

The Religious and Symbolic Significance of the Tripartite Wig in Ancient Egyptian Male Statuary

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Abstract: The symbolic shift of the tripartite wig from female to male statuary during the Old Kingdom, especially within royal and elite representations suggests deep religious and cosmological meanings that may not have been fully explored. Regarding the wig's changing theological role, its origin in female imagery is widely recognized as a reference to birth process. Yet its appearance on male figures raises important questions. This change seems to correspond with the growing complexity of ancient Egyptian religious thought particularly with regard to the blending of solar and lunar ideologies.

Keywords: Wig - Tripartite wig – Divine – Statues - Symbolic Significance.

الأهمية الدينية والرمزية للشعر المستعار الثلاثي في التماثيل الذكورية المصرية القديمة

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المخلص: يُشير التحول الرمزي للشعر المستعار الثلاثي من التماثيل الأنثوية إلى التماثيل الذكورية خلال عصر الدولة القديمة، وخاصةً في التماثيل الملكية والنخبوية، إلى معانٍ دينية وكونية أعمق ربما لم تُستكشف بالكامل. يثير ظهوره على التماثيل الذكورية تساؤلاتٍ مهمة حول الدور اللاهوتي المتغير للشعر المستعار، على الرغم من أن أصله في الصور الأنثوية معروفٌ على نطاق واسع بأنه إشارة إلى عملية الولادة. ويبدو أن هذا التغيير، وخاصةً فيما يتعلق بمزج الأيديولوجيات الشمسية والقمرية، يتوافق مع التعقيد المتزايد للفكر الديني المصري القديم.

الكلمات الدالة: الشعر المستعار - الشعر - إلهي - تماثيل - المعني الرمزي.

I- Introduction:

Despite its origins as a female hairstyle since the prehistoric era, the tripartite wig^{1, 2}, and its connection to the processes of creation and resurrection in the afterlife raises compelling questions—particularly when worn by male figures, whether divine, royal, or individual—Although Tassie³ successfully traced the artistic development of wigs in ancient Egypt, including the tripartite form, and linked them to Osirian symbolism from the Middle Kingdom onward, he primarily focused on the social and artistic aspects. His analysis emphasized the wig's association with rebirth through birth symbolism due to its feminine roots. Therefore, this study will focus on the religious side of the tripartite wig.

This study will present a close examination of statues across different periods to reveal deep and hidden, religious layer: one that aligns the tripartite wig with the solar journey of Re, the Osirian rebirth, and the transformation of the deceased into a divine being. Notably, male statues—whether in *sah* form, *ba* bird figurines, or mummiform representations—frequently wear the tripartite wig. This raises **fundamental questions**: Why is the tripartite wig associated with the transformation of the deceased? Is there an underlying theological connection between Re and Osiris reflected through this wig? When did this iconographic element begin to appear on male figures? Could the concept of the united Re-Osiris predate the Middle Kingdom and be traced back to the Old Kingdom or even earlier?

Through the religious lens of male statuary—divine, royal, and private—across Egypt from the prehistoric period to the Ptolemaic era, this research attempts to answer these questions, thus offering a new perspective beyond previously explored artistic or social interpretations.

II- Description of the tripartite wig:

Egyptologists frequently refer to a traditional hairstyle with long hair that falls between the shoulders and the waist as a "tripartite wig." Two thick sections of hair rest over the chest in the traditional representation, while the third section of the hair

¹ For more information about the wigs in ancient Egypt: Aldred, Cyril. "Hair Styles and History." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 15, no. 6 (1957): 141–47. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3257776>; Joann Fletcher, "Ancient Egyptian Hair and Wigs: The Untold Story," *The Ostrakon: Journal of the Egyptian Study Society* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 34–43; Gay Robins, "Hair and the Construction of Identity in Ancient Egypt, c. 1480–1350 B.C." *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 36 (1999): 55–69. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40000202>; Stevens Cox, "The Construction of an Ancient Egyptian Wig (c. 1400 B.C.) in the British Museum." *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 63 (1977): 67–70. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3856302>.

² For more information about the wigs in ancient Egypt: Aldred, Cyril. "Hair Styles and History." *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 15, no. 6 (1957): 141–47. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3257776>; Joann Fletcher, "Ancient Egyptian Hair and Wigs: The Untold Story," *The Ostrakon: Journal of the Egyptian Study Society* 13, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 34–43; Gay Robins, "Hair and the Construction of Identity in Ancient Egypt, c. 1480–1350 B.C." *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 36 (1999): 55–69. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40000202>; Stevens Cox, "The Construction of an Ancient Egyptian Wig (c. 1400 B.C.) in the British Museum." *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 63 (1977): 67–70. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3856302>.

³ Geoffrey Tassie, "Hairstyles Represented on the Salakhana Stelae" *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 94 (2008): 1–26, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40000202>.

is arranged to fall freely down the back. Sometimes the hair is neatly tucked behind the ears as a variation of the style. The wig is usually depicted in artistic representations as a solid black mass or with fine striations that run vertically and occasionally diagonally to imply texture and individual strands. (Fig. 1)

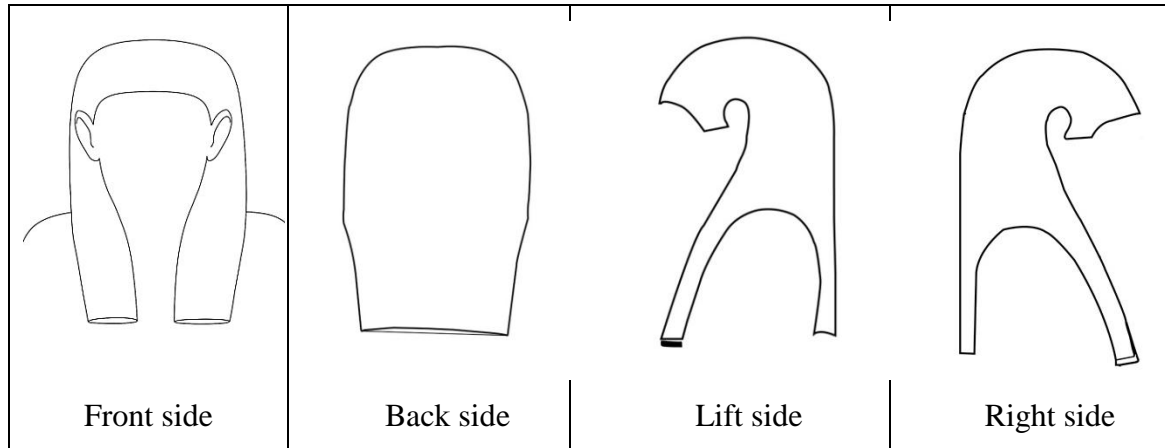



Fig.1 Line drawings of tripartite wig
©Done by Ahmed Sakr.

In his catalogue Darsssey¹ referred to this kind of wig as among his collection of divine statues, as  "krft"² I'm not sure why he hasn't called the tripartite wig by that name yet (?), but he didn't mention a wig or natural hair underneath it. Qrft, which means a linen bag. Raven, on the other hand, recognized it as a tripartite wig in Ptah-Sokar-Osiris statues and dubbed it the divine wig³.

On the artistic and religious levels, Tassie⁴ and Fletcher⁵ traced that type throughout ancient Egyptian history. The present study traces it and focuses on filling the gaps in the research for male statues as follows:

¹ Georges Darsssey, *Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du musée du Caire 38001-39384, statues de divinités*, I, (La Caire, 1906), 398

² WB, V, p. 60.

³ A characteristic item of the funerary furniture in later Egyptian burials consists of a wooden statue of a god, often having a cavity in the trunk or base. For more information: Maarten Raven, *Papyrus-Sheaths and Ptah-Sokar-Osiris Statues*, 251-296.

⁴ He discussed the wigs in general and it's uses to distinguish the elites in the community in ancient Egypt since Nagada I when it was moving from an egalitarian to a ranked society, and it was related to the woman more, for more information: Geoffrey Tassie, "Ancient Egyptian Wigs in the Cairo and Other Museums" in *Egyptian Cultural Heritage: Proceedings of the International Conference* (Cairo: Supreme Council of Antiquities Press, 2009), 145-167.; Geoffrey Tassie, "The Social and Ritual Contextualisation of Ancient Egyptian Hair and Hairstyles from the Protodynastic to the End of the Old Kingdom" (Unpublished PhD diss., University College London, 2008)

⁵ Amy Fletcher, "Ancient Egyptian Hair: A Study in Style, Form and Function", 2 vols. (Unpublished PhD diss., Manchester: University of Manchester, 1995)

III- The tripartite wig in male divine statues:

The tripartite wig was a common feature in both male and female divine statues. . This study specifically examines its use in male deity representations, where it often appeared as a composite wig incorporating various elements. The main focus of this study is on the full human shape and its relation to the normal human beings in the human body not on the divine statues in the animal forms partially or fully. The main focus on that research the full human shape and it's relate to the normal human beings at least in the human body.

Tassie mentioned that the earliest appearance of the tripartite wig in the divine statues was the statue of goddess Netih in early dynastic times¹ but he didn't refer to any male deities wearing the tripartite wig; in the same period. During the investigation, I found two deities wore the tripartite wig; one in the triad of Menkaure² (Fig. 2a), dating to the 4th dynasty reign of Menkaure, the deity of Thebes wearing the wig and above it the sign of the 4th district of upper Egypt, West/Thebes. And the second was in the 5th dynasty, where the group statue of King Sahure³ with the deity of Qeft, were standing beside him and wearing the same wig. The sign of the district and clutching the Ankh emblem by his left hand was also seen above. (Fig. 2b)

	
<p>(Fig:2a) the deity of Thebes in the tirade of Menkaure</p> <p>JE 40678, Cairo Museum, https://egyptianmuseumcairo.eg/artefacts/menkaure-triad/</p>	<p>(Fig:2b) the deity of Qeft in the group statue of king Sahure</p> <p>M.M.A 18.2.4, Metropolitan Museum, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/543882</p>

¹ Geoffrey Tassie, "What Your Hair Says About You: The Social Significance of Hair in Ancient Egypt" *Archaeology International* 12 (2008): 45–59.

² JE 40678, Cairo Museum, <https://egyptianmuseumcairo.eg/artefacts/menkaure-triad/>, (accessed 5-1-2025).

³ M.M.A 18.2.4, Metropolitan Museum, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/543882>, (accessed 5-1-2025).

Although no parallels for the use of the tripartite wig in divine statues have been identified from the Middle Kingdom, examples from the New Kingdom demonstrate that Ptah-Tatenen was frequently depicted in human form wearing the tripartite wig, along with a composite crown composed of a pair of ram's horns surmounted by a sun disc and two tall feathers¹. This iconographic combination is also attested in royal statuary of the 18th Dynasty, namely in representations of Amenhotep II as Ptah-Tatenen.²

Additionally Ptah-Sokar-Osiris statues occasionally feature a composite tripartite wig adorned with an ostrich feather crown, sometimes accompanied by a sun disk, Atef crown, or Hedjet crown. This wig is typically secured with a headband and a knot at the back of the head. Examples of such representations date back to the 25th and 26th dynasties³, extending into the Late Period⁴ and the Ptolemaic era⁵.

Wsir-Iah⁶ statues: had the same wig, but with the crown of the moon, which symbolizes the moon disk resting on the crescent moon, it encompasses the moon in all its phases. The statues dated to the late period to the Ptolemaic period⁷

Then the same wig appeared in **Osiris** statues, where they are depicted in mummiform with an erect phallus, wearing a tripartite wig flanked by a divine beard. These representations date to the Ptolemaic Period, specifically to the reign of Ptolemy VI Philometor (circa 180–145 BC)⁸

¹ From the 19th Dynasty on Tatenen was linked to the Memphite god Ptah as Ptah-Tatenen. This deity was then worshipped as a royal god and as a creator god; as such he can even be called the father of the Ogdoad of Hermopolis, the eight gods who themselves embody the primeval elements before creation. For more information Richard Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 56-58.

² JE 11248, Cairo Museum, <https://egypt-museum.com/statue-of-amenhotep-ii-as-ptah-tatenen/>, (accessed 3-24-2025).

³ E 127, Louvre Museum, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010019312>, (accessed 10-24-2024).

⁴ E 13328, Louvre Museum, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010341143>, (accessed 10-24-2024).

AF 1633, Louvre Museum, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010019229>, (accessed 10-24-2024).

⁵ N 3510, Louvre Museum, <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010018404>, (accessed 10-24-2024).

⁶ According to Budge, ancient Egyptians associated Osiris with the moon, a concept that likely originated during the Fifth or 6th dynasty. During the beginning of spring, when the new moon appeared, Egyptians celebrated a festival explicitly referred to as "the entrance of Osiris into the Moon." This association stemmed from the belief that Osiris embodied the power and influence of the moon. It is also possible that the moon was considered a dwelling place for the souls of the blessed, similar to the stars; however, there is no concrete evidence to support this claim, for more information; Ernest Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, Vol 1, (London, 1911). 384-38[^]

⁷ M.M.A 1971.272.15, Metropolitan Museum of Art, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/548421>, (accessed 3-27-2025).; M.M.A 04.2.452, Metropolitan Museum of Art, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/570681>, (accessed 3-27-2025).; CG 38.029, CG 38.030, Cairo Museum, Daressy, G., *statues de divinités*, I, 12-13.

⁸ Inv. 10077, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, <https://egypt-museum.com/statuette-of-osiris-as-a-mummy-with-erected-phallus/>, (accessed 3-27-2025).

And also the statues of Atum,¹, Khepri,², Nefer-tum³ and Hapi⁴ wore the tripartite wig with various elements.

The tripartite wig was a common feature among various deities, particularly in representations of Osiris when associated with other gods such as Ptah, Sokar, Tatenen, and Iah. These deities, all related to creation, life, and death, and share a symbolic connection to the fundamental cycles of existence. Osiris, in particular, embodied the concept of resurrection⁵, while gods like Atum and Khepri, forms of the sun god Ra, represented cycles of life, death, and rebirth. Similarly, Nefer-Tum, as the son of Ptah, symbolized the sun's first rays and the act⁶

IV- The tripartite wig in male royal Statues:

The tripartite wig was uncommon in male statues, whether in royal or private sculptures. as illustrated in what follows:

Old Kingdom 3rd dynasty; As far as the researcher knows, it first appeared in the third dynasty in the royal statue of Djoser, when the Nemes was above it.⁷

Middle kingdom, 13th dynasty, it was seen in the royal statue of king Hor, with the Ka sign above it⁸. In addition it appeared in **the third intermediate period**, in the 25th dynasty in the statue of a sphinx representing King Taharqa⁹ with a missing Uraeus in the middle of the wig. The same combination appeared in the Statue of a **Ptolemaic king** dated to 332–30 BCE¹⁰¹¹ with the most important feature of the tripartite wig of having no lines, so that no king was ever seen wearing a tripartite wig without additions; (nemes, uraues, Ka) to demonstrate either royal authority, protection, or rebirthing.

Up to this point, the tripartite wig has been associated with various types of headdresses in royal statuary, mainly to represent kings. For instance, in the statue of

¹ CG 38.106, Cairo Museum, Daressy, G., *statues de divinités II*, plVIII

² CG 38.103, Cairo Museum, Daressy, G., *statues de divinités II*, plVIII

³ CG 38.76, Cairo Museum, Daressy, G., *statues de divinités II*, plVII

⁴ CG 38.101, Cairo Museum, Daressy, G., *statues de divinités II*, plVII

⁵ Richard Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods*, 45-48.; Geraldine Pinch, *Egyptian Myth: A Guide to the Gods, Goddesses, and Traditions of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 169-170.; Michael Rice, *Who's Who in Ancient Egypt* (London: Routledge, 2001), 101-102

⁶ Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods*, 78.

⁷ JE 49158, Cairo Museum.

⁸ JE 30948, CG 259, Cairo Museum, <https://egyptianmuseumcairo.eg/artefacts/ka-statue-of-king-auibrehor/> (accessed 11-23-2024).

⁹ E3916, Louvre Museum, https://fr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:CF0774_Louvre_roi_Taharqua_E3916_rwk.jpg, (accessed 3-23-2025)

¹⁰ Cat. 1384, Museum Egizio, https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/en-GB/material/Cat_1384m, (accessed 3-23-2025)

¹¹ Cat. 1384, Museum Egizio, https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/en-GB/material/Cat_1384m, (accessed 3-23-2025)

King Taharqa in sphinx form—an image traditionally linked to the solar deity Re—hence it appeared with other royal elements, such as the nemes headdress and the uraeus, both of being strong solar symbols. As will be discussed in the following sections, these attributes emphasized the solar aspect of its representation. Therefore, it was evident that these royal figures embodied a dual identity—both Osirian and solar—that reflected the well-known theological concept of the union between Re and Osiris: Re within Osiris, and Osiris within Re.

V- The tripartite wig in male Individual statues:

Iteti Ankhires¹ (fig. 3a), “the Elder of the is-chamber in the Two Houses, overseer of the palace “ḥ”², is one of the non-royal individual statues from the Old Kingdom where the tripartite wig first appeared. Tasseie's paper³ stated that the tripartite wig was first used in the protodynastic period in two ivory figurines from Hierakonpolis that depicted it. However, the researcher was unable to locate them or any images or registration numbers in the museums. This statue lacked overt funeral imagery and had neither a crown nor a headband. But given his titles, it's possible that this wig design was originally designed only to be worn by the elites who were close to the royal palace.

The other two statues belonging to Seshemnofer IV, (Fig.3b) wore the same wig and also took the title “director of the two thrones in the Mansion of Life, secretary of all secret commands of the king, chief of Bat”⁴. Further, Susanna explained why the ka statues of Iteti Ankhiris and Seshemnefer IV both had the peculiar tripartite wig. Seshemnefer IV, for example, had a number of high-ranking positions in the royal court, including Director of the Two Thrones in the Mansion of Life, Overseer of the King's Private Apartments, and Guardian of the King's Secrets. Therefore, thier positions implied participation in the building and upkeeping of royal architectural projects. King Djoser was also depicted wearing a tripartite lappet wig underneath a nemes headdress in the famous ka statue of the king that Firth found in the serdab of the Step Pyramid complex in 1924. It is likely that Iteti Ankhiris and Seshemnefer saw the statue in situ some three hundred years later and were inspired to mimic the appearance of the first king-god of Dynasty 3. The relationship between the tripartite wig and the high-ranking official in the old kingdom, namely between the end of the fifth and the sixth dynasty were attributed to the elites whos had a strong relation with the king.⁵ And the researcher totally agrees with her opinion.

¹CG 45, Cairo Museum, <https://egypt-museum.com/iteti-ankhires/>, (accessed 11-23-2024); Ludwig Borchardt, *Statuen und Statuetten von Königen und Privatleuten im Museum von Kairo*, I (CG), (Berlin: Reichsdruckerei, 1911): .41-42, Bl. 12; Bodil Hornmann, *Types of Ancient Egyptian Statuary*, 3, (Copenhagen, 1951-1969): pl.705. PM, III², 598; Susanna Thomas, “A Ka Statue of Iteti-Ankhiris” *Ancient Egypt*, (August 2012): 10-15

² PM, III, 598.

³ Tassie, “What Your Hair Says About You”, 611

⁴ <http://giza.fas.harvard.edu/ancientpeople/760/full/>, (accessed 04-29-2024).

⁵ Susanna, “A Ka Statue of Iteti-Ankhiris”, 15.



(fig. 3a) Iteti Ankhires, CG 45, Cairo Museum,
Susanna. , A Ka Statue of Iteti-Ankhiris, ,
10



(fig. 3b) Seshemnofer [IV], in situ, tomb (LG53)
<http://giza.fas.harvard.edu/ancientpeople/760/full/>

Additionally, the wig could be seen in four statues in the Middle Kingdom,¹ the first one was a statue of a man called Montuhotep (Fig: 4a)² and the second was an official³, both of them dated to the 12th dynasty while the third and fourth statues were a Limestone statue of Intef (Fig:4b)⁴ and a statue of unknown⁵ dating to the same time.



(Fig: 4a) Montuhotep, Inv. No. 4650, Berlin Museum, <https://linksshortcut.com/Incbyq>,
(accessed 06-29-2025).



(Fig:4b) Intef, EA461, British Museum, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA461, (accessed 06-29-2025).

Regarding to the New Kingdom, the tripartite wig appeared in more explicitly funerary contexts. Notable examples include a double ushabti of Bnr-mr(w)t and his

¹ Amy Joann Fletcher, *Ancient Egyptian Hair: A Study in Style, Form and Function* (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1995), vol. 2 of 2, p. 663-664 .

² Inv. No. 4650, Berlin Museum,

³ E. 26019, , Louvre Museum,

⁴ EA461, British Museum, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA461, (accessed 06-29-2025).

⁵ E 10445, Louvre Museum, <https://linksshortcut.com/oGsrB>, (accessed 06-29-2025).

mother from the 18th Dynasty (reign of Thutmose III)¹, in which both figures wore the tripartite wig². Bnr-mr(w)t's title as "overseer of works" suggested a high-status official. Another example comes from the 19th Dynasty: the pair statue of Wenennefer, "High Priest of Osiris," and his wife, dating to the reigns of Seti I and Ramesses II. This statue was found in the area of the enclosure wall of the Osiris temple at Abydos. Both figures are depicted in full mummy form, wearing the tripartite wig, in a form closely resembling the ushabti type³.

Therefore, based on the preceding evidence, it is clear that this wig style became closely associated with both the Ushabti⁴ and Mummiform representations. As Wehlan⁵ has discussed, the mummiform statue served as a ritual substitute for the physical body, intended to revive and transform the deceased into an *akh* through ceremonial acts. This symbolic function began to emerge during the late Middle Kingdom, where such forms played a significant role within the Osirian solar funerary ideology, which sought to unite the deceased with both Osiris and Ra. Supporting this connection is the provenance of the previously mentioned statue of Wenennefer, found within the sacred enclosure of the Osiris temple at Abydos—a context that reinforces the wig's symbolic association with Osirian beliefs and hopes for rebirth.

Furthermore, the tripartite wig seemed to have remained particularly associated with elite individuals throughout these periods, emphasizing its role as both a social and religious marker.

It is also noteworthy that there were examples, of both male and female figures from the New Kingdom wearing the tripartite wig. This may reflect broader theological associations—female figures embodying rebirth as life-givers, and male figures wearing the wig to align themselves with creating and regenerating deities. Thus, the wig likely functioned as a visual marker of the deceased's desire for rebirth and participation in divine cycles of renewal.

However, all of the preceding parallels reveal strands in the wig. Unlike the divine statues, both male⁶ and female⁷ could wear the tripartite wig or composite wig.

¹ M.M.A 44.4.73, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/548728>, (accessed 3-23-2025)

² Rehab Hema, "Group Statues of private individuals in the New Kingdom" *BAR-IS* 1413, (2005), 47, pl 32

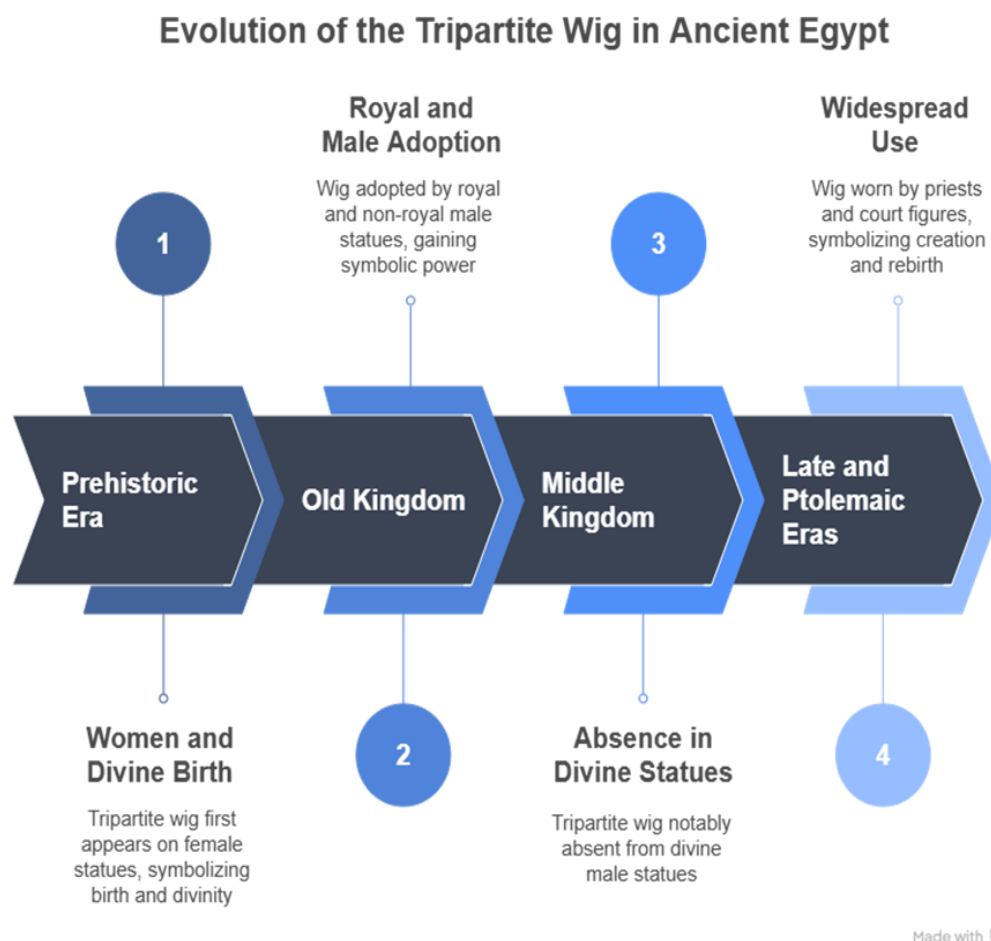
³ Hema, "Group Statues of private individuals", 267, pl 123

⁴ For more Ushabti statues wearing the tripartite wig from new kingdom, M.M.A 30.8.57, 30.8.58, 30.8.56, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/548343>, (accessed 4-4-2025), from the late period, 56.20.710, National Museums Liverpool, <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/artifact/shabti-of-horwedja>, (accessed 4-4-2025).

⁵ Paul Wehlan, "On the Context and Conception of Two 'Trademark' Styles from Late Middle Kingdom Abydos", *MKS* 2, (2016), 321-323.


⁶ CG 39217, CG 39250, Daressy, *statues de divinités*, I, 302, 313.

⁷ CG 38891, CG 38907, CG 38912, Daressy, *statues de divinités*, I, 223, 227, 228.






VI- The headdress that combined with the tripartite wig and its religious symbolism.

I shall explore the headdress¹ that coupled with the tripartite wig and its symbolic religious meaning in the next table.

The headdress	The symbolic religion	the associated gods and goddesses with the headdress
 <i>šwty</i>	<i>šwty</i> was linked to <i>sšd</i> and the <i>nms</i> . Collier ² shed light on its correlation with Horus and Osiris and the aspects of kingship and eternity; also it was related to the living king as Horus.	Ta-tennen, Ptah-Sokar-Osiris, Horus

¹ Collier, in her Ph.D. on the crowns of the pharaohs, talked about the various headdresses of the kings and their relationship to the gods or the royal aspects in the king's shape. For more information: Sandra. Collier, *The Crowns of Pharaoh: Their Development and Significance in Ancient Egyptian Kingship*, (Unpublished PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1996)

² Collier, *The Crowns of Pharaoh*, 69-78.

The headdress	The symbolic religion	the associated gods and goddesses with the headdress
 <i>sšd</i> ¹	<p>Similar to the Atef crown's association with Osiris and the mortuary cult, it later came to represent rebirth in the afterlife through light and air². It may also be a synonym for the sun's radiance and, in mortuary texts, it is linked to fresh life in the hereafter: According to Bruyere³, the "<i>sšd</i>" resembles the Ankh sign of "life" in shape when viewed from above. Additionally, the deceased was occasionally referred to as "the one with the "<i>sšd</i>" fillet" when he was recognized as an Osiris, therefore in the framework of Horus-Osiris, this headpiece is connected to the rebirth of life.⁴</p>	Osiris, Re, Shu
 <i>mdḥ</i> ⁵	<p>The word has funerary association and occurs in a hymn to Osiris⁶</p>	Osiris
 <i>Nms</i> ⁷	<p>The <i>nms</i> associated with the kingship, and when the king wore it, he already became associated with Re, and the <i>nms</i> would protect whoever was wearing it in the same way⁸</p>	Re, Sekhmet

¹ Collier, *The Crowns of Pharaoh*, 61.

² Collier, *The Crowns of Pharaoh*, 65-66.

³ Bernard Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir El Médineh (1934-1935) : Le Village, les Décharges Publiques, la Station de Repos du Col de la Vallée des Rois*, FIFAO 16 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1939).180-181.

⁴ Collier, *The Crowns of Pharaoh*, 64-66.

⁵ Both *sšd* and *mdḥ* indicate to the headband, the different between them is the way of writing for more information: Collier, *The Crowns of Pharaoh*, 62.

⁶ Its first appearance was in the Middle Kingdom on the individuals, but its first attestation on the kings was in the 18th dynasty. For more information: Collier, *The Crowns of Pharaoh*, 62.

⁷ Collier, *The Crowns of Pharaoh*, 67-68.

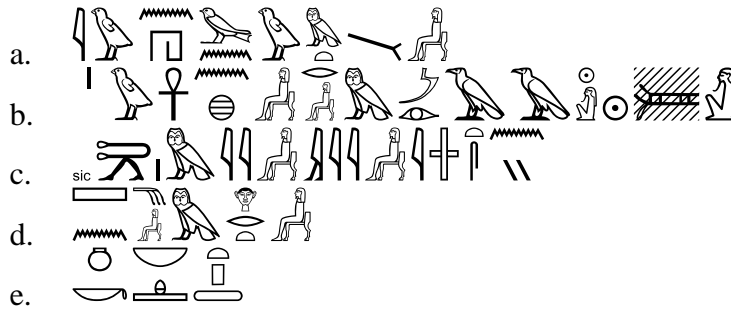
⁸ Collier, *The Crowns of Pharaoh*, 74-76.

Additionally, the headpiece incorporated ram horns, a sun disc, and a crescent moon ribbon into the tripartite wig. From the foregoing, it is evident that each headpiece or additional component has some connection to Re and Osiris, but particularly to Re

VII- Religious and Symbolic Significance of the Tripartite Wig.

According to Tassie¹, the human head has great symbolic significance and frequently represents the whole person. Additionally, the hair, similar to the head, may function as a synecdoche for the body, acting as a flexible and expressive stand-in for social and personal identity. In order to guarantee the resurrection of the deceased, I also attempted to investigate all possible relations between the tripartite wig and the ideas of creation and daily rebirth that occur in the otherworld.

Starting from the coffin text, there was mention of the wig in spell 510-BqC (CT, VI, 96 a-e), when the deceased wanted to be with Re and Re-Atum, and the deceased confirmed that he was wearing his wig. He meant that it is an important item to ensure his existence between Re and Re-Atum.



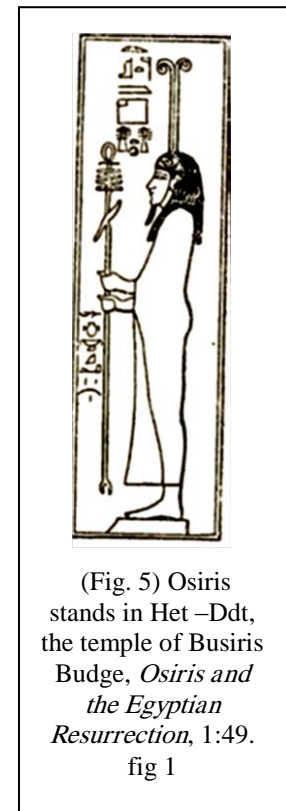
Transliterate:

- "iw nh.n wi m(w)t.I"
- "Iw 'nh .I (i)r.I m m33 R^c R^c-Tm"
- "(š)my.I iy.I imytw.sny"
- "šn.I m hr(y)t .I "
- "ink nb htp"

Translation:

- ("my death have lost me")
- ("(and) I live, as for me, in the sight of Re (and) Re-Atum")
- ("I go and return between them")
- ("My wig is what on me")
- ("I am the owner of offerings")²

Although the term "šn=I" does not directly refer to the tripartite wig itself, it implicitly emphasizes the symbolic significance of the wig in the ritual context of accompanying the deceased in their journey toward Re and Re-Atum.



(Fig. 5) Osiris stands in Het -Ddt, the temple of Busiris Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, 1:49. fig 1

¹ Tassie, "Hairstyles Represented on the Salakhana Stelae", 425.

² FCT, II, 144; CL. Carrier, *Textes des Sarcophages*. Vol VI, 1244

And at the same time, the tripartite wig, as a divine attribute, is intrinsically linked to the concepts of creation and rebirth. Its symbolism is further reinforced by the crown or other divine elements with which it is combined, enhancing its representation of divine authority and cosmic power when it relates to a male.

To explain, there is a relation between Osiris and the birth in the other world by observing one of his seven forms that appeared in Abydos in the late period (Fig.5). Osiris stands in “*ḥt -ddt*”, the temple of Busiris, he holds in his hands a scepter bearing the symbols of stability “*dd*”, and Life “*nh*”, On his head the symbol usually worn by the Meskenet goddesses the one who is responsible of birth¹, can be seen. Of great significance are the tripartite wig and its relation to birth in Osiris form.

In the Book of the Dead, the earliest known depiction of the deities Re and Osiris appears as a unified single entity—not as two distinct forms, speaking with one voice. This manifestation is commonly referred to as the “United Ba.” The iconography of this composite is attested in numerous New Kingdom tombs, both royal and private, as well as in the textual traditions of the Litany of Re and the Book of the Dead². Among the most significant depictions is the scene from the tomb of Queen Nefertari, where the United Ba is shown emerging between the outstretched hands of Isis and Nephthys, symbolizing the twin peaks of the Horizon (Akhet). The accompanying inscription explicitly identifies this figure as the embodiment of the United Ba.

“*Rḥ pw ḥtp m Wsir, Wsir ḥtp m Rḥ*”

"It is Re who rests in Osiris; it is Osiris who rests in Re"³

All that was depicted in the *ba* bird statuettes and figurines⁴ as wearing the tripartite wig too⁵ (Fig.6)

¹ Budge, *Osiris and the Egyptian Resurrection*, 46–47

² For more information: Günther Lapp, *The Papyrus of Nebseni (BM EA9900): The Texts of Chapter 180 with New Kingdom Parallels* (London: British Museum, 2003).

³ Nehad Kamal, “The Unification of Re and Osiris in the Netherworld.” *The Conference Book of the General Union of Arab Archaeologists* 13, no. 13 (December 1, 2010): 74-75.

⁴ The primary function of *ba*-bird statuettes and figurines within the corpus of funerary equipment appears to center on the resurrection and mobility of the soul. These representations likely served as vehicles enabling the *ba*—the individual’s spiritual manifestation—to ascend to the sky and accompany the sun god Re during his celestial journey by day, or to revisit the realm of the living. Crucially, the *ba* was also expected to return to the tomb during the night, to reunite with the *ka*, the vital essence of the deceased, and draw sustenance from its enduring energy. For more information; Hanaa Mokhtar and Yahya Mostafa Zaki, “Unpublished Ba-Figurines in the Egyptian Museum at Cairo,” *International Journal of Tourism Archaeology and Hospitality*, 2, no. 1 (August 2022): 117–128, DOI: 10.21608/ijtah.2022.244453.

⁵ JE 94594, JE 94380, JE 94546 JE 94549, JE 94547, Cairo Museum, The usage of the *ba* within the funerary domain starts from the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom, and was attributed to non-royal people without emblematic depiction. Also, had been inscribed on texts (coffin texts specifically).



(Fig.6) JE 94594, Cairo museum.

Mokhtar and Zaki, “Unpublished Ba-Figurines,” fig 1(a-b).

Further, the connection becomes particularly evident when Osiris assumes the role of a creator god—especially during his unification with Re. One interpretation of the unification of Re and Osiris views Osiris not only as a god of the dead but also as a creative force, equivalent to the Primeval Waters (Nun) from which the sun god first emerged. Ancient Egyptians believed that the Netherworld represented these primeval waters, through which the solar bark journeyed. They also understood Osiris as an embodiment of the Duat itself, as illustrated in the final scene of the *Book of Caverns*, where Osiris was shown encircling the Netherworld with his curved body. (Fig. 7)



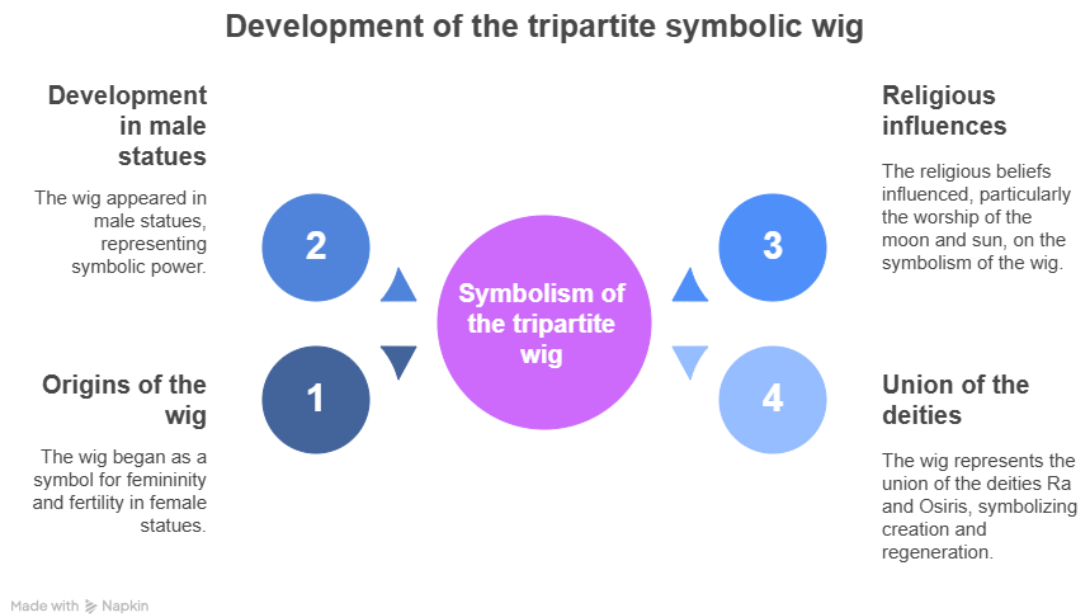
(Fig.7) Osiris as a source of the primeval water

Kamal, “The Unification of Re and Osiris in the Netherworld.”, fig.8

Hence, it is most likely that the tripartite wig in the divine process was associated to Re’s different forms and Osiris, not just Osiris. Consequently, it can be inferred that the most famous quote saying “Re rests in Osiris and Osiris rests in Re” was already known before it was written.

Many Egyptologists have studied the symbolic union between Re and Osiris as a conceptual framework to interpret several complex notions within ancient Egyptian religious thought. Due to this duality, Osiris was often associated with darkness, permanence, and the past—particularly "yesterday"—while Re symbolized light, transformation, and the renewal of the day, namely the "morning."¹

Therefore, the combination of the tripartite wig with other elements, achieves the duality of Re and Osiris as a key to interpreting Egyptian religious concepts and has already achieved chapter 180 in the Book of the Dead in word and deed.



Conclusion:

Since the prehistoric era, the tripartite wig began with divine and individual female statues and derived its ultimate power from the primary meaning of women and their giving birth of human beings. However, during the old kingdom namely from the beginning of the reign of King Djoser, the wig began to appear in royal and non-royal male statuary where it acquired a more veiled and symbolic power. This development coincided with a period when religious focus showed stronger connections to lunar theology, prompting the critical inquiry: could the conceptual framework that later unified Re and Osiris has its embryonic roots in the Old Kingdom, or even earlier, albeit expressed through alternative forms?

Notably, the tripartite wig's, combination with specific types of headdresses—such as those associated with solar deities—began to embody dual associations with both Re as the solar creator and Osiris as the regenerative force. In later periods, especially during the Late and Ptolemaic eras, this form of wig was adopted not only by

¹ Kamal, "The Unification of Re and Osiris in the Netherworld", 62–84.

individuals closely linked to the royal court but also by priests affiliated with the cults of Osiris and Re.¹ This evolution highlights how the wig became a powerful symbol of creation and rebirth, its significance amplified by its union with divine headdresses placed above it. Thus, the tripartite wig came to encapsulate a metaphysical notion wherein the head, adorned and symbolically charged, stood as a synecdoche for the whole person and a guarantor of resurrection in the afterlife.

However, many facets are still underexplored and more research needs to be conducted in light of the evidence examined in this paper. Most importantly, the lack of divine statues supporting the existence of the tripartite wig during the Middle Kingdom raises questions such as the following: is this caused by archaeological discovery gaps or a purposeful theological change? Furthermore, what are the other symbolic interpretations of other kinds of wigs in male statuary? Finally, the conceptual union of Re and Osiris—usually linked to New Kingdom sources—may have earlier, undocumented origins in the Old Kingdom. Could other visual or textual depictions of this duality have existed but gone unnoticed?

Despite all the above still unanswered questions, the evidence in this study shows that the tripartite wig is not only a stylistic or visual element but also a theological marker that reflects complex beliefs about the hidden roots of the union of Re and Osiris and, undoubtedly, the transformation, resurrection, and divine unity. This implies that the interaction between Osirian and solar ideologies started earlier—and was more complex—than previously thought. Finally, it opens up new possibilities for the unconventional interpretations of male statuary.

¹ For more information, Eman Nousir, Unpublished statue of the foreigner Her-em-sa-wsir "1r-m-sA-Wsir" in the Egyptian Museum (CG 38412), under publishing.

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