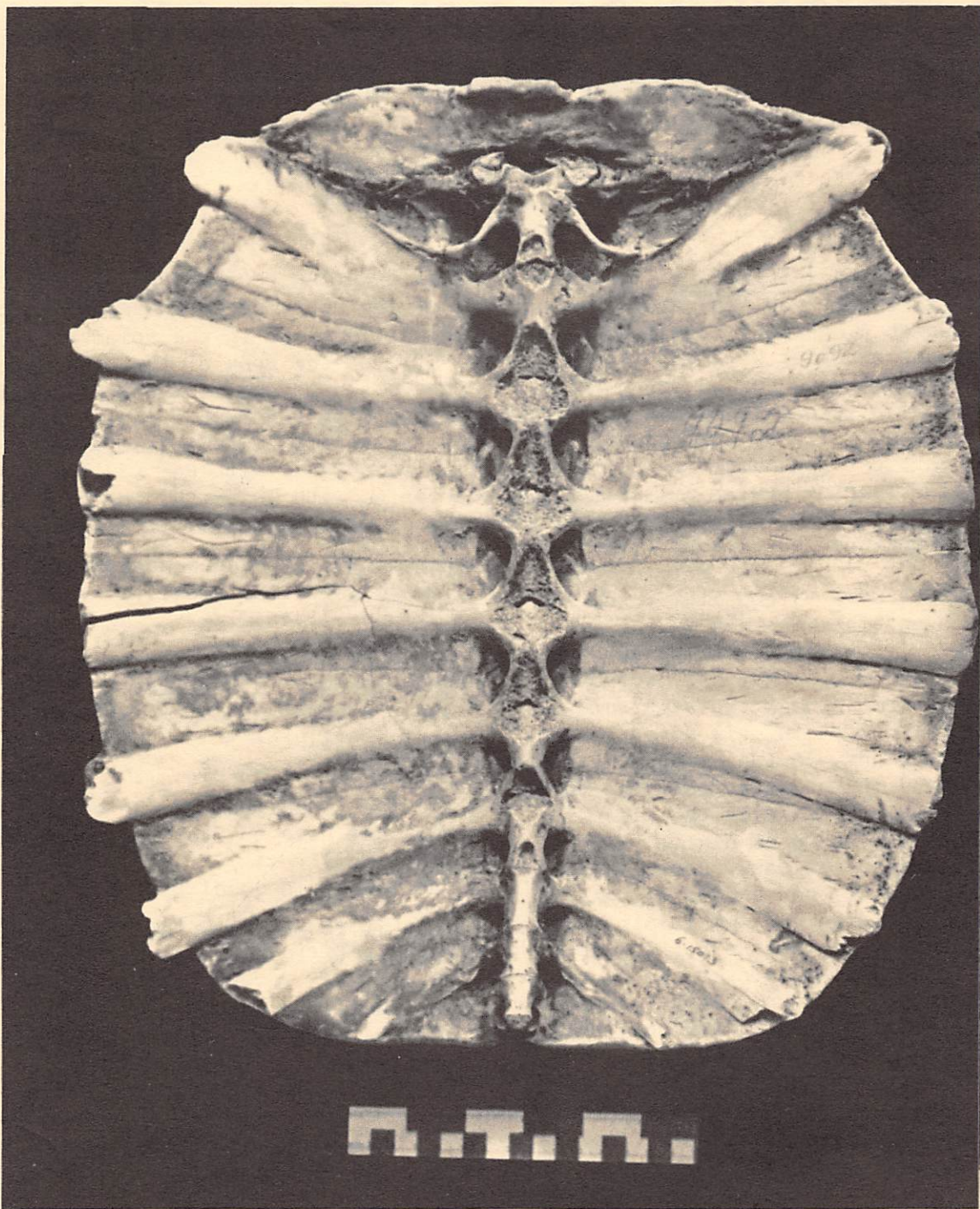


# CHELONIA

Vol. 2, No. 5



Ancient Egyptian *Trionyx triunguis*

Published Bimonthly  
Sept. - Oct. 1975

articles +  
Bibliography

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## A TRIONYX CARAPACE FROM AN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN TOMB

by Diana de Treville  
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The carapace of Trionyx triunguis (Forsk.) depicted on the covers was excavated in about 1901-05 by George A. Reisner from a deposit made against the exterior wall of a tomb in Cemetery 9000 at Naga ed-Der in Upper Egypt. It is preserved in the Lowie Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, and bears catalog number 6-15013. Its anteroposterior length is 41.5 cm. This specimen is the one from the "unpublished Naga ed-Deir burial" mentioned by Fischer (1968:6n).

Although turtles were a food item in ancient Egypt in predynastic times and in the Old Kingdom, there is evidence that by the Middle Kingdom (2134 B.C.) they had become associated with various negative attributes, particularly with certain evil powers associated with the night. In the Am Duat, a guide for the deceased in the hereafter, the turtle is said to be associated with the eleventh hour of the twelve hours of night, through which the deceased must pass. Here, the deceased is likened to the sun god Re, and must overcome the turtle demon, who is pitted against the goodness of Re. As Re, the deceased eventually triumphs over the hours of darkness and rises at dawn, having passed through the twelve hours of darkness, each controlled by its own demon. The following four verses must be repeated as part of the

ritual ensuring the passage of the deceased out of the hours of darkness and into the sky, where he joins Re in the solar bark (Chapter CLXI of the Book of the Dead). Each verse is addressed to one of the four deities associated with the four winds: (1) the north wind, associated with Osiris; (2) the south wind, associated with Re; (3) the west wind, associated with Isis; (4) the east wind, associated with Nephthys.

Here I am clearing a passage for myself  
Toward the Solar disk...  
Truly Re lives!  
The turtle is dead!

Thus my body is purified,  
And the bones of Osiris are purified.  
Truly Re lives!  
The turtle is dead!

And the inhabitant of the coffin  
Will not have to fear the reach of evil.  
Truly Re lives!  
The turtle is dead!

Thus it is protected by Kebhsennuf,  
The inert flesh of death!  
Since it is Re who lives!  
The turtle is dead!  
Listen! They are pulling the bars of the  
gates  
So that I can pass the threshold!

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CHELONIA Magazine is published six times per year by CHELONIA, a conservation and research organization, with headquarters located at 536 Fifth Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94118

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## LETTERS

Sept - Oct 1975

The supernatural association of the turtle with certain negative powers extended also to ritual formulations written on coffins, where religious formulae were occasionally prefaced by the admonition: "As Re lives, and the turtle dies...(etc.)", presumably alluding to the above-mentioned victory of Re over the turtle.

The carapace under discussion was found associated with two wooden hoes and several cattle horns, and so might be interpreted as a symbolic food offering for the deceased. However, since the grave probably dates from the First Intermediate Period or Middle Kingdom, this interpretation appears somewhat doubtful in light of the associations of the turtle with the powers of evil by this time.

An alternative suggestion, substantiated in part by the break on the right side, is that the carapace was ritually 'killed'---perhaps as part of a ceremony---in order to aid the deceased in his passage through the eleventh hour of night. Ritual killings of animals are not unknown in Egypt, the practice being extended even into the writing of hieroglyphic religious texts in which appeared the forms of hostile animals. For example, a serpent might be depicted in segmented form, hence assuring that his negative powers were disembodied, or a bee might be drawn without a head, etc. Inanimate objects, such as clay shards inscribed with the names of enemies, were also sometimes broken and symbolically 'killed'. Since the vertebral centra and distal ends of the ribs show abrasion and damage, and since no other bones are known to have been found with the carapace, it was evidently not deposited as part of an intact turtle carcass. Assuming the crack was made in antiquity, which seems most likely, it might have been deliberately inflicted on the shell, which was then placed near the tomb as a magical charm.

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CHELONIA wishes to thank the Lowie Museum of Anthropology for their kind cooperation in providing us the use of the photographs reproduced on this issue's covers.

...We are presently undertaking an investigation into the identification of turtle oil as a component of commercial handcream products. This project was initiated...in response to a request from the Deputy District Attorney for Alameda County, California.... In connection with this investigation we have visited and obtained samples from...Mazatlan, Mexico, where the sea turtles are slaughtered ...and where the processed oil is incorporated into a commercial handcream product... exported to several locations within the United States. Our approach...is to examine the "non-saponifiable" portion of the total lipids extracted from commercial products and from samples of turtle oil obtained from the commercial harvesters in Mazatlan. Preliminary evidence utilizing gas-liquid chromatography indicates that there may be some high molecular weight components in the "aromatic fraction" of the lipids of sea turtles present in sufficiently high concentrations to be considered as candidates for an "indicator substance" of the presence of turtle oil in a commercial product. We are planning to continue the search for compounds of this nature until we are able to identify a component present in both turtle lipids taken directly from animals at the time of slaughter, and in whole lipid extracts from commercial products reportedly containing turtle oil. Once we have obtained mass spectrometric identification of this particular compound, we hopefully will be able to make some statement about its uniqueness as a component of sea turtle oils, as opposed to other oils such as those extracted from plants. With these data we hope to be able to provide the District Attorney with the evidence he needs to prosecute successfully the individuals...selling products containing turtle oil...within California. In addition, a successful prosecution will set a precedent for future applications of the Endangered Species Law in other states and at the federal level. These chemical procedures, when standardized and sufficiently corroborated, should provide forensic laboratories with the capability to support legal efforts to protect endangered species. We should like to receive suggestions from other investigators in any of the scientific fields relevant to this study ...We are especially interested in...data on the food habits of the several species that inhabit the western coast of Mexico...

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