

## Uncommon Scene of Elephant in the Tomb of Petosiris at Tuna El Gebel Doaa Abdel Motaal Ahmed

Faculty of Tourism and Hotels- Minia University

### Abstract

Depictions of animals dominate the daily life scenes depiction in ancient Egypt that reflecting the important role they have played in the people's lives. Among those animals is elephant. The aim of this study is to highlight the depiction of uncommon scene of elephant in the tomb of Petosiris at Tuna el-Gebel in Minia through displaying the few different representations of elephant during the ancient Egyptian time and the Graeco- Roman Period. Additionally, comparing between the elephant representations during those different periods and analyzing the contexts of the scenes. This study is depending on a descriptive and analytical methodology to achieve its aims. Result of this study reveals the rarity of elephant presentation from the ancient Egyptian time till the end of the Roman period. It also proof with that the represented elephant in the Petosiris tomb is from Asiatic type.

**Keywords:** Elephant, Petosiris Tomb, Animal, War, Offerings, Ancient & Graeco-Roman Egypt.

### Introduction

Depictions of animals dominate the visual records of ancient Egyptian civilization. It is reflecting the important role they have played in the people's lives. Ancient Egyptians enjoyed close and significant relationships with animals. The images of animals indicate that ancient Egyptians managed to reproduce accurately their physical appearance and defining features. There is much evidence to confirm this relation, such as, more than seven hundred hieroglyphic signs, nearly one-fifth that represent mammals and birds or parts of them (Evans, 2010). Animal depiction continued during the Graeco-Roman Period. Representing of animals is very distinguished at the tomb of Petosiris at Tuna El-Gebel.

Tomb of Petosiris at Tuna El Gebal is one of the most significant tombs of the Late Period and the Ptolemaic Period in Egypt as the number of decorated tombs with some daily life scenes during this period is very limited comparing to those of the Ancient Egyptian. Tomb of Petosiris has a specific significance as its scenes represent the combination of the Ancient Egyptian and Greek arts. The tomb dates back to the late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C.E. It is a family tomb of Petosiris the high priest of Thoth, who lived at the end of the Pharaonic period and the beginning of the Ptolemaic period. (David, 2002). Egyptian tombs of the Ptolemaic period continued the Egyptian traditions of the Late period. But, the tomb of Petosiris at Tuna el-Gebel is considered to be almost the only remarkable exception, (Baines,2002) that it shows a mixed iconography between Egyptian and Hellenistic styles which was occasionally unsuccessful (Robins, 1997).

The pronaos of the tomb is decorated with daily life scenes in a hybrid Greek/Egyptian style , while in the walls of naos are only decorated with religious scenes represented in pure Egyptian style .(Aidan, 2008) except the lower register which depicts offering bearer scenes in a mixture style of art. Among those offering scene is uncommon scene of Elephant, which consider being a rare representation in the tombs of the Graeco-Roman Period.

There are many studies focused on elephant in ancient Egypt (مكي، ٢٠١٢) either at the pre-dynastic period or as a hieroglyphic signs (Abd Elnaiem, 2016) or the different types of elephants at war or as an ivory trade (Haland, 2014) but none of them detected the scenes depicting elephant in the Graeco-Roman Period.

This Study aims to highlight the depiction of the uncommon scene of elephant at the tomb of Petosiris at Tuna El Gebel through displaying the few different representations of elephant during the ancient Egyptian time and the Graeco- Roman Period, comparing between the elephant representations during those different periods and analyzing the contexts of the scenes. This study is depending on a descriptive and analytical methodology to achieve its aims.

## **Literature Review**

### **Wild animals:**

Humans have divided animals into categories: domesticated and wild. The first type which we have appreciated because their easy management and dependably quiet natures as well as have enabled us to use them for food, clothing, and companionship. Wild species, which we have been keen to kill because they consumed our food supplies, threatened our lives. Wild animals have been feared because they remained beyond our control. Actually, one of the most potentially destructive of wild animals on land, is the elephant. Although most herds are now kept in parks and preserves, the elephant was classified as a 'wild' animal which is confirmed by its being displayed in zoos and in circuses (Scullard, 2000).

### **Elephants**

Elephants are large mammals of the family Elephantida. Elephant was known by the name *abw*, that was at Beni Hassan (Abd Elnaiem 2016). The English word elephant is derived from the Sanskrit word for ivory (*ibha+danta=elephant+teeth*) (Haaland 2014). The symbol for dentist in Ancient Egypt was an elephant's tusk as appeared in the wooden panels of Hesire, a 3<sup>rd</sup> dynasty official, was among other things, a dentist (Ikram, 2011).

Elephant appeared in civilizations of the ancient Nile valley, where they were hunted and distributed to Egypt and to the Greek cities for ivory, military, and amusement purposes (Richard 2002). From Prehistoric Period of ancient Egypt there are records of the presence of the African elephant (*Loxodonta Africana*) on ivory carvings, palettes, painted ceramics, and rock paintings. During the Near Eastern campaigns of the New Kingdom, the Syrian elephant (the Asian elephant), a breed of the Indian elephant (*Elephas maximus*), became known in Egypt for the first time. (Houlihan,1996). Few characteristics distinguish the Asian and African elephants. The African elephant is larger and has much larger ears, longer tusks, and is sway-backed, whereas in the Asian species the back arches upward. The forehead of the African species is lower, and the crown of the head is without the two bumps only one on that of the Asian elephant (Osborn, 1998).

### **Elephants in Ancient Egypt:**

Elephant form great importance in the ancient Egyptian civilization, especially in prehistoric times. During this period elephants spread widely that they named the first province in ancient Egypt in the name of the elephant (Elephantien Island). In the same region, the necropolis of the graves of elephants was found to confirm their importance during that time. Gradually, by the end of the third Dynasty, Egyptians were less interested in the elephants, but by the Fifth Dynasty, a trip of Harkhuf to bring elephant from the south was highly appreciated. During the Middle Kingdom, ivory, was included within the gifts provided by the foreigners. During the New Kingdom, Elephant was depicted at the Tomb of Rekhmira (2012، مكي). Elephants hunts became popular in the New Kingdom, as kings such as Thutmose I and Thutmose III, hunted Syrian elephants in Syria, mostly in the area of modern Apamea (ancient Ni). According to the tomb biography of Amenemhab, a courtier of Thutmose III, the king was almost killed by a

rampaging elephant in Ni and survived only because Amenemhab managed to cut off the elephant's trunk and save the king's life. Egyptian kings used images of hunting to demonstrate their power to conquer chaos, establish *maat*, and rule over the real world. (Dodson, 2008).

During the New Kingdom at Thebes, the tomb paintings and inscriptions record the coming of ivory in Egypt as part of the tribute of Kush. In the second and early first millennia BCE, the focus of the ivory trade began to move to the Red Sea. The Egyptian queen Hatshepsut brought to Egypt elephant tusks among the goods of her expedition to the Land of Punt by her fleet. (Stanley, 1996). The elephant was known in Egypt but is not often shown in Egyptian art or inscriptions. Ivory was prized and came from Nubia. (Wilkson, 2005)

### **Elephants in the Graeco-Roman period:**

In the Graeco-Roman period, elephants had served as war tools. In the fourth century BCE, when Alexander the Great had marched his army to north India, his military had employed units of elephants. As he defeated these armies, he possessed their elephants and commemorated his victories by issuing coins which depict him astride a horse, thrusting a lance at his opponent, who is riding an enormous elephant. After Alexander's death, coins issued in Egypt show, Alexander wearing an elephant scalp head-dress, and in another example, Alexander driving a chariot pulled by four elephants. The message on the coins is clear. The elephant was so closely recognized with the military strength of Alexander's enemies that his defeat of them could be symbolically represented by portraying him cloaked in the hide of a dead elephant (Scullard, 2000).

Elephants took a new segment in the Ptolemaic era, where the Ptolemies were ready to get the killed elephant to make their ports in the Red Sea and to work as centers for hunting and reproduction. As for the war side, there was a defeat for the African elephants and perhaps all this attention did not come with the desired outcome. With the first experience in the battle of Rafah, the African elephant was defeated by the testimony of Morj Boulebaus (مكي، ٢٠١٢).

We know from written sources that the Ptolemies sent hunting expeditions south along the Red Sea to capture elephants (Adams 1977; Burstein 2008). Ptolemies saw the military importance of these animals and looked to sub-Saharan Africa to get a supply of them. The significance of the elephants might have been in their use for warfare during the second to third century BCE. Over times, elephant seem to have been used more for display and ceremonial processions (Haaland, 2014).

In the training of elephants, the Ptolemies and Kushites were dependent on Indian trainers, so-called mahouts. They dressed in clothing suggesting South Asian origins and even had Indian names despite being native to Africa. Indian elephants could be captured and domesticated by using enclosures or pits and the same methods could have been used in Africa (Kistler, 2007). Unlike horses, elephants can be “ridden” only by particular individuals. Each elephant has a specific “rider(s)”—and mahouts. Elephants trust individual riders and trainers, and this relationship is nurtured for the lifetime of an elephant (Haaland, 2014).

By the second half of the third century BCE, Ptolemies founded trading ports along the western coast of the Red Sea for their war elephants were of the Indian variety, although the lion's allocate of trade with India and the East seems to have remained in Seleucid hands, (Stanely, 1996). The Ptolemaic kings, in contrast, were forced to acquire theirs from the Nubian tribe of Blemmyes, living at the southern extremes of Upper Egypt, and trade with sub-Saharan east Africa flourished under the Ptolemaic rule. (Bagnall, 2004)

Edfu was well situated to take advantage of trade coming from the Red Sea through the port at Berenike in the Ptolemaic period served as the main way for the Red Sea trade under the Romans

and perhaps even under the later Ptolemies. Ptolemy Philadelphus was the first one who used elephants in the Ptolemaic army that were protected by shields. The Ptolemaic kings organized its hunt and training (سليم, ٢٠٠٠). Ptolemy Philadelphus built a road from Edfu out to the Red Sea port of Berenike. The strategic location of Edfu for controlling the trade, which was mainly in war elephants and gold (Ikram, 2011).

The Milon Archive is an important bilingual archive, found in a jar on Elephantine Island at Aswan, gives a unique view of the relationship of the high priest and *lesonis* (the head of the temple administration) at Edfu to the land and the state. Milon was the *praktor* of the temples in the Edfu nome. Among his papyri are a famous order for the payment of elephant hunters and correspondence with Milon's superiors, actually resident in Thebes, concerning the finances for the building of the Edfu temples. However, the bulk of the papers is about the ending of the landed property of a prominent priestly family who lived in Edfu during the middle years of the third century BC. A letter of 223 BC, seemingly unconnected to Milon's papers, is indicative of the importance of the import of war elephants through Edfu in this period (Bagnall, 2004).

The Romans first encountered elephants in Italy in the third century BCE. At that time elephants were native to India and Africa, including those areas of north Africa. They were used as war machine by armies in those regions much as modern armies use tanks. Howard Hayes Scullard's book, *The Elephant in the Greek and Roman World*, is an essential study of how elephants were used by armies in the Mediterranean area and Asia Minor from the time of Alexander the Great to late Roman antiquity. This study shows that although the number of elephants, as a percentage of the total resources deployed in ancient battles, was quit small, their assistance to the success of a military campaign could be immense<sup>(1)</sup>. A line of these huge, trumpeting beasts in the front row of a battle was a threatening sight and sound, particularly for men and cavalry horses new to the experience. Soldiers riding in 'towers'(boxes) on the elephants' backs could launch arrows or javelins down on the enemy troops. When the elephants charged, they crushed under their feet the opposing soldiers. (Shelton, 2006).

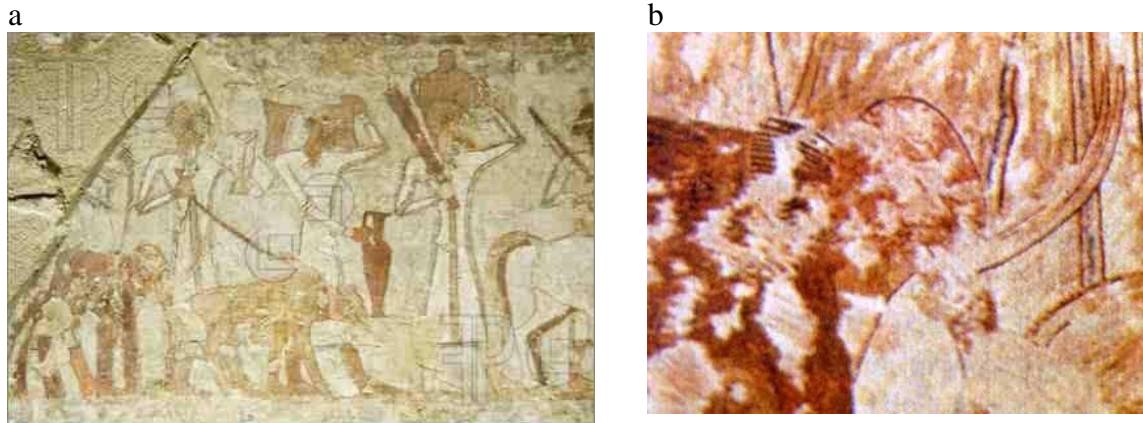
#### **Displaying of Elephant Scene during the Ancient Egyptian Period:**

There is only one scene (fig.1) from the tomb of Rekhmire (TT100) at Thebes during the Eighteenth Dynasty. Rekhmira was a vizier during the reign of king Thotmosis III and Amenophis II. In his tomb there is scene depicting tributes offering from different foreign lands such as Punt, Crete, Syria, Kush. A young elephant (fig. 1,a,b) was depicted with bear and horses among other offering such as weapons, pots and carts Those animals are represented in procession of tribute offering from Asiatic lands offered to Rekhmira the owner of the tomb.

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<sup>1\*</sup> Scullard also collects some of the information about the natural history of the elephant that is presented by ancient authors, such as Aristotle, Pliny, and Aelian. Also invaluable to the study of elephants in the ancient world is Jocelyn M.C. Toynbee's *Animals in Roman Life and Art*.

Fig.1, a and b: Scene of young elephant in offering procession from the Thebian Egiteenth Dynasty tomb of Rekhmira



After Davis, 1940

There other representations of elephants but only as a part of the word of Elphentien Island as:

- The inscription of the lintel wall of Abu-El-Hagag Mousque at Luxor Temple (fig.2, a, b).
- The inscription of Wadi El Hammamat.
- -The Tomb of Sabni from the Sixth Dynasty at the Nobles tomb at Qibet El Hawa at Aswan (Elnaiem, 2016).

Fig. 2, a and b, inscription of elephant as a part of a ward from Abuel Hagag Mosque in Luxor



by the researcher

### Scenes of Elephant from the Graeco-Roman Period

There is no representation of elephant scenes during this period except the scene of Petosiris tomb at Tuna El-Gebel. There is some inscription of elephant as part of texts from the Graeco Roman period from temples such as, Dendera, Kom Ombo, and Phila (fig.3, a,b,c).



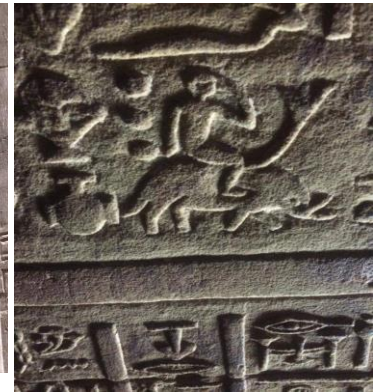
Fig. 3a, Dendera



Fig 3b, Kom Ombo



Fig 3c, Philae



by the researcher

### The elephant scene at the tomb of Petosiris at Tuna El Gebel

This scene is presenting an image of young elephant. This scene is representing at the lower register of the northern wall of the naos (the chapel room). The main context of this scene is representing offering procession in front of the owner of the tomb. This scene is depicting offering bearers represented in Greek clothes, holding animals and plants in their hands and shoulders. Gazelle, ibex, goat are also depicted with the young elephant (Figs.4,5,6). It is worthy to mention that there is a young child accompanied his father in front of the young elephant. This elephant is represented with arched up bake and small ears. These characteristics may indicate that this elephant is from Asiatic origin.

Fig. 4: Elephant scene in Petosiris Tomb

Fig. 5: Detail of previous scene



By the researcher

Fig. 6. Elephant scene at the tomb of Petosirs in an offering procession



*After Lefebvre, 1923*

### **Discussion and results**

This well preserved wall scene is considered to be a rare scene of elephant in ancient Egypt in general. Moreover, it is a good evidence ensuring the appearance of elephant from the late fourth century BCE.

The context of this rare scene is similar to the context of the rare scene of elephant which were represented in the Theban New Kingdom tomb of Rekhmira. As both of them are representing offering procession. These offering included different types of animals. The difference between them that the New Kingdom Scene is a tribute scene from the Asian land that refers that their elephant from the Asian type while the scene of Petosiris is representing common offering scene. The elephant in the tomb of Petosiris is very similar in shape to that of the Rekhmira scene which may indicate that Petosiris elephant is also from the Asian origin.

Elephants in civilizations of ancient Nile valley were hunted and distributed to Egypt and to the Graeco-Roman world for ivory, amusement, and military purposes. (Mark, 2016). The representation of a child accompanied a person in front of the young elephant may indicates that there is some relation with the children and elephant may be for the amusement of children as our modern circus today.

It was previously mentioned that Alexander the Great's campaigns in India brought the Indian elephant, trained for work and military uses (war machines), to the Near East and it was used in the wars of the Diadochs. In 321 BCE, the regent Perdikkas and his troops entered Egypt to attack Ptolemy. Indian elephants were used during the failed attempt to capture Memphis. That episode may explain that singular image. Thus, the elephant here in the scene presenting the Indian elephant to show the power of the Ptolemies and proved the defeat of Perdikkas.

In the temples of the Graeco-Roman Periods such as Dendera, Kom Ombo, and Phila, elephant appear to be a letter in different inscription. In all these inscriptions, a form of Horus the Child (Harpocrates) surmounts the elephant. This signifies that, the elephant, as all the animals that come from foreign lands and deserts, is considered being a symbol of god Seth and a personification of him. Depicting elephant surmounted by Horus is a reference to the triumph of Horus upon Seth and in the same time, the triumph of maat upon the chaos.

## Conclusions

The archaeological and literary sources confirmed that the spread of elephants was throughout the continent and that all ancient civilizations had traces of elephants and paid great attention to it.

Elephant was very important in the ancient Egyptian civilization, although there are no traces of the elephant in the religious realm of ancient Egypt. With the exception of elephants put on display in the New Kingdom, in dynastic times interest was focused exclusively on the ivory (3bw) of the tusks. Ivory imports came to Egypt from the end of the Old kingdom onwards.

Elephants took a new phase in the Ptolemaic Period, it became a war machine. Elephant appeared as a symbol of the power of any kingdom, as it mentioned before how Alexander the Great presented it in the coins. Therefore, Ptolemy Philadelphus impressed by the war elephants in the Seleucid army, and put his efforts in training elephants for warfare, adapted to Egyptian requirements, but using the African rather than the Indian species.

Actually, after the battle of Raphia in 217 BCE during which African elephants proved less powerful than Indian elephants, the elephant troop became less and less important in the Ptolemaic army. Under Ptolemy V the experiment was abandoned.

The uncommon scene of elephant in the tomb of Petosiris confirms the rarity of depicting elephant in Egypt, while the presence of a child with this elephant may refer to the amusement role of elephant.

There is a great similarity between the context of elephant scenes at both tombs of the New Kingdom and the Graeco-Roman which is offering processions.

Elephant is considered to be a Seth's animal and in temple Horus is represented surmounting him as symbol of triumph of maat.

This study strongly suggests that this elephant is from Asiatic origins based on two facts. The first one is the similarity of this elephant to the Rekhmira Elephant which were brought by the Asiatic troops at the famous tribute scenes of this tomb. Secondly, the characteristic of the elephant, the small ears and the arched up back is very distinguished at the Indian Elephant.

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