

**Beyond the obvious:
the Middle Kingdom sources and its contribution to the study of household
religion in ancient Egypt**

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IF RELIGION is one of the most prolific and analysed domains of Egyptian civilization, household religion – the set of religious practices that took place at home – is, in contrast, one of the least studied. Victim of the numerous difficulties involved in its analysis, household religion has been relegated to the sidelines by scholars and its presence in the bibliography is residual¹.

Household religion is usually understood as just another element of a broader set which, among other designations, can be named personal piety². Concerning space and time, household religion is seen as a religious phenomenon only possible to analyse from New Kingdom onwards, and where Deir el-Medina and Tell el-Amarna, while suppliers of material sources, assume an almost total hegemony³.

Between 2010 and 2015 a PhD research was conducted devoted to household religion in ancient Egypt focused, mainly, in the material sources. A key result from this research is a data-base gathering the vestiges, with a confirmed or potential religious nature, from 30 settlements, dated from the Early Dynastic Period to the Late Period, located in the Egyptian territory and in Nubia when under Egyptian domination. These sources allow new analyses with more complete and accurate perspectives.

One of the ideas that arise is the value and relevance of the Middle Kingdom sources. Thus, the aim of this paper is to demonstrate that although Middle Kingdom sources may not compete with the vestiges from New Kingdom onwards they are sufficient for us to study household religion in this period⁴.

¹ R. RITNER, “Household Religion in Ancient Egypt”, in J. Bodel, S.M. Olyan (ed.), *Household Religion in Antiquity. The Ancient World: Comparative Histories*, Malden, 2008, p. 171.

² M. LUISELLI, “Personal Piety (Modern Theories related to)”, in W. Wendrich, J. Dieleman (ed.), *UCLA, Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles, 2008.

³ A. STEVENS, “Domestic Religious Practices”, in W. Wendrich, J. Dieleman (ed.), *UCLA, Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles, 2009; R. RITNER, *op. cit.*

⁴ All the data presented here may be found at: S. MOTA, *O sagrado num espaço profano: a Religião Doméstica no Egipto antigo*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Lisboa, 2015.

The Middle Kingdom sources to study household religion in ancient Egypt

The sources available for the study of household religion in ancient Egypt during the Middle Kingdom come from 14 settlements: Askut (Nubia), Buhen (Nubia), Elephantine (Upper Egypt), Kom el-Fakhry (Lower Egypt), Kumma (Nubia), Lahun (Lower Egypt), Lisht (Lower Egypt), Mirgissa (Nubia), Qasr el-Sagha (Lower Egypt), Semna (Nubia), Shalfak, (Nubia), South Abydos (Upper Egypt), Tell el-Dab'a (Delta), and Uronarti (Nubia). These settlements are scattered throughout all the considered territory, from the Delta to the Nubian forts, although with greater emphasis in Nubian and in Lower Egypt.

The contribution of each settlement varies and is uneven. The values, in percentage, are: 0,2 in Elefantina, 0,4 in Tell el-Dab'a, 0,7 in Kumma, 0,7 in Lisht, 0,7 in Qasr el-Sagha, 0,9 in Askut, 3,1 in Kom el-Fakhry, 3,1 in Mirgissa, 5,5 in Semna, 5,9 in Shalfak, 6,3 in South Abydos, 14,7 in Uronarti, 26,5 in Buhen and 31,5 in Lahun.

From these settlements, two should be highlighted: Lahun in Lower Egypt, more precisely in the Fayum region, and Buhen, a Nubian fort. More than 50% of the existing sources originated from these two sites.

Despite the dissimilar input of each settlement, they show, as a whole, that this religious practice existed, in the Middle Kingdom, all over the territory. Therefore, this wasn't a reality confined to a given location.

Now that we already know the provenance of the sources, let us look carefully at them. Our research identified 457 vestiges dated from the Middle Kingdom, which represents about 12% of the known sources used to study household religion in ancient Egypt⁵. In addition, there are seven situations where the bibliography or the reports inform us about the existence of sources but don't say how many they are⁶. Although in these cases we don't have numbers, these vestiges are also important. It should as well be mentioned a set of sources whose dating is inaccurate, i.e., is uncertain if they date from the Middle Kingdom or from the New Kingdom. Therefore, they won't be considered here. The sources were organized in four categories: architectural structures, decorations, objects and others.

Regarding the first group, architectural structures, we have six accounted examples and two situations without exact values. In Tell el-Dab'a were found two niches⁷. Niches were cavities in the walls of houses where statues, stelae or other religious items could be placed. It was also possible that these structures were used for the placement of other non religious things, like lamps, for example. So, in this case we need more data for a more reliable interpretation. In these two niches weren't found vestiges that allow us a more accurate analysis, but we should mention that in the same rooms where the niches were found, offering deposits⁸ were also found, buried in the floor. They consisted of objects such as miniature pottery vessels, remains of cultic meals and/or animal bones. This kind of deposits was only found in this

⁵ Comparatively, we may say that about 48% of the gathered sources came from Tell el-Amarna and about 6% from Deir el-Medina.

⁶ See, for example, A. MACE, "The Egyptian Expedition 1920-1921 I: Excavations at Lisht" *BMMA* 16, 1921, p. 12.

⁷ M. BIETAK, *Tell el-Dab'a V. Ein Friedhofsbezirk der mittleren Bronzezeitkultur mit Totentempel und Siedlungsschichten*, Wien, 1991, p. 137-138; V. MÜLLER, "Offering Deposits at Tell el-Dab'a", in Chr. Eyre (ed.), *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Egyptologists, Cambridge, 3 - 9 September 1995*, *OLA* 82, Leuven, 1998, p. 799.

⁸ Considered under the category of objects, typology 'others'.

settlement⁹. Their proximity with the niches seems to create a religious surrounding that makes feasible the idea of the niches as a structure with ritual purposes.

The four accounted altars were identified in three settlements: Askut¹⁰, Lisht¹¹, and Mirgissa¹². Besides these ones more were found in Lisht and in Tell el-Dab'a¹³ but without concrete numbers. About the altars of Lisht, Mace said: "In many of the houses seems to have been a shrine, in which was placed the rough limestone figure of the household god"¹⁴.

The existing altars have different features, some being more elaborate and complex than others. At Lisht the structures were simple, consisting of mud brick pedestals placed next to a wall¹⁵ or in the centre of the room¹⁶. At Lisht we only know in detail one example found in the house A 1.3, located in the West limit of the settlement, which probably belonged to a craftsman. Here was found in the H room, a room which would be the core of the house, an altar in the East side of the southernmost column. The altar was a simple pedestal of mud brick on top of which a stela was found. The stela belongs to Ankhu who had it made for his father Mentuhotep, thus, it was possibly related to ancestors' worship¹⁷.

In Askut the structure which we call altar comprises a niche, for the placement of a stela, with an Egyptian type mantel modelled in stucco. In front of it was a pedestal which would be used to place cultic items. The structure was placed in the room 12, in the Southwest sector of the settlement, which is considered a reception and family gathering room¹⁸. In an adjacent room was found a stela related to ancestors' worship. Smith believes that this stela would have been used in the altar which leads him to assign to it a function related to the cult of the deceased kin¹⁹.

In Mirgissa two altars were identified. Of one of them only remains the base located in the central room of the men's quarters. The other one is in a better state of preservation and allows us a more complete characterization. This altar was a mud brick pedestal leaning against the West wall of the room. Above the pedestal was a concavity in the wall, a niche, which was complemented by a plastered wooden panel. Traces of red and white paint were present. The lower part of a pottery bowl stand was found on the top of the pedestal²⁰.

About the Tell el-Dab'a altars we know very little. Only that they existed and that they were identified in houses. But we don't know about quantity and characteristics.

These scattered and sparse vestiges don't allow us to infer major conclusions. We realize that

⁹ M. BIETAK, *op. cit.*, p. 137-8; V. MÜLLER, *op. cit.*, p. 799-803.

¹⁰ S.T. SMITH, *Askut in Nubia: The Economics and Ideology of Egyptian Imperialism in the Second Millennium B.C.* London, New York, 1995, p. 128, pl. 7; *id.*, *Wretched Kush: Ethnic Identities and Boundaries in Egypt's Nubian Empire*, London, New York, 2003, p. 127-128.

¹¹ F. ARNOLD, "Settlement Remains at Lisht-North", in M. Bietak (ed.), *Haus und Palast im alten Ägypten*, Wien, 1996, p. 17.

¹² D. DUNHAM, *Second Cataract Forts: Uronarti, Shalfak, Mirgissa*, Boston, 1967, p. 144, 149, pls. LXXIX-A, LXXX-B.

¹³ M. BIETAK, *op. cit.*, p. 32; V. MÜLLER, *op. cit.*, p. 799.

¹⁴ A. MACE, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁵ A. STEVENS, *op. cit.*, p. 4, fig. 4; A. MACE, *op. cit.*, p. 12, fig. 12.

¹⁶ F. ARNOLD, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ S.T. SMITH, *op. cit.*, 1995, p. 128, pl. 7; S.T. SMITH, *op. cit.*, 2003, p. 127-128; *id.*, "The House of Meryka at Askut and the Beginning of the New Kingdom in Nubia", in G.M. Zaccane, T.R. Netro (ed.), *Sesto congresso internazionale di egittologia (6th 1992 Turin, Italy) II*, Turin, 1993, p. 66.

¹⁹ S.T. SMITH, *op. cit.*, 1993, p. 66.

²⁰ D. DUNHAM, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

the presence of a religious architectural structure at home wasn't the norm and, at the same time, we also perceive that to have an altar at home wasn't a geographically confined choice since they were found in the Delta, Fayum and in the Nubian forts.

The “decorations” category has only one example. In 1891 Petrie found at Lahun the oldest known domestic decoration with a potential religious motivation: a parietal polychromatic painting representing an offering scene. The composition is complex, with different elements. The emphasis lies on two human figures in the centre of the first level of the image. One figure is bigger and is sat; the other one is smaller and is standing in front of the first one. The seated figure is receiving offerings placed on a table in front of him²¹. Although this is the only religious domestic decoration prior to the New Kingdom, it is believed that they were more common but they haven't survived²².

Once again it's not possible to draw conclusions from this vestige. But, anew, it shows us that religious behaviours could have a place at home since this image might serve, for example, to bound a space where domestic rituals would take place.

The more numerous and eloquent category of sources is “objects”: about 440 accounted pieces and 10 situations with uncertain values. This group is divided into eight different typologies: statues, statuettes and busts; stelae; figurines and models; instruments; jewellery and amulets; furniture and ritual equipment; ceramic pieces and others. Unfortunately, it's not possible to present here, in detail, all the vestiges which comprise this category. Therefore, we'll summarize their characteristics.

In the typology “statues, statuettes and busts” were accounted 35 pieces: seven representing animals (monkeys, hippos and unidentified animals), four representing gods (Taweret and unidentified goddesses), and 24 human figures (female, male and with unidentified gender).

The typology of “stelae” consists of 10 vestiges: one representing the god Khentekhetai with an inscription with the offering formulae, three fragments of unidentified theme, and six representing humans (four of them most likely related to ancestors' worship, one with a three columns inscription reporting the devotion of Api to Sobek and Anubis and the other with only an human figure).

The typology “figurines and models” is the most numerous one having 277 accounted elements and one situation without concrete value: 144 animal figurines, two figurines of gods (Taweret and Isis with Horus), 130 anthropomorphic and body parts (30 female, 39 stylized female, seven male and 54 with unidentified gender), and a set called miscellany where we have one perseia fruit and an undefined number of unidentified objects from Lisht.

The “instruments” – objects potentially used as auxiliary during domestic religious rituals – is a small typology comprising only seven pieces: two wands from Lahun (distinct from those known from tombs, more simple: one have a draw lion and the other only with incised diagonal patterns), and five clappers.

Of “jewellery and amulets” we have 27 examples: nine representing animals (hare, monkey, fish, starfish and dragonfly), 13 representing gods (Ptah-Sokar-Osiris, Taweret, Bes, Hathor, Harpocrates and an unidentified goddess), two body parts (hands), and a miscellany group comprising different shapes or unidentified and accounted ones.

The typology “furniture and ritual equipment” consists of 72 vestiges: two basins, 53 offering

²¹ W.F. PETRIE, *Illahun, Kahun, Gurob: 1889-1890*, London, 1891, p. 7, pl. XVI-6.

²² St. QUIRKE, *Lahun: A town in Egypt 1800 BC, and the history of its landscape*, London, 2005, p. 85-86.

tables of offering trays (*soul-houses*), 11 pedestals, stands or incense burners and seven objects under the designation miscellany (a birth brick, a linen and plaster mask depicting the face of the god Bes, and four different types of lamps).

The small group of “ceramic pieces” – fragments and parts of various types of containers or house wares with any kind of decoration which gave it a potential religious nature – have five accounted pieces: three representing animals (bull, crocodile and an unidentified animal), and two representing gods (an image of Bes and the name of Sobek).

Finishing the category of objects we have the typology of “other” which comprises an indefinite number of offering deposits. These vestiges, originating from Tell el-Dab’a, were already mentioned under the architectural structures.

The last considered category of sources named “others” concerns a kind of vestige hard to classify. These vestiges don’t fit any of the above categories and at the same time is a sort of vestige which wasn’t yet fully understood: the infant burials in domestic space.

We have 17 accounted burials (12 at South Abydos, two at Kom el-Fakhry, two at Mirgissa and one at Lisht), and two situations without concrete values (Lahun and Tell el-Dab’a).

The infant burials from the Middle Kingdom houses may present different features, for example, some were buried in wooden boxes and others in ceramic jars. Unfortunately, in most cases we don’t have detailed information about the burying characteristics.

To sum up, the existing Middle Kingdom sources, although few in number if compared with later periods, are enough for us to try to understand the different facets that compose household religion in this period – mainly due to their diversity and variety.

The household religion in the Middle Kingdom

When looking to the Middle Kingdom sources for the study of household religion in ancient Egypt two main ideas strike us: this kind of religious practice was a reality in this period but, at the same time, we cannot make generalizations. Thus, the ideas that follow are valid for the considered settlements and maybe but not necessarily for all territory. So, what do the gathered sources tell us about household religion in the Middle Kingdom?

The studied sources show us the importance of ancestors’ worship in domestic context. We may even say that it is the predominant household religion practice in the Middle Kingdom. Several typologies of vestiges clearly point to this kind of practice: the altar and the associated stela from Lisht and also from Askut, the parietal decoration from Lahun, the stela from Lahun, and, above all, the set found at Kom el-Fakhry (the different elements were accounted separately), illustrate, clearly and without interpretation doubts, a domestic space aimed for ancestors worship.

The Kom el-Fakhry altar, as we prefer to call it, comprises a stela and an offering table arranged together. The stela has three levels of decoration: the first shows an offering table, the second a seated couple both holding a lotus, the third has a female kneeling with a lotus in her hand in front of a little offering table. This level was probably a late addition. The offering table was rectangular with a small furrow to drain the liquids. It was decorated in high-relief with two tall jars, breads and the leg of an animal. Next to this set was also found a small statue of a man and a woman, most likely Nyka and Sta-Hathor, the couple represented in the stela, and two pieces of a statue of a dwarf (similar to those found at Lahun) probably used as

a stand or to burn incense²³.

The worship of divinities seems to be less pronounced in the Middle Kingdom household religion. This idea is consistent with the prevailing perspective that states that the relationship between the believer and the gods, in ancient Egypt, only effectively develops in the New Kingdom within the context of Personal Piety²⁴. Nevertheless, in the Middle Kingdom, the gods weren't absent in the domestic context. They are identifiable, in representations or through the presence of the name, in statues (Taweret and an unidentified god), stela (Khentekhetai), figurines (Taweret and Isis with Hórus), ceramic pieces (Bes and Sobek) and mainly in amulets (Ptah-Sokar-Osiris, Taweret, Bes, Hathor, unidentified god and Harpócrates).

Some ideas emerged from this data: the most commonly found deities are, more or less, related to the household context; the use of amulets representing divinities seems to be the most expressive form of relationship with the gods although the stela, the statues and the figurines may also suggest some sort of worship.

These are the situations where the sources clearly point out to a certain kind of practice. The altars and stelae from Kom el-Fakhry show us that in some houses existed a specific space used to worship the dead kin. The stelae, statues and amulets, for example, show us the presence of gods at home. But there are many sources that we cannot relate to any of these practices.

Some architectural structures and ritual furniture, given the absence of any associated objects, may not be securely related to the domestic cults aforementioned. This is the case of the altar from Mirgissa, those of unknown number from Tell el-Dab'a and Lisht, and the niches also from Tell el-Dab'a.

The ritual function of these structures isn't questioned, at least if we take into account the information transmitted by the archaeologists and scholars. For example, as we have seen, Mace doesn't hesitate to call altars the structures of Lisht²⁵; Müller puts the offering deposits in association with one of the altars from Tell el-Dab'a: "The most ancient deposit of this category – dating from the beginning of the thirteenth Dynasty – was found in a house (...). Directly against the enclosure wall an altar was erected (...)." ²⁶. Dunham describes the altar from Mirgissa as follows: "In the West wall of room 32, half way between the doorway into the room 47 and the corner to the South, are the remains of a small shrine." ²⁷.

Nevertheless, although they attest the presence of spaces devoted to religious practices at home, it isn't possible to establish if they were used to ancestors' worship, gods' worship or even for both.

The same happens with the offering tables and trays, and the pedestals, stands or incense burners. Once again the religious purpose is clear but the context of their use isn't. For example, the offering trays usually called *soul-houses* are, in funerary context, associated with

²³ A. TAVARES, M. KAMEL, "Short end-of-season Report to the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA). Mit Rahina Field School, 2011", *AERA/ARCE*, 2011, p. 6; *id.*, "Memphis, a city unseen: joint AERA-ARCE-EES Beginners Field School excavates oldest part of Egypt's Ancient Capital City", *AERAGRAM* 13, 2012, p. 6.

²⁴ J. BAINES, "Society, morality, and religious practice", in B.E. Shafer (ed.), *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths and Personal Practice*, London, 1991, p. 179; B. KEMP, "How Religious Were the Ancient Egyptians?", *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 5/1, 1995, p. 38; M. LUISELLI, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

²⁵ A. MACE, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

²⁶ V. MÜLLER, *op. cit.*, p. 799.

²⁷ D. DUNHAM, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

the cult of the dead²⁸, hence, at home, they probably had the same purpose. But we cannot state that with certainty.

Although, in the case of these vestiges, we miss the full understanding of the context of their use, they have the added value of pointing out to specific behaviors or to the performance of the cult. In other words, these objects help us to understand how the cult, either to the gods or to the ancestors, was done.

Compiling the input from these and other sources we are able to realize that at home the cult mimicked the actions that took place in temples and tombs, consisting of offerings, burning incense and libations.

Before concluding we should also mention some sources that don't fit directly into any of the religious practices aforementioned but that are equally relevant because they point to other forms of religiosity and show the preponderance of religion at home in the Middle Kingdom.

Let's start by the birth brick. Albeit the use of bricks for women to kneel on during childbirth was known, only in 2001 the team from the University of Pennsylvania directed by J. Wegner found the first one in domestic context, more exactly in a house dated from the Middle Kingdom in South Abydos²⁹. This brick is made of mud, measuring 360mm length, and features colorful decoration on all sides. Wegner refers to it as "a polychrome magical birth brick painted with childbirth imagery."³⁰

The most important aspect of this vestige is, in fact, the imagery. Wegner offers a detailed description of it and an in-depth analysis of its meaning³¹, so we'll only resume the most significant information. In general, we can say that it's the representation of a woman with a child in her arms – probably an after childbirth moment – accompanied by three other women and deities and demons that protect women and children during and after the childbirth. It's possible to identify the goddess Hathor, a deity shaped like a hippopotamus – Taweret? –, a coiled cobra – Renenutet? –, unidentified entities grabbing or biting snakes, a lioness goddess beheading a human enemy, among other things. Due to the evocative presence of their power, all these characters had the purpose of chase away any potential danger or threat – human, animal or demoniac – at the so potential dangerous moment of childbirth. Wegner states: "(...) the Abydos brick articulates a potent blend of magico-religious symbolism related to childbirth."³²

Alone, this object is enough for us to apprehend two key facts about household religion, not only in the Middle Kingdom: the importance of children in the family context and the preponderance of the belief in magic and its practice.

To finish this point we'll look at two examples of sources that we consider relevant not only due to their quantity – about 46% of the Middle Kingdom sources (although they aren't exclusive from this period) – but also because of the difficulties of interpretation that surround them and the information that may emerge from a full understand of the use of these sources. We are talking about female and animal figurines.

²⁸ S.T. SMITH, *op. cit.*, 1993, p. 66; S.T. SMITH, *op. cit.*, 2003, p. 128.

²⁹ J. WEGNER, "A Decorated Birth-Brick from South Abydos: New Evidence on Childbirth and Birth Magic in Ancient Egypt", in D.P. Silverman, W. Simpson, J. Wegner (ed.), *Archaism and Innovation: Studies in the Culture of Middle Kingdom Egypt*, New Heaven, 2009.

³⁰ J. WEGNER, "Echoes of Power. The Mayor's House of Ancient Wah-Sut" in *Expedition Magazine* 48/2, 2006, p. 35.

³¹ J. WEGNER, *op. cit.*, 2009, p. 447-491.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 455.

These vestiges, mainly because they are made of mud, were seen, since the beginning, as objects of little value and relevance. W. F. Petrie found a lot of these pieces in Lahun and classified them as toys: “(...) amusement were also well known. Of children toys there was an abundance. (...) Clay toys were made in many forms.”³³. Thus, when preserved, these pieces were cataloged as toys and, in the case of the animal figurines, this habit sometimes still prevails³⁴. The problem with these objects is that, in both cases, their concrete use hasn't yet been completely decoded. Thus the animal figurines haven't yet been the subject of a thorough study³⁵, though the female figurines have been studied for many years³⁶ the interpretations aren't settled. However, currently these vestiges are mainly regarded as having a magico-religious purpose. The research conducted about them points that they are used or as offerings during gods or ancestors' worship or during magic rituals, or even both.

To sum up, we may say about household religion in the Middle Kingdom that: most of the sources point out to the worship of ancestors in the domestic context; although in small number we have sources that attest the presence of gods in houses and that the chosen gods were essentially deities related to the domestic life; we have many sources that attest to the performance of religious procedures but it's not possible to associate them with some type of worship in particular; some of these sources help us to realize how the worship was done; other sources were not directly related to the worship of ancestors or gods but indicate other practices / concerns.

Comparison between the Middle Kingdom and the New Kingdom sources

To conclude, aiming to emphasize the value of the Middle Kingdom sources to understand the household religion in this period, we'll establish a brief comparison between these sources and dating from the New Kingdom.

As mentioned at the beginning, in terms of quantity the Middle Kingdom has a significant inferior number of sources when compared to the later periods (except for the Second Intermediate Period). The following tables systematize the values in question considering the number of sources per period and also the number of settlements where vestiges were collected.

As we may see in table 1, regarding the number of settlements with vestiges, there's no significant difference between the Middle and the New Kingdom. The variation is limited to two settlements. However, as far as the number of sources is concerned (table 2), the gap is enormous: 457 sources dating from the Middle Kingdom and 2344 from the New Kingdom (we should point out that 1738 of these sources come from Tell el-Amarna and 216 from Deir el-Medina, corresponding to the great majority of vestiges from this period). The table 3 shows the accounted sources in each category and typology in the considered periods.

³³ W.F. PETRIE, *Kahun, Gurob, and Hawara*, London, 1890, p. 30.

³⁴ A. TAVARES, KAMEL, “Short End-of-Season Report to the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA)”, p. 11.

³⁵ St. QUIRKE, “Figures of clay: Toys or ritual objects?”, in St. Quirke (ed.) *Lahun Studies*, Reigate, 1998.

³⁶ G. PINCH, “Offerings to Hathor”, *Folklore*, Vol. 93, p. 2, 1982; E. WARAKSA, “Female Figurines (Pharaonic Period)”, in W. Wendrich (ed.) *UCLA - Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, Los Angeles, 2008; J. BACKHOUSE, “Female Figurines From Deir el-Medina: A Review of Evidence for Their Iconography and Function”, in L. McGarrity, C. Graves, E. Millward, M. Bealby (ed.), *Current Research in Egyptology 2012, Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Symposium*, University of Birmingham, 2012.

Early Dynastic Period	First Intermediate Period	Middle Kingdom	Second Intermediate Period	New Kingdom	Third Intermediate Period	Late Period
Old Kingdom						
2	1	14	3	16	5	2

Table 1. Number of settlements where sources from each period were found.

Period of time	Accounted sources	Cases without a concrete value
Early Dynastic Period / Old Kingdom	22	2
First Intermediate Period	7	–
Middle kingdom	457	7
Uncertain dating: Middle or New Kingdom?	6	7
Second Intermediate Period	3	1
Uncertain dating: Second Intermediate Period or New Kingdom?	12	–
New Kingdom	2344	13
Uncertain dating: New kingdom or Third Intermediate Period?	18	–
Third Intermediate Period	548	–
Late Period	192	2

Table 2. Number of sources in each period.

This systematization allow us, on one hand, to have a concrete idea of the differences between the contribution of each period but, on the other hand, shows that this difference is mainly in quantity not in categories or typologies. All the categories are represented in the Middle Kingdom sources. Regarding the typologies, from the 18 existing ones only six aren't represented in this period.

Thus, although we cannot disregard the huge difference in the quantity of sources available for the study of household religion in the Middle Kingdom when compared to the New Kingdom, we think it is inaccurate to consider that it is not possible to characterize this religious practice during the Middle Kingdom. As we have tried to demonstrate the existing sources let us perceive which were the religious practices carried on at home and how they were performed.

Category	Typology	Middle Kingdom	New Kingdom
Architectural Structures	Altars	4	118
	Shrines	–	42
	Niches	2	210
	Lustration slabs	–	39
	False doors	–	17
Decoration	Reliefs	–	39
	Painting	1	
	Inscription	–	
Objects	Jewellery and amulets	27	902
	Figurines and models	277	516
	Statues, statuettes and busts	35	270
	Stelae	10	52
	Ceramic pieces	5	32
	Instruments	7	2
	Furniture and ritual equipment	72	56
	Decorated and figurative plates	–	17
	Other	?	26
Other	Infant Burial	17	6
		457	2344

Table 3. Sources accounted by period.