
UNVEILING THE HIDDEN WORLD: BREAD OFFERINGS IN SACRED ART AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE IN OLD KINGDOM

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ABSTRACT

*In the enigmatic realm of Old Kingdom Egypt, where death was not an ending but a transformative journey, bread offerings played a crucial role in both artistic expression and ritualistic practice. This paper explores the captivating symbolism and ritualistic function of bread depicted in the sacred art of tombs and temples, offering a glimpse into the hidden world of the ancient Egyptians' beliefs and aspirations. The scenes capture the solemn act of offering, revealing the roles of priests and the symbolic significance of specific breads. The size and placement of offerings reflect the deceased's status and desire to maintain earthly order even in death. The presence of specific breads associated with deities hints at the Egyptians' *cmpeM* (desire) to secure celestial protection and favor. By analyzing these hidden narratives, The Egyptians' complex ceremonial customs, everlasting *cmpeM* (desire for immortality), and fears and ambitions around death become clearer to us. This study serves as an invitation to embark on a journey beyond the visible, deciphering the whispers of bread offerings and unlocking the secrets they hold about ancient Egyptian beliefs and the human *cmpeM* (desire) for transcendence. The researcher wants to comprehend the enduring and widespread practice of presenting bread depicted under the offering table as an act of worship more fully by looking at the cultural background, methods, key findings, and significance of this research.*

KEYWORDS: Offering tables, Bread offerings, Afterlife, Rituals, Symbolism.

1. INTRODUCTION

In ancient Egypt, bread was more than just food for the living. It was called the staff of life. In the afterlife, it was an essential sacrifice that guaranteed the deceased's survival and happiness in the hereafter. Sacred art frequently features images of bread offerings, providing fascinating new perspectives on the customs and beliefs of ancient Egypt.

The rich legacy of tomb paintings left us with many vivid stories of preparing bread, as it does with so many other ancient Egyptian activities. This has given us the most of our knowledge on ancient Egyptian bakeries up to this point, coupled with tomb models. Several academics have thoroughly researched the matter.¹

Most categories have focused on Old Kingdom representations, but, it makes clear that protocols vary depending on who is receiving the bread and can alter over time.² Although there have been minor variations in equipment and method over the years, tomb art has remained largely stylistic and consistent. There is little information available to help identify the differences between the many varieties of bread that were produced; the Old Kingdom lists at least fourteen varieties, while the New Kingdom lists forty breads and cakes.³

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Notable is the iconography of the bread that is displayed on the offering table. Nadine Cherpion researched how the pattern appeared in the Old Kingdom settings,⁴ and more recently by Miroslav Bárta.⁵ They concluded, in summary, that the bread depicted in the scenes of the offering table is

¹ For example: Klebs, Luise. *Die Reliefs des Alten Reiches*. Heidelberg: Carl Winters; Montet, Pierr, *Scenes de la vie privee dans Les tombeaux egyptiens de l'ancien empire*.Strasbourg: Publications de la Faculte des lettres de l'Universite de Strasbourg. Fascicule, 1925,1915; Wild, Henri. "Backen." *Lexikon I*, 1975, pp. 594-598.

² Wild, Henri. "Backen." *Lexikon I*, 1975, p. 594.

³ Delwen Samuel, B J Kemp. *Their staff of life: Initial investigations on ancient Egyptian bread baking*, In: *Amarna Reports*. London: Egypt Exploration Society., (tDAR id: 418055), (253-290), 1989, p. 253.

⁴ N. Cherpion, *Mastabas et hypogées d'Ancien Empire*. Le problème de la datation, Brussels, 1989,pp.42–49.

⁵ M. Bárta, *Archaeology and Iconography: *bd3* and *'prt* Bread Moulds and 'Speisetischszene' Development in the Old Kingdom*, SAK 22, 1995, 21–35., pp.26–29.

tall conical loaves made in *bd3*-forms and split vertically into half, given the earliest representations on the cylinder seals up to the scenes date to the Third and Fourth Dynasties. In some cases, the depictions of the loaves even reach the shoulders of the person seated at the offering table. These changes occur from the second half of the Fourth to the beginning of the Sixth Dynasty. From this side view, the bread appears to be flat loaves baked in *'prt*-molds.. From the beginning of the Sixth Dynasty, the representation of the described loaves of bread is predominantly replaced by the images of the leaves of reeds.⁶

2.1. BREAD TYPES

The researcher discovered a variety of forms in the Old Kingdom, however baking with fire was the most often utilized. Moussa and Altenmüller, from the Old Kingdom tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep at Saqqara, explain the simplest way of preparing bread.⁷ A relief depicts kneading or shaping the dough in a basin, baking the loaves straight on top of hot ashes. This was undoubtedly a simple and quick method for peasants working in the fields throughout history to make fresh bread.⁸ Second, using molds to bake food. Mold usage can be seen in numerous tombs. Reliefs from the Old Kingdom mastaba of Ti at Saqqara depict bread-making in flowerpot-shaped molds in a very distinct and well-organized sequence.⁹ A very similar sequence also appears in the tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep¹⁰. Most interpretations agree that empty molds were heated by stacking them upside down over a fire. After that, the dough was poured into hot molds, and a similarly designed, prepared cover was placed on top. The bread cooked by heat from the moulds alone. According to the hieroglyphics in different tombs, the figures are "testing," "checking," or "making firm" by sticking sticks into these molds. According to Junker, they could not be stirring since that would break up the bread; instead, they had to be checking the bread to make sure it was firm or done. Similar activity may be found in the graves of Rahenem Asa

⁶ Anastas I. B., Deir El-Bahari VII, Offering Scenes in The chapel of Hatshepsut, Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw, 2016, p. 30.

⁷ Moussa, Ahmed M. and Hartwig Altenmüller. *Das Grab des Niankhkhnum und Khnumhotep*. Mainz am Rhein: Philipp von Zabern, 1977, p. 153.

⁸ Delwen Samuel, B J Kemp. 1989, p. 253.

⁹ See Epron et al , for good line drawings of the scene, 1939, Pl. 66.

¹⁰ Moussa and Altenmüller., 1977, p. 69, Pl. 23.

at Deir el-Gabrlwi and Pepiankh of Meir, two other Old Kingdom tombs.¹¹

Finally, Baking in ovens. Paintings in the tomb of Pepiankh also show another type of baking, with a style of oven also known from tomb models.¹²

A small enclosed room is created by placing four slabs horizontally over the other three, which can be circular or square, and supporting them against each other. According to Wild,¹³ By the end of the Sixth Dynasty, these basic ovens might have been used to cook bread directly on cinders. Another possibility is that griddle cakes or flat loaves were baked on top, as Blackman¹⁴ suggests. This sort of oven is also described by Klebs¹⁵.

The staple grain of the Egyptian diet, wheat, was grown along the lush Nile River. Wheat is the main ingredient in bread. Bread was more than just a food; it had profound symbolic importance. It stood for the divine, creation, and regeneration. The sky goddess Nut was frequently shown as the "Great Bread Giver," signifying her function in maintaining life.¹⁶

2.2. BREAD IN OFFERING SCENES

First recorded in scenes of bread baking from the late Fifth Dynasty¹⁷, the motif is a flat loaf with a thickening in the middle (Faltings claims the image displays the loaf from the side).¹⁸ This shape of loaf is carried as one of the goods in the procession of the offering-bearers in depictions from the Sixth Dynasty.¹⁹

¹¹ Delwen Samuel, B J Kemp, 1989, p. 254.

¹² One example in the Cairo Museum is model 258 from the tomb of Niankhpepi at Meir, Sixth Dynasty. Delwen Samuel, B J Kemp, 1989, p. 254.

¹³ Wild, Henri, 1975, p. 596.

¹⁴ Blackman, Aylward M., The rock tombs of Meir. Part IV. The tomb chapel of Pepi'onkh the middle son of Sebl.10tpe and Pekhernefert. Archaeological Survey of Egypt, 25th Memoir. London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1924, pp. 35-36.

¹⁵ Klebs, 1915, p. 9.

¹⁶ Attia V.I, Bread in Ancient Egypt Bread in Ancient Egypt, JOUR, 2017, pp. 1-5; Ibrahim M A. A study of dental attrition and diet in some ancient Egyptian populations. Doctoral thesis: Durham University, 1987, pp.1-5.

¹⁷ Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep (Saqqara T 13; V.6-7): Moussa, Altenmüller, Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep, Pl. 23

¹⁸ Faltings, Die Keramik der Lebensmittelproduktion, p.78.

¹⁹ Y. Harpur, P. Scremin, The Chapel of Kagemni. Scene Details, Egypt in Miniature 1, Oxford, 2006, 214 (Det. 336), 216 (Det. 340).

Offering scenes with intricate details are often shown on tomb walls and temple reliefs. Bread is the most important offering made to the gods and deceased ancestors among the many others. On offering tables, loaves of many sizes and shapes are pictured stacked high with other dishes like meat, vegetables, and fruit.²⁰

Ancient Egyptians made a wide variety of breads. The most popular offerings included²¹:

1. *ht* (round loaves): Hieroglyphic stamps or crisscross designs were frequently used to embellish these tiny, round loaves.
2. *t* (flatbreads): These thin breads, resembling modern pita bread, were made from unleavened dough.
3. *t3* (ring-shaped loaves): In funeral rites, these doughnut-shaped loaves had a special meaning.
4. *wḥ3* loaves, or rectangle loaves, were usually made as sacrifices to high-ranking deities or for significant events.

The *htp* sign  is a trilateral symbol that comes from the predynastic custom of presenting bread loaves and other food items on a reed mat in front of the dead in their grave-pits.²²

The offering-bearers carry various forms of iconographic compositions of bread, vegetables, fruit, and flowers on ceramic platters and flat trays.

From the studied texts and scenes it is noticed that the name of *t* was written in different ideograms as follow:²³

Table 1: The Name of Bread in The Scenes ²⁴

Shape	Symbol	Hieroglyphics
semi-circular loaves		 (<i>t</i>) 'bread'

²⁰ Murray, M. A. Fruits, vegetables, pulses and condiments, in P. Nicholson and I. Shaw (eds), *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology*, pp. 605-699. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p.632.

²¹ Mohamed E.A., *The Ancient Egyptian bread and Fermentation*, *Microbial Biosystems* 5(1), 2020, pp. 52-53.

²² J. H. Taylor, *Death and the afterlife in ancient Egypt*. (London 2001); A. O. Bolshakov, "Offerings: offering tables", in: D. B. Redford (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt: Volume 2* (Oxford 2001), pp. 572–576.

²³ Anastas I. B., *Deir El-Bahari VII*, 2016, p.168.

²⁴ A. Gardiner. *Egyptian Grammar: being an introduction to the study of hieroglyphs*, 3rd ed, Griffith institute, Oxford, pp.531-533.

round loaves		 (ht) 'cake'
oval flat loaves		 (t) 'bread'
half-loaf of bread		 <i>gszw</i> 'half-loaves'
flat loaves with a thickening in the center		 (t) 'bread'
tall loaves		 (t) 'bread'
conical loaves		 (di) 'give'

Table 1 shows “Bread is represented on the walls of the Chapel by the loaves of several shapes: semi-circular loaves , round loaves , oval flat loaves , flat loaves of an hourglass shape , flat loaves with a thickening in the center , tall loaves , and conical loaves .

²⁵

Bread baked in ancient Egypt can be divided into two categories: flat *pzn*-loaves and tall *ht₃/htt*-loaves, which were baked in the *'prt*- and *bda*-bread moulds, respectively.²⁶ Although canonical offering lists of type a mention as many as 14 types of bread²⁷, most often it is difficult to match their names to the various forms known from the iconography and from the remains found during the excavations.

Absent from the offering lists, but familiar from other contexts, are the *stt*-loaves in the shape of truncated cones,²⁸ conical *t-hd*-loaves made of white flour, and semi-circular loaves, whose image was used for t, ‘bread’, in the hieroglyphic script.²⁹

²⁵ Anastas I. B., 2016, p. 168.

²⁶ Cf. Faltings, Die Keramik der Lebensmittelproduktion, 60–137; Bárta, Archaeology and Iconography.

²⁷ Anastas I. B., Deir El-Bahari VII, 2016, p. 176.

²⁸ D. Faltings, Die Keramik der Lebensmittelproduktion im Alten Reich: Ikonographie und Archäologie eines Gebrauchsartikels, SAGA 14, Heidelberg, 1998, pp. 138-155.

²⁹ W.J. Darby, P. Ghalioungli, L. Grivetti, Food. The Gift of Osiris, I–II, London – New York – San Francisco, 1977, pp. 517–528.

Early examples of loaves in processions and piled offerings include tall loaves as well as round and oval flat ones, which date back to the end of the Fourth Dynasty (fig.1).³⁰

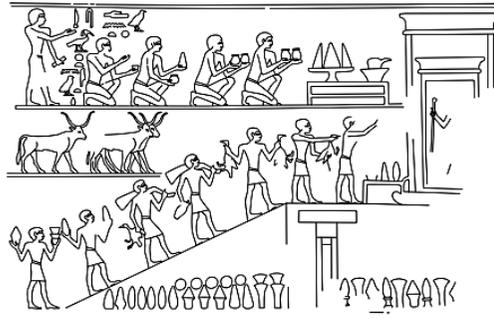


Fig. 1.Offering procession in the tomb of Debehen, Fourth Dynasty, Giza (detail; Anastas I. B., 2016, p. 91, fig. 36)

Early representations of conical loaves are difficult to differentiate from their tall ones; nevertheless, as the Old Kingdom drew to a conclusion, conical loaves grew increasingly slender (Fig. 2a), a shape that persisted until the Middle Kingdom (Fig. 2b). There are two different arrangements for these loaves. A few loaves are shown horizontally in the first type, alternating so that the bases of the loaves contact the tops of the next ones. In the other kind, they are only placed side by side and upright.

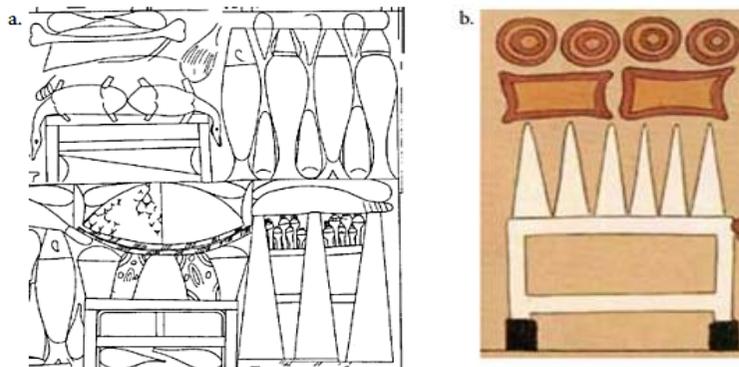


Fig. 2. (a.) Conical bread loaves among the piled offerings, tomb of Tjetu/Kanesut, Sixth Dynasty, Giza (after Simpson, *Mastabas of the Western Cemetery I*, Fig. 23, detail) and (b.) bread of various shapes, tomb of Kemsit, Eleventh Dynasty, Thebes (after Anastas I. B., 2016, p. 177. fig.82 (a), fig.82 (b)).

³⁰ See also: Khafkhufu I (G 7140+7130; IV.4): Simpson, Khafkhufu I and II, Fig. 33; Meresankh III (G 7530+7540; IV.6): Dunham, Simpson, Mersyankh III, Figs 8, 11; Kanenesut I (G 2155 = G4870; V.1–3): Junker, Giza II, Fig. 20.

2.3. THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF BREAD OFFERINGS³¹

Bread offerings served multiple purposes:

- Provision for the afterlife: It was thought that bread would nourish the deceased on their eternal journey, just as it did the living. They would not be hungry in the hereafter thanks to the donations.
- Symbolic devotional gesture: Offering bread to the gods or ancestors was a way to show appreciation, ask for benefits, and keep a good rapport with the divine.
- Prosperity and abundance: The copious amounts of bread portrayed in offerings scenes stood for prosperity, fertility, and the expectation of an abundant afterlife.

The researcher concludes that Offerings of bread were not reserved for the hereafter. They were essential to temple ceremonies and daily religious observances. To preserve cosmic order and guarantee the divine's continuous blessings, priests regularly offered bread as sacrifices to the gods. By looking at depictions of bread offerings in sacred art, the researchers discover more about the beliefs of the ancient Egyptians on death, the afterlife, and their relationship with the gods. These seemingly simple loaves of bread served as more than simply food; they were also potent symbols of life, death, and the possibility of eternal existence.

3. AIM OF THE STUDY

This study aims to explore the scenes of bread depicted under the sacrificial table in the Old Kingdom, the reasons for depicting scenes of bread under the sacrificial table, their significance, types and symbolic significance.

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to explore the scenes of bread depicted under the sacrificial table, the reasons for depicting scenes of bread under the sacrificial table, their significance, types and symbolic significance. By showing a collection of samples found in the tombs of the ancient state.

5. STUDY OBJECTIVES

- Systematically identifying and documenting the scenes depicted beneath bread offering tables in the private tombs in Old Kingdom. This will involve compiling a comprehensive database of these often-

³¹ Bergström, L. Gräddat. Brödkultur under järnåldern i östra Mälardalen. Theses and Papers in Scientific Archaeology Stockholm University. Stockholm, 2007, p. 53.

overlooked images, noting their location, style, and any recurring motifs or symbols.

- Displaying scenes of bread under the offering table in the private tombs in Old Kingdom.
- Exploring the reasons and symbolism for depicting bread under the offering table in Old Kingdom.

6. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive-analytical methodology to ascertain several facts regarding Ancient Ritual Offerings. Especially, bread offered under tables. the reasons for depicting scenes of bread under the sacrificial table in Ancient Egypt's private tombs (Old Kingdom). These scenes are dissected to clarify the many kinds of objects and make comparisons between them across periods and locations.

By Carefully observe details like figures, activities, objects, symbols, and inscriptions. The main motif of each scene is different, But they share one symbolic meaning, which is The ritualistic significance is the same. So, Bread served as a link between the living and the dead, ensuring the deceased's well-being and facilitating their journey into the afterlife.

7. THE SCENES

7.1. Scene (1):

Tomb Name: The Tomb of Iy-nefert

Dynasty: 4th dynasty.

Title: Tomb of Iy-nefert, High Priest of Pharaoh Teti (Tomb C56).

Scene Location: Room III, south wall of the tomb of Iy-nefert in Saqqara.

Iy-nefert is shown in the scene seated on a chair with padded backrest and bull's legs. He presents one hand to an offering table full of offerings while holding a folded cloth in the other. He is dressed in a collar, a beard, and a shoulder-length wig. A litany of several offerings, including bread, cake, beer, alabaster, garments, oxen, poultry,



Fig. 3: Tomb of Iy-nefert, High Priest of Pharaoh Teti (Tomb C56). (after Kanawati N, Abder-Raziq M., 2003, pl. 37 [b])

Oryx, and gazelles, is inscribed beneath the table, to the right of it³². A variety of offerings are arranged in front of the ewer in a basin that is supported by a stand to the left of the stand beneath the table.³³

Beneath the table is inscribed


t h3 p3t h3 hnqt h3 šs h3 mnht h


K3 h3 3pd h3 m3-hd h3 ghs h3

It is meaning “Bread, one thousand; cake, one thousand; beer, one thousand; alabaster, one thousand; clothes, one thousand; oxen, one thousand; fowl, one thousand; Oryx, one thousand; gazelle, one thousand.”

Commentary: Iy-nefert is shown in the scenario as a wealthy and well-connected individual who is able to make the numerous offerings mentioned in the inscription. Iy-nefert appears to have been a person of high social status based on the bull's leg and padded back chair, and the numerous offerings show that he had access to a variety of resources. The offerings' inscription sheds light

³²N. Kanawati, M. Abder-Raziq, A. Woods, A. McFarlane, T. H. Schmidt-Schultz, M. Schultz, S. Shafik, E. Strouhal, E. Thompson, N. Victor, R. Walker. The Unis cemetery at Saqqara: the Tombs of Iyefert and Ihy (reused by Idut), The Australian Centre for Egyptology. Reports, Aris and Phillips, Volume II, Oxford, UK, 2003, p. 62.

³³ Kanawati N, Abder-Raziq M. The Unis Cemetery at Saqqara. vol. II, The Tombs of Iyefert and Ihy (reused by Idut). Oxford: 2003. pp. 18–19

<p>on the kinds of commodities and materials that ancient Egyptian society valued and valued highly.</p>	
<p>7.2. Scene (2): Tomb Name: The Tomb of Seshathetep/Heti (G 5150)³⁴ Dynasty: 5th dynasty. Title: Unknown Scene Location: Chapel, south wall, middle part, Giza. Below the offering table, to the right is written the amount of offerings: Bread, one thousand; beer, one thousand; alabaster, one thousand; clothes, one thousand; rth – bread, wr – bread. The owner of the tomb is facing two men who are kneeling and one man who is standing as they perform a ceremony on the other side of the table.³⁵ The first man, with jars in both hands, is described as wdpw hntj wr ‘butter of the great collar’. The second man, with both arms raised is described as wtj ‘embalmer’ and is probably announcing snmt Ah ‘food for the glorified’. The third man designated as hri wdb ‘master of reversions’ stretches his arm palm up and says, htp di</p>	 <p>Fig. 4: The Tomb of Seshathetep/Heti (G 5150) Chapel, south wall, middle part, Giza (after N. Kanawati, Tombs at Giza, Seshathetep/Heti (G5150), 2002, Pl. 5)</p>

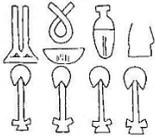
³⁴ For more information, see: N. Kanawati. Tombs at Giza II. Seshathetep/Heti (G 5150), Nesutnefer (G 4970), and Seshemnefer II (G 5080), A. McFarlane, S. Shafik, E. Thompson, N. Victor, S. Winlaw (Edts) ACE Reports 18, 2002.

³⁵ Junker, H. Giza II. Pl. 63-64, p.69; Nesutnefer. (n.d.). The Tomb of Seshathetep, 1938, Pl.16, 56.

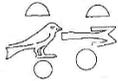
nswt ‘an offering which the king gives’.³⁶

There is a scene in the tomb of nswt – nfr that is almost a copy of that of sšAt – ḥtp, modified for a different tomb owner.

Beneath the table is inscribed³⁷:



t ḥ3 ḥnqt ḥ3 šs ḥ3 mnḥt ḥ3



m ḥt nb(t) nfrt

It is meaning “Bread, One thousand; Beer, One thousand; Alabaster, One thousand; Clothes, One thousand.”

Commentary: The scene in the tomb of Seshathetep/Heti reflects the typical offering scenes commonly found in Old Kingdom tombs, where the tomb owner is depicted making offerings to the gods. The accompanying figures represent different roles in the offering ceremony, including the presentation of offerings, announcement of offerings, and acceptance of offerings. The inscriptions provide details about the types and quantity of offerings being made.

³⁶ N. Kanawati. Tombs at Giza, Seshathetep/Heti (G5150), Nesutnefer (G4970), and Seshemnefer II (G5080), 2002. Vol. II, The Australian Centre for Egyptology, Report 18, Pl.5.

³⁷ N. Kanawati, 2002, Pl. 46.

7.3. Scene (3):

Tomb Name: The mastaba of

Akhethotep  and

Ptahhotep , Mastaba (D64)³⁸

Dynasty: 5th dynasty.

Title: Bringing forward the per-kheru offerings as daily dues of every day

Scene Location: Offerings chapel, North wall.

The offerings on the table before Akhethotep were arranged in five rows of sixteen columns, totaling eighty items instead of the ninety-six in Ptahhotep's chapel. Beneath the table, which varies only slightly from tomb to tomb, are the words "Funerary offerings : thousands (meaning many) of bread, beer, oxen, geese, yarn and cloth." and a pile of masses offerings.³⁹ Beneath the table is a pile of massed offerings. A similar scene is also present on the south wall.⁴⁰

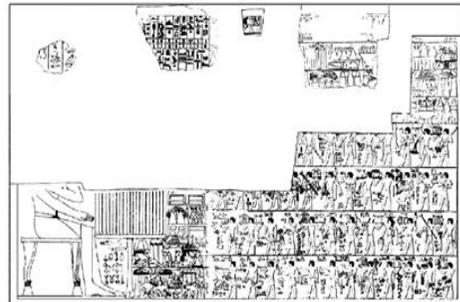
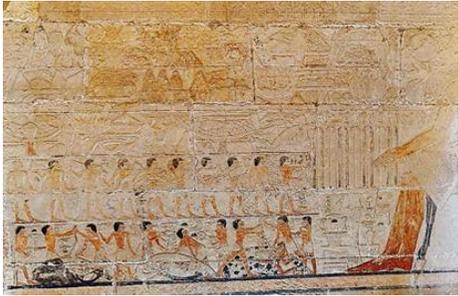


Fig. 5: The mastaba of Akhethotep and Ptahhotep (after N de G Davies, Mastaba of Ptahhotep and Akhethotep at Saqqareh - Part II", EEF, London, 1901)

³⁸ NTN P.M. III, pl. VIII.

³⁹ Osirisnet, Mastaba D 64 : the decorated areas belonging to Akhethotep, Akhethotep's Chapel North Wall, at: https://www.osirisnet.net/mastabas/akhethotep/ptahhotep/akhethotep_02.htm (Retrieved 19 December 2023) 10:06 pm.

⁴⁰ N De G, Davies, M.A, B.D., Ninth Memoir, The Mastaba of Ptahhotep and Akhethotep at Saqqareh, part II, thirty four plates and frontispiece, F. L. Griffith (Ed), The Offices of The Egypt Exploration Fund, U.S.A: Boston, PLXXIV.

 <p><i>t h3 hnqt h3 p3t h3 k3 h3 3pd h3 m3 – hd h3</i></p> <p>It is meaning "Funerary offering, thousands (meaning many) of bread, beer, oxen, geese, yarn, and cloth".</p> <p>Commentary: Scenes like the one in the Mastaba of AkhetHotep are commonly found in ancient Egyptian tombs. It shows the tomb's owner seated in front of an offering table with a pile of offerings placed underneath it. The inscriptions beneath the table include offerings of bread, beer, oxen, geese, yarn, and fabric. It was believed that by making these sacrifices, the dead would get nourishment in the afterlife. The repeating of this motif on the north and south walls of the tomb is another feature common to ancient Egyptian tombs. The details provided do not provide the tomb's owner, Akhet Hotep, a specific title.</p>	
<p>7.4. Scene (4):</p> <p>Tomb Name: The Tomb of Ni-ankhkhnum and Khnumhotep</p> <p>Dynasty: 5th dynasty.</p> <p>Title: Ni-ankh-khnum: Overseer of the Manicurists of the Palace of the King Khnum-hotep: Overseer of the Great Mansions of the King.</p> <p>Scene Location: The offering room,</p>	 <p>Fig. 6: The Tomb of Ni-ankhkhnum and</p>

<p>south wall. In this scene, basins intended for cleaning are covered by an offering table, with Ni-anhkhnum seated to the right of it. The sacrifices he has made are listed in an inscription on the table.⁴¹ Beneath the table, the inscription continues with a summary of his daily offerings: “rolls of provisions, jugs of beer, calves, fowl, sweets, ointments, and all pleasant things.”⁴²</p> <p><u>Commentary: The second scene in the offering room contains specific details about Ni-anhkhnum's religious beliefs and customs. It exemplifies the attention taken in their preparation and the significance of offerings in ancient Egyptian culture. Ni-anhkhnum's wealth and social standing are also revealed by the depiction of his contributions.</u></p>	<p><u>Khnumhotep</u> (after Reeder Greg: "<u>Queer Egyptologies of Niankhnum and Khnumhotep</u>", in C. Graves-Brown, ed., "<u>Sex and Gender in Ancient Egypt</u>", p. 143–156)</p>
<p>7.5. Scene (5): Tomb Name: <u>Merefnebef</u> Dynasty: <u>The end of The 5th Dynasty and beginning of The 6th Dynasty.</u> Title: <u>Unknown</u> Scene Location: <u>West wall south side of Merefnebef's tomb, The Interior of The Main Chapel in Saqqara, Upper register - right.</u></p> <p>In this Scene, Merefnebef is shown in the scene sitting in front of an offering table. Sixteen bread loaves,</p>	 <p><u>Fig. 7: The Merefnebef Tomb, The Interior of The Main Chapel, East Wall</u> (after</p>

⁴¹ E. Mostafa, "The Tomb of Ni-anhkhnum and Khnumhotep" from speculation to realization Revised Edition – Rediscovering the Egyptian Legacy (REL), Series of Investigations, Part I, Issue No. 1, Cairo, Egypt August 2015, pp. 2-6.

⁴² R. Greg, the tomb of Ni-anhkhnum and Khnum-hotep (Queer Archaeologies, 2000), pp. 193-208; P. Richard Ni-anhkhnum and Khnum-hotep, lovers or twins, KMT, 1993 (3, 4), pp. 3-4.

<p>arranged in four rows of four each, adorn the table. There are four jars shown underneath the table. The image shows the deceased accepting offerings from family members and servants, a traditional offering scene found in ancient Egyptian tombs.⁴³</p> <p><u>Commentary: An important theme in ancient Egyptian art was the offering scene, which represented the concept that the dead needed food and provisions in the beyond and the significance of the afterlife. Merefnebef is shown as having wealth and social standing based on the fact that he is shown accepting offerings. The image also sheds light on the food and beverages that were thought to be significant for the afterlife, as bread and beer were commonplace in ancient Egyptian Art.</u>⁴⁴</p>	<p>https://www.osirisnet.net/mastabas/merefnebef/e_merefnebef_03.htm</p>
<p>7.6. Scene (6): Tomb Name: Idut, also called Seshseshet Dynasty: 6th dynasty Title: Princess Scene Location: Room IX, north wall of Idut's tomb in Saqqara. <u>The north wall of Room IX is occupied by an offering table scene, similar in many ways to that on the west wall of the same room. The princess is depicted sitting on a chair with lion's legs, holding a perfume jar to her nose, and extending her</u></p>	 <p>Fig. 8: Idut Tomb (after Aldred, C. . <i>Ancient Egyptian art.</i> Thames & Hudson, 1980, pl. 25)</p>

⁴³ Myśliwiec, Merefnebef - Karol Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb of Merefnebef.* Text, plates. PolishEgyptian Archaeological Mission, Saqqara I, ZAŚ PAN. Warsaw, 2004, p. 160.

⁴⁴ Strudwick, N. *The administration of Egypt in the Old Kingdom: the highest titles and their holders.* British Museum Press, 1999, p. 41.

right hand towards an offering table laden with eighteen half-loaves of bread.⁴⁵ The inscription beneath the table lists offerings of bread, beer, cakes, oxen, fowl, and Oryx, each in a quantity of one thousand. On the other side of the table is an ewer in a basin placed on a stand. The bottom register beneath the offering table scene shows six offering bearers, five of whom are wringing the necks of geese while the last carries a pigeon in one hand and supports a tray of food on his shoulder with the other.⁴⁶

Beneath the table is inscribed⁴⁷:



*t h3 hnqt h3 p3t h3 k3 h3
3pd h3 m3 - hd h3*

It is meaning Bread, one thousand; beer, one thousand; cakes, one thousand; oxen, one thousand; fowl, one thousand; Oryx, one thousand.

Commentary: In the context of the Tomb of Princess Idut, the

⁴⁵ Mastaba of Idut, at: <https://www.meretsegerbooks.com/gallery/522/mastaba-of-idut-Idute-016>. (Retrieved 5 December 2023) 02:16 am.

- For More Information: The mastabas of Nikauisesi, Hesi, Iyneferet and Seshseshet/Idut N. Kanawati, M. Abder-Raziq, The Teti Cemetery at Saqqara VI. The Tomb of Nikauisesi, ACE Reports 14, Warminster, 2000.

⁴⁶ Budge, E. A. W. *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day*. Chronicle Books, 2010; Malek, J.. "The Old Kingdom (c. 2686-2160 BC)". In *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, edited by Ian Shaw. Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 203.

⁴⁷ Mastaba of Idut, <https://www.meretsegerbooks.com/gallery/522/mastaba-of-idut-Idute-016>. (Retrieved 5December 2023) 02:16 am.

<p>inscription you gave, describing copious amounts of food, beer, cakes, oxen, poultry, and Oryx, presents a complex tapestry of meaning. Each offering carries specific meaning; Bread: Staple food representing nourishment and life. Beer: Refreshment and enjoyment, often associated with Osiris, god of the afterlife. Cakes: Sweet offerings for appeasement and divine favor. Oxen: Sacrificial animals symbolizing strength and offering meat for sustenance. Fowl: Associated with the sky and rebirth, potentially linked to Princess Idut's journey to the afterlife. Oryx: Powerful animals linked with the sun god Ra, potentially offering protection and divine connection.⁴⁸</p>	
<p>7.7. Scene (7): Tomb Name: Watetkhethor Tomb Dynasty: 6th dynasty Title: Unknown Scene Location: Room B5, west wall, recess, south side wall of Watetkhethor's tomb in Saqqara, dating back to the 6th dynasty. <u>Similar decorations adorn the recess's two side walls, which each feature a scene of Watetkhethor at an offering table, each one piled with twenty half-loaves of bread. She reaches out to the table with her right hand in both situations. On the north side, she is holding a lotus flower near her nose with her left hand, while on the south side, she is holding an empty left hand in her</u></p>	 <p>Fig. 9: Watetkhethor Tomb (after Kanawati and Abder-Raziq, 2008, p.31; B.O'Neill, 2023, p. 37)</p>

⁴⁸ Malek, J., 2000, p. 134; Dodson A and Hilton D. Complete Royal Families of Ancient Egypt, Thames & Hudson, 2004, p. 156.

lap. She is seated in a chair like a lion's limb.⁴⁹ A hieroglyphic inscription above the table lists the prerequisites for making an offering, and below it are jars, a ewer, and piles of food. Below the scene of the offering table are eight offering bearers; the first four are seen bearing animal forelegs, while the next four are shown wringing the necks of geese.⁵⁰

The inscriptions above the scene is inscribed,



*dbht htpt hnk h3 t h3 hngt h3
k3 h3 3pd h3 šs h3 mnht h3
rnpt nbt nfrt*

Requirements of “*htpt*” offerings and “*hnk*” offerings, “One thousands of bread, One thousands of beer, One thousands of oxen, One thousands of fowl, One thousands of alabaster, One thousands of clothes and One thousands of all good offerings of the year. On the opposite side of the table and beneath it are stack of food items, jars and an ewer, above which is written ‘*rnpt nbt nfrt*’ ‘all the good offerings of the year’

⁴⁹Kanawati N., Abder-Raziq M., Mereruka and his family, Part II, The Tomb of Waatetkhetor (Australian Centre for Egyptology: Reports 26), 2008, Pl. 43.

⁵⁰O’Neill B., Art as Ritual Engagement in the Funerary Programme of Watetkhetor at Saqqara, C. 2345 BC, Access Archaeology, Archaeopress Publishing Ltd., 2023, p.6.

Commentary: The scene sheds important light on the customs and ceremonies related to worship and offerings in ancient Egyptian civilization. It is implied that Watetkhehor was a women of means and social standing who could support herself and others by her representation at the offering table, surrounded by a variety of food products and offerings. The significance of these ceremonies in ancient Egyptian religion is further highlighted by the comprehensive list of conditions for offering found in the hieroglyphic inscription above the table. The offering bearers' representation emphasizes the part that people play in organizing and carrying out these rites and offerings.⁵¹

7.8. Scene (8):

Tomb Name: Meryteti (King's Daughter.)

Dynasty: 6th dynasty.

Title: King's Daughter.

Scene Location: Room C3, South wall, Right of Meryteti's tomb in Saqqara.

The scene, an intricate and beautifully maintained offering table scene, shows Meryteti sitting on a cushioned chair with lion-legs, a shoulder-length wig, bracelets, and a half-pleated kilt. He extends one hand toward an offering table filled with twenty-two half-loaves of bread, and he carries a folded cloth in the other. There are two

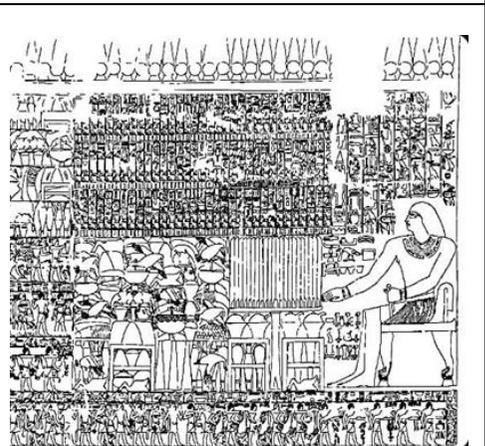


Fig. 10: Meryteti Tomb (King's Daughter.) (after Mereruka and his Family - PART 1 - The tomb of Meryteti" is "Report 21: https://www.osirisnet.net/mastabas/meryteti/e_meryteti_04.htm)

⁵¹Le tombeau de Watetkhéhor, prêtresse d'Hathor à Saqqâra. Bulletin de la Société française d'égyptologie, 194, pp. 31-58.

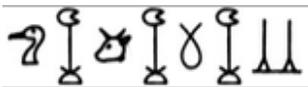
inscriptions to the right of the offering table, one of which explains the requirements of the *htpt*-offerings and *hnk*-offerings



htpt hnk, while the other lists: ⁵²



h3 t h3 hnqt h3 p3t h3 k3 h3



3pd h3 šs h3 mnht

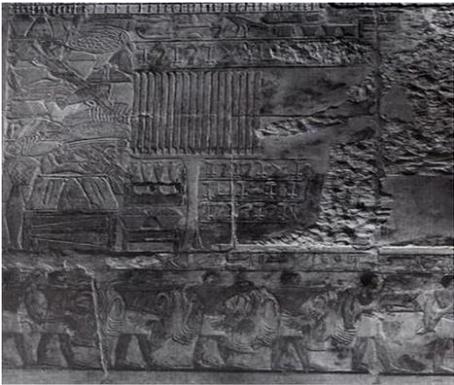
It is meaning "One thousand bread, one thousand beer, one thousand oxen, one thousand fowl, one thousand alabaster, and one thousand clothes."

Below the table are two stands on which are placed four ewers and jars, with one foreleg on the ground. To the left of the table are more stands and piled offerings of food and drink, including loaves, geese, cuts of meat, vegetables, and fruits. ⁵³

- *h3* (pronounced "kha"): thousand
- *t* (pronounced "te"): bread
- *hnqt* (pronounced "hanket"): beer.
- *p3t* (pronounced "pet"): cake.
- *k3* (pronounced "ka"): oxen .
- *3pd* (pronounced "aped"): fowl.
- *šs* (pronounced "shesh"):

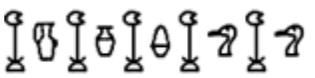
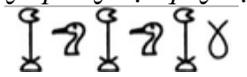
⁵² Baud, M., Dobrev, V., & Schoch, E., The Pyramid Complex of Raneferef I: The Pyramid of Raneferef: The Basal Fills and the Temple. Peeters, 2015; Dodson, A., The Royal Tombs of Ancient Egypt, Pen and Sword, 2016.

⁵³ Dodson, A. 2016, p. 90; Kanawati, Abder-Raziq, Meryteti: N. Kanawati, M. Abder-Raziq, Mereruka and his Family I. The Tomb of Meryteti, ACE Reports 21, Oxford, 2004, p. 49.

<p>alabaster.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mnht (pronounced "menket"): linen. <p>Commentary: <u>Meryteti is presenting sacrifices to the gods in the afterlife, the scene offers insight into the religious customs and beliefs of the ancient Egyptians. Meryteti appears to have been a wealthy and well-respected individual who could support his family and people under his employment based on the intricate inscriptions and gifts. Almost every offering scene in the tombs of the officials from the end of the Fifth and the beginning of the Sixth Dynasties has a Type 2 portrayal. Either behind the offering list or in one or more registers, they are situated.</u>⁵⁴</p>	
<p>7.9. Scene (9): Tomb Name: The tomb of Seankhuptah Dynasty: 6th dynasty. Title: Unknown Scene Location: Room I, west wall Seankhuptah is depicted sitting on a lion-legged chair holding a folded cloth in his left hand, while extending his right hand to a table with 18 half-loaves of bread.⁵⁵ Beneath the table is inscribed:</p> <p>  <i>h3 3pd h3 3pd h3 k3 h3 t h3 mnht</i> </p>	 <p><u>Fig. 11: The tomb of Seankhuptah (after N. Kanawati, A.Hassan, pl. 64; Kanawati and Abder-Raziq, 1998: pl 27)</u></p>

⁵⁴ N. Kanawati, M. Abder-Raziq, Mereruka and his Family I. The Tomb of Meryteti, ACE Reports 21, Oxford, 2004, p. 46.

⁵⁵ N. Kanawati, A.Hassan, The Teti cemetery at Saqqara. Vol. III: The tombs of Neferseshemre and Seankhuptah. ACE Reports 11, Oxford, 1998. p. 58.

 <p><i>h3 p3t h3 hnqt h3 h3t t (?)h3 3pd</i></p>  <p><i>h3 3pd h3 3pd h3 ŠS</i></p> <p>It is meaning “One thousands of fowl, one thousands of fowl, one thousands of oxen, one thousands of bread, one thousands of clothes, one thousands of cakes, one thousands of beer, one thousands of unguent, one thousands of fowl, one thousands of fowl, one thousands of alabaster.”</p> <p>Commentary: The scene depicts the offering of food and other items to Seankhuptah for use in the afterlife. The use of hieroglyphs and the specific items offered provide insight into the religious beliefs and practices of the time. ⁵⁶</p>	
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8. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The ideological purpose of the Old Kingdom private tomb was multifaceted and served several intertwined functions, Some of the most common ones include bread under the offering tables, scenes depicting food preparation and burial customs, and real offerings made at the tomb to make sure the deceased was given food in the afterlife.

Bread had a deeper meaning than its earthly purpose in the mysterious Old Kingdom, where death was not the end but rather a doorway to forever. It was woven into the fabric of sacred art. This is shown by analyzing scenes in 9 different tombs, from the fourth dynasty to the end of the sixth dynasty.

Bread continues to be a subject of scholarly interest and has complicated iconographical connotations. The deceased is shown in an ever-more-complex offering table scene by the Fourth Dynasty. Though the table still

⁵⁶ Wilkinson, R. H., 2017, p. 117.

held naught but loaves of bread shaped like reeds⁵⁷, providing iconography that went beyond the table to include a long list of items that were listed as "essential" to the afterlife, such as linen (fig. 10).

The most popular type is loaves, which can be placed on offering tables individually or piled. There were several shapes, such as conical, spherical, and rectangular. (fig. 1.3).

Fourth Dynasty Bread Offering Evolution, Loaves predominated and were frequently pictured stacked on level platforms. Bread molds began to arrive for regular forms . The fifth and sixth dynasties saw a rise in the variety of shapes and sizes, including cakes and ceremonial forms ( ) (fig. 4, 6, 8). Offering tables grew more ornate and taller. Scenes showing the making of bread, offering sacrifices, and gods accepting offerings become increasingly prevalent (fig. 10, 11).

The bread offerings served different purposes; the crumb was thought to be food for the dead, and the offerings supplied nourishment for the soul's trip to the afterlife. They can also symbolize symbolic actions to express piety, thanksgiving to the gods, and hope for rewards. Lastly, they can symbolize mediation between the worlds, a kind of payment made to the gods in return for favours or protection.

Wealthier individuals offered more diverse and abundant bread, reflecting their social standing, like scene at tomb of Iy-nefert, high priest of pharaoh teti (fig. 3). Specific types of bread and offering rituals linked to particular deities or funerary practices (fig. 5).

Inscriptions on the table itself detailed the types and quantities of bread offerings placed upon it. And underneath as well "t h3 p3t h3 h3 h3 šs h3 mnht h", it is meaning a big quantity of offering by the deceased to support him in his journey to the afterlife (fig. 3, 5, 8).

The type and quantity of offerings depicted in the tomb also reflected the social status of the deceased. The variety and abundance of offerings, including various types of bread, showcased Merefnebef high rank and wealth. By displaying such offerings, his family ensured his continued prosperity and privilege in the afterlife (fig. 7).

⁵⁷ Snape, S. *Ancient Egyptian Tombs: The Culture of Life and Death* Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell. 2011, p. 39.

Beyond its literal interpretation, bread could also hold symbolic meaning. Wheat, the primary ingredient in Egyptian bread, was associated with the god Osiris, the lord of the underworld and resurrection. Thus, bread offerings represented not just physical sustenance but also divine favor and blessings for Merefnebef's afterlife journey and eventual rebirth.

In Merefnebef tomb, bread transcends its humble role as sustenance to become a powerful tool for artistic expression and ritualistic performance. Its detailed depiction, symbolic forms, and ritualistic activation create a multifaceted experience that connects the physical realm with the spiritual, ensuring Merefnebef's well-being and whispering stories of the fascinating beliefs and practices of the Old Kingdom.

The offering scenes were not merely static depictions; they served a ritualistic purpose. Priests, likely descendants or officials closely associated with Merefnebef, would perform rituals in the tomb, reciting spells and performing gestures that mirrored the depicted offerings. This activated the offerings, making them real and available to Merefnebef in the afterlife. Bread, along with other offerings, played a crucial role in this ritualistic process (fig. 7).

By understanding the types, functions, and evolution of bread offerings in the Old Kingdom, we gain valuable insights into the daily lives, religious beliefs, and social structures of this ancient civilization.

CONCLUSION

Bread offering representations were not only decorative elements; rather, they were skillfully constructed statements of faith. Different varieties and patterns of loaves, frequently tucked in with other food and beverages, have symbolic implications. Round loaves might represent the sun and renewal, while long shapes were thought to represent celestial qualities. Their exact positioning matched the intention to nourish the deceased during their journey into the Duat. It is possible to carve loaves into elaborate designs that represent holy creatures or gods. These were not just works of art; they were sacrifices infused with the spirit of particular beings, promising the deceased protection and blessings in the hereafter. Rather than being inert objects, the painted offerings acted as initiators of complex ceremonies. Worn in ritual clothing, priests would make elaborate movements and cast spells that reflected the things shown. This gave the gifts a genuine spiritual reality and guaranteed that the deceased could still access them.

In some rituals, bread transcended its painted form. Crumbs might be sprinkled on the ground as offerings, or dough figures sculpted and incorporated into the ceremony. This physical interaction blurred the lines between artistic representation and ritualistic reality, deepening the connection between the physical and spiritual realms.

The creative representation of bread functioned as a visual link between the Duat's spiritual world and the tomb or temple on earth. Mourners and priests may communicate with the deceased on their hereafter journey by recognizing and comprehending the symbolic meaning of the offerings, providing not just with physical nourishment but also with emotional comfort and spiritual assistance.

The artistry and ritualistic activation of the bread offerings were not merely aesthetic exercises; they were crucial for guaranteeing the deceased's continued existence and well-being in the afterlife. The symbolism and rituals ensured that their spiritual need for nourishment was met, paving the way for their eternal life.

In Old Kingdom sacred art, bread finally rises beyond its lowly origins to become a potent medium for creative expression, ceremonial enactment, and spiritual communion. The intricate belief system and creative inventiveness of the Old Kingdom Egyptians are better understood when we crack open the coded messages contained in these offerings. The human desire for perpetual connection and sustenance—both bodily and spiritual—is evoked by their dedication to the afterlife and the transforming properties of bread.

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