

Baines, J.

## *Forerunners of Narrative Biographies*

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produced material which is clearly datable to the Persian Period. These well-dated groups can be used to date other deposits, particularly settlement material at Tell el-Dab'a,<sup>63</sup> and funerary material at Saqqara<sup>64</sup> and Thebes.<sup>65</sup> The latter are important since this pottery is the only indication of Persian Period burials at these sites. Unfortunately these burials are all of a poor nature and few, if any, grave goods were found with them.

In the preceding paragraphs I have endeavoured to highlight the problems inherent in the funerary archaeology of this period. Clearly, people continued to be buried during these times, although the distinct lack of new tomb constructions would indicate that most burials were either placed in shallow surface graves, as at Saqqara, or were intrusive within earlier structures, as at Saqqara and Thebes. Not only did people continue to be buried but, since many similar items of funerary equipment are reputedly dated to both the Twenty-sixth and Thirtieth Dynasties, these funerary items must have continued throughout the intervening one and a half centuries between 525 and 380 BC. It is hard to believe that, magically, in 525 BC a change in funerary customs suddenly resulted in nothing being buried with the deceased, whilst in 380 BC a sudden interest in antiques led to a copying of the burial customs in vogue one hundred and fifty years earlier. It is surely more likely that a gradual evolution took place during the Persian Period: thus sarcophagi may have developed from those types in which the chin rested on the chest to those in which the neck was exposed; in both sarcophagi and coffins there was probably a gradual change from normal sized heads to oversized ones; shabtis undoubtedly continued throughout the period and many stylistically attributed to the fourth century may well be fifth century in date; Late Period stelae and Ptah-Sokar-Osiris figures must also have continued, and, where no other dating evidence exists, it is probable that a number of so-called Thirtieth Dynasty examples are a little earlier, and so-called Twenty-sixth Dynasty examples a little later. Class I funerary papyri may have developed into Class II during the Persian Period, whilst amulets undoubtedly continued. It was during the Persian Period too that bead nets presumably developed from those of Silvano's type C to those in which the amuletic figures were again made of faience. Canopic jars probably disappeared at this time whilst the use of shrine-shaped canopic boxes was certainly in fashion. Finally the placement of pottery in graves of this period is also attested and, in the absence of inscriptional evidence, it is the pottery, more than anything else, which will break the Twenty-sixth/Thirtieth Dynasty mould which has bedevilled Egyptian funerary archaeology for almost as long as the Persian Period itself.

## FORERUNNERS OF NARRATIVE BIOGRAPHIES<sup>1</sup>

By JOHN BAINES

### Introduction

In the extant Egyptian record, biography is the essential and typical public written genre. Examples are attested for almost all periods from which texts in continuous language are preserved.<sup>2</sup> The genre is not easy to define. A definition should not be too restrictive; one aim of this essay is to explore ways of extending the concept for early times. I use the term 'biography' rather than 'autobiography' for two reasons. Some of the material is not clearly 'voiced' in the first or third person even though it conveys 'biographical' information, most third-person examples being early. Moreover, 'autobiographies' were probably not normally composed by their protagonists but by writers in their service or in that of their surviving kin who completed their funerary monuments. First-person narrative autobiographies are therefore composed as 'fictions', exploiting complex devices of display, framing, and genre.<sup>3</sup>

The majority of scholars see biographies as having emerged during the Old Kingdom, the first texts dating to the end of the Fourth or the early Fifth Dynasty. The most influential interpretation has probably been that of Jan Assmann,<sup>4</sup> who built upon work of Erika Schott<sup>5</sup> to argue that a vital threshold in the presentation of a protagonist's life was passed when actions were narrated as occasions for promotion, as in the strongly subjectivizing late Fifth Dynasty biography of Kaiemtjenedet which Schott studied. Such an organization occurs in the Sixth Dynasty biography of Weni,<sup>6</sup> the most extensive preserved from the Old Kingdom, and can be compared with much in later texts.

'Narrative' might be characterized as a text or passage that constitutes continuous discourse and includes generally past linguistic forms expressing consecution. Even such a definition, however, is too narrow. Biographies that focus upon the protagonist's achievements and the stages of his career form a minority, the majority, from the later Old Kingdom on, being moralizing self-presentations rather than accounts of action or events. Nonetheless, the genre as a whole can be assimilated to the notion of narrative, because it looks back upon and presents a life as something in the past, even if a text does not 'recount' anything or contain 'narrative' constructions. The architectural and iconographic context of the tomb marks the composition as relating to the past and re-evoking it for the present and future, while much of the language in first-person presentations remained time-neutral and generalizing for most of the genre's history.

From the Fourth Dynasty onward, there was a bifurcation, in which most monuments of individuals continued to focus upon figures of their owners with captions containing titularies and names, with

dissertation, University of Chicago, 1992; eadem, 'The Saite and Persian Period Forts at Dorginarti', in W. V. Davies (ed.), *Egypt and Africa. Nubia from Prehistory to Islam* (London, 1991), 205-19.

<sup>63</sup> B. Ditzze, 'Tell el-Dab'a', *BCEg* 16 (1992), 7-8.

<sup>64</sup> Clearly Persian in date, by associated pottery, are the poor burials published by J. E. Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara 1905-1906* (Cairo, 1907), 8-11; J. E. Quibell and A. G. K. Hayter, *Teti Pyramid North Side* (Cairo, 1926), 3-6; L. L. Giddy, *The Anubieion at Saqqara, II. The Cemeteries* (London, 1992), 33-90, there, page 88, dated to the first half of the fourth century BC.

<sup>65</sup> Good examples of Persian Period pottery are found within the tombs of Amenemope: J. Assmann, *Das Grab des Amenemope TT41* (Mainz, 1991), 225 nos. 66-7, 69-70; Nefersescheru: E. Feucht, *Das Grab des Nefersescheru (TT 296)* (Mainz, 1985), pls. liv-lviii nos. 35, 182, 218, 221; and Amenemose: Seyfried, *Amonmose*, 228 nos. 1387, 1412, 1419, 1430 and 1507.

<sup>1</sup> The argument of this essay intersects with work published separately: 'Kingship before Literature: The World of the King in the Old Kingdom', in R. Gundlach and C. Raedler (eds.), *Selbstverständnis und Realität: Akten des Symposiums zur ägyptischen Königsideologie, Mainz 15-17.6.1995* (Wiesbaden, 1997), 125-74; and 'Prehistories of Literature: Performance, Fiction, Myth', in G. Moers (ed.), *Definitely: Egyptian Literature—Papers from a Colloquium at UCLA, March 24-26 1995* (Göttingen, 1999). Work was begun during a Humboldt-Stiftung fellowship at the University of Münster. I am very grateful to Richard Parkinson, Mark Collier, and Christopher Eyre for reading drafts and most valuable comments, to Mark Collier and Sabrina Gomez-Deluchi for discussions of relevant themes, and to Rolf Krauss for procuring photographs at short notice. Many ramifications of the topic cannot be addressed here.

<sup>2</sup> Valuable survey by Andrea Gnirs, 'Die ägyptische Autobiographie', in A. Loprieno (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms* (Leiden, 1996), 191-241.

<sup>3</sup> On the definition and characterization of fiction, see W. Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore and London, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Especially 'Das Grab als Vorschule der Literatur', reprinted in his *Stein und Zeit: Mensch und Gesellschaft im alten Ägypten* (Munich, 1991), 169-99.

<sup>5</sup> 'Die Biographie des Ka-em-Tenenet', in J. Assmann, E. Feucht, and R. Grieshammer (eds.), *Fragen an die altägyptische Literatur: Studien zum Gedenken an Eberhard Otto* (Wiesbaden, 1977), 443-61c.

<sup>6</sup> *Urk. I*, 98-110; A. Roccati, *La littérature historique sous l'Ancien Empire égyptien* (Paris, 1982), 187-97, with refs.; C. Eyre, 'Weni's Career and Old Kingdom Historiography', in Eyre, A. Leahy, and L. M. Leahy (eds.), *The Unbroken Reed: Studies in the Culture and Heritage of Ancient Egypt in Honour of A. F. Shore* (London, 1994), 107-24.

perhaps an offering formula in continuous language. This core self-presentation, which has an objectivizing and 'performative' character, was extremely flexible and suited to the grandest and the most modest monuments, to statuary as well as flat surfaces, and to repetition throughout a monument. In comparison, the biography is infrequent and specialized. The question I address here is how far monuments that date from before this bifurcation incorporate elements comparable with the later narrative tradition, in addition to the performative elements they display clearly.

Both Schott and Assmann see the tomb as the essential monumental context in which biographies developed, as must be correct for late third millennium works of all but royalty. Only after the Old Kingdom were written biographies frequently set up outside the tomb,<sup>7</sup> whether they were inscribed upon the structure itself or on separate stelae. While Assmann's position is instructive for the late Old Kingdom, he does not address earlier tombs and his approach may underplay the general human significance of 'biography'. Here, a study of Wolfgang Helck on the origins of Egyptian 'literature' is valuable in suggesting how terse Fourth Dynasty inscriptions may relate to their more loquacious successors, which in turn helped set the scene for the altogether later emergence of written belles lettres.<sup>8</sup> Helck dwelt upon juridical and moralizing aspects of the early texts that, while overlapping, also point toward 'narrative' and 'ideal' biographies respectively. His approach of asking about possible functions overcame the division between narrative and other forms, but did not focus upon the inscriptions' significance in their context of the tomb, except insofar as tomb expenditure required legitimation and funerary cults required juridical support for endowments. Ultimately, such foci cannot elucidate the development of quasi-literary biographies or of self-presentation in tombs, which must have wider significance to have attracted such heavy investment.

Much of this discussion of origins of biographies and written literature is inevitably coloured teleologically by later forms. Such a bias may not be inappropriate because later forms will have been stimulated by earlier ones and not only by other, lost contexts. I concentrate here upon selected materials from the first four dynasties, in an attempt to model the role of biography before the non-royal elite inscribed continuous language in the representational and architectural contexts of their monuments. The enormous timespans must be borne in mind. The principal monuments were probably created over more than three hundred years, a period as long as that of all developed Old Kingdom biographies. It is a great pleasure to dedicate this study to Harry Smith, whom I first met thirty years ago, near the crucial tombs at North Saqqara.

### Background

Human lifespans and concepts of the person are essential components of the individual's role in any society. Egyptian written texts can be only very partial windows onto the society's negotiation of these matters, and their presentation is affected by such factors as genre and decorum. I therefore start with a general and abstract sketch of issues.

The person<sup>9</sup> is a moral entity that balances self-interest with social participation in widely varying ways. With personhood comes the sense of a shape proper to a life, including expectations, goals, achievements, and its end.<sup>10</sup> Most societies attach a positive value to a specific and personal life trajectory, possible exceptions being where ideals are strongly communitarian or where the individual's ultimate aspiration is extinction of self in some impersonal or cosmic whole, as in some Asian belief systems. Such does not seem to have been the case in Egypt.

The positive value of a person can tend toward unique achievements that changed someone's world, or toward their full and harmonious embodiment of the ideals and aspirations of their social group. In the former case the focus is upon the individual, but positive achievements also must embody group values in some way. Conversely, exemplification of those values is significant only if it is focused in a particular individual. In either case, there is a tension between the individual and the group, between the dynamic and the static.

Personhood may be a good accessible to all who survive to become viable human beings or it may be

<sup>7</sup> For a Sixth Dynasty rock inscription at Bir Mueilha in the Eastern Desert that uses 'biographical' formulas, see R. D. Rother et al., 'New Hieroglyphic Evidence for Pharaonic Activity in the Eastern Desert of Egypt', *JARCE* 33 (1996), 97-8, inscription M1.

<sup>8</sup> 'Zur Frage der Entstehung der ägyptischen Literatur', *WZKM* 63/64 (1972), 6-26. Assmann partially incorporates Helck's ideas.

<sup>9</sup> Collection, including the 1938 lecture of M. Mauss: M. Carrithers, S. Collins, and S. Lukes (eds.) *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History* (Cambridge, 1985).

<sup>10</sup> For the concept's broad utility, see Baines, 'Practical Religion and Piety', *JEA* 73 (1987), 83-4, with refs.; id., in B. E. Shafer (ed.), *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice* (Ithaca NY, 1991), 140-5.

socially circumscribed. Dale Eickelman<sup>11</sup> has drawn attention to parts of the contemporary traditional Islamic world where both the full realization of personhood and the creation of biographical memoirs (*tarjamas*) are the privilege of a small elite. Something similar is likely to have been the case in Egypt: it may not be useful to ask whether in antiquity elaborate notions of biography extended to sectors of society different from those producing the surviving evidence.

The embodiment of persons in their funerary monuments is characteristic of Egypt<sup>12</sup> but by no means confined to it.<sup>13</sup> The monument presents the living person who commissions it to peers<sup>14</sup> and to posterity. Since the dead do not bury themselves, the deceased's heirs contribute decisively to a biography's final realization, both in the funerary ceremonies and often in the composition and inscription of tomb decoration (it cannot be known what proportion of biographies was commissioned during a protagonist's lifetime or after his death—the latter was probably the more frequent case). Thus, the tomb mediates both between this life and the next and between the owner, his immediate circle, and the wider society for which such a monument is a generalized expression of status. Because tomb owners often belonged to the inner elite and controlled many dependants, 'biographical' elements relating to subordinates are frequently present. The clearest instance of this is in the common secondary inscription of titles and especially names beside subsidiary figures in Old Kingdom tombs.<sup>15</sup>

### The development of biography as a written form

#### Early examples

Since the high status of the owners of major early tombs must have encompassed full personhood, the absence of continuous biographical inscriptions on their monuments will relate to limitations of writing rather than any overriding desire for self-effacement. The architecture of the monuments also evolved considerably, so that it cannot be assumed that an apparent absence of individualizing features is due to conformism. Limitations in writing could relate to various factors, including insufficient development of the medium, the possibility that no one had considered using it to record certain things, and restrictions of decorum. An important element may have been the subordination even of people of the highest status to the king, since his identity was not presented in a 'biographical' guise on his monuments. Even though the elite developed written biographical forms earlier than he did, his presence and the prestige of his forms may have stood in the way of non-royal initiatives. Non-royal monuments had a positional standing in relation to royal ones, as well as spelling out their owners' relation with the king internally in titularies and other elements.

The two essential contexts of narrative biographies are the tomb, with its slow elaboration of continuous written language for display, and the social and oral arena in which biographies were experienced and enacted. Some significant tombs of the Early Dynastic Period and Fourth Dynasty are accessible to study. Potentially more important, but accessible only to modelling, is the oral construction of the self, of narrative, and of performance, to which I return briefly at the end. Self-presentation in monuments forms part of aesthetically and thematically organized works of architecture and decoration that also provided for the deceased's existence in the hereafter. Developments must have responded to aspirations and stimuli among the living and built upon conventions of the living context. Limited early written practices, which offered formidable obstacles to extensive self-presentation, need to be seen in this perspective.

The self is presented through the structure of the tomb, through stelae and false doors from the First Dynasty on, and less directly through pictorial decoration, of which the first significant example is the

<sup>11</sup> 'Traditional Islamic Learning and Ideas of the Person in the Twentieth Century', in M. Kramer (ed.), *Middle Eastern Lives: The Practice of Biography and Self-Narrative* (Syracuse NY, 1991), 35-59.

<sup>12</sup> Repeatedly discussed by Assmann (see n. 4 here); see also his *Ägypten: eine Sinngeschichte* (Munich, 1996), 81-6.

<sup>13</sup> On the 'speaking' quality of Greek funerary monuments, see J. Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: An Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece*, trans. J. Lloyd (Ithaca NY, 1991), 8-25; see in general C. Sourvinou-Inwood, 'Reading' Greek Death, to the End of the Classical Period (Oxford, 1995), 140-297. More broadly, funerary monuments of European civilization, from the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus to more recent times, have often been the most significant projections of their owners' sense of self. For a case in Borneo where the monument is magnificent but essentially commemorates someone other than the deceased, see P. A. Metcalf, 'Aban Jau's Boast', *Representations* 37 (1992), 136-50. In a sense, the fourth century BC sarcophagus inscription of Djeho from Saqqara does this too: J. Baines, 'Merit by Proxy: the Biographies of the Dwarf Djeho and his Patron Tjatharpta', *JEA* 78 (1992), 241-58.

<sup>14</sup> Emphasized especially by J. Spiegel, *Die Idee vom Totengericht in der ägyptischen Religion* (Glückstadt and Hamburg, n.d. [1935]).

<sup>15</sup> Primary inscription of this sort occurs in the earliest extensively decorated tombs, at Maidum, where relatively few figures are shown, some of whom could be the deceased's kin rather than subordinates (dispersed: W. M. F. Petrie, *Medum* (London, 1892); Y. Harpur, 'The Reliefs of R'-*htp* and *Nfri* from Meydum', *JEA* 72 (1986), 23-40.) Secondary inscription is harder to

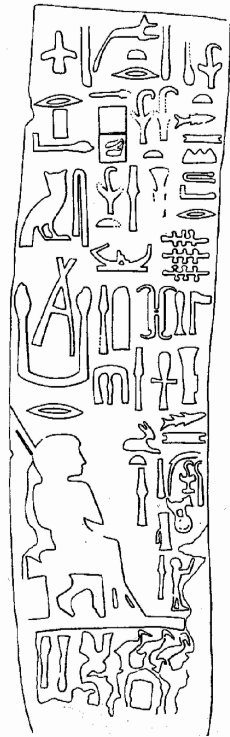


Fig. 1. Stela of Merika from his tomb at Saqqara; from W. B. Emery, *Great Tombs of the First Dynasty, III* (London, 1958), pl. 39. Courtesy Egypt Exploration Society.

early Third Dynasty tomb of Hezyre at Saqqara.<sup>16</sup> Of these three contexts, the structure can say nothing very specific about the tomb owner, although its size and location proclaim his status and group allegiance. The earliest monuments that contain more than names and 'determinatives' or undistinctive human figures are the late First Dynasty stelae of Merika, and of Sabef from Abydos.<sup>17</sup> The Helwan stelae may be a little later.<sup>18</sup>

The stela of Merika from his tomb at Saqqara (fig. 1) was evidently set up at the offering place.<sup>19</sup> It has a distinctive tall rectangular form. It must have formed the central element in a door-like arrangement, with a different shape from later slab stelae and false door slabs.<sup>20</sup> The seated relief figure of Merika may be seen as relating the 'door' to the burial behind and virtually partaking in offerings, but this cult element appears less central than in slab reliefs. A seated figure is probably more prestigious than a striding one; it is also in a pose appropriate to receiving offerings by relating to the table, as well as being passive and thus of high status. It is therefore functional in terms of the funerary cult. This form later became the normal determinative for writings of names of the prestigious deceased.

More broadly, the distinction in composition between the vertical and the lateral or horizontal is also that between the written and the pictorial. The slab stela, classically represented by Fourth Dynasty examples, originated in, and retained the format of, a figure of the deceased by a table with a tabular listing of offerings.<sup>21</sup> Although slab stelae contain large amounts of writing, their representational mode is pictorial, focusing upon provisioning the deceased. The seated figure fits the lateral composition better than a striding one would, and in effect confirms its pictorial character.<sup>22</sup>

Vertically-oriented reliefs came to be placed on the outer segments of a false door, a position that required some bilateral symmetry. The following comments are based on general Old Kingdom practice rather than the earliest examples. In a sense, these reliefs are displaced versions of the figure of the deceased moving through the narrowed central slit of the door, which is greatly reduced from the broad proportions of Merika, Hezyre, or Khabausokar (n. 20), where the figure of the deceased is central.<sup>23</sup> The figure carved beneath the titularies mostly strides. This pose fits the location well, allowing the figure to hold sceptres indicative of status and to display other iconographic features more clearly than do seated poses. More subjectively, the striding pose mediates between the figure's dignity, its capacity for

track, and may have become common later; for typical late Fifth Dynasty examples, see A. M. Moussa and H. Altenmüller, *Das Grab des Nianchnum und Chnumhotep* (Mainz, 1977), plates passim.

<sup>16</sup> Grave goods, which may define a tomb owner further in relation to his or her social group, cannot be considered here.

<sup>17</sup> W. M. F. Petrie, *The Royal Tombs of the First Dynasty*, I (London, 1900), pl. xxx.

<sup>18</sup> Z. Y. Saad, *Ceiling Stelae in Second Dynasty Tombs from the Excavations at Helwan* (Cairo, 1957); interpretation: G. Haeny, 'Zu den Platten mit Opferischszene aus Helwan und Giseh', in Haeny (ed.), *Aufsätze zum 70. Geburtstag von Herbert Ricke* (Wiesbaden, 1971), 143–64; see also T. Wilkinson, 'A Re-examination of the Early Dynastic Necropolis at Helwan', *MDAIK* 52 (1996), 342–3. I do not discuss these stelae or others of the Second and Third Dynasties here.

<sup>19</sup> Tomb 3505: W. B. Emery, *Great Tombs of the First Dynasty at Saqqara*, III (London, 1958), 10–13, pls. 23b, 39; crucial discussion: B. J. Kemp, 'The Egyptian 1st Dynasty Royal Cemetery', *Antiquity* 41 (1967), 26–30.

<sup>20</sup> The late Third Dynasty false door niches of Khabausokar and his wife Neferhotepathor show a transitional form combining elements of slab and vertical figure: PM III, 449–50; J. Kahl, N. Kloth, and U. Zimmermann, *Die Inschriften der 3. Dynastie: Eine Bestandaufnahme* (Wiesbaden, 1995), 188–97.

<sup>21</sup> Listing: G. A. Reisner, *A History of the Giza Necropolis*, I (Cambridge and London, 1942), 64–5; some examples: H. F. Lutz, *Egyptian Tomb Steles and Offering Stones of the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnology of the University of California* (Leipzig, 1927), nos. 1–3.

<sup>22</sup> Later orthography, in which personal determinatives were seated or squatting rather than standing, does not apply in early times, so that the script is not relevant here.

<sup>23</sup> From the late Sixth Dynasty on, *wedjat* eyes incorporated into the design of false doors mediated between this world and the next: S. Wiebach, *Die ägyptische Scheintür: Morphologische Studien zur Entwicklung und Bedeutung der Hauptkultstelle in den Privatgräbern des Alten Reiches* (Hamburg, 1981), 160 with n. 180.

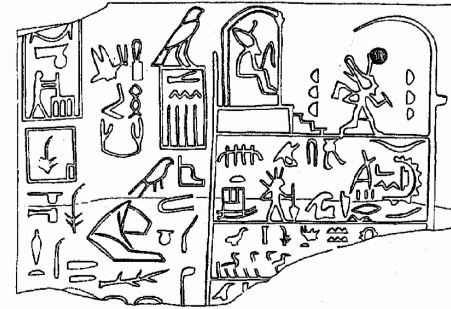


Fig. 2. Tag of Den with sed festival run in three registers and vertical columns of writing to the left; from W. M. F. Petrie, *The Royal Tombs of the First Dynasty 1900, I* (London, 1900), pl. xv:16.

movement, and a sense that it 'meets' the visitor: it is more active and involving than a seated pose.<sup>24</sup> In a different way, statuary integrated with the false door and emerging from it to receive offerings conveys a sense of the merging of spheres of existence, but it is normally seated and so does not relate to the striding model.<sup>25</sup>

The vertical columns of inscription on the outer segments of false doors contain

titularies and figures of the deceased and family members that can be compared with statuary, for example in differentiating stages of life. As such, they display the deceased's identity more broadly than do slab stela scenes. Unlike most Old Kingdom statuary, and also unlike some slab stelae, they would have remained in principle visible in a tomb's cult place.

The vertical orientation has a comparable but more abstract reference. Writing was vertically arranged while pictorial forms were horizontal, in keeping with the horizontal lived world on earth. This distinction is clear but complex in the contrast between the semi-pictorial Early Dynastic year tags (fig. 2) and the forms in which comparable material was laid out in the annals reproduced on the Palermo Stone (fig. 3), where the pictorial elements are reduced to determinatives. The striding figures of the deceased on false doors fit the vertical arrangement, while also being 'determinatives' to the titularies. Henry G. Fischer in particular has explored the implications of this point for the overlap between writing and representation.<sup>26</sup> While the figures' written and pictorial functions cannot be separated, their scale turns them into pictorial statements.

This tension between vertical writing and horizontal representation was exploited in the early development of false doors, notably on the stela of Merika (fig. 1), whose inscription is the longest connected piece of writing preserved for its date; larger amounts were no doubt written in lost contexts.

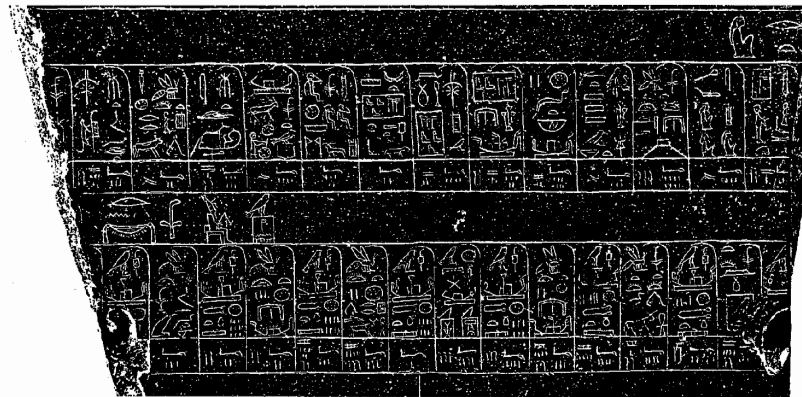


Fig. 3. Palermo Stone, sections of lines 3 and 4; sample of annals for parts of the First and Second Dynasty. Reproduced from H. Schäfer, *Ein Bruchstück altägyptischer Annalen* (Berlin, 1902), pl. I.

<sup>24</sup> The rather different treatment of women would need investigation in any full study.

<sup>25</sup> See A. Bolshakov, *Journal of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston* 3 (1991), 4–15 (Ankhaf), with refs.; on the comparison of relief panels and statuary, see also F. D. Friedman, 'The Underground Relief Panels of King Djoser at the Step Pyramid Complex', *JARCE* 32 (1995), 12–14.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. 'Redundant Determinatives in the Old Kingdom', *MMJ* 8 (1973), 7–25 = *Ancient Egypt in the Metropolitan Museum Journal* (New York, 1977), 73–91; *L'écriture et l'art de l'Égypte ancienne* (Paris, 1986), 24–46.



Fig. 4. Panel showing Hezyre seated at an offering table, probably from the southernmost niche in his tomb corridor; rephotographed from Quibell, *The Tomb of Hesy*, pl. xxxi.

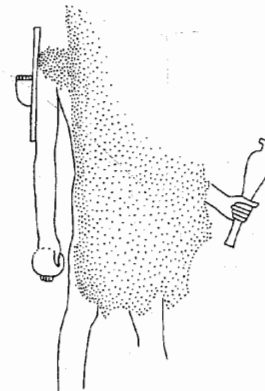
Continuous language was not yet inscribed in public places, so that any transitivity or temporality should inhere in the arrangement of the material. Although not technically well executed, the inscription is hierarchically composed to emphasize the titles *jrj-p't sm* 'Member of the *p't* and *sm* Priest', which are larger than the others and immediately precede Merika's name.<sup>27</sup> This creates a pinnacle for his identity in his membership of the innermost group and his personal proximity to the king as ceremonial clothier.<sup>28</sup> Most of the remaining titles can hardly be interpreted, but seem to be less exalted. The seated figure below determines, and through its prestigious iconography extends, the inscription's meaning. In creating an offering 'scene' it incorporates a tension between the horizontal 'pictorial' area, associated with the figure, and the 'textual' in the vertical columns; these elements were later separated. The composition serves both a ritual and a declarative purpose. This may be all the monumental relief presentation of an identity that was possible in Merika's time. He also possessed a pair of wooden statues in the cult complex on the north side of the tomb.<sup>29</sup> Their striding pose could have complemented the stela, and they were open to the cult, extending the meaning of his self-presentation.<sup>30</sup>

The wooden reliefs of Hezyre, from more than a century after Merika, show much development.<sup>31</sup> They were set in eleven niches along a corridor painted with patterns on the niched side and representations of funerary equipment opposite.<sup>32</sup> Wendy Wood has proposed a reconstruction including placing the reliefs in a meaningful sequence.<sup>33</sup> The initial, seated relief (fig. 4) is close in composition to Merika's stela but much advanced in technique—in a different material—and in iconography. The presence of an offering table gives more prominence to the notion of funerary cult here than on the other reliefs, all of which have a striding Hezyre. About half of them nonetheless have elements of offering lists; apart from the incongruity of striding next to a table, which relates to a seated position, a table would be compositionally impossible. Each relief has a slightly different physical type and/or iconography. The key example is the last (fig. 5), which shows Hezyre holding a libation jar and a disk that together 'write' his name while perhaps also signifying bread—which can have the same disk form as the sun—and libations or liquid offerings.<sup>34</sup> This image merges the deceased's identity with the funerary cult and projects it strongly.

It might be possible to construct a meaningful progression through the sequence of reliefs to model something like a career, but the alternation among attributes held and worn makes it likely that an arrangement would be complex and rhythmically rather than sequentially patterned. The choice of titles

on the different reliefs does not follow any clear pattern, except that the fullest selection is on the seated relief (fig. 4), where more space is available for writing. The loss of several reliefs and the uncertainty of the placing of others render any result insecure. What emerges clearly is that the reliefs have meaning as a group more than they do individually and that the figures present an identity focused in the corporeal person of Hezyre through iconography and the final emblematic relief, and not just in his title sequences. They present a balance between social role and individual.<sup>35</sup>

Wendy Wood terms the Hezyre ensemble a 'narrative',<sup>36</sup> a line of interpretation that is favoured by her problematic identification of a figure of the king on the east wall (see n. 35). However this figure may be read, the view of the set of reliefs and their putative goal as expressing a transitivity must take into account that the most complete identities of Hezyre are presented in the first and last reliefs, and that the first relief represents him elderly and the last in an idealized and enacted identity but not elderly,<sup>37</sup> so that there can hardly be a simple progression from first to last. I therefore see the composition as having an organization of its own that is thematic and artistic, as shown by Wood herself. The organization presents but does not 'narrate' an identity; any more closely narrative aspects would have had to be realized in material now lost. There was a marsh scene painted in the tomb's outer corridor.<sup>38</sup> This is significant both because it may suggest that the decorative programme modelled an environment and because it is the earliest such composition known. It need not, however, have narrative meaning, even in the broadest sense.<sup>39</sup>



#### Metjen

The early Fourth Dynasty chapel of Metjen from Saqqara, from about two generations after Hezyre, is the oldest decorated chapel that is almost completely preserved.<sup>40</sup> It contains a remarkable amount of inscription, as well as pictorial elements.<sup>41</sup> The ratio of inscription to picture may be in part a function of status. The contemporaneous tombs at Maidum, whose owners were of higher status than Metjen, are more strongly pictorial, even though their chapels were of similar size (while forming part of enormous mastaba structures).<sup>42</sup> I suggest that this emphasis at the highest level on the developing pictorial mode was normative; Metjen, with his allusive designs, would have incorporated pictorial mo-

Fig. 5. Northernmost panel of Hezyre from his tomb at Saqqara, from owner's figure; from H. G. Fischer, *Ancient Egypt in the Metropolitan Museum Journal* (New York, 1977), 44, fig. 25; also reproduced in Fischer, *L'écriture et l'art de l'Égypte ancienne* (Paris, 1986), 42 fig. 10. Courtesy H. G. Fischer and The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

view of the 'rather literal mentality of the Egyptians', which he evokes in discussing what the figure may signify. Here, Wood's interpretation is preferable (*JARCE* 15, 18–19).

<sup>27</sup> Wood (*JARCE* 15, 15) has proposed that a painted figure on the east wall, of which only a foot is preserved (Quibell, *Hesy*, pl. vxi; her pl.iii b), represented the king and was the focus of the whole. Both such an arrangement and the presence of the king have no parallel and would offend against rules of decorum, not least because the proposed royal figure would not stand out in an assemblage of furniture. I prefer to see the entire east wall as depicting funerary equipment. The identity of the painted figure remains uncertain; it could represent a statue of Hezyre.

<sup>36</sup> *JARCE* 15, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Although the face is lost, this point is secure because the iconography of age would not fit with the figure's pose and dress.

<sup>38</sup> Quibell, *Hesy*, 10; see Wood, *JARCE* 15, 21.

<sup>39</sup> Later Third Dynasty material cannot be considered here. The most significant examples are probably Khabausokar and Neferhotepthor (n. 20 here) and the tomb entrance of Akhtia (C. Ziegler, *Catalogue des stèles, peintures et reliefs égyptiens de l'Antique Empire et de la Première Période Intermédiaire* (Paris, 1990), nos. 14–15; Kahl et al., *Inscripfen der 3. Dynastie*, 206–11).

<sup>40</sup> The contemporaneous Maidum chapels (see n. 15) are more fragmentary. Hardly any decoration is preserved from the mastabas near the northern pyramid at Dahshur, which may also have contained similar material: N. Alexanian, in R. Stadelmann et al., 'Pyramiden und Nekropole des Snofru in Dahschur', *MDAIK* 49 (1993), 281–3; id., in *Kunst des Alten Reiches* (Mainz, 1995), 1–18.

<sup>41</sup> PM III<sup>2</sup>, 493–4; LD II, 3–7; Roccati, *Littérature historique*, 83–8; remarks by Wood, *JARCE* 15, 14–15. The chapel, Berlin 1105, is presently inaccessible.

<sup>42</sup> Petrie, *Medum*; Harpur, *JEA* 82, 23–40. The only 'biographical' detail preserved at Maidum is the much quoted statement about Nefermaat: 'he is one who makes his "gods" in writing that cannot be erased' (*swt jr ntrw f m zh n sijnw f*; Petrie, *Medum*, pl. xxiv; for comment, see e.g. Baines, *Fecundity Figures* (Warminster and Chicago, 1985), 32–3). This is distinctive in using a nominal sentence with present meaning for a potentially 'narrative' assertion; see further n. 93 here.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. J. Baines, 'Origins of Egyptian Kingship', in D. O'Connor and D. P. Silverman (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian Kingship* (Leiden, 1995), 132–3. Size of hieroglyphs is used in comparable fashion at Maidum to privilege the groups *jrj-p't h'jtj-<sup>2</sup> jrj(?) nbn*; Petrie, *Medum*, pls. xix, xxi, xxii.

<sup>28</sup> A role typified by the Fifth Dynasty inscription of Rewer: J. P. Allen, 'Re'wer's Accident', in A. B. Lloyd (ed.), *Studies in Pharaonic Religion and Society in Honour of J. Gwyn Griffiths* (London, 1992), 14–20.

<sup>29</sup> Emery, *Great Tombs*, III, 10, pls. 24–5; W. Wood, *Early Wooden Tomb Sculpture in Ancient Egypt* (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University; Ann Arbor, 1977), 12–14.

<sup>30</sup> The unique decoration beneath the base line of Merika's stela may assimilate his composition to royal models that possess such a base area, but it can hardly be interpreted.

<sup>31</sup> PM III<sup>2</sup>, 437–9; J. E. Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara (1911–12): The Tomb of Hesy* (Cairo, 1913); Kahl et al., *Inscripfen der 3. Dynastie*, 104–11.

<sup>32</sup> The use of a subtly varying linear arrangement is paralleled in the contemporaneous reliefs in the corridors under the Step Pyramid and its south tomb: Friedmann, *JARCE* 32, 1–42, with refs.; see further W. Wood, 'A Reconstruction of the Reliefs of Hesy-re', *JARCE* 15 (1978), 20. The contrast between royal and non-royal decoration — as in the fact that the king runs while the non-royal has more restricted poses — would repay study.

<sup>33</sup> Wood, *JARCE* 15, 9–24. For the emblematic relief, see H. G. Fischer, 'Some Emblematic Uses of Hieroglyphs with Particular Reference to an Archaic Ritual Vessel', *MMJ* 5 (1972), 5–23 = *Ancient Egypt in the Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 31–49.

<sup>34</sup> Fischer, *MMJ* 5, 44–5, raises the possibility of a ball of natron. His reservations over the sun disk may be unnecessary; but whether or not the figure embodies a ritual action with bread and libation, the association with the name of Hezyre can hardly be gainsaid. Perhaps what Hezyre is holding is on one level a hieroglyph rather than a sun disk. I would not share Fischer's

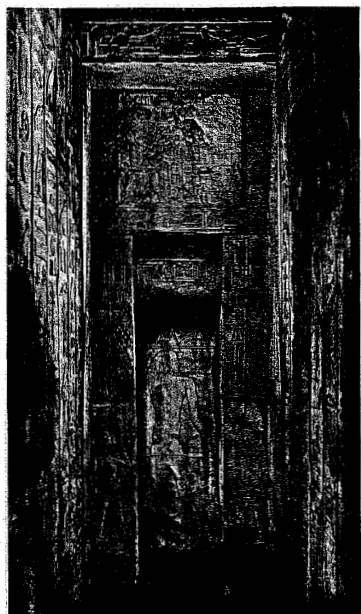


Fig. 6. View of the chapel of Metjen (Berlin 1105) with false door taken from the entrance. Old museum photograph. Courtesy Ägyptisches Museum Berlin.

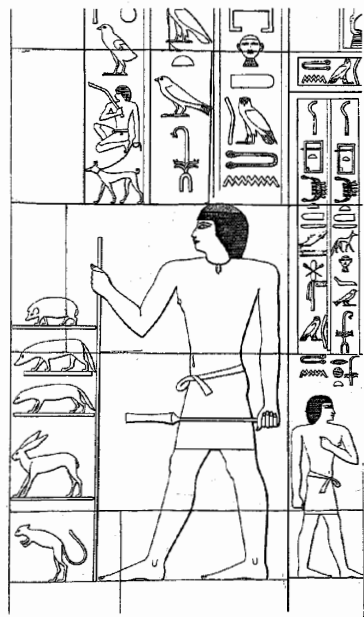


Fig. 7. False door thickness of Metjen (Berlin 1105), south side, lower part; reproduced from LD II, 3.

tifs as far as he could within constraints of status. Although his tomb appears exceptional to us, the only close parallel being the lost one of Pehernefer,<sup>43</sup> it may have been more like the average for its date than the Maidum tombs.

Metjen's false door, which is the focus of his symmetrically arranged chapel, looks forward to much later designs but has hardly any inscription in continuous language. The consecutive 'texts', which are above the door niche and on other walls of the chapel, are hardly 'biographical'. Is there nonetheless a sense in which the chapel as a whole may present a transitivity and an identity that goes beyond the assertion of titles?—or is the decoration almost wholly concerned with legal and property matters, as is often assumed?<sup>44</sup> Promising approaches to this issue are through the disposition of the west and south part of the chapel, and through part of the long inscription on the south wall of the entrance corridor.

An analysis of the west wall must take into account the chapel's visual impact, as seen from the entrance (fig. 6). All that is visible from there is the false door niche, which forms an architectural as well as a thematic unity. The section of inscription above should be disregarded and read with the west wall as a whole, because only its middle columns surmount the false door.<sup>45</sup>

The false door's central area is wide and comparable with Merika and Hezyre in containing a large, in this case striding figure of the deceased. Above the door roll is the small slab with a seated figure. The tension between striding and sitting is thus resolved by placing both in the same area. The striding figure asserts the purpose of the false door to act as a transition between this world and the next by being larger than the two flanking figures which 'determine' the pairs of columns of inscription on the jambs.

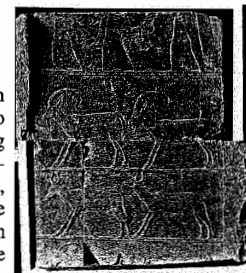
This play with scale is extended in the approach to the false door by the forward-facing figures on the

<sup>43</sup> PM III<sup>2</sup>, 502-3; H. Junker, 'Phnfr', ZÄS 75 (1939), 63-84. I have not been able to consult the Nestor l'Hôte mss in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, cited in Porter and Moss, which may record elements that would allow a study of context.

<sup>44</sup> E.g. H. Goedicke, 'Die Laufbahn des Metjen', MDAIK 21 (1966), 1-71; Helck, WZKM 63-64, 10-13; K. B. Gödecken, *Eine Betrachtung der Inschriften des Metjen im Rahmen der sozialen und rechtlichen Stellung von Privatleuten im ägyptischen Alten Reich* (Wiesbaden, 1976).

<sup>45</sup> This is the roof balk in the corridor indicated in Lepsius's section (LD I, 38, tomb 6).

Fig. 8. Chapel of Metjen (Berlin 1105), south wall, upper registers of animals with legs of offering bearers above; museum photograph of current dismantled state, courtesy Ägyptisches Museum Berlin.



thickness of the recess.<sup>46</sup> These are somewhat larger than the figure in the central opening and form part of 'scenes' that relate by implication to the decoration on the north and south walls. The northern, right-facing figure wears a leopard skin and knot amulet, and is the recipient of offerings. It might be characterized as 'official', while the focus on offerings, which extends to the north wall with its vision slit for the serdab, fits the fundamental purpose of the funerary cult.<sup>47</sup> This side may have been chosen for these motifs in part to harmonize with the right-facing figure in the false door opening.

The south thickness relief (fig. 7) has in front of it five small desert animals arranged vertically on baselines. The first column of inscription above names Metjen as 'Administrator of the Desert (*zmjt*),<sup>48</sup>

Controller of Hunters/Hunting ...', with the strongly particularized determinative for hunting at the bottom of the column and filling about a third of its height. The south wall again has five narrow registers (fig. 8). Each shows two animals, with the bottom three evoking the hunt through a dog attacking the other animal's rear quarters. The animals face left, as do the figures of Metjen, while three offering bearers above, who carry clothing, a bed, and water(?), face right.<sup>49</sup> Above this is a seated figure of Metjen as a fat older man (fig. 9), without a headdress and wearing a long cloak, holding his hand out to a water bowl and receiving voice offerings from a kneeling and a lost standing figure in two sub-registers. Under Metjen's chair are two signs *mn* 'nh. These are perhaps a partly funerary wish, either 'enduring of life' or 'may he endure in respect of life'.<sup>50</sup> His figure, which is the only seated one on the south side, may counterbalance the slab on the false door, but is much less formal, and unlike the latter is active rather than heraldic. On the south side of the east wall two bearers in sub-registers approach Metjen carrying game animals similar to those on the south wall.

This decoration focuses more on a distinctive aspect of Metjen's activities than is normal in elite tombs. About a third of the pictorial area concerns hunting. Heinrich Schäfer discussed briefly this remarkably effective evocation of an environment and an activity.<sup>51</sup> The integration of selected titles of the deceased with what is depicted and implied is exceptional, bringing the formal false door together with the more variable other surfaces. Hunting, an essential preoccupation of kings and elites, was later treated on a vast scale in the complex of Sahure and continued to occur in non-royal tombs.<sup>52</sup> Within the severe constraints of his tomb decoration and the inscriptions' focus on juridical matters, Metjen's designer expanded upon this

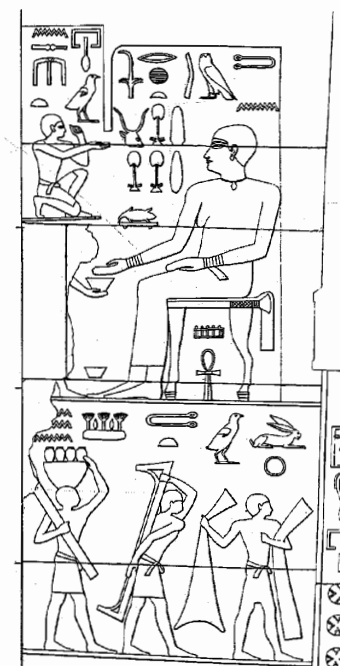


Fig. 9. South wall of chapel of Metjen (Berlin 1105), top section; reproduced from LD II, 6.

<sup>46</sup> LD II, 3, flanking scenes; these are not on the side wall, as might appear from the arrangement on Lepsius' plate.

<sup>47</sup> For the statue of Metjen from the serdab, Berlin 1106, see PM III<sup>2</sup>, 494.

<sup>48</sup> *zmjt* normally means 'desert' as domain of the dead (Wb. III, 445; other meanings on p. 444). Here it may not have this meaning, or the usage could evoke contrasting themes among the living and the dead.

<sup>49</sup> The captions above these figures may be either titles or designations of what they carry.

<sup>50</sup> The second reading takes *mn* as an exclamatory stative. It may be unwise to press such a caption for its grammatical structure. The phrase seems only to be paralleled by the Sixth Dynasty pyramid name of Pepy II (e.g. W. Helck, LÄ V, 5) and a Late Egyptian word for 'coffin' (Wb. II, 63, 1).

<sup>51</sup> *Principles of Egyptian Art*, ed. E. Brunner-Traut, trans. and ed. J. Baines (Oxford, 1986), 43-4.

<sup>52</sup> See articles cited in n. 1 here.

theme, interweaving it with the complementary topic of the owner's material success and with the bringing of gifts and funerary offerings — the latter more particularized and less prominent than on the north.

The text on the south side of the entrance corridor<sup>53</sup> begins with an enumeration of Metjen's acquisitions of productive land and the relevant documentation. There follows his purchase of 200 arouras (ca. 55 ha) supplying daily food offerings for the tomb, deriving from the funerary foundation of the Second Dynasty Queen Nimaathapi, and that of a parcel in an enclosure, 200 cubits square (4 arouras, ca. 1.1 ha), which was laid out as an orchard. While only a fiftieth of the size of the domain, this was large for fruit growing (fig. 10):<sup>54</sup>

...(and) (col.7) a domain (*pr*), length 200 cubits, width 200 cubits, enclosed(?)<sup>a</sup> and equipped and planted with fine trees. A very large garden was created in it (*jrjw šj jm.f ʿ wrt*). Fig trees and grape vines grew (8) in it. There was writing (*jw zhw*)<sup>b</sup> concerning (it) in a royal document and their<sup>c</sup> relevant names were in the royal document.

(9) The trees and vines flourished (*wšh?*) very greatly and a very large quantity of wine was made.

(10) There was made for it<sup>d</sup> an arbour (?—*jnknwke*) of (one) *šht* and 2 *hš*, dug(?) within the enclosure and planted with trees,

(11) (and named?) Imeres, a foundation (*šjt/grgt?*)<sup>e</sup> of Metjen, and Iatsobek, a foundation of Metjen.

<sup>a</sup> The reading of this phrase is uncertain, but its rendering is fairly secure.

<sup>b</sup> For the use of *jw*, see below.

<sup>c</sup> This may refer to all these domains, but the *.sn* could relate to the different species of trees and vines.

<sup>d</sup> *jrj(w) n.f*. The *f* here could refer to the garden or to Metjen. A rendering 'he made' (*jrj.n.f*) seems unlikely.

<sup>e</sup> This word appears to be otherwise unattested.

<sup>f</sup> This word is written once with an *r* and once with a *t*, suggesting a variation deriving from a cursive draft.

Behind the inscription is a set of three offering bearers in vertically arranged sub-registers. Above them is a caption 'Foundation of Metjen' and in front of each is a ☉. This layout indicates that the unnamed figures 'personify' estates, like those at Maidum<sup>55</sup> and in the valley temple of the southern pyramid of Snofru at Dahshur.<sup>56</sup> The matching inscription on the north of the corridor ends with three female offering bearers, similarly captioned but without the ☉.

These figures indicate the inscriptions' underlying purpose to enumerate domains that will supply offerings, but this does not exhaust the meaning of the southern text. The passage describing the orchard is more elaborate than any other section, using more nearly continuous language and three times qualifying a statement with *ʿ wrt* 'very greatly/much'. All these features suggest that this was the acquisition by which the author—whether Metjen himself or not—set most store. There is no indication that the orchard contained a house, but this is plausible because of the tendency in all periods to set prestige country dwellings in enclosures sheltered by trees.<sup>57</sup> The passage parallels later idealizing texts (see p. 35). Metjen's example is particularistic and documented like all his inscriptions, but the selection of this element for elaborate treatment suggests that more is at stake. The orchard or garden is the place of later delectation celebrated in texts and images,<sup>58</sup> and its evocation here is likely to play upon similar ideas in the extremely restricted available recording style.

In summary, I suggest that the south side of the chapel presents elements of an individual life that are focused upon provision for the tomb but also evoke Metjen's most prestigious achievements. Apart

<sup>53</sup> LD II, 6 (left), 7b; subsequently designated inscription C: *Urk.* I, 3–5; Goedicke, *MDAIK* 21, pl. iii; Roccati, *Littérature historique*, 86–7, §§ 62–3.

<sup>54</sup> Translations: Goedicke, *MDAIK* 21, 64–5; Gödecken, *Betrachtung*, 12, 'Akte IV'. Both translate in the present tense on the basis of juridical interpretations. While this approach seems well founded in general, it creates severe grammatical difficulties. My rendering, which does not claim to solve the problems of the text, is close to Roccati's excellent treatment. The rendering of C. J. Eyre, 'The Water Regime for Orchards and Plantations in Pharaonic Egypt', *JEA* 80 (1994), 67, is comparable with Roccati's and mine.

<sup>55</sup> E.g. Petrie, *Medum*, pl. xix.

<sup>56</sup> These are the earliest pictorial examples, but such estates are known from the Early Dynastic Period. See A. Fakhry, *The Monuments of Sneferu at Dahshur II: The Valley Temple 1: The Temple Reliefs* (Cairo, 1961), 17–58. See in general H. K. Jacquet-Gordon, *Les noms des domaines funéraires sous l'Ancien Empire égyptien* (Cairo, 1962).

<sup>57</sup> New Kingdom example, e.g. E. Dziobek, *Das Grab des Ineni: Theben Nr. 81* (Mainz, 1992), 60–2, pls. 15, 64a. This arrangement can be seen today in the Egyptian countryside and has evident advantages in reducing wind and dust, as well as in security.

<sup>58</sup> See e.g. J. Baines and H. Whitehouse, in G. Jellicoe et al. (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Gardens* (Oxford and New York, 1986), 155–8; J.-C. Hugonot, *Le jardin dans l'Égypte ancienne* (Frankfurt etc., 1989), 268–74 may understate this aspect.

from the associations of the orchard, hunting, which probably brought its elite administrator close to the king, may have distinguished Metjen from his peers, and thus offers a parallel for the events and achievements celebrated in narrative by such Fifth Dynasty officials as Niankhsakhmet and Kaiemtjenet.<sup>59</sup> The selection of achievements may have been distilled from a wider range of interests as texts became disseminated among the elite. Thus, Metjen may not point specifically toward later biographical practice, which could have been devised afresh and mobilized different themes. The description of Metjen's orchard probably displays a background in documentary practice, which was no doubt highly developed in hieratic on papyrus, but greatly transcends the documentary. The treatment of hunting is more fully integrated with his figure and titles than is most later tomb decoration.

The themes of the south side of Metjen's chapel are relatively this-worldly. While the two sides complement each other, the north was probably the more important in context, containing numerous formal elements and relating more closely to a next-worldly destiny. Thus, the south appropriately presents the individual—perhaps as symbolized in the hieroglyphs *mn nḥ* inscribed beneath the chair (discussed above)—while the north has more generalized themes. As noted by Winfried Barta (see n. 60), this south-north distribution is the reverse of later normal practice. The later pattern respects the general rule of primacy for south over north; it is not clear why Metjen's composition is eccentric in this respect.

Together with the Maidum chapels, Metjen's is the earliest to contain the *hṫ-dj-njswt* offering formula, which occurs twice on the north side.<sup>60</sup> This distribution fits with other distinctions between the sides and is textually and linguistically significant. Since the formula is not attested in preserved Third Dynasty tombs, these examples may be among the earliest ever inscribed in a public place. They do not appear tentative, and may build upon oral ritual practice as well as expertise in syntactic written language, which had been used for several generations to inscribe divine speech formulas and statements about royalty,<sup>61</sup> and probably also extended to writing ritual texts on papyrus.<sup>62</sup>

Another linguistic feature of Metjen's inscriptions is the presence of *jw* in the passage about the orchard (n. b above). This is probably the earliest attestation of this fundamental particle which, as Mark Collier expresses it, has a function 'as "presencing" or "setting up" a situation within language.'<sup>63</sup> It does not follow that the written forms are close to spoken ones, but the occurrence of *jw* in the passage that is identifiable on other grounds as the most vivid and immediate suggests that it drew upon the greatest range of linguistic forms, as well as subject matter, that was inscribed in a public, non-royal context. *jw* is a subjectivizing feature that tempers the 'objectivity' of the rest of the inscriptions.

All these points suggest that the chapel of Metjen presents a specific person and his achievements

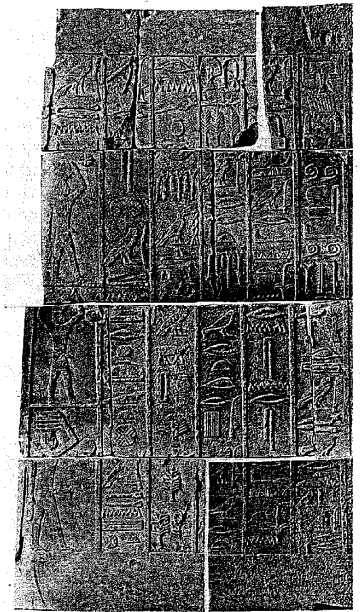


Fig. 10. Section of inscription on the south wall of the entrance passage of the chapel of Metjen, Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum 1105. Collage of old museum photographs by Hans Goedicke, *MDAIK* 21 (1966), pl. iii; rephotographed from there with the permission of Ägyptisches Museum Berlin, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, and Hans Goedicke.

<sup>59</sup> E.g. Roccati, *Littérature historique*, 96–8, 118–21, with refs.; E. Schott, in *Fragen an die altägyptische Literatur*.

<sup>60</sup> LD II, 4 (left), 5 (lower centre); see W. Barta, *Aufbau und Bedeutung der altägyptischen Opferformel* (Glückstadt, 1968), 3.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Baines, in Gundlach and Raedler, *Selbstverständnis und Realität*, 132–3 with n. 8.

<sup>62</sup> The title *hrj-ḥtj* 'bearer of the festal papyrus roll (lector priest)' is first attested from the Second Dynasty: P. Lacau and J.-P. Lauer, *La pyramide à degrés*, IV: *Inscriptions gravées sur les vases* (Cairo, 1961), nos. 70, 123–5 (including cases with the addition *hrj-tp*). This implies the presence of written forms used as the basis for rituals. If these papyri were, for example, less evolved forms comparable to the Ramesseum Dramatic Papyrus (K. Sethe, *Dramatische Texte zu altägyptischen Mysterienspielen* (Leipzig, 1928)), they might have contained little continuous language. The corpus upon which the Pyramid Texts drew had much such language, but it is uncertain when it began to be written.

<sup>63</sup> 'Time, Person and the Meaning of *iw*', in C. Eyre (ed.), *Seventh International Congress of Egyptology, Abstracts of Papers* (Cambridge, 1995), 38.

through text and representation, especially on the south side of the chapel, but that his individuality is subordinated on the north side to schematic and generalized social values relating both to this world and to the funerary cult and his destiny in the next world. The passage about the orchard uses verbal forms with past meaning (see n. 54) and a relational particle to evoke a narrative about a person and his interests, but is filtered through conventions that did not favour free elaboration in writing. For any trace of such interests to emerge, the drive to present them must have been strong.

Metjen's inscriptions have no direct successors. The next known group of significant 'biographical' inscriptions dates around the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty, and consists of the texts of Debehni,<sup>64</sup> Niankhsakhmet (see n. 59), and Washptah (see n. 85). In these the transformation of voice can be seen taking place. Both Niankhsakhmet and Washptah are voiced according to context, with the posthumous inscription of Washptah composed exclusively in the third person. Niankhsakhmet's texts are strongly framed and include speeches of the protagonist and the king, generalizing description, and a eulogy of the king, concluding with an assertion by Niankhsakhmet of his own worth. This last feature is the one with the most significant later development. In context it may point to oral practices that I discuss below, which turn away from conspicuous personal achievement to moralizing. As such they are suited to the partly legitimizing context of tomb and funeral. Debehni's poorly preserved text describes the occasion for the commissioning of his tomb as a favour granted by Menkaure on a visit to a construction site and continues with an extensive narrative of the building and equipping of the tomb. It is the earliest formally first-person biography, introduced by *ddf* 'He says',<sup>65</sup> and may be the oldest text of the group, all of which share a number of features. If so, no consistent direction of development emerges, and person and voicing, with their potential differences between the objectivizing and the subjectivizing, appear to be adapted to the specific context. These biographies exemplify incipient textual genres and Niankhsakhmet's points to the separate genre of eulogy, as well as implying a context of performance.<sup>66</sup> In no case is a biography presented as 'spontaneous': like later texts, these are framed by distancing devices that can be connected with their quasi-fictional, performed character. In that sense, the text of Metjen, in which a significant passage is embedded without specific markers, exhibits a more radical approach than later ones. But its case is specialized and the potential for development from it no doubt limited; it is not surprising that it had no clear successors.

### Discussion

#### *The context of the tomb*

If half the decoration of Metjen's chapel presents an individual and his life and constitutes a less grand equivalent to the more pictorial decoration of the Maudum tombs, what does this imply about the themes and function of the latter? This question relates to the essentially unsolved general problem of the purpose of Old Kingdom tomb decoration. The purpose is presumably summarized at the focal point of the false door, where offering comes together with the titulary and figures of the deceased. Three principal interpretations have been proposed or assumed; the second and third of these are to some extent compatible. First, the scenes, and later models, with their mainly productive contents were added to tombs as a semi-magical substitute for offerings—the most widespread interpretation.<sup>67</sup> Second, the reliefs create a remembered world that the deceased could revisit from the hereafter and dwell within.<sup>68</sup> Third, the construction and decoration of tomb superstructures relates more strongly to this world and the owner's career and social relations than to provisioning the next life.<sup>69</sup> In this last, more 'biographical' perspective, as in the detailed interpretation offered above, the whole tomb might celebrate a life. I

<sup>64</sup> S. Hassan, *Excavations at Giza, IV: 1932–1933* (Cairo, 1943), 168–9 with fig. 118; Roccati, *Littérature historique*, 91–3.

<sup>65</sup> The *ddf* is reversed to face the rest of the inscription and thus implies a speaking figure. Beneath the biography was a row of thirteen statues of the deceased, who presumably spoke the biography through them.

<sup>66</sup> For the latter, see Baines, 'Prehistories of Literature' (n. 1 here).

<sup>67</sup> Presented but only partly accepted by W. Wolf, *Die Kunst Ägyptens* (Stuttgart, 1957), 258–62; see H. A. Groenewegen-Frankfort, *Arrest and Movement: An Essay on Space and Time in the Representational Art of the Ancient Near East* (London, 1951), 30–6, also summarizing earlier views. The interpretation of D. Kessler, 'Zur Bedeutung der Szenen des täglichen Lebens in der Privatgräbern (I): Die Szenen des Schiffbaues und der Schifffahrt', *ZÄS* 114 (1987), 59–88, is too specialized to be convincing.

<sup>68</sup> Wolf, *Kunst*, 260. This seemingly promising approach appears not to have been explored further. It would proceed from a position that was not directly knowable for the Egyptians any more than it is for us. The emphasis of Groenewegen-Frankfort on the deceased as 'looking' at the action in a tomb has similar implications: *Arrest and Movement*, 31–5.

<sup>69</sup> Spiegel, *Idee vom Totengericht*, esp. 5–10; Assmann, *Ägypten: eine Sinngeschichte*, 84–6. R. van Walsem, *De iconografie van Egyptische elitegraven van het Oude Rijk... Theoretische en methodologische aspecten* (Nijmegen, 1994), 35–6, correctly remarks that the figures in Old Kingdom tombs are always shown alive and not dead (see also N. Kanawati, 'The Living and the Dead in Old Kingdom Tomb Scenes', *SAK* 9 (1981), 213–25; see further n. 70 here). It remains convenient to speak of 'the deceased'; although figures of owners show them alive, they were deceased when the tomb became inhabited.

explore this third approach a little further; it is unlikely to account for all aspects of decoration.<sup>70</sup>

The scenes in the earliest decorated tombs appear quite different in content from most title strings. They are, however, rather less different from the implications of Metjen's inscriptions, which dwell upon land and its produce. As indicated, the inscriptions may substitute in part for pictorial forms, as in the Maudum tombs (n. 15 here), which have scenes of fishing and marsh pursuits, as well as series of animals comparable with Metjen. A gross division of themes may reflect general implications of decoration. The Maudum scenes focus on the bucolic, inaugurating a topic that encompasses much later decoration. Bucolic life also contributes through agricultural production to the central focus of offering bearers,<sup>71</sup> the presentation of offerings to the deceased, and such motifs as butchery. Much in the more 'industrial' later scene types could possibly be related to the production of tomb equipment.<sup>72</sup> While such a characterization is compatible with the 'magical' reading of decoration as provisioning the after-life, the bucolic aspect should be evaluated in its own terms: the ideal life is not urban, as it is in some New Kingdom tomb motifs, but is that of a landholder on his estate. Pictorially represented it can be a more prestigious equivalent for the titles of Pehernefer and Metjen and for the latter's written presentation of country estates.<sup>73</sup> An estate-based life is incorporated in the formulas of late Old Kingdom ideal biographies which state that the protagonist built a house, planted trees, dug a pool, went to and fro from his fields, and so forth.<sup>74</sup> These are likely to be textual counterparts for pictorial decoration, as well as for physical representations such as the early Middle Kingdom house models of Meketre.<sup>75</sup>

The scene types are allusively presented even at Maudum; Fifth and Sixth Dynasty renderings are more explicit. Decoration may have developed from the allusive to the explicit—as for example in Western art from the early Renaissance to the Baroque—but the use of registers on Early Dynastic year tags (e.g. fig. 2) suggests that the potential for expansive forms existed before. The Maudum style could be condensed from something fuller, perhaps occurring on royal monuments or conceivably palaces, houses, or smaller objects. Such possibilities are suggested by comparison of Sahure's reliefs, which contain motifs such as hunting and rewarding high officials<sup>76</sup> that have reduced counterparts in non-royal scenes and texts. The most distinctive instance is perhaps the famine motif of Sahure<sup>77</sup> and Wenis.<sup>78</sup> This is probably a topos of the king's 'giving bread to the hungry' (seemingly foreigners in his case), anticipating its occurrence in non-royal biographies (but never in reliefs) by a century or more.

If this interpretation of the distribution of motifs among tombs is viable, two things follow. First, the pictorial has primacy over the textual, while royal and very high ranking non-royal pictorial motifs can be related to 'biographical' inscriptions across boundaries of social hierarchy and of genre. The seeming absence of public textual records of royal exploits before the Middle Kingdom is comprehensible in this light. Second, from the opposite perspective of biographical inscriptions, the non-sacred motifs in texts in non-royal tombs can be comparable with reliefs and can model an individual's life and environment. In some cases they might report upon actions and achievements—a possibility that seems hardly to have been explored—so that these too could acquire a subjectivizing quality.<sup>79</sup>

One implication of this model is that constraints on written biographies did not relate only to limitations in the use of writing. The precedence among written genres which originally favoured the tabular over the continuous<sup>80</sup> was paralleled and overridden by a general precedence for the visual over the inscribed—so far as they can be separated. By including extensive areas of non-tabular writing in tomb

<sup>70</sup> As Sabrina Gomez-Deluchi points out to me, elements in the *htp-dj-njswt* formula that relate to the prospect of death rather than the perpetual renewal of offerings favour reading the decoration as relating to this life and its end. Such a point, which cannot be pursued here, could have implications for textual elements or for the decoration.

<sup>71</sup> The statistically dominant element in mastaba decoration: van Walsem, in Seventh International Congress of Egyptology, *Abstracts of Papers*, 196–7.

<sup>72</sup> This reading would not be valid for New Kingdom non-royal tomb scenes.

<sup>73</sup> This does not argue against the juridical interpretations of Gödecke, Goedicke, and Helck, but suggests that the inscriptions operate on more than one level.

<sup>74</sup> E. Edel, *Untersuchungen zur Phraseologie der Inschriften des Alten Reiches* = *MDAIK* 13 (1944); E. Doret, *The Narrative Verbal System of Old and Middle Egyptian* (Geneva, 1986), 98–102; there is no recent extensive treatment.

<sup>75</sup> H. E. Winlock, *Models of Daily Life in Ancient Egypt from the Tomb of Meket-Re' at Thebes* (New York, 1955), 83–4, A, B; pls. 9–12.

<sup>76</sup> L. Borchardt et al., *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs Šašhu-re' II: Die Wandbilder* (Leipzig, 1913), pls. 17, 52–4.

<sup>77</sup> Z. Hawass and M. Verner, 'Newly Discovered Blocks from the Causeway of Sahure (Archaeological Report)', *MDAIK* 52 (1996), 185 fig. 2a, pl. 55b.

<sup>78</sup> *PM* III<sup>2</sup>, 420; S. Schott, 'Aufnahmen vom Hungersnotrelief aus dem Aufweg der Unaspyramide', *RdE* 17 (1965), 7–13, pls. 1–4.

<sup>79</sup> An altogether exceptional evocation of personal experience may be the mid Eighteenth Dynasty tomb scene of Amenemhab confronting a hyena (W. S. Smith, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt*, 3rd ed., rev. W. K. Simpson (Harmondsworth, 1998), 144–5 fig. 253, with pertinent comments). This probably has more than literal commemorative meaning.

<sup>80</sup> Baines, in Baines et al., *Pyramid Studies and Other Essays Presented to I. E. S. Edwards* (London, 1988), 124–33.



decoration, Metjen's inscriptions constitute a vast transformation of what went before and of the contemporaneous tombs at Maidum. The writing is distinct from reliefs but also substitutes for them. Only in the passage about the orchard does it approach living forms. The further development to Debehni and Niankhsakhmet<sup>81</sup> is another transformation, in which writing in non-pictorial contexts narrates lived episodes, and for Niankhsakhmet displays praise poetry. The underlying concerns of the actors may have changed less than did forms of expression. A presentation of the elite individual and his or her<sup>82</sup> life is common to all preserved forms but is conveyed in allusive, indirect, slowly developing ways.

#### *The living context of tomb and text*<sup>83</sup>

Biographies as concerns of the elite, and perhaps of others inaccessible to us, are unlikely to have been completely constrained by written and pictorial conventions and hierarchies. They were probably expressed in oral forms and conventions that might focus around crucial transitions, especially that of death. Some Old Kingdom tombs contain reliefs of funerary rites,<sup>84</sup> but there is no textual description of these, so that the relation between tomb and biography must be seen in general terms. Biographies can allude to their subject's death, either as an event that should come after a perfect old age or by stating that the monument was completed after the subject's death by a son or heir. From the Fifth Dynasty, they could be composed after death<sup>85</sup> and came to be given to the deceased in the first person, in a fictional device framed by speech markers similar to those of much later fictional literary texts. These strategies, which make play with the ambivalences of persons and their roles, come at the end of the process reviewed here. Is it possible to model a role for the projection of a person's identity in the context of death that would be valid before and after this transition and might have informed it?

As several scholars argue (see nn. 2–5), the core components of Old Kingdom biographies are: the deceased's career, especially as relating to royal favour; and the assertion of moral worth, with its value for the present, for posterity, and probably for destiny in the next world. The two come together in the partly narrative composition of Niankhsakhmet. A third vital component of consecutive inscriptions is the offering formula, present from Metjen on. This too connects the individual to the king and incorporates posterity through requiring performance.

The career can be related to the title strings present on monuments from Merika on. A clear illustration of this overlap in function is the mid Fifth Dynasty false door of Ptahshepses<sup>86</sup> with its enumeration of distinctions accorded by successive kings. Oral narratives that incorporated titularies could have evoked careers, including the cause-and-effect style which is not attested in writing until the late Fifth Dynasty.<sup>87</sup> The obvious context for such a performance is the funeral, when someone, ideally the deceased's eldest son who should ensure his burial and funerary cult, might pronounce a eulogy. Factitious biographies form part of some of the latest Egyptian funerary rituals,<sup>88</sup> where they are voiced in the second person, as are the New Kingdom versions mixed with 'biographical' materials in compositions like that of Paheri of Elkab.<sup>89</sup> The second person also occurs widely in the Pyramid Texts. This usage has few parallels in longer biographies, yet suggests a plausible context of a public address to the deceased in the final passage into the next world.<sup>90</sup> The conventions of self-presentation and biography in tombs might in part distil such addresses, developing from there along paths of their own, as is normal for visual and verbal art.

Such a practice may underlie the treatment of identity in early tombs. For Metjen, the idea of an

<sup>81</sup> Roccati, *Littérature historique*, 96–8, with refs.; for other discussions, see n. 1 here.

<sup>82</sup> A significant proportion of early monuments belonged to women, but they seem to have fewer complex biographical implications than the works discussed here. This question would be worth investigating.

<sup>83</sup> This section takes up themes developed by Christopher Eyre and published by him with myself in M. T. Larsen and K. Schousboe (eds.), *Literacy and Society* (Copenhagen, 1989), 91–119.

<sup>84</sup> See e.g. J. A. Wilson, 'Funeral Services of the Egyptian Old Kingdom', *JNES* 3 (1944), 201–18; H. Altenmüller, 'Zur Vergöttlichung des Königs Unas im Alten Reich', *SAK* 1 (1974), 1–37; id., *LÄ* 1, 745–65.

<sup>85</sup> The texts of Washtah from the reign of Neferirkare may be the earliest clear example: *Urk.* I, 40–5; Roccati, *Littérature historique*, 108–11; they are, however, in the third person. The inscriptions of Senejemib, which are partly in the first person and partly in the third, appear to be posthumous: *Urk.* I, 59–67, esp. 63, 14–64, 6; Roccati, 122–8, esp. 126–7. For the general issue, compare D. Franke, *Das Heiligtum des Hegaib auf Elephantine: Geschichte eines Provinzheiligtums im Mittleren Reich* (Heidelberg, 1994), 22. Other types of biography, such as a number of Middle Kingdom Abydos stelae reporting visits to the site, appear to have been composed and set up during their protagonists' lifetimes, yet share many features with posthumous biographies. It is therefore difficult to use formal criteria to establish whether a biography was composed during life.

<sup>86</sup> Roccati, *Littérature historique*, 105–7; British Museum EA 682; PM III, 464.

<sup>87</sup> See E. Schott, in *Fragen an die altägyptische Literatur* (n. 5 here).

<sup>88</sup> Baines, *JEA* 78, 252, with refs.

<sup>89</sup> *Urk.* IV, 111–23; parallels 146–9, 496–500, 1217–23.

<sup>90</sup> Baines, *JEA* 78, 252–3; id., in *Definitively: Egyptian Literature* (n. 1 here); Assmann, *Ägypten: eine Sinngeschichte*, 190–1, referring to Diodorus Siculus, I, 91–3.

inscription voiced from the deceased's perspective might not have been present, especially since the only known older voiced material consists of speeches of gods. Other attested usages of written language are impersonal, as is everything in Metjen's tomb except for the offering formulas and the passage about the orchard. The voicing of the partly first-person Niankhsakhmet and the continuous posthumous third-person narration of Washtah go together with the transformation of content discussed above. Indeed, the latter text thematizes the protagonist's death, unlike most biographies, while its third-person form is probably an objectivizing narrative device, a little like the 'document' of Rewer (n. 28), which was set up in his tomb as one half of his biographical material. Debehni's text, which may be slightly earlier, nonetheless demonstrates that first-person biographies had emerged by that date. In these, the deceased addresses the viewer from the perspective of his figures in the tomb (not closely adjacent in the case of Debehni), integrating biography and decoration. This step 'fictionalizes' the whole while rendering it immediate and vivid. The distinction between narrative and general presentation of self and world almost disappears.

These developments should be seen in the context of construction during tomb owners' lifetimes. More than many wealthy groups, the Egyptian elite attempted in effect to bury themselves and to control posterity's image of them. This preoccupation would surely have encompassed the owner's acquaintance and thus attempted to shape others' perceptions. Decoration was not well suited to presenting temporal development—which was perhaps reserved for 'annals' and rarely shown even in royal reliefs—but it could present the individual and his role before death, for contemplation by both contemporaries and posterity.<sup>91</sup>

#### Conclusion

Although the development sketched here ultimately relates to the conduct of life and of the transition to death, it is anchored in the architecture, inscription, and decoration of tombs, and in the tension between vertically inscribed titles, with their implications of process and career, and the potentially expansive horizontal forms of decoration, with their presentation of an idealized style of life (among other concerns). Two phases can be discerned. The first leads from the minimal focus on the false door or offering place, and is exemplified by Merika and grandiosely expanded in Hezyre's tomb. The second runs from Metjen, whose tomb may contain the most elaborate extant self-presentation in relation to the means employed,<sup>92</sup> to Debehni and the early Fifth Dynasty biographies. The inscriptions of Niankhsakhmet, moreover, focus the biographical content, which had spread out into the chapel as a whole, back upon the false door. For Niankhsakhmet, this location is an artifice, because the door itself is the subject of half the inscription.<sup>93</sup> By his date, uses of writing had extended so that formal genre rather than written means shaped a biography's form. For earlier periods, innovations sit in the context of more limited uses of writing. There also appears to have been a hierarchy of access to the more prestigious pictorial forms that constrained the style of tombs that were below the near-royal status of Maidum, but opened up the potential of writing and sparse pictorial decoration to remarkably specialized achievements.

Down to the end of the Old Kingdom, the earlier distinction of vertical and horizontal governed much self-presentation in tombs. We are far from comprehending the intent and meaning of the elaborate decoration in Fifth and Sixth Dynasty tombs. I hope that this analysis of aspects of earlier ones may suggest a context for development and for the relationship between the tomb as communicative and enactive monument on the one hand, and the world in which it was created and the deceased was celebrated and laid to rest on the other.

<sup>91</sup> The deceased's ethical aspirations, which are implicit in the inscription of Niankhsakhmet, are not evident in the monuments considered here. How far the general presentation of the tomb implies ethical values is difficult to say.

<sup>92</sup> In his discussion of Pehernefer (*ZÄS* 75, 73–7), Junker proposed that the order of his inscriptions and of Metjen's modelled careers. Later work on titularies, such as W. Helck, *Untersuchungen zu dem Beamtentiteln des ägyptischen Alten Reichs* (Gluckstadt, 1954), and K. Baer, *Rank and Title in the Old Kingdom* (Chicago, 1960), identified other patterns. Junker's approach does not seem promising. Although Goedicke's treatment of Metjen has the title 'Die Laufbahn des Metjen' (*MDAIK* 21, 1–71), he is not principally concerned to map Metjen's career.

<sup>93</sup> Such a reflexive feature is visible in the inscription in the tomb of Nefermaat at Maidum quoted in n. 42; this is generally taken to refer to the use of paste inlay decoration.