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THRONE العرش

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THRONE

العرش

Klaus P. Kuhlmann

Thron

Trône

By today's definition, a "throne" is the seat of a king or sovereign. In ancient Egypt, a plethora of terms referred to the throne, but none apparently carried this specific connotation. Explicit reference to the seat of a king or god was made by addressing the latter's "elevated" position (*wrr*, 𓂏). There were two major types of thrones: a basic ("sacred") one of the gods and of pharaoh as their heir and successor that had the shape of a square box (block-throne) and a "secular" one that incorporated a pair of lions into a stool or chair (lion-throne) and depicted pharaoh as powerful ruler of the world. Thrones usually stood on a dais inside a kiosk, elevating the ruler well above his subjects and displaying his supreme social rank. At the same time, the arrangement was meant to evoke a comparison with the sun god resting on the primordial hill at the moment of creating the world. The enthronization of pharaoh was thought to be a perpetuation of this cosmogonic act, which was referred to as "the first time" (*zp tpj*). As an object, which could be desecrated (for example, by usurpation), the Egyptian throne underwent purification rites. There is no evidence, however, of it ever having received cultic reverence or having been deified (as the goddess Isis).

بحكم تعريف اليوم، <<العرش>> هو مقعد الملك أو الحاكم، وقد تعددت المصطلحات الدالة على العرش في اللغة المصرية القديمة، ولكن لا يبدو أي مصطلح منهم حمل ذلك المعنى المحدد، فكانت الإشارة الصريحة إلى عرش الملك أو الإله تتم باستخدام لفظ يدل على موضع الإله المرتفع (*wrr*, 𓂏). وهناك نوعان رئيسيان للعرش، الأول: العرش الأساسي <<المقدس>> للآلهة والملك - باعتباره خليفة الآلهة - وكان هذا العرش على شكل مكعب (وهو ما يسمى باسم عرش الكتلة)؛ وثانياً العرش <<الدنيوي>> (عرش الأسود) والذي صمم على هيئة زوج من الأسود مما يظهر الملك كحاكم قوي للعالم. كان العرش عادة يوضع على منصة داخل مظلة والتي تظهر مكانة الحاكم الاجتماعية الأعلى من رعاياه، وفي الوقت نفسه كان الهدف من هذه الهيئة تشبيه الملك بإله الشمس الذي يبرز من التل الأزلي لحظة خلق الكون حيث كان يعتقد أن جلوس الملك على العرش ما هو إلا استمرار لهذا التمثيل الكوني والذي كان يشار إليه على أنه <<المرة الأولى>> (*zp tpj*). اعتبر العرش شيء يمكن تدنيسه (مثلاً عن طريق اغتصابه) ولذلك أجريت على العرش المصري شعائر التطهير، ولكن ليس هناك أي دليل يشير إلى أن العرش تم تقديسه أو تأليهه مثل أي إله (مثل الآلهة إيزيس).

For most people in Africa and the ancient Near East—worldwide, in fact—“squatting” was and is the common position of repose, as it was also for the ancient Egyptians. Amongst ordinary Egyptians, mats (*tmz*) remained the most commonly used piece of “furniture” for sitting or lying down. Pharaoh on his throne, therefore, ruled over “the mats,” i.e., his “lowly” subjects (Gardiner and Calverly 1933 - 1958, Vol. 2: pls. 4 and 22). There is evidence, however, that this basic household item originally conferred “status” to its owner, a fact in tune with modern ethnographic data from Africa (Schilde 1929: 107, 109, 114). Gods are said to be “elevated” on their mats (Gardiner and Calverly 1933 - 1958, Vol. 1: pls. 18 and 26), or the justified dead will be granted the privilege of sitting on “the mat of Osiris” (cf. Laucau 1905: 222; Sethe *Urke VIII*: 62i). Archaizing tendencies during the late stages of Egyptian history resulted in the use of the reed mat \square (= *pj* < *wpj*, “split,” i.e., reeds) as a word for “throne.”

Although forcing a posture, which “squatting” people generally experience as being less relaxing (Hahn 1918), stools and chairs were eagerly adopted by Egypt’s nobility because the raised position signaled “superiority” rather than being a means of achieving more comfort. Ancient Egyptians (like their contemporary descendants or Africans, cf. Hahn 1918: 220) even attempted to “squat” on a chair (cf. Baker 1966: fig. 172). Like a crown or scepter, the chief’s chair became one of ancient Egypt’s most important royal insignia as the quintessential symbol of divine kingship. Gods acknowledged pharaoh as their “son” and legitimate heir by bequeathing to him their thrones as the one piece of ancestral symbols of office explicitly referred to. It was mainly Ra, Atum, Amun, Geb, and Horus who confirmed pharaoh’s rightful claim to power by saying “to thee I give my throne...” (e.g., Sethe *Urke. IV*: 563, 571). This preeminent status amongst Egypt’s regalia derived from the dogma of pharaoh’s rule being first and

foremost cosmogonic in nature. The king’s enthronization upon a dais was intended to recall and reenact the “first time” (*zp tpj*), i.e., the establishment of cosmic order and equilibrium (*maat*) when the sun god descended upon the primeval hill and created the world in its proper god-given state. This is why the throne could also be referred to as “she (i.e., *st, nst*) who keeps alive *maat*” (PT 1079c; for translations of the Pyramid Texts, see Sethe 1908 - 1922). It has also been suggested that the throne might have had a deeper meaning representing the sky and that it was a symbol of perpetual rebirth (Westendorf 1966: 53ff.; similar de Wit 1951: 158ff.).

Usurpation of the throne resulted in its desecration and the need for ritual purification (Erichsen 1933: 75, 8 - 9). No convincing evidence exists, however, that it ever became the object of cultic reverence or deification. Religious texts are free of any allusion to such a fact. PT 1153b - 1154b—a key reference in connection with any such suggestion—refer to the throne (-kiosk) as having been “made by the gods, made by Horus, created by Thoth” and not by “the Great Isis” on whose lap the newborn-kings were pictured, sitting as if on a throne (cf. Kuhlmann 1977: 99ff.).

The manufacture of thrones involved precious materials like ebony (PT 1906c) and gold or electrum/fine gold (Kuhlmann 1977: 29, 30, 31, 88 note 1). The frequent expression *hndw bjzj* (or: *hndw n bjz*, “throne made of iron,” e.g., PT 1992c) might more generally refer to the use of “mining products” (i.e., metal and precious stones for inlay work) rather than the use of “iron” as the manufacturing material of the throne. Offices connected to the throne were much less common than previously assumed. Assured are *jrjw st pr ʿ3*, “guardians of the palace throne,” *hntj hndw*, “he before the throne,” *tj jsbt n nb t3wj*, “carrier of the throne of the Lord of the Two Lands,” and maybe *hrj tp st nsw*, “servant of the royal throne/chamber” (cf. Kuhlmann 1977: 102 - 108).

Typology

Basically, Egyptian thrones came in two shapes, which seem to have coexisted since early Old Kingdom times. A square block incorporating a short backrest represented a simple “traditional” type (earliest example under Khufu; cf. Smith 1949: pl. 5b). It remains unclear whether this type of seat evolved from (a flight of three brick-made) stairs as early sign shapes seem to suggest or from a bundle of reeds (e.g., Abu Bakr 1953: pl. 20B; Saad 1957: pl. 3; Wreszinski 1923: pls. 121, 268; cf. Kuhlmann 1977: 51). In general, the block-throne has a *hwt*-like design (𐩣) on its sides (fig. 1). This is the typical throne of gods, who “preside” over a temple (*hwt-ntr*), and it is mainly—but not exclusively—in a religious context that also pharaoh is shown on such a (“sacred”) block-throne. The other type is the lion-throne that combines a chair with a tall backrest with figures of two lions flanking it. Famous examples are the thrones of the Khafra statues from the king’s valley temple at Giza or Tutankhamen’s throne (figs. 2 and 3; e.g., Lange and Hirmer 1961: figs. 36 - 37, 190). No armrests are shown in examples of three-dimensional thrones from the Old Kingdom although they are part of the throne of queen Neith (Jéquier 1933: pls. 4 - 5). Egyptian beds flanked by lions, cheetahs, or hippopotami offer several formal analogies to the lion-throne, but the concept is a common one and much older than Egyptian civilization. The earliest example—showing a [seated female figure between two felids](#)—comes from Çatal Höyük in Anatolia and dates to Neolithic times.

The lion-throne was the characteristic (“secular”) royal throne of ancient Egypt. Armchair-type lion-thrones are frequently depicted from the New Kingdom on (e.g., Naville 1901: pl. 88, 1906: pl. 125; Radwan 1969: pl. 12; Säve-Söderbergh 1957: pl. 30). By this time, the pairs of lion legs present in three-dimensional examples of the Old Kingdom had been reduced to four legs, and the backrest had been turned into the stylized shape of an elegantly (though unnaturally) erect tail. Stool-type lion-thrones (fig. 4)

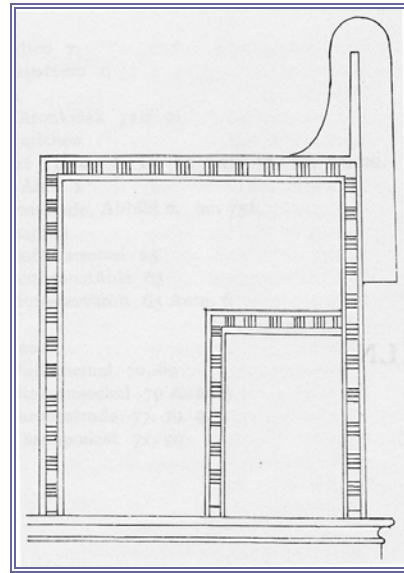


Figure 1. *Hwt* block-throne.



Figure 2. Old Kingdom lion-throne of Khafra.

without armrests only seldom show the animal’s head (exception in Roeder 1938: pl. 30).

Textual evidence indicates that prior to the lion-throne gaining general acceptance, also stools with bull’s legs (frequently found in tombs of Egypt’s Proto- and Early Dynastic elite) had served as thrones (cf. PT 1124 a-c (P)). Lightweight stools and folding chairs were also embellished with symbols of royalty (lion legs, *zm*) and accompanied the king into the field or during more pleasurable outings (Champollion and Champollion-Figeac 1835 –



Figure 3. New Kingdom lion-throne of Tutankhamen.

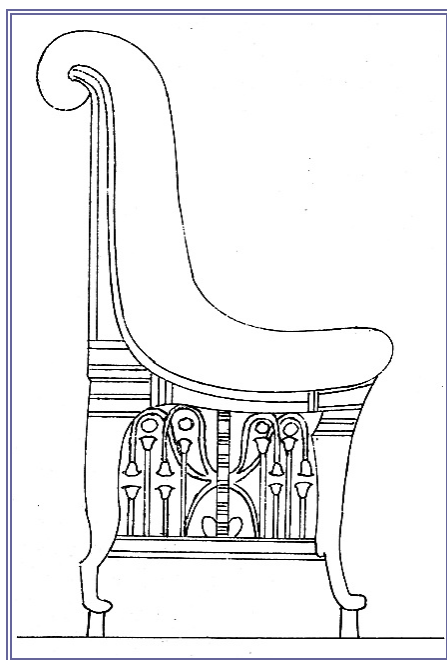




Figure 4. Stool-type lion-throne.

1845, Vol. 2: pl. 200; Desroches Noblecourt 1972: 41, pls. IXa - b; Lepsius 1849 - 1856, Vol. 3: pl. 153). It remains unclear what exactly caused Tutankhamen's folding chair to

be turned into a rigid throne with a backrest. Possible explanations might be the aspect of royal "leisure" associated with such stool-types or, on the contrary, the symbolism derived from being used by a "warrior"-king. There is no apparent reason, however, to identify its function as "ecclesiastical" (Desroches Noblecourt 1972: 52, pl. XII), comparable to medieval *faldistoria* (armless folding chairs).

When it became necessary to carry the king in procession, either type of throne was simply put on a portable support. During inaugurations and jubilees, the support often took the shape of a basket, which gave the allusion that the king was "presiding" over the festival ($\text{h}3b$) or was "the Lord of Sed Festivals" (*nb h3b-sd*). Prior to the Amarna Period, officials were received at court before the "elevated throne" (*st wrwt*), pharaoh "shining" ($\text{h}f$) above them like the sun god on the primeval hill and embodying the last link to Egypt's erstwhile king-gods. Akhenaten broke with this traditional throne kiosk imagery. Even the term *st wrwt* was exchanged for *jsbt 3t* (probably meaning the same: "elevated throne"), and during official functions, the royal pair appeared seated on a simple stool (Davies 1908: pls. 6 and 17). Instead, the "window of appearance"—a dais with surrounding parapet and a front reminiscent of a broken-lintel doorway—became the essential feature of interaction between the king and his subordinates. Inspired, no doubt, by the country's age-old concept of portable shrines (e.g., divine barges) and justice being spoken at the "gate" (Sauneron 1954; Brunner 1986), Akhenaten adapted the "window" also for venturing before the public, adding it to the royal palanquin together with pairs of lions and sphinxes as symbols of royal and apotropaic power. Presumably, the contraption was meant to convey the message that the king was "approachable," i.e., willing to grant audience and justice to the common people, too. This understanding is corroborated by the fact that during public oracular processions, also deities—for example, the deified Amenhotep I or Amun in his so-called

“aniconic form”—were called upon while being carried about in similar palanquins with a broken-lintel facade. Reliefs and drawings depict just the parapet in side view (e.g., Davies 1905a: pl. 37, 1905b: pl. 13; Foucart 1932: pl. XXVIII), but three-dimensional examples also show the broken-lintel door in the front (cf. Kuhlmann 1988: pls. 48 - 49). This type of throne—at least of the aniconic form of Amun—seems to have been called *bḥdw* (cf. Kuhlmann 1977: 68, note 2).

The throne is shown to rest at least on a mat. Usually it stands raised on a  -shaped (double) dais (surmounted by curvy canopies: ) or inside (often very elaborate) kiosks consisting of four columns supporting a canopy made of a framework of lintels surmounted by a cavetto cornice. The earliest example dates to the Middle Kingdom (Senusret I; cf. Davies and Gardiner 1920: pl. 16). Since Amenhotep III, more elaborate kiosks are in evidence packing two, even three kiosks into one another (fig. 5; Davies 1933: pl. 43, 1941: pl. 29; Lange and Hirmer 1961: fig. 152; Säve-Söderbergh 1957: pls. 30 - 31; Wreszinski 1923: pls. 88b and 203). The columns are usually of the lotus-capital type with or without buds tied to the shaft. So-called “lily”-capitals may replace the lotus (cf. Radwan 1969: pl. 10,1; Amenhotep II) or the “lily” occurs in combination with the lotus (cf. Radwan 1969: pl. 14; Thutmose IV). Botanically the flower does not actually represent a type of lily, and it seems likely that this is a monumentalized version of the Upper Egyptian heraldic plant (a flowering type of “sedge”?), which has not yet been identified beyond question. Three-stage composite capitals of papyrus flowers (and buds) were also used (Radwan 1969: pl. 10,2; Amenhotep II) and became more frequent from the Amarna Period on. A consistent feature on the kiosk since the New Kingdom are the winged solar disc and bunches of grapes on the lintel.

The vegetal features and the image of the solar god above it match the dais’ symbolic interpretation as the “primeval hill,” i.e., the fertile land appearing in the receding waters of

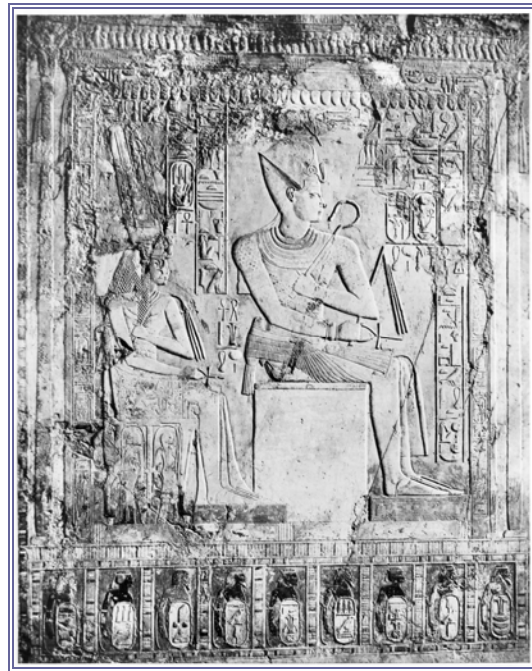








Figure 5. Kiosk in the tomb of Kheruef showing Amenhotep III on a *srh*-throne (unfinished) and Queen Tiy on a lion-throne with all male attributes (lion heads, captives, sphinx) rendered female.


the inundation. Sprouting with vegetation, Egypt provided the king with all kinds of vital produce and allowed him to lead a merry, carefree life. Representing two highly important vegetal commodities, lotus and papyrus epitomized Egypt’s most archetypal plants of the primordial world. Because of their symbolic and practical value in everyday life, they figured ubiquitously in art and architecture. In the time of Amenhotep III, vegetal capitals were also embellished by protomes of ducks (Davies 1933: pl. 43; Säve-Söderbergh 1957: pls. 31 and 36), omnipresent in the pools and puddles left by the receding inundation. For Egyptians, the duck represented “fowl” as a basic type of nourishment and offering ( *ꜥꜥd*, “bird”). Providing a counterbalance to the (Lower Egyptian) papyrus appears to have been the (Upper Egyptian) “lily”-capital’s sole *raison d’être*, which also explains its comparatively modest deployment in architectural designs since the time of king Djoser. Throughout the ancient world, wine was considered a drink of gods and royalty symbolizing a ruler’s happy

and content life (cf. Alföldi 1949 - 1950, 1952; Meyer 1986). It appears that the kiosk originated from primitive lightweight shades erected for trellising vines and for having a pleasurable time in a garden.

Ornamental Symbols

Ornamental patterns—many of them hieroglyphic signs—decorating the throne and its paraphernalia relate symbolically to the dogma of divine kingship, to the power of rule, or functioned as apotropaica.

A variation of the -hieroglyph is the  (*srh*) on the sides of the block-throne, the earliest examples dating to the time of Amenhotep III (figs. 5, 6, 7; Epigraphic Survey 1957: pl. 326; Gardiner and Calverly 1933 - 1958, Vol. 2: pls. 32, 35; Säve-Söderbergh 1957: pl. 31). Rarely, the *srh* was also combined with a lion stool (Donderlinger 1973: fig. 131). The *srh*-decoration was probably inspired by the Horus-name of the royal titulary and alludes to the king as “living Horus” and “Lord of the royal palace” (cf. Kuhlmann 1981: 84 - 85). The fact that pharaoh’s rule was “based” on the gifts of eternal “life” (*nh*, ) , “endurance” (*dd*, ) , and “wellbeing” (*wss*, ) bestowed upon him by the gods is expressed by representing these signs along the dais (e.g., Lepsius 1849 - 1856, Vol. 3: pl. 62b; Radwan 1969: pl. 14).

Amongst hieroglyphic symbols of authority and dominance, one finds the -sign (*zm3*, “unite”) in combination with papyrus and “sedge” symbolizing the “Two Lands” (i.e., Upper and Lower Egypt) united under one ruler (*zm3 t3wj*; cf. figs. 2, 3, 4, 8). Hence the expression *zm3(y)t*, “unifier,” for the throne, which is said to “unite” (*j3b*) the living (e.g., Sethe *Urk. IV*: 571) under pharaoh. Gods of the country’s two parts, who are handling or tying the two heraldic plants of Upper- and Lower Egypt to the *zm3*, may augment the sign (since Menkaura; Kuhlmann 1977: 53 - 56; Smith 1949: 37, fig. 12), as well as figures of northern and southern foreigners on lion-thrones (since the New Kingdom, fig. 8;

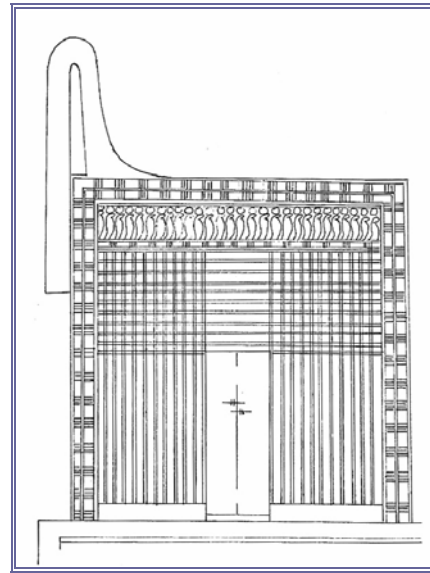


Figure 6. *Srh* block-throne.

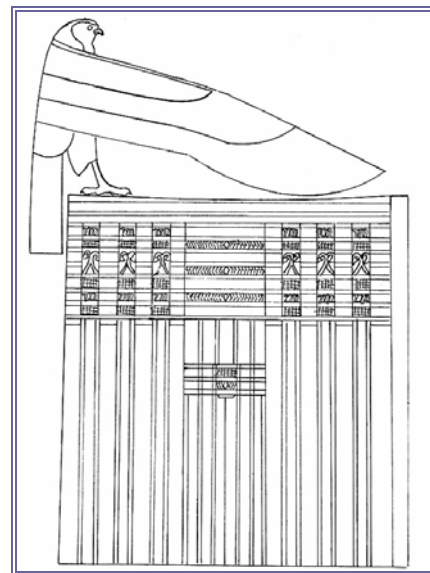



Figure 7. *Srh* block-throne with protective falcon replacing backrest.

Radwan 1969: pl. 12; Wreszinski 1923: pl. 203). Foreigners—or their hieroglyphic symbol, the bow ()—are also represented on footstools or the dais (fig. 9; Desroches Noblecourt 1972: 51, pl. XI2c; Lange and Hirmer 1961: pl. 152). The theme of pharaoh triumphing over the rest of the world is also taken up on the armrest of thrones by depicting the royal sphinx trampling upon Egypt’s enemies (e.g., Säve-Söderbergh 1957:

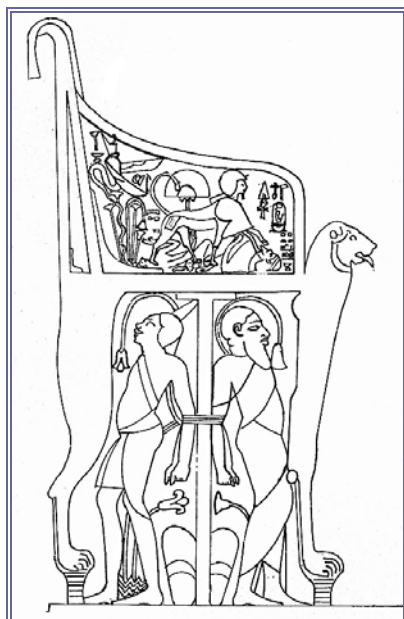



Figure 8. New Kingdom lion-throne.



Figure 9. Original dais from the palace of King Merenptah decorated with figures of captives and bows.

pl. 30; Wreszinski 1923: pl. 203). Graphic variations of the -hieroglyph (*rhyt*, “subjects”) on the dais (and footstool) illustrate pharaoh’s rule over the “civilized” Egyptian world, praising their leader (Bouriant 1894: pl. 3; Davies and Gardiner 1926: pls. 4, 20, 22; Epigraphic Survey 1980: pl. 47; Scheil 1894: pl. 3). Differently colored stripes with a pattern reminiscent of feathers are also a frequent decorative design displayed on the sides of *hwt* block-thrones (fig. 10).

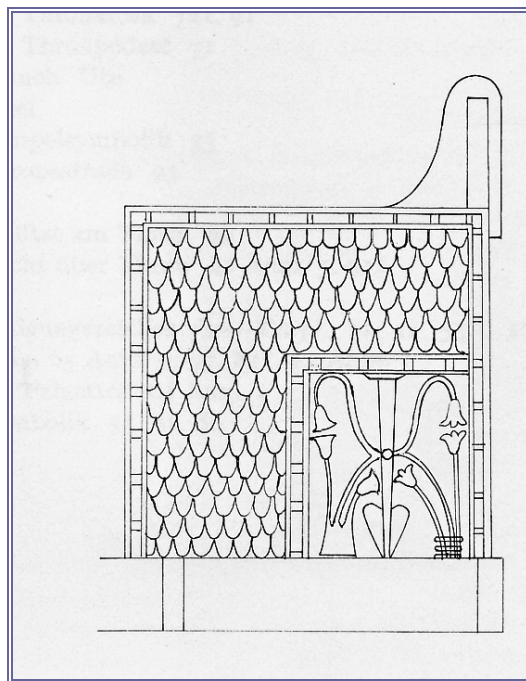




Figure 10. *Hwt* block-throne with *zm3-t3wj* and feather décor.

Essentially, lions and (hieraco-) sphinxes flanking the king’s throne or before and on the dais (Roeder 1938: pls. 23 and 24; Säve-Söderbergh 1957: pl. 36; cf. Pongracz 1957) seem to have been images of the king himself evoking a leader’s fierce strength and supremacy. This is suggested by the analogous griffin—furtive ruler of Egypt’s deserts—that also symbolizes aggressive, overwhelming power, as well as by the exchange of the lion protomes for human heads on the queen’s throne (fig. 5; Epigraphic Survey 1980: pl. 47). Animals—because of their natural or imagined powers—took on the role of warding off evil and protecting the person of the ruler. Lion heads decorated the abaci of the throne kiosk, alternating with heads of the demon-god Bes, who is sometimes likened to the lion (Davies 1930, Vol. 2: pl. 11, Vol. 1: pl. 43; Keimer 1954: 141). Bucrania were mounted on the canopy (e.g., Baud 1935: 92, fig. 39; Radwan 1969: pls. 14 and 16) supplementing the three dangerous lion aspects of the king by yet another one associated with deadly animal force ( *dnd*, “rage”). Kiosk lintels were also decorated with







Hathoric-heads () recalling images of the king standing protected under the head of the Hathor-cow (Davies 1933: pl. 3; cf., for example, Lange and Hirmer 1961: pls. 142 and 143). Freezes of uraei crowning the canopy or snakes (Wadjet), vultures (Nekhbet), and falcons (Horus) protecting the king on arm- and backrests of the throne are all part of the comprehensive theme of divine animal powers watching over the king.

Lexical Meaning

None of the many Egyptian terms referring to the “throne” imply the “regal” or “religious” connotation the word carries today. Being “special” as the seat of a god or king was expressed by referring to the throne as being “elevated,” i.e., standing raised above its surroundings.

st (Coptic: $\text{C}\epsilon$, $\text{C}\iota$), *nst* (Coptic: NHCE), *jsbt*, *mnbt*, and *bhḏw* are derived from lexical roots denoting “to sit” or “to rest” (cf. Kuhlmann 1977: 8 - 39; for *bhḏw*, cf. *hdb*, “come to rest,” and metathesis of type ABC > CAB; cf. Osing 1976: 526, n. 318). Other expressions originally referred to physical aspects like shape—for example, *hndw*: from a curved bar (< *hnd*, “bend,” for such seats, cf. Smith 1949: pls. 2a - b, 3a - b, 3d); *hdmw*, “box,” for the block-throne (loanword < Hebrew: *hadom*)—

or position as in the case of the frequent term *st wrwt* (“the elevated throne”) and *tpj rdww* (“the one (i.e., *hndw*) on top of the steps”) indicating the throne’s elevated position in the kiosk (or in the holy of holies) on a (“high”) dais (*intst* ($\text{C}\iota$)), which was also referred to as a “high rising and tall” *mnbt* (cf. Fakhry 1943: 465, line 9).

Words for the royal “palanquin” are mostly self-explanatory: *wzt* < *tzj/wtz* (“lift”), *kzyt* < *kz* (“high,” Davies 1905b: pls. 13 and 14); for *hmr* and *zp3(t)*, cf. Semitic *hml*, “carry,” and Semitic *zbl*, “basket,” respectively. Other words like *bkr(t)* (Coptic $\text{B}\epsilon\lambda\kappa\epsilon$), *bdj*, *ndm*, and *skz* resist etymological explanation. Words semantically related to “throne” often show graphically “simple” determinatives like ,  (a litter with an ancient type of curved shrine), or  (steps, dais) indicating that the object was a “place of rest” and could be carried or stood raised. The block-throne sign () on the head of Isis (*3st*: HCE) is not a symbol but “writing” (= *s/se*). It allowed the identification of iconographically undifferentiated female deities just as other hieroglyphic signs like  or  on the head of other goddesses denoted a “reading” as “Nephthys” or “Nut,” respectively.

Bibliographic Notes

The most comprehensive treatment of this subject is Kuhlmann (1977, 1981). For thrones of the ancient Near East in general and for the Egyptian throne with regard to Biblical archaeology in particular, see Metzger (1985; cf. Kuhlmann 1987) and Kyrieleis (1969). For Meroitic thrones, cf. Hofmann (1986) and Tomandl (1985, 1999). For a general study of sitting habits and seats, see Schmidt (1971). Egyptian chairs were more recently treated by Fetten (1982), and the thrones of Tutankhamen have been studied by Eaton-Krauss (1984, 2008). Dohrmann (2006) examined the fecundity figures on the Lisht thrones of Senusret I. For the *srh*-throne, see also Rühlmann (1977). Compare Westendorf (1986) and Goedicke (1992) for possible explanations of *bhḏw* and the titles *nb nswt t3wy* and *hrp nstj*, respectively. Like many things Egyptian, the throne has also been suspected of harboring deeper symbolic meaning than seems plausibly deducible from the written and pictorial record, see Westendorf (1966) and de Wit (1951).

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- Figure 1. *Hwt* block-throne. (After Kuhlmann 1977: pl. I, fig. 1a.)
- Figure 2. Old Kingdom lion-throne of Khafra. (Lange and Hirmer 1961: pls. 36 - 37.)
- Figure 3. New Kingdom lion-throne of Tutankhamen. (Kuhlmann 1977: pl. II, fig. 4a.)
- Figure 4. Stool-type lion-throne. (After Kuhlmann 1977: pl. II, fig. 3b.)
- Figure 5. Kiosk in the tomb of Kheruef showing Amenhotep III on a *srh*-throne (unfinished) and Queen Tiy on a lion-throne with all male attributes (lion heads, captives, sphinx) rendered female. (Lange and Hirmer 1961: pl. 152.)
- Figure 6. *Srh* block-throne. (After Kuhlmann 1977: pl. I, fig. 2a.)
- Figure 7. *Srh* block-throne with protective falcon replacing backrest. (After Kuhlmann 1977: pl. I, fig. 2b.)
- Figure 8. New Kingdom lion-throne. (After Kuhlmann 1977: pl. II, fig. 4b.)
- Figure 9. Original dais from the palace of King Merenptah decorated with figures of captives and bows. (Kuhlmann 1977: pl. V, fig. 12.)
- Figure 10. *Hwt* block-throne with *zm3-t3wj* and feather décor. (After Kuhlmann 1977: pl. I, fig. 1b.)