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DOMESTIC RELIGIOUS PRACTICES
الممارسات الدينية المنزلية

Anna Stevens

Religion im Alltag
Pratiques religieuses privées

Domestic religious practices—that is, religious conduct within a household setting—provided an outlet especially for expressing and addressing the concerns of everyday life. They can be traced throughout Egyptian dynastic history, in textual sources such as spells of healing and protection, offering and dedicatory texts, and private letters, and in cult emplacements and objects from settlement sites. Protective divinities such as Bes, Taweret, and Hathor were favored, along with ancestors who could be deceased kin, local elite, or royalty. State-level deities were also supplicated. Central practices were offering and libation, and conducting rites of protection and healing, while there was also strong recourse to protective imagery. These practices formed part of a continuum of beliefs, actions, and imagery shared with temple and mortuary cult; due to the fragmentary and scattered nature of the sources, the degree to which they overlapped with these spheres cannot be determined for all periods.

أتاحت الممارسات الدينية المنزلية التي تقام بداخل نطاق المنزل للناس التعبير عن ومخاطبة مخاوف الحياة اليومية. يمكن تتبع هذه الممارسات عبر التاريخ المصري، فتظهر بالنصوص المتعلقة بالسحر أو الشفاء أو الحماية، وبنصوص القرابين والنصوص الإهدائية، وبالخطابات الشخصية، وأيضاً بمواضع الأشياء المتعلقة بالطقوس المختلفة، وأخيراً الأشياء التي عثر عليها بالمواقع السكنية. فضل المصري القديم العديد من المعبودات للممارسات الدينية المنزلية: منها معبودات الحماية مثل بس وتاوسرت وحتحور، وهذا إلى جانب الأجداد المتوفيين، وعلية القوم والأفراد الملكيين المتوفيين، وأيضاً معبودات الدولة. كانت الممارسات الأساسية هي القرابين والتطهير وأيضاً القيام بمناسك الحماية والشفاء، وكانوا يستعينوا بصور مرتبطة بالحماية. وهذه الممارسات هي جزء من الإستمرارية من خلال ممارسة ومشاركة المعتقدات والأعمال والنقوش كتلك التى كانت داخل المعبد وطوائف العبادة الجنائزية، ولكن بسبب تشتت و قلة المصادر المتاحة لا يمكن معرفة مدى تداخل هذه المجلات على مر العصور المختلفة.

D omestic religious practices are documented mainly in texts and material culture; depictions of domestic cult "in action" are rare. The sources tend to be indirect and unevenly distributed across time, becoming more prominent from the New Kingdom onwards. As a result, their form and the intensity of personal involvement before the New Kingdom are important research themes (for example, Baines 1984; 2006; Kemp 1995).

Textual Sources

While direct written accounts of the kind we might term "insider documentaries" fall

largely beyond Egyptian written tradition, everyday texts can contain references to personal religious responses, often incidental to the main theme. In such texts a domestic environment is sometimes implied or appears suitable. Some New Kingdom letters, for example, contain claims of religious performance undertaken by the writer, such as invocation of and libation to divinities, prompting the question of how far they reflect real-life actions (Baines 2002).

"Calendars of Lucky and Unlucky Days" offered forewarning of whether the day ahead was to be auspicious or otherwise, and sometimes included advice on activities best undertaken or avoided (Drenkhahn 1972; Kemp and Rose 1990: 105 - 107). They could advise, for example, on when to undertake rituals such as "pacifying" (i.e., offering to) deceased ancestors. Most survive from the Ramesside Period (Leitz 1994), but they were in use from at least the Middle Kingdom (Collier and Quirke 2004: 26 - 27). It has been suggested that their role was similar to that of modern western horoscopes: they had little real impact on how people went about their daily lives, but affected how comfortable they felt (Drenkhahn 1972). Their longevity of use attests, nonetheless, that they filled a significant need. The Nineteenth Dynasty *Dream Book* owned by the scribe Kenherkhepeshef and his descendents at Deir el-Medina documents the related practice of dream interpretation in the private domain (Papyrus Chester Beatty III; McDowell 1999: 110 - 113; Szpakowska 2003a). It was probably derived from a Middle Kingdom original. Events seen in dreams, including interactions with divinities, were held to have good or bad consequences for the future, and advice could be provided on the use of spells to counteract inauspicious visions. Although, for the most part, direct consultation of such texts may have been limited to the literate elite, we should allow for the possibility of the oral transmission of their contents.

Magical and medical spells inform on the concerns that drove personal religion and on the structure of the attendant rituals. Many

surviving spells date directly to the Middle Kingdom, while the language of later spells often indicates an origin in this period, and sometimes possibly the Old Kingdom, pointing to considerable longevity of tradition. Although communities included specialist practitioners of magic (Gardiner 1917; Sauneron 1989: 198 - 206; von Känel 1984: 284 - 298) who may have attempted to restrict knowledge of its more complicated forms, an awareness of simple charms was probably widespread, most likely, again, in oral form. Most spells were intended to protect—against harmful animals, disease and illness, dangerous people (including the deceased), and against the evil eye. The protection of children is a prominent concern, as is the treatment of women's ailments, especially those affecting child-bearing. Such concerns are also expressed in the "oracular amuletic decrees" introduced in the Third Intermediate Period—protective decrees said to be pronouncements of deities (oracles) that were worn around the neck in an amuletic case (Edwards 1960).
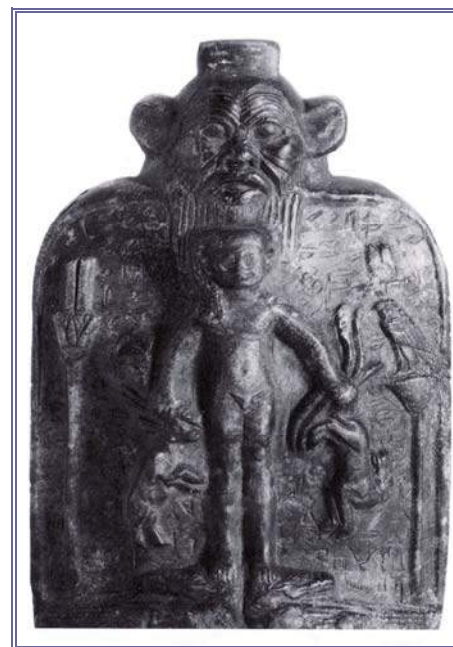

Figure 1. Small, steatite Horus *cippus*. Late to Ptolemaic Period. Inscribed scene, surmounted by Bes-image, shows Horus as a child, trampling and grasping dangerous animals; inscribed spells protect against their bites.

Magical and medical spells were often written on ostraca or papyri, but could also be inscribed on ritual items such as stelae. One group of stelae in use since the later New Kingdom and especially popular during the Late, Ptolemaic, and Roman Periods known as Horus *cippi*, bear images of the god Horus as a child, trampling and gripping snakes, scorpions, crocodiles, and similarly threatening animals (Sternberg el-Hotabi 1999; fig. 1). The *cippi* were often inscribed with spells designed to protect against, or heal the wounds inflicted by, these creatures. Water could be poured over the *cippi*, and thereby imbued with magical potency, before being drunk by the patient. Probably used in varied settings, some *cippi* are likely to have been set up in the home (Ritner 1989: 106 - 107).

Other sources include offering formulae and dedicatory texts inscribed on items such as stelae found among houses, or on domestic door- and niche-frames (e.g., Seidlmayer 1983), while inscriptions on votive stelae, in private tombs, and among student exercises— such as hymns—can reveal something of the broader context of domestic religion (e.g., Assmann 1999: 369 - 449; Baines 1991; McDowell 1999). We can also look further afield to transactional documents, especially from the New Kingdom workers' village of Deir el-Medina. These outline orders for private cult equipment, often funerary but including items such as amulets, statues, and portable shrines that may have been destined for the home (Janssen 1975: 246 - 247: §57 - 58; 310 - 311: §86 - 87). They help to position religion in its socio-economic context and to construct a fuller picture of the life histories of cult objects (Cooney 2006, 2007).

Archaeological Evidence

Archaeology is most informative for studying the actual performance of domestic cult, rather than its underlying belief system. Identifying the material evidence of religion is often difficult, in part because of its tendency to overlap, in appearance and sometimes function, with decorative items or objects that could have served as children's toys (Quirke 1998; Tooley 1991; also Renfrew 1994: 52). Moreover, much research potential has been lost to inadequate recording methods employed at settlement sites during the early days of Egyptian archaeology.

As regards the diachronic distribution of source materials, the New Kingdom is best represented archaeologically. The village of Deir el-Medina and the ruins of the city of Akhetaten at el-Amarna provide particularly rich and reasonably well-provenanced material corpora across large tracts of settlement remains. While exposures of pre-New Kingdom settlement are not insubstantial (see Kemp 2006: 194 - 244), material evidence for religion has been less forthcoming here, especially from Old Kingdom contexts. Such is the case at the well-known sites of Elephantine (Kaiser et al. 1999) and the workers' settlement at Giza (Lehner 2002; Lehner and Wetterstrom 2007), for example. This may itself be a clue as to the shape of the pre-New Kingdom religious landscape, although sites of such antiquity also tend to be more denuded. One important exception is the Middle Kingdom village at Lahun, which yielded a rich assemblage of domestic cult items and serves as a key site for the study of pre-New Kingdom domestic religion (Petrie 1890, 1891; Quirke 2005; Szpakowska 2008). Egyptian settlements in Nubia have also provided quite extensive material assemblages, especially from the Middle to New Kingdoms. For the immediate post-New Kingdom, archaeological source material is patchy, again because exposures of settlement remains are relatively limited. The source material is rich once more in the later phases of Egyptian history, especially the Roman Period. Here we need to allow for interplay between indigenous and foreign (primarily Hellenistic) beliefs and practices (Frankfurter 1998).

Similar issues can arise when dealing with sites in the Delta, with its long history of Mediterranean contact and immigration, especially of settlers from the Near East. The cults of Near Eastern deities, for example, tended to take root here (Redford 1992: 231 –
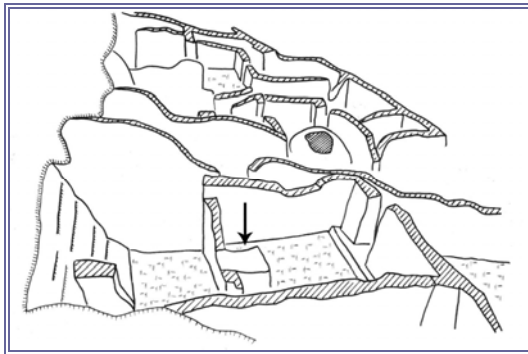
Figure 2. Houses at Lisht, dating to around the 13th Dynasty. House in foreground contains possible mud-brick altar (see arrow).

Figure 3. One of several forms of domestic altar at el-Amarna, here in the central room of house P46.24. Note traces of whitewash and worn surface of projecting steps or ramp, perhaps from the pouring of liquid libations.

233; Stadelmann 1967). The Delta also possessed particular indigenous cultural traditions, such as a greater intermixing of settlement and cemetery space than in the Nile Valley, and distinct local mythologies (Meeks 2006). It is difficult to know how these aspects were manifested in a domestic environment, as Delta settlements have not been explored as extensively as their Nile Valley counterparts, although a group of buried offering deposits and remnants of ritual meals reported from houses at Tell el-Dabaa potentially represent an amalgam of Egyptian and Near Eastern cult practices (Müller 1998, 2001).

Following this article, Table 1 presents a survey of dynastic sites at which "religious" material has been found among houses (often

a cult use is one of several possible functions for the items listed).

The material framework of Egyptian domestic religious practices consisted of fixed installations and portable objects that are partially recoverable through archaeological and other methods.

Focusing Attention: Cult Installations

Excavations of domestic structures have revealed a variety of facilities for performing cult in the house. Some householders chose to build a fixed emplacement, generally in the form of a raised altar or a wall niche (figs. 2 – 6). Most emplacements served as focal points of rituals, although others may have been repositories of protective images. Traces of white plaster on some altars may suggest a concern with purity. The earliest such installation yet identified is a probable shrine formed of a wall niche above a low bench in a Middle Kingdom context at the Egyptian fortress at Askut in Nubia (Smith, S.T. 2003: 128). Domestic altars are particularly well represented at Deir el-Medina and el-Amarna, usually in the form of stepped pedestals, with those at Deir el-Medina sometimes preserving painted or modeled representations of Bes and female figures. The Deir el-Medina altars fall within a long tradition of building shrines within houses, but remain unusual for the extent of their surviving decoration and their frequency at the site. Wall niches found in Roman Period houses at sites such as Karanis, some with elaborate modeled decoration, may represent the latest domestic shrines (Boak and Peterson 1931). A cult function is also possible for some tall wall-recesses with related texts and scenes of worship, examples of which are best preserved again at el-Amarna and Deir el-Medina (Meskell 1998: 231 - 232; 2002: 119; see also von Bissing 1926; fig. 7). Others bear red and yellow panels of paint and are similar to the false doors of funerary contexts designed to accommodate the movements of the *ka*. It is possible that they served similarly as transition zones and points of contact, perhaps with deceased ancestors, in the home (Meskell
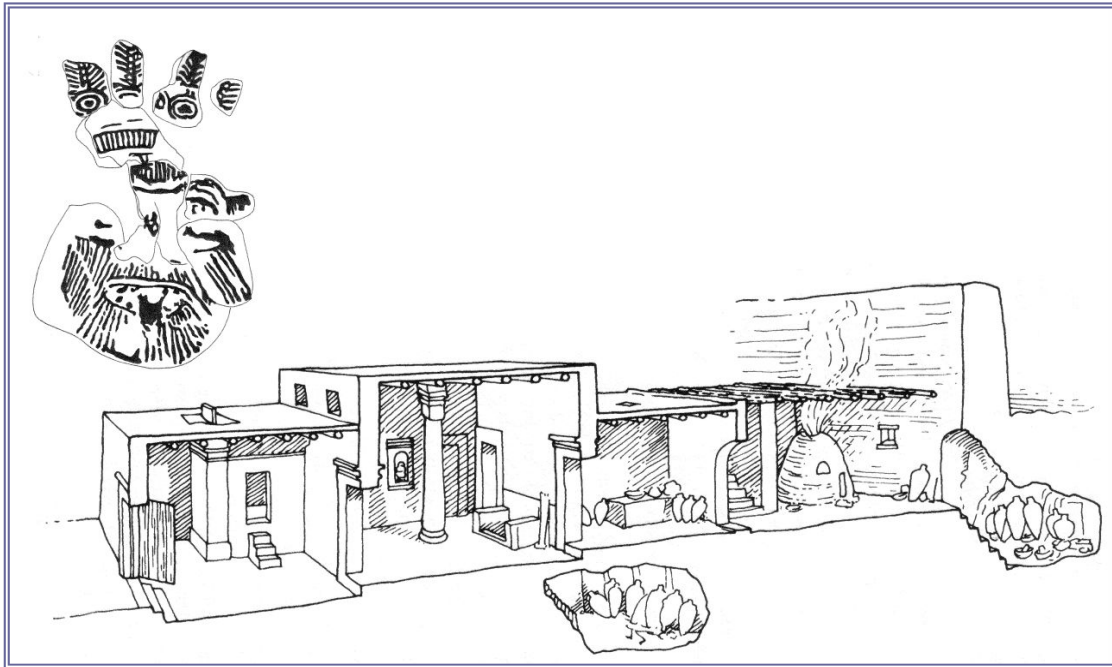
Figure 4. Cross-section of Deir el-Medina house showing elaborate mud-brick altar in front room. Upper left: fragments of modeled Bes-image that once decorated the altar in house SE.IX.
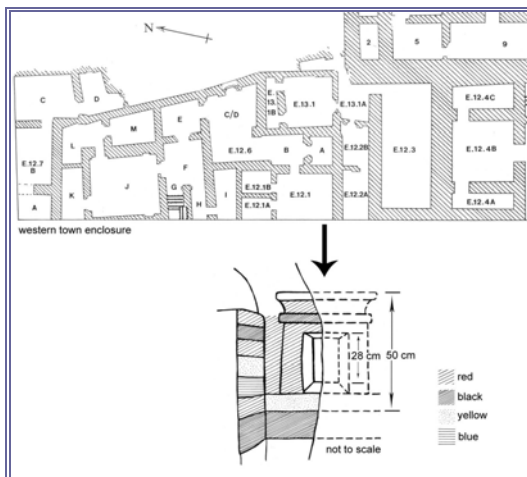

Figure 5. Sketch of partially preserved niche (bottom)—cut into interior face of town enclosure wall (top)—with painted decoration and cavetto cornice in New Kingdom house at Amara West. Its elaborate decoration suggests it may have been an altar rather than a storage space.

1998: 232 - 232; 2002: 119; von Bissing 1926). A group of stone slab-like emplacements, generally termed "lustration slabs" and best attested at el-Amarna, have been suggested as offering places, especially for liquids (Spence 2007). Some basins within the home were

possibly employed for the collection or storage of liquid libations, or perhaps water for personal purification (fig. 6).

We have much still to learn about the range, development, and significance of domestic cult installations, although S. T. Smith (2003: 129 - 131, 133, figs. 5.26, 5.29) offers one inroad here. He contrasts an altar comprising raised platform, stela niche, and cornice dating from around the beginning of the New Kingdom at Askut with a Middle Kingdom niche-shrine at the same site, and posits that the elaborateness of the later altar reflects a growing awareness of, and desire for, a more personal relationship with divinities at this site.

The vast majority of excavated houses have no (identifiable) inbuilt cult installations. In all likelihood these households relied on portable cult equipment. Free-standing offering tables, trays, stands, and basins are all attested in houses, especially from the Middle and New Kingdoms (fig. 8). Most survive in robust materials such as stone and pottery. At Lahun, Petrie excavated stone stands that still held cakes of dough, presumably offerings (David
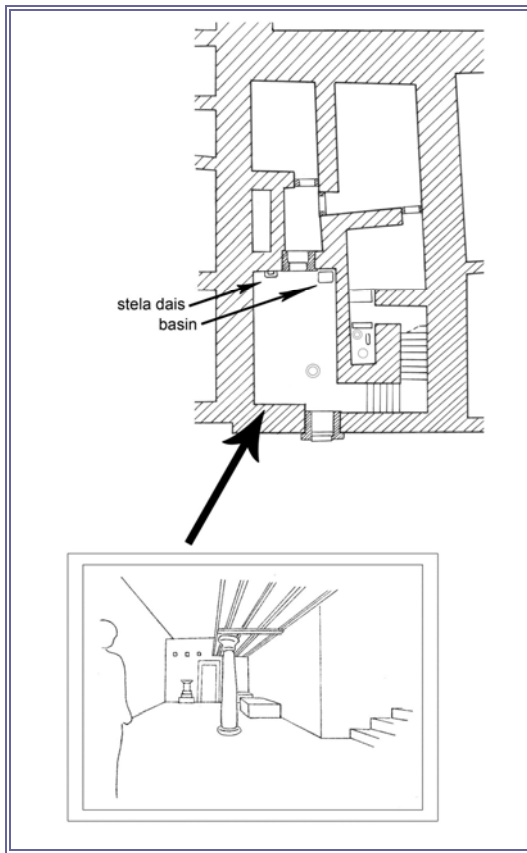
Figure 6. A Late Period priest's house beside the Temple of Karnak, shown in plan (top) and reconstructed cross-section (bottom). A stone basin and niche with stela (all excavated *in situ*) flank a doorway in the first room.
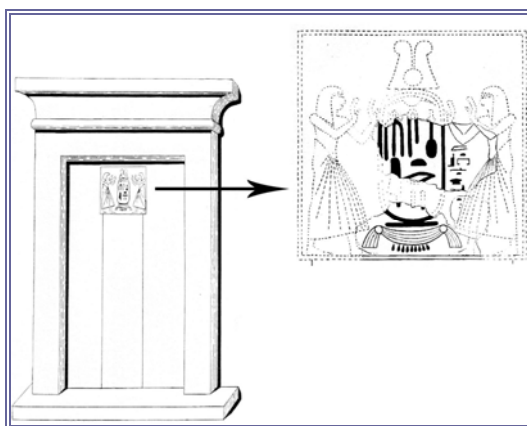

Figure 7. Niche in a house at Deir el-Medina with a partially preserved representation of the house owner worshipping the cartouche of Ahmose Nefertari.
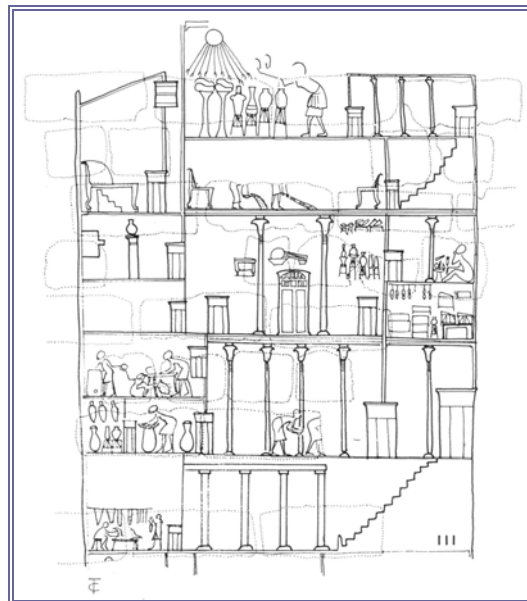

Figure 8. Representation of 18th Dynasty priest's house, Karnak, with attached shrine to the Aten. Inside shrine, offerings are piled on tall stands. Similar stands in pottery and stone have been excavated in domestic assemblages of various periods.

1986: 134; Petrie 1890: 25; 1891: 11). Cult equipment in perishable materials has in general not been preserved, but shrines in wood have occasionally been recovered, while mats and baskets, sometimes used to hold offerings at shrines (Pinch 1993: 321 - 322), could have served a similar function in the home.

Domestic Decoration

Domestic decoration occasionally engaged with religious themes. From at least the Eighteenth Dynasty, scenes and texts documenting devotion to divinities, including living and deceased royal figures, could be carved and painted on doorframes and lintels, and in and around wall recesses. Examples have been recorded from sites including Buhen (Smith, H.S. 1976: 94 - 156), Deir el-Medina (Bruyère 1939), Karnak (Anus and Sa'ad 1971), el-Amarna (Seidlmayer 1983), Hermopolis (Hermann et al. 1937), and Aniba (Steindorff 1937: 28). Scenes of the living king, especially those displayed on public parts
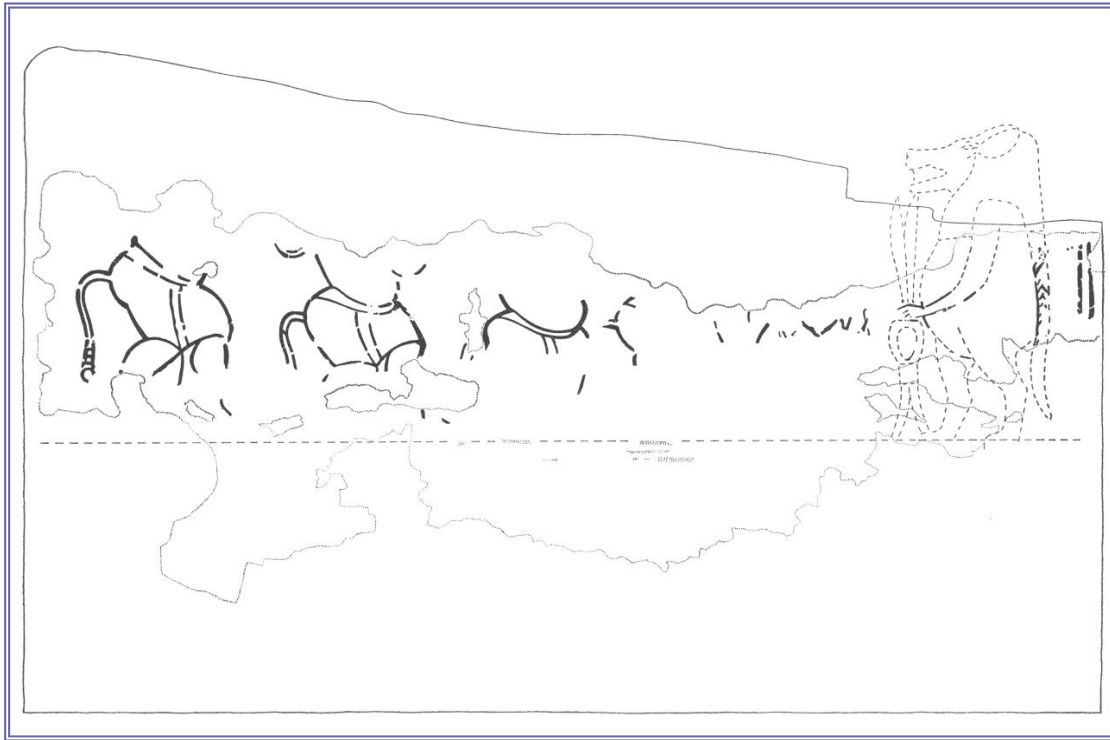
Figure 9. Wall painting in a house at the Amarna Workmen's Village, as found in 1921. It appears to show a group of dancing Bes-images before a figure of Taweret.

of the house and in dwellings in Egyptian occupied territory abroad, should probably be read foremost as displays of loyalty rather than religious devotion (Budka 2001). The workmen's villages at el-Amarna and Deir el-Medina exhibit a somewhat different tradition, featuring wall paintings of female figures and divinities such as Bes and Taweret, thus foregrounding fertility-related themes (Bruyère 1923; Kemp 1979; fig. 9). Painted representations may have been far more common than now represented archaeologically; part of a possible offering scene was recorded from a house wall at Lahun, for example. The main purpose of many such scenes was probably to provide a protective backdrop to household activities, although we should allow for the possibility that some scenes were themselves focal points of cult, such as the worship scenes in some wall-recesses (fig. 7).

Items Used in Ritual

A variety of smaller items that may have been used in household cult have been recovered from domestic and burial sites. Portable cult images, especially stelae and statuettes, were certainly used in the home, although just how central they were to domestic religion is unclear (fig. 10). They are best attested at Deir el-Medina, in a group of stelae and anthropoid-bust statuettes that seem to relate to ancestor cults (Demarée 1983; Friedman 1985; Keith fc.; Keith-Bennett 1981). We should probably allow that cult images were not always large or of high quality, so items such as figurative ostraca and pottery figurines may have served this purpose. Figurines are a particularly common component of domestic assemblages, seemingly of all periods (fig. 11). They could take the form of human beings (especially naked females); domestic divinities such as Bes and Taweret; animals; and, particularly in the Roman Period, deities worshiped in indigenous temples (such as Isis and Harpocrates). Apart from possible use as cult images, they were probably used often as talismans to enhance particular abilities or attributes, perhaps as elements of healing rituals, and certainly as protective charms. A
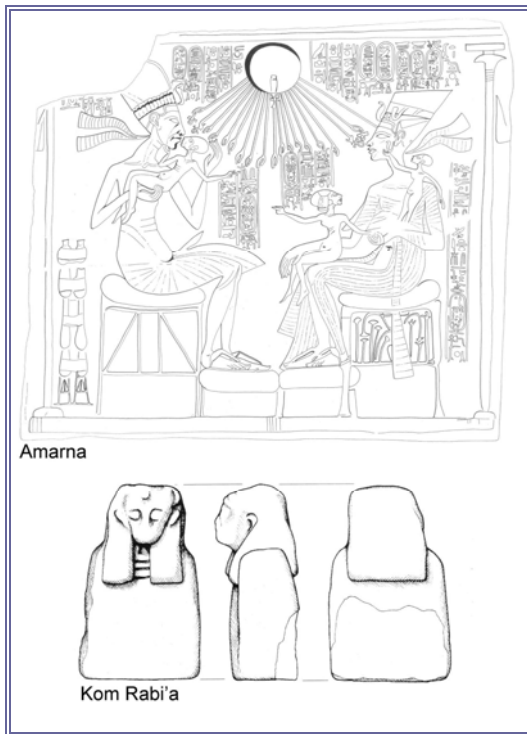
Figure 10. Top: One of the "royal family" stelae from el-Amarna, likely used in a domestic royal cult. Bottom: Small anthropoid bust from Kom Rabi'a, probably once set up in a New Kingdom house as part of an ancestor cult.
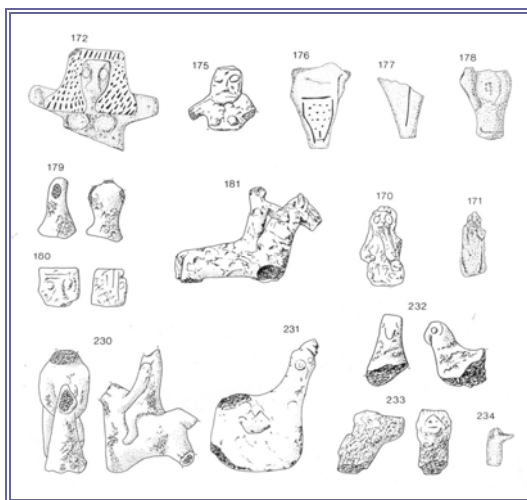

Figure 11. Figurines of animals, humans, and occasionally divinities are common to domestic assemblages of all periods. These are from an area of Third Intermediate Period housing at El-Ashmunein.

spell for protection during sleep, for example, calls for cobra figurines to be placed in the same room as the sleeper (O. Gardiner 363; Ritner 1990; Szpakowska 2003b). In Roman times, pottery figurines of gods may have been carried during festivals and processions before being returned to domestic shrines.

Two important groups of objects dating to the First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom are flat wands (fig. 12), usually made of hippopotamus ivory, and segmented rectangular or cylindrical rods, made of ebony or glazed steatite. Both items bear images of gods, animals, and mythical creatures. It is not clear how these objects were used, but the few inscribed "magic" wands indicate that this army of magical figures conferred protection especially upon women and children (Altenmüller 1965, 1983, 1986). Most have been recovered from tombs, but traces of use and repair suggest that they were also used during life. At Lahun, a group of related artifacts comprising a pair of ivory clappers and a statuette and mask, each with Bes-like features, were found in two adjacent houses and may have been used in birth magic, perhaps belonging to a specialized practitioner (Quirke 2005: 81 - 84). Similar protective imagery occasionally appears on household items such as headrests and cosmetic vessels during the New Kingdom. Again, these could be taken to or made for the grave. The occurrence of these items in burial assemblages suggests that the concerns of the living and the dead were similar (for which see also Roth and Roehrig 2002).

Small amulets, usually worn on the body, were also an important accompaniment to domestic religious practice. For the pre-New Kingdom they are best recorded from burials, but we can assume that their use sometimes extended to life; some pieces show signs of wear (Dubiel 2004). Motifs included animals, body parts, hieroglyphic symbols, and domestic divinities such as Taweret (Andrews 1994). Some of the motifs found on scarabs produced from the First Intermediate Period onwards were probably amuletic. Although such objects often now lack a secure
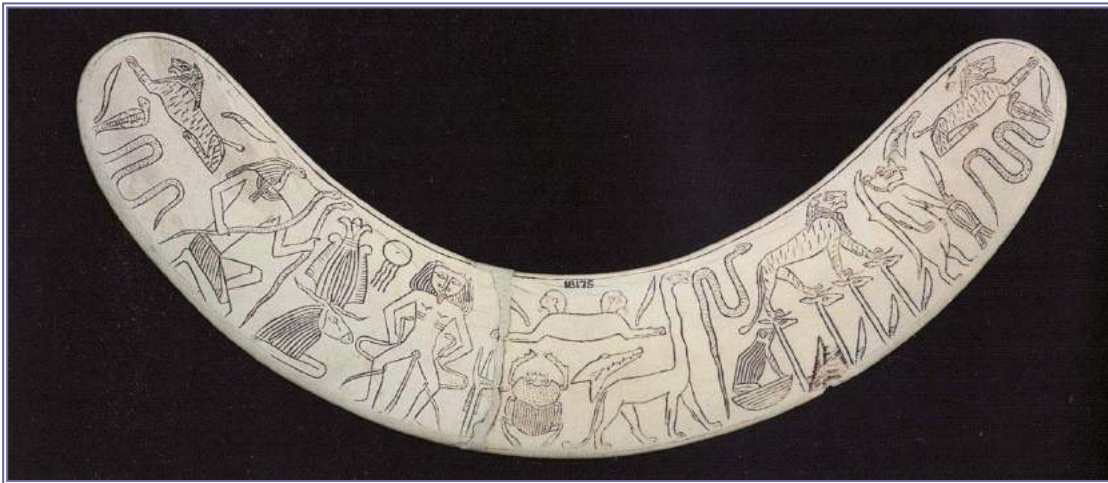
Figure 12. Middle Kingdom "magic wand," decorated with magical creatures and protective divinities. The reverse bears a protective formula for a lady called Seneb. The wear to the wand edge, and its (repaired) break, may be the result of ritual use.

provenance, we should leave open the possibility of their use within the home (Cooney and Tyrrell 2005: Part 1; Hornung and Staehelin 1976). The use of amuletic jewelry seems to have proliferated around the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty, coinciding with an increase in the production of molded faience jewelry. Deities also feature more often on jewelry from the New Kingdom onwards. Excavations at el-Amarna, for example, have revealed faience jewelry to be a prominent component of the artifact assemblage, with motifs including Bes and Taweret; standing figures of gods in anthropomorphic form, usually too small to identify further; animals such as crocodiles and scorpions; anthropoid busts that probably relate to ancestor worship; and hieroglyphic symbols. By far the most common jewelry type at el-Amarna consists of finger rings in blue faience with bezels in the shape of a *wedjat*-eye. These were probably all-purpose protective amulets. Finds of molds among houses here suggest that such amulets were being produced in a household context.

Ritual Genres and their Performance

Combining texts and archaeological material, we can construct a picture of the ritual practices undertaken in domestic settings.

These drew upon the same set of ritual actions used in temple and mortuary contexts: presenting offerings of food, incense, liquids, and small objects; conducting rites of purification by means of fumigation and libation; erecting protective images; manipulating metaphysical forces through verbal and physical means; and perhaps sharing ritual meals. In operating largely according to a problem-solving framework, a domestic ritual practice must often have taken place in response to immediate needs, so lending it a sense of irregularity in its performance that contrasted with the overall regular patterning of temple cult, in particular (cf. Baines 1991: 150). Omen texts such as the above-mentioned Calendars of Lucky and Unlucky Days, however, are evidence that there were concurrently measures to try to counteract the randomness with which misfortune could strike, and we need not assume that religious responses in the home were entirely random. So too, the erection of domestic cult images may have brought an obligation to provide the images with daily offerings, as in temple cult. Elucidating patterns of performance, and the related issue of the place of religion in everyday routines, are aspects that remain to be teased out of the available sources.

Addressing Everyday Concerns and Threats

Domestic religious practices were concerned largely with the uncertainty and threat that formed the backdrop to everyday life, although for some the domestic environment was probably also a context for personal experiences of deities.

Sources of threat were varied: dangerous animals, the disgruntled dead, evil spirits, and human adversaries. The potential outcomes were equally wide-ranging: misfortune, injury to person or property, illness, and death. Protection against such outcomes could be sought both at the level of the individual and of the house or household. Handbooks document the performance of magic rites to protect the house at the end or beginning of the year (Jankuhn 1972). Such acts included knotting threads and linen (written) amulets, drawing protective images on the floor, and applying ointments to the window frames. A spell against the threats of the five final days of the year preserved in a Middle Kingdom manuscript required the house owner to make a tour of his home carrying a "club of *des*-wood," presumably to magically seal the house and club demons to death (Papyrus Edwin Smith [50] vs. 18, 11 - 16; translation by Borghouts 1978: 15, no. 15). Purifying acts such as the burning of incense may have served a similar purpose, while excavations in a Late Period house at Tell el-Muqdam yielded the extraordinary find of several figurines sealed into the walls (Redmount 1997; Redmount and Friedman 1994)—perhaps foundation deposits related to the protection of the house and its occupants.

The protection of women and children was a particular priority, which must be understood as a more general concern for fertility, extending to all aspects of conception, childbirth, and child-rearing. Fertility concerns found particularly vivid expression in material culture. Figurines of naked women are ubiquitous at New Kingdom settlement sites, where they seem to have been used as charms to stimulate fertility and might also have had use in healing rites (Waraksa 2009). Female sexuality is expressed potently in an incomplete limestone statuette of a young female wearing only jewelry, from Lahun. Originally standing at least 400 mm high, it was perhaps a household talisman (Bourriau 1988: 23 - 24, cat. 116; a domestic origin for the piece cannot be confirmed; Petrie 1891: 11). A monkey or baboon statuette of similar scale with prominent phallus, excavated among Third Intermediate Period housing at el-Ashmunein (Spencer, A.J. 1993: 33, pls. 6a, 30), might have been associated with fertility practices that highlighted male sexual performance, drawing also upon the local cult of the baboon deity Thoth. In addition to such concerns, domestic religion could be directed towards more general household well-being: having enough (or, if possible, an excess of) material provisions and health.

Attendant Divinities: Domestic

There arose, from at least the Middle Kingdom, a set of attendant divinities who specialized in the concerns of everyday life: Bes, Taweret, Hathor in her role especially as fertility goddess, and a range of minor protective spirits, as found on the "magic" wands and rods. Though sometimes regarded as peripheral and "popular," these deities and demons were worshiped and supplicated by individuals of all social classes over most periods of Egyptian history. The Bes images and Taweret figures that appear within New Kingdom palace decoration probably reflect the participation of royalty (Hayes 1959: 338; Smith, W.S. 1998: 164 - 167; Winlock 1912: 186). The spread of material relating to domestic deities across houses of varying sizes at el-Amarna supports its use across a broad range of socio-economic spectra (Stevens 2006: 308 - 311, table III.4.1).

Attendant Divinities: Local and State

Local divinities were also worshiped in and around the house. Deir el-Medina, in particular, offers abundant evidence of this. The cobra goddess Meretseger was especially popular here, worshiped not only in houses but also in nearby chapels, some on and

around the mountain overlooking the Valley of the Kings (Bruyère 1930). Also attested in Deir el-Medina households are Hathor, Ptah, Amun, and Anukis, and local ancestors. In the Ramesside Period, personal experiences of deities, in addition to their supplication in problem-solving, seem to have found prominent expression here in household settings. It is tempting to read the occasional appearance of divinities such as Amun and Ptah within the slightly earlier New Kingdom assemblage at el-Amarna (Stevens 2006), and the apparent absence of similar figures among Middle Kingdom settlement material, as stages in the gradual growth of personal relationships with state and local deities (the early material certainly requires clarification, although consider Smith, S.T. 2003: 133). It may be, of course, that in these periods expressions of such relationships were embedded in words and actions that only found articulation—material or written—later in history.

Ancestor Worship and Infant Burials

Private religious practices could also focus on royal or non-royal ancestors who after death were sometimes elevated to the status of local or national "saints." At Deir el-Medina, Amenhotep I and Ahmose-Nefertari were favored, venerated in local shrines, petitioned for oracles, and celebrated during festivals. Dedicatory formulae to these deities also appear on the frames of wall recesses within houses (Bruyère 1939; fig. 7). Local ancestor worship is also attested from much earlier periods. In the Twelfth Dynasty, for example, a small shrine was built at Elephantine to support the cult of the Sixth Dynasty official Heqaib; patrons of the cult included local elite and later generations of kings (Franke 1994; Habachi 1985; Kaiser et al. 1999). Other deified officials included Imhotep of the Third Dynasty, and the Eighteenth Dynasty official Amenhotep Son of Hapu, whose cults grew to particular prominence in the Late, Ptolemaic, and Roman Periods (Wildung 1977). It is unclear how far such cults spread into the domestic realm. Heqaib's shrine at Elephantine, however, shows how small

settlement-shrines could be closely integrated with neighboring houses (see Kemp 2006: fig. 70), so that the religious concerns and practices within the home may often have crossed over into neighborhood shrines, and vice versa.

Ancestor worship was not restricted to deceased public figures. During at least the New Kingdom, if not earlier, deceased private individuals were also venerated in the home (Demarée 1983; Friedman 1985, 1994; Keith fc.; Keith-Bennett 1981; and see Smith, S.T. 2003: 127 - 135 for Middle Kingdom material). Their presence can be placed within a problem-solving framework, but with the added aspects that the living wished to remember them and maintain their mortuary cult. The largest collection of evidence for private ancestor cults comes from Deir el-Medina, mainly in the form of anthropoid-bust statues (cf. fig. 10, bottom), and stelae showing a deceased individual usually seated or kneeling before a table of offerings, often clutching a lotus flower. The stelae are often inscribed with offering formulae for the *kꜣ* (*ka*) of the *ꜣḫ jqr n Rꜥ*: the "life force" of the "excellent, or able, spirit of Ra"—that is, the deceased at one with the gods of the afterlife and in possession of the power to intervene in the affairs of the living. The bust statues seem to have been equated with the *ꜣḫ jqr* of the stelae, while *ꜣḫ jqr n Rꜥ*-formulae also appear on offering tables and basins. These items all seem to have been complementary components of a cult within the home that saw the presentation of food offerings and libations; ritual meals were possibly also shared with these objects. The cult extended to tombs, and probably shrines, where some bust statues may have been dedicated and set up to receive offerings. Similar materials have been found at sites throughout Egypt and Egyptian-occupied territory in Nubia. These must also relate to ancestor worship, but it remains uncertain how closely they corresponded in use and meaning to the materials from Deir el-Medina.

Another practice that brought the deceased into the domestic realm was the interment of

infants and fetuses within settlements. It has been suggested that the practice, best known from Lahun (Petrie 1890: 12; Szpakowska 2008: 33 - 35), reflects a foreign origin (David 1986: 137 - 138; 1991: 37). Such burials are, however, recorded from other sites in Egypt, including Abydos and South Abydos (Adams 1998; Baines and Lacovara 2002: 14; Wegner 2001: 303), Deir el-Medina (Bruyère 1939: 271; Meskell 1999: 171), and el-Amarna (Stevens 2006: 209 - 210), and the practice is probably an indigenous one. Sometimes the burials include objects, suggesting that some funerary rites were carried out and that the infants were believed to have an existence in the afterlife. Did the families seek to keep them close, protecting and sustaining them in their journey through the underworld? Or did the liminal status of the infants offer to the living a channel of communication with the divine world (Szpakowska 2008: 34)? Much more work is needed on the subject to elucidate its meaning and origins within Egypt.

El-Amarna and the Worship of the Living King

Towards the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty at el-Amarna, images of the contemporary royal family featured prominently upon domestic cult items. They attest to a trend that can be traced from around the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty: the increasing promotion of the divine aspect of the living king. While there may have been a domestic strand to this earlier than the reign of Akhenaten (consider Kemp 1978: 130 - 131, note 41; Radwan 1998: 334, note 45), it certainly peaked at el-Amarna. This may suggest a deliberate attempt on behalf of Akhenaten to shape domestic worship—the main source of royal cult images at el-Amarna was workshops connected to the central administration (Arnold, F. 1996: 41 - 83)—and for a short time official and personal agendas probably mixed in the cult of living royalty. But the cult of the living king was transposed onto an already diverse, and apparently adequate, domestic religious landscape, and in the end it did not take. Domestic religious practices may have absorbed aspects of official religion, but at no period do they seem to have been harnessed by the state.

Table 1. A survey of dynastic sites yielding archaeological evidence for domestic religion. The Roman Period village of Karanis is included as just one example from the later phases of ancient Egyptian history.

Site	Date	Main published finds
Abydos	Early Dynastic Period – Old Kingdom	Among layers of waterlogged and denuded houses and settlement debris, Petrie excavated one of the earliest collections of domestic "cult" items from the Dynastic Period. Some of these items recall objects from temple votive deposits of a similar date. Finds include: • pottery figurines of quadrupeds and possibly human figures • baboon figurines • a cylinder seal with offering inscription • pottery hearths with snake-image appliqués • jewelry items such as bull's-head pendants

- model flint implements and weapons
- possibly pieces of chipped flint in the shape of animals such as crocodiles (although they are not specified to be from settlement contexts)

	First Intermediate Period	More recent excavations yielded part of a limestone offering table and infant burials within houses of First Intermediate Period date.
		Publications: Excavation reports (Early Dynastic Period – Old Kingdom): Petrie (1902)
		Excavation reports (First Intermediate Period): Adams (1998)
Lahun	Middle Kingdom (12th Dynasty)	The site offers the richest known Middle Kingdom assemblage of "everyday" religious material, although the provenance of the material is poorly recorded. Key finds from probable domestic contexts include:

- offering stands, lamps or incense burners (some carved as dwarfs)
- figurines of divinities such as a leonine-hippopotamus goddess, of females, animals, and a lion-masked figure
- part of a limestone statuette of a naked girl, of uncertain provenance
- offerings trays
- ivory clappers and a magic rod
- a plastered linen face of a Bes- or Beset-image, seemingly a mask

Some houses also bore painted wall-decoration; one showed part of a possible offering scene.

Publications:
Excavation reports: Petrie (1890, 1891)

Secondary publications: Bourriau (1988); David (1991); Quirke (1998, 2005); Szpakowska (2008); also Arnold (1989) and O'Connor (1997) for the possibility that Lahun houses contained shrines.

Qasr el-Sagha	Middle Kingdom	A small collection of finds has been excavated in this quarry-workers' settlement in the Fayum—a model ax, a pair of bone clappers, and stela fragments—although the excavator suggested that the latter were intrusive from the nearby cemetery.

Publications:
Excavation reports: Śliwa (1992)

Buhen	Middle Kingdom – New Kingdom	Excavations in the fortress at this Nubian site yielded a range of potential cult objects, many from living quarters and in contexts that seem to span the Middle Kingdom to New Kingdom. Much contextual background of the finds is lost. Some are suggested in the excavation report to have been re-deposited from cemetery contexts, but this should not be taken for granted (cf. Smith, S.T. 1995: 66). Finds from the fortress included: • model boats and animals (pottery and mud) • many pottery female figurines • a small number of stone offering tables • pottery "soul houses" and offering trays • anthropoid and baboon statuettes • a vessel with probable crocodile appliqué • a small collection of amuletic jewelry Publications: Excavation reports: Emery et al. (1979)

Lisht	Late Middle Kingdom – early Second Intermediate Period	A group of "middle-class" houses built around the ruins of the pyramid of Amenemhat I yielded: • an "ancestor" stela • animal figures and figurines and/or figure-vessels of domestic divinities (Taweret and Bes) and possibly dwarfs Several of these houses may have had simple mud-brick altars (fig. 2). One house featured an altar with part of a limestone stela set upon it (Mace 1921: 12).
	New Kingdom – Third Intermediate Period	From later settlement contexts at the same site originated a group of male and female anthropomorphic figurines, and figurines of oxen, crocodiles, and hippopotamuses. Publications: Excavation reports: Mace (1921) Secondary publications: Arnold (1996); Hayes (1959)

Tell el-Dabaa	Middle Kingdom – Second Intermediate Period	Mud-brick altars and niche shrines occur in houses and courtyards here, the site of the Hyksos capital during the Second Intermediate Period. Excavations have also revealed intentionally buried deposits of miniature vessels and the remnants of cult meals, sometimes within house enclosures. They may represent a blending of Egyptian and Near Eastern cult practices.
		Publications: Excavation reports: Bietak (1991)
		Secondary publications: Müller (1998); also Paice et al. (1996) for similar deposits from a Hyksos settlement at Tell el-Maskhuta.
Askut	Middle Kingdom – mid-18th Dynasty	The fortress at this site in Nubia presents a relatively well-documented and rich corpus of objects and architectural emplacements: • pottery offering-platters and stands/tables of the Middle Kingdom; incense burners from Middle Kingdom and later • several stelae, some probably connected with ancestor cults • model fruit, vessels, and implements • anthropomorphic and animal figurines, in both Egyptian and Nubian style A house in the Middle Kingdom barracks preserved a probable niche shrine, while an altar was uncovered in an area of late 17th to early 18th Dynasty settlement.
		Publications: Excavation reports: Badawy (1964, 1965)
		Secondary publications: S. T. Smith (1993, 1995, 2003)
South Abydos	Middle Kingdom (late 12th Dynasty) – New Kingdom	Finds reported from the town of *Wah-sut,* built in connection with the mortuary complex of Senusret III, include infant burials within housing complexes and a magical birthing brick of Middle Kingdom date. Early twentieth-century excavations yielded finds that seem to represent New Kingdom occupation of *Wah-sut*, or of the nearby village serving the mortuary complex of Ahmose. These finds included: • a statuette of the goddess Taweret with a woman • a bovine figure-vessel

- a faience vessel with Hathor image (?)
- monkey figurines

Publications:
Excavation reports: Ayrton et al. (1904); Wegner (1998, 2001)

Secondary publications: Wegner (2002)

Deir el-Ballas	Late Second Intermediate Period – early 18th Dynasty	The excavation of two houses yielded a small collection of pottery female figurines and a mud animal figure. Publications: Excavation reports: Lacovara (1990)
Sesebi	New Kingdom (18th – 19th Dynasties)	Finds from this Egyptian settlement in Nubia include: • an anthropoid-bust statue • animal figurines, including monkeys, bovines, and a possible dog; and a probable figurine of the protective "genius" Ptaikos • figurative ostraca • pottery vessels decorated with Hathor heads Publications: Excavation reports: Blackman (1937); Fairman (1938) Secondary publications: Peterson (1967); Keith-Bennett (1981: 60 - 61); Keith (fc.); and on the site generally, see Morkot (1988).
El-Amarna	New Kingdom (predominantly late 18th Dynasty)	With around 1000 excavated houses, the largest corpus of material from any site is presented here. The material helps elucidate how the city's residents reacted to the attempts by its founder, Akhenaten, to promote the worship of a single, solar god, the Aten. Objects include: • many pottery and stone figurines, especially of women and cobras • vessels decorated with Hathor-images, cobra figures, and Bes-images • an occasional infant burial • a range of amuletic jewelry • portable stone offering tables and pottery offering stands • vessels containing incense • stelae and statues, depicting both the royal family and Aten,

as well as "traditional" divinities

- model (mud) balls with impressions (including Tutankhamun's throne name and *wedjat* eyes), possibly used in magical rites

Within some houses appear altars (fig. 3) and possible cult installations such as niches and "lustration slabs." Shrines for the royal family and the Aten were built in the gardens of some larger houses, and painted wall scenes and decorated doorframes occasionally express religious themes.

Publications:
Excavation reports: Peet and Woolley (1923); Frankfort and Pendlebury (1933); Pendlebury (1951); Borchardt and Ricke (1980); and Kemp and Stevens (fc.).

There are many studies of private religion at Amarna, but those dealing with material evidence include: Borchardt (1923); Aldred (1973); Kemp (1979; 1995: 30 - 32); Hari (1984); Ikram (1989); Krauss (1991); Arnold (1996: 96 - 108); Lepper (1998); Stevens (2006); and Spence (2007).

Amara West	Later New Kingdom (19th and 20th Dynasties)	Layers of occupation buildup at this Egyptian settlement in Nubia yielded: • figurines of humans (male and female) and animals • a model (mud) ball with impressions • various amulets One house contained a possible niche shrine. Publications: Excavation reports: P. Spencer (1997)
Deir el-Medina	New Kingdom	The workers' village presents an extensive corpus of material, most of which probably dates to the Ramesside Period. The archaeological evidence is enhanced by a rich body of inscriptional data. Objects excavated within the village, or in nearby rubbish deposits, include: • anthropoid busts and *ꜣḥ jqr n Rꜥ*-stelae • offering tables • Bes-image and Taweret figurines • pottery figurines of animals and humans, especially females • infant burials within houses • Bes- and Hathor-image vessels • animal and anthropoid statuettes

- amuletic jewelry

Domestic altars and niche shrines appear in most houses, and wall reliefs showing domestic divinities and fertility-related themes are prominent (fig. 4).

Publications:
Excavation reports: Bruyère (1930, 1939)

There is an extensive bibliography on private religion at Deir el-Medina. A selection is: Demarée (1983); Valbelle (1985); Sadek (1987); Friedman (1985, 1994); Meskell (1998, 1999, 2002).

Medinet Habu	New Kingdom (late 18th Dynasty)	A group of houses of late 18th Dynasty date near the Temple of Medinet Habu contained small podiums that are probably altars. The houses may be part of the city established by Amenhotep III at Malkata.
	Third Intermediate Period	Similar stepped pedestals, perhaps altars, appear in houses of the Third Intermediate Period. These also yielded pottery model beds with images of household and fertility-related divinities.

Publications:
Excavation reports (New Kingdom): Hölscher (1939)

Excavation reports (Third Intermediate Period): Hölscher (1954)

Secondary publications: Stadelmann (1985)

Kom Medinet Ghurab	New Kingdom (c. mid-18th – 20th Dynasties)	A rich artifact assemblage was excavated, but very little material from the settlement proper is closely provenanced. Some came from partially burnt deposits in pits beneath houses, the origin of which is much debated. The assemblage includes:

- amuletic jewelry
- anthropomorphic and animal figurines
- vessels decorated with images of divinities and animals
- possible royal statuettes and stelae
- implements such as clappers and wands

Publications:
Excavation reports: Petrie (1891)

Secondary publications: Thomas (1981); Habachi (1965); and on the site

generally, and the burnt deposits, see Kemp (1978); Bell (1991); and Politi (2001).

Memphis (Kom Rabia)	New Kingdom (mid-18th Dynasty) – Third Intermediate Period	A small exposure of settlement remains has yielded a collection of objects, excavated across multiple occupation strata: • figurines of animals, especially cobras, and of female and male humans • figurative plaques • an anthropoid-bust statuette (a surface find) • stelae, including one possible *ꜣḫ jqr n Rꜥ*-stela • faience jewelry with amuletic designs • Bes-image pottery vessels One house contains a tentatively identified domestic shrine. Publications: Excavation reports: Giddy (1999); Jeffreys (2006) Secondary publications: Bourriau (1993)
El-Ashmunein	Third Intermediate Period (up to the beginning of 26th Dynasty)	Occupation debris and foundation fill of stratified domestic structures yielded: • figurines of animals, male and female humans, and divinities • a larger monkey or baboon statuette • pottery situlae and Bes-image vessels • assorted amuletic jewelry Publications: Excavation reports: Roeder (1959); A. J. Spencer (1993)
Luxor	Late Period	A group of priests' houses at the Temple of Karnak contained niche shrines, and stelae and fragments of door lintels with offering scenes. Stone basins may also have been connected with domestic cult (fig. 6). Publications: Excavation reports: Anus and Sa'ad (1971)

Tell el-Muqdam	Late Period (late fifth century)	Areas of Late Period settlement yielded rich deposits, especially of figurines. Finds include: • terracotta figurines of male phallic figures, animals including snakes, Bes-images, horse and rider figures, and a female possibly giving birth • a bronze statuette of Isis suckling Horus • faience amulets Several figurines had been built into the lower parts of walls, seemingly as domestic foundation deposits. Many animal remains were also found within infill, perhaps remnants of offering rituals. Publications: Excavation reports: Redmount (1997); Redmount and Friedman (1994)
Karanis	Third century CE	This well-preserved settlement yielded objects including terracotta figurines, and some houses contained painted images of divinities and probable cult niches. Publications: Excavation reports: Boak and Peterson (1931); Husselman (1979) Secondary publications: Bell (1948); Allen (1985); Frankfurter (1998)

Bibliographic Notes

The character of private religion in ancient Egypt is discussed in several works, including Baines (1987, 1991, 2002), Kemp (1995), and Assmann (1995, 2001; 2002: 229 - 246); and for private religion in Roman Period Egypt see Frankfurter (1998). The more specific subject of domestic religion is not addressed from a broad temporal or structural perspective in any single study. Key collections of magic spells, especially those suited to the domestic environment, include Edwards (1960), Borghouts (1971, 1978), Fischer-Elfert (1996, 1999), Bohleke (1997), Raven (1997), Leitz (1999), Yamazaki (2003), and Collier and Quirke (2004). For the idea that religious knowledge was restricted at an official level, see among others Baines (1990) and Spalinger (1998). The role of magic and magical objects is addressed by Ritner (1993), Étienne (2000), Szpakowska (2003a, 2006), and Pinch (2006). For a "magician's kit" excavated in a late Middle Kingdom tomb at the Ramesseum see Quibell (1898: 3 - 4, pl. 3) and Bourriau (1988: 110 - 127). Case studies of domestic religion at individual sites include Friedman (1994) and Meskell (1998; 2002: 110 - 121) on Deir el-Medina, S. T. Smith (2003: 127 - 135) on Askut, and Stevens (2006) on Amarna. Smith and Meskell respectively offer readings of cult material according to themes of ethnicity and social and gender relations. Popular religion at Deir el-Medina is more generally covered by Valbelle (1985) and Sadek (1987); and see the sample of texts from this site published by McDowell (1999:

91 - 126). For key publications of material assemblages from settlement sites, see Table 1 above. Pinch's (1993) work on private votive offerings to Hathor is of broader relevance to the material components of domestic cult, as is Waraksa's (2009) study of female figurines from the Mut Temple complex. Further studies of cult objects include Szpakowska (2003b) on cobra figurines; Steindorff (1946) and Altenmüller (1983, 1986, 2004) on magic wands; and for figurative ostraca generally see Brunner-Traut (1956) and Page (1983). Dunand (1990) is one of several catalogs of Roman Period terracotta figurines, while Allen (1985) offers a study of a rare provenanced assemblage, from Karanis. Studies of architectural emplacements include Borchardt (1923) on altars and Spence (2007) on "lustration slabs," in both cases from el-Amarna. Gahlin (2007) also presents an accessible overview of the material components of private religion. Birthing and fertility as a theme of domestic religion is addressed by Pinch (1983; 1993: 198 - 234) and Robins (1994-, 1996). Meskell (1999: 99 - 102; 2002: 113 - 114) reviews a long-standing debate over whether the Deir el-Medina "altars" served as (birthing) beds or ritual structures. On domestic ancestor worship, and its material components, see Keith-Bennett (1981), Keith (fc.), Demarée (1983), Friedman (1985, 1994), Schulman (1986), Lines (2001), and Harrington (2003). See also Lloyd (1989) for the broader context of ancestor worship. For houses and the domestic environment generally, see Bietak's edited work (1996) and Koltsida (2007).

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Figure 1.   Small, steatite Horus *cippus*. Late to Ptolemaic Period. Inscribed scene, surmounted by Bes-image, shows Horus as a child, trampling and grasping dangerous animals; inscribed spells

protect against their bites. (BM EA 60959; Pinch 2006: 40, pl. 19. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.)

Figure 2. Houses at Lisht, dating to around the 13th Dynasty. House in foreground contains possible mud-brick altar (see arrow). (Drawn by the author after Mace 1921: 5, fig. 2.)

Figure 3. One of several forms of domestic altar at el-Amarna, here in the central room of house P46.24. Note traces of whitewash and worn surface of projecting steps or ramp, perhaps from the pouring of liquid libations. (Egypt Exploration Society Amarna Archive Negative 23/1. Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society.)

Figure 4. Cross-section of Deir el-Medina house showing elaborate mud-brick altar in front room. Upper left: fragments of modeled Bes-image that once decorated the altar in house SE.IX. (Bes-image redrawn by author after Bruyère 1939: 276, fig. 148, @IFAO; cross-section from McDowell 1999: 10, fig. 3; reproduced courtesy of Andrea McDowell.)

Figure 5. Sketch of partially preserved niche (bottom)—cut into interior face of town enclosure wall (top)—with painted decoration and cavetto cornice in New Kingdom house at Amara West. Its elaborate decoration suggests it may have been an altar rather than a storage space. (Spencer, P. 1997: 175, pl. 111b. Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society.)

Figure 6. A Late Period priest's house beside the Temple of Karnak, shown in plan (top) and reconstructed cross-section (bottom). A stone basin and niche with stela (all excavated *in situ*) flank a doorway in the first room. (Redrawn by the author after Anus and Sa'ad 1971: figs. 5 and 6.)

Figure 7. Niche in a house at Deir el-Medina with a partially preserved representation of the house owner worshipping the cartouche of Ahmose Nefertari. (Bruyère 1939: 326 - 327, figs. 196 and 197, @IFAO.)

Figure 8. Representation of 18th Dynasty priest's house, Karnak, with attached shrine to the Aten. Inside shrine, offerings are piled on tall stands. Similar stands in pottery and stone have been excavated in domestic assemblages of various periods. (Traunecker 1988: 85, fig. 1. Courtesy of Claude Traunecker.)

Figure 9. Wall painting in a house at the Amarna Workmen's Village, as found in 1921. It appears to show a group of dancing Bes-images before a figure of Taweret. (Kemp 1979: fig. 1. Courtesy of Barry Kemp and the Egypt Exploration Society.)

Figure 10. Top: One of the "royal family" stelae from el-Amarna, likely used in a domestic royal cult. Bottom: Small anthropoid bust from Kom Rabi'a, probably once set up in a New Kingdom house as part of an ancestor cult. (Anthropoid bust: Giddy 1999: 48 - 49, pl. 14.47; courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society; "royal family" stela: Berlin 14145, after Kemp 2006: 269, fig. 98; courtesy of Barry Kemp.)

Figure 11. Figurines of animals, humans, and occasionally divinities are common to domestic assemblages of all periods. These are from an area of Third Intermediate Period housing at El-Ashmunein. (Spencer, A.J. 1993: pls. 37, 39. Courtesy of A. Jeffrey Spencer and the Trustees of the British Museum.)

Figure 12. Middle Kingdom "magic wand," decorated with magical creatures and protective divinities. The reverse bears a protective formula for a lady called Seneb. The wear to the wand edge, and its (repaired) break, may be the result of ritual use. (BM EA 18175; Pinch 2006: 145, fig. 77. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.)