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MACE  
الصولجان

*Alice Stevenson*

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Short Citation:

Stevenson, 2008, Mace. *UEE*.

Full Citation:

Stevenson, Alice, 2008, Mace. In Willeke Wendrich (ed.), *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles, <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz000sn03x>

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1070 Version 1, September 2008

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## MACE الصولجان

Alice Stevenson

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*The mace, a club-like weapon attested in ancient Egypt from the Predynastic Period onward, played both functional and ceremonial roles, although more strongly the latter. By the First Dynasty it had become intimately associated with the power of the king, and the archetypal scene of the pharaoh wielding a mace endured from this time on in temple iconography until the Roman Period.*

الصولجان ، سلاح يشبه عصا غليظة عند طرفها ، كان معروفاً في مصر القديمة منذ عصر ما قبل الأسرات ولعب أحياناً دوراً وظيفياً وغالباً دوراً تشريفياً في المراسم. في عصر الأسرة الأولى أصبح مرتبطاً على نحو حميم بقوة الملك والنموذج الأصلي لمشهد الفرعون ممسك بالصولجان بدأ آنذاك بالمعابد وإستمر حتى العصر الروماني.



The mace is a club-like weapon with a heavy head pierced through for the insertion of a handle. The mace is often considered to be the characteristic weapon of Predynastic Egypt, as Predynastic maceheads (which usually survived their handles) are comparatively numerous. Nevertheless, even in the Predynastic Period, the mace's additional function as a ceremonial object—a role ascribed to it throughout Egyptian history—seems likely.

Polished stone maceheads are attested in Egyptian burials from as early as the Predynastic Period. Disc-shaped maceheads (fig. 1) are found in some Naqada I graves and are known from the Khartoum Neolithic (Arkell 1953: 50, 104). Pear-shaped, or “piriform,” maceheads (fig. 2) were favored in Naqada II, although the earliest examples are from the Neolithic 5<sup>th</sup>-millenium settlement site of Merimde Beni-Salame (Junker 1929: 224, figs. 5f, 5g). Very infrequently ring-shaped and double-ended examples are encountered, but it is the pear-shaped form

that became prevalent in dynastic Egypt. Maceheads were made in a wide variety of stones including diorite, alabaster, dolomite, and limestone, the latter material becoming the preferred medium in the late Predynastic.

The handles to which maceheads were hafted were probably organic and rarely survive, or may not have been commonly included in graves. The exceptions include a handle of wood from a grave at el-Mahasna (Ayrton and Loat 1911: 21); the handles of two intact discoid maces from grave B86 at Abadiya—a 330-mm handle of oryx horn and an ivory example of similar length (fig. 3; Kirby 1998: 25; Petrie and Mace 1901: 33, pl. V); an especially elaborate handle of sheet-gold casting embossed with an animal frieze, from grave 1 at Sayala, in Nubia (Firth 1927: 201 - 208, fig. 8); and a more recently excavated example painted with red and black stripes, from grave 24 at Adaima (Crubézy et al. 2002: 79, 468 - 471).

In an initial study of 100 Predynastic graves with maceheads, Cialowicz (1985: 164) noted

that the maceheads were more common in the graves of males, but were not rare in the graves of females. Given the unreliability of sex attribution in preliminary excavation reports, however (Mann 1989), these conclusions are, at present, tentative. The presence of maceheads in graves is often assumed to be an indication of authority or status, but this assumption is based on later historical parallels: whether the value and meaning of maceheads remained unchanged from much earlier Predynastic conceptions remains open to debate.



Figure 1. Predynastic disc-shaped macehead from Badari.



Figure 2. Predynastic pear-shaped macehead from Abydos.

Not all maces were employed in a functional capacity—that is, as actual weapons. Their symbolic role is certainly

suggested in the Predynastic Period by the presence of model maces, such as that found at el-Amra (Randall-MacIver and Mace 1902: 16, pl. XII.1). Moreover, maceheads found in the “Main Deposit” at Hierakonpolis—particularly four large pear-shaped limestone examples, together with a smaller ivory one (Adams 1974: pls. 1 - 6; Quibell and Green 1902)—appear to demonstrate a linkage with the emerging ideology of kingship. They are carved with elaborate raised reliefs arranged in registers datable to approximately the early First Dynasty, and their exceptional size and artistic accomplishment clearly set them apart as “ceremonial” objects.

A brief description of the exceptional maceheads from the Main Deposit is in order. The “Scorpion macehead” (fig. 4: largest macehead; Asselberghs 1961: 172 - 176; Baumgartel 1966; Cialowicz 1997) measures about 250 mm high. The surviving portion (less than half) depicts an individual, often identified as King Scorpion on the basis of the scorpion carved in front of the face, wearing the white crown of Upper Egypt, a tunic, and a bull’s tail, and holding a hoe. The “Narmer macehead” (fig. 4: far right; Asselberghs 1961: 177 - 179; Quibell 1900: pl. XXVI B) portrays Narmer seated in a kiosk, wearing the red crown and a close-fitting cloak, with attendant officials and standard-bearers. The scene has been variously interpreted as a marriage ceremony (Petrie 1939: 79), a year-name (Millet 1990), and as Narmer’s participation in a *Sed*-festival (Cialowicz 2001: 257; Schott 1951; Serrano 2002: 49, 52 - 57; Vandier 1952: 602 - 605). The relief on the “King’s macehead” (Adams 1974: pl. 1) is badly damaged, but the surviving portion shows the king attired in the red crown and a cloak, seated in a kiosk with a falcon facing him. The preserved sections of the “Bearer macehead” (Quibell 1900: pl. XXVI A) show only the fragmented images of several individuals, some holding vessels and/or animal skins. The small ivory macehead (Quibell 1900: pl. XII: 4) depicts captives tied at the neck, their arms bound behind their backs.



Figure 3. Intact maces from Abadiya, grave B86.



Figure 4. Group of maceheads from the Hierakonpolis Main Deposit, including the “Scorpion macehead” (largest macehead in group) and the “Narmer macehead” (far right).

Some scholars have preferred not to interpret these scenes literally—that is, as representations of actual events—but consider them part of a wider repertoire of ceremonial objects, including palettes and knives, that were appropriated to play a role in the secluded world of elite culture (Baines 1993: 62; 1995: 109 - 121; Wengrow 2006: 178). Rather than abstracting the scenes from the objects upon which they are depicted,

these scholars propose a more holistic interpretive approach that reasserts the images as an integral part of the (tangible) artifacts themselves, linking the artifacts to their Predynastic development and thus connecting decorative form with object function.

In addition to the Late Predynastic/Early Dynastic ceremonial maceheads in the Hierakonpolis “Main Deposit,” several plain “functional” maceheads of pink limestone and of standard size, as well as a number of decorated mace handles, were found at the site. The phenomenon of collecting both weapons and symbols together in a deposit is also attested in the eastern Nile Delta at Tell Ibrahim Awad, where several plain calcite maceheads were discovered (Van Haarlem 1995: 45; 1998: 12) along with small votive objects of various kinds, including faience tiles and faience baboons, all presumably of Early Dynastic date upon comparison with similar examples found in the Main Deposit at Hierakonpolis. It is significant that both deposits also contained Old Kingdom material datable up to the Fifth Dynasty, suggesting that a process of decommissioning of symbolically potent Early Dynastic objects, including maces, took place throughout Egypt toward the end of the Old Kingdom (Wengrow 2006: 184).

The Hierakonpolis Main Deposit also provides further evidence that the mace had become an important component of the regalia of kingship by the Early Dynastic Period, as a potent symbol of royal power. Such symbolism is manifested in the form of another class of ceremonial object—the palette—with which ceremonial maces share close stylistic similarities. Representative is the Narmer palette, upon which the king is shown brandishing a mace above a group of captives. This image of the smiting pharaoh held great iconographical significance throughout Pharaonic history as is evidenced by numerous temple inscriptions and reliefs (fig. 5), although it was most prevalent from the New Kingdom through the Roman Period (Hall 1986: 48). In representative scenes the king smites an individual or group of enemies,



most commonly with a mace. As one of the most frequently depicted themes in royal iconography, it has been referred to as the “Smiting of the Enemy” topos (Hall 1986) and has been cited as an important motif of the Pharaonic “Great Tradition” (Baines

1996: 351). Notable examples of (intact) maces include two gessoed and gilded wooden maces (Murray and Nuttall 1963: nos. 218, 233) found between the outermost and second shrines in Tutankhamun’s burial chamber.

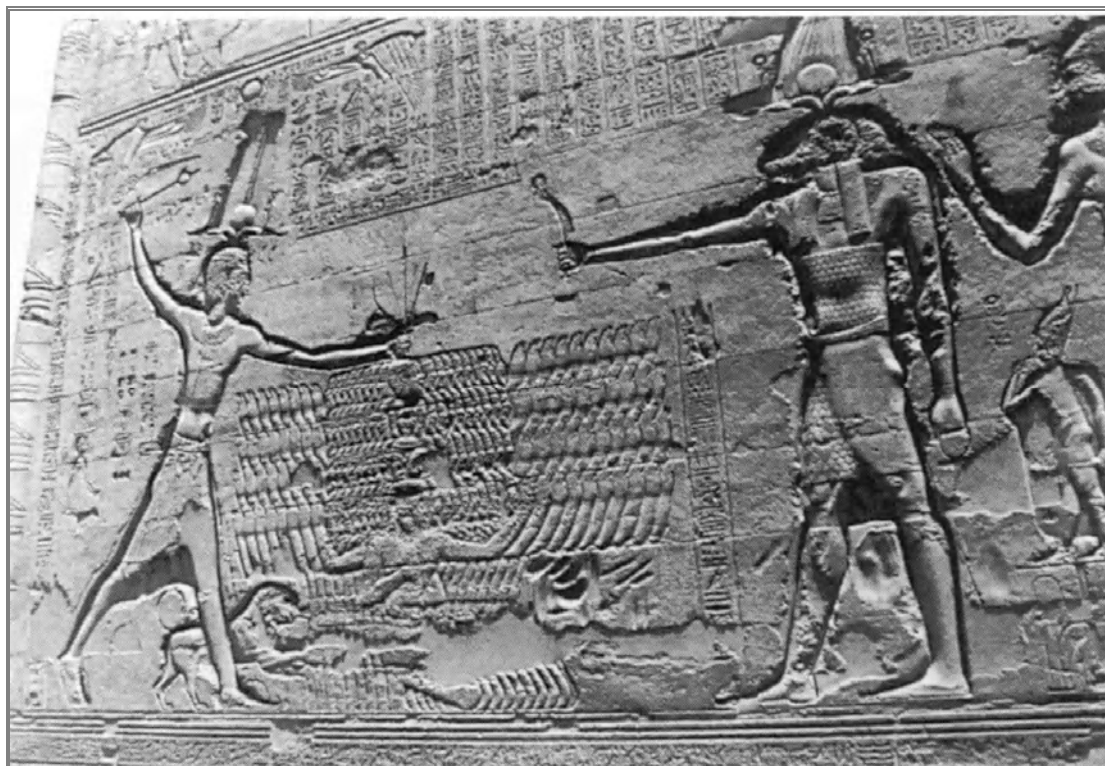









Figure 5. The Roman emperor Trajan, brandishing a mace, smiting foreigners in the presence of the ram-god Khnum. Esna: exterior of the north wall of the Khnum temple.

## *Egyptian Terminology*

Two types of mace appear as hieroglyphic signs—the *mnw*-mace (Gardiner 1957: Sign-list, T1) and the *ḥd*-mace (Gardiner 1957: Sign-list, T2 and T3)—and there is a clear distinction between them in the terminology. A third sign (Gardiner 1957: Sign-list, T4) depicts the *ḥd*-mace with straps. The *mnw* sign features a representation of a disc-shaped macehead and is used in the writing of the word “*mnw*-mace” on coffins (e.g., Lacau 1906: 162), where it is frequently contrasted with writings of the word “*ḥd*-mace,” which feature a depiction of a round or piriform macehead. The *mnw*-mace hieroglyph is attested in writing the word “mace” only from the Middle Kingdom to the Late Period (WB II: 72, 3, Erman and Grapow 1928); however, the sign (and accordingly the word) must necessarily be older, as it is already used as a phonetic component in the Pyramid Texts (Gardiner 1957: 510). The regular word for “mace” in the Pyramid Texts is *ḥd*,

written with the *ḥd*-mace sign (WB III: 206, 9-13, Erman and Grapow 1929; Gardiner 1957: 510). It remained the common word for “mace” as long as the Egyptian language was in use.

	sign T1	
	sign T2	
	sign T3	
	sign T4	
 <i>mnw</i>	not before MK	passim
 or  <i>ḥd</i>	all periods	passim

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A study of the origins and typology of maceheads is provided in Cialowicz (1987), together with a discussion of ceremonial maceheads. Cialowicz summarizes ceremonial maceheads in an accessible, more recent work (2001). A review of Predynastic and Early Dynastic burials containing maceheads is attended to by Cialowicz (1985) and more recently by Gilbert (2004: Appendix 4: 166 - 170). Smiting scenes from throughout Egyptian history are most comprehensively brought together by Hall (1986).

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- Figure 1 Predynastic disc-shaped macehead from Badari. Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology.
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- Figure 3 Intact maces from Abadiya, grave B86. Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society.
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- Figure 5 The Roman emperor Trajan, brandishing a mace, smiting foreigners in the presence of the ram-god Khnum. Esna: exterior of the north wall of the Khnum temple. Photo courtesy of Ian Shaw.