

# Establish the Work of Our Hands: An Egyptology-Informed Analysis of Psalm 90 with Creative Applications

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# Research Question

Psalm 90: “The prayer of Moses the man of God”

- What in Psalm 90 was relevant to the Ancient Egyptian context around Moses as he wrote it?
- What from that is relevant to us today?

# Goals

Based on a **canonical** approach vs form critical or literary critical analysis

- Deeper understanding of the historical-cultural world and context of the author
- Deeper understanding of the theological significance of the psalm
- Reconstruct that world and create an imaginative narrative that highlights the historical-cultural context as well as the theological implications of the psalm for both an Ancient Egyptian character and the modern reader

# Methods

- Personal Translation of the Psalm
- Word Studies
- Historical and Structural Research
  - Egyptological Connections
  - Chiastic Structure
- World-Building Research
- Creative Application

|   |   |
|---|---|
| (1) The prayer of Moses, the man of Elohim: Lord (Adonai) you have been a dwelling for us from generation to generation,                            | 1 תַּפִּלָּה לְמֹשֶׁה אִישׁ־הָאֱלֹהִים אֲדֹנָי מֵעוֹן אַתָּה הָיִיתָ לָּנוּ בְּדֹר וָדֹר:   |
| (2) before the mountains were born, and you were forming the land and the world, from forever until forever—you are God (El).                       | 2 בְּטֶרֶם ׀ הָרִים יִלְדוּ וְתַחֲלֹל אֶרֶץ וְתִבְלַ וּמַעוֹלָם עַד־עוֹלָם אַתָּה אֵל:  |
| (3) You will return man to dust, and say “return, sons of Adam.”  | 3 תָּשׁוּב אָנוּשׁ עַד־דָּפָא וּתְאָמַר שׁוּבוּ בְנֵי־אָדָם:  |
| (4) For a thousand years in your eyes are like a former day, truly a passing of a watch in the night  | 4 כִּי אֶלֶף שָׁנִים בְּעֵינֶיךָ כְּיוֹם אֶתְמוֹל כִּי יַעֲבֹר וְאַשְׁמוּרָה בְּלַיְלָה:  |
| (5) You flood them away; they are like a night’s rest, like grass that will be renewed in the morning.  | 5 וְנִמְתָּם שָׁנָה יִהְיוּ בַּבֶּקָר כְּחֹצִיר יִתְקַלֵּף:   |
| (6) In the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it will fade and wither.  | 6 בַּבֶּקָר יִצְיֵץ וְתִקְלַף לְעָרֵב יִמּוֹלֵל וְיָבֵשׁ:   |
| (7) For we are finished in your anger and in your wrath, we are terrified.  | 7 כִּי־כָלִינוּ בְּאַפֶּךָ וּבַחֲמָתְךָ נִבְהַלְנוּ:  |
| (8) You have set our iniquity before you, our hidden things in light before your face.  | 8 שֵׁתָּ׀ [שֵׁתָהּ] [עֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ לְנִגְדֶךָ עֲלַמְנוּ לְמַאֲוֵר פְּנֶיךָ:   |
| (9) For all our days wane away in your wrath; we finish our years like a sigh.  | 9 כִּי כָל־יְמֵינוּ פָּנוּ בְּעָרְבֶךָ כְּלִינוּ שָׁנֵינוּ כְּמוֹ־הִגָּה:   |
| (10) The years of our life span seventy, or with strength, eighty, and their pride is toil and iniquity. But soon they are cut off and we fly away. | 10 יְמֵי־שָׁנוֹתֵינוּ כָּהֵם שְׂבָעִים שָׁנָה וְאָם בְּגִבּוֹרָת ׀ שְׁמוֹנִים שָׁנָה וְרַהֲבָם עֲמָל וְאָנוּ כִּי־גָז חִישׁ וְנִעְפָּה: |



# “dwelling place” מִיִּנְיָ (v. 1)

- *Maon*, dwelling place, habitation.
- First reference: Deut. 26:15
  - “look down from your holy *habitation*, from heaven, and bless your people Israel...”
- Often describes the dwelling place of animals
- God as protective place
- Short Story: longing





# “and you were **writhing**” וַיִּחַלֵּל (v. 2)

- *Chil*, or *chul*, to whirl, dance, or to writhe
- *Chul*: labor of childbirth
- *yeladw* יִלְדוּ “[the mountains] **were born**” previously in the verse implies childbearing
- Short story: intimate creation story, gentleness, God with both female and male characteristics





# “dust” אֶפְרָי (v. 3)

- *Dakka*, crushed, contrite
- First references:
  - Job 4:19, “how much more those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are **crushed** like the moth.”
  - Job 6:9, “that it would please God to **crush** me, that he would let loose his hand and cut me off!”
- Different to the word commonly translated as “dust,” *aphar* אֶפֶר (Gen 2:7 creation of Adam and curses of Gen 3).
- Short story: fragility of life



# Egyptian Connections in Psalm 90

| verse | Biblical quotation  | Egyptian connection                  |
|-------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 2     | “before the mountains were born”  | Primordial mound                     |
| 3     | “you will return man to dust, and say ‘return to dust, sons of Adam’”                           | Egyptian beliefs about the afterlife |
| 6     | “In the morning [the grass] flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it will fade and wither.” | “Osiris beds”                        |
| 10    | “soon [the years] are cut off and we fly away”  | The <i>Ba</i>                        |



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- “before the mountains were born” (v. 2)
  - Primordial Mound





# Egyptian Connections in Psalm 90

- “you will return man to dust, and say, ‘return to dust, sons of Adam’” (v. 3)
  - Ancient Egyptian beliefs about the afterlife



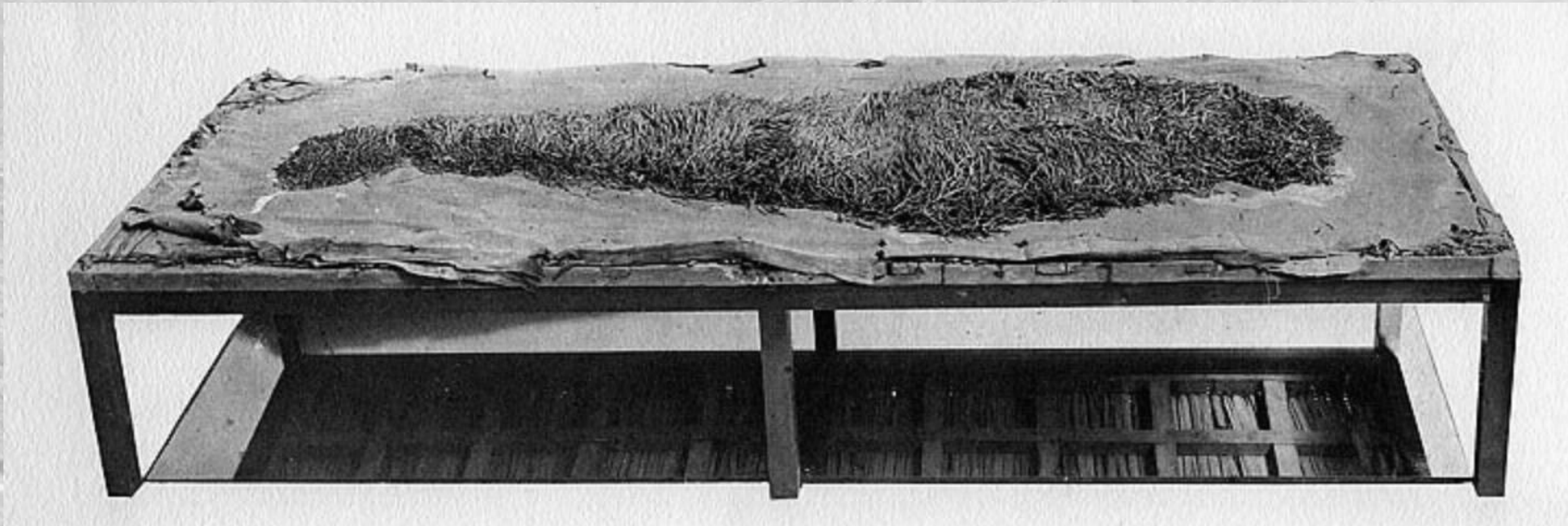
[http://anubis4\\_2000.tripod.com/KV36/MummyProfile.jpg](http://anubis4_2000.tripod.com/KV36/MummyProfile.jpg)





# Egyptian Connections in Psalm 90

- “In the morning [the grass] flourishes and is renewed, in the evening it will fade and wither” (v. 6)
  - Ancient Egyptian “Osiris beds”



William Max Miller, “Special Exhibit: The Tomb of Maihirpre Gallery II,” Theban Royal Mummy Project, [http://anubis4\\_2000.tripod.com/KV36/OsirisBed.jpg](http://anubis4_2000.tripod.com/KV36/OsirisBed.jpg).

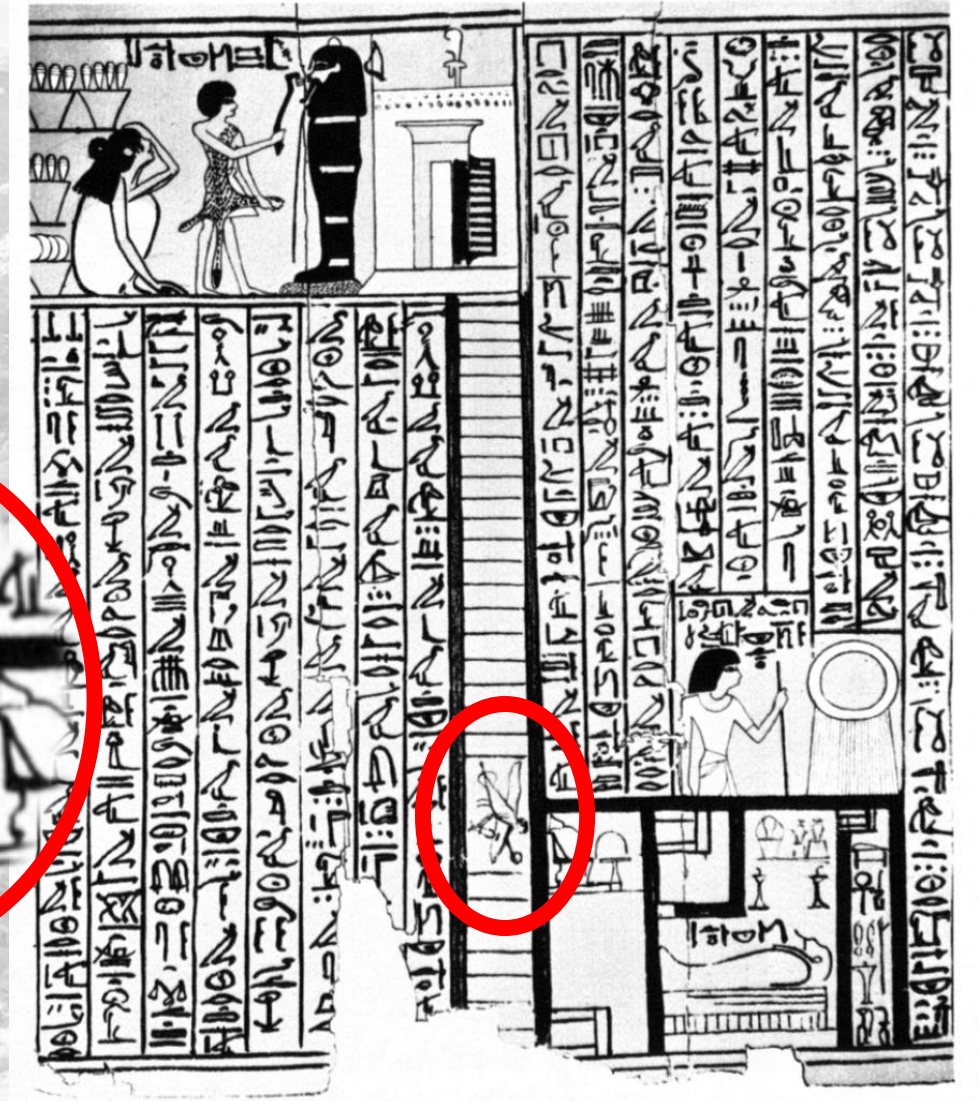


# Egyptian Connections in Psalm 90

- “soon [the years] are cut off and we fly away” (v. 10)
  - The Ancient Egyptian concept of the *Ba*



ibid, plate 3.



# Chiastic Structure in the Names of God

| verse | Name of God<br>(in chiastic structure) |                  |               | original<br>Hebrew |
|-------|--|------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| 0     | <i>Elohim</i>                          |                  |               | אֱלֹהִים           |
| 1     | <i>Adonai</i>                          |                  |               | אֲדֹנָי            |
| 2     |  | El               |               | אֵל                |
| 13    |  |                  | <i>Yahweh</i> | יְהוָה             |
| 17    | <i>Adonai</i>                          |                  |               | אֲדֹנָי            |
| 17    |  | <i>El-oheinu</i> |               | אֱלֹהֵינוּ         |



# World-Building Research

- Recreating Khol
- Topographical map of Avaris
- Visiting Egypt and Jordan in 2017
- Brandon Sanderson lectures

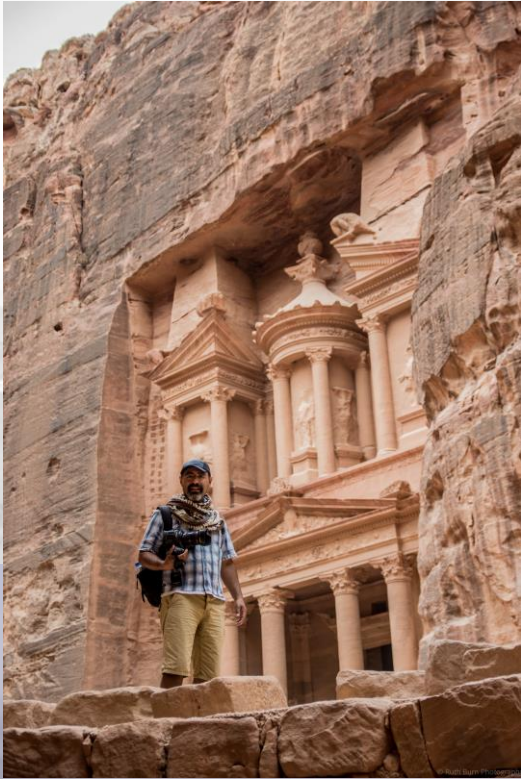


<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/543960>





# Egypt-Jordan 2017





# Creative Application



Statue of Jackal god Anubis

[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y\\_EA61506](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA61506)



Modern Pharaoh hound

<https://www.zooplus.co.uk/magazine/dog/dog-breeds/pharaoh-hound>



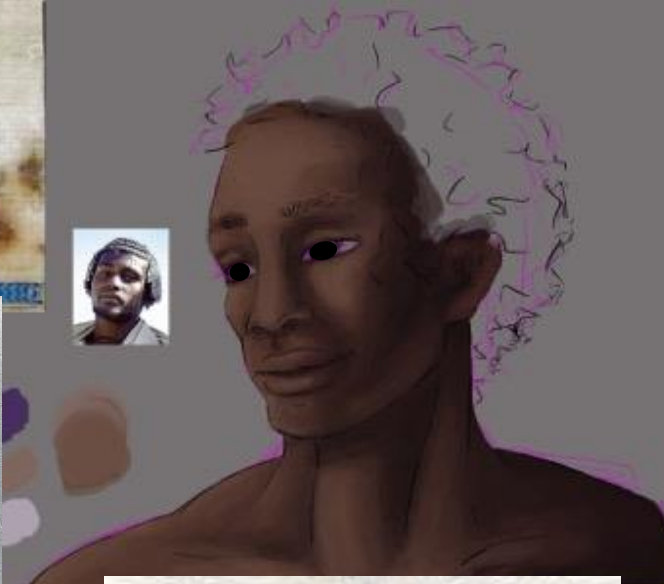
Ancient Egyptian dog breed "tesem"

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tesem.jpg>



# Creative Application

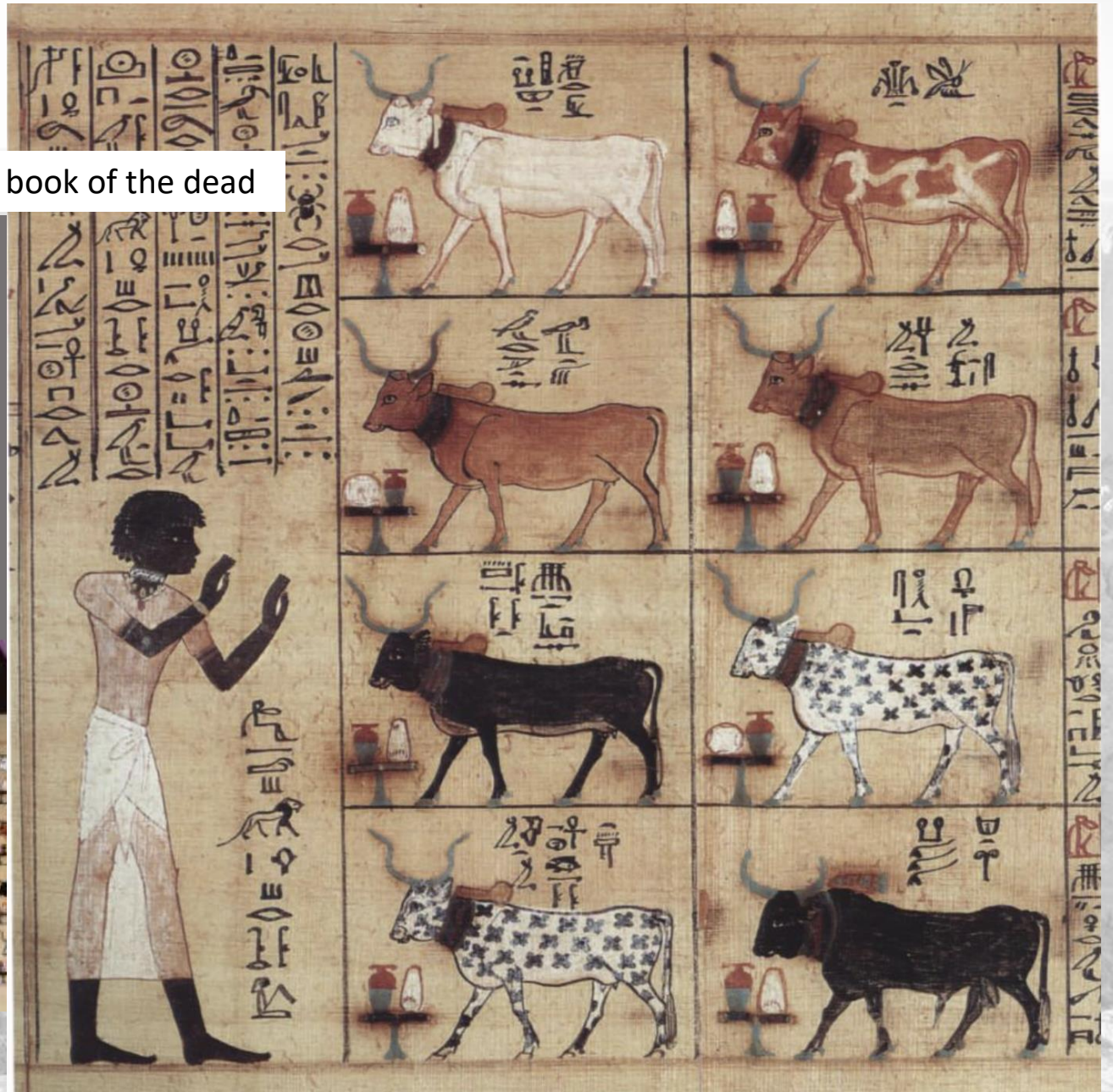
Personal artistic visualization of Mai, based on his mummy and book of the dead



[http://anubis4\\_2000.tripod.com/KV36/Mummyfull.jpg](http://anubis4_2000.tripod.com/KV36/Mummyfull.jpg)



[http://anubis4\\_2000.tripod.com/KV36/MummyProfile.jpg](http://anubis4_2000.tripod.com/KV36/MummyProfile.jpg)

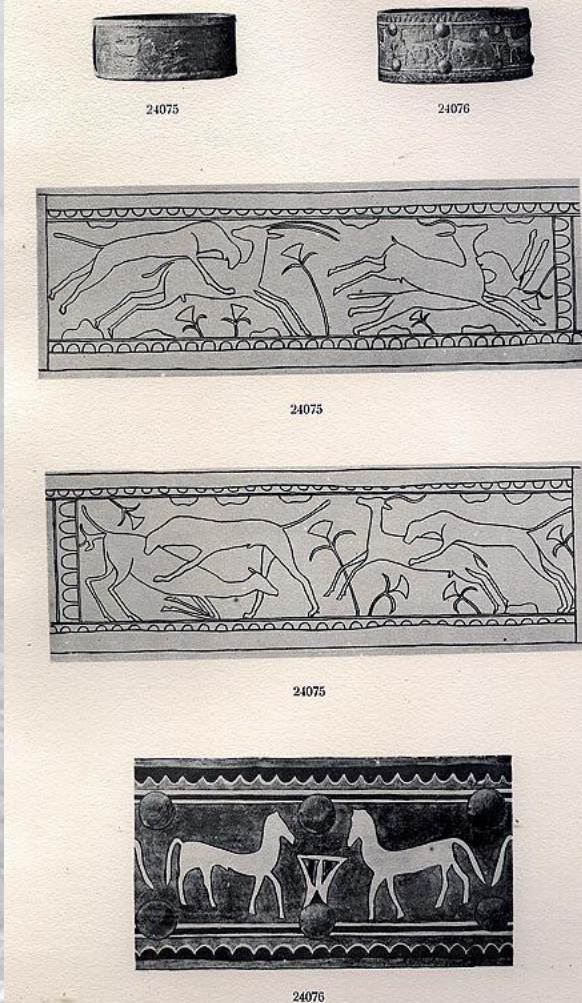


Rochrig, "The Tomb of Maiherperi in the Valley of the Kings," 72.



# Creative Application

Mai's leather dog-collars

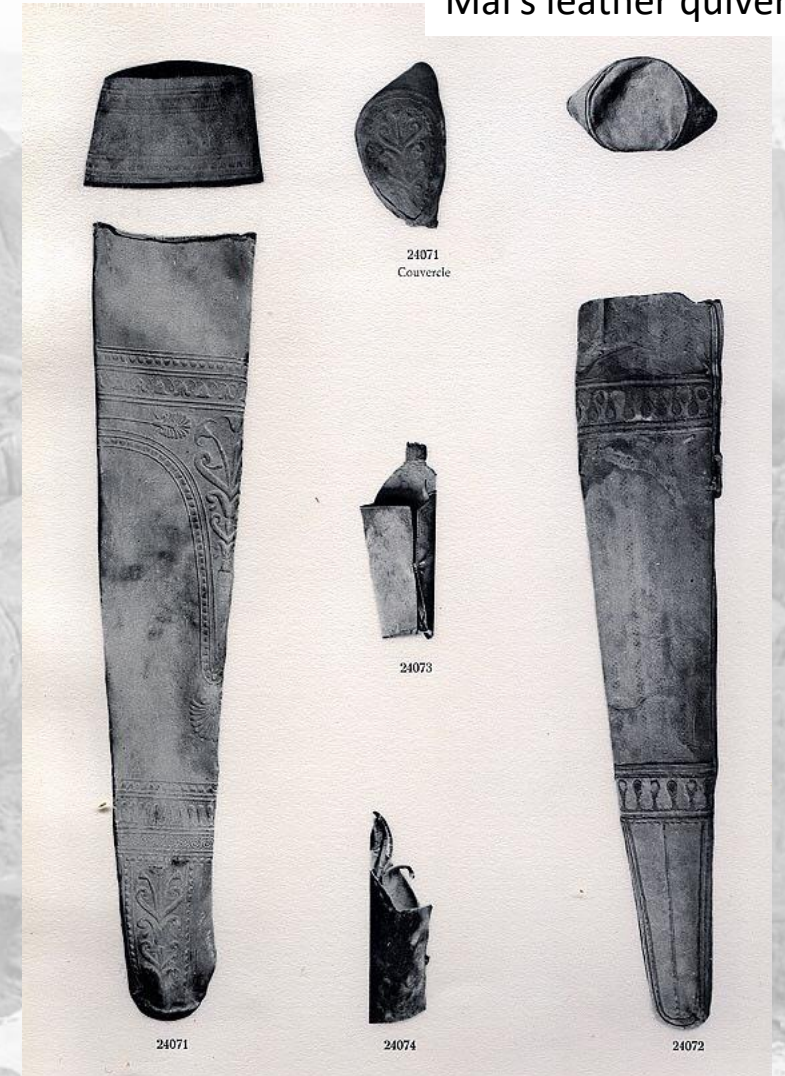


[http://anubis4\\_2000.tripod.com/KV36/DogCollars.jpg](http://anubis4_2000.tripod.com/KV36/DogCollars.jpg)



Personal artistic visualization of Mai, his dogs, and the leather dog-collars and quiver.

Mai's leather quiver



[http://anubis4\\_2000.tripod.com/KV36/Quivers.jpg](http://anubis4_2000.tripod.com/KV36/Quivers.jpg)





Personal photos from Karnak Temple and statue of Apis Bull from Cairo Museum



# Analysis



- Attempt to convey the “gray area” complexity of the real world
- Fragility of life, confronting mortality
- Attractiveness of a gentle, creation God
- God as dwelling place
- God as the only true god
- It’s okay to ask God the hard questions
- God is a god who listens
- Injustice, yearning, and fulfillment



# Conclusion

A grayscale photograph of a vast, rugged mountain range. The foreground shows a rocky ledge with a metal railing. The middle ground and background are filled with layered, eroded rock formations and peaks, extending into the distance under a clear sky.

- Four-year long experience full of amazing opportunities
  - Immersive classes
  - Traveling abroad for firsthand research
  - Mentoring by Terri L. Fivash
- Deeper goal: foundation for future writing
  - Depth of knowledge in story-crafting and research



# Weaknesses and Strengths

- Emphasis of the thesis on the Creative Application
  - Lack of potential depth in the Exegesis
- Limited amount of time for writing
  - Lack of review
- Focus on Creative Applications
  - Immersive reading experience
- Depth of theological insights
  - See the story from a new, meaningful perspective



# Further Research

- Ambiguous ending of the psalm:

*“And let the favor of my Lord our God be upon us;  
and the work of our hands establish upon us,  
and the work of our hands  
establish him/it.*

Ps 90:17.



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