

# **Uncommon Panic Statements in Ancient Egyptian Art**

*Ahmed Faraman*

**Department of Egyptology, Faculty of Archaeology,  
Aswan University.**

## Uncommon Panic Statements in Ancient Egyptian Art

*Ahmed Faraman\**

### Abstract

The Ancient Egyptian Artists had capably succeeded in depicting various human and animal feelings of extreme fear; manifested in portraying dread of strike and its consequences, a moment of high stimulation in which the protagonist of the picture was shown within the main scene. These uncommon cases were scarcely existent in both reproduced and permanent private drawings. Two visual devices had successfully transmitted this marked symptom; which are: Defecating and urinating, concerning both human beings and animals, they had mainly provided a concealed message understood only by a limited number of audiences. The iconographies had been created during the End of the Old Kingdom and continued to the last days of the New Kingdom. These peculiar devices could be treated as a trusted reflection of incidents during the period, together with the typical groups of potsherds which existed during the Ramesside period. The following pages will investigate these uncommon pictorial cases, and focus on their role within the picture chosen and meaning of the depiction displayed.

---

\* Department of Egyptology, Faculty of Archaeology, Aswan University.

## Introduction

The evidences discussed in this paper are among the abundant preparatory sketches date to the ramisside period, along with examples of mural reliefs in private tombs found during the End of the New Kingdom; fortunately, they are among the artworks which have survived the most from Ancient Egypt, and they can be treated as a trusted source for extracting details. Actually, the device contents must be studied within the main context of the picture in order to understand the intended purpose and also for revealing their hidden impressions within the picture, manifesting in artistic, religious and political messages.<sup>(1)</sup> The iconographies could indicate how much the artist felt disengaged of the traditional and restricted art themes at the time, and display his ability to express freely other ideas and concepts which he believed relevant at that time. The use and appearance of these devices could be considered a standard indicator of the rapport between the authority and the artist's community. This sort of art could not occur in common iconographies, in which restricted rules had been firmly respected.<sup>(2)</sup>

Urinating and defecating are spontaneous indispensable human doing, which both religious and literature sources provide clear evidence which expresses how much these actions were reviled and detested. For further purity, and for securing his journey in the

---

<sup>(1)</sup> M. Müller, Iconography and Symbolism, in M. Hartwig (ed.) *A Companion to Ancient Egyptian Art*, UK, 2015, 78.

<sup>(2)</sup> G. Perrot and C. Chipiez, *A History of Art in Ancient Egypt*, II, London, 1883, 352 f.

netherworld, the dead King had to get rid of each kind of profanity.<sup>(1)</sup> Actually, offensive smells were execrable and had been used to express executed professions,<sup>(2)</sup> as well as, it was considered defilement where the element must be removed, by means of purifying all the body with water, along with perfuming it with odours of both flowers and incense.<sup>(3)</sup>

According to the sketched devices, which date back to the ramesside period, and are achieved by artists whose main or only profession was cutting and decorating the royal tombs at the western Thebes, it could be concluded that the subject of these ostrakon might relate to monarchical subjects,<sup>(4)</sup> their rise was relevant to the reign of Ramses III, a period notable for disorders, which could be considered the birth of a different era, a turning point for the workmen at Deir el-Medina, in which they could practice in complete self-confidence when such pursuit had been normally manifested in the notable and effective strike against the impotent administrative authority. Moreover, critical troubles occurred within the royal palace, represented in the futile assassinate against the pharaoh, consequently it had encouraged the artists community to snatch their right to

---

<sup>1</sup> J. Allen, *A New Concordance of the Pyramid Texts*, II, Brown, 2010, PT 210.

<sup>2</sup>T. Peet, *A Comparative Study of the Literature of Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia*, London, 1931, 115; W. Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, London, 2003, 433.

<sup>(3)</sup> J. Allen, *Pyramid Texts*, II, PT. 269, 412;

<sup>4</sup> J. Černý, *A Community of Workmen at Thebes in the Ramesside period*, *BdE*, 1973, 99.

express freely new ideas, out of the traditional artistic terms, imposed and esteemed for thousands of years before.<sup>(1)</sup>

## Statements and Investigation

### 1- A Defecating wild bull (fig. 1)

This uncommon iconography was frequent within the tombs of the Elites during the fifth and sixth Dynasties.<sup>(2)</sup> The interaction between the wild lion and the frightened bull is the focal point within the context of the hunting scenes; normally it is usually composed of a lion attacking a scared wild bull, who is trying to free itself. By means of fixing its posterior legs in the ground, in order to pull out and free its head away from the lion`s tusks. The artist succeeded to portray this attack, adding an unprecedented feature to the device, by their depiction of the defecating bull. The picture shows a particular status included within a desert hunting scene; incompatible with the surrounding cases which represent several attacked animals, the relevant status leads us to believe that it might provide a concealed message to the audiences. Moreover, the tomb of Ptah-Hotep

---

<sup>(1)</sup> R. Faulkner, Egypt from the Inception of the Nineteenth Dynasty to the Death of Ramses III, in *CAH*, 2, part 2, Ch. XXIII, 246, 247; T. Peet, A Historical Document of Ramesside Age, *JEA*, 10 (1982), 116-127; A. Gardiner, *Ramesside Administrative Documents*, Oxford, 1948, 49 f.; A. De Buck, The Judicial Papyrus of Turin, *JEA* 23 (1937), 152-164.

<sup>2</sup> P. Duell, *The Mastaba of Mereruka*, I, Chicago, 1938, pl. 24, 25; N. Davies, *The Mastaba of Ptahhetep and Akhetetep at Saqqareh*, I, London, 1900, 10, pl. XXI; W. Smith, *A History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Oxford, 1949, fig. 92 a, 239; N. Kanawati, *Mereruka and King Teti the Power behind the Throne*, Cairo, 2008, pl. 111; *PM*, III, 528.

introduces a particular case, in which a hunter is pointing to this  
<sup>(1)</sup>unique status, focusing on its peculiarity and symbolism.

Theologically, this picture could be a symbolic conflict between two doctrines, the one of Heliopolis against the other of Memphis. The scene could synchronize the rise of the sun-cult, prevailed from the End of the Old Kingdom onward, manifested in the lion shape,<sup>(2)</sup> at the expense of the local deity of Saqqara, which espoused the bull, sacred animal of god Apis, who manifests the living figure of Ptah, patron deity of Memphis.<sup>(3)</sup>

From a political point of view, the lion together with the bull had been considered symbols of royal power, since the archaic period down to the New Kingdom, variant artifacts bear the manifestation of this idea, and both lion and bull were shown while fighting enemies as a characterization of the Egyptian ruler.<sup>(4)</sup> The present picture could be a manifestation of the radical conflict took part between two

---

<sup>1</sup> N. Davies, *The Mastaba of Ptahhetep*, 10; M. Hartwig, Painting in, D. Redford (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, III, Oxford, 2001, 3.

<sup>2</sup> S. Hassan, *The Great Sphinx and its Secrets*, Cairo, 1953, 142.

<sup>3</sup> G. Hart, *The Routledge Dictionary of Ancient Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*, New York, 2005, 29; R. Wilkinson, *The complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, London, 2003, 170, 171.

<sup>4</sup> R. Stadelman, Sphinx in, D. Redford (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, III, Oxford, 2001, 307; S. Hassan, *The Great Sphinx*, 142; C. Coche-Zivie, *LA*, 1139; I. Shaw and P. Nicholson, *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, Cairo, 2002, 277; K. Cooney, and J. Tyrrell, *Scarabs in Los Angeles County Museum of Art*, II, USA, 2005, 37; G. Pier, Historical Scarab Seals from the Art Institute Collection, *AJSL* 23, No. 1 (1906), 89, 90; P. Houlihan, *The Animal World of the Pharaohs*, Cairo, 1996, 91, fig. 65; P. Houlihan, Felines in, D. Redford (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, I, Oxford, 2001, 513, 514; C. Aldred, *Old Kingdom Art in Ancient Egypt*, London, 1949, 27.

theocratic parties, a classic struggle which reached its summit at the End of the Old Kingdom, a period which witnessed the rise of power<sup>(1)</sup> of the sun priests, against the royal authority.

## 2- A peeing foreign Prisoner, fig. 2

The scene dates to the ramesside period in which shows a lion while capturing with his tusks a humbled and scared foreign prisoner, who is depicted in an uncommon submission gesture; he is pulled along by the lion`s power, while the drawing shows how much panic this foreigner displays, manifesting in urinating with unprecedented attitude,<sup>(2)</sup> throughout his physical lineaments, the foreigner could be easily identified as a Nubian prisoner,<sup>(3)</sup> this peculiar statement might include a symbolic impression, by means of the concealed message, which the artist intended to transmit to the audiences, represented in the lion as a manifestation of the mighty Egyptian authority while beating the Nubian rebels, who committed a misdemeanor. Actually it was an old picture, in which the Egyptian king had been shown as a lion attacking the enemies of Egypt.

---

<sup>1</sup> W. Smith, The Old Kingdom in Egypt and the beginning of the First intermediate period, in, *The Cambridge Ancient History*, I, part 2, 179, 180; W. Simpson, *The Literature*, 20-24.

<sup>2</sup> W. Peck, *Egyptian Drawings*, London, 1978, fig. 94; J. D`Abbadie, *Catalogue des Ostraca figures de Deir El Médineh*, I, le Caire, 1936, 47, pl. XXVI: 2226.

<sup>3</sup> A. Roth, Representing the Other, in M. Hartwig (ed.) *A Companion to Ancient Egyptian Art*, UK, 2015, 170; B. Trigger, Nubians, Negro black Neolithic in (ed.) *Africa in antiquity*, the Essays, Brooklyn, 1978, 27.

(1) Moreover, enemies of Egypt had been usually shown in despised positions and variant attitudes, commonly represented passivity, undertaken and defeated by the Egyptian ruler, they were always depicted submitted, mainly kneeling with the bounded hands, as well as, trampled under the pharaoh's feet,<sup>(2)</sup> but the current example had not occur before in Egyptian Art, and It supports the view that kings are usually defending their boundaries enthusiastically.

### 3- Defecating fighting bulls. Fig. 3

This case is placed on a potsherd, dates back to the End of the ramesside period, it depicts two fighting bulls, and each of them is defecating.<sup>(3)</sup> The bulls had been drawn with the raised tails, symbol of stimulation.<sup>(4)</sup> Such action occurs involuntary in extreme fear statements as a defense strategy, actually in such case each of the bulls are stimulated, and tries to beat the aggressor, the left bull's excrement is depicted in an unreal form, as it drops straightly according the animal's body direction, which indicates that the artist intended to draw this detail in order to illustrate how horror and panic

---

<sup>1</sup> R. Stadelman, Sphinx in, D. Redford (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, III, 307; S. Hassan, *The Great Sphinx*, 142; C. M. Coche-Zivie, *LA*, 1139; I. Shaw and P. Nicholson, *The British Museum Dictionary*, 277; K. Cooney, and J. Tyrrell, *Scarabs*, 37; G. Pier, *AJSL* 23, No. 1 (1906), 89, 90; P. Houlihan, *The Animal World*, 91, fig. 65.

<sup>2</sup> A. Roth, *A Companion to Ancient Egyptian Art*, 156-159; R. Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic in Egyptian Art*, London, 1994, 194; S. Smith, People in, D. Redford (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, III, Oxford, 2001, 32.

<sup>3</sup> W. Peck, *Egyptian Drawings*, fig. 9.

<sup>4</sup> R. Demarée, *Ramesside Ostraca*, London, 2002, pl. 92 (40972); E. Naville, *Deir El-Bahari*, III, London, 1913, III, 25, pl. XXII.



effected the bulls.<sup>(1)</sup> Parallel reliefs occur in private tombs of the Old Kingdom down to the New Kingdom, but such details of this scene are absent, which make us believe that such scenes of impurity mustn't be shown within the tombs,<sup>(2)</sup> and support the suggestion that the current depiction had been achieved for intimate purpose only. Actually bulls were considered among the mightiest of animals selected as representative expression of mighty Egyptian ruler,<sup>(3)</sup> where iconographies which represent fighting bulls had been attested as early as the Old Kingdom, but whose actual status were absent.<sup>(4)</sup> In the relevant device the artist added this indispensable detail in order to transmit a concealed messages to the audiences, which could be a virtual conflict that occurred between two governors, in which one succeeded to defeat the other, alternatively it may refers to the political conflicts and troubles that took place during the rameside period.<sup>(5)</sup>

#### 4- A defecating Hyena. Fig. 4.

This painting is one of the abundant drawings date back to the rameside period, the device represents a scene albeit with a missing piece, which bears the head of the animal, the survived part shows a defecating hyena, the same way *ناصر* which the artist represented

---

P. Houlihan, *The Animal World*, fig. 11.<sup>(1)</sup>

<sup>(2)</sup> N. Davies and A. Gardiner, *The Tomb of Amenemhet*, London, 1915, pl. XL; N. Davies, *The Rock Tombs of Deir El Gebrawi*, I, London, 1902, 17, pl. XI; A. Blackman, *The Rock Tombs of Meir*, II, London, 1915, pl. XV.

<sup>(3)</sup> R. Wilkinson, *Symbol & Magic*, fig. 3.

<sup>(4)</sup> W. Smith, *A History of Egyptian Sculpture*, fig. 88, 215.

<sup>(5)</sup> R. Faulkner, *CAH*, 2, part 2, ch. XXIII, 246, 247.

the previous fighting bulls, a sign for high stimulation in the animal world, it leads us to suppose that the missed part of the chip could be occupied with another competent animal, and the picture may portray a fight between two stimulated hyenas, or maybe it fights another animal.<sup>(1)</sup> It is often repeated and common topic widely spread during the End of the ramesside period, which reflects that disorder took place during the last part of this period.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The evidence discussed above supports the view that the Ancient Egyptian Artist was aware that human being and animals shared the same actions for expressing basic defense strategies. Urinating and defecating as two Panic marked symptoms were not commonly portrayed in Egyptian Art, as they were considered sign of impurity. The substance of the relevant cases reflects how much the artist felt free – outside the predominant artistic themes - to express his own ideas.

Some sketches, might be preliminary design of future mural scenes within the tombs of the elites, who enjoyed total self-independence during these periods. The relevant physical processes reflect an extreme stress response, which give an importance to the picture and characterize a concealed message to the audiences.

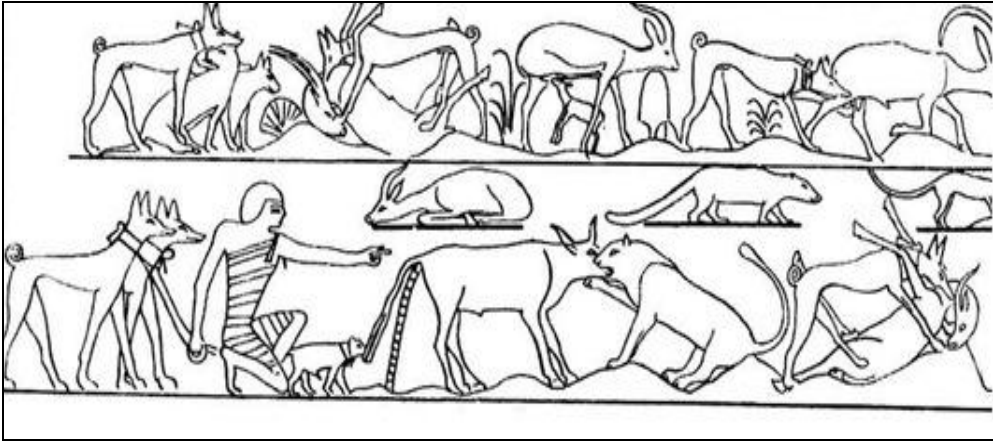
---

<sup>(1)</sup> W. Peck, *Egyptian Drawings*, fig. 79; J. D'Abbadie, *Catalogue des Ostraca figures de Deir El Médineh*, IV, le Caire, 1959, 179, 180, pl. CXII: 2824.

Defecating bull was the only exceptional device to be portrayed within the tombs of the Elites; it could demonstrate the cruel political competition between the disciples of the sun-cult pictured in the lion and the predominant authority pictured in the bull at the End of the Old Kingdom. As well as, the current gesture of the bull could be a sign of the sudden decline of the cult of Ptah which espoused the bull known since the proto-dynastic period.

The lion had always enjoyed a respectful estimation in the Egyptian art, the current device shows that it was the most important figure attributed to the mighty Egyptian ruler, responsible for defending severely the boundaries of Egypt, as well as defeating rebels. Urinating Foreigner shown in submission attitude could refer to the great Egyptian victories during the New Kingdom.

### Illustrations



#### 1- A Defecating wild bull

After, N. Davies, *The Mastaba of Ptahhetep and Akhethetep*, 1, pl.

XXI.



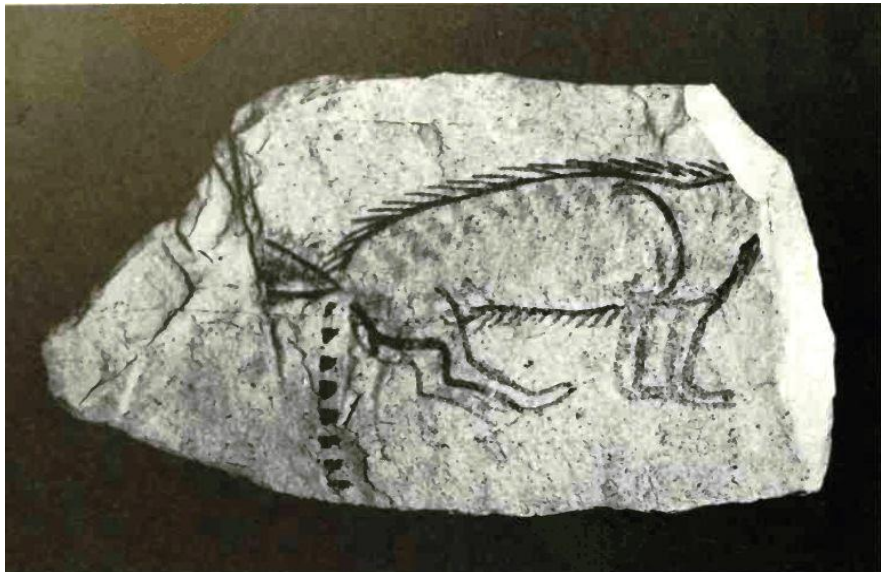
#### 2- Urinating Prisoner

J. D'Abbadie, *Catalogue des Ostraca Figures*, I, 47, pl. XXVI: 2226.



3- Wrestling bulls

W. Peck, *Egyptian Drawings*, London, 1978, fig. 79



4- Drawing of a defecating Hyena

W. Peck, *Egyptian Drawings*, London, 1978, fig. 79

## Bibliography

- C. Aldred, *Old Kingdom Art in Ancient Egypt*, London, 1949.
- J. Allen, *A New Concordance of the Pyramid Texts*, II, Brown, 2010.
- A. Blackman, *The Rock Tombs of Meir*, II, London, 1915.
- J. Černý, A Community of Workmen at Thebes in the Ramesside period, *BdE*, 1973, 99.
- K. Cooney, and J. Tyrrell, *Scarabs in Los Angeles County Museum of Art, II, USA, 2005*.
- J. D`Abbadie, *Catalogue des Ostraca figures de Deir El Médineh*, I, le Caire, 1936.
- J. D`Abbadie, *Catalogue des Ostraca figures de Deir El Médineh*, IV, le Caire, 1959.
- N. Davies, *The Mastaba of Ptahhetep and Akhethetep at Saqqareh*, I, London, 1900.
- N. Davies, *The Rock Tombs of Deir El Gebrawi*, I, London, 1902.
- N. Davies and A. Gardiner, *The Tomb of Amenemhet*, London, 1915.
- A. De Buck, The Judicial Papyrus of Turin, *JEA* 23 (1937), 152-164.
- R. Demarée, *Ramesside Ostraca*, London, 2002.
- P. Duell, *The Mastaba of Mereruka*, I, Chicago, 1938.
- R. Faulkner, Egypt from the Inception of the Nineteenth Dynasty to the Death of Ramesses III, in *CAH*, 2, part 2, ch. XXIII.
- A. Gardiner, *Ramesside Administrative Documents*, Oxford, 1948.
- G. Hart, *The Routledge Dictionary of Ancient Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*, New York, 2005.
- M. Hartwig, Painting in, D. Redford (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, III, Oxford, 2001.

- S. Hassan, *The Great Sphinx and its Secrets*, Cairo, 1953.
- P. Houlihan, *The Animal World of the Pharaohs*, Cairo, 1996.
- P. Houlihan, Felines in, D. Redford (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, I, Oxford, 2001.
- N. Kanawati, *Mereruka and King Teti the Power behind the Throne*, Cairo, 2008.
- M. Müller, Iconography and Symbolism, in M. Hartwig (ed.) *A Companion to Ancient Egyptian Art*, UK, 2015.
- E. Naville, *Deir El-Bahari*, III, London, 1913.
- W. Peck, *Egyptian Drawings*, London, 1978.
- T. Peet, *A Comparative Study of the Literature of Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia*, London, 1931.
- T. Peet, A Historical Document of Ramisside Age, *JEA* 10 (1982), 116-127.
- G. Perrot and C. Chipiez, *A History of Art in Ancient Egypt*, II, London, 1883, 351.
- G. Pier, Historical Scarab Seals from the Art Institute Collection, *AJSL* 23, No. 1 (1906).
- PM*, III.
- A. Roth, Representing the Other, in M. K. Hartwig (ed.) *A Companion to Ancient Egyptian Art*, UK, 2015.
- I. Shaw and P. Nicholson, *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, Cairo, 2002.
- W. Simpson, *The Literature of Ancient Egypt*, London, 2003.
- W. Smith, *A History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom*, 2nd ed. Oxford, 1949.

W. Smith, The Old Kingdom in Egypt and the beginning of the First intermediate period, in, *CAH*, I, part 2.

S. Smith, People in, D. Redford (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, III, Oxford, 2001.

R. Stadelman, Sphinx in, D. Redford (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, III, Oxford, 2001.

B. Trigger, Nubians, Negro black Neolithic in (ed.) *Africa in antiquity*, the Essays, Brooklyn, 1978.

R. Wilkinson, *The complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, London, 2003.

R. Wilkinson, *Symbol and Magic in Egyptian Art*, London, 1994.