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On lustful deities and the ontological turn in the archaeology of ancient Egypt

Introduction

One of the recent developments in archaeological theory is a heterogenous interpretative approach inspired by New Materialism, posthumanism, speculative realism, object-oriented ontology and the ontological turn in anthropology (among others Alberti, 2012; Fahlander, 2017, 72; Harris et al., 2017; Olsen, 2010).[1] Those inclined towards New Materialism are critical of the notion that archaeology treats things as merely vehicles for something else (Witmore, 2014, 203). Advocates of these developments go beyond the concept of "secondary agency" for objects, as formulated in anthropology and art history (Gell, 1998), and towards the social, understood as being constituted not only by humans but also by a plethora of other actants, including non-human entities (Bennett, 2010; Latour, 1993; 2005). Those inspired by the ontological turn in anthropology draw their inspiration from ethnographic studies advocating for an ontological turn based on encounters with communities such as indigenous Amazonians and other Amerindians. In these communities, animals and plants have the same culture as humans, i.e., blood is to jaguars what manioc beer is to humans, though they have different natures. This perspective has led to the understanding that there can be more than one world, each populated by different things (Viveiros de Castro, 2014, 57; 2015, 27).

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[1] It is important to stress that these intellectual movements have considerable differences that do not allow them to be lumped into what some would call a new paradigm. For example, Bruno Latour's (1993, 2005) Actor-Network Theory refers to the specific configuration of actants that come together in a particular network at a given moment, always in a state of becoming and evolving. Jane Bennett's (2010) vibrant matter is a concept that refers to materiality as inherently relational. Graham Harman's (2005, 1) object-oriented ontology is an approach in which objects have a withdrawn essence, and "the relation of humans to pollen, oxygen, eagles, or windmill is no different in kind from the interaction of these objects with each other". Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's (2014, 56–73) multinaturalism implies the existence of one culture and many natures in the world of Amerindians, so that epistemology remains constant and ontologies become variable. There is thus a difference in understanding of ontology among ethnographers in Brazil and philosophers advocating for New Materialism or speculative realism and object-oriented ontology. Archaeologists advocating for New Materialist, posthumanist, and object-oriented archaeology are not really clear which of these various understandings of reality they adhere to, surely a consequence of half-baked disciplinary transfer (see Babić, 2019; Ribeiro, 2019, 28).

Common to all of these approaches is a move away from what some have termed "the tyranny of meaning" (Back Danielsson et al., 2012, 2; see also Olsen, 2010: 3). The central tenets of these varied approaches and their applications in archaeology can be summarized as follows:

1. Flat ontology, implies that "the analyst cannot declare-in advance of the analysis-whether people, animals, things, landscapes, or whatever is playing a more or less important role" (Crellin et al., 2021, 9). In a more extreme version advocated by object-oriented ontology, all objects are considered equally real and significant. However, as Graham Harman stresses, premature taxonomies should not be imported from outside, and existing taxonomies should not be neglected. For example, attempts at a flat ontology that would treat God, humans, and animals in the Middle Ages in the same way are conceptually on thin ice. The goal is not only to describe the features of things but also to highlight the differences between their various kinds (Harman, 2017, 55).

2. "Displacement of the human as the logical point of departure" (Fahlander, 2017, 69). This has been criticized by archaeologists who emphasize that in everyday life our practices prioritize human responsibility. This means that insisting on ethical asymmetry between humans and things does not mean denying the capacity of objects to act or affect (Ribeiro, 2016, 231–232; 2021a, 534–535).

3. "When everything is human, the human becomes a wholly other thing" (Viveiros de Castro, 2014, 63). Ethnographic records abound with worlds in which personhood is not limited to humans, and where animals, plants and spirits see themselves as humans and others as nonhumans. This is why the proponents of the ontological turn insist that indigenous ideas should be regarded as concepts with philosophical meaning and potential philosophical use (Viveiros de Castro, 2014, 189).

4. Things are seen as assemblages and participants (Witmore, 2014, 204), and they should be approached and apprehended as "things *qua* things" (Olsen et al., 2021, 7).

5. Archaeology without the past and as the discipline of things (Witmore, 2014, 204).

6. Abandoning the reductive emphasis on material properties (Witmore, 2014, 205) and focusing on what materials do rather than on what they are (Back Danielsson et al., 2012, 7).

Advocates of New Materialism and the ontological turn in archaeology plead for an approach that starts with material things and follows them wherever they may lead

(Witmore, 2014, 205). In the words of Bruno Latour (2005, 62) we have to "follow the natives, no matter which metaphysical imbroglios they lead us into". From the discussion above, it becomes evident that most of the philosophers and archaeologists concerned with New Materialism, posthumanism, speculative realism, and object-oriented ontology focus more on humans and things than on other nonhumans such as animals or plants (for these see Žakula et al., 2019). This might be because not many would deny the "real existence" of these entities. Indeed, following Graham Harman (2017, 27) those who would deny the "real existence" of spirits, demons and deities do so because they define "real existence" as "physical existence". However, we can think of plenty of things that are not physical but are undoubtedly real, such as the Dutch East India Company. Thus, when it comes to nonhumans like spirits and deities, these appear to be an entirely different matter, one that posthumanist approaches to archaeology have largely avoided (but see Matić, 2019a; 2019b). This raises a question already posed by Artur Ribeiro (2016, 233): "Today agency concerns objects; tomorrow, who knows?" Might I add deities? This question was also raised by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2014, 194), who asked: "What happens when one takes indigenous thought seriously?"

The answers to these questions require a clear definition of how we understand the actants involved in a past or present case we are studying. This paper does not intend to definitively answer whether there are indeed many worlds out there rather than one world with many cultures (Viveiros de Castro, 2014, 71–72; 2015, 58–59). Furthermore, I distance myself from the idea of being capable of fully understanding how any past world worked and leave this task to those who claim such capability (Crellin et al., 2021, 8; for the harmfulness of this idea, see Ribeiro, 2019, 28; 2021b, 32). However, in this paper, I do not neglect the specificities of the world in which ancient Egyptians lived – a world we can attempt to comprehend through the study of texts, images and other remnants. This world included humans, animals, plants, things, demons, spirits and deities often encountered in the environment or manifested in animals, plants and minerals (Rummel, 2016; von Lieven, 2004).[2] While some may view the latter as products of imagination, such an approach does not really help us to understand the world of ancient Egyptians. From this perspective, an entity we encounter in the texts or images representing their world *bona fide* exists and can be considered significant for social analysis "only insofar as the knowing subjects are consciously aware of it and are able to discursively articulate this experience" (Olsen, 2010, 63). Ancient Egyptians, as knowing subjects, were consciously aware of spirits and deities and were capable of articulating their experiences in relation to them. They conveyed these experiences in texts and images, which we, as Egyptologists, study.

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2   This resembles what Philippe Descola (1994) termed "society of nature" in Amazonia, a collective in which humans, animals, plants, minerals, and astronomical bodies are agents.

Now that the question of the entities involved is clarified, I would like to formulate the central question of this paper: How should we interpret cases in which deities and humans are attested engaging in sexual intercourse with each other? To narrow this down further, I am particularly interested in instances where this intercourse involves fictional members of well-known social groups (such as wives of priests and *ḫnm.wt* women) or actual historical figures (like Ahmose, the mother of the female ruler Hatshepsut, and Mutemwiya, the mother of the pharaoh Amenhotep III).

Furthermore, to emphasize that sexual desires of deities were also satisfied in an earthly context, I will explore the evidence for sexual encounters between statues of deities. Drawing on recent approaches to imagery inspired by New Materialism and ontological turn (Back Danielsson et al., 2012, 1), I will focus on the multisensory aspects of texts that visually describe sexual encounters between statues of deities. By sexual encounters, I do not refer to the well-known practice of agalmatophilia documented in the ancient Greek world (Hersey, 2009; Scobie et al., 1975; White, 1978), but rather to sexual interactions between deities in their statue forms.

While in this paper I primarily rely on evidence from ancient texts, this does not align with what some proponents of the ontological turn in archaeology envision as post-discursive archaeology. Nevertheless, I prefer to begin with textual or otherwise mediated encounters rather than "direct engagements with things themselves in their concrete and messy manifestations" (Olsen et al., 2021, 7). My reason for this preference is the consideration of social context. As I will demonstrate in this paper, when adopting an object-oriented ontology and viewing deities and statues of deities as objects in their own right, we risk neglecting the past social context in which we, as archaeologists and historians, encounter them and their desires. In the words of Viveiros de Castro (2014, 131), we are overlooking a field that is "ontologically heterogenous and sociologically continuous". Simultaneously, we neglect the archaeological record upon which our interpretations should be based (cf. Ribeiro, 2019, 25–29). The social context of sexual encounters between humans and deities and between deities as statues allows us to recognize the power relations at play in these encounters (cf. Ribeiro, 2021b, 22). Just like Michel Foucault (1978) argued, where there is sex, there is power.

Sexual encounters between deities and humans

The first question of this paper pertains to the sexual encounters between ancient Egyptian deities and humans. Our sources for these encounters are not numerous, and most of them are well-known in Egyptology. Therefore, I will primarily focus on the aspects of sexual interactions between deities and humans, avoiding extensive summarization. The evidence will be presented chronologically, from older to more recent

sources. Towards the end of this section, I will identify patterns and explore their potential interpretations.

In the well-known *Tale of the Herdsman*, partly preserved on the 12th Dynasty (approx. 1991–1802 BCE) Papyrus Berlin 3024, a herdsman encounters a goddess in a bucolic setting of grazing land. The herdsman describes her as a woman (*s.t-ḥm.t*) who possessed a non-human form (*nn sj m twt.w³ rmṯ.w*). In the story, the herdsman finds the external appearance of this non-human woman frightening (Darnell, 2010, 100–131). The motif of the goddess Hathor emerging from the mountain and appearing through the marshy plants is well-attested, as seen in the vignette of spell 185 from the *Book of the Dead* on the Papyrus of Ani (British Museum EA10470,37) from the 19th Dynasty, approx. 1292–1189 BCE (Figure 1). This depiction helps us to imagine the bucolic setting in which the herdsman encountered the goddess.

Figure 1. Detail of the vignette of spell 185 from the *Book of the Dead* of the Papyrus of Ani (British Museum EA10470,37) showing the goddess Hathor emerging from the mountain and appearing through the reeds of the marshes (graphic based on https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/686310001).

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3   Here I follow the reading of Thomas Schneider (2007, 311–312). For other readings see Allen, 2015a, 362; Darnell, 2010, 102.

The fact that the encounter between the herdsman and goddess took place in an erotically charged setting is supported by the well-documented existence of bucolic and marshy environments as significant backdrops for sexual encounters in ancient Egypt. This is elaborately described in the so-called love poetry of the New Kingdom, approx. 1550–1070 BCE (Caramello, 2007, 539–544; Darnell, 2016, 22–23). The marshy sexscape might have even been an inspiration for the sexually suggestive phrase *sꜣb sš* which translates to "roaming/cruising through the marshes". This phrase is attested in a hymn to the goddess Hathor from Medamud during the Ptolemaic period, 305–30 BCE (Darnell, 1995, 49–50). However, despite the herdsman encountering the goddess in a location where couples met for sexual activities, the story does not progress in that direction. I will explore possible reasons for this later in this section.

I would now like to explore another well-known story found in Papyrus Westcar (Papyrus Berlin 3033, 9.9–10), which mentions a woman named Ruddjedet. She was the wife of a *wꜥb* priest of the god Re (Blackman, 1988, 11–12) and is described as pregnant with three children of Re (Lepper, 2008, 148, 188–189, 318–319).[4] The divine nature of these children is further emphasized by the description of their bodies, which had golden limbs and headdresses described as being of genuine lapis lazuli (Lepper, 2008, 49). This description of divine bodies finds parallels in other ancient texts. For instance, in the Middle Kingdom *Story of the Shipwrecked Sailor*, the giant serpent encountered by the sailor is a form of the Sun god and is described as follows: *ḥꜥ.w=f sẖr.w m nbw jn.wy=fy m ḥsbḏ mꜣꜥ* "His flesh was overlaid with gold and his eyebrows were of real lapis lazuli" (Allen, 2015a, 22). In Papyrus Harris 501 from the 19th or 20th. Dynasty, in section H, the Ogdoad (eight primordial deities worshiped in Hermopolis) describes the body of god Amun as follows: *ḳs.w=f ḥḏ jwf=f m nbw ḥry-tp=f m ḥsbḏ mꜣꜥ.t* "His bones are silver, his flesh gold, his hair is real lapis lazuli" (Lange, 1927, 38). In the great Hibis temple hymn to Amun, the Ogdoad also describes the body of god Amun as follows: *ḳs.w=f ḥḏ jnm=f m nbw ḥry-tp=f m ḥsbḏ mꜣꜥ.t* "His bones are silver, his skin gold, his hair is real lapis lazuli" (Davies, 1953, Pl. 3).

The pregnancy of Ruddjedet by the god Re in Papyrus Westcar is related to the story known in Egyptology as the *Divine Birth Legend*. The earliest known form of this legend is found in the pyramid complex of 5th Dynasty king Djedkare, approx. 2410–2380 BCE (Megahed et al., 2015, 275–277). Another early attestation can be found in the causeway of king Senwosret III, approx. 1882–1842 BCE in Dahshur (Oppenheim, 2011, 171, 183). The persistence of this narrative underscores its significance for the ancient Egyptian ruling elite.

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4   For a summary of historical interpretations see Gundacker, 2015, 156, 310.

However, the most detailed version of the *Divine Birth Legend* is found in the inscriptions at the Deir-el Bahari temple during the reign of the female pharaoh Hatshepsut, approx. 1479–1458 BCE, and in the Luxor temple of Amenhotep III, approx. 1388–1351 BCE. As these texts share substantial content similarities, I will provide a summary of both (Figure 2).
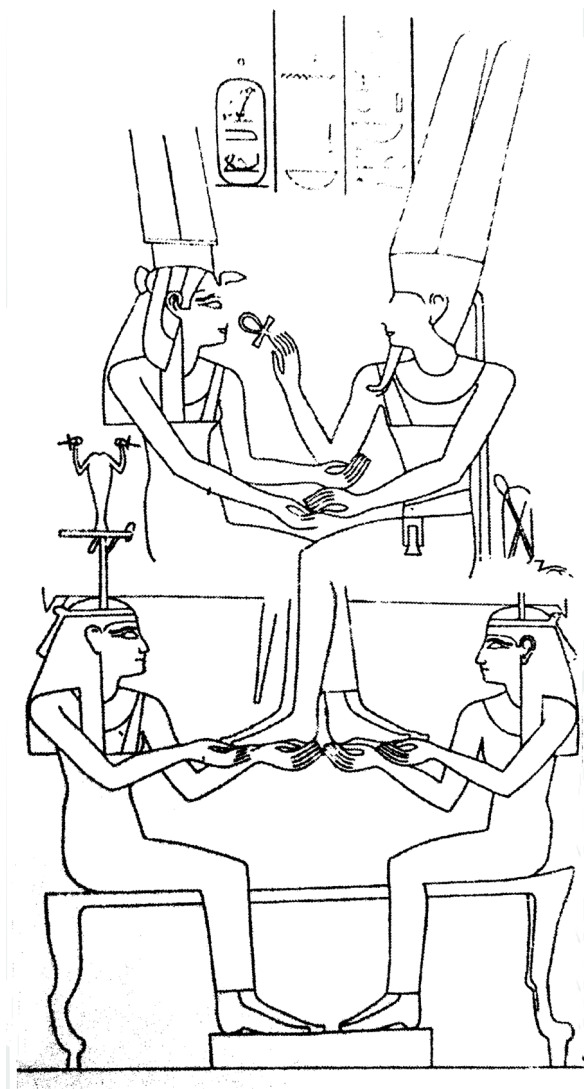

Figure 2. The god Amun and queen Mutemwiya, mother of Amenhotep III sitting on a bed, detail of the *Divine Birth Legend* representation, Luxor temple (after Brunner, 1986, Tf. 4).

These texts inform us how the mother of Hatshepsut, named Ahmose (Deir-el Bahari version), and the mother of Amenhotep III, named Mutemwiya (Luxor version), were sleeping in their palaces when they were visited by the god Amun, who took on the form of their husbands: Thutmose I (approx. 1504–1492 BCE), the husband of Ahmose, and Thutmose IV (approx. 1397–1388 BCE), the husband of Mutemwiya (Sethe, 1906, 219.13–220.6). The queens were awakened by the divine smell of frankincense, which was considered a sign of Amun's presence in ancient Egypt. However, upon opening their eyes, they saw their husbands before them. Each of them smiled at her husband. Amun spread (*ḥꜣd*) himself towards each woman, and each woman rejoiced to see his *nfr* ("beauty", alternatively "beautiful one"). His love (*mrw.t*) entered into their bodies, and the entire palace was filled with the scent of the land of Punt, known for its frankincense, and the birthplace of Amun (Sethe, 1906, 345.6–8). I have argued in detail elsewhere why the word *nfr* here has to be understood as a reference to the penis of Amun (Matić, 2018a; 2018b; see also Rikala, 2008: 117, f. 8 for this possibility but without further discussion). Therefore, I will only summarize my arguments here. Clearly, as proponents of posthumanist approaches in archaeology would argue, the materiality of the human and divine body, as well as their representations found in the texts, are crucial for their interpretation (cf. Back Danielsson et al., 2012, 4). I turn to these next.

The verb *ḥꜣd* is written with a phallus determinative. Therefore, the spreading of the god Amun towards these women can be understood as a description of an erection (similar to "in Erregung geraten" von Lieven, 2013, 159). For instance, in the Ptolemaic Papyrus Bremner-Rhind (British Museum 10188) from the 4th century BCE, it is stated: *ḥꜣd=j m ḫfꜥ=j dtꜣy.n=j m ḏr.t=j* "I satisfied myself with my fist, and I copulated with my hand" (Faulkner, 1933, 60. 11). The love (*mrw.t*) of the god entering bodies of the queens can be understood as ejaculation. This is also supported by a parallel from Papyrus MMA 35.9.21 (7, 10) in which goddess Nephthys tells Osiris that she came because of his wish to relieve (*sfḫ*) his love (*mrw.t)* in her body (von Lieven, 2006, 145). The consequence of Amun's love entering the bodies of the queens is that the entire palace smelled like Punt, the land of frankincense. Frankincense is produced by *Boswellia* trees as a milky-white, sticky substance that flows from the trunk when injured, eventually healing the wound (Espinel, 2017, 25). It is collected as a valuable aromatic resource after drying. The characteristic smell of frankincense is already present before the substance dries. Given that Amun's birthplace is Punt, in the context of the *Divine Birth Legend*, some material properties of fresh frankincense resin, such as colour and consistency, intriguingly resemble those of sperm. This observation aligns with the notion that the divine can be found not only in so-called sacred animals in ancient Egypt but in nature as a whole (von Lieven, 2004, 167). One could even argue that such an understanding of the divine bodily fluids aligns with

the concept of vital materialism proposed by Jane Bennett (2010). After the god had an erection (verb *ḥꜣd*), the women rejoiced at seeing his *nfr*. Although the word *nfr* in these texts is not written with a phallus determinative, in other texts where the *nfr* of the god is mentioned the determinative is present, as I will discuss in the next section of this paper. Therefore, the *Divine Birth Legend*, as attested in Deir el-Bahari and Luxor temples, provides a rather explicit description of the sexual encounter between the god Amun who took the form of the living pharaoh to have intercourse with his wife and thus ensure the continuation of the divine line of pharaohs. Mia Rikala (2008, 143–144) even suggested that the king and his wife consummated their marriage in the form of a ceremony in which the king assumed the role of Amun-Re and the queen the role of Hathor. Indeed, the daughter of Amun, Hatshepsut, is described in another text from Deir el-Bahari as having the fragrance of a god, mingling with the scent of Punt. Her skin is gold-plated with electrum and glitters like the stars. Indeed, she has the body of a goddess, and Hathor is often described like this (Matić, 2018a, 45–47).

Lastly, I would like to discuss another case from a later period. In a *Book of the Dead* spell found in the Ptolemaic period Papyrus Leiden T20 and Papyrus Louvre 3218 (Allam, 2006), which can be identified as supplementary spell 162 (Wüthrich, 2015, 32–79), it is stated about the god Osiris: *mṯꜣ=k m-ẖnw ẖnm.wt* "your penis is in *ẖnm.wt* women". A *ẖnm.t* 𓄤𓇋𓈖𓏏 is a term for a woman, and in these papyri, it is written with a phallus determinative 𓂸 . This has led some authors to suggest that these women could be sex workers. If the term is indeed interpreted in this manner, it remains puzzling why Osiris would have intercourse with a sex worker (Quack, 2009, 158). If indeed *ẖnm.wt* were sex workers, this could be related to Osiris's lustfulness and his alleged adultery with Nephthys, who was the wife of Seth, as attested in Plutarch, Papyrus MMA 35.9.21, and PGM IV 94–153 (von Lieven, 2006, 144–145).

An overview of textual sources attesting to sexual encounters between deities and humans reveals several interesting patterns. These encounters typically involve male gods, such as Re, Amun, and Osiris, as active, penetrating partners, and human women, including the wives of priests, the wives of ruling kings, and potentially sex workers, as passive, penetrated partners. In all of these cases the women are either married or could be sex workers, and thus they cannot be considered virgins in a strict sense (Green, 2001; von Lieven, 2013). When these women are married, their husbands are either priests or pharaohs, and their offspring are destined to become future pharaohs. When it comes to women who may be sex workers, we are not informed about the potential offspring. This indicates that being impregnated by the gods was a privilege reserved for women from the ruling family. Therefore, a focus on relations, as advocated by proponents of posthumanist approaches in archaeology, should not overlook the identities of those involved. It becomes evident that the distinction between the divine nature of pharaohs and the human nature is, in fact, a reflection of class difference! Ad-

ditionally, the fact that in the *Divine Birth Legend*, the god Amun disguises himself as the pharaoh and husband of the queen in order to sleep with her is not coincidental. In this way, the queen is not committing adultery, an act both practiced and condemned by ancient Egyptians. Literary stories portray adultery as an act that invariably leads to a tragic fate for the women involved, as they often meet a violent end, and their names are not even recorded (Matić, 2021: 29–34).

Examining the meeting between the herdsman and goddess in the *Tale of the Herdsman*, it becomes evident that encounters between human men and female deities were perceived as terrifying. However, in light of the ontological and class distinctions I previously emphasized, we can delve deeper into this argument and propose that in such a sexual encounter human men would take on the role of active penetrating partners, while the goddesses would assume a passive role. As a result, such a sexual encounter would reverse the established ontological order, placing the goddesses in a subordinate position to human men. This is because, in ancient Egypt, passive partners (women and passive men) were, at least in principle, subordinated to the penetrating partners (active men) (Matić, 2021: 137–143). Furthermore, any potential offspring with a human father would have a legitimate claim in the divine world due to their divine mother. It is thus understandable why such scenarios were avoided. Therefore, what may appear to be an ontological difference ultimately relies on royal legitimation and on ancient form of patriarchy, both being ideologies par excellence.

Sexual encounters between deities as statues

The second question of this paper pertains to the sexual encounters between ancient Egyptian deities, albeit in the form of statues residing in earthly temples. I will argue that the information derived from ancient Egyptian textual sources allows us to consider the notion of deities materializing as statues, thus potentially engaging in sexual activities on Earth.

Ancient Egyptian statues of deities were more than artistic representations. They were adorned, meticulously maintained, and presented with offerings in the form of food and drink (Meskell, 2004, 87–115). These divine statues were the materialized embodiment of the deities, serving as focal points (Quack, 2015, 255). Like the statues of the Near Eastern deities, those from ancient Egypt also resided in temples ("houses of deities"), and, intriguingly they were known to travel to visit each other. When Near Eastern statues of deities are concerned, in Amarna letter EA 23 (13–17), sent by the Mitannian king Tushratta to the Egyptian pharaoh Amenhotep III, it is mentioned that the goddess Shaushka of Niniveh expressed her desire to travel to Egypt and return. Tushratta further claims that the goddess had already visited Egypt during the reign of his father, Shuttarna II (Moran, 1992, 61). Some scholars have suggested that

Tushratta sent a statue of the goddess to Egypt (Allen, 2015b, 165; Forstner-Müller et al., 2002, 156; Quack, 2015, 268; Singer, 2016). One can only imagine that such a statue might have resembled limestone counterparts of Shaushka (Figure 3), like the statue of the goddess Narundi/Narunte from Susa (109cm high), dating back to ca. 2100 BC, and now in the Louvre Museum (SB 54-body, SB 6617-body).[5]

Figure 3. Statue of the goddess Narundi/Narunte from Susa, in Louvre Museum, SB 54-body, SB 6617-body (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Statue_Narundi_Louvre_Sb54-Sb6617.jpg, courtesy of Wikimedia user Jastrow).

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5   This statue was discovered in the temple located to the south of the Ninhursag temples and was dedicated by Puzur-Inshushinak. The goddess is adorned in distinctive deity attire, featuring a flounced garment made of lambswool and a headdress with horns over her hair, which is gathered in a chignon at the nape of her neck. The face was likely originally plated with gold, as suggested by the presence of rivet holes, and the eyes could have had shells and lapis lazuli inlays embedded in bitumen. She is seated on a backless throne adorned with six lions sculpted in bas-relief. This throne bears a dual inscription in cuneiform Akkadian and linear Elamite, with the former identifying the dedicator as the prince of Susa, and the latter identifying the goddess by name (André-Salvini, 1992, 90–91).

However, Dominique Collon (2007, 68) emphasized that this statue was evidently a cult statue, and its weight would have made it impractical to be carried in procession or transported by boat to visit other temples. It is worth noting that equally heavy ancient Egyptian private and divine statues found their way to the Bronze Age Levant (Ahrens 2020), which prompts a re-evaluation of Collon's perspective. Alternatively, the statue mentioned by Tushratta might have resembled the 142cm tall white stone statue of a goddess (Figure 4) holding a flowing vase, currently housed in the National Museum in Aleppo (1659), dating to early 2nd millennium BCE.[6] Still it is more plausible, that the statue mentioned by Tushratta was made in wood and gilded with gold.

Figure 4. Statue of a goddess with flowing vase from National Museum in Aleppo (1659) (https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Goddess_of_the_vase,_Mari,18th_ century_BCE.jpg, courtesy of Wikimedia user पाटलिपुत्र).

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6   The fragments of this statue were discovered in room 64 and court 106 within the palace courtyard of Zimri-Lim in Mari. The headdress, in the form of sinuous horns, indicates that the figure represents a deity. The hair beneath the headdress falls around the shoulders and is gathered at the back. The long garment worn by the goddess crosses over the chest and back with two incised bands at the waist. The skirt falls in wavy incised lines over sculpted ties ending in volutes. Elaborate jewellery adorns the goddess, carved in relief. The eyes would have been inlaid.

However, in addition to the desire to travel, other aspects of deities in the form of statues have not received equal archaeological attention. When Near Eastern deities are concerned, theogamy, or sexual intercourse between deities, is well attested. It also included statues of deities which spent time together in specially prepared bedchambers in temples. We can only imagine that these statues were composite artworks made using wood, gold, silver and lapis lazuli, materials regarded to have pure and sacred properties in Mesopotamia (Pongratz-Leisten et al., 2015: 11–12). The theogamy of deities in statue forms is described in relation to the restoration of the Enninu temple at Girsu by Gudea, ruler of the state of Lagash in southern Mesopotamia at the end of 22nd century BCE. Gudea describes this building and adornment of the bedchamber for the god Ningirsu and his spouse the goddess Bau (Pongratz-Leisten, 2008: 60–61). The encounter of the god Nabu and the goddess Tashmetu is described on a single Neo-Assyrian (911–609 BCE) tablet believed to be from Niniveh. Tashmetu describes the shade of juniper trees as a shelter for her and Nabu. She also invites Nabu into a bedchamber and expresses her wish for him to accompany her in a garden (Nissinen, 2016, 157; Rubin, 2021, 274–276). We have seen that the sexual intercourse involving deities in ancient Egypt is also accompanied by pleasant aromatic smells (Amun and the smell of Punt). Another parallel to Near Eastern theogamy is found in sexual encounters between ancient Egyptian statues of deities to which I turn next.

In the ancient Egyptian Papyrus Sallier IV (18, 3–4) from the 19th Dynasty (approx. 1292–1189 BCE), it is documented that on the 26th day of the second month of $Pr.t$ season the god Min emerges from Coptos in a procession with lettuce (Münster 1968, 130).[7] The festival of Min's approach ($pr.t$ Mnw) is well attested from the New Kingdom to the period of Roman rule in Egypt (Moens, 1985, 62). According to the text on the papyrus, the goddess Isis then beholds the nfr 𓄤 of Min, his "beauty" or more precisely, his "beautiful one". The term nfr is here written with a phallus determinative 𓂸 and unambiguously refers to a divine penis (Gauthier, 1931, 8; Myśliwiec, 2004, 90). In a much later Ptolemaic text from the Edfu temple (Edfu I, 398. 10–11), it is mentioned that the goddesses are delighted to see the nfr of Min (Wilson 1997, 515). Ithyphallic statues of deities have been known in Egypt since the Predynastic period. However, in the 26th Dynasty (664–525 BCE) tomb of Thaty from the Bahariya oasis, there is a depiction of the procession of the god Min with his ithyphallic statue on a carrier covered with linen. It is portrayed as being carried by eight

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7   The role of lettuce in this procession is a result of Min's association with the god Horus and his conflict with the god Seth. Isis, the mother of Horus, used a clever ruse by smearing Horus's sperm onto lettuce from Seth's garden, which was intended to trick Seth into unwittingly consuming Horus's semen. As a consequence, Seth, who had killed Osiris due to his adultery with Seth's wife Nephtys, becomes impregnated by his rival Horus. Seth loses the trial for the right to the throne of Egypt when the deities demand the semen of Horus to come forth. When summoned, the semen of Horus emerges from the head of Seth in the form of a Sun disc. Consequently, Seth plays a passive role in this masculinity contest and ultimately loses the battle.

porters (Fakhry, 1942, 140, Fig. 111). Consequently, just as Ahmose and Mutemwiya, the wives of Thutmose I and Thutmose IV in the *Divine Birth Legend*, saw the *nfr* of Amun in their palaces and rejoiced, the goddess Isis saw the *nfr* of Min's statue. In both cases, we are dealing with ithyphallic forms of the god.

In another text from the 19th Dynasty, Papyrus Anastasi III (Papyrus British Museum 10246), Recto (5,1) there is a hymn dedicated to the god Thoth in which it is stated: *nfr=f n ḥrs.t* "his beautiful one (penis) is out of carnelian" (Gardiner, 1937, 25). Similar to the previously discussed case of god Min, the word *nfr* 𓄤𓂸 here is written with a phallus determinative. Carnelian, which derives its name from the Latin *carneus*, meaning fleshy, is a translucent red to reddish-brown stone found on nearly every continent. Today, it is mined in regions including Egypt, Brazil and Uruguay to obtain the gem quality-stones highly valued for jewellery.[8] In Ancient Mesopotamia, carnelian was kept in temple storehouses together with gold, silver and lapis lazuli. All these materials, including carnelian, were associated with the sacred or were themselves considered to be sacred or divine (Benzel, 2015: 91–93). Lists of resins from the Ptolemaic temples in Anthribis and Edfu indicate that resins with the colour of carnelian originate from the eye of Horus, heart of the god or the vulva of the Distant Goddess, and they possess a pleasant aroma (von Lieven, 2004, 163–164). Given that ithyphallic anthropomorphic representations of god Thoth are unknown, it can be assumed that this reference pertains to his baboon form. In fact, the erect penis of a baboon displays a distinctive red colour similar to that of carnelian (Figure 5).

This also leads me to propose that penises, which were originally components of the composite statues of ithyphallic Amun-Ra, could have been crafted from precious stones like carnelian. An example of this can be observed in the 148cm high granodiorite statue of Amun-Re (Figure 6) from the British Museum (EA 21), which portrays the god alongside 18th Dynasty king Horemheb (approx. 1319 or 1305 to 1292 BCE).

The god is depicted holding the base of his penis, which has the opening for the insertion of the shaft of the penis made from another material. This feature is reminescent of a hymn by Darius II to god Amun in the temple of this deity in El-Hiba, located approximately 32km south of Beni Suef. In this hymn, Amun is described as *hꜣy stj.w nfr.w=f* "a husband who shoots with his beautiful one (penis)" (Brugsch 1878, XXVI). The verb *stj* "to shoot" was used in ancient Egyptian to describe the act of shooting an arrow with a bow at enemies or hunted animals, or impaling them with a spear. Interestingly, it was also used to describe the act of ejaculating sperm from

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8   Exact locations of ancient quarries of carnelian in ancient Egypt are unknown. The only known ancient carnelian mine in the region was in the Nubian desert near Gebel el-Asr, but there are indications that more quarries existed in deserts of Egypt or the Nile River terraces (Albaz et al., 2021).
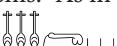
the penis.[9] As in the previously mentioned cases of the gods Min and Thoth, the word *nfr.w* 𓄤𓄤𓄤𓂸 is written with a phallus determinative.

Figure 5. Photo of a *Papio hamadryas* baboon from Worms zoo in Rheinland-Pfalz, Germany (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Worms_Tiergarten_junger_ männlicher_Mantelpavian_2011.JPG, courtesy of Wikimedia user 4028mdk09).

There is thus ample evidence to suggest that ithyphallic statues of gods such as Min, Thoth, and Amun played a role in processions where the gods departed from their temples and encountered goddesses who rejoiced upon seeing their erections. This rejoicing mirrors the kind seen when queens beheld the ithyphallic gods in disguise as their husbands. One could even venture to propose a parallel, inspired by the work of Viveiros de Castro (2014, 72, 2015), suggesting that both humans and deities, despite their distinct corporealities, share the same culture but possess different natures. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014, 72; 2015: 257), the difference lies in the specificity of their bodies. Human bodies in ancient Egypt were composed of flesh and bone, whereas deities had bodies made of silver, gold and lapis lazuli. Even the

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9   The connection between shooting from or with a weapon at an enemy and shooting sperm from a penis is explicit in an Early Dynastic rock art representation from Wadi Ameyra on Sinai, where an Egyptian male figure holds his penis next to the mouth of a kneeling captive (Förster et al., 2022).

bodies of the statues of the deities were crafted from these precious metals and stones. However, all three categories engaged in sexual practices and adhered to the same social norms regarding sex. Their differing bodies led to distinct approaches to these practices, except in cases when deities assumed human form.
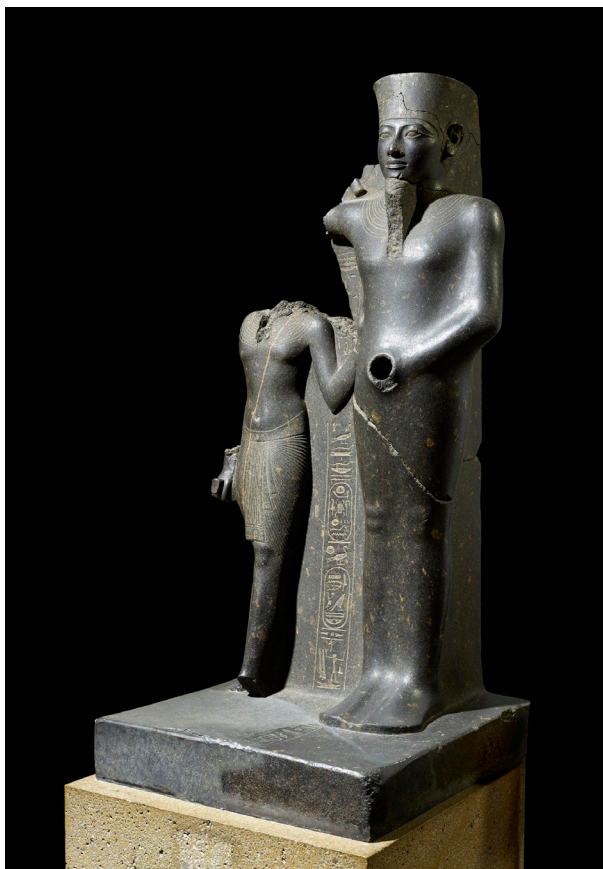

Figure 6. Photo of the statue of Amun-Re with king Horemheb, British Museum EA 21 (after https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/1613735132).

Conclusion

The examination of sexual encounters between deities and humans, as well as between deities and statues in ancient Egypt, necessitates a meticulous and in-depth analysis of the available sources. Nevertheless, it is crucial to emphasize that identifying the actants involved and asserting that such encounters actually transpired in ancient Egypt, rather than serving as symbolic representations, is a complex undertaking. In fact,

even Viveiros de Castro (2014, 57) notes that Amerindian perspectivism is primarily applied by Amerindians only to certain animals, particularly large predators and scavengers such as jaguars, anacondas, vultures, and their prey, including wild boars, monkeys, fish, deer and tapirs. This preference arises from the foundation of perspectivism, which is rooted in predator-prey relations. Therefore, ontological distinctions in this context signify more than just being.

When the sexual encounter between a god and a human woman in ancient Egypt results in offspring, the woman in question is always a member of the higher or ruling class, and the children are destined to become future pharaohs. Whether or not, for ancient Egyptians, this really happened does not change the fact that the god Amun, in the *Divine Birth Legend*, disguises himself as the queen's husband. Although there are clear indications that the queen recognized the god, she remains unperturbed. In fact, the disguise assumed by the god averts any accusations of adultery. The queen is thus not like those unnamed adulterous women who die tragically in various literary stories for cheating on their husbands. How could she have known it was not her husband who came to her when he, too, possessed a divine nature, just like Amun?

Regarding sexual encounters involving deities represented as statues, these statues were depicted as having their own desires. However, this does not mean that they are not images like other comparable objects and that as such they cannot communicate identities nor structure social relations (*contra* Alberti, 2012, 14). In fact, it is exactly because they are "motile extensions of practice" (Alberti, 2012, 14) that they can do this more effectively. For example, through the fact that sexual encounters between deities as statues only occur between male-female couples, norms of sexual behaviour are communicated (cf. Foucault, 1978). Ancient Egyptians knew of the sexual encounter between the gods Horus and Seth (see footnote 7), but we do not know of any cases in which statues of male deities engage in sexual activity. It is naïve to neglect the fact that it is the ancient Egyptian people who physically produced the statues of deities, and that it is the people (priests) who choose which known sexual preferences will be practiced by these statues. As Ribeiro (2016, 233) already summarized, without the social context to provide meaning to the intentions of the actors (e.g., humans and statues of deities), we are left with a world of random connections.

As I have demonstrated in this paper, when sexual encounters between humans and deities, and deities as statues, are concerned, these connections are anything but random. Following Viveiros de Castro (2014, 188; 2015, 18), we could say that ancient Egyptians thought like us, but that the concepts they elaborated are different than our own, and the world these concepts describe is also very different. However, as demonstrated in this paper, when differences in being (divine/human) are intertwined with power asymmetries related to gender and class, we find that we are not really worlds apart.

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O pohotnih božanstvih in ontološkem obratu v arheologiji starega Egipta

Ključne besede: stari Egipt, božanstva, spolnost, ontološki obrat, spolne strukture, razredne strukture

Na podlagi aktualne diskusije o novem materializmu, posthumanizmu, spekulativnem realizmu, objektno usmerjeni ontologiji in antropološkem ontološkem obratu skušamo v članku dati nov pogled na spolne stike med božanstvi in ljudmi oziroma med božanskimi statuami v starem Egiptu. Samo upoštevanje, da so takšni stiki obstajali, in njihovo natančno opisovanje ne omogočata polnega spoznanja spolnih in razrednih struktur, ki delujejo na takšne stike. V članku zagovarjamo, da so spolne stike, ki so predmet naše analize, oblikovale spolne in razredne asimetrije, ki kažejo, da med perspektivami starega Egipta in sodobnim časom ni tolikšnih razlik, kot se zdi.

On lustful deities and the ontological turn in the archaeology of ancient Egypt

Keywords: ancient Egypt, deities, sex, ontological turn

Building on the ongoing debates surrounding the archaeological application of New Materialism, posthumanism, speculative realism, object-oriented ontology, and the anthropological ontological turn, this paper examines sexual interactions between deities and humans, as well as among deities represented as statues in ancient Egypt. Acknowledging the existence of such sexual encounters and providing detailed descriptions of the involved entities alone does not fully recognize the underlying gender and class structures. This paper argues that these analysed sexual encounters were shaped

by gender and class-based power asymmetries, revealing that the ancient Egyptians and contemporary perspectives are not as distinct as they might seem.

O avtorju

Uroš Matić je leta 2017 doktoriral na Inštitutu za egiptologijo in koptske študije na Univerzi v Münstru ter za disertacijo prejel nagrado Philippika Prize of Harrassowitz (2018) in nagrado za najboljšo publikacijo Avstrijske akademije za znanost (2020). Od leta 2018 je vodil dva samostojna postdoktorska projekta, o kozmetičnih pripomočkih v Nubiji v času Novega kraljestva (DAAD P.R.I.M.E., 2018–2019) in o staroegiptovskih seznamih vojnega plena (Foundation for Postgraduates in Egyptology, Vienna, 2022–2023). Med njegovimi novejšimi publikacijami izstopata monografija *Violence and Gender in Ancient Egypt* (Routledge, 2021) in zbornik *Beautiful Bodies. Gender and Corporeal Aesthetics in the Past* (Oxbow, 2022), ki ga je uredil. Od leta 2019 deluje kot postdoktorski sodelavec Avstrijskega arheološkega inštituta. Predaval je na univerzah v Gradcu, Münstru in na Dunaju.

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Uroš Matić is a lecturer at the Institute for Classics, University of Graz, Austria. He obtained his PhD at the Institute for Egyptology and Coptic Studies of the University of Münster (2017). His thesis was awarded the Philippika Prize by Harrassowitz (2018) and Best Publication Award of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (2020). Since 2018 he has conducted two stand-alone post doc projects, one on cosmetic utensils in Nubia during the New Kingdom (DAAD P.R.I.M.E, 2018-2019), and one on ancient Egyptian lists of spoils of war (Foundation for Postgraduates in Egyptology, Vienna, 2022-2023). His most recent publications include a monograph *Violence and Gender in Ancient Egypt* (Routledge, 2021) and edited volume *Beautiful Bodies. Gender and Corporeal Aesthetics in the Past* (Oxbow, 2022). From 2019 to 2023 he was a postdoctoral research associate of the Austrian Archaeological Institute. He taught at the Universities of Münster, Vienna and Graz.

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