
**REPRESENTATIONS OF DISTINCT PHYSICAL FEATURES
IN WALL SCENES OF THE OLD AND MIDDLE KINGDOMS**

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the significance of Egyptian wall scenes, whether they depict stereotyped themes or specific individuals and events. The representation of human figures in Egyptian art was governed by well-known strict canons of proportion and perspective, which resulted in most figures looking similar and necessitated the addition of accompanying inscriptions to identify them. Such identification however demonstrates the artist's intention to draw specific individuals. A careful examination of these scenes demonstrates that the artist was observant of the physical differences of the people he represented, whether these were the result of race, birth defect, disease, or accident. Variations in the skin colour, hair type and style, shape of the beard and nose, colour of the eyes were observed, and so were body shape, with some shown as emaciated, dwarves, suffering severe in-toeing, hunched-up shoulders, or even blindness. Sudden physical effort required in certain professions resulted in hernias, and both umbilical hernias and scrotal hernias appear in wall scenes. Physical deformities, perhaps the result of accidents or diseases, such as polio, are represented in some scenes, while living on the banks of a river rich in dangerous aquatic animals no doubt resulted in accidents, as is commemorated in the tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hassan in the case of a man who lost the lower part of his leg. These examples which were depicted side-by-side with other more typical scenes strongly demonstrate the specificity of Egyptian wall scenes, despite the restrictive canons.

KEYWORDS: Egyptian art - wall scenes – physical features – deformities – accidents.

INTRODUCTION

The strict canons governing the Egyptian art were responsible for making it appear as stereotyped. Instances of copying a complete scene,¹ or specific details² from that found in a spectacular tomb may well be produced. Yet we should not think of Egyptian daily life activities represented in tombs as merely a selection of themes copied from earlier tombs or from a catalogue and may have never taken place by the tomb owner but were merely intended for his future wellbeing. While the depicted figures were almost certainly believed to benefit the tomb owner in his afterlife, there is no reason to think that they were not based on his personal experiences, or that individuals represented were not specific people who played a role in the tomb owner's life, even if their names were not recorded. The copying of certain scenes or details were possibly the result of the similarity of experiences and the ease of reproducing an earlier composition by a master artist or from one's own earlier work.

Figures of the tomb owner and different members of his family as well as some of his subordinates, officials and workmen, are usually identified in his tomb by their names and frequently titles, but the figures of other less important individuals are frequently depicted with no inscriptional identification. The multi perspective technique of representing human figures makes them appear standardised, at least to our untrained eyes to distinguish subtle differences. However, the Egyptian artist was very observant of the general characteristics of the people he came into contact with, and of the physical differences of certain individuals and represented them with great accuracy. Colour for instance was one of the obvious methods of distinguishing individuals, and Henqu II of Deir el-Gebrawi had two wives, one was painted much darker than the other.³ Similarly, Niankhpepy the Black of Meir had two wives, one considerably darker than the other, and the artist succeeded in distinguishing them.⁴

¹ See for instance the copying of Niankhpepy the Black of a complete wall scene from the tomb of his father Pepyankh the Middle. Compare Blackman, A. M., *The Rock Tombs of Meir* 4 (London, 1924), pl. 8; Kanawati, N., *The Cemetery of Meir* 1 (Oxford, 2012), pl. 79 with Blackman, A. M., *The Rock Tombs of Meir* 5 (London, 1953), pl. 13; Kanawati, N., Evans, L., Lashien, M., Mourad, A-L., Senussi, A., *The Cemetery of Meir* 3 (Oxford, 2015), pl. 69.

² As for the positioning of the spare spears above the head of the tomb owner in the spearfishing scene. Blackman, *Meir* 4, pl. 7 and Altenmüller, H., *Die Wanddarstellungen im Grab des Mehu in Saqqara* (Mainz, 1998), pl. 13. See also Lashien, M., *The Nobles of El-Qusiya in the Sixth Dynasty: A Historical Study* (Wallasey, 2017), 174-175

³ Kanawati, N., *Deir el-Gebrawi* 1 (Oxford, 2005), pls. 25, 31.

⁴ Kanawati and Evans, *Meir* 3, 14, 42-43, pls. 20-21, 23, 25a, 68-69.

Many scholars have discussed these themes,⁵ and some unpublished theses were devoted to them. However, the aim of the present article is not to study these features and what they represent, but to examine the extent to which the Egyptian artist was observant to physical differences between individuals, and the significance of that for the interpretation of Egyptian art.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To examine whether the Egyptian wall scenes represented specific or stereotyped individuals and events, a careful examination of the scenes in some important, well documented and well preserved tombs dated to the Old and Middle Kingdoms was undertaken. For the last 25 years the author has been responsible for the epigraphic work of the Australian expedition at Giza, Saqqara, Deir el-Gebrawi, Meir and Beni Hassan. Wall scenes had to be studied in great detail with the purpose of recording them in line drawings, and that raised the question whether the sculptors and painters who produced these masterpieces were true artists inspired by what they saw, although bound by rules, or were mostly copiers of each other's work.

Scenes were divided into two groups: a) what may be described as "typical" and b) the "specific". The first group included themes common to most tombs, such as the tomb owner at the offering table, herdsman presenting cattle and other animals to the tomb owner or reporting to scribes, agricultural activities, such as ploughing, sowing, harvesting, transporting the harvest, measuring and storing the grain. Various professions are also occasionally represented, such as metalwork, carpenters, manufacturing of pottery, leather products, textile, etc. The second group includes men and women of distinguished appearances, such as dwarves, foreigners, men with deformities and also named individuals. Themes and individuals belonging to groups 'a' and 'b' were depicted side by side on the same walls. It is unlikely that the Egyptian artist represented themes and individuals from both groups side by side, leaving it to the viewer to decide which of the themes is real and which is typical. Typical scenes are well known, and describing them here will serve little purpose.

⁵ See for instance Mahran, H. and Kamal, S. M. 'Physical disability in Old Kingdom tomb scenes', *Athens Journal of History*, vol. 2, issue 3 (2016), 169-191; Kamal, S. M., 'Baldness scenes in ancient Egyptian private tombs; as an indicator of social class, activity and physical ability', *International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management*, vol. 2, issue 2 (2019), 127-179; Anthony, F. B. *Foreigners in Ancient Egypt: Theban Tomb Paintings from the Early Eighteenth Dynasty* (Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 2016); Smith, S. T., 'Nubian and Egyptian ethnicity', in: *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean*, McInerney, J. ed. (Online, 2014), 194-212.

Some of the scenes which may be described as specific will be examined. The aim is not to study the theme itself, as for example, dwarfism, or the colour or features of foreigners, but the level of success of the artist in capturing these features and the significance of that for understanding the purpose of Egyptian wall scenes in general.

FINDINGS

Distinct physical features may be the result of race, birth defect, disease, or accident. Although Nubians for instance must have been regular visitors to, or settlers in Egypt, they were constantly represented of much darker skin colour and with curly or even kinky hair around which a headband was occasionally tied or in which a feather was stuck. In the Fifth Dynasty tomb of Nesutnofer at Giza for instance, Nubian men are represented as employed in the service of the tomb owner.⁶ However, despite the fact that they mostly carried Egyptian titles and names, such as *Smsw Mrj* 'the retainer, Meri' or *xtmw ꜥnb* 'the sealer, Seneb', presumably indicating their long residence in Egypt, they were portrayed with a hairstyle characteristic of their origin, and more importantly they were individually labelled as *NHsj* 'Nubian'. Another Nubian appears in the Giza tomb of Seshathotep/ Heti, also labelled as *NHsj* 'Nubian', but bearing no title.⁷ The lack of a title and his unusual name, *@rTs.j* 'Hertjesi',⁸ may refer to his foreign background and perhaps his relatively recent arrival in Egypt. However, it is interesting to notice that such difference in colour and hair did not alienate these individuals from the Egyptian high officials, and in both tombs the Nubian men are shown to be in the personal service of the tomb owner and are depicted immediately next to the false door where he and his wife are represented.

Although in the Old Kingdom Nubia was not considered as part of Egypt, Nubians were not only employed in various positions within Egypt, but were also included in the Egyptian army. The well-known official Weni of the Sixth Dynasty described the army he led to fight the Asiatics as being formed of men from all of Upper Egypt, all the Delta, the different Nubian regions and from Libya.⁹ The need for Nubian soldiers appears to have increased during the First Intermediate Period, particularly by the southerners, in their fighting with the north, with many stelae belonging to

⁶ Junker, H., *Giza 3* (Vienna, 1938), fig. 27; Kanawati, N., *Tombs at Giza 2* (Warminster, 2002), pl. 53.

⁷ Junker, H., *Giza 2* (Vienna, 1934), fig. 28; Kanawati, *Tombs at Giza 2*, pl. 45.

⁸ Ranke, H., *Die ägyptischen Personennamen 1* (Glückstadt, 1935), 254:7.

⁹ Sethe, K., *Urkunden des Alten Reichs 1* (Leipzig, 1933), 101:9-16; Strudwick, N. C., *Texts from the Pyramid Age* (Atlanta, 2005), 354.

Nubian soldiers, and particularly archers, found.¹⁰ These soldiers continued to be employed in the local troops after the reunification of the country, as we can see in the tombs of Baqet III and Khety of the Eleventh Dynasty¹¹ and Amenemhat of the Twelfth.¹² The continuing clashes between neighbouring provinces, possibly over land and water, increased the need for the employment of foreign men in some local troops. In the tombs of Baqet III, Khety, Khnumhotep I and Amenemhat at Bei Hassan, contingents of Asiatic soldiers are also shown fighting alongside the Egyptian provincial troop.¹³ In all instances, the foreign men were distinguished by their skin colour, the very dark for the Nubians and the pale, yellowish colour for the Asiatics. However, nowhere did the Egyptian artist succeed in demonstrating his observance of different physical features than in his rendering of the arrival of the Asiatic group of men, women and Children, depicted in the tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hassan.¹⁴ The Asiatics, both men and women, are painted with a yellowish skin colour and have a different hair style from that of the Egyptians. They also have rather large hooknoses and greyish-blue eyes, and unlike the Egyptians, the Asiatics have pointed beards and wear clothes distinguished by their beautiful patterns and colours (figure 1).

Nubian women were occasionally employed as house servants. In an offering table scene in the tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hassan twelve men and four women are represented progressing towards the tomb owner carrying items of food and drink. While most men are labelled with their names and titles, only one of the four women is so described. She is 'the Household servant, Tjenet'. Another woman has no label, while the last two women in the row are described as 'the household servant' and 'the household servant of the kitchen', but with no names (figure 2).¹⁵ Contrary to the first two women in the row, who have typical Egyptian feature, the

¹⁰ See Vandier, J., 'Quelques stèles de soldats de la première période intermédiaire', *Chron. D'Ég.* 18 (1943), 21-29; Vandier, J., *Moaalla: La tombe d'Ankhtifi et la tombe de Sébekhotep* (Cairo, 1950), pl. 35; Fischer, H. G., 'The Nubian mercenaries of Gebelein during the First Intermediate Period', *Kush* 9 (1961), 44-80; Wojciech Ejsmond, 'The Nubian mercenaries of Gebelein during the First Intermediate Period in light of recent field research', *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections*, 14 (2017), 11-13.

¹¹ Newberry, P. E., *Beni Hasan* 2 (London, 1894), pls. 5, 15; Kanawati, N. and Evans, L., *Beni Hassan* 4 (Oxford, 2018), pl. 77.

¹² Newberry, P. E., *Beni Hasan* 1 (London, 1893), pls. 14, 16; Kanawati, N. and Evans, L., *Beni Hassan* 3 (Oxford, 2016), pls. 98, 102.

¹³ Newberry, *Beni Hasan* 1, pls. 16, 47; vol. 2, pls. 5, 15; Kanawati and Evans, *Beni Hassan* 3, pl. 102; vol. 4, pl. 77.

¹⁴ Newberry, *Beni Hasan* 1, pls. 30-31; Kanawati, N. and Evans, L., *Beni Hassan* 1 (Oxford, 2014), pls. 42-48, 124-128.

¹⁵ Newberry, *Beni Hasan* 1, pl. 35; Kanawati and Evans, *Beni Hassan* 1, pl. 139.

last two women in the row are almost certainly foreigners. Their thick lips, curly hair made in thin brads and collected in a ball at the back of the head, clearly indicate a non-Egyptian background. The hairstyle is not dissimilar to that of the women represented among the arriving foreigners in the tomb of Khnumhotep I,¹⁶ which may hint at Libyan background. On the other hand their black eyes and hair may suggest a Nubian origin,¹⁷ but the fact that their skin colour is similar to that of the Egyptian women may suggest that they belong to the second or third generation of foreigners in Egypt. The fact that their names are not recorded should not indicate a kind of discrimination, for one Egyptian woman has no label, while the name of the other Egyptian woman, Tjenet, is identical to that of the mother of Khety, Khnumhotep II's wife. This may well suggest that this servant belongs to a long serving family of Khety's ancestors.

Foreigners also appear in the Twelfth Dynasty tombs of governors at Meir. Thus in the tomb of Senbi I (No. B 1) two emaciated herdsmen, with visible collarbones and ribs, bushy hair and tufted beard, one with hunched-up shoulders, lead fat oxen and head the procession presenting animals to the tomb owner.¹⁸ A similar man is crouching in a boat where the boatmen are engaged in mock-fight with those on a neighbouring boat, although the crouching man is not taking part in the fight.¹⁹ Blackman suggested that the emaciated men belong to the Beja tribes, who inhabited the eastern desert of Egypt and Sudan and who are renowned pastoralists.²⁰ Their services were presumably particularly needed following the disastrous famines of the First Intermediate Period. Perhaps the same three emaciated men, with one also having hunched-up shoulders, appear again in the neighbouring tomb, belonging to Senbi's son Wekhhotep I (No. B2).²¹ It is likely that these men were in the service of the father and the son, with the possibility of one of them serving also under the latter's successor, owner of tomb No. B4.²² The Beja man represented on the south wall of tomb B2 is the best preserved and the artist has demonstrated unusually high skill in rendering the features of this foreign man with his bushy hair, unshaven face, tufted beard, projecting ribs and collarbones

¹⁶ Lashien, M. and Mourad, A.-L., *Beni Hassan 5* (Oxford, 2019), pl. 76a.

¹⁷ See also Kanawati and Evans, *Beni Hassan 1*, 67.

¹⁸ Blackman, A. M., *The Rock Tombs of Meir 1* (London, 1914), pls. 9-10; Kanawati, N. and Evans, L., *The Cemetery of Meir 4* (Oxford, 2017), pl. 77.

¹⁹ Blackman, *Meir 1*, pl. 3; Kanawati and Evans, *Meir 4*, pl. 79.

²⁰ Blackman, *Meir 1*, 32-33.

²¹ Blackman, A. M., *The Rock Tombs of Meir 2* (London, 1915), pls. 3, 6, 11; Kanawati and Evans, *Meir 4*, pls. 86-87, 90.

²² See the man in the bottom register of the north wall (Blackman, A. M., *The Rock Tombs of Meir 3* (London, 1915), pl. 4).

(figure 3).²³ Another probable foreigner is a master drover who appears in the tombs of Baqet III,²⁴ Khnumhotep I²⁵ and Amenemhat.²⁶ Unlike all other herdsmen who are either semi-naked or wear a short kilt, he wears a long garment decorated with horizontal bands, has a pointed beard and may well have been a foreigner.

Pigmies and dwarves are typically represented in Egyptian art with normally grown torso and head, but short and slightly bent arms and legs. The famous dwarf Seneb did not hesitate to accurately depict these features even in the family group statue where he appears with his normally grown wife and children.²⁷ However, such sharp differences are not emphasised when Seneb is represented with his attendants.²⁸ Pigmies and dwarves were obviously not discriminated against because of their stature, with some considered as part of the household of important officials, while others reached high ranking positions. However, because of their shortened stature, pigmies and dwarves were generally assigned to more creative but less physically demanding work. Accordingly, one of the professions they seem to dominate was the manufacturing of jewellery as we can see them performing this task for example in the tombs of Mereruka and Kahai at Saqqara and Ibi at Deir el-Gebrawi.²⁹ Others were employed as dancers for religious festivals as we gather from the letter of King Pepy II to Harkhuf when he brought back a pigmy with him presumably from Punt.³⁰ Other, perhaps less gifted/ skilled pigmies and dwarves, were given the task as carers for pet animals, mainly dogs and monkeys. Under the seat of the Sixth Dynasty official of Beni Hassan, Ipi, a dwarf is shown holding in one hand the leash attached to the tomb owner's dog and in the other a baton terminating in a hand,³¹ and standing behind the vizier Ankhmahor at Saqqara is a pigmy carrying a small container of fruit in one hand and in the other holding the rope attached to a monkey perched on his shoulder

²³ Kanawati and Evans, *Meir* 4, pls. 39, 86.

²⁴ Newberry, *Beni Hasan* 2, pl. 7; Kanawati and Evans, *Beni Hassan* 4, pls. 62, 83.

²⁵ Lashien and Mourad, *Beni Hassan* 5, pls. 72, 77.

²⁶ Newberry, *Beni Hasan* 1, pl. 13; Kanawati and Evans, *Beni Hassan* 3, pl. 96.

²⁷ Junker, *Gîza* 5 (Vienna, 1941), pl. 9.

²⁸ Junker, *Gîza* 5, *passim*.

²⁹ See for example Duell, P., *The Mastaba of Mereruka* (Chicago, 1938), pls. 29-33; Kanawati, N., Woods, A., Shafik, S. and Alexakis, E., *Mereruka and His Family III*:1 Oxford, 2010), pls. 74-75; Moussa, A. M. and Altenmüller, H., *The Tomb of Nefer and Ka-Hay* (Mainz am Rhein, 1971), pl. 9; Lashien, M., *The Chapel of Kahai and His Family* (Oxford, 2013), pl. 81; Davies, N. de G., *The Rock Tombs of Deir el-Gebrâwi* 1 (London, 1902), pl. 13; Kanawati, N., *Deir el-Gebrawi* 2 (Oxford, 2007), pl. 53.

³⁰ Sethe, *Urkunden* 1, 128-129; Strudwick, *Pyramid Age*, 332-333.

³¹ Lashien, M., *Beni Hassan* 2 (Oxford, 2016), pl. 40.

and eating one of the fruits.³² Others pigmies were appointed as attendants, carrying light objects and following their masters.³³ In the chapel of Princess Waatetkhetor, eldest daughter of King Teti and wife of the vizier Mereruka, she appears in a palanquin carried by four, or possibly eight normally grown women. Accompanying the procession are twelve women, mostly or perhaps all pigmies/ dwarves, although some do not show such pronounced characteristic bodily features. They carry light objects such as sandals, a linen bag, lotuses, a jar, a fan, or a mirror. When the weight was rather heavy, it was shared by two, as in the case of the chest holding myrrh or another holding ointment.³⁴

Three men, a dwarf/ pigmy, a man with severe Intoeing and Femoral Anteversion and a humpbacked appear together next to Baqet I in his tomb at Beni Hassan (figure 4).³⁵ The first was labelled as *nmw* ‘dwarf’,³⁶ although Ranke lists this as a name,³⁷ the second is designated as *Dnb* ‘Crooked/ crippled’, but Erman and Grapow raise the possibility of it being also a name,³⁸ while the third is described as *jw*, which Erman and Grapow as well as Faulkner translate as hump-backed,³⁹ but Ranke lists as a personal name.⁴⁰ Perhaps these men were given names that describe their physical appearance. The humpbacked does not appear again at Beni Hassan and it is possible that he died shortly after. Yet the dwarf/ pigmy and the man suffering from Intoeing appear again in the tomb of Remushenti,⁴¹ Khety,⁴² and Khnumhotep I,⁴³ and in the last tomb the man with the Intoeing is given the task of holding the leash of the tomb owner’s

³² Kanawati, N. and Hassan, A., *The Teti Cemetery at Saqqara 2* (Warminster, 1997), pl. 42.

³³ Four attendants, three normally grown females and one male pigmy, are depicted on the right jamb of the false door in the tomb of Seshemnofer I at Giza. All four carry light objects (Kanawati, N., *Tomb at Giza 1* (Warminster, 2001), pl. 47). Similarly, two pigmies are shown on the right jamb of Nesutnofer’s false door at Giza, both carrying light objects, namely headrest, staff and sandals. Thus, two dwarfs are shown next to the false door of Nesutnofer of Giza, carrying his headrest, staff and sandals (Junker, *Giza 3*, fig. 27; Kanawati, *Giza 2*, pl. 53).

³⁴ Kanawati, N. and Abder-Raziq, M., *Mereruka and His Family II* (Oxford, 2008), pl. 69

³⁵ Newberry, *Beni Hasan 2*, pls. 32.

³⁶ Erman, A. and Grapow, H., *Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache 2* (Berlin, 1971), 267.

³⁷ Ranke, *Personennamen 1*, 204:10.

³⁸ Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch 5*, 576.

³⁹ Erman, and Grapow, *Wörterbuch 1*, 43; Faulkner, R. O., *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford, 1972), 11.

⁴⁰ Ranke, *Personennamen 1*, 16:7.

⁴¹ They are represented behind the standing figure of the tomb owner on the south wall (Personal examination).

⁴² Newberry, *Beni Hasan 2*, pls. 16.

⁴³ Lashien and Mourad, *Beni Hassan 5*, pl. 77.

pet dog. If these men represent actual loyal and valued dependents of this governing family, which seems very likely, this suggests a short period of time between Baqet I and Khnumhotep I. While the number of governors is large for this relatively short period, it should be noticed that this was a period of instability and wars as represented in these tombs, all of which were left in an unfinished condition as a result. Grouping these three men together shows that the Egyptians considered them, including the dwarf, as having unusual features, yet they were particularly close to the tomb owner. People with such conditions appear to have been selected for light tasks. A man with severe chest deformity and emaciated lower half of his body is depicted under the chair of the overseer of Upper Egypt, Nikausesi, in his Sixth Dynasty tomb at Saqqara (figure 5). Labelled as 'the sealer, Itji', he was given the task of holding the leash of the tomb owner's pet dog and to support a small box on his shoulder, perhaps containing jewellery or perfumes.⁴⁴

In the Twelfth Dynasty tomb of Wekhhotep I at Meir, the tomb owner sits on a chair with presumably his wife sitting on the ground, clasping his leg and looking up affectionately into his face. Crouching in front of the couple are three entertainers: a flute player, a harpist and a singer, the last two of whom were almost certainly blind (figure 6). Although blindness is difficult to portray in relief, the artist here succeeded in representing it, with the eyes of the two men deeper than usual, closed and appear slit-like, and it is astonishing that these blind eyes instantly draws the attention of the viewer.⁴⁵ Blackman suggested that the blind musicians were deliberately selected, particularly when they had to perform in the presence of women.⁴⁶ In favour of this suggestion is the fact that all musicians, harp and flute players, face Khnumhotep I of Beni Hassan when he was represented without his wife,⁴⁷ while in the tomb of Wekhhotep I the flute player, whose eyes are opened, faces away from the tomb owner and his wife, while the two blind entertainers face towards the couple.⁴⁸ On the other hand, other examples of musicians with full sight facing the tomb owner and his wife do exist, as is the case in Kaiemankh of Giza.⁴⁹ That

⁴⁴ Kanawati, N. and Abder-Raziq, M., *The Teti Cemetery at Saqqara* 6 (Warminster, 2000), pls. 12, 48.

⁴⁵ Blackman, *Meir* 2, pls. 3, 23; Kanawati and Evans, *Meir* 4, pls. 60, 90.

⁴⁶ Blackman, *Meir* 2, 12-13.

⁴⁷ Lashien and Mourad, *Beni Hassan* 5, pl. 77.

⁴⁸ The flute player in the tomb of Pepyankh the Middle of Meir also faces away from the tomb owner and his wife, while the two harp players face towards the seated couple. However, in this case the harp players are both females and the daughters of the couple (Blackman, *Meir* 4, pl. 9; Kanawati, *Meir* 1, pl. 88.

⁴⁹ Junker, H., *Giza* 4 (Vienna, 1940), fig. 9; Kanawati, *Tombs at Giza* 1, pl. 32.

musicians face each other was not unusual and may have been a normal arrangement perhaps in order to help synchronisation.⁵⁰ More important in this respect is the fact that a blind but gifted person was able to follow a profession in which he was talented and which does not require physical effort or using his sight.

Certain professions such as fishing with the dragnet, fowling with the clap net and pulling and lifting large, heavy bundles of papyrus in the marshlands frequently require the exerting of a sudden maximum force, which can cause internal organ to break through a weakened area in the tissue that holds it in place, resulting in a bulge or a lump in the affected area. The majority of hernias occur in the abdomen, such as the umbilical hernias with the bulge appearing near their belly button or the scrotal hernia where the scrotal size is enlarged. Older people are more prone to suffer hernias. The ancient Egyptian may not have understood the causes of the hernia, but the artists were observant of its symptoms. Thus, in the tombs of Tjy at Saqqara a man who is trying to lift up a particularly large bundle of papyrus on his back while being helped by two comrades, is clearly suffering from scrotal hernia. In the same tomb a herdsman who is carrying a calf over his back, appears to be suffering from the same injury.⁵¹ In a fowling scene in the tomb of Ankhmahor, also at Saqqara, one of the men is clearly suffering from an advanced scrotal hernia (figure, 7), while another has what appears to be umbilical hernia.⁵² As expected, all the men shown with hernias are elderly men judging by their potbellies and balding forehead.

A number of scenes depict what appears to be healthy men but with withered legs, limping, or walking with difficulty using canes, occasionally at a relatively young age.⁵³ It seems possible that they suffered from polio, or other unknown degenerative condition, or that their conditions were the result of some kind of accidents. These men can walk, even though with a limp, but probably could not carry heavy loads (figure 8). They are encountered in tomb scenes particularly in the herding profession, where

⁵⁰ See for instance Junker, *Giza* 4, pl. 15; Kanawati, *Tombs at Giza* 1, pl. 35; Moussa, A. M. and Altenmüller, H., *Das Grab des Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep* (Mainz am Rhein, 1977), fig. 25; Harpur, Y. and Scremin, P., *The Chapel of Niankhkhnum & Khnumhotep, Scene Details* (Oxford, 2010), 635 (context 85).

⁵¹ Wild, H., *Le tombeau de Ti* 2 (Cairo, 1953), pls. 110, 114, respectively

⁵² Kanawati and Hassan, *Teti Cemetery* 2, pl. 42. See also Nunn, J. F., *Ancient Egyptian Medicine* (London, 1995), 92-93, 166-167.

⁵³ This is judging by the fact that most of them do not have bulging stomachs or balding foreheads.

they are represented leading cattle on ropes, a task which they were obviously able to perform.⁵⁴

Living on the banks of a river rich in dangerous aquatic animals and practicing many activities on its water, Egyptians must have had many accidents that resulted in the death or mutilation of individuals. Such accidents are rarely depicted in tomb scenes, which usually focus on the happy and productive experiences of the tomb owner. Despite this certain artist, or perhaps the tomb owners themselves, found it necessary to record life experiences, both happy and sad. The fighting boatmen for instance was presumably a mock fight often watched and enjoyed by the tomb owner. The game aimed at throwing the opponents into the water using punting poles, or the like.⁵⁵ In the Fifth Dynasty tomb of Kahai at Saqqara, the men batter each other in various parts of their bodies; the neck, the chest, the stomach and even the face. A man was knocked into the water but is still being attacked on his neck and chest by two opponents.⁵⁶ In a Sixth Dynasty tomb at Zawiyet el-Maiyitin, a crocodile is actually shown biting the leg of the falling man.⁵⁷ The artist depicted the man's leg inside the crocodile's mouth. A unique representation of the result of a similar accident, which was presumably not uncommon, is found in the Twelfth Dynasty tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hassan. So unusual was the representation that earlier publications have consistently copied it wrongly, showing the men in the two opposing boats helping a comrade who fell into the water and is presumably unconscious, but no physical injuries are visible.⁵⁸ Recent re-recording of the scene however clearly demonstrates that the falling man has lost the lower part of his leg (figure 9).⁵⁹

⁵⁴ For some examples see Moussa and Altenmüller, *Nefer and Ka-Hay*, pl. 24; Lashien, *Kahai and His Family*, pl. 84; Macramallah, R., *Le mastaba d'Idout* (Cairo, 1935), pl. 40; Harpur, Y. and Scremin, P., *The Chapel of Ptahhotep, Scene Details* (Oxford, 2008), 188, 361 (scene 264, context 10); Newberry, P. E., *El-Bersheh 1* (London, 1895), pl. 18; Newberry, *Beni Hasan 1*, pl. 13; Kanawati and Evans, *Beni Hassan 3*, pl. 96; Newberry, *Beni Hasan 1*, pl. 30; Kanawati and Evans, *Beni Hassan 1*, pl. 125; Newberry, *Beni Hasan 2*, pls. 4, 7; Kanawati and Evans, *Beni Hassan 4*, pls. 60, 62; Newberry, *Beni Hasan 2*, pl. 17.

⁵⁵ For a study of this theme see Harpur, Y., *Decoration in Egyptian Tombs of the Old Kingdom: Studies in Orientation and Scene Content* (London, 1987), 153-155; Vandier, J., *Manuel d'archéologie égyptienne 5* (Paris, 1969), 510-524.

⁵⁶ Lashien, *Kahai and His Family*, 23-25, 81-82

⁵⁷ Varille, A., *La tombe de Ni-ankh-Pepi à Zâouyet el-Mayefîn* (Cairo, 1938), pl. 6.

⁵⁸ See Lepsius, K. R., *Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien II*, reprint (Geneva, 1972), 130; Newberry, *Beni Hasan 1*, pl. 34. Later studies naturally relied on these records, as in Vandier, *Manuel 5*, fig. 224.

⁵⁹ Kanawati and Evans, *Beni Hassan 1*, pls. 79, 135,

CONCLUSIONS

From the above examples it is clear that the artists were observant of physical differences between individuals.⁶⁰ Such differences could be in the stature, the colour of the skin or eyes, the shape of the nose, the hairstyle, or in the dresses they wear. While it was common to represent pigmies/ dwarves, as well as older men with bulging stomach and receding hair, certain individuals had distinguishable bodily feature as for instance a local bulge resulting from a scrotal or an umbilical hernia. Others are depicted as blind or suffering from chest or legs deformities, and in one instance have lost part of a leg probably as a result of a crocodile attack. These representations indirectly throw some light on the Egyptian social responsibility. Individuals with limited abilities due to physical differences or deformities were not given normal duties or segregated from the community, but were give lighter duties that suit their condition, like caring for an animal, playing music or singing. As these very specific individuals and themes are represented on the same walls alongside other so-called typical themes, it is reasonable to think that all scenes were meant to be specific, even if the similarity of the geographical features, the background, the individuals and animals make the scene look as typical.

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⁶⁰ In fact, in addition to the Egyptian artist's detailed distinction of the different species of animals, he was observant of the physical differences an animal of a particular species might have. See for instance the oxen with deformed horns in Wild, *Ti*, pls. 167-168; Lepsius, *Denkmäler II*, 70; Macramallah, *Idout*, pl. 20; Kanawati, N., *The Teti Cemetery at Saqqara* 8 (Oxford, 2006), pls. 49a, 52, or those with clipped horns in Newberry, *Beni Hasan 2*, pls. 4, 7; Lashien and Mourad, *Beni Hassan 5*, pls. 72, 77.

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LIST OF FIGURES

All photographs are published here for the first time, courtesy of the Australian Centre for Egyptology (ACE). Figures 5 and 7 were originally drawn by the present author, with permission to reproduce here by the ACE.

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Figure 1. An Asiatic Represented in the Tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hassan



Figure 2. A Nubian Women in the Tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hassan



Figure 3. A Beja man in the Tomb of Wekhhotep I at Meir



Figure 4 .Men with unusual features in the Tomb of Baqet I at Beni Hassan .

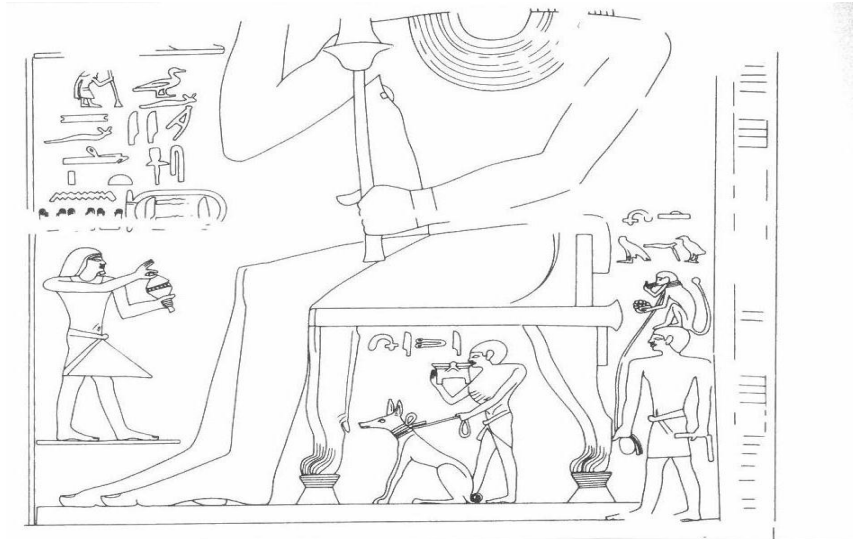


Figure 5. A man with severe chest deformity in the tomb of Nikauisesi at Saqqara .



Figure 6 . Blind harpists in the Tomb of Wekhhotep I at Meir

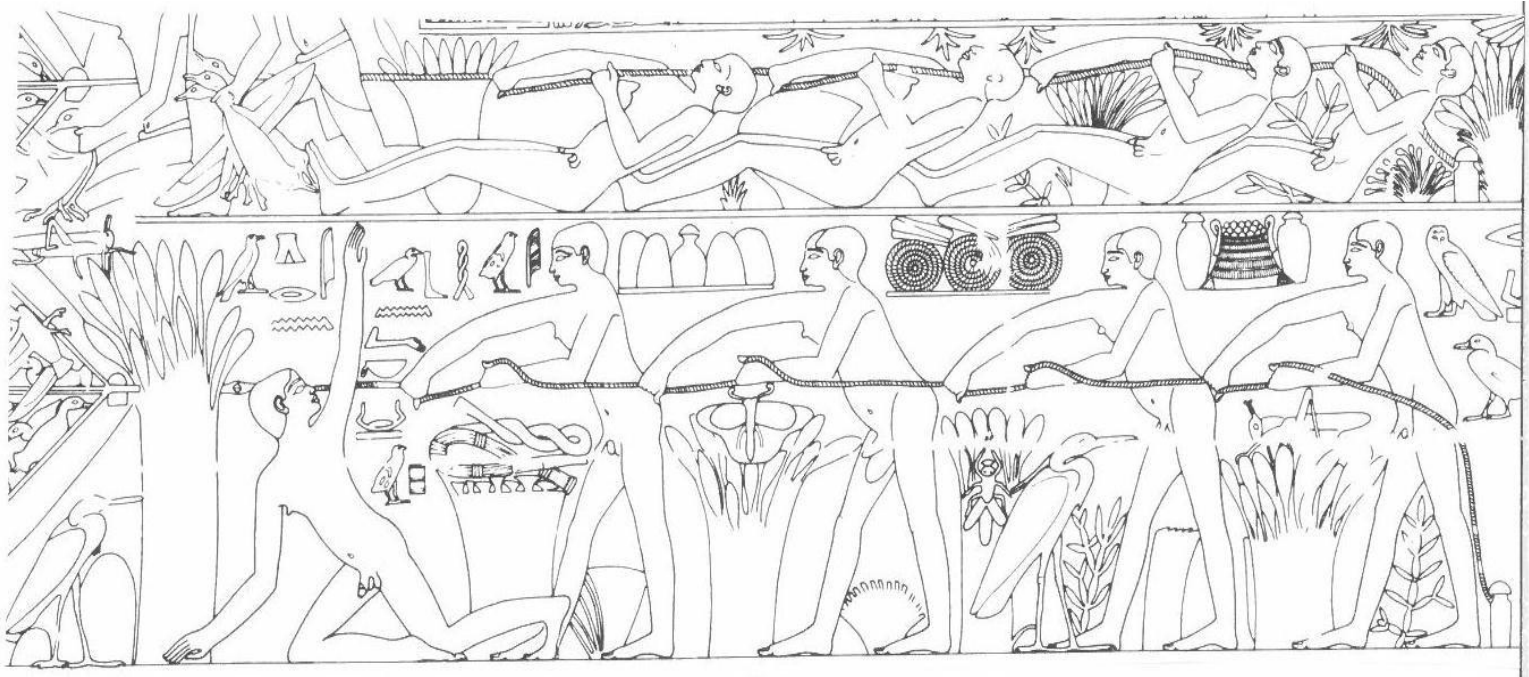


Figure 7 . A man with scrotal hernia and another with umbilical hernia in the tomb of Ankhmahor at Saqqara .

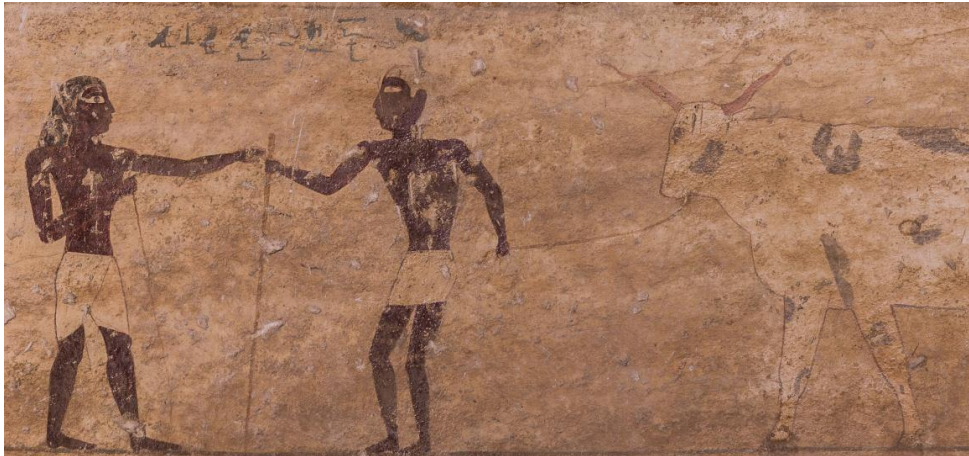


Figure 8. A herdsman with white hair in the Tom of Khety at Beni Hassan



Figure 9. A boatman who lost the Lower part of his leg in the Tomb of Khenumhotep II at Beni Hassan