

# Continuity, Discontinuity and Change

Perspectives from the New Kingdom  
to the Roman Era

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The publication was composed within the framework of the Czech Science Foundation – Grant GA ČR 19-07268S: “Continuity, Discontinuity and Change. Adaptation Strategies of Individuals and Communities in Egypt at Times of Internal and External Transformations”.

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Cover: illustration courtesy of Veronika Dulíková

Published by Charles University, Prague, Faculty of Arts, nám. Jana Palacha 2, Prague 1

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Design, typesetting and print by Togga Prague

First edition, Prague 2021

ISBN 978-80-7671-048-1

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## Introduction

*“It takes so little time to change a lifetime,  
And it takes a lifetime to understand the change”<sup>1</sup>*

Any society, antique or modern, is anything but constant and unchanging; rather it is continuously subjected to internal and external influences and stimuli that result in processes of modification and transformation.<sup>2</sup> Continuity, discontinuity and change are in this context not to be seen as opposing concepts. In essence, any form of continuity always infers change to a certain extent, while every change also implies an aspect of continuity.<sup>3</sup> Throughout history, political-ideological as well as socio-economic developments – from within and abroad – have necessitated the frequent reshaping of communities, elites or the individual.<sup>4</sup> The rate of adjustment and adaptation of the individual or society to ongoing processes on a political, economic or religious level could be gradual and span many generations (the so-called *longue durée*).<sup>5</sup> But every so often, a dramatic, intense transformation can be witnessed over a single lifetime (or, at most, 2-3 generations; e.g. the Amarna period).

How a person or a society reacts to these ongoing changes and reshapes its identity can be extremely varied. It could encompass the consolidation of ancient traditions and the affirmation of religious and/or historical roots to construct – at least seemingly – continuity in the face of foreign influence and/or occupation (e.g. the use of iconography and deliberate archaism as a way of postulating continuity). Alternatively, it could focus on the adjustment of age-old practices to new impulses or the creative redefinition of tradition, as the adaptation to the present conditions are considered a productive strategy, if not a necessity for survival – whether on an individual basis or for the entire community.<sup>6</sup>

In whatever manner an ancient society or individual decides to articulate itself to these ongoing processes it eventually finds its reflection in the material culture. One obvious means

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1 J. WINTERSON, *The Gap of Time*, London: Random House, 2015, 270.

2 J. TAINTER, *The Collapse of Complex Societies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016<sup>27</sup>; M. BÁRTA/M. KOVÁŘ (eds.), *Civilisations: Collapse and Regeneration. Rise, Fall and Transformation in History*, Prague: Academia, 2019.

3 For an archaeological perspective, see for example: T. KNOPF, *Kontinuität und Diskontinuität in der Archäologie. Quellenkritisch-vergleichende Studien*, Tübinger Schriften zur Ur- und Frühgeschichtlichen Archäologie 6, Münster: Waxmann, 2002.

4 For example: I. HODDER, “Agency and Individuals in Long-term Processes”, in: M.-A. DOBRES /J. ROBB (eds.), *Agency in Archaeology*, London: Routledge, 2000, 21–33.

5 On cultural and linguistic changes in the Roman Near East, see for example: H. M. COTTON/R. G. HOYLAND/J. J. PRICE/D. J. WASSERSTEIN (eds.), *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

6 For instance, several contributions in F. TIRADRITTI (ed.), *Pharaonic Renaissance. Archaism and the Sense of History in Ancient Egypt*, Budapest: Museum of Fine Arts, 2008 for examples from ancient Egypt

in which to observe and probe the dynamics and interaction of continuity, discontinuity and change within an ancient society, such as Egypt, is by focusing on cult and religion as a crucial manner by which a community identifies and formulates itself. The individual, as well as communities or the society as a whole, expresses its (religious) identity in tangible forms, such as architecture, text and image.<sup>7</sup>

Ancient Egypt provides throughout its long history a wealth of opportunities – and a mass of material – to study processes of continuity, discontinuity and change and its reflection in the material culture. As such, Egypt offers researchers the chance to not only focus on a single, unique period in which society and/or the individual was faced with major political-ideological and/or socio-economic changes and its subsequent (re)action, but to actually tackle the issue from completely different standpoints. This could be from the perspective of the individual or from the viewpoint of a specific community; the key impulse behind the transformation and adaptation strategies could be of a mainly internal or external nature; the timeframe could be limited to one or a few generations or cover several centuries; etc. All of these specific standpoints, and many more, can be observed in Egyptian society and its material culture, not in the least during the political-ideological changes over the course of the New Kingdom Eighteenth Dynasty, or during the Ptolemaic–Roman period – two eras that lie at the core of this volume.

The publication at hand is one of the outcomes of a research project funded by the Czech Science Foundation (Grantová agentura České republiky) for a three year period between 2019 and 2021.<sup>8</sup> The central aim of the project was to gain a more in-depth picture of general characteristics as well as different methods and strategies employed by individuals and/or communities when confronted with major changes in society and its reflection in the material culture. The project had two main components with a clear temporal (New Kingdom versus Ptolemaic–Roman) and spatial distinction (tomb versus temple), involving once mainly internal (Amarna) and once predominantly external (Greek and Roman) impulses, and once seen primarily from the perspective of the individual (elite), and once chiefly from the viewpoint of a religious community (the priesthood). Project members met during two workshops in Prague (August 2019 and September 2020) to discuss both the general themes and topics at the very core of the project, as well as the specific research of all individual collaborators. The

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7 See for example several contributions in E. FROOD/R. RAJA, *Redefining the Sacred. Religious Architecture and Text in the Near East and Egypt 1000 BC – AD 300, Contextualising the Sacred I*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2014, covering the entire Eastern Mediterranean region.

8 Grant GA ČR 19-07268S: “Continuity, Discontinuity and Change. Adaptation Strategies of Individuals and Communities in Egypt at Times of Internal and External Transformations”. The core team was located at the premises of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, in Prague, and consisted of Filip Coppens as principal investigator together with three Ph.D. students – Dana Bělohoubková, Jiří Honzl, and Dorotea Wollnerová. The international team members consisted of Silke Cassor-Pfeiffer (Institut für die Kulturen des Alten Orients, Ägyptologie, Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen), Kenneth Griffin (The Egypt Centre, Swansea University), Gabriele Pieke (Reiss-Engelhorn Museum Mannheim), and Nico Staring (Faculty of Humanities, Institute of Area Studies, Leiden University/Faculty of Arts, Department of Archaeology, KU Leuven). Stefan Pfeiffer (Lehrstuhl für Alte Geschichte, Institut für Altertumswissenschaften, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg) joined the team slightly later, on the occasion of the first workshop in Prague, in August 2019.

initial draft of all contributions in this volume were commented upon by all project members, and presented during an international conference in Prague in August 2021.

The focus of the first section in this volume is on developments and transformations observable in New Kingdom private tombs commissioned by non-royal individuals in the three main cemeteries of the time – Amarna (Dana Bělohoubková), Thebes (Gabriele Pieke) and Saqqara (Nico Staring) – during the turbulent period immediately before, during and after the so-called “Amarna age”. The individual cemeteries are not studied in isolation, but all three authors focus specifically on the selection and diffusion of explicit motifs (especially in architecture and iconographic programs and details) over time and space, taking into account also the specific location of the tombs and the social status of the owner, against the backdrop of a changing society. In each of these cemeteries, one can clearly observe an ongoing interaction between traditional and innovative ideological and religious concepts, as well as the transmission and adaptation of existing ideas and models as expressed in architecture, text and image. This provides a thought-provoking insight into the possible influence and impact of the ongoing changes in society upon particular choices taken regarding the overall layout and outlook of individual tombs, and in more general terms on the life and times of the individuals who commissioned these final resting places.

The second section of this volume focuses on strategies of adaptation and modification, as reflected on the level of the priesthoods and the design of the temple program (architecture, text and image) during the Ptolemaic and Roman period. At the core of the first five contributions in this section are various examples of the means by which the ancient Egyptian priests interpreted the ongoing transformation of society and in what manner it was reflected in their understanding and adaptation of rituals and associated text and image – not in the least in the figure and concept of the pharaoh itself. Individual authors focus on developments in the iconography and function of specific motifs and/or ritual scenes, such as the change of the protagonist, from king to child deity, in the act of holding the lapwing (Kenneth Griffin) or being suckled by a goddess or divine cow (Silke Cassor-Pfeiffer), or the sudden increase in the use of specific designations, such as the *št3*-garment, associated with Horus and kingship (Dorotea Wollnerová), during this time. New themes related to the (foreign) pharaoh, yet steeped in older traditions, are examined in the contributions of Stefan Pfeiffer (returning statues of Egyptian deities from Asia) and Filip Coppens (ritually spearing a human opponent). In essence, all variations, modifications and developments observed in these contributions turn around the relation between the ruler and the divine, and not in the least the (legitimate) position of the (foreign) king within an age-old system. Each individual contribution portrays the various manners in which the priests, designing text and image for the temples, tried to articulate answers to questions related to the nature of (divine) kingship and the inheritance and the transfer of royal/divine power, at a time of significant changes on a political and social level. The individual studies also testify to the immense knowledge and vast experience of the priestly designers involved, as they concurrently continued with traditional models, at times dating back to the Old Kingdom, as well as incorporated new themes, as a reflection on ongoing changes in life outside the temple.

In the final contribution of this section, Jiří Honzl looks at the traditional religious landscape of Egypt from an entirely different perspective, on the basis of epigraphic evidence with

a religious connotation left behind by members of the Roman military. His research highlights varied regional approaches to the existing religious landscape, including both interaction and co-existence, but also alteration and modification.

Both sections conclude with a co-authored chapter gathering the main results of the individual research and placing it within its wider historical context.

During the editing of the volume no attempt was made to unify the transliteration of ancient Egyptian or the writing of personal names and the names of places, sites and monuments, hence several different variants occur depending on the choice of the individual authors.

I would like to thank all project members for their continued and unwavering collaboration and teamwork throughout the project, not made any easier as it was for a large part impacted by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and the often limited access to research institutions and libraries. A warm thanks as well to all members of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, and in particular Alexandra Hejduková, Luděk Markvart, Mohamed Megahed, Jana Mynářová and Hana Vymazalová, for their constant help and support throughout the entire project.

*Filip Coppens*  
Prague, August 2021