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Materia Magica Aegyptiae: The ancient Egyptian offering table as funerary landscape, ritual utensil, and unifier of elements

LUNDIUS, ESMERALDA,IRENE

MATERIA MAGICA AEGYPTIAE

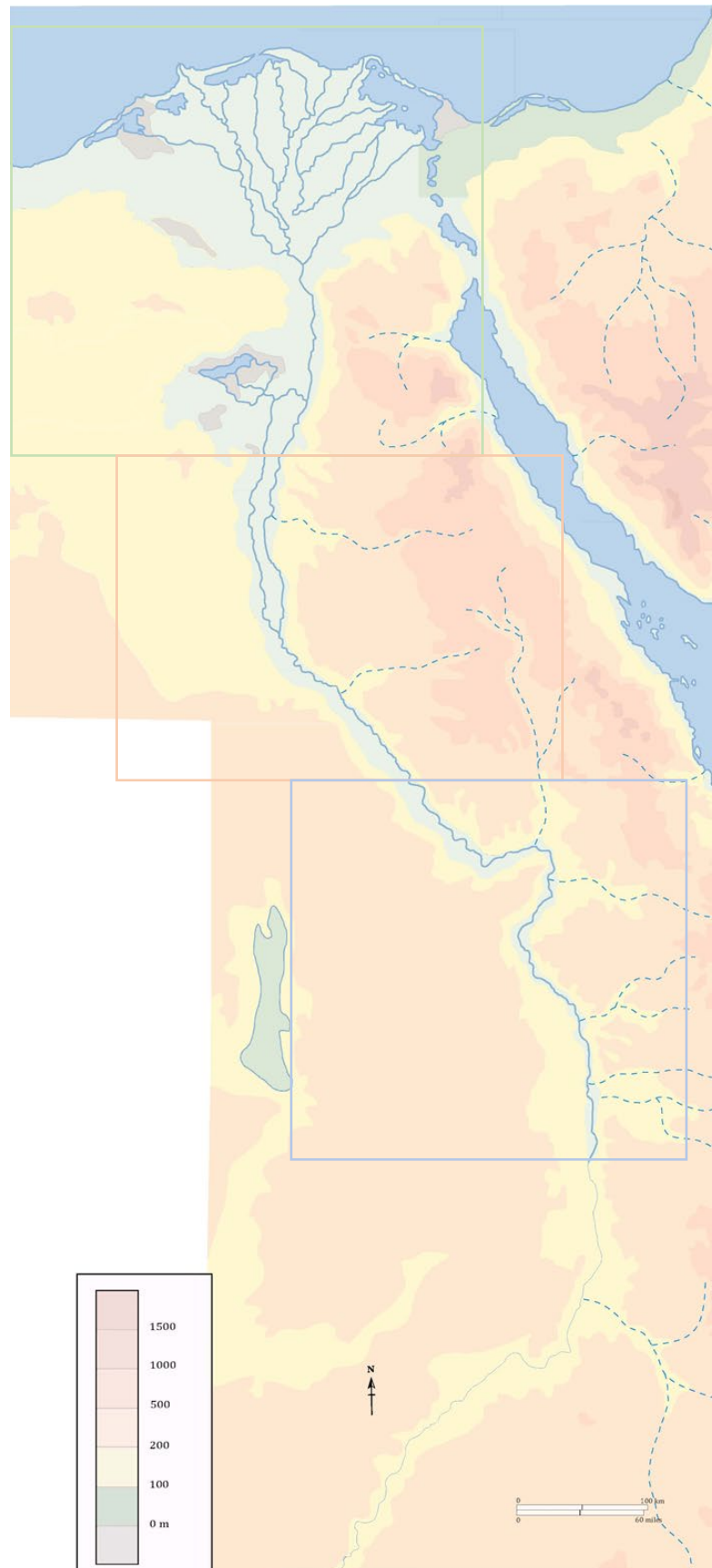THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN OFFERING TABLE AS A FUNERARY LANDSCAPE, RITUAL UTENSIL, AND UNIFIER OF ELEMENTS. *VOLUMES I-II*.

Volume I: Text

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Lower Egypt (green), Middle Egypt (red), Upper Egypt (blue).

ABSTRACT

Founded on a sample of 387 thoroughly studied cult items from museum collections in Europe, the US and Egypt, as well as 90 Asyutian offering tables, most of which were studied *in situ*, this thesis offers a diachronic analysis of the design, use, context, and provenance of ancient Egyptian offering tables and similar *materia magica.* A hands-on description of artefacts, including offering tables, soul-houses, offering trays and amulets, places them within a time- and geographic specific context, and relates their function and design to written and pictorial sources, tomb architecture, means of production, as well as ritual practice and religious/mythological notions. By applying an in-depth analysis of single, specific items, an attempt is made to reconstruct their function and meaning for users within a specific socio-cultural, geographical, and temporal setting. The unifying role of water within the Egyptian landscape and culture is highlighted. A conclusion is reached indicating how offering tables over time mirrored their socio-economic and religious context. From being a simple tool used during offering rituals, the offering table eventually became multi-functional and an essential element within ancient Egyptian religious practice – an embodiment of the entire funerary/ancestral cult, becoming a magical, transformative object in its own right.

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To my family and their loving kꜣw,

To Papi Jan and all his stories,

and Farmor Inga with lilla Kali in the Field of Reeds.

ASYUT CATALOGUE #	ACAT
ÄGYPTISCHES MUSEUM UND PAPYRUSSAMMLUNG, BERLIN	AMP
APPENDIX I-VI	APP
EL BERSHEH, P.E. NEWBERRY	BERSH.
BENI HASSAN TOMB, GARSTANG 2002	BH
BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON	BM
BOOK OF THE DEAD, ALLEN 1974	BOD
MAIN CATALOGUE ID # (SEE APPENDIX IV)	CAT ID
CHRONIQUE D'ÉGYPTE; BULLETIN PERIODIQUE DE LA FONDATION ÉGYPTOLOGIQUE REINE ÉLISABETH, BRUXELLES (BRUSSELS)	CDE.
CATALOGUE GENERAL DES ANTIQUITES EGYPTIENNES DU MUSEE DU CAIRE	CG
COFFIN TEXT, FAULKNER 1969	CT
THE TEMPLE OF DEIR EL BAHARI, E. NAVILLE	D EL B
THE EBERS MEDICAL PAPYRUS, GHALIOUNGUI 1987	EB.
EGYPT EXPLORATION SOCIETY, LONDON	EES
FIRST INTERMEDIATE PERIOD	FIP
NOTES ON THE STORY OF SINUHE, A. H. GARDINER	GNS
GRECO-ROMAN	GR
GRECO-ROMAN PERIOD	GR-P
HIEROGLYPHIC TEXTS FROM EGYPTIAN STELAE ETC. THE BRITISH MUSEUM	HTBM
KUNSTHISTORISCHES MUSEUM VIENNA	KMV
LEXIKON DER ÄGYPTOLOGIE, 7 VOLS., ED. W. HELCK, E. OTTO, W. WESTENDORF, 1972/5, WIESBADEN	LÄ
DENKMÄLER AUS ÄGYPTEN UND ÄTHIOPIEN II, ED. K.R. LEPSIUS, 1849-1859	LD
ÄGYPTISCHE LESESTÜCKE ZUM GEBRAUCH IM AKADEMISCHEN UNTERRICHT, K. SETHE	LES.
LATE PERIOD	LP
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK	MET
MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON	MFA
MIDDLE KINGDOM	MK
MEDELHAVSMUSEET, STOCKHOLM	MM
NEW KINGDOM	NK
NORTH EAST ANCIENT EGYPT SOCIETY, NEWCASTLE	NEAES
ORIENTAL INSTITUTE MUSEUM, CHICAGO	OIM
OLD KINGDOM	OK
OPENING OF THE MOUTH CEREMONY	OMC
OFFERING TABLE	OT
PTOLEMAIC PERIOD	PP
PYRAMID TEXT, ALLEN 2015	PT
EGYPTIAN READING-BOOK, A. DE BUCK	RB
RIJKSMUSEUM VAN OUDHEDEN, LEIDEN	RMO
SECOND INTERMEDIATE PERIOD	SIP
THE INSCRIPTIONS OF SIUT AND DEIR RIFEH, F. LL. GRIFFITH	SIUT
THE ASYUT PROJECT 2005-2019	TAP
THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD	TIP
THEBAN TOMB, PORTER, B., MOSS, R. L. B., & MÁLEK, J. 1927	TT
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON	UCL
URKUNDEN DES ALTEN REICHS, CONTINUED BY W. HELCK, URKUNDEN DER 18. DYNASTIE	URK
WÖRTERBUCH DER ÄGYPTISCHE SPRACHE, 7 VOLS., A.ERMAN AND W. GRAPOW, 1926-1931	WB.
TALES OF THE MAGICIANS IN THE WESTCAR PAPYRUS, BLACKMAN 1988	WESTC.
ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR ÄGYPTISCHE SPRACHE UND ALTERTUMSKUNDE, LEIPZIG	ZÄS

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. RESEARCH QUESTION

The offering table is an enigmatic concept when associated with ancient Egyptian magical practice. Usually in the form of a stone slab/plate with depictions of offerings, it is categorised in museums as a ritual utensil, often lacking a provenance and not placed within its respective socio-economic context. Nevertheless, it is mentioned in passing in religious texts and has been found in mortuary, religious, and domestic contexts. It is difficult to not encounter at least one offering table in any ancient Egyptian collection exhibited in a museum, not to mention within the ruins of an Egyptian temple complex or necropolis.

The first question to ask is why and to what extent was this object common and long-lasting throughout ancient Egypt, regardless of context and variations in local tradition? This leads us to the main aim of the research on this particular *materia magica*: attempting to establish the role and overall significance of the ancient Egyptian offering table. The goal is to identify the intentions behind its versatility especially as a symbol for shared social and religious practices related to its physical surroundings. Its multifaceted nature, its enduring presence in the ancient Egyptian religious tradition, and its transformation into a symbol for rejuvenation pinpoints the offering table's importance, becoming a useful tool for understanding the dynamics of ancient Egyptian thought. Any ritual object, especially one with a 3000-year history has a biography of its own. This concept will be used as the theoretical foundation for reconstructing the use and significance of the offering table through an anthropological perspective, considering the dynamics of a changing and adapting funerary cult.

By presenting an extensive sample composed of variations of a particular object, an assessment may be made regarding its ritual use and diachronic development especially when considering their particular geographical and socioeconomic context. The outcome of the research will show how offering tables and similar objects mirror the evolution of the ancient Egyptian funerary landscape and its symbiosis with ritual practice.

1.2. THESIS STATEMENT

The sample upon which this study is based is composed of 387 offering tables and similar objects from 21 museum collections as well as an additional 90 offering tables from the Asyut necropolis. This material is presented in an extensive catalogue in App III, accompanied by a large database made with Access 2016. A summary of the methods used to select the artefacts will be presented, as well as an outline of the limitations to the dataset and problems encountered (section 2.2). The research, which is multidisciplinary, presents an in-depth analysis of artefacts from various collections, placing them into their temporal context, while addressing their physical relationship to the mortuary landscape. Concepts of ritual landscape linked to theological thought as well as archaeological methodology will be used to try and identify the significance of *materia magica* in ancient Egyptian magical practice. The extensive and varied nature of the sample on which the analysis is based does, although it is only a small part of the vast amount of offering tables, basins, trays and soul-houses found in museum collections and in situ, nevertheless enable an assessment of the ritual use, diachronic development, placement and iconography of this *materia magica*. The analysis has made it possible to validate the importance of these objects, including different aspects of their respective geographic and socio-economic contexts.

A central concept for the thesis is that the objects reflect what was at the very core of ritual practice – to unite what is dispersed into a whole. Offering tables were used to facilitate the transition of the deceased from one world to another, to restore the body and redefine the existence of the departed. The tomb was a microcosm with numerous elements which all had to come together to recreate the deceased person – their history, legacy, identity. The offering table may have been intended as a symbol/reflection of the different elements in the Eye of Horus, the parts of a soul, and even of the Egyptian landscape. Uniting these diverse and dispersed elements of the world into a whole by using water as a unifying element, the offering table provided a liminal space where such unison was made possible.

Accordingly, aside from being an integral part of a ritual site and a fixture within a tomb, the offering table became a ritual landscape in of itself, mimicking the scenery of which it was part, as well as becoming the centre of a sacred environment. Through its handling and its linkage to sacred acts and texts, the offering table became an instrument of sacred power. The study will show that the offering table was not only a utensil for one specific cultic practice, but it also had a multifaceted socio-religious function in ancient Egyptian culture.

1.3.   AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The current research is based on numerous offering tables and similar material from museum collections in Europe and the USA, as well as the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, and from some items analysed in situ within funerary structures. The objective is not only to compile a representative catalogue of different types of offering tables/trays/basins and soul-houses, but also to establish a viable methodology for categorising offering tables in accordance with their use, context, material, and religious connotations, and aims to investigate how the presented sample reflects diachronic changes in ancient Egyptian religion and the funerary cult. The study aims to demonstrate that although the design of offering tables has changed over time, they have nevertheless preserved their main function as a means to *materialise* the immaterial by fomenting a relation with a spiritual realm via funerary rituals involving the use of liquids as transmitters of a vital force.

Furthermore, style choices and the role of the tables varied significantly according to use and context. The emphasis on use and context of the offering tables is therefore the primary focus of the work (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 The aims and objectives of the thesis.

The Aims	- To establish the multifaceted nature of the offering table as a unifying concept within the ancient Egyptian belief/religious practice. - To provide a holistic evaluation of the 'offering table' and its role as a medium for shared cultural, social, and religious practices and activities. - To relate the offering table to the funerary context: to the tomb, the surrounding landscape, people, and settlements and understand its role.
Overall Objectives	- To establish a viable methodology to categorise the offering table through the analysis of the use, context, material, and religious connotations. - To link the analyses of the funerary ritual texts to the meaning and use of ritual utensils - specifically the offering table - and place them in context within the funerary landscape and structures. - To compile and analyse a comprehensive catalogue of different types of offering tables/trays/basins and soul-houses based on in depth studies of artefacts in numerous museum collections.

	-	To present a detailed account of funerary ritual texts to be compared with the meaning and use of ritual utensils — including the offering table — and placed in context within the funerary landscape and structures.
Specific Case Study Objectives	-	To gather and analyse the specific geographical, spatial, and topographical context of material from Asyut to identify local trends and changes over time (Chapter 4).
	-	To gather and analyse pottery trays, tables, and soul-houses to provide a vertical view of Egyptian society, local trends at specific times and how non-textual funerary needs are met in objects (Chapter 5).
	-	To gather and identify material from the TIP, LP, PP and G-RP to track changes in representation/use of offering tables and what this means within the wider context of funerary ritual and its importance in Egyptian culture and analyse specific rituals in religious texts which may involve the use of this *materia magica* (Chapter 6).

1.4. DEFINING THE OFFERING TABLE

Traditionally, the ancient Egyptian offering table has been defined as a stone slab inscribed with reliefs depicting food and beverages, often with a *ḥtp*-sign and inscriptions listing the names and titles of the person to whom it was dedicated (Hölzl 2002; Bolshakov 2001; Taylor 2001).[1] However, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, the traditional definitions of "offering table" were deconstructed and reassessed according to a revised set of criteria which specifically address the use and function of the offering table within ancient Egyptian ritual practice (Figure 1.1). The physical diagnostic rietria are: 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. These features mainly concern the practical use of liquids and/or the depiction of offerings dedicated to the deceased/god(s).

Figure 1.1: Diagram of a typical limestone Middle Kingdom offering table (AD90, Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna). The transliterations may need adding in the labels
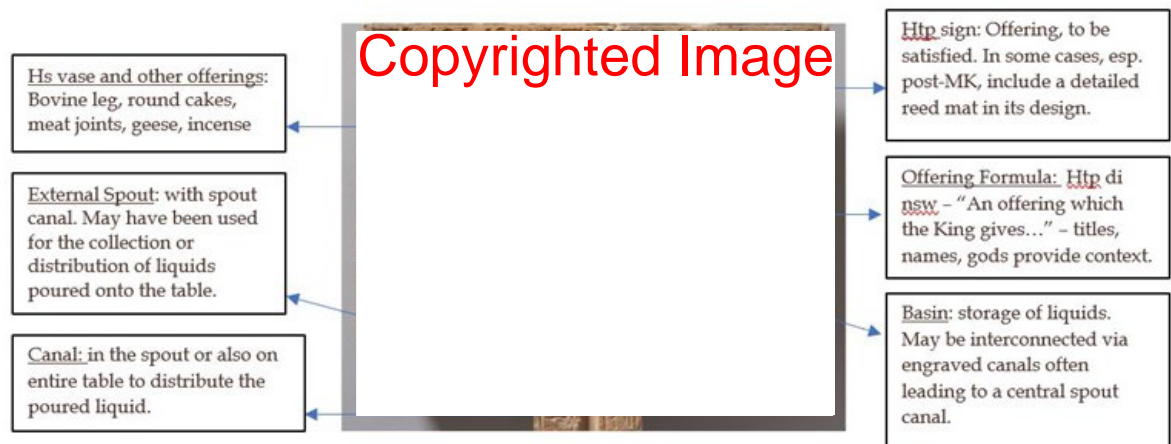
As outlined in the methodology (Chapter 2), objects were included in the study when at least two of the six features listed were identified. Based on this general set of criteria, numerous ritual utensils may fall under the same definition of "offering table", including pottery offering trays, offering basins, *soul houses*, and miniature models/amulets (Table 1.2; for a more detailed description of typologies and contextual criteria see 3.3). Some material was excluded from the study, such as alabaster circular tables and their cylindrical stands (*ḫꜣwt*), openwork metal lattices (*wdḥw*) versions in which jars and bouquets could be placed inside, and other paraphernalia such as

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[1] ⌂ *ḥtp*-sign – this triliteral sign is defined as a loaf of bread (*šꜥ*) placed on a reed mat, a practice originating from the predynastic offering ritual of placing offerings on mats near the deceased within grave-pits (Bolshakov 2001; Taylor 2001). The sign has been translated as "to be satiated" or simply "offering" but has many meanings (Betrò 2010: 56).

wooden models. The exclusion of these objects was not only to limit the large number of objects already present in the study, but also for methodological reasons. The main aim of the thesis was to identify the use and function of offering tables within ancient Egyptian ritual practice, which is why objects were selected with at least one "functional" element, especially related to the use of liquids, such as the presence of spouts, canals, and basins. Also, some of the excluded objects mentioned above do possess at least one functional element, their material and original context do not necessarily point to the active use of liquids.

Table 1.2 *General descriptions of offering tables and similar material present in the study.*

Object Type	Frequent Features	Criteria for the sub-categories of 'Offering Tables'
Offering Table	**Spout, Canal(s), Basin(s), *ḥtp* sign,** Offering Formula, *ḥs* Vase and other Offerings	A rectangular table with a raised or sunken central platform containing the depictions of offerings in raised relief, encircled by a canal leading to an external spout structure and a drainage canal. The central space is often enclosed by a raised rim containing inscriptions in sunken relief.
Offering Tray	**Canal(s), Offerings,** Basin(s)	A usually oval/circular/semi-circular plate with a sunken area created by a raised rim. The surface may be divided into sections by canals. Each "area" is dedicated to specific offerings, usually various cuts of meat. The trays are made of fired clay and are generally painted red.
Offering Basin	**Basin(s), Offering Formula**	A square/rectangular/circular basin with a raised rim. May sometimes have an external spout structure and a drainage canal. The rim often contains inscriptions in sunken relief.
"Soul-house"	**Spout, Offerings, Canal(s),** Basin(s)	May be similar to Type C, with an external spout structure and a central "courtyard" area with offerings encircled by a raised rim. The "shrine" area is a more complex structure usually with a two/four-columned façade and an internal area. The top of the structure may have basins and ramparts resembling "mezzanines" (see 3.3.1).
Offering Table Amulet/Model	**Spout, Offerings,** Canal(s)	Similar standardised shape as in Type A, although miniature with less detail. These are square/rectangular objects usually made in faience or bronze. May contain a central sunken/raised platform encircled by a canal leading to an external spout structure. At the opposite end there may be a ring intended for the object to be used as a pendant.

Offering tables were placed at the foot of false doors, funerary stele, statues or representations of the deceased; inside tomb courtyards or beside tomb shafts (sometimes even inside the burial chamber itself; Forman & Quirke 1996; see 2.3-4; 3.4.1; 4.6; 5.6; 7.2-4). These objects constituted a link between the sphere of the living and a spiritual realm (Bolshakov 2001: 572-573). Their size, shape, material, and placement might indicate the social status of their users, as well as their various functions. Tables may be found in temples, especially in mortuary complexes, made of different materials such as limestone, sandstone, granite, pottery and vary in size, shape, and iconography, depending on context and time-period. Depictions upon the tables may include

victuals, ritual vessels, vegetation, but what is most common and found in nearly all categories of tables are features concerning the use of liquids, specifically water (Lundius 2020).

A basin, or vessel, may have been placed beside the tables for the collection of liquids poured over their surface (Forman & Quirke 1996), evidenced by the fact that most tables are equipped with a spout. Rituals concerning the use of offering tables have been interpreted as being related to the $k\!\!\!/\!\!\!\!3$ of the deceased, in the most simplified of terms – the vital essence of all things (Taylor 2001; Nyord 2019).[2] The offering tables can be found in all time periods from Protodynastic times (Nagada III at El-Kab, Bard 1994:272) until and throughout the Greco-Roman Period (G-RP). They may be made of prestigious materials such as granite or more commonly available materials such as Nile coarseware, be large in size and *fixed* (i.e., directly carved out of the bedrock of the tomb; see 3.3-4; 4.4-5; 5.6; 6.4.1; 7.2-3) as well as small and portable, and even have an amulet form (3.5.5; 6.4.1). They have seldom been categorised in accordance with their function, but mostly according to general typologies characterised by specific features, such as basins, canals and spouts (see Hölzl 2002).

While addressing the ritual use of offering tables, ancient Egyptian funerary beliefs have to be taken into consideration, starting with concepts of the soul and the role of the funeral as a rite of passage. The deceased could only enter another existence if funerary rituals were conducted in a correct manner, that is, assisted by prayers, offerings and libations, all of which could be done by making use of an offering table (O'Neill 2015: 15). Within a tomb, the offering table provided access to a metaphysical world, not only for the deceased but for the living as well (O'Neill 2015:15). The thesis will show that the offering table not only reflected a liminal space within a tomb but was at the same time a fundamental funerary/magical utensil. The research applies an innovative and multidisciplinary methodology by relating offering tables and similar objects to their geographical, social, and temporal contexts.

1.4.1   Interpretations of Offering Tables

Offering tables have been described as the "focal element" inside ancient Egyptian tombs, as well as in temples (Bolshakov 2001: 572). Numerous tombs contain remnants of offering tables still in situ allowing their original relationship to the architectural form to be analysed. Defining the monumental/temple offering tables has often proven to be problematic since in these contexts, offering tables have been labelled as sacrificial "altars", while, as yet no fuller definition has been made for offering tables found in funerary contexts (Bolshakov 2001: 573). The earliest objects to be defined as offering tables are early Dynastic round trays placed on a stand usually made of alabaster or limestone (ḫꜣwt), often found inside the burial chamber, sometimes with real goods placed on top of them, though generally with manufactured copies of offerings (Bolshakov 2001: 574; see Jirásková 2013). By the 4th Dynasty, limestone offering tables were positioned at the foot of false doors outside the burial chambers (Hölzl 2002: 121-123; Bolshakov 2001: 574).

Early offering tables have been labelled as ḫꜣw.wt and seem to be identical to those in early depictions of offering scenes on stelae, seals (e.g., steatite cylinder seal of woman seated at offering table, Protodynastic, unknown prov. *42.168* Walters Art Museum, in O'Neill 2015: 18) and false doors. By the 4th-5th Dynasty offering tables contained numerous basins and canals, merging with a spout structure. Such tables have been labelled as š, meaning "reservoir" or "pond" (Bolshakov 2001: 574; Wilson 1997: 982). Offering tables are often mentioned throughout the Pyramid Texts,

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[2] The term $k\!\!\!/\!\!\!\!3$ is also associated with terms such as "food", "sustenance", and "plough" as well as "bull", all connected with victuals, sustenance, and vital forces provided from the land (Taylor 2001: 19; Wilson 1997: 1079; see 2.2 [App I:2.2]).

usually with the word *ꜥbꜣ*, translated as "stone altar" or more specifically from the German *operstein* (Wb 1, 177.7-9). Although also referred to as "altars", *ꜥbꜣ* may simply indicate the use of a stone slab or offering place (PT 511; Wb 1, 177.7-9). According to Bolshakov (2001: 574), by the MK the tables have in some cases been labelled as *mꜥḥꜥ.t* (i.e., tomb/cenotaph) 𓌳𓊖𓉐 (Faulkner 1962: 105; Seth 1959: 71, 16; also *ꜥḥꜥ* "tomb offering table" in Wilson 1997: 173). By the end of the OK offering tables became standardised, generally containing a central *ḥtp*-sign in raised relief (Hölzl 2002: 121). Other offering tables not associated with the *ḥtp* category are four-legged models made from copper, labelled *wdḥw* and found within burial chambers (Wilson 1997: 280). They contain votive vessels used for libation ceremonies and the OMC (e.g., PT 474c). Nevertheless, the word *wdḥw* was later used for all offering tables since they shared a common function – to revive the vitality of the deceased (see 7.3.4).

Until recently, offering tables have generally been exclusively defined as "receptacles for real food and drink" (Bolshakov 2001: 574), something which now seems to be a simplistic view, especially considering that offering tables depict victuals, as well as intricate canal-designs. A later assumption has been that these tables provided nourishment to the deceased, allowing her/his *kꜣ* to roam freely from the inner burial chambers to the offering chapel. Due to the presence of water features, it has been assumed that they were used to purify offerings and were not exclusively used for libation ceremonies. Further associations and functions were added during the MK when the tables were equipped with reliefs resembling irrigation systems, probably alluding to the flooding of the Nile and the Osiris-cult.
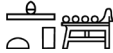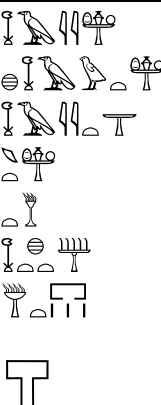
Throughout the research on offering tables and their association to rituals involving the use of liquids a distinction was made between a) liquids, specifically water used for purification; and b) water used in libations ceremonies, i.e., water as an offering in itself. This distinction will be further outlined when the role of offering tables is addressed in relation to funerary ritual in Chapter 7. However, in the simplest of terms, libations are defined as liquid offerings to honour a god/ancestor and is mostly defined as a gift or symbolic manifestation of a connection with the divine. This is evident in several funerary texts as will be presented throughout the thesis (see 4.6.1, 7.4.3). The water offered in this instance can be interpreted as the efflux of Osiris, issued from him and a symbolic representation of the floodwaters rejuvenating both the land and in this case the deceased (see 2.5). Purification rituals differ from this recitation since they explicitly outline how the water offering is intended to be used as a cleanser (see 7.3.4). The table is cleaned in preparation for the presentation of food offerings to the deceased. The ritual is therefore more practical in nature, also reflected in the design of some offering tables as will be discussed in sections 7.3.4 and 7.4.2.

Purification and libation ceremonies have generally been linked to the use of offering tables, especially in the NK when deeper cartouche-shaped basins began to be incorporated in table designs. During the Amarna period large tables made of mudbrick were placed in open courtyards of temple structures, erected for the sun-cult. Later, the tables imitated OK styles as evidenced during the Saite Period, when an archaizing trend was common throughout Egypt. Nevertheless, during the G-RP offering tables were very diverse. An iconography containing nature and water features became even more common and so did depictions of the *bꜣ* spirit and extracts from funerary texts (see 2.2; 3.3.1; 4.4.4; 5.5.2; 6.2-3; 7.4.3; [App II:2.2]). These developments have often been overlooked by Egyptologists and not included in their attempts to categorise and/or define the use of offering tables. Pottery offering trays and "soul houses", which include similar depictions of foodstuff and ritual elements as well as water features, have so far not been thoroughly analysed (see Niwiński 1975; Leclère 2001; Spence 2011) in combination with stone offering tables. This may

be due to their plain and simple materials, lack of context and evidence of their use being absent in religious texts.

The most common types of ancient Egyptian offerings tables did of course change shape and design over the timespan of 4000 years. The words for "offering table", however, hardly change although they became more varied during the Pharaonic Period, introducing numerous determinatives and related iconographic references (Table 1.3).

Table 1.3 Ancient Egyptian definitions of the Offering Table, based on Bolshakov 2001: 572-576; Wilson 1997: 687; Faulkner 1962: 73, 173, 179, 183, 260; Wb 1 177.7-9 (TLA).

Egyptian	Determinatives	Definitions	Time-period	References
ḥtp		An altar, also defined as a four-legged table for offerings; can also be the determinative for offerings. Associated verbs: to be pleased, to be satisfied, to be at peace, rest, rest in tomb, occupy the throne.	Old Kingdom onwards	Gardiner 1957: 501, R4; Faulkner 1962: 179; Wilson 1997: 687.
ḫꜣwt variations : *ḫwt, ḫꜣw.wt, ḫꜣ(y)t*		Originally constituted the round, one-legged offering table in alabaster or limestone – found before 4ᵗʰ Dynasty found inside the tomb, then change into functional tables; it is often translated as an altar. Root also in other words: massacre, slaughter *ḫꜣyt*, corpse *ḫꜣt*.	Early Dynastic Period onwards	Faulkner 1962: 183; Bersh. I, 14, II ; Les. 77, 1; "altar" Siut pl. 5, 240; Urk. IV, 27, 2; RB 113, 4; D el B. 140; "altar, chamber" CT I, 164.
ḥnḳ.t		Offerings; very similar to the *ḫꜣwt* – a round or rectangular tray on a pedestal or even legged for the placement of offerings and utensils (see 2.3.3, 7.3.4). May also be of wood or bronze – may have replaced the *ḫꜣwt* after the 4ᵗʰ Dynasty.	Old Kingdom onwards	Faulkner 1962: 173; Siut pl. 2, 64.
ꜥbꜣ		A stone altar or "opferstein" (TLA). Occurs in numerous Pyramid Texts in reference to the "gods of the mouth" altar (e.g., PT 511) and funerary stele. It may be associated with the iconographic representation of the *ḫꜣwt* with reeds. In some translations (e.g., stela MMA 12.184), *ꜥbꜣ* is translated as a "stone" being offered, which may simply indicate that it is a stone offering table.	Old Kingdom onwards	TLA; Wb 1, 177.7-9; PT 511; PT 1029; BM EA 1059; MMA 12.184; BM EA 562; pBerlin P 3022; Kairo JE 51811.
wdḥw variations: *wdḥw*		Offering table; root *wdḥ* "to pour" (PT 1148), *wdḥw* "offering"; Bolshakov (2001) claims this is the four-legged copper offering table. The determinative was widely used as a determinative for any type of offering table/tray or altar. It may also be square and placed on the ground or on a pedestal and covered by a cloth.	Late Old Kingdom onwards	Faulkner 1962: 73; Les. 75, 15; Bersh. I, 12; Westc. 9, 26; Urk. IV, 133, 17; Paheri I; PT 1148, 2067, 474, 696.

š		Pool or lake; also translated as garden or tomb garden (š-ḫnt), or most importantly, a basin for liquids. They may also be Offering tables with stepped basins. Actual term translated as "reservoir".	Old Kingdom onwards	Faulkner 1962: 260; "garden" ZÄS 45, 129; URK IV 28, 3; Westc. 5, 2; 2; "tomb-garden" GNS 116; "basin for liquids" Eb. 60, 13; D el. B. 142.
š-ḫnt NB: In Middle Kingdom replaced with mꜥḥꜥ.t/iꜥ				

An offering list, an offering table and a false door are often depicted on the eastern wall of the offering chamber, directly associated with the placement of the burial chamber containing the deceased (see O'Neill 2015). This position is by far the most common throughout ancient Egypt, in all time periods and geographical locations.

The earliest offering tables were mostly round plates (ḥꜣw.t) made of alabaster, placed upon a cylindrical pedestal and intended for the placement of offerings. The offering tables of the OK had mostly a functional role as well and were usually made out of mudbrick and positioned in front of a cult fixture, i.e., a stela or false door (Hölzl 2002: 13-15; Figures 1.2-3).

Figure 1.2 (left): Alabaster offering table "fitted" into a limestone base containing an additional two compartments. (5th Dynasty, Old Kingdom, Giza, MFA Boston 12.1481, CAT ID256).

Figure 1.3 (right): The offering basin (MFA 12.1481) in Figure 13 in situ, by the statue (MFA 12.1481) and false door of Akhmeretnisut facing southwest in his mastaba tomb, taken in 1912 during the Harvard University-MFA Expedition (G 2184, 5th-6th Dynasty Giza; Der Manuelian 2020: 987).

Itemised offering lists determine the Greater Offering Ritual, but may also be associated with other ritual actions, such as the cleansing and censing of the offering table, as well as pouring zꜣṯ using ḥs-vases, often represented on offering tables. The act of placing "both hands upon the table" is even three-dimensionally represented in the false door of Idu at Giza (G7 102) dating to the 6th dynasty. Another direct association between the offering rituals and the placement of offering table are two offering tables still found in situ in tomb N11.1 at Asyut (see 4.4.1; 4.5-6). The placement of the offering tables indicates that they were not only associated with offering rituals but were

probably also used in connection with other funerary rituals. This assumption is based on their iconography, as well as their placement, which is not directly under any offering list, nor in the eastern part of the tomb, but at the very centre of the offering chamber.

1.4.2   Museum Collections and Previous Typological Studies

The first interpretations of or assumptions about the use of offering tables were made by early archaeologists such as Flinders Petrie, who took note of their context, and attempted to categorise them (see 3.3.1). Petrie specified different classes of similar objects: offering tables, offering trays and 'soul-houses'. Even if he offered no categorisation for offering tables, he did mention them in various publications concerning his campaigns, including Hawara (1888-89, 1910-11), Lahun and Gurob (1889-90, 1919-20), Denderah (1897-99), Abydos (1899-1904, 1921-22), Sedment (1903-04), Gizeh and Rifeh (1906-07), Tarkhan (1911-13), and Riqqeh (1912-13). Petrie's most valuable typological studies include offering trays and 'soul-houses'.

During his campaigns at Lahun, Petrie compared offering trays to actual dwellings found in 12th dynasty Kahun. He does mention that household fittings were copied in rock cut tomb designs between the 6th and 12th Dynasty, although he does not go into further detail regarding the use of such of 'soul-houses', other than stating that the *k₃* or *b₃* of the deceased was believed to frequent them, he does not venture to relate them to any funerary ritual, in spite of the fact that they all had been found in a necropolis, in some cases just outside of the tomb itself, indicating that they must have been used by living family members. Petrie mentioned that pottery trays found at Lahun, often presented watery features and apparently were used for liquid offerings, though he did not provide any clear indication of any specific, ritual use of the trays (Petrie 2013: 8-15).

Throughout his campaigns, Petrie placed offering tables ("altars", as he calls them), offering trays and soul-houses within the same category, arguing that the pottery models originated from the stone altar design. Apart from assuming they were used for offerings; Petrie does not present any theory regarding their actual function within the funerary rituals (Petrie 1937).

Previous Studies on Stone Offering Tables

Ernest A. Wallis Budge (1893) dedicated an entire chapter to the offering table, starting from its pre-dynastic origins as an offering placed upon a mat, to the stone slabs with offerings and basins for liquid offerings incorporated into its design. He outlines its position inside the tomb itself and even states that the table was used for the sustenance of the *k₃* of the deceased. Even though some of his explanations now seem rudimentary, he does provide logical explanations for the presence of offering tables and the incorporation of basins in a funerary context. For example, he states that the depictions of foodstuffs on the tables was commissioned by priests on the behalf of "kinsfolk too poor to make any offerings in his tomb" (Wallis Budge 1893:433). Later interpretations are more viable but they all stem from the same hypothesis, namely that the offering table was a funerary utensil used for libations for the dead in order for his/her *k₃* to receive victuals.

Jacques Vandier (1954-5)'s research made other Egyptologists more fully aware of the offering table's importance. Vandier (1954-5) stressed the fact that offering tables were often part of a tomb's architectural fixtures, indicating that their functions were more intricate than constituting a support for the placement of offerings or even more complex than being mere transmitters of sustenance for the *k₃*. He acknowledged the frequent presence of watery features and assumed that offering tables were part of a complex funerary ritual rather than just tools for an offering ritual. He also tried to establish a diachronic account of the development of the offering table.

Even if observations have multiplied concerning the development of offering tables, as well as their materials and design, no large all-encompassing interpretation of their function have so far been presented. What is lacking is a direct linkage to funerary ritual practice, although their relationship to textual counterparts such as the offering list and funerary sequence has been observed (e.g., Willems 2016; Hölzl 2002).

Maha Mostafa (1982) provided a detailed account of OK offering tables, framing them within their context, designing a method for categorising them and also linked offering formulae inscribed on the tables to offering lists present in tombs at Saqqara, Giza, and Dashur (1982: 5-20). Furthermore, by observing the presence of pots and meat processing tools in the vicinity of tombs (Burton 1928: 42 – in Mostafa 1982). Mostafa assumed a relation between the realm of the deceased and that of the living, something that also could be discerned in tomb architecture that reflected the dwellings of the living (1982:8). He indicated a transition from the burial chamber as being the most important feature of the tomb to the offering- or antechamber, evidenced through fixed paraphernalia like offering tables preserved in situ at Giza and Saqqara (Hassan 1948: 11-12).

The collection at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo is of course extensive, particularly in relation to the diversity of offering tables emanating from the OK (Borchardt 1964). There are circular types as well as intricate offering tables with incorporated basins, general ḥtp-sign and ladle spouts, looking like the Opening of the Mouth kits also dating back to the OK. Ludwig Borchardt (1911)'s descriptions are very concise with transcriptions and translations of the offering formulae present on most tables. He offers no interpretations of the iconography.

Ahmed Bey Kamal's 1909 *Catalogue Général des Antiquités Égyptiennes du Musée du Caire* (Nos *23001-23256) Tables d'Offrandes*, deals with offering tables ranging from the MK to the G-RP. Kamal offers some tentative interpretations of their function by stating that the tables were used for "water libations" (1909: preface I). He compares circular OK offering tables with washbasins "*khouans*" used by present-day Egyptians before meals (1909: preface II). For each object Kamal provides a description, as well as transcriptions and translations of offering formulae. He also includes a section entitled "technique" which may offer subjective comments like "poor manufacturing" (e.g., CG23144). In some cases, an archaeological context is mentioned, but most offering tables are presented without a provenance.

Habachi (1977)'s catalogue offers descriptions, drawings and comments on offering tables and basins from the OK to the LP present at the Egyptian Museum in Turin. Each object is described in great detail and there are also comments about origin, as well as transcriptions and translations of the inscriptions, which are analysed, comparing them with names and titles on stelae. Detailed context is also provided, particularly for those offering tables that have been found in Deir el-Medina. Habachi also mentions the development of offering tables, quoting Kamal and Vandier. Furthermore, he mentions depictions of ḥs.t vases on most offering tables, starting from the MK onwards, possibly indicating how the canals and basins were used in connection to sacred vessels. It is clearly stated that libation waters had a vital importance for the use of offering tables and basins and Habachi (1977: 11-14) established a clear connection between offering tables and Pyramid Texts.

Regina Hölzl (2002)'s *Ägyptische Opfertafeln und Kultbecken: eine Form- und Funktionsanalyse für das Alte, Mittlere und Neue Reichfrom* describes, catalogues and analyses an extensive sample of stone offering tables (as well as some pottery offering trays) ranging from the OK to the NK. Using samples from numerous museum collections she identifies and categorises different types of offering tables, arranging them in accordance with clear and useful typologies based on their

design. A detailed summary of her data and results is presented in Chapter 3. Even if Hölzl's comprehensive study mentions their potential role in ancient Egyptian funerary ritual, a detailed account of the context and function of offering tables, as well as ritual theory, theological notions, and comparisons to other *materia magica*, were not part of the scope of her study.

In summary, catalogues dealing with offering tables have been an important asset in the interpretation and understanding of these objects. However, there is a large gap between the interest offering tables received in the early 1900s to a renewed interest in the early 2000s, in contrast to a large amount of research dedicated to funerary rituals and offering lists. Associated research on offering stelae also gained some momentum during this time, with scholars placing an emphasis on their role within the funerary cult and landscape and especially how these objects may reflect the socio-economic status of their owners (Der Köhler & Jones 2009; Van Walsem 2005; Richards 2005; Manuelian 2003). Offering tables do — to some degree — still remain neglected in studies on funerary ritual as well as within funerary archaeology and landscape studies, probably due to a persistent oversimplification of their function and role in ancient Egypt.

Definitions and Previous Studies on the Origin of Pottery Trays and 'Soul-houses'
Pottery offering trays and "soul houses" have often been categories together, mostly due to the material in which they are made as well as deriving from similar contexts (see Chapter 5). The term 'soul-house' was first coined by Petrie and Quibell (Petrie & Quibell 1896: 42). In 1907, Petrie documented at Rifeh about 150 objects which resembled "models of dwellings", defined as "*k3-houses*" (Petrie 1907:14). The highly debated topic on the nature of soul-houses, whether they are model houses or, as proposed by Niwiński (1975) and Leclère (2001), substitutes for rock-cut tombs and chapels of the elite in Middle and Upper Egyptian cemeteries, will be addressed as a case study in Chapter 5.

Among other endeavours, Petrie analysed 150 soul-houses found in Deir Rifeh, defining them as either models of "dwellings", or "trays of offerings" positioned on the ground above or beside a grave or shaft tomb. Based on the findings, typologies A (offering trays)-M (see detailed description in 3.2; 3.3.1) were determined based on design elements and classified diachronically. These objects were better preserved at Rifeh since the ground was mostly composed of gravel providing a protective coverage. The trays from Rifeh were included in Type A, which was composed of a courtyard with a small shelter with two pillars or a portico at the opposite end of the spout (Petrie 1907: 14,16, Pl.XV). Petrie observed that soul-houses did not face the east, as most offering tables did, and thus they were assumed to be "dwellings for the soul". In more recent publications (Leclère 2001; Spence 2011) and as will be pointed out in later sections of the thesis (section 3.3.1; 5.3-7), this is certainly not the case and there is no standardised orientation for offering tables.

Quibell (1898) also briefly mentioned offering trays in his El Kab publication but offers no detailed typological study. It was not until Niwiński's article in 1975, that offering trays and soul-houses were analysed in detail, specifically those from the 12th Dynasty. Niwiński's study was based mainly on the 1938 and 1939 franco-polish excavations at Edfu. He describes offering trays as a slab surrounded by a rim which may contain canals for liquids and at the back there is usually a model of a building. He only considered this structure as a "soul-house" if the building was elaborate and resembled a house and/or tomb (Niwiński 1975:74).

The term "offering tray" was first recorded as a German term *Opferplatte*, which differs from the common offering table (Bonnet 1952; Quibell 1898). According to Niwiński, offering trays are direct descendants of the offering table, as initially stated by Petrie, and then became prototypes for the

soul-house in the 12th Dynasty (1975:76). Based on Niwiński (1975)'s study, the following conclusions were reached regarding the evolution of the offering tray:

1) offering trays were direct descendants of OK offering tables;

2) these objects imitated the main features such as having a raised rim, canals and offerings;

3) they steadily became more frequent and began to incorporate domestic features such as postholes;

4) shrines and porticos made up of several columns were included in tray design;

5) Petrie (1907)'s 12 types applied to soul-houses emerged – staircases, mezzanines and human figures began to be included;

6) offerings disappear completely from the surface of offering trays, making these objects less of a funerary utensil and the soul-house became more of a house for the $k3$.

The main problem with Niwiński's analysis is that it assumes a linear process. Furthermore, offering trays have erroneously been defined as "primitive" and associated with the "poorer" sections of society (Petrie 1889-90; Niwiński 1975: 98). The problem with this definition is that it is not based on archaeological evidence, solely on typological sequencing, with an evolutionary viewpoint.

The origin of offering trays is still debatable. Niwiński (1975) differs from Petrie, stating that trays may have originated from Lisht during the end of the 11th dynasty, directly imitating stone offering tables of surrounding sites and the Memphite region which in turn spread south. Nevertheless, the theory is disproven due to archaeological evidence, as stated by Tooley in her 1989 study. Early "horseshoe" trays have been found at Upper Egyptian sites such as Qubbet el-Hawa and in FIP tombs on Elephantine Island, contemporary with their occurrence in the north. Tooley (1989) also states that the original idea that offering trays evolved into soul-houses from the time of Senwosret II onwards is not proven, since trays were found much later, such as the "altar-form" trays in Nubia and the Ptolemaic "horseshoe" trays presented in the current study (see 6.3.3).

Petrie's (1900) and Niwiński's (1975) assumption that offering trays were cheaper substitutes for stone offering tables may be partially correct considering the execution of the trays and the use of readily available materials. It is also common to find offering trays in non-elite cemeteries with no other funerary equipment of note, which may also be an indication of looted/disturbed contexts (Petrie 1900:26; Tooley 1989:300). Nevertheless, trays have been found with other funerary equipment such as elaborate wooden models in Tomb 14 at Asyut (Tooley 1989: 299-300). Accordingly, both high- and low-ranking members of society used these trays, but the elite was more likely to use stone offering tables as well (Tooley 1989:300).

1.5 The Offering Table in Egyptological Research

Ancient Egyptian funerary art and architecture are increasingly set within the research context of the ancient Egyptian landscape (Geisen 2020; Niwiński 2019; Cervelló-Autuori 2017; Magli 2011; Richards 2005). Accordingly, it is somewhat astonishing how little is actually known about funerary ritual practice in ancient Egypt and it is not until recently that an increasing number of Egyptologists have turned to other disciplines than philology, archaeology and history to obtain new insights into funerary practice. So far, interpretations of funerary material have often been limited by specific preconceptions. For example, that ancient Egyptians were "obsessed" by the thought of *transubstantiation* and an afterlife, concepts generally based on westernised religious beliefs and ideologies (Nyord 2018:79).

Deciphering Egyptian funerary ritual involves numerous aspects of ancient Egyptian beliefs, such as ritual texts, funerary architecture, the surrounding ritual landscape, as well as the assumed ideas

of the average person. It has been argued that in ancient Egypt death was considered to be the most ritualised of all phases of human existence, the final rite of passage (Baines 1991: 144). However, there has not been any concise analysis and systematisation of theological thoughts concerning funerary rituals, in particular efforts to illuminate how the ancient Egyptians might have perceived death at an existential level (O'Neill 2015: 26; Gee 2009:3). Grave goods have generally been defined as if they were definite and static objects, even if they may have been imbued with countless meanings and functions, especially in ancient Egypt where dichotomies were common, and contradictions seem to be present in different aspects of religious thought (O'Neill 2015: 26; Meskell 2007:35). It is now common to connect the function of ritual objects to their specific physical and ritual context (Cooney 2021; Barker 2018; Odler 2017; Willems 2016). Ritual items may have served as utensils intended to change a person's identity and agency, even if they appear standardised, they may nevertheless have been very personal (Bárta 2011: 238-257). Such ritual items include purification vessels, amulets and votive implements, make-up sets, coffins, and offering tables.

In a thesis[3] concerning the use of liquids in ancient Egyptian magical practice, various objects were analysed to determine their role in rituals as magical 'utensils' connected with liquids. The study revealed that the role of offering tables specifically in ancient Egyptian funerary practice had often been overlooked and seldom been fully placed within their ritual context. More emphasis had been placed on royal/elite offering tables within mortuary/temple complexes (Betrò 2017; Bolshakov 2013; Negm 2001; Hays 2003), than to the function and contextual significance of 'humbler' tables and plates found outside royal capitals and in remote necropoli. New ideas concerning material analysis of ancient Egyptian funerary equipment have also emerged, often making innovative use of interdisciplinary methods (Miniaci 2019; Jurman 2018; Eschenbrenner-Diemer 2017; Willems 2016, 1988), something that is also addressed in aspects of material analysis.

1.5.1 Egyptology, Anthropology, Archaeology – Material Analysis

"[…] the problem of religion understood not in the confessional sense but in a secular sense as a unit of faith between a conception of the world and a corresponding norm of conduct (though why call this unit of faith "religion" rather than "ideology" or just "politics")."

Gramsci, ed. Gerratana, *Quaderni nel Carcere* II, 1975, 1378 – after Quirke 2015:15.

As a discipline Egyptology has traditionally placed emphasis on written material, thus defining Egyptian 'religion' through an approach common to interpretations of other religions with scriptural evidence of religious laws, practices, interpretations, mythology, etc. Nevertheless, in recent years a shift has occurred – an almost exclusive reliance on preserved texts is being complemented with an intensified interest in the 'phenomenology' of religion, i.e., how religion actually works and is experienced, through for example ancestor cults, oracles, the use of domestic ritual utensils, etc. (Harrington 2012; Assmann 2005; Quirke 2015: 9; Fitzenreiter 2018;). An increased interest is devoted to archaeological fieldwork and artefact studies (Willems 2016; Roeten 2021; Hodgkinson & Tvetmarken 2020). An earlier overriding reliance on texts tended to exclude not only a large number of the population who could not read or access texts, but also obscured the exploration of more or less *hidden* practices. Numerous individuals could have had other narratives than those governing the official cult (Quirke 2015: 111). Harco Willems (1996) has argued that ancient texts

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[3] Lundius, E. 2013. Swallowing the Sacred: the use of liquids and vital forces in ancient Egyptian religion [Unpublished BA dissertation]. Department of Archaeology, Durham University, UK.

juxtapose tangible and intangible elements, especially in funerary rituals and the embalming process. Texts which Egyptologists in the past tended to label as "theological/philosophical treatises" may have had a more practical meaning and application, than a deeper philosophical one (Willems 1996: 270-324; Quirke 2015:111).

It has been argued that there was no border between magic and religion in ancient Egyptian belief (Raven 2012: 12). Magic is a controversial concept that has been defined in different ways. For example, the Egyptologist and historian of religions Herman te Velde (1988) stated that "the distinction between the magical and the religious is one of definition. The word *magic* is often used simply to label actions, sayings, and ideas that do not seem reasonable from a Western positivist or Christian point of view" (te Velde 1988: 29). This should be considered while trying to define ancient Egyptian magical practice. Nuances within any kind of belief system are hard to perceive especially when considering a belief system from a Eurocentric point of view (for definitions of magic, myth, and ritual [App II:1.2-4].

An offering table constitutes a ritual object and as such it needs to be defined in accordance with its usefulness, something that may be done by applying an anthropological/functional approach. The offering table was part of a specific context where religious traditions and practices influenced its design and function. Therefore, a study of the offering table, specifically its appearance, use, and context also implies a study of human behaviour (Lundius 2020: 79).

The study of mortuary contexts, especially, could imply a focus on attitudes the ancient Egyptians had regarding death and the afterlife. The volume of funerary artefacts in the archaeological record in the form of texts, imagery, and artefacts from a particular social class, may have led to an erroneous generalisation about all ancient Egyptian society. Accordingly, differences in space and time as well as between different social and geographical areas may be forgotten (Lundius 2020:79).

The main difficulty encountered while studying ancient Egyptian artefacts is archaeological context. Information about their provenance has often been limited to an indication of the site where they were discovered, while less information, at least earlier, was provided about their actual setting or where they were positioned within a tomb (Lundius 2020:80; Quirke 2015; Richards 2005).

Joseph Cervelló Autuori has pointed out that "a funerary monument (tomb or ritual enclosure) is above all a ´ritual artefact´, that is, an anthropic creation with specific mythical and ritual motivations and purposes" (Cervelló-Autori 2017:213). This means that a tomb cannot only be considered from an economic point of view, but also from a social anthropological perspective: it is imbued with a funerary symbolism that defines its location and fittings, including the offering table. The object in question should be placed within its intangible context, taking into consideration the sensory experience (Teeter 2011: 56-71).

Cross-cultural comparisons of Egyptian ritual practices are not common (see van der Brink 1982). For example, only a few sources mention ancient sub-Saharan rituals' relation with ancient Egyptian magical practice (see Quirke 2015; Wilburn 2005). Apparently, ancient Egyptians have been, and still are, generally depicted as unique and independent from their neighbouring civilisations and their religions and ritual practices (Lundius 2020: 80).

While analysing an object it is important to acknowledge the roles of both its creator and its user. Why was the object manufactured, for whom and for what purpose? According to Lynn Meskell (2002), a researcher studying an object, or iconography, from an ancient material culture has to address the broader connotations behind the object and its representation, as well as taking into

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consideration her/his eventual personal biases. Ancient Egyptians apparently considered an object and its representation to be one and the same, imbued with a certain essence present in all organic and inorganic material (Teeter 2011: 3-13). In a certain sense, this notion allowed for the unknowable to become "perfectly familiar", such as a tomb being a home, or even an offering table being a tomb (Teeter 2011: 9).

An archaeological approach to ancient Egyptian culture would be to take a specific object from a specific geographic/spatial context and examine its shape, material, colour, and wear. This approach could then be further developed through an anthropological study, which would connect the use and appearance of an artefact to its assumed spatial and ritual context and thus trace its meaning for the people of a specific time and place.

Compared to anthropology, archaeological methods tend to apply a "post-processual approach", placing emphasis on "contextual archaeology" by combining scientific methodology, ethnographic and anthropological theory, ethical implications, and archaeological processes. Such innovative methods show that material culture is not only a diagnostic tool, or an indicator of context, but is provided with symbolic meanings indicating the imagination and ideology of the individuals behind their manufacture, use and disposal (Hicks 2010:36-44, 73-79; Lundius 2020: 81).

During the 1960s, cultural anthropologists like Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz studied religious rituals in situ interpreting each element of a sacred act by relating it to the symbolic and communicative context of the society in which it was performed (Turner 1969; Geertz 1973). Geertz (1973) labelled his approach as 'thick description' (1973: 3-32) emphasising that ritual actions ought to be observed in connection with their immediate environment, while avoiding cross-cultural generalisations (Lundius 2020: 80-1). While concentrating on actions and the symbolic functions of ritual behaviour, Geertz was generally not concerned with ritual paraphernalia. By contrast, Victor Turner (1977) tried to apply a more holistic approach by integrating both action and materials. Turner (1977) defined ritual as "a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests" (Turner 1977: 183; Lundius 2020: 81). A recent in-depth study on the relation between ritual behaviour, socio-economic activities, and Egyptian material analysis is offered by Kathlyn Cooney (2021), stemming from the detailed study of coffins at Deir el-Medina. From its creation in workshops for commerce, its use in funerary rituals, its final resting place as a container for a corpse within a burial chamber and possible reuse in later periods is described in detail with specific examples, illustrating how an object, often seen as basic and self-explanatory, may not only have various uses, but was also a vital symbol of Egyptian craftsmanship and economy (Cooney 2021).

1.5.2 New Research on Funerary Ritual and Offering Tables

Hartwig Altenmüller (1972) placed utterances from Pyramid Texts into roughly five ritual traditions assumed to be performed in an official funerary setting: The Funeral Procession, The Great Offering Ritual, The Lesser Offering Ritual, The Ritual for the Royal Statue and The Rites of the Sacred Precinct (i.e., 'Divine Realm'). According to Altenmüller (1972), rites outlined in the Pyramid Texts may have been actual scripts for both spoken words and acts carried out during a ceremony, while offering lists depicted on tomb walls might have served a similar purpose. However, the inscribed utterances lack any clear instructions (aside from tabular offering lists and the occasional indication of an item offered) and thus the connection between image and ritual action remains ambiguous. Using a behavioural approach, Robert Ritner categorised ancient Egyptian ritual in accordance with actions such as spitting, licking and swallowing. An example of how Ritner explains Egyptian

'behaviourism' is that the verb "to swallow" also meant "to know" (Ritner 1993: 72, 106), stating that "licking and swallowing are means of internalising divine force" (Ritner 1993: 100).

There has been one attempt to compile funerary literature and ritual into one volume: Assmann 2008: *Ägyptische Religion: Totenliteratur* as part of the series *Welt Religionen*. However, there are several detailed studies of specific funerary rituals, like Altenmüller (1972) *Die texte zum Begräbnisritual in den Pyramiden des Alten Reiches* as well as Winfried Barta (1963)'s extensive work on offering lists from the OK to the G-RP, providing detailed translations of texts in both elite and non-elite funerary contexts.

Funerary inventories and rituals are generally divided into two sections: offerings made to sustain the *k₃* and offerings and funerary equipment required to perform funerary rituals. A comprehensive compilation and analysis of various in-depth studies of funerary paraphernalia is, however, still lacking (Barta 1963). Ancient Egyptian temple ritual, such as standardised offerings and rituals carried out to divinities, has been extensively studied, including the associated materials (Sauneron 2000; Cauville 2012; Eaton 2014; Geisen 2020). In a temple ritual the main intention was to purify offerings and then perform a morning ritual constituted by feeding the *k₃* of the gods, a ceremony carried out three times a day. Priests offered incense and *m₃ꜥt* to the divinities represented in the temple, often related to the senses through the use of liquid, food, incense, singing, sunlight – animating different parts of the soul and ritual space within the temple itself (Sauneron 2000: 79).

Martin Fitzenreiter has tried to distance Egyptology from exclusively textual interpretation by placing more importance on the material evidence of the relationship between the living and the deceased (Richards 2005; Ayad 2004; Fitzenreiter 1994: Willems 1988). One aspect of funerary rituals that so far has not been comprehensively researched is the relationship between funerary rituals, tomb architecture, design and paraphernalia to the funerary - and actual landscape, including their relation to the deceased within her/his coffin and the actual burial chamber.

Harco Willems (1988)'s *Chests of Life* is an important contribution to the study of MK coffins and Coffin Texts. He emphasises a transition within the mortuary cult, from being heavily reliant on the living to sustain the *k₃* of the deceased, to being a more internal affair, independent from the assistance of those still alive. The survival of the *k₃* could thus be ensured by the coffin itself, through its internal texts and funerary equipment, only strengthened by occasional rituals performed in the outer realm by the living (Willems 1988: 46).

Willems (2001) *The social and ritual context of mortuary liturgy of the Middle Kingdom (CT Spells 30-41)* outlines a mortuary liturgy and identifies physical events where the text, myths and rituals are closely intertwined. Real life action performed by the priests and the funeral party is difficult to disassociate from presumed activities of the deceased in another realm (Lundius 2020: 92). An interpretation of funerary rituals could be offered by relating written texts to the extensive funerary equipment in the archaeological record, as well as specifying the use of tools and traces of liquids found in tombs. In his 2016 publication, Willems analyses ritual and votive artefacts (including several miniature offering tables) found in an undisturbed tomb at Deir el-Bersha, dating back to the MK, with a particular focus on their relationship to each other and their surrounding context. This was made in order to decipher remnants of a ritual outlined in the Coffin Texts recovered in the tomb (Willems 2016).

In his study of workshops and local styles, Alexander Ilin-Tomich analysed private, generally commissioned, offering tables from Asyut and their complex provenance (Ilin-Tomich 2018a,b). Although best known are the high quality tables, often filled with inscriptions and displayed in

museum collections and catalogues, the complete survey of Ilin-Tomich (2018a) is vital for the understanding of how workshops functioned, and gives an insight into the importance of ancient Asyut and its role as a cultural hub for local production, including funerary equipment such as offering tables and steles.

As mentioned earlier, recent decades have witnessed a significant change in Egyptological research. Within Egyptology there are now more multidisciplinary approaches, involving fields such as anthropology, theology, geology, and archaeology (see Willems 2016; Quirke 2015; Harrington 2015; Richards 2005). A recent example is a study of offering table iconography by Barbara O'Neill which provides a fresh approach while accounting for a "complex iconology integral to afterlife transitional process" (2015:1). She attempts to provide a better understanding of scenes on stelae and tomb walls by applying interpretations based on the assumed ritual function of offering tables within specific contexts, as well as their development during the period of socio-political change between the OK and towards the end of the MK. She presents an analysis of the interaction between physical and metaphysical aspects within a tomb context, establishing an innovative framework for the interpretation of the use of offering tables.

1.6 DIFFICULTIES AND LIMITATIONS

A large difficulty and limitation in studying ancient ritual practice is that we are addressing past actions, something which has been summarised by Quirke: "Ethnographic accounts of ritual have similarly served as warnings of how much in a human performance cannot survive in an archaeological record" (from Quirke 2015: 62; Insoll 2004: 1-30). A phenomenological and anthropological approach to the study of past ritual behaviour could, however, foster a more dynamic understanding of ancient religious behaviour (Quirke 2015: 9). An example of this is offered by Nyord (2018) when outlining the difficulties in interpreting ritual objects such as *ushabti*. Their traditional role as being substitutes for the deceased to take up duties in the afterlife may be evident in the NK, but their earlier versions known as stick *ushabtis* may have played a very different role in funerary contexts. In the SIP these objects were deposited in accessible areas indicating a more cultic and cosmological significance in Egyptian society (Nyord 2018: 75-6).

A significant difficulty in studying a ritual object is that of assuming the social status of their manufacturers or the individuals behind its commission. Ritual artefacts need first of all to be considered as functional utensils after which an interpretation of their origin may be reached (see Cooney 2021). Quirke (2015:26) emphasises that context plays a major role in defining the origin of an object and its intended uses within a social context:

> *"… a religion of the poor might be identified whenever and wherever inexpensive, often organic materials, sometimes in forms requiring little time or skill, are used for offerings, instead of visibly skilfully produced or inscribed materials – as if the rich make the things they use. The offering of a lump of mud tells us nothing automatically about the social status of the offeror; a particular offering practice might, instead, require that the person in need, or in gratitude, must fashion an offering with their own hands, in which case the rich adult and poor infant may produce similar material results. More sensitive recording of archaeological contexts can be followed by a more open comparison of contexts…"*

In order to establish the multifaceted nature of the offering table as a unifying concept within the ancient Egyptian belief/religious practice, as a medium for shared social and religious practices and the relationship to the funerary context a methodology is discussed in Chapter 2. Here is a detailed account of the methodological approach of the data collection process and analysis of the objects present in the database, which will be used throughout the thesis and final discussion. Following this description, an assessment of ancient Egyptian theological notions will be outlined in connection with the methodology to provide a socio-religious framework and address the aims and objectives of the thesis, specifically to establish the multifaceted nature of the offering table within ancient Egyptian religious practices.

The theoretical background is based on previous studies and aims to create a *mise en scène* for the offering tables and similar material analysed throughout the thesis. The ancient Egyptian funerary landscapes and their development from "space" to "place" are described and then related to ancient Egyptian cosmology and funerary ritual practice. The importance of the Nile is also addressed with its fluctuations in accordance with ritual practice. This will introduce one of the main concepts present throughout the thesis: opposite aspects found in nature, and not the least in human nature, are united by *flux*, i.e., the action/process of flowing liquid. Ancient Egyptian religious notions tend to unite disparate elements into an ordered totality and the offering table is at the centre of this ritual process, uniting, activating, and maintaining life-providing forces.

In order to provide a supporting analysis for the methodology, Chapter 3 both presents and uses the collected database of examples of offering tables and similar objects in order to compare it with previous methods of categorising these objects in the past. This will in turn show the value of the earlier approaches and highlight any gaps to specifically establish the complex character of the 'offering table'. The analysis of materials, contextual data and placement indicators, as well as unique iconography and comparative samples of offering tables in amulet-form will show how the tables express numerous notions simultaneously, especially in their later forms, the main aim and concept of the thesis.

The role of the 'offering table' as a medium for shared cultural, social, and religious practices and activities as well as it's relationship to the funerary context will be analysed through specific case studies from question raised by the database sample analysis. Chapter 4, The Asyuti Offering Table is attempt to reconstruct funerary ritual in the ancient necropolis of Asyut and presents a study of 90 stone offering tables outside the main database, studied in situ at the OK-MK necropolis. The section will gather and analyse the specific geographical, spatial, and topographical context of material from Asyut to identify local trends and changes over time. It will also specifically highlight how offering tables reflect the funerary landscape as well as localised religious beliefs and traditions.

Chapter 5, focuses on the sample of pottery offering trays and soul-houses in the database, mainly dating to the late Ok and MK, and their role as miniaturised processing sites, bringing together food requirements and how they are prepared for consumption in relation to funerary rituals. Overall the analysis will provide a vertical view of Egyptian society, local trends at specific times, how non-textual funerary needs are met in objects and the relationship of the pottery material to people and settlements. At the same time the pottery trays offer some local and individualised traits but operate within the broader framework of social and religious contexts/systems.

Chapter 6, presents a detailed study of diachronic change in the design and iconography of offering tables and related *materia magica* between the TIP and G-RP, emphasising the role of water and changing religious traditions. The analysis will track changes in representation/use of offering tables and what this means within the wider context of funerary ritual and its importance in Egyptian culture and analyse specific rituals in religious texts, which may involve the use of this *materia magica* (Chapter 6). At this later time the issue of unifying the functions of the offering table as well as emphasising particular aspects of water ritual comes into play, so that the final form of the tables represents the multifaceted nature of the offering table as a unifying concept within the ancient Egyptian belief/religious practice.

Chapter 7, "Discussion", presents the main findings regarding the use and significance of offering tables within ancient Egyptian magical practice. Through the analysis of funerary literature and related iconography, several conclusions can be made regarding the diachronic changes in use and function of offering tables and their multifaceted role in several ancient Egyptian religious traditions. The chapter is divided into three main sections: 7.2 "The Funerary Cult", 7.3 "The Opening of the Mouth Ceremony: A Place for Emotion", and 7.4 "The Eye of Horus Concept". Each ancient Egyptian ritual and associated practices will be discussed while referring to studies such as Altenmüller (1972), Otto (1960), Willems (1988), Miatello (2015; 2017), and Aufrère (1999). Offering tables and associated material will be set within the framework of cultic practice whilst taking into consideration the ancient Egyptian ritual landscape. The discussion is centred around how these objects reflect and create 'place' within the funerary cult and associated sacred landscape. The multifaceted nature of the objects is exemplified through the Opening of the Mouth Ceremony, framing their overall symbolism by describing the water process apparent during the ceremony and within mortuary festivals and comparing it with the Eye of Horus concept.

Chapter 8 constitutes a reflection on the proposed methodology presented in the thesis and how it can be used to interpret understudied and neglected finds like offering tables, especially those usually found in museums and lacking an archaeological context. The key concepts and findings in the thesis will be outlined as well as suggestions about further research that may be required within the field of funerary ritual in Egyptology and Egyptian Archaeology. The offering table is intimately related to its spatial, geographical, and temporal context, as is reflected in its role within the funerary cult. It has a multifaceted socio-religious function and is an important element in all time periods and contexts in ancient Egypt because of this key characteristic of Egyptian culture. It is not, however, the only such object that focusses and harnesses such ideas, but this thesis has demonstrated that how there are specific time and place dynamics at play, that can be deconstructed.

"It is for the son you build a house,
When you make a place for yourself.
Make good your dwelling in the graveyard,
Make worthy your station in the West.
Given that death humbles us,
Given that life exalts us,
The house of death is for life."

The Instruction of Hardjedef (Lichtheim 1973: 58).

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The extreme difference between the fertile "Black Land" $km.t$ of the floodplains and the Delta and the arid, mountainous "Red Land" $dšrt$ influenced the cosmological as well as theological mindset of the ancient Egyptian population [App II:1.1]. The Nile inundation provided fertile floodplains and boosted the produce and economy of the land, while the desert contained important trade routes connecting oases and distant lands to the heartland (see Map 0.1). Similarly, the funerary landscape and that of the living were interrelated and made accessible through liminal points of contact: tombs and their cult fixtures. In this way, Ancient Egyptian landscape may be understood as an interplay between natural and man-made elements.

Already during the OK, the tomb was not meant to be a mausoleum dedicated to the dead, but a dwelling and container of life, a place that mitigated the boundaries between a tangible reality and the immaterial (Eaton 2013: 16). The phenomenon was reflected not only through the actual funerary landscape, but also by funerary texts and rituals. Both the landscape and the tomb were containers of life utilised and preserved through human actions.

The study focuses on funerary landscapes and structures related to ancient Egyptian cosmology and funerary ritual practice. The role of water and the importance of the Nile's seasonal changes will be explored in accordance with ritual practice, as well as its fundamental link to the use and function of offering tables and similar magical material, thus presenting a theoretical backdrop to the thesis and its methodology. The offering table was considered as one of the main tools, which through the use of water was believed to unite, activate and maintain life-providing forces. It was therefore an essential tool in bringing about order into a funerary landscape and perhaps to a wider context.

2.2   METHODOLOGY

A ritual object is part of a context, a ritual landscape, i.e., the environment, daily human existence, actions, and cosmos. These elements are all animated by the faith of a believer, which motivates the shape, material, function, and placement of any ritual utensil – such as an offering table.

As previously discussed in Chapter 1, offering tables have generally been neglected within the study of ancient Egyptian funerary ritual. As ritual artefacts they have rarely been properly placed within their surrounding ritual landscape and their use within a funerary setting has often been overlooked. In his study of the funerary cult, Altenmüller (1972) analyses Pyramid Texts together with NK depictions of funerary practices but lacks a practical application of utensils and their ritual contexts. Altenmüller's analysis of the ritual landscape is incomplete in the sense that he limits the

rites taking place before transporting the deceased to the necropolis to a temple complex "at the edge of a cultivated field" (1972: 172). After the rituals are carried out there, the deceased is brought to the "Divine Realm" where protective and transformation rituals occur. Texts and images often do not correspond to the actual ritual actions, indicating that they are location specific and depend upon the funerary landscape, and/or other traditions. There is accordingly a major difference between external ritual practices and internal funerary rituals, which interplay with depicted imagery and related fixtures. Altenmüller (1972) thus misses a step – the incorporation of the landscape with the tomb and the ritual. By limiting his analysis to texts and images originating from different periods the entire context of the ancient Egyptian funerary ritual is not taken into account (see 7.2.3).

By contrast, Willems (1988) applies another approach by using coffins and coffin texts as tools for analysing the funerary cult, mainly by comparing to what is in the coffin and its vicinity with the surrounding landscape. According to Willems (1988), the coffin summarises concepts and actions of a multifaceted ritual, localising it into one single ritual object, which in itself becomes a ritual landscape encapsulating the deceased. In a similar manner, the offering table may during its later development be considered as a summary of several concepts and actions of the funeral ritual into a single multifaceted, multifunctional object, something which is made evident through the study of offering trays and soul houses. In order to address the lacunae identified in Altenmüller's rendition of the funerary cult and at the same time define the role of the offering table within the funerary sphere, three different research topics are investigated. The first is a detailed account of a dynamic funerary landscape with its associated offering tables (i.e., Asyut), the conceptual landscape represented on pottery offering trays and soul houses, and the consolidation of funerary traditions and libation practices in later offering tables and similar objects. These objects eventually became the central piece of mortuary rituals, including eternal nutrition of the dead, contact between the mourners and the deceased, as well as being instrumental for the transcendent passage of the deceased.

Offering tables were placed in the proximity of, or inside tombs, to transmit life providing force to the dead, or placed in temples and private homes, where they served as a means of communication with deceased ancestors and the divine sphere. They have been used to summon the $k\!z$, feed and maintain it via basins and other watery features present in offering table design (see 7.4.2).

Ritual artefacts outlined in funerary contexts are highly symbolic in nature. Objects may represent elements of the cosmos, such as broad collars and processional barques are related to the sun and voyage of Re. *The Eye of Horus* may represent the moon and its dominance over the inundation as well as its associated offerings such as perfumes and ointments. The offering of wine and milk and the actual pouring of libations may be associated with the inundation of the Nile (Eaton 2011: 16).

Considering the main aims of the thesis (see Table 1.2 in 1.3), the methodology employed through the research has been to concentrate on the artefacts themselves, their shape, texture, wear, design, age and in particular their assumed placement and define them within a specific ritual, temporal and physical context. In order to achieve a basic grounding for the methods a representative sample of offerings tables was collected and analysed.

2.2.1   The Sample: context, chronology, accessibility

The sample consists of 477 offering tables, basins, models, amulets, offering trays and soul-houses. 387 objects were documented and handled in museum collections in Europe, Egypt and the US and 90 objects were analysed in situ at the ancient necropolis of Asyut as well as in the magazine at

Shutb as part of The Asyut Project (TAP).[4] The current study is based on a comprehensive analysis of a heterogeneous sample which, taking into consideration the parameters of this Ph.D. thesis, is considered as representative as it could provide new insights and hypotheses in connection with paraphernalia used in the ancient Egyptian mortuary cult and hopefully inspire further research (see 8.2).

The initial concept on which the selection of objects was based was the idea of broadening the term 'offering table' (see Table 1.2). To challenge preconceived notions of what is a standardised ancient Egyptian offering table, a list of objects in Egyptian collections around the world was compiled mainly based on their association with *functional* water features (i.e., spouts, basins, and canals), resulting in material from a variety of temporal/ geographical contexts. The initial data collection stage began with creating a standardised recording system and then test it at the first available museum, which in this case was the Egyptian collection at Manchester Museum. It is at this stage of the research that it became clear that offering tables are extremely diverse in material, shape, design, etc., leading to the realisation of the need to study these different objects in detail by handling them, taking precise measurements and observe potential surface treatment as well as any evidence of use or indication of their original placement within the ancient Egyptian landscape.

> Main selection criteria for objects in museum collections:
> Water features and other functional elements: canals, basins, spouts, legs, engravings
> Level of wear: non-fragmented, visible functional features, not heavily reconstructed
> Level of access at museums: ability to handle object, access to the base, available detailed photography (or ability to take own pictures), detailed measurements of water features, etc.

The museum collections were selected according to volume of Egyptian material present. The first museums on the list included British Museum, UCL Petrie Museum, Louvre Museum Paris, AMP Berlin, Museo Egizio Torino, MET New York, OIM Chicago. An introductory email was sent to ascertain complete access to the objects, especially in regard to personally handling them and taking detailed measurements. Several museums had to be excluded due to limited access to the material, including Louvre Museum which in turn resulted in excluding France as a destination due to time-constraints and limited budget. Due to these new insights the list of objects was narrowed down since the study of them depended on the level of accessibility offered by the museums. In a way this is a self-selecting randomised sample, that is thus treated as being representative as it has excavated and collected material; the excavated material often from older work when cemeteries were the focus of museum sponsored activity and the collected material being portable objects that could be removed from tombs and carried out of Egypt easily, without the fittings and impedimenta attached to tables that show their use. The Asyut study to some extent is to provide a balance (see Chapter 4) of a cemetery excavated according to modern principles, even though many of the offerings tables are not present now at the site. The potential bias is that something is missed out that would change the conclusions, but even a completely new cemetery with *in situ* tables would only be one more case study within the greater holistic picture. It is more likely that it would add quantity and refinement but not overturn the main argument. The confidence in the analysis of the 'self-selecting randomised sample' is thus estimated here at 70%.

The following list of museums granted unlimited access to their collections, including handling the objects, measuring specific features as well as detailed photographic documentation:

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[4] In collaboration with Prof. Dr. Joachim Kahl at Freie Universität Berlin and the entire Asyut team.

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK.
British Museum, London, UK.
Brooklyn Museum, New York City, USA.
The Egyptian Antiquities Museum, Cairo, Egypt.
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK.
Garstang Museum, Liverpool, UK.
Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, Denmark.
Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Vienna, Austria.
Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden, Netherlands.
Manchester Museum, Manchester, UK.
Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm, Sweden.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, USA.
Museo Gregoriano Egizio: Musei Vaticani, Vatican City.
Museo Egizio di Torino, Turin, Italy.
Museo Egizio: Museo Archeologico Natzionale di Firenze, Florence, Italy.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, USA.
Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen, Denmark.
Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Berlin, Germany.
Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago, USA.
UCL Petrie Museum, London, UK.

The author's background in the UK, Italy, Sweden and Germany significantly contributed to selecting important Egyptian collections in these respective countries, while the access granted by the MET in New York and OIM in Chicago resulted in adding Brooklyn Museum in New York and the BFA in Boston to the list of contacted museums in the US. The KHM in Vienna was a significantly important museum due to the presence of Prof Dr. Regina Hölzl, a pioneer in the study of ancient Egyptian offering tables as will be presented in further detail in Chapter 3. This particular collection contains a vast number of offering tables and basins from important necropoleis such as Giza, Saqqara, and Abydos recovered from Herman Junker's campaigns in the early 20th century.

The number of objects studied in each museum depended on the availability of staff, time constraints, level of access and budget.[5] The number of items analysed at each museum ranged between 30-60 objects. As presented in Table 2.1, the museums with the most accessed material are the AMP Berlin, the British Museum in London, and the Egyptian Museum in Turin. This is due to the fact that more staff was readily available in the dates provided as well as the presence of more material which was not exclusively on display or inaccessible for research purposes. Nevertheless, the number of museums visited allows for a vast study of material from different archaeological contexts as every Egyptian collection has its own history of provenance from archaeological expeditions from the end of the 19th century until recently.

Table 2.1 Number of offering tables according to type analysed in each museum collection.

Museum Collection	Soul-houses	Offering Trays	Offering Tables
Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung Berlin	2	7	23
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford	7	6	2
British Museum, London	1	8	26
Brooklyn Museum, New York	0	0	12
Egyptian Museum Cairo, Egypt	0	0	24
Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge	2	4	9
Garstang Museum, Liverpool	0	1	6

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[5] The museums which were initially contacted but then omitted from the list due to a variety of reasons but mostly accessibility and time constraints include: The Louvre Museum in Paris, Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon, The Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst in Munich, National Museums Scotland in Edinburgh, The Penn Museum in Philadelphia, USA.

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna	0	0	25
Manchester Museum	6	11	12
Medelhavsmuséet Stockholm	0	6	14
Metropolitan Museum New York	2	1	14
Musei Vaticani - Museo Gregoriano Egizio	0	2	9
Museo Egizio Firenze	0	1	7
Museo Egizio Torino	1	12	23
Museum of Fine Arts Boston	1	4	12
Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen	0	0	7
National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen	1	1	0
Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago	1	3	13
Petrie Museum, London	0	15	15
Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden	5	7	16
Grand Total	**29**	**89**	**269**

Other items were studied but not all documentation could be accessed, such as the pottery offering trays at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo [see App VII]. These objects (including several stone offering tables, basins, and amulets) were only photographed, and information was gathered from published catalogues such as Kamal (1909)'s *Catalogue General*.

Several difficulties are associated with any effort to arrive at a comprehensive and entirely satisfying interpretation and clear conception of such dispersed and multifaceted material. One example of specific constraint related to the study of offering tables and related objects is the difficulty of obtaining complete data sets due to the fact that data from Egyptian archaeological storage facilities and the Egyptian museum in Cairo are currently far from complete. The best choice for non-Egyptian researcher would then be to access and compare some of the wealth of this material and search for it outside of Egypt, though even their dispersion, lack of access and/or inadequate cataloguing are quite common setbacks for a researcher [for material analysed at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo see App VII].

Various issues arise while analysing an extensive, as well as temporally, stylistically, and geographically diversified archaeological sample. One important concern is the question of provenance. Several of the items found in museum collections lack information about where and when they have been found and even less so about their original placement within an archaeological site and an approximated time-period for their use and fabrication. Furthermore, if such information is available, it is often limited to numbers of findings and the sites where they were found. Such data limitations may produce a biased impression that a certain object may appear to be more common within one specific location compared to another. However, this might have been due to several other factors than mere presence and quantities. Limitations may include the changing importance of the site over time, looting, depositional conditions, durability of material, etc. Obviously, there is also the fact that all archaeological sites have not been thoroughly investigated. An example of this is the significant lack of offering tables and similar material from the Delta regions since many necropoli lack published archaeological data. All of these factors and shortcomings led to an approach that considered the local and temporal context of any cultic object and identification of certain traits that might indicate its provenance and functions.

The unique assemblage of offering tables investigated at the necropolis in Asyut was vital in addressing some of the limitations presented in the research. It almost functioned as a control after the data collection executed at museums. By separating the Asyuti tables from the sample presented in the database it was possible to investigate diachronic changes in function and design of offering tables on a smaller scale within a contained environment. In doing so it was possible to

further address the main aim which is to understand the role of offering tables in fomenting a relationship between tomb, landscape and settlement.

2.2.2. Museum recordings

A standardised method of recording data was employed on every object analysed in the sample. An example of the recording sheet may be found in [App II:2.2.3]. It was mainly used as an initial documentation and systematic analysis of the object and to facilitate comparability. The documentation also allowed for the compilation of "thick descriptions" (i.e., descriptions of object design and evidence of wear/use to its context and provenance, see 1.2) of every object in order to consider its original intended use and significance. The main entries in the recording sheet include museum documentation, detailed measurements, initial typology notes, catalogue entries and bibliographical references. The recording sheets were then edited and compiled into a catalogue system with every object given a specific catalogue number "CAT ID#" [App III].

Photographs of each object were systematically taken starting with an overview of the object itself and then specific iconographic details, raised features, as well as any evidence of surface treatment or wear. The bases of the objects were also documented and photographed in order to potentially interpret archaeological context and a more detailed study of the material and manufacturing techniques.

The material, size, and design of these objects may nevertheless determine their context, especially when related to the documented "thick descriptions". The following graph represents the methodology used to place offering tables within a certain temporal as well as geographical context (Chart 2.1):

Chart 2.1 General methodology for the classification and identification of the context of offering tables and similar materials.
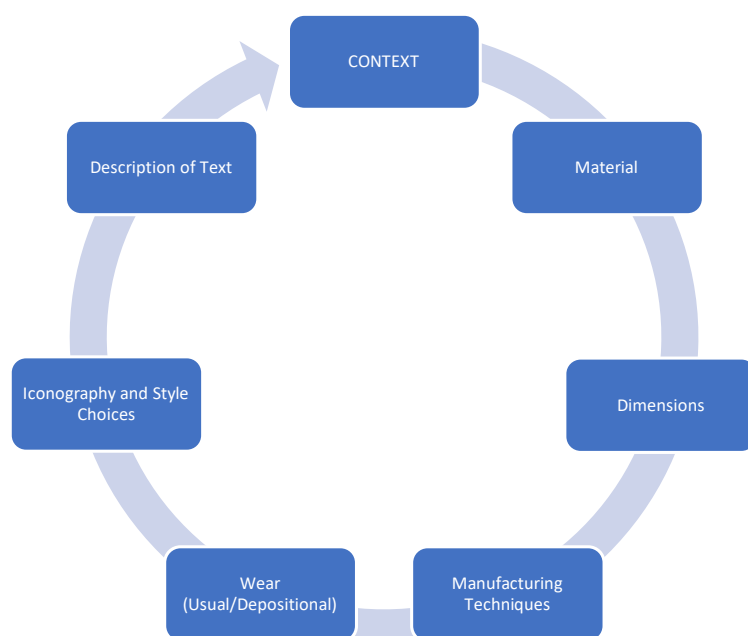
2.2.3. Database

Based on the data collected at the museums, a database was designed with Microsoft Access 2016. The column entries were divided into the following themes: a) basic information (museum accession code, context, object types, measurements, materials, etc.); b) use and function

(including water features, presence and depth of water features, wear and potential signs of use, etc.); c) list of iconographic elements with measurements; d) inscriptions (depth, stylistic choices, translated material, etc.); e) documentation (bibliography, archival material, etc.).[6]

As will be presented in more detail in Chapter 3, there are several database entries used for the categorisation of offering tables, especially in relation to their "functional context" (3.4.1). These entries include degrees of surface wear, evidence of use (especially in relation to liquids), and original placement within the ritual landscape. The same methodology for data collection was used for the offering table studies as part of the Asyut Project but were recorded in a separate Excel document in order to not skew the results of the data analysis since they are all from the same archaeological context and more or less similar time period (FIP to MK).

The database is further divided into three separate data files: Offering Tables, Offering Trays, Soul-houses. It was decided to separate these categories of objects since unique features were also recorded. These may include specific architectural features only identified on pottery soul-houses, or the limited time period and material of offering trays. The same spreadsheets were used in every category with only few extra columns added for specific features. As will be presented throughout the thesis, all objects described have at least two features in common pertaining to the use of liquids. Pottery offering trays and soul-houses are therefore addressed together with stone offering tables, while at the same time categorised separately.

2.2.4. Categorization and Typology

The categorization process was only made after the recording and insertion of the data into the database was complete. An initial categorization and typological study was conducted based on observations made during the data recording stage. As presented in a Case Study on previous approaches for the categorization of these objects, the data set is processed based on a classification of the type of object according to its overall design, material, and shape (see Chapter 3). New approaches were used to address gaps in previous typological studies. These include contextual data (i.e., any indication of original placement, e.g., an irregular base and modern chisel marks may indicate that the offering table was originally carved into a structure and then removed at a later date), and size categories (monumental/portable) (see Tables 2.2-3). This initial categorisation was made in order to define the type of object: offering table (A); offering tray (B); offering tray with incorporated shrine (C); offering basin (D); soul-house (E); offering table amulet/model (F) (Chart 2.2).

Table 2.2 Definitions of the contextual typologies based on size in the material in the database.

Contextual Typology	Description
Monumental Average Height: 18.9cm Average Width: 53.2 cm Average Length: 43.8 cm	Monumental offering tables are >30 cm in width, with elaborate iconographic elements. They are generally made of prestigious stone such as granite. Inscriptions are often royal and refer to the veneration of deities. The external sides of monumental tables are often decorated. The original context is generally a royal temple complex.

Portable	Portable offering tables are commonly found in museum collections since they were relatively easier to transport. These tables may often be classified as 'votive' due to their size and may occasionally be made of a material other than limestone, such as alabaster. These may be <30 cm in width or may also be made of pottery. Portable tables usually lack a specific context.
Average Height: 7.4 cm Average Width: 28.0 cm Average Length: 24.0 cm	

Table 2.3 Definitions of the contextual typology of offering tables, basins and amulets/models.

Fixed	"Fixed" offering tables and/or were most likely directly carved from the limestone bedrock of the tomb – they could have been removed in ancient times or by archaeologists as evidenced by chisel marks, which are irregular and deep on the bottom surface of the table.
Fitted	"Fitted" offering tables and/or basins are often <30cm in width to be incorporated into other funerary fixtures within the tomb. These objects often have sloped edges and a smoothed base, which may indicate that the table was fitted into another kind of structure. Chisel marks on the sides and bottom are regular and have been smoothed.
Free-standing	"Free-standing" offering tables describes all objects which were meant to be moved or are not necessarily linked to other fixtures within their original context. These include tables with legs as well as amulets/models with rings for their intended use as pendants. These objects are more prone to weathering.

Chart 2.2 Examples of the General Typologies of the material in the database.

A. Offering Table B. Offering Tray C. Offering Tray with Incorporated Shrine D. Offering Basin E. "Soul House" F. Offering Table Amulet/Model

Monumental Fixed/fitted Portable/personal

Colours: Red, Black, White, Blue
Materials: Limestone, sandstone, granite, alabaster, pottery (fired clay), faience, bronze

To compare and to some extent corroborate the findings and conclusions, references to quantitative and qualitative accounts and classifications employed by other researchers, in particular Regina Hölzl's 2002 study on stone offering tables/basins were made. Hölzl (2002) applies a functional approach while classifying her sample into various groups depending on shape, design, time periods (OK-NK), and the presence of specific functional characteristics like canals, basins, gussets, figurines, and spouts. Even though Hölzl' (2002)'s categorisation of offering tables is applied, the current study differs since the time period also extends from the NK onwards.

Pottery offering trays were categorised according to Tooley (1989)'s typological and contextual study presented in *Middle Kingdom Burial Customs: A study of wooden models and related material*, which considers contextual differences of pottery trays, especially since they are limited to a specific time period in the archaeological record. Pottery soul-houses were analysed separately and identified within Petrie (1907)'s A-M typology and sample from Deir Rifeh (see 3.2). The aim was to

compare the current study to previous findings and inquiries by various notable scholars. This in turn would provide a working basis for further analyses and discussions. By taking into consideration new, additional information, in particular contextual and use-related data, an alternative approach to preceding research and conclusions is presented (see 3.5).

2.2.5. Data Analysis

The data presented in the current study illustrates a very complex picture of the offering table and its numerous definitions. As stated by Stevens (2009): "Stone offering tables, pottery offering-stands, pottery and stone vessels and perhaps free-standing wooden shrines could all have served to focus religious conduct, and similar emplacements could have been destroyed or removed, or have multi-purpose nature that obscures religious function" (2006: 297). The sacred objects which may be identified under the umbrella term "offering table" may have had a multifaceted function in ancient Egyptian religious tradition. The only way to fully address the multifaceted nature of these objects is with a multidisciplinary approach, therefore addressing not only the object in question, but any related material and, most importantly, their surrounding context, especially the ancient Egyptian funerary landscape and diverse religious traditions reflected within it (see Chart 2.3).

Chart 2.3 Outline of methodological process including predicted outcomes of the data analysis.
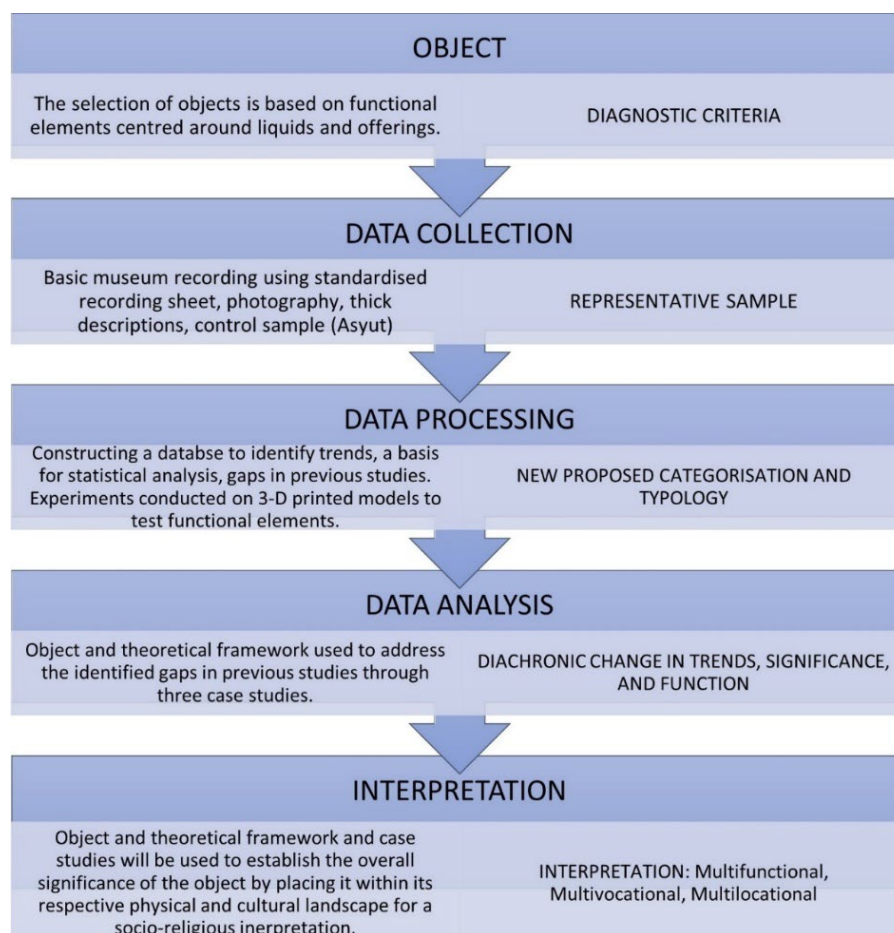
While analysing the database, design and iconography were not only addressed in detail, but also any evidence of surface wear (see 3.4.3.3). An attempt was made in determining the flow or storage of liquid upon the investigated utensils. Part of this endeavour has been to determine why the surface of the items has been divided through rims, canals, elevated and sunken areas, as well as other design elements that could have influenced the use and course of a liquid during a ritual. When considering the trajectory of a liquid poured on these objects, any indications of "interaction"

between different areas on both the object itself and its surrounding were recorded or taken into consideration (see 3.4.3.3, 7.4.2). To determine the flow of water across some types of these objects, two different offering tables were selected to be 3-D printed with the support of the Durham Archeomaterials Research Centre. Several experiments were then performed upon the replicas during a workshop organised in collaboration with the NEAES (Oriental Museum, Durham University, November 3rd, 2017) (see 7.4.2 [App V: Experiments 1-3]).

Contextual analysis of the objects was also considered in detail. Not only was the archaeological context of every object considered when available, but also any physical evidence on the object itself. To remedy the significant lack of context for some offering tables and similar material present in the database, an opportunity arose to analyse an assemblage of offering tables in situ. 90 stone offering tables were recorded, categorised, and analysed as part of TAP in the 2018 season, four of which were still in their original placement within the funerary landscape. The data collection and analysis is presented as a case study in Chapter 4. The methodology employed on the self-contained sample was similar to that presented in this thesis.

While the objects themselves were considered, their religious connotations were also analysed by identifying the potential use of offering trays and similar materials in common ancient Egyptian religious traditions. These include: the Funerary Cult (especially the ancestor cult and OMC) and rituals related to the Eye of Horus and Inundation. The iconographic elements, evidence of use and function, water features, and basic information including potential archaeological contexts were used in an attempt to not only identify a specific religious tradition, but also to construct a viable account of the diachronic changes in offering table design. These diachronic changes were then systematically compared to the diachronic changes in religious traditions in ancient Egyptian funerary practice.

The analysis and interpretation of offering tables was only possible through a thorough anthropological and socio-religious study of ancient Egyptian funerary tradition and ritual behaviour. A summary of the theoretical framework applied to the methodology outlined above is presented in the following sections. The socio-religious themes include the ancient Egyptian funerary cult, landscape traditions, water and its religious connotations, and the Eye of Hours as an overarching religious tradition will be addressed in accordance to the three main aims of the research on offering tables and related *materia magica* (see Table 1.1).

2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: PREVIOUS APPROACHES

The three main notions regarding the funerary cult and how it interplayed with the surrounding ancient Egyptian landscape have been recently studied by scholars such as Bommas (2018), Legros (2016), Willems (2016), Effland & Effland (2010), Richards (2005). The main aspects include the funerary cult, the creation and manipulation of the funerary landscape, and the religious connotations of water and its management. The offering table may be at the very centre of these themes, vital in understanding its role within ancient Egyptian religious tradition.

The best analysed example of an ancient Egyptian funerary landscape is that of the sacred site of Abydos (see Richards 2005). Based on several votive offerings archaeologists have been able to establish votive-based cultic activity from the MK into the late and Coptic periods (Effland & Effland 2010: 128). The most impressive architectural features still present at Abydos are the chapels along processional routes scattered across the sacred area (Richards 2005: 125-36). The routes were interlinked with pre-existing natural routes composed of stone walls in the high plateau, linking the

wadi to the eastern face of the mountainside. The opening of the natural route extending from the (Osiris)-Chontamenti Temples in the north to the west, has been suggested to resemble a physical entrance to the Underworld (Figure 2.1). These routes were divided into publicly accessible and inaccessible areas, creating a sacred zone between the northern and middle cemeteries (Effland & Effland 2010: 133). The cult topography at Abydos was composed of processional axes uniting temples as well as tombs, which were referred to as the resting place of Osiris (Effland 2010: 145).

Figure 2.1: Map of the direction of the processional routes at Wadi Umm el-Qaab, with the main axis extending from the southern mound to the opening of the Wadi (ìnt'ȝt) in the north. It illustrates a direct link from the Osiris Temple to the mouth of the Underworld in the mountain range (Effland & Effland 2010: 145, Abb. 9).
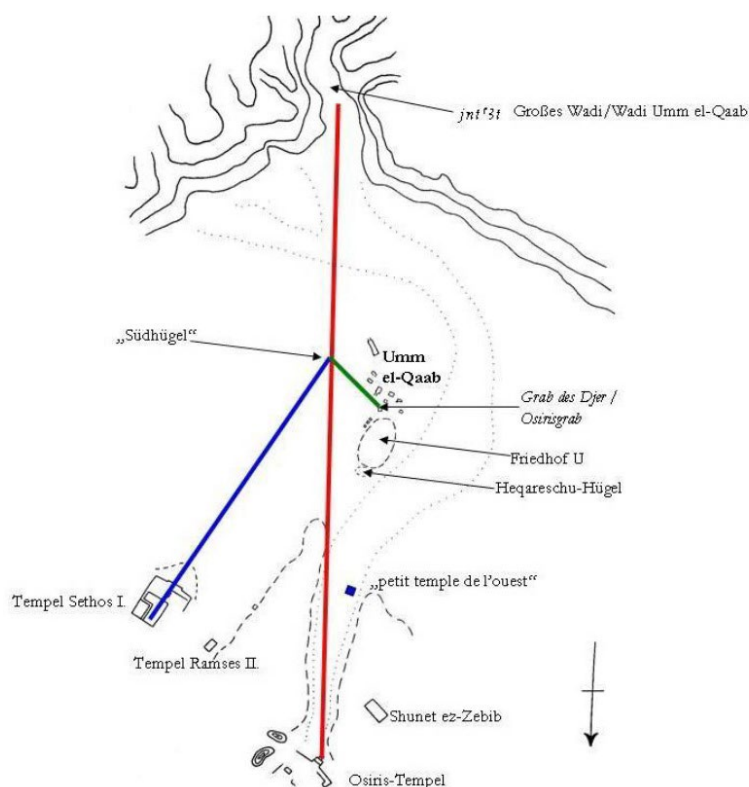
Generally, by the 6th dynasty new practices are preserved such as *kȝ* chapels and private cult sites with the presence of offering tables, a trend which lasts well into the MK and onwards. The FIP plays a significant role in this transition with numerous variations and changes occurred in the funerary cult. Legros (2016) identified in the royal necropolis of Pepi I at Saqqara at least 90 offering tables in their original cultic context, representing only about ten percent of the offering tables recorded in this specific area, dating between the late OK-FIP (2016: 59). These findings indicate an active and public funerary cult dedicated to the deceased royal consort and members of the elite. This practice suggests that offering tables no longer only served as "passive" offering places, but their function had become "active" elements within a cultic context that included funerary offering rituals, as well as a general ancestor cult (see 4.5.1; 7.2.5).

It appears that, over time, two types of offering rituals were conducted in connection with burials; one was performed outside the burial chamber, and one was symbolically taking place inside it. The tomb became the theatre of life preserving acts connecting the deceased with the living, and vice versa, though it also functioned as a kind of magazine containing the powerful presence and force of something sacred/divine, strengthened by each recurring ritual (Mostafa 1982:9). According to Mostafa (1982), the two ceremonies meant an improved assurance of the permanent welfare and survival of the *kȝ*.

Hartwig Altenmüller (1972) studied *Pyramid Texts* from the OK and has interpreted what he calls the *Dramatische Texte* (Dramatic Texts) included in them. Through directions, lists and sometimes direct address, these texts appear to describe ritual procedures. By comparing them to representations of funerary scenes in the Theban tomb of Rekhmire (TT100), an attempt was made to establish the sequence of funeral rituals, which included the embalming procedure, equipment rituals, Opening of the Mouth, recitation of directions, offering rituals, the actual entombment, and many other aspects of performances carried out during burial ceremonies. Recurring acts during almost each and every step of these funerary rituals were incense burning, "gifts of water" and "pouring of water" accompanied by "appeals" and "addresses" (Altenmüller 1972; see 7.2.2 [App I:2.4.1-2]), indicating acts connected to and using offering tables.

In Otto's (1960) study of the Opening of the Mouth Ceremony, NK tombs, especially that of Rekhmire (TT 100), are used to establish a viable sequence of the OMC. However, despite Otto (1960)'s almost complete account, the actual location where the ritual was performed, is hardly discernible. Nevertheless, Otto (1960)'s analysis of the OMC is very informative, not the least through its sequencing and clarification of the ceremony's essential elements: purification rituals before the statue/coffin, the handover acts and descriptions of various utensils, slaughter rituals, the offering of a heart and leg, the opening of the mouth with an adze and *psš-kf*, anointing and censing, invocation and specified offering rituals involving lists of food items, vegetation, and beverages. The main actors within the ceremony are cult functionaries such as the *sm*-priest, *ẖrỉ-ḥbt*, *ỉmỉ-ẖnt*, and *r-pꜥ.t*. Other participants include the *smr* and the "beloved son". The role of cult functionaries and other participants is to animate the statue, or mummy, through a series of invocations, as well as symbolic acts intended to rejuvenate and restore essential body functions of the deceased by providing their food requirements.

The Concepts of the Soul

Related to the aim in providing a holistic assessment of the offering table as a medium for shared socio-religious practice is also the ancient Egyptian concept of the soul and individual agency. As stated by O'Neill (2015), whilst paraphrasing Bickel (1998): "Religious concepts were constantly rethought" (O'Neill 2015: 29; Bickel 1998: 164). Accordingly, as ideologies changed within the cycle of seasonal changes, everything found itself in a constant flux and the various components that constitute Cosmos, and the beings who are part of it, need to be sustained, as well as replenished, by individuals, victuals, the manipulation of the elements, etc. All of these numerous and diverse components created a whole, a belief that perhaps was the fundamental concept underlying the ancient Egyptian belief system. A restoration of the numerous, vital components that constituted a living human being might mean that a deceased person would be able to live again, though in another form of existence. Ancient Egyptian funerary ritual concentrated on creating a different kind of being (Nyord 2013: 196). Ancient Egyptian concepts of the soul and how it could be manipulated, revived and nourished through *ḥkꜣ* are vital for an understanding of any funerary ritual and utensils associated with it [App II:2.2]. Death was considered to be a kind of rite of passage as outlined by Van Gennep (1961), incorporating rituals involving the breaking down or separation of elements that made up the previously living person in order to create a new being with an entirely different kind of existence (van Gennep 1961; O'Neill 2015: 40).

The most complicated aspect of a human being was his/her non-physical aspects/agents. The part of the soul named the *kꜣ* has been and still is a topic widely discussed amongst Egyptologists (see Nyord 2019). The sign for *kꜣ* is composed of two upraised arms as if in an embrace, a sign of worship, or receiving/giving offerings. At death, the *kꜣ* is temporarily separated from the body only to return when certain ceremonies have taken place to nourish it [App II:2.2.1]. The energy, or essence,

provided to *kꜣ* was transferable from body to object, as well as from generation to generation (Bárta 2011: 237).

A statue (or other image) of a deceased could for example be believed to be a "transient receptacle for the presence or essence [*bꜣ*] of the god" (Teeter 2011: 43). *kꜣ* and *bꜣ* could be made "free-flowing" via the use of liquids and thus enabled to travel from one place to another, as well as from one element to another (Teeter 2011: 44). Offering tables and similar libation vessels were tools designed for the purpose of manipulating these properties of the soul (or individual) [App II:2.2.1-2].

According to Assmann (1998), the *bꜣ* was able to restore the physical properties of the deceased, such as movement, materiality, fertility, etc., while the *kꜣ* restored status, agency, and identity and was thus of a more *immaterial nature* than *bꜣ* and able to pass on to the next generation (Assmann 1998a: 384–403). Accordingly, creative acts could be accomplished through embraces (or at least physical contact) transmitting the vital force of *kꜣ*. Gordon (1996) states that the *kꜣ* may be an "animating life force" and an "impersonal vital energy that makes the world live and function" (Gordon 1996: 35). *kꜣ*'s life-providing energy could be stored, transmitted and/or nurtured via parts from certain animals, such as a calf's leg, a bull's head, bread, vegetables — all the required offerings, often depicted on offering tables and similar *materia magica*.

2.4 FUNERARY CULTS AND TYPOLOGY

Death is a process of separation, a detachment of elements of the soul, of the self and of society, through which the deceased individual obtains a new identity, and personal agency (O'Neill 2015: 40; Assmann 2005: 174). A funerary ritual thus constitutes an embodiment, a tangible visualisation of a concept, an idea. As in a theatre piece a ritual needs props, and the most essential one might be the offering table, the central piece of the ceremony. Thus, the study of the many aspects of the offering table, in accordance with the meaning of archaeology, is a study of human activity through the recovery and analysis of material culture. Ritual actions taking place in inner inaccessible areas, as well as outer accessible areas are represented in texts and visual representations, as well as through tomb fixtures, such as the offering table. An understanding of the funerary cults and their variation through time across the Egyptian landscape will allow for a holistic interpretation of the offering table and its role within a socio-religious setting.

In his *Traité d'histoire des religions* from 1949, Mircia Eliade claimed that the act of sacrifice and offerings can be seen as the ritual re-enactment of the first primaeval sacrifice, which is essentially a foundation myth, becoming the archetype for every subsequent sacrificial act (Eliade 1996:346). Similarly, Assmann (1990a) argues that offerings or sacrifices are both cosmological and regenerative and explained through concepts such as *mꜣꜥt* and The Eye of Horus (*ỉrt-ḥr* and *wḏꜣt*, 1990a: 161,186). Such sacred acts are part of a process of unification of different parts, like the dualisms found in the landscape and in the funerary/living transitional sphere: the necropolis and tomb (see 7.4.1; 7.5 [App II:4.0]).

Mortuary rituals in ancient Egypt appear to have been concerned with concealing the terrifying aspects of death, understood as a definite state of separation from the living (Assmann 2001). Instead, death was presented as a transformative process similar to birth, a passage between two realms of existence (Eaton 2013: 16). Ritual scenes, as well as utensils, were manipulated in shape, size, material, etc. to mimic movements and impersonate entities associated with Cosmos, such as movements of celestial bodies and the Nile inundation (Eaton 2013: 16). The mortuary cult intended to present the deceased individual as different from society by means of associating them

with the past and the future, as well as the constancy and life-preserving forces of Cosmos (Harrington 2012: 29).

The oldest known offering ritual from ancient Egypt is Rahotep's prayer from Medum dating to the 4th Dynasty, consisting of an invocation to Anubis on the false door of his tomb. The *ḥtp di nsw.t* formula ("an offering which the king gives") soon became standardised in all royal, as well as non-royal, tombs, together with the mentioning of additional offerings constituting the offering lists (Bárta 2011: 239; Barta 1963: 2; see 3.4.3.5; 7.2.4-5).

The first mentioning of Osiris as a funerary deity may be attested to the 5th Dynasty, specifically in Pyramid Texts in the Pyramid of Unas (c. 2375-2345 BCE) (Quirke 2001: 44-45). Smith (2017: 173-4) suggests an even earlier date, during the reign of Reneferef. The living king was then still associated with the sun god Re, but the deceased had become more closely related to Osiris, becoming the deity himself after a series of complex rituals (Quirke 2001: 45). The notions of a transformation of the deceased into Osiris are related to complex and multi-faceted Egyptian perceptions of the nature(s) of the human soul(s) and its (their) survival after death.

The funerary cult is one of the most elusive aspects of ancient Egyptian religion, despite being defined by an extensive funerary culture centred around necropoleis and the use of various paraphernalia, not to mention the unique preservation of the corpse. The Egyptian afterlife is focused on transformation and sustenance (Taylor 2001), the very core of the funerary cult, and offering tables support and encapsulate such concepts in a practical way. Tangible evidence of the practices and beliefs are mainly found in decorated and inscribed elite mortuary structures in Thebes, Memphis, and Abydos, creating a significant bias in defining funerary ritual practice (Quirke 2015: 202; Richards 2005). The influence of these three important sites can, however, be identified across the Egyptian funerary landscape in iconography and textual evidence. The funerary cults, especially those pertaining to offering tables, trays and soul-houses may be summarised by three main aspects: performative, ceremonial, and commemorative.

2.4.1. Performance: The Funeral and Cultic Focus

The performance of a ritual, especially a funerary one, is especially linked to space. Each ritual occurrence is assigned to a specific area within a tomb, which is why the position of offering tables is vital to their function. This is especially true while exploring iconography in Theban 18th Dynasty tombs. As outlined by Hays & Schenck (2007: 97), text and iconography present on tomb walls can be divided into two categories: collective ritual and personal recitations. Collective rituals are identified via the presence of official ritual offering texts and lists on tomb walls, accompanied by depictions of priests and other participants performing rituals for the deceased. These presentations differ from "personal recitations" since they are not assumed to be performed by the deceased for their own benefit (Hays & Schenck 2007: 97). The depicted scenes are found at the end of accessible areas where the funerary ritual would be performed, including the OMC, offerings and closing rites. *Pyramid Texts* are often collective in nature (e.g., 7.2.2), while later excerpts from the *Book of the Dead* are more personal, concerning actions assumed to be performed by the deceased. The tomb of Rekhmire (TT100), in particular, is decorated in a highly sophisticated manner with scenes from his role as vizier, found in the more external parts of the tomb, leading to a long, narrow corridor depicting scenes of his funerary procession, ritual re-enactments, as well as sacraments, while incorporating offering lists and formulae all the way up to the false door (Hays & Schenck 2007:101-103). At the end of the passage is one of the most complete depictions of the OMC as well as the funeral processions, which were already a common feature in MK tombs. These depictions of collective funeral processions, involving priests, family members, mourners, servants, etc., became the "cultic focus" of the tomb itself (Hays & Schenck 2007: 102 [App I:2.4.3]).

Traditionally, the funerary rituals may be defined as the transition of a deceased person into a different realm of existence, specifically by the treatment of their actual remains, or their symbolic representation (Tamorri 2017: 445-55). This means that the body is treated and acted upon from the moment the person dies until s/he is finally entombed. Funerary rituals also attend to the social and emotional needs of mourners and descendants, and generally intend to eternally secure the maintenance and nourishment of the deceased. By handing down or transferring titles and property to successors, a funerary process also functions as an economic transaction. Funerary rituals combined with the presentation of the corpse aid the community in achieving an equilibrium by creating a close relationship between the living and the dead, as well as by assigning important roles to the deceased, like changing them into ancestral entities, while simultaneously re-assigning them roles in the social hierarchy of the living (Turner 1973: 1100; Tamorri 2017: 462). Like most other ritual funerary observances, funerary rites are carried out in accordance to a strictly established sequence, supported by cultic experts and a religious, mythological substructure, reflected in imagery, utensils, texts, and monuments [App I: 2.4.1-3].

2.4.2. The Opening of the Mouth Ceremony

Offering tables and similar material from religious contexts across Egypt may have played a central role in the execution of the Opening of the Mouth Ceremony, *wpt rꜥ*, among the oldest known ritual practices, which may date to the mid-3rd millennium BCE (Quirke 2015: 89; see 7.3 [App I:2.4.3]). It is, arguably, the most common of ancient Egyptian rituals, occurring in both funerary and temple contexts, especially when associated with statues of kings and the upper elite. Its importance was assured by the beginning of the 4th Dynasty. By the 18th Dynasty the ritual was composed of several instances involving the use of numerous magical utensils, such as an adze and votive representations of fingers. The main objective of the OMC, specifically within a funerary context, was to reanimate the mummy, call upon the deceased's *kꜣ* and thus enable them to receive offerings. The mummy, or representation of the deceased, is re-animated by regaining qualities and functions they had as a living being, restoring the deceased's senses. It may also be understood as an act intended to purify the corpse (Teeter 2011: 140: Roth 1993: 57-8). This is achieved through the activation of the mummy/statue, especially the eyes and mouth, by presenting/touching them with numerous devices, generally related to embalming practices, the manufacture of statues and coffins, as well as slaughter. The ceremony itself is a rite of passage for the deceased who in the world of the living starts out as an individual who dies, becomes an inanimate corpse and, through the ritual combination of various entities is eventually resurrected, and thus becomes an *ꜣḫ* in the afterlife [App II:2.2.3].

The longest recorded sequences of the ritual derive from Thebes, including the D. 18 Tomb of Rekhmire (TT100), D.19 Tomb of Seti I (TT17), and the D.26 funerary chapel of Amenirdis I at Medinet Habu (Quirke 2015: 231; Otto 1960; Ayad 2010). The OMC may have occurred at several instances during the funeral, initially performed on the mummy itself during the embalming ritual and then on the coffin, as well as the deceased's statue. The sequence, most thoroughly outlined and described by Otto (1960), may be divided into the following themes: purification, presentations and offerings, and the opening of the mouth, nostrils, and eyes using various implements [App I:2.4.3].

It is unclear where exactly the OMC took place and it may even have occurred at the workshop where the deceased's statue was commissioned for the funeral, since the statue is often depicted as being subject to incense rituals during its transportation to the tomb (see Otto 1959; Eaton-Krauss 1984). Offering tables and similar material may be related to this ceremony. This is mostly due to the multilocational nature of the ceremony as well as the variety of multifaceted utensils

used throughout. The diversity and multifunctional nature of the offering table will in section 7.3 be connected with an analysis of the OMC.

The utensils used in the ceremony and mentioned in sacred texts, as well as being depicted by imagery present on some offering tables and tomb walls, include an *adze*, an axe with the cutting-edge perpendicular to the handle, a censer, a blade, and a calf's leg. Other utensils present at the ceremony are *ḥs*-vases, a copper sieve, copper offering tables, and several miniature containers (Willems 2016:163). The containers could probably be the pottery offering trays and miniature offering tables that often have been found inside burial chambers, rather than in the offering chapels or courtyards (Willems 2016:168). Macy Roth (1993) interpreted the Opening of the Mouth ritual as a birthing and nourishing ritual, especially due to the presence of utensils such as the *psš-kf* knife interpreted as a symbolic reed-knife, which was previously used to sever the umbilical cord (1993: 60). By the MK, the OMC appears to have been a funerary, "nourishment" ritual, occurring repeatedly and performed in front of or above the burial chamber probably using an offering table (Roth 1993: 60-64). The offering table, in all its variations may have been a multifaceted ritual utensil used in the numerous steps of this particular ceremony which is also a multilocational and multifunctional ritual process in ancient Egyptian ritual tradition.

2.4.3. Memory: Ancestor Cult

A funeral is a social affair, as evidenced from documents recovered from the workmen's village of Deir el-Medina (ca. 1550–1080 BCE) (Harrington 2012: 33; see 7.2.4-5). Since women were not part of the workforce, they were responsible for the ancestor cult, as well as performing specific religious duties related to the deceased and the gods. This is illustrated by numerous stelae also found at Deir el-Medina (Harrington 2012: 33; see 7.2.5; 7.3; 7.5). The mortuary cult during this period was carried out within a domestic context, as well as in the vicinity of tombs and within tomb chapels, based on an intimate "principle of reciprocity", rather than being part of any official cult (Harrington 2012: 63). This explains the different types of ritual utensils required and how they changed according to use. They may have been intended as part of a funeral ritual and accordingly manufactured for single use, providing a holistic view of the role of the offering table within Egyptian society.

The final rites provided to the deceased, "coming of the voice", *prt-ḫrw* (stage 15 – Table 7.1), are generally depicted as an offering scene, with the deceased and their spouse faced by numerous priests and offering bearers standing by tables heaped with victuals and receptacles. Accompanying the offering scene is an offering list containing detailed offerings and their quantities, necessary for the symbolic feeding of *kꜣ* as well as for any ritual needed to be performed, including the *zꜣṯ*-pouring ritual [App I:2.4.1]. This mortuary service was frequently carried out by *sm*-priests and/or family members utilising the ritual utensils described in the lists, as well as uttering spells essential for a correct execution of the rites. Such ceremonies were performed daily within the necropolis, or on specific calendrical days in the form of festivals. In some cases, the celebrants may have accessed offering chambers within the tombs, using offering tables permanently installed in such places, often in the vicinity of false doors and depicted offering lists/scenes.

The Act of Offering

The offering ritual would involve three main actions: libation, purification, and censing (O'Neill 2015: 57; Altenmüller 1972). These acts apparently accompanied any ritual/offering dedicated to the deceased person and/or divine entity. According to Barta (1963), what he calls *Speisungsrituals,* eating rituals, emerged in connection with the Osiris cult and adhered to ritual offering instructions for over 90 items, making up Barta's so called Type A list (1963: 75). Other types (B-E) are all similar

but contain different combinations of offerings and associated rituals. By the MK such lists became associated with the OMC and can be found in both royal and non-royal funerary contexts (O'Neill 2015: 58).

These offering lists are composed of detailed quantities of specific offerings (116 offerings) and ritual utensils and were usually found next to offering tables or scenes depicting them in funerary complexes, from the OK onwards (PT23-171). Barta (1963) compiled and categorised numerous offering lists from the OK to the G-RP, basing his categorisation on funerary inventories as well as rituals. He divided the lists into offerings connected with the provision of victuals to the deceased, i.e., sustaining the $k\ni$, and ritual utensils or vessels required for the performance of offering rituals. Barta emphasises a clear transition from offering lists being solely present in royal funerary contexts to intricate lists with relevant iconography present in non-royal tombs, widening access to the Osirian funerary cult (Barta 1963, O'Neill 2015:13). Hays (2010) argues that the greater offering list is present in the non-royal tomb of Debeheni at Giza, predating the offering list present in the Unas complex, indicating that this transition is not exactly straightforward and may depend of different states of preservation (Hays 2012: 89). The offering ritual may be divided into two action cycles: the first concerns the Type 1B offering list which may have occurred before burial and involved the $ḥnḳt$-offering and, therefore, this specific type of depicted offering table); the second involves the offering rituals during the mortuary service. These actions may also be labelled as the Lesser and Greater Offering Rituals (see 7.2.2, Table 7.1, stages 12, 15 [App I:2.4.1]).

Offering tables, basins and trays obtained symbolic power through the pouring of liquids, mainly water. By reciting utterances from funerary texts as well as invocations, the offerings and symbols depicted on such utensils would be "activated", and thus enabled to vitalize and empower the liquids that were poured over them and used to effectuate the intentions of the rituals. Acts of libation constituted an essential part of all funerary rituals (Hölzl 2005: 311).

Libations, the act of pouring out offerings (e.g., $z\ni\underline{t}$), may thus have symbolised mythical journeys across the mr n $ḥ\ni$ (Winding Waterway) represented by canals and basins incorporated in offering table design. Processions involving the use of boats may have been replaced by libation rituals performed within the context of funerary rituals (see Derchain 1955: 238-239; Kessler 1987: 74-87). Willems (1988) claims that the *Stundenwachen* and boat processions may be one and the same, even though the *Stundenwachen* seems to be a "static" ritual, not involving any processional elements. It was nevertheless a transitional act, and its "nautical element" may have been an indication of libations connected with offerings (Willems 1988: 158). He refers to the BM stela 1372 where a man is depicted carrying what may be a libation basin, as well as three model boats, towards a corpse lying on a podium (Willems 1988: 158; HTBM I, pl. 54). Offering tables, and their symbolic, transformative power, were essential to most libation ceremonies (see Hölzl 2005). Pouring liquids upon them was often considered to be a symbolic re-enactment of funerary rituals. Through the recitation of offering lists, offerings depicted on the tables could be believed to become charged with power through the act of libation (Hölzl 2005: 311).

Elements of the funerary cult, especially those pertaining to activation, transformation, and rejuvenation rituals remained central to the rites and thus maintained the crucial importance of the offering table. The unifying concept is particularly evident in the OMC, which is connected with rejuvenation, protection and transformation of the mummy within the mythologized context of Osirian beliefs and rituals.

Ritual utensils such as the offering table can be placed within their sacred environment, such as a tomb, but also within a wider surrounding ritual and physical landscape to define its use and significance. For our purposes, 'landscape' is defined by the environment, daily existence, actions and the cosmic harmony animated by the faith and actions of practitioners, who motivate its shape, material, function and placement (Branton 2009; Hood 1996; Tilley 1994). The ancient Egyptian tomb constituted a meeting place between two separate realms where Cosmos was ritually maintained through various means and tools (Harrington 2015: 144; see also Chauvet 2011), generally centred around an offering table.

2.5.1. Space to Place: Creating Sacred Landscapes

Space may be defined as a physical as well as social landscape, imbued with meaning via place-related, social practice. A sacred space is generally understood as an area separated from domestic, everyday life, but this does not mean that it necessarily contains specific, tangible man-made elements. Therefore, 'space' generally denotes a physical/natural universe, independent of human impact on/transformation of it. Eliade (1959: 11) defines "hierophany" as a manifestation of the sacred which may take various forms. For our purposes, a sacred or ritual landscape is explicitly where hierophany takes place or is manifested.

Boundaries between the landscape of the living and that of the dead were interconnected and may therefore show similarities (Weiss 2020: 124-5; Lundius 2020: 85). This connection between a sacred space and everyday life is crucial for an understanding of ancient Egyptian ritual. What linked the concepts of space and place to the ancient Egyptian definitions of sacred places is the need to "embody" or "personify" the landscape. Casey (1996) stresses the need to create a tangible presence to justify a place. A field, a tomb, a temple in the ancient Egyptian landscape was a way of controlling chaos and transforming it into an ordered cosmos. This had to be done on a regular basis, just as tending to an irrigation field, carrying out temple administration or even performing rituals administered in a tomb. The places themselves embodied Cosmos, just as the Pharaoh both embodied and maintained it (see Memphite sacred landscape in Magli 2013: 22, 2011: 5-7;). Therefore, a sacred landscape is vulnerable and subject to decay if not properly maintained. Such notions are apparent in Egyptian iconography, with its frequent depictions of guardians, custodians, and protectors and in the design of objects serving such purposes (Quirke 2015: 131-132). The depiction of Wepwawet, the "opener of ways" on over 600 stelae found in Asyut indicates how elements in the natural landscape were used to emphasise or define the sacred space and also how it could function on a metaphysical level with the aid of manifested gods (see DuQuesne 2009).

The tomb itself is a specific liminal space where an event created a connection between two realms via the use of offering tables. According to Casey (1996) water is a "transcending" means of contact, just like roads and mountain passes. The pouring of water onto offering tables in such a liminal, sacred space therefore mimics these features in the landscape (see 7.4.4a). "The very "transition" effected by passing through a threshold is inextricably place-bound, and its description requires an entire paraphernalia of place predicates (e.g., "boundary" and "zone")" (Casey 1996: 37-38).

The creation of place out of space is evident through the manipulation of the physical landscape to accommodate the needs of both the living and the deceased. The elite were able to build their tombs in the vicinity of power, whether it be natural sources of life and fertility, such as floodplains and irrigation fields, or close to deceased kings and high officials who served as guarantors of eternal life (Bárta 2011: 233; see also Roth 1988). There was a social hierarchy in place in both royal and provincial cemeteries across ancient Egypt. In general terms, ideal burial grounds in the desert were reserved for the wealthy, while lower levels of society may have been buried in the outskirts of settlements. This tendency created a bias in the archaeological record, especially since settled

areas have often been subject to cultivation practices and flooding (Wada 2007: 349). Notions about limits between the sacred and the profane may be hard to define, especially since sacred space was often imbued in the domestic contexts of everyday life. It is, therefore, important to consider whether the individuals in ancient Egypt experienced sacredness as we would define it in modern terms (Qurike 2015: 39).

As seen in the introductory quote from *The Instruction of Hardjedef*, the funerary landscape was not only reserved for the dead, but was especially important to the living, symbolising life rather than the finality of death and, therefore, heavily embedded in the living landscape (see 5.5; 7.2.4-5). The juxtaposition between elements of the living, filled with agency and creating actions, and the inactive elements of the dead, characterised by silence and preservation, may be evidenced throughout Egypt in nearly all time periods. Both features of existence are evidenced in tomb architecture and decoration. The coffin itself has been defined as a "Chest of Life" *ḥn n ʿnḫ*, designed to preserve life and not simply store the corpse of a loved one (Willems 1988: 47). Ritual objects are therefore especially bound to their surrounding sacred landscape and similarly vary and involve according to changing customs and practices.

To establish a sacred environment, celestial and natural symbols present in the landscape such as primordial hills, etc. were incorporated in temples and funerary architecture fomenting a relationship between the immaterial and material realm (Allen 1989: 50-51). The funerary landscape at North Saqqara was arranged around elite tombs on the eastern plateau facing the floodplains (Reader 2017). The rise of non-elite tombs in the desert shows a growing need for visibility. At a certain point the shaft tombs were oriented towards the settlements themselves (e.g., Dashur) showing a connection between the living and the dead.

Landscape phenomenology in places such as OK Saqqara centred around visibility and accessibility, rather than size and execution (Nuzzolo 2017: 289). Cemeteries were often visible from settlements, especially rock-cut tombs or *saff* tombs at Middle and Upper Egyptian sites. Rural settlements and farmland could be seen from tomb entrances, creating a visible connection between the realm of the dead and that of the living. Examples may be found at El-Kab (e.g., Tomb of Ahmose overlooking El-Kab through a doorframe containing the inscription, *ḥtp=i m ḥrt irt.n=i ḏs=i* "I rest in the tomb that I myself built"), and the workers' village of Deir el Medina, which was literally in the shadow of their dead (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2: Overview of the workers village of Deir el-Medina from the elite tombs in the upper cemetery (Photograph by author, 2018).

North Saqqara illustrates how a ritual, mortuary landscape was created and maintained over the course of 3000 years. With the rise of non-elite tombs in the desert there was a growing need for visibility, emphasising the view of inundated fields (Reader 2017: 71). In MK tombs, the deceased was often laid on the left side facing the east as well as a pair of eyes on the external (and occasionally internal) side of the coffin. This direction was in fact where the offering rituals would take place on the opposite side of a false door and/or stelae also depicting such eyes, creating a link to the realm of the living (Taylor 1989: 15-16; Bourriau 1988: 89; see 7.5). This orientation was slightly changed, though the same notion remained. In northern Dashur during late MK the orientation of shaft tombs appears to have been of less importance compared to elite tombs. There seemed to be a larger emphasis on formal geographical orientation and towards the settlement itself (Yazawa 2017: 540; Seidlmayer 1990: 443). During the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods, the fault lines between the two realms were blurred further. In G-RP Deir el-Medina for example, numerous festivals, pilgrimages and growing tourism changed the funerary landscape, transforming it into a liminal space for the funerary cult, as well as a place of permanent habitation (Montserrat & Meskell 1997:183).

The physical landscape in ancient Egypt was linked to order and the unification of contrasting elements. In the OK, a ritual landscape constituted a "landscape of power", a manifestation of Cosmos (Magli 2013: 22). A more direct reason behind the establishment of a ritual landscape may be its surroundings and natural features. In the Upper Egyptian Nile valley, during the MK, ancient Egyptians buried their dead in the lower edge of the desert near the cliffs, a landscape associated with death and chaos since this is where, visually, the sun goes to die. The reason behind burying their dead in the west and at the edge of the arid cliffs may have also been practical since it preserved the valuable, fertile land in the floodplains (Richards 2005: 63). Although a sacred landscape was constructed to mirror Cosmos, it was still dependent on the shape and specific character of the actual natural landscape. This is evidenced by sites such as Giza, Saqqara, Memphis, etc., where the location of sacred buildings was not only strategic but significantly symbolic, in tune with the Cosmos, social customs, and ideology (Arnold 2015; Love 2006).

Regions differ to a great extent from the First Cataract to the shores of the Mediterranean, as well as from East to West. Upper Egypt (*šmꜥ*) and Lower Egypt (*tꜣ mḥw*) and *km.t* and *dšrt* were differentiated since pre-dynastic times (Quirke 2015: 16). The unification of Upper and Lower Egypt has often been described as the epitome of ancient Egyptian culture as well as what established stability and power in ancient Egyptian ideology. The Nile, for example, was associated with Osiris and his efflux, while the fertile floodplains were associated with Isis since they were irrigated by the Nile creating new life in the form of vegetation (Quirke 2015: 152 [App II:2.4]). Since it is a space created and inhabited through life and activity a landscape can thus not be considered as a "passive spatial reality" (Tilley 1994: 15-17; Borges Pires 2017: 153).

The dualism within the Egyptian landscape created existential spaces where gods manifested themselves, explained in Egyptian ideology as creation stories. The creation ideas are methods of establishing ownership by a divine presence over a sacred place (and vice versa). However, since these stories are also of human creation, the delimitation of space into place may also be a method for political control. Bussmann (2010) outlines several examples of how upholders of centralised power built temples for specific gods in order to assert dominance over a landscape. Early provincial temples underwent a historical transformation from local to royal institutions during the 3rd millennium BCE (e.g., Hierakonpolis, 2010: 11). Simple provincial temples remained despite the emergence of royal cultic centres, reflecting local variations and a dynamic interaction between local traditions and the centralised pharaonic cult (Bussmann 2010: 12).

Aspects of the landscape were believed to reflect Cosmos, not only through the dynamic dichotomy of elements such as the life-giving water of the Nile and the sterile desert etc., but also through

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passivity and rest – like the primordial waters and the efflux of Osiris that activated the fecundity of the Nile water. This interaction between static and non-static elements is reflected by funerary architecture and tomb fittings. Ramesside period temples align all liminal/transitional elements such as gateways, courtyards, and causeways in order to create an image of movement and transition between different states, emphasising the permeability between secular and divine spheres (Rummel 2018: 263). Similarly, MK coffins such as those found at Deir el-Bersha depict maps including water systems and fields, referred to as "The Book of Two Ways" and may be representations of the *dwзt* (Willems 1988: e.g., cat no B3L). The "Winding Waterway" has also been identified as *the ecliptic arch* (Allen 2012: 24) (i.e., the centre of the *zodiac*, a celestial belt through which the Sun, the Moon and the planets appear to move). This "waterway", divides the sky in two and according to ancient Egyptians, flowed from east to west between the northern "Field of Rest" and the southern "Field of Reeds" (Priskin 2019: 153; Allen 2012: 24-5). Ancient Egyptians believed that the sky was a dynamic agent and not just a static background to the Cosmos (Conman 2003: 34-36; Lesko 1972: 1-3). Furthermore, the vigorous, ever-changing sky was traversed by celestial bodies in the form of gods often depicted standing on board boats (Conman 2003: 39).

As outlined by Assmann (2007), ideas of cosmos and creation were significantly influenced by hieroglyphic signs and writing. A sacred landscape was defined by specific elements, such as a pyramid or an obelisk (Assmann 2007: 27-29). Tombs may sometimes mimic the *pr*-sign, just like offering tables often came in the shape of *ḥtp*. The natural landscape was also reflected in hieroglyphs transcribed into tangible structures, such as monuments and religious utensils (Allen 1989: 69). The constellation Ursa Minor was depicted as two adzes, usually associated to the OMC, an essential part of funerary rituals (see 7.3). To solidify a sacred environment, celestial symbols and natural ones present in the landscape (e.g., primordial hills, etc.) were incorporated in temple/tomb architecture. An example would be the *serdab* at the Step Pyramid in Saqqara. A statue of Djoser is located inside the small square structure with sloping walls only visible through two small openings corresponding to his eyes at a 12-degree angle. The holes are perfectly aligned towards a star within the Ursa Major constellation and one from the Ursa Minor, creating a direct connection between the immaterial and material realm as well as the two adzes required to revive the *kз* every night (Allen 1989: 50-51).

Outer decorations of MK coffins show *wḏз.t*-eyes, painted along the front side by the head-end of the coffin. This side of the coffin was oriented east, therefore allowing the deceased, who lay sideways inside the coffin (Willems 1988: 120), to watch the sunrise and participate in the solar cycle. The deceased could also "see" the offerings provided in the tomb chapel, which was also almost always located east in the offering chamber above. Two architectural elements also appear depicted in the coffin: a false door combined with the *wḏз.t*-eyes and an offering table, both of which were placed before the entrance of the tomb chamber in a designated offering place in the late OK, with a similar orientation and set up (Willems 1988: 120; see 7.5). Every component within a tomb therefore had its fixed place and orientation reflecting Cosmos, also evident in the placement and function of the offering table.

2.5.2. The Necropoleis and Realm of the Dead
The ordered/cosmic landscape was composed of two main elements: the natural landscape including the sky and its celestial bodies, and the "memorial landscape", i.e., ancient monuments built by Pharaohs or individuals with similar religious-political backgrounds (Magli 2013: 156). A tomb thus becomes a microcosm, a unification of dichotomies, and a meeting place, symbolising rest/eternity that in combination with life/change thus mirrors human existence.

The realm of the deceased has in ancient Egypt been described as "the land that loves silence" (Taylor 2001: 13), though this did not mean that sound was excluded from the abode of the dead. A tomb could be labelled as *pr ḏt* "house of eternity" (Taylor 2001: 31), a specific liminal place where *events* connected two realms. Rituals involved all senses, but specifically sound – songs, chants, and spoken formulas passed through walls and across the boundaries that separated worshipers from sacred and often secluded, sealed realms. Rituals were frequently performed in a space close to the walled-up burial chamber where the corpse of the deceased rested (Figure 2.3). In such abodes of public access communal meals, the OMC and other actions centred around the offering table. Sounds from such areas reached secluded areas, just like the consecrated water from offering tables ran into the confined spaces of the deceased (see 7.4.4). These aspects of a surrounding sacred space are essential to decipher in order to identify the context of the offering tables and therefore their designated role within the funerary cult and associated ritual behaviours.

Figure 2.3: Plan of a Theban elite tomb with solar/heavenly activities marked in red, realm of the dead marked in blue, earthly activities in green, and where ritual actions take place in yellow. Numbering according to Dodson & Ikram (2008: 82, 81): 1-2 images of tomb owner, 3-4 images of outdoor activities in non-domestic contexts, 5-6 crafts and outdoor activities in domestic contexts, biography of deceased, 7-8 cultic focus.
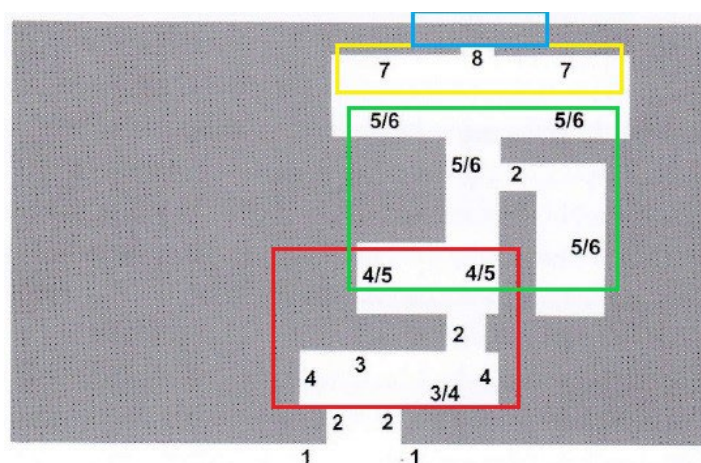
Inside tombs there was a constant interplay between "presence" and "absence" (Nyord 2013: 198). The term *prt-ir-ḫrw* can be translated as "coming forth at the voice" illustrating how the deceased's *kꜣ* can reach different points of the tomb, especially by thresholds or other crucial liminal points within a tomb structure. The term is present on numerous offering rituals indicating how crucial it was to create areas inside a place dedicated to connectivity of both tangible and intangible elements (Nyord 2013: 199 [App I:2.4.1]). The differentiation of space was mostly to create one which was ritually charged, and one which was the place where the activation/charge could take place. The burial chamber, like the coffin/sarcophagus, would function as a womb providing the environment necessary for the rebirth of the deceased and induce them with a new identity and agency (Willems 1988: 46). Based on NK Theban tombs, the tomb consisted of three zones: a solar/heavenly realm composed of a superstructure or statue, an earthly realm reflected in the courtyard, chapel, stelae and false doors and the shaft entrance, and the realm of the dead in the *dwꜣt,* which included the substructures, shaft, and burial chamber (Harrington 2012: 86).

Margaret Maitland (2018), inspired by the social anthropologist Mary Douglas' (2003: 4) ideas about purity, pollution and taboo within religious thinking, studied how notions about cleanliness and dirtiness were reflected in the design of ancient Egyptian tombs. She states for example that some architectural features were intended to offer protection from external pollutants and impurities, like courtyards, whilst at the same time they provided a platform for butchery and the organisation of offerings (Maitland 2018: 61), also performed on offering tables in a very stark way (see 5.5). Tomb fixtures, fittings and paraphernalia were all means of imposing order to what may have been considered as fundamentally impure and potentially chaotic.

It has been assumed that the Egyptian tomb functioned as "a kind of lens capturing and diffracting the past, present and future" (Nyord 2013: 195). An important funerary landscape element, therefore, is the Egyptian concepts of space and time: *nḥḥ* and *ḏt*. The term *nḥḥ* refers to the flux of human life reflected in cosmic cycles, such as the seasons influencing agricultural activities and religious ritual, while *ḏt* was a term used to describe time and eternity in the realm of the gods and that of the dead (Gregory 2017: 143-178; Nyord 2013: 201;). Such a distinction is reflected in tomb design, specifically elements that re-define the deceased as another species than a living being, who is subject to temporal cycles such as birth, decay, and regeneration. Outside the burial chamber was the realm of *nḥḥ*, reflected in texts and imagery relating autobiographies and narratives of the deceased (Gregory 2017: 143-178). *nḥḥ* provided sustenance which was offered to the deceased by the living. Close to the hidden inner chamber of a tomb, imagery often began to change, depicting an idealised/ethical autobiography accompanied by images of another realm, thus placing the deceased within another existence (Nyord 2013: 203-209; Kloth 2002: 221-57). Accordingly, throughout Egypt's history, the tomb served "as a place of mystery and one of memory" (O'Neill 2015: 37).

Points of departure from one world to another were indicated by statues, stelae and offering tables positioned by doorways. Accessible parts of a tomb, mainly the offering chapel, forecourt and/or *mastaba*, were areas of activity, often marked not only by imagery, but also through the distribution of fittings such as false doors and offering tables, generally facing the west (Fitzenreiter 2001:76). Implements were positioned in liminal areas, something which is especially evident from the contextual analysis of offering tables. An overview of their specific placement within the funerary landscape is essential in defining their role within the ancient Egyptian funerary cult.

In ancient Egypt the basic tomb structure was a sealed burial chamber and an outer offering chamber (Taylor 2001: 136). In the OK these structures were usually found inside a *mastaba*, a superstructure often made of mudbrick or stone also common for the non-elite until the MK and even later (Taylor 2001: 137). In most cases, there would be a delineated courtyard outside the main tomb structure, possibly furnished with vegetation and in some cases even a garden, especially during the NK (Taylor 2001: 107; see 5.5; 7.2.2-4). Non-elite tombs would mostly be composed of a shaft dug into the hill or desert surface leading to the coffin or corpse wrapped in a reed mat, and in some cases a small, delineated space for offerings. In most cases a superstructure is rarely identified, however, miniaturised substitutes may have been used such as soul-houses/offering plates placed in the vicinity of shafts, something that will be discussed throughout the thesis.

By the end of the OK, non-royals gained access to the afterlife and its associated concepts, which further altered tomb architecture. Reasons behind this observation have been widely debated by numerous scholars, resulting in a re-evaluation of what has been labelled as a "democratisation" of the afterlife (Allen 2006: 9; Smith 2017: 264). Although there are major changes in funerary religion at this time, it may have been a reflection of social change such as an increased influence of local traditions rather than an overarching royal cult. As pointed out by Smith (2017:265), religious change is rarely influenced by political instability, but rather a change in personal preference. This is certainly the case for funerary tradition, which did change between the OK and the FIP as will be outlined throughout the thesis. Non-royal elite may have already had access to royal funerary ritual between the 5th and 6th Dynasties as evidenced by the presence of offering lists, formulae, and iconographic representations of funerals (Smith 2017: 265). However, an increase in the display of funerary ritual tradition in non-royal tombs may be marking a change in personal preference as to what should be displayed (Allen 2006: 9). Royal and non-royal funerary architecture are distinct,

with one directed towards a more restricted and royal audience, while the other emphasising a more domestic setting and closer contact with the living (Allen 2006: 10). However, this distinction may be due to a difference in focus rather than privilege, with one having depictions which guarantee an afterlife and the other relying on a more interactive funerary ritual practice (Allen 2006:10) Therefore, it is important to differentiate what is meant by *access* and *display*, a difference which is highlighted in the variation and context of offering tables in the sample (Smith 2017: 268).

Nevertheless, the towards the end of the OK, the royal tradition slightly changed in regards to the role and position of the pharaoh. He was assumed to secure the inundation of the Nile and the movements of celestial bodies, aiding divinities in performing these tasks. After his death, the pharaoh was believed to exist among the stars, while his subjects were assumed to experience an afterlife resembling their previous earthbound existence (David 2007:39; Bárta 2011; 132; O'Neill 2015: 4). Accordingly, non-elite tombs resembled households and domestic settings, and were constructed as houses complete with courtyards (see 5.6). However, the fittings within a tomb generally differed from those of a common home and thus emphasised the difference between the deceased's identity/agency in life to those in death (see Harrington 2012; Bárta 2011: 94).

A specific feature of the ancient Egyptian sacred landscape and funerary rituals was the so called Butic Burial. Its connection with vegetation and fertility is part of the ancient Egyptian concept of creating mythical space centred around physical, tangible, and especially visible space. The presence of vegetation within ancient funerary contexts are related to the mythical narrative of Osiris and the creation of the primordial hill. Colonna (2014:42-73) indicates three main features in the mythical world: the hill, the waters and the tree, elements that may be found in most NK tombs[7], recreating what he refers to as "mythical space". Vegetation is often represented as a tree and therefore becomes a fixed point connecting two realms, those of the waters of Nun and the primordial hill (Colonna 2014: 65-70). The Butic burials are a tangible, concrete representation of mythical space: "lo spazio mitico, divenne cosi uno spazio fisico, concreto e tangibile"[8] (2014: 59; Figure 2.4). The ancient Egyptian funerary landscape is intrinsically linked to funerary ritual and therefore varies according to time-period and context since funerary rituals may have all been similar but were expressed differently as evidenced by the material culture.

Figure 2.4: Gardenscape referring to the rites in tꜣ ḏsr, at Sais (see 5.5.2; 7.2.2-3) at the centre of the eastern wall in the tomb of Reneny (T7) at Mo'alla (photograph by author, 2018).

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[7] As well as New Kingdom temples and other sacred areas, therefore it may be a concept that links other aspects of the sacred world. Examples of such areas include Edfu, Philae, and Dendera.
[8] "The mythical space thus became a physical, concrete and tangible space".

2.5.3. Development of Funerary Cult Space

To understand the development of the offering table as a central concept in ancient Egyptian practice, it is useful to look at the emergence of separate spaces in non-royal tombs entirely dedicated to the funerary cult. The creation of "proto-chapels" may have emerged from as early as the late Naqadian period at the prehistoric site of Tarkhan (Bárta 2011: 29-30). These chapels were made of mudbrick and connected to a burial pit via two small openings in the internal wall. The chapel was accessed through a small opening to the north containing numerous vessels for drinking/feasting (Bárta 2011: 29). Most interesting are two small openings from the chapel to the pit, indicating the emergence of a symbolic communication between the world of the living and the deceased (Bárta 2011: 30).

Since the Predynastic/early Dynastic Period areas dedicated to the dead were frequented by the living. Functional facilities such as administrative buildings, priests' households, storage facilities for written records were placed within pyramid complexes, making the entire burial ground, like that of Saqqara, a world of the living as well as that of the dead (e.g., Sahure pyramid complex, Bárta 2011: 160).

In the 5th Dynasty, at least two temples dedicated to Ra were constructed at Abu Ghurab (ca. 2445-2421 BCE) near pyramid of King Nyuserra and the mortuary temple connected to the Nile via a canal and a causeway (Borchardt 1907:5-8). The main feature was a large alabaster offering table (upper surface of the central block is ca. 1.8 meters) with four $ḥtp$-signs arranged around a circular platform (Bárta 2011: 174-5). The tables were placed within a communal and visible area, a departure point for well-established rituals to the $k3$ but within a solar context (McNamarra 2016; Bárta 2006).

Stelae became a main feature in Mastaba tombs, placed within a niche on the tomb's eastern side which became the standard offering place in private tombs throughout the OK (Legros 2016; Dodson and Ikram 2008:135-36). The practice coincides with the design of offering tables, which only became standardised by the 5th Dynasty onwards (see 3.3.1; 7.2.4 [App I:2.3.5]).

An interplay with the landscape is evident in numerous cemeteries that during the FIP to the MK were established along the western cliff-face in Middle Egypt. Shaft tombs directly cut in the less steep and more accessible areas are common and often directly positioned in front of, or below, elite tombs with elaborate facades and forecourts. Deir el-Rifeh presents an example of this with the presence of elite tombs with columned facades, under which, in the valley just below, there are countless shaft tombs. The unique number of soul-houses found at Deir el-Rifeh may indicate a dynamic and interactive use of the landscape along processional routes which are now lost (see 5.6-7). Family members, often accompanied by professional members of a priesthood, must have performed commemorative rituals using these pottery structures, which often contain canal systems and votive size basins (e.g., Hagara, Riqqeh, Abydos; see Richards 2005).

This dynamic use of the local landscape for mortuary rituals continued after the reunification of Egypt, (which followed the Intermediate Periods), especially in connection with the growing influence of nomarchs and changes in the royal cult. Regions in the south, which also used impressive cliff-faces for funerary purposes, continued and developed the tradition of making use of geographical features in their western necropoleis (see 5.2). This is evident in MK cemeteries incorporating shaft-tombs strategically positioned on cliff faces such as those in Meir, El-Tarif, Deir-El-Bahari, etc.

The funerary cult was adapted to its surrounding landscape. In Middle Egypt, inhabitants used the extensive mountain range on the west and sometimes eastern side of the Valley facing the west, to

create a socio-religious stratification of the funerary landscape, while the funerary cult changed and adapted according to alterations in ritual practice and the emergence of new local traditions, especially during the FIP (Richards 2005; Willems 2014). While the political power structure changed, so did religious behaviour. Rituals and the cult were moving closer to commoners, meaning that religion did no longer mainly serve the interest of a centralised power, i.e., the Pharaoh and the administrative centres (Richards 2005: 78-87). However, the elite may have practiced the cult in a similar manner as it was before while still showing their elite status legitimising their authority, while simultaneously benefiting the king and his royal cult. The political climate during the FIP is reflected in cemeteries, especially through Heracleopolitan influences common during the OK and cemeteries of the Memphite region (Legros 2016). Here, and in the Siutian *nome,* nomarchs remained in power as well as in other rising provincial areas (see 4.2-3). New Theban traditions arose in the south are exemplified through *saff*-tombs at El-Tarif and Deir-El-Bahari. (Willems 1988: 60).

In Middle Egypt, *nomarchs* (ḥr.y tp ꜥꜣ) prevailed in various places including Qaw, Asyut, Meir, Bersheh, Beni Hasan and Akhmim, where they ruled and established provincial courts (Willems 1988: 61). This change is exemplified in Chapters 4-5, which highlight case studies outlining the presence of "non-elite" grave goods such as offering trays and soul-houses, while the cemeteries of political centres from this period generally lack causeways and contain more shaft tombs than before.

It has been suggested that post-MK tombs are more cosmological, celestial, and otherworldly. The agency of the deceased is depicted on a more personal level, illustrating journey and renewal, with less everyday items and inventory lists (see 7.3.3-4; 7.5). Everything produced was intended for burial, the internal mortuary cult provided all necessities, fomenting the emergence of depicted funerary banquet scenes and lamentation scenes depicted (O'Neill 2015).

2.6. WATER

The offering table, with its watery features including a spout, basins and incorporated canals changed water from being inactive to become active, imitating the Nile inundation whilst at the same time, through the physical act of libation, unifying the immaterial energies engraved upon it (see 7.4.2-3). The offering table is a unifier of different religious mortuary concepts, incorporated through the act of pouring water over it, often accompanied with empowering spells (Assmann 2005: 357; Oestigaard 2011a: 47). As described previously, numerous tombs in the OK and MK contained offering tables which were strategically positioned by, or on top of, burial shafts and passageways leading to the deceased, uniting the dead with the living via a visible and active stream of water.

The Nile is the only river in the Mediterranean characterised by a seasonal annual flood (Prell 2009:212). The duration of agricultural practices seems to be important in agricultural communities, especially in the process of irrigating the fields. The irrigation process consisted of a feeder canal from the Nile River filling various basins along the banks. These basins could also be divided into smaller basins which are then filled until a sluice-gate is opened to fill the subsequent basin. The water would then sit idle when it would reach about 1.5m, a process which took between 40-60 days. Once irrigation was complete, the gates would open allowing the water to return to the river (Haug 2012: 43-45; see Willcocks & Craig 1913).

Irrigation systems are both a physical and social construct which creates entire "communities of water" (Mikhail 2011: 39). It may be argued that these systems must be governed and maintained either by officials or the farmers themselves. In ancient Egypt, where basin irrigation systems endured up until modern times, water management was largely supervised at a local level and never truly required a centralised and "despotic" management as often argued by early historians (Mikhail 2011: 39; see Wittfogel 1959). Rituals centred around water management and irrigation systems, emphasised on early Pharaonic offering tables, reinforced the link between local authority and state control (Haug 2012: 47).

Water is a vehicle for fertility and rejuvenation and as such it was at the centre of ancient Egyptian society and religion, which pursued the means to harness its power for the benefit of humanity, a truly cultivating endeavour. The presence of water unified and energised all components of the Egyptian environment, physical as well as mental. One of the most common and powerful tools in this endeavour was the offering table.

Water was a means of unifying the forces of chaos, as evidenced in Egyptian creation myths and was mirrored in libation rituals, which could be considered as the transference of creative force through "god's dew" (Blackman 1998: 78). The $k3$ and $b3$ and other elements of the deceased's identity had to be unified once more in order to become $3h$, and the act of pouring water over a utensil such as an offering table enabled this unification to happen (7.4.4 [App II:2.2, 2.4]). The distinctive properties of water carried magical properties from one object to another, thus materialising the essence of a magical utensil, such as an offering table and what it depicts and represents. As a life providing entity, active but not alive, water was considered to be transformative, both in its passive and active form (Oestigaard 2011b: 40-41 [App II:2.4]).

If we look at the cosmogonies [see App II:2.2.1], the role of water and its uses are at their very core. Nun, the primeval waters, was regarded as the origin of everything, while the seasonal flooding of the Nile was an obvious sign of water's dynamic life force (Rotsch 2005: 233). Canals and basins in the landscape may be considered as efforts to harness the chaos and unpredictability of natural forces, symbolised by the offering of the Eye of Horus to the king, in order to secure welfare and prosperity. The use of $hk3$ may be assumed to have a similar purpose.

Osiris is intimately connected to water and its ritual use [see App II:2.2.4]. The efflux of Osiris, rdw, is closely associated with regenerative powers, harnessed through libation and used to purify the deceased. His efflux represented the life force and the reproductive capacity imbued in all human beings (Centrone 2005: 359). This is a common allusion found in the Pyramid Texts: "Giving cold water: You have your water, you have your flood, the fluid which issued from the god, the exudation which issued from Osiris […] Raise yourself, o king, for you have not died" (PT 436, §788-9). "The canals are filled, the waterways are flooded by means of the purification which issued from Osiris" (PT 455) (Faulkner 1969: 151). Osirian water is at the core of ancient Egyptian ritual practice, as stated by Plutarch: "Not only the Nile, but every form of moisture they call simply the effusion of Osiris; and in their holy rites the water jar in honour of the god heads the procession" (Plutarch, *Moralia V*: 87).

These practices date back to as far as the MK, when round lumps of germinated grain were buried as votive objects at the entrance of the Pyramid of Senwosret II at El-Lahun (Raven 1982: 8). In the NK these rituals took the form of "Osiris Beds", which consisted of a plot of soil shaped into Osiris which permitted seeds to germinate and sprout into the shape of the deceased deity (Raven 1982: 17; see 7.4.4c). Bas-reliefs at the temple of Dendera describe ritual practices of creating life from earth and water by forming Osiris-figures on the 12th day of Khoiak. By the TIP, the practice was elaborated making the germinated figure of Osiris three-dimensional by creating a composition of

germinated seeds, soil, wheat and sand, wrapped in linen. These effigies are known as "corn-mummies" and were watered by priests with situla (Goddio & Massion-Berghoff 2016: 141).

The waters of the flood become fertile through Osiris and his efflux, and in some texts the flood becomes a combination of water and earth, and, therefore, Osiris and Isis (Koemoth 1994: 3; Prell 2009: 224). In this sense, the flood is a highly fertile element, as well as a unifier of elements. Osiris is also equated to the earth, especially since he brings forth vegetation. These notions were celebrated after the Nile floods and the symbolic death of Osiris by creating figurines of the god made of soil, water, and seeds. When these seeds germinated, the god was symbolically transformed from being dead to becoming alive (Prell 2009:224; see Centrone 2009). The god is regenerated by the same element that perhaps previously caused his death.

It may be argued that water had three main uses in ancient Egyptian magical practice: i) as a unifier capable of combining disparate elements into one entity. Its liquid properties acted as a coagulant and realised the unification of different elements, such as the kꜣ and bꜣ of the deceased, as well as various parts of *The Eye of Horus*; ii) as a conductor transporting different magical properties, just as the Nile inundation transported the efflux of Osiris and the waters of Nun stored energies necessary for creation; iii) a purifying element, which due to its transparency and force cleansed surfaces and pushed impurities out (see 7.4.4).

2.7. EYE OF HORUS: AN OVERALL APPROACH

"Fils efficient de Jsdn (Thot), qui apaise l'Oeil-Vénérable (wrt), prepare (ꜥpr) l'Oeil-Resplendissant (ꜣḫt) et complète l'Oeil-Oudjat au moyen de ses elements (dbḥw=s), lui (agissant) en tant qu'Jsdn qui prepare (ḏbꜣ) l'Oeil d'Horus, qui illumine l'Oeil-Vivant (ꜥnḫt), au moyen de ses rayons (ꜣḫw=s)."

Dendera I, 107, 15, in Aufrère 1991: 282*.*

Ancient Egyptian funerary literature is imbued with symbolism, most of which concerns the assemblage of parts or filling of parts to create an all-embracing image. The fact that the *Eye of Horus* is frequently depicted at most ancient Egyptian ritual sites emphasises how significant this symbol was. It represented numerous elements combined, as is the purpose of most iconography at sacred sites (see Cauville 1989). *The Eye of Horus* symbolised a unification of different elements, for example the waters of the Nile inundation and various manifestations of the soul of an individual (7.4.1 [App II:4.0]).

Aufrère (1999) presents an etymological study of the significance and various definitions of the *udjat* in the ancient Egyptian organic and inorganic world. The alliteration of the word *wḏꜣt* is a frequent wordplay, especially in the Ptolemaic Period when its presence is noted in both short and long versions of religious texts illustrating the importance of this concept and a religious tradition (Aufrère 1991: 281-282). As illustrated in the quote above, filling the Eye with all its elements and components is a vital practice stemming from the royal cult. It represents the "triumph" of fertility over infertility and light over darkness, therefore the essence of life being reinstated in inanimate elements, transferring the immaterial into the material (Aufrère 1991: 292-93). In the same way, an inanimate corpse undergoes protection rituals over its mineral elements with the use of magical vegetation, necessary for the conservation of the mummy (e.g., resin) (Aufrère 1991: 292-93). The same process is applied to the Eye during the filling rituals. The material elements used to fill the eye are all represented by a god and therefore an immaterial force (also the different elements in the landscape itself represent certain gods, e.g., the desert as Seth, water as divine intervention in the form of Thoth, etc.). These are natural elements of both the mineral and organic spheres, which

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in turn are components of Egypt itself [App II:2.2.1]. This concept of uniting such forces is at the very core of ancient Egyptian religious tradition which is why it will play a fundamental role in attempting to define the symbolic significance of offering tables in ancient Egyptian thought (see 7.4-5).

The Eye of Horus motif is the most repeated symbol in the *Pyramid Texts*, which according to Eaton (2011) makes up roughly a quarter of the utterances (e.g., PT 35 in Assmann 2005: 356-7), and is used as a symbol for various types of offerings (Eaton 2011: 238). If we consider the liquid properties of the Eye, it may be said that it contains life-giving properties and provides the "cold water" of the Nile inundation: "O Osiris the King, take the water which is in the Eye of Horus, do not let go of it. O Osiris the King, take the Eye of Horus, the water in which Thoth has seen *ḥrs*-sceptre, a *dbꜣ*-sceptre and a mace" (PT 22 from Oestigaard 2011a: 37). The Eye is a symbol of power, and the waters within may be controlled and accessed. The Eye, therefore, is often associated with the king, giving him a legitimate claim to the throne – the supreme controller of water.

The thesis will address two main religious traditions in ancient Egyptian magical practice. The first concerns the funerary/mortuary cult, including its ritual stages, the OMC and ancestral cult. The offering table has a longstanding principal role in this tradition. As a religious concept as well as a utensil, it highlights notions of unification of elements of the deceased, especially in regard to bringing forth the *kꜣ*. It also calls upon the deceased's transformation and rejuvenation of the "effective spirit" *ꜣḫ* and its role as an ancestral entity in need of veneration of future generations in both a funerary as well as domestic setting [App II:2.2.3]. The second tradition is more complex, concerning the offering table as a ritual utensil but especially as a powerful symbol, reflecting the Eye of Horus concept. It becomes a unifier of elements and is explicitly a multifaceted entity.

2.8. CONCLUSION

Ancient Egyptian funeral rites are interlinked with the unique Egyptian landscape. Cosmological ideologies through ritual actions and paraphernalia such as offering tables, transformed the existing landscape into ritualized space, in the form of tombs and necropolis. The context and acting out of the funerary cult can be considered to mirror ancient Egyptian cosmogonies and how ritual actions, like the handling of the corpse, processions, libations, purifications, offerings and entombment, were supported by "life providing" magical activities like the *Opening of the Mouth* and the *Filling of the Eye of Horus.* Rituals intended to unite plurality and contrasts into harmony and preservation and thus guarantee a continued existence of the deceased within another realm of reality. The offering table was at the centre of these notions and activities.

A description of the methodology used to investigate and catalogue a diverse and extensive sample of offering tables studied in various museum collections, and in situ was presented. The analysis of the sample of offering tables is part of an intent to determine the cultic use of offering tables and similar paraphernalia and to stimulate further research of such objects. The sample presented is unique in its variation and temporal range, allowing for a more all-encompassing definition of what is an offering table. With a clear methodology and various indicators of what defines an offering stemming from an analysis of the object itself, gaps may be identified in how these objects have been interpreted in the past. The following chapters concern different attempts at filling the various gaps identified in previous typological and theoretical studies on offering tables and similar material.

3. DATABASE IN CONTEXT[9]

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The sample in the database provides a backdrop for different aspects of offering tables and similar material to be used in the analysis. Limitations to the dataset are the inevitable lack of access to significant numbers of objects, as well as only having access to material from museum collections and not in situ. However, the wide range of material allows a deeper understanding of what defines this specific group of objects, what their main characteristics are, specifically their material, size, and distinct design elements. By outlining these distinct features, conclusions may be reached regarding these items' original placement within the ancient Egyptian funerary landscape as well as regional, temporal, and ideological changes. By presenting an overview of previous approaches which use data sets of similar objects several gaps are identified including those concerning the role of offering tables in ancient Egyptian religious traditions and surrounding ritual landscape.

3.2. PREVIOUS APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF OFFERING TABLES AND SIMILAR MATERIAL

Regina Hölzl (2002) categorised and analysed over 800 stone offering tables and basins from 27 museum collections around the globe. Her sample consists of tables from the OK, MK and NK, allowing her to consider diachronic changes in style during an approximately 1500-year period. The material was structured into a typology based on certain characteristics (see Table 3.1 [App I:2.3.3]). Offering basins are not separated from the typological seriation of offering tables since they generally constitute an integral part of the offering table and its development within the funerary cult. Other types of offering tables are used as examples, including statue combined tables and miniature basins. Interpretations on function as well as diachronic change are considered, providing insights into the development of the offering table as both a functional and ritual utensil.

Table 3.1 Main typology criteria for offering tables and offering basins in Hölzl 2002: 11.

Typ	Beschreibung
Typ ø	Podeste, Tafeln und Opfertafeln, die keine Hauptmerkmale aufweisen
Typ A	Opfertafeln mit runden Erhöhungen und/oder Vertiefungen oder isolierte runde Opfertafeln
Typ B	Opfertafeln mit Becken oder isolierte Kultbecken
Typ C	Opfertafeln mit Napfkuchen bzw. ḥtp-Zeichen oder Opfertafeln in der Form des ḥtp-Zeichens
Typ A+B	Opfertafeln mit runden Erhöhungen und/oder Vertiefungen und Becken
Typ A+C	Opfertafeln mit runden Erhöhungen und/oder Vertiefungen und Napfkuchen bzw. ḥtp-Zeichen
Typ B+C	Opfertafeln mit Becken und Napfkuchen bzw. ḥtp-Zeichen
Typ A+B+C	Opfertafeln mit runden Erhöhungen und/oder Vertiefungen, Becken und Napfkuchen bzw. ḥtp-Zeichen

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[9] Based on the 'Main Catalogue' entries in App III (CAT ID1-394) and material compiled in the Access2016 database in App VI.

The three main types are round offering tables, or tables which include round features (Type A), followed by offering tables with basins, or simple offering basins with a raised rim (Type B), and offering tables shaped as *ḥtp*-signs, or with several *ḥtp*-signs depicted on the surface (Type C) (Hölzl 2002:11). Combinations of these three main types are common during all time periods.

Hölzl (2002) argues that OK offering tables present the most variation compared to later periods (Graph 3.1). By the end of the OK, the variety of forms decreases, with the establishment of the B+C form first appearing in the 6th Dynasty at the royal tombs in the south cemetery at Saqqara (Hölzl 2002: 16). This "standardised" form of offering table reaches a significant peak in the MK, overtaking other forms such as the B2 which was most popular during the OK (see 3.3.1).

Graph 3.1 Offering Table Trends in Hölzl (2002) Publication (corresponds to "kenn-nummer", i.e. identification number).
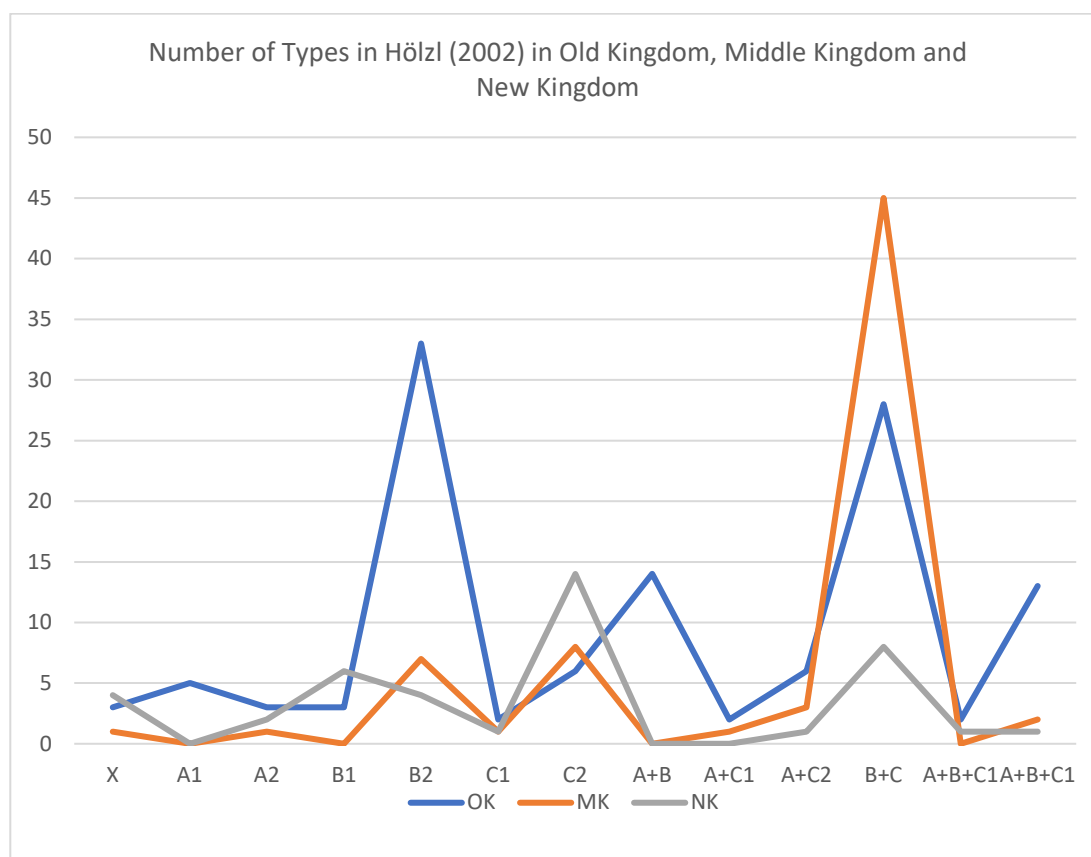
The most extensive study on pottery offering trays concerning typology and diachronic analysis was made by Angela Tooley in her account of MK burial customs and associated funerary equipment (Tooley 1989). Her study contains 371 offering trays and soul-houses from MK sites between Qubbet el-Hawa to Giza and identifies five main and two sub-types (Table 3.2):

Table 3.2 Typology of Offering Trays from Tooley (1989: 249-250).

Type	Description
Altar-Form (15%)	Usually square in shape with an external spout structure resembling stone offering tables.
Horseshoe-Form (17.3%)	Term used by Petrie (1907) to describe an elongated semi-circular shape (Petrie's Type E)
Plate-Form (14%)	Plates which are oval, or circular, with a sunken area resembling a dinner plate.
Slab-Form (1.6%)	A flat, rim-less plate with no central sunken area or rim.

Sub-Types (including misc. 5.9%)	
Tomb-Form (1.1%)	Usually, a square tray divided into sections. The area may be distinguished by specific offering(s), canals/basins, or may have a covering of some kind.
"Soul-house" (44%)	A domestic structure composed of one or more stories.

These typologies were analysed according to context. The "horseshoe" type, first labelled as such by Petrie (1907), appears to have originated within Upper Egyptian rural sites from the Aswan region to El-Minsha [App I:Maps1.1.1.,1.2.2-3]. The "plate-form", most common after the "horseshoe" variant is originally from between Rizeikat and around Thebes. The "altar-form" is limited to Upper Egypt and the southern end of Middle Egypt. Tooley relates trends and/or preferences in offering tray design to both geographical context and placement within the funerary site (Tooley 1989:296). Most offering trays in her sample are concentrated to the Theban region, specifically between Gebelein and Abydos. As evidenced in Petrie's Gizeh and Rifeh investigations, a particular concentration of soul-houses can be located at Rifeh (Tooley 1989:296). Another outlier is Armant, where a concentration of over twenty offering trays from two family tombs was recorded.

What makes Tooley's observations particularly valuable is the fact that she presents a large sample from numerous archaeological sites along the Nile valley, most of which have a definite context (Chart 3.1). Modern studies are often limited to the number of trays present at a specific archaeological site, most of which have already been disturbed. Since offering trays are very easily moved and thus subject to displacement, conclusions regarding use across several sites is very problematic. Tooley's study is important for the understanding of not only the use of offering trays but also on their social distribution within the necropolis. Tooley states that by the 12th dynasty offering trays had steadily become "self-contained providers of nourishment, a departure which meant that they could be placed in positions inaccessible to living" (Tooley 1989: 302).

Chart 3.1 The disposition of the pottery offering trays analysed based on Tooley (1989)
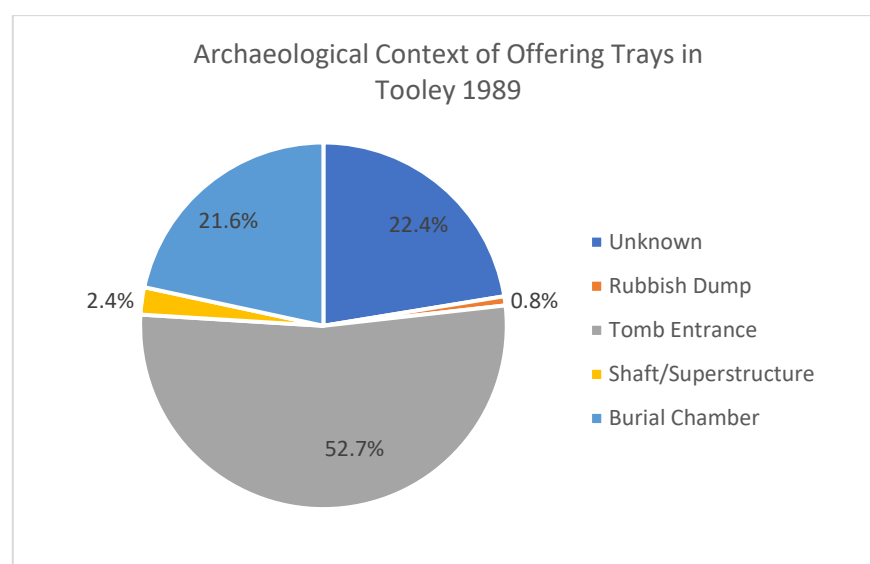
The fact that just over half the offering trays in Tooley's sample (52.7%) were found in the vicinity of the tomb entrance seems to be the norm for this specific funerary utensil (see Killian 2012). As for stone offering tables, these objects were often positioned in liminal places within the tomb structure, specifically by a false door, *kꜣ* statue, or courtyard entrance (see 3.4.1; 3.5.2; 4.3-5; 7.2).

Pottery offering trays may thus be classified in the same category as offering tables and apparently endowed with similar functions. The only difference in function may be that miniature versions of stone offering tables, as well as pottery trays, have been found in the tomb chamber, the second largest context (21.6%).

The minor types out of the 370 trays described by Tooley are Field Forms and Tomb Forms, while the largest number are of the "Horseshoe Form", resulting in a total of 64 trays present in nearly all archaeological contexts south of Meir and with a significant concentration in El-Tarif [App I:2.3.15-16]. The "Horseshoe Form" seems, therefore, to have originated from the Upper Egyptian regions. (Tooley 1989:295).

Theories regarding the origin of pottery offering trays have been numerous and often presumptive. Niwinski (1975) stated that trays originated from the Lisht/Sedment region during the 12th Dynasty were a direct imitation to stone offering tables from the same region (1975: 91). Based on Tooley's (1989) study, both Horseshoe and Altar Forms have been found at Qubbet el-Hawa and FIP tombs on Elephantine Island, contemporary to trays occurring in northern regions. The evolution in offering tray design is thus not as straight-forward as that of stone offering tables, mostly because of the region-specific designs of the trays.

"Soul-houses" are a very particular type of item and date from between the FIP and late MK. They are considered to be one of the most distinctive types in the material culture from this time period (Spence 2011:895). Their unique nature has proven hard to categorise, and they have thus often been set apart from other items connected with funerary rituals. Nevertheless, soul-houses seem to have more than a few features in common with objects such as offering tables, trays, and basins.

It is assumed that soul-houses, like pottery offering trays, emerged from stone offering tables from the FIP onwards. The typology (see Table 3.3) outlined by Petrie (1907) is chronological, starting from Type A which is essentially an offering tray with an incorporated shrine structure, not unlike Type C in the initial typology presented in 3.3.1 [App I:2.3.4]. The earliest soul-houses found at Rifeh date back to the 6th Dynasty, which include types A (126 total), B (100 total) and E (133 total). The soul-houses in 10th-11th Dynasty contexts contain the following types: E (33 total), H (86 total), J (101 total), L (68 total), M (78 total). Later soul-houses date back to the 12th Dynasty and include types which mainly have architectural features and lack offerings and an external spout structure: Type J (45 total), L (102 total), M (46 total).

Table 3.3 Typologies and descriptions of soul-houses from WM Flinders Petrie (1907), 14-20, pl. XV-XXIIE.

Type	Description	Soul-houses in Sample with Reference to Petrie (1907)
A	An offering tray with a "shelter" or shrine structure at the opposite end of the spout or open area of tray. It may have pillars incorporated in the design creating a façade or portico. It does not have a *satáh* (i.e., a sunken area on the roof creating a terrace).	Maybe CAT ID362 (pl. XV – 5)
B	A soul-house with a portico/façade and *satáh* on top and may have an incorporated stairway.	CAT ID27 (pl. XV – 5) CAT ID270 (pl. XV – 86)
C	An offering tray with a "hut" or enclosed chamber at the opposite end of the opening with a portico/façade before it.	

D	The tray contains a covered internal area and a portico/façade before it. There is no *satáh* on top of the covered structure. It may generally have three doors and two incorporated *mulaqfs* (i.e., semi-circular openings or "wind catchers" in the roof)	CAT ID31 (pl. XVIA – 82) CAT ID212 (pl. XVI – 115) Maybe CAT ID315 (pl. XVIA – 87)
E	The surface of the covered area contains two *mulqafs* and a *satáh* in between.	CAT ID28 (pl. XVIA – 151) CAT ID315 (pl. XVII) CAT ID366 (pl. XVIA – 25)
F	The internal structure at the opposite end of the opening may have two to five separate chambers and no *satáh, mulqaf* or stairway is incorporated in the design.	
G	The internal structure is covered by a *satáh* which also stretches across two *mulqafs.*	
H	The internal structure may contain three connected *satáh*, which may be on or in between *mulqafs.*	CAT ID26 (pl. XVII – 67),
J	The roof of the internal area contains two *mulqafs*, each with its own separate *satáh.*	CAT ID30 (pl. XVIIIA – 4) CAT ID359 or CAT ID364 (heavily restored) (pl. XVIII – 42)
K	The internal structure is sealed off with "closed" doors and the structure usually has no incorporated portico or *mulqafs.*	
L	The internal areas have no *mulqafs* and little access. The soul-houses and courtyard areas begin to contain representations of furniture such as beds and seats as well as individuals.	CAT ID206 (pl. XVIIIA – 20) CAT ID355 (pl. XVIIIA – 2) CAT ID365 (pl. XVIII, XXIID – 118)
M	The courtyard area of the tray is enclosed with a high wall and the internal areas continue to contain furniture and individuals.	CAT ID29 (pl. XX – 18)
N	The "house" structures begin to have four engraved stripes or marks on the external sides and the internal areas contain household items and furniture.	

Unique designs of soul-houses in the sample, such as the "boat-houses" may indicate localised trends and/or changes in the funerary cult (3.3.1, Figure 3.2-3 [App I:2.4.1]). The main issue arising while applying typological studies to locally diverse objects is a potential ignorance of the meaning of their unique design and thus perhaps the religious connotations they may represent. Petrie (1907)'s study, although very thorough, is perhaps over-analysed, especially when considering his analysis regarding the chronology and evolution of the soul-house. By presenting a comparative study of objects which have been found in similar contexts to soul-houses a more dynamic interpretation of their chronology, as well as their overall significance in the funerary cult may be offered. The diversity in design may not only indicate a local tradition, but also the multifunctional nature of these objects, especially when an analysis does not exclusively rely on the unique and quantitative sample from Deir Rifeh.

Out of the three previous studies presented, Tooley (1989)'s account on FIP-MK pottery offering trays appears to be the most thorough when considering context and diachronic change. The main limitations presented by the above-mentioned studies of ritual objects is over-categorization based on features alone, ignoring indications of original placement or use. However, the studies create a baseline for categorisation of offering tables and similar material presented in the current study.

3.3. THE DATA SAMPLE[10]

The 387 items in the current study which were analysed in museum collections may all be identified under the umbrella term 'offering table' (see section 1.1-2). The descriptions are based on a systematic categorisation identifying three main types of offering tables: stone offering tables/basins/models, pottery offering trays, and pottery soul-houses [App I:2.3.4]. The data is related to potential use and function as well as iconographic descriptions, highlighting the most significant features present in offering tables and similar objects. A short description of the data related to inscriptions and engravings is also presented. The dataset indicates the variety of offering tables and how they may express numerous notions simultaneously.

The following are statistics related to the offering tables, basins, offering trays, models and soul-houses present in the Access 2016 database (Table 3.4, Chart 3.2). Objects classified as offering tables and/or basins as well as those represented in amulet-like form consist of a total of 269, from a wide range of time periods and contexts throughout ancient Egypt. The other objects, which include offering trays (89) and soul-houses (29) were classified in a similar manner but in a different database sheet. The items constitute a representative sample which forms the basis for a detailed analysis that could be applicable to a larger dataset.

Table 3.4 Number of objects in the sample present in each time-period.

Time Period	Soul-houses	Offering Trays	Offering Tables	TOTAL
Unknown	3	18	51	72
Old Kingdom	0	2	55	57
First Intermediate Period	1	15	8	24
Middle Kingdom	25	44	41	110
Second Intermediate Period	0	4	2	6
New Kingdom	0	2	32	34
Third Intermediate Period	0	0	11	11
Late Period	0	0	37	37
Ptolemaic Period	0	4	19	23
Greco-Roman	0	0	11	11
Meroitic*	0	0	2	2
Grand Total	29	89	269	387

*These two offering tables are considered as outliers in the dataset. They are often included as part of the total but not considered in sufficient detail.

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[10] The statistical analysis in this section is mostly presented as reflecting real numbers of objects within the database rather than percentages, otherwise specified.

Chart 3.2 Percentages of materials reflected in each time-period present in the database.
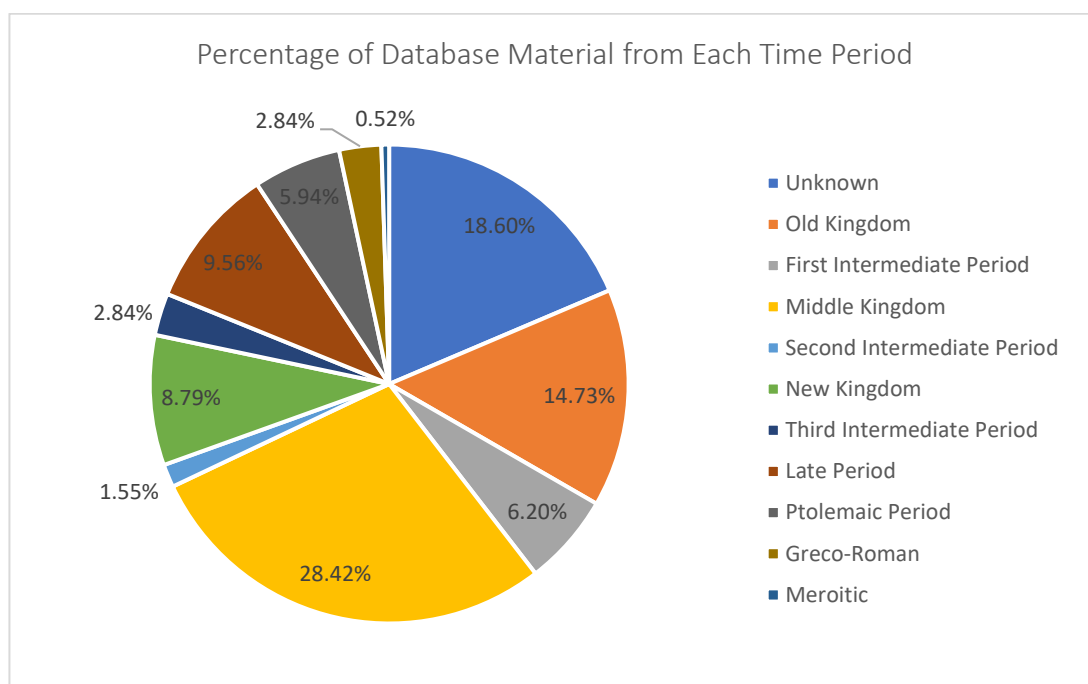
The statistical analysis of the date of offering tables in the sample indicates that offering tables are present in all time periods of ancient Egypt, something which is particularly important for an understanding of their influence and main function (Chart 3.2 [App I:2.3.2]). The numbers may not reflect a realistic quantitative representation of offering tables and similar material from each time-period, though they demonstrate their presence, and some observations may be made on the basis of such statistics.

Other items were studied but not all documentation could be accessed, such as the pottery offering trays at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo [see App VII]. These objects were only photographed, and information was gathered from published catalogues such as Kamal (1909)'s *Catalogue General*.

Offering tables have been found across Egypt, ranging from the Delta to Elephantine with concentrations occurring in both north and south according to their temporal context (see Table 3.5 [Maps in App I:1.2.1-9].

Table 3.5 The geographical context of the objects present in the database.

Archaeological Context	Offering Tables/Basins/Models	Offering Trays	Soul-houses
Unknown	**142**	**44**	**10**
Lower Egypt	**70**	**2**	**-**
Tanis	1		
Sa el-Hagar	1		
Tell el-Rataba	2		
Kom Abu Bello	1		
Memphis/Heliopolis	5		
Tarkhan	3		
Giza	20		
Abusir	6		
Ghurab	1		
Saqqara	15		
Lisht	6		
El-Riqqa	2		
El-Lahun	6		
Hawara	1	1	
Sidmant		1	

Middle Egypt	**22**	**12**	**18**
Hermopolis	1		
Amarna	2		
Asyut	9	7	
Matmar	1		
Deir Rifa	1	4	18
Akhmim	2		
Abydos	6	1	
Upper Egypt	**33**	**31**	**1**
Al-Amrah		1	
Deir el-Ballas		3	
Dendera	4	6	
Deir el-Medina	5		
Armant	2		
Thebes	7		
Luxor	1		
Deir el-Bahari	1		
Medinet Habu	4		
Karnak	3		
Gebelein	1	5	
Moalla		1	
El-Kab	1	11	
Aswan		1	
Rizekat			1
Esna	2	2	
Berenike	1		
Elephantine	1		
Outliers	**2**	**-**	**-**
Qasr Ibrim	1		
Sanam, Sudan	1		
Grand Total	**269**	**89**	**29**

In the statistical analysis presented, most stone tables have been found in necropoleis/funerary complexes or in the vicinity of royal centres/complexes, especially in sites in the Memphis area, such as Saqqara and Giza [App I:1.1.1-4]. Pottery offering trays and soul-houses are mostly from Middle and/or Upper Egyptian contexts, clustered around regional necropoleis such as Asyut and el-Kab (Graph 3.2). This does of course depend on the time-period in question, as the centre of influence shifted between the north and the south. The archaeological contexts are widespread across the Egyptian landscape. Most sites are necropoleis, while there are some exceptions such as temple complexes in the Theban region, as well as village settings. A more detailed study of contexts are the archaeological contexts outlined in Table 3.6. The sample does not provide an accurate picture of the distribution of these objects since nearly half of the sample lacks an archaeological context. The only noteworthy analysis is that this typology of religious objects can be found across the entire Egyptian landscape and concentrations can occur in every time-period, ranging from the Early Dynastic Period to the Roman Period.

Table 3.6 The archaeological context of offering tables, basins and amulets/models present in the database.

Original Archaeological/Temporal Contexts	Offering Tables/Basins/Amulets
UNKNOWN TIME-PERIOD	**51**
Unknown	**40**
Asyut	**1**
Asyut?	1
Abusir	**3**
Abusir (El-Meleq)	2
Abusir (El-Meleq) Mass grave of Harsaphes-priests – Chamber 6	1
Elephantine	**1**
Kafr el-Haram	**1**
Kom Abu Bello	**1**
Sa el-Hagar	**1**
Saqqara	**2**
Thebes	**1**
Thebes, Ramesseum West Bank	1
OK	**55**
Unknown context	**25**
Abusir	**2**
Giza	**19**
Giza	17
Giza (G 7813 D)	1
Giza, West cemetery, Mastaba of Hesi (?)	1
Memphis/Heliopolis	**1**
Memphis?	1
Saqqara	**7**
Saqqara	4
Saqqara (Sacred Animal Necropolis, North Saqqara)	1
Saqqara, Iriu-ka-Ptah Tomb	1
Saqqara, Mastaba D2, north of the great Pyramid, a few steps south of enclosure	1
Tarkhan	**1**
FIP	**8**
Unknown context	**2**
Asyut	**4**
Dendera	**1**
Saqqara	**1**
MK	**41**
Unknown context	**13**
Abydos	**5**
Asyut	**4**
Asyut	3
Asyut (Tomb 13A-Hogarth)	1
Deir Rifa	**1**
El-Kab	**1**
El-Lahun	**6**
El-Lahun	5
El-Lahun (Fayum (governorate) Tomb N 17	1
El-Riqqa	**1**
Hawara	**1**
Karnak	**1**
Lisht	**6**
Lisht	5
Lisht, funerary chapel of Senusret I	1
Memphis/Heliopolis	**1**
Memphis (Cairo)	1
Saqqara	**1**
Saqqara, north of Teti Pyramid	1
Thebes	**1**
Sheik Abd el-Qurna (Thebes) Kiosk 1 - Thutmosis III	1
SIP	**2**
Deir el-Bahari	**1**
Thebes	**1**

Thebes (Asasif)	1	
NK		**32**
Unknown context	15	
Abydos	1	
Amarna	1	
Deir el-Medina	5	
Deir el-Medina	4	
Deir el-Medina?	1	
El-Amarna	1	
Ghurab	1	
Karnak	2	
Luxor	1	
Luxor, Karnak Temple, Thebes, East Bank	1	
Medinet Habu	1	
Medinet Habu, Thebes, Upper Egypt West Bank	1	
Memphis/Heliopolis	2	
Heliopolis?	1	
Possibly from Memphite Region, Heliopolis (Iunu; On)	1	
Thebes	2	
Thebes	1	
Thebes necropolis?	1	
TIP		**11**
Unknown context	4	
El-Riqqa	1	
Gebelein	1	
Medinet Habu	1	
Tanis	1	
Tarkhan	2	
Kafr Ammar	2	
LP		**37**
Unknown context	25	
Akhmim	1	
Armant	1	
Abusir	1	
Abusir (El-Meleq)	1	
Matmar	1	
Medinet Habu	1	
Medinet Habu West Bank Thebes	1	
Memphis/Heliopolis	1	
Memphis?	1	
Saqqara	4	
Saqqara	2	
Saqqara (H5-1556)	1	
Saqqara, near Nectanebo Temple	1	
Thebes	2	
Thebes (Asasif)	1	
Thebes, necropolis, tomb of Montuemhat	1	
PP		**19**
Unknown context	10	
Akhmim	1	
Berenike	1	
Dendera	3	
Esna	1	
Hermopolis	1	
Hermopolis (Ashmunein; Khemenu)?	1	
Tell el-Rataba	2	
G-RP		**11**
Uknown context	8	
Armant	1	
Esna	1	
Medinet Habu	1	
Medinet Habu, Thebes, West Bank	1	
M		**2**
Qasr Ibrim	1	
Sanam, Sudan	1	
Grand Total		**269**

Graph 3.2 The geographical context of the objects present in the database.
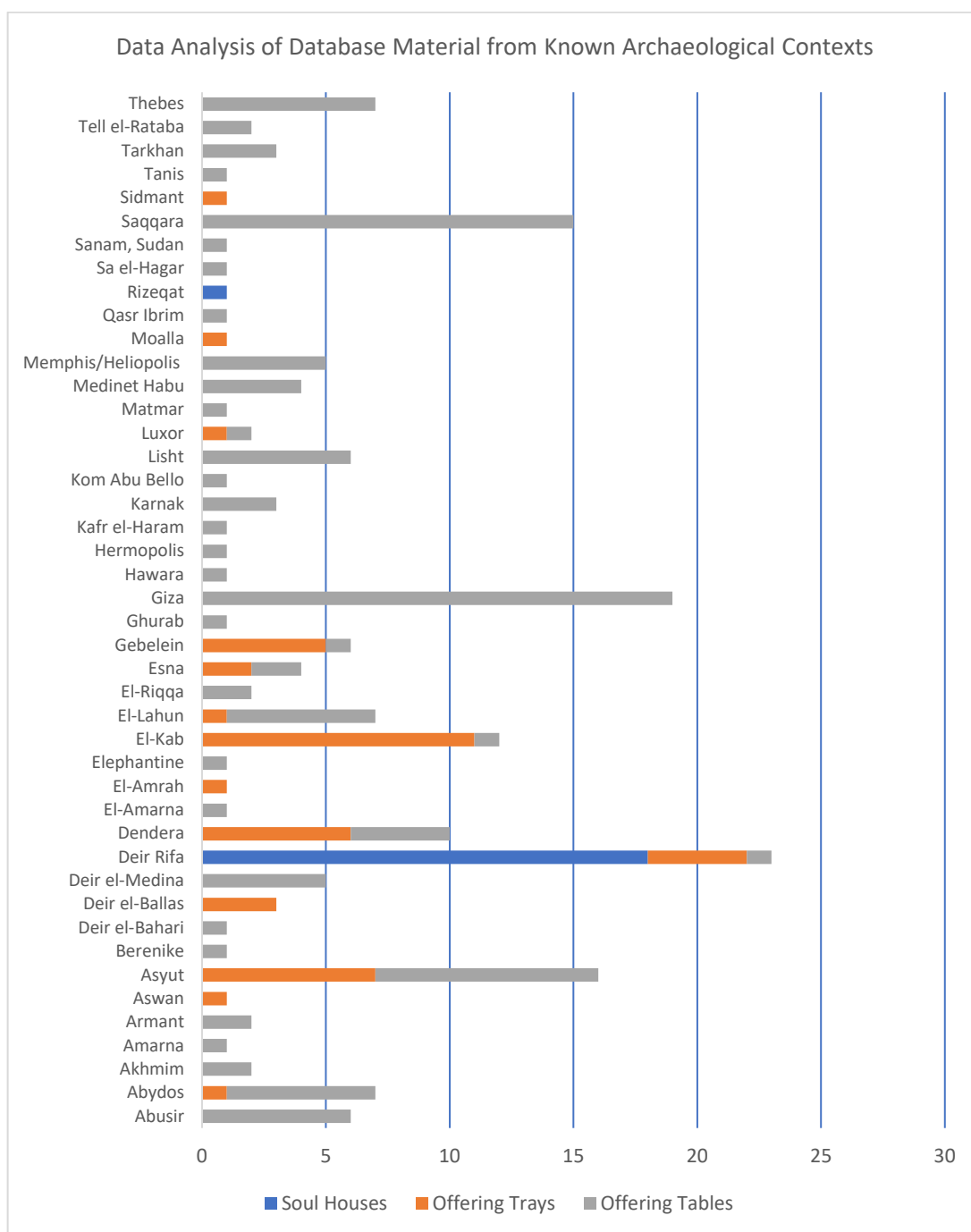
The 387 objects used in the analysis are made of a variety of materials, indicating that offering tables and similar materials were commissioned in workshops throughout ancient Egypt (3.5.1 [App II:3.1-2]). Furthermore, some of them originate from household economies as indicated by the extensive use of disposable materials, such as pottery and porous sandstone[11] in Upper Egyptian *nomes*. The most common material in almost all time periods is limestone. This may be an indication of its availability and malleability (Table 3.7 [App I:2.3.1]). Whether it was readily available or had important ideological properties, material played a vital role in the manufacturing of magical utensils. Even the most accessible stones such as limestone may have had magical connotations

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[11] It may be important to note that this material may not have been considered as porous or perishable in the Upper Egyptian regions during specific time-periods but may be a later observation. The availability of the stone in these areas as well as its high level of malleability made it more attractive for use.

due to its appearance, and interaction with liquids. Due to their exclusivity and density, more prestigious materials such as granodiorite and basalt were mostly reserved for temple fixtures, their hardness also made them difficult to process and shape. Nevertheless, their appearance had symbolic connotations and specific effects when in contact with water. The most common materials include limestone, sandstone, and pottery, all of which are not water resistant and can be easily eroded and absorb large quantities of water if not treated. They also 'change' in terms of colour and appearance, transforming from one state to another, no matter how brief their contact with liquids might have been. The reasons behind this may not only be due to availability and economic strain, but rather a calculated choice. Pottery offering trays almost always had some kind of surface treatment protecting the highly porous fabric from liquids. The reason behind the use of certain materials is, therefore, also indicative of ideological preferences.

Table 3.7 Percentage of objects made in each material reflected in the database.

Materials - Offering Tables/Basins/Amulets	Percentage
Unidentified	0.37%
Alabaster	3.35%
Basalt	1.86%
Granite	8.92%
Bronze	6.69%
Pottery	2.97%
Wood	0.37%
Greywacke	0.37%
Limestone	59.48%
Diorite	0.37%
Faience	4.09%
Granodiorite	1.49%
Sandstone	8.55%
Quartzite	0.37%
Schist	0.74%
Grand Total	**100.00%**

Limestone is used in over half of the sample (59%) (see Chart 3.3). Other common materials include soft stones such as sandstone (9%) and harder more sought-after stone such as granite (9%). The remaining stones present in the sample reflect monumental offering tables commissioned by the elite and/or state authorities due to their more elaborate extraction process and availability [App II:3.1-2].

There are 124 pottery objects present in the database. These include offering tables (6), trays (89) and soul-houses (29). In the table presented above there are 6 pottery objects classified as tables, while there is a separate database for all pottery objects classified as offering trays and soul-houses.
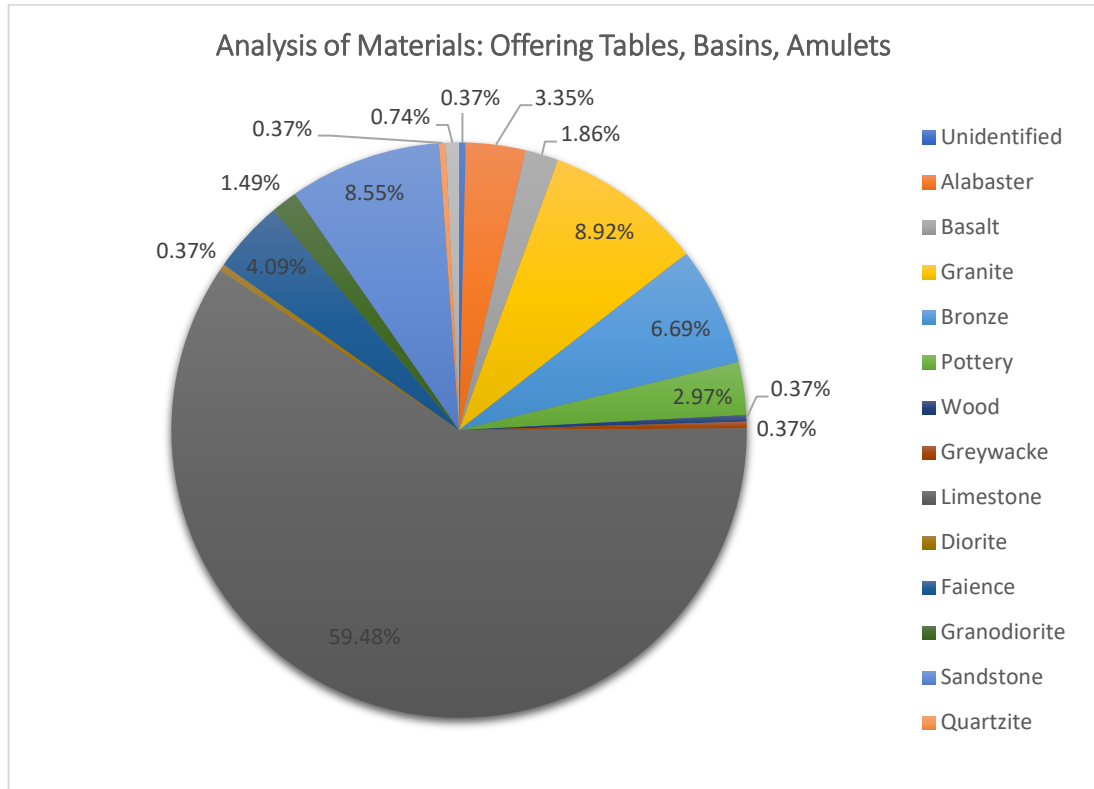
An initial characterization defined so-called "offering tables" as objects displaying one or two water features, such as a spout and/or canal as well as a basin (see section 1.4, Figure 1.1). Subsequent features noted were depictions of offerings or a *ḥtp*-sign in the design. When at least two of the six features listed were identified, the "offering table" could then be classified into a subsequent general typological study (Table 3.8, Chart 3.4). More detailed classifications of object types were then elaborated depending on material, shape, and size.

Table 3.8 General typology and descriptions of offering tables and similar material in the database.

Type and #	Frequent Features	Description
A. Offering Table 180 (46.5%)	**Spout, Canal(s), Basin(s), *ḥtp* sign,** Offering Formula, Hs Vase and other Offerings	A rectangular table with a raised or sunken central platform containing the depictions of offerings in raised relief, encircled by a canal leading to an external spout structure and a drainage canal. The central space is often enclosed by a raised rim containing inscriptions in sunken relief.
B. Offering Tray 74 (19.1%)	**Canal(s), Offerings,** Basin(s)	A usually oval/circular/semi-circular plate with a sunken area created by a raised rim. The surface may be divided into sections by canals. Each "area" is dedicated to specific offerings, usually various cuts of meat. The trays are made of fired clay and are generally painted red.

C. Offering Tray with Incorporated Shrine 13 (3.4%)	**Canal(s), Offerings,** Basin(s)	A rectangular or oval plate with a raised rim and spout opening and a shrine/throne structure on the opposite end. The space in between the spout opening and the "shrine" may be considered as a "courtyard" due to the presence of model offerings which often include meat cuts, pot stands and even a central basin.
D. Offering Basin 38 (9.8%)	**Basin(s), Offering Formula**	A square/rectangular/circular basin with a raised rim. May sometimes have an external spout structure and a drainage canal. The rim often contains inscriptions in sunken relief.
E. "Soul-house" 26 (6.7%)	**Spout, Offerings, Canal(s),** Basin(s)	May be similar to Type C, with an external spout structure and a central "courtyard" area with offerings encircled by a raised rim. The "shrine" area is a more complex structure usually with a two/four-columned façade and an internal area. The top of the structure may have basins and ramparts resembling "mezzanines" (see 3.3.1).
F. Offering Table Amulet/Model 43 (11.1%)	**Spout, Offerings,** Canal(s)	Similar standardised shape as in Type A, although miniature with less detail. These are square/rectangular objects usually made in faience or bronze. May contain a central sunken/raised platform encircled by a canal leading to an external spout structure. At the opposite end there may be a ring intended for the object to be used as a pendant.

Chart 3.4 Percentages of Types A-F and combination present in sample.

Types Present in Database

1.3%   1.0%   1.0%
11.1%
6.7%
9.8%
3.4%
46.5%
19.1%

Legend:
- A
- B
- C
- D
- E
- F
- A+D
- B+D
- B+E
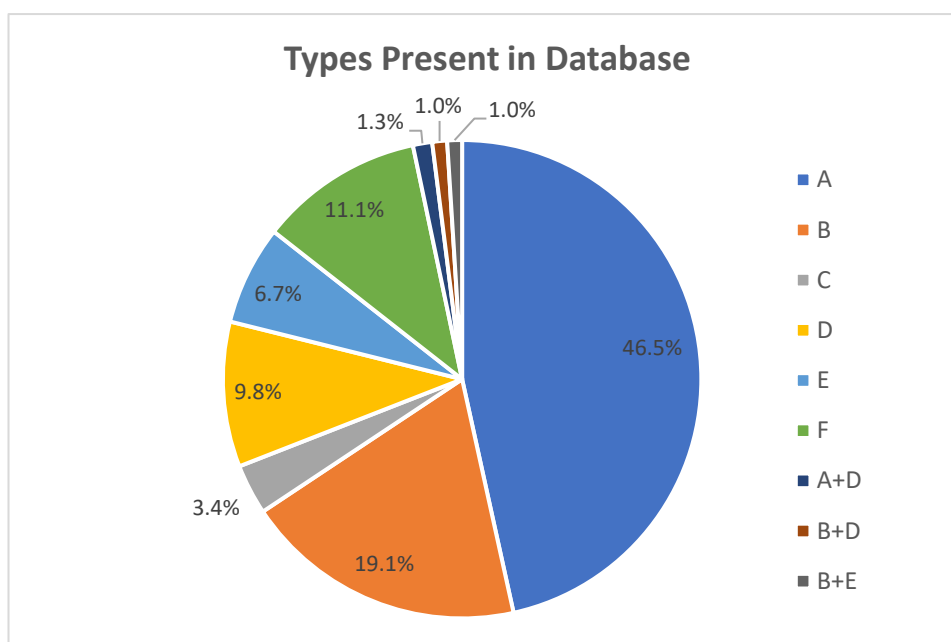
The typological sequence was mainly based on initial observations of the objects, while the data was collected, defining them as offering table, offering tray, soul-house and amulet/model (Chart 3.4). Subcategories reflecting a combination of two types were identified. The last category is that of six undetermined objects which could not be classified in the typologies described above. These objects make up 1.5% of the sample. This typological approach provided a preliminary method for defining the "offering table", determining at least six similar *materia magica* (Types A-F).

A secondary classification was made during this initial stage of data collection by considering the base of the object as well as its material, shape, and size. Four main categories were observed: *monumental* or *portable* (Table 3.9-10, Graph 3.3), with three subcategories indicating context: *fixed*, *fitted*, or *free-standing* (see Table 3.11-12, Graph 3.4). The data presented below excludes pottery offering trays and soul-houses since they are classified as portable and free-standing objects.

Table 3.9 Definitions and descriptions of contextual typologies based on size in the material in the database.

Contextual Typology	Frequent Features	Description
Monumental (54 objects, 20% of sample) Average Height: 18.9cm Average Width: 53.2 cm Average Length: 43.8 cm	Smoothened and finished surfaces Inscriptions present Use of prestigious stone or white, dense limestone Has an elevated height of more than 10 cm Geometric design	Monumental offering tables are >30 cm in width, with elaborate iconographic elements. They are generally made of prestigious stone such as granite. Inscriptions are often royal and refer to the veneration of deities. The external sides of monumental tables are often decorated. The original context is generally a royal temple complex.
Portable (214 objects excluding pottery offering trays, 79.6% of sample) Average Height: 7.4 cm Average Width: 28.0 cm Average Length: 24.0 cm	Mostly smoothened surfaces Inscriptions not always present Frequent use of average stone such as limestone and/or sandstone Height is less than 10 cm	Portable offering tables are commonly found in museum collections since they were relatively easier to transport. These tables may often be classified as 'votive' due to their size and may occasionally be made of a material other than limestone, such as alabaster. These may be <30 cm in width or may also be made of pottery. Portable tables usually lack a specific context.

Table 3.10 Size of offering tables in the database.

Offering Table Size	Objects in Database
Monumental	**54**
A	50
A+D	2
Portable	**214**
A	129
A+D	3
B	2
B+D	1
D	36

F	43
Uncertain	**6**
Grand Total	274

Graph 3.3 Size of Offering Tables in Sample.

# of Offering Tables According to Contextual Size
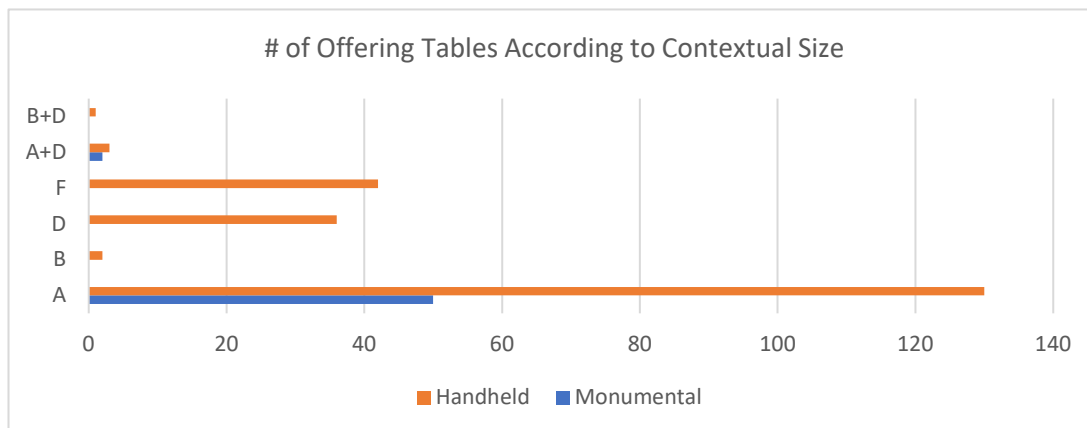
Table 3.11 Statistical analysis and description of the contextual typology of offering tables, basins and amulets/models (excluding one uncertain object). The data in the table excluded pottery offering trays and soul-houses, which are all considered as portable and free-standing.

Fixed (36 objects, 13.4% of sample) 11 classified as monumental 25 classified as portable	Object has an irregular base with large chisel marks Material is often coarse limestone Discoloration is present on the surface, and lighter on the irregular base Often larger than portable objects	"Fixed" offering tables and/or were most likely directly carved from the limestone bedrock of the tomb – they could have been removed in ancient times or by archaeologists as evidenced by chisel marks, which are irregular and deep on the bottom surface of the table.
Fitted (69 objects, 25.7% of sample) 8 classified as monumental 61 classified as portable	Smoothened and chiselled edges Often have a raised rim Sloping external edges and a smaller base Base has also been chiselled into shape Staining present on external edges Often smaller than monumental objects	"Fitted" offering tables and/or basins are often <30cm in width to be incorporated into other funerary fixtures within the tomb. These objects often have sloped edges and a smoothed base, which may indicate that the table was fitted into another kind of structure. Chisel marks on the sides and bottom are regular and have been smoothed.
Free-standing (163 objects, 60.6% of sample) 35 classified as monumental 128 classified as portable	All surfaces have been smoothened and chiselled into shape May sometimes have sloping edges to create a "hovering effect" May have 3-4 legs Often made of high-quality limestone or other prestigious stone Size of objects varies significantly	"Free-standing" offering tables describes all objects which were meant to be moved or are not necessarily linked to other fixtures within their original context. These include tables with legs as well as amulets/models with rings for their intended use as pendants. These objects are more prone to weathering.

Table 3.12: Types and Contextual data of offering tables in the database.

Types and Context of Offering Tables	Number of objects
Fixed	**36**
A	29
A+D	1
D	6
Fitted	**69**
A	43
A+D	3
D	23
Free-standing	**163**
F	43
B	2
B+D	1
A	108
A+D	1
D	8

Graph 3.4 Contextual data of Offering Table Types in database.
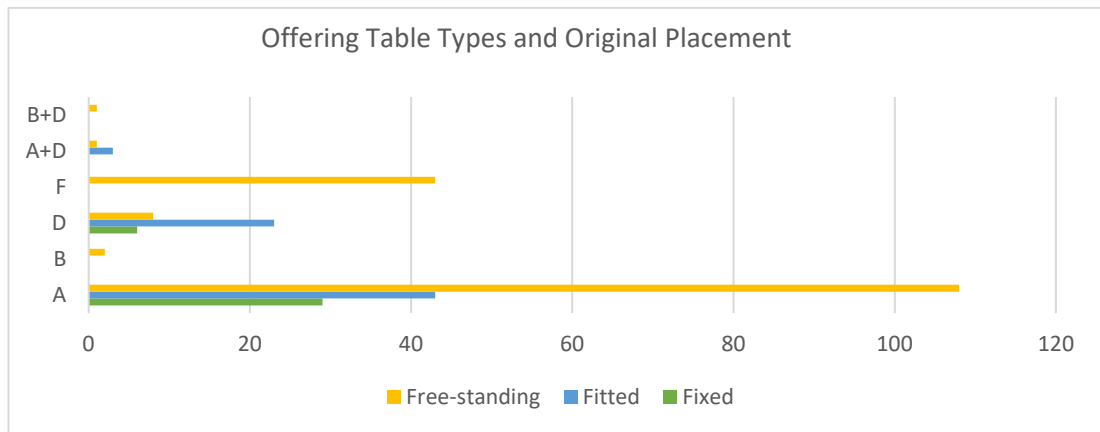
3.3.1 Categorical and Typological Study

The 387 offering tables presented in this study have been placed within a wider chronological frame, applying a more elaborate typological sequence. Nevertheless, it is important to stress the aims of the current study, which intends to provide a platform for the analysis and interpretation of the concept of "offering table" and accordingly accentuate its original context, iconographic elements, and magical connotations rather than diachronic changes and typological sequence. Examples from the current study have been added under each category with a reference to its catalogue number. Objects are further categorised in accordance with the following time periods: OK, FIP, MK, SIP, NK, TIP, LP, PP, and the G-RP [for chronology see App I:2.1.1]. The typologies are based on Hölzl (2002) and a total of 53 offering tables, basins, and models out of the 269 objects in the sample under these categories are also part of her study. The reason for applying Hölzl (2002)'s categorisation system is to establish whether the styles described by her re-emerge in later periods, and to identify new designs inspired by previous, standardised iconography.

Overview of Offering Table Design Between OK and GR-P[12]

There are 55 offering tables and basins in the sample which can be dated to the OK [App II:2.3.5]. The most numerous type is that of B1, which essentially consists of rectangular offering basins. The second type is B2, i.e., offering tables with one or two basins incorporated into their structure, and the third is the B+C Type, indicating the emergence of the *ḥtp* sign and how offering tables came to reflect an offering ritual. Rectangular offering tables are most common, (44 out of 55) and were set up freely or embedded (i.e., "fitted") into pedestals, platforms, or even larger offering tables, generally categorised as basins. Thirty out of 55 offering tables/basins have been categorised as "fitted", followed by 10 "fixed" and 14 "free-standing" (Table 3.13).

Table 3.13 Contextual data for Old Kingdom offering tables in database.

OK Offering Tables/Basins/Models	55
Free-standing	14
Fixed	10
Fitted	30
Uncertain	1

All variations documented by Hölzl (2002) during the OK become the standardised form of the offering table from the MK onwards. By the late OK, there is a diminishing of round features, a trend which seems to continue into the MK and re-emerge only in later time periods. During the 5th Dynasty, the *ḥtp*-sign was increasingly used on tables and became standardised, with the B+C type becoming the most common from the FIP onwards. Hölzl (2002) documents a concentration of offering tables and basins from Saqqara (south cemetery) in the 6th Dynasty, which corresponds to the number of offering tables in the present study, concentrated to the Memphite royal necropoleis (Graph 3.5). The main type at Saqqara appears to have been of the B+C type, a large *ḥtp* sign in the centre sided by two rectangular basins, a variant that became standardised during the late OK (see Legros 2016 study on offering tables in the Pepy I necropolis at Saqqara).

Graph 3.5 Types of Offering Tables/Basins/Models from each Context dating to the Old Kingdom in database.
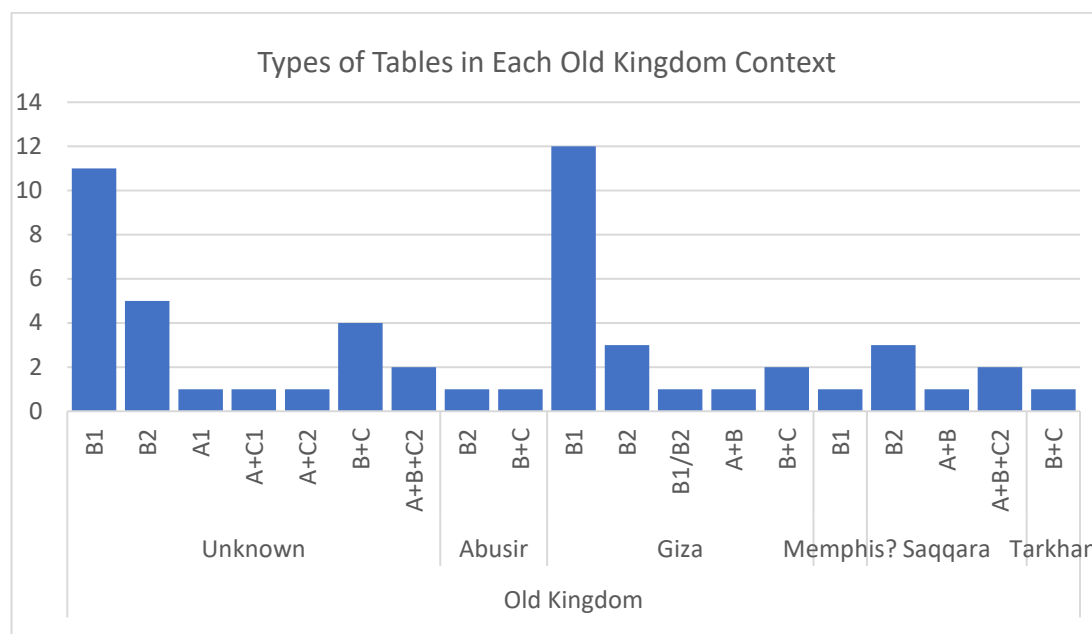
There are only 8 stone offering tables dating to the FIP in the database [App II:2.3.6], four of which are from Asyut. The comparative sample of FIP and MK offering tables (90 in total, 43 of which may be dated to the FIP and 14 to the MK) recorded at Asyut is not addressed here but will be presented

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[12] For detailed overview see tables 2.3.5-13 in App I.

and analysed in section 4.1. The most common type is the B+C, also evident in the Asyut sample, as well as other studies (see Legros 2016; Willems 2016). Due to the variety of the material present in the database, a specific case study (4.3) regarding the progression of offering tables between the end of the OK into the first half of the MK will be presented in Chapter 4. Based on the materials recorded from museums, the most common type of stone offering tables is B+C, possibly attested to OK royal styles at Giza and Saqqara (Table 3.14 [App I:1.2.2]). Pottery offering trays and soul-houses begin to emerge in Middle and Upper Egypt during this time.

Table 3.14 Provenance of Offering Tables present in Database dating to the FIP.

FIP Offering Table Contexts	Objects in Database
FIP	**8**
Unknown	**2**
B2	1
B+C	1
Asyut	**4**
A1	1
B+C	3
Dendera	**1**
B2	1
Saqqara	**1**
B+C	1
Grand Total	**8**

In the sample there are 41 offering tables dating to the MK [App II:2.3.7]. The most common type remains the B+C Type, now including significant variations in iconography and overall design emphasising water features (see 3.4.3.3-4; 4.4; 7.3; 7.4.2). Other types are not as frequent in the current sample, which may be representative of a royal standardised design of the offering table. Most MK offering tables are rectangular in shape with a slightly raised rim/frame usually reserved for inscriptions. Offering tables without a frame can be dated to the FIP or early MK (also evident in Hölzl 2002:29). The *ḥtp*-sign and mat became more significant and emphasised. The sign for the bread may be depicted without the mat and occupy the entire surface of the table, common between the 11th and 12th dynasties (see 3.4.3.4; 3.5.3; 4.4.4; 7.3.4). Basins are no longer mass produced as they were during the OK, most probably due to their incorporation in standardised design. Two significant innovations occur during this time period: "multiple" offering tables and legged tables (7.3.3-4). Multiple or "double" offering tables, i.e., tables composed of two or more almost identical offering tables, were possibly intended for the benefit of members of the same family. During the late OK, a similar notion is reflected through the incorporation of multiple *ḥtp*-signs (Hölzl 2002: 30). Three to four legged tables are present in the sample and considered as "free-standing", consisting of more than half of the MK sample (see Table 3.15).

Table 3.15 contextual categorisation of Middle Kingdom offering tables in database sample.

MK Offering Tables/Basins/Models	41
Free-standing	22
Fixed	9
Fitted	10

The context of stone offering tables in the MK is a reflection of the political state of Egypt after the FIP [App I:1.2.3]. Rather than a large concentration of tables in cemeteries associated with the royal cult in the north as in the OK, offering tables seem to become a common feature in both royal and non-royal necropoleis, extending from royal centres in the north, such as Lisht, to provincial centres

in Middle Egypt, such as Asyut and growing royal centres around Thebes in the south (see Graph 3.6).

Graph 3.6 Number of types in sample with corresponding Middle Kingdom context.
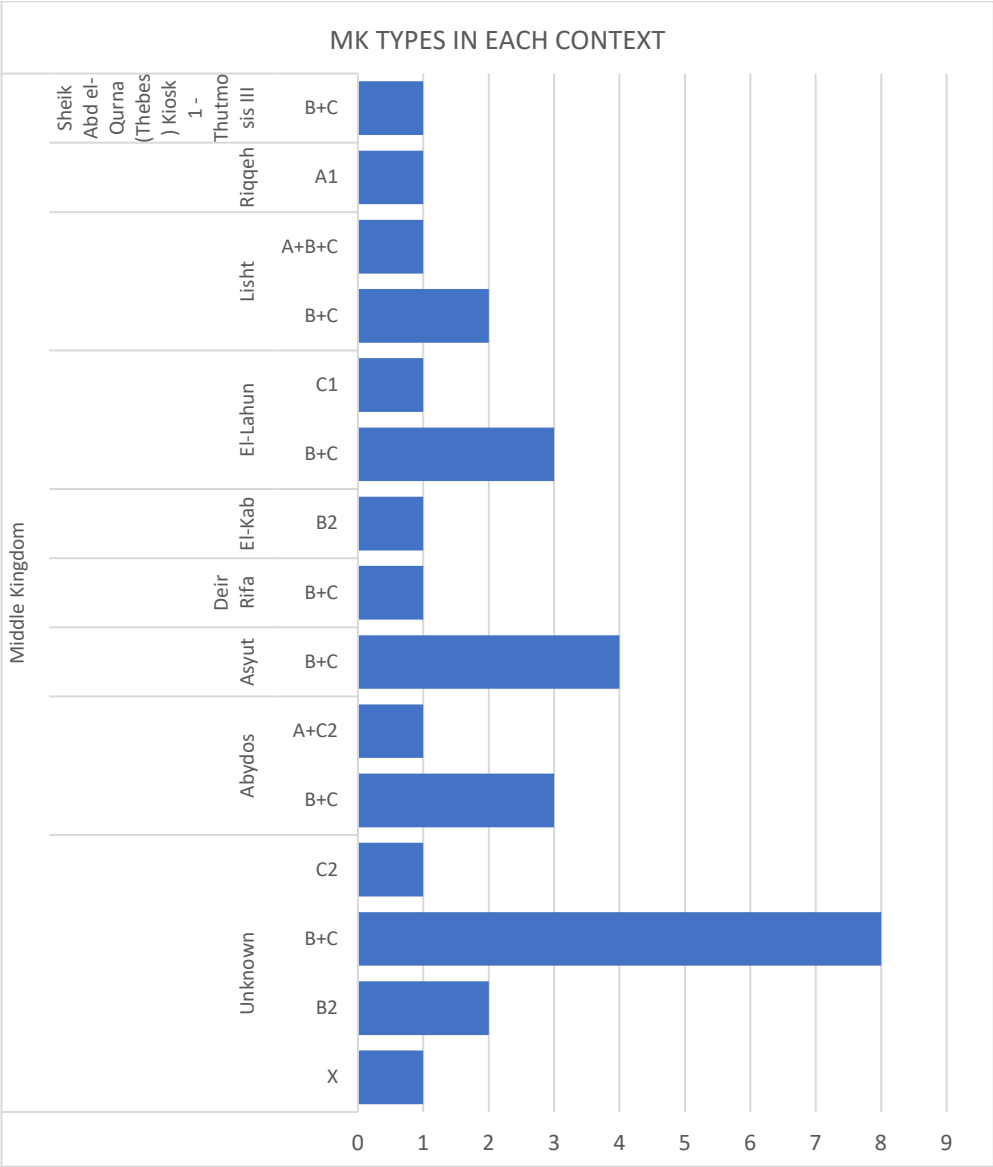
There are a total of 32 stone offering tables and basins present in the database which may be dated to the NK [App II 2.3.9]. The most common type appears to be the B+C, however there is an interesting emerging trend of the C2 Type, emphasising the $ḥtp$-sign rather than watery features. Variations in design begin to occur, especially with the $ḥtp$-shaped external spout structure and the inclusion of "gussets" (i.e., a bracket or additional surface on either side of the external spout structure). Basins, which also re-emerge during this time-period, and sunken areas on offering tables become deeper (see Hölzl 2002: 41), illustrating an emphasis on water features (Table 6.1 in 6.3). These features together with an increase in the number of $ḥtp$ signs, gave rise to "gussets" added on either side of the spout in order to provide additional space for inscriptions (Hölzl 2002: 41). Other developments include the appearance of kneeling figures and Hathor heads along the rim of rectangular and circular offering basins.

The context of NK offering tables does not significantly vary from the MK, in the sense that the greater percentage of the offering tables are in the sample classified as "free-standing" and portable meaning they were easily transported (Table 3.16).

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Table 3.16 contextual categorisation of New Kingdom offering tables in database sample.

NK	32
Free-standing	22
Fixed	3
Fitted	7

With the construction of religious and royal centres in the south since the late MK onwards, it is only logical that most monumental tables, especially of the standardised NK C2 type, are concentrated in necropoleis around Thebes and rural provincial cemeteries such as Deir el-Medina and Amarna in Upper Egypt (Table 3.17; App I:1.2.4]). There are a few tables in the sample which are most likely from temple complexes, evidenced by decorative features such as Hathor heads and kneeling priests. At least two offering tables present in the sample come from temple contexts. Nevertheless, most offering tables in the sample originate from a funerary context. The stylistic choices for either context seem to not be substantially different, and only minor differences emerge between the late NK and LP (see 6.2).

Table 3.17 Offering table Types within each archaeological context.

Types in Each Context in NK	Offering Tables/Basins/Models
New Kingdom	**28**
Unknown	**13**
X	2
A2	1
B1	2
B2	1
C2	3
B+C	3
A+C2	1
Abydos	**1**
B+C	1
Amarna	**2**
X	1
B2	1
Deir el-Medina	**5**
A1	1
C2	4
Ghurab	**1**
C2	1
Heliopolis?	**1**
C2	1
Luxor, Karnak Temple, Thebes, East Bank	**1**
C2	1
Medinet Habu, Thebes, Upper Egypt West Bank	**1**
C2	1
Possibly from Memphite Region, Heliopolis (Iunu; On)	**1**
X	1
Thebes	**2**
C2	1
B+C	1
Grand Total	**28**

A total of 11 offering tables, basins, as well as models/amulets (4 total), may be dated to the TIP [App II:2.3.10]. The most common types appear to be the ø Type as well as the C2 Type. The emergence of models is noted during this time-period, with the presence of faience amulets shaped like offering tables. The standardised shape of the table as a rectangular altar with a spout and/or other watery features remains the norm even in small model replicas.

A few unique pieces dated to the TIP are present in the sample, such as a round basin containing a kneeling figurine together with a crocodile positioned on the rim facing the basin (e.g., CAT ID150). Offering table design in the TIP seems to be a standardisation of earlier NK types such as C1 with slightly new trends emerging such as basins shaped like cartouches (K), perhaps in an attempt to feel closer to the royal cult (6.2.1). Most offering tables provided with a context seem to originate far from the centres of influence, such as Tanis, but are rather from Middle Egyptian sites such as Tarkhan, Gebelein and El Lahun (Table 3.18 [App 1:1.2.5]). This may be a reflection of the division between Lower Egypt with Near Eastern influences and Upper Egypt under Nubian influence, while at the same time reflecting a continuous local tradition and ritual practice (Table 3.19; 6.2.1).

Table 3.18 TIP offering table types in each context

Types in Each Context in TIP	Offering Tables/Basins/Models
Unknown	**4**
A+B+C2*	1
C2*	1
X*	2
El Lahun	**1**
X*	1
El-Riqqa	**1**
B2*	1
Gebelein	**1**
B1*	1
Tarkhan	**2**
A2*	1
B1*	1
Medinet Habu, Thebes	**1**
C2*	1
Tanis	**1**
C2*	1
Grand Total	**11**

Table 3.19 contextual categorisation of TIP offering tables in database sample.

TIP	**11**
Free-standing	9
Fixed	1
Fitted	1

The 37 offering tables present in the database from the LP [App II:2.3.11] provide an insight into the diachronic changes in offering table design and its diversity during later periods. The styles recall past standardised types, such as the popular C1 in the NK, or even the B+C "irrigation fields" design in MK offering tables (6.2.2). Much of the LP sample is composed of offering table amulets and/or models (51%) (Table 3.20). Most of these votive tables are made of bronze with a specific iconography (Tables 3.21-2). The most important innovation during the LP is the introduction of pendants in the shape of offering tables with images of kneeling priests (H) and/or offering bearers,

together with aquatic animals (M) (see 6.4.1). They were particularly common during the 4th-2nd centuries BCE but are attested earlier in the LP.

Table 3.20 General types of offering tables according to context from the LP in the database.

Table 3.21 Materials of offering table models and amulets in the database from the LP.

Types in LP and Contextual Data	Offering Tables/Models	
Late Period		37
Free-standing		31
A	12	
F	19	
Fixed		3
A	3	
Fitted		3
A	3	

Materials of Offering Table Models/Amulets	19
Bronze	14
Faience	2
Limestone	1
Schist	2

Table 3.22 Type and context of offering table models and amulets in the database from the LP

Types in Each Context in LP	Offering Tables/Baisins/Models	
Late Period		37
Unknown		25
X	13	
A2	1	
B2*	1	
C2*	9	
B+C	1	
Abusir (El-Meleq)		1
B2*	1	
Akhmim		1
B+C	1	
Armant		1
X	1	
Matmar		1
C1*	1	
Medinet Habu West Bank Thebes		1
X	1	
Memphis?		1
A1*	1	
Saqqara		2
X	1	
C2*	1	
Saqqara (H5-1556)		1
X	1	
Saqqara, near Nectanebo Temple		1
A+C2*	1	
Thebes (Asasif)		1
C2*	1	
Thebes, necropolis, tomb of Montuemhat		1
A+B+C1*	1	
Grand Total		37

There are a total of 19 offering tables, basins, and models/amulets in the database which may be dated to the PP [App II 2.3.12], although there is an overlap with the sample attested to the "Greco-

Roman Period". The most common types appear to be the B2 Type, an interesting new trend combining the offering table with a standardised external spout structure and the inclusion of one or two basins in the central area (6.2.2; 6.3.1). Types of offering tables from the PP are similar to those from the LP, recalling previous types and features such as "gussets" (J) and C2 types. A new feature during Ptolemaic times is the B2 type with staircases incorporated in the basins. In one example from Berenike, the basin contains six staircases, three on either side (Table 3.23; see 6.3.1 [App I:1.2.8-9]). It appears that monumental offering tables decrease in number during and after the NK.

Table 3.23 Materials of offering table models and amulets in the database from the PP

Types in Each Context in PP	Offering Tables/Basins/Models
Unknown	**10**
X	3
A2	1
B2	3
A+C2	3
Akhmim	**1**
B2	1
Berenike	**1**
B2	1
Dendera	**3**
B2	2
B+C	1
Esna	**1**
X	1
Hermopolis (Ashmunein; Khemenu)?	**1**
C2	1
Tell el-Rataba	**2**
B2	2
Grand Total	**19**

In the sample there are a total of 11 stone offering tables and basins which may be dated to the G-RP [App II:2.3.13]. The most common type during the later periods appears to be the B2 type, with an increasing emphasis on the internal quadrilateral basins with an addition of singular or interlinking staircases. Offering tables are mostly portable and not necessarily monumental in design (Table 3.24). The offering table has in itself become a symbol and is now standardised. The rectangular shape with an external spout structure remains the most common design well into the Roman period.

Table 3.24 Contextual categorisation of G-RP offering tables in database sample.

G-RP	11
Free-standing	8
Fixed	1
Fitted	2

Summary

One form that completely disappears after the OK is the A+B, i.e., rectangular offering tables with square/circular basins and/or the presence of a raised circular platform. These may combine basins with the circular alabaster offering tables common during the early Dynastic period. Their decline may be an indication of the establishment of a funerary ritual linked to offerings rather than purification ceremonies. Hölzl (2002) argues, that by the end of the OK, the B+C form and its

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additional features became the standardised shape of offering tables. In the current study, the MK seems to be a period of significant change in offering table design, mostly due to regional differences and the emergence of unique and personalised features, such as "multiple tables", uniquely styled ḥtp signs, and intricate "watery" features such as canals and internal and external spouts. With the standardisation of offering table design established by the 6th Dynasty, more liberties were taken with iconography, materials, and use.

Stylistic choices change from the later MK onwards. B+C style steadily decreased in popularity, while the C2 type made a significant increase during the NK and continued well into the G-RP. Offering tables with no significant features become more common in later periods, especially in miniature form. Basins (Type B1) make a come-back between the NK and the TIP. Deeper basins emerge, especially with an increase in the B2 type, which are offering tables with square basins included in its design. This type is especially popular during the PP and GR Period (see Graph 3.7).

Graph 3.7 Trends in Offering Table Typology in the database
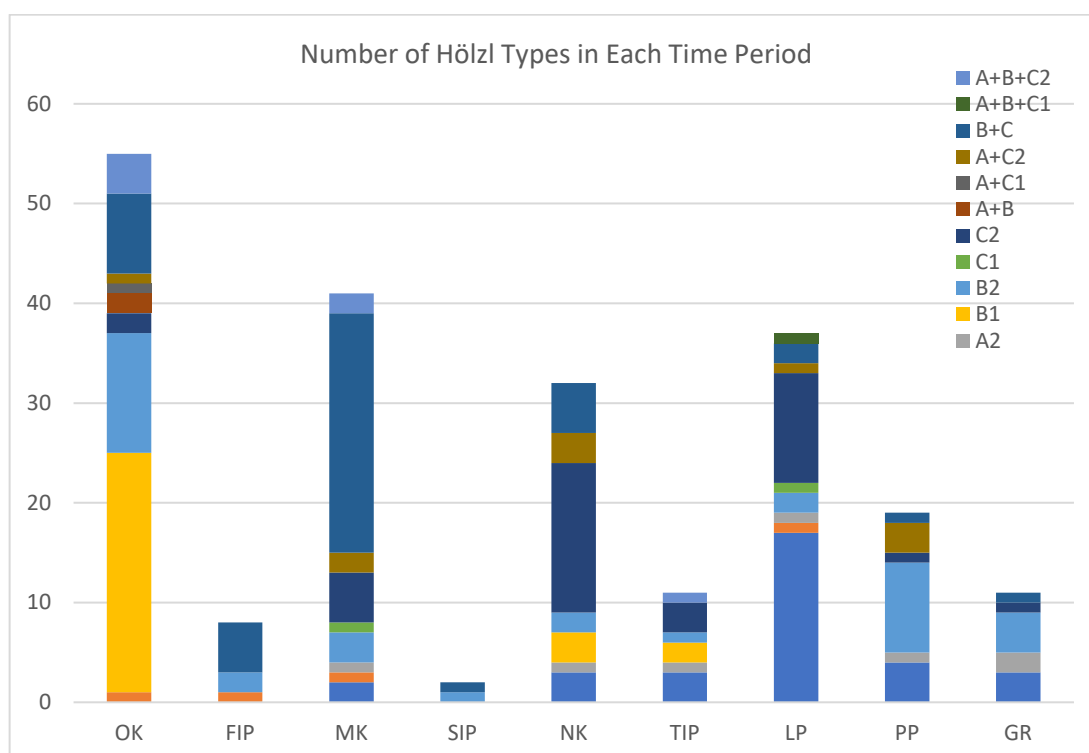
Overview of Pottery Offering Tray Typology in Sample

Pottery offering trays have often been described as simplified versions of stone offering tables (Killian 2012:106; Legros 2016). This definition does not necessarily reflect the extensive variations of offering trays. Based on the 89 pottery offering trays in the sample, early offering trays do not take the standardised form of the OK offering table, since they are most commonly oval with depictions of meat cuts, still not common on stone tables.

The categorisation process for the 89 pottery offering trays was initially similar to that of the stone offering tables, placing them in the initial 6 letter system (see 3.3, Table 3.9; Chart 3.6 [App 1:2.3.4]). 72 objects present in the database fall under the category of "offering tray" (B) while 13 objects are classified as offering trays with an incorporated shrine structure, a mix between a tray and a soul-house (C) (see Table 3.25).

Table 3.25 Types of Offering Tables in the Initial Categorisation (Table 3.9) classified as pottery "Offering Trays".

Lundius Type	Offering Trays
B	72
B+D	3
B+E	3
C	11
Grand Total	89

After this initial categorisation was made, Tooley (1989)'s typology was applied to the pottery offering trays in the database. These include Altar Form, Horseshoe Form, Plate Form, Soul-house and Tomb Form. These types are indications of the general shape of the tray itself. Trays may be a combination of two features, such as the very common "Horseshoe Form", which also may be a "Soul-house", meaning that the tray has superstructures resembling a tomb, or a house (Table 3.26). The "Tomb Form" is slightly more complicated and accordingly categorised on its own. This form includes trays divided into sections via raised rims. The delimited areas usually divide the upper part of the tray containing offerings, or a shrine-like structure, and the lower area which usually is rectangular and resembles the outer courtyard of a tomb (5.6.2). Divisions upon the tray are common in almost all forms described by Tooley (1989). These divisions are in the database classified as "courtyards", they may on offering tables and trays be "raised", as in a central platform containing offering surrounded by a drainage canal or sunken, a common feature in pottery offering trays (76 out of 89 trays) since their shape resembles more a tray/plate than a table/altar. These sunken areas may thus be "divided", which becomes a further classification, 8 trays in the sample (Table 3.27).

Table 3.26 Tooley (1989) Types of Offering Trays present in database.

Types of Offering Trays in Sample	Offering Trays
Altar	**32**
Altar	16
Altar/Other	5
Altar/Tomb	11
Horseshoe	**33**
Horseshoe	21
Horseshoe/ Soul-house	6
Horseshoe/Tomb	6
Plate	**18**
Plate	13
Plate/Other	3
Plate/Slab	1
Plate/Tomb	1
Soul-house	**1**
Soul-house	1
Tomb	**5**
Tomb	1
Tomb/ Soul-house	4
Grand Total	**89**

Table 3.27 "Courtyard" classifications of pottery offering trays in the database.

"Courtyard" Classifications	Pottery Offering Trays
1. Raised platform	2
1. Raised platform, 2. Sunken courtyard	1
2. Sunken courtyard	76
2. Sunken courtyard, 5. Divided	8
3. Basin - no courtyard present	2
Grand Total	**89**

If we consider the context of the pottery trays within the sample, their distribution resembles that of Tooley (1989)'s study, with a concentration in necropoleis across the MK Nile Valley [App II:2.3.14]. As evidenced in graph 17 below, the concentration of the "Horseshoe form" in the 89-tray sample is found in Upper Egyptian cemeteries, such as El-Kab, and has a unique style incorporating multiple canals. The "Horseshoe" forms may also have a shrine structure incorporated in their design, resulting in a combination with the "Tomb Form", which was common in Hierakonpolis (Table 3.28; Graph 3.8), and are present in most contexts with "Horseshoe" trays.

The second most frequent type is that of the "Altar Form" present in a total of 56 trays, found in almost all contexts between Kahun and Edfu, with the highest concentrations in Middle Egyptian sites, such as Asyut and Rifeh. Tooley (1989) observes that only "Altar Form" offering trays have been found between Mostagedda and Rifeh, and when they occur north up to Sedment, their iconographic elements and design emphasise libation and the use of liquids (Tooley 1989: 295). This is also observed in the offering trays from Asyut present in the current sample, which may even have representations of *ḥs* vases (4.4.4).

Most "Plate Form" trays in the sample are from an unknown context but demonstrate a high degree of uniformity, something which may indicate influences from the Theban region showing a pronounced emphasis on libation rituals (see Tooley 1989: 294). Plate forms are the third most common type documented by Tooley (1989), with a concentration in Upper Egyptian regions. Trays at Rizeqat, Gebelein, Salamieh and Armant all present a high degree of uniformity. The trays are oval in shape with a sunken area usually containing a tied animal and a t-shaped canal (Tooley 1989: 294). Trays are common throughout the Nile Valley, with a larger concentration in the Theban region, specifically between Gebelein and Abydos. The numbers are scarce in the sample used for this study, but due to the distribution of types it is clear that the influence in tray design seems to be more common in Upper Egyptian regions, than those north of Asyut (see Graph 3.8; Table 3.28 [App I:2.3.15])[13].

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[13] A recent study on the provenance and distribution of pottery offering trays at the Museo Egizio in Turin is offered by Mi (2020). Three main groups of trays were identified into three main contexts: Asyut, Gebelein, and unknown, and then further classified based on stylistic choices. The study further emphasises the distinct differences in regional and local practices expressed in these types of objects.

Graph 3.8 Types of offering trays in each context present in the database.

Types of Offering Trays in Each Context Present in Database
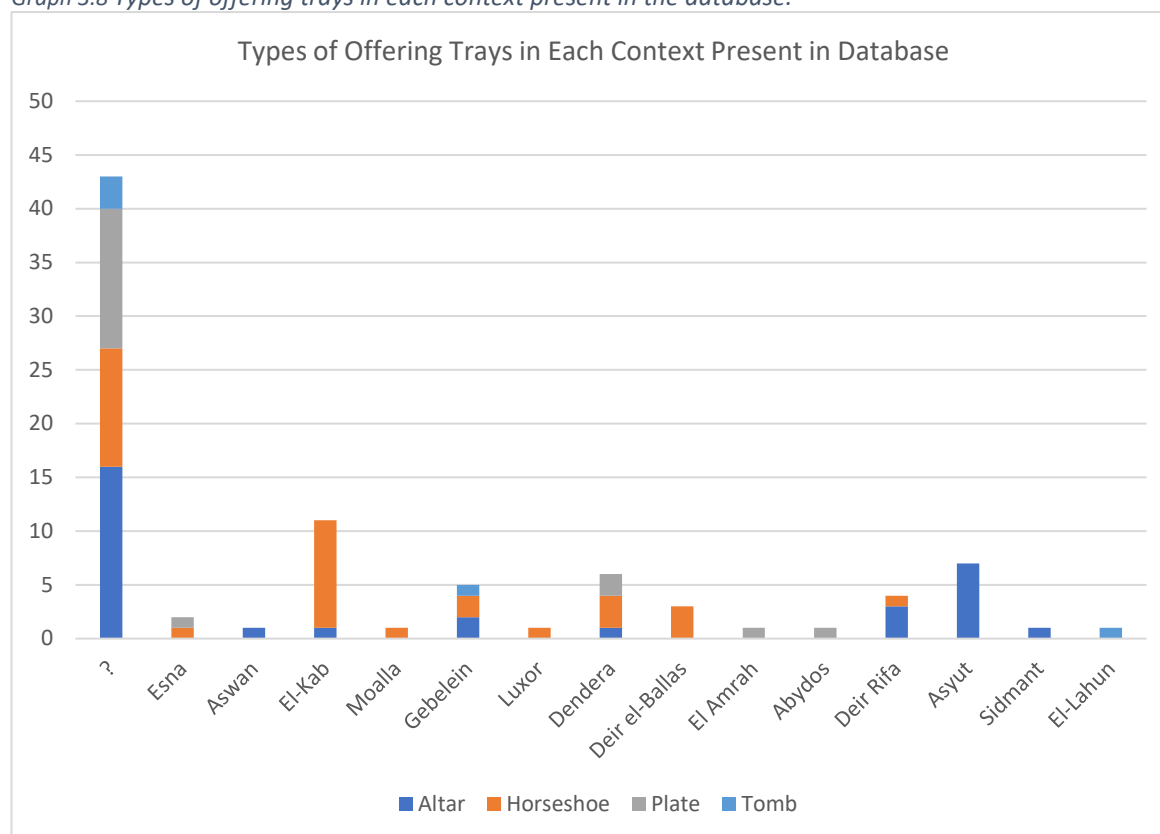
Table 3.28 Types of offering trays in each context in the database.

Types of Offering Trays by Context in the Sample	Offering Trays	
Unknown Context		**44**
Altar	9	
Altar/Other	4	
Altar/Tomb	3	
Horseshoe	6	
Horseshoe/ Soul-house	4	
Horseshoe/Tomb	1	
Plate	12	
Plate/Other	1	
Soul-house	1	
Tomb/ Soul-house	3	
Esna		**2**
Horseshoe/Tomb	1	
Plate/Slab	1	
Aswan		**1**
Altar/Other		1
El-Kab		**11**
Altar/Tomb	1	
Horseshoe	7	
Horseshoe/ Soul-house	2	
Horseshoe/Tomb	1	
Moalla		**1**
Horseshoe	1	
Gebelein		**5**
Altar	2	
Horseshoe	2	
Tomb/ Soul-house	1	
Luxor		**1**
Horseshoe	1	

Dendera		**6**
Altar/Tomb	1	
Horseshoe	1	
Horseshoe/Tomb	2	
Plate/Other	1	
Plate/Tomb	1	
Deir el-Ballas		**3**
Horseshoe	2	
Horseshoe/Tomb	1	
El Amrah		**1**
Plate	1	
Abydos		**1**
Plate/Other	1	
Deir Rifa		**4**
Altar	3	
Horseshoe	1	
Asyut		**7**
Altar	2	
Altar/Tomb	5	
Sidmant		**1**
Altar/Tomb	1	
El-Lahun		**1**
Tomb	1	
Grand Total		**89**

The presence of offering trays does not abruptly come to an end after the MK as is the case for soul-houses at Deir Rifeh (see Table 3.29). Ten trays in the sample are from later periods, they are all region-specific in design and not in the slightest resembling stone offering tables (see 4.4-5, 5.0). The four pottery offering trays dating to the Ptolemaic Period are quite unique, with a "Horseshoe" shape but with a funnel at one end (see 6.3.3).

Table 3.29 Types of Offering Trays in the Sample classified into time periods and context.

Origin and Time Period	Altar	Horseshoe	Plate	Soul-house	Tomb	Grand Total
Unknown Time Period	**6**	**7**	**5**			**18**
Unknown	6	5	3			14
El Amrah			1			1
El-Kab		1				1
Esna			1			1
Luxor		1				1
OK			**2**			**2**
Unknown			2			2
FIP	**9**	**3**	**3**			**15**
Unknown	4	1	3			8
Asyut	2					2
Gebelein	2	2				4
Sidment	1					1
MK	**15**	**19**	**4**	**1**	**5**	**44**
Unknown	6	1	2	1	3	13
Aswan	1					1
Asyut	3					3
Deir el-Ballas		3				3
Deir Rifa	3	1				4
Dendera	1	3	2			6
El-Kab	1	9				10
El-Lahun					1	1
Esna		1				1

Gebelein					1	1
Moalla		1				1
SIP	**2**		**2**			**4**
Unknown			2			2
Asyut	2					2
NK			**2**			**2**
Unknown			1			1
Abydos			1			1
PP		**4**				**4**
Unknown (Kom Tuman?)		4				4
Grand Total	**32**	**33**	**18**	**1**	**5**	**89**

Overview of Soul-house Typology in the Study

In the database, a total of 29 objects are classified as "soul-houses", fourteen of which can be classified as Hölzl´s (2002) Type B2, consisting of a table with two basins, often with an external spout structure and interlinking canals (Table 3.30 [App I:2.3.4]). Twenty-three have canals incorporated in their design, either in the sunken courtyard/tray area or on the roof, and 18 have at least one basin present. These are indications that soul-houses may not only be considered as models but constitute a combination of other more functional utensils. Ten of the soul-houses have no particular functional features (Type ø) (see 3.4.3.3). These possibly had a slightly different significance compared to other soul-houses. "L" refers to soul-houses which are "boat-shaped", meaning that the courtyard area is pointed at the opposite end of the internal structure (Table 3.31-2). This is a quite unique shape, as illustrated in two soul-houses at the *ÄMP* in Berlin, both with a "boat-shaped" design (Figures 3.1,3.2).

Figures 3.1, 3.2 "Boat"-shaped soul-houses from unknown contexts (Catalogue ID53, ÄM 34488/34490).

Dating and chronology is problematic when it comes to the soul-houses present in the sample. Most objects are simply dated to the MK, 10 of which are from an unknown archaeological context. Eighteen soul-houses are from Deir Rifeh, of which 17 are categorised in the Petrie 1907 publication (Table 3.3 above). Nevertheless, 20 soul-houses are classified with "significant" wear or "fragmented" since they are either heavily restored/reconstructed with plaster or have been subject to significant seasonal wear.

According to the types identified by Petrie (1907), all types except Types F and K are present in the sample. The only uncertain classification is that of a soul-house present at the RMO in Leiden (CAT ID197, F1901/1.62) categorised as a combination of Types L and M (see Figure 3.3). The Types are evenly spread out across the sample, with the highest number classified as Type L, which by Petrie is considered as being from a later date (see Table 3.32). As evidenced in the table below, there is a variety of types in Rifeh, but the outliers such as circular trays with an incorporated shrine as well as the three "boat-shaped" soul-houses are from unknown origins, or from Rizeqat (Table 3.34).

Table 3.30 General shape of soul-houses present in the database

Table 3.31 Original Categorisation of Soul-houses in current study (NB: U refers to the "Horseshoe" Type described earlier, and L referred to boat-shaped soul-houses.

Hölzl /Lundius Types	Soul-houses
A1	1
B2	14
U/L*	1
X	10
X/A2	1
X/L*	2
Grand Total	**29**

General Shape and Design	Soul-houses
Rectangular	13
Square	11
"Boat" Shaped	3
Oval/Circular	2

Figure 3.3 (left): Pottery "soul-house" from an unknown context (Catalogue ID197, F1901/1.62, RMO Leiden).

Table 3.32 Types of "Soul-houses" present in database based on Petrie (1907) Typology.

Soul-house Types in the Database	Soul-houses
A	3
B	2
C	2
D	4
E	4
H	1
J	3
L	5
L/M	1
M	4
Grand Total	**29**

The occurrence of soul-houses in ancient Egypt ranges from Beni Hasan in Middle Egypt up to the Nubian fortress at Buhen (Spence 2011:895). The largest number come from Middle Egyptian cemeteries, specifically Deir Rifeh, as evidenced by the 18 soul-houses present in the sample (see Table 3.33-4). According to Spence (2011), soul-houses outside of Rifeh contain fewer domestic architectural features, consistent with the interpretations given by Leclère (2001), stating that these houses are imitations of ritual architecture and practice.

Table 3.33 Types of "Soul-houses" in each context in the database.

Soul-house Types in Context	Soul-houses
Unknown	**10**
A	2
C	2
E	1
L	1
L/M	1
M	3
Deir Rifa	**18**
A	1
B	2
D	4
E	3
H	1
J	3
L	3
M	1
Rizeqat	**1**
L	1
Grand Total	**29**

Table 3.34 General shape of "Soul-houses" in each context in the database.

General Shape of Soul-houses	Soul-houses
Unknown	**10**
Rectangular	4
Square	3
Oval/circular	1
"Boat-shaped"	1
"Boat-shaped"	1
Rizeqat	**1**
"Boat-shaped"	1
Grand Total	**11**

The archaeological context of soul-houses at Rifeh has been commented on by Petrie (1907), who observed that these items generally were positioned between 35-40 inches above the floor level of the grave (5.3-4, 5.7). The soul-houses were placed on a pile of earth about 10 inches high, usually at the south-east corner of the tomb (Petrie 1907:14-15). However, the great majority were documented as just being placed on the ground level, which explains why the bases of the soul-houses in the current sample are well preserved and the surfaces heavily worn and dried out.

Iconography Data

As illustrated in Graph 3.9, 28 iconographic elements were recorded based on the objects present in the database. Most frequent is "round bread", followed by the bovine leg and meat cuts, most common on pottery offering trays. The most frequent iconographic feature for stone offering tables is the ḥtp-sign, present in most of the Types (see 3.4.3.4).

Graph 3.9 Frequency of iconographic elements represented on the material in the database.
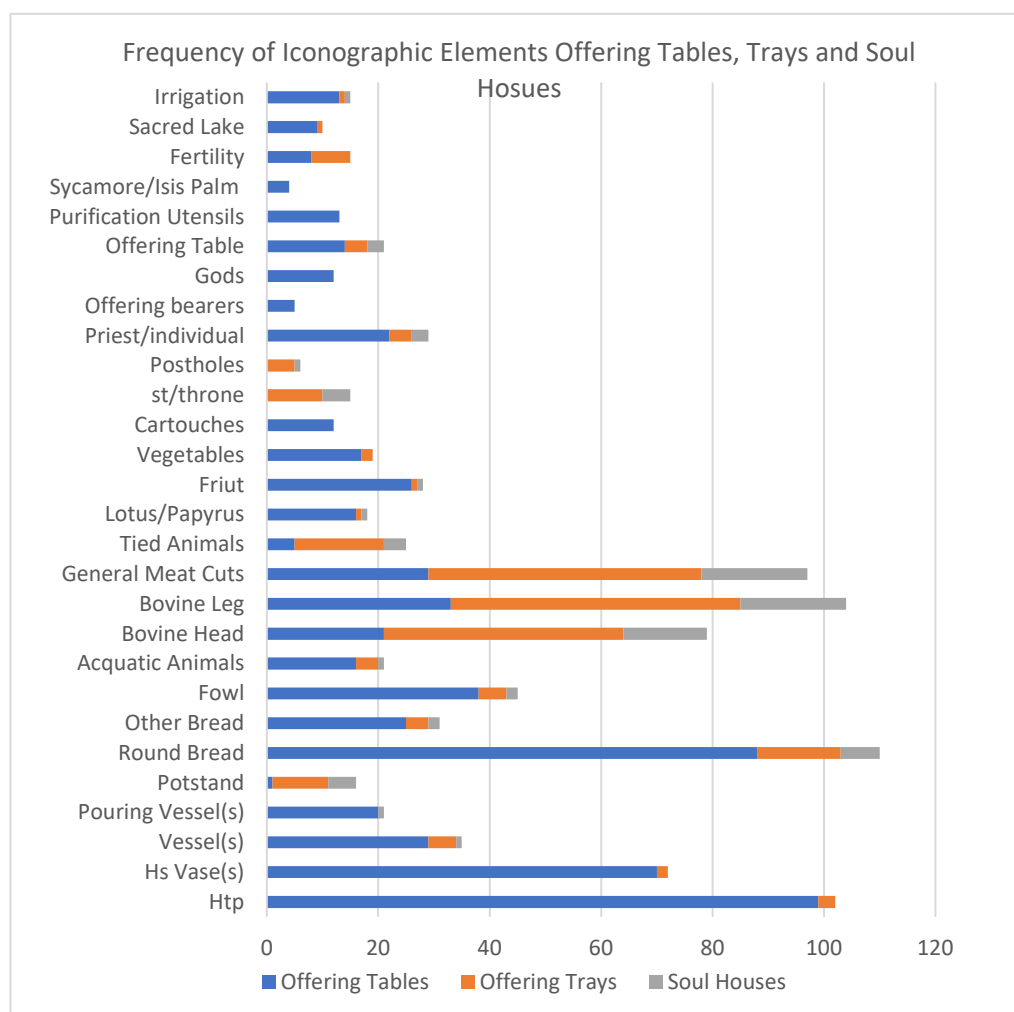
3.4. METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Categorisations as well as proposed typologies of previous scholars were mainly used to discard trends, regional patterns as well as significant diachronic changes of offering tables. These observations were documented, and the data presented in accordance with features showing the following distinct cultic changes: functional features and any evidence of use, as well as iconographic features relating to funerary practices and religious traditions.

The sample and number of objects are based on availability in consulted museum collections (for methodology see section 2.2). The lack of consistency, however, does not prevent the research to assume a comparative validity. The variability of similar material from a wider range of time periods and contexts allows for an analysis of stylistic choices and are thus valid for the aim of this thesis, which is to understand the function and growing significance of the offering table as a concept in ancient Egyptian magical practice, specifically in the funerary context.

Examples addressed in Chapter 6 show how design and diversity of offering trays may indicate local styles and thus provide an insight into local customs and religious traditions (see section 6.2-3). Since pottery trays are context specific and occur during a limited timeframe, discussing regional changes as well as the funerary landscape in which they were found is essential for an understanding of their use and function (see Graph 3.10).

Graph 3.10 The number of offering trays in each context according to time-period.
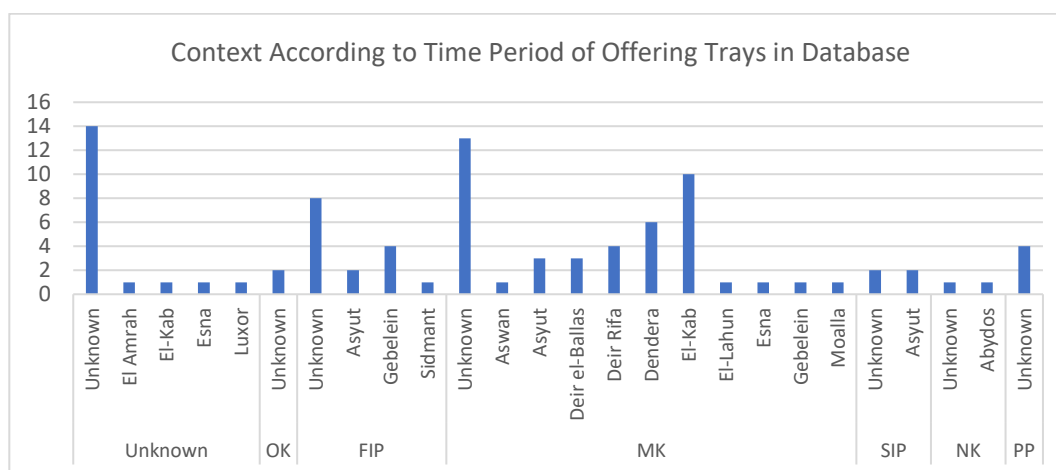
Some inconsistencies arise when looking at the frequency of objects within each context. The first is a bias in the data collection which is from different museum collections and accordingly derive from different archaeological investigations, with perhaps a higher concentration of offering tables from important religious sites (1.3.1). This may be a reflection of the types of sites, for example elite cemeteries with well-preserved material or an elite funerary kit imitated in pseudo-elite cemeteries in Middle Egypt. Another factor to consider is the temporal context. Certain areas were particularly influential during specific time periods and is it in the vicinity of such areas that most funerary material of a certain date is encountered [App I:1.2.1-9]. The data presented in the study may thus present a dynamic picture of chronological, regional, and perhaps ideological diversity.

Furthermore, the archaeological context of offering tables and similar objects is problematic since most of the tables are portable, and thus easily moved and subject to wear and breakage (for more specific examples see the "Hogarth Depot" context at Asyut in 4.4.1). The number of offering tables present in museums across the world reflects this fact, and an indication as to why they generally have been appreciated in accordance with their inscriptions and sometimes prestigious materials, as well as their "magical" connotations and occasionally impressive iconography, while their provenance to a great extent has been ignored. The material, size, and design of these objects may nevertheless determine their context (see Chart 2.1 in section 2.2.2).

3.4.1 Places: Context and Provenance[14]
The archaeological contexts behind any ancient Egyptian material studied away from their original Egyptian site must take into consideration whether they originate from acquisitions, donations, and excavations commissioned and handled by a specific institution, often the museum where they now are found. This inevitably creates a bias for any researcher and must be considered while analysing a bulk of material. However, the methodological approach to this particular study aims at pulling away from the study of a singular archaeological context, but rather focuses on an overview of where, when, and how a specific item was used. To move towards the focus, the object itself was placed in the foreground before carrying out any in-depth studies on archival material and archaeological records reflecting actual locations. In doing so, a focus on "functional context" is achieved, i.e., the original intended placement and context of a distinct type of object (see Graph 3.11).

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[14] See Data Maps in App I:1.1-1.2.

Graph 3.11 The offering tables, basins and models at each context according to time-period.

Context According to Time Period of Offering Tables/Basins/Models in Database
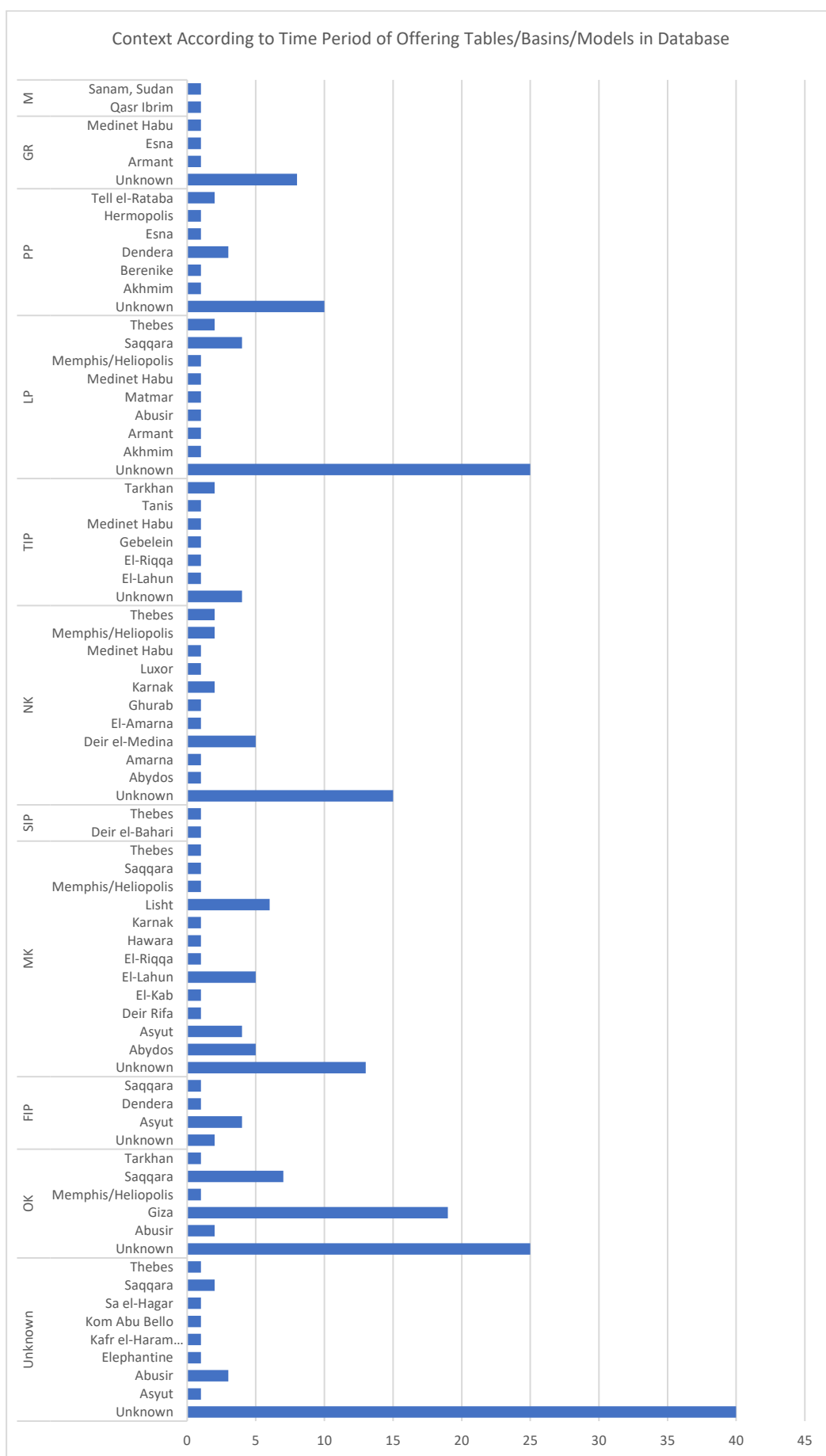
3.4.2 Representative Data Sample

Based on the initial categorising process [App II:2.3.1-3], it is evident that the sample is representative rather than quantitative. Nevertheless, by comparing the data with previous typological studies such as Hölzl's (2002) analysis of Old, Middle and New Kingdom offering tables and basins, it is possible to discern trends within each time-period. Based on the initial categories proposed, stone offering tables appear to be common in all time periods, while numbers of basins have an early peak in the OK with a steady decline until a slight rise occurring during the NK (see Graph 3.12). The two types of offering paraphernalia which are studied are pottery offering trays and offering table/basin models/amulets (Hölzl 2002 labels these models as "miniatures").

Graph 3.12 Offering Table Initial Typology Trends in Database.
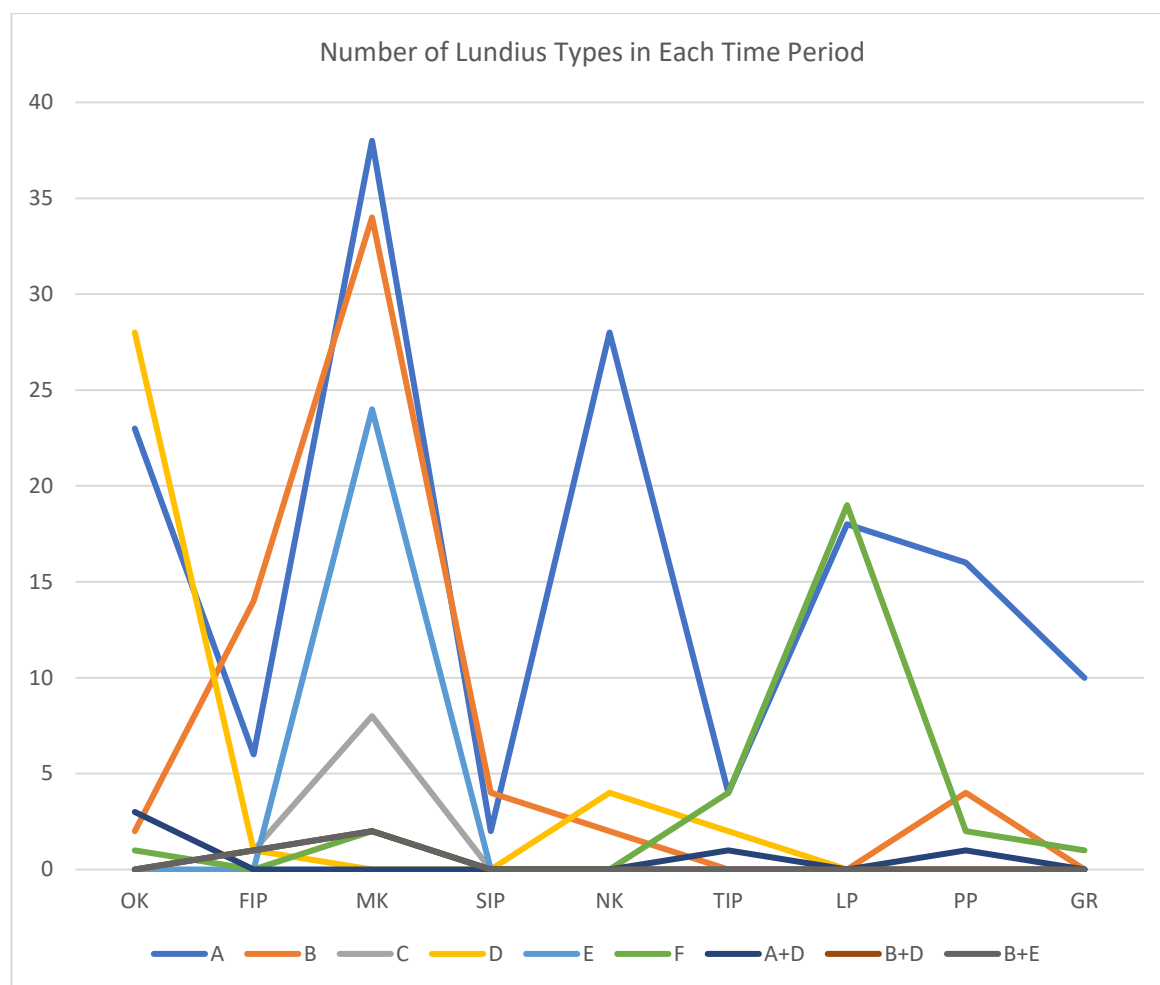
The data for pottery offering trays in the sample is representative since it corresponds to typological and contextual studies carried out by Tooley (1989), Petrie (1907), Niwiński (1975), and Mi (2020). Due to the limited timeframe as well as the regionality presented in offering trays it is very difficult to create a general typological sequence like the one designed by Hölzl (2002) for stone offering tables and basins. Regionality and local styles play a vital role in classification, as outlined by Mi (2020) in his study of pottery offering trays present at Museo Egizio Turin. For these reasons, the sample presented in the current study is closely corroborated to the contextual analyses offered by previous researchers. This will allow for an in-depth analysis of the use and significance of pottery offering trays within a funerary landscape and how changes in the cult and overall funerary traditions were subject to change (see 5.0).

The typology and chronology proposed by Petrie (1907) was used in relation to the 29 soul-houses present in the database. Petrie's types were used due to the provenance of soul-houses from Rifeh

in the sample. Tooley's (1989) typology of offering trays applies little here, due to the fact that all the objects can be classified as various combinations of the "Tomb Form". This initial classification allowed for observations regarding ritual function and use, while taking into consideration practical elements such as the depiction of offerings and the presence of basins, canals, and spouts, something that often has been overlooked.

3.4.3 Applied Methodology

3.4.3.1 Amulets and Models

Amulets have been found in settlement contexts as well as numerous non-elite tombs, which may indicate that they were worn by the deceased during their lifetime and considered as personal items (Pinch 2006: 104). Amulets from domestic contexts have not been analysed as much as funerary amulets, except for those found at Amarna (Stevens 2003: 89-90), mostly due to their overwhelming presence in funerary contexts (Pinch 2006: 105). Nevertheless, amulets have also been recorded at temple sites, as well as in shrines, indicating their potential use as votive objects imbued with magical meaning. All of these notions are very similar to the function of different types of offering tables. Pinch (2006) defines an amulet as a "powerful or protective object worn or carried on the person. In Egypt, this definition might be extended to include some larger objects, such as headrests, which also worked through physical contact." (2006: 105). An offering table, especially in the funerary context, does exactly this; it ensures the well-being of the person to whom it was dedicated via physical contact, regardless of size, material, or shape. The versatility of offering tables is also evidenced via their occurrence as amulets, pendants, and miniature models from the end of the NK onwards (6.4.1).

The objects in the database were classified as models or amulets mostly based on material and size (<10 cm in width). The average dimensions would be about 2.1cm in height, 6.5 in width and 6.8 in length. The length might be slightly longer due to the frequent presence of a ring or external structure for the amulet to be used as a pendant. On the basis of size, the database contains forty-two offering table/basin shaped amulets, pendants and miniature models and there are seven others which cannot be classified in accordance with these criteria.

The objects can be classified into three distinct categories: miniature models, amulets, or bronze pendants (see 6.4.1). The main features which distinguish the categories are the material of which the object was made, its additional structures (bales, chains, etc.), as well as iconographic elements. Miniature offering tables and/or basins are often made in similar materials as those of life-size offering tables such as limestone and may even have been painted, as was the case for some offering tables.

Miniature basins dating to the OK, were discussed in Regina Hölzl (2002)'s study, two of which are present in the database (INV8561 CAT ID338; INV8563 CAT ID340). Hölzl (2002) describes the miniature models as substitutes for offering tables and basins but with no functional use (2002:60-61). Nevertheless, they guaranteed the cultic care of the deceased in the long term due to the fact that these items had an increased symbolic value. Miniature offering tables present in the sample include a combination of statues and offering tables dating from the OK onwards and including the miniature offering table with the statuette of Sehetepib (MMA 22.1.107a, b) dating to the MK.

3.4.3.2   Wear vs Use

Wear plays a significant part in determining the potential use of an object in the archaeological record (Marreiros *et al.* 2020: 477-479). Offering tables have been subject to both natural, as well as man-made weathering. Natural wear refers to damage caused by depositional conditions such

as water sedimentation and heat exposure. Limestone offering tables, for example, may often be extremely flaky on the surface due to acidic conditions or exposure to humidity. Staining is also common on limestone offering tables, especially in museum collections and the items might occasionally have black mould due to humid conditions in storage facilities. Wear caused by reuse is common, for example in monumental offering tables which have been reused for fixtures such as thresholds or even used in agricultural activities where they have served as mortars or grinding stones.

A simple classification system was used to categorize the wear in the objects present in the sample based on degrees of surface damage from visual inspection with a light source (Table 3.35-6):

Table 3.35 Classification of wear in the database.

1. *None:* No significant signs of wear are present on the surface
2. *Some:* Minor signs of wear are present on the surface, including minor staining (including mould spots).
3. *Medium*: Some signs of wear are present on the surface in the form of staining as well as damage to the original features. Some chipping present.
4. *Significant:* significant signs of wear are present on the surface as well as in the material itself, with significant staining and damage to the original surface treatment. Significant chipping present with small fragments of stone removed.
5. *Fragmented/Restored*: The object is fragmented or missing parts and/or the surface is subject to staining and fragmentation.

Table 3.36 Classification of the degree of wear of the objects present in the database.

Wear	Offering Tables	Offering Trays	Soul-houses
1. None	4	0	0
2. Some	55	11	2
3. Medium	96	49	7
4. Significant	90	23	12
5. Fragmented/Restored	24	6	8

After the degree of wear had been addressed (see Table 3.37), it was possible to hypothesize whether the objects had been subject to frequent use or handling (Table 3.37). Wear caused by use is usually evidenced by the presence of smoothened surfaces on the object, especially on handled stone (7.4.2). Damage caused by the use of liquids is more difficult to assess since the wear may be confused with exposure to natural sedimentation (i.e., silts or soil deposited on the stone by its immersion (whole or part) in water). Sedimentation caused by variation in water levels usually leaves a stain caused by water-carried particles, usually evident in stratigraphy (see Stanley 2019). Wear on offering tables and similar materials may be evidenced via a discolouration of the surface in areas such as the external spout structure, basins and/or around raised reliefs. Staining (colour and material deposition) may also be evident on some tables. Hölzl (2002: 71), did for example note staining present in a basin caused by decomposed red wine on the MK offering table 31.3.90 at the MET, New York.

Table 3.37 Classification of any evidence of use on the objects in the database.

Use	Offering Table	Offering Tray	Soul-houses
Frequent	134	61	14
Uncertain	92	25	15
Infrequent	92	3	0
Total	269	89	29

3.4.3.3　Function

Design elements on offering tables and similar objects that are related to function and use include water and utilitarian features such as pedestals, spouts and basins. Hölzl (2002: 77) classifies representational elements on offering tables into two categories: functional and magical. She defined functional elements in accordance with a potential use during an offering ritual such as basins, spouts, and canals. Magical elements were defined as effective in accordance with their representation on the offering table. These elements include the *ḥtp*-sign, offerings as well as three-dimensional "washing sets" (Hölzl 2002: 65; 7.3.4).

For our purposes, Hölzl (2002)'s "functional elements" are the equivalent of basins, canals, spouts and "delineated space". The placement of offerings in relation to the functional elements is also of importance, since their iconographic representations are "activated" or play a role in the ceremony only when they come in contact with the physical elements that are part of the ritual, specifically the liquids poured across the surface (see 5.7; 6.3; 7.2.4).

Functional elements are prominent in the OK, evidenced by the large number of offering basins and offering tables which include basins (51 out of 55 tables). Functional elements include the depiction of a "washing-set" which is composed of a bird's eye view of a water jug with its spout usually facing a small basin. Three offering tables in the sample are equipped with a "washing-set" (Figure 3.4) labelled as "ladles" (see Graph 3.9 in 3.3.1). These are combined with circular depressions for the seven sacred oils/ointments also used as part of a "washing-set", present in two offering tables in the sample dating to the OK.

Figure 3.4: Old Kingdom limestone offering table of Hetjer, Neferka (Catalogue ID295, 37.1496E, Brooklyn Museum, New York).
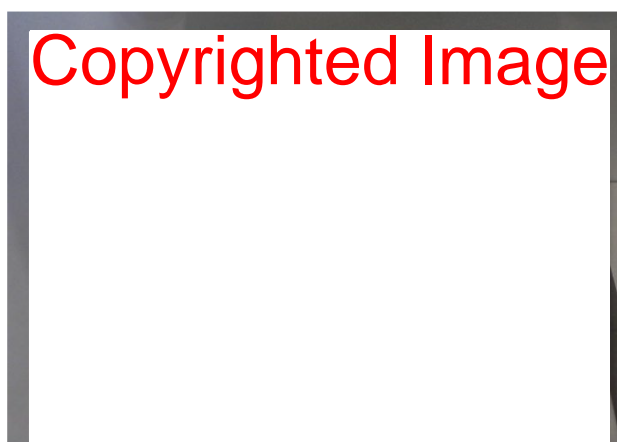
Round, elevated platforms inspired by the original circular alabaster plates with bases from the 1st — 3rd Dynasty, are attested from the mid- 4th Dynasty (Hölzl 2002: 65). By the MK, the round elevations decrease significantly. Round platforms may also have round bread, which is magical as well as functional. In the OK the round platforms may have been more functional, since they could have been used as actual tables for the placement of real offerings. By the MK, round elevations are mostly defined as "round bread" rather than altars (see 3.4.3.4). Functional elements on offering tables may decrease from the NK onwards. However, these elements evolved overtime and became symbolic representations of a specific concept, something which will be discussed in 6.3; 7.3.4.

Basins and Canals

Basins are used in almost every time-period, either in combination with other ritual utensils or incorporated into offering table design. Their functional use is for the collection of "cleansing and

libation fluids" or for receiving of liquid offerings (Hölzl 2002: 77). Canals have not been extensively interpreted in previous publications on offering tables, only when they obviously resemble irrigation systems (5.5.1, 6.3).

Offering tables with spouts may be slightly inclined towards the spout end (28% of objects in the sample), influencing the trajectory of the liquids poured onto the surface (see Table 3.38). A large number of offering tables do not present any clear inclination (56% of the sample).

Table 3.38 Inclination of the surface of the objects present in the database.

Inclination	Offering Tables	Offering Trays	Soul-houses	TOTAL
1. Towards spout	36	57	17	110
2. Left of spout	2	1	0	3
3. Right of spout	0	2	0	2
4. Opposite of spout	0	4	0	4
5. No inclination	206	3	7	216
6. Undetermined	24	21	4	49
7. Bulging	1	0	1	2
8. Towards centre	0	1	0	1
Grand Total	**269**	**89**	**29**	**387**

The number of basins in offering tables and similar stone material in the database appears to be particularly significant in the OK and MK, when the most common offering table design is B1 (basins), B2, and B+C. The presence of a single basin appears to be most common (see Table 3.9). Tables with two basins are the second most common occurrence, reflected in the Type B+C. The time-period showing the highest number of basins in offering table design is the MK, which also indicates a rise in watery features. Offering tables with two basins seem to be most commonly combined with canals, while it is important to note the high number of 83 offering tables with the presence of a canal without the incorporation of a basin, most likely it is a drainage canal or spout. The high number of offering tables with no basins in the NK, as well as the LP, indicate an emphasis on the expulsion of water rather than retention, coinciding with the rise of the C2 Type.

Table 3.39 Number of basins present in offering tables and similar material in the database.

# BASINS	?	OK	FIP	MK	SIP	NK	TIP	LP	PP	GR	TOTAL	With Canals
0	*26*	*4*		*9*		*20*	*5*	*30*	*5*	*3*	*102*	*83*
1	7	30	0	5	1	5	4	3	8	5	68	32
2	12	12	6	11	0	5	1	1	5	2	55	38
3	3	2	1	6	0	0	0	0	0	1	13	11
4	1	3	0	4	0	1	0	2	1	0	12	7
5+	3	3	1	8	0	0	1	1	0	0	17	9
TOTAL	26	50	8	34	1	11	6	7	14	8	165	97

The number of basins present on pottery offering trays and soul-houses in the sample is more significant than previously assumed (Table 3.40). This indicates an important similarity between these funerary utensils and stone offering tables. Although a significant number of trays do not contain basins, most do have a canal. However, the most common number appears to be 1 to 2 basins. A single basin may be an indication of a sacred area within the "courtyard space" of the trays. However, two basins and the combination with canals may also be reminiscent of the common B+C Type in the FIP and MK (3.3.1; 4.4).

Table 3.40 Number of Basins present in offering trays and soul-houses in the database.

#Basins	Offering Trays	*With Canals*	Soul-houses	With Canals
0	35	*28*	11	*6*
1	26	*23*	7	*6*
2	21	*18*	6	*5*
3	2	*2*	2	*2*
4+	5	*4*	3	*3*
Grand Total	89		29	

The most common shape of basins is a combination of different types upon the same offering table. Table 3.41 describes the data on basin design in stone offering tables and similar material in the database organised by time-period.

Table 3.41 General basin shape in stone offering table and similar material in the database.

Basin Shape	?	OK	FIP	MK	NK	TIP	LP	PP	GR	TOTAL
rectangular	2	0	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	7
square	2	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	7
circular	0	2	0	2	2	1	1	4	0	12
other	5	0	1	0	2	2	1	3	3	17
combinations	4	5	0	5	0	1	1	3	0	19
TOTAL	13	7	4	12	4	4	3	11	4	62

The design of the basin may be relevant while identifying trends. Sloping-edged basins are common in earlier periods, as well as rimmed basins. Basin design appears to be more elaborate in the OK, with the presence of a rim containing inscriptions and sloping edges, possibly reflecting the high number of "fitted" offering tables during this time-period (Table 3.42).

Table 3.42 Basin edges in stone offering tables/basins in the database.

Basin Edges	?	OK	FIP	MK	NK	TIP	LP	PP	GR	TOTAL
plain	17	14	6	16	8	6	5	13	5	90
sloping	7	18	1	15	4	0	1	1	0	47
rimmed	2	0	0	3	0	0		0	2	7
rimmed + sloping	1	16	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	19
double rimmed + sloping	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4

Overall, canals are more common than basins with a total of 177 compared to 97 out of a total of 269 tables (Table 3.43). The database shows no significant indicators of trend, although offering tables in the MK indicate an increase in the use of canals compared to other periods. Another significant number is that of the 51 items in the OK showing the presence of no canals, indicating a need for water retention during this period.

Table 3.43 Number of canals present in stone offering tables and similar material in the database.

# CANALS	?	OK	FIP	MK	NK	TIP	LP	PP	GR	TOTAL
0	**6**	**51**	**4**	**8**	**9**	**4**	**6**	**1**	**0**	**89**
1	27	4	1	14	22	6	22	9	5	110
2	16	0	0	7	1	0	7	7	5	43
3	1	0	1	10	0	1	0	1	1	15
4+	1	0	2	4	0	0	1	1	0	9
TOTAL	45	4	4	35	23	7	30	18	11	177

There are similarities between the presence of canals in pottery trays and stone offering tables (Table 3.44). Offering trays appear to emphasise water expulsion rather than water retention. The most common number of canals remains one, however, most likely a spout or drainage canal.

Table 3.44 Number of canals present on offering trays in the database.

# Canals	?	OK	FIP	MK	SIP	NK	PP	TOTAL
0	3			6		1	4	14
1	4		5	13	1			23
2	5	2	8	8	1			24
3	3		1	5	2			11
4	1		1	2		1		5
5+	2			10				12
Total	18	2	15	44	4	2	4	89

Canal formations upon offering tables are indicative of trends. Although they are closely related to iconography (3.4; general position and form is outlined in Table 3.45). The most common type is the "spout canal", essentially leading through the external spout structure. Second most common is a combination of a spout and "drainage" canal. The latter is usually a canal surrounding a central area containing offerings and functioning in a similar manner as a drainage system surrounding temples. The less common canal formation is Y-shaped, common on offering trays and soul-houses as well. It is composed of three canals, two of which extend from separate basins merging into a spout canal. Sometimes this variant omits the spout canal, creating a V-shape. This is most common from the FIP onwards, as evidenced in the examples from Asyut (4.4; for canal formation trends in offering trays according to region see table 3.46).

Table 3.45 General overview of the canal formations on stone offering tables in the database.

Canal Shape	?	OK	FIP	MK	NK	TIP	LP	PP	GR	TOTAL
Spout	17	2		12	19	5	15	7	5	82
drainage	2		1				2	3	1	9
Covered, Spout canal	1		1	1			3			6
Drainage, Spout canal	15			3	1	1	8	5	3	36
Y-shaped/V-shaped	0		1	6		2	1	0		10

Table 3.46 Trends in canal formations in pottery offering trays in regions.

Geographical Provenance and Canal Formations	Offering Trays
Unknown	**44**
Undetermined	8
#-formation	1
+ -formation, Drainage, Hole	1
Covered	2
Covered, Spout canal	1
Drainage	3
Drainage, Hole	3
Drainage, Hole, T-shaped	1
Drainage, Hole, TT-shaped	1
Drainage, Spout canal	1
Hole	1
Hole, Parallel	1
Hole, T-shaped	1
Linking, V-shaped	1
Parallel	2
Parallel, Spout canal, V-shaped	1
Spout canal	7
T-shaped	4

TT-shaped	1
V-shaped	2
X-shaped	1
Lower Egypt	**2**
Spout canal	1
Spout canal, X-shaped	1
Middle Egypt	**12**
Undetermined	2
Covered	1
C-shaped, Drainage, Hole	1
Drainage, Hole	1
Drainage, Spout canal	1
Spout canal	3
Spout canal, V-shaped, Y-shaped	1
Spout canal, Y-shaped	1
V-shaped	1
Upper Egypt	**31**
Undetermined	5
"horseshoe"-formation	2
"horseshoe"-formation, Hole	1
#-formation	1
+ -formation	1
circular, Drainage, Semi-covered	1
Covered	5
Drainage	2
Drainage, Hole	1
Hole, U-shaped	1
Parallel	6
φ-formation	1
Spout canal	2
T-shaped	1
V-shaped	1
Grand Total	**89**

Spouts

Spouts are possibly the main feature of offering tables which indicate use and overall function. They were so common in offering table design that by the NK they had become a standard feature. A single spout is by far the most common in the sample (Table 3.47). However, multiple spouts in one single offering table are not uncommon, possibly indicating multiple water processes or part of the "multiple" offering tables described earlier. The most important functional elements in the MK are basins connected with spout openings (internal spout structures), funnels, and external spout structures with canals. Only a few offering tables are composed of basins and no spout.

Table 3.47 Number of spouts on each offering table in the database.

# SPOUTS	?	OK	FIP	MK	NK	TIP	LP	PP	GR	TOTAL
0	9	47	6	8	8	3	6	3	1	91
1	42	7	1	30	24	7	28	13	8	160
2		1	1	4			2	2	1	11
3+				1		1	1	1	1	5
TOTAL	51	55	8	43	32	11	37	19	11	267

The spout may be positioned on different areas of the offering table and similar items (Table 3.48) The external spout structure is the most common, identified as a protruding structure of the table surface functioning as a drain. Other positions include the internal spout structures which may be

means of interlinking several basins across the surface or being included to drain water from a flat surface into a basin incorporated into the offering table design. Incorporated spouts may be described as spouts with "gussets" on either side, emerging from the NK onwards. The notable lack of spouts in the OK is indicative of the large number of basins.

Table 3.48 Spout position on offering tables in the database.

Spout Position	?	OK	FIP	MK	NK	TIP	LP	PP	GR	TOTAL
External	33	3	1	23	17	8	28	12	7	132
Internal	2	3		3				1	1	10
Incorporated	5			2	5				2	14
Combination	1	2	1	5	1		2	3		15
Uncertain/Incomplete	3			3	2		3	1	1	13
None	7	47	6	7	6	3	4	2		82
TOTAL	51	55	8	43	31	11	37	19	11	

In the sample there is a significant increase in the use of canals, basins as well as spouts, for example 35 tables in the MK have at least one canal and 15 out of these have more than two. In the OK, only four tables out of fifty-five have a canal. Only 8 out of 43 MK offering tables in the sample do not have a spout, while 29 tables have at least one spout, canal, and basin. This indicates an increase in the use of liquids and a need to remove the liquid from the surface of the offering table itself. The external spout structure appears to be an exclusive innovation in the MK. In the current sample, 60% of the offering tables in the MK have an external spout structure, compared to 7% in the OK (Table 3.48).

By the NK, there is a decrease in the use of canals, but incorporated basins and external spout structures are still very common. Twenty-three out of 32 offering tables in the NK have a canal, mostly in the form of a "spout canal" rather than incorporated drainage canals (Table 3.49). Hölzl (2002: 72-3) notes a significant decrease in the use of "stepped" basins, which is evidenced in the sample where no rectangular basins have double-rims. Spouts steadily became more diverse in shape, with *ḥtp*-shaped spouts becoming increasingly common during the NK (see Table 3.49). Functional elements continue to include the presence of basins, spouts, and external spouts, although canals and drainage canals become less common. The number of tables with recessed basins decrease significantly and singular offering basins reappear, inspired by OK models. The external spout structure may be straight ("standard") but also *ḥtp*-shaped. This is both a functional and magical element recalling protruding *ḥtp*-spouts of the OK, which appeared in the 5th dynasty (Table 3.49-50).

Table 3.49 The shape of spouts in offering tables present in each time period in the database.

Spout Shape	OK	MK	NK	LP	PP
Standard	2	23	7	14	11
Htp	2	1	14	3	2
Circular/Drainage Hole	0	0	0	2	1
Covered	0	0	0	9	1
V-Shaped	0	4	1	3	1
Ladle (Water Jug)	3	0	0	0	0
Not present	47	7	5	4	1
Other/Missing	1	5	5	2	2

Table 3.50 General overview of spout design in offering tables in the database.

Spout Design	Offering Tables
Unidentified	2
Standard	93
V-shaped	20
Open ended	1
Ladle (water jug)	3
Incorporated	4
Htp	26
Circular/hole	5
Combination	2
Other	9
None	79
Covered	12
Broken/missing	13
Grand Total	269

Spouts in offering trays and soul-houses do not really have significant variation in design and tend to be standard, open-ended, or in some cases a drainage hole incorporated into the surrounding rim (for examples see 5.3).

Delineated Space

This functional element refers to the central area where the depiction of offerings is usually positioned, it may be constituted by a) a raised platform surrounded by a drainage canal and/or rim; b) a sunken area surrounded by a raised rim usually containing offerings, and which may be linked to a spout canal; c) a combination of both; d) a divided area, usually by a raised rim or sunken canal (Table 3.51). When these elements are combined, they interplay with the use of liquids during a ceremony, influencing the duration of the process and/or its efficacy (see 7.4.2). In the OK, 30 offering tables are basins and, therefore, automatically sunken areas, while MK shows a deliberate choice of sunken areas containing offerings, emphasising a complicated water process. A decrease in sunken areas is noted from the late NK onwards, indicating an emphasis on offerings rather than an elaborate "active" water process.

Table 3.51 The "delineated space" or "offerings area" on offering tables in the database

Offerings Area	?	OK	FIP	MK	NK	TIP	LP	PP	GR	TOTAL
sunken	25	7	5	33	24	7	26	8	3	138
raised	19	17		3	2	1	6	9	5	62
basin	5	30	2	5	4	2	1	2	3	54
combination			1	1			1			3
unidentified	2	1		1	2	1	3			10

Pottery offering trays and soul-houses usually present a sunken area surrounded by a rim. This is mostly due to the overall design as outlined in section 3.3, resembling a plate, or more figuratively, a courtyard structure with a surrounding enclosure.

3.4.3.4 Iconography

The orientation of the iconography in all three main types of objects was recorded (Table 3.52). The most common orientation is towards the spout; accordingly, it was intended to be read by the receiver of the offering. Although this orientation is not as important in offering trays, it is interesting to note that some iconographic elements on trays are oriented in a direction opposite of the spout.

Table 3.52 Orientation of offerings depicted on objects in the database.

Orientation of Offerings	Offering Tables	Offering Trays	Soul-houses	TOTAL
Towards Spout	132	37	6	175
Opposite Spout	7	15	5	27
Mixed	16	25	11	52
Left/Right	0	1	2	3
Not applicable*	103	8	4	115
Undetermined	13	4	1	18

*The object does not have a spout or does not contain the depiction of offerings.

The design upon most tables and trays is inclined towards the spout, or an open end. This design element most likely facilitated the liquids to flow across the entire surface. No items, except four offering trays have an inclination away from the spout (Table 3.53).

Table 3.53 Surface inclination of the objects present in the database.

Surface Inclination	Offering Tables	Offering Trays	Soul-houses	TOTAL
Towards Spout	36	57	17	110
Opposite Spout	0	4	0	4
Left of Spout	2	1	0	3
Bulging	1	0	1	2
Centre	0	1	0	1
Side	0	2	0	2
No inclination	206	3	7	216
Undetermined	24	21	4	49
TOTAL	269	89	29	387

Some objects in the sample do not present any iconographic elements in their design. However, this does not indicate that they lack indications of use, they may simply be a basin or a model of an offering table with the typical rectangular shape and external spout structure (Table 3.54).

Table 3.54 Objects in the database with no iconographic elements incorporated in their design.

Object Type	Number of objects with no Imagery
Offering tables	68 (NB: 39 are basins)
Offering trays	6
Soul-houses	1

Magical elements are attested more rarely than functional ones. These elements include the *ḥtp*-sign, representations of "washing sets", *ḥs* vases and other ritual vessels, and countless offerings. Even if the distinction between "functional" and "magical" iconography is difficult to define it might nevertheless be useful while describing the cultic function of the various features upon offering tables, trays, and soul-houses. Functional elements may decrease as magical elements increase or vice versa, always according to time-period and context.

Food offerings were common since the Predynastic Period and are incorporated into offering tables from the 4th Dynasty onwards. Before this (and possibly several in later contexts) they probably consisted of actual offerings placed on calcite plates resting on pedestals. When offerings are depicted on OK offering tables, they are positioned on round bases or platforms. These would also consist of the "delineated spaces" mentioned above. Offering scenes appear mostly in the B+C category of offering tables and are usually represented on the *ḥtp*-sign. The majority of such tables are from the OK, usually found in tombs where the cult site was a niche in the wall and false doors, which did not include a depiction of the deceased. Offering scenes were steadily moved onto the walls. Depiction of individuals are rare, and the deceased are usually represented by their name on

the table. Raised round platforms and/or depressions no longer may be interpreted as functional but have rather become representations of round bread (3.3.1).
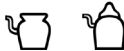
Offerings are most likely to be represented at the centre within a raised or sunken area surrounded by a drainage canal. During the MK and onwards offerings become significantly more varied than before and often include breads, cakes, fruits, vegetables, and numerous cuts of meat. These may be depicted as lined up, piled, or placed in disorderly fashion around the table. A great number of trays and tables lack representations of offerings and instead emphasise designs alluding to landscapes, such as fields and irrigation systems (see 4.6.1; 5.5-6; 6.3.1-2).

During the 18th dynasty, the selection of offerings and their arrangement became similar to MK representations, but offerings now appear to be concentrated by the external spout end of the table or close to it, while at the opposite (top) end there may be a second *ḥtp*-sign, functioning as a "frame divider". When the *ḥtp* was depicted at the spout end, the top sign may also represent a basket of offerings or a sacred vessel, indicating an emphasis on symmetry in the table design. Even if magical elements increased significantly during the NK, the *ḥtp*-sign eventually lost its central role as a symbol for "offering".

Ritual Utensils

During the OK different types of vessels are rarely depicted and they are usually defined as "Purification Utensils", which include washing sets, sacred oil palettes, and censers. Offering lists are usually incorporated onto the tables together with a sacred oils palette and a washing set. In the data set, four offering tables from the OK contain "purification utensils" (see Graph 3.9 above). During the MK ritual utensils appear more frequently than before, including *ḥs*-vases, vessels, and purification utensils. *ḥs*-vases are most frequent from the MK onwards. These were used for libation fluids, even though they lack a spout, they could be used for the storage of sacred liquids. These vases are depicted as free-standing or with a frame/stand. The ritual is often emphasised through depictions of inclined *ḥs*-vases pouring out liquids, most frequently into a basin and/or spout. From the 12th Dynasty onwards, *nsmt*-jars are also depicted, these are vessels for specific use during cleansing and libation rituals (for definitions see Table 3.55; 7.3.3). Pottery offering trays usually only contain pot-stands and water jugs (5 with water jugs, 14 with pot stands) for the storage of water.

Table 3.55 Types of Vessels depicted on offering tables and similar material in the database.

Vessel	Transliteration		Use
ḥs-vase	*ḥs*		Used in offering and libation rituals
Nmst-jar	*nmst*		Used in royal purification rituals
jar	*?*		Generic storage jar
Cup	*wsḫ, sḫw, ꜥ*		Drinking cup, cup for holding offerings, goblet
Bowl (*nb*-basket)	*nb*		Basket, also sign for "lord"
Beer jar	*ḥnḳt*		Beer jar
Washing set	*?*		Used in purification and libation rituals

Jar with handles	wḫꜥt / ḳrḥt, wdpw		Cauldron or boiler,
ḏwi-vessel			
bꜣs-jar	bꜣs		
ḫntw-pots	ḫntw		Water pitchers stand, fresh water

In the sample, vessels are more common from the MK onwards, including ḥs-vases as evidenced in the Asyut sample (see 4.4.4). Six out of 41 offering tables have depictions of pouring ḥs-vases, most often with canals or the actual engraved streams of liquids reaching the external spout structure and drainage canal (Table 3.56). Other ritual vessels emerge in importance in later examples in the database.

Table 3.56 Frequency of depicted vessels on material in the database.

Ritual Utensil	Offering Tables (269)	Offering Trays (89)	Soul-houses (29)
ḥs-vases	97	2*	0
Pouring ḥs-vases	21	0	0
Other pouring vessels	5	0	1
Other vessels	34	5	1
Pot-stand	1	14	5
Offering table	19	4	3

*Both of these offering tables are from Asyut. One dates to the FIP and the other to the MK. Four stone offering tables with the same depiction of Hs vases are from an unknown provenance but may show signs of regionality (two from the FIP and two from the MK). Pouring ḥs-vases are also common from this time period at Asyut (5 in total) and Abydos.

Bread and Cakes

During the OK representations of individual offerings, such as numerous types of bread and vessels, were rare. Round platforms appearing on OK offering tables have been confused with the representation of round bread or cakes (Hölzl 2002: 67-9). However, these are elevated platforms which were used as actual round tables (*iwt*-tables) for the placement of "real" offerings.

In the database, the most frequent OK offerings are round bread (6 out of 55; see Graph 3.9 above). During the MK, the "offering" or bread part of the *ḥtp*-sign is often emphasised, it is generally oversized, stylized and lacking a mat (see 3.5.4). Many *ḥtp*-signs include numerous offerings. Round bread accompanied by two *ḥs*-vases is frequent. It is important to note a growing presence of different types of bread such as the conical loaf. In the database, round bread is more frequently depicted during the NK than the *ḥtp*-sign (19 out of 32 tables). Round bread increases in number of attestations from the LP onwards and becomes a standard iconographic element on offering tables and similar material well into the G-RP (Table 3.58). Different types of bread and cakes are now numerous, often cone-shaped rather than pyramid-shaped (for definitions see Table 3.57)[15].

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[15] For a note on the occurrence of different Baker's Marks presented on types of bread in the database see App II:2.3.17.

Table 3.57 Types of Bread depicted on offering tables and similar material in the database.

Type of Bread	Transliteration	Gardiner	Description	Representation
Round bread	*pȝt*	X6, x6a	Round loaf Round loaf with a baker's mark Donut	
Conical loaf	Determinative in: *wnmw* (sustenance, food)	X2, X3	Cone-shaped bread Cone-shaped bread with a bread mould base	
Pyramid cake	Determinative in: *rdỉ* (to give)	X8, X8a	Conical loaf, shaped like a pyramid	
Bread roll	Determinative in: *ḥw* (food, sustenance, etc.), *rdnỉw* (to shape, portion)	X4, X4a, X4B	A horizontal bread loaf or roll A horizontal bread loaf or roll with baker's mark	
Bread loaf (t)	*t*	X1	A semi-circular bread loaf	
Square loaf	?	?	Square loaf often with indented sides	

Table 3.58 Frequency of different types of bread depicted on stone offering tables in the database.

Time Period	Round Bread	Conical Loaf	Pyramid Cake	Bread Roll	Bread Loaf (*t*)	Square Loaf
Unknown	27	1	1	1	1	0
OK	6	0	0	0	1	0
FIP	0	0	0	0	0	1
MK	17	4	3	2	0	1
NK	19	5	1	3	1	0
TIP	4	0	0	1	0	0
LP	29	0	3	2	0	0
PP	10	0	0	1	0	0
GR	4	1	0	2	0	0
Grand Total	**116**	**11**	**8**	**11**	**3**	**2**

Meat Cuts and Live Animals

Pieces of meat/poultry (for definitions see table 3.59) were occasionally depicted on offering tables during the OK, though they were shown more often in late periods. During the MK different meat cuts, geese and other fowl began to be consistently depicted on offering tables. In the database, 12 offering tables have a bovine leg depicted, 7 have an ox or calf's head, while 10 offering tables show other types of cuts as well such as ribs, joints, cone-shaped lumps, and tails. Entire animals, often depicted tied, are also emerging in importance. These cuts are common on pottery offering trays as well – out of a total of 89 trays, 34 have heads, 37 have a bovine leg and 33 have general cuts. The growing importance of meat cuts indicates a change in the funerary cult, specifically connected with the OMC, probably evidenced through the fact that more bovine legs than heads are depicted. Nine out of the 12 offering tables from this period have depictions of legs, accompanied by *ḥs*-vases and other cultic utensils.

Meat cuts were common also in the NK. Compared to the MK there is a larger emphasis on the ox/calf head than the leg; 9 heads in the database are usually paired with a single bovine leg, there are only 2 bovine legs unaccompanied by a head, while in earlier periods the opposite was more

common. All types of meat cuts are never present on their own, at least another type of cut was depicted.

Table 3.59 Definitions of the type of meat-cuts represented on the material in the database.

Type of Meat	Transliteration	Gardiner	Description	Representation
Ox/Calf Head	*iḥ* *ḫnt*	F1, F1A F63	The head is usually severed and has horns when depicted on offering trays (rarely without)	
Bovine leg	*msḫtiw, ḫpš*	F23, F24	The hindleg of a calf/ox.	
Joint/ Lumps of meat or flesh	*isw, iwꜥ*	F44, F119, F142	On tables it may contain a bone in the centre, otherwise is a mass on trays	
Ribs	Determinatives	F37C, F40A, 40B, F14A, F51C	Depicted as a stack or rack of sausage-like objects	
Cone-shaped object	*ḥꜣty*	F34	It may be a heart, since on offering trays, it is often depicted at the centre of all other cuts	
Trapezoidal shaped object – tails/ intestines/ chitterlings	Tail = *dḥr, pnw*	F27	May be depicted as a trapezoid object with zig-zag motif, or four sausages stuck together on trays	
Tied carcass	Determinatives	E268	If a head is depicted elsewhere, the carcass may be headless, or it is an entire ox tied at its legs.	

The most frequently depicted meat-cut is the calf's leg, common in all types of offering tables, but especially on pottery offering trays. A detailed study on the significance of this cut can be found in 5.5.2 as well as 7.3. Some detailed statistics on the depiction of meat-cuts in the sample can be found in App II:2.3.18-22.

Fruits and Vegetables

Fruits and vegetables (Figure 3.5) are depicted on a few OK offering tables but became significantly more common and varied by the MK onwards. In the database there are 12 offering tables depicting fruits and nine depicting vegetables out of a total of 32 NK items. The depiction of fruits and vegetables, especially grapes and melons, steadily increases and become more varied on offering tables from the late NK onwards (Table 3.60).

Figure 3.5: *Sketch of various fruit and vegetable offerings depicted on offering tables in the database.*
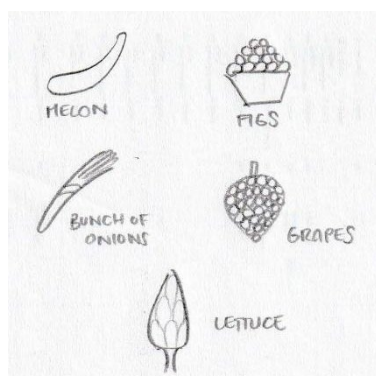
Table 3.60 *List of fruits and vegetables depicted on offering tables and similar material in the database.*

Time Period	Offering Tables	Offering trays	Soul-houses
OK	None	None	-
FIP	None	Melons, onions	-
MK	Melons/grapes	None	Figs
SIP	None	None	-
NK	Grapes, figs, melons, onions, lettuce	None	-
TIP	Grapes	-	-
LP	Grapes, figs, melons, onions, lettuce,	-	-
PP	Onions, melons	None	-
GR	Melons, grapes	-	-

Vegetation: Lotus Flowers, Papyrus Reeds

Lotus flowers and/or other forms of vegetation (Figure 3.6) become more common during the NK (5 out of 32 offering tables), while irrigation fields and landscape connotations became less frequent. Vegetation such as papyrus reeds and lotus flowers indicate an emphasis on rejuvenating elements (see 6.2-3; 7.4.4). Papyrus reeds and various forms of vegetation are also used throughout the funerary ritual and closing rites (see 7.2.2; 7.3.2). Examples from the database will be used to highlight these iconographic elements related to vegetation in 6.2-3 since they are related to later periods (e.g., CAT ID122; CAT ID126).

Figure 3.6: *Sketch of various vegetation offerings depicted on offering tables in the database.*
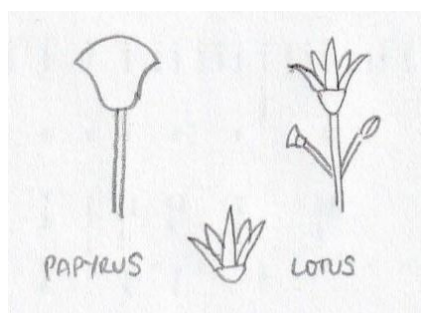
Depictions of Ritual Acts

During the OK iconographic elements, such as offering scenes and dining tables, were steadily incorporated into offering table design. However, during the MK the funerary cult changed,

something which is emphasised by the presence of ritual utensils; offering tables are also more frequently depicted. Offerings become more extensive and diverse, and the offering tables are often equipped with a raised rectangular platform, which Hölzl (2002) interprets as a tablecloth on an altar (e.g., Louvre D23-N365). In the database two tables from the MK depict censers and other royal cult paraphernalia such as *djed*-pillars.

The inclusion of a representation of an offering table on actual offering tables, trays, and soul-houses is very common. This iconographic element may be a representation of the *ḥnḳt*-offering table, with a pedestal and an offering represented upon it. In pottery offering trays and soul-houses this may be a table on a pedestal containing meat offerings (Table 3.61). During the MK the funerary cult changes, emphasised by the presence of ritual utensils, including depicted tables.

Table 3.61 Occurrences of "offering tables" depicted on the material present in the sample.

Time Period	Number of Offering Tables with the depiction of an "Offering Table"	Offering Trays	Soul-houses
Unknown	3	-	1
OK	3	-	-
FIP	1	1	-
MK	4	3	2
NK	1	-	-
LP	5	-	-
PP	2	-	-
Grand Total	**19**	**4**	**3**

During this period, offering scenes are common, not on the top of the offering table but on the sides, since these tables are often thicker than earlier tables. The deceased is often depicted as standing/kneeling/worshipping and accompanied by gods and libation scenes. This reflects the hopes of the deceased – that their death cult will be taken care of by their relatives and guaranteed by deities (7.2.5; 7.4.2).

In later periods, priests/offerers (Table 3.62) became a common feature upon offering tables and similar material. Nevertheless, they may also be common in the OK together with depictions of the deceased receiving offerings. On pottery offering trays and soul-houses there may also be people represented in the courtyard or internal areas, as will be discussed in case study 4.2. Priests are commonly depicted on the bronze pendant offering tables which occur in significant numbers in the LP (see 6.4.1).

Table 3.62 Individuals depicted on the material in the database (including pottery trays in red and soul-houses in blue).

Time Period	People pouring	Offering bearers	Priest/person
Unknown		(1)	2 (1) (2)
OK			2
FIP			1
MK		2	(1)
SIP			
NK	1		2
TIP			1
LP	2	3	14
PP			3 (4)
GR			

General Iconographic Connotations in the Shape of Offering Tables

During the MK, fertility figures are frequently depicted but only on royal offering tables. They rarely appear in the private cult. Some tables may show phallic or vulvic (?)/ovarian (?) connotations (4 out of 41 tables – 2 phallic, 2 ovarian). The external spout structure may have an incorporated *ḥtp*-sign in the form of a phallic design. This may also be the case for pottery offering trays (see CAT ID3 at Manchester Museum). Offering tables from Lisht, for example, have curved canals in a V-formation which resemble the vulva (see 5.7; 6.3.3; CAT ID371; CAT ID378).

The trend of incorporating fertility symbols and allusions to reproductive organs continued and occurred during the NK, for example 3 tables in the database have phallic *ḥtp* signs (see 3.4.6). Twelve offering tables are classified under "fertility" in the database. At least 5 have phallic connotations (specifically the external spout structure as incorporated *ḥtp*-sign). Four tables may allude to female reproductive features, such as the vulva and/or ovaries. Three are classified as both organs, or "uncertain". There are 5 from MK, 3 from NK, 1 from LP, and 2 Unknown. There is one Pottery tray (vulva) from the FIP (CAT ID175, see 6.3.3).

A sacred lake is identified when at least one staircase is incorporated inside a basin present in the offering table design (see 6.3.1). In the database, 11 offering tables present a sacred lake, 6 of these date to the PP, which is when most offering tables and similar materials have "watery" connotations. In the database, 16 objects include frogs, 15 of which are classified as Models/Amulets. These objects date from the LP onwards (see 6.4.1). Crocodiles are present on both offering tables and pottery offering trays from the PP. (Crocodiles present on offering tables: 1 in TIP, 1 in LP 1 in G-RP; Ptolemaic offering trays usually contain depictions of 9-10 fish (1 out of 4 trays has only 1 fish), 2 trays have frogs, 2/4 trays have a pair of crocodiles; 1 soul-house from an unknown period contains the depiction of fish).

Irrigation fields design refers to tables with at least four basins, usually rectangular and both horizontally and vertically oriented. These basins are interlinked with small, sometimes semi-covered, funnels/canals. These intricate designs may have made the liquids poured upon the surface mimicking the inundation of fields, flooding them completely and then slowly receding back into basins via the drainage of canals. Thirteen tables in the database show evidence of irrigation field systems, 11 of which date back to the MK. This high number may indicate a change in the cult (see detailed analysis in 6.3; 5.5.1; 7.4.2).

3.4.3.5 Inscriptions

Eighty-one offering tables out of 269 are inscribed[16], usually along an external raised rim surrounding an offerings area and/or watery features. The aims of this thesis concern the magical and overall significance of the offering table and similar material in ancient Egypt, which is why a lesser emphasis has been placed on hieroglyphic inscriptions. Nevertheless, general insights regarding use may be provided by studying inscriptions, as well as the presence of magical formulae, and depictions of deities.

There are two offering tables which show signs of secondary use through a later addition of inscriptions. Possible examples are outlined in 7.2.5, with relevance to the ancestor cult. Some comments can be made about the general execution of offering tables, especially when it comes to inscriptions on items commissioned from workshops, especially royal paraphernalia and those that incorporate complex iconographic elements (Table 3.63). It is important to note that most of the

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[16] For a detailed description of the inscriptions present on offering tables in the database see [App II:2.3.40].

inscribed tables relate to members of the royal family, as well as an elite composed of overseers, viziers, and high members of the priesthood.

Table 3.63 Execution style of inscriptions and iconographic elements present on offering tables/basins/models in the database.

Execution Style	Offering Tables
Unclassified	2
1. Workshop	153
1. Workshop, 5. Reused	5
2. Semi-professional	84
2. Semi-professional, 3. Personalised	1
2. Semi-professional, 5. Reused	2
3. Personalised	12
4. Poor	2
5. Reused	6
6. Undefined	2
Grand Total	**269**

The offering formula inscribed on offering tables and cult basins from the OK onwards, is generally quite short and simple, consisting of four different types or a combination of several of them: 1) the King formula; 2) the God formula; 3) invocations from the offeror; and/or 4) the recipient of the invocation.

During the OK, the King and God formulas were often written together with the name of the recipient of the offering/invocation in the following manner: *ḥtp dì nswt, ḥtp dì NN.* The full formula can be translated as follows "The offering that the king has given, the offering that the god has given NN" (Satzinger 1997: 182). This formulation is particularly frequent in the 4th and 5th dynasties. On the other hand, the formulae occurs less often on offering tables of the 6th Dynasty onwards (Hölzl 2002: 78). During the MK the God formula becomes part of the King formula, though in a slightly different form: "The offering that the king has given to the god N" (Hölzl 2002:79).

From the MK onwards, many offering tablets have around the central raised/sunken area a narrow, circumferential frame, which is well suited for the addition of inscriptions. Often the offering tablets are inscribed with two symmetrically arranged offering formulas, running in different directions (see Abb. 10 in Hölzl 2002:81). In offering formulas of the OK, Osiris still plays a subordinate role, while in the MK he is the most frequently mentioned god. During the MK there is a closer relationship between God's formula and invocations compared to the OK. A request for the offering to the deceased remains most important and besides bread, beer, beef, and poultry it may include linen, alabaster, incense, ointment, cool water, and fresh vegetables, as well as "all good and pure things" and "everything that is on the offering table is coming". The list of offerings and parts of the grave equipment became increasingly extensive and detailed during the MK (Hölzl 2002: 81)

Offering tables are rarely inscribed with elaborate offering lists, as their external shape is not suitable for extensive inscriptions. The earliest offering tables containing offering lists date from between the 5th-6th Dynasty. During the MK they are even more sparse than in the OK. In the sample there are a total of seven offering tables with offering lists/sacred tests, with only three examples from the FIP-MK. In the NK, four examples are present with offering lists, but most importantly sacred texts/specific cultic invocations [App II:2.3.40]. Only one offering table with an offering list is known from the NK, which was probably made based on the model of an OK round sacrificial table (Hölzl 2002: 88). Offering tables and cult basins from the NK are also inscribed with special ritual utterances. The most common are libation utterances, which can either be placed on the raised

frame of the offering table or anywhere close to the spout area. A short libation phrase is for example found in the spout area of the offering table Turin N. 22029: "Purification twice before you, Osiris signatory at the Place of Truth Pai" (translation in Hölzl 2002:90).

3.5 DIFFERENCE FROM PREVIOUS STUDIES

Regina Hölzl (2002) notes a voluminous and diverse range of offering tables during the OK, which by the end of that Period becomes more standardised and the variation of forms decreases. This may be true for stone offering tables, but a wide range of variations is reflected in the emergence of pottery offering trays and soul-houses, as evidenced by the volume of material dating to the MK (Graph 3.1). The decline in the production of offering tables during the NK may not be unequivocally proven but change in the use of pottery offering trays and soul-houses is evident. Hölzl (2002) noticed a decline in variation in NK offering tables but discerns a re-appearance of basins, specifically circular ones, something which is also apparent in the materials present in the database. Therefore, even though the volume of material is not as extensive as Hölzl's (2002) the collected data still seems to reflect some subtle diachronic changes in the appearance of offering tables and similar material. Such changes might be validated by considering religious practices and changing landscapes in which the offering tables had to function, pointing to contextual importance, as well as regional changes.

3.5.1 Material Analysis

3.5.1.1 *Stone Types*[17]
The availability, malleability, and morphology of certain types of stone determined their use and function in ancient Egypt. Prerequisites changed over time and according to context, something which is reflected in the material culture.

The ideology centred around the absolute power of kingship, and this also influenced the availability of raw materials since the king now possessed a "virtual monopoly" (Aston *et al.* 2000: 6). Inscriptions from the G-RP support this notion. Texts composed by the priesthood paid homage to the Pharaoh as the lord over all creations within the cosmos, including its mineral components (Aston *et al.* 2000: 6; Aufrère 1991: 731-4, 809-20). Such an ideology emphasised a need for the Pharaoh to constantly attempt to recreate the Cosmos within temple complexes by using raw materials reflecting a microcosm of the universe. An example of this would be the use of black stones such as basalt as pavements to symbolise the fertile Nile valley (Aston *et al.* 2000: 6). Quarrying was state-controlled, and the procurement of stones (even the readily available limestone) was constrained.

For obvious reasons, soft stones were quarried more easily than hard ones, and furthermore available throughout the Nile valley. Clusters of limestone sites ranged from the Cairo region all the way up to Esna and were exploited to a very large extent up until the 18th Dynasty, when sandstone began to grow in importance for construction purposes. Sandstone was procured from Upper Egyptian sites ranging between Esna and Sudan. Extraction sites were selected according to the quality of the specific stone, rather than its availability. Limestone outcrops were located where the stone was hardest and most uniform in colour, with minor fractures, often resulting in awkward sites such as cliff-sides at Asyut and the Theban region (Klemm & Klemm 2008: 23-4). The most common hardstones to be extracted were granite and granodiorite, common in Aswan and

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[17] For detailed material analysis see App II:3.1-2.

extracted from the 1st Dynasty onwards, with their usage peak occurring during the Ramesside period when they were used for the construction of colossal statues and monumental fixtures.

Items such as offering tables, sarcophagi and elaborate stone vessels required a large amount of time and skill and were relatively costly to manufacture. Sculptors are occasionally identified with personal names inscribed in workshop scenes depicted on tomb walls, indicating that they were considered as skilled workers and not members of an anonymous workforce (Aston *et al.* 2000:65). As soon as a block of rock was acquired from the quarry site, preliminary drawings were sketched on its sides as a guideline. Stone tools were used to define the general shape and then copper tools such as a chisel or drill would be used for finer detail (Klemm & Klemm 2008: 23, 196). After chiselling, the surfaces were polished using rubbing stones such as quartz. In some cases, depending on the stone used, the surfaces were painted. There are a few examples of offering tables in the sample which show evidence of pigments remaining from previous colouring (seven offering tables may have been painted, while thirty-eight are labelled as "uncertain" or with minor signs of potential red/black pigment) (e.g., Hölzl 2005; 7.2.2).

In the sample, 59% of tables were identified as being made of limestone of varying types and qualities. Limestone is a sedimentary rock composed of calcite. Due to its alluvial composition, it often contains fossils combined with mineral elements, such as quartz and clay. It is often white or greyish in colour but can also be yellow or pink when exposed to varying levels of iron oxides (Aston *et al* 2000: 40). It is a soft stone depending on its levels of calcite and is accordingly malleable and often porous. Hard limestone, which is more durable, has a high content of crystallised calcite and dolomite, as well as silt making the stone less porous (Aston *et al* 2000: 40). Limestone is widely distributed across the Egyptian landscape, ranging from the Mediterranean coast to Esna in Upper Egypt.

It is currently not possible to identify the source of limestone from a simple observation of objects and, in addition, when exposed to weathering the quality of the limestone may drastically change depending on the varying levels of mineral content. Most of the limestone offering tables were exposed to the elements after they had been placed within damp offering chapels, or even outside in courtyards. In museums they are exposed to damp storage facilities causing the limestone to mould and in some cases becoming even more friable to the touch (Table 3.64).

Table 3.64 Varying levels of limestone quality of offering tables and basins present in the database.

Limestone Quality/Description	No of Offering Tables/Basins
Generic Limestone	30
Reddish-yellow Limestone	4
Dense, hard Limestone	23
White, dense Limestone	26
Flaky Limestone	62
Porous and Brittle Limestone	11
Stained Limestone	4
Grand Total	**160**

Other stone materials include granite, diorite etc. but most were from royal or elite contexts, although there is an increase in hard-stones into the LP perhaps due to the opening of specific quarries. Perhaps allude to some of the symbolism, especially colour and permanence as well as regional choices.

3.5.1.2. Pottery: Fabric, Manufacturing Techniques, Production

The most common pottery fabric used for offering trays and soul-houses is Nile silt (see Table 3.65). It was generally dug out from the riverbanks of the Nile and/or irrigation channels (Bourriau *et al.* 2000: 122). The various steps for pottery processing involve the removal of coarse inclusions from the fabric and trampling the clay to soften it and remove excess air (Bourriau *et al.* 2000: 122). Most of the pottery used for offering trays and similar objects is made of coarseware (Nile C according to the Vienna System of classification), which involves a crude manufacturing process. Since it contains a significant amount of organic material, coarseware does not require a heavily controlled fire within a kiln. The organic material burns up during the firing process, making the material porous and water absorbing, and it must be glazed to be watertight (Bourriau *et al.* 2000: 124). In modern Egypt, water is still stored in coarseware jars, *zirs,* made of Nile silt. The porous fabric allows some of the water contained within to evaporate and permeate the surface of the jar, keeping it cool and the water inside fresh.

Table 3.65 Fabrics of the pottery objects within the sample.

Fabric (Vienna System)	Pottery Objects
Nile C	87
Nile C?	1
Nile C1	20
Nile C2	15
Marl A?	1
Total	124

The shape of the pottery object is determined by secondary processing methods. The following three methods pertain to handmade pottery, used to produce various forms of coarseware relevant to the sample (based on Bourriau *et al.* 2000:125; Arnold & Bourriau 1993) (Table 3.66).

Table 3.66 Manufacturing techniques and descriptions based on Bourriau et al. *2000:125; Arnold & Bourriau 1993.*

Methods under "hand-shaping":	Description:
"Free-hand shaping"	Handmade shaping by scooping out the material from inside the object and modelling the outside.
"paddle and anvil"/ shaping over a core	Material is placed around an object and beaten into its shape using a wooden paddle
"coil/ring building"	Rolling out coils of clay and stack them to form a shape. A paddle is then used to smoothen the surface and hide the ridges of the coils. These marks may often be mistaken as wheel marks.
"patrix" (shaping inside a mould)	A hollow mould or form is used to model clay into it, labelled as "patrix". This was a common method used to manufacture breadmoulds.

After the item had been shaped it was dried. During this phase a slip could be applied to the surface. This is a common feature on most pottery offering trays present in the sample, usually showing signs of a red slip. Painted decoration may also be added at this stage in the process. The way to differentiate between painted ware and slipped ware is that paint chips off easily from the surface, while slip is much thinner and often incorporated in the fabric (see Fig. 3.8-9 in Table 3.67).

The third and final step in pottery manufacture is that of firing the vessels (see Chart 3.5). As described previously, the firing process involved various methods which altered the temperature according to the type of fabric used. The firing atmosphere may also determine the coloration of the clay once the vessels are finished. In fires with a high oxygen content or "redox conditions", the vessels made with clay containing a high level of iron become red/reddish brown. These fires contain less smoke and, therefore, more levels of oxygen giving them the name of "oxidising fires" (Bourriau *et al.* 2000: 128). Almost all the pottery objects present in the sample are reddish-brown in colour or have been treated with a red slip. Nevertheless, there are also a few trays which are slightly lighter or darker in colour indicating that another firing method was used, although not as frequently used as for coarsewares (see Table 3.68). After the ware was fired it may be painted with a thin coating called a "wash" (Rice 2015:151). Some offering tables in the sample show signs of having a whitewash applied post-firing, as seen on some offering trays from Asyut. This is a common trait from the FIP onwards especially for funerary ware, since the white-washed surfaces may have been an attempt at imitating marl wares (Wodzińska 2009-10:147).

Chart 3.5 Flow chart of primary coatings used as surface treatments for pottery vessels (Aston 1998:32).
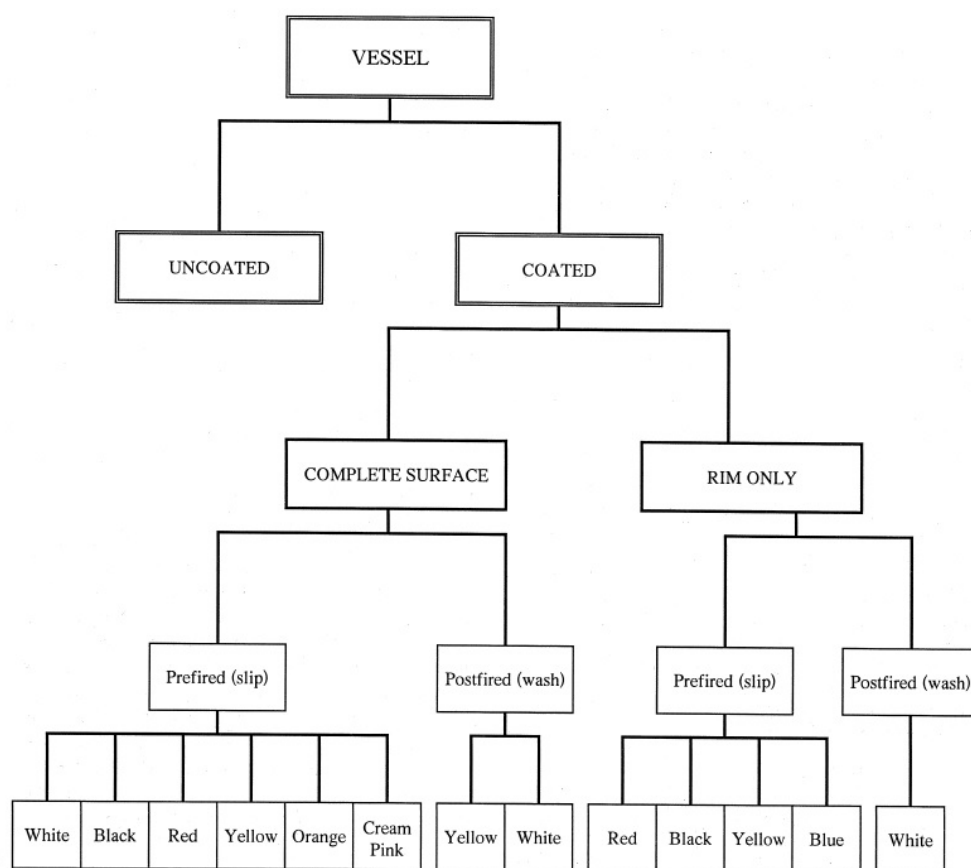
The main aspects to observe and record when interacting with pottery is to note the following: a) the method of manufacture, b) any surface treatments or ware c) clay type/fabric d) the general shape of the vessel. There are 124 pottery offering tables/trays/soul-houses present in the sample all of which are handmade with evidence of "pinching and drawing", which involves modelling a lump of clay by squeezing it into shape using fingers and thumb (Aston 1989:27). It may be possible that some trays were made using the coiling or even stacking methods described earlier. Nevertheless, since most pottery objects are shaped like plates or trays, it may even be possible that they were made with the "coiling" or "patrix" methods, a common method for making plates as well as similar bread-trays (Aston 1989:27).

Surface treatment used for offering trays is harder to define. This feature is often overlooked in museum descriptions and catalogues not to mention in field reports. The descriptions of surface treatments made and recorded in situ were based solely on observation, often in poor lighting conditions and comparisons. Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish three common surface treatments employed on pottery offering tables, trays and soul-houses (Table 3.67-8):

Table 3.67 Types of surface treatments identified in sample.

a) slipped: the surface of the objects was treated with a mixture of pigment (usually red), water and clay before firing. If the clay is of a similar composition as the vessel, the slip tends to fuse with the surface during firing making it hard to chip off when dry (Aston 1989: 31). About 20% of the pottery sample shows signs of a slip. All vessels except one are made with a combination of red pigment. The slip is distinguished by a thin coat of red paint applied onto the surface with a cloth and/or fingers. There are no signs of chipping or flaking, and only minor discoloration due to surface wear. Oval offering trays are often slipped, probably due to their surface being easier to dampen with a cloth or finger (Figures 3.7, 3.8).

Figure 3.7 (left): Example of a "slipped" offering tray with evidence of red pigment. Classified under "slipped – red paint". Manchester Museum, 3078 (CAT ID 5).

Figure 3.8 (right): Example of an offering tray in a different fabric and colourless slip, classified simply as "slipped". What is noticeable here are the traces of the potter's fingers On the surface as well as possible cloth markings. ÄMP Berlin, ÄMP10786 (CAT ID 43).

b) surface coating – red/yellow/white paint: the surface may have been treated with a mixture of water and pigment. The coating is most likely applied post-firing and applied with a brush. About 69% of the pottery sample has a thicker surface coating. All objects within this category show signs of red pigment. There may also be traces of white (6 objects) or yellow pigment (7 objects). It appears that red paint was used in all cases for the entire surface of the table/tray including the rim which was painted up to a certain point on the exterior side of the tray. White and/or yellow paint may be used on trays (see 4.4.2) as well as some soul-houses (4 in total), perhaps to mimic limestone. This colouring may also be the result of the staining or discoloration of red pigment as a result of exposure to the elements (Figures 3.9-3.11).

Figure 3.9 (left): Example of an offering tray with a thicker surface coating of red paint. Classified under "surface coating – red paint". British Museum, EA43446 (CAT ID111).

Figure 3.10 (right): Example of an offering tray with evidence of a flaking surface coating of red paint. The surface has been subject to weathering or use as evidenced by the discolouration of the red paint, resulting in a yellowish red colour in the centre. The tray has also been coated with another substance to protect the surface from further weathering during modern times. Petrie Museum, UC38982 (CAT ID93).
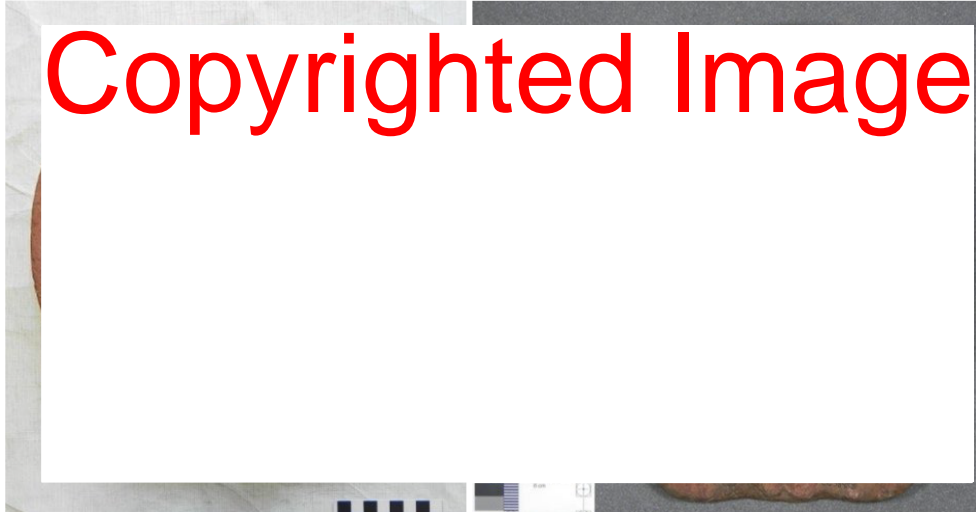
Figure 3.11: Example of an offering tray with evidence of a surface coating of red paint. The entire internal surface of the plate has been painted, while only the rim was painted on the external sites of the tray. This is a very common trend on most FIP and MK offering trays. Medelhavsmuseet, MM1966:002 (CAT ID240).

c) none? (i.e., no surface treatment identified): In about 11% of the pottery sample, a specific surface treatment could not be clearly defined. In some cases the surface of the offering tray was too worn, exposing the coarse fabric within. It may be possible that the object was originally not treated. One or two trays in this category are bright red in colour due to the level of oxidation during the firing of the clay, perhaps indicating that the potter did not find it necessary for red paint to be applied. One tray and four soul-houses were too heavily restored, preventing an accurate identification of the original surface coating (Figures 3.12, 3.13).

Figure 3.12 (left): Example of an offering tray with a worn surface resulting in the surface treatment classified under "None?". Manchester Museum, 6585 (CAT ID2).

Figure 3.13 (right): An example of a soul-house which shows little evidence of surface treatments. The coarse surface has not been smoothened, but some surfaces may show signs of red paint. This is classified under "None?". RMO Leiden, F1939/1.19 T1553 (CAT ID212).

Table 3.68 Surface treatments of the pottery objects within the sample.

Surface Treatment	Pottery objects
None?	8
None? Heavily restored	5
slipped	1
slipped - red paint	24
surface coating - red paint	73
surface coating - red/white paint	6
surface coating - red/yellow paint	7
TOTAL	124

Pottery production connected with funerary settings was usually represented by small workshops with only two individuals working at a time. These workshops were often established outside in courtyards and associated with other activities such as basket-making or brewing (Aston 1989: 136). In the tomb of Khumhotep III at Beni Hassan, potters are even depicted together with textile workers, but are still set apart from other industries perhaps indicating that potters were mostly independent and considered as a "commodity" (Aston 1989: 136).

At OK pyramid complexes, pottery workshops have been identified with remains of vessels and objects necessary for the funerary cult, especially since they are made of coarseware (Aston 1989: 137). A specific example of a pottery manufacture centre has been identified at Abusir, corroborated by administrative papyri, which do not mention any expenses for food production. This seems to indicate that the coarsewares such as breadmoulds, beer and water jugs, miniature vessels, etc. were all manufactured for use during funerary rituals or intended for the deceased (Aston 1989: 137). Despite there being a standardised pottery typology present throughout Egypt by the end of the OK, it is still uncertain to what extent potters and their production sites were controlled by the state and therefore obliged to follow a certain style (Aston 1989: 138). It is also debated that rather than being state-controlled, potters developed a similar style due to trade and replication of styles in a more organic manner. The typology sequence in the OK was interrupted with the political fragmentation during the FIP, significantly affecting the distribution of certain

styles of pottery. This may be of importance while assessing pottery offering trays and similar MK and FIP objects present in the sample (see Chapter 5.0). With political instability, provincial centres may not have had access to previously state-controlled material such as stone and may have been obligated to rely on pottery for the production of essential funerary utensils. During the civil war, regional styles emerged due to limited trade across boundary regions, as well as the end of the royal court determining nationwide fashions (O'Connor 1974:27). These styles correspond to the diversity and yet local homogeneity of pottery offering trays and soul-houses in Middle and Upper Egypt during this time-period (see Chapter 5). A "homogenous style" became common again by the 12th Dynasty, incorporating the new regional styles across Egypt (Bourriau *et al.* 2000: 138).

Archaeological evidence for pottery production is very scarce for the MK. Specialist funerary production centres may have been identified at MK and SIP sites, specifically at Beni Hasan and Ballas. Funerary equipment made of pottery differed from settlement wares, which may have been a common practice in most of Egypt despite there being more evidence in later periods (Bourriau *et al.* 2000: 139). Rice (2015) described the various modes of production which may have been employed throughout ancient Egypt (summarised in Bourriau *et al.* 2000: 139, Table 3.69):

Table 3.69 Definitions of different modes of production based on Bourriau et al. *2000:139.*

Household-based or 'domestic' production: Pottery is made by the household exclusively for its own use and is mainly executed by women without using specialised equipment. Therefore, the vessels are usually made solely by hand and only manufactured when necessary.
Household industry: Pottery is made by potters within a domestic setting and surplus wares may be subject to trade. The activity is not vital to the household and the potters use standard equipment.
Individual workshops: Pottery manufacturing is executed by male potters and is considered to be a vital source of income despite not being the main activity of individuals involved in the production. The workshops are considered as isolated industries with specialised equipment, serving the local community.
Nucleated workshops: Potters work in designated workshops within an organised industrial complex. A standardised line of high-quality goods is made with specialised equipment and within designated facilities.
"Attached" specialist producers: Potters and other specialists are controlled by state authorities, or commissioned by the elite, to produce specialised objects. The workshops may also produce a surplus for commercial trade.

Due to the use of coarseware and their handmade characteristics, pottery offering trays and similar items dating to the end of the OK to the MK in Middle and Upper Egypt have been assumed to have been manufactured in households. Nevertheless, they are all part of a "specialised" group of objects which have a specific role in funerary rituals. The question remains whether the potters behind these objects required prior knowledge of the intricacies of funerary ritual (Bourriau *et al.* 2000: 141). The most identifiable modes of pottery production in ancient Egypt are those defined as "attached specialist producers" since they contain standardised wares and are also evidenced via trading routes, etc. (Bourriau *et al.* 2000:142). Specialised production of funerary equipment is sometimes considered as mode of production apart from the others. This is due to the fact that wares found within necropolis and funerary complexes often differ significantly from domestic and traded wares (Bourriau *et al.* 2000:142). With the collapse of centralised government, new regional styles emerged throughout Egypt and incorporated into a standardised typology or disappeared as soon as a government was re-established. It can be argued that this was the case for pottery offering trays and specifically soul-houses, as their manufacture declined towards the end of the MK only to reappear in certain contexts in later periods, though in scarcer numbers (6.3.3). Generally, pottery production remained scattered but not strictly domestically based throughout ancient Egypt.

The choice of material according to each offering table type is of interest since it may show a preference for specific types of stone for certain types of offering tables, indicating an elite or royal context. The B+C type shows a large concentration of limestone offering tables, possibly since it is also the most common type in earlier periods (Graph 3.13). The limestone preference may be an indication of non-royal elite use[18] since it is standardised and only includes two main features: the presence of square basins and the representation of the *ḥtp* sign. Granite is a common stone for prestigious offering tables, which also indicate their use in more elaborate later types, as the tables with multiple *ḥtp* signs categorised as C2. Alabaster is another prestigious stone, common in exclusively "royal" and elaborate designs such as A+B (OK circular altars; see section 2.5.3) and A+C1, which usually include the seven circular depressions for the sacred oils. The three types which come in the most diverse of materials are Types X, A2 and C2.

The X (Hölzl Type ø) in Graph 3.13 indicates the absence of identifying features and an occasional presence of a spout. The rectangular shape is the most typical shape of an offering table, and can be monumental, as well as miniaturised in amulet form and made in any type of material. Type A2 mostly occurs in prestigious materials and its rectangular shape make it identifiable as an offering table in miniature versions. It has circular features reminiscent of OK monumental tables and contains specific ritual features such as 3-D water jars and circular basins for sacred oils. C2 is also easily recognisable as an offering table since its main – and usually only – feature is the *ḥtp* sign, making it a ritual object in itself, representing the sign for "offering". This is also why it occurs in several prestigious materials such as granite, alabaster, and basalt.

Graph 3.13 The number of offering tables made in each outlined material according to Hölzl *(2002) Typology.*

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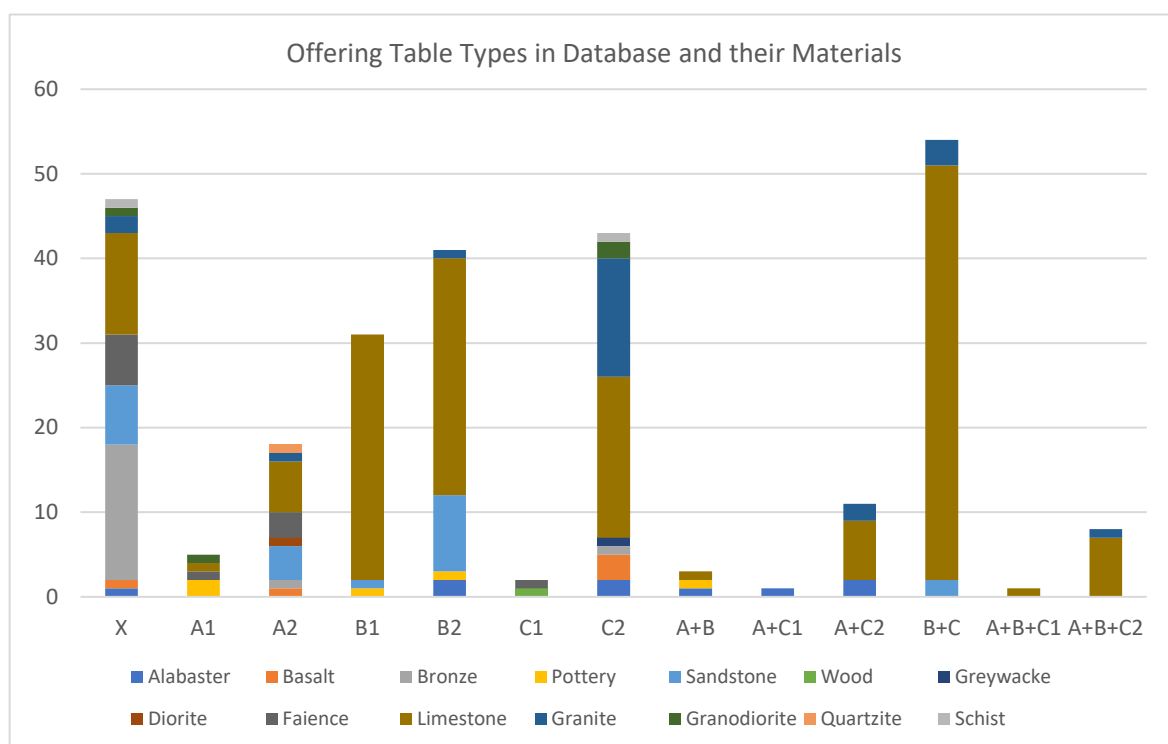
[18] It is important to note that common burials may have included an offering table/mat ("offering place") with vessels and perishable items re-creating the *ḥtp*-sign. These items would not have survived in the archaeological record. As soon as an object is made of stone and non-perishable items with evidence of workshop manufacturing techniques, the object passes from an ordinary to an extraordinary status.

By analysing the materials, how they are procured, distributed, and treated, may give us an insight into not only its significance within ancient Egyptian society, but also its value within socio-economic spheres. The variety of materials in which ritual objects such as offering tables are made illustrate its adaptability to regional and political change. It also illustrates a need to show individuality or local tradition in its manufacture as illustrated in the surface treatment of pottery trays or the varying quality of limestone in stone offering tables. Materials are a valuable tool in determining provenance as well as local tradition, an initial step in determining an object's original use and function.

3.5.2   Position Type, Size, Shape

By observing their base design and size, several comments can be made about the positioning of offering tables and their use. "Free standing" offering tables seem to be frequent in most time periods, but are common from the SIP onwards, with a spike in the LP with the emergence of miniature offering tables, specifically in the form of amulets or bronze pendants (6.4.1). "Fitted" offering tables are most common in the OK, due to the use of offering basins incorporated in structures positioned in the vicinity of false doors and statues within funerary chapels (see Graph 3.14; see 3.3; 4.4; 7.2.3-4).

Graph 3.14 Positioning/Placement Trends of Offering Tables in Database
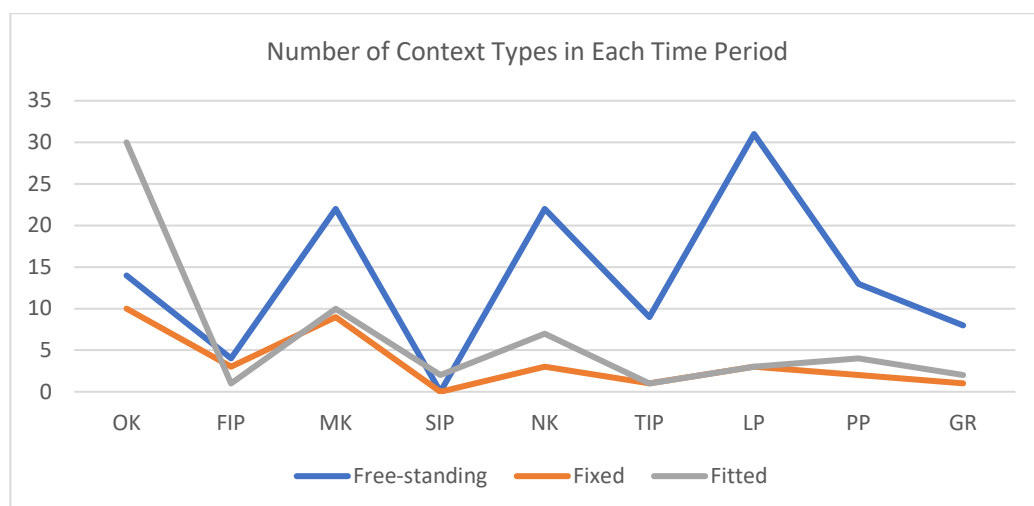
Offering table size varies and does not seem to alter chronologically (see Graph 3.15). Monumental offering tables re-emerge in importance during later periods, imitating earlier OK royal offering tables at important funerary temple complexes.

Graph 3.15: Trends in Offering Table Size in Database
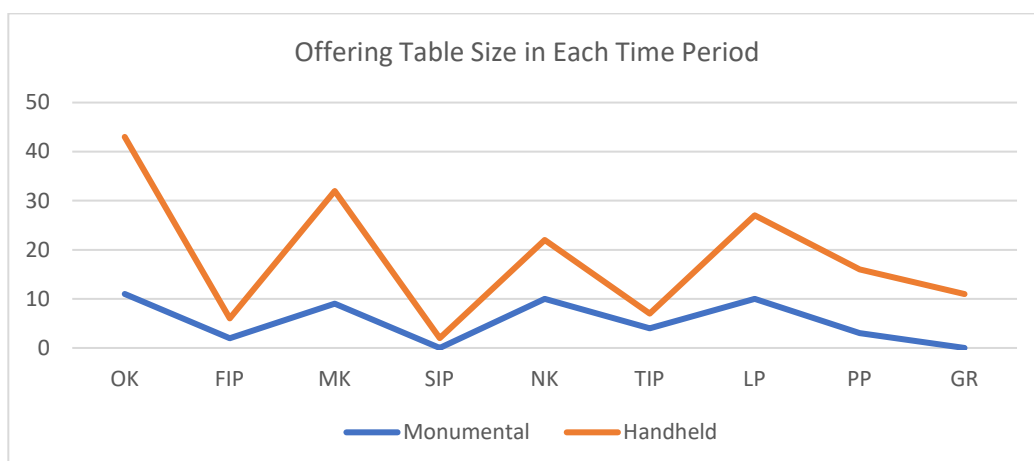
The current sample contains 89 pottery offering trays, most of which lack an exact archaeological context. Comparison of their general geographical context and with Tooley's typology (1989), suggests that the sample may nevertheless be representative of general trends and specific local traditions.

The most frequent Types in the current sample are the D, E and M Types (cf. Table 3.32), indicating a trend related to inserting shrine-like or even domestic architectural features in the trays. This will be further developed in Chapter 5, where a detailed analysis will be presented in regard to the funerary use and significance of this type of object within Middle and Upper ancient Egyptian rural areas between the FIP and late MK.

3.5.3 Iconographic Analysis: $ḥtp$[19]

The most basic and frequent iconographic element on stone offering tables (and a few pottery offering trays, especially from Asyut) is that of the $ḥtp$-sign. It originated from the reed mat with offerings placed upon it in Predynastic tombs and continued in the Early Dynastic Period, between the 1st and 3rd dynasty this practice consisted of a round alabaster table with a stand (Hölzl 2002:65). It was not until the end of the 5th dynasty that representations of this act were merged with the traditional $ḥtp$-sign.

During the OK, representations of the offering table moved away from the elevated platform shape of earlier dynasties to the incorporation of symbolic elements, specifically an all-encompassing $ḥtp$ sign and additional offerings (3.3.1; 7.2.4; 7.3.4). From the NK onwards, offering tables came to include an increasing variety of iconographic elements, gradually becoming a symbol in itself.

In the depiction of the $ḥtp$-sign, the mat is not always incorporated but the symbol itself is a representation of "the offering", usually oriented towards the deceased. When several $ḥtp$-signs are represented, it may indicate that the table is dedicated to multiple members of the family (see Table 3.70). In the database, 16 out of 55 tables dating to the OK have a $ḥtp$-sign, indicative of the most common B Types, with the B+C emerging later in date. During the MK, the incorporation of the $ḥtp$-sign became more pronounced and frequent, while the mesh design of the reed mat is engraved in more detail than before.

In the database, 34 out of 41 offering tables dating from the MK contain a $ḥtp$-sign, only 12 of which include the reed mat. The $ḥtp$-sign is generally very stylized with type H4/H5 (large $ḥtp$-sign with no detailed features) being most common — 20 out of 34 are H4. $ḥtp$-signs are often accompanied by $ḥs$-vases and round bread — 19 out of 34 tables a $ḥtp$-sign have the presence of $ḥs$-vases (only three of which are not in pairs). 15 out of the 34 tables with $ḥtp$-signs contain round bread, also often in pairs.

During the NK, the external spout structure may be straight, but also $ḥtp$-shaped, thus becoming both a functional and magical element – it also recalls the protruding $ḥtp$-spouts of the OK (which appeared in the 5th dynasty). In the data base, 18 out of 32 tables dating from the NK have a $ḥtp$-sign, four of which have two such signs. In general, the $ḥtp$-sign is positioned at the top (5 out of 32) and/or at the spout end (5/32) (Table 3.70).

There are also two pottery trays from the MK in the database which contain a $ḥtp$-sign, designed as a raised platform containing offerings: from Dendera (Manchester Museum 2758, ID4) – 1 $ḥtp$ Sign

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[19] See App II:2.3.24-39 for more detailed statistics on the $ḥtp$-sign depicted upon offering tables in the sample.

(top), Type H5, with offerings depicted on top; from Asyut (BM EA46611, CAT ID 104) – 1 *ḥtp* Sign (top), Type H7.

Table 3.70 Presence, Position, and Number of ḥtp-signs present on offering tables in the database.

# of *ḥtp*-Signs Present on Offering Tables and Their Placement	Offering Tables
No ḥtp Present	**158**
1 ḥtp-Sign	**86**
1 (+ mat)	18
1 (+ separate mat)	1
1 (bottom + separate mat)	1
1 (centre)	5
1 (centre + mat)	5
1 (centre + separate mat)	1
1 (internal spout)	1
1 (spout + separate mat)	1
1 (spout)	7
1 (top + mat + spout)	1
1 (top + mat)	14
1 (top)	30
1 (off centre)	1
2 ḥtp-Signs	**19**
2 (bottom + mat)	1
2 (centre + mat + spout)	3
2 (centre + mat)	1
2 (mixed + mat)	1
2 (opposite + mat)	1
2 (top + mat + spout)	6
2 (top + mat)	1
2 (top + separate)	3
2 (top)	2
3 ḥtp-Signs	**4**
3 (+ mat)	1
3 (top + centre + spout)	1
3 (top + separate)	2
4+ ḥtp-Signs	**2**
4 (top + separate in pairs)	1
6+ (mixed + mat)	1
Grand Total	**269**

The number of *ḥtp*-signs present on an offering table may be an indication of the multifaceted use of offering tables, for example the *ḥtp*-spout may be phallic, symbolising the reproductive process, while a second *ḥtp* at the opposite end represents a designated space for offerings. On the other hand, more than one *ḥtp*-sign can indicate offerings dedicated to more than one individual. "Multiple" offering tables described in 3.2.4, may contain multiple *ḥtp*-signs, a trend evident from the MK onwards (Graph 3.16).
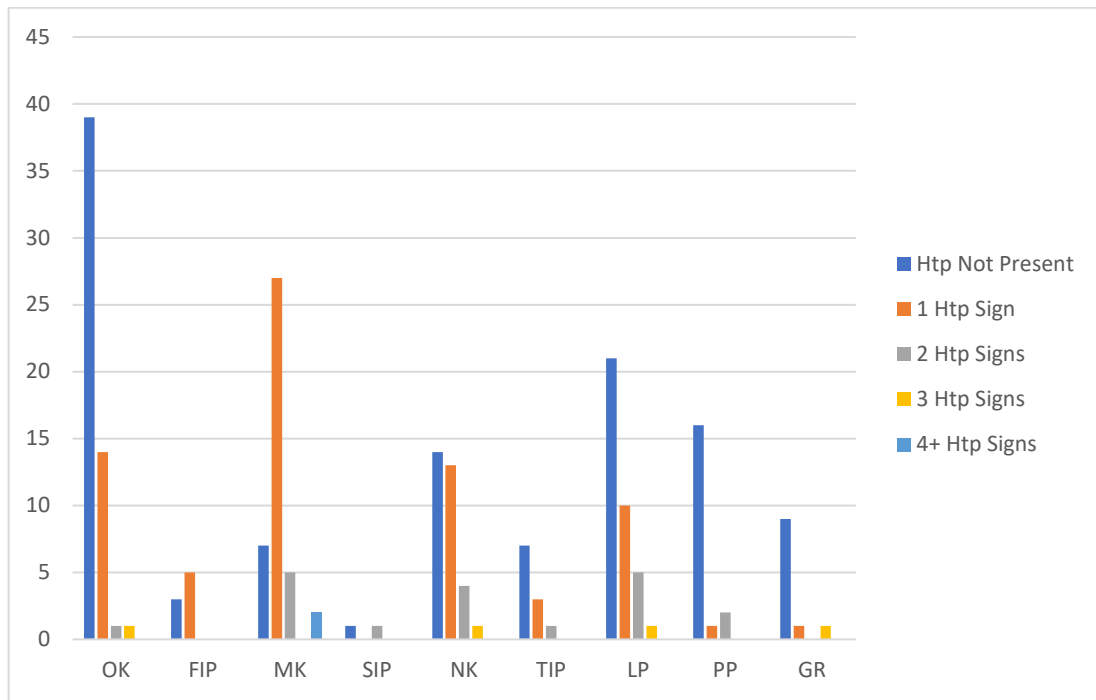
The varying designs of the *ḥtp*-sign upon offering tables and similar material also indicates stylistic choices, as well as diachronic changes (see Figure 3.14, Graph 3.17). The earliest and most common style is the H4, typical from the end of the OK to the late MK. It is reminiscent of ritual utensils used in the OMC, while at the same time resembling a highly stylised bread (7.3.3-4). From the NK onwards, the *ḥtp*-sign is more varied in design, with a particular preference of the H5 and H2 design, being a more stylised version of the sign and resembling the actual *ḥtp*-sign. New styles also emerge, such as the H3 and H6, which appear to have phallic connotations, especially when considering the NK offering tables in the upper cemetery at Deir el-Medina.

Figure 3.14: Different Types of the ḥtp-Sign represented on offering tables in the database.
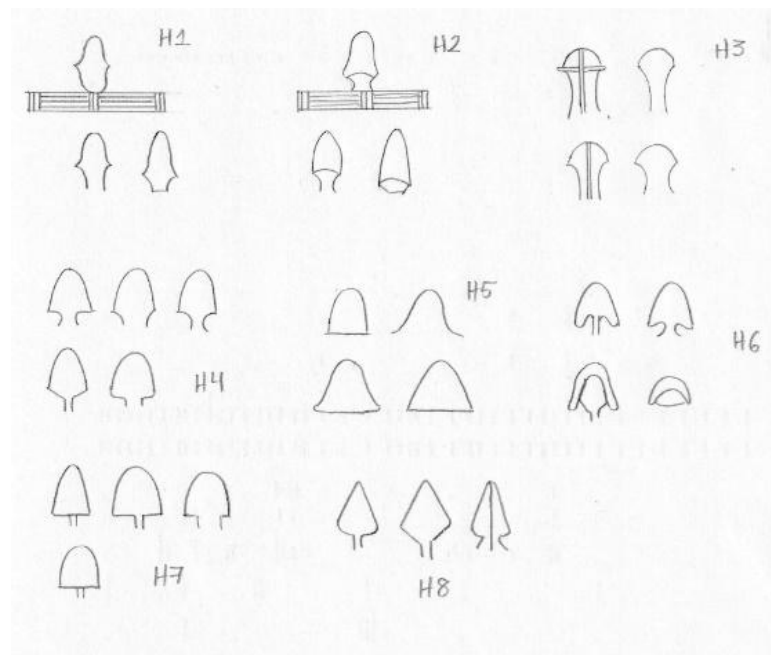
117
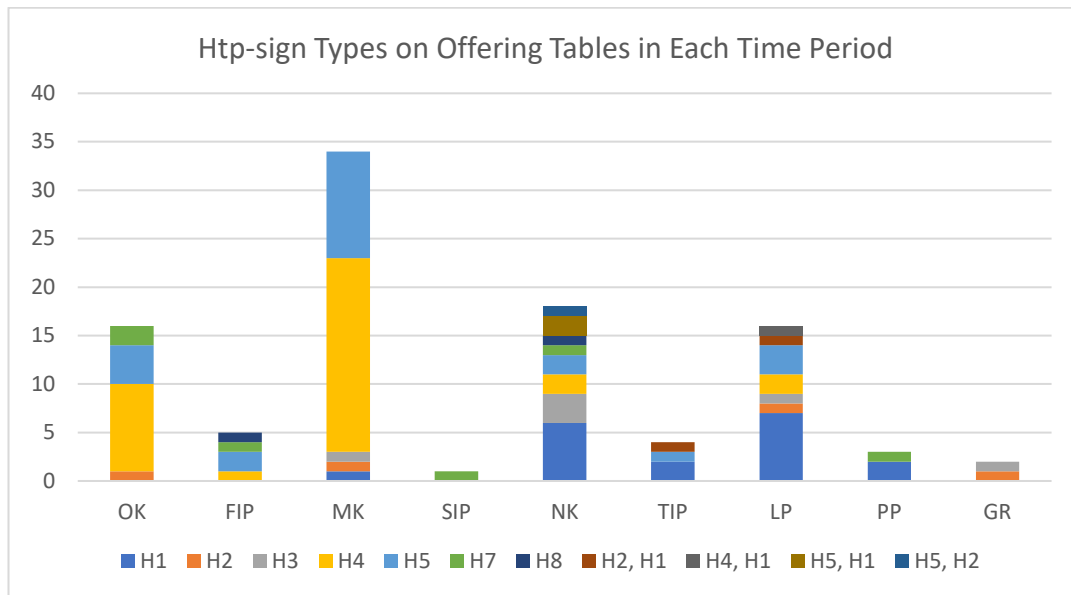
3.5.4 Offering Table Models and Amulets

The form and combination of representational elements on real size offering tables are also present on model offering tables in miniature which, despite their small size, often include functional elements such as canals, basins, and external spout structures. In the database, there are 11 objects classified as miniature offering tables and/or basins. These differ from amulets and bronze pendants due to their material, iconographic elements, and the lack of a hoop or hole for the item to be worn or suspended as an offering. Some of the miniature tables may also be inscribed, such as an OK offering table/basin from Abusir (Berlin ÄM 11573 CAT ID58). It is 11 cm in size with a central sunken area, surrounded by a raised rim containing an offering formula dedicated to *Nfr-ḥtp.s*. It is also classified as "fitted", which is often the case for miniature offering tables and basins dating to the OK, since they may have been inserted into a table structure at the foot of a statue and/or by a false door (3.2.3). Few miniatures offering tables/basins date prior to the NK, although most of the miniature tables have not been dated or have a context. There is one potential miniature offering table at the Medelhavsmuseet in Stockholm, which could date to the MK despite it lacking a specific context and date (MM1006, Figure 3.15). The "katalogkort" of the object states "Assiut ½ 1922", indicating a potential context. The design of the table itself and quality of the limestone are both reminiscent of the MK offering tables typically encountered at Asyut, since it does contain two inclined *ḫs*-vases leaning towards a central canal, which runs between two square basins (see 4.4.4). This example may indicate the introduction of a new kind of miniature offering table, evolving from a smaller fitted version of a basin or votive receptacle for the deceased to a miniaturised imitation of larger life-size offering tables. These objects may be reminiscent of the emergence of offering trays as well as the process of miniaturisation evidenced in pottery soul-houses of the MK (see Chapter 5.0).

Figure 3.15: Miniature offering table potentially from Asyut, dating to the Middle Kingdom (MM1006 Medelhavsmuseet Stockholm). CAT 232. Photograph by author.

Free-standing miniature offering tables are very similar to contemporary offering table design and are usually very elaborate. An example would be the fragment of a highly decorated offering table, tentatively dated to the TIP from an unknown context (CAT ID141, Museo Egizio, Firenze 6417; Figure 3.16). Its style (classified as C2) is reminiscent of NK offering tables, which tend to contain two *ḥtp*-signs, one at the opposite end of the spout with a highly detailed reed mat design, and a second one incorporated in the external spout structure. The sunken area contains elaborately executed offerings in raised relief, which still show signs of red paint. The design is almost identical to a monumental basalt offering table of Anchsjepenwepet dating to the LP[20] at the RMO Leiden (AM103; Figure 3.17). The resemblance may suggest that individuals may have commissioned miniature replicas of large-scale offering tables to either be used as amulets or votive substitutes for life-size tables.

Figure 3.16 (left): Miniature offering table with remnants of red pigment from an unknown origin (6417 Museo Egizio Firenze). CAT ID151. Photograph by author.

Figure 3.17 (right): Basalt offering table of Anchsjepenwepet from an unknown origin dating to the Late Period (AM103 RMO Leiden). CAT ID213. Photograph by author.

Several miniature offering tables in the database are from the Oriental Institute in Chicago, originating from the Architectural and Epigraphic Surveys carried out at a temple complex from the 18th Dynasty and the mortuary temple of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu in Thebes. A cruder example of one of the models offering tables from Medinet Habu shows similarities to the design of monumental offering tables in the NK, with the inclusion of gussets (OIM14661; Figure 3.18). The inscriptions on the model, however, have been scratched onto the brittle limestone and the hieroglyphic inscription is quite hard to read which may indicate that they have been copied from real size offering tables. The context of these models is indicative of their use, which differs from larger, functional offering tables. They can be better understood as votive offerings deposited in temple/mortuary cult shrines rather than memorials or cenotaphs with specific ritual functions.

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[20] The offering table is catalogued as belonging to the NK, but it may be later in date. The TIP may be a good compromise. It is possible that this offering table is from an earlier date and an exact model was made, which explains its presence at the Museo Egizio Firenze (no references are documented under this model).

This is a practice that continued well into the LP (Figure 3.19) and G-RP, as evidenced by an elaborate miniature model of an offering table at the KHM in Vienna (Figure 3.20).

Figure 3.18 (left): Miniature offering table found in the vicinity of the mortuary temple of Ramesses III, Medinet Habu in Thebes, dated to the New Kingdom (OIM14661 Oriental Institute Chicago). CAT ID313. Photograph by author.

Figure 3.19 (right): Miniature offering table from unknown origin dated to the Late Period (16.580.66 Brooklyn Museum New York). CAT ID290. Photograph by author.

Figure 3.20: Miniature offering table from unknown origin dated to the Greco-Roman Period (INV207 KHM Vienna). CAT ID321. Photograph by author.

3.6. CONCLUSION

Offering tables and similar material have been subject to numerous categorical and typological studies. The earliest seriation was proposed by Petrie (1907) for pottery offering trays and soul-houses, specifically from Deir Rifeh. Together with other studies such as Tooley (1989) for the typology and contextual analysis of trays and Hölzl (2002) who offered a detailed categorisation based on functional and magical elements on stone offering tables, an idea about what the concepts "offering table" signified may be created. The previous studies form the background for an in-depth analysis of the current data sample. Several gaps in previous studies have been noted, specifically contextual data based on wear, indicators of placement within the landscape, material analysis and modes of production, as well as comparative approaches with similar objects such as amulets. Considering previous approaches to the study of offering tables and applying earlier methods to such a diverse sample allowed for a better understanding of the data and potential gaps in the research.

These following aspects stood out as requiring further discussion after analysing the dataset:

- the role of offering tables within the funerary cult;
- the placement and use of offering tables in the ritual and real landscapes;
- how the objects, especially those of pottery, evolved from rural contexts and interplayed with landscapes of production;
- how water increased in importance from the late NK onwards creating a schism between practical and symbolic objects such as amulets/models. This becomes quite significant in the study of ritual practice concerning offering tables since it illustrates a need to no longer perform the libation process, but to rather imbue the object with the same or at least similar active potency through imagery;
- The overall conceptual processes governing the role of objects like offerings tables, the understanding of what they symbolised and how the dynamics worked.

The following chapters will attempt to address these "gaps" in the research on offering tables, specifically to highlight how the context, i.e., ritual landscapes and funerary cult; the actual production landscape, socio-economic circumstances and specific time periods have influenced the design and use of specific ritual utensils. In order to achieve this research, three 'case-studies' follow:

Chapter 4: an account of findings and conclusions from fieldwork carried out in in the necropolis of Asyut (4.0);

Chapter 5: a presentation, description and analysis of FIP-MK pottery offering trays and soul-houses as miniaturised production sites (5.0);

Chapter 6: an account of diachronic change in the design and iconography of offering tables and related *materia magica* between the TIP and G-RP, emphasising the role of water in the design and use of these utensils (6.0).

4. THE ASYUTI OFFERING TABLE: AN ATTEMPT AT RECONSTRUCTING FUNERARY RITUAL IN THE ANCIENT NECROPOLIS OF ASYUT

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The following description and analysis of offering tables found in the necropolis of Asyut is the result of an opportunity provided by Prof. Dr. Jochem Kahl as part of TAP.[21] Ninety offering tables were analysed at the magazin at Shutb, four of which are still in situ on the Gebel at Asyut. Despite the heavily worn state of many offering tables, and the fact that a large number of them are fragmented, a general classification could be made. Estimated dating is based on the categorisation methods presented in Hölzl's 2002 publication (see 3.2; 3.3.1). Based on context and design, the majority of the tables (43 in total) could be dated to the FIP. It is important to note that most tables originally had been "fixed", i.e., cut directly from the bedrock and later removed from their original sites, most of them possibly during the Coptic period. The iconography is often unique to Asyut.

The specific environment of Asyut and the remains of its offering tables, some of which are still found in their original setting strengthened a resolve to analyse offering tables in a "socio-anthropological" manner, namely trying to trace their ritual function/use within their original context and relate it to ideas and traditions of people living in the place in which they were used. The offering table will be placed within a specific funerary context to identify its role and how it reflects local trends and traditions in the region of Asyut, and its diachronic change related to its role as an influential city.

4.2. THE GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL AND SOCIO-RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

The offering table is intimately connected to the specific geographic/spatial context where it has been found and furthermore relates to the time-period during which it was in use. Such a realisation could be further developed through an anthropological approach, by connecting the use and appearance of an artefact to its assumed spatial and ritual context, thus tracing the meaning and importance it once had for the people of a specific time and place.

The modern city of Asyut lies on the western bank of the Nile, built in the vicinity of the ancient capital known as Sauti. Asyut has been continuously inhabited for at least five thousand years. It first emerged in importance during the OK and is mentioned in the *Pyramid Texts* dating to the 6th Dynasty (Kahl 2007: 35). From approximately 2500 BCE, Asyut was the capital of the 13th Upper Egyptian *nome* (province), known all over ancient Egypt for its fertile farmland (Kahl 2007: 108-109). The name Asyut is derived from the early Egyptian *Sauti* (*sꜣw.tï*), meaning *The Guardian*, apparently referring to the strategic importance of the town as controller of routes into the desert from the Nile Valley (Kahl 2007:14). During Greco-Roman times Asyut was called *Lycopolis*, Wolf City. Wepwawet, the main deity of Asyut,[22] was depicted in the shape of a canid, though the Greeks

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[21] The following case study is based on 90 offering tables exclusively pertaining to The Asyut Project report carried out in the 2018 excavation season ("The Asyut Project": "Die altägyptische Nekropole von Assiut: Dokumentation und Interpretation" (DFG) (2005-2019) a collaboration between the Johannes Gutenburg Universität Mainz, Freie Universität Berlin and Sohag University. https://www.aegyptologie.uni-mainz.de/the-asyut-project-feldarbeiten-in-mittelaegyptenfieldwork-in-middle-egypt/ [Accessed: 07.08.2019]). The objects are categorised and analysed outside of the main database previously presented in section 3.3.1. Associated catalogue in Vol IV. The findings are in the process of being published in the upcoming TAP Volume (submitted 2019).

[22] An inscription from the temple of Aset (Isis) in Philae describes Wepwawet as the Great God in Asyut (Junker 1958: 115).

considered Wepwawet's appearance to be similar to that of a wolf (Kahl 2007: 108). As a hunter and a warrior, Wepwawet was believed to be a guardian against menacing powers. He also served as a guide for the dead and a guardian of cemeteries (Pinch 2004). Dogs were often painted inside coffins found in Asyut's necropolis, affirming the status of Wepwawet as the town's protective deity and a companion to the Duat (Kahl 2007: 56). Wepwawet was labelled as "the Opener of Ways", guarding access to mountains and oases and was thus considered to be a "liminal deity" (Kahl 2007: 39). As "opener" and a chthonic god Wepwawet has furthermore been associated with the OMC possibly due to his liminality (see 4.6; 7.2.3; Wilkinson 2003: 191).

To the west of Asyut, a mountain range faces the Nile, which at this point contains dangerous currents and intersects a route which leads from Darfur to the Kharga Oasis (Map 0.1; [App I:Map 1.1.1]). To the West, Asyut is protected by a vast mountain range (Kahl 2007). This means that Asyut is not only sheltered by natural barriers, it also has a unique position at the crossroads of waterways and caravan routes. Furthermore, Asyut's importance is related to the veneration of its gods. Its temples, specifically that of Wepwawet and Anubis (FIP-MK, NK, Kahl 2007:133-35; DuQuesne 2009; LP-GR, Kahl 2007: 35-58), were centres of economic activity, controlling extensive landholdings. They were equipped with small industries like kitchens, bakeries and workshops and provided jobs for local residents, who also benefited from the fertile lands and Asyut's strategic position (Kahl 2007: 36).

During the FIP and MK, Asyut was the most prominent religious centre of ancient Egypt (Kahl 2007: 151-153; Kahl 1999: 17), after Thebes in the south, and Herakleopolis and Memphis to the north. Its position between these two power centres proved to be both prodigious and precarious. Asyuti art, craftsmanship, cults and power-structures were influenced by both Thebes and Herakleopolis, influences that created a unique syncretistic culture (Kahl 2012: 1-3).

The earliest material which has been recorded on Gebel Asyut el-gharbi dates to the OK. An OK tomb with nine rock-cut sculptures was recorded during the French Expedition but is now lost (Kahl 2012: 10; Wilkinson 1843; Commission des sciences et arts d´Egypte (1809-1828), Panckoucke 1822, Pl. 46.9). Material dating to this period was also presumably excavated by Hogarth (Tombs 45, 49, 53-54, 56-57, although exact location has not been determined, see Zitman 2010b: 71-91; Zitman 2010b). Recent surveys have revealed OK pottery at several locales between levels 6-9 (see Table 4.1 below), but it may have fallen from higher levels, indicating that the mountain was already used as a cemetery from the early OK (Kahl 2012:11; Rzeuska 2011).

After the 8th Dynasty, there was no centralised government in Egypt, consequently the country was divided into several regions governed by local rulers. Asyut, which over time had been increasingly influenced by Herakleopolis, did after an approximately twenty-year long war, suffer a rapid decline while Theban rulers took over the city. It has often been stated that Asyut did not recover from the Herakleopolian defeat and that it ended up as a provincial town of little importance. Recent archaeological findings have proven that this was not the case, however[23] (Kahl 2007: 8). Between the 11th and 12th Dynasty Asyut did maintain its influence and importance, both artistically and economically (Zitman 2010a: 182). However, it was constantly influenced by its precarious position between two even more influential power spheres.

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[23] Elaborate tombs complete with grave goods including wooden models and exquisite coffins have been discovered and analysed in great detail. This includes the re-examination of the tomb of Djefai-Hapi I, which is the largest known MK tomb in Egypt, (Kahl 2007: 9).

Throughout its long history Asyut has been a strategic place receiving influences from various parts of the antique world, facilitated by its position as a trading and pilgrimage site. For much of its existence Asyut was a garrison town containing more soldiers than any other Egyptian town, several of them coming from other areas (Khal 2012: 12). Asyut absorbed influences not only from its allies, in particular the Herakleopolitan kingdom, but also from Thebes and other areas, mingling them with local styles and belief systems. The town sometimes ended up as a battle ground and was occasionally for longer periods forced to succumb to hostile forces.

Asyut's grandest building was the temple of Wepwawet, where a preeminent religious festival was celebrated for five days at the end of each year. As part of the festivities Wepwawet's statue was carried from the city centre to the home of Anubis, a site probably situated by the edge of the necropolis (Regulski & Golia 2018: 20). Other important temples at Asyut, were dedicated to Hathor and Thoth and the place was historically linked to Osiris, whose temple was recorded in the FIP and functioned for more than two millennia.[24]

The temples and the funerary cults of the necropolis areas were controlled and supervised by the local elite. In the tomb of Djefai-Hapi I, ten contracts related to mortuary rituals and the construction of a tomb have been found, listing details concerning the burial ceremonies and addressing the administrators of proceedings connected with Djefai-Hapi's funeral (Kahl 2007: 45). Contracts mention the erection of a statue within a complex, which included a garden at the lower edge of a causeway leading from the cultivated areas to the forecourt of his tomb. They explicitly proclaimed Djefai-Hapi to be worshipped as a god as evidenced by the recounting of priests, whose duties were to be similar to those concerning the cult executed at the temples of Wepwawet and Anubis (Kahl *et al.* 2015: 121-126). The organisation of everything around elaborate burials, the treatment of corpses, the furnishing and construction of tombs, etc., apparently constituted an important and profitable business in Asyut, actively supported by functionaries and administrators. Furthermore, during the 11th and 12th Dynasties the chief priests of the Wepwawet and Anubis temples served as *nomarchs*, rulers, of the Asyut province. The cults, festivities and high-ranking officials may explain the presence of numerous steles, as well as elaborate offering tables dedicated to deities worshipped in Asyut during various time periods, but also to nomarchs buried within the necropolis[25] (Kahl 2007: 57).

4.3.   THE NECROPOLIS: THE TOMBS AND GEOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The necropolis embodies the socio-religious stratification of an ancient Egyptian community, which in turn is reflected in the individual funerary complexes. The people of Asyut buried their dead in the mountain range to the west of their city, where the necropolis extended several kilometres along the edge of the cultivated plain. Tombs belonging to Asyut's ancient elite overlooked the city from the side of the mountain Gebel Asyut al-Gharbi (Kahl 2007: 60). The tombs of the wealthy came with a view over the Nile valley and floodplain since they were impressive rock-cut tombs carved into the limestone cliff (Figure 4.1). The cliff itself is steeply inclined and divided into eleven limestone layers, with numerous elaborate tombs and shaft tombs which stretch from at least 1km

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[24] An important pilgrimage site and sanctuary was also established in the G-RP dedicated to the cult of Osiris known as *The House of the Eight Trees* (Kahl 2007: 35).

[25] Royal cults were common throughout Egypt. Rulers were venerated in ka-houses along processional routes such as the ones present in Asyut, including the impressive causeway outside the tomb of Djefai-Hapi I. The venerated "saints" at Asyut included Pepy I, Ramesses Meryamun as well as Djefai-Hapi, worshipped from the SIP all the way through the NK. See Kahl 2012: 163-188.

east to west (Zitman 2010a: 13). The tombs of high officials are almost always accompanied by smaller shaft tombs in the vicinity or even the courtyard of the tombs, which may have belonged to members of the household, officials and dependants.

In general terms, wealthy tombs were equipped with coffins, statues, wall paintings, models and figurines, while lower status tombs contained funerary equipment often inscribed with names and titles of officials to provide access to the cult above (although this is not a frequent feature at Asyut; Arnold et al. 2015: 319). Offering tables found in the tombs of the wealthy were cut out directly from the bedrock, or placed inside them, often in front of the burial chambers. Offering tables could also have been cut out directly from the rock beside the shaft tombs (e.g., shaft tomb N13.11 in front of tomb N13.1, Figure 4.4 below), though it was probably more common that portable offering tables were placed beside the shafts, mostly depending on their date and context within the necropolis (see below).

Even if the necropolis was a liminal area, set apart from the living and referred to as *The Mountain of the Desert Edge*, it was nevertheless frequently visited by family members, pilgrims and others who carried with them votive offerings (Kahl 2007: 59). The inner, burial chambers of elite tombs were sealed off, though some were equipped with specific cult chapels, and some were decorated with reliefs and paintings depicting Egyptian landscapes and human activities, thus constituting versions of the Egyptian cosmos, complete with actions repeated for eternity, transforming the cult chapel into a reflection of real life (Harrington 2015). Specifically, in the case of Asyut, FIP tombs have a large hall containing vertical shafts leading to the burial chambers below (e.g., Tomb N12.1) (Kahl 2007: 73-77). From the MK onwards more rooms were added for specific cults (e.g., Tomb P10.1) as well as a more complex system of shafts which lead to numerous chambers below. The tomb functioned as a liminal space centred around the offering table as the essential tool for a ceremony that not only united the world of the living with the one of the deceased, but also served as a vehicle bringing vital forces to deceased ancestors, reviving the entire mortuary space (2.4).

Provincial cemeteries throughout Middle Egypt like the one in Asyut, boasted large rock-cut tombs dedicated to their most powerful officials, especially the nomarchs, but also high priests of local cults. The cultic paraphernalia in such tombs dating to the FIP exhibit a regional style. However,

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later tombs are often made in conformity with the royal style of the early 12th Dynasty, mixed in with own stylistic choices and regional influence as evidenced in the tomb chapel of Djefai- Hapi I (Kahl 2007: 9-12).

Between the FIP and the 12th Dynasty, the necropolis was separated into a sacred area and until then no quarrying had been carried out within the burial area. However, by the beginning of the 18th Dynasty, the more ancient tombs began to be quarried for stone and new quarries were eventually opened all over the mountain. During the NK it was not uncommon for older tombs to be reused, especially throughout the LP and into the Ptolemaic era (7.2.5). Centuries later, when the ancient religion had largely been forgotten, as well as the language inscribed in tombs and temples, the Coptic communities of Asyut adapted the burial grounds to their specific needs. In addition to burying their dead there, the Copts built monasteries and some of the ancient tombs were transformed into chapels (Kahl 2007: 102-106).

4.3.1. *Geological characteristics*

The Asyut Necropolis is composed of at least three superimposed series of rock-cut tombs: OK tombs at the top of the cliff; FIP burials of which numerous offering tables have been preserved; early MK numerous tombs of important officials in the north-western lower cliffs (Kahl 2007: 60-62).

The *gebel* is composed of 11 layers of limestone geology, each with several distinct properties within the limestone (Table 4.1; see App I:1.3.2 for a general plan of the necropolis site).

Table 4.1 Geological layers of limestone and corresponding time-periods and tombs. Based on Klemm & Klemm 2005 and Khal 2007: 59-106.

Geological Level	Time Period/Featured Tomb	Description of Level
Level 1	Middle Kingdom? – tombs have been subject to looting and damaged due to their easy access from the modern road.	Limestone of roughly 5 m thickness. Area very damaged due to modern destruction and natural erosion. Limestone is light grey in colour, significant karstification.
Level 2–4	Middle Kingdom Level 2 = Tomb of Djefai-Hapi I "Djefai-Hapi-unity"	Layer 2 is roughly 15 m thick, contains karsified hard limestone and an 8 m thick layer composed of marly limestone with clay liners. These features seem to continue up to Level 4. Limestone light grey in colour with karst holes and fossil features.
Level 5–7	First Intermediate Period, Middle Kingdom Level 6 = Tomb of the Soldiers "Khety-unity"	Hard limestone plains – karst cavern formation decreases in frequency. Fewer or non-existent fossil remains and are lighter in colour compared to lower layers.
Level 8	First Intermediate Period, Middle Kingdom Tomb of L12.1	Subdivided by 15 cm thick layers of merlons (marl/clay liners). Limestone becomes coarser since it shows signs of calcification.
Level 9	Presence of numerous small tombs, dates not yet confirmed.	White limestone layer with 10 cm thick black (magnesium rich?) karst filling with some traces of alabaster-like structures. Limestone is significantly coarser due to calcification and is therefore more porous .
Level 10 (Level 11 inaccessible)	Presumably early in date, however the site is inaccessible.	Each layer is roughly 8 m thick and includes a combination of marl and limestone beds; hard limestone re-emerges after the 7th layer.

Numerous chisel marks are still visible on the tomb walls and have been used to date the tombs (Klemm & Klemm 2005). The tomb chambers were cut with copper chisels, which before the 18th Dynasty left tracks that were five to eight centimetres long. Until then the tracks formed chaotic patterns, though from the 18th Dynasty onwards the entrance angles become regular and the chiseled walls present a "fish bone pattern". During the NK the tracks became longer, generally up to 20 cm, and during Coptic times the tracks have broad entrance angles and are 2.5 cm x 4 cm long (Klemm & Klemm 2005).

The characteristics of the limestone and chisel marks existing in the Asyut necropolis may not only be used to identify the age of the tombs, but they may also inform about the origin and previous positions of the numerous offering tables found within the perimeters of the necropolis. Several of the preserved offering tables, as well as numerous fragments, have been removed from their original sites, making it hard to date them or interpret their use and importance in the mortuary cult.

The contemporary form and function of the necropolis has to be taken into account while studying an offering table or stele originating from Asyut. The site has over time, suffered a lot of damage, also evidenced by the poor condition of most tables in the sample. Torrential rains and earthquakes, combined with ruthless plundering and quarrying that occurred already in antiquity and then continued throughout the centuries, have left clefts that continuously damage the tombs, sometimes burying them in rubble. Early ill-advised excavations have contributed to the devastation of the site, even dynamite was used to open-up the tombs (Kahl 2007: 3). Records kept during earlier excavations are often inadequate or missing all together. Artefacts like offering tables were carelessly removed or thrown away and destroyed while excavators were searching for "more valuable" finds. Findings were haphazardly documented and spread to collections all over the world (Zitman 2010a). An attempt at contextualising finds from these excavations by consulting field notes as well as archival material and artefacts present in museums such as the British Museum and the Museo Egizio in Turin has been made by Marcel Zitman (2010a).

4.4. THE SAMPLE

By observing offering tables, especially *in situ*, and trying to establish their original context within a funerary setting, conclusions may be reached regarding the use and significance they had for the individuals living within the socio-religious realm of Asyut, as well as the role they played in the sacred landscape surrounding them. In contrast to previous studies, the current sample of 90 unpublished offering tables currently present in Asyut will be analysed in relation to their immediate topographical and geographical surroundings following a methodology based on contextual analysis and in-person observation. The offering tables which are still in their original placement are observed as practical fixtures and considered through a phenomenological approach. Few offering tables can now be found *in situ*, and most of them are found in museum collections, although the majority are rarely exhibited mainly due to their size, poor state of conservation, as well as a limited public interest. Furthermore, many offering tables are stored without any information regarding their provenance and original context. This is one reason why a holistic study of Asyuti offering tables is valuable. At least four offering tables directly carved into the bedrock are still in place and may thus reveal something about their original function. A study of these tables as well as 86 others, not found exactly in their original location but with a clear and specific provenance, provides a unique possibility to connect them with a specific, topographical context. This will allow for a comparative study of a group of offering tables and basins form a

specific regional context as well as providing examples of stone offering tables within their original placement in an ancient Egyptian necropolis.

An analysis of the 90 offering tables presented in this study has so far not been published. The sample consists of four tables still in situ, 48 tables found in the so-called Hogarth Depot in Asyut (Kilian 2012: 196-201; Czyzewka-Zalewska 2015: 104-116), 38 tables for which context and exact location are described in archaeological reports, and four tables from an unidentified context. Most of the tables are of a similar size, varying between 20–40 cm in width and 15–30 cm in length and almost all of the tables are made out of limestone, which is the most common material used for manufacturing offering tables in general (3.5.1). Most of the studied offering tables appear to have been cut directly inside the tomb, using the natural limestone bedrock. The varying qualities of the limestone may indicate a table's original location, considering the quite easy definition of the various limestone layers (see Table 4.1 above) present in the gebel (mountain) of Asyut. Some offering tables are made of limestone not found in this place. They have a much whiter hue and a more compact density than the limestone found on the gebel. Furthermore, the absence of chisel marks on the bases may indicate that they were free-standing and commissioned elsewhere than in the necropolis.

4.4.1. *Context Typology*

Most of the analysed offering tables originate from Levels 5–7 (see Table 4.1 above), which also include the four offering tables still in situ. Thirty-eight of the 90 analysed offering tables have been found in the Hogarth Depot inside two niches cut into the southern wall in Tomb IV, which did not belong to its original design. These niches contained several layers of mixed artefacts from various time periods, deposited there by earlier excavators of the site (Kilian 2012: 196-201). Despite the originally "jumbled" state of this site, it is nevertheless possible to reach some conclusions about the origin of the offering tables found there (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: Plan of tomb N12.2 (Tomb IV) and the location of the so-called "Hogarth's Depot" (plan by M. Maschke 2009, photo Kahl 2006, in Kahl et al. 2015: 104, Fig. 1).
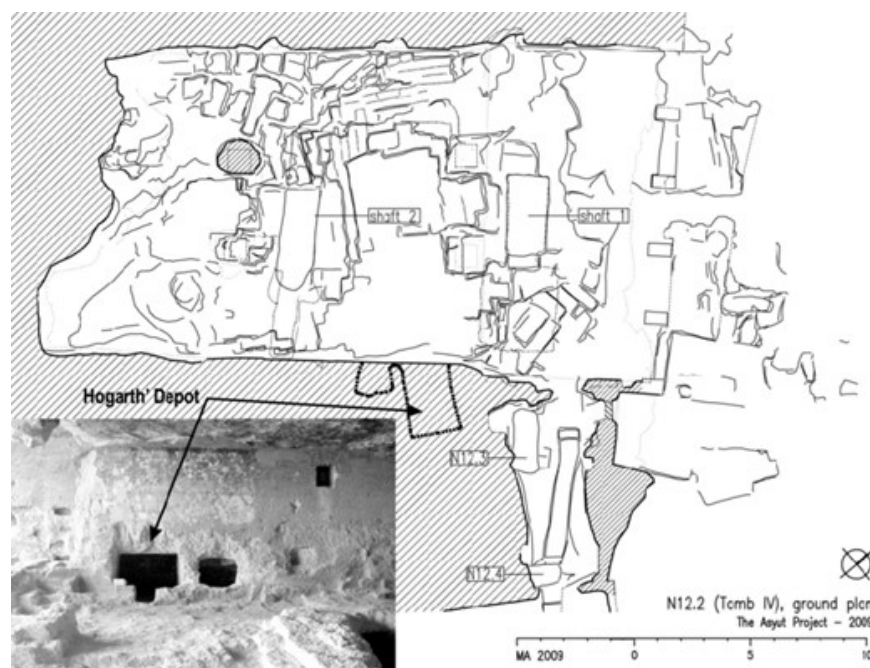
According to their fixture[26], offering tables may be described as (Chart 4.1; Table 4.2):

Fixed: means that the table was carved directly from the limestone bedrock of the tomb (see examples in N11.1; Figure 4.6) indicated by their irregular bases and sides as well as the presence of large, irregular chisel marks (e.g. S04/47; Figures 4.3-4). Most offering tables were removed either at an earlier stage (e.g., NK or Coptic Period when tombs were used as dwellings) or by archaeologists later-on. The approximate time for their removal may be indicated by chisel marks. These offering tables are often placed close to or directly above tomb shafts and/or inside the tombs. They were usually strategically placed by the entrance to the burial chamber, with their spout facing the shaft, or canal, entering the chamber. They were assumedly used during official ceremonies performed by religious practitioners/ritualists.

Fitted: These offering tables may be large or small, though with sloping edges and a smoothened base, indicating that they have been fitted into another kind of structure (e.g., S05/408, S04/168, S12/35, etc. also see Tor S.09178). Chisel marks on the sides and bottom are regular and smoothened. These offering tables are often "monumental" (for definitions see 3.4.1) and placed in front of kA statues or stelae in the tombs of wealthy or influential people.

Freestanding: This type of offering table may be classified as a votive offering due to the size and the fact that they are often made of materials other than limestone, such as alabaster (e.g., S09/0006, etc. also see Leiden AP 82; for an example of an amulet see MM10006). Such tables may also be made of pottery and are accordingly easy to transport. The stone tables and/or basins are often quite elaborate, and some have apparently been made in a workshop, commissioned on demand to be placed in a public area as offerings presented to the deceased by her/his relatives. Usually, it is impossible to place these offering tables within a specific context.

Of the 90 tables: 6 are classified as fitted and 28 as portable; one offering basin made of alabaster (ACAT 28), may be classified either as portable or fitted. Examples of portable tables are those with remnants of four legs, or with a flat base. Such offering tables are not as heavy or large as those which are fitted or fixed. Offering tables classified as "votive offerings" are significantly smaller than regular tables, include miniature tables in the shape of amulets and/or small models.

Chart 4.1: Percentages of Fixed, Fitted, Freestanding Material.
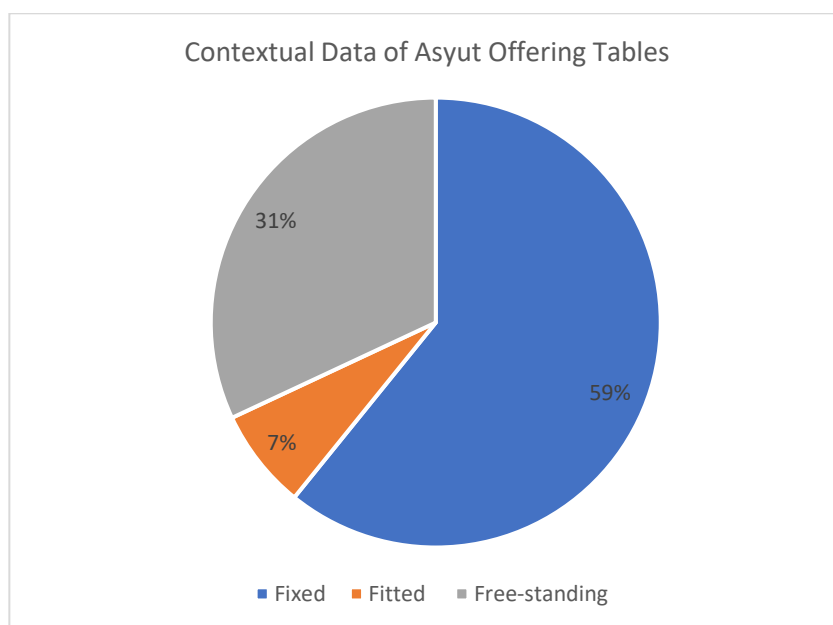
Figure 4.3 (left): Surface of offering table S04/0047. Photograph: F. Barthel 2018

Figure 4.4 (right): Side-view of the offering table S04/0047 showing irregular and prominent chisel marks across the surface. Photograph by author 2018.

4.4.2. *Preserved Paint*

21 of the tables show indications of having been painted, though only three of them have with all certainty been painted, preserving red, and blue/black pigmentation. Without microscopic analysis it cannot be established whether the others have been painted, their reddish hue may have been caused by the use of red limestone which occurs naturally within the necropolis (see Klemm and Klemm 2008).

4.4.3. *Materials*

38% of the analysed offering tables was of a *marly* kind, i.e., slightly dense, but also quite fine, flaky, and easily subject to wear coinciding with layers 5–7 (see Table 4.1 above). More than half of the offering tables made of this type of limestone are of the *fixed* type, while a third can be classified as *portable*. This is not uncommon in other sites as well, since most offering tables are actually made from marly limestone (for examples see 3.5.1.1).

7.8% of offering tables were made from dense limestone (Table 4.2) and all can be classified as *portable*, indicating that they were manufactured from limestone not quarried in or in the vicinity of the necropolis, but commissioned from workshops situated elsewhere. The difference between dense limestone and the marly kind is quite small and to be certain of the identification petrographic analysis would have to be applied (Aston et al. 2000: 40-44; Graph 4.1).

Table 4.2 Classification of offering tables in the sample according to dimensions and material.

Type of Limestone/Material	Fixed	Fitted	Portable	Undetermined	TOTAL	Percentages
Dense/Marly	0	0	7	0	7	7.8%
Flaky/Marly	35	5	19	3	62	68.9%
Porous	16	0	2	0	18	20%
Striped/Magnesium Fillings	1	0	0	0	1	1.1%
Other	1	1	0	0	2	2.2%
TOTAL	53	6	28	3	90	100%
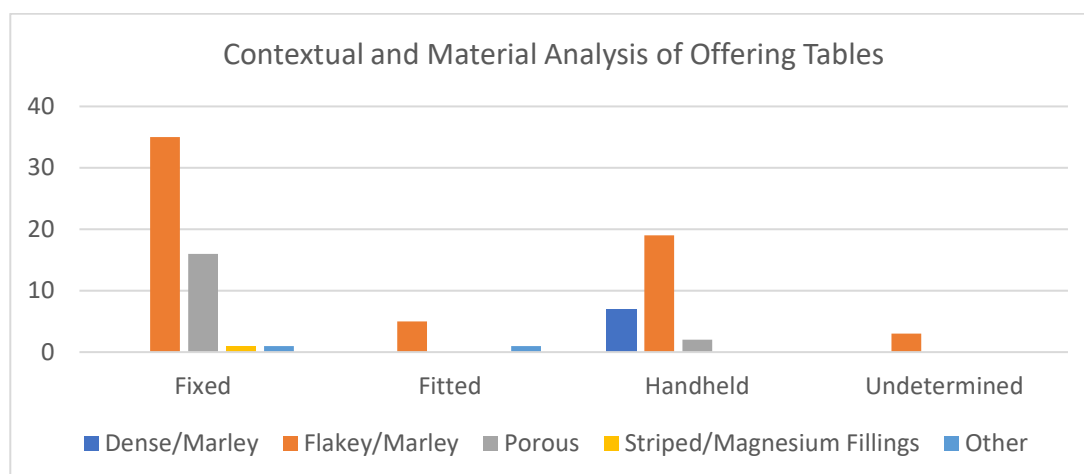
4.4.4. Iconography

55 tables out of the 90 in the sample have a central $ḥtp$-sign in raised relief. It is the most common feature on offering tables at Asyut. The other two most common features of the Asyuti tables are $ḥs$-vases (eight tables) and irrigation fields (six tables); this is followed by bovine head/leg (three tables) and round bread (three tables; Chart 4.2; section 3.4.3.4)[27].

The most prominent theme apparent on the offering tables is water management, shown by basins and/ or canals leading to an external spout structure (3.4.3.3). The offering tables *in situ* illustrate how the ceremony of filling them with water may have functioned – water was poured over the $ḥtp$-sign and then flowed towards the basins which were filled up to the brim, after which the water was conducted by the small, drainage canals until it reached the spout and flowed down into the burial chamber, or tomb shaft (see 7.4.2; 7.4.4).

Although this case study deals exclusively with stone offering tables, the iconography is similar to that found on pottery offering trays, which have been studied in more detail by Andrea Kilian (2016, 2012). Pottery offering trays contain canals, basins, oxen, bread, vegetables, etc. – similar to the design of stone offering tables. Differences are in the depiction of $ḥs.t$-vases as well as the $ḥtp$ and pottery trays do not usually contain inscriptions[28] but do have some kind of spout or a drainage hole. The pottery trays are not mass produced and most of them do apparently not come from a workshop, since no tray is similar to another, all have minor differences as well as in the fabric itself (Kilian 2012: 109).

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[27] Ilin-Tomich analysed another sample from Asyut made up of offering tables in museum collections, and noted that triangular bread is more common than round bread in Asyuti iconography. This appears to be a unique feature among Asyuti artisans (Ilin-Tomich 2018a: 89).

[28] For an example of an offering tray with an inscription of an offering formula from Qubbet el-Hawa see Kilian 2016: 174.

Chart 4.2 *Percentages of the main iconographic elements present on Asyuti offering tables in the Sample.*

Iconographic Elements on Asyuti Offering Tables in the Sample

Legend:
- Htp
- Hs-vase
- Pouring Hs-vases
- Round Bread
- Bovine Leg
- Flowers
- Irrigation Fields
- Vessels
- Water

Values shown: 61%, 10%, 2%, 3%, 2%, 1%, 1%, 1%, 1%, 7%
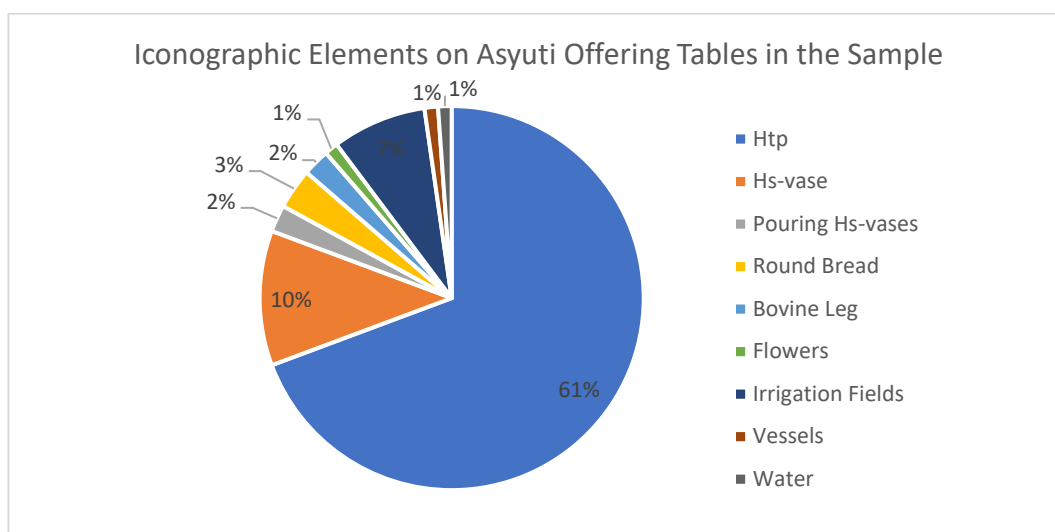
4.4.5. PREVIOUS STUDIES

Over the course of centuries, more than one hundred tombs, with dates ranging between the OK and the PP have been excavated in the ancient necropolis of Asyut and analysed (main expeditions include Hogarth 1906-07, Schiapparelli 1905–1913, Bey Kamal 1913-1914, Chiassinat & Palanque 1903). Most important so far have been the Chassinat and Palanque excavations in 1903, unearthing twenty-six tombs, all but five of which were intact. Objects from this expedition are housed in the Egyptian Museum of Cairo and the Louvre Museum of Paris. Outside of Egypt, the largest group of artefacts from Asyut is in the Turin Museum. During seven seasons of fieldwork, 1906-1913, the team of Ernesto Schiaparelli uncovered over three thousand artefacts. The site was also explored by David George Hogarth. The British mission lasted between December 1906 and March 1907 and Hogarth did not publish his findings. He did however compile a detailed fieldwork archive and brought about 700 artefacts to England (see Ryan 1988). In 1913, Ahmed Pasha Kamal excavated in Asyut on behalf of a private collector. Kamal published lists of the recovered items, but his assembled collection was soon dispersed worldwide.

All the tombs have been cut out in a stratified limestone cliffside,[29] and are in the form of rock-cut tombs and shaft tombs [App I: Map 1.3.2]. Even if most of the tombs, and their content, have been thoroughly researched and scientific excavations continue to be carried out, the offering tables found at the site have so far to a high degree been neglected. Offering tables brought from Asyut during the last 150 years can be found in Egyptian collections around the world, while some are still left *in situ*, or have been stored in the excavation magazine located in the village of Shutb. Several offering tables, both intact and fragmented, have been discovered during recent campaigns and as late as in 2016 fragments of five different offering tables were found.

The Asyuti offering tables have recently been studied by scholars, such as Ilin-Tomich, who mainly addresses the 'elaborate' type of offering tables and their complex provenance (Ilin-Tomich 2018a, b). Since the tables present in museum collections are of a high quality and often have inscriptions, they have received the most attention. The work of Ilin-Tomich is vital for the understanding of how workshops functioned and the importance of ancient Asyut, which role as a cultural hub for local production, has often been overlooked. By comparing objects from a large sample of pottery offering trays from Asyut, Ilin-Tomich identified artisans from various local workshops, who

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[29] The porous limestone is both layered and compact, giving the cliff-face a "honeycomb" like appearance. Kahl 2007: 3

originally seem to have been exclusively inspired by local traditions. During the MK new features emerged indicating that Theban design had been incorporated in most trays, as well as offering tables. Ilin-Tomich (2018a) assumes that several of the portable offering tables were manufactured in other places, most probably in Herakleopolis. The production of funerary equipment, such as offering tables and steles, was more complex and abundant in this area than previously thought (Ilin-Tomich, 2018a,b). Another important publication mentioning Asyuti offering tables and their possible archaeological context is that of Marcel Zitman (2010a,b; [App I:1.3.1]) for a map of Hogarth's tombs). The Asyuti offering tables highlight the importance of this site, not only as an ancient Egyptian town, but also as a garrison town, pilgrimage site and a necropolis for *nomarchs* (Kahl 2007: 15). Andrea Kilian has also contributed to the study of Asyuti offering tables, specifically pottery offering trays, which have some similarities to stone tables and were found in similar archaeological contexts (Kilian 2012; 2016). The Asyuti offering tables highlight the importance of this site, not only as an ancient Egyptian town, but also as a garrison town, pilgrimage site and a necropolis for *nomarchs* (Kahl 2007: 15).

Provenance
Most offering tables found in the Asyut necropolis date from the FIP and onwards, and their original location may be considered as fairly assured, their origin mainly assumed to have been Middle Egypt. Alexander Ilin-Tomich (2018a: 82) assumes that the manufactured tables of Asyut may have three basic origins:

> **Centralised production** meaning that offering tables were produced at prestigious workshops in places other than Asyut, where they have been purchased and brought to the Asyut necropolis by private buyers, or their contractors. In the case of Asyut, comparisons of certain characteristics may indicate that such a manufacturing centre could have been Abydos.

> **Localised production.** Asyut offering tables produced in local workshops, supported by local patrons, and applying local/regional designs.

> **Mobile production.** Itinerant artists originating from different areas were hired to construct tombs and the various artefacts used in mortuary rituals, not the least including offering tables.

By comparing objects from a large sample of stone offering tables found in Asyut, Ilin-Tomich (2018b) has been able to identify artisans from various local workshops. Originally these artisans seem to have been exclusively inspired by local traditions. However, during the MK a Theban style was from then on incorporated into the design of most offering tables and trays, as well as offering tables, indicating that the artisans were copying iconography and styles preferred by Theban artists (Ilin-Tomich 2018a: 92). Furthermore, several of the portable offering tables found in Asyut were manufactured in other places, most probably and commonly in Herakleopolis[30]. There are significantly more varieties in the shape and form of offering trays and tables emanating from the MK, such as soul-houses, pottery offering trays (see 3.3.1; 5.0). Differences in shapes and aspects may have been due to the rise of new "personal" styles and tastes, as well as an adaptation to styles from other areas.

There appear to have been several workshops in Asyut producing grave goods and cutting tombs. Marcel Zitman (2010a) has pointed out that inscriptions in the coffins, i.e., offering formulae and names, are similar to those formulae inscribed on some offering tables, something that may indicate that several coffins and offering tables were manufactured by the same workshop (Zitman

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[30] Herakleopolitan workshops were during the 9th–10th Dynasties (FIP), important producers of offering tables, as indicated by such tables found in Qubbet el-Hawa, Mo'alla, Dendera, Akhmin, Bersheh, Beni Hasan, Saqqara, Abusir, Herakleopolis, and Sedment (Ilin-Tomich 2018b: 58-87).
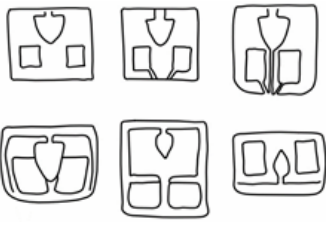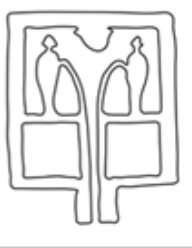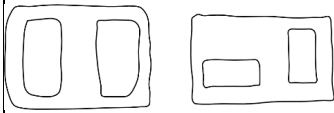
2010a: 245-343). Offering tables were made from local limestone, after all – the entire *gebel* that overshadows the town was limestone, the preferred material for laymen tombs. Comparing Asyuti offering tables with those produced in other places, Ilin-Tomich (2018a) found that the execution and iconography of some offering tables found in Asyut were excellently done, but that the inscriptions were often clumsily executed, something he interpreted as an indication that the tables had been purchased from workshops in other towns, while the inscriptions had been added and custom-made in Asyut (Ilin-Tomich 2018a: 92). Furthermore, the iconography on some offering tables had been adapted to Asyut preferences. For example, $ḥs.t$- vases recurrent on offering plates/tables from other places have in Asyut been replaced by tilted $ḥs.t$- vases. Depictions of such vases on offering trays and tables may indicate local, religious/funerary rituals[31] (Ilin-Tomich 2018a: 83-84). Both Ilin-Tomich (2018a,b) and Zitman (2010a) indicate that Asyut constituted an eclectic, but nevertheless highly active, unique, and innovative artistic environment, receiving influences from both local and regional sources.
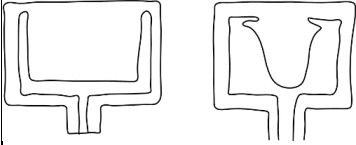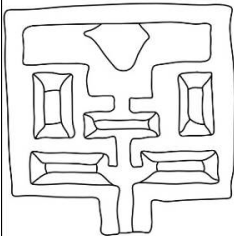
4.5. ANALYSIS: CATEGORISATION OF THE DATASET
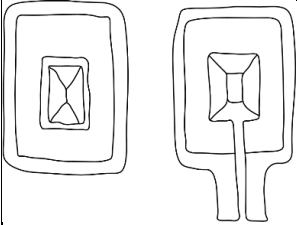
The 90 Asyuti offering tables may be classified in 6 general types and 14 sub-types as illustrated by the sketches (Table 4.3). Type 7 is classified as non-identifiable mostly because of the poor condition of the table or if it is too fragmented. Categorisation was based on iconographic elements as well as contextual analysis of the offering tables in the sample, an innovative approach which aims at considering the funerary context of the object.

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[31] $ḥs.t$- vases are depicted as spilling a stream of liquid through an external spout structure, a ritual carried out by priests within a funerary setting. $ḥs.t$- vases are occasionally depicted together with Wepwawet and this unique iconography may thus allude to local rituals, perhaps. Possibly a local variant of the OMC since in which $ḥs.t$- vases played an important role in this ritual (3.4.3.4; 7.2.2; 7.3.3-4).

Table 4.3 Typology of the offering tables in the sample and identified using Hölzl's typology charts, according to time-periods (based on Hölzl 2002: 9–51; see 3.2; 3.3.1).

Type Description	Hölzl Categorisation, Dating (see section 3.3.1)	Similar Tables in Museums	Offering Tables at Asyut (Cat. # in Vol III: Catalogues) - ACAT
Type 1: A-F Rectangular/square shaped with two rectangular basins on either side of a central *ḥtp*-sign in raised relief. Each basin has a small, often diagonal, canal oriented towards the centre and outer edge of the table. If not *in situ* it often has irregular edges and base indicating that it was originally fixed.	Typ B+C: Opfertafeln mit Becken und Napfkuchen bzw. Htp-Zeichen – Typen des Alten Reiches (p. 23) Typ B+C: Opfertafeln mit Becken und Napfkuchen bzw. *ḥtp*-Zeichen – Typen des Mittleren Reiches (p. 34) FIP/early MK	BM EA 973 Tor. S14939 (Tor-Provv. 0314) RMO LX15 RMO F1901/F1.63 MM NME047 Hölzl Examples: OK = Cairo CG 1355, Cairo CG 1335, Cairo CG 1363, Louvre D70 MK = Tor N.22012, Tor N.22014, Tor N.22011, Tor N. 22024	ACat. 3, Cat. 4, Cat. 7, Cat. 10, Cat. 11, Cat. 13, Cat. 14, Cat. 15, Cat. 17, Cat. 18, Cat. 20, Cat. 22, Cat. 26, Cat. 34, Cat. 37, Cat. 38, Cat. 39, Cat. 46, Cat. 48, Cat. 50, Cat. 52, Cat. 53, Cat. 54, Cat. 55, Cat. 57, Cat. 58, Cat. 60, Cart. 61, Cat. 62, Cat. 63, Cat. 64, Cat. 65, Cat. 66, Cat. 67, Cat. 68, Cat. 69, Cat, 71, Cat. 75, Cat. 76, Cat. 77, Cat. 78, Cat. 80, Cat. 81, Cat. 82, Cat. 86
Type 2: G Rectangular shaped with a sunken area at one end containing a *ḥtp* flanked by two large *ḥs.t*-vases with spouts facing inwards, with streams of liquid flowing to the external spout structure, both creating a canal extending from the *ḥtp* at one end to the spout structure. Edges are often smoothened outwards to a certain extent, then become irregular as well as the base, something which indicates that the table was originally fixed.	Typ B+C: Opfertafeln mit Becken und Napfkuchen bzw. Htp-Zeichen – Typen des Mittleren Reiches (p. 34) Early MK	BM EA 46611 (pottery offering tray) MM10006 Tor S.14939 – offering tables of Hetepneb Hölzl Examples are similar to the previously described Type 1 (see above).	ACat. 83
Type 3: H, I Rectangular shaped offering basin/table with two rectangular sloping-edged basins which may	Typ B2: Opfertafeln mit Becken – Typen des Alten Reiches (p. 17-18) Late OK	Hölzl Examples: OK = Cairo CG 1334, AR-8, Cairo CG 1326, Cairo CG 1367	ACat. 6, Cat. 9, Cat. 19, Cat. 31, Cat. 56, Cat. 59,

have contained organic residue (to be analysed further). The edges and base are irregular, indicating it was originally fixed.			
Type 4: J, K Rectangular/square shaped with a central raised area which may contain a *ḥtp* in raised relief. The table also has an external spout structure containing a canal which flows from around the raised area to the end of the spout. The sides of the table may be sloping to a certain extent, but the rest is highly irregular indicating that the tables may have been fixed.	Typ C2: Opfertafeln mit Darstellungen des Napfkuchens oder *ḥtp*-Zeichens – Typen des Mitteleren Reiches (p. 32) MK	Hölzl Examples: MK = Cairo CG 23063, Cairo CG 23109	ACat. 8, Cat. 35, Cat. 36, Cat. 47, Cat. 51
Type 5: L Rectangular/square shaped with a geometric design alluding to irrigation fields. The table contains a t-shaped sunken area at the top usually incorporating a *ḥtp*-sign in raised relief. A canal connects the sunken area to a central horizontal basin and then all the way down to the external spout structure. On either side of the sunken area and central basin are two vertical rectangular basins, followed by a large horizontal area divided into two basins via an intersecting canal. The edges and base of such tables are smoothened, and chisel marks are faintly visible. The edges are often slanted creating a "floating effect" for the table. They may have been portable or fitted.	Typ B+C: Opfertafeln mit Becken und Napfkuchen bzw. *ḥtp*-Zeichen – Typen des Mittleren Reiches (p. 37). MK	BM EA 990 Tor S.09178 Tor S.09176 Tor S.09177 Hölzl Examples: MK = Leiden AP 82, Tor N. 22022, Tor CG 23068, Tor CG 23028	ACat. 32, Cat. 42, Cat. 45, Cat. 49, Cat. 87, Cat. 88,
Type 6: M, N	Typ B1 und B2: Einzelne Kultbecken (Typ B1) oder Opfertafeln mit Becken (Typ B2)	Hölzl Examples: NK = Tor CG 23086, NR-10, Tor CG 23084	ACat. 24, Cat. 30, (Cat. 41), Cat. 90,

Rectangular/square shaped table/basin which may have a long external spout structure containing a canal extending from a central sloping-edged basin inside a sunken area to the end of the spout. There may be depictions of offerings in raised relief in the sunken area. The edges and base have all been smoothened and the chisel marks are hardly visible indicating that the offering table was portable.	Opfertafeln mit Becken und Napfkuchen bzw. Htp- Zeichen (Typ B+C) – Typen des Neuen Reiches Late MK/early NK		
Type 7: Undetermined These tables are too worn or fragmented. Most fragmented tables in this category have smoothened bases and edges and are small in size, which may indicate that they were portable and put in precarious areas which may explain why they are so fragmented – votive offerings or commissioned tables – they present inscriptions, paint and elaborate depictions of offerings.			ACat. 1, Cat. 2, Cat. 5, Cat. 12, Cat. 21, Cat. 23, Cat. 25, Cat. 27, Cat. 28, Cat. 29, Cat. 33, Cat. 40, Cat. 43, Cat. 44, Cat. 70, Cat. 72, Cat. 73, Cat. 74, Cat. 79, Cat. 84, Cat. 85, Cat. 89,

Graph 4.2 Numbers of offering tables/basins present in each typology and fixture.
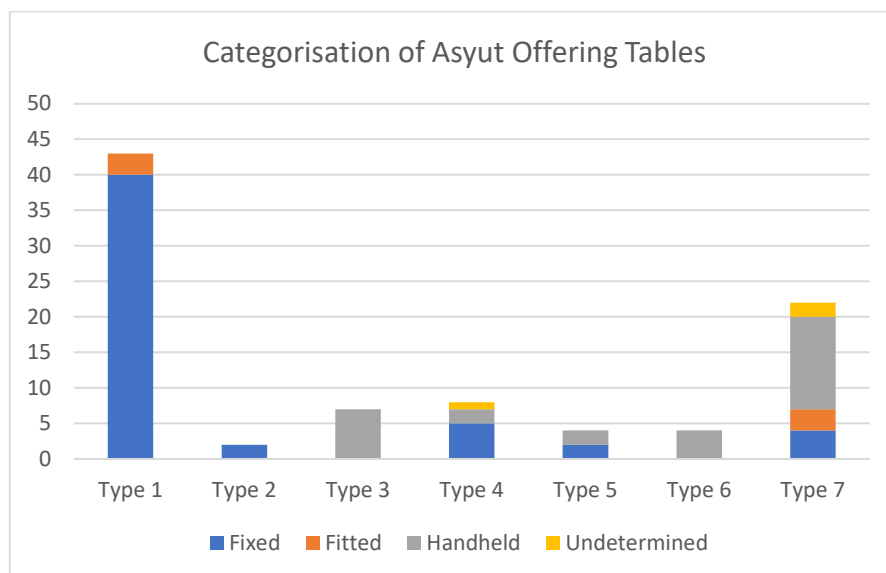
Interesting to note is that the most frequent type is Type 1, specifically Type A which is mostly composed of fixed offering tables (see Graph 4.2). The types which are mostly portable are those which are more elaborate in nature such as Type 5 composed of tables with an irrigation field design. They are also the most numerous in the unidentified field. This must be due to their archaeological context since they could be easily moved and therefore damaged.

Types 1 and 3, which are most common, can be dated to the FIP or even earlier, especially Type 3, if based on the design. What is interesting is that the design is very similar to that of offering tables found in Saqqara, which also date to the FIP[32], perhaps alluding to external influences from the north, or vice versa.

Types 2, 4 and 5 can be dated to the MK, specifically 12th Dynasty, while Type 6 may even be dated to the early NK, based on the sloping edged basins as well as the elaborate offerings present on some tables. Most of these tables date to the FIP and the MK, in accordance with the classification charts published in Hölzl (2002). The more elaborate ones may have been manufactured somewhat later. Generally speaking, few offering tables can be dated to the OK.

Apart from the 90 offering tables studied at Asyut and the antiquities warehouse at Shutb, there are two Asyut tables in the British Museum (EA973, EA990), five in Turin (S14939, S09178, S09176, S09177, S09175) and one in Medelhavsmuseet, Stockholm (MM10006) which are part of the entire database described in Chapter 3. Outside of the current study, about 24 additional stone offering tables are documented by Zitman (2010a: 264-279), 18 were recorded in connection with Hogarth's excavations[33] (including ES973-437, ES976-440, ES978-442 at the British Museum), three are described in Schiaparelli's listings[34], two are recorded by Chassinat & Palanque (Boston BMFA 04.1891 and CPA 50-51), and another has been identified in the Khashaba collection now in Berlin[35]. As seen in Table 3, they are just a few examples which can be categorised and compared to the unpublished offering tables in the sample. Unfortunately, only six offering tables out of the 90 in the sample are inscribed and are all fragments of larger offering tables with only parts of the general offering formula.

4.5.1. Placement of Offering Tables

The size, shape, material and placement of offering tables indicated the intentions and social status of their users. Offering rituals performed in the vicinity of burial chambers and tombs were generally separated from the actual burial chamber by a wall and/or a shaft and were in some cases later even replaced by symbolic practices and rituals carried out in separate offering chapels (Harrington 2015: 138). Nutrition for the dead was offered by family members, or in the case of the royal funerary/elite cult by priests (ḥmw-kꜣ) (see Eaton 2013; Cauville 2012; section 7.2.2; 7.2.5). They entered accessible areas of the tomb, or nearby chapels and used the offering tables in combination with rituals activating depictions of offering lists and following instructions that were depicted and/or written on the walls (Strudwick 2005: 270; Taylor 2001: 175).

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[32] Legros 2016: 241, fig. 6 and 7 illustrate tables with similar typological features present on most tables dating back to the FIP in the sample from Asyut. The offering tables present in Legros' study allude specifically to the mid-late half of the FIP. It is important to note that the tables classified as Type 1 include the two tables in tomb N11.1, which can be dated to early-mid FIP.

[33] The offering tables recorded by Hogarth and listed by Zitman (2010a: 264-279) can be associated to specific tombs accompanied by a plan. Unfortunately, most of the Hogarth tombs have not been identified, however, it may be interesting to note that 19 offering trays were also recorded by Hogarth and that out of the tombs containing offering tables, seven contained only stone offering tables, while five contexts contained both.

[34] The three tables are at the Museo Egizio in Turin, two of which Zitman has directly associated to coffins: Tor. Suppl. 14939 joins with coffin 14462 of a male Ḥtp-nb(=i) and Tor. Suppl. 8931-9187 joins with S15Tor coffin of Pepꜣ. Zitman 2010a: 264-279.

[35] The offering table of šmsw dating back to the MK. Kamal 1916: 95–96 (no. 111).

Provenance of Offering Tables on the Gebel

Legend: ■ Near/Inside Shaft ■ Forecourt ■ Other/Unknown
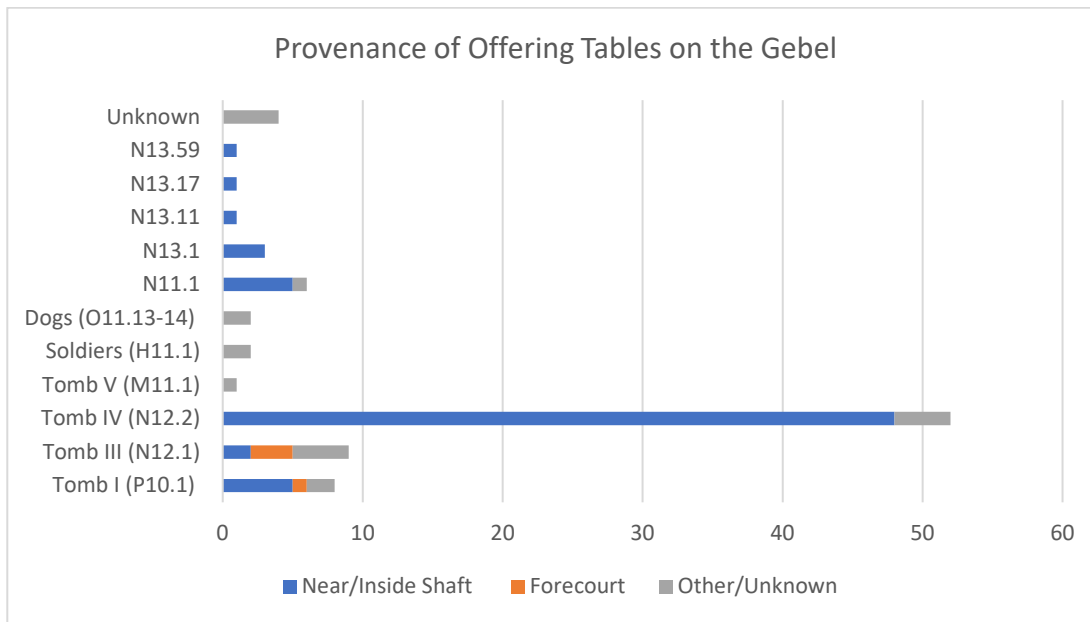
At Asyut, it appears as if 66 of the analysed offering tables (73 %) were found inside, or close to, shafts (Graph 4.3). However, 48 of these offering tables had been disposed of in *Hogarth's Depot* (Figure 4.2). Only one out of the 90 analysed tables was found inside the forecourt of a tomb. Nevertheless, it is nearly impossible to provide these offering tables with a reliable context, unless they had been directly cut out of the bedrock and left there, as is the case with four of the tables (Figures 4.5–7).

Figure 4.5: *Offering table (blue) at one of the shafts (N13.11) in front of Tomb N13.1. Photograph by F. Barthel 2018.*

Figure 4.6: Two offering tables (Cat. 81, 82, red) positioned by shafts (5 and 6), one of which is facing one of the entrances to tomb N11.1, Gebel Asyut. Photograph: F. Barthel 2018.
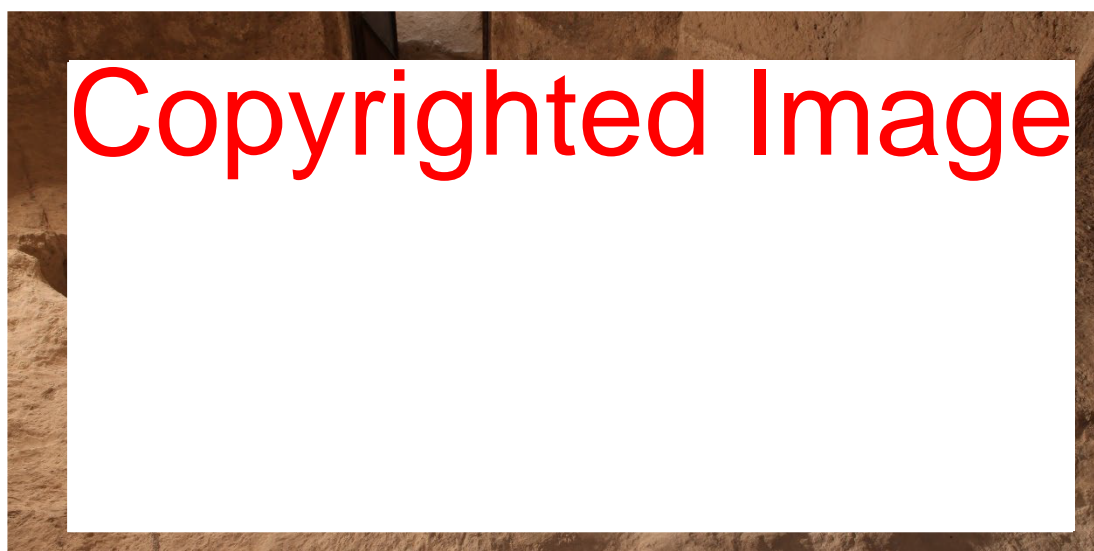
Schiaparelli's notes mention that five offering tables, now in the Turin Museum (Tor. Suppl. 8142-8144), were found in front of the FIP tombs of Khety I and Khety II, though without a context and it has so far been impossible to establish their exact placement (Zitman 2010b: 120). These offering tables were probably all cut directly from the bedrock, and they were thus an essential part of the architecture of the entire tomb structure. In tomb N11.1, two tables can still be found *in situ* (Figure 4.6). Each is positioned over a shaft leading into a burial chamber below. Both tables are orientated towards the shaft itself. One of the tables (ACat. 81) is positioned over shaft 6 which may have directly faced the original main entrance/forecourt to the tomb. Tomb N11.1, however, has a very particular design and is still under investigation. Table ACat. 80, positioned near shaft 5 is orientated towards another chamber and potential secondary entrance to the north-east. Nonetheless, both tables are facing liminal areas within the tomb structure. A large number of the Asyut tombs date to the FIP onwards and usually contain a large shaft at the entrance and several other shafts inside (although this is not always the case – cf. Tomb III). These shafts all lead to burial chambers below[36]. It is also important to note that from the FIP onwards smaller offering tables have been found inside the burial chamber near the deceased (Figure 4.7). This may be the case for most of the pottery offering tables as well as smaller votive-sized stone offering tables. In her analyses of pottery tables found in Asyut, Kilian mentions that several of them have been found in the vicinity of the corpse's head[37] (Kilian 2012: 110). It is possible that there is a relation between the iconography and placement of such portable offering

Figure 4.7: Plan of Hogarth Tomb 51, now lost. This is described as a small tomb dating back to the late MK with a single chamber containing a coffin and an offering table inside the burial chamber (Zitman 2010b: II, Pl. 31).

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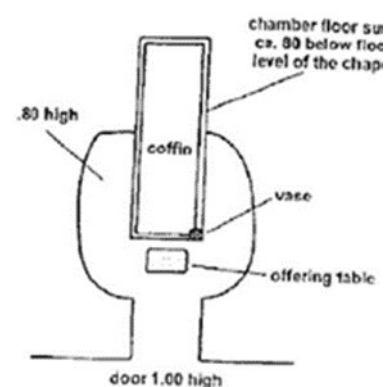
[36] It is important to note that there is always a level of uncertainty whilst dating the tombs at Asyut, not only due to their poor preservation but also since a significant amount of data is missing from earlier excavations.

[37] Both stone and pottery offering tables have been found in the same tomb, although in different archaeological contexts (Zitman 2010a,b; Ryan 1988;). As Kilian (2012) states, offering trays were placed in the burial chamber while offering tables were placed in the offering chapel or in the forecourts, possibly for the same ritual but in different scenarios and for different audiences.

trays/tables and the iconography and placement of the fixed offering tables in Asyut. They may be an indication of a specific mortuary ritual, like the one of the OMC, as will be discussed later (see 4.2.7, 5.3; 5.7; 7.3.3).

Most portable tables are either from a mixed context or in a causeway/forecourt, with the exception of a large, fixed offering table in front of Tomb III (Figure 4.8). Out of 23, only two were found in the vicinity of a shaft. This may indicate their use as a moveable cultic object, perhaps placed in front of statues and/or steles along the causeway or in public areas such as the forecourt, while fitted or more likely fixed tables were used for 'official'/formal funerary rituals performed directly over or by the burial chamber.

Figure 4.8: Large fixed offering table (ACat. 79) in the forecourt of Tomb III, which may date to the New Kingdom, and it was then altered in the Greco-Roman period as evidenced by the presence of red mortar. Photograph by author 2018.

4.6. Discussion: The Visible Link Between the Dead and the Living

As suggested by Regina Hölzl (2002: 159-161), even though it is not explicitly outlined in ancient Egyptian sacred texts, offering tables may have played a major role in almost all ancient Egyptian rituals, expressed initially as part of an offering ritual and then as a more abstract libation ritual. They appear to have been at the very centre of the liminal space between the living and the dead constituted by an ancient Egyptian tomb. The Asyuti offering tables reflect their spatial context and in turn embody the interplay of local religious traditions with the surrounding landscape.

4.6.1. *The ritual landscape and water ritual*
The design of offering tables may reflect architectural as well as the natural elements in their surroundings. This is evidenced by their resemblance to irrigation fields as well as their direct association to objects/fixtures found within tombs such as steles, false doors and the ritual texts inscribed on the walls or even within the tomb chamber (3.4.3.4; 7.2.3-4). Rituals centred around an offering table were enacted within a liminal space between the profane world of the living and a sacred world of the dead. An Asyut tomb, with its burial chamber and forecourt/chapel was

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constructed with the inclusion of the offering table in the ground plan, and its placement and entire design were thoroughly characterised by its function as a link between the living and the dead and as a tool, which, with the help of flowing water, transferred vital force into the realm of the dead (7.4.2).

The action of pouring liquids over the table covered in depictions of offerings in raised relief, as well as canals and basins was all done as an activation process. To get an impression of the ritual proceedings and their mimicking of real life it may be illuminating to compare them to techniques still used in Egyptian agriculture, where fields are flooded and separated by canals, similar to the imagery upon and the processes indicated by offering tables (Figures 4.9-11). Like the surface of an offering table a field is filled with water and then drained after the water has soaked the ground. The offering table was thus designed in such a manner that its surface, with depictions of canals and basins, water symbols, vegetation, offerings, as well as symbols of life and fertility, like the *ḥtp*-sign, was believed to be able to empower the water that was poured over it (7.4.2). The water endowed the sign and table with a life-giving force, just like the Nile water and Osiris's efflux (2.5). The offering table was placed so that the vitalized water ran through a shaft and could reach the abode of the dead person, at the same time as the participants in the ritual were able to witness how the water reached the underworld (Figure 4.9; 7.4.4). The area of the dead was blocked from the one of the living by a wall, or a closed, false door, while the offering table was placed in an intermediate, liminal space between these two realms (Willems 2016: 80).

Figure 4.9 (left): Offering table (ACat. 81) above shaft 6 in Tomb N11.1. One of the basins has been filled with water, illustrating how the water flows from the table down a channel to the shaft below. Photograph by author 2018.

Figure 4.10: Offering Table S09/6 with an "irrigation fields" design corresponding to Type 5. Photography by F. Barthel 2018.

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Figure 4.11: Filled irrigation fields outside the village of Sa el-Hagar in the Delta Region. Photograph by author 2018.

4.6.2. *A link to the Opening of the Mouth ritual*

The offering table thus also served as a utensil supporting a funerary cult in the sense that it was intended to transform an individual from being alive into being a deceased person to be revived. The water process upon the table is an act of reviving the deceased, while at the same time asserting his status as an "excellent spirit" (*ȝḫ*) (7.2.5; 7.4.2; 7.4.4). The individual goes from being a living being with a well-defined social existence and becomes a being endowed with the status and actions necessary to exist in the otherworld, the *Duat.* This transformation was achieved through the OMC in which the offering table may have had a decisive role (7.3). Furthermore, the offering table was also essential for an *ancestor cult,* in which all actions concerned the relationship between the deceased and the survivors (Fitzenreiter 1994: 74; 7.2.5).

The OMC was a ritual performed on a mummy and/or statue in order to animate it and make it functional by restoring all its essential parts. Among other utensils (adze, censor, *ḫpš*, etc.) present at the ceremony include *ḥs*-vases, offering tables, and several miniature containers. The "miniature containers" could probably be the pottery offering trays and miniature offering tables that often have been found inside burial chambers, rather than in the offering chapels or courtyards. As mentioned above, Andrea Kilian (2012) described how pottery trays have been found by the heads of mummies in Asyut, just as they have been found in similar rock-cut tombs in nearby Deir el-Bersha (Figures 4.12-13). Harco Willems states that mouth opening rituals were carried out beside the corpse during a funeral, though they could also be staged in other places in different contexts, like commemoration ceremonies in tomb forecourts (Willems 2016: 168). This might partly explain the permanence of fixed offering tables by tomb shafts and the fact that they often are unchiselled, with symbolic signs probably connected with the OMC (7.3). Such may be a later development, as evidenced by a change in the dimensions and designs of offering tables from the FIP to the early MK (3.3.1; 5.0.)

Figure 4.12 (left): Two miniature alabaster offering tables, from: Willems 2016: 163, Abb 13.

Figure 4.13 (right): Spatial distribution of funerary finds within the burial chamber of Djehutinacht I(?) [Ankh (B4B)] at Deir el Bersha. The objects in white are made of calcite-alabaster and include utensils commonly used in the OMC including two miniature offering tables, from Willems 2016, 148, Abb. 5.
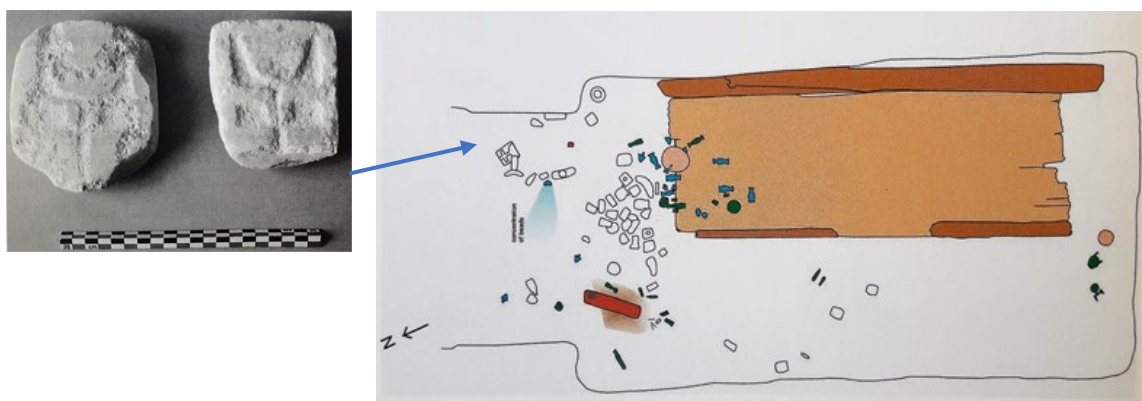
Most of the analysed offering tables found in Asyut do not exhibit the wealth of symbols and depictions of victuals and other paraphernalia as offering tables that have been found in other sites. They do, however, often depict canals and basins indicating the life-providing flow of the Nile water across agricultural plains, and most of them also depict *ḥtp*-signs, indicating the nourishment of the deceased. By the MK, the OMC appears to have been a funerary, "nourishment" ritual, occurring repeatedly and performed in front of, or as in Asyut, above the burial chamber, probably using the offering table (see 7.3). The Asyuti tables then resemble the MK offering tables found by Willems at Deir el Bersheh inside the burial chamber but are smaller and possibly votive offerings, something that may be assumed by their material (Figures 4.12-13). Their design, however, is almost identical to the Asyuti FIP and later MK offering tables (Figure 4.14). We are perhaps looking at the evolution of the funerary ritual, expressed in numerous ways (see 7.2.4; 7.3.4; 7.4.3). In the MK, the Asyuti tables begin to be similar to southern styles, in particular those with the irrigation fields design. It seems possible that the offering tables may have been in more frequent use than previously believed. Although these objects vary significantly in design, material, size, etc., they may be expressions of the same ritual process, only expressed in different ways and used in different ritual contexts.

Figure 4.14: Limestone offering table S16/st102 (ACat. 37) at Asyut, dating to between the 11th and 12th Dynasty. The table originates from a slightly disturbed shaft in the forecourt of Djefai-Hapi I (P10.1), which dates to the 12th Dynasty. The date is not exact since the table has been chiselled out from its original location and the shaft disturbed. It is nevertheless interesting to note the similarities in design compared to the votive offering tables found at Deir el Bersha. They may have been used in similar ceremonies; however, their shape and material may indicate that they were meant to be used on different occasions. Photograph by author 2018.

4.7. CONCLUSION

The offering tables act as a link between the settlement, necropolis and a hidden realm beyond the mountainside. Through an analysis of the offering tables present at Asyut, it became clear that these objects were literally part of the funerary landscape and therefore a visible link between the mountain (a locality and its landmark) and otherworldly elements. A study of offering tables found in Asyut directly addresses one important aim of the thesis, namely, to understand the role these objects had in fomenting a relationship between tomb, landscape, and settlement.

The offering tables at Asyut provide insight into the dynamics of ancient Egyptian funerary ritual, especially whilst considering their social context and surrounding landscape. The deceased were assumed to exist in the necropolis, some of them even surrounded by painted images and wooden replicas of the world below them. Several areas were venerated through the ages, dedicated to numerous gods and even deified officials such as Djefai-Hapi I. The causeways, forecourts, *k3-*chapels, etc. were all filled with offering tables from the MK onwards, as evidenced by the numerous steles[38] and the development of new tombs inside ancient ones. This may indicate that offering tables were not only "cenotaphs" for the deceased inhabitants of Asyut, but also areas for the performance of libations and an indication of a pious veneration of the ancestral leaders of the land. Asyut therefore is an extremely important site for the interpretation of funerary ritual in general since its history is so dynamic and its position within a sacred landscape so evident.

The diversity of the shape and size of offering tables at Asyut, as well as their fixture and, assumed, original archaeological context demonstrate that the funerary ritual was essentially the same as elsewhere in Egypt, but could be expressed in different ways. In a sense, the inhabitants of Asyut expressed their affinity to their place of residence via the sacred landscape of the *gebel* as well as their unique material culture, in particular the relation of limestone and water. At Asyut the offering tables present an almost perfect chronological sequence, though with contextual differences that cannot be neglected. They reflect the dynamism of expression of rituals in material culture, even though the nature of the ritual text meant that it was unchanging.

The connection between offering tables and the deceased is evident throughout the Asyuti funerary landscape. The processions that from the numerous temples meandered to the edge of the mountain and its necropolis reflect the connection between the living and the dead, via the protection and assurance of the libation made on numerous offering tables. Funeral corteges also entered the necropolis and its honeycomb of tombs and tomb shafts, which could be viewed from the city below, reflecting a living cult which was continuously transformed and yet endured through the ages.

The sample from Asyut illustrates the diachronic changes outlined in the dataset described in 3.3.1; 7.2.3-4. It provides a focus on the case of regionality and landscape and how they interplay with local traditions and therefore influence the overall design and significance of offering tables. The designs of the Asyuti offering tables also illustrate the changes in iconographic choices as well as

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[38] The Salakahanah tomb at Asyut contained numerous stele from the 13th Dynasty onwards, giving an insight into the funerary cult during the NK on the gebel. These objects could have been positioned in numerous places around the gebel and moved in later times, but the shear volume of votive material indicate a need to for ancestor cult and commemoration, something to be compared with objects such as offering tables at Asyut (duQuesne 2009: 80-87).

the rise of standardised funerary material. Types H, I (which may correspond to the general sample B2) may be dated to the OK and differ from the dynamic, standardised L Type reminiscent of the MK B+C "irrigation fields" design. Type G also shows evidence for a localised funerary tradition with an emphasis on the active role of water in libation rituals. Nevertheless, the most evident funerary tradition at Asyut is how the dynamic landscape influenced offering table design as well as function. The offering tables reflect the cultivated fields (canals, basins), the Nile, and the gebel itself reflected through its material and permanent fixture within the landscape. The ritual action of pouring water was a means of unifying the deceased with the home, the dynamic landscape of Asyut and the Duat.

5. Processing Sites in the Funerary Landscape: Observations on ancient Egyptian offering trays and 'soul-houses'

5.1. Introduction

Deciphering Egyptian funerary ritual involves a study of numerous aspects of ancient Egyptian beliefs and practices. It has been argued that in ancient Egypt death was considered to be the most ritualised of all phases of human existence, the final rite of passage (Baines 1991: 144). Despite this, grave goods have up until now generally been defined as if they were static objects, even if they may have been imbued with countless meanings and functions, especially in ancient Egypt where dichotomies were common, and contradictions seem to be present in all different aspects of faith (O'Neill 2015: 26; Meskell 2007: 35). The following analysis[39] indicates the multiple uses and concepts connected with offering trays and 'soul-houses'. This case study is based on a total of 89 pottery offering trays and 29 soul-houses', categorised in 3.3.1. Although it is not a complete sample, trends and examples from the sample will be highlighted in order to illustrate the significance and use of offering trays and soul-houses in relation to funerary ritual and their surrounding context, emphasising their role as multifaceted utensils. This will in turn indicate the development of a funerary ritual that meets a person's individual requirements concerning Osirian beliefs whilst moving away from a more rigid, abstract, and institutionalised form of religious practice. Like stone offering tables, pottery offering trays and soul-houses reflect actual landscapes, the importance of water and its ritual use and indicate how ritual utensils mirror everyday life, connecting it with the cycles of the Cosmos.

5.2. The Geographical and Historical Context

By the end of the OK, the provinces became increasingly powerful, and the presence of important necropolis areas increased from Memphis further to the south. Although the Memphite area was still considered to be a power-centre during the FIP, the influence of centres in Upper Egypt was increasing (Seidlmayer 2000: 108-36) for example from places such as Mo'alla. This time-period has until recently been described as a period of decline, however, it was rather a 'period of contrasts' due to the mixture of old traditions with new ones, as well as a growing local, provincial material culture and influence (Grajetzki 2006: 8).

The civil war between Heracleopolis and Thebes, as well as instability within the centralised power at Memphis, caused provincial regions to become more influential (Seidlmayer 2000: 108-36). The growing influences of the provinces resulted in an enrichment of provincial centres, evidenced by the numerous necropoleis dating to this period. Large monuments appear to be missing during the FIP, but smaller private monuments are more numerous than ever before, expressing a unique localised material culture (Grajetzki 2006: 9). By the 11th Dynasty, political reunification was taking place in the south, making Thebes the centre of a small but influential kingdom (Seidlmayer 2000: 108-36). Nevertheless, this did not halt the development of local styles in every region of Egypt during this time. Kings as well as nobles decided to be buried in *saff* tombs directly cut into towering cliff faces in Middle and Upper Egypt rather than in mastabas or self-standing pyramids as they did in earlier periods. Chapels such as the Haqib sanctuary in Elephantine were erected for kings and

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[39] Upcoming publication (2021-22): "Processing sites in the funerary landscape: observations on ancient Egyptian offering trays and 'soul-houses' in G. Miniaci, W. Grajetzki *The World of Middle Kingdom Egypt (2000-1550 BCE), Contributions on archaeology, art, religion, and written sources – vol. III.*

other important officials of the time emphasising a more personal approach to ritual practice (Grajetzki 2006: 13). Funerary material began to change as well, giving rise to wooden models placed inside the burial chamber indicating new and innovative art production. These objects have been found in necropoleis which were new at the time, with no pre-existing OK material culture. In Memphis, art production never ceased during the FIP.

Most of the preserved material culture from ancient Egypt comes from arid contexts, especially in the low desert regions and plains located at the edge of the Nile floodplains (Baines 2020: 177), creating a bias in the archaeological record. Patterns of modern-day settlements and rural centres have also influenced the recording of findings, since some villages and urban centres are situated on ancient settlements near the floodplains, while desert areas are well-preserved and modern constructions have usually not infringed on ancient sites (Baines 2020: 178). This means that there is an apparent lack of archaeological material from ancient agricultural centres with a rural population (Baines 2020: 178).

In Middle Egypt, the Nile flows closer to the eastern edge of the valley creating a wide floodplain in the west. An ancient canal from the Nile River called Bahr Jusuf flowed along the western side, while the eastern valley is edged by low hills and limestone outcrops in the desert mountains (Gillam 2020: 160). Near Salamut, for example, the mountain ranges move closer to the Nile creating the iconic cliff faces, containing wadis cutting through the mountains [App I: Map 1.1.1]. On the western side, the floodplain is flanked by hills and sand dunes (Gillam 2020: 160). Agricultural activities, as well as meadows for animal grazing, were usually limited to the low areas at the edges of the floodplain, preferably on the 'new lands' created by the annual flood (Gillam 2020: 162; see Bunbury 2019). Agricultural areas were classified according to their proximity to water sources since the floodwaters were collected in 'alluvial basins' (ẖnmw) (Gillam 2020: 162). By the MK, water was so vital for agriculture and transportation that even the name of the Nineteenth Nome located near Bahr Jusuf, *špr-mrw* translates to 'close to the waterway' (Gillam 2020: 165).

The design of pottery offering trays and soul-houses may reflect agricultural processing sites, as well as the surrounding landscape and associated agricultural activities. It may be argued that there is an emphasis on activities such as cereal processing, irrigation practices, gardening, and husbandry in rural Middle and Upper Egyptian sites (see Moeller 2016; Allen 1997: 135-54). Such elements are frequent in funerary contexts across ancient Egypt, expressed in various ways depending on the time-period and socio-religious setting.

5.3.   THE DATASET

Pottery offering trays and 'soul-houses' seem to appear in significant numbers during the FIP and then decline in the archaeological record by the late MK (see 1.4.2; 3.3.1).[40] They occur mainly in Middle and Upper Egyptian contexts, though this may be due to lack of excavation in northern Egypt. Offering trays and similar objects which originate from FIP and MK contexts located in Upper Egypt may have forms and features reminiscent of rural contexts, reflecting processing sites as well as agricultural activities in the landscape (see Table 5.1). The sample presented in this case study will be analysed according to design and incorporated features and iconography which reflect local

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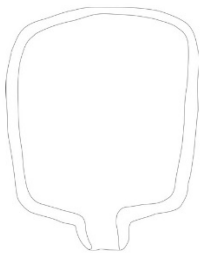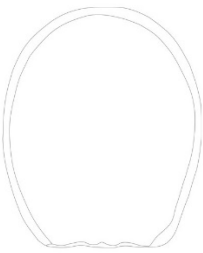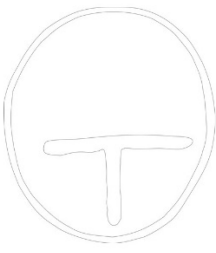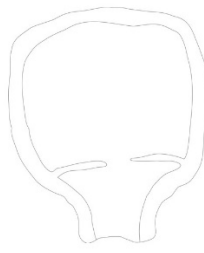
[40] For more on the categorisation of offering trays as well as interpretations regarding their original provenance see also Mi (2020).

trends and how non-textual funerary needs were addressed in rural communities in Middle and Upper Egypt between the FIP and MK.

The analysed sample mostly consists of 'Horseshoe Form' and 'Tomb Form' trays (see Graph 5.1). Flinders Petrie's description of 'Horseshoe' trays refers to trays and soul-houses shaped like horseshoes with an open end and usually containing canal formations in the centre (Petrie 1907). 'Tomb Form' trays, as described by Tooley (1989) refer to offering trays and soul-houses divided into sections for specific offerings, or covered areas resembling shrines or tomb-like structures. These trays may not only be reminiscent of tombs and associated tomb courtyards (and associated ritual events) but may also be communal processing areas in domestic or rural contexts.

Various combinations of different forms are present in the sample (Table 5.2; see 3.3.1), therefore offering trays and soul-houses have often been categorised together in previous studies (Leclère 2001; Niwiński 1975; Petrie 1907).

Table 5.1 Four main types of offering tray design present in the sample.

Altar	Horseshoe	Plate	Tomb
Based on *8757* Museo Egizio Firenze, unknown origin (5.6x23.5x30.4).	Based on UC38982 Petrie Museum UCL, MK El-Kab (6.9x24.4x30.5).	Based on *EA43555* British Museum London, unknown origin (3.9x26.1x30.5).	Based on E274 Manchester Museum, MK El-Lahun (26x30.8x24.8)/

Graph 5.1 First Intermediate Period/Middle Kingdom offering tray design and provenance frequency.

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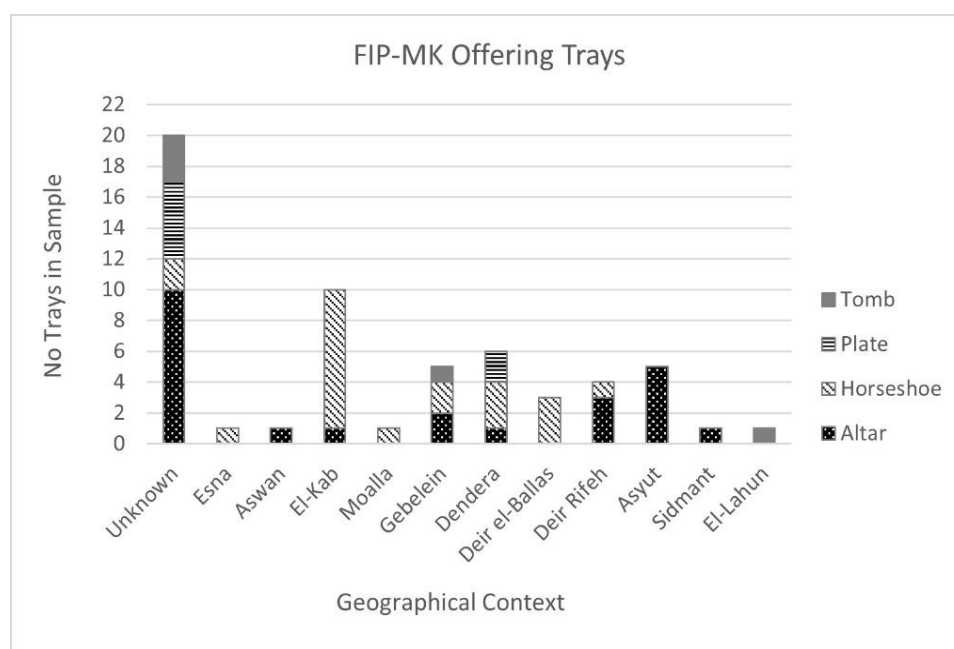
Table 5.2 Combined forms of offering trays present in the sample.

Combined Forms	No. Trays in Sample
Undetermined	1
Altar	16
Altar/Other	4
Altar/Tomb	9
Horseshoe	17
Horseshoe/Soul House	6
Horseshoe/Tomb	6
Plate	9
Plate/Other	1
Plate/Slab	1
Plate/Tomb	1
Soul House	1
Tomb	1
Tomb/Soul House	4
Grand Total	**77**

In the current sample, an initial distinction was made between offering trays and soul-houses. This distinction is similar to Petrie's differentiation (Petrie 1907) defining soul-houses as pottery trays with elaborate, and often multi-storey architectural features (1.1.2; 3.2). The twenty-nine soul-houses present in the sample were categorised separately, eighteen of which originate from Deir Rifeh in Middle Egypt (see 3.3.1). Most soul-houses at Deir Rifeh have elaborate domestic features, with columned porticos and internal areas, while the outliers in the sample are more elusive in shape, such as boats, granaries, or pylon-shaped house-like structures. These outliers will be the focus of this study together with Upper Egyptian offering trays, both of which highlight rural practices and domestic structures.

5.4. PREVIOUS STUDIES

The most in-depth study of offering trays within their original archaeological context and exact placement within the funerary landscape is that of Tooley (1989; see 1.4.2; 3.2; 3.3.1). Pottery soul-houses as well as some offering trays have often been interpreted as 'houses for the $k3$' (Spence 2011; Petrie & Quibell 1896: 42; Petrie 1907: 15). Spence (2011) argues that the unique sample of soul houses at Deir Rifeh may reflect architectural fixtures related to the comfort and benefit of the deceased, representing domestic elements rather than MK funerary architecture. However, they may prove to be more complex rather than simply being considered as miniature domestic buildings. Leclère (2001) has suggested that these objects may be substitutes for funerary chapels, especially rock-cut tombs in Middle and Upper Egypt (Leclère 2001: 112; cf. Niwiński 1975: 101-5). A more detailed account of previous contributions related to pottery offering trays and soul houses present in the sample is outlined in Chapter 3. This study will emphasise the funerary context as well as iconographic features which may relate to the rural surroundings of these objects to better understand their role in rural populations and their local customs and social roles. Funerary architecture is in most cases, very similar to dwellings which explains why elements of funerary architecture, as well as domestic fixtures are present in their design. The regional and contextual diversity of these objects in such a short time frame suggests that they may be multifunctional in nature and could also therefore have a variety of ritual connotations.

5.5. ANALYSIS: AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES AND PROCESSING SITES

5.5.1. Cereal Processing and Irrigation Systems

One of the most important underpinning features of ancient Egyptian society is that of the production of barley and wheat and the processing of cereals (Murray 2000: 505). Archaeological evidence indicates that emmer wheat and barley have been cultivated in Egypt from the sixth millennium BCE until the G-RP (Murray 2000: 512; Wetterstrom 1993: 201). This production was

facilitated by the black, fertile banks along the Nile, created by the annual flood. The silt deposits were then subject to the unique and impressive agricultural system administered by the Egyptians throughout the pharaonic period (Murray 2000: 506). The constant production of emmer wheat and barley provided the backdrop for an elaborate administration of both wages and taxation across the Egyptian *nomes*. This system was responsible for all economic, political, and social stability (Murray 2000: 506; Kemp *et al.* 1994: 121-38), but it was also subject to political instability, and natural disasters caused by climate change, causing governing parties to alter the system even at a local or regional level (Allen 1997: 135-54; Harlan 1995: 115). As is the case for many societies today, rural areas are most affected by these changes and must not only develop practical ways of dealing with these inconsistencies in production but may also have used more spiritual practices. Notions of dominance over cosmic order and natural cycles are most evident in the OK royal cult (Magli 2013; Grzymski 1999; Arnold 1999a; Friedman 1996).

Controlling natural elements through the use of agricultural practices such as irrigation systems, seed management, and the control of water levels may be reflected in offering table design. Offering tables and basins from the OK apparently reflect agricultural practices controlled by a central power, where the pharaoh had the main responsibility for cosmological occurrences and the practical procedures in connection with agricultural production. The offering table of Sezu (*CG1330*) from the fourth dynasty illustrates the royal cult and its responsibility for the inundation. Each step in the basin is dedicated to a season and its associated water level in cubic units (Borchardt 1937: 14; Figure 5.1). This should not be considered unique in Egyptian society. Despite the royal cult and the pharaoh's divine responsibility for cosmic changes, the rural and, most importantly, agricultural society was responsible for the gestation of agricultural activity and handling seasonal change. Therefore, it is only logical that a similar cult was reflected in rural localities across the Egyptian nomes, especially after the FIP, when more provinces and local practices emerged. This may explain the emergence of pottery offering trays indicating similar notions as those influencing the design of royal offering tables.

Figure 5.1: Offering table of Sezu (CG1330) with detail of the upper four-stepped basin with the first three levels inscribed with a season: ꜣḫt, prt, šmw, after Borchardt 1937: 14, Blatt 5.

Agricultural practices such as cereal processing, as well as irrigation systems, may be evident in offering table and soul-house design and their iconographic elements. The two staple products of barley and wheat are bread and beer, the two most important foods in ancient Egyptian culture. However, barley was also an important animal fodder, as suggested from archaeobotanical evidence (see Moens & Wetterstrom 1988: 159-73). Archaeological evidence for cereal processing includes artefacts, remnants of rural/administrative architecture, as well as stratigraphy within settlement sites (Murray 2000: 508). The arid environment in various parts of Egypt facilitated the preservation of otherwise perishable material, and specifically utensils used for agricultural activities. These include ploughs, sickle blades, shovels, sieves, and winnowing fans or baskets (Murray 2000: 508).[41]

Winnowing is performed to separate cereal spikelets from straw and other debris (Murray 2000: 525). This process would usually take place on the threshing floor within an area protected from the wind (Harpur 1987: 158). The fact that most offering trays have a raised rim and rampart incorporated into their shape indicates that this may in fact be a processing site for grain.[42] The cereals are thrown into the air using winnowing baskets causing the lighter chaff and weeds to blow away leaving the heavier cereals. This is the first stage in cereal processing and alters the very shape of the harvested grain (Murray 2000: 525; Hillman 1981: 155). In the sample, a total of thirty-three offering trays are of the 'Horseshoe' form, twenty-two of which can be dated to the FIP and MK (see 3.3.1).

'Horseshoe' form offering trays may actually be shaped as winnowing fans or baskets, common in rural communities since they are used for cereal processing. Most such offering trays in the sample are from rural communities in Upper Egypt. The main administrative centres during the FIP in Upper Egypt include Dendera, Thebes (Waset), Hierakonpolis (Nekhen), Edfu (Behdet) and Elephantine (Abu), all of which have a significant concentration of pottery offering trays in their respective necropoleis, especially those in the 'Horseshoe' form (Graph 5.1, above). The most numerous horseshoe trays have been found in Upper Egyptian cemeteries, especially Cemetery 1 at Edfu, the necropolis at El-Kab, cemeteries at Esna, the royal necropolis at El-Tarif, and non-elite tombs at Dendera (Tooley 1989: 254-93; [App I:2.3.15]). The exact context of the offering trays is often not certain, however.

With the growing influence of the Theban governorate, the provincial centres grew in importance, as did the demands of local and regional production. The administrative centres in the FIP coincide with the concentration of 'Horseshoe' form offering trays, which allude to the cereal process and rural agricultural production sites. This is especially evident from the large concentration of 'Horseshoe' form offering trays found at El-Tarif, which was the royal necropolis situated near the power centre of Thebes in Upper Egypt. In the current sample, however, the largest and most significant concentration of 'Horseshoe' form offering trays is from El-Kab (Nekheb). A large cemetery is located here dating to the end of the FIP and the beginning of the MK. The site remains largely unexcavated and has also been subject to significant plundering, which has unfortunately caused portable objects such as pottery trays to be displaced and fragmented. No specific contextual information was provided from the museum records for the ten pottery offering trays

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[41] see examples in Petrie 1917, *Tools and Weapons*, 54-55, pl. XVIII.

[42] Pottery soul-houses, especially in the sample from Deir Rifeh, often incorporate structures intended for wind protection such as raised ramparts as well as structures for wind 'catching' such as porticos and *mulqafs*. It is interesting to note here how these may also be intended for cereal processing, especially in the aspect of winnowing, which may also be evident in soul-houses shaped like winnowing fans (e.g., *E4374* at Manchester Museum, UK, CAT ID28).

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in the sample.[43] Nevertheless, Tooley (1989) highlights two soul-houses found in tomb M12 in the MK cemetery at El-Kab but that remain unpublished.[44]

The El-Kab offering trays are usually treated with a red surface coating and have an average width of 27.5 cm and length 31.5 cm and height 7.5 cm. This size may also be a reference to larger winnowing baskets used in large scale cereal processing, rather than the smaller portable wooden winnowing shovels often depicted in processing scenes in elite tombs (Hillman 1984: 11; Petrie 1917: pl. LXVIII; see Figure 5.2). Heaps of the winnowed products may have been decorated with offerings (Murray 2000: 525; Harpur 1987: 158), something which may also allude to the presence of offerings within the pottery offering trays shaped like winnowing tools.

Seven out of eleven trays have no compartments present and five trays have between seven and nine canals covering the entire surface of the plate. The canals seem to have been made by using finger imprints across the clay before it was fired. The raised rim around the sunken area is always inclined towards the open end resembling the sides of a winnowing basket (Figures 5.3-4). The plate area is almost always inclined towards the open end of the tray, facilitating the draining of liquids when poured upon it (see 7.4.2). All trays have meat cuts present in the sunken area; seven out of eleven trays have a bovid head positioned along the internal edge of the left side of the tray [App I:2.3.18]. This may indicate the specific placement of meat-cuts in processing areas in both tomb and domestic courtyards. The offerings depicted are grouped and arranged in specific corners in the trays which may actually be miniature offering places rather than plates of offerings (Spence 2011: 900). The fact that large-scale cereal processing is depicted in NK tombs at El-Kab shows that this area was engaged in large-scale agricultural activities (see Figure 5.2). Pottery offering trays being shaped like agricultural tools and also being decorated with offerings and irrigation canals may illustrate the agricultural landscape surrounding the people who made them and its importance in sustaining the rural community.

Figure 5.2 Cereal processing and flax growing scenes in the New Kingdom Tomb of Paheri (T3), responsible for the administration of Upper Egyptian regions, at El Kab, Dynasty 18, from Naville & Griffith 1894: pl. III.

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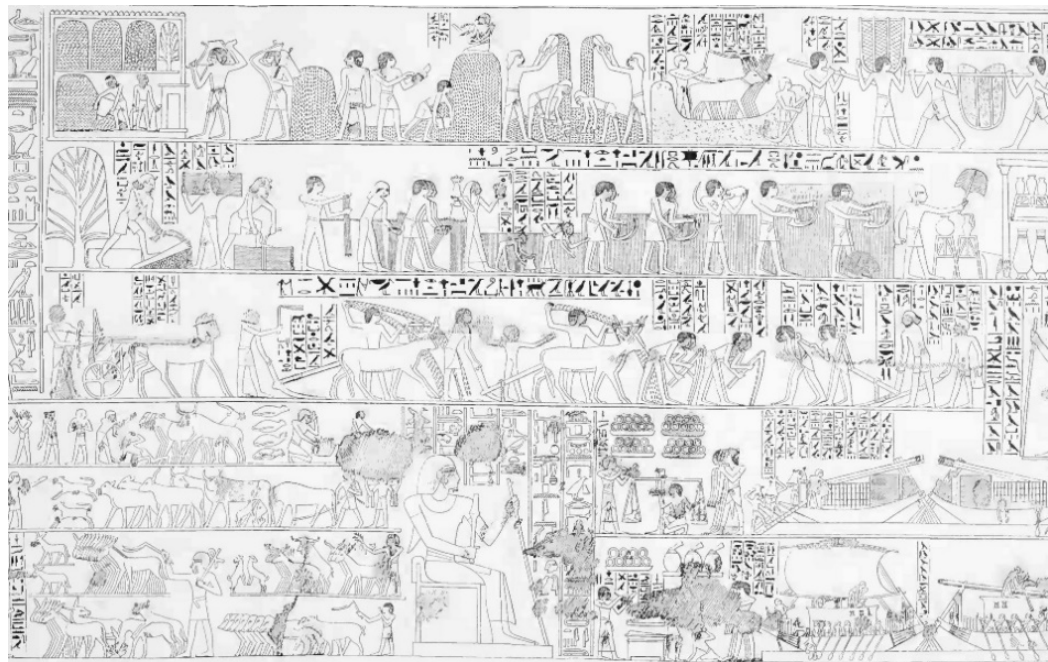
[43] For a general overview see Quibell 1898, *El Kab*, 16-18, Pl. V.

[44] For an overview of frequency of forms of offering tray at each archaeological context see Tooley 1989: Fig. 4, 294, see 3.3.1; [App I:2.3.15].

Figure 5.3 (left): Winnow and two wooden winnowing shovels from the New Kingdom, Elephantine (Upper Egypt) ÄM 10773 (12478, 13886), Neues Museum, Berlin. Photograph by author, 2018.

Figure 5.4 (right): Pottery offering tray in 'Horseshoe' form, from Middle Kingdom (12th Dynasty) El-Kab, E3078, Manchester Museum, UK, CAT ID5. Photograph by author, 2017.

Offering trays and soul-houses may also incorporate structures which mimic granaries. An example would be a model granary, *E6929*, from Beni Hasan in the shape of a pottery offering tray with a spout opening, in the Garstang Museum (Figure 5.5). Its size is similar to regular offering trays and dates to the MK (12th Dynasty). Another example is present in the Museo Egizio di Torino from the FIP necropolis in Gebelein (see *S. 11960*, Museo Egizio Torino in Montonati (2018: Fig. 9), not in database). Granaries of this shape are depicted in several funerary wall scenes and even inside coffins, as in the coffins of Iqer and Henuy at Gebelein, dating to the 12th Dynasty (Montonati 2018: 12; Willems 1988: 202-5, 214). These models usually contain emmer spikelets, barley and weed seeds which would have been found with grain before a secondary winnowing was performed at the storage facility itself (Murray 2000: 527; personal observation). The round shaped granary facilities in pottery offering trays differ from more elite structures, as evidenced from the wooden model of a granary with scribes found in the tomb of Meketre (TT280).[45] The archaeological record shows a wide variety of different storage facilities, stemming from large-scale and centrally administered facilities to more locally controlled storage sites handled by the rural population (see Kemp 1994: 121-38; Hepper 1990; Winlock 1955). The fact that granaries are represented on pottery offering trays may indicate a need for the representation of and access to processing sites for the deceased. With the economic instability caused by the civil war in the FIP, it was only reasonable to rely on the cyclic forces of the cosmos to provide some form of constancy. This may have been achieved using offering trays in the shape of agricultural utensils, reflecting rural processing sites and also the irrigation systems used to control the annual flooding of the Nile and ensure sustenance and prosperity.

Figure 5.5: Pottery model granary from Middle Kingdom, Beni Hasan (E6929, Garstang Museum Liverpool, UK), not in database. Photograph by author, 2017.

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[45] Winlock (1955); Wooden model of a granary with scribes from the 12th Dynasty Tomb of Meketre (TT280), south Asasif, Thebes *20.3.11*, MET New York.

Fifty-nine out of 79 offering trays in the sample from the FIP and MK contain canals, most of which are from Upper Egyptian sites. The variety in canal formations may illustrate different regional artistic preferences, but they may also reflect various irrigation systems or even region-specific religious connotations and indicate that rural communities had an even more profound connection to the agricultural landscape (see Table 5.3). The depiction of water management may also be represented for the use of funerary libations, where water was channelled for the rejuvenation of the receiver (Assmann 2005: 355-61; Leclère 2001: 105; 7.4.4a).

Table 5.3 Canals and water channels in FIP and MK offering trays in the sample.

Canal Formation in FIP/MK Offering Trays	Unknown	Fayum/ Lower Egypt	Middle Egypt	Upper Egypt	Grand Total
No Canals Present	6		2	5	13
"horseshoe" formation				4	4
#-formation	1			1	2
+ formation	1			1	2
Covered	3		1	6	10
Drainage	3		1	3	7
Hole	1				1
Parallel	3			6	9
Parallel, V-shaped	1				1
φ-formation				1	1
Spout canal	8	1	2	2	13
Y-shaped			2		2
T-shaped	3			1	4
TT-shaped	2				2
V-shaped	2		1	1	4
X-shaped	1	1			2
Grand Total	**35**	**2**	**9**	**31**	**77**

The most common canals present on FIP and MK offering trays in the sample, are 'spout canals', that is the singular canal clearing the liquids poured on the tray through the incorporated external spout structure (see 3.4.3.3). The second most common canal formations on offering trays are those with a 'covered' or 'drainage' canal, which would indicate a canal running through a dividing rim within the tray, or a funnel, or drainage hole present in the rim, which encircles the entire plate area of the tray. Both of these canal systems are similar to those present on most stone offering tables.

The increasing presence of canals and interlinking basins on stone offering tables in the MK coincides with the appearance of pottery offering trays containing basins and numerous variations of canal systems incorporated in their design. The presence of canals together with other agricultural features on trays may show how important these systems were for the benefit of the rural community and successful cereal production. Upper Egypt may have been more dependent on irrigation ditches and canals than Lower Egyptian sites, which may also explain why there are more offering trays which resemble agricultural landscapes as well as utensils used in cereal production. However, this is difficult to ascertain due to the lack of Lower Egyptian offering trays in the archaeological record [App I:2.3.15-16].

Rainfall diminished significantly in the Predynastic Period and then again during the MK, especially in the Nile Valley (Butzer 1976: 39). This change in climate created the arid conditions known in

Middle and Upper Egypt and accordingly an emphasis on efficient irrigation systems to exploit the Nile River (see Butzer 1976). The system of canals, dikes, and flood basins allowed for not only efficient irrigation of the fields and the provision of fertile land, but also prevented settlements and grain storages from being flooded (Murray 2000: 514). Low or too high Nile floods in Pharaonic times significantly influenced cereal production and therefore also political and economic stability. During the FIP and MK there may have been significant fluctuations in annual flooding levels. This is evidenced in flood records, as well as pictorial sources in numerous tombs from this time-period, describing what has been interpreted as widespread famine and grain shortages (see Murray 2000: 514-15; Schenkel 1978). Irrigation systems grew in importance during the MK, differentiating between low-lying and high-lying lands, while in the OK there seems to have been little emphasis on irrigation canals, but rather a reliance on natural flood basins (Eyre 1995: 169-70; see Butzer 1976, 1984). It also appears as though irrigation systems were mainly constructed and maintained by rural or local communities, rather than by governing parties (Butzer 1976: 43-50).

5.5.2. Gardening and Animal Husbandry

Many pottery offering trays and soul-houses present in the sample have iconographic elements which resemble rural gardens, as well as animal husbandry. As discussed earlier, irrigation methods and agricultural activities may have influenced offering tray design not only for the benefit of the deceased but also for influencing the control of natural elements for stability.

Gardens are commonly depicted on tombs walls, especially from the MK onwards (see Kristensen 2015; Wilkinson 1998). However, the depicted gardens may be more relevant to stone offering tables rather than those potentially incorporated in pottery offering tray and   soul-house design. The gardens may reflect agricultural activities, while being at the same time a reference to the ethereal gardens with vineyards and sycamore trees commonly depicted in funerary contexts. An example would be potential seedling beds depicted on soul-houses, pottery offering trays, as well as stone offering tables[46] (Figures 5.6-8). Seedling beds are also found in modern irrigation fields in Egypt. These basins are initially filled with seeds and then with water until sprouts emerge (Figure 5.9; Solchaga 2020: 137-38). The shoots are then transferred to larger plots of land. Since the represented gardening plots on pottery trays are relatively small in size, they may be similar to seedling plots for the sprouting of new plants and accordingly the rejuvenation of the deceased (Solchaga 2020: 138).

17 offering trays and soul-houses in the sample contain a single square basin positioned directly in front of the upper shrine structure, or space filled with offerings, and have a small canal leading through an external spout structure.

No significant archaeological evidence of funerary gardens was discovered until 2017 when a team of archaeologists of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) discovered an almost intact garden in front of a 12th Dynasty rock-cut tomb at Dra Abu el-Naga near Thebes. The garden is composed of 30x30 cm quadrants, with a slightly larger square at one end, which contained remnants of a tamarisk tree (Figure 5.10; Galán & Garcia 2019: 5). Due to the size of the plots, the lead archaeologists have speculated that it was a miniature orchard containing symbolic victuals necessary for the provision of the funerary cult (Galán 2017: 60-1).[47] The symbolic nature of the

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[46] For an example of a pottery offering tray: 11th Dynasty Qurna, Thebes *UC18269* Petrie Museum UCL (not in database). For a recent study on the representations of gardens in pottery souls house see Solchaga (2020).

[47] 12th Dynasty ritual vessels including $ḥs$-vases were also discovered in the vicinity of the garden, alluding to its likely role in funerary practices (Galán & Garcia 2019: 5).

garden, which is also located in the '*Heiliger Bezirk*' (see 7.2.2-3) or sacred space in the courtyard of the tomb, reflects its importance in ritual practice.[48]

Figure 5.6 (left): Offering tray/'soul-house' of unknown origin with a 'garden' on the roof of the shrine-like structure, Middle Kingdom, (F 1901/9.120 RMO Leiden), CAT ID222. Photograph by author, 2017.

Figure 5.7 (right): Offering tray of unknown provenance, garden on the roof, First Intermediate Period (E.15.1950 Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge), CAT ID349. Photograph by author, 2017.

Two pottery offering trays or soul-houses in the sample contain similar grid-marked gardens, usually located on the roof of the shrines or pillared structures incorporated in the tray surface (Figures 5.6-7). Both pottery trays contain offerings in the courtyard space in front of a two-pillared shrine-like structure covering a seat/throne dedicated to the deceased. This superstructure may resemble the rock-cut tombs present in numerous FIP and MK sites in Upper Egypt such as at Dra Abu el-Naga. The area in front of the tombs was reserved for the execution of funerary ritual which explains the presence of offerings within the courtyard (Solchaga 2020: 139; Galán & Garcia 2019: 5). The fact that the gardens are positioned on the roofs of these structures may not *only* indicate that they are miniature households but rather miniaturised ritual spaces or even processing units for the provision of sustenance for the deceased. All outer space is for ritualised action, such as gardening, husbandry, slaughtering, irrigation systems, etc. while the internal spaces are inert.

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[48] The term '*Heiliger Bezirk'* also refers to the garden scenes depicted on New Kingdom tomb walls from the 18th Dynasty onwards (e.g., TT 12, TT 15, TT 81; Galán & Garcia 2019: 8).

Figure 5.8 Drawing and image of a limestone offering table from Saqqara, A II-0236 after Legros 2016: fig. 14, 93. Photograph by M. Alavoine.
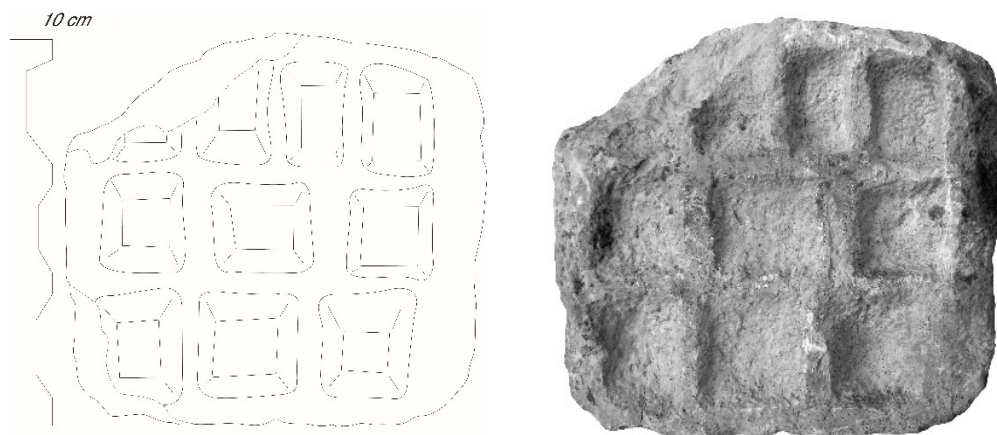
Figure 5.9 Gardening scene depicted in the tomb of Khnumhotep II in Beni Hasan (BH 3), from Cailliaud 1831: Pl. 33A, in Hudáková 2016: Fig. 10, 325.
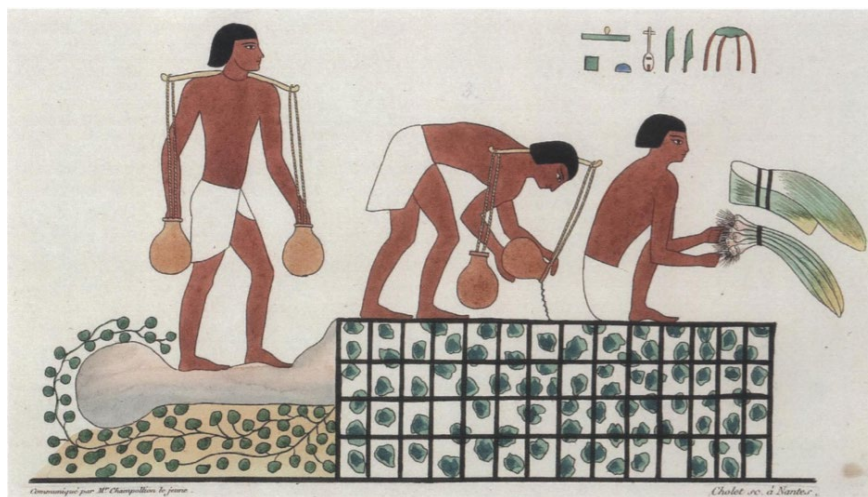
Figure 5.10 Garden discovered near the Twelfth Dynasty official rock-cut tomb at Dra Abu el-Naga near Thebes, image from CSIC, ©Proyecto Djehuty.

The smaller circular or square basins at corners of offering trays may be watering holes rather than libation basins or for the provision of offerings, resembling agricultural processing sites in rural areas. These basins are smaller compared to the square basins usually positioned near the spout end of the tray and are located near the animal remains carefully placed in specific areas within the 'courtyard' space. These basins may, therefore, be watering holes for animals or wells used within domestic settings (e.g., pottery 'soul-house' from MK (12th Dynasty) Deir Rifeh, *E4383*, Manchester Museum UK, personal observation, 2017, CAT ID29).

The slaughtering and butchering of mammals are a common iconographic feature on tomb walls and is referenced in the offering trays. In OK tombs at Saqqara, for example, there are still sacrificial blocks believed to have been where oxen were ritually killed for the benefit of the deceased (e.g., stone slaughter ring in the main chamber (A13) in the Tomb of Mereruka LS10 in the Teti Cemetery at Saqqara (6th Dynasty, Figure 7.1 in 7.2.4). The first part of the process would be to wrestle the animal down to the ground and then cut the throat. The blood was drained by pumping the bovid's foreleg, forcing the blood to exit the severed neck (Ikram 2000: 657). The foreleg appears to have been very important in funerary ritual due to its conversion into a tool used to drain the blood of the animal and thus prevent the meat from being spoiled (see Ikram 2000). The foreleg has numerous other ritual connotations, especially during the Opening of the Mouth ritual (see Otto 1960; Ayad 2007: 150; see 7.2.2-3).

A total of 66 out of 77 offering tables and soul-houses in the sample dating to between the FIP and MK have at least one bovid leg present among other meat cuts. The leg in itself is a butchering *utensil*, which explains its dominance over all other types of offerings present on the offering trays (see 3.4.3.4).

The drained blood from the animal may have been collected but if not, the butchering must have been a very bloody affair, staining the ground of the processing site. The fact that almost all pottery trays and soul-houses have been treated with a red pigmented surface coating, may indicate the table as a butchery site. The coating usually does not extend beyond the internal area of the tray and does not appear on the outer edges of the rim (Table 3.68 in 3.5.1.2).

After the blood was drained, the animal was skinned, and internal viscera removed. The 'sausage-like' elements present on numerous trays may be the entrails or tails of the animal, sometimes placed on raised, round platforms, which may be bowls used to collect these parts.[49] The carcass was then jointed, and parts hung on lines to be preserved.[50] Different meat cuts are depicted on pottery offering trays and soul-houses consisting of joints, ribs, triangular cuts, tails or entrails, cone-shaped meat lumps, as well as a number of horned bovid heads. Such heads are usually positioned along the rim, generally at the opposite end of the spout in case there are no superstructures present on the table, or on the left side, as is the case for most meat parts. There is usually one of each item present in the courtyard space of the tray, indicating that they may have belonged to the same processed animal. This seems to be the case with headless bovid bodies, which are also present on some trays. These carcasses are usually laid on their side with their legs tied, indicating that they have been subject to the slaughtering process described above. When the animal is headless, its head is usually present along the rim. The careful positioning of the meat cuts on the table may refer to a meat processing site since they have perhaps been laid out in order to be subjected to different preservation methods (see Ikram 2000).

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[49] The butchery scene in the 5th Dynasty Mastaba Tomb of Ty (D22) at Saqqara illustrates this process.
[50] see meat processing scene in the 12th Dynasty Tomb of Itefiqer at Thebes (TT60).

The placement of different types of meat cuts as well as other types of offerings upon pottery offering trays, within delineated spaces,[51] indicates a need to differentiate this space as a processing site (see 3.4.3.4 for placement of iconographic elements). Sometimes trays may contain a small shrine-like structure with a seat intended for the deceased. However, the structure may resemble utilitarian huts common in agricultural communities for storing tools, for the rest and comfort of the workers, or animal sheds. Nevertheless, it designates an inactive and shady space, which differs from the processed elements located directly outside.

Another common feature on offering trays and soul-houses is the presence of small holes surrounding basins incorporated in the tray area or inserted into the surrounding rim. These holes were possibly used as 'postholes' for the insertion of sticks or rolls of clay. Their intended use has been widely debated since Petrie's original interpretation of them as supports for tents, or coverings, providing shade for the pools or even a miniaturised embalming tent, due to its position directly in front of a shrine-like structure (see Altenmüller 1972; Petrie 1907). Photographs from Petrie's campaign at Deir Rifeh show some soul-houses still containing small wooden sticks. According to Leclère (2001), these holes were possibly intended to be supports for small model bushes or trees, resembling the wooden models in the tomb of Meketre (Leclère 2001: 105-6). This may be the case for some trays or soul-houses, especially for the holes positioned around the outer rim. The holes around small basins in the courtyard space may be too close together for the placement of trees, which could support Petrie's interpretation of canopies for shade. This shows further that there may have been choices in what was on the trays, also indicating the multifunctionality of these objects within a funerary setting (see 7.3.3).

5.6. ANALYSIS: FUNERARY VERSUS DOMESTIC LANDSCAPES

5.6.1. Domestic connotations

As pointed out in Spence (2011)'s article on the soul-houses from Deir Rifeh, numerous objects from her sample have architectural fixtures present in their design, which do not occur in MK funerary architecture (Spence 2011). These features include multiple storeys, staircases leading to the roof, windows, beds, *mulqafs* (i.e., 'wind catchers') and granaries (Spence 2011: 898; e.g., pottery soul-house (*07.550*) from MK Deir Rifeh at the MFA in Boston, drawing in Lundius 2020: Fig. 13, 90). Such features may therefore point to domestic settings or representations. As is the case for all offering tables and similar materials, however, context is a key to deciphering use and significance within ancient Egyptian funerary practice.

The interpretation of soul-houses and similar pottery offering trays varies according to context and individual sites and even within the same archaeological site, depending on their original placement (Spence 2011: 899). Porticos are incorporated in almost all soul-houses present in the current sample, although the sample is slightly biased, since most of the soul-houses are from Deir Rifeh. Porticos were a common feature in MK elite houses at Kahun and Abydos in Upper Egypt (Wegner 2001: 281-308; Eigner 1996: 73-80). They were necessary for providing a cool space and catching the wind, similar to the function of *mulqafs* in the upper storeys present on a significant amount of soul-houses from Deir Rifeh (Spence 2011: 901-2). As argued by Spence, these features, including the staircases leading to the upper mezzanines, are also for the benefit and comfort of the

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[51] For examples consult the Asyut Type II and associated variants categorised as such by Mi 2020: Fig. 5-8. The examples of offering trays at the Museo Egizio Torino are also of the 'Tomb Form' type.

deceased. These may be associated with harnessing the wind, something which is important for the well-being of the deceased, as evidenced in excerpts from the Coffin Texts[52] (Spence 2011: 902-4).

According to Petrie, numerous soul-houses at Deir Rifeh were found in the direct vicinity of shaft tombs (Petrie 1907). The variation in architectural elements incorporated in soul-houses at Rifeh alone may indicate that they were intended to be 'burial markers' allowing the deceased to maintain a certain identity that they had in life, and also incorporating their own domestic elements to create more idealised versions of where they would wish to live (Spence 2011: 905). This may indicate more 'breezy' or 'shady' houses with elaborate porticos and façades. The more private spaces within the soul-houses also show similarity to domestic architecture. In these closed-off spaces there are usually domestic fixtures present, such as chairs and beds, sometimes being utilised by figurines. According to Spence, the seats positioned directly in front of offerings are there for the comfort of the deceased, while at the same time representing a funerary cult site (Spence 2011: 907). Upper Egyptian offering trays from El-Kab may therefore represent simple shelters like those at Dendera with a seat incorporated at the upper end of the tray. These differ from the more elaborate and almost unique examples from Deir Rifeh, which show house elements (Spence 2011).

Figure 5.11 Soul-house from unknown origin (F 1901/1.62 RMO Leiden), CAT ID197. Photograph by author, 2017.

Together with domestic processing elements such as pot-stands, water jugs, meat cuts within a specific area, the presence of a courtyard defined by a raised rim, postholes for the placement of trees, orchards, as well as internal structures containing domestic furniture, soul-houses may be considered as domestic in nature. As summarised in Gorman-Evans, analysis of the soul-houses present at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford shows that there are important dissimilarities between different houses found within the same context (Gorman-Evans 1992). The subtle differences in decoration may reflect personal preferences, or even a feature on later soul-houses, which start to resemble dwellings with less emphasis on the courtyard space with offerings (Figure 5.11). In some cases, offerings are even positioned on the rooftops, possibly due to a more restricted courtyard space in town settings. Food processing and other activities must also have occurred on the roof (Gorman-Evans 1992: 52-3). Courtyard space appears to be a luxury at most urban sites, especially at El-Lahun where large houses on the north side of the street had an entrance leading to a courtyard (Gorman-Evans 1992; Kemp 1989: 152). Enclosed forecourts were an important feature throughout the Pharaonic Period, reflected also in the hieroglyphic sign for house 'pr', which may represent a walled courtyard (Gorman-Evans 1992: 54). Bourriau (1981) states that pottery offering trays reflect the courtyard space of dwellings where food processing would have occurred, since it is walled and protected from the wind and sun, as well as providing some privacy (Gorman-Evans 1992: 54; Bourriau 1981: 119). Nevertheless, the fact that almost all soul-houses in the sample contain a sunken area in front of covered structures

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[52] CT 355 in Faulkner 1977: 1.; CT 373 in Faulkner 1977: 10; quoted in Spence 2011: 902-4.

indicates that the courtyards were intended to be miniaturised ritual spaces rather than figurative domestic courtyards.

5.6.2. Funerary connotations

The lack of internal rooms inside earlier soul-houses and the presence of elaborate columned façades incorporated into the superstructures do not resemble MK domestic buildings in the archaeological record (Spence 2011: 897; Hayes 1953: 255-57). Therefore, to decipher their use and significance it is essential to look at the surrounding context of the soul-houses, especially when they are placed within a funerary landscape.

The uniqueness of the Rifeh sample may actually reflect the local funerary landscape. The fact that they have been found upon shaft-tombs may reflect a process of miniaturisation of ritualised space by the rural population. The rock cut tombs at Deir Rifeh tower over the cemetery containing the numerous shaft tombs below and are highly visible from miles away. Most of the façades contain two rows of four columns, similar to the façades of the soul-houses (half of the soul-houses from Deir Rifeh in the sample; Figures 5.12-13). These tombs date to the MK and belonged to high officials of the ancient town of Shashotep in the 11th Upper Egyptian nome (Map 5.1). The fact that soul-houses and the rock-cut tombs are contemporary may indicate similar notions of funerary belief.

Figure 5.12 (left): The Middle Kingdom rock-cut tombs at Deir Rifeh Unger. 2010.

Figure 5.13 (right): Soul-house from shaft Tomb 72 (below upper cemetery) (07.231.11 Metropolitan Museum of Art New York). CAT ID270. Photograph by author.

Map 5.1 Merged plan of the cemeteries at Deir Rifeh, based on map in Petrie 1907: pl. VIII, from Griffith Institute, Artefacts of Excavation, online.

The relationship between the landscape of the dead and that of the living is very evident at Middle and Upper Egyptian sites. Landscape in ancient Egypt constituted an interplay between natural and artificial elements, connected via processional routes and ritual activities (see 2.5; 7.2.3). The non-elite and the elite were separated in life as in death, something made evident through numerous types of tombs and their positions within necropoleis in Middle Egypt. At sites such as Qaw el-Kabir, Qubbat al-Hawa, Deir al-Bahri, Beni Hasan, as well as Asyut, there is a clear differentiation between elite and non-elite tombs (Lundius 2020). At these sites, rock-cut tombs are quite common, sculpted directly into the cliff-face, while directly beneath them are shaft-tombs and shallow tombs, lacking commemorative superstructures, being reserved for the lower classes (Willems 2014: 79, 224). Since they were cut into nearby rock walls, elite tombs were visible from nearby settlements and connected by communal processual routes, thus influencing the mind-set of the non-elite.

That aspects of MK tombs influenced the design of offering tables becomes evident through a comparison between soul-houses and rock-cut tombs and their respective courtyards. For example, in the rows of elite rock-cut tombs at Beni Hasan, every tomb has a small square courtyard below ground level, reached by a stairway (Lundius 2020: Fig. 8, 89; Snape 2011). Most tombs in the Upper Cemetery at Beni Hasan were accessed through a causeway. The offering tray (*E3253*) from Beni Hasan in the Manchester Museum, UK has a shape similar to the 'Upper Cemetery' tombs at Beni Hasan and includes elaborate façades, with pillars and small covered spaces leading to internal offering chapels and then further into underground burial chambers (Lundius 2020: Fig. 7, 88, CAT ID7). There are similar tomb structures at Asyut and Rifeh, as well as at Kahun and Lisht. Several soul-houses and pottery offering trays have been found in the vicinity of shaft tombs (Garstang

2002; Petrie 1907: 14). Such soul-houses and trays may not only be considered as miniature representations of 'houses for the *kꜣ*' but could also have been used as centrepieces in ritual spaces, similar to those in front of elite tombs.

According to Leclère (2001), the presence of staircases, terraces, and seats cannot only be given a domestic interpretation but may also mirror funerary architecture at MK necropoleis and mortuary complexes. Elite tombs such as that of Montuhotep at Deir el Bahari had multiple storeys and cenotaphs, which become more frequent in the MK and have a similar shape to the shelters incorporated on offering trays (Leclère 2001: 112-5). Soul-houses and pottery trays may, therefore, mimic funerary architecture, which may in turn have been inspired by domestic households and in particular those of the elite. It is, therefore, impossible to make a clear distinction between the two. 'Tomb form' trays[53] are usually divided into sections with an area designated for offerings and another may have a covered area resembling a shrine. This form occurs in most contexts since they are usually combined with other forms, especially 'Horseshoe' types (see 3.3.1).

The presence of figurines within soul-houses and offering trays may also be interpreted as fixtures within a funerary setting rather than representations of daily life, as would be the case in wooden models. Offering trays in the 'tomb form' or 'altar form' may reflect the interpretations offered by Leclère (2001) for soul-houses as tomb structures. 'Altar Form' trays are the second most frequent trays present in the sample and have generally been found in Middle and Lower Egyptian sites, rather than in Upper Egyptian regions.

A total of four soul-houses/offering trays contain a figurine, while ten pottery offering trays and five soul-houses contain an empty seat or chair. A seated individual, such as the one present in the 'boat-shaped' soul-house with an unknown provenance in the ÄMP Berlin (Figures 5.14-5) as well as empty seats, or thrones, may represent *kꜣ*-statues or stelae and therefore a central, liminal space where the offerings were placed, and funerary rituals were performed (see 2.5.2; 7.2.4-5). They may even reflect funerary offering scenes depicted on tomb walls (Altenmüller 1972). Seats are also often protected by a covering or placed inside the portico of the structure at the opposite end of the spout. According to Leclère (2001), the fact that these seats are placed in semi-hidden and protected areas and positioned facing the offerings in the courtyard, indicates their interpretation as *kꜣ*-statues to be imbued with the *kꜣ* of the deceased (Leclère 2001: 112-5).

Figures 5.14, 5.15: Details of figures present on two fragmented 'boat-shaped' soul-houses (ÄM 34488 (left)/34490 (right) ÄMP Berlin, CAT ID53). Photographs by author, 2017 (see also Figures 3.2,3.3).

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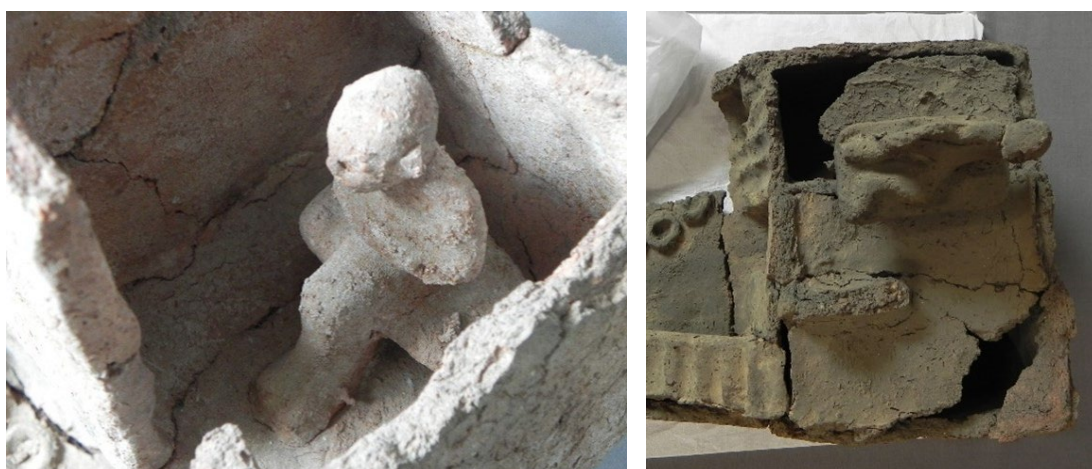
[53] See Gebelein and Asyut Type II examples at the Museo Egizio Torino in Mi (2020).

There are, however, several examples of figurines of individuals performing certain activities within the internal spaces or even interacting with the offerings in the courtyard. In a pottery offering tray at the British Museum an individual is depicted pouring from an amphora or ḥs-vase, while being surrounded by various meat cuts in the 'courtyard' area of the tray (e.g., *EA22782* British Museum London, CAT ID110). A seat is also present inside a semi-covered area at the opposite end of the tray. This may be a representation of ritual action performed in the 'active' parts of the tray, while the seat represents the hidden and inert spaces of the tomb (7.3.3).

Another example is a two-storey soul-house in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford (Figure 5.16), where the figurine of an individual grinding grain or baking bread is positioned under the staircase, facing away from the courtyard area, towards the internal structures. This is also a representation of processing activities in the forecourt of the building, although it may no longer represent an act of offering. Similarly, there is a unique example at the ÄMP, which in the form of a 'boat-shaped' soul-house represents an individual in the upper level of the house, inside what must have been hidden rooms, lying on his side in a relaxed stance (Figure 5.15). This may be an indication of Spence's theory of houses being spaces intended for the comfort of the deceased (Spence 2011), which may also be evidenced by the presence of beds in numerous soul-houses at Deir Rifeh. However, Leclère (2001) argues that the presence of beds in soul-houses may also be representations of the funerary barge, or even miniature sarcophagi (2001: 115).

Figure 5.16: Detail of a soul-house from Deir Rifeh (AN1896-1908 E.3904 Ashmolean Museum, Oxford), CAT ID369. Photograph by author, 2017.

The interpretation of soul-houses and offering trays as miniature tomb chapels may be contradicted by examples found within domestic settings. There is an emphasis on the ability to control, inhabit and receive offerings within these miniaturised objects (Spence 2011: 907). The representation of offerings in soul-houses may be a reminder for the household to carry out commemorative rituals dedicated to their dead. Possible examples of this can be found on soul-houses from Buhen, Uronati, Mirgissa and possibly Kahun (Leclère 2001: 102). The funerary cult was linked to the physical tomb and outer ritual space which must have been difficult to access for rural populations and towns affected by political instability during the Intermediate Periods, causing large groups to migrate (Spence 2011: 908-9). Furthermore, political instability and military campaigns led to the construction of forts along important borders, manned by soldiers and administrators who often brought their families with them.

The examples of pottery offering trays at the MK fortress of Buhen have large courtyard areas and a very small, covered structure with an incorporated staircase. As seen in the pottery offering tray now currently at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (Figure 5.17), the features present are mostly meat cuts, including a bovine leg on the left side of the tray and an elaborate system of basins with small openings leading to a, now missing, external spout structure. The shape and composition of the tray is similar to a more elaborate example at the British Museum (Figure 5.18).

A fragment representing the unique layout of tails or viscera along the left internal rim is in the Oriental Institute in Chicago and is also from Nubia although from a site further north at Bab Kalabsha (Figure 5.19). Both examples have been discovered in the vicinity of temples within the settlements, indicating that they may not have been strictly domestic but were, most probably, of a votive nature. The objects may have been placed in a chapel or shrine-like structure dedicated to the veneration of the dead away from the settlement. The fact that these trays have been found within a fortress is significant since they may have belonged to the displaced families of soldiers (Figure 5.20). They may have wanted to allude to ancestral cults or practices from their places of origin while, at the same time, establishing a more local style and integrating as a group around a local, temple cult – similar to examples at Asyut (see 4.0; 7.2.5).

Figure 5.17 (left): Soul-house/offering tray from Buhen M10-3 (1584 Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery) Not present in database. Photograph by author.

Figure 5.18 (right): Soul-house/offering tray from unknown origin (EA32610 British Museum London). Not present in database. Online catalogue.

Figure 5.19 Fragment of a pottery soul-house/offering tray from Bab Kablabsha, Nubia (E32307 OIM Chicago). Not present in database. Photography by author.
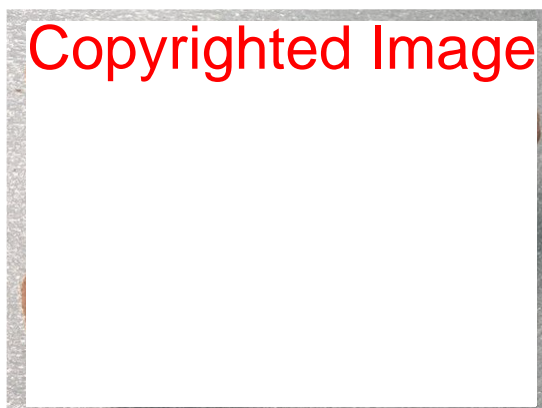
Figure 5.20 Plan of the fortress of Buhen during the Middle Kingdom, highlighting area L10 in the vicinity of the temple complex where ten offering trays/soul-houses were found. From the EES excavations of 1957-64, courtesy of the Lucy Gura EES Archives, 2017.
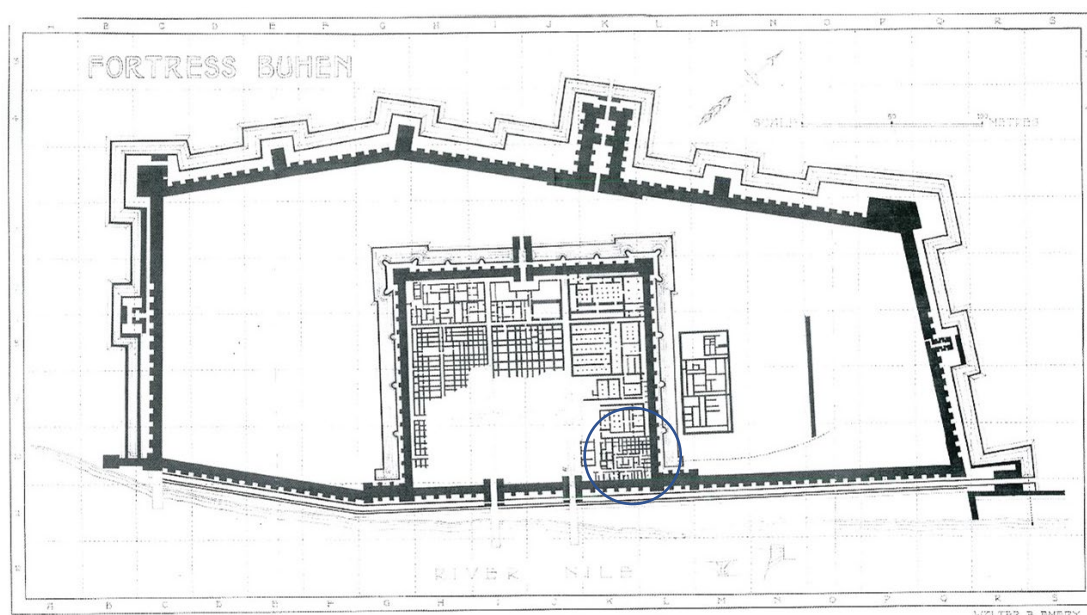
After analysing the overall design and incorporated fixtures and iconographic elements within pottery trays and soul houses it is evident that processing sites and related activities within domestic settings were interwoven with rural, localised funerary ritual practices reflected in funerary ritual space. As summarised in the following statement by Spence, offering tables are highly versatile in their role as ritual utensils: "The occasional example of what appears to be an offering table may equally derive from the function of the objects as miniature offering places rather than necessarily be intended to tie the shelter to ritual enclosure" (Spence 2011: 910).

The combination of forms and different architectural elements may indicate a multifunctional nature of offering trays and soul-houses. It is difficult to give these representations one single interpretation, but the most plausible appears to be that these objects reflected processing sites together with more funerary fixtures and architectural elements, representing the liminal aspects of the funerary cult. While discussing 'liminality' and 'seclusion' in relation to design and depictions of offering trays and soul-houses, it might be assumed that if they depict a rural reality, they may also mirror concerns for cleanliness and order. Processing sites, in particular those connected with slaughter, were 'impure' and thus probably had to be kept apart from domestic, and especially sacred areas.

5.7. DISCUSSION: RITUAL USE, CONTEXT, AND RELIGIOUS CONNOTATIONS

The ritual use and religious connotations behind FIP and MK offering trays and soul-houses can be understood by considering their provenance as well as their original archaeological context. Although these objects are usually not provided with an exact context and provenance, mostly due to their portability and being made of perishable material, the few which have been found in context show a significant variation in their placement and accordingly their role in funerary ritual practice.

Soul-houses are usually more worn when compared to pottery offering trays, especially when it comes to surface discoloration and damage caused by seasonal weathering (see Table 5.4). The

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reason behind this may be the original placement of the objects within the funerary landscape. Soul-houses differ from pottery offering trays in other sites, which have been found in the burial chamber itself. Even though the exact placement of soul-houses has not been well documented during early excavations, Petrie did generally comment on the placement of soul-houses at Deir Rifeh (Petrie 1907). They were most commonly placed in the vicinity of shaft tombs, usually at the north end with the spout facing the opening of the shaft (Lundius 2020; Petrie 1907: 14-15). This clearly indicates their use as a point of interaction, or liminal place, between the living and the dead, similar to that of offering tables placed in liminal places within the tomb complex (see 4.5.1). The fact that they were placed outside over shaft tombs made soul-houses more prone to displacement and also significant weathering and breakage.

Table 5.4 Classification of states of conservation of the offering trays and soul-houses present in the sample.

Wear	Offering Tray	Soul Houses
1. none	0	0
2. some	11	2
3. medium	49	7
4. significant	29	12
5. fragmented	6	8
TOTAL	89	29

The direct relationship of soul-houses with their surrounding landscape is of great significance and also unique in the archaeological record. Funerary utensils and fixtures are usually placed within the tomb structure itself and rarely found outside, indicating their central role in funerary ritual practice. They also differ in this sense to their wooden counterparts, since these are often found inside the tomb itself together with the deceased, or in an adjacent chamber (see Tooley 1989). It is therefore valid to assess these objects in relation to the landscape and the rural population who made them.

As described earlier, the 150 soul-houses found at Deir Rifeh are a unique assemblage in the archaeological record. An interpretation offered for their uniqueness is described by Spence, who claims that these houses emphasise certain funerary rituals identified in the Coffin Texts concerning wind, air, and breathing (Spence 2011). Several Coffin Text spells describe the deceased needing to breathe in the afterlife and the need for 'domestic comfort' (Spence 2011: 902-4): 'SPELL FOR HAVING POWER OVER THE WINDS. The mouth of my open nostril is in Djedu, my offerings are in On, this house of mine is built by Seshat, Khnum has sat on its parapets. If the weather comes as the north-wind, I will sit to the south of it (…) I blow my nose (?), which is opened up at the place where I wish to dwell'.[54] This spell is clearly related to the Opening of the Mouth ritual intended to restore all the senses to the deceased, or his statue. Spence suggests that the *mulqafs*, airy porticos, as well as features present for libation and the storage of water are all for capturing the winds and air as well as water for the benefit of the deceased (Spence 2011: 903). Air is hard to represent in offerings and may not only be represented by offering incense, therefore the *mulqafs* and other architectural elements may represent the natural element of air. With the combination of earth and water via liquid libations stored in basins and directed towards the external spouts, and air captured by these architectural elements, soul-houses function as stone offering tables, attempting to combine numerous elements into one whole (see 7.5).

What relates the use of soul-houses to that of offering trays is the pouring of liquids over them, evidenced via the presence of canals and basins, as well as external spout structures. Thirty out of

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[54] CT 355 in Faulkner 1977: 1; see also Willems 1996: 259-62.

forty-four MK offering trays in the sample have a significant internal inclination towards the spout end, indicating the need for the water to exit the table as fast as possible and not remain in the canal or basin features incorporated in the sunken area of the trays (see 7.4.2-3). The water was meant to be poured over the offerings and then flow into basins and canals to be led into the shaft, reaching the deceased buried below. If the object was votive, or placed inside the burial chamber, however, it may previously have been used during the funerary ritual, or even within a domestic context to be buried with the deceased (see 4.5.1; 4.6).

Religious connotations behind the iconographic elements in the offering trays and soul-houses are essentially Osirian, in the sense that they stress the rejuvenative qualities of water and a direct link to the seasonal changes of the Nile and the insurance of the recurrence of the fertile Nile sediments. One example of these rejuvenative qualities is the representation of reproductive organs or elements of fertility on pottery offering trays. Eleven pottery offering trays in the sample may present the following reproductive elements: phallic representation, ovaries, and the birthing canal (Figures 5.21-23; 3.5.4; 6.3.3). Such organic elements may be linked to the Opening of the Mouth ritual (see Roth 1992: 78), since they may resemble the *pšf-kf-*knife used in childbirth, as well as the birthing canal itself, as depicted by the frequent canal formation 'ⵁ' (Figure 5.23). All these elements combined with the symbolic connotations evidenced by the use and representations of the calf's leg, as well as other symbolic representations of sustenance, not to mention the wind-catchers in soul-houses, are all correlated to the rejuvenation of the deceased. The ritual act of pouring water over these elements activates them, and the spouts lead these 'active' liquids to the deceased (see 7.4.2).[55]

Figure 5.21(left): Offering tray from El-Kab (AN1896-1908 E.2095 Ashmolean Museum, Oxford), CAT ID361. Photograph by author, 2017.

Figure 5.22 (centre): Offering tray from Deir el-Ballas (E4529 Manchester Museum), CAT ID3. Photograph by author, 2017.

Figure 5.23 (right): Offering tray from El-Kab (UC38982 Petrie Museum UCL). CAT ID93. Photography by author.

5.8. CONCLUSION

Generally, soul-houses are no longer produced in significant numbers after the end of the MK (Leclère 2001: 120). The reason behind this disappearance in the archaeological record may be due to their steady replacement by more elaborate wooden models placed inside the tomb chamber, together with the emergence of ushabti and models of daily life (Leclère 2001). These models may have had similar connotations to soul-houses in the sense that they may more literally reflect

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[55] For the sacramental explanation of the water process see Assmann 2005: 355-68.

processing sites, which may in turn reflect a change in funerary ritual practice. These types of funerary utensils start to become more present in sealed off areas inside the tomb, while the only object that fundamentally maintains a similar ritual practice is that of stone offering tables placed in liminal areas, as well as the pottery offering trays.

The combinations with ritual fixtures, such as cenotaphs, representations of the *kꜣ* and tomb facades, allude to their surrounding landscape and their use as place-markers for the dead. Since they are usually not inscribed (see 4.4.4), the fact that they represent 'places' may attest to the agency and individuality of the person(s) to whom the object was dedicated. They are, therefore, also personal, and memorial acts of the living. This explains why offering trays have also been found in domestic contexts – they create a ritual space for the living to honour the dead as an ancestral cult in the domestic setting. Although pottery trays and soul-houses slightly differ in both appearance and function, it remains clear that they are indeed multifunctional and may be more elaborate than stone offering tables, which sometimes only depict one ritual element intended to provide libations for the deceased. As outlined by Leclère (2001), offering trays and soul-houses can serve as offering tables, plates for the placement of offerings, tomb epitaphs or markers, the deceased's dwelling, or ideal household, production sites, or simple houses for the *kꜣ* (Leclère 2001: 117).

The outer spaces on pottery offering trays and soul-houses may be thought of as processing sites rather than simply being plates of offerings or ritualised areas. They are sites of active elements such as water, air, earth, whilst the internal space, or closed-off areas in the upper half of the table furthest away from the spout structure were reserved for the inert, dark, and hidden quarters of the deceased. Gardening units, butchering areas, pot-stands, trees, winnowing baskets, granaries, irrigation systems and reproductive systems are all essentially 'active' sites of production. They are even more 'powerful' than the products represented on stone offering tables. Therefore, these objects are also present inside burial chambers and in the same tomb as stone offering tables. They represent the entire household which stands behind the deceased in constant provision of sustenance as they did in daily life.

6. Offering Tables and similar material in the 1ST millennium BCE: Rejuvenative forces and the Nile

« Etant donné que le monde procède d'un univers liquide, en raison des connotations organicistes du temple ressenti comme un être vivant ainsi que l'indique la cérémonie d'animation du temple qui s'apparente au rituel de l'ouverture de la bouche opère sur les morts et les statues, on pourrait risquer l'hypothèse suivante, en suivant la perspective d'un continuum nature-culture. La mise en contact avec les eaux phréatiques primordiales (celles du Noun) des dépôts de fondation et des fondations elles-mêmes de temples, par enfouissement dans les tranchées, serait liée au thème de la germination, l'eau du Noun régénérée par l'eau nouvelle de Hapy diffusant ses propriétés dans l'ensemble de l'édifice. »

(Marie-Ange Bonhême 1995: 137).

6.1. Introduction

The following case study concerns 82 objects in the database relating to the TIP and into the G-RP, including several that apparently have served as amulets (see Graph 6.1). The study will show how these objects reflect the emergence of a personalised cult based on fertility notions of the Nile, Osirian mythology as well as ancient notions of a royal cult in elite offering table design.

Like other ritual utensils, offering tables developed in accordance with socio-economic and diachronic changes affecting religious notions and rituals. Originally having constituted the support of actual offerings, offering tables were increasingly incorporated in complicated rituals, becoming abstract in the sense that real offerings were substituted by symbols of victuals, while design and shape came to mirror production landscapes, like irrigation systems, as well as intricate religious notions and ritual behaviour. During the TIP some offering tables even became magical objects in their own right, imbued with sanctity and accordingly no longer exclusively used as ritual utensils, but as amulets and signs of personal piety. It is important to note that Egypt's rural population endured very little change from the NK to the PP. They largely depended on seasonal changes and were/are still subjects to the same constraints until modern times (Grimal 1998: 386).

During these later periods the offering tables and associated material undergo a profound change in design that so-far has not been thoroughly studied. This period is characterised by multifaceted religiosity, revivified ancient traditions, and foreign religious notions, which influenced design while emphasising and preserving the offering tables' main function which was to materialise the immaterial via the use of water. Objects reflecting this change include amulets, bronze pendants, and offering tables reflecting water management and rejuvenation processes. The case study will apply a diachronic approach to the offering tables and similar *materia magica* in accordance with the following time periods: TIP, LP, and G-RP. The objects will be framed within a socio-religious setting (i.e., the changes in society and consequently - religious notions), highlighting their transformation into a multifaceted entity and symbol.

Types of "Offering Tables" from the TIP to the GR

Legend: TIP, LP, PP, GR
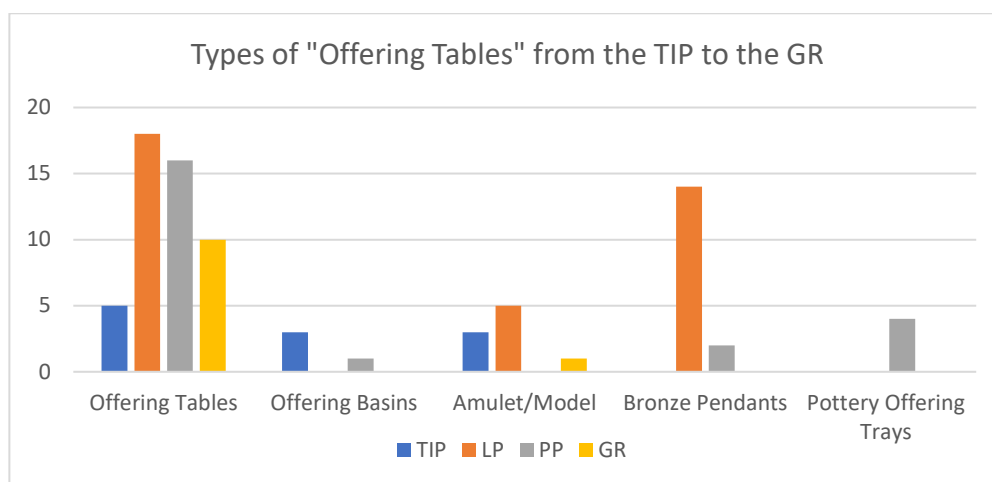
6.2. THE EVOLUTION OF OFFERING TABLES DURING THE 1ST MILLENNIUM BCE

The following historical account is presented as a backdrop for the complex diachronic changes of TIP to G-RP 'offering tables' especially since their development and religious connotations have not been fully researched. If a precise and secure archaeological context, or the presence of hieroglyphic inscriptions are missing, it is difficult to accurately date offering tables based on categorisation techniques alone. The problem is aggravated by the fact that most styles are repeated in almost all time-periods after the end of the OK (see 3.3.1). As Graph 6.2 shows, however, the frequency of iconographic elements on offering tables in later periods indicates a new trend. During these periods, the most frequent depiction is that of round bread. There is a small sample from the TIP that still reflects an emphasis on the *ḥtp*-sign, *ḥs*-vases, and the depiction of round bread, although it seems that round bread became the standard symbol for offering, taking over the age-old tradition of depicting the *ḥtp*-sign. *ḥs*-vases are still common, and vegetation becomes important in the PP. During this period, one can see an increase in sacred lake designs (see 3.4.3.4).
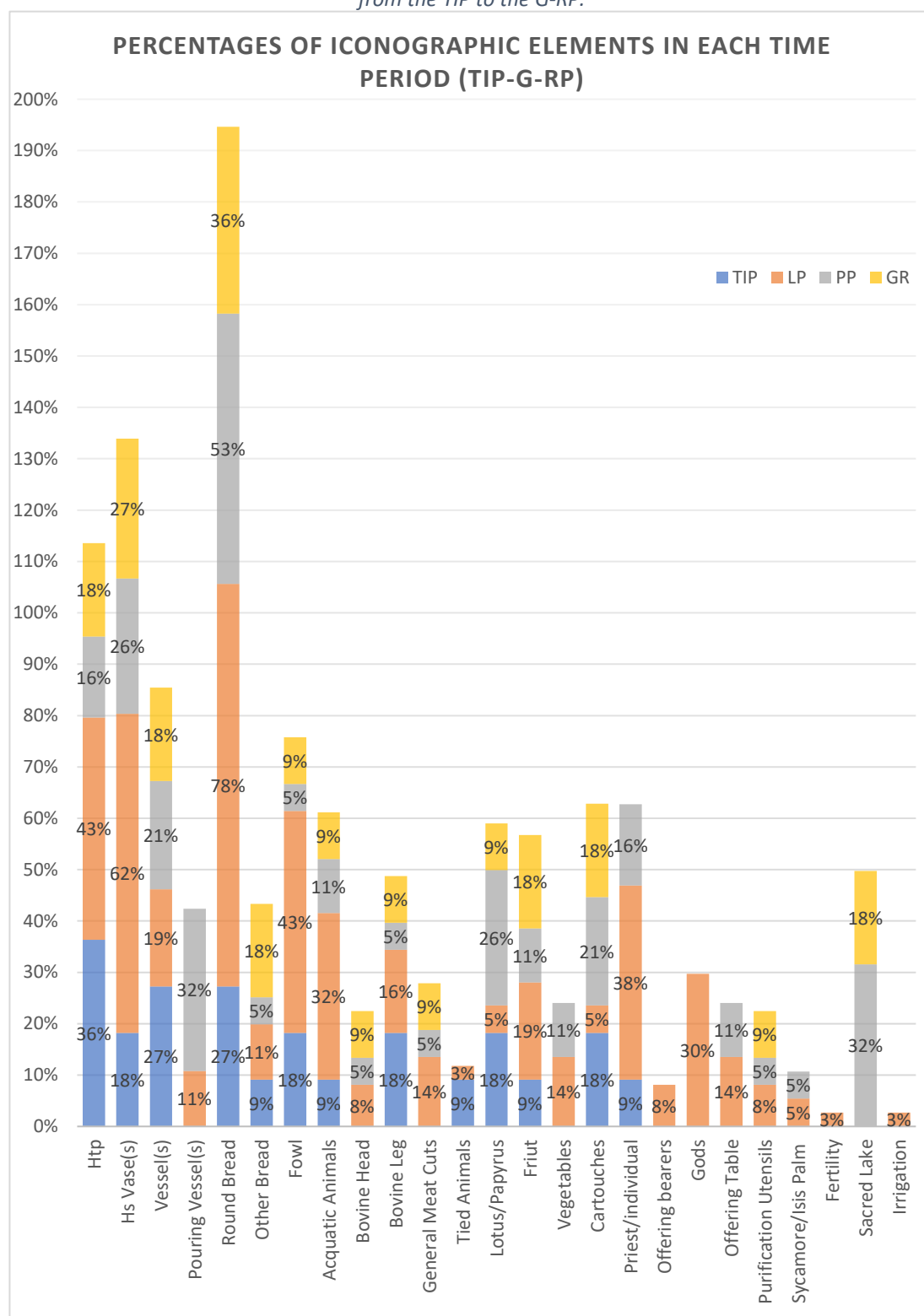
6.2.1. *Third Intermediate Period (1069-664 BCE)*

The TIP (1069-664 BCE) was marked by significant political instability and external influences, the gap between royalty and the private sector was significantly reduced while Individuals began to commission works with royal paraphernalia (e.g., cartouche-shaped basins, etc.) (Grimal 1998: 332; Arnold 1999b: 94). *ḥs*-vases, *nmst*-jars, and purification sets which are often depicted on offering tables at this time (see 3.4.3.4). After being very common in the OK (c. 2686-2160 BCE) as well as on some offering trays from the FIP (c. 2160-2055 BCE) and MK (c. 2055-1650 BCE), representations

of such items do not necessarily take a centre stage again until the TIP/LP. In some examples, the vessels even replace the iconic and central ḥtp-sign, which is the universal symbol for the offering table (Figures 6.1-2). This indicates that the offering table itself had become a powerful symbol and utensil, while still maintaining iconographic elements needed to show active participation in the ritual – just like representations of processing sites on MK offering trays.

Figure 6.1 (left): Offering table with a large basin from El-Riqqa (Middle Egypt) dating to the Third Intermediate Period (5840 Manchester Museum). CAT ID15. Photograph by author.

Figure 6.2 (right): Granite offering table from unknown origin, dating to the Third Intermediate Period (26th Dynasty) (1799 Museo Egizio Firenze). CAT ID150. Photograph by author.

The change was mirrored through a prominent return to past traditions[56] and the rise of popular religious practices (Arnold 1999b: 94; Grimal 1998: 332;). This transition began by the end of the Amarna period, when a need for a more personal religion was felt after such a drastic revolution in religious administration (see van Dijk 2000). Offering table design in the TIP seems to be a standardisation of earlier NK (c. 1550-1069 BCE) types such as C1 (see 3.3.1: Table 3.19) with slightly new trends emerging. Basins began to be shaped like cartouches (see 3.3.1; 3.4.3.4), perhaps in an attempt to feel closer to the royal cult in a period of political unrest and a destabilised government. By the end of the TIP a new religious practice based on votive offerings (see 6.3), private hymns as well as an "oracular government" was established (Grimal 1998: 332-33).

6.2.2. *Late Period (664-332 BCE)*

The relatively stable 26th Dynasty (664-332 BCE) ruled Egypt from Sais (Lloyd 2000a: 364) and marks a time in which Egypt was mostly concerned with maintaining traditions and a cultural identity, evidenced by the Saite artistic movement which was highly conservative and recalled the royal traditions of the OK and MK (Lloyd 2000a: 370-371; Grimal 1998: 355-56). The LP marked the final phase of Egyptian independent culture. A new Mediterranean trading network extending from Asia Minor to the Aegean was established, bringing new artistic influences. However, rulers such as the Kushite Kings as well as Psammetichus I wanted to promote "nationalistic" artistic movements,

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[56] An example of how the TIP marks the start of returning to past traditions and artistic preferences is the double statue of Amenemhat III (c. 1860 - c. 1814 BCE) in the semblance of the Nile god Hapi. Although the statue clearly dates to the 12th Dynasty (MK), it was usurped by Psusennes I (1047 - 1001 BCE) and transferred to the capital of Tanis during the 21st Dynasty. The uniqueness of the statue, representing offering tables with fish as well as lotus flowers hanging of their sides, coincides with the increasing watery elements and naturalistic iconography emerging from the TIP onwards. It was not uncommon for TIP kings to reuse 12th Dynasty monuments, as has also been evidenced by the MK-SIP dyad of sphinxes labelled as "Hyksos monuments" (Habachi 1978:79-92).

returning to OK and MK styles as well as religious beliefs (Arnold 1999b: 65; Grimal 1998: 355-356). By the end of the Late Period, from 525 until 332 BCE, Egypt was under Persian rule with a few periods of Egyptian resurgence. By the 30th Dynasty, Nectanebo I ruled Egypt marking the very end of Egyptian control. For Egyptian rulers, these last decades marked a need to construct and rebuild temples to maintain remnants of Egyptian culture for generations to come. This initiative succeeded even though Egyptians lost control of their own nation again with the conquest of Alexander the Great in 332 BCE (Lloyd 2000a: 386-387).

A resurgence of the royal cult in the LP is evident in the material culture (Lloyd 2000a: 364-87). Despite going back to the artistic notions of the OK (e.g., C1760, CAT ID190), numerous foreign influences can be deciphered. This artistic movement was not significantly determined by the ruling elite as it had been in the pharaonic period but was rather defined by the artistic choices of artisans. This also gave rise to the more "naturalistic" iconographic elements identified in both architecture and material culture. Temples became the main focus for funerary cults rather than elaborate tombs, evident through a significant rise of Osirian paraphernalia in all religious sites across Egypt[57] (Arnold 1999b: 94; Zivie-Coche 2008: 6). Small votive objects associated with the god's cult can be found in every religious site. Numerous festivals and oracles were celebrated by the non-elite, creating a sense of public interest in ritual practices, giving rise to phenomena such as "letters to the gods", animal mummies, votive offerings, and most importantly, new designs of amulets (e.g., see two schist amulets in 6.4.1).

The 38 offering tables present in the database from the Late Period provide an insight into the diachronic changes in offering table design and its diversity during later periods. It appears that the styles recall past standardised types, such as the popular C1/C2 in the NK (e.g., CAT ID133, 276, 248), or even the B+C "irrigation fields" design in MK offering tables (e.g., CAT ID138). The most important innovation during the Late Period is the introduction of bronze pendants in the shape of offering tables (see 3.5.5; 6.4.1).

Two important objects from the LP in the database are a large, monumental circular table from Memphis and a circular limestone offering table from Thebes (see 3.3.1). The first table is categorised as an A1 type, with a shallow central depression and 15 crude concentric "canals". It appears the table has been reused as a mortar due to the worn nature of the central depression and the presence of the concentric marks that might have been cut to facilitate the grinding process. Nevertheless, the decoration on the outer edges indicates its original use as an offering table due to the depiction of offerings and Nile deities such as Hapi along with cartouches containing the name of Nectanebo II (Figure 6.3). The second circular offering table is of the A+B+C1 type, which became rare after the OK. Its emergence during this period of foreign rule is no coincidence since it apparently was a means of legitimising the ruling elite. The external iconography of the table differs from OK examples (see CAT ID196) since it depicts the various ritual stages in the OMC as well as the offering scenes before the offering table and the deceased (see Figure 6.4-5).

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[57] An example of the growing popular cult of Osiris is present in the TIP temple complex of Medinet Habu. The cult of Osiris became increasingly important in the 26th Dynasty—a development that began in the 25th Dynasty, as witnessed by several shrines at Karnak. In the northern section of the temple complex, several chapels were dedicated to specific forms of Osiris, such as "Osiris Wennefer, Neb Djefau" (Osiris Wennefer, Lord of Nourishment) and "Osiris Hery-ib pa Ished" (Osiris Who Resides in the Persia Tree). Holscher 1954 from Zivie-Coche 2008: 6.

Figure 6.3 Granodiorite Late Period offering table of Nectanebo II (1751 Museo Egizio Torino), CAT ID167. Photograph by author.

Figure 6.4 (left): Limestone A+B+C type offering table from the Late Period tomb of Montuemhat in Thebes (C1760 Museo Egizio Torino) CAT ID190. Photography by author.

Figure 6.5 (right): Detail of the base of offering table showing the ritual action of purifying the offering table before the ritual severing of the bovine leg at the Opening of the Mouth. C1760 at the Museo Egizio Torino. CAT ID190. Photograph by author.

6.2.3. *Greco-Roman Period (332 BCE – AD 395)*

The Ptolemaic (332-30 BCE) and Roman (30 BCE – AD 395) Periods are marked by a systemic reorganisation of the priestly class as well as the promotion of an independent religious system (see 6.4.1) with the Greek influence of *polis* (Grimal 1998: 384; Lloyd 2000b: 506). The Ptolemies invested in the reconstruction as well as establishment of religious buildings throughout Egypt, evidenced by the temples still standing from the Philae region all the way up to the Delta (Grimal 1998: 384). Since preservation of the Egyptian tradition had become one of the main aims of the ruling class and priesthood, numerous religious texts were rewritten and recorded. The priesthood dedicated their time to research rituals and ancient religious practice, while the laity was more likely influenced by Greek practices, though mixing them with Egyptian notions. Although religious iconography was still reminiscent of the past, Greek influence began to be noted, especially with the rise of "composite iconography" based on the most popular religious cults (Grimal 1998:385).

Types of offering tables from the PP are similar to those during the LP, in the sense that they recall previous types and features such as "gussets" (J) and C2 types (see 3.3.1; e.g., CAT ID282). These tables also maintain an emphasis on religious paraphernalia such as elaborate *ḥs*-vases at the

centre (Figures 6.6). Evident in the sample composed of 19 offering tables, is the emergence of a new feature which becomes common during Ptolemaic times: the B type with staircases incorporated in the basins (further discussed in 6.3.1). Another new offering table type is the B+C type from Dendera (see Figures 6.7-8). This table has two large and symmetrical *ḥtp*-signs covering most of the surface. Two *ḥtp*-signs so close together at the centre may indicate a function similar to the one of "multiple" offering tables from earlier time-periods. The use of "multiple tables" is attested in the MK (see 3.3.1; 7.2.5), coinciding with the estimated dating given to offering table 26.3.339 at the MET, New York. This offering table was found together with material ranging from the 11th to the 18th Dynasty, significantly earlier than the material associated with offering table Boston MFA 98.1056 found in Ptolemaic tombs excavated by Flinders Petrie at Dendera (1898, 32-22, pl.XXVa). The latter offering table may be from the later burials in the scattered Ptolemaic – Roman Period necropolis, which cuts through 11th Dynasty mastaba tombs and burials. Petrie (1898) associates this table with other "sacred lake" designed tables (see below) at Dendera which may pertain to cults performed at the Temple of Hathor already present in the 25th Dynasty. The fact that these two tables are from such different spatial and temporal contexts and yet seem perfectly identical is interesting. Either the offering table at Dendera is from earlier periods and was re-used in the later Ptolemaic period, or it may have been exported from the Theban area during this time-period. It is also possible, due to the early date of the excavations by Petrie (1898), that the stratigraphical and archaeological data recorded may not be entirely accurate.

Figure 6.6 A+C type offering table from the Ptolemaic Period with a central ḥs vase (22762 Museo Gregoriano Egizio, Vatican Museums) CAT ID148. Photography by author.

Figure 6.7 (left): B+C type offering table from uncertain time-period (ranging between 11th Dynasty to the 18th Dynasty – MK-SIP) from Tomb MMA 604, Deir el-Bahari. (26.3.339 Metropolitan Museum of Art New York) CAT ID279. Photograph by author.

Figure 6.8 (right): B+C type offering table from Ptolemaic Period (305-30 BCE) Dendera (Petrie 1898: 32-33, pl. XXVa) (98.1056 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) CAT ID263. Photography by author.

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Another series of offering tables dating to the late PP /early Roman period from Esna may reflect a similar trend that became common in the LP: the emergence of offering tables as symbols or votive objects, i.e., a displayed/deposited object without the intention to be used. Five offering tables in the sample from the Garstang Museum all have the typical gusset-spouted edge, a trend which emerged in the NK (see 3.3.1), and a central rectangular raised platform surrounded by a canal. The central area tends to have Greek names scratched onto its surface. Even though only one offering table out of the five in the sample is documented as originating from Esna (305 BCE) (Figure 6.9), it seems plausible that this provenance may be applied to the rest of the tables recovered from the Garstang 1905-06 campaign. More research is needed in deciphering the exact provenance[58], nevertheless, it may be possible that these sandstone offering tables were mass-produced in a workshop and then re-purposed for the benefit of devotees to place them at shrines in an act of veneration (see CAT ID32-36).

Esna is located some 55 km south of Luxor. Its Greek name was Latopolis after *Lates Niloticus,* the Nile perch, dedicated to Neith, goddess of war and creation and by the Greeks identified with Pallas-Athene. The biggest temple of Esna was dedicated to Khnum, his consorts Menhit and Nebtu, as well as their son Heka and daughter Neith (Bard 1999: 295). Veneration of the Nile perch is documented through votive statues, figurines, and wall paintings, (van Neer & Gonzales 2019: 312) as well as a vast number of mummified perch[59] found together with human remains in a cemetery west of Esna. The veneration of fish was related to the rejuvenating properties of water. For example, the *Decan* deities were believed to have regenerated their bodies and become birds/stars by staying 70 days under water – the time needed to execute the mummification of a body (Van Neer & Gonzales 2019: 338).

Figure 6.9 Sandstone offering table from the Greco Roman Period found at Esna (E48, Garstang Museum Liverpool). CAT ID32. Photograph by author.

Considering that Esna was an important pilgrimage site, some of the offering tables may have been related to votive offering. Placing small objects within shrines and other sacred areas is one of the oldest Egyptian religious practices. Deposits of Early Dynastic and OK votive offerings have been found in temple areas at Elephantine, Abydos, Hierakonpolis, Saqqara, and Tell el-Farkha and the

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[58] Dr. Penelope Wilson has investigated the provenance of offering tables from the Garstang 1905-06 campaign. According to photographs and records consulted at the Garstang Museum Archives, a total of 90 offering tables were found at Esna but have since then been dispersed across museum collections in the UK, in particular, the Garstang Museum, Liverpool Museum and Manchester Museum. Out of the 90 offering tables, 70 still appear to be missing, possibly due to the custom of reburying the material as was the case in for example Hogarth's campaigns at Asyut (see 4.2; 4.4.1, 5).

[59] LP deposits of fish mummies have been found in Middle Egypt, specifically in the Oxyrhynchus nome, el-Bahnasa where during a 2012 campaign by the Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, a ritual deposit of an estimated 50,000 fish was discovered together with other votive material such as wooden fish adorned with "Hathor crowns" (Van Neer & Gonzales 2019: 322). In later periods, certain fish, like the Nile flood, were believed to have issued from the body of Osiris, indicating that the efflux of Osiris had to be ritually renewed in order to revive the deceased god. According to Van Neer & Gonzales (2019: 311-342) in their account of the fish deposits at el-Bahnasa, the oxyrhynchus fish "could be a vector of renewal, just like the goddess Hathor/Thoeris acted as receptacle for regeneration".

custom continued unabated throughout the centuries (Pinch & Waraska 2009: 2). The custom of making votive offerings became particularly common during the Late and Ptolemaic Periods when public access to shrines and temples increased. Both simple and costly statuettes and ritual objects were placed in sacred areas and dedicated by named individuals (Pinch & Waraska 2009: 4). Some of these offering items are miniature representations, models, or cheaper versions of objects used in temple rituals and funerary cults. Their use and spiritual benefits may have been thought to be the same, whether the offering was a functional object or a model (Pinch & Waraska 2009: 5). This trend is evident in offering tables and similar material present in the sample which date from the Late Period onwards (see Graph 6.1), even though this could be a reflection of the better-preserved material in the archaeological record dating to later periods.

Syncretism in the Funerary Cult during the Greco-Roman Period
Exposure to Greek art in the Ptolemaic period may be evidenced in the naturalistic style adopted by artisans, especially in funerary material culture where a growing emphasis was placed on a realistic representation of the deceased (Boozer 2019: 362). A greater emphasis was placed on the body since it was believed to be the actual site of transfiguration of the deceased into Osiris. This concept was after all integral in funerary religious belief throughout the Pharaonic period, especially in the representation of Cosmos (Boozer 2019:370; Hornung 1982: 107-125). Continuity is considered to be the most important aspect in ancient Egyptian funerary practice (Riggs 2006), something that is especially evident in the reuse of ancient tombs or funerary landscape as well as the combination of new funerary utensils with old ones (Boozer 2019: 372). Accordingly, funerary material culture is a mixture between innovation and reuse/revival of ancient Egyptian ritual practice (Riggs 2010: 348). It is common to come across a juxtaposition of royal paraphernalia and pharaonic symbolism with more personalised and contemporary individualistic elements (Boozer 2019:373). Locality continues to be equally as important as it had been in the Pharaonic Period and the presence of Ptolemaic tombs within ancient necropoleis is very common throughout Egypt [App II: Maps 1.1.1; 1.2.8-9], illustrating a need for connecting the dead to the past, as well as society in general via the funerary landscape (Smith 2006: 336).

Late examples of continuity are encountered in the necropoleis of Tuna el-Gebel in Middle Egypt (AD 1st-3rd century), indicating the presence of a multi-ethnic society at the nearby Hermopolis during the G-RP (Lembke 2012: 83). Late tombs of the priests of Thoth appear to have structures similar to previous tombs (e.g., tomb of Petosiris, tomb of Padjkam), imitating Egyptian offering tables while adding Greek altar designs (see Lembke 2012: 84). These together with other objects are reminiscent of annual flood festivals, which continued well into the Roman Period and involved the offering of food and drink in mortuary contexts. Already in the PP there was a rising need for tombs to have access to water, not only for the performance of new libation rituals related to Greek tradition, but also for banqueting and feasting within necropoleis. An example of this growing trend is evidenced in Alexandria, where twenty Ptolemaic period tombs had access to water, versus six from earlier pharaonic times. Basins containing purified water were placed at the foot of sacrificial altars or used for ceremonies honouring the dead (Tricoche 2009: 31-120).

An example of how mortuary identity in G-RP Egypt shows signs of an amalgamation between Greek and Egyptian traditions may be found in mortuary iconography in the tomb of Petosiris in the Dakhla Oasis (early G-RP) (Whitehouse 1998: 497-509; Boozer 2013: 377). On one of the tomb walls is a depiction of Petosiris in Greek-style clothing (*himation*) receiving funerary rites by an Egyptian priest over an offering table on a pedestal (Figure 6.10). Next to this is the image of a more stylistic representation of an Egyptian god (Osiris or Hapy-figure), or royal, holding an offering tray with a

central spouted-*ḥs*-vase and four round bread, elements which are typically depicted on LP and G-RP offering tables (see 3.4.3.4; Figure 6.11).

Figure 6.10 Painting inside the Tomb of Petosiris at Qaret el-Muzawwapa in the Dakhla Oasis (2ⁿᵈ century CE) showing Petosiris in Greek-style clothing facing two different offering scenes using similar offering tables. From Amheida Project Staff, 'Paintings from the Tomb of Petosiris at Muzawaka (X)', Ancient World Image Bank, New York: Institute for the Study of the Ancient World 2004, in: Boozer 2019: 377).

Figure 6.11 Offering table from unknown origin, dated to the Greco-Roman Period (from Schiapparelli 1887: 527, no. 1823, dated as "periodo assai tardo". Despite being catalogued as 3-4ᵗʰ CE the style indicates an earlier date, presumably between 2ⁿᵈ cent BCE-3ʳᵈ cent CE) (6412 Museo Egizio Firenze) CAT ID154. Photography by author.

Objects associated with ritual action are strongly connected with both the identity of the people behind them, as well as their setting. In Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, offering tables and the materiality of the funerary context represented "longevity and the temporal connections between past, present, and future" (Boozer: 378-379). The interchangeable role of domestic and funerary items increased during this time-period, one reason could be that transitional events and ritual utensils involved in liminal action also were common aspects of Greek tradition (Gell 1998; Boozer 2019: 379).

An Example of Syncretism: The Hawara Group

There are several examples of offering tables with a foot imprint carved out in sunken relief. These tables have a dubious provenance, being labelled as coming from "Labyrinthe ?" in the Kamal's 1906 *Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire N° 23001-23256*. It appears as though they originate from the PP necropoleis surrounding the pyramid temple at Hawara later excavated by Petrie between 1888-1889. One offering table present at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, C23217, depicts a central right foot, a situla on the left and a cobra (?) on the right surrounded by a canal leading to an external spout structure. This iconography, which appears to be rather late in design, incorporates most of the iconographic elements pertaining to the Osiris/Isis cult. A possible interpretation of the use of these tables has been offered by van Pelt & Staring (2019), who after studying examples at the *Museo Egizio* in Turin, state that poor priests could not afford elaborate statues or offering tables. However, by inscribing their name, title, and occasionally their

footprints on more or less elaborate objects, they could indicate their trust in a god and furthermore forever remain in their presence (van Pelt & Staring 2019). Footprints may represent the presence of individuals while simultaneously referring to the cult of Serapis since votive feet played a major role in his cult at Hawara (see Castiglione 1967).

6.2.4. *Previous Work*

Limited research has been dedicated to the categorisation, analysis, and interpretation of offering tables dating to the FIP to the latter half of the 1st millenium BCE and onwards. The relationship between the Nile floods, water preservation and other watery aspects of offering tables during these time periods has not been explored in great detail. Some studies have been carried out on region-specific series of objects, but no wide-scale study such as Hölzl (2002)'s analysis on earlier tables is known. Studies include Hibbs (1985)'s publication on a series of offering tables from Mendes and an analysis of their role in Nile cults, as well as a recent study of the pottery offering trays shaped like "stirrups" from Kom Tuman carried out by Ivanov (2015) and the Russian Archaeological Mission at Memphis (see 6.3.2-3). Other studies on agricultural innovations and water cults during this period have been made (see Haug 2012; Römer 2017; Rossetti 2020) but not in relation to the use of offering tables, which is what is proposed in this case study. Specifically, a series of objects which are related to both offering tables and water cults may be amulets shaped like offering tables as well as bronze pendants, previously researched by Teeter (1994), which will be outlined at the end (see 6.4.1). Nevertheless, previous to the current study no research has been carried out regarding the relation of amulets and bronze pendants to offering tables and the Nile cult.

6.3.   ANALYSIS: NEW TRENDS IN OFFERING TABLE DESIGN

The world emerges from a liquid universe (see 2.5-6), creating a symbiosis between nature and culture. The animation ceremonies in the cult of the dead and that of the living is a representation of this symbiosis. The life-giving flow of water guarantees the germination of vegetation from the primordial waters, just like the foundations of the temple give it life (Bonhême 1995: 137). Similarly, this process is represented on offering tables, representing the implications of a liquid universe and our connection with it. Examples of these objects include offering tables incorporating sacred lake design and features related to water management, offering tables from the region of Mendes, and the rare group of pottery offering trays dating to the PP. Nilometers, sacred lakes, large scale state sponsored irrigation projects in the Fayum, Osiris and his link with the flood and Nile inundation festivals are all referenced by these later offering tables in specific places or perhaps from specific workshops or groups of individuals.

Nilometers resemble a stepped-descending corridor leading to Nile waters below. Sometimes the steps contain records of Nile levels in cubits, such as the one present on Elephantine Island at the 1st cataract, used during Nile festivals from the Ramesside Period onwards in devotion to the god Hapi (Bonhême 1995: 132). The pharaoh was required to give offerings twice a year during the annual flood and at various "thresholds", specifically at Thebes, Gebel Silsileh, and Memphis (Bonhême 1995: 132). As stated on the Kawa Stela near Karnak, the king was responsible for the discipline of the floods both ritually and technically[60] (Bonhême 1995: 132). The shape of nilometers

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[60] "His Majesty ordered to institute offerings for Amon, King of the Gods, for Hapy, father of the gods, and for the college of the gods of the South who preside in the flood, twice a year, at the time of the holy water of Silsileh (- flood), magnificent place, and has (the time or) the water is low" (Stèle de Ramses II, 1. 8-9: Barguet 1952, 56 (text) and 61-62 (trans.).

and the fact that they may be linked to the royal cult and its involvement in the provision of the Nile flood may be reflected in offering tables dating to the PP. Nile water was considered to be a purifying agent as well as having rejuvinative powers and was therefore used in various religious ceremonies (Koenig 2005: 91-105). The floodwater itself was stored in sacred pools in temple complexes, especially during the G-RP. The waters were also said to have a fertile effect and reports are known of women bathing in them for these purposes (Perdrizet 1921-22: 62; Prell 2009: 227).

With the rising influx of Greek populations within Egypt during the time of the Ptolemies came a revolution in water-management, specifically within the eastern edges of the Fayyum. With its previous centre being Shedat during the MK, a new thriving community rose in the same region now called Arsinoe or Krokodilopolis in the 4th - 3rd century BCE (Römer 2017: 171; Haug 2012: 59). The Fayyum was already described as a waterscape of canals and drains by Herodotus (484-425 BCE) two hundred years prior to Egypt's greatest pre-modern agricultural expansion during the PP, (Haug 2012:58; Herodotus, *Histories* 1972:189). Even though it is believed that this was an agricultural revolution, irrigation systems endured little change until the modern dams of the 20th century (Haug 2012: 40-45; Herodotus, *Histories* 1972:136). However, the Fayyum reflects a new irrigation system which was no longer entirely dependent on the levels of the Nile Flood, but rather concentrated all its canal irrigation systems on Lake Moeris, which unfortunately was subject to desiccation and salinification processes due to the restriction of the Nile waters (Haug 2012:70-74).

Perhaps what truly shows a change in water management in the Greco-Roman era is the state-organised annual cleaning of the canal-systems known as *penthemenos* (Haug 2012: 58). Canals had to be maintained, especially in the newly founded settlements in the Fayyum since their irrigation system was highly dependent on the newly constructed canals linking the areas to the main branch at Bahr Qasr el-Banat. This work had to be carried out by the locals; every male inhabitant was required to conduct five days of cleaning every year prior to the flood. Basin irrigation was then practiced with ease, as it was in the rest of Ptolemaic-Roman Egypt (Römer 2017: 186-187). The basins filled with water of the Nile flood, called περιχώματα or ὑδροστάσια, were significantly larger in Fayyum when compared to basins located in other parts of Egypt (Römer 2017: 187).

In anticipation of the flood, the Egyptians had to ensure its efficacy through ritual action combined with practical preparations involving the construction of irrigation fields, canals, and basins (Haug 2012: 40-45; Prell 2009: 213; Bonhême 1995: 137-138). Ritual preparation mostly consisted of festivals, which were held during the inundation period (see 7.4.4b). During the flooding season most agricultural work came to a halt, allowing the rural population to participate in festivals which involved the use of inundation waters for healing as well as fertility purposes (Prell 2009:215; Bonneau 1964: 130). Since the early PP, libation rites have been handed down for the regeneration and rejuvenation of the dead, which were carried out using waters from the inundation (Blackman 1921: 52). These waters were so important in the G-RP, that they were exported to sacred sites throughout the Mediterranean world, especially with the spread of the Isis cult (Prell 2009: 227; Turcan 1996: 79-85, 111).

In principle, the pharaoh was the main individual responsible for the occurrence and quality of the Nile flood. He was during the early Pharaonic Period while alive equated to Hapi, rather than Osiris or Horus (Prell 2009: 231). When connected to the Nile flood, the king acted as a mediator between men and gods, ensuring the inundation through the provision of offerings. After his death the Pharaoh became equated to Osiris and in this shape an unceasing source of the flood (Prell 2009: 232). This relationship was highly emphasised throughout the PP (Prell 2009: 232). The king became

to be considered as more of an overseer of the Nile rather than the actual personification of the Nile flood. He represented the power over it, just as Isis was envisioned as its mistress and Serapis envisioned as the dimension of water and grain (Prell 2009: 324). Osiris' association with grain and rejuvenation was further strengthened during the G-RP. The Greeks associated Demeter's daughter Kore with Osiris since her return from the realm of the dead was considered to be a symbol for fertility and renewal, just like the annual inundation of the Nile (Vandrope & Clarysse 2019: 426).

Osiris' connection to fertility as well as his role in securing harvest in ancient Egypt can be attested to ritual practices involving the creation of "corn-mummies". The emergence of life from the Osiris figurines symbolised an awakening of nature and the rejuvenation of the land (see 2.6; 7.4.4c). On the 22nd day of Khoiak these mummy figures were placed upon the sacred lakes within the temples (Goddio & Massion-Berghoff 2016: 141).

The flood waters have been interpreted as originating from the summer winds which over forty days came in from the northwest. (Haug 2012: 43-45, after Herodotus, *Histories* 1975:136-8). The winds brought "cool water" which were associated with Osiris, while the hot winds prior to the flood were associated with Seth (Prell 2009:216-217). Creation stories were reflected by ritual utensils, especially the rural offering trays and soul-houses discussed in the previous case study (see 5.6). Rural communities attentive to the workings of nature (i.e, changes in wind directions, water levels, the colour of the Nile waters, etc.) prior to the Nile flood.

The origin of the Nile was in ancient Egyptian texts described as having been issued from Osiris' left leg (Sauneron 1952: 42). Osiris' role in the creation of the Nile flood is often represented in offering tables and similar materials of later periods, though earlier tables also reflect these notions, although more subtly as in the frequent representation of a bovine leg on the left side of the table surface (see 3.4.3.4; 5.5).

Figure 6.12 Seal impressions depicting the god Hapi holding an offering table with ꜥnḫ signs and a wꜣs-scepter (E.GA.5661.1943, Gayer-Anderson Collection, Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge).

Devotion to the Nile changed significantly over time (Prell 2009:219). The Nile cult could be devoted to personifications of the Nile, or to the flood itself. During the LP, the god Hapi rise in popularity, attested in religious and temple texts, as well as processions of Hapy-figures from different nomes (Baines 1985; see Lists E in Papyrus Harris I: Grandet 1999; Figure 6.12). The most likely definition of Hapi's role is that he was considered as a personification of the inundation. The root of his name (ḥꜥpy) may be related to the Egyptian verb "appear" (ḫꜥỉ – Faulkner 1969: 229) or "become" (ḫpr – Faulkner 1969: 232) (Prell 2009:219). Hapi is often depicted holding an offering table and also became a common iconographic element on offering tables themselves, especially at the base and in the vicinity of the external spout structure (e.g., see CAT ID167). Prior to the G-RP, Hapi was rarely depicted on his own but incorporated in processions with similar Nile deities as well as most of the fertility gods in the Egyptian pantheon (Prell 2009: 220).

Celebrations in honour of the Nile flood in the G-RP are known to have taken place throughout the Nile Valley (cf. Harris Papyrus BM EA999, 37b, 16; 54 a, 2 in Grandet 1999: 274-297)[61]. Evidence of this is apparently attested at Elephantine, Thebes, Tuna el-Gebel and Akhmim (Prell 2009: 238). There is less evidence from Memphis mostly due to the fact that Nile celebrations were overshadowed by the Serapis cult (Bonneau 1971: 53). The most famous Nile festival is that of the Khoiak in honour of Osiris, sometimes also known as "Ceremony of bringing forth the Nile" (see Chassinat 1966-68; 7.4.4b).

On the 1st day of Khoiak, further processions took place and women performed symbolic rituals referred to as "opening the womb of the woman" (Alliot 1949: 225; Prell 2009: 240). Herodotus describes ritual processions at Bubastis, where naked women would be involved in certain fertility rites (Herodotus, *Histories* 1975: 152-153). These rites would possibly re-enact the posthumous procreation of Horus after Isis recovered Osiris' corpse in the Nile (Herodotus, *Histories* 1975: 153). Birth houses were incorporated in the construction of Greco-Roman temples, such as those present in temple complexes at Dendera, Edfu, and Philae. These were intended for the annual re-enactment of the conception of Horus identified with the living pharaoh (Daumas 1958). Purification and ritual fertility scenes point towards a need to combine the two via the use of utensils such as the offering table.

The original form of the Nile flood festivals was celebrated at least as far back as 2778 BCE (Prell 2009:243). And it was not until the building of the Aswan dam that these rituals ceased to exist in Egypt (Prell 2009: 250). The Nile festivals were public but have seldom been documented. The most well-documented ritual action would be to throw offerings into the Nile and the collection of flood waters[62] (Prell 2009: 245). Processions involving the statues of gods are also documented and in the Roman period flood waters were collected and kept in Hydreion vases used in temple ritual (Prell 2009: 245). Offerings included bread, beer, vegetation, various meat cuts, dates, grapes, oil, honey, milk and onions (Bonneau 1964:398; Grandet 1999:274, 297). Offering tables do during this time period not usually contain depictions of such offerings, though they had been common during previous centuries (Graph 6.2 above). An exception would be offering tables which imitate ancient designs (e.g., C2 Types: CAT ID133, CAT ID189, CAT ID276) like two tables in the sample with a similar design from unknown origin, potentially dating to the LP (see Figures 6.13-14). The offering tables during the G-RP are very simplistic in their depiction of offerings, usually limited to round bread and ritual utensils such as *ḥs*-vases. This may indicate a break from an actual offering process, which was replaced by a sole act of libation, a very Greek phenomenon within ritual practice.

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[61] Petrie (1911) assumed that there were 106 shrines dedicated to Hapi along the Nile. His assumption was based on extensive offerings described in the Papyrus Harris, Egypt's largest papyrus which in great detail lists temple endowments and summarises the reign of Rameses III (1186-1155 BCE). The papyrus mentions that offerings were made at each "towing stage" *shonei*, along the Nile. Based on Herodotus mentioning that each shonei measured approximately 60 *stadie*, Petrie calculated that between Asawn and the sea there were at every six or seven miles a small shrine "with a priest endowed with a small provision to provide for the honouring of Hapi by passing travellers". Petrie (1911): 4-5.

[62] Petrie (1911) states the following regarding offerings during Nile Festivals (based on excerpts from the Harris Papyrus): "Offerings were *ḥtp* tables set out with bread meat and rakusu cakes, 15 of which were offered on the great day, with thirty more similar *ḥtps* "of gold" probably gilded baskets containing the offerings. Petrie (1911): 1.

Figure 6.13 (left): Granodiorite offering table (C2) inscribed with an offering formula dedicated to Osiris from Khensemhat. Unknown origin dated to the Late Period (C1757 Museo Egizio Torino). CAT ID193. Photograph by author.

Figure 6.14 (right): Granite offering table (C2) from an unknown origin dated to the Late Period (724-333 BCE) (NME049 Medelhavsmuseet Stockholm). CAT ID248. Photograph by author.

6.3.1. Sacred Lake Designs and Water-systems from the Ptolemaic Period onwards

A trend which became popular in offering table design towards the end of the MK is a greater emphasis on water features, such as canals and basins. From the late Ramesside period onwards, water features centred around water retention such as deeper basins (and aquatic iconography) continued the trend in a different manner (see Table 6.1). This is especially evident from the fact that offering table sunken areas and basins were becoming deeper (Hölzl 2002: 41). Due to the emphasis on water features and the increased number of *ḥtp*-signs, "gussets" were added on either side of the spout and, therefore, provided additional space for inscriptions (Hölzl 2002: 41). The steady rise in basin depth from the SIP onwards reflects the decline of canal depth, showing an emphasis on basins rather than canals up until the G-RP. Although a small sample, the data appears to show deeper features linked to water retention in these later periods and more shallow canals (Table 6.1, marked in blue; see 3.4.3.3; 7.4.2).

Table 6.1 Average basin and canal depth of the offering tables and basins present in the database.

Time Period	#Tables with Basins	Average Basin Number	Average Basin Depth	#Tables with Canals include %	Average Canal Number	Average Canal Depth
OK	52	2*	4.2	4	1	0.5
FIP	8	2	2.8	4	3	0.9
MK	32	3**	1.7	33	2	1.2
SIP	2	2	3.8	2	2	3.7
NK	12	2**	3.3	23	1	0.5
TIP	6	1**	3.2	7	1	0.7
LP	7	3	4.2	31	2	0.5
PP	14	2	2.1	18	2	0.5
GR	8	2	3.1	11	2	0.4
*has 1-2 outliers of tables with over 10 basins						
**has 1 outlier with 20-40 basins						

The basins incorporated in offering table design dating to the TIP tend to be deep and include cartouches as well as ritual utensils (e.g., CAT ID343, fig. 14 below, with a basin depth of 12 cm), a common element in the OK which tends to disappear. Basins in the form of cartouches, possibly illustrate the royal dominance over natural, cosmic elements such as the Nile waters and the stored creative potential in the primordial waters of Nun (Figures 6.15-16). The trend for deep basins

continues well into the LP as seen in an offering table found near the temple of Nectanebo (Sacred Animal Necropolis) at Saqqara (Figure 6.16).

Figure 6.15 (left): Cartouche-shaped offering basin (A1) from Kafr Ammar, dated to the Third Intermediate Period (23rd-25th Dynasty) (E.180.1912 Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge) CAT ID343. Photograph by author.

Figure 6.16 (right): Offering table found near the Temple of Nectanebo at Saqqara, dated to the Late Period (400-300 BCE) (E.4.1971 Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge) CAT ID348. Photograph by author.

A significant new feature on offering tables dating to the later periods are basins containing staircase(s) which may resemble sacred lakes. However, there is one potential example of a pottery offering basin shaped like a sacred lake dating to the NK[63] from an unknown provenance, now in the *Museo Egizio Torino* (S01188; Figure 6.17). During the NK, sacred lakes began to be increasingly included in temple complexes, with the earliest attested example at the temple of Amun at Karnak dating to the reign of Tuthmosis III (1479-1425 BCE). Most temples incorporated a sacred lake intended for the purification of priests as well as providing a constant source of water for libation rituals to be performed in the daily cult (Sauneron 2000: 77-78; Geßler-Löhr 1983: 144–145).

Figure 6.17: Pottery offering basin from unknown origin, dated to the New Kingdom based on Schiapparelli's 1900-1901 purchasing campaigns at various locations in Egypt (S01188 Museo Egizio Torino) CAT ID154. Photography by author.

Sacred waters were drawn from the river at the temples' access point to the Nile using specific constructions intended for ritual use. These structures not only included sacred lakes, but also wells, docks, cisterns, and *nilometers*. Underground, chthonian waters were during the Nile floods, seethed up through foundation cracks filling lakes, wells and pits where effigies and other votive

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[63] This item is part of a large sample of 1400 objects purchased by Ernesto Schiaparelli between 1900 -1901 in Egypt. These objects are labelled as "Inventario Manuscritto" at the Museo Egizio in Turin and inspired Schiaparelli to undertake his archaeological endeavours from 1903 onwards (Ugliano & Sbriglio 2015: 278-79). The items lack a particular archaeological context and dated based on similar objects from that time-period within the Schiaparelli collection. It may be argued that this terracotta basin dates to the NK based on the evidence of red pigment present on the outer surface, however it may easily be from later periods when sacred lake designs were certainly more common.

objects were thrown containing divine, sacred energies (Bonhême 1995: 138). Sacred Lakes are known from the Great Temple of Amun at Karnak (18th Dynasty), Tod, Medamoud, Medinet Habu, Dendera, Tanis, and Sais (Bonhême 1995: 130). The lakes were artificially constructed and equipped with lateral staircases. The water varied in depth according to the height of the groundwater and Nile flood (Bonhême 1995: 131). The lakes did not only have a cosmological significance, recalling the primordial waters of Nun, but were also a key feature during important ritual processions and reenactments such as the mysteries of Osiris during the 24th day of the month of Khoiak at Karnak (see 2.6; 7.4.4b). Effigies of Osiris were placed upon the lake by the pharaoh in his role as Horus (Bonhême 1995: 131; BoD Ch. 125 "coffin on the edge of the *mꜣt*-basin (Herakleopolis) at the time of the evening meal"). Purification rituals were also performed by priests within the lake, as mentioned in The Golden Ass/Metamorphoses in Apuleius XI, where Lucius is purified before being initiated into the mystery cult of Isis (Apuleius, *XI* 1984: 231-236).

Nilometers are another common architectural feature pertaining to water. Although they may have a practical use by measuring the annual levels of the inundation, they were not necessarily used as a means of informing agricultural communities. As summarided by Kemp (2006: 11): "There was a professional interest in the maximum height of each year's inundation. Records of this were carved on suitable markers: Nilometers or temple quays. But there is no evidence that the figures were used in calculations to assess crop yields, although people must have been well aware of the consequences of flood levels." Pseudo-nilometers are also commonly found in Greco-Roman temples, which are wells containing a staircase, but lacking any measurements or scales by the steps. These are present at Edfu and have been described on the temple walls as being used for the supply of water for specific rituals to be performed at the temple (Edfu VI, 8, 1-3 (Kurth 2021); Bonhême 1995: 132).

In the sample, there are three types of "sacred lakes" depicted on the PP offering tables, two of which will be discussed below (see Table 6.2):

Table 6.2 Types of offering tables/basins with a "sacred lake" design in the database.

1) A single basin with a descending staircase from the external spout structure end of the table (2/11 offering tables with sacred lake design, 18%).
2) A basin with two to four interlinking staircases lining the basin walls. This is the most common basin design in Ptolemaic Period offering tables in the sample (8/11, 73%).
3) Larger offering table basins with two to six staircases (1/11, 9%).

Type 1 basins may be similar to the T-shaped pools present in numerous temple complexes from the NK onwards. The two offering tables with this type of basin are both from Tell el-Rataba in Lower Egypt (Figure 6.18-19). The site was a major outpost during the NK, with an Amun temple but also has material from the 29th and 30th dynasties. The offering tables in the sample are small (classified as portable and free-standing) and are made of porous limestone. They may originate from a votive cult connected with a temple or a local cult of officials positioned in the outpost. This first type of basin with a single staircase resembles the previously mentioned nilometers which had a strong link to sacred lakes and associated water management.

Type 2: There are numerous (8) offering tables in the sample dating to the PP with a central basin and an interlinking staircase, an item from Armant dating to the PP (BM, EA1778; Figure 6.20) and a similar offering table also from Armant (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen AEIN1682), not classified as a sacred lake due to the lack of a staircase (Figure 6.21). This offering table is inscribed with two offering formulae dedicated to the "Great Cow" Ta-ast, who is believed to have given birth to the Buchis Bull, incarnation of the fertility god Montu, who was venerated in the ancient city of Armant:

> *"An offering which the King gives, consisting of bread, wine, oxen and fowl (to) the Great Cow, who gave birth to Re, the Mother of Buchis, the Living Ba of Re, the Herald Re, Wah-ib-re in eternal joy".*

> *"An offering which the King gives, consisting of food, provisions and every good thing to the Great Cow, who gave birth to Re, whose name is Ta-ast. The man from Djamet, before Osiris, the Great, Foremost in the Necropolis in Eternity."*

The offering table in the British Museum contains a similar inscription in the form of a prayer to the Buchis bull. The offering tables were accordingly used in association with the Buchem, the necropolis of the Buchis bulls. This was a common practice from the LP onwards, as is evidenced in the animal cult at the Sacred Animal Necropolis at Saqqara. Votive offerings as well as libation rituals were performed and offered at the shrines of mummified animals. Basins on these offering tables may symbolise the purification elements in the sacred lakes present within the temples.

A common provenance for sacred lake offering tables in the sample (4) is Dendera. The Hathor temple at Dendera dates to the G-RP and incorporates a sacred lake. Surrounding the temple are also several Osiris chapels involved in the celebration of the Khoiak festival during which the mysteries of Osiris were performed, most likely using sacred water from the artificial lake at the temple (2.5; 7.4.4b-c). The offering tables from Dendera have a similar design to the actual lake, including a small square basin with four interlinking staircases, recalling the staircases incorporated in the sacred lake. Both have two spouted $ḥs$-vases with streams of liquid connected to the square basin and across four round breads at the centre. Liquid pours from the vases onto the central offerings, all connected to the sacred lake at the top of the table. On either side of the vases are lotus flowers, considered to be symbols of rejuvenation. At the very centre is a piece of flesh and the sacred waters in the lake. The entire table emphases the libation process and activation by the waters from the basin (lake). One of the two offering tables, OIME5007 at the Oriental Institute Chicago (Figure 6.23), seems to be an imitation of an offering table (98.4.64) at the MET New York (Figure 6.24). This may be deduced from the execution of the design, since the images seem to be scratched crudely into the sandstone and the design does not include all the iconographic elements present in the MET example. This indicates that it might not have been made in the same workshop, perhaps it was commissioned by someone of another social status who nevertheless wanted to include all of the iconographic elements pertaining to the Dendera cult. However, the palm decoration on the OIME5007 may have been executed at a later date since it indicates a later Roman Isis cult. Nevertheless, both tables may testify to a localised religious tradition. A similar design is featured in offering table OIM4943 also at the Oriental Institute of Chicago, which was initially from an unknown provenance, but after closer inspection it appears to belong to Petrie's finds at Dendera, precariously dated to the PP (Petrie 1898: pl. XXVa; Figure 6.25).

Instead of the water flowing into a basin, as in earlier tables, the water flow of these tables is directed towards an external spout and thus the water stream was directed towards the receiver of the offerings instead of being stored in a basin reminiscent of a "sacred lake". The water canals of these specific tables have the shape of lotus stems, a plant that is a symbol of rejuvenation as well as the primordial waters, as evidenced in Nun bowls of the Ramesside Period. In simpler terms, the water from the sacred lake flows along the spout when the table is inclined, causing the lotus stems to function as channels (see 7.4.2).

Figure 6.24 Limestone offering table from Dendera dating to the Ptolemaic Period (Petrie 1898) (OIM4943 Oriental Institute Chicago).CAT ID302. Photography by author.

It appears as though the sacred lake basins emphasise already "charged" waters, rather than a previous need for "activating" waters. They nevertheless still represent sacred landscapes as well as "processing sites" since sacred lakes were constantly used by priests for purification purposes, as well as providing water for the execution of temple rituals. Incorporating them on funerary offering tables provides a direct link not only to the sacred landscape but they also indicate a flow of rejuvenation waters. This is evidenced in offering basins with an external spout structure with palm designs, a constant source of regenerative and nurturing powers (Figures 6.26-29).

Most offering basins in the sample shaped as sacred lakes are portable (i.e., mobile) and may thus be due to their size even be considered as votive items (see 3.5.2). They are significantly worn, perhaps an indication of a constant use of liquids. Nevertheless, their standardised shape, design as well as miniature size may indicate their use as votive gifts, such as the previous examples from Esna (see 3.3.1, 6.2.3). They are made of sandstone, an indication that they may derive from Upper Egyptian provinces. The fact that they are heavily worn may be indicative of depositional processes,

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or that they have been placed in areas exposed to the elements, however, it cannot exclude the possible frequent use of liquids in ritual contexts, or that they may have been deposited in the numerous structures containing water within temple complexes.

Figure 6.25 (left): Sandstone offering table from unknown origin dating to the Ptolemaic Period (EA554 British Museum London).CAT ID122. Photography by author.

Figure 6.26 (right): Sandstone offering table from unknown origin dating to the Ptolemaic Period (A1106a KHM Vienna).CAT ID316. Photography by author.
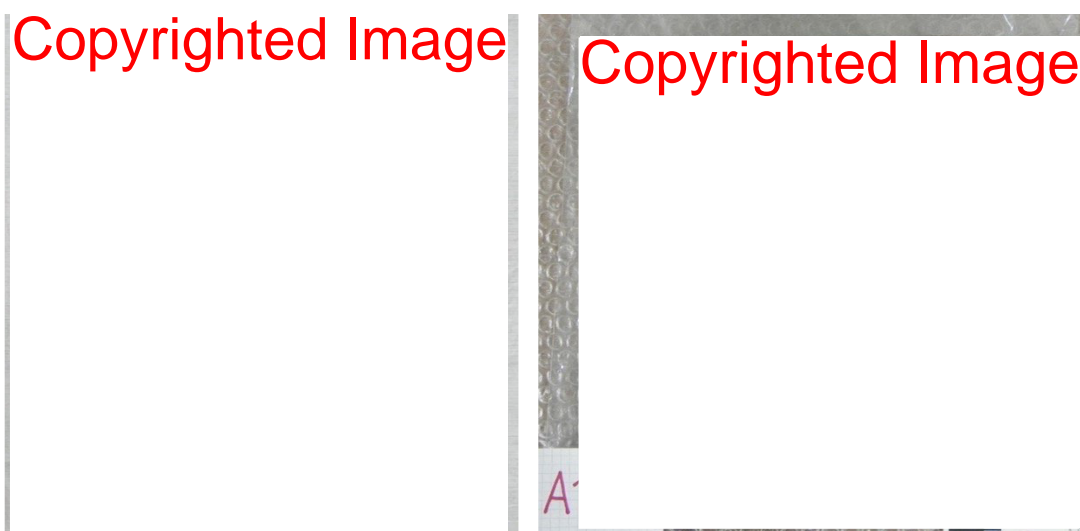
Figure 6.27 (left): Sandstone offering table from unknown origin dating to the Greco-Roman Period (09.889.807a Brooklyn Museum New York). CAT ID289. Photography by author.

Figure 6.28 (right): Limestone offering table from unknown origin dating to the Greco-Roman Period (F 1995/3.1 RMO Leiden). CAT ID201. Photography by author.

6.3.2. The Nile Cults and the Mendes Maze Tables

A unique group of limestone offering tables from the region of Mendes dating to the $2^{nd} – 3^{rd}$ century CE may reflect notions regarding the Nile cults and their connection to the god Hapi. Vivian Hibbs (1985) studied 18 of this type of "libation tables", two of which are present in the current sample (Figure 6.30). Among them an offering table 70.135 (Brooklyn Museum, New York) contains an intricate labyrinth canal design, creating seven closed sunken areas,

each containing an iconographic representation of offerings, aquatic animals, and vegetation in raised relief. There are two protruding structures on one end, each containing a drainage hole. Hibbs (1985) describes the labyrinth design on these tables as meanders in the form of "rectilinear ornamental bands". Such meandering patterns are commonly found in objects from the Aegean region dating to as far back as 6000 BCE (1985:42). Several of the tables studied by Hibbs (1985) are equipped with a base decorated with spouts in the form of ram-horned lions (e.g., JE52519 at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo) often flanked by Bes figures. A basin may be present in the very centre of the table, containing a single staircase leading down to a crocodile, a design similar to the Ptolemaic offering tables described earlier. As in the example present in the sample (Figure 6.30), offerings may be present in the form of bread or liquids receptacles, as well as vegetation such as "rosettes" and lotus flowers (Hibbs 1985: 8). Aquatic animals are common, especially crocodiles, frogs, and fish.

Figure 6.29 Limestone offering table, without provenance, dated to the Ptolemaic-Roman Period (70.135 Brooklyn Museum New York). CAT ID298. Photograph by author.

The Mendes tables are associated with local cults related to the Nile flood and a local deity called Banebdjed, "lord of the Ba of Djedet", probably alluding to the town of Djedu, close to Osiris' cult centre[64] (Plutarch *Moralia V* 1936*:* 55). This is evidenced by the ram-headed lions present on most of the spouts. However, this deity is also represented as "the reproducer in the name of Menes, Khnum[65] who seeded gods and men"[66]. Contemporary with the appearance of these tables is the emergence of a cult revolving around Khnum as the Lord of the first cataract, making him fully in control of the stream of the Nile compared to any other deity. As Lord of the cataract, he is also Master of Hapi/Neilos, who is the fertilising water of the inundation.

The vegetation and offerings in the form of round bread may be a clear reference to the offerings thrown into the Nile in devotion to Hapi during Nile festivals (Petrie 1911: 1-11, see below). Flowers were particularly important in the Hapi cult from the NK onwards, as evidenced in the Temple of Amunhotep III at Wadi-Sebua: "I bring thee flowers that Hapi causes to grow, Amun"; "I bring thee all good and pure things that are in heaven and are produced by Hapi" (Leibowitch JNES 12

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[64] Djedu was called Busiris by the Greeks and was during the G-RP one of the most important centres of the Osiris cult. According to Plutarch, Busiris was the original birthplace of Osiris and also his final resting place (Plutarch, *Moralia V* 1936: 53).

[65] Khnum was widely worshipped on the island of Elephantine, where the priesthood were said to control Hapi's appearance from the so-called Two Caverns, i.e. the location where the god Hapi is rejuvenated. This particular location is of great importance for the Nile cult since offerings were made in order to invigorate the Nile stream. As a consequence of the Nile flood, the cubits would rise to 28 in the first cataract and 7 in the Nile Delta at Diospolis (Hibbs 1985: 176-77).

[66] Excerpt from The Great Mendes Stela (Ptolemy II Philadelphos, 284-246 BCE), translated by S. Birch, after a German translation by Brugsch-Bey, 1875 *Records of the Past*, Series 1, Vol. 8.

1953:109). Rosettes are depicted in reference to the 137 bouquets of flowers which were also thrown into the Nile (Leibowitch JNES 12 1953:109). Rosettes are also closely related to the fertility goddess Sehat and Hathor as evidenced on decorated menats, which are necklaces also used as rattles (Hibbs 1985: 70).

Crocodiles, frogs, and fish are depicted on the Mendes tables. As previously mentioned, fish cults were common all along the Nile, connected with life-force and protection. An example of this interconnection is the goddess Hatmehit with her cult centre in the area around Per-banebdjedet (later called by its Greek name Mendes). Her name translates as "foremost of the flood" or "chief of the flood". She apparently has a connection with Hathor, who also went by the name Mehet-Weret, "the great flood". The presence of fish on Mendes tables may be connected with this belief. Hatmehit was furthermore considered to be one of the consorts of the local deity Banebdjet (Wilkinson 2003: 228-229). Plutarch mentions that Osiris has a clear association with fish cults: "Of the parts of Osiris' body the only one which Isis did not find was the male member for the reason that it had once been tossed into the river and the *lepidotus*, the sea beam, and the pike had fed upon it" (Plutarch, *Moralia, V*: 47). This association to the member of Osiris is also an association to the rejuvenative qualities of fish and fertility, also evidenced on the 29 stelae recovered at Mendes illustrating the fan and fish as fertility symbols (Redford 2004: 32).

The labyrinth shape of the Mendes tables alludes to meandering movements of rivers and how the divine force from a central source spread throughout a landscape and fertilises it (Figure 6.31). The water process of energizing and activating liquids is what occurs on offering tables from the MK onwards. The canals and basins upon offering tables function as a means to spread divine energy across an entire landscape, energised by the very fertile depictions placed upon them. The water-process upon the Mendes tables according to Hibbs (1985), alludes to the inverse water-process commonly found in offering tables from the PP onwards. Liquids are poured into the central basins containing a staircase as well as a crocodile, i.e., the personification of the Nile and the force of the inundation (Hibbs 1985: 59). The liquids then fill the entire surface but are slowly released from an internal spout within the basin itself, flowing eventually through the ram-headed lion-shaped spouts. Hibbs (1985) claims that the central basin and its steps may be shaped like nilometers.

The crocodile may also be a reference to Sobek (present on 13 of the 18 tables described by Hibbs 1985), who is a symbol of time and eternity, fertility, resurrection, and rejuvenation of the Nile water (Dolzani 1961:116-120). The fact that a crocodile is placed in connection with a staircase that might symbolise a nilometer can be due to the fact that the animal was considered to be knowledgeable beforehand about the levels of the inundation. The crocodile "lays as many eggs as geese and by a sort of clairvoyance hatches them always beyond the line to which the Nile is likely to flood at any year when the Nile is likely to flood" (Pliny the Elder 1991: 118).
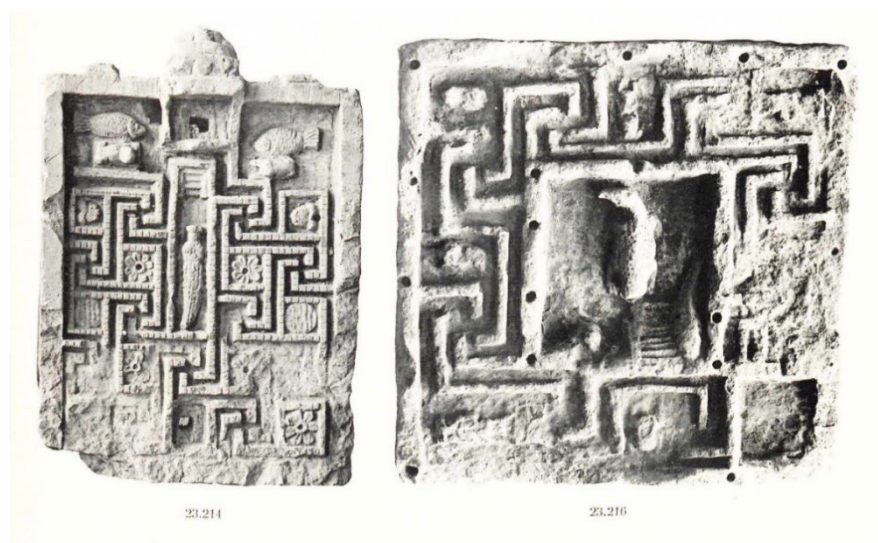
6.3.3. "Stirrup-shaped" Pottery Offering Trays and the Birthing Process

Four pottery offering trays in the sample have been described as "stirrup-trays" since they are shaped like stirrups on a horse-saddle (Petrie Museum UCL, Figures 6.32-35). Petrie categorised them as "horseshoe" types, but because the tray has a covered external spout structure, they can more accurately be described as stirrups. The trays almost function like funnels, with the spout containing a small drainage hole at each end. Nevertheless, the main shape of the tray is highly similar to that of pottery offering trays in the FIP and MK. The main differences are the iconographic elements present on the sunken tray area and the ritual function of the tray itself.

These objects have by Steven Quirke been dated to the PP although the provenance is not known (CAT ID85-7; Ivanov 2015:122). It appears as if these preliminary dates may be accurate since recent excavations by the Russian Archaeological Mission at Memphis have uncovered fragments of at least three pottery offering trays. Although they were found in disturbed layers, i.e., "re-deposition" or grave robbers' pits, they may nevertheless provide information regarding Memphite popular religious practice between the LP and PP (Ivanov 2015: 116-117). Accordingly, the time-period roughly corresponds to that suggested by the Petrie Museum and further analysis of similar objects during this particular time-period may show more definite links.

The excavations at Kom Tuman, a Late-PP administrative and military site in Memphis, uncovered household utensils of various production activities together with a significant number of finds pertaining to rural or domestic ritual practice (Ivanov 2015: 116). These included fertility figurines such as naked women and/or "megalophallic youths" (Ivanov 2015: 116). Ivanov (2015: 116) defines these objects as "connected to domestic workshops, to be votive offerings or a means of popular charms for fertility, prosperity, safety and well-being". It is therefore plausible to classify these objects as domestic ritual utensils rather than funerary utensils from the FIP and MK. They may be very similar to the offering trays found in military and/or domestic settings and refer to processing sites [see 5.7].

The four offering trays analysed at the Petrie Museum are all "stirrup-shaped", with a funnel, external spout structure and a sunken, open-ended tray area containing depictions of aquatic animals in raised relief. All are made with slightly finer coarseware compared to earlier trays, and show signs of having been slipped and treated with a surface coating such as red and/or white paint.

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White coating is common on LP and G-RP terracotta figurines (Ivanov 2015:121) (Figure 6.32). The trays contain the figure of a squatting person at the centre, or positioned on the external spout structure. The shape of the latter is different, as pointed out earlier, also since it may be "scoop" shaped, which is similar to the interpretation of horseshoe shaped trays as modelled after winnowing baskets (see 5.5.1). Ivanov (2015) presents an example of a fragmented offering tray from Kom Tuman (KT 14bis/S/0005) which is similar to one of the six offering trays at the Petrie Museum (UC74851), which seems to have been made by remodelling a water jug (Figure 6.32). The wheel marks are still present on both trays and the rim of the vessel was purposefully left in order to function as the external spout structure. Clay was then added to the broken and filed-down fragment to create the tray area (Ivanov 2015:118). The coarseware has been classified as Nile B2/C, very similar to that of the Nile C clay used for earlier trays.

Figure 6.31 (left): Pottery offering tray from an unknown origin dated to the Ptolemaic Period (UC74854 Petrie Museum UCL). CAT ID85. Photograph by author.

Figure 6.32 (right): Pottery offering tray from an unknown origin dated to the Ptolemaic Period (UC74855 Petrie Museum UCL). CAT ID86. Photograph by author.
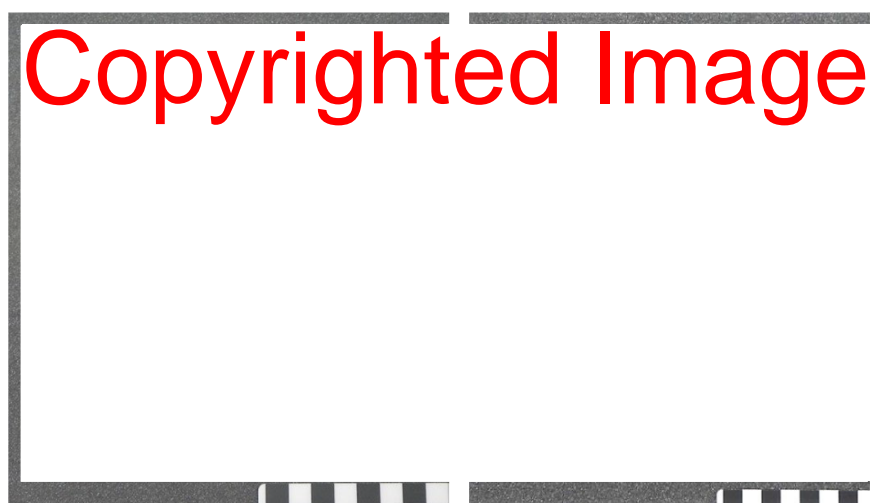
Figure 6.33 (left): Pottery offering tray from an unknown origin dated to the Ptolemaic Period (UC74856 Petrie Museum UCL). CAT ID87. Photograph by author.

Figure 6.34 (right): Pottery offering tray from an unknown origin dated to the Ptolemaic Period (UC74853 Petrie Museum UCL). CAT ID88. Photograph by author.
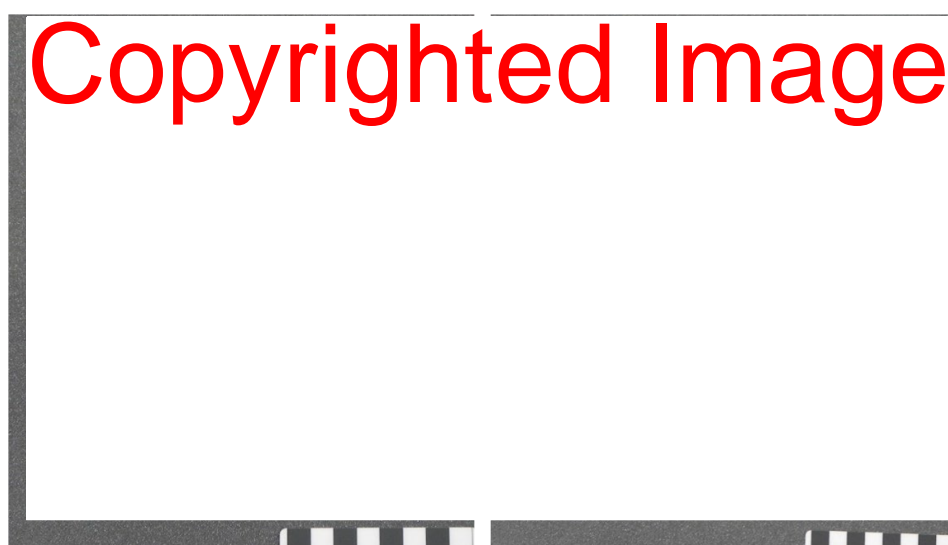
The main differences between pottery offering trays and soul-houses from the FIP, are mainly the iconographic elements. The tray area may be described as a pool containing fish and crocodiles along the edges facing the open-end of the tray and, therefore, the offeror (Figure 6.33). Images of aquatic animals do not appear on offering tables, nor on similar objects, until the LP (Graph 6.2 above). Another important element is the incorporation of naked individuals in specific positions.

In offering table UC74954, there is the depiction of a human figure, possibly a woman, with splayed legs and a central hole which creates the funnel in the external spout structure (Figure 6.32). Incorporated on the structure itself is another naked individual in a prone position, sharing the same head as the squatting woman. The frontal position may recall a typical "birthing squat" still common in rural communities during childbirth. Other than the birthing stance, offering tray UC74853 shows an individual in a prostrate position who in the Petrie Museum catalogue (Figure 6.35) is defined as a man. However, the fact that the position also recalls that of the goddess Nut, who lies prone over the world in numerous Pharaonic depictions of the Cosmos, may indicate the figure is a woman. Furthermore, the legs of the individual are encircled by lotus buds linked by a stem in a semi-circular position. This may recall the shape of the female reproductive system, with the buds representing ovaries. The individual is holding a fish as well as a frog, both animals associated with fertility and rejuvenation. Holding these animals may also be a reference to *cippi*, which are magical stelae from the Late Dynastic to the Roman period featuring Harpocrates, or Horus the Child, holding snakes, scorpions and lions while standing on two crocodiles. All except one of the offering trays in the sample from the PP had at least two crocodiles along the internal sides of the rim. The insertion of crocodiles on protective amulets, *cippi*, as well as healing statues, are symbols of defeated evil, or are at least important for protection, as well as healing.

The ritual use of these trays changed during this time-period, especially when considering the trajectory of the liquid once poured over the tray. Ivanov (2015) claims that the orientation of the offerings on pottery trays and soul-houses in the FIP and MK are directed towards the seat/throne/figure/structure. However, in reference to the offering trays and soul-houses in the sample, this is certainly not the norm. Most offerings are oriented towards the open-end of the tray (see 3.4.3.4; 7.4.4). Nevertheless, the main difference between the two sets of objects is that the water must have been directed towards the opposite end of the tray and through the external spout structure. The offerings are, therefore, always oriented opposite the spout end. Accordingly, the water must have been poured over the tray in such a way that it would flow from the spout end, covering the entire tray surface. If this process is linked to the iconographic elements present, it may mimic the process of childbirth, or creation, since in the three trays containing squatting figures, the hole is made between the individual's legs. It is as though the waters containing fish, lotus flowers, and crocodiles flow from the womb outwards rather than in the opposite direction. The entire tray may therefore function as the female reproductive system and mimic the moment of birth, while simultaneously simulating the flood.

A heavily worn offering table at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (B/2.1.3) from the TIP at Tanis, depicts iconographic elements which may be lotus buds in a similar form as those depicted on offering tray UC74853 (Figure 6.35). The canal formations in the table area (V-shaped) are also reminiscent of the Lisht offering tables in the MK (Figures 6.36-7; Table 3.47 in 3.4.3.3; Table 5.3 in 5.5.1). This canal formation with the central *ḥtp*-sign orientated directly at the fork of the canals may be a representation of the human reproductive process.

Figure 6.35 (left): Heavily worn offering table (C2) from Tanis dating to the Third Intermediate Period (B/2.1.3 Egyptian Museum Cairo). CAT ID371. Photograph by author.

Figure 6.36 (right): Fragmented offering table (B+C) from Lisht dating to the Middle Kingdom (CG23052 Egyptian Museum Cairo). CAT ID378. Photograph by author.

6.4. DISCUSSIONS: IMPLICATIONS OF NEW TRENDS IN OFFERING TABLE DESIGN AND EMERGING RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

The architectural elements in PP temples may reflect the growing popularity of a cult centred around the rejuvenative qualities of the Nile, distancing itself from the irrigation practices in rural areas and rather emphasising a cosmic relationship between the royal and the divine. Providing the river with products from processing sites such as bread, meat cuts, cultivated plants, etc., ensured the expanse of agricultural life and ritually optimised the flood waters. This may be the very ritual function of the Nile festivals and therefore the ritual utensils involved in its execution (see Bonneau 1971: 64-65). The three types of offering tables described above reflect new emerging religious trends between the TIP-G-RP, specifically features related to the Nile flood and its festivities, changes in the Osirian cult, and notions regarding the rejuvinative qualities of water.

By the end of the NK, the Nile flood was rarely attested to the primordial waters of Nun, however its importance came at its height in the PP and G-RP. A new expression emerged: $Nw\ wr$, which often is connected with Hapi ($ḥꜥpỉ\ wr$/ $ḥꜥpỉ\ ꜥꜣ$/ $ḥꜥpỉ\ ꜥꜣ\ wr$) (Claus 2005: 201-3). The Nile could also be understood as the "flesh" or "limbs" of Osiris. This explains why offering tables in the PP obtain a more "watery" aspect than before, containing deeper basins as well as an emphasis on vegetation. These iconographic elements are not only Osirian notions but are most importantly a combination of Hapi and the inundation waters and their association to Osiris. The Nile reveals Osiris' true nature by changing his human elements into a new conceptual entity, just like the transformation of the deceased. Osiris' association with the Nile flood is already mentioned in the Pyramid and further emphasised in the Coffin Texts (see 2.6; [App II:2.4.4]). At a certain point Osiris and Isis are accompanied by the god Hapi, and in the Delta region a syncretic connection of the two gods was formed: Osiris-Hapi (Claus 2005: 201-210). However, these notions disappear during the PP and become syncretised with the emergence of a new god Serapis, who gained popularity and became heavily associated with the Nile (Prell 2009: 223). Although Isis and Nephthys were still venerated, it was not until the time of Plutarch's *Moralia* from 100 CE, that the account of Osiris is once again related to the inundation and Osiris is not considered as solely a chthonic god (Plutarch, *Moralia V:* 82, 98-99). This is an interesting notion while considering the evolution of the offering table during these time periods. "Active" elements such as canals diminish significantly after the LP (see Graph 6.1 above), while stagnant water elements such as basins with steps and ritual utensils become common during the PP (see 7.4.3).

Offering tables and similar material during this period reflect Osirian notions to a greater extent than their predecessors. It may be interesting to note the absence of Osiris depictions on offering tables, while the god Hapi is an active participant in offering processions along the external sides of offering tables. This may be due to the active qualities of water as a unifying agent with its "active" source stemming from Osiris himself in the form of his efflux. He is the unifier of elements. It is the various elements represented upon the offering tables such as iconographic features and architectural features harnessing water which bring the different parts of Osiris together and when the inundation (i.e., active stream of water) is poured upon these utensils that the offering table itself becomes a rejuvenated Osiris (see 7.4.4; 7.5).

Together with deep basins, there is also a rise in iconographic elements representing vegetation or natural elements, such as papyrus reeds, lotus flowers and buds (Graph 6.2). A total of ten offering tables in the sample depict lotus flowers and other vegetation, there are no offering tables depicting lotus flowers or elements of vegetation dating prior to the NK. This may also illustrate a shift from practicality to figurative symbols of fertility and rejuvenation, emphasised and "activated" via the use of liquid receptacles. What seems evident is an increased emphasis on the rejuvenating powers of water as well as the contained creative potential of the primordial waters, like the previously mentioned Mendes tables.

Offering tables undergo a change from the late NK onwards. They move away from being practical objects involved in the provision of offerings to the deceased, into magical utensils used for rejuvenation of the dead, or of the offerings themselves. This is evidenced by the iconographic elements incorporated into Ptolemaic pottery offering trays as well as the features related to use and function. Iconographic elements and functional additions to the offering tables and similar objects create an entire reproductive process in some cases, symbolising the fertile qualities of the Nile.

6.4.1. Offering Table Models/Amulets

Most of the objects classified as miniature models and amulets date to the LP (45%), and they are mostly bronze offering table pendants. Most of these objects, unfortunately, lack a context, which is often the case in the archaeological record since they are easily displaced, portable and found in disturbed deposits.

Amulets

Fourteen objects are categorised as "amulets" in the database. They seem not to be as frequently attested as miniature offering tables/basins or bronze pendant offering tables. Amulets in the shape of offering tables have been identified, for example, in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (Reisner 1907: 157-158, Pl. XIX-XX) and UCL Petrie Museum (1914: 20, PL. V no. 68a-e). These are very few published examples and no amulet in the shape of an offering table has been recorded as found in situ. Out of the fourteen offering table amulets in the database, only two date to the MK (3.5.5). The other 12 amulets have been dated to no earlier than the TIP, in line with Andrews dating of them (1994: 93).

Three amulets in the database date to the TIP and they are all made of modelled, glazed faience, quadrilateral, and with a suspension loop. Two noteworthy examples in the sample are in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and consist of necklaces composed of green-glazed, faience offering table amulets linked together by a string (23.6.108; 23.6.109; Figures 6.38-9). Unfortunately, their context is lost since they are part of the Francis Martin Drexel collection which is spread across most of the US Egyptian collections (Harer 2008:111-113). Nevertheless, their composition illustrates how these types of amulets could have been worn and originally used. One of the necklaces is
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composed of thirty small offering tables with a sunken area and an external spout structure functioning as the suspension loop. As strung in modern times, the necklace is 30.3cm long.

All of the amulets in the sample are made from glazed composition, specifically blue or green faience (twelve in total). All except two of the amulets are of the same design, with a central circular or square raised area surrounded by a canal leading to an external spout structure. The circular feature probably represents a round bread, a very common feature on offering tables from the MK onwards (see 3.4.3.4). On one example at the Petrie Museum, possibly dating to the MK, the central square area has the remnants of four round breads painted in black pigment (UC 45199; Figure 6.40). The increased presence of offering table amulets coincides with a greater variability of amulet forms in the MK (Andrews 1994: 11). Arguably, the design of offering table amulets is similar to the TIP and LP amulets present in the rest of the sample. The fact that these amulets have this specific shape indicates that by the beginning of the 1st millennium BCE, the concept of "offering table" was engrained in the ancient Egyptian mindset; the general shape is understood as a square object, with an external spout and central raised area. The shape symbolises transformative power, a constant source of regenerative energy. The material itself and its vibrant blue colour further strengthens the definition of the offering table as a symbol of life and regeneration.

The suspension loops suggest that the amulets were to be worn around the neck, one of the most important points of the body linked to important airways, as well as one of the main points of sustenance (Pinch 2006:112). It is evident that the positioning of amulets on the body had a symbolic significance (Andrews 1994:7-8), especially within the funerary sphere. Mummies from the NK to the PP demonstrate specific patterns of amulet placement upon the body (Andrews 1994: 8).

Figure 6.39 (left): Fragment of a faience coated offering table amulet from an unknown origin, dating to the Middle Kingdom (UC45199 UCL). CAT ID83. Photograph by author.

Figure 6.40 (right): Green faience offering table amulet from an unknown origin, dating to the Late Period (15.43.60 Metropolitan Museum of Art New York). CAT ID273. Photograph by author.

Petrie classifies offering table amulets as "amulets of property", together with representations of offerings such as cattle, clothing, and various forms of vessels (Petrie 1914: 20). Amulets shaped as possessions served as substitutes for personal items accompanying the deceased within the tomb and have been termed *ktematic*, the Greek word for "property" (Andrews 1994:91). Despite the fact that these items may have been worn in life, their presence within the funerary setting reflects their significant symbolic meaning, indicating that they can be just as easily classified into Petrie's "amulets of power" (Andrews 1994:91). The bovine leg, for example, is classified as a funerary offering, while at the same time it is a symbol of power in its own right, with an essential role to play as a utensil during the OMC. Arguably, this is also the role of the offering table, which was not only used for the placement of offerings, but also became a symbol of a transformative process. Rare amulets such as offering tables were possibly worn for protection, as illustrated by the two necklace examples at the MET. This counters both Petrie (1907)'s and Andrews (1994)'s categorisation of such amulets as "objects of property" or just signs of offerings. They were probably worn as personal charms imbued with symbolic powers, especially since all the amulet forms in the sample indicate the presence of a suspension loop either in the form of a spout or placed opposite the spout end.

One amulet (MET 15.43.60; Figure 6.41) is rectangular, dated to the LP and equipped with a protruding external spout structure with a hole for suspension. On the amulet seven crocodiles are depicted all facing the spout end. They are made in raised relief and carved in detail, although their surface is quite worn. Crocodiles start to appear on offering tables and related objects from the LP onwards. This emergence is contemporary to the rise of *cippi*. Despite its ferocious qualities, which are shown being tamed by the Horus Child, crocodiles may symbolise fertility, rejuvenation, and the inundation waters of the Nile (Dolzani 1961:116-120). Ptolemaic cult centres venerating the crocodile were present at Fayum, Kom Ombo, and Esna. Another example is a Saite period amulet at the British Museum (EA17285, similar to 15.43.60 above, 26th Dynasty rectangular amulet with seven crocodiles and a suspension ring). By this time the crocodile was representative of the active qualities of the Nile flood and therefore the entire process on the offering table itself. It is the only aquatic animal which is represented on its own on offering table amulets and/or real-life tables/basins.

A further connection with the cippi may be in terms of the materiality of amuletic offering tables. Two amulets at the Petrie Museum dating to the LP are shaped like offering tables and are made of

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schist or siltstone, a rare material for offering tables as well as standard amulets (Figures 6.42-43). Both are slightly fragmented and have remnants of an external spout structure, now missing. Depicted at the centre of the table are ḥs-vases, round breads, and meat cuts. One of the amulets (UC45750) has the representation of an offering table with offerings placed upon it. At the opposite end of the spout are two holes for the amulet to be used as a pendant. The surfaces are very worn which may indicate use, especially since this stone is very malleable and susceptible to surface wear when in contact with water. Schist was believed to have magical properties and the earliest Egyptian amulets were made of green schist, indicating fertility and revitalization (Tyldesley 2011). A significant number of *cippi* in the Sternberg-el Hotabi (1999) study were made of schist, emphasising these objects' relationship to miniature cippi.

Figure 6.41 (left): Schist offering table amulet from an unknown origin, dating to the Late Period (UC45749 UCL). CAT ID81. Photograph by author.

Figure 6.42 (right): Schist offering table amulet from an unknown origin, dating to the Late Period (UC45750 UCL). CAT ID82. Photograph by author.
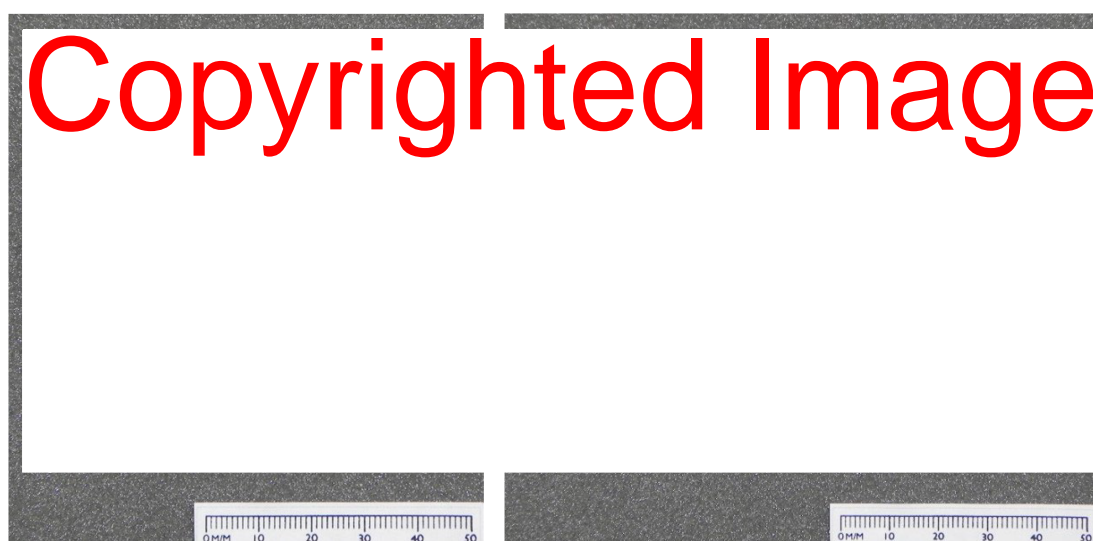
Like offering tables, cippi come in various shapes, sizes, and materials, as mass-produced crude objects or elaborate masterpieces (Sternberg-el Hotabi 1999). Larger *cippi* generally date to the NK, when they were integrated in state-temple contexts (Liesegang 2012). Temple *cippi* are often connected with basins containing water that had been poured into them (Watterson 1998). By the end of the NK, small *cippi* are becoming common and appear in cruder shapes, indicating they had become accessible to ordinary people and were associated with healing practices and emergency remedies (Forman & Quirke 1996; Sternberg-el Hotabi 1999). The popularity of *cippi* in domestic contexts is evidenced by amulets shaped like Horus stelae (Sternberg-el Hotabi 1999). This evolution is contemporary to that of offering tables and their uses may be similar.

Bronze Offering Table Pendants: Priests and Cosmogonies

A similar development from offering tables to amulets and miniature models may be evidenced in bronze offering table pendants and situla from the LP. Miniature bronze offering tables are surprisingly frequent in Egyptian collections across Europe and the US. In the database, there are eighteen bronze offering tables, fourteen of which date to the LP. Only two bronze models have provenance (Table 6.3; 3.5.5).

Table 6.3 Number of bronze offering table pendants present in the database according to context and time-period.

Time Period and Context	Total
Unknown	**2**
Late Period	**14**
Unknown	12
Medinet Habu West Bank Thebes	1
Saqqara (H5-1556)	1
Ptolemaic Period	**2**
Grand Total	**18**

Most of the bronze pendants have two suspension loops at the end of the table opposite the external spout structure which is usually covered by the representation of a frog. The suspension loops may occasionally contain the remnants of a bronze chain (e.g., OIM11393 CAT ID311, AEIN287 CAT ID226; Figure 6.44). The simplest design was a square offering table with a kneeling figure at the opposite end of the spout and in between two loops, directly positioned in front of offerings such as four round cakes. All the models have an external

spout structure, suspension loop(s), and a sunken area dedicated to offerings. Offerings mostly include round cakes as well as one or two *ḥs* vases. The general size of the amulets ranges from 1.6cm to 8.5cm in width, indicating that they were light enough to be worn. The main difference between these models and other miniaturized versions of offering tables is the inclusion of small figurines, individuals, gods and or aquatic lifeforms. All of the objects

in the sample except two have a shaven headed, kneeling man dressed in a kilt, with his arms usually by his side or engaged in an act of libation. In one or two examples, the figure is represented with outstretched arms in veneration and in one example the figure is keeping a circular tray of offerings upon his head

Figure 6.43 Bronze offering table pendant with chain from an unknown origin, dating to the Late Period (OIM11393 Oriental Institute Chicago). CAT ID311. Photograph by author.

(ÄM2749; Figure 6.45). The figure is positioned facing the offering area and the spout structure and is always aligned in the same direction as the frog placed upon the spout. Along the outer rim other figurines may be present in pairs, usually as representations of haloed baboons, jackals, felines and/or falcons, all facing the external spout structure. Obelisks may also be present at the corners of the table.

Figure 6.44 Bronze offering table pendant depicting a figure balancing a tray of round bread upon its head, facing a ḥtp-sign and two ducks. Unknown origin dating to the Late Period (664-332 BCE) (ÄM2749 ÄMP Berlin). CAT ID41. Photograph by author.

What appears to be the main difference between amulets in the form of offering tables and the bronze versions, is the frequent depiction of religious paraphernalia as well as deities exclusively venerated within the temple cult. The figures with shaven heads suggests that they are priests performing specific ritual acts and indicating their role in official temple cults, or that the offering tables were votive offerings at important religious sites, rather than funerary emblems worn by mummies or used as protective, personal amulets.

Teeter (1994) defines these objects as votive offering tables deposited at temples by devotees demonstrating their piety and compares them to the ritual use of contemporary situlae (1994: 262-264). If we relate these conclusions to the material and iconographic elements present on the objects, as well as to the context in which they have been found, this may certainly be the case. Seventeen of this type of pendant described by Teeter (1994) have been found in the animal necropolis at North Saqqara, while others have been found at Abydos and Medinet Habu (Teeter 1994:259; Green 1987: 116-20). Only two tables in the sample have a provenance; one from Saqqara, while the other is from Medinet Habu. The provenance of this type of object is rarely recorded since they have often been acquired by museums as gifts or were bought from private collectors (Teeter 1994:259). Nevertheless, considering the few that have been found in situ, it appears as though they were restricted to votive zones. The iconographic elements are similar to other contemporary types of votive objects commonly found in these contexts, like bronze *situlae*.

Situale are bronze receptacles shaped like an udder with a movable handle incorporated at the rim. They seem to have been used in mortuary contexts since they are represented in funerary processions when milk was sprinkled before the oxen, which pulled the sledge with the deceased along the path to the tomb (Lichtheim 1947: 172). However, they also appear hanging from offering tables, as depicted on a situla at the Oriental Institute in Chicago (OIM1351; Lichtheim 1947: pl. VIIA; Figure 6.46). It may therefore be plausible that the votive offering table may be a combination of the two. The ritual acts of individuals on votive offering tables are similar to how they are represented on situlae. Teeter (1994) highlights numerous examples in which the devotee is depicted pouring libations over an offering table and the animals represented in processions on situlae also correspond to those depicted on tables. These include baboons and jackals, as illustrated in a diagram of a situla in Teeter's publication. Baboons linked to worship of the sun disk are described numerous times in funerary texts, especially in exerts of the Book of the Dead, and

jackals tend to be responsible for accompanying the deceased and pull the sun bark into the evening (Teeter 1994: 261). The contrasting entities (baboons for greeting the dawn and jackals for greeting the dusk) together with the occurrence of falcons which represent the sun disk, are all intended to illustrate cosmic entities, rather than the funerary journey of the deceased. This is also in accordance with depictions of devotees in front of offering tables facing the Ennead.

Figure 6.45 Wooden stela of Zed-Khonsu-as-Ankh, daughter of the prophet Amon-Re-Suten Neteru from the Ramesseum in Thebes. It dates to the Third Intermediate Period (22nd Dynasty, OIM E1351 Oriental Institute Chicago). From the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago online catalogue.

In the LP, utensils such as situlas had a heightened role, especially during funerary processions as mentioned earlier. This action had a close association with the goddess Isis, who is often invoked on bronze offering table pendants of the LP (Lichtheim 1947).

Inscriptions are present on two objects in the sample, at the base of the table and consist of dedications to a deity, in particular Isis:

"Isis who gives life to bs-spd (?) daughter (?) of Pawenhatef, born of Nb-ḥwy"

Inscription upon bronze offering pendant EA64027 (CAT ID113) in the British Museum London, Translated by Leclère & Spencer 2014:64.

"Isis who gives life to (?) ptḥ son of pꜥꜣ"

Inscription upon bronze offering pendant EA66672 (CAT ID114) in the British Museum London (own translation) Transcribed by Andrews 1994: 94.

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The fact that both bronze offering tables depict individuals in acts of offering or pouring libations, indicates that these inscriptions were offering formulae or dedications to assign the votive objects to a specific deity on behalf of the devotee. The inscriptions invoke Isis to give life to the dedicator, thus alluding to the nurturing qualities of the goddess and the function of situlae as storage vessels for milk. According to Teeter (1994), "this association was transferred to the model tables as a dual symbol of offerings (ḥtp) and satisfaction (ḥtp) inherent in the shape of the table itself" (1994:262).

Another possible interpretation of the use of bronze offering table pendants may be related to their design, as well as their iconographic elements. Martin Bommas (2005) argues that bronze situlas may have been used as insignia, i.e., an identifier for the title of specific priests during this time period. This priestly title from the LP onwards mostly concerns the execution of water rituals. During the PP and G-RP perhaps with the influx of Greek notions as well as their organisation of the priesthood, new titles emerged and therefore no longer classified priests engaged in ritual activity under the umbrella term of "ḥmw kꜣ" (2005:257-272). In Greek they may be referred to as *choachytes/is*, who were responsible for taking care of the tomb and were required to perform libations, giving them the title of "water-pourers"[67] (Vandorpe & Clarysse 2019: 416-17). Based on the material, size and use of bronze offering table pendants they may just like situlae served as insignia for a specific priesthood, such as the *choachytes*. Accordingly, this group of objects strengthens the claim that offering tables became a concept reflecting several different socio-religious notions.

6.4. CONCLUSION: FROM THE PRACTICAL TO THE SYMBOLIC

Towards the end of the NK there appears to be a noticeable change in the design, use and production of offering tables. During this period there are two parallel lines of production, one that appears to be directed to official use, in line with the notion of "centralised production" (e.g., Saqqara, Abusir, Memphis, Thebes), while another trend pertains to a more personal and local industry (Dendera, Kom Tuman, Esna, Mendes). Funerary material culture was a mixture between innovation and revival of ancient Egyptian ritual practice, and it is common to see a juxtaposition of royal paraphernalia and pharaonic symbolism with more contemporary, personalised elements. This split may have widened already by the FIP with the emergence of pottery offering trays, and is further emphasised in later periods through comparison with 'foreign' cults and the consolidation/heightening of Egyptian characteristics. This period is defined as a period of change and contrasting religious traditions which is reflected on the offering tables especially since they are heavily influenced by their surrounding ritual context as illustrated in previous studies. Through this current investigation, it is possible to emphasise their versatility as well as their main role as their permanence in their main role as a transformative utensil via the use of water.

Those characteristics led to offering tables changing from being practical objects involved in the provision of offerings to the deceased, into magical utensils used for rejuvenation purposes through the power of water. This is illustrated in the change of water-flow upon offering tables, now spreading from internal structures, rather than being poured over depicted canal-systems (see 7.4.4). The role of Pharaoh as provider of divine force, and maintainer and guarantor for cosmic order was increasingly transferred to Osiris, as a divine force epitomizing and uniting notions related to fertility, death and resurrection, afterlife, vegetation, agriculture and

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[67] The coffin of Pakepu, dating to the LP (680-665 BC), describes the role of a "water pourer", employed to continue the cult of the dead after family members are no longer present.

above all the Nile and its recurrent, fecundating inundations. Notions reflected in religious paraphernalia like offering tables and amulets.

In parallel with this development, offering tables and trays became increasingly "watery" and "stagnant" in their design. "Active" elements such as canals diminished significantly after the LP, while stagnant water elements such as basins with steps and ritual utensils, combined with imagery depicting water creatures and vegetation became more common. The development of offering tables and trays after the end of the NK shows how versatile these objects were and how their design and use intimately mirror socio-economic changes and answer to the practical and spiritual needs of their users. These unique ritual utensils responded to several different socio-religious notions and eventually became magical objects in their own right.

7.1. INTRODUCTION

Offering tables, trays, soul-houses, amulets, and models may all be classified under the umbrella term "offering table" (see 3.3). Their function and purpose is kept separate/diverse, while their main connection remains their primary role in the funerary offering rituals. What becomes evident after placing them in their respective physical, social, and religious context, is that the diversity and multifunctionality of these objects reflect different religious traditions. In doing so, these objects become "place-makers", i.e., representing actual, conceptual, or practical landscapes that in turn became adapted to changing religious traditions (see 2.5.1; 5.5-6; 6.3). Diachronic analysis of the design of offering tables and similar *materia magica* implies a development from them mainly being tools for purification and ritual offerings to increasingly becoming multi-purpose objects, summarising and symbolising the entire mortuary cult and eventually being transformed into magical objects in their own right. The following discussion attempts to place offering tables in two main religious traditions: the funerary cult (including the ancestor cult and OMC) the main context in which offering tables are found, and concepts connected with the Eye of Horus, argued to be an ancient and encompassing theme.

7.2 FUNERARY CULT

> *"Make a good burial for NN after the landing [= death].*
> *You go to the necropolis and accompany NN to the beautiful West.*
> *You go to the God-Hall of Anubis (zH-nTr n inpw) in the western desert and accompany NN to the boat.*
> *You go upstream to the Unification Hall (ab-wsxt).*
> *Turn around, go downstream, and accompany NN to Sais.*
> *Go downstream to the Gates of Buto and come to Hwt-sr (?).*
> *Take NN downstream and make a halt in the middle of the water (nT).*
> *On land walk by the side of NN and grant him protection on the part of the people of Buto (P)."*

(TT 82, 100) Description of the coffin sledge trail from the place of death to the mortuary temple (Altenmüller 1972: 128).

7.2.1. Introduction

The funerary cult has been difficult to interpret due to a disconnection between text and imagery and real-life ritual actions. It is a dynamic process that changes overtime and includes various elements like the landscape, changing traditions and the ancestor cult. Texts and imagery have been analysed in order to establish specific action sequences that may be used to determine how, where and when the ritual took place. Altenmüller's (1972) analysis of the North Wall inside the coffin chambers of Pepi I's and Pepi II's pyramid complexes, identifies various ritual stages but not the actual sequence of the funerary ritual (Figure 7.1). The later stages of the ritual appear to be positioned beside a false door and offering niche indicating that most of the rituals might have taken place in the vicinity of this wall.

In Old Kingdom tombs, the funerary cult and its related recitations and ritual accounts are most often depicted and inscribed at the end of the accessible areas of a tomb complex. Such depictions and descriptions might occasionally have been preceded by imagery representing brewing

processes and other processing activities to ensure the efficacy of the ritual liquids used and described in textual accounts (Poo 2010: 3). Similarly, in MK tombs there is a separation between imagery depicting everyday activities (e.g., processing sites such as cattle herding, pottery manufacture and gardening, hunting scenes, and aquatic landscapes) and the actual funerary procession and mortuary rites. In the Tomb of Khnumhotep (BHIII) at Beni Hassan the deceased is shown in a watery landscape hunting ducks, on either side of the entrance to the corridor leading to the offering space and shaft areas. Such organization of imagery and text highlights the intimate connection between life and death. More recent studies emphasise the importance of the placement of text and imagery when attempting to define ritual actions (a "grammaire de la tombe" as opposed to the G-RP temples' "grammaire du temple" described by Derchain (1966) (Ayad 2021; 2004; Hays 2012).

Figure 7.1 Diagram of the location of Pyramid Texts relating to the later stages of the funerary ritual outlined by Altenmüller 1972: 108, Abb. 15.

Altenmüller (1972)'s reconstruction of the funerary cult (which we will return to) is highly dependent on texts and imagery. However, an important aspect of the ritual which often has been neglected is the importance of tomb fixtures and artefacts. Their placement within the outer and inner funerary contexts can provide significant insights into the various stages of the funerary ritual and its overall sequence. This may be mostly due to the fact that texts frequently have not been associated with their functional context, i.e., the actual tomb and related fixtures. The tomb in conjunction with archaeological evidence, such as processional routes, indicate often-disregarded active parts of a funerary cult which cannot be considered as being static, or limited to the recitation of texts, on the contrary - it was highly dynamic, characterised by movement and accompanied by ritual action (Ayad 2021). Funerary rituals included the OMC, processions, offerings and closing rites. If depicted in tombs, the funeral procession is usually positioned on the left side of the tomb chapel (viewer facing inside the tomb), while the OMC and other more specific rituals are depicted on the right side (Hays & Schenk 2007).

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Both the wider landscape and the offering table are tangible and essential parts of the funerary cult. The starting point for any kind of ritual is the tangible space of and the specific time for carrying out the sacred actions. This means that each section of the funerary cult can be spatially defined and reflected in structures like temples and tombs, circumscribing the ritual acts. Actual places like Abydos and Sais, overtime became mythologised/symbolic spaces or even equated with mythical/ritualistic acts. This means that the ritual landscape must be determined in order to define the ritual elements within it. Specifically, the wider landscape both outside and inside the tomb is *telescoped* onto the offering table as a ritual utensil and "place" (see 2.5.1).

7.2.2. The Ancient Egyptian Funerary Cult and Ritual Sequence

Table 7.1 is an attempt at outlining the textual ritual sequence of the funerary cult and how it is related to the archaeological context and associated paraphernalia. Interpretations are in reference to specific actions outlined in both textual and pictographic sources, as well as allusions which could reference objects such as wordplays connecting offering tables with symbolic places/beings. Based on Altenmüller's (1972) detailed description and analysis of the funerary process, 15 main stages in the Funerary cult may be identified along with places or object for reference (Table 7.1)[68]:

Table 7.1 Stages of the Funerary Ritual, mainly based on Altenmüller (1972), with additions from Quirke (2015), Hays (2010) Assmann (2005), and Willems (1988) and role of the Offering Table suggested (more detailed analysis in App II:2.4.1-2).

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1. *Death* (i.e., leaving the "house of the dead"): FUNERARY BIER [OT = house?]
2. *Travel to the "place of embalming (zḥ-nṯ ỉnpw) and "landing" (dw/rḏit r tꜣ, zmꜣ tꜣ)*: BOAT [OT = landscape of travel]
3. *"Disembarking" (prt ḥr tꜣ) and Coffin Sledge Trail (i.e., spr r zḥ-nṯr)*: SLEDGE [OT = place of arrival]
4. *Embalmment ("wrapping" wt) in the Anubis Hall or "place of embalmment" (zḥ-nṯr)/ "pure place" (wꜥbt/pr-nfr):* EMBALMING TENT and UTENSILS [OT = pure place]
5. *Stundenwachen or "Hourly Vigil"* [OT = focus for mourners and cult functionaries]
6. *Procession to Sau (Sais), Coffin Procession* [OT = landscape of travel]
7. *Procession to Pe and Dep (Buto), arrival at the "gates of the Divine Realm" (tꜣ dsr)* [OT = landscape of travel]
8. *Protection and Transformation Rituals at Sau (Sais), "the Divine Realm" (tꜣ dsr)* [OT = landscape of travel]
9. Procession to Iunu (Heliopolis) [OT = landscape of travel]
10. *Opening of the Mouth Ceremony (wpt r)* [OT = focus for rituals]
11. *The interment (ỉnt rd), "making a perfect burial" Tekenu and Canopic Trail* [OT = guarantor that rituals have been carried out = the past]
12. *Offering Rituals, "making an offering" (wꜣḥ ỉḥ.it)* [OT – continuously maintains future offerings]
13. *Funeral Procession and Tomb Rituals – "funeral" (ỉrt ḳrst nfrt), Devices Ritual (ḏbꜣw.t.t)* [OT = symbol for all rituals]
14. *Travel to Abydos, "statue ritual" (ꜣwt-ỉb-rꜥ)* [OT = landscape of the afterworld]
15. *Mortuary service, "coming at the voice" (prt-ḥrw)* [OT = focus for the service]

Each section indicates what the Offering table is representing within the ritual practice and thus demonstrates how deeply embedded it is as a symbol of all the rituals.

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[68] For a detailed overview of the funerary cult sequence with references to text as well as the various implements used see App II:2.4.1-2.

Out of all the rituals performed the OMC is the culmination of the funerary process of transformation and therefore has additional emphases on the Offering Table. They can be summarised in the following table showing that the purification with water, and 'stage' for the performance of the rituals are linked to the offering tables (see 2.4.1-2 [App 1:2.4.3]).

Table 7.2 Four main stages of the OMC identified within the 75 subdivisions defined by Otto (1969):

a) purification rituals with the use of *nmst*-jars and censing (scenes 1 to 8). At this stage the deceased is cleansed with two blue eyes of Horus (*nmst*- jars). The god is described as standing upright like Min, but impersonated by a priest equated with the god Geb;

b) a slaughter scene where the leg and heart are removed from a sacrificed bull and presented to the mummy (scenes 9 to 25);

c) The *ìmì-ḫnt* and a "hereditary noble" (*ìrì-pꜥ.t*) perform recitations and use a finger made of electrum, a *psš-kꜣf* -knife, and a bowl of water to open the mouth of the mummy (scenes 28 to 32);

d) this sequence is repeated twice for efficacy. At the final stages of the ritual, seven sacred oils are used to consecrate the mummy. Altenmüller (1972) links this ceremony with a ritual event labelled as "the treatment of the mummy" (1972: 129-32, 153-57). However, the ritual is also outlined in the events he describes as occurring after the Great Offering and as part of the "statute ritual" (Altenmüller 1972: 193-202).

The entire funerary cult can be summarised as an agglomeration of numerous natural and cosmic processes intended for the transformation of the deceased into another entity, specifically an ancestor, an "excellent spirit", a cosmic element, or even a god (see 2.4 [App II:2.2.2]). Natural processes include both a physical journey through landscapes known by the deceased i.e., the Nile, the cultivation fields, the mountain range, or even his own dwelling. The funerary rituals may also have symbolized a birthing process triggering the re-emergence of the deceased by providing them with rejuvenative energies. Cosmic processes include the birth of the sun through Nut, resembling the transformation of night into day. The water elements may be equivalent of bodies of water within the Cosmos and therefore constitute a connection to divine, transformative forces (see 2.6 [App II:2.1-4]). Nevertheless, what seems to bring all these elements together is the offering table in its various forms, this is where these processes occur, both symbolically and physically through the pouring of water upon them (see 7.4.4). The following sections will address these processes and how they may be reflected in offering table design as well as the funerary landscape itself.

7.2.3. The Altenmüller Problem: The Funerary Landscape Revisited

As illustrated in the case study on the offering tables in the funerary landscape of Asyut presented in Ch. 4, there are two landscapes to consider: the necropolis and its surrounding natural landscape, and the funerary architecture and fixtures within a tomb.

The various stages of the funerary cult originally described in the Pyramid Texts were steadily reinterpreted and accommodated into specifically designed structures and locations within the ancient Egyptian funerary landscape. There appears, however, to be a disconnect between imagery and text sequences. The Great Offering Ritual, for example, specified which ceremonies had to be accompanied by utterances and was furthermore complemented with offering lists and illustrations of ritual actions, as exemplified in the OK funerary temple of King Sahure. The main issue which arises is that spells are "spiritualisations", frequently without illustrations. It is only by the 18th

dynasty that a vague connection can be made between image and ritual, as outlined in the Tomb of Rekhmire (TT100). Altenmüller (1972: 278-279) tries to, in a schematic manner, relate building components of 5th Dynasty mortuary temples with rituals described, or alluded to, in the Pyramid Texts. Accordingly, the initial funerary rituals taking place in the "God's Hall of Anubis" may have been carried out in a valley temple at the edge of the "Cultivated Field". The same structure is believed to contain the Unification Hall where the wrapping occurs as well as different rooms and locations symbolising the three halting places. (Altenmüller 1972: 172-73; see 7.2.4 [App I:2.4.1-2]).

The differences between text and tomb imagery continued to be apparent throughout the Pharaonic Period indicating a need to adapt the funerary cult to the surrounding landscape (see 2.5). An example of this are the Theban tombs of the 19th dynasty at Deir El-Medina, where the western mountain range was incorporated into the imagery (Figure 7.2).

Figure 7.2 The Eye in the western mountains offering a bowl of burning incense to the seated god Osiris. The inscription "lighting a lamp for Osiris" is painted in black beside Pashedu. Tomb of Pashedu (TT3), Deir el-Medina, 19th Dynasty, photograph by author.
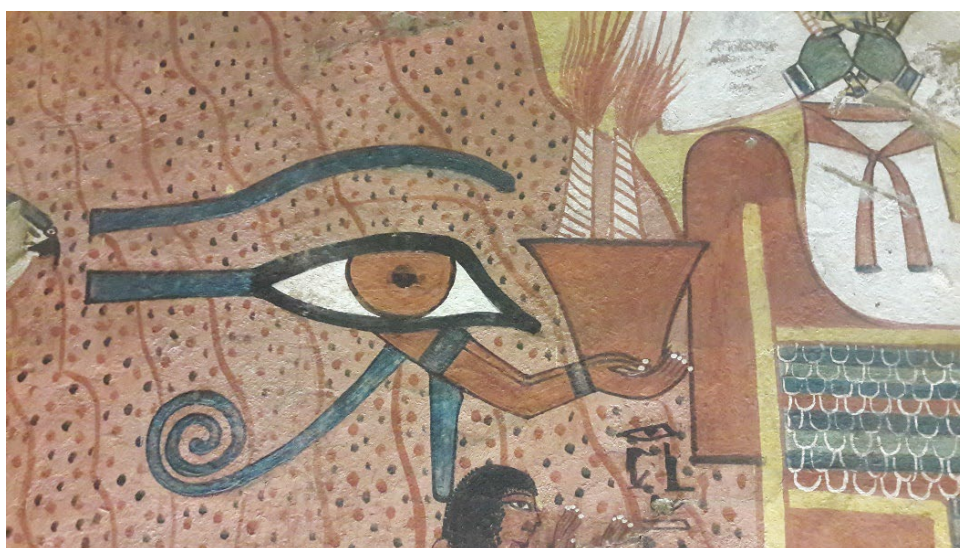
As summarized in section 2.7, the stages of the funerary cult have rarely, if not ever, been systematically organized within the ancient Egyptian funerary landscape and its associated fixtures. In order to bypass Altenmüller (1972)'s text and imagery discrepancy, an emphasis was placed on location and how it may change according to local costumes and religious traditions. If an offering table is interpreted as a ritual place, then its variation and archaeological context may provide a more complete picture of the funerary cult sequence and where it occurs within the Egyptian landscape.

MK elite tombs in provincial cemeteries appear to emphasise later stages of the funerary cult, maybe due to a growing prominence of internal structures and especially the offering place. Such changes may be reflected by MK offering tables, which depict features and activities related to the funeral such as processing sites, cultivated fields, and the house of the dead (see 5.5). Royal tombs, on the other hand, show an emphasis on cows, the consumption of liquid offerings and lotus flowers, for example in depictions found in the tomb of Montuhotep at Deir El Bahari (Dodson and Ikram 2008: 190). All of these motifs emphasise rejuvenative elements pertaining to the transformation rituals in the "Divine Realm". These differences may be due to the specific ritual landscapes of the areas. The contrasting topography of Middle Egypt with cliff-faces and desert valleys may represent a type of landscape where the dead requires protection and guidance in the

semblance of protective deities (see 4.2-3). This environment may be opposed to the western landscapes in the south such as Deir el-Bahari, where a fertile landscape might emphasise nurturing aspects embodied as Hathor. If such nuances are real, they may make the idea of 'one funerary' overarching cult difficult to support; however, offering tables and similar objects may hint at the explanation of ideas within specific contexts or unifiers of diverse concepts.

The Necropolis and Surroundings in the Asyut Landscape
When compared with the 15 stages of the funerary cult and especially considering the scenes pertaining to descriptions in the Coffin Texts rather than Theban tombs and their associated physical and mythological locations [App I:2.4.2]. Asyut and its geography may provide insights about funerary processions and related use of offering tables, especially since the necropolis remained a sacred area up until modern times.

The two temples to the east of the necropolis dedicated to the gods Wepwawet and Anubis, as well as the funerary cult, were supervised by the local elite and cult officials as stated in the ten contracts inscribed in the 12th Dynasty tomb of the Djefai-Hapi I (Tomb 1). The temples may be the valley temples at the edge of the cultivated land alluded to by Altenmüller (1972), also known as the "God's Hall of Anubis". The contracts within the Djefai-Hapi tomb concern a burial ceremony and mortuary ritual administered by priests/officials and mention the erection of the nomarch's k_3 statue within a context containing a garden by the lower edge of a causeway leading from the cultivated area to the forecourt of his tomb (see 4.2). This structure is now lost, but the main causeway leading up to the remnants of the forecourt of Tomb 1 still remains and is currently being excavated by the German archaeological team (Kahl *et al.* 2018). These locations may be identified as the scene for the first four stages of the funerary cult (Table 7.1; 7.2; App II:2.4.1).

Along the causeway, tombs dating to later time periods, such as Ptolemaic shallow graves and remnants of NK stelae, have been identified. The presence of later mortuary material indicates the importance of processional routes and their role in both the funerary ritual and mortuary cult. Graves and chapels are known to be strategically positioned along these routes in numerous necropoleis to secure provisions and libations in honour of the deceased (Richards 2005: 38-41; Bommas 2021).

During the journey libations are carried out, especially in order to facilitate the transportation of the coffin sledge [App I:2.4.1-2]. Funeral processions included several halting places, reached through a figurative voyage by boat along the so-called *Winding Waterway*. It must have been an impressive sight, especially within the arid and steep cliff-faces like those found in the Middle Egyptian site of Asyut. The causeways paved with white stone shone in the sunlight that was reflected by the sprinkled water, mimicking the downstream transportation of the coffin along the Nile. The routes up the hillsides and in the fields were most likely lined with offering tables and stelae dedicated to deified nomarchs and members of the elite, (e.g., Abydos, Yamamoto 2006).

Shrines may have contained commissioned, portable offering tables inscribed with offering formulas dedicated to the deceased, or a deity (Richards 2005: 22, 85). The portable offering tables at Asyut are most frequently from either an unknown context or found in the forecourt of tombs (see 4.5.1). It may be assumed that some of these portable tables had been placed within the necropolis, especially along the processional routes (Richards 2005: 38-40).

While describing OK mortuary temple complexes, Altenmüller (1972) does not in detail mention any causeways. Nevertheless, one famous example would be the main causeway leading westward

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toward the pyramid of Unas at Saqqara. On either side of the causeway are the tombs of the court officials Wadjkawes and Khenu (Figure 7.3; Snape 2011: 52). It appears as if the causeways of this period were imposing, but seldom as accessible as in later funerary landscapes.

Figure 7.3 Main causeway leading to the Pyramid of Unas at Saqqara, 5th Dynasty (Witthuhn 2004, online).

Changing funerary practices during the FIP are evident in the landscape of the Asyut necropolis. Processional routes became more accessible, while imposing structures of central power no longer were erected. The funeral landscape became more dynamic and influenced by local traditions (see 2.5). Particularly in the south, these routes became interactive, dynamic places where the landscape was utilised in a more adaptive manner than it was earlier (Willems 2014; Pouls Wegner 2012; Ziermann 2004). However, members of the non-elite may have had more community-focused burial customs throughout the year, which were steadily incorporated into the formal structure of funerary cults between the FIP-MK. These community-based rituals/traditions interacted with the specific landscape in which they were enacted.

The layout of the necropolis in Asyut indicates a social stratification where FIP-MK nomarch tombs generally are placed at levels that provided them with a visible prestige and access to good quality limestone (see 4.3-4). The various stages of the funeral processions and rituals had to be adapted to a limited, naturally stratified, and precipitous space (see 4.0, 5.0). To enable the elaborate and difficult transport of the coffin sledge, the causeways had to be accessible, and reasonably levelled. Along this procession trail there were less important tombs, which owners wanted to take advantage of the accessibility created by a causeway. In Beni Hassan, processional routes and shaft tombs from the MK are similar to those at Asyut (Richards 2005: 81-82; Fukaya 2019). Several elite tombs have a broad terrace in front of them giving access to their forecourts and reached by a causeway. On either side of them and especially directly below the elite tombs there are shaft tombs with no superstructures. During the processions for a funeral of a member of the elite and or during festival days (e.g., Opet festival), the surrounding shaft tombs would have been accessed via causeways that had been explicitly constructed for the elite (e.g., funerary landscape of Abydos,

Richards 2005: 125-33). Another reason for the organisation of communal rites could have been that they facilitated the transport of large amounts of water used for libations and similar cultic activities. Specific structures may have been in place for storage and/or a direct supply of water, especially along the processional routes (e.g., drainage canal systems in the mortuary temples in northern Lisht, see Arnold 2008).

In Asyut, tomb N13.1 found on the upper level, is of difficult access, indicating there may have been another processional route that is now destroyed (see 4.3; 4.5.1). A sign that this site had been more accessible is the presence of numerous shaft tombs in front of the elite tomb. These tombs probably belonged to members of the households, officials and dependents of the nomarch and other deceased buried inside N13.1. By one of these shaft tombs, one of four offering tables found in situ is carved directly out of the bedrock and provided with canals leading to the entrance of the shaft (see 4.3-5). Considering the rituals taking place by halting places before the entrance of a forecourt of a tomb, this type of public and openly exposed offering places might have been strategically placed along the main processional route in order to carry out libations and similar rites. A necropolis such as the one found in Asyut and filled with shaft tombs, as well as exposed fixtures and offering areas must have been quite common from the MK onwards, especially in cemeteries which interacted with the surrounding landscape (Richards 2005).

The coffin is often likened to a vessel, indicated in the funerary cult and alluded to in solar bark spells (BoD 148, 58, 122, 136) as well as the placement of oars beside the coffin in the burial chamber (e.g., the oars placed by the coffin of Tutankhamun, see Creasman & Doyle 2015: 91). This is also an example of how the placement of items within the tomb is vital to understanding their ritual function (Willems 1988: 157). Depending on the tomb architecture, the entombment process could be quite difficult and time consuming. If we once again consider Asyut, the architecture of FIP and MK tombs is mostly constituted by two to three open spaces, with burial chambers located as deep as 28 meters below the tomb floor (see 4.3; 4.5). Before the coffin is placed inside the burial chamber, the Great Offering ritual is performed and directly linked to the OMC (see 2.4.2; 7.3.2). Depending on the tomb architecture the ceremony could have taken place in the forecourt, or in the direct vicinity of the offering place. In accordance with Altenmüller (1972)'s suggestion that the funerary cult occurred in various rooms in a mortuary temple complex, it may be plausible that several tombs constructed between the late OK and the LP, especially private tombs, were designed with an emphasis on the offering chapel and its associated features, thus mirroring different locations within a temple. Private elite tombs may reflect specialised areas within a more limited space with fixtures and objects related to more localised funerary practices (Figure 7.4). Offering rituals, tomb rituals and mortuary services may have all occurred in the same delineated space, evidenced by not only the iconography, but also through the actual location of fixtures, such as the false door, the $k3$ statue, and the offering table.

Figure 7.4 Diagram showing the exterior and entrance to the funerary complex of Queen Inenek/Inti at Saqqara, 6ᵗʰ Dynasty. It shows the presence of a large number of offering tables in the B+C Type which are attested in greater numbers by the 6ᵗʰ Dynasty onwards. A total of 23 offering tables were found outside the pyramid complex, with dates ranging between the 5ᵗʰDynasty and the First Intermediate Period (Legros 2016: 52-56, Fig. 5, Tabl.2) suggesting a long-lasting mortuary cult of the queen.
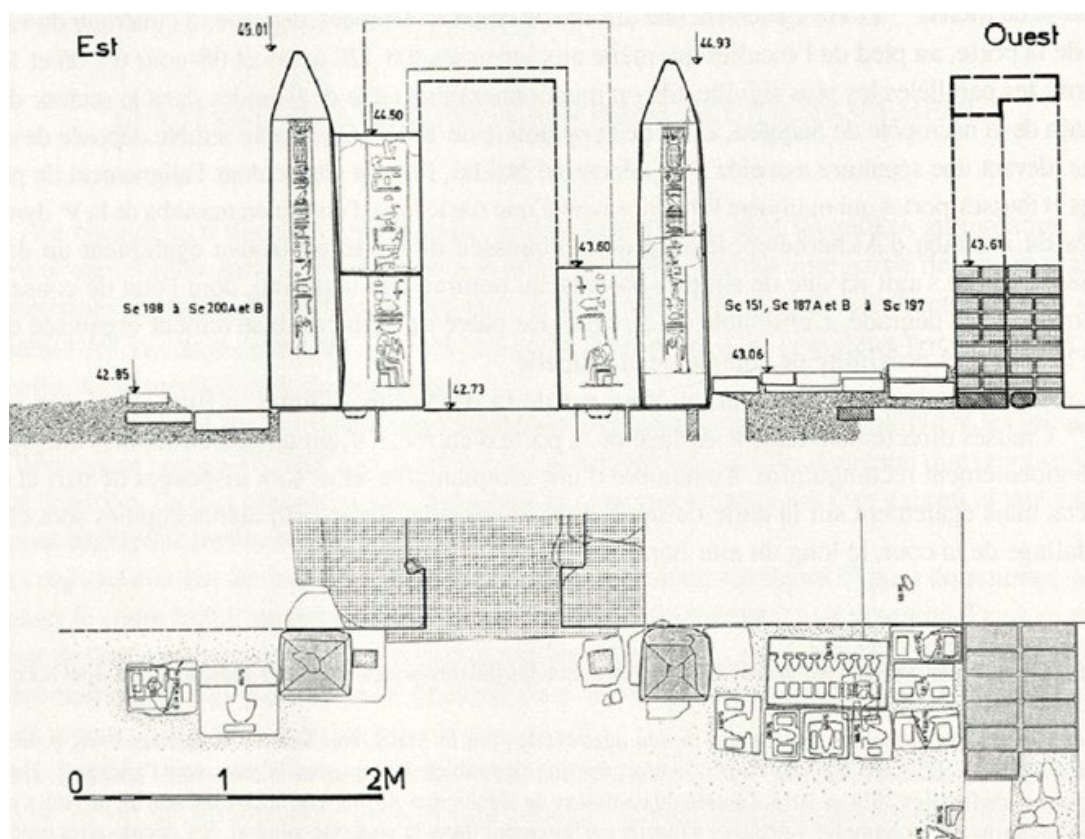
7.2.4 The offering table as place maker

Altenmüller (1972) describes the funerary ritual by mentioning hypothetical spaces where stages of the ritual may have taken place. Thus, he does not emphasise that a ritual creates place by demarcating sacred ground via the use of fixtures and ritual utensils such as offering tables. Accordingly, offering tables may be thought of as markers of sacred space, becoming a point of reference where all places pertaining to a funerary cult may be interacted with. These objects retain a ritual spiritual focus regardless of landscape, regionality and diachronic change. Offering tables may therefore reflect actual and/or conceptual places in the funerary ritual sequence [App I:2.4.1-2].

Offering tables with "washing sets" and round platforms are reminiscent of the original function of offering tables, that of serving as an offering place (Figure 7.5-7). The OK A+B Type (consisting of a raised round platform and smaller basins) and A+C Type (circular platforms/basins with a *ḥtp* sign) are reminiscent of the original design of alabaster tables upon which vessels were placed and were required for the various stages of the closing rites of the funerary ritual. However, such types of offering tables tend to go out of use after the OK (see section 3.3.1) coinciding with a change in the funerary cult and the broadening of access to mortuary practice (Richards 2005: 173; Assmann 2005). By the 6ᵗʰ Dynasty an entire funerary ritual had become outlined/available symbolically; including mourning, a funerary procession across land and water and rites performed before the mummy.
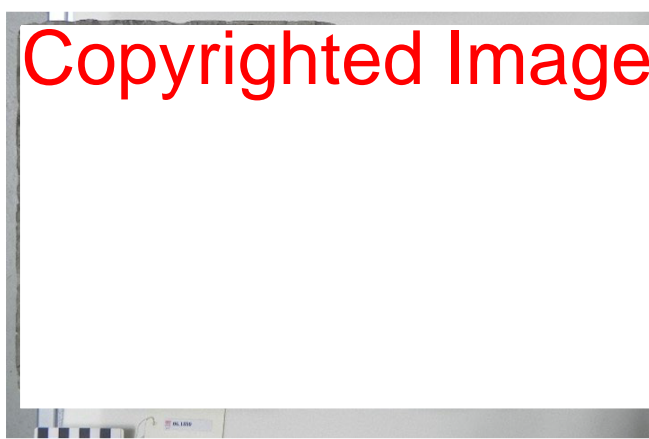
Figure 7.7: Votive alabaster offering plate and miniature vessels (5th Dynasty, British Museum, EA67257, Saqqara), showing how votive function was combined with the real offering tables which have the representation of these elements and accommodate the active process (basins, spouts, canals and central ḥtp-sign to represent offerings).

This meant a changing role for the offering table, that accordingly became more complex than just constituting *an offering place*. The entombment of the deceased together with the equipment destined for his/her further existence, also have involved an activation ritual like the OMC intended for ensuring the efficacy of the utensils and offerings placed together with the deceased inside the tomb. This act may explain the presence of votive offering tables such as the miniaturised alabaster tables found in the vicinity of the coffin of Ankh (B4B) in her burial chamber at Deir El Bersha[69] as well as pottery offering trays found near the head of the corpses in several tombs at Asyut (Willems 2016, 2018; Kilian 2012). Such items may have served as a double insurance for the deceased, particularly since the objects are present in both the tomb and on the offering table used outside the coffin chamber. The symbolic travel to Abydos, as well as the statue ritual, may have occurred within an offering chamber above, either concluding the entombment or performed somewhat later, since it concerned the activation and efficacy of the statue in order to receive the deceased's *kꜣ*.

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[69] Previously labelled as tomb of Djuehutinakht I(?) in 2016 publication.

The transport of the coffin and the procession of a funeral party to the necropolis allowed individuals to interact with the entire funerary landscape, by using processional routes and central causeways leading to an elite tomb. This may explain why halting places are called the *Saisfahrt*, arrival at the gates of Buto and the Heliopolitan *ḥwt-sr*. These are transitional places where the muu-dancers, acts of libation with references to boats and lakes, and the transformation rituals for the deceased might all have been symbolically connected with sites and actions along a processional route leading to the tomb of the deceased. The offering tables found outside tomb structures may highlight this interaction as well as the transition of the deceased through "the cultivated field", the entrance of the necropolis and the winding waterway, which is essentially the processional route leading to the tomb (Figures 7.8-9).

Figure 7.8, 7.9: (Fine) Limestone offering table of Schemseui with an irrigation fields design (B+C Type), Middle Kingdom, unknown context (AM 31226, CAT ID55). (Fine) limestone offering table from Tell el-Rataba with a surrounging drainage canal and central "sacred lake" design (B2 Type), Ptolemaic Period (Manchester Museum 3395, CAT ID1).

The outer funerary landscape and its permeability with the world of the living is facilitated via the use of objects and fixtures such as offering tables. Internal areas within the necropolis may however reflect different funerary ritual notions as well as a space for more personalised ritual practices and individual traits of both the deceased as well as the living.

The forecourt is the site of the coronation and consecration rituals at the liminal site of Buto and the transformation rituals in the so-called "Holy Realm", that is, Sais. Contrary to the previous rituals, which are highly active and transitional, occurring in the mythical "winding canal" (*wrt*) through the necropolis, the rituals in the forecourt are highly location-specific. The butchering scenes, for example, at the mythical site of Sais require a certain amount of space and access to drainage systems. Depending on context, this ritual practice may be highly figurative (part of the funeral 'performance'). It may nevertheless be argued that butchering of sacrificial animals may have been quite common in ritual contexts. This is because, as is the case of most ancient societies, the practice of slaughter was highly beneficial to the entire community (see Detienne & Vernant 1989; Smith 1987). Parts of the sacrificed animal may not only be used during the ritual but also ritually consumed by the priesthood and/or members of the funeral party.

The entrance to the tomb, especially its forecourt is an essential feature in the procession and the funeral itself. The Gates of Buto were imagined as a liminal location within a necropolis. In a way they may also be the doorways to actual ritual spaces marked by columns or temporary papyrus plants/reed bundles. During the FIP offering places were positioned in wide, shallow forecourts with pillars such as the *saff*-tombs in Thebes, e.g., the Saff El-Qissaia at El -Tarif, the tomb of Intef

II (11th Dynasty). During the FIP offering places were positioned in wide, shallow forecourts with pillars such as the *saff*-tombs in Thebes. Tomb forecourts gained importance from the late MK, and especially during the NK onwards. An emphasis on such liminal and slightly more private spaces, rather than the processional roads, were accentuated during the NK. Nevertheless, the courtyards could be reminiscent of similar sites in front of OK tomb complexes. Perhaps the difference was an increased need for a more open space and access to sunlight and the elements. Pillared forecourts gained importance through an accentuated focus on the solar cult. In Ramesside period tombs the forecourt was located just in front of the internal structure of the complex and surrounded by high walls. The funerary landscape therefore seems to have been adapted to new traditions, like those connected with the sun cult from the 18th Dynasty onwards.

By the NK, another shift in the funerary cult occurs. It is a period of significant monumental development in royal burial practice, similar to that which occurred in the OK between the 4th and 5th dynasties. An example of this would be some of the NK tombs in Thebes and Saqqara, which by the 18th Dynasty and Ramesside Period began to look like temples, with a larger courtyard (see Meskell 1999; Ugliano 2013; Figure 7.10). This change may be related to depictions of gods in the chapel area. By the mid-19th Dynasty, there is a significant transition from indirect contact between the deceased and a god to more physical contact between the two entities. This increased intimacy with the divine indicates a personal space within the private tomb, at the same time as a collective experience is conveyed throughout the entire funerary landscape.

Figure 7.10 Map of New Kingdom tombs at Saqqara south of the Unas Pyramid causeway showing the large couryards surrounded by enclosures with pyloned entrances similar to contemporary temple complexes (The Friends of Saqqara Foundation 2021).
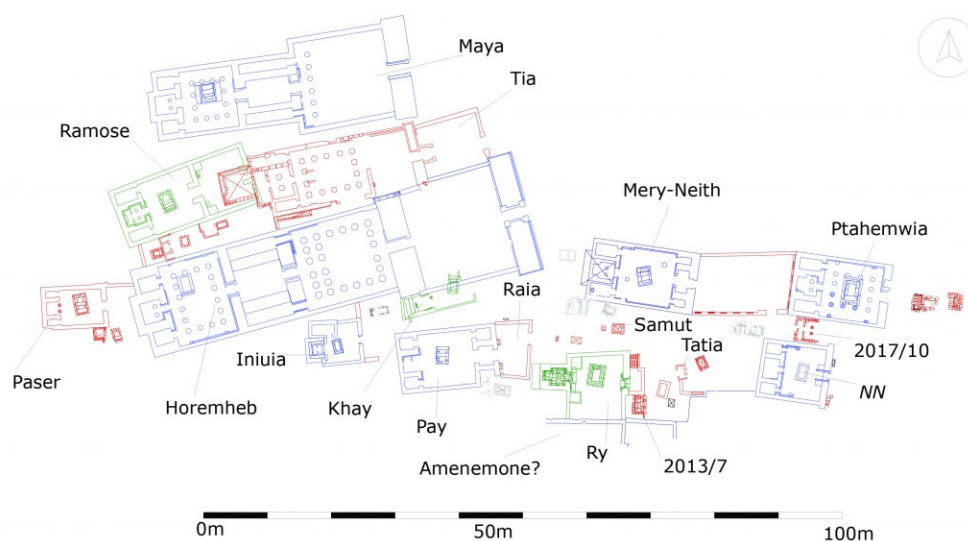
Numerous offering tables, as well as offering trays, may portray forecourts, highlighting the separation between an outer space where an actual ritual slaughter might have occurred, and internal areas where rituals probably were more limited to symbolic/figurative acts (3.4.3.3; 5.5-6). In Asyut, there is still a large offering table in situ, carved directly into the bedrock and located in the remnants of the forecourt of Tomb N 12.1. Although the tomb dates to the late FIP/early MK, judging from its overall design, the offering table may have been made at a later date (NK) (see 4.4-5). This may have coincided with a changing funerary cult during the NK, which emphasised the importance of the forecourt areas of tomb complexes, which featured numerous circular basins and a central drainage canal, perhaps used during the various interactive rituals which occurred in the "Holy Realm".

Most offering tables in the archaeological record which remain in situ and date to the early NK onwards tend to be located in the forecourt or the pillared halls of royal/elite tomb complexes, as evidenced by the rise in statue-combined offering tables (see Hölzl 2002). These highly elaborate designs may perhaps reflect hypostyle halls found in elite 'palaces' and temples (Figure 7.11), evidenced by offering tables positioned in the offering halls in forecourt areas of royal temple complexes. A temple is essentially a tomb since it is the abode of a god similar to the transformed deceased. The NK offering tables increasingly contain depictions of offerings, as well as parts of slaughtered animals, rather than water-features which were previously more frequently incorporated. Perhaps this indicates an increased use of a space like the forecourt, while referring to ritual practices at the mythical place of Sais.

Figure 7.11 Large granite offering table with Thuthmose III depicted offering vessels on either side of the Htp-shaped spout-structure. The surface contains numerous circular depressions classifying the table as a Type A+C2. The offering table was originally located in the Great Temple of Karnak in the Central Court, Temple of Thuthmose III (CG88803 Egyptian Museum Cairo CAT ID394).

The garden landscape depicted in Theban tombs, and often referred to as "Buto burials" (Colonna 2014; Diamond 2012) may have been idealistic/symbolic representations of all three halting places (see 2.5). However, there is archaeological evidence for some elements connected with an assumed location for transformation rituals. The catching and slaughter of sacrificial animals may have been performed in designated areas, with access to a drainage system, most likely in the forecourts of tombs. It may have been in the same area where the following offering rituals were performed, like in the 6th Dynasty tomb of Mereruka in Saqqara, where a slaughter stone is still in situ to the left of the central offering table beneath the tomb owner's *k3* statue (Figure 7.12). The incorporation of basins upon offering tables may be a miniaturised version of the four basins often depicted in the garden scenes alluding to Sais and other Delta sites.

The second part of the Sais rituals involved the use of water basins and occurred within a real, or symbolic palm-tree garden, linked to the performance of libation acts. Even if the depictions of such gardens in Theban tombs probably were "idealistic", there are, in the archaeological record some indications of their actual existence. As exemplified in 5.5.2, funerary gardens have been found in the vicinity of MK tombs and such sites might be associated with parts of slaughtered animals and processing sites, which are represented on pottery offering trays.

Transformation rituals included the OMC "to bring the *kꜣ* to a man in the necropolis" (CT359d) and it may be assumed that this process of calling forth the *kꜣ* and activating the statue must have involved the offering tables usually shown as being positioned directly in front of this representation. Representations of vegetation and specific plants are by the Late NK and onwards depicted on the offering tables emphasising rejuvenative elements related to the transformation of the deceased (as in the Book of Coming Forth by Day) while images of the Lady of the Sycamore are depicted in the vicinity of the offering chamber, dispensing nourishment to the deceased and their *bꜣ* (Buhl 1947; Figure 7.13).

Figure 7.13 The Tree Goddess holding an offering table and pouring water out of a spouted Hs vase to Panehsy and his bꜣ (18th Dynasty, Tomb of Panehsy, Deir el-Medina TT16) (Thebantomb16, 2020).

The Lady of the Sycamore is depicted on some late NK offering tables, but even more common are representations of the four basins said to be located in the "Divine Realm" or "Sais" (Figure 7.14).

Figure 7.14 Limestone offering table with the depiction of the Tree Goddess offering liquid libations from spouted Hs-vases to the deceased (British Museum EA1689, Late Period, unknown context, CAT ID166).

The "coming at the voice" include transformation spells and an invitation to the deceased to be seated at an offering place and receive offerings dedicated to a god (*ḥtp-nṯr*). The Lesser Offering Ritual (*ḥtp dỉ nswt Gb*) is inscribed on several stone offering tables of the elite. Family members did not necessarily have to visit the actual offering chamber of the tomb but could perform rituals dedicated to the deceased on offering tables positioned in more publicly accessible areas or, in some cases, even in the privacy of their own home, since offering tables and similar objects have been found in domestic settings (e.g., offering table in situ at El-Lahun during Petrie's 1890 campaign in Quirke 2015: 76, fig. 2.20). The entire funerary landscape could be represented within the tomb itself. If we use the tomb of Djefai-Hapi (Tomb 1) at Asyut as an example, its architectural details may refer to places described in the funerary cult (see 4.2). The decorated roof of the main entrance hall has textile patterns which may be a reference to the embalming tent, or any temporary structure used during the funerary process. Extensive images of slaughter are also a common representation in elite tombs of the MK onwards, which may also be a representation of locations in the landscape. There may have been non-permanent areas dedicated for the funerary ritual within the necropolis, since there is little archaeological evidence for the presence of what Altenmüller (1972) has called, the "Valley Temple by the edge of productive land." Even the Unification Hall is called the Embalming Tent in Pyramid Texts, indicating its non-permanence. The offering table was perhaps the only tangible evidence for family members, and Egyptians in general, that the entire funerary process had occurred and would continue to occur for eternity (see 7.2.5; 7.3.3). Its iconography, design and placement alluded to crucial elements of the funerary ritual, including the deceased's household, the cultivated land, the winding waterway of the processional route, the lakes described in mythological accounts, the gardenscapes of the Delta, butchering sites, ritual acts of libation, rejuvenation and the activation of life preserving forces.

As evidenced in the case studies (Chapters 4-6), several places which may be identified in the funerary sequence such as the offering place in OK tables, slaughter areas and gardens in the MK sample or the simple representation of basins and vegetation, maintain their significance throughout the funerary tradition even though the original meaning may be lost. Rituals may become relics or change according to context but through versatile objects such as the offering tables that preserve their function. An example may be a change in emphasis of the *kꜣ* of the deceased and its contained energy to the *bꜣ* which in the form of a bird embodies transferable energy and therefore the need to create a place with easily identifiable symbols of sacred space

such as a basin or the representation of a tree (see 7.5). Once these places are established for the newly transformed deceased it is up to the living to define his place within society.

7.2.5 The Ancestral Cult: Offering tables as "Place"

The ultimate end product of the transformation ritual in the funerary cult is a newly defined place for the deceased, not only amongst the gods but also within society. This is accomplished via a maintained ancestor cult.

The various objects which are classified as offering tables may reflect various religious notions, as well as different levels of society, and cultic activities. Offering tables with an inscribed $htp-di-nsw$ formula signified use by members of the elite and the literate few (estimates range from one to ten percent of the population; see Baines 1983; te Velde 1986), while pottery soul-houses may have been used by members of lower levels of society, who wanted to emphasise other elements of the same belief system as the elite. Both kinds of objects, as well as all others which may be classified as offering tables, encompass the idea of "totality", (i.e., the Eye of Horus, see 7.4).

The mortuary cult, expressed through the final rite of the funerary ritual and the continued veneration and remembrance of the dead, marked a separation of the deceased from society, while maintaining their identity and linking the living to the past, something which is often stressed in Egyptian literature (see 2.4; 2.3.3; Assmann 2005:113-140). The main outcome of the mortuary service was to restore not only capacities of the living to the deceased, but also their dignity by invoking their name and previous social role (Harrington 2012: 29). The $k3$ comes into play as a vital reality since it is an "animated life force" in need of constant stimulation through the presentation of offerings. The replenishing of food offerings represents a continuous life cycle and reuse of energy. The offering stela of Intef (11th Dynasty) clearly outlines the various ritual steps and related implements to be used in order to allow the deceased to continue benefiting from the eternal execution of these rituals, as well as showing future participants how ritual and utensils are to be used (O'Neill 2015: 95) (Figure 7.15). A process which entails a continuous funerary cult based on communal memory and thus part of a powerful ancestor cult, common throughout ancient Egypt. The connection of the generations is evidenced by the role of the "hereditary noble", impersonated by the son of the deceased, who, like any oldest son of an Egyptian family, was expected to perform an important role in the veneration of his deceased parents and their transformation into sacred ancestors (Harrington 2012: 29). A means to ensure this practice was a continuous use of offering tables, usually inscribed with an offering formula dedicated to the deceased by a member of the household. An even more prestigious reflection of the deceased's local, social status was to be honoured by a shrine within the necropolis, or at the most basic level in a household.

The ancestor cult was generally performed using offering tables in the vicinity of statues of the deceased. By the NK, statues played such an important role that they were included in the forecourt architecture and thus present in the more accessible areas. By this time, ancestors' busts were located within domestic contexts, where offerings were placed on specific days throughout the year (Assmann 2005: 256-258). Offering tables were even inscribed with instructions such as the offering table of Pay and Meryre: "may (the gods) grant that water be poured out for me upon the offering (slab) at the door of my tomb daily" (Harrington 2015: 61; Kitchen 2000: 441).

Although the ancestor cult may have grown in importance during the NK (although evidence may be biased), its presence is nevertheless evident in the construction of MK tombs and earlier tombs in the vicinity of important royal OK cemeteries, an indication of a general need to venerate royal ancestors. During later periods the mortuary cult may have been commonly executed in the home and/or the vicinity of a tomb. Pinch (1994) describes this tradition as "multi-locational" (1994: 76–89). In the current study, there are numerous examples of the concept of multi-locality, especially exemplified by the emergence of pottery offering trays and soul-houses during the MK. Furthermore, these items were easily moved and could follow a family when it resettled. Soul-houses were essentially offering tables, but similar to tomb structures, they may have clear references to household architecture and accordingly reflect a complex ancestor cult (see 5.6-7).

There are several indications that soul-houses may have been connected with rituals both in a domestic and tomb setting (see Chapter 5). Bruyère (1939: 67) has found false doors in the main room of Deir El Medina houses, which have the same decorations as the entrance composed of yellow and red painted elements present on some soul-houses. A painting found inside a house in the Late MK town of El Lahun, depicts an offering scene, as well as vessels placed upon offering tables and a series of gates, which may represent false doors, indicating offering practices that occurred in domestic settings, rather than exclusively within a funerary context (Quirke 2015: 75; Petrie 1891, Pl.16).

Libation slabs and offering tables have been identified within domestic settings, like those found in mudbrick niches near staircases in households at Amarna, as well as a unique limestone table with a central circular basin found in the corner of a house in MK El Lahun (Harrington 2015: 79; Quirke 2015: 76). Activities related to the mortuary cult may also have occurred during specific dates, as the inscription in the Tomb of Nacht (TT 52): "Month 1 of Akhet, day 1, the day of the death of my sister: four *mḥt*-jars and eight *pꜣwt*-loaves". Part of the Beautiful Festival of the Wadi was celebrated in tomb courtyards (Harrington 2015: 93; Shedid & Seidel 1996; Hartwig 2004: 5, 8). Domestic settings contained places dedicated for devotion and offerings, most likely connected with ancestor cults. This explains why there are so many types of offering tables, since the concept itself proved to be so easily adaptable to different contexts and the surrounding landscape. Domestic sites containing remnants of pottery offering trays and similar material include Abydos (FIP), El Lahun (MK), Buhen (MK, see section 4.2), Lisht (MK to 2nd IP), El Amarna (NK), Deir El Medina (NK) (Stevens 2009: 12-19 [App I:Maps 1.1.3-4; 1.2.2-4]).

The *kꜣ* chapels described earlier are also an important feature of the ancient Egyptian ancestor cult. An example of this is the 12th Dynasty Heqaib sanctuary at Elephantine, which contains numerous statues erected by and for members of the local elite, as well as 6th Dynasty officials; all of them equipped with their own limestone offering table with spouts leading to a central drainage system (Arnold 2015). These ancestor cult items are not limited to a specific social class, but evident in connection with members of the upper elite and even the royal cult. The cult is also evident in the funerary ritual, particularly through the presence of the *muu* dancers, labelled as the "dancing ancestors" (TT 17). Offering tables are inscribed with a standard offering formula dedicated to the *kꜣ* of the deceased, which in Deir El Medina and other domestic areas appear to be dedicated to the *ꜣḫw*, i.e., transformed ancestors' "effective spirits" (Harrington 2012: 7, 61; Démaree 1983).

Another indication of a continued ancestor cult and offering tables as place makers might be the reuse of sacred spaces for the veneration of family members from different generations within private households. The offering formula inscribed on several offering tables within the sample (see 3.4.3.5) may be an example of this veneration and the reuse of sacred space. Some offering tables show evidence of different styles of inscriptions upon the same table, indicating an addition of family members within an older tomb as a means of economising on material, cost, and space (Figure 7.16).

The so-called "multiple offering table", may represent another example of reuse as well as a "multi-locational" ancestor cult. Offering tables with more than one *ḥtp* sign and/or several offering surfaces and external spouts might indicate that they were not only dedicated to specific, single individuals but that new, deceased ancestors could be included in the offering rituals, even if their names had not been inscribed. Offering tables did not always need inscriptions since they catered to both literate and non-literate audiences. Offering tables are a focal place for the ancestor cult to occur but are also multilocational since their design does not prevent the addition of new places either in the form of inscriptions and/or iconographic/structural elements. The venerated ancestors lose their specific identity but gain permanence and universality.

Figure 7.16: Limestone offering table with an irregular base and sides classified as "fixed" and of the B+C Type. It contains several inscriptions, with the main ḥtp dỉ nsw formula in the raised rim (blue), dedicated to mnTw (?) Additional inscriptions are present in the ḥtp-sign as well as along its side near the depicted leg in a slightly different style (red, green). It is from an unknown context. (EA 414, British Museum, Middle Kingdom, CAT ID116).
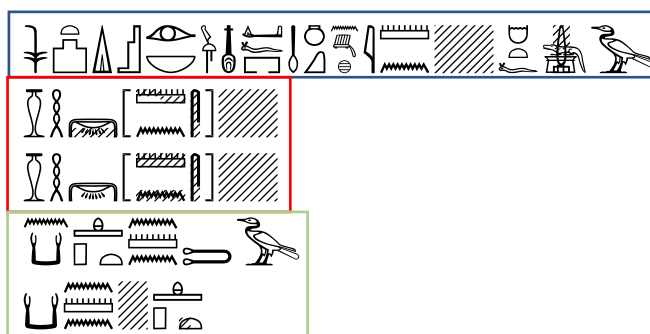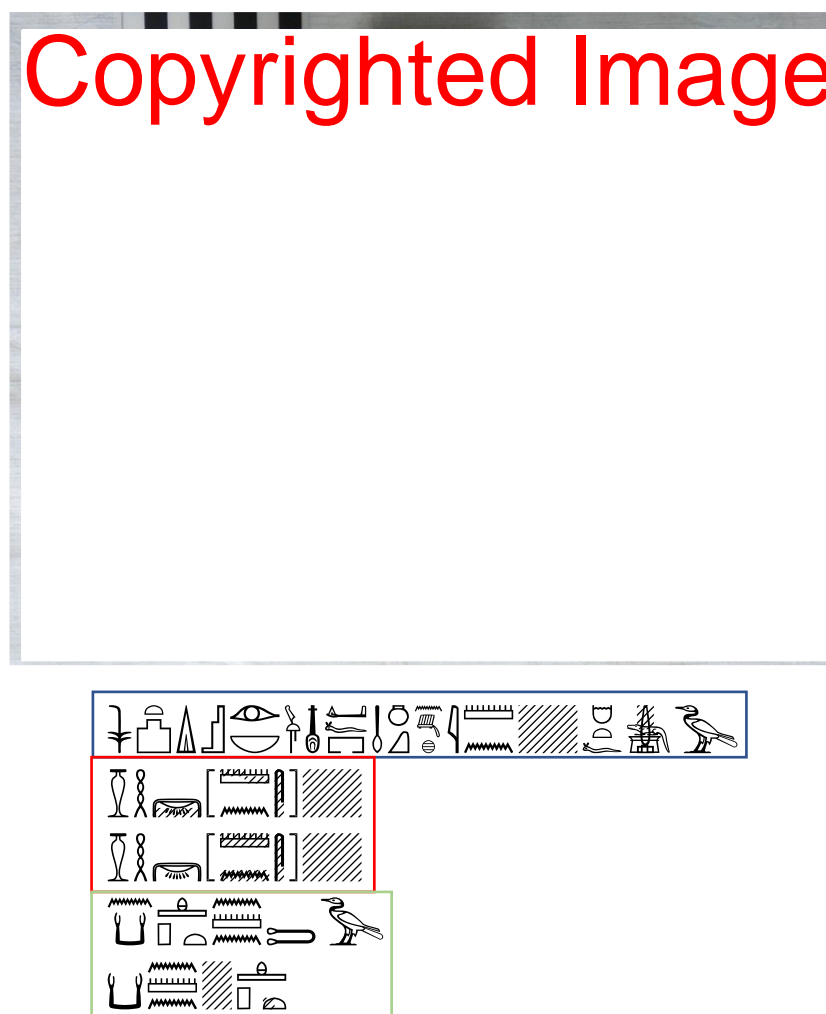
7.2.6 Conclusion

An analysis of the role of the offering table within the funerary cult has been difficult due to a disconnection between preserved texts and imagery and real-life ritual actions. Furthermore, the cult is far from being a static phenomenon. It is a dynamic process reflecting socio-economic, regional, and political changes, while it frequently incorporated traditional influences from ancestral and royal cults, at the same time as it became harmonized with new beliefs and a changing landscape. The importance of the offering table is intimately related to the spatial, geographical, and temporal context reflected in its role in the funerary cult.

Although offering tables during the LP onwards no longer maintained the same design (e.g., offerings and the ḥtp-sign), active elements (i.e., basins, canals and the external spout structure) remained fundamental. This indicates that some elements of the funerary cult, especially those pertaining to activation, transformation, and rejuvenation rituals remained central to the rites and thus maintained the crucial importance of the offering table which eventually was recognized as a specific emblem of the funerary cult. These elements of the funerary cult occur in specific places, which are reflected in offering table design as well as their context. If these elements are incorporated, the objects themselves may be thought as place makers via their use. However, their permanence and multilocational elements facilitate their function within an ancestor cult centred

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around maintaining a place for the deceased within society. The following will focus on the main transitional phase of the cult which is when the offering table changes from place maker to an actual place intended for the newly transformed deceased, the OMC.

7.3. THE OPENING OF THE MOUTH CEREMONY: A PLACE FOR EMOTION

7.3.1. Introduction
The OMC's close connection to the Great Offering ritual and closing rites at the final stages of the funerary cult suggests that offering tables took the centre stage during this particular ceremony. Archaeological evidence for this claim has been highlighted through findings in the burial chamber of Lady Ankh (in shaft 17K85/1B) at Deir El-Bersha, described and analysed by Willems (2016; 2018). Miniature alabaster offering tables were discovered inside a bowl containing several other miniature utensils used in conjunction with the OMC (Figures 4.12-13 in 4.6.2). The bowl was placed within the burial chamber, next to the head of the deceased. Willems (2016) associated these utensils with purification and offering rites carried out during the OMC (2016: 162-168).

The proximity of the offering table to the deceased may also be an indication of its close relationship to the mummy and the active participation of the living. The OMC marks the last physical interaction with the deceased before his final transformation. The offering table in the context of the OMC therefore creates a place of emotion for the mourners and a physical indication that this important ritual of transformation has and will continue to occur. When placed within the context of the OMC, the occurrence of offering tables may indicate a general knowledge of their importance as a memorial as well as their versatility, meaning that they can be found in any context (e.g., funerary, domestic, religious, etc.).

7.3.2. The Opening of the Mouth Ceremony[70]
The OMC was performed at several stages of the funerary ritual; its versatility is thus important while addressing its use of offering tables (see 2.4.2). Various parts of the OMC expressed elements of an ancestor cult, for example the role of the hereditary noble, denominated as the "beloved son" (Scenes 14, 25, 42, 45) or "son who loves" (Scenes 29-32, 42), who handles various paraphernalia and uses spells to revive 'his father'. Over time, several of these objects became symbols themselves and were in later periods used as amulets. The OMC may also be defined as a transition between two realms, as evidenced in the "transitional scenes" which involved acts of slaughter and purification.

The OMC is at the apex of the funerary cult and is perhaps the point of the ritual in which the funeral party, including the mourners, are in the closest, final contact with the deceased. Offering tables from the OK up until the late 6th Dynasty include practical elements linked to the utensils used during the ceremony. At the same time, however, there are other forms of offering tables which emphasise the act of offering during later stages of the funerary cult. Since a severed bovine leg is presented to the mummy, the ceremony must have occurred in the vicinity of the previously described slaughter ground. Most of the offering tables and trays outlined throughout the thesis reflect these various paraphernalia as well as the locations associated with the OMC (e.g., forcourt and offering chapel), evident from the OK all the way through the later periods. By exploring the OMC one may identify the desired ritual outcomes of offering tables defined as ritual utensils, especially evident in MK pottery trays as processing sites and personalised stone offering tables.

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[70] For a detailed outline and analysis of the OMC based on Otto (1960) with excerpts from texts as well as a list of related utensils see App II:2.4.3.

The "multilocality" present on offering tables is therefore further emphasised through an analysis of their role within the OMC as places of emotion and not only for the execution of ritual acts.

The outcome of the ritual varies according to context and time-period, but its original purpose is related to the verb *wpi* "to separate". This term may refer to the actual opening of the mouth and eyes, but presumably also to the separation of the deceased from their former existence and entrance into a new one: the *ꜣḫ*-spirit. The ceremony is difficult to reconstruct in its entirety, particularly since over time incorporated elements from all over Egypt while connecting different religious notions and ritual actions, though the presence and use of the offering table was essential for its execution.

It does not really matter if the ceremony was intended for a statue or a mummy, as long as the full name of the deceased and genealogy was stated in order to enable a magical activation of specific properties (Ayad 2021), not unlike the function of ritual actions and inscribed offering formulas made upon offering tables. The fact that the OMC continues to be depicted within royal contexts in the NK onwards, indicates that it was an essential ritual, which nonetheless was used by commoners in a manner and context distinct from a more standardised royal cult. The royal cult secured a deified king's afterlife by other means than those applied to a non-royal mortal. This indicates that much like the use of the offering table; the OMC was universal although expressed differently according to context and individual preferences.

The essential content and performance of the OMC appear to originate from a series of dramatic texts, which largely lacked allusions to mythology and historical accounts (Otto 1960: 4, 22). This may explain why the locations of the OMC are usually vague and not as explicit as in the funerary cult. Since it can be related to the statue ritual, offering ritual, embalming process and temple ritual, the actual location where the ritual was performed could be quite diverse (see Figure 7.21).

Figure 7.17 A supposed OMC performed upon two anthropoid coffins within a workshop depicted in the Ramesside Period Tomb of Ipuy/Ipy (TT217) at Deir el-Medina Otto (1960) has been interpreted as a scene in which a priest is reciting from a papyrus wp.t-rꜣ opposite a table containing OMC equipment and wooden anthropoid coffins (from Otto 1960: 26-7, Abb. 13).
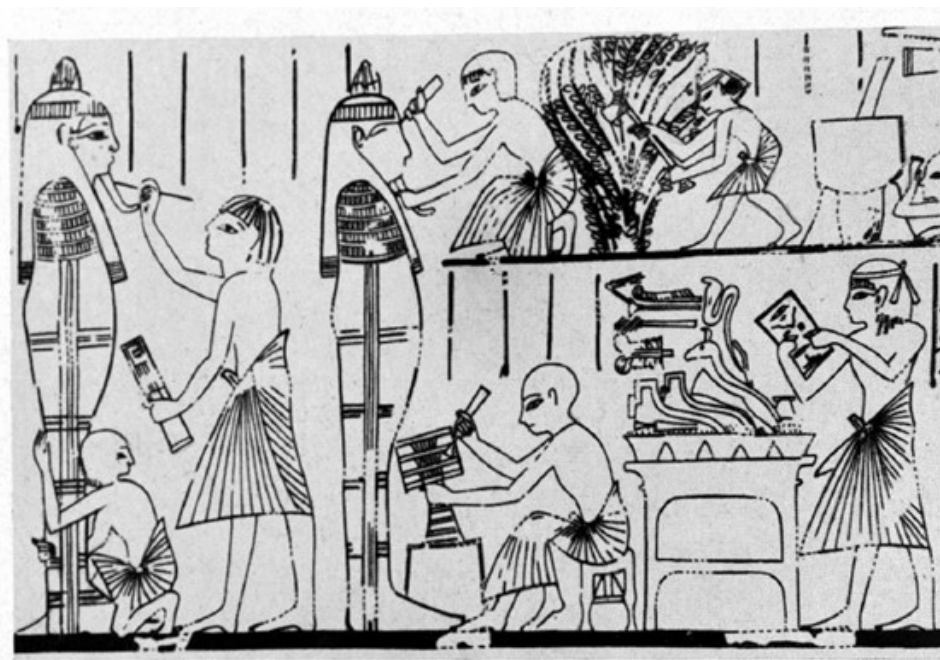
By the NK the main objective of the ritual was not only to enable the *kꜣ* to receive offerings, but it also constituted an act of unification of different elements into one place, as well as a possibility of the deceased to be constantly rejuvenated through the acts of pouring water and emotional display. No matter which parts of the ritual are chosen to be emphasised, these two outcomes remain the same even in the G-RP when perhaps the origins of the actions within the OMC have been forgotten or adapted to other, later ritual traditions.

7.3.3. The Role of the Offering Table

There may be two specific aspects of the OMC which architectural fixtures such as offering tables may focus on. These are actions occurring during the ceremony (e.g., purification, slaughtering, offering), while they guarantee the desired outcomes of the ritual.

The offering table is explicitly mentioned in the following scenes of the OMC: 1, 65 to 69, and 70 to 72. It is there described as a utensil actually used in the ritual, while other scenes may include elements, or mythological connotations, referring to offering table design and iconography. The first offering scene in the Golden House involves the *ẖri-ḥbt* lector-priest who cleanses the deceased in front of an offering table (Scene 1). This sequence involves placing the mummy upon a heap of sand (TT181). The offering table is explicitly indicated together with invocations to Ptah ("protector" of the OMC), a creator god (Otto 1960: 34-47). It is accordingly an initiation sequence with various elements related to the creation myth, emphasising the creation of a consecrated ground through libations and therefore a place for emotion and transformation [App II:2.4.3].

Another action including an offering table is presented in scenes 65 to 69, where the *sm*-priest with a bowl of water in each hand kneels before the *twt* (e.g., statue) and an offering table denominated as *wdḥw*. He is accompanied by a lector priest holding a *ḥnk.t*-offering table. The *wdḥw*-table may allude to a fixed or fitted offering table, which in the current sample is most frequent between the OK and early NK. Usually positioned by tomb shafts and/or in front of *kꜣ* statues/false doors, its iconography is usually not detailed and mainly include functional elements (e.g., canals, basins, spouts) intended to facilitate libation ceremonies (scenes 65-69 and 70-72). Libation acts may be depicted on the *wdḥw*-table, as pouring liquid from *ḥs* vases, a common design on MK offering tables (see 3.4.3.4; 4.4.4).

The active *wdḥw*, passive *ḥnk.t*, and the *ḥtp*-mat[71]

The difference between the two types of offering tables described and depicted within the context of the OMC may provide an insight into their role within the funerary cult as well as personal preferences and local traditions. The two types of offering tables may be represented together as in a vignette in Ch.1 of the BoD of Hunefer (19th Dynasty, EA 9901; Figure 7.18). At the top register, a *sm*-priest is depicted performing censing and purification acts in front of a sarcophagus and an offering table containing various types of offerings, including numerous round bread. In some cases, this type of offering emphasising purification is not depicted as an offering table stacked with victuals, but as a flat, raised platform onto which a priest pours a stream of water from a *ḥs*-vase. The type of offering table in the vignette in BoD of Hunefer may be a combination of the *wdḥw* and the *ḥnk.t*, illustrating both the action of pouring water upon a typical offering table and the "outcomes" of the OMC such as the actual opening of the statue/coffin's mouth and eyes. This type of offering table is represented in the bottom register which depicts two offering tables; one holding food offerings while the other implements and utensils used throughout the OMC (e.g., *ḫpš*, adzes, vessels, knives and priestly attire). These types of offering tables differ from the one

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[71] For definitions see Table 1.1 in section 1.1.

illustrated in the upper register since they are inactive and actually emphasise different elements of the ceremony, specifically the opening of the mouth and the ability of the *kꜣ* to receive offerings. This may explain why there are two almost identical representations of offering tables containing the same victuals but in different contexts. The table with implements may be a *ḥnk.t*-offering table alluding to offering tables which do not necessarily emphasise the active elements of the *wdḥw*-table in the upper register, but rather the desired outcome of the ceremony and its efficacy. Their placement is of importance, since an offering table used during a libation ceremony is positioned in front of the deceased and the ȋs. This is the location of most "fixed" and "fitted" offering tables. The offering tables in the register below have legs, a common feature of "free-standing" offering tables which usually reflect more inactive elements (Figure 7.19). Such different types of offering tables may indicate a personal preference, or a local tradition, preferring depictions of purification/libation acts over that of offerings, something which is evident in the sample (see 3.3-4; 4.2; 4.4-6; 5.5-6; 6.3). This diversity may not only be due to diachronic change, but also might be a reflection of agency of the individual behind the offering table, evident in the archaeological record where numerous different types of contemporary offering tables have been found within the same necropolis.

Figure 7.18 Vignette illustrating the OMC performed upon the coffin of Hunefer. The top register contains an illustration of the actual opening of the mouth by practitioners holding a series of adzes as well as presenting the "golden finger" to the deceased. Directly behind them stands a sm-priest holding an sn̠tr for censing and a spouted Hs-vase, pouring a stream of liquid onto a heaped offering table, specifically an offering mat (ḥtp) (blue) (see Fig. 7.24 below). The lower register contains two different types of legged offering tables (yellow), one heaped with offerings (left) and the other with OMC utensils including the pss̠-kf, h̠ps̠ and numerous adzes (BoD of Hunefer, 19th Dynasty, EA 9901 British Museum – online).

Figure 7.19 Limestone offering table with four legs dating to the 12th Dynasty, El-Lahun. It depicts a Htp-sign as well as two Hs-vases, round bread, and what may be animal parts. It has a double spout structure and two basins (B+C Type, free-standing, 272b Manchester Museum, CAT ID12).

The OMC generally involves the act of pouring water (*z3ṯ*), either upon the coffin or statue itself, or upon the ground before it. During the NK, coffins were made of cedarwood and treated with multiple layers of varnish and resin making the coffin water-resistant (see H. Strudwick 2016; Eschenbrenner-Diemer *et al.* 2021: 54-55). Similarly, the treatment of certain offering tables, or their ware, may indicate extensive use of liquids upon them. As evidenced in section 3.3, pottery offering trays were often slipped with red pigment in an attempt to make the highly porous coarseware less permeable, while there is ample evidence of use and ware on limestone and sandstone offering tables, especially indicating where the main stream of liquid would have been poured. Evidence of the use of liquids or surface wear in specific areas of the table is evident in the sample: 134 out of 269 stone offering tables are classified under "frequent" use, while 92 are classified under "uncertain" use (Figures 7.20-2; see 3.4.3.2; 7.4.2-3).

Figure 7.20 A detail of a ḥtp-sign from a FIP offering table at Saqqara, show how the use of liquids has eroded the limestone (from Legros 2016: 94, offering table 78 No-1139, Fig. 19).

Libation rituals are described in offering lists, like the *zꜣṯ*-ritual occurring in the closing rites of the *ỉn.t-rd* ritual (see 7.2.2, stage 15) (see Barta 1963: 47-48). Willems (2016) claims that the miniature offering tables found within burial chambers indicate an execution of the *zꜣṯ* "pouring" ritual. Other objects within the assemblage could be related to other kinds of rituals, such as cylinder vessels for sacred oils, grinding stones for the provision of eye shadow, and *ḥs*-vases for purification acts. However, as outlined throughout this thesis, all of these elements are represented on offering tables during almost any time period.

As in the OMC, all these elements are interchangeable, and some actions were preferred to be depicted over others. The presence of numerous water elements indicates a general emphasis on purification and cleansing, while the outcomes of the ceremony may not be important. Offering tables covered in canals and spout structures were perhaps intended to show future onlookers that this entire action sequence has occurred despite limited space, or their owners intended to demonstrate a preference for libation processes over depictions of offerings. This emphasis on active processes may also ensure the longevity, as well as constant replenishment, of the offerings,

even if an actual offering had not been provided in the first place. "Multiple" offering tables may not only indicate a dedication to multiple tomb owners but may also be both "multi-locational" and "multi-functional", for example by providing the same purification or libation ritual for both the statue and the mummy. This may coincide with depictions of the OMC where there are multiple coffins.

The use of *nmst*-jars, *ḥs*-vases and natron balls are common throughout the OMC (Scenes 2 to 7, 37 to 41, 58 to 64, 70 to 72), all relating to cleansing and purification rituals and accordingly depicted on numerous offering tables (Figure 7.23). It has also been argued that the round bread which is one of the most common features on offering tables and similar material (see Graph 3.9 in 3.3.1), may also be a reference to purification (i.e., natron and resin balls) and therefore their definition may be interchangeable. In the PP, these round objects present in temple offering scenes such as three scenes of Ptolemy VIII offering to the god Tutu in the temple of Philae, may actually represent incense/resin balls (see Quaegebeur 1991: 339).
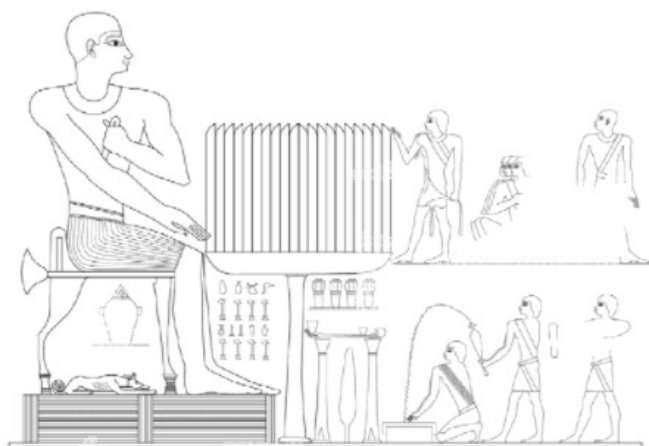
Figure 7.23 Offering scene on the eastern wall inside the Tomb of Karakhamun (TT223) depicting a libation sequence in the bottom right, with a sm-priest pouring water from a *ḥs*-vase upon an offering table. The second practitioner performs the actions outlined in scene 69, kneeling before the *twt* and preparing the *wdḥw*-offering table (from Molinero Polo 2014: 134).

Another important element that may be related to the OMC and its outcomes is the *ḥtp*-sign ("to be satisfied"), arguably the most common iconographic element on offering tables up until the LP (present on 111 out of 269 stone offering tables in the sample). Its inclusion in offering table design and its connection with intricate canal systems, basins, and spouts, may indicate an even more comprehensive definition. For example, in some cases the bread in the *ḥtp* resembles hieroglyphic signs for specific types of bread (X2, X3), while in others it may resemble the *nbs*-tree, or even a pointed edged instrument, reminiscent of instruments used during the OMC (see 3.5.4). Bread often takes the form of different utensils, examples of this are *nbs*-tree shaped bread, as well as bread shaped like the *psš-kf* knife. This fact may be connected to the diversity of the *ḥtp*-sign, which just like bread may be considered as a universal symbol for offering. Such multi-levelled associations are quite common among signs, concepts and tools connected with the OMC and a characteristic of ancient Egyptian religious, magical practice.

The most iconic utensils and action sequence depicted in the OMC involve the adze, calf leg (*ḫpš*) and heart (*ib*). While analysing the frequency of iconographic elements on all offering tables and related material throughout pharaonic Egypt, the leg is the second most common item (see Figure 3.15 in 3.5.4). The preference of the leg over an ox head or any other slaughter piece may be of significance since the offering of a calf leg constitutes the most dramatic part of the OMC. A leg is severed from a live calf while its mother is forced to witness the slaughter (e.g., Relief no. 396 Egyptian Museum in Cairo). This occurs while the female participant labelled as *ḏr.t nḏš.t* (*kleine Weihe*, "Small Consecration", Sc. 23, Otto 1960: 14) whispers a recitation in the calf's ear, the leg is

then presented to the mummy or statue still twitching and moving, being a literal manifestation of the life force of what should be a lifeless object (Ayad 2004; Otto 1960: 73-76). This action-packed sequence is part of the main OMC, Scenes 23 to 25, and 26 to 28. This is another attestation to the emotional separation of a deceased family member from his household and former self.

The adze has a very similar shape to the calf leg, they are thus associated, and the adze is a common utensil used throughout the OMC. It was originally used during wooden statue manufacture. Its shape is reminiscent of the Big Dipper/Plough constellation of the Egyptian star group 𓎟𓄿𓄡𓐍𓇳 *msḫtyw* ("The Bull's Foreleg") (Lull & Belmonte 2009: 162), indicating a cosmic association of both the calf leg and the adze and, thus, just as is the case with most other ritual elements, the adze has multiple meanings that may be applied to different contexts.

The OMC also stresses a transition between two realms, as Scenes 19 to 22 which also allude to the outcome of the ritual. The transition may be figuratively described as a rejuvenation process of the deceased, or in some cases even a birthing sequence as argued by Roth (1992; 1993). The connection of the rejuvenation process with birth and reproduction may also be represented in the iconography of numerous offering tables, of which several are phallic in nature and/or show the reproductive process (see 3.4.3.4; 5.7; 6.3.3). Therefore, the offering table not only represents the two main actions related to purification and the actual opening of the mouth but also a more emotional active process such as the separation of a child from his mother. The offering table thus represents a place for the deceased's traumatic separation from the living and ultimately his transformation/birth into a celestial being. The table constitutes a place for the mourners to express emotion while at the same it alludes to the desired outcome of the ritual action.

7.3.4. Diachronic changes in the Opening of the Mouth Ceremony as reflected in OT design
The OMC is first identified on tomb wall depictions from the 12th Dynasty, specifically in the Tomb of Amenenhet (BH2) (Otto 1960: 1), although the actual ritual dates back even further to the OK, when it probably was carried out as a symbolic act within the embalming tent (*ibw*). In Pyramid texts the *wpi* "to separate or to divide" is already identified (Otto 1960: 1; Roth 1992). The expression *wp.t-rꜣ* is found in Meten tomb inscriptions (LD II, 4/5) together with other texts connected with *sꜣḫ.t,* "Verklärung" [transfiguration] and *snṯr," Reinigung*" [cleansing] (Otto 1960: 6-7). Its occurrence within the private cult may only be attested after the OK, when tools related to the OMC are mentioned but not explicitly described in connection with a unique, standalone ritual.

During the OK, the Offering Ritual and the Statue Ritual were still separate, but a significant change occurred by the end of the NK, as evidenced by the occurrence of Statue Ritual utensils within offering lists, meaning that they were becoming united with other rites within a more complex cult. This transition is also evident by the frequent use of the calf leg, constituting a bridging between the Statue Ritual and the various slaughtering events that were part of the offering ritual. This link is strengthened by the mentioning of the *zꜣṯ*-ritual (see 7.2.2; 7.3.3), which became significantly more important by the end of the OK and the FIP.

Many utensils which had an original practical function, such as the *ḫpš* and the *psš-kf*, eventually became multifunctional in the sense that they obtained symbolic associations, while still maintaining their practical essence. During this period, offering tables also became increasingly multifunctional by combining different ritual traditions into one item with multiple uses. Utensils used during the NK OMC are often depicted apart, on a separate offering table in another register (Figure 7.23). In the OK, these two types of tables were separate, evidenced by the presence of OMC toolkits, which have only been attested to the OK. Offering tables significantly changed design, combining different elements such as "washing sets", and compartments for sacred oils as well as

an essential place for the positioning of offerings by the 5th Dynasty (Figure 7.24). With the OMC's growing emphasis on cleansing utensils towards the end of the OK, a new type of offering table was introduced: the B+C Type with two basins and a drainage canal with a large central *ḥtp* sign. By the MK, the shift from magical utterances and utensils towards cleansing rituals and the transference of the deceased into the afterlife, is even further emphasised.

Figure 7.24 Monumental alabaster offering table dating to the 5ᵗʰ Dynasty from an unknown context. It presents two ḥtp signs, one containing a detailed offering list (right) and the other the offering formula and titles of the deceased (left). There are four round depressions, possibly for the use of sacred oils as well as a central, circular raised platform probably used for the placement of utensils (A+C2 Type, monumental "fitted", ÄM 1159, ÄMP Berlin, CAT ID54).

Transfiguration related to these emerging concepts and changing rituals are frequent in Coffin Texts, such as CT III 312, 325, 339 (see Willems 1988; Otto 1960). The new emphasis is also evident in offering table design from the same time, since this is when intricate canal systems, numerous basins and spouts start to emerge. The pouring *ḥs*-vases described in OMC Scenes 65 to 69 are represented in some local traditions within Middle Egypt and reflected on offering tables (see 4.4.4). After the collapse of the OK a private cult emerges, reflected in the design and iconography of offering tables which display a more personalised interpretation of the OMC and a growing diversity in their design. Stone versions have an emphasis on the *ḥtp*-sign and purification rituals and are generally found in a fixed position within the necropolis, while pottery offering trays began to be more common within provincial cemeteries, reflecting an emphasis on the offering ritual, presentations of a calf leg, and a single act of libation (Figure 7.25).

Figure 7.25 Pottery offering tray dating to the FIP from Asyut, with the representation of meat offerings including a calf's leg and a central rampart and spout separating the offerings from more "active" elements such as an inclined ḥs-vase (S14940, Museo Egizio Torino, CAT ID162).

During the NK, there was a further emphasis on the offering itself which appears to be one of the main goals the OMC. New scenes are introduced in the sequence, especially concerning the sun cult (e.g., Scene 71, censing rituals performed for Re-Harakhte (Otto 1960: 151). The Statue Ritual becomes adapted to the 'transference into the afterlife' process. The implements used take on a variety of forms such as the *psš-kf* and combinations of tools are common, such as the *nṯrì* and its variations, causing some objects to be misinterpreted and lose their original meaning and function (e.g., as workshop and embalming implements). This process also affects offering tables, which become more complex depicting various rituals.

The differences in how the OMC is presented in NK contexts is evidenced by the variation in length, as well as which particular rituals are incorporated (see table 7.3).

Table 7.3 Four ways of how the OMC is depicted or described in New Kingdom contexts (Otto 1960: 29-30):

Type 1 consist of a fairly complete representation of the ritual which includes titles and texts.
Type 2 is an abbreviated version and usually showing a representation of the ceremony performed in front of the tomb (19th Dynasty).
Type 3 is another abbreviated version with a composition of the seated deceased receiving the outcomes of the ritual, i.e., the offering, a depiction common from the 18th Dynasty onwards.
Type 4 a very abbreviated version of the ceremony with only one officiant and the coffin or statue before him.

Even when the ceremony consists of Type 1, such as the most complete version in TT100, there was a preference for certain ritual actions to relate to water and purification, as well as the Statue Ritual. A different example of this would be the abbreviated depiction of the ceremony within a BoD vignette where the actual opening of the mouth is shown using the golden finger, adze and even an offering table beneath the scene representing all the ritual instruments used throughout the ceremony (Figures 7.18, 7.26). This indicates a preference for demonstrating an intricate knowledge of the entire ritual, rather than what would occur after the process has been completed. The most common depiction is an abbreviated version showing a "double purification" consisting of both censing and pouring water over an offering table (*zȝṯ*). This combination of different rituals may be represented in offering table design which show both the ritual action, as well as the desired outcomes, all summarised into one single object and place.

Figure 7.26 Offering Stela of Ramose (19ᵗʰ Dynasty, New Kingdom), depicting both the purification and censing rituals in front of the mummy and offering table by the sm-priests holding nmst-jars and censer, as well as the presentation of an offering table containing all of the implements used during the Opening of the Mouth ceremony, while the Lector priest reads the ritual. It depicts both the active ritual and participants as well as an assurance that the deceased holds all necessary knowledge of the ritual itself (Art Institute Chicago, 1920.264, online).

Although some of these versions are abbreviated, the ritual itself was most likely performed to its fullest extent. This may be indicated by "scenic notes" made on ostracon by priests during the Ramesside Period found at Deir el Medina (tomb of Rameses II, 19ᵗʰ Dynasty; Cairo JE 44892 in Keimer 1933: 196,197). These notes[72] contain recitations and ritual actions annotated by priests probably to remember how to conduct the ceremony (Otto 1960:28-30). The only way to prove that the outcome of the ceremony has been reached is the presence of the offering table.

7.3.5. Conclusion

As an essential tool at the centre of the funerary ritual, the offering table seems to have played an important role in the OMC. The multi-functional nature of the offering table may be evidenced through an analysis of not only the funerary cult but also of the OMC. The diversity of the ritual may be evidenced through offering table design and iconography, indicating a high degree of adaptability to changing needs and preferences of both a personal and temporal nature. A constant and progressive development of the OMC pertaining to changing ritual contexts and outcomes was mirrored by the evolution of the offering table from place for purification, to agglomeration of offerings and other actions at the OMC and a place for mourning. By the PP the emphasis on rejuvenation through water-pouring had emerged as a key focus, reflected by offering tables.

One characteristic of the offering table was its variety of uses and relevance to different rites. It could, as an *wdḥw* table, serve as an exclusive instrument for actions regarding purification and a demonstration of the act having been carried out and a guarantee that it would continue to do so

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[72] The ostracon contains on the front surface 8 vertical lines scenic notes and titles of the actors from scenes 9 to 13, on the backside two notes connect to scene 17b, but no recitations.

for ever. At the same time, it could take the semblance of the *ḥnk.t*-table, a more passive implement, but which nonetheless reflected through the depiction of elements and offerings a variety of ritual traditions such as purification, transformation and rejuvenation of the deceased. Through its comprehensive design and placement within the funerary context the offering table eventually became a kind of agglomerate of offerings and other actions carried out during the OMC and in turn defines a place for mourning.

Offering table design may indicate both the ritual action, as well as the desired outcomes, all summarised into one single object. By the NK the main outcome of the OMC was not only for the *k₃* to receive offerings, but it was also an act of unification of different elements, something which is reflected in offering tables, which in the end, throughout the Pharaonic Period, show the possibility of the deceased to be constantly rejuvenated through the acts of pouring water. As will be seen in the following section, this unifying concept addressed by Willems (1988) in relation to the function of coffins, is encompassed in the Eye of Horus concept and how it interplays with offering tables via a complex water process.

7.4. THE EYE OF HORUS CONCEPT

7.4.1. Introduction
The Eye of Horus is a cosmological and regenerative concept which is part of a notion of separation and unification of elements, constituting a long-standing notion within ancient Egyptian religious thought (see 2.7). By exploring the Eye as a concept, an overall analysis on the offering table as a medium for cultural, social, and religious practice can be made in relation to the previously outlined studies and contextualised examples, a primary aim of this thesis. The offering table represents a union of elements and may therefore be compared to the Eye of Horus and its different parts, as well as the practice of filling it through the use of liquid. Through a unification process via the use of water (e.g., the Nile) the offering table does not only represent the Eye in its entirety but also becomes an active place just as the active ritual landscape is defined by natural elements.

The Eye and its Components
The Eye of Horus, known as *wḏ₃t*, is arguably the most iconic symbol of ancient Egyptian religion. It finds its roots in the Heliopolitan cosmogony and related mythologies, specifically in the physical altercation when Horus wounded Seth in his testicles and Seth in response tore out Horus' left eye (Pinch 1994: 27). In the cosmogony, Horus' right eye symbolised the sun, while his left was the moon and was therefore closely associated with Thoth. After the lunar Eye was damaged, Thoth restored its fullness, resulting in its definition as the "sound eye" (Pinch 1994: 27). It is by the power of the full *wḏ₃t* eye that Horus "resurrected" Osiris in the Duat (Pinch 1994: 27). The wounding of Horus is constantly used as a sacramental explanation in numerous magical and funerary texts and also reflected in its reproduction in protective amulets (Pinch 1994: 29). Accordingly, the word for amulet, *wḏ₃*, has the same root as *w₃ḏt*, meaning "to seal" (Pinch 1994: 109). It is a symbol of wholeness, while its parallel, the solar Eye of Re (*irt rꜥ*), is a protective and powerful symbol (Pinch 2004: 128-131). The Eye of Re, usually depicted as a right eye together with the goddess Sekhmet, comes from a parallel mythology in which Thoth retrieves the solar Eye's power in the *dšrt* after the Eye has gone away for a time. It is also associated with the creation myth in which the god Amun-Re creates mankind with the tears from his solar eye (Pinch 1994: 24).

In both temple and funerary contexts, the Eye of Horus is offered to gods and the deceased; it is considered as the "cultic expression" for every offering item, especially (but not exclusively) if related to water (Assmann 2001: 357). Every single item represents a process of restoration and

making whole again something that has been damaged, separated, or lost (Assmann 2001: 357). It therefore became a "symbol of reversibility that could heal everything, even death" (Assmann 2001: 357). As stated by Quirke (2015), "Every movement of material for a meal, for sound, for burning incense, and for washing evokes the restoration of wholeness or loss" (2015: 135). While addressing concepts like the Eye of Horus, there are connotations to broader themes, such as the intermittent replenishing of the Nile banks after the inundation period. Any ritual, especially within the funerary cult, was never devoid of a higher intended meaning, no matter how ancient or simplistic any action or object appeared to be. Quirke (2015) argues that the offering of a loaf of bread could be linked to the Eye of Horus and was neither intended "to fill a gap" nor to invent a tradition (2015: 149), it rather mirrored the notion of: "a loaf is offered (tangible to this world) and it is the Eye returned to make the world whole (re-expressing the same physical world as interaction between divine forces)" (Quirke 2015: 149). This definition may be applied to the offering table as not only a ritual utensil but as a symbol for a process of restoration, rejuvenation, and endurance of the deceased within a funerary context. As illustrated in chapters 4-6, the offering table throughout Egypt and over time still maintains its primary function as a processing site for the execution or even representation of various funerary rituals of activation and/or restoration. In a way, offering tables represent the same theological concepts as the Eye of Horus as well the rituals behind it, especially the act of "filling" a receptacle to reinstate its effectiveness [App II:4.1].

The process of filling the eye, as described in CT 155, is an act intended to *mḥ.t* "complete" the *ẖḳs.t* "injured eye" (Miatello 2015: 81 [App II:4.3]). The process is completed by filling a vessel with a remaining 10th part of the Eye which is the crucial difference between an incomplete and a complete eye, corresponding to 1/10 *ḥḳꜣt* (Miatello 2015: 81). The significance of 10 entities is also represented in the Ennead, where Horus is the tenth member. This last part is described as *iri mw hnw* "making a water of 1 *hnw*" (1/10 *ḥḳꜣt*) (Miatello 2015: 82). The calculation of a missing part corresponds to the 1/64 described by Gardiner (1927). The rites were performed on festival days such as the 6th Day Festival (see below). By quoting ancient texts, Junker (1911) outlined the ritual of magically healing the *wḏꜣt* and purification acts performed upon both eyes to reinstate their fullness during the *s(is)-n.t* (1911: 101-106) for example: "I have filled the eye with what was missing, as the sixth-day feast had not (yet) come" (18th Dynasty, Papyrus Louvre N 3073, BoD Ch. 80, 6-7, in Miatello 2015: 72). The festival was performed in Edfu and intended to support renewal and rebirth. It is described in association with the construction of the temple (*znnwt* in Wilson 1997: 857 – 858).

The concept of the missing element remained fundamental throughout the Pharaonic Period, only the types of measurement changed (e.g., corn-measurement not found earlier than the 19th Dynasty). This is usually the case for all *materia magica*; although the means of arriving at the outcome of the ritual, the particular elements that were chosen or emphasised, as well as the main concepts remained more or less the same. The outcome of the Filling of the Eye ritual is similar to that of rituals related to funerary offering tables: to rejuvenate, activate, and satisfy the deceased by unifying and combining various and dispersed entities into one. This process, much like the Eye and its connotations to the Egyptian landscape, is accomplished by the use of liquids, specifically water.

7.4.2. Water Process: Creating an Active Place

The water process upon an offering table can be summarised as taking water from the Nile and pouring it over the table's surface which contains engravings, canals and basins enabling a transformation of the water into a new substance to be distributed or collected (see 2.6). This process constitutes an act of unification of the iconographic elements represented on the table,

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accomplished by "filling" its surface with water. The following description will illustrate how liquid is "activated" in order to produce a desired outcome.

There are two main ritual actions to consider while analysing waterflow upon offering tables and similar material. The first is how the type of surface and iconographic design of the item may influence the length of the process. The second is in what manner material, features and design influence the outcome of the application of liquid. The outcome is affected by the manipulation of the liquid, for example the time it is allowed to stay upon the surface, the way in which it moves across the entire surface - if it does so in a controlled or uncontrolled manner-, and if it covers or avoids certain areas upon the surface. It is important to note, however, that some offering tables and similar utensils were not intended to be used with liquids, but as highlighted in 3.4.3.3; 6.4.1, their function could also be symbolic, especially when associated with their origin as a platform for offerings (e.g., *ḥnḵt* table, see 7.3.4).

As argued throughout the thesis, context plays a central role in defining the use and function of offering tables. When considering the water process, the inclination or strategic positioning of the offering table may significantly alter the length and destination of the waterflow (Table 3.39 in 3.4.3.3). A total of 110 out of 387 objects in the sample show a surface inclination towards an external spout structure, or an opening at the edge of the item, while 216 out of the 387 show no particular inclination. This does not exclude the possibility that the offering tables and similar objects may have been placed upon an inclined surface, especially if fitted or free-standing. The high number of objects with no inclination may also reflect the presence of numerous offering basins or amulets/models within the sample. It is very rare to encounter an object with an inclination directed towards the opposite end of an opening or external spout structure (see 3.4.3.3).

If a table, or its surface, is inclined, the liquid poured upon it will leave the surface at a quicker pace suggesting a need to either collect the water or clear the surface as quickly as possible. This may reflect specific phases within the funerary cult such as the often-repeated action of cleansing the offering table before and after an act of offering (*zꜥṯ*). Accordingly, it is a ritual-specific feature, while a non-inclined offering table is relatively not ritually specified and, therefore, may be defined as multi-functional. The depth of the engraved features and iconographic elements may affect the transference of liquids across the surface. Depending on local style and workmanship, the depth of engravings may vary. In addition, one cannot exclude the likelihood that the depth also had ritual significance, especially since features such as the *ḥtp*-sign, often are positioned more than one centimetre above the surrounding area. If water is poured upon it, the sign would emerge almost like the primordial hill [App II:2.1]. Even if it were not originally intended to be of ritual significance, due to the modelling process involved in pottery manufacture, the miniature models of cattle parts and other offerings are almost three-dimensional and would accordingly emerge above their surroundings during a hypothetical water process. The water surrounding parts of butchered animals may even mimic the bloody ground of a slaughtering area, especially since the surface was almost always painted red (Table 3.68 in 3.5.1.2).

The typology and classification of offering tables, trays and soul-houses outlined in 3.3.1 may also significantly affect the water process. For example, the B1 Type consists of offering basins intended for liquid offerings or the storage of liquid, while the ø Type shows no particular features upon the surface, which would manipulate or retain liquid. Such plates were probably not intended to be used within a lengthy or complex ritual but had a singular function such as a place for offerings and were subject to frequent cleansing and clearing.

Another factor to consider is the material in which the offering table was made, its morphology could significantly affect the transmission of liquid, especially since it may have had varying levels of permeability. Limestone has varying levels of porosity and may be significantly affected by water damage and other types of erosion. Moreover, its high malleability creates a white powder across the surface, especially if exposed to the elements and, when in contact with water, it may produce a white milky substance (see 4.6.1). The ancient Egyptians were probably aware of this effect, especially in the context of Middle Egyptian rock-cut tombs. The outcome of the ritual of pouring liquid across the surface and its changing colour when stored in basins or transferred from a spout may indicate the transformation of a liquid into an otherworldly substance. This magical manifestation must have had a sublime effect on cultic practitioners, as well as other members of a ritual party, while they witnessed such an act of transformation, especially if accompanied by invocations and recitations.

Different stones may alter their appearance when they come in contact with liquid. For example, a highly porous material like sandstone may absorb water and become several shades darker, while other more precious stones containing inclusions such as mica may create a shimmering effect when covered by water. These types of tables were common in mortuary temple contexts, perhaps emphasising their magical power and the unifying or altering effects of water. Less valuable materials such as pottery may also be manipulated to increase water retention or permeability. The coarseware present in the sample has a significant high level of porosity but has often been subject to surface treatments such as applying a slip or red paint.

The ritual function of the offering table depends on its ability to retain or discharge water. Table 7.4 below outlines different features present in offering tables and similar material that influence the water management (Figure 7.27-28). The structure and design of these items may indicate different functions within the funerary/mortuary cult.

Table 7.4 Features present on offering tables and similar material which may alter the flow of liquids when poured upon them.

Water retention	Water discharge
No inclination	Inclination
Deep engravings	Shallow engravings
Raised rims	Shallow rim/no rim
Non-functional/lack of spout structures	Functional/increased number of spouts
Little to no inscriptions	Numerous, shallow canals
1-2 canals max/no canals	Numerous shallow basins/no basins
Few deep basins	Limited or concentrated signs of erosion
Signs of sedimentation	Raised platform
Sunken area	Relatively short process
Long water process	

Figure 7.27 (left): An example of a stone offering table with two double-rimmed basins with no outlets for the discharge of liquids. This is an example of an offering table which has features favouring water-retention (Old Kingdom, 6ᵗʰ Dynasty, 37.1491E Brooklyn Museum, New York, CAT ID291, Type B2).

Figure 7.28 (right): An example of a stone offering table with features favouring water discharge (e.g., shallow sunken area and engravings). The depth of the engravings, especially upon the external spout structure reflect an expedited water process, while offering tables with numerous canals and deeper engravings still promote water-discharge, but a slower process (Late Period, NME049, Medelhavsmuseet Stockholm CAT ID448, Type C2).

While considering typology and offering table design, other factors such as placement do not necessarily alter the water flow. This includes the criteria of fitted, fixed, free-standing, portable, or monumental. The only part of the process which may be affected is where the water or liquid goes after the process has been completed. A portable offering table standing on legs may have an elevated external spout structure which may easily allow for a container to be placed under it, while a fixed offering table often directly carved into the ground, does not facilitate the collection of liquid after it has evacuated the surface.

Direction of waterflow

The orientation of iconographic elements engraved/incorporated upon the surface of an offering table and similar objects may provide an insight into the relationship between "giver" and "receiver". Since the offering table is most frequently positioned within a liminal space (i.e., between two different realms), the water process symbolises an exchange of gifts. The most common manipulation of the waterflow and iconographic orientation is to direct them towards an external spout structure or opening in the surrounding rim indicating that the outcome of the water process will benefit a receiver.

A more ambiguous representation of the interplay between giver and receiver is when the orientation of the iconography is directed away from the drainage facilities. One hundred and thirty two out of 269 offering tables in the sample show such an orientation (Table 3.53 in 3.4.3.4). The iconography directed towards the deceased emphasises the ability of their k_3 to acknowledge their presence, while at the same time accessing their inscribed name. Since the most common orientation of the drainage spout/gap is opposite (i.e., away from) the false door/statue it suggests that the deceased is considered to be a guest/witness to a process initiated by practitioners/family members who receive the evacuated liquid and then offers it to the deceased just like a host offers nutrition to a guest (Figures 7.29-30).
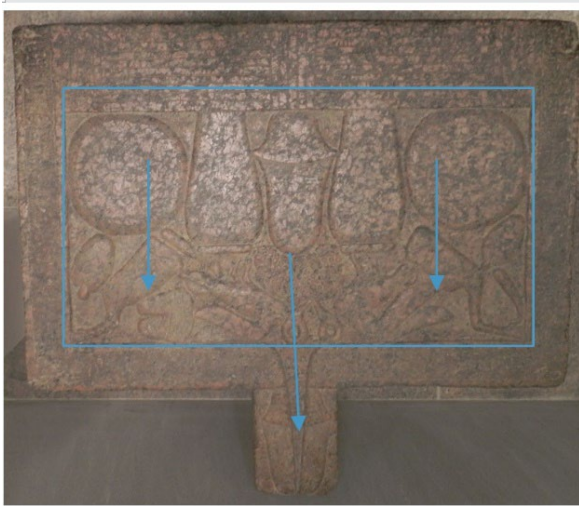
Figure 7.29 An example of an offering table with the depiction of offerings orientated towards the external spout structure (blue) (22.3.2 MET New York, Late Period 26th Dynasty, Thebes. CAT ID276, C1 Type).

Figure 7.30 An example of an offering table with the depictions of offerings orientated opposite the external spout structure (red) and other water features (C1753 Museo Egizio Turin, New Kingdom, Thebes. CAT ID158, B+C Type).

On some offering trays, the direction of the iconography may be restricted by features on the tray itself, meaning that it is directed towards representations of the deceased or the structure in which he may reside. The difference between stone offering tables with iconographic features orientated towards the spout and those with offerings orientated in a opposite direction is significantly more pronounced compared to offering trays and soul-houses in the sample (see table 3.52 in 3.4.3.4). This may be due to a more direct relationship with the deceased represented in the object itself. In some cases, the water process is separated from the offering area (Figure 7.36, see 4.5-6; 5.6-7; 6.3).

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Figure 7.31 (left): Pottery soul-house with a central square basin and canal leading through an external spout structure. The area containing water features is in the outer "courtyard" space of the house (4327 Manchester Museum, Middle Kingdom 12ᵗʰ Dynasty, CAT ID27).

Figure 7.32 (right): Stone offering tables with a large, deep basin and separate area containing engravings of offerings as well as tilted ḥs vases pouring out streams of liquid through an external spout structure (EA610 British Museum, CAT ID134, New Kingdom 26ᵗʰ Dynasty Type B+C).

Controlled vs. Uncontrolled Waterflow

Water movement may be indicated by engravings directing the water flow, inclined ḥs-vases and other libation utensils (Figure 7.37). Inclined ḥs-vases are often depicted on offering tables and trays from Asyut, indicating not only a local style but also a specific ritual (see 4.2.5). In Asyut, ḥs-vases increasingly became a common iconographic element (see 4.4.4) more common than the *nmst*-jars which were used in other areas (see table 3.56, section 3.4.3.4). ḥs-vases may vary in size, but their iconic shape remained the same throughout the Pharaonic Period.

The use of liquid in funerary rituals may be summarised as pouring, anointing, or sprinkling (see Ritner 1993: 73-110 [App II:1.2]). If a table was meant to be cleansed, a non-specific stream of water may be required, but if the ritual action had to be controlled, both the water source and the application of the liquid varied in accordance with the ritual context. A controlled stream of liquid is not essential on offering tables which lack an outlet, while it is crucial on those equipped with such a device. The timing of the water process is significantly influenced by features included in offering table design. These include features intended for liquid to remain, to evacuate immediately, or to go through a specific process before it is dispersed.

Experiments

To test the retention and flow of water on offering tables a short experiment was carried out on two replicas of offering tables. The aim was to observe how the water process would work, i.e., where the water may have been poured, what features were meant to be highlighted, and where the water went. Two different offering tables were selected to be 3-D printed[73] in resin. One copy was made of a stone offering table from Abydos dated to the 12ᵗʰ Dynasty, it was originally made of fine limestone and is now at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge (E. 61.1966; Figure 7.38). The table is of a portable, free-standing type though its dimensions had to be reduced by 50%. The original external rim is inscribed but the replica's rim was too shallow to allow the hieroglyphic text

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[73] Reproduced with the support and courtesy of Dr Kamal Badreshany, Research Associate in the Department of Archaeology and the Durham Archaeomaterials Research Centre.

to be reproduced. Nevertheless, all other features corresponded to a 2:1 ratio. The second item to be replicated was a pottery offering tray with a typical irrigation field design of MK trays found at El-Kab (see 3.3.1; 5.3,5; Figure 7.39). It is of a 1:1 ratio and therefore life-size. Several experiments were performed upon the replicas during a workshop organised in collaboration with the NEAES (Oriental Museum, Durham University, November 3rd, 2017; [App V:1-3]).

Figure 7.33 Limestone Offering Table, 12th Dynasty Abydos, Fitzwilliam Museum, E.61.1926.
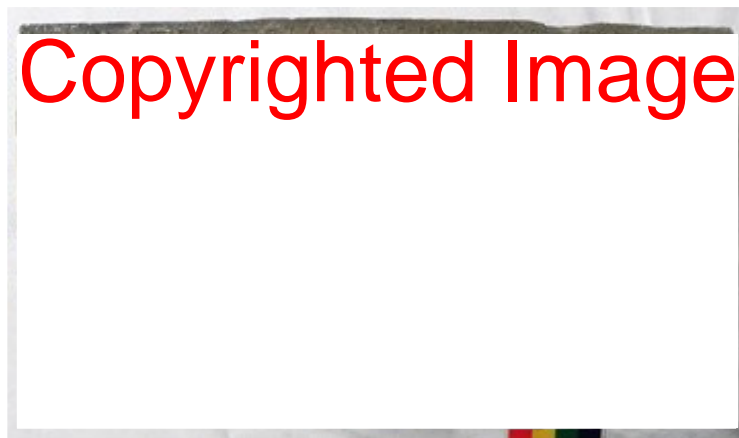
Figure 7.34 Pottery Offering Tray with evidence of red slip, Middle Kingdom El Kab, Fitzwilliam Museum, E.230.1902.

a) Method

The surface of the offering table is by a raised rim divided into two separate areas. Each area contains an opening leading to a central spout canal, two spouted Hs-vases and a large *ḥtp*-sign orientated towards the external spout structure. There are eight sloping-edged rectangular basins with no incorporated outlet at the spout edge. The table is categorised as a "multiple" offering table, possibly dedicated to several individuals. Water was poured from a hight of about 40 cm using a jug containing about 400 ml of water. The spout of the glass jug generated a steady stream and only took about five seconds to wet the surface of the entire table, a time that could be easily doubled if considering the life-size offering table. The first water process was initiated on one of the outermost *ḥtp*-signs and the stream was then moved laterally across the surface. The first features to emerge from the water were the *ḥtp*-signs while the rest, including the basins, were submerged. Some of the water very slowly left the surface through the spout canal and the external spout structure, but a significant amount of liquid was retained within the sunken area and the eight basins (Figure 7.35). A second experiment was carried out by filling each basin separately in a consecutive manner. When the basins were overfilled the excess liquid did not reach the sunken area containing the offerings, indicating that the water process most likely had been initiated on the *ḥtp*-sign, creating a dynamic and long-lasting process. It therefore took some time for the water

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to disperse and the various items upon the table (e.g., _ḥtp_ signs, _ḥs_ vases, bovine legs) to emerge by the action of filling basins and distributing the liquid into canals (for footage of experiments see App V:1-2).

The pottery offering tray replica from El Kab is almost exact in both size and features. It was made in red coloured resin to resemble the original surface treatment. The tray is horseshoe shaped with a raised rim sloping downwards towards the large opening. The tray contains about 11 canals, (possibly made with finger impressions) and three distinct representations of animal parts, including an ox-head missing its horns, a bovine leg and a circular platform containing what may be entrails. The most surface-wear was identified on the innermost part of the tray, as well as the tip of the leg and the ox head. The experiment was therefore initiated by pouring water upon the inner area and the highest point upon the tray surface, which is the ox-head. A small amount of water was poured about 30 cm above the surface, a lesser height than the previous experiment since it proved to be difficult to control the stream on such a small surface area as the ox head. The water created a pool at the opposite end of the opening and only evacuated from the surface through the canals following the raised rim (Figure 7.36). Accordingly, the water only covered about 30 percent of the surface. In a second experiment water was poured onto the centre of the tray allowing it to surround the offerings and make use of the numerous canals. The anomalous pooling of water may have not been originally intended especially since the design contains an excess number of canals. This may have been caused by an error in design or may indicate that the tray was originally placed on an inclined surface or tilted and adjusted as necessary [App V:3].

Figure 7.35 (left): Replica of the limestone offering table (E.61.1926) after the first experiment. The steam of water was first poured on the left and then dragged across the surface.

Figure 7.36 (right): Replica of the pottery offering tray (E.230.1902) after the first experiment. The water was poured upon the ox head, resulting in a pool of water at the top end of the tray.

b) Outcomes

Both experiments provided insights into the timing of the water process, which parts of the surface were emphasised, and which parts were intended to be filled. However, the material, in this case pottery and limestone, may not only alter the timing of the waterflow but also the outcome by changing the colour of the surface and in some cases the liquid itself. The aims of the experiment were mainly to observe the action of pouring water across the surface and its included features. The sunken areas on the stone offering table were not only created as a consequence of the raised reliefs but was an intentional negative space causing the _ḥtp_-sign to slowly emerge from the liquid

thus highlighting the desired outcome of the ritual. This process may resemble a field after the inundation period, while the basins, like those in the fields, continue to "fertilise" the table. The water process can thus be considered as a regenerative phenomenon reflected as an interplay between stagnant and active water.

7.4.3. Diachronic Changes in the Water Process

The diachronic changes in offering table design may indicate a change in the execution and desired outcome of the water process and the need to maintain the permanence of ritual action. In the OK there is a significant emphasis on water retention combined with the extensive use of rectangular basins, which became a frequent element during the 4th Dynasty onwards. Out of the 55 objects dating to the OK in the sample, 24 are classified as the B1 Type, i.e., basins, other frequent types are B2 and B+C, all containing rectangular basins and maximum two canals. These offering tables were associated with the royal cult which emphasised notions of unification and control over the Egyptian landscape. Numerous basins have sloping edges or are "stepped" due to the inclusion of multiple rims. Contrary to later periods, it appears as though water was initially poured into the basin in order to steadily rise, overflowing each rim and then eventually the surface. However, the opposite may have occurred, if the basin contained an internal spout structure and was incorporated into a larger surface with representations of offerings (Table 3.49 in 3.4.3.3).

If we once more consider the offering table of Sezu dating to the OK (CG 1330), the varying basins labelled as different seasons, as well as the measurements of the inundation (25 cubits, 23 cubits, 22 cubits, etc.) may correspond to the different desired levels of liquids poured within the central basin (see Figure 5.1 in 5.5.1). In a sense, this water process may be very similar to that of "filling the Eye" in much later periods, restoring the efflux to the deceased while at the same time replenishing Egypt and its Nile banks.

The manipulation of water upon offering tables symbolises human control of water resources. Canals and basins within the actual irrigated fields were a visible manifestation of the control the pharaoh exercised over the landscape. This responsibility was also held by the nomarchs and local governors during the FIP and MK, and then into the NK, symbolically expressed in offering table design. The emergence of the B+C Type in the late OK is usually composed of two basins, each with a diagonal canal merging into a single outlet, or each creating a separate outlet for the content of the basins. Most examples of surface erosion on limestone tables of the B+C Type is present in the enlarged *ḥtp*-sign, indicating that this is where the water process commences. Offering tables during this period may often have been inclined depending on their placement within the funerary context (Figure 7.37). This would have caused the water to fill the basin at an angle, perhaps in an effort to slow down the water process, thus causing some liquid to remain in each basin and then slowly disperse along the channel (see 4.6.1).
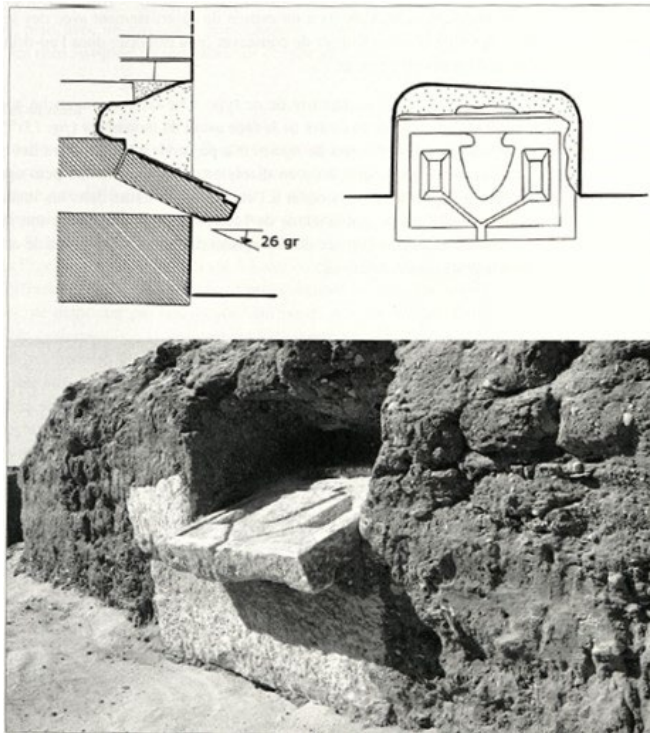
Figure 7.37 Plan and photograph of an offering table still in situ and in its original angled placement, fitted into a niche in an unknown Mastaba tomb, west of the pyramid of Ankhnespepy III (Middle Kingdom, Saqqara), in Legros 2016: 91, Fig. 12).

Between the 11th and 12th Dynasty the *ḥtp*-sign became highly stylised and occupied a large area of the surface of the table, often surrounded by intricate canal systems and/or interlinked basins. This may have been an effort to slow down or control different elements of the water-process. By the 12th Dynasty the enlarged *ḥtp*-sign and canal systems became standardised while at the same time recalling OK stylistic choices. Nevertheless, there is a change in the water process with the incorporation of an external spout structure, essential from this period onwards. This feature correlates with the changing placement of the offering table which in the OK tended to be fitted or fixed, while a significant number of tables from the MK in the sample are classified as free-standing.

The elevated spout indicates a need to control outcomes of the water process as well as an intention to slow it down. It is during the MK that offering trays and soul-houses emerge in significant numbers in the archaeological record. Basins and various canal formations in the design of pottery trays show a similar change in the water process, i.e., a need to influence the timing and force of the water flow. There is an increase in the use of liquids and, with the introduction of spouts, an increased need for removing them. The amount of liquid must have varied significantly since some basins were meant to be filled, while the increased number of canals were meant to expel the liquid. This may indicate that water was poured rather than sprinkled, as stated in religious texts and by scholars such as Hölzl (2002). Sprinkling water is more uncontrolled which leads to water being dispersed, while pouring the liquid may facilitate its compartmentalisation within design elements as well as its potential collection.

Coffin Texts from the MK referring to the "Lord of the Field of Offerings" illustrate the need for sowing and irrigation fields to receive magic (*ḥkꜣ*) as well as nourishment (CT 464, 465). The process of becoming 'content' (*ḥtp*) is the same as the water process upon offering tables, which provides water imbued with power and nourishment. This might explain why pottery trays and soul-house constitute a 'place' or processing site, which the water process activates in order to create products for the deceased (see 5.5-7).

The desired movement of the water shifts between the end of the MK and the NK. Although the shift may be subtle, the reasons behind it may be due to a change in how the deceased is believed to enter the afterlife. During the NK, funerary notions shifted from an "ascent" of the deceased to his "rebirth", represented by a union between Osiris and Re, leading to his transformation into a solarised Osirian entity (Pouls Wegner 2002; 2010).

By the NK there appears to be a greater emphasis on water retention evidenced by an increased depth of basins upon the offering table surface, as well as the presence of sunken areas as opposed to raised platforms. The water process may be a symbolic representation of the inundation, filling the entire surface, which no longer is covered by canals, transforming it to a processing site akin to an irrigated field. This greater emphasis on water retention caused a lack of space for inscriptions, which was resolved by including gussets on either side of the external spout structure. The *ḥtp*-sign became smaller, while the B+C Type is steadily replaced by the C2 Type (see 3.3.1). In general terms, the water process may be described as follows: water is poured at the centre of the table, where a representation of offerings is present, until it is filled to the rim, the water then flows quickly through the spout canal and through a second *ḥtp*-sign. The water is thus imbued with the essence of the offering and leaving through a phallic representation of the *ḥtp*-sign, a reproductive process is mimicked. This marks a significant change in the funerary cult and religious tradition.

The rejuvenative powers of water and the water process take the centre stage in religious ceremonies from the NK onwards. New magical material such as statue-combined offering tables, healing statues, Horus stelae (i.e., *cippi*) and offering tables in amulet form, are all part of this new process (see 6.4.1). Water was poured on many of these objects to be imbued with magical properties and rejuvenative qualities (see Price 2016; Kákosy 1999; Ritner 1989).

By the LP, the water process maintains its rejuvenative connotations, evidenced by an increased need for water retention, as well as the occurrence of votive offering tables lacking water retention facilities, but symbolising the outcome of the water process (e.g., fertility, purity, and vitality). The offering table steadily becomes a symbol, while at the same time it adapts to changes in ritual traditions (see Chapter 6).

During the PP the water process changes slightly with the introduction of sacred lake-style basins, emphasising the need for water retention to preserve the fertilising power of water, (see 3.3.1; 6.3.1-2). A parallel innovation is the representation of reproductive processes and even the birthing process, attested by pottery offering trays dating to around this period. The act of pouring (*sṯi*) may be an example of "sympathetic magic used to expedite birth". It has its roots in the Egyptian verb *wart* "to flee", a term also used to describe the waters of the inundation (Wb. I, 286, 16 and 18, in Roth 1992: 118). The action may be illustrated by an inversion of the water processes on the pottery Ptolemaic offering tables in the sample. In rare cases, the water is poured through a funnel-shaped spout and emerges from a drainage hole between the legs of a woman and onto the depictions upon the sunken area (see 6.3.3).

The movement of liquid across the surface of Mendes offering tables may also be described as an inverted water process. Similar to the process upon Ptolemaic sacred lake basins, liquid is poured into the central basin containing a staircase and a crocodile symbolising the Nile, until it rises to the edge and slowly flows along a maze until it reaches sunken areas with internal drainage holes leading the liquid through lion-headed spouts causing it to slowly dissipate. Drainage holes may also be present inside the central basin emphasising a need for the liquid to recede, imitating the

function of a Nilometer (see 6.3.1-2). The function of the water process throughout the PP is to unite not only different parts of the offering table but to also represent the unification of elements, as well as the movement and rejuvenation of the Nile and Egypt itself.

7.4.4. Festivals and the Use of Water

> *"Transfiguration for your bꜣ!*
> *May you be called on at the Wag-festival,*
> *May Nun make a flood for you in your rock-cut tomb."*

Scribal statue of Amenmose (from TT 373, KHM Vienna ÄS 5749) in Assmann 2005:347.

This inscription on an offering statue dating to the NK may indicate when and for what purpose offering tables were used. In this case it shows how the offering table, accompanied by invocations, may even have the power to change the trajectory of the Nile in order to reach the tomb of the deceased. Nun represents the source of the inundation which is then said to flood the tomb (Assmann 2005:347). This process takes place during the previously described mortuary cult, which occurred on specific calendar days and within the frame of religious festivals.

During the festivals, the offering table is used to regulate the life-providing forces of water through three capacities: a) provision of nourishment and vital forces through offerings; b) replenishment and maintenance of rejuvenating capacities; and c) restoration of life functions through divine efflux, - Filling of the Eye. The following presents a few examples of ancient Egyptian festivals which may be related to the use and overall significance of the offering tables and similar material. (For a summary of important festivals and calendar days see Quirke 2015: Table 3.1, 101).

a) *Provision*: Mortuary festivals

Various local and 'national' mortuary festivals are recorded throughout the Pharaonic Period, (Quirke 2015: 102). The most iconic and best evidenced is the Valley Festival during which the people in Thebes would visit their deceased in chapels or burial places. Archaeological remains of mortuary activities have also been found in contexts dating to the 1st Dynasty at Abydos (Quirke 2015: 104-5; Effland & Effland 2010). The activities during this festival included dancing, feasting and most importantly - the offering of numerous items and victuals for the deceased. This gave rise to mortuary offering lists from as early as 2500 BCE (Barta 1963), (see 2.4.1-3; 4.5.1; 7.2-3). Nevertheless, the Valley Festival mainly concerned Upper Egyptian contexts, while it is likely that other festivals were performed in a similar fashion in other parts of Egypt. Festivals in the necropolis were part of the ancestor cult since deceased relatives were visited and offered to, highlighting the practice of provision while using implements such as offering tables. The inhabitants of the settlements would celebrate together with the deceased, bridging the gap between one realm and another. However, there is also evidence of a less formal mortuary cult in which visitors would perform offerings while visiting the necropolis on their own, evidenced by graffiti inscribed by a handful of literate Egyptians, especially within important elite tombs placed within public areas (Assmann 2005: 181). The practice of provisioning the deceased as well as evidence of visits and offerings may not only indicate the use and reuse of offering tables, but also the leaving behind of votive substitutes or miniature offering tables in sanctuaries and sacred sites.

The Wag-festival involved a journey to Abydos on a *nšmt*-barque which is also part of the Statue Ritual in the funerary cult. There is evidence that this ritual event took place every year at Abydos on the 11th day of the first month of the inundation (Assmann 2005: 308). The festival was

specifically linked to the inundation. It involved the provisioning of offerings so the deceased could participate with the living during the festival. Representations and references to the festival found within tombs and mortuary inscriptions allowed the deceased to participate in the celebrations for all eternity. It was important for the deceased to be invoked and be present during festivals occurring during the inundation period (the beginning of the period of the rejuvenation of the soil), since it is during this time that fresh libations are provided on the designated offering place/table. It was a memorial cult but also a communal affair linking the realm of the dead with that of the living, as well as it relied on a community to facilitate the provision of offerings to the ancestors. During these festivals, the living brought the inundation to the necropolis, just as pharaoh and the gods brought the inundation to the land.

b) Replenishment: Festivals of the Nile

When the inundation waters began to recede other important festivals occurred, including the Nile festivals, which increased in popularity during later periods, combining both temple and funerary rituals. The inundation season ended with the Khoiak festival which was when the silt covered the banks, and the Nile valley re-emerged, allowing for a new agricultural cycle to begin. This is when the grain begins to grow and produce nourishment for the population. The festival was originally called *kꜣ-ḥr-kꜣ* "abundance on abundance" and was intended to celebrate new life and provide nourishment to all *kꜣ*-souls (Eaton 2006; Quirke 2015:100). The festivals celebrating the inundation provide a central role to female entities and the reproductive process, emphasising the use of canals and basins to mimic the trajectory of the replenishing water within the new agricultural field. It is a process of replenishing the land as well as a celebration of the very essence of all things (*kꜣ*).

Annual flood festivals were closely linked to mortuary festivals since they involved the presentation of offerings and means to replenish and consecrate the new waters. The original inundation festivals were celebrated as far back as 2778 BCE and were public celebrations when offerings were thrown into the Nile and inundation water was (Prell 2009: 243). Both actions are closely related to offering table design and iconography, especially from the LP onwards (see 6.3.1-2). During the Ramesside Period, mortuary temple complexes began to incorporate Nilometers that were possibly used during the Nile festivals and rituals surrounding the god Hapi. These ritual practices were incorporated into offering table design, as well as marking a change in the representation of the water process (see 6.3.1). This was further emphasised during the PP when the rejuvenative qualities of the Nile became more important than irrigation practices and processing sites, like those represented on offering tables and similar material during earlier periods. The ritual function of the Nile festivals focused on optimising the flood waters by presenting the river with products gained from previous agricultural activities. This may explain why the water process changed from being a representation of the active flood waters to an emphasis on the outcome of the flood.

Texts alluding to the Khoiak-festival are first encountered during the PP, but they may be much older (LÄ I-5: 958-59). The festival was celebrated in public areas across Egypt and eventually became a national holiday (Assmann 2005:363). The open court and offering chapels during the reigns of Seti I and Rameses II began to include a "bed of earth for watering seeds" to be used on the days of Khoiak. Effigies of Osiris were placed upon sacred lakes, or a particular basin filled with seeds and water. This ritual is sometimes known as the "ceremony of bringing forth the Nile" (Chassinant 1966-68). Inscriptions at Dendera emphasise that the Osiris figurines were composed of various quantities of barley and sand. Water was everyday poured upon the figurine and on the last day it would be taken out of the basin, mummified, exposed to the sun and then buried (Dendera, inscription of the Khoiak festival 18-23). The water in the basin had become "energised"

due to the efflux of Osiris represented in the figurines (see 2.6; 6.3.1-2). These water basins played a central role in the use of offering tables since they contained the waters of the Nile flood, as well as they had figurative efflux of Osiris. This process was mirrored when liquid flowed out from basins, generally through a drainage hole in the centre, to be collected in a lower basin and considered the efflux of Osiris (Goddio 2016: 168). The sacred basins used within the temple cult basin would probably have been consecrated through a ritual resembling the OMC. The annual celebration of the Khoiak-festival became closely interlinked with regenerative rites for the deceased, especially since the offering chapel and entrance to the burial chamber was reached along a sloping passage, rather than a steep shaft, so that the water could easily be transported to the offering table (Assmann 2001, 2003; Quirke 2015: 220-221; Figure 7.38).

Figure 7.38 Representation of the open-court chapel of a tomb engraved on a limestone slab in the chapel of Mennefer (Memphis, New Kingdom 18th-19th Dynasty). It depicts a woman and a man kneeling at the edge of a large basin with water collected from an offering table and its ḥtp-shaped external spout structure (a common feature in the NK Type C1). The context of the ritual suggests a temple complex due to the represented architecture and fixtures. However, free-standing NK tombs at Memphis (e.g., tomb of Horemhab) have a similar architecture, reflecting actual tombs. The water process may therefore be part of a religious festival, such as the Khoiak-festival (UC408, Petrie Museum, in Quirke 2015: 221; Wegner 2017).
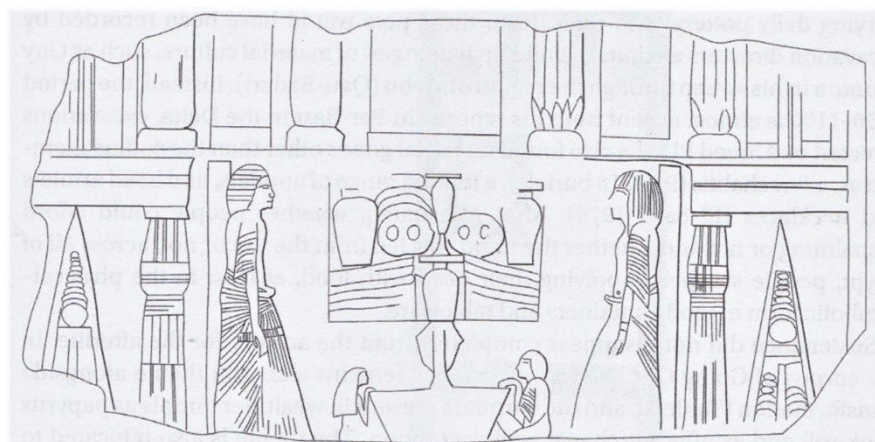
c) Restoration: Mysteries and Monthly Festivals

The Nile water collected during the inundation was believed to be the efflux of Osiris and was mainly used in the mortuary cult since libation played a central role in replenishing the deceased. According to Assmann (2005), the invigorating faculty of the Nile flood is the oldest and most enduring sacramental explanation for any offered object within the Egyptian cult (2005:355). Together with the Eye of Horus, both liquid entities are closely associated with restoration, while the efflux of Osiris mainly represents every liquid offering, the eye of Horus is the cultic expression for every item offered. There is, throughout the pharaonic period, a series of festivals which concern mythologies and cosmogony of these important symbols. The oldest Osirian festival would be the "Mysteries" or "Great Festival of Vindication at Abydos". It was a processional festival most frequent during the MK when stelae in the necropolis were erected with *ḥtp-dỉ-nswt* formulas containing wishes for the deceased to take part in the festivities (Assman 2005: 212; see Richards 2005). The processions are very similar to the previously described Valley and Wag-festivals, though the mysteries were intended to restore Osiris and his efflux after the mythical conflict with his brother Seth [App II:2.1, 2.4].

During these processions and rituals, an effigy of Osiris was transported across the Nile and his funeral re-enacted. The details of the rituals remained secret, but they seem to have occurred in the House of Gold at Abydos where Osiris' dismembered body is restored and returned to life (see

Goddio & Fabre 2015; Centrone 2005). This process of restoration is described in the Khoiak-festival, but the creation of the Osiris figurines was a secret process and involved the combination of different minerals using specific implements. (see Robinson & Goddio 2015: 34-35; Centrone 2009; Aufrère 1991; Chassinant 1966). During the mysteries, the water element was of great importance as evidenced through the Osireion, a tomb designed like an island surrounded by a water channel and a central basin in front of step structures (see 7.2.2), all resembling an offering table and the water process.

The MK was a time of experimentation within the mortuary cult, while festivities were added within the standardised and less flexible offering list from the OK (Eaton 2011: 229-231). So called day-feasts occurred monthly and became increasingly common during the OK, continuing well into later periods. By the 18th Dynasty, these festivities had gained the denomination "coming forth" (*prt*) and alluded to in invocations and offering formulas within the mortuary cult (*prt-ḫrw*) (Eaton 2011: 231). These monthly celebrations do in the mortuary literature gradually obtain slightly different meanings. In the Pyramid Texts there is a focus on the recipient of the offerings, while Coffin Texts highlight the need for protection and transformation, as well as the acquisition of knowledge (Eaton 2011: 231-233), all reflected in changes of the water process during the MK. Excerpts of the BoD show a further variation and change in the performance of monthly rituals since there is an emphasis on the ritual offering and its performer rather than the recipient, especially within royal cult complexes (Eaton 2011: 241). Monthly rituals and day feasts were incorporated into the mortuary rituals with a reference to the lunar cycle. Already in the OK there is a relationship between the phases of the moon and the state of the deceased (Eaton 2011: 241). This may allude not only to the cosmogony, but also the water process upon offering tables. Even if it is not constant, the association between the two processes is highlighted in several ways.

The most relevant of these monthly festivals are the Sixth (*sn.w.t, sn.t, sìs.nw.t*) and the Seventh (*dnìt, ḏntì, ḥb ḏnìt*) Day festivals during which the Filling of the Eye ritual was most likely performed. The determinatives for these days can be a beer jug (W22) and a loaf (X2) highlighting the importance of offerings, while in some cases they may have a determinative for "house" or *snwt* "shrine", perhaps indicating the location of the ritual. The Seventh day festival may also have an irrigation canal (N23) as a determinative, or even the pupil of the eye (D12 O) (Eaton 2011: 244). Both determinatives indicate an emphasis on a water process in conjunction with the Eye of Horus, alluding to the act of "filling" and restoring its essence. There are associations between day festivals in the MK and the healing of the Eye of Horus, especially since the wounding and healing of the eye is compared to the phases of the moon (see Aufrère 1991 [App II:2.3]). The eye is "filled by lunar festivals", equating the waxing moon with the healing of the eye and clearing its sight (Eaton 2011: 239).

By the MK, the injury and repair associated with the mythical fight between Horus and Seth was connected to the day feast outlined in the funerary cult. The outcome of the ritual is mentioned throughout the funerary cult, since the sound and complete eye represents almost all items offered to the deceased during the process of restoring and reanimating him. The act of providing the deceased with water is actually a restoration of something that has been lost or is missing, an act of healing and life giving, explained as the efflux of Osiris returning to his corpse, as well as the Eye of Horus becoming filled and unified once again and returned to Horus. As outlined in the following libation spell, which was one of the most common mortuary spells throughout the PP, these two elements summarise the water process and its desired outcome:

PT 32, from the Papyrus of Nesmin, in Assmann 2005: 356-57.

The spell ends with the bringing of the Eye of Horus highlighting the main goal of the water process, which is to make the heart radiant by placing it at the feet of the deceased (i.e., statue, stela, etc.). In this case it may be deduced that this location would be the offering place, i.e., the offering table or similar material, and therefore the location for this activation process. The recitation ends with the line "take the discharge that has issued from you, may your heart not be weary of it" - the water poured onto the table is the missing element; it symbolises a part of the eye and/or the efflux of Osiris. As they reach the table, these elements are unified with the deceased who accepts the product of the liquid, now imbued with offerings and powerful symbols, making him whole by restoring all his qualities once again.

7.5 THE OFFERING TABLE AS A PLACE FOR THE UNIFICATION OF ELEMENTS

It may be argued that two main traditions are reflected in the use and function of funerary offering tables and similar material. The first falls under the umbrella term of funerary cult, which includes the versatile OMC as well as the ancestor cult. This tradition concerns the tangible actual use of offering tables within a long-lived ancient Egyptian practice. The second tradition is here labelled as the Eye of Horus, a concept which addresses the cultic meaning of offering tables and their role as a platform for, or representation of, the unification of elements. The definition of the eye within Heliopolitan cosmology, as well as in rituals describing its role as a unifying and restorative agent, has been exemplified through specific temple and mortuary festivals. These festivals show how offering tables, through the different ways in which they express the water process, were used to convey three main outcomes: to provide, to replenish and to restore the deceased.

Offering tables may be defined as a patchwork of different ritual traditions, local cultural expressions, personal perceptions and, on a wider scale, landscapes. The principal method used to bring all of these concepts together is essentially the use of a liquid and, more specifically water. Water symbolises the Nile, which by connecting distant regions and various geographical areas, as well as its ability to expand laterally and change an entire landscape, created a basis for ancient Egyptian magical practice. What unifies all of the elements surrounding the Nile is the annual flood. This intermittent, but relatively reliable and predictable element is often defined as a substance which has to be reinstated into an incomplete or inanimate entity. For our purposes, this missing element would be the efflux of Osiris needed for making the Eye of Horus complete. The offering table does in a way represent the Nile and all its surroundings, while liquid poured upon it symbolises the flood and its unifying and rejuvenating force. The offering table thus represents what the Nile does for Egypt, i.e., unify different traditions, landscapes, etc. through a water process.

As illustrated in Chapters 4-6, case studies highlight the various types of offering tables and their change over time reflecting how ancient Egyptians manipulated the course of the Nile and especially the Nile flood by using canal systems and basins. In the OK, the Pharaoh was the main earthly figure who had the utmost religious, supernatural and administrative power and control over the Nile and the inundating flood. With the collapse of centralised government and the rise of local religious traditions this exclusive role was disseminated amongst private individuals and provincial areas (see 2.5.2). However, the manipulation of the flood waters continued to be represented in offering table design. The water process is, therefore, in the MK also represented on pottery offering trays and soul-houses, which linked various funerary practices with irrigation fields and gardening, reinterpreting the supreme control over the Nile as a means of manipulating its trajectory to reach a loved one and purify/revitalise his offerings.

The water process, consisting of filling and uniting different parts of the offering table surface, creates a visible representation of a liquid changing an object and creating a new element/substance. This process is made tangible and was no longer limited to restricted sources or cryptic representations. Through performing the practical and yet complex water process upon offering tables and similar materials and visualise it to a non-expert audience, made it more accessible and comprehensible. The actions also summarised entire cultic episodes as well as numerous locations and related paraphernalia. Accessibility not only allowed future generations to employ what would otherwise be a complex ritual practice, but it also ensured the survival of the cult through time. The versatility and visibility of the ritual practice of using offering tables may also explain their constant incorporation within funerary rituals and the mortuary cult. This may be due to the fundamental need of the living to establish contact with the realm of the dead. The water process allowed the living to witness a tangible reality in which the dead could manifest themselves and become active participants in festivities and the ritual process itself.

The representation of a compilation of different symbolic and iconographic elements within the Theban tradition may serve as an illustration to the function and significance of offering tables and their cosmological connotations. It is constituted by a combination of the offering vessel (W10 ▽), *mw* (N35A ≋), and the eye of Ra, represented on the right side and the eye of Horus on the left side (D10c) in between the two eyes and above the water we find the *šn* sign (N89 Ꝺ). This composite motif is only attested from the Ramesside period, specifically in Deir El Medina, and in the proximity of royal centres (Quirke 2015: 128). The motif is found on funerary stelae and within tomb offering chambers (e.g., Sennefer TT 96), specifically above offering scenes. It is a very elusive motif since it is not only complex but also part of a limited assemblage. According to Quirke (2015), this combination of symbols may have been avoided since they are almost too sacred and too closely related to royal symbolism pertaining to the solar cult (2015: 128). The *šn*-sign has been interpreted as the circuit of the sun represented by the eye, and the composite motif as a journey by boat within the cosmos represented by the water sign (Quirke 2015: 128; Westendorf 1966). However, this interpretation of the compilation of symbols as a cosmic journey may be somewhat limited, given the varying definitions of each symbol and its context (Figure 7.39).

Figure 7.39 Diagram of the composite symbol including the two eyes, šn-sign, mw-sign, and offering cup. Each element within the symbol is defined and how they interplay.
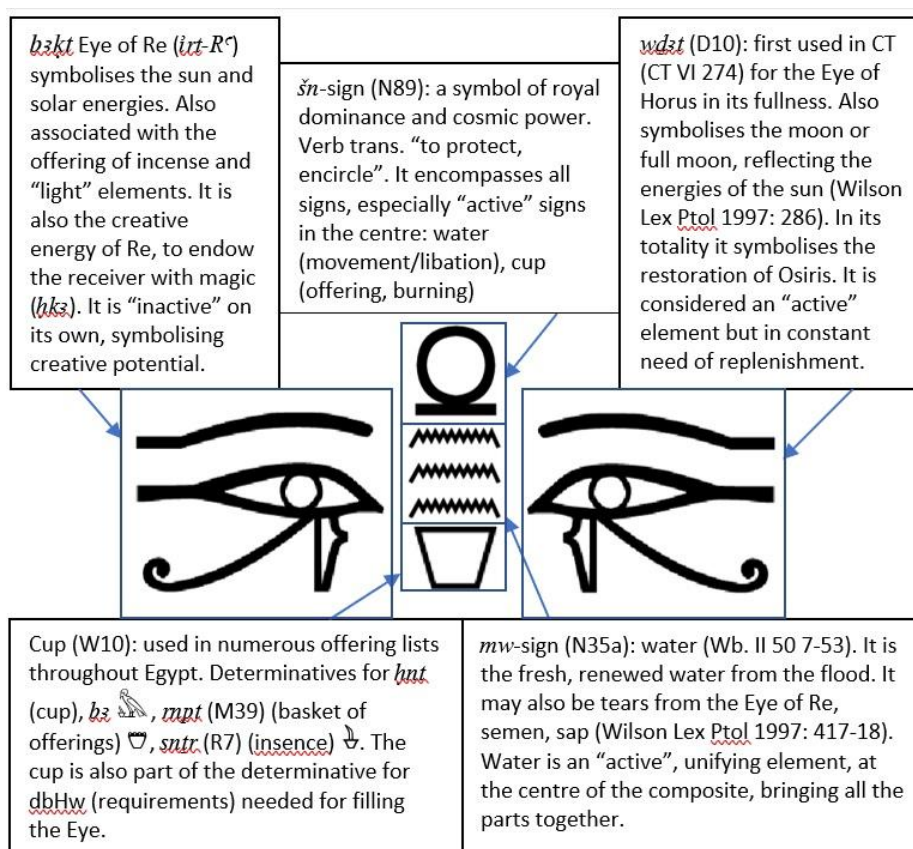
The composition appears to be unique, though the various symbols and determinatives may be found within more ancient contexts. A combination of one or two elements is common, especially the two eyes within mortuary settings in the MK, the water sign and vessel in funerary offering lists and the *šn*-sign as a royal symbol from the Early Dynastic Period onwards (Lightbody 2020; Baligh 2008).

There is an increased elaboration in the design of false doors across Egypt in the MK, which begin to include a pair of eyes and the central *šn*-sign. Outer decorations on MK coffins contain *wḏꜣ.t*-eyes. The presence of eyes upon coffins, stelae and false doors inside the tomb chamber permits the deceased to look out and access the offerings (Willems 1988; H Strudwick 2016). They may also have an "apotropaic function" by protecting the deceased's soul and corpse (Willems 1988: 47).

The funerary stelae emerging in the 18th Dynasty at Deir El Medina, which included the composite symbol, may omit the water symbol but nevertheless represent an act of libation or purification at the centre (e.g., stela of Tiagnuni, Turin C 1644; Stela of Djehutynefer, Turin C1638). The stela of Djehutynefer, has an abbreviated offering list above the offering table which includes the *mw*-sign as the last offering in the list. The water process is not represented in the upper motif but is highlighted as a final act within the offering list positioned directly above the depicted offering table (Figure 7.40). Funerary stelae from the MK do not have this unique composition in the upper frieze, but also emphasise libation/purification acts (e.g., stelae of Horhernakht). It may therefore be argued that the accumulation of signs in the upper register of the funerary stelae at Deir El Medina is a summary not only of royal and cosmological ideology, but also the ritual action meant to be performed before it.

The motif may also represent Egypt itself and the royal duty of completing the eye of Horus with all of its parts through the invocation of the Nile flood (Edfu VI, 1999-2001; Miatello 2017:97-98). Miatello (2017) proposes an interpretation of some parts of this motif, specifically the Eye of Horus, the water sign and the *šn*-sign. If the Eye of Horus represents the fertile territory of Egypt, subdivided into several components (*ḏbḥ.w*), then the water symbol at the centre is the flood and the Sn sign is the circuit of the Nile, as well as the circuit of the sun. The fertile territory of Egypt was approximately 27 million *sṯ3t* (Miatello 2017: 98) and included four main regions: the cultivated field, the Delta region, the entire Nile with a normal flow and the Fayum region, which in the Edfu text add up to 26 million *sṯ3t*. The missing million is the Nile flood which inundates the fields and enlarges the Nile, expanding the fertile region (Miatello 2017:99-101). Miatello uses symbolism present in the early Ptolemaic granite sarcophagus of Wereshnefer from Saqqara (MET New York 14.7.1) where the *šn* sign is inverted and represents the iris of the Eye of Horus, subdivided into five horizontal registers containing the solar barque and deities representing the East and West: "It is the annual flood that fills the eye as indicated in the text. Such a concept was at the basis of the ritual of the fillings of the eye: a quantity of water in a cup magically filled and made whole the *wḏ3ti* and Egypt" (Miatello 2017: 110).

There is a significant switch into cosmological/cyclical thinking, concentrating on movement and regeneration and not only ascension. The cup depicted in the temple of Kom Ombo, although much later in date, shows the various measurements of the Eye of Horus which on the cup corresponds to the course of the Nile, with the lowest value corresponding to Elephantine (1/128 *3bw.t*) (in

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Miatello 2015: 74). This illustrates how the filling of a receptacle such as a basin may have significant parallels to the Eye of Horus concept as well as the surrounding Egyptian landscape and the fluctuations of the Nile.

Based on this analysis the combination of symbols on private funerary stelae in tombs of the Ramesside period may also represent Egypt in its entirety. The Solar Eye of Ra represents the East (*iꜣbt*) and the land of the living, while the left eye represents the Eye of Osiris and therefore the West and the realm of the dead. At the centre of these two axes is Horus (representing the kingship) who brings the flood (represented by the iris and *šn* sign) to the Nile (*mw*). Accordingly, a combination of these signs may be a visual representation of Egypt with the Nile dividing East and West and the flood being presented as an offering completing the eye of Horus and Egypt itself.

The compilation of symbols representing different locations may also reflect the funeral landscape and associated ritual practices. The central signs representing the Nile connect the East and the West, i.e., the living and the dead. The act of libation serves a means of bridging the gap between the two realms. The water process also represents the manipulation of the landscape bringing the natural cycles present outside the necropolis into the tomb itself. This phenomenon may be symbolically represented through the combination of signs present in the funerary landscape of Deir El Medina. Funerary practices may also be represented through various iconographic elements. The Eye of Ra (*bꜣḫt*) is sometimes offered as incense, while the Eye of Osiris, when specified as being green, represents the liquid offering of wine and in its white form represents an offering of milk. The offering cup positioned below the *šn*- and *mw*-sign may be a literal representation of the offering and water process. This kind of cup is also part of the hieroglyphic determinative for a lamp or even incense (*snṯr* R7 ♨), a potential reference to the act of censing as well as the "fiery"/light component of the eye in contrast to its liquid elements. The vessel is often present in offering lists at the bottom of registers and when combined with the *mw*-sign, represents the pouring ritual *zꜣt*. In the PP the cup is represented with the Eye of Horus inside it, becoming a determinative for the word *dbḥ.w* "requirements"/"component" of the *wḏꜣt* eye (Miatello 2015: 77). A variation also introduced in the NK is substituting the eyes with the canine god Wepwawet "the opener of ways".

One of the oldest symbols present in the composite motif is the royal *šn*-sign. Its cosmological connotation has already been outlined, and it was present in ritual actions performed within the royal mortuary cult from the Early Dynastic Period onwards (Lightbody 2020: 15-22). The *šn*-sign began to be incorporated in private funerary contexts during the Ramesside period (e.g., TT 100 and TT 1) and was subsequently represented between a pair of eyes, a popular motif in the MK with the inclusion of the eyes on the external side of coffins (Baligh 2008; Willems 1988;). The importance of this sign within a mortuary context is reflected in its role as a unifier of different elements by encircling all the ritual components represented within the funerary structure, while at the same time ensuring their efficacy and durability.

The specific composition of symbolic elements (the eyes, *šn*, *mw*, and offering cup) in funerary contexts may actually summarise the role and significance of offering tables within the ancient Egyptian tradition. It may be argued that offering tables may either be the "sound" Eye of Horus (*wḏꜣt*) or represent the potential unification of filling of the eye components. Just as these funerary motifs, the offering table as a concept symbolises different elements at the same time, including the act of filling and restoring via the water process, as well as a means for providing replenishment and restoration of the deceased in all his parts and former essence. There may also be other processes at play, such as establishing a link between the realm of the living and that of the dead,

by mimicking natural cycles (seasonal flooding, agricultural processes, reproductive system, etc), while at the same time representing cosmic cycles (mythologization, the celestial journey, etc).

As previously argued the combination of central iconographic elements (cup, *mw*-water sign, *šn*-sign) may be a representation of not only the Nile separating the East and the West, the living and the dead, but also of how Horus brings the inundation and replenishes Egypt. The missing element which is the energising flood water is also highlighted on offering tables and similar material. It is either represented in a literal manner through the incorporation of libation and purification vessels or symbols, or which is most often the case, represented by the intrinsic characteristics of the offering tables indicating the potential arrival of the flood, or alluding to the fact it has already occurred. The incorporation of symbolic imagery such as the composite motif described above, may not only have been decorative or have an apotropaic function, but also constituted a visual message (imperative/predicative), inviting the onlooker to perform a unifying and restorative act in its vicinity. Since this motif and other iconographic elements (e.g., offering scenes and representations of the OMC) are incorporated in liminal structures, such as funerary stelae, false doors or nearby burial shafts, they are placed, or depicted, in the direct vicinity of offering tables. For the eyes of the average worshipper/or mourner, these symbols and fixtures, as well as the essential presence of an offering table, offering tray or soul-house provide a stimulus *tremendum et fascinans*, i.e., a profound religious sentiment (Otto 1959). At a certain point, the offering table also became an imperative/predicative symbol encompassing all the most important ritual actions and funerary traditions in ancient Egyptian magical practice.

The offering table is an enigmatic concept when associated with ancient Egyptian magical practice. It is categorised in museums as a ritual utensil, often lacking a provenance and not placed within its respective socio-economic context (see 1.4-6). Nevertheless, it is mentioned in passing in religious texts and has been found in mortuary, religious, and domestic contexts.

The main aim of the thesis is to establish the multifaceted nature of the offering table as a unifying concept within ancient Egyptian religious practice and define its role as a medium for shared cultural, social, and religious activities. To address these numerus aspects, it was necessary to provide a holistic evaluation of its surrounding socio-economic context, especially evident within an all-encompassing funerary landscape (i.e., the physical landscape, its inhabitants, and associated settlements). This in turn leads to defining the offering table as a medium for a shared cultural, social, and religious practice. In response to these notions and the main research question regarding the offering table's enduring presence in the ancient Egyptian religious tradition, it is evident that these objects were not only multifunctional, but also multilocational. Through an analysis of the offering table, especially through the reconstruction specific object biographies, it was possible to redefine the offering table through a socio-anthropological perspective.

8.1 A MEDIUM FOR A SHARED CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

A major theoretical aspect used to address the central aims of the thesis was the Egyptian funerary landscape and its development from "space" to "place", indicating how a natural environment becomes transformed through human action (see 2.5.1). A place might be a field, a production site, a temple, or a tomb where opposite aspects found in nature and human essence are united by flux, generally an action supported by the use of liquids. In the productive landscape of ancient Egypt, flux was provided by the Nile flood and in the religious context by liquid poured upon an offering table and similar *materia magica*, a concept reflected in their design, material, and placement.

The tomb may then be considered as a microcosm of numerous elements collaborating in the recreation of the life force of deceased persons, as well as their history, legacy, and identity (see 2.5). The role of an offering table within such a ritual context can thus be interpreted as a place maker (7.2.4). Place making may be considered as a means people use to experience and construct their reality. Accordingly, rituals can be considered as an effort to convert space into place. In this sense "space" is considered as a boundless realm made finite by a delimitation carried out through rituals making use of *materia magica* like the offering table.

Findings and interpretations presented in this study were based on a database compiled from a comprehensive analysis of 487 offering tables and similar ritual objects (Chapter 3). The analysed artefacts were placed within their temporal context and physical relationship to the ancient Egyptian mortuary landscape and linked to religious beliefs and ritual practice. The extensive and varied nature of the sample enabled an assessment of the ritual use, diachronic development, placement, and iconography of these *materia magica*, resulting in an analysis of their geographic and socioeconomic context. A central conclusion reached is that the studied objects reflect what is at the core of ancient Egyptian ritual practice and perhaps conceptual conformity spread throughout Egyptian cultural areas: to unite what has been dispersed into a whole.

Throughout the study it became clear that offering tables and similar objects can inform us on the complexity, conformity, cross-social strata, and regional religious/cultural practices across the ancient Egyptian landscape. This notion may seem to be overreaching but as outlined in the various case studies (see Chapters 4-6) it is not merely an Egyptologist narrative to find long-standing religious tradition but may also be evident in the material culture and surrounding landscape.

The thesis is structured in various sections illustrating how the offering table and similar ritual objects mirror the evolution of the ancient Egyptian funerary landscape (Chapter 4). An analysis of offering tables found in the necropolis of Asyut was used to reconstruct this symbiosis between the landscape and ritual practice. Descriptions of the design, placement, and use of offering tables within the ancient Asyuti necropolis were made to illustrate and compare local aspects of offering tables with textual representations and imagery found in tombs, coffins, papyri in other locations and thus try to discern how ritual practice could essentially be maintained over time and within different localities, though nevertheless related to prerequisites prevalent during specific time periods and within unique places.

Pottery offering trays and soul-houses presented in the database were then used in an effort to establish their unique design and role within the funerary cult (Chapter 5). One essential conclusion was that most of these items can be considered as representing miniaturized processing sites, intended to procure sustenance for the deceased, as well as they probably were an essential part of a multifaceted ancestral cult, including private, domestic piety, a "multi-vocational" ritual practice and their function as votive offerings (see 7.2.5).

Asyuti mortuary rituals and the ritual use of pottery trays/soul-houses were then connected with diachronic changes in the design and iconography of these ritual items, occurring during the TIP and up until the end of the G-RP (Chapter 6). Particularly how these changes in shape, iconography and other features mirrored changes affecting the production landscape, power structures and foreign influence. Offering tables nevertheless continued to be related to the Nile flood and notions connected with the achievement of harmony and maintenance of vital forces, which were assumed to be rejuvenating both the living and the deceased.

An analysis of and discussion concerning funerary literature and related iconography indicated the place of offering tables and similar objects within a specific cultic practice and ritual landscape. Renderings of the OMC is particularly common. However, an actual sequence and interpretation of this ceremony, as well as its diachronic development and local variants, remain difficult to establish (see 7.3). Nevertheless, a comprehensive study of the OMC and the ritual objects connected with it reveal that any ritual item with a 3000-year history has a "biography" of its own. The offering table developed from being a simple support for offerings to become a multifaceted ritual object that over time came to include and allude to almost any aspect of the funerary cult and its associated places. Even if offering table design changed over time and its functions within the funerary cult became ever more varied, it preserved its main function as a means to "materialise the immaterial" by fomenting a relation with a spiritual realm via funerary rituals involving the use of liquids as transmitters of a vital force.

An in-depth study of a specific cultic artefact – the offering table and related objects like pottery offering plates, soul-houses and amulets/models – provided insights to the diachronic change not only of ancient Egyptian funerary rituals, but also how they mirrored changing notions such as power structures, new/innovative production systems, and foreign influences. This "archaeological" approach to religion and social change was inspired by recent research and will hopefully inspire further research along the same lines.

The ancient Egyptian offering table proved to be particularly interesting and revealing when it comes to the relation between rituals and the objects used within them. The offering table developed in conformity with the changes in rituals to such an extreme degree that it eventually became a multifaceted item, a tangible image of an entire, complicated ritual and its various religious notions. It even evolved as a visible summary of the funerary cult and a magical object, proved, among other things, by its later use as an amulet, while at the same time maintaining its role as a medium for materialising the immaterial.

8.2 Reflections

An essential aim of the study was to emphasise that context is key for the study of any religious artefact rather than an almost exclusive dependence on texts and imagery while trying to establish a viable use of a utensil within a cult. It could be just as important to focus on the objects that have been used – their material, design, size, wear, provenance and assumed placement within a ritual setting (aims and objectives in Table 1.2 in 1.3). It was to that end that a comprehensive database of different offering tables/trays/basins and soul-houses was compiled, and a viable methodology devised to categorize these items in accordance with their material and design and relate them to their assumed function, context, and religious/mythological connotations (see 2.2; 3.3). By initially selecting offering tables and similar material with the presence of at least one "functional" element specifically intended for the use of liquids and/or offerings, it was possible to decipher a more detailed definition based on use, functionality, and context (see 2.2.1; 3.4.3.3). The extensive sample used throughout the thesis is mostly composed of decontextualised material from museum collections which may be considered as problematic. However, after analysing the sample in accordance with previous studies as well as individual case studies of offering tables and similar material in context (e.g., Asyut and the northern necropolis at Saqqara (see 4.0; 2.3; 2.5.3; 7.2.5).

A key outcome of the study is to emphasise the importance of material analysis based on museum collections and how various difficulties such as provenance may be overcome with a consistent methodology and theoretical approach. This is where the assemblage at the necropolis at Asyut proved to be fundamental in addressing the numerous aims of the thesis, especially when attempting to provide a holistic evaluation of the offering table's role within Egyptian society. This may be a major strength in the methodology, providing an important comparative sample to the varied sample within the database, bypassing problems often encountered by researchers such as limited access to magazines and excavation records (see1.6; 2.2). As outlined in the case study (Chapter 4), the sample of Asyut shows a significant local trend within a specific geographical, spatial, and topographical context, which when compared to the wider sample actually aligns with the diachronic changes in offering table design as well as ancient Egyptian religious tradition. The Asyut sample also provided a unique insight into the design of stone offering tables, specifically the variation in limestone, manufacturing techniques, and, most importantly, their original placement within the landscape. The close connection between landscape and ritual was initially identified through the offering tables still in situ within the necropolis at Asyut by observing the tables cut directly from the bedrock beside a burial shaft (see 4.5.1).

The fundamental point of view that gave rise to this research was the realisation that the study of ancient text-based religions may be supported and enhanced by archaeology. Rituals may not only be studied through interpretations of text, but also need to be based upon the recovery and analysis of material culture. A study of the past must draw upon insights regarding socio-cultural behaviour, natural environment (topography, natural resource utilisation, etc.), cultural landscapes,

architecture, and artefacts (see 1.5.1). Recent studies such as Cooney (2021)'s research on coffins from Deir el-Medina have tried to illustrate a "mind-map" of the different characteristics and histories of a specific ancient Egyptian object. The different materials and physical elements related to the object's manufacture can be linked to the ideas, sensory events and even memories of the individuals behind them. Similarly, the methodology applied in this study intended to demonstrate that a particular object such as an offering table may show long-lived religious traditions over 3000 years indicating a flexibility in the face of new ideas and the agglomeration of layers of continuity. From offering place, to ritual utensil, to universal symbol for rejuvenative powers and sustenance, the offering table and associated material represents a combination of different ancient Egyptian ideas and therefore the evolution of religious/magical practice.

Being able to actually observe the waterflow upon offering tables allowed for a clearer understanding of how they functioned in their original setting. The outcome of the experiments, especially the one performed in Tomb N11.1 at Asyut surpassed all expectations. It was necessary to see how the waterflow upon the tables interacts with not only the functional elements upon the table itself, but also the physical landscape surrounding it. The inclusion of 3D replicas of offering tables in the sample proved to be vital in outlining the intricacies of the water process and how it would be influenced by specific design choices. The experiments performed on these objects had very important results which showed how stylistic choices may have been more dependent on function, in some cases, than previously thought. The direction of waterflow, timing, and result may all represent a specific funerary tradition and therefore also aid in defining the offering table's role within ancient Egyptian society. The diachronic change in the water process represented on offering tables and similar material shows a dynamic process of change (see 7.4.2-3). This entails the maintenance of previous ideas, their gradual modification and combination of new concepts. The offering table and its basic meaning enabled the *materia magica* to be retained and yet to express some important adaptations in rituals and religious practice.

Ritual objects can accordingly be considered as a means for establishing and maintaining communication between the sacred as a transcendent/supernatural realm and the profane, i.e. the realm of time, space, as well as cause and effect. An in-depth study of a ritual object like the offering table can thus be used to reconstruct the socio-religious ambiance of an ancient society. Accordingly, the ritual function of offering tables and similar objects can be understood as their role as facilitators of a transition of the deceased from one world to another.

Areas which could be improved in the research would first of all be the sample itself. It has largely been beyond the scope of this study to concentrate on specific time periods (see 1.3). Furthermore, preserved textual material and imagery that might have provided essential insights into the function of the studied items have generally been summarised with the main purpose of the dissertation in mind, i.e., a concentration on the object itself and an effort to place it within its ritual context. The sample mostly consists of displaced material in museum collections, therefore stripped of most if not all physical elements pertaining to their original context. This may not only include residue from the use of liquids, but also any associated ritual paraphernalia which may have been placed upon or in the vicinity of offering tables and similar material. Examples can be drawn from votive sites such as Saqqara with the Animal Necropolis (Nicholson 2009: 44-71), and recent findings from LP shaft tombs containing debris of pottery cultic vessels together with crude offering tables in the hallways (Hussein 2020: 655). A comparison between the objects studied in this sample and previous reports from relevant excavations such as Reisner and Junker's extensive work in Giza would be beneficial in order to see whether there is more evidence which points to cultic activity surrounding the use of offering tables. Another point of interest is the use of offering tables within

a votive context, such as the extensive sample from Esna (see 6.2.3). A comparison between sites which have a unique assemblage of offering tables and/or offering spaces with associated paraphernalia may be an option for further research on the use and significance of these objects within a funerary context. In-depth material analysis may be added to the methodological approach, such as investigating any residue or evidence of cleared material upon the objects over time.

Another important step would be to link offering tables to other utensils with an assumed similar function, such as pottery offering trays as well as any equipment used in funerary ceremonies found in the burial chamber. These objects may include reed-mats and associated vessels which may be the predecessors of the offering table in pre-Dynastic times. This action may have continued throughout the Pharaonic Period and may be added to the terminology with some further research and possible case studies. Another related category of funerary objects is that of wooden models, especially in relation to 'soul houses' and pottery trays reflecting processing sites and domestic settings. Although briefly mentioned in Chapter 5, a further in-depth study may show how these objects may overlap in function and change over time. Offering tables from surrounding necropoleis other than those described in the case studies have only briefly been mentioned. In the case of Asyut there are for example interesting parallels found at similar Middle Egyptian sites such as Beni Hasan, Meir, Qau el-Kebir, Deir El-Bahari, etc. (just to mention a few) which could benefit from a more close examination in future research, together with findings from both the north (Herakleopolis, Saqqara and Memphis) and the south (Abydos, Thebes, El-Kab, etc.) in order to discern similarities and differences in the progression of certain styles as well as the placement of various types of offering tables.

In addition to exploring offering table assemblages in numerous sites around Egypt, it may be important to explore similar practices in Nubia as well as other Egyptian areas of the Levant. These examples had to be excluded from the current thesis due to the sheer amount of material but there are countless examples of similar offering tables from these sites with stylistic choices reflected their own local religious traditions. It may also be important to mention the economic aspects of offering table production and distribution and how this may have influenced the dissemination of certain stylistic choices over others, aside from an overarching royal cult. This leads to another area of investigation which the current study only briefly brushes upon: the offering tables from temple contexts and royal complexes.

Due to the scope of the research, an emphasis was placed on funerary/mortuary offering tables and similar material. This selection was mainly based on the notion that offering tables from a temple context, specifically related to a cultic site may be considered as more rarefied and elite. Another reason was perhaps the tendency to decontextualise royal offering tables due to the presence of inscriptions, a common practice in museum collections. On a more theoretical level, temple ritual is in some cases similar to the funerary ritual process, although directed toward the veneration of a god (see 7.3). However, what differentiates between the two is the occurrence of a more personalised ritual practice and therefore a clearer reflection of the society behind their manufacture and use. By mainly including funerary offering tables and only a few examples from mortuary complexes, it was possible to include similar objects such as pottery offering trays and 'soul-houses' which clearly represent the rural population rather than simply reflecting the ritual needs within the royal cult. The sample, therefore, represents a grater cross-section of society. Nevertheless, future research may include a clearer outline of various sub-categories of offering tables such as temple offering tables which in some cases may even be labelled as 'altars', especially

in later contexts. Offering tables in a temple or votive context could also be studied in accordance with ritual practice and how the context may change the desired outcome of the ritual when compared to funerary offering tables and similar objects. The final result should however remain the same, to materialise and manifest something immaterial, whether it be a deceased king or celestial god.

A key aspect throughout the thesis is how offering tables and similar objects interact with their surrounding landscape. As highlighted throughout the analysis, offering tables may be used to identify activities at grave sites, something often overlooked by previous scholars. Ritual activity is often difficult to identify in the archaeological record, therefore the close relationship these specific objects have with the ritual landscape proved to be vital for the understanding of the funerary cult. As illustrated in Chapter 7, offering tables could either be functional in a practical sense or could be imbued with power indicating that the living did not necessarily have to be present to ensure their efficacy. What may be expanded upon in this area of research is what is the overall responsibility of this *materia magica* – was it to ensure the efficacy of the ritual or as a safeguard for the deceased to be cared for regardless of the presence of the living?

The in-depth study of a specific ritual artefact eventually turned into a kind of cultural "mind map", illustrating several different materials, ideas, sensory events, and memories. Key characteristics emerging from an analysis of a single, cultic item might of course not be exclusive to the study of ancient Egyptian beliefs and how they evolved overtime. This meant challenging pervious definitions of offering tables, often including how ancient Egyptians portrayed them in the past as outlined in Table 1.3 in 1.4.1. Even though these definitions were addressed and interpreted throughout the research it is important to note the limitations and potential bias of a westernised background (see 1.4; 1.5.1; 2.3). An example of this are the connotations behind the word "altar". A common view may be to see this item as a static element or location upon which is specifically intended for the execution of ritual ceremonies, while a "table" is merely a flat surface intended for the placement of items. The automatic assumption is that offering tables should be defined as altars, however one must consider that "functional" and "magical" practices were interchangeable (see 3.4.3.3). A more profound study on the past translations of the numerous Egyptian words for "offering table" such as *ꜥbꜣ* for stone altar and *wdḥw* for a four-legged table may be necessary to reconsider how these items were categorised in texts when compared to their 3-D counterparts.

A reoccurring theme in the thesis is the representation of natural elements and the surrounding landscape upon offering tables as well as within the execution of funerary rituals. Colour symbolism of not only the material used but also the choice of pigments intended for surface treatments applied to several objects clearly show ritual connotations as illustrated within the various case studies. Nevertheless, further study on how the water process is affected by these choices of colour, especially when considering the final result as represented in the case study at Asyut (see 4.6), is needed. The experiments performed on the 3D replicas also indicate that the surface of offering tables change in colour, something which has to do with several religious traditions in ancient Egypt concerning the significance of liquids (see 2.6).

On a wider scale, it may be important to address ancient Egyptian concepts and how they were reflected throughout society. Although this theme was touched upon throughout the thesis (see 2.4; 4.6; 5.5-7; 6.4; 7.2; 7.4-5), an exploration of how religious tradition was transmitted, whether there was room for change and amalgamation may be of interest to further explore how these adaptations are reflected in ritual implements. Another aspect to consider is who drove such

change and to what extent did this change diffuse throughout Egypt. The current sample may reflect a variety of religious traditions as outlined in the final discussion but what may be lacking is an evaluation of how and to what extent these traditions and diachronic change in ritual behaviour be reflected outside the Nile Valley, specifically in the Delta.

It would be desirable if the approach demonstrated in this study could be continued. Much remains to be discovered in connection with the role and function of ancient Egyptian offering tables and similar *materia magica*, not the least do similar objects exist in places like sub-Saharan Africa, in and around the Mediterranean basin, in Mesopotamia and several other places as well, awaiting holistic interpretations that in a sociological/anthropological manner might relate them to their topographic and human context.

8.3. THE RITUAL USE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN OFFERING TABLE

It soon became clear a definition for the offering table may be reached if the following three aspects are identified or analysed: original placement, the surrounding landscape, and the representation of watery elements. Offering tables and similar objects are literally part of a landscape, which is in turn represented or miniaturised upon them, such as production sites, sacred space, and personalised dwellings. Most important, however, is the inclusion of waterscapes, a fundamental aspect of all ancient Egyptian religious thought: the reviving and active qualities of water. As illustrated in the numerous case studies outlined throughout the thesis, offering tables eventually became a symbol for any active process, whether natural, ritual, or metaphysical. It may even represent a potential ritual process, perhaps even outlining the ritual to the onlooker or visitor. In its many forms or even in its combined version, the offering table becomes the cultic focus of any individual living within a ritual landscape.

Based on these findings and analyses several conclusions were made and compared to earlier studies of funerary rituals and tomb fixtures, in particular the assumed sequence of the funerary ritual and its association with the preserved cultic landscape. Funeral rites were interlinked with the unique Egyptian landscape, while cosmological notions were expressed through ritual actions involving the use of offering tables. The existing landscape at Asyut, for example, was gradually turned into a ritualised space, meaning that some aspects of nature became emphasised, "improved" and changed into place. A tomb, or a temple, brings forth and elaborates certain aspects of an already present "nature", at the same time as they are set apart from both nature and everyday life. Such places become delimited areas. Several sacred places have been circumscribed to such a degree that they have become inaccessible, like an Egyptian tomb chamber, or the inner sanctuary of a temple. In such places a specific object might be considered as a concentration of its "holiness/other-worldliness", for example a mummy enclosed in its coffin. However, a ritual object may nevertheless be an accessible space/place and can as in the case of the offering table or pottery tray/soul house serve as the means of communication between a public area, like an outer offering chapel/chamber and a secluded place, like a sealed tomb.

Quirke (2015: 204) refers to the diversity of individual, social, and geographical aspects involved in tomb design and funeral rituals: "Separable histories need to be written for architecture of burial space below ground, for burial-place architecture above ground, for other spaces for offerings to the dead away from the burial place, and for the equipment placed in any of these spaces. The various uniform histories rarely if ever apply to all regions or all social classes. […] To this extent, afterlife history can provide a mirror of general social complexity". The ancient Egyptian offering table and similar objects concentrate and transmit such notions, especially in the non-literate world

where ritual texts had to be symbolised in imagery and materials such as pottery trays/soul-houses and offering tables. They became focal points for manifestations of a sacred revitalising force within the realm of everyday existence.

Among several other uses, offering tables and similar objects served as transmitters of nutrition and life-sustaining energy to the deceased. They also constituted instruments that supported and even brought about the transition of a departed being from one form of existence to another. Furthermore, they were used to guarantee a continuous, "eternal" well-being for the deceased, and as such they were also part of a commemoration and ancestor cult.

Funerary practices, such as the handling of the corpse, processions, libations, purifications, offerings, and entombment, were supported by "life-sustaining" magical activities like the Opening of the Mouth and the Filling of the Eye of Horus. The latter ritual may be considered as distinctive from the funerary cult. The offering of the Eye of Horus was the prototype of all funerary offering rites, but was also equated with any ritual act, symbolising all sustenance provided to the gods and the deceased. The concept was thus part of public festivals, for example those connected with the Nile flood and the different phases of the moon. The process of filling the Eye of Horus, summarised in the use of offering tables, was likened to the waxing of the moon, the Nile flood's unification and fertilisation of the agricultural land, restoration and maintenance of cosmic order and most importantly the unification and revival of life-providing aspects to the deceased. Both funerary rituals and the Filling of the Eye of Horus intended to unite plurality and contrasts into harmony and accordingly also guarantee a continued existence of the deceased within another realm.

The offering table and similar *materia magica*, were as ritual utensils at the very centre of such rituals. Accordingly, the offering table may thus be considered as a symbol/reflection of a wide variety of elements within Ancient Egyptian cosmogony, which also is expressed through the concept of the Eye of Horus, a mythologisation of the five parts considered to constitute human existence and even the Egyptian landscape. The study demonstrated that the offering table was not only a utensil for a specific cultic practice, but it also furthermore developed into a multifaceted socio-religious appliance at the very centre of ancient Egyptian culture.

Offering tables reflect a combination of ritual/local traditions, emotional and personal expressions, as well as their surrounding ritual, social and natural landscapes. Just as the Nile connects different geographical areas across Egypt and changes an entire landscape, so does the water process expressed upon an offering table. This cultic expression may aid a further understanding of what defines ancient Egyptian magical practice. What may have started as a mundane ritual tool eventually became a place and symbol of an otherwise finite and static ritual practice. Rituals are often thought of as relics, as part of a standardised religious practice especially in such a long-lasting religious tradition. Through the study of offering tables and their lesser-known counterparts it was possible to reconstruct the dynamic aspects of the ancient Egyptian funerary cult, how its execution changed over time and how different social classes and localities across Egypt mirrored the formal cult in their own expressions of grief and sense of belonging. This object perhaps shows the fundamental need of the living to not think of death, or the dead themselves, as a static, stagnant pool of water, but rather active and forever fluctuating as the Nile. The offering table functions as a means to materialise and animate the immaterial.

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