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# Scorpion II: A new theory<sup>1</sup>

Thomas C. Heagy

*The identification of Scorpion II as a royal name is based primarily on the Scorpion Macehead. This monument, undoubtedly of royal origin, is one of the most controversial and widely discussed objects from the late Predynastic period in Egypt. It has been attributed to “King Scorpion” based on the presence of a rosette and a scorpion depicted immediately in front of the face of the king. Alternatively, it has been ascribed to Narmer because of the stylistic resemblance with that king’s monuments. This paper will demonstrate that King Scorpion II did, in fact, exist. The minor Gebel Sheikh Suleiman rock carving and the Munich Statuette will also be considered as possible examples of Scorpion II’s name and, therefore, evidence of his historical existence.*

*The magnificence of this macehead and the fact that it was deposited in the temple of Horus of Nekhen (Hierakonpolis), near where Narmer’s Palette and Macehead were found, argue for Scorpion II having been king of a unified Egypt. However, the absence of his burial at Abydos and of any*

*definite attestations of his name outside Hierakonpolis suggest that Scorpion II did not belong to the Abydene line of rulers, but instead ruled the proto-state of Hierakonpolis. Yet for many Egyptologists, the Scorpion Macehead shows a Lower Egyptian scene, which is cited as evidence that Scorpion II’s rule extended beyond Hierakonpolis.*

*After reviewing the seemingly conflicting evidence regarding his regnal date and the extent of the territory he controlled, it will be proposed that Scorpion II was the last of his line as King of Hierakonpolis, but acted as a client king to the Abydene polity. After an initial period during which Abydos and Hierakonpolis were allies, the relationship evolved into one of political dominance by Abydos, with a client king left to rule in Hierakonpolis.*

*L’identification de Scorpion II en tant que nom royal repose principalement sur la tête de massue de Scorpion. Ce monument, indubitablement d’origine royale, est l’un des objets les plus controversés et les plus dis-*

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1. This essay is dedicated to Günter Dreyer, a good friend and great Egyptologist who died prematurely last year. He was always kind, supportive of new ideas, and helpful. He provided reliable encouragement and advice for this paper. My hope is that he would have been pleased with the result. Stan Hendrickx and Renée F. Friedman have played an invaluable role, providing ongoing support, critique, and insight. This paper would not have been possible without the diligence of my research assistants, Elise V. MacArthur, Rozenn Bailleul-LeSuer, and Brendan Hainline.

*cutés de la période prédynastique tardive en Égypte. Elle a été attribuée au « roi scorpion » en raison de la présence d'une rosette et d'un scorpion, gravés devant le visage du roi. Elle a également été associée avec Narmer à cause de sa ressemblance stylistique avec les monuments de ce roi. Cet article démontre que le roi Scorpion II existait bel et bien. Le relief du scorpion au Gebel Sheikh Suleiman et la statuette de Munich sont également considérés comme des exemples possibles du nom de Scorpion II et, par conséquent, comme preuves de son existence historique.*

*La splendeur de cette tête de massue et le fait qu'elle ait été déposée dans le temple d'Horus de Nekhen (Hiérakonpolis), près du lieu où la palette et la tête de massue de Narmer ont été retrouvées, pourraient indiquer que Scorpion II était le roi d'une Égypte unifiée. Cependant, l'absence de sa tombe à Abydos et de toute attestation définitive de son nom en dehors de Hiérakonpolis suggèrent que Scorpion n'appartenait pas à la lignée des rois d'Abydos mais contrôlait le proto-état de Hiérakonpolis. Pourtant, pour de nombreux égyptologues, la tête de massue de Scorpion montre une scène de Basse Égypte, citée comme preuve que le règne de Scorpion s'étendait au-delà de Hiérakonpolis.*

*Après avoir examiné les preuves apparemment contradictoires concernant sa date de naissance et l'étendue du territoire qu'il gouvernait, il est proposé que Scorpion II était le dernier de sa lignée sur le trône de Hiérakonpolis, agissant en même temps comme roi-client d'Abydos. Après une alliance initiale entre Abydos et Hiérakonpolis, cette relation a évolué pour devenir une relation de domination politique de la part d'Abydos, avec un roi-client restant à son poste à Hiérakonpolis.*

## Introduction

The existence of Scorpion II (then simply called King Scorpion) was first proposed by Petrie<sup>2</sup> after Quibell's discovery in Hierakonpolis, during the 1897/1898 season, of what is now known as the Scorpion Macehead (Figs 1a-1c). Nineteen additional inscriptions have since been attributed to this ruler, including six *serekhs* or quasi-*serekhs*, which originate from Upper Egypt (Abydos, Hierakonpolis, and Abu Umuri), Lower Egypt (Minshat Abu Omar, Tura, and Tarkhan), and Tel Ma'ahaz in the Southern Levant. They include a stone statuette, ink and incised inscriptions on pottery, stone vases, and inscriptions on ivory. All of these were reviewed by this author, and only two, in addition to the Scorpion Macehead, were determined to be probable inscriptions of Scorpion II's name, i.e., the Gebel Sheikh Suleiman rock carving tableau (Fig. 10) and the Munich Statuette (Figs 14a & 14b), both of which will be discussed in detail in this article. The other seventeen will be briefly addressed in the Appendix.

The most important artefact is, of course, the Scorpion Macehead. Dominating the preserved portion is a figure of the king wearing the White Crown of Upper Egypt facing the symbols for a rosette and a scorpion that have been widely read as "King Scorpion". This paper will discuss the iconography of both the rosette and the scorpion and how they relate to the interpretation of the Scorpion Macehead.

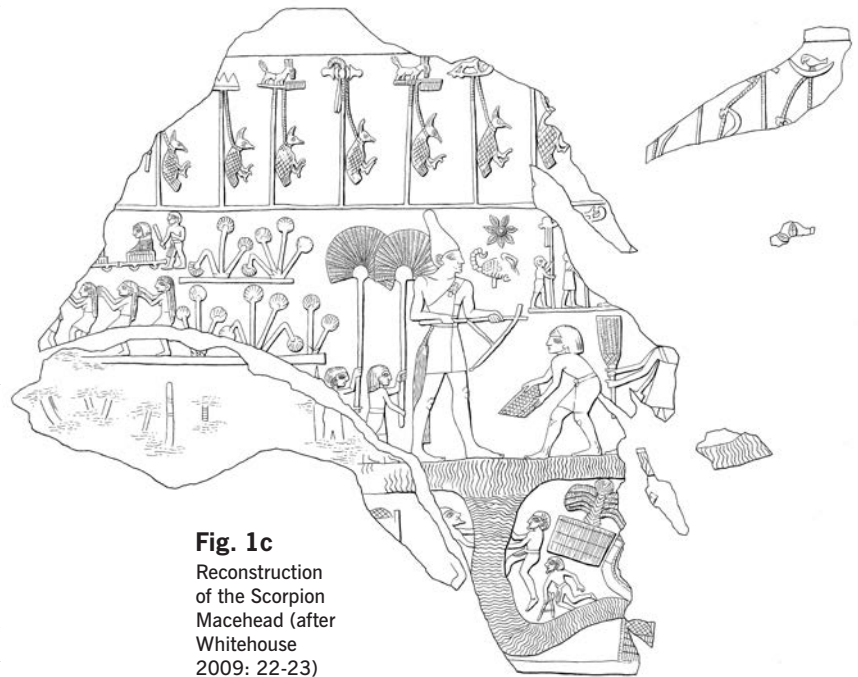
Finally, three main theories have been offered concerning the historical existence of Scorpion II and the extent of his political influence. Some scholars argue that he was king of a united Egypt, while others believe that he was just king of the proto-kingdom of Hierakonpolis. It has also been proposed that there was no such king named Scorpion II, the Scorpion Macehead being, instead, a monument of Narmer's. This

2. Petrie 1900b: 9. This king is referred to as Scorpion II, rather than just Scorpion, to distinguish him from Scorpion I, a ruler whose existence was proposed by Dreyer (1998: 173) after the excavation of tomb U-j in Abydos. Whether or not Scorpion I existed is controversial and outside the scope of this paper. Therefore, the term Scorpion II will be used, to avoid confusion.

paper will evaluate the validity of these arguments and propose a new theory to reconcile the conflicting evidence.

## Scorpion Macehead

This Macehead (**Fig. 1a-c**), currently on display at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford<sup>3</sup>, is considered the largest and finest decorated example of its kind from ancient Egypt, although less than a third of the original artefact has been preserved.<sup>4</sup> Discovered with a large number of undecorated maces<sup>5</sup> under the temple of Horus at Hierakonpolis (Nekhen) in the Main Deposit<sup>6</sup>, it dates to the Protodynastic/1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty period. It is one of the earliest examples in Egyptian iconography of the ruler being shown as a human being rather than as an animal symbolising the power of the king.<sup>7</sup> This Macehead shows a king wearing the White Crown of Upper Egypt facing the symbols



**Fig. 1c**  
Reconstruction of the Scorpion Macehead (after Whitehouse 2009: 22-23)  
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**Fig. 1a**  
Scorpion Macehead

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**Fig. 1b**  
Detail of the Scorpion Macehead showing the king wearing the White Crown. A scorpion and a rosette are depicted near his face

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3. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum Inv. No. AN1896.1908.E.3632. The reconstruction measures 31.5 cm in height and 30 cm at its maximum diameter (Whitehouse 2009: 21).

4. Whitehouse 2009: 19-25.

5. The discovery of the Scorpion Macehead with a large number of non-decorated maceheads may provide a context and help interpreting its meaning, but what exactly this meaning is remains unclear.

6. Quibell 1900: pls. XXV (lower), XXVIC; Petrie 1900b: 9. Quibell & Green (1902: 34-35) say that the objects of the Main Deposit “may then be unhesitatingly attributed to the earliest historical period,” although the deposition of these objects would have been made at a later period. McNamara (2008) argues that the structure, traditionally identified as the foundation of an Early Dynastic temple or shrine, was actually a royal ritual precinct.

7. It is also the earliest attestation in which the king is named.

of a rosette and a scorpion. As discussed in the following section, “Rosette Iconography”, the two signs have been interpreted as reading “King Scorpion.”

On this artefact, the king is shown holding a hoe while standing next to a river. A man is represented in front of him with a basket, presumably to receive the earth that the king is about to dig up. Above this man is a sub-register with a row of standards similar to those known from the Narmer Palette and Narmer Macehead. Above the king are standards with lapwing birds hanging from them. In ancient Egyptian iconography, lapwings are often associated with the people of the Delta (the *Rekhyt* people).<sup>8</sup> However, this identification is problematic. According to Griffin<sup>9</sup>, there are no texts that support this interpretation, and the association of the birds with “the populace of Egypt” is currently more generally accepted. However, in the context of the Scorpion Macehead, it is unlikely that the common population, whether of the whole country or more specifically of Lower Egypt, would be portrayed as hanging from standards. More plausible would be that they represent enemies or rebels. Following the king are two fan bearers, also similar to those on the Narmer Macehead. A loose fragment, which on the reconstruction is placed in the upper right, shows parts of three standards with bows hanging from them.<sup>10</sup>

Below the king, in a second register, is a river, presumably the Nile, and what may be a canal, both watercourses bordering a portion of land occupied by two men and a palm tree in a fenced area, possibly indicating a divine domain. Also, in the second register, to the left, is a partially preserved dome-covered building, generally considered to be a shrine, perhaps the *pr nw* shrine of Lower Egypt. On the lower right of the second register is a portion of what may be a second shrine. Even though the identification of these shrines as *pr nw* shrines has been described as “questionable”<sup>11</sup>, the presence on the Narmer Macehead of a similar shrine surmounted by a heron, a well-established symbol of the Lower Egyptian town on Buto<sup>12</sup>, suggests that the shrines on the Scorpion Macehead might also be a reference to the Delta.<sup>13</sup> To the left of the king are papyrus plants, another symbol of Lower Egypt.

Despite the uncertain meaning of the lapwing birds and the shrines, it is widely believed that the Scorpion Macehead represents an event that occurred in Lower Egypt.<sup>14</sup> Since the White Crown is traditionally associated with Upper Egypt, the scene might represent the outcome of the conquest of Lower Egypt by Upper Egypt.<sup>15</sup> As discussed below, it might be the case, as on the Narmer Palette, that the complete Scorpion Macehead featured the king wearing both the Upper and Lower Egyptian crowns, although this is speculative.

8. Although the interpretation of the lapwing as a symbol of the Delta (or Lower Egypt) is widely accepted (Morenz 2004: 141-142), the conclusion is, to some extent, based on circular reasoning. For some authors, the presence of the lapwings on the Scorpion Macehead demonstrates that they represent the Delta or Lower Egypt; while, for others, their presence on the Scorpion Macehead proves that the scene takes place in Lower Egypt. These birds have also been identified as symbolising rebellious foreigners, followers of Seth, and the population of the common people of Egypt. See Griffin (2018: 10-18) for a discussion of the various theories.

9. Griffin 2018: 16, 43-46.

10. Petrie (1900b: 9) considers that the bows, represented as hanging from the standards on the unplaced fragment, stand for the “nine bows,” later a general symbol of the enemies of Egypt.

11. Hendrickx & Förster 2010: 838. In their opinion, the *pr nw* shrine is only known with certainty from later sources; see also Regulski 2010: 157. According to Gautier & Midant-Reynes (1995: 108), it is unlikely that it is a *pr nw* shrine because the scene takes place in Upper Egypt.

12. The heron on a shrine was the symbol of Buto in Lower Egypt (Friedman 1996: 35, n. 12).

13. Friedman (1996: 33), in discussing a similar shrine on the Narmer Macehead, describes it as being like the *Pr-nu* or *Pr-nzr* type shrine, the archetypal form of the Lower Egyptian shrine.

14. Kaiser (1964: 91) interprets the plants as being papyrus and, on that basis, concludes that scene takes place in Lower Egypt.

15. Gautier & Midant-Reynes 1995: the combination of White Crown + Lapwing Birds + Papyrus Plants = victory of Southern Egypt over Northern Egypt.



The overall scene has been interpreted as depicting the king opening a canal for irrigation purposes.<sup>16</sup> Hendrickx and Förster<sup>17</sup> reject this interpretation on the basis that no evidence exists to suggest that large-scale irrigation had been developed at the time, and they propose that it represents a “founding” ceremony related to agriculture.<sup>18</sup> In this author’s opinion, the most likely interpretation is that it represents the opening of a waterway between the Nile and a religious sanctuary<sup>19</sup>, perhaps in Buto or Nekhen.

Another loose fragment shows the partial representation of a second rosette. Using this fragment as the base of their argument, some scholars<sup>20</sup> have proposed that the Macehead originally included a second representation of the king, probably (according to these authors) wearing the Red Crown of Lower Egypt, thus suggesting that Scorpion II was king of a united Egypt. The proposed reconstructions<sup>21</sup>, however, are speculative and will not be discussed further in this paper. While the existence of the rosette fragment supports the theory that a second representation of King Scorpion was on the original Macehead, there is no evidence to substantiate the claim that he was shown wearing the crown of Lower Egypt.<sup>22</sup> In addition, the second rosette could be associated with a royal servant (sandal bearer), similar

to what is shown on the Narmer Palette and Macehead, rather than with a second representation of the king.<sup>23</sup> According to Morenz<sup>24</sup> and Menu<sup>25</sup>, it is unlikely that the original Macehead included a second representation of the king, because of the awkward overall composition it would create, at variance with the iconography of the period.

## Rosette Iconography

The meaning of the rosette motif shown in front of the king on this Macehead has been the object of speculation and discussion for several decades.<sup>26</sup> It has often been considered to be a visual designation of the title “king,” hence the signs of the rosette and the scorpion should be read “King Scorpion.” According to Hendrickx and Förster<sup>27</sup>, “the rosette is unanimously accepted as an emblem denoting kingship.” They propose that, during the time of Scorpion II and Narmer, it probably referred to an “aspect” of kingship. Schott<sup>28</sup> suggests that it was a special title of the king of Upper Egypt. As pointed out by Kaiser<sup>29</sup>, however, if the interpretation of the rosette and scorpion as “King Scorpion” is correct, this inscription would be the only example where the rosette is used as a royal title.<sup>30</sup>

16. Quibell & Green 1902: 41; Vandier 1952: 600-601; Wilkinson 1999: 216; Menu 2003: 322.

17. Hendrickx & Förster 2010: 838.

18. Ciałowicz (1987: 34-36) believes that the scene shows the foundation of Memphis. For a discussion of the wide variety of interpretations of the Scorpion Macehead, see Gautier & Midant-Reynes 1995: 93-121.

19. See Gautier & Midant-Reynes 1995: 121. Baumgartel (1960: 117) describes it as the dedication of a temple, perhaps the temple at Hierakonpolis (Nekhen).

20. Millet 1990: 58; Davis 1992: 225; Gautier & Midant-Reynes 1995: 101-106; Ciałowicz 1997: 11-27, fig. 2; Midant-Reynes 2000: 249; Ciałowicz 2001: 197-200.

21. Gautier & Midant-Reynes 1995: 101-106; Ciałowicz 1997: 11-27, fig. 2; Ciałowicz 2001: 197-200.

22. Ciałowicz (1997: 13, fig. 2) suggests that a different fragment shows a very small part of a Red Crown, but it is too incomplete to come to any conclusion.

23. Kelder (2013: 149) believes that a sandal bearer must have been originally represented on the Scorpion Macehead, and that the fragment of a second rosette is a part of that image.

24. Morenz 2004: 151.

25. Menu 1996: 38.

26. Petrie 1900b: 9; Quibell & Green 1902: 41; Bénédite 1918: 10; Schott 1952: 20; Helck 1987: 139; Millet 1990: 58; Ciałowicz 1992a: 86; Smith 1992: 244; Gautier & Midant-Reynes 1995: 11; Wilkinson 1999: 56; Morenz 2004: 118, 151-154; Hendrickx & Förster 2010: 833; Bestock 2018: 57.

27. Hendrickx & Förster 2010: 833.

28. Schott 1950: 1731 (25).

29. Kaiser 1964: 103.

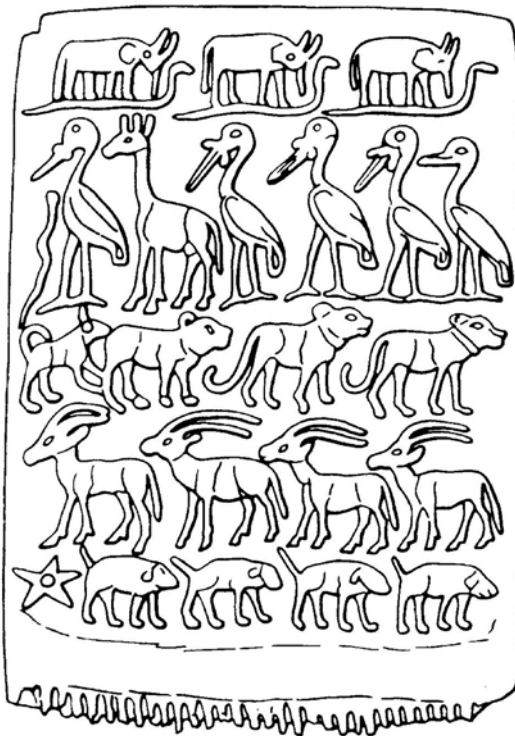
30. No examples of the rosette as a hieroglyph (sign m10 in Kahl/Regulski) appear after the Narmer Palette and Narmer Macehead (Regulski, *Database of Early Dynastic Inscriptions*). The rosette then comes to be used solely as a decorative element, seemingly devoid of linguistic meaning.

Some scholars<sup>31</sup> suggest, instead, that the rosette should be read *hrr.t* (flower), a homonym for *Hr*, i.e., the god Horus. Smith<sup>32</sup> proposes a different meaning for this motif, which, as he describes, originated in Mesopotamia during the Halaf Period (ca. 6500-5500 BCE), and probably represents a flower, such as a rose. In contrast to the description of the rosette as a rose, Saad<sup>33</sup>, as well as Hendrickx and Eyckerman<sup>34</sup>, suggest that the rosette symbol is a view from above of the leaves of a palm

tree. Likewise, according to Bénédite<sup>35</sup> and Barta<sup>36</sup>, it could instead be the *swt*-plant seen from above.

In the ancient Near East, the rosette is frequently associated with the domination of animals. When encountered in ancient Egyptian iconography, Smith<sup>37</sup> believes that it should be associated with the concept of the ruler imposing control over wild animals seen as agents of chaos, a view shared by Dreyer and Raffaele.<sup>38</sup> Hendrickx specifically identifies the role of the rosette at the end of animal rows (e.g. in Fig. 2)<sup>39</sup> as imposing control over the wild animals in the row.<sup>40</sup> Such a concept is closely associated with ancient Egyptian kingship, since the maintenance of order, or *Maat*, was the primary duty of the king. The rosette also acts as a symbol of the domination over animals when it is depicted entwined by snakes on ivory knife handles. For instance, on the Gebel el-Tarif knife, the rosette is seen as symbolically imposing order on the wild creatures that are the snakes.<sup>41</sup>

The Narmer Palette may help shed some light on the role of this rosette on the Scorpion Macehead. On the recto side of the Palette, both the symbols of the catfish and the chisel in front of the king are part of the king's name. Since the position of Narmer as king is clearly indicated by his wearing the Red Crown, no royal title is needed. Similarly, in Narmer's name, the chisel (*mr*) is an epithet (or secondary name) accompanying the primary name, catfish (*n'r*). By ana-



**Fig. 2**  
Face A of the Davis Comb. A rosette can be seen in the lower left corner (after Ciałowicz 2001: 175, fig. 25).

31. Schenkel 1984: 723; Barta 1990: 56; Kahl 1994: 55.

32. Smith 1992: 241-244. He refers to the rosette as a "florette."

33. Saad 1951: 34.

34. Hendrickx & Eyckerman 2012: 49-50. It is important to note that, in their opinion, the palm tree is a sign of order. It also symbolises the power of the king.

35. Bénédite 1918: 10.

36. Barta 1969: 56.

37. Smith 1992: 242-244.

38. Dreyer 2005: 254; Raffaele 2010: 266.

39. Face A of the Davis comb (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Inv. No. 30.8.224. See Ciałowicz 1992b: 250-252 for a detailed discussion of this artefact). The Abu Zeidan knife handle (Brooklyn Museum, Inv. No. 09.889.118) shows a rosette in a similar location.

40. Hendrickx & Förster 2010: 832-833.

41. Hendrickx & Förster 2010: 833. Other Egyptian examples of the rosette and snake combination symbolising the domination of animals on ivory knife handles are Petrie Museum, Inv. No. UC16294 and Ägyptisches Museum Berlin, Inv. No. 15137.

logy, rather than standing for “king”<sup>42</sup>, the rosette on the Scorpion Macehead is either part of Scorpion’s name or is an epithet further qualifying the king, since the concept of kingship is unequivocally conveyed by the White Crown he is depicted wearing.<sup>43</sup> This interpretation is consistent with Hendrickx and Förster’s description of the rosette as being an “aspect” of kingship and may suggest that the name of the king is not simply “Scorpion,” but rather “Scorpion, the one who controls chaos.” According to Hendrickx and Eyckerman<sup>44</sup>, although the rosette has been interpreted in a variety of ways, “all readings refer one way or another to the king.”

On both the Narmer Palette and Macehead, the rosette and Gardiner’s sign U36 (fuller’s club), standing for the word *hm*, “servant,” have been widely interpreted as standing for the title, not the name, of the sandal bearer<sup>45</sup> in front of whom these signs are carved. According to this view, this man is labelled as being a “servant of the king.”<sup>46</sup> If we reject the interpretation that the rosette reads “king,” as discussed above, what does the motif mean in this specific context? If the epithet “the one who controls chaos” is used exclusively to refer to the king (as on the Scorpion Macehead), the two signs could still refer to this man as being a royal servant.

In contrast to the dominant opinion that the Scorpion Macehead is a monument to king Scorpion II are the views of Baumgartel.<sup>47</sup> In her opinion, the rosette, a Mesopotamian symbol of fertility<sup>48</sup>, came to also be associated with the Egyptian goddess later known as Seshat. She bases her argument on the various examples of Egyptian representations of a rosette that cannot be interpreted to mean “king”. She also rejects the notion that Scorpion is a king’s name. She describes the scorpion as representing motherhood and protection for people in the Near East, and suggests that, in Egypt, it became the symbol of the goddess Selket.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, she claims that ancient Egyptian kings never adopted the name of a goddess for their personal name, although they later incorporated them in titles and epithets. Based on the stylistic similarity with the Narmer Palette and Macehead, she attributes the Scorpion Macehead to Narmer, a conclusion that has a number of adherents today. However, her specific theory described above is not generally accepted.

## Scorpion Iconography


Interestingly, at Hierakonpolis, scorpions and falcons have comparable roles. Intimately linked, these two animals came to

42. Mark (1997: 111-112) agrees that if the Scorpion Macehead contains the name of king Scorpion, then the rosette is part of the name rather than a title.

43. On the famous incense burner from the Nubian site of Qustul (Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago, Inv. No. E24069; Williams 1986: 138-145, fig. 55 (p. 142), pl. 34, 38), a king is shown wearing the White Crown of Upper Egypt and facing a rosette. Immediately in front of the king, (in-between the king and the rosette) is a falcon surmounting a structure identified by Williams as a *serekh*, but which might instead be a shrine. On this artefact and the Scorpion Macehead, the concept of kingship is unequivocally conveyed by the White Crown worn by the man seated on a throne. No additional title reading “king” is needed. Therefore, the rosette may have a different meaning in this context; it may be an epithet of the king, such as “the one who controls chaos,” as on the Scorpion Macehead.

44. Hendrickx & Eyckerman 2012: 50.

45. Wilkinson 1999: 191. Baumgartel (1966: 10) proposes to read the title as “priest of the rosette.”

46. The same can be said for the man identified by the sign , possibly standing for *βty*, “vizier.” (However, this title is not specifically attested until the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty (Strudwick 1985: 300)).

47. Baumgartel 1966: 9-13.

48. Although Mesopotamian influence in Egypt is generally accepted, it has been argued that the extent of this influence must remain uncertain because of the paucity of Mesopotamian objects found in Egypt from the early period (see Hendrickx & Bavay 2002: 73).

49. Baumgartel (1960: 103-104, 116-117). According to von Känell (1984: 830-831) and Whitehouse (2009: 26), the name of the scorpion goddess, Selket (a.k.a., Selkis, Serket, or Selqet), is attested from the 1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty onwards. However, von Känell does not believe that there is a connection between Selket and the Scorpion king.

respectively represent the primary female and male deities of the city.<sup>50</sup> A total of 46 scorpion and 30 falcon representations have been found at this site, primarily in the Main Deposit, and date to the Predynastic/Protodynastic period.<sup>51</sup> In addition, two scorpion figurines were recovered from Tomb 23, an early Naqada II royal burial located in HK6 cemetery.<sup>52</sup> However, the scorpion and falcon are rarely shown together. The iconographic association of these two animals is only attested on three Protodynastic monuments, i.e., the limestone cylindrical vase from the Main Deposit<sup>53</sup>, Tableau 1 of the Gebel Tjauti rock inscriptions in the Western Desert<sup>54</sup>, and the Abu Umuri palette.<sup>55</sup> Although the original interpretation of these inscriptions as meaning “Horus Scorpion” is no longer accepted (See Appendix)<sup>56</sup>, no convincing explanation has yet been offered to explain the combination of the falcon with the scorpion in these examples.

Examples of fragmentary and complete scorpion figurines found in HK6, the elite necropolis of Hierakonpolis dated to the Naqada IIB period, show the long history of the city’s special relationship with scorpions and may be evidence that a scorpion cult developed from this special affinity with the arachnid.<sup>57</sup>

Friedman suggests that the scorpion representations excavated in HK6 and the large number recovered from the Main Deposit might indicate that Scorpion was the principal female deity of the city<sup>58</sup>, after whom Scorpion II could have been named.

Malek<sup>59</sup> argues that the presence of a “tang” on the bottom of the scorpion motif represented on the Macehead, probably for its insertion in a pole or mast, makes it unlikely that the scorpion sign is used to write the name of a king, but should instead be interpreted as being a “large ceremonial image.” Following Baumgartel, he identifies the Macehead as belonging to Narmer. Likewise, Mark<sup>60</sup> views the “shaft that protrudes from the belly of the scorpion” as indicating that the scorpion sign should not be read as a name, but as “some type of a standard or title, [...] possibly signifying a clan or god.” Whitehouse<sup>61</sup> agrees that this peg, as she refers to this appendage, “shows that it is not a depiction of the creature *per se*, but an emblem, possibly a component for an ensign which might indicate a group affiliation rather than an individual.” All of the scorpion figurines from area HK6 in Hierakonpolis also “[...] have a hole on the underside which would allow them to be mounted in some way, most likely as standards.”<sup>62</sup>

50. Hendrickx et al. 2011: 140.

51. For scorpion representations, see Hendricks et al. 2003: 25-31 (Table 2). There are also 66 images of scorpions that were found at Abydos, with all but three from tomb U-j (Naqada IIIA). No other site has a significant concentration of scorpions. For falcon images, see Hendrickx et al. 2011: 156-162 (Appendices 1-9). There are 20 from Abydos, only two of which are from tomb U-j. Unlike scorpion depictions, falcons from this period are widely distributed throughout Egypt.

52. Friedman 2008: 1163, 1189.

53. Quibell 1900: pl. XIX.1.

54. Darnell 2002: pl. 11.

55. Kaplony 1965.

56. The Gebel Tjauti tableau is generally considered to be too early to be Scorpion II and, therefore, is not discussed in this paper.

57. Wilkinson (1999: 270) argues that “it is perhaps safer to attribute the preponderance of the scorpion images at Hierakonpolis to an aspect of a local cult.” Kahl (2003b: 52) describes the scorpion as a local deity of Hierakonpolis. According to Hendrickx et al. (2003: 14), “Le nombre de figurines de scorpion découvert à Hiérakonpolis laisse penser qu’il existait un culte local du scorpion. Pourtant, aucun culte de la déesse protectrice scorpion, Selket, n’est attesté dans cette ville” (The large number of scorpion figurines discovered in Hierakonpolis could let us think that there was a local scorpion cult. But no cult of the protective scorpion goddess Selket is attested in this city). See also Friedman 2011: 89-90; Hendrickx 2014: 271.

58. Friedman 2011: 89-90.

59. Malek 1986: 29.

60. Mark 1997: 111.

61. Whitehouse 2009: 24.

62. Friedman 2011: 90.

## Interpretation of the Scorpion Macehead

As mentioned previously, because of the close similarities between the Scorpion Macehead and the Narmer Macehead and Palette, several Egyptologists have assigned the two artefacts to Narmer.<sup>63</sup> Parallels between the Scorpion Macehead and the Narmer Palette (Figs 3 & 4) are undeniable.<sup>64</sup> On both, the name is shown without a *serekh*. If the Scorpion Macehead belonged to Narmer, how do we account for the omission of his name in the same prominent position as on the Narmer Palette, directly in front of the face of the king? This is the key question addressed in this paper.

Two theories have been proposed to explain the absence of Narmer's name in this context. First, according to Baumgartel<sup>65</sup>, the rosette-scorpion combination alludes to deities. The second hypothesis, proposed by Menu<sup>66</sup>, is that the scorpion motif refers to the earlier Scorpion I. To the extent of this author's knowledge, no parallels exist to substantiate either of these theories, which also fail to explain why Narmer would choose to place the names of deities or a previous ruler in lieu of his name. Instead, the Narmer Palette represents a strong comparable to argue that the inscription represented in front of the king on the Scorpion Macehead should be considered to be a spelling of his name.

This convention continued during the first few dynasties of Egyptian history: in several inscriptions, 1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty pharaohs, Djer<sup>67</sup>



**Fig. 3**  
Detail from the Scorpion Macehead  
© Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.



**Fig. 4** • Detail from the Narmer Palette  
(after Quibell 1898: pl. XII).

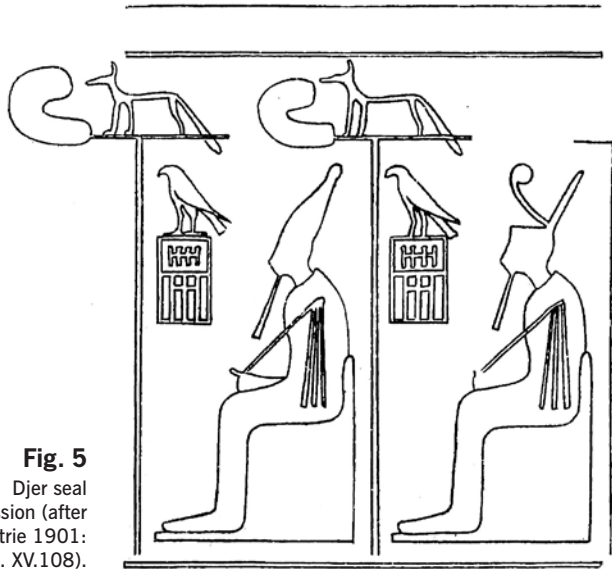
63. Malek 1986: 29. Baumgartel (1960: 116-117; 1966: 9-13) rejects the notion that Scorpion is a king's name. Menu (2003: 323-324) interprets the inscription as indicating that the king shown on this object, whom she identifies as Narmer, is a descendant of Scorpion, who, according to her, was the king who first unified Egypt, and thus worthy of this particular association. In this context, Menu is referring to Scorpion I, not Scorpion II, whom she rules out as a king's name because of the lack of a *serekh*.

64. R.F. Friedman (2019, personal communication) points out that the comparison is not exact. In the case of the Narmer Palette, the primary name (catfish) is first and the epithet (chisel) is second. On the Scorpion Macehead the order is reversed. It is not clear that this has any significance, given that they both date to a very early point in the development of hieroglyphic writing and, in particular, the representation of royal names.

65. Baumgartel 1966: 9-13.

66. Menu 2003: 323-324.

67. Petrie 1901: pl. XV.108.



**Fig. 5**  
Djer seal  
impression (after  
Petrie 1901:  
pl. XV.108).



**Fig. 6** • Den ivory label. © British Museum.

(Fig. 5) and Den<sup>68</sup> (Fig. 6), 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty kings, Sekhemkhet<sup>69</sup> (Fig. 7) and Djoser<sup>70</sup> (Fig. 8), whose royal status, in each case is clearly identified by their attire, are shown with their Horus name, in these cases in a *serekh*, written at approximately the same level as their faces. There is also an inscription of Den with his *nswt-bity* name in the same position (Fig. 9).<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, the possible existence of a scorpion cult in Hierakonpolis is insufficient to justify the inclusion of the deity's image in one of the most prominent positions on the Macehead, where one would expect the king's name. It may, however, explain why the king was named "Scorpion." Theophoric royal names are certainly common in later periods. Kings

often chose to show reverence to deities from their region of origin by incorporating them into their names<sup>72</sup>, as would be the case with Scorpion II, a Hierakonopolitan ruler. It could be argued that the depictions of scorpions discovered at Hierakonpolis, with no apparent ties to royal appellations, such as scorpion figurines that display holes for attachment to standards, are evidence that the scorpion on the Scorpion Macehead, which may have served an analogous role, is not part of the king's name. However, there is no reason why the image of a scorpion cannot represent in one context a deity<sup>73</sup> (or the object of a cult<sup>74</sup>) and in others an amulet for protection against scorpion bites<sup>75</sup>, a manifestation of royal power<sup>76</sup>, or the name of a king, as argued here.

68. On an ivory label of Den (British Museum, London, Inv. No. EA55586; Spencer 1993: 87, fig. 67). A second inscription showing Den facing his name in a *serekh* is in Petrie 1900a: pl. XIV.7.

69. On a relief of Sekhemkhet at Wadi Maghara (Gardiner & Peet 1917: pl. I).

70. Friedman 1995.

71. Wilkinson 1999: 75. Baker (2008: 78) refers to it as the *nbtj*-name. As noted by Wilkinson (1999: 204), these two names may have been equivalent at this time.

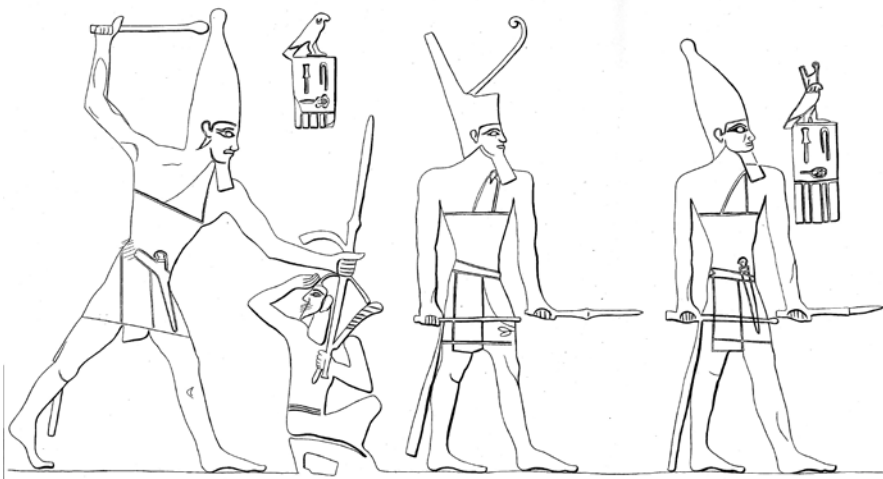
72. Examples of later kings who took names of their local deity include Montuhotep from the Middle Kingdom and Amunhotep from the New Kingdom. Old Kingdom kings often incorporated the name of the Heliopolitan god Re in their names.

73. In addition to Baumgartel's argument for the scorpion on the Scorpion Macehead representing a deity, Kahl (2003a: 127-128) proposes that the scorpion images paired with sign D32 (𓏏) on stone vessels from the Main Deposit in Hierakonpolis represent deities.

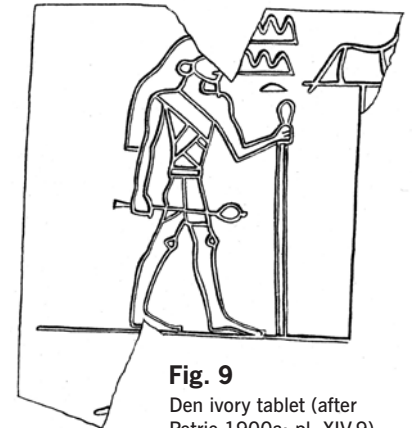
74. Wilkinson 1999: 299.

75. Dreyer (1986: 76) bases this theory on a proposed parallel with crocodile figurines found at Elephantine, which were meant to soothe the crocodile, an especially dangerous animal in that locality. However, as Dreyer also points out, scorpions were certainly as much a danger in Elephantine as in Hierakonpolis, but no scorpion figurines were found there. The scorpion figurines must therefore have a specific significance tied to Hierakonpolis. Hendrickx et al. (2003:19) rejects the theory that scorpion figurines were amulets against scorpion bites on the basis that they are unknown outside Hierakonpolis.

76. Hendrickx et al. 2003: 23.



**Fig. 7** • Semerkhet inscriptions at Wadi Maghara (after Gardiner & Peet 1917: pl. I).



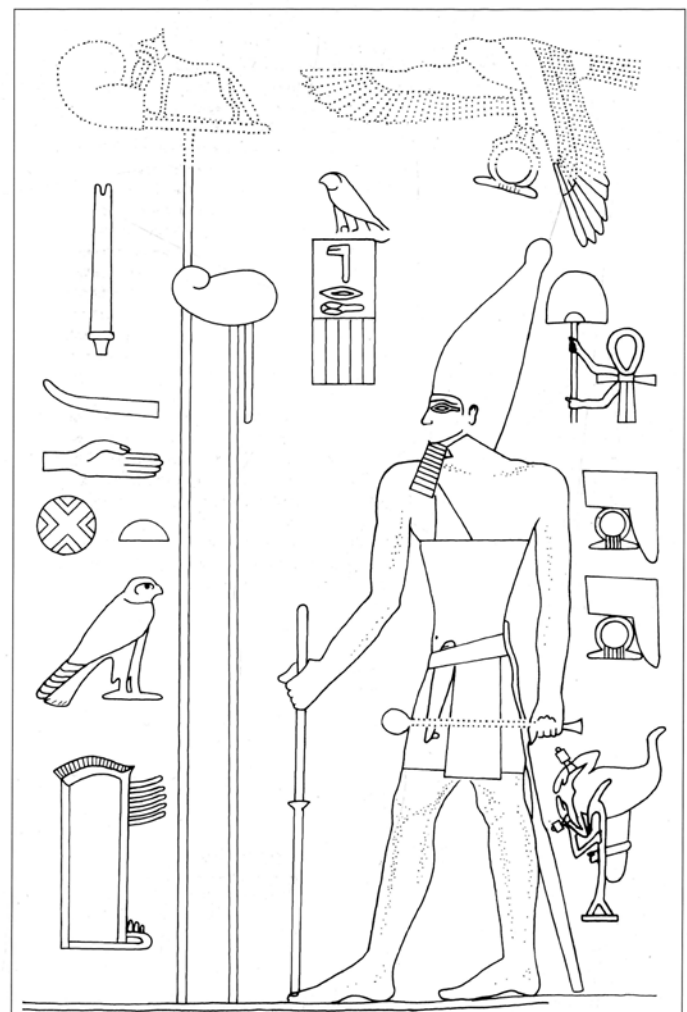
**Fig. 9**  
Den ivory tablet (after  
Petrie 1900a: pl. XIV.9).

One detail that remains unanswered is the significance of the protrusion attached to the bottom of the scorpion. The only comparable examples of scorpions with similar tangs are found on panels under the Step Pyramid of Djoser (**Fig. 8**)<sup>77</sup>, where they appear to serve a protective function. Despite this puzzling detail, reading the Scorpion Macehead inscription as a royal name is the only satisfactory explanation for the presence of the rosette and scorpion signs in front of the king. It is possible that the meaning of the scorpion image with a tang was more nuanced than simply “Scorpion,” a subtlety that is lost to us today.

## Gebel Sheikh Suleiman

A rock inscription from Gebel Sheikh Suleiman in Upper Nubia<sup>78</sup> (**Fig. 10**) has also been linked to Scorpion II's reign. This inscription was discovered by Needler<sup>79</sup> in her 1962-1963 expedition near the better-known Major Gebel Sheikh Suleiman relief.<sup>80</sup> No consensus has yet been reached as to what is represented or when it was carved.<sup>81</sup>

**Fig. 8** • Djoser underground relief panel (after Friedman 1995: 19, fig.12).



77. Friedman 1995: 19, fig. 12; 38, fig. 23.

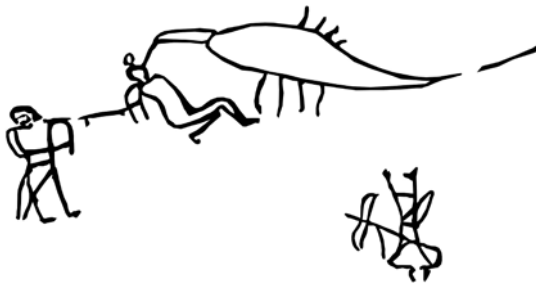
78. Needler 1967.

79. Needler 1967.

80. Arkell 1950: 27-29, pl. X.

81. Arkell (1950: 28-30) dates the main tableau to the reign of Djer in the 1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty. Murnane (1987: 284) places it before the 1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty. We cannot assume that the minor relief was carved at the same time as the major relief. Somaglino and Tallet (2015: 125) suggest that the minor relief seems to be older. Midant-Reynes (2003: 305) dates the main tableau to the 1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty.

**Fig. 10**  
Rock carving  
from Gebel  
Sheikh Suleiman  
(drawing by Elise  
MacArthur, after  
Needler 1967:  
pl. 1.3).



For some scholars, the scene commemorates an Egyptian victory over Nubia<sup>82</sup> that could be assigned to Scorpion I<sup>83</sup> or to Scorpion II.<sup>84</sup> Wilkinson<sup>85</sup> agrees that the tableau shows a successful invasion of Nubia by Hierakonpolis. He dates it to Naqada IIIB, which would correspond to the likely time of Scorpion I's reign, rather than the reign of Scorpion II. He describes the scorpion as a symbol of royal power rather than as a royal name. Ciałowicz<sup>86</sup> dates the inscription to the reign of Scorpion II, but does not interpret the inscription as being the name of this king. Knoblauch<sup>87</sup> doubts that the inscription relates to King Scorpion, using as criterion for his rebuttal the different engraving techniques used to carve the scorpion and the other characters in the scene. These different elements, according to him, may not be contemporary.

The scorpion in this tableau is shown from above and is similar in style to the only other Predynastic/Protodynastic rock inscription that includes one or more scorpions.<sup>88</sup> It is widely believed that the angle chosen by the

artist to represent a scorpion can be used as a dating criterion.<sup>89</sup> Scorpion images from Naqada I and II are always shown from above, whereas the majority of images from Naqada III show a profile view. There are, however, six examples from the Naqada III period that do not follow this convention, including the two rock inscriptions (in addition to Gebel Sheikh Suleiman) that include a scorpion. In their comprehensive catalogue of scorpion representations from the Pre- and Protodynastic periods, Hendrickx et al.<sup>90</sup> divide these representations into seven categories. The last category, labelled "Various," includes all of the Naqada III images of scorpions depicted from above.<sup>91</sup> We may infer from this that the style chosen to depict the scorpion may be tied to the type of inscription to which it belongs rather than the date when it was inscribed. Consequently, this cannot be used as a dating criterion.

In the Gebel Sheikh Suleiman tableau, the image of the scorpion holding a rope attached to a prisoner can be compared to the figure of the catfish smiting prisoners on the Narmer ivory cylinder<sup>92</sup> (Fig. 11). On this cylinder, the presence of a chisel that completes the name of Narmer removes any doubt that the catfish is part of the name of the king rather than being a deity or a symbol of royal power. Likewise, the Narmer Year label<sup>93</sup> (Fig. 12) shows a catfish holding a mace and ready to smite an enemy, with a

82. Baines (1995: 101-102) describes the inscription as showing a successful invasion of Nubia by Egypt and dates it to Dynasty 0, but does not identify the name of the king who commissioned it. Williams (1986: 171) claims that the tableau showed the victory of Nubia over Egypt.

83. Raffaele (2003: 113) believes it is more likely to be from Naqada IIIA (the period of tomb U-j), which would correspond to Scorpion I, if he existed.

84. Needler 1967: 90-91 (somewhat tentatively). On the other hand, Jiménez-Serrano (2011: 38-42) says that it could be assigned to either Scorpion I or Scorpion II.

85. Wilkinson 2000: 390.

86. Ciałowicz 1998: 21.

87. Knoblauch 2012: 339.

88. It is from Gebel Tjauti, inscription no. 1 (Friedman & Hendrickx, cont. Darnell 2002: 10-19, pl. 11).

89. Hartung 2006: 674; Evans 2015: 149-150.

90. Hendrickx et al. 2003: 25-31 (Table 2).

91. This includes one inscription that is not in their list, but which, if it had been included, would have best fit into the "Various" category.

92. Quibell 1900: 7, pl. XV.7, now in the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford) Inv. no. AN1896-1908 E. 3915.

93. Dreyer et al. 1998: 138-139, fig. 29, pl. 5c, currently in the Cairo Museum.





**Fig. 11** • Narmer cylinder (after Whitehouse 2002: 434, fig. 4).

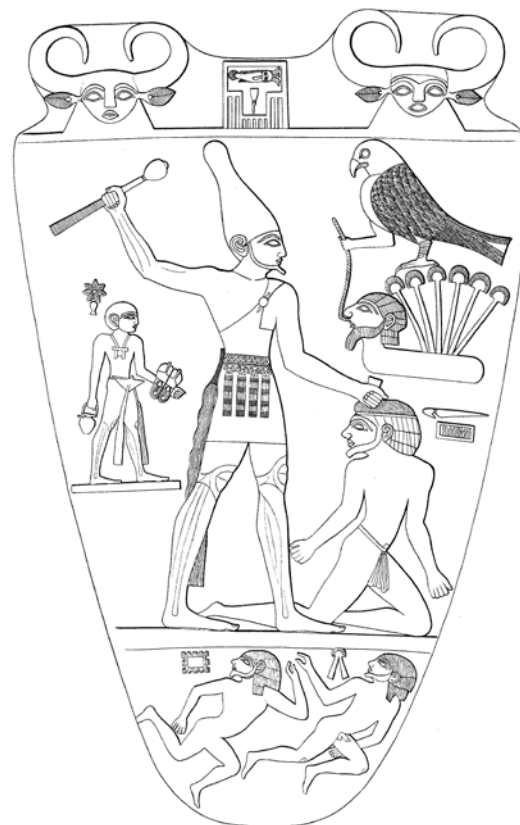


**Fig. 12** • Narmer Year-label. © Isabel Plumed.

chisel represented underneath. Once again, the presence of the signs confirms the identity of the king as being Narmer. The verso of the Narmer Palette (**Fig. 13**) also includes a comparable motif: on this artefact, a falcon presents Narmer with the people of the Delta. In this case, it can clearly be determined that the falcon represents a god and not the king, because the bird is shown facing the king and presenting prisoners.<sup>94</sup>

It might be argued that the figure to the left of the scorpion-prisoner motif in the Gebel Sheikh Suleiman inscription is, in fact, the king. If this were the case, the scorpion, probably a deity, is presenting the prisoner to the king, a scenario similar to what is represented on the Narmer Palette. However, an important detail makes this interpretation unlikely: the man in front of the scorpion, if he were to be the king, would be expected to tower over the prisoner; here, the two figures are of the same size.

In conclusion, despite a certain degree of uncertainty, this author proposes that the inscription in the Gebel Sheikh Suleiman tableau includes the name of Scorpion II, which, in this case, is written without the rosette. Such an omission can be compared to Narmer's name frequently written with-



**Fig. 13**  
Narmer Palette  
(verso) (after  
Quibell 1898: pl.  
XIII (verso)).

hout the chisel epithet (secondary name). Its location in Nubia as the result of a military campaign would be consistent with Scorpion II being either the local ruler of Hierakonpolis or the king of Egypt.

<sup>94</sup> The scene could also represent the king as Horus presenting the prisoners to the king in his human form, which would not change the conclusion.

## Munich Statuette<sup>95</sup>

A torso of a very small (7.5 cm tall) unprovenanced statue (Fig. 14a) has been attributed to Narmer, based on the presence of a *serekh* superficially inscribed on its left shoulder and because of the typology of the statuette.<sup>96</sup> The *serekh* (Fig. 14b) consists of a palace façade and a name panel filled with an oblong motif, which has been identified as a catfish.<sup>97</sup>

Some scholars have suggested that this motif might instead be a scorpion facing to the right, with its tail curving upward to the left, as is typical in representations of scorpions.<sup>98</sup> The two lines extending in front of the figure would stand for its two claws. If the name panel includes the image of a scorpion, the *serekh* would have to be that of Scorpion II, not Scorpion I, since Scorpion I, if he existed, would have predated the introduction of the *serekh*. Moreover, the style of the statue

points to a later date than the reign of Scorpion I. Although there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the statue, the inscription is unlikely to be part of the original design of this beautifully carved statuette, but is rather a graffito added later. The style of the statue allows us to place the sculpture during the late Protodynastic/Early Archaic period<sup>99</sup>, which would be consistent with the *serekh* being that of Scorpion II or Narmer. There is no other known king whose name could match this inscription.<sup>100</sup>

The Narmer interpretation is problematic as the so-called catfish only displays two “whiskers,” an unusual feature for the catfish typically depicted in Narmer’s name. Of the 50 definite Narmer inscriptions, where the number of whiskers can be determined, only four catfish (8%) exhibit two clearly defined whiskers. The most common is three whiskers (56%).<sup>101</sup> Scorpions, on the other hand, always have two pincers when these appendages are depicted. Considering the small scale of the inscription, which would make accuracy challenging, it is not surprising that these pincers would be highly simplified. If the artist wanted to portray a catfish, it would have been fairly easy to add a third whisker with one more stroke.

Based on these stylistic criteria and on the likelihood that the animal depicted is a scorpion, it seems probable that this *serekh* can be attributed to Scorpion II. This interpretation has important repercussions because it would represent the only example of Scorpion II’s name in a *serekh*. Since it was the perceived absence of a *serekh* that led several scholars to dismiss the possibility that Scorpion II was a royal name, this proposed *serekh* of Scorpion II would invalidate this objection. It also affects the dating of Scor-

**Fig. 14a**  
Statue of a god  
(after Grimm  
1998: 226,  
no. 187).



**Fig. 14b**  
Inscription on  
the statue (after  
Grimm 1998:  
227, no. 187).



95. This statuette is in the Staatliche Sammlung für Ägyptische Kunst, Munich, Inv. No. ÄS 7149.

96. Grimm & Schoske 2000: 33, no. 40. Grimm compares it to the Narmer Palette.

97. Grimm & Schoske 2000: 33, no. 40.

98. G. Dreyer (2016, personal communication) and J.-P. Pätznick (2017, personal communication) both consider “Scorpion” to be more likely.

99. Grimm 1998: 227. The inscription could, of course, have been incised at a later date, but there is no later king with a Horus Name that would fit with what is preserved. The inscription could also be a modern forgery, intended to increase the value of the statuette, but, if that were the case, we would expect a better-quality inscription.

100. Raffaele (2003: 108-109) says it could either be Nar(mer) or Scorpion.

101. Heagy, *Narmer Catalog*. Interestingly, even forgers knew to put 3 whiskers on the catfish.

pion II: if his name appears in a *serekh*, he cannot predate or be contemporary with Iry-Hor, the last king to not use a *serekh*, or a quasi-*serekh*<sup>102</sup>, to write his name.

## Theories regarding King Scorpion

Three alternative theories regarding the identity of Scorpion II have been proposed: (1) he was king of a unified Upper Egypt, as well as a section of Lower Egypt that had been conquered; (2) he was a regional king, possibly the last of his line, ruling from Hierakonpolis; (3) Scorpion II is not a royal name. A fourth alternative will be presented at the end of this section.

As shown above, the name “Scorpion” on the Scorpion Macehead can be associated with a historical king, hence invalidating Theory #3. Estimates of the regnal dates of Scorpion II are based chiefly on stylistic comparisons of the Scorpion Macehead with the Narmer Palette and Macehead. According to Davis<sup>103</sup> and Mark<sup>104</sup>, these three artefacts were sculpted at approximately the same time. They also propose that the Scorpion Macehead and Narmer Palette had possibly been carved by the same sculptor.<sup>105</sup> Wilkinson<sup>106</sup> suggests that Scorpion’s and Narmer’s reigns may have at least partially overlapped. Most scholars<sup>107</sup>, however,

believe that the Scorpion Macehead was manufactured slightly earlier than the Narmer artefacts, making Scorpion II Narmer’s immediate predecessor, if we think of him as part of the Abydene line. While Dreyer<sup>108</sup> originally proposed the possibility that Scorpion II ruled between Narmer and Aha<sup>109</sup> and was buried in tomb B 50 in Abydos, he subsequently concluded that Scorpion II, in fact, reigned before Narmer and, therefore, could not have been buried in B 50, which shows no sign of ever having been used.<sup>110</sup>

A few Egyptologists assign an earlier date for this reign.<sup>111</sup> Since they believe that Scorpion’s name was never written in a *serekh*, they argue that he may have ruled between Iry-Hor and Ka. Jiménez-Serrano<sup>112</sup> uses as a dating criterion a large tile from Abydos that, in his opinion, shows the names of Iry-Hor, Scorpion, and Ka. He bases his interpretation on the presence on this tile of a *nswt*-plant, a symbol which is later associated with kingship. However, Jiménez-Serrano’s interpretation is not generally accepted because none of these “royal names” are accompanied by either a falcon or a rosette. Lastly, it has also been proposed that Scorpion ruled before Iry-Hor<sup>113</sup>, an unlikely scenario given the similarity between the Scorpion Macehead and the monuments of Narmer discussed earlier.

Using the absence of a *serekh* for Scorpion II’s name proves to be an unreliable

102. King Crocodile used a quasi-*serekh*, defined as a *serekh* without a palace façade.

103. Davis 1989: 162.

104. Mark 1997: 111.

105. This seems unlikely given the differences between them (e.g., the distinct depictions of the rosettes).

106. Wilkinson 1999: 57.

107. Sethe 1915: 56-57; Needler 1984: 28; Barta 1990: 55; Hoffman 1991: 313; Hassan 1992: 311; Dreyer 1998: 178; von Beckerath 1999: 36-37; Wilkinson 1999: 56-57 (“near contemporaries”); Dreyer 2000: 3; Hendrickx et al. 2003: 18; Raffaele 2003: 112 (who places Scorpion “neither post-Narmer nor, very likely, pre-Ka”); Baker 2008: 352; Hendrickx & Förster 2010: 837-838 (who are just dating the Scorpion Macehead and have doubts about the existence of King Scorpion). Kaiser (1990: 289-291) says it is most likely immediately before or after Narmer. Davis (1992: 224) dates the Scorpion Macehead as roughly contemporaneous with Narmer.

108. Dreyer 1987: 41-43.

109. Mark (1997: 109, 112) also endorses the chronology of Scorpion II being in-between Narmer and Aha (if the existence of Scorpion II can be ascertained), based on his interpretation that the Scorpion Macehead is contemporary with, or slightly later than, the Narmer Palette.

110. Dreyer 2007: 228, n. 6.

111. Trigger 1983: 50. Kaiser (1964: 104) says he might be the immediate predecessor of Ka.

112. Jiménez-Serrano 2003: 97, fig. 1.

113. Kaiser & Dreyer 1982: 238; Ciałowicz 1987: 37; Helck 1987: 94; Menu 2003: 312.

method to estimate when this king was on the throne. It is only valid if we can firmly determine the geographic extent of Scorpion's rule (see below), since the use of the true *serekh* is only well established for the Abydene line of kings.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, it is also possible that there was a *serekh* of Scorpion II on a portion of the Scorpion Macehead that did not survive. Finally, if a *serekh* of Scorpion II is carved on the Munich statuette, as proposed above, the early dates proposed for his reign are no longer possible, but it should rather be placed during the period starting with the reign of Ka and ending with that of Narmer.

In addition to the difficulties encountered in establishing the date of Scorpion's reign, further challenges arise when we attempt to estimate the extent of the territory he controlled. While it has been proposed that he ruled all of Upper Egypt and all or part of Lower Egypt<sup>115</sup>, no solid evidence of Scorpion II's existence has surfaced outside of Hierakonpolis.<sup>116</sup> Despite the tombs at Umm el-Qaab in Abydos having been plundered on multiple occasions, archaeologists have been able to recover inscriptions from Iry-Hor, Ka, and every king of the 1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty in this cemetery. On the other hand, no material assigned to Scorpion II has been identified in Abydos. Likewise, the absence of a tomb for Scorpion II in the Abydene cemetery is especially problematic if he is thought to have ruled between Iry-Hor and Aha. The graves of Iry-Hor, Ka, and Narmer are neatly lined up in Abydos' cemetery B,

with Narmer's tomb immediately adjacent to that of Aha. The entire area has been thoroughly excavated, and no additional tomb has been found.<sup>117</sup>

Despite the absence of Scorpion II's burial from Abydos' cemeteries, some scholars have proposed that he was king of both Upper and Lower Egypt. Several authors<sup>118</sup> argue that the Cities Palette illustrates Scorpion II's conquest of Lower Egypt. Morenz<sup>119</sup> credits him specifically with the founding of Buto in Lower Egypt based on his analysis that the Scorpion Macehead represents a "founding" ceremony that took place in this Lower Egyptian city. Kaiser<sup>120</sup> also believes that the ceremony takes place in Lower Egypt because of the presence of papyrus plants and lapwing birds, which he identifies as being the subjugated people of Lower Egypt.<sup>121</sup> He proposes that Iry-Hor, Ka, and Scorpion II were all kings of a united Egypt. Since Scorpion II is attested at Hierakonpolis but is absent from Abydos, he suggests that Scorpion II interrupted the sequence of Thinite kings.<sup>122</sup>

Alternatively, Hendrickx et al. and others<sup>123</sup> propose that Scorpion II was a regional king of Hierakonpolis. The apparent absence of attestations of his name outside that region<sup>124</sup> would support this theory. The strong connection tying Hierakonpolis with the scorpion and the likelihood that a scorpion cult was well-established in Hierakonpolis are discussed earlier in this paper. However, describing Scorpion II as a regional ruler

114. According to Hendrickx (2001), the different components of the *serekh* developed separately both in time and space. For instance, King Crocodile, whose existence was proposed by Dreyer (1992), had his name written in a quasi-*serekh* (without a palace façade). He did not belong to the Abydene line of rulers.

115. Schott (1950: 1720(14); 1952: 19) bases his reasoning on the presence of papyrus plants, the symbol of Lower Egypt on the Macehead.

116. Except for the relief at Gebel Sheikh Suleiman, which commemorates a military operation, not political control.

117. Scorpion II could, in theory, have been buried in the earlier cemetery U. But this is unlikely since it would place Scorpion II too early for the Scorpion Macehead to have been stylistically similar to the Narmer Palette and Macehead.

118. Sethe 1915: 56-57; Schott 1952: 17; Helck 1987: 96; Dreyer 1998: 173-174.

119. Morenz 2004: 151-154. Kaiser (1964: 91) agrees that the scene on the Macehead takes place in Lower Egypt.

120. Kaiser 1964: 91-92.

121. This opinion is shared by Monnet Saleh (1990: 264).

122. Kaiser 1982: 261-268; Kaiser 1990: 294, n. 40.

123. Kaiser 1964: 104; Helck 1987: 94; Hendrickx et al. 2003: 18; Logan 1999: 270-271; Wilkinson 1999: 39, 56-57; Raffaele 2003: 112-114; Hassan et al. 2006: 694-695; Kahl 2007: 12. Helck (1987: 94) argues that the use of a rosette to indicate "king" instead of a Horus falcon demonstrates that he was not part of the Thinite line, all of whom have Horus names.

124. Although his name appears on a rock inscription in Upper Nubia (Gebel Sheikh Suleiman), this does not indicate that he ruled that area, but just passed through on a military campaign, as discussed earlier. The Munich Statuette is unprovenanced.

from Hierakonpolis creates a new problem. It is now generally accepted that the unification of Egypt was a gradual process begun before Iry-Hor and completed by Narmer.<sup>125</sup> Such a scenario places Scorpion II chronologically in the middle of the Upper Egyptian conquest of Lower Egypt. It is improbable that Abydos would send its army north towards Lower Egypt when an unconquered polity remained to threaten its rear.<sup>126</sup>

It is important to keep in mind that, as stated by Friedman and Bussmann<sup>127</sup>, “Hierakonpolis is one of the central places of Egyptian state formation and plays a key role for investigating the emergence of Pharaonic kingship.” Before Abydos asserted itself, Hierakonpolis was governed by a series of kings, one of whom was buried in Tomb 23 in zone HK6, “by far the largest known tomb of its time.”<sup>128</sup> The grave labelled as Tomb 1 was also larger than any contemporary tomb, and it has been speculated that it may have been the tomb of Scorpion II.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, the regional deity, Horus of Nekhen, was retained as the patron god of the king by the Abydene line that ruled a unified Egypt.

A possible solution to the conflicting evidence on the extent of Scorpion II’s rule would be to suggest that Hierakonpolis was a client state of Abydos<sup>130</sup> and that Scorpion II served as a subordinate ruler to the king of Egypt in Abydos. Before the unification of Upper Egypt, several proto-states, among which Abydos, Naqada, and Hierakonpolis were the most important, competed to gain prominence in the region.<sup>131</sup> A key issue in these discussions is the nature of the relationship between Aby-

dos and Hierakonpolis. According to Hendrickx and Friedman<sup>132</sup>:

*[...] it might be more sensible to consider an alliance between Abydos and Hierakonpolis. This could in fact already be the case for the campaign against Naqada, of which we consider the Gebel Tjauti inscription to be testimony. [...] In this respect it must also be mentioned that not the slightest evidence for conflict between Abydos and Hierakonpolis has ever been found. On the contrary, they share the same political and religious symbolism, while at the same time they are supposed to be two different kingdoms. [...] While the capricious nature of archaeological discoveries is recognized, it is nevertheless striking that the most important monuments of Narmer, his decorated palette and mace head, have been found at Hierakonpolis. Perhaps the idea of proto-kingdoms popularized, especially by Kemp (1989) and the obvious importance of violence in the royal iconography and to state formation (e.g. Campagno 2002b) have caused us to accept too easily a struggle between Abydos and Hierakonpolis as the decisive element in the unification of Egypt. Violence, for once, however, seems to be lacking, and Hierakonpolis may simply have been confronted by the fact that after the expansion of the Naqada culture to the north, it became more and more peripheral, but nevertheless still a powerful, site. In order to maintain its status and at the same time have access to luxury items coming in from the north, collaboration with Abydos might have seemed a very logical step, followed by a peaceful (gradual?) transfer of political*

125. Bard 2000: 63; Heagy 2014: 65-74.

126. Hendrickx & Friedman 2003: 103-106.

127. Friedman & Bussmann 2018: 79.

128. Friedman 2008: 1161.

129. Hoffman et al. (1982: 43-47, 60) suggest that Scorpion might have been buried in Tomb 1 of area 6 in Hierakonpolis. However, the designation remains speculative since no artefact related to Scorpion II was found in the tomb. Adams (1995: 51) says that if king Scorpion II indeed existed, then Tomb 1 would be a good candidate for his burial. Kaiser (1964: 104) and Ciałowicz (1987: 36), while not mentioning Tomb 1, believe that Hierakonpolis is his likely burial place.

130. Trigger (1983: 49) says, “It seems more likely that the rulers of Hierakonpolis also became clients of the kings who founded the First Dynasty [...]” However, he does not associate Scorpion II with this theory, and, in fact, states that the existence of Scorpion II must remain in doubt.

131. Kemp 1989: 73-92.

132. Hendrickx & Friedman 2003: 104-105. Campagno (2002: 183) endorses the theory of an alliance between Abydos and Hierakonpolis.

*power from Hierakonpolis to Abydos. Such an evolution would match very well the theoretical framework for the development of proto-states as defined by Campagno (2002: 57-58).*

As suggested by Wilkinson<sup>133</sup>, “up to the threshold of the 1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty, it appears that the other line of Upper Egyptian kings, those ruling from Hierakonpolis, maintained a degree of control over the southern part of the country.” Because of his cultural and ideological importance and his connection with Abydos, the ruler of Hierakonpolis might have been entitled to retain his status as local king, a privilege that granted him the right to portray himself as king on the official monuments he erected in Hierakonpolis.

There are numerous examples throughout history of dominant powers allowing the rulers of a subordinate polity to maintain control over their own jurisdiction, while, at the same time, being subject to a central oversight.<sup>134</sup> This subordinate status was not always the result of a military conquest, as certain polity may have considered it advantageous to be under the sway of a dominating power, benefiting in this way from better access to resources or from protection in case of attacks. As proposed here, the relationship between Abydos and Hierakonpolis may have evolved from an alliance between two polities in which one of them, in this case Abydos, gradually assumed more power until it came to dominate the other, Hierakonpolis, which then became a client state. If this were the case, it would solve the difficulties of establishing whether Scorpion II was a king of Egypt or solely a Hierakonpolitan ruler. It would also allow us to establish when he ruled. As discussed above, the com-

parison of the Scorpion Macehead with the monuments of Narmer shows that the former artefact was manufactured slightly earlier than Narmer’s, suggesting that Scorpion II ruled Hierakonpolis sometime during the period ranging from Ka’s to Narmer’s reigns. The absence of attested inscriptions with Scorpion II’s name outside Hierakonpolis can likewise be explained by the fact that his authority did not extend past the boundaries of this proto-state. Once a centralised administration was fully consolidated under Narmer<sup>135</sup>, it was no longer necessary to have a client king in Hierakonpolis, and Scorpion II would indeed have been the last king of Hierakonpolis.

Nevertheless, Hierakonpolis continued to be an important religious centre, with Horus of Nekhen becoming the patron god of the king. This religious significance is shown by the fact that the Narmer Palette and Macehead were both found at Hierakonpolis along with a large number of maceheads, a weapon symbolically associated with kingship. In addition, an Early Dynastic royal palace was built in Hierakonpolis, and the Predynastic tombs of HK6 appear to have continued to be the object of cult as late as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty.<sup>136</sup> The continuing importance of Hierakonpolis is also shown by the status of the “Souls of Pe (Buto) and Nekhen (Hierakonpolis).”<sup>137</sup> Abydos later suffered a similar fate as Hierakonpolis, as the administrative capital of the country moved to Memphis during the Early Dynastic period. While losing its status of capital, Abydos remained an important religious centre dedicated to the cult of Osiris, as Hierakonpolis remained the centre of the cult of Horus of Nekhen.

133. Wilkinson 2000: 392.

134. The Egyptians used this approach in the Southern Levant with local rulers (Redford 1992: 192-198). The Roman Empire also used this tactic in many of its conquests (Goodman & Sherwood: 1997: 15-16). The Athenian Empire’s experience is closer to that of Abydos/Hierakonpolis, with most of its empire starting out as allies (Thucydides (I.75)).






135. According to Wilkinson (1999: 58), “Once the prize of national unity had been won, Egypt’s early kings set about establishing mechanisms of rule that would maintain and bolster that unity, guaranteeing their own privileged position at the same time.”

136. Friedman 2010: 74.

137. Frankfort 1978: 93-95. The Souls of Pe and Nekhen are mentioned in the Pyramid Texts, utterances 306, 468, 474, 530, and 580.

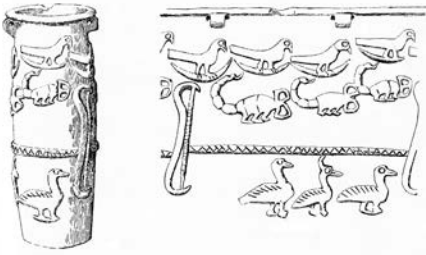
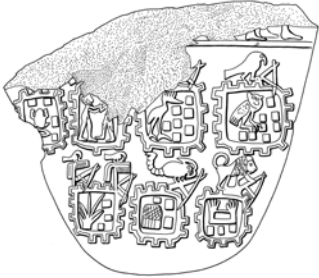


## Appendix: Other inscriptions attributed to Scorpion II

A. *Serekhs* and Quasi-*Serekhs*

Inscriptions	References attributing them to Scorpion II	Current interpretation shared or proposed by this author
<p>Classic <i>serekh</i> from Minshat Abu Omar.</p>  <p><b>Fig. 15</b> Serekh from Minshat Abu Omar (after Kroeper &amp; Wildung 1985: 74, fig. 213).</p>	<p>Kroeper &amp; Wildung 1985: 74-75, fig.213; Kroeper 1986-1987: fig. 70.</p> <p>This <i>serekh</i> was first associated, although with uncertainty, with king Scorpion II (Kaiser 1982: 266, fig. 15; 267, n. u; Kroeper &amp; Wildung 1985: 75), an interpretation accepted by Dreyer (1987: 42) and Jiménez-Serrano (2003: 113 (type 3D-MAO1)). According to Kahl (1994: 176, no. 77), Wildung (1981: 35), and Raffaele (2003: 112-114), it could be either Scorpion or Aha.</p>	<p>This interpretation can be rejected on the basis that the sign in the <i>serekh</i> is unreadable. This is confirmed by the fact that, in addition to Scorpion II, it has been identified as Aha and Crocodile (van den Brink 2001: 43).</p>
<p>Two quasi-<i>serekhs</i><sup>138</sup> from Tarkhan.</p>  <p><b>Fig. 16</b> Ink inscription on vessel from tomb 1549, Tarkhan (after Petrie 1914: 11, pl. IX.3). Currently in Petrie Museum, London, Inv. No. UC16947.</p>	<p>Petrie et al. 1913 (Tarkhan I): 8, 28, pl. XXXI.66 (UC16071), from tomb 315; Petrie 1914 (Tarkhan II): 11, pl. IX.3 (UC16947), from tomb 1549.</p> <p>Kaiser 1982: 266, fig.15; 267, n. v, w; Schneider 1994: 276.</p>	<p>Using infrared photographs, Dreyer (1992: 259-263) convincingly demonstrated that the symbols represented in the quasi-<i>serekhs</i> were crocodiles and not scorpions.</p>
<p><i>Serekh</i> written in ink from 1<sup>st</sup> Dynasty cemetery in Tura.</p>  <p><b>Fig. 17</b> Ink inscription on vessel 14.k.11 from the cemetery of Tura (after Junker 1912: 5, fig. 4).</p>	<p>Junker 1912: 5-10; Sethe 1915: 57, n. 3; Schott 1950: 1714 (8).</p>	<p>Kaiser (1964: 102-103, fig.3), using infrared photography, convincingly showed that the <i>serekh</i> enclosed the name of king Djer. According to Helck (1987: 92-93, n. 13), this interpretation has since stood unrefuted.</p>
<p>Fragmentary <i>serekh</i> from Tel Ma'ahaz, in the Southern Levant.</p>  <p><b>Fig. 18</b> Fragment from Tel Ma'ahaz, said to be inscribed with a <i>serekh</i> (drawing by Elise MacArthur, after Schulman &amp; Gophna 1981: 166, fig. 1).</p>	<p>Schulman &amp; Gophna 1981: 165-167, fig. 1; De Cree 1991: 30.</p>	<p>Since there is not enough of the <i>serekh</i> preserved, it is not possible at this stage to identify the royal name inscribed within it (Levy et al. 2001: 434-436; Kahl 1994: 184, no. 176; Amiran &amp; van den Brink 2001: 29, 37-39).</p>
<p>Rock graffito carved to the west of Tomb 1 in Hierakonpolis.</p>  <p><b>Fig. 19</b> Rock graffito from Hierakonpolis (Courtesy of the Hierakonpolis Expedition).</p>	<p>Logan 1999: 271; Adams 2000: pl. Vb.</p>	<p>Adams (1995: 51) describes the graffito as representing a bull. According to R.F. Friedman (2017, personal communication), "It is definitely not a <i>serekh</i> of Scorpion and may not be a <i>serekh</i> at all."</p>






138. These are referred to as "quasi-*serekhs*" because they lack palace façades.

**B. Other Inscriptions**

Inscriptions	References attributing them to Scorpion II	Current interpretation shared or proposed by this author
<p><b>The Limestone Vase from Hierakonpolis.</b> Currently in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Inv. No. A.M. E.347.</p>  <p><b>Fig. 20</b> • Limestone vase (after Quibell 1900: pl. XIX.1).</p>	<p>Petrie 1900b: 8; Müller 1938: 15-16; Vandier 1952: 600, n. 1; Kaplony 1965: 136, n. 2; Adams 1995: 48-49; Morenz 2004: 154-155; Vasquez 2013: 215: a row of falcons perched on crescents above a line of scorpions was interpreted as “Horus Scorpion.”</p>	<p>The motif of the falcon on a crescent is not attested elsewhere as being associated with a royal name. It should also be noted that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between the falcons and the scorpions (Kaiser 1964: 104, n. 1; Barta 1969: 51-52, n. 8). It may instead be deities (Baumgartel 1966: 12), or a divine symbol, (Hendrickx et al. 2003: 22), possibly the god Nemti (Kahl 2003b: 52).</p>
<p><b>The Cities Palette.</b> Currently in the Cairo Museum, Inv. No. JE 27434, CG 14238.</p>  <p><b>Fig. 21</b> • Verso of the Cities Palette (after Kemp 1989: 50, fig. 16, above).</p>	<p>According to Dreyer (1998: 173-174), the animals equipped with hoes and attacking cities are royal names, including Scorpion II, who probably commissioned the palette. The other animals are the names of Scorpion II’s predecessors, who played a role in the conquest of the Delta.</p>	<p>Rather than being an unprecedented example of a king giving his predecessors equal prominence with himself, it is more likely that all of the animals represent manifestations of royal power (Wengrow 2006: 208; Kemp 2018: 95).</p>
<p><b>Four inscriptions on alabaster vessels from the Main Deposit in Hierakonpolis.</b><sup>139</sup></p>  <p><b>Fig. 22</b> Incised inscription on vessel (after Quibell 1900: pl. XXXIV.2a).</p>	<p>Quibell 1900: pl. XXXIV.2a, 2b, 2c, 3; Adams 1974: 44-45, pl. 33.226 and 228.</p> <p>The scorpion, interpreted as showing the name of king Scorpion, is represented next to two stretched arms pointing downwards (Gardiner sign D32) (Petrie 1900b: 5, 11; Menu 2003: 322).</p>	<p>It has been convincingly shown that the scorpions in these inscriptions are divinities, not royal names (Kaplony 1968: 15-16).</p>
<p><b>Abu Umuri Palette.</b> Currently in the Cairo Museum, Inv. No. JE 71326.</p>  <p><b>Fig. 23</b> Close-up of the falcon and scorpion motifs on the Abu Umuri palette (drawing by Elise MacArthur, based on Kaplony 1965: pl. 49).</p>	<p>Kaplony 1965. A falcon is shown dominating or controlling three scorpions.</p>	<p>This theory has not received scholarly approval, as it would be an unlikely way for king Scorpion II to represent himself.</p>

<sup>139</sup> It should be noted that, in addition to these four, there are seven additional inscriptions on alabaster or calcite vases from the Main Deposit that are similar to these, and two additional ones that are unprovenanced. They are listed in Hendrickx et al. 2003: 25-26.



 <p><b>Limestone vase from Hierakonpolis.</b> Currently in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Inv. No. A.M. E.348.</p> <p><b>Fig. 24</b> • Limestone vase (after Quibell 1900: pl. XVII (upper left)).</p>	<p>Quibell 1900: pls. XVII, XXXIII (upper left corner); Petrie 1900b: 7.</p>	
<p><b>Scorpion on an engraved ivory fragment from Hierakonpolis.</b> Currently in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Inv. No. A.M. E.312.</p>  <p><b>Fig. 25</b> • Carved ivory figurine (after Quibell 1900: pl. XII.2).</p>	<p>Quibell 1900: pl. XII.2; Petrie 1900b: 7.</p>	<p>Other than the depiction of a scorpion, these representations do not include any other element suggesting that they should be associated with king Scorpion II.</p>
<p><b>Ivory inlay from Abydos.</b></p>  <p>Currently in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Inv. No. AN1896-1908 E.1336.</p> <p><b>Fig. 26</b> • Inscription on an ivory inlay (drawing by Elise MacArthur, based on Petrie 1901: pl.III.19).</p>	<p>Helck 1987: 93.</p>	<p>It is impossible for us to determine whether it should be read as a royal name or be seen as a symbolic depiction of a scorpion.</p>
 <p><b>King's Macehead</b> from the Main deposit at Hierakonpolis. Currently in the Petrie Museum, London, Inv. No. UC14898.</p> <p><b>Fig. 27a</b> • Photo of the King's Macehead (Courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL).</p>	<p>Quibell 1900: pl. XXVIA; Petrie 1900b: 8. Discovered by Green in the Main Deposit at Hierakonpolis. Despite being badly damaged, Arkell (1963) identifies it as belonging to Scorpion II. This interpretation was accepted by Baker (2008: 352).<sup>140</sup></p>  <p><b>Fig. 27b</b> Proposed reconstruction of the rosette and scorpion motifs before the king (after Arkell 1963: 34, fig. 2).</p>	<p>Adams (1974: 3) re-examined this artefact but was unable to discern the details described by Arkell. Millet (1990: 59) describes the macehead as "too fragmentary to do much with." Ciałowicz (1997: 20, n. 36), and Jiménez-Serrano (2002: 51) both reject the interpretation of king Scorpion II.</p>

140. It is not clear whether their opinion is based on an actual examination of the macehead, or just Arkell's reconstruction.

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