

THE SYMBOLISM AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BUTTERFLY IN ANCIENT EGYPT

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Ancient Egyptian art and artefacts reveal a great deal about the culture and beliefs of this civilization. It was a civilization steeped in myth, symbolism and imagery. Tomb art has been extensively analysed and studied in an effort to reveal the essential way of life of the Ancient Egyptians, their religious beliefs and their philosophy of life.

It is agreed that symbolism was an inherent part of their lives and beliefs. They looked to nature and observed the behaviour of animals, plants, the environment and also the weather to attempt to rationalize the world they lived in. Their close observation of behaviour patterns in nature resulted in a complex hierarchy of gods and goddesses who were accountable for successful living.

Among the animal kingdom, certain animals gained such distinction that they were linked to certain deities. The scarab beetle is one such creature. Insects featured variously in their art, their myths and their belief in magic. While the scarab beetle is possibly the most documented of the insects, other insects such as the bee, the fly, the locust and the praying mantis have all been investigated.

The butterfly features frequently in Ancient Egyptian art and yet has not been the subject of in-depth study. This investigation attempts to examine the symbolism and significance of the butterfly in Ancient Egypt.

Richard Wilkinson (1994) has provided a framework for analysing symbolism in Egyptian art. He suggests nine aspects which can be examined in order to reveal symbolism. In this study, a selection of art from various dynasties is systematically examined according to these nine aspects. Each art work portrays the butterfly. Through this careful examination it is hoped that a clearer indication of the role of the butterfly in Ancient Egypt will be obtained.

Having discussed all nine aspects for each of the sources, a discussion and various conclusions follow which look at the trends which appear. Certain patterns emerge which indicate that the butterfly does indeed play a significant role as a symbol in Ancient Egypt.

Antieke Egiptiese kuns en artefakte openbaar baie oor die kultuur en oortuigings van hierdie beskawing. Dit was 'n beskawing ryk aan mites, simboliek en beelde. Grafkuns is deeglik ontleed en bestudeer in 'n poging om die wesenlike lewenswyse van die antieke Egiptenare, hul godsdienstige oortuigings en lewensfilosofie te openbaar.

Daar word saamgestem dat simboliek 'n inherente deel van hul lewens en oortuigings uitgemaak het. Hulle het op die natuur gesteun en die gedrag van diere, plante, die omgewing en ook die weer waargeneem om te probeer om hul lewenswêreld te verklaar. Hul noukeurige waarneming van natuurverskynsels het tot 'n komplekse hiërargie van gode en godinne gelei wat vir 'n suksesvolle lewe verantwoordelik was.

Sekere diere in die diereryk was so besonders dat hulle met sekere gode en godinne verbind was. Die skarabee kewer is een so 'n skepsel. Insekte verskyn onder andere in hul kuns, hul mites en hul geloof in magie. Terwyl die skarabee moontlik die mees gedokumenteerde insek was, is ander insekte soos bye, vlieë, sprinkane, en die bidsprinkaan ook almal ondersoek.

Die skoenlapper verskyn gereeld in die antieke Egiptiese kuns, maar was nog nie die onderwerp van 'n grondige studie nie. Hierdie studie poog om die simboliek en belangrikheid van die skoenlapper in antieke Egipte te ontleed.

Richard Wilkinson (1994) verskaf 'n raamwerk vir die ontleding van simboliek in Egiptiese kuns. Hy het nege aspekte voorgestel wat bestudeer kan word om die simboliek te openbaar. In hierdie studie, word 'n seleksie kuns van verskillende dinastieë, sistematies aan die hand van dié nege aspekte ontleed. Elke kunswerk beeld die skoenlapper uit. Deur hierdie noukeurige ondersoek, word daar gehoop dat die rol van die skoenlapper in antieke Egipte duideliker voorskyn.

Na die bespreking van al nege aspekte vir elk van die bronne, volg daar 'n bespreking met verskillende gevolgtrekkings wat kyk na die tendense wat voorkom. Sekere patrone kom te voorsyn wat daarop dui dat die skoenlapper wel 'n belangrike rol as 'n simbool in antieke Egipte gespeel het.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The butterfly features significantly in the art of Ancient Egypt. It is found in tomb scenes, particularly marsh scenes such as that in the tomb of Nebamun in Thebes (Johnson 2000:18). Evans (2010:50) lists eighty four depictions of butterflies located in thirty three Old Kingdom tombs.

Butterflies are also found in jewellery such as the bracelet found in the tomb of Queen Hetepheres I (see 4.7 below) and on various artefacts, including faience amulets (see 4.6 below).

However, the butterfly is generally regarded as simply decorative in Egyptian art. Kritsky (1993:37) states that:

“The butterfly is an example of the Ancient Egyptians’ use of an insect motif for its own beauty rather than as a symbol with religious significance”.

Some interesting observations have already been made by the “father” of the study of Egyptian Art, Heinrich Schäfer (1974:230:originally published in 1919), who comments on both the size and the yellow colour of the butterflies in the marsh scene in the tomb of Nebamun. He points out the large size of the butterflies in comparison to the other animals in the scene. It is suggested this may indicate that there is some importance attached to the butterflies. They are not simply included for their beauty but may be significant as a symbol.

Art in Ancient Egypt was not simply decorative and aesthetic. Through their art, the Ancient Egyptians depicted not only their physical world but also their customs and beliefs.

As agriculturalists, they were very much in tune with the environment and this includes insects. Insects were incorporated into their myths and legends and hence into their religious beliefs. The Ancient Egyptians looked for evidence of divine intervention in their lives by examining the world they lived in.

Liu (2001:168-169) states that:

“Butterflies undergo complete metamorphosis, passing from a larva or caterpillar stage to an immobile pupa or chrysalis, from which the winged adult emerges. Anyone observing these life stages would make the association with rebirth, resurrection, immortality and longevity, as had the Chinese and Mycenaean Greeks”.

The creatures in this world were an integral part of the lives of the Egyptians. Many species of insects thrive in the hot climate of Egypt. By examining the behaviour of insects, they hoped to interpret the will of the gods. These ideas are reflected in their tomb art.

Gagliardi (1997:22-23) lists numerous examples of the symbolism of butterflies in Western art. Ranging from resurrection and freedom to death and temptation, the butterfly has been variously used in different cultures throughout history as a symbol in art. It seems unlikely that the Ancient Egyptians, whose religion and culture was steeped in symbolism, should have used the butterfly simply for its beauty.

1.1 The Egyptian Environment

Life in Ancient Egypt was influenced to a large degree by the environment. The environment of any country determines the flora and fauna of the region. Hence any study of animal life of a country must take into account the natural environment of that country. It is necessary to examine this environment if there is to be any understanding of the complexities of this ancient civilisation, including their art. Both the topography and the climate impacted hugely on their daily lives. The culture, including religion, ritual and beliefs of the Egyptian people is completely interwoven with the environment.

Most of Egypt is characterised by a hot, arid climate with a rainfall of less than 10mm per year (Brewer & Teeter 2007:17). Winding through this desert country is the fertile valley of the river Nile. Along the Nile valley significant vegetation is found and consequently the natural fauna is most prolific in this region where food, water and shelter are available. The Egyptians were an agricultural people and so mostly lived along the banks of the Nile so as to make the most of its fertile soil. Vineyards, fruit trees and grain were farmed. Hunting and fishing were popular activities, providing much needed food for the people. Cattle, sheep and goats were kept. Within such an environment, insects thrived. The exception is the butterfly which was mostly a migrant visitor although a few species did live in certain very specific areas where particular food was available (Larsen 1994:24).

The ecosystem of the Nile Valley was interwoven with Egyptian culture. The river Nile itself was personified by the Egyptians and was known as *Heru* while the inundation of the land was referred to as a god named *Hapy* (Brewer & Teeter 2007:27). Because the flooding brought the silt in which the crops were grown, this god was associated with fertility and regeneration as were the marshlands themselves. These two themes of fertility and regeneration (re-birth) are of paramount importance in Egyptian culture and will be seen to be associated with the insects of the country and the beliefs associated with these insects. This will be referred to in discussions concerning the butterfly. Egyptian gods and goddesses were thus found in all aspects of their lives, from the river itself to the creatures and the people as well as the environment in which they lived.

The river Nile brought life-giving water to this desert country. The low annual rainfall is far too little to support life and so the regular annual inundation of the river was the life of the country and its people. It was the miracle which sustained Egypt. The river

Nile runs for 6695km from central Africa. Starting in Uganda, it runs through nine African countries. It splits into several channels making a large Delta area, before flowing into the Mediterranean Sea.

The annual spring floods occur in the months of August and September. During this period, the Nile floods an area of approximately 3 349 000 km² of which only 40 000km² lies in Egypt. The total area of Egypt is approximately a million square kilometres (www.ancient-Egypt-on-line.com). This means that only a very small percentage of the country has a sustainable water supply.

The land itself is therefore divided into two distinct and very different ecosystems. The Ancient Egyptians called the fertile land *Kemet* which means “the black land” and obviously refers to the black silt which the river deposits during the annual inundation. In contrast, the desert area is known as *Desheret* which means “the red land”, referring to the barren sands of the desert (Robins 2008:14). The duality of their environment is reflected in so many aspects of Egyptian life and belief. This constant struggle of sterile desert versus fertile land is mirrored in their mythology where chaos versus order is told in the myth of Seth and Osiris. In fact, one of the main functions of the king was to maintain order in the world (Brewer & Teeter 2007:79).

Egypt itself was divided into two regions, Upper and Lower. Upper Egypt referred to the upper reaches of the river Nile in central Africa while Lower Egypt referred to the Delta area. When the two lands were united, the king wore a double crown incorporating the white crown of Upper Egypt and the red crown of Lower Egypt. The symbols of each were then combined so that both the vulture of Lower Egypt and the cobra of Upper Egypt are found on the royal headdress. The king was the mediator between the divine and human world. He was both human and divine. He performed rituals which often re-enacted creation to maintain order in the world, an order known as *Ma^cat*.

1.2 Religion and culture

Certain concepts in the religious beliefs of Ancient Egypt are of primary importance when considering symbolism in this culture. Although it is impossible to fully understand how the Egyptians viewed the world around them, an understanding of the concepts of *ma^cat* and duality will assist in knowing how they viewed their world.

1.2.1 The concept of *ma^cat*

The goddess *Ma^cat* is the deity concerned with both order and truth. She was represented by an ostrich feather. The goddess personified the concepts which were

central to Egyptian society and religion, those of justice and truth. It is through these concepts that world order is maintained (Wilkinson 1992:37).

Assmann (2002:147) describes ma^c at as:

“the harmonious force of connective justice that unifies all humans as well as animals , gods, the dead and the cosmos”.

One of the main functions of the pharaoh was to ensure that this world order persisted, no matter what the disturbance or disruption may be. Order must be maintained by means of human actions so that the cosmos would be free from chaos. The security of the cosmos depended on order in the world. When harmonious living on earth was disrupted, major disruption of human contact with the world of the gods and goddesses was certain to follow (Assmann 2002:170). In the New Kingdom dynasties the belief that daily activities and particularly political and economic activities were inextricably linked with the interventions of the deities, resulted in the high profile given to both the high priests and the generals who were equal in status and responsible for the course of history as ultimately decided by the deities (Assmann 2002:203). It was the specific task of the temple to ensure that the deities were appeased and that the course of the sun remained uninterrupted thereby continuing the process of creation. This concept of the continuation of creation will be significant when considering the possible symbolism of the butterfly in Egyptian art.

Hence, rituals and rites maintaining order were a primary function of the priests in the temples and had to be carried out regularly and carefully. At the judgement in the afterlife, the heart was weighed against the feather of Ma^c at to determine the balance of the person's life with regard to truth and justice.

According to mythology, the goddess Ma^c at was also associated with the sun god in that she is the daughter of the sun god Ra. She is often depicted on the barge with him as he journeys across the sky (Wilkinson 1992:37).

As well as the goddess Ma^c at, the Egyptians had at the centre of their social functioning, the concept and practice of what they referred to as ma^c at.

Assmann (2002:127) refers to ma^c at as “connective justice” and traces its formulation to the writings of the Middle Kingdom. He does, however, state that the concept of ma^c at as an essential aspect of Egyptian life existed in practice in the Old Kingdom.

Ultimately, this concept that the order of the cosmos is essential to maintaining harmony both for humans and deities alike pervades all aspects of life in Ancient Egypt. It is also linked to the concept of creation which was not believed to be a single act by the creator god, but a continuous daily process which was not restricted to the living but flowed uninterrupted into the after-life. This concept of indefinite

creation is also significant when interpreting Egyptian art and will be discussed in relation to butterfly images.

Ma^c at therefore is the essential concept underlying harmonious life. It is through this “connective justice” that humans and the gods are connected. Moreover, by maintaining ma^c at, order in the cosmos is maintained.

1.2.2 The concept of duality

Complementing the concept of ma^c at is that of duality as the two philosophies relate to each other. Duality is a way of thinking which tries to make sense of the world by using the realm of philosophical thought. It also includes making sense of cultural practices and the natural world. Paired aspects abound in Egyptian thought for example with regard to the cosmos where *ntt* and *jwt*, “what is” and “what is not”, combine to give the totality of the cosmos (Servajean 2008:1).

In the natural world this gives meaning by association so that any two aspects of the duality are equally related. The one relies on the other. They are interdependent and cannot exist independently. In ma^c at this is seen as order/disorder and in creation it is male/female/ or earth/sky. The division of the country into Lower Egypt and Upper Egypt takes into account the topography of the land and allows the whole country to function as a dualistic entity. The symbol of the *ankh* represents the life-giving elements of air and water and this potent symbol thus incorporates duality (Wilkinson 1992:177).

Applying this to the butterfly, the larva cannot exist without the flying insect. They are dependent on each other. The butterfly has an inherent duality of existence. Certain animals, such as the hippopotamus had two very different types of symbolism which co-exist and balance each other.

Servajean (2008:4) summarised the importance of dualism by saying :

“...it was a mental structuring device the Egyptians lived by, expressing implicitly or explicitly, a vision of the world and its functioning”.

This concept will be relevant when considering the possible symbolism of the butterfly.

1.2.3 Animals and the gods

Egyptian mythology abounds with gods and goddesses who are closely linked with various animals (Dodson, Aidan, 2009, Rituals Related to Animal Cults. In Jacco Dieleman, Willeke Wendrich (eds.), UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology, Los Angeles. <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/6wk541n0>).

This is reflected in their belief that all living creatures are connected in the continuing process of creation. It was through their observations of the world in which they lived that the Egyptians made sense of their lives, their environment and their history. The behaviour of the animals in their environment was mirrored in the stories of the gods and goddesses and thus many of the deities acquired the mannerisms and behaviours of the animals observed in the Egyptian environment. Some of these are listed below:

NAME OF DEITY	ANIMAL
Apis	Bull
Bastet/Mut	Cat
Hathor	Cow
Sebek	Crocodile
Horus	Falcon
Heket	Frog
Taueret	Hippopotamus
Thoth	Ibis/baboon
Anubis	Jackal
Amun	Ram
Khepri	Scarab beetle
Selket	Scorpion
Buto	Serpent
Nekhebet	Vulture
Upuaunt	Wolf

from Ames 1965:150

It is noted that all types of animals are included; mammals, birds, reptiles and insects.

Among the insects, the god Khepri was represented by a beetle, the scarab or dung beetle. This beetle was common due to the fact that the Egyptians were farmers and kept cattle. The scarab uses the dung of the cattle and forms a ball which it rolls along the ground. This dung ball is buried in the ground to provide food for the larvae of the beetle. On observing this beetle, the Ancient Egyptians made two important associations.

Firstly, the rolling of the ball was seen to reflect the movement of the sun across the sky each day. The myth of the god Khepri relates how the god rolls the ball of the sun across the sky each day. The dung beetle thus became associated with the god Khepri (Ratcliffe 1990:162).

Secondly, because the dung beetle laid its eggs in a tunnel underground, it seemed to the Egyptians that the young beetles emerged spontaneously from the ball of dung. The beetles thus “came forth” from the dung ball and the scarab was seen to

be a “creator”. This associated the scarab beetle with the creator god, Atum (Wilkinson 1992:113).

This example shows how closely the Ancient Egyptians observed their environment and how they attached symbolism to creatures based on the observed behaviour of that creature. However, not only symbolism became associated with deities. The animals in their environment were also incorporated into their hieroglyphic writing and into their magical amulets.

1.3 The Symbolism of Insects

Insects are found in art, hieroglyphs, myths, spells and rituals in Ancient Egypt. They were closely observed and their behaviour relates directly to the significance and symbolism associated with them (Kritsky 1991:39).

1.3.1 The Honey Bee

The common honey bee, *apis mellifera*, features in myths, legends and religious beliefs throughout the world from earliest times. The honey bee has been variously used in art as well as metaphorically to represent such ideas as love, divinity, political ideology and immortality (Wenning 2004:785).

Known as *afj* by the Ancient Egyptians, bees were very much part of the environment and an integral part of the Egyptian people’s lives. The honey bee in Egypt was both a religious and a political symbol. As the producer of honey, a unique delicacy for royalty, the bee became a political symbol. However, the sweetness of the honey led to the belief that the honey bee was of divine origin, in fact from Ra himself (Leek 1975:148). The divine nature of the pharaoh was well established and hence only an animal with a divine origin would be worthy to represent the pharaoh. The honey bee was this creature.

The bee was the national symbol of Lower Egypt while sedge was the symbol of Upper Egypt. These two symbols appear together indicating the joint nature of the country. The bee was thus a symbol of royalty. An old Egyptian poem states:

“He hath united the two lands,
He hath joined the reed and the bee”
(Hallman 1951:199)

Fig 1: Symbol of Lower and Upper Egypt



Nesu-Bity, Ruler of the Sedge and the Bee, referring to the sedge plant of Upper Egypt and the Bee of Lower Egypt (www.egyptological.com)

The bee was associated with the gods in a number of ways. Bees were thought to be the tears of Ra, the sun god (Leek 1975:148). Ra was the giver of life and resurrection which is reflected by the pictures of bees found in tombs. Through these pictures, resurrection would be assured.

The bee symbolised the inspiration of the gods and was worshipped as a source of eternal life. There are pictures of bees in many funeral vaults including that of Ramses III (1198 – 1167) which has designs of bees on the tomb (Arnold 1955:47).

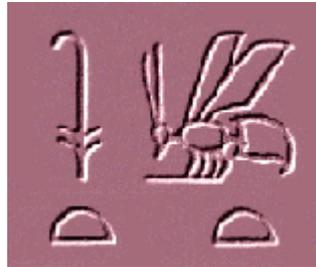
The power of the bee as the maker of honey elevated this insect to a position just short of deification. The power of nature was seen in the bee not only because of the sweetness of its honey, but more so because of the healing powers of honey and therefore of the bee. The bee became a powerful symbol of the potency of nature. To associate oneself with the bee was to associate with the inspiration of the gods. It is thus easy to understand why this insect was chosen as the symbol of Lower Egypt. Not only did the bee produce honey, but in the process it pollinated the flowers increasing plant fertility and seemingly participating in the propagation of life – “life’s breath”.

In hieroglyphic writing, the bee represents both the king of Lower Egypt and a phonetic symbol.

Hieroglyphic writing was more than just a method of recording information, it was an art form. The word “hieroglyph” is derived from the Greek meaning “sacred carvings” (Brewer & Teeter 2007:136). As with all aspects of Egyptian culture the gods were intimately involved. Their writing was inspired

by the god Thoth, and was a combination of practical, religious and artistic expression. It had the power of transcending death.

Fig 2: Hieroglyphic symbol of the bee



Temple of Amun, 12th dynasty (www.kendalluk.com/sacredinsects)

1.3.2 The Beetle

The symbolism of the scarab as rebirth was closely associated with the gods of the sun, Khepri, Atum and Ra. Originally, the god Khepri represented the sun from sunrise to sunset but eventually became associated only with the rising sun. He was depicted as a man with a scarab as his head. The setting sun was depicted by the god Atum who has a ram's head. From these two associations, the ram-headed scarab represents both the rising and the setting sun, Ra (Cambefort 1994:17).

Fig 3 : The god Khepri



<http://ancientcivilisationegypt.wikispaces.com/Khepri>

The scarab was also used as a sign in hieroglyphic writing.

Fig 4 : Hieroglyphic symbol of scarab



(Wilkinson1992:113)

The scarab is used extensively in king's names such as that of Tutankhamun who also had the name *Nebkheperu-Ra* and so the symbol for this latter name contained the image of the scarab pushing the sun before it. The scarab also features in the hieroglyphic sign for the verb, "to come into being" - *hpr*, and the noun "that which comes into being" - *hprr*. The name of the new morning sun deity, "khepri" - *hpry* was also depicted by the scarab pushing the sun (Cooney 2008:1).

1.4 Insects in Ancient Egypt

It is important that we consider in greater depth the symbolism of insects in Egypt in order to try and get a better understanding of the function of insects in their art, their culture and their religion. Some insects have been well documented and studied in detail.

It has already been noted that the Ancient Egyptians were careful observers of the nature surrounding them. By noting closely all the activities of the fauna in the area, they hoped to be able to get a better understand of life and of life after death. Kritsky (1991:39) says that:

"The common theme which runs through ancient Egyptian depiction of insects - and other animals as well - is that actual behaviour of these creatures relates directly to whatever ritual significance or symbolism was associated with or applied to them..."

He points out that the Ancient Egyptians held insects in special reverence and that several insects played roles in the writing, religion and daily lives of the Ancient Egyptians (Kritsky 1991:32). Some of the most important of these insects will now be discussed.

1.4.1 The Beetle

The most commonly depicted insect in Ancient Egypt was the beetle which is the most prolific insect in the world. There are approximately 350 000 known species and more species are being discovered annually. Of these, about 30 000 belong to the group known as scarabs (Ratcliffe 1990:159). This group contains some of the most beautiful, the most fascinating, and the most economically important beetles on this earth. Scarabs are robust beetles with distinctive segmented antennae which end in plate-like leaves which can be folded together. Most scarabs have similar life styles and some show signs of “parental care”. It is this latter behaviour which was noticed by the Ancient Egyptians and led them to elevate the simple scarab to the level of a deity.

Reproductions of scarab beetles have been found from the late Middle Kingdom. The most likely species to have been observed closely by the Egyptian priests is *scarabaeus sacer*.

Fig 5: The Sacred Scarab



www.dungbeetlesforAfrica.org/scarab

The scarab pushing his dung ball was not only likened to Ra, but the beetle was given the status of this god as if the beetle was the earthly manifestation of Ra. In addition to this, Ra was believed to have been born from matter without the joining of male and female and so the apparent “birth” of a beetle from the buried dung ball further developed this link between the sun god and the dung beetle. Hence the name given to the beetle was “Khepri”, the name of the creator god, meaning “The Being”.

The scarab therefore became the symbol of creation and also of rebirth after death. The beetles were among the first to emerge after the annual flooding

of the Nile which marked the beginning of spring and the creative power of the earth which was regenerated each year. As a symbol of the god of creation, the scarab also represented the abstract concept of “coming into being”. It is not certain when such associations began although the famous William Flinders Petrie who wrote extensive volumes on the scarab beetle found a jar of dried dung beetles in a Pre-Dynastic grave (Kritsky 1991:32). The more accepted symbolism can be traced to the late Middle Kingdom.

But it was not only the scarab beetle that carried significance in Ancient Egypt. Other lesser known beetles were also important.

The metallic wood-boring *buprestid* beetles are common in necklace design dating from the fourth Dynasty. These are beautiful beetles. An example can be seen in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston where a necklace for the burial of Queen Hetepheres is kept (Kritsky 1991:35). The same beetle is found in an unusual location, as heads of the pins holding together the corner posts of Queen Hetepheres bed canopy which is in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (Kritsky 1993:35). However, these beetles were not simply adornments. They also had symbolic significance. It seems that the beetle depicted in both these cases is *stercoraria squamosa* which is a large beetle 35mm long. The larvae of this beetle feed off the tamarisk tree and the adult beetles emerge from holes in the trees. It is easy to see how, to the Egyptians, this would have been linked to the myth of Osiris who was imprisoned in the tamarisk tree and later freed by his sister/wife, Isis (Kritsky 1991:35). It is highly likely that these beetles would thus have symbolised this rebirth of the lord of the afterlife. This is supported by the fact that amulets of buprestids have been found on mummies. Made of gold, the beetles are symbolic not only of rebirth but also of the divine. Gold was believed to be the metal of the gods. It was divine and imperishable, its colour and shine being a reminder of the sun itself, and hence the sun god Ra.

Another beetle species of significance to the ancient Egyptians was one from the order *elateridae*, known as the click beetles. The most likely species is *agrypnus notodonta* which is found on three different artefacts. The artefacts, two carved reliefs from the First Dynasty and a golden necklace from the Fourth Dynasty indicate that beetles were significant symbols before the proliferation of scarabs in the latter dynasties. The reliefs illustrate the symbolism of the beetles as follows. The one, triangular in shape, depicts two beetles head to head and flanked by abdomens incorporated into the symbol of the goddess Neith. The other shows a beetle holding the was sceptre which is usually associated with gods and kings. The goddess Neith was one of the oldest in the Egyptian pantheon and was usually depicted holding arrows and wearing a shield. Egyptian shields were often the same shape as the prothorax of the elaterid beetle and could hide the heads of the soldiers carrying them. In a similar way, the prothorax of the click beetle appears to

conceal the head of the insect. It is thus highly likely that the click beetle, a *notodanta*, symbolised the goddess Neith (Kritsky1993: 35). By wearing a necklace of elaterid beetles, the woman would be protected by the goddess Neith.

A little, black, nondescript beetle, the *tenebrionid*, was also depicted by the Egyptians but it is not possible to determine which species they portrayed in their art. These little insects have the habit of pretending to be dead as a defence mechanism. When disturbed, the beetle tucks its appendages close to the body and lies still for up to a few minutes. It will then suddenly extend its legs and walk away. This behaviour would definitely have reminded the Egyptians of a rebirth after death and it is quite likely that this behaviour is what drew their attention to the insect. Furthermore, when it is lying still, the shape of the beetle reminds one of a bandaged mummy with its appendages hidden beneath the wrappings.

Figure 6 : The Tenebrionid Beetle



www.terrain.net

1.4.2 The Honey Bee

The Honey Bee (*apis mellifera*) was known as *afj* by the Ancient Egyptians. Bees were very much part of the environment and an integral part of the Egyptian people's lives. The oldest temple in Egypt at Sais in the Nile Delta was named *Hwt-bit* which means "castle of the Bee". The wife of King Menes was named after the bee goddess, *Neit*. The honey bee in Egypt was both a religious and a political symbol (Wenning2004:786). As the producer of honey, a unique delicacy for royalty, the bee became a political symbol. However, the sweetness of the honey led to the belief that the honey bee was

of divine origin, in fact from Ra himself. The divine nature of the pharaoh was well established and hence only an animal with a divine origin would be worthy to represent the Pharaoh. The honey bee was this creature.

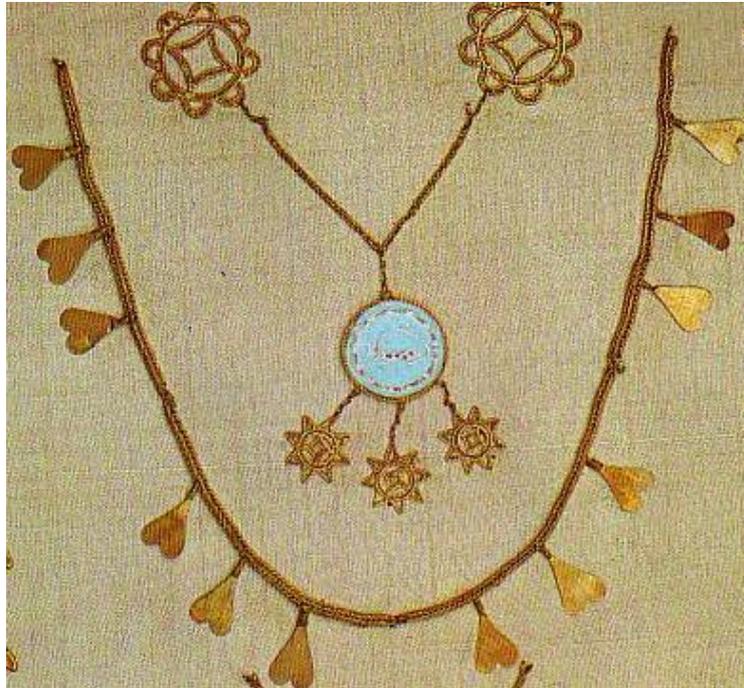
The bee was the national symbol of Lower Egypt while the sedge was the symbol of Upper Egypt. These two symbols appear together indicating the joint nature of the country (see Fig1 above). The bee was thus a symbol of royalty.

1.4.3 The Fly

Egypt is a country with high temperatures and flies are therefore common. Flies lay their eggs in dead tissue or decaying matter and it is quite possible that the newly hatched flies were seen leaving a dead body after a few days and therefore associated with the departing spirit. Some evidence for this belief exists in that even today, in certain areas in Egypt, the shiny green flies may not be killed as it is believed that they contain the soul of a person who died recently in the area (Kritsky 1993:38).

In a country as hot as Egypt, the fly is common to the point where it may be thought to be a pest. However, the symbolism of the fly seems to be linked to its determination. No matter how many times a fly is swatted, it will return. It is not easily chased and shows a type of bravery. For this reason, the fly became a symbol used as an award for bravery and tenacity in battle. It was a military award, a type of medal for bravery. The "Fly of Valour" was highly prized and worn with pride. A necklace of Queen Ahhotep of the 18th Dynasty is made of gold and depicts the Fly of Valour as does a gold necklace of Princess Khnumet. Some mummies have been found with a gold necklace of small flies. (Kritsky 1993:38). The flies depicted are quite small and it is not possible to identify the species accurately. However, once again we note that it is the behaviour of the insect that was noted and used in a symbolic way.

Fig 7: Gold Fly necklace



Necklace of Princess Khnumet from Dahshur depicting a “heart-shaped” fly of valour

Aldred 1971: fig 15

Flies were also depicted on common amulets and although their symbolism in this case is not clear, it is possible that the wearer would be seeking the bravery of the fly (Arnold1955:48).

Although not as common as the beetles, bees and flies, other insects are also found in Egyptian art and religion. Locusts, dragon flies and praying mantis all feature in Egyptian art.

1.4.4 The Praying Mantis

In many countries in Africa, the praying mantis is a symbol of strength, courage and boldness due to its practice of attacking creatures larger than itself. In “The Book of the Dead” the mantis appears as a minor deity and conducts the souls of the dead to meet the divine spirits (Prete & Wolfe 1992:97).

It is also suggested that butterflies may also have been regarded as guides to assist the deceased on their journey to achieve eternal life.

“I have made my way into the Royal Palace,
and it was the Bird-Fly (ie. the mantis) who brought me thither.
Hail to thee, who fliest up to heaven, to give light to the stars
And protect the White Crown which falleth to me.
Stable art thou, O mighty god, for even, make thou me a path
Upon which I may pursue my course”.

(Prete & Wolfe 1992:97)

Mantids were thought to have supernatural powers and are referred to as “necromancer”, one who foretells the future. This may be due to the stance of the mantid which appears to be pointing in a particular direction (Prete & Wolfe 1992:98).

1.4.5 The Ant

The Egyptian word for ant is not known but it is unlikely that the industrious ant would have gone unnoticed. Many cultures admire the ant for both its industry and strength (www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/bestiary/index.html).

The Demotic Magical Papyrus translated by (London-Leidon) col.VIII,4, records a magical potion and a charm to cure gout using ants. Thus they were considered to have magical healing powers.

Then you shall bring an ant. You shall boil it in henna oil.

You shall anoint his feet with it.

(www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/bestiary/index.html)

1.4.6 The Locust

The locust is a small yet dangerous insect due to its appearance in huge swarms which destroy the crops. There are a number of texts involving the locust. In the Pyramid Texts, a significant section refers to a swarm of locusts in flight:

“Someone flies up, I fly up from you. O! men; I am not for the earth, I am for the sky. O! you local god of mine, my double is beside you, for I have soared to the sky as a heron, I have kissed the sky as a falcon, I have reached the sky as a locust which hides the sun”.

Hymn 467 : Ancient Egyptian Pyramid texts translated by R.O.Faulkner (www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/bestiary/index.html).

The best known reference to the locust is that in the Book of Exodus where they are documented as the eighth plague of Egypt. In spite of their destructive habits, locusts are found in numerous marsh scenes from as early as the fifth dynasty.

Fig 8: Locust



Tomb painting c.1425 courtesy of Albert Skira (Southwood1997:36)

In tomb art, some dissent exists regarding depictions of an insect which is variously described as a grasshopper, a locust or a dragonfly. Evans (2010: 53) discusses the morphological characteristics of these insects and suggests that they are more than likely dragonflies. However, Kritsky (1991:36) says that the locust motif was extremely common. The species he describes is *schistocerca gregaria* which is a small migratory locust. Kritsky notes that it was used as a glyph in writing, as a seal and as an amulet. It seems that it was a symbol of beauty. The locust appears at rest in Old Kingdom tombs but it is in flight in most of the New Kingdom tomb reliefs and paintings. However, Kritsky does concur that the insects depicted are not anatomically accurate, especially the shape of the wings (Kritsky 1991:37).

2. THE BUTTERFLY IN EGYPT

As has been noted, insects were incorporated into many aspects of Egyptian life, and were highly symbolic. One would expect the butterfly with its beautiful wings and complete metamorphosis to fulfil a significant role and yet its function is clouded in uncertainties.

With most of Egypt being extremely dry, with very hot summers and cold winters, butterfly survival is precarious. Egyptian butterfly fauna is limited and Egypt is noted as one of the poorest habitats for butterflies anywhere in the world (Larsen 1994:26). In fact, Larsen refers to only 58 species of butterfly in Egypt and many of these are only found in the high, mountainous regions in the extreme south east of the country. This is confirmed by the comprehensive study done more recently by Gilbert & Zalut (2007). They describe 61 species and 2 sub-species presently identified in Egypt but note that 12 of these are critically endangered. Most existing species (2/3 of the total population of butterflies in Egypt) are found in the Southern Sinai mountains with the remaining species largely found in Gebel Elba and the Mariut area near Alexandria (Gilbert & Zalut 2007:10). This information all indicates that the butterfly is not a widespread insect in Egypt.

About 40% of the butterflies in Egypt are seasonal migrants who do not visit annually, but infrequently. With such a limited population, the butterfly is therefore not as common in Egypt as, for example, in South Africa where there are more than a thousand species many of which are permanent inhabitants with very large, widespread populations (Quickelberge 1986:6). It can thus be concluded that the butterfly was not a common insect in Egypt, as were beetles, bees and especially flies. Add to this the fact that the summers are very hot and the winters very cold, and this further limits the survival of the butterfly.

The caterpillar of many species of butterfly is very specific in its diet. Caterpillars do not eat any available vegetation. One of the more common butterflies in Egypt is the Small Cabbage White (*artogeia rapae*) which feeds on wild and cultivated cabbages. It occurs mainly in Sinai and has become quite successful, even to the point of becoming a pest (Larsen 1994:24).

The butterfly which is recognisable in most Egyptian art is the Common Tiger (*danaus chrysippus*). It is a tropical butterfly and a migrant to Egypt. It is a large, easily noticed butterfly. Its body is dark black topped with white dots, and its wings are a mixture of brown and orange, surrounded with the same black colour of the body with the white dots along its wing edges.

Fig 9: The Tiger Butterfly



Picture from www.usefilm.com



Picture from www.wildlifeextra.com

The caterpillar of the Common Tiger feeds on the plants of the milkweed family which contain powerful toxic alkaloids. These are stored in the butterfly's tissue making it both poisonous and foul tasting to birds and to other predators (Larsen 1994:25). This means that this butterfly would have been observed by the Ancient Egyptians as a creature which was special and had a "hidden" means of survival. Furthermore, the butterfly chrysalis can survive for up to four years in poor conditions when it will remain totally still and take up no nourishment until conditions are favourable for it to emerge. This survival tactic shows remarkable adaptation to harsh desert conditions. It is likely that some significance would have been attached to a butterfly which survived where other similar insects perished and were eaten by predators.

2.1 Butterfly symbolism

Butterfly symbolism in Ancient Egypt is not clear and most references to butterflies in Egyptian art regard this insect as being purely decorative. No doubt the butterfly is decorative but it seems unlikely that it does not provide some significant meaning as well. As stated by Schäfer (1974:37):

"Works of art which represent living beings or things do not have the same meaning for us as they did for the Egyptians. For them figures could not have only aesthetic qualities but also that of living beings.

Egyptian art was not there only to be enjoyed".

It is helpful in this instance to consider the symbolism of butterflies in other cultures.

The butterfly features as a symbol in numerous cultures throughout history and is frequently used in art to represent a variety of symbolic meanings. In Western art, Gagliardi (1976:iii) reports no less than seventy four separate symbols and concludes that butterflies are major symbols in western art. These symbols range from beauty and femininity to freedom, protection and resurrection (Gagliardi1976:17-19). Gagliardi notes that the symbolism of the butterfly tends to be concerned with six main categories as follows:

- Their ability to fly
- Aspects of their wings and bodies
- Their enemies
- Their ability to metamorphosize
- Their habits
- Miscellaneous activities

In the discussions which follow, it will be noted that these same categories occur in Egyptian art featuring butterflies.

In ancient cultures other than Egyptian, the butterfly features significantly. This is particularly the case in Ancient Greece. The myth of the goddess Psyche describes the goddess as having the wings of a butterfly. The Greek word “psyche” means soul and the butterfly in Ancient Greece was a powerful symbol of the soul and of new life (Seigneuret 1988:199). The wings of the butterfly are thought to portray the lightness of the soul and the butterfly features in various art works hovering over the body of a dead person depicting the soul departing from the body. Seigneuret mentions that a significant feature of the life cycle of the butterfly is that the metamorphosis takes place in a relatively short period of time. Liu (2002:170) refers to Mycenaean and Mexican beliefs that the butterfly represents the soul in both these cultures. This short lifespan of the butterfly seems to emphasise the power of new life and resurrection and adds to the significance of the symbolism.

In India, the butterfly features at weddings and is symbolic of conjugal bliss. This corresponds with one of the Western symbols noted by Gagliardi in his study of Western art listed above. Among the South America Hopis, the butterfly is thought to be a link between humans and the gods (Capinera 1993:225).

3. RESEARCH PROBLEM, AIM, METHOD

3.1 Research Problem and Aim

Egyptian art has fascinated historians for hundreds of years. Most of the art comes from tombs and temples of pharaohs, priests and other aristocrats, and is thus indicative of the lifestyle of the elite. The poorer people did use art and although the quality was not as good, it performed the same function. The distinctive style of Egyptian art changed over the 3000 years of this great civilization, but it remained easily recognisable.

Robins (2008:12) reminds us that Egyptian art is first and foremost functional. For the Ancient Egyptians, to represent was to create. A picture was not simply a two dimensional representation produced by an artist. Once it was visible in art, it existed. In this way, images ensured continuity and were a meaningful part of religion, particularly of the cult of the dead. Art did have an aesthetic function and the art of the pharaohs and the elite is far superior in composition and proportion than that of the art from those lower in the social hierarchy. This was doubtless due to the fact that the wealthy could afford better artists.

The content of Egyptian art was tied to its function. This function was in turn linked to the context. Images were not placed haphazardly. Size was relevant as were colour and form. Art had a function in religion, in the culture and the social structure of the people and also had a significant function in the cult of the dead. Thus although Egyptian art was intended to be enjoyed and appreciated, this was not its primary purpose. Our problem lies in our ability to interpret the symbolism of this art.

In his preface, Wilkinson (1992:8) says:

“Egyptian artworks can often appear deceptively simple, and much can remain hidden from view without knowledge of the symbolic repertoire which was used by the ancient artists and craftsmen. Many Egyptian works of art were designed, in fact, to be “read” symbolically and to provide an underlying message which was an essential part of their composition”.

There is, however, a real danger in symbolic interpretation. Symbols may have different meanings in different contexts and may change over time. It is tempting to impose our own ideas on those of the ancients. Symbols which would have been easily read and perfectly clear to the Ancient Egyptians, may elude us, or be misinterpreted due to our own ideas.

The fact still remains: Egyptian art was functional and symbolic. This presents us with numerous problems not the least of which is related to the objects in the art. It is only by examining as much information as possible, that we can hope to draw any conclusions. This is our challenge.

Fortunately, a great deal of research has been done which has unlocked many of the symbolic meanings in Egyptian art (Wenning 2004, Lobban 1994, Cherry 1985). The art did not only focus on people, but included many scenes of the environment. These scenes were based on careful observation of the fauna and flora of Egypt. Many of the animals in Egyptian art have been well researched and the symbolism has been extensively documented. Insects fall into this category. There has been a great deal of attention given to the beetle and to the bee. Both of these insects are used as hieroglyphic signs and feature prominently in Egyptian art. The fly, the locust, and the praying mantis have received varying amounts of attention and there are accounts of the symbolic use of all these insects to be found in numerous journal articles (Kritsky & Cherry 1993, Prete & Wolfe 1992).

The butterfly is an exception. References to the butterfly in Egyptian art are usually brief and most gloss over any possible symbolism by statements such as the butterfly is used

”for its own beauty rather than as a symbol with religious significance” .

(Kritsky 2007:37)

Yet, although the butterfly is not found as a hieroglyphic sign and is drawn naturalistically in some cases, it cannot simply be assumed that the butterfly has no symbolism and is simply included to look pretty. When Heinrich Schäfer (1974:230) observes that:

“ ..when a marshland butterfly is drawn almost the same size as a duck”

this may well be an indication of the importance of the butterfly.

In a world where duality is so engrained in the culture and religion of the people, it seems unlikely that the life cycle of the butterfly which consists of two distinctly different living phases, that of the caterpillar and that of the winged butterfly, would not be significant. The duality of this insect must have been observed by the Egyptians and the ability of the butterfly to be “re-born” from the chrysalis must have seemed like a miracle. It is therefore highly unlikely that the butterfly would be seen only for its beauty. In a culture where animals suggested something metaphorically about the gods and goddesses (Brewer & Teeter 2007:98), and every aspect of life was a manifestation of religious belief, it is highly likely that the butterfly had a role other than purely decorative.

The research problem to be addressed therefore is: is the butterfly merely an object of beauty or does it convey some religious symbolism?

The aim of this research is to examine a variety of butterfly images from Ancient Egypt in a systematic way so as to attempt to uncover any symbolism of the butterfly.

Images have been selected from different dynasties in the history of Ancient Egypt as well as from different artistic mediums. Tomb painting, jewellery and figurines will be examined. The same methodology will be applied to each of the butterfly images. This methodology is based on that suggested by Wilkinson in his book, "Symbols and Magic in Egyptian Art" (Wilkinson 1994).

Through this systematic examination, it is hoped that any similar trends which indicate symbolism of the butterfly may be discovered. Using the same system to examine the selected images, it will be possible to note any similar findings. Obvious differences will also be noted.

An examination of the symbolism of the butterfly in art from countries and historic periods other than Ancient Egypt will also be considered. This may point to trends in the use of the butterfly as a symbol which may support or refute the findings of this study.

3.2 Research Method.

In his important book on Egyptian symbolism Wilkinson (1994:7) points out that:

"symbols represent something other than what they actually depict, and in Ancient Egypt that deeper meaning was invariably linked with the very nature of existence itself."

Egyptian art was highly symbolic but this symbolism is in no way straightforward or easy to interpret. It was often conflicting and could be used in different ways depending on the message to be conveyed.

Wilkinson suggests nine aspects of the art which can be examined in order to reveal the symbolism intended. These nine aspects are:

1. Form
2. Size
3. Location
4. Materials
5. Colour
6. Numbers
7. Hieroglyphs
8. Actions
9. Gestures

Not all of these nine aspects will be found in each example. Different works stress different aspects. By examining these aspects for each art work selected, it will be possible to explore the different meanings and attempt to apply these meanings in a more general way to the use of the butterfly in Egyptian art. It is possible that there might be a range of symbolic meanings.

By applying the above methodology consistently, personal interpretation should be avoided. The danger of superimposing one's own ideas will thus be minimised.

The aspects to be considered are as follows.

3.2.1 Form

(Wilkinson1994:16-29)

The shape of an object was given great importance in Ancient Egypt. In fact, the form was more important than the function and so practical needs were often secondary to the symbolic needs of form (Wilkinson 1994:16). Form may be directly associated with a specific deity. In this way, the shape of the object reflects an attribute directly associated with that deity. This shape will be incorporated into the design. Wilkinson refers to this as Primary Association (Wilkinson 1994:16). Many amuletic charms have Primary Association.

In Secondary Association, the visual relationship is more subtle but is nevertheless an important and powerful symbol. Here, the shape is reminiscent of the object – it looks similar. In this way, the form is a symbol of the deity represented. For example, a bunch of grapes looks like a heart and so the bunch of grapes becomes a symbol for life and rebirth normally attributed to the heart (Wilkinson 1994:18).

This type of symbolism is not only related to the overall form, but also to the various components of the shape. This is more subtle. One of the most powerful symbols, that of the *ankh*, is often incorporated into the form so as to include the symbol of creation and rebirth. Thus the details of the form may represent various symbolic aspects.

3.2.2 Size

(Wilkinson 1994:38-51)

Relative size is usually associated with the hierarchy of importance. However, this is not necessarily always true. Composition and artistic license must also be considered. Wilkinson points out that aspects of the afterlife are massive and that there may be mythological reasons for figures having a large size (Wilkinson 1994:39).

The colossal statue made during the reign of Ramesses II had its own attendant priesthood and was regarded as a deity in its own right. Its huge size may also signify the power to prevent evil. This would give the statue a power of its own through symbolism with which the Egyptians were familiar.

At the other extreme, the Egyptians were adept at making extremely small art works. These were seen as replacements for the full scale objects. Such objects were to provide what was needed in the afterlife and so had important magical powers.

Hostile creatures were often much smaller so as to reduce their power and make them look helpless. Smaller size is also related to weakness and defeat. It may therefore be deduced that larger size is to emphasize protection and convey strength and victory.

Isocephaly, that is, drawings of figures the same size which indicates equality of position or rank, is used frequently. A pharaoh drawn the same size as a deity thus equates them. Proportional differences are also used to emphasise certain qualities. Images were not meant to portray reality, such as a mature man with a portly stomach, but to symbolise the success of the individual.

3.2.3 Location

(Wilkinson 1994:60-73)

The position and placement of an object in the overall composition of an art work is an important aspect of symbolism in Egyptian art (Wilkinson 1994: 60). This should be considered on two levels.

Firstly, one must consider absolute location ie. where the location is relative to the compass. Once again, caution must be exercised to examine this aspect from the perspective of Ancient Egypt. Their country was the centre of their universe with the river Nile as the North/South axis and the movement of the sun as the East/West axis. Certain locations within this area were given special significance and were considered to have either religious or mythological significance.

During the time of the Middle Kingdom when the worship of Osiris was important, the city of Abydos was an important cult centre being the traditional burial place of the Underworld god and hence temples were built here. Chapels, tombs and stelae were also erected here. Those who were unable to actually visit this site had pictorial representations showing them travelling there by boat. Remembering that once a picture was painted, it became a reality, this meant that even though the burial site was not at Abydos, the picture allowed it to have the strongest possible link with the holy site, a sort of pilgrimage in art.

Other sites also had mythological significance and it was thought that the gods dwelt in certain specific areas. Knowing that the Underworld was as real a location to Ancient Egyptians as the world they lived in, made the choice of a location extremely important. The gods of the underworld must be considered and pleased at all times.

The other important factor to consider with regard to location is Relative Placement. This refers to the position of the object relative to other figures in the composition as well as the orientation of the object. Hence, to be beneath a figure symbolised inferiority while the right side was more important than the left. The right ear thus did not only symbolise hearing but also wisdom. This could be related to the fact that Egypt was oriented towards the south and so therefore east and west are parallel with left and right. In the judgement of the dead, the just were sent to the right/west and the wicked to the left/east. The dead were known as “westerners” and Hathor, the goddess of the west, welcomed them.

The east was also symbolic of rebirth and during the Old Kingdom, the dead were buried facing the east, the rising sun. The orientation of the stars and the sun were also of symbolic importance, especially the polar star of the time, Alpha Draconis and the Orion constellation in the southern sky (Wilkinson 1994:66).

3.2.4 Materials

(Wilkinson 1994:82-95)

The material from which an object was made was of primary importance. It was often extremely symbolic and an essential part of the purpose or function of the object. Metal, stone, wood and even wax, clay and water, had significant symbolism for the Ancient Egyptians.

Of all the substances, gold was of great importance. Not only was it valuable but it was the metal most closely associated with the sun. As the sun god, Ra, was a major divinity, the shine and colour of gold signified the eternal life associated with the sun god.

Similarly, silver was also extremely important. Here the symbolism is associated with the moon and the god Hathor. Iron was known as the “metal of heaven” and objects made from iron were thought to have magical properties. Lead was also used symbolically and many charms and powers were associated with leaden objects. As lead is a fairly soft, malleable metal which is extremely heavy, it was thought to have potent magical powers.

Many stones were also associated with various magical powers. Basalt, granite and lapis lazuli were all important for their symbolic properties. Glass and faience were also thought to possess potent magical powers.

Apart from the date palm, wood is fairly scarce in Egypt and most of their wood was imported from Lebanon. There are many myths associated with the deities and trees. The goddess Hathor was known as “Lady of the Sycamore” in Memphis (Barnett

1996:88) and the god Osiris was freed from the Tamarisk tree by his sister, Isis (Kritsky 1991:35).

Ivory was thought to contain great strength and power, especially that from the hippopotamus. Even water was symbolic of creation which is easy to understand in a country whose life depended on the regular flow of the river Nile. Many temples thus had a sacred lake in the grounds.

It is the natural properties of each material which were noted by the Ancient Egyptians and the significance of the material was attributed to one or more of these properties.

3.2.5 Colour

(Wilkinson 1994:104-115)

In Ancient Egypt, colour was associated with life. It was infused into objects so that it was seen as the essence of the object, an essential element of its being. The hieroglyph for colour, *iwēn*, can also be translated as “being” which indicates just how important and symbolic colour was.

The Egyptians used mineral compounds for their colour and many of their art works retain a vivid, brilliant colouration even after so many years. Their ancient paints were quite permanent. The principal colours and some of the more common symbols for each are as follows:

Colour	Symbolism
Red	Life, regeneration Danger, anger, destruction Setting sun
Blue	Life and rebirth God Thoth and god Amun-Ra
Yellow	Eternal and imperishable
Green	Life and resurrection Healing, the eye God Hathor
White	Cleanliness , purity Priesthood Heraldic colour of Southern Egypt
Black	Death, destruction of enemies Resurrection , fertility, the underworld

(Wilkinson 1994:106-109)

It is noted that many colours have quite different symbolism. Once again, this is associated with the observations of the world around them. For example, black is symbolic of death and destruction. However, because of the black colour of the life-giving silt from the river Nile, black was also symbolic of fertility and hence life. Black therefore has a duality in its symbolism.

3.2.6 Numbers

(Wilkinson 1994:126-139)

The Ancient Egyptians are not noted as brilliant mathematicians and some of their seemingly advanced mathematical concepts may be more coincidence than intent. However, they were acutely aware of “patterns” and this, applied with their observations in astronomy, accounts for a great deal of the symbolism associated with numbers. Numbers are found in numerous texts, myths and art forms but the symbolism of numbers can change significantly depending on the context and circumstances.

The numbers 1,2,3,4 and 7 as well as their multiples are all significant. The number 1 is obvious as the symbol for uniqueness or “oneness” and is often associated with the deities. One also represents unity.

An extremely important number, 2, represents duality (see 1.2.2 above). This concept was one of the central ideas in the Egyptian culture and we find this in many aspects of their religion: day and night, heaven and earth, light and dark, sun and moon. This duality is a concept which does not involve our more modern interpretation of “opposites”. It is in fact a concept of “completeness”. This pattern of pairing is seen not only in myths and religious beliefs but also in practical ways. Many Egyptian monuments reflect duality and the depictions of their deities are often paired. Their land was a duality itself, being divided into upper and Lower Egypt, the Delta and the Nile valley. The symbolism of the number 2 thus goes beyond mere binary systems and becomes a symbol of the nature of creation. It is the identity of Egypt.

The number 3 refers to plurality. In religion it also refers to a closed system. For example among deities there is the trinity of Amun, Ra and Ptah, the three major deities in the New Kingdom constituting a single triune god. Hence 3 symbolises a closed, harmonic system.

The number 4 is common in Egyptian art and ritual as representing totally or completeness as seen in the four cardinal points. Most religious rituals had some reference to the number four: four arrows, four birds, or incantations repeated four times.

Seven was a number representing great potency and symbolised perfection and effectiveness. This may be due to it being equal to 3 + 4. It is often associated with deities such as the seven souls of Re or the seven gods revered at Abydos. Spells often contained the number 7. For example, tying 7 knots would relieve a headache. Multiples of 7 feature frequently in both myth and magic with 14, 21 and 42 being used often.

3.2.7 Hieroglyphs

(Wilkinson 1994:148-161)

Of all the images associated with Ancient Egypt, the hieroglyphic script is possibly the best known and most easily recognised. It is a unique form of writing which was developed very early in Egypt as a means of recording accounts and business deals. The Egyptians referred to hieroglyphs as “*medu netcher*” – “the word of the gods” (Wilkinson 1992:9). Hieroglyphs were associated with Thoth, the deity of writing. The hieroglyphic script is pictorial and symbolic, an interaction of words and pictures. In fact, the script is a work of art in itself and not simply a means of recording information.

The hieroglyph of a living thing was considered to be alive itself. Thus these signs were powerful symbols containing a magical force associated with the essence of life. Once again, we are challenged to lose our present day connotations of “writing” and attempt to view the Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs as the people of those times would do. Hieroglyphs were often used in conjunction with other art forms either on a primary or secondary level. At the primary level, the hieroglyphs are easily evident while at the secondary level objects or people are depicted in such a way as to represent a hieroglyphic form. This interaction of writing and pictorial representation is of major symbolic importance.

3.2.8 Actions

(Wilkinson 1994:170-183)

Egyptian art conveys actions in two ways, either in actuality or mythologically (Wilkinson 1992:170). Scenes frequently show people or creatures performing actual tasks such as building, running, hunting etc. Some of these actions reflect the daily lives of the people but many have ritualistic meaning as well.

Other actions are more obviously mythological and may include the deity associated with the action. A picture of the king learning to shoot the bow and arrow may include one of the gods such as Horus who was associated with this activity. This type of symbolism was taken even further when the artist emphasises certain aspects of the

movement in order to portray a required connotation such as strength. The action then becomes symbolic of strength. The king is more often than not depicted in this latter manner.

It must be emphasised that any depiction of an action meant that the action had actually occurred. This was of particular importance when applied to ritual and appeasing the gods. It must be remembered that the king was not only human, but was also divine. This dual nature of kingship is often reflected in the actions he is performing. Through his actions, he could use his supernatural powers. A scene of a hippopotamus hunt in this way symbolised the power of the king to replace chaos with order. The hunt depicted may be that of a real hunt, or it may be a ritual re-enactment of a hunt.

Actions of animals frequently have deeper symbolism. This concept is studied in depth by Evans (2010:49-55) and these findings will also be considered when dealing with the symbolism of actions.

3.2.9 Gestures

(Wilkinson 1994:192-203)

The actions discussed above are often supplemented by careful use of gesture. Gesture refers to the movement of a part of the body to symbolise something specific. For example, the gesture of clapping hands together symbolises approval and enjoyment, what we call “applause”. Gestures may also be more subtle and involve a simple positioning of a part of the body, such as the tilt of the head.

Although it is sometimes difficult to interpret a gesture in a two dimensional representation, the following categories of symbolism are noted:

Category	Symbolic gesture
Dominance	Raised mace Foot on enemy
Submission	Bowing Prostration
Protection	Two fingers stretched out
Praise	Arms at shoulder height, palms outwards
Invocation	Arm stretched out, thumb at top
Offering	Arm stretched out, hand cupped
Mourning	Arms raised to cover head
Rejoicing	Arms above shoulders, palms out

(Wilkinson 1994:194-195)

Although some of these nine aspects seem to deal exclusively with the human figure, the basic symbolism can at times be applied to animals including insects. Hence it will be important to maintain a systematic application of the above, even if it seems unlikely that it will reveal any symbolism.

4. **ANALYSIS OF SOURCE MATERIAL**

A variety of images has been selected in an attempt to use examples from different dynasties and different art forms. For each art work, Wilkinson's nine aspects of symbolism will be applied in a systematic manner. Wherever possible, evidence from other sources will also be cited. Where no evidence has been found, logical discussion will be given.

The images selected are as follows:

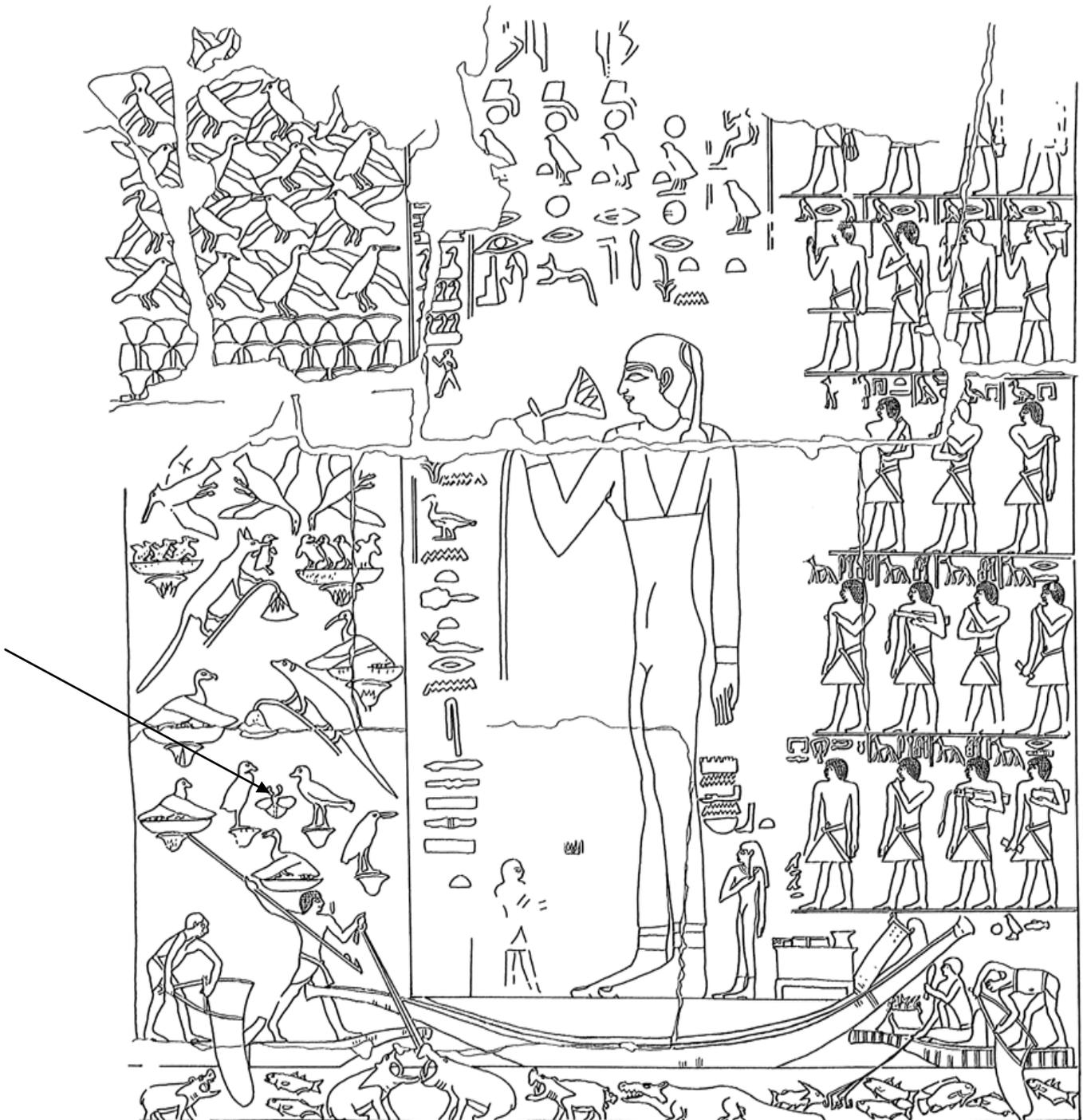
	IMAGE	LOCATION	DYNASTY	MEDIUM
1	Pleasure scene	Tomb of <i>Jdwt</i> -Saqqara Kanawati	4 th	Limestone relief
2	Fishing scene	Tomb of <i>K3-gm-nj:mnj</i> - Saqqara Kagemni-Memi	4 th	Limestone relief
3	Hunting scene	tomb of Nebamun in Thebes	18 th	Painted mural
4	Hunting and fishing scene	Tomb of Nakht	18 th	Painted mural
5	Hippo statuette	Unknown burial ground (kept in Museum of Art, Rhode Island school of design)	11 th or 12 th	Faience statuette
6	Amulet	Memphite region of Lisht North in the cemetery Radim.	12 th or 13 th	Faience Amulet
7	Bracelets	Tomb of Queen Hetepheres, east side of the Great Pyramid of Khufuat, Giza.	4 th	Jewellery

The source of the images is as follows:

1	Pleasure scene	(http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk) And Evans 2010:291
2	Fishing scene	(http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk)
3	Hunting scene	James 1979:31
4	Hunting and Fishing scene	Johnson 2000: 18).
5	Hippo statuette	Friedman 1998:238).
6	Amulet	http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/100000301?rpp=20&pg=1&ft=butterfly+amulet&pos=7
7	Bracelets	www.ancients-egypt-history.com/2011/04/treasures-of-queen-hetepheres-i-of.html

4.1 PLEASURE SCENE

Fig 10: Pleasure scene relief



This marsh scene is from the west wall of room 3 in the tomb of Kanawati-Abden-Raziq *jdwt* – Saqqara (Archeology Data service, University of York)

(Harpur 1987:275)(Evans 2010:291).

In this scene, which is typical of the Old Kingdom murals, the large central figure is surrounded by a number of sections depicting various activities. It is the activities on the left which will be considered.

The lower segment shows two hunters, one netting fish and the other harpooning hippopotami. Immediately above the hunters is a group of birds' nests with a central butterfly. Above this are a mongoose and a genet capturing nestlings while the final section at the top shows a group of various birds in flight. There is a great deal of activity from all the animals in these scenes. While the title "pleasure scene" focuses on the main figure, the animals are conveying various hunting activities.

The single butterfly will now be discussed.

FORM

The single butterfly in this scene is seen from above, a "bird's-eye" view. It is the only creature in this mural scene viewed in this way. All the other animals (birds, mongoose, fish, hippopotami, crocodiles) are drawn in profile. The humans are also in profile.

Viewed in this way, the outstretched wings are clear and the butterfly is obviously in full flight. This suggests life, action and the freedom of flight. The birds surrounding the butterfly display wings in three different positions.

- (i) The bird on the immediate left and that on the lower right have no distinct wings.
- (ii) The bird on the upper right has a wing in the position of rest.
- (iii) The bird below and that on the far left have a large, obvious wing in a position of protection over the eggs (or possibly young chicks) in the nest.

It is quite possible that the form of this centrally placed butterfly symbolises life and freedom. The fully extended wings of the butterfly suggest flight and complement the large, protective wings of the birds on their nests.

All four wings are easily visible in this butterfly. This places the butterfly after the fifth dynasty (Evans 2010:51). The extended wings show that the butterfly is in full flight in the air. When a butterfly alights, its wings are held vertically so this butterfly is not still, it is flying in the air. The obvious terminating knobs on the antennae of the insect further identify this as definitely a butterfly and not a moth (Evans 2010:52).

The wings of the two nested birds are significant in the context of the scene depicted. These wings are large and in a position which clearly indicates protection. The wings are folded over the eggs/young birds. In contrast, the butterfly's wings

are fully extended. Hence we have a balance, a duality common in Egyptian art. Duality refers to:

“... the juxtaposing of opposite or complementary realities (whether cultural, philosophical, or of the natural world) in a static or dynamic relationship and serves as a mechanism to make sense of, and explain, the functioning of the world”.

(Servajean 2008:1)

In this case, a dynamic duality exists which means that some dominant element combines the two. It is suggested that this common element is that of freedom and life. This is because the baby birds are about to lose their lives while the butterfly will fly away freely to continue its life.

There is a definite contrast of the wings of the parent bird protecting her young from capture or death and the extended wings of the butterfly in flight. This suggests a balance of death and life, of capture versus freedom. By using a butterfly and not another bird in flight, the analogy of the wings is amplified. The butterfly suggests the freedom of flight intended for the nestlings and thereby restores peace in place of chaos. In this way, the artist has provided a balance and *ma^c* at is restored.

SIZE

The size of the butterfly in relation to the birds in this segment of the mural is not proportionate. The butterfly is similar in size to the body of the bird. Hence the butterfly is depicted much larger than it should be. In Egyptian art, the relative size of a figure relates frequently to its importance in the hierarchy (Wilkinson 1994:38). The comparatively large size of the butterfly therefore gives it considerable importance in the scene.

Large size may symbolize strength and power as well as importance. Although in this case it is possible that the butterfly is enlarged due to “artistic license” (Wilkinson 1994:39), it is more likely that it is “larger-than-life” to convey an important message. This may be that the butterfly symbolises life and the freedom of flight.

Wilkinson (199:44) also points out that:

“the various wildlife have some hierarchical scaling – hippopotamus and crocodiles are smaller to diminish their magical influence while birds and butterflies are large”.

This certainly seems to be the case in this scene. The hippos in the lowest segment of the mural are considerable smaller in scale, while the birds – and, significantly, the butterfly – are much larger.

The large size of the butterfly would be most unlikely to represent physical strength. It could therefore represent the “strength” to escape the hunters and to remain free and alive.

Wilkinson (1994:45) also states that:

“symbolic significance was also sometimes achieved through the inclusion in a composition of a subject which is naturally small”.

The Tiger Butterfly which is the species most often portrayed in Egyptian art has a wingspan of approximately 50mm. This would make it similar in size in reality to the bird’s beak. The message inherent in this obvious misrepresentation of size, is that the butterfly is extremely important. It has a specific function within this scene. This function seems to be that of restoring the balance of life in a situation threatened by death.

LOCATION

Wilkinson (1994:66) emphasises that of all the aspects of symbolism, location is possibly the most important. He describes location in terms of Absolute and Relative as follows.

Absolute location revolves around the fact that Egypt was regarded by the ancient Egyptians to be at the centre of the world (Cornelius 2010:324). It refers to the actual placement of an object. Relative location is to do with orientation.

Absolute Location of this mural is on the west wall of room III. The west is associated with the sinking sun and the goddess Hathor (see 5.3 above). This is the location indicating death and so it is fitting that the scene with the hunting and consequent death of animals be on the west.

Relative location is just as important as absolute location and refers to the alignment of the objects in the composition.

This mural is arranged in nine similar sized segments all of which stand on a narrow base representing the water/marsh. This lower segment contains hippos, fish and a crocodile. The three segments on the left all contain scenes relating to water-fowl (birds). It is the left scenes that will now be discussed.

The figures at the bottom show a man in the process of netting fish and harpooning hippos. They are hunting and are therefore in the process of killing these animals. Above these men are five birds and one butterfly. The birds are variously positioned. Two are sitting on their nests and their large, folded wings show that they are trying to protect their young in the nest from predators. The other three birds are standing on mounds in the shape suggesting lotus flowers. The butterfly is in the middle and above one of the nests. This gives the butterfly a significant position in the scene.

Wilkinson (1994:67) describes the symbolism of location as follows:

“The lower section which is often the marshland environment symbolises the produce of a fertile land.

The middle section depicts kings or gods.

The upper section often shows a form of worship of the gods”.

In this scene, the butterfly is in the centre, at the top. This location therefore places it in a position relating it to the gods. Butterflies fly in a meandering fashion and are brightly coloured. The Tiger butterfly is bright orange. This rapidly moving insect could easily have been associated with the sky god. Its flight pattern is mostly horizontal which could easily be a reminder of the path of the sun as it moves across the sky each day. Furthermore, butterflies are only active during the day, in the sunshine. The bright orange colour could possibly have been identified with the sun god Ra. In a land where the sun god was the supreme creator and ruler, a bright orange butterfly could logically fit this context. The position of the butterfly in the centre and at the top puts it in a location often used for deities and their worship in Egyptian art. The artist could easily have located the butterfly under the bird's nest on the left. Instead, it is in the centre between two standing birds which are facing each other. This location between the two standing birds makes it a focal point. Attention is drawn to the butterfly because of its location. This suggests that it is important. It is quite possible that it could symbolise life and possibly the life given by the sun god, Ra.

MATERIALS

This mural is created on the limestone wall of the chamber. Limestone was available and frequently used in burial chambers. It is durable and Wilkinson (1994:88) states that “the timeless endurance associated with stone” suggests the reality of the afterlife which is permanent and immutable. By carving this relief in stone, it was to ensure that all the images depicted would endure in the after-life. This includes the butterfly.

COLOUR

Unfortunately, the original colours used in this scene are no longer visible.

NUMBERS

Although the Ancient Egyptians were not known for their mathematical genius, and Wilkinson (1994:126) comments that “they were not that great!” – (at mathematics) numbers were still significant and were used in mystical contexts.

The number one denotes uniqueness and unity (see 5.6 above). There is only one butterfly in this mural. The single butterfly is positioned significantly between two birds that are facing each other. The bird on the left displays only one leg and the bird on the right has two legs and a wing in the rest position. The number two pervades all aspects of Egyptian culture. So many beliefs and customs centred on duality. It is possible that these two birds could represent a form of duality – flightless versus able to fly. The single butterfly with its four obvious wings is placed in the middle of the birds and it is possible that it may symbolise the hope of flight and therefore life for the nestlings being protected by the large wing of the mother bird. Only one butterfly is needed to convey this hope. The single butterfly unites the concept of flight portrayed by the birds on either side of it.

There are two nests, significantly opposite each other – another indication of the importance of duality – similar to the two standing birds. The fifth bird in this sector is quite different from the others. It appears to be larger and has a much longer beak. It does not seem to be a part of the group around the butterfly. Perhaps with its long beak, it is the provider of food for the nestlings. The long beak seems to suggest this.

So, it is feasible that the single butterfly gives the hope of life and flight, the single bird with the large beak gives the assurance of food to sustain life. The two mother birds protecting their young with their wings are assured that the nestlings will not be flightless. They will live and fly.

ACTIONS

The butterfly clearly has four wings spread out in the action of flying. Wilkinson (1994:173) reminds us that the marsh scenes are largely iconographic portraying two main actions: service to the gods and maintaining order in the cosmos.

In this context, the flying action of the butterfly is significant. It is in obvious contrast to the nestlings which are too young to fly. The threat of their capture and death is therefore balanced by the flight and life of the butterfly portrayed in the action of flying. Ma^cat has been restored. The order of the cosmos is maintained.

The hunter who is harpooning the hippo in the scene below the butterfly warrants comment, as does the scene with the genet capturing the baby bird above. Royal hippo hunts were believed to be a way of restoring order over disorder, the hippo being an animal of destruction (Wilkinson 1992:71). The hippo hunt developed into a

ritual acted out, and signifies removing danger and restoring peace. The butterfly scene above could easily mirror this.

The scene above the butterfly shows another hunting scene. The mammal on the left appears to be a genet hunting and capturing a baby bird from the nest. This type of hunting scene is quite common in tomb marsh scenes (Evans 2010:118). The action of the genet hunting is again parallel to that of the hippo hunt below. Wilkinson (1994:182) suggests another possible symbolism. He refers to the context of the marsh relating to sexuality, fertility, and re-birth:

“The marsh setting itself is frequently associated with original creation, with verdant plant life and fecundity, and with Hathor, goddess of sexual love. Both the hunting of wild ducks or hippopotami (a symbol of afterlife triumph over chaotic forces) and the capturing of bulti fish (symbolic of the sun and rebirth) may fit into the overall theme of sexuality, birth and re-birth”.

The genet on the right is climbing the papyrus stalk and moving carefully towards the nest where the parent bird has a large protective wing over the nestlings. It is in the process of hunting.

The lone butterfly in the centre is the only animal in all the scenes that is not involved in the action of hunting. It is in contrast to all the actions above and below it. The symbolism suggested above is therefore plausible. The butterfly appears to symbolise life, freedom and hope.

GESTURES

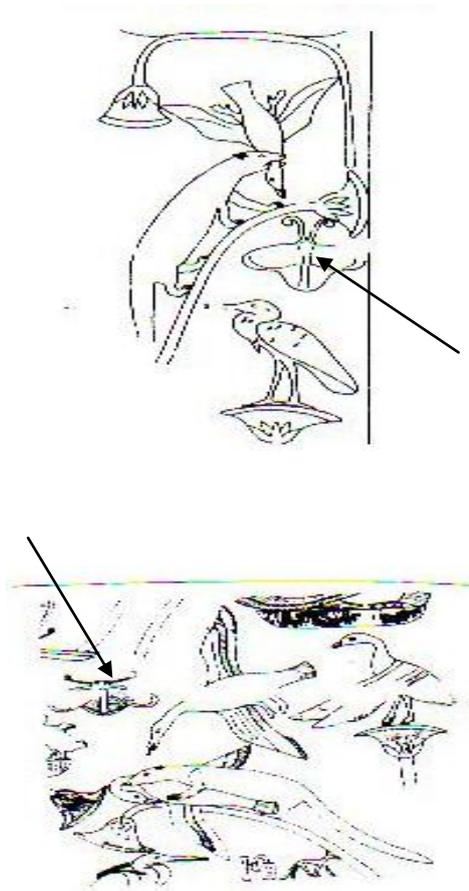
Gesture refers to “individual movement, stance or pose which may be used as part of a larger activity or which may function independently” (Wilkinson 1994:192). The butterfly in this scene is facing upwards, towards the heavens and is vertically aligned. The raised arms of a figure are a protective gesture invoking the god’s power (Wilkinson 1994:196). The two distinctive antennae of the butterfly which are raised upwards may parallel this symbolism and signify a gesture of asking for protection of the nestlings. This would reinforce the aspect of hope and freedom discussed above.

Wilkinson (1994:39) discusses the symbol for the deity *Heh* who is depicted with two upraised arms. *Heh* was the personification of eternity. It is possible that the two upraised antennae of the butterfly reminded the Ancient Egyptians of this deity. This association would add to the possible symbolism of the butterfly as life and hope.

The scene discussed above is by no means unique. The two figures below show two different scenes where a butterfly features prominently in a hunting scene. In

both of these cases, the conclusions drawn above regarding the symbolism of the butterfly as that of life, freedom and hope, could apply.

Fig 11: Butterflies in Old Kingdom tombs



(Evans 2012:146)

In the top scene the butterfly is very large and is located directly below the mouth of the mongoose in which the trapped bird is caught. The wings of the butterfly are fully extended and mirror the wings of the dying bird.

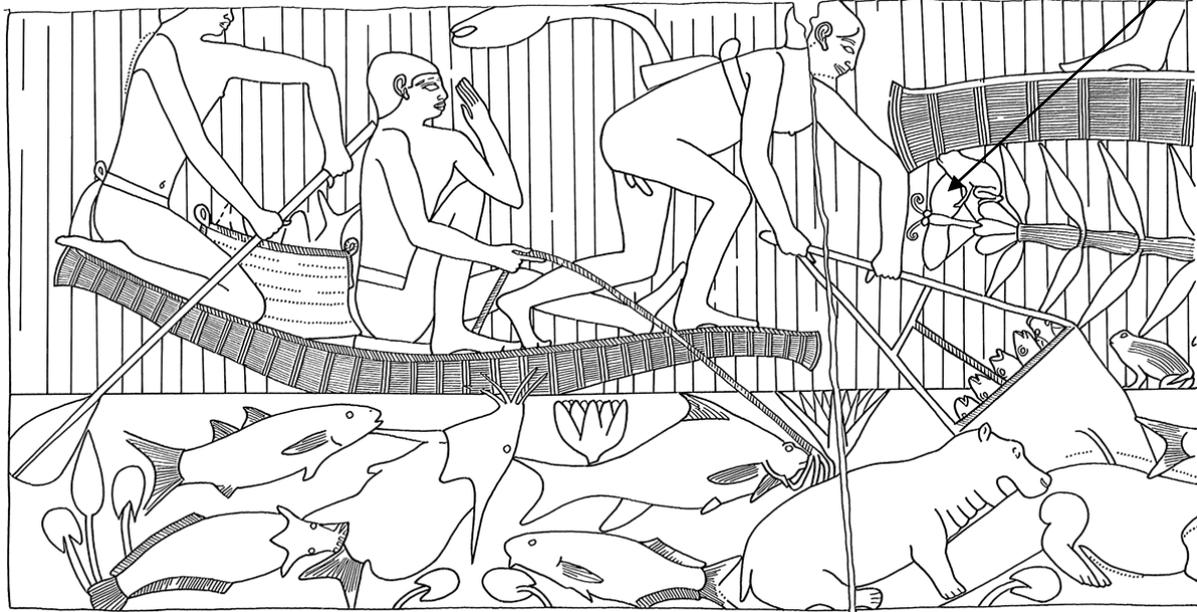
In the bottom scene, the butterfly is situated above the dying bird which is once again being hunted by a mongoose. The large, extended wings again dominate and the size of the butterfly emphasises its significance in the scene. Note also the large, up-turned antennae.

The examples above are all from Memphite tombs of the 5th and 6th dynasty. However, this theme recurs as will be seen in the famous mural from the tomb of Nebamun below (see 4.3). This is from the 18th dynasty.

The butterfly is significant in each of these scenes and once again, balances the chaos of the hunt with the life and freedom of the flying butterfly. Ma^cat is restored.

4.2 FISHING SCENE

Fig 12: Fishing scene



This marsh scene is from the west wall of room 1 in the Tomb of Kagemni-Memi

K3-gm-nj:mj-Saqqara

(<http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk>)

In this scene, three men in a light skiff are seen. The man at the back is rowing and there is a basket in front of him containing some recently caught fish. The man in the middle has a rope with a large hook at the end and he is catching fish while the man in the front of the skiff is dragging a basket full of gasping fish out of the water. In the water below the skiff are numerous fish and some water plants. There is also a hippo attacking a crocodile. In front of the fishing boat is an extended branch of a plant at the apex of which a large butterfly is perched. Immediately behind the butterfly is a frog and there is another frog below the plant. This scene shows a great deal of activity typical of a marsh fishing scene.

The single butterfly will now be discussed.

FORM

The butterfly in this scene has clear shape and structure. The four wings are spread out as though in flight. The body with two large “eyes” and obvious antennae are all clearly defined. This detailed body structure places this butterfly after the 5th dynasty

(Evans 2010:51). The bilateral symmetry of the butterfly is emphasised by its position at the apex of the plant which is also bilaterally symmetrical. However, the butterfly is seen from above. Schäfer (1974:265) reminds us that perspective may simply be due to the fact that the artist may draw the detail of an item which has stayed in his mind – in this case, the outspread wings of the butterfly. All the other creatures, with the exception of the catfish in the lower left corner, are seen in profile. This is the typical form of a butterfly in full flight. Although the butterfly is obviously not in flight, being perched on the plant, the spread wings suggest flight. Hence the form of the butterfly seems to be significant. It is not portrayed in a realistic way and so could be used in the picture to convey an idea or concept.

The flight of the butterfly may symbolise freedom and life. This proposal is based on the fact that all actions must be balanced and counter-acted to maintain harmony in Egyptian culture. Thus the freedom and life of the butterfly with its outstretched wings is in stark contrast to the fish being caught in the basket held by the man in the front of the boat. The fish are obviously trapped while the butterfly is free. The concept of duality which was central to Egyptian culture and religion is thus noted (see 2.2 above). The freedom of the butterfly restores the balance caused by the capture and death of the fish. Chaos has been avoided and the harmony of the scene is restored by balancing the butterfly in full flight with the trapped fish immediately below it.

This seems to be a reasonable assumption as the butterfly is at the apex of a large reed, possibly papyrus, which symbolises life. According to Wilkinson (1992:123), the papyrus is a natural symbol for life and protection. He refers to the many marsh scenes with clumps of papyrus which are growing and which are often used to signify joy. Papyrus was a symbol of the marsh from which all life came. It was also seen to be similar, and therefore symbolic, of the pillars of the temple, and the papyrus stalks were regarded as pillars which held up the sky. It is thus not unreasonable to attribute similar symbolism to the butterfly which in this scene is almost an extension of the papyrus stalk.

SIZE

The wing span of the butterfly is nearly the same as the length of the fisherman's fore - arm. It is significantly larger in proportion to all the other animals in the scene. This obvious distortion of its size relative to the size of the other creatures gives it considerable importance in the scene. In Egyptian art, size frequently reflects importance in the hierarchy (Wilkinson 1994:38). Although large size may represent strength and power, it may also be used to suggest a power different from that of physical strength. A butterfly is obviously not a physically strong creature and yet it is depicted so large. This could be to symbolise the function of the butterfly in the scene. It is there to show the importance of life and freedom of flight. As in the

previous scene, discussed above, it is reasonable then to see the function of the butterfly as that of restoring the balance of life and freedom in a scene depicting death and entrapment. In comparison, the hippopotamus in the water below the butterfly is much smaller in proportion, as is the crocodile. This diminishing in size would be to reduce the threat of the hippo which was a dangerous animal to be feared. By making the hippo smaller in the hierarchy of animals in the scene, its danger would be reduced. In fact, the hippo is almost the same size as the various species of fish in the water.

LOCATION

The primary location of this scene, as given by Evans(2010:295) is the west wall of room 1 in the tomb. Marshland scenes are typically located on the lower section of the wall which was considered to represent the actual location of the marsh, an environment which produced the offerings and produce necessary to sustain life. Wilkinson.R. (1994:69) suggests that the western wall of the room is dedicated to the gods associated with the setting sun. The west was the area of death. As much of this scene is depicting hunting, both by the men in the boat and also by the hippo in the water which is attacking the crocodile, this seems a reasonable association. In contrast to the death and destruction in the lower section of the mural, we have the large butterfly, placed to the east of the men. The east is associated with the rising sun, with the god Ra, and with life. The butterfly being a creature of the sky would have been accepted as a creature of Ra. This has some support from the fact that there are butterflies on the ceiling of the palace of Amenophis III at Thebes. The position of these insects on the ceiling puts them close to the sun god and suggests a possible close association. This reinforces the concept of life and freedom already mentioned.

The relevant location of the butterfly is significant. The butterfly is directly opposite the arm which is holding the fishing net. In this way, the arm which is causing the destruction of life is directly counter-balanced by the butterfly which is in the full flight of a living creature. Once again, ma'at has been restored and the butterfly's life and freedom has balanced the death and entrapment caused by the arm of the man holding the net.

The second point to note about the location of the butterfly relevant to the other creatures in the scene is that it is located immediately above the trapped fishes and the attacking hippo. This location one again balances the chaos. The destruction below is counteracted by the free flying butterfly above. There are many other locations in this mural where the artist could have placed the butterfly. A more realistic placement would have been in the sky above the right hand boat, or flying between the first two men. The artist, however, placed the butterfly above the dying

animals and to the right of the man's arm. The significance of this location cannot be overlooked.

Thirdly, the butterfly is placed at the apex of the plant. As mentioned already, this plant is symbolic of the life arising from the fertile marshland. The butterfly at the apex therefore connects it with the plant, not merely by association, but by its being an extension of the plant itself. In fact, it is at the point, the growing, leading point of the plant. This clearly indicates that the butterfly and the plant are one. As the plant symbolises life, so does the butterfly.

Robins (2008:19) reminds us that:

“Images were not placed haphazardly. Position and placement were relevant to the overall order”.

This supports the discussion above and further extends the concept that the function of Egyptian art is always linked to its context. In this case, the function of the butterfly is linked to the context of the scene.

MATERIALS

This aspect applies to the stone of the tomb in which it is located. This mural is found on the inner wall of the burial chamber. The relevance will be that the wall is made of stone which is durable stone and long-lasting. The tomb was meant to last and so was this mural.

COLOUR

Unfortunately, the colour in this and other similar scenes from this tomb, is not clear.

The scene below which is located nearby shows some of the remaining colour but the butterfly appears to have no specific colour.

Fig 13: Fishing scene from tomb of Kagemni



Picture from www.osirisnet.net/mastabas/kagamni/e_kagemni_01.htm

NUMBERS

There is only one butterfly in this scene. In Ancient Egypt, the number one signified uniqueness and individuality (Wilkinson 1994:126). The number one also represents unity. This one unique butterfly could therefore represent the uniqueness of free flight in a scene which is focussed on destruction. Only one butterfly is needed to restore the balance and maintain the order in the cycle of life. The two frogs in the scene have some relevance in this context. Wilkinson (1994:20) reminds us that all creatures which lived in water have connotations of sexuality and fecundity. The frog is one such creature. Frogs are associated with rebirth goddess Heqet (Wilkinson 1992:107). Thus, the one frog which is very close to the butterfly but not on it and the other which is close to the fish, reinforce the symbol of life and rebirth suggested by the butterfly.

HIEROGLYPHS

Although the butterfly itself is not featured in Egyptian hieroglyphs, the shape of the butterfly, which is particularly obvious in this scene, deserves some discussion in the context of hieroglyphs. It must be remembered that a very small percentage of the population of Ancient Egypt, between one and four percent, were literate (Graves-Brown 2010:8). Art was very much a means of teaching the people and reinforcing their customs and beliefs. It was their detailed observations of the world around them that enhanced all of these beliefs. They were acutely aware of the inter-relatedness of all aspects of their world. With this in mind, let us attempt to look at the butterfly through the eyes of an Ancient Egyptian, as far our imagination will allow this and based on our understanding of their culture, beliefs and way of life.

Possibly the best known hieroglyphic sign and certainly one that every Egyptian would recognise is the Ankh sign. This sign means “life” or “air” (the breath of life). Even in the 21st century, it is recognised and accepted as a symbol with very strong mythical and religious significance.

If we look at the basic shape of the ankh sign and then look at the butterfly, a striking connection can be seen.

Fig 14: Ankh sign

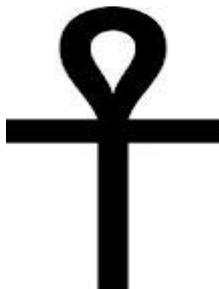


Fig 15: Tiger butterfly



The head of the butterfly and its abdomen are very similar to the central vertical section of the ankh sign. The horizontal section corresponds to the upper edge of the butterfly's wings. The colouring of the Tiger butterfly makes this comparison even more obvious, this would not have gone un-noticed by the ancient Egyptians. In fact, it would have been affirmed by the fact that the butterfly was a creature of the air. It therefore seems reasonable to accept that the butterfly, like the ankh sign, was seen as a symbol of life. Wilkinson (1994:157-158) discusses the visual analogy of hieroglyphic signs and refers to this as "analogy of form". This means that certain forms were utilized and "projected on to natural objects which resembled the form of the hieroglyph".

Schäfer (1987:75) offers some support for this. He refers to the shape of a libation vase as follows:

"..they saw the sign of life, the *ankh*, in the protuberant shape of a libation vase and this gave expression to the ideas of water and life and created a new type of libation vase called the "*ankh*", like the symbol of life itself".

If this applies to the shape of a vase, it seems reasonable to suggest that it may equally well apply to black the body and wing tip of the Tiger butterfly.

ACTIONS

Aldred (1980:12) states that an examination of Egyptian art reveals that the dominant impression is that of humanity and that the main subject of this art is "man and his many activities in an Egyptian milieu".

Aldred emphasises that Egyptian art "mirrors an ideal aspect of the natural world" in which a rational and disciplined approach is depicted. In this way, the art repeats the orderly rule established in the creation of the world by *ma'at*. *Ma'at* is central to Egyptian society. *Ma'at* is the god's supreme gift to humanity, that of truth, justice and order (Wilkinson 2008:173). The absence of *ma'at* therefore results in chaos (*isfet*), evil and unrest. An important function of the Pharaoh was to maintain *ma'at* in society by re-establishing order in the land. Through art, the Egyptians could perpetuate an ordered universe. Aldred (1980:18) suggests that the purpose of their art was:

"..to cast a spell, to impose a favourable order upon the universe under the inspiration of the Creator who first brought it into being out of Chaos".

Wilkinson (1992:37) draws attention to the fact that the symbol for *ma^cat* is the narrow hieroglyphic sign resembling a straight rule. The concept of “straightness” such a staff, a spear or in this case, a stalk is frequently associated with *ma^cat*. The goddess *Ma^cat* with the large upright feather is often placed on a column or plinth. In this scene the butterfly is at the apex of what appears to be a straight stalk of a plant. This extension of the “straightness” of the stalk suggests that the function of the butterfly is to restore order.

Wilkinson (1994:70) discusses three different categories of actions:

- i) Real: these actions convey real events.
- ii) Mythical: in this category there are deities involved and the gods play a part in the actions portrayed.
- iii) Iconographic: these actions are based on a real event but are used more for “propaganda” i.e. for spreading a particular message to the people.

Wilkinson continues to say that the marsh scenes fall into the third category which would include service to the gods and, particularly, maintaining order in the world.

The actions of the men in this scene are normal activities, rowing and fishing. The actions of the animals are varied. Some of the fish are swimming, some are gasping for breath after being caught in the basket, and some are already dead with their tails visible in the basket on the boat. The hippo is attacking the crocodile, the frogs are poised in a position suggesting they are ready to jump, and the butterfly is perched significantly at the apex of the plant.

Although the butterfly appears to be inactive, the artist has portrayed the butterfly in the form which suggests full flight. The four wings are spread as they would be in flight. The prominent antennae and two large eyes further enhance the suggestion that this butterfly is not in repose but is actively involved in the scene. The flight of the butterfly therefore gives life to the scene. It is in contrast to the death and destruction of the other animals and, together with the frogs, may symbolise not only life, but rebirth and therefore the restoration of *ma^cat*. The frog which is sitting very close to the butterfly warrants brief discussion as it supports the suggested symbolism of the butterfly.

The frog, *kerer* in ancient Egyptian (Wilkinson 1992: 106-107), was the symbol of creation, fertility, birth and regeneration. It was associated with the forces which originally brought life into being (Wilkinson.R.1992:107). Having a frog so close to the butterfly, in fact, touching it, it would be reasonable to assume an association between the two creatures. The second frog is perched immediately to the right of the basket of fish and above the attacking hippo. This would restore the order in the scene by counteracting the death with a strong symbol for creation. The frogs therefore reinforce the suggestion that the butterfly is used as a symbol of life and that its function in the scene is to maintain order.

GESTURES

It is difficult to identify any gestures in the butterfly. The possibility exists that the positioning of the butterfly in front of the arm of the fisherman may be a gesture of opposition, almost of attack. Once again, the straightness of the stalk being quite “spear-like” may suggest not attack, but a gesture of defence. The accepted gesture of extending two fingers to dangerous creatures symbolising protection could possibly be applied in this case. The two prominent antennae are directed towards the man and could possibly signify protection of the hunted animals.

Wilkinson (2002:194) refers to gestures as “stance or pose”. This stance of the butterfly in opposition to the hunter could therefore be called a gesture.

Keeping the above discussion in mind, it seems reasonable to conclude that the butterfly is not simply a pretty creature included in the scene purely for its beauty. The evidence points to the fact that the butterfly is a symbol of life and freedom used to maintain order, to restore balance and thereby to perpetuate ma^cat.

4.3. HUNTING SCENE

Fig 16: Hunting scene from tomb of Nebamun



www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/jan/04/british-museum-egyptian-nebamun-tomb

This scene from the 18th Dynasty tomb of Nebamun in Thebes shows Nebamun standing on a boat and holding a throwing stick which was used for hunting birds. His daughter sits in the boat while his wife stands beside them (James 1979: 31). This mural is housed in the British Museum and is 81cm high. A special gallery at the British museum is dedicated to various paintings from the tomb of Nebamun. Described by Richard Parkinson, the curator at the museum, as “the greatest surviving paintings we have from Ancient Egypt”, the 10-year project to house the collection was opened in January 2009.

(www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/jan/04/british-museum-egyptian-nebamun-tomb; cf. Parkinson 2008)

The hunting scene depicts this activity for two reasons. Firstly, this was a means of procuring food which would be needed in the afterlife. Secondly, the Ancient Egyptians enjoyed hunting and this activity could therefore be enjoyed in the after-world as depicted in the mural. Hunting in the marshes seems to have been a common activity enjoyed by the whole family.

During the annual inundation of the Nile, the Delta area became alive with creatures. In these marshes, fish and birds were favourite targets for hunting. Light boats were used and simple instruments such as throwing sticks and wooden spears were used to target both fish and birds. A cat was sometimes used to flush the birds from the papyrus thickets as well as to retrieve the dead birds. This is the scene depicted above.

A striking feature of this scene is that the creatures are depicted in a naturalistic way. While the human figures remain largely stylized, the animals could come from a text on natural history they are drawn so accurately. There is rich detail and the skill of the artist is evident not only in the overall design but in the use of paint, the subtle colouring especially of the birds, butterflies and fish as well as the attention to fine detail.

This is a “busy” scene depicting a great deal of activity. The butterflies in this scene have been identified as *danaus chrysippus*, the plain Tiger, which is a wide ranging migrant butterfly (Gilbert & Zalut 2007:114). Significantly, this butterfly is a hardy specimen which is capable of migrating across deserts until it finds a suitable oasis for breeding. The larvae feed on plants of the milkweed family and the toxic alkaloids ingested remain in the tissues of the adult butterfly. This makes the butterfly poisonous to predators (Larsen 1994:25). The Ancient Egyptians would have noticed that this butterfly survived where others did not. They would also have noticed that birds and other predators did not eat this butterfly. In this way, it is not unlikely that the butterfly would have been regarded as possessing magical powers. These magical powers would undoubtedly be associated with the ability to live and survive in a harsh environment where other species perished.

The diagrams below show the various stages of the life cycle of the Tiger butterfly.

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<http://www.treknature.com/guidelines.php#notes>

Fig 17: Life cycle of Tiger butterfly



Wilkinson's Categories will now be discussed in relation to Nebamun's hunting scene.

FORM

The most striking aspect of form for all the butterflies in this mural is that they are so naturalistic. The shape, colour and anatomical detail show that the artist has observed these creatures as they occur in nature and has tried to depict the insects accordingly. The butterflies are shown in two different attitudes; with outstretched wings in full flight and with wings held vertically at rest.

The largest and most detailed butterfly is the one to the right of the cat's head. The head and abdomen are clear, as are the antennae and the two legs trailing from the lower abdomen. The pattern of spots on the wings is similarly detailed, as is the colour. With its wings outstretched this butterfly is in full flight. The artist has

conveyed the activity and energy of the butterfly. The form, or shape, shows clearly that this butterfly is active. What is most striking about the butterfly is its freedom. The birds in the scene are clustered and give the impression of being trapped. The three birds around the cat are clearly caught by the cat. In contrast, the butterflies are free. The cat has the wing of the trapped bird firmly clenched in its jaw. This bird obviously cannot fly and the body shape of the bird shows its anxiety and struggle. By placing the butterfly with the outstretched wings so close to the trapped bird that their wings are actually touching, the artist seems to be conveying some connection between the two creatures. It is quite possible that the loss of freedom of the bird is being counteracted by the freedom of the butterfly in full flight. This may mean that the butterfly is a symbol for freedom.

The cat has three birds; one in its mouth, one in its fore paws and one in its hind paws. Surrounding the cat are three butterflies in a very similar form. The butterfly near the cat's tail, just above Nebamun's foot, is shown with very distinct wings but the wings are held vertically. This is the position of a butterfly's wings when it has alighted. This butterfly is therefore in a stationary position. It is, however, far from inactive. The two large wings are clearly visible. Although a butterfly has four wings, when the wings are moving, it looks like two large wings. Hence the form of the wings indicates movement even though they are in the vertical position. This butterfly is thus alive and active. It is ready to fly at any time. This contrasts totally with the bird trapped by the cat's hind paws which obviously cannot fly. In this way the two winged creatures balance each other and order is restored. The wings of the trapped bird are also vertically aligned and are cleverly mirrored by the artist who has drawn the butterfly in a similar way. It was essential for the ancient Egyptians to maintain order and where chaos existed, this had to be balanced in order to maintain *ma'at*. The artist achieves this admirably by balancing the trapped bird which is desperate to fly but cannot, with the free butterfly which is stationary but can take off in flight at will. It seems likely that the butterfly may symbolise both life and freedom.

The third butterfly is above the bird which is captured strongly in the cat's mouth and just below Nebamun's elbow. The movement of the butterfly contrasts with the captured bird and although both creatures have wings which appear to be flapping vigorously, the butterfly seems to balance the captured bird with its freedom. Once again, the butterfly has two distinct wings held vertically but the angle of the butterfly is such that it seems to be trying to land on the bird's wings. There is a sense of urgency conveyed by the artist in the form of this butterfly's body and the angle of the wings. This urgency is also conveyed by the trapped bird which is obviously struggling to get free. In this way, the artist has made a connection between the butterfly and the trapped bird. Once again, we find a duality; the trapped bird versus the free butterfly. It seems reasonable to attribute freedom to the butterfly.

The fourth butterfly in this scene around the cat is above the trapped bird's beak and to the left of Nebamun's forearm. This butterfly also has its wings held vertically and seems much more restful than the previous two butterflies. It is viewed in profile with a clear body shape, distinct antennae and a clearly defined wing outline. However, only one wing is visible. This seems to indicate that the butterfly is stationary and settled. It is almost perched on the back of the bird to its left. This butterfly is not threatened, nor is the bird. The single visible wing of the bird shows that the bird is sitting at rest, and so is the butterfly which also has only one wing visible. The artist seems to be reinforcing the connection between the butterflies in the picture and the birds. The form of the butterflies mirrors the form of the birds nearby.

Fig 18: Detail of cat from tomb of Nebamun



This relationship between the butterflies and the birds is also reflected in the form of the creatures in the top left of this picture. Although the damage makes the picture incomplete, three butterflies can be distinguished, all of which are in free flight. Similarly, the birds in the top left are all in free flight. They are escaping from the hunter and flying away. The butterflies could once again symbolise freedom.

SIZE

All the butterflies in this scene are of a similar size. They are, however, significantly out of proportion when compared with the other animals. The free-flying butterfly with its wings outspread indicates that the butterflies are drawn considerably larger than life. As mentioned above, the colouring and patterns on this butterfly identify it as the common Tiger butterfly (*danaus chrysippus*) which has a wingspan of

approximately 50mm. It is the largest and most common butterfly in Egypt. If drawn in proportion, it should be drawn about the same size as the duck's beak. It is much larger than that and hence it stands out in the scene and attracts attention immediately by its very large size.

Wilkinson explains the importance of size by quoting Heinrich Schäfer as follows:

“In sophisticated art like the Egyptian there are two sides to the emphasising of figures. On the one hand it is a factual statement of importance without aesthetic meaning...[and on the other hand]... Egyptian artists of all periods were well able to appreciate the great advantage for construction and composition of exaggerating the size of certain figures”.

(Wilkinson 1994: 39)

Wilkinson continues his discussion by mentioning that the enlargement of certain subjects may be merely the result of artistic license, and yet these enlargements are based on the relative position of the object in the artist's mind of their importance.

Schäfer (1974:230) in his discussion of size in Egyptian art says:

“A butterfly is drawn almost as big as a duck or even a hippopotamus”

Schäfer expands on this by saying that in some cases, larger size is an aspect of *perspective*. It is the artist's way of stating that this object is closer to the viewer. This does not seem to be the case in this scene. Schäfer then stresses that larger size is most frequently used to emphasize power and authority. He sums up by saying that an object which is so obviously bigger than all the others is being emphasised. The artist is drawing attention to it. This seems to apply in this scene.

The large size of the butterflies in this scene draws our attention immediately to these insects and the hierarchical scaling of the creatures in the scene place the butterfly firmly at the top of the scale. The various species of bird as well as fish and also the cat are all fairly similar in proportion. It is only the butterflies that are drawn so large. While the obvious beauty of the butterfly enhanced by the detail of the artist's drawing add to the aesthetic beauty of the picture, one must remember that the Egyptian artist was not a free spirit who could unleash his creative talents as and how he liked. Egyptian art was bound by convention and symbolism. The artist was commissioned to create a picture as prescribed by the priests who would be sure that everything in the picture served its purpose as laid down by belief and culture.

With this in mind, the large size of the butterflies indicates that they are important and carried a special meaning. The immediate impression of their flight patterns and their freedom seem to indicate that the butterflies are important in that they symbolise freedom and life.

LOCATION

According to Parkinson (www.ancient-egypt.co.uk/british%20museum/nebamun), this painting was originally on the wall of the tomb-chapel which is a chamber above the hidden burial chamber. The tomb-chapel was used by both family and priests to give offerings to the gods. It was thus quite a public place and these paintings would have been seen by many people who visited the tomb-chapel. Thus these paintings were to elevate Nebamun's status and to form the link between this life and the next.

The website says:

“...animals are often included because they had great symbolic importance. That great hunt scene is more than a depiction of everyday life: the birds and cat are symbols of fertility and female sexuality, and Nebamun's expedition can also be seen as “taking possession of the cycle of creations and rebirth”.

It is proposed that in this context, the butterflies too are of symbolic importance. The life cycle of the butterflies displays a pattern which could easily be interpreted as “creation” or “rebirth”. However, the butterflies in this scene are the adult, free-flying insects and hence the symbolism could be that of freedom and of life.

The relative location of the butterflies refers to where the butterflies are located in relation to the other objects in the scene.

There are seven butterflies in this scene and they are clustered in two distinct groups. The first group is around the cat and the second group is above the birds in the top left of the scene. Let us first consider the butterflies around the cat.

There are two butterflies above the cat, one below and one to the right. The butterfly to the right is positioned directly opposite the cat's mouth in which a bird is struggling. This positioning of the large butterfly with obvious outstretched wings balances the large outstretched wings of the bird. Hence the positioning of the butterfly retains the necessary balance between life and death. Furthermore, the large butterfly is on the right i.e. east of the cat. This right side is more powerful (Wilkinson 1994:64) and consequently gives the butterfly strength and possibly magical power. It is likely that being in the east, the butterfly signifies rising or rebirth as the sun rises in the east. This significance would complement the symbolism suggested above of rebirth and freedom. Interestingly, to the west of the cat is a papyrus thicket. While the west is usually associated with the sinking sun and with death, the papyrus symbolises birth and the life of the marsh.

Below the cat is another butterfly, this one placed in the south but facing the east. The dead in Ancient Egypt were often buried facing the east, once again to symbolise re-birth. Above the cat are two more butterflies, i.e. to the north of the cat. These two butterflies are facing opposite directions, one east and one west. Hence

the four butterflies encompass all four points of the compass, north, south, east and west, either by their actual position relative to the cat or by their orientation. Wilkinson(1994:72) states that orientation suggests protection. The butterflies are thus protecting the birds in all directions. The orientation of the butterflies effectively surrounds the birds captured by the cat and therefore maintains the balance of life in the face of death.

MATERIALS

The stone in the tomb of Nebamun was rather a weak limestone. The tomb-chapel which contained this panel was carved from the rock and the walls were then lined with mud plaster, a thick coating of straw and mud (Aldred 1980:28). A thin layer of white plaster was added and as this dried, the paint was applied. Onto this prepared surface, the draughtsmen would outline the scene and then the artist would apply the colour. Wilkinson (1994:89) reminds us of the symbolism of stone when he states:

“...the permanence of stone,...could also be viewed as a direct link with the beginning of time and thus with the creation of the cosmos itself. ..The funerary use of stone [objects] were clearly seen as an interface between the visible world and the divine reality beyond”.

Although this tomb was a simple carved chamber, the mud and straw used to coat the walls had significance. From the mud of the Nile, new life grew. This mud was life-giving and as a primeval substance recalls the process of life and fertility. Hence the substance on which the painting was drawn added significance to the scene and enhanced the message of re-birth depicted in the actual painting.

COLOUR

The colours used in this painting reflect as far as possible the natural colours of the creatures. Yet there is an overall “blue” hue to the painting with blue being used in the water below the boat, the thicket of papyrus and in most of the birds. Blue was associated with both the heavens and the primeval flood and hence symbolised life and rebirth (Wilkinson 1994:107). However, blue was also associated with solar-related objects, in this case the birds.

In contrast to the blue of the birds, the butterflies are painted in deep orange/red, very similar in colour to the skin of the man. Wilkinson (1994:106) says that this deep reddish colour is symbolic of life and regeneration. The Tiger butterfly is

naturally this colour and so it has an inherent symbolism associated with life and regeneration. The spotted wings are carefully painted so as to make each butterfly as close as possible to the real creature. The only discrepancy noted is that the abdomen of the butterflies is fully spotted. In nature, only the head and under side of the upper abdomen is spotted and not in all butterflies. Perhaps the artist simply used spots to give the butterflies more interesting colouration but this is unlikely. The Egyptian artist did not use art simple for aesthetic reasons.

It seems likely that there was another reason related to the symbolism of colour (3.2.5 above). The body of the butterfly is black, and black is the colour of the underworld, the colour of death. However, black is paradoxically also the colour symbolising life as the silt of the life-giving Nile river was black. White is a sacred colour and perhaps the artist introduced the white spots on the black to emphasise the inherent “magic” in this creature which the birds would not eat. By covering the whole abdomen with white spots, the artist is combining the message of these two colours. In this way the butterfly’s black body, spotted with white, would convey a message of life (of the butterfly) as well as that of death (of the bird).

Fig 19: Tiger butterflies



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NUMBERS

There are four butterflies surrounding the cat and the captured birds. The number four was symbolic of completeness to the Ancient Egyptians. It has already been discussed above (see 3.6) that the four butterflies indicate the four cardinal points in their location. This totality of the number four which encompasses the four areas of the cosmos (earth, sky, heavens and underworld) once again indicates that the butterflies are not simply beautiful, they complete the action in the picture.

There are three butterflies in the top left group. The number three was also significant in that it conveyed an interactive, closed system. This also indicated a type of completeness which reinforces the suggestion above that the butterflies complete the action in the scene.

In total there are thus seven butterflies. A group of $3 + 4 = 7$ in Ancient Egypt was indicative of perfection. The number seven had great potency in Egyptian magic with Ra having seven souls (Wilkinson 1994:136). In Ancient Greek culture, the butterfly was a symbol of the soul (Liu 2001:168). It is not impossible that the seven butterflies, creatures of the sky, could be linked in some way to the idea of the seven souls of Ra.

HIEROGLYPHS

This does not apply to this scene.

ACTIONS

The butterflies in this scene all convey an urgency in their actions. The artist has managed to capture the various movements of all the creatures in the scene, making it one of the most striking examples of a marsh scene in existence.

In an interview for the Guardian newspaper in England, Richard Parkinson, Egyptologist from the British Museum, says that:

“the artwork celebrates Nebamun’s life and bursts with energy”.

(www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/jan/04/british-museum-egyptian-nebamun-tomb)

The butterflies are an important part of this energy and it is their actions which are significant. The central, large butterfly has both wings fully spread. This is typical of a butterfly in full flight. The outspread wings show not only the flight of the butterfly but also its beauty and its freedom.

Wilkinson (1994:179) reminds us that capture and hunting of animals are related to ritual. While the royal hippopotamus hunt is most commonly quoted, Wilkinson states that other marsh scenes are parallel to hippo scenes and are symbolically linked by means of the actions depicted in the scenes.

The reason for this is because hunting is destructive and the environment is thus in turmoil. Order must be maintained. The absence of *ma'at* brought about by the chaos of the hunt – which is so well portrayed in this scene – must be balanced. The butterflies and their actions are one of the ways that the artist restores this balance. It is therefore possible that by their actions, the butterflies symbolise both freedom and new life and this counteracts the loss of freedom of captured birds as well as their imminent death at the hands of the hunter.

GESTURES

In this scene, the artist has used different positions of the wings of the butterfly to give information. These positions and the “stances” of the butterflies can be equated with gestures as they are each a distinct pose. In fact, the artist has given a sequential series which accurately conveys the different aspects of the butterfly's flight. Schäfer (1974:227) describes the various stages of action in one picture as an attempt by the artist to give accurate information. In this case, the butterflies are actively surrounding the cat and its victims. Three of the butterflies have their wings stretched up which closely resembles the common gesture of praise. Once again, the gestures of the butterflies seem to suggest life and freedom.

It is important to remember what Schäfer (1974:37) says:

“Works of art which represent living beings or things do not have the same meaning for us as they did for the Ancient Egyptians. For them figures would not have only aesthetic qualities but also those of living beings”.

The life and energy portrayed by the flight of the butterflies in this scene bears testimony to this statement.

4.4 HUNTING AND FISHING SCENE

Fig 20: Hunting scene from tomb of Nakht



The scene above shows Nakht and his family on a bird and fish hunting expedition in a swampy area. This is taken from a wall painting from the tomb of Nakht who was a scribe and priest under Tuthmosis V, Thebes (Johnson 2000: 18).

The background to the two scenes is a wide expanse of papyrus thicket topped by three rows of umbels, creating a very attractive display. Above and among the stems fly a number of birds, butterflies and dragon-flies; there can also be seen two throwing sticks. On top of the papyrus umbels are two bird nests each with two eggs. These are protected by the actual birds, both being of a different breed. A further nest and eggs, plus the protective bird can be seen among the papyrus stems.

The following description of the scene raises some interesting aspects:

“The scenes are solidly rooted in religious ideas, with the papyrus thicket being regarded as a mythical place of fertility and regeneration. Hence the fact that members of his family are represented, which wouldn't normally be the case if it just represented Nakht enjoying the activity of hunting. There are far too many occupants for such a frail craft, again emphasising the fact that this activity, as shown here, could never have taken place. In general, some aspects of the imagery point to the scene beings a representation of Nakht in the reign of Amenophis II. However, his wide belt suggests that it belongs to the time of Thutmosis IV. The columns of blue text above the right-hand side of the scene describes it:

"Traversing the fowling-pools, penetrating the swamps, enjoying himself by spearing fish, by the serving-[priest of Amon, the scribe] Nakht, justified."

www.osiris.net/tombes/nobles/nakhtsz/e_nakht_01.htm

The symbolism of the marsh, and particularly the papyrus thicket, as a place of fertility and re-birth has already been discussed. In this scene, it is interesting to extend this symbolism to the inclusion of the family of Nakht. There seems therefore to be an emphasis on this aspect ie. fertility and re-birth. The symbolism of re-birth may reasonably be extended to other figures in the scene and this includes the animals in the top panel, specifically, the butterflies. Wilkinson (1994: 182) supports this concept and says that the presence of the man, his wife and children in such scenes "functions as concrete expressions of the theme of sexual fertility, birth and rebirth". Other activities in the scene would support this symbolism.

Fig 21: Detail from tomb of Nakht showing butterflies



FORM

The butterflies in this scene are all in full flight. Their wings are fully extended but it is not clear that four wings are depicted. This could possibly be because the artist had not completed the painting. One of the butterflies is obviously incomplete and one is damaged so it is possible that some detail is missing from all the butterflies. What is relevant as far as form is concerned, is that the butterflies are shown with large, fully

extended wings. The middle butterfly is the most complete and the abdomen is drawn with a clearly demarked head but the antennae are not clear.

The emphasis is on the wings. The butterflies are viewed from above, unlike the birds which are viewed from the side or from below. Once again, this view emphasises the wings of the butterfly. The butterflies are not static, their activity adds to the overall urgency of action portrayed in the scene. They are not “additional” to the scene but are included in the action and the overall energy of the scene. Interspersed between the birds which are obviously agitated, the butterflies seem to convey a calm reassurance by their outspread wings in flight. It is possible that the butterflies symbolise freedom.

SIZE

The butterflies are disproportionately large in comparison to the other creatures, particularly the birds. Each butterfly is almost the size of a bird’s fully extended wing.

This large size draws attention to the butterflies and also suggests that they have an important function in the scene. If the butterflies were merely for decoration, the artist could have drawn numerous small butterflies more in proportion with the birds. However, this is not the case. Large size is often a way of giving importance to an object and this cannot be overlooked in this case. All three butterflies are similar in size and this further draws attention to them. Wilkinson (1994:44) states that scale is related to magical influence. The hippopotamus is often drawn very small to reduce their negative influence. Conversely, the butterfly is drawn very large to increase its influence.

LOCATION

The tomb of Nakht is located in the village area of Sheikh ‘Abd el-Qurna just east of the tomb of Menna and is one of fifty tombs in the area dating from 18th-20th Dynasties. It is not a large tomb and is unfinished, one wall being bare plaster. However, the existing tomb decoration is of a high quality. (<http://egyptsites.wordpress.com>)

The absolute location of this scene is on the west wall of the chamber. The entire panel in which this scene appears is 1,4m high and 2m wide. Being located on the west wall, the scene could be linked to the symbolism of the west being the direction of the setting sun and the afterlife. This would parallel the obvious symbolism of the marsh mentioned above, that of re-birth. There is a suggestion that the butterfly may be one of the insects which act as a guide to the deceased on his journey to eternal life (Ancient Egyptian Bestiary : Insects from www.reshafim.org.il) . This suggestion would relate to the belief in Ancient Greece that the butterfly symbolised the soul of a

person. Hence the butterfly bears the soul/spirit into the afterlife (www.baylor.edu/lakewaco_wetlands).

The relative placement of the butterflies needs to be discussed with reference to the birds in the scene. There are two bird's nests, both containing eggs. The nest on the right has a bird standing guard near it and two other birds with outstretched wings facing each other just above the nest. A large butterfly is placed between these two birds. This placement aligns the butterfly in such a way that it suggests some association between the birds and the butterfly. The birds are being threatened in the hunt and are in danger of being killed. The butterfly, however, is flying freely. The juxtaposition of the birds and the butterfly allows for the balance of activity to be restored. The threatened birds are balanced by the free flying butterfly with its large outstretched wings and so *ma'at* is maintained and chaos averted. Symbolism in Egyptian art frequently performed the function of restoring balance to a universe in conflict. In this case it is nature that needs to be balanced; the death of the birds and the freedom of the butterfly.

The damaged butterfly of the left is similarly positioned between two birds which are being threatened by the hunter. The incomplete butterfly on the right flies actively between two agitated birds with their wings fully outspread in an effort to flee from the danger of the hunter. It is quite possible that where the mural is damaged on the left, there could have been another butterfly in a similar position between the threatened birds. The positioning of the butterflies appears to be more significant than mere decoration. When examined in the context of the birds and the hunt, it seems highly likely that the butterflies which are clearly not being hunted, are symbolic both of freedom and of the assurance of life in the next world.

MATERIALS

This scene is painted on the stone wall of the chamber and was meant to last forever. Stone is durable and long-lasting and so the qualities of the material pass to the images painted on the stone wall. These images are therefore also meant to last forever. Stone was symbolic of cosmic origins and was seen as the interface between this world and the next (Wilkinson 1994:89). The scene painted on the stone wall would thus endure into the next life and so would all the images painted on it. This includes the butterflies.

COLOUR

The butterflies in this scene are not painted as naturalistically as the birds. They are far more stylized and yet they all have the same colours. Both the colour and the pattern of dots on the wings suggest that the butterfly depicted is the common Tiger. The orange/yellow colour of this butterfly and the spots around the periphery of the

wings are typical of the Tiger butterfly. This was the largest and one of the more common butterflies in Egypt and so it seems reasonable that this is the species drawn.

The orange/yellow colour of the butterfly is important as this is the colour of eternity (Stratos 2012:9). The artist would have been aware of this symbolism and so the selection of the Tiger butterfly was not incidental. There were other butterflies in Egypt, but it is the Tiger which is depicted. The symbolism of the colour is thus significant and once again it is noted that if the butterfly was merely for decoration, why was some other colour not used? The golden colour used is also the colour associated with the sun and the sun god, Ra (Stratos 2012:9). The butterfly being a creature of the heavens would therefore be close to Ra. A yellow butterfly would be even more powerful.

The dots on the butterfly are not colours as would be expected. The Tiger butterfly has black spots, not white. There are two possible explanations for this difference. Firstly, it is possible that the painting is incomplete and that the artist had yet to paint the black on these images. Secondly, the dots may have been left white to symbolise the purity and sacredness of the butterfly. White was frequently associated with embalming and funerary ritual and so the butterfly may portray an element of ritual associated with re-birth.

NUMBERS

There are three large butterflies in the scene. While it is quite possible that the number of butterflies was not significant symbolically and was merely a result of the composition of the scene on the available rock face, there may be some importance in there being just three butterflies.

Three was the number denoting plurality (Wilkinson 1994:131-132) and as such, the three butterflies would symbolise numerous butterflies. Three is also the number symbolising a complete, closed system. The three butterflies therefore offered complete assurance of re-birth and assured this to all the birds in the scene, hence it is not necessary to have one butterfly per bird.

As the solar deity was considered to have three forms, morning(Khepri), noon(Ra) and evening (Atum), it is possible that the three butterflies strengthens the link between the butterflies and the sun god.

HEIROGLYPHS

There is no hieroglyph for the butterfly. This aspect does not apply in this case.

ACTIONS

The butterflies in this scene are extremely active. Their fully outspread wings show that they are flying and there is a certain energy conveyed in this flight. In contrast to the birds which are obviously stressed and anxious in their flight, the actions of the butterfly flight appears to be more at ease and conveys a sense of freedom. The butterflies are also all aligned in a similar way. They are almost copies of each other. Their wings are all horizontal and fully extended. This conveys a certain amount of control which contrasts to the anxiety of the “flapping”, stressed birds.

Their action therefore could symbolise restoring balance and maintaining the order in the cosmos.

GESTURE

It is difficult to identify a specific gesture. However, the alignment of the outspread wings and the fact that the butterflies are seen from above seem to suggest a gesture of both praise and protection. This is reinforced by the fact that the two antennae on the central butterfly are pointing upwards in a gesture reminiscent of that seen when two arms are held upwards in praise.

4.5 BUTTERFLY ON FAIENCE HIPPOPOTAMUS

Fig 22: Faience Hippo



This hippopotamus statuette is from the Middle Kingdom, Dynasty 11 or 12 (2040-1783). It is made from faience and stands 9,7cm high, is 20.3cm long and 7,4 cm wide. It is kept in the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence and is sometimes referred to as the “Providence Hippo”(Friedman 1998:238).

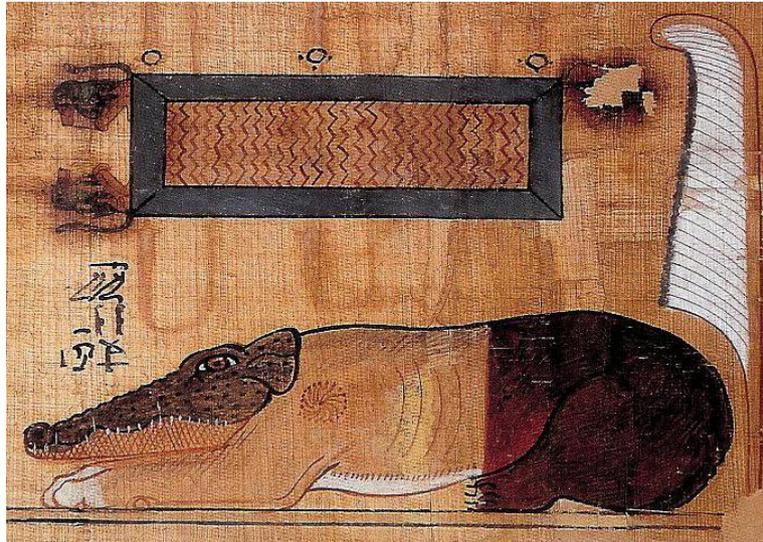
At least sixty faience hippos have been found in excavations of burial chambers and those on record have been placed behind the mummy’s back or below its feet (Friedman 1998:238). Many of these have had their legs broken off, possibly to make the animal immobile and hence ward off any danger that the animal might bring. The hippopotamus was regarded as an evil creature due to its habits of destroying crops at night and attacking people. It was a creature which created disorder and destruction. All the hippo statuettes are dated from the 11th and 12th dynasties and all are decorated with flowers, plants and creatures found in the marshes. Two of the four hippos discussed by Friedman have large butterfly designs.

Wilkinson (1992:71) reminds us that the hippo had dual symbolism. Firstly, Ancient Egyptian myths tell of the hippo being associated with the god Seth, who was an evil god. Seth appears as a red hippopotamus to fight Horus, the son of Isis. Horus of Behdet fights against the sun god Ra’s enemies and these enemies appear in the forms of crocodiles and hippos. Thirdly, Ammit, the “devourer of hearts” in the judgement hall of the afterlife, was part crocodile and part hippo.

“When the heart was weighed by Thoth, if not innocent, the heart was thrown to Ammit –the devourer- a hybrid monster, lion, hippopotamus and crocodile, who devoured the heart of the guilty”.

(Wilkinson 1992:146)

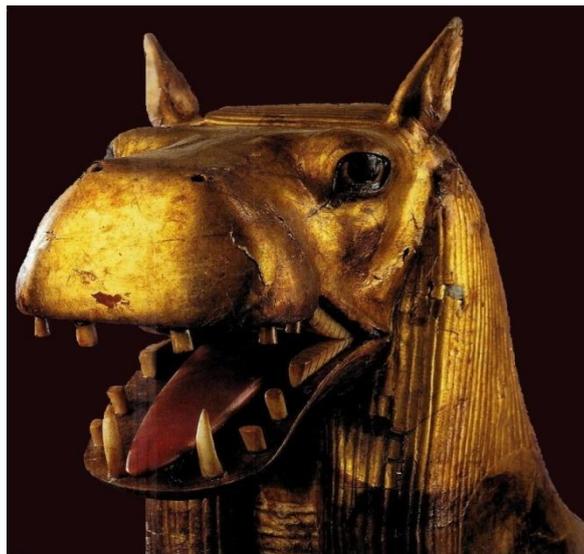
Fig 23: The god Ammit



<http://www.ancientsites.com>

One of the funerary beds found in the tomb of Tutankhamun has the head of Ammit.

Fig 24: Bed from tomb of Tutankhamun



The photo of Ammit's hippo head on the couch from Tutankhamun's tomb is by Araldo De Luca, from T.G.H. James, "Tutankhamun " (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2002:140) <http://www.ancientsites.com>

The other myth associated with the hippo is that of the goddess Taueret who took the form of a pregnant hippo holding the hieroglyphic sign of protection, *sa*, on a piece of rolled papyrus. She was especially worshipped in Thebes (Ames 1965:110). Hence the hippo has two possible symbolic meanings which are both quite different. The first is the more common, that of destruction and evil. The second is that of childbirth and protection as well as fertility. The hippo was also associated with the goddesses Isis, Hathor and Nut who were all involved in the re-birth of the deceased.

The mastaba tombs of the Old Kingdom contain many scenes of hippopotamus hunts (Harpur 1987: 28,141,184,201,355) and these scenes seem to include elements which are aimed at restoring the balance created by the destructive hippo.

It is in this context that the discussion of the butterfly on this faience hippo will proceed.

FORM

The butterfly on this hippo is clearly drawn in such a way as to recognise that it is a butterfly and not a moth. The anatomical details of the wings, abdomen and antennae identify it as such. However, it is not possible to classify this butterfly from the image. The markings on the wings give no indication of the species and so we can presume it is not meant to represent a specific species but rather a "generic" butterfly.

There are four wings but the smaller wings, usually the rear wings have been superimposed onto the large wings. In this way, the artist has made it clear that there are four wings but has emphasised the size and thereby the importance of the wings.

The abdomen is made up of a series of circles. While there is no butterfly with a segmented abdomen like this, the spots on the abdomen of some butterflies could easily be seen as a series of circles. It is proposed that this is the reason for the abdomen being drawn this way. The two antennae are large and extended, almost in defence.

The form of the butterfly must be considered in relation to the form of the statuette, that is, the hippo. Wilkinson (1994:20) in his discussion of the decorations on hand

held mirrors notes that most of the decorations carry a symbolic significance associated with Hathor, the goddess of love, joy and fertility symbolic in the mirror itself. Similarly, the symbolic form of the butterfly must be seen in its context of the symbolism of the hippo.

The form of the hippo has two possible symbolic meanings as discussed above. Both these meanings can be applied to the butterfly. The hippo being an animal which was feared and hunted due to its destructive nature, causes chaos in the world. In order to restore peace to this chaos the image of the butterfly is included. The butterfly has fully extended wings which show that it is in full flight. It is free and alive. This freedom of the butterfly complements the destruction caused by the hippo. But more than that, the butterfly may represent life and possibly also re-birth. The life cycle of the butterfly has clear indications of a type of re-birth as the adult butterfly dies and is replaced by the larva which in turn is “re-born” as a new adult butterfly. In this way, balance is restored.

The other symbolism associated with the hippo is that of fertility. Although not as common as the feared, destructive symbolism, this fertility could be enhanced by the butterfly which could once again be symbolic of re-birth.

SIZE

In comparison to the other decorations on the hippo, the butterfly is extremely large. It is almost the same size as the bird and easily the size of the hippo’s head. This large size draws attention to the butterfly and emphasises its importance. The artist could easily have decorated the hippo with a number of small butterflies more in keeping with, for example, the papyrus plants below. However, he chose to draw just one very large butterfly.

Large size is a symbol of power and importance (Wilkinson 1994:39). This is discussed at length by Schäfer (1974:231) who concludes that while in some circumstances large size may be for aesthetic reasons, this is unlikely to be the only reason. In most instances, size is symbolic of importance. While the butterfly is not a powerful creature in terms of strength, it is nevertheless important and its strength must lie elsewhere. It is suggested that the strength of the butterfly lies in its symbolism for life and freedom.

LOCATION

The absolute location of this hippo is an unknown person’s burial site. It originally had its legs broken off, probably to protect the deceased from attack by the hippo in the afterlife. The statuette was placed below the mummy’s feet. This may indicate that the deceased is placed above danger (Friedman 1998:238).

The location of the hippo in a burial site indicates that it was possibly part of the funerary rites of the deceased. It was placed close to the mummy which indicates that it was considered to be symbolically significant. This applies to the decoration on the statuette as well. Hence the butterfly is significant in that it provides something necessary for the deceased in the afterlife. It is proposed that the butterfly provides an assurance of freedom and re-birth in the afterlife. By placing it so close to the mummy, it would provide this life immediately.

The relative placement of the butterfly is on top, immediately behind the hippo's head. This places the butterfly in the north relative to the hippo. Funerary mythology accepted the north as the afterlife location of the dead. Hence the butterfly has a direct association with the afterlife due to its location on the statuette (Wilkinson 1994:65). Once again, the most likely symbolism in this instance is that of re-birth in the afterlife. The large lotus flower on the hippo's head is immediately behind the butterfly. The lotus flower was closely associated with the sun due to the fact that it goes under the water at night and then rises again with the sun. The butterfly too is not seen at night. It seems to disappear, and then flies freely again when the sun rises. Furthermore, the lotus flower was often associated with the *ankh* symbol of life (Wilkinson 1994:182). The placement of the lotus and butterfly close to each other reinforces the symbolism of both being associated with life. The overall setting of the marsh which is obviously what the artist has created on the hippo, is itself a symbol of life and creation. Hence the placement of the butterfly in a position at the top/north gives it an element of power.

Another interesting fact is that the hippopotamus cannot turn its head backwards. It is unable to see what is behind it (Evans 2010:192). The butterfly is located in such a way that it is looking backwards, almost as though it is working together with the hippo in providing the view behind the animal. This protective partnership has some justification in that the butterfly is confronting a rather angry looking bird. The outspread wings of the bird indicate that it is in a threatening pose (Evans 2010:141). It is possible that the bird is threatening the butterfly but this is unlikely as the butterfly most commonly found in Egypt is the Tiger butterfly which is poisonous to birds. It does, however, suggest that the butterfly and the hippo are similar. It seems likely that the hippo itself and the butterfly are in this instance symbols of life and not of chaos.

MATERIALS

Faience was essentially a luxury product in Ancient Egypt and faience objects were mostly acquired by the elite. The main ingredient in Faience is quartz which was crushed from sand or pebbles. An alkali such as plant ash was added to this as well as lime and ground copper. When mixed with water, this forms a malleable paste

which could then be moulded or hand-modelled. When fired, the green-blue colour develops (Nicholson 2009:1).

In the first two dynasties, faience was used extensively in religious and funerary practices. While used for decorative purposes as well, faience also symbolises rebirth. Faience inlays are an example of this (Friedman 1998:17). Friedman states that there is little evidence of how faience objects were produced, unlike the tomb paintings which show the production of pottery, jewellery, and stone carving for example. She suggests:

“ Faience working was deliberately shrouded in mystery because of its inherently magical and religious significance, accounting for its absence from visual records”.

(Friedman 1998:17)

This finds some support in the record of an artist, Rekhamun, in the nineteenth dynasty who is referred to as “the maker of faience for the god Amun” (Friedman 1998:18) from Goyon, J-C.1972 *Le confirmationdu pouvoir royal au nouvel an*. Cairo).

There are very few texts describing the faience industry but those that do exist show that there are similarities with the process of obtaining stone for sculptures. Therefore, faience production was religiously sanctioned and seen as a symbol of the triumph of the pharaoh over the forces of chaos (Friedman 1998: 22). A butterfly placed so prominently on the top of a faience hippo could support this symbolism in that the butterfly symbolising freedom and re-birth restores the balance to the hippo which symbolises destruction. Once again, *ma'at* has been maintained.

On another level, faience is associated with figures used in funerary contexts dealing with procreative powers identified with Osiris. This includes resurrection or metaphysical regeneration (Friedman1998:25). As mentioned above, the life cycle of the butterfly displays elements easily interpreted as regeneration or re-birth. Thus it is reasonable to suggest that a large butterfly prominently displayed on a faience statuette, as in this case, could take on the symbolism of the material of the statuette. The butterfly becomes a faience object. The artist has not attempted to colour the butterfly in any way. It retains the lustre and brilliance of the faience.

Wilkinson (1994:95) emphasises that materials have profound symbolic importance. The hardness and durability of faience together with its luminescence and colour necessarily carry a symbolism and significance beyond the aesthetic value of the material.

COLOUR

The distinctive blue-green colour of faience comes from the copper included in the mix but it is only apparent after firing. When faience first appeared during the late pre-dynastic period, its brilliant colour was a symbol of life and good health (Friedman 1998:15). This is easily extended to include a wish for continued life in the after world.

Wilkinson (1994:102) describes blue as being the colour of the heavens and also of the primeval flood, which allows blue to be symbolic of life and re-birth. With the waters of the Nile being blue and also the association of the Nile with the source of life, blue is associated with fertility. There are many fecundity figures made from faience and blue is the colour mostly associated with the god Thoth. Blue also has solar connotations and Wilkinson (1994:107) says:

“A number of solar-related objects are manufactured from blue faience”.

This would certainly include the butterfly which is prominent on this hippo. The butterfly is a solar-related creature. It is only seen during the day and flies freely in summer. The Ancient Egyptians could therefore have given the butterfly attributes associated with blue, with solar objects and with flight. The symbolism suggested by this combination is one of life and re-birth as well as a connection with the god Amun-Ra. The detail on faience was added by using black manganese (Nicholson 2009:7). While this is certainly decorative, black is also the colour symbolising the after-life. The black outline of the butterfly on the blue faience therefore connects it with both the sky and the after- life.

Blue was the colour of the heavens, the cosmic waters above the earth. The butterfly being a creature which flies, is a creature of the heavens. Thus once again, it is quite possible that the butterfly would be a symbol of the heavens and would be given magical qualities associated with the heavens. Assmann (1996:58-63) gives an interesting interpretation of the use of the sacred space of the heavens. He says that by building large monuments which reached high into the heavenly space, these buildings became part of the heavenly radiance. This was “the supreme form of salvational action”. Using this concept of occupying heavenly space, the butterfly would certainly have taken on some of this salvational power. It seems probable that the symbolism of the heavens would easily have been transferred to the butterfly.

Wilkinson (1992:101) discusses the symbolism of the heavens related to wings. This combination of wings and blue may give the butterfly some powers of protection. Wilkinson says that many gods are given wings and that these wings are attributed the ability to protect. It is possible that the butterfly may symbolise protection.

Faience was extensively used for the figurines called “brides of the dead”. The blue/green brilliant hue of the faience enhances the erotic overtones of these figures and is eluded to in a phrase from The Instructions of Ptahhotep, “do not be taken in

by a woman with a body of *tjehnet*" (Friedman 1998: 25). The colour of the faience suggests youth, vigour and joy, all of which are qualities associated with these figurines. These connections could also be extended to the large butterfly which is so prominent on this hippo statuette. It is possible that the butterfly also represents these qualities which were to be part of the re-birth of the deceased.

NUMBERS

There is only one large butterfly on this hippo. It seems unlikely that there is any specific symbolism of the number one in this instance apart from the fact that there is one hippo and so only one butterfly is required to balance the destructive qualities of the hippo. Although no single interpretation is possible, the number one does convey the uniqueness of the object. Applied in this case, the single large butterfly may represent the unique power of the butterfly to balance the negative energy of the hippo. By having only one butterfly, attention is drawn to it and its importance is emphasised.

HIEROGLYPHS

Hieroglyphs are not just symbols used in writing. They are an essential aspect of art and convey both magic and the power of the gods (Wilkinson 1994:148). In fact, hieroglyphs represented the gods. It is valuable in this context to examine the word *tjehnet* which means faience. The choice of faience as the material used for this hippo is not accidental, nor is the large butterfly adorning it.

The word *tjehnet* not only meant faience but also "luminosity" or brilliance. The Egyptians appreciated the sparkling qualities of faience and so the connotations of luminosity and scintillation became associated with the symbolism of *tjehnet*. This luminosity was associated with the sun god himself and so faience also became a symbol of the sun god's brilliance. Funerary figurines made from faience thus took on this symbolism and became solar symbols. The spell which accompanied these objects ensured that the descent to the under-world would be easier and that the person would immediately be assimilated into the solar deity due to the luminosity of the accompanying faience object (Friedman 1996:24).

Hence *tjehnet* carries the symbolism of the sun god and it seems reasonable that the butterfly itself may enhance this symbolism. Being a creature of the sky, it would have been associated with the sun god and being "made of" brilliant, scintillating faience it could therefore be symbolic of life and re-birth. Together with this re-birth is the associated symbolism of good health due to the blue/green hue of the faience.

This statuette is dated around the 12th dynasty. Assmann (1996:118) emphasises that the 12th dynasty represents an "apogee in the history of Egyptian civilisation" in

that at this time language was extensively used for religious purposes and art had very definite expression. The population was largely literate and so would have been well aware of the associations discussed above relating to *tjehnet*. It is therefore not surprising that so many similar statuettes were produced in this era.

The suggested symbolism of the butterfly on this hippo would have been understood and appreciated by the people of this time.

ACTIONS

One of the main functions of the king was to maintain order. He was the link between the gods and humanity. Through representations of various actions, harmony and the preservation of *maat* were achieved.

“But the subjugation of human foes was not the only way in which containment of unruly was expressed. One of the most important motifs in this regard is that of the capture or destruction of animals which were considered hostile and which therefore served as an allegory of the establishment of rule over order. Of the various animals which represented untamed life force – and thus chaos- the hippopotamus was probably pre-eminent”.

(Wilkinson 1994:177)

Wilkinson continues his discussion to explain the significance of the many depictions of the hippopotamus hunt but he stresses that with time, the hippo became the animal which represented the archenemy of order, the god Seth.

In contrast to this disorder, the butterfly with its large, outstretched wings provides the balance and restores order. The butterfly is obviously active and flying. The wings are in the position of full flight and while not anatomically correct, (there are not two sets of wings, fore and aft), they are none the less in a position which clearly shows the action of flying.

Apart from the wings, the two antennae are fully extended and once again show the action of the butterfly as an insect in full flight.

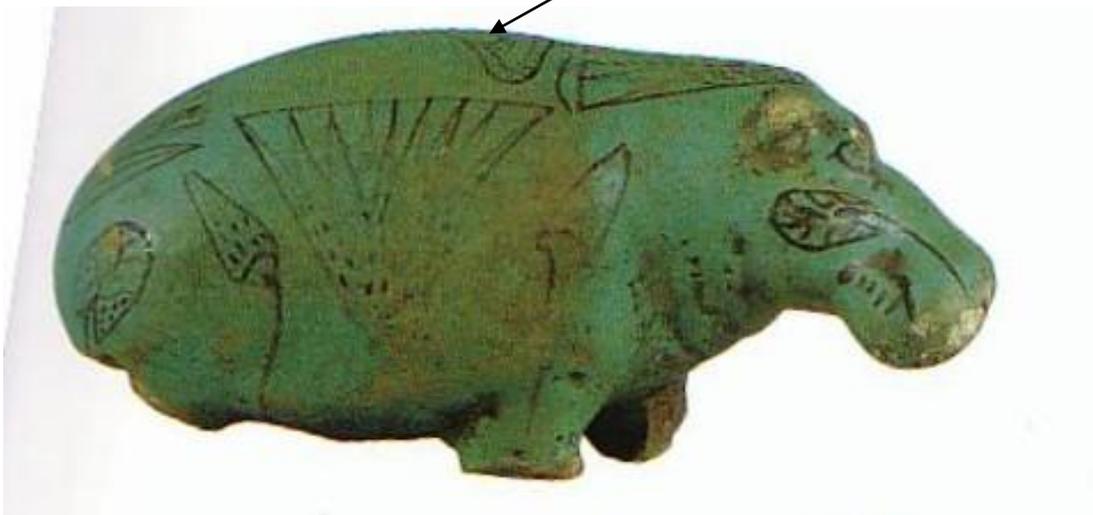
It is interesting that the butterfly is opposite a bird which is also in full flight but the wings of the bird and its feet indicate that it is threatening or attempting to attack. The common Tiger butterfly which is probably the species best known to the artist, is poisonous to birds. Perhaps the opposite is true and the bird is threatened because it cannot eat/attack the butterfly due to the inner power or magic of the insect which would result in its death? This would certainly add to the power of the butterfly in this scene and would enhance its opposition to the destructive hippo. The butterfly then represents order, life and protection all of which would restore the balance of the destructive powers of the hippo.

GESTURES

Although it is difficult to see any specific gesture in the movement of the butterfly, the prominent, outstretched antennae do resemble the extension of two fingers towards dangerous creatures which Wilkinson(1994:194) says is a sign of protection. In this way, the destructive nature of the hippo is being balance by the protective gesture of the butterfly. Because the butterfly is facing the opposite direction to the hippo which cannot turn its head to see behind, this protective element is more powerful as the hippo is unaware of it.

The large butterfly on this faience hippopotamus therefore seems to symbolise life, protection from the destructive force of the hippo and a promise of re-birth. Another faience hippo from the same period has a similar butterfly in a similar position.

Fig 25: seated faience hippo



Friedmann1996:149

The use of the butterfly, as with all Egyptian art, is not simply for effect or aesthetic reasons. While this insect is indeed attractive, its incorporation into the marsh environment depicted in this instance suggests that it carries a symbolism which is significant. The use of the statuette in funerary ritual further enhances the likelihood of its symbolic meaning.

4.6 AMULET

Fig 26: Butterfly amulet



<http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/100000301?rpp=20&pg=1&ft=butterfly+amulet&pos=7>

This faience butterfly amulet is on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. It is dated from 12th or 13th Dynasty sometime between 1981BC and 1640BC. It was found in the Memphite region of Lisht North in the cemetery Radim. It is 2.4cm high, 2.3cm wide and 0.3cm thick.

Andrews (1998:6) states that:

“An amulet, talisman or charm is a personal ornament which, because of its shape, the material from which it is made, or even just its colour, is believed to endow its wearer by magical means with certain powers or capabilities. At the very least it should afford some kind of magical protection”.

and

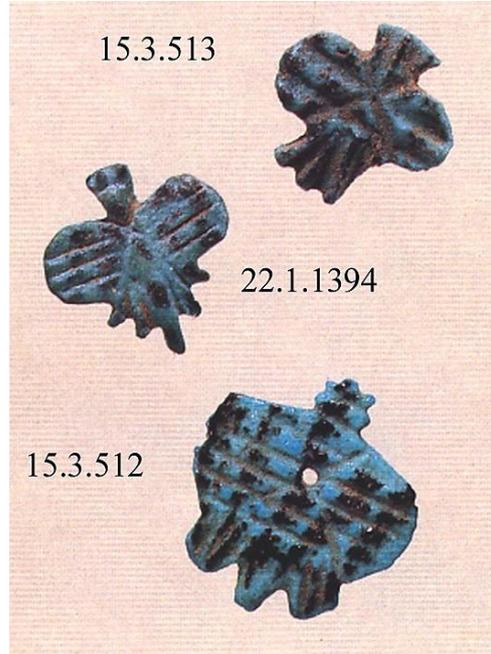
“For the Ancient Egyptians, amulets and jewellery incorporating amuletic forms were an essential adornment, especially as part of the funerary equipment for the dead, but also in the costume of the living”.

Hence, an amulet always contains some magical qualities, some symbolism and some power. The Egyptians made amulets with the intention that their magical

powers should last forever. Butterfly amulets were fairly common and many examples have been found.

The following are stored in the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

Fig 27: Selection of butterfly amulets



<http://www.metmuseum.org/Collections/search-the-collections/100000301?rpp=20&pg=1&ft=butterfly+amulet&pos=7>

The discussion which follows could apply to all of the above examples of butterfly amulets.

FORM

The primary form of the amulet is easily recognisable as a butterfly. The wings are fully extended and the creature is thus in full flight. The anatomical details are not evident and the emphasis of form is on the wings. This suggests that the power of the amulet is associated primarily with the wings. Wings feature significantly in Egyptian beliefs and are incorporated into many different art works. Flying vulture pendants, winged sun discs and winged scarabs are frequent. Schäfer (1974:56) comments that birds flying upwards lift their wings in adoration towards the sun. Possibly, the wings of the butterfly could similarly be uplifted, or in this case fully extended, to suggest a similar association.

The form definitely indicates that the butterfly is alive and actively flying. The visual relationship of flying immediately associates the butterfly with the realm of the sky. The deity who rules the sky is the creator-god, Ra. Each day, Ra is re-born as the sun appears in the east and proceeds to travel across the sky. It seems likely that the re-birth of the sun god could extend to the creatures living in his realm. The life

cycle of the butterfly certainly supports the concept of re-birth and thus it is quite possible that this insect, who in a similar way that Ra disappears at night, also disappears at night (butterflies are strictly diurnal creatures) and whose life cycle resembles a re-birth could easily be given the qualities of life and re-birth associated with the sky god whose realm it occupies.

SIZE

The dimensions of this amulet are given in the description above. The actual size of the common Tiger butterfly which is the species most frequently depicted in Egyptian art is twice the size of the amulet (Quickelberge 1986:26). It seems reasonable to suggest that the smaller size made the amulet more portable and more accessible. Such amulets were made in large numbers and the size does not seem to be significant. Evidence points to the fact that moulds were used and amulets were made in factories (Friedman 1998:60. It was the shape of the amulet ie. what it represented, as well as other qualities which gave it power. Size does not seem to be relevant when discussing the use of amulets.

LOCATION

The absolute location of this amulet is the Memphite region of Lisht North in the cemetery Radim. It can therefore be concluded that the amulet was part of the provisions made for the afterlife. The relative location is not known as it was not recorded at the time.

This amulet was found in a cemetery which means it was part of the funerary ritual. It is known that amulets were used extensively in burial rites. Over 200 spells associated with amulets are to be found in the *Book of the Dead* as well as in the so-called *Pyramid Texts* (Andrews 1998:6). The amulets were placed at various localities on the body of the mummy and wrapped in the bandages at different stages of the mummification process. Certain amulets, such as the heart scarab which was placed in the position of the heart, were placed in very specific localities. However, although there are extensive lists of amulets, as on the MacGregor papyrus (Andrews 1998:7), the location on the body of many amulets was not noted when the mummy was unwrapped.

Andrews (1998:7) states:

“The positioning of an amulet on the body must originally have had a special significance; certainly the location of the prescribed funerary amulet was always laid down”.

Wilkinson (1994:72) extends this by saying that the placement of the amulet on the mummy was dictated by mythological and symbolic concerns which may have been

associated with the various parts of the body. These amulets would then have been placed on or near those specific parts so as to impart their magic directly to that part of the body when the person entered the underworld.

A variety of animal amulets exist and many of these have accompanying spells, however, the butterfly is not among those recorded. In some cases, the amulet itself was not included, but simply a drawing which was done on the bandages of the mummy. Andrews (1998:12) notes that up to the Ptolemaic Period positioning of amulets was always specified. After this, it seems that positioning was random. This butterfly amulet was from the Middle Kingdom which means that its position or location on the body of the mummy would have been specified and significant. Unfortunately, this exact position is not known.

However, what is significant is that this amulet was part of the burial ritual. In this way, the magical properties of the amulet would have been transferred to the dead person in the afterlife. Often, amulets were worn in life and then placed in the tomb with the dead person so that the magical properties would accompany them into the afterlife. These properties would be associated with the characteristic capabilities of the creature. In this case, it seems to be both the freedom of flight and the ability for re-birth which the butterfly displays in its life cycle. Although there is no written evidence, the location of the butterfly in a burial site allows us to conclude that the amulet did indeed have a special significance and that the magical properties of the butterfly were valued as important in the afterlife.

MATERIALS

Faience was by far the most popular material used for making amulets (Andrews 1998:100). The reason for this is that this material can easily be moulded. It could be made into any shape as it was relatively soft. It was also easy to add a loop or hole to allow the amulet to be suspended from a string or cord. Although faience was made in various colours, the majority were blue/green. Faience was durable and attractive. These two properties made it the preferred substance for amulets and ensured that their magical power would last forever.

Faience was “a material inextricably linked to ideas of regeneration” (Friedman 1994:27) and it is noted that almost all *wadjet-eye* amulets are made of faience. It seems likely that this butterfly carried the essence of the symbolism of faience as noted. This means that it is reasonable to suggest that the butterfly symbolised re-birth.

A full discussion of the symbolism of faience was given with regard to the hippo statuette in section 4.5 above. The points made in that discussion are also relevant here.

COLOUR

The blue/green colour of this butterfly is typical of most objects made from faience at this time. The glazing process was done differently at various times and could be applied or self-glazing. In the former, the powdered raw materials containing the colour pigments were mixed with water and the object was dipped into this slurry. After firing, an uneven appearance resulted. It seems likely that this method was used for this butterfly amulet. Self-glazing results in a more even distribution of colour found in the amulets of deities from the Late Dynastic Period.

Wilkinson (1994:107) states that “a number of solar-related objects are manufactured from blue faience because the colour blue was the colour of the god Amun-Ra.” It is the colour of the heavens and thus has solar connotations. The butterfly being a creature of the heavens could reasonably be expected to symbolise the qualities most often associated with Ra, that is the powers of life and re-birth. The blue colour of faience would support this. However, the colour is not purely blue but has a green tinge imbued. Thus one must also consider the significance of the green colour.

Green is the colour of growing plants and thereby the colour of life. It is a positive colour and is also associated with re-generation (Wilkinson 1994:108). Green is strongly associated with the afterlife and so, once again, we could apply this to the butterfly in its possible function as a symbol of re-birth.

NUMBERS

This amulet represents just one butterfly. Although some amulets were comprised of many similar images which may have been tied together to form a necklace, bracelet or belt, many were just a single figure. The number one was associated with uniqueness but also with the unity of many. Hence by portraying only one butterfly, the magical powers of all butterflies would be incorporated into this one amulet.

As mentioned above, it is not possible to determine the species of butterfly and in this case, the species is not relevant. The single faience butterfly is meant to be a type of “generic” butterfly or as Andrews (1998:66) states about animal amulets, a “stylized animal used for its protective properties”. It was the type of insect which was important. The butterfly with outstretched wings in full flight is what is being portrayed. This means that the powers of the amulet are common to all butterflies.

HIEROGLYPHS

This is not relevant in this instance as there is no hieroglyph. However, it must be noted that an amulet often had a hieroglyphic name or message engraved on it.

The name could be the name of the person, or the king, or the deity represented. Amulets also had messages on them to invoke the type of protection required.

ACTIONS

The butterfly is in full flight with its wings stretched out. It is active and alive. The amulet portrays the action of flying and this could be the link between the butterfly and the sky god Amun-Ra. The flying butterfly could be interpreted as serving the god of the heavens with its beauty, its life and its ability for re-birth.

The action portrayed by the amulet must be considered in conjunction with the actions performed with the amulet. Amulets were worn by living people and were also used in funerary rites.

The action of wearing an amulet dates back to the earliest dynasties. The wearer chose the amulet specifically for the power and magic thought to be in that image. Jewellery was not purely for adornment, it was for protection and for the magical properties in the jewellery. Amulets were worn as necklaces, as rings or just carried by the person as a type of "lucky charm". Having the amulet on your person meant that it would endow you with the characteristics, powers and capabilities attributed to that image (Andrews 1998:12).

When used as part of the burial rite, the power of the amulet was similar but it was expected to stay with the person in the afterlife. The actions performed with amulets were very specific and the spells which accompanied the placement of the amulet were also specific. The action of wrapping amulets at various levels and in various places during mummification indicates the power inherent in the amulet.

Hence, the actions performed with the amulet point to its significance and symbolism as much as the actions portrayed in the amulet itself.

GESTURE

There is no specific gesture noted in this case.

4.7. BRACELETS WITH BUTTERFLY IMAGES

Fig 28: Butterfly bracelets



Bracelet from tomb of Queen Hetepheres I : wife of Sneferu, and the mother of Khufu.

These bracelets were found in the tomb of Queen Hetepheres which was discovered in 1925 on the east side of the Great Pyramid of Khufuat Giza. Twenty similar bracelets were found in a wooden jewellery box covered inside and out with gold leaf. The queen is depicted on her carrying chair wearing 14 similar bracelets on one arm.

www.ancients-egypt-history.com/2011/04/treasures-of-queen-hetepheres-i-of.html

The bracelets are dated from the 4th Dynasty (2605BC) and are presently kept in the Museum of Fine Art in Boston. Each bracelet has an outer diameter of 10cm, inner diameter 7cm and width 2.4cm. The bracelets are silver inlaid with lapis lazuli, carnelian and turquoise.

www.info.org/collections/object/bracelet-fragment-148355

Fig 29: Wooden jewellery box with bracelets



Picture from: The mysteries of Queen Hetepheres' burial
by Jimmy Dunn writing as Alan Winston
www.ancients-egypt-history.com/2011/04/treasures-of-queen-hetepheres-i-of.html

FORM

The butterflies on the bracelets are not meant to be at all realistic. They are easily recognised as butterflies because they have outspread wings and a thorax with antenna. That is, the basic form of the body parts is correct. Thus, the butterflies are decorative in form. This does not in any way reduce their significance or render the shape purely decorative. Wilkinson (1994: 20) when discussing the decoration on mirrors states that:

“Thus most if not all of the decorative forms found on Egyptian mirrors may carry a similar symbolic significance – an association with the sun god and his cohort”.

Wilkinson then continues the discussion to include the symbolism of the decorative designs on spoons and dishes. This argument which discusses the fact that the decorations on the mirrors were meant to be attractive and yet still do have a symbolic value, could similarly be applied to these bracelets.

While there is no doubt that the butterflies are attractive and are crafted in the bracelets to look good, this could have been done by simply creating a pattern using the inlays. It was not essential to use the form of the butterfly if the bracelets were to be purely decorative.

We also need to consider the form of the bracelet itself.

A bracelet is a ring. It is basically a hollow circle and the circle was a hieroglyphic symbol of the sky god Ra. A circle is also infinite. It has no beginning and no end. The *shen*-ring hieroglyph was a symbol of eternity (Wilkinson 1992:1923). It is proposed that the Ancient Egyptians were the first people to use a wedding ring, the symbol of eternal love (<http://symboldictionary.net>).

Hence a bracelet could easily be symbolic of the infinite realm of the sky god, the infinite cycle of life, death and re-birth. With this in mind, the form of the butterfly becomes significant. As a creature of the sky, it extends the link with the cycle (circle) of life. Also, it seemed that a butterfly never really dies, it just transforms from one shape to the next as it moves through the different stages of its life cycle.

The form is not recognisable as a particular species of butterfly which seems to stress that it is the form, the shape of the creature that is significant. Therefore, no matter what species it is, all butterflies have the same connotations. The butterfly is certainly attractive and in the case of the bracelets, the butterfly is definitely decorative. It seems unlikely that it is purely decorative.

The other form on the bracelet is that of a solid yellow circle between each butterfly. This circle is commonly found in Egyptian art and represents the sun. There are many pictures and sculptures which have the circular disc of the sun god Ra. The symbolism of the circular disc is well known and is unmistakable. The fact that the circular disc in this case is placed between the butterflies, links each butterfly shape to the disc and hence links the sun to the butterfly. Although this does make an attractive design on the bracelet, once again it seems unlikely that the design is the only factor to consider. The link between the sun and the butterfly is unmistakable and intentional. The symbolism of the sun can therefore be extended to include the butterfly. This would support the proposal that the butterfly is a symbol of life and re-birth.

SIZE

The butterflies on the bracelet have been constructed so as to fill the available width while maintaining the correct proportions. By spreading the wings along the length of the bracelet, the artist has been able to make the butterflies large. Similarly, by

the simplicity of the design of the wings, the relative size of the butterflies is large. While the size is fairly large, it is the wings that dominate. Once again, we note that the emphasis is on the outspread wings of the butterfly, ie. it is the wings that have a large size. This draws attention to the fact that the butterfly is in full flight. It is a creature of the sky, filled with life and soaring in the heavens. It is thus possible that the butterfly would be associated with the sun god, Ra, the god of the heavens.

LOCATION

It is known that the decorations on the outside walls of temples were to ward off danger and were often depictions of protective deities (Wilkinson 1994:27). The butterflies on the bracelet are similarly visible. They are on the outside. It is possible that this may signify that the butterflies are able to offer protection in some way similar to that of an amulet. As well as this, the bracelet would be worn on the arms of the person. This location is on the body and so may be connected with the body.

The arrangement of the butterflies is systematic. They are placed evenly around the bracelet and fill the surface of the bracelet. Their wings are located tip to tip, separated by a sphere. This circular object is commonly used in Egyptian art to represent the sun, or the sun god. Thus it seems that the alternation of butterfly and solar disc places the butterfly firmly in association with the sun god, Ra. Once again, it seems possible that the butterfly may not simple be a decoration but may in some way symbolise the cycle if life associated with the sun god.

The bracelets were found in the burial chamber of Queen Hetepheres. They had obviously been placed there for her use in the afterlife. This means that the bracelets were considered important and carried something of value which would be needed in the afterlife. Possibly, the butterflies would ensure that the Queen would be re-born in the same way that a butterfly is re-born. The symbol of the butterfly would assist in this.

MATERIALS

The bracelets are made from silver. Silver was a particularly precious metal in Ancient Egypt. It was scarce and was valued to the extent that the bones of gods were thought to be made of silver, the colour of the moon (Wilkinson 1994:83). Silver had to be imported and so goods made from silver were highly prized. Thus silver is symbolic of both the moon and the gods.

The stones embedded in the bracelet are turquoise, lapis lazuli and carnelian. All of these stones were thought to have amuletic, protective powers. Lapis Lazuli was particularly important because of its colour, the blue associated with the heavens.

Andrews (1998:102) agrees that lapis lazuli was the most prized of the semi-precious stones from as early as Pre-dynastic times and symbolised joy and delight. It was particularly significant due to its colour, that of the sky. Stones were not used simply for their attractiveness. Wilkinson (1994:88) refers to the instructions in the *Book of the Dead* which specify the type of stone needed in order to provide the necessary power or magic. The stones in this bracelet were therefore chosen for their powers of protection. Being placed in the shape of a butterfly would have added more power. The wearer now has the protection inherent in the stone as well as the protection of the butterfly. It is the skill of the artist which has combined the inherent properties of the stones with the butterfly design to make an object which is attractive and potent due to the symbolism of the precious stones and the added butterfly design. Wilkinson (1994:88) comments that the Egyptologist Jorge Ogdon says:

“the symbolic and religious significance of stone is well known in the science of the history of religions, for the material possesses the characteristics of permanence, immutability, and incorruptibility that suggest the existence of another reality, another form of being which escapes the short-lived and corruptible existence of human life”.

Thus these silver bracelets inlaid with semi-precious stones carry a powerful symbolic message.

COLOUR

The colours of the butterflies on these bracelets are not realistic. While there are blue and green butterflies in nature, there is no butterfly in Egypt which looks like the ones depicted here. Moreover, the wing patterns on the left side of the butterfly do not consistently match those on the right wings. This would never be the case in nature as butterfly wings are perfectly symmetrical in pattern and colour with the right wing always being an exact mirror image of the left. Thus the artist has used the shape of the butterfly and has selected a pattern of shapes and colours to depict the insect in an attractive way on the bracelets. The selection of colours is of interest here.

In a dry, desert country, there is not a great deal of colour. Vibrant colours were thus of great significance to the Ancient Egyptians as such colours indicated life, either flora or fauna. There are three strong basic colours on these bracelets, red, blue and green. All three of these colours had important symbolic messages for the Egyptians.

Red is the colour of blood and fire and symbolised both life and regeneration. Red is used in the bracelets on the butterfly itself and on the solar discs between the butterflies. Using red for the abdomen of the butterfly gives it a vibrancy. Wilkinson (1994:106) notes that the Egyptian artist chose certain precious stones in the

production of jewellery for a reason, that reason being the symbolism attached to the colours of these stones. Red symbolises both life and danger. It seems unlikely that the colour is used in this instance as a symbol of danger because the butterfly is not a dangerous creature at all. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the red signifies both life and regeneration. This is supported by the red disc which is used often in Egyptian art to portray the sun god Ra who is the creator god, the origin of life.

The colour blue is similarly associated with life and rebirth. It is the colour of the heavens and of the river Nile. Most butterflies in Egypt lived in the fertile region of the Nile and as these are flying creatures, creatures of the sky, the blue colour carries this double meaning. Blue also has solar connotation and Wilkinson (1994:107) notes that a number of solar-related objects are manufactured from blue faience. In this case, the blue lapis lazuli and turquoise could have been selected to symbolise this creature of the heavens which only flies during the day and which is seemingly capable of rebirth.

Green is also a colour symbolic of life. Green is associated with growing things. It depicts the life inherent in growth and is therefore a colour with positive force. Green is also strongly associated with resurrection. In this instance the green malachite is even more symbolic as it combines the symbolism of the colour with that of the material. The following extract quoted in Wilkinson (1994:108) is relevant in this context:

“Early texts refer to the afterlife itself as a “field of malachite” after the vivid green mineral used by the Egyptians in the production of this pigment. This is the meaning behind the statement in The Pyramid Texts: “O you who stride out...strewing green stone, malachite, turquoise of the stars, if you are green then the King will be green (even as) a living rush is green” In a similar manner, in Chapter 77 of the Book of the Dead, it is stated that the deceased desires to become a great falcon “whose wings are of green stone”. As such wings would certainly not be functional, it is clear that the symbolism of the colour is what is important”.

These bracelets have malachite, turquoise and wings, all of which are mentioned above. Thus the butterflies seem to clearly symbolise both life and rebirth.

NUMBERS

There are four butterflies on each bracelet. Four is the number of totality or completeness (Wilkinson 1994:133). These four butterflies are arranged evenly around the bracelet which is significantly, a complete circle. One of the rites performed in the king's coronation ceremonies involved four birds being released in the directions of the four cardinal points (Wilkinson 1994:134). These four butterflies

are certainly reminiscent of this rite. However, the number four is not only connected to the four cardinal points. It is more frequently used to symbolise completeness. Protective rituals were performed four times. These four butterflies could therefore symbolise complete protection of life and an assurance of rebirth.

HIEROGLYPHS

This aspect does not apply to the bracelets.

ACTIONS

The butterflies on the bracelets are very obviously in full flight. Their wings are spread out fully and are the main focus. Thus the action of flying is clearly conveyed. Flying and butterflies are associated with the sky and the heavens. Hence the action conveyed is one of life. Schäfer (1974:150) points out that Egyptian artists settled upon and standardised particular forms for both animate and inanimate objects in order to communicate clearly and unambiguously the things they were intended to signify. In this case it is the outspread shape of the wings which the artist has used to unambiguously convey the action of flying. It is thus clear that the butterflies are not being used as decorative objects only but also to symbolise the action of flying. The fact that butterflies are creatures of the sky means that they are a connection between the human and the divine, between the earth and the heavens.

Another action which may be significant, is that the bracelets are meant to be worn. They adorn the arms of the Queen. Her action in wearing the bracelets shows that the bracelets are more than just attractive objects to be looked at. They provide the Queen with some aspect other than mere adornment. It is proposed that the butterflies on the bracelet symbolise protection, life and an assurance that she will “fly” safely and be reborn in the afterlife.

GESTURES

This aspect does not apply in this case.

5. DISCUSSION

The above analysis of seven different art forms each depicting the butterfly shows certain trends. These trends will now be considered in the context of Ancient Egyptian thought, culture and religion. It must be noted that although it is impossible to know exactly how the mind of the Ancient Egyptian conceived the world around him, historians and Egyptologists all agree on one important aspect. This is that nothing is without meaning and everything is connected to the deities. This somewhat generalised statement reminds us that trying to see the world through the eyes of an Egyptian is almost impossible in the 21st century. As Wilkinson (1994:8) states:

“To understand the symbolic dimensions of Egyptian art, then, we must learn to see it as the Egyptians did. We may never be in a position to comprehend or replicate that experience, but with practice we can come to recognize many of the symbols found in Egyptian painting, sculpture and other works, and the way in which the artist used them”.

With this in mind, it is possible to look for the patterns of thought and possible symbolism of the butterfly in Egyptian art.

5.1 Form

The most significant part of the butterfly is its wings. In the majority of scenes depicting butterflies, the wings are fully extended as they would be in flight. Of the 84 depictions of butterflies in Memphite tomb scenes noted by Evans (2010:51-52), only five are seen in profile. This predominance of the fully extended wings is seen throughout the dynasties and in all art works including jewellery.

Schäfer (1986:150) points out that Egyptian artists settled upon, and standardised, particular forms for both animate and inanimate objects in order to communicate clearly and unambiguously the things they were intended to signify. If this concept is applied to the images of the butterfly discussed above, it is noted that the outspread wings depict a butterfly in full flight. It is thus the aspect of flying that is being stressed and hence the symbolism associated with flying should be considered.

The first point to note regarding flying is that it is an activity of the sky. In the case of the butterfly, it is a daytime activity and moreover, one only seen on sunny days, so this means that we need to consider the flight of the butterfly in the context of the sky and the sun. The god of the sky, Ra, was the supreme deity and ruled the heavens. As the creator sun-god Ra was worshipped from the 4th dynasty and became so important that he was considered a universal deity and his worship became almost monotheistic (Barnett 1996:90). Known variously as Ra, Horus-Ra and Amun-Ra, depictions of this deity often include the hieroglyphs for everlasting or eternity (Wilkinson 1992:129).

He was depicted as a falcon with the sun's disc on his head.

Fig 30: The god Amun-Ra (Ra-Harakhty)



<http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/Pr-Sa/Ra-Re.html>

Although the falcon is not shown with wings, the fact that it is a bird means the wings are implied, as is the ability to fly. However, the morning sun is depicted as the god Khepri, a winged beetle.

Fig 31: Winged beetle

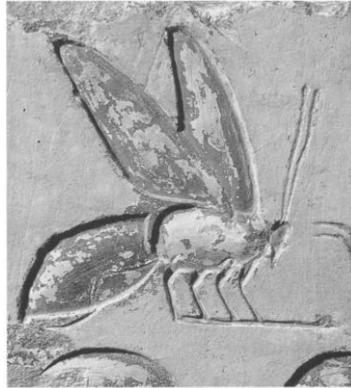


Scarab from Tutankhamun's treasures is made from gold, carnelian, turquoise and lapis lazuli (www.londonnet.co.uk).

The act of flying is thus a significant aspect of this god. It is reasonable to deduce that flying is therefore not only important but symbolic. It would seem from the above that flying is also associated with eternity, the cycle of re-birth. These two aspects are inherent in the butterfly: it is a flying insect with a life cycle that is seemingly eternal and does not die, it merely changes its form.

Let us now consider the outspread wings of the butterfly, its most common form in all the images examined. Evans (2010:52) notes that the profile image of flying insects is most frequently associated with stinging insects, (bees, wasps). The bee is a well-documented symbol of kingship being the emblem of Lower Egypt (Wilkinson 1992:115).

Fig 32: Honey Bee

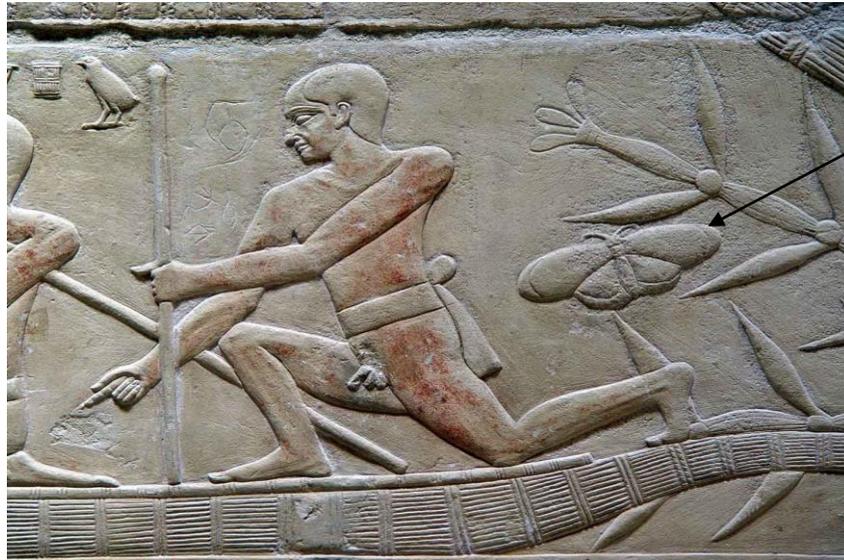


An Egyptian Bestiary- Arnold 1955:47

Other insects common in Egyptian art follow this trend. Beetles, flies and dragonflies are all depicted from above, similar to the butterfly. Locusts are variously depicted both in profile when at rest, and with outspread wings as seen from above when in flight. This is possibly due to the destructive behaviour of locusts and their ability to devour crops.

Where the butterfly is shown in profile, it is obviously not still but is in a position of hovering or readiness to fly. In most murals of marsh scenes where butterflies are present, the butterfly is shown with open wings, even when it is not flying. Although only four marsh scenes have been included in this study, there are numerous other scenes containing butterflies all of which have their wings extended.

Fig 33: Butterfly in tomb of Kagemni



Tomb of Kagemni – www.osirisnet.net/mastabas/kagemni/e_kagemni_01.htm

Fig 34: Butterfly in tomb of Merefnebef



Tomb of Merefnebef

http://www.osirisnet.net/mastabas/merefnebef/e_merefnebef_04.htm

The butterfly then is associated with the freedom of flight and with the realm of the sky-god Ra. Due to the emphasis in most art works of the open wings, it seems highly possible that the butterfly is not just used as a decorative insect, but as a symbol of the freedom of flight, the eternity of the sun-god and the concept of re-birth as evident in its life cycle.

5.2 SIZE

Without exception, the size of the butterfly in Egyptian art is emphasised. The butterfly is always much larger in proportion than other animals in the scene. It may be the same size as a duck or even a hippopotamus. While Schäfer notes that this may just be artistic license, he does qualify this statement by stating that it is more than likely to be a sign of importance (1974:230). In contrast to the relatively large size of the butterfly, other animals are diminished. Crocodiles and hippos are often very small and this is to reduce their destructive power. In fact, wildlife has hierarchical scaling in order to diminish or enhance magical influence (Wilkinson 1994:44).

In all the examples examined in this investigation, the butterfly is particularly large in size. Harpur notes that this tendency is seen from the earliest depictions of marsh scenes found in Old Kingdom tombs and describes this as:

“...a disproportionately large butterfly with its wings outspread”.

(Harpur 1987:189)

In all the scenes examined by Harpur where a butterfly is present, the insect is significantly larger in proportion than any of the other creatures. This seems therefore to indicate that the butterfly has some importance in the scene beyond that of mere decoration. This is also noted by Schäfer (1974:233), who states that the more important figures in a composition are larger in proportion to the other figures.

The consistently large size of the butterfly in Egyptian art is therefore likely to convey both importance and some form of power. From the other aspects of symbolism examined, it would seem that the butterfly is an important symbol of life and re-generation.

One would expect that if the butterfly was used merely for decorative purposes, it would be smaller and possibly used in scenes other than the marsh scenes in which it predominates. This is not the case. Even in jewellery which is in itself decorative, the butterfly is formed extremely large.

It can be deduced that the butterfly is therefore important and is of some significance in the scene. The significance and symbolism cannot be concluded from size alone. However, the consistently large size is doubtless of importance.

5.3 LOCATION

The location of the butterfly in Egyptian art is possibly the most important aspect to consider when attempting to determine its possible symbolism.

Of the seven examples examined above, four are marsh scenes. This predominance of marsh scenes is not by design when selecting art to include in this discussion. The fact is that the vast majority of scenes containing butterfly images are marsh scenes.

Within each scene, the location of the butterfly has been discussed fully above. There is an obvious pattern regarding the content of the scenes in which a butterfly features. Without exception, each scene contains some other animal under threat of capture or in the process of being captured. Whether it be fledglings in a nest, or large birds being hunted, or fish trapped in a net, the butterfly is positioned in such a way as to counteract the capture and consequent death of the creatures. With regard to the faience hippo, this is a creature of death and destruction and so the theme remains. To balance the killing caused by the hippo, a very large butterfly is placed in a prominent position on the dorsal aspect of the hippo, behind its head.

Harpur (1987:139-157) describes numerous marsh scenes found in tombs of the Old Kingdom and the vast majority which depict a butterfly are scenes where other creatures are being trapped or caught. Evans (2010:50-52) discusses numerous butterfly images. She states that eighty four images were found in thirty three tombs. Once again, the majority of the images of butterflies are located in scenes depicting other animals being threatened or trapped.

It therefore seems unlikely that the butterfly is placed in such scenes merely for decoration. If this was true, there would be evidence of butterflies in other pastoral and outdoor scenes. One must therefore consider the possible function of the butterfly as based on its position in these scenes. The discussions above point to the position of the butterfly as being in opposition to the destruction and death in the scene. This means that the butterfly images balance the scene by conveying the life, the freedom and the surety of regeneration. There is also the possibility as mentioned in the Ancient Egyptian Bestiary: Insects, (www.reshafim.org) that the butterfly will escort the creatures under threat to the afterlife. The life cycle of the butterfly is such that it appears to never die, but simply change its form. This life cycle of metamorphosis would strongly support the concept of the continuity of life which is so much a part of the Ancient Egyptian idea of creation being a continuous process. Kritsky (1991:39) summarises this as follows:

“ The common theme which runs through ancient Egyptian depiction of insects – and other animals as well - is that actual behaviour of these creatures relates to whatever ritual significance or symbolism was associated with or applied to them, proving that the dwellers along the Nile in antiquity

were careful observers of nature in their attempts to understand and portray life and life after death”.

The other important observation due to the location of the butterfly image in these scenes is that of restoring the balance in nature. As noted in the discussion of “maꜥ at” (see 3.1.1 above) the pharaoh was responsible for maintaining the balance of the cosmos. Aldred (1980:12) states that the high priest of Ptah was responsible for the design and execution of Egyptian art. This meant that art reflected the ideal aspect of the natural world as it related to religion. One of the prime functions of Egyptian art was to re-establish the orderly system of the land, and this includes the balance in nature. The fact that the art was designed by the high priest and then executed exactly according to his instructions limits the amount of artistic freedom allowed by the artist and emphasises the religious significance of the art. This means that every image in the scene had significance. There was magic inherent in the scenes and one of the functions of this magic was to restore the balance. Robins (2008:19) reminds us that images in Egyptian art are not placed haphazardly but that position and placement were relevant to the overall order. James (1985:17) supports this by emphasising that the content and detail in Egyptian art was of the utmost importance. The scenes were not painted to be viewed but rather to “be capable of magical activation on behalf of the tomb owner”.

The fact that the butterfly is located primarily in scenes depicting death or destruction of other animals thus empowers the butterfly as a significant image in the scene. The butterfly is flying freely and the wings are outspread in most cases. The butterfly is evidently alive. The freedom of the butterfly is thus in contrast with the captivity of the other creatures and maꜥ at is restored. There is a balance and the gods will be appeased. As maꜥ at is a law which liberates the weak from oppression at the hands of the strong, the power of the butterfly as a symbol of life is liberating the weakness of the trapped and captured animals allowing them to be “transformed” as a butterfly is transformed and thus ensure the continuity of creation. It must be remembered that the Egyptians did not see death as an end but merely as a transition. This concept is perfectly reflected in the life cycle of the butterfly.

5.4 MATERIALS

Stone :

The marsh scenes in Old Kingdom tombs were carved in the rock and were meant to last forever. The scenes were not purely for decoration but were intended to provide the dead person with all that was necessary in the afterlife. Not only is stone permanent but it can also be regarded as “a direct link with the beginning of time and thus with the creation of the cosmos itself” (Wilkinson 1994:89). The stone walls of the chapels which display the marsh scenes were certainly more than a large surface on which a scene was

carved. The length of time it must have taken to create these carved reliefs is testimony to the fact that time in Ancient Egypt was a continuum. Spending time carving complex scenes was not for this life only but was a part of the extension into the afterlife and gave immortality to the creatures depicted. This would include the butterfly which features in a large number of stone reliefs.

Limestone:

The murals such as the one from the tomb of Nebamun and also that from the tomb of Nakht were painted on a carefully prepared surface. Lined with a mud plaster and then a coating of straw and mud, the rock surface became linked with the life-giving soil of the river Nile itself by using the rich soil from the banks of the river.

Any image painted on such a surface would incorporate the powers of the material into the image. Thus the creative powers of the plaster applied would transfer to the painting. Firstly this ensured the existence of the painting in the next life but it also ensured the existence of the creatures in the painting. These creatures would be as alive and as significant in the afterlife as they were on earth.

Faience:

Numerous statuettes and amulets were created from faience. The colour and connotations of life associated with faience would therefore be an essential part of the butterflies which were either crafted from faience or painted onto faience objects such as the hippopotamus. Being a malleable substance, the artist could literally create an image from the clay-based compound. Nicholson (2009:1) suggests that the Egyptians created faience from a mixture of silica(quartz), alkali(soda) and lime so as to replicate the reflective blue colour of the sky. It was an artificial substance made to imitate semi-precious stones and was undoubtedly linked to the powerful sky god. As a creature of the sky, the butterfly would become a powerful symbol when made of faience. The large number of faience butterfly amulets which have been found bears testimony to this.

Silver:

Silver was a highly prized metal, as important as gold. Jewellery made from silver was highly prized and made only for the highest ranking individuals such as queens and princesses. Thought to be the bones of the gods, there are numerous items of jewellery and adornment made from silver. Notably, mirrors were made from silver as these were thought to symbolise the moon. The silver bracelets from the tomb of Heterephe I, with their beautiful inlaid

butterflies show that this metal was used for jewellery which was not only beautiful but also had symbolic power. Although there are not many items of jewellery depicting butterflies, the fact that silver was used in these bracelets signifies the importance of the butterfly motif.

Gold:

Wilkinson (1994:83) suggests that gold was an extremely important substance not only for its value but also for its symbolism. Gold was regarded as divine and imperishable and because it did not tarnish, was thought to symbolise eternity and the sun god Ra. The flesh of the gods was thought to be gold. Consequently, objects made from gold contained all this symbolism. A beautiful butterfly pendent from the tomb of Princess Khnumet for Dashur is significant in this context. Described by Aldred (1971:15) this single, large butterfly is suspended from a chain and is part of the treasure of jewellery found in this tomb. Significantly, a second gold necklace from the same tomb which has numerous inverted “heart-shaped” gold objects suspended from it has been described as stylized flies. The symbol of the fly as that of courage and valour and the protective properties of such a necklace are agreed (Kritsky 1991:38). It seems likely that the single butterfly would therefore also be symbolic. Once again, it is possible that the symbolism is associated with regeneration and the surety of a continued existence in the afterlife.

Fig 35: Gold butterfly necklace



Aldred 1971 : 15

5.5 COLOUR

In most of the examples used in this study the colour of the butterflies in the painted scenes is close to that of the Tiger Butterfly, *danaus chrysippus*. This butterfly has a black body with white dots on the upper segment of the abdomen, large orange wings with a black border and white dots around the edge.

Fig 36: Tiger butterfly wings



Fig 37: Tiger butterfly from tomb of Nebamun



Fig 38: Tiger butterfly with outspread wings



Fig 39: Butterflies from tomb of Nakht



Tiger Butterflies from www.dezimmer.net

The black colour of the body and the wing border could be linked to the possible symbolism of the butterfly as a creature which escorts others safely to the afterlife. Maspero (2003:4) is referred to in *Ancient Egyptian Bestiary: Insects* as suggesting that butterflies, grasshoppers and praying mantis might all serve as guides to the deceased on their journey to eternal life. Black is the colour of death and symbolised the underworld. It is also the colour of life, as the rich soil in the Nile valley was black. From this soil, new life grew. This duality of symbolism is not uncommon in Egypt. Dualism was an essential way of making sense of the world around them, and the Egyptians would rationalize concepts by juxtaposing two seemingly opposing realities. In this case, life and death are both associated with the colour black. Referred to by Servajean (2008:1) as “a mental structuring device the Egyptians lived by, expressing implicitly or explicitly, a vision of the world and its functioning”, it is aptly applied to the life of a butterfly which is seemingly dead in the chrysalis only to be “born again”. The dualism of the butterfly’s life cycle is easily the motivation for this creature to symbolise life and freedom as well as death and re-birth.

The golden colour of the wings would be associated with the concept of eternity given to the metal gold as discussed above. It is also the colour of the sun, and the butterfly being a creature of the heavens would naturally be associated with the sun and thereby the sun god, Ra. The golden colour of the wings reinforces this likely symbolism.

White is the colour of sacredness and ritual purity and so the white dots on the wings which are both white and circular, would again suggest a linking of the butterfly with a ritual crossing over from this life to the next.

It is interesting to note that all the butterflies portrayed in marsh scenes are of similar colours. While some are not as naturalistic as the painting in the tomb of Nebamun, all are as described here. While other butterflies must have been seen in Egypt, although infrequently, the artists throughout the dynasties all chose to use similar colours for the butterfly. This strongly supports the proposals above regarding colour.

Fig 40: Tomb of Nkawssi



Butterfly from Old Kingdom tomb of Nkawssi shows colour of Tiger butterfly

Nkawssi_C1_ewall www.osiris.net

In jewellery, amulets and statuettes, colour is used more creatively as is the butterfly motif. However, from the examples considered in this study, the colours are still significant. They are predominantly blue/green and thus symbolise the sky and the fertile earth. Once again we see the concept of duality used to unite both the heavens and the earth and thereby connect these two major parts of the cosmos. The butterfly is the ideal creature to symbolise this as it is found both flying in the sky and alighting on various plants on the earth. It could therefore be considered as a creature of the sky and the earth, a dualistic existence.

5.6 NUMBERS

It is significantly more common that the butterfly features in Egyptian art as a single creature and not a group. While there are scenes such as that from the tomb of Nebamun and the tomb of Nakht where there are a number of butterflies, this is not the norm. It would therefore appear that one butterfly portrays all that is necessary. As the single butterfly is usually very large in comparison to the other creatures in the scene, this suggests that the butterfly is significant. It has been mentioned that the butterfly is almost exclusively found in scenes where other animals are under

threat. There are frequently many fledglings, many fish or many birds being trapped or hunted. However, only one butterfly is included to balance the chaos of the hunt. Again, this indicates the inherent magical power or symbolism of this single creature.

It is interesting to note that in the case of jewellery, this is different. There is a single butterfly on a chain from the tomb of Princess Khnumet, but the bracelets of Queen Hetepheres each have four butterflies. All of these butterflies are stylized and not identifiable as a particular species. It is therefore a generic butterfly motif that is used. The number four is associated with many rituals in Ancient Egypt and is therefore known to be symbolic of completeness (Wilkinson 1994:133). Added to the completeness of the circle, this would make these bracelets extremely symbolic and powerful. However, there is a further numerical symbol and this is the number fourteen. The Queen is depicted wearing fourteen bracelets. Seven was also a number denoting completeness and is associated with the deities in many ways (Wilkinson 1994:136). Seven times two is significantly more powerful as the number two pervades almost every aspect of Egyptian culture as the concept of duality. This combination of powerful, symbolic numbers gives these butterfly bracelets a symbolism far surpassing that of a simple decorative motif. With the numbers all symbolising eternity, it seems reasonable that the butterfly complements this symbolism by adding the concept of completing the journey from this life to the afterlife safely.

5.7 HIEROGLYPHS

The butterfly is not found as a hieroglyphic symbol. The discussion in 4.2 above (see fig 14) suggests a possible analogy between the Ankh symbol and the butterfly. In the case of the Tiger butterfly, if the coloured section of the wings is removed and only the black marking left, there is a strong resemblance of form to the ankh sign. Although the following diagram is modern, it assists one to see this analogy.

Fig 41: Modern ankh design



While this may be controversial, there is some evidence to support this. Wilkinson (1994:20) discusses the decorative form of various objects carrying symbolic significance. This same reasoning could be applied. Wilkinson refers to the shape/form of both bowls and spoons. He mentions that:

“many are *ankh*-shaped, symbolising – like mirrors – life, rejuvenation and rebirth”.

It is relevant here to remember that Schäfer (1974:37) states that:

“.. works of art which represent living beings or things do not have the same meaning for us as they did for the Egyptians”.

In this instance, the challenge is to change one’s mind set and attempt to see the world through the eyes of the Ancient Egyptian where every aspect of nature had some link with the gods and some meaning. The body shape of the butterfly could reasonably have been considered from this perspective.

5.8 ACTIONS

When considering actions in Egyptian art, one must begin with the context in which these actions occurred. This context relates to the pharaoh and the gods. Assmann (2002:107) states that all actions in the world fall under :

“...pharaonic responsibility for the world, for only the pharaoh could restore order and balance in a world out of joint and threatening to fly apart”.

This restoration of order, of *ma’at*, was the central idea that governed all actions. Ritual was part of this and Assmann continues with the explanation that :

“...every king in Egypt set himself up as a guarantor of *ma’at* (truth, justice, and divine order), every king had the job of establishing *ma’at* in the place of *isfet* (untruth, injustice, chaos)”.

The king, however, did not perform every action himself. It was often the high priests who acted on his behalf so as to maintain good relations with the gods in a well-ordered world. This is the case with regard to art.

Schäfer (1974:38) states clearly that regarding art in Ancient Egypt:

“..there is no Egyptian work of any importance that would not have had a definite function to fulfil, apart from and before any consideration of its value as art; to put it simply, it was not there only to be enjoyed”.

From the Middle Kingdom onwards, art fell largely under the jurisdiction of the priests and was commissioned. This meant that the art work was planned carefully in size, content, alignment and execution to fulfil certain requirements. These requirements were linked directly with the function it was to perform, as stated above.

The artist was more an artisan than a creative talent. This does not mean that artists were not creative. However, their creativity was curtailed by the very prescriptive planning done by the priests. Thus the action of creating art was to act on behalf of the pharaoh and maintain order in the world.

In this context, the actions of the butterflies in various art works become meaningful.

In all the art works discussed, the butterfly is an essential part of the scene although not portrayed in a realistic way. In all the scenes where other animals are being threatened, the butterfly features in a way that is not at all realistic. Hence the action of the butterfly must be significant. It would appear that the action is actually to counteract an opposing action and thereby restore balance. The butterflies are all alive and flying. Even those butterflies with vertical wings are portrayed in such a way that they indicate potential to fly off at any point. The emphasis is on the ability of the butterfly to fly. The wings of the butterfly feature prominently and are the focus of the action.

It would seem, then, that there are two important aspects of the actions of the butterfly. Firstly, the action of flying conveys life, a passage from this life to the next and the hope of re-birth. Secondly, the action of flying provides the balance to the entrapment of the other creatures who are under threat of dying and thus the butterfly restores balance to the scene.

5.9 GESTURE

The concept of gesture refers to a more static feature, that of a pose or stance. It seems difficult to apply this to the butterfly however there are two aspects which reflect a quality which could be termed gesture.

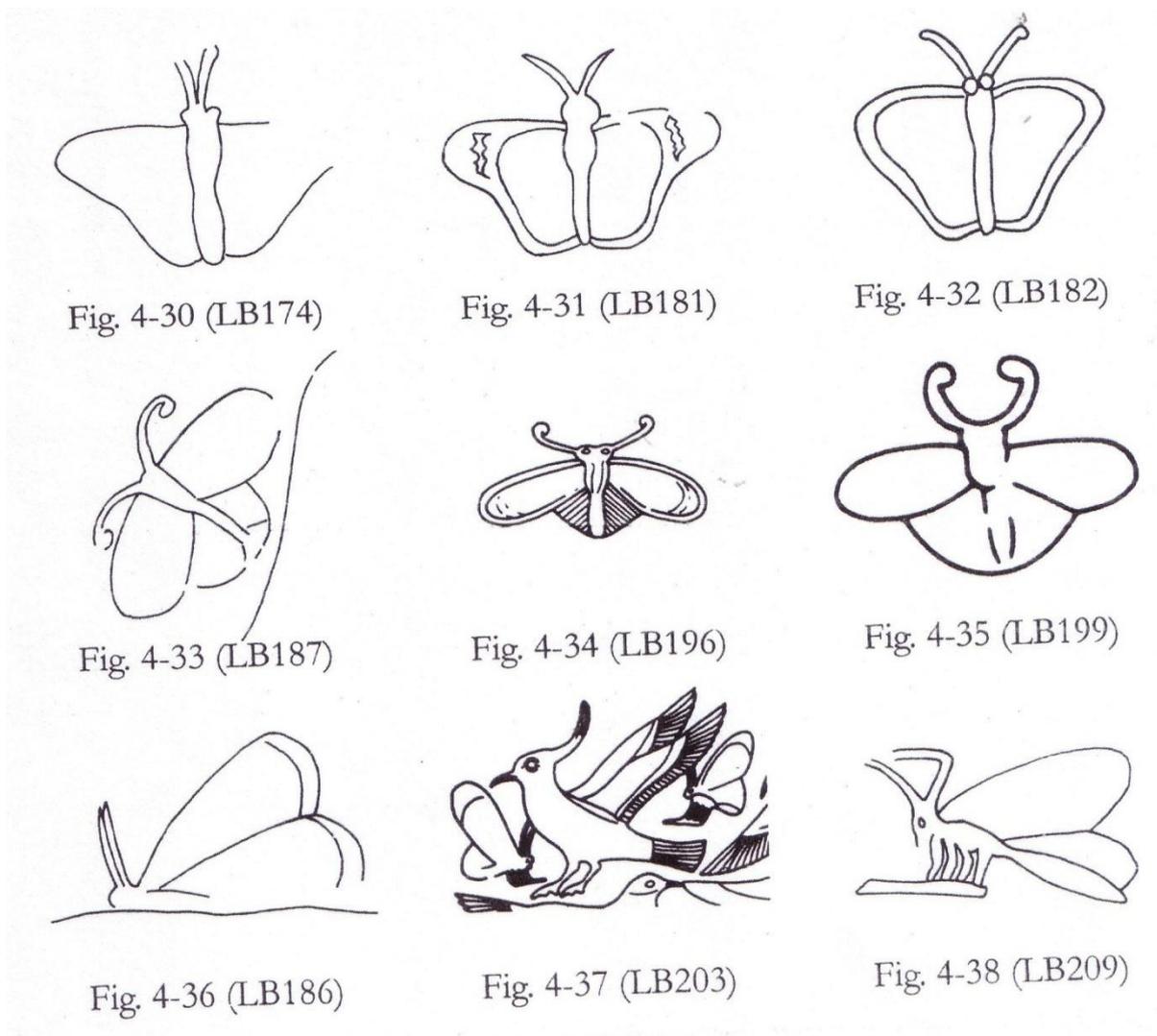
In Wilkinson's discussion of gesture he cites two important symbols as follows:

Protection: From Old Kingdom times a specifically protective gesture is found in representations showing figures extending one or two outstretched fingers towards dangerous creatures such as the hippopotamus or the crocodile.

Praise: The basic attitude of praise which is frequently seen in representations of Egyptians before their king or before their gods involves holding up one or both arms. (1994:194)

Considering both of these, one can apply this figuratively to both the wings and the antennae of the butterfly.

Fig 42: Butterflies in Memphite tombs



(Evans 2012:55)

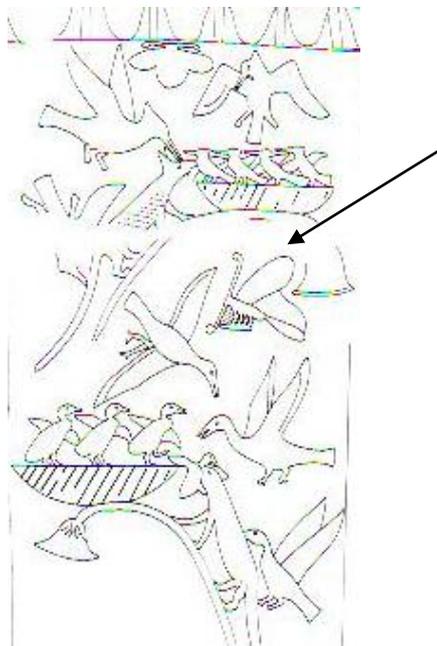
In the above butterfly images found in Memphite tombs, the antennae of all the butterflies are prominently held upright. This is clearly reminiscent of the symbol of protection described above. The butterflies with their wings in the upright position are similarly reminiscent of the praise gesture.

Schäfer (1974:55-56) discusses the possible symbolism of both the horns of oxen and the wings of birds and draws a similar conclusion. He says:

“.. the artificially deformed horns brought to mind the up-stretched arms of men begging for mercy. A literary image in the Amarna sun hymn says of birds flying upwards that they lift their wings in adoration towards the sun, which shows us we have interpreted the horn decoration in a genuinely Egyptian way”.

Harpur (1987:201,202,533) supports this and refers to a butterfly from the first Intermediate Period in the chapel of *Mhw*, where the insect has a profile body and a near profile wing but its antennae are spread out as viewed from above.

Fig 43: Butterfly in Old Kingdom tomb



Harpur 1987:533 Fig 196

The gesture of the antennae could symbolise a plea for protection of the baby birds.

The prominent antennae of the butterfly in all the art included in this investigation are not only lifted up in praise/protection but are also exaggerated and made much more prominent than, for example, the legs. This indicates the importance of the antennae and the possible function they play in gesture.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Egyptian art must always be studied in the context of the Ancient Egyptian environment and culture. This includes the beliefs, rituals and way of life at the time.

Any art is in essence a “symbol” in so far as it represents things or beings (Schäfer 1974:32). Art representing living creatures as well as people does not have the same meaning for us as it had for the people living at that time. Much of the art from Ancient Egypt is funerary/tomb art, and thus the religious beliefs surrounding death and burial are also significant when considering the art of this period.

Some key concepts need to be kept in mind. The first is that for the Egyptians, death was not an end but a transition. They believed that this world and this life were part of the continuum of existence which transformed from one plane of existence to another at the time of death (Assmann 2002:172). This meant that everything that exists in this life can be transported to the next.

The second concept is the “method” of transportation which is basically the link between this life and the after-life. Here is where art plays a significant, major role. The belief was that any representation of an object, a being or an animal would be sufficient to ensure its existence in the after-life. Aldred (1980:18) states this as:

“Any completed painting was transformed from an inanimate product of man’s hands into a vibrant part of the divine order charged with numinous power”.

This meant that anything represented in the form of art would exist forever. Aldred continues by referring to Egyptian art as a “religious experience”. By this, he means that everything in Egypt was influenced by the belief in the gods as being intrinsic in every aspect of life. Worship of the gods was necessary for survival and appeasement of the gods was of paramount importance in order to maintain the balance in the cosmos as prescribed by the concept of *maꜥt*. The king was the mediator between human and divine.

In the discussion above, Wilkinson’s (1994) categories have been applied to seven different sources which all contain butterflies. The following have been noted:

In all cases, the butterfly is represented as a very large image. In comparison to the other creatures in each case, the butterfly is exceptionally large. This indicates that the butterfly is important and portrays some power. While it may be true that in some cases this large size may simply be for aesthetic reasons, one would then expect to find the butterfly drawn small in certain cases where it is used purely for decoration. This is not the case. This relatively large size of the butterfly is consistent and therefore one may conclude that the butterfly is an important creature with an important function to fulfil.

In all the marsh scenes discussed, the butterfly features in conjunction with other creatures that are either being hunted or attacked. Whether the creature threatened are fledglings, large birds or fish, the butterfly is positioned in such a way as to balance the threat of death. The large wings of the butterfly are often significantly fully spread out and denote a butterfly in full, free flight. This freedom of flight juxtaposes the threat of death to the other animals. In many cases, the other animals are birds which also have wings. Considering the marsh scenes in the context of their symbolism of fertility and re-birth (Wilkinson 1994:182) this indicates that the butterfly reinforces the concepts of re-birth, particularly as it is a creature which undergoes significant transformation/metamorphosis in its life cycle. It is significant that the butterfly does not feature in other outdoor scenes such as pastoral or agricultural scenes where one would expect to find butterflies. This evidence points to the strong possibility of the butterfly symbolising life and freedom in the after-life.

The position of the butterfly in each scene allows the butterfly to fulfil a function of giving balance to the chaos of the hunt or attack. In this way, the butterfly functions in maintaining *ma'at*. Again this indicates a strong possibility that the butterfly conveys positive magical forces associated with life and re-birth. This would account for its presence in art where other animals are dying or being captured.

The butterflies which appear in Egyptian art are almost exclusively orange/yellow/gold in colour. The significance of this is twofold. Firstly, yellow is the colour of eternity and is closely associated with the gods. Secondly, it is the colour of the sun and symbolises the sun god. The constant use of yellow colour to portray butterflies indicates the association of the butterfly with the sun god who is also the creator god. This association is reinforced by the fact that the butterfly is a creature of the heavens. In the case of jewellery denoting butterflies, it is significant to note that on the bracelets of Queen Hetepheres (see Fig 28) the blue/green butterflies are separated by a circular yellow sun. It seems highly likely that the use of the colour yellow is not incidental but is used specifically to portray the symbolism associated with this colour, that of eternal life.

Apart from the permanency of the rock faces on which the marsh scenes are painted, butterflies appear on materials which symbolise life and creation. The faience of the hippo and the aquamarine and silver of the jewellery indicate that the butterfly is a creature of some importance. The use of precious materials to portray butterflies indicates that the butterfly is not simply for decoration but that it has a value.

The numerous faience butterfly amulets which have been found indicate that the butterfly is a creature which contains some magical powers. Amulets all carried some form of magic and some power beneficial to the wearer. Those amulets used in funerary rituals were similarly powerful. Once again, it seems likely that the symbolism of freedom and of re-birth which would have been noted in the marsh

scenes is also present in the amulets. An amulet was not purely for decoration. It was used to give the person certain assurances of essential qualities or powers.

Although there is no direct reference in any form of spell, incantation or written rite referring to the power or symbolism of the butterfly, all indications as discussed in this investigation seem to point to the butterfly being a symbol of freedom and of re-birth. While this is still conjecture, it seems highly likely when seen in the context of the ancient Egyptian, that a creature portrayed so frequently in similar situations would be used symbolically.

The butterfly is highly significant and symbolic in many cultures throughout history. This includes the North American Indians, Mexicans, Chinese and Ancient Greeks. In a culture such as that of Ancient Egypt where symbolism was an integral factor and so much of their religion and beliefs included observations of the creatures in their environment, it seems highly unlikely that the butterfly was simply seen to be merely a beautiful insect.

It is therefore proposed that the butterfly is indeed an insect with symbolism and significance in Ancient Egypt and that this symbolism is associated with freedom, re-birth and safe passage to the after-life.

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