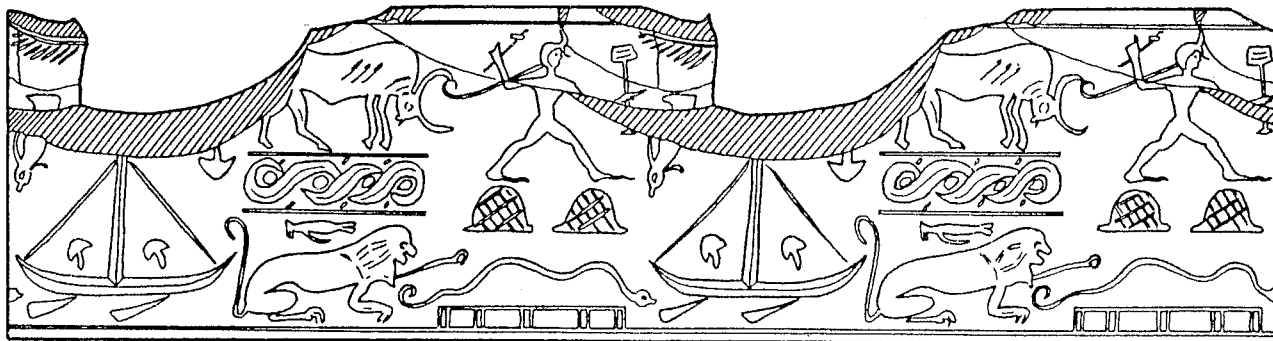


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# ÄGYPTEN UND LEVANTE



# EGYPT AND THE LEVANT

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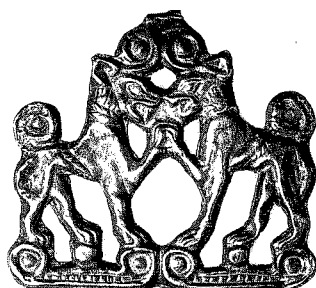
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# THE STATUE OF AN ASIATIC MAN FROM TELL EL-DAB<sup>a</sup>, EGYPT<sup>1</sup>

By Robert Schiestl

The site of Tell el-Dab<sup>a</sup>, today generally identified with ancient *Avaris* (BIETAK 1996), has become synonymous with a meeting point for East Mediterranean cultures, a fertile urban ground for reshaping various traditions to local needs. Among the most remarkable, and monumental, expressions of this found at the site are the fragments of a larger than life statue of an Asiatic man. The head, bearing a voluminous mushroom shaped coiffure, and an adjoining shoulder fragment have been published (BIETAK 1991 b, 62–63, Abb. 10, Taf.16, 17; 1994; 1996 a, fig. 17, pl. 4 B–C) and often reproduced (e.g. BOURRIAU 2000, 189; SCHNEIDER 2003, 188–189). Further fragments can be attributed to this sculpture and, while constituting only a very small part of the whole, a reconstruction of the statue is suggested here (Figs. 2, 3 and 5). The following questions will be addressed: The archaeological context of the fragments, the reconstruction of the statue and a discussion of its iconography. The discussion of the mutilations is excluded here (see SCHIESTL in print).

## 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE LATE MIDDLE KINGDOM CEMETERY, WHERE THE STATUE FRAGMENTS WERE FOUND

All the pieces of the statue presented here were found between 1986 and 1988 in a southeastern part of the cemetery F/I at Tell el-Dab<sup>a</sup> by the excavation team of the Austrian Archaeological Institute under the directorship of Manfred Bietak. The cemetery of stratum d/2 is the oldest cemetery unearthed at Tell el-Dab<sup>a</sup> to date (BIETAK 1991 b). The boundaries of the cemetery have so far been only discovered in the north, where a settlement, centering around a Syrian "*Mittelsaalhaus*", was discovered (BIETAK 1984, 324–325, Abb. 3; EIGNER 1985, 19–21, Abb. 1). A small group of tombs was built immediately to the south of the residential area, but the main cemetery area began about 50 m to the

south. Of this cemetery, which seems to have been used exclusively for funerary purposes, an area covering roughly 3500 m<sup>2</sup> and 45 tombs have been excavated to date. The tombs are predominantly mud brick built chambers covered with mud brick vaults, which were set into pits. They stand in an Egyptian tradition of funerary architecture. A small number of tombs consist only of pits without architecture. Most people were interred individually, adults as well as children, but our picture is blurred by the high degree of plundering. There is great variation in tomb size, ranging from brick cist tombs for infants and small children (e. g. tombs o/19-Nr. 6 and 7; Fig. 1) to large single- or multi-chambered constructions. The diversity in dimensions of tomb constructions among the adult burials could be indicative of a marked social stratification. While we lack almost any inscriptional evidence, the remaining funerary ensembles represent an intriguing mixture of Egyptian and non-Egyptian features. The overwhelming majority of the ceramic tomb goods are Egyptian in shape, fabric and production, specific symbolic goods, however, such as the weaponry, are exclusively of Syro-Palestinian types, for example a duck bill axe, numerous socketted javelin heads and a dagger with two mid ribs (SCHIESTL 2002 and in print). Also the earliest evidence at Tell el-Dab<sup>a</sup> for the Near Eastern custom of ritually interring a donkey in entrance pits of tombs or in an offering pit in the cemetery (o/19-offering pit 3, o/19-tomb 8, o/21-pit 14, see Fig. 1) occurs in stratum d/2. We are dealing with an ethnic group of *ʿm.w* or *Asiatics*, as they are called in Egyptian and referred to in Egyptology respectively.<sup>2</sup>

In the following stratum d/1 this cemetery continued to be used. 27 tombs have been unearthed so far. They now formed part of an elite and organized necropolis of homogenous appearance, focused on the palatial structure

<sup>1</sup> This is an updated version of a paper presented at the Third ICAANE in Paris in April 2002.

<sup>2</sup> For discussion of the term see the latest summary by SCHNEIDER 2003, 5–11.

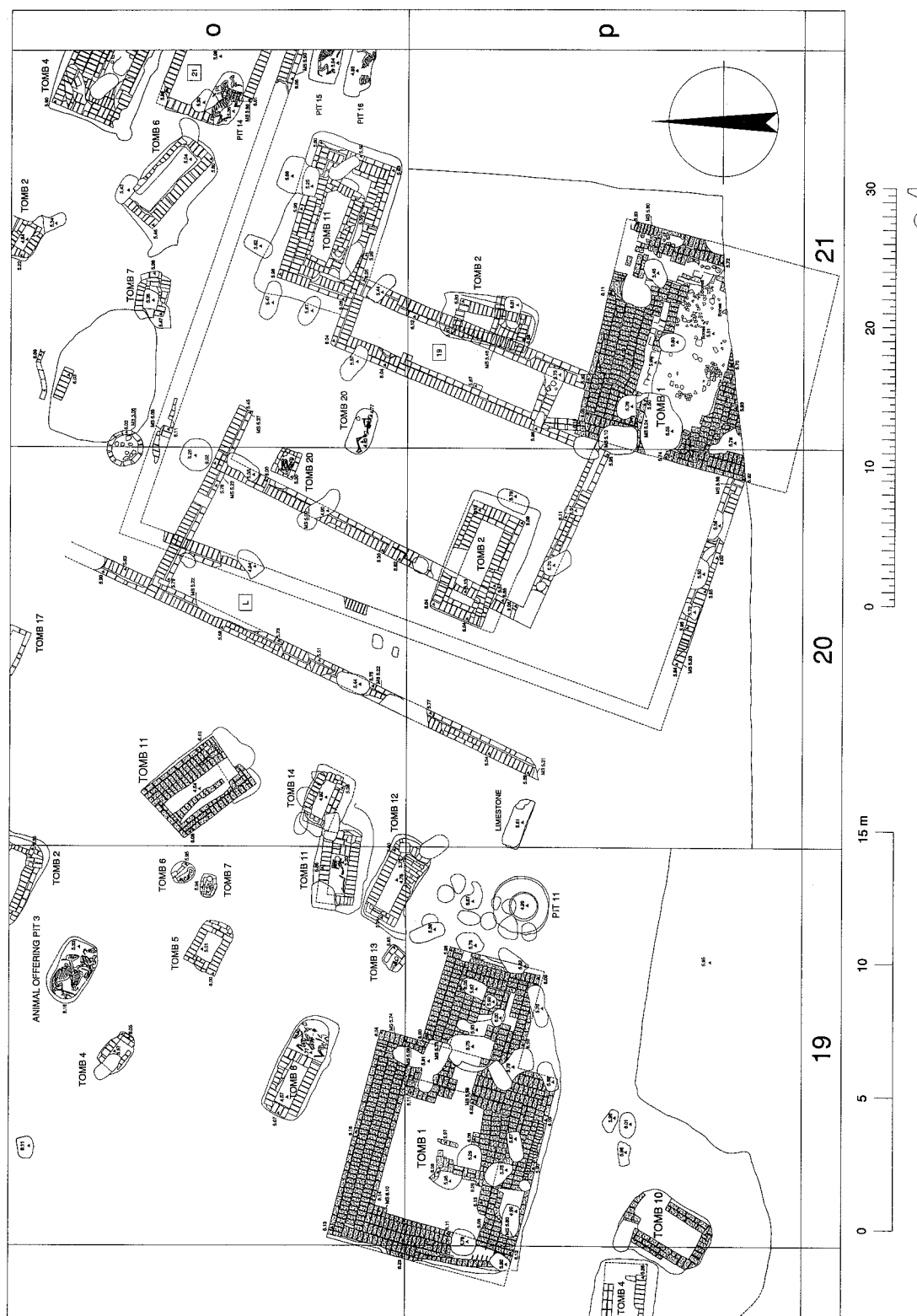


Fig. 1 Map of Tell el-Dab'a, area F/I, southeastern part of cemetery of strata d/2 and d/1 (H and G/4), late 12<sup>th</sup> to early 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. The shaded tombs (p/19-Nr. 1 and 10, o/20-Nr. 11, p/21-Nr. 1) indicate where fragments of the statue were found

erected in the north (EIGNER 1985; BIETAK 1991 b) and thus dubbed "Palace Cemetery". The older tombs of stratum d/2 were generally respected and not disturbed by new constructions.

## 2. THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS OF THE SCATTERED FRAGMENTS AND THE ORIGINAL PLACEMENT OF THE STATUE

The fragments of the statue under discussion were discovered in the context of plundered tombs of strata d/2 (= phase H, late 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty; ca. 1820–1785 B.C.), d/1 (= phase G/4, early 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, ca. 1785–1750 B.C.) and possibly c (= phase G/1–3, first third to mid 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, 1750–1710 B.C.);<sup>3</sup> see Fig. 1, shaded tombs). The tombs lie in an area which continued to be used as a cemetery throughout the 13<sup>th</sup> and into the 15<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (the Hyksos period). It is noteworthy that no fragments of the statue were found in these later tombs (not shown in Fig. 1).

It has been argued (BIETAK 1991 b, 61–64) that the statue was originally set up in the most prominent tomb structure of stratum d/2, tomb p/19-Nr. 1, where the head, a part of the right fist, different fringes of garments, numerous fragments painted red and presumably belonging to the seat and a part of the inscribed base were discovered in the upper layer of a robber's pit. The tomb is a massive construction at the southern end of the cemetery, with remains of a superstructure measuring 8 × 7 m and a smaller annex, 3.7 × 3.7 m, erected in the east of it (BIETAK 1991 b, Abb. 7–9). All in all it covered about 70 m<sup>2</sup>. As only the lowest layers of this construction remain, we cannot say what its superstructure originally looked like, but other Middle Kingdom parallels suggest a vaulted chapel. The tomb had been completely plundered and nothing was left of the original tomb equipment inside the chamber. Bone fragments from the burial chamber can be assigned to two individuals, an adult male and a mature female.<sup>4</sup> While this tomb remains a very good possibility for the original location of the statue, tomb p/21-Nr.1 of stratum d/1, discovered 20 m to the east one year later, would also qualify. In

order to accommodate such a massive figure, a large superstructure is required, which both tombs possess. Of the superstructure of tomb p/21-Nr. 1 only the length (approximately 8.2 m) is known. The width is not clear, as the construction is cut off by a huge pit in the south. If the width is reconstructed symmetrically in relationship to the tomb-chamber, it reaches almost the same measurements, resulting in a roughly square layout of even greater size than p/19-Nr. 1 (see Fig. 1). In a brick-lined entrance shaft to the tomb-chamber a large assortment of lime stone fragments, many without traces of hewn surfaces, and amongst them the right shoulder of the statue was found. As head and shoulder were a fit, it was clear one statue had been smashed and the fragments spread out. Thus the likelihood that further fragments discovered also belong to the same statue increased and all fragments discovered, such as a left foot found in the tomb o/20-Nr. 11 of stratum d/1 (Fig. 1), are included in this reconstruction.<sup>5</sup> Chips of limestone painted red were found in the small tomb p/19-Nr. 10, just south of p/19-Nr. 1. This tomb was completely robbed and filled with settlement debris. It is very difficult to date, but most likely should be placed in stratum c (G/1–3).

Thus, unfortunately, the original position and stratigraphic attribution of the statue remain ambiguous. The end of this monument, its mutilation (Fig. 4.1 and 4.2) and destruction (see SCHIESTL in print) are tentatively assigned to the end of stratum c.

## 3. THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE STATUE

Putting the pieces together, the following reconstruction is suggested (Figs. 2 and 3):<sup>6</sup> The seated figure of a man reaches a height of approximately 2 m, the depth of the seat is about 70 cm (about 1.3 m including the base).<sup>7</sup> The figure is approximately one and a half times life size. On the back of the right shoulder the top right corner of a back support is still visible, thus making its placement and height certain. Emerging from the fragment of the fist tiny traces of the throw-stick

<sup>3</sup> Cf. BIETAK 1996, fig. 3.

<sup>4</sup> I thank K. Grossschmidt and his team for this information.

<sup>5</sup> It cannot, however, be excluded that more, very similar statues had been set up.

<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to my father Reiner Schiestl, my col-

league Nicola Math and Biri Fay for helping me with this reconstruction. Any mistakes are, however, my own.

<sup>7</sup> The reconstruction is based on the Egyptian canon (Cf. ROBINS 1991). It should, however, be noted that the neck is "too" wide, possibly indicating that the whole figure is to be reconstructed with a stockier build.

or crook can be detected,<sup>8</sup> thus clearly placing it in the right hand. The length of the garment is hypothetical. Also, there are no indications of how the left arm and hand were positioned. The fragments painted red on their flat and smoothened surfaces are considered as part of the seat. Initially the statues' eyes were considered to have been inlaid. A limestone eye-inlay found north of the tomb p/21-Nr. 1 was suggested to be from the statue (HEIN in BIETAK and HEIN (eds.) 1994, 99, 112–113). However, the eye sockets are not deep enough to receive inlays. The eye inlay, which is hardly damaged, must therefore have belonged to something different –possibly a funerary mask.

Larger than life size statuary of non-royal Egyptians in the Middle Kingdom is very unusual, but rare examples do exist throughout the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, both from tombs<sup>9</sup> and from temples.<sup>10</sup> They seem to be limited, however, to families of highest ranks. In the late Middle Kingdom non-royal statuary can become quite small in size (VANDIER 1958, 255, 271, 284), as represented by the statuette from tomb l/19-Nr. 1 of stratum d/1 (BIETAK 1991 b, Abb. 12). On the other hand, most examples of non royal larger than life statuary date to this period as well.<sup>11</sup>

The most prominent features of the statue are the protruding hair-do, which is painted in a dark brownish red, and the throw-stick or crook, which in Egyptian hieroglyphs (𓏏) can be used to write '3m, "Asiatic". The skin is painted yellow and its combination with red hair constitutes the Egyptian ethnic code for Asiatic people. Parallels for these features are well known in Middle Kingdom art, such as for example on a relief from the pyramid complex of *Sesostris* I from Lisht (HILL 1995, 153) or the representations of Asiatic group from Beni Hasan tombs 2 (GRIFFITH 1900,

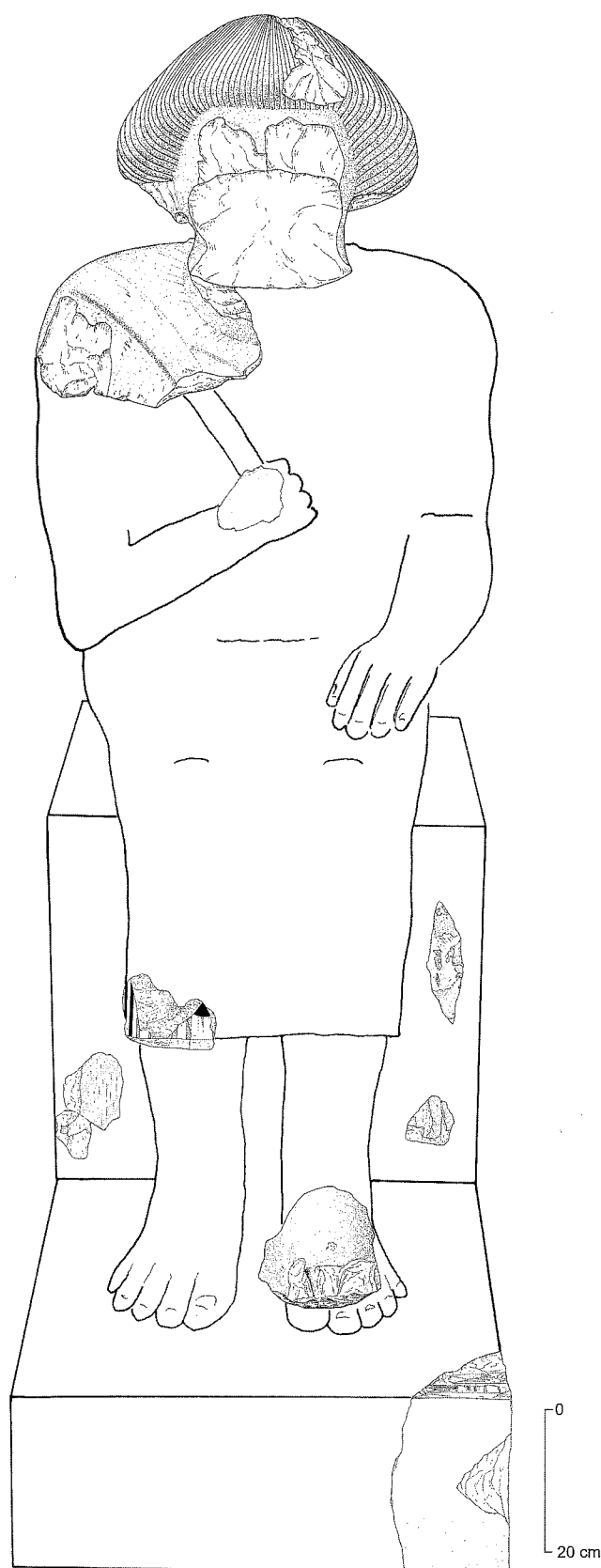


Fig. 2 Graphic reconstruction of limestone statue of an Asiatic man from Tell el-Dab'a, area F/I. Fragments from tombs p/19-Nr. 1 (head, fist, fringe of garment, fragments of seat and base), p/21-Nr. 1 (right shoulder), o/20-Nr. 11 (left foot)

<sup>8</sup> I thank N. Math for this detection.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. EVERS 1929, Taf. 22, 24; Cf. the depiction of the transport of a colossal statue in the tomb of *Djehuti-hetep* at el-Bersheh (NEWBERRY 1894, pl. XV); WILLEMS, PEETERS and VERSTRAETEN 2005, 173–189.

<sup>10</sup> Abydos; MMA 02.4.191; WILDUNG 2000, 149, Nr. 71.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. *Ibu* from Qau, STECKEWEH and STEINDORFF 1936, pl. 15 a; *Imenjseneb* from Elephantine, HABACHI 1985, 51, pls. 61–67 (Nr. 21).

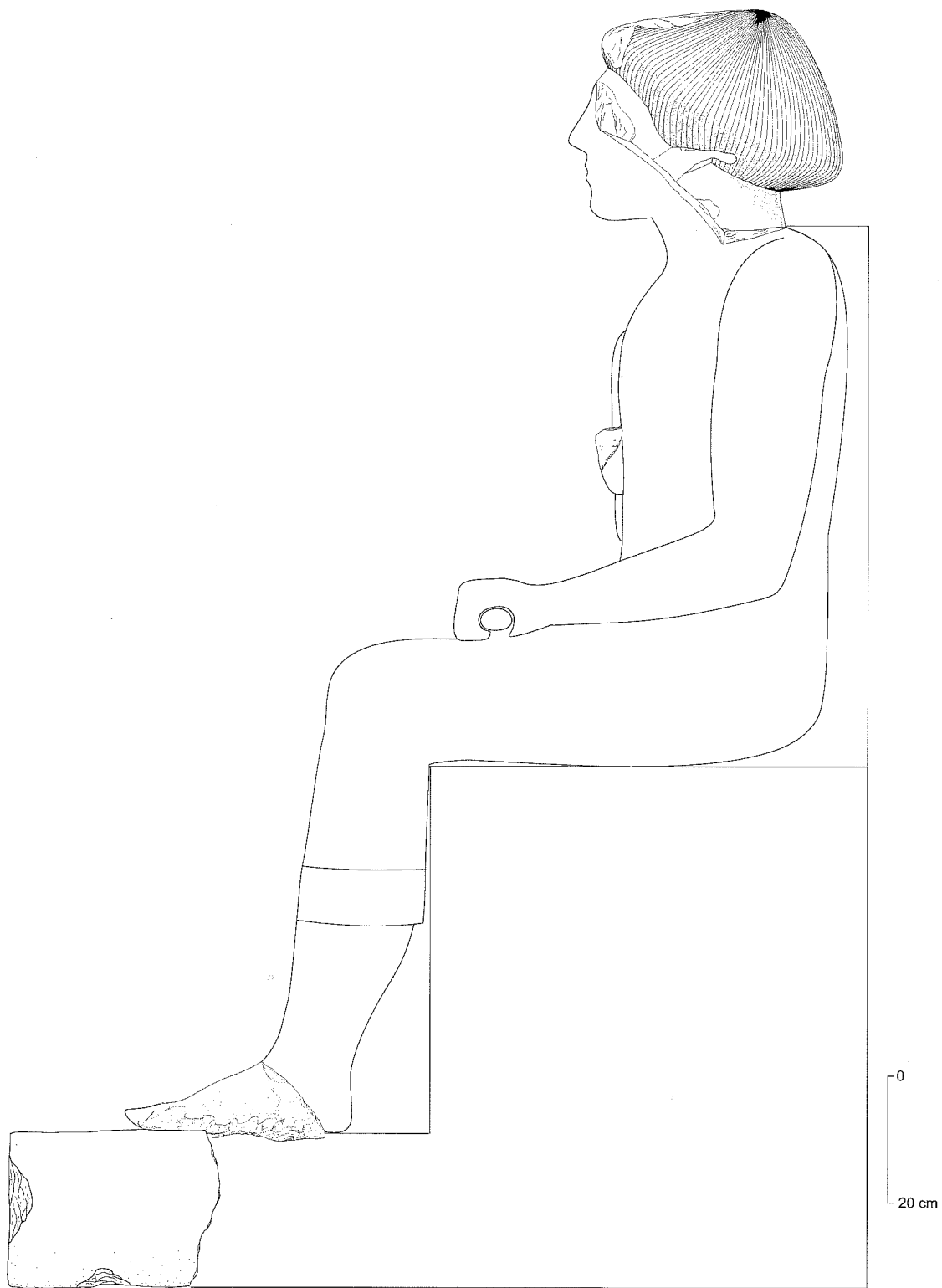


Fig. 3 Graphic reconstruction of statue of Asiatic man from Tell el- Dab<sup>a</sup>, area F/I. For findspots of fragments, see Fig. 2

pl. XXIII, 3) and 3 (NEWBERRY 1891, pl. XXX). The hair style appears in the depictions of conquered Asiatic warriors on the pectoral of princess *Mereret* from Dahshur (DE MORGAN 1895, pl. XX, 2, pl. XXI). It is also worn by a bound Asi-

atic prisoner on a Middle Kingdom magic wand (FISCHER 1987, pl. IV, 14) and is similar to the hairstyle of crudely fashioned execration figurines, covered with magical texts (POSENER 1940, frontispiz, Figs. 3–4). Two small figures of



Fig. 4.1 Head of the statue of the Asiatic man from Tell el-Dab<sup>a</sup>. Chisel marks on top of head



Fig. 4.2 Head of the statue of the Asiatic man from Tell el- Dab<sup>a</sup>. Chisel marks in left eye



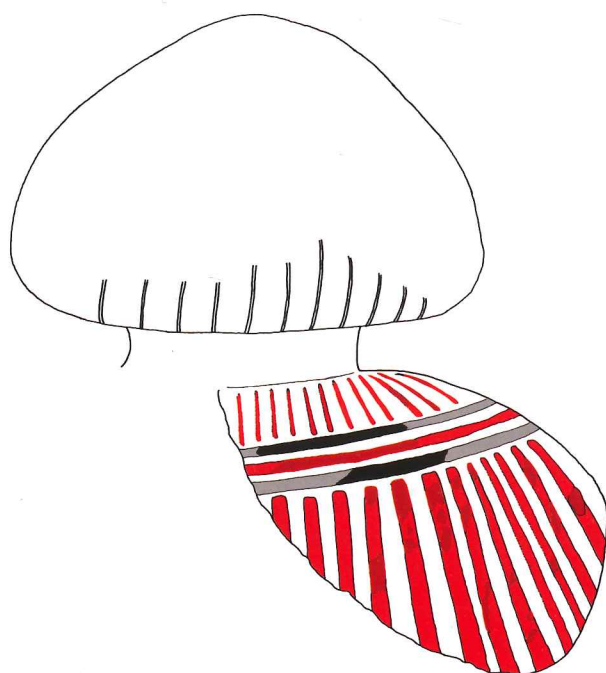


Fig. 5 Statue of the Asiatic man from Tell el-Dab<sup>a</sup>. View of the back of the right shoulder. The reconstruction of the garment: The dark areas represent traces of actual colours. The backpillar has been omitted.

foreign women also have comparable hairstyles, a wooden statuette from Beni Hasan (BOURRIAU

1988, 108–191, fig. 97) and an ivory figure from Kerma (WILDUNG 1984, fig. 159). The closest parallel is a limestone head recently acquired by the Egyptian Museum in Munich.<sup>12</sup> The hair protrudes even more prominently on all sides. In contrast to the Dab<sup>a</sup> head, traces of a beard, which by Egyptian standards is typical for Asiatics, have remained as well. The colors on the Munich head have disappeared but for a small region in the back where the back pillar enters the hair and some traces on the top. The remaining traces of color are of the same diagnostic reddish brown as on the Tell el-Dab<sup>a</sup> head.

Another feature emphasized in Egyptian depictions of Asiatic people is their colorful attire. On our statue traces of the design of the garment are best visible on the back of the right shoulder (Fig. 5): A collar is detectable, with three horizontal stripes in black, red and black, with white spaces in between. Above this, short vertical red lines radiating from the neck are visible. Beneath the collar, the cloth consists of vertical red stripes (see Fig. 5). Traces of the same design can still be detected on the front upper chest, beneath the crook. It is clear that the right shoulder was covered and therefore, despite our scarce evidence, we can draw some conclusions as to how the garment looked.<sup>13</sup> The whole upper body was covered, as is clear by the way the horizontal stripes of the garment fall in the back (Fig. 5). Furthermore, if a shoulder is left bare, it is generally the right one, both in Syro-Levantine<sup>14</sup> and Egyptian costumes. The figure was clearly not wearing the Syro-Mesopotamian robe with fringes ("Fransenmantel")<sup>15</sup> or thickly rolled borders ("Wulstsaummantel"),<sup>16</sup> which either leaves the right shoulder free<sup>17</sup> or drapes one end of the garment over it.<sup>18</sup> The fragment of an end of a cloth shows a different arrangement of stripes: four vertical red stripes and two vertical black stripes

<sup>12</sup> MÄS 7171, WILDUNG 2000, 165, Nr. 83; I would like to thank Biri Fay who kindly provided me with information on this statue.

<sup>13</sup> The evidence for dress from tombs is also scarce. As of stratum b/3 (F) onwards toggle pins are found *in situ* in tombs at Tell el-Dab<sup>a</sup>. They are always on the left side of the upper body (Cf. BIETAK 1991 a, 156–157).

<sup>14</sup> There are, in glyptic art and wall paintings, exceptions, where the left shoulder is shown bare. For example in Beni Hasan tomb 3 (NEWBERRY 1893, pl. XXX): Of the group of four Asiatic men in the middle, one is depicted with a bare left, one with a bare right shoulder. On

seals (cf. for example, SCHROER 1985, Abb. 12, 44) in both cases two persons are shown antithetically and the person facing right is shown with a bare left shoulder, presumably due to the composition as a mirror image.

<sup>15</sup> STROMMINGER 1958, 121.

<sup>16</sup> SCHROER 1985, 51–115.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. statue of *Ishtup-Ilum*, from Mari, PARROT 1959, pls. I–II, or statue of dignitary from Ebla, MATTHIAE 1992, pl. 50:1–3.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. statue of *Idi-Ilum*, from Mari, PARROT 1959, pls. IX–X, or statue of a sitting king from Ebla, MATTHIAE 1992, pl. 50:4, pl. 51:1–2.



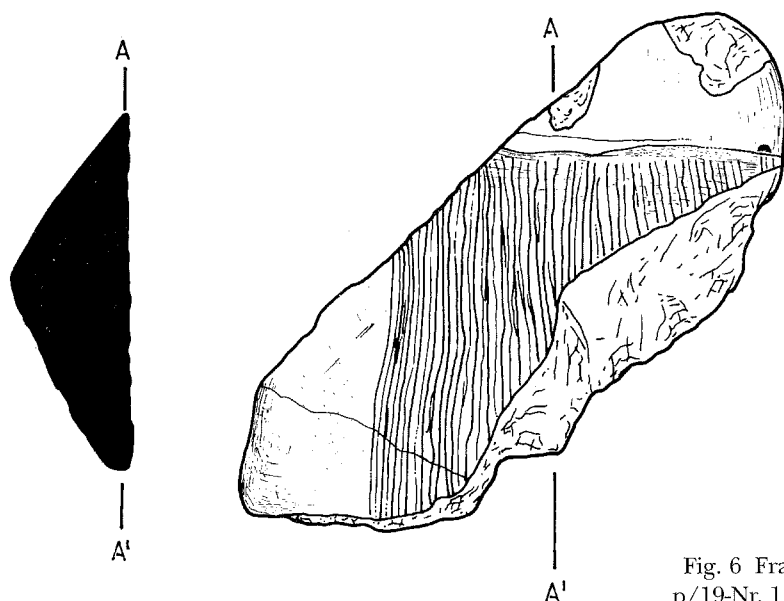


Fig. 6 Fragment of a fringe (8754H2), from tomb p/19-Nr. 1, limestone, wavy fringe painted black, 1:1

remain, as well as part of a larger, possibly round black design. It is most likely that this fragment is from a separate garment, the main piece of clothing, while the red striped garment might constitute a sort of short cape. Such garments are shown as worn by elite men in Egyptian tombs of the Middle Kingdom (e.g. NEWBERRY 1894, pl. XI, XII, XIX, XX).<sup>19</sup>

However, in addition there are three small fragments which seem to be part of a wavy fringe painted black (Inv.Nr. 8754H 2, 3, 4, Fig. 6). This fringe could have formed part of the main garment, possibly a wrap around cloak with a vertical fringe. Such garments appear on stelae of the Second Intermediate Period (MARÉE 1993), possibly representing a fashion influenced by Asiatics.

The fabrics worn by Asiatic men and women (NEWBERRY 1891, pls. XXX–XXXI) tend to be shown as very ornate and full of intricate detail, in contrast to the Egyptian's clean cut textiles. A parallel to the comparatively plain cloth worn by the Dab<sup>c</sup>a statue can be found in the depiction of Asiatic men on a well preserved stela at the temple of Serabit el-Chadim on Sinai. Two figures are wearing kilts with a décor of horizontal red and white

stripes (ČERNÝ, GARDINER and PEET 1952–1955, 206, fig. 17, pl. LXXXV). There also exist long Egyptian cloaks with horizontal stripes (Cf. NEWBERRY 1894, pl. VII); one type in particular had become popular in late Middle Kingdom private statuary (VANDIER 1958, 231, 256).

It seems most likely that the cape and cloak represented an Egyptian-Asiatic stylistic mixture. A similar blend can possibly be seen in the cloak, draped equally over both shoulders, depicted on a Bronze statuette of an Asiatic dignitary, which is said to have been found in the Delta (WILDUNG 1984, 186, fig. 164).

#### 4. MIDDLE KINGDOM TOMB STATUES AT TELL EL-DAB<sup>c</sup>A AND IN THE DELTA

The excavations of the late Middle Kingdom and 2<sup>nd</sup> Intermediate Period cemeteries of Tell el-Dab<sup>c</sup>a have produced few tomb statues. From the hundreds of tombs excavated at Tell el-Dab<sup>c</sup>a to date, only three statues have been found, and only one is clearly associated with a specific tomb.<sup>20</sup> So far all tombs discovered are associated with the Syro-Palestinian population, which settled at Tell el-Dab<sup>c</sup>a as of the late Middle King-

<sup>19</sup> I thank Dorothea Arnold for this suggestion.

<sup>20</sup> Statuette Inv. Nr. 5093 was found in the chamber of F/I-1/19-tomb 1 (BIETAK 1991 b, 64–65, Abb. 12, Taf. 25 B, C), which dates to stratum d/1. A second statuette (Nr. 7195) was found out of context, in area F/I-p/19-above tomb 13 (HEIN 1994). Other out of context finds of

fragmentary Middle Kingdom statues were considered to originally have been set up in temples (ROGGE 1994, 192–193). The royal Middle Kingdom statues discovered by L. Habachi had most likely originally been set up in the Memphis-Fayoum region and been carried off to Avaris at a later point in time (ENGEL 2001, 156).

dom (stratum d/2). While there is evidence of Egyptian settlement at the site at least from the early 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty onwards, we lack any information on their tombs and thus are not able to compare the funerary customs of the immigrants to local ones. While tomb statues, as the sculptural representation of the deceased set up in his or her burial place, are an integral feature of Egyptian tombs, this is not the case for the Middle Bronze Age Levant, the region from where it is assumed the Asiatic population at Tell el-Dab<sup>a</sup> came. However, the few statues found are also from a cemetery of Asiatic people, albeit only associated with tombs of the earliest two strata (d/2 and d/1, H and G/4) discovered so far. Despite a range of foreign features already present in these oldest tombs (SCHIESTL 2002), many aspects of the funerary equipment are in agreement with contemporary Egyptian tombs. Tomb statuary might have been one element of Egyptian religious life the Asiatic settlers originally integrated into their culture of death, but, over time, eventually decided to eliminate.

Most tombs excavated at Tell el-Dab<sup>a</sup> date to the very late Middle Kingdom and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Intermediate Period. In the course of the Middle Kingdom changes in Egyptian funerary practices are observable. The importance of tomb statues seems to decrease, while the wish to set up statues and stelae in temples (DELANGE 1987, 8; BOURRIAU 1991, 8) and shrines, both local and "national" such as at Abydos, increases. This shifting of importance from the resting place of the dead body to cultic centers might have intensified in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Intermediate Period.

However, other regional factors should be taken into account as well. There is a remarkable general dearth of private Middle Kingdom tomb statuary from the Delta (VANDIER 1958, 261–262). It cannot only be explained by the lack of large scale excavations of Middle Kingdom cemeteries there, as also "unprovenanced" hard stone statues in museums and collections very rarely refer to Delta sites. One factor could be the disappearance of any wooden statuary, as no organic material survived in the envi-

ronment of Tell el-Dab<sup>a</sup> and other Delta regions. Considering the local absence of stone raw material, the small wooded areas of the Delta (BUTZER 1975, 1048) could have served as the basis of a regional tradition, now lost. Thus our understanding of wooden statues in the Middle Kingdom and the observation that they become less frequent towards the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (VANDIER 1958, 255; DELANGE 1987, 7; for exceptions see NEEDLER 1981; FAY 1996, 137, fig. 26), is based on statues from Middle and Upper Egyptian sites. In this context one could note the recent discovery of gold foil originally covering two remarkable late Predynastic or Protodynastic wooden statues from the Eastern Delta site of Tell el-Farkha.<sup>21</sup> Had they not been covered in metal, no evidence of these wooden statues would have survived.

## 5. ASIATICS IN MIDDLE KINGDOM ART

Due to the lack of Palestinian early Middle Bronze images, looking for comparisons one is largely forced to resort to either Egyptian or Syrian depictions. Both have their ethno-cultural<sup>22</sup> and contextual limitations. In the Egyptian perspectives, *Asiatics* are restricted to ethnic stereotypes and limited to scenes of conquered or bound prisoners, the Asiatic people essentially being vanquished by definition. There are, however, some indications in Middle Kingdom art, which could be interpreted as a cautious loosening of the rigidly prescribed role the *Asiatic* foe previously had to play. As other sources tell us of a sizeable Middle Kingdom *Asiatic* presence in Egypt (POSENER 1957; SCHNEIDER 2003), before and beyond the region of Tell el-Dab<sup>a</sup>, these changes in Egyptian society are but dimly reflected in art. This is on the one hand due to a generally swift visual integration. Of the large group of people specifically noted as *ʿ3m* (*Asiatic*) mentioned and shown on Egyptian Middle Kingdom stelae, only very few are visually set apart from Egyptians: In one case a woman is marked by an unusual hairdo and costume (SCHNEIDER 2003, 186), in another case the men's skin color is shown as red (SCHNEIDER 2003, 59). On the

<sup>21</sup> [www.muzarp.poznan.pl/muzeum/muz\\_eng/Tell\\_el\\_Farcha/index\\_tel.html](http://www.muzarp.poznan.pl/muzeum/muz_eng/Tell_el_Farcha/index_tel.html)

<sup>22</sup> The problem of using primarily North Syrian and Mesopotamian sources to reconstruct Palestinian and Levantine costume was addressed by D. REDFORD. He

concludes, however, that "*Cloak over kilt...also was the vogue in Palestine and the Levantine coast*" and it can be "*construed as the basic winter costume of the "Amorite" upper class*" (REDFORD 1988, 21).

other hand, when *Asiatics* need to be identifiable as such, different trends can be observed in their depiction: In the Beni Hasan scene (NEWBERRY 1891, pl. XXX), the *Asiatics* are not shown vanquished, but as traders, self-confidently carrying their own weaponry and their leader is not an anonymous enemy, but has a title (*hq3-h3s.t*, “leader of the foreign land”) and a name, *Jbsha*.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, on the above mentioned Dahshur pectoral, only visible on the reverse side, we can detect the conquered enemy wearing a barrel shaped *šwr.t*-bead, an Egyptian type of jewelry, which was often inscribed with the name of the owner (ANDREWS 1990, 196–197) and thus marked their identity as Egyptians and as human individuals. A conflation of these two trends could be seen in the base of a statue showing heads of captives which had completely lost their foreign features (SPANEL 1988, 70). Visually egyptianising foreigners in such a composition would seem to blur the message.

## 6. THE TELL EL-DAB<sup>ca</sup> STATUE IN SOCIAL CONTEXT

Our reassembled statue, however, is a rare example of the self-representation of foreigners living in Egypt, drawing on and emphasizing Egyptian stereotypes of skin color and hairstyle and transforming them to a monument of self-confidence. The statue reflects iconographically what the material culture of the tombs of the strata d/2 and d/1 indicated: a highly Egyptianised, elite group of *Asiatics*, who strived to successfully combine their own traditions with the new ways of the country to which they had immigrated. The material of the statue, limestone, and the high workmanship are definitely Egyptian, the conception a collaboration of the Egyptian artist and his Asiatic client. The size and quality of the product argue for a connection to a royal workshop.

Of particular interest is the inscribed block, which must have formed part of the base upon which the feet rested. It is painted red on the smoothened top and sides, the bottom was left rough and unpainted. Of the hieroglyphic inscription the only legible part is the word *šntr*, incense, written at the beginning of a horizontal line of text, running from right to left. Above it,

a second horizontal line can just be made out, but the signs unfortunately remain illegible (discussion in SCHIESTL in print). They are the last traces of the offering formula, in which the deceased requested certain provisions, such as food, drink, clothes and more, to be offered to him. What makes this most remarkable is that this is our first clear proof that an *Asiatic* inhabitant of Tell el-Dab<sup>ca</sup> is presented as an integrated member in the Egyptian concept of afterlife and all that entails. Whether he, or the other people buried in these tombs, believed in it as well we do not know.

Until the recent discovery of statues flanking the entrance to the royal tomb in Qatna (ELSEN-NOVÁK, NOVÁK and PFÄLZNER 2003, 156–163), the concept of a tomb statue was considered alien to Middle Bronze Age Syria-Palestine. However, temple statues and other imagery from tombs at Ebla offer close iconographic parallels to the Dab<sup>ca</sup> statue. One of the statues discovered in a pit, associated with temple P 2,<sup>24</sup> shows a man holding a similar crook in his left hand over the left shoulder, while the right hand holds a bowl. A scene on a curved ivory object from the tomb of the *Lord of the goats* at Ebla<sup>25</sup> presumably depicts a funerary banquet. A man, probably the deceased, holding a crook or staff in his right arm over his right shoulder, just as in Tell el-Dab<sup>ca</sup>, is seated in front of a table heaped with offerings. The shape of object itself is reminiscent of Egyptian magic wands of the Middle Kingdom.

As unusual as the Tell el-Dab<sup>ca</sup> statue seems, within Egyptian tomb statuary it simply is a variation. Its language was derived from an iconographic Egyptian pool and as such clearly understandable to Egyptian viewers. When interpreting its message, we are easily influenced by the later history of Tell el-Dab<sup>ca</sup> as capital of foreign rulers in Egypt. Thus, is it to be seen as a provocative statement of autonomy on the part of the local Asiatic community and, from the Egyptian point of view, as a warning sign of loss of control? The relationship of the *Asiatic* population at Tell el-Dab<sup>ca</sup> to the Egyptian state, and their degree of independence are, during this period, not clear. Lacking textual evidence, we have to base our

<sup>23</sup> For the suggested reading 'Ab(i)-šarr see SCHNEIDER 2003, 129.

<sup>24</sup> MATTHIAE 1995, 411.

<sup>25</sup> PINNOCK 1994, 22, pl. V c.

“reading” of their political role on the remains of the material culture. This shows a high degree of acculturation to late Middle Kingdom Egyptian culture. There is no evidence that the Asiatic community was acting against Egyptian interests, but indications to the opposite. Within a suggested scenario of cooperation between the Egyptian state and the local Asiatic community in mining, trading and possibly even military expeditions, another, complementary, reading of the statue could be suggested. While it clearly shows an Asiatic man in power, a dignitary, it could also be read as a dignitary ruling over Asiatics. During the period under discussion, it could be argued both sides profited from this collaboration, resulting in a discourse on power and control. The statue could be seen as a product of this discussion, to which it also contributed. Such a collaboration must have been fraught with a certain amount of distrust on both sides. Keeping an Egyptian conception in mind, the iconographic fusion of Egyptian and “Asiatic” roles was one way of appropriating the latter. Within the fluid concepts of ethnicity, in the statue under discussion the Asiatic characteristics were (over)empha-

sized, just as they were completely omitted in the statuette from tomb I/19-Nr. 1 (BIETAK 1991 b, Abb. 12). In the Egyptian way of thinking, what induced fear was often used precisely against it and thus elegantly subdued. In the realm of religion and magic, dangerous creatures such as crocodiles, snakes and scorpions were turned into benevolent gods, and, for example, the scorpion goddess was called upon to help fight scorpion bites, thus, “*fighting like with like... the dangerous force is neutralized*” (PINCH 1994, 36–37). In the case of the god Sopdu, he was turned into a god of foreign lands, and could appear in Asiatic garb (SCHUMACHER 1988). In the Middle Kingdom he appears as such also in border regions, such as the Wadi Gasus (Gawasis), and on Sinai in the get up of a Beduin, holding a crook in one hand (ČERNÝ, GARDINER and PEET 1952–1955, pl. XLVII).

Thus, the Dab<sup>a</sup> image could be considered as actually reassuring Egyptian power over the Asiatics, both in and outside of Egypt, while, in a skilful iconographic ambiguity, simultaneously conveying to the local Asiatic community an appropriate message of their growing importance.

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