

A SHORT BUT INTENSE HISTORY OF ANCIENT EGYPT

AND SOME LATER INTERPRETATIONS

IN FOUR 90-MINUTE MEETINGS

**(+ maybe a visit to “Echoes of Egypt” at the Yale Peabody
Museum, Nov. 7, 1:30pm)**

October 31, 2013

Review and clarifications

A few catch-up notes

- Dynasties are linked by family relationship (typically) and/or their capital city.
- Some dynasties rule concurrently.
- The hieroglyphic alphabet expanded over the centuries—maybe 700 signs in the Middle Kingdom.
- Tooth abscesses could be a major problem.
- MRIs of mummies may reveal information about disease, health, nutrition, age.

Incest

Until Ptolemaic times (after 332), it is unclear how common incest was in ancient Egypt, although the guessing seems to be that it would have been restricted to royalty.

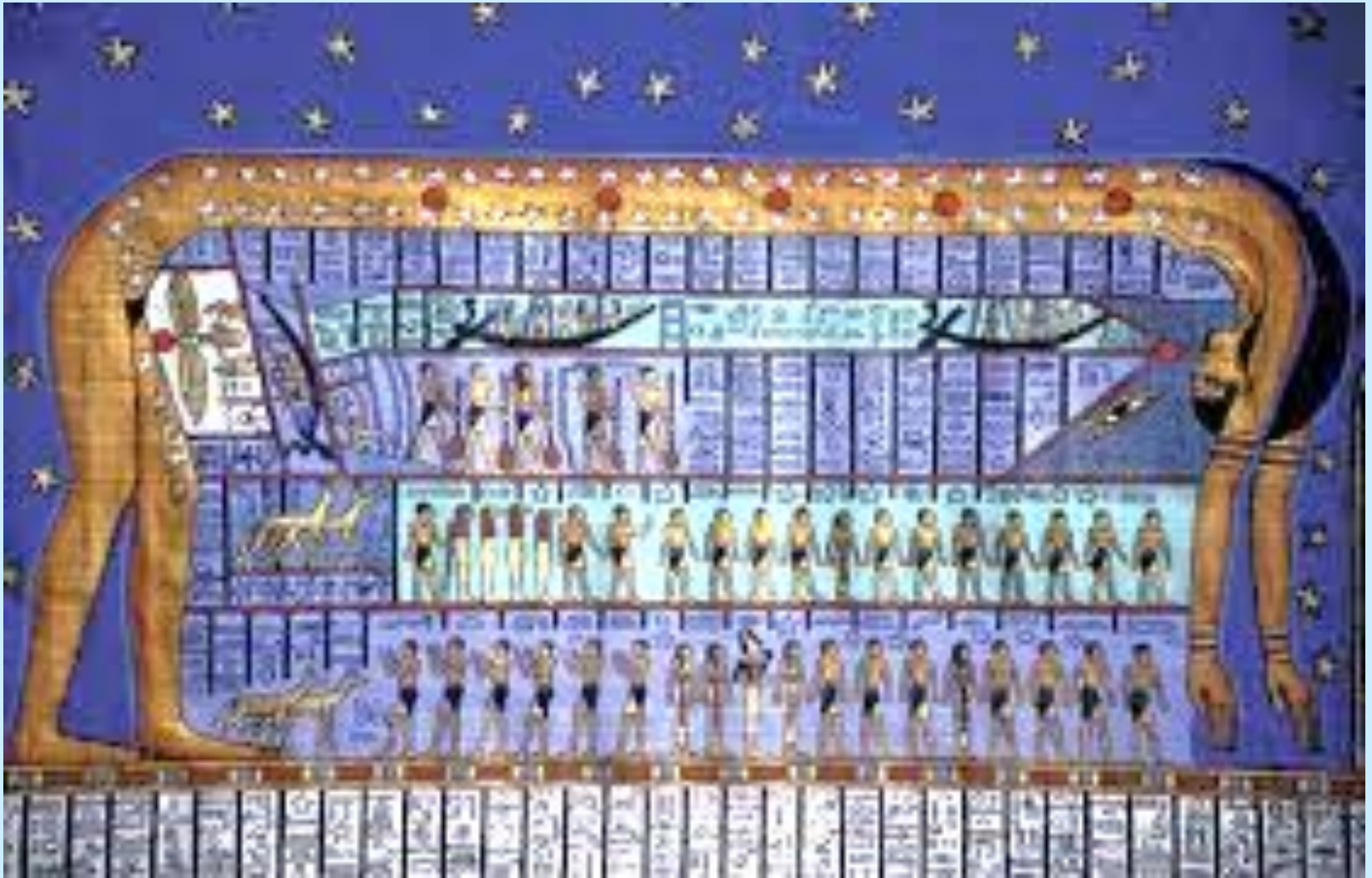
- The parents of Ahmose, conqueror of the Hyksos to end the 2nd intermediate period, were full siblings.
- Ahmose married his full sister.
- A 2010 study headed by the chief of Egyptian antiquities, Zahi Hawass, contends that King Tut's parents were siblings, and that family incest had gone on for several generations.*
- The Ptolemaic period saw frequent incestuous marriages among siblings, parents and children.



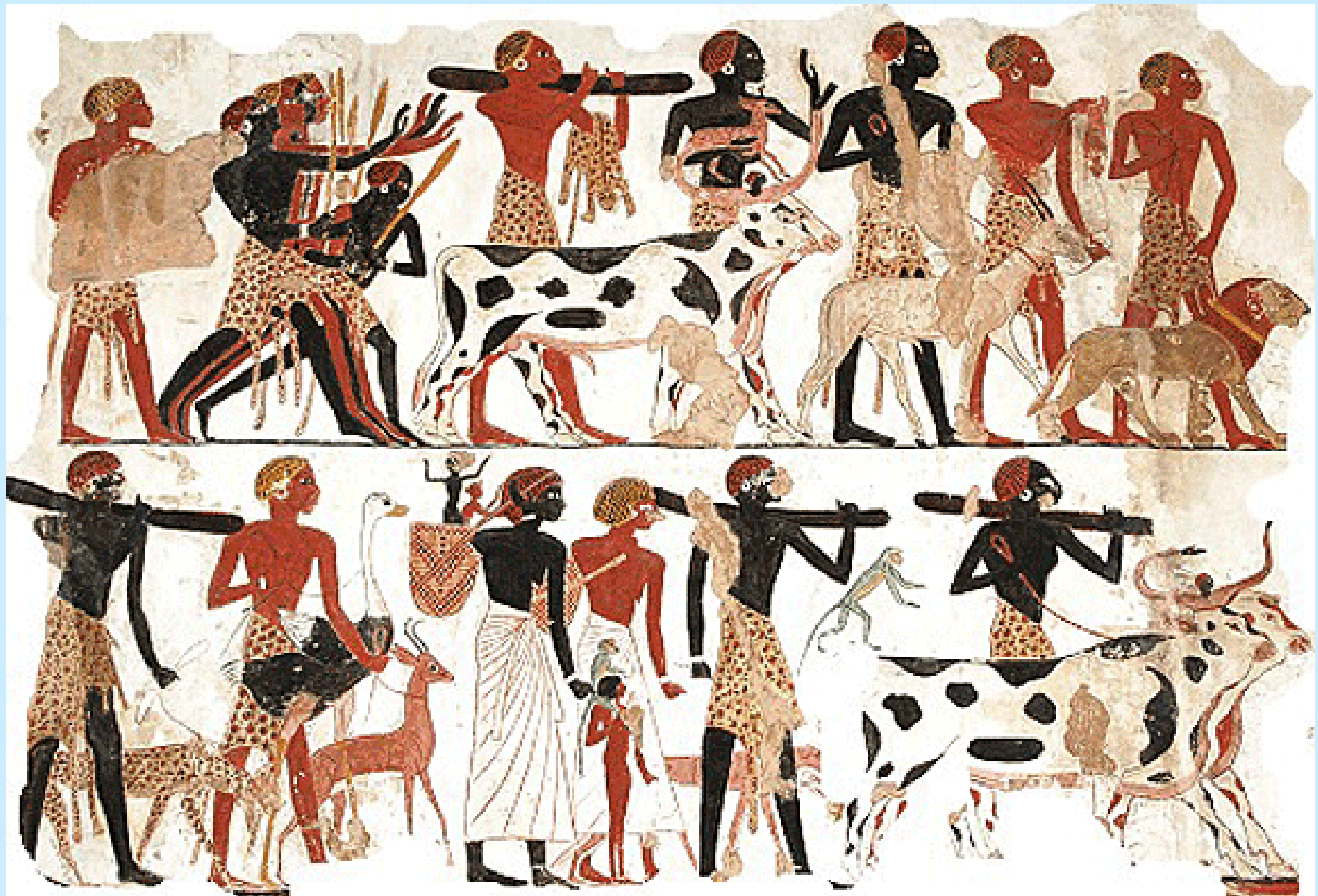
Upper Egypt

Lower Egypt

Nut



The heaven that the sun crossed was also the star-studded body of the goddess Nut.



| Period (dynasties sometimes mushy) | Noteworthy events |
|---|---|
| Pre-dynastic (roughly 5000-3000 BCE, with rise and fall of several Nile cultures; includes “dynasty 0”) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population shift from desert to Nile • Evolution of agriculture, pottery, agriculture, herding, boats, trade, well-digging, social hierarchy, control of territory up and down the Nile • Origin of hieroglyphs |
| Early Dynastic (3200/2950-2575; dynasties 1-2) | Main cemetery established at Saqqara (dynasty 2) |
| Old Kingdom (ca. 2575-2125; dynasties 3-6) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dynasty 3: 1st (Step) pyramid at Saqqara (Djoser) • Dynasty 4: Meidum, Bent, Red pyramids (Sneferu); Giza pyramids (Khufu, Khafra, Menkaura) |
| 1 st intermediate period (c. 2125-2010; dynasties 7-10) | Egypt divided; dynasties 9-11 |
| Middle Kingdom (2010-1630; dynasties 11-13) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Egypt reunited; Thebes becomes capital • Flourishing of literature • Hatshepsut (female ruler; creator of label “pharaoh”) |
| 2 nd intermediate period (ca. 1630-1539; dynasties 14-17) | Hyksos (“rulers from foreign lands,” based in Delta) |
| New Kingdom (ca. 1539-1069; dynasties 18-20) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Egypt reunited • Akhenaten (r. 1353-1336) attempts to change Egyptian religion • Tutankhamen (son of Akhenaten) • Book of the Dead • Ramesses II (r. 1279-1212) |
| 3 rd intermediate period (ca. 1069-664; dynasties 21-25) | Egypt fragmented, ruled by many different groups, including Nubian period of about a century |
| Late period (ca. 664-332; dynasties 26-31) | Egypt sort of reunited; variety of rulers, including Persian kings as pharaohs from afar (dynasty 27) |
| Ptolemaic (Macedonian-Greek) period (332-30) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alexander the Great conquers Egypt • His lead general (Ptolemy) begins final ruling family • Manetho creates dynasty approach • Cleopatra VII (59-30): last pharaoh |

Quick review of key ideas

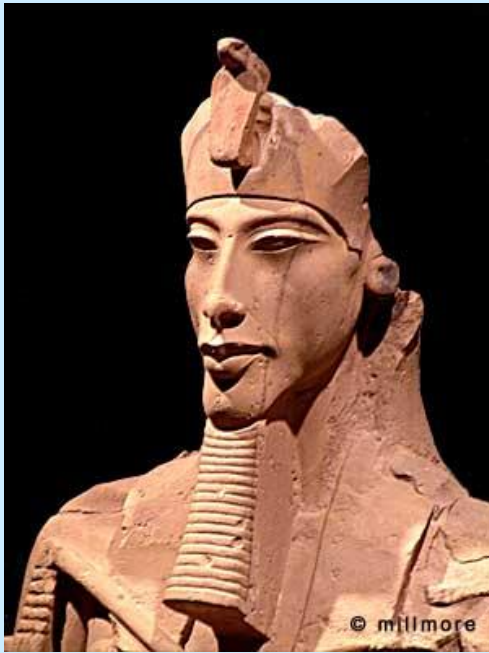
- “The” Egyptian mind embraced order, the concrete, and what could be observed around it.
- Egyptians applied such attitudes towards the nature of life, festivals, magic, gods and the afterlife.
- At least early on, the clergy were part-time and held other jobs the rest of the time, so people in general were mixing in day-to-day life.
- Death rituals, tombs, texts for guidance through the underworld, and evolving mummification techniques were all geared to attaining a peaceful, easygoing afterlife that resembled earthly life.

- Monumental architecture was a major preoccupation of ancient Egyptian culture.
- Burial structures—first pyramids (through the Middle Kingdom) and then tombs typically dug into large hills—were one important dimension of this theme.
- Especially for royalty, preparing for the afterlife began many years before one expected to die—and was extremely expensive.

Interlude: Akhenaten

(r. 1353-1335)

Akhenaten





End of interlude

XIV. Gender

Hatshepsut (New Kingdom)



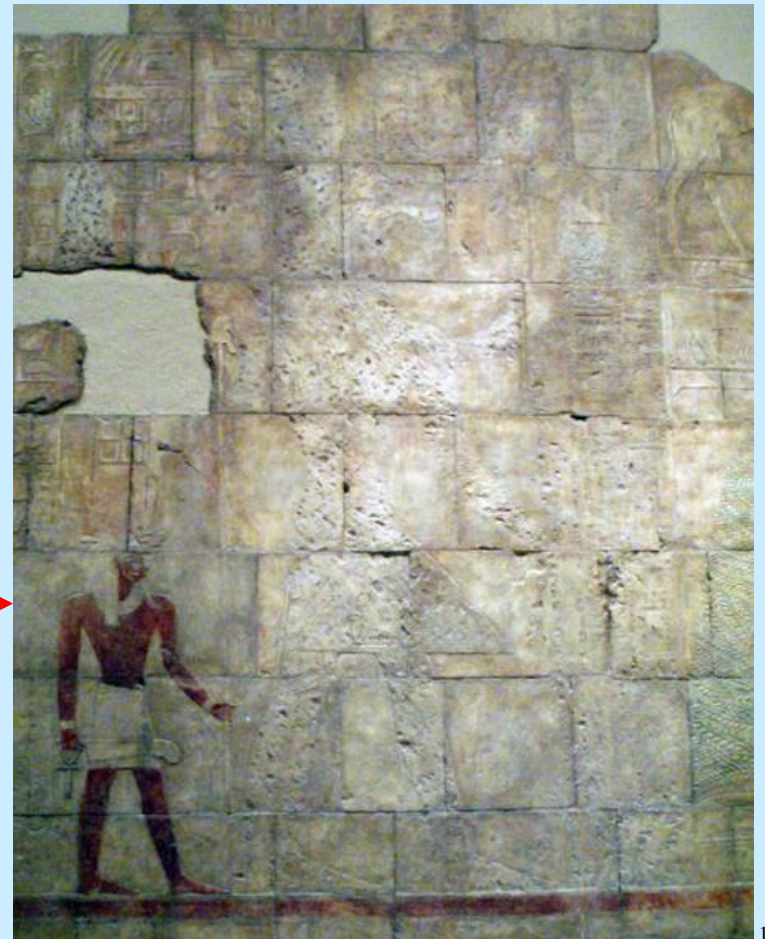
Temple of Hatshepsut





These two statues once resembled each other; however, the symbols of her pharaonic power (uraeus, double crown, false beard) have been stripped from the left image.

Plaster cast recreation of Queen Hatshepsut's expedition to Punt, with the image of the Queen deliberately chipped away and removed.



Nefertiti (wife of Akhenaten)



Priestesses

- According to at least one Egyptologist, ancient Egypt is well known for gender equality,
- Twenty-sixth Dynasty: a woman, Nitocris, held the title First Priest of Amun.
- Female priestly roles were downgraded in the New Kingdom and the Third Intermediate Period, when women were almost exclusively singers in divine choirs.

3rd intermediate period

- It is no coincidence that the prominent role played by high-ranking women in religious cults in the 21st Dynasty was often in connection with child-gods.
- Their titles included “nurses” or “divine mothers” of their gods.
- The Third Intermediate Period marks the early stages in the growth of emphasis on the mother-child relationship in Egyptian religion, which was to become one of the central aspects of life in Egypt during the remainder of the first millennium BCE.

Common problem of social archaeology

- A grinding pounder discovered in a female tomb was taken to mean that it was buried with the person who used it.
- Discovered in a male tomb, we would likely interpret the same object to belong to the person who manufactured it, or for whom it was used.

Variables in the well-being of women

- Many factors affected a woman's well-being: economic resources, state of health, whether her husband was alive, property the couple had accumulated during their working years, support from children, practical and emotional help from friends, family and other connections, and her own initiative, determination and skills.
- Any or all of these elements could affect whether a woman ended her life in destitution or comfort.

- Virtually nothing is known about how much women earned in Ancient Egypt, nor do we know whether it was customary for women to share their income with their husbands.
- In the New Kingdom, the only title besides a form of “wife” that a respectable woman could earn was “musician,” for singing hymns and playing the sistrum.
- Lower class men as well as women from all social classes were musicians.

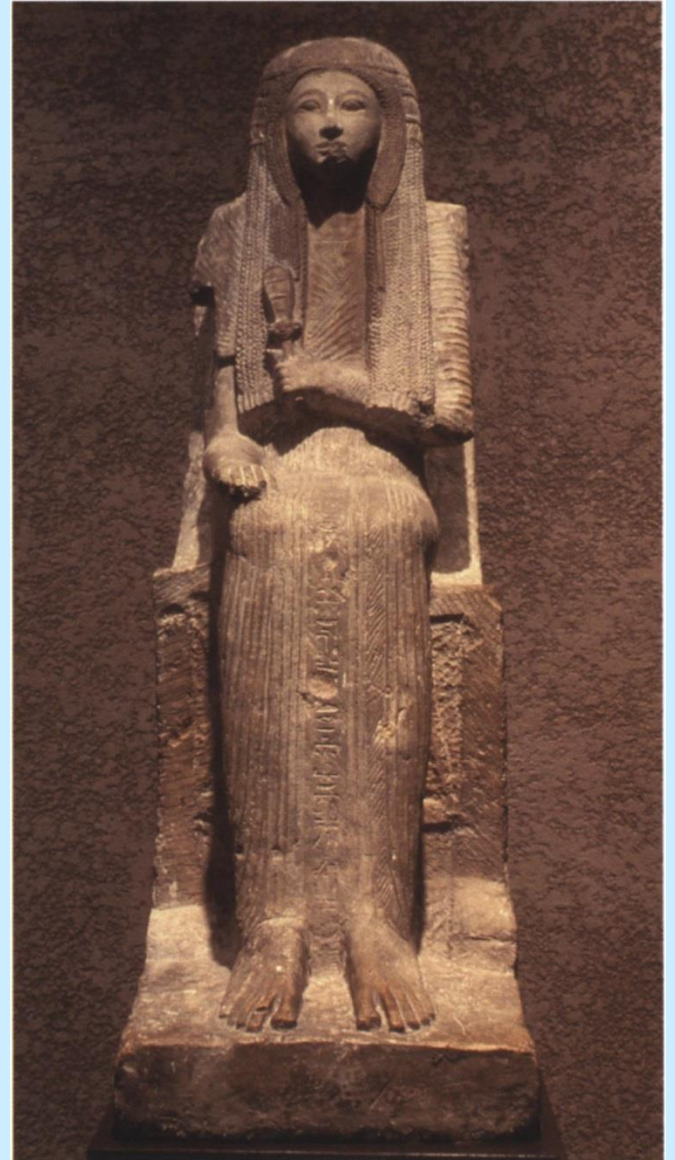
Midwives

- Midwifery required knowledge of the birth process, some female anatomy, magic, strength in arms and crouching/bending, and good eyesight.
- An aged midwife would presumably have valuable experience and knowledge.

Female musician

- Dynasty 19 statue of a temple musician seated and holding a sistrum.

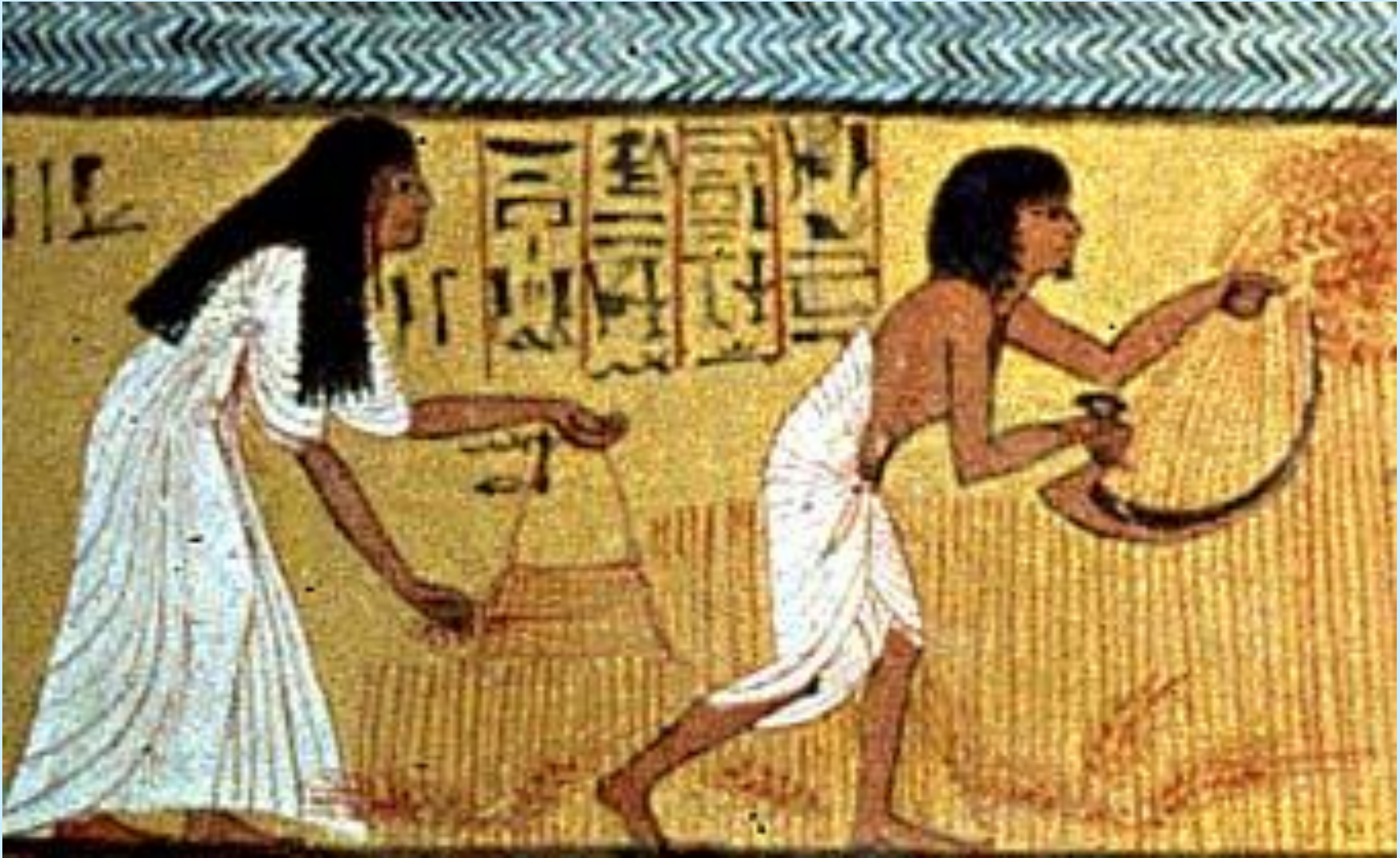
Photo from Walters Museum, Baltimore, Maryland



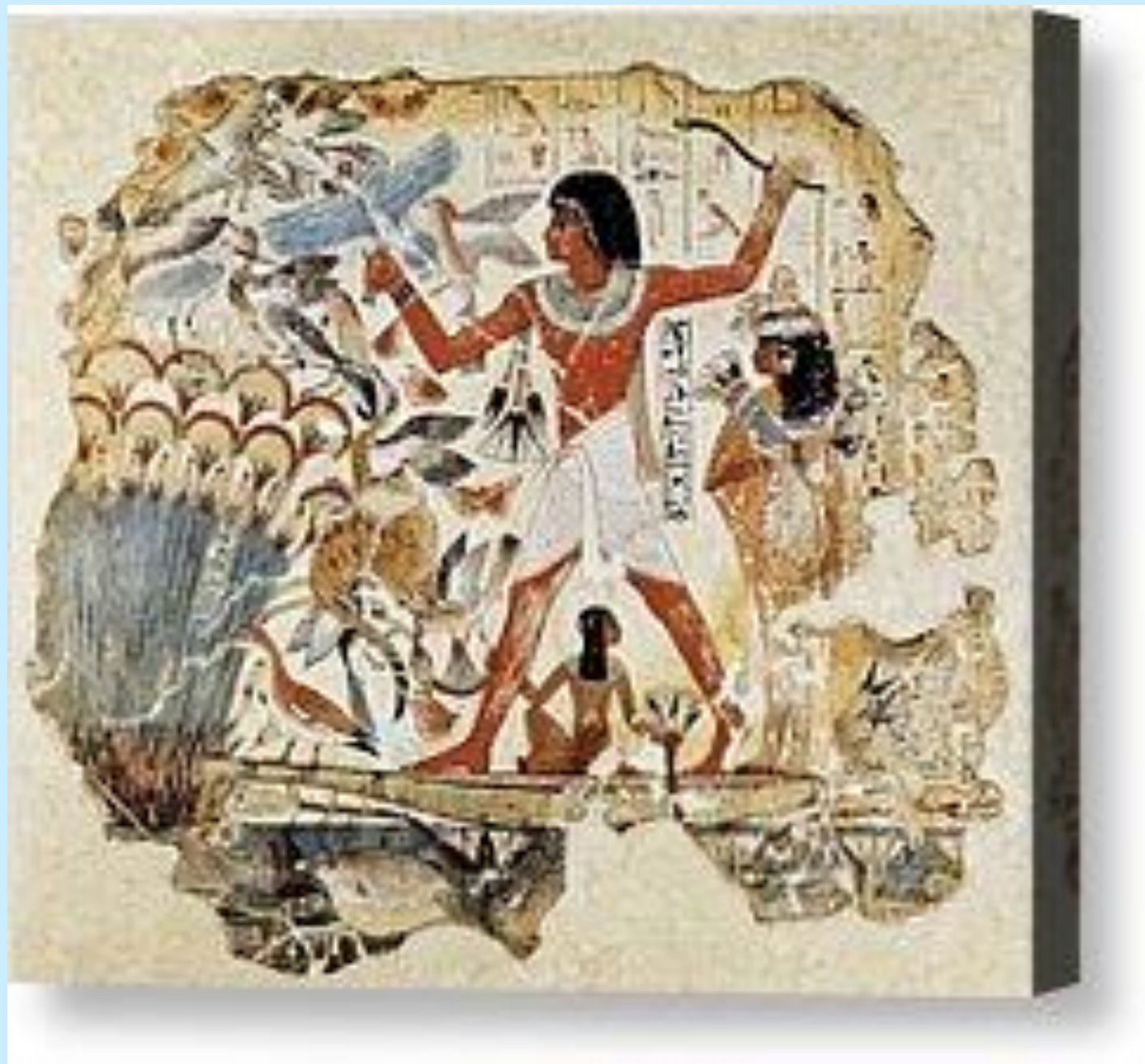
- Cultic singers required a certain amount of walking and standing
- It would have been possible to take a break from the ritual at any point to rest or urinate (especially a problem at times with increasing age)
- Older mourners might have known a greater repertoire of laments, and their presence would then imply that expertise was available so that the funeral could be as good as possible.

- Spinning and weaving were female activities.
- Women could increase their personal capital by the exchange of self-made textiles or clothes for desired goods—sometimes trading at markets.
- Whether they had to share the profits with their husbands, is unclear.

Agriculture









Marriage

- An Egyptian man had to marry to leave his father's home—to “found a house.” Any other arrangement was vaguely immoral.
- A house without a woman was meaningless.
- The woman “entered his house” and ran the home.
- Wife = “she who fetched her cattle,” “Mistress of the House,” “eating companion” of husband.
- Those terms = marriage, the key sign of which was cohabitation.

- A first marriage was characteristically between social equals, and expensive for the families.
- Men seem to have decorated the houses.
- Raising the children was mainly a female task.
- Women were responsible for food preparation.
- There is no clear evidence for gendered sections of homes.
- Men were involved in beer-making, so the kitchen may not have been exclusively a female area.

- At least with respect to adultery, wives were regarded as property of their husbands.
- Full socialization for a woman was probably when she gave birth, not when she consummated the marriage.
- A wife was expected not to display self-absorption in her own female social interest.
- On a late Ptolemaic stela, a wife left instructions/wishes that if her husband survived her, he should not be celibate—but this may have reflected literary tradition of the time more than true wishes.

Homosexual acts (= “a male partner acting as a woman”) were within the expected range of human behavior, though not supported—and not as bad as a man trying socially to fulfill a woman’s role in the home.

Polygyny

- We find no evidence *against* polygyny.
- Our assumption is that other than for royalty, serial monogamy was the norm.
- A Ramesside Adoption Papyrus (New Kingdom) describes a situation where a concubine seems to serve as surrogate mother (but not a wife) for a married couple.
- A sequence of wives (presumably via divorce) predeceasing the husband may best hope for burial together in a family tomb.

Marriage finances

- Practical and legal distinctions between marriage settlement and a will are blurred.
- Ability of a father to provide for a second family was constrained by the rights of his primary heir.
- Marriage settlements were often dated after consummation of a marriage.
- Revocation or change of a wife's settlement required formal assent from both her and her heir(s).

Remarriage

- We have no records of remarriage of a widow or divorcée.
- At least in late Ptolemaic times, a man was expected to remarry despite likely financial problems.
- Rights to family property focused on children of a first marriage, which greatly constrained the father's options for a 2nd wife.
- A contract might declare the 2nd wife's right to be buried with husband.

- A 2nd wife might be resented as young and pretty—and therefore scheming—or frivolous.
- Egyptian legal documents might have clauses forbidding a stepchild's challenge to an inheritance arrangement.
- Stepchildren could resent a fertile stepmother.
- Stepchildren might try to isolate the stepmother from the rest of society (e.g., cut off visits to other homes).
- An “evil stepson” (vs. evil stepmother) who persecutes the innocent stepmothers was felt to have a sort of right on his side.

- The eldest son had preferential status.
- Children of the 2nd marriage needed, in effect, to be legitimized.
- Late Ptolemaic records include a complaint by 2 children driven from their home and having their inheritance go to a stepmother.
- The Ptolemaic period has the story of man who has such lust for a woman that he agrees to let her murder his children so they can't dispute any inheritance.

Figurine of an Old Kingdom female miller



A woman weaver (tomb drawing)

From the Middle Kingdom until Amenhotep III, sagging breasts are restricted to depictions of working women, mourners, and foreigners.



A professional
mourner



Aging women

- Older women are doubly invisible in the sources, both by being female and by being older.
- Women's aging might have been considered to begin when the possibility of childbirth ceased.

Head of older woman from a workshop at el-Amarna



- Carrying goods to the market probably became more difficult as one aged, though bargaining skills may have been enhanced with aging.
- Whether carrying objects to market or just going there to shop, one needed agility to fend off thieves and reasonably good eyesight to check goods offered in payment.

- Thanks to a lifetime of physical labor, ancient Egyptians might have found it easier to continue such work in old age than it is in the modern West for women who have led more sedentary lives.
- All the stages of weaving and preparing thread can be done for as long or as brief a time as one wants, so that in theory an older woman could have worked for shorter hours or stopped to rest when she grew tired.

Mummification and women

- Males and elites predate females and commoners in receiving transabdominal evisceration.
- Although the elite were eviscerated in earlier periods, detailed evisceration data for mummies before the Middle Kingdom are not readily available.
- Primarily in the early dynastic period, 24% of mummies were not eviscerated.

How could women get into the afterlife?

- A deceased male could display sexual virility to assist with his rebirth into the next world.
- How could this apply to women?
- Women's funerary equipment, monuments, texts, and rituals are all adapted from male forms by changing male pronouns in texts and male figures in scenes to female ones.
- A woman's name could be combined with Osiris, allowing her to become male.

- A woman's coffin might include some feminine goods (e.g., bracelets, earrings, a wig) while still identifying her as a male god (Osiris, Re) with hints at the feminine via addition of breasts or vulture headdresses.
- A clearly feminine statue of the deceased might be placed near her masculinized coffin.

- Ancient Egyptian art shapes many of our perceptions of ancient, seemingly passive, Egyptian women.
- Many representations of women seem stereotypically feminine—doing their toilet, supporting husbands, being mothers.
- But Egyptian art often presented highly coded information that reflected the interrelation of ideal social relations, social rank, religious knowledge, and political ideologies.
- Art and writing (especially in hieroglyphs) were not as strictly separated in ancient Egypt as for us.

- Artistic diminution of woman is reflected in their being seated on the right side of an offering table, their legs behind a male's legs if seated side by side.
- Depictions of women's hair signaled differences in age rather than a social role or official position.
- As bread, beer and certain luxuries were depicted for consumption in the afterlife, so too a wife or women were necessary commodities.
- Question: is our inference of female passivity accurate?

Mummy Board of a 19th dynasty woman



<http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/561774#fullscreen>

XV. Everyday life

a. Some health issues

Health issues in ancient Egypt

- Infant mortality was high,
- Waterborne and infectious diseases were rife.
- Standards of health and safety on government projects were terrible.
- Spinal damage was common from dragging heavy objects.

Health in the 5th dynasty

- Upper echelons of society could call on the services of doctors, dentists, and other medical specialists.
- In their tombs, the elite are always depicted in vigorous health—men fit and virile, women nubile and graceful.
- For the peasantry, skeletons and mummified remains—as well as the occasional tomb scene—confirm suffering from a range of debilitating and painful diseases, many prevalent in Egypt today.
- Schistosomiasis, a parasitic disease transmitted by water snails in canals, ditches, and stagnant pools, was likely a common cause of ill health and early death.
- Tuberculosis seems to have been prevalent.

Value of being a scribe (Middle/New Kingdom)

The Instructions, or Precepts of Tutauf to his son Pepi

- Advice of a father to his son, who is leaving to train for the profession of scribe.
- Over and over, the father urges his son to apply himself to the pursuit of learning as the foundation of all great and lasting success.
- All of the following jobs pale beside that of the scribe:

blacksmith (hands like
crocodiles' hide, a
stink worse than roe)
metal worker
peasant
stone mason

barber
builder of houses
farmer
envoy to foreign lands
dyer
shoemaker

washerman
catcher of water-fowl
fisherman (worst job of
all...in blind terror of
the crocodile)

The end of the Middle Kingdom

In the final decades of the Middle Kingdom, the state was undermined by a convergence of natural and human-made disasters.

- At Hutwaret (Avaris) in the lower Delta, plague and famine devastated the population.
- Whole families of adults and children were buried together.

- Weakened by disease, Lower Egypt became easy prey to an outside aggressor.
- From across the Sinai, a force of well-equipped Hyksos invaders, armed with the latest military technology—horse-drawn chariots,—overran Hutwaret and then swept southward to conquer the ancient capital of Memphis.
- The Egyptian government retreated to Upper Egypt, with Thebes as its capital.

Akhetaten (aka el-Amarna, New Kingdom)

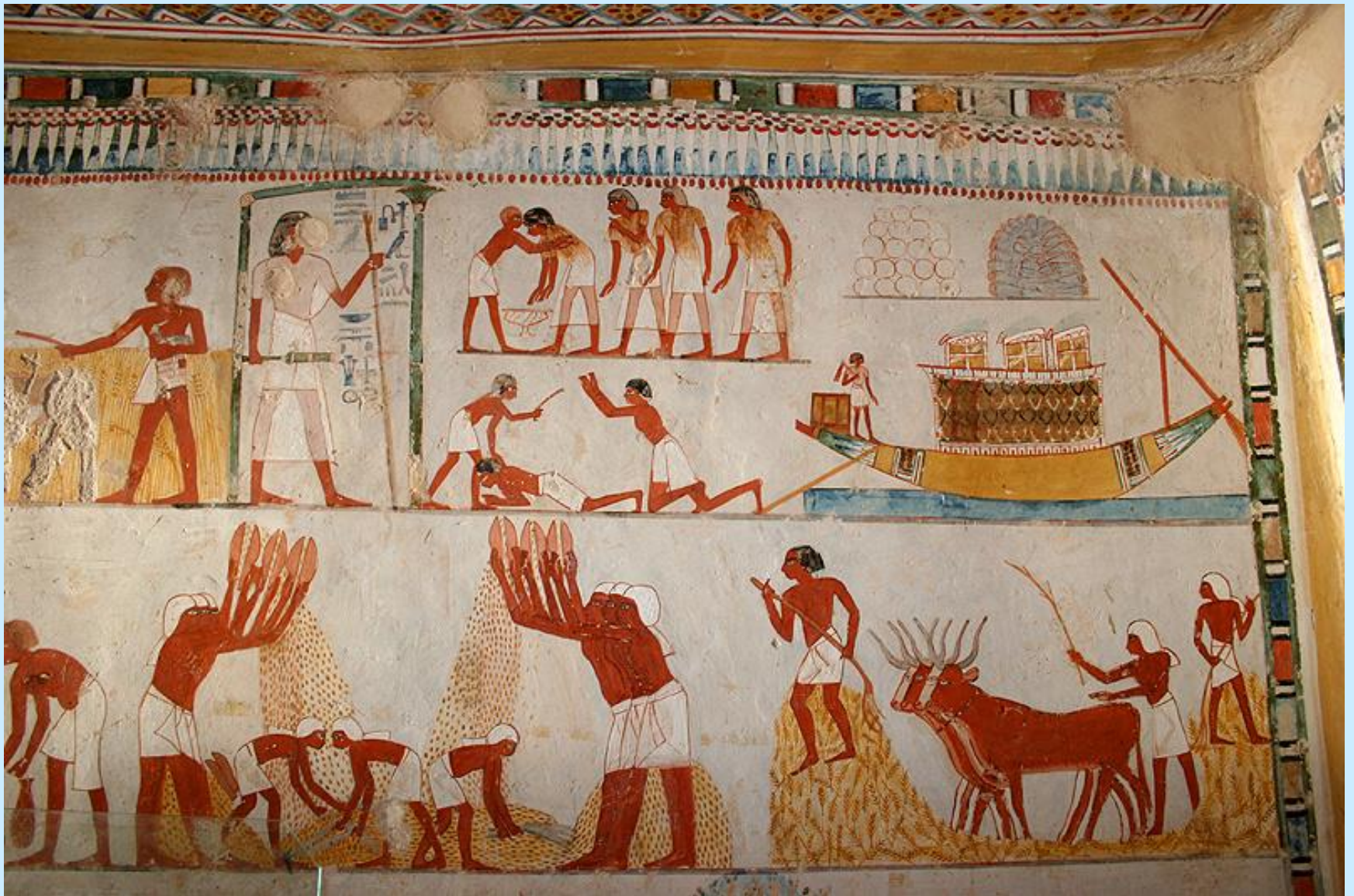
- Citizens of Akhetaten lived short, hard lives with poor diets, high stress, and physical hardship.
- Some did irreparable damage to their spines by carrying heavy burdens on a daily basis.
- Others squatted or knelt all day on mud floors, toiling over crucibles of molten metal or glass in the city's workshops.
- Inadequately fed in childhood, and mocking the mountains of food laid out for the Aten, men and women alike were physically stunted and prone to debilitating conditions such as anemia.
- More than half the population died while still in their late teens, and most were dead by thirty-five.

XV. Everyday life

b. Routine labor

Farming

- Throughout Egypt's history, the economy was based upon agriculture, and perhaps 75 percent of the population were farmers who grew emmer wheat, barley, and other vegetables on their own land or share-cropped fields.
- When harvesting corn, farmers wept and pretended to be grief-stricken to appease any spirits that might become angry at having their home violated.



On the other hand...

- Rainfall decreased throughout much of Egypt after about 2900 BCE, and some scholars postulate that this would have reduced agricultural resources and eliminated much of the seasonal pasturage adjacent to the Nile Valley.
- Reliefs from the causeway of Unas (end of Dynasty 5) show scenes of starving people (men?), which may have been the result of poor inundation levels.



Hunting

- Peasants rarely ate meat but rather bread, beer, vegetables and dried fish.
- As hunting lost economic importance for survival, it became a sport for kings, courtiers and dignitaries.
- Hunting resources included dogs, spears, arrows, throw-sticks, and nets.



Resources and trade goods

- Besides agriculture, animal husbandry was important, with evidence of sheep, goats, cattle, and pigs.
- Fishing remained basic to the economy.
- Luxury raw materials, like ivory, ebony, incense, and exotic animal skins, were in great demand from the earliest dynasties and came largely from beyond Nubia.

War and trade

- The Egyptian state often pursued an aggressive foreign policy with sizable armies.
- Many campaigns were against Nubians to the south and "Asiatic Sand Dwellers" to the east.
- The goal was to maintain domination over economic resources and to ensure the flow of luxury items. For example:
 - ❑ Nubia had gold mines, feathers, ostrich eggs, and ebony.
 - ❑ Modern Lebanon had cedar timbers used for ships.

XV. Everyday life

c. Workers' village

Few non-elite settlements have survived from ancient Egypt

- Building materials tended to be perishable (e.g., mud brick).
- Settlements were often built near moist soil from the Nile.
- Some locations were re-used over the centuries (so that older buildings may lie hidden beneath more recent housing).

- Over the millennia, there were several workers' villages to build tombs and other religious and civil structures.
- Three of the most revealing have been:

| Village | BCE dates | No. of homes |
|----------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Lahun | ~1900-1800 | ~90 |
| Deir el-Medina | ~1500-1000 | ~68 |
| Tell el-Amarna | ~1350-1336 | ~40 |

Village locations

Lahun



Amarna

Deir el-Medina

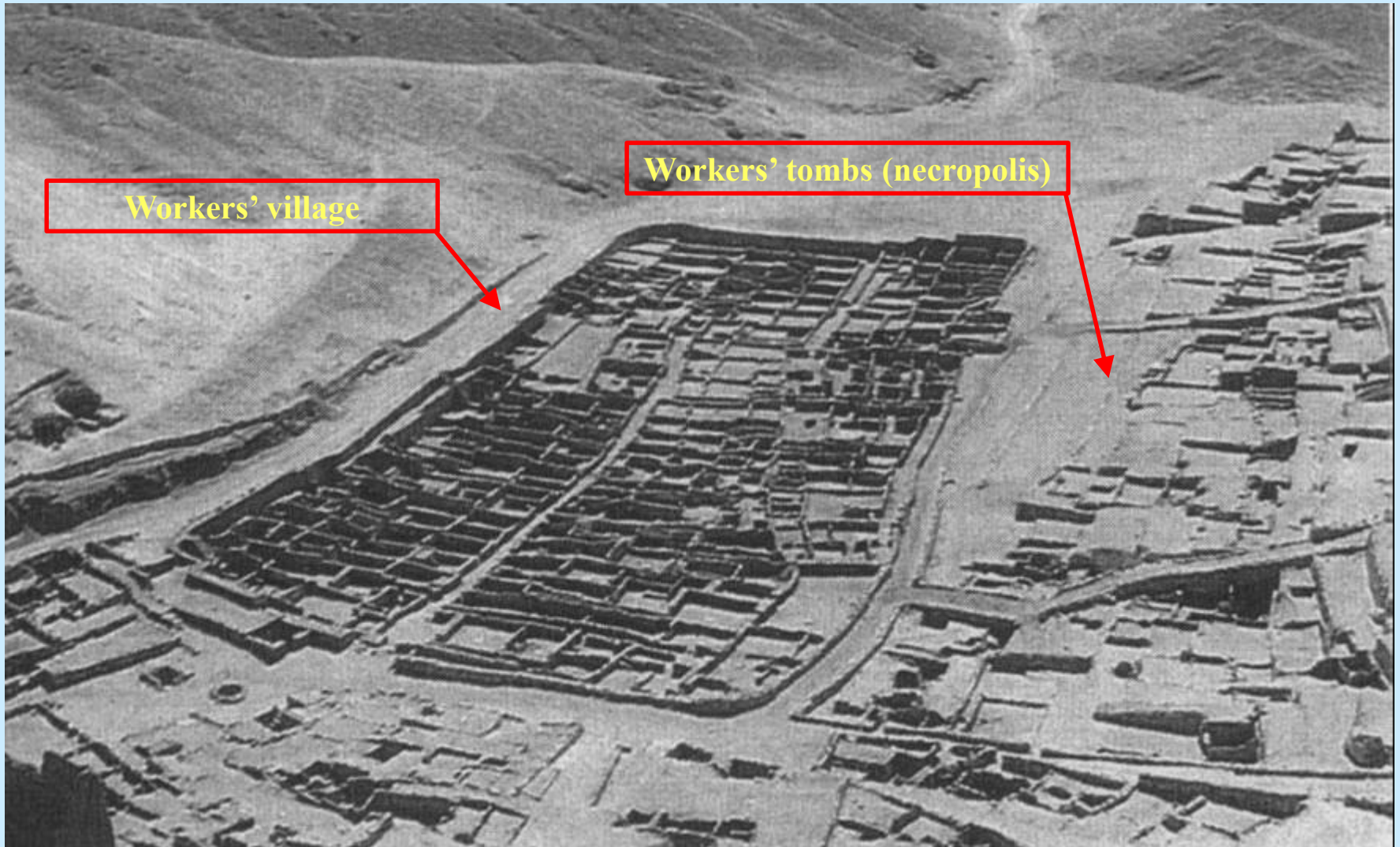
Logistics for royal tomb building

- Huge expenditure for materials, labor, support staff
- Great planning required for housing and maintenance of workers' families and support staff:
 - ☐ Homes
 - ☐ Huts (perhaps for temporary residence near a work site, perhaps as workshops)
 - ☐ Chapels (for the living and for tombs)
 - ☐ Tombs (for workers and their families)
 - ☐ Storerooms

Lahun



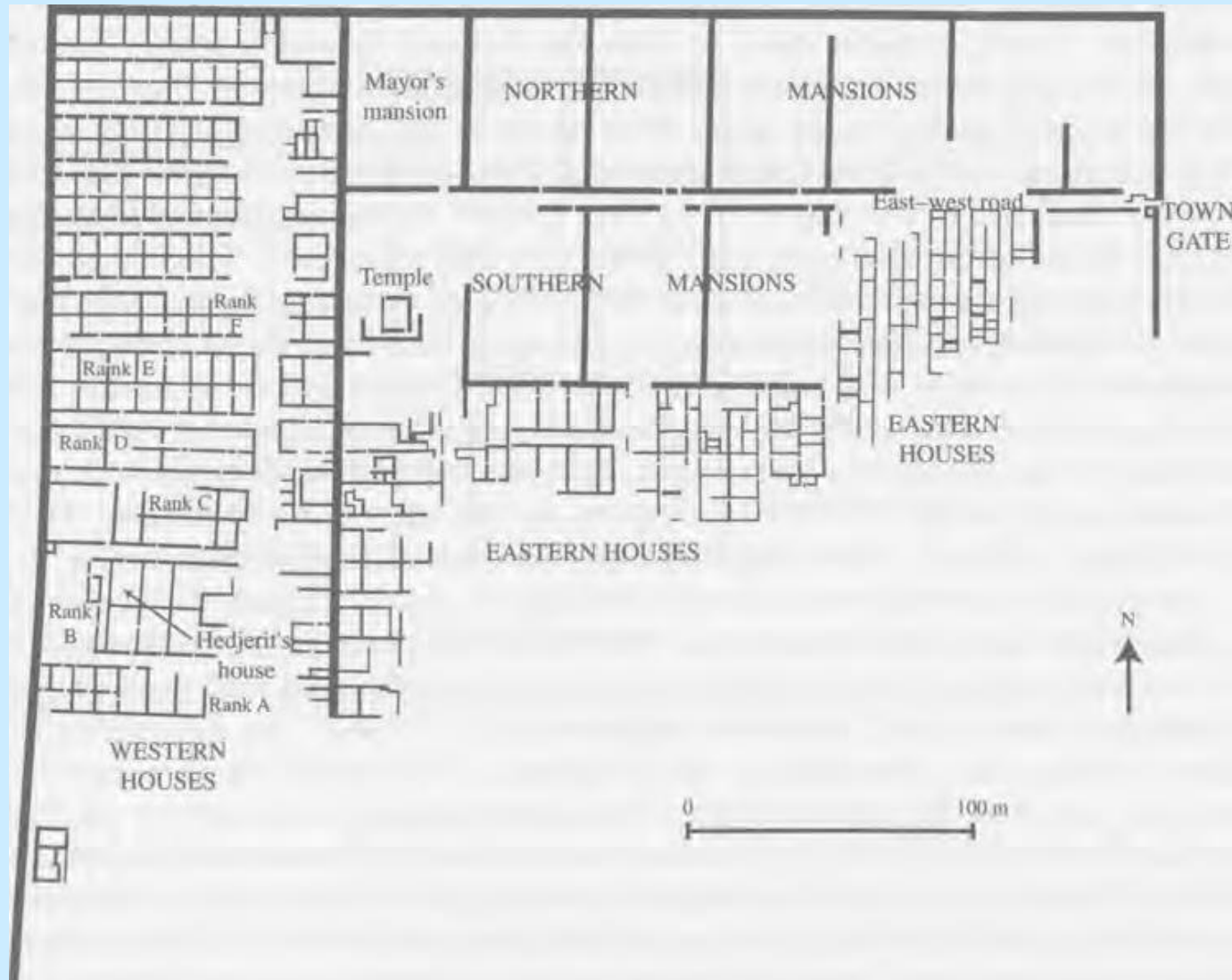
Deir el-Medina (Arabic for “City Monastery”)



Section of Deir el-Medina



Lahun: workers' village layout



~1400 square meters with mud-brick wall ~3m thick, 6m high, on at least 3 sides of the town

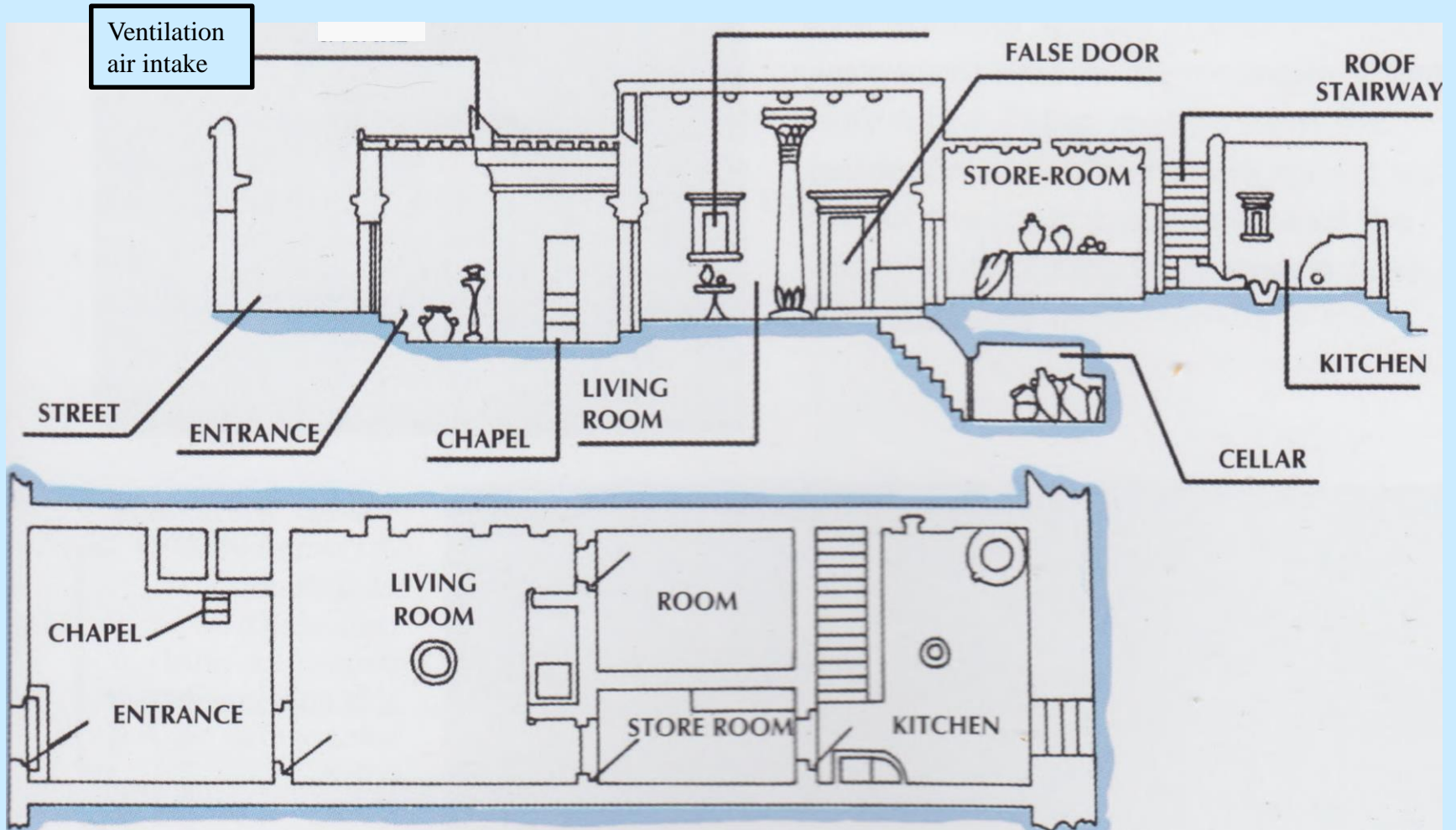
Lahun “mansions”

- Because the wind in Egypt blows from north to south, the ideal location to live would be in the northern section of the town.
 - Homes with porticoes and vents facing north would be able to take the best advantage of the fresh cool breezes.
 - Homes included reception halls, granaries, administrative offices, kitchens, a pool, possible stalls for animals, servants’ quarters, private living quarters with dressing rooms and bathrooms for owner, family, and guests.
- Szpakowska, *Daily Life in Ancient Egypt*

“Ordinary” houses in Lahun

- Mud-brick and plastered with mud
- Roofed with wooden beams and poles (straw or reed tied to poles)
- Walls often painted in red, yellow, white
- Flat roofs may have been extensions of living space or storage
- Possible early use of vents, latticed windows for light and air (these existed in New Kingdom)

Typical Deir el-Medina house structure

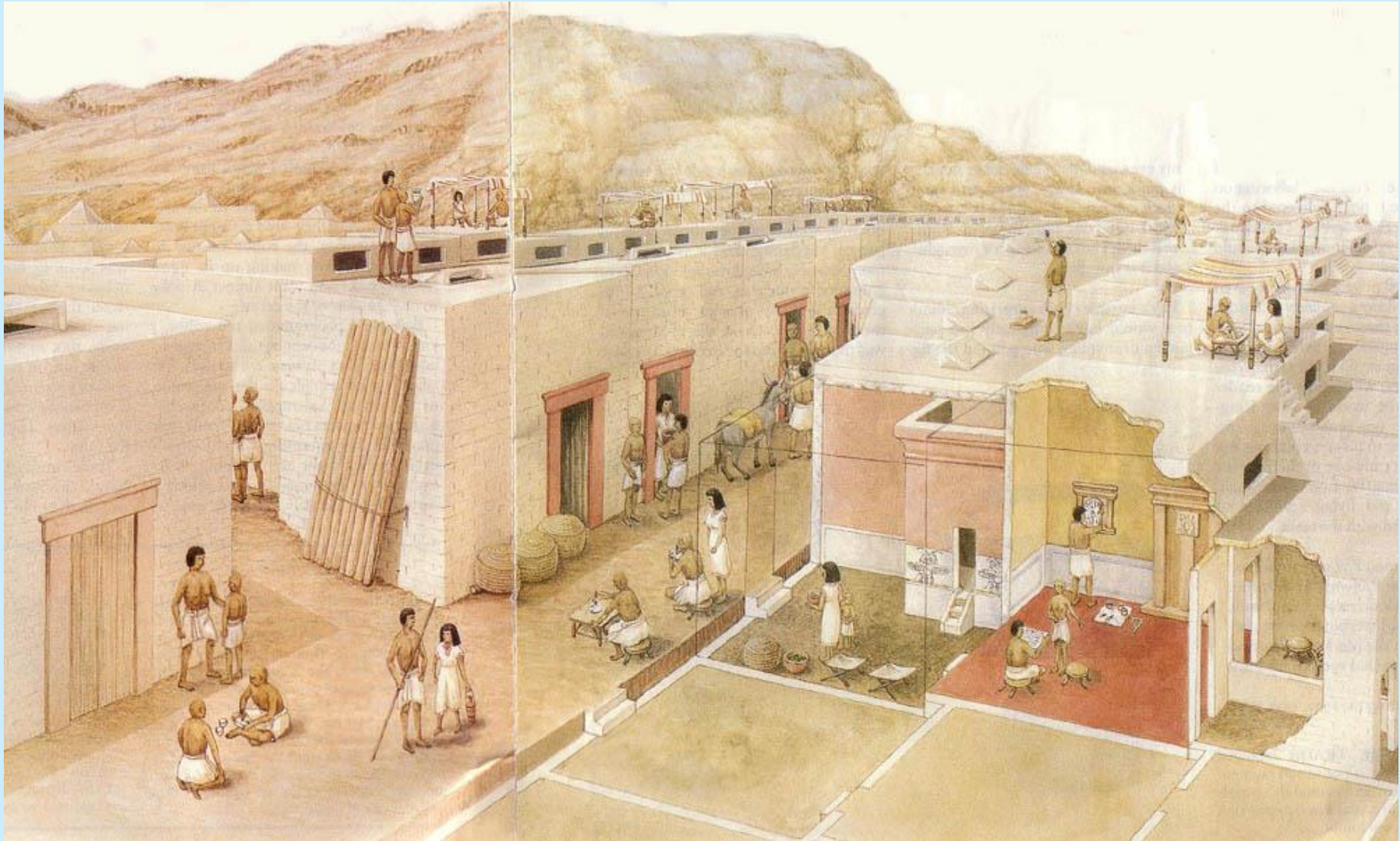


A Deir el-Medina home structure

Archaeological, iconographic and textual evidence clearly suggests that ancient Egyptian village rooms had multiple uses, with no clearly distinguished male and female areas.

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <i>Front room</i> | Multifunctional area, possibly unroofed, for female activities like spinning, weaving, grinding, animal-keeping |
| <i>Platform in a room</i> | Probably a house altar equally used by men and women, though it is possible that the room was female territory during daytime hours (when men were often away working and women performed daily domestic tasks) |
| <i>Middle room</i> | Sitting and eating; a dais, a column, wall decoration, niches and false doors are typically male status symbols |
| <i>Bedroom</i> | Possibly related to sexually mature women during menstruation (only one relevant text from ancient Egypt supports this) |
| <i>Rear rooms & kitchen</i> | Perhaps for lower-status females (e.g., slaves/servants—possibly including men not in the fields but involved in beer-making) |

Artist's view of Deir el-Medina



Lahun village residents

General labor

- Peasants
- Farmers
- Herdsmen
- Fishermen
- Laborers
- Builders
- Craftsmen
- Entertainers
- Servants (but not slaves)
- Captured foreigners
- Marshland dwellers
- Beggars

Higher status residents

- Officials and overseers who supervised the work
- Priests and other personnel employed in the king's pyramid temple
- Doctors
- Scribes
- Tradesmen

Lahun pyramid of Senruset II



Valley of the Kings served by Deir el-Medina



Deir el-Medina

- Population: Depending on the stage of a building project, 16-120 workmen and their families lived here—maybe as many as 1,200 people.
- Workers were relatively privileged.
- Government met all basic needs.
- Pay was typically in weighed quantities of grain: the higher your rank, the more grain, and if you didn't use it all, you could sell the excess

Social structure of Deir el-Medina

- Vizier (highest minister in Pharaoh's government) monitored work progress
- Overseer of the Treasury monitored finances
- Main village administrators dealt with these high officials located in Memphis [?]
- Governing structure: “The tomb”
- Workers: “The gang,” divided into two groups called “left” and “right” sides
- Workers' sons often inherited their fathers' positions; the fathers might give “gifts” to administrators to favor their sons
- Some children left the village

Jobs in workers' villages (sometimes inherited)

- Foreman (one for each side: responsible for effective work at the tomb)
- Scribe (one for each side; kept copious records of wages, rations, deliveries, disputes, lamp wicks, and on and on)
- Work gang (one for each side; varied in numbers depending on stage of work; dug and decorated the tomb)
- Deputy (in charge of distributing some material goods--e.g., lamp wicks)
- Guardian of the tomb (guarded storehouse, where copper tools and lamp wicks were kept)
- Door keeper (guarded tomb and work officials)
- Slave women (as many as 15: assigned to families of gang members; responsible for grinding grain)

Work hours at Deir el-Medina

- Egyptian week: 10 days
- Egyptian month: 3 of these weeks
- Egyptian year: 12 months + 5 special days
- Workers were on duty 8 days for 4 hours each day.
- A large number of days were holidays, typically for religious celebrations.

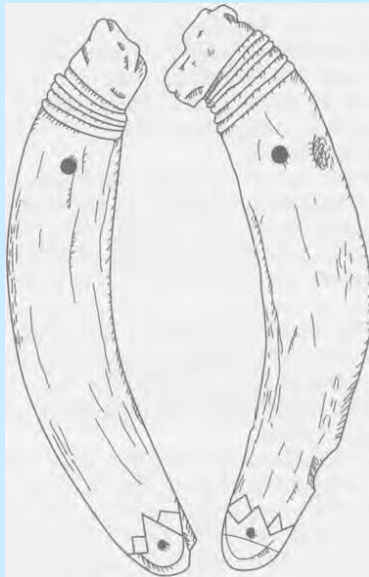
Village support personnel funded by Pharaoh's government

- Woodcutters (several per side; supplied wood and dung as fuel for cooking, baking [and heat at night?])
- Gardeners
- Fishermen
- Potters
- Laundrymen
- Gypsum makers
- Water-carriers

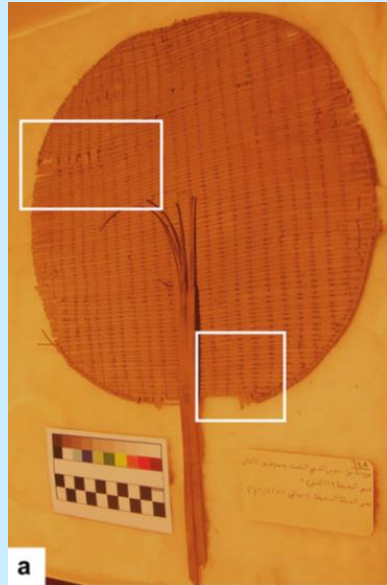
Artefacts found at Lahun

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Wooden hoes | Copper mirror | Fishing nets |
| Statuette of a dancer | Basket with hatchets, chisels and a copper bowl | Slender chair of dark wood inlaid with ivory pegs |
| Balls of thread | Jewelry | Brick-mold |
| Weaving equipment | Blue glazed pottery | Toilet equipment |
| Knives | Rakes | Linen cloth |
| Toys and games: dolls, tops, mud toys, a woven sling, game boards | Copper and flint tools | Babies buried in wooden boxes, often with necklaces |

Lahun grave goods



Deir el-Medina reed artefacts



Amarna house models



Labor unrest: rare but not unknown

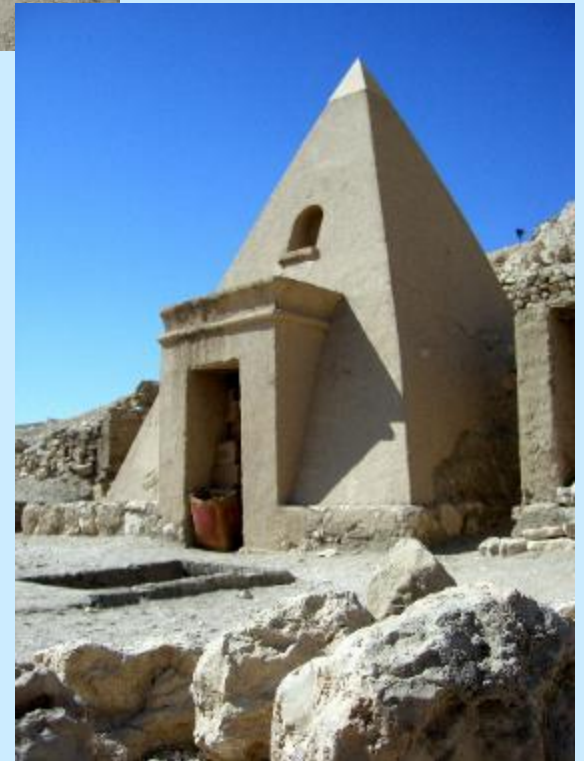
- An official Lahun “journal” summarizes an incident of apparent withdrawal of manpower.
- At Deir el-Medina, in 1157-1156/55 (reign of Ramesses III), problems with lack of pay and late deliveries prompted labor rebellion.

<http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/kahun.htm>

Burial chamber at Deir el-Medina (of architect Kha, 18th dynasty)



Some Deir el-Medina tombs



Tomb of a Deir el-Medina artisan



Tomb, about 16 ft long x 8 ft high and wide, shared with wife, children, grandchildren

<http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/sennedjemt.htm>

Tomb of an early Ramesside foreman or stone mason

