

Personal Religion in Domestic Contexts during the New Kingdom

The impact of the Amarna Period

Iria Souto Castro



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Note to the Reader

Detailed reports addressing some of the artefacts mentioned in this publication can be found with accompanying graphic matter in the second volume of my PhD Dissertation (Souto Castro 2020c).

In order not to clutter the tabular display of information, I have adopted the layout convention that wherever a table cell should contain the same contents as the cell immediately above, it is left blank. Thus, except where stated otherwise, an empty cell is to be read precisely as the last nonempty cell above.

The bibliography at the end of this monograph provides the full title of periodical publications. The short form can be found in the List of Abbreviations.

References

Souto Castro, I. 2020c. *Appendices*. Volume 2 of *Changes in personal religious action in domestic contexts from the early New Kingdom until the Twentieth Dynasty. A comparative study on the impact of the Amarna period*. 2 volumes. Viewed 9 March 2023, <<http://hdl.handle.net/11093/1648>>.

List of Abbreviations

This glossary contains an alphabetically sorted explanatory list of standard abbreviations for the names of academic and research institutions, journals, publishers, book series, and collections of specialized monographs.

ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testaments: Studien zur Geschichte, Kultur und Religion Ägyptens und des Alten Testaments
AERAGRAM	Newsletter of Ancient Egypt Research Associates
ÄF	Ägyptologische Forschungen
AJA	American Journal of Archaeology
ARCE	American Research Centre in Egypt
ASAW	Abhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig
AUC	American University in Cairo
AUC Press	American University in Cairo Press
BAEDE	Boletín de la Asociación Española de Egiptología
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BES	Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar
BiOr	Biblioteca Orientalis
BAR International Series	British Archaeological Reports International Series
BMMA	Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art
BMPES	British Museum Publications on Egypt and Sudan
BMP	British Museum Publications
BMOP	British Museum Occasional Publications
BIFAO	Bulletin of the Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale
BSA	British School at Athens
CAJ	Cambridge Archaeological Journal

CENiM	Cahiers Égypte Nilotique et Méditerranéenne
CRE	Current Research in Egyptology
CRIPeL	Cahier de Recherches de l'Institut de Papyrologie et d'Égyptologie de Lille
DFIFAO	Documents de fouilles de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire
EEF	Egypt Exploration Fund
EES	Egypt Exploration Society
ENiM	Égypte Nilotique et Méditerranéenne
FIFAO	Fouilles de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale (IFAO) du Caire. Rapports préliminaires (Cairo)
GHP	Golden House Publications
GM	Göttinger Miszellen
HÄB	Hildesheimer Ägyptologische Beiträge
IBAES	Internet-Beitraege zur Aegyptologie und Sudanarchaeologie
IFAO	Intstitut Français d'Archéologie Orientale
JAEA	Journal of Ancient Egyptian Archaeology
JAOS	Journal of American Oriental Society
JARCE	Journal of the American Research Center in Cairo
JEA	Journal of Egyptian Archaeology
JSSEA	Journal of the Society of the Study of Egyptian Antiquities
Kmt	KMT: A Modern Journal of Ancient Egypt
LÄ	Lexikon der Ägyptologie
LingAeg	Lingua Aegyptia. Journal of Egyptian Language Studies
MDAIK	Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo
MKS	Middle Kingdom Studies
MIFAO	Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale
MittSAG	Mitteilungen der Sudanarchaeologischen Gesellschaft
NEA	New Eastern Archaeology
NINO	Nederlands Instituut voor her Nabije Oosten
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
PALMA	Papers on Archaeology of the Leiden Museum of Antiquities

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

RdE	Revue d'Égyptologie
SAGA	Studien zur Archäologie und Geschichte Altägyptens
SÄK	Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur
UCL	University College London
UCLA	University of California Los Angeles
UZK	Untersuchungen der Zweigstelle Kairo des Österreichischen Archäologischen Institutes
VA	Varia Aegyptiaca
ZÄS	Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde

Preface

This publication is intended to contribute to the enhancement of our understanding of the personal relation with the sacred in Ancient Egypt within domestic contexts, where individuals enjoyed a larger degree of freedom to express their devotion than in the collective displays of public scenarios (nonetheless, see Kilian 1998 for a thorough discussion of public and private space in Ancient Egypt). Indeed, the very existence of a religious practice in the private domain highlights a dichotomy, if not a tension, between the official forms of worship and those conducted in intimacy.

Throughout the chronology of Ancient Egypt the domestic space has been a showcase of the tangible signs of *personal religion*, the private, as opposed to public, expression of acquaintance with the sacred. The intimacy of this religious practice is an essential factor contributing to the character of its imprint on the archaeological record in the form of very particular domestic structures and artefacts. These objects are altogether a treasure trove of information not only for the reconstruction of the practice but also for the development of comparative architectural studies. The insights thus gained for our understanding of gender roles and of the daily life of the ancient Egyptians have boosted the interest among Egyptologists in the study of personal religion bound within the confines of the domestic space, an aspect of *household religion*.

The focus of this contribution is set on the hallmarks contemplated by the archaeology of religion and household studies for ritual actions in the private sphere, to wit: the practices of the communication with the divinities and the interaction with the deceased, which altogether substantiated a cosmogony providing human beings with a sense of hopefulness, peacefulness, and overarching fulfilment.

My approach in undertaking the subject follows the methodological tenets of comparative studies and the compilation of sources. It draws from my own research on the practice of personal religion in Ancient Egypt at the domestic level based on the material evidence provided by the archaeological record, emphasizing the evolution from the pre-Amarna to the post-Amarna periods. Topics related to domestic spaces, gender roles, and comparisons with parallel elements in other contexts have proven useful in order to assess the cultic nature of certain archaeological remains.

The sheer order of magnitude of the number of objects and structures found at domestic settings, as well as their dispersion and distribution, have been altogether decisive in

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trimming down the scope of the study from personal religion at large to domestic settings. Consequently, structures such as tombs and temples are not contemplated herein despite their paramount significance for the practice of personal religion in Ancient Egypt.

Certain published contributions of renowned scholars have been veritable signposts along the path that took me to the writing of this book. Most of these publications are cited throughout, but I feel obliged to single out some that have been particularly inspiring to me as representatives of what I meant to achieve. I should start with Sadek (1987), one of the first efforts to compile evidence on the topic of personal religion, followed by the discussions focused on specific sites of Stevens (2006) for Tell el-Amarna and Weiss (2015) for Deir el-Medina. More recently, Toye-Dubs (2016) and Dewsbury (2017), together with the series of studies by Mota (2015, 2018, and 2019), have added invaluable insights.

Since its beginning as an academic discipline, the study of personal religion in Ancient Egypt has been acknowledged as a complex topic out of its multidisciplinary nature. This may have been a factor hindering the publication of a book-sized monograph dedicated to a general historically informed account of the state of the art in this field of research. My ultimate motivation in writing this book has been to satisfy a deeply felt need for the availability of a study filling such a void. I expect this contribution to be of particular interest both to Egyptologists and to scholars of ancient religions, although the intended audience extends to encompass a broader range of researchers in fields such as anthropology, archaeology, or history. Moreover, I have made the best of my efforts as author for the discussion to be appealing to every interested reader with just a general knowledge of Egyptology.

But no matter how deep the academic probe be sent, this is never to trespass the fundamental academic limitation that the perception stemming from one's nurture in a particular system of the sacred and from the actual practice of the implied techniques devised to contact that realm cannot be grasped otherwise. The understanding of an outsider and the experience of an insider are bound to remain two worlds apart, just as it has been repeatedly attested by cultural anthropologists (Katz, Biesele, and Denis 1997; McTaggart 194; Myerhoff 1976; Reichel-Domatof 1996; Schlesier 1993 make poignant statements in this regard). To what measure can we reasonably expect then to convey something of the mindset of the members of a society predating ours by three thousand years? This question, ostensibly rhetorical, is only a call of attention to our expectations, including the acknowledgement that the enhancement of our understanding of a culture different from one's own is an unending endeavour. As for this book, I expect that it can open vistas to new working hypotheses and theories that push forward our understanding of personal religion in Ancient Egypt, and I hope that it encourages Egyptophiles to learn more about this fascinating subject.

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Introduction

Religions are systems of concepts, techniques, and technology aiming at transcending the boundaries of the sensible in order to contact the realm of the sacred, a putative reality endowing life with a meaning transcending life itself and which may or may not be populated by beings of different nature (sacred beings) among which are deities, whose essential attributes are their emergence from nothingness and their primeval power as creators. The technical subsystem deploys a complex of actions (religious, ritual, or cultic actions) using a technology defined by regalia and paraphernalia, from among which artefacts and structures will be of primary concern hereinafter. The conceptual subsystem is usually organized around a body of myth and a doctrine determining certain statements that the practitioner is required to hold as true (thus, religious beliefs) for the techniques to be effective. In this regard, a religion is an *instrument*, but one that can be used effectively to its intended effect only under the above proviso. From the religious beliefs and the accompanying doctrine may emanate moral systems and an ethics which, as such, functions as a guideline to the pursuit of happiness through the hardships that can be experienced in a lifetime and at the face of the awareness of death. A personal religion is a religious system partially characterized by a manifold of expressions such as direct appeals to divinities chosen by the practitioner and rituals of veneration to the ancestors.

Worldwide parallels of personal religious actions include different rites of affliction, rites of exchange, and rites of passage (van Gennep 2008). Material evidence of their practice has been found reaching back to the Palaeolithic and spreading geographically with the migrations of human groups and their eventual settlements. A few highlights in a quick glance around the globe should suffice to substantiate this assessment:

- The cult to the ancestors in the domestic setting (an important topic in the discussion of Ancient Egypt developed in this book) is attested in the Asian continent from India to China (Nickel 2011: 450–453).
- In the Pacific and the Japanese archipelagos there abound signs of early rituals of worship to the ancestors in the form of figurines, stone pillars, and phallic stones (see Kaner 2011: 459 for the case of the Jomon people). The rituals of passage from Papua New Guinea and Australia are well-covered in the literature (e.g. David 2011: 485). Moreover, their peoples have left the most remarkable rock paintings (David 2011: 487)

and identified sacred places and landscapes as symbolic elements of the mythic times, the *Dreamtime* (David 2011: 489).

- Moving to the American continent, the Inca used oracular divination, expressed veneration to ancestors, and cosmogonies were especially important in their daily cults (Lane 2011: 575–576). In the Mesoamerican subcontinent, the Maya used to destroy household objects at end-of-year ceremonies (Joyce 2011: 544). Indeed, in a similar way to what happened in Ancient Egypt, actions such as burning, burying, or depositing were sacralized (Joyce 2011: 545). The preparation of the deceased with ornaments and the interactions with them are attested in classic Oaxaca and Chichen Itza (Joyce 2011: 548; McAnany 1995). The Aztecs had two main expressions of domestic rituals in households: one of them included objects that allowed the individuals to reproduce actions of the state religion (e.g. offerings and long-handled censers), whereas the other, related to the female world, included the use of ceramic figurines together with musical instruments for divination and healing (Smith 2011: 566–567). In the North American Southwest, the culture of the Chaco Canyon in the northwestern area of New Mexico (c. 900–1130 AD) built monumental religious and domestic structures, some of them as *kivas*, subterranean buildings with a hearth and an elbow-shaped ventilator and benches, pilasters, foot drums, niches and a *sipapu*, a hole on the floor that represented the emergence of the people from the Underworld to this world (Hays-Gilpin 2011: 606–607). Among the Pueblo nations, including the Zuni and the Hopi, there is a rich and living tradition of *kachina* processions and rituals in the sacred *kivas* (Ladd 1994, Schaafsma 1994). Much further to the North, in the Alaskan region, there is a rich tradition of ceremonies and festivals among the Alutiiq, Yup'ik, and Inupiat nations (Salius Gumà 2014: 127–134).
- The sub-Saharan is a showcase of rock paintings contemporary with those from Palaeolithic Europe (Kinahan 1995: 187) which have been understood as a sign of ritual actions. Also, portable objects of a cultic nature such as human heads, torsos, figures, masks, and animals, together with human burials and shrines for the dead and the divinities found at North-West Ghana and Burkina Faso are signs of techniques to enter the sacred (Insoll 2011b: 428–436). But, undoubtedly, the Mesopotamian case is of especial interest for its geographic and chronological closeness to Ancient Egypt (Butler 1998; Jeyes 1989; Rochberg 2004; Seymour 2011: 781–783).
- Europe is no exception in this account. The Bronze Age (c. 2300–800 BC) is particularly rich in signs of personal religious practice. Instances include the shrine found at Bargerosterveld in the province of Drenthe (the Netherlands), consisting of wooden posts forming a small square building that could be used both in natural places and in houses, or a chalk phallus deposited in a post-hole at the porched entrance of roundhouse D at Itford Hill in Sussex, England (Burstow and Helbaek 1957: 176). In addition, votive deposits and burials were found in domestic settlements (Brück 2011: 395–396).

Personal religion is not only a subject of early cultures, as it is highlighted by noting the case of the *Devotio Moderna* at the end of the 14th century, a religious movement founded by Gerard Groote that became popular in the German regions and the area of the Low Countries until the Protestant Reformation (van Dijk 2014). This religious doctrine sought the rediscovery of genuine pious practices such as humility, obedience, and the simplicity of life, striving to attain an innermost relationship with the divine by focusing on personal devotion, meditation, and

PREFACE

Table 1. Chronology of Ancient Egypt (moving backward in time).

Period	Chronology		Dynasties	
	To	From	To	From
Roman period	640	-30	Constans II	Octavian
Ptolemaic period	-30	-323	Cleopatra VII	Cesarion
			Ptolemy XV	Ptolemy I Soter
Macedonian period (Paralleled)	-305	-332	Alexander IV	Alexander the Great
Second Persian period	-332	-343	Alexander the Great	Nectanebo II
Late Dynastic period	-343	-404	30th	28th
First Persian period	-404	-525	27th	27th
Late period	-525	-664	26th	26th
Third Intermediate period	-664	-1069	25th	21st
New Kingdom	-1069	-1550	20th	18th
Second Intermediate period	-1550	-1700	17th	13th
Middle Kingdom	-1700	-2025	12th	11th
First Intermediate period	-2025	-2181	10th	7th
Old Kingdom	-2181	-2686	6th	3rd

the projection of piety towards Jesus Christ. Interestingly enough, Groote's movement can be understood as a reaction to the enforcement of the unified official cult by the Church of Rome (Bagchi and Steinmetz 2004), much in a likeness to the probable motivating force of the strictures of the official worship to Aten in regard to the turn toward personal religion throughout the Amarna period in Ancient Egypt.

The main thesis put forward in this book is the continuity of a tradition in the domestic practice of personal religion in Ancient Egypt from the pre-Amarna period (Early New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty) through to the post-Amarna period (Late 18th Dynasty and Ramesside), actually reaching as far as the 20th Dynasty. Table 1 should help in developing a sense of the relative time frame under discussion as compared to the chronology of Ancient Egypt.

In shaping this thesis the seminal works by Assmann (1995, 2001, 2005a, and 2005b), founded upon such groundbreaking contributions as Erman (1894) and Breasted (1912), have always been in the background. Altogether they introduced a suggestive, if not plainly revolutionary, theory about the origins and the development of religion in Ancient Egypt one of whose major claims is that personal religion reached a zenithal point in the New Kingdom. Nevertheless, in the framework of this theory personal religion is contemplated as an inner process rather than as an expression of intimate devotion (Dewsbury 2017: 47–48). As such, the approach revolves around theology, philosophy, and philology, emphasizing textual rather than archaeological evidence and in this way missing the strength of proof brought about by the archaeological record. Other scholars and researchers have focused instead on the material signs of religious practice in private settings, highlighting in this way the manifestation of beliefs. This approach is more of a collective enterprise, counting among their most notable contributions those by Baines (1987, 1991), Kemp (1995), Luiselli (2008, 2011, 2014), Stevens (2006, 2009), and Weiss (2009, 2015), whose work is expanded and updated by Mota (2015, 2018, 2019) and Toye-Dubs (2016). Understanding that textual sources must be accounted for

always in their broader archaeological context, both approaches contribute jointly to enhance our understanding of personal religion in Ancient Egypt. The present study straddles the two of them and is informed also by household archaeology, counting especially on the insights gained in this regard from the multidisciplinary approach of Stevens (2006) for Tell el-Amarna and Weiss (2015) for Deir el-Medina.

Another cornerstone of this investigation is based on the specialized historiographic notions of continuity and change applied to socio-religious practices that, together with the ideas of tradition and evolution, complemented by that of crisis, have been suitably addressed by the foundational contributions of the School of Annales, where they are introduced as elements of a running social and political milieu whose study involves the perception by contemporary actors and spectators of the historical events, as opposed to a simple chronological report of factual matter (Forster 1978: 58). The approach is of a dynamical nature in that historical change is pictured as the movement of states of affairs in the time continuum under the agency of historical events, which function as forces (Aróstegui 1990: 150), whereas continuity implies stability (Gerschenkron 1962: 196).

The above encompasses ancient history and applies, in particular, to the investigation of those factors that may have been influential on the development of socio-religious processes, time being among of the latter (Tomich 2011: 53–57). Researching on the continuity of the domestic practice of personal religion in Ancient Egypt involves developing a diachronic account of those events that pinpoint development throughout the periods that fall within the scope of the study. Such a task meets certain methodological difficulties. Thus, gaps in the timespan (e.g. the Second Intermediate Period), the geographic dispersion of archaeological pieces throughout Egypt and their relocation to museums all over the world, and the problem that those rare artefacts that are found in situ “relate primarily to abandonment practices rather than original usage” (Weiss 2015: 23–25), together with missing data that are essential to pinpointing the exact location and context of the finds, determine a hardcore methodological problematic to which it must be added the insufficient number of excavations conducted at some sites. The limitations implied by such difficulties are of especial importance inasmuch as the main thesis put forward in this book appeals to the dialectic between continuity or tradition and change or innovation throughout history, on the one hand, and between the spatial boundaries separating the domestic from the public, on the other.

It is nonetheless possible to conduct a comparative study of certain archaeological structures and artefacts that depict actions performed by an individual conveying a devotional sentiment toward a divinity including pieces from different periods. Such a study, especially if it is enhanced by the analysis of iconography and of textual sources, can illuminate evolutionary trends in the practice of personal religion insofar as this is understood as the framework of individual beliefs that make those actions, personal religious actions indeed, meaningful.

More precisely, the continuity thesis concerns the *existence* of a domestic religious practice besides the official actions, albeit acknowledging that the forms of the practice underwent changes throughout the Amarna period in order to adapt to the new official cult to Aten insofar as the latter eclipsed certain aspects of religious tradition such as the conception of the Afterlife, suppressed certain purification rites, and precluded mentioning, not to say worshipping, specific gods such as Osiris. Nonetheless, rituals such as libations, incense

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burning, and the pre-Amarna official cultic apparatus, were all of them maintained in the private sphere during the same period. Most importantly, the veneration to the ancestors, together with cults to gods and goddesses different from Aten, were preserved in the form of small amulets, votive stelae, and other objects and structures. In the post-Amarna stage, certain personal religious traditions practiced in domestic units experienced a revival, achieving their culmination in the Ramesside period.

The path taking to this conclusion has been laid upon a diachronic comparative analysis of a critical catalogue of domestic structures and artefacts highlighting the interaction between individuals and divinities, on the one hand, and the communication between the living and the dead, on the other (Souto Castro 2020d). The diachronic analysis of preserved artefacts attached to the domestic practice of personal religion supports the thesis that the majority of these objects were used before the New Kingdom. After the Amarna period, cultic objects such as votive stelae and altars became more elaborated. Deir el-Medina is a showcase of this change, which can be explained by the privileged status of the site, a “monopole royale” (Bruyère 1939: 15) where the workmen were artisans with an expertise in creating luxury objects for the royal family, the noblemen, and high-ranked officials.

A fraction of the texts conserved from Ancient Egypt, including the *Letters to the Dead*, autobiographies, and inscribed stelae, are particularly informative regarding personal religion. Hence, textual sources are sometimes provided to exemplify relevant data or to discuss different aspects related to the scope of the study, but always with the caveat that they are scarce and may have been tuned to the requirements of decorum (see nonetheless Mota 2015; Stevens 2009: 1–3). These texts must always be approached with the companion of critical literature in order to assess properly their intended function, whether religious, socio-economic, or self-presentational. Graffiti are not discussed herein, suggesting instead the detailed study of their use in the practice of personal religion during the 18th and 19th dynasties at Abusir and North Saqqara by Navrátilová (2006: 99–101).

Ultimately, the most significant types of archaeological pieces of evidence brought about in support of the thesis of the continuity in the domestic practice of personal religion are artefacts and structures. As archaeological categories, the main distinguishing attribute of artefacts is portability. This is a key notion to bear in mind for the study of cultic activities in a domestic setting because it affects the contextualization of finds. In fact, general cultic equipment (basins or offering objects such as tables, stands, and grills) and more specific religious objects (amulets, anthropoid figurines or busts, stelae, ostraca, etc.) were portable. It is even possible that the *lit clos* found at the site of Deir el-Medina included wooden beds that could be disassembled and taken from one room to another (Killen 2017d: 52).

Likely material evidence of religious action in domestic contexts includes any signs of intended interaction with supernatural agencies; the presence of elements such as burials, altars, shrines, or certain underground deposits; and the layout and orientation of the house itself, substantiating the idea that, as a small-scale reproduction of the cosmos, the house can attract supernatural forces (Blanton 1994; Steadman 2015). In order to obtain a coherent picture of the domestic practice of personal religion based on the archaeological record, artefacts and structures must be contemplated jointly as suitably interacting elements. For instance, niches and altars acquire functional sense through their interaction with inscribed

stelae used for verbal invocations, with ritual meals as offerings and banquets, or with nearby figurines and anthropoid busts (Backhouse 2012; Exell 2008; Friedman 1994; Harrington 2013).

Contextual analysis is necessary in order to infer the intended function of one or another structure or object. Thus, as mundane an object as a stool, an artefact intended to provide a seat, attained a sacred nature if buried with its owner for use in the Netherworld. Such an analysis is hardly possible if the material piece was removed from its original context with no record of the location of the find. A case in point concerns the fieldwork of early excavators at sites such as Tell el-Amarna and Deir el-Medina, which, although plentiful in valuable information concerning the artefacts and the domestic structures that they discovered at those sites, is marred by the lack of an adequate methodological background and, consequently, by an irretrievable loss of contextual information. Furthermore, theft and pillage since the times of Ancient Egypt have contributed to the scarcity, scattering, and reuse of structures and artefacts, adding to the difficulties of interpretation. It is therefore fortunate that there remain sites where excavations are incomplete. It can be expected that the current standards of scholarship and archaeological fieldwork allow to retrieve significant information regarding the domestic practice of personal religion in Ancient Egypt from those sites once the excavations continue.

It must be borne in mind that the practice of personal religion implies actions such as daily cults to a selected deity, but such actions can be performed without an intimate belief or sentiment as belongs in the veritable practice of personal religion, which requires the conscious participation of the individual in the action of devotion (Luiselli 2008; Luiselli 2011; Stevens 2006). This has the effect that not every archaeological mark of domestic religious practice can be taken as a true sign of personal belief. On this account, Stevens (2006) compiles a number of differences between the archaeological evidence of private religion and “ritual, conduct and belief” that become instrumental for the adequate study of personal religion in domestic contexts and likely in other spheres as well.

Social stratification is another aspect that needs to be accounted for in every discussion of personal religion inasmuch as the domestic performance of the cults, from the available space to the type of cultic artefacts, was affected by socio-economic status (Luiselli 2011: 83). Individual religious practices within a community are not directly “reflective of the religious practice of that community” (Troche 2014: 467) insofar as they change as we move from one to another social level. In particular, the archaeological record is biased towards the elite of a community and may or may not be representative of the beliefs and the behaviour of individuals of lower social levels because artefacts or structures to manifest their devotional sentiments were not affordable to them. Instead, they left their own marks of devotion inside the temples and around their precincts (Jacquet-Gordon 2003), or in the form of graffiti, or simply acquired artefacts made with less expensive materials, which compromised their durability and preservation. Nevertheless, the archaeological record and the textual resources do not always suffice to ascertain the socio-economic origins of the worshippers or their gender.

Certain particularities of the archaeological sites providing most of the archaeological evidence discussed throughout this study for each period and stage, especially Deir el-Medina, limit the extrapolation of the thesis of continuity to other sites. This situation makes all the more important the search for parallels at other sites where artefacts and structures remain

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preserved in context. This approach is not without caveats, though, and not only because every domestic space must be understood within its specific context, which requires solid knowledge of the evolution of each site and landscape, but also because certain tracts of the practice of personal religion changed from one territory to another within Egypt (Luiselli 2011: 86).

Besides the above problematic it is found the drawback that more recent architectural studies in the field of Egyptology either focus on materials, structures, and on establishing parallels among different buildings in terms of those aspects (Arnold 1989; Correas–Amador 2012; Koltsida 2007c; Lacovara 1997; Lesko 2008; Möeller 2016; Mota 2015; Picardo 2015; Ritner 2008; Spence 2004; Stevens 2006; Uphill 1998; Weiss 2015), or they do on urban development (Uphill 1998, Snape 2014). Architectural studies dedicated to household religion or domestic studies that include religious actions are comparatively scarce, although the volume of the literature dedicated to them is steadily rising. In this regard, it is remarkable the discussion of similarities among housing models from different sites by Arnold (1989), together with the discussion of gender roles in domestic spaces by Meskell (2002) and Koltsida (2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c).

The literature on domestic contexts is comparatively scarce most likely out of “the difficulties involved in its analysis” (Mota 2018: 23, footnote 1). There are not many works for pre-dynastic or early dynastic periods compared with the number of those focusing on Tell el-Amarna and Deir el-Medina, perhaps as a consequence of the scarcity of evidence of personal religion practice from pre-New Kingdom domestic contexts. However, recent investigations (Koltsida 2007c; Möeller 2016; Mota 2015; Spence 2015; Stevens 2009) provide evidence of domestic religious action prior to the New Kingdom, and there is no reason to think that there be no similar structures and artefacts dating from even earlier periods. It is worth noticing the study of the continuity of the practices of personal religion in domestic contexts before the New Kingdom developed by Mota (2015), especially so inasmuch as acquaintance with the early manifestations of personal religion in the time frame extending from the Old Kingdom to the Second Intermediate Period is necessary in order to grasp the parallels drawn from the comparative analysis of the contents of the archaeological record.

The material evidence considered in the early stages of this study came from archaeological sites that follow the pattern of a Workmen’s Village, a settlement of artisans and workers consisting of “a group of small, contiguous-walled dwellings, usually bounded by a perimeter wall and often designed on an orthogonal plan” (Lacovara 1997: 152) devised to replicate the function of the pyramid towns of the Old Kingdom (4th Dynasty) suited to the labour force dedicated to building the pyramids (Lacovara 1997: 152; Möeller 2016: 194; Troy 2008: 15; Wente 1990: 42). In particular, the layout of the pyramid town of Lahun, typical of the Middle Kingdom and found at residential sites, is a template for workmen’s villages (Troy 2008: 15).

Taking this type of settlement as archaeological reference was a decision made on the rationale that, as residential areas, they provide the opportunity to conduct an informative case study of domestic spaces. Moreover, the documentation of the finds at Tell el-Amarna and Deir el-Medina, the two paradigmatic cases of workmen’s villages during the New Kingdom, has benefited from a big bulk of rigorous scholarship. Nevertheless, for some time frames, such as the Second Intermediate Period, the lack of preserved structures and of excavations in some

settlements turns the interpretation of the domestic space into a delicate task. Besides, it became evident soon that the large volume of informative parallel artefacts and structures discovered at other sites dating from the periods within the scope of this research made it important to expand the area of New Kingdom settlements under discussion. This applies also to sites other than those of the workmen's type, pre-New Kingdom to post-Amarna. Artefacts and structures similar to those from the New Kingdom appear in the Memphite and the Nubian areas, and these can be included in a comparative study with those from the pre-Amarna, Amarna, and post-Amarna periods, concentrated in Tell el-Amarna and Deir el-Medina. Nevertheless, the dispersion of the structures and objects throughout Egypt and Nubia for different periods makes more difficult the task to trace out the development of the domestic practice of personal religion.

Access to every pertinent archaeological record has not been always possible. It can be expected that the insights gained from the unaccounted pieces and from archaeological excavations and discoveries too recent to be included in this study (e.g. at Tell Edfu) contribute valuable information regarding personal religion action. At the end of the study, more than 24 cases turned out to be considered, the locations of the most important of which are highlighted in Figure 1. A comparative analysis of domestic spaces in more problematic sites out of their poor preservation as well as throughout a broader geographic area, encompassing the Egyptian and the Nubian territories, is available in Mota (2015).

Due to the dispersion of the finds, it is a difficult task to provide specific locations and contexts for structures and artefacts discovered in the expanse of the archaeological sites of Egypt. To make matters worse, “[g]reater difficulties in assessing whether [. . .] linkages [between a site and a find] are meaningful arise when site and object are different in date. Where the object is of a type unambiguously older than the structural remains on a site, various interpretations are possible” (Ralston and Jones 2010: 2). Besides, the spot of the finds *in situ* is rarely the location where they were originally intended to be functional, but it is rather the result of a convoluted story of successive finding and dropping or abandonment through time. Moreover, the lack of uniformity in the criteria used by archaeologists and Egyptologists to identify the function of certain structures has led to a confusing terminology. This is particularly delicate insofar as terminological matters may impinge on the interpretation of the function of a piece.

The evidence that some structures and artefacts may actually have served a manifold of purposes and the multi-functionality of the rooms in small houses out of the unavailability of the required space for a specific cultic practice add to the difficulties brought about by the inevitable subjectivity of the interpretation of their intended function and use. Fortunately enough, the parallels found at other settlements, sometimes smaller in size than the thoroughly studied sites of Tell el-Amarna, Deir el-Medina, and other New Kingdom workmen's villages, shed light on the above subjects. Such sites include new towns established at the old fortresses in Lower Nubia with the creation of temples to Horus at the beginning of the New Kingdom, when the Egyptian power was reasserted in this area (see Auenmüller 2018: 239–260 for towns in Upper Nubia). Sites such as Buhen or Aniba grew to encompass administrative buildings, temples, residences, and farming villages (Troy 2008: 21). The fortified city of Sesebi, where houses dated to the Late 18th Dynasty and the 19th Dynasty have been discovered, is another case in point. The houses continue the same type of block housing for temple personnel that is found at Lahun and South Abydos. Most of them are small with a basic structure consisting



Figure 1. Main sites within the scope of the study. Source: The author.

of a large outer room with at least four inner ones. In another house type there is a hall and sometimes an antechamber, a large inner living-room, and a varying number of smaller rooms clustered around the former. There are also a few houses resembling the tripartite structure found at Tell el-Amarna and Deir el-Medina (Spencer 2012: 23; Lacovara 1997: 206–207).

Pre-Amarna sites such as Askut or Lisht provide parallels of altars and structures, together with Karnak, Sais, and Amara West, the last one dating from the 19th Dynasty and having seen four occupation stages (Mota 2015: 56). These sites also provide parallels of artefacts. There are other later examples such as Medinet Habu, Pi-Ramesses (Qantir), Kom Rabia, or el-Ashmunein that present parallels for the finds in the workmen's villages, especially those from Deir el-Ballas, Malkata, and Amara West. In addition, recent discoveries of an ancestor bust and structures in the ancient town that surrounds the south and the east sides of the temple at Edfu seem to have provided new parallels (Möeller 2018).

At the end of the day, the historical development of domestic spaces seems bound to remain uncertain, with particularly significant gaps concerning some time frames, such as the Old Kingdom, and the First and Second Intermediate periods.

There are important aspects of the practice of personal religion that are not contemplated in this study, the most immediate of which may be the practice outside the domestic context due to the difficulty of attaining the adequate sense of privacy outdoors in sites such as the workmen's villages, where houses were attached to one another, even taking into account the probable radical difference between the notions of privacy and intimacy in Ancient Egypt and those of the present western societies. Certainly, this study would impinge on our understanding of the differences between the practice of personal religion in high culture and in low culture, something that is only mentioned in passing in this publication.

Another such aspect is the possibility that some of the practices were conducted by a group of individuals, especially at those sites as Deir el-Medina where houses were small units hosting six to eight people on average. In this regard, it would be interesting to tackle the question as to the emergence of a communal sentiment towards certain deities. This is a question that affects our knowledge and understanding of the sense of belonging (to a community) in Ancient Egypt and of how this sense would help in overcoming the grief for the loss of deceased relatives or in dealing with daily affairs. In turn, this may provide new insights into the interplay of personal religion and the concerns about the Afterlife that is known to have existed from the evidence discovered in mortuary contexts.

Moreover, the evidence of cultic practice in every room may be a sign that there was no specific space dedicated to this activity inside the houses. Both Deir el-Medina and Tell el-Amarna provided an alternative space suited to the worship of ancestors and deities, namely, the chapels located near the enclosures (Bomann 1991), but although votive stelae have been found at chapels together with other artefacts, an in-depth study of the possibility that these were actually spots where the practitioners would render cult is still much needed.

Further study of these aspects would enhance not only our understanding of personal religion but also of the ways in which the practice of religion in general had an effect on the lives of ancient Egyptians. Truly enough, the origins of personal religion may never be established with certainty, but the study of its continuity and development may provide further insights and enhance our understanding of the phenomenon.

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