

SYMBOLIC ROLES OF CANINE FIGURES ON EARLY MONUMENTS

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Résumé

Les représentations de canidés sur les monuments de la fin de l'époque prédynastique se répartissent en chacals, chiens sauvages (lycaon pictus)—qui sont très proéminents— chiens domestiques, dont plusieurs races sont distinguées. Les chiens sauvages, animaux des marges désertiques de la Vallée du Nil, semblent symboliser les marges du cosmos ordonné. Ils sont absents des reliefs de l'époque dynastique. Ils ne participent pas directement aux scènes de chasse organisée par des hommes. L'attention prêtée aux chiens domestiques se laisse peut-être expliquer par l'esprit de compétition parmi l'élite. Il convient de comparer l'iconographie des canidés et celle des lions. L'apparition du roi au centre du système décoratif dynastique et l'identification du roi et du lion ont influencé profondément le rôle des canidés.

Les canidés de l'époque dynastique se répartissent plus nettement en chacals et chiens domestiques. Les dieux canidés sont des chacals. Ils gardent beaucoup du symbolisme des chiens sauvages prédynastiques, mais dans un contexte différent.

Abstract

Late predynastic representations of canine figures on palettes and other objects can be divided into jackals, wild dogs (lycaon pictus)—which are very prominent—and domesticated dogs, among which several breeds can be distinguished. Wild dogs, which are animals of the low desert, appear to symbolize the margins of ordered cosmos; they are absent from reliefs of the dynastic period. They do not participate directly in scenes of hunting organized by human beings. The attention devoted to domesticated dogs probably relates to competition among the elite. The treatment of canine figures contrasts with that of lions. The emergence of the king at the centre of the dynastic system of decoration and the identification of king and lion influenced profoundly the presentation of canines.

Canine figures of the dynastic period separate more neatly into jackals and domesticated dogs. Canine deities are jackals. They retain much of the symbolism of predynastic wild dogs, but in a different context.

I. Introduction; canine species

The cat in ancient Egypt has attracted much more scholarly and general interest than has the other principal, and far more anciently domesticated, species of "pet", the dog. No detailed study of the dog or of canine species in Egypt has been undertaken. For most aspects of the role of canines, Fischer (1980) supplies an excellent brief treatment (see further Boessneck 1988:83-85; Paton 1925:19-24). The most extended treatment of predynastic representations of dogs is S. Hendrickx's (1992), in his

publication of a scene on a late Naqada I/Early Naqada II period vase in Brussels. This valuably assembles all the relevant objects (for which exhaustive references are given), including some not touched on here, as well as a comprehensive bibliography of secondary literature, but addresses rather different issues from those discussed here, in part because his focus is on earlier evidence.

The present article, which I hope will be complementary to that of Hendrickx, does not contribute toward a full study of Egyptian dogs, which would be illuminating in many ways. Instead, it focuses on the

presentation and significance of canines on the crucial group of palettes of the late predynastic period (the core of Asselberghs, 1961 [cited ahead as A]; conveniently gathered and reanalysed by Cialowicz, 1991). The treatment on the palettes can be complemented from other objects of the period, and can also be interpreted in relation to theoretical considerations and to non-pictorial evidence for the role of canine species. I do not offer a detailed artistic analysis; that would involve a separate study.

An essential question is whether the canine figures shown on these objects are dogs, jackals, or members of other related species (following Störk, 1986, I assume that the wolf did not occur in Egypt). This is not easily answered, because dogs and jackals can be very similar in appearance, and in any case the representations are not primarily concerned with anatomical or species accuracy. Uncertainties of identification are symptomatic of a real overlap in characteristics which is paralleled by ambivalences in the symbolism of wild and domestic dogs, jackals, and the deities manifested in some of them. These ambivalences probably applied both to their forms in art and to their meaning for human society.

Although detailed zoological discussion is not appropriate here, it is possible to break the representations of canines down into three basic categories (for further comments see ahead).

1) Jackals—wild animals whose Egyptian habitat is the desert, primarily the low desert—are characterized by erect ears, long, lean bodies, and long, often bushy tails that hang low behind the body. I assume, with most writers, that the canine deities of dynastic times were jackals.

2) Henry G. Fischer (1958:80-83), following a suggestion of A. J. Arkell, identified the canines which form the edge of at least three palettes (A figs. 127-128, 129-130, 133-134), and probably several more, as *Lycaon pictus*, the African wild hunting dog now restricted to regions south of Khartoum. Whether this identification excludes others or not, the animals are neither domesticated dogs nor jackals, and do not relate directly to those depicted in later

times. In the following, I accept Fischer's identification without further comment.

The wild hunting dog has a similar body shape to the jackal. Its most distinctive feature is the very large, upright, semi-circular ears with clearly visible inner surfaces. Its tail is not so long as that of the jackal. This animal is absent from representations of the dynastic period (the single later example cited by Störk, 1980:92-93, seems uncertain to me, even though the context is appropriate: Blackman 1915:pl. 7). Its habitat was probably similar to that of the jackal.

3) Domesticated dogs are more various than the other two categories. Their most obvious marker is the man-made collar almost always included in representations, no doubt in part to distinguish them from wild species. Next comes the tail, which in some breeds is upright and curled back or screw-shaped; Hilzheimer (1932:418) and Boessneck (1988:84) stated that these tail forms had to be maintained by careful breeding. The third distinctive feature is floppy or set-back ears, which are not found on adult wild canines. These ears occur in varying patterns, but are always strongly distinctive of domesticated dogs.

This enumeration omits further canine species, such as the fox, that do not seem relevant to the material discussed here. The hyena, whose later treatment is of interest, does not certainly occur in early representations.

II. Context, themes, and associations of the motifs

The prominent role of canines on the palettes is immediately striking. The treatment may elaborate on motifs that were current in other, largely lost media, as is suggested, for example, by a Naqada II Decorated Ware vase with a symmetrical scene of two domesticated dogs attacking an antelope (*L'Égypte des millénaires obscurs* 1990:59 no. 310 [Lyon, Musée Guimet]). Whereas in dynastic times deities with canine manifestations did not occupy leading positions, there are numerous instances of canines—whether deities or not—on the

palettes, some of them among the largest figures shown. Canines occur as delimiting semi-sculptured elements around the palette edges, as actors in the relief compositions on the surfaces, and bridging these two principal functions.

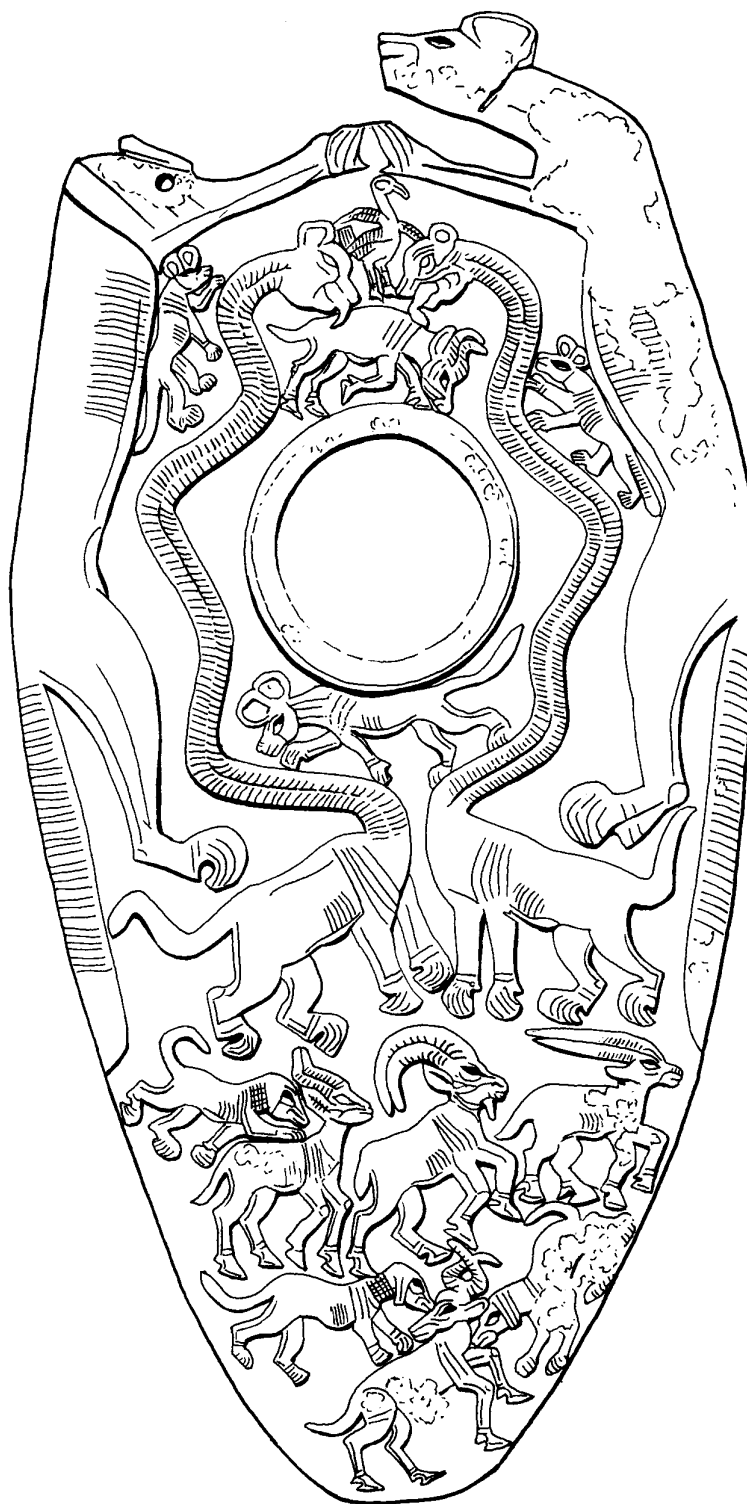
While the iconographic position and possible meaning of these canine figures can be paralleled from later times, their salience is difficult to match. The obvious points of comparison are with bulls, as on the Bull Palette in the Louvre (e.g. de Cenival 1978:figs. 58-59; A figs. 166-167), and with falcons, whose symbolism is increasingly pervasive but more indirect (for lions see §3). Both bulls and falcons were identified explicitly with the king—the central figure who only begins to appear on the palettes—whereas canine figures were never more than partially assimilated to him. Bulls and falcons relate more directly to the iconography and religious symbolism of dynastic times. These changes form part of a general reduction and simplification of the depicted repertory that accompanied the development of “classical” Egyptian representational art. In dynastic times, canines occur in more circumscribed contexts. Their loss of position can be paralleled in other animal species.

The fullest development of the palettes came with what is probably the latest of them, the Narmer Palette (e.g. Schott 1950:figs. 10-11; A figs. 168-169). This constitutes a radical transformation of earlier designs such as that of the Two Dog Palette in the Ashmolean Museum (Figs. 1-2). Arguments underlying a cosmographic interpretation of the Narmer Palette's organization cannot be presented here, but the matter is not very controversial. Rather like much decoration of the dynastic period, the composition appears to show a “world”; the supports for the sky are symbolized by the paired bovine heads at the top, between which the falcon of the king's Horus name is implied as being present in the sky but is not depicted. The questions then arise whether the earlier palettes also had a cosmographic organization and whether the animal figures on them have a function at all comparable to that of the bovine heads on the Narmer Palette, and possibly the bulls of the Bull

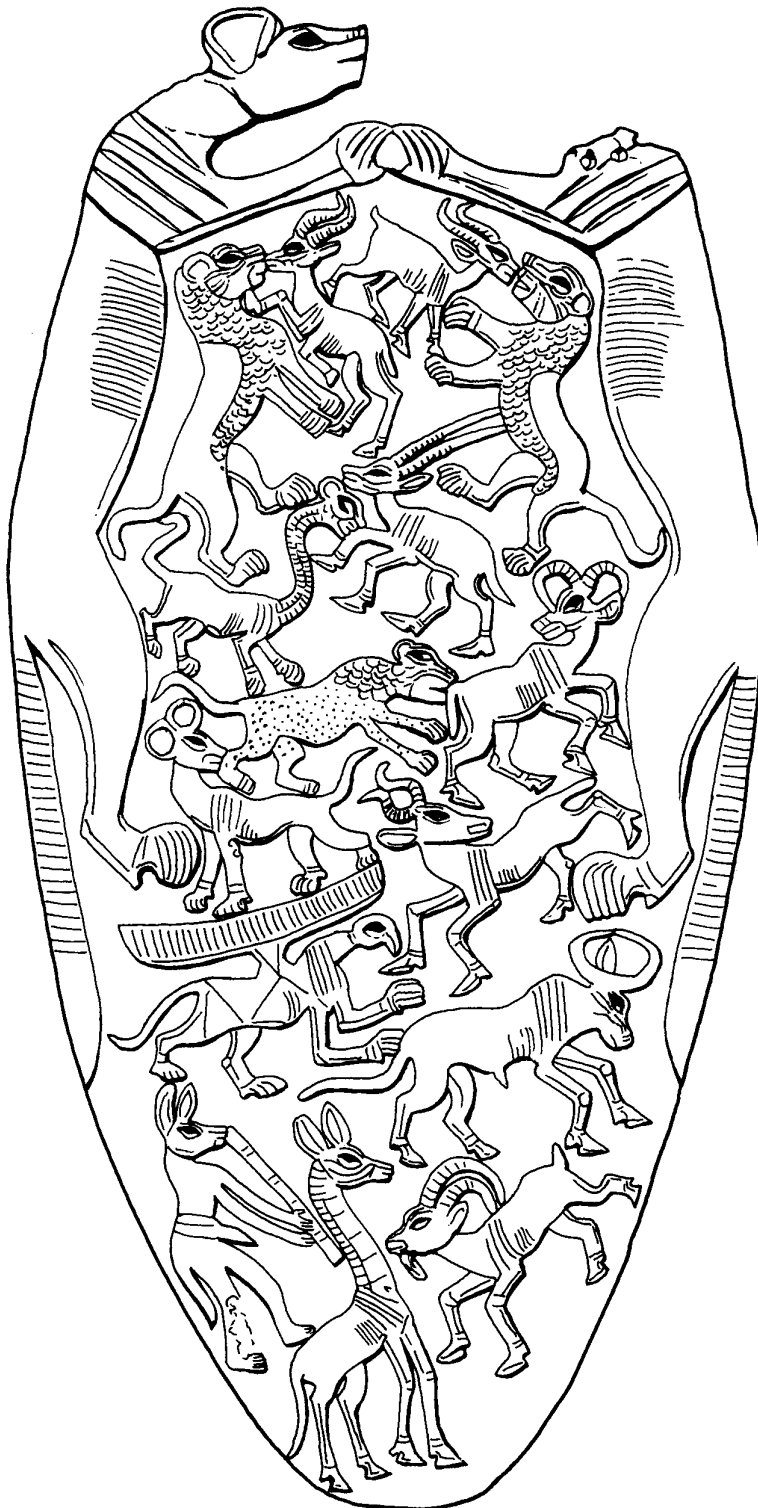
Palette (such a reading was proposed at least as early as Asselberghs, 1961:283). In this group, the Hunters' Palette (e.g. A figs. 122-124) has a distinct position, because its edge incorporates no animals and its principal demarcations are created by the human figures flanking the central field. (Tefnin, 1979, has analysed formal implications in detail.)

What sort of world might be shown in the earlier compositions? Various analogies exist between their subjects and those of the Narmer Palette, the most obvious being the theme of defeat or of mastering adversaries. Many scholars have seen a temporal and thematic development between the palettes with exclusively animal decoration and the largely human forms of the Narmer Palette, with such works as the Bull Palette occupying an intermediate position. One interpretation has been that the change in representational form betokens a change in the perceived positions of animal and human in the cosmos. In the earlier period people would have seen animals as superior to them and would have focused their representations on them; later, people acquired an anthropocentric and theocentric view that encouraged them to organize their represented world around human figures (see e.g. Hornung 1982: 100-109; for such a hypothesis in studies of Palaeolithic traditions, see e.g. Lorblanchet 1989:137-138, referring to Giedion).

There are difficulties in this reading of the development in Egypt, not least because, although the decrease in the numbers of animals represented between predynastic and dynastic times is clear, the increase in human figures is less evident, except in the special case of the king, and significant numbers of them are found in predynastic art. An alternative I have suggested is that the shift in topic and presentation was at least partly driven by developing rules of representational decorum (e.g. Baines 1985:73-75, 277-286) that created and displayed an ordered and sanctified cosmos in which many elements of the earlier palettes would have been out of place. This point can be seen most clearly through a comparison of the Bull and Narmer palettes. The bull(s) of the former, which occupy the



Figures 1-2 The Two Dog Palette from the Main Deposit at Hierakonpolis, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum E.3924.
Drawing by Marion Cox.



crowning position, perform a similar action to that of the bull in the base area of the verso of the Narmer Palette. Both probably symbolize the king, whose principal rendering on the Narmer Palette has become the full human form, while his bovine form is reduced to a marginal, emblematic sector of the composition.

Such a change excluded all the existing elements from the central areas of decoration. It raises the question of why the earlier works should concentrate on the edges of the ordered environment and not on the Nile Valley. This focus has given rise to much speculation on the putative arrival of nomads among agricultural populations and other such uncertain possibilities (see summary of Behrens, 1982), but is perhaps better compared and contrasted with dynastic practice. The crucial works of both epochs that were buried in tombs or dedicated to the gods—as probably applies to the Two Dog Palette (Figs. 1-2)—focus on the exceptional and are deeply concerned with transitions and boundaries. They should not be used as balanced evidence for normal life, but rather might be compared with the nexus of displayed royal historical action in the world abroad and in exceptions to routine. The “scenes of daily life” in Old Kingdom tombs lack much of this most significant content, probably in part for reasons of decorum.

To argue against too close a comparison of the earlier and later palettes is to leave greater uncertainty as to the significance of the earlier. There remain nonetheless thematic parallels between the earlier palettes and much later times. These could be

illusory, but are more likely to reflect long-lasting folk conceptions that are rarely reflected in surviving visual evidence. Thus, the reliefs of the Two Dog Palette (Figs. 1-2) include a winged griffin-like animal that can be compared to figures among those hunted in the landscape of the low desert in two tombs at Beni Hasan (Newberry 1893: pls. 4, 13; evidently from a single model) and those represented with an additional human head among other fabulous beings on Middle

Kingdom ivory wands (e.g. Altenmüller 1965:figs. 1, 3, 6, 9, 12-13, 16, 21, 29). The Gebel Tarif knife handle, more or less contemporary with the palette, offers a point of comparison in showing both a “griffin” and a domesticated heavy hunting dog with a collar (Fig. 3; see e.g. Sievertsen 1992:5). The basic context of the hunt in the Middle Kingdom tombs can be compared closely with the palette and knife handle. Much more remotely, the flute-playing canine or canine-masked human figure on the Two Dog Palette has an analogy in the animals playing musical instruments shown in late New Kingdom representations of “fables” on ostraca and papyri (Brunner-Traut 1968). Both may relate to folk beliefs and narratives about animals and the parodistic roles they

perform in them (see also §4). Despite the clear differences in context and treatment, this parallel may be valuable in supporting the assumption that the world of the Two Dog Palette is marginal both in location and in reality status. In setting the hunt and confrontation of animals there, the unseen master of the hunt is subduing the edges of the ordered cosmos. In addition to these distant analogies, the visual and textual



Figure 3 Decoration of one side of the gold leaf handle of the ripple-flaked knife from Gebel Tarif, Cairo CG 14265; reproduced from Quibell 1905:237.

evidence for canine figures in early dynastic and later sources suggests analogies for the predynastic treatments.

Henri Asselberghs drew an analogy between canines and the "taming" of the world (1961:285-286, building on Schott, 1950:15-16). These suggestive insights can be extended.

The large figures of the wild hunting dog edging palettes enclose a world that is hunted, rather as the human figures of the Hunters' Palette envelop the scene of the kill. In a sense, the framing dogs "hunt" the "prey" shown within. This reading is only partial, because some palettes have edging animals, like bulls with royal associations (the Bull Palette) and antelopes (e.g. A figs. 131-132, 125-126 [probable]), that can hardly have such a meaning, and in any case the relationship between edge figures and relief field is seldom close. The habitat of the wild dog is now the savannah and in predynastic times was probably the low desert, where large-game hunting would also have taken place. Yet the animals framed by the dogs are not being hunted by them in any simple sense, but seem to partake in pursuits of their own; alternatively, warring human figures are shown with animal participation, as on the Battlefield Palette (A figs. 151-154). Thus, the world of the palette surface may be best characterized as one in need or in process of ordering (compare the reading of Kemp, 1989:46-53 with fig. 14). It is ambivalent between animal and human and between "real" and "fantastic", omitting the ordered agricultural world of the Nile Valley. By the time of the Narmer Palette, both the desert and the Valley were largely excluded from the principal monuments: his palette and mace head (e.g. Baines 1989:473-474 figs. 1-2, 4) show ritual, sacralized events that did not lie at the centre of the system of decorum but were very close to it. Their locations have become almost abstract.

The canine figures on the slightly earlier palettes span the real, social, and symbolic worlds. In addition to the wild dog, clearly domesticated dogs, characterized by floppy ears and collars, are shown both on the palettes and on other objects of the same general period (e.g. Ashmolean ivory statuette E.310: Hilzheimer 1932:pl. XI

fig. 13; knife handles: Cialowicz 1992; cylinder: Whitehouse 1992:79 figs. 1-2). These occur on the "recto" of the Two Dog Palette (Figs. 1-2), and are shown suckling (?) from the framing animal on the "Munagat" fragment published by Fischer (1958:figs. 11, 13; provenance perhaps Minshat Abu Omar) and probably on the Metropolitan Palette, whose preserved decoration consists almost exclusively of canine figures (Fischer 1958:figs. 19-20). The suckling explicitly bridges the world of the palette's relief decoration and its demarcating canines, exhibiting the contrast between the wild and the domesticated and, by reference to the absent keepers of the domesticated dogs, implicitly intermingling the animal and the human.

On the Two Dog Palette and elsewhere, the relationships of different varieties of canines can be observed in other ways. The recto of that palette has three miniature wild dogs inserted between the edging animals and the serpopards' necks and between the necks and the rim of the grinding area. These form part of the upper area of decoration, which is terminated by the feet of the serpopards. This grouping occupies at least two thirds of the decorated area, but has relatively few figures. Beneath, and oriented right to left unlike the symmetrical upper part, is the crowded section in which the domesticated dogs attack antelopes and ibexes. This division between the wild and mythological—in the form of the serpopards—on the one hand, and human agency exercised through domesticated animals on undomesticated ones on the other, mobilizes the differences between the species of canines to create and endow meaning to symbolic and compositional areas. The division between upper and lower, more and less heavily symbolic, has an evident analogy with the disjunction of sky and earth, where sky is the mythical realm. Any such distinction is mediated by the wild dogs, which are too concrete a symbol to be simply celestial in association, but the division itself is so clear that it must have some significance.

The verso of the palette is harder to interpret, but its flute-playing canine, which most resembles the wild dog, condenses into

a single figure the paradox of wild and tame; the paired lions at the top of the relief may also have a complex symbolic meaning and could allude to kingship. Barry Kemp has interpreted this side as symbolizing the "containment of unruly in the universe", a reading that has a clear relevance for such a composition as the Narmer Palette (1989:46-53 with fig. 14; I do not see the Sethian associations he finds in the flute-playing figure).

The Battlefield and Bull palettes appear to be transitional between the marginal depicted world of the Two Dog and Hunters' palettes and the ordered forms of the Narmer Palette and of dynastic times. The rigid organization and subject definition of "classical" Egyptian art mask what is frequently seen as a deeply unstable view of the cosmos and its permanence (e.g. Assmann 1990:213-222). In comparison, palettes of the earlier group openly confront and master the same circumstances. There is no reason to think that they project a fundamentally different view of the world's stability from that of the later materials, but the change from focusing on the containment of disorder to banishing it to the margin of decoration is eloquent of the ordering ambitions of the emerging state and of its insecurity. The earlier palettes may not relate directly to the world of the gods, and in my opinion offer no definite indication of deities (also the conclusion of Cialowicz, 1991). In contrast, the divine associations and emblematic form of the canine standards on the Bull Palette belong in a new different symbolic world.

III. Animals and human and royal status

The collars, upturned tails, and floppy ears that characterize distinct domesticated breeds of dogs also have a function in reality and in representation in displaying the status of their owners. The palettes are elite products. Several of them, such as the Two Dog Palette, which comes from the Main Deposit at Hierakonpolis, are of the highest possible status. The same applies to other objects decorated with canine figures, including the decorated knife handles and

ivory and schist statuettes (e.g. Gebel el-Araq knife handle: A figs. 55-58; Sievertsen 1992; Ashmolean ivory spoon: A fig. 31; schist statuette, Lowie Museum, Berkeley: de Cenival 1978:55 fig. 61). The importance of the Two Dog Palette is evidenced additionally by the care with which it had been preserved and repaired by reattaching the missing head of the pair of dogs; the damage visible on the remaining dog's head was probably present already when the repair was done. Before the piece was included in the deposit, it had evidently been a treasured object. To judge by the ivory with the name of Den in the deposit (Whitehouse 1987), it might then have been two hundred or so years old.

The domestic dogs form part of the elite world, being bred for particular characteristics that are often dysfunctional in terms of hunting and other possibly "natural" activities, and kept on collar and leash both for control—not least control of breeding—and for companionship. Perhaps three domesticated breeds with collar can be identified on late predynastic objects. The floppy ears of some examples are the most distinctive element here, because only puppies of the angular breeds generally found in Egypt have them; these are therefore dogs of specific breeds or types. The dogs vary between a light-boned, lean breed, as in the Ashmolean ivory statuette (Hilzheimer 1932:pl. XI fig. 13), and the heavier type with forward-sloping pointed ears shown on the Gebel el-Araq and Gebel Tarif (Fig. 3) knife handles and elsewhere. Hendrickx (1992:14-26) distinguishes among hunting dogs between a greyhound type (*lévrier*), which he identifies with the Egyptian word *t-zm*, and a pointer type (*braque*).

The complex of hunting and breeds of highly selected dogs is typical of many elites. Hunting becomes restricted by access to the areas where it is done or to the weapons and animals used for it. The dogs themselves may occupy both the hunting and the narrowly domestic arenas, as they did in Egypt in later periods.

This control of dogs does not in itself imply the existence of a complex society, as

is shown, among other examples, by a Naqada I pottery bowl whose interior bears a representation of a bowman holding four dogs on leashes (Moscow, Pushkin Museum: Avdieff 1935:42 fig. 8; another Naqada I bowl probably also shows dogs: Petrie and Quibell 1896:pl. 29 no. 95; for discussion, see Hilzheimer 1932:417-418; Hendrickx 1992:14-18). Similarly, predynastic burials of dogs (Boessneck 1988:23) provide evidence for attitudes that can be compared with those of later times but say little about their social setting. Hendrickx's observation (1992:16-17) that even the earliest dogs have the artificially bred upturned tails emphasizes their social importance and perhaps fits the date of the examples in the transition from Naqada I to the far more highly differentiated Naqada II. This may reflect growing competition and elite formation as manifested in control of a prized domesticated resource. The later occurrence of more highly differentiated dogs on extravagant decorated objects intensifies this development.

The elite associations of the dogs do not contribute directly to the overall interpretation of the palettes. Rather, the discriminations embodied in the dogs, which are characteristic of incipiently or fully complex societies, form part of the general symbolism of the decoration. Insofar as the palettes' vehicles of expression are representations of hunting and of the natural and fantastic worlds, the distinctions of dog breeds, which may have been a consuming interest of those who commissioned the works, are excellent ways of incorporating meaning. Such meanings may be analogies and relate to almost unrecoverable folk categories. Thus, I accept Kemp's view that a central theme of the decoration is the containment of disorder, but would interpret its treatment along more complex social lines. Its purpose can hardly be elite display of dogs. A detailed elucidation has yet to be achieved, and in the absence of supporting evidence may not be possible.

While the elite was displaced from the central royal and religious monuments of dynastic times, the king continued to express his status through his relations with animals. Relevant examples here include the mortuary

complex of Aha at Abydos, where the king's pet (?) lion or lions were sacrificed at his burial together with numerous young men (Dreyer *et al.* 1990:67), among cases from all periods where kings were represented with lions as companions, often in aggressive contexts (see e.g. Pongracz 1957; van Essche 1991). An ivory statuette of a lioness with a collar from the tomb of Djer, perhaps a gaming piece relating to others representing dogs, points in the same direction (Drenkhahn 1987: 55 fig. 7). Barbara Adams plausibly suggests that these figurines from non-royal tombs were signs of royal favour (Adams and Jaeschke 1984:30).

The co-occurrence of lions and dogs on other decorated pieces similarly implies that their owner, presumably the king, masters animal powers which mere humans cannot master (e.g. Ashmolean spoon A fig. 31; Ashmolean small high relief mace head Quibell 1900:pl. 19 no. 6; Quibell and Green 1902:pl. 66). The dogs on these objects are domesticated, and on the mace head they paw the lions in a characteristic gesture (also found on the Gebel Tarif knife handle, Fig. 3). The juxtaposition of dog and lion in games may be one of tame and wild that is implicitly also of non-royal and royal (a gaming set in the tomb of Hezyre probably shows dogs and lions, but the forms of the dogs are surprising: Quibell 1913:pl. 11). The much later game of "hounds and jackals" also contrasts tame and wild, but without royal associations (see e.g. Hayes 1953-1959:I, 250; II, 39, 199, 405; Murray 1952:15-16). In some ways closer to the canine figures on which I focus here is the grandiose hunting scene of Sahure from his mortuary temple at Abusir (Borchardt *et al.* 1913:pl. 17), where at least two dogs are shown assisting in the king's triumph. This, however, is not very far in type from hunting scenes in non-royal tombs, and so is less distinctive than the use of lions.

Thus, the king exploited exclusive and expensive animals for messages of status and role still more than the elite did. His most striking choice of lions, which can never be fully domesticated, expressed his own powers and prowess, as well as forging a symbolic link between him and the undomesticated world; his more than human

power was not contained within the merely human cosmos. (This is, of course, only one aspect of the association of king and lion.)

The association of "royalty" and lion is visible well before the beginning of 1st dynasty. The Hunters' Palette is crowned with royal symbols (Baines in press) and shows lions as the prey and dogs as part of the means of capture (e.g. A figs. 122-124; Cialowicz 1991:55 fig. 24), while the mauling lion in the centre of the recto on the Battlefield Palette probably symbolizes the king (A fig. 151). Even the otherwise undistinctive paired lions of the Two Dog Palette (Figs. 1-2) could have royal associations. The comparable canine figures did not survive in the same way as the lions, perhaps in part because they were not exclusively royal symbols. The king appropriated cosmographic symbolism to monuments of himself and of the gods.

IV. Symbolism of canine figures

Canine species are ambivalent in relation to the categories of wild and tame, but in a very different way to lions. Lions symbolize strength and aggression, and a "tame" lion symbolizes the containment of those qualities, but it does not become a companion or serve a directly useful human purpose. Despite the existence of large numbers of feline species, it does not offer a continuum from wild to tame—and the small cat had not been domesticated in predynastic times. The lion is not strongly variable within its species. Its uniqueness and intractability make it a most powerful royal symbol. The use of figures of lions as guardians in many cultures exploits the ambivalence of the lion as far as possible, while perhaps incorporating folk knowledge of the role of male lions in their prides as well as responding to the awesome visual quality of the animal.

The iconography and forms of lions exhibit the artistic transformations of late predynastic times. Barbara Adams has presented a typology of this material, which shows a gradual and overlapping transition from an open-mouthed, ferocious style to the restrained forms of the dynastic period

(Adams and Jaeschke 1984:19-31; see already Schäfer 1986:11-12). The symbolically "tame" lion figurines with collars, which are paralleled by other gaming pieces in the ferocious style (e.g. Petrie 1901:pl. 6, 3-4), undergo the ordering process of the palettes and other artistic media. Later lions seldom have collars or leashes.

Canines contrast with these developments; unlike lions, the presentation of non-divine canines changed with dynastic times only in the disappearance of the wild hunting dog. Canines are rare both in spanning wild and tame easily and comprehensively, and in offering gradations between the two. The depiction of pet dogs under chairs in later periods is the best known manifestation of the tame pole of this continuum (Fischer 1980:78). From later periods in Egypt the symbolism of cats (see Delvaux and Warmenbol 1991) offers analogies to this treatment of the canines, but the gulf between the cat and its wild poles, the panther and the lioness, is far greater than that between domestic dog, wild dog, jackal, and hyena (distinctions of gender appear important for felines in a way in which they are not for dogs). Thus, the symbolic mobilization of canines, and in particular the paradox of the palettes in showing domesticated dogs suckling from wild ones, displays the ambivalence of their environment and almost creates a taxonomic transition that comments on the artistic transformations of the period.

This ironic-seeming presentation of themes through what would now be termed ethology can be compared with the intense "scientific" interest in animals documented in later artistic and textual sources, such as the Chamber of the Seasons in the 5th dynasty solar temple of Neuserre (Edel 1961-1964) and the late period manual on snakes (Sauneron 1989). An apparently practical analogy for this is the representation in the 6th dynasty tomb of Kagemni of a hyena being force-fed (Smith 1969:308-309 with fig. 1; see e.g. Störk 1980; hyenas are also shown being controlled by minders: Paton 1925:23 figs. 3-4). This has been taken as an example of the attempted domestication of a basically untamable species, but part of

its meaning might be more indirect than that, and relate to discourse about the boundaries of wild and tame among canine species.

Modelling of human society through canine species, especially dogs and hyenas, is widespread and well reported for sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. Beidelman 1975; Gottlieb 1986, 1989; see also references cited by Störk, 1980) and elsewhere (e.g. Tambiah 1985 [Thailand]). These examples characteristically do not focus on the elites of highly or increasingly unequal societies, and they tend to lump dogs together as a single category. The Egyptian palettes and other evidence offer an opposite case, where elites make play with canine differences. As in the ethnographic analogies just cited, some of the associations may be ironical. The later "scientific" treatment of animals then transposed such ironies onto a level of deeper high-cultural seriousness.

A major change appears with the sacralization of the latest palettes. The symbolism of the figures can no longer be seen as analogous with folk wisdom. The Bull Palette shows the set of royal-divine standards familiar from later times, including two with figures of recumbent wild canines. These figures, which are erect on the standards of Scorpion and Narmer (e.g. Smith 1949:114 fig. 30; Baines

1989:473-474, figs. 1, 4), were later associated with the divine name Wepwawet "Opener of Ways", an identification first securely attested in the Middle Kingdom (the name itself occurs on the Palermo Stone for the reign of Shepseskaf: Schäfer 1902:32). They seem with their fellow standards to have a function in guarding the king; in a crude sense they are his watchdogs (e.g. Petrie 1903:pl. 25; Simpson 1974:pl. 63:45.1; see also *LD* 3, 36: Thutmose III, Karnak). They are clearly divine in reference.

While these figures are not directly comparable with the palette material, they can be linked with a palette in Geneva without relief decoration that is crowned with a recumbent canine figure (A figs. 86-87). This canine is schematically rendered, but its ears seem not to be those of the wild dog; it might be a jackal. By analogy with the crowning figures on the latest palettes and with dynastic symbolism, it could have divine associations. Both the bull of the Bull Palette, which probably symbolizes the king, and the cow heads of the Narmer Palette can be seen as demarcatory figures, and the divine symbolism of the latter implies the presence of the sky. The single canine of the earlier palette might have a comparable meaning, but lacks definite royal and divine associations.

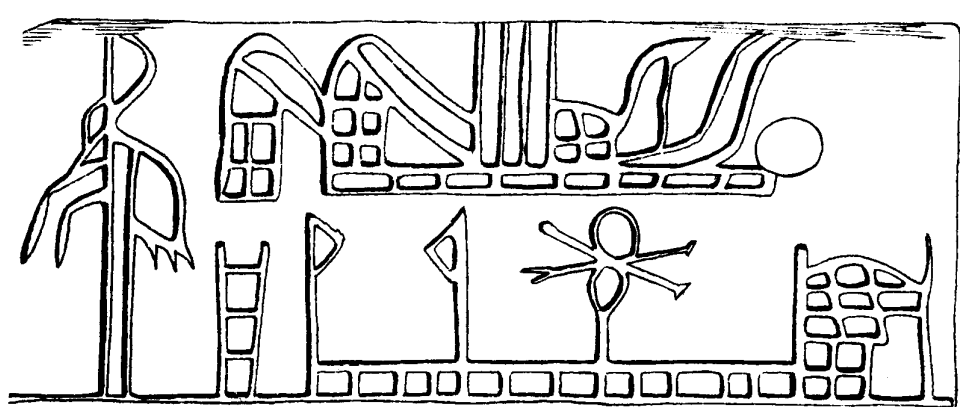


Figure 4 Shrine of Neit with *ntr*-poles and Imiut before it. Tag of Aha from Abydos; reproduced from Petrie 1901: pl. 10, 2.

V. Early dynastic canine figures

These parallels can be related to canine figures in early dynastic symbolism. The most distinctive strands of evidence are connected with Khentimentiu, the protector god of the royal cemetery at Abydos, and the canine Imiut symbol, which is shown in front of sanctuaries in 1st dynasty representations of shrines (Fig. 4), on sealings (Fig. 5), and on large numbers of reused stelae and other stones from the Step Pyramid enclosure at Saqqara (Köhler 1975:fig. 3 after p. 319; 6-11; Firth *et al.* 1935:pls. 86-87). The Imiut appears to consist of the skin of a slaughtered and decapitated canine suspended on a pole above a bowl set to catch its blood (absent from the earliest examples illustrated in Figs. 4-5). Although the iconography of the living canine Anubis is known from the Old Kingdom and frequent in hieroglyphs, the god's name is not definitely attested before the 6th dynasty; the association of Imiut and Anubis iconography can, however, plausibly be traced to the early 1st dynasty (Fig. 5; Köhler 1975:3, 328-334). Khentimentiu is known from a 1st dynasty pottery inscription (Petrie 1903:pl. 12 no. 278) and from the "dynastic" seal of the necropolis dating to the reign of Den (Dreyer 1987; an extension to the end of the 1st dynasty has since been found).

The functions of these deities as guardians of the necropolis and as royal heralds can be compared with the role of the wild canines on the palettes. The canine guardian of the dynastic period occupies a marginal zone both in space and in time, in space through its habitat on the low desert, and thus in the realm of the dead, and in time through the transition from this life to the next. It has often, and probably correctly, been proposed that a reason for this canine symbolism is the scavenging of jackals, wild dogs, or feral and domesticated dogs in the low desert and hence the cemetery (e.g. Barta 1984:527). Deification would be a form of propitiation. But this reductive reading does not do justice to the canines' rich associations or to the complex symbolism of the earlier monuments. The "watchdog" role on the

standards relates to the real function of trained dogs—and thus bridges the gap between the wild jackal of the standards themselves and the domesticated dog of everyday life—and at the same time implies that the greatest manifestation of order is the king himself, before whom go marginal beings and symbols that protect him and act as a point of transition to the less ordered world beyond. It is also possible that the sight of jackals in guarding poses contributed to this role and iconography.

The Imiut has related implications. The slaughtered canine is not simply a sacrifice on behalf of the dedicatee, who might be a deity or a deceased king, or later a private person. The figure set up at the entrance to a shrine, or in the original design of the Step Pyramid perhaps as a boundary marker, appears to demarcate one "world" from another—this world from the next, or the profane from the sacred—while itself partaking in divinity. In this sense, its symbolism is analogous with, but far more vivid than, that of the hieroglyph for "god" (Baines 1991). The taking of the animal's life cannot be a purely hostile act, because the resulting emblem was from the start closely identified with a canine deity. This death may instead symbolize the sacrifice involved in transition between domains, the most significant transition being death itself.

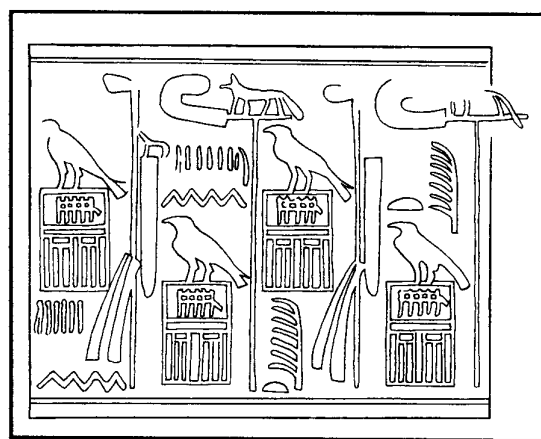


Figure 5 Imiut emblem and jackal standard on a cylinder seal of the reign of Djer from Abydos; redrawn by Marion Cox from Petrie 1901:pl. 15, no. 109.

Among canines as a highly ambivalent group of divine beings, the Imiut is the only divine symbol that is regularly shown dead and dismembered; even Osiris has a much milder iconography.

The idea of transition may also be seen in the forms in which Anubis and Wepwawet occur on stelae of later periods. Middle Kingdom stelae typically show one or two canine deities in emblematic form in the lunette (e.g. Simpson 1974:pls. 19: 19.1-4, 40:74.2, 52:43.2, 54:36.1, 63:44.1-2, 45.1-2, 67:49.1, 71:52.1, 73:66.1-2, 76:54.1, 81:59.1). They are often represented as standards or on top of chests, a form which as a hieroglyph has the reading *hrj sšt3* "keeper of secrets" (Wb. IV, 299). Many such "secrets" are related to rituals or texts aiding passage into the next life, so that this association also points to the idea of transition. The purpose of the stelae was equally to further the destiny of the deceased in the next life, so that they too had an evident transitional meaning.

This placing of Anubis and Wepwawet is comparable to that of the wild dogs on the very much earlier palettes, while there is a more contemporaneous parallel in the treatment of cats in openwork door and false door reliefs (Hermann 1937; Warmenbol and Doyen 1991). The Geneva palette with the single canine figure is the closest apparent forerunner (A figs. 86-87), but its lack of symmetry and unparalleled composition make this comparison fragile. Cosmographic implications for the arrangement on the stelae are given by signs for "east" and "west" and by celestial symbols. While these need not necessarily be read back into the much earlier material, with which there is no direct connection, it remains possible that the two different treatments attest to similar underlying conceptions, if not in so direct a way as I have suggested for the occurrence of griffins in quite different periods (§2).

Thus, I propose a homology between the roles of the wild and domesticated dogs on the palettes on the one hand, and the later role of canine deities and the Imiut on the other hand. The apparent sacralization of the later material may be determined partly by decorum, and the profound differences in artistic conventions make a comparison

difficult. The homology is, however, supported by the later occurrences of some related figures in such contexts as hunting scenes. "Civilization" has as a prime concern the taming of variety in the name of an overarching ideology. The canine figures give some insight into how this might be done and what is lost in the process.

This argument leaves open the question of why the wild dog disappeared from the repertory of dynastic times while other canines continued to be depicted. Because the wild dog is so closely associated with the palettes, its later absence is likely to relate in part to the loss of the genre. Thus, although the animal itself may have become rare, its possible extinction in nature is not an appropriate explanation, even if it could have contributed to the change. An attractive interpretation is that the dynastic period division between wild jackal and domesticated dog, which was also that between divine and human-related, would have been blurred by the wild dog, whose role on the palettes—where jackals are largely absent—was indeed intermediate between completely wild and tame, human and animal. It cannot be excluded that the wild dog became subject to some kind of taboo or avoidance, but such an arbitrary hypothesis would not relate predynastic forms meaningfully to dynastic ones, and other parallels suggest that the two groups of evidence should be linked. I suggest, therefore, that the wild dog was sacrificed iconographically to the tidy categories of dynastic times.

VI. Conclusion; the change to dynastic conventions

The rich variety of late predynastic canine representations, only some of which I have mentioned, became drastically restricted around the beginning of the 1st dynasty, along with much else in the scenic repertory; the material of the most uncertain date is the Main Deposit from Hierakonpolis. The deities depicted as wild canines on early dynastic monuments are probably emblematic, because they are not set in a context where full representation of a deity

would be expected (more detailed arguments: Baines 1985:73-75). The loss of this iconographic range from the preserved record relates to the position of the king: with his peremptory assertion of absolute power, "merely" elite phenomena and interests became marginalized and are difficult to trace in the representations (purely archaeological sources are more revealing).

This restriction of material is misleading even for the king, among whose retinue dogs were buried during the 1st dynasty, while in the 5th dynasty a royal dog received an inscribed gravestone and mortuary offerings (for these, see Fischer 1980). The neatly structured world of temple representations, with its very limited repertory of figures and scenes, had no space for beings as anomalous as the domestic dog.

Dogs may be domesticated and even acquire an almost human status, but others of their species and genus will be different in form and characteristics, and will be disturbingly similar to wild jackals or dogs. The dogs "of the street", ubiquitous now in Egypt and mentioned in New Kingdom and later texts, have survived more than a millennium of notional Islamic contempt for their species (but see e.g. Lane 1966:292-294), and were no doubt even more prevalent in an epoch when animals were yet closer integrated into the human world. This uncontrollability and variability of an individually controllable and definable species gives the dog, as the canine species most available to humanity, some of its great symbolic potential; this is reinforced by the extreme variations in behaviour within and between canine species. The late predynastic material exploits this potential additionally through its integration of wild and domesticated species. Without this evidence and its implications for elite interests and practices, it would be difficult to approach these topics. As in many cases, the dynastic record is impoverished in comparison with its forerunners. Apart from the intrinsic value of the earlier sources, they are vital in throwing into relief the gaps in the later.

The introduction of the tidy iconographic categories of the dynastic period is part of a general transformation in methods of assembling artistic compositions and

conveying meaning through representational forms. This transformation spans approximately the period from such works as the paintings of Tomb 100 at Hierakonpolis (Quibell and Green 1902:pls. 75-79), which contain initial pointers to later conventions, to the Narmer Palette. The meaning of predynastic works like the Two Dog Palette appears to reside in the total composition as much as being assembled from individual motifs (although such a characterization would not apply to the entire Hierakonpolis painting). Dynastic works can be said to assemble their meanings, and they operate through a vocabulary of symbolic forms and procedures that is closely related to the appearance and integration of the hieroglyphic script (e.g. Baines 1989) and to the introduction of strict register composition.

In such a vocabulary, particular figures or concepts symbolize specific entities. The obvious example is the king, who is represented by the lions and the bulls of the reliefs, and also by the increasingly prevalent Horus names and human figures of himself. In the case of the canine figures, a general symbolic role, which is all that can be safely interpreted for their occurrences on the palettes, gives way to discrete figures with divine identifications, occupying defined roles on the standards. This change may seem sharper than it really was, because there is no readily available means of penetrating the symbolic significance of predynastic forms. It is also easy to see the change as an impoverishment, because the general and abstract metaphors that can be read from the earlier works lose resonance in their successors. Such a reading could be mistaken in the terms of the actors, who were able to bring far greater resources than we can to the creation and use of the works, but the exclusively royal and divine focus of the later ones, which goes together with their greater semiotic clarity, nonetheless justifies the perception that a loss was involved. While there does not appear to be a necessary connection between the change in methods of conveying meaning and that in relations of power caused by the emergence of a predominant king, the coincidence cannot be overlooked. The change in the position of

canine figures exemplifies this wider transformation.

Both the more detailed and the wider readings offered in this article attempt to explore implications of representing canines in context and to model their position in relation to the human, the royal, and the divine. They do not point toward a neatly structured interpretation of the principal palettes, or to any particular close reading of them. As interpretations based essentially on associations of the figures, they cannot aspire to proof. Rather, they aim to enrich perceptions of these leading late predynastic works of art and to relate them to hypothetical social and natural forms and to conceptions attested from dynastic times. Like all such studies, they can make at best a limited claim to reconstruct the conceptions that underlay the decisions of those who commissioned and created the works of art. The works themselves, some of them dedicated in temples to deities who could not be directly experienced, made a similar leap into the dark. Both their significance for their own time and the resonance they may now evoke may go some way toward justifying the speculative character of any reading.

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