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Forever Young? The Representation of Older and Ageing Women in Ancient Egyptian Art

DEBORAH SWEENEY

In Egyptian art, women are generally represented as young and beautiful; representations of older women are rare. By contrast, male ageing is represented far more frequently and in greater detail than that of women, since it was a positive image for men.

Nonetheless, examples with some features of ageing, such as a wrinkle on the face, are known from all periods, and associated with both elite and non-elite women. These representations of older women could be an attempt to express the authority and experience conveyed by the image of male ageing.

Features of ageing are absent from the images of elite women between the early Eighteenth Dynasty and the Amarna period. Although women did not, by and large, adopt the image of older women to the same degree as Tiy and Nefertiti, after the Amarna period elite women are once more represented with some characteristics of ageing in formal Egyptian art.

Egyptian art seldom depicted older women or women growing older: “neither pregnancy nor the spreading waistline that many women must have had after years of bearing children is part of the image.”¹ Women were normally depicted as young, slender and beautiful.² This was partly due to the performative function of Egyptian art, aimed at establishing whatever was depicted in an alternative reality, such as the world of the gods or the afterworld. In principle, people were depicted at the peak of their energy and beauty in order to remain so forever.³ Elite women portrayed in tomb chapels were supposed to be sexually attractive⁴ to assist in their husband’s regeneration and rebirth in the afterworld;⁵ non-elite women were conventionally portrayed as healthy energetic servants of the tomb-owner and his family in the next life. Egyptian men might be depicted at different stages of life, both in the prime of life and also in successful, portly middle age,⁶ but women who are anything

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¹ Gay Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1993), 180.

² E.g., John R. Baines, *Fecundity Figures: Egyptian Personification and the Iconology of a Genre* (Warminster, 1985), 125.

³ Actually, people rich enough to own tombs where they were represented as young were probably already mature (Gay Robins, personal communication).

⁴ Ann Macy Roth, “Father Earth, Mother Sky: Ancient Egyptian Beliefs about Conception and Fertility,” in Alison E. Rautman, ed., *Reading the Body. Representations and Remains in the Archaeological Record* (Philadelphia, 2000), 194–96 argues that in ancient Egypt fertility was a male attribute: Egyptian women were supposed to be sexually alluring in order to stimulate men’s fertility.

⁵ Roth, “Father Earth, Mother Sky,” 198.

⁶ E.g., Elisabeth Stahelin, *Untersuchungen zur ägyptischen Tracht im Alten Reich (MÄS 8)* (Berlin, 1966), 183–89, or Baines, *Fecundity Figures*, 126. By contrast, Henry G. Fischer, “Varia Aegyptiaca,” *JARCE* 2 (1963), 19, 23 argues that this image represents old age “an ideal of sedentary and well-fed ease that was appropriate to the tomb owner’s later years.”

other than young are unusual in Egyptian art. As Heike Behlmer puts it, "Ägyptische Elitemänner altern gut, Männer der Unterschicht und Ausländer altern schlecht. Ägyptische Frauen altern gar nicht."⁷

This stereotypical representation of women as young and beautiful was so well-established that even individuals known to be no longer young were portrayed in the bloom of youth. For instance, Mer-si-ankh III is represented as young in the reliefs of her tomb at Giza⁸ although her skeleton seems to be that of a woman in her fifties.⁹ In the tomb of Userhat at Thebes (TT 51), his wife and his mother-in-law are depicted as more or less the same age.¹⁰ Often only an accompanying inscription makes clear whether a figure is that of a man's wife or his mother.¹¹

In this essay, I will attempt to trace the portrayal of older women and women growing older in Egypt, from the Third Dynasty down to the end of the New Kingdom. Before the Third Dynasty, many aspects of the canons of Egyptian representation were not yet standardized. In the Third Intermediate Period, by contrast, a more rounded body type appeared:¹² larger, more drooping breasts and thickened body became standard representations of the female figure and no longer necessarily denoted a woman growing older.

1. Methodological Considerations

As women age, their bodies change in various ways. Breasts begin to sag and stomachs to grow rounder, lines and wrinkles appear on the face, backs begin to stoop, and in later old age women may become very gaunt.

However, Egyptian art did not necessarily combine these features consistently, or in a fixed order, when portraying women as they grew older. This may reflect the reality of the ageing process: people do not always age in the same way.¹³ Facial lines and body changes appear in different sequences for different people at different ages. On the other hand, the choice to represent people in a certain way may have been ideological, aimed at communicating the message that a person was growing older without including every detail of the ageing process. For instance, the face of a statue or a two-dimensional representation may show signs of ageing whereas the body does not. One of the most dramatic examples of "an old head on a young body" is the statue of Queen Tuya in the Vatican, whose face is deeply lined but whose body is firm and youthful. Barbara Lesko argues that this is an attempt to foreground the sexuality of the queen mother, the major mother figure upon earth, and that this body is ideological rather than a representation of the queen's actual body.¹⁴ However, Arielle Kozloff has recently shown that the statue originally belonged to Queen Tiy of the Eighteenth Dynasty, and the deep cheek ridges are in fact the result of cutting down the original face of the statue.¹⁵ Nonetheless, as Lesko remarks, it is nonetheless significant that the end product, combining

⁷ Heike Behlmer, "Alte werden unter Pharaonen," *Mitteilungen der Grazer Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 11 (2002/2003), 48. Cf. Gay Robins, *The Art of Ancient Egypt* (London, 1997), 76.

⁸ Dows Dunham and William Kelly Simpson, *The Mastaba of Queen Mersyankh III (G 7530-7540)* (Boston, 1974). However, the statuette head MFA 30.1461 (pl. 19) shows a woman with lined face.

⁹ Dunham and Simpson, *Mersyankh*, 21.

¹⁰ Norman de Garis Davies, *Two Ramesside Tombs at Thebes* (New York, 1927), 10, 16, pls. 8, 9.

¹¹ Gay Robins, "While the Woman Looks On: Gender inequality in the New Kingdom," *KMT* 1/3 (1990), 21.

¹² Karl-Heinz Priebe, *Das Ägyptische Museum Berlin* (Mainz, 1991), 231; Sylvia Schoske, Barbara Kriebel, and Renate Germer, *Anch: Blumen für das Leben: Pflanzen im alten Ägypten* (Munich, 1992), 211. Edna R. Russmann, *Eternal Egypt. Masterworks of Ancient Art from the British Museum* (London, 2001), 221-22, 248.

¹³ Douglas E. Crews, "Biological Anthropology and Human Aging: Some Current Directions in Aging Research," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 22 (1993), 395-423.

¹⁴ Barbara Lesko, "Queen Khamerernebt II and Her Sculpture," in Leonard H. Lesko, ed., *Ancient Egyptian and Mediterranean Studies in Memory of William A. Ward* (Providence, Rhode Island, 1998), 158.

what appears to be a deeply lined face with a slender body, was thought appropriate to represent the queen mother.

Many depictions of older women and women growing older are not necessarily portraits of that individual. Rather, they represent types such as ‘an old woman’ or ‘a mature woman’ or hint that a person is mature. Even in cases when statues or reliefs of an individual display distinctive features, this may be for ideological reasons rather than representing how that person actually looked.¹⁶

In certain contexts, some of the signs which were commonly used to denote ageing may have a different significance. Edna Russmann has demonstrated the existence of a “second style” during the Sixth Dynasty. One characteristic feature of this “second style” is ridges running from nose to mouth, which in this case do not necessarily denote age.¹⁷

Similarly, in the Amarna period, certain signs usually associated with ageing in Egyptian art appear with the royal daughters, even in childhood, such as lines at the corner of the mouth,¹⁸ probably derived from the iconography of the royal couple. The princesses are also occasionally shown with double chins,¹⁹ which may indicate childhood plumpness since it is not part of their parents’ characteristic image.

Looking at portrayals of ageing may show us how the Ancient Egyptians constructed different stages of the gendered life cycle. But looking at gender in isolation is not enough.²⁰ We should investigate how gender and the ageing process intersect with class and race, and what type of representation the Egyptians considered appropriate for which social group.

Normally it was unusual for elite women to show signs of ageing on their bodies, particularly when they were portrayed together with their spouses. By contrast, servants and other non-elite women were portrayed more often with lined faces and drooping breasts.²¹ This distinction was primarily ideologically motivated, highlighting the contrast between the young, healthy elite and anyone outside the elite, yet nonetheless it might have had a certain basis in reality. Although most women probably became pregnant frequently, irrespective of their status, elite women were seldom obliged to perform manual labor, and they probably enjoyed a more nourishing diet and could afford better medical care than poorer women, who would have aged more rapidly.

As a starting point to identify characteristics of women’s ageing in Egyptian art, I selected the most elderly of all representations of women, an Old Kingdom figurine of a miller from the Louvre (fig. 1).²² From this figurine, a number of characteristics of ageing may be identified, although most of them are not present simultaneously on most of the representations under discussion, and few display them to such a great degree. These characteristics are:

- a. Drooping breasts
- b. Gauntness
- c. Nasolabial folds
- d. Line at the corner of the mouth
- e. Bags under the eyes

¹⁵ Arielle P. Kozloff, “A Masterpiece with Three Lives—The Vatican’s Statue of Tuya,” in Peter der Manuelian, ed., *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson* (Boston, 1996), 483.

¹⁶ Edna R. Russmann, *Egyptian Sculpture: Cairo and Luxor* (Austin, Texas, 1989), 115.

¹⁷ Edna R. Russmann, “A Second Style in Egyptian Art of the Old Kingdom,” *MDAIK* 51 (1995), 268–79, especially 270.

¹⁸ Dorothea Arnold, *The Royal Women of Amarna. Images of Beauty from Ancient Egypt* (New York, 1996), fig. 108.

¹⁹ Arnold, *Royal Women of Amarna*, figs 49, 108.

²⁰ Lynn Meskell, *Archaeologies of Social Life: Age, Sex, Class et cetera in Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 1999), passim: see p. 2 for a formulation.

²¹ Cf. Baines, *Fecundity Figures*, 125.

²² Louvre E 7704 bis.



Fig. 1. Figurine of a miller from the Old Kingdom. Cliché RMN, modèle de meunière agée: Les Frères Chuzeville.

2. Signs of Ageing on the Body

a. Drooping breasts

The flattened, elongated breasts of much older women are easy to identify, for example, the two millers (fig. 2)²³ on the false door of Itefnen and Peritem in the Cairo Museum or a woman from the tomb of Kahif represented threshing grain (fig. 3).²⁴

²³ After Nadine Cherpion, "La fausse-porte d'Itefnen et Peritem au Musée du Caire," *BIFAO* 82 (1982), pls. 16, 17. Cf. Harvard University-Museum of Fine Arts Expedition 21.2600–Yvonne J. Markowitz, Joyce L. Haynes and Rita E. Freed, *Egypt in the Age of the Pyramids* (Boston, 2002), 90–91; BM 1372–Dietrich Wildung, *Sesostris und Amenemhet. Ägypten im Mittleren Reich* (Munich, 1984), 27.

²⁴ After Hermann Junker, *Bericht über die von der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien auf gemeinsame Kosten mit Dr. Wilhelm Pelizaeus unternommenen Grabungen auf dem Friedhof des Alten Reiches bei den Pyramiden von Giza*, vol. 6 (Wien and Leipzig, 1943), 148–49, pl. 14. The female victims of famine on the causeway of Unas are also portrayed with flattened drooping breasts, probably the result of malnutrition. See John F. Nunn, *Ancient Egyptian Medicine* (London, 1996), 20.

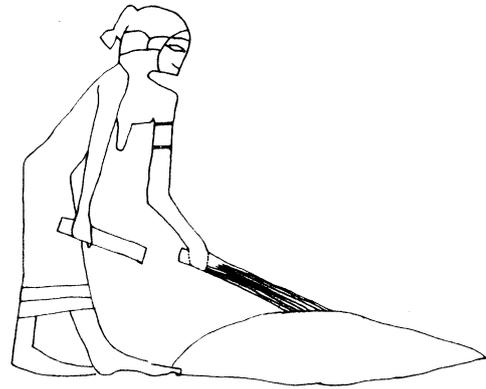
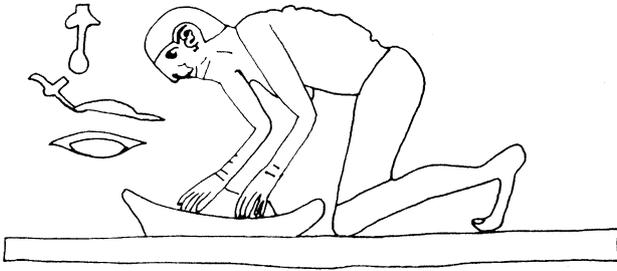


Fig. 3. Elder woman from the tomb of Kahif threshing grain.



Fig. 2. The millers Samut and Nefer. Drawing by the author.

14.²⁵ As a rule of thumb, in seated or standing representations, the face from the hairline downwards and neck will take up two squares in this grid and the upper chest another two; the distance between hairline and shoulder should be the same as that between shoulder and nipple. If the nipple falls below this point, then the breast is beginning to droop. When women bend over, however, their breasts automatically droop more.²⁶ Although this is certainly true of representations of female brewers and millers from the Old Kingdom, nonetheless, some of them seem to have full or drooping breasts in any case.²⁷

Women from the elite are rarely depicted with ageing bodies. However, there are a couple of interesting cases from the Old Kingdom where elite women are shown on their own personal monuments with drooping breasts. Hathorneferhotep, the wife of Khabausoker, had a tomb of her own, as was customary during the Third Dynasty, and is shown with drooping breasts, and other signs of ageing²⁸ (fig. 4).²⁹ On a false door from the First Intermediate Period now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, a woman named Hemy-Re is portrayed as a girl, as a woman in her prime and as an older woman with drooping bosom (fig. 5).³⁰ This may be an analogy to the contemporary

²⁵ Gay Robins, *Proportion and Style in Ancient Egyptian Art* (Austin, Texas 1994), 46–47, 75, 79.

²⁶ *Fecundity Figures*, 125.

²⁷ E.g., Ahmed Mahmoud Moussa and Hartwig Altenmüller, *Das Grab des Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep* (Mainz, 1977), pl. 23; Ludwig Borchardt, *Statuen und Statuetten von Königen und Privatleuten im Museum von Kairo, Catalogue Général des antiquités égyptiennes du musée du Caire, Nos. 1–1294* (Berlin, 1911), no. 110.

²⁸ CGC 1386, 1387. Nadine Cherpion, “The Human Image in Old Kingdom Nonroyal Reliefs,” in Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids* (New York, 1999), 104–5.

²⁹ After Nadine Cherpion, “Le mastaba de Khabaousokar (MM A₂): Problèmes de chronologie,” *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 11 (1980), pl. 2 following p. 80.

³⁰ Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge E.6.1909. Eleni Vassilika, *Egyptian Art* (Cambridge, 1995), 22–23; Henry George Fischer, “Some Early Monuments from Busiris in the Egyptian Delta,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 11 (1976), 14–22.

practice of depicting men in their tombs as both in the prime of life and in successful portly middle age.³¹ These older women may thus have appropriated aspects of the Egyptian images of successful male ageing to express female power and experience, an aspect of their lives which might become more prominent in circumstances when women were not required to appear in the role of attractive partner to their husband.³²

From the Middle Kingdom until the reign of Amenhotep III, sagging breasts do not form part of the iconography of elite women. They are restricted to depictions of working women,³³ mourners,³⁴ and foreigners,³⁵ such as a weaver from the tomb of Khnumhotep in Beni Hasan (fig. 6).³⁶

However, during the reigns of Amenhotep III and Akhenaten, the most influential women in Egypt, Queen Tiy (fig. 7)³⁷ and Nefertiti (fig. 8),³⁸ were represented with signs of ageing. Dorothea Arnold argues that this is a deliberate attempt to provide a female parallel to the image of the venerable and experienced older male.³⁹ She suggests that the later representations of Tiy and Nefertiti as older women developed from the adoption at the start of Akhenaten's reign of an artistic idiom of hollow cheeks, hooded eyes, strongly marked cheekbones, and lines and folds at the corners of mouth and nose, commonly used to depict outsiders and older people, for the royal couple.⁴⁰ Without these intermediate stages, she thinks, it would not have been possible to depict the queens with signs of ageing. However, it is important to note that Nefertiti allowed ageing to be inscribed not only on her face but also on her body, a most unusual combination for elite women.

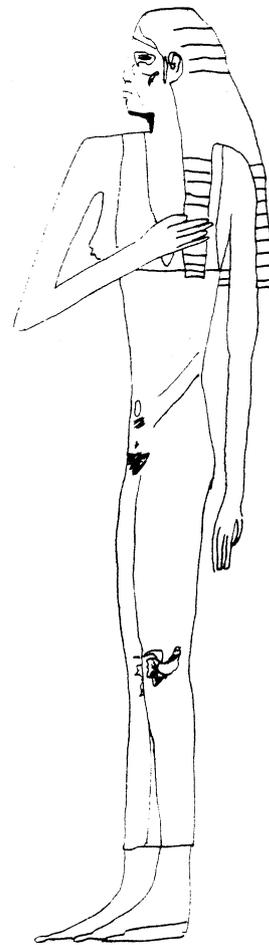


Fig. 4. Relief of Hathorneferhotep. Drawing by the author.

³¹ Fischer, "Some Early Monuments from Busiris," 14.

³² However, another contemporary example from the First Intermediate Period depicts a woman with drooping breasts in the company of her husband. Boston 12.1475—Ronald J. Lephoron, *Stelae I. The early dynastic period to the late Middle Kingdom*, Corpus Antiquitatum Aegyptiacarum Boston, fasc. 2 (Boston, 1985), 2.63–65.

³³ Turin Inv Supp. 1342—Anna Maria Donadoni Roveri, ed., *Egyptian Civilization: Daily Life* (Turin, 1987), 129; TT 57 Walter Wreszinski, *Atlas zur altägyptischen Kulturgeschichte*, I (Leipzig, 1923), 192; weaving workshop in the tomb of Djehutinefer—Abdel Ghaffar Shedid, *Stil der Grabmalereien in der Zeit Amenophis' II*, Archäologische Veröffentlichungen 66 (Mainz, 1988), pls. 5a, 27, 36. The sex of this person is uncertain. Some think that an older woman is represented here, some an older man (Sadid, *Stil der Grabmalereien*, 128). It is possible for older men to have a sagging bosom: breast development in men is a side effect of schistosomiasis (see Nunn, *Ancient Egyptian Medicine*, 69). The figure's hairstyle and clothing are more typical of men at this period, although women were also occasionally portrayed working stripped to the waist in the New Kingdom, as in the tomb of Nakht (Barry Kemp and Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood, *The Ancient Textile Industry at Amarna*, [London, 2001], 193).

³⁴ William Christopher Hayes, *The Scepter of Egypt*, vol. 2 (New York, 1959), 31.

³⁵ E.g., TT 78 Haremheb—Anneliese and Artur Brack, *Das Grab des Haremhab. Theben Nr. 78* (Mainz, 1980), 50; TT 81 Ineni—Wreszinski, *Atlas*, vol 1, 261 B.

³⁶ After Ann K. Capel and Glenn Markoe, *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven: Women in Ancient Egypt* (Cincinnati, 1996), 20.

³⁷ Ägyptisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Inv. 21834.

³⁸ Ägyptisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Inv. 21263.

³⁹ Arnold, *Royal Women of Amarna*, 30.

⁴⁰ Arnold, *Royal Women of Amarna*, 19–20.



Fig. 5. False door of Hemy-Re. Reproduction by permission of the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



Fig. 6. Weaver from the tomb of Khumhotep in Beni Hasan. Drawing by the author.

During the reign of Akhenaten, elite women are not depicted with signs of ageing on their bodies, although one of a group of musicians has drooping breasts.⁴¹ After the Amarna period, however, elite women are occasionally shown with somewhat fuller breasts.⁴²

From the end of the reign of Amenhotep III onwards, mourners with drooping breasts⁴³ become more common. Maybe artists varied the shape of the women's breasts to make a group of mourners visually more interesting. However, it is significant that drooping breasts are not avoided in this context, and even the tomb-owner's own relations were occasionally depicted mourning with drooping breasts (fig. 9).⁴⁴



Fig. 7. Head of Queen Tiy. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kultbesitz/Art Resource, NY.

⁴¹ Lise Lotte Möller, *Ägyptische Kunst aus der Zeit des Königs Echnaton* (Mainz, 1965), cat. no. 38.

⁴² E.g., Louvre B6—Guillemette Andreu, Marie-Hélène Rutschowskaya, Christiane Ziegler, *L'Égypte ancienne au Louvre* (Paris, 1997), 132–33; CGC 801—Dietrich Wildung and Sylvia Schoske, *La Femme dans l'Égypte des Pharaons* (Genève, 1986), 153.

⁴³ Nina de Garis Davies and Alan Henderson Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Paintings* (Chicago, 1936), pl. 72; Max Wegner, "Stilentwicklung der Thebanischen Beamtengräber," *MDAIK* 4 (1933), pl. 26a; James Edward Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara (1908–9, 1909–10): The Monastery of Apa Jeremias* (Cairo, 1912), pl. 67; Norman de Garis Davies, *Seven Private Tombs at Kurnah* (London, 1948), pl. 5; Marcelle Werbroueck, *Les Pleureuses dans l'Égypte ancienne* (Brussels, 1938), pls. 12, 22; Norman de Garis Davies, *The Tomb of Nefer-Hotep at Thebes II* (New York, 1933), pl. 4; Geoffrey Thorndike Martin, *Corpus of Reliefs of the New Kingdom from the Memphite Necropolis and Lower Egypt* (London, 1987), no. 66; Bernard Bruyère and Charles Kuentz, *La tombe de Nakht-min et la tombe d'Ari-nefer*, MIFAO 54/1 (Cairo, 1926), pl. 3.

⁴⁴ After Norman de Garis Davies, *The Tomb of Two Sculptors at Thebes* (New York, 1925), pl. 21.



Fig. 8. Statue of Nefertiti. Photo Juergen Liepe. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY.



Fig. 9. Tomb-owner's widow mourning. Drawing by the author.

There may, of course, be other reasons for representing a woman's breasts as sagging—from breastfeeding,⁴⁵ or pregnancy,⁴⁶ for instance. Many of the vases in the form of pregnant women, which may have contained ointment to be rubbed on a woman's body during pregnancy,⁴⁷ have flat sagging breasts⁴⁸ (fig. 10).⁴⁹ It is significant that the women's breasts are not represented full but flat, since they could have been represented rounded and full of milk, protruding from the surface of the vessel. Since they are not, I suggest that the vases might represent women who have *already* borne several children, women of proven

⁴⁵ MMA 26.7.1405—*Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids*, 393; Moussa and Altenmüller, *Nianchnum und Chnumhotep*, pl. 26a.

⁴⁶ O CGC 25141; MFA Boston 72.4158—Edward Brovarski, Susan Doll, and Rita Freed, *Egypt's Golden Age: The Art of Living in the New Kingdom 1558–1085 B.C.* (Boston, 1982), 226.

⁴⁷ Emma Brunner-Traut, "Gravidenflasche—Das Salben des Mutterleibes," in Arnulf Kuschke and Ernst Kutsch, eds., *Archäologie und Altes Testament: Festschrift für Kurt Galling zum 8. Jan. 1970* (Tübingen, 1970), 35–48.

⁴⁸ British Museum WA 48447—Gay Robins, *Reflections of Women in the New Kingdom* (San Antonio, Texas, 1995), 72; AEIN 1646—Mogens Jørgensen, *Catalogue: Egypt II (1550–1080 B.C.)*, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek (Copenhagen, 1998), 324–25; Boston MFA 02.525—Brovarski, Doll, and Freed, *Egypt's Golden Age*, 293; Berlin Ägyptisches Museum 24018—Arne Eggebrecht, ed., *Ägyptens Aufstieg zur Weltmacht* (Mainz, 1987), 173.

⁴⁹ CGC 18418. After Mohamed Abdel-Hamid Shimy, et al., *Parfums et Cosmétiques dans l'Égypte ancienne* (Cairo, 2000), 83.



Fig. 10. Vessel depicting a pregnant woman.
Drawing by the author.

fertility and experience, characteristics which would quite literally rub off on the women who used the ointment.

b) Gauntness

Occasionally during the Old Kingdom, elderly servant women are represented as extremely gaunt, such as the statuette of the Louvre miller (fig. 1), and possibly the two women grinders Samut and Neferet (fig. 2). Although the latter might represent the concept of “leanness in the midst of plenty,” well established in Old Kingdom art, since these women also have lined faces and drooping breasts, they are likely to be old.⁵⁰

The noble lady Hathorneferhotep is also represented as extremely gaunt (fig. 4); her iliac crest clearly juts out from the surface of her dress, whereas in almost all other two-dimensional representations of women from the Old Kingdom the hip bones are represented in stylized fashion as a mere line.⁵¹

Women are also occasionally represented with the fuller figure that might be associated with middle age. One example from the late Seventeenth Dynasty exists,⁵² along with a few statuettes from the reign of Amenhotep III depicting women with a slightly fuller figure.⁵³ Queen Tiy and her husband are represented as rather stocky in build in two miniature figurines from the Römer-Pelizaus Museum in Hildesheim.⁵⁴ After the Amarna period, this image becomes slightly more common for both non-elite women⁵⁵ and women from the elite⁵⁶ (fig. 11).⁵⁷

3. Signs of Ageing in the Face

As one ages, a wrinkle (the nasolabial fold) develops along the edge of the cheek, running from the corner of the nose down towards the mouth. However, it can be difficult to distinguish between the edge of the cheek and the nasolabial fold on statues, especially in the Old Kingdom, where cheeks tend to be slightly more rounded.⁵⁸

I suggest that the nasolabial fold should at least reach a point parallel to the upper line of the upper lip to be considered a wrinkle in three-dimensional representations. In two dimensions, however, it is always possible to omit this line, so I have tended to assume that its presence is intentional.

⁵⁰ Henry George Fischer, “An example of Memphite influence in a Theban stela of the Eleventh Dynasty,” *Artibus Asiae* 22/3 (1959), 251.

⁵¹ Nadine Cherpion, “Le mastaba de Khabaousokar (MM A₂): Problèmes de chronologie,” *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 11 (1980), 81–82, 90.

⁵² Museo Egizio Turin, Cat. 3095—Gay Robins, *Beyond the Pyramids: Egyptian Regional Art from the Museo Egizio, Turin* (Emory, Atlanta, 1990), 87.

⁵³ Brooklyn Museum no. 47.120.3 Arielle P. Kozloff, Betsy M. Bryan, and Lawrence M. Berman, *Egypt's Dazzling Sun: Amenhotep III and his World* (Cleveland, 1992), 258–59; Musée du Louvre E 10655—Kozloff, Bryan and Berman, *Egypt's Dazzling Sun*, 257.

⁵⁴ Möller, *Ägyptische Kunst aus der Zeit des Königs Echnaton*, cat. no. 2.

⁵⁵ BM 48658—Lise Manniche, *Music and Musicians in Ancient Egypt*, London, 1991, pl. 18 (Musician); Bologna KS 1893—Sergio Pernigotti, ed., *La collezione Egiziana* (Bologna, 1994), 38 (mourners).

⁵⁶ André Wiese, Sylvia Winterhalter, and Andreas Brodbeck, *Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig. Die ägyptische Abteilung* (Mainz, 2001), 133 (women from stela donor's family); Mertseger, together with her husband Nakhtmin—*Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Ägyptisches Museum 1823–1973: zum 150 jährigen Bestehen der Sammlung* (Berlin, 1973), no. 40.

⁵⁷ Cairo 3.7.24.2—after Wildung and Schoske, *La Femme dans l'Égypte des Pharaons*, 174.

⁵⁸ E.g., Georg Steindorff, *Egypt* (New York, 1945), 29, or the goddesses in the Menkaure triads (George Andrew Reisner, *Mycerinus: the temples of the third pyramid at Giza* (Cambridge, Mass., 1931), pls. 41, 44.



Fig. 11. Woman with fuller figure. Drawing by the author.

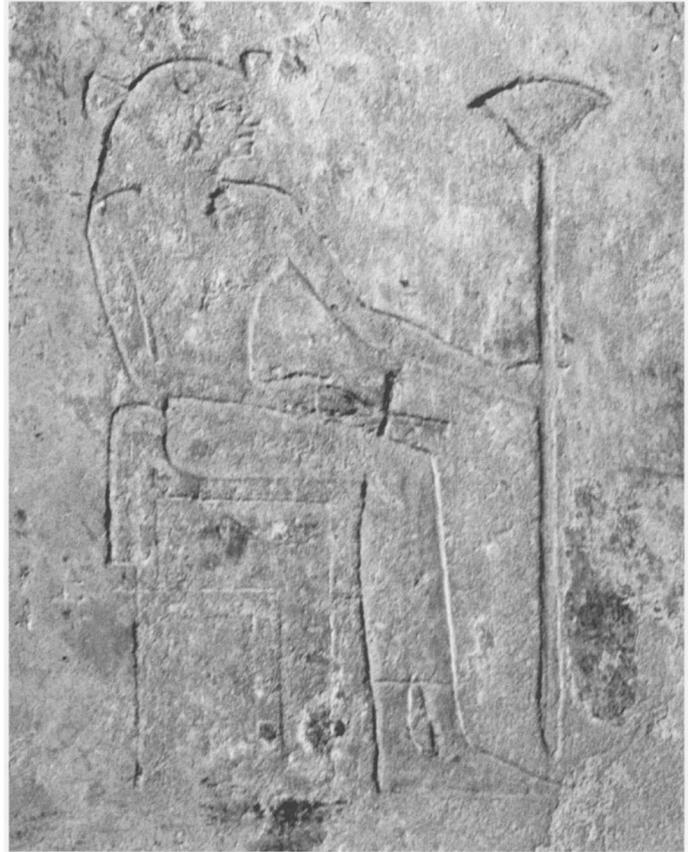


Fig. 12. Relief of Queen Khentkaus. Reproduced by the kind permission of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, Prague.

However, in reliefs, if the stone is poorly preserved, it is difficult to tell the difference between damage to the stone and lines on the face.⁵⁹ Different angles of lighting effects can also influence the appearance of facial lines drastically.⁶⁰ Dietrich Wildung has recently shown that, with a change in the angle of lighting, the famous bust of Nefertiti has the first traces of a nasolabial fold, lines at the corner of her mouth and under her eyes.⁶¹

In the Old Kingdom elite women are occasionally depicted with nasolabial folds, such as Queen Khentkaus on a pillar on the portico in her pyramid complex at Abusir (fig. 12),⁶² or the false door of Princess *Mrt.it.s*.⁶³ This is also true in the Middle Kingdom.⁶⁴ One particularly interesting statue

⁵⁹ E.g., Selim Hassan and Abdelsalam Abdelsalam, *Excavations at Giza*, vol. 2, 1930–1931 (Cairo, 1936), pl. 78.

⁶⁰ Yvonne Harpur, *The Tombs of Nefermaat and Rahotep at Meidum: Discovery, Destruction and Reconstruction* (Oxford, 2001), 263–68.

⁶¹ Dietrich Wildung, “Nofretetes Neues Gesicht,” *Amun- Magazin für die Freunde der Ägyptischen Museen* 3/11 (2001), 6–9.

⁶² Miroslav Verner, *Abusir III: The Pyramid Complex of Khentkaus* (Prague, 1995), frontispiece and front cover.

⁶³ Boston Museum of Fine Arts 12.1510—R. J. Leprohon, *Corpus Antiquitatum Aegyptiacarum Boston Museum of Fine Arts*, vol. 2, *Stelae I* (Mainz 1985), 2.82–85. Also Museo Egizio di Firenze Inv. no. 1815—Pier Roberto del Francia and Maria Cristina Guidotti, *Cento immagini femminili nel Museo Egizio di Firenze* (Florence, 2002), 94, 104; Cairo JdE 35137—Michel Valloggia, *Au coeur d'une pyramide. Une mission archéologique à Égypte* (Lausanne, 2001), 91.

⁶⁴ Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden, *Gids voor de verzameling van Egyptische Beeldhouwwerken* (Leiden, 1961), ill. 9; Strasbourg Inv. No. 11.987.0.159—Annie Schweitzer, Claude Trauneker, *Strasbourg, musée archéologique; Antiquités égyptiennes de la collection G. Schlumberger* (Strasbourg, 1988), 24.

from the Middle Kingdom depicts a queen with nasolabial folds and deep bags under the eyes,⁶⁵ probably derived from contemporary male royal statuary. Elite women from the Old Kingdom⁶⁶ are also occasionally depicted with downturned mouth, or lines at the corner of their mouths. Non-elite women may be represented with more pronounced wrinkles. In the Old Kingdom, most of these examples are millers.⁶⁷ The miller Samut on the false door of Itefnen and Peritem in the Cairo Museum⁶⁸ has a line running from nose to mouth and another deep wrinkle on her cheek. A Middle Kingdom statuette of a Beduin woman shows her with two deep concave creases running from her nose to her chin.⁶⁹ Similar creases also appear in two-dimensional representations from the Middle Kingdom⁷⁰ where they might represent a fusion of the nasolabial fold and the line at the corner of the mouth, although at this period women are also represented with both nasolabial fold and downturned mouth.⁷¹

A royal statue from the late Seventeenth or early Eighteenth Dynasty shows its owner with nasolabial folds.⁷² In the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty, by contrast, women are not represented with facial wrinkles. Nasolabial folds reappear in the reign of Amenhotep III,⁷³ but statues and reliefs of Tiy (fig. 7) and Nefertiti show them with more pronounced signs of ageing, such as downturned mouth, or lines at the corner of the mouth, drooping cheeks, lines from nose to mouth and heavy lidded eyes.⁷⁴

A few other women at this period adopted this image of the wise older woman and presumably found it attractive. Two examples are particularly striking, since they involve women incorporating old age into their repertoire for the afterlife: the cultic singer of the god Aten, Isis, owned an ushabti (fig. 13)⁷⁵ whose face bears a strong resemblance to the head of Queen Tiy from the Berlin Museum.⁷⁶ The head of an older woman from the workshop of the sculptor Dhutmose shows a greater variety of wrinkles than any other depiction of an elite woman from ancient Egypt (wrinkles at the corner of the eyes, bags under the eyes, wrinkles across the forehead) (fig. 14).⁷⁷ The plaster heads

⁶⁵ Berlin AMP 14475—Dietrich Wildung, *Ägypten 2000 v. Chr. Die Geburt des Individuums* (München, 2000), 143.

⁶⁶ Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim 3113a-c—Karl Martin, *Corpus Antiquitatum Aegyptiacarum, Pelizaeus-Museum Hildesheim 7, Reliefs des Alten Reiches II*, 7.90–94; Ahmed M. Moussa and Hartwig Altenmüller, *The Tomb of Nefer and Ka-Hay* (Mainz, 1971), pl. 33; AEIN 672—Maria Mogensen, *La Glyptothèque Ny Carlsberg. La collection égyptienne* (Copenhagen, 1930), pl. 12.

⁶⁷ CGC 110, 114; Hearst Museum 6-19766 in Capel and Markoe, *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven*, 91.

⁶⁸ Cherpion, "La fausse-portre d'Itefnen et Peritem," pl. 17.

⁶⁹ Janine Bourriau, ed., *Pharaohs and Mortals: Egyptian Art in the Middle Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1988), 108–9.

⁷⁰ Florence Inv. No. 7400—Sergio Bosticco, *Museo Archeologico di Firenze, Le Stele Egiziane dell' Antico al Nuovo Regno* (Rome, 1959), 59; Vienna AS 5897—Irmgard Hein and Helmut Satzinger, *Stelen des Mittleren Reiches II. Corpus antiquitatum Aegyptiacarum. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Lieferung 7* (Mainz, 1993), 7.153–57.

⁷¹ Allard Pearson Museum 25—Pieter Adrian Art Boeser, *Beschreibung der Ägyptischen Sammlung des Niederländischen Reichsmuseums der Altertümer in Leiden. Die Denkmäler der Zeit zwischen dem alten und mittleren Reich und des mittleren Reiches. Erste Abteilung: Stelen* (The Hague, 1909), pl. 33.

⁷² MMA 16.10.224—Manfred Bietak and Irmgard Hein (eds.), *Pharaonen und Fremden. Dynastien im Dunkel* (Wien, 1994), no. 369.

⁷³ Mourner in tomb of Nebamun and Ipuky: Davies, *Tomb of Two Sculptors*, pl. 20 (although Werbroueck, *Les Pleureuses*, 132, remarks that the lines traced on the woman's face might be the traces of tears or scratches); Vienna AS 9226—Michaela Hüttner and Helmut Satzinger, *Stelen, Inschriftsteine und Reliefs aus der Zeit der 18. Dynastie. Corpus antiquitatum Aegyptiacarum. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Lieferung 16* (Mainz, 1999), 16, 142–44.

⁷⁴ For Nefertiti see Rita Freed, Yvonne Markowitz and Sue d'Auria, *Pharaohs of the Sun* (Boston, 1999), 115, 216; Arnold, *The Royal Women of Amarna*, fig. 62; Ludwig Borchardt, *Porträts der Königin Nofret-ete aus der Grabungen 1912/13 in Tell el-Amarna* (Leipzig, 1923), 11; Bernard von Bothmer, in: Emma Swan Hall (ed.), *Antiquities from the Collection of Christos G. Bastis* (Mainz, 1988), 32; Joachim Selim Karig and Karl Theodor Zauzich, *Ägyptische Kunst aus dem Brooklyn Museum* (Berlin, 1976), no. 42; possibly Arnold, *The Royal Women of Amarna*, 6, 9. For Tiy see Arnold, *Royal Women of Amarna*, figs. 23, 24.

⁷⁵ Purchase, Fletcher Fund and the Guide Foundation, Inc. Gift, 1966, MMA 66.99.38. Reproduced by the kind permission of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

⁷⁶ A court lady depicted in a relief on loan to the Brooklyn Museum L72.17 has a line at the corner of her mouth. Cyril Aldred, *Akhenaten and Nefertiti* (Brooklyn, 1973), 199.

⁷⁷ Ägyptisches Museum, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Inv. No. 21261.



Fig. 13. Ushabti of the songstress of Aten, Isis. Purchase, Fletcher Fund and the Guide Foundation, Inc. Gift, 1966, MMA 66.99.38. Reproduced by the kind permission of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Fig. 14. Head of elder woman from the workshop of Thutmose at el-Amarna. Photo Juergen Liepe. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/ Art Resource, NY.

of non-royal persons from Dhutmose's workshop may have been models for tomb statues.⁷⁸ If so, a court lady, and/or the members of her family, wanted her to be represented as an older woman in one of the most important contexts of self-presentation.

Dominique Laboury suggests that other royal heads, including several from the workshop of Dhutmose featuring downturned mouth, lines at the corners of the mouth, and lines running from mouth to nose, represent Neferneferuaten, the successor of Akhenaten.⁷⁹ Following

⁷⁸ Arnold, *Royal Women of Amarna*, 51. However, Aldred, *Akhenaten and Nefertiti*, 46 suggests that it might have been a portrait-study of one of the foreign women in the king's harem. In that case, it is more difficult to imagine a setting for the tomb statue: would women from the royal household, who had no other family, have been buried in one of the North or South tombs? No such tomb has been found until now. On the other hand, what other setting might have been appropriate for such a statue?

⁷⁹ Dimitry Laboury, "Mise au point sur l'iconographie de Neferneferuaton, le prédécesseur de Toutankhamon," in: Mahmoud Eldamaty and Mai Trad, eds. *Egyptian Museum Collections around the World*, vol. 1 (Cairo, 2002), 711–22.



Fig. 15. Queen Nofertari, from her tomb in the Valley of the Queens. Drawing by the author.

Krauss and Gabolde,⁸⁰ Laboury equates this individual with Akhenaten's oldest daughter Meritaten. I do not intend to discuss the complex and controversial issue of Neferneferuaten's identity here, but merely to comment that, if this is in fact the case, this could be considered the greatest triumph of the image of the older, experienced woman, since it was adopted for the iconography of a woman ruler who was probably at the most in her early twenties.⁸¹

After the Amarna period, elite and non-elite women were at times portrayed with nasolabial folds,⁸² lines at the corner of the mouth,⁸³ or downturned mouth.⁸⁴ The nasolabial fold sometimes continues downwards and fuses with the line at the corner of the mouth.⁸⁵ These features occasionally appeared in depictions of very highly placed women, such as Queen Nofertari in her tomb in the Valley of the Queens⁸⁶ (fig. 15).⁸⁷

Bags under the eyes⁸⁸ appear, but very rarely, at all periods, and lines running from the corner of the eye⁸⁹ appear occasionally during the Old Kingdom and from the Amarna period onwards.

⁸⁰ Rolf Krauss, *Das Ende der Amarnazeit*, Hildesheimer Ägyptologische Beiträge 7 (Hildesheim, 1978), 43–46; Marc Gabolde, *D'Akhenaton à Toutankhâmon* (Lyon, 1998), 183–85.

⁸¹ Meritaten's age is unknown, but since she is depicted as a toddler on the relief blocks from the temples that Akhenaten built at Karnak in the first years of his seventeen-year reign, she must have been born early in his reign or even before he became king. D. B. Redford, *Akhenaten, the Heretic King* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1984), 79.

⁸² Munich Gl. WAF 33–D. Wildung (ed.), *Katalog der Staatlichen Sammlung Agyptischer Kunst*, 2. ed. (Munich, 1976), 129; Geoffrey Thorndike Martin, *The Hidden Tombs of Memphis* (London, 1991), fig. 84; BM No. 285—Terence Garnet Henry James, ed., *Hieroglyphic Texts from Egyptian Stelae, etc.* part 9 (London, 1970), pl. 45.

⁸³ TT 1 Arpag Mekhitarian, Marc Kunnen and René Wulleman, *Passage vers l'éternité* (Paris, 1989), 111, 114; TT 178 de Garis Davies and Gardiner, *Ancient Egyptian Paintings*, pl. 94; Brovarski, Doll, and Freed, *Egypt's Golden Age*, 263; Emma Brunner-Traut, *Die altägyptischen Scherbenbilder (Bildostraka) der Deutschen Museen und Sammlungen* (Wiesbaden, 1956), pl. 23, no. 59; Louvre Inv. A 16—Guillemette Andreu, ed., *Les artistes de Pharaon* (Paris, 2002), 265 (Twentieth Dynasty); Jadwiga Lipinska et al., *Geheimnisvolle Königin Hatshepsut. Ägyptische Kunst des 15. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* (Warsaw, 1997), 80.

⁸⁴ Louvre E 3028—Lawrence Michael Berman and Bernadette Letellier, *Pharaohs: Treasures of Egyptian Art from the Louvre* (Cleveland, 1996), 66.

⁸⁵ Pieter Adrian Art Boeser, *Beschreibung der Ägyptischen Sammlung des Niederländischen Reichsmuseums der Altertümer in Leiden, Neues Reich, Erste Abteilung* (The Hague, 1911), pl. 9; Shafik Allam, *Some pages from everyday life in ancient Egypt* (Giza, 1985), 20; Cairo JdE 43573—Bernard Bruyère, "Quelques stèles trouvées par M. É. Baraize à Deir el-Médineh," *ASAE* 25 (1925), pl. 3.2; Florence Museum Inv. No. 2522—Sergio Bosticco, *Museo Archeologico di Firenze: Le Stele Egiziane del Nuovo Regno* (Rome, 1965), no. 47; Florence Museum Inv. No. 2591, Bosticco, *Le Stele Egiziane del Nuovo Regno*, no. 48; Kestner-Museum, Hannover, Inv. No. 4506—Rosemarie Drenkhahn, *Ägyptische Reliefs im Kestner-Museum, Hannover* (Hannover, 1989), 129.

⁸⁶ John K. McDonald, *House of Eternity. The Tomb of Nefertari* (London, 1996), 107.

⁸⁷ After Barbara Lesko, *The Remarkable Women of Ancient Egypt*, 2d ed. (Berkeley, California, 1987), plate following p. 12.

⁸⁸ Old Kingdom servants—Louvre miller (fig. 1); miller Samut on the false door Cairo JdE 56994 (fig. 2); Middle Kingdom elite women—D Wildung, *Ägypten 2000 v. Chr.*, 143; Middle Kingdom non-elite women—Bourriau (ed.), *Pharaohs and Mortals*, 108–9; Amarna period—Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Inv. No. 21261 (fig. 14).

⁸⁹ Old Kingdom—Moussa and Altenmüller, *Nianchnum und Chnumhotep*, pl. 26a; del Francia and Guidotti, *Cento immagini femminili*, 94, 104; Amarna period (fig. 8); Arnold, *The Royal Women of Amarna*, fig. 62; Late-Eighteenth Dynasty—British Museum EA 644—Richard B. Parkinson, *Cracking Codes. The Rosetta Stone and Decipherment* (London, 1999), 64.

In the Old Kingdom, elite women are very occasionally represented with a sagging chin, such as Hathorneferhotep, Nianchnum's wife Khentikhaus,⁹⁰ and Werbau's wife.⁹¹ This feature reappears occasionally after the Amarna period both for mourners⁹² and members of the elite.⁹³

4. White Hair

During the New Kingdom,⁹⁴ people were occasionally represented with white hair (or perhaps white wigs). Occasionally, white streaks were painted into dark hair to give a pepper-and-salt or gray-ing effect, as for the tomb owner's relatives in the tomb of Pashed at Deir el-Medina.⁹⁵ In depictions of the elite, white hair is not necessarily combined with signs of ageing on the face and body, but in the tombs of Neferhotep⁹⁶ and Nebamun and Ipuky,⁹⁷ older women mourners are sometimes depicted with white hair and drooping breasts or sagging chin.

White hair is more common for men⁹⁸ than for women,⁹⁹ and begins earlier in the Eighteenth Dynasty, originally with male servants and slightly later for the tomb-owner. By contrast, the earliest example of a woman with white hair is a mourner from the tomb of Nebamun and Ipuky,¹⁰⁰ dated to the late reign of Amenhotep III or the early reign of Akhenaten.¹⁰¹ However, it is possible that the gray hair of women mourners was actually caused by throwing dust over their hair,¹⁰² in which case the earliest examples of women with white hair appear after the Amarna period, the Nubian taxpayers in the tomb of Huy, dating to the reign of Tutankhamun.¹⁰³

⁹⁰ Moussa and Altenmüller, *Nianchnum und Khnumhotep*, Ill. 19. Many thanks to Yvonne Harpur for this reference.

⁹¹ Moussa and Altenmüller, *Nefer and Ka-Hay*, pl. 37.

⁹² Birmingham City Museum No. 686'66—John Ruffle, "Four Egyptian Pieces in Birmingham City Museum," *JEA* 53 (1967), pl. 7.

⁹³ Cleveland Museum 1963.100—Lawrence Michael Berman *et al.*, *The Cleveland Museum of Art: Catalogue of Egyptian Art* (New York, 1999), 250 (tomb owner's wife and other relative); Henricus Petrus Bremmer, *Egyptische Kunst uit het Museum te Leiden* (Utrecht, 1937), 20 (tomb owner's wife).

⁹⁴ White hair does not normally appear as a characteristic of ageing before the New Kingdom, although this may simply be an accident of preservation. For a possible earlier example see Dieter Arnold, *Der Tempel des Königs Mentuhotep von Deir el Bahari*, vol. 2 (Mainz, 1974), pl. 62.

⁹⁵ Alan-Pierre Zivie, *La tombe de Pached à Deir el-Médineh* [No. 3] (MIFAO 99) (Cairo, 1979), pl. 24. Baines, *Fecundity Figures*, 127 suggests that three different stages of life or three generations may be represented here. Cf. Bernard Bruyère, *La tombe no. 1 de Sen-Nedjem à Deir el Médineh*, MIFAO 88 (Cairo, 1959), pl. 28.

⁹⁶ Norman de Garis Davies, *The Tomb of Nefer-Hotep at Thebes*, vol. 2 (New York, 1933), pl. 5.

⁹⁷ Davies, *Tomb of Two Sculptors*, pl. 20.

⁹⁸ Davies, *Nefer-Hotep*, vol. 2, pls. 5 (mourners), 6 (tomb owner); Bernard Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el-Médineh* (1927), FIFAO 5 (Cairo 1928) 57 (tomb owner), 81 (tomb owner); Bernard Bruyère and Charles Kuentz, *Tombe thébaines. La nécropole de Deir el-Médineh. La tombe de Nakht-min et la tombe d'Ari-nefer*. Tome premier, MIFAO 54.1 (Cairo, 1926), pl. 19 (tomb owner's father); Andreu, *Les artistes de Pharaon*, fig. 31 (tomb owner); Dominique Valbelle and Jean-François Gout, *Les artistes de la vallée des rois* (Paris, 2002), 78 (tomb owner's father), 155 (tomb owner's father); Terence Garnet Henry James, *Egyptian Painting* (London, 1985), 56 (Ani depicted in the presence of Osiris in his Book of the Dead); Davies, *Two Ramesside Tombs*, pl. 31b (priest and craftsman); tomb of Menna—Robert Boulanger, *Egyptian Painting and the Near East* (London, 1966), 59 (servant), 60 (servants); Tomb of Nakht, Aude Gros de Beler, *Vivre en Égypte au temps de Pharaon: le message de la peinture égyptienne* (Paris, 2001), 81 (servants); Zivie, *La tombe de Pached*, pl. 24 (tomb owner's father); Wegner, "Stilentwicklung der Thebanischen Beamtengräber," pl. 26b (male mourner).

⁹⁹ Davies, *Nefer-Hotep*, vol. 2, pl. 5 (mourners); Valbelle and Gout, *Les artistes de la vallée des rois*, 78 (tomb owner's mother); Davies, *Two Ramesside Tombs*, pl. 12 (mourner); Bernard Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el-Médineh* (1934–35) 3, FIFAO 17 (Cairo, 1939), 194 (house owner on jamb of naos).

¹⁰⁰ Davies, *Tomb of Two Sculptors*, pl. 20.

¹⁰¹ Davies, *Tomb of Two Sculptors*, 19.

¹⁰² Werbroueck, *Les Pleureuses*, 131–32.

¹⁰³ Wreszinski, *Atlas I*, 158.

5. Contrast with the Depiction of Male Ageing

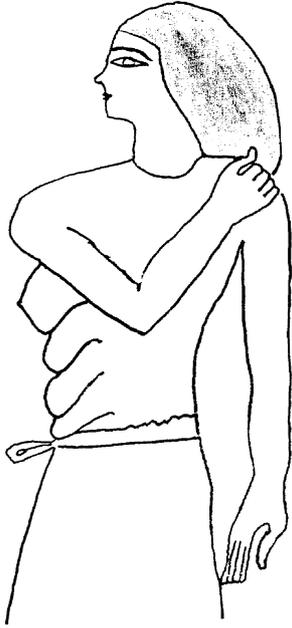


Fig. 16. Overseer of the weaving workshop in the tomb of Khnumhotep at Beni Hasan. Drawing by the author.

Various characteristics of ageing rarely or never appear when older women are depicted, but may be used to depict older men:

First, partial baldness due to hair loss may be used to denote male ageing¹⁰⁴ but is never used to denote female ageing. Given that hair was constructed as a major erotic signal for women in ancient Egypt¹⁰⁵ in a way that it was not for men, it is not surprising that female hair loss is not represented.

Second, certain sets of wrinkles are never associated with women: such as vertical lines of concentration¹⁰⁶ between the eyes. Lines across the forehead and hooded eyes are much rarer for women than for men. It has sometimes been argued from the Egyptian artistic convention of representing women with paler skins than men that women tended to be less exposed to the sun than men,¹⁰⁷ so this distinction may have some basis in reality.

Third, multiple folds of fat on the lower torso are rare for women but are a well-established part of the image of mature elite men¹⁰⁸ and occasionally their attendants.¹⁰⁹ For this reason, I argue that two images which have been suggested to be female are not necessarily so. The figure of the overseer of the weaving workshop in the tomb of Khnumhotep at Beni Hasan has been said to represent a woman overseer¹¹⁰ (fig. 16),¹¹¹ but is actually very similar to a scribe who appears elsewhere on the same wall.¹¹² A vessel from the Brooklyn Museum that has been suggested to represent a midwife¹¹³ (fig. 17)¹¹⁴ poses more difficulties, because it has a long thick plait, reminiscent of certain New Kingdom vessels in female form¹¹⁵ but not characteristic of male iconography.

¹⁰⁴ E.g., Annelies and Artur Brack, *Das Grab des Haremheb. Theben Nr. 78* (Mainz, 1980), pl. 73; Joseph John Tylor and Francis Llewellyn Griffith, *The Tomb of Paheri at El Kab* (London, 1894), pls. 3, 4. However, baldness may also have cultic connotations: see, for example, Jacques Jean Clère, *Les chauves d'Hathor*, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta* 63 (Leuven, 1995).

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Phillippe Derchain, "La perruque et le crystal," *SAK* 2 (1975), 55–74; Gay Robins, "Hair and the Construction of Identity in Ancient Egypt c. 1480–1350 B.C.," *JARCE* 36 (1999), 63.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Wildung, *Sesostris und Amenemhet*, 203; Wildung, *Ägypten 2000 v. Chr.*, 110, 111.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Gay Robins, "Some Images of Women in New Kingdom Art and Literature," in Barbara Lesko ed., *Women's Earliest Records from Ancient Egypt and Western Asia*, *Brown Judaic Studies* 166 (Atlanta, Georgia, 1989), 108.

¹⁰⁸ Kent Weeks, *The Anatomical Knowledge of the Ancient Egyptians and the Representation of the Human Figure in Egyptian Art* (UMI dissertation, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1971), 99–107.

¹⁰⁹ Weeks, *Anatomical Knowledge of the Ancient Egyptians*, 108–9.

¹¹⁰ Catherine Roehrig, "Women's work: Some occupations of nonroyal women as depicted in ancient Egyptian art," in Capel and Markoe, *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven*, 20.

¹¹¹ After Capel and Markoe, *Mistress of the House, Mistress of Heaven*, 20.

¹¹² Percy E. Newberry, *Beni Hasan I* (London, 1893), pl. 29.

¹¹³ H. Rand, "Figure-Vases in Ancient Egypt and Hebrew Midwives," *Israel Exploration Journal* 20 (1970), 209–12.

¹¹⁴ After Brovarski, Doll, and Freed, *Egypt's Golden Age*, 292.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Christiane Desroches-Noblecourt, "Pots anthropomorphes et recettes magico-médicales dans l'Égypte ancienne," *RdE* 9 (1952), 49–67.

6. Body Modification



Fig. 17. Vessel representing a kneeling person. Drawing by the author.

Is it possible that these culturally preferred images of youth and slenderness¹¹⁶ impinged on people's consciousness to the point where they tried to reverse their own ageing processes? Although we know nothing about Egyptians trying to slim, there is other evidence that Egyptians attempted to modify their bodies to approximate a cultural ideal of beauty as youth—notably the remedy for sagging breasts in the medical papyri¹¹⁷ and the recipes for hair dye (for both sexes),¹¹⁸ and wrinkles.¹¹⁹ This tendency is epitomized most clearly in the caption for a recipe from Papyrus Edwin Smith v.21.9ff. for combating the *hnt*-disease¹²⁰ and skin disease on the face or head, which reads “Transforming an old man into a young one.” However, there is some indication that these pressures could have been more powerful for women. The treatment for sagging breasts was gender-specific; no male equivalent exists, probably since rolls of fat on the torso were part of the positive image of mature masculinity.

7. Conclusions

At most periods the representation of elite women tended to hint at ageing with a wrinkle or two, both when portrayed with their spouses and when alone. These varied slightly from period to period; for instance, gauntness is more typical of the Old Kingdom, but white hair is very rarely found before the New Kingdom. In the Middle Kingdom, for instance, the nasolabial

fold and line at the corner of the mouth might be combined into a single line. In the early New Kingdom, before the reign of Amenhotep III, elite women are very rarely shown with signs of ageing.

The occasional more daring or extreme portrayals of female ageing tend to be associated with women alone, as far as I can tell, such as Hemy-Re's false door or Hathorneferhotep's reliefs in her own chapel. But it is possible to interpret these women as making a bid for images of experience and wisdom, especially in contexts where they did not need to appear as their husband's desirable partner.

However, it was only briefly in the Amarna period, with the sponsorship of the queen and the queen mother, that this image was appropriated more widely. It seems that the Amarna queens' initiative to establish a strongly marked image of female ageing, parallel to male images of wisdom and success, was not taken up later. Like other ways of depicting Amarna queens—smiting enemies, driving in chariots, offering sacrifices in their own right—the image of the wise older woman may

¹¹⁶ For such pressures in contemporary society see Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight. Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1993), 139–212; Andrew Blaikie, *Ageing and popular culture* (Cambridge, 1999), 23, 138; Sara Arber and Jay Ginn, *Gender and Later Life. A Sociological Analysis of Resources and Constraints* (London, 1991), 42–43; Terri Apter, *Secret Paths. Women in the New Midlife* (New York and London, 1995), 60–77.

¹¹⁷ P. Ebers 808.

¹¹⁸ See Wolfhart Westendorf, *Handbuch der altägyptischen Medizin*, HdO 1/36 (Leiden, 1999), 454–55. The body of a woman buried at Hierakonpolis shows that use of henna was used to cover up graying hair as far back the mid-fourth millennium B.C.E. (<http://www.hierakonpolis.org/site/moremummies2.html>).

¹¹⁹ Westendorf, *Handbuch*. 456.

¹²⁰ Westendorf, *Handbuch*, 140 suggests that the *hnt* disease was catarrh.

have been considered too characteristic of the Amarna heresy and later women preferred to distance themselves from it.

However, the Amarna period nonetheless brought changes in the depiction of women's ageing. Although elite women did not adopt this strongly marked image of ageing, they appeared again with signs of ageing, such as lines on their faces, drooping breasts and, for the first time, white hair and thicker bodies. Characteristics of ageing also became more widespread in the depiction of non-elite women.

Wisdom and experience may also explain why older or mature women are sometimes included in groups of women workers. This might just be to vary the group and make it more interesting visually, but it might also mean that the workforce at the tomb owner's disposal included older women with resources of skill and experience; Norman de Garis Davies noted that senior workmen were often represented executing tasks which required these traits.¹²¹ These older women are not usually shown leading the work, but they could teach, advise and enrich the activities when needed. However, this explanation does not fit every case, since there are also representations of aged women grinding corn, a job where expertise did not increase with the passage of time.

The same may apply to foreign women who are also shown with signs of ageing.¹²² As prisoners of war, they would be potential workers. However, as Thomas Gilroy recently argued, this may be a type of caricature, differentiating between the Egyptian norm and the non-Egyptian other.¹²³

Women were thus in a double bind. In order to appropriate images of experience and wisdom, they also had to depart from the socially dictated female norm of youth and beauty and risk being associated with the strange and laughable—a problem which is with us still.

In undertaking this work, I had hoped to uncover empowering images of women's ageing. The reality seems more complicated, with ageing often being stigmatized and associated with outsiders and subordinates. For women, it was difficult for ageing to provide a positive counterpoint to youth and beauty.

Attempts to reclaim the attributes of ageing as a source of authority and experience only gathered a limited momentum when initiated by the queen, the most important and powerful woman in the land. All the more, then, we should respect women who made the brave and extraordinary gesture of reclaiming, in some small way, their age and experience.

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¹²¹ Norman de Garis Davies, *The Tomb of Puyemrê at Thebes*, vol. 2 (New York, 1923), 74, 76.

¹²² E.g., Nina de Garis Davies and Alan H. Gardiner, *The Tomb of Huy, Viceroy of Nubia in the Reign of Tutankhamun (No. 40)* (London, 1926), pl. 30.

¹²³ Thomas Gilroy, "Outlandish Outlanders: Foreigners and Caricature in Egyptian Art," *Göttinger Miszellen* 191 (2002), 35–52.