UNIVERSITÀ
DI PAVIA

University of Pavia

Department of Humanities

Master's Degree in The Ancient Mediterranean World: History, Archaeology and Art

Narrative in Egyptian Imagery: The Funerary Chapel of Maya, Museo Egizio, Turin (Suppl. 7910)

Supervisor:

Dr. Johannes S. G. Auenmüller

Co-supervisor:

Prof. Lorenzo D'Alfonso

Thesis written by:

Sima Boustani Parsa

Academic Year 2025–2026

Abstract

This thesis investigates narrative structures in New Kingdom private tomb decoration through a study of the funerary chapel of Maya TT338 at Deir el-Medina. Although the iconography and symbolic meanings of Theban tomb scenes have been extensively examined, the ways in which these visual programs construct narrative meaning as integrated systems have received comparatively limited attention. This study therefore explores how tomb imagery organizes sequences of actions, spatial relationships, and interactions between figures in order to communicate funerary rituals, social identity, and religious ideology.

The research combines iconographic analysis with approaches drawn from visual and narrative theory. Particular attention is given to the spatial arrangement of scenes, the organization of registers, and the visual strategies that connect actions across the decorative program. Through this framework, the thesis examines how narrative structures contribute to the representation of ritual practice and commemorative identity within New Kingdom tomb chapels.

The Chapel of Maya TT338 serves as the central case study and is analyzed in comparison with contemporary Theban tombs, including those of Amenemopet (Tjonufer/Thonufer) TT 297, Horemheb TT 78, Rekhmire TT 100, Userhat TT 56, Sennefer TT 96, Menna TT 69, Nakht TT 52, Pairi TT 139, Nebamun and Ipuky TT 181, Neferhotep TT 49, and Simut (Samut/Kyky) TT 409. By integrating the study of narrativity with the analysis of tomb decoration, this thesis argues that New Kingdom funerary imagery functions as a structured visual narrative system shaped by religious beliefs, workshop traditions, and the agency of tomb owners.

Keywords:

New Kingdom; Theban tombs; visual narrative; tomb decoration; Deir el-Medina; Maya TT 338

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1. Introduction

Private tomb decoration of the New Kingdom represents one of the most extensive and structurally sophisticated corpora of visual narration in the ancient world. Within these funerary monuments, pictorial programs articulated biography, ritual participation, social identity, and religious aspiration through carefully ordered spatial arrangements. While individual scenes have long been studied iconographically, The mechanisms through which tomb decoration constructs narrative meaning as an integrated visual system have received comparatively limited systematic analysis. The present thesis addresses this issue through a focused examination of the Chapel of Maya at Deir el-Medina, analyzed within the broader framework of New Kingdom tomb decoration.

The principal reference works for the tombs of the Theban Necropolis are Bertha Porter and Rosalind Moss (1960) and Friederike Kampp (1996). Both provide systematic discussions of each Theban Tomb, including dating and the names of tomb owners, with Porter and Moss also listing their principal titles.

Porter and Moss base their chronology primarily on inscriptional evidence—such as regnal dates and royal cartouches—supplemented by artistic criteria where precise dating is unavailable. Kampp builds upon this framework but refines the dating by classifying tombs according to architectural development, tracing their evolution from Middle Kingdom and early New Kingdom "Houses of the Dead" to Ramesside "private mortuary temples" (Kampp-Seyfried 2003: 10).

This thesis investigates how the narrative scenes in the Chapel of Maya reflect individual, social, and workshop-specific choices in the decoration of Eighteenth Dynasty tombs, and what challenges arise in comparing such visual programs across different contexts. By examining the visual and thematic organization of Maya's tomb in relation to comparable examples, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of narrative strategies in New Kingdom private tombs and to explore how artistic, ideological, and personal factors intersected in their creation.

1.1. Thesis Structure

The first chapter introduces the broader historical and cultural background of the New Kingdom. It discusses the evolution of tomb architecture and decoration under the Eighteenth Dynasty, outlining the ideological and religious functions of tomb imagery as both a medium of commemoration and a space of transformation for the deceased. Special attention is given to the concept of the tomb as a microcosm of cosmic and social order, reflecting both state ideology and individual aspirations. It provides a critical review of previous scholarship and theoretical frameworks used to interpret narrative representation in Egyptian art.

The second chapter traces how the concept of "narrativity" has been approached in Egyptology, art history, and visual studies, from early descriptive typologies to more recent models that emphasize viewer participation, visual syntax, and the temporal unfolding of meaning. Methodologically, the chapter integrates iconographic analysis with contextual and

comparative approaches, acknowledging the role of workshop practices, patronage, and intervisual references between tombs.

The forth chapter focuses on the Chapel of Maya as a case study. It examines the tomb's architecture, spatial organization, and iconographic program to understand how narrative meaning is constructed through the interplay of space, image, and ritual. Comparative examples from the Eighteenth Dynasty—such as the tombs of Rekhmire (TT 100), Userhat (TT 56), Horemheb (TT 78), and Nebamun and Ipuki (TT 181)—are discussed to highlight similarities and divergences in composition, theme, and workshop style. This comparison reveals both shared conventions and individual innovations that reflect the complex relationships among personal identity, social status, and artistic tradition.

Throughout these analyses, particular attention is given to the challenges of comparing visual programs that differ in scale, context, and preservation. The study addresses how factors such as patron agency, workshop organization, and spatial constraints affected the narrative structure of tomb decoration. The concluding section synthesizes these findings to propose a more nuanced understanding of narrative choices in Maya's chapel and situates them within the broader dynamics of Eighteenth Dynasty artistic production and commemorative practice.

2. Studies on Narrative in New Kingdom Art

2.1. Historical and Cultural Background of New Kingdom Art

The Eighteenth Dynasty (ca. 1550–1292 B.C.) marks the beginning of the New Kingdom, a period of political unification, imperial expansion, and cultural prosperity. Founded by Ahmose I, the dynasty established Thebes as the political and religious capital. Key rulers—Amenhotep I, Thutmose I–III, Hatshepsut, and Amenhotep III—oversaw military campaigns, architectural achievements, and artistic innovation. Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV) introduced a radical religious reform centered on the Aten, while later rulers, including Tutankhamun and Horemheb, restored traditional religious practices (Aldred, 1951, pp. 1-5).

Art of the period is notable for its diversity, combining monumental works, idealized and realistic portrayals, as well as traditional and experimental styles. While grounded in conservative traditions, Eighteenth Dynasty art reflects the social and ideological tensions of the time, balancing state authority, personal piety, and the memory of past foreign domination.

During the Eighteenth dynasty, royal burials took the form of rock-cut tombs at Thebes, with mortuary temples located separately. Tombs of officials were often decorated with tempera paintings on plastered walls. Painters were experimenting with narrative, historical, and daily life scenes. These developments reflect an evolving concept of the tomb as a record of personal identity and earthly achievements, rather than solely a vehicle for magical regeneration. Surviving examples, such as Hatshepsut's mortuary temple (see Figure 1), show a growing interest in narrative and commemorative imagery (Aldred, 1951, pp. 1-5).

During the late Second Intermediate and early Eighteenth Dynasties, tomb decoration evolved. Tombs at Hierakonpolis and el-Kab, painted by Sedjemneteru and his team, display skilled drafting without grids, reflecting a revival of older traditions and the need to train new artisans. The tomb of Renni (Amenhotep I) marks the transition to New Kingdom style: carefully proportioned figures, sunken relief, gray-blue backgrounds, and Egyptian blue hieroglyphs. Grain-filling scenes disappeared, replaced by agricultural and divine depictions typical of later Theban tombs.

Figure 1. Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri. From the Art Newbie (2024).

2.2. Previous Studies on Narrative in New Kingdom Art

The study of ancient Egyptian tomb decoration has long emphasized its religious, symbolic, and commemorative functions. In the New Kingdom, private tomb chapels were richly adorned with painted scenes combining ritual imagery, offering depictions, and representations of family and social life. These visual programs not only expressed beliefs about death and the afterlife but also reflected ideals of identity, status, and memory within the Theban elite. At the same time, questions of narrativity—whether these scenes tell stories, and if so, how—have remained comparatively underexplored.

2.2.1. Early Interpretations and the Problem of Narrativity

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Egyptologists such as Gaston Maspero (1886, p. 111), James Baikie (1932, p. 594), Alan Gardiner (1913, p. 6), and Arthur Weigall regarded funeral procession scenes as repetitive and monotonous, believing they were identical in every tomb.

Baikie described them as scenes one easily grew tired of, while Maspero acknowledged minor variations but dismissed them as unimportant. Gardiner and Weigall similarly referred to these scenes as stereotyped. This dismissive attitude was reflected in works like Emile Amelineau's Les sépultures et les funérailles dans l'ancienne Égypte, which included no discussion or illustration of funeral scenes, even in the chapter on the New Kingdom. However, Georges Foucart (1935) questioned why so little attention was paid to these scenes and suggested that many Egyptologists limited themselves to superficial descriptions instead of analyzing variations between tombs. In contrast, modern Egyptologist Carol Andrews (1994) recognized that funeral procession scenes actually show considerable variation, particularly in the details chosen and the sequence of their depiction (El-Shahawy, p. 81).

Earlier scholarship more generally regarded Egyptian art as essentially static, timeless, and non-narrative, with few exceptions such as royal battle reliefs[1] or exceptional historical events (Kantor 1957; Gaballa 1976; Braun 2020). Helen Kantor wrote that "if by narrative art we mean the rendering of specific events … involving recognizable personages, then surprisingly few works fulfilling these conditions can be found in the vast corpus of Egyptian representational art" (Kantor 1957, 44). For her, repeated or typical actions could not be considered narrative.

2.2.2. Foundational Theories and Definitions

One of the first comprehensive attempts to define Egyptian pictorial narrativity was Henri Albertus Groenewegen-Frankfort's Arrest and Movement: An Essay on Space and Time in the Representational Art of the Ancient Near East (1951/1970). She distinguished between "typical situations," which she saw as timeless and non-narrative, and "transient events," which alone qualified as narrative. In her view, canonical Egyptian art—established around 3000 BCE—deliberately avoided actuality and functional rendering in favor of symbolic forms. Thus, "daily life" scenes in tombs, despite their lively character, were considered pictorial conceits rather than representations of real events. Only monumental battle reliefs, such as those of Seti I (see Figure 2), were identified as truly narrative, while even Amarna-period images were seen as repetitive and therefore non-narrative.

Gaballa Ali Gaballa's Narrative in Egyptian Art (1976), the first monograph dedicated to the subject, followed this restrictive definition, seeing narrative only in specific identifiable events. Although he acknowledged dynamics and actuality in many depictions, he excluded them from

[1] Heinz identifies three main thematic groups in New Kingdom war scenes: pre-battle scenes, battle and campaign scenes, and post-battle scenes. A central concept in her analysis is the *Bezugspunkt der Erzählung*, the narrative point of reference defined by the temple's interior. The spatial placement of scenes reflects a conceptual movement away from Egypt during departure and battle and back toward Egypt in scenes of return and aftermath.
Heinz interprets monumental battle reliefs both as narrative sequences and as compositions shaped by architectural constraints. She argues that there is no standardized narrative structure for these reliefs and cautions against reading their spatial organization as a literal representation of historical chronology or geography. As a result, battle reliefs should not be treated as straightforward historical records but as carefully composed visual narratives adapted to specific architectural contexts (Heinz 2001, pp. 187–188).

narrative unless their historicity was clear. A similar approach was later adopted by Miral Lashien (2011), who restricted the term to unique, real moments in the life of the tomb owner, thereby excluding “ritual” and “daily life” depictions, no matter how dynamic (Lashien, 2011, pp, 1055–1062).

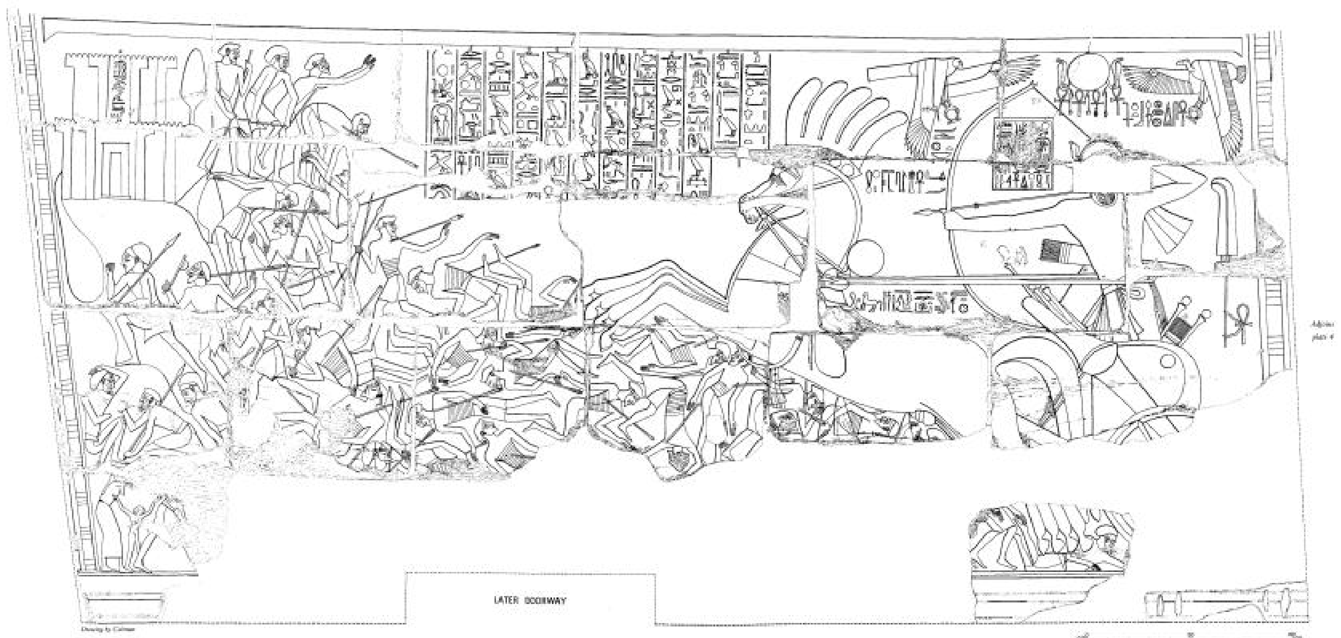

Figure 2. Battle relief scene, King Seti I attacking Shasu Bedouin near a town in canaan. (Epigraphic Survey, Reliefs and inscriptions at Karnak: The battle reliefs of King Sety I, Vol. 4, OIP 107, 1986).

2.2.3. Expanding the Concept: From Function to Perception

The 1990s witnessed the introduction of narratological theory into Egyptology, most prominently through Whitney Davis’s Masking the Blow (1992). Drawing on literary theory, Davis distinguished between fabula (the chronological sequence of events), story (their arrangement), and text (their actual representation). He argued that Egyptian images could be read narratively by reconstructing these levels through viewing—making narrativity an effect of interaction between image and viewer rather than a fixed property of the object.

Following this direction, Patricia A. Bochi explored how images create “time” through movement and repetition, introducing “temporality by inference,” where implied motion suggests sequence. However, he still denied full narrativity to such works, calling them “pseudo-narratives” since they functioned more as icons of ideas than as stories (Bochi 2003, 173–176).

More recently, Nadja S. Braun's Bilder erzählen. Visuelle Narrativität im alten Ägypten (2020) applied a prototype semantics approach, arguing that true narration requires “tellability”—the depiction of extraordinary events that rise above routine or ritual. Accordingly, she excluded most tomb and temple imagery as normative and non-narrative. In contrast, Frederik Rogner (2022) criticized the continued identification of narrativity with historicity, emphasizing instead the perceptual and formal qualities that evoke sequence and story, even without historical specificity.

2.2.4. Reassessing New Kingdom Tomb Decoration

Studies on New Kingdom tomb chapels have shown that “daily life” and funerary scenes function on multiple levels—as magical provision, as symbolic expressions of abundance, and as reflections of social identity (van Walsem 2005; Hartwig 2004). Groenewegen-Frankfort’s earlier framework remains influential, revealing how Egyptian imagery operated on both literal and transcendent levels, combining representation with deeper conceptual meaning. As Abeer Abd El Monem Mohamed El Shahawy observed, understanding these traditions allows us to appreciate how ancient Egyptian funerary customs continue to shape modern practices (El-Shahawy, p. 89).

Despite these advances, the narrative strategies of New Kingdom private tombs have rarely been systematically examined. The history of scholarship on Egyptian pictorial narrativity thus reveals a persistent tension between restrictive definitions—limiting narrative to rare historical episodes—and broader approaches that explore narrative effects through composition, temporality, and reception. This evolution opens the possibility of re-examining New Kingdom tomb decoration not only as symbolic or ritual imagery but also as visual narrative. It is within this context that the Chapel of Maya can be analyzed, contributing to a broader understanding of how Egyptian images communicate sequence, action, and meaning.

2.3. Studies on New Kingdom Tomb Chapels and their Decoration

Research on New Kingdom private tomb chapels has traditionally centered on the interpretation of their decorative programs, especially within the Theban necropolis. These studies have investigated both stylistic developments and thematic content, often debating whether “daily life” depictions should be read literally, symbolically, or magically. Early scholarship tended to view such scenes as reflections of real activities in the lives of the tomb owners, whereas more recent studies emphasize their ritual, symbolic, and commemorative functions.

2.3.1. Excavations and Documentation of New Kingdom Chapels

During Schiaparelli's mission in Deir el-Medina in1905,1906, 1908, and 1909 numerous tombs were uncovered—some from the Eighteenth Dynasty, but most from the Twentieth—

consisting largely of small mud-brick chapels with plastered walls, often built closely together. In addition to the mud-brick chapels, the excavations revealed a few rock-cut tomb shafts. Among the structures, the Italian team also uncovered small halls for public gatherings, chapels dedicated to the cults of deceased pharaohs, and walls decorated with paintings (Dorn & Polis, 2014, p. 109).

During Ernesto Schiaparelli's excavations at Deir el-Medina, two major discoveries were made: the Chapel of Maya (TT 338), with its wall paintings (inventory numbers S. 7886–7910), and the Tomb of Kha (TT 8), which included the shaft, passage, and burial chamber with the coffins and funerary equipment of Kha and Meryt. Because the excavation team worked at multiple sites, gaps in the inventory numbering help identify which objects came from each season of work. Schiaparelli's reports to the Italian Ministry of Education note that during the first season in 1905, the most important work took place in the necropolis of Deir el-Medina, around the temple of Hathor, where more than 500 workers excavated for over forty days. They cleared areas with up to 15 meters of debris, mainly on the upper slopes of the western mountain (Dorn & Polis, 2014, p. 109).

The earliest systematic documentation of Theban tombs was carried out by Norman de Garis Davies, whose careful copies of wall paintings remain indispensable (Davies 1913–1933). His work laid the foundation for stylistic and iconographic studies, though at the time interpretive frameworks were limited largely to descriptive recording.

Systematic excavations in the North Saqqara plateau have documented numerous New Kingdom tombs. The EES–Leiden expedition (1975–1998), later continued with the Museo Egizio, focused on locating tombs such as that of Maya (028/usc). Additional New Kingdom tombs were found north of this area by Cairo University's team, including the tomb of Vizier Neferrenpet (034/usc), and later excavations (2005 onward) nearly connected the Leiden–Turin and Cairo University concession areas. Loose blocks from New Kingdom tombs have also been discovered near the valley temple of Unas and at the monastery of Apa-Jeremias, indicating reuse of tomb materials. At the southern North Saqqara plateau, New Kingdom tomb shafts cut through earlier mastabas, although their superstructures were not preserved. Together, these findings show a widespread distribution of New Kingdom tomb clusters across North Saqqara (Staring, 2023, pp. 85–86).

One major challenge in studying the New Kingdom necropolis at Saqqara is that most tombs are "lost." Many were excavated in the early 19th century but soon disappeared due to shifting desert sands. Additionally, the tombs are usually not systematically numbered, which complicates tracking how many are known. In contrast, Thebes uses a consistent system assigning each tomb a unique TT ("Theban Tomb") number, preventing confusion. At Saqqara, multiple numbering systems exist for a small number of tombs, creating ambiguity; for example, there are at least 14 possible candidates for the "tomb of Ptahmose." While adding the individual's principal title could reduce confusion, a unique numbering system would remove all doubt. The author therefore proposes a comprehensive numbering system for the Saqqara New Kingdom necropolis, after first reviewing existing systems, which are mostly tied to specific excavation concession areas (Staring, 2023, p. 73).

2.3.2. The Painters and the Practice of Tomb Decoration

Most of the documentary evidence concerning painting and painters comes from Deir el-Medina and dates to the Ramesside period. Scholars such as Cathleen Keller (2001), Tamás Bács (2001, 2011), and Kathlyn Cooney (2008) have shown that these village artisans also decorated tombs for private individuals, both within Deir el-Medina and in the elite necropolis to the north, though how often they worked outside the village remains unclear.

The surviving records provide little information about specific work processes beyond the general terms seen in the Ramesses IV tomb plan papyrus (Museo Egizio, n.d.). Furthermore, since the artisans were reorganized by the crown after the Amarna period, it is unknown whether Eighteenth Dynasty painters were divided into right and left crews, as no evidence has emerged to confirm or deny this. (Bryan, 2017, p. 4)

In the first half of the Eighteenth Dynasty, tomb decoration was likely carried out by artisans from royal temple projects, not by the specialized crews later known from Deir el-Medina. The Theban elites, who supervised royal construction projects, could direct artisans to decorate their own tombs as well. Evidence for this comes from ostraca studied by William Hayes (1942&1960), which mention tomb construction for Senenmut, Hatshepsut's steward, and connections to major royal monuments such as Djeser Djeseru (Hatshepsut's temple) and Djeser Akhet (Thutmose III's temple) (Bryan, 2010, p. 1004).

2.3.3. Painting Terminology and Artistic Processes

A group of ostraca excavated by the Metropolitan Museum of Art appears to document the construction of a tomb presumed to be the upper tomb of the royal steward Senemut, around 1471 BCE. Additional ostraca concern Senemut's lower tomb, Hatshepsut's funerary temple Djeser Djeseru, Thutmose III's high temple Djeser Akhet, and others with less certain references. These texts, dating to the reigns of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III (ca. 1479-1430 BCE), contain terminology related to building and decorating tombs and temples.

Bryan (2017, pp. 15-17) examined these ostraca in detail, identifying a sequence of technical terms associated with painting stages. Terms such as ꜣʿʿ and ỉʿʿ ("to plaster") refer to filling and smoothing surfaces, while šʿd ("to trim") denotes the final stage of wall preparation. The verb dqw/dqr/dgꜣ ("to apply background paint") described creating background layers rather than plastering. The compound term wꜣḥ ḏrỉw ("to lay out pigments") referred to the sketching stage carried out by scribes, while drỉw/dr ("to paint") indicated the application of color.

The noun sš ("scribe"), combined with qd(t) ("form"), denoted a draftsman responsible for decorating monuments. Bryan concluded that sš referred to final outlining, while wꜣḥ ḏrỉw described preliminary layout work, demonstrating a sophisticated division of artistic labor in Eighteenth Dynasty tomb decoration.

2.3.4. Interpretation of Tomb Decoration: Function and Meaning

In the later twentieth century, studies increasingly addressed the function of chapel decoration in relation to Egyptian beliefs about death and the afterlife. Herman Kees (1926) highlighted the connection between tomb imagery and funerary belief, though his approach was shaped primarily by religious history rather than analysis of the visual program itself.

A major line of inquiry has focused on the so-called "scenes of daily life," such as agriculture, fishing, and craft production. For a long time, these were interpreted as straightforward depictions of activities familiar to the deceased, serving as pleasant reminders of earthly life. Later, however, scholars such as Jan Assmann (2003) and Lise Manniche (1987) argued that these images were not mere illustrations but rather integral to the cult of the dead, functioning to secure provision for eternity.

René van Walsem (2005, 2012) further emphasized the polyvalence of Egyptian images, showing that depictions could be understood simultaneously as literal, symbolic, and magical. A harvest scene, for instance, might serve as a record of activity, an evocation of abundance, and a magical provision for the afterlife.

2.3.5. Tomb Decoration as Social Identity and Narrative Structure

Another important development in scholarship has been the exploration of how chapel scenes reflect the social identity of the tomb owner and his family. Menna's tomb (TT 69) has been analyzed as both a reflection of elite status and a medium of collective memory (Baines, 1985; Hartwig, 2004). Similarly, the tombs of Rekhmire (TT 100) and Sennefer (TT 96) integrate official duties, family roles, and funerary rituals, embedding individual identity within the ideological framework of the New Kingdom elite (Kampp 1996).

Recent research has also highlighted the narrative dimension of chapel decoration. Although many scholars hesitate to call such images "narrative" in the strict sense, they increasingly recognize that sequences of scenes—such as funerary processions, offering rituals, or pilgrimages to Abydos—are arranged to guide the viewer through a structured progression of actions (Rogner 2022, 52).

In this way, the tomb chapel itself becomes a space where the living and the dead interact through ritualized images that both recall and perform essential rites.

2.3.6. Research Gap

Overall, studies of New Kingdom tomb chapels have moved from descriptive recording toward interpretive frameworks that stress symbolism, ritual function, and social identity. Yet despite these advances, the narrative strategies of tomb decoration—how images create temporal sequences, connect actions across registers, and stage interactions between figures—have often remained underexplored.

The review of previous scholarship reveals two parallel but often disconnected lines of inquiry: first studies of Egyptian pictorial narrativity, which have focused on theoretical definitions of narrative; and second research on tomb chapel decoration, which has emphasized function and symbolism.

This thesis aims to bridge these two fields by analyzing the Chapel of Maya not only in terms of iconography and function, but also in terms of its narrative structure and visual storytelling strategies, situating it within broader New Kingdom artistic traditions.

3. Concept of Narrative in New Kingdom Art

3.1. Narrative in Visual Arts

Narrative, as a structured method of representing events and experiences, extends beyond literature into visual arts, where time, causality, and sequence are conveyed through composition, gesture, and spatial arrangement. In visual media, narrative operates both formally—through framing, repetition, or perspective—and conceptually, by guiding the viewer's interpretation of events and relationships within a scene.

Visual narration appears on various media—from pottery and wall paintings to books and digital screens—and each medium shapes the strategies of storytelling it enables. The origins of narration can be traced to the basic nature of the image itself: a flat representation created through forms and colors, providing a framework to convey actions or events (Graf, 2017, pp. 157–174).

The concept of "narrative" in visual art is more complex than the straightforward telling of a story. While some scholars, such as Gaballa (1967) and Braun, argue that many images were not created to narrate events, they can still convey a vivid sense of time, movement, and life. It is essential to distinguish between narrativity (the experiential effect of temporal or causal progression), storytelling (the intention to narrate), and story-reference (links to known narratives), as demonstrated for the Egyptian New Kingdom (Rogner, 2022, p. 21).

According to Stansbury-O'Donnell (2011), the analysis of visual narration primarily depends on how often characters appear and how changes in space and time are represented across scenes. As outlined in his typology, single images can be monoscenic, synoptic, or progressive, while narratives composed of multiple images can be unified, cyclical, continuous, episodic, or serial. Although such systems are useful for categorization, Stansbury-O'Donnell acknowledges, echoing Cartier-Bresson (1952), that visual storytelling ultimately transcends formal classification, as it engages the intellect, perception, and emotion simultaneously. To fully grasp a visual narrative, one must consider the integrated process of seeing, reading, and interpreting an image. Since a single image can depict only one moment, the viewer's mind plays an active role in constructing continuity and coherence. The chosen medium also shapes narrative strategies: for example, storytelling on three-dimensional objects like Greek vases operates between ornament and narration, using the vessel's circular form rather than creating

an illusion of depth. In contrast, painting on flat surfaces—such as Botticelli's frescoes or his illustrated books—offers opportunities to explore temporal progression and spatial detail in distinct ways (Stansbury-O'Donnell, 1999, p. 7).

If narrative art is defined as the depiction of specific events—mythological, historical, or fictional—few examples exist in Egyptian visual art. Complete mythological cycles are absent; only isolated episodes, such as the conception of Horus by Osiris in Seti I's Abydos temple (see Figure 3), appear, reflecting funerary importance rather than narrative intent. Scenes like the sky goddess Nut upheld by Shu function more as cosmological diagrams than as sequences of events (Kantor, 1957, p. 44). The earliest attempts at narrative specificity date to the Gerzean phase of the Predynastic period, such as decorated vases, ivory carvings, or slate palettes depicting hunts and processions (Kantor, 1957, p. 44).

Modern art theory emphasizes how single images can imply broader sequences. Charles Le Brun (2003) suggested that a painting should evoke events preceding and following the depicted moment, while Lessing (2007) introduced the concept of the "pregnant moment," implying narrative beyond the single frame (Rogner, 2022, pp. 29–30). Continuous narration, in which repeated figures signal the passage of time, also reflects this principle.

Rogner (2022) also explains that narrative can extend across multiple images, as seen in scrolls, comic pages, or monumental architectural cycles. Such sequences translate linearity into spatial and pictorial form, distinct from textual storytelling. Comparative traditions—from European illustrative sequences to Mesoamerican boustrophedon codices—demonstrate diverse strategies for conveying temporal progression, causal relationships, and spatial context. Even in sequences, visual narration rarely mirrors strict linearity, emphasizing key moments over rigid chronological order. In monumental settings, artists could not fully control how viewers moved through the space, so multiple narrative layers often coexist, with storylines progressing across panels while thematic or spatial references reinforce overarching ideas (Rogner, 2022, pp. 27–28).

In the case of Egyptian tombs, "image" refers to the individual visual unit or "image field" within architectural decoration. These units were integrated into their surroundings, with boundaries defined by friezes, baselines, or color guides. Monumental works—reliefs and wall paintings in temples and tombs—were created for permanence, embedding content within enduring contexts and discourses (Rogner, 2022, pp. 11–12). Narrative effects in such works are deeply shaped by cultural context, viewing practices, and material permanence.

The formal analysis of pictorial devices in New Kingdom Egyptian art should not be viewed as the identification of a fixed set of "rules" or a rigid "toolkit" that artists simply selected from. Rather, the categories emerge from an external analytical perspective, isolating certain features as "possibilities" or "mechanisms." For ancient Egyptian artists and patrons, these constituted just a subset within a broad and creatively dynamic tradition. They actively engaged with their inherited visual language, generating unique and innovative combinations tailored to each depiction. (Rogner, 2022, p. 44)

Effective visual storytelling relies on context. Single images can become narrative when they capture decisive, ambiguous moments; continuity can be created through techniques similar to

cinematic montage, and text can anchor meaning, especially in religious contexts. Throughout history, visual narration has merged imagery and storytelling, evolving alongside the development of images themselves.

Having outlined the broader concept of visual narrativity, it is now necessary to consider how this concept applies specifically to New Kingdom tomb decoration.

Figure 3. conception of Horus by Osiris in Seti I's Abydos temple. Adapted from Kingship and the gods: A study of ancient Near Eastern religion as the integration of society and nature (H. Frankfort, 1978, University of Chicago Press.

3.2. Narrative in Egyptian New Kingdom tomb decoration

During the New Kingdom, tomb paintings developed both traditional and innovative qualities. While temple reliefs largely retained conventional religious depictions, tomb painters embraced new approaches. Mud and plaster walls decorated with tempera acquired distinctive qualities and became recognized as an independent art form. This period also reflects broader cultural tensions: the Hyksos invasion, exposure to Mediterranean cultures, and internal contradictions produced a mix of traditional and modern styles, monumental and miniature works, idealized and realistic representations, and a focus on both personal biography and

eternal truths. In the concept of Egyptian painting, we should first consider the purpose and functionality in tomb decoration.

3.2.1. Functions of Tomb Narratives

With regards to the concept of narrativity in New Kingdom imagery, it is necessary to consider its function and the reasons underlying the decoration of tombs.

Ancient Egyptian beliefs are central to understanding the functionality of tomb decoration. their belief held that earthly life was brief and transitional, while the afterlife constituted the true and eternal existence. Death was understood not as an end but as a necessary transformation, a passage into a renewed form of life for which individuals prepared throughout their lifetime through religious practices, moral conduct, and the construction of tombs and monuments. Although death remained constantly present in Egyptian consciousness, it did not diminish their enjoyment of life; rather, life and death were seen as closely interconnected. The tomb functioned not as a final resting place but as an eternal dwelling, equipped with objects essential for continued existence. Tomb decoration further reflects this continuity, particularly in festival and banquet scenes where it is often deliberately ambiguous whether the tomb owner is represented as living or deceased, reinforcing the Egyptian conception of existence as an unbroken continuum extending beyond death. Therefore, the New Kingdom tomb functioned as a representation of both earthly life and the afterlife, a dual role that is reflected in its wall imagery and overall conception (Hodel-Hoenes, 2000, pp. 2-3).

Even the simplest private tombs of the Theban necropolis belonged to members of the propertied classes, while poor peasants could only afford shallow desert pits with minimal belongings and sustenance. During the New Kingdom, the wealthy class mainly consisted of officials and military officers, and Thebes became a dominant religious center, with the Theban priesthood gaining power in Dynasty XX. The private tombs reflect these developments, as owners sought their "homes of eternity" in Thebes. Depictions of the king or royal couple became more frequent, emphasizing personal relationships and duties performed for the monarch rather than religious mediation. Tomb size depended more on official position than personal wealth, although wealth was often linked to office; social, political, and religious conditions also influenced tomb decoration and architecture (Hodel-Hoenes, 2000, pp. 3-4).

Tomb paintings fulfilled magical, religious, and increasingly biographical purposes. Scenes of hunting, fishing, banquets, and entertainment ensured enjoyment in the afterlife, while depictions of receiving foreign envoys, training soldiers, or participating in court ceremonies recorded personal achievements (Aldred, 1951, p. 5). Most scenes depict general processes rather than specific events; symbolic and timeless imagery predominates over sequential storytelling (Groenewegen-Frankfort, 1951; Kantor, 1947).

In considering the function of tomb decoration, it is also necessary to take into account what Bryan (2017) said that painting a tomb was a ritual act transforming space into a dynamic environment that guided the deceased into the afterlife. Pigments were believed to repel illness, provide healing, and maintain ritual purity (Bryan, 2017, p. 21). Front chambers, where visitors

gathered during festivals and funerary rites, were designed to engage viewers, combining artistic excellence with ritual and social functions (Bryan, 2010, pp. 990-1007).

In relation to Egyptian beliefs about painting, it is also important to note that connections between painting and medicine were recognized by artisans. According to Deir el-Medina Online (2009), an ostracon from Deir el-Medina (Berlin Inv. P 11247) records the draftsman Pay instructing his son to bring honey, yellow ochre, and galena for his eyes, reflecting both medical knowledge and personal experience of eye disease (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Ostracon O. Berlin P. 11247, Deir el-Medine Online ID 290. Image © Deir el-Medine Online. Retrieved from https://dem-online.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/fragment.php?id=209

3.2.2. Workshops and artists

While the previous section focused on the function and meaning of tomb decoration in the New Kingdom, attention must also be given to the artists themselves and the workshop structures and practices that shaped their production.

In one notable example, the inscription of King Neferhotep concerning Abydos rituals, even claims that the king personally participated in the workshop process. This involvement may have served ritual purposes, but it also ensured that the image precisely followed specifications revealed through an ancient scroll. A later and fragmentary inscription from the reign of Akhenaten suggests a similar situation, although framed by his religious reforms (Redford 1981) (Nyord, 2020, pp. 39-40).

Egyptian sources typically highlight the king as patron, with little detail on interactions with craftsmen (Nyord, 2020, pp. 40-41).

A very different perspective on image-makers appears several centuries later in the evidence from Deir el-Medina, the planned village established to house royal tomb craftsmen working in the Valley of the Kings (McDowell, 2002; Meskell, 2002). This isolated settlement, located away from the Nile and closely controlled, was inhabited by state-employed artisans and their families. The community stands out for its unusually high levels of literacy and its intense engagement with artistic production. Because of their specialized skills and physical isolation, inhabitants frequently produced images themselves for both everyday and funerary purposes. Their literacy and restricted social environment also meant that many image-related

transactions were recorded in writing, often on ostraca—pottery sherds or limestone flakes used as convenient writing and drawing surfaces.

Additional evidence from the Theban west bank sheds light on the broader social and economic framework of artistic production in necropolis contexts (Hartwig 2004: 22–35). For private tombs, access to skilled craftsmen appears to have depended largely on the patron's social networks, since many artisans were attached to state or institutional workshops. Regardless of the means of procurement, decorated tombs required substantial financial investment (Hartwig 2004: 26–27; Cooney 2007) (Nyord, pp, 37-39).

This passage explains how the identities and social roles of image-makers in ancient Egypt are largely obscured by Egyptian ways of talking about images and image production (Quirke 2003; Laboury 2013). Images were primarily understood as tools for establishing a relationship with the depicted being, rather than as expressions of individual artistic creativity. As a result, technical skill was valued mainly as a means to fulfill this function, and when it was acknowledged, it enhanced the prestige of the patron rather than that of the maker. This understanding aligns more closely with modern ideas of "craft" than "art," although the Egyptian language itself did not distinguish between the two. Such a relatively backgrounded role for image-makers is not unusual in traditional societies more broadly (d'Azevedo, 1989 [1973]) (Nyord, 2020, p.p. 34-37).

Image-makers in ancient Egypt were largely anonymous. When names appear in or next to images, they usually belong to the patron (the tomb owner, king, or elite individual) or to members of that person's social circle, not to the artist. As a result, the images themselves tell us very little directly about who made them or how the creative process unfolded. Any understanding of the artist's identity, training, or working conditions must therefore be reconstructed indirectly, using other kinds of sources that occasionally illuminate the relationships between artists, patrons, and the broader social networks in which they operated.

Second, the text turns to the social life of images after their creation, especially how they were received by viewers, whether those viewers were intended or unintended. Here, the key issue is aesthetics. While aesthetic judgment is a defining feature in some cross-cultural definitions of "art" as noted by John Baines (2015, pp. 2-3), such concerns do not align easily with the relational and functional roles of Egyptian images discussed earlier. This tension raises an important question: how do aesthetic value and function relate to each other? The passage suggests that Egyptians were likely capable of judging images as "beautiful" or "ugly," but it remains unclear whether such judgments determined whether an image was considered effective, successful, or appropriate in fulfilling its purpose (Nyord, 2020, p. 29).

The New Kingdom saw a high level of artistic skill among the craftsmen. Transparent garments were painted with careful attention to folds, proportion, and detail, as in the linen robes of the pharaohs (Cartocci & Rosati, 2007, p. 173). Artists experimented with three-quarter and frontal views, shading colors for depth, and adapting row organization to fit the narrative of the scene (Shedid, 1988; Bryan, 2009).

The tombs of Horemkhauef and Sobeknakht, now dated to the Seventeenth Dynasty immediately preceding the New Kingdom, provide evidence for named artists and

collaborators (W. V. Davies, 2001b). The primary artist, Sedjemneteru, is depicted and named in both tombs. In the tomb of Horemkhauef, he was accompanied by a second "scribe of form." In both chapels, representations of the tomb craftsmen appear in addition to the scribes (W. V. Davies, 2001b; Junker, 1957). (Bryan, 2010, p. 1000).

In the late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Dynasties, tomb decoration reflects both continuity and transition in artistic practice. At Hierakonpolis and el-Kab, expert artisans were highly valued, and even lower-status tomb builders were represented at work (Junker, 1957). (Bryan, 2010, p. 1000).

With the renewed monument building at Thebes beginning under Ahmose, the training of artisan crews became necessary (Friedman, 2001; Harvey, 1998; Robins, 2001b). in addition, the establishment of the use of grids in the reign of Thutmose II, and the change in figural proportions around the reign of Thutmose III, shows that the use of grids functioned as a method for training artisans (Bryan, 2010, pp. 1000-1004).

Skilled artisans were often assigned to prominent areas such as front chambers, while junior collaborators handled secondary or less visible sections (Shedid, 1988; Bryan, 2009).

Shedid (1988) also notes that from the reign of Thutmose III onward, in the Eighteenth Dynasty tombs the highest-quality painting was typically concentrated in the front chambers, while the rear rooms often show differences in quality, Bryan (2009) mentions this difference was likely not due to lighting, but to the deliberate allocation of the best artists and most labor-intensive work to the front chambers, where visitors gathered during festivals such as the Beautiful Feast of the Valley and during funerary rites (Bryan, 2010, p. 1002).

During the reign of Thutmose III, Egypt's imperial expansion brought wealth, foreign influence, and the rise of a new class of patrons which stimulated craft production and provided a large body of skilled artisans. Royal workshops produced high-quality objects reflecting both Theban and Memphite influences. Memphis was playing a renewed role in shaping stylistic trends alongside Theban workshops, and contributing to both private and official artistic programs (Aldred, 1951, p. 16).

In Theban tombs, painters worked within workshops that included both master artists and younger or less experienced collaborators. Early Eighteenth Dynasty tombs, such as those of User and Rekhmire, continued Middle Kingdom traditions: careful draftsmanship, strong outlines, broad washes of color, and rectangular registers. Slightly later tombs, such as that of Qenamun, show innovations in background color, brushwork, attention to detail, and the depiction of movement and depth, indicating experimentation within the workshops. Minor figures—laborers, dancers, and professional mourners—were often the work of less experienced artists, allowing them to practice freer poses and expressive gestures while master painters handled major compositions (Aldred, 1951, pp. 16-18).

Artists executed reliefs and paintings with conveying mood, spirituality, and humility, reflecting the individuality of the tomb owner while still operating within the overarching conventions of Egyptian art (Aldred, 1951, pp. 20-21).

These Artisans and scribes working in Thebes, came from royal temple projects and workshops, often overseen by powerful elites responsible for temples, royal tombs, and their own tombs. Evidence from ostraca documents shows that artisans participated in building and decorating both royal and elite private tombs during the Eighteenth Dynasty (Hayes, 1942, 1960). In some cases, crews of Deir el-Medina artisans were hired for cemeteries outside their village, particularly in the second half of the dynasty, when the organization of workers became more systematic (Keller, 2001; Andreu, 2002) (Cartocci & Rosati, 2007, p. 225).

It is suggested that many artisans decorating elite tombs may have come from large royal temple projects. As Thebes reorganized resources to rebuild major temples—particularly Karnak, royal funerary temples, and the Valley of the Kings—the powerful elites overseeing royal construction were also preparing their own tombs. In their administrative roles, they were likely able to direct skilled artisans to build and decorate their own monuments. (Bryan, 2010, pp. 1003-1004).

A group of ostraca published by Hayes (1942; 1960) refers to tomb construction, including material presumed to relate to the tomb of the royal steward Senenmut (c. 1468 BC), as well as works connected to the funerary temple of Hatshepsut (Djeser Djeseru) and the temple Djeser Akhet built by Thutmose III. These documents provide evidence of administrative coordination between royal building projects and elite tomb construction. (Bryan, 2010, p. 1004).

New Kingdom image producers usually worked within temple or palace administrations. Draftsmen, sculptors, and painters on private tombs in Thebes belonged to these workshops. The Eighteenth Dynasty centralized artisans in Deir el-Medina, the workers' village, an institutional unit. Employing palace or temple workers required connections or wealth. Their availability was limited by temple or palace obligations, economic difficulties, or early tomb owner deaths, explaining why many Theban tombs remain unfinished (Rogner, 2022, p. 44).

Many artists who decorated private tombs in Thebes were connected to the estate of Amun. This institutional network included both high-ranking officials and lower administrative figures, creating a shared visual culture across the necropolis (Bryan & Dorman, 2023, p. 131). While this system promoted stylistic cohesion, it still allowed for subtle differences between workshops.

An art-historical analysis shows that pre-Amarna tombs at Deir el-Medina were generally modest and repetitive compared to contemporary elite tombs in the Theban necropolis. Their decoration often relied on a simple and widely shared iconographic repertoire, similar to that seen on inexpensive funerary monuments like stelae. Although some ambition is occasionally visible, the overall artistic level and innovation appear limited. In contrast, elite Theban tombs display highly individualized and carefully adapted decorative schemes that respond to architectural space and the tomb owner's identity. Preparatory sketches in these elite tombs suggest that artists had considerable creative freedom, elaborating on basic compositional plans. Such artistic independence seems largely absent in pre-Amarna Deir el-Medina tombs, indicating a noticeable gap in skill and creative autonomy. This raises the question of whether

Eighteenth Dynasty artists of Deir el-Medina were capable of decorating elite Theban tombs at all (Bryan & Dorman, 2023, p. 131).

At the same time, the Deir el-Medina workforce—although somewhat secluded due to their involvement in royal tomb construction—was not completely isolated. Administrative evidence suggests they were overseen by high officials connected to the domain of Amun, such as the mayor of Thebes and possibly the High Priest of Amun. Titles like "painter of Amun in the Place-of-Maat" further demonstrate institutional ties. Therefore, it is plausible that both elite private tomb decoration and royal tomb construction were supervised by the same central authority, likely based on the eastern bank of the Nile (Bryan & Dorman, 2023, p. 137).

Andreu (2002) explains unlike the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties—when artisans from Deir el-Medina, including those who worked in the royal tombs of the Valley of the Kings, could be hired by local officials (Keller, 2001)—there is no direct documentation linking royal tomb workers to elite tomb decoration in the early Eighteenth Dynasty.

At the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty, artists in the Theban workshops became particularly skilled in depicting scenes of intense and excessive grief (El-Shahawy, 2007, p. 37).

It also appears based on Alice Cartocci and Gloria Rosati (2007) that during the reign of Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV), at the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty, the pharaoh himself directed the artists and established new artistic rules, marking a decisive break from earlier conventions. Before leaving Thebes, Pharoah commissioned a series of colossal statues at Karnak, presenting a radically new image of kingship. These statues, with elongated features, narrow eyes, emaciated faces, delicate torsos, and exaggerated hips and thighs, introduced a deliberately provocative and innovative visual language that challenged traditional ideals. This new style created a model for representing the royal family, which gradually extended to the monuments of private individuals (Cartocci & Rosati, 2007, pp. 250-251).

During the co-regency of Amenhotep III and Akhenaten, the revolutionary changes in ideology and court life had a profound impact on the artists and workshops of the period. The shift towards the monotheistic worship of the Aten and the emphasis on the human, domestic life of the Pharaoh required artists to depart from traditional modes of representation and adapt to new visual demands. While ritual scenes continued to follow established iconography, many compositions—especially those depicting the royal family and courtiers—required a more expressive, intimate, and spatially integrated approach (Aldred, 1951, pp. 22-23).

The artists available for Akhenaten's ambitious projects were primarily younger craftsmen who were not yet fully trained in the conventions of Egyptian art. This circumstance facilitated experimentation, as they were less constrained by inherited techniques and more receptive to the new royal directives (Aldred, 1951, p. 24).

Painting workshops at Tell el-Amarna and in the rock-cut tombs of officials reflected these changes in both composition and execution. The traditional use of registers was abandoned in favor of large, continuous scenes where principal actors were emphasized in the foreground, and secondary figures were integrated into a natural spatial arrangement. Courtiers and

attendants were depicted in poses and gestures previously reserved for minor figures, reflecting a deliberate vernacularisation of art. Emotions such as joy, pride, and mourning were expressed through posture and facial expression, rather than symbolic gestures, providing young artists with opportunities to explore psychological and narrative representation (Aldred, 1951, pp. 25-26).

The workshops' output also shows varying levels of technical skill. While younger or less experienced artists handled minor details, such as crowds or attendants, master-painters and senior collaborators executed the main scenes and principal figures, ensuring both adherence to royal stylistic directives and the maintenance of technical quality. Reliefs and paintings demonstrate freer modeling in plaster on friable rock cores, with dramatic exaggeration and expressive detail, marking a clear departure from the more disciplined and conventional work produced for Amenhotep III's projects at Thebes. Nevertheless, not all contemporary artists immediately embraced the Amarna style. Tombs such as those of Kheruef, Ra-mose, and Par-en-nefer show that conventional Theban techniques persisted alongside the new approach. In these cases, traditional carving and painting continued in most sections, with only the latest additions or minor areas reflecting Akhenaten's directives (Aldred, 1951, pp. 27-28).

Following the death of Amenhotep III in the ninth year of the co-regency, the later phase of the Amarna period saw significant changes in workshop activity and artistic output. The proscription of the cults of Amen and other deities, along with the cessation of the large-scale projects initiated by Amenhotep III, released a substantial number of skilled craftsmen who subsequently relocated to the new capital. This influx of highly trained labor contributed to a refinement in the execution of Amarna art, providing a more traditional touch even as the revolutionary style persisted. Nevertheless, senior master-draughtsmen maintained their earlier mannerisms, creating a coexistence of conservative and innovative tendencies within the workshops (Aldred, 1951, pp. 28-29).

3.2.3. Tomb Locations and orientation

Most known New Kingdom tombs are in the Necropolis of Western Thebes (Gaballa, 1967, p. 2). The Theban Necropolis is situated on the western bank of modern Luxor and encompasses several major funerary and settlement areas, including the Valley of the Kings, the Valley of the Queens, the royal mortuary temples, the workers' settlement at Deir el-Medina, and the so-called Tombs of the Nobles. This private cemetery consists of hundreds of non-royal tombs arranged along the desert margin bordering the cultivated floodplain and running parallel to the Nile. Geographically, it is framed by the Theban Mountains to the west—beyond which lies the Valley of the Kings—and by the line of royal mortuary temples to the east. The New Kingdom necropolis stretches from el-Tarif in the north to the modern road leading to Deir el-Medina in the south and is subdivided into distinct topographical sectors: Dra Abu el-Naga, Deir el-Bahri, el-Asasif, el-Khokha, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, and Qurnet Murai. Additionally, Deir el-Medina contains a separate enclosed burial ground (Slinger, 2022, p. 1).

During the late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Dynasties, tombs in the Theban Necropolis clustered in areas such as Dra Abu el-Naga, Qurna, el-Khokha, and later Qurnet Murai. Choices were influenced by proximity to royal tombs and mortuary temples, visibility, elevation, alignment with the Beautiful Festival of the Valley, and association with Middle Kingdom elites. Tomb clusters shifted over time, expanding eastward or onto lower slopes due to space constraints. During the Amarna Period, most burials moved to Amarna, and after the return to Thebes, Qurnet Murai became increasingly popular. Deir el-Medina tombs, belonging to village craftsmen, show chronological patterns but reflect local population homogeneity rather than necropolis-wide trends (Slinger, 2022, pp. 41-49).

The cemetery of Deir el-Medina contains 54 Theban Tombs (TTs), all dating to the New Kingdom. Of these, six are securely dated to the Eighteenth Dynasty (TT8, TT291, TT325, TT338, TT340 and TT354), with two additional tombs assigned broadly to either the Eighteenth or Nineteenth Dynasty (TT6 and TT268) (Slinger, 2022, p. 241). The cemetery was used exclusively by the craftsmen and inhabitants of the village (Slinger, 2022, p. 251).

During the Eighteenth Dynasty, Thebes remained the main burial center for elites, although as Alain Zivie (2007) mentions evidence from Saqqara, broadens this view.

Saqqara occupies the central zone of the Memphite necropolis, extending approximately 6.2 km between Abusir in the north and Dahshur in the south, and is conventionally divided into North and South Saqqara (Staring, 2023, p. 59). Four clusters of New Kingdom tombs have been identified on the North Saqqara plateau: the eastern escarpment above Abusir, the Teti Pyramid Cemetery, the Cliff of Ankhtawy (later the Bubasteion), and the area south of the Unas causeway. (Staring, 2023, p. 65). The Saqqara plateau is characterized by an uneven, undulating landscape, and the main concentrations of New Kingdom tomb construction developed on its higher elevations, particularly at the Teti Pyramid Cemetery in the north and the Unas South Cemetery in the south. No evidence suggests that these two cemeteries were connected during the New Kingdom, as no tombs from this period have been found in the areas between them (Staring, 2023, p. 70).

Sheikh Abd el-Qurna also became a favored burial site starting with Hatshepsut's regency. likely due to its view of the processional route to her temple at Deir el-Bahri, where the Beautiful Feast of the Valley was celebrated (Bryan, 2010, p. 1002).

Having outlined the main locations of New Kingdom tombs, it is important to consider the social and hierarchical factors which influenced the choice of these sites and the orientation of the tombs.

The New Kingdom private tombs were generally aligned along an east–west axis and oriented toward the rising sun, emphasizing their association with Re-Horakhty (Staring, 2023, pp. 71-72).

3.2.4. Tomb Owners and Tombs

Tomb owners often held multiple titles and could therefore belong to more than one occupational category. One principal group consisted of members of the priesthood, including various types of priests as well as individuals with specialised or esoteric functions, such as the "Chief of the Brazier Burners," the "Scribe of Divine Records," and the "Head of the Master of Ceremonies." A second category included officials connected to the temple estate in administrative capacities rather than strictly religious roles, such as stewards, overseers of temple departments (treasury, granary, storehouse), the Overseer of Works, temple scribes, and others responsible for temple provisioning. The third category includes officials holding royal administrative titles and affiliated with the palace or court, serving the king and royal family directly. This group comprises royal stewards, heralds, butlers, physicians, nurses, royal scribes, and overseers of the king's treasury, granary, or harem. Members of the royal family themselves—royal sons, wives, and daughters—form a small, distinct subgroup.

Another category represents the centralised state administration, including high officials with nationwide authority such as viziers, chancellors, overseers of the state treasury and granary, and holders of major agricultural offices. In contrast, the local administration consists of officials with regional authority, including mayors, local governors, harbour-masters, and provincial representatives such as the "King's Son of Kush" and the "Eyes of the King" in foreign territories.

Military officials constitute a separate group, encompassing titles such as Overseer of the Army, Lieutenant Commander, Captain of Troops, Chief of Horses, and Military Scribe. Finally, a category is reserved for tomb owners known only through honorary court titles, such as "Sole Companion" or "Child of the Nursery." When honorary titles occur alongside functional ones, the latter determine the occupational classification (Slinger, 2022, pp. 4–5).

Research on the development of the private Theban necropolis shows that its organisation was neither strictly chronological nor rigidly determined by rank. Alexander Henry Rhind (1862, pp. 50-51) observed no clear progression of tombs by date or status, though decorated tombs on upper slopes such as Qurna and Dra Abu el-Naga were mainly owned by priests, officials, and military personnel. Wolfgang Helck (1962, pp. 225-243) argued for a correlation between social status and tomb location, suggesting that elite tombs followed the southward shift of royal mortuary temples in the Eighteenth Dynasty and that tomb orientation reflected nearby temples.

In contrast, Friederike Kampp (1996, pp. 120-122) emphasised processional routes, natural pathways, and topography rather than direct temple alignment, particularly in the Ramesside Period. Abdul-Qader Muhammad (1966, pp. 3-4) identified patterns influenced by rank, slope elevation, spatial constraints, and limestone quality, while Aidan Dodson (1991, pp. 33-42; with Salima Ikram 2008, p. 217) similarly stressed geological and spatial factors, noting that many late Eighteenth Dynasty elites were buried at Saqqara rather than Thebes (Slinger, 2022, pp. 8-9).

Scholars broadly agree that tomb placement within a cemetery primarily reflects the economic and social status of the deceased (Ikram, 2003, pp. 141-143; Dodson & Ikram, 2008, pp. 23-30). Salima Ikram argues that in non-royal cemeteries higher-status individuals were generally

buried higher on the cliffs, while lower-status burials occupied lower slopes and desert margins, although this pattern could be reversed where stone quality differed, as at Thebes (Ikram 2003: 150–151). Family groupings and clusters of tombs belonging to individuals with similar offices are also attested (Dodson & Ikram, 2008, p. 27).

Certain areas, particularly Deir el-Bahri and neighbouring el-Khokha and el-Asasif, were favoured for their religious significance and proximity to royal monuments (Dodson & Ikram 2008, pp. 27-29). John H. Taylor (2003, pp. 139-141) likewise observes that cemetery layout often reinforced social hierarchy. Johannes Auenmüller (2014, pp. 171-193) emphasises that burial location also reflected institutional affiliation: high officials connected to the king or the cult of Amun were typically interred in major centres such as Thebes, whereas provincially focused officials were usually buried locally, with notable exceptions. The presence of lower-ranking officials in the Theban necropolis therefore likely reflects either Theban origin or professional ties to the region (Slinger, 2022, p. 10).

Kathryn Shirley (2010, 73-113) links tomb location to administrative and religious offices, identifying Dra Abu el-Naga with late Seventeenth Dynasty burials and Qurna with early Eighteenth Dynasty high elites, while other areas were used mainly by mid- and lower-ranking officials connected to the Estate of Amun (Slinger, 2022, p. 11). The presence of lower-ranking officials in the Theban necropolis suggests that they either originated from Thebes or held professional roles connected to the area (Slinger, 2022, p. 10).

The most prominent burials at Deir el-Medina belonged to the 'Chief Workmen' (Foremen) and senior 'Scribes of the Tomb' (Peden 2011: 382–383). Seven Ramesside tombs were owned by "Foremen in the Place of Truth," including Neferhotep and Nebnefer (TT6), Neferhotep (TT216), Baki (TT298), Inherkhau (TT299; TT359), Pashedu (TT326), and Kaha (TT360), while an earlier example is Kha (TT8), titled "Chief in the Great Place." Other high-ranking craftsmen include Amennakht (TT266) and Hay (TT267), both "Chief Craftsmen of the Lord of the Two Lands," and Amenemopet (TT215), overseer of workmen and mayor (Slinger, 2022, p. 254).

Relationships between Tomb Owners / Tombs The confined nature of the village makes familial relationships easier to trace than at other sites, but as with all ancient relationships, there are a number of factors which make this problematic. The reuse of names and the frequency with which they recur, and the lack of differentiation between the words used to designate relationships, makes positive identification of individuals a complex task (Davies 1999: xxiii). Several Deir El-Medina tombs are located close to family members. There are several tombs belonging to fathers, sons, and in some case three generations of the same family (Slinger, 2022, p. 257-259).

The Vizier (and the High Priest of Amun) has been chosen as someone important enough to have had a say in his own choice of burial site, and to potentially influence tomb distribution of others (Van den Boorn, 1988, p. 335). Vizier User, serving Hatshepsut and Thutmose III, placed his tomb centrally and eastward, reflecting independence and family ties to the Amun priesthood. Viziers and families formed elite "neighborhoods," surrounded by relatives and clients (Bryan, 2010, p. 1002).

This spatial and environmental context, combined with the social and hierarchical considerations of tomb placement, establishes a framework within which the principles of Egyptian representational art can be understood.

3.2.5. Systems of Visual Meaning and Narrative Structure

To understand how narrativity operates in New Kingdom tomb decoration, it is necessary to examine the systems through which visual meaning is constructed.

Egyptian art was conceptual rather than strictly visual. Objects were depicted as understood, combining multiple perspectives within a single form. Davis (1989) notes three principles: (1) forms constructed from characteristic contours; (2) proportions following a compositional canon with selective grids; (3) fixed viewpoints, usually frontal–profile. Transient details and individuality were rare.

Heinrich Schäfer (2002), emphasized that these rules were descriptive, not prescriptive; artists adapted traditional forms rather than obeying laws (Rogner, 2022, p. 37). The style originated in the late Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods and was refined into the highly recognizable Egyptian visual language.

Images and hieroglyphs function as separate systems. Rogner (2022) identifies four levels: figurative (real-world actions): This level corresponds to what Van Walsem (2005) terms the "literal meaning in a one-to-one relation," though here the term "figurative" is used to avoid confusion with linguistic readings. At the figurative level, one must consider the distinction between the real and the depicted world, and recognize that images are not universally or immediately accessible, particularly to external (etic) viewers. For instance, a harpoon depicted in an image is simply a harpoon, and a desert hunt represents a desert hunt. Symbolic (thematic meaning) Beyond the figurative meaning, certain elements or entire scenes can carry symbolic significance. This reading can be prompted by similarities between writing and image elements, including hieroglyphic associations. For example, a harpoon could symbolically reference regeneration, due to its phonetic similarity in Egyptian to the word for "ejaculation" (stj < sTj), and a desert hunt may represent the triumph of order over chaos. Terms such as metaphorical, allegorical, or thematic are sometimes used, but all indicate an additional layer of meaning beyond the figurative. The term "symbolic" is adopted here because it is commonly used in Egyptology. Emblematic (conventional motifs) which are "signs that can be infinitely replicated and have an unequivocal semantic reference." At this level, readings are more conventionalized than in the symbolic mode. For image elements—often called attributes—features such as the animal heads of Egyptian deities indicate their essential traits, and the "ointment cone" on banquet participants signals a pleasant fragrance. For entire images, such as a "slaying of enemies" scene, the emblematic reading conveys the king's victory over his foes and over chaos, and Hieroglyphic (phonetic or visual signs) which is based on the phonetic value of visually similar writing signs and can generate symbolic meaning. It may also function as a visual pun, highlighting the skill of both the artist and the patron. While reading an entire image hieroglyphically is generally not feasible, some compositions allow every element to be

interpreted as a hieroglyph, creating an overall visual "phrase," as seen in depictions of Ramses II with the god Hauron or the pictorial frieze in the tomb of Padykam (Rogner, 2022, pp. 39-42).

Rogner (2022) also notes narrativity arises from standardized forms, symbolic functions, and selective individualization. Inscriptions, composition, and visual dynamism suggested temporal progression and event specificity. Narrative is therefore not inherent but activated by definiteness, dynamism, detail, and cultural knowledge, allowing recognition even in symbol-laden forms. Rogner (2022, p. 35) identifies three parameters of pictorial narrativity: definiteness, dynamism, and detail. Narrative impressions arise from the interaction of at least two.

Narratology distinguishes story (sequence of events) from text (means of conveying them), useful for repeated motifs in tomb decoration (Vinson, 2018, p. 183).

3.2.6. Narrative and Typicality

Most scenes—ritual depictions or daily life tableaux—illustrated standard symbolic actions rather than unique historical events (Gaballa, 1967; Groenewegen-Frankfort, 1940). Sequential scenes, like ploughing, sowing, and harvesting, were conceptual rather than strictly narrative.

New Kingdom tombs increasingly included narrative scenes, such as military campaigns, processions, and biographical episodes. Depicting time was addressed through inscriptions, compositional sequencing, repeated figures, or changes in position (Rogner, 2022, pp. 30–31). Movement is strongly linked to narrative quality, especially in military reliefs.

3.2.7. Spatial and Temporal Localization

In New Kingdom tomb painting, the shift from indeterminate to generic spatial location occurs when elements like baselines or ground lines gain definitional and symbolic meaning. For instance, a baseline may indicate where a stake is planted or where activities such as sowing take place. Features such as water edges, trees, buildings, and architectural elements help create a sense of natural or constructed space, even if it does not correspond to a specific location. Background colors can further signify special realms, such as divine or royal spheres (Rogner, 2022, pp. 89–91). Natural space is often implied indirectly through continuous elements like watercourses, warehouses, columns, or gates. Temporal localization is similarly conveyed: generic time appears in recurring events, such as festivals or audiences before the king, emphasizing the action rather than a precise moment, often reinforced by captions in the infinitive form or direct speech.

"Speeches and cries" in Egyptian images, such as spontaneous shouts from farmers or relatives, create a "virtual soundscape" and mark a specific, singular moment in time, distinct from more general time markers like a king's reign. In contrast, formal direct speech from the tomb owner to gods or the king, or praise from the king, expresses timeless truths rather than momentary

exclamations. A hybrid form exists in subordinates' comments during events, mixing spontaneity with ongoing relevance, as do funeral songs and speeches that are emotional yet pertain to eternal matters. Specific spatial localization often comes through buildings shown in continuous pictorial spaces. Identifiable monuments, sometimes named by captions or context, anchor other image elements spatially. Titles of the tomb owner in different scenes also help localize actions. Even without text, showing the tomb as the destination of a funeral procession situates the scene specifically within the landscape and the chapel's context. (Rogner, 2022, pp. 89–91) In this way, New Kingdom tomb imagery presented not just isolated representations but richly contextualized narratives embedded within a recognizable visual world.

3.3. Interaction Between Tomb Paintings and Viewers

Understanding how ancient Egyptian audiences interacted with images provides critical insight into the social and cultural functions of tomb decoration. Monumental elite tombs served a dual purpose: preserving the deceased's afterlife and ensuring their memory remained alive within the living community. This memorial function depended on visitors entering the burial chapels to view images and read accompanying texts. The relatively elaborate and narrative nature of tomb decorations, compared to other contexts, reflects this communicative goal.

Tombs were created not only for relatives and cult priests, who visited regularly, but also to engage a wider audience, such as passing elites, priests, artists, and apprentices, through visually distinctive decoration (Rogner, 2022, pp. 53–54). Inscriptions like the "Appeal to the Living" highlight the importance of visitors viewing and interacting with tomb imagery. For example, Iamunedjeh addresses future passersby who will "come to my tomb to see the good deeds I performed on earth for the great god" (TT 84, Iamunedjeh). Some tomb owners even encouraged others to copy motifs or inscribe graffiti, revealing the social and participatory nature of tomb decoration. (Sethe, 1909, p. 939; Den Doncker, 2010, p. 79; Den Doncker, 2012, p. 23).

The concept of "performativity," often discussed in scholarship regarding Egyptian images and texts, can be defined here as the effectiveness or impact that images and texts have on their viewers, independent of magical or religious interpretations. Pascal Vernus (1996) describes this as the "illocutionary force" of sacred signs, emphasizing their enduring, monumental presence across media, which served the tomb owner's desire for lasting remembrance (Rogner, 2022, p. 54). Although this perspective might suggest magical functions, it is unlikely that ancient Egyptians literally believed that tomb depictions provided material sustenance for the deceased.

When viewers engage with an image, they interpret it through the lens of their own lived experiences. According to Rogner (2022, p. 36), an image's narrative force depends on how closely it aligns with reality across three dimensions: dynamism (the evocation of movement and time), detail (visual precision), and definiteness (clarity of reference). Here, "reality" encompasses both shared cultural understanding and personal experience, shaped by collective beliefs about storytelling, the afterlife, and the underworld.

Viewers draw on their understanding of daily life and historical events to recognize causal relationships within an image. Even a static scene can generate narrative tension when it juxtaposes a problem with its less apparent solution, directing interpretation through visual composition and scale. The concept of "impression" refers to the narrative impact that figurative images evoke—an effect that artists could deliberately heighten or moderate depending on the intended meaning and context (Rogner, 2022, p. 33).

Scholars like Ricœur (1983) and Genette (2007) emphasize that meaning depends both on what a story refers to and how the audience interprets it. Bal adds that interpretation relies on a shared "frame of reference"—the common cultural knowledge that helps viewers make sense of what they see. Eco expands this idea through "scenography," which includes the social roles and situations that give actions their meaning (Rogner, 2022, p. 26). In this context, the term definiteness describes how clearly an image connects to recognizable people, objects, or events. These references can be specific, general, or unclear, and Egyptian art often uses general (generic) settings rather than depicting a single identifiable event (Rogner, 2022, p. 35).

3.4. Narrative Techniques in New Kingdom Tomb Painting

The construction of narrative scenes in New Kingdom tomb painting was closely linked to the practical conditions of artistic production. From wall preparation to the final application of pigment, each technical step contributed to the clarity, hierarchy, and legibility of the depicted episodes.

The organization of work in private Theban tomb chapels can be inferred from traces of wall preparation and painted depictions of tomb construction (Hartwig, 2004, p. 21). Much of the painting in the Theban necropolis was executed on walls of low-quality stone. To prepare a suitable surface, irregular patches were filled with chopped straw and mud. In areas where the rock was especially poor, gaps were stabilized using a mixture of limestone chips set in a light gypsum mortar, over which a layer of straw and mud was applied. Larger gaps were bridged with mud bricks combined with limestone chips, and holes in the rock were often patched with limestone chips embedded in a straw-and-mud matrix. Next, a rough layer of gypsum plaster was applied by hand and smoothed, followed by a fine layer of white or yellow gypsum plaster that served as the painting ground. When the rock was of good quality, a simple layer of fine white gypsum plaster was used as the painting base. This gypsum plaster layer ensured that the pigments were applied evenly and not fully absorbed into the wall substrate (Hartwig, 2004, p. 19).

3.4.1. Collaboration in Tomb Decoration

The work process involved outline-draughtsmen (*sš-.kd*), painters (*sš*), and assistants who prepared pigments and walls. The *ḥry sš-.kd* ("overseer of the outline-draughtsmen") supervised the entire process, correcting errors, completing motifs, and adding final outlines where necessary. This collaborative system, with apprentices trained and monitored by

experienced artists, ensured stylistic uniformity across the chapel wall. The overlapping contributions of individual artists under the master craftsman's supervision allowed the team to achieve both efficiency and visual coherence (Hartwig, 2004, p. 21). As Rogner (2022) indicates in later stages, painters added subtle surface textures or transparency effects, while outlines defined forms; by the Nineteenth Dynasty, outlines were sometimes omitted to achieve a softer appearance. (Rogner, 2022, pp. 42–43).

Evidence for the organization of artistic labor in New Kingdom tomb decoration is preserved not only in wall remains but also in documentary sources. The ostraca from Senenmut's tomb reveal a detailed process and terminology for Eighteenth Dynasty tomb decoration. First, walls were plastered (pꜣ) to fill gaps and smooth the surface, then finely plastered and trimmed (sad). Draftsmen, or scribes, created preliminary sketches (wAH / Driw) using red ochre. Artisans then applied a blue or white background (dqw / dgA) to unify the surface, followed by painting color patches (Driw). Finally, scribes completed outlines and details (sS). These records show that while tomb artisans performed most of the painting, scribes handled the initial and final stages, demonstrating a clear division of labor between designers and painters. In Egyptian belief, true image creation occurred through drawing and outlining, not merely by applying color, and scribes were responsible for these sacred tasks. Many workers likely came from temple crews, such as those at Karnak. Ostraca from Senenmut's tomb indicate that varying numbers of scribes (two to ten) participated, reflecting highly organized collaboration in elite tomb decoration. (Bryan, 2010, pp. 990–1007).

3.4.2. Colors and other Materials

The colors available in the Egyptian palette, all derived from earth and mineral pigments, were relatively limited. These consisted of red, yellow, brown, black, blue, green, and grey. The red, yellow, and brown pigments were varieties of ochre, that is, natural iron oxides commonly found in Egypt. Black was obtained from carbon substances, mainly soot and only rarely charcoal. In the earliest examples, azurite—a natural blue copper carbonate—was used as a blue pigment. Green was produced either from powdered malachite or from an artificial frit comparable to the blue frit. Grey was made by mixing black and white (Gaballa, 1967, p. 4). White pigments were derived from calcium carbonate (whiting) or calcium sulfate (gypsum). Huntite white was first used during the Old Kingdom and became increasingly common in the New Kingdom, often applied as a contrast to whitewash or as a base to enhance the luminosity of overlying pigments. Ochres, ranging from yellow through red to dark brown, came from naturally occurring iron oxides. From the Middle Kingdom onward, bright yellow was also obtained from orpiment, while a lighter yellow came from jarosite. Realgar red, used in the New Kingdom, appeared as a bright orange-red. The primary blue pigment was Egyptian blue, produced by heating silica together with copper filings or a copper ore such as malachite, lime, or alkali, in varying proportions to yield shades from light blue to dark blue and turquoise. Green pigments were created from green frit—a wollastonite-rich or glass-rich compound—and basic copper chloride. Varnishes made from tree resins or lipids could be applied to the colors, producing a translucent yellow coating that darkened over time. There is some evidence

that beeswax was used as a coating or pigment binder during the New Kingdom. Then To prepare these minerals and compounds for application, they were first ground into powders. Natural gums from animal glue or native trees such as acacia were mixed with the pigments (Hartwig, 2004, pp. 20-21). In this context, Cartocci and Rosati (2007, p. 222) note that archaeological discoveries show the pigments were prepared as solid cakes combined with binding substances.

In case of brushes, two types were employed to apply the paint. The first type was small and thick, made of fibers folded over and bound back. The second type consisted of fibrous wood frayed at one end. In the execution of low relief sculpture, the primary tools used were the chisel and mallet (Gaballa, 1967, p. 6). Brushes were made from Egyptian rush (Juncus maritimus), palm ribs, or wood; fibers were cut, folded in half, bruised into bristles, and bound at the fold with string. Brush thickness determined the width of painted lines (Hartwig, 2004, p. 21).

It is also worth noting that the materials and terminology of painting were closely linked to medicine and magic. Pigment application (dqw, dr/driꞽw, sš) intersected with healing and protective practices, demonstrating that color carried practical and symbolic significance. For example, pulverized minerals (dqw) were used in cosmetics and medical recipes, and color application (dr/driꞽw) signified protective or purifying actions, paralleling medical use. Specific pigments were associated with therapeutic or magical properties, adding layers of meaning and reinforcing ritual efficacy in tomb decoration (Bryan, 2017, p. 21).

3.4.3. Application of Color in Tomb Painting

The techniques used to apply pigments to tomb walls have been discussed by several scholars. Gaballa (1967) states that Tempera painting was the sole technique used to apply these pigments to the walls. Some colors, especially green and blue, required an adhesive medium, though its exact composition remains uncertain. However, since glue, gum arabic, and albumin were materials that were easily available, it is very probable that they were used for this purpose (Gaballa, 1967, p. 5). In the context of Theban tombs, Cartocci and Rosati (2007) note that the fragile character of the rock determined the decorative technique that could be used. In this case, painted relief—customary in earlier periods—proved unsuitable, and the artists therefore applied tempera directly onto a plaster layer (Cartocci and Rosati, 2007, p. 222). Hartwig (2004) adds the paint was then applied with a brush to a dry wall using tempera (Hartwig, 2004, pp. 20-21). While Rogner (2022) describes that mural painting were executed on a thick mud-plaster base covered with a finer gypsum layer, primed, sketched in red pigment, and painted using a secco technique (Rogner, 2022, p. 42).

Concerning the use of pigments, in New Kingdom tomb painting, as Rogner (2022) mentions pigment choice and application were integral to narrative meaning. Colors were selected for visual, ritual, and cultural associations. Terms for painting often overlapped with those for overlaying or inlaying precious materials, reflecting the symbolic weight of color. For example: red and yellow ochres or rarer minerals like orpiment or realgar could signify gold, linking

figures to solar power; green pigments like malachite represented vegetation and life; blue pigments (ẖsbd) conveyed celestial or watery realms; white pigments suggested purity and divine radiance. Artists used colors strategically to guide attention, reinforce narrative hierarchies, and imbue scenes with visual and ritual significance. (Rogner, 2022, p. 60).

Surface textures were also differentiated by color and painting techniques to indicate materials: metal vessels by color, wood by texture, and stone vessels by surface appearance. Paint imitated materials symbolically rather than literally, such as rose granite painted on false doors to confer prestige (Rogner, 2022, pp. 59–60). Techniques included precise painting of objects, refined depiction of fur and plumage, use of pastose paint and stucco, subtle shading, and attention to reflections and gleam, creating lifelike visual effects (Rogner, 2022, p. 60).

3.4.4. Grid system

Beyond the application of color, the organization of figures within the pictorial field was governed by a systematic grid structure.

Grids, snapped onto surfaces with red-ochre strings, established proportional order and visual balance. Colors were applied in successive stages—background, main areas, then detailed contours—organizing complex multi-register scenes for narrative clarity (Gaballa, 1967, pp. 2–18).

Grids were employed to construct larger figures and organize compositions, serving practical purposes rather than strictly ensuring ideal proportions (Rogner, 2022, p. 42).

Scenes and figures were often constructed using guide lines: a string dipped in red paint marked the wall boundaries and register lines, snapped at intervals. Within this framework, additional lines guided the layout of figures, texts, and scenes (Hartwig, 2004, p. 21).

By the reign of Thutmose II, grid systems were reinstated to regulate proportions and train artists for expanding monumental programs under Ahmose and Hatshepsut. During Thutmose III's reign, figures became noticeably more slender, reflecting a new artistic canon (Bryan, 2017, p. 15). The grid system for planning wall decorations was well established by this period. Artistic proportions evolved, possibly beginning under Ahmose, alongside renewed training for artisans. (Bryan, 2010, pp. 990–1007).

By the reigns of Thutmose IV and Amenhotep III, grids became less common for scene proportions, though still used in large offering scenes, as seen in the tombs of Menna, Nakht, and Neferrenpet. Painting style grew more uniform in the fourteenth century BC, implying fewer sources of artisans. Small tombs might have been completed by one draftsman with a few assistants, though evidence suggests at least two draftsmen usually collaborated (Bryan, 2010, pp. 990–1007).

Agricultural scenes frequently appear in Eighteenth Dynasty Theban tombs, contrasting with Seventeenth Dynasty tombs, which typically depict worship scenes before deities like Ptah and Osiris, foreshadowing the later inclusion of gods. Fragile rock surfaces made carved reliefs less

practical, and artists increasingly painted directly onto plaster, allowing greater flexibility and expressive composition while maintaining formal conventions.

Ostraca were used to test designs, practice figures, or copy motifs, sometimes for personal use rather than preparatory work. Templates helped maintain proportions and spatial coherence across scenes (Rogner, 2022, pp. 43–44).

Two main narrative methods were used: the "culminating scene," showing the decisive moment and implying the whole story, common in Prehistoric times, and sequences of selected episodes, preferred in historical periods (Gaballa, 1967, pp. 2–18). From the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty, artists combined traditional motifs with innovative strategies, altering canonical forms, depicting material qualities, blending colors, and emphasizing textures to enhance expressive and narrative potential (Rogner, 2022, pp. 57–59).

Pictorial space was crucial for narrative, often combined with polychrony to depict multiple moments within a single image. Minimal cues could convey temporality, and spatial organization ensured coherence. Landscape elements and atmospheric details structured action and located events in time and space (Rogner, 2022, p. 31).

Analytically, a distinction exists between the image field—the physical surface—and the pictorial space—the virtual spatial environment. Unlike Western linear perspective, Egyptian art often only partially or not at all opens into three-dimensional space. Placement on the image field concerns physical arrangement, while localization in pictorial space refers to spatial relationships, enhancing specificity and dynamism (Rogner, 2022, p. 74).

3.4.5. Framing Devices and Registers

Narrative organization relied on horizontal registers, figure gazes, architectural structure, and the symbolic "path of life" (Ryan, Ruppert, & Bernet, 2004).

In New Kingdom private tombs, image fields were structured using framing elements—friezes, color ladders, and socles—that established spatial boundaries while referencing earlier visual conventions. Walls typically featured continuous image fields bounded by narrow color ladders and ornamental friezes above, while the lower socle zone was often left unpainted or monochrome, separated by bands. Artists occasionally transgressed these frames—a phenomenon Rogner terms "pictorial metalepsis"—extending figures into the viewer's space and blurring the boundary between depicted and physical realms, enhancing visual interaction (Rogner, 2022, pp. 74–75)

In what are usually called "true Egyptian" pictures, figures are commonly aligned on straight base lines, but stresses that this feature has nothing to do with natural visual perception. Instead, the base line is identified as a fundamental sign of image-based depiction. Initially, the base line functioned simply to link figures of the same height and level. and to emphasize the upright posture of single figures. Over time, the line acquired the broader significance of ground, sometimes defining only the specific surface on which figures stand rather than an entire

landscape. This transformation proved crucial: the base line gave Egyptian figures firmness and stability, forcing them—like real bodies—to relate to a supporting surface. As a result, elements such as feet and wheels no longer appear to float freely. the base line is presented as both a decisive formal achievement and a binding convention within Egyptian two-dimensional art. (Schafer, pp. 163-165)

In practice, factors influencing narrative impact—such as dynamism, certainty, and detail—operate simultaneously rather than independently. Techniques that enhance certainty and detail often also increase dynamism by introducing a sense of temporality, while a well-articulated pictorial space strengthens spatial coherence and embeds figures within an interactive context, amplifying narrative action beyond mere juxtaposition (Rogner, 2022, p. 56).

Building on the elaboration of individual elements, spatial relationships within the pictorial space are crucial for visual storytelling. Schäfer's (1974) foundational analysis identifies mechanisms such as overlapping, sequencing (with or without overlap), and the use of one element as a carrier for another. Overlapping partially conceals figures or objects to create depth cues, applied subtly or decisively to reinforce spatial recession while maintaining recognizability. Sequencing, whether linear or stacked, implies spatial progression through vertical placement or directional flow, and when combined with overlap, enhances the perception of depth.

In Tell el-Amarna tombs, for example, the king and queen may appear side-by-side either conventionally or through extensive overlap, where "one behind the other" conveys "side-by-side" relationships. These arrangements reflect not only compositional strategies but also cultural and representational significance, with variations in posture, color, or orientation providing clarity and individuality within crowded groups. Spatial order was further guided by framing devices, which defined the pictorial field and mediated the viewer's engagement with the scene.

The use of base lines and registers was even more important for the organization of entire pictorial surfaces than for individual figures or simple rows. Over time, Egyptian artists increasingly arranged figures into clearly ordered registers stacked one above another. This development can be traced almost step by step, but the full awareness of the base line's value for organizing large wall surfaces emerges most clearly in the flourishing mid–Old Kingdom. At this stage, rows of images are placed one above the other with confidence and clarity, guided by established models. The author stresses that this compositional beauty can only be fully appreciated in front of the original monuments, since reduced illustrations cannot convey their full effect. Often, a dominant central figure—the god, the king, or the blessed dead—anchors the entire composition, visually holding the registers together at their ends like a large parenthesis. Standing before such walls reveals the sensibility that consistently guided Egyptian artists in achieving balanced articulation of surfaces, whether on a small object, a manuscript page, or a monumental wall.

As a rule, activities depicted on a wall are arranged so that the end of a register coincides with a break in meaning, but this is not obligatory. Actions can extend across several registers, with each one continuing the previous one. On especially long tomb walls, continuous processes such as mourning processions may ascend or descend through multiple registers, likely to accommodate the viewer moving along the wall. When an action consists of several stages, these stages are often distributed vertically across registers.

Schafer addresses objects or figures placed above one another without overlapping. In some cases, vertical placement corresponds directly to real spatial relationships. (Schafer, pp. 165-168)

In Egyptian two-dimensional art, representations in which figures or objects are placed directly above one another follow the same principles as single figures composed of several elements. Objects shown on tables, mats, or boards—such as the washing equipment on a table (fig. 98), the gaming board with its pieces (fig. 155), or the offering mat with bread (fig. 156)—combine different viewpoints to express the relationship "on top of." The supporting surface is shown from above, while the objects resting on it are rendered from the side. This corresponds to the real situation, in which bread lies within the surface of the mat, gaming pieces within the board's squares, or lotus stems across the middle of a plate of fruit (fig. 37), even though the exact spatial configuration is not optically described. Egyptian artists frequently narrowed the supporting surfaces—mats, writing tablets, seats, platforms, or sledges (pl. 23; figs. 125, 194)—far beyond their real proportions, in order to accommodate what was placed upon them. Because painted surface patterns have often disappeared, such narrow rectangles are sometimes no longer identifiable, even when a figure is shown sitting on them. (Schafer, p.168)

Vertical placement also acquired strong symbolic meaning. Certain groupings of figures above one another became part of a repertory of symbolic motifs (pp. 155–9), especially in representations of domination. In Egyptian art, superiority is expressed by standing or sitting on top of another figure: defeated peoples are shown "under the soles of the feet" of the victor, whether as bound captives or as symbolic substitutes such as lapwings with clipped wings or the nine bows (fig. 311). (Shafer, p.p. 168-171)

The juxtaposition of figures without overlapping is the most common compositional principle in Egyptian art. From Predynastic times onward, figures—especially animals—are arranged side by side across the surface, often walking one after another, first without and later with base lines (Propyl. 185.1). This open, non-overlapping arrangement remained standard throughout Egyptian history and was frequently employed in long rows filling entire chambers, particularly in tombs and temple side rooms. Even when figures appear identical, variation is introduced through the objects they carry or lead, subtly altering arm positions while preserving overall uniformity. As Schmarsow observed, the repeated rhythm of walking legs produces a powerful visual effect. (Schafer, pp. 172-177)

However, such juxtaposition is spatially ambiguous. A row of figures placed next to one another can equally represent figures standing side by side or one behind another. A typical

example is the standing couple of husband and wife on tomb walls (fig. 249). When shown without mutual embrace, the figures could be read as one standing behind the other, yet knowledge of Egyptian convention makes it clear that they are meant to stand shoulder to shoulder.

The precedence of conceptual hierarchy over visual impression is particularly clear in depictions of married couples. When two such couples face opposite directions, Egyptian artists consistently place the man in front in both groups (figs. 166–7), regardless of what a perspectival rendering would require (fig. 165). This reflects the idea of male predominance rather than optical observation. The same principle governs reliefs and paintings in which the wife's arm encircles the husband, emphasizing his role as support. In statues, although the man begins to place his arm around the wife in the New Kingdom, the underlying meaning remains unchanged. Spiegelberg, drawing on an observation by his brother Georg, linked certain developments to the "feminine character" of the New Kingdom (1929), a point also referenced on p. 294.

Seated couples further demonstrate the independence of figures within such groupings. Whether standing or seated on a couch (fig. 125), attempts to interpret these images according to visual realism lead to contradictions in the placement and function of arms and hands (cf. Fechheimer 1923, pp. 120, 125). The visible arm of a couch may simultaneously stand for both back and arm, comparable to the depiction of houses (pp. 129–37), while the positioning of hands may contradict anatomical possibility. These inconsistencies show that Egyptian artists were not concerned with coherent spatial logic but with expressing social hierarchy and relational meaning. Physical contact beyond the embracing arm is rare, and even when bodies overlap (fig. 168b), the figures remain essentially independent entities within the composition. (Schafer, pp. 172-177)

Close layering, where figures overlap more tightly, emerges at the beginning of the Old Kingdom and develops gradually. It first appears with animals, then humans, and finally objects. Long rows of closely layered men only appear in the Middle Kingdom and similar object groupings become common in the Eighteenth Dynasty. New Kingdom artists, especially those of the Amarna period, favored this device for its ornamental parallel lines. (schafer, p. 179). (Schafer, p.p. 178-181)

Internal divisions relied on base lines—thin lines positioning figures without indicating location—and ground lines, broader bands defining the depicted action's site. Ground lines represented substrates such as water, desert, or mats, with specific visual treatments like zigzag water lines or sandy textures to convey setting. Together, these lines formed registers, dividing scenes while maintaining a unified pictorial space distinct from panel subdivisions. The integration of framing elements and marked corners created a sense of virtual architecture, reinforcing coherence, while color ladders continued to serve as meaningful compositional devices (Rogner, 2022, pp. 81–82).

During the Eighteenth Dynasty, compositional practices shifted away from strict reliance on continuous baselines and ground lines. Scenes were arranged more freely according to narrative or symbolic intent, with pictorial elements often carrying their own implied baselines. Landscape and architectural features sometimes replaced structural lines, reviving early Egyptian conventions abandoned for over a millennium. While humans and animals remained constrained by traditional compositional norms and hierarchical conventions, objects and plants could be positioned more freely, enhancing the creation of continuous pictorial spaces that supported visual narrativity (Rogner, 2022, pp. 78–80).

In late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Dynasty tombs, new formats further structured image fields: pillar sides became unified image-text units, as in Neferhotep's chapel (TT 49), while tombs like Amenemope's (TT 41) employed horizontal strip compositions dividing fields into registers (Rogner, 2022, pp. 78–80). Once the pictorial field was organized, accompanying text became equally important in clarifying and enriching narrative meaning.

Narrative techniques in ancient Egyptian imagery reveal a distinctive mode of storytelling that transcends mere depiction, embedding complex temporal, spatial, and symbolic frameworks within visual compositions. Through the use of registers, spatial localization, and conventionalized human representations, Egyptian artists created multifaceted narratives that invited contemplation and interpretation. The integration of text and image, alongside the deliberate use of materials and techniques, further enhanced the communicative power of these works. Understanding these strategies is essential not only for appreciating the aesthetic qualities of Egyptian art but also for unlocking the cultural and ideological messages encoded within, ultimately enriching our comprehension of ancient Egyptian civilization and its enduring artistic legacy.

3.4.6. Figurative Elements

Once the structural framework of the tomb scenes had been established through grid systems and registers, the careful depiction of human and divine figures became central to conveying narrative meaning. Figurative elements—how bodies, faces, and gestures were rendered.

Erman (1885) argued that Egyptian artists intentionally combined different viewpoints—profile, frontal, and three-quarter—to mediate between frontal shoulders and profile legs, interpreting the off-center navel as evidence of a three-quarter view of the abdomen. Heinrich Schäfer (1974) rejects this view, maintaining that it imposes modern assumptions about artistic problem-solving onto Egyptian art. He contends that Egyptian artists did not attempt to reconcile conflicting perspectives but instead consistently selected the most characteristic and clearly visible aspects of each body part. The navel was positioned near the body's outline not as a transitional device, but to ensure visibility. Schäfer reinforces this argument by citing similar representational practices, such as depicting only half of a symmetrical object when intersected by a contour. He concludes that Egyptian figural representation is governed by a

systematic emphasis on clarity and essential features rather than mixed viewpoints or perspectival logic (Schäfer, 1974, pp. 283–284).

In classical Egyptian art, the chest is consistently represented in side view rather than frontally, as shown by the chest outline, nipple placement, shallow torso depth, and lack of modeling indicating a broad frontal form. If it were depicted frontally, additional features such as both shoulders, arms, or a second breast in female figures would be visible, but they are not. The rendering of hair—particularly the long female headdress and its adaptation for animal-headed deities—demonstrates that artists prioritized visual consistency within established outlines over anatomical realism. Overall, Egyptian artists followed conceptual conventions and dominant contour lines, especially those of the chest and back, rather than naturalistic visual perception (Schäfer, 1974, pp. 285–289).

In Egyptian art, the head is regarded as the most significant part of the human figure, sometimes substituting for the entire body, being enlarged in proportion, or executed with greater technical refinement than the rest of the figure (Schäfer, 1974, p. 290). A key element is the eye, which is always depicted frontally, even when the head is shown in profile, because it forms an essential component of the canonical image of the face and conveys life and awareness. Emotional expression is not rendered through changes in the eye itself; for example, weeping is indicated by stylized lines representing water rather than by altering the eye's shape. Although fleeting emotions are generally absent, more enduring states—such as alertness, fatigue, attentiveness, or death—are suggested through subtle variations, particularly from the New Kingdom onward. Similarly, temporary movements of the mouth appear only beginning in the New Kingdom, while more permanent qualities such as strength, seriousness, and kindness emerge earlier and become more widespread over time (Schäfer, 1974, pp. 290–293).

In mature Egyptian art, standing men are almost always depicted with their legs a pace apart, even when surrounded by seated or kneeling figures (pl. 21), so their stance does not indicate walking. Clothing generally covers the body from just above the knee, limiting visibility of the legs' musculature. New Kingdom male legs often resemble female legs in form. women are distinguished by the pose of their legs, either closed or open. (Schäfer, 1974, pp. 293-295)

According to Schäfer (1974), the depiction of hands in Egyptian art is governed by fixed conceptual conventions rather than by naturalistic observation. The forward hand of a standing figure is typically shown with the thumb turned toward the body, while the rear hand has the thumb turned away—an intentional device to indicate that both hands share the same posture. Open hands are slightly bent, with fingers rendered in side view, close together, without overlap, and without consistent differentiation in length. Anatomical transitions, such as between thumb and palm, are simplified, sometimes creating exaggerated hollows. Hands holding objects also follow strict rules: the thumb is placed on top of flat objects and opposite the fingers when grasping cylindrical forms. These conventions support Schäfer's argument that Egyptian art prioritizes rule-based clarity over optical realism (Schäfer, 1974, pp. 297–298).

In the New Kingdom, fingertip positions become more dynamic: the backward bending of fingertips appears and develops into a noticeable ornamental feature. Clear articulation of

fingers bent at the joints emerges relatively late, particularly in the second half of the Eighteenth Dynasty, reflecting a growing attention to finger movement compared to earlier, more static representations (Schäfer, 1974, p. 298).

From the Eighteenth Dynasty onward, some female figures are occasionally shown with two breasts instead of one, incorporating elements associated with a three-quarter view. However, Schäfer (1974) cautions against generalizing from such details: although examples like the tomb of Qenamun TT93 demonstrate this feature, it does not justify interpreting the standard Egyptian figure type as representing an overall oblique or three-quarter view.

Elaboration of figurative elements varied by form, consistency, texture, and volume, enhancing realism and narrative clarity. Realism was conveyed through interactions among elements and spatial effects, while architectural cues and rare shading suggested depth and volume. (Rogner, 2022, pp. 62–63).

Altogether, the way figures were depicted—through their poses, gestures, and emphasized features, set the stage for the stories and meanings that these tomb scenes would convey, which will be examined in the next section on narrative themes.

3.5. Storytelling through content: Themes in New Kingdom Tombs

In addition to understanding the formal and compositional techniques that structure visual narratives, it is essential to examine the thematic content depicted in New Kingdom tombs. The subjects and motifs chosen for tomb decoration reveal how narrative operates not only through form but also through content. These recurring themes provide insight into the values, social roles, and beliefs of the deceased.

Chloe Kroeter (2009) mentions eleven typical subjects in New Kingdom Theban tombs including representations of the king, depictions of the tomb owner completing the actions of his government office, the tomb owner making offerings, fishing and fowling, desert hunting, agricultural scenes, wine making, funeral rites, the voyage to Abydos, the Opening of the Mouth ceremony, and banquet scenes. While many of the scenes appear to illustrate themes from everyday life, all had distinctly imbedded messages about rebirth and were painted in the service of transporting the deceased into the afterlife.

El-Shahawy (2005) explains throughout Egypt's Pharaonic history, artists developed rich funerary imagery. In the New Kingdom scenes of funeral processions in Theban tombs illustrate recurring themes of death, transition, and the journey to the afterlife.

Most Middle Kingdom iconographic themes continued in the New Kingdom tombs, though hunting scenes disappeared by Thutmose IV, depiction of deities particularly Osiris became standard in Eighteenth dynasty tomb decoration, and the royal kiosk scene vanished by the dynasty's end, likely due to Amarna influences which emphasized the royal family scenes, reducing the visual prominence of the tomb owner in funerary narratives (Bryan, 2010, p. 1006).

During the New Kingdom from the early period to the Ramesside era, the emphasis gradually shifted from scenes of daily life toward explicitly funerary imagery. This change was accompanied by an increased focus on religious texts, such as those from the Book of the Dead, which addressed anxieties about the afterlife and the threats posed by malevolent supernatural forces (Hodel-Hoenes, 2000, p. 22).

Studies of numerous tombs from the Eighteenth Dynasty and the Ramesside period show how the depiction and sequencing of these funerary rituals evolved over time, reflecting both artistic innovation and enduring cultural beliefs about the afterlife.

3.5.1. Death, Afterlife, and Funerary Beliefs

In ancient Egyptian funerary culture, the brevity of earthly life was a frequent motif, underscoring the belief that true and everlasting existence resided in the afterlife. Death was not perceived as an end but rather as a transition into a new form of being—an inevitable passage shared by all. Tomb decorations frequently reflect this worldview, portraying an eternal realm where the living and the dead could coexist, particularly illustrated by annual festivals in the Theban necropolis. These celebrations brought together the deceased and their relatives, blurring the boundaries between life and death in the visual narratives of tomb walls (Hodel-Hoenes, 2000, pp. 1–2).

This belief in the afterlife shaped both the motifs and the function of tomb imagery. New Kingdom tombs often transcend literal representations of daily life, emphasizing elite ideals and the tomb owner's official roles performed in the presence of family, along with idealized provision of food and offerings. While many images served magical or religious purposes, modern scholarship increasingly interprets them through the lens of performativity—the capacity of images and texts to stabilize the memory and presence of the deceased independently of literal magical belief. Pascal Vernus (1990) notion of "illocutionary force" captures how sacred signs preserved identity through monumental visual and textual media, ensuring the tomb owner's lasting presence.

Tombs incorporated complex visual and textual programs encompassing a wide range of funerary and daily-life themes. These included funerary rituals, such as funeral processions, tomb rituals, the deceased's journey into the afterlife, judgment scenes, and offerings; daily life activities, including official duties, agricultural tasks, and recreational pursuits such as hunting; and commemorative practices, with autobiographical inscriptions emphasizing family relations, names, titles, and kinship ties embedded in both image and text (Rogner, 2022, p. 51).

3.5.2. Tomb Layout and Theme Placement

The conceptual organization of tomb themes extended to their spatial layout, with scene placement reflecting both symbolic and functional purposes: upper chambers were symbolic meeting places for the living and the dead, depicting the tomb owner's earthly life (professional activities, farming, craftsmanship, leisure pursuits); the long hall featured funerary themes including Opening of the Mouth, journey to Abydos, and the Judgment of the Dead; shrines showed the deceased alone or with family, receiving offerings or interacting with relatives; and banquet scenes in the front chambers depicted festive occasions with food, drink, music, dance, sometimes with subtle erotic undertones (Hodel-Hoenes, 2000, pp. 13–15).

In Eighteenth Dynasty Theban tombs, the placement of decorative programs followed functional and social conventions. Scenes of the tomb owner's official duties, banquets, or audiences with the king were usually positioned on the focal wall of the front chamber, designed to impress visitors and assert status (Radwan 1969; Hartwig 2004). Rear corridors or side chambers were reserved for funerary and ritual cycles, including processions, offering rituals, and the Opening of the Mouth Ceremony. The rear rooms were often painted less elaborately than the front, not due to lighting constraints but because the most skilled artists focused on areas visible to visitors, where inscriptions, banquet scenes, and autobiographical texts would engage viewers and sustain the tomb owner's memory (Bryan, 2010, p. 1004). Front chambers featured banquet scenes with named participants, inscriptions with prayers, and autobiographical texts presenting idealized life. Visitors speaking the deceased's name were believed to provide magical sustenance in the afterlife. These spaces were actively used during festivals, especially the Beautiful Feast of the Valley (Bryan, 2010, pp. 1004–1009). From the reign of Thutmose III onward, Eighteenth Dynasty tombs commonly featured an upside-down T-shaped layout, with the cross hall often serving as a front room with focal walls. Rear corridors were typically decorated with scenes of funerary processions, the Opening of the Mouth ceremony, and offerings providing sustenance for the deceased and his wife in the afterlife. These areas also contained niches for statues of the deceased and sometimes false doors. The quality of paintings often varied between front and rear rooms, with the most skilled artists and the most labor-intensive scenes reserved for the front chambers, where the tomb owner's life was meant to be commemorated and admired by visitors (Bryan, 2010, pp. 1002–1003).

Hartwig's (2004) study on painting examines several key iconographic scenes that adorned the tombs of nobles from the reign of Thutmose IV—especially those placed on the walls facing the entrance, known as focal walls. Whether these scenes depicted the ruler with the tomb owner before him, a family banquet centered on the tomb owner, or the deceased performing his official duties, the front chamber consistently served to highlight the tomb owner's lifetime achievements.

3.5.3. Personalization and Evolution of Themes

Central to these thematic programs according to Hodel-Hoenes (2000) was the tomb owner, whose life and social identity were emphasized above all. The selective divine presence also

reinforced the focus on the tomb owner's own journey and continued existence, though depictions of deities were relatively rare and typically limited to gods[2] associated with death and the necropolis who guided the funeral rites (Hodel-Hoenes, 2000, p. 13). Hartwig (2004) discusses standard scenes were modified for each tomb owner and arranged them thematically within the chapel. These standardized scenes were composed of a number of images joined to form motifs or themes such as 'fishing and fowling,' 'banqueting,' and 'royal kiosk.' While no two scenes were exactly alike—partly due to the directives of the tomb owners or their delegates—the themes themselves remained fairly consistent. These scenes not only reflected aspects of the deceased's life but also symbolically encoded ancient Egyptian ideas, concepts, and beliefs about this world and the next. Understood in this way, the standardized scenes can also be considered icons, and their properties, together with the accompanying texts, make them particularly suitable for iconographic analysis (Hartwig, 2004, p. 53).

Regarding the tomb owner's individuality it is also noteworthy that over time the depiction of daily activities became increasingly personalized while retaining deep symbolic meaning. Agricultural production, essential for sustaining both earthly and eternal life, was rendered with greater detail and a stronger emphasis on the deceased's personality and rank (Cartocci & Rosati, 2007, pp. 222-225). Tomb owners selected images reflecting personal and societal values. Closer examination reveals individuality in otherwise conventional scenes. Spatial arrangement and inscriptions conveyed messages about career, family, and status (Bryan & Dorman, 2016, p. 197).

These thematic and iconographic choices were often the result of close collaboration between tomb owners and artists. They worked together to define overarching themes for each tomb wall, often guided by brief thematic notes. Artists then drew on a rich visual vocabulary to produce appropriate scenes, with tomb owners frequently providing input during the decoration process. This interaction could lead to modifications in imagery and sometimes even architectural adjustments (Rogner, 2022, pp. 42–43).

Understanding these principles provides a foundation for analyzing the Chapel of Maya, where similar strategies of narrative construction, thematic selection, and spatial organization are employed. In the next chapter, the Chapel of Maya will be examined as a case study, illustrating how these narrative techniques and thematic programs are specifically realized in its decoration, allowing for a nuanced interpretation of its storytelling strategies and the social, ritual, and symbolic concerns they express.

[2] such as Osiris, Isis, Anubis, Nephthys, Hathor, and the West Goddess (Hodel-Hoenes, 2000, p. 13).

4. Analysis of Narrative Scenes

4.1. Methodological Framework for Visual-Narrative Analysis

This chapter examines narrativity in New Kingdom tomb imagery, with the Chapel of Maya TT 338 as the primary case study. To contextualize Maya's tomb, a selection of comparable tombs has been made based on thematic similarity, including funerary processions, offering scenes, family participation, priests and mourners, Abydos pilgrimage, and purification and ritual scenes. The comparative tombs span the New Kingdom period, from the early Eighteenth Dynasty through the Ramesside period, and are located at multiple sites, including Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Deir el-Medina, and Khokha.

For analytical clarity, each tomb has been systematically catalogued in a table according to thematic categories, and the tombs are presented in chronological order. This allows the study to trace developments in narrative structure over time and to highlight differences and similarities in visual storytelling.

This approach also considers differences in workshop traditions and artistic styles, as well as the role of the tomb owner's profession and social status in shaping imagery. The analysis combines a study of the narrative structure in the Chapel of Maya with comparative observations from other tombs, emphasizing continuities and variations in spatial organization, thematic integration, and visual storytelling.

An important question arises in this context: to what extent can differences observed between tombs be attributed to the personal choices of the tomb owner, to the creative agency of artists and workshops, or to established conventions of visual decorum? While these factors cannot always be disentangled with certainty, acknowledging their interaction is essential for a balanced interpretation.

Comparative analysis must also consider inherent challenges, including differences in tomb size, intended audience, ritual function, geographic location, and state of preservation. These variables inevitably shape narrative expression and limit direct equivalence between monuments. Accordingly, comparison in this study serves as a contextual and interpretative tool rather than as an attempt to establish strict typological classifications.

Within this framework, the Chapel of Maya is analyzed in depth with regard to spatial sequencing, thematic integration, and visual-temporal organization, while comparative observations from other New Kingdom tombs provide contextual insight into broader narrative tendencies.

While the Chapel of Maya has been documented in excavation reports and catalogues, and wall depiction described in terms of iconography, it has not been examined in detail with regard to its narrative structuring. The present study therefore aims to contribute a focused visual-narrative analysis of the monument.

4.2. Selection of Comparative Examples

For the purpose of comparison with the Chapel of Maya TT 338, several New Kingdom tombs have been selected. Each presents narrative scenes or distinctive iconographic features relevant to this study, and together they represent the main sectors of the Theban necropolis, including Sheikh Abd el-Qurnah, El-Khokha, and El-Asasif. The following overview is arranged broadly according to chronology.

The earliest of these is the tomb of Amenemopet, called Tjonufer or Thonufer TT 297, located in El-Asasif. Amenemopet held the titles of Scribe, Overseer of the Fields, and Counter of the Grain of the Estate of Amun. His tomb, dating to the early Eighteenth Dynasty, contains several scenes of daily and professional activities that reflect his administrative role.

The Tomb of Horemheb TT 78, tutor of Princess Amenemipet, master of the horse, and royal scribe, is located in Sheikh Abd el-Qurnah and dates to the period from Thutmose III to Amenophis III. The Tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100), vizier and governor of the town, also in Sheikh Abd el-Qurnah, dates to Thutmose III–Amenophis II.

The Tomb of Userhat (TT 56), royal scribe and Child of the Nursery, is located in Sheikh Abd el-Qurnah and dates to the reign of Amenophis II. Similarly, the Tomb of Sennefer (TT 96), mayor of the southern city and also in Sheikh Abd el-Qurnah, dates to Amenophis II.

The Tomb of Menna (TT 69), mayor of the southern city and located in Sheikh Abd el-Qurnah, dates to Thutmose IV. The Tomb of Nakht (TT 52), also from Thutmose IV's reign and situated in the same necropolis sector, emphasizes intimate domestic scenes executed with delicate artistic technique.

Moving to the reign of Amenophis III, the Tomb of Pairi (TT 139), wab-priest and overseer of the peasants of Amun, in Sheikh Abd el-Qurnah. The Tomb of Nebamun and Ipuky (TT 181), located in Khokha and dating to Amenophis III–IV, belongs to two officials associated with sculptural and artisan work. The tomb reflects high artistic skill, and surviving evidence suggests the artists likely decorated their own tomb or collaborated closely in its execution. The Tomb of Neferhotep (TT 49), chief scribe of Amun, is situated in Khokha and probably dates to the reign of Ay.

Finally, the Tomb of Simut (TT 409), chief scribe and counter of the cattle of the Estate of Amun, in El-Asasif, dates to Ramesses II.

Together, these tombs cover the main areas of the Theban necropolis and provide representative examples of New Kingdom narrative and iconographic strategies, offering a solid basis for comparison with the Chapel of Maya.

In the following section, catalogues of the selected tombs are presented for comparison with the Chapel of Maya.

4.2.1. Catalogue of Tombs used for Comparison

The tombs selected for comparison are organized according to two criteria: thematic similarity and chronology. Only tombs containing scenes comparable to those in the Chapel of Maya TT 338 (including funerary processions, offering scenes, family participation, priests and mourners, Abydos pilgrimage, and purification and ritual scenes) are included.

They are presented in chronological order, from the early Eighteenth Dynasty to the Ramesside period, in order to trace developments in narrative structure over time. All tombs are cited according to Porter and Moss (PM I), with full references provided for each entry (Porter and Moss, 1971).

TT 297 – Amenemopet (called Tjonufer / Thonufer)

(Temp. Early Eighteenth Dynasty, ʻAsasif)

Scene Category	Brief Description of Scene	Location in Tomb	PM Reference
Funerary Processions	-		
Offering Scenes	Son with offering-bringers presenting bouquet to deceased and wife	Hall, wall (3)	PM I.1, p. 370, TT 297, Hall, wall (3)
Family Participation	Deceased and wife seated; son presenting offerings; girl standing before couple	Hall, wall (1-3)	PM I.1, p. 370, TT 297, Hall, wall (1–3)
Priests and Mourners	-	-	-
Abydos Pilgrimage	-		-
Purification and Rituals	Measuring crops before deceased (ritual-economic context of funerary provisioning)	Hall, wall (3)	PM I.1, p. 370, TT 297 Hall, wall (3)

TT78 – Haremhab

(Temp. Tuthmosis III to Amenophis III (Early to Mid-Eighteenth Dynasty), Sheikh ʿAbd el-Qurna)

Scene Category	Brief Description of Scene	Location in Tomb	PM Reference
Funerary Processions	Funeral procession: oxen dragging sarcophagus; ‘Nine friends’; tekenu; statuettes; funeral outfit; chariot and horse	Passage, wall (9), Reg. I–III	PM I.1, p. 154, TT78, wall (9), Reg. I–III

Scene Category	Brief Description of Scene	Location in Tomb	PM Reference
Offering Scenes	Offering-scene to couple	Hall, wall (3), Reg. II	PM I.1, p. 152, TT78, wall (3)
Family Participation	Deceased and wife seated; girls and female musicians offering floral vases; remains of banquet; sub-scene with offering-bringers and bull	Hall, wall (2)	PM I.1, p. 152, TT78, wall (2)
Priests and Mourners	Mourners in funeral procession	Passage, wall (9), Reg. I	PM I.1, p. 154, TT78, wall (9)
Abydos Pilgrimage	Abydos pilgrimage	Passage, wall (9), Reg. IV	PM I.1, p. 154, TT78, wall (9), Reg. IV
Purification and Rituals	Man with offering-list and papyrus-bouquet before deceased and wife	Passage, wall (10)	PM I.1, p. 154, TT78, wall (10)

TT100 – Rekhmire

(Temp. Tuthmosis III to Amenophis II (Early Eighteenth Dynasty), Sheikh ʿAbd el-Qurna)

Scene Category	Brief Description of Scene	Location in Tomb	PM Reference
Funerary Processions	Large multi-register funeral procession with 68 episodes; shrines, rites in garden, procession to Anubis, coffin carried by "Nine Friends," sarcophagus dragged, rituals before divinities	Hall, wall (15)	PM I.1, p. 212, TT100, wall (15)
Offering Scenes	Sons offering to deceased and wife	Hall, wall (16)	PM I.1, p. 212, TT100, wall (16)
Family Participation	Sons and relatives offering bouquets to deceased on return from acclaiming Amenhotep II	Hall, wall (17), register I	PM I.1, p. 213, TT100, wall (17), register I
Priests and Mourners	Lector-priest, sem-priest, priests dragging shrine, ritual officiants in procession	Hall, wall (15)	PM I.1, p. 212, TT100, wall (15), registers VI–VIII
Abydos Pilgrimage	Abydos pilgrimage within funeral procession; deceased purified by two priests; dancers; foreleg-rite; burnt-offerings before altar	Hall, wall (15), Registers VIII–X	PM I.1, p. 212, TT100, wall (15), registers VIII–X
Purification and Rituals	Purification of the deceased by two priests during procession	Hall, wall (15), Register VIII	PM I.1, p. 212, TT100, wall (15), register VIII

TT 56 – Userhat

(Temp. Amenophis II (Mid Eighteenth Dynasty), Sheikh ʿAbd el-Qurna)

Scene Category	Brief Description of Scene	Location in Tomb	PM Reference
Funerary Processions	Three registers: funeral procession including priest with Opening of the Mouth instruments; booths with wine-jars; bringing funeral outfit with chariot and led horse; boats	Inner Room, wall (16–18)	PM I.1, p. 113, TT 56 Inner Room, wall (16–18)
Offering Scenes	Deceased libating offerings, followed by wife and mother	Hall, wall (2)	PM I.1, p. 111, TT 56, Hall, wall (2)
Family Participation	Wife and two daughters offering necklace and cup; son offering bouquet	Hall, wall (5)	PM I.1, p. 112, TT 56, Hall, wall (5)
Priests and Mourners	Female mourners and relatives in funeral procession	Inner Room, wall (16-19)	PM I.1, p. 113, TT 56, Inner Room, wall (16–18)
Abydos Pilgrimage	Not attested in PM description		
Purification and Rituals	Purification of statues; Opening of the Mouth rite	Hall, wall (4)	PM I.1, p. 111, TT 56, Hall, wall (4)

TT 96 – Sennufer

(Temp. Amenophis II (Mid-Eighteenth Dynasty), Sheikh ʿAbd el-Qurna)

Scene Category	Brief Description of Scene	Location in Tomb	PM Reference
Funerary Processions	Funeral procession with oxen and sarcophagus; men dragging shrines; dancers; teknu; setting up obelisks; statues purified	Hall, wall (33-34)	PM I.1, p. 201, TT 96, Hall, wall (33–34)
Offering Scenes	Daughter offering to deceased and Sentnay	Hall, wall (9); p. 197, Inner Hall, wall (24)	PM I.1, p. 195, TT 96, Hall, wall (9); p.198–199, Inner Hall, wall (24)
Family Participation	Deceased with wives Sentnay & Sentnefert in multiple seated offering/banquet scenes	Hall, wall (1–2, 7–8); Inner Hall, wall (16–23)	PM I.1, pp. 197–199, TT 96, Hall, wall (1–2, 7–8); Inner Hall, wall (16–23)

Scene Category	Brief Description of Scene	Location in Tomb	PM Reference
Priests and Mourners	Son as priest censing and libating	Hall, wall (35)	PM I.1, p. 201, TT 96, Hall, wall (35)
Abydos Pilgrimage	Abydos pilgrimage within funeral procession registers	Hall, wall (40), Reg. I–II	PM I.1, p. 202, TT 96, Hall, wall (40), Reg. I–II
Purification and Rituals	Deceased purified by sem-priest	Hall, wall (36)	PM I.1, p. 201, TT 96, Hall, wall (36)

TT69 – Menna

(Temp. Tuthmosis IV (Mid-Eighteenth Dynasty), Sheikh ʿAbd el-Qurna)

Scene Category	Brief Description of Scene	Location in Tomb	PM Reference
Funerary Processions	Funeral procession: offering-bringers, mourners, boats, shrines, canoes, Anubis	Hall, wall (9)	PM I.9, p. 138, TT69, wall (9)
Offering Scenes	deceased offers on braziers; wife and children with bouquets; offering-bringers, butchers, clappers with song	Hall, wall (5)	PM I.5, p. 137, TT69, wall (5)
Family Participation	Deceased Menna, with wife and daughter, adoring; hymn to Amen-Re; mention of Valley Festival	Hall, wall (3)	PM I.1, p. 135, TT69, wall (3)
Priests and Mourners	Deceased and wife receive offerings and produce	Hall, wall (6)	PM I.1, p. 137, TT69, wall (6)
Abydos Pilgrimage	Abydos pilgrimage	Hall, wall (11), Register I	PM I.11, p. 138, TT69, wall (11), registers I
Purification and Rituals	-	-	-

TT52 – Nakht

(Temp. Tuthmosis IV (Mid-Eighteenth Dynasty), Sheikh ʿAbd el-Qurna)

Scene Category	Brief Description of Scene	Location in Tomb	PM Reference
Funerary Processions	Deceased and wife pour ointment over offerings	Hall, wall (4)	PM I.1, p. 99, TT52, wall (4)
Offering Scenes	Offering-bringers and priests with tapers and ointment before deceased and wife	Hall, wall (5)	PM I.1, p. 99, TT52, wall (5)

Scene Category	Brief Description of Scene	Location in Tomb	PM Reference
Family Participation	Son offering bouquets to deceased and wife during banquet	Hall, wall (3)	PM I.1, p. 99–100, TT52, wall (3)
Priests and Mourners	Deceased and wife receive offerings and produce	Hall, wall (6)	PM I.1, p. 99–100, TT52, wall (6)
Abydos Pilgrimage	-		
Purification and Rituals	-		

TT139 – Pairi

(Temp. Amenophis III (Late Eighteenth Dynasty), Sheikh ʿAbd el-Qurna)

Scene Category	Brief Description of Scene	Location in Tomb	PM Reference
Funerary Processions	Dragging sarcophagus; carrying funerary equipment including model ship	Hall, wall (4), Reg. II	PM I.1, p. 253, TT139, wall (4), Reg. II
Offering Scenes	Son Amenhotep and priest with family offer to deceased and wife	Hall, wall (5), outer lintel	PM I.1, p. 253, TT139, wall (5)
Family Participation	Son Amenhotep with others offers bouquet to deceased and wife; deceased offers to parents	Hall, wall (3), Reg. I–II	PM I.1, p. 253, TT139, wall (3)
Priests and Mourners	Rites before statues; two priests with Opening of the Mouth instruments before mummies	Hall, wall (4), Reg. III	PM I.1, p. 253, TT139 (4), Reg. III
Abydos Pilgrimage	Abydos pilgrimage	Hall, wall (4), Reg. IV	PM I.1, p. 253, TT139, wall (4), Reg. IV
Purification and Rituals	-	-	-

TT 181 – Nebamun & Ipuky

(Temp. Amenophis III–IV (Late Eighteenth Dynasty), Khokha)

Scene Category	Brief Description of Scene	Location in Tomb	PM Reference
Funerary Processions	Four registers, including “Nine friends” bringing funeral outfit, boats with coffin and mourners	Hall, wall (4-5)	PM I.2, p. 287, TT 181, Hall, wall (4–5)

Scene Category	Brief Description of Scene	Location in Tomb	PM Reference
Offering Scenes	Son and relatives offering bouquets to deceased and couple	Hall, wall (2, 8)	PM I.2, p. 286, TT 181, Hall, wall (2, 8)
Family Participation	Nebamun with mother, small daughter; Ipuky (?) and wife; parents holding bouquets; relatives before deceased	Hall, wall (2-3, 7-8)	PM I.2, p. 286, TT 181, Hall, wall (2–3, 7–8)
Priests and Mourners	Priests with incense/libation; female mourners; semi-priest; blind singers; boats with mourners; priests performing ceremonies before mummies	Hall, wall (1, 2, 4-5)	PM I.2, pp. 286-287, TT 181, Hall, wall (1, 2, 4–5)
Abydos Pilgrimage	-	-	-
Purification and Rituals	Nebamun pouring incense on offerings	Hall, wall (2, 8)	PM I.2, p. 286, 288 TT 181, Hall, wall (2, 8)

TT49 – Neferhotep

(Probably temp. Ay (Late Eighteenth Dynasty), Khokha)

Scene Category	Brief Description of Scene	Location in Tomb	PM Reference
Funerary Processions	Boats with mourners; priests before mummies; deceased and wife inspecting funerary equipment; making of coffin	Hall, wall (8), Registers I–III	PM I.1, p. 92, TT49, wall (8), Reg. I–III
Offering Scenes	Deceased with brazier and wife; butchers; offerings	Pillar A (a)	PM I.1, p. 94, TT49, Pillar A (a)
Family Participation	Deceased and family above niche; family in offering context	Shrine, wall (22)	PM I.1, p. 94, TT49, wall (22)
Priests and Mourners	Female mourners accompanying offerings	Hall, wall (10), sub-scene	PM I.1, p. 93, TT49, wall (10), sub-scene
Abydos Pilgrimage	-	-	-
Purification and Rituals	Priest performing libation ritual before deceased and wife	Hall, wall (10)	PM I.1, p. 93, TT49, wall (10)

TT409 – Simut (Kyky)

(Temp. Ramesses II (Nineteenth Dynasty), Asasif)

Scene Category	Brief Description of Scene	Location in Tomb	PM Reference
Funerary Processions	Funeral procession (continued at 10)	Hall (9), Reg. II	PM I.1, p. 462, TT409, Hall (9–10)
Offering Scenes	Priest offering to the couple; three offering scenes	Hall (4–6), Reg. III	PM I.1, p. 462, TT409, Hall (4–6)
Family Participation	Deceased and wife together in offering scene	Façade (2)	PM I.1, p. 462, TT409, Façade (2)
Priests and Mourners	Mummy on couch; six priests (two with Anubis and hawk masks); six female mourners	Inner Room (13)	PM I.1, p. 462, TT409, Inner Room (13)
Abydos Pilgrimage	-	-	-
Purification and Rituals	Priest offering before couple	Hall (4–5)	PM I.1, p. 462, TT409, Hall (4–5)

4.3. The Funerary Chapel of Maya (Suppl. 7910): Historical Background and Previous Studies

The Chapel of Maya (TT 338) was discovered in 1906 during Ernesto Schiaparelli's excavations at Deir el-Medina, a community housing the artisans responsible for royal tombs in the Theban necropolis. Alongside the nearby tomb of Kha and Meryt (TT 8), Maya's chapel was uncovered in a lateral wadi during the 1906 excavation season (Dorn & Polis 2014, p. 109). Schiaparelli's reports detail the scale of excavation work, noting the clearing of areas with up to fifteen meters of debris, and highlight the significance of the chapel in understanding New Kingdom funerary practices.

Aguilera Martín (2020) explains only a few months after the work had begun, Schiaparelli discovered the chapel of the tomb of Maya (TT 338), a painter active during the final years of the Eighteenth Dynasty. The vivid colors of the decoration led him to carefully remove the walls of the chapel in order to transport them to the museum in Turin, where they can still be seen today.

The chapel was constructed at the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty, possibly during the reign of Akhenaten (circa 1340 BCE) (Tosi, 1970, p. 17). Its structure consisted of a rectangular hall surmounted by a now-lost pyramid, with the precise limits of the courtyard and pyramidion remaining unknown. The interior walls were decorated with tempera paintings, The colors, produced from minerals and vegetables (ocher for red and yellow, charcoal for black, limestone carbonate for white, malachite for blue and green), were mixed with water and gum Arabic as a blinder. By February 1906, Fabrizio Lucarini had successfully transferred the painted plaster to canvas using the Strappo technique, preserving them for further study in Turin (Museo Egizio, n.d., Chapel of Maya, TT338).

The funerary stele of Maya (see figure 5), also brought to Turin as part of the Drovetti collection, which was installed at the back wall of the chapel.

Figure 5. Chapel of Maya TT338 and the Stele at the back wall (Suppl. 7910). Museo Egizio, Turin.

4.3.1. Deir el-Medina

As we talked under 3.2.3 tomb location, Deir el-Medina lies at the southern extremity of the Theban Necropolis, to the east of the present-day road leading to the Valley of the Queens and south of the Valley of the Kings, which is situated beyond the hill to the north of the village. The associated cemetery extends across the western slopes of the workmen's settlement. The tombs are located at elevations ranging from approximately 110 to 150 meters above sea level, whereas the Nile floodplain lies further to the east at about 90 meters above sea level. All tomb owners were craftsmen and scribes residing in the village, meaning their tomb distribution does not reflect broader necropolis-wide patterns. However, chronological patterns can still be observed when tombs are analyzed by reign (Slinger, 2022, p. 241).

The settlement of Deir el-Medina was occupied from the reign of Tuthmosis I until the Amarna Period, when it was apparently abandoned and destroyed by fire, before being reorganised and expanded under Horemheb (Bierbrier, 1982, p. 65). Final abandonment occurred during the reign of Ramesses XI, when the inhabitants relocated to Medinet Habu (Bierbrier, 1982, p. 119).

The cemetery contains 54 Theban Tombs TTs, all dating to the New Kingdom. Of these, six are securely dated to the Eighteenth Dynasty (TT8, TT291, TT325, TT338, TT340 and TT354), with two additional tombs assigned broadly to either the Eighteenth or Nineteenth Dynasty (TT6 and TT268) (Slinger, 2022, p. 241).

The Deir el-Medina cemetery was exclusively used by the craftsmen and inhabitants of the village. Due to the limited range of titles among the buried individuals (Slinger, 2022, p. 251).

The most prominent individuals buried at Deir el-Medina were the 'Chief Workmen' or 'Foremen' and senior 'Scribes of the Tomb' (Peden, 2011, pp. 382-83). The foremen, as affluent members of the community, had elaborate tombs with extensive inscriptions, allowing genealogical reconstruction (Davies, 1999, p. 2).

A perspective on image-makers appears in the evidence from Deir el-Medina, the planned village established to house royal tomb craftsmen working in the Valley of the Kings (McDowell, 2002; Meskell, 2002). This isolated settlement, located away from the Nile and closely controlled, was inhabited by state-employed artisans and their families. The community stands out for its unusually high levels of literacy and its intense engagement with artistic production. Because of their specialized skills and physical isolation, inhabitants frequently produced images themselves for both every day and funerary purposes (Nyord, pp, 37-39).

The brevity of the instructions demonstrates that the craftsman was expected to know divine iconography and compositional conventions well enough to execute the image without further explanation. Numerous similar devotional drawings are known from Deir el-Medina (Weiss, 2015, pp. 383-426), even though none precisely matches this description, possibly because phrases like "kissing the ground" could denote a general act of worship rather than a specific pose (Walsem, 1982, p. 194).

For private tombs, access to skilled craftsmen appears to have depended largely on the patron's social networks, since many artisans were attached to state or institutional workshops. Regardless of the means of procurement, decorated tombs required substantial financial investment (Hartwig, 2004, pp. 26-27).

Documents from Deir el-Medina also show that religious images played a central role in economic and social exchanges. Some images could have temporary or situational value, possibly connected to their perceived power or efficacy, even though the text does not specify the purpose (Nyord, pp, 37-39).

Studies of the limited evidence concerning the organization of the Deir el-Medina community during the Thutmoside period indicate that the workmen were overseen by the mayor of Thebes, Ineni, and possibly also by the "High Priest of Amun", Hapuseneb, both described as "Directors of all Offices of the Domain of Amun" (Bryan & Dorman, 2023, p. 137).

The tombs in Deir el-Medina were modest in size but decorated by skilled artists and craftsmen who were accustomed to working for demanding clients—the pharaohs themselves in the Valley of the Kings. These artisans also worked on their own tombs, applying the same care and expertise (Cartocci & Rosati, 2007, p. 238).

The work in Deir el-Medina demonstrates technical skill, though it generally lacks the inventive qualities seen in the tombs of high-ranking New Kingdom officials. The choice of themes reflects the artists' experience: they often depicted the dangers of the netherworld that the Sun had to overcome at night, and included numerous scenes derived from illustrations of the Book of the Dead, the most commonly used mortuary text (Cartocci & Rosati, 2007, p. 238).

4.3.2. Maya the tomb owner

The owner of the chapel was called Maya. He was a painter employed at the Theban Necropolis and living in Deir el-Medina during the Eighteenth dynasty, around 1300 BC. His title was the "Outline Draughtsman of Amun". Maya had a title which translated from Egyptian, literally sounds like scribe, designer, that is painter in the necropolis of Deir el-Medina. Maya was excellent painter but in hyperbolic style of Egyptian epitaphs we often find reality exalted and uncomfortable qualities attributed to the deceased. Maya, also known as the "Painter of Amun in the Place of Order," possibly held a leadership role among the artists of the place-of-order (Tosi, 1970, p. 19).

It is also noteworthy that the painter Maya, owner of TT 338, identified himself as a "Painter of Amun in the Place-of-Maat," a title shared by many of his early Ramesside successors. (Bryan & Dorman, 2023, p. 137)

As Schiaparelli, during his excavations discovered the chapel of the royal architect Kha, a few meters to the west and about one meter above the level of Maya's chapel. Both chapels face toward the funerary temple of King Amenhotep II, situated on the plain north of the temple of Ramesses II and according to Mario Tosi (1970) the possibility that Maya's tomb belongs to the period between the reigns of Thutmose IV and Amenhotep III would lend weight to the theory that a connection between Maya and Kha may have existed during their lifetimes (Tosi, 1970, p. 36). The proximity and orientation of the funerary monuments of Kha and Maya suggest that Maya was a scribe of Kha and chose to be buried, precisely for this reason, near his superior, Kha.

His name, Maya or May, is probably a variant of the very common name "Meri," which means "beloved." More precisely, it is the same name Meri, modified according to the contemporary pronunciation of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties, as we know from cuneiform transcriptions.

The presence of numerous foreigners in Egypt, and at Deir el-Medina, may have encouraged the tendency to adopt names different in form from the traditional ones.

Bernard Bruyère, the French archaeologist who brought the village and necropolis of Deir el-Medina to light over thirty-five years of persistent and passionate work, writes in one of his excavation reports in 1933–34, during excavations in the lower levels of the necropolis, in the western sector, in tomb No. 1352 of Setau, from the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty, a wooden headrest was found in the sarcophagus of a woman, Taat, bearing the following hieroglyphic inscription on its support: "The excellent scribe, skilled in his duties as scribe-draftsman, Maya."

It is noteworthy that Maya does not hold the title “Servant in the Place of Truth” (or of Righteousness or Justice), which was typical of the artisans of Deir el-Medina, nor do his children, as listed in the chapel or on his stele, carry this title. The “Place of Truth” was the designation of the pharaoh’s tomb (Tosi, 1970, p. 32).

The name had a religious-funerary character, and similarly the deceased recognized as innocent by the tribunal of Osiris was designated as “true of voice” or “justified.”

In this regard, it should be noted that Maya already held a clearly defined qualification: “scribe-draftsman of Amun in the Place of Truth,” whereas the title “Servant in the Place of Truth” was created specifically to meet the religious needs of those who, working in the necropolises as simple artisans (masons and stonecutters) or as laborers (diggers, carriers of water and materials, lime burners, and apprentices), and belonging to the “guild of stone workers”—a civil association of which the pharaoh was the supreme head—wished to possess a title that distinguished them from others and that they could proudly display during life and in their funerary inscriptions (Tosi, 1970, p. 33).

We know the names of Maya’s parents: Meriuaset and Mutnofre. In the onomastics of Deir el-Medina, in addition to Meriuaset, father of Maya, and Meriuaset, son of Maya, there exists another Meriuaset, who lived much later, at the end of the Nineteenth Dynasty and the beginning of the Twentieth Dynasty (Tosi, 1970, p. 39).

Maya’s wife, Tamit (her name means “the cat”). The name Tamit appears on a fragment of a circular limestone basin (No. 12314) in the lapidary of the Egyptian Museum of Turin.

The children of Maya listed in the chapel number seven; of these, only Parennefer (the name means “he of the beautiful name”) and Khonsu (the god Khonsu) also practiced their father’s profession and bear the title of scribe-draftsman (Tosi, 1970, p. 39).

The other children—Meriuaset, Nebmehit, Nebmose, Ramose, and Tutu—have no title, but only the designation of “son.” For Parennefer and Meriuaset, the term “beloved” is added to this designation.

Their names, which repeat names or epithets of deities and kings, are common in the onomastics of Deir el-Medina; only Tutu, perhaps of foreign origin, is rather rare (Tosi, 1970, p. 39).

The three daughters—Nubnofre, Mutnofre, and Arinofre—also bear no title.

It should also be noted that Amenemope, who in Chapel 338 is depicted as a bearer but is not indicated as a son of Maya, and does not appear on Stele No. 50009, is in fact identified as

Maya's son with the title "Chief of the Painters in the Temple of Amun" on a *shuebte* found in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.

Maya's mummy has not been found, because his tomb was certainly violated in antiquity, perhaps toward the end of the New Kingdom (Tosi, 1970, p. 36).

4.3.3. The Chapel: Architectural Layout and Decorative Program

The chapel of Maya is located on the hill west of the village, in the northern sector of the necropolis, and has been designated as No. 338 by the archaeologists who mapped the necropolis. It was of the type consisting of a parallelepiped covered by a pyramid. The pyramid that once surmounted the rectangular building has disappeared; the surface and boundaries of the courtyard are unknown. Unfortunately, along with the pyramid, the pyramidion of Maya has also been lost (Tosi, 1970, p. 17).

On the west side of the chapel, a shallow shaft was found, simply cut into the rock. The burial chambers consist of two small caves without decoration, one following the other, separated by a doorway with a limestone frame lacking inscriptions.

As has happened with many other monuments of Ancient Egypt, several remnants of the tomb of Maya were discovered at different times and placed in various museums. There was a stele that was situated on the eastern wall of the pyramid: with the pyramid gone, the stele was discovered by local inhabitants and sold in 1825 to Mr. William J. Bankes. It is now in England, in the Bankes Collection at Kingston Lacy, near Wimborne in Dorset.

This stele depicts Maya standing with her hands raised in a gesture of worship toward the sun disc, shown sailing along its cycle on its boat. At the bow sits the sun god, represented as a child with the thumb of his left hand in his mouth.

Another stele that in antiquity was placed in a niche in the back wall of the chapel (see Figure 3), it is currently displayed inside the reconstructed chapel at the Turin Museum. This stele had already arrived in Turin before the chapel itself, together with the artifacts of the Drovetti collection (Tosi, 1970, p. 17).

The aforementioned semicircular-topped stele of Maya is made of colored limestone, measuring 0.67 meters in height and 0.42 meters in width. Here, as in other similar stelae, in the upper register we see the deceased together with his wife, worshipping the god Osiris and the goddess Hathor, who are seated opposite an offering table.

In the lower register, Maya and Tamit, also seated, receive the tributes of their children: seven sons and two daughters. Next to Tamit's chair is depicted a little girl, another of her daughters (Tosi, 1970, p. 17).

About the decoration of the Chapel itself which we discuss further under 4.4, it is beautifully painted in a post-Amarna style with a varied iconographic program, including detailed boat processions related to the Abydos pilgrimage, a funeral scene with active female mourners, and a double depiction of the tomb itself. More space is devoted to inscriptions, written in a

practiced hand, including two quotations from the so-called Pyramid Texts, now interpreted as glorification-ritual texts.

The depictions beside the doorway also deserve attention, even if they show ordinary scenes: on the left, there is a woman, perhaps a daughter of Maya, who brings her left hand to her head in a gesture of grief and on the right, there is another depiction of the chapel-pyramid and various offerings gathered in large baskets, themselves placed on elegant small tables (Tosi, 1970, p. 30).

If we observe the ceiling of the chapel of Maya, we see that the frieze running along the vault and the decoration of the vault itself are among the most remarkable achievements of Egyptian decorative art.

An interesting detail in one section of the ceiling is the spiral, a characteristic element of Aegean art, which began to appear in Egypt during the Middle Kingdom. It appears fairly frequently on monuments of the Eighteenth Dynasty, then disappears with the emergence of other elements typical of Egyptian decoration (Tosi, 1970, p. 30).

TT 338 – Maya

(Temp. Akhenaten (Late Eighteenth Dynasty), Deir el-Medina)

Scene Category	Brief Description of Scene	Location in Tomb	PM Reference
Funerary Processions	Funeral procession in three registers: I, sarcophagus dragged by men and oxen to pyramid-tomb	wall (2), Register I	PM I.1, p. 406 (2), Reg. I
Offering Scenes	Offering scenes to couples (within three-register composition)	wall (2), Register II	PM I.1, p. 406 (2), Register. II
Offering Scenes	Offering scene to deceased and wife	(3), Reg. I	PM I.1, p. 406 (3), Reg. I
Offering Scenes	Deceased and wife offering to Osiris and Hathor (stela, Turin Mus. 1579)	Finds	PM I.1, p. 406, Finds
Family Participation	Three sons and daughter offering to deceased and wife (stela find)	Finds	PM I.1, p. 406, Finds
Family Participation	Relatives represented (stela find)	Finds	PM I.1, p. 406, Finds
Family Participation	Maya's parents before offering table and Maya's as sem-priest		
Priests and Mourners	Female mourner	(1)	PM I.1, p. 406 (1)
Priests and Mourners	Priest before offerings (double-scene)	(4), Reg. II	PM I.1, p. 400 (4), Reg. II
Abydos Pilgrimage	Abydos Pilgrimage (third register of main three-register composition)	(2), Reg. III	PM I.1, p. 400 (2), Reg. III

Scene Category	Brief Description of Scene	Location in Tomb	PM Reference
Purification and Rituals	Priest before offerings (ritual action)	(4), Reg. II	PM I.1, p. 400 (4), Reg. II

4.4. Thematic Analysis of Funerary Imagery

4.4.1. Funerary Procession: Description and Thematic Analysis in Maya's Chapel

For the ancient Egyptians, death was both a moment of mourning and a sacred transformation. Grief was a natural reaction, expressed through formal lamentations and ritual acts that affirmed the continuing bond between the living and the dead. As Aguilera Martin (2020) mentions an ostraca from the Deir el-Medina village that provide written evidence showing workers were granted seventeen days of absence following the death of a relative. The initial part of this mourning period was devoted to preparing the body, performing the necessary rites, embalming, and mourning. The remaining nine days were reserved for post-burial offerings and ritual activities.

These stages of mourning and ritual activity ultimately converged in the funeral procession, where the passage from death to regeneration was enacted before the community. In the New Kingdom, the funeral procession from the embalming hall to the tomb was a solemn, highly ritualized event. The sarcophagus was carried on a sledge drawn by cattle and accompanied by the shrine with the canopic jars and the tekenu[3], which may have contained embalming leftovers or symbolized the removal of evil forces from the deceased (Dw.t nb.t). The procession was marked by the song "Beware, O earth: a god is coming!", highlighting it as a hierophany, an appearance of a sacred being. The funeral was usually publicly visible (Assmann, 2005, p. 308).

The wall 2 of the Chapel of Maya TT 338 (Porter & Moss, 1960, p. 406) contains representations that are fairly well preserved, the wall is divided into three registers (see Figure 4). In the register I, the funeral of Maya is described. Here as it in many other New Kingdom tombs the sarcophagus of the deceased is placed on a catafalque (Assmann, 2005, pp. 308), made of wooden panels, set upon a boat between statues of the goddesses Isis and Nephthys who were based on Henri Frankfort (1978) were the sisters of Osiris[4] and care for him, the boat itself rests on a sledge. Six men and a pair of oxen pull the whole structure, while a man wrapped in the ritual cloak and holding a long staff precedes the group of attendants and mourners.

[3] A bag containing embalming remnants sewn into animal skin (Assman, 2005, p. 299).

[4] According to the myth, due to the conflict between Osiris and his brother Seth, Seth killed and dismembered him into fourteen parts. Isis, with assistance of her sister Nephthys, gathered his scattered limbs and restored him to life. Thereafter, Osiris became the ruler of the underworld and the judge of the deceased. This strong association with life, death, and rebirth explains why he became such a great and powerful deity (Mansour et al., 2023, p. 30).

Next to the catafalque, one of Maya’s sons, Khonsu, mourns the death of his father, while another son, Tutu, walking alongside the oxen, sprinkles the ground with milk to purify the path. Jan Assmann (2005) explains that the officiant, acting as the grieving son, presents the deceased not merely as his own father but as the son of Osiris and the goddess, thereby affiliating him with the divine sphere. In this way, the bond between father and son is reestablished for their mutual benefit (Assmann, 2005, p. 158). More broadly, the deceased was believed to enter an afterlife in which he retained status and the capacity to care for those he had left behind. Although situated beyond a metaphysical boundary, he was not considered absent from the world of the living. Rather, communication across this culturally regulated boundary remained possible: the living could symbolically “descend” to address him, and the deceased, even if unable to return physically, could continue to exert influence on behalf of his family. This belief is evidenced by the practice of depositing letters to the dead in tombs, through which the living sought the assistance of the departed (Assmann, 2005, p. 158). This may help explain the role and actions of Maya's sons during the funeral procession, however we shouldn't dismiss the role of the son and his responsibility for the funeral cult of his parents, whether it was a condition of inheritance or just moral motive as result of religious and social teachings (Soliman & Sotohy, 2021, p. 23).

The funeral procession is received by a group of seven lamenters, who weep, cry aloud, and scatter dust over their heads which we will discuss it further under 4.4.4 priests and mourners.

Then above the transport scene, twelve very short columns of hieroglyphs remain legible; here is the text referring to the deceased: "You are in the West, you are in the West, the favored one, you are in the West: you go on the sought-after path upon which the gods travel" (Tosi, 1970, p. 22). Since the sun was seen to set in the west behind the mountains of the Libyan chain, it was natural for the Egyptians to think that the entrance to the realm of the dead lay precisely in that region. Consequently, the West became the standard term to indicate the realm of the deceased, and every cemetery was established on the western bank of the Nile (Tosi, 1970, p. 23).

Ritual scenes have been treated as insurance that the rites would be carried out properly to ensure the eternal well-being of the deceased in the next world (Hartwig, 2004, p. 49). This could be a reason that in the register I on the right, seven men arranged in two rows and depicted in reduced scale, who are tasked with carrying the ritual furniture: chairs, small tables, boxes, and personal objects of the deceased, including his scribe’s palette, represented in a highly stylized manner within the tomb. The names of some of the seven carriers are legible: Amenemope, Thutmose, and the sculptor Amenemhet (Tosi, 1970, p. 28). We further observe that Sekherufmen, one of the bearers appearing on Wall, is preceded by the title “Servant” (Tosi, 1970, p. 39).

This scene, surmounted by a small pyramid which is considered the typical chapel of Deir el-Medina. The presence of the pyramid can express that the rites performed in front of the tomb. Assmann (2005) in a similar new kingdom example, tomb of Amenemope TT41 describes the funeral procession included three major segments: crossing the Nile from the city of the living on the east bank to the necropolis on the west, the procession from the embalming hall to the

tomb, and the rites were in front of the tomb. The coffin was drawn by cattle, accompanied by two smaller processions—one carrying a shrine with the canopic jars and the other carrying the tekenu, Dragging the coffin with cattle, mourners, and priests remained the canonical core of the procession across all periods (Assman, 2005, pp. 299-303). While the pyramid is painted white, the pyramidion is black; this color perhaps does not aim to imitate black granite, since most pyramidions at Deir el-Medina are made of white limestone or whitewashed plaster. The black color would thus have aesthetic and religious significance (Tosi, 1970, p. 39).

Register II of the wall 2 illustrates the offering scenes and register III depicts the voyage by boat to Abydos, Osiris' cult center, where the deceased could symbolically join in the god's festivals. They will be discussed respectively under 4.4.3 and 4.4.10.

4.4.2. Funerary Procession: Comparative Analysis

In comparison with the Chapel of Maya TT 338, several Eighteenth Dynasty tombs present similar funerary processions while differing in composition, gestures, and narrative emphasis.

The funerary procession represented in the Chapel of Maya TT 338 can be understood more comprehensively when compared with other Eighteenth Dynasty and Ramesside tomb scenes, which share certain formal elements but differ in expression, composition, and ritual focus.

In the tomb of Amenemopet TT 276, dating to the early Eighteenth Dynasty, the anthropoid coffin lies beneath an open canopy and is tended by three priests (see Figure 8). Isis stands at the foot and Nephthys at the head of the coffin in gestures of protection, both rendered at a larger scale than in Maya's scene (see Figure 18). The mummy itself, bound with golden bandages, is visible through the open canopy, showing a precise moment when priests tend the body (El-Shahawy, 2005, p. 21). In contrast, Maya's scene focuses on the movement of the procession, with the sarcophagus enclosed and transported as part of a ritual transition.

A similar configuration occurs in the tomb of Userhat TT 56, built in the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty. There, a naos-shaped coffin rests on a boat-sledge drawn by oxen and accompanied by bearers of furniture and funerary equipment in the upper registers, while boats with decorated cabins appear in the lower register (see Figures 9–10). The attendants are shown in long, static rows carrying offerings and equipment, without overlapping or varied gestures, and with minimal emotional expression. The color scheme is limited—red ochre for male figures, white for garments and background surfaces—creating a restrained visual tone compared to the more vivid color palette of Maya's chapel.

According to El-Shahawy (2005), in certain late Eighteenth Dynasty scenes, naos-shaped coffins are depicted partially open to show the inner anthropoid coffin containing the mummy, as seen in the tomb of Pairi TT 139. The deceased lies within the coffin beneath an open canopy on a sledge, and his son follows behind in slight mourning gestures. This contrasts with the more expressive posture of Maya's son, who bends slightly and places his hand on the catafalque (see Figure 7). In Pairi's tomb, the son walks behind the boat-shaped sledge,

touching the coffin with one hand while placing the other on his forehead in a gesture of grief (el-Shahawy, 2005, pp. 29–33). Statues of Isis and Nephthys also appear but in smaller scale and protective poses, similar in function to those flanking Maya's sarcophagus.

Another comparison can be made with the tomb of Nebamun and Ipuki TT 181, where three registers depict purification rituals, porters carrying offerings, and the leading of oxen (El-Shahawy, 2005, p. 21). The naos-shaped coffin, adorned with horizontal and vertical motifs, is flanked by Isis and Nephthys, with bouquets beside it. The coffin rests on a boat set upon a sledge drawn by men and oxen. Around it stand female relatives in expressive gestures of mourning. The wife Henwtnefert leans forward to touch the coffin, the son bends over it touching it with one hand and placing the other on his head, while the daughter Mwt-Nefert raises both arms to touch the coffin. Another woman, probably a second daughter, raises a hand above her head and gestures toward the priests, seemingly asking them to slow the procession. The scene conveys intense emotional mourning and close family ties with the deceased (El-Shahawy, 2005, p. 31). Boats in this composition overlap, creating depth, and one boat carries female mourners with varied hand gestures. The palette is generally restricted—red, white, and black—with selected decorative accents, whereas Maya's chapel employs comparatively richer tones.

By the New Kingdom, funerary scenes illustrated realistic clothing and actions while retaining older ritual frameworks (Assmann, 2005, p. 308). Assmann notes that Eighteenth Dynasty tomb depictions combined traditional ritual elements with contemporary, more realistic renderings of the funeral ceremonies.

In Ramesside tombs, the funerary procession evolved further: the deceased was shown carried by relatives, friends, and high-ranking officials instead of symbolic figures from the Delta (Assmann, 2005, p. 308). Realistic funeral scenes included arbors along the route, laden with food and drink, serving both as offerings to the sarcophagus and hospitality for participants—mirroring the atmosphere of major religious festivals. During this period, aristocratic funerals functioned as private processional events that could involve the local population (Assmann, 2005, p. 308).

Figure 6. Three registers of funerary procession scene (Suppl. 7910). Museo Egizio, Turin.

Figure 7. Funeral Procession, Tomb of Pairi TT 139 (el-Shahawy, 2005, p. 29).

Figure 8. The anthropoid coffin of Amenemopet TT 276 (El-Shahawy, 2005, p. 21).

Figure 9. Fragmentary scene from the funerary procession in the tomb of Nebamun and Ipuki TT 181 (El-Shahawy, 2005, p. 21).

TT 56.

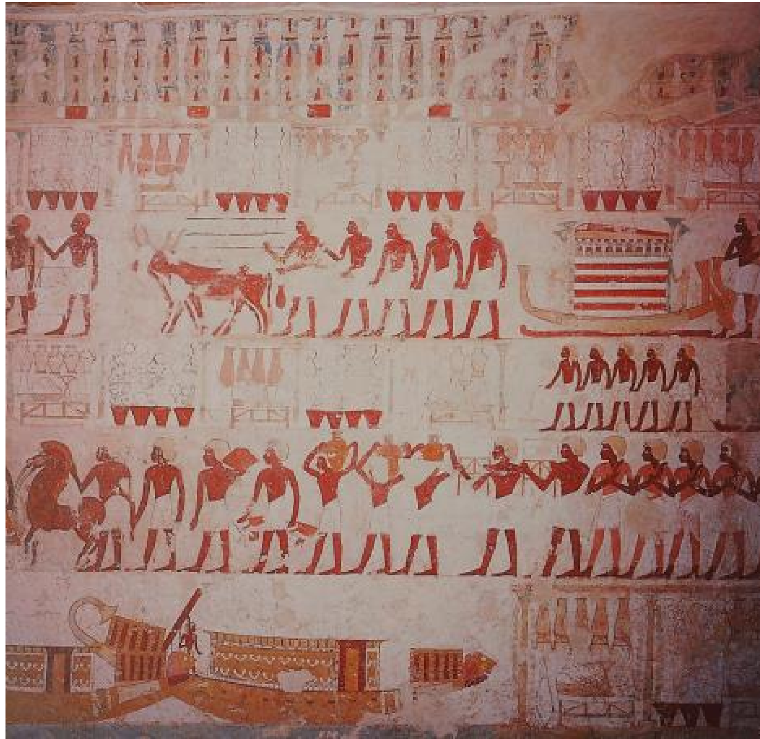

Figure 10. Funerary procession from the tomb of Userhat TT 56.

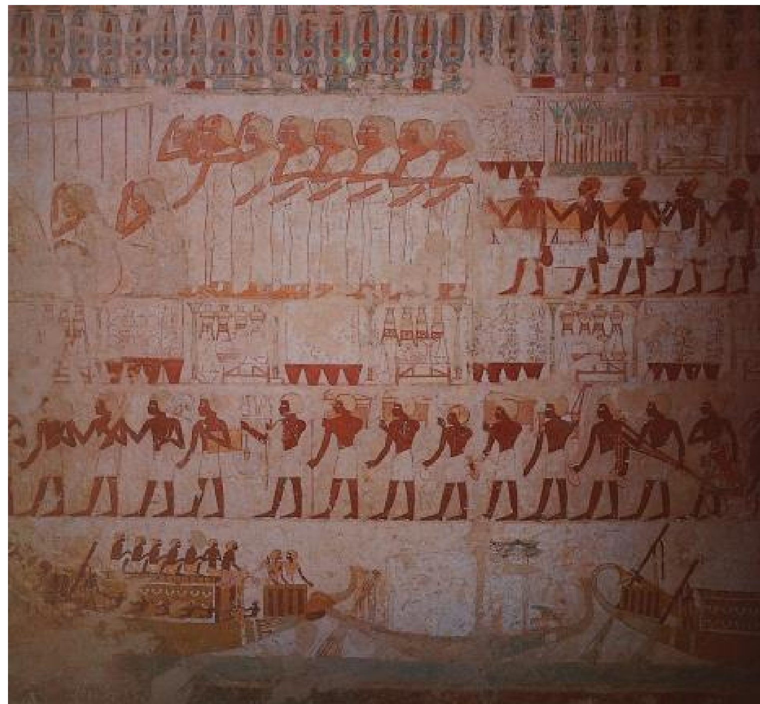

Figure 11. long rows of attendants carrying offerings and ritual equipment, tomb of Userhat TT 56.

4.4.3. Offering Scenes: General Description and Thematic Analysis in Maya's Chapel

Ensuring the deceased's successful transition and continued existence in the afterlife was a fundamental concern in ancient Egypt, necessitating a vital exchange between the realms of the living and the dead. Aguilera Martin (2020) explains just as the land of the living was fraught with dangers, the land of the dead was also full of threats that endangered the existence of the individual. To counter this, various techniques were employed, including amulets, spells, and offerings from the living. This exchange essentially created a bidirectional dependency between the living and the dead. Examining this relationship, it appears fragile and somewhat unstable; the ancestors, like the gods, required rituals and offerings to sustain themselves in the afterlife and maintain their favor toward their families.

This devotion to the deceased extended beyond mere sustenance and was a cornerstone of the mortuary cult itself. One of the important elements of the mortuary cult of the parents is the offering rituals on the feasts and occasions which the ancient Egyptians believed were useful to the dead (Hartwig, 2004). Offering scenes to the parents by the tomb owner or others, due to the high filial piety during the New Kingdom period carries important meaning and goals (Soliman & Sotohy, 2021, p. 23). These scenes translated the desire of the tomb owner to cause his parent's name to live by maintaining their tomb and presenting the necessary sacrifice. This religious piety towards the parent connected with the role of the son as Horus towards his parents after death (Soliman & Sotohy, 2021, p. 23) which we will discuss it further under Family Participation.

The distribution of the bearers in superimposed registers is an Egyptian graphic device indicating the placement of the rows in depth on the same ground plane (Tosi, 1970, p. 28).

These offering scenes can be distinguished by the traditional appearance of the parent as seated couple while receiving offerings from their children, the owner of the tomb, whether he is alone or with his wife. This is the same traditional appearance of the tomb owner and his wife when they receive the offerings of their children or others.

When the tomb owner offers to the parents among other relatives of brothers or ancestors, this connected to the ancestor cult (Davies & Gardiner, 1915) that developed in the New Kingdom and appeared strongly in Deir el-Madina. This kind of cult was more active in homes by keeping ancestor busts or for blessing and protection (Soliman & Sotohy, 2021, p. 24).

Another type of tomb owner's offerings scenes can be classified as thanksgiving for some favors. This classification occurred when the tomb owner offers to one of his parents or to his wife when they have one of two titles "royal tutor" or "royal nurse" (Soliman & Sotohy, 2021, p. 25).

Through the study of the scenes which represents the owners of the tombs offer to relatives or generally other persons, and because of the absence of death signs in most the texts of tomb owners, we can reach an important analysis that the owner of the tomb in these scenes is alive in the realm of the living, not the dead (Soliman & Sotohy, 2021, p. 25).

One of the important proofs that the tomb owner presents himself alive when offers to relatives or generally other persons, that the receiver of offerings is called Osiris, or held the adjective "revered" "ImAxy" which indicates his death, while the tomb owner did not identified as Osiris when he offers, this occurred also in some other tombs. When the owner of the tomb wears the costume of the sem-priest and performs the funeral rites to the deads he plays the role of the living Horus who performed the funeral rites before the dead Osiris (Shahawy, 2005) (Soliman & Sotohy, 2021, p. 26).

Turning our attention to the specific iconography of the offering scenes within the Chapel of Maya TT338, we find a compelling visual narrative of familial continuity and the essential rituals that sustained it. The wall 2, register II of the Chapel of Maya TT338 (Porter & Moss, 1960, p. 406), three almost identical scenes follow one another on the same plane; some of Maya's sons and daughters are depicted presenting offerings to their seated parents in front of offering tables covered with flowers, fruit, sweets, and bread. These offering tables are of a peculiar type in Ancient Egypt, consisting of a vertical support upon which a horizontal table rest (see Figure 12).

These are long rows of figures, and therefore the Egyptian artist had to be very skilled in varying their postures and balancing the different volumes to avoid a certain monotony in these scenes. Experience shows that an individual carrying an object can modify the position of the arms depending on the nature of what is carried. On this point, the artist sometimes emphasized subtle variations that escape the eye of the hurried visitor (see Figures 12&13).

4.4.4. Offering Scenes: Comparative Analysis

Offering scenes form an important component of New Kingdom tomb decoration and reflect the reciprocal relationship between the living and the deceased, in which offerings presented by family members, priests, or attendants sustain the tomb owner in the afterlife (Aguilera Martin, 2020; Hartwig, 2004). Such scenes visually reinforce the functioning of the mortuary cult and the continuing role of relatives in maintaining the deceased's sustenance and remembrance.

A comparable example appears in the tomb of Sennefer TT 96**.** In this tomb, Sennefer and his wife are shown seated as recipients of offerings, while priests approach with baskets, altars, and provisions (see Figure 15). The ceiling above the chamber is decorated with vine motifs symbolizing fertility and abundance. Long rows of attendants are depicted across several registers bearing a wide range of objects, including sandals, jewelry, amulets, weapons, ointments, and food, while priests perform libation and incense rites (see Figure 16). The decoration of the chamber is accompanied by hieroglyphic inscriptions and framed by a decorative ceiling pattern.

Within the scene, the tomb owner is represented on the left side holding a staff and facing a procession of priests approaching from the right. These figures carry ritual objects such as fans, vessels, and other ceremonial items, suggesting a scene of offering or ritual presentation. The

orientation of the procession toward the tomb owner establishes a clear directional flow within the composition and emphasizes his role as the principal recipient of these actions.

The composition further highlights the social and symbolic importance of the tomb owner through the use of hierarchical scale. The seated deceased is depicted significantly larger than the surrounding figures, while his wife, who stands closely behind him, is also represented on a larger scale than the attendants and offering bearers. This difference in scale visually distinguishes the principal couple from the servants approaching them and reinforces their elevated status within the scene. The wife is shown placing her arm affectionately around the arm or shoulder of her husband, a gesture conveying intimacy and marital unity.

The color palette in these scenes is relatively restrained. Red-brown tones are used for male skin, while garments are generally rendered in white. Black is used for hair and outlines, and yellow or ochre appears in certain objects and decorative details. The light background enhances the clarity of the figures, while the black contour lines define their forms and movements.

Another scene within TT 96 depicts Sennefer offering a bouquet of Amun to his brother, Amenemopet called Pairy**,** illustrating the close relationship between them (PM I, p. 198; Slinger, 2022, pp. 277–281). This representation demonstrates that offering scenes could also emphasize familial bonds alongside ritual practices.

A further comparison can be drawn with the tomb of Menna TT 69**.** In this tomb, the offering tables are depicted piled with a wide variety of goods, including bread, meat, vegetables, fruits, wine jars, and incense cones, while priests and attendants contribute to the richness of the ritual setting. In contrast, the offerings in the Chapel of Maya appear simpler and are carried primarily by his children, emphasizing the role of family members in maintaining the mortuary cult. In Menna's tomb, two male offering-bearers stand behind Menna and his wife. One holds three cuts of meat in his right hand and wears a white kilt and a wig, while in his left hand he carries a bouquet composed of lotus flowers and buds. The second man, dressed in a short kilt, carries a small altar decorated with lotus flowers (Mansour et al., 2023, p. 32).

More generally, Eighteenth Dynasty funerary scenes frequently depict porters carrying the equipment and personal possessions of the deceased (see Figure 14). These porters are typically represented walking in a line while transporting various pieces of furniture such as beds, chairs, headrests, tables, stools, and stands. In addition, they carry statues, amulets, jewellery, vessels of perfume and unguents, dismantled chariots, bags, sacks, writing implements, bouquets, flowers, and papyrus stems.

Boxes containing the belongings of the deceased are also shown, sometimes with lids revealing their contents. These objects may include weapons, sceptres, jewellery, clothing, mirrors, cosmetic containers, and other toiletry items. The items are transported in different ways—carried on the head, across the shoulders, held in the hands, or suspended from chains attached to yokes placed on the carriers' shoulders. Egyptian artists used these varied methods to create visual diversity within the procession scenes and to avoid monotony in the representation of offering bearers.

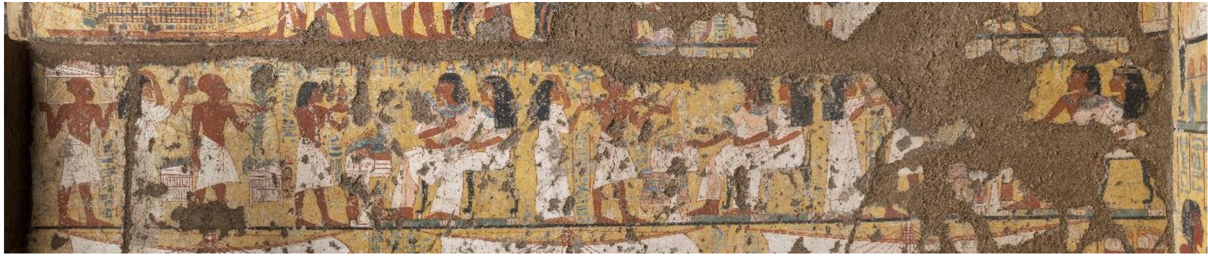

Figure 12. Offering scene: Maya’s children bringing offerings to their parents (Suppl. 7910). Museo Egizio, Turin.

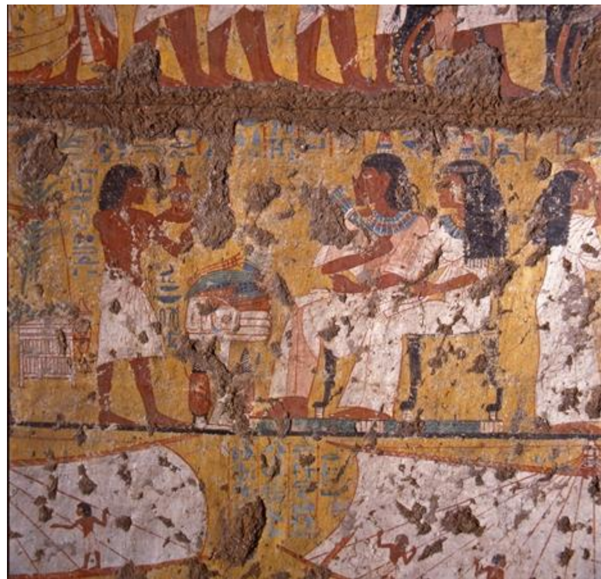

Figure 13. Details of offering scene (Suppl. 7910). Museo Egizio, Turin.

Figure 14. Tomb of Rekhmire TT 100, Porters of the funerary boxes containing the belongings of the deceased (el-shahawy, 2005, p. 50).

Figure15. Tomb of Sennefer TT 96, showing Sennefer and his wife seated in front of offering bearers.

4.4.5. Family Participation: General Description and Thematic Analysis in Maya's Chapel

The section on Family Participation delves into the profound significance of the son's role, mirroring the actions of Horus. This responsibility was not merely ceremonial but held deep implications for the restoration of the deceased's identity and the perpetuation of their legacy, underpinned by both piety and the assurance of inheritance. According to Hartwig (2005) The son, as Horus, who held the title "Eldest son" was the one who is responsible of the mortuary cult for his parents, perhaps motivated by the fact that inheritance was contingent on his performance of these activities. The "Eldest son" of the deceased as el-Shahawy (2005) indicates was one of the most important characters in the funeral pageant. His presence was very important as what confirmed that the deceased was an Osiris and his beloved son was Horus. It also guaranteed the son's future role, who by observing the funerary rites for the deceased in turn assured his inheritance (Soliman & Sotohy, 2021, p. 28). Assmann (2005) emphasizes certain ritual texts about the son's responsibility in restoring his father's social identity—these are described as "Horus-texts." Horus's actions toward Osiris aim to reestablish his honor, status, and kingship: he restores his rule with the *wrr.t*-crown, raises him up against his enemy, humiliates and subdues that enemy, and ensures Osiris's protection. Horus also secures Osiris's recognition by Geb, the ultimate authority in royal succession. Assmann (2005) stresses the fundamental bond between father and son, highlighting their togetherness and the son's devoted turning of the heart toward his deceased father (Assmann, 2005, p. 42). Horus restores Osiris's personal identity by reintegrating him into the community of the gods. The restoration of the body is linked to conjugal love (husband and wife, brother and sister), while the restoration of social identity is connected to filial love and piety (father and son).

Both horizontal and vertical relationships were seen as powerful bonds capable of overcoming death and sustaining ties between the living and the dead, forming the basic structure of Egyptian society (Assmann, 2005, p. 41), While Teeter (2011) discusses the New Kingdom's designated "eldest son" and their significant title within the mortuary cult, he also clarifies that the role could be filled by others. In situations lacking sons, the responsibility and title of "eldest son" could fall to a brother, a daughter, or the widowed wife.

The insights drawn from Assmann and others regarding Horus's restorative actions and the son's vital role in maintaining social and divine order are vividly illustrated by the consistent depiction of the sem-priest. The repetition of the sem-priest dress as in the scenes gives a specific meaning related to the role of Horus as the protector of his father's position. The appearance of the son in his cultic role for protecting and inheriting his father's position while offering to him is very similar to the role of *iwn mwt.f*, who symbolized the eldest son of the royal family and who cared for the deceased king. These scenes of *iwn mwt.f* was repeatedly represented on the walls of the royal and divine monuments during the new kingdom. *Iwn mwt.f* also appears as a priest wearing a leopard skin and interpreted as royal *kA* descended from one generation to the next and from father to son. The role of *iwn mut.f* was performed by some priests on behalf of the son responsible for the cult of the royal *kA* symbolizing the eldest son and successor of the king (Soliman & Sotohy, 2021, p. 27).

While the symbolic roles of the son as Horus and the sem-priest were paramount, the presence of deceased's parents also formed an aspect of familial devotion. The parents of the tomb owner were the most important element of the extended family, therefore, talking care of them in old age and after death as Whale (1989) notes was more than others. when the Tomb owner offers to his parents, as in most of the scenes, this could be included within the general frame of piety towards the parents which related to the role of the son and his responsibility for the funeral cult of his parents (Soliman & Sotohy, 2021, p. 23).

Turning to Maya's chapel, family participation is evident. The decorations, of the back wall of the chapel of Maya which is largely lost and the stele of Maya as we talked under 4.3.3 was originally placed here (Porter & Moss, 1960, p. 406). On the left remains of the wall we observe the depiction of two seated figures, who are parents of Maya: Meriuaset and Mutnofre. Positioned to the right of her husband, Mutnofre wears a wide and long white linen tunic, transparent at the chest; her black "enveloping" wig, in use during the Seventeenth Dynasty, is adorned with a colored ribbon. Both have on their heads the cone of perfumed unguent, a prerogative of guests at banquets. Beneath the wooden couch with lion-legged supports, two colored vessels can be seen, which were used for ointments (see Figure 16).

On the lower left is depicted Maya's son, Ramose, dressed in the leopard skin typical of the priests called "Sem," responsible for funerary rites, while he extends a vessel with lustral water and a portable censer that is lit (see Figure 17). Indeed, in Egyptian practice, the firstborn son of the deceased served as the funerary priest; it was his duty to perform the daily offering and honoring ceremonies and to take care of the most solemn annual commemoration ceremony (Tosi, 1970, p. 22).

In the central area, partially lost, were depicted the offerings for the deceased placed upon a mat: an assortment of fruit, grapes, figs, sweets, and watermelons; on the right, another son of Maya, Parennefer, also dressed in a leopard skin, presents similar offerings (Tosi, 1970, p. 22).

The back wall of the Chapel of Maya TT 338 presents a composition in two horizontal registers framed by text bands. In the upper register, Maya's parents are depicted seated before an offering table, while in the lower register their grandson Ramose officiates as funerary priest. Separate groundlines structure the composition, reinforcing order and clarity, and the sequencing of figures side by side, slight overlap, and framing lines lend the scene depth and a sense of virtual architecture.

The wife overlaps her husband slightly, conveying intimacy, while Ramose, wearing the leopard skin of the sem-priest, presents a vessel of lustral water and a censer. His dynamic gestures contrast with the seated calm of his grandparents. Unlike in many tombs, the scale of the figures is consistent: Ramose is not reduced, but integrated as an equal participant.

4.4.6. Family Participation: Comparative Analysis

When compared with other Theban tombs of the Eighteenth Dynasty, the Chapel of Maya TT 338 demonstrates distinctive choices in the representation of family relationships and the visual expression of filial roles. Unlike many contemporaneous tombs, Maya's chapel emphasizes active participation of his children—particularly his sons Ramose and Parennefer—as sem-priests performing offerings, rather than illustrating them merely as attendants in subordinate scale. This compositional and thematic approach underscores the continuity of the Horus paradigm, where filial devotion ensures both ritual legitimation and inheritance, principles widely discussed by Hartwig (2005), El-Shahawy (2005), and Assmann (2005).

In Nakht's tomb TT 52**,** the tomb owner and his wife dominate the offering scene, while attendants and children appear markedly smaller, emphasizing hierarchical scale instead of equal participation. One of the main scenes depicts Nakht pouring myrrh over heaps of food and vessels, as his wife stands behind him holding a sistrum and menit, instruments symbolically linked to Hathor. Attendants in the background prepare and present further provisions (see Figure 18). The composition highlights ritual completeness and divine association through music but maintains a rigid social order where the principal couple remains the focal point.

By contrast, in Menna's tomb TT 69**,** expressive family gestures dominate the imagery. Menna stands in an attitude of adoration with his wife behind him, described in the labels above as the "Lady of the House." She wears a long transparent garment reaching to her feet, a large collar necklace, and heavy wig, adorned with bracelets and a broad necklace on her chest. She holds a garland in her hands (Mansour et al., 2023, p. 32). Scenes in Menna's tomb stress symbolic tenderness—the wife embracing her husband and daughters offering sistrums and menits—linking familial devotion to Hathoric imagery and the concept of rebirth through affection and music**.**

In the tomb of Rekhmire TT 100, dating to the late reign of Tuthmosis III, familial continuity is presented through the depiction of his predecessors and relatives. Rekhmire, the grandson of Ahmose who began a lineage of viziers serving under Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III, portrays these ancestors alongside himself, thereby emphasizing dynastic and genealogical succession (PM I, p. 210; Slinger, 2022, pp. 281–285). The inclusion of predecessors in the decorative scheme serves as a visual expression of lineage and transmission of social authority within the family.

Sennefer's tomb TT 96, by comparison, presents the son as sem-priest, dressed in the leopard skin, performing libation before his father and mother. This iconography not only asserts marital unity but also symbolizes ritual and priestly succession, echoing wider practices in which the eldest son—acting as Horus—ensures the continuation of the mortuary cult. This motif closely parallels that in Maya's chapel, where Ramose performs the same sem-priest duties, extending water libation and incense as acts of filial and cultic devotion (Soliman & Sotohy, 2021, p. 27; Tosi, 1970, p. 22).

Similarly, the tomb of Nebamun and Ipuki TT 181 displays emotional and intimate family gestures, particularly in mourning and farewell scenes. The wife and children express visible grief through raised arms and tactile gestures of closeness (see Figure 9). These interactions portray the family's emotional engagement with the deceased, contrasting with more formal representations elsewhere.

Taken together, these examples reveal a spectrum of approaches to family participation in Eighteenth Dynasty tombs—from the hierarchical and formal composition of Nakht's and Menna's tombs, through the genealogical and successor-based imagery of Rekhmire and Sennefer, to the deeply emotive family gestures in Nebamun and Ipuki.

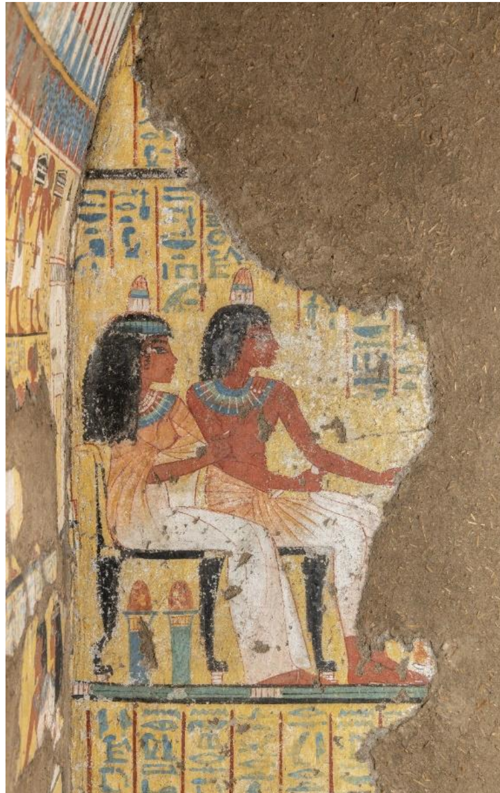

Figure 16. Maya's parents (Suppl. 7910). Museo Egizio, Turin.

Figure 17. Maya's son in leopard skin as sem-priest (Suppl. 7910). Museo Egizio, Turin.

Figure 18. Family participation from the tomb of Nakht TT 52, showing Nakht pouring myrrh over heaps of food and vessels, while his wife stands behind him.

4.4.7. Priests and Mourners: General Description and Thematic Analysis in Maya's Chapel

As we know from Aguilera Martín (2020), although adult life expectancy rarely exceeded forty years and infant mortality was high, death in Deir el-Medina was taken seriously and considered a distressing event for the living.

In addition, Hartwig (2004) describes priests from the local temple or special mortuary priests could be entrusted with the funeral, the burial, and the long-term continuation of the deceased's mortuary cult (Soliman & Sotohy, 2021, p. 28). Multiple priests participated in these rituals. The chief lector priest and sem-priest (as we mentioned above under Family Participation 4.4.5 which the Eldest Son usually had the role of sem-priest) performed mortuary offerings and represented Thoth and Horus, respectively. The embalmer, often linked with Anubis, was the only participant who wore a mask. Other participants—including imy-is-priests, imy-khent-priests, friends, sculptors, craftsmen, mourning women, and birds—acted as roles in the ceremonial drama rather than as professional mortuary priests. In ordinary mortuary cults, a single *ka-servant* priest performed the rites, often wearing the panther skin of the sem-priest _as in Chapel of Maya was performed by his son with leopard skin (see Figure 17) _ and conducting libations over offerings that were depicted but not always physically present (Assmann, 2005, pp. 299–303). During the Amarna Period, historical or symbolic

representations were removed from tomb art, including the sem-priest in panther skin, as the emphasis shifted entirely to realistic depictions (Assmann, 2005, pp. 299–303). El-shahawy adds several priests participated in the funeral procession and performed different ritual duties. Among them was the khery-heb, the lector priest responsible for reciting sacred texts, and the imy-khenet, who conducted the rites involving perfumes. The Aherep-wash and the hm-wash were in charge of coordinating and maintaining the rhythm of the funeral procession. In the Tomb of Rekhmire TT 100, a sem-priest is depicted carrying out the Opening of the Mouth ceremony on the mummy of the deceased (El-Shahawy, 2005, p. 45).

Depicted in the funerary procession wall 2 register I next to the catafalque, one of Maya's sons, Khonsu, mourns the death of his father (see Figure 19). In addition, the funeral procession is received by a group of seven lamenters, who weep, cry aloud, and scatter dust over their heads (see Figure 20).

According to Assmann (2005) grief in New Kingdom was depicted in a wide range of gestures. Women displayed intense pain, while men were usually shown mourning calmly, although in the Amarna and post-Amarna Periods even high-ranking men could be shown in passionate mourning (Assmann, 2005, p. 309). This is also reflected in the gesture of Maya's son Khonsu, who places his hand on the catafalque while expressing overt grief, demonstrating a more intense and public display of mourning rather than calm sadness (see Figure 19). although the depiction of the seven female mourners, who place dust on their heads and cry, remains even more extreme (see Figure 20) and according to Assmann (2005) acted as roles in the ceremonial drama rather than as professional mortuary priests.

4.4.8. Priests and Mourners: Comparative Analysis

When compared with other Theban tombs, especially the tomb of Samut called Kyky TT 409 from the Ramesside Period, the representation of priests and mourners in the Chapel of Maya reveals notable stylistic and thematic differences. In TT 409, as noted by El-Shahawy (2005, p. 23), groups of mourning women are depicted in highly expressive gestures, emphasizing emotional intensity and communal grief.

Stylistically, the two scenes differ in the treatment of figure form, gesture, and color. In Samut's tomb, the female figures are elongated and schematic, drawn mainly through strong red linear outlines with minimal internal modeling. The repeated gestures—arms raised to the head or face—create a collective rhythm of lamentation typical of New Kingdom funerary contexts. Anatomical detail is secondary to gesture: the hands are simplified and linear, the bodies slender, and the chest rendered according to Egyptian convention with only one visible nipple, reinforcing the stylized canon of frontal torso and profile body. The palette is limited, dominated by reddish tones and black wigs against a white or light background, producing a graphic, linear appearance and conveying intensity through visual economy rather than chromatic richness.

In contrast, the Chapel of Maya presents a more refined and color-rich execution. The mourners—especially the seven lamenting women receiving the funeral procession (see

Figure 20)—are fuller in proportion, with gestures more controlled and individualized. Hands and facial features are carefully articulated, and the mourners' grief appears solemn yet vivid. The palette contrasts sharply with TT 409: garments are rendered in white, wigs in black, and the background painted yellow, giving the composition a warmer and more monumental tone. This chromatic refinement corresponds to Maya's broader decorative approach, where pigment differentiation and spatial arrangement enhance the narrative continuity from priestly ritual to emotional participation.

Figure 19. Maya's son expressing grief (Suppl. 7910). Museo Egizio, Turin.

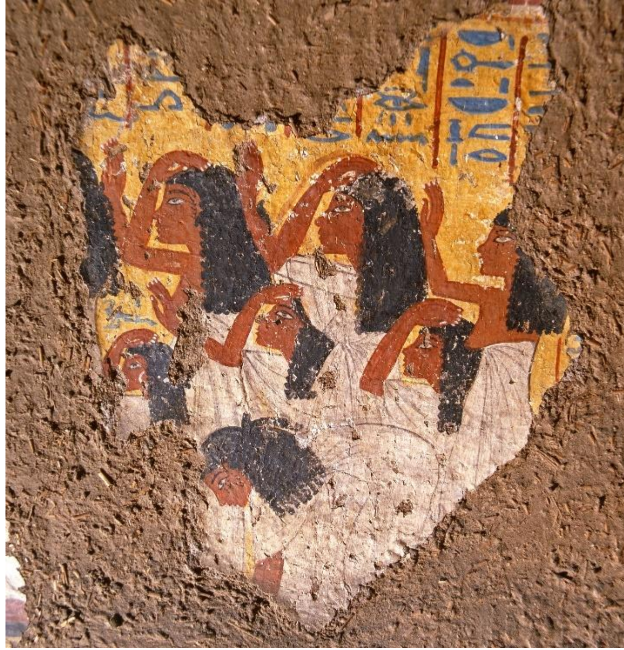

Figure 20. Female mourners expressing grief at the funeral procession (Suppl. 7910). Museo Egizio, Turin.

Figure 21. Maya's daughter expressing grief (Suppl. 7910). Museo Egizio, Turin.

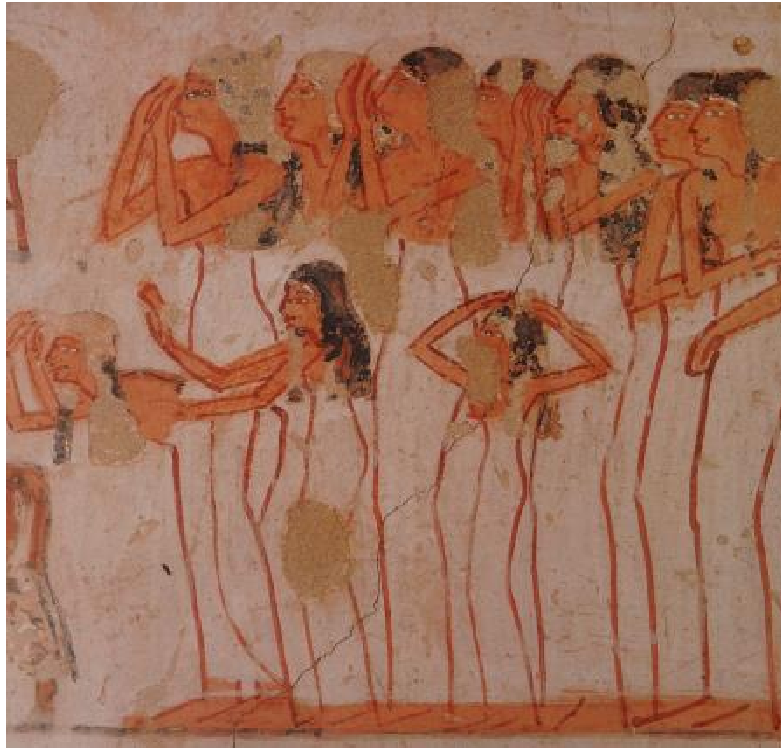

Figure 22. Group of mourning women in expressive gestures, tomb of Samut called Kyky TT 409 (el-Shahawy, 2005, p. 23).

4.4.9. Abydos Pilgrimage: General Description and Thematic Analysis in Maya's Chapel

Mario Tosi (1970) about the Abydos mentions that it was the cenotaph of Osiris, the god of the dead. The cult of Osiris, originally from Busiris in the Delta, was transferred in very ancient times, following circumstances unknown to us, to Abydos in Upper Egypt. Tradition holds that Osiris was buried in this location, and consequently it became one of the principal centers of Osirian worship, the most sacred site in Egypt, a destination of continuous pilgrimage by the faithful hoping to obtain benefits for their afterlife. The great religious ceremonies held at Abydos were counted among the country's main festivals; it was believed that the souls of the deceased arrived here by magical means on boats offered for this purpose. Mansour et al. (2023) argue that the beliefs that developed around Osiris are fundamental. He is regarded as one of the most ancient deities of the afterlife; he is the lord of the dead and the son of the god of Heliopolis. The meaning of his name has been interpreted as "the mighty one," "the complete being," or "the venerable god." Among his principal epithets are: "Lord of Abydos," "Foremost of the Westerners," "Bull of the West," "Lord of Eternity," and "Ruler of the Dead" (Mansour et al., 2023, p. 33).

Assmann (2005) highlights the purposeful nature of the journey to Abydos in Egyptian belief. the deceased became powerful ancestral spirits who could support the living. The afterlife was an ordered realm with hierarchical and legal structures. The deceased, provisioned and

recognized as ancestral spirits, consciously journeyed to the court of Osiris to gain status, recognition, and the ability to maintain connections with the living (Assmann, 2005, p. 162).

Within this religious framework, Abydos held particular significance. It was regarded as especially sacred and symbolically closer to the netherworld than other places. The transition from home to tomb was therefore understood to include a journey to Abydos, the site most closely associated with Osiris and the realm of the dead. Abydos was sometimes the location of the Judgment of the Dead (Assmann, 2005, pp. 305–306). In addition, Because of the importance of Osiris in his role as ruler of the netherworld, as well as his association with rebirth and fertility, every deceased individual aspired to become "an Osiris" in the afterlife. (Mansour et al, 2023, p. 35)

This theological conception is depicted in the register III of wall 2 of the Chapel of Maya (Porter & Moss, 1960, p. 400), where scenes of ritual navigation on the Nile toward Abydos can be observed (see Figures 24). On the left, the first vessel has a trapezoidal sail: Maya and Tamit are seated at the center of the ship, while their son Khonsu is at the prow (see Figures 23). Two enormous oars are placed on either side of the stern and mounted on forks that functioned as rudders; next to them stands the helmsman, who maneuvers them using a bar. In the second vessel, also with a sail, in addition to the helmsman and a pilot at the prow who probes the sandy bottom with a long pole, four sailors attending to the sail and a row of nine oarsmen can be seen. A third boat, also with a sail and similar to the other two, can be visible (Tosi, 1970, p. 28).

The "journey to Abydos," always depicted as a real journey by boat, with a larger river-worthy boat towing a barque. In the barque sat statues of the tomb owner and his wife. Captions indicate that the journey to Abydos was connected with participating in Osiris' cultic dramas, and inscriptions express the wish to travel to Abydos and Busiris in a transformed state to attend major festivals of Osiris (Assmann, 2005, pp. 305-306).

The procession toward Abydos, the sacred city of Osiris. The inclusion of this motif places TT 338 within a broader network of Eighteenth Dynasty tombs in which the journey to Abydos symbolized the deceased's participation in Osirian resurrection (Tosi, 1970, pp. 19-27; Bryan & Dorman, 2023, p. 119).

The right wall of the Chapel of Maya, in the register III, there are additional scenes of navigation toward Abydos. In this case, however, two rowed boats are depicted, each with a row of seven oarsmen. In the first, in addition to the rowers, there is a pilot at the prow with a sounding pole and a helmsman at the stern next to the enormous oar or rudder. In the second boat, which differs from the first by the presence of a cabin, there is also a sailor who keeps rhythm for the rowers with a whip.

Here are some excerpts from the hieroglyphic text: "Words of jubilation that say: You are at Abydos, the favored one of Amun. You are at Abydos." "His beloved son, the scribe-draftsman Parennefer, says: 'Turn to the right…' … they say: lamentation for the one who is mourned, come, mourn him… to the right… toward the west…" (Tosi, 1970, p. 30). Assmann (2005)

adds crossing to the west bank is interpreted as a transition into a secure, divine sphere, granted only to the righteous. The combination of ceremonial language and the use of a symbolic barque demonstrates that the crossing was not merely a physical movement of the corpse, but a ritual riverine procession with spiritual significance (Assmann, 2005, p. 304).

The lower register depicts the ritual journey to Abydos, the sacred cult center of Osiris. By participating symbolically in ceremonies at Abydos, the deceased could join the eternal cycle of Osiris.

4.4.10. Abydos Pilgrimage: Comparative Analysis

Comparative evidence from other Theban tombs demonstrates that the representation of the pilgrimage to Abydos follows a recognizable iconographic pattern during the Eighteenth Dynasty. In several tombs, the coffin boat is explicitly identified as the neshmet, the sacred barque of Osiris used in the ritual mysteries of Abydos. In Theban Tomb 347, the coffin is depicted being transported in this ceremonial vessel, typically represented as a papyrus boat with a high prow and stern terminating in large papyrus blossoms. The coffin rests on a lion-shaped funerary bed beneath a baldachin**,** while statues of Isis and Nephthys are positioned at the head and foot. As noted by Frankfort (1978)**,** these goddesses—sisters of Osiris—play a protective role in funerary contexts, caring for the body of the deceased. The barque carrying the coffin is usually accompanied by mourners and is towed by a larger, river-worthy boat equipped with sail and oars, reinforcing the notion of a ritual voyage connected to the Osirian cult.

Inscriptions accompanying such scenes further clarify the symbolic meaning of the journey. Captions spoken by the pilot standing at the prow address the West as the harbor of the righteous and the divine realm granted to the deceased. The texts also invoke Hathor, Mistress of the West**,** who was believed to welcome and protect the dead as they entered the western domain of the afterlife (Assmann, 2005, p. 304).

However, the iconography of the Abydos pilgrimage is not always clearly distinguished from other riverine funerary scenes. In some Eighteenth Dynasty tombs, depictions of boats crossing the Nile toward the western necropolis appear visually intertwined with those illustrating the pilgrimage to Abydos. A notable example occurs in the tomb of Pairi TT 139 (see Figure 25). In this scene, the neshmet boat carrying the coffin is shown being towed by another vessel, following the conventional arrangement of a ceremonial barque accompanied by a larger transport boat. At the same time, the leading vessel contains boxes and chests, objects that are more typically associated with the funerary procession on land, where such equipment is carried by porters. The presence of these elements, together with the accompanying inscription, suggests that scenes of boats crossing the Nile and those depicting the pilgrimage to Abydos could sometimes be blended within a single visual composition (El-Shahawy, 2005, p. 24).

In comparison with these examples, the scenes in the Chapel of Maya TT 338 emphasize navigation and ritual movement through multiple boats and crews, as described in the previous

section. Rather than focusing on the transport of the coffin within the neshmet barque, Maya's decoration highlights the processional character of the voyage, with vessels carrying the tomb owner and his family and accompanied by sailors, pilots, and rowers. This approach integrates the pilgrimage within the broader narrative of the funerary program, visually expressing the deceased's participation in the sacred journey toward Abydos and the Osirian afterlife.

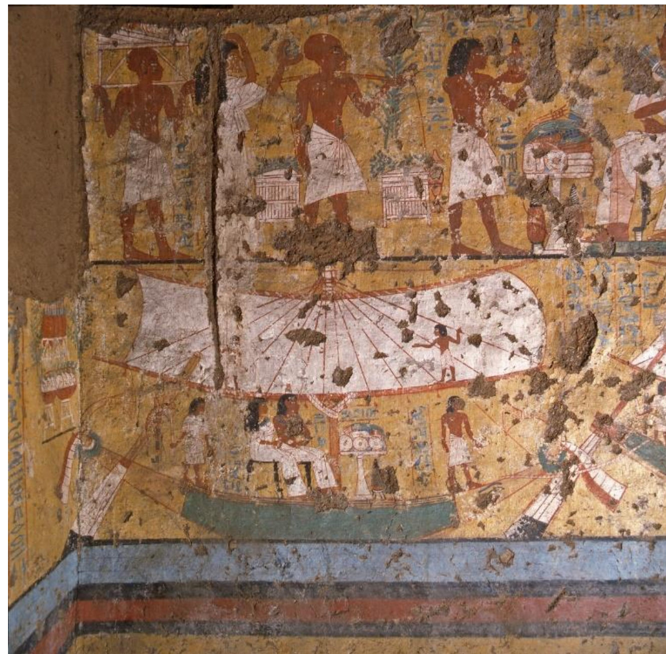

Figure 23. Journey to Abydos: Maya and his wife seated on the boat (Suppl. 7910). Museo Egizio, Turin.

Figure 24. Journey to Abydos: Three funerary boats (Suppl. 7910). Museo Egizio, Turin.

Figure 25. The boat carrying boxes and chests, Tomb of Pairi TT 139 (el-Shahawy, 2005, p. 24).

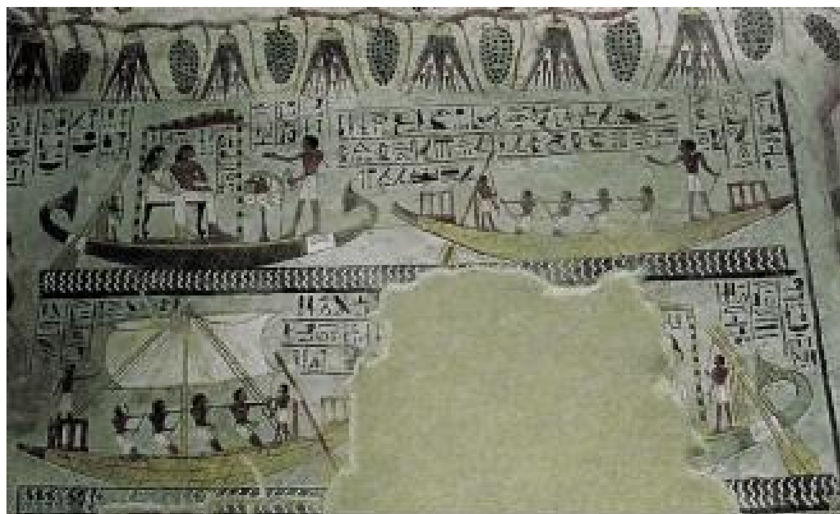

Figure 26. Tomb of Sennefer TT 96, Nile voyage to Abydos (el-Shahawy, 2005, p. 44).

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4.4.11. Purification and Ritual Scenes: General Description and Thematic Analysis of Maya's Chapel

Purification is a recurring theme in the Chapel of Maya, integrated into different phases of the funerary cycle. Two distinct purification moments are represented. On the back wall, Ramose, Maya's grandson, officiates as sem-priest, wearing the leopard skin and extending a censer and lustral vessel before his seated grandparents (see Figure 17). The composition is carefully structured: two registers separate the seated ancestors above from the officiating priest below,

with groundlines reinforcing order and clarity. Ramose's extended arm adds dynamism to the otherwise static scene, visually linking the ritual to its recipients.

On the upper register of the left wall, another son purifies the path before the oxen drawing the sarcophagus. He sprinkles water along the road, ensuring ritual purity for the coffin's passage (see Figure 27). Structurally, the purification figure is integrated directly into the linear progression of the procession.

The textual and visual integration of hymns and ritual formulae further emphasizes this transition. Fragments of solar hymns, comparable to those found in the Theban tombs of Ramose TT 55 and Amenhotep Huy TT 54, suggest the persistence of theological concepts that combine the solar and Osirian aspects of rebirth (Assmann, 2005; Polz, 1997b). The juxtaposition of these themes within Maya's chapel demonstrates the coexistence of conservative and innovative tendencies typical of the late Eighteenth Dynasty, when artists and patrons negotiated between earlier Theban models and emerging post-Amarna sensibilities (Bryan & Dorman, 2023, pp. 130–131).

4.4.12. Purification and Ritual Scenes: Comparative Analysis

Comparative evidence from other Theban tombs of the Eighteenth Dynasty demonstrates that purification rituals formed an essential component of the funerary cycle, although their representation varies according to context and emphasis.

In the tomb of Sennefer TT 96, purification appears as a highly structured ritual involving several officiants. A sem-priest pours nemset water over Sennefer and his wife, while their son, also wearing the leopard skin, performs complementary rites such as burning incense and making libations. Additional priests carrying torches and censers participate in the ceremony, suggesting a coordinated ritual performed by multiple specialists.

A similar emphasis on ritual specialization can be observed in the tomb of Rekhmire TT 100. Here purification forms part of a broader and more elaborate sequence of funerary rites. Priests perform libations and burnt offerings, and the cycle culminates in the Opening of the Mouth ceremony. The presence of named specialist priests underscores the technical and liturgical precision associated with these rituals.

Related motifs also appear in other Theban tombs. In the tomb of Nebamun and Ipuki TT 181, a priest leads the oxen drawing the funerary equipment while carrying a vessel of offerings, and the sprinkling of milk on the funeral road is again depicted (see Figure 28), emphasizing the purification of the route before the coffin's passage. In the tomb of Samut called Kyky TT 409, purification is likewise performed by priests in scenes that combine libation rituals with the transport of the coffin and broader mythological symbolism. Meanwhile, in the tomb of Amenemopet TT 276, the theme of purification appears in a more symbolic form: the mummy rests on a lion-headed bier beneath a canopy, attended by priests and flanked by Isis and Nephthys, whose presence underscores divine protection and ritual sanctification.

Figure 27. Purification of the path by Maya's son (Suppl. 7910). Museo Egizio, Turin.

Figure 28. Purifying the road, Tomb of Nebamun and Ipuki TT 181.

4.5. Narrative Structure Analysis

4.5.1. Narrative Strategies in Maya's Chapel

To understand the narrative strategies employed in Maya's chapel, we turn our attention to Wall 2 (Porter & Moss, 1960, p. 400). This wall presents a funerary procession across three registers, visually organized against a yellow background. The wall as a physical surface—or, according to Rogner (2022), the image field—is organized into three horizontal registers, each structured by base lines beneath the rows of figures. These base lines function compositionally, linking figures of equal height and conveying stability and firmness. Ornamental friezes appear above, while the lower socle zone remains unpainted and is separated by bands.

In register I, rows of men are depicted walking. However, according to Schäfer (1974), in New Kingdom representation men's legs are typically shown with one leg placed a pace forward, even when standing beside seated figures; therefore, this posture does not necessarily indicate movement. Nevertheless, sequencing contributes to the sense of temporality: a leading man wearing a long ritual cloak appears at the front, followed by oxen pulling the ensemble, suggesting progression in time.

Register I also depicted Maya's son, Khonsu, in a posture of mourning, placing his hand on the catafalque. According to Rogner (2022), such gestures mark a specific moment in time rather than representing a generalized state. The rows of figures in this register partially overlap and

conceal the second row behind them; as Schäfer (1974) explains, such overlapping creates depth cues.

Spatial organization also contributes to narrative meaning. In register III, the base line represents natural space, specifically a simplified watercourse identified as the Nile River. In register I, the pyramid-shaped tomb of Maya appears on the right side, functioning as an identifiable monument that anchors the scene spatially. According to Rogner (2022), such monuments localize events within pictorial space by establishing spatial relationships. The white color of the pyramid may signify purity and divine radiance, reflecting the narrative significance of pigment choice.

Within pictorial space, multiple moments occur simultaneously: in register I, the funerary procession, mourners, and servants carrying the deceased's belongings; in register II, multiple offering scenes; and in register III, the journey to Abydos. In addition, landscape elements such as the pyramid and the watercourse situate events spatially. As Rogner (2022) states, localization in pictorial space refers to spatial relationships that structure narrative action.

Rogner (2022) in addition notes that Egyptian artists express temporality through inscriptions, composition, sequencing, repeated figures, or changes in position. This is evident in register II, where repeated figures of Maya and his wife appear before the offering table together with their children. The changing hand posture of Maya in each repetition suggests the passage of time and reinforces the narrative quality of the scene.

In register II, objects placed on the offering tables are shown above one another. Schäfer (1974) observes that Egyptians often narrow supportive surfaces such as seats, table tops, mats, or boards, sometimes to the point that they are barely identifiable. This can be observed here in the rendering of the table surface, the rectangular mat beneath the feet of Maya and his wife, and the surfaces of the chairs.

The partial overlapping of Maya by his wife also suggests spatial depth. At the same time, a conceptual hierarchy is evident, as discussed by Schäfer (1974): the wife places her hand on her husband's shoulder, emphasizing his role as supporter and indicating male dominance.

The representation of one nipple and the modeling of the torso in the figures of Maya and Tamit demonstrate that the chest is depicted in side view. Similarly, the depiction of a single nipple in female figures confirms the lateral rendering of the torso. The eyes, however, are shown frontally and do not convey individual emotion. Grief among female mourners is expressed through teardrops beneath the eyes rather than through changes in eye shape. The treatment of hair further reveals the artist's preference for visual consistency over anatomical realism, reflecting the typicality of New Kingdom artistic conventions (Schäfer, 1974).

Depictions of hands also follow fixed conceptual rules rather than naturalistic observation (Schäfer, 1974). Open hands are slightly curved, with fingers rendered in profile, placed close together, without overlap and without consistent differentiation in length. When grasping objects, strict conventions apply: the thumb rests on top of flat objects and is positioned opposite the fingers when holding cylindrical forms. These conventions support Schäfer's argument that Egyptian art prioritizes codified clarity over optical realism.

Finally, certain elements carry symbolic significance. As Rogner (2022) explains, identifiable elements or entire scenes may function symbolically. The journey to Abydos may represent not only a literal event but also a symbolic journey. In the Chapel of Maya, symbolic elements include statues of Isis and Nephthys, the Eye of Horus, the lotus flower, and the ointment cone placed on the heads of participants. The "ointment cone" worn by banquet participants signifies a pleasant fragrance.

4.5.2. Broader Narrative Frameworks

Comparative material from other Theban tombs demonstrates that narrative organization was closely connected also to the architectural structure of the tomb itself. Architectural features such as doorways, chambers, and wall divisions often guided the arrangement of scenes and contributed to the narrative and symbolic meaning of the decoration.

Doorways and portals, for example, are frequently charged with ritual significance. In tombs such as Userhat TT 56 and Horemheb TT 78**,** they represent not only physical passage but also spiritual transformation (Bryan, 2023, p. 25). As Bryan (2023, p. 25) notes, doorways often functioned as *Sinnbilder* of separation—marking distinctions of status, sacred knowledge, or access to the afterlife. In TT 56, the inscribed prenomens of Amenhotep II and Thutmose IV distinguish the entryways of the storage magazines, visually regulating access and reinforcing hierarchical order. In this way, architectural elements become metaphors for ritual or social worthiness.

Architecture could also create controlled spaces for specific types of imagery. In the burial chamber of Sennefer TT 96, the spatial configuration provided a confined environment in which restricted or innovative imagery could be displayed. The chamber's decoration includes grapevines painted on an undulating ceiling and representations of the deceased and his family as white-clad, gold-adorned akhu figures. By placing these elements within a secluded burial chamber, the tomb's architecture both protected esoteric imagery and enhanced the social prestige of the tomb owner among his peers (Bryan & Dorman, 2023, pp. 43–58).

In other tombs, architectural divisions correspond directly to thematic organization within the decorative program. In the tombs of Rekhmire TT 100 and Nebamun and Ipuki TT 181**,** the arrangement of scenes follows the structural divisions of the walls and chambers, creating a hierarchical ordering of themes across the decorated surfaces (Davies, 1925b). Such organization parallels the narrative structuring observed in the Chapel of Maya, where the image field is divided into registers and scenes are arranged according to narrative progression.

The tomb of Horemheb TT 78 further illustrates the interaction between architectural space, decoration, and commemorative practice. In some scenes, captions or graffiti appear above the figures, including inscriptions placed over the depiction of Horemheb in the royal kiosk. These additions demonstrate a nuanced use of tomb surfaces: while visitors could leave graffiti, these inscriptions did not replace or challenge the identity of the tomb owner. Rather, they contributed to the ritual activation of the space, reflecting the ongoing interaction between visitors, decoration, and the tomb's commemorative function (Bryan, 2023, p. 25).

The painterly treatment of these tombs also reveals a clear awareness of spatial and narrative organization. Compositional divisions often follow architectural axes, while figures are arranged in rhythmic sequences that suggest controlled movement. Color is employed not only for aesthetic effect but also to indicate hierarchy and divine presence. The careful depiction of vessels, floral elements, and ritual implements—comparable to those found in the banquet scenes of Rekhmire TT 100—reflects both broader artistic continuity and localized workshop traditions. Such technical precision underscores the dual role of these decorated spaces as settings for ritual devotion and as visual expressions of elite identity.

4.6. Artist and Workshop Influence

While the previous section examined how narrative meaning is structured through spatial organization and architectural frameworks, the execution of these visual programs ultimately depended on the practices of the artists and workshops responsible for their production. The stylistic features observed in tomb decoration therefore reflect not only iconographic conventions but also the training, organization, and collaboration of the artisans who created them.

The decorated tombs of the Eighteenth Dynasty in the Deir el-Medina cemetery, though often modest in size and material quality, showcase a remarkable consistency in their iconographic repertoire and compositional schemes. This stylistic uniformity across multiple monuments suggests a foundation in collective authorship within established workshop traditions. However, upon closer examination, minor variations in the modeling of faces or the handling of line and color reveal the distinct touch of individual painters. Understanding these distinctions between personal and collective styles is crucial for appreciating how workshop practices fundamentally shaped visual narrative.

The transition into the late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Dynasties marks a period of both continuity and change in artistic practice. Evidence from Hierakonpolis and el-Kab indicates that expert artisans were highly esteemed, with even tomb builders of lower status being depicted at their work (Junker, 1957; Bryan, 2010, p. 1000). Bryan (2009) notes that from the reign of Thutmose II, formalized artistic training became increasingly necessary. The establishment of grid systems during this reign and changes in figural proportions around the reign of Thutmose III indicate the systematic method for training artisans (Bryan, 2010, pp. 1000–1004).

The following sections will explore these developments chronologically, examining the artistic characteristics and workshop practices evident in tombs from the early, mid, and late Eighteenth Dynasties, as well as the distinct period of the Amarna interlude and the subsequent Ramesside era.

4.6.1. Early Eighteenth Dynasty

Tombs from the early Eighteenth Dynasty demonstrate a clear continuation of Middle Kingdom traditions, including careful draftsmanship, strong outlines, broad washes of color, and the use of rectangular registers. Rekhmire TT 100, the tomb of a vizier under Thutmose III and Amenhotep II, serves as a prime example of the adaptability of Theban tomb architecture and decoration in this period (Serrano, 2005, pp. 91-94). This tomb skillfully integrates elements inherited from both Middle Kingdom and earlier Eighteenth Dynasty traditions, illustrating a continuous line of development. Decorative motifs, such as offering vessels and banquet scenes, are strategically arranged across registers and walls, effectively balancing ritual function with aesthetic clarity (Bryan & Dorman, 2023, p. 90).

4.6.2. Mid-Eighteenth Dynasty

The mid-Eighteenth Dynasty saw a variety of artistic expressions and workshop practices. The tomb of Sennefer TT 96, for instance, showcases the integration of architectural design and visual innovation. Its extensive polychrome decoration facilitated selective iconography and texts, tailored for a space accessible only to a limited elite audience (Bryan & Dorman, 2023, pp. 43–58). Workshop organization in Eighteenth Dynasty Thebes reveals a structured division of labor. In the tomb of Menna TT 69, visual analysis identifies several collaborating outline scribes, each distinguishable by stylistic traits, working under the supervision of a master painter. Stratigraphic examination of the wall paintings demonstrates a methodical sequence of work—from surface preparation and preliminary sketching to color application, outlining, and final corrections (Bryan & Dorman, 2023, p. 90). Similarly, in Theban workshops, master painters executed principal figures and major compositions, while younger or less experienced artists handled minor figures such as laborers, dancers, and professional mourners, enabling them to experiment with freer poses and expressive gestures (Aldred, 1951, pp. 16–18). In contrast, the tomb of Nakht TT 52 exemplifies delicate execution and intimate domestic imagery, prioritizing aesthetic refinement and personal devotion over grand elite monumentality (Bryan & Dorman, 2023, p. 90).

4.6.3. Late Eighteenth Dynasty and Amarna Period

As Thebes reorganized resources to rebuild major temples—particularly Karnak, royal funerary temples, and the Valley of the Kings—the powerful elites overseeing royal construction were simultaneously preparing their own tombs. In their administrative capacities, they were likely able to direct highly skilled artisans to construct and decorate their personal monuments (Bryan, 2010, pp. 1003–1004). The late Eighteenth Dynasty saw the continuation of these trends, with tombs reflecting the artistic developments of the era. The tomb of Nebamun and Ipuky, for example, would further illustrate these established artistic conventions. During the Amarna period, towards the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty, the Chapel of Maya exhibits the artistic shifts characteristic of Akhenaten's reign.

During the co-regency of Amenhotep III and Akhenaten, while ritual scenes continued to adhere to established iconography, many compositions—particularly those depicting the royal family and courtiers—began to embrace a more expressive, intimate, and spatially integrated approach (Aldred, 1951, pp. 22–23). The artists available for Akhenaten's ambitious projects were largely younger craftsmen not yet fully trained in traditional conventions. This facilitated experimentation, as they were less constrained by inherited techniques and more receptive to new royal directives (Aldred, 1951, p. 24). Within this system, junior artists handled minor details such as attendants and crowds, master painters were responsible for ensuring adherence to stylistic and technical standards in the principal scenes.

The tomb of Nebamun and Ipuky TT 181 represents the high level of skill and autonomy exercised by elite artists in the Theban necropolis. As chief sculptors, they likely supervised or directly participated in the decoration of their own tomb, with Pasanesut, the "painter of Amun," identified as the only external artist (Davies, 1925b). Evidence from contemporary workshop practices suggests that artists associated with Maya's chapel operated within an institutional framework linked to the domain of Amun. It is noteworthy that Maya, owner of TT 338, identified himself as a "painter of Amun in the Place-of-Maat (Bryan & Dorman, 2023, p. 137). Comparable cases indicate that artists sometimes decorated their own tombs or those of close colleagues, suggesting the circulation of a shared visual language within elite artistic circles (Davies, 1925b; Serrano, 2005). The precision of line, controlled palette, and proportional figures in these monuments correspond to the high artistic standards evident in contemporaneous Theban tombs such as Rekhmire TT 100 and Nebamun and Ipuky TT 181 (Davies, 1925b; Bryan & Dorman, 2023, p. 131). At the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty, Theban workshops became particularly skilled in depicting intense and excessive grief, a characteristic feature of tomb decoration during this period (El-Shahawy, 2007, p. 37).

4.6.4. Distinctions in Artistic Production: Deir el-Medina vs. Elite Theban Tombs

A significant gap in artistic skill and creative independence is observable when comparing the pre-Amarna tombs made by Deir el-Medina craftsmen with contemporary elite tombs in the Theban necropolis. The decoration of Eighteenth Dynasty chapels at Deir el-Medina is highly repetitive, and any attempt to move beyond the standard repertoire often results in obvious mistakes. In contrast, elite Theban tombs of the same period display schemes carefully adapted not only to the specific architectural spaces but also to the personal, professional, and historical characteristics of the patrons. Surviving preparatory sketches in elite tombs usually contain only minimal information—focusing on general layout or thematic encoding—indicating significant freedom for the artists to improvise and elaborate upon a basic model. Such artistic autonomy appears to have been largely absent among pre-Amarna Deir el-Medina craftsmen. These observations suggest that the Eighteenth Dynasty artists of Deir el-Medina would not have been capable of producing the nearby elite Theban tombs, raising the enduring question: who, then, executed the private tombs of Thebes? (Bryan & Dorman, 2023, p. 131).

Eighteenth Dynasty tombs in the Deir el-Medina cemetery, compared to non-elite monuments, such as early New Kingdom tombs at the base of Dra' Abu el-Naga, these tombs appear largely ordinary and average, though occasionally showing traces of artistic ambition—likely reflecting the specific skills of the workforce and their experience in monumental production. The artists drew on an iconographic repertoire rooted in the visual culture of simple, low-cost funerary monuments, such as stelae, a repertoire that may have been informed by their professional activities and shared broadly across Egyptian society. Nevertheless, their pre-Amarna tombs remain stylistically distant from the more specialized and scholarly iconographic tradition that the Deir el-Medina community would develop in the Ramesside period, following the reestablishment and organizational reform under Horemheb, when the artists gradually appropriated and reinterpreted the sophisticated visual and textual culture of royal tombs they themselves helped construct and decorate.

4.6.5. Ramesside Period

In the Ramesside period, the tomb of Samut (Kyky) exemplifies the artistic traditions and tomb construction practices of that era. During this period, innovations became more frequent than in the Eighteenth Dynasty. Artists appear to have pursued originality rather than monumental grandeur. The smaller scale of Ramesside tombs allowed greater freedom for experimentation and individual expression through new compositional strategies and novel elements. By contrast, the large scale of Eighteenth Dynasty tombs required sizable teams working collectively within established conventions, with master artists occasionally introducing individual touches while junior artists replicated standard models (El-Shahawy, 2005, p. 83).

These developments highlight the close relationship between artistic production, workshop organization, and the social environment in which tomb decoration was created. The following section will examine how the social and hierarchical status of the tomb owner influenced both the content and the presentation of funerary imagery within these monuments.

4.7. Social and Hierarchical Influences

The scale, location, and decorative program of private tombs were not determined solely by artistic conventions, but were also shaped by the status, profession, and institutional affiliations of the tomb owners themselves. Examining these social and hierarchical influences helps clarify why certain individuals were able to commission elaborate monuments and how their roles within the administrative and religious framework of Thebes influenced the visual narratives represented in their tombs.

In the New Kingdom, private tomb superstructures varied in size and complexity, from modest chapels to temple-shaped monuments (Staring, 2023, pp. 71–72). The official position of the tomb owner in society had influence on the size of the tomb rather than his wealth or lifetime. His wealth, however, was to some extent related to his position. Viziers such as Rekhmire were certainly wealthier than a mere "bread accountant" such as Userhat. The pre-vailing state of

affairs and religious beliefs also had a decisive influence on the scenes and the architecture of any given tomb (Hodel-Hoenes, p. 4). The Vizier and the High Priest of Amun[5], has been chosen as someone important enough to have had a say in his own choice of burial site, and to potentially influence tomb distribution of others (Roth, 1988, p. 206).

4.7.1. The Vizierate and High Officialdom

During the first part of the Eighteenth Dynasty, viziers' tombs were crucial focal points for contemporary burials (Cooney, 2018, pp. 64–65). Rekhmire, appointed as Vizier by Tuthmosis III and serving into the reign of Amenhotep II, exemplifies this high status. His tomb TT 100 reflects his status with large-scale halls and chapels suitable for both commemorative and ritual purposes (Serrano, 2005, pp. 91–94). The tomb's modifications to accommodate Amenhotep II's accession highlight its adaptability to political changes (Slinger, 2022, pp. 281-285). Vizier like Rekhmire should have had a choice in choosing his own burial site and its wall depictions (Van den Boorn, 1988, p. 335).

Amenemopet TT 29, Rekhmire's successor, was a Scribe, Overseer of Fields, and Counter of Grain for the State of Amun, demonstrating significant administrative roles. His tomb's adjacent placement to TT 100 suggests a deliberate connection, perhaps due to the Vizierate, even without a familial link. Appointed by Amenhotep II, potentially due to a childhood connection, Amenemopet's administrative importance is underscored by his position (Helck, 1958, pp. 294-95; Slinger, 2022, pp. 281-285).

Other high-ranking officials also commissioned significant tombs such as Horemheb, serving as Tutor of Princess, Master of the Horse, and Royal Scribe, held positions that would have necessitated a tomb reflecting his influence and proximity to royal power. And Userhat, a Royal Scribe and member of the "child of nursery" (implying close royal ties), his role would have also secured him a burial of notable status.

4.7.2. Civic and Religious Leadership

Civic and religious leadership also significantly impacted tomb prominence. TT96 is located to the north-west of Rekhmire TT100, slightly further up the hill than the previous tombs. Sennefer was the brother of Rekhmire's successor. In his capacity as the 'Mayor' of Thebes, and 'Overseer of the Arable Land in the Record Department' he would have had very close links to the Vizier – certainly to his brother but also potentially his predecessor. The record

[5] The High Priest of Amun was an extremely important official in the New Kingdom, responsible for religious activities and temple administration within the vast temple of Amun at Karnak, with considerable economic and political power because of the extensive resources controlled by the temple and the influence of the god Amun on kingship in the New Kingdom. His duties included leading religious processions during major festivals, conducting cult ceremonies, and playing a leading role when Amun was consulted for oracular decisions (Kubisch, 2018, pp. 189-190).

department is mentioned in the 'Duties' as being under the authority of the Vizier, and the title 'Mayor' is also referred to as a colleague of the Vizier. He also held a number of important roles within the Estate of Amun, but as 'High Priest of Amun in Menisut', and 'Overseer of Priests…' he would also have worked with the Vizier (Slinger, 2022, pp. 277-281).

Sennufer and Menna, both Mayors of the Southern City, were strategically buried in prominent locations (TT 96 and TT 69, respectively). Sennufer's roles in particular which placed him in close contact with the Vizier, highlight how civic and religious authority intertwined and influenced burial choices (Slinger, 2022, pp. 277-281).

Pairi, a Wab-Priest and Overseer of Peasants of Amun, held a significant religious and supervisory role within the Amun temple administration, indicating a level of authority that could justify a well-appointed tomb.

4.7.3. The Role of Specialized Officials and Artisans

Beyond top-tier administrators, individuals with specialized roles or artisanal expertise also left their mark on the necropolis.

Maya TT338, identified as a "scribe-draftsman" or "painter" in Deir el-Medina (Tosi, 1970, p. 30), served as a "painter of Amun in the Place-of-Maat." His professional role within the Theban workshop and connection to cultic administration placed him under the authority responsible for royal tombs (Bryan & Dorman, 2016, p. 137). His leadership role suggests that even those directly involved in artistic production could hold positions of significant influence.

Nebamun and Ipuky, officials associated with sculptural and artisan work, commissioned significant tombs TT 181. Their roles highlight how skilled craftspeople and those contributing directly to the artistic output of the necropolis could achieve notable burial monuments.

Neferhotep, as Chief Scribe of Amun, combined administrative authority with a key role within the Amun priesthood, meriting a tomb that reflected this dual importance.

Simut (or Samut), Chief Scribe and Counter of Cattle of Amun, held a critical administrative position within the temple economy, signifying influence and importance within the Amun cult during the Ramesside era.

The case of Nakht TT 52, a horologer priest of Amun, illustrates how individuals of modest administrative or priestly rank could nevertheless achieve remarkable visibility through tomb decoration. Despite his relatively minor status, Nakht's chapel exhibits one of the finest and most elegant painted programs of the Eighteenth Dynasty (Bryan & Dorman, 2023, p. 90). This indicates that personal and professional devotion to Amun could justify the construction of elaborately decorated private tombs, even among groups not typically expected to possess such monuments.

The representation of architectural thresholds in tombs such as Userhat's TT 56 reflects an increasing conceptualization of space as a metaphor for moral and ritual passage. As Bryan (2023, p. 25) observes, doorways could signify distinctions of rank and access, but also the initiate's movement between material and immaterial realms.

In Sennefer's tomb, thematic and ritual choices emphasize transformation, family, and selective textual display. The white-clad depiction of Sennefer and his family, adorned with gold jewelry, illustrates their status as transformed akhu in the afterlife, a motif absent in contemporary coffin decoration but explored here within the hidden burial chamber (Bryan&Dorman, 2023, pp. 43-58).

Rekhmire's tomb emphasizes his official role and the performance of ritual duties as vizier, combining ancestral, offering, and banquet imagery. Scenes include elaborately depicted vessels—globular jars, semi-spherical bowls with wavy rims, and carinated bowls with animal figurines—used in offering processions or depicted with flowers extending from their rims, signaling ritual significance (Serrano, 2005, pp. 91–94). The tomb also presents ancestors of Rekhmire's wife, Baki and It(ef), connecting family memory with ritual practice.

Thematically, TT 181 reflects the professional and social identity of its owners as chief sculptors, emphasizing their mastery over artistic production as well as their participation in funerary ritual. The tomb's decoration illustrates both personal taste and professional expertise, with Nebamun and Ipuki likely guiding the program to align with their roles in the royal domain. This underscores a broader pattern in the Eighteenth Dynasty, where members of the Deir el-Medina community utilized their own skills to create funerary monuments, sometimes for colleagues or for themselves, while maintaining a high standard of artistic and ritual coherence (Polz, 1997b; Fábián, 1992, 1997, 2004).

4.7.4. Shifting Power Dynamics and Tomb Ownership

By the Twentieth Dynasty, a notable shift in power dynamics occurred, with authority transitioning from the vizier to the local mayor (Cooney, 2018, pp. 64–65). This transition signifies an ongoing evolution in the social hierarchy and the types of officials who commanded the resources and influence necessary for prominent burial sites.

These developments illustrate how the organization of tomb space, decorative programs, and artistic production were closely intertwined with the broader social hierarchy of the New Kingdom. The position of the tomb owner—whether vizier, priest, administrator, or artisan—shaped not only the scale and location of the monument but also the thematic emphasis of its visual program.

The preceding analysis of narrative structure, artistic practice, and social hierarchy within the Chapel of Maya and comparable Theban tombs therefore provides the foundation for the final synthesis presented in the following concluding chapter.

5. Conclusion

This thesis has examined the concept of narrative in Egyptian imagery, with particular focus on New Kingdom tomb decoration and the funerary chapel of Maya TT 338 as a case study. In this research, narrative is understood as the visual representation of sequences of events that convey temporality and spatial localization. These narrative structures shape the themes depicted in tomb decoration and are closely connected to Egyptian religious beliefs concerning death, the afterlife, and funerary ritual.

Within New Kingdom tomb imagery, storytelling emerges through the organization of scenes, the arrangement of figures, and the visual strategies used to convey movement, sequence, and spatial relationships. Elements such as the positioning of figures, the use of registers, the depiction of ritual actions, and the inclusion of symbolic motifs contribute to the construction of a narrative framework. Through these devices, tomb decoration communicates funerary themes that reflect both religious ideology and the commemorative function of the tomb.

The formation of these visual narratives was also influenced by artistic workshops and by the social identity of the tomb owner. Workshop traditions shaped stylistic features and compositional approaches, while the status, profession, and personal preferences of the tomb owner played a significant role in determining the selection and emphasis of particular themes. As a result, tomb decoration represents not only religious concepts but also aspects of social identity and individual self-representation.

The funerary chapel of Maya provides a particularly valuable example within this context. Located in the cemetery of Deir el-Medina and reflecting a pre-Amarna artistic style, the chapel presents a range of funerary scenes that illustrate the narrative organization of ritual activities. Maya, who served as a painter associated with the state of Amun, occupied a professional position that likely facilitated access to skilled workshop practices and high-quality decoration. His artistic background may also have allowed him a degree of agency in the selection and depiction of the themes represented in his tomb. This individualization is particularly evident in the frequent representation of family members and children, as well as in the emphasis placed on ritual scenes that articulate both personal and religious dimensions of the funerary program.

A broader comparative perspective, incorporating examples of New Kingdom tomb decoration from sites such as el-Khokha and Abd el-Qurna and spanning periods from the late Seventeenth Dynasty to the Ramesside era, further highlights the influence of workshop practices and the social role of tomb owners on the formation of tomb imagery. Across these examples, funerary scenes are structured through narrative strategies that convey sequences of action, spatial depth, and temporal progression. The depiction of figures in procession, the organization of ritual participants, and the inclusion of symbolic and detailed elements together create dynamic visual compositions that represent the ritual, symbolic, and historical aspects of the funerary procession and related ceremonies.

Although a substantial body of scholarship has examined the iconography and thematic content of New Kingdom tomb paintings, relatively fewer studies have focused specifically on narrative in Egyptian tomb decoration. In particular, there remains limited research that

integrates the study of iconographic themes with an analysis of narrative structure in order to evaluate how effectively these visual programs communicate ritual meaning, symbolic concepts, and historical actions. This thesis therefore contributes to ongoing discussions by examining how narrative strategies—such as the representation of temporality, dynamism, spatial localization, and depth—function within tomb imagery and how these strategies may have shaped the viewer's understanding of the scenes and the beliefs they express. In doing so, the study seeks to demonstrate that New Kingdom tomb decoration should not be understood merely as decorative imagery, but rather as carefully structured visual narratives that articulate key aspects of Egyptian funerary ideology.

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