

الروحانية وعبادة الأسلاف في مصر خلال عصور ما قبل التاريخ وبداية عصر الأسرات.

Spiritual and Ancestral worship in Egypt during Prehistoric and early dynastic period .

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ملخص

كان الدين هو اللبنة الأولى التي قامت عليها الحضارة المصرية القديمة، وكان اعتقاد المصري القديم بالعالم الآخر هو المحرك الأول له منذ عصور ما قبل التاريخ، وكانت التعددية الإلهية من أهم سمات المجتمع المصري: تلك التعددية التي اتسعت لتشمل العديد من الآلهة والربائب، بل وأرواح الأسلاف التي تنوعت ما بين الخير والشرير، وهناك العديد من الأدلة التي تؤكد على وجود عبادة أو تقديس أرواح الأسلاف في مصر خلال عصور ما قبل التاريخ حيث المجتمعات الأولى التي اعتمدت على الصيد والجمع والالتقاط والتي عاشت آنذاك، وكان الجد أو السلف هو سندهم ودعامتهم سواء في حياته أو بعد موته.

تحاول هذه الدراسة توضيح معنى عبادة الأسلاف في مصر خلال عصور ما قبل التاريخ وبداية الأسرات؛ من خلال لقاء الضوء على العديد من الأمثلة والأحداث التي تؤكد على دور وأهمية تلك العبادة في مصر آنذاك.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

(بوتو، نخن، عبادة الأسلاف، الرمز، الأقنعة، الأرواح)

Abstract

The ancient Egyptians had an extremely religious culture and strong believers in the afterlife; they lived in a religious community with multiple Gods, meaning that instead of worshipping just one god, they worshipped many different gods and goddesses and they had known the ancestral worship.

Evidence for the existence of ancestor worship is varied and abundant; some of the ancestral spirits are regarded as good and some as evil. The role of ancestors is also obscured in many societies whose religions are based on spirituality; such as the hunters and gatherers who had lived in Egypt during the prehistoric period.

The article tries to clarify the meaning of "ancestor worship" in ancient Egypt during the prehistoric period and the early dynastic times by showing many examples and evidences which emphasized the role of ancestor worship in Egypt.

Key words

(Buto, Nekhen, ancestor worship, Symbol, masks, the souls)



Introduction

Ancestral worship is an act of religious belief that was known in a few of primitive societies and was based on the belief in the extension of the influence of the lives of the dead ancestors during the life of the human community. This worship had aimed to appease the ancestors and obtained their protection and aid individually and collectively.

The subject of ancestral worship may refer to the origin of religion; it is an expression of the sacramental virtues and social organization based on the divisional structure of the body.

There are many examples which point to the ancestors' worship in prehistoric Egypt, such as: the terracotta head of the Mermdit Bani Salama and the masks of Hierakonpolis. All are considered examples for a type of religious rite in Egypt during the Predynastic period.

The Souls of Buto and Nekhen also were considered of the most important evidences on proving the role of ancestor worship at that time onward.

That is beside the human sacrifice which was known in Egypt during the pre and early dynastic period which proves the existence of ancestor worship in Egypt during Predynastic and early dynastic periods.

Ancestral worship

According to Harrington, death had a great importance in ancient Egypt, and it is important to study the meaning of death to discuss ancestors, cults, and the relationship between the living and the dead that is because the world of the dead is the gate through which the souls of the ancestors relate to the living.¹

some Egyptologists refuse the idea of ancestor worship in Egypt that is because in their opinion; the ancient Egyptian society wasn't believe in it, so many scholars as Lehmann and Myers saying that; ancestor worship is often reserved for those societies where the dead are explicitly called by a term that is translated as ancestor, thus excluding societies whose religious

1-Harrington, N., living with the dead, Ancestor Worship and Mortuary Ritual in Ancient Egypt, Oxford, 2013, p.1.

practices concern ghosts, shades, spirits, souls, totemic plants and animals, or simply the dead.¹

WILLIAM pointed out that dreams were the first perception of the worship of ancestors, whereas Ancestors provided their valuable services to the living by advice or prophesies through dreams.²

Harrington suggests that; there is a strong relation between the Living and the dead in ancient Egypt; that is emphasized by the cults which were practiced for the individual ancestors.³

About the dead in ancient Egypt, Bommas mentioned that the dead were not really dead but living a life in the hereafter. It made death negotiable and opened possibilities for social connection between the living (in this world) and the dead. The concept of living alongside the dead was made possible by accepting the fact that the dead were alive.⁴

Perhaps the village of Mermdit Bani Salama is the best witness to it; the people of the village were buried their dead inside their homes or between their homes as a kind of respect for their dead.

According to POYIL and TAYLOR the worship of the manes, or ancestors, is one of the great branches of the religion of mankind. Its principles are not difficult to understand, for they plainly keep up the social relations of the living world. The dead ancestor according to them was turned into a deity, to protect his own family for this purpose he was received the gifts and services from them. The prevailing belief is that the dead chief still watches over his own tribe, still holds his authority by helping friends and harming enemies, still rewards the right and sharply punishes the wrong.⁵

1-Lehmann, A. C., and Myers, J. E., Ghosts, Souls, and Ancestors: Power of the Dead, Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion, eds. A. C. Lehmann and J. E. Myers, London, 1993, p.284.

2 - William, C., *Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, Oxford, 1926, p184

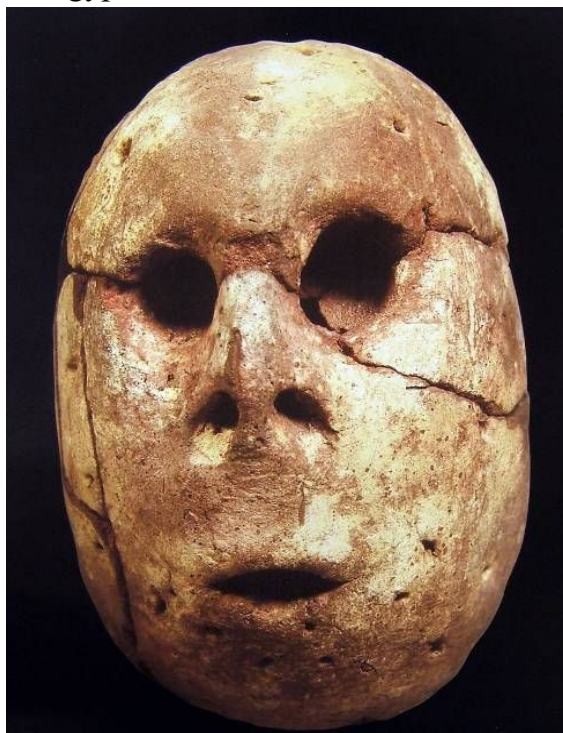
3-Harrington, N., *Op.Cit.*, p. 146.

4-Bommas, M., "The Mechanics between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Egypt," in Carroll, M., Rempelm J., (eds.), *living through the Dead, Burial and Commemoration in the Classical World*, 2011, p.162.

5-Poyil, M., *Op.Cit.*, 293; TAYLOR, E.B., *Primitive Culture II*, London, 1871, 113.

Merimde Beni Salaam's head

The interest of the dead and the ancestor's worship was proven in prehistoric period by burial customs,¹ at the village of Mermdit Bani Salama in North Delta², there were combination between houses and tombs together³. The archaeologists were found in Merimde village the famous head (fig. 1) which may be considered the first evidence of the existence of ancestral worship in Egypt.



(Fig.1) -Terracotta idol's head- Merimde Beni-Salam, Neolithic period.⁴

1-Williams, H., Remembering and forgetting the medieval dead, In : Williams H., (ed.), *Archaeologies of remembrance : death and memory in past societies*, New York, 2003, 227–54.

2- Mączyńska, A., Lower Egyptian communities and their interactions with Southern Levant in the 4th, in : *Studies in African Archaeology millennium BC*, Vol. 12, Poznań, 2013, p.61-64.

3-Vandier, J., *Manuel d'archéologie égyptienne*. Tome I, Paris.1952, p.101.

4-Saleh, M., et Sourouzian, H., *Official Catalogue, Egyptian Museum, Mainz*, 1987, n01.

The head dates to 4800 - 4500 BC, and is made of terracotta, it is considered one of the oldest artistic sculptures in the ancient Egyptian civilization.

On the other hand, many of the holes were distributed in the skull and around the face, perhaps for fixing the hair and the beard. Despite the simplicity of the head, it carries some artistic expression. It shows us that there is a prominent and wide hole at the bottom of the chin probably to fix the head in a stick or flag.

The head may have intended to religious purpose; the appearance of the holy religious figure with the human head probably confirmed that: this head is one of the symbols of the ancestors or the leaders of the village.

It can be considered a sacred Symbol, based on what Pinch said; Objects which was discovered in situ provide us with a certain amount of information about mortuary cults or surviving parts of an act of worship.¹

Nekhen Masks

Hierakonpolis is the city of the hawk², it is in southern Upper Egypt on the western bank of the Nile³. it is one of the most important early archaeological sites in Egypt⁴. The settlement and building of the city spans the time from 4000 B.C when the elements of Egyptian society were first formed to the early dynastic time⁵. It provides substantial evidence for understanding the foundations of that ancient civilization, a century of archaeological research has shown this vast site's central role in the

1-Pinch, G., *Votive offerings to Hathor*, Oxford, 1993, p.339.

2-Friedman, R., “*City of the Hawk*”, in: *Archaeology*, 56, No. 6 (November/December 2003), p.56.

3-Hoffman, M. A., & Hamroush, H. A., and Allen, R. O., “A Model of Urban Development for the Hierakonpolis Region from Predynastic through Old Kingdom Times” in : *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, Vol. 23 (1986), p.176

4-Rice, M., *Egypt's making, the origins of Ancient Egypt 5000–2000 BC*, London, 1990, p.76.

5-Hoffman, M. A., A rectangular Amratian house from Hierakonpolis and its significance for Predynastic research. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 1980, pp.39 : 119–137.

transition from prehistory to history of the rise of early Egyptian civilization.¹

Barbara Adams has been found at Locality HK6 in Hierakonpolis two pottery masks, it dates to the Pre- and Proto-dynastic period, one of them was rough-made, it may be associated with magic and religion purpose, it had curvature that allowed it to be placed on the face, this mask was found within the funerary offerings or personal belongings to the owner of the tomb.² (Fig.2-3)



(Fig.2) -Egypt's earliest funerary masks, dating to 3500 B.C ³

1-Harlan, J.F., *Excavations at Locality 11C, In the Predynastic of Hierakonpolis*, M. A. Hoffman (ed.), *Egyptian Studies Association 1*, London ,1982, 14–25 ; FRIEDMAN, R. A., “*Tour of the Palace*”, in : *NN*, 21, 2009, p.4.

2-Adams, B., “*More Surprises in the Locality HK6 Cemetery*”, in : *NN*, 11, 1999, 4.

3-Droux, X., and Others, *Further Adventures at HK6 : the 2010 Season*, in : *Nekhen News*, Vol. 22, 2010, p.5.



(Fig.3) -Cast of the Hierakonpolis mask on display in The Gallery of Early Egypt, British Museum ¹

The other mask according to Barbara Adams is larger and more complete. It also has bending, cut-out eyes and an aquiline nose, with brows, eye line, mouth and a beard in plum red paint with white strap details. The brakes on the top corners of this bearded mask seem to be in the wrong position for the human ears and may indicate that it once had bovine horns or animal ears attached. This mask is essentially life-sized and curves to fit over a human face, whether in life or in death².

The mask takes a long oval shape, the forehead is wide, and the chain is narrow. It is also noticed that a hole was made on both sides of the mask

1-Friedman, R., "A Year to Remember", in : NEKHEN NEWS, Vol. 26, 2014, p.3.

2-Adams, B., Op.cit, p, 4.



behind the ears at the lower back edge; It is therefore possible to imagine that the mask was mounted on a human face and attached to the back.

The mask is the embodiment of the human head who has been assigned a special function (Part expresses about each)

The Mask's date

ADAMS confirmed that Nekhen masks dated to the Predynastic period.¹ she discussed the appearance of these masks and showed up the details of the faces and she compared between these masks and the figurines of the Naqada II and Naqada III periods, she stressed that these masks show us that one of them was humanoid, the other was feline².

The funerary Role of Nekhen masks

Wolinski argued the funerary mask's role in historical times in ancient Egypt saying that; the funerary Masks which were placed on the mummified bodies of the dead served to transform them into spirits born again in the afterlife, and he confirmed that; the use of human-faced masks is well documented and dates to the Fourth Dynasty.³

BOLSHAKOY explained the funerary role of masks, saying that; wear the masks especially for the dead person is a tradition in many countries⁴. This mask was believed to strengthen the spirit of the dead and guard the soul from evil spirits on its way to the afterworld.⁵

So, we can say that; the funerary role of Nekhen masks is confirmed by finding it in one of the tombs of HK6 cemetery.

1 -Adams, B., *Op. Cit.*, 5.

2 -Adams, B., *Some Problems Solved in the Locality 6 Cemetery*, in : *NN*,12, 2000, 4.

3 -Wolinski, A., "Egyptian Masks: The Priest and His Role", in: *Archaeology*, 40, No. 1, 1987, 22- 23,

4-Bolshakoy, A. O., Man and his Double in Egyptian Ideology of the Old Kingdom, in : *ÄAT*, 37, 102

5 -Adams, B., and Friedman, R., "Imports and Influences in the Predynastic and Protodynastic Settlement and Funerary Assemblages at Hierakonpolis," in Edwin C. M. van den Brink, ed., *The Nile Delta in Transition : 4th. -3rd. Millennium B.C.* (Tel Aviv, 1992), 320-28.

May be there is a connection between this burial and the Shamanic thought, perhaps this tomb was belonging to one of the shamans and this mask was one of his possessions.

The religious Role of Nekhen masks

Masks are one of the most important themes of art that express the existence of "religious thought" In prehistoric times.

An early example of the use of masks comes from Hierakonpolis, in the form of this remarkable pottery face-mask.¹

Perhaps these masks were part of personal funerary Content of a priest or a diviner man, it indicates to the Religious rituals. Or May be these masks refer to what has been known in historical times as "spirits of Nekhen" Who appeared with animal masks since the beginning of the historical ages and were referring to their leaders of the ancestors who ruled Upper Egypt and took from Nekhen the legendary capital of the high pre-dynastic times.

Some scholars believe that the animal shape masks had an important role in Egyptian thoughts, and maybe Nekhen masks point to this kind of animal masks that is because of its shape. Wolinski mentioned that; The importance of bringing the mask in ancient Egyptian religion is back into the function of animal masks, the Egyptian deities as animal-headed gods played the important role in Egyptian rituals by priests who wore the animal masks that appeared artistically to be their heads.²

Poyil said that the faith in rebirth inspires many tribes to respect certain species of animals and birds which are believed to be creatures carrying the spirits of the ancestors³

So, we can say that there is a strong relation between both of animal figures, Totems, wearing masks and ancestor worship in prehistoric Egypt. MILLER confirmed that the Research into cross-cultural burial practices and propitiatory rituals, including sacrificial death, has been interpreted to

1-Rice, M., Op.Cit., 86.

2-Wolinski, A., Op, Cit., 23.

3-Poyil, M., Op.Cit., 301.



indicate beliefs in a netherworld existence, populated by nature spirits and ancestors.¹

According to RICE, Masks were always important in Egyptian rituals, as they were in many ancient cultures. By adopting them, the priest or other participant in the temple ceremonies could suppress his own personality and thus is ready to be united with the god. In the later periods there is little doubt that the priests, when impersonating the gods at the great ceremonies in the temples and around the king, so, we can say that the mask was represent of the animal like it.²

Souls of Nekhen and Buto.

The souls of Buto and Nekhen played an important role in the rituals and scenes as depicted on the walls of the ancient Egyptian temples since ancient times. These souls are the embodiment of the ancestral spirits of the rulers Who ruled the cities of Buto (in north) and Nekhen (in south) since the Predynastic Egypt.³

The Souls of Nekhen, mentioned first in the pyramid texts⁴, refer to the ancestors of the ancient Egyptian kings. Nekhen was the Upper Egyptian center of the worship of the god Horus, who was associated with his predecessors of the pharaohs.⁵

Friedman argued that the early kings of Hierakonpolis, called the Souls of Nekhen, were honored guests at the coronations and funerals of all pharaohs. Friedman also confirmed the religious and the funerary role of Hierakonpolis, he says that: by combining the evidence of industrial production, temples, masks, mummies, and funerary architecture as early as 3500 B.C. is placing Hierakonpolis at the forefront of traditions and practices that would come to typify Egyptian culture centuries later. These

1-Miller, I.,” *The Mask of Eternity the Quest for Immortality and the Afterlife*”, in : *JCER*, 2016, 7, Issue 11, 1218.

2-Rice, M., *Op.Cit.*, 85- 86.

3-Wilkinson, R.H., *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, London, 2003, p.89-90

4-Hart, G., *the Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*, Rutledge, 2005,152.

5-Frankfort, H., *Kingship and the Gods*, Chicago, 1978, 93- 94.

discoveries may have knocked Narmer and his palette off their historical pedestal, but they confirm the central role the city played in the long development of Egyptian civilization. It is little wonder that for millennia the deified early kings of Hierakonpolis, called the Souls of Nekhen, were honored guests at the coronations and funerals of all pharaohs.¹

Hence the kings of historical times may have linked themselves to these legendary leaders and these two cities and their gods to appear as the rightful successors of their ancestors who ruled these two cities.

The kings of Egypt were always keen to emphasize that they came from the souls of Nekhen and the souls of Buto².

The souls of "Nekhen" and the souls of Buto were not of human flesh and blood, but like the ancient Egyptians thoughts in connecting their daily life with the events of the emergence of the earth, so this term was a projection of the Eternal.

Spirit had an important role in the ancient Egyptian thoughts, Rapoport pointed to the Components of human parts saying that; each human consisted of the physical body, the 'Ka', the 'Ba', and the 'Akh'. The Name and Shadow were also living entities, to enjoy the afterlife, all these elements had to be sustained and protected from harm.³ (fig.4)

1-Friedman, R., "City of the Hawk", in: *Archaeology*, 56, No. 6 (November/December 2003), 56.

2-Sales, J. das C., *Divine Triads of Ancient Egypt -Hathor Studies of Egyptology*, 2012, p.123.

3-Rapoport, S., *the Animated Soul : Gateway to Your Ka*, Leonardo, 25, No. 2, 1992, 218-219.



(Fig.4) - the souls of Nekhen (jackal) and Pe (falcon)¹

The ancient Egyptian artist depicted the shapes of Nekhen's and Buto's souls placing the left-hand fist over the heart and raising the right hand in the air. This situation is known as Henu. One of the most beautiful scenes depicting the status of the "Hanu" is the scene of King Ramses I in his tomb at the Valley of the Kings. He sits in the position of "Hanu" between Anubis (symbol of the souls of Nakhan) and Horus (symbol of the souls of Buto). Celebrate the renewal of the King's "Ba" and Renewing spiritual power.²

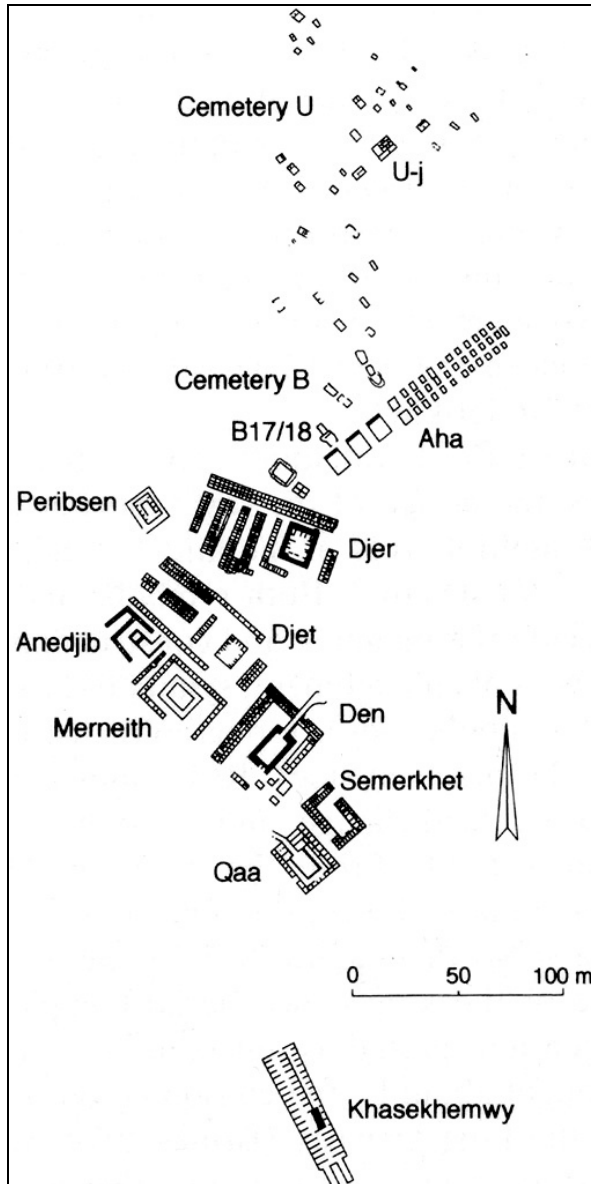
Human sacrifice and worship of ancestors

Many scholars refuse the admission of human sacrifice existence in ancient Egypt. In contrast there are many others convinced of the opposite; that is because of the multiple individual burials which were found in pre and early dynastic cemeteries especially in Abydos and Saqqara.³ (Fig.5-6)

1-https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Souls_of_Pe_and_Nekhen ,10 April 2017, at 20 :45

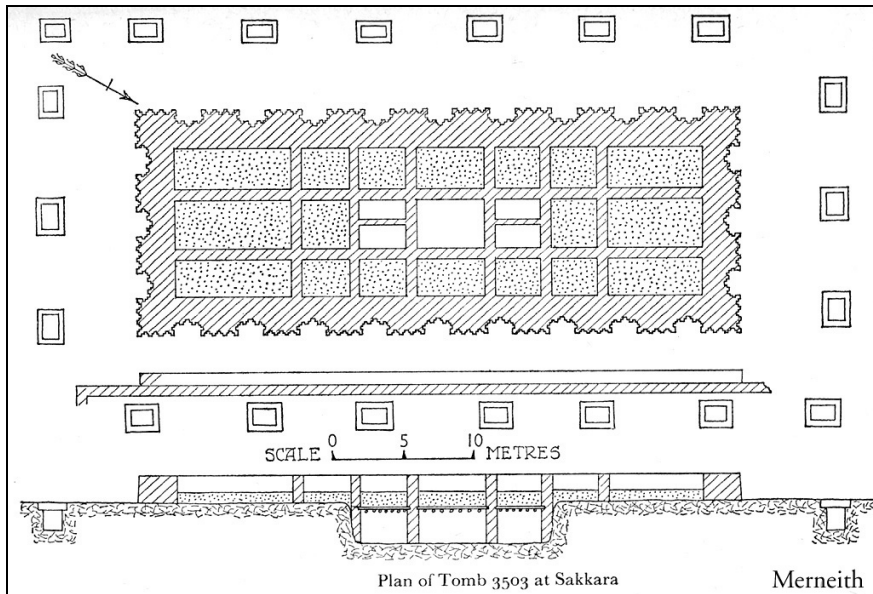
2-Wilkinson, R.H., *Opacity.*, p. p.89-90.

3-Dreyer, G., 'Zur Rekonstruktion der Oberbauten der Königsgräber der 1. Dynastie in Abydos', *MDAIK* 47 (1991) 93-104



(Fig.5) -Abydos, Umm el-Qaab royal tombs; subsidiary burials¹

1-<http://www.odysseyadventures.ca/articles/mastabas/abydos.html>28.06.2012



(Fig.6)- Saqqara3503, dated to Queen Merneith (Dyn. 1) & subsidiary graves¹

RICE discusses the Egyptian's beliefs, saying that; the Egyptian's attitudes towards death was influenced by their belief in immortality. To this end also was directed their love of and identification with the living world they saw around them. In apparent contradiction in this principle, there are the companies of retainers that the kings of the First Dynasty took with them, who were sacrificed and buried with their royal master or sometimes mysterious. as a matter of fact, these were subsidiary burials which surround most of the great tombs at Saqqara and many at Abydos and other royal centers.²

The ancient Egyptians believed that the king is the symbol of God on earth, and he is the ancestor of the predecessor; they wished to be with him in the

1-Watson, J., the 1st Dynasty Tombs of Saqqara in Egypt, in : <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/firstdynastysaqqara.htm>
2-RICE, M., Op.Cit., p.133.

other world as they were with him in life, so they buried around his tomb as kind of the desire to stay with him. Semple¹ and Emery suggested that; the tombs of early dynastic Kings as Dyer and Aha were filled with servants who were sacrificed by being buried alive with their tools².

In the Cemetery of Abydos... the archaeologist found some evidence which may prove the existence of human sacrifice at that time, such as what has been found in many subsidiary tombs were near the Tombs of the early dynastic Kings.³

VAN DIJK Illustrates two main forms of human sacrifice. On the one hand, there is the ritual killing of a human being, either as a regular or as an exceptional form of the offering cult. In this case human beings usually, though not always, convicted criminals or prisoners of war who sacrifice to the gods to maintain or re-establish cosmic order and to emphasize the role of the King as its main guarantor. In some cases, this type of human sacrifice may be no more than a ritualized form of the legal death penalty. On the other hand, VAN DIJK confirmed that there is the practice of retainer sacrifice, where the death of the king is followed by the killing of people who are supposed to accompany him to the hereafter. It is on this latter custom that we shall focus here, although it is possible that the two forms of human sacrifice may sometimes overlap.⁴

1-Semple, D.L., Macramallah's Rectangle: Re-Examining a First Dynasty Egyptian Cemetery A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, University of Alberta, 2012, p.135.

2-Emery, W.B., Great Tombs of the First Dynasty II (London, 1954) ; Wilkinson, Early Dynastic Egypt, 259–60.

3-Lemara, D., Re-Examining a First Dynasty Egyptian Cemetery. A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, Alberta, 2012, p.135 – 139

4-Van Dijk, J., “Retainer Sacrifice in Egypt and in Nubia”, in : Bremmer, J.N., (ed.), The Strange World of Human Sacrifice. – Studies in the History and Anthropology of Religion, Vol. 1 (Leuven, Peeters, 2007), 135–155.

This habit did not last long, according to Morris these retainer sacrifices were eventually phased out and replaced with symbolic human figure.¹

THAYER noted that the ancestor worship engaged in some civilizations with providing offerings and animal sacrifices² that is emphasized by the animal burials which were found in early dynastic cemeteries in Egypt.³

SPENCER Confirmed that ancestor-worship is the root of every religion in prehistoric times.⁴

Conclusion

Ancestral worship is deeply dependent on the perception which is believed that the souls of the dead may return to the living and influence their lives; Prehistoric man imagine it and keen on the happiness of the dead.

The cult of ancestor worship was confirmed in Meredith Bani Salama through burial customs. the dead were buried between the living homes; they were part of their own life. The worship of ancestors was associated also with the idea of offering human sacrifices in ancient Egypt especially during Predynastic period.

Perhaps there was a connection between some burials of Hierakonpolis and the Shamanic cult. It was proved by the Masks which were found in HK6 cemetery. Mask also was an essential component in many of the rites conducted in Egyptian temples in historic times, worn by priests impersonating the gods whom they served.

The earliest example of the use of masks comes from Hierakonpolis, in the form of this remarkable pottery face-mask dates to Naqada I period.

The souls of Buto and Nekhen are the embodiment of the ancestral spirits of the rulers who ruled the cities of Buto (in north) and Nekhen (in south) since the Predynastic Egypt.

1-Morris, E.F., a Sacrifice for the State : First Dynasty Royal Funerals and the Rites at Macramallah's Rectangle. In *Performing Death: Social Analyses of Funerary Traditions in the Ancient near East and Mediterranean*, Chicago, 2007, pp.15-37.

2-Thayer, T., *Ancestor Worship in Africa*, in : *The Harvard Theological Review*, 17, No. 2, 1924, 165.

3-See: Flores, D.V., *the funerary sacrifice of animals during the predynastic period*, Toronto, 1999.

4-Spencer, H., *Principles of Sociology*, New York, 1896, p.411.

The ancestor worship engaged in many civilizations with providing human sacrifices. That is cleared in Egypt by the inhabitants of the subsidiary graves in the early royal tombs at Abydos and Saqqara.

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Friedman, R.F., Hierakonpolis Locality HK29A: The Predynastic ceremonial center revisited. *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, 45, 2009, pp. 79–103.

Harlan, J.F., *Excavations at Locality 11C, In the Predynastic of Hierakonpolis*, M. A. Hoffman (ed.), *Egyptian Studies Association 1*, London, 1982, 14–25

Harrington, “The Cult of the Ancestors,” in *Living with the Dead: Ancestor Worship and Mortuary Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, 2013, 29---64

Harrington, N., *living with the dead, Ancestor Worship and Mortuary Ritual in Ancient Egypt*, Oxford, 2013, p.1.

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