

## The Suckling and Lactating Female Mother Dogs Scenes in Ancient Egypt

Noha Hany Gerges


Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Suez Canal University

### Abstract

The daily life scenes in Ancient Egypt and its depiction in the temples and tombs is a reflection of the early Egyptian's life style. The Ancient Egyptians domesticated animals for some varied purposes; including food offerings, sustenance and also labor. The dog in particular was illustrated in different positions and accompanied by various individuals, they were also the earliest animals to be known and illustrated in the scenes since the Predynastic period. The feeding development of female mother dogs to their young in Egyptian art and the progressive stages of suckling, and lactating in the female dog scenes are limited. The main purpose of this article is to reveal the scenes of two main maternal behaviors in the female mother dogs; the *Suckling scenes* by which the drawing of milk into the mouth of the newborn dog in order to be nourished; the only behavior that is common among mammals, and the *Lactating scenes* of the mother dog with prominent teats – an obvious indication that the female dog has been pregnant, while the young puppies are absent, as a transition to the weaning process.

**Keywords:** Suckling, Female Dogs, Puppies.

### Introduction

The dogs and especially the domesticated ones  <sup>1</sup> 'tjesem' means 'hound'<sup>2</sup>, is the most likely breed to the Ancient Egyptians, and the early evidence for their inhabitation in the Nile Valley is dated back to around 4800 B.C.E. in the Neolithic site of Beni Salama in the southwestern Delta. These dogs when were used in hunting and as pets in homes and also as companions in daily work and even for guarding, as well as in military battles<sup>3</sup>. The greyhound type, sometimes known as a Tesem, has a long tail, long ears, and a slim head. The Egyptians had a variety of dog breeds *iw*<sup>4</sup>; some were used for chasing, while others were allowed into the parlour or served as a companion<sup>5</sup>. The wolf and canids are known for their prick ears, but young tame wolves kept in captivity gained their crooked tails. The earliest canine remains discovered in Egypt resemble wolves. They date to 4,800 B.C. and come from the Badarian site of Beni Salama "Merimda". These canines are undoubtedly Pariah breeds. The largest kind, known as a "Pariah," has a sturdy build, prickly ears, and tails that can be either straight or partially curved<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Wb. V, p. 409.



<sup>2</sup> R.O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, Oxford, 1969, p. 308.

<sup>3</sup> A. Driesch – J. Boessneck, *Die Tierknochenfunde aus Neolithischen Siedlung von Merimde-Benisalama am Westlichen Nildelta*, Munchen, 1985, p. 53; D.J. Osborn – J. Osbornova, "The Mammals of Ancient Egypt", *The Natural History of Egypt*, V. IV, Warminster, p. 57; R.J. Janssen – J. Janssen, *Egyptian Household Animals*, London, 1999, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> A.H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar: Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphics*, Oxford, 1927, p. 549.

<sup>5</sup> J.G. Wilkinson, *A popular Account of the ancient Egyptians: revised and abridged from his larger work*, London, 1854, p. 230.

<sup>6</sup> Osborn, "The Mammals", p. 57.

These dogs' species come in a variety of breeds, including the cape hunting dog, mastiff, greyhound, dachshund, and saluki.<sup>7</sup> The Dogs motifs and themes have been found dating back to the Predynastic Period and the Roman era<sup>8</sup>. Most of the motherhood and suckling scenes of animals on general appeared in the tombs of Saqqara and Giza, which date back to the old Kingdom, while they appeared to a lesser extent during the Middle Kingdom and New Kingdom in the tombs of Bani Hassan, Barsha, Meir, Deir al-Bahari, Sheikh Abd al-Qurna, and El-Kab<sup>9</sup>. The young dog or puppy is a breed of dog; the tummy is fatty, as in the Tsm puppy, and the tail is curled<sup>10</sup>. The female dog was named as ,  *t<sub>sm</sub>*<sup>11</sup>, or *whr.t*<sup>12</sup>.

*The Suckling scenes* depict puppies being suckled by their female mother dog, demonstrating intense engagement and attachment between the mother dog and the young<sup>13</sup>. *The Lactating scenes* of the female mother dog with prominent teats, and with no apparent puppies being represented, displays the mother dog's isolation from her puppies; this could be related to a physiological drop in milk, or even a behavioral avoidance on the part of the mother dog as a form of rejection or punishment, indicating a decrease in parental investment.<sup>14</sup>

## **The Suckling Representations in the Female Dogs:**

### ***In Deir el Gebrawi***

#### ***I. A Female Dog Suckling her Three Puppies***

Location: Deir el Gebrawi Complex<sup>15</sup>; The Rock Tomb of Djau<sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup>; South Wall, West Half.

Date: 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.

On the western half of the southern wall of the tomb's only chamber, Djau is represented sitting on a chair in unique state, dressed in a tunic and holding a scepter. A female tesem dog is nursing and suckling three puppies with lopped ears and straight, short tails under the chair is seen (Fig.

<sup>7</sup> P.F. Houlihan, *The Animal World of the Pharaohs*, AUC Press, 1996, p. 77.

<sup>8</sup> L. Evans, *Animal Behavior in Egyptian Art: Representations of the Natural World in Memphite Tomb Scenes*, Oxford, 2010, p. 78.

<sup>9</sup> M. Ezz, "A Study of Animal Motherhood scenes in the private tombs in Ancient Egypt", *Journal of Association of Arab Universities for Tourism and Hospitality*, V. 11, No. 1, 2014, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> Osborn, "The Mammals", p. 63.

<sup>11</sup> R. Hannig, "Die Sprache der Pharaonen", *Agyptisch Deutsch, KAW*, 1995, p. 966.

<sup>12</sup> *Wb. I*, p. 346.


<sup>13</sup> E.M. Blass – M.H. Teicher, "Suckling", *Science* 210 (1980), p. 15-22; C.M. Pond, "The Significance of Lactation in the Evolution of Mammals", *Society for the study of Evolution*, Vol. 31, 1977, p. 177.

<sup>14</sup> P.H. Klopfer - L. McGeorge - R.J. Barnett, "Maternal Care in Mammals", *Mass*, 1973, p. 18-20.

<sup>15</sup> The tomb complex is located west of the tomb of Aba, Djau's father, and is part of Deir el Gebrawi's southern group of tombs., in E. Zahradnik, *Der Hund als geliebtes Haustier im Alten Ägypten anhand von bildlichen, schriftlichen und archäologischen Quellen: Altes und Mittleres Reich*, Berlin, 2009, p. 160.

<sup>16</sup> The Anteopolite Nome Nomarch; Prophets Inspector and the Forester of the Pyramid of Neferkare'; in B. Porter and R.L.B. Moss *Topographical bibliography of Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic texts, reliefs and paintings. IV. Lower and Middle Egypt (Delta and Cairo to Asyût)*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934, p. 244.


<sup>17</sup> The tomb of Djau is situated to the west of that of his father Aba. The tomb from inside consists of one chamber with a shrine at the back. The uneven walls were plastered over, concealing all the irregularities and providing a flat surface for painting. Another burial site is available near the West wall, and it is of some depth., in N. de G. Davies, *The Rock Tombs of Deir el Gebrâwi, Part II, Tomb of Zau and Tombs of the Northern Group*, London; Boston, 1902, p. 2.

1, 2)<sup>18</sup>. In front of the mother dog her name is inscribed as being  $\overline{D}tt$   which may signify “The fat one”, as Davies suggested. The puppies are well rendered in a clumsy form, standing on their hind legs and trying to reach the teats of their mother, who appears here in a standing position, suggesting the transition from suckling to weaning state<sup>19</sup>. In a scene associated with death and resurrection, this mother female dog is depicted completing her duty towards her puppies and suckling them under her master's chair, which may appear somehow odd<sup>20</sup>.

***Two other Examples show puppies being suckled by their mother, on figurines in El-Bersheh<sup>21</sup>:***

## ***II. Limestone Tablet of a Female Dog Suckling Five Puppies***

***Musée du Louvre, Paris, (E. 11557).***

Location: El-Bersheh; Tomb of  $\overline{D}hwt\overline{y}-\overline{h}tp$  II  <sup>22</sup>.  
Date: Middle Kingdom, Dynasty XII.

In 1900 Ahmed Bey Kamal examined the tombs in El-Bersheh. In the tomb of  $\overline{D}hwt\overline{y}-\overline{h}tp$  II, he had found in a second vault belonging to a woman, a limestone tablet<sup>23</sup>; in a grave shaft, in addition to some other accessories. The relief tablet of a female mother dog suckling its puppies was painted red and is shown on this stone (Fig. 3)<sup>24</sup>. This panel is in the Louvre (E. 11557) and is made of painted limestone and the motif is carved in relief in the stone<sup>25</sup>. It measures 18.5 cm in length and shows a female dog lying down with her head to the right<sup>26</sup>. It has lopped ears and a tail that is straight and downward-pointing. The fur on the head and ears is light brown, with black lines running through it. On the mother dog's body, traces of black paint have been

<sup>18</sup> Osborn, ‘The Mammals’, p. 63.


<sup>19</sup> B. Miles, “Enigmatic Scenes of Intimate Contact with Dogs in the Old Kingdom”, *Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology*, 2010, p. 76.

<sup>20</sup> Davies, *The Rock Tombs of Deir el Gebrâwi*, p. 5; Zahradnik, *Der Hund*, p. 160; W.S. Smith, *A History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom*, II, London, 1949, p. 216.

<sup>21</sup> M.M. Thiringer, *An Egyptian's Best Friend? An Analysis and Discussion of the Depiction of the Domestic Dog in Ancient Egypt*, Unpublished Master Degree, The University of Memphis, 2020, p. 26.

<sup>22</sup>  $\overline{D}hwt\overline{y}-\overline{h}tp$  II; The distinguished inhabitant of the second tomb in El-Bersheh was Hare-nome Nomarch, prince of the nome of Hermopolis. It's believed that he lived at ancient Khemenu, which was his capital. The tomb of  $\overline{D}hwt\overline{y}-\overline{h}tp$  is possibly the most beautiful tomb ever discovered at El Bersheh, and it was the most visible of all the tombs there. Unfortunately, much of it was destroyed by an earthquake., in P.E. Newberry, *El Bersheh*, Part I, The tomb of Tehuti-Hetep, London: The Egypt Exploration Fund : Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1895, p. 1; *PM IV*, p. 179.

<sup>23</sup> A similar representation in El-Bersheh, in the tomb of  $\overline{D}hwt\overline{y}-\overline{n}ht$  IV; A Limestone Plate depicting a Black Female Dog Suckling Her Puppies, in the Egyptian Museum Cairo, *Journal d'Entrée (JE 34325)*. It is noted that Ahmed Bey Kamal

found in the tomb of  <sup>23</sup>  $\overline{D}hwt\overline{y}-\overline{n}ht$  IV, After cleaning this tomb, we discovered twelve wooden sailors in terrible condition, as well as half of a painted red plate made of limestone, 0.9 cm long, on which is sculpted in relief a broken black mother dog suckling her puppies., in A.B. Kamal, 'Fouilles a Deir-el-Barsheh (mars-avril. 1900), *ASAE* 2, 1901, p. 35; A.M.J. Tooley, “Coffin of a Dog from Beni Hasan”, *JEA*, Vol. 74 (1988), p. 210.

<sup>24</sup> Zahradnik, *Der Hund*, p. 312.

<sup>25</sup> Tooley, *JEA* Vol. 74 (1988), p. 210; Zahradnik, *Der Hund*, p. 312.

<sup>26</sup> Musée du Louvre, Paris, (E. 11557).

preserved. The teats, as well as the collar and a dog leash with the end wrapped up in front of the front paws, are reddish<sup>27</sup>.

There are strange ribbon-like stripes on the female dog's shoulder blades, hind thighs, and tummy. Five small puppies are lying in front of her, drinking. They have black paint residues in the form of patches and bands that resemble a dog harness and were temporarily held behind the respective bodies. The ground beneath the animals has been painted a light brown color<sup>28</sup>.

### **III. Painted Limestone Panel Tablet of a Female Dog Suckling two puppies**

*Musée du Louvre, Paris, (E. 17373).*

Location: El-Bersheh; Tomb of *Dḥwty-ḥtp* II 

Date: Middle Kingdom, Dynasty XII.

A second tablet was found in El-Bersheh, in the tomb of *Dḥwty-ḥtp* II. This tablet is smaller and more coarsely wrought than the previous one. It measures 9.90 x 6.10 x 1.50 cm<sup>29</sup>. The female mother dog is shown here laying on her left side while being suckled by two puppies (Fig. 4). The snout of this female dog is pointy. Ears should drop, although this is tough to achieve. The female dog's legs have some black paint residue, while the rest of her body is covered in a black and red paint pattern. In a few areas, the puppies still have black paint residue. The plate's surface was painted a light brown color<sup>30</sup>.

#### **A. The Lactating Representations in the Female Dogs:**

- I. *A Lactating Female Dog in the Tomb-Chapel of (Pepy-ankh-hery-ib, a) 6Th Dynasty, provincial leader at Meir. (Blackman, Meir IV, pl. 12)*<sup>31</sup>.

Location: Main Room, west wall, South side of Façade stela.

Date: The Old Kingdom, 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.

A female mother dog is seen crouching beneath the chair of Pepy-ankh-hery-ib, a. The female dog's name is inscribed above her as *Nwht* (Fig. 5). The female dog appears with prominent teats as if she is still lactating or more likely in a weaning state; the mother dog appears to be nursing because she has noticeable nipples. Unfortunately, the spectacle is no longer preserved, but the absence of puppies may signal the eventual separation of mother and young, whether by human

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<sup>27</sup> Zahradnik, *Der Hund*, p. 312, pl. 58; Ph. Germond – J. Livet, *An Egyptian Bestiary: Animals in Life and Religion*, London, 2001, p. 71.

<sup>28</sup> Zahradnik, *Der Hund*, p. 312.

<sup>29</sup> Musée du Louvre, Paris, (E. 17373).

<sup>30</sup> Zahradnik, *Der Hund*, p. 313.

<sup>31</sup> He is the feudal ruler and provincial leader of the 14th Nome of Upper Egypt, and the owner of the (D, no. 2) rock tomb-chapel, which is located near the southern end of Meir. He is the son of Sebk-hotpe, in A.M. Blackman, *The Rock Tombs of Meir. Part IV. The tomb-chapel of (Pepy-ankh-hery-ib, a), son of Sebkḥopte and Perkhernesfert (D, no. 2)*, London; Boston: The Egypt Exploration Society, 1924, p. 34.

interference, natural selection (physiological decrease in milk production), or rejection or punishment of the mother<sup>32</sup>.

II. *A Lactating Female Dog in the Rock Tomb of Sarenput 'Qubbet el-Hawa'*

Location: On the southern half of the façade, Sarenput Tomb.

Date: Middle Kingdom, Dynasty XII.

Sarenput is depicted striding and being pursued by a man wearing sandals. Two dogs could be seen walking in the same way behind him. The first dog is a greyhound-like dog with Saluki-style lops, while the second is a female spitz-like dog with pricked ears and curled tail (Fig. 6). Her teats are prominent; either they sought to accentuate their gender or she is a lactating female dog. Above the greyhound, a stone slab is missing, which could have depicted the third dog. Both dogs appear to be wearing collars<sup>33</sup>.

III. *A Lactating Female Spitz-like Dog:*

In 1836 Wilkinson mentioned the different types of dogs in ancient Egypt. This style of a little spitz-like female dog (fig. 7) is also represented on Dedusobek's stela and in Khnumhotep's tomb, for example. Surprisingly, no more images of these short-legged dogs can be seen in the New Kingdom<sup>34</sup>.

IV. *Another example of lactating female dog is mentioned by Wilkinson:*

In the desert of Thebaid, in a chasing scene, a female lactating dog (fig. 8) is depicted to the left, with some sort of aggressive features<sup>35</sup>.

## ***Conclusions***

The Ancient Egyptians recorded typical scenes and events from their environment and surroundings, such as suckling, and milking, which are all part of daily life. Meanwhile, due to their care in showing even female dogs, the investigated scenes alluded to the depth and character of Egyptian zoological knowledge. As a result, sufficient knowledge about mother dogs that were part of ancient Egyptian daily life is presented.

In Ancient Egyptian art, known scenes of female dogs are uncommon and rare. This study aims to deal with the published scenes of mother-female dogs suckling and lactating their puppies.

The artist did a great job capturing the pain of suckling and the mother dog's attitude while breastfeeding; the mother's concern for her baby's nutrition and care is palpable. By depicting the mother dog lying down during suckling, an ancient Egyptian artist was able to convey deep

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<sup>32</sup> Barnett, *Mass*, 1973, p. 18–20; Blackman, *The Rock Tombs of Meir IV*, p. 34; Miles, *BACE* 21 (2010), p. 76.

<sup>33</sup> Zahradnik, *Der Hund*, p. 323.

<sup>34</sup> Zahradnik, *Der Hund*, p. 323.


<sup>35</sup> J.G. Wilkinson, *A Popular Account of the Ancient Egyptians: Revised and Abridged from his Larger work*, London, 1854, p. 225.

compassion and maternal instincts, showing how the mother tries to make the baby's suckling easier.

In a scene associated with death and resurrection, the mother's female dog is depicted completing her duty towards her puppies and suckling them under her master's chair (Fig. 1, 2), which indicates the mother's insistence to fulfill her duties towards her young in any circumstances.

Female dogs are depicted in chasing scenes even if they are still lactating (Fig. 8), which reflects their sacrifice towards their duty in hunting and chasing.

The standing position of a lactating female dog might suggest the transition from suckling to a weaning state.

Davies suggested the mother dog's name  $\overline{D}tt$  , signifying "The fat one"; due to her weight gaining during lactation and after delivering her puppies.

Depictions of named dogs, including female ones (Fig. 1, 5), such as  $\overline{D}tt$ , and *Nwht* are documented as far back as the First Dynasty, peaking during the Old Kingdom.

The number of puppies being suckled differs from one scene to another; two puppies in (Fig. 4), three in (Fig. 1), and even five puppies in (Fig. 3).

Most of the figured puppies in the Suckling scenes appear with lopped ears and straight, short tails.

Female *tesem* dogs are the kindest figure in *Suckling scenes*, while Spitz-like female dogs are the kindest figure in *Lactating scenes*.

Figures



Fig. 1 - A scene represents three dogs suckling from their mother's bosoms, the tomb of Djau, 6th dynasty, Deir el Gabrawi.

After, N. de G. Davies, "The Rock Tomb of Deir El Gebrâwi II. Tomb of Zau and Tombs of the Northern Group", *Archaeological Survey of Egypt Memoir XI*. London, 1902, pl. IV.

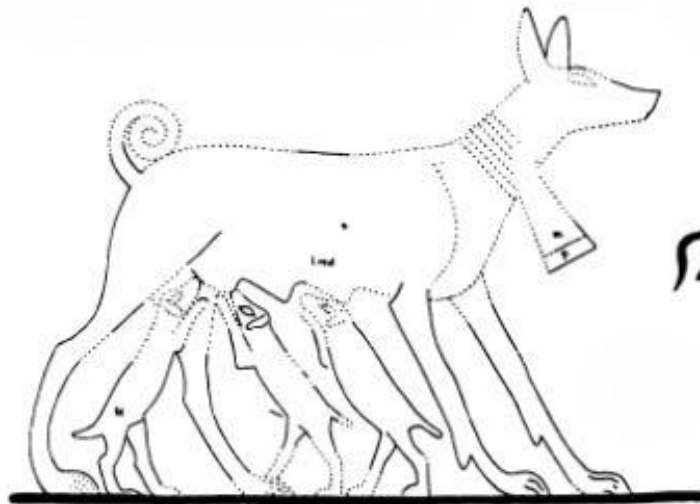


Fig. 2 - A Female Dog Named Suckling Three Puppies, Tomb of Djau, Deir el Gebrawi  
After, Davies, *The Rock Tombs of Deir el Gebrâwi II*, pl. XV; Zahradnik, *Der Hund*, Abb. 103.



Fig. 3 - Limestone Tablet with Motif of a Female Dog Suckling 5 puppies;  
Musée du Louvre, Paris, (E. 11557).

Taken by Zahradnik; in Zahradnik, *Der Hund*. pl. 58; <https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo/suckling-puppies.html>, respectively.





Fig. 4 - Painted Limestone Panel Tablet of a Female Dog Suckling 2 puppies;  
Musée du Louvre, Paris, (E. 17373).  
Taken by Zahradnik; in Zahradnik, *Der Hund*, pl. 59.

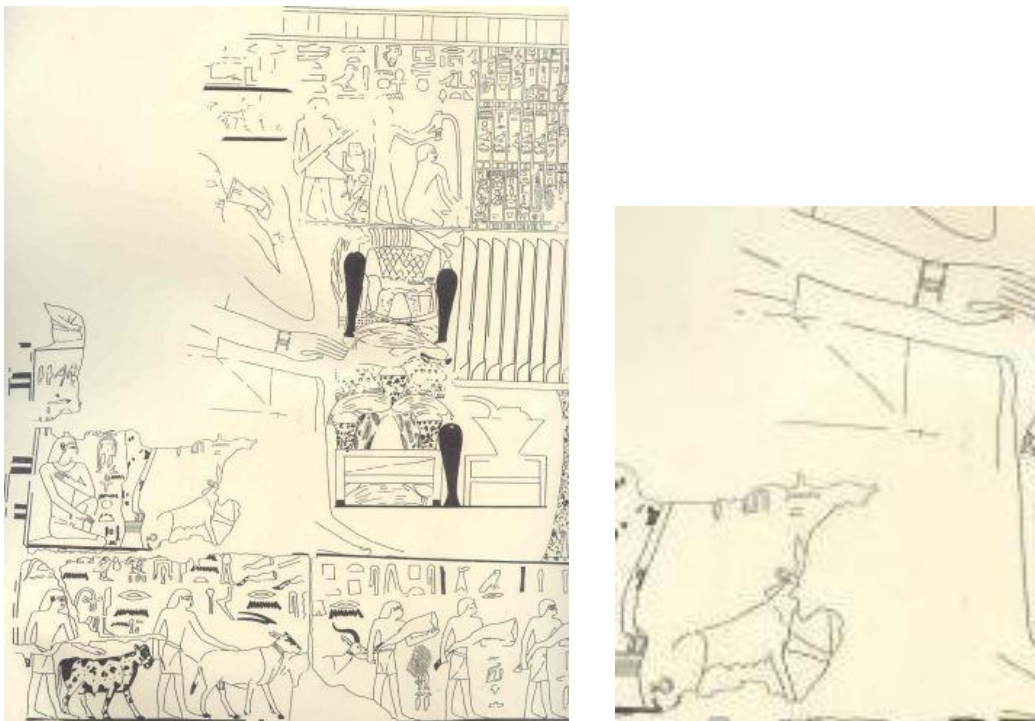


Fig. 5 - The Tomb-Chapel of 'Pepi-ankh the Middle' - Main Room, west wall, South side of  
Façade stela.

After, Blackman, *The Rock Tombs of Meir IV*, pl. XII.

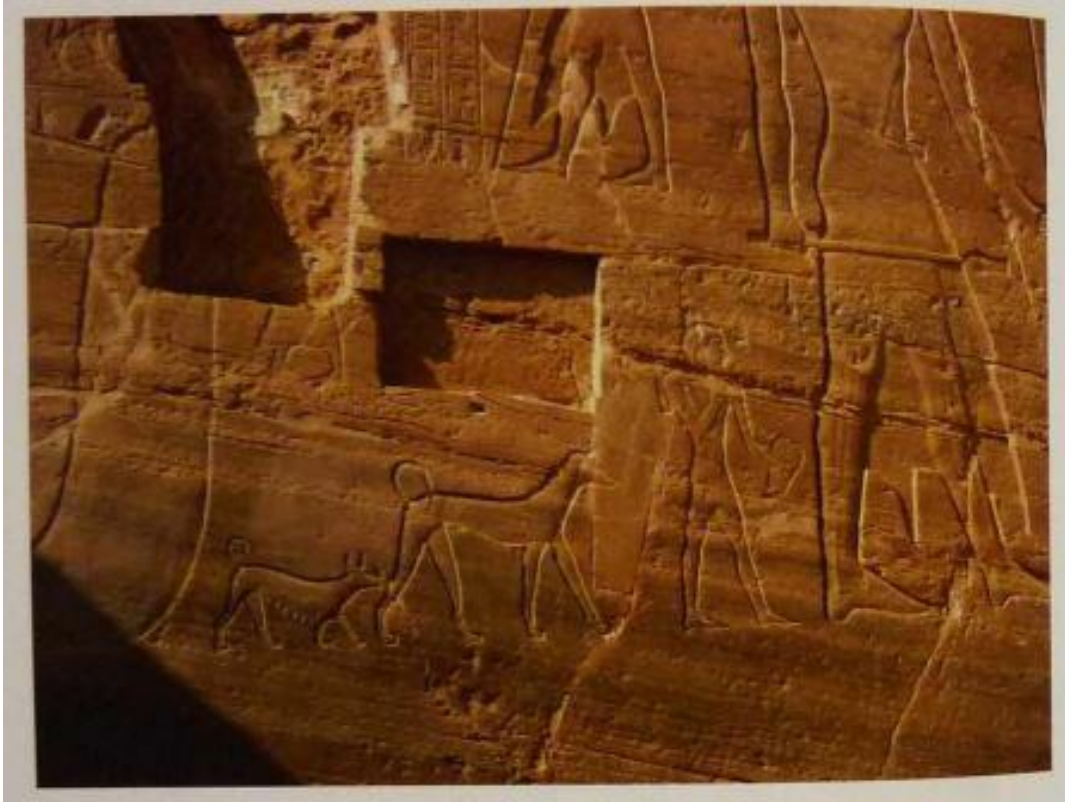


Fig. 6 - The Southern Half of the Façade, Sarenput Tomb 'Qubbet el-Hawa'  
After, Zahradnik, *Der Hund*, pl. 24, Abb. 185.



Fig. 7 - The Type of Small Spitz-like Female Dogs with Teats.  
After, Wilkinson, *A Popular Account of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 230.

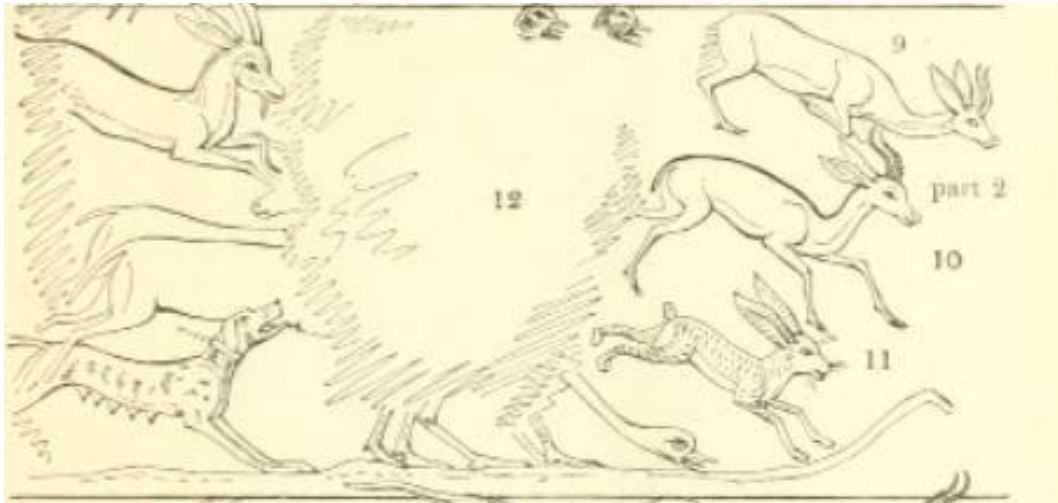


Fig. 8 - A chase in the desert of Thebaid, Thebes.  
After, Wilkinson, *A Popular Account of the Ancient Egyptians*, p. 225.