

A falsifiable hypothesis: semasiography in fourth millennium B.C. Egypt

Egyptian 'prehistoric' (fourth millennium B.C.) iconography raised many questions in the nineteenth and early twentieth century during its scientific exploration, when two camps arose in regards to its identification: the peculiar signs either represented aquatic or terrestrial constructions. However, as many of the hypotheses neglected a considerable number of social aspects, both interpretations – of archaeological authorities Petrie & Quibell and archaeologist Cecil Torr – cope with practical and theoretical issues which necessitated a re-evaluation of the presented arguments and a reconsideration of the iconography in general.

In this PowerPoint-presentation the sign-clusters are presented through a manual recording-method. Their systematics will accordingly be analyzed and contextualized with (and within) historic data to suggest that the iconography may have represented highly religious architecture which under foreign influences converged into ships and eventually found its way into Dynastic iconography; essentially combining plausible arguments from the earlier two interpretations.

This presentation will also touch upon the possible existence of a semiology-based writing system (semasiography) which was already proposed in 1985, but not really accepted until the turn of the new millennium. Consequently, the numerous definitions and understanding of 'writing' ('recording of speech') and its development in Egypt (and possibly elsewhere) are at trial or at least open to debate.