

## SHAPE

### Seeing and Hearing the Ancient Producers of Egypt



#### Objectives

The main aim of the project was to define the circulation of knowledge within the sphere of material production conceived holistically, against the persistent modern habit of separating art and crafts, in the transition phase Middle Bronze to Late Bronze Age in Egypt (Middle Kingdom, 1900-1500 BC). The fusion of ancient written and pictorial expressions together with the findings of archaeology offers the possibility of identifying linguistic and conceptual categories active within the ancient horizon of the producers/ consumers themselves.

The main objective questions were: **(a)** Which were the crafts? **(b)** Who were the craftsmen/craftswomen?; **(c)** Which were the sites of production (single and multiple crafts) and how did they interconnect?; **(d)** What is the role of external production in local Egyptian production and among networks of production/consumption across the Near East-North Africa?

These questions were addressed through four main objectives:

1. identification of the dominant separable crafts that form the elemental segments in the circle of material production from the written and textual sources.
2. identification of relational geographies by which crafts were connected among areas of production and power.
3. definition of from the dataset obtained from objectives 1-2 the circulation of knowledge within the sphere of material production and consumption on two horizons: (I) endogenous (internal Egyptian regionalism); (II) exogenous ('internationalism', relations between Egyptian and external groups).
4. development of a simultaneously evidence-based and speculative theory on the ideational world of the material creator.

#### Research work

The first part of the project was concentrated on training activities: a) Training in hieratic script reading at EPHE; b) Training in management and the improvement of the linguistic database for craftsmen profession in ancient Egypt at EPHE; c) Implementation of the knowledge of the modern Arab world (Institute du Monde Arabe – Paris).

The research strand has focused on the selection of artifacts in the museums in order to produce digital vocabularies linked to material artefacts. For this purpose, the core of the research was carried out at the Musée du Louvre on the material coming from the ancient site of Zawyet Sultan; in addition, the researcher examined extensively other Egyptian collections relevant for the project (Petrie and British Museums, London).

The second part of the project has been devoted to define the profile of ancient Egyptian craftsmen through words, images and artefacts. The aim was not to identify WHO were the artists

(searching specifically for the names of craftsmen) but WHAT made someone a craftsman in Middle Kingdom Egypt; skills, technical choice, social profile, including the dimensions of age and gender. Self-cognition though written and visual analysis was integrated and calibrated through the visible signs left on the materiality of artefacts.

The third part has focused on the identification of modes of circulation of ideas among craftsmen in production (apprentissage, transfer of knowledge, development of combined skills, role of children in material production and social constraints). The aim was to explore, through the archaeological evidence, the social and technological relations generated inside production places, exchange of ideas, materials, and skills between craftsmen.

The concluding part of the project has involved both dissemination of the research, through a large international conference (<http://www.egypt-shape.com/news/>), two small workshops and informal seminars at EPHE, travels and meetings (EPHE and external meetings), and writing activity in order to present the results of the project in a series of scientific articles.

### **Results achieved**

SHAPE has been a pioneer research project, both in raising new questions in linguistic, historical, and archaeological research, and in combining theoretical approaches with scientific and technological applications. The final results of the SHAPE project, as presented in the forthcoming proceeding of the international conference, demonstrate direct scientific impact above two main different strands:

The project was able to move Egyptology outside the discipline, inside the different research environments of history, archaeometry, anthropology, and sociology, in order to introduce a comparative dimension from better documented spatio-temporal contexts. The aim is to create mental analogy-bridges, to switch our way of thinking, moving from Europe to Egypt and the Near East.

The project created a solid scientific base to draw a social history for ancient Egypt, generating multiple model(s) of the ‘creative imaginary’ in Middle bronze Age Egypt starting from a comparative anthropological perspective.

The overall goals were to supply robust scientific evidence for a wide-ranging vocabulary in use today for material production (like “artist”, “workmen”, “workshop”, “apprentissage”, etc.), and to propose new (and multiple) theoretical models in order to re-think the mechanisms of material production in the “broad” Egyptian Middle Kingdom (2000-1550 BC).

### **Impact**

The funding of the project has enabled the researcher to complete a high profile cutting-edge research project at EPHE, and to move towards role of world leader in this emerging interdisciplinary terrain of theory and practice, and hence consolidate his position of Europe as a leader in this research area against competition from current USA fieldwork and study.

The researcher has moved from a research environment dedicated to the study of history to a research group focused on the social interpretation of material production, interaction between culture, gender. The mobility has been beneficial in multiple directions, for the candidate, the institution of provenance, and the host institution, by creating efficient integration between the Mediterranean and the Anglo-Saxon approach to research topics.

In addition, the SHAPE project has constituted the basis for future collaborations and wider international cooperation. The researcher is already involved in a solid networks of collaborations and contacts, bridging across the Europe: University College London, British Museum, Petrie Museum (United Kingdom), Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium), Univerzita Karlova v Praze (Czech Republic), Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France-Palais du Louvre, Musée du Louvre (France), University of Pisa, University of Salerno (Italy).

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