
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BANQUET SCENES IN THE NEW KINGDOM THEBAN PRIVATE TOMBS¹

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ABSTRACT

Theban private tombs, which date to the New Kingdom (c.1550–1070 BC), are highly symbolic monuments. They belonged to a group of high officials who desired to guarantee their rebirth in the afterlife and to retain their identity and memory for all time. These tombs provide a wealth of information regarding the deceased's life, accomplishments, and social status. Additionally, they provide insight into Egyptian religious beliefs, rituals, and deities, as well as numerous other social, economic, and artistic realities of the era. This paper aims to discuss the iconography of banquet scenes in the Theban private tombs focusing especially on the food consumption as a significant practice in ancient Egypt, especially during New Kingdom Period, through number of tomb scenes. This paper depends on a descriptive- analytical methodology to identify the term of banquets, describe the iconography of ancient Egyptian banquets, investigate the occasions of banqueting, clarify the function of banqueting, finally discuss the economic and social consequences of banqueting. This paper would conclude that the tombs banquets scenes created direct communication between the living and the dead by means of food ritual, music, songs, and dancing.

KEYWORDS: Banquet scenes - Food – private tombs– Tomb decoration – New Kingdom Period.

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INTRODUCTION

The tomb was significant to the Egyptians because it allowed them to preserve the deceased's body while also providing a venue for live visitors to pay their respects and ensure the deceased's transfer into the afterlife. The New Kingdom's private Theban tombs (c. 1550–1070 BC) provide us with valuable insights into the purpose of these structures, Egyptian religious beliefs, and the identities of their owners. Members of the Egyptian nobles who wished to guarantee their rebirth and maintain their identity in the afterlife owned these tombs. The embellishment and decoration of the tombs supported the transition to the afterlife, safeguard the body of the deceased and honour him in both the worlds of the living and the dead.

These tombs were open to the public for visits on key occasions when it was thought that the living might communicate with the dead, such as during banquet celebrations.² Furthermore, these tombs provide insights into specific parts of Egyptian religion and ideology, as well as their social identity.³

The Theban Private tombs, as a special category of tombs in Theban Western necropolis, a term applied to burials of the elite of the high officials like governors of the city, viziers, high priests etc., The private necropolis occupies the areas of Deir el-Medina, Qurnet Murai, Sheik Abd el-Qurna, el-Khôkha, Deir el Bahari, Dra Abu el-Naga and el-Asasif.⁴

Deir el-Medina is the southernmost area and was the village of the workers of the royal tombs. Its necropolis was created at the beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty.⁵ The oldest tombs of this necropolis, dated of the reign of Hatshepsut, are in the Eastern part, while those from the post-Amarna period are in the Western part of the site.

The Qurnet Murai necropolis, near Deir el-Medina, has been until recent times under a modern city and that is why many tombs located here have been damaged, although there are still important examples of paintings and decorative reliefs, like the ones inside the tombs TT 40, TT 276 or TT 277.⁶

² Hartwig, M., (2004) *Tomb painting and identity in ancient Thebes, 1419-1372 BCE*. Monumenta Aegyptiaca 10 , Brepols: Turnhout, 5, 8.

³ Guardia, B., (2020), "Private burials in New Kingdom Thebes: religious belief and identity", in *The Birmingham Egyptology Journal*, Volume 7, 51-69.

⁴ Strudwick, N., and Strudwick, H., (1999), *Thebes in Egypt: A Guide to the Tombs and Temples of Ancient Luxor*. Cornell University Press: New York, 19.

⁵ Haring, B. (2001), 'Deir el-Medina', in D. B. Redford (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*. Vol. 1. Oxford University Press, 368-369.

⁶ Berenguer, F. (2003), 'The Qurnet Murai Necropolis (Thebes West)', in Z. Hawass and L. P. Brock (eds.) *Egyptology at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century: Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Egyptologists*, New York, The American University in Cairo Press: New York, 81-86.

Sheik Abd el-Qurna is the central section of the Theban necropolis and one of the most important areas, with the largest number of tombs dating to the Eighteenth Dynasty.⁷ Its use began at the same time as the use of the Valley of the Kings, with burials consisting of nobles' tombs, most of them without chapels.⁸ The upper part of the site was the first to be occupied because it allowed the direct view of the Great Temple of Karnak above the royal mortuary temples, and was used until the reign of Amenhotep III, when the tomb structure became more complex and there was less availability of space, so then the lower level of the hill was occupied.⁹

Another important area is Dra Abu el-Naga, to the North of the necropolis, where one finds tombs of the Middle Kingdom, the Second Intermediate Period, and the New Kingdom.¹⁰ It is an area approximately one kilometre long and 250 metres wide divided into two parts, North and South, coinciding with two hills.

In the areas of El-Khôkha and el-Asasif there are tombs of the Eighteenth Dynasty, some Ramesside tombs, as well as tombs of earlier periods. The quality of stone in these areas is better. For this reason, the elites preferred these locations when the structure of the tombs became more complex architectonically.¹¹ Despite these modern divisions of the physical space, it should be borne in mind that in ancient times the area was conceived of as a unique sacred space with the name of 'The West of Thebes'.¹²

⁷ Polz, D., (2001). 'Qurna', in D. B. Redford (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*. Vol. 3., Oxford University Press, 109-110.

⁸ Bryan, B., (2010), 'La XVIII Dinastía antes del Período Amárnico (c. 1550-1352 a.c.)', in I. Shaw (ed.) *Historia del antiguo Egipto*, 293. [287-357].

⁹ Seidel, M., (1996) 'The Necropolis of Western Thebes to the End of the New Kingdom' in A. G. Shedid and M. Seidel (eds.). *The Tomb of Nakht: The Art and History of an Eighteenth Dynasty Official's Tomb at Western Thebes*, 11, [9-12]; Kanawati, N., (2001), *The Tomb and Beyond: Burial Customs of the Egyptian Officials*. Aris & Phillips: Warminster, 66.

¹⁰ Higuera, Á., (2016), *Development and Landscape of the Sacred Space at Dra Abu el-Naga: A case study within the Theban Necropolis*. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Liverpool.

¹¹ Polz, D., (2001), 'Khokhah', in D. B. Redford (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*. Vol.2. Oxford University Press, 232-233; Polz, D. (2001), "Asasif", in D. B. Redford (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*. Vol. 1. Oxford University Press, 140-142.

¹² Higuera, Á., (2016), *Development and Landscape of the Sacred Space at Dra Abu el-Naga*, 2.

DISCUSSION

Banquet scenes are among the most common in the private Theban tombs of the New Kingdom, particularly in the Eighteenth Dynasty, when they were most likely part of the core decoration.¹³

The vivid imagery of the New Kingdom banquet scene, which is uncommon in other Egyptian art, makes it one of the most well-known decorating motifs in elite tombs. These images are often located on the walls of the longitudinal halls of the tombs and the broad/transverse halls of the Theban T-shaped tombs.

The banqueting guests are seated in rows on chairs, stools, or reed mats facing the tomb owner in the west (away from the tomb entrance). Attendants provide them with floral collars, beverages, and unguent in addition to maybe anointing them with oil. It is common to see images of male and female musicians performing songs on lutes, harps, lyres, pipes, and drums with the lyrics.¹⁴ It is uncommon to see single male and female guests seated together at feasts, despite the fact that musicians are frequently portrayed in mixed-sex groups. It is unclear whether this gender segregation would have happened naturally or if it is just one of the many artistic traditions that define these scenes (such as the consistently idealistic figure of the eternally young participants).¹⁵

It is remarkable that in these scenes the absence of old or people with disabilities, nor children, although sometimes we can see girls dedicated to some duties in these scenes, as dancers or servants.¹⁶

BANQUET DEFINITION

There are many definitions for the banquet or banqueting such as: Linguistically, Merriam Webster dictionary defines banquet as: “an elaborate and often ceremonious meal for numerous people often in honor of a person and a meal held in recognition of some occasion or achievement”.¹⁷ while

¹³ Manniche, L. (1997), ‘Reflections on the Banquet Scene’, in R. Tefnin (ed.) *La Peinture Égyptienne Ancienne: Un monde de signes à préserver, Actes de colloque international de Bruxelles*, Fondation Égyptologique Reine Élisabeth: Brussels, 29. [29-36].

¹⁴ Pirelli, R. (2007), ‘Les répertoires de scènes des tombeaux privés de la 18^{ème} dynastie et les scènes de banquet: présentation d’une étude’, in J. C. Goyon and C. Cardin (eds.) *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Egyptologists*, Peeters: Leuven, 1519-1525; Kroeter, C. (2009), ‘The sensual banquet scene: sex and senses in Eighteenth Dynasty Theban Tomb Paintings’, *North Street Review: Arts and visual culture* 13, 47-56.

¹⁵ Harrington, N. (2016), “The Eighteenth Dynasty Egyptian banquet: ideals and realities”, in Catherine Draycott and Maria Stamatopoulou (ed.) *Dining and Death: Interdisciplinary perspectives on the funerary banquet* in ancient art, burial and belief, Paris.

¹⁶ Kroeter, C., The sensual banquet scene 51. For example, in TT 22, TT 38, TT 52, TT 75, TT 79, TT 100, TT 129, TT 254, and TT 367.

¹⁷ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/banquet>

Britannica dictionary offers a similar definition as “a ceremonial meal for many people, often followed by speeches”¹⁸ and finally the Britannica Dictionary proposes that banquet is “a formal dinner for many people usually to celebrate a special event”.¹⁹ On the other hand,

Linguistically, there is no word in ancient Egyptian language expressing the term ‘banquet’ or ‘to attend banquet’. The closest word for banquet in ancient Egyptian language is (*hb*)’ which means to celebrate and feast/festival.²⁰

In the context of ancient Egyptian ceremonies, “Banqueting” or “Feasting” can be defined as the celebration of significant occasions through the formal ceremony of communal eating and drinking.²¹

THE “FUNERARY MEAL AND “BANQUET SCENE”

Theban Private tombs of the New Kingdom portray two distinct types of banqueting: the Funerary Meal and the Banquet Scene as a part of daily life activities. The funerary meal or post-funeral meal broke the fasting after the tomb owner’s burial,²² while “banquet scene” refers to any other banquets held in the presence of the deceased, including those related to festivals. The strict formality of Funerary Meal, the total absence of the sense of movement present in banquet scene images, and the consistent placement of visitors such that they face the tomb owner, and his wife (or mother) highlight the dead tomb owner rather than the living.²³

BANQUET COMPOSITION

In terms of scene composition (Figure 1), The master of the house and his wife are depicted in large size and seated on higher seats than the guests, but the artist has reserved the best of his talent for the lively groups that form the guests, the servants and the musicians. Pretty girls circulate between the groups, the servants bring the food and the cupbearers hold jugs, cups or small vials that contained, as it were, perfumes to add to the drinks. Other servants place flower necklaces around the guests' necks, massage their arms with ointments, or replace the cone of perfumed ointment on their heads.

¹⁸ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/banquet>

¹⁹ <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/banquet>

²⁰ Gardiner, A. H., (1957), *Egyptian grammar: Being an introduction to the study of hieroglyphs*, Oxford, 580–81.

²¹ Harrington, N., The Eighteenth Dynasty Egyptian banquet: ideals and realities, 131.

²² Parkinson, R.B., (1991) Voices from Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Middle Kingdom Writings, London, 34-35; Frandsen, P.J., (1999), “On Fear of Death and the Three *bwts* Connected with Hathor”. In Teeter, E. and Larson, J.A. (eds), *Gold of praise: Studies in Honor of Edward F. Wente*, Chicago, 131–47.

²³ Harrington, N., The Eighteenth Dynasty Egyptian banquet: ideals and realities, 131.

The feasts were enlivened by music, songs and dances. The dances were performed by women and the musicians played the flute, the oboe, the tambourine, the lyre and the harp.²⁴

These banquets, which include stages ranging from banquet preparation to the presentation of food and beverage to the hosts, were typically presided over by the deceased and his wife, both of whom are depicted in a larger scale sitting pose welcoming their guests. In front of them is a big offering table. The guests take up the majority of the scene, and they are always separated by gender, although being in the same room. They are shown in various poses while seated on seats or mats. They are served by a variety of servants, both male and female. In most instances, they serve wine and beer.²⁵ The final group to be emphasized in these settings is the ensemble consisting of orchestras, often accompanied by dancers.²⁶

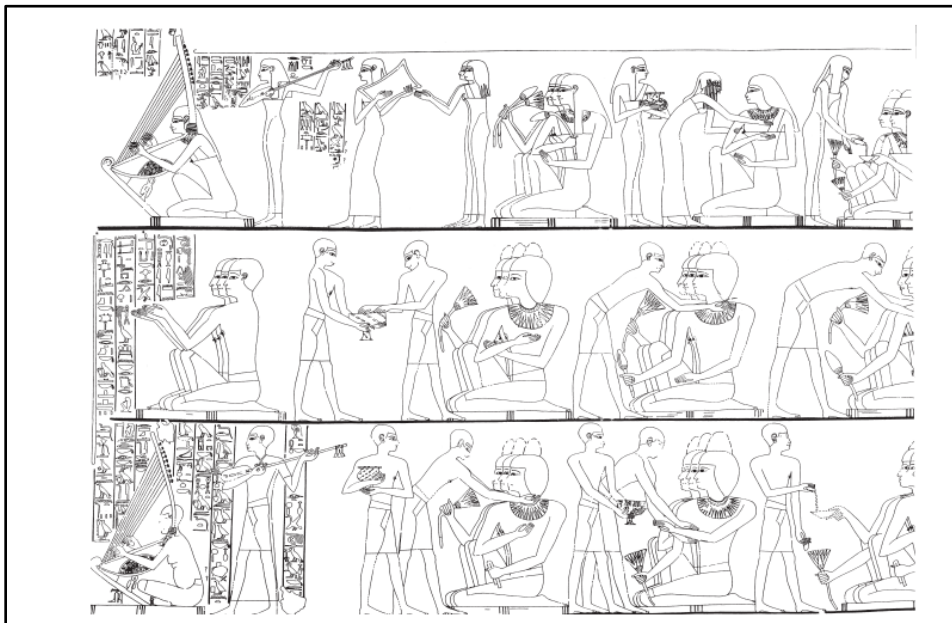


Figure 1: Banquet scene in the passage of the tomb of Rekhmire (TT100) at Sheikh Abd el Qurna, after N. de G. Davies and Gardiner, A.H, *Seven Private tombs at Qurnah*, London, 1948, pl. 66

²⁴ Lopez, J., “Gastmahl”, in LA II, cols. 383-386.

²⁵ Guardia, B., Private burials in New Kingdom Thebes: religious belief and identity, 60.

²⁶ Guardia, B., (2019), « La representación de la danza dentro de las escenas de banquete de las tumbas tebanas privadas de la XVIII dinastía egipcia », *Panta Rei. Revista Digital de Ciencia y Didáctica de la Historia*, 69-89. Dancers within banquet scenes have been found in TT 251, TT 53, TT 18, TT 82, TT342, TT 79, TT 80, TT 92, TT 100, TT 129, TT A5, TT 22, TT 367, TT 75, TT 176, TT 8, TT 78, TT 297, TT 38, TT 52, TT 175, TT 249, TT 254, TT 49, TT C5, TT 135.

OCCASIONS OF THE BANQUET

As an agricultural community, the ancient Egyptians celebrated Renenutet, the goddess of harvest, and Min, the god of fertility, in the summer. During the month of Keihak or Khoiak, feasts were conducted for plowing the field, and the deity Osiris was praised for resurrecting after death, similar to how the soil dies and reborns each season. Royal feasts, such as coronations and anniversaries, as well as feasts of the dead, where relatives brought food to the graves of the departed, were other noteworthy events marked by food. There were also annual feasts to honor the gods and other regionally specific festivities.²⁷

The New Kingdom Beautiful Feast of Opet was a significant religious ceremony during which Amun, the state's main god, moved from Karnak to Luxor temple. The feast, which revived Opet's legitimacy, lasted nearly a month. The king offered sacrificial offerings such as meat, chicken, fruit, milk, bread, beer, flowers, and perfume. During the yearly feast, the king nourished the town of Thebes at his own expense. Amun celebrated the Beautiful Feast of the Valley, which lasted ten days and involved visiting temples on the west bank of Luxor to welcome the cemetery gods.

The ancient Egyptians celebrated the Feast of the Harvest, also known as Sham al-Nessim. The term "sham" originates from the ancient Egyptian word "shemu," which refers to the harvest season or summer. The ancient Egyptians associated Sham al-Nessim with rebirth and the beginning of creation. This ceremony celebrated the arrival of spring with a variety of dishes, including ripe green chickpeas and lettuce, both associated with the fertility and reproduction god, Min.²⁸

Wall scenes depict banquets held by ancient Egyptians. The type of food served at a banquet was typically determined by the host's status and income. The wealthy would order the slaughter of a fattened bull and set the meal with roasted goose, beer, wine, fruit baskets, bread, and sweets. For those who cannot afford a magnificent spread, a smaller animal, such as a sheep or goose, may be slaughtered for a banquet if necessary. Drinks would likely be restricted to beer, which was easily accessible.²⁹

Banquets also can be presented in the context of private occasions as Jesus Lopez argues for Rekhmire's banquet: "The banquet that Rekhmire offered

²⁷ El-Sabban, S., (2000), *Temple festival calendars of ancient Egypt*, Liverpool University Press; Anwar E. H., (2019), "The Religious Festivals in Ancient Egypt", *Egyptian Journal of Tourism and Hospitality*, No.26, 2(1), 1 – 22.

²⁸ Nasr, Y., "Ritual of Cutting Grain in Theban Temples: An Overview of the Concept of the Divine and Royal Fertility", *Journal of Association of Arab Universities for Tourism, and Hospitality*, Vol. 20 No. 4, (2021), 189-230.

²⁹ Montet, P. (1997) *'Daily Life in Egypt'*, Trans., Aziz Morqos. General Egyptian Book Organization.

to his officials, after setting the appointment for his job, can be considered a business meal”.³⁰

EXAMPLES OF BANQUET SCENES

There is a vast number of tomb reliefs depicting the many indulgences of food and drink likely reflected the lifestyles of the privileged segments of society, such as high-ranking civil officers, priests, landowners, and nobility. The masses would wait for feasts and special occasions for an excuse to indulge. Given the abundance of festivals associated with various annual events such as seasons, the Nile, sowing, harvesting, as well as coronations and funerals, it is probable that they did not have to wait for a long time.³¹

The present researchers will describe some examples of banquet scenes in the Theban private tombs of New Kingdom focusing on the main elements of these scenes especially the tomb owner, the participants, the contents of banquet and the female and male servants, musicians and dancers.

Banquet Scene of Userhat (*wsr hst*)³² , TT56 at Sheikh Abd el-Qurna

The banquet scene (figure 2) is located on the vestibule hall's western wall, on the southern side. Most archaeologists and researchers believe that the banquet scene shown here was made by three painters who collaborated.³³ The artwork represents Usherat and his wife seated on chairs, with a monkey holding a mirror under her chair, symbolizing resurrection. The couple is presented with offerings by their two daughters and son in front of a brightly coloured offering table.³⁴ Behind the son are three registers portraying different people. The upper register features female guests seated on chairs, each with a monkey underneath, identical to the one represented beneath the host's seat. Female visitors are also depicted sitting on the ground with the 'Blind Harpist' and a female musical trio. The two lower registers show a couple seated on seats and attended to by male servants. Above the seated

³⁰ Lopez, J., “Gastmahl”, in LA II, 383.

³¹ Bleeker, C., (1967), *Egyptian Festivals: Enactments of Religious Renewal*, Brill Archive.

³² Royal Scribe and Child of Nursery, reign of Amenhotep II. Manniche L., (2003) "The so-called scenes of daily life in the private tombs of the eighteenth dynasty: an overview", in Strudwick Nigel, Taylor John H., "The Theban Necropolis, past, present and future", The British Museum Press, 42-45.

³³ Weeks, K. R. (2005). *The illustrated guide to Luxor*. American University in Cairo, Cairo. 421.


³⁴ Beinlinch-Seeber, C., and A. B. Shedid, (1987), *Das Grab des Userhat (TT 56; Philipp von Zabern, Mainz*, 53.

pair, a group of women sit on the ground and are served by maids. In front of them is a row of male servants carrying various items and strolling in a symmetrical pattern.³⁵



Figure 2: Banquet scene of Userhat (TT56) at Sheikh Abd el Qurna, after

https://osirisnet.net/popupImage.php?img=/tombes/nobles/ous56/photo/ouserhat56_sb_21.jpg&lang=en&sw=1536&sh=864 accessed 13th July 2024

Banquet Scene of Djeserkareseneb (*djsr k3 r^c snb*)³⁶  TT38 at Sheikh Abd el-Qurna³⁷

³⁵ Khalifa, S., (2014), 'Banquets in Ancient Egypt', *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* 2: 478. Figure 5. [474-480].

³⁶ Djeserkareseneb (Djeser-ka-re-seneb", was scribe counter of the grain of Amun" and "steward of the second priest of Amun", who lived during the reigns of Thutmose IV and Amenhotep III.

³⁷ Davies, N. de Garis: "Scenes from Some Theban Tombs (Nos. 38,66,162, with Excerpts from 81" (= Private Tombs at Thebes, 4). Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1963, 21-32, pls. I-VII;

The long west end of the south wall of the transverse hall is occupied with a large banquet scene where, at the left side of the main register, the large figures of Djoserkareseneb and his wife, Wadjrenpet, have almost been lost, with only a small part of Djoserka now remaining. In front of the seated couple is a festival bouquet, not the usual table of food. Standing at the other side of this are two of his daughters. Although they appear to stand slightly one behind the other, they are probably standing side-by-side. The first, actually further away than the other, approaches him with a very colourful necklace and the other with bowl of wine. The remainder of this register, beyond the two daughters, is separated into two sub-registers. They portray the musicians and visitors who look to be celebrating Djoserkareseneb and Wadjrenpet. This is not a feast, as no tables packed with food are depicted. But what can be seen indicates that there is plenty to drink. The right-hand side of the wall's bottom register is probably certainly a continuation of the top sub-register, which depicts the male attendees at this event.

The bottom sub-register is the beginning of the scene, starting on the left with a company of musicians and singers. In total, there are eight, five standing at the front and three sitting cross-legged on mats, at the rear. Leading the musicians is a harpist, dressed in the same attire as the two daughters. Her companion, behind her, who dances while playing the lute. A young girl follows her, who also only wears the same minimum attire as the lute player. She seems to be singing and beating time with her hands on her body and also dancing. Another musician follows, playing a double oboe. Her upper torso is also missing (so again, see the line drawing for detail) and she would appear at first glance to also be almost naked, however, she is wearing an almost transparent loose fitting long dress. Whilst dancing, she turns her head to face the girl behind her. The fifth member of the musical group plays the lyre, and like the harp player at the front, she stands with her feet together. The lyre has a very curious shape, with a main harp shaped section, with only seven strings, and a square sound-box. The lyre player is dressed in the same fashion as the harp player at the front of the group.

Following the musicians are a group of three chantresses, who sit with their feet tucked under them and all of them wearing long dresses. At the right-hand end of the register, behind the chantresses, is seated the first of the guests. She is the first of six women, the rest being on the upper sub-register.

Porter, Bertha and Moss, Rosalind: *Topographical bibliography of Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic texts, reliefs and paintings*, Second Edition, vol. I, Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 1994, 69-70; Scheil, Jean-Vincent: "Le tombeau de Rat'eserkasenb" (= MMAF 5,2), Cairo, 1889, 571-579, pls. I-IV.

The men, again six in total, are found at the right-hand side of the bottom register.

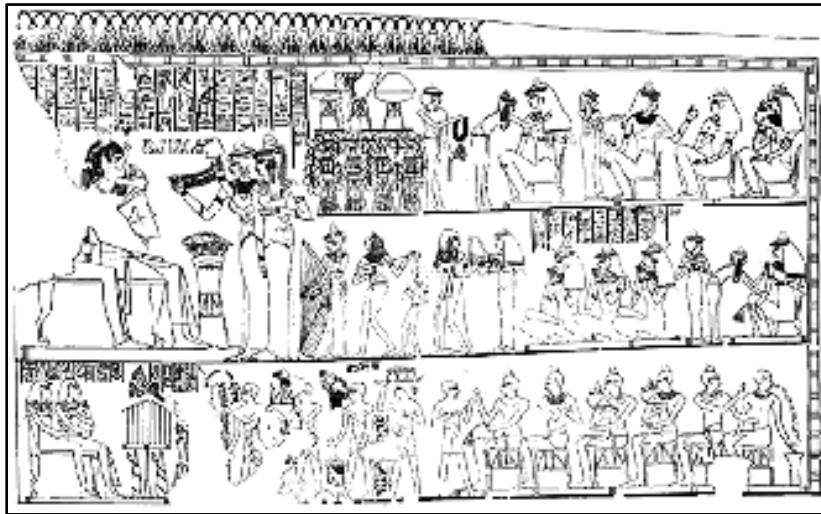


Figure 3 a Banquet Scene Djeserkareseneb after Davies, N. de Garis (1963)

"Scenes from Some Theban Tombs (Nos. 38,66,162, with Excerpts from 81",
Oxford: Griffith Institute, pl.VI.



Figure 3 b Banquet Scene Djeserkareseneb after

https://www.osirisnet.net/popupImage.php?img=/tombes/nobles/djeserkareseneb38/photo/djsrkasnb_th_swallow_05_bs.jpg&lang=en&sw=1536&sh=864 accessed 13th July 2024

THE BANQUET SCENES AND RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF FOOD IN ANCIENT EGYPT

Since ancient times, food has played a significant role in Egyptian culture. The ancient Egyptians developed a wide variety of food and beverages and relished everything that nature had to offer.

The abundance of scenes depicting the acquisition, manufacture, storage, and presentation of food in Egyptian tombs, together with the significance of the offering list, demonstrates the importance of food to the ancient Egyptians, both in life and in death.³⁸ Apart from the numerous depictions and writings related to food, the elite and commoners Egyptians aimed to provide sustenance for the deceased for all eternity by enclosing real food offerings in tombs as part of the funeral equipment or transporting them to the offering place(s) regularly. The custom of placing various food gifts in tombs dates to the predynastic era in Egypt and persisted long into the Roman era. Most meals discovered within tombs have a direct connection to the offering lists written on the walls of the tombs. Most of the meals found within tombs are directly related to the offering lists that were inscribed on the tomb walls.³⁹

Traditional knowledge of food offerings, particularly those of animal origin, has been acquired from writings and images in tombs, resulting in a 'canon' of offerings. Early funerary stelae from Saqqara,⁴⁰ and Helwan⁴¹ depict cattle, ducks, and geese. Later, in the Old Kingdom proper, a canonical list of offerings appears, with five pieces of meat and five types of poultry, among other foods on the menu.⁴² The meat offerings, which are frequently more varied in the offering lists, do have certain common elements, such as the ribs (spr), the femur (iw^c), the shoulder/ scapula and humerus (parts of the hpš), and often a boneless piece of meat. The poultry appears to be more standardized. They, too, are five in number, with four waterfowl (often two geese and two ducks), and one pigeon/dove, with the specific type of bird being named: r3, or, sr, trp, st, s, and mnw.t.⁴³

³⁸ Khalifa, S., (2014), 'Banquets in Ancient Egypt', *Heritage: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Archaeology* 2: 474-480.

³⁹ S. Ikram, "Food and funerals. Sustaining the dead for eternity", *Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw*, 20 (Research 2008), 361-371, ISSN 1234-5415 (Print), ISSN 2083-537X (Online)

⁴⁰ W.B., Emery, *A Funerary Repast in an Egyptian Tomb of the Archaic Period*, Leiden: Nederlands instituut voor het nabije oosten, 1962, pl. 3.d.

⁴¹ Z., Saad, *The Excavations at Helwan. Art and Civilization in the First and Second Egyptian Dynasties*, Norman: University of Oklahoma press, 1969.

⁴² S. Hassan, *Excavations at Giza Vi.2. 1934-1935. The Offering-list in the Old Kingdom*, Cairo: government press, 1948, 348-375, especially 365-375

⁴³ See S. Hassan, *Excavations at Giza*, 348-375, especially 365.

Tombs from all periods of Egyptian history depict scenes of banqueting. These scenes are frequently interpreted as showing a funerary meal, but representations of banqueting on more "mundane occasions" are also found, and it is often difficult to tell how a particular scene is to be interpreted. Beginning with the Eighteenth Dynasty tombs, however, we find more elaborate scenes of banqueting. These show the deceased and his wife seated on stools or chairs before a table filled with food-offerings. Several rows of guests are often depicted as seated facing the guests of honour.⁴⁴

These banquets occurred on several types of occasion. The main division seems to be between everyday scenes, in which the "master" is still alive, and "mortuary" scenes, in which he is dead. Examples of mundane scenes are found in the tombs of Rekhmire (TT100) and Kenamun (TT93). The banquet in the tomb of Rekhmire apparently took place when he went to greet the new King Amenhotep II upon his accession to the throne.⁴⁵ In the banquet scene of TT93, the guest of honor is King Amenhotep II, shown as a child, rather than Kenamun, the tomb owner. The purpose of this scene, which Fox assumes to be "essentially biographical," appears to be to illustrate "the intimacy between Kenamun's family and the King.

Mortuary banquets can be further subdivided into three categories; the funeral banquet, depicting the first meal "the deceased enjoys after his revivication;⁴⁶ banquets occurring during particular mortuary festivals such as the New Year Festival, the Festival of Djesru, and the Festival of the Valley; and banquets representing the daily mortuary meal provided for the deceased.⁴⁷

CONCLUSION AND RESULTS

- Banquet scenes were used to decorate Egyptian tombs throughout history. This was frequently a funerary meal, but Theban tombs of the New Kingdom have depictions of social or familiar meals.
- The New Kingdom elite tombs played a major part in the commemoration of the owner (and, to a lesser extent, his family), gave a link to the past, and helped to maintain social order through the feasts held within or near them. A grave is a transitional area between the worlds of the living and the dead, as it exists in both realms.
- Banquets in ancient Egypt were governed by specific rules and traditions. In their portrayals on the tomb walls, the feast host was

⁴⁴ J. Vandier, *Manuel d'archéologie égyptienne*, vol. 4: Bas-Reliefs et peintures (Paris: éditions A. et J. Picard et cie, 1964). 219.

⁴⁵ M. Fox, "The Entertainment Song Genre in Egyptian Literature", *Scripts Hierosolymitana* 28 (1982): 271.

⁴⁶ M. Fox, 273.

⁴⁷ M. Fox, 275.

invariably larger than the guests. Banquet scenes were typically placed on the vestibule hall's western wall, on the south side.

- Banquets were community activities that strengthened social bonds through shared experiences. However, their inclusivity is unclear, as they may have been restricted based on family or class membership. A hierarchical pattern, expressing the social order, is identifiable in the way the visitors are seated in Egyptian banquet scenes, some close to the tomb owner on high-backed chairs, others at a distance kneeling on reed mats.
- Typically, the dinners comprised musical groups of male or female musicians and dancers. Aside from music, alcohol was a vital commodity during ancient Egyptian banquets, as seen in painted scenes through ornamented jars alongside large quantities of food.
- The prominence of tomb design, which included banquet scenes, stems partly from its function as a forum for aristocratic presentation, an exhibition of wealth, and the associated access to talented craftsmen.
- By commissioning the development of an artistically beautiful composition, the tomb owner increased the potential number of visitors and hence the likelihood of receiving a physical or vocal offering. This would extend his afterlife existence even after the tomb was abandoned.
- Funerary meals are characterised by their rigid formality, the complete absence of the sense of movement found in mortuary feast imagery, and the uniform seating of guests so that they face the tomb owner and his wife (or mother); the focus is thus almost entirely on the dead rather than the living. Musicians and servants are rarely depicted.

One of the main festivals that took place in the Theban necropolis was the 'Beautiful Feast of the Valley', a procession of the cult statue of Amun-Re in which the private Theban tombs, among other buildings in the necropolis, were visited to celebrate banquets. These banquets were later represented in tomb reliefs and paintings.
- These banqueting scenes show little or no variation in content, regardless of the occasion of the banquet. It appears that these scenes are not to be considered as reflecting a specific festival, but as an abstraction that may be applied to all festivals.
- The New Kingdom private tombs provide an insight deep idea, through images and texts, about food and beverages the ancient Egyptian used in their life and wished to consume in their hereafter.
- More research in the banquet scenes and mortuary and daily life festivals can provide many answers for the ancient Egyptian food habits.

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