



The right words, actions and objects could act together and be seen as very powerful. An example of this is the gold djed pillar amulet placed on the neck of Tutankhamun's mummy. The gold represents the flesh of the gods, the yellow colour is associated with the sun, the backbone confers endurance and stability while the placement on the neck protects one of the most vulnerable areas of the human body.

Ritual objects included the wood from particular trees, sceptres, incense bowls. The wood of the 'ima tree' (thought to be the caper tree) is still used in sub-Saharan Africa to heal a range of medical problems.

Iron from meteorites was known and recognised as such in ancient times. Known as 'iron of the sky' meteoric iron was seen as having special life-giving powers because of its connection with the stars. It was used for the adz employed in the opening of the mouth ceremony and a piece of the green stone from the Kamil meteorite was used in a necklace for Tutankhamun. The Kamil meteorite's crater was discovered in 2008 close to the border with Sudan and geologists think it fell to earth about 5000 years ago. (Google Earth)



A very different kind of life-giving object was a foreleg cut from calf. It needed to be very fresh – if possible, still moving (!) in order to have the life force necessary to revive the dead if it was pressed against a mummy or statue.

Model of a fore-leg – Metropolitan Museum of Art – public domain

Linen also had powerful protective qualities. Just as the foetus is wrapped and protected in the mother's body so too wrapping a corpse in linen could protect it from scavenging animals and maintain the integrity of the body.

The deserts surrounding the Nile valley were full of dangers and were seen as places of hostility and chaos. The water of the Nile also contained dangers in the form of crocodiles and hippopotamuses. Yet these areas had to be crossed which is where the 'horus and the crocodiles' of Christina's title came

into play. She is just about to publish a cippus which is in the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.



Cippi are small stelae which show Horus, known later in the Romanized form of Harpocrates. These come from Ptolemaic times when people looked to Horus for protection against dangers. Horus subdues the crocodiles by standing on them and holds snakes and scorpions in his hands. The household deity, Bes, looks out from the top providing further protection and there are spells inscribed on the stone.

The cippus in Cambridge is made of a green/black basalt. The colours are significant as black is the colour of the Nile silt which encourages growth and green is the colour of growing vegetation. The face of Horus has been worn down which suggests people touched it for protection.

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Christina's talk provided a detailed survey of all the elements which went into ancient Egyptian 'heka': words, objects, spaces and rituals which were designed to provide protection and ensure growth in a dangerous world.

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