

In the presence of my king forever: Royal images in the tombs of noblemen of the Middle Kingdom and beyond



Abstract: The paper discusses the origins of royal representations and their transformation into the divine presence in private tomb decorations. The point of departure is a small fragment of the divine beard of Mentuhotep II recently rediscovered in TT 311. Although the scene with the king in TT 311 is, thus far, the earliest attested representation of a pharaoh in a private tomb, the motif fits well into the evolving pattern of gods' and kings' presence in private tombs, initiated in the Old Kingdom with Anubis and Osiris occasionally depicted on tomb walls and the king addressed in offering formulae. The introduction of the image of Mentuhotep II with Osirianizing features in TT 311 also sets up a paradigm of a closed cycle of Osirian presence in private tombs: from prayers to Osiris in *hṯp-di-nswt* formulae, through the king-as-deity to the image of Osiris himself.

Keywords: Asasif, Mentuhotep II, king's image, deity's image, decoration, divine beard, divinization

INTRODUCTION

The socio-political changes that started during the First Intermediate Period encouraged provincial elites to introduce in their tombs some new motifs and scenes formerly reserved for royalty (W.S. Smith 1981: 154; Kamrin 2015: 32). One such theme that appeared in the Middle

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Kingdom and had never before been represented in the private tombs of the Old Kingdom was the image of a king. The origin of this motif, widely attested in the decorative program of non-royal tombs of the New Kingdom, is very difficult to trace due to the scarcity of preserved scenes.

This paper aims to contribute to the discussion on the origins of the introduction of the king's image into private tombs and its subsequent transformation into a divine representation in the funerary cult sphere. To date, the research has mostly focused on the physical presence of images of the king-as-ruler or the king-as-deity (Moret 1902; Posener 1960; Semat 2016). As

a point of departure for these deliberations the author has chosen a small fragment of the divine beard of Mentuhotep II recently rediscovered in Theban Tomb (TT) 311 by an expedition of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw (PCMA UW). This small piece of relief decoration is crucial for the analysis of the development of royal and divine imagery in private funerary contexts, as it is the earliest attested image of the king in a private tomb, and Mentuhotep II is depicted not only as a contemporary ruler, but also as a deity. Both motifs are widely present in the decorative program of later periods.

PERCEPTIONS AND DEPICTIONS OF THE PHARAOH IN ANCIENT EGYPTIAN ICONOGRAPHY: AN OUTLINE

The pharaoh was variously depicted in ancient Egyptian iconography: as the ruler, the living Horus, a member of the divine family of his ancestors, and a deity (Moret 1902: 1–3; Posener 1960: VII–XV; Málek 2000: 241). These special roles of the king were exhibited already in the royal tombs of the Old Kingdom. The pharaoh was typically depicted either as the main figure in a given scene or as a subject of rituals held in the presence of gods or members of the royal family (El Awady 2009: 52; Do. Arnold 1999: 83–98). The themes comprising the decorative programs of non-royal tombs from the Old Kingdom and the Middle Kingdom were, to some extent, similar (Kamrin 2015: 30–32). The “commoner” was presented in a similar set of scenes as the king, except for direct interactions with the divine sphere, which were reserved for royalty.

Prior to the Middle Kingdom, figurative representations of the pharaoh were absent from non-royal private tombs (Junker 1955: 132), even though the name of the ruler was often mentioned in individual (auto)biographies or *hṯp-dī-nswt* formulae referring to the king in general (Vasiljević 2005: 141; Nuzzolo 2021: 123, 130). This rule also applied to depictions of gods, never portrayed in tombs besides references to Anubis or Osiris in the same formulae. Anubis was by far the most frequently addressed god in offering formulae from the beginning of the Old Kingdom. In some hieroglyphic inscriptions, the glyph of a resting jackal was larger than the rest of the signs, as is especially noticeable in reliefs from mastabas of Khufu's family members in Giza (Kawab; Khafkhufu; Mersyankh II; Mersyankh III dated to the Fourth Dynas-

ty) (Simpson 1974: 4). As for Osiris, the first references to this god come from the mastabas of Ptahshepses and Ti in Saqqara, the tomb of Hemetre, and the inscription on the false door of Inti from Giza, all dated to the Fourth or Fifth Dynasty (Shalomi-Hen 2007: 1695; M. Smith 2017: 118–123). Nuzzolo, who inventoried mentions of Osiris in inscriptions from Old-Kingdom private burial contexts including offering formulae, noted that “the deity was seen as a god of the afterlife, acting for the sake of the tomb owner side by side with Anubis and, most importantly, the living king (*nswt*)” (Nuzzolo 2021: 127). Although in the beginning the formulae were addressed to Osiris less frequently than to Anubis, by the end of the Sixth Dynasty references to Osiris became more common and finally outnumbered those to Anubis (DuQuesne 2005: 90, 143–145). During the Middle Kingdom, representations of gods in non-royal tombs continued to be fairly rare. Thus far, they have only been recorded in a provincial tomb in Asyut (representation of Anubis and Hathor in the so-called

tomb of the Northern Soldiers (H11.1)), dated probably to the Eleventh Dynasty (El-Khadragy 2006: 155–157, Fig. 6) and in Qubbet el-Hawa (Osiriform statues in the tomb of Sarenput II),¹ dated to the Twelfth Dynasty (Müller 1940: 29–31). The expansion of the Osiris cult in non-royal tombs is further attested by two wooden statues found together with the *imiut* in the shrine of Imhotep’s tomb. Initially considered as figures of Senuseret I, they are now believed to represent divine guardians: the divine and regenerated king depicted as Osiris, standing in a shrine with the symbol of the *imiut*, Anubis, who made this regeneration possible.² Johnson noticed that the figures were made of 16 pieces of wood—matching the number of fragments into which Osiris’ body was cut by Seth, and from which he was subsequently resurrected by Anubis—which additionally supports the interpretation of the guardians and the *imiut* as “symbols of resurrection, the “becoming Osiris” of the king through the good offices of Anubis” (Johnson 1980: 13; Do. Arnold 2015: 18, Fig. 23).

1 The Osiriform statues were placed in three symmetrical niches in the corridor of the tomb of Sarenput II. The statues with red-painted skin and collars were inscribed with the names and titles of Sarenput II, and the ones with black skin typical for Osiris were anepigraphic. Whether the statues represented Sarenput II or Osiris, they all intentionally resembled the god (Lobban 2003: 370).

2 The statues represented young men in striding pose, holding the crooked staff. One figure was shown wearing the red and the other the white crown, both lacking a uraeus. The traces of attachment of a divine beard and a short staff are extant, although the attributes themselves were not found. The purpose of placing guardian statues and the *imiut* in the shrine near the tomb of Imhotep and its relevance to the Osiris cult was discussed at length by Aldred (in Johnson 1980: 11 note 4), Johnson (1980: 11–20) and Do. Arnold (2015: 17–18, Cat. 168 on pp. 230–232). Johnson (1980: 17) dated these figures to the late Twelfth or early Thirteenth Dynasties, while Do. Arnold (2015: Cat. 168 on p. 231) limited the timeframe to the reign of Amenemhat I.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE PHARAOH IN PRIVATE TOMBS OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

The earliest known example of a royal image in a private tomb is the one of Mentuhotep II from the tomb of Khety dated to the Middle Kingdom (TT 311).³ Due to its novel iconography, TT 311 is vital for understanding the evolution of non-royal funerary customs, the process of development of the New Kingdom canon, and the factors that led to its emergence. This picture can now be enhanced owing to an additional piece of the king's torso with a divine beard and a collar, retrieved by the PCMA UW during the 2020 field season [Fig. 1].



Fig. 1. Fragment of the torso with the divine beard and the collar discovered in TT 311 (PCMA UW | Photo P. Karwowska)

TT 311 was discovered at the beginning of the 20th century by Herbert Winlock during his 1922–1923 season (Winlock 1923: 11–22). It is a rock-cut tomb of the IIa corridor type (Di. Arnold 1971: 45), with a large court. Starting from the façade entrance, a long corridor with two niches on both proximal sides leads to a square offering chapel. The entrance to the corridor used to be guarded by a wooden door, which has not survived to our time (Winlock 1923: 15–16; Soliman 2009: 98). The sepulchral part is hidden behind the offering chapel with the burial chamber oriented north – south. It was already in antiquity that the tomb was badly damaged by robbers and stone vessel producers. Some remaining relief fragments excavated by Winlock were taken to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. In his excavation reports, Winlock (1942: 16–19) described the remains of relief decoration from the corridor, including a panel with the representation of the king but did not indicate its exact location beyond a remark that it was placed in a niche. This was repeated by Porter and Moss in the *Topographical Bibliography* (Porter and Moss 1970: 387; Hayes 1978: 163–164) [Fig. 2:a]. A probable reconstruction of

3 Asasif North is a necropolis located on the left side of Mentuhotep II's mortuary complex at Deir el-Bahari. Numerous private tombs dating mainly from the early Middle Kingdom are situated on the northern slope of the hill, facing Mentuhotep II's causeway. One of the most prominent among them is the tomb of Khety (TT 311), the seal-bearer and treasurer of Mentuhotep II. The site has a long history of excavations, first by the Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition (Winlock 1942: 11–22), and, since 2013, by the PCMA UW (Chudzik 2015; 2016; 2017; 2020).

the scene was assembled from the fragments at the museum [Fig. 2:b, c].⁴

Another example of a Middle Kingdom tomb with an image of a pharaoh is the tomb of Antefiker and his mother Senet (TT 60), dated to the Twelfth Dynasty, located at Sheikh Abd el-Qurna [Fig. 3]. The king, Senuseret I, was depicted on the southern wall of the corridor, presumably in a seated po-

sition facing the tomb owner. Sadly, the scene and the king's figure have been badly damaged, leaving room for speculation about the attire and regalia he was displayed with.⁵ Specifically, it is uncertain whether he was wearing the white crown (as shown in Davies's reconstruction, cf. [Fig. 3]) or the *atef*-crown (Davies 1920: 13–14; Bács 2006: 12).

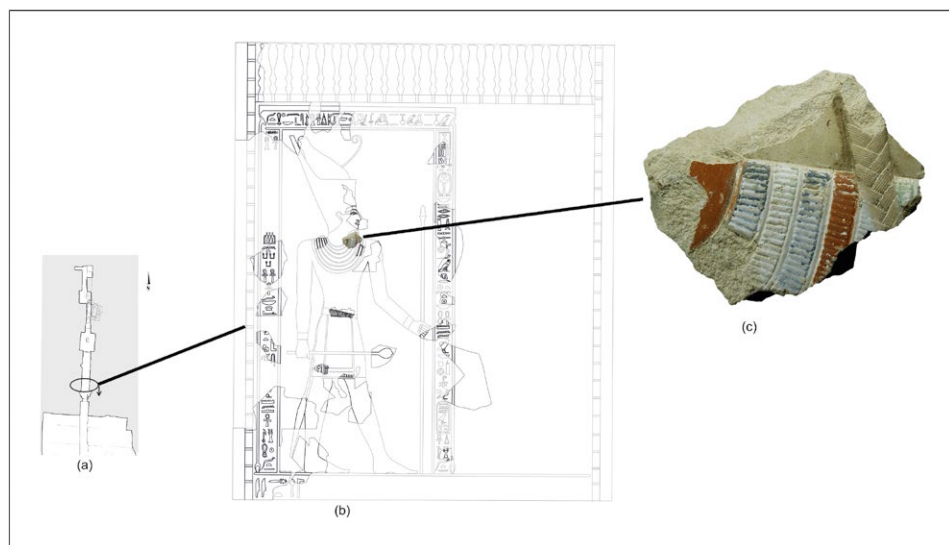


Fig. 2. Tomb of Khety (TT 311) with the reconstructed scene with Mentuhotep II: a – tomb plan with the possible position of the scene, with the arrow indicating the orientation of the king's figure (PCMA UW | drawing K. Andraka); b – reconstruction of the scene of Mentuhotep II at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/590886>, accessed: 12.01.2023); c – fragment of the torso with the divine beard and the collar (PCMA UW | Photo P. Karwowska)

- 4 The displayed fragments under discussion are housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession number 26.3.354-8; <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/590886> (accessed: 12.01.2023). Despite the scarcity of these fragments, the presence of a mace implies that the pharaoh was depicted in a standing pose.
- 5 According to Davies: "Antefoker was here shown approaching the throne of his king, Sesostri I; though the only evidence now left for his figure is the pains which have been taken to expunge it. The king too is lost, apparently by intent, as the line of fracture closely follows that of the body" (Davies 1920: 13, Pl. XVI). One may wonder if this is evidence for deliberate destruction during the Amarna revolution, or if it suggests a refashioning of the scene already in the Eighteenth Dynasty (Bács 2006: 15–16).

A debated example of an image of a king is present in the tomb of Antef in Asasif (TT 386), dated to the Eleventh Dynasty. The presence of a royal representation is suggested by a chair with lion-shaped legs and adorned with a lion's head. Such furniture was initially reserved for royalty, but later, toward the end of the Old Kingdom, it occasionally appeared in noblemen's tombs as well. The scene was painted on wall plaster at the entrance (Jaroš-Deckert 1984: 83–86). If the scene indeed featured an image of the king, it would be the earliest royal representation in

a non-royal tomb, predating even TT 311 (Jaroš-Deckert 1984: 86; Fischer-Elfert 2003: 173 note 14; Vasiljević 2005: 133; Bács 2006: 6 note 9; Di. Arnold and Do. Arnold 2015: 40 note 24). Notably, Intef additionally attempted to acknowledge the king's visual presence by prominently displaying the royal names of Mentuhotep II on the tomb pillars (Jaroš-Deckert 1984: 83–86). Similar manifestations are noted in a few other tombs from the Middle Kingdom, which feature the kings' names on tomb walls or stelae with no direct relation to the *ḥtp-di-nswt* or the autobiographical text.⁶

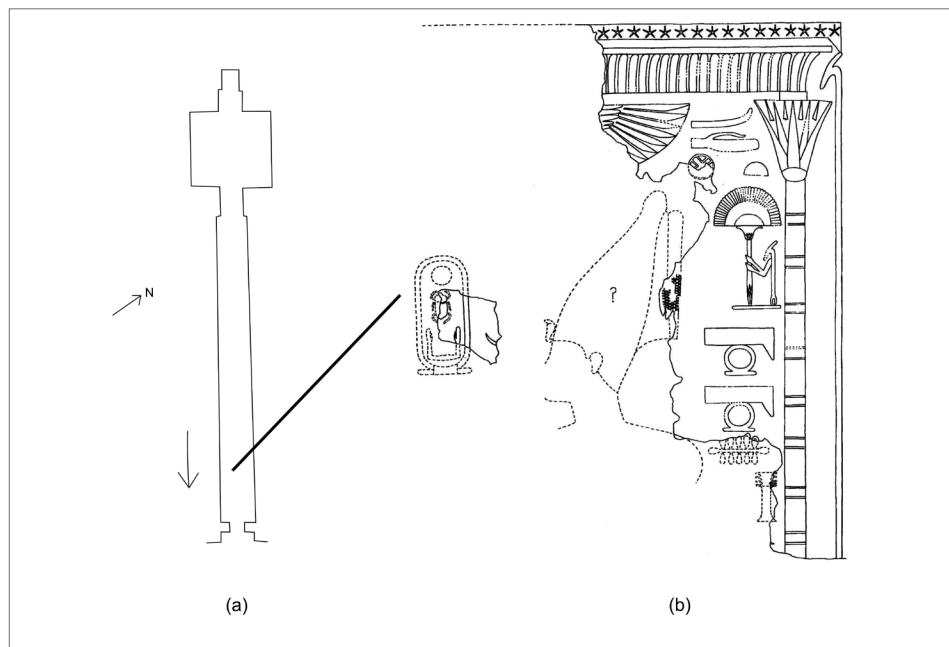


Fig. 3. TT 60 with the image of Senuseret I: a – tomb plan with the arrow indicating the orientation of the king's figure (Drawing P. Karwowska after Porter and Moss 1970: 106); b – Senuseret I scene (Davies 1920: Pl. 16)

6 Examples are: a stela from TT 313 of Henenu from Asasif mentioning Mentuhotep II (Hayes 1978: 165); Tomb BH 2 of Amenemhat mentioning Senuseret I (Newberry 1893: Pl. 7); and Tomb No. 2 of Djchutihotep from Bersheh mentioning Senuseret II, Amenemhat II and Senuseret III (Newberry 1895: 12, Pl. 5).

No depictions of kings in non-royal tombs of the Middle Kingdom are known to have been discovered outside the Theban necropolis. However, in the tomb of Djefaihapi in Asyut (Tomb No. 1), the nobleman adores the “presence” of Senuseret I in the form of the king’s *serekh* and his two cartouches [Fig. 4] (Griffith 1889: Pl. 4; Vasiljević 2005: 134–135; Kahl 2014: Abb. 2). The scene is placed on the eastern wall of the hall, and the owner is turned towards the king’s names and the entrance to the tomb. The names of the ruler are

framed with two *was*-scepters and a *pet*-sign, similarly to the reconstructed image of Mentuhotep II in TT 311, as well as that of Senuseret I in TT 60.⁷

During the New Kingdom, tombs featuring representations of kings increased significantly in number, as the royal image became part of the canonical decorative scheme. As demonstrated by Bács, the image from TT 60 was reproduced in later New Kingdom scenes depicting the king, preserved in numerous tombs of the Eighteenth Dynasty, where Thutmose I, Hatshepsut or Thutmose III are presented

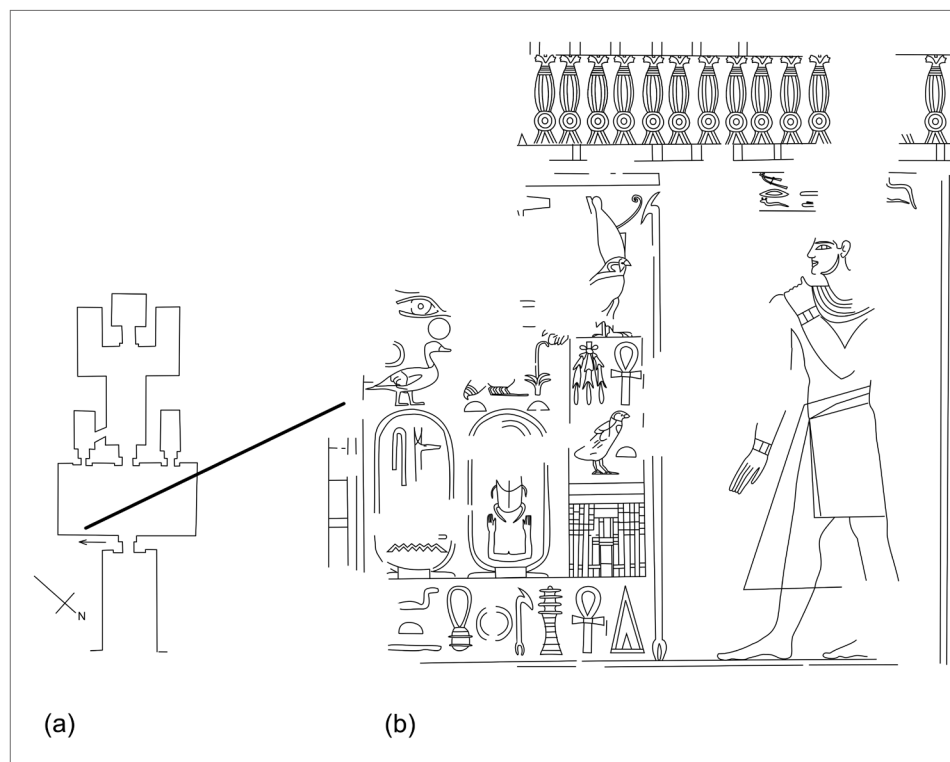


Fig. 4. Tomb of Djefaihapy, No. 1 in Asyut: a – plan with the location of the adoration scene (Drawing P. Karwowska after Porter and Moss 1968: 260); b – Djefaihapy adoring cartouches of Senuseret I (Drawing P. Karwowska after Kahl 2014: Pl. 4)

7 This may also indicate an affiliation of the ruler to the divine sphere (cf. Stupko-Lubczynska 2016: 132 with note 23).

sitting under a baldachin.⁸ Later, in the Ramesside period, the same composition can be found in scenes showing Osiris sitting in a kiosk.⁹ Also, the scene of Djefaihapy adoring the names of Senuseret I was almost certainly copied in the tomb

of Senenmut (TT 353), as indicated by the position of the latter scenes within the tomb (on the eastern side of the hall), the pose of the tomb owner in adoration, and the placement of the royal names [Fig. 5] (Dorman 1991: Pl. 60; Kahl 2014).

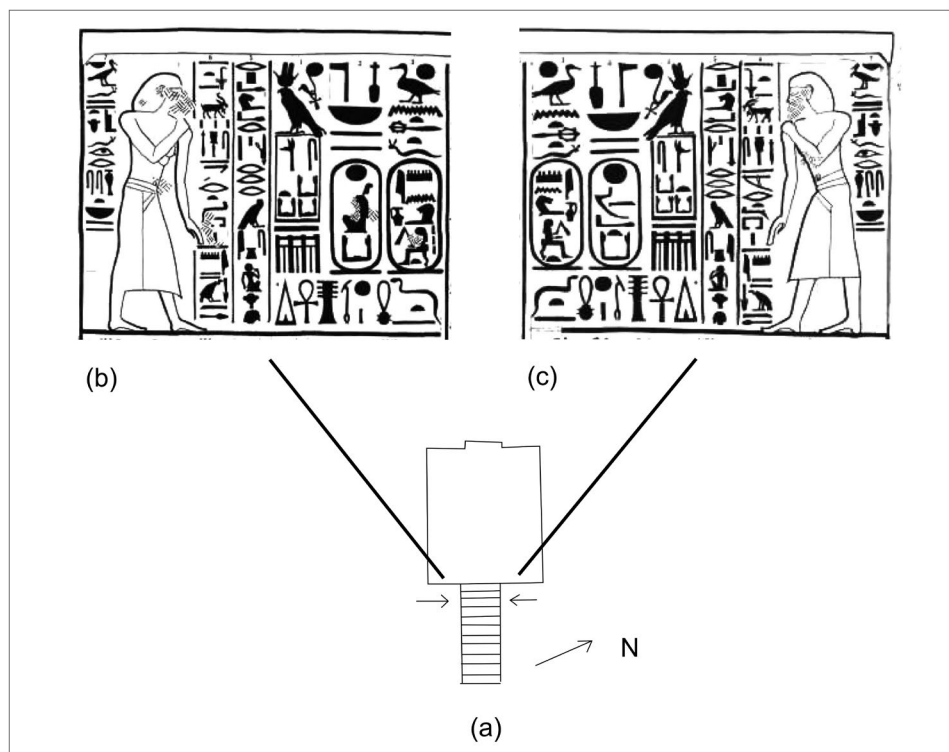


Fig. 5. TT 353 of Senenmut: a and b – Senenmut adoring cartouches of Hatshepsut (After Dorman 1991: Pls 80 (a), 82b (b)); c – location of the scene on the tomb plan (Drawing P. Karwowska after Porter and Moss 1970: 415)

- 8 Bács (2006: 8–9) lists the representations of kings and tomb owners, for example Hatshepsut or Thutmose III in the tombs of Hapuseneb (TT 67), Amenhotep (TT 73), Duauyerneheh (TT 125), Djehuty (TT 110), and possibly Senenmut (TT 71), and Thutmose III alone in the tombs of Amenemhat (TT 123), Menkheprreseneb (TT 86), Yamunedjeh (TT 84), Senneferi (TT 99) and Rekhmire (TT 100). For more examples of New Kingdom tombs with royal representations, see Hartwig 2004.
- 9 There is a strong resemblance between the image of Osiris in the Ramesside tomb of Imiseba TT 65 and that of Thutmose III in TT 131. In particular, the composition of the scene, with the curved ram's horns, bull's protome and a figure behind the deity, is analogous to the one in TT 65. The decoration in TT 65 was prepared for the first owner of the tomb, Nebaum, in the time of Hatshepsut, so it presumably represented either Hatshepsut or Thutmose III (Bács 2006: 3–5, 15–16).

IMAGES OF MENTUHOTEP II IN NON-ROYAL TOMBS: THE ISSUE OF THE BEARD

One of the tasks undertaken by the PCMA UW expedition to North Asasif was to clear and reinvestigate the debris pile left in the court of TT 311 by the former excavators. To date, over 3500 pieces of tomb decoration have been salvaged, offering great potential for broadening the picture of the decorative program in TT 311, including the scene with the king.¹⁰ Many of the already retrieved fragments seem to complement some of the scenes housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

The scene under discussion here presents Mentuhotep II in a standing position, equipped with royal attributes: the double crown, the mace, and the scepter.¹¹ In addition to this well-known set of royal insignia (Aldred 1988; Do. Arnold 1999: 86–92; Semat 2016; Masquellier-Loorius 2020), Mentuhotep II also has a false divine beard attached. The beard, resting on red, blue and green colored bands of a collar, is preserved on the fragment rediscovered by the PCMA UW [see *Fig. 1*]. This detail, fairly uncommon in the royal iconography of previous periods, has encouraged the author to offer some insights into the

possible role of a beard in the depiction of the ruling king and his identification with a deity in the non-royal funerary context (the issue has been studied to some extent by Staehelin 1966: 92; 1975: 627–628; M. Smith 2017: 126, 207–208; Volokhine 2019: 63, 72–73).

Generally, the false beard was worn by kings as a symbol of male power since as early as predynastic times (Hendrickx, De Meyer, and Eyckerman 2014). As of the Third Dynasty, two types of false beards can be distinguished in Egyptian iconography: a royal beard and a divine one. In the former, the hair is arranged in horizontal lines or in a wave-like pattern, and the end forms a straight edge.¹² The divine beard, in turn, is thinner, meticulously braided, and its tip is curved forward. Although different in shape, both divine and royal beards were artificial and fixed to a headdress or a crown. The process of crafting such an artificial beard, attaching it to the king's face, as well as maintaining and grooming it required considerable effort. Such a proclivity for neat looks, leaving no margin for naturally grown beards, was meant to manifest the supremacy

10 The fragments testify to the use of different work techniques and engagement of different artists (Chudzik 2020: 173).

11 The reconstruction of the image of Mentuhotep II at the Metropolitan Museum of Art is based on the fragments from Winlock's excavations. It shows the king in a standing pose, wearing the royal insignia —the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt and the false beard— and holding the *hd*-mace and the *mdw*-shaft in his left hand.

12 An example of such a beard is found in a relief from the mortuary temple of Djedkara Isesi in Saqqara, depicting the king embraced by a divinity (Evers 1929: 29). In contrast, a shorter beard can be seen on relief representations of non-royal individuals (Steindorff 1913: Pl. 130) or even foreign prisoners (e.g. Borchardt 1913: Pl. 6; Jéquier 1938: Pl. 40).

of the Egyptian culture over foreign “savages” represented with their natural hair and beards (Staehelin 1966: 92–93; Hendrickx, De Meyer, and Eyckerman 2014: 135–136; Volokhine 2019: 63, 73). The beard on the relief fragment from TT 311, rediscovered by the PCMA UW, features all the attributes of the divine beard: it is thin, braided and curved at the tip. This beard, formerly called “Osirian”, was strongly associated with the deceased king and funerary worship, although kings might occasionally wear it in other contexts. Its earliest known

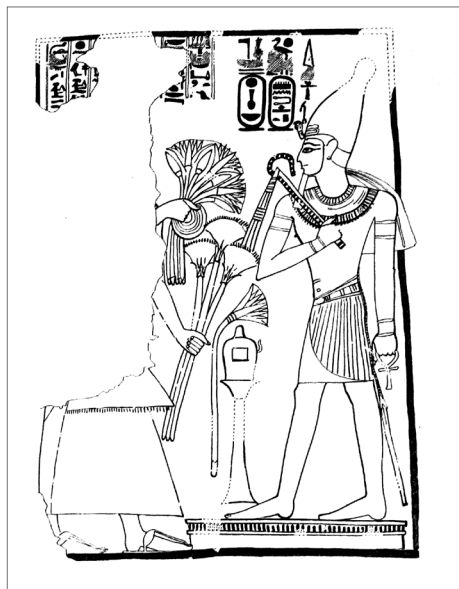


Fig. 6. TT 31 of Khonsu (Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties). Scene of adoration of Mentuhotep II's statue (After Davies 1948: Pl. XVIII)

depiction, found in the Djoser chapel in Heliopolis, most likely belonged to the god Geb, but it was also worn by other gods, including fertility deities like Amun Min and Osiris (Baines 1985: 87; Hendrickx, De Meyer, and Eyckerman 2014: 135; Volkhine 2019: 66, 72–73).

Mentuhotep II seems to be the first pharaoh portrayed wearing the divine beard while still alive, as shown on several of his contemporary reliefs.¹³ On an image from the Dendera chapel, built by Mentuhotep, the king wearing the red-and-white crown and the divine beard is depicted in the act of defeating his enemies (Habachi 1963: 22, Fig. 6). On the relief from the Elephantine temple, the pharaoh is interacting with the goddesses Satis and Montu (Habachi 1963: 42, Fig. 19). However, the best-known reliefs of the deified king are found in his mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahari, including the chapels of his wives (Naville and Clarke 1910: Pls V.C, D, VI.B, XI, XIII, XVIII). The same mortuary complex yielded a sandstone statue, discovered accidentally by Howard Carter. It shows the ruler in a seated position, wearing the red crown and the divine beard (Di. Arnold and Do. Arnold 2015: 38, Fig. 6).

Another relief depiction of Mentuhotep II was found at Wadi Shatt el-Rigal (Winlock 1940: Fig. 7). The king is shown with his mother Iah and his son Intef, accompanied by Khety.¹⁴

¹³ Lalib Habachi provided an overview of the images of Mentuhotep II in the monuments the latter had built or rebuilt, including depictions with a royal deity, mainly Amun, Min and probably Montu (Habachi 1963: 50–52). Habachi, however, did not discuss the royal-divine iconography, the type of the false beard Mentuhotep II was wearing or its Osirian symbolism in funerary cult. See also Di. Arnold and Do. Arnold (2015: 47).

¹⁴ On another relief carved in the nearby rock, only the king and Khety are portrayed; here the king wears the *hb-sd* robe and the white crown (Winlock 1940: 137–161, 142, Fig. 7).

The depiction of the pharaoh closely resembles the figure from Khety's tomb in North Asasif, wearing the double crown and the false, curved beard, and holding the staff and the mace (Habachi 1963: 16–17).

Distant analogies to Mentuhotep II's images from TT 311 can be found painted on plaster in two Theban tombs from the Ramesside period: TT 31 of Khonsu in Sheikh Abd el-Qurna (Davies 1948: 11–30, Pl. XVIII) [Fig. 6], and TT 277 of Ameneminet in Qur-

net Murai (Vandier d'Abbadie 1954: Pl. XV.1; Habachi 1963: 50–51) [Fig. 7].¹⁵ In these representations, Mentuhotep II is shown in a standing position, wearing the white crown with the uraeus and the royal beard attached, and holding royal attributes: the scepter and the mace or flail. In both cases, the images of the king are poised on pedestals, and might therefore be depictions of a statue or statues of Mentuhotep II or, alternatively, of reliefs at his mortuary temple in Deir el-Bahari (Win-



Fig. 7. TT 277 of Ameneminet (the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties). Scene of adoration of Mentuhotep II's statue (Facsimile, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Acc. No. 30.4.124 <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/557844>)

¹⁵ In her master's thesis, Gabrielle Heffernan (2010) mentions two other examples of representations of Mentuhotep II: one in TT 2 from Deir el-Medina, belonging to Khabekhnet (Lepsius 1865: 2a); and the other in TT 19 from Dra' Abu el-Naga', belonging to Amenmose (Champollion 1845: Pl. clxxxiv; Foucart 1935: Pl. xii). In this case, Mentuhotep II is depicted among other kings and queens who accept offerings from the tomb owner (Heffernan 2010: 140, 143, 145).

lock 1947: 41). In TT 277, the image of the king's statue is shown at the foot of the Theban mountain, from which the Hathor-cow emerges. The scene clearly evokes the Beautiful Festival of the Valley, reaching back to the Middle Kingdom, when the festive procession of Amun's bark departing from Karnak

started visiting Mentuhotep II's temple (Pinch 1993: 4–6; Dolińska 2007).

It cannot, however, be excluded that the artists and owners of the tombs were also inspired by TT 311¹⁶ and/or reliefs of the nearby mortuary temple of the king, or tombs of the king's wives.

KING AS PROTECTIVE DEITY

Tomb iconography was intended to serve a number of goals. From the tomb owner's perspective, the most important aims were to secure rebirth and a prosperous afterlife by assuring continuity of offerings and rites, to preserve identity through commemoration by visitors, and to sustain a link with society and its culture by making the tomb a part of a larger mortuary complex (Hartwig 2004: 1–2, 51–52).

Incorporating “the king's presence” into one's tomb decoration may have also been a way of meeting the above

objectives by additionally placing oneself under the protection of a deified ruler, who could be perceived as a patron of the necropolis. Indeed, such deification is attested for Mentuhotep II in the Theban necropolis (Habachi 1963: 50–51), as well as for Amenhotep I and his mother Ahmes Nefertari (particularly at Deir el-Medina)¹⁷ and for later rulers like Thutmose I, Thutmose III and Amenhotep III (Kees 1958: 122; Assmann 2003). Rulers subjected to adoration might even date back to the Old Kingdom or form groups perceived

16 The possible use of the representations of the king from TT 311 as models for decoration of other tombs might be explained by the popularity of Khety's monument, prominently placed on the North Asasif slope, as indicated by numerous visitors' inscriptions left on the tomb's walls, dating mainly from the Eighteenth Dynasty and the Ramesside period (Bács 2006: 7; Ragazzoli 2021: 222–225). The latter may also apply to TT 60, favorably placed in Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, which was a popular destination (Bács 2006: 8; Ragazzoli 2013; 2021: 237). Also the tomb of Djefaihapy in Asyut, one of largest rock-cut tombs in Middle Kingdom Egypt, was visited by designers of the Eighteenth Dynasty (Reisner 1918: 80; El-Khadragy 2007: 54; Kahl 2014: 161–163; Stupko-Lubczynska 2021: 205, note 28).

17 The cult of Amenhotep I and Ahmes-Nefertari, which started in the Eighteenth Dynasty and continued until the end of the Twenty-first Dynasty, was mostly limited to the Theban necropolis (Valbelle 1985). There are numerous examples of tombs with representations of this king alone, with his mother, and with other kings. For example, in TT 178 of Neferronpet in El-Khokha from the Nineteenth Dynasty (reign of Ramesses II), the deceased with his wife are shown censuring and pouring libations before Amenemhat I and Ahmes-Nefertari (Porter and Moss 1970: 283–285), and in TT 51 of Userhet in Sheikh Abd el-Qurna from the Nineteenth Dynasty, Thutmose I with Ahmes-Nefertari are offered braziers by the tomb owner and family members (Porter and Moss 1970: 97–99).

as local “saints”, to use an expression proposed by Málek (Porter and Moss 1968: 571–572; Málek 2000).¹⁸

Mentuhotep II was venerated not only by his immediate successors, but his cult persevered until the very end of the Ramesside period.¹⁹ It is reasonable to suppose that his successes in reunifying and strengthening the country earned him a reputation of a man with extraordinary powers. Whether he was regarded as a god already during his lifetime is, however, uncertain. Habachi argues in favor of his “deification”, pointing to the divine attributes used by Mentuhotep II, as well as texts in which he is addressed directly as the god “beloved-of-Horus” or “the living god, foremost of kings”. Such inscriptions, placed on the Dendera chapel walls during his lifetime (Daressy 1917; Habachi 1963: 18–21, 52), support the argument that the ruler received the offerings as a god rather than as a human *ka*-statue (Habachi 1963: 12). Finally, images of Mentuhotep II show him assimilated to gods like Min, Amun or Kamutef on Konosso Island (Habachi 1963: 43), on

Elephantine (Habachi 1966: 42–43), in Dendera (Habachi 1963: 52), and in Deir el-Bahari (Habachi 1963: 50). However, Habachi’s interpretation was challenged by Mark Smith, who denied that these examples were proof of Mentuhotep II’s deification, arguing that the mummiform figures of Mentuhotep represented him in the context of the *sed* festival, not as Osiris, whereas the inscriptions calling him “beloved-of-god” were expressions of his interaction, rather than identification, with the deity (Leblanc 1980: 69–80; M. Smith 2017: 208–210).

The identification of living and deceased kings with Osiris in the context of the afterlife has been thoroughly studied by Mark Smith (2017). Analyzing the spells and offering formulae in Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts, in which the king was sometimes referred to as Osiris and, in other places, as a subject of the god, he concluded that “...the king’s identification with Osiris was ritually contingent, valid within the context of the rite in which it was asserted, but not in the world beyond the spell” (M. Smith 2017: 155, 265–266).

18 Porter and Moss also mention two New Kingdom stelae from Saqqara representing King Teti. One is a stela of Amenemhat, overseer of horses, dated to the Eighteenth Dynasty, showing the tomb owner with offerings to Osiris with King Teti behind him (Porter and Moss 1981: 572; Gunn MSS. xix. 2). The second one is a stela of draftsman Prahsetji, dated to the late Eighteenth/early Nineteenth Dynasty, where King Teti makes an offering to Osiris, and the tomb in Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, where the owner and his wife are represented below in an adoration scene (Porter and Moss 1962: 572; Boston Museum, Acc. No. 25.635; <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/125389/stele-of-ptahsetji?ctx=24fafd43-6834-4572-876e-c479466ba308&idx=0>, accessed: 07.06.2023). Another example might be a relief showing King Menkauhor from the Fifth Dynasty, which had originated from an unknown Eighteenth-Dynasty tomb and was found in the Memphis Serapeum (Louvre, N° inv. E 3028 <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010030295>, accessed: 29.07.2023).

19 Examples of special acknowledgment of Mentuhotep II by Senuseret I and Senuseret II can be seen in the form of their cartouches placed on the statue of Mentuhotep II, found in the temple of Amun at Karnak, and scenes of adornment by tomb owners in TT 31 and TT 277 (Habachi 1963: 50–51).

The mirrorlike reflection of the ritual relation of king-as-god and god-as-king can be seen in the change that occurred in the veneration of Osiris, who might be addressed with pleas for help as a ruler of the contemporary world (M. Smith 2017: 498). This was especially clear in the 1st millennium BC, when numerous small chapels and temples were built for this god.

Habachi and Smith have largely focused in their discussions on the written sources concerning the relation between god/Osiris and king, omitting the issue of the king's image with a divine attribute in the form of the divine beard.

As mentioned above, the image of Mentuhotep II in Khety's tomb (TT 311) is the earliest known image of the king in

a private funerary context, and the first such image of the king with divine features. In TT 311, Mentuhotep II wears the divine beard, characteristic for Osiris, but also for Geb and Amun Min. Although Mentuhotep II identified himself with the latter, the funerary context indicates that in this case it is more likely that the king was functioning with Osirian features, and his presence was of a ritual nature as an extension of *hṯp-di-nswt* offering formulae. Most probably Khety's intention was to secure for himself a good afterlife in the presence of the king and the god Osiris through continuous commemorations by visitors who came to pray not only to Osiris, but also to the deified great ruler, whom Khety had served.

KING AS CONTEMPORARY RULER

The group of images introducing the king in his deified form can be juxtaposed with representations of the king as a ruler of the state. These are mostly depictions of the pharaoh hunting, fishing, being nursed, or sitting on the lap of a tutor (Dodson and Ikram 2008: 221). In a few cases, the deceased was portrayed at the moment of special interaction with the contemporary monarch, for example in TT 73 Amenhotep was shown adoring Hatshepsut (Säve-Söderbergh 1957: 1–10), and in TT 40 Amenhotep Huy was depicted during his nomination as viceroy of Kush by Tutankhamun (Porter and Moss 1970: 65, 75).

Although the practice of depicting the monarch in non-royal tombs was not confined to the Theban necropolis, examples

from outside Thebes are few. It may be that the scenes depicting royalty were an exclusive privilege of distinguished noblemen who had the benefit of direct contact with kings and/or royal family, and they commemorated actual interactions with the king, testifying to the given individual's high status (Hartwig 2004: 54–76; Kamrin 2015: 32). For example, Vizier Rahotep in his tomb in Sedment is shown kneeling before cartouches of Ramesses II (Petrie and Brunton 1924: 29, Pl. LXXI.2; Porter and Moss 1968: 117). In Saqqara, Vizier Paser had himself depicted on a stela with Ramesses II (Dunham 1935), and Hormin, the overseer of the royal apartments of the harem, chose to be shown receiving an award of collars from Sety I.²⁰

20 *Stela des colliers*; Louvre, N° inv. C 213; <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010025430#> (accessed: 20.10.2022).

LOCATION WITHIN THE TOMB — PLACE WITHIN THE THEBAN LANDSCAPE

Middle Kingdom representations of kings in private tombs are few, making it difficult to identify patterns in their location and orientation. The figure of Mentuhotep II in TT 311 was depicted standing, most likely in a niche near the entrance [see *Fig. 2:a*]. Excavation reports do not specify whether the king was facing toward the inside or outside the tomb. There are no known parallels to royal images from earlier non-royal tombs that could help determine the location of the king's representation within TT 311. However, should the arrangement of royal representations be modeled after those from royal tombs, which is likely taking into consideration the pattern seen in later tombs, the king was most probably placed on the eastern side of the corridor, facing left, towards the entrance, i.e. towards the outside of the tomb. The second known royal representation from the Middle Kingdom, that of Senuseret I in the tomb of Senet (TT 60), was placed on the southern wall of the corridor, looking right (east), towards the entrance to the tomb, and “approaching” the figure of the tomb owner [see *Fig 3:a*].

The scene of adoration of the cartouches of Senuseret I in the tomb of Djefaihapy in Asyut is placed on the

southern side of the eastern wall of the outer hall, while the hieroglyphs of the cartouches face away from the entrance and towards the tomb owner, who is shown adoring them [see *Fig. 4:a*] (Griffith 1889: Pl. 4). The New Kingdom already had an established compositional pattern of incorporating the figure of the monarch in private tomb decoration, referred to as *Blickpunktbild*.²¹ The royal figure, presented either as a worshipped deity or as the ruling king, would usually occupy the most prominent place, giving the visitor an opportunity to almost immediately notice him in direct interaction with the tomb owner. These scenes were usually located in the outer hall or at the beginning of the corridor, flanking the entrance to the inner part of the tomb. The royal figure was shown sitting or standing in a kiosk, facing the entrance, while the image of the tomb owner approaching in adoration was oriented as if entering the tomb.²²

The placement of royal representations shows no correlation with the geographical alignment of the tomb's axis or entrance, but rather aims to achieve the greatest impact in displaying the deceased and their distinguished biographies. Similarly, on a broader scale,

21 This special composition of the scene, referred to by Arnold as the *Blickpunktbild*, denotes a scene that occupies the most prominent and exposed place (Di. Arnold 1962: 128). Engelmann-von Carnap has shown that this pattern was followed by most Theban tombs from the Eighteenth Dynasty (Engelmann-von Carnap 1999: 245–246; Bács 2006: 4; Stupko-Lubczynska 2021: 204–205).

22 Theban tombs TT 40, TT 63, TT 110; TT 41, TT 51, TT 178 and TT 296. Even though the Ramesside depiction of Mentuhotep II in TT 31 is placed differently (in the niche, not in the corridor), it still complies with the concept of *Blickpunktbild*.

the prominent placement of noblemen's tombs in the Theban necropolis was meant to grant the deceased not only

an eternal view of the king's mortuary temple, but also remote participation in festive processions.²³

CONCLUSIONS

The presence of representations of gods and kings in non-royal tombs was a result of a long process of evolution of the decorative canon. It began in the Old Kingdom, when Anubis and Osiris were occasionally depicted on tomb walls, and the king was commonly mentioned in offering formulae and tomb owners' autobiographies. Both Osiris and Anubis were strongly associated with the funerary cult, and Osiris himself was identified with the deceased king or a collective of past kings — the royal ancestors. The decorative canon then gradually evolved towards the inclusion of the figure of the king among the visual means of securing a better afterlife.

The representation of King Mentuhotep II in the tomb of Khety is the earliest documented example of a royal image in a private context dated to the Middle Kingdom, and it finds no parallels in the imagery of previous periods.²⁴ Scenes depicting monarchs, scarce as they were during the Middle Kingdom, became a standard feature in decorations of noblemen's tombs in the New Kingdom, especially in the Theban region. In the latter tombs, the royal image was either a subject of divine worship or a testimony to the high standing of the deceased

in the royal court arising from their exceptional relations with the king. This aggrandizement of the tomb owner might also take on a somewhat indirect form in scenes of adoration of cartouches, as in the case of Djefaihapy in Asyut.

The fragment of the relief showing Mentuhotep II's divine beard, recently rediscovered by the PCMA UW, is typical of this ruler's portraits from other sites and complementary to his divine image. The representation in Khety's tomb might have subsequently served as a model for depictions of the deified pharaoh in Ramesside tombs as, judging by numerous graffiti left in TT 311, it must have been visited frequently. Royal images in noblemen's tombs of the Middle Kingdom show that the preferred place and position for these motifs was the outer part of the tomb — either the corridor (probably TT 311, TT 60) or the hall (Tomb No. 1 in Asyut), with the king looking out towards the tomb entrance. This outward orientation and *Blickpunkt* position were maintained in the New Kingdom. The depiction of the king and its specific placement served a number of purposes, one of them being to demonstrate the exceptional status of the tomb owner and his special rap-

23 A similar attitude can also be observed outside the Theban area. In Abydos, the route of the procession with the figure of Osiris on a bark leading to his tomb in Umm el-Qaab was lined with cenotaph chapels allowing their owners the best possible view and spiritual participation in the festival (Leahy 1989: 42–57; M. Smith 2017: 233).

24 On a possible example of a royal image in TT 386, see above, note 12.

port with the king. It may be compared to Old Kingdom texts carved on tomb façades to showcase special acts of royal grace towards their owners. The dead pharaoh was also represented as Osiris and as an embodiment of all royal ancestors. Osirian presence in private tomb decorations likewise changed over time. Prayers to Osiris in *hṯp-di-nswt* formulae were already present in Old Kingdom inscriptions; then, the Middle Kingdom brought the introduction of the image of King Mentuhotep II with Osirianizing

features in TT 311 and perhaps King Senuseret I as Osiris (as might be the case in TT 60); finally, in the New Kingdom, the images of Osiris himself, and of a deified king from the past, served to protect the deceased in the afterlife.

Further efforts to reconstruct the scene showing Mentuhotep II in TT 311 may contribute to the understanding of its symbolic meaning and the role it played in the decorative program of Khety's tomb and other funerary contexts.

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