

## WORK SONGS IN OLD KINGDOM ELITE TOMBS: THE WORK SONG OF THE CLOTH PORTERS IN THE TOMB OF PEPIANKH HENIKEM IN MEIR\*

JANNY ROOS

### *Introduction*

The elite tombs of the Old Kingdom in ancient Egypt are known for their richly decorated tomb chapels. A fine example is the chapel of Hetepherakhty in the museum collection of the Dutch National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden. The walls of the chapel have been decorated with reliefs that show scenes of daily life in ancient Egypt. In some cases, the iconographic depictions are accompanied by hieroglyphic texts, which can be divided in captions, observations, and spoken texts. Some texts of the last category can also be considered as work songs.<sup>1</sup>

Work songs indicate texts that are sung in support of mostly heavy physical activities. Examples of such work include hauling in full fishing nets, hoisting the sails of a ship, and reaping grain in the fields. Singing a song to the rhythm of the work required makes it easier for the workmen to keep up the pace.

One of the first Egyptologists to mention that songs had been written on the walls of the tombs of the Old Kingdom was Adolf Erman. It was he who recognised the songs on the walls of the tombs of Ty and Mereruka accompanying agricultural and fishing scenes, and also scenes in which the tomb owner is shown being carried in a palanquin.<sup>2</sup>

Although no direct evidence exists for the texts having been sung as songs – musical notations are absent, as are captions to indicate that a specific text is a song – scientists agree that at least some of the texts above the scenes of labour are songs. Mirjam Lichtheim for instance stated ‘(...) we may class as songs the short pieces of poetry carved above scenes of labour depicted in tomb reliefs’.<sup>3</sup> Emma Brunner-Traut also considers some of the texts on the walls of these Old Kingdom tombs as work songs. In her entry ‘Arbeitslieder’ in the *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, she even distinguishes different types of work songs. According to Brunner-Traut, the first purpose of singing at work is the strengthening of the rhythm, inherent to some of the labour tasks depicted, or to keep steady. If labour does not produce rhythm, this can be aroused artificially by means of a song, in order to guarantee the steadiness of the

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<sup>1</sup> Roos, in Verschoor *et al.*, *Imaging and Imagining*, 245-266.

<sup>2</sup> Erman, *Reden*, 4, 19-24; Erman, *Poetry*, 131-132.

<sup>3</sup> Lichtheim, *Literature* I, 193.

muscular movements. This can all be reached by exhortations, by playing an instrument, by singing songs or by clapping one's hands.<sup>4</sup>

The occurrence and types of work songs are, however, not unique to ancient Egypt. The work song is a universal phenomenon, which can be found in *many eras* and in *many places*. The anthropological studies of modern Egypt by Karl Bücher, Hans Schäfer and Hans Alexander Winkler, at the beginning of the twentieth century, have shown that work songs sung by the Egyptian workmen of our time are comparable to those of ancient Egypt.<sup>5</sup>

An anthropological study of the musical instruments of present-day Africa, south of Egypt, further reveals a number of interesting parallels to the work songs in ancient Egypt.

'The singers are farmers, fishermen, hunters, herdsman, porters, camel drivers, soldiers, or coffee sifters. (...) An agricultural song provides rhythm for work in the fields. Porters carrying African chiefs or Europeans in sedan chairs on long journeys through the bush or forest walked to the rhythm of their singing. In equatorial Africa boatmen and fishermen sing boat songs and paddling songs. Herdboys play flutes as they watch the cattle. (...) The call-and-response form is common to many of these songs. A leader starts the song, the group answers, the leader sings again and is answered by the group, and so on.'<sup>6</sup>

Egyptologists have paid considerable attention to Egyptian poetry, hymns, and songs, but in most cases, the subject of their publications and anthologies are the ancient Egyptian poems of the New Kingdom, which clearly have a poetical character. The interest shown in the work songs of the Old Kingdom is much smaller, although a number of articles have been published on specific work songs, such as the shepherd's song and the palanquin song.

The texts of work songs are usually very simple. They are, after all, not intended to be performed before an audience, but to support the work. It is therefore not important how the text runs and what exactly is sung.<sup>7</sup> But how can we distinguish between humble work songs and ordinary spoken texts, if the texts are not indicated as songs, and if there is no musical notation? In his article, 'Ancient Egyptian Literature', John Foster points out that the Egyptian verse makes use of the same devices as other literatures, such as the metaphor, alliteration, repetition, vivid imagery, personification, characterisation, and symbol.<sup>8</sup> It is exactly these artistic figures of speech, that help us to recognise poetry or songs.

Texts in the tombs of the Old Kingdom may thus have a poetical character, or contain poetical elements, such as alliteration, repetition of words, parts of sentences or even complete sentences. However, these poetical elements may not be present in a text at all. In such cases the accompanying iconography may suggest that the texts mean more than just words. In harvesting scenes, for instance, we may see someone singing or playing the flute, standing between workers in the field, supporting them by setting the pace for the reaping of grain (Fig. 1).

<sup>4</sup> Brunner-Traut, in Helck and Otto, *Lexikon* I, 378-385.

<sup>5</sup> Bücher, *Arbeit*; Schäfer, *Lieder*; Winkler, *Bauern*.

<sup>6</sup> Dietz and Babatunde Olatunji, *Musical Instruments*, 2; also in Peek and Yankah, *African Folklore*, 519.

<sup>7</sup> Von Wilpert, *Sachwörterbuch*, 43; Bücher, *Arbeit*, 42.

<sup>8</sup> Foster and Foster, in Wilkinson, *Egyptology Today*, 217-218.

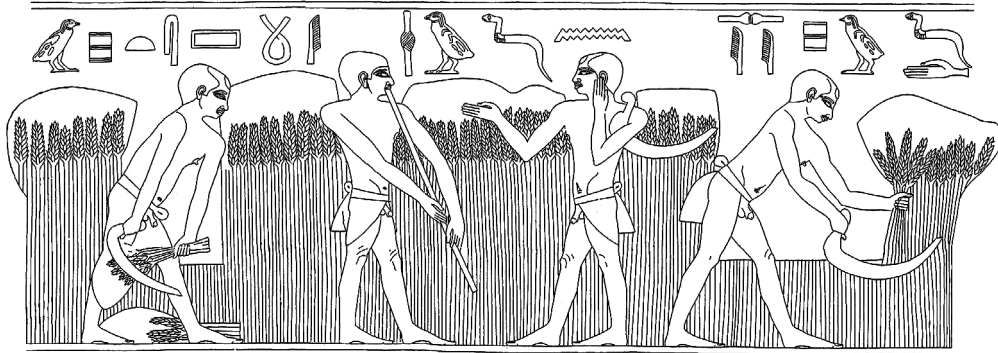


Fig. 1: The reaping of grain in the tomb of Ty in Saqqara (LMP 049, room VI, east wall 34-35, register 4) (Épron *et al.*, *Tombeau de Ti* III, Pl. CLIII).<sup>9</sup>

A scene from the tomb chapel of Mereruka clearly shows that work could be done to a specific rhythm (Fig. 2). Here, six men are shown treading grapes, with next to them two men sitting on the floor, within a circle, who set the pace with sticks or rattles. Above the two men a caption reads *m3h*, meaning ‘beating a rhythm’. No further texts are present in this scene, so there is no direct evidence that singing also accompanied such activities.

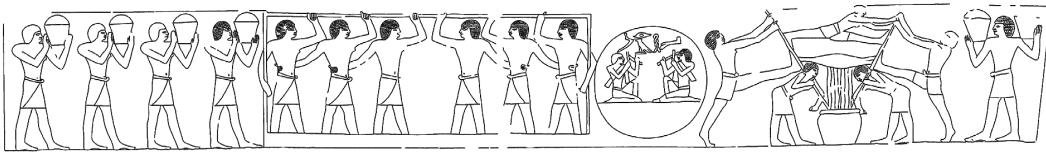


Fig. 2: The treading and pressing of grapes in the tomb of Mereruka in Saqqara (LMP 182A, room XII, north wall 066, register 8) (Kanawati *et al.*, *Mereruka*, Pl. 107).

The best textual evidence for the presence of a work song is found in the New Kingdom tomb of Paheri at El Kab. Three registers on the west wall show agricultural scenes of ploughing, sowing, reaping and threshing. The text concerned appears in the second register, above the reaping scene (Fig. 3).

<sup>9</sup> For this article, I made use of *MastaBase*, the digital database of Old Kingdom elite tombs in ancient Egypt, as developed by René van Walsem. The tombs in *MastaBase* are numbered and all start with the abbreviation LMP (Leiden Mastaba Project). The numbering of tombs, tomb chambers, walls, and registers in *MastaBase* were developed by Van Walsem.



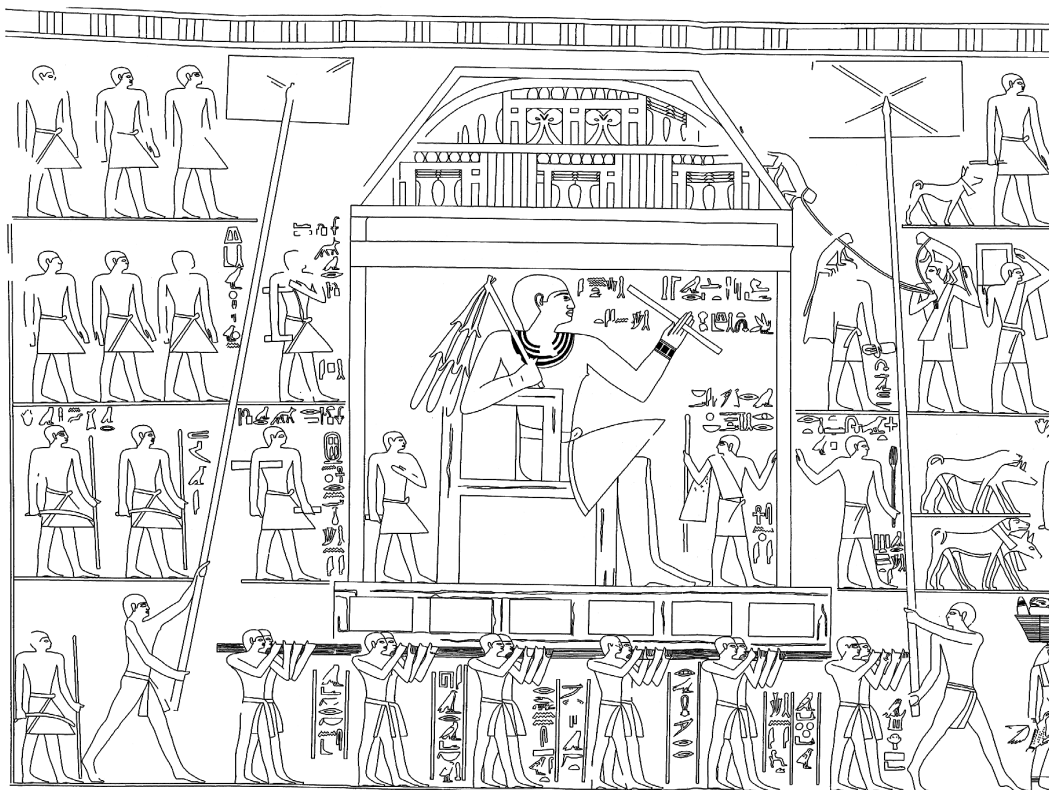


Fig. 4: The palanquin scene in the tomb of Pepiankh Henikem in Meir (Tomb Chapel A, No. 2, Room B, east wall) (Blackman and Apted, *Meir* V, Pl. XXXI).

The complete text on the wall runs as follows:

*Nmty hr-š'*  
*im ḥw ḥny km*  
*ir(.i) wr mī mrr(.i)*  
*mr(.i) s(y) mḥ.t(i)*  
*r wnn.s šw.t(i)*  
*ih3(.i) r mḥnk wd3(.i)*  
*ih3(.i) r mḥnk snb(.i)*

(O), Nemty, who is upon the sand,  
 Grant that Heny the Black be protected.  
 I act much like I wish.  
 I prefer her<sup>12</sup> to be full  
 than to be empty.  
 I go down to the carried one that I may be prosperous,  
 I go down to the carried one that I may be healthy.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> 'Her' refers to the female noun *ḥwdt* (carrying chair), mentioned in the palanquin song in the tomb of Djau (S 12) in Deir el-Gebrāwi; De Garis Davies, *Deir el Gebrāwi* II, 11; Kanawati, *Deir el-Gebrawi* III, 45-46.

<sup>13</sup> The most recent translation of the palanquin song in the tomb of Ipi was made by René van Walsem in Fitzenreiter and Herb, *Dekorierete Grabanlagen*, 302.

The transliteration above shows some poetical elements, such as alliteration and repetition of words and verses. Alliteration appears in the third and fourth verse, in the words beginning with the sound [m]. In the same verses, the repetition of the verb *mr(r).i* can be noticed, whereas at the end of the song the last two verses are repeated for the greater part. These poetical elements enhance the idea of the texts being more than just captions accompanying the palanquin scene.<sup>14</sup>

### *The Work Song of the Cloth Porters*

Whilst studying the tomb of Pepiankh Henikem, I discovered a scene that reminded me of the palanquin scene in the same tomb: in both cases, a group of porters is shown carrying a heavy load. The burdensome nature of this work simply begs for a work song, but is it present in the depictions, and which texts can be read as such on the walls?

The scene concerned can be found on two adjacent, perpendicular walls on the west wall of Room B, marked with arrows in Fig. 5.

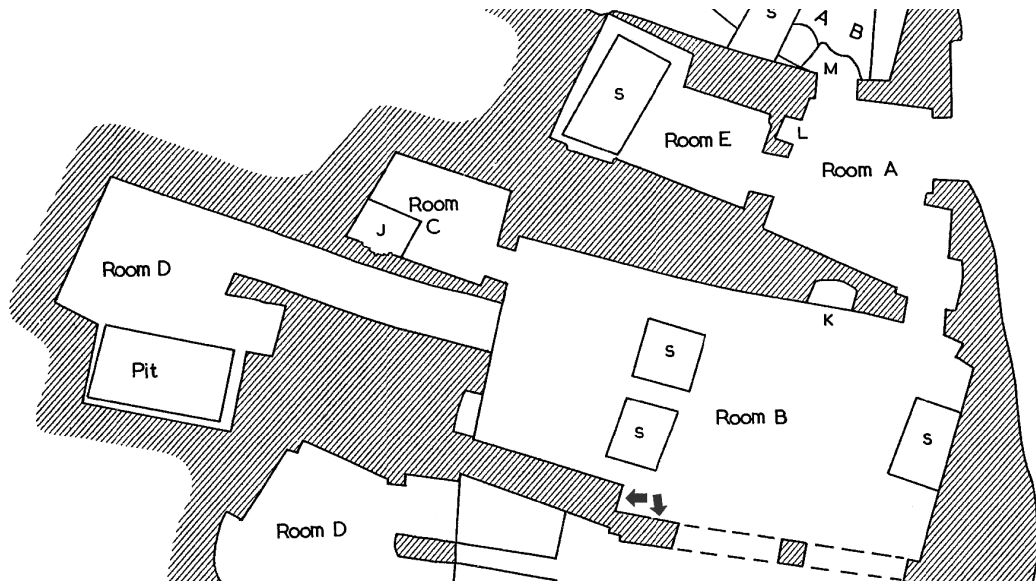


Fig. 5: Partial plan of the tomb of Pepiankh Henikem in Meir (Tomb Chapel A, No. 2) (Blackman and Apted, *Meir* V, Pl. I).

Here, the tomb owner is depicted receiving offerings, borne to him by rows of offering bearers in four registers on each wall. The complete scene is reproduced in Figs. 6 and 7 below, with both walls presented side by side in each figure. In registers 3 and 4 of the main

<sup>14</sup> As far as we know, the palanquin song appears in seven other Old Kingdom elite tombs: in Saqqara in the tombs of Ipi (LMP 221), Sabu (LMP 181A), and Mereruka (LMP 182A); in Giza in the tomb of Nekhebu (LMP 231); in Deir el-Gebrâwi in the tomb of Djau (S 12); and in El-Hawawish in the tombs of Kheni (H 24) and Kahep (H 26). In the palanquin song in the tombs of Ipi and Nekhebu the porters invoke the gods Dja and Sokar, respectively.

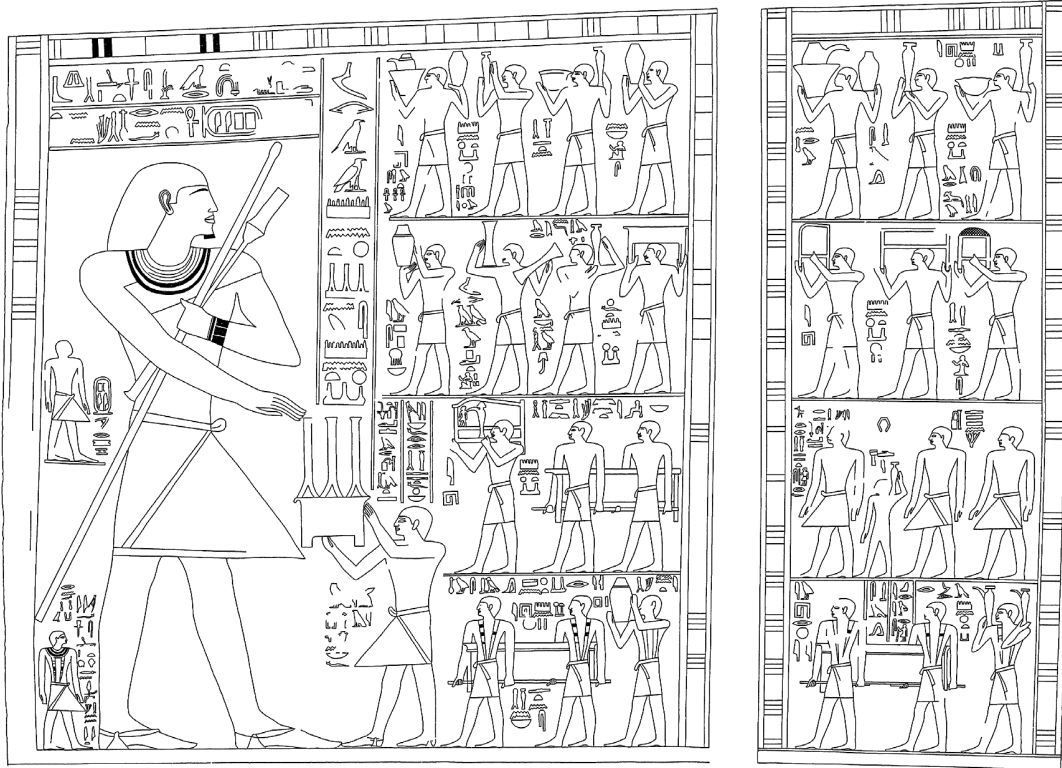


Fig. 6: The offering of cloth in the tomb of Pepiankh Henikem in Meir (Tomb Chapel A, No. 2, Room B, west wall, south section, north of architrave (left) and west wall, south section, angle, south face (right) as drawn by Blackman (Blackman and Apted, *Meir* V, Pl. XXVI).

wall (depicted left), and in register 4 of the sidewall (depicted right), porters carry chests by means of sticks attached to the chests. In the remaining registers, men transport other objects, such as jars, vases, small tables, and stools.

Note that Fig. 6 is almost identical to Fig. 7, yet there are some notable differences between the two line drawings. Fig. 6 is from the 1953 publication of the tombs of Meir by Aylward Blackman and Michael Apted,<sup>15</sup> while Fig. 7 is from a study of the same cemetery, published some sixty years later by Naguib Kanawati and Linda Evans.<sup>16</sup> Although one would expect the quality of the reliefs to have deteriorated over time so that Kanawati's line drawing would show less detail than Blackman's, the opposite is in fact true. At the time Blackman discovered the tomb, the working conditions were much more primitive than at the beginning of the twenty-first century. There was not much light to go by and the tomb was also filthy, due to bat droppings, which covered the floors and the reliefs on the walls. It took the digging team two months to clean the tomb, before the actual archaeological investigation could even begin.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, Blackman may have missed some hieroglyphs due to low visibility, or

<sup>15</sup> Blackman and Apted, *Meir* V.

<sup>16</sup> Kanawati and Evans, *Meir* II.

<sup>17</sup> Blackman and Apted, *Meir* V, preface v.

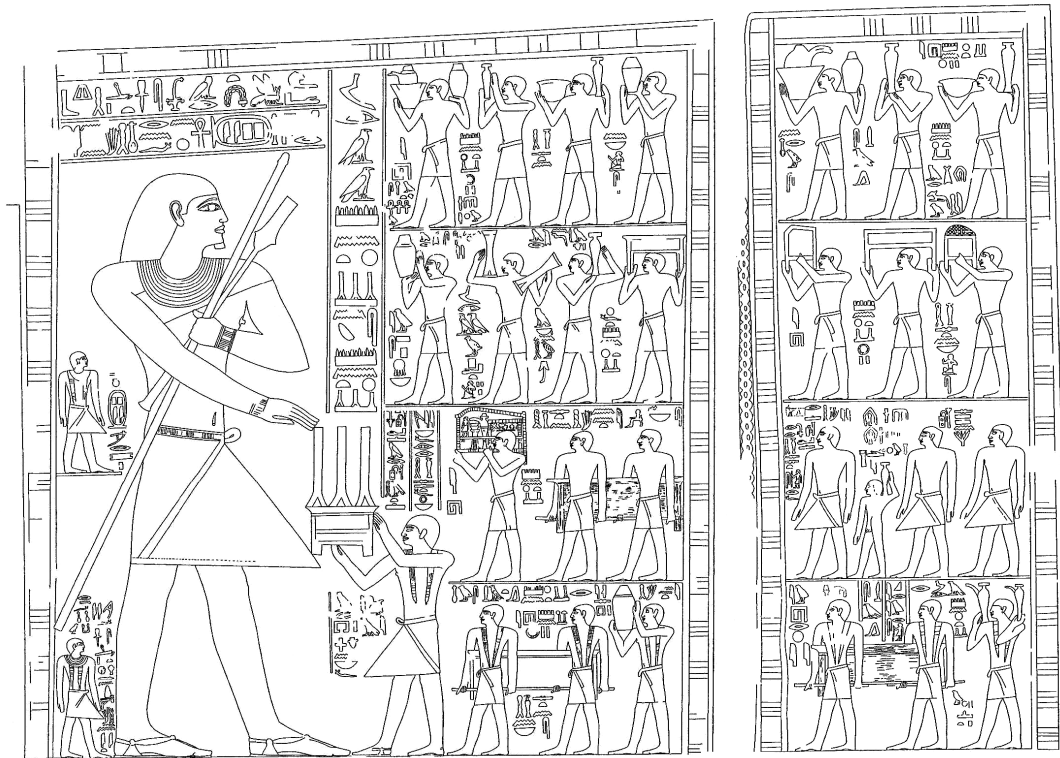


Fig. 7: The offering of cloth in the tomb of Pepiankh Henikem in Meir (Tomb Chapel A, No. 2, Room 4, west wall, south section, north of architrave (left) and west wall, south section, angle south face (right) as drawn by Kanawati (Kanawati and Evans, *Meir* II, Pl. 87).

because some parts of the reliefs were still covered with dirt, despite the efforts to clean them. Fortunately, Kanawati noticed these details when he investigated the tomb.

As a result, his line drawing gives us more information, and in this article his line drawing will be used as the starting point for the discussion of the depictions and texts on the two perpendicular walls.

The line drawing by Kanawati (Fig. 7) shows more details of the iconography, such as the face and clothes of the tomb owner, and of the servants standing behind and in front of him; also, the text is more visible.

### *The Main Characters*

On the far left, the relief shows the tomb owner, Pepiankh Henikem, facing right, depicted in rather a unique pose, holding his staff and sceptre in one hand, pressed against his chest.<sup>18</sup> His titles and names are written in two lines of hieroglyphs above him: ‘the count, the sealer of the king of Lower Egypt, the overseer of Upper Egypt, the sole companion, the lector

<sup>18</sup> Kanawati and Evans, *Meir* II, 43.



priest, the overseer of priests, Pepiankh, his beautiful name, Henenit'.<sup>19</sup> Behind him we see two men: below his son Henyt, with the good name Neferka, behind his father's feet, and above Merpepy, the physician of the palace, depicted behind his back. His title is partly damaged, but the same person appears elsewhere in the tomb, carrying the same title.

In front of the tomb owner, a man is shown offering him a small chest, with on top a large ideogram for *mnḥt* (Gardiner S27), in the *Wörterbuch* translated as 'Kleid' or 'Gewand', in particular meant for statues of the gods.<sup>20</sup> Blackman and Kanawati translate *mnḥt* with 'cloth'. According to Gardiner, sign S27 can be written with two or more vertical strokes, although here *mnḥt* is written with three strokes, possibly to indicate the plural, perhaps to indicate that the chest contains more pieces of cloth (although these are not visible). The name and titles of the servant are written in two columns above his head and before his apron, clarifying that he is the 'scribe of the royal documents, the overseer of the scribes of the land, beloved of his lord, who does what he praises every day, the overseer of the house, confidant of his lord, Itjai'.

In a vertical column directly before the image of Pepiankh Henikem is written what the tomb owner is doing: *m33 mnḥt sn mnḥt* or 'viewing the cloth, disclosing the cloth'. In the line drawing, the phrase *sn* ends with a determinative, which is hard to identify. It looks like an oval, but it is questionable whether this is really the case. The published photograph of the relief in any case does not clarify the used determinative behind the word *sn*.<sup>21</sup> In the line drawings (Figs. 6 and 7), an oval-shaped form has been drawn, but it is clear that this is not the nicely drawn oval of Gardiner signs N18 or Z8, which leads to the translation 'disclosing' used by Blackman and Kanawati.<sup>22</sup> Instead, the depicted hieroglyph rather looks like a nose, as depicted in the *Wörterbuch*.<sup>23</sup> The fact that the tomb owner touches the *mnḥt* ideogram with his hand perhaps indicates that he is about to feel the cloth, for instance in order to judge the quality thereof. His senses thereby experience the quality of the cloth offered to him. For the meaning of *sn* followed by determinative D19 (nose), the *Wörterbuch* distinguishes between a literal meaning of the verb 'küssen', and the metaphorical sense of the verb 'berühren'. An example of the latter meaning is 'den Himmel küssen', in the meaning of 'ihn berühren', 'erreichen'.<sup>24</sup> The meaning of the phrase *sn* in the relief could therefore very well be 'to touch' or even 'to test', in the meaning of judging the quality.

#### *The Offering Bearers on the South Section, North of the Architrave*

On the main wall (Fig. 7, left side), the servants bringing jars, vases and furniture to the tomb owner have been depicted in four registers. The separate registers are discussed below, from top to bottom.

The topmost first register (Fig. 8) shows four men carrying various vessels, either in their hands or on their shoulders. The titles of the first two servants, on the left, have been placed

<sup>19</sup> The names, titles and texts in this paragraph have been derived from Kanawati and Evans, *Meir* II, 42-44.

<sup>20</sup> Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch* II, 87.

<sup>21</sup> Kanawati and Evans, *Meir* II, Pl. 39.

<sup>22</sup> Hannig, *Ägyptisches Wörterbuch* I, 1149.

<sup>23</sup> Erman and Grapow, *Wörterbuch* IV, 153.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, 154; Hannig, *Ägyptisches Wörterbuch* I, 1155-1156.

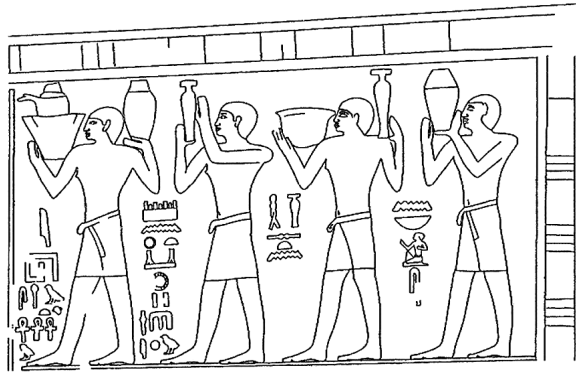


Fig. 8: South section, north of architrave, register 1  
(Kanawati and Evans, *Meir II*, Pl. 87).

in front of their feet: the first one is the ‘inspector of embalmers, Ankuh’; the second is the ‘director of the dining hall, Ikhu’. The two other men do not have any titles.

In addition to the titles of the servants, more hieroglyphs can be distinguished. These seem to be slightly larger than the hieroglyphs used for the titles. In front of each porter a text is written at waist height. From left to right the following texts can be discerned: in front of the first porter we see the word *ih*, before the second *mnht sp snw*, ahead of the third *hst.n* and in front of the last one *nb.s*. Together, these words form the following sentence:

*ih mnht sp snw hst.n nb.s*

O, the cloth, the cloth, which its owner has favoured.

Although the text mentions *mnht*, it is remarkable that no cloth or linen is actually depicted in this relief. Indeed, neither the jars nor the vases that the men bear, nor the titles of both men at the head of the group, suggest a connection with the *mnht* in the text.

In the following second register (Fig. 9), three men also bear vessels on their shoulders, most of a different shape than those seen above. The last man in the group carries a small wooden table above or on his head. Above their heads, the first servant is identified as

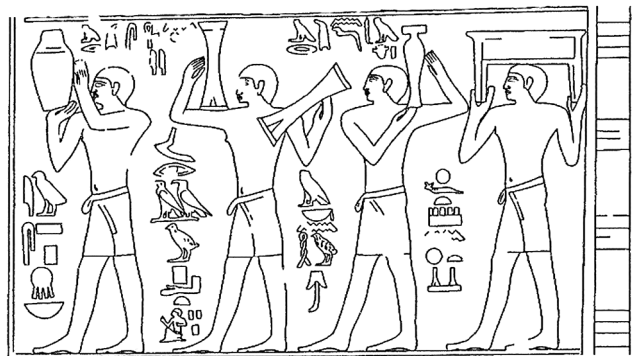


Fig. 9: South section, north of architrave, register 2  
(Kanawati and Evans, *Meir II*, Pl. 87).

Seankhy, ‘overseer of linen’, just like the third servant, who is named Nedjemib. In this title, a direct link to *mnht* can be noticed. No names or titles are provided for the second and fourth servants of the group.

Here too further hieroglyphic texts in a slightly larger size are depicted at waist height in front of all four porters. In front of the first porter we read *iw sšp nb*, before the second *mšš.w p't*, ahead of the third *m knhw*, and in front of the last one *hft mnht*, resulting in the following sentence:

*iw sšp nb mšš.w p't m knhw hft mnht*

Any brightness, which the nobles see in the darkness is due to the cloth.

The text in this register also concerns *mnht*, although the porters bring along vases, jars and furniture, but no cloth or linen.

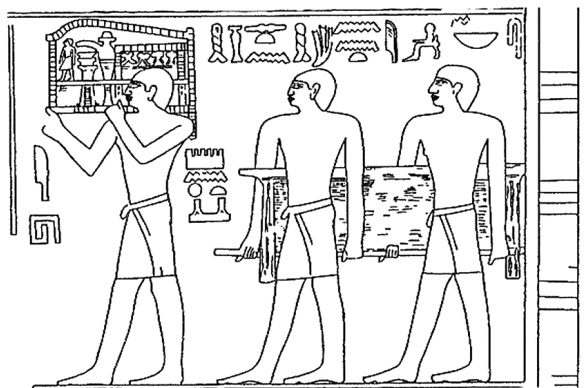


Fig. 10: South section, north of architrave, register 3 (Kanawati and Evans, *Meir II*, Pl. 87).

In the third register (Fig. 10), a man carries a painted wooden chest on his right shoulder.<sup>25</sup> On the side of the chest can be seen a statue, a djed pillar and a spouted *hs*-vase, possibly as an illustration of what is inside the chest. Two further porters together carry a large chest, which might contain cloth, although the cloth is not visible.

In this register, no names are provided, but we see hieroglyphic texts in front of the first and the second porter, and there is also a line of hieroglyphs above the heads of the two men carrying the large chest. In front of the first porter we see the word *ih*, before the second *mnht* and the longer text above the second and third porters reads *hst.n hnnit nb.s*. Together these words form the sentence:

*ih mnht hst.n hnnit nb.s*

O, the cloth, which Henenit, its owner, has favoured.

<sup>25</sup> Kanawati and Evans, *Meir II*, 43. In note 235, Kanawati refers to Duell, *Mereruka*, for a similar chest; Kanawati *et al.*, *Mereruka*, Pl. 94. This chest might be the same as the one depicted on the north wall of Room 1, decorated by the painter *Thy-m-sš-Ppi*.

This fragment resembles the text in the top register (Fig. 8), although two chests are depicted here, instead of jars or vases. The hieroglyphs all have the same size, although the word *ih* takes more room than the following *mnht*.



Fig. 11: South section, north of architrave, register 4 (Kanawati and Evans, *Meir II*, Pl. 87).

Lastly, in the bottom or fourth register (Fig. 11), the first two men together carry a chest by means of carrying sticks, whilst a third man carrying a large jar on his shoulder is shown behind them. Above their heads the following text can be read:

*nfr.w(y) sd3.t mnht r is hnnit*

How happy is it to convey the cloth to the tomb of Henenit.

Between the first two porters, beginning above and continuing below the chest, another hieroglyphic text says:

*ih mnht sp snw hst.n nb.s*

O, the cloth, the cloth, which its owner has favoured.

This is the same text as in the top register (Fig. 8), although in this register the hieroglyphs have been spread differently over the available volume of space.

Bringing together the various texts on this wall that relate to *mnht*, we can consolidate a text running over all four registers, reading as follows from top to bottom:

*ih mnht sp snw hst.n nb.s*  
*iw sšp nb m33.w p't m knhw hft mnht*  
*ih mnht hst.n hnnit nb.s*  
*nfr.w(y) sd3.t mnht r is hnnit*  
*ih mnht sp snw hst.n nb.s*

O, the cloth, the cloth, which its owner has favoured.  
 Any brightness, which the nobles see in the darkness is due to the cloth.  
 O, the cloth, which Henenit, its owner, has favoured.  
 How happy is it to convey the cloth to the tomb of Henenit.  
 O, the cloth, the cloth, which its owner has favoured.

This text clearly contains elements that are characteristic of a song. A repetition appears in the first, third and fifth lines of the text. Each of these starts with the exclamation *ih mnht*, as a result of which the object is immediately clear: the cloth. Moreover, all three lines are identical, except for the addition of the name of the tomb owner in the middle or third line. Conversely, the first and last lines of the ancient Egyptian text mention *sp snw*, which means ‘twice’, in the meaning of ‘once more, again’. In the context of a song *sp snw* seems to be functional, for it indicates that, while singing, the word *mnht* should be repeated. Finally, the way in which the texts have been spread over the four registers, located both above, in front of and between the depicted persons, could be a further indication for the presence of a song.

The positioning of the text of the song of the cloth porters differs from that of the porters of the palanquin (Fig. 4). The verses of the palanquin song appear in one register only, with a line of text in front of each porter. The verses of the cloth porters’ song, however, have been divided over four registers, and within each register different parts of one verse have been placed around a porter; only in one case has a complete verse been placed above the porters.

It is conspicuous that the verses of the cloth porters’ song have been represented in larger hieroglyphs than the names and titles mentioned in the same scenes. One explanation could be a last-minute addition of previously omitted or forgotten names and titles. However, it might also suggest that the texts on the carrying of cloth were deemed more important than those mentioning mere names and titles of servants.

#### *The Offering Bearers on the South Section, Angle, South Face*

The sidewall also features four registers, with the same type of depictions and texts as featured on the main wall (Fig. 7, right side).<sup>26</sup> The separate registers are discussed below, from top to bottom.

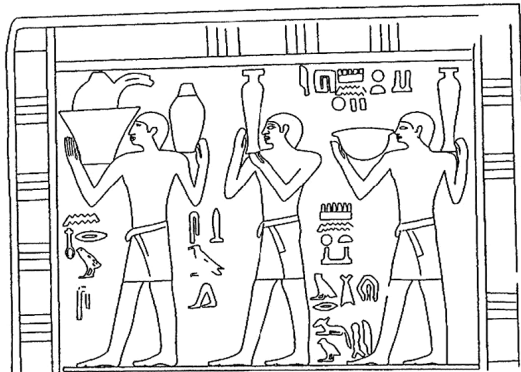


Fig. 12: South Section, Angle, South Face, register 1 (Kanawati and Evans, *Meir II*, Pl. 87).

In the topmost first register (Fig. 12), three men carry jars, vases and a basin. The familiar text *ih mnht sp snw* has been placed above the last porter. In addition, the following texts can be read in front of each porter: *nfr.w(y) s(y)* before the first porter, followed by *sd3(.t)* in

<sup>26</sup> The line drawing of this wall by Kanawati shows more text than the line drawing of Blackman (compare Figs. 6 and 7, right side, registers 1, 2 and 4).

front of the second porter, and *mnht* ahead of the third one. Before the feet of the rear servant are written his name and titles: the ‘overseer of linen’ and ‘k3-servant, Iuhi’. Here the complete text runs as follows:

*ih mnht sp snw*  
*nfr.w(y) s(y) sd3(.t) mnht*

O, the cloth, the cloth,  
 How happy is it to convey the cloth.

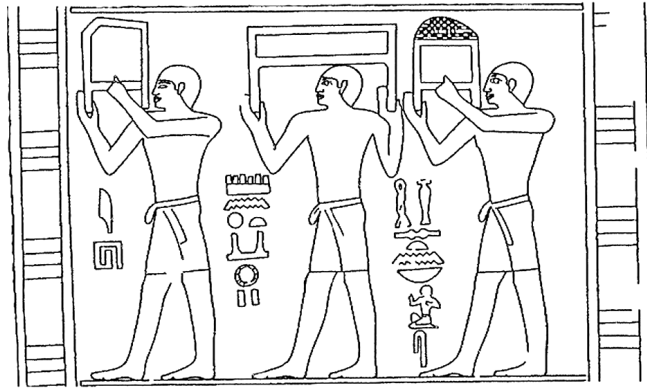


Fig. 13: South Section, Angle, South Face, register 2 (Kanawati and Evans, *Meir II*, Pl. 87).

In the following second register (Fig. 13), three men carry chests and possibly a little table. In front of each porter we see hieroglyphic texts, which from left to right form the line:

*ih mnht sp snw hst.n nb.s*

O, the cloth, the cloth, which its owner has favoured.

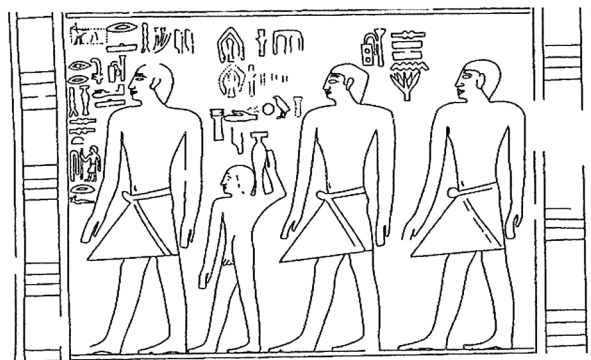


Fig. 14: South Section, Angle, South Face, register 3 (Kanawati and Evans, *Meir II*, Pl. 87).

In the third register, three men and a naked boy are depicted (Fig. 14). The titles and name of the first person, on the left, have been placed above his head and in front of the upper part of his body. He is the ‘juridical book keeper, scribe of the royal documents’. A short relative

clause follows after the titles: ‘who does that, which his noble favours, Heny’. The second person is a naked adolescent, named Djedi above his head. The third man is the ‘*k3*-servant, the director of the dining hall’.<sup>27</sup> His name is uncertain. The fourth man is the ‘scribe, Seshe-shen’. The clothes the men wear differ from the clothes of the servants in the seven other registers. Indeed, their kilts are similar to those of Pepiankh Henikem himself and of the men standing behind and directly in front of the tomb owner. The men in register 3 do not carry vases or chests, perhaps because they are higher in rank than the persons in the other reliefs. Only the naked boy carries a *hs*-vase on his shoulder. No texts on ‘cloth’ are present in this register: as the men are no porters, there is no need for a work song in this scene.

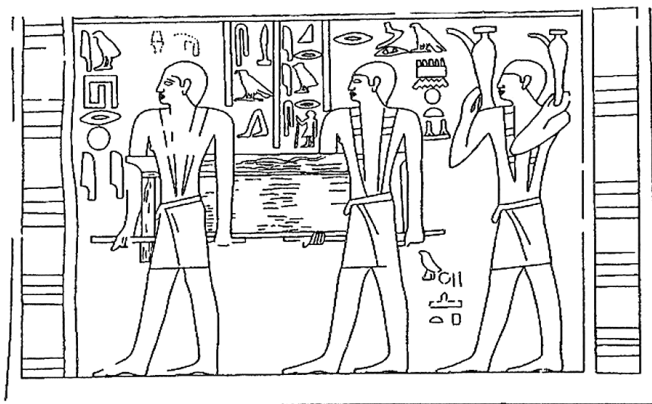


Fig. 15: South Section, Angle, South Face, register 4 (Kanawati and Evans, *Meir II*, Pl. 87).

Lastly, the bottom or fourth register (Fig. 15) shows two men carrying a chest by means of sticks, followed by a third man who holds two spouted *hs*-jars on his shoulders. The lines of text in this register are slightly different, in comparison with the preceding texts. From left to right the following can be read: *iw hri.i*<sup>28</sup> in front of the first porter, *sd3(.i) ikr iw sr* in two columns before the second porter, and *r m33 mnht* above the third porter, resulting in the following lines:

*iw hri.i sd3(.i) ikr*<sup>29</sup>  
*iw sr r m33 mnht*

I am happy, while conveying well.  
 The noble will view the cloth.

The servant walking in front has the title ‘director of the dining hall’ placed above his head, whilst the name ‘Wekhhotep’ is written before the legs of the servant, at least according to Kanawati. The notation of this name differs from the way it appears in Ranke, where it is written with the quail chick (Gardiner G43) and followed by *h* (Gardiner Aa1), or with the

<sup>27</sup> These titles seem to be written twice.

<sup>28</sup> Transliteration cf. Edel, *Altägyptische Grammatik I*, § 160.

<sup>29</sup> Translation of the first verse by Kanawati: ‘How pleasant is it to convey well’.

*wḥ*-fetish (Gardiner R 16):<sup>30</sup> in this occurrence, the two strokes following *ḥ* are missing. Through the combination of the little circle and the two subsequent strokes, the reader is tempted to read *sp snw* following after *m ḥtp*. This would be a perfect ending of the text on the offering of cloth on both walls. However, the bird in the name is no owl (Gardiner G 17), but a quail chick (Gardiner G43), as a result of which this transliteration is not possible. Moreover, both the title ‘director of the dining hall’ and the name Wekhhotep were added at a later stage, in black paint (according to Kanawati), and the title and name were written in smaller hieroglyphs, just as in the preceding registers.

The lines that relate to *mnḥt* in all four registers of this wall together form the following text:

*ih mnḥt sp snw*  
*nfr.w(y) s(y) sd3(.t) mnḥt*  
*ih mnḥt sp snw ḥst.n nb.s*  
*iw hrī.ī sd3(.i) ikr*  
*iw sr r m33 mnḥt*

O, the cloth, the cloth,  
 How happy is it to convey the cloth.  
 O, the cloth, the cloth, which its owner has favoured.  
 I am happy, while conveying well.  
 The noble will view the cloth.

Here too, repetition is used as a poetical element: the line *ih mnḥt sp snw* is used twice, in registers 1 and 2; the word *mnḥt* is used four times; and the two last lines both start with *iw*. Here we also see alliteration, as appears in *m33 mnḥt* in the last line.

In the work song the emphasis lies on the cloth, favoured by its owner, the quality of the cloth, and the pleasure of bringing the cloth to Henenit. When compared, the verses on the offering of cloth on both walls match in part. Some verses are repeated, but also some varying verses appear, such as in the second register on the main wall: ‘Any brightness which the nobles see in the darkness is due to the cloth’. In the fourth register of the sidewall a porter is speaking, saying: ‘I am happy while conveying well’. Here, the perspective changes, as a result of which the work song is no longer a general song, but a personal song. This is exactly what we see in the palanquin song (Fig. 4).

#### *Offerings of Cloth in Other Old Kingdom Elite Tombs*

One wonders if these depictions, and in particular similar texts, appear in other elite tombs of the Old Kingdom. Using *MastaBase* it is easy to check this for the 337 elite tombs in the Memphite Area included in the database. Scenes of potential interest for this research are categorised under the main theme Offerings (OF) and appear in 4,343 registers in 290 tombs.

In *MastaBase* a refined way of searching is possible by combining the main theme, in this case Offerings (OF), with a subtheme, in this case Garments/linen (G). This combination of filters results in a list of 24 tombs. From a cursory review, we can tally that six tombs have

<sup>30</sup> Ranke, *PN I*, 84. Ranke assigns the name of Wekhhotep to the Middle Kingdom, for which reason this name is probably not mentioned in Scheele-Schweitzer, *Personennamen*.



no text at all, whilst the remaining 18 tombs contain a total of 78 texts. However, only seven tombs have texts in which cloth or linen is transported by means of chests: LMP 027 (Neferka, Giza), LMP 139 (Akhethotep, Saqqara), LMP 182A (Mereruka, Saqqara), LMP 183 (Kagemni, Saqqara), LMP 184b (Nikawissi, Saqqara), LMP 190 (Ankhmahor, Saqqara), and LMP 227 (Nyhetepptah, Giza).<sup>31</sup> The texts in the other tombs concern names and titles, and indications for different kinds of cloth and their quality.

In one tomb, that of Icheti in Saqqara (LMP 200), the numbers of bales of linen and other cloth are mentioned in astonishing quantities on the south wall in offering scenes of garments and linen: ‘16,000 (bales of) *hntyw*-material’; ‘1,400 (bales of) fine linen’; ‘3,000 (bales of) white linen’; ‘1,400 (bales of) fine linen’; ‘20,100 (?) (bales of ?) material’; ‘1,000 (bales of ?) material’; ‘1,400 (bales of) *hntyw*-material’; ‘1,400 (bales of) fine linen’; ‘400 (bales of) fine linen’; ‘40,800 (bales of material)’; and ‘33,000 (bales of) linen’.<sup>32</sup> The preceding enumeration shows that cloth and linen took a prominent position among the tomb offerings in this particular tomb – none of the 336 other tombs listed in *Mastabase* feature a similarly sizable list.

The wall decoration of the seven tombs mentioned before consists of one to three registers in each tomb, with female and male offering bearers carrying cloth and linen, whether or not in chests. In the tomb of Mereruka (LMP 182A), much more room is reserved for the depiction of offering bearers than in the other tombs. Furthermore, they do not only carry chests with linen, but also libation vases and jars with oil. Some of the accompanying texts can be translated as follows:

‘Best Libyan oil, best cedar oil, best *tw3t*-oil, best *nhnm*-oil, best *sft*-oil, best *hknw*-oil, best *sti-hb*-oil.’

‘The best cedar oil for N. for his ka, daily. The best Lybian oil for N. for his ka, daily.’

‘Bringing the first-class royal linen and clothing, the first class ointments, which are given to him from the residence as a boon which the king gives to T(itle) N(ame), his good name is N.’<sup>33</sup>

The texts in the six other tombs on the whole correspond with the last preceding text. In the iconography of the seven tombs found, offering bearers carry chests, vases and jars, comparable to the depictions and items in the tomb Pepiankh Henikem. The captions, conversely, do not show any similarity with the texts on the transporting of cloth found in the tomb of Pepiankh Henikem. These verses do neither appear in any of the 337 tombs in the Memphite area listed in *MastaBase*, nor in fact in any of the other tombs in the necropolis of Meir. So far, no comparable texts can be found, one that resembles in the slightest the texts in the eight registers discussed in the previous pages.

This again shows the individual character of the tomb chapel in ancient Egyptian elite tombs.<sup>34</sup> Surely, the tomb owner must have been involved in the choice of the iconography and of the texts on the walls of his tomb. The texts accompanying the porters of cloth in the tomb of Pepiankh Henikem are unique, and together they form a unique work song.

<sup>31</sup> *MastaBase*, tombs LMP 027, 139, 182A, 183, 184b, 190, 227.

<sup>32</sup> *MastaBase*, tomb of Icheti, LMP 200, 200/S/07.

<sup>33</sup> *MastaBase*, tomb of Mereruka, LMP 182A/IX/045-51.

<sup>34</sup> Van Walsem, *JEOL* 44 (2012-2013), 117-139.

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