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Banquets of Gods, Banquets of Men. Conviviality in the Ancient World

I. Archaeology

This volume includes the proceedings of the sixteenth international colloquium of the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology of the Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj, on the subject of "Banquets of Gods, Banquets of Men. Conviviality in the Ancient World", held on November 23rd- 24th, 2012, in Cluj. Due to the diversity of subjects addressed by the participants, the two days of the conference were subdivided into morning sessions reserved for epigraphical and historical topics and afternoon sessions for the archaeological ones; which is reflected by the structure of this volume.

Not only with the dead: banqueting in ancient Egypt

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Abstract. Convivial occasions among the living are not well attested from ancient Egypt. Scenes in tomb decoration, especially of the Old Kingdom (3rd millennium), that show a solitary figure before large quantities of food and drink involve participation of others and thus say something about practices of celebration. Patrons might also celebrate with their subordinates, but people of different status are not shown eating or drinking at the same time; these asymmetrical practices are depicted both for kings and for elites. Banquets and related entertainments would be set in tents or colonnaded spaces, the character of which was imitated notably in the decoration of 18th dynasty tombs (ca. 1500-1350). These banquets could be held near the tomb and involved drinking wine, in particular, that would favour communication between the living and the dead. Another significant setting appears to be in the countryside. At banquets harpists might perform songs that emphasized the importance of eating and drinking while still alive, because one does not know what will happen after death, an idea that was probably voiced in counter-cultural laments during funerals. The funerary stelae of the couple Taimhotep and Psherenptah, who died in 42 and 41 BCE, expressed both the need to celebrate in life and the political character of banquets at which the king and his family were present, rounding off a tradition that had endured for millennia.

Key words: ancient Egypt, banquet, tomb decoration, tent, wine, funeral lament.

Rezumat: Nu numai cu cei morți: banchetele în Egiptul antic. Prilejurile de convivialitate între cei vii nu sunt bine atestate în Egiptul antic. Scene în decorația unor morminte, mai ales din timpul Regatului Vechi (mileniul III), care reprezintă o figură solitară aflată în fața unor mari cantități de mîncare şi băutură, presupun implicarea altora şi astfel spun ceva despre practicile celebrării. Patronii pot de asemenea celebra împreună cu subordonații lor, dar oameni de statut social diferit nu sunt arătați bînd şi mîncînd la un loc; aceste practici asimetrice sunt reprezentate atît pentru regi cît şi pentru elite. Banchetele şi distracțiile legate de ele aveau loc în corturi sau spații cu colonade, care erau imitate mai cu seamă în decorația mormintelor dinastiei a XVIII-a (ca. 1500-1350). Aceste banchete puteau avea loc lîngă mormînt şi participanții beau, vin mai ales, ceea ce favoriza comunicarea între cei vii şi cei morți. Alt cadru important pentru banchete pare să se fi aflat la țară. La banchete, harpiştii interpretau cîntece care subliniau că e important să mănînci şi să bei cît te mai afli încă în viață, fiindcă după moarte nu se ştie ce se va întîmpla, o idee probabil exprimată în lamentări contra-culturale în timpul înmormîntărilor. Stelele funerare ale cuplului Taimhotep şi Psherenptah, care au murit în 42 şi 41 a. Chr.,

exprimă atît nevoia de a sărbători în timpul vieții, cît şi caracterul politic al banchetelor la care erau prezenți regele şi familia sa, completînd astfel o tradiție care dura de milenii.

Cuvinte cheie: Egiptul antic, banchet, decorația mormintelor, cort, vin, lamentație funebră.

Evidence for banqueting and conviviality in the ancient Mediterranean and Europe exists in many forms and for many contexts – secular, religious, this-worldly, mortuary – as is made clear by other articles in this volume. Scholars generally assume that these practices and institutions are necessary elements in social life: people eat and drink together not merely out of necessity but also to bring groups together in a suitable hierarchical order, to celebrate, and to communicate between spheres of existence, among which may be different levels within society, the living and the dead, and people and gods. In coming together and enhancing communication they very often consume or inhale psychotropic substances, of which by far the most widespread is alcohol. Celebrations very commonly involve music and dance. These usages are strongly hedged around with rules and conventions, but they also offer important contexts for moderating or inverting norms of behaviour that apply in other contexts. Psychotropic substances help in breaching those norms, as well as contributing to counter-norms, such as those of drunkenness, that can apply in the special setting of the banquet.

Ancient Egypt provides only modest amounts of material relating to comparable institutions. The most prominent body of relevant evidence dates to a span of just a couple of centuries in the New Kingdom (ca. 1500-1300 BCE). Yet people surely had communal celebrations in other periods. It is therefore desirable both to discuss the ancient setting and to ask why the distribution of examples is so uneven.

Images as sources

The most familiar Egyptian images of people sitting with food, as against presenting offerings of food to the gods, show lone protagonists (Fig. 1) or a couple. They are there perpetually, for the next life as well as this life, and they aspire to receive food offerings in the hereafter, although that is often not stated explicitly. They are very seldom seen in the act of eating; rather, they sit in front of vast quantities of food, which may be presented either pictorially or in lists of offerings, with the latter also encompassing other types of material, such as vessels or clothing[1].

[1] Barta 1963.

Even servants are absent, although details demonstrate that the person about to eat could not take his meal by himself (women are shown far less often than men, so that Fig. 1 is an exception). For example, without assistance one could not complete the necessary preliminary of washing one's hands, for which the required pair of vessels is represented, as well as monograms indicating water-pouring and washing. Indeed, before very recent times the same constraint applied to washing, in decorous forms of which one person would pour water over another's hands, with a recipient for the spent water beneath, at least in tidy indoor contexts. Because of overtones of preparation, sociality, and care, such practices could be laden with symbolic meanings, including sexual ones. In the Egyptian Tale of the Two Brothers (ca. 1250 BCE), the first hint the husband has of his wife's attempt at infidelity is that she is not present to pour water over his hands when he returns home in the evening from work in the fields[2]. From a different culture and context the Dutch painter Gabriel Metsu's *A man visiting a woman washing her hands* (ca. 1662-64) shows a handsome visitor greeting a young woman who is being attended to by a servant pouring water over her hands into a bowl, perhaps with similar implications to the Egyptian tale; the equipment used is comparable with that known from ancient Egypt[3].

The chief exception to the dearth of Egyptian images of banqueting is where the living communicate with and honour the dead. Scenes of this type, which had limited forerunners in earlier periods, are widely attested in tombs of the 18th dynasty (ca. 1500-1300 BCE), but relatively little textual material elucidates their meaning. I discuss these later in this article. Here, I note only that they provide a significant point of departure for seeking relevant evidence from earlier periods, when much that related to religion and the dead was depicted a great deal less explicitly. The idea of drinking and eating together as a forum for communication originates among the living, so that – in addition to evoking mortuary practices metaphorically – images in which the dead are included almost certainly offer some guide to how the living connected with one another in such contexts. While the scenes should not be taken too literally, both details and the general configuration of these compositions are very suggestive for thinking about the social setting and meaning of being at table.

Third and early second millennium BCE

While representations of group events are relatively rare in early Egyptian sources, quite apart from the point about service made above, the depiction of just one or two people does not mean that only they would partake. Some

[2] E. g. Lichtheim 1976, 205.

[3] Private collection: Waiboer 2010, 67 fig. 51, cat. 41.

occasions are on a grander scale than even the richest might wish to keep to themselves. The 5th dynasty tomb owner Ti sits with his wife beside him while an orchestra and dancers perform for him (Fig. 2); only they are shown, but it does not follow either that only they would be present or that food and drink would not be served. But we face death alone, and scenes of people before tables are normally seen as relating only to the transition to the next world and presence there. Exceptions to this solitude are where a group of people below the highest status are shown together at tables – both seated and squatting on the ground – because they share a tomb or a memorial chapel (e. g. Fig. 3). Tables are individual or at most for two people: large dining tables did not exist in ancient Egypt.

Decorum, in the sense of proper manners and presenting oneself in a dignified fashion, is very important even in a context where licence can be accepted, as I discuss below. More broadly, decorum also limits the permitted range of occurrence of figures so that, for example, in earlier periods people were very rarely shown directly before deities. Where food is present in a formal context, hardly anyone is depicted drinking and eating, although exceptions can be found. Occasionally someone has his hand to his face, but even then mostly not actually putting something in his mouth[4]. Eating is not an elegant activity, and to this day many people try to avoid being shown with food in their mouths, a reticence that can be found across a range of cultures. Moreover, ancient Egyptians were rarely depicted with their mouths open, except when singing, lamenting, or sometimes shouting.

The archaeological record shows that water is important as well as food. Purification, or just hand-washing, when coming in to the house is basic to proper living. Washing sets are among the most prestigious objects from third millennium Egypt[5]. Their metal forms were imitated in a fine ceramic which is known also in bowls that were probably used for ceremonial serving, perhaps of dairy products[6].

The clearest pointer to the fact that eating is not normally depicted is given, by exception, in a recently published scene of celebration of an expedition's successful return to Egypt, from the causeway of the early 5th dynasty mortuary complex of Sahure (ca. 2450 BCE; Fig. 4)[7]. This example is significant because the context is not funerary even though it comes from a mortuary complex: what is shown is an achievement commissioned by the

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[4] Lloyd/Spencer/el-Khouli 2008, pl. 22, both the tomb owner and the small figure of his wife before his knees; she is additionally holding a lotus flower to her nose.

[5] Radwan 1983.

[6] E. g. Anonymous 1978, nos 150 (pl. iii), 152; Hendrickx et al. 2002: forms suggested to be for dairy products.

[7] Full context: el-Awady 2009, pl. 6; Brinkmann 2010, 200.

king as an episode in his rule. The king, whose throne has been literally wheeled in for the occasion, sits with an incense tree, a token of the most prestigious product imported. Facing him are his highest officials and members of his family, simply seated and not doing anything. On the opposite side, in two lower sub-registers, is a group of men captioned as artists/sculptors, a category known from other sources as especially favoured mid-ranking people[8]. It is evidently their privilege to consume in the king's presence. Three appear to be eating and one drinking, and they have rich foods and drink before them. They do not, however, have their mouths open: the food is simply near their mouths, while the vessel – probably for wine – is pressed against the drinker's closed mouth. The scene as a whole is enhanced by a large-scale musical performance. The music is elaborately choreographed with hand gestures and probable rhythmic clapping, a form of 'chironomy' that is typically Egyptian and would have a strong visual effect, but on the preserved block there is no element of actual dance.

This idea of a privilege of eating before the king extended to some expedition leaders, that is, perhaps people equivalent to those standing in the registers above the eating sculptors in Fig. 4 (omitted from the figure for reasons of scale). A biographical inscription of a high official named Iny from about 2200 BCE states as much[9]:

> I was seated eating bread in the (royal) daily round,
> and great was His Person's satisfaction
> at seeing me eat, more than any peer of mine.

Comparable practices are known in a number of European cultures, where kings would eat by themselves or might invite a few favoured people to their tables[10]. Eating would thus be in the same space of celebration or favour as the ruler, but it would very often not be simultaneous. In Egypt the subordinates might eat first or in a pattern unrelated to the king's eating, as is implied by the statement that Iny was seen 'eating bread in the (royal) daily round', when the king's entourage, and perhaps the king himself would process through the palace complex and view what was happening.

Such privileges are paralleled from less absolutely exalted social contexts, no doubt in emulation of royal practice. Some elite men were shown with their personal sculptors, in scenes completed by music, dance, and presentation of food (see n. 8). The sculptor in the tomb of Rashepses at Saqqara (ca. 2400 BCE) has his hand in a tray of fruit, while the tomb owner,

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[8] E. g. Junker 1959, 41 fig. 4.
[9] Marcolin/Diego Espinel 2011, 606-607.
[10] See e. g. Ottomeyer/Völkel 2002.

who is the patron, is not shown eating[11]. In another tomb an artist is given special treatment in a trip to the marshland, where he has meat barbecued for him on the spot, as well as going on his own little fish-spearing expedition (Fig. 5). He is the eminent member of the group and is shown by himself. Another, lower-ranking special person, perhaps just an elderly peasant, lolls and fishes with a line from a boat that contains vast amounts of food. Here, the privilege seems to be to appear with food that is provided by others, so that the protagonist can simply receive it. We need not assume that these people would take the food by themselves: they may have less highly favoured companions who are not shown.

The setting of these banquets is seldom indicated visually. Where were banquets or receptions located? One answer seems to be in a colonnaded space, as is shown in the image of the high-ranking man with his sculptor (see n. 8; see also below for New Kingdom evidence from about a millennium later). More often they might be in a tent, or the colonnade might be extended with a tent. Tents can accommodate far more people than most houses, and they offer the advantage that one does not have to have guests in one's private quarters. A widespread title of the third millennium, held by both high-ranking people and subordinates, is 'controller of the tent', the latter being set up for hospitality[12]. There is even a hierarchy of related titles. The Instruction for Kagemni, a text of the early second millennium that is set fictionally in the late third millennium, describes how one should behave in such places[13]:

> The meek man prospers, and the honest man is favoured.
> The tent is open for the quiet man,
> and wide is access for the calm man.
> …
>
> If you sit with many people, scorn the bread you love!
> Restraining the heart is a brief moment.
> Gluttony is wrongdoing; people point at it.
>
> A cup of water quenches thirst.
> A mouthful of herbs makes the heart firm.

We need not take these joyless, moralistic, careerist prescriptions literally; rather, part of their purpose is to contrast with the realities of celebration. They are also significant in mentioning non-mortuary entertainment and thus confirming – as if it were needed – that what is shown in tombs relates to wider usages.

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[11] See n. 8; from Lepsius n. d., pl. 61a.
[12] Jones 2000, II, 736-737 (translates wrongly 'dining hall').
[13] After Parkinson 1997, 291.

Similarly, we should not be too literal in interpreting a pair of stelae from around 1800 BCE, one of which shows an extremely fat harpist performing before the owner of a stela and by implication his family, with a very brief text in a caption above[14]:

> O tomb, you were built for festivals,
> you were founded for good times.

His song relates to the tomb, but its message is probably that 'good times' are what a celebration with a harpist should contribute to. Both in his person and in what he says, he reminds people that they should eat, drink, and enjoy themselves because they will die, as later texts from comparable contexts make clear (discussed below). The second stela is the harpist's own, dedicated by friends, and it shows him reaching out his hand toward food, probably conveying a similar message.

The New Kingdom (ca. 1500-1300 BCE): other implications of banquets

From about 1500 BCE for a couple of centuries images of banquets were relatively common[15]. Most attestations are in tombs at Thebes, the oldest significant one being in the tomb of Tetiky from early in the period (Fig. 7, see below)[16], together with two very small chapels of similar date (discussed below). The best analysed is probably the banquet from the tomb of Nebamun (ca. 1400 BCE), fragments of which are in the British Museum and several other collections, which offers a particularly rich combination of guests, drink, food, music, and dancing[17].

Some captions to details in scenes of this type state in no uncertain terms that one should in particular get drunk, as in the tomb of Paheri at Elkab (ca. 1480 BCE), upstream from Thebes. It seems, however, that one should not make a mess of oneself or behave in an unseemly manner. A servant addresses a woman to whom he offers drink in a bowl (Fig. 6)[18]:

> For your ka[19]: imbibe to drunkenness.
> Celebrate. Hear what your companion says.

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[14] Simpson 1974, pl. 56; text: Sethe 1928, 87 no. 27a.

[15] Hartwig 2004, 12-13, 98-103; Harrington 2013, 113-121; Liao 2013, also citing possible forerunners.

[16] Davies 1925; Hofmann 2010.

[17] Parkinson 2008, 70-92.

[18] Naville/Tylor/Griffith 1894, pl. vii (overall context); detail presented here: Baines 2008, 107 with fig. 70.

[19] Vital force that takes the deceased into the next world and transmits heritage down the generations.

Do not pass out (?) wrongly.

Her companion, however, says:

Give me 18
jugs of wine!
What I want is to get drunk on the spot …

The servant in the group to the left warns a woman who is pushing away the cup he proffers that she should not 'slosh' the wine. These humorous captions are confined to a register of women and are perhaps intended to enliven the superficially staid tone of the rest.

This banquet is not quite what it might seem at first glance. Some of those depicted are the renowned local deceased ('true of voice'), notably Ahmose son of Ebana, the owner of a nearby tomb who had been an actor in major historical events a couple of generations earlier. The composition displays a hierarchy: the most important deceased are shown at a larger scale and the privileged sit on chairs, with couples seated together, whereas the other guests are divided by gender and squat on mats, as most Egyptians probably did for their meals. Guests or pairs of guests generally have tables before them, low for those on the ground, higher for those on chairs. Among the corpus of scenes the pattern of use of chairs developed over the period, with chair forms being distinguished for status and gender; similar pieces of furniture have been found in tombs, where they could have been deposited after funeral banquets or as tokens of banquets among the living[20].

A scene from about a century later, in the tomb of one – Djeserkareseneb – at Thebes, presents related content more explicitly[21]. The caption above the seated tomb owner says clearly that he is deceased: 'Sitting in the tent to delight the heart as when he was on earth, by TITLES, NAME', while women presenting a festive broad collar to him say: 'Join the perfect day (a term for a celebration), O TITLES'. Above a group of women who are showing respect through a gesture of pressing their hands together is another caption: 'A perfect day: One constantly recalls the perfection [of Amun] – how content is the heart! – and praise is given to the height of the sky before you, each one saying "our desire is to see them (?)" … O [TITLE, NAME] perpetually'. A group of female musicians and dancers is also present.

The focus of this banquet, as of many others, is on drinking more than eating; this is made clear by an array of wine vessels, garlanded with vine tendrils, bearing bunches of grapes that bring to mind the source of

[20] In a funeral procession: Lange/Hirmer 1968, pl. 171; from a tomb: Vassilika 2010. See in general Manuelian 1982.

[21] Theban Tomb 38: Davies 1963, pls. v–vi.

wine. One male guest displays effects of drink, vomiting into a vessel that has been set out in case of need, and the captions cited above show that drunkenness was expected. Vomiting, which is attested in a number of examples for both men and women, was evidently within accepted standards of behaviour for the occasion, but may also have been included in the scene as a piquant feature. To the modern viewer it contrasts markedly with the restrained poses of the figures – including the vomiting man – which is in keeping with the norms governing Egyptian images of elites. This contrast may not have been meant entirely seriously.

While wine drinking could break down barriers and encourage contact with relatives and associates in the next world – a contact that is documented explicitly in letters to the dead[22] – it was evidently valued for its own sake. One should not take the mortuary associations as showing that enjoyment was not a prime purpose of the occasion, as it would also be in banquets away from the tomb. The lesser emphasis on drink in the royal scene of Fig. 4, from about a millennium earlier, may suggest that more purely this-worldly occasions did not focus so much on breaking down barriers to communication, but conventions for representing celebrations may have changed without significant alteration in their character as events. The king's presence might also inhibit people's behaviour, although the name of a work crew on the Great Pyramid of Khufu, around a century earlier, was 'How drunk is Khufu!'[23]. Drunkenness was also valued in the cult of deities, as the attestation from around 1470 BCE of a 'porch of drunkenness' outside the temple of Mut in Thebes reminds us[24]. Much later, in the Graeco-Roman period, texts on ostraca probably from Hermopolis, midway between Memphis and Thebes, evoke celebrations involving eating, drinking, and sexual activity in relation to the cult of two goddesses[25].

Tents set up for banquets can be imagined from the decor of tomb interiors. From the Middle Kingdom (ca. 1900 BCE) onward ceilings of some tombs bore designs that evoke patterned fabrics and perhaps matting[26]. They are as richly coloured as the technology of the period allowed. The decoration of tomb walls is often framed by motifs inspired by edges of fabrics or tasselling of rugs, suggesting a compromise between pictorial content and wall hangings or walls made of fabrics. Tents would be temporary structures consisting of a frame covered with patterned and

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[22] E.g. Wente 1990, 210-220.

[23] Brunner 1954; see more broadly Brunner 1986.

[24] Bryan 2005, 182-183.

[25] Depauw/Smith 2004, with valuable discussion and references to other material.

[26] E. g. Shedid 1994, 21 fig. 24, 44 fig. 72.

perhaps quilted fabrics or skins. An alternative would be to have a natural setting under a tree or a vine – the latter being known for example in Assyrian art[27] – and this too is represented in more than one way in the ceilings and images in Theban tombs[28]. Shade could also be set up next to columned porticos; any banquet that did not take place after sunset would require some protection from the sun. Images of reed shelters are also common; these are smaller in scale but could offer an alternative, especially if a number of them were assembled for a banquet.

Banquets for the living might happen anywhere suitable, whereas those which celebrated the dead were probably held within or near the necropolis. The former type of banquet may be suggested by the setting shown in the tomb of Tetiky (Fig. 7)[29]. The owner and his wife are in a columned portico, facing a row of seated men followed by standing women, with these different poses expressing a hierarchy of the sexes. A second sub-register beneath, now almost entirely lost, included a figure of a servant girl ministering to the needs of a probably drunken man. No structure is indicated except the portico, but one would be necessary, and it might be supplied in a sense by decoration of the chamber, whose vaulted roof has a fabric-derived pattern centring on a depiction of a plank of fine imported wood[30]. Further along the upper sub-register of banqueters is a tree, under which sits another figure of Tetiky with two women, observing country life while being offered food and drink (Fig. 8).

The layout of Tetiky's tomb complex and the decoration of another of its elements may suggest a setting in the necropolis for a banquet (Fig. 9). At right angles to the main painted chamber—possibly a cult chamber—is a court with a small chamber, perhaps a store room, leading off it. A shaft with a raised surround in the middle of the court leads to the burial chamber. Opposite the shaft is a miniature vaulted chamber, two metres deep, 80 cm wide, and not much over a metre high[31]. This uninscribed space is decorated on the west wall with a banquet scene of three men flanked by two couples (Fig. 10); on the east wall is a vine trellis with a man picking grapes; on the largely destroyed south wall are a row of wine jars and an

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[27] E. g. Collins 2008, 136-137.

[28] Notably the underground chamber in the tomb of Sennefer, where part of the ceiling uses a rug-like pattern and part a vine; see e. g. Anonymous (ed.) 1988. This chamber is thematically close to the tombs of Tetiky and others discussed below.

[29] Davies 1925, pl. iv, mid; Hofmann 2010, pl. 6.

[30] Hofmann 2010, pl. 16a.

[31] Hofmann 2010, 50, terming the space a niche, following the original publication. It is, however, deeper than it is wide, and so not niche-shaped. East and south walls at the time of excavation: Carnarvon/Carter 1905, pl. III 2.

offering figure. The chamber's decoration may point to what the adjacent court would be used for, as well as indicating that this small space was a storage place for wine.

The court, which is relatively large, would be a suitable place for a banquet. The shaft in the middle would create a link to the spirits of the dead buried beneath (these tombs typically contained several burials). Tents set up for the occasion would not leave any trace that would have been recovered when the court was excavated in 1905. Eva Hofmann (see n. 31) remarks that the decoration of the small chamber is not that of a tomb chapel, but this is slightly misleading: while the prime decoration of tomb chapels centres on the mortuary cult, it also often includes banquet scenes. Communication with the dead, which is solicited by banquets, is an aspect of the cult but is not the central presentation of offerings. Hofmann also points to a larger chamber in the Western Valley of the Kings that contained among other objects pottery suggestive of a banquet near the tomb of Amenhotep III (ca. 1355 BCE). Such a banquet might perhaps have been held in tents near the tomb, with the chamber being used for storage and for discarded material[32]. The presence of this chamber is significant, because the associated tomb was purely otherworldly and was in principle sealed permanently after the burial, so that it could not have been used for banquets.

The banqueting in the tomb of Tetiky is partly paralleled by two tomb chapels of similar date, those of Amenemhat (no. 340) and of an unknown owner (no. 354)[33]. These too have the form of mudbrick vaults and so are unlike most Theban tombs. At two metres in their longer dimension, they are too small to have been used for rituals, and only one of them has a suitable space outside; perhaps in this case the funeral was conducted further away. In both tombs the decoration is restricted to banqueting and the funeral procession, as well as scenes of the deceased before gods in the lunettes of the vaults that are quite exceptional for the period. Both have vaulted recesses with images of wine jars above them, making the association of that feature with wine as explicit as in the tomb of Tetiky, but within the chapel rather than next to the courtyard. The best interpretation of this range of images is that it shows the complementary episodes of funeral and mourning, on the one hand, and the funeral banquet on the other hand. The ceiling of the tomb of Amenemhat bears a vine trellis pattern very similar to that on the east wall of the miniature chamber of Tetiky, while the ceiling of Tomb 354 has a detail of a wooden plank that is close to that in Tetiky's larger vaulted chamber.

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[32] Kondo 1995, 30-32.

[33] Cherpion 1999.

These compositions, which are different in character from the scenes in later tombs of the period, associate banquets with the funeral and therefore with the living, as also seems plausible for the chamber in the Western Valley, rather than focusing around communication between the living and the dead and festivals (see below). Connection between banquets and the funeral is also given by the depicted furniture, as indicated above.

Archaeological evidence for the use of tomb courts for banquets comes from deposits found in them, such as one reported for the tomb of Tjanuny (ca. 1400 BCE), which contained traces of plants, matting, and pottery blackened by burning[34]. These finds fit with the implications of the layout of the tomb of Tetiky and Tomb 354, but banquets could have been celebrated during the 'Perfect Festival of the Wadi', an annual ritual that brought people to commemorate their dead in association with the cult of the goddess Hathor, the patroness of the Theban necropolis[35].

The widespread assumption by scholars that banquets were set in the accessible chambers of tombs, which is somewhat implausible because many of the spaces are unsuitable, is argued against by the evidence of Tetiky and related tombs, as well as by the chamber in the Western Valley.

Other, probably non-funerary contexts for banquets are strongly suggested by the exceptional tomb of Amenemhat (no. 82, perhaps two generations after Tetiky); this includes a number of banquet scenes of varied character, one of them showing sculptors and thus perhaps looking back to models like the third millennium reliefs mentioned above[36].

A banquet could have marked the end of the funeral, as seems plausible for the chamber in the Western Valley. A connection between banquets and the funeral is also suggested by the furniture shown in funerary processions, which includes some of the same chair types as are depicted in banquets, types that are also attested by largely uncontexted finds from the necropolis (see n. 20).

The images of banquets have a function that is normal for pictures, to depict in one context something that would happen in another. Their evocation of a tented environment in the spaces themselves takes the tomb chamber some way toward being a symbolic tent, one of whose purposes would be banqueting, but it does not make it into a banqueting place. And although tomb forecourts are a very plausible setting for celebrating the dead, such events might also have been held in quite different locations.

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[34] Hartwig 2004, 12-13, with references.

[35] E.g. Bietak 2012; often termed the 'Festival of the Valley', but the 'valley' in question is not in the Nile valley but in the desert, and so a wadi.

[36] Davies/Gardiner 1915.

Despite these connections and implications of the images, one should beware of taking representations of banquets literally. The extreme instance of an idealized banquet is in the Theban tomb of Ramose, a contemporary of Amenhotep III and his successor Amenhotep IV/ Akhenaten (ca. 1360 BCE)[37]. The finely carved scene occupies the wall to the south (the premier side) as the visitor enters the tomb. A group of the highest-ranking officials in the land is shown, including some whose residence was Memphis, more than 600 kilometres to the north, and Amenhotep son of Hapu, the most prominent nonroyal individual of the period. Ramose and his wife sit among the others at the same scale, and he holds his hand up in a gesture of speech and perhaps of invitation to the feast. His wife and a number of the others are said to be 'in the necropolis', a rare extension to the normal designation 'true of voice' which signifies that a person is deceased or prospectively so. While many of the inscriptions are fragmentary and some were never carved, captions above two pairs contribute significant additional meaning:

> Receiving gifts daily that come forth from the presence of [Amun], being very pure, for the *ka* of the overseer of the horses of the Lord of the Two Lands, the King's Messenger in all foreign lands, the effective confidant of the Sovereign, enduring in favour before the Lord of the Two Lands, May, true of voice; his 'sister', his beloved, the favoured one of the goddess Mut Lady of Ishru, mistress of the house, Werel, true of voice.
>
> Being content with provisions daily from the offering-loaves of the Lord of the Gods, for the *ka* of the overseer of the seers? of [Amun], Kushy, true of voice.

This indicates that those depicted are to participate perpetually in the reversion of offerings, an institution in which what was presented to the gods, in this case Amun in the great temple of Karnak across the river from the Theban necropolis, was then offered to deceased elites, many of whom would possess statues in the temple, before being consumed by priestly personnel and others. This practice unifies the sacred landscape symbolically, but it is not known whether offerings themselves were brought to the necropolis, as seems to have happened with some consecrated floral bouquets[38]. Be that as it may, the captions show that this banquet scene does not signify any one occasion or context such as a festival. Rather, with all its

[37] Davies 1941, pls. viii–xix; Lange/Hirmer 1968, pls. 171, 173-177 (selection of figures); text cited Davies pl. viii, Lange and Hirmer pl. 173.

[38] Dittmar 1986, 118-121.

this-worldly finery it represents the aspiration to a perpetual social and religious communing of leading elites from the whole country in the next world as, no doubt, in this world.

The Ramose composition shows the height of order and of connection with the next world. A few years later, in the revolutionary reign of Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten (ca. 1355-1338) with its profound innovations in religion, the conventions posited above, as perhaps explaining why we have few pictures of eating in banquets, were reversed. This reversal went together with many others, some of which seem to show primarily that things were different, probably in part to shock audiences (so far as audience is a relevant concept). A composition in the tomb of the high official Huya at the new capital of el-Amarna shows Akhenaten, his queen Nefertiti, and his mother sitting and drinking in one scene, while in the matching one the king gnaws on a leg joint of meat and the queen on a duck[39]. Even here, however, the queen mother is not eating; she perhaps belonged to an older generation that would not accept to be depicted in this way. It is difficult to believe that this scene was not created both to defy convention and perhaps, since no non-royal people apart from servants are included, to set royalty apart from others (the presence of servants itself differs from much traditional practice). Moreover, the art of the period placed very heavy emphasis on food, which is in keeping with the character of this pair of scenes[40].

The setting of Akhenaten's intimate but hardly private banquet is given in the registers beneath, which show beneath each scene a retinue, food, vast amounts of wine, and musicians (see n. 41). Further beneath are very fragmentary landscapes of agriculture and countryside, including in the better preserved example a vine and a meal left for a subordinate – perhaps remotely comparable with the Old Kingdom example of Fig. 5. It seems thus that the feast is imagined as being either set in the country or connected with it in an idealized way – neither in the palace nor in the necropolis. Barry Kemp (see n. 40) suggests that feasts would be held in the palace complex and identifies a suitable location, but this is not incompatible with the rural ideal implied by the tomb relief. Other areas in the palace also celebrated the world of nature.

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[39] Davies 1905, pls. iv-vii.

[40] See Kemp 2012, 145-146, with brief discussion of banqueting. His figure does not reproduce the rural compositions beneath the scene of Akhenaten and Nefertiti. The parallel he cites in the decree of Akhenaten's fourth successor Horemheb is not as close as he implies. While the latter text is significant for relations between the king and his guards, who are to be fed well and rewarded, the very broken passage does not certainly refer to a banquet.

Later periods (after ca. 1100 BCE)

In the period after Akhenaten, tomb art gradually moved its focus from this world to the next, and few banquets or related events were depicted. The chief relevant genre that proliferated in the late New Kingdom (ca. 1300-1100 BCE) was the harpist's song (mentioned above)[41]. Images of harpists are also known from later periods, but without associated songs.

The songs mobilized a discourse about the fleeting character of this life that could either promote the importance of the next world or assert that provision for it is vain, because no one has returned from there. One song thematizes this dissonance explicitly, saying that the message of the cynical songs should not be accepted[42]. Although banquet scenes were hardly included in tombs in the late New Kingdom, visual evidence from earlier in the period presents the setting of harpists' songs in banquets where love poems were probably also performed – banquets that no doubt related both to this world and to the next. People think about death while drinking, eating, and enjoying themselves, and in many cultures they are encouraged to engage more intensively in these activities by the prospect that in future they will no longer be able to indulge. The same idea is present even in the highly moralistic context of the tomb of Petosiris at Tuna el-Gebel (ca. 300 BCE), where a rather broken inscription states that one should drink to inebriation, contrasting this with the inevitability of death[43].

Here, one can link Egyptian and much later classical views of the importance of enjoyment and its connection with confronting mortality. Herodotus (2, 78) says that at Egyptian parties model coffins and skeletons would be carried around to encourage the revellers to drink and celebrate[44]. Such a practice would fit with the themes of the harpist's songs, and Katherine M. D. Dunbabin has extended earlier discussions of small figures of skeletons, most of which appear to date to the Graeco-Roman period, to argue that these represent the kind of objects that would be circulated at parties, although extant examples almost certainly come from tombs[45]. Moreover, the context of death and funerals, which brings people together in unwonted groups, is itself a form of celebration, and it is often accompanied by drinking and feasting. Perhaps the skeleton figures could have been used then – but they could also relate to the notion of the

41 Assmann 1977; version in a collection on a literary papyrus: Fox 1985, 345-7.
42 Kákosy/Fábián 1995, esp. 219.
43 Lefebvre 1923-1924, I, 161, II, 90-1 (text 127).
44 See e. g. Lloyd 1976, 335-357.
45 Dunbabin 1986.

deceased's 'shadow' and its rebirth. Many New Kingdom funeral processions are depicted as lined by booths that shelter wine jars in particular. The jars are overturned as the coffin passes and the booths taken down, the whole process being accompanied by extravagant gestures of grief[46]. While actions of this sort have a specifically funerary meaning, notably in the destruction of value accompanying the end of a life, they probably also point to heavy consumption of wine as part of the funeral process.

A wide range of evidence for conviviality survives from the late second and first millennia, especially in texts[47]. It is not possible to treat that material here. Instead, my concluding examples come from two stelae from the reign of Cleopatra VII Philopator, shortly before the Roman conquest deprived the indigenous elite of wealth, restricting the display of traditional Egyptian culture. Taimhotep, the second wife of the high priest of Memphis, died in 42 BCE. Her funerary stela bears one of the best known ancient Egyptian texts (first published in the 1830s), the content of which is profoundly steeped in older Egyptian high culture. The following passage probably relates both to funerary laments and to the tradition of harpists' songs, but it is cast as a dirge from the next world addressed to the living, the latter being the setting for numerous Egyptian biographical texts[48]:

> Oh my brother, my husband,
> my companion, great controller of craftsmen:
>
> may your heart not tire in drinking and eating,
> drunkenness and sexual pleasure.
>
> Have a good day and follow your heart all the time.
> Do not place care in your heart.
>
> Years snatched upon earth are good.
> (But) as for the west[49], (it is) a land … darkness.
> It is miserable to dwell in for those who are there.

[46] E. g. Priese 1991, 136-137 no. 82.

[47] See e. g. Kees 1938 (exhortation in a priestly biography to eat, drink, and enjoy life); Lichtheim 1980, 13-24 (the same text in translation and a comparable inscription); Caminos 1958, 97-104 (vast scale of celebratory offerings that would be recycled for the benefit of the living); Hoffmann/Quack 2007, 160-162 (tale of the drunken king Amasis as the setting for a cycle of stories).

[48] British Museum, EA 147. Photograph: Walker/Higgs 2001, 187 no. 193; translations e. g. Lichtheim 1980, 62-63; Panov 2010. My rendering here is based on a new facsimile by Richard Parkinson, for which I am very grateful.

[49] The realm of the necropolis and the dead.

Such a text, or an elaboration on its themes, might be performed in relation to the funeral, making explicit the paradoxes of death and its relation to the living group, in a form of licence that would temper the sense of grief. This particular piece was commissioned by the widower and is stated at the end to have been composed by a relative. Whether or not its content connected with normal funeral practices, one might say that Taimhotep's husband, Psherenptah, may have taken the advice attributed to his deceased wife too much to heart, because he died just eighteen months later. His biographer – the author of Taimhotep's text, this time aided by his son who carved the stela – attributed to Psherenptah a different, more pragmatic view of the good life as he looked back to the time of Ptolemy XII Neos Dionysos ('Auletes', 80-51 BCE; for the stela see Fig. 11)[50]:

> When the king reached Memphis,
> on every occasion that he travelled south
> or travelled north to inspect the Two Lands—
>
> when he stopped at the ? of Ankhtawy (?),
> he went to my temple
>
> together with his officials and his wives and royal children
> and all his possessions, resting at leisure,
>
> as well as passing by at the festivals of the gods and goddesses who are in Khanefer,
> inasmuch as love of me was in the heart of the Lord of the Two Lands.
> He distinguished (me) before all his [officials, or similar].

This passage suggests that banquets and celebrations would happen also around the world of the temples, as has been mentioned above, surely among numerous settings in which such events could take place. The occasions mentioned in Psherenptah's text would have had a strongly political character. As the highest-ranking representative of indigenous culture in late Ptolemaic Egypt, he might have been responsible for entertainment in more traditional styles, although nothing is known of the character of such events or of how far they would have mixed Egyptian and Greek customs. In any case, his evocation of receiving the king and his entourage, although without close parallel from the dynastic period,

[50] British Museum EA 886, from Saqqara. See Walker/Higgs 2001, 192. No modern edition available. On this passage, see Derchain 1998. The Ankhtawy and Khanefer mentioned in the text are two ancient names for Memphis, the latter extremely learned. My rendering is based on a study of the original.

complements the third millennium mentions and images of association with the king that were cited in an earlier section.

Conclusion

Whereas in much of this article I have used visual evidence to suggest something of how banquets might be imagined, this is not possible for Taimhotep and Psherenptah: only the texts are available, although other biographies show that their preoccupations were by no means unique[51]. As is normal, on neither the wife's nor the husband's stela does the scene at the top, which is in a sense the focus of the whole, indicate anything about the two different styles of conviviality that are evoked in the texts inscribed underneath.

Egyptologists of an earlier generation argued correctly, against popular imagination of a death-obsessed society, that the ancient Egyptians loved life and for that reason represented much of it in their tombs, so that they could take it with them into the next world. While that approach has its problematic aspects, its premise that what is shown in tombs relates to institutions of this life is surely correct. In the near-absence of suitable archaeological sites, tombs constitute the core sources for understanding Egyptian institutions of conviviality, supported by some biographical and literary texts.

I have given only a very selective view of the material, focusing in particular on the issue of why some periods produce one style of evidence and others another. What may not have emerged but bears emphasis is how for ancient Egypt, as for other complex societies or indeed for so many social interactions of any type, who one eats and drinks with, what conventions surround these most fundamental human activities, and how one can escape from everyday conventions through what is consumed and how it is done – all these are essential questions for understanding ancient societies and what held them together. As with so much else, it is also essential to avoid taking these matters too earnestly. Although things can go badly awry, convivial occasions are meant to be enjoyed. And one thing the Egyptian sources convey especially well is the spirit of enjoyment, often laced with humour in its depiction and description. That is as it should be.

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[51] See e. g. Jansen-Winkeln 1997; Depauw/Smith 2004.

made very valuable criticisms of drafts. Alison Wilkins most kindly worked on a number of illustrations at very short notice.

Illustrations

1. Slab stela of Nefer, from Giza Mastaba G 1207. 4th dynasty (ca. 2500 BCE). Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, Berkeley, 6-19801. Epigraphic copy. Copyright Peter Der Manuelian, used with kind permission.

2. Tomb of Ti at Saqqara, south wall of corridor, above entrance into chapel. Late 5th dynasty (ca. 2350 BCE). After Epron/Daumas/Wild 1939-1966, I, pl. lvi.

3. Tomb of Nefer and Kahay at Saqqara, west wall, south section, scene above false door of Kahay. Late 5th dynasty (ca. 2350 BCE). After Moussa/ Altenmüller 1971, pl. 32. Courtesy of Deutsches Archäologisches Institut.

4. Causeway of Sahure at Abusir, blocks with scene of the king with his court receiving the expedition to Punt. Early 5th dynasty (ca. 2450 BCE). After el-Awady 2009, pl. 6.

5. Tomb of Pepyankh Henikem at Meir, room B, east wall, north scene, bottom sub-registers, left section. Mid-6th dynasty (ca. 2225 BCE). After Blackman 1953, pl. xxx.

6. Tomb of Paheri at Elkab, south ('east') wall, detail of female guests in banquet scene. Early 18th dynasty (ca. 1470 BCE). After Naville/Tylor et al. 1894, pl. vii.

7. Tomb of Tetiky at Thebes, main vaulted chamber, north wall, upper register, left section. Early 18th dynasty (ca. 1500 BCE). After Davies 1925, pl. iv.

8. Tomb of Tetiky at Thebes, main vaulted chamber, north wall, upper register, middle section. Early 18th dynasty (ca. 1500 BCE). After Davies 1925, pl. iv.

9. Tomb of Tetiky at Thebes, schematic plan. Redrawn by Alison Wilkins after Carnarvon/Carter 1912, pl. ii.

10. Tomb of Tetiky at Thebes, banqueting scene on west wall of miniature vaulted chamber. After Carnarvon/Carter 1912, pl. iii, 1.

11. Stela of Psherenptah, probably from a mortuary chapel at Saqqara. Reign of Cleopatra VII Philopator, 41 BCE. British Museum EA 886. Courtesy of museum.

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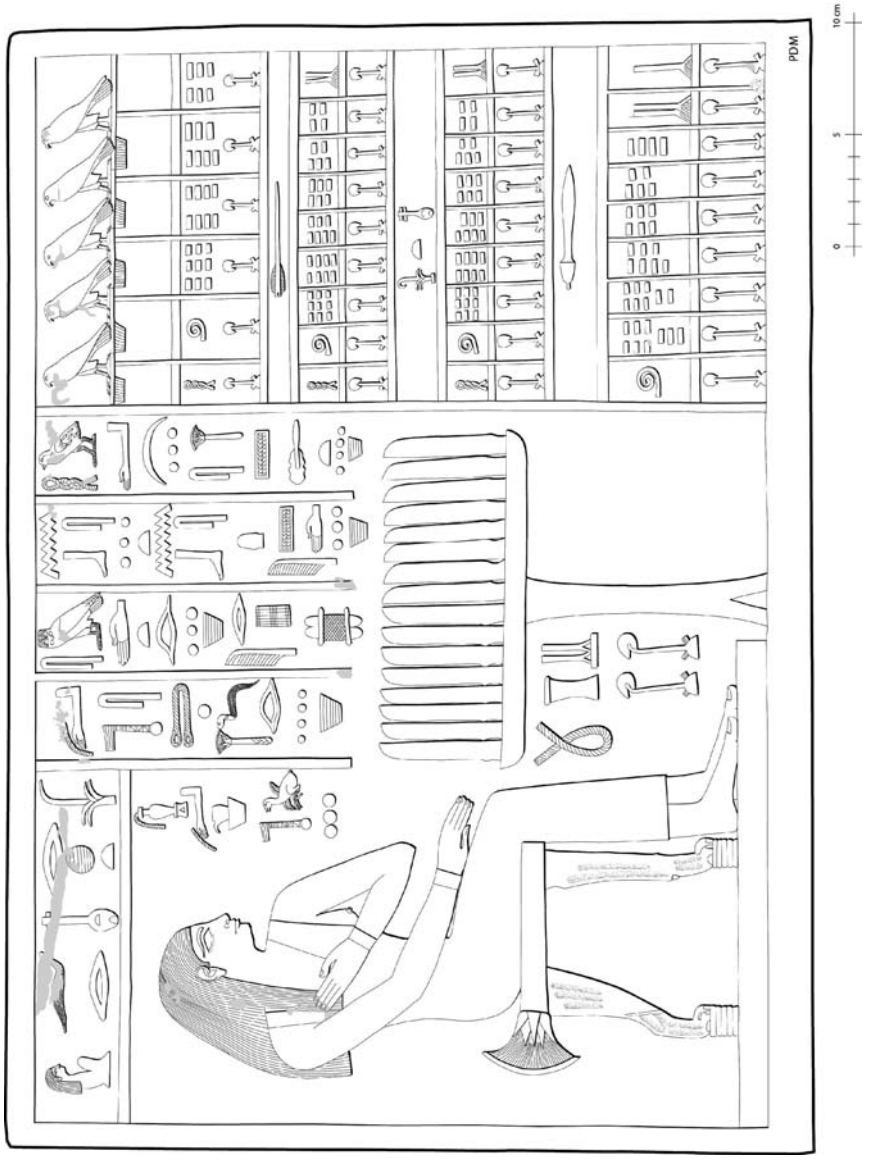

Fig.1.

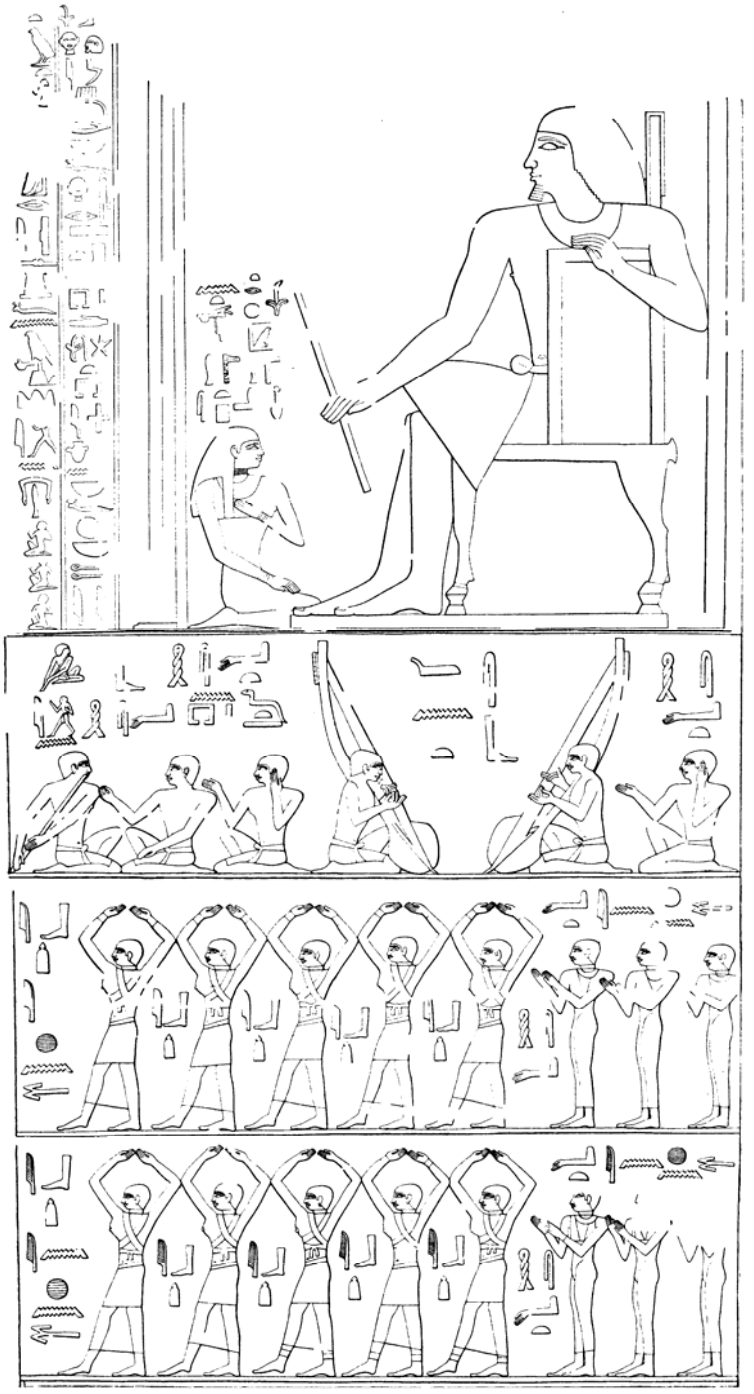

Fig. 2.

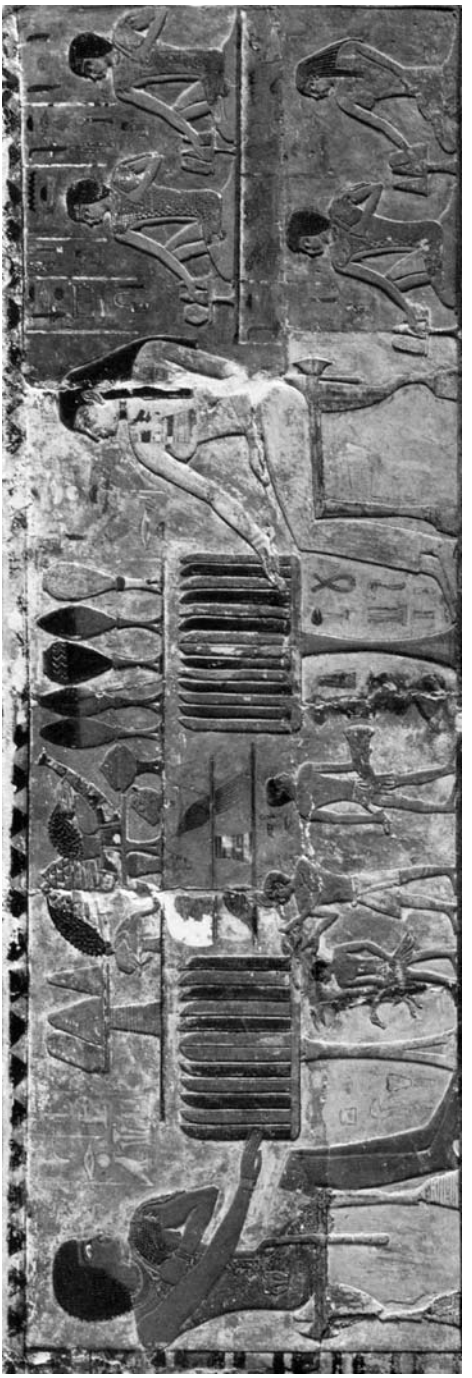

Fig.3.

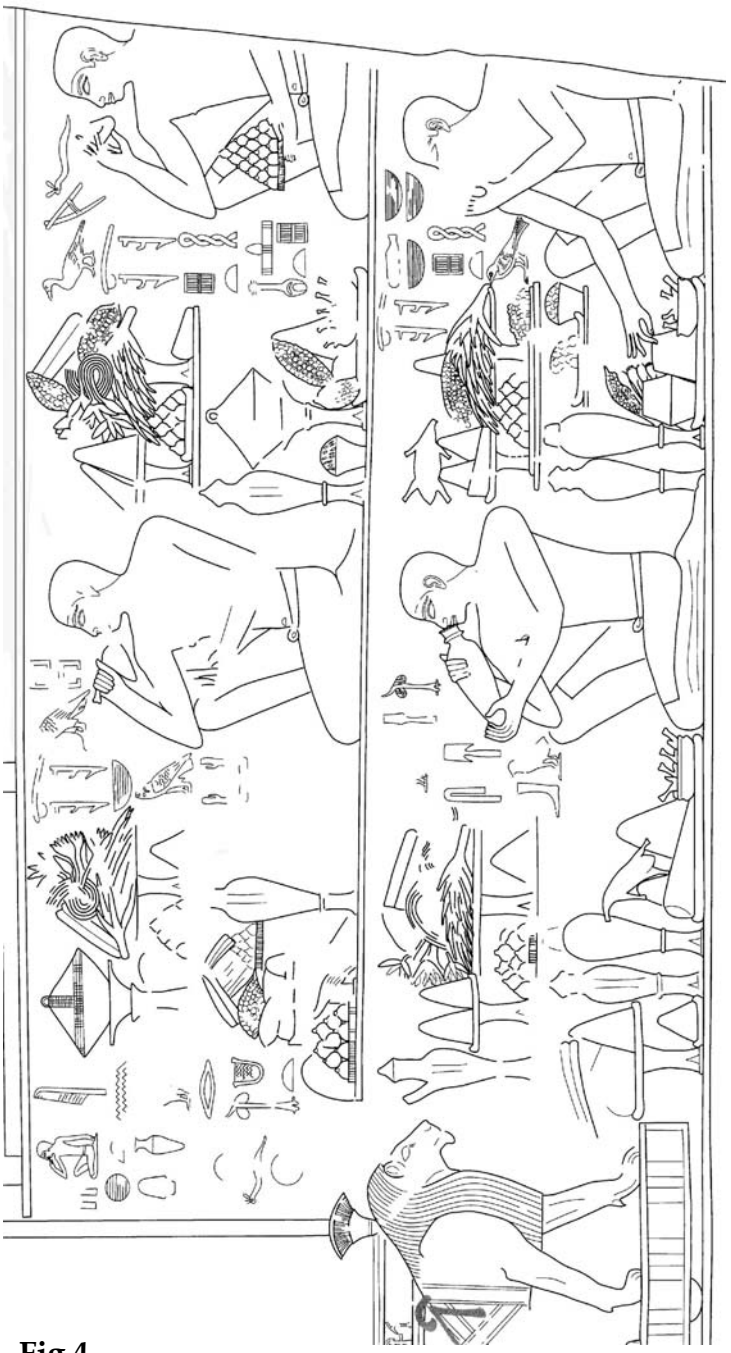

Fig.4.

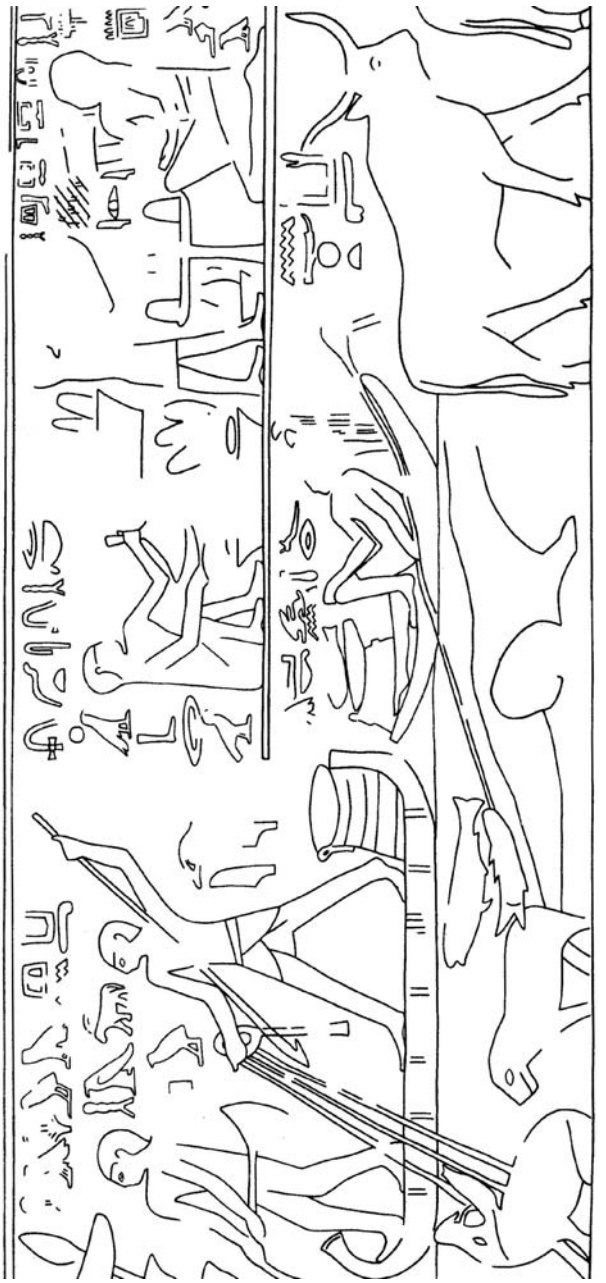

Fig.5.

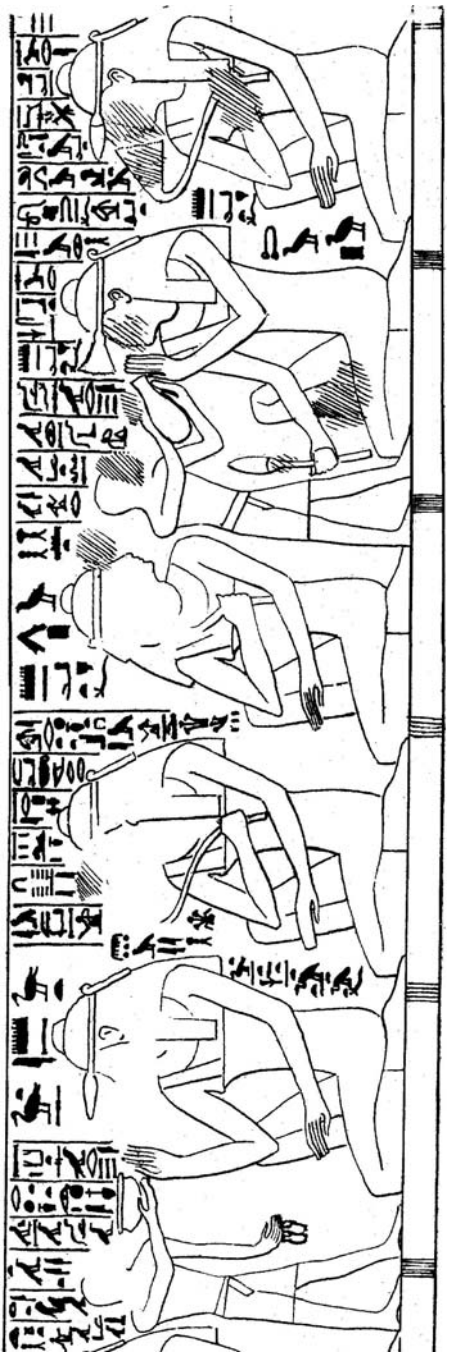

Fig.6.

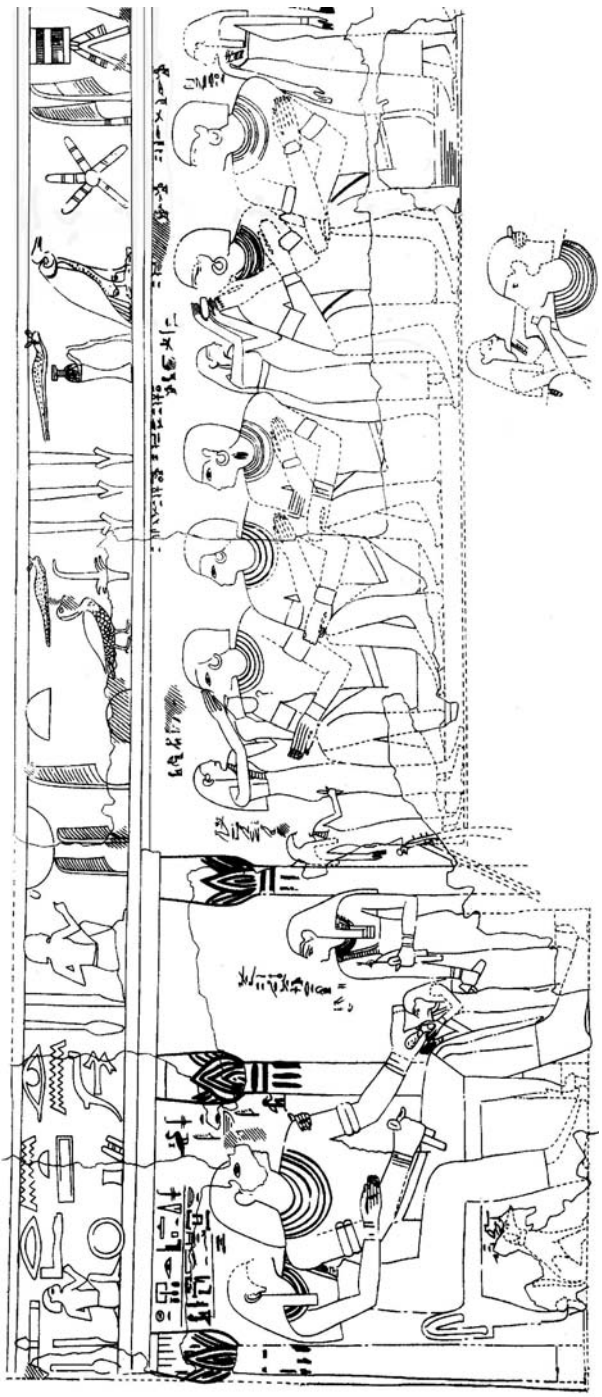

Fig.7.

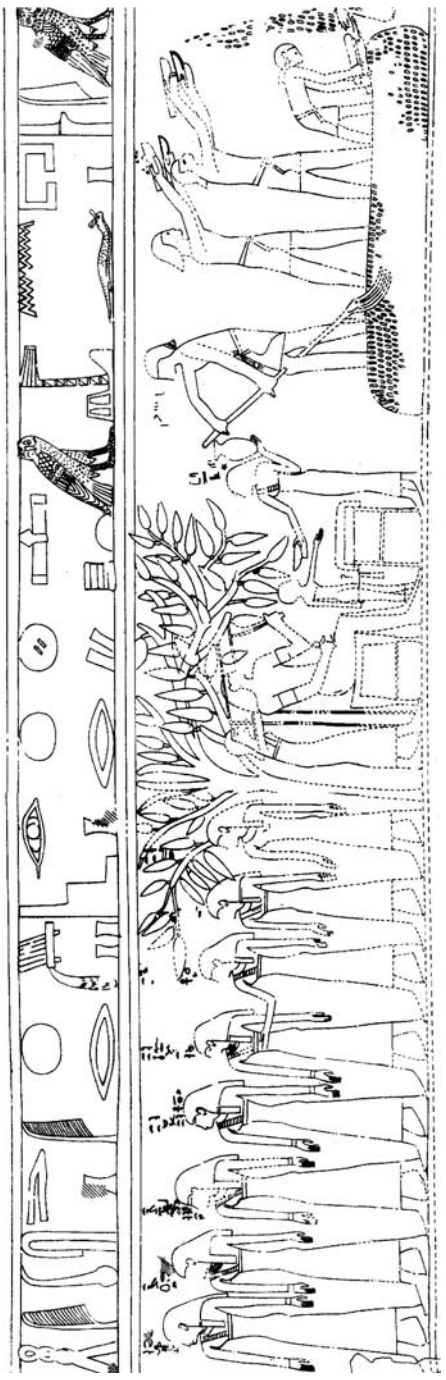

Fig.8.

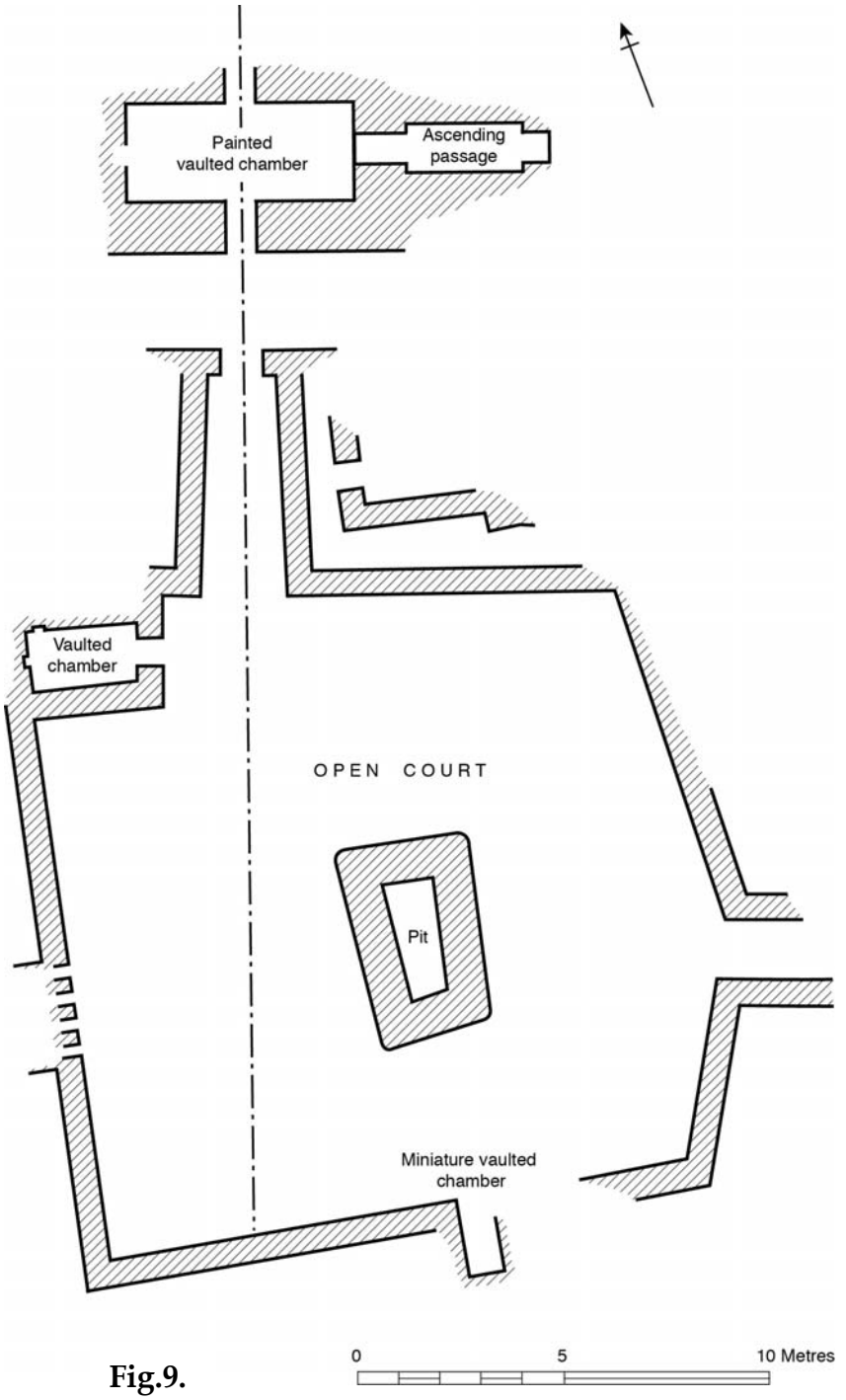
Painted
vaulted chamber
Ascending
passage
Vaulted
chamber
OPEN COURT
Pit
Miniature vaulted
chamber
0
5
10 Metres

Fig.9.

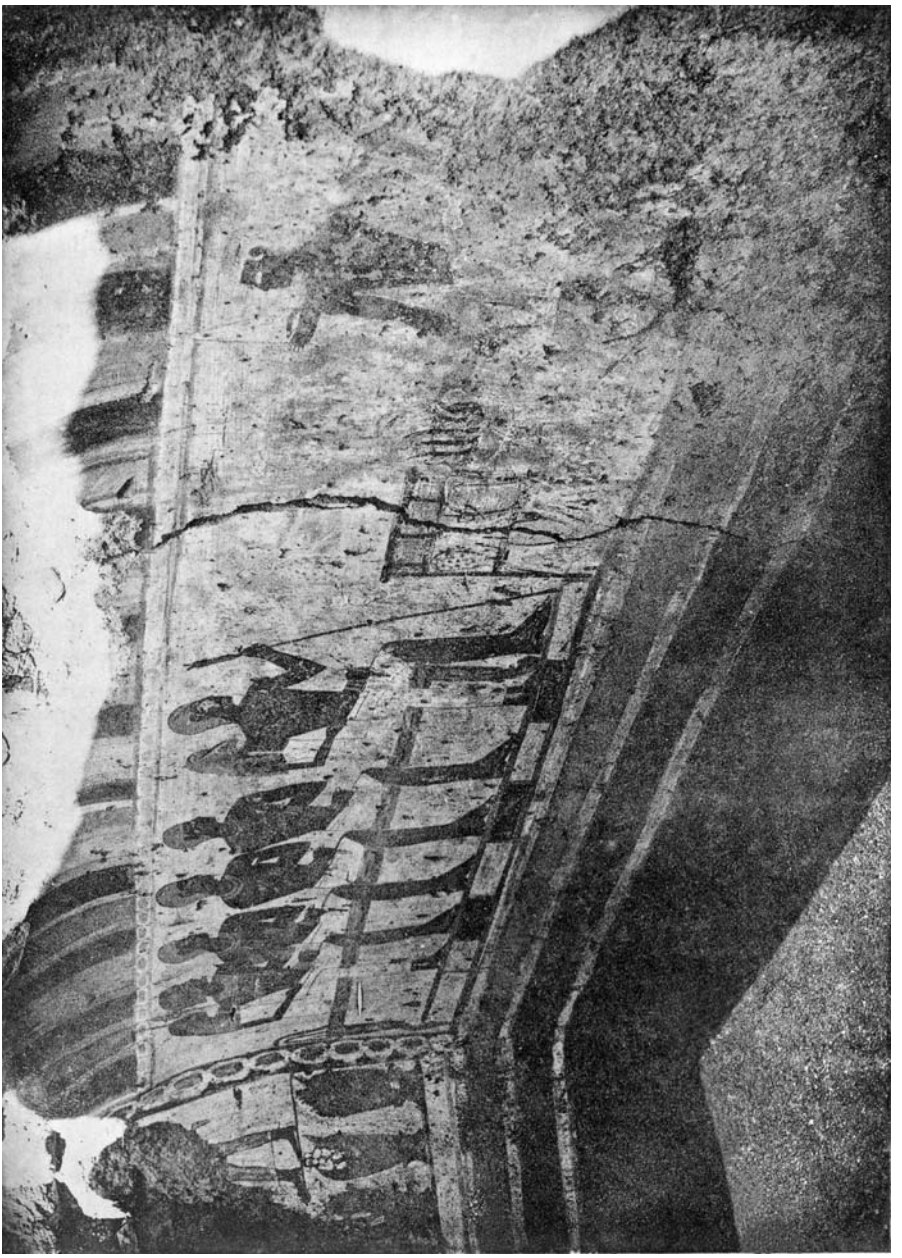

Fig.10.

Fig.11.