AN UNDISCOVERED REPRESENTATION
OF EGYPTIAN KINGSHIP?
THE DIAMOND MOTIF ON THE KINGS’ BELTS

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Introduction

As symbolised by the concept called ‘maat (order),’ the existence of the king was highly important to maintain the cosmos of ancient Egypt. Studies of kingship are, therefore, one of the most popular research areas in Egyptology. As a result of that, many investigations have been accomplished by now. One noteworthy study is “Kingship and the Gods” by Henry Frankfort(1), who stressed the pre-eminent power of Egyptian kings as living gods. His view was supported for decades, but later modified by scholars such as Posener and Wildung. Posener described various human aspects of the king from the viewpoint of texts, especially in the Middle Kingdom(2), and Hornung accentuated the aspects of the ruler as the Sun god(3). Recently, those works have been evaluated in the book called “Ancient Egyptian Kingship,” a remarkable compilation of those studies(4).

Current studies about Egyptian kingship tend to deal with royal texts or architecture in a more limited span of time, rather than reviewing the culture of ancient Egypt as a whole. Escaping from such an academic subdivision would be difficult. But in the case of Egyptian kingship studies, we should notice that little attention has been given to royal artefacts that might have a close connection to the king. The main reason is that countless tomb robbers have entered royal tombs since ancient times. As a consequence, most royal artefacts were lost. You cannot expect the gold of Tutankhamun often. Unfortunately, that is a very exceptional case.

In this short essay, I shall suggest a new procedure to review ancient Egyptian kingship in the light of royal artefacts, an area which seems to be somewhat neglected in previous studies. My suggestion here focuses on a royal

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motif, that was applied to the belts of king statuary throughout dynastic periods. As O'Connor and Silverman suggest, 'a new direction of the studies of kingship would benefit from analytical and interpretive investigations of royal iconography and symbolism(5).' Yet the motif has not been attracting people's interests until now. Thus, I am only choosing a few examples from the vast range of material.

I selected the king statuary to review the nature of Egyptian kingship for several reasons. The first reason is that the statuary was produced in royal workshops closely connected to the king. They functioned under a rigid royal canon that must have contained various specialised traditions throughout Egyptian history. The second reason is that the king statuary was certainly a medium of representing the king's sovereignty, divinity, and prosperity to the public, as well as to governing elites and priests. Indeed, some studies have already focused upon the material. The faces of Amenophis III statues varied according to his divine character(6). Such facial expressions cannot be a source to compare with other kings unfortunately. Therefore, another feature of the statuary should be considered. Attachments to the statuary would be a good subject in that sense. For that reason, a motif on the king's belt should be a suitable choice. Finally, many king statues, particularly those made of stone, were often placed outside such as the court of the temple. Therefore, the probability of robbery is lower than the artefacts in royal tombs.

Diamond Motif on the King's Belts

The motif I am concerned with in this paper should be called a "diamond motif." It is usually a continuous lozenge pattern engraved on the belts of king statuary. One good example is the standing figure of Thutmose III, currently kept in the Luxor museum (Luxor J. 2; Cairo CG 42054)(7). As shown in the Fig. 1-1, this masterpiece of the Eighteenth Dynasty art has the pattern on his belt round his cartouche with the king's name. Continuous lozenge and wavy lines are engraved in a quite sophisticated manner in harmony with the clear pleats on his kilt. The numbers of the wavy lines are different between the upper and lower part of the pattern: three and four, respectively.

Another fine example in the New Kingdom comes from the pair statue of Thutmose IV with his mother Tia, in the Egyptian museum in Cairo (CG 42080, Fig. 1-2)(8). In this case, only the king has the motif. The mother does not have...
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Fig. 1 Diamond Motif on the Kings' Belts
1-1 A standing figure of Thutmose III
1-2 The pair statue of Thutmose IV with his mother Tia
1-3 A body relief of Sneferu from Dachsur
1-4 The ivory statuette of a king from Abydos
1-5 The Narmer palette with the details of the king's kilt
any motif on her waist. The motif is mainly occupied with double lozenges; hence, the wavy lines are quite limited. In the same museum, a golden statue of Tutankhamun on a papyrus raft (JE 60709) also wears the “diamond motif.” As it is not difficult to discover the motif on the statues of other kings, even in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasty\(^9\), the “diamond motif” seems to have been quite popular at least in the New Kingdom. If so, how far back can we date the motif?

Although I have not been able to identify the “diamond motif” on the king statuary in the Middle Kingdom so far, the belt motif can be seen on a relief of the pavilion of Senwosret I inside the Karnak temple precinct\(^{10}\). On the building, the motif also occurs in the serekh with the name of the king.

On the other hand, examples from the Old Kingdom are mainly reliefs from the funerary temples. The oldest, obvious case has been discovered from the Fourth Dynasty valley temple of Sneferu at Dachsur\(^{11}\). About twenty-five fragments of raised relief are shown as “Fragments of reliefs” and “Fragments of aprons” on plates. The lozenges are doubled in raised relief, and their sizes vary according to their positions. It is not evident whether these fragments are from the belt of the king. However, one large relief of the body of Sneferu with the motif confirms the tradition of it (Fig. 1-3)\(^{12}\). Such reliefs were also found from the funerary temple of Sahure at Abusir\(^{13}\) and Niuserre at Abu Ghurab of the Fifth Dynasty\(^{14}\).

Turning to the Early Dynastic Period, a beautiful ivory statuette (BM 37996) discovered from the Abydos temple site is of great importance (Fig. 1-4)\(^{15}\). This statuette is about 9cm in height. The royal crown of Upper Egypt can be identified on the top. Although the legs are missing, the left leg seems to step forward as the royal statuary of later periods. A staff was also held in his left hand, probably. Most of his mantle is covered with the “diamond motif” that is edged by another chain pattern. Whether this statuette originally had a colour on it is unclear, but the style definitely shows that it is a king’s figure probably on his Sed festival. While the “diamond motif” is not placed on his belt, this figure confirms the significance of the motif already in the formative period of Egypt.

Finally, on the famous Narmer palette, the king wears a skirt having the belt of the diamond-like motif (JE 32169 = CG 14716, Fig. 1-5)\(^{16}\). The belt motif of the king of Upper Egypt has dots inside a lattice pattern, whereas the king of Lower Egypt has just a lattice pattern. Therefore, both motif schemata
are slightly different from the "diamond motif" discussed above. Perhaps they are prototypes of the "diamond motif," but we should bear in mind that there is a case of the Warka-vase of Mesopotamia\(^{(17)}\). In the top register of the vase, a high ranking person has a similar lattice pattern on the belt, but it seems to be just an indication of colours rather than any geometric motifs.

The Implication of the Diamond Motif

With these examples in mind we can foresee the meaning of the "diamond motif." As this motif has not received scholars' deep interests until now, it presents serious difficulties to identify the motif by museum catalogues or excavation reports. Nevertheless, current evidence indicates that this "diamond motif" was used for the kings' belts at least from the Early Dynastic Period to the New Kingdom. Besides, the fact that the motif is represented on king reliefs as well as on statues also implies that the king actually wore the belt with the "diamond motif" frequently. The gold belt of a royal son Ptahshepses in the Fifth Dynasty (Fig. 2-1) would be a good example to consider the actual usage of it\(^{(18)}\). This belt measures 90cm round and the motif consists of colourful beads. In the centre is the buckle on which his seated figures and names are symmetrically arranged.

On which occasions the king used the belt is a matter open to question. The early example such as the Abydos statuette, shows that the motif was first used as the pattern of the Sed-festival robe. However, a small figure of a lion that has the "diamond motif" on his neck (Fig. 2-2)\(^{(19)}\), and the royal stela of Djer (Fig. 2-3) with the motif seem to suggest that the "diamond motif" had already been regarded as a kind of royal emblem in the early stage of kingship\(^{(20)}\).

The usage of the motif was mainly restricted to the king. So far, no private statuary has the "diamond motif" throughout dynastic periods. Apart from the genre, such finds as two ivory boxes discovered from a First Dynasty elite tomb at Minshat Abu Omar (Fig. 2-4) in the eastern delta have a somewhat similar "diamond motif" on their surfaces\(^{(21)}\). One box measures about 12 by 11cm in length and breadth, and about 8 cm in height. The remains of the other case are three fragile panels. They are about 22 to 23 cm in height and about 31 to 36 cm in length each. As similar fragments have been unearthed at Abydos royal tombs in quantity\(^{(22)}\), the boxes of Minshat Abu Omar should be royal gifts for
Fig. 2 The Implication of the Diamond Motif

2-1 The gold belt of Ptahshepses
2-2 A small figure of a lion from Abydos
2-3 The royal stela of Djer from Abydos
2-4 Reconstructive drawing of an ivory box from Minshat Abu Omar
2-5 Painted decoration of the large niche of Saqqara tomb 3505
2-6 The burial chamber of the Unis pyramid
local chiefs. From Abydos, over 50 pieces come from the tomb of Djer, Djet, Dewen, Anedjib, and Qaa. Each king of the First Dynasty, therefore, seems to have deposited the boxes in their tombs.

Concerning this connection, it is noteworthy that the great First Dynasty elite cemetery of Saqqara, perhaps, had the same kind of privilege of using the "diamond motif" on the walls of some tombs. The best-preserved example is the wall of tomb 3505, on which the motif occupies a larger area than other motifs (Fig. 2-5)(23). Here the "diamond motif" is painted in large niches, whereas such motifs as the half-divided lozenge or chain pattern are drawn in small niches. Similar drawings seem to have existed on the tombs such as 3503, 3504, and 3507, and it probably indicates the hierarchy of the motifs.

As regards the hierarchy of the motifs, the burial chamber of the Unis pyramid (Fig. 2-6)(24) gives us much useful information. This chamber, famous with the so-called Pyramid Texts, has various motifs on the walls. Here, the "diamond motif" was painted wider than others were, and the top position of the motif demonstrates that it actually divides the wall and the ceiling. Since many stars cover the ceiling, one can imagine that the role of the "diamond motif" was to separate the Egyptian cosmos into some sections (e.g. this world and the next world) in a sense. Whether this role of the "diamond motif" also relates to the symbolic role of the king should be examined in the future. Likewise, the frequent occurrence of the "diamond motif" on the false doors in the Old Kingdom and coffins in the Middle Kingdom also should be considered. The elaborate scheme of both motifs looks so similar to the diagram of the Unis pyramid motifs. Thus a typical corpus of funerary motifs might have existed among elites by the end of the Old Kingdom. On the other hand, diamond-like motifs on the ceilings of some noble tombs in western Thebes seem to be variations of the funerary motifs in the New Kingdom.

Other Motifs on the Kings’ Belts

Accordingly, the "diamond motif" seems to have significant meanings among the Egyptian kings at least until the New Kingdom, but there is a case like that of the great ruler Khufu of the Fourth Dynasty, who did not have any motif on his belt. This tendency seems to have lasted until Khafre and Menkaure (Fig. 3-1)(25). The statues of these three kings are well known as the masterpieces of the Old Kingdom art. They did not wear the belt with the
Fig. 3 Other Motifs on the Kings' Belts
3-1 Menkaure and Queen Khamerernebty
3-2 A standing figure of Senwosret III
3-3 The Ka statue of Tutankhamum
3-4 A standing figure of Amenophis IV (Akhenaten)
3-5 A standing figure of a Ptolemaic king
“diamond motif.” Since the “diamond motif” has been attested at the valley
temple of Sneferu in the beginning of the dynasty, the lack of any motif for the
three kings must have some serious significance\(^{(26)}\). It is unlikely that they used
a belt like the one of Ptahshepses, as most statues of the kings already have a
blank buckle on their belts.

On the other hand, it is worth pointing out that a new type of motif
appeared on the belts of the king statuary in the Middle and the New Kingdom.
In the Middle Kingdom, the most common type is the motif that has a group of
two or three vertical lines at regular spaces. One of the finest examples is the
standing figure of a Twelfth Dynasty king Senwosret III in the Egyptian
museum, Cairo (Fig. 3-2)\(^{(27)}\). This statue, famous with the personal expression
of his face, was placed in front of the funerary temple of Nebhepetre
Mentuhotep in the Eleventh Dynasty. It is my understanding that most king
statues in the Middle Kingdom have the motif on their belts, if any. It should be
emphasized that the new motif also appears on the kings’ belts in later periods\(^{(28)}\)
as well as gods\(^{(29)}\).

As for the New Kingdom, various motifs were used for the kings’ belts. A
new, rishi (feather)-coffin like pattern was favoured in the reign of
Tuthankhamun, as well as the traditional “diamond motif.” An interesting point
is that those motifs can be identified among the statues found from one place,
that is his famous tomb (KV62) in the Valley of the Kings. Here, while his Ka
statue (Fig. 3-3)\(^{(30)}\) has a plaited pattern, small figures such as the king with
harpoon wears the “diamond motif.” Whether there is a choice of motifs
meeting the character of the statues should be examined. It should also be added
that these motifs were not used for coffins\(^{(31)}\) or shabtis. Apart from such cases,
an unique motif appeared on some statues of the heretic king, Akhenaten (Fig. 3-4)\(^{(32)}\)
in the Eighteenth Dynasty. The motif consists of a series of his cartouches,
which is utterly a distinctive feature compared with others.

Finally, motifs of the Mediterranean world seem to have influenced the
pattern of the kings’ belts in Ptolemaic period. A king (no. 939, Fig. 3-5)\(^{(33)}\) in
the Cairo catalogue of statues adds circles to the traditional king’s belt motif of
the Middle Kingdom. The circles are placed next to the vertical lines group, and
some circles even have a cross inside. The same motif is used for his armlets on
both arms.

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Conclusion: Belt Motifs for the Legitimation of the King

A series of evidence discussed above clearly shows that Egyptian kings had several motifs on the belts of their statues. The oldest motif was probably a "diamond motif," which dates back to the First Dynasty. Various motifs were invented later, and most of them were used repeatedly by later kings.

My hypothesis on the usage of these motifs is that it must have connected to the legitimation of the kings. The traditional motifs such as the "diamond motif" seems to have been favoured by the kings who required to legitimate their powerless kingship, whereas such powerful kings as Khufu or Ramesses II probably did not need to use or to depend on them. On the other hand, kings who wanted to create a new image of his kingship need a completely new style of motif. Perhaps Akhenaten was such a king, therefore the use of traditional "diamond motif" by the next king Tutankhamun might be a result of his re-legitimating actions against a series of radical reforms by the prior king.

Since there are great difficulties to make a corpus of the motifs of the kings' belts at the present stage, there is room for argument on this hypothesis. Further researchs would be required in the future. At the same time, we should bear in mind whether the usage of these belt motifs would be an indication of the differences of the statues' character or provenance. Or it may depend on the divine character of the kings. For that reason the investigations of the king statuary after the Third Intermediate Period would be highly useful in the future, too. As the studies of Egyptian kingship from the viewpoint of artefacts, especially motifs, have been insufficient compared with the studies of royal texts and architecture by now, I hope that this investigation will be a good start to have a better understanding of the unique king-centred culture.

Notes

References of the figures in this paper are indicated in the notes below. On several points in the paper, I gratefully acknowledge helpful discussions with Emeritus Professor Setsu Onoyama of Kyoto University, and Professor John Baines of the University of Oxford.

(5) Ibid., p. XXVII.
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(9) For example, The Twentieth Dynasty Statue of Ramesses III as a standard-bearer of Amun-Re (JE 38682; CG 42150) has the motif on his belt. See, *Ibid.*, pp. 266-7.

(10) C. Vandersleyen, *Das alte Agypten*, Berlin, 1975, pl. 270a


(13) L. Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs S'ahu-Re' II*, Leipzig, 1913, pls. 18, 33, 35, and 36.


(23) Beautiful illustrations of the motifs can be found in: W. Emery, *Great Tombs of the First Dynasty III*, pls. 6-8.


(26) As no king statues with the motif on their belts have been found prior to these kings until now, the adoption of the motif to the king statuary may have started from the Middle Kingdom.


(28) For instance, the statue of Amenhotep II with Meretseger in the Cairo museum (JE39394, Eighteenth Dynasty) has the same motif on his belt.

(29) On the Gold plaque of Psusennes I in Cairo (JE85821, Twenty-first Dynasty), the Four Sons of Horus have the vertical line motif on their belts. Also a statuette of the god Amun in the Cairo museum (JE 38049) wears the belt with the same motif.
(30) Tiradritti (ed.), op. cit., pp. 204-5.

(31) An exceptional case I noticed is the “diamond motif” engraved on the sarcophagus (JE 87297, Egyptian Museum, Cairo) of Merneptah (Nineteenth Dynasty), reused by Psusennes I (Twenty-first Dynasty). Here, the lines of the motif are crude; it may be a later addition by Psusennes I.
