

The Artist in his Context: New Tendencies on the Research of Ancient Egyptian Art

Inmaculada VIVAS SÁINZ

This article explores the role of the artist in ancient Egypt in his social and cultural context, analysing a diversity of sources, that could help understand how Egyptian artists worked and how they made their artworks, especially focusing on the New Kingdom. In the past years new investigations have analysed the paintings, the teamwork of the painters and the variety of techniques they used. Other researchers have tried to reproduce the conditions in which the artists worked in a tomb, following an experimental approach. The importance of studying the corpus of varied figurative *ostraca* is also remarked, as they could be highly useful to understand the painter's work and his production. The answer to many questions regarding the ancient Egyptian artworks could be in the analysis of the creative process of the artists, conditioned by the strong artistic tradition but looking for originality, which reveals their individuality.

El presente artículo incide en la necesidad de estudiar la figura del artista del Egipto antiguo en su contexto social y cultural, a través un conjunto de fuentes diversas que pueden ayudarnos a conseguir una visión más realista de cómo trabajaban y realizaban sus obras, en especial durante el Reino Nuevo. En los últimos años se han desarrollado novedosas investigaciones que analizan las obras de los pintores, su manera de trabajar en equipo y sus técnicas, o que tratan de reproducir las condiciones materiales de trabajo en una tumba con un enfoque experimental. Igualmente destaca la importancia de los corpus de *ostraca* figurativos como una fuente primordial para comprender el trabajo del pintor egipcio y su obra, una importancia determinada por la diversidad de tipologías de *ostraca* en base a su temática y a su variada calidad técnica. La respuesta a muchos interrogantes sobre las obras del antiguo Egipto podría estar en el análisis del proceso creativo de los artistas, condicionados por la tradición artística pero buscando la originalidad, que es fiel reflejo de su individualidad.

Keywords: Egyptian Art, painters, techniques, *ostraca*.
Palabras clave: Arte egipcio, pintores, técnicas, *ostraca*.

The interest in Egyptian art starts with the origins of Egyptology, when the first travellers and adventurers began to draw and document the monuments. Napoleon Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt, developed between 1798 and 1801, can be considered as a milestone in the study of the artistic legacy of ancient Egypt. The extensive number of one hundred and sixty-seven scientists and artists who accompanied Napoleon in his campaign not only admired

the monuments and drew them, but also showed a scientific interest on their details and dimensions. The work performed by those scientists was compiled under the title *Description de l'Égypte, Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'Armée française*, commonly known as *Description* or *Description de l'Égypte* printed in Paris between 1810 and 1826. Two centuries have passed since this titanic work of nine volumes of text and elev-

TdE 7 (2016) — Páginas: 203-220

Recepción: 30/10/2016 - Admisión: 30/11/2016

Inmaculada Vivas Sáinz — ivivas@geo.uned.es

Departamento de Historia del Arte / Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) / Madrid / España

<http://doi.org/10.25145/j.TdE.2016.07.11>

en volumes with plates was published, and our approach to Egyptian art has changed significantly since then.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, Émile Prisse d’Avennes published what could be considered as the first history of Egyptian art¹, setting the basis for future studies and conforming it as a subject with its own character. During the twentieth century, and to a certain degree thanks to the intensive archaeological work in Egypt, a significant number of studies were published about Egyptian objects as well as about the monumental buildings, from outstanding temples of Karnak or Luxor, to the numerous pyramidal structures or the tombs and their paintings and reliefs. In the same manner, many collections of ancient Egyptian art from several museums were studied and published, not only in Egypt but also those from American and European museums, as well as different private collections. Perhaps the most relevant fact is that during the twentieth century various studies appeared with a critical and detailed analysis of Egyptian art as a whole. A good example is the one written by Heinrich Schäfer, who published in 1919 the first analytical study on Egyptian art focusing on the paintings and reliefs of ancient Egypt. Such an excellent study, re-issued several times and later enlarged by Emma Brunner-Taut, continues to be a reference for the analysis and the insight on how the artists from ancient Egypt considered the space, represented the human body or na-

ture itself². Other outstanding studies were devoted to new aspects such as the Egyptian canon, such as the one developed by Erik Iversen who dedicated an in-depth study on the analysis and explanation of the proportion and the canon in Egyptian art³. A similar focus had the extensive work of Gay Robins which implied a great improvement in the knowledge of the canon, the metrics and the proportions⁴.

The constant flow of publications related to Egyptian art increased significantly in the second half of the twentieth century providing with a large amount of information that is currently increasing year after year. Nowadays, our knowledge of ancient Egyptian art is much more extensive, as proved by the numerous publications and studies nourished by the different projects of excavation and restoration of Egyptian monuments. Besides, access to the results provided by the investigations is now much easier thanks to the Internet, both through serious and specialised websites related to scientific projects and through the various e-publications available online, which allow to disseminate research in a faster and easier way. Furthermore, access to traditional publications is feasible all around the world through different online repositories of important digitalised publications on Egyptian art. However, the objective of this study is not to revise the art history of ancient Egypt, which has already been analysed in recent publications⁵, but to highlight the new focuses which may specially result in an enrichment of the de-

1 Prisse d’Avennes, 1878-1879.

2 Schäfer, 1986.

3 Iversen, 1955.

4 Robins, 1994.

5 Bergmann, 2015.

velopment of this subject. The article aims to focus specifically on figurative arts, paying attention to the paintings and the painted reliefs from private New Kingdom tombs, a subject on which various studies have recently appeared with new proposals.

1 | The artist's role and his practices

Firstly, it is necessary to highlight the new emphasis that several recent studies have placed on the analysis of the artwork itself as a mean to understanding how Egyptian artist worked. Without doubt, there is a need to have rigorous publications about the artistic monuments of ancient Egypt, although they are usually centred on the study of a particular monument, be it a temple or a tomb, analysing its architecture, its hieroglyphs and its decorative repertoire. Despite the importance of these data, it is also necessary to analyse in detail the artwork itself, especially paintings and reliefs, in order to understand how they were accomplished. Therefore, it would be interesting to stress the *how* rather than the *what*, formulating new questions related to the way those artists worked. How did the Egyptian artists organise themselves when decorating the walls of a temple or a tomb? Is it possible to identify several artists' "hands"? Did they work simultaneously performing different works at the same time? The analysis of the numerous Theban tombs of the New Kingdom becomes especially useful to know how the painters and sculptors worked. In particular, Betsy Bryan's work on the Theban tomb of Suemni-

wet, TT 92, which implies a new approach to Egyptian painting, is a model to be followed⁶. Her study is focused on a Theban funerary chapel of the Eighteenth Dynasty (dated to the early years of Amenhotep II), mostly unfinished (fig. 1). Contrary to what could be thought, the unfinished state of the tomb decoration results in a great advantage in order to understand the way those artists worked and the elaborate phases.

Starting with the analysis of the paintings, the methodology of Theban artists and their way to organise the work could be observed, which is different in each part of Suemniwet's tomb. A diverse style within the TT 92 paintings can be attested, as well as a different way of organising the work, which could lead to the conclusion that several crews of artists with a variable number of members, each of them supervised by a master artist, were involved. Bryan proposed that around twenty-five painters could have worked in the tomb of Suemniwet, probably not simultaneously, using a variety of techniques (including several types of grids) as well as diverse types of pigments⁷. It seems that each master leading a crew or group could organise the work and apply his own techniques with total freedom, which may indicate a diverse origin of the artists, either geographical or from various local workshops. In order to complete the picture of the way the artists worked in a certain tomb, Bryan also analysed the available textual evidences, such as the Theban *ostraca* found by the Metropolitan Museum of Art mission dated in the time of Thutmose III and Hatshepsut.

6 Bryan, 2001.

7 Bryan, 2001: 70.

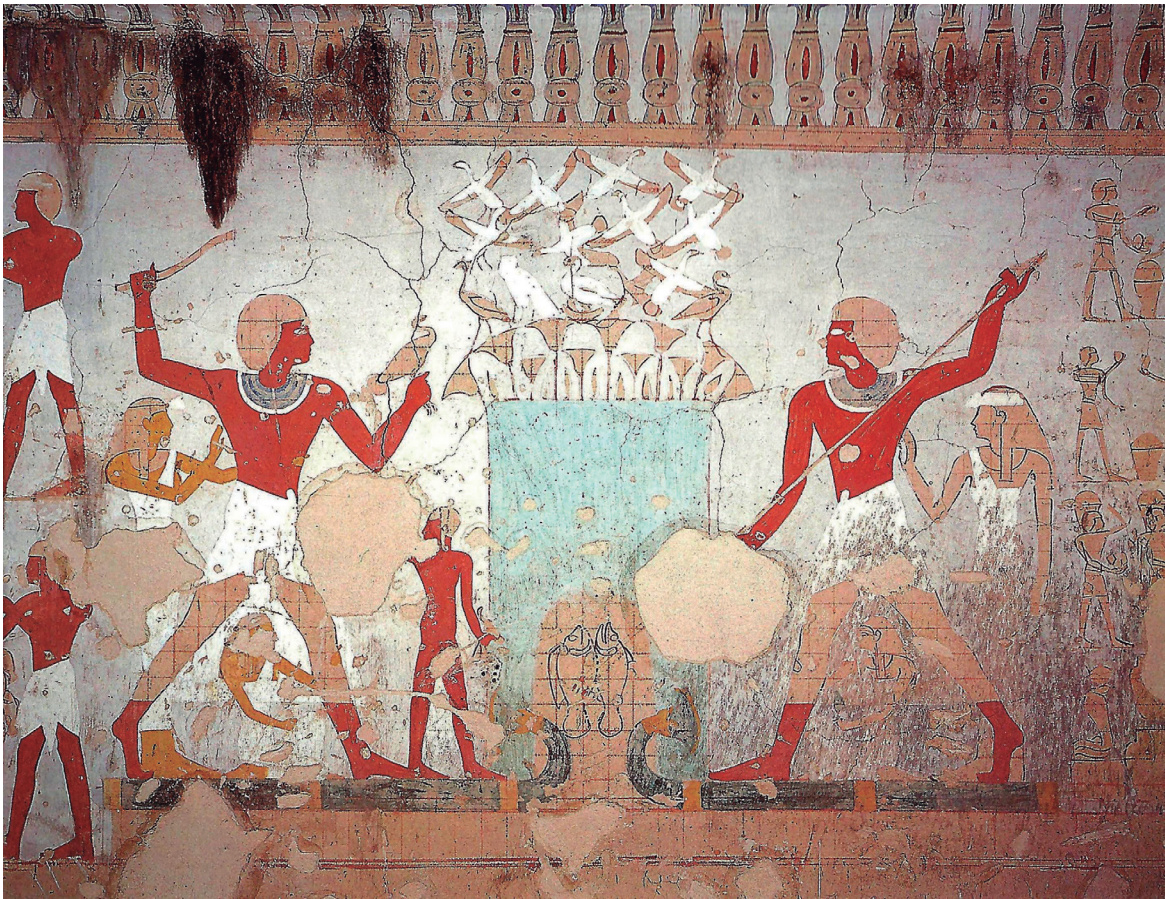


Figure 1. Unfinished scene of TT 92, tomb of Suemniwet (Bryan, 2001: fig. 18.1).

From these short texts, it can be inferred that the process of producing these Theban paintings involved, on the one hand the so-called scribes of forms or scribes of contours, responsible for performing the preliminary drawings and the final contour of the figures, and on the other hand the artists who performed the rest of the process, that is, the colour applications on the paintings. It seems that the task of performing the sketches on the walls, as well as the task of finishing the paintings by drawing their contour in black were both complet-

ed by the scribes of forms, who had greater technical ability and were probably responsible for supervising the other artists who applied the colours⁸. From the detailed analysis of these private Theban funerary chapels of the Eighteenth Dynasty we can deduce that the decoration process of a tomb was really a team effort, although it is still often possible to recognise the individuality of each artist. This kind of study allows for an understanding of the day-to-day work of the artists rather than the process of decoration of the tomb itself, as

⁸ Bryan, 2010: 1006.

there is scarce textual information of their difficulties or the time spent by an artist in a tomb, and even less in the case of private funerary chapels, with the clear exception of the tomb of Kynebu (TT 113). In one of the texts from TT 113, it is mentioned that the painter who performed the decoration worked in this small tomb for three months and nineteen days until he finished his task⁹, which gives a precise idea of the time required to decorate this type of building, although the scarcity of artists may lead to a variety of scenarios.

The importance of the artist's figure in ancient Egypt is particularly evident in the works of several Belgian Egyptologists, especially in the research conducted by Dimitri Laboury, who follows a new line of investigation focused on the analysis of private tombs of the Eighteenth Dynasty as a way to know the work of the Egyptian painters. Laboury has highlighted the need to track the presence of the Egyptian painters through the tombs, setting aside the idea of the artist as an evanescent or nearly invaluable figure, as was usual in many Egyptological investigations¹⁰. It should be noted that the work by Laurent Bavay and Laboury, based on their investigation of three nearly contemporaneous Theban tombs of the Eighteenth Dynasty¹¹, offers the possibility to study the variability of pictorial practices and styles in a timeframe and within a sociological context. These are TT 96, TT 29 and TT C3, which present variable conservation conditions, although they are frequently degraded. However, this circumstance motivated the development of a series

of techniques to register the conditions of the paintings in order to differentiate a preliminary sketch from a completed scene or in another phase of completion¹². The project team studying tombs TT 96, TT 29 and TT C3, has emphasised the evidence of diverse pictorial practices and the artist's individuality. From their analysis it can be inferred that at least five different artists worked on the decoration of TT 96, the tomb of Sennefer, apparently a usual practice in Theban tombs at that time.

On the other hand, the analysis of TT 29 in which the method of decorating the tomb has been studied in-depth, suggests a different scenario. This tomb-chapel belonged to the vizier Amenemope, who was promoted to that important position by Amenhotep II just after being crowned. Amenemope succeeded the vizier Rekhmire and ordered the construction of a tomb that emulates in some aspects the one of his predecessor, TT 100. In fact, in one of the walls of the transverse room of TT 29, the text known as the Duties of the Vizier can be found, also attested in the tomb of Rekhmire, as well as some figures, which are quite similar to those of the latter describing the functions of this important position, therefore revealing a copy or inspiration from TT 100. However, the tomb of Amenemope could not reach the magnificence of the tomb of his predecessor, leading to a different strategy of peculiarity and distinction, for instance, through the use of a rare chromatic palette or the inclusion of unusual funerary ritual scenes. It seems that in TT 29 there is a specific emphasis regarding

9 Amer, 1981: 9-12.

10 Laboury, 2012: 200.

11 Bavay and Laboury, 2012: 76.

12 Bavay and Laboury, 2012: 74.

originality, and the analysis of pictorial practices suggests that it could have been mainly performed by a single artist, who tried to complete his work in a hurry, without success (fig. 2)¹³. All this evidence reflects the diversity of situations and the varied artistic practices that can be attested in Theban tombs, as well as the difficult availability of artists and the adaptability of those artists to their circumstances.

Our knowledge of the ways of working of painters and sculptors in the New Kingdom relies mainly on the data from the Theban necropolis, mainly because of the large number of tombs built there. However,

what can be said about other Egyptian sites? Could it be inferred that the artists from other parts of the country worked in a similar way to their Theban colleagues? The analysis of the decorated reliefs within the private funerary chapels from Tell el Amarna decorated with reliefs, developed by Gwil Owen and Barry Kemp, brought forward interesting data that complete and enrich our vision¹⁴. The study of several private tombs in the so-called Amarna South Cemetery revealed their unfinished state in various degrees depending on each funerary monument. There are tomb-chapels with hardly a few rooms excavated in which



Figure 2. Detail of TT 29 with unfinished scene (Bavay, Laboury, 2012: fig. 19).

¹³ Bavay and Laboury, 2012: 76.

¹⁴ Owen and Kemp, 1994.

the plaster had been only partially applied, as may be observed in tombs 13 and 21. It can be stated that all funerary chapels in Amarna are unfinished, both in the North and South Cemetery, which lead to the suggestion that there was a great demand of artists, whose scarcity forced the owner to wait until the available craftsmen could continue their work in his ultimate resting place. If the private tomb-chapels in Amarna are compared with the group of royal tombs in the same site, our attention is drawn to the fact that the five tombs in the Royal Valley are also unfinished, although the ones belonging to members of the royal family reveal a better coordination of the craftsmen and a more arranged sequence of the construction and decoration phases. This fact could indicate that it was much easier to find artists for the building and decoration of royal burial monuments in Amarna than for the private ones¹⁵. In summary, in spite of the peculiarity of this site and the Amarna Period itself, the lack of craftsmen is noticeable in these tombs and coincides also with the data from other places like Thebes, this showing the difficulties in finding artists who could work in a continued way.

The importance and convenience of studying the way in which the Egyptian artists worked during the New Kingdom could even be applied to other fields such as the scribal practices. Within this tendency it is worth mentioning the current research conducted by Lucía Díaz-Iglesias on the funerary chamber in the Theban tomb of Djehuty (TT 11), where the walls and ceiling are decorated with texts and vignettes from

the corpus of the Book of Coming Forth by Day, more commonly known as the Book of the Dead. Her in-depth analysis offers the exceptional possibility to approach material questions, such as the decorating processes of the tombs and the practices of Egyptian scribes. All the steps of the artists' and the scribal work can be analysed in detail, from the preparation of the surface to be decorated with figures and texts to the final correction of mistakes made during the copying process. It is also possible to distinguish several scribes' hands and establish criteria in order to determine how many people participated in the decoration of the funerary tomb chamber. In her study, Díaz-Iglesias follows the new trends of materiality, considering not only the text itself from a philological point of view, but analysing how it was made, thus resulting in an enriching approach to understand the combined work of scribes and painters within the same tomb¹⁶.

2 | An experimental approach to ancient Egyptian painting

Within the frame of this new research on Egyptian painting, a pioneer study performed by Hugues Tavier, who takes a step forward on the development of an experimental analysis of the paintings in the Theban tombs TT 96A and TT 29, must be mentioned¹⁷. Of special interest is TT 29, an unfinished tomb both in its construction and its decoration, which allows for exploring the process of the scenes and their different

15 Owen and Kemp, 1994: 121-124.

16 Díaz-Iglesias, 2015.

17 Tavier, 2012: 211-215.

stages. For example, the detailed study of the ceiling decoration of TT 29 suggests the participation of two painters who decorated the surface by stages, which correspond to the sections that had already been plastered and smoothed. Therefore, the surface was prepared in phases, possibly plastered by the same painters,¹⁸ and it seems that the plastering and painting took place while the walls of the tomb were still being excavated. The painters working in this tomb did not face an extensive surface completely prepared, and probably it was not feasible to mark a cord with red paint in order to define the length of the registers within the same wall. Starting from the experimental work reproducing the plastering of a similar surface to TT 29's ceiling, with the same tools and raw materials the Egyptian artists used, Tavier has tried to reproduce and recreate the work performed in an Egyptian tomb with very interesting results. For example, the sections which a plaster is applied to are relatively small, corresponding to a space of approximately 1.5 metres, which is the space an artisan can handle from a fixed point when applying the plaster and corresponding also to the probable capacity of the raw materials containers. Due to the nature of the plaster used by the ancient Egyptians, it could be inconvenient to prepare large quantities as it had a certain tendency to dry quickly. Starting from this experimental practice, Tavier pointed out the complexity of the plastering process requiring a high ability to obtain a smooth surface as well as the need to work on small surfaces of approximately 1.5 metres¹⁹.

On the other hand, Tavier's study shows how the working conditions of this tomb

have been recreated along the restoration process of this tomb in an experimental fashion, for example, regarding the light produced by oil lamps, as was used by Egyptian painters in ancient times. Natural light reached the areas close to the tomb's entrance, which in a typical inverted T tomb was near the entrance axis, but other tomb areas required artificial illumination. The use of lamps produced a weak light and the influence on colour perception is far from negligible, while their extended use would darken the tomb's walls. It is likely that the painters did not hold their lamps in their hand, as it seems logical they needed to hold the palette with pigments, so they used lamp stands. Curiously, the lamps used by painters would create a well illuminated space of around 1.5 metres matching with the different sequences of paintings that can be identified in the longitudinal room in TT 29, which remained in semi-darkness. Tavier has proposed that when analysing the varied quality of the paintings within the same tomb, other factors like illumination may be taken into account. The location of a wall near the entrance in the inverted T shape tomb ensures a precise exposure to light and determines the working conditions. It is not surprising that the more refined and highly skilled paintings in a tomb are usually found near the entrance. It seems logical that the best paintings were produced by the more experienced painters who may have worked in areas more exposed to natural light. But we should also consider the possibility that paintings with diverse quality were produced by the same painter under drastically different light con-

18 Tavier, 2012: 210.

19 Tavier, 2012: 210.

ditions. In the same way, our calligraphy is different depending on the material, the tool used, our own position and the light, it seems reasonable to think that the ancient Egyptian painters' work was determined by their working conditions²⁰.

The paintings in TT 29 show a uniformity of style and shape, which leads to the belief that they belong to the same painter, although on the northern wall the result seems more hurried, which seems logical considering it is unfinished. Besides, on the northern wall the painter drew the figures manually without using the usual lines and grids, which produced rather wavy registers. The analysis of TT 29 and the experimentation of the artists' techniques suggest the need to reconsider old ideas about the required timing to build and decorate a tomb, which seems to be shorter than originally thought, as well as the number of artists participating in the tomb decoration could occasionally be very limited, even just one painter. A limited number of artists would be an advantage from an economical standpoint and would also avoid ergonomic conflicts when working inside a tomb, an aspect of high relevance. In conclusion, Tavier's study highlights that our knowledge of Egyptian Theban painters is necessarily linked to the analysis of their pictorial practices, the materials and tools they used and their working conditions. It is necessary to analyse the Egyptian painter and his circumstances, a painter who must be considered as an artist and not a simple artisan²¹. In the opinion of this author, the Egyptian painter should be regarded as an artist with his own talent and creativity,

who performs an artistic creation process determined by the working conditions in the tomb as well as the time factor.

3 | Individuality and originality in the Egyptian artist

On the other hand, it is worth noting the importance of some studies focused on the Egyptian artist as a figure with his own personality, whose work reveals his individuality and his own style. Traditionally, the idea of the ancient Egyptian artist being anonymous has been remarked, as there was no desire to reveal the authorship of an artwork, nor the evidence of a real social recognition of his work (except for limited exceptions). For such reasons, it has been assumed that the Egyptian artist was more an artisan, a word with different connotations, which seems to imply less importance of the originality and individuality of the creative process.

The artist's figure has traditionally been a very limited subject in studies on Egyptian art, which can offer really important contributions to better know and understand Egyptian artworks. Some recent publications have paid attention, for example, to the artists' community of Deir el Medina, where those who built and decorated the tombs in the Valley of the Kings lived. It is worth mentioning Dominique Valbelle's publication, *Les artistes de la Vallée des Rois*, with an exhaustive analysis of Deir el Medina tombs created as an eternal resting place for this community of artists, which to some extent imitate the royal tombs. Throughout their scenes, it is possible to know their re-

²⁰ Tavier, 2012: 211.

²¹ Tavier, 2012: 212.

ligious beliefs and their daily life as well as to appreciate the originality and creativity of many details²². The catalogue of the exhibition *Les artistes du Pharaon. Deir el Medina et la Vallée des Rois*, organised between 2002 and 2003, also reflects this new interest in understanding the life of ancient Egyptian artists and convey it to the public²³. More recently, the topic of the drawings and the work of the painters in ancient Egypt, the so-called scribes of forms, has been the subject of greater interest, as shown by the publication *L'Art du countour, Le dessin dans l'Égypte ancienne*. In fact, this study is a catalogue of a large exhibition displayed in 2013 at the Musée du Louvre in Paris and the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels²⁴. It is significant enough that the Musée du Louvre, an institution with one of the largest Egyptian collections in the world, had dedicated a great exhibition to the “forgotten topic” of the Egyptian artists and their paintings. Among the contributions of this publication, worth highlighting is Laboury's statement that the Egyptian artist is “the great unknown in Egyptology”²⁵, and he remarked the need to reaffirm his individuality in the creative process²⁶.

The creativity in artistic production is a field that deserves more attention and can offer interesting results, as shown in Abeer El-Shahawy's recent work on innovation in

New Kingdom Theban tombs²⁷. The detailed study of these private tombs reveals that the artists did not limit themselves to copy scenes of previous funerary monuments, but their creativity is attested in several aspects, such as the presence of new themes in the decorative repertoire, the existence of unusual details of an icon, the freedom or contravention of pictorial rules, or the innovative treatment of a conventional theme²⁸. Besides, the presence of particular details or characteristic styles can even help to track the movements of the artists through several Egyptian areas, as suggested by El-Shahawy's study about the interaction between the repertoire from the Theban tombs and the Memphite ones in the New Kingdom²⁹.

On the other hand, Melinda Hartwig's exhaustive investigation of the private tombs in the Theban area from the time of Thutmose IV and Amenhotep III deserves a special mention³⁰. These funerary monuments have been traditionally published in an individual way and, in spite of the convenience of being a comprehensive publication, the joint analysis provides a special enrichment. Hartwig's monograph studies the iconography of those paintings in relation to the owner of the tomb, especially to his “professional identity”. Therefore it is possible to distinguish two types of styles in these funerary paintings: those tombs belonging to the “state class”

22 Valbelle and Gout, 2002.

23 Andreu, 2002.

24 Andreu-Lanoë, 2013.

25 Laboury, 2013a.

26 Laboury, 2013b.

27 El-Shahawy, 2010.

28 El-Shahawy, 2010: 6-7.

29 El-Shahawy, 2012.

30 Hartwig, 2004.

(military, palace, civil and regional administration) which were probably decorated by painters from the palace workshops, and those belonging to officials attached to the religious administration the temples, probably decorated by painters linked to Karnak temple³¹. In my opinion, it is worth noting that not only a different decorative repertoire depending on the owner's position may be observed, but also a completely different style according to his affiliation can be attested. This could be due to the link between the painters who decorated these private tombs and the temples or the royal institutions, which would allow them to work occasionally in the decoration of the private funerary monuments, following the characteristic style of their palace workshop or of the temple workshop³². Finally, Hartwig's investigation offers an excellent vision of the artist in his context and of his work, related to his patrons and their social identity, establishing a model for future works in other periods.

4 | Figurative *ostraca* as the Egyptian artist's creation

The evidence regarding the originality in the creative process of painters and sculptors working in tomb decoration, particularly those in the New Kingdom, must also be examined beyond the tombs themselves. In order to have a broad view, it is necessary to consider the corpus of figurative *ostraca*, which is frequently forgotten. What can be seen in Egyptian tombs, both royal and private, is conditioned by the space's own

nature as a burying place and is linked to religious beliefs. Besides, in the case of private tombs, such space served as a memorial monument for the owners of the tomb chapels and their relatives as they were the places where burial rituals and funerary cult ceremonies were performed. Therefore, the scenes were conditioned by the images the tomb owner wanted to transmit, images that summarised his life and his accomplishments. In the decoration process of the tomb, the artist had to adapt himself to the peculiarities of his patron, the tomb's owner, as well as creating attractive scenes that contributed to transform his tomb-chapel into an adequate space to provide a cult to his memory and be visited by relatives and friends³³.

However, through the study of figurative *ostraca*, the artist's creativity in a pure state can occasionally be guessed. It is necessary to highlight the large variety of typologies within the corpus of *ostraca*, not only according to their themes but also by the quality of their drawing and their degree of completion. Many *ostraca* are only rough sketches reflecting a hurried stroke, whether to copy a particular motif or to practice a specific detail, while others show a detailed and meticulous drawing that occasionally suggests the direct observation of nature. As an example of this type of detailed *ostraca*, it could be mentioned the one preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, dated to the co-regency of Thutmose III and Hatshepsut, representing a swallow with a precise drawing in spite of the chromatic limitation (Inv. No. 23.3.7).

31 Hartwig, 2004: 122.

32 Hartwig, 2004: 30-35.

33 Vivas Sainz, 2014: 19.

From the point of view of this author, the sketches and drawings executed on *ostraca* by Egyptian artists should be considered as artistic products themselves, in the same manner as we consider artworks the sketches performed by great masters such as Francisco de Goya or Pablo Picasso, despite their usual schematic style. Besides, *ostraca* can be a reflection of the iconography that can be seen in tombs or temples, as well as a reflection of “non canonical art”, as highlighted by Natalia Pomerantseva. Some *ostraca* are clearly preparatory drawings for the tombs’ scenes, copies or sketches of minor details, while others show a more free and spontaneous character³⁴. A good example of both uses would be a curious *ostrakon* of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (inv. No. 31.42) which depicts on one side two images of a man’s face, probably Senenmut (fig. 3), perhaps corresponding to an initial drawing performed by the master and copied later by the apprentice³⁵. This would be the type of canonical image, with parallels in Senenmut’s figures in his own tomb. But the verso of this *ostrakon* shows the figure of a small rodent, which seems to be a drawing performed only to exercise the artist’s ability (fig. 4). The curious image of a rodent on this *ostrakon* is not the type of elaborate representation typically found in an Egyptian tomb, yet it reveals the noticeable details the painter could perform in a drawing. That is, *ostraca* can also be excellent examples of what we could consider “non official” art, where the Egyptian artist expressed his originality and practiced details far from the traditional themes of the iconographic repertoire.

The analysis of the figurative *ostraca* iconography can be of special interest to enrich our knowledge of the Egyptian artistic repertoire showing images and attitudes outside the “canonical art”, like the *ostrakon* in the Walters Museum of Baltimore collection (inv. No. 32.1), which could represent Seti I (fig. 5). It is an exquisite drawing of an Egyptian monarch with the traditional royal attributes but whose face appears covered by a light beard, an element commonly used as a mourning symbol. This sketch could have been used as a model for trainees and is the work of a master painter. The spare area in this *ostrakon* was used afterwards to practice the drawing of two human hands executed in a much more schematic way. Egyptian kings used to be represented with their face shaved as a symbol of their purity, but in this curious *ostrakon* he is shown with a beard reflecting the habit of growing a beard during mourning. Significantly, the parallels for such an unusual image can be found in other *ostraca* as, for example, the one in Musée du Louvre (inv. No. E14318) dated to the Nineteenth Dynasty and showing a king with a small pointed beard, which could be an image of Amenhotep III copied in Ramesside times³⁶. A similar image is attested in another *ostrakon* recently found in the Valley of the Kings, showing a bearded pharaoh possibly represented during his predecessor’s mourning ritual³⁷. These images of bearded pharaohs are extraordinary atypical details that Egyptian artists could have perhaps produced as a way to practice their abilities, or even motivated by the

34 Pomerantseva, 2002: 981.

35 Roehrig, 2005: 63.

36 Andreu, 2002: 172.

37 Reeves, 2002: 27, fig. 54.



Figure 3. Ostraca with possible representations of Senenmut inv. nr. 31.4.2. © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

direct observation of an unusual fact, but probably never as a preparatory drawing of a tomb's scene.

As it has been pointed out, *ostraca* can be a source of information to enrich our knowledge of the Egyptian artistic repertoire, but also a way to track down the transmission of skills and techniques between masters and apprentices. The presence of grids, not only in the Theban tomb paintings themselves but also on some *ostraca* (as for example the one in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. Nr. 23.3.8), reveals the methods used by Egyptian artists to create harmonious and proportioned figures. Especially during

the Eighteenth Dynasty, the grids seem to have been extensively used as a method to achieve proportioned figures according to the Egyptian canon, but their use disappears progressively towards the end of the dynasty. Curiously, the number of *ostraca* of the later period, especially those from Deir el Medina of the Ramesside Period, is significantly higher and is probably related to the abandonment of the use of grids, and the subsequent need to practice the representation of human or animal figures. Through the repetition of figures and details, the Egyptian artists could have then developed their proportion and style skills³⁸.

³⁸ Cooney, 2013: 161.



Figure 4. Reverse of the ostraca inv. nr. 31.4.2, with a figure of a rodent. © Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

The detailed analysis of certain types of *ostraca* can offer interesting results, as shown in Jennifer Babcock's investigations of examples with animal representations also related to papyrus. Babcock analysed for example the so-called satiric *ostraca* with animal images performing human roles, tracking down the narrative in these objects and the potential connection with Egyptian folklore and fables, like the so-called Tefnut Legend. The study of *ostraca* with animals in human attitudes reveals a narrative potential, and they could have been used as complementary images when narrating Egyptian folklore and literature, given their excellent artistic quality and colour³⁹. Unquestionably, it is a question of having a broad vision of the possibilities offered

by the study of these artistic manifestations that have frequently remained in a secondary position.

Conclusions

This article has highlighted the importance in studying the figure of the artist in ancient Egypt within his social and cultural context through diverse sources, which in turn can help to establish a more realistic vision of how they worked and developed their creative process, especially in the New Kingdom. Starting from the varied evidence analysed, it seems that the different specialists who worked in an Egyptian tomb did so as a team, as revealed by the scarce written

39 Babcock, 2014.



Figure 5. Ostraca with the image of a mourning pharaoh. Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, inv. nr. 32.1.

sources. Unfortunately, ancient Egyptians never left a legacy in the form of a text that can be considered an “art handbook” to show their artistic concepts. Nor did they show any special interest in describing the painters’ and sculptors’ work. In this sense, it is important to highlight a scene in the Theban tomb belonging to Tati, TT 154, (fig. 6), which shows a unique image of several individuals performing different tasks of the decoration of the tomb, similar to the

process of decorating a stela (with the participation of three artists), or the plastering of the tomb-walls with lime to cover imperfections⁴⁰. TT 154 is a simple tomb which could be dated to the reign of Thutmose III according to stylistic criteria, or could be dated even earlier according to its location and its shape⁴¹. Based on the evidence of this curious scene, it might be inferred that Egyptians themselves were aware of the multiple steps in the tomb decoration

40 Davies, 1913: 43.

41 Kampp, 1996: 441.

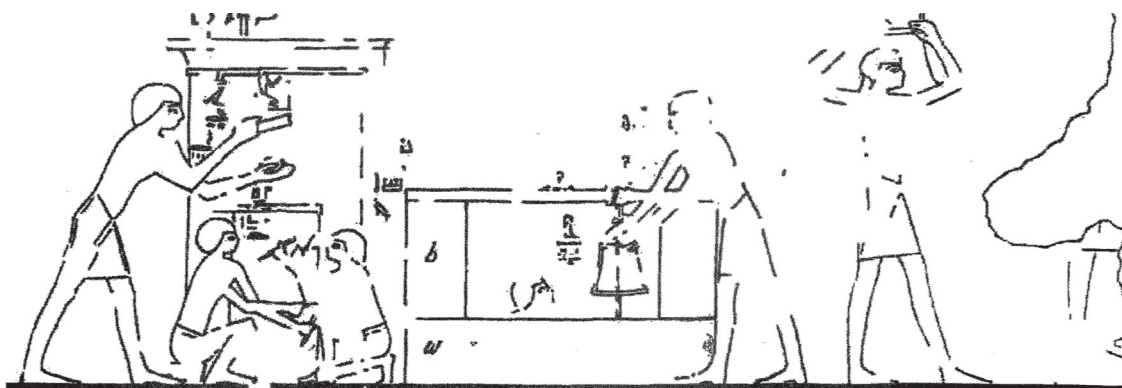


Figure 6. Detail of a scene of the tomb of Tati, TT 154 (Davies, 1913: fig. 39).

and of the participation of different artists working in a coordinated manner.

The focus of this study has been to analyse the artistic production in ancient Egypt, paying particular attention to the artist's figure and his importance in the creation process, highlighting different approaches that could result in an enriching perspective as, for example, the experimental approach to Egyptian painting reproducing its working conditions. In the same way, it is convenient to give value to the use of other sources like the Egyptian *ostraca*, whose importance had been frequently relegated to a secondary position. The thematic diversification and the different technical quality of the *ostraca* corpus indicate that their uses were really varied, and they should not be considered as mere objects discarded by ancient Egyptians and with no real value to the Egyptian art history.

The analysis of Egyptian artists' works, especially the painters and sculptors who decorated the New Kingdom tombs, reveals the complexity of the creative process of the artist who had to follow a strong iconographic tradition, adapt himself to the peculiarities of the patron, as well as achieving original

and attractive scenes to create a unique monument. In spite of the strong iconographic tradition and the existing canon of proportions, the originality must be considered as a major element particularly searched for by Egyptian artists. In fact, the *graffiti* found in many Theban tombs used to be located next to the most important and attractive scenes, which seemed to be really appreciated by tomb visitors of Pharaonic times. This could make us think about the idea of the aesthetic reception of ancient Egyptian artworks, as pointed out by Alexis Den Doncker's investigation on *graffiti*, which could be considered as an answer to focal tomb scenes or *Blickpunktsbild*⁴². The paintings in private Theban tombs in the New Kingdom are not only a set of scenes created for eternity but also created for a certain "audience".

To sum up, it may be time to overcome the traditional way of approaching Egyptian art and to pay attention to the artist's circumstances, since he is the ultimate author of his work. The answer to many questions about Egyptian artistic production could be in the analysis of the artists' processes and in their social and cultural context. Their

⁴² Den Doncker, 2012: 23-34.

works, from the most splendid wall painting to the simplest *ostrakon*, are products of their time and their circumstances, and all of them could provide an enriching knowledge about their world.

Bibliography

- ANDREU, G. (ED.)
2002 *Les artistes de Pharaon: Deir el-Medineh et la Vallées des Rois*. Paris.
- G. ANDREU-LANOË (ED.)
2013 *L'art du contour. Le dessin dans l'Égypte ancienne*. Paris.
- AMER, A.
1981 "A unique Theban Tomb Inscription under Ramses VIII", *GM* 49: 9-12.
- BABCOCK, J.
2014 *Anthropomorphized Animal Imagery on New Kingdom Ostraca and Papyri: Their Artistic and Social Significance*. Doctoral Dissertation, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.
- BAVAY, L.; LABOURY, D.
2012 "Dans l'entourage du Pharaon, Art et archéologie dans la necropole thébaine", in: L. Bavay, M-C. Bruwier, W. Claes, I. De Strooper (eds.): *Ceci n'est pas une pyramide... Un siècle de recherche archéologique belge en Égypte*, Leuven, Paris: 62-70.
- BERGMAN, D.
2015 "Historiography of Ancient Egyptian Art", in: M. Hartwig (ed.): *A Companion to Ancient Egyptian Art*, Oxford: 25-38.
- BRYAN, B.
2001 "Painting Techniques and Artisan Organization in the Tomb of Suemniwet, Theban Tomb 92", in: W.V. Davies (ed.): *Colour and Painting in Ancient Egypt*, London: 63-72.
2010 "Pharaonic Painting", in: A.B. Lloyd (ed.): *A Companion to Ancient Egypt*, Oxford: 990-1007.
- COONEY, K.
2013 "Apprenticeship and Figured Ostraca from the Ancient Egyptian Village of Deir el-Medina", in: W. Wendrich (ed.): *Archaeology and Apprenticeship: Body Knowledge, Identity, and Communities of Practice*, Tucson: 145-170.
- DAVIES, N.M.G.; GARDINER, A.H.
1913 *Five Theban Tombs: Being Those of Mentuherkhepeshef, User, Daga, Nehemaway and Tati*. London.
- DEN DONCKER, A.
2012 "Theban Tomb Graffiti during the New Kingdom. Research on the Reception of Ancient Egyptian Images by Ancient Egyptians", in: K.A. Kothay (ed.): *Art and Society. Ancient and Modern Contexts of Egyptian Art. Proceedings of the International Conference held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, 13-15 May 2010*, Budapest: 23-34.
- DÍAZ-IGLESIAS, L.
2015 "The Book of Going Forth by Day in the Funerary Chamber of Djehuty: past, present, and future", in: *International Congress of Egyptologists XI, Florence, 23-30 August 2015, Papers and posters Abstracts*, 43-44 (accessible in <http://www.ice11florence.org/circular>)
- KAMPP, F.
1996 *Die Thebanische Nekropole: Zum Wandel des Grabgedankens von der XVIII. bis zur XX. Dynastie. (Theben 13)*. Mainz am Rhein.
- HARTWIG, M.
2004 *Tomb Painting and identity in Ancient Thebes, 1419-1372 BCE. (Monumenta Aegyptiaca 10; Imago 2)*. Turnhout.
- IVERSEN, E.
1955 *Canon and Proportions in Egyptian Art*. London.
- EL-SHAHAWY, A.
2010 *Recherches sur la décoration de les tombes Thébaines du Nouvel Empire. (IBAES 13)*. London.
2012 "Thebes-Memphis: An interaction of iconographic ideas", in: L. Evans (ed.):

- Ancient Memphis 'Enduring is the Perfection'. (Orientalia Lovaniensa Analecta 214)*, Leuven, Paris: 133-145.
- LABOURY, D.
2012 "Tracking Ancient Egyptian Artists, a Problem of Methodology. The Case of the Painters of Private Tombs in the Theban Necropolis during the Eighteenth Dynasty", in: K.A. Kothay (ed.): *Art and Society. Ancient and Modern Contexts of Egyptian Art. Proceedings of the International Conference held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, 13-15 May 2010*, Budapest: 199-208.
2013a "L'artiste égyptien, ce grand méconnu de l'Égyptologie", in: G. Andreu-Lanoë (ed.): *L'art du contour. Le dessin dans l'Égypte ancienne*, Paris: 28-35.
2013b "De l'individualité de l'artiste dans l'art égyptien", in: G. Andreu-Lanoë (ed.): *L'art du contour. Le dessin dans l'Égypte ancienne*, Paris: 36-41.
- OWEN, G.; KEMP, B.J.
1994 "Craftsmen's Work Patterns in Unfinished Tombs at Amarna", *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 4/1: 121-129.
- POMERANTSEVA, N.
2002 "The Ostraca-Drawings as a Reflection of Canonical and Non-Canonical Art", in: M. Eldamaty; M. Trad (eds.): *Egyptian Museum Collections Around the World. Studies for the Centennial of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo*, Cairo: vol. II, 979-989.
- PRISSE D'AVENNES, A.C.T.E.
1878-1879 *Histoire de l'art égyptien d'après les monuments, depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à la domination romaine*. Paris.
- REEVES, N. (ED.)
2002 "Five o'clock shadow", *Newsletter of the Valley of the Kings Foundation* 1, (Special Issue): 27.
- ROBINS, G.
1994 *Proportion and Style in Ancient Egyptian Art*. Austin.
- ROEHRIG, C. (ED.)
2005 *Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh*. New York.
- SCHÄFER, H.
1986 *Principles of Egyptian Art* (edited by E. Brunner-Traut). Oxford.
- TAVIER, H.
2012 "Pour une approche expérimentale de la peinture thebaine", in: K.A. Kothay (ed.): *Art and Society. Ancient and Modern Contexts of Egyptian Art. Proceedings of the International Conference held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, 13-15 May 2010*, Budapest: 209-215.
- VALBELLE, D.; GOUT, J.-F.
2002 *Les Artistes de la Vallée des Rois*. Paris.
- VIVAS SAINZ, I.
2014 "Solving problems and pleasing patrons: The case study of the Egyptian artists who decorated the XVIIIth Dynasty private Theban tombs", in: *Proceedings of the Second European Conference on Arts and Humanities held in Brighton, 17-20 July 2014*, Aichi: 17-28.

Trabajos de Egiptología
Papers on Ancient Egypt

Consejo editorial

Director

Miguel Ángel Molinero Polo
Universidad de La Laguna, Tenerife, Islas Canarias

Secretaría de edición

Lucía Díaz-Iglesias Llanos
Centro Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid

Alba María Villar Gómez
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Colaborador de edición / English editorial assistant

Kenneth Griffin
Swansea University, Gales, Reino Unido

Consejo de redacción

Antonio Pérez Largacha
Universidad de Castilla - La Mancha

José Ramón Pérez-Accino Picatoste
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

M^a Covadonga Sevilla Cueva
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Comité científico

Josep Cervelló Autuori
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

María José López-Grande
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Josep Padró i Parcerisa
Universitat de Barcelona

M.^a Carmen Pérez Die
Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid

Esther Pons Mellado
Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid

José Miguel Serrano Delgado
Universidad de Sevilla

Trabajos de Egiptología
Papers on Ancient Egypt

Número 7
2016

Trabajos de Egiptología está producida por
Isfet. Egiptología e Historia
con la colaboración del Centro de Estudios Africanos
de la Universidad de La Laguna

C/ Blanco 1, 2º
38400 Puerto de la Cruz
Tenerife-Islas Canarias
España

© De los textos: sus autores y **Trabajos de Egiptología**

Diseño de arte y maquetación
Marian Montesdeoca y Ulises Ramos
info@marianmontesdeoca.com

Imprime: Gráfica Los Majuelos

Depósito Legal: TF 935-2015
ISSN: 1695-4750

Contents

Prefacio/Foreword	7
Chiefs, Kings, and Patrons. Leadership and Social Logics in the Beginnings of Ancient Egypt Marcelo CAMPAGNO	9
The Development of Local Osirian Forms. An Explanatory Model Lucía DÍAZ-IGLESIAS LLANOS	23
Shaushka, the Traveling Goddess Graciela GESTOSO SINGER	43
What are we Talking about when we Talk about Memphis? Maria Helena Trindade LOPES	59
Stone Vessels of Egyptian Appearance from Ibiza María José LÓPEZ-GRANDE	67
The Argentine Archaeological Mission at Tell el-Ghaba. A Third Intermediate-Early Saite Period Site on the Ancient Egyptian Eastern Border. Remarks and Main Results Silvia LUPO	89
TT 209. Objectives of the <i>proyecto dos cero nueve</i> and the Name of the Tomb Owner Miguel Ángel MOLINERO POLO	111
The Herakleopolis Magna Project (Ehnasya el Medina). Summary and Results of Work 2000-2015 M. ^a Carmen PÉREZ DIE	131
Tombs of the Roman Period in Sector 26 of the High Necropolis Archaeological Site of Oxyrhynchus, El-Bahnasa Esther PONS MELLADO	161
The Decoration of the Pronaos of Petosiris' Tomb. Themes, Scenes, Styles and Techniques José das Candeias SALES	179
The Artist in his Context: New Tendencies on the Research of Ancient Egyptian Art Inmaculada VIVAS SÁINZ	203