Emotions have been extensively studied across disciplines, but are best defined within specific cultural contexts. In ancient Egypt, they are presented both as visceral experiences that may be “contained” within or transmitted from the heart or stomach, and as socially constructed strands of personhood. Emotions manifest in gestures, postures, and, to a lesser extent, facial expressions in Egyptian art; the presence or absence of their markers in humans may be connected to decorum and status. Animals are used both in art and script to represent emotional states. Various expressive terms exist to describe emotions linguistically, many of them compounds involving the heart, and emotional states are described in diverse genres of texts throughout time, particularly in New Kingdom love poetry. This discussion presents an overview of how emotions have been identified and studied in ancient Egypt and suggests possible future avenues and domains for research.

In all cultures, emotions are a key component of personhood (Wendrich 2010; Meskell 2004: 57-62; te Velde 1990), whether or not they are viewed positively (see Gosden 2004), or even as a separate strand to the self (Assmann 1982). Broadly, they fall into the category of sensory experiences, like sight, smell, hearing, touch (Fleischer and Norman 2016: 1). Since they are deeply embedded socially (Barbalet 2001), they have been viewed as motivating forces within society, either as tools wielded by a regime to maintain identity and control and as a means of social inclusion/exclusion (e.g., Reddy 2001), or less polemically as forces binding together an “emotional community” in a variety of ways (e.g., Rosenwein 2006).

In the past there was a strong dichotomy between those who believed emotions to be a biological imperative and those who believed them to be social constructs (summary in
Leavitt 1996). Many approaches across disciplines now study emotion as both (e.g., Kövecses and Palmer 1999; Tarlow 2000: 714), although some (e.g., Gosden 2004) still distinguish “primary emotions” (happiness, sadness, fear) from “social emotions” (embarrassment, guilt, jealousy). Indeed, some have also argued strongly for the existence of a small number of basic emotions that are universal and not culturally determined (e.g., anger, happiness, surprise, disgust, sadness, fear; identified in Ekman, Friesen, and Ellsworth 1972, defended in Ekman 1992; compare Plutchik and Kellerman 1980), although these are not accepted by all (Ortony and Turner 1990). Recently there has been a suggestion that while happiness and sadness are clearly distinguished by human response, anger/disgust and fear/surprise form their own spectrums and thus the number of basic emotions is four (Jack, Garrod, and Schyns 2014).

Emotions have been extensively studied in the domains of sociology, anthropology, philosophy and psychology, cognitive linguistics, etc., both in terms of how they manifest physically (e.g., Darwin’s study of emotions manifesting in physiognomy, first published in 1872) and how they are embedded cognitively and expressed linguistically (e.g., Kövecses 2000; Lakoff 1987; Niemeier and Dirven 1997). Archaeology has also become increasingly interested in exploring emotional residues within cultures (seminal contributions in Tarlow 2000; Kus 1992). Emotion has become a topic of considerable interest within classics (Chaniotis 2012; Cairns and Fulkerson 2015), while Egyptology has taken a more piecemeal approach.

**Definition**

Defining emotion, both broadly as a category and in terms of its individual members, is fraught with difficulty since definitions necessarily differ between cultures and over time (Kus 1992; Reddy 2001). Many terms are used simultaneously both by laymen and specialist researchers, which has led to a blurred synonymity between some: emotion, sentiment, affect, feelings (Munezero et al. 2014). Within the category, there are prototypes that approach being “emotional universals” (e.g., anger, fear). But along the category’s fuzzy edges, it is often a judgement call to decide what might be considered “emotional” or not. For example, in ancient Egypt, the emotional content in mrwt (love) seems unequivocal, but hst (praise) presents a more difficult case. Both terms are closely tied together in texts (e.g., Doxey 1998: 28), and the definition of the self in biographies centers on the acquisition of hst from the king, one’s peers and family, and one’s gods (te Velde 1990: 91). The line between personal qualities and emotions is also hard to draw. For the Egyptians, the quality of being “silent” (gr) or being “efficient” (mnḥḥ) may have had particular emotional resonance that is lacking in the English-speaking world.

A working definition of emotions might be: aspects of experience that reflect a living entity’s inner life that may be expressed physically through gesture, posture, or facial expression, or verbally, and which are subject to considerable cultural glossing. For Egyptian conceptualizing of emotion, we might usefully look to the body’s center, which was believed to house the organs of thought and feeling. Terms for the heart and the belly (ḥstj, ḫb, ḫjb, ḫt) show considerable overlap as both organs of the body and as vessels for emotion (Frandsen 2001: 159; Nyord 2009: 55-67; te Velde 1990: 89). In the context of the Coffin Texts, the ḫjb exclusively serves as a metaphorical “container” for the emotions of love (mrwt) and anger (ṣpt), although the ḫstj and the ḫt may store fear, awe, and dread as forces generated by a fearsome entity (Nyord 2009: 75-78). The ancient Egyptians thus seem to have regarded emotions as visceral things, contained within the belly of the self and transmitted into the bellies/bodies of others. A person thought and felt with his heart, reinforcing the intertwining of those two actions (te Velde 1990: 93-94), and there is no evidence of a hard and fast distinction made between the physical and the mental aspects of these experiences (Nyord 2009: 113). This perhaps clarifies why many physical states (heat, cold, roughness, smoothness, etc.) are compounded with ḫjb to describe internal

Emotions and Egyptology

Within Egyptology, individual emotions have been the object of study. Happiness and sadness have been compared in both art and language (Beaux 2012). Anger as an Egyptianized concept has received considerable attention in the last few years (Effland 2003; el-Magd 2012; Köhler 2011, 2012; Tait 2009). Depictions of familial affection and grief have been studied from the Amarna Period (fig. 1) when, exceptionally, emotions become part of the artistic canon (Freed 1999: 119-121; Manniche 1997: 36-38); grief itself (albeit stylized) is in evidence from the Old Kingdom (Beaux 2012: 1567-1577) and bodily expressions of it are commonplace in mourning scenes (Werbrouck 1938). For the most part, emotions are not depicted on faces in Egyptian art; this is not unexpected since it has long been recognized that art strove to present the eternal, and not the ephemeral (Simpson 1978: 22). There are dramatic exceptions, notably in the reigns of Senusret III and Amenemhat III, when (negative) emotional states appear to be represented in facial expressions (fig. 2): “bitterness, disillusionment, sorrow and solitude” (Assmann 1996: 76) seem to present themselves in royal portraiture (although Maya Müller 2009 has argued that the only emotional quality that can be represented in the face is sadness, and the others are subjective readings by modern viewers) and are copied in the non-royal sphere. Thus, the emotions that are a feature of Middle Kingdom literature suddenly find an echo in sculpture (Maya Müller 2005).

It is well established that Egyptian art represents its subjects in a unique way; Brunner-Traut’s (1986) term “aspective” pervades the literature, although its meaning continues to be redefined (e.g., Assmann 2005: 28; Verbovsek 2015: 146-147). Nyord (2013: 144) suggests that the Egyptian artist was attempting to show “the completed object,” which accounts for parts or views of an object being shown that could not be seen together in reality, while other aspects were simply not shown. Emotions might be viewed as one of these latter aspects, if one is considering faces. Bodies might encode certain emotions—for example, raised arms might indicate happiness, and lowered arms, sadness (Beaux 2012)—but the possibilities here are restricted and unmirrored by facial expressions, which arguably only show emotion in mourning scenes (fig. 3). However, there were other methods for showing the “complete” personal experience, which included emotion. One method was the inclusion of animal elements...
in a scene, the animals seeming to act as exemplars of emotion: for example, distress represented by animals with open mouths (Evans 2015: 1665; McDonald fc.), or fearsomeness embodied in the lion accompanying the king in New Kingdom battle scenes (although some would interpret the lion simply as a “pet,” e.g., Gaballa 1976: 122). Animals used in this way should be seen as distinct from those used to represent body parts in hieroglyphs, where they are exemplars of physical features (for the possible origins of this, see Anselin 2001).

Figure 2. Obsidian head of Senusret III (Middle Kingdom), showing his typically hooded, heavily shadowed eyes and downturned mouth.

Figure 3. 19th Dynasty vignette from the papyrus of Hunefer. The mourning women's gestures convey their emotion, but their faces remain impassive. Compare, in the register below, the distressed cow protesting at the mutilation of her calf.
If we do not expect to see emotion reflected in the face, we might look for it in posture and gesture (Dominicus 1994; Baines 2017); for example, in the embrace of couples in statue groups, we see either an arm around shoulders, or a hand on an arm (fig. 4; compare P. Harris 500, Group B: “... your arm rests on my arm, for my love has surrounded you”: Fox 1985: 22). Even if the activities of the minor figures in tomb reliefs and paintings contrast with the passivity of the tomb owner himself, the gestures of the former speak of practicality and not emotion (Robins 2008: 20). Exceptions to this rule can be found in the Middle and especially New Kingdoms (particularly among those of low status), but again the emotional content of a scene or interaction between persons derives from stance and pose rather than facial expression. Thus in the tomb of Menna we see aggression between two servant girls, one of whom pulls the other’s hair, while the other girl grabs her attacker’s wrist. This is a demonstrable example of both the representation of emotion and its reception by a visitor, who left a hieratic graffito above the scene, labeling it with the term “fighters” (Hartwig 2013: 33).

Enemies constitute a special category in Egyptian art. It is rare to see emotion reflected in their faces (e.g., Schneider 1997: 102, no. 156B), but their bodies are often presented in states of chaos and disorder (fig. 5), which may be direct representations of how they were conceptualized (e.g., btntw-jb, hsjkw-jb, bštjt-jb: Franke 2005: 92). On Tutankhamen’s Painted Box, the king, shown calmly in profile, shoots an arrow into a melee of falling and fallen enemies, many shown frontally, with soldiers from the Egyptian side dispatching them from within and making them bleed (Schulz 2000; Tefnin 2003: 34-35, 58-60). The caption beside the king describes him as making them into a gbgb (a fallen, weakened heap) (Ward 1986)—the determinative mirrors the essence of the action, where the physical pose echoes the internal state. The suffering of enemies seems to have contributed to Egyptian ideals of upholding maat, even if the infliction of suffering was not a prevalent theme in art and texts (Marcus Müller 2009: 133 and passim).

The torment encapsulated in bodily contortions as well as the development of negative epithets like hsj (wretched) (Beatty 2008) are both means of expressing “otherness,” since Egyptians (at least the elite) are rarely depicted or described in this state; this finds a close parallel in the art of the Classic Maya, where emotional displays had negative connotations and were reserved for the depiction of captives or others of low status, contrasting strongly with the “tight control” exercised by the elite (Houston 2001: 209-211, 215). One circumstance in Maya art in which the elite might be shown in a state of emotional abandon is ritual drunkenness (Houston 2001: 211). Drinking, sometimes to excess, was part of the Egyptian artistic canon in New Kingdom banquet scenes and occasionally we see the effects of this (e.g., a fragment of a banquet scene from an 18th Dynasty Theban tomb: Mekhitarian 1980: 87-88). A possible parallel in the round is a drinking vessel in the

Figure 4. 18th Dynasty statue of a man and his wife, each with an arm around the other. Their daughter is sheltered beneath.
shape of a slightly off-balance scribe (Russmann 2001: 152). His expression is controlled, but his body betrays signs of drinking and eating to excess—perhaps the artist’s attempt to capture the hedonism of those excesses for magical purposes.

Mourning (Werbrouck 1938; Volokhine 2008) is another special category in Egyptian art, mostly associated with women (Meskell 2002: 190). Again, its emotional aspect in art is represented through gesture, and not necessarily facial expression (Beaux 2012: 1569-1572). Mourners in painting and relief were shown with disheveled hair and clothing, with scratches or streaks of dust and/or tears on their cheeks, their bodies contorted to express their state (Dominicus 1992: 70-76; Riggs 2013). In the round, a small group of statuettes depict male mourners, with their heads upon their knees, encapsulating a common expression from texts (Feucht 1984). Texts further elucidate the psychological (and hence emotional) effects death had on the Egyptians (Lloyd 1989; Shih 1997). A short-lived but striking development in the Ramesside Period was the depiction of stubble on the face of pharaohs to depict their grief for a deceased predecessor (fig. 6; Czerkwiński 2014; Staehelin 1975).
Proceeding with caution, it might be fruitful to explore the ways in which Egyptian art sought, not to represent emotion, but to elicit it (cf. Houston 2001: 209). In the case of tomb art, designed to “seduce” visitors into remembering the tomb owner (Angenot 2007: 22), a general feeling of awe might have been the aim, and we see this reflected in visitors’ graffiti expressing exactly these feelings (e.g., “he found it as if heaven were within it”: Ragazzoli 2013: 284, n.92). On a deeper level, the positioning of such graffiti may evidence the writers’ desire to integrate themselves with what elicited reactions from them, concretizing the act of emotional reciprocity (Ragazzoli 2013: 274; Den Doncker 2012). Engagement through humor seems to be the intended effect in other cases, expressed visually (e.g., the “antics” of craftsmen in a scene from Ipuy’s tomb [fig. 7]: Houlihan 1996: 50, fig. 46) or verbally (e.g., a weary servant complaining that roasting a large goose is taking forever: Collier and Manley 2008: 8). Whether the objective was simply to mock (Vonk 2015: 92) or to delight (Baines 2015: 11) is presently impossible to say.

On his celebrated 11th Dynasty stela Irtyesen proclaims himself “a scribe and sculptor” (1.6). He describes his “accomplishments in pictorial representation, as well as some technical processes” (Baines 2015: 10), but since sculpture, relief, and painting include few details like “the cringing of a single captive, the glancing of one eye towards its fellow and the spreading fear on the face of a victim” (l. 10), it is possible he is describing effects created by words instead.

Figure 7. 19th Dynasty facsimile painting showing a comic scene in which clumsy workmen injure themselves and each other while sculpting a monument for well-being.
Scribes were capable of creating particularly emotive texts not just through word choice, but through innovative orthography. Within the genre we call Letters (perhaps more appropriately “Appeals”) to the Dead (Gardiner and Sethe 1928; Donnat Beauquier 2014), the written medium is manipulated to express the emotions of the senders: e.g., devotion in the unusually elaborate form of the bsk (servant) determinative in the Munich Vessel’s letter (Buchberger 1991), and the dread in the choice of a unique Sethian determinative for rswt (nightmare) (P. Naga ed-Deir N3737: McDonald 2002a). Appeals to the Dead generally employ tactics of expression designed to elicit and manipulate the emotions of their deceased recipients. A striking example is found in the Cairo Letter on Linen (Gardiner and Sethe 1928: 1-3 and pl. I): the text begins with parallel paired columns, in which the appellants—a wife and a son—address the dead man citing their own relationship to him. The columns then unite and continue in what can be interpreted as four short horizontal lines before the text splits again into twin columns, each one addressing a different deity, before a final short horizontal line of text brings the two appeals together and the column ends.

The textual record overflows with acknowledgements and descriptions of the emotions that characterize and motivate human (and often animal) behavior. Approximately 90 words describing happiness are known in Middle Egyptian texts (H. Altenmüller 1975: 330). One of the most common expressions, sw-jb, literally “broadness of the heart,” is manifest in a bracelet charm of Princess Khnumet (H. Müller and Thiem 1999: 105), the charm enabling the princess to wear the hieroglyphs for “happiness” around her wrist and therefore to possess the emotion. Similarly, the double-heart pendant worn by Sennefer and some other New Kingdom officials may have been a concretization of the king’s affection, worn amuletically (Angenot 2007: 28). Many studies of happiness have been conducted for the final stages of Egyptian history (e.g., Vandorpe 2013; Verbovsek 2011) when sources engage with emotions more freely.

While no in-depth studies of emotions as a sensory category in ancient Egypt exist (for a brief overview, see B. Altenmüller 1975), many emotions have been discussed incidentally through overviews of figurative language (e.g., Grapow 1920, 1924; Brunner 1975; Goldwasser 1995; compare Jaques 2006 for the expression of emotion in Sumerian texts). Commonly, studies have isolated either groups of figurative expressions within specific contexts (e.g., those describing the might of the king in royal inscriptions: Hsu 2013), or have explored one particular emotion within a wider textual genre (e.g., expressions of fear in religious texts: Bickel 1988; Cazemier 1977-1978; Eicke 2015; although see Zaniolo de Vázquez-Presedo 1958 for a more general study of fear).

Love poetry concerns itself with encapsulating feelings in words and images that seek to concretize the abstract sensations of love and despair. Even the term mrwt does not tend to describe the abstract feeling of love within oneself, but rather a physical effect that emanates from a person, affecting another person; occasionally it is used metaphorically for the phallus (Mathieu 1996: 168-172). Animals in love poetry stand again as exemplars of particular emotional states: e.g., a crocodile representing feelings of threat or fear of rejection, and a mouse representing the opposite (Deir el-Medina Vessel, stanza 4: Mathieu 1996: 98-99), a jackal representing lustiness (P. Harris 2, 2: Mathieu 1996: 57 and n.169). Very common are tropes that concretize abstract feelings, making them manifest as physical things or sensations: e.g., a series of descriptions on the Deir el-Medina Vessel (Mathieu 1996: 97) of love melding with the lover’s body like oil mixing with honey, like fine linen wrapping the body, like incense smoke in the nose. Further, each simile captures an aspect of love embedded in the body: a signet ring on the finger encapsulates its perfect fit, a mandrake in the hand anticipates the pleasure it will bring. All the images presented culminate in the idea that the two lovers will experience togetherness in the same way. Other senses are often evoked, particularly the senses of smell and taste through images of flowers and fruit. The
longing for a loved one evident in love poetry is echoed in texts expressing the longing for particular cities (Ragazzoli 2008), for the past (Baines 2007: 332-335), and for gods, particularly in the New Kingdom (Luiselli 2014; Sadek 1987).

Echoing the use of animals in Egyptian art to represent emotions that decorum proscribed in the elite human realm, examples of animal determinatives acting as emotional prototypes abound in script. A mother cow and suckling calf embody the concept of familial affection (sms), just as they do in art; crocodile determinatives are used for a spectrum of terms ranging from the threat of fearsomeness to actual aggression (McDonald 2002b: 339-495), and various birds epitomize feelings of fearfulness. Mosticonically, the trussed goose can be used as a determinative or logogram for the noun snD (fear) and its derivatives, perhaps because the exposed body shows “goosebumps” (e.g., Héry and Enel 1993: 145, fig. 178; Terrace 1968: pl. 13), but possibly also because it represents the endpoint of the frightening act of strangulation: numerous written (e.g., “I will seize him like a bird so that I may cast fear [snD] into him”: Urk. I. 202.6-7) and visual renderings (Akhenaten strangling a goose: Houlihan 1996: 137, fig. 96) of this act survive, and the sign is used as a determinative for the act of sacrificing birds as offerings as well as the birds themselves throughout history (Ward 1981; Derchain-Urtel 1994).

A fruitful approach to studying emotions in ancient Egypt might follow archaeology’s lead in searching for emotional resonance in things (e.g., Gosden 2004). There have been steps in this direction (e.g., Meyer-Dietrich’s study [2006] of Senebi’s coffin as an encapsulation of the self; Meskell’s acknowledgement [2004: 117-124] of the hatred invested in an exegation figure as opposed to the devotion associated with a votive figure; Szpakowska’s innovative approach to Middle Kingdom history [2008], presented through the person of an imagined child growing up embedded within this period at the specific site of Lahun and experiencing its physical and emotional landscape personally). The material cultural horizon, particularly studied alongside the realms of writing and art, doubtlessly has much to offer a researcher of emotions.

**Bibliographic Notes**

The scholarly study of how emotions manifest and might be analyzed can be traced back to Darwin (1872; reprint 1998). Attempts to identify “primary” or “basic” emotions (e.g., Ekman 1992) are often met with criticism (see Ortony and Turner 1990), although certain “emotional universals” reappear in scholarly literature (e.g., anger and fear). There is today a general consensus that emotions should be seen as both biological and cognitive imperatives and social constructs (e.g., Leavitt 1996), but different disciplines focus on distinct aspects, for example, Lakoff (1987) applies a cognitive linguistic perspective to explore the ways in which many emotions are embedded within language (compare Kövecses 2000), whereas Barbelet (2001) takes a sociological approach. Within archaeology, seminal studies of emotions and their material manifestations are Kus (1992) and Tarlow (2000). In Egyptology, beyond brief overviews (e.g., B. Altenmüller 1975) no extensive study of emotions or their manifestations exists to provide a comprehensive look at how we might identify and classify instances (for Classics, cf. Chaniotis 2012). However, certain specific emotions have received attention: happiness and sadness in the work of Beaux (2012), anger in Effland (2003), Köhler (2011), and Tait (2009), fear in Bickel (1988), and grief in Feucht (1984) and Riggs (2013). Individual discussions in Kipfer’s edited volume (e.g., Baines 2017) explore the expression of emotion in art, principally in Egypt and the ancient Near East. Emotions are recognized as an important aspect of personhood in Egypt (Wendrich 2010), and more specific studies tease out the
implications of this for the centering of emotions in particular parts of the self (el-Kholy 2003; Nyord 2009). Studying the use of animals in art and text offers particular insights into the ways emotions could be expressed without breaching decorum (e.g., McDonald forthcoming).

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Figure 1. An exceptional kiss from the Amarna Period between Akhenaten and daughter. Tenderness flows from the daughter's hand, resting on her father's arm, which in turn touches her shoulder, and the sculptor has, unusually, fused their lips together (Egyptian Museum, Cairo, JE 44866). (Courtesy of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo.) CC BY-SA 4.0 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:By_ovedc_-_Egyptian_Museum_(Cairo)_-_143.jpg

Figure 2. Obsidian head of Senusret III (Middle Kingdom), showing his typically hooded, heavily shadowed eyes and downturned mouth (Gulbenkian Museum, Inv. 138). CC BY-SA 4.0 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Statues_of_Senusret_III#/media/File:Head_of_King_Senusret_III_in_Gulbenkian_Museum.jpg

Figure 3. 19th Dynasty vignette from the papyrus of Hunefer. The mourning women's gestures convey their emotion, but their faces remain impassive. Compare, in the register below, the distressed cow protesting at the mutilation of her calf (BM EA 9901). (© The trustees of the British Museum.) PD-1996 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Opening_of_the_mouth_ceremony.jpg

Figure 4. 18th Dynasty statue of a man and his wife, each with an arm around the other. Their daughter is sheltered beneath (Musée Georges Labit, Toulouse, Inv. 49.264). CC0 1.0 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Labit_-_A_couple_and_their_child_-_Reign_of_Thutmose_IV_-_Egypt.jpg

Figure 5. 19th Dynasty scene from the Battle of Qadesh, showing the drowning of Hittite leaders. Their bodies are contorted, while tender gestures from smaller figures on the river banks invest their deaths with emotion (Temple of Ramesses II, Abydos). (Photograph by author.)

Figure 6. Ostracon showing a king with stubble on his face as a sign of mourning (Walters Art Gallery, 32.1). CC0 1.0 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Egyptian_-_Ostracon_with_a_Royal_Head_-_Walters_321.jpg

Figure 7. 19th Dynasty facsimile painting showing a comic scene in which clumsy workmen injure themselves and each other while sculpting a monument for well-being (Tomb of Ipuy, Deir el-Medina, TT 271; MMA 30.4.116). CC0 1.0 https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Tomb_of_Ipuy_TT217#/media/File:Building_a_Catafalque,_Tomb_of_Ipuy_MET_30.4.116_EGDP019715.jpg