

Save Ancient Studies Alliance

Summer 2021 Texts-in-Translation Reading Group

Representations of “the Other” in ancient Egyptian literature



(Nubian Tribute Presented to the King, Tomb of Huy. Metropolitan Museum of Art 30.4.21)

In the mainstream, ancient Egypt is often considered without a geographical context; however the Egyptians were strongly aware of their place within the world that was known to them. As with most ancient civilizations, the ancient Egyptian worldview centered around their belief that their land and peoples were superior to other lands and peoples. This worldview is exemplified in pharaonic art and literature, and these representations also permeated non-royal contexts.

There were two sets of understanding what modern scholars now refer to as “the other”. Ancient Egyptians consistently in art and literature set foreigners apart by stereotyping tropes that included different styles of dress and body adornment, hairstyles, skin color, and behaviorisms such as battle tactics. Sometimes these differences were highlighted, mostly in royal contexts, the dangerous nature of “non-Egyptianness”. Non-Egyptian meant uncivilized and chaotic, which was a major

threat to cosmic and political balance. On the other hand, foreigners were essential to Egyptians, and Egypt benefited from foreign trade and diplomacy.

This reading group aims to examine these two sets of understanding of “the other” through the lens of the ancient Egyptian voice. We shall read Egyptian literature in translation and explore the various ways in which foreigners are represented and how Egyptians interacted with them both peacefully and militaristically. Pictorial representations of foreigners and their activities shall also be examined, as art was a major method of self-presentation in ancient Egypt. Toward the end of the course, we will also look at how Egypt was perceived by foreigners via literature, namely that of Herodotus.

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Meeting Dates and Readings

Dates (6 weeks):

Tuesdays @ 11:00 am EDT

-Session 1: June 15

-Session 2: June 22

-Session 3: June 29

-Session 4: July 6

-Session 5: July 13

-Session 6: July 20

Week 1 Introduction

Semna stela reading:  Semna Stela.pdf

Semna stela photo:  Senwosret III Semna boundary stela

Kamose stela reading:  Kamose.pdf

Kamose stela photo:  Kamose stela.jpg

Israel stela reading:  Israel stela.pdf

Israel stela photo:  Kairo_Museum_Merenptah-Stele_01.jpg

Prompt questions

1. What are the main themes that you noticed in these texts?
2. How do Egyptians see foreigners?
3. How do Egyptians see themselves?
4. What do you think was the purpose of these texts?
5. BONUS: are there any terms you did not understand and would like us to explain?

Supplementary helpful material

Maps:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1Cj2MuAF27yb9qoGYRXKY3QdApu8wYfTh?usp=sharing>

Chronology:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1428-sssOc7BvSiclioBqB2w0HYTv8yPJ?usp=sharing>

Useful Terms:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PvCgjlUm4bArNzqybCswC95gSmWH6pR9d4CuLA2Gx2U/edit>

Week 2: Non-royal biographies

Biography of Harkhuf:  Harkhuf.pdf

Biography of Ahmose, son of Ebana:  Ahmose son of Ebana.pdf

Complementary images:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1oqKW1O0Dpk6NT-CGwgos19m2gfFsyTBZ?usp=sharing>

Prompt questions (in addition to those of Week One)

1. Consider the difference in tone
2. Consider how the language (terms and formulas, etc.) differs from royal texts

Supplementary helpful material

Ancient Egyptian Object Stories: The Statuette of Ankhnesmeryre and Pepi II (by Briana Jackson): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOAqvZtYwro>

Consider also this lecture by Stuart Tyson Smith (he's the dude who consulted on Stargate) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iweIEwnY70A&t=2950s>

Folder of secondary literature:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1abx1l-vlHYqsq-bH1eNYr5jAzxfEdWuB?usp=sharing>

Week 3: Correspondences with kings of the Near East

The Amarna Letters -- letters from Tushratta [W](#) Tushratta Letters and info

The Letter to the Hittite King [L](#) Letter to Hittite king.pdf

Correspondence between two queens [N](#) Nefertari-Puduhepa.png

Week 4: Travelling to the Levant

Story of Sinuhe [S](#) Sinuhe.pdf

Story of Wenamun [W](#) Wenamun.pdf

Supplement: History of Egypt Podcast, Episode 69: North by Northwest

<https://www.egyptianhistorypodcast.com/episode-69-north-by-northwest/>

Questions to consider

1. What are the primary themes in each story?
2. What are the characteristics (both in terms of appearance and lifestyle) that Egyptians think “make an Egyptian”?
3. How do Egyptians and Levantines communicate and behave with each other?
4. What do Egyptians fear about traveling outside Egypt?
5. Who do you think the audience is, and what effect do you think the stories are meant to have on the audience?



Week 5: Art as literature

There are a lot of images to study and they are all in this folder:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1_ZDS5y949y3r30J37fbQCSo-wngNkl48?usp=sharing

1. What are the different negative and positive ways foreigners are represented

2. ARE there actually positive ways foreigners are represented?
3. What foreign civilizations do you think are represented? (It's ok not to know)
4. Can you think of any foreign civilizations that do not seem to appear in the "collection"
5. In some cases, these images appear in palace floor decoration where foreign delegates would be received by the king. What do you think foreign delegates would think when they are made to veritably step on themselves in front of the king? (no wrong answers here, purely speculative)

Supplement: my video "Egyptianizing and Othering"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCDuCyQ5Jk4&list=PLLVC67-qUWShqOQ_cp8LEFHtUlskUeUS&index=3&t=2s

Week 6: Egypt as 'the other'

Herodotus 📄 Herodotus_The_Histories_BOOK TWO.pdf

Horace 📄 Horace Odes I-37.pdf

Juvenal 📄 Juvenal, Satires. (1918). Satire 1.pdf

Pliny 📄 Pliny_37-16.pdf

Location:(Provided by SASA)

Zoom Meeting Link

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83500268943>

Zoom Meeting ID

835 0026 8943

Zoom Meeting Password

950311