

cardinal points.⁷⁵⁰ Recovered from a shallow grave (22 cm deep), three inscribed limestone figures and the head of a fourth all showed signs of intentional blows to the top of the skull which had been administered *prior to the painting of the statuettes' hair*.⁷⁵¹ This mutilation must thus be considered an integral part of the fabrication of the figures, which thereby become tangible images of the "stricken ones" (*sqr.w*) conjured in the accompanying texts. Corresponding injuries on Brussels figurines, pierced by three holes in the crown of the head, probably attest to a similar practice at Saqqara.⁷⁵² At Mirgissa, yet further ritual striking must have occurred, for although the group was undisturbed, one of the figurines was found reduced to small fragments. This suspicion is confirmed by the Old Kingdom deposits from Giza in which the clay figures were shattered before their burial in jars.⁷⁵³ The single head may derive from a similar destruction prior to burial, or (like the mud head in the central pit?) allude to the sacrificed Nubian, whose severed skull constitutes the major component of the third deposit.⁷⁵⁴

HUMAN SACRIFICE

It is the content of this third deposit which yields the most curious and unexpected element of the Mirgissa find, for it provides the first indisputable evidence for the practice

750. By virtue of its association with the cardinal directions, four is the most common symbol of "completeness" in Egyptian numerological symbolism and ritual repetition (Sethe 1916, pp. 31–33). For the common ritual use of four enemy figurines, see the examples discussed in Parker, Leclant, and Goyon 1979, pp. 61–65. Although four is the expected number of figures, an illegal excavation at Helwan(?) produced five alabaster examples later acquired by the Cairo Museum (see Posener 1939a, pp. 313–17; and the complete publication in idem 1987). Though the five figures could correspond to the sections of the execration litany, Posener posits the original existence of a sixth for symmetry (1939a, p. 314). The preserved figures contain duplicate copies of all but the first (Nubian) section, which might have been copied on a lost, sixth statuette.

751. Vila 1973, p. 631 and 1963, p. 147. With this "mutilation in production" compare the argument for magical significance in the use of clay images fired prior to being inscribed, advanced above, p. 158.

752. Posener (1940, p. 19) notes that the careful placement of the holes argues against their being the result of later blows. However, he does not recognize that these could still represent intentional mutilation, and he theorizes instead that they might have been filled with hair, feathers, or knives. Of these suggestions, the last (itself a form of intentional mutilation) is the most likely, see below, p. 166.

753. See the comments of Osing 1976a, p. 156.

754. Versus the suggestion by Vila 1973, p. 638, that the head might be "the conventional sign" for commanding the decapitation of a real prisoner (an Egyptian counterpart to the ring of Herod in Wilde's *Salome*). One would expect that the rite had made use of four originally complete figurines; see n. 750, above, and now Koenig 1990, p. 101. The use of "severed" sculpted heads within the execration rites may have Old Kingdom antecedents in the so-called "reserve heads" that typically show disfigurement (Tefnin 1991).

of human sacrifice in classical ancient Egypt.⁷⁵⁵ Interred about four meters from the central deposit, a skull rested upside down on one half of a broken pottery cup, its mandible missing and its upper jaw flush with the surface.⁷⁵⁶ About the skull were found small traces of beeswax dyed with red ochre, presumably the remnants of melted figurines.⁷⁵⁷ Although the cup which had probably once held the skull seemed naturally broken, perhaps as a result of burial, an intentionally shattered piece of inscribed red pottery 15 cm to the southeast clearly affiliated the find with the ritual of the central deposit. Lying a further 5 cm from this broken pottery was a flint blade, the traditional ceremonial knife for ritual slaughter.⁷⁵⁸ That the skull derived from a ritual sacrifice cannot be denied, as it was the initial discovery of a nearby decapitated and disarticulated skeleton which had led to the find of the execration assemblage.⁷⁵⁹ Clearly, the head had belonged to the adjacent body, which appeared less buried than discarded. Examination of the fragile remains suggested a Nubian origin for the sacrificed individual—a human counterpart to the broken enemy figurines.⁷⁶⁰

KNIVES

The close correspondence between the destruction of such substitute images and the Mirgissa sacrifice is underscored by the design of clay figurines from Giza (Old Kingdom) and Saqqara (late Middle Kingdom) whose rudimentary modeling suggests the depiction of

755. This example resolves the issue, but is only briefly mentioned in the basic study by Yoyotte 1980–81, p. 58. See also above, p. 158, n. 727 and p. 160, n. 743. For the possibility of a comparable execration sacrifice at Meroe, compare Shinnie and Bradley 1981, p. 167 (a defleshed skull lacking its mandible placed in a temple wall).

756. Vila 1963, pp. 146–47 and 145, fig. 6; idem 1973, p. 631; and Koenig 1987a, p. 309 (fig. 4).

757. Vila 1973, p. 631, n. 15.

758. The use of flint (*ds*, cf. *Wb* 5: 485–86) for knives dates from Egyptian prehistory, providing the basic Egyptian term for knife (*ds*, literally "flint object," cf. *Wb* 5: 486), and thus attaining traditional and sacred status. In the Book of the Dead, for example, it is specifically used against the enemies of the gods; see BD spell 172, §S5, in Allen 1974, p. 180: "(your) nails like knives of flint against the faces of them that do these (things) against thee." Similarly, the "Apopis Book" stipulates that images of Apep be struck with knives of flint, compare Faulkner 1933, pp. 44–45 and 56 (cols. 22/20–23 and 26/4) and 1937b, pp. 168 and 171 (the significance of flint is ignored by Faulkner, who translates only "knives"). Flint knives are used as well in the cultic sacrifice of the oryx, like foreign enemies a symbol of Seth (see above, p. 132; see also Rochemonteix et al. 1984–87, p. 77/13–14 and Derchain 1962b, pp. 58/7 and 59). A divine pedigree for the weapon appears in Pap. Salt 825: "A knife of flint from eastern Behdet is brought. It came forth from Ra to repel his enemies by means of it" (Derchain 1965, pp. 139 and 7* [col. 6/5]). In light of this evidence, it is difficult to accept Vila's suggestion (1973, p. 638) that the flint blade was used only after a more merciful death by strangulation.

759. Vila 1973, pp. 628–29 and 631.

760. Vila ib d., pp. 637–38.