

Word and Image in Ancient Egypt¹

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General features of the Egyptian Art

The Egyptian word, which leads us to the world of “the ancient Egyptian art” is *Hmt*². Literally, the meaning is “skill, mastership”. It is clear that *Hmt* corresponds to the secondary meaning of art /from a modern point of view/ as mastership of performance, in particular, material objects to be worked up with instruments, which the ancient Egyptians had no equal among other ancient peoples³. Except a few works, which are really “art in the full sense of the word”⁴ the large number of monuments, which we easily, but incorrectly, call works of Egyptian art, are actually material expression of different performances of the Egyptian spirituality, connected with the world of magic and religion in Ancient Egypt.

Human activity in Egypt was deployed in the sea of religious proficiency. Even if the Egyptians had the feeling for “art”, it was not over conscious as far as that proficiency was concerned⁵.

The discovery and expansion of the forms in the material world by the Egyptian artists, is a private sequel of the creation process, as a result of which the Egyptian Universe appeared. The Egyptian artist takes part in the daily renewal of the Universe. The Egyptian artists are priests of God Ptah. As to the Memphis theological treatise, god Ptah created the world with the help of his mind and utterance, creating the images and their reality as well, or realities:

“... and all the works were created and all the skills /= arts/, the products of hands... and He gave birth to the gods, he created the towns, he established the regions, he placed gods in their sanctuaries, he made their offerings, he built their temples, he made their bodies /=statues!/ according to the wishes of their hearts.

And the gods entered their bodies /meaning instilled in them!/ from any wood, from any stone, from any clay, from all the things, that were growing inside him, in which they received their images. Then they gathered around him – all the gods and their doubles /Ka”⁶.

The ancient primitive hill, which arose from the Chaos and on which Memphis was built later, is also Ptah. All things, like: clay, stone, metals and minerals, that the

¹ The idea of this work was born in 1996 when the Seminar “Word and Image” of the Department of Mediterranean and Eastern Studies at NBU has started. This article is an abridged version of lectures held on that seminar. Meanwhile several works concerning this problem has been published - А.О.Большаков, А.Г. Сушевский. Образ и письменность в восприятии древнего египтянина. ВДИ. Кн.1, 2003, 45-59; A.Bolshakov. Representation and Text: Two Languages of Ancient Egyptian Totenglauben. *Altorientalische Forschungen*. (AoF) 30 . (2003), 127-139, and in Russian - А.О.Большаков. Изображение и текст: два языка древнеегипетской культуры. ВДИ. 2003, кн.4. 3-20.

² Wb.III, 84.

³ Aldred, 1994:11.

⁴ Matie, 1961: 3-8.

⁵ Aldred, 1994: 11.

⁶ Sethe, 1928: 50 – translation from Egyptian S. Ignatov. comp. Matie, 1956: 84.

Egyptian needed to create other things as to Ptah's will, were there – in that first earthy elevation. The Egyptian artist in the role of god Ptah's priest, is the means, with the help of which the Creator realizes himself and acts in the created world. This concept is unambiguously implied in the meaning and contents of the word, which provisionally is interpreted as a priest – Hmw. "Hemu" is the means, by which the divine power realizes itself⁷. It turns out, that the Egyptian artist's basic function is his participation in the daily re-creation of the world. The god's conception is rendered from top to bottom in a strictly hierarchical order. As a rule, the supreme priest of Ptah is the head of the Egyptian artists. "The Great Master" is among his most prominent numerous titles. He is responsible for the performance of all the works in the world of forms.

The Egyptian word for a scribe and an artist is sS. "Sesh" is a nest of words, whose root is a bearer of the notion "to write", "to depict":

1. a device for writing
2. write /a text/
3. paint /a picture with a brush/
4. a text, a book, a painting
5. script
6. a writer
7. an artist
8. papyrus in the meaning of something (material) for writing⁸

The identity of the meanings from item (i) 2 and i.3, as well as i.6 and i.7 should be underlined.

The scribe transforms into an artist, when he learns to depict (= to paint) the whole list of ideograms /hieroglyphic writing/, as the composition of a painting is the combination and binding of different ideographic signs, often expressed in a fixed, rhythmic pattern⁹ The hieroglyphic writing in Egypt is unique. It was formed about the middle of the fourth millennium B.C.¹⁰. The previous stage, however, is inaccessible for scientific research.

It is presumed that the shape of the hieroglyphs and their meaning had influenced the objects of art. Cyril Aldred gives as an example the vessel for libation, which was made in the form of "Ankh" sign, symbolizing the idea for outpouring of a living vitality¹¹.

The Egyptians called their writing, as well as the revelations of their culture, mḏw-nTr - "divine word", "god's speech". That word namely is the combining part between the hieroglyphs and art. The common thing between writing and art lies in the divine potentiality of both, the possibility of the hieroglyphs and images to be animated. The ideographic signs are the prototypes of the images from the larger scale, more detailed and enriched. The only difference between the ideograms and the images is the size and the ensuing possibility for individualization¹². Recently, Dr. Henry Fischer's opinion (from the Metropolitan Museum of Arts in New York), according to whom the prevailing right direction of the Egyptian writing had influenced the scenes, pictured over the earliest ancient monuments. This fact is on

⁷ Berlev, 1972.

⁸ Wb III: 475-481.

⁹ Aldred, 1994: 17.

¹⁰ Ignatov, 1998: 14.

¹¹ Aldred, 1994: 16.

¹² Aldred, 1994: 16 – 17.

the point of turning into a characteristic feature for the centuries old culture of the valley of Nile¹³. If we accept H. Fischer's opinion, this means that the whole Egypt with the hundreds of images, sculptures, architectural complexes, is a deployed text in the literal meaning of the word, which should be read one day.

H. Fischer reminds of the overwhelming effect of the right orientation of the writing over sculptures. In statues the left leg or hand are forward, the children are carried in the left hand, the load is on the left side as well. Lions and sphinxes are with tails on the right, which is a manifestation of the right orientation of the hieroglyphic image of the lion. The statues of working in pairs are exceptions. They are in balance¹⁴.

It turns out that the Egyptian consciousness, the way like god Ptah creates the world by a single word, the same way in material world, in the world of forms "the word of god", i.e. writing, images create things.

The distinctive feature of the Egyptian art is its anthropocentrism. As both Prof. Matie and Dr. Cyril Aldred underline, the main object of this art is man and his various activities¹⁵. On the background of the imposing character of the Egyptian civilization, as though contrary to our expectations, the huge figures are few in number. Even statues of gods and kings /in Egypt the king is god/ are smaller than human's height. As a whole, the Egyptian art puts an accent on the ideal aspects of the world.

The Egyptians had no approach to the expression of personal impressions. They did not represent a certain moment, but what they considered for eternity! The artist did not depict what could be seen, which was passing and short-lived, but he depicted what was eternally existing, i.e. the world was pictured the way it objectively existed. The momentary, short impression was considered as deceptive. This conception of the world can explain the peculiarities of the Egyptian canon. M. Matie in her "Art of Ancient Egypt" renders some characteristic features of this canon and having in mind the studied theme, we shall point out the basic one, namely:

"...some objects are depicted, which actually are invisible for the artist, but their presence at a certain place in the depicted scene is well-known /fish, hippopotami and crocodiles in the water/"¹⁶

It is probably referred to "legalization" of a peculiar seeing, belonging to Ptah's subservients, whom we shall call here artists. Similar seeing, being a result from the supersensitive experience is very much honoured and considered by the Eastern philosophy. Here is a contemporary description: India – Yogananda:

"The roots of the plants and trees could be seen through the soil's matt transparency; I could distinguish the internal movement of their juice.

The whole vicinity was lying in front of me. My ordinary front view was replaced by a vast spherical look, simultaneously perceiving everything. With my scruff of the neck I was watching people, walking away in a street..., I also spotted a white cow, which was calmly getting near. Once the cow reached the place in front of the open doors of the ashram, I was watching it with my both physical eyes. When it passed behind the brick wall, I could still see (sense) her."

¹³ Fischer, 1978.

¹⁴ Fischer, 1978.

¹⁵ Matie, 1961; Aldred, 1994.

¹⁶ Matie, 1961: 6.

This character feature of the Egyptian canon explains the peculiarities of the anthropomorphous images. Looking not for the instant picture exactly, but for the objective portrayal of the world, has predetermined the lack of attempts for perspective solutions. For the Egyptian conception of the world, the perception in the images was no more than an abnormal distortion of the existing reality, however, in all cases this reality is independent of space and time.

When the Egyptian scribe wrote the words, he arranged the hieroglyphs in an imaginary square and if the signs were more, - in a rectangle. The order of signs could be rearranged from a phonetic point of view. The important thing about that is the saturation of this rectangular space. Absolutely the same rules apply to the compositional construction of the wall images. The world looks like a box in the Egyptian consciousness, which box is crossed by two co-ordinates in the right angles:

1. The flow of the Nile from South to North
2. The Sun's floating from East to West over the sky, which is supported by a third axis. In a completely deployed plan this notion could be observed in an Egyptian temple, which is "precisely cubic and is a model of the world at its creation"¹⁷. This rectangular feeling of the space can be spotted even in the elements' position in a circular plan¹⁸.

Egyptian art is two-dimensional in its origin. Figures are actually an integration of the front and side point of view. These figures are acknowledged as symbols, that substitute for the prototype. At least, such is the feeling of the contemporary researcher. Making use of symbolic shapes is one of the basic characteristic features of the Egyptian art.

Egyptian Symbolism

Richard Wilkinson in his widely discussed book "The Symbol and Magic in the Egyptian Art" /London, 1994/, analyses the types of symbolism in the Egyptian art. The analysis is based mainly on the stele of Sa-Inheret from the Museum in Boston. This is a typical stele of 12th dynasty and most of the stelae from the Classical age in Egypt are of the same model. In his monograph the author analyses nine aspects of symbolism in Egyptian art. All of them are reflected in Sa-Inheret stele (fig.1). It descends from Upper Egypt in Sa-Inheret's tomb in Naga ed-Der. The scene is quite common: servants or relatives bring sacrifices to the dead man and his wife – all the necessary for their welfare in the Beyond. The author, however, underlines that a whole chain of symbolic details is available, which enriches and saturates the composition. Messages of extreme importance can be read, transmitted by means of a pictorial language for the status of the key figures and for their security in the Beyond. Here are some of the most important details that Wilkinson analyses:

¹⁷ Reymond, 1969.

¹⁸ Aldred, 1994: 13.

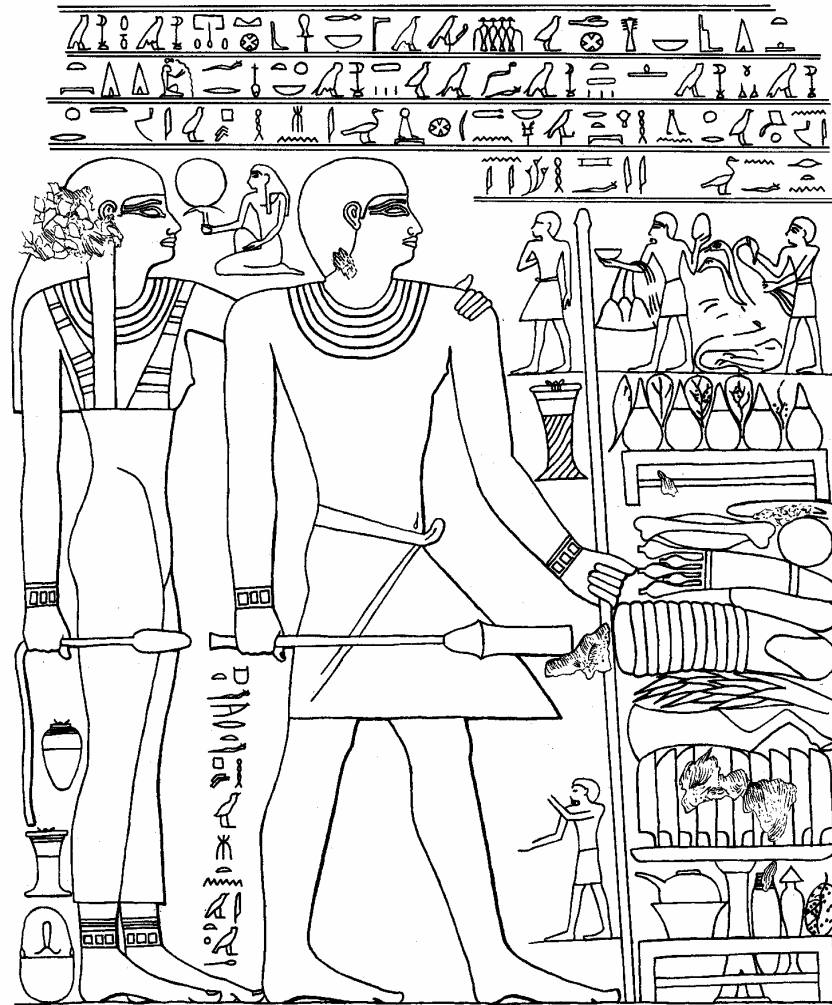


Fig.1. Stela of Sa-Inheret (Mus. of Fine Arts, Boston, from Wilkinson 1994, p. 9)

The form: The lotus bud, which Hepu, the wife of Sa-Inheret is carrying, is somewhat abnormally and oddly exposed in front of the woman's hand, but it probably expresses her high position, because, if we literally quote the author, "it reflects the scepter, carried by her husband"¹⁹

The size: On the one hand, the similar sizes of the owner of the tomb and his wife should be compared and on the other hand – the small figures of these bringing the sacrifices. The word goes for a symbolic meaning of the owner of the tomb and his wife.

Establishment/disposition: Except in the disposition of the stele inside the tomb in a position to pull out and in a magic way to supply the owner of tomb with gifts and offerings, the very way of disposing of loaves of bread over the offering table symbolically reflects after-death localization²⁰

Material: Wilkinson presumes that a number of materials, besides the practical side of the matter, are bearers of a symbolic meaning as well. He pays attention to the

¹⁹ Wilkinson, 1994: 10.

²⁰ see Hieroglyph; Wilkinson 1994: 10.

hand metal mirror in the composition, which according to him, is a symbol of the Sun and therefore the Renaissance as well, because of the smooth reflecting surface²¹.

Colour: The man in Egyptian art is always depicted in dark reddish hues, while the woman is in more pale yellowish-white colours – a form of origin differentiation, reflecting the traditional outer and inner role of the man and woman in the Egyptian society²².

Numbers: The standard “1000+the name of the sacrifice”, in a sense of an endless multitude and abundance in the Outer world²³.

Hieroglyph: Sa-inheret is shown in a position, which is an enlarged copy of the hieroglyph, meaning the rank, the status of the owner of the tomb - Gardiner List, A 22.

The loaves of bread over the sacrificial table look like reed leaves. This is the hieroglyph sign for “a field” and it symbolizes the idea for “a reed field” or “a field of victims”, which is one of the names of the after-death place, where the dead is dwelling.

Actions: The sacrifice itself is a symbolic act. However, the small figure of the serving-maid facing Hepu, who is holding a mirror, is also a symbolic act. “Ankh” is the Egyptian word for “a mirror”. Most likely, this is a symbolic granting of life, the Egyptian word for which is also *anx*. This scene is a parallel of similar images, where gods grant the king with the sign *anx* “ankh”. The bunch of flowers, carried in front of the dead /*anx* as well/, is probably having the same functions²⁴.

Gestures: The small figure in front of Sa-Inheret expresses honour and respect with the position of his hands. The pose is typical for a servant in front of his master. Sa-Inheret’s stele is a small, but impressive example for the symbolism of the Egyptian images. The analysis shows that each Egyptian composition can be read in the literal sense of the word. I believe that the role of the homonymy /consonance/ and the conversion of an image into a secondary ideogram is underlined, acquiring meaning, often too far from prototype /the concrete image/. It is clear, that the game of words, typical for the Egyptian literature, creating multi-layer connotation of the implied meaning in the world of the Egyptian art, exists as “a game of images”, which is a game of words simultaneously.

Appearance and progress of tomb images and reliefs

In order to understand properly, a number of phenomena in ancient Egypt’s art, it is very important to have in mind, that the mural images, the relief and sculpture are a manifestation of the complex notions for the invisible world and are in connection with the contacts between the physical world and the Beyond.

The possibility of clearly tracing the establishment of the canon, whose initial stages can be spotted in the monuments of the kings of “Zero” dynasty and most of all in its last representative Nar-Mer, is a typical feature in the development of the relief during the Early Dynastic Period²⁵. The purpose of the greater part of the reliefs from

²¹ Wilkinson 1994: 10.

²² Wilkinson 1994: 10.

²³ Wilkinson 1994: 10.

²⁴ Wilkinson 1994: 10.

²⁵ Matie, 1961: 40.

this age is the engraving of important state events /marches, expeditions or such in connection with the requirements of the ritual/. Often the monument served both aims.

Stelae render important data for the development of the relief's history since the time of the Early Dynastic Period. They were discovered in different necropolises of the Egyptian North – Sakkara, Helwan, Abu Roash. The stelae are from tombs of private persons. These are comparatively not large limestones with relief figures of the dead, who is sitting in front of a table. A flat basket with bread is on the table. The name of the dead and his position are written around the figure and the sacrificial gifts are depicted as well.

The appearance of these stelae is connected with the belief, that the position of the dead in front of the table and the list of the sacrifices shall assure him, in a magic way, a constant availability of food and of the enumerated gifts²⁶. Depending on their purpose, these stelae were put either close to the dead body and they built them in the ceiling of the passage around the funeral chamber, so that the representation of the stele was turned to the face of the dead, or they were stuck to the sacrificial niches in the outer wall of the mastaba²⁷.

The similar construction of the stelae is a typical feature. The dead man is sitting on a chair with legs in the shape of bull's legs or on a throne with not high back, similar to royal or deity ones. The last variation is connected with the high position of a person. The right hand of the dead is usually stretched towards the offering table. The left hand is pressed against the chess and sometimes it holds an attribute.

The figures and articles from the earliest types of stelae, having in mind the manner of their representing, are quite similar to the analogous compositions of cylindrical seals, from which they originate²⁸. During the time of I and II dynasties the composition of the scene of the dead man, sitting in front of the sacrificial table, is finally affirmed and acquires this canon appearance, which was maintained during the ages.

It should be mentioned that this scene is missing in the stelae from that time, which were discovered in Abydos. The stelae contain only inscriptions with the name and rank of the buried man. Initially these stelae were made as per sample of the monument stelae that were around the royal cenotaphs. They were also with rounded tops and were put vertically near the tomb. The private persons' stelae, however, were small and unsteady, because of which they started to build them in the tomb's walls. The rounded top became inconvenient, so the stelae's shape became rectangular.

The technique of the relief in most of the private stelae in Abydos is quite primitive and is weaker not only compared to the royal stelae, but it also deviates from a number of analogous monuments from Sakkara and Hellwan. Only the largest one from the private stelae is interesting to a certain extent. It belonged to Sabef – a prominent noble and a priest of Anubis (fig 2). Sabef was a contemporary of the last pharaoh of the First dynasty Ka. It is for the first time in this stele in Abydos that the figure of a man on a stele is the image of the dead himself, but not of a hieroglyph-determinative, finalizing the inscription of the name or rank of the dead. In spite of that, however, Sabef's figure is identical with the hieroglyph, meaning "a noble": a figure of a man, walking to the right with a stick /which he is slightly leaning on/ in

²⁶ Matie, 1961: 42.

²⁷ Matie, 1961: 42.

²⁸ Matie, 1961: 42.

one hand and a scepter in the other /see what is mentioned about Sa-Inheret/. Thus we can understand that the establishment of the canon is parallel both in art and in script. The question arises whether there is a difference between the two of them during the Early Dynastic Period.

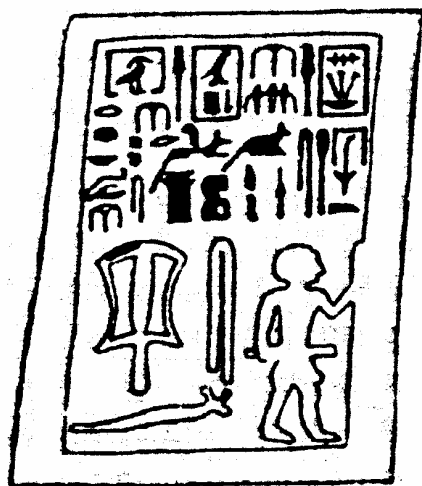


Fig.2. Stela of Sabef. (From Petrie, *Royal Tombs*, I, XXX).

The different shapes of the stelae from Abydos and the stelae from Memphis necropolis is probably explained with the different function and purpose of the tombs in Sakkara and Hellwan and the cenotaphs in Abydos. First there were designations of the name of the buried man everywhere over the tombs or round them. Gradually, with spreading of the mortuary cult and the images in the tombs, they started to depict the dead in front of the offering table in the tombs of the northern necropolis, while in Abidos, where a certain archaization in the cenotaphs formation is typical, as to the old habit, over the private persons' stelae they restricted themselves with the inscription of the dead man's name and rank only. Why is the scene with the owner of the tomb, sitting in front of the sacrificial table missing? You will be aware of the answer at the end of this paper.

The temples from the Early Dynastic Period are decorated with reliefs with cult images. These reliefs considerably surpass not only the earlier works of art, but also the stelae of II dynasty. Fragments of Heb-Sed fest and scenes with rituals from the establishment of sanctuaries, are the basic parts of them.

The end of "dynasty – 0" and Early Dynastic Period is the time when the canon was established. Right there, all of a sudden, we come across some images, which remain out of the canonic frames.

Yet the images of the two captives, holding the heads of the fantastic beasts in Nar-Mer's palette, are out of the canon. Further on, until the very end of the Early Dynastic Period, the statue of the captives /the figure of Hasehem from Nehen/ are depicted absolutely free, in different positions (fig.3). The "stiffness" is missing, the images are not repeated. M. Matie is hardly right, when she exclaims, that these examples are the best visual proof for the level of the degree the canons are underlying as suppressing burden in the works of the Egyptian art masters during the Early Dynastic Period²⁹. The reason for the canon dropping out is different. Those who are out of the canon are the people, deprived of immortality, of life after death.

²⁹ Matie, 1961: 44.

By the way, the captives, while still living, were considered for dead, which comes from the meaning of word *sqr-anx*, (*sekr-anekh*) “live-murdered /=slaughtered/”³⁰. As O. Berlev mentions, this designation has a magic effect as well, because it transforms the enemies of Egypt, when still living, into dead³¹. The important thing for us is the affirming connection between canon and Eternity, i.e. the invisible world and the possibility to make a bond between our physical reality and the Beyond.

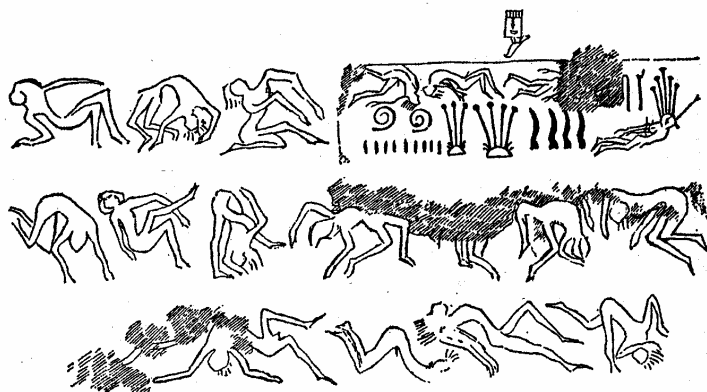


Fig. 3. Representations of captives at the base of Hasehem statue
(from W.Emery. *Archaic Egypt*, fig.62).

During the age of the Old Kingdom, which covers the greater part of III mill. B.C., the subject matter of the images is established, the scheme of scenes disposition, the separate scenes composition, the episodes, groups and figures, are set up. Since the time of III – IV dynasties, images on the walls of the mortuary temple complexes are missing. The reliefs in the mortuary and sun temples of V and VI dynasties, however, are quite important for the appraisal of the “art” progress during that age. Only in the pyramid complex of Sahure the colour reliefs occupy an area of 10 000 square metres.

The subject matter of these reliefs is defined by their destination. They glorify the king as God’s son and God by flesh, reproduce everything that affords him prosperity in the Invisible world. This explains the depiction of a goddess, who is breastfeeding the king, the king among gods, scenes from a battle, bringing up of captives and treasures, a triumphant hunting and finally offering of sacrifices for the ruler’s after life and different mortuary rituals.

The king plays the principal part in each composition. As the king is not a human, he is god, the royal figure, as well as the figures of gods, were depicted higher than man-high.

If we compare the reliefs from the tombs of private persons from the Old Kingdom with these from the preceding age, the Old Kingdom strikes with the size of its expansion.

The images of the owner of the tomb, possibly, are portrait, like his mortuary statues. The content of the reliefs and images from the walls is a reveal of the Old Kingdom’s mortuary cult.

³⁰ Wb. IV: 307.

³¹ Berlev, 1989: 86-107.

In order to understand the life of the images, it is necessary to see their disposition in the tomb. Each Old Egyptian tomb /i.e. from the Old Kingdom, III millennium B.C./ is divided in two basic parts: a funeral chamber and overground premises, which in the most common case, are presented by a small chapel. The overground part is available for visitors. It is here that the offerings are presented³².

The wall pictures /frescoes/ are the most important element in the formation of the overground premises. They are successors of the first images of the owner of the tomb from the early Egyptian stelae, which were mentioned above.

As a rule, quite large figures of the dead husband and his wife, who sometimes are accompanied by small figures of children, are depicted over the entrances of the tombs of III-IV dynasties. By them, the names and titles of the depicted figures are mentioned, together with short prayers for obtaining of gifts from god. The scenes with the offering of sacrifices for the dead by relatives or priests are standing on the walls of the corridors and in the room for prayers: long processions of men and women, bringing gifts, which represent the land possession, earnings from which ensure the mortuary cult of a certain tomb: scenes of preparing the offerings, of gifts and the necessary funeral inventory stock: depiction of the gifts and objects of the mortuary cult. The central part of the middle niche is occupied by the so-called “false door” with the image of the dead, sitting in front of the sacrificial table. Here is the place where the table with squares, where the sacrifices are enumerated. This is the general case.

What are the actual data in the different types of old Egyptian tombs? The most important part in the designing of the chapel is the “false door”, situated on the Western wall. The “false door” is a three-dimensional representation of a door. The owner is depicted with his face looking outward on both sides of the niche. He is again depicted on the door frame facing the niche. It is possible his statue, stepping outside, to be found in the niche. In such a way, the plastic designing of the “false door” obviously shows, that it is intended for the dead owner of the tomb to “go out” to the chapel to receive the sacrifices and then go back again.

All the rest images in the chapel are connected with the “false door”. It is typical, that ritual scenes are on the Western wall and the farm scenes – on the Eastern. Later on, during the time of IV dynasty, all scenes are fixed on the Western wall, even on the “false door” itself.

Such is the situation in Giza. In Sakkara the chapels are narrower. The Western wall is often completely occupied by the false door, that is why the Northern and the Southern ones receive the images, typical for the Western wall. The Eastern – farm scenes or scenes of provision.

The design of the Western wall is first of all connected with the food stored for the dead. With VI dynasty in Giza the meaning of the Western wall becomes more important due to the fact, that some farming and living scenes were moved over it. They were probably afraid of the fact that the master of the tomb would not be able to see the distant scenes and because of that will deprive himself of the depicted, which led them closer to the false door.

In multi-chamber tombs the analysis is a little bit more complex. The reason lies in the fact that two similar multi-chamber tombs do not exist.

³² Korostovtsev, 1976: 196-210.

Images of long rows of people with sacrifices can be seen. They form a procession, originating from the very entrance in the mastaba and winding towards the false door. The procession repeats the path of the alive visitors of the tomb, carrying the sacrifices. That means just the opposite – the alive visitors are walking on the same path as the pictured procession, because the tomb with its images precedes the owner's death and the coming of the relatives and the priests with the sacrificial gifts. This is essential, because it visually shows that what was created as a thought and an image, is prior to the objects in the material world. A part of the depicted procession might turn to the store, to "fill up" the reserves there. Besides the goods, scenes of their preparation can be depicted as well in the store. In this way, the store in the tomb imitates a part of the master's farm – his home, the place where they produce and store the goods. This is outlined by the inscriptions in two mastabas. The depicted procession can "take out" goods from the store and carry them to the false door. So, the events from the physical world are doubled by images – the store is a depository of the real food, brought by the priests and at the same time, it is the depicted Snaw-house.

The images of the provision of the offerings are "watched" by the depicted owner of the tomb. They can be disposed in all premises and are oriented to the depicted processions.

The images in the funeral chamber appear quite stealthily, only just on the boundary of V – VI dynasties, although their pictorial design starts with the stelae, depicted on the ceiling, which were already mentioned. These stelae come from II dynasty in Izbet el-Walda below Hellwan. The first images in the funeral chamber are of inanimate objects. People and animals are not depicted even in the hieroglyphs. The reason lies in the fear that they can spoil the mummy. The images of the living creatures in the science of hieroglyphs, were killed. This is easily done – as the living creature is depicted slaughtered: just a head without a body, or there is a knife, depicted in the neck, which has slaughtered the image.

At the end of V dynasty images of living creatures appear in the funeral chamber and this could be found just in a few tombs. There is only one tomb, where all plots from the chapel have passed to the funeral chamber. This is the tomb of Kay-em-anekh. The peculiar thing is that the scenes disposition is just the opposite of the chapel. The mummy in the sarcophagus is lying facing the East, the rising sun and the main images are before his eyes. Thus the most important ritual scenes, which are on the Western wall in the chapel, here they are to the East before the mummy's eyes and these of life – to the West.

There is a tendency appearing with VI dynasty – serdab /the premises with the statue/ to near the funeral chamber.

After all mentioned up to here, there arises the question of where the dead man lives according to the Egyptians and how he "goes out" through the false door into the chapel, as well as in what way the dead images can ensure their after-death life? A large number of texts show that the West is the place of living after physical body's death. The Egyptian word "West" is "imnet". The West has no real geographic localization, that is not any kind of "a country of the dead", which exists behind the false door³³

³³ Ignatov, 1998: 73 and ff.

The practice of the Egyptians testifies that they obviously did not consider the images for alive, but they knew that there was some life behind them³⁴. The answer to these questions could be found in the inscriptions of Yarti and Itu-ha-ha, analyzed by O.D.Berlev. According to them the Egyptians considered the assessment of the labour of the artist as a purchase of the depicted people – the images themselves are not bought, but the living one, which is connected with them and which is “going out” out of them. Something quite essential is, that the image is called “a door”. It is said about the artists, that they create the “after-death” world. The used term “herit-necher” coincides in meaning with “imnet”. In this way the “after death world” is connected with the images, but is not reduced to them, it consists of this reality, which is going out of them³⁵. Yet, how can we understand what does this reality mean, that is going out of them. Before we pass to the short survey of the Egyptian sculpture, whose function is absolutely different from this of the reliefs and the wall paintings, something more should be mentioned about the owner of the tomb. His images are usually followed by “formulae of looking/watching/sensing”. It is mentioned in them that he is watching the scenes in front of him. Looking/watching/sensing proved to be the most important function of the image of the owner of the tomb.

In his preface to the full edition of the collection of V.S. Golenishchev, O.D.Berlev points out the following common features between the dead body and the image:

1. The body and the image cannot see.
2. The body and the image can “hear” and due to “hearing” communicate with our world. That is why reading and singing of lists of food, drinks, clothes and other accessories is made in a loud voice by special priests. So that the dead can serve to himself, without the priests’ help, the “funeral formula” was introduced, or the “formula of seeing”. Now, the dead could already hear the written text with no need for it to be read in a loud voice and to obtain the depicted without mentioning it. I.e. the formula creates the possibility for seeing, turning the dead body or the image into “seeing”. It is possible to be translated “enlightened”.
3. The dead body and the image possess a feeling for smell, which explains the great importance of the burning of incense and censuring in the cult.

The general features of the dead body and the image are the initial basis of the concepts, which are embodied in such ceremonies like the opening of the eyes, ears, mouth and the nostrils, whose final result is the “making alive” of the dead body and image.

O.D.Berlev underlines, that the two worlds – this of the dead body and the one of the image – are inclined to merge together. As to the data from “The Book of the Dead” and other similar texts, the world of the image has penetrated into the world of the corpse through the New Kingdom, while the world of the corpse has penetrated into the world of the images much earlier – about the end of the Old Kingdom³⁶.

³⁴ Ignatov, 1998: 73 and ff.

³⁵ Ignatov, 1998: 73 and ff.

³⁶ Berlev, 1982: 14-15.

Ancient Egyptian sculpture

The Egyptian sculptures are disposed in tombs, in temples /the place for pray/, in front of the temple, on both sides of the road to the temple. The presence of the sculpture in the valley of Nile is omnipresent

Prof. Matie emphasizes, that “Egypt hardly knew architecture without sculpture”³⁷. Sculptural images of gods and kings were disposed in sanctuaries, in the covered galleries of the temples’ yards, round the columns of the hypostyles. In all cases statues have cult and religious function. Yet, if statues in the room for prayers are direct object of rituals, these outside, keeping their religious allocation simultaneously with this, are a prominent decorating element in the architectural solution of a certain object³⁸.

Statues of eminent mortals are put in the temples’ yards as well. The temples’ yards are actually a kind of portray galleries of their age. The sculptures of the most prominent people together with the Curriculum Vitae of the depicted man, written over the statue itself are there. One can notice the difference between frescoes and reliefs on the one hand and the statue on the other hand. The statue contains biography, while the other types of images are accompanied by a name and a title. This difference is essential in the ancient Egyptian’s idea for the two types of images. He used to call his statue “his heritage on the earth, a recollection of himself in the necropolis ...”³⁹

Types of statues

1. Mortuary Statues

Statue in Egypt arose as a substitute of the mummified, but not everlasting body in the tomb. The statue should be a substitute for the body in case of its destruction. There should be a body in the tomb at all events, because after death life depends to a large extent on the possibility of the soul to communicate with the corresponding body. Soul is alive in any case, but in order to enter the physical world, our world, it should be instilled into a body, because our world is nothing else but a world of forms, of appearances⁴⁰. These are the reasons why during the first half of III millennium B.C. statues appear in the tombs. By the way, this is a notion typical almost for all over Africa.

A number of peoples keep the dead skulls, as the head is considered for a receptacle of the soul. Small figures of the dead are made⁴¹. Ancient Egyptians also consider the head for a special part of the body, that is why a common practice appears to ensure the wholeness of statues in the tombs, they keep enough number of spare heads, which they put over the body, just in case the statue is damaged /most often after some thieves’ invasion into the tomb⁴².

³⁷ Matie, 1969: 10.

³⁸ Matie, 1969: 10.

³⁹ Urk. IV, 1032.

⁴⁰ Ignatov, 1998: 67 & ff.

⁴¹ Matie, 1969: 12-13.

⁴² Bolshakov, 1995: 21-23.

The Ancient Egyptian mortuary statue is not a simple image of the dead, but it was also considered for his embodiment⁴³. The creative solution of working out of the mortuary statues depends on their cult function. Placing of the statue in the niche of the grave room for prayers has determined the front position of the sculpture. It was put by the wall and it was not allowed to be moved anywhere from that place. That was the reason why sometimes statues were carved in the wall itself. In the same way temple statues stood closely to the wall⁴⁴. The image of the dead person, dwelling in the Beyond is rendered with solemn stillness even in the simplest possible posture and full relaxation of the body.

There are two postures from the earliest time:

1. The nobleman is sitting with hands on his knees
2. He is sitting with his left leg forward /let us remember the influence of the right orientation in script over works of "art"/, as though he is going out from the niche of the prayers room, rushing to the gifts, offered to him by his relatives coming in.

The posture of a recorder appeared with IV dynasty. Initially the king's sons were depicted this way. The women are sitting or standing. Family statues – groups, appear as well. Male statues are coloured in brick red, female ones – in yellow, the hair – in black and clothes - in white.

Persons' portraits can be proved in most cases.

In addition to the dead man's statue, there are also small statues of people in the tomb, doing different things and working in the dead man's farm – in a physical and after death aspect⁴⁵.

2. Temple Statues

Besides placing of statues into architectural complexes, there were sculptures of gods in each temple, being natural objects of worship and performance of some ceremonies. Those sculptures were considered for embodiments of deities. One of the best preserved text proofs is an extract from an inscription over the image of Osiris on a wall in Dendera's temple:

"Osiris appears as a ghost, to merge with his image in the temple. He comes flying from the sky...and enters in his secret similar likeness, he instills in his image"⁴⁶.

It is clear that God is spirit for the Egyptians and they are not worshipping idols. Both statues of gods and kings are objects of cult.

Alongside with the cult statues in the temples, there were also statues of deities, presented by kings and priests, aiming at praying for certain mercy. That was the aim of the mortals, donating statues to the temples. There were statues in the temples, "to give oracles". Sometimes they had a movable head and hand.

The mortal Egyptians, with prominent positions in the state, put their statues in the temples, entreating for prosperity, health, success, long life, happy old age, inheriting of their positions by their heirs and a special prayer for after death well-being.

⁴³ Matie, 1969: 14.

⁴⁴ Matie, 1969: 16; 136.

⁴⁵ Ignatov, 1998: 40-42.

⁴⁶ Matie, 1969:20.

The statues, placed in the temples served to this purpose, alongside with the mortuary sculptures in the tombs, as the kings ordered the statues of the nobles to be put in the temples, in such a way they ensured the offerings with the relevant documents⁴⁷. As the common belief in Egypt was that deities needed food and drinks, people were bringing every day sacrifices and put them in front of the statues in the temples – meat, birds, loaves of bread, cakes, fruit and vegetables, vessels with wine and milk. The daily and holiday sacrifices were left in the altar in front of the god’s statue for a certain period of time, then they were brought in front of the altars of the noblemen’s statues, standing in the temples, by the king’s will. Now, it suddenly appears, that the prayer appeals for posthumous well-being, which say that the dead will cross the threshold of Eternity /a game of words: “seba” is a door and image, but it probably means here the image in the false door!/, like the statement, that he will be eating from the table of the Lord of Eternity, etc., which are actually prayer addresses for posthumous well-being in the world of images or in reality, closely related to them.

The sculpture turns from stone, wooden of some other material piece into a statue, only just it “has been animated” after the special ritual “opening of mouth and eyes”. The major purpose of this ritual is to instill the spirit of the depicted man or deity into the statue. Then the statue became alive during the ritual’s progress, not before it and then it could be put in the place of its constant stay⁴⁸.

3. Sculptures in Ancient Egyptian Thinking

The ritual of dedication shows that the statues are considered for bodies, in which spiritual essence of a human or a deity is instilled. That they are bodies is what is said in the monument of Memphis theology, mentioned earlier.

Statues denominations:

1. “Tut” /Wb, V, 255/. This is the most frequently used denomination of a statue of god, king or mortal. It has also been used for the figures in the frescoes and reliefs. It means “similarity”, “I am similar to”, “I look like”, as well. It is quite important that the Egyptians called “tut” “a figure in the eye”, i.e. human’s reflection in the eyes of his interlocutor /Wb, V, 256, 13-14/. In combination with the word “ankh” /life, to live/ it literally means “a living statue”, i.e. “incarnation” /Wb, V, 256, 17-18/.
2. “Shesep” – a lively image, incarnation of one or another deity /Wb, IV, 536/.
3. “Senen” – an image with an accent on the similarity, likeness /Wb, III, 460/.
4. “Menu” – a monument
5. “Henti” – the most discussed name. These were initially statues of gods and kings, who were carted /driven/ during the festivities.
6. “Ibui”/“ibib”. Reading of this word is not clear. I believe, although the term is disputable, it comes from “ib” – the heart as a receptacle of brain, feelings, emotions, i.e. the word goes for the statue as a receptacle of a certain spiritual essence.

⁴⁷ Matie, 1969:24.

⁴⁸ Matie, 1969:26; Roth, 1992: 113-149.

From all the enumerated basic denominations of the sculptural figures, “menu” /monument/ is the only one corresponding to the contemporary idea for a statue. All the rest emphasize on meanings according to which the statue is a body, which receives the spiritual essence of the represented image.

Thus, since the figure in frescoes and reliefs is “a door”, through which a living thing is passing, connected with the image and the sculptural carving is a body, which spiritual essence is instilled in, then we should look for the answer of the question who is passing and who or what is being instilled in?

Egyptian anthropology and the world of images

Ancient Egyptians believe that the human personality consisted of physical body, double “Ka”, “Ba” (conventionally translated by “soul”), Name and Shadow⁴⁹. According to the texts human immortality is realized after the body’s death with the following conditions:

- the body is in the Underworld with Osiris
- the double is divine among gods
- Ba is in the Creator’s hands
- The name is in the mouths of these living on Earth⁵⁰.

Throughout the whole Egyptian history the notion of the double and the name are closely connected and with XXII dynasty these notions merge. The analysis of the ideogram for Ka shows that Ka is an essence, which seizes, covers.

Ba is most often depicted as a bird with a human head. Ba merges with the Creator, as to its substance, it is consubstantial with the Creator, but with the merging of the physical body after death, Ba keeps its individuality and the possibility to visit the physical world. Ba is visiting the tomb. It hovers over the mummy as it can be spotted in the pictures. Ba can be instilled in, to obtain a different form and thus to inhabit the physical world. That is the reason why the whole funerary literature was created, “The Book of the Dead” in particular⁵¹.

According to W. Budge – Ba inhabits Ka. Ba is an essence, which can acquire forms.

O. Berlev unambiguously shows that one of the multiple aspects of the double Ka is that part of human personality, which can be depicted with the means of art. The depicted image is regarded as Ka /= double/ of man and Ka – as his image. The world of Ka is the world of the images in the tomb. This is “herit necher”, a term, meaning “the World Beyond”, which is equal in meaning to “imnet”, “west”, i.e. “beyond world”. It turns out that the artists are the creators of the beyond reality, which merges with the world of images⁵². The connection of Ka with the images spreads out not only over frescoes and reliefs, but over statues as well. There is a special hall in the tomb where the dead body’s statue is placed in. The tomb is the home of the double⁵³.

⁴⁹ See recent account and bibliography in: Lekov 2004, 70-138. (T.Lekov. The Secret knowledge. Sacred books of Ancient Egypt. Sofia 2004).

⁵⁰ Ignatov, 1998: 67 & ff.

⁵¹ Ignatov, 1998: 67 & ff.

⁵² Berlev, 1982: 14-15; Berlev, 1978: 17-34.

⁵³ Ignatov, 1998: 67 & ff.

Discovering the answer to the question “who passes through the image?”, “who is instilled?” belongs to the greatest Egyptologist in Saint Petersburg - Y. J. Perepyolkin. According to the famous Egyptologist, Ba is passing through the image and it is instilled in the statue. Here is the way – it is enough that Ba is identified with a certain form, shape /a kind of an image/ and to think literally, “This is mine” or “It is me”, in order to be instilled in it⁵⁴. The world of the primeval and eternal spiritual essence needs a form, to penetrate into the physical world and pass through it⁵⁵

Conclusion

The analysis of the ancient Egyptian notion for the image reveals the Egyptian “art” in a surprising, unexpected light. Two types of images exist for the Egyptians, different from each other not that much in form, as in the function, which they perform. The first type are the frescoes and reliefs. For the Egyptian awareness the figure, depicted in this way, is “a door”, through which an essential part of the depicted personality is passing. The second type – these are the statues. There is only one word for a statue – “menu” /a monument/ among the various words in the Egyptian, that corresponds to the contemporary notion. For the Egyptians the statue is a body, where this essential part of the depicted personality is instilled in, which passes through the first type of images – frescoes and reliefs. The frescoes, reliefs and statues are closely connected with one of the aspects of the Egyptian notion for the double Ka. They create the individual worlds – doubles, that form a certain level of the great Beyond. The artists are the creators of that beyond world. The literal conception is that they are “the means”, by which the divine power realizes itself. It is essential to comprehend, that this world starts functioning not after the depicted personality’s death, but suddenly after the creation and animation of the images. If the images are associated with the notion for the double Ka on the external level, then this power, which is instilled in them, is the spirit Ba. This interaction between Ka and Ba, as well as between a hieroglyphic text and images from the larger scale, are the core, over which the Egyptian civilization was created. We can summarize, having in mind all mentioned above, that the Egyptian notion for art has no common ground with the contemporary one. This conclusion opens the door to the mysterious world of the Egyptian ideographic script.

⁵⁴ Vassoevich, 1998: 169 – 189.

⁵⁵ Ignatov, 1998.

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