



Suckling A Baby Donkey Scene from A New Kingdom Tomb in Saqqara

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ABSTRACT

During excavations of Zahi Hawass north of the Teti pyramid in the season 2020/2021 a limestone wall relief block was discovered, decorated with remains of three registers of scenes and accompanying hieroglyphic inscriptions. Relief style indicates that it is part of a New Kingdom tomb chapel and the names of the owner, the scribe Djehutyemheb and his wife Iry are mentioned on the block. The names suggest that the block was part of the nearby New Kingdom free-standing tomb chapel of Djehutyemheb(238/tpc). Further the block adds a new title to the wife Iry, namely "chantress of the god Amun". Yet the most remarkable thing about this block is the scene in the middle register showing a group of donkeys that is reminiscent of similar scenes from the Old Kingdom mastabas in Saqqara. This kind of scene though is not common in New Kingdom tombs, and it also shows a unique depiction of a baby Donkey suckling from its mother. So, the question arises if the New Kingdom artist was inspired for the donkey herd scene by the decoration of close by Old Kingdom mastabas in Saqqara.

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INTRODUCTION:

Scenes of donkeys or groups of donkeys in agricultural contexts are frequent in mastabas of the Old Kingdom, especially in the Saqqara necropolis. They become increasingly seldom starting from the Middle Kingdom. So, it's even more interesting to find a relief in Saqqara from a New Kingdom tomb, showing a group of donkeys, in a way reminiscent of Old Kingdom scenes. A small detail, in the actual sense of the word, makes the difference: a unique scene of a baby donkey suckling from its mother.

The domestication of the donkey *Equus asinus* (For the role and the importance of the Donkey in Ancient Egypt with further literature see: Förster2015, 385-401) starts in Egypt around the late fifth or the first half of the fourth millennium BC. Donkey burials were found since the early dynastic times in royal funerary context in Abydos and in non-royal context in Abusir (Radwan1991, 305-308). Scenes of donkeys are frequent especially in mastabas of the Old Kingdom and reflect the significant role of donkeys as means of transportation, in trade and in agriculture. Herds of donkeys carrying water vessels secured the water supply for caravans especially in the vast western Desert (Förster2015, 435-437). Donkey burials in the Delta highlight their religious importance

in the time of the Hyksos (Ashmawy2019, 39 with further literature to donkey burials in the Delta). The economic importance of donkeys becomes also clear from New Kingdom documents from Deir el-Medina (Jacobus2005, 96-103). The vast dependence of the ancient Egyptians on donkeys continues throughout the history of Egypt especially in the field of agriculture and is still indicative in the villages of modern-day Egypt.

During excavations of Zahi Hawass north of the Teti pyramid in the winter excavation season 2020/2021 a wall relief block was discovered among the debris in a late period mud brick shaft (fig.1). The relief style, the appearance and coiffure of the representation of the owner and his wife immediately date it to the New Kingdom, but the main scene showing a group of donkeys with their two drovers calls to mind similar scenes from the Old Kingdom. The relief block is dislocated but was most probably part of one of the free-standing tomb chapels from the New Kingdom cemetery that were built on top of the mastabas of the high officials of Teti, north of his pyramid (Tawfik 2003, 508-513).



(fig. 1) Wall relief block, Saqqara, Registration Number 157\2020 (courtesy of Zahi Hawass)

DESCRIPTION OF THE RELIEF

A limestone block (Saqqara Excavation Register Book 25, Registration Number 157\2020) measuring 70 x 58 x 18 cm, with a rectangular fragment missing from the lower left corner (fig.2). The block is from the inner casing of a tomb wall. At the very left side of the block a part remains crude and is slightly raised. This suggests that it was a corner block, which was joined in the crude, unpolished area by another block at a right angle.

The relief shows portions of three registers. From the upper register only about the lower quarter is preserved, showing feet and legs of eight persons. Two individuals

are heading towards the left. One of them is wearing the long-pleated kilt, common to high officials of the New Kingdom. He follows a person, of whom curiously the legs are visible up to the knees, which means that this person was wearing a short kilt. In the opposite direction, going to the right, a group of four high officials shown staggered follow a leader towards another person who is facing them.



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Drawn by Aya Ismail

(fig.2) Facsimile of the wall relief block, Saqqara, Registration Number 157/2020 (drawn by Aya Ismail Elsayed Mohamed)

The best-preserved middle register shows two drovers taking eight adult donkeys towards the right. The eight donkeys are divided in two staggered groups. In the rear group a baby donkey is suckling from its mother, who is depicted up front of her group. Judging from the genitals of the two animals shown complete in each group of donkeys, the front group seem to be male and the rear group are the female donkeys. The lower half of the drover in the front is covered partially by the rear group of donkeys. This first drover turns his head backwards towards the second drover who is walking behind the herd raising a stick (Diab2017,192-193, Table 3 shows the different positions of holding sticks in the hands of the drovers of donkeys). A horizontal line of hieroglyphs at the top of this register reads:

/// ꜥš n imntnw.s ꜥš mi šꜥ ḥbs.sn wdb///

/// many to create (increase) their numbers, numerous like sand, cover them with folded cloth.

Below, a second horizontal line of hieroglyphs, starting from the right, reaches only the middle of the register beside the head of the drover in the center and it reads:

Imi hr.k n n3 n i3w.t

Give, your face towards the [flock] of donkeys

Between the heads of the two drovers is written:

hrp.sn

Flog them

Only the upper part of the lower register of this block is preserved showing the tomb owner and his wife looking towards the right. They are probably represented seated, as the upper part of the staff held by the tomb owner, which is visible to the right between the signs of the accompanying hieroglyphic text, is shown in a tilted way at an angle too large for the couple to be depicted seated. The tomb owner is shown wearing a two graded wig. His wife is represented shorter than him, so only the upper part of the wig held with a band survives with a lotus flower and a head cone atop.

To the right of the head of the tomb owner is a hieroglyphic text from which there are remains of four columns stating the name and the title of the owner:

///nbt3.wy hr ??///

///the lord of the two lands upon ///

sš nsw.t Dhwty-m-hb m3^c hr.w

the royal scribeDjehutyemhebtrue of voice

The text accompanying the lady informs in five columns about the title and the name of the wife:

sn.t.f mr(.t).f n st-ib.f šm^c.jyt n(.t) Imn Iry

His wife (lit. his sister), his beloved one in his favorite place, the chantress of the god Amun Iry

The title of the lady is *šm^c.jyt*, which is one of the most common female titles of the New Kingdom. (It's the title ID 531:

https://anneherz.github.io/ProM/detail/singleview_titles.html?ids=531).

Altogether 71 women bearing that title are listed in the Prosopographia Memphitica Database, but none of them is named Iry (like the lady on the relief). (See: Herzberg-Beiersdorf, A. 2023, 203–207.)

THE OWNER AND HIS WIFE

This block was found near the recently discovered funerary temple of Queen Neit a wife of King Teti (The results of these ongoing Excavations by Zahi Hawass north of the Teti Pyramid in the seasons of 2020-2021 still await publication) suggests that it originated from Djehutyemheb's nearby tomb chapel based on its proximity. Our block only preserves one title for the owner, which is that of a royal scribe. From the five individuals known so far from the Memphite necropolis with the name Djehutyemheb only one has solely this title (Herzberg-Beiersdorf, Anne, ProsopographiaMemphitica,

https://anneherz.github.io/ProM/detail/singleview_persons.html?ids=2652. Accessed August 26, 2023) and by chance the remains of his small free-standing tomb chapel were located close by, to the south of the small pyramid of one of King Teti's other wives, Queen Khuit. The tomb chapel of Djehutyemheb (238/tpc) was built against the north wall of the much larger free-standing tomb of Neferrenpet (225/tpc). Both tombs date probably to the early 19th dynasty (Staring 2022, 228-232). These two tombs were not documented on the rather incomplete plan of V. Loret from 1899 (Loret1899, plan after p. 16). They were also not mentioned in the publications of later excavations in this area (Quibell and Hayter 1927; Firth and Gunn 1926).

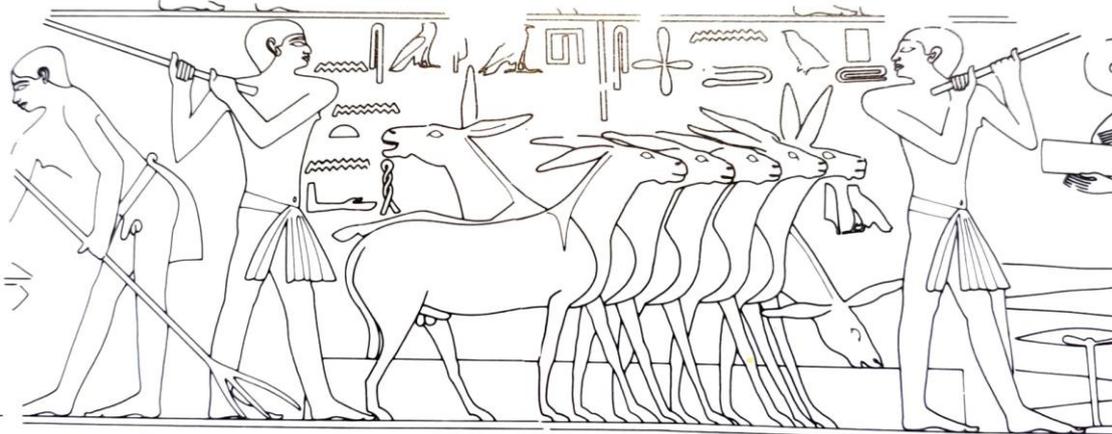
The little remains of the free-standing tomb chapel of Djehutyemheb (238/tpc) were excavated by the Supreme Council of Antiquities in 1999 and consist of a ramp leading through a doorjamb on the right and the wall of the adjacent tomb of Neferrenpet(225/tpc) to the left into a court with remains of mud brick walls on the east, north and west sides. On the west side there is a doorway from which only the right decorated limestone doorjamb survives. The rest of the tomb towards the west is unfortunately lost (Morssy 2017, 191-196). Due to this very incomplete plan of the tomb, it is not possible to say where our block was originally located within the tomb.

The name of the wife Iry is mentioned on the doorjamb found *in situ* on the west side of the tomb chapel of Djehutyemheb (238/tpc)(Morssy 2017, 193-194), but without the title "chantress of the god Amun". The name Iry accompanied by this title is not listed in the Prosopographia Memphitica of Anne Herzberg-Beiersdorf (Herzberg-Beiersdorf 2023, 203-207) and can hence be added as consort of Djehutyemheb. He must have been quite fond of her to lovingly call her "his beloved one in his favorite place".

COMPARISON TO SOME DONKEY SCENES FROM THE OK IN SAQQARA

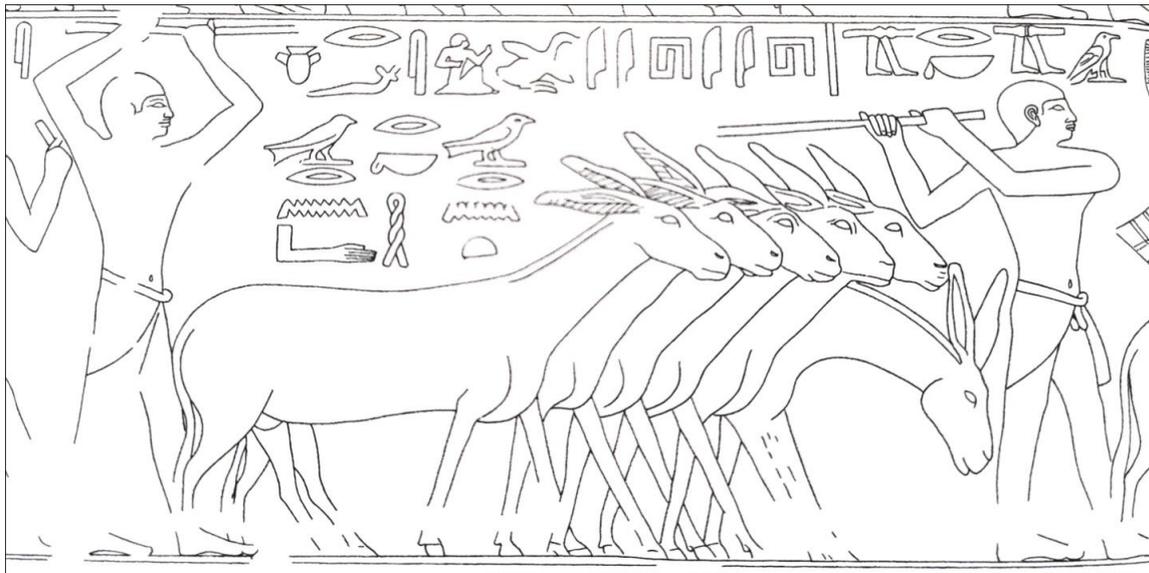
Donkey heard scenes with their drovers are common in the mastabas of the Old Kingdom in Saqqara. In the direct vicinity of the location of the tomb chapel of Djehutyemheb (238/tpc), right behind it, there is a scene in the mastaba of Ankhmahor showing donkeys trampling grain-stems on a threshing floor (Kanawati and Hassan 1997, 30). The impressive mastaba of Mereruka with scenes of herds of donkeys is also located near, a little bit further towards the west.

Six donkeys in the scene in the mastaba of Ankhmahor (fig.3) are shown beside each other orderly graded with the two front legs of each animal clearly visible, but only the hind legs of the donkey up front are shown. The furthest donkey in the group lowers his head probably to feed. A seventh donkey is heading in the opposite direction raising one of his front hooves at the drover in the rear. Depicting the animal going in the wrong direction and raising his leg might be to show how stubborn the donkeys can be and hence the need for the stick to control them. In the group the ears of four donkeys lay back only the one facing the drover in the front has his ears raised. The one lowering his head feeding is shown with his ears stretched sidewise. The eyes are depicted almond shaped.

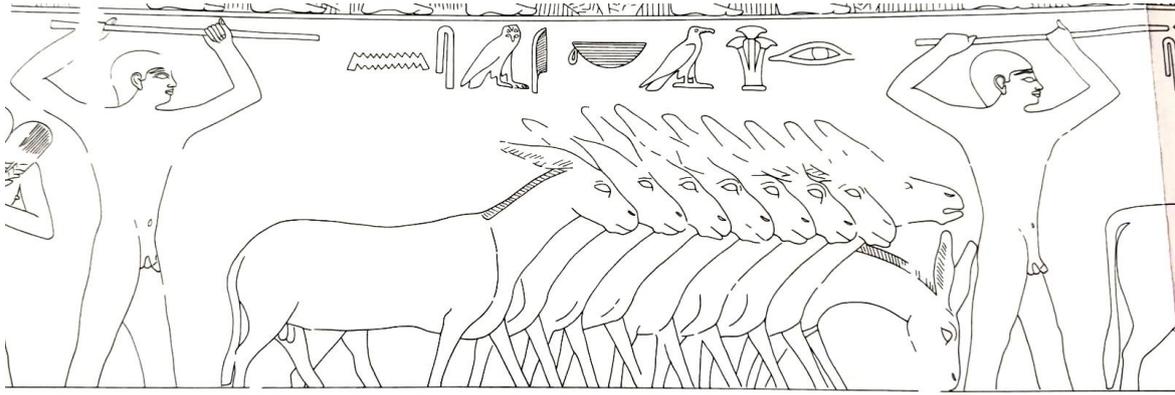


(fig. 3) A group of donkeys in a scene in the mastaba of Ankhmahor (detail after: Kanawati and Hassan1997, Pl. 37. Room I (a) East wall)

In the mastaba of Mereruka several scenes on the eastern wall of room 13A show donkeys in an agricultural context. Two scenes, have some resemblance to our scene. One shows a group of donkeys arriving at a grain field to be loaded with sheaves (fig.4) (Kanawati, Woods, Shafik and Alexakis 2011,17 (3.1.10)). The second depicts donkeys trampling grain-stems on a threshing floor (fig.5) (Kanawati, Woods, Shafik and Alexakis 2011, 17 (3.1.14)).

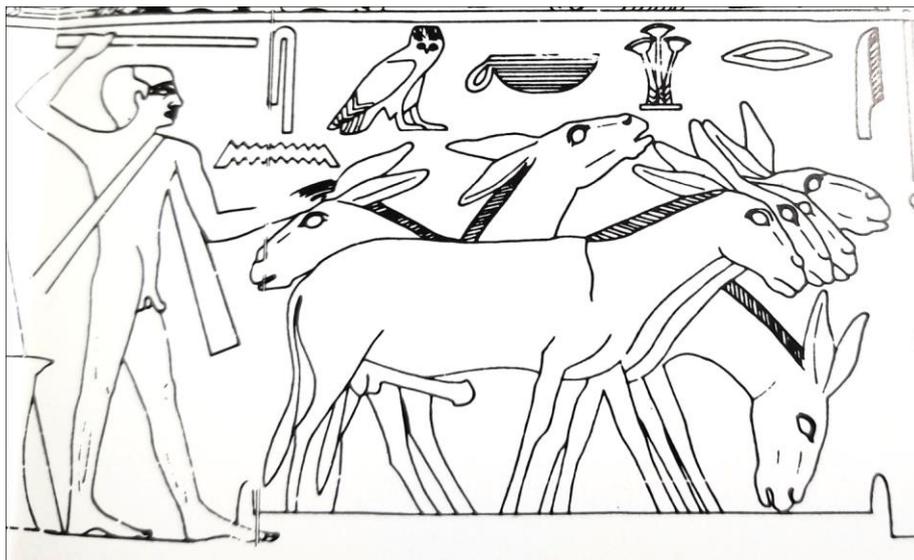


(fig. 4) A group of donkeys arriving at a grain field to be loaded with sheaves in the mastaba of Mereruka (Kanawati, Woods, Shafik and Alexakis 2011, Pl. 81, Room 13A, east wall, north section)



(fig. 5) Donkeys trampling grain-stems on a threshing floor in the mastaba of Mereruka (Detail after: Kanawati, Woods, Shafik and Alexakis 2011, Pl. 84 Room A13, east wall, south section, detail)

Another earlier comparable scene is in the funerary chapel from the mastaba of Neferirtenef (now in Brussel in the Musées Royaux D'Art et D'Histoire Inv. Nr. E.2465). The remains of this 5th dynasty mastaba D 55 are located near the southeastern corner of the enclosure wall of the step pyramid (<https://www.globalegyptianmuseum.org/record.aspx?id=379>, accessed August 29, 2023). Here a group of seven donkeys are accompanied by only one drover, shown naked. Three of them are depicted walking beside each other, the fourth lifts its head a little and the fifth lowers its head to feed. The head of one donkey is facing in the opposite direction and in the middle of the composition a donkey is shown raising its neck higher than the others (Walle 1978, 61). The ears of all the donkeys are laid back, they are shown with manes on the back of their heads and necks, and the eyes are depicted roundish (fig.6).



(fig.6) Scene is in the funerary chapel from the mastaba of Neferirtenef (detail after: Walle 1978, planche 12)

When comparing these scenes from the Old Kingdom with our New Kingdom relief it can be noticed that there was no exact copying from any of the scenes but presumably the artist was inspired by walking around in the Saqqara Old Kingdom Necropolis. The nearest tomb would be the mastaba of Ankhmahor, but as tombs of the New Kingdom were being built on top of these Old Kingdom mastabas it is not very likely that the artist had access to the mastaba of Ankhmahor unless he had entered it before the tomb became inaccessible due to the construction of the New Kingdom tombs. Also, the almond shaped eyes of the donkeys are different than the roundish eyes of the New Kingdom relief. The general composition of our New Kingdom donkey herd scene resembles the Old Kingdom depictions of donkey herds with their drovers as seen also in the mastabas of Mereruka and Neferirtenef but the details show differences that seem to reflect the personal innovative touch of the New Kingdom artist and the artistic style of his time.

Unlike any of the Old Kingdom donkey herd scenes, the eight donkeys are divided in the New Kingdom relief into two staggered groups. The front group seem to be male and the rear group female donkeys. The baby donkey suckling from his mother in the rear group is unique to this scene and might be meant to highlight and visualize the efforts mentioned in the accompanying text: "many to create (increase) their numbers, numerous like sand". Increasing the number of donkeys meant also increasing the wealth of the owner and elevating his status. Interestingly the eyes of the New Kingdom donkeys are depicted roundish, the donkeys are shown with erect manes on the back of their heads and necks, the tails start off slim and thicken noticeably towards the bottom, and the ears of all the donkeys are laid back like in the tomb of Neferirtenef.

CONCLUSION

The decorated limestone block, showing a unique scene of a baby donkey suckling from its mother, discovered during the excavations of Zahi Hawass in the winter season 2020/2021 north of the Teti pyramid in Saqqara, can be attributed to the free-standing New Kingdom tomb chapel of the royal scribe Djehutyemheb (238/tpc). The tomb chapel of Djehutyemheb (238/tpc) had been discovered earlier during excavations by the Supreme Council of Antiquities in 1999. The name of the wife Iry appears on a doorjamb still *in situ* in the remains of the tomb chapel of Djehutyemheb, but the accompanying title "chantress of the god Amun" is a new addition found only on the here published block and needs to be included in the Prosopographia Memphitica.

The inspiration for the composition of the scene depicting a herd of donkeys in the middle register of this block might have come from similar scenes of donkey herds in nearby mastabas from the Old Kingdom. Comparison of the New Kingdom scene with some scenes that bare resemblance in the mastabas of Ankhmahor, Mereruka and Neferirtenef have shown that there was no direct copying of a specific scene. Even the general composition of the New Kingdom donkey herd scene is significantly different, as the donkeys are divided into two groups, a group of male donkeys in the front and a group of female donkeys in the back. Little details like the roundish form of the eyes of the donkeys, the erect mane at the back of the head and neck of the donkeys, the tails that start off slim and noticeably widen towards the tip, and the laid back ears of all the depicted donkeys resemble the scenes in the mastaba of Neferirtenef. The donkey herd scene from the tomb chapel of Djehutyemheb through adding the unique scene of a baby donkey suckling from its mother and mentioning in the accompanying text the wish to

increase the number of the donkeys to be "numerous like sand" indicates that the aim of the scene was to show the aspiration of the tomb owner to enlarge his herd and by this to increase his wealth.

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منظر إرضاع حمار صغير من مقبرة من عصر الدولة الحديثة في سقارة

الملخص

كشفت زاهي حواس أثناء موسم الحفائر ٢٠٢٠/٢٠٢١ شمال هرم الملك تتي بسقارة عن كتلة من الحجر الجيري عليها بقايا ثلاثة أشرطة من المناظر يصاحبها بعض النصوص بالخط الهيروغليفي؛ ويوضح الأسلوب الفني أن الكتلة المزينة جزء من مقبرة من عصر الدولة الحديثة وذكر عليها أسم صاحب المقبرة الكاتب جحوتي ام حب وزوجته إيرى. ترجح الأسماء أن هذه الكتلة جاءت أصلاً من المقبرة القريبة المشيدة لجحوتي ام حب (٢٣٨)/tpc، وتضيف الكتلة لقباً جديداً للزوجة إيرى وهو "منشدة المعبود أمن"؛ ولكن أكثر ما يميز هذه الكتلة المنقوشة هو شريط المناظر الأوسط الذي يصور قطعاً من الحمير يُذكر بمناظر قطعان الحمير المصورة في مصاطب الدولة القديمة بسقارة ولكن هذا المنظر غير مألوف في عصر الدولة الحديثة بل وينفرد بتصوير حمار وليد يرضع من أمه مما يثير التساؤل عما إذا كان الفنان قد استلهم الشكل العام لمنظر قطع الحمير من زينة مصاطب عصر الدولة القديمة المجاورة بسقارة.

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بيانات المقال

تاريخ المقال

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تم استلام النسخة المنقحة في ٢٠ أكتوبر

٢٠٢٣

تم قبول البحث في ٢٨ أكتوبر ٢٠٢٣

متاح على الإنترنت في ٢١ يناير ٢٠٢٤

الكلمات الدالة

حمار؛

إرضاع؛

منشدة أمن؛

سقارة؛

مقبرة مشيدة