Review of: Bestock, L. (2017). Violence and Power in Ancient Egypt: Image and Ideology before the New Kingdom. London: Routledge. 294 p., incl. 127 figs. ISBN 9781138685055

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"*Violence and Power in Ancient Egypt. Image and Ideology before the New Kingdom*" by Laurel Bestock is a new and exciting work on the representations of violence in ancient Egypt from the Early Dynastic Period until the end of the Middle Kingdom (c. 4000-1650 BC). It comes as an attractive hardcover, counts 268 pages in 9 chapters, bibliography, 10 pages of an index, and contains 127 figures (line drawings, and black and white photos), an impressive count, bearing in mind the scope of the book. The chapters are preceded by acknowledgments and the chronology context of the work, highly valuable for readers from outside of the narrow field of Egyptology who are interested in the discussion nevertheless.

Already in the first chapter "*Picturing violence*", the author clarifies that the book is not about violence, but about the pictures of violence against people and where and why they were produced in the 4th and into the 2nd millennium BC Egypt (Early Dynastic Period, Old Kingdom, First Intermediate Period, and Middle Kingdom). She stresses the importance of distinguishing representations of violence from its practice. Additionally, she points towards the importance of producers and consumers of such images. This approach is rarely taken by Egyptologists. The main problem Bestock recognizes is our focus on those images that directly show violence, although there could be other visual references we cannot recognize as such (pp. 1–3). She states that she gathered and represented all images of violence she knows of (pp. 5), however, as it will be commented on later in this review, some of the important images were unfortunately left out. This does not have a serious consequence on Bestock's overall argument and her interpretations. The author´s premise is that the same motif has different effects depending on its context. Bestock noticed a consistency concerning certain motifs and their contexts. The battle scenes are found only in royal and private tombs, the smiting of the enemy motif in all contexts except private tombs (with exception of Hierakonpolis tomb 100) and the smiting of the enemy is also the only motif found in the landscape (with exception of Gebel Sheikh Suleiman rock art) (pp. 6). The author states that she did not deal with texts in much detail, which she justifies with her

focus on pictures of violence and not violence itself (pp. 7). This is a serious methodological problem. Not only is other archaeological evidence, such as traces of trauma on skeletons, entirely excluded from the discussion, but the complex relationship between text and image in ancient Egypt is not given enough attention. Textual record is no less discursive than iconographic record and including it in the study could have shed more light on the images. Bestock argues that the main difference to later images of violence of the New Kingdom is that these had a much larger audience than those from earlier periods. She leaves us without the answer to the question: why?

Chapter 2 "*The origins of violent imagery*" deals with representations of violence from Naqada I and II. The earliest are those on White Cross-Line ware from Naqada IA-C (c. 3800-3400 BC) from the Predynastic cemetery at Umm el-Qaab, Abydos. The motifs found on this pottery are the domination of larger figures over smaller figures and the binding with ropes. Smaller figures are usually grouped in two. Bestock is cautious with such interpretations and points towards the fact that Egyptologists interpret them in this way because of the influence of later well-identified images of violence and the iconographic pattern of hierarchic scaling in which larger figures in a scene are those having higher status and more importance. For the Naqada II evidence, the author refers to the Gebelein textile, fragments of a large piece of linen with figural scenes. There are parts of at least four boats depicted and the largest boat features a figure in the middle which is often interpreted as a bound captive. The posture of this figure does resemble later images of bound captives. However, nothing except the posture distinguishes this figure from other figures on the boats. According to my personal communication with Wojtek Ejsmond, director of the Gebelein Archaeological Project, and based on a close inspection the figure seems to be holding an oar. The shape of the pole to which this one is supposedly bound is slightly different than that of the figure on the larger boat below. The pole on the boat above resembles the mnj.t pillar found in later iconography and texts (BEAUX, 1991). Bestock argues that first unambiguous imagery of violence from Egypt is found in tomb 100 in Hierakonpolis (pp. 27). Since the southwest wall on which these images are found suffered greatly since its discovery, discussions are limited to the facsimile published by J. E. Quibell and F. W. Green. Here we must be careful. There are cases in which Quibell did not properly document monuments. This is evidenced by his

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exclusion of a phallus of one of the enemy figures in the publication of the Narmer stela (Davies & Friedman, 2002). Three motifs are of interest. One is the smiting of the three bound and kneeling captives by a larger figure on their left. The large figure is black with red details and the smaller figures of bound captives are red figures with black details. The other two are depictions of armed figures in combat. The first depiction shows to figures fighting against each other, the second one depicts two figures whereat the left one is upside-down. In each case, one figure is depicted with a white torso and black spots on it and the other with a red torso. Although Bestock criticizes the tendency of Egyptologists to use information from later periods to interpret earlier evidence, one has to stress that red color is often used in depictions of dangerous entities in later periods (Ritner, 1993). In fact, the figures depicted in red on the southwest wall in tomb 100 in Hierakonpolis are three bound prisoners, one figure turned upside-down and one possibly parrying an attack by the figure on the right. The upside-down figure and the one parrying the attack are both left of the figures wearing white. This fact, and the fact that bound prisoners are also depicted in red, strongly suggests that red color is reserved for captives or enemies as one would expect, bearing in mind the later pharaonic tradition.

Chapter 3 *"The violence inherent in the system. Imagery and royal ideology in the period of state formation"* deals with violent imagery from the Naqada III or Early Dynastic Period. The chapter discusses ceremonial relief palettes (the Battlefield palette, the Libyan palette, the Bull palette, the Narmer palette), ivory knife handles (the Oxford knife handle from Hierakonpolis' main deposit at the Metropolitan Museum, the Gebel el-Arak knife), maceheads (the Scorpion macehead from Hierakonpolis' main deposit, the Narmer macehead), ivory cylinders from Hierakonpolis' main deposit, figurines of captives from Tell el-Farkha and Tell Ibrahim Awad, the Gebel Sheikh Suleiman relief, the ivory cylinder and tag of Narmer. The author's presentation of this material is concise and informative. Some of her comments deserve reflection. In the part on the Libyan palette and its depiction of the seven squares representing walls of enemy towns or forts attacked by various emblematic animals, Bestock discusses the meaning of the number seven. She argues that it is unlikely that the number seven is used to represent plurality, as in ancient Egyptian tradition one would expect the numbers three or nine for this. As the system of writing is still in development, she also

warns that it could be a mistake to expect that there is a regularity behind numbers (pp. 48). It is tempting to interpret the use of the number seven as an indication of the absolute domination as attested in later pharaonic tradition (Matić, 2017a). It is also important to mention her critical analysis of the Gebel Sheikh Suleiman relief. The supposed thick line going from the neck of a kneeling captive to the boat on his right is not clear, and a reassessment by Bruce Williams indicates that it might be a line in the strata of the rock itself (pp. 63–64). This is confirmed by my own observation of the relief during my recent visit to the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum where the relief is on exhibition in the museum courtyard. This also means that the idea of Kerry Muhlestein (2005) that the relief is an early attestation of killing enemies by drowning them in the Nile waters, cannot be accepted and also does not relate to some later attestations of enemies hanged upside-down on the prow of the ship, as I have already argued (Matić, 2017a). Some comments by Bestock are given without much critical reflection, namely she claims that the smiting of the enemy motif on the Narmer palette is an icon familiar from later periods which *"parallels to the Islamic State beheading images"* and *"can help us understand how such an icon functioned in the rapidly emerging Egyptian state"* (pp. 66, see also her comments on pp. 73). The first problem is that smiting with a mace, as in the case of the Narmer palette, is not beheading. The second problem is that the state formation in Egypt of the late 4th millennium BC cannot be paralleled to the formation of the Islamic state. Such analogies cannot be drawn without much critical reflection. As the author herself argues, early ancient Egyptian images of violence had a restricted audience, namely the dead and the gods (pp. 77). The beheadings of the Islamic state are images of terror aiming at a large audience. Nevertheless, the chapter closes with some very interesting observations. Bestock states that the emergence of particular individuals in violent imagery is visible only in the period of state formation, as previous imagery uses abstraction. A reflection on evidence of trauma on skeletal remains from this period could have been useful but was unfortunately left out from the book. There is evidence for dismemberment and mutilation at Naqada, El Gerzeh, Adaima, and Hierakonpolis dating to the Predynastic period (Dougherty & Friedman, 2008) which has to be mentioned. At Hierakonpolis 21 individuals, out of which 11 are male, two female and eight indeterminable, had lacerations of the vertebrae, suggesting that they were decapitated.

In addition to these individuals, five males had cut marks indicative of scalping. These individuals were found within the non-elite cemetery HK 43 of the Naqada IIA-C period. Most of the 14 burials that contained these individuals were disturbed, but seven received common Predynastic burial treatment (body placed in a pit on the left side, head to the south facing west, arms flexed at the elbows, hands near the face). Six individuals were accompanied by pottery grave goods, and some of them can be ranked among the better-equipped burials of this cemetery. One burial probably also contained copper implements. The presence of multiple cuts on several vertebrae indicates repeated blows with a lighter blade. The cut patterns suggest that the purpose was to sever the neck to some degree, but it is not clear if decapitation was the ultimate intention. The publishers suggest various interpretations for these individuals, with the most widely recognized one being that they were punished social deviants.

Chapter 4 *"To live forever. The decoration of royal mortuary complexes"* deals with evidence from royal temples and tombs from the 4th dynasty to the 12th dynasty and thus covering the Old and the Middle Kingdom. Bestock notices that only *"Asiatics"* (inhabitants of the Near East) are shown as victims of the battle (pp. 89). Although mentioning the presence of the Goddess Seshat counting the spoils of war on several occasions, Bestock does not reflect more closely on the fact that this changed in the New Kingdom when the counting is done by scribes. This change from divine to human recording of the spoils of war is surely not a coincidence. Also, she does not reflect on the fact that the representations of deities interacting with enemies (e.g., holding ropes with which enemies are bound in the causeway of Sahure's mortuary complex) rarely appear in the later periods (for exceptional later attestations of deities smiting or trampling over enemies see WERNER, 1986). One should be cautious with the author's interpretation of one of the reliefs from the causeway of Unas at Saqqara where she recognizes a sword rather than a dagger. This interpretation is unlikely as swords are unknown in the Bronze Age before the 17th century BC. This is because swords are not known in the Bronze Age before around 17th century BC. Another detail she misses to reflect on is the penis sheath worn by a Libyan woman in the Libyan family scene (pp. 117). Either this is no penis sheath at all, as it could be a piece of clothing worn by both genders, or for some reason a male gender marker is depicted on a woman. If the latter is the case, then this could be a deliberate masculinization of the Libyan woman.

Chapter 5 *"Uniter of the two lands. Images of violence in divine temples"* deals with rare cases of representations of violence in temples dedicated to Egyptian deities from the Early Dynastic period until the Middle Kingdom (Hierakonpolis, Gebelein, Dendera). The smiting scenes found in Gebelein and Dendera do not differ from those in royal mortuary complexes. However, it is indeed unusual that Nebhepetra Mentuhotep is depicted in Dendera smiting an emblem representing Egypt.

Chapter 6 *"The preservation of order. Images in landscape"* discusses representations of violence (smiting of the enemy) found in the landscape. The author noticed a repeated return to a site on which images of violent kings already exist. All of the evidence comes from Sinai. If the author had also focused on the textual record, she would have noticed that the motif of the destruction of landscape, although already existing during the time her study covered, only appears later in the visual record (MATIĆ, 2017b).

Chapter 7 *"Out and about. Images of violence on portable objects"* covers evidence from the Early Dynastic Period to the Middle Kingdom. The author argues that these objects, which were of limited number and variety and thus were not much more accessible than other representations of violence. The part dealing with Early Dynastic evidence does not include the label of king Aha with a peculiar motif at the very end of the first register from above. A seated or kneeling (?) figure on the left is depicted holding a bowl or an object (?) in one hand and piercing a figure on the right in his abdomen (?) with the other hand (PETRIE & GRIFFITH, 1900, pl. 3). The section on execration figurines refers to a case of a decapitated human being as a most notable case of an execration ritual. The author is referring to the Mirgissa deposits but does not quote the original excavation reports by André Vila. Instead, she focuses on secondary literature dealing with execration figurines. There is little, if any, evidence for decapitation at Mirgissa. The skull argued to be associated with decapitation lacks the lower mandible and was located approximately 4m away from other skeletal remains. The fact that the mandible was missing when the remains were found rather indicates postmortem use of the skull. The silex blade sometimes argued to be a weapon of execution, is actually only 9 x 2 x 0,4 cm large and surely did not serve this purpose (MATIĆ, forthcoming b). Bestock does not include important sealing fragments from a cylinder seal from Abydos (Umm el-Qaab) found in the vicinity of the tomb of Den. Both fragments were sealings attached to a vessel,

and they belong to the category of festival seals which are rare and most of which date to the reign of Den. On both fragments, there is a representation of the king with a harpoon. On one (Ab K 6500), two enemies with their hands bound behind their backs are depicted as beheaded bodies under the feet of the king. Their decapitated heads are depicted between their legs. On the other (Ab K 6501), the enemy with hands bound behind his back is depicted under the king but slightly to the left. His decapitated head is also depicted between his legs. Unlike in the case of the Narmer palette and the ivory plate from Hierakonpolis (E 4012, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford), the enemies on the sealing fragments from Abydos are laying on their sides (MÜLLER, 2008).

Chapter 8 *"Who is who? Private monumental images of war"* is the last chapter before the concluding discussion. Although providing us with contextual discussion, the author failed to notice that, when the king appears in battle scenes in the New Kingdom, these scenes disappear from private tombs. The statement that *"the depiction of the king is counter to decorum in private tombs prior to the New Kingdom"* should be read with caution as there are Middle Kingdom depictions of the king in private tombs. These developed from the previously rather abstract representation of the king in private tombs. This occurs either in the form of the word njswt (king) or, more specifically, by mentioning of personal names. According to V. Vasiljević the appearance of depictions of kings in private tombs is due to closer relationships between "chiefs" and "kings" during the reunification of the divided land at the end of the First Intermediate Period (VASILJEVIĆ, 2005). In the discussion of images of war on private monuments, Bestock left out some important aspects, such as gender. When compared to later images of violence it becomes clear that there is a change in decorum. Namely, in the period of her study, foreign women are not only depicted as aggressive but also as victims of Egyptian violence. This changes in the New Kingdom when foreign women are no longer depicted as victims of violence (MATIĆ, 2019).

Chapter 9 *"Violence, power, ideology"* is the concluding chapter of the book. The author opens it with a strange parallel between the handing down of 105 death sentences to members of the Muslim Brotherhood on the 23rd of May 2015 with some of the images studied in the book. The argument is that in both cases we are dealing with an ideological display. Bestock stresses that *"historical accuracy in imagery is a separate issue from the*

impact, importance, and perhaps we might say 'truths' from the perspective of a particular worldview, that a picture can convey" (pp. 264). A slightly pessimistic conclusion she makes is that *"no neat conclusions can be drawn about the totality of the material covered"*. However, a completely different picture emerges when her observations are juxtaposed to later evidence. Namely, she observes, as have many authors before her, that no one except the king had the right or the ability to be shown smiting and trampling as he was the incarnation of an institution (pp. 265). During the reigns of Amenhotep III and Akhenaten of the 18th dynasty, the queens Tiye and Nefertiti are depicted engaging in such activities. As my own study showed, decapitation was a royal prerogative in the New Kingdom Egypt, c. 1550-1070 BC (MATIĆ, forthcoming a). Another observation made by Bestock can be confirmed in later periods, namely that *"a monopoly on scripted types of violence legitimized the king"* (pp. 265). I observed the same in my work on violent treatments of enemies and prisoners of war in the New Kingdom. The violence conducted by the king is different than the violence conducted by the soldiers, among others due to the presence (king) or rather absence (soldiers) of a religious background (MATIĆ, forthcoming a). This is further reflected in Bestock's observation that *"reality is deliberately cast as ritual killing, not martial killing"* (pp. 266). Therefore, Bestock's conclusions indicate a long tradition of certain forms of violence and ideology attested in later periods of ancient Egyptian history.

The bibliography counts 297 works cited, an impressive count, bearing in mind that the book comes in small format and counts 268 pages. Nevertheless, some important references are missing, and to some of them, I pointed previously.

The overall impression is that this new and valuable contribution to the study of war and violence in ancient Egypt stands shoulder to shoulder with some other works on the same topic but focuses on later periods of ancient Egyptian history (SPALINGER, 2011). It presents new ideas about mostly well-known and published material. The discussions are mature and well-informed, with only some of the visual material missing. Unfortunately, as she herself proclaims at the beginning of the book, Bestock did not include textual and archaeological evidence in a narrower sense (skeletal remains and evidence of trauma) in her study. It would indeed be interesting to see how they stand in comparison to each other. New results are being published and one should mention the study conducted on the skeletons from burials

of the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period Elephantine on the First Cataract. There we find evidence of trauma with a high percentage (30 %) possibly stemming from physical punishment resulting in bone fracture (Gresky, Roumelis, Kozak & Schulz, 2013). Such evidence is crucial, as it warns us that the royal, and state ideology we see in images and we read about in texts, had serious effects on the lives of some ancient Egyptians, sometimes being their end. This is a problem for Bestock´s initial argument that the reality of violence and representations of violence have to be distinguished. The fact that traces of trauma, corresponding to some violence attested in texts and images, can be observed on skeletons, indicates a more complex relation between reality and its representations. This complexity can be further explored only by including the anthropological record. Bestock´s book nevertheless offers an important guideline for this future endeavor.

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