

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

LECTURE SERIES FB07

04.12.

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Ancient Egyptian Concepts of the “Corpse.” Attempt to Reconstruct an Emic Perspective

All earthly beings – whether humans, animals or plants – are mortal. However, humans seem to be the only ones who are aware of the existential uncertainty of death. What happens after death has always concerned people. Not only is the question essential if there is a life after death, but also how this afterlife can be assured. Especially in Ancient Egypt much attention was devoted to the cult of the dead.

Nowadays, a “corpse” is usually defined as a lifeless (human) body. Furthermore, death itself is associated with the decay of the body and ultimately the complete disappearance of the lifeless shell. However, this modern interpretation does not show how a “corpse” could be perceived from an Ancient Egyptian point of view, thus signifying the emic point of view.

Such information can be obtained – in addition to the archaeological remains – especially from the Ancient Egyptian written sources. This applies in particular to the texts of the afterlife. But also, from mythological, medical or literary text sources, conceptions of the “corpse” can be reconstructed.

This lecture will introduce some Ancient Egyptian lexemes, which could convey the meaning “corpse,” “dead body,” “mummy” etc. In addition to the presentation of several individual word meanings, some comprehensive Ancient Egyptian concepts of the corpse will be introduced and discussed.