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A new technology for understanding the secrets of ancestral Saharan beliefs through the tattoos of the very first tattooed people (XI-Sciences and ancestral knowledge).

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Summary : Several naturally mummified human bodies have been exhumed near Gebelein (40 km south of Thebes). Six of them (EA 32751-32756) were obtained for the British Museum in 1899 by Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, who claimed to have witnessed their excavation (BUDGE, 1920). Apparently, all the bodies had been buried in the foetal position, at a shallow depth in the sand, in accordance with predynastic traditions and surrounded by objects echoing Saharan rock art. The first approach to understanding these traditions shows that, until now, researchers have focused on highlighting a possible community of forms between Saharan rock art and Egyptian art, or a common mythological content that would have been conveyed by these two art forms (D'HUY & LE QUELLEC, 2009 : 85). This quest for origins seems to ignore the violence and brutal changes associated with the process of state formation in Egypt, as well as the break with certain traditions that may have resulted. Recently, thanks to new technologies, scientists have discovered traumas¹ and tattoos² on two of Gebelein's bodies (the horned beasts on the man's arm, four "S" symbols on the woman's upper shoulder and an "L" on her arm). N.B. N.B. Tattoos were not found on mummified bodies until the Ramses period³, two thousand years later (BLAKEMORE, 2023). In our opinion, profound societal mutations are at the origin of these violent and brutal changes, and we try to understand them in this article.

Keywords: Early tattooists, Great Goddess civilization, Snake Goddess, Bronze Age collapse, bimillennial break in tattoo practice.

Une nouvelle technologie pour comprendre les secrets des croyances sahariennes ancestrales à travers les tatouages des tous premiers tatoués (XI-Sciences et savoirs ancestraux)

Résumé: Plusieurs corps humains naturellement momifiés ont été exhumés près de Gebelein (40 km au sud de Thèbes). Six d'entre eux (EA 32751-32756) ont été obtenus pour le musée britannique (British Museum) en 1899 par Sir E. A. Wallis Budge, qui a affirmé avoir assisté à leur fouille (BUDGE, 1920). Apparemment, tous les corps avaient été enterrés en position fœtale, à une faible profondeur dans le sable, conformément aux traditions prédynastiques et entourés d'objets faisant écho à l'art rupestre saharien. La première approche pour comprendre ces traditions montre que, jusqu'à présent, les chercheurs se sont plutôt attachés à mettre en évidence une éventuelle communauté de formes entre l'art rupestre saharien et l'art égyptien, ou un contenu mythologique commun qui aurait été véhiculé par ces deux formes d'art

¹ On examining the woman's body, scientists discovered that she had suffered head trauma, while the man had been stabbed in the back with a knife that had pierced the shoulder blade from top to bottom: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/virtual-autopsy-discover-how-ancient-egyptian-gebelein-man-died>

² As part of an ongoing reanalysis and conservation program, the skin of each of 6 mummies was examined by infrared imaging under flash and ambient light conditions using a Panasonic Lumix DMC ZS19 portable camera, converted to 720 nm infrared by Kolari Vision. Tattoos were detected on observable areas of the bodies of two individuals (FRIEDMAN & All, 2018 : 116-125). N.B. : The date of death of these two individuals has been estimated at between 3,351 and 3,017 B.C.E. (*idem*).

³ This period of ancient Egypt is a subdivision of the New Kingdom, characterized by the abundance of kings bearing the name of Ramses. It is often referred to by the French adjective "ramesside", which becomes a noun qualifying the period. It spans the 19th and 20th dynasties (1296-1069 B.C.E.).

(D'HUY & LE QUELLEC, 2009 : 85). Cette quête des origines semble ignorer la violence et les changements brutaux liés au processus de formation de l'État en Égypte, ainsi que la rupture avec certaines traditions qui a pu en résulter. Récemment, grâce à de nouvelles technologies, les scientifiques ont découvert des traumatismes⁴ et des tatouages⁵ sur deux de corps de Gebelein (les bêtes à cornes sur le bras de l'homme, quatre symboles "S" sur le haut de l'épaule de la femme et un "L" sur son bras). N.B. Il faut attendre près de deux mille ans (l'époque ramesside⁶) pour retrouver des tatouages sur des corps momifiés (BLAKEMORE, 2023). Selon nous, les profondes mutations sociétales sont à l'origine de ces changements violents et brutaux et nous essayons les comprendre dans cet article.

Introduction, method and hypothesis.

In FLE (teaching French as a foreign language), it's common to draw parallels with the mother tongue. We applied our linguistic methods to archaeological analysis. Our method of comparison by parallelism was born. It makes it possible to "read" archaeological artifacts in their global context, following the evolution of their concepts in space-time. In this article, we attempt to understand the origin of societal mutations manifested by changes in funerary objects and other archaeological artefacts, by reconstructing the anthropological context, based on comparative analyses of tattoo motifs found on Gebelein mummies and motifs on artefacts belonging to neighbouring cultures (Saharan, Anatolian and others), as well as motifs from the same period found in the tombs of the first kings of Egypt.

We hypothesize that the tattoos on the Gebelein mummies could be a cultural code whose iconography reflects ancestral beliefs, in which the feminine was associated with the serpent and the masculine with the horned beast. According to the theory of Marija Gimbutas (GIMBUTAS, 1974, 1978, 2005), these beliefs, common to a very wide area (referred to here as the "common cultural horizon"), persisted over a long period of time. We hope that new technologies (digitization of archives, infrared imaging, scanners, etc.) and the parallels that can be drawn between the Nagada⁷ culture and similar cultures in space-time will help us to understand the origin of the societal and religious mutation between the Predynastic period and the Egypt of the Pharaohs.

Content.

⁴ En étudiant le corps de la femme, les scientifiques ont découvert qu'elle avait subi un traumatisme crânien ; quant à l'homme, il avait été poignardé dans le dos avec un couteau qui avait transpercé l'omoplate de haut en bas : <https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/virtual-autopsy-discover-how-ancient-egyptian-gebelein-man-died>

⁵ Dans le cadre d'un programme continu de réanalyse et de conservation, a peau de chacune des 6 momies a été examinée par imagerie infrarouge dans des conditions de flash et de lumière ambiante avec un appareil photo portable Panasonic Lumix DMC ZS19, converti en infrarouge 720 nm par Kolari Vision. Des tatouages ont été détectés sur les zones observables du corps de deux individus (FRIEDMAN & All, 2018 : 116-125). N.B. : La date de la mort de ces deux individus a été estimée entre 3 351 et 3 017 B.C.E. (*idem*).

⁶ This period of Ancient Egypt is a subdivision of the New Kingdom, characterized by the abundance of kings bearing the name of "Ramses". It is often referred to by the French adjective "ramesside", which becomes a noun qualifying the period. It spanned the XIXth and XXth 19th and 20th dynasties (1296-1069 B.C.E.).

⁷ The archaeological culture to which these two tattooed mummies belong. N.B. The Nagada or Naqada culture (3,900 - 3,150 B.C. E) is the most important prehistoric culture in Egypt. It developed over some 750 years in Upper Egypt. It saw the transition from a population practicing hunting and herding, as well as a few domesticated crops, to a hierarchical society of cereal farmers, grouped into cities and dominated by chiefs, then by rulers who waged war against each other until one of them became pharaoh and unified all Egypt under his reign. N.B.: It was during this last period that Egyptian writing first appeared.

The application of tattoos to the human body has a history in many ancient cultures. Until now, the earliest examples were mainly geometric tattoos of the individual known as Ötzi - the Iceman (Deter Wolf & al., 2016), dating from the late 4th millennium BC. (3370-3100 B.C.E), whose skin was preserved by ice. He had 61 tattoos of lines and crosses all over his body. Given that they were mainly grouped on the parts of his body where he would have felt discomfort due to the degenerative diseases from which he suffered (around his lower back and joints), we can deduce that the application of these tattoos had a medical rather than a symbolic purpose.

In contrast to Ötzi's tattoos, the tattoos on our two Predynastic Gebelein mummies appear to be highly symbolic in nature, since they are applied to parts of the body (arm and shoulder) exposed to the gaze of others, and their iconography comes from the rock art of the time. It is currently accepted that they are the oldest figurative tattoos known (FRIEDMAN & All, 2018).

The fact that there was an interruption of almost two thousand years in this practice intrigues us and is the subject of our reflections. Indeed, it was not until the « Ramesside period » (see note n°3) that tattoos were found on a mummified body⁸. We believe that profound societal and religious changes are at the root of this abrupt break. We will delve into the archaeological record to understand this rupture.

Let's not forget that, up until now, researchers have focused mainly on highlighting the common origins of forms between Saharan rock art and Egyptian art. This quest seems to ignore the violence and brutal changes associated with the process of installing the first dynasties, as well as the break with certain traditions that may have resulted. To understand this, let's take a look at each of our mummy tattoo designs.

1) *The image of horned animals.*

According to some archaeologists, the representations of horned animals found on the Gebelein Man are frequent elements for ancient Egyptian iconography, but identifying the intended species remains a challenge (FRIEDMAN & All., 2018). Based on the shape of its elaborate horns and long tail, the lower tattoo represents a bovid (most likely a wild bull) and the upper tattoo suggests it is a Barbary sheep (*idem*).

Incidentally, this tattooed man has shattered the legend that only women were tattooed for reasons of fertility or even eroticism (*idem*).

According to studies by Julien d'Huy and Jean-Loïc Le Quellec, in the eyes of the Egyptians, each image executed on the skin was a living being endowed with its own magical power and efficacy (D'HUY & LE QUELLEC, 2009: 93).

Knowing that the wild bull was one of the three heraldic figures of Predynastic Egypt, along with the falcon and the lion (GRAFF, 2015), we can deduce that this tattooed man was part of an emerging elite in Nagada culture.

⁸ . Archaeologists have discovered over thirty different tattoos, including lotus flowers and the eye of Horus, on the skin of a female mummy discovered in the Valley of the Kings, who is thought to have lived between 1292 and 1189 B.C.E. Researchers believe she was a priestess or magician with a special connection to the ancient celestial goddess Hathor.

Given its violent death⁹, and the abrupt break with certain traditions such as the disappearance of tattoos for two thousand years, the change in the body posture of the deceased (the foetal position replaced by the supine position in dynastic Egypt), as well as the form and content of tombs (radical change in funerary furnishings, to which we'll return), we can legitimately assume that this elite was eliminated or, rather, migrated¹⁰ (since we note the return of the practice of tattooing thereafter).

2) *The image of the stick (« L »).*

Like the previous motif, the 'stick' is a fairly frequent element in Saharan rock art. It is often used as a magical object to control wild animals, particularly in hunting scenes. From the period commonly known as "Round Heads", dated by Jean-Loïc Le Quellec between 8000±900 B.C.E (LE QUELLEC, 2013). Around 3000 B.C.E, these sticks are still held by women (called "Iheren"). Later, the 'sticks' were replaced by bows and lassos: (see Figures 1-3 in the article of Francis David Lankester¹¹). The gender of the people holding these objects no longer has any obvious female characteristics.

3) *The image of the « S ».*

Unlike the previous motifs, this one is completely new. Without being able to rely on the archives, we're taking the liberty of applying our method of parallels to understand its symbolism. In our opinion, the "S" on our tattooed woman's shoulder is graphically similar to a snake. This view is supported by Egyptian hieroglyphs (N°13193, 13197 et 13193)¹².

So let's take a look at the cultural horizon of this symbol through space and time:

- It is found in abundance at Göbekli Tepe in sculptural and graphic versions (SCHMIDT, 2015; ШМИТ, 2011) but rarely in Saharan desert rock art (MOSTEFAI, 2013).

⁹A reminder: by scanning the man's body, scientists discovered that he had been stabbed in the back: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/virtual-autopsy-discover-how-ancient-egyptian-gebelein-man-died>

¹⁰. Their descendants may have survived into the Iron Age in Siberia, giving rise to the 'animal style', in which brooches representing long-horned animals were hierarchical symbols. They are found on the bodies of people in positions of power (vidéo @NewAechaeology, January, " Скифы верхней Оби » : 52 :22 – 53 :07).

¹¹. See Figures 1-3 in the article "L'art rupestre et les rites de passage des élites naissantes au Prédynastique égyptien" by Francis David Lankester (LANKESTER, 2016 : 84-86)..

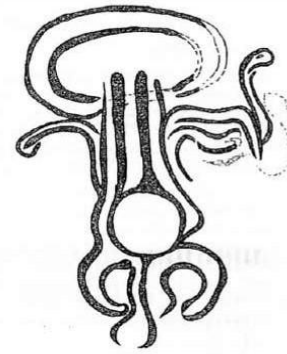
¹². The numbers shown are part of the "Unicode standard » : <https://symbl.cc/ru/unicode/blocks/egyptian-hieroglyphs/>



1)



2)



)

The evolution of the concept of divine power represented by the snake in chronological order: **Images 1 and 2**, sculpture and engraving from Göbekli Tepe (around 6000 B.C.E.): a stone head with a snake on its skull and a woman giving birth with a snake's head (Photos courtesy of Vincent J. Musi). **Image 3**, The Libyan Messak engraving of a visibly pregnant woman with a snake-like hand (around 4000 B.C.E., photo courtesy of Axel & Anne-Michel VAN ALBADA, 1996:10).

- This symbol very often adorns and is even an essential element of the headdresses of Egyptian pharaohs and their Gods (GUILLOU & PEVRE, 2014); it is usually in the shape of an "L", but sometimes in a "U".



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Image 4, The goddess Hathor welcomes SETI I (1294 to 1279 B.C.E; Paris, Musée du Louvre ; <https://www.photo.rmn.fr>) ; **Image 5**, Emblem of the Middle Kingdom goddess Hathor (Paris, Musée du Louvre; <https://www.photo.rmn.fr>), N.B, it is unclear whether she has a snake or horns on her head

- It travelled thousands of years and miles to appear among the Minoans (see the statuettes from Knossos; EVANS, 1906).



6)



7)

Images 6 and 7, Knossos statuettes (photos mythagora.com) dated circa 1600 B.C.E. N.B. With the two snakes around the arms, the first figurine echoes **Image 3**.

These last two images associated with the snake can help us understand the evolution of this concept, which apparently migrated northwards through time and space.



Image 8, Minoan pendant "Mistress of the Animals" found on the island of Aegina (British Museum, 1700-1500 B.C.E., photo.rmn.fr/achats R6NORD24767). N.B. It includes 4 snakes and two birds **Image 9**, Tombstone, 400-600 CE (Photo: Gotlands Museum (CC BY 4.0), at the bottom of this stone, an open woman holding two snakes, topped by a crown of horns. **Image 10**, Scythian goddess¹³ wearing a crown of horns and surrounded by snakes, 300 B.C.E. (Photo: Kerch Museum, public domain)

This latest series of feminine images echoes prehistoric "Venuses". As far as these prehistoric "Venuses" are concerned, the famous archaeologist Marija Gimbutas (GIMBUTAS, 1991) carried out archaeological excavations (over several decades), accumulating traces of funerary rituals in which these representations (statuettes and

¹³ . In 1704, Leibniz placed the region of origin of the Scythians in the Pontic steppe, making them the ancestors of the Slavs (DEMOULE, 2015: 27). Today, genetic analysis confirms this in part.

female figures painted on ceramics) were too frequent not to be noticed. It was then that Marija Gimbutas put forward a new hypothesis. What if these female figures "surrounded by animals" represented a civilization of the Great Goddess?

There are many similarities that are still echoed today in folk tales over a vast territory (cultural horizon) extending beyond the lands between the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

To illustrate this, we draw on the studies of a Russian anthropologist, Professor and academician Bereskin Ju. E., who has built up a database of myths (first from prehistoric America, then from the rest of the world), in which he discovers the correlation between the spread of archaic myths and the first migrations of Sapiens out of Africa, whose territory suffered from severe periods of drought between 60,000 and 14,000 B.C.E. (БЕРЕЗКИН, 2013: 16).

Two African myths with a very broad "common cultural horizon" caught our attention: the immortality of snakes and the origin of human death. In South America, these myths merged, giving the following story: snakes remain immortal due to the fact that they change their skin, and humans became mortal because they lost this ability for one reason or another (БЕРЕЗКИН, 2013: 32-35). We assume that during one of these early migrations, some individuals chose to travel along the coasts of the Mediterranean Sea (rather than heading to the Pacific Ocean).

In our opinion, Göbekli-Tepe (images 1-2) is the "0 point" where nomads (gatherers and hunters) begin to transform into sedentary (farmers). Under favorable climatic conditions, they experienced a demographic explosion and migrated in all directions¹⁴ in search of new exploitable lands. Between the 7th and 6th millennia B.C.E., some of them returned to Africa, bringing with them new knowledge (agriculture, animal husbandry and very first writing). This hypothesis explains the almost simultaneous appearance of very first writing in the Balkans, among the Sumerians and the Egyptians (TYAGLOVA- FAYER, 2023), as well as the acceptance of the new peoples by the aborigines, who took them as their own, sharing with them the myths of the bull and the snake. It should be noted that the myth of the immortal snake is still told today in Southern Africa (БЕРЕЗКИН, 2013: 33-34).

To finish with the motifs found on the skin of our mummies, let's analyze the artifacts of the first pharaohs. Take, for example, the "Palette of Narmer" from the Cairo Museum and the "Tombstone of Ouadji" (Snake King) from the Louvre Museum. Unfortunately, we have not obtained the right to produce their images here, so we will describe them.

¹⁴This may explain one of the enigmas of the hundreds of naturally mummified bodies (the oldest dated between 2100 and 1700 B.C.E.) found in the Tarim basin (now in China). It should be noted that, from the outset, their rather Eurasian appearance (hairstyles, clothing, boat-shaped coffin covered in cattle hides and funerary objects including the oldest cheese in the world) led scientists to believe that they were the remains of a group of Indo-European migrants. The debates are still going on, but they are contaminated by political and social recuperation. We choose to follow the neutral scientists who, after carrying out very detailed genetic analyses, believe that these are descendants of the "ancient North-Eurasian" group dating back to the Pleistocene (ZHANG, 2021: 1-6). This period stretches from 2.58 million years ago to 9,700 B.C.E. Coincidentally or not, our first farmers from Göbekli-Tepe also started moving around the same time.

There are many representations of bovids on Narmer's palette. There are two cow heads at the top, on the recto and verso. At the bottom (recto side), we see a bull with its head down, tearing down the walls of a city while trampling an enemy to the ground. The king is wearing a skirt with 4 cow-headed ribbons and a belt ending in a bull's tail. This tail is an obvious parallel with the tattoo on our male mummy (see paragraph 1).

Narmer's palette includes numerous representations of bovids. At the top, recto and verso, there are two cow heads. At the bottom (recto) is a bull, head down, tearing down the walls of a city by trampling on an enemy. The king is wearing a skirt with 4 ribbons in the shape of a cow's head and a belt ending in a bull's tail¹⁵. This tail is an obvious parallel with the tattoo on our male mummy (see paragraph 1).

As for the "Tombstone of Quadji", we note the recovery of the snake, which previously represented feminine power (paragraphs 2-3). From then on, this symbol was an integral part of the pharaohs' headdresses, making them immortal (image 4).

These last two artifacts show that, while installing a new elite, the pharaohs clearly appropriated the code of the predynastic period linked to images of bovids and snakes.

4) Funeral traditions.

If we compare predynastic Saharan funerary traditions, we also find many similarities in the funerary rituals of the same period noted by M. Gimbutas over a vast territory (cultural horizon) of the Middle East and Eastern Europe. To illustrate this, let us compare the funerary practices of the Linear Pottery culture (ГИМБУТАС, 2006) and those of the Nagada Culture (GRAFF, 2008: 169-182).

The Linear Pottery Culture is the oldest Neolithic culture in Europe. It dates from 5500-4700 B.C.E. and spread to northern France and Belgium, Western Germany, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Moldavia, Romania and Ukraine. It is characterized by a high degree of uniformity in its material culture. Cremation was practiced here, but burial was much more common. Almost all burials are individual and shallow. The bodies lie in the foetal position, most often on their left side, with their hands in front of their faces, their heads facing east and their eyes facing south (ГИМБУТАС, 2006: 87-89).

As for the Nagada culture, its 750-year history is clearly stratified. This is why archaeologists divide it into three periods. During the first period (Nagada I), the burials were almost all individual and uniform. By the end of Nagada II and throughout the Nagada III period, the hierarchical structure - a sign of social inequality - was so

¹⁵ . This last element came back into fashion in the « Ramesside period », and the bull's tail can be seen between the legs of Ramses II (see his sculpture in the seated position in the British Museum). N.B., another element of the "Narmer Palette" was adopted by Ramses II. This is his posture as a warrior lifting a royal mace with his right hand, while with his left he pulls his kneeling enemies by the hair. We are fascinated by the ability of the Egyptian collective memory to transmit myths, which enabled the Ramses (of foreign origin, this dynasty sought legitimacy from the ancient one) to establish their legitimacy by adopting the same code as the first dynasty.

obvious that different areas appeared in the necropolises: on the one hand, large, richly furnished tombs for the elite and, on the other, much more modest burials (sometimes even communal). But there is one constant: **all the bodies are folded on their left side, with their hands in front of their faces** (GRAFF, 2008: 170). This is a common feature of the Linear Pottery Culture. On the other hand, the head of the Saharan deceased is oriented towards the south and his eyes towards the west (*idem*). We believe that the gaze turned towards the west (setting sun) heralds future beliefs in which this orientation will represent the world of the dead to the west of the Nile, with the world of the living to its east (the Nile would be the border between the two worlds).

Returning to our tattooed mummies, we assume that they were among the **last adorers of the Great Goddess**.

Indeed, their violent deaths (cranial trauma in the case of the woman and a stab wound in the back in the case of the man), their foetal position, the lack of funerary objects¹⁶ and the absence of defensive lesions suggest that they were the last adorers of the Great Goddess condemned to die or migrate (see images 6-10) in the face of the new societal order emerging in dynastic Egypt.

5) Funerary objects and other archaeological artefacts.

As Gwenola Graff notes, some of the objects deposited in the tombs (linked to wine and oil, as well as palettes and club heads, whose choice of material made them "unusable" and therefore made solely for funerary rites), especially from the end of Nagada II, were intended to underline the symbolism of a certain **social status**, and were very often imported from other regions of the Mediterranean (GRAFF, 2008: 179-180).

To return to our tattooed mummies (unfortunately devoid of funerary objects), we can legitimately assume, on the basis of our previous analysis (paragraphs 1-3), that their tattoos were markers of a certain elite social status that had not found its place in dynastic Egypt¹⁷.

Let's take a look at the funerary objects that accompany the deceased in both cultures. Even if the construction and shapes of these funerary vessels differ in the two cultures, their presence in tombs is an indisputable constant. In the Nagada culture, even the poorest tombs contained one or two of these vessels (GRAFF, 2008: 173). These similarities allow us to extend the common cultural horizon beyond the established borders : from the Levant to Nubia (GRAFF, 2008: 180) and to offer our reader the following series of images :

¹⁶ . In fact, a person who believes he will be reincarnated in a new body does not need as many objects as a person who intends to be resurrected.

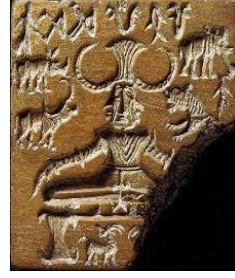
¹⁷ . Hunting scenes were an integral part of the decoration of the tombs of Egyptian dignitaries for almost 3,000 years in dynastic Egypt. Once again, we see the recovery of the predynastic code.



11)



12)



13)



14

Image 11, One of the Tărtăria tablets features a scene of the domestication of a horned beast depicting a humanoid form with two long arms, although it is not clear whether it is a man or a woman (Musée d'histoire de Transylvanie, Cluj-Napoca, avant 5.000 B.C.E. public domain) ; **Image 12**, Fragment of the ivory handle of a knife (Egypte, Naqada II, 3.300-3.200 B.C.E., Louvre, <https://www.photo.rmn.fr/>) ; **Image 13**, Indus Valley seal (2000-1800 B.C.E., Mohenjo-Daro, photo courtesy of J.M. Kenoyer/Harappa.com) ; **Image 14**, Minoan pendant "Mistress of the animals" (accompanied by 4 snakes and two birds) found on the island of Aegina (British Museum, 1700-1500 B.C.E., [photo.rmn.fr/achats](https://www.photo.rmn.fr/achats))

We can see that images 1 to 10 shows that the snake symbol is more specific to women (although horns that could be mistaken for snakes appear at later periods), while images 12 and 13 shows man as the 'master of animals'. We can therefore see that the artefacts dating from the early Neolithic (including the tattoo found on the male body of one of our two mummies) reflect the global change in hunter-gatherer societies, where the domestication of wild animals and the establishment of a new societal order were underway. These changes included the recovery of ancient feminine symbols of power (such as snakes) by converting them into symbols of masculine power (image 4). Although certain territories (mainly islands) still resisted this widespread trend towards the Bronze Age (image 14), it developed over a vast area of the Mediterranean and far beyond (image 13), covering a very broad 'cultural horizon' that became 'common' at this time.

At the dawn of the Neolithic (Mesolithic) period, Paleolithic beliefs linked to the cult of the Great Goddess, which can still be seen at Göbekli Tepe (images 1 and 2) and in Libya (image 3), began to change as hunter-gatherers became the first 'farmers' with the advent of livestock rearing and agriculture in the 'Fertile Crescent'. At the time, Mesopotamia, with its favorable climate and abundant natural water resources, was the ideal place for the birth of agriculture.

A little later, Neolithisation also took place in the Sahara, only in the regions around the Nile. In fact, consecutive arid climatic phases forced the Saharan peoples to regroup around the Nile, as the large fauna of the Sahara began to disappear and hunting was no longer sufficient for their survival. By Nagada I, for example, the consumption of hunting meat had fallen from 10% in the Badarian period (the culture preceding Nagada) to just 1% around 3800 B.C.E. (LANKSTER, 2016: 88). However, hunting retained a symbolic character, remaining practiced by the emerging elite and forming part of their rituals associated with initiation and the justification of a privileged status (*idem*).

From the beginning of Nagada, new human activities began to replace hunting. This led to the social stratification already mentioned, creating a hierarchical pyramid in which the most productive farmers were the best placed, and the beliefs associated with the Great Goddess were no longer compatible. It should be noted that the funerary inventory specific to these beliefs shows that the adepts of the Great Goddess lived in fairly egalitarian societies (GIMBUTAS, 2005).

While in the Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers only took what the land and nature gave them, remaining totally dependent on their generosity, in the Neolithic period the land lost its sacred character and became a source of covetousness for humans: it was the strongest who won the right to cultivate its best plots. Beliefs changed, as did funeral rituals. In particular, there was a change in the posture of the deceased: the foetal position was replaced by the supine position in dynastic Egypt. Thus, veneration of the Great Goddess was replaced by beliefs linked to these new activities, but female clay statuettes (echoing prehistoric "Venuses") were still found in tombs up until the beginning of Nagada III (GRAFF, 2008: 174). N.B.: Some of them bore motifs similar to the mummy tattoos we mentioned earlier

6) Rock and cave art.

The evolution of the motifs in cave art supports our reflection on the radical change in beliefs associated with the Great Goddess. In the Palaeolithic, cave art was invisible. Housed deep in uninhabited caves, to contemplate it you often had to travel hundreds of metres underground, bringing your own source of light with you. This is consistent with the concept of the "sacred womb of Mother Earth" that can still be seen at Nagada I.

Around the Neolithic period, rock art became visible in daylight and, unlike the previous period, the subjects became very varied. We see all kinds of animals, trees, humans, orants with their arms raised, often of great size, as well as images linked to human activities, weapons, chariots, dwellings, etc. These figures are quite commonly organized into scenes: pastoralism, hunting and war are the most common themes (ANATI, 2003). Curiously, the only theme that remains common to Palaeolithic and Neolithic art is that of negative hands, with or without pseudo-amputation. Can this be explained by the importance attached to hand production throughout the ages? We have no answer to this question. Whatever the case, these new beliefs clearly gave rise to a whole industry of funerary furniture.

7) Changing the posture of the deceased person.

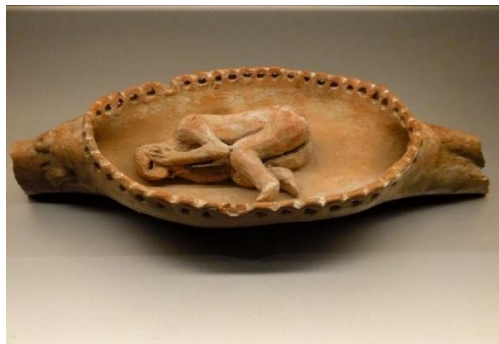
We have already discussed the change in posture of the deceased in paragraph 5. In our view, the replacement of the foetal position goes hand in hand with a change in beliefs, where those of the hunter-gatherers linked to the veneration of the Great Goddess were replaced by beliefs linked to the new activities.

On the basis of the previous analysis, we have every reason to believe that the foetal position is linked to the belief in reincarnation in the 'womb' of the Great Goddess Mother Earth, while the reclining position is probably linked to the new beliefs in

resurrection influenced by the cult of Osiris¹⁸. This is consistent with our earlier thoughts that our tattooed mummies were among the last worshippers of the Great Goddess, condemned to die or migrate in the face of the new gods emerging in dynastic Egypt.

Apart from their violent deaths (head trauma in the case of the woman and stabbing in the back in the case of the man), another fact argues in favour of our resemblance: the sudden end of tattooing, which had been practised for almost two thousand years. It should be remembered that it was not until the Ramesside period that tattoos were found on a mummified body (BLAKEMORE, 2023). To sum up, the images of funerary objects from different Egyptian periods below illustrate this change in the posture of the deceased.

In addition to their violent deaths (head trauma in the case of the woman and stabbing in the back in the case of the man), another fact supports our hypothesis of a radical religious and societal change in which the sudden cessation of tattooing, which had been practised for almost two thousand years, is the most telling. It should be remembered that it was not until the « Ramesside period » that tattoos were found on a mummified body (BLAKEMORE, 2023). The following images of funerary objects from different Egyptian periods illustrate the change in posture of the deceased¹⁹, reflecting the profound changes in religious and societal organization between the predynastic and dynastic Egyptians :



15)



16)

Image 15, Terracotta (Nagada I), photo courtesy of the National Archaeological Museum of the Netherlands (Rijksmuseum van Oudheden). **Image 16**, « Oushebti momiforme » : ritual object from the sarcophagi (Middle Kingdom 2,162-1,552 B.C.E.) Paris, Musée du Louvre; <https://www.photo.rmn.fr>. N.B. This object (supposed to work in the afterlife in place of the deceased) reflects the radical change in funerary ritual: the foetal position was replaced by the supine position, as were the shape and contents of the tombs, since a resurrected person needs more objects than a person reincarnated in a new earthly life cycle.

¹⁸ The cult of Osiris was essentially funerary; every deceased Egyptian identified with his posthumous fate and believed in his resurrection in the afterlife. The oldest texts attesting to this cult date from the V^e dynasty and are found on the walls of the tomb of Pharaoh Ounas (mid XXIV century B.C.E), who wished to be assimilated to Osiris in his quest to join the immortal Gods (RACHET, 1996:7).

¹⁹ This posture spread over a very wide "cultural horizon" beyond Egypt from the 3rd millennium B.C.E. (undoubtedly thanks to cultural and commercial exchanges and above all the influence of Egyptian civilization). Towards the end of the Bronze Age, the deceased were only found in the "contracted" position in the Andronovo culture. N.B. The Andronovo culture formed over a very wide area (in Siberia and Kazakhstan, between the Altai and Ural mountain ranges) around the 2nd millennium BC. Its most recent phase extended from the 13th to the 9th century B.C.E.

Résultats et recherches futures.

At the dawn of the Neolithic (Mesolithic), Palaeolithic beliefs linked to the cult of the Mother Goddess, still visible in Turkey (Göbekli Tepe) and Libya (Messak), began to change. These changes spread beyond the Fertile Crescent, prompting populations keen to preserve their ancient beliefs to migrate northwards (images 6 to 10). A new social order (images 11 to 13) was established, in which the land lost its sacred character and became an object of covetousness, provoking wars and violence. Part of the population continued to resist, taking refuge on islands (image 14). Others (like our mummies) fell victim to this brutal change in civilization. When the Bronze Age collapsed, there were no longer any adherents of the ancient beliefs on the shores of the Mediterranean: funeral rites (position of the deceased, objects accompanying them, etc.) changed. We assume that the worshippers of the Great Goddess survived in spite of everything, moving towards the north-east (see images 9 and 10), but this hypothesis will be the subject of future studies. In a forthcoming article, we will also look at the myths relating the killing of the serpent or dragon in various popular legends which, we believe, illustrate the transition from feminine to masculine monotheism. Here's an overview in pictures :




Images illustrating the evolution of the concept of the Great Mother Goddess during the last 3,500 years over a vast territory from south to north and from west to east: **Image 17**, Late Hellenistic III period figurine, head with bird profile (1400-1200 B.C.E., Paris, Musée du Louvre ; <https://www.photo.rmn.fr>)²⁰ ; **Image 18**, Tombstone, 400-600 CE (Photo: Gotlands Museum (CC BY 4.0), open woman with a crown of horns, holding two snakes) ; **Image 19**, Slavic embroidery still practised today (photo in the public domain) the snake is at the bottom, represented schematically in a zigzag, a female figurine holding birds in her hands (another ancestral symbol), echoing the figurine of predynastic Egypt: "bird-woman"²¹.

Conclusions.

Our hypothesis is plausible: comparative analysis of the archives confirms that the tattoos found on the Gebelein mummies thanks to the new technologies applied to the skin of our mummies clearly have a sacred character (cultural code) specific to the

²⁰ . It reminds us of another "figurine" from Predynastic Egypt (3 500 - 3 400 BC) of the culture of Nagada II, currently at the Brooklyn Museum).

²¹ · There is a surprising similarity between the first "open women" of the Sahara (Van Albada, 1996 : 1-14), the Egyptian hieroglyph  (to beget, to give birth: see the cartouche of Ramses « Re gave birth to him») and Russian letter « ж » : in the archaic Slavic alphabet: 1) Животъ - belly, 2) жизнь во всем своем многообразии жизненных форм - life manifested in every existing creature.

Great Goddess civilization and certainly refer to beliefs linked to a divine power where the 'masculine' is associated with the magical power of horned beasts (paragraph 1) and the 'feminine' with that of the serpent (paragraphs 2-3). We can also see that the cultural horizon of the great goddess Mother Earth broke down during the Neolithic period, gradually replacing the 'feminine' (images 1 to 10) with the 'masculine' (images 12 to 13). The break was a violent one, and our mummies bear the marks of it (see footnotes 1 and 7).

38 721 signes (espace compris)

Bibliography : (4 343 signes)

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