

(Auto-)“Bioconographies” versus (Auto-)Biographies in Old Kingdom Elite Tombs: Complexity Expansion of Image and Word Reflecting Personality Traits by Competitive Individuality

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“Cemeteries are ultimately for the living, not the dead.”
(Vedral, *Decoding Reality*, 2010, 58)

Specifying the previous overarching motto, I would like to start this paper with three introductory mottos from “Eternal Rest,” “a meditation on cemeteries and on the relationship between the living and the dead,” written between 1957 and 1960 by the Jewish author V. Grossman.¹ It is one of the most impressive texts on this subject I have ever read and it should be obligatory “reading food” for Egyptologists and leads us straight to the heart of our conference. I quote:

Motto 1: “Yes, there are many reasons, many reasons indeed, why people go to a cemetery.”
(Grossman, *The Road*, 2011, 310)

The word “cemetery” leads us to the second motto:

Motto 2: “One could say, following von Clausewitz, that the cemetery is a continuation of life by other means. The graves express both the characters of individuals and the character of a particular time.”
(Grossman, *The Road*, 2011, 314)

An “individual’s character” can only be known on the basis of *information*, which brings us to the third motto:

1. Grossman 2011, 295–317, esp. 297. The direct inspiration for this essay, or rather meditation, was the Vagankovo cemetery where his father had been buried (Grossman 2011, 299). Grossman is the author of the international bestseller novel *Life and Fate* on the Second World War in Russia.



Figure 1. Façade of the mastaba of Hetepherakhty, National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden (after Holwerda, Boeser, and Holwerda 1905, pl. 5).

Motto 3: “What is important is that ... inscriptions—those that speak of the status of the deceased and those that speak of how much he is loved by those near and dear to him—have only **one purpose**: to **inform** outsiders ... The inscription is there in order to be read. It is addressed to those who pass by.” (Grossman, *The Road*, 2011, 309–10)

These mottos essentially coincide with a summarizing statement by J. Baines in his *Forerunners of Narrative Biographies*, on Old Kingdom elite tombs: “In this last, more ‘biographical’ perspective, as in the detailed interpretation offered above, the *whole* tomb might celebrate a *life*.”²

This statement together with the preceding mottos reveals that each elite tomb (our basic data set) tells a *life* story, since it is inextricably connected to a human individual. This is achieved by means of texts only, by iconography only, or by a mixture of both. It should be borne in mind that the purely textual “programs” are a minority among the great mass of iconographic “programs.”³

The mastaba of Hetepherakhty in the National Museum of Antiquities at Leiden (fig. 1) represents one of these textual and iconographic programs.⁴

On both sides of the entrance on the façade the texts framing large depictions of the owner and his son⁵

2. Baines 1999, esp. 34–35.

3. Kloth 2002 enlists ninety-eight (auto-)biographies, while several hundred elite tombs with iconographic programs are known for the Old Kingdom: the Leiden Mastaba Project (LMP) and its database, published in 2008 as a CD-ROM named MastaBase (van Walsem 2008), contain iconographic data on over 330 tombs from the Memphite area only.

4. Mohr 1943.

5. Note that on the right side the area above the figure of Hetepherakhty is blank, indicating that the tomb was never finished; the interior shows more evidence of incompleteness for the iconography as well.

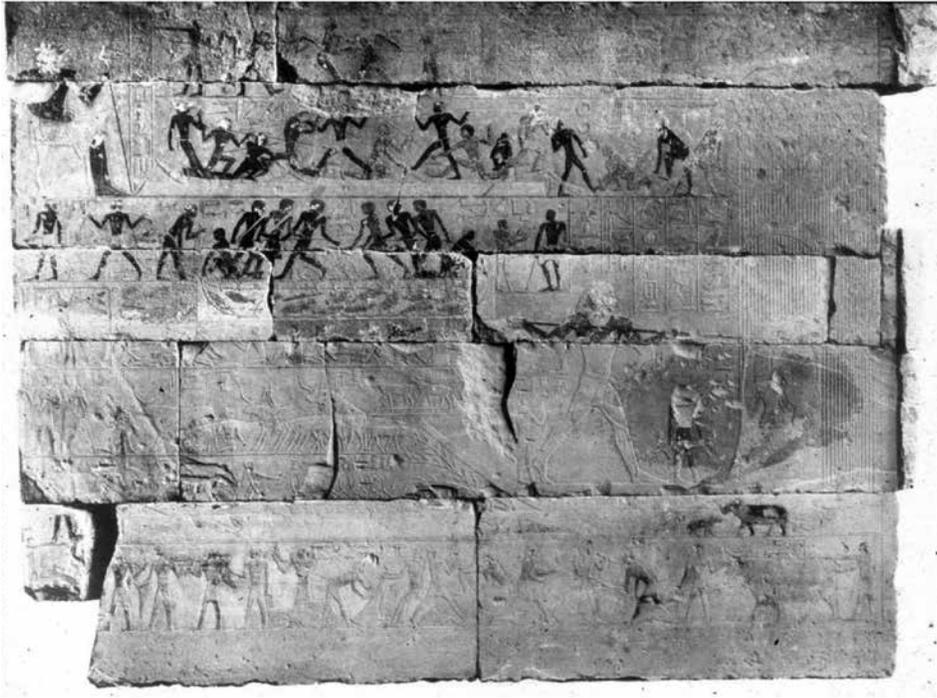


Figure 2. North wall of the mastaba of Hetepherakhty (after Holwerda, Boeser, and Holwerda 1905, pl. 5).

contain (auto-)biographical passages on the building of the tomb and the deliverance of the sarcophagus⁶ (“on behalf of” the king?).⁷

The only existing photograph of the entire north wall inside the chapel shows—admittedly not very well visible—so-called daily life, or, better, “profane” scenes,⁸ which mainly concern here “wet” scenes,⁹ such as fishing, fowling waterfowl, cattle crossing a waterway, and so on (fig. 2). The problem with walls of this kind is how to

6. Mohr 1943, 34–35; Kloth 2002, 27, no. 54, 321 sub *Htp-hr-3h.t(j)*.

7. Mohr 1943, 35, translates: “I was a revered one near the king *who delivered* the sarcophagus to me,” which—taken literally—sounds a bit odd. The gift is, of course, that the king was at least involved in the procurement of the sarcophagus. This line is followed by Kloth 2002, 27 (“Hinweis auf den Sarkophag *als königliches Geschenk* gegeben”), 70, 124 (“wegen meiner Geertheit beim König, [*der mir einen Sarkophag gebracht hatte*]”). However, Strudwick 2005, 274, translates: “I made this tomb, and a sarcophagus *was brought* for me.” The crux is the reading/interpretation of *inn*, namely, as *in(.w) n(=i)*, an attributive perfective active participle (Edel 1955–1964, §§ 627 and 634) connected to “king,” or as a passive *sdm.w=f* (Edel 1955–1964, §§ 555 and 560) “one brought”/“was brought,” where the unexpressed agent may imply the king again/as well. There is even a third or fourth possibility: *in(=i)*, a perfective *sdm=f* (Edel 1955–1964, § 468) or *in.n(=i)* historic/present perfect *sdm.n=f* (Edel 1955–1964, §§ 536–37): “I (have) brought (for me) [implying: ‘I myself’ since it was not a direct gift from the king; one would expect a form of *rdi* then] the/my(?) sarcophagus,” as a kind of terse culminating phrase of his being a “revered one by the king”; (in)dependency of the king for building and/or outfitting one’s tomb has been discussed in van Walsem 2012–2013, 135, and in Chauvet 2007. The discussion shows the potentially interpretative complexity and/or uncertainty of a “simple” spelling of a verb form.

8. They lack any textual reference to and/or pictorial representation of any deity or king. See van Walsem 2005, 33, 38, 42, 45, 54, 62, 71.

9. Strictly speaking, the term “wet” scenes is better than “marsh” or “riverine” scenes because it remains impossible to decide whether the water represented is the river Nile, a canal, a lake, a swamp or a pond. So far, any specifically identifying captions are

devise a method to show in *one simple* scheme, using a single consistent method, the entire iconographic repertoire and its complexity as expressed in the number of (sub)registers and their main and subthemes of that wall. The plan and the wall schemes of the Leiden mastaba, which only verbally *describe* the scene contents in the registers (fig. 3), are taken from Harpur's *Decoration in Egyptian Tombs of the Old Kingdom*.¹⁰ Because the scheme is in black and white only, it is impossible to see, without reading the various texts, whether, for example, the top register of the north wall has the same main theme as another register. Besides, since every register has a different description, one soon forgets its *content* and its *position*, about which one has read a few moments before. In short, although there are a great deal of highly useful data relating to the tomb's plan, it is very difficult to extract them to their full advantage.

Because of the combination of abstract registers with texts and figurative parts (fig. 4, top left [sitting tomb owner] and right part of wall [tomb owner spearing fish]), Harpur's method fails to give an easy overall visual impression of the entire iconographic content of Hetepherakhty's north wall. The Leiden Mastaba Project (LMP), cognizant of this, divided the iconography of all its 337 elite tombs into seventeen main themes,¹¹ each with a distinct color and an abbreviation in the top left corner, indicating its content. For example, bright green, SL is "Slaughtering," in addition to another abbreviation for the 187 subthemes into which the main themes were subdivided: C is "Cattle," and D is desert animals (fig. 5), for example.¹²

One should note, however, that there are considerable discrepancies in the description of the various subthemes between the Harpur and LMP wall schemes. Therefore, a detailed comparison is useful:

- *Register 1*, LMP summarizes under main theme FO ("Fowling") the catching of waterfowl with the "hexagonal net" (H), including the two figures offering fowl who are separately mentioned in Harpur's scheme;
- *Register 2*, subthemes "fighting boatmen" (Fb) and "building papyrus boat" (Pb) are identical in both schemes under main theme "Ships" (SH), but LMP adds to the far right the subtheme "papyrus harvest" (Hp) under main theme "Marsh scenes" (MA);
- *Register 3*, "fish transportation" (Tr) and hauling "dragnet/seine" (D) are again identical in both schemes under main theme "Fishing" (FI), but here Harpur adds on the far right the "overseer";
- *Register 4*, the "processing of fish" (Pr) [that is, "gutting of fish" in Harpur's scheme] is extended there with "overseer in hut," while the remainder is summarized as fabrication of papyrus objects (Fp) under main theme "Marsh scenes" (MA), respectively as "making mats";
- *Register 5*, Harpur indicates here only "punishing worker," "milking cow," and "mating cattle," but LMP adds at the far left, under main theme "Offerings" (OF), an "offering bearer" (Ob) while including the "punishing" scene¹³ under main theme "Stockbreeding" (ST), subtheme "milking" (M), and to the right of the "mating scene" (that is, "copulating scene" in LMP) LMP adds subtheme "herd" (H), omitted by Harpur;

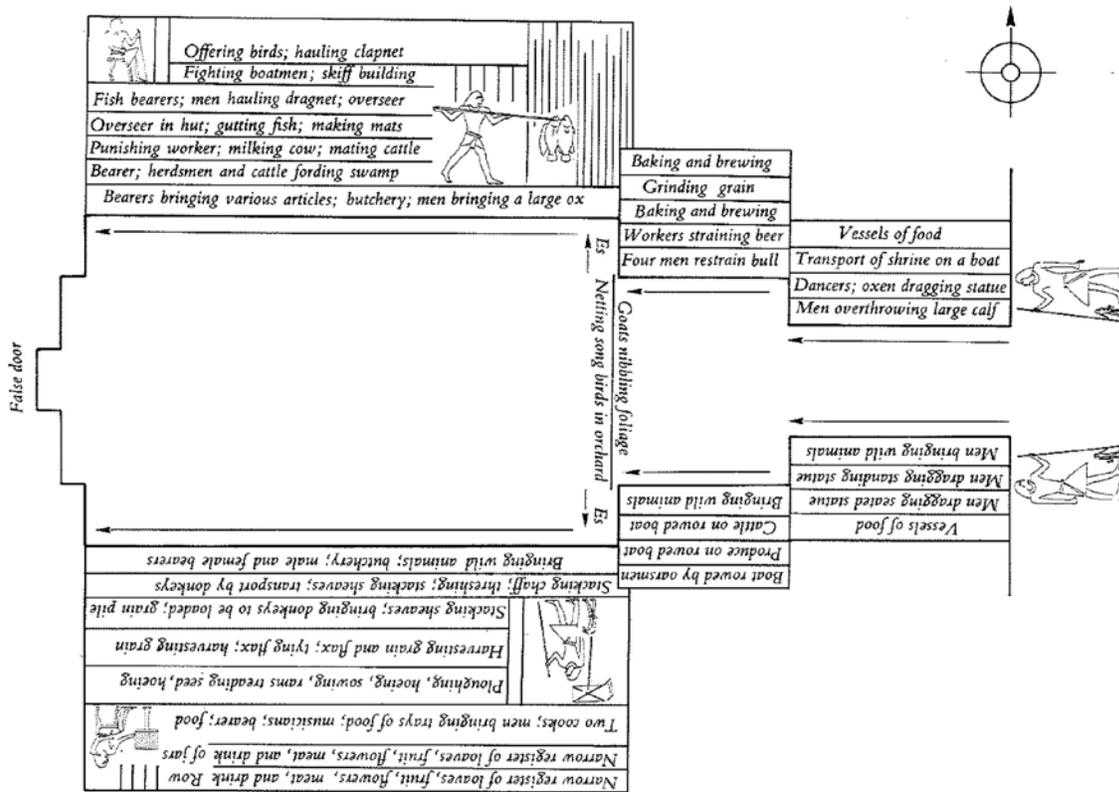
totally lacking, except for the general designation of the large tomb owner in a papyrus skiff as being "fishing ... in the *šꜣw* (*lotus* pools, ) , the *sꜣw* ('bird-pools,' ) and *phꜣw*" (best translated as "back swamps"). For an example of the entire series, see Harpur and Scremin 2010, 626, 73. It is revealing that the words *mr* ("canal") or *itrw* ("river," that is, "Nile") are never used. Therefore, it remains completely unknowable whether the continuation of the water with—as in Leiden—the crossing of cattle (Mohr 1943, 63, fig. 33) is in the same back swamp or in a canal.

10. Harpur 1987, 420, plan 97.

11. Van Walsem 2008, 9.

12. The wall schemes are not (exactly) according to scale, but are approximations that are as close as possible.

13. It is most likely a wrestling scene; see Decker and Herb 1994, pls. 3–4, L 9, and Vandier 1958, pl. 40, nos. 3–4; both are statues. It is remarkable that Hetepherakhty's relief was not recognized as such.



97 Htp-hr-htj, WSP (PM 593-5), V.6-8E

Figure 3. Plan and wall scheme of the mastaba chapel of Hetepherakhty (after Harpur 1987, plan 97).

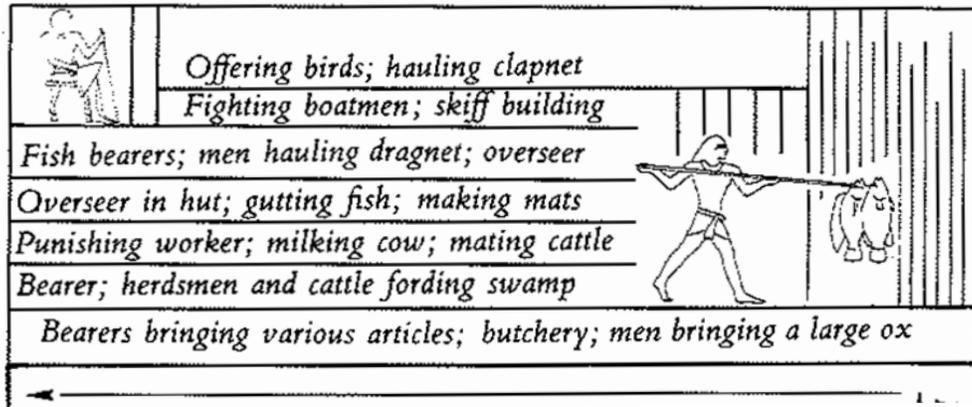


Figure 4. Scheme of Hetepherakhty's north wall, Harpur's method (detail of fig. 3).

- Register 6, here Harpur does distinguish a single “bearer” at the left, although two are actually represented.¹⁴ The “fording scene,” or “cattle crossing” (Ccr) are identical, but the subtheme fishing with a line (L), main theme “Fishing” (FI) on the far right is completely ignored by Harpur;

14. Mohr 1943, 63, fig. 33.

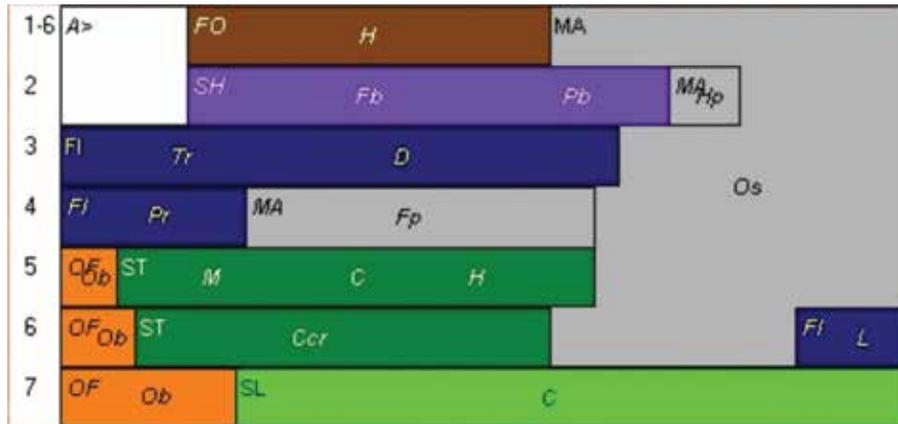


Figure 5. Scheme of Hetepherakhty's north wall (LMP 045), LMP method.

- *Register 7*, on the left LMP discerns just offering bearers (Ob), while Harpur mentions “bearers bringing various articles,”¹⁵ and splits the single category slaughter of cattle (C) of LMP into “butchery” and “man bringing a large ox,” which is obviously part of the butchery process and as such does not necessarily need to be mentioned.

Two final observations:

1. One of the advantages of the colored LMP registers is not only that they show immediately, at a glance, where switches of the main theme occur in an individual register (here, for example, reg. 4: FI to MA) but also the overall vertical distribution of main themes (or clusters of them) over the entire wall.
2. The increase in size of a subtheme under an identical main theme over various registers can be easily visualized, such as the increase in number of offering bearers from one to two, to four in registers 5–7 on the left in figure 5.

Using these *objective* color conventions and abbreviations, the Leiden Mastaba Project processed 337 published tombs of the Memphite area comprising 581 rooms and 2,366 polychrome wall schemes consisting of 6,943 registers. Not only do they reveal the “*iconographic character*” of each individual tomb and, implicitly, its owner, but they also make it possible to visualize the iconographic complexity of single tombs *and/or* compare them with others.¹⁶ Finally, the iconography is accompanied by 11,548 texts.

Since having or representing a “character” (see above, motto 2) is also one of the marks of literature, it is not illogical that J. Assmann established a connection between the elite tomb and this medium:

Motto 4: “Das ägyptische Monumentalgrab ist kein Grab in unserem Sinne. Seine Stellung in der ägyptischen Welt läßt sich am ehesten unserem Begriff der Literatur vergleichen.”¹⁷

15. However, the variety is actually a variety of *meat* products, not a variety of bird(s), fish, meat, fruit, objects, so the information is ambiguous.

16. See pp. 128–30.

17. Assmann 1996, 100; this was motto 1 of my presentation for the conference; see also n. 28.

As the title of his essay “*Schrift, Tod und Identität: Das Grab als Vorschule der Literatur im alten Ägypten*” indicates, Assmann was the first to explicitly construe an analogy or similarity between tomb and text. I also highlighted the connection in my article on “individuality” in respect of Nefermaat’s statement about his new decoration technique (“[...] that could not be erased [...]”): “With this example we find ourselves in the domain of the ‘autobiography’ which cannot be treated here.”¹⁸

To put our perspective right from the very beginning: whether one is dealing with a(n) (auto-)biography *strictu sensu* (that is, consisting of text only), or with a *bioconography* [a neologism to be explained below]—consisting of images *alone*, or (potentially) *combining* image(s) and text(s)—one should keep in mind the irrefutable fact that the *image always* has the existential primacy over text. This is evinced by the simple fact that long before the oldest writing systems were developed, humankind was using all sorts of imagery to express its interaction with external reality, from the scenes in the caves of Lascaux to the paintings on Naqada II ceramics.

The above stated is true for the late “prehistoric” purely textual¹⁹ tags from tomb Uj at Abydos, which consist of *images* only,²⁰ turned metaphorically into linguistic *signs* of writing by means, for example, of the *rebus* principle. It also holds true for tomb 100 at Hierakonpolis,²¹ which offers images only without the slightest reference to any signs of writing.²² The ultimate truth of this statement is, of course, the fact that, strictly speaking, the *entire* hieroglyphic writing system only consists of images. The ancient Egyptians’ sensitivity for images was much stronger than, for example, that of the Sumerians or Babylonians. This is obvious from the fact that the hieroglyphic script never completely disappeared by evolving towards a *single* abstract shape, as cuneiform did. Instead, it kept various forms side by side: hieroglyphic, cursive hieroglyphic, hieratic, abnormal hieratic and demotic, all of which show various degrees of recognizability of the original signs.

In sum: pictures always precede texts. The most basic “information” originates in pictures, which can only *secondarily* be turned into a script for text, or, into complex iconographic representations that potentially may be further specified by texts, possibly encompassing a (purely) realistic and/or a metaphoric and/or a symbolic meaning.²³

Since I am talking about the elite tomb as presenting *various visual media*—all transferring “information” to a passing “observer” by its physical presence as a stone building with internal spatial organization, iconography, and texts²⁴—one might also use the term “*work*” in the sense of a “literary work” as a metaphor for this artifact. This was also succinctly and appositely suggested by J. Assmann:

18. van Walsem 2012–2013, 135.

19. Note that in archaeology, in general, “prehistory” denotes the period of the *total* absence of writing, while in Egyptology, evidence of knowledge of the first hieroglyphic script appears in Dynasty “0” (also known as Naqada III, or “late prehistory”), implying that this period should no longer be called “prehistoric” in relation to writing but only in relation to the still *absent political unification* of Egypt. Thus, the latter should no longer be linked strictly to the invention of hieroglyphic writing.

20. Baines 2007, 119, fig. 5.

21. Kemp 2006, 80, fig. 25.

22. Goldwasser 1995; Morenz 2004, 14–17, 29–33, 39–50, 58–68, 110–18, 214–28, 278–86, 348 fig. 16, 354 figs. 41 and 43.

23. This is in agreement with Moreno García’s presentation that autobiographies are “optional extensions to the main pictorial and epigraphic program found in private monuments” (this volume, p. 252) while also “represent[ing] a way to introduce some sort of individuality and difference in an otherwise highly canonical environment” (this volume, p. 253). See the definition of *bioconography* below.

24. The funerary equipment in the tomb chamber is excluded, of course, because it was inaccessible to visitors. The importance of the transfer of “information” to a visitor is rightly stressed by Vischak 2015, 221: “The evident effort by the artisans to make the relief and painted images visible indicates that the viewing needs of a living audience formed a driving force of the system’s development” (see above, motto 3).

Motto 5: “In Gestalt seines monumentalen Grabes tritt der vornehme Ägypter sozusagen als Herausgeber seiner ‘Gesammelten Werke’ auf.”²⁵

The term “gesammelte Werke,” metaphorically designating a grave that is an *artifact*, implies that an Old Kingdom elite tomb is an *encoded* entity,²⁶ encapsulating and representing various and multiform *existential dimensions* of its owner, which encompass, at minimum, the following nine key attributes:

1. First, and above all, it is the *above-ground local marker* of its owner’s mortal remains. It materializes and expresses:
2. its *architecture*, which encompasses its cubic size, its quality of masonry (materials used and precision of construction),²⁷ and its internal spatial layout *complexity* (number and shape of rooms and connecting corridors).²⁸ These represent a *plan* on the horizontal level of the accessible part(s) of the tomb.
3. Here the *iconographic program* is shown in all its complexity, which encompasses *quality* of relief and/or painting;²⁹ encompassing the *primary layout* of walls on the level of the selection of “*main themes*,” varying in number and length of registers. The primary layout encompasses the “*secondary layout*” of registers on the level of selection (combinations) of “*subthemes*,”³⁰ which, finally, encompass the level of the number, size, and complexity of their composing *basic iconographic entities* or “*particles*” (persons, their clothing, animals, landscape features, accompanying texts, etc.).

Points 2–3 reflect:

4. the *economic “potential”* of the once-living tomb owner, that is, his “materialistic” *status*;
5. the (optional) inclusion of a(n) *(auto-)biography* in the strict sense of a written text only (whether it concerns an *Idealbiographie* or an *Ereignisbiographie*³¹ is of no relevance here), which adds information about the owner’s *career* indicating
6. his (immaterial) *social status*, encapsulating also his *cultural education* that includes his knowledgeability of subthemes to be chosen and their regularly present *innovations*.

From these six points *emerges*³² what one might best call:

25. Assmann 1996, 103; quoted as motto 2 of my conference paper.

26. For a definition of “artifact” and its encodement, see van Walsem 2005, 2 and 34.

27. Compare van Walsem 2012–2013, 127, on the difference of masonry between the chapel facades of Akhetetep in the Louvre and Hetepherakhty in Leiden.

28. Van Walsem 2012–2013, 124.

29. For instance, three elite tombs in Saqqara possess differently executed depictions of crocodiles. Ty’s tomb shows a crocodile in raised relief with the individual scales on the body and the softer texture on the belly also executed in relief (Aldred et al. 1978, 152, fig. 152). In Mereruka’s tomb, however, another crocodile in raised relief does not display these details (Aldred et al. 1978, 154, fig. 154), suggesting that they were added in paint. This leads to the tomb of Sankhuipthah where one finds an extremely detailed picture of a crocodile in paint only (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1998, pls. 2d (color), 38, 69, 76; the best large size photograph is still in Eggebrecht 1984, 27).

30. The subtheme “fowling with the hexagonal net” of the main theme “Fowling,” can be represented in one (van Walsem 2005, 36, fig. 3 [tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep]), in two (van Walsem 2005, 35, fig. 2 [tomb of Ptahhotep]), and even in three scenes (van Walsem 2012–2013, 132, fig. 10 [tomb of Ty]).

31. Kloth 2002, 229.

32. The term “emerge(nce)” originates from modern “chaos,” better: complexity theories and tries to describe and explain—via

7. a kind of *icon-“text”* or *icon-“portrait”* or *icon-“personality”* (see pp. 152–53, nn. 85–89 for a definition) plus/minus additional text(s) of or concerning the tomb owner, revealing in various *degrees*, and *levels*, in various iconographic and textual *selections* and in various *intensities* (expressed in varying numbers of composing entities) his *sensitivity* or wish for expressing his (*abstract*) *individuality*.³³ This includes his:
8. preoccupation with *competition*³⁴ with his peers, expressed by the increasing complexity and extension of the subtheme iconography and the increase of grammatical comparative constructions and statements in texts, his sensitivity for *innovation* and for *stretching the rules*, his incorporation of scenes that express *emotion* (humor,³⁵ grief, pride), which, taken together, reflect a certain degree of *taste*³⁶ and “*fashion*.” This is part of and ultimately reveals
9. something of his personal *vanity*, defined as: exaggerated self-love; inflated pride in oneself or in one’s appearance, attainments, performance, possessions or successes; hunger for praise or admiration.³⁷

In principle, a person’s *real* portrait reflects in its facial expression—at a fixed, “biological” time *moment* or end point—a time *interval* that starts with the person’s birth and (after the creation of the portrait) continues till death. In short, up until the portrait’s creation, it reflects and encompasses the (entire) *preceding* “life,” and thus is a kind of “biography” in a condensed shape and medium. Various stages in age are reflected by different “biographical events,” not necessarily by texts only, but also by sculptural and/or pictorial techniques to suggest the ravages of time, such as wrinkles, sagging cheeks, dull or vivid expression of the eyes, baldness, and so on. By analogy, someone’s (funerary) iconographic “portrait”/“personality” (see above, point 7) reflects the content of what I call a *bioconography*,³⁸ a *single* term especially coined here for grasping the preceding nine points and meant to be instrumental for both a *synchronic* as well as a *diachronic* analysis of the iconographic and textual data of elite tombs.³⁹

the process of self-organization along a very few basic “rules”—a complex dynamic or static stage of components that is more than the sum of its parts; see Mitchell 2009, 4, 13, 48, 189, 196, 293, 301.

33. On individuality, see van Walsem 2012–2013, 125 (note that the text of this paper was already read in 1998 in Berlin).

34. On competition, van Walsem 2012–2013, 129, 134–35, 138. In her study, Kothay, this volume, uses phrases and formulations such as “fierce competitive spirit” (p. 262) “increased competitiveness” (p. 262) “intense intra-elite competition” (p. 265), and notes that “success achieved through rivalry was a fundamental existential reality for the elite” (p. 265). Competition is also emphasized in Moreno García’s chapter in this volume.

35. For the humorous motifs in the Old Kingdom elite tombs, see Houlihan 2001, 15–33.

36. This aspect is convincingly discussed and stressed by Pieke 2012, esp. 131.

37. Webster 1976, 3:2532. One might almost suspect that Webster’s definition is the outcome of a detailed study of Old Kingdom elite tombs.

38. In my original paper the term was *biconography*, but a few English colleagues drew my attention to the fact that, although *I* intended *bi* to be an abbreviation of *bios* in this very *particular* context, in *general* it is ambiguous, since it may mean *double*, or *two*, suggesting a double iconographic program, which is definitely not what I mean. I am very grateful for their observation.

39. Although, in a strict sense, texts are not iconographic in *content*, their length, composition of individual signs (note that each hieroglyph is an iconographic entity in its own right!), number of lines/columns, the quality of execution and their presence or total absence above/in an iconographic configuration, affects the *pictorial*, that is the *iconographic* realization, of the decoration program of an elite tomb. Therefore, because of their *intrinsically pictorial/iconographic character*, not because of their *content*, texts still fall under the “umbrella” of *bioconography*, whose main accent is, of course, iconography as such. For the complementarity of image and writing, see, e.g., Assmann 1991 (1983), 81–85.

DEFINITION OF “BIOCONOGRAPHY”

The term is a compound of “bio-” from Greek *bios* “life,” and “[i]conography” from Greek *eikôn*, “image” and *graphein*, “describe.” Its *semantics* are *visually* represented by the “use” and “use *life*” (the interval between the first and the last use)⁴⁰ of any *general* or *specific (complex)* composition of iconographic *and* textual entities, potentially integrative into a(n) (complex) iconographic *program*. Within a program, it operates on the various levels of *main* themes (for example, “Fowling,” “Fishing,” “Marsh scenes”) and/or *subthemes* (for example, “Fowling with the hexagonal net,” “Fowling with a tree net,” “Fishing with a dragnet,” “Tomb owner spearing fish,” etc.), with or without *specifying* text(s), all in all originating and resulting from the tomb owner’s personal, that is his *individual*, interaction with his artist(s) and thus, by definition, revealing aspects of his “personality.”⁴¹ It is this *strictly representational* or, rather, *icontext* bioconography, that reflects the tomb owner’s form of life, or “Lebensform,” using a term of Wittgenstein.⁴²

It thus reflects the tomb owner’s *purely personal choice* (which certainly does *not* imply absolute freedom or autonomy of choice)⁴³ that results in and consists of a combination of variables (from all potentially eligible entities, that is, from the smallest iconographic and textual units/attributes to the largest subtheme and main theme compositions), on any level, as *specifically* executed in *his* tomb. This reveals some deep aspects of a person’s (sensitivity for)—let it be repeated—individuality (above, point 7); their drive for competition, need for innovations/stretching the rules, and expressing emotion (above, point 8); and their *vanity* (point 9). After all, a certain degree of vanity is unavoidably and undeniably necessary for, and present in, the total and intricate method(s) of self-(re)presentation used by the elite tomb owner.

The result, as already stated above under point 7, may be considered a kind of *abstract*—in the sense of *not* being sharply delineated and fixed only in terms of shape and outer components—iconographic programmatic “*portrait*”/“*personality*” that emerges on the *individual* level. The correctness of the analogy with the concept of a “portrait” is underscored by the fact that *each and every tomb is different*, just as there are no two exactly identical portraits or faces in the real world (even the most identical twins show facial differences, even though they may be minute).

It should be noted that, by definition, in each individual tomb the entire biological “use life” of *one* human *entity* or “artifact,”⁴⁴ viz. the tomb owner, is encapsulated. This is even analogous or identical to one or more iconographic entities figuring only *once* in *one* particular tomb, resulting in a “use life” of (at least) the same length as the tomb owner’s life span and, running partly—after all, he does not start his tomb as a child—parallel to the tomb’s construction and decoration within the owner’s life. It results in an *individual, static* “frozen” bioconography, which, however, reflects a *dynamic* life span. This implies that in order to get an idea about *chronological depth* on a *collectively* bioconographic scale—that is, on a more complex, *collectively dynamic* scale—one

40. The chronological interval from the first to the last appearance of any iconographic entity and/or artifact; see van Walsem 2005, 1; 2006, 112.

41. It is again interesting to note that Gnirs in her paper presentation for this conference, “The Narrativity of Death: Life Stories beyond the Biographical Genre,” 1–2, also addresses the concepts of “personhood” and “(in)dividual.”

42. See van Walsem 2005, 85.

43. Figurative representations of any god or any king were apparently forbidden or a *tabu* in Old Kingdom elite tombs, witness the fact that not a single example has so far been found. Deities and kings occur in texts only. Only royal funerary complexes show both kings and deities *in effigie* beside texts.

44. The term “artifact” as used here for a human being seems to contradict its definition in van Walsem 2005, 1, with nn. 4–5, because a human body grows and takes shape without input of any human “skill.” But *that* only concerns his “biomass.” A lot of human *educational* skill, however, is put into him by his parents while growing up, from baby to adult, in his particular culture: this certainly makes him a *social* or *cultural* (“human”) “artifact.”

needs minimally *two* subsequent tombs to compare and analyze. The upper limit of the number of tombs for this purpose remains open, of course.

Both *pure* biographies and bioconographies *have to be read* by an “addressee” (see above, motto 3). When these are completely textual, by definition their “message” can only be received and understood by persons who can read (and write). When they only consist of images, one needs to know the iconographic conventions and/or “code(s)” for understanding the “message.” They may also consist of a *combination* of image *and* text. This, again, requires the ability to read in order to understand completely implicitly or explicitly *added* written subtleties of meaning, which cannot be expressed by image alone, for example, “dialogues,” and which differ completely from “captions.”

Within the widely set cultural boundaries (see n. 40) the *degrees of freedom* for the *location* of the (*textual*) *biography/ies* are considerable. The sixteen most important degrees are listed here:

- I. *horizontal plane* (in relation to the *plan* of the superstructure): on the exterior facade (1), in the entrance (2), and/or the interior of the superstructure (3);
- II. *vertical plane* (in relation to the verticality of the walls = *wall position index*):⁴⁵ on a low (4), middle (5) or high (6) position on the wall, or covering its total height (7);
- III. *orientation*: on an east (8), south (9), west (10) or north (11) wall;
- IV. *external composition*: text in columns (12), lines (13), or a combination of both (14);⁴⁶
- V. *embedding*:⁴⁷ the placement of a textual entity may be *completely independent* (15) from (iconographic) context (for example, strict [auto-]biographical texts), or loosely/strongly *connected* (16) to iconography/context (for example, captions, dialogues).

The degrees of freedom for the (*representational*) *bioconographies* are enormous; actually, they are literally endless. The number for *horizontal* and *vertical planes* and *orientation* is identical to that of the texts (ten degrees of freedom [I (2) + II (4) + III (4) = 10]). The great difference and literally endless flexibility is expressed by the *external composition* and the *embedding* of the iconographic entities.

Starting with the *external composition*, it should be noted that not a single tomb plan is identical, nor are the heights of internal tomb walls. Furthermore, the length of walls of rooms and/or corridors is not standardized. Therefore, there is literally an endless number of ways to organize and/or divide the *vertical* plane in different numbers of registers, varying from one to ten, or sometimes even more per wall (figs. 5–13). Since, in fact, there is not a standard height for registers, on one wall several individual registers may display various heights (figs. 6, 7, and 10). This means that the wall-position index in case of high numbers of registers per wall can be refined by adding the designations of middle low, upper middle, and upper middle low position (three extra degrees of freedom).

The *length* equally is flexible without end, since there is no prescribed length for any (complex) iconographic entity. Thus, the same topic can be represented in a very compact way, for instance on a very narrow wall beside

45. For this term, which is meant to establish an objective position of an iconographic entity on the verticality of the wall, see van Walsem 2008, 11.

46. The “external composition” for bioconographies, of course, concerns, among other things, the division, size, and number of register *surfaces*, in/on which the text *columns* and *lines* are distributed.

47. “Embedding” concerns the phenomenon of *any combination* of (an) iconographic and/or textual entity/ies as found in the elite tombs. For instance, in one tomb the subtheme of the music band may be found adjacent to a fish-gutting scene on the right side and a milking scene on the left, while above a fording scene of cattle is found and below a slaughtering scene of desert animals while texts are, for example, only found with the music scene. In another tomb, the music may be surrounded by, that is, embedded in, a totally different arrangement with texts all over the place, and so forth.

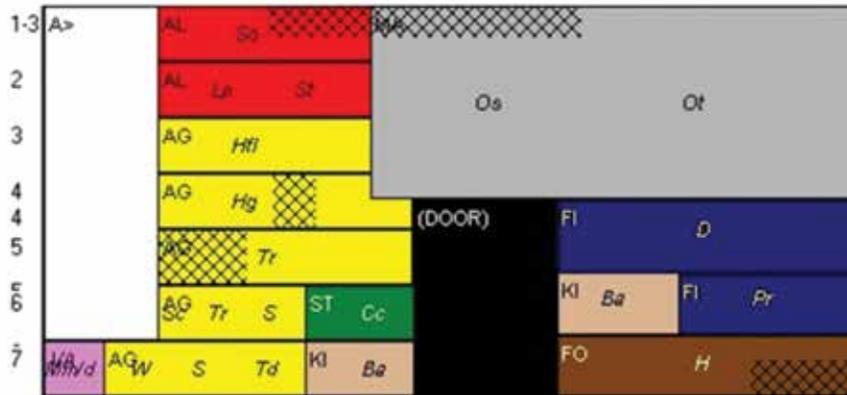


Figure 6. Saqqara LMP 042/I/02+08 east wall.

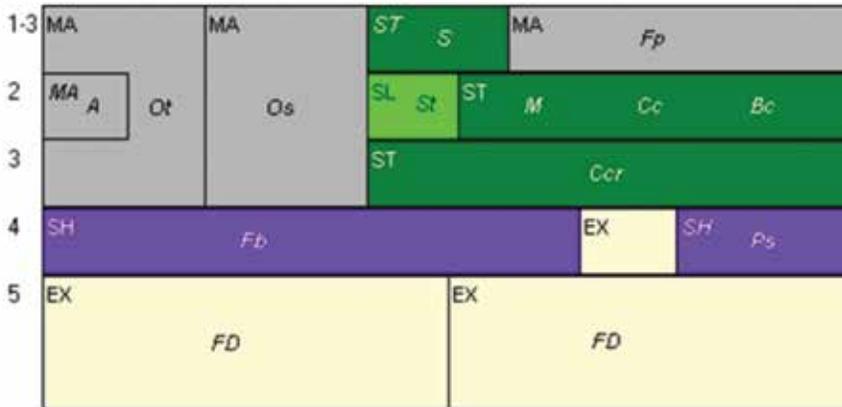


Figure 7. Saqqara LMP 048/V/21bis west wall.

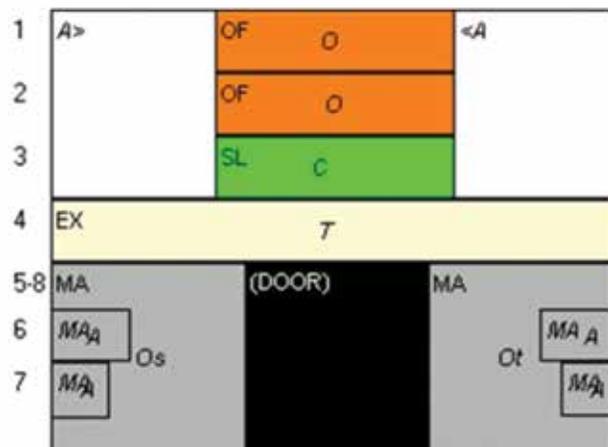


Figure 8. Saqqara LMP 048/I/04 south wall.

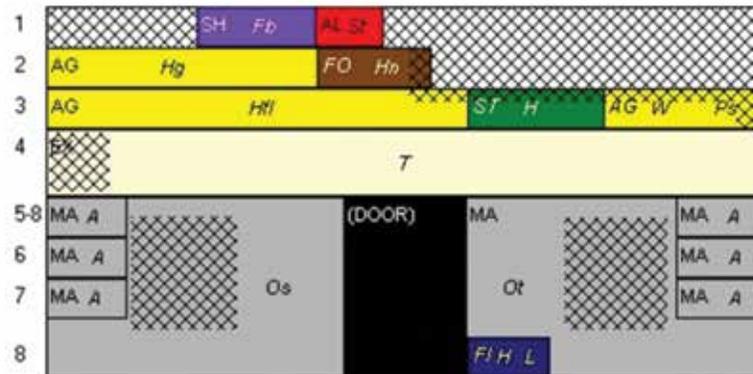


Figure 9. Saqqara LMP 184a/E/04-05 south wall.

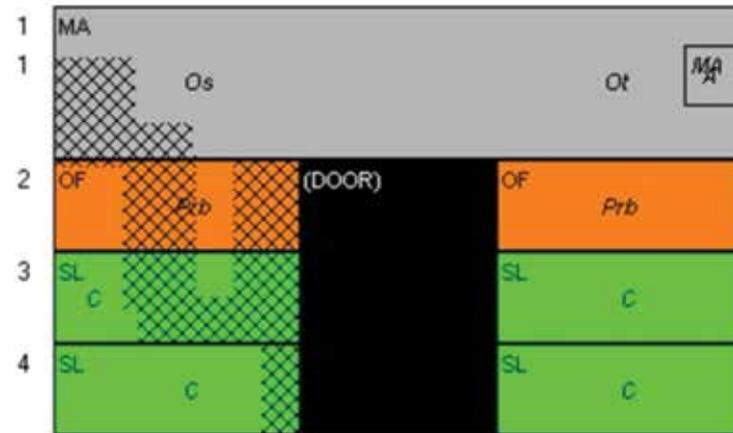


Figure 10. Saqqara LMP 205/I/06-07 east wall.

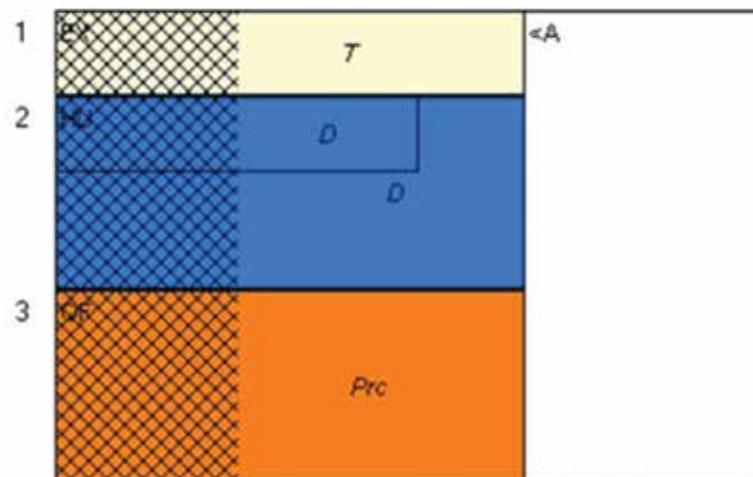


Figure 11. Meidum LMP 001A/I/04 south wall.

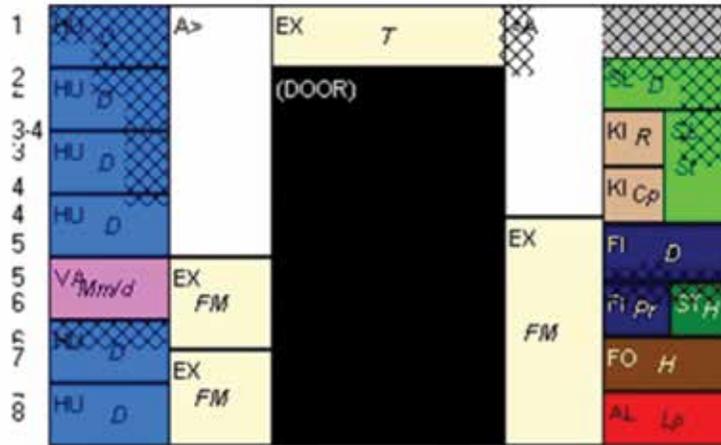


Figure 12. Meidum LMP 002A/I/03-04 Orientation West.

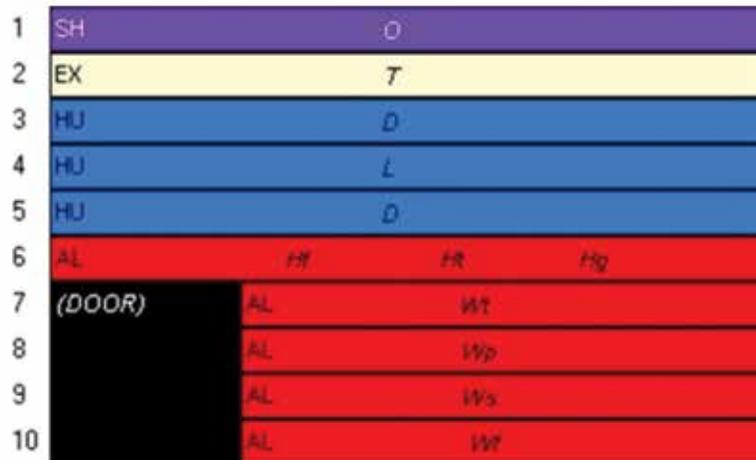


Figure 13. Saqqara LMP 48/II/10 Orientation West.

a door, or it may be “stretched” out over (almost) the full length of a wall (figs. 12–13, “Hunting”), covering several meters, compare for example the fishing with a dragnet in the Leiden chapel (fourteen fishes in the net) with that of Mereruka (twenty-five fishes; fig. 14), or the crossing of cattle in the same Leiden chapel (eleven cattle plus a calf) with that of Ankhmahor (thirty-three cattle plus a calf; fig. 15). The degrees of freedom here, therefore, are literally limitless.

The use of texts concerns five degrees of freedom:

1. *No texts* at all, only an image. The reason for this may have been that the images were considered eloquent enough for omitting texts. Or *cost* may have been a prohibitive factor because the time-consuming labor of inserting texts above/among the scenes, especially in raised relief, required an extra investment.
2. *Captions*, which merely identified *what* action(s) is/are represented; sometimes followed by the identification of *who* takes part in the action, especially in the scenes of the standing tomb owner observing all kinds of activities. These may be introduced by the formula “Observing” (*m33*).

3. *Titles plus name*, merely identifying *who* is/are represented.
4. *Spoken words*, consisting of:
 - 4.1. *Dialogues*. They merely, and literally, *substantiate* in stone, and/or painting, *what* the participants, who are represented in various activities, say.
[Note that in contrast to the previous two kinds of text that only describe and fixate a kind of “stable characteristic(s)” (identifying an activity as “fowling” is and remains fowling all the time; a “scribe” is and remains a scribe), the dialogue texts *transform invisible, only audible, ephemeral, dynamic sounds* into *visible* and thus *legible, static*, sculpted or painted hieroglyphic texts, thus enabling the observer to indirectly “*hear*” with his personal “mental ear” what once was said.] In ancient Egypt, this step was taken first in the tomb of *Meresankh III* (LMP 13).⁴⁸
 - 4.2. *Monologues*. They may be:
 - 4.2.1. in the first person, about the first person (“*I made/did*” etc.), or;
 - 4.2.2. in the third person, spoken by another person about the first or a third person (“*He made/did*” etc.), or;
 - 4.2.3. (exhortative and/or “magical”) spells (for example, spoken to/by the herdsman in scenes of cattle crossing a waterway [fig. 16]).⁴⁹

Only points 3. and 4.2 concern the real (auto-)biographical texts as well.
5. A *combination* of points 1–4 in (highly) complex iconographic programs.

The absence of rules for orthography makes the composition and combination of signs for the various texts also literally limitless, all the more so since the length of texts tends to expand over time (compare, for example, the caption of the cattle crossing scene in the Leiden chapel (LMP 045) with that of Mehu and Ankhmahor (LMP 188 and 190; fig. 15), reflecting literally the “living force” of the original text line, demonstrating its use life, alias bioconography (as it is inextricably connected to this specific iconographic subtheme).

Finally, for the *embedding*, that is, the (potential) number of possibilities for the combination or conjunction of main themes and/or subthemes on the individual walls, the number of degrees of freedom is again astronomical. The seventeen defined “main themes” of the Leiden Mastaba Project can theoretically be combined in *seventeen!* (read “!” as *factorial*) ways, that is, $17 \times 16 \times 15 \times 14 \dots \times 2 \times 1$ times, over *all* varieties of register compositions on the walls of the individual tombs. The possibilities on the level of the 187 “subthemes” completely lies beyond any mental comprehension: $187!$ ($187 \times 186 \times 185 \dots \times 17 \times 16 \dots \times 2 \times 1$) ways. No wonder it is easy to explain that not a single tomb is identical to another. The maximum combinatorial potential was, of course, only reached at the end of the Old Kingdom when no *new* main/sub themes were conceived any longer.⁵⁰

The increasing length of the strict biographical *texts* during the Old Kingdom, expressed by an increasing number of details and refinements, thus shows a shift or rather a *complexity expansion* from the simple(st), most neutral (auto)biographical statement of Nefermaat in a *single column* (fig. 17), to the most complex, imposing and conceited compositions that are exemplified by Weni and Harkhuf, consisting of dozens of columns. This, in my view, can only be explained when we assume a congenital *competitive* drive or need (potentially) present in

48. Dunham and Simpson 1974, fig. 11, lower register, to the right.

49. Figure 16 only shows the development of the “herdsman spell” (oldest version in the tomb of Hetepherakhty [LMP 045], where the herdsman is exhorted to watch out for the crocodile). During the development, other shorter phrases could be added to this core text, as found especially in Hesi’s tomb (LMP 184a), see below, p. 145 with n. 73.

50. For the mechanism of growth in the number of iconographic entities and the ensuing larger freedom in selection, see van Walsem 2005, 51–54.

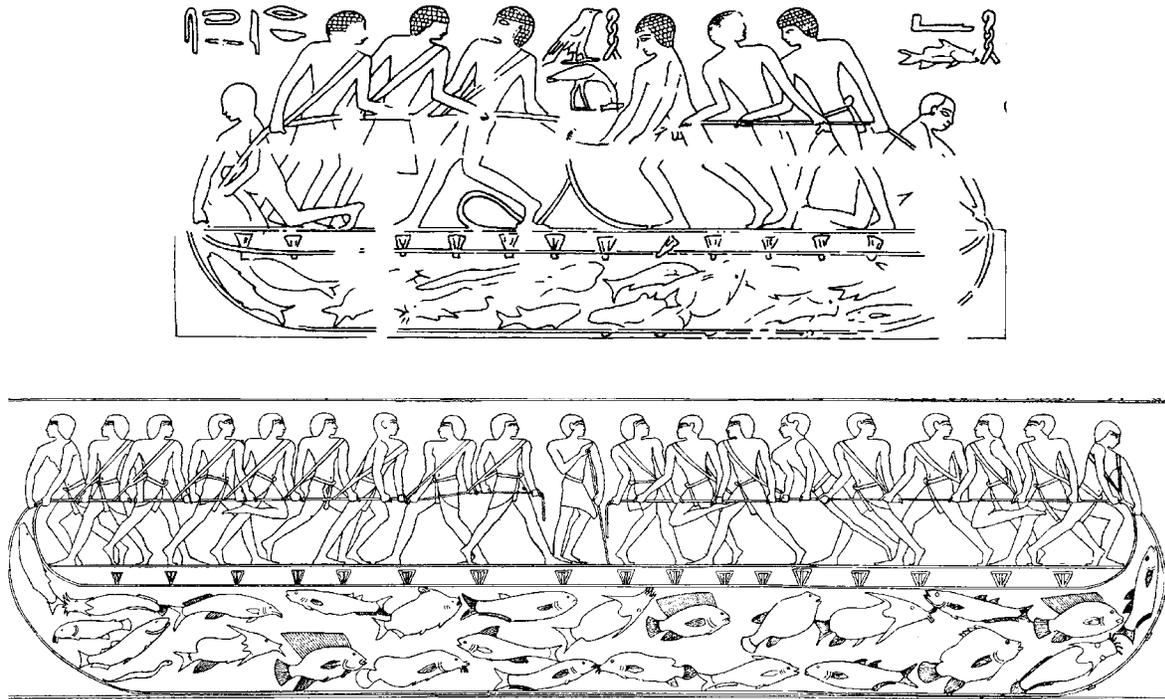


Figure 14. Saqqara, Fishing with the dragnet in the tombs of Hetepherakhty (LMP 045) and Mereruka (LMP 182A; after Mohr 1943, fig. 29; Harpur 1987, fig. 100).

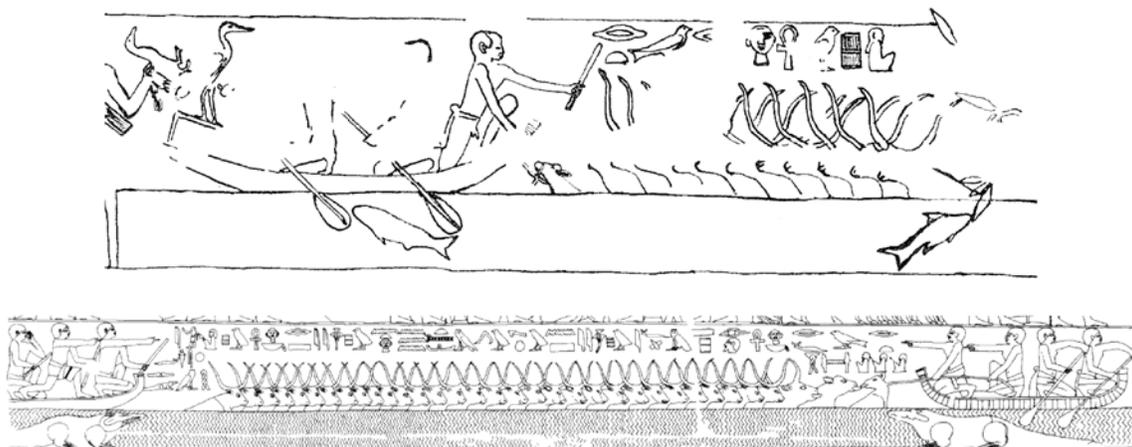


Figure 15. Saqqara, cattle crossing a waterway in the tombs of Hetepherakhty (LMP 045) and Ankhmahor (LMP 190; after Mohr 1943, fig. 33; Harpur 1987, fig. 211).

every human individual. It follows that the same process is also valid for the evolution of bioconographies, thus both text and bioconography increasingly *complement* each other.⁵¹

51. For a more penetrating treatment of this paragraph's issues, see van Walsem 2012–2013, 129 and 134–39.

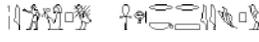
045/II/10	
049/VI/44-46	
059/II/01	
064/II/07	
070/II/05	
071/II/Fr-01	
165/II/05-10	
182A/II/012-013	
183/III/12-14	
184a/E/02/	
188/II/11-13	
190/II/02	
218/II/07	
258a/?/Fr-02	

Figure 16. Development of “herdsman spell” caption over cattle crossing waterway. © 1998–2008 MastaBase, Leiden University.

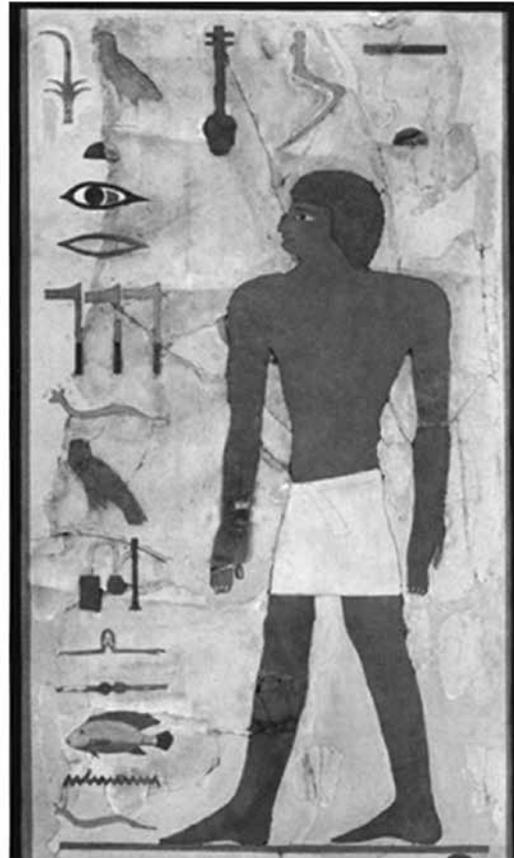


Figure 17. Nefermaat with his one-column biographical text (after Harpur 2001, pl. 27).

Since the great majority of tombs displays no (auto-)biographical texts, the iconography alone in principle sufficed to profile the tomb owner. Purely textual (auto-)biographies were a bonus, betraying more or less prominent *vanity*.

This observation makes it interesting to compare the bioconographical complexity of a few elite tombs with an (auto-)biographical text.⁵² This can best be done by comparing the wall schemes as produced by the MastaBase on the level of the *main themes*. The first step is to match all ninety-eight tombs with these texts as collected

52. It is also interesting to compare the *architectonic* complexity of the tombs in relation to the presence of purely (auto-)biographical texts and/or bioconographies, but this falls outside the present framework. Table 1 contains only thirty-four tombs from the Memphite area that possess (an) (auto-)biographical text(s) *and* (the remains of) a bioconography and are related to the number of rooms per tomb in the far right column.

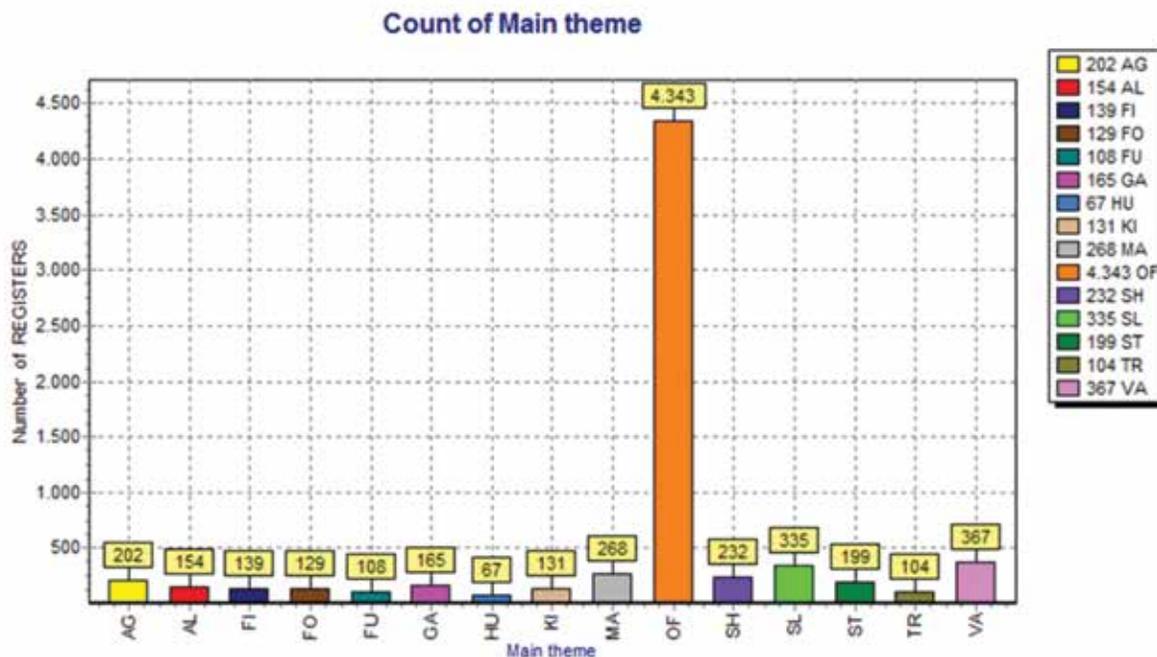


Figure 18. Bar graph indicating the absolute number of *registers* per main theme on the total of 6,943 registers.

by N. Kloth⁵³ with the 337 tombs collected by the LMP. This results in twenty-nine (useable) tombs of the Memphite area.⁵⁴

Before drawing the actual comparisons, it is most revealing to show a bar graph of fifteen⁵⁵ main themes and their objective quantity in relation to the entire amount of iconographic material as well as to each other (fig. 18).

It is immediately obvious that “*OF*,” “Offerings,”⁵⁶ consisting of 4,343 registers (62.5%)⁵⁷ out of a total of 6,943, are the most frequent main theme. The remaining fourteen main themes are in between the next most

53. Kloth 2002, 3–44.

54. Actually, there are thirty-four tombs in MastaBase, but five are too damaged for creating wall schemes (see n. 3 of table 1 on p. 139). It means that in the present stage of preservation roughly *one in ten* tombs contains a purely (auto-)biographical text, the number of which, of course, was higher when all tombs were intact. Note that the MastaBase only concerns tombs from the Memphite area, the provinces, alas, had to be excluded to keep the project manageable, not because they should be considered less interesting or less important.

55. There are two more main themes: “*A*” or “General” (large figures of the tomb owner) and “*EX*” or “Extra categoral” (false door, family members, offering lists and large, e.g., [(auto-)biographical] texts). They fall outside the primarily iconographic research object of the LMP, so they are not incorporated into the statistics, etc., but they complete the number to seventeen, the number mentioned before (p. 120).

56. The abbreviations for the other main themes are as follows: “*AG*” (Agriculture: grain and flax), “*AL*” (Agriculture: land preparation and horticulture), “*FI*” (Fishing), “*FO*” (Fowling), “*FU*” (Funeral), “*GA*” (Games/music), “*HU*” (Hunting), “*KI*” (Kitchen scenes), “*MA*” (Marsh scenes), “*SH*” (Ships), “*SL*” (Slaughtering), “*ST*” (Stock/cattle breeding), “*TR*” (Trades), “*VA*” (Varia).

57. Ideally, all bar graphs in the figures should have been presented in absolute numbers and percentages, but that would go beyond the scope of this contribution.

frequent main theme, “*Slaughtering*,” 335 registers (4.8%),⁵⁸ and the least frequent main theme, “*Hunting*,” 67 registers (0.97%).

The very important conclusion is that *only* the number of registers with offering scenes outnumbers the total number of tombs, 337, by a factor of 13. This reveals that, on average, each tomb had more than *ten* registers of offerings. The other numbers of registers all remain below the total number of tombs. This means that, aside from the false door—the feature that makes a tomb a tomb, and which is thus present in 100 percent of cases in any building (to be) identified as a tomb—the *only* main theme that is present in 100 percent of cases is that of “Offerings.” All other main themes are thus reduced to purely *optional* ones. This very much weakens the likelihood that deeply metaphorical and/or purely symbolic “real meanings” were meant to be conveyed concerning existential issues like “chaos,” “fertility,” “rebirth,” supposedly intentionally encoded in certain (sub)themes. But that is not our subject here.⁵⁹

Next, the bar graphs of the main themes of two tombs will be compared, which will indicate whether the *entire range* of main themes is represented in each individual tomb or not. The assumption is that they were (personally) chosen by the tomb owner. The *height* of the individual bars indicates the number of registers per main theme, that is, the *iconographic “volume.”* This, in turn, makes it possible to gauge the (relative) *importance*⁶⁰ that each individual tomb owner attached to each main theme and its constituent subthemes. The basic point of reference will be the Leiden chapel (LMP 045).

Of course, an in-depth analysis of the iconographic main-theme data of figures 19–24 falls outside the purview of this article. Only a few striking highlights will be mentioned—it is up to the reader to perform deeper analysis by carefully reading the tables containing the absolute numbers of registers (per main theme per tomb), which are given below the bar graphs. These are sometimes indicated by absolute numbers, sometimes in percentages, or a combination of the two. The main goal is to demonstrate the incredible variety and complexity of each iconographic program using only a minute selection from the total available material.

Figure 19, top, compares the absolute numbers of registers per main theme in the tombs of Debeheni (mid- to late Fourth Dynasty)⁶¹ and Hetepherakhty (mid-Fifth Dynasty). The first shows only *six* main themes: “Fishing,” “Fowling,” “Funeral,” “Games,” “Offerings” and “Slaughtering,” while *seven* are missing: “Agriculture Grain/Flax”; “Agriculture Land preparation”; “Kitchen scenes”; “Marsh scenes”; “Ships”; “Stock/cattle breeding” and “Trades.”⁶² This number is a bit too high to explain away by using only the argument of “damage.” Even if we allow five destroyed main themes, still two gaps remain, similar to the virtually intact tomb of Meresankh III, also of the Fourth Dynasty. Rather, the absence indicates the tomb’s *early* date.⁶³ Taken together, thirteen of the fifteen main themes are present in the tombs.

Figure 19, bottom, shows the same graph but now the quantities are expressed in percentages, which offers a better comparison between the tombs than absolute numbers. The number notation just indicates the *unrelated* number of registers per main theme per tomb, while the percentages express the *ratio* of the number of present

58. Although “*Varia*” counts 367 registers, it is excluded since it contains a heterogeneous collection of (sub)themes in contrast to the other, sharply defined, main themes.

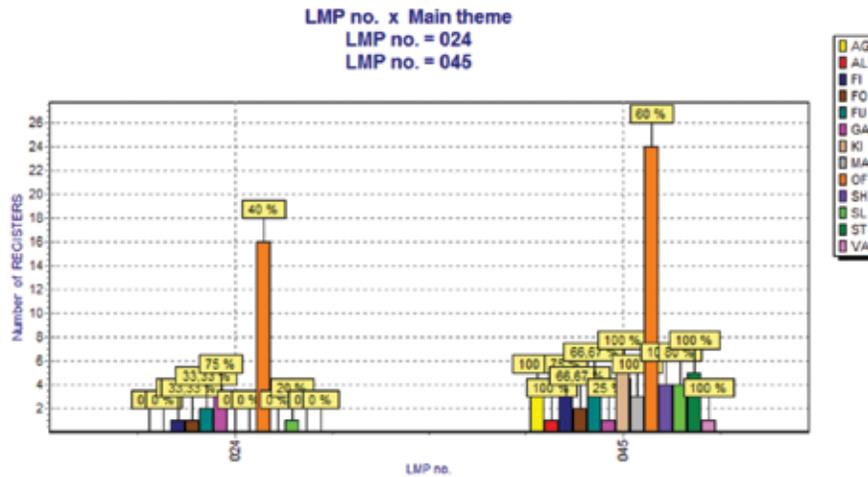
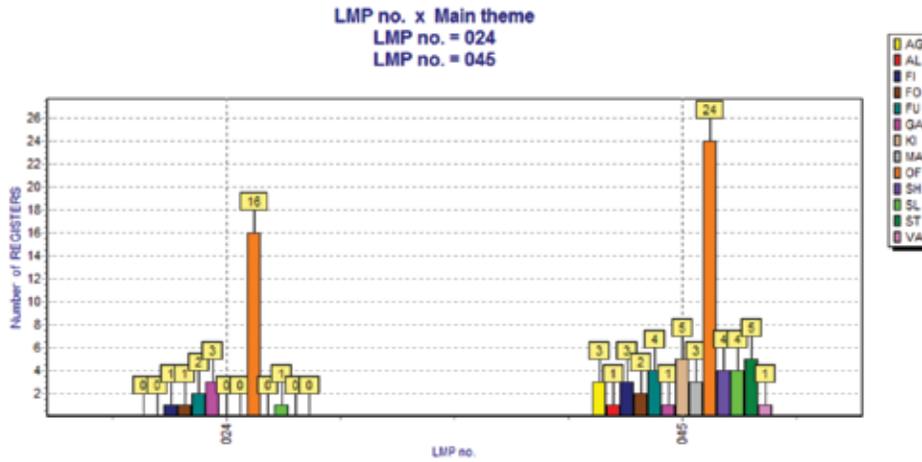
59. On this, see van Walsem 2005, 71–83.

60. See p. 155 below, where this is elaborated further.

61. I completely agree with Baud 2005, 120 n. 80, that this tomb belongs to the Fourth Dynasty.

62. It should be noted that in the bar graph of LMP 045 a gap should be visible, between “Games” and “Kitchen scenes” representing the missing main theme “Hunting,” while “Trades” is also missing after “Stock breeding”; apparently it is caused by a “bug.” It is correctly absent from the left graph in figure 20. In any case, one can easily check the “legend” at the top right side of the diagrams for each bar graph, where, in this case, HU and TR are completely missing, correctly indicating that in both tombs these main themes are absent.

63. Klooth 2002, 38–39, 184–87, strongly opts for a Fifth Dynasty date, but see n. 61.



LMP no.	AG	AL	FI	FO	FU	GA	KI	MA	OF	SH	SL	ST	VA	Total
<u>024</u>	0	0	1	1	2	3	0	0	16	0	1	0	0	24
<u>045</u>	3	1	3	2	4	1	5	3	24	4	4	5	1	60
Total	3	1	4	3	6	4	5	3	40	4	5	5	1	84

Please note that the values represent the number of REGISTERS.

Figure 19. Comparison of main themes in LMP 024 and 045.

registers per main theme per individual tomb *in relation* to the other tomb(s) of a comparison: in this case the relation between LMP 024 and 045. The table at the bottom gives the absolute number of registers per main theme. So, for example, for “Offerings” it means that of *all registers in both tombs*, LMP 024 possesses 40 percent, and 045 60 percent; in short: at a ratio of 2:3, which is not that far apart. However, for “Slaughtering,” 024 has 20 percent, while 045 has 80 percent; that is, a ratio of 1:4, which is a considerable difference. The ratio of

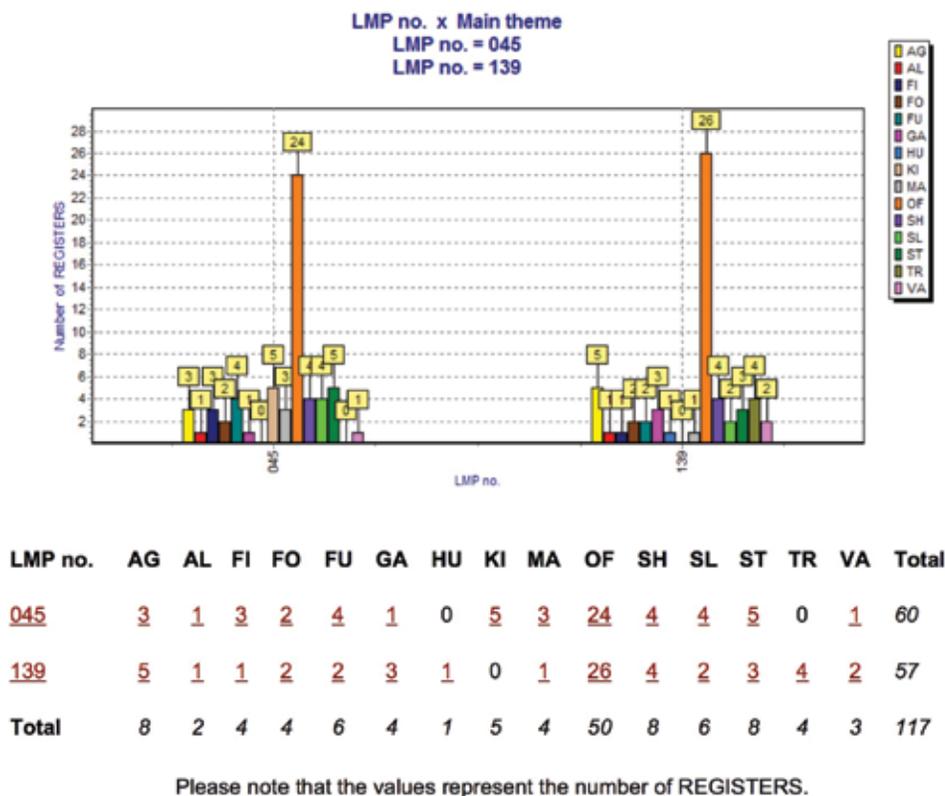


Figure 20. Comparison of main themes in LMP 045 and 139. © 1998–2008 MastaBase, Leiden University.

total numbers of registers per tomb for LMP 024 (24), resp. 045 (60), is 2 : 5, which, again, is considerable. We conclude that there exists no great similarity between the tombs, revealing a highly personal bioconographical design.

Comparing Hetepherakhty’s single-room chapel (LMP 045) with Akhetetep’s contemporaneous single-room chapel (LMP 139) results in a completely different picture (fig. 20). LMP 045 has omitted main themes “Hunting” and “Trades,” while LMP 139 has omitted “Kitchen” scenes, which is represented by five registers in LMP 045. In both tombs, comparing “Offerings” with the other main themes demonstrates that the former are the most frequent: 24 (LMP 045) against 26 (LMP 139) registers. Both tombs are virtually identical in this respect,⁶⁴ which in various degrees is in contrast with the other main themes, as revealed by the absence/presence of certain themes in each individual tomb. The ratio for the total numbers of registers is 60 (LMP 045), resp. 57 (LMP 139): 20 : 19 ≈ 1 : 1.

The tomb of Ptahshepses in Abusir (LMP 036a) presents an entirely different picture: a strong rise in offering registers, which can be explained by the large size of the tomb. The tomb is very damaged, however. This explains

64. One should be very aware that here we are only concerned with identity in the absence/presence of (a) main theme(s) and its/their iconographic *volume* expressed in the number of registers. The *contents* of the various *offerings* on these registers, their *selection*, the *quantity* of individual offerings, their *presentation* and their *artistic execution* may considerably differ and must therefore be assessed on completely different levels and along different lines of approach.

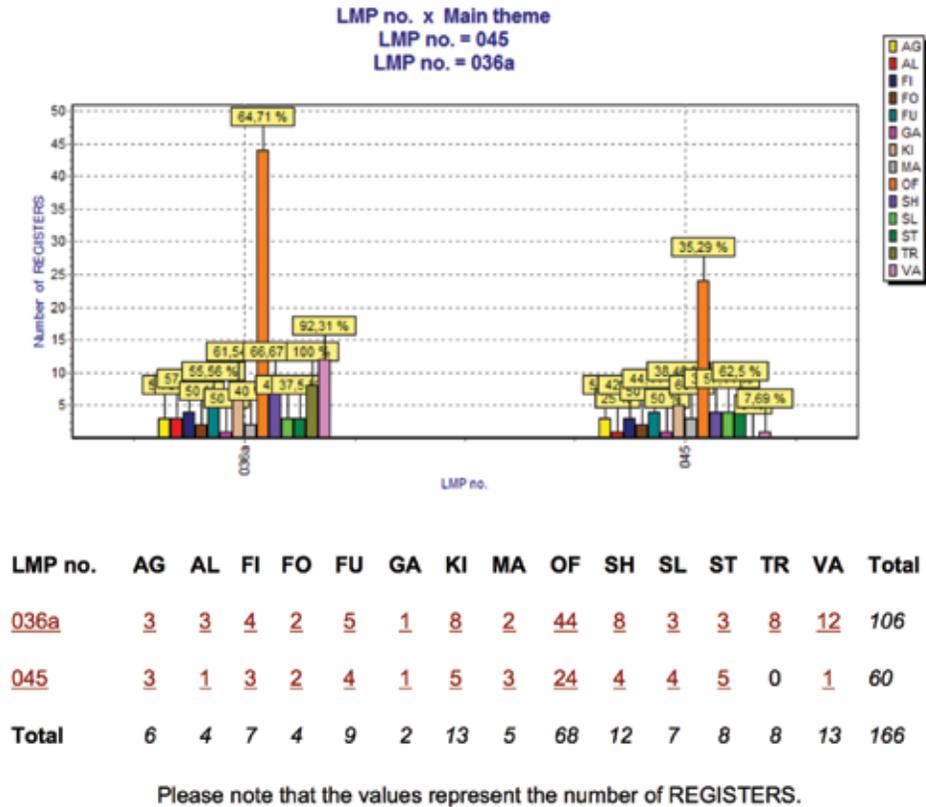


Figure 21. Comparison between main themes in LMP 036a and 045. © 1998–2008 MastaBase, Leiden University.

the low numbers of registers for the other main themes, which do not differ dramatically from the small tomb of Hetepherakhty (fig. 21). The ratio for the total number of registers is 60 (LMP 045), resp. 106 (LMP 036a), which results in 30 : 52 [≈3 : 5].

Figure 22 shows the effect of mere size by comparing Hetepherakhty (LMP 045) with Mereruka (LMP 182A). The number of offering registers—219 against 24—is stark, but most interestingly, the main theme of “Kitchen scenes” is missing in this tomb, while LMP 045 devotes five registers to it and omits only the main themes “Hunting” and “Trades.” This must reveal some *personal inclination* for certain subjects. The ratio for the total number of registers 60 (LMP 045), resp. 307 (LMP182A) [≈1 : 5].

The picture from the comparison of the more or less contemporaneous Fifth Dynasty tombs LMP 045, 048 (Niankhnun and Khnumhotep) and 049 (Ty) is different again: *all* main themes are represented in the large tombs, and the number of “Offerings” rises from 24, to 82 to 130 registers (fig. 23, table 1). The difference between LMP 048 and 049 is especially remarkable in this respect, since the total available wall-surface area is not that different, yet Ty incorporates forty-eight more registers; again, personal taste best explains the difference. The same holds true for the main themes “Agriculture: land preparation” (11 [048], 6 [049] [≈2 : 1]); “Fowling” (4 [048], 13 [049] [≈1 : 3]); “Funeral” (16 [048], 3 [049] [≈5 : 1]); and “Marsh scenes” (11 [048], 3 [049] [≈4 : 1]); “Ships” (5 [048], 15 [049] [1 : 3]). Remarkable is “Kitchen”: 5 (045), 5 (048), 6 (049) [≈1 : 1 : 1]. The ratio over all registers per tomb: 60 (045), 186 (048) and 226 (049) [≈1 : 3 : 4].

Comparing three more or less contemporaneous, (very) large and complex Sixth Dynasty tombs—LMP 183

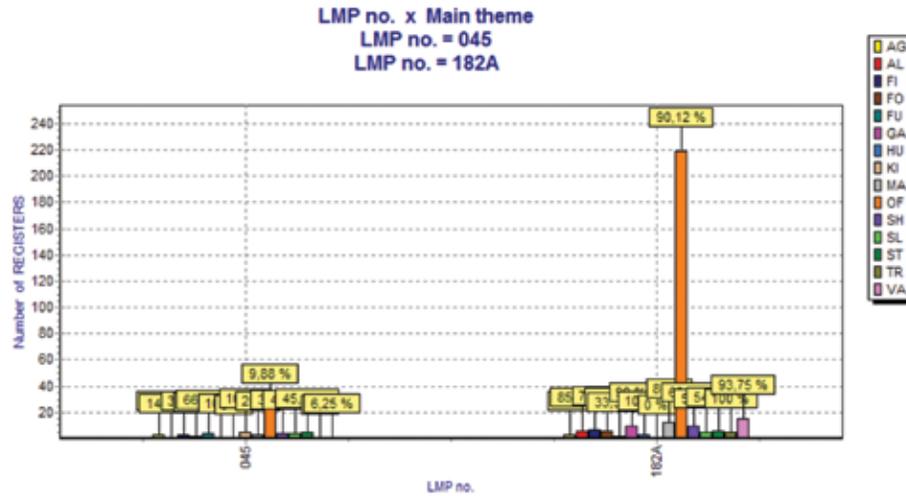
Table 1. Concordance of LMP tombs and Kloth's list of tombs with (auto-)biographies, indicating the number of rooms per tomb.

Serial no.	LMP no. ¹	Kloth no.	Number of rooms
1	024	84	3 [2] ²
2	036a	28	>10 [3]
3	041	75	1
4	045	50	1
5	062A	02	5 [3]
6	078	57	1
7	083	47	>10 [7]
8	094	97	1 [2]
9	114	69	5 [4]
10 ³	122	79	2
11	124	76	2 [1]
12	152	70	1
13	157	72	8 [7]
14	181A	64	1
15	182A	35	>10 [>10]
16	183	80	8 [7]
17	184	39	0
18	184a	51	1 [2]
19	185	60	> 10 [7]
20	188	37	6 [5]
21	189	44	5 [3]
22	190	19	7 [6]
23	191	43	3
24	194	73	1
25	203	23	0
26	204	50	2
27	220	03	>10 [5]
28	221	07	0
29	226	78	4 [1]
30	226a	18	0
31	227	53	1
32	230	12	1
33	231	31	2
34	236	01	2

1. The LMP tombs are ordered in approximately chronological order, in contrast to Kloth's alphabetical order.

2. The first number indicates the actual (i.e., *architectural*) number of rooms; the number between [] indicates the actual (i.e., [potentially] *bioconographic*) number of decorated (parts of) rooms. Because also (parts of) corridors and/or porticos may be decorated, this number is sometimes higher than the first one.

3. Shaded numbers indicate tombs that are too much damaged for making wall schemes; “0” in the right column indicates that there is no plan available. These tombs could thus not be taken into account for the analysis and are only listed for the sake of completeness.



LMP no.	AG	AL	FI	FO	FU	GA	HU	KI	MA	OF	SH	SL	ST	TR	VA	Total
<u>045</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>60</u>
<u>182A</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>219</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>307</u>
Total	6	7	10	8	6	10	3	5	15	243	13	9	11	5	16	367

Please note that the values represent the number of REGISTERS.

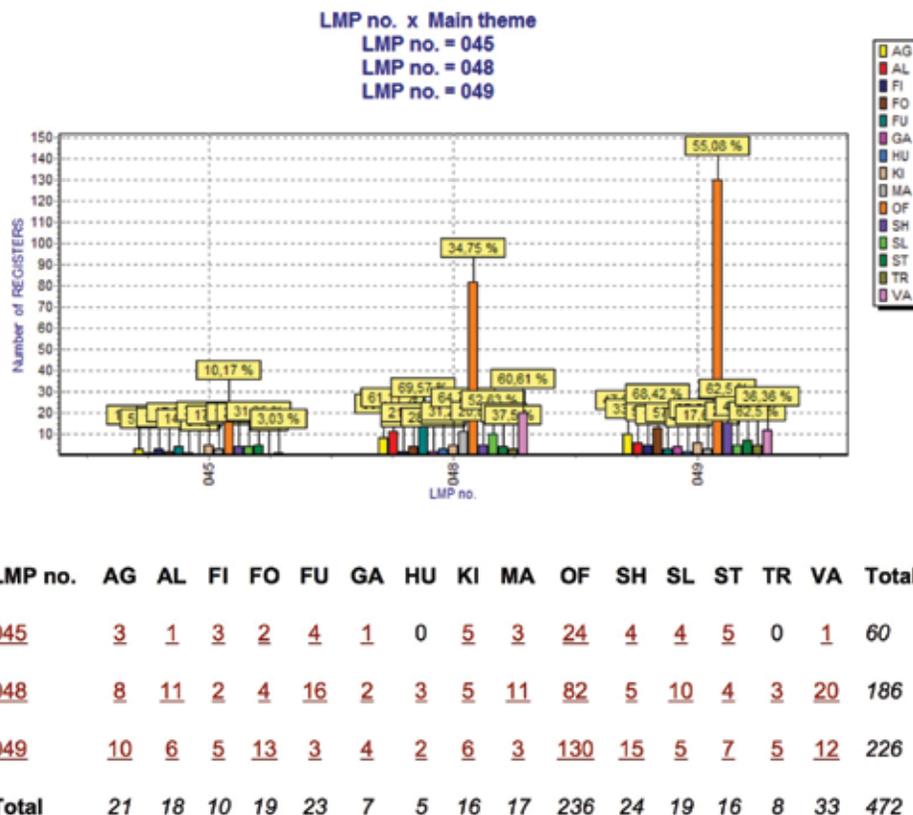
Figure 22. Comparison between main themes in LMP 182A and 045. ©1998–2008 MastaBase, Leiden University.

(Kagemni), 188 (Mehu), and 190 (Ankhmahor)—reveals their iconographic heterogeneity (fig. 24). Remarkable is the absence of “Agriculture; land preparation” in Ankhmahor. The absence of “Funeral” in Mehu is noteworthy as well. Only Kagemni has all fifteen main themes. Mehu’s ten registers for “Marsh scenes” and “Slaughtering” are very high in comparison to the other tombs. The total number of registers per tomb: 211 (LMP 183), 185 (LMP 188) and 112 (LMP 190) results in a ratio of $\approx 21 : 18.5 : 11 \approx 4 : 3.5 : 2$. The number of only two (LMP 183), resp. five (LMP 190) registers of “Slaughtering” in these huge tombs is out of proportion with the available wall surfaces if compared with LMP 045 which has *four* registers.

These few examples should suffice to demonstrate a way to objectively—that is, by using numbers alone—establish the iconographic complexity of individual tombs *and* their mutual comparison, revealing their degrees of bioiconographical (dis)similarity. One should note that, in the preceding pages, a tomb from Giza was included only once, so that the main results concern a *local* comparison in Saqqara only. Of course, the emphasis could have been on Giza, or a systematic comparison could have been made between Giza and Saqqara tombs, potentially revealing possible, significant bioiconographic differences between these two localities.

Motto 6: “Wo sonst tritt der Grabherr als “Autor” seines Grabes und seines darin aufgezeichneten Lebens in Erscheinung?”⁶⁵

65. Assmann 1996, 101.



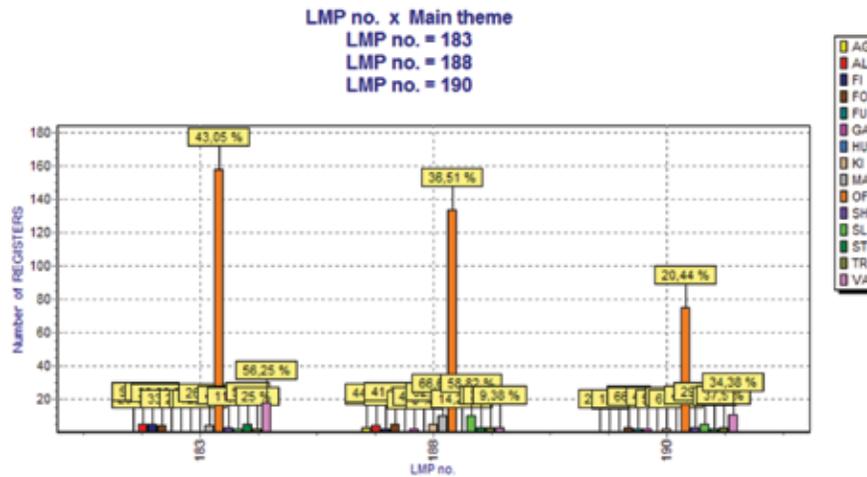
Please note that the values represent the number of REGISTERS.

Figure 23. Comparison between main themes in LMP 045, 048, and 049. ©1998–2008 MastaBase, Leiden University.

The few preceding examples that demonstrate the *individual iconographic complexity* expressed in each tomb and in its comparison with other tombs during the Old Kingdom, show that there is a *shift* or *complexity expansion* from a *not* complete selection in a single tomb from the fifteen available main themes (LMP 024 has only six [see fig. 19 above], while 045 misses only “Hunting” and “Trades”) to a *complete* one. The number of iconographic registers per main theme shows a rise in the larger tombs of the late Fifth to Sixth Dynasties, but it is *not linear*. A certain main theme, that is, its “iconographic volume,” may have more registers in a small tomb than in (a) large(r) one(s). It underscores the earlier established (seemingly) *ruleless* layout⁶⁶ of the wall schemes and consequently the *lack of any direct (causal) connection between any (auto-)biographical text and the iconographic program*.

This is in sharp contrast to the relatively few texts that do show a direct connection with only *architectonic parts* of the tomb building—such as false doors, jambs, and lintels—and parts of the *tomb equipment*—such as stone

66. Not to be interpreted too narrowly. Of course, there were “rules,” for example, a wall is never divided into twenty registers because that would lead to practical problems of the *aesthetically* experienced proportions of the height of the registers in respect to the entire wall, the sizes of the human figures, and the size of texts, and so on. But there was *no rule of placement* of any main or subtheme on any wall outside the cult chapel.



LMP no.	AG	AL	FI	FO	FU	GA	HU	KI	MA	OF	SH	SL	ST	TR	VA	Total
<u>183</u>	1	5	5	4	1	1	1	1	4	<u>158</u>	3	2	5	2	<u>18</u>	211
<u>188</u>	3	4	2	5	0	2	0	5	10	<u>134</u>	1	10	3	3	3	185
<u>190</u>	1	0	1	3	2	2	1	2	1	<u>75</u>	3	5	2	3	<u>11</u>	112
Total	5	9	8	12	3	5	2	8	15	367	7	17	10	8	32	508

Please note that the values represent the number of REGISTERS.

Figure 24. Comparison of main themes in LMP 183, 188, and 190. ©1998–2008 MastaBase, Leiden University.

offering tables and the sarcophagus and its lid.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the shift from rather sober iconographic programs in the early Old Kingdom to the extremely rich and extensive ones of the Sixth Dynasty runs parallel to the shift from Nefermaat’s single column of (auto-)biographical text of the early Fourth Dynasty (fig. 17) to the highly detailed and informative texts of Weni and Harkhuf of the Sixth. All phenomena discussed so far reflect aspects of what Wittgenstein called the “*form of life*”⁶⁸ of each tomb owner, which irrefutably reflects *competition* and necessarily expresses a high degree of the owner’s *individuality* and its ensuing (funerary) “*portraiture*”/“*personality*.” Thus, the term *bioconography* is a reasonably suitable concept for this intricate state of affairs.

The strongest connection between a tomb’s *inner architectonic arrangement* and a(n) (auto-)biographical text, or “literature” (see motto 4), is found in the tomb of Hesi at Saqqara (LMP 184a).⁶⁹ On the left thickness of the entrance he says in the fourth and fifth columns of his autobiography (figs. 25–26): “(4) I caused *one* room to be

67. See Kloth 2002, 211–17, 241.

68. See van Walsem 2005, 69, 84–86.

69. Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1999, 37–38, pls. 33, 59. In addition to Kanawati’s translation and brief commentary, there are those of Silverman 2000; Baud and Farout 2001; Strudwick 2005, 275–77; Moreno García 2004, 118–20, and Stauder-Porchet 2015 (only the right jamb is treated).

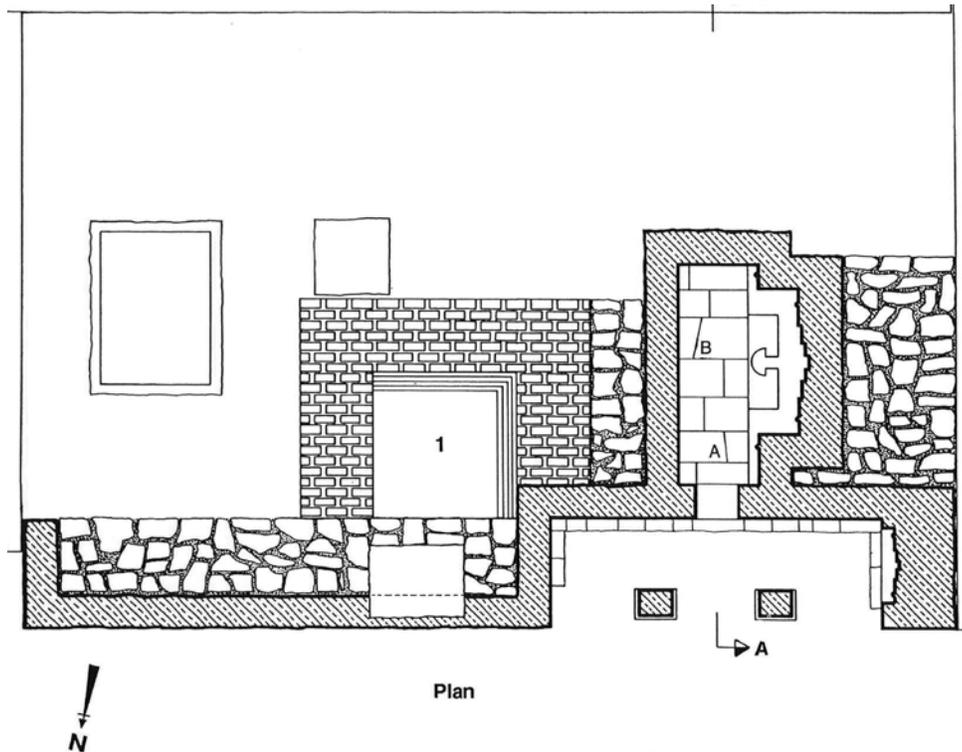


Figure 25. Plan of tomb of Hesi (LMP 184a; after Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1999, pl. 47).

built in this tomb in order that (5) invocation offerings may come forth for me in it; (although) I was empowered to build it (consisting) of *numerous* rooms....”⁷⁰

With this abrupt and so far *unique* statement, without any further explanation, the reader is left in the dark about Hesi’s *implied* reason(s) or motives—which, of course, must have been based on *something*—that satisfied him more to choose for only *one* room, and not for more/many.⁷¹ What was this “something”?

Actually, I think, “this something” can be easily detected if one scrutinizes the iconographic and textual program of which a few examples follow (figs. 27–35).

Before doing so, however, one should note that Chauvet’s catalogue in her study of portico-chapels⁷² allots equal page space to a description of the iconographic diversity of main/subthemes in Hesi’s small *single-room*

70. Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1999, 38.

71. Although his tomb does consist of a single room indeed, the majority of the iconographic (sub)theme variation is distributed over the walls of the *portico*, which is not separately specified by him as an architectural spatial unit, although for us it is. It is more than likely that Hesi had for example Mereruka’s close-by tomb in mind when he speaks of “many rooms.” Staring 2011, 258 n. 20, enumerates a few reasons for the small size of Hesi’s tomb, such as the lack of space for a large tomb at the present spot, or that he could have built a large tomb in another spot, but at a greater distance of Teti’s pyramid. These arguments seem to make him a kind of “victim” of circumstances beyond his power, the consequences of which he, from sheer necessity, would have accepted. However, Hesi’s actual statement strongly suggests the opposite: he made a very conscious *personal* decision *not* to effectuate his power to build a large tomb *anywhere*, implying that there *was* a large available space but he simply did not use it. *Why* he did not use it remains in the dark, see further p. 152, with n. 79 and p. 153, with n. 90 below.

72. Chauvet 2011, 300 n. 7.

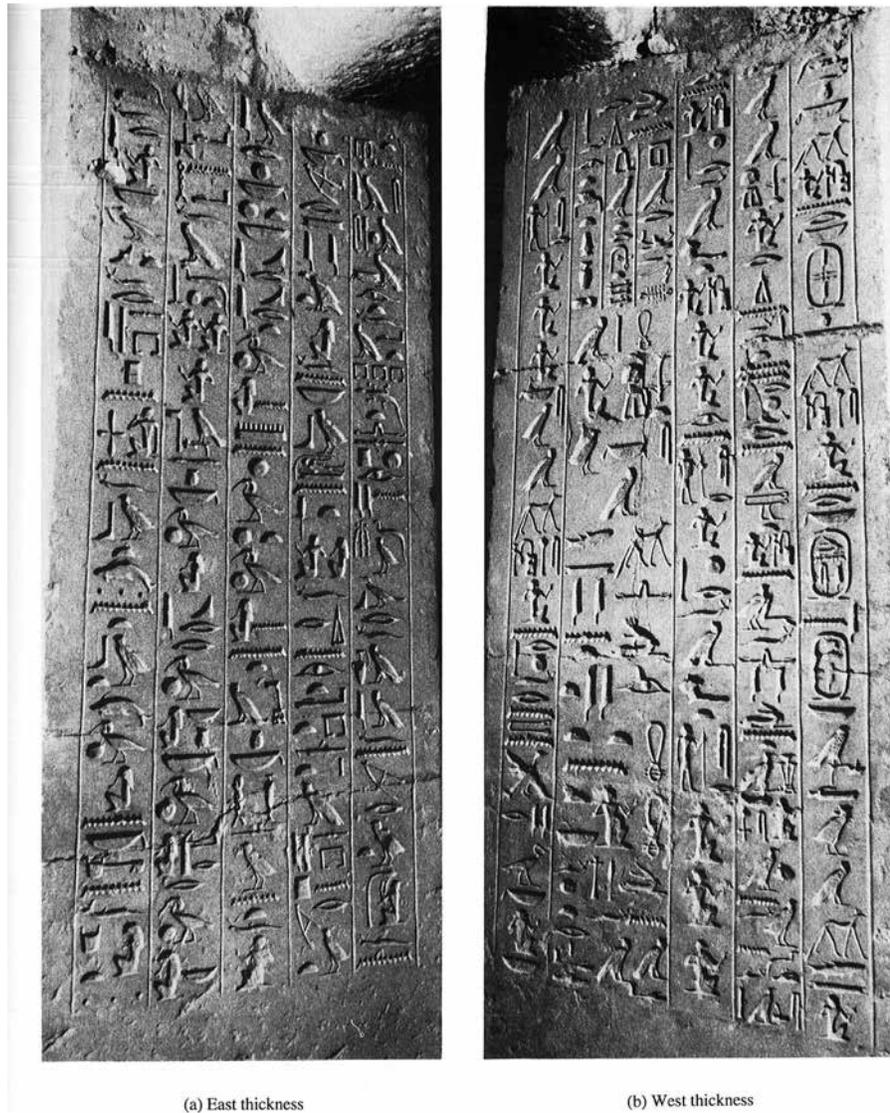


Figure 26. Tomb of Hesi (LMP 184a) (auto-)biographical text on the thicknesses of the entrance (after Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1999, pl. 33).

tomb as to Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep's large *multiroom* tomb (LMP 048), and twice as much as to Ty's tomb (LMP 049), thereby demonstrating the former's iconographic richness, which seems to reveal a certain competitive drive on Hesi's part.

Figures 27–28, a photograph and a line drawing of the “Fishing with the dragnet” and “Cattle crossing a waterway” scenes, reveal the quality of the relief in greater detail. Some extremely rare or even unique details can be detected, such as fishes *overlapping the lower border of the net* and crocodiles *really swimming*, that is, not just resting, as usual, on the bottom line of the water. Also *showing the phallus* between the loincloth strips of only *standing* ordinary workmen is not that common. Finally, the longest and *most complex spoken text over the fording*



Figure 27. Tomb of Hesi, fishing with a dragnet, and cattle crossing waterway (after Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1999, pl. 23).

scene (fig. 29)⁷³ is found here, which for the first time in this context explicitly mentions the word “crocodile,” *msh*, which is unique and apparently broke a taboo (in line, actually, with point 8 on p. 125 about the stretching of rules).

There are two “Marsh scenes” representing the effaced⁷⁴ tomb owner. In one he is spearing fish with a harpoon (fig. 30), including again some extremely rare or unique representations: such as *mating crocodiles* (figs. 30–31 [detail of relief])—otherwise only known from the tomb of Kagemni⁷⁵; a unique scene of *mating tortoises* (figs. 30–31); a unique *diagonally represented tortoise, seen on its back* (figs. 30 and 32, bottom right corner); and highly

73. See figure 16, which only shows the development of the “herdsman spell” where the herdsman is exhorted to be watchful for the crocodile, which is euphemistically circumscribed as the “aquatic” (*šy*) and “who/he comes unseen/invisible” (*iw m šp tp*). This nonmainstream translation of the latter phrase is irrefutably argued for by van Gompel 2012, 29.

74. Hesi apparently fell into disgrace since his image was obliterated in several places; see Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1999, 15. Note the care with which even the part of the harpoon to the right of the vertical text column has been erased, together with the heads of the fishes.

75. Harpur and Scremin 2006, 80 (detail 129, see 494, context drawing 9), 387–88, commentary.

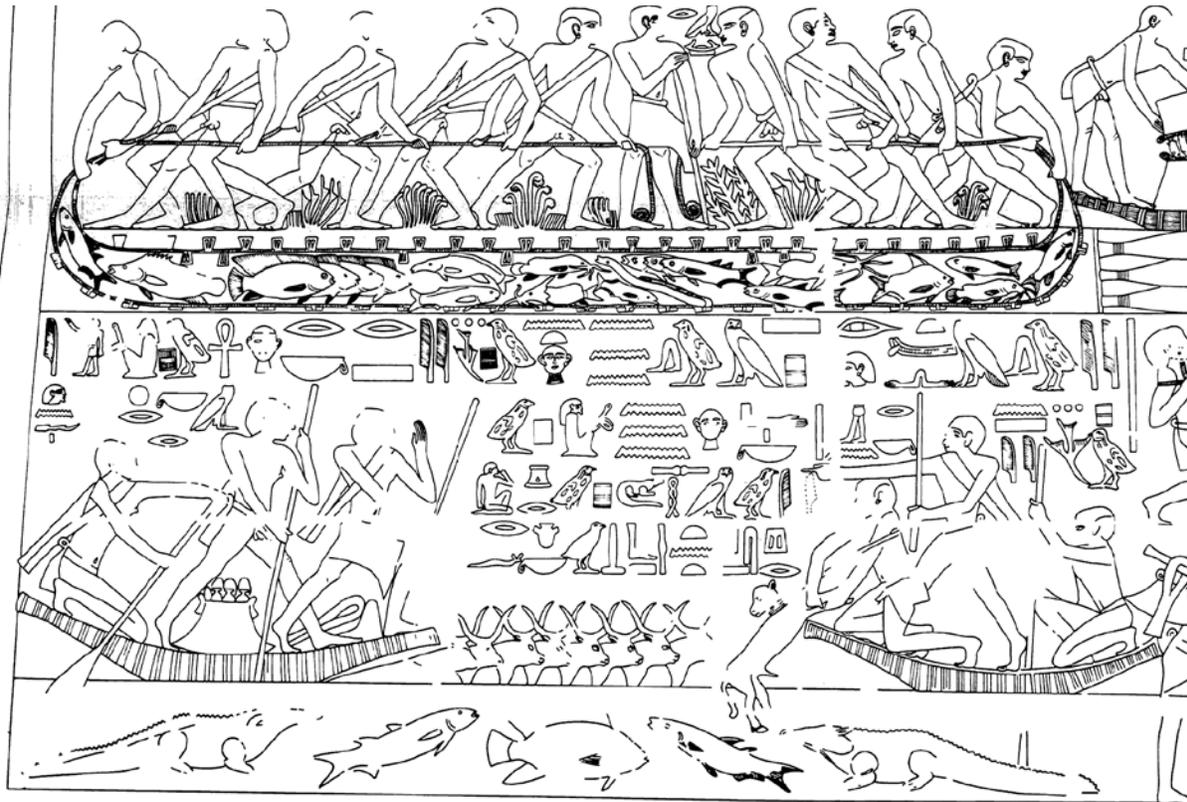


Figure 28. Line drawing of figure 27 (after Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1999, pl. 55).



184a/E/02



184a/E/02



184a/E/02



184a/E/02



Figure 29. Detail of inscription of cattle crossing scene of figure 28 and its parsed hieroglyphic version in MastaBase.

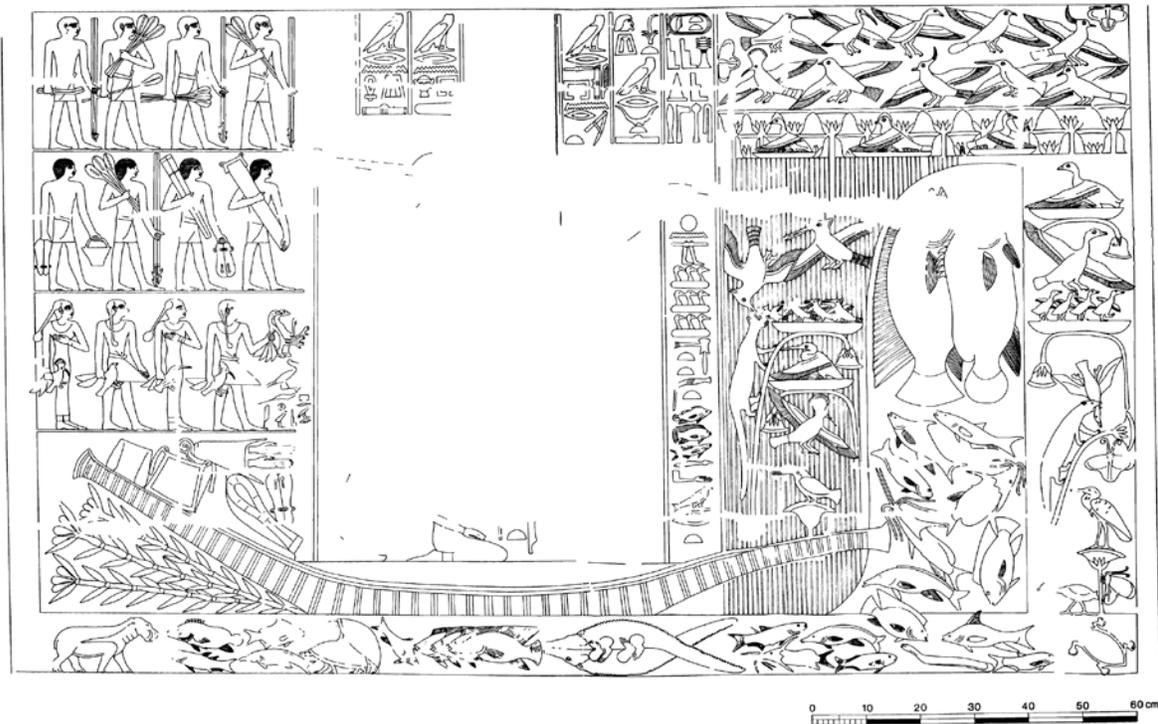


Figure 30. Tomb of Hesi, marsh scene, tomb owner spearing fish (after Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1999, pl. 53).

realistic, cruel, and violent details of ruthless and aggressive predators attacking nestlings, while being attacked and vehemently bitten themselves by the upset and desperately defending parents (fig. 32), all together expressing brute *emotion*.

This is even more prominent in the other “Marsh scene,” with the owner fowling with a throw stick (fig. 33), showing comparably realistic details as well as a so far unique *double* depiction of a *pair of gloves* in the skiff (figs. 34–35; also present in fig. 30).⁷⁶ Below its stern one finds the unique representation of a *praying mantis* (fig. 35, bottom right corner).

What is the common denominator of these examples, which are apparently enough for Hesi to compensate for the “many rooms” he gave up? In my view the most likely answer is: the *quality* of the iconographic and textual programs, including several innovative and unique phrases and images in his (auto-)biography, respectively bioconographic program.⁷⁷ In this very compact tomb, Hesi epitomizes all points of pp. 124–25: his tomb as an impressive marker of its owner (1–2); its iconographic complexity (3); his “*materialistic*” status (the financial cost

76. El-Menshawly 2001, 35, mentions Hesi’s gloves as the oldest in his study on gloves in general. The now most complete bibliography (Martin 2012, 20–22) adds two from the Old Kingdom: one preceding (Lymery, G 6020; *temp.* Niuserre or later), one following (Qar, G 7101, *temp.* Pepi I or later), both showing a *single* glove only, once in each tomb. This reveals two things: Hesi took the trouble to “import” a motif possibly unknown at Saqqara from Giza, and he outdid his examples in number of gloves by doubling them (depicting them as a pair) and by their number (again expressing competition).

77. Stauder-Porchet 2015, 192, also stresses the “very high quality” of the tomb’s decoration, the fact that it is the only tomb of the Teti cemetery with a portico (see Chauvet 2011) and its “highly original formulation of its texts,” the latter elaborated in the remainder of her article (Stauder-Porchet 2015, esp. 195–98).

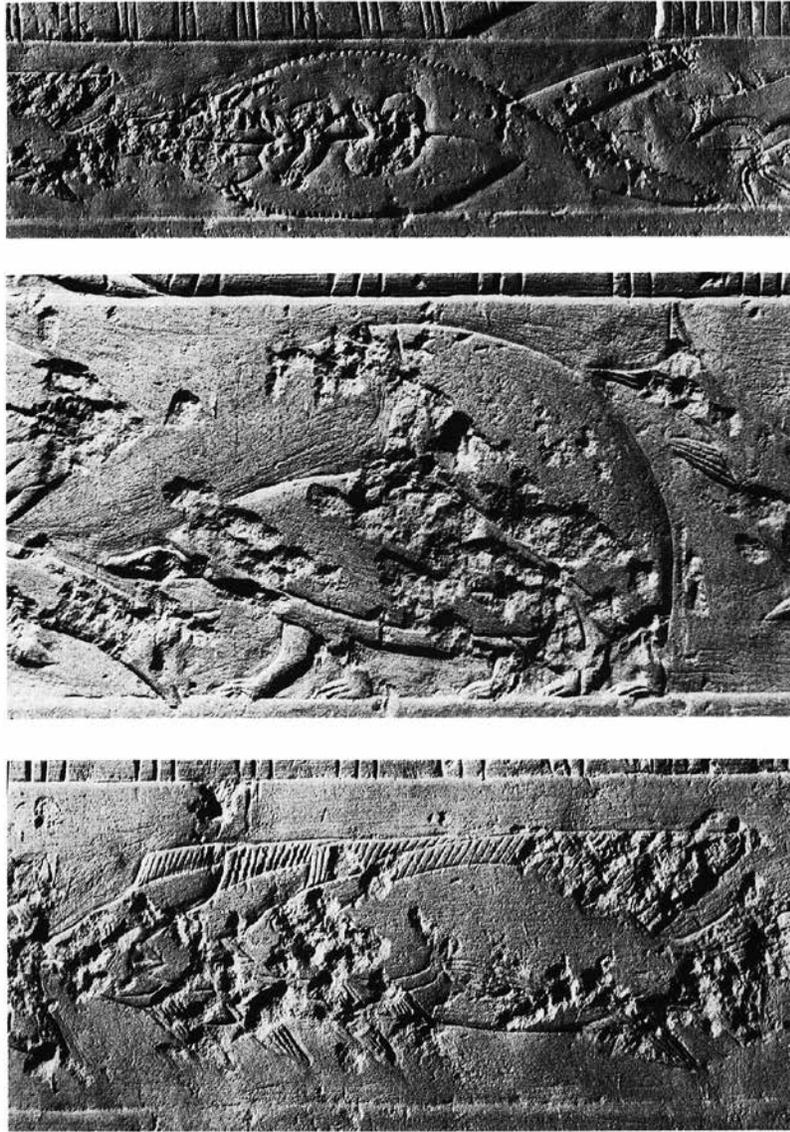


Figure 31. Tomb of Hesi, details of figure 30 (after Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1999, pl. 14).

of creating this tomb) (4); his “(auto-)biography” (with innovative passages) (5); his (immaterial) “social status” (reflecting his knowledgeability, expressed by innovations in iconography and text elements) (6–7); his “competition with peers” (expressed by the increasing complexity of iconography and texts containing comparative grammatical constructions and, for example, the depiction of so far the largest number of gloves in a single tomb during the entire Old Kingdom); his “stretching the rules” (breaking the elite rule that “big,” read: “many rooms,” is better than a single one); his “expressing emotion” (the realistic animal life/death struggle) and, ultimately, his “vanity,” for one needs a certain degree of vanity to realize the elite tombs under discussion and especially those containing an (auto-)biography (9).



Figure 32. Tomb of Hesi, detail of spearing fish (after Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1999, pl. 12).

After all, the *unspoken information*⁷⁸ is that the owners of these tombs have such high esteem of themselves that they at least hope, but more likely expect, random passers-by to be so much impressed by their tombs that they will spend their (precious) time to inspect the decoration and/or read their (auto-)biographies. Such expectations—apparently supposed to remain valid for ages in light of the durable building materials employed—fall perfectly within the definition of vanity (point 9 on p. 125).

78. See motto 3. It is different from the “appel aux vivants” where passers-by are explicitly addressed (Sainte Fare Garnot 1938). The author is not aware of any invocation like “Read this biography!” on any Old Kingdom tomb.



Figure 33. Tomb of Hesi, papyrus thicket with birds, detail of fig. 34, fowling with a throw stick (after Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1999, pl. 17).

From a careful study of his unique iconographic program, complemented with his (auto-)biography, Hesi emerges as a strongly competitive individual who succeeded in creating one of the most completely preserved—if not the best—bioconographies of the entire Old Kingdom. He thus allows us a glimpse into his *psychological make-up*, because that is the ultimate “core” we are confronted with. Thus each tomb, viewed *integrally* as a *bioconography*, is the outcome or *materialization* of unique and highly complex thought processes of a once-living *individual*, which reflect generic and individual personality traits that encompass a partial time interval of his

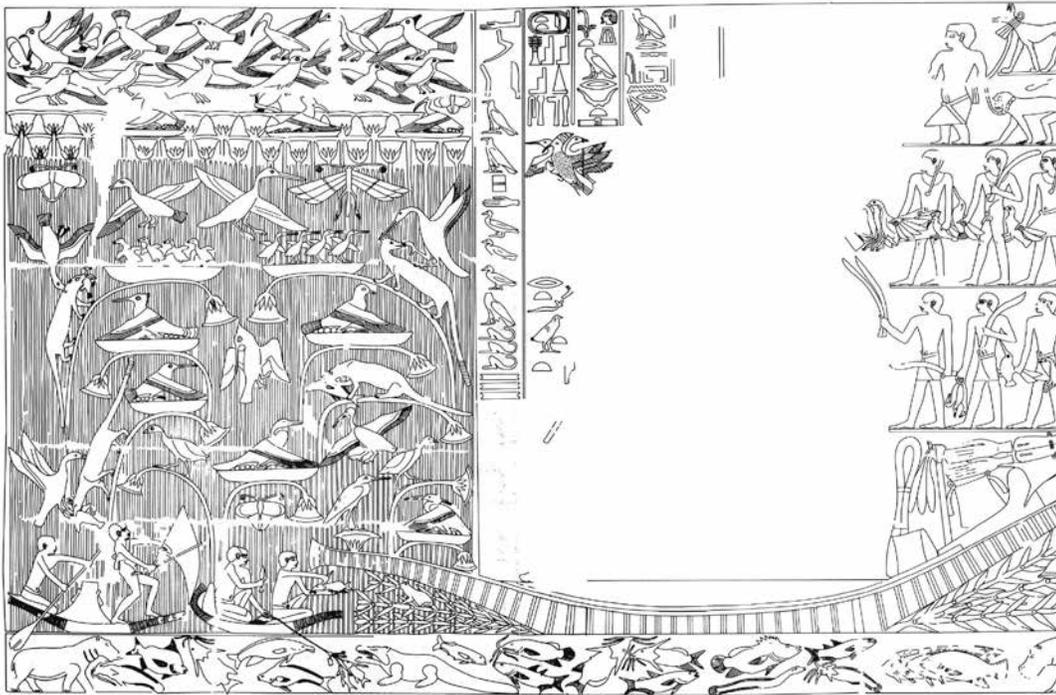


Figure 34. Tomb of Hesi, fowling with a throw stick (after Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1999, pl. 54).



Figure 35. Tomb of Hesi, detail of skiff with gloves and of praying mantis (after Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 1999, pl. 19).

entire biological space time,⁷⁹ *none* of which is, however, ever *specified* or *quantified* with *exact dates* in the Old Kingdom (auto-)biographies or iconographic programs. For, although J. Stauder-Porchet is right in her statement that “Hezi’s inscription is not about *events*, still less about sequences of events,”⁸⁰ the texts of Weni and Harkhuf, which do contain (sequences of) specific events, are still completely mute about the exact *dates*—at least as a year number—of their own lifetime, or the regnal year of (a) specific king(s) in which the event(s) took place, irrespective of whether this concerned a rise in administrative function coupled to a specific title, or executing a specific mission abroad. However, Hesi indicates a specific *sequence of kings* whom he served, plus a sequence of, admittedly *not* chronologically exactly quantified, *intervals* (themselves representing a collective of—basically—daily events) of specific service at the royal court. In short, even Hesi’s compact (auto-)biography, deep down, does concern events, but they are less obvious and explicit than those of Weni’s and Harkhuf’s texts. So, already from these compact *texts* alone, certain personality traits of Hesi⁸¹ emerge,⁸² although probably a little more “schematically” or “hazily” than those of Weni and Harkhuf.

Unavoidably, these facts raise the question *whether*, and to *what* extent a bioconography reveals *what* about the *personality* responsible for its shape and content, as Egyptologists find it in its original place and can study it, by definition, only from a *culturally outsider’s*, or “*etic*,” position.⁸³ Let it be clear right away that the author is *not* propagating a kind of “archaeo-psychologizing.” Although, again by definition, every single human-made artifact reveals “something” about its maker’s mindset or psyche, simply because he could not have made it without “seeing” it in his mind’s eye or without the necessary thought processes for turning the intangible mental image into a material object, one must be very modest in drawing (far-reaching) conclusions in this realm.⁸⁴

Yet, it is legitimate to probe some aspects of an individual’s *personality* (defined as “the totality of an individual’s emergent⁸⁵ tendencies to act or behave esp. self-consciously or to act on, interact with, perceive, react to

79. “Space time” as a synonym for “duration” or even better “life span” is a very apt term in this context, since somebody’s life does not only take place on a linear time axis but also in a three-dimensional *space context*. This means that the first decision made concerning a tomb, namely its *place*, is directly connected to a *moment in time* in one’s course of life. For only after reaching a certain position at a certain *age*, one can determine the location of a tomb. This location *may* be influenced by the fact that one’s career falls inside king X’s reign, so one may wish to build one’s tomb close to the king’s funerary complex to be near him after death, or near his residence where one served him, but this does *not necessarily* need to be the case, considering the wide geographic distribution of elite tombs in the Memphite area, of which only a certain number is clustered near royal funerary complexes. The earliest example of an outlier is Metjen’s early Fourth Dynasty tomb in Saqqara, which is at a considerable distance from both Meidum and Giza. See p. 143, n. 71.

80. Stauder-Porchet 2015, 201.

81. See p. 125 above.

82. See n. 32.

83. See van Walsem 2005, 49, on “emic” and “etic.”

84. On “modesty,” see van Walsem 2005, 65, 102–3. Nevertheless it is the author’s opinion that *each branch* and or *discipline* of the humanities, for example, (art) history, sociology, archaeology, theology, law, and on, should teach *all* students the basic principles of, and the most modern insights into, *cultural* psychology (for instance Matsumoto 2000). After all, all material and immaterial aspects students are supposed not only to study but to understand and explain originate in the human brain and mind. This does not mean at all that historians should become a psychologists (or vice versa), yet, it would be very useful if they were able to consult psychologists in ways that would further a more thorough understanding of the subject matter. No one—for very good reasons—is allowed to be a medical practitioner without a thorough knowledge of anatomy, the *foundation* of all insight on the functioning of the human body. Yet, Egyptologists have written, and sold as valid scientific Egyptology, “biographies” on the most important pharaohs without demonstrating even the slightest knowledge of or reference to *scientific* modern psychological knowledge that might still offer some better insight into the issues raised by the extremely scarce material on these persons. Only a diary (fragment) could give us an inkling of what the real personalities like Djoser, Khufu, Sesostris I, or III, Hatshepsut, Akhenaten, Nefertiti and Cleopatra once were. Alas, we do not have even the smallest shred of such a document of *any* king/queen!

85. See n. 32.

or otherwise meaningfully influence or experience his environment,”⁸⁶ and/or “distinction or excellence of personal and social traits: the social characteristic of commanding notice, admiration, respect or influence through personal characteristics,”⁸⁷ and/or “a person of importance, prominence, renown, or notoriety”⁸⁸ in conjunction with his *identity* (defined as: “unity and persistence of personality: unity or individual comprehensiveness of a life or character.”)⁸⁹

Does Hesi’s choice of a compact yet extremely rich and complex (auto-)biography, in contrast to the very long and much more specific texts of Weni and Harkhuf, imply that the latter were “men of words” who liked reading (and writing) more than Hesi did? Does Hesi’s choice of a compact yet extremely rich and complex iconographic program of the highest quality, in contrast to the “poor” programs in the other two tombs, reveal that he was a “man of pictures” who liked to observe “(daily) life” and capture it in his tomb’s bioconographic program, more than the other persons? The interesting thing to note here is that, so far, not a single *combination* of both a (very) *long* (auto-)biography and a *highly complex* iconographic program has been found. Apparently (?) one *could* not—because of lack of economic means and/or time (?)—or one *would* not—simply because one was not interested (?)—have *both simultaneously*.

Another question is this: Does the relatively smaller architectonic size of Hesi’s tomb⁹⁰ reveal that he was a more modest or humble person than, for example, Mereruka or Kagemni? After all, he was a vizier too, who, in his own words, had enough power to build a big multiroom tomb. In contrast, do the three huge complexes of Kagemni, Ankhmahor, and Mereruka⁹¹ characterize their owners as megalomaniacs, of whom Mereruka—not only vizier but also the king’s son-in-law—was most obviously exhibiting this mental defect? Or was the tomb that big—but note that a portico as status marker⁹² was omitted—because he simply had the means (being so close to the king and his resources) for a big building, as well as for high quality reliefs, and that a (long) (auto-)biography simply did not interest him because he was not a “man of words” in this respect, unlike Hesi?

A final example, “Hunting in the desert,”⁹³ concerns necessarily a primitive, cruel, and bloody activity among the profane scenes whose iconography regularly shows very realistic and thus distasteful details such as: (in the tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep) a living hare between the jaws of a hunting dog,⁹⁴ a lion biting an oryx’s throat;⁹⁵ (in Ptahhotep’s tomb) a wild bull defecating while being suffocated by a lion,⁹⁶ a grasshopper

86. Webster 1976, 2:82, 5, d2.

87. Webster 1976, 2:1687, 6a.

88. Webster 1976, 2:1687, 6b.

89. Webster 1976, 2:1123, 2. Compare motto 2.

90. Chauvet 2007, 320, does not consider quality as a possible reason, but agrees with Staring 2011, 268 n. 69, that for Hesi: “[i]t was more important to have a small tomb in the direct vicinity of the king’s pyramid than one which by its size would have better reflected his social status and personal achievement” (see p. 145, n. 73). Apart from this, I further completely subscribe to her downplaying the king’s role in the procurement of tombs by the elite.

91. For a site plan of the north section of the Teti cemetery, showing the sizes and positions of large and small tombs, see Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2004, pl. 41. Dividing Mereruka’s tomb (no. 1:1), surface [54.72 cm²] by Hesi’s (no. 4:13), surface [6.72 cm²] shows that the former is 8.1 times larger than the latter.

92. Chauvet 2011, 261 and 295, distinguishes between social status and “knowledge- and accessibility-status” (Chauvet 2011, 296).

93. Besides actual hunting, there are also several scenes of the ordinary life cycle of desert animals, varying from mating to killing.

94. Harpur and Scremin 2010, 265 [no. 285].

95. Harpur and Scremin 2010, 260 [no. 277]–261 [no. 278].

96. Harpur and Scremin 2008, 101 [no. 140], 301–2; 140 [nos. 154–55], 304. It is also found in Mereruka’s tomb, Kanawati et al. 2010, pls. 19 and 73.

between the jaws of a hedgehog,⁹⁷ and other revolting details, such as a dog's teeth sinking into the necks of all kinds of desert animals.⁹⁸ However, the most gruesome and atrocious hunting scene is found for the first time in Mereruka's tomb where nine trained dogs⁹⁹ tear an ibex (almost certainly alive) apart (fig. 36).¹⁰⁰ The motif is repeated—slightly adapted—in his son's tomb, which is annexed to Mereruka's (fig. 37),¹⁰¹ and it is also found in the nearby tomb of Inumin.¹⁰² Whether the animal was actually still (half-)alive or dead is of no consequence, since it does not diminish in the least the openly shown, detailed expression of the *collective* relentless bloodthirst and voraciousness of the dogs.

How does one interpret this scene—as a reflection the “enjoyment” of cruel scenes and their details perhaps?¹⁰³ First of all, it is interesting to note that the *main theme* of “Hunting” is by far the least popular during the entire Old Kingdom: only sixty-seven registers from a total of 6,943, that is 0.97 percent, less than 1 percent (see fig. 18), or twenty-eight tombs out of a total of 337, that is 0.83 percent.¹⁰⁴ One should also realize that the figure of sixty-seven registers, even if only one register per tomb was used, falls *five times short* of providing all tombs with only one register, which reveals that many tombs must have completely ignored the main theme, as is demonstrated by figures 19 and 21 where it is entirely missing in the legend. This shows that its presence was a very deliberate choice by the tomb owner, which discloses irrefutably an inextricable trait of his personality. An explanation for the general rareness of this main theme may be found in the suggestion that the realistic (read: aesthetically “unpleasant” actions/images) were obviously viewed as too harsh for incorporation into tomb decoration by the great majority of the sophisticated elite.

The scene under consideration is a further step *within* the main-theme iconography of “desert hunting,” showing an increase in violence and the like over the regular, already reasonably atrocious hunting scenes available. Without accusing Mereruka of being an unpleasant, extraordinarily cruel person because he apparently “enjoyed” hunting in general (and worse, this scene in particular), it is not unreasonable to state that obviously “something” in his personality gave him “a stronger (iconographic) stomach” than his predecessors and contemporaries. That is all we can say. The question whether his son, Meryteti, wanted to show that he also had a “strong stomach” like his father, or that he copied it because he liked it more as an interesting innovation and extension of the repertoire, or for any other conceivable reason, is impossible to answer. This also holds for Inumin. Both borrowings, however, demonstrate that those who commissioned them were not inferior to Mereruka in this respect and received less of an emotional “hit” from this kind of scene than the majority of the elite.¹⁰⁵ However, the finer details will escape us forever.

97. Harpur and Scremin 2008, 109 [no. 153], 303. See pp. 356, 358–59 for context drawings.

98. Harpur and Scremin 2008, 100 [139], 101 [140], 102 [141], 301–2; 113–14 [161–64], 305.

99. They wear neck straps or collars, so they are not wild dogs.

100. Kanawati et al. 2010, 25, and pls. 19, 73.

101. Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2004, pls. 6 and 46.

102. Kanawati 2006, pls. 14a and 47 (here *ten* dogs are involved, reflecting complexity expansion).

103. I leave aside here comparable cruel scenes between crocodiles and hippopotami (e.g., the fight between a crocodile and a hippopotamus, where the latter “swallows” the former's head [Kagemni: Harpur and Scremin 2006, 80 (127), 387], or where a crocodile threatens a hippopotamus young [80 (128), 387], or a crocodile being bitten in its back at hind legs by a hippopotamus bull while it attacks a half-born hippopotamus baby [Harpur and Scremin 2006, 20 (27), 361]); or crocodiles and fishes (a fish being swallowed head-on by a crocodile with gruesomely sharp teeth [Harpur and Scremin 2006, 20 (28), 361–62]), which are all located underwater and concern the results of *natural* hunting/enmity instincts. This is not the case in the scene under discussion where a *wild* animal is hunted down and killed by *domestic* (that is, *civilized*) dogs, especially trained to do so.

104. Even if one assumes that only half of the original volume has survived, it still is a very low frequency in comparison with the other main themes.

105. Kanawati (2009, 268, 272, fig. 9), discussing this scene as well, suggests that it may concern three different specific incidents experienced/watched by all three tomb owners, or a single event shared by all three and that the “similarities ... might

My fundamental and central point is that, *nolens volens*, the personal choice of main themes by each tomb owner, made from the wide range of available main themes—that is, on a more generic level—works together with the iconographic “volumes,” or sizes, of the bars of each main theme (as visualized by the MastaBase in figs. 19–24) to disclose and reflect “something” of his personality—*visually embedded stages* of it, although these are *not specified* or *quantified* and so are not sharply identifiable. Scrutinizing bar graphs like those in figures 19–24 unavoidably reveals that person X had more “rapport” with “Kitchen scenes,” that is food (preparation), than person Y, simply because the former used nine registers of a total of sixty-five for this subject, while the other has only one of a total of 121 registers. This tells us “something,” simply because of the saying: “*Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.*”¹⁰⁶ By definition, *what* the abundance of the heart is, concerns nothing else than somebody’s *personality*.

Since the building and full decoration of, especially the big(ger), elite tombs took years, reflected in all the adaptations, corrections, etc., that were executed over time, it is also logical to assume that it was within the owner’s general freedom of choice to change and adapt his iconography and texts, turning his tomb into a *bioconographical “portrait,”* as real and outstanding as a portrait



Figure 36. Tomb of Mereruka, ibex torn apart by hunting dogs (after Kanawati et al. 2010, pl. 73).



Figure 37. Tomb of Meryteti, ibex torn apart by hunting dogs (after Kanawati and Abder-Raziq 2004, pl. 46).

not necessarily be the result of direct copying or even the influence of one scene on the other.” I very much agree with his general approach and interpretation of his examples, all of which, indeed, concern much more specific *events* and are thus indicative of a (highly) *personal* choice, connected to specific *places*, (intervals of) *time*, and actual *life* (Kanawati 2009, 271) than is generally acknowledged in mainstream Egyptology. They all show (a number of) key attributes encompassed by the concept of bioconography as outlined and discussed on pp. 124–25. Finally, it should be noted that Darnell (2011, 1163, 1166–69) discusses a Naqada II representation of a Barbary sheep attacked by *four* dogs in the Theban “Wadi of the Horus Qa’a.”

106. See p. 135 on “importance,” n. 63. One might investigate tombs showing a fat representation of the owner beside a slender one with respect to the number of present registers of offerings. Are there significantly more registers in tombs showing a corpulent owner?

reflecting actual life, but with different means.¹⁰⁷ The fact that, so far, no two identical Old Kingdom elite tombs have been found proves this irrefutably.¹⁰⁸

The deepest driving force for this apparently unremitting manifestation of a search for variance has, in the author's opinion, been explicitly and perfectly formulated by an ancient Egyptian himself, namely by Ptahhotep, in his first maxim (my translation):

The limit of craftsmanship has not been reached (yet);
There is no craftsman (yet), whose potential¹⁰⁹ is (already) (completely) equipped (with perfection).¹¹⁰

The fundamental meaning is quite obviously that one can never lean backwards in self-satisfaction with the idea that the ultimate and perfect stage (of any activity) is finally reached. One has to be always on the move.¹¹¹ Therefore the concept of *bioconography* is aptly enshrined in this wisdom, since it represents and reflects the construction of a highly complex and multifaceted funerary artifact during a certain dynamic life span of—in each and every case—a *unique person(ality)* who would otherwise forever escape us.

This too, was admirably captured by Grossman:

Motto 7: “Grand tombs, memorial inscriptions and the flowers that grow on a grave are all equally unable to show us the soul of someone who has died; they cannot show us their love or grief. Stone, music, prayer and the lamentations of mourners are all equally powerless to convey the mystery of a human soul ... So: here we are—this is death for you.”
(V. Grossman, *The Road*, 2011, 317)

107. Several of these aspects and processes are also discussed in Vischak 2015, an important analytical study of the elite tombs of Qubbet el-Hawa. See, for example, her emphasis on the individual (esp. 7–9, and 180) and identity (esp. 209, 215, and 222), great variety of styles over longer periods (esp. 160–61, and 172), increasing complexity (esp. 173–74), great differences in the number of subsidiary figures per tomb (revealing individually differing sizes of “social networks” as in actual individual lives, 180–99).

108. An analogy to someone's personal library suggests itself. Both an elite tomb as a “bioconography” and a library reflect “something” of a personality over a period of time. Although the end result can be surveyed at one specific point in time, they were constructed, respectively collected, over years, literally reflecting the life span or *curriculum vitae* of the owner. An Egyptologist's library, for instance, can be divided into fiction and nonfiction books; the latter can be further divided into, say, Egyptological books, because of the owner's primary profession, and other ones such as books on philosophy, especially perhaps Wittgenstein; next a collection on modern science like complexity theories and psychology because in the owner's opinion they may be useful for addressing complex issues in Egyptology. It is quite obvious that a library of another Egyptologist that, in addition to Egyptological books, contains books on sport signals another scientific interest and thus personality than the former. It is also obvious that the owner of the library did not start with modern scientific books, but that during his life span he got interested in these subjects through his scientific experiences. Similarly, bioconographies in the shape of tombs reflect such *processes* of increasing insight into a person's *integral* designing of their tomb; see the difference between Hetepherakhty's tomb (LMP 045), Mereruka's (LMP 182A), and Hesi's (LMP 184a).

109. I translate the word *ꜥꜣw* with “Macht” (Hannig 2003, 15), “power,” from which the word “potential” can be simply derived.

110. I translate the word *ꜥꜣr(w)* with “ausgestattet” (komplett) (Hannig 2003, 268), “equipped.”

111. This conclusion was already reached in van Walsem 2012–2013, 137.

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