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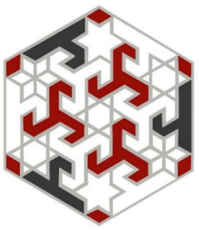

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UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

Contents

CHRONOLOG

Predynastic Egyptian Frog Vessels in (Inter)regional Context

Jacob Glenister

Abstract

Tiny vessels in the shape of frogs are one of the many theriomorphic stone objects produced by the artisans of Late Predynastic Egypt. This paper identifies 15 such vessels ranging widely across Egypt, from Naqada and Naga ed-Dêr in the south to a recent find at Tell el-Farkha in the Delta. Detailed investigation of their forms reveal two distinct types regardless of point of origin: most belong to the "sitting" type which rests upon its legs, but two examples follow another set of conventions best described as "prone" with the legs splayed out and the animal resting on its stomach. Of the latter category, the frog from tomb N7304 at Naga ed-Dêr is particularly significant, for its lapis inlays and archaeological context point towards connections with the greater Mesopotamian world. Comparisons with material from Susa and Uruk from the same period permit a better understanding of this object and confirm and augment prior conclusions about the tomb's occupant.

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Research Interests: Late Predynastic Egypt, animal symbolism, interregional connections in the Early Bronze Age

This paper is an adaptation and expansion of a talk originally given at EACC 2023 entitled "Predynastic Stone Frog Vessels: A Catalog and Analysis"

تعتبر ألواني الصغيرة بشكل الضفادع من بين العديد من ألشكال الحجرية الحيوانية التي أنتجها الحرفيون في مصر خالل الفترة ألخيرة لألسرات المصرية. يحدد هذا البحث وجود 15 وعاًء من هذا النوع يمتد توزيعها على نطاق واسع في مصر، من نقادة ونجع الدير في الجنوب إلى اكتشاف حديث في تل الفرخة في الدلتا. يتضح من التحقيق المفصل في أشكالها عن وجود نوعين متميزين بغض النظر عن موقع االكتشاف: فمعظمها ينتمي إلى النوع "الجالس" الذي يستند على أرجله، ولكن هناك نموذجين يتبعان مجموعة مختلفة من القواعد ويصفان بشكل أفضل .بأنهما "مضطجع" حيث تكون ألرجل متباعدة والحيوان مستلق على بطنه ومن بين ألمثلة في الفئة ألخيرة، يعتبر الضفدع الموجود في مقبرة7304 في نجع الدير ذو أهمية خاصة، حيث تشير البيانات ألثرية والتشكيالت الزرقاء نحو االرتباطات مع العالم المسيحي ألكبر. تسمح المقارنات مع المواد من .سوسة وأوروك من نفس الفترة بفهم أفضل لهذا الكائن وتؤكد وتعزز االستنتاجات السابقة حول محتوى المقبرة

Translation by Mahmoud Alsayed Ahmed, MA-student, University of Copenhagen

Introduction

The Late Predynastic period, Naqada IIC-D, approximately 3650-3350 BCE (Savage 2001, 1266), was an early flourishing of the mastery of stoneworking that would come to define the material culture of the northern Nile Valley for millennia to come. Artisans produced vessels, amulets, and game pieces of fine finish and intricate detail. One of the most striking expressions of this artistic skill was theriomorphy, the making of objects into animal shapes. While animal-shaped objects of many types are known throughout Egyptian history, the Late Predynastic in particular is marked by the diversity of artifacts bearing zoomorphic forms (Wengrow 2006, 99). Among vessels in particular, Egyptian stonemasons and potters produced forms shaped like animals found in their physical and cultural landscapes: birds (Petrie and Quibell 1896, 24), hippopotami (Adams 1996, 10-11), fish (Petrie and Quibell 1896, plate 27), and turtles (Fischer 1968, pl. 11) among others. The focus of this article will be on vessels in the shape of frogs, a vessel category with clearly definable and consistent characteristics and, in one case, important implications for a particular Predynastic Egyptian and their connections with the wider world.

Predynastic Frog Vessels

Frogs are known from all phases of Egyptian history as amulets, figurines, and wall art of various forms (Kremler 2008, 98), but provenanced examples of frog-shaped vessels restricts them to the Late Predynastic. In the Early Dynastic period and later, figurines in the shape of frogs are generally associated with the childbirth goddess Heqet (see Faltings 2014 and Cooney 1976 for several examples); she and other divine amphibians such as those of the Ogdoad are prominently attested in text and art throughout Egyptian history (Gregersen 2019). However, as yet we cannot say if this association was true in the Late Predynastic, and indeed Kremler argues that it is unlikely to be accurate even in the Early Dynastic period (2008, 98-99). Uniquely in the Late Predynastic, it is not only figurines but also vessels that frequently exhibit frog-like features. To date, sixteen of these vessels are known, including one dubious case. (See Table 1).

The frogs depicted in early Egyptian art are, generally speaking, true toads of the genus Bufo. In particular, the tendency towards a “spotted” decorative style, either by stone type (as in the British Museum example) or by inlaying (as in Fig. 3) mirrors closely the warts and poison glands of toads of this genus, which are known to have existed in Egypt (Faltings 2014, 125-130). That being said, several different species within the genus may nonetheless be represented (Cooney 1976, 204; Wyatt 2020, 505). This assessment holds true for the substantial corpus of figurines found from the Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods and the Old Kingdom, as well as the vessels here (Faltings 2014). However, this paper will continue to use the term “frog” to refer to the objects in question, following the precedent set by Kremler (2016, 127). The Egyptians do not seem to have clearly distinguished the two types of animals in their own language with any degree of consistency; terms like ḥqt, pggt, and qrr

Number	Collection Number	Material	Size (cm)	Category	Findsite	Museum	Other Notes
1	E9665	Marble	3 x 6.1 x 4.1	sitting	el-Mahasna	Penn Museum	
2	AN 1895.216	Pink lime-stone	4.8 x 9.3 x 8.1	sitting	Naqada, tomb 695	Ashmolean Museum	
3	Not in museum	Serpentine		sitting	Tell el-Farkha	Not in museum	
4	14403	Dark green stone	3.5 x 7.5 x ?	sitting	Unknown	Berlin Museum	No head nor foreleg
5	EA65240	Breccia	3.6 x 5.9 x 4.9	sitting	Unknown	British Museum	
6	70.91.4	Serpentine	4.5 x 8.2 x 5.7	sitting	Unknown	Brooklyn Museum	
7	37.648E	Serpentine	2.1 x ? x 3.8	sitting	Unknown	Brooklyn Museum	
8	FGA-ARCH-EG-0346	Serpentine	2.8 x 7.75 x 6.4	sitting	Unknown	Fondation Gandur pour l'Art	
9	E 27200	Chlorite	3.4 x 7.3 x 4.9	sitting	Unknown	Louvre	
10	LDUCE-UC15212	Limestone	? x 8 x ?	sitting	Unknown	Petrie Museum	Badly broken
11	E.03022	Gneiss	3 x 8 x 6.5	sitting	Unknown	RMAH, Belgium	
12	E.03023	Dark stone	3.4 x 6 x 4.5	sitting	Unknown	RMAH, Belgium	
13	910.100.3	Serpentine	3.5 x 7.6 x 5	sitting	Unknown	Royal Ontar-io Museum	
14	6-17171	Limestone		prone	Naga ed-Der, tomb N7304	Hearst Museum	Lapis inlays
15	E1382	Limestone		prone	Naqada	Penn Museum	
16	LDUCE-UC15213	Steatite	5 x 8.5 x 7.2	figurine	Unknown	Petrie Museum	No rim nor lug handles

Table 1: List of known Predynastic frog vessels. Sizes only given when exactly indicated by museum records. Compiled by Jacob Glenister.

seem to have referred to any tailless amphibian without differentiation, or at least none that modern researchers of the language can determine (see for example Iversen 1947, 48). This is not to say that the Egyptians would not have recognized different animals as different, of course. We might analogize the situation with wꜣḏ as a single category covering both English "blue" and "green"; Egyptian eyes would have recognized different shades, but they chose to place them into a single category. Using the word "frog" also keeps this paper in line with general museum collection practices, which universally use "frog" to refer to the objects under study.

Unfortunately, only five of the vessels have certain archaeological contexts. Vessel number 1 comes from Mahasna, having been removed from its original context and left on the surface prior to excavation (Garstang and Sethe 1903, 6). Vessel 15 comes from Naqada, as does 2, but only 2 has a known specific context, coming from grave 695 (Payne 1993, 144; Petrie and Quibell 1896, pl. XII); Petrie and Quibell provide no notes on this grave in their list of notable tombs, so we can draw no conclusions about vessel 2 in particular from context (1896, 26). Vessel 14 comes from Naga ed-Dêr grave N7304 (Kantor 1952, 242). Vessel 3 is a recent find from Tell el-Farkha, located in a foundation deposit for a chapel of Naqada IIIB date (Chłodnicki et al. 2012, 305). Among the unprovenanced vessels, vessel 8 has already been the subject of a dedicated publication (Wright 1971). Vessel 4 was manufactured without a head or forearms, though without context we cannot understand why this may have taken place; an earlier publication's dating of the artifact can be amended to Naqada IID based on provenanced examples (Scharff 1931, 220). A frog statuette in the Petrie Museum (LDUCE-UC15206) is almost certainly modern and in any case not in this class of vessel ("LDUCE-UC15206," 2015).

All of the frog vessels show considerable similarities beyond the shape of the animals they depict. They can be considered as variants of the design of the squat lug-handled jar (Fig. 1). The frog vessels share with these jars the characteristic lug handles placed on their sides, a flat bottom, a short height, and a clearly-defined rim narrower than the body of the vessel itself (Aston 1994, 91). Such stone vessels are known particularly from the late Naqada II period, precisely the time when the frog vessels were produced (Aston 1994, 91). All the frog vessels also show the legs and eyes of the animal, but omit any other details. The eyes were originally inlaid, though in almost all cases the inlays have been lost; the positioning of the legs varied in a way that will be discussed in the following sections.

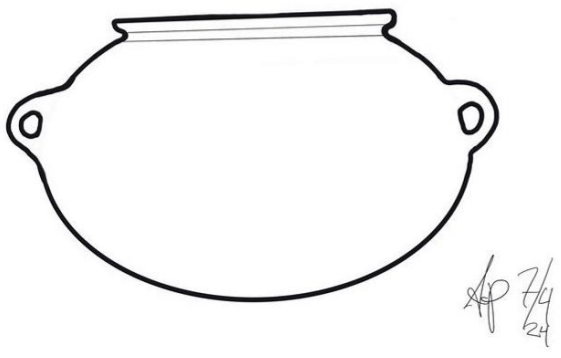

Figure 1: A line drawing of a lug-handled stone vessel. Reproduced from Petrie and Quibell 1896, drawn by Anna Silberg Poulsen.

Nonetheless, there exists a great deal of individual variation in detail among these vessels. The head shapes and rim types represented show considerable diversity among all examples. The largest examples are nearly double the length and width of the smallest. Vessel 1 is quite slender; vessel 6 has a wide, squat body (see Table 1). This differentiation of wider and more slender forms might be reflective of the varied species of frogs that exist along the Nile (Cooney 1976, 204). The rim of the former is of the deeply incised variety; the latter is a simple flat top rim flush with the body. Vessel 2 is rotund almost to the point of circularity; the back legs are barely represented.

The materials of the vessels show a similar variability; breccia, chlorite, gneiss, steatite, and several varieties each of limestone and serpentine are represented. The use of many types of colorful stone is a part of the flourishing of stoneworking during the Late Predynastic. Excavations at Nekhen confirm Naqada II as a period of diverse stone use (Hikade 2004). Looking through any major museum's collection of Naqada II stone vessels will display a similar range of stones, especially multicolored stones like serpentine and breccia (Needler 1984, 238, for example). The range of materials in the frog vessels is a part of this wider tradition. In certain cases, such as the breccia of vessel 4, the choice of stone may be reflective of the toad's warts (Faltings 2014, 129-130).

Unlike all other vessels in the catalog, vessel 16, LDUCE-UC15213, the Petrie Museum example, is not a lug-handled jar in its basic design. It bears no rim on its back nor lug handles anywhere on its sides. Moreover, the basic shape of the frog is quite different from all other examples: it is the tallest of the vessels, as opposed to the other frog vessels that bear a lower profile, and it has a sharply sloping back rather than a flat outline as is more common. These features are easily explained by this not being a frog-shaped vessel of the same category as the others. Instead, it is a frog-shaped figurine with a hole drilled in the back. If we were to simply plug the hole, it would fit in well with the "quadrant"-style slope-backed frog figurines found at Elephantine and other sites (see Krammler 2016, 127). Unfortunately, a lack of provenience prevents us from fully investigating the possible reasons, timing, and origin for this particular innovation, but it is of a different type of artifact than all those now under consideration.

Sitting Frogs

A group of closely shared traits marks all but vessels 14 and 15 as belonging to a single stylistic category, exemplified by vessel 1 (Fig. 2). In these vessels, the jar handles rest on the flanks of the animal, generally about level with the eyes. The legs are folded underneath the animal; in all but one case, they are incised flush against the body; in some cases, including vessels 7 and 12, toes have been carved into the feet. The position differs slightly for vessel 5, which has legs that stick out straight down a

Figure 2: Vessel 1, the sitting frog vessel from el-Mahasna, front and side views. E9665 - Courtesy of the Penn Museum.

short distance upon which it sits. From this posture, we might call this category "sitting frogs", in that the frog sits neatly upon its legs.

The 13 of the 15 frog-shaped stone vessels found so far fall into this category. While there are a few differences in exact proportions, nonetheless the sitting vessels form a distinct type. The remarkable regularity of feature placement speaks to a clear, culturally-informed idea of what a frog vessel should look like and how it should be produced. This similarity of form is quite like the standardized "quadrant" shape of the faience frog figurines known from the Early Dynastic Period and Old Kingdom (Kremler 2016, 127). It is also quite unlike the case of stone frog figurines from that same period, where great variability seems to have been the norm (Kremler 2016, 134). This seems to have held true across all of Egypt, as our known Lower Egyptian example does not contrast with any of those from Upper Egypt, though more examples could change this assessment in the future.

Prone Frogs

There are a few vessels in the corpus, however, that follow a slightly different pattern; we might term these the "prone" frogs. Vessels 14 (Fig. 3) and 15 have strong similarities to one another, as noted by Kantor (1952, 242), and two significant differences from the rest of our corpus. Rather than resting under the body, the legs protrude some distance; the forelegs of vessel 14 have detailed toes. The jar handles sit not on the flanks, but at the rear of the animal and the nape of the neck. These are sharp deviations that affect both the appearance and practical use of the object in how it sits and how the lug handles can be used.

While the low number of known examples hinders deeper analysis, the existence of two similar and well-provenanced examples of a distinct type points to an underlying phenomenon. One possible explanation is hybridization between multiple animal types, which is known from many other artifacts of the time (examples include Petrie 1896, pl. XLVII, no. 2 and the knife handle of Huyge 2004). If these vessels are hybrids, then the animal with which they are mixed is the turtle. Turtles, which when represented in art in this period are generally the African softshell turtle Tri-

onyx triguinis (Fischer 1968, 5), share their habitat with Nile-bound amphibians such as frogs and toads and therefore may have been associated with them. Turtle vessels from this period are known; several examples are described by Fischer (1968, p. 9, pl. 11 and 12). The short legs sticking out from the body and lug handles (if any) at the neck and tail are diagnostic of turtle vessels of the period, such as Fischer's plate 11 (1968). It is therefore plausible that these features were grafted onto the frog. This is at present highly speculative as other diagnostic features, such as a shell, are missing, but in an artistic world that could produce a hybrid fish-ibex (Huyge 2004) a turtle-frog is conceivable. Perhaps with more examples of this type, it would be clearer whether or not such a hybridization has taken place.

Vessel 14 In Local Context

Frog vessel 14 shares the general features of a prone frog with 15, but with a unique addition: small holes have been carved along the body into which have been inserted fine chips of lapis lazuli, some of which have survived. This is a rarity in the period; lapis does not appear among the turtle corpus cited by Fischer, nor among the comparable vessels cataloged by Petrie, nor any other of the Naga ed-Dêr theriomorphic vessels (Fischer 1968; Petrie and Quibell 1896; Savage 1995). Indeed, only one other vessel from the whole of the Naqada II period is known to have lapis inlay, a single tubular vessel from el-Amrah with a disk in its base (Aston 1994, 72-3). A few examples are known of small artifacts, such as palettes, with lapis inlays (Kantor 1952, 242), but these artifacts are neither numerous nor particularly similar to 14. Rather, Predynastic lapis artifacts are chiefly beads made wholly of lapis; it is worth noting that this is often in connection with imported goods or Mesopotamianizing artifacts such as cylinder seals (Payne 1968). In order to understand why this vessel might bear this unique decoration, it is worth investigating its original context in more detail.

Naga ed-Dêr's cemetery N7000 represents the burials of a community of Upper Egyptians spanning from the Middle Predynastic II (ca. 3800 BCE, early in the Naqada II period) to just before the First Dynasty (Savage 2001, 1266). Through an analysis of the spatial arrangement of the graves in the cemetery, it is possible to create a picture of six distinct social groups present at the site (Savage 1995, 81-

Figure 3: Vessel 14, The lapis-inlaid prone frog vessel found at Naga ed-Dêr. Courtesy of the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology and the Regents of the University of California — 6-17171.

86). Each of these groups pursued different strategies in pursuit of social and economic gains. Cluster 1, for example, was highly connected with Nubian trade, with ivory objects found frequently among their grave goods, while Cluster 6 seems to have used a mixture of control of pottery manufacturing and ritual activity (Savage 1995, 288-294).

N7304, where vessel 14 was found, belongs to Savage's Cluster 3. This group rose in fortune slowly throughout the cemetery's lifetime, with its influence (as measured by tomb content, size, and design) peaking in Phase 3 of the cemetery before declining slightly (Savage 1995, 284). Savage's Phase 3 corresponds neatly to the Late Predynastic II, i.e. roughly Naqada IID (Savage 2001, 1265). Several groups in Naga ed-Dêr used trade as a tool towards advancement, with Cluster 3 seemingly focused on the north and east, drawing goods from Sinai, the Levant, and the broader Mesopotamian trade networks (stretching ultimately into Central Asia). The presence of substantial copper and lapis goods in particular point to a successful and long-term profit from thetrade of with the region (Savage 1995, 293). While one author has suggested that some lapis may have been procured natively within Egypt, the balance of other evidence nonetheless guarantees Mesopotamian connections with cluster 3 (Hoffman 1986). The more likely scenario is lapis mined in Afghanistan, imported to Uruk and neighboring sites, then traded through Levantine merchants into the Nile Valley through intermediaries like those of Savage's group 3 (Wengrow 2006, 33).

Grave N7304 is a particularly striking example of how deep the Mesopotamian connections ran at Naga ed-Dêr. It contains a cylinder seal, an object common in Mesopotamia during the period and one important for both practical and symbolic reasons to its owner (Kantor 1952, 246; Hill 3004, 8). This seal, likely of limestone, bore a design of four fish with herring-bone cross-hatching, a style broadly like that of contemporaneous Uruk seals but with details suggesting an Egyptian manufacture imitating Mesopotamian designs (Kantor 1952, 246). The making, ownership, and use of such a seal would have been a strong indicator of the owner's links to regions outside the Nile Valley. In a similar vein, the tomb contained many small pieces of worked copper and beads of lapis lazuli, among other grave goods (Kantor 1952, 245). Both of these materials also have origins in West or even Central Asia (Wengrow 2006, 33, 39). This further supports the idea of a tomb owner with substantial trade links to the regions through which these raw materials were imported, i.e. the Sinai and the wider Uruk world. Not only does this assemblage paint a picture of a wealthy individual, it also tells us directly where this wealth came from.

Mesopotamian Influences on Vessel 14

If we examine other material at contemporary Mesopotamian sites, we can find an explanation for the lapis inlays and other unique features of frog vessel 14. The Late Predynastic of Egypt corresponds most closely to the Late Middle and Late

Uruk periods in Mesopotamia (and their equivalents at other sites with differing chronological traditions) (Joffe 2000, figure 1). At Uruk during the Late Uruk period, we find a substantial corpus of animal figurines, mostly of white stone and largely of comparable size to the Egyptian frogs (Becker 1993). The best parallels to the frog from tomb N7304 can be found among cattle figurines. Looking at Becker's figurines numbers 1059 and 1060 in particular, we can see patterns of lapis lazuli inlays pressed into the sides of seated cattle (Becker 1993, pl 97). A similar pattern is presented by no. 1117, from the same time and place, which again features lapis (this time on a standing cow) (Becker 1993, pl 103).). While these are not vessels, they use the same technique of decorating animal representations as vessel 14, inlaying shaped lapis in white stone to produce a colorful effect.

At Uruk, frog-shaped artifacts are also attested during this period, but they are of a distinctly different form than their Egyptian contemporaries. Only two and a half frogs are preserved, and only one is clear enough to allow obvious anatomical comparison (1188 on Becker 1993, pl. 114). It is quite triangular viewed from the top down and has a pointed nose. The forelegs are under the animal, but the back legs are carved on top, so that from the top view they are prominently visible down to the feet. It has none of the roundness of its Egyptian counterparts and the oversized back legs contrast sharply with the balanced size of the limbs of Egyptian frog vessels. While the Egyptians borrowed certain motifs and ideas from Mesopotamia, the dissimilarities between the Uruk frog vessels and the amphibians in the Egyptian corpus demonstrate that the way of representing frogs was not among them.

More good comparisons to vessel 14 can be found at another major Mesopotamian city of the period, Susa. There, during the Susa II period, skilled artisans produced a wide variety of theriomorphic stone vessels; these vessels are chiefly in alabaster, which contrasts with the wide diversity of stone used in Egypt (Álvarez-Mon 2020, 48). These range from the realistic and detailed, such as several birds with carved feathers, to the fantastical, such as a bird with two heads, to the charming (a bear drinking from a pot) (Le Breton 1957, 111). Most relevant to our discussion here is a frog-shaped vessel currently on display in the Louvre (numbered SB 2919 ; AS 6587) from the site (Fig. 4). The frog has little in common with its Egyptian contemporaries; its legs are ill-defined, the eyes fully sideways, no lug handles, the body long and perhaps salamander-like; only the basic form of a tailless amphibian betrays its common animal origin. As with the Uruk frog, whatever the Egyptian artists may have been drawing from their counterparts at Susa, it was not the precise means of representing frogs in stone. Better parallels can be found among other theriomorphic vessels of the time. Some of the Susa II vessels have decorations of various sorts in the stone of the vessel. There is, for example, a bird-shaped vessel that has been beautified by chiseled lines along the sides and back of the animal, matching exactly the location of the wings and tail of the animal in life (Harper et al. 1992, 65). And it is not alone; the three-necked vessel on the same page displays a

"characteristic zigzag pattern" carved all over the body (Harper et al. 1992, 65). Other vessels are painted or have a multisegmented and multimaterial form (Harper et al. 1992 61-62). This diversity of decorative techniques differs sharply from the Egyptian frog vessels, where the body is mostly smooth and undecorated, with only small carvings of the legs and inlays for the eyes. Several frog figurines with decorative inlays on the body are known (Faltings 2014, 126-127), but among vessels only number 14 has inlays of this type. The use of lapis inlays in vessel 14 fit well with the diversity of decorative techniques used by Susian artisans in their theriomorphic vessels.

There is a more direct analog for vessel 14 at Susa. Louvre vase SB 3016 (Fig. 5) has several dozen tiny holes drilled carefully and shallowly into its sides. These holes seem to have been filled with bitumen (Álvarez-Mon 2020, 48). This was the same material used to affix the lapis lazuli to the frog from Naga ed-Dêr tomb N7304 (Kantor 1952, 242). While the ambiguities of cross-regional dating make it difficult to say if this particular vessel came before or after tomb N7304 frog, it demonstrates that the same technologies in use in Egypt for vessel 14 existed in Susa around the same time. While this is not quite as exact a comparison as that of the Uruk lapis-inlaid cattle, it is further proof for technological and stylistic parallels between the two regions.

Vessel 14 in Interregional Context

These similarities between decorative methods fit into a wider picture of large-scale, long-term exchange across the Ancient Near East during the fourth millennium. Egypt was connected to these networks of exchange chiefly by trade with the Levant, especially sea trade with Syria (Wengrow 2006, 140). The Late Predynastic saw a massive expansion in these trade routes, driven by social shifts and the needs

Figure 4: A frog vessel from Susa. © 2007 Musée du Louvre / Thierry Ollivier. https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010122979

of elites (Guyot 2008, 720). Trade carried not only goods like copper and lapis but also symbols and the ideas they represented (Wengrow 2006, 142; Guyot 2008, 725). There are many examples, such as the famous niched architecture symbolized in the serekh (Silverstein 2008) and the iconography of the Gebel el-Arak knife (Pittman 1996). In general, what was shared was not exact meaning, but rather the "form and function" of artistic motifs (Pittman 1996, 13-14). The end result was a "shared system of pictorial symbolic expression" between Egypt and Mesopotamia (Pittman 1996, 18). This, in turn, was part of a pattern of growing and shifting networks both within Egypt and with the outside world (Stevenson 2016, 438-443).

This theory of a loose exchange of ideas mediated by long networks, rather than exact replication of foreign ideas, fits neatly with vessel 14 and its similarities and differences with Mesopotamian art. On the one hand, the basic object is clearly Egyptian; it shares much more in common with the other known Egyptian frog vessels than than to those found in Susa or Uruk. On the other hand, its lapis inlays stand out among local works but fit nicely the patterns of Mesopotamian art. The pattern of lapis inlays differs between similar pieces from Uruk (whose inlays are stylized triangles, rather than circles), but the technology and motif of lapis inlay is nonetheless shared. That lapis itself comes to Egypt through Levantine trade networks and adds to the foreignizing nature of the vessel. Moreover, the use of white stone, while known in Egypt from the period, fits neatly with the Mesopotamian sculptors' strong preference for similarly-colored stones. The overall impression of vessel 14 is of a Mesopotamian finish on an Egyptian artifact.

Social Implications

The intricate detailing of these vessels allows us to paint at least a partial picture of their social role. We do not know most of their use life, as detailed chemical and

Figure 5: A stone theriomorphic vessel from Susa with holes for inlays. © 2008 Musée du Louvre / Thierry Ollivier. https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010122980

wear analysis has yet to be performed, but we know that they most probably played a role in funeral rites, as four of five provenanced examples come from tombs. The fine work would have taken many hours of labor to complete, meaning the final product would come at considerable expense. Displaying such a valuable vessel during funerary rites (and perhaps earlier in its object history) would have signaled one's wealth and access to highly-skilled stoneworkers. This, in turn, would have increased its owner's social capital, aiding their advance to still-greater wealth and authority (Plourde 2009, 265-6). As a knock-on effect, those who could control such production therefore wielded significant power in their communities (Bard 2017, 12-3). Beautiful, detailed theriomorphic vessels represent one of the many expressions of this phenomenon, what Wengrow calls "a prestige-goods economy" that was critical in the development of the early Egyptian elite (Wengrow 2006, 75-76).

As much as this is true of frog vessels in general, it is even more clear for Vessel 14. Much of the value of a prestige good comes from its ability to signal one's access to a wider network of wealth and exchange (Wengrow 2006, 75-76). Its materials draw upon both local and foreign stones, demonstrating its owner's access to the wealth of the Nile and the world beyond. Its deliberate combination of Egyptian and Mesopotamian styles would have drawn further attention to this fact, making its owner's connections obvious to anyone who saw it. In the context of other finds from Naga ed-Dêr tomb N7304 like copper and the cylinder seal, it seems that the tomb's occupant embarked on a deliberate program to signal their participation in the trade routes from Egypt to Afghanistan. This complements the general picture painted by Wengrow, Stevenson, Pittman, and others of a Late Predynastic shaped heavily by interregional trade and the exchange of ideas and forms that went along with it (Wengrow 2006, 75-76; Stevenson 2016, 438-443; Pittman 1996).

Conclusion

Frog-shaped vessels represent a distinct and well-defined category of Late Predynastic stone vessels. These small vessels, based on squat lug-handled jars, are one example of the larger phenomenon of theriomorphy characteristic of Late Predynastic stonework. They fall into two categories; most are seated, resting upon their legs, while two are prone, lying on their bellies with their legs extended. A lack of provenience hampers fuller understanding of most of the vessels, but the vessel found in grave N7304 at Naga ed-Dêr (called Vessel 14 in this paper) is of particular note. Both its unique composition (particularly its lapis lazuli inlays) and its context point to the Mesopotamian ties of its owner. This agrees with and expands upon earlier findings of interregional connections in the Late Predynastic both at Naga ed-Dêr in particular and in Egypt in general.

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