

HOW MANY PORTERS?

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Abstract: Members of the Old Kingdom elite were at times represented in their tombs in carrying chairs, transported by varying numbers of porters, from two up to twenty four. More than a dozen porters seems to be unparalleled in both ancient and more recent written and visual sources, including photographs. It will be examined whether and to what extent the representations of the porters of carrying chairs, and especially their number, in the Old Kingdom private tombs represent a reality, a snap-shot of a particular moment, or convey the idea of the event, with all the elements of which the mental image consists, regardless of whether they were all present, employed or visible at the same time or not.

Introduction

The oldest representations of carrying chairs in private tombs,¹ as well as two records of the item in offering lists² from the same context, date from the 4th Dynasty, as does the only actual find of the object.³ The basic repertoire of the ways in which the carrying chair occurs further on in the Old Kingdom tomb decoration is already present at the time: Nefermaat in a carrying chair is carried by porters, Meresankh III sits in a carrying chair

which is lowered, (though not on the ground as it is the case later, but on the boat deck), and her tomb decoration shows a carrying chair in a workshop, and also among the grave goods brought by the attendants. The majority of the Old Kingdom representations of the object are from the 5th and 6th Dynasty, and some forty persons, approximately two thirds of those who had a carrying chair at their disposal in the Old Kingdom, were represented while being carried in it.⁴ The data on the blood relationships and titles of the carrying chair owners/users and the chronological distribution of the representations allow us to draw a conclusion, that the carrying chair, originally a prerogative of a king and after that of his descendants, became accessible to a limited number of elite members, not necessarily of royal descent; since the regular or temporary use of the sedan chair being at least in some cases if not always assigned by a king, it retained its value as sign of high social status.⁵ The position of the carrying chair scene in tomb decoration, and the written sources show that although the journeys of a high ranking persons in a carrying chair may have been undertaken out of mundane reasons (in order to inspect the agricultural works, building activities in the necropolis including the official's own tomb), some authors

¹ Nefermaat (PETRIE 1892, pl. XXI); HARPUR 2001, 67–68, 75, pl. 8a); Meresankh III (DUNHAM and SIMPSON 1974, figs. 5, 8).

² Neferhetepthuter (MURRAY 1905, pl. II); Rahotep (PETRIE 1892, pl. XIII; HARPUR 2001, 108, fig. 98).

³ The litter belonging to the Queen Hetepheres (REISNER and SMITH 1955, 33–34, fig. 34, Pls. 27–28).

⁴ Four owners are included in the list (Table 1) although the porters of the carrying chair were not or were poorly preserved: Neferseshemre: Sheshi, Kaemnefert, Meru: Tetiseneb and Pepiankh: Hui. The scene from the tomb of Kaemnefert (Saqqara D 23; PM III, 467 (3, n.r.); SIMPSON 1992, 15–16, fig. 14, pl. E) probably had the porters, but the lower register is not preserved. The porters from the scene of Neferseshemre: Sheshi (PM III, 512 (6 – n.r.); KANAWATI and ABDER-RAZIQ 1998, 35–6, pls. 18, 58) are not preserved, but were certainly originally represented (cf. similarly composed and placed scenes of Sehemnefer from Dahshur, Ptahhotep II (Saqqara D 64), Ptahhotep: Tjefu).

The traces indicating that Meru: Tetiseneb (PM III, 520(3)) and his sunshade bearer were a part of a carrying chair scene were detected (LLOYD *et al.* 1990, 9, pl. 7), but they were not commented on, nor was the drawing of the traces published. In the tomb of Pepiankh: Hui, in the lower left corner of the carrying chair scene (PM IV, 125 (n.r.); SCHENKEL und GOMAA 2004, 194ff., pl. 172–173, Beilage 15), in front of the bearer of sandals, the leg of one person, drawn to a larger scale than the figures behind it, is preserved, and it probably belongs to the last porter of the carrying chair or eventually to the supervisor. When it was not clear whether a carrying chair was carried or placed on the ground, the scene was not included in the analysis: e. g. the lower part of the scene representing Metjetji sitting under the canopy is not preserved, and it is not certain whether it was intended to show the owner and the chair when carried or not (KAPLONY 1976, 21–22).

⁵ RÖSSLER-KÖHLER 1984, 334.

recognize in it an underlying “mortuary metaphor” but most of those who analysed the scene agree that the emphasis on the status⁶ was not only present, but had been of primary importance when representing the journey. The representations of the entourage, consisting of members of the family and household, personal attendants, pets and their keepers, sunshade carriers etc., are often part of the scene and they contributed to the image of social and economic status and power, especially when the size of the entourage was considerable. The number of porters of the carrying chair can also considerably vary from scene to scene, fluctuating from two to over twenty. Observing that the number of porters often exceeds the number necessary to carry the palanquin and the person in it, A.M. Roth explained that the intention may be to display the economic power, a prerequisite to engage so many carriers.⁷ This explanation of the reasons to represent high numbers of porters fully accepted, the question remains as to whether the simultaneous use of numerous porters is suitable for a reasonably fast journey in daily life,⁸ i.e. does a scene with numerous porters represent a reality, a snap-shot of a particular moment, or it primarily conveys the idea of the event, with all the elements the mental image of it consists of included (regardless of whether they were all present, employed or visible at the same time or not), whereby the details which particularly contribute to the image of power were stressed or exaggerated. The iconographic and written data on the porters of carrying chairs will be examined focusing on the Old Kingdom scenes in the private tombs, and as the practical issues of using human power for carrying chairs are not exclusively Egyptian, some non-Egyptian ancient and more recent written and visual sources will be taken into account. Since the means of transport of a culture correlate with the physical context of their usage, few remarks on roads and travel by land will be made too.

⁶ Funerary interpretation: ALTENMÜLLER 1984–1985; ROTH 2006, 248. Representation of status: GOEDICKE 1959, 9; ROTH 2006, 247–248; VAN WALSEM 2006, 301–303 (including the critique of the funerary interpretation).

⁷ ROTH 2006, 248.

⁸ There is no indication that any of the Old Kingdom carrying chair scenes were meant to represent a participation of the elite member in a religious festival.

⁹ For the short discussion of the issue, see DARNELL and DARNELL 2002, 1–2.

¹⁰ GRAEFF 2004, 193, n. 1.

¹¹ On the possible royal ceremonial visits – in a carrying chair – to the pyramid building sites, and similar ones by a vizier: ROTH 1994, 238.

A note on land travel and roads in the Nile Valley

Though the boats are almost an epitome of the transportation in ancient Egypt, some routes, within the Nile Valley and beyond it, were always to be made by land.⁹ For the officials of the higher class the boats were probably the primary choice for the travel on longer distances,¹⁰ but their private interests and official duties could have called for occasional,¹¹ and presumably also regular, if not daily, shorter journeys over the land. Transportation in a carrying chair meant a journey with reasonable comfort and little effort for those officials who had it at their disposal. If the visits to the building site of an official’s own tomb and inspection of agricultural activities represented by the carrying chair scenes correspond to the activities on this world and not exclusively to his needs in the After-life, the question of the distances to be travelled arises.¹² Unfortunately, there are no data informing us on the stretches between the home and the estates of an official. As for the visits to the tomb, the area of Memphis and its necropolises, from Dahshur to Giza, wherefrom the majority of the Old Kingdom scenes come, stretches along the Nile for approximately 25 kilometres.¹³

A number of ancient Egyptian roads leading to or in the area of the oases, mines, quarries and building sites has been identified and the archaeology of desert roads became a dynamic field of research.¹⁴ During the last decade, new studies on the roads and transport over land in ancient Egypt included the data on the existence of road network within the Nile Valley before the Roman period, and the reasons for its use for military, economic and private needs,¹⁵ as well as the typology of the roads and paths, and the means of the transport.¹⁶ The two main roads running from north to the south along the edge of cultivated land were presumably connected by smaller roads with settle-

¹² There are no iconographic and visual data on the use of a carrying chair for other travel destinations, and therefore, the question remains open whether or not high officials travelled on foot over the longer distances, eg. to the quarries, mines or oases, as the lower ranking members of the expeditions certainly did.

¹³ BAINES and MÁLEK 2000, map on pp. 166–167 (10km according to JEFFREYS 1999, 588).

¹⁴ RIEMER and FÖRSTER 2013; DARNELL and DARNELL 2002; GRAEFF 2004; ASTON *et al.* 2000, 18–20.

¹⁵ GRAEFF 2004, 185, 191–193.

¹⁶ KÖPP 2009a, 31–37; KÖPP 2009b, 71–77.

ments within the area of cultivated (and flooded) land. The roads in the Nile Valley itself are less known, especially those from the earlier periods. The tops of the embankments and dikes were suitable for such roads and paths over most of the year, some possibly always, and they are recognized in the sign N 31,¹⁷ and could have been as well used to access the fields from the settlements. The tracing of the roads and paths in the Valley is largely impeded by problems of identification:¹⁸ on the one hand, some of them have been continuously used up to the present time and the solid proofs of their age are meagre or virtually non-existent; on the other hand, the majority was obliterated or stays hidden below the silt deposits there where they crossed the arable land, etc. As for the latter, it is assumed, that due to reasons such as the annual flooding of the Nile, the shifting of its river bed, or even the minor changes in size and place of irrigation channels and basins, some paths and roads disappeared or were abandoned and new trails were made.

The main and desert roads could have considerable width.¹⁹ The passage in the *Eloquent Peasant* illustrates how narrow some of the paths can be: on one side of the path there was water, on the other a field of barley, and a loin-cloth was sufficient to cover the path and block the way.²⁰ It can

be presumed, that a carrying chair of an official had to be suitable for the use on both wide roads and narrow paths.²¹

The distances to be travelled by foot must have also varied over the seasons, increasing with the receding water level; during the dry season, for many distances the travel by water was inconvenient or impossible. Therefore, beside the economic reasons for the assumption that transport of the troops or of the crop through some parts of the land was not exclusively conducted by ships,²² the seasonal differences in depth of water and with it in the usability of channels and boats should be taken into account, as they may have affected the private and administrative journeys, which were carried out over the whole year.

Travelling in a carrying chair

It is likely that during the Old and Middle Kingdom the majority of Egyptian population, including the elite, had to go on foot in order to cover the distances over land.²³ The iconographic and written records show that only a small fraction of the elite owned carrying chairs or had access to them. Most of the ancient Egyptian scenes with carrying chair belong to the members of the Old Kingdom elite –sixty-five individuals, predominantly male,

¹⁷ HELCK 1986, 1163; GARDINER 1976, 489.

¹⁸ On the subject, including the difficulties of identifying the roads, paths and similar: KÖPP 2009a, 31; GRAEFF 2004, 3, n. 4; ASTON *et al.* 2000, 18; PARTRIDGE 1996, 80.

¹⁹ The width was closely related with the function of the roads. The broadest roads were made for transport of heavy stones (GRAEFF 2004, 49, 119–120), eg. the 10m wide Ramesside road on the route Alexandria – Abousir was probably used for military needs (GRAEFF 2004, 18–19, 26); Dahshur desert road, ca 25 m wide, in Dynasty 25–26, was possibly used for transport of stone already during the Old Kingdom (GRAEFF 2004, 49–50), whereas 4m, the width of Fayum road, would represent the average width of ancient Egyptian desert roads (GRAEFF 2004, 50, n. 2, 95); the road leading into the Valley of the Kings, intended for the funerary processions, was 4–6m wide (GRAEFF 2004, 91). On the subject also: KÖPP 2009a, 32–36.

²⁰ GARDINER 1923, 7–8; PARKINSON 1997, 59.

²¹ H. Köpp considers the paths unsuitable for the carrying chairs, suggesting that a 2 m wide walking surface is necessary for a carrying chair and its porters; except for the dimensions of the litter of Hetephes, other parameters used for the calculation are not named (KÖPP 2009b, 71–73). Different calculations are also plausible: if the width of the same litter (53 cm: REISNER and SMITH 1955, fig. 34) with ca 47 cm for average male shoulder width are

taken as a starting point, the necessary path width would be 1.50 m (when a row of porters walk on each side of the carrying chair, holding the poles in hands at the height of their hips) or even less (if the poles rested on their shoulders, probably ca 1.30 m); if the porters walked in one row between the poles, a path wide enough for one person to walk on it, i.e. for a pedestrian would be suitable for the carrying chair too (especially in open spaces, in which there are no objects that demand to manoeuvre it because of the length).

²² GRAEFF 2004, 198–199.

²³ There is no iconographic evidence of donkeys being ridden by the Egyptians during the Old Kingdom (BRUNNER-TRAUT 1977, 28; PARTRIDGE 1996, 97–98). It was recently suggested that saddled donkeys were represented in the Old Kingdom tombs – those of Kahief, Neferiretenef and Methethi (KÖPP–JUNK 2013, 7), but it is probable that the objects are to be identified as empty, rolled sacks fastened to the donkeys' backs to be brought to the field during the harvest, and which were later filled and carried away by donkeys, as the well preserved details (especially the visible “ears” of the rolled sack) in the scene in tomb of Neferiretenef show (VAN DE WALLE 1978, pl. 12; on the “couffin classique”, and on an example of opened empty sack: VANDIER 1978, 129, 132).

were shown in a carrying chair, being carried or lowered to the ground, or the item was being brought empty, and in some instances brought with other grave goods.²⁴ Five Old Kingdom women are attested as owners of carrying chairs,²⁵ but only one of them, Watetkhether, king's daughter and the wife of Mereruka, is represented being carried in her litter.²⁶ The only find of a carrying chair dates also from the period and belonged to the Queen Hetepheres, mother of Khufu.²⁷ Eight private owners of such human-powered transport vehicle, all male, are dated to the Middle Kingdom,²⁸ and after that there are no representations of carrying chairs owned by the private persons, however high their status was. A relatively small number of scenes showing a king in a carrying chair is preserved, ranging from the Old Kingdom to the Ptolemaic Period.²⁹

The decoration of private tombs in the Old Kingdom had multiple functions to fulfil, and some individual scenes have likewise multiple meanings. Such a scene is the one showing a tomb owner in a carrying chair.³⁰ Depending on the position of the scene in the decoration of a tomb, its orientation and inscriptions, as well as on the content of the scenes placed close to it, the carry-

ing chair scene may be seen as closely connected to funerary activities like dragging the statues and slaughtering the cattle are, or as an inspection of agricultural activities or of the work on the official's own tomb. Whether the funerary or mundane meaning or their interconnection is perceived as crucial for the theme, all the examples of the scenes have one thing in common: they are a statement on the high status of the person represented.³¹ What is more, the self-presentation of the Old Kingdom elite members in the decoration of their tombs found its best visual expression in these scenes. The tomb owner, or in some cases his close relative,³² was shown sitting in the sedan chair, sometimes as if he is sitting on it, in order to avoid overlapping of his body with armrest.³³ The litter is usually being transported by means of human power, or, in few cases, fastened on the back of pair of donkeys.³⁴ The carrying chair is more often than not equipped with a canopy, and the additional protection from sun is occasionally provided by sunshades held by men running by the sides of the carrying chair. The carrying poles were attached on the underside of the seat/canopy, and though in some cases the carriers hold them at the height of their hips, they generally place the

²⁴ Empty carrying chairs were brought with other grave goods: Seshathetep – JUNKER 1934, fig. 31; Ti – ÉPRON and DAUMAS 1939, pls. 16, 18. The number of individuals is slightly higher, if the carrying chairs named in the offering lists (Neferhetepthuter – MURRAY 1905, Pl. 1; Rahotep – PETRIE 1892, pl. 13; Senenu – BROVARSKI 1996, 128, 134; Seshemnefer I – KANAWATI 2001, pls. 41, 43), those mentioned in the autobiographies (see below), as well as those represented in workshops or in magazines, together with other tomb goods are taken into account. Workshops: Meresankh III – DUNHAM and SIMPSON 1974, fig. 5; Kaemrehu – BORCHARDT 1937, pl. 48; Ibi – DAVIES 1902a, pl. 14; Djaw – DAVIES 1902b, pl. 10; Tepemankh – London UC14309; possibly also Kaihep: Tjeti iqer – KANAWATI 1980, fig. 9. Magazines: Sekhentiu and Neferseshemptah, a carrying chair with a canopy – MOUSSA and JUNGE 1975, Frontispiece, pl. 1; Kaiemankh – KANAWATI 2001, pl. 35. Some portable chairs (see BROVARSKI 1996, 144–146, fig. 9) may have been used as carrying chairs (ÉPRON and DAUMAS 1939, pls. 16, 18; MOUSSA and JUNGE 1975, Frontispiece, pl. 1; BORCHARDT 1937, pl. 48; MOUSSA and ALTENMÜLLER 1977, pl. 63) if attached to the poles (for the representations of the way the poles were attached, s. DUELL 1938, pl. 158; ÉPRON and DAUMAS 1939, pls. 16). Owner sitting in a carrying chair lowered on the ground: Perneb (PM III, 497), Metjetji (PM III, 647), Idu (SIMPSON 1976, pl. 25a, fig. 38), Pepiankh Her-ib (PM IV, 255.15), Pepiankh/Iniankh (SCHENKEL and GOMAA 2004, 113–114, pls. 56–57); probably

also Akhetmehu, sitting *on* a chair lowered on the ground (G2375, GIZA ARCHIVES, photo ID number A5797_NS) – cf. VASILJEVIĆ 2012, 398ff., on the identification of the seat as a carrying chair. Empty chair on the ground, prepared for the owner standing nearby: Werirniptah (PM III, 699.2)

²⁵ On the subject of female owners of carrying chairs: VASILJEVIĆ 2012.

²⁶ KANAWATI and ABDER-RAZIQ 2008, pls. 47–49, 69.

²⁷ REISNER and SMITH 1955, 33–34, fig. 34, pls. 27–28.

²⁸ Beside the five Middle Kingdom carrying chair owners mentioned in Table 1 (end), two persons are shown in a chair placed on the ground: Karenen (model: QUIBELL 1908, 74–75, pl. 16), and Anonymous (relief: ARNOLD 2008, 87, pl. 167a). A fragment of a relief showing a carrying chair is found in the tomb of Wahka II (STECKEWEH 1936, pl. 12b).

²⁹ VANDIER 1964, 354–363; see also n. 38 below.

³⁰ VANDIER 1964, 328–363; BROVARSKI 1996, 134–135, n. 104; ROTH 1994; ROTH 2006; VASILJEVIĆ 1995, 56–63; VASILJEVIĆ 2012.

³¹ ALTENMÜLLER 1984–85, 15–30; ROTH 2006, 247–248, 253.

³² In the tomb of Iymery (LG 16, G 6020) it is his father, Shepseskafankh, who is sitting in a carrying chair (WEEKS 1994, 38–9, fig. 32, pl. 16).

³³ VASILJEVIĆ 2012, 401–402.

³⁴ A kind of litter strapped to the donkey's back, with a tomb owner squatting in it: HASSAN 1944, fig. 104; MOUSSA und ALTENMÜLLER 1977, Tf. 42, 43; MARTIN 1979, pl. 33 (90).

poles on their shoulders, thus lifting the traveller above their heads. The scene rarely consists only of the carrying chair, its owner and the bearers; usually, the subordinates, personal attendants, and pets with their keepers accompany the official too. The overall number of the members of such an entourage could mount to several dozens of persons (fig. 1).



Fig 1 Kagemni in his carrying chair (after Wreszinski, Atlas III, Taf. 9)

At least in some cases, the difference in size of the entourage can be explained by the status and/or wealth³⁵ of the official, but the affordable space in the tomb decoration can also play a role.³⁶ Just as the number of the other members of the entourage varies, the number of men carrying the palanquin does too. The higher numbers of bearers

enhance the impression of the official's high status already created by the carrying chair itself. The size of a carrying chair, including a canopy, seems to be of little influence on the number of represented bearers – there can be almost any number of them ranging from twenty-four to six, even four; the number of porters for a carrying chair without a canopy ranges from two to twelve (see Table 2).³⁷ If the number of represented porters is taken on the face value, the varying number is perplexing. The questions arise: does the different number of porters reflect different weight to be carried, how many porters were sufficient to carry a palanquin and its occupant, and to what extent this segment of the representations, and with it the scene itself, corresponded to the reality? The manner the porters and the carrying chair were shown in the scenes from the private tombs will be analysed, and some aspects of the royal representations will be commented on too. Both visual and written data will be taken into account, and they will be reconsidered in the light of some of the abundant non-Egyptian data of the later date on the way of transportation.

The number of porters of private carrying chairs – iconographic data

The weight to be carried is the one of the chair itself and its occupant. Usually only one person sits in the chair, the only Old Kingdom solid exceptions are from the tomb of Mereruka.³⁸ Watetkhether is sitting with her son Meryteti at

³⁵ ROTH 2006, 248: economic power.

³⁶ It is especially noticeable with scenes decorating the false doors: in the tombs of Seshemnefer from Dahshur, and the Saqqara tombs of Ptahhotep II: Tefi, Ptahhotep: Tefu and Neferseshemre: Sheshi, the entourage is reduced to porters. Somewhat different is the case of Seneb: the whole decoration of the tomb is concentrated in the offering niche, and the scene is “condensed”, so that beside the porters a sunshade bearer and a personal attendant are shown too.

³⁷ The main bibliographic data for the scenes discussed are part of the Table 1.

³⁸ Room B5 (Watetkhether with her son), and Room C1 (Meryteti with his wife?): KANAWATI and ABDER-RAZIQ 2008, pls. 47–49, 69; KANAWATI and ABDER-RAZIQ 2004, 27f., pls. 10, 48; NIMS 1938, 642, n. 25. Although two persons are represented standing within the canopy of Pepi-ankh Heny-kem who is sitting under it (BLACKMAN and APTED 1953: Pl. 31), they were actually attendants striding at the sides of the palanquin. A.M. Roth considered the

possibility that the wife or a child of Kaemnofret were shown with him inside the canopy (ROTH 2006, 250). The Middle Kingdom model shows Karenen and his wife sitting in the carrying chair placed on the ground (QUIBELL 1908, 74f, pl. 16; SMITH 1946, 103), but it is uncertain whether the intention was to clearly connect the wife with her husband and distinguish her from the musicians surrounding them or to show that they were also carried together.

The representations belonging to the royal and ritual sphere are out of the scope of the paper, but some examples with more than one figure in a carrying chair will be mentioned: The only example of a king and a queen in one carrying chair is the one of Akhenaten and Nefertiti (VANDIER 1964, 359f., fig. 181). The mummy-form figures sitting in a litter with an arched roof occur in the context of Heb-Sed, and among those dating from the formative period of the state and from the Old Kingdom at least some may have represented statues, not living beings (KAISER 1983, 273–274, 289–290). In some cases, it seems that two

Table 1: Number of porters: first number – number of the porters in front of the palanquin; when one number – there is a continuous row of bearers; when the number is multiplied, the bearers are represented as a double row; square brackets – unknown whether there was continuous row or two groups of porters; if not all porters of a group are preserved, the number of the preserved ones with an added „x“ is in brackets.

Old Kingdom												
Tomb owner	Cemetery / tomb number	Reference	Date	P - number of porters			Details: canopy (C); empty chair (E); occupant sitting low (ls) or high (hs), chair carried on shoulders (s) or hands (h)			Porters' dress:		
				P	F	C/E	ls	hs	s	h	B	O
1	Nefermaat	PM IV, 93; HARPUR 2001, 67–8, 186–7, fig. 77, pl. 8a.	IV.IE-M	x+3				hs		h		O?
2	Iymery	PM III, 171(4); WEEKS 1994, 38–9, fig. 32, pl. 16. <i>Shepseskafankh, father of Iymery, in palanquin</i>	V.6	3+3	F/t/L	C	ls		s		B	
3	Ptahshepses	a) PM III, 341(1); VERNER 1986, 98–104, photos 90–7, pls. 53–55. b) VACHALA 2004, 86 [E296 (1974)].	V.6–7	a) 8+9 b) [1+x]	F/t/L	C	ls		s		a) B b) B	
4	Niankhhnum and Khnumhotep	PM III, 643(18); MOUSSA and ALTENMÜLLER 1977, 129–30, Taf. 60. <i>Niankhhnum in palanquin</i>	V.6L-7	3+3	F/t	C	ls		s		B	
5	Itisen	PM III, 252(2).	V.6–8?	2+3		C	ls		s		B? or	O?
6	Seshemnefer	PM III, 891.	V.6–9?	3 × 2		C		hs	s		O	
7	Ti	PM III, 470 (6–7).	V.7–8E	5+5		C	ls		s		B	
8	Kaemnefert	PM III, 467 (3 n.r.) SIMPSON 1992, 15–16, fig. 14, pl. E.	V.7–9E	np		C			(s)		np	
9	Rashepses	PM III, 496 (13) unpublished	V.8M	unpublished								
10	Senedjemib : Inti	a) PM III 85 (3); BROVARSKI 2001, 46–7, pl. 25a, fig. 40 b) PM III n.r.; BROVARSKI 2001, 6, pl. 30, fig. 51	V.8M-L	a) 6+7 b) 4+4 (3+x)+5		a) C b) np		hs	s		a) B? or	O?
11	Neferkhuwi	PM III, n.r.; ROTH 1995, 145–6, pl. 191.	V.8–9		F/t	C	ls		s		B	
12	Nimaetre	PM III, 283(2)	V.9	6+6 or (6×2)+(6×2)? 7+7		C	ls		s		B	
13	Ankhamare	PM III, 206(6); SIMPSON 1979, 494–5, fig. 3.	V.9			C	ls		s		B	

Old Kingdom													
	Tomb owner	Cemetery / tomb number	Reference	Date	P - number of porters				Details: canopy (C); empty chair (E); occupant sitting low (ls) or high (hs), chair carried on shoulders (s) or hands (h)				Porters' dress: B – Belt-sash O – ordinary kilt np – not preserved W – women's dress
					P	F	C/E	ls	hs	s	h	C	
33	Meryteti : Meri	Saqqara	a) PM III, 536(115); KANAWATI and ABDER-RAZIQ 2004, 26–7, pls. 7 [a, b], 47. b) PM III, 536(116–117) KANAWATI and ABDER-RAZIQ 2004, 27–8, pls. 10, 48.	VI.2M-L	a) 12×2 b) (3×2)+(3×2)			a) C b) np	ls		s		a) B b) O
34	Ibi	Deir el-Gebrawi (8)	PM IV, 244 (5–6)	VI.4E	[(x+1)]		C						np
35	Meryrenefer : Qar	Giza G 7101	PM III, 185(8); SIMPSON 1976, 8, pl. xi [b], fig. 27.	VI.4	4+6		C	ls			s		unclear
36	Ipi	Saqqara	PM III, 671(3)	VI.4?	7	F/t	C		hs		s		B
37	Djau	Deir el-Gebrawi (12)	PM IV, 245(9)	VI.4L	(1×2)+(1×2)		C	ls			s		B
38	Pepyankh : Henykem	Meir A 2	PM IV, 247, 249, n.r.; BLACKMAN and APTED 1953, 39–40, pls. xxxi, lix.	VI.4–5	6×2	F/t*			hs		s		B
39	Kahep : Tjet-iqer	El Hawawish H26	PM V, 19; KANAWATI 1980, 23–4, pl. 9 [left], fig. 13.	VI.5–6	x+5(?)		C				s		B
40	Shepsipumin : Khenni	El Hawawish H24	PM V, n.r.; KANAWATI 1981, 25–6, pls. 2, 6 [b], figs. 21–2.	VI.6	4+4	F/t*	C		hs		s		B
41	Remni	Saqqara	PM III n.r.; KANAWATI 2009, pls. 23, 25, 48.		(3×2)+(3×2)						s		O
42	Pepiankh: Hui	Kom al Ahmar / Sharuna V23	PM IV, 125 (n.r); SCHENKEL und GOMAA 2004, 194ff., P.1172–173, Beilage 15	Dyn VI	1(?)×x		C						?
Middle Kingdom													
1	Kheti	Thebes TT 311	PM I.1, 386–387; GRAJETZKI 2009, fig. 21g.	Dynasty XI	?		C	ls?					
2	Khnumhotep	Beni Hasan	PM IV, 145(6)	Dynasty XII	2+2				hs?		s		O
3	Djehutihotep	Bersheh	PM IV 180	Dynasty XII	a) 2+2 b) 2+2		a) E b) E				s		O
4	NN	Sedment	Manchester Museum 6596; TOOLEY 1995, fig. 59.		1+1		(E)				s		
5	Ny-anekh-Pepi, usurper (originally Itjefy, late OK)	Hierakonpolis	PM V, 197(2); On ownership & dating, DAVIES 1999, 18; DAVIES 2001, 117.	SIP / Dynasty XII	4+4						s		B? or O?

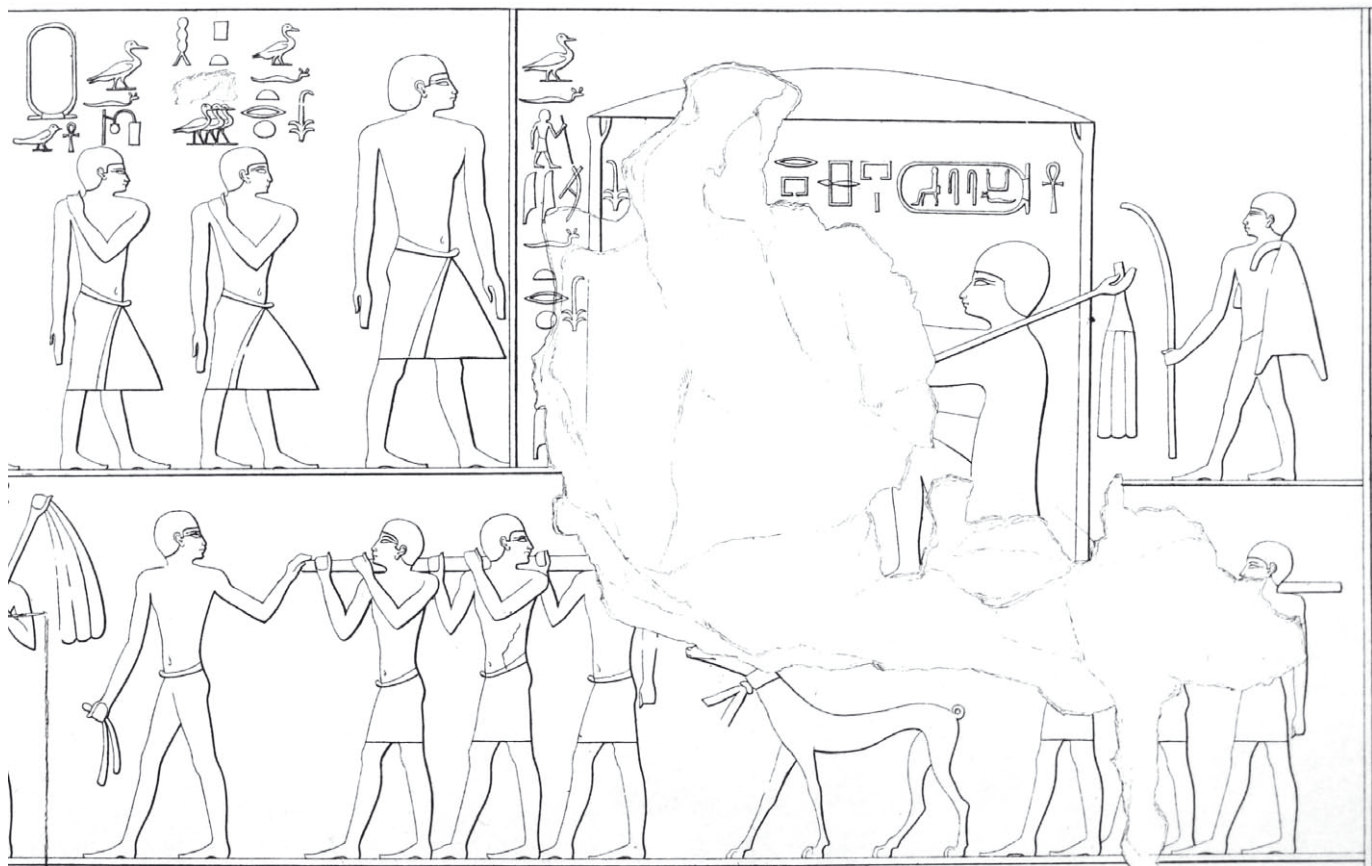


Fig. 2 Shepseskhafrankh in a carrying chair, from the tomb of Iymery, G 6020 /LG 16 (after LD. , II. 50 [a])

her feet, but his hair style, the bird he is holding and the lack of the bureaucratic titles in the inscription identifying him show that he is represented as a child. The person accompanying Meryteti in his sedan chair is not identifiable, and therefore its potential weight is unknown.

The number of porters for an occupied carrying chair varies from two (Seneb) to twenty (Kagemni, Khnumenti) or even twenty four (Meryteti, perhaps Nimaatre too). There is an impression, that from the beginning of the Sixth Dynasty, there is a tendency to represent more

often more than ten bearers, whereas before that fewer than ten and ten are common. Most of the carrying chairs have a canopy, and the design of its roof varies from simple curved or seldom flat form mounted on tent poles, to an elaborate woodwork forming the sides of the roof, in some cases resting on the tent poles, in other enclosing the upper part of the poles (fig. 2). Though a canopy and especially the woodwork of the roof must have had increased the weight of the carrying chair,³⁹ they do not seem to correlate with the number of bearers (Table 2). Thus, the palanquin of Meryteti,

or three figures were placed in the same carrying chair. Thus, in the Sun-Temple of Niuserre, one incomplete and one damaged representation of the chair being carried can be recognized as one chair with several figures in it – KEES 1928, 35, Bl. 14 (246); BISSING und KEES 1923, 3, Bl. 3 (7b). Two better-preserved representations from the same temple show that it indeed may be the case: the carrying chairs are without porters, set on the ground (?), each of the figures is represented sitting under their own vaulted roof, whereas the lower, box-like part looks like as if one carrying chair is meant (BISSING und KEES 1923, 7, Bl. 18 (44d), 21 (50a). As for the earlier examples, the figurine from Tell el Farkha, dated to Dynasty 0/early First dynasty, represents two persons, identified as a woman and child, in a litter (CIAŁOWICZ 2011, 57–59, fig. 6.5; CIAŁOWICZ 2009, 8, pl.

VI). On the obverse of the palette fragment from San Antonio, in front of the male figure shown seated within a carrying chair with an arched roof; the figure in front of it, identified as a female, may be sitting on the ground (SCOTT 2007, 344ff., fig. 1) but as the short feet of the carrying chair are under the line she is sitting on, this may have been the open part of the carrying chair. Two figures, each in its own litter (without a roof) and set beside each other, are represented on the Scorpion's macehead (QUIBELL 1900, pl. 25; EMERY 1984, fig. 3) and on the wooden label of Djer, from the tomb S 3035, attributed to Hemaka (EMERY 1984, 59, fig. 21; for the more recent discussion on the ownership of the tomb: MORRIS 2007, 182–183, 186–188).

³⁹ VANDIER 1964, 343.

Table 2. Overview of the number of porters in carrying-chair scenes. (? – indicates tentative number of porters; cursive – alternative possibilities; capital X stands for the porters carrying a chair with a canopy)

Old Kingdom																	
		2	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	12	13	14	15	16	17	20	24
1	OK 1				x?												
2	OK 2				X												
3	OK 3a														X		
4	OK 4				X												
5	OK 5			X													
6	OK 6				X												
7	OK 7								X								
8	OK 10 a										X						
9	OK 10 b						x										
10	OK 11								X?								
11	OK 12									X							<i>or X</i>
12	OK 13											X					
13	OK 14	x															
14	OK 15		x														
15	OK 16		x														
16	OK 17															X	
17	OK 19								X								
18	OK 20															X	
19	OK 21													x			
20	OK 22								X?								
21	OK 23									X							
22	OK 24							X									
23	OK 25												X				
24	OK 26						X										
25	OK 27a											X					
26	OK 27c									x							
27	OK 28a		x														
28	OK 28b		x														
29	OK 30				X		<i>or X</i>										
30	OK 31									X+							
31	OK 33a																X
32	OK 33b									x							
33	OK 35								X								
34	OK 36					X											
35	OK 37		X														
36	OK 38									x							
37	OK 39								X?								
38	OK 40						X										
39	OK 41									x/X							
Middle Kingdom																	
1	MK 2		x														
2	MK 3a		x														
3	MK 3b		x														
4	MK 4	x															
5	MK 5						x										

furnished with an elaborate woodwork canopy, is carried by twenty four bearers, the one of Pepi-ankh Heny-kem by twelve bearers; Ipi and Shep-sipumin: Kheni needed eight and seven men respectively to carry them,⁴⁰ whereas Djau had

merely four porters for the similar task. And the litter in which Watetkhether with her son were sitting was carried by just four female attendants.

An occupied carrying chair is usually represented on the shoulders of bearers. There are four

⁴⁰ Kahep: Tjeti iqer probably had ten bearers.

exceptions, in two Old Kingdom tombs, showing the bearers that hold the poles at the height of their hips. The one belonging to Nefermaat is at the same time the earliest example of a private carrying chair. Other three are from the family tomb of Mereruka, representing, Mereruka, Watetkhet, and Meryteti (scene OK 33b) respectively. Only one carrying chair out of these four, the Meryteti's, may have had a canopy.⁴¹ The only attested further example of the occupied chair without a canopy is the one of Seneb, but it is carried on the shoulders of the bearers.

The representations of the porters of carrying chairs are attested in the decoration of two Middle Kingdom private tombs, and one model was found too. None of these has a canopy, and the poles are attached at mid-height of the chair, and carried on the shoulders. Khnumhotep from Beni Hasan (BH 3) sits in a lavishly decorated box-like litter, carried by four men.⁴² In two scenes from the tomb of Djehutihotep in Bersheh, four porters carry an empty chair.⁴³ The model from Sedment shows two porters with an empty chair suspended from one carrying pole resting on their shoulders.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, there are no data on the number of porters assigned to carry the chairs equipped with canopies, documented in the tombs of Khety (Thebes) and Djehutyhotep (Bersheh).⁴⁵

The Old Kingdom porters are represented as A1) continuous single row; A2) continuous double row; B1) two groups, each in a single row, usually one in front of the palanquin, the other behind it;

B2) as B1, but shown as a double row. When shown as two groups, the number of porters in both groups is often the same; when one group is larger, it is usually the one behind the chair (exception: Hetepnptah G2430; Niakuisesi, Saqqara).⁴⁶ The space between the groups, under the carrying chair itself, is sometimes left empty, but more often it is used for representation of other members of the retinue. Because of the reduced height of the space and the proximity to the palanquin owner, these are often the pets with their keepers who are frequently dwarfs, or text of the „Sänftenlied“.⁴⁷

Hermann Junker had suggested that the porters holding the carrying poles in their hands were standing between the poles, whereas each of the poles had its own row of the porters when carried on the shoulders.⁴⁸ The assumption H. Junker made on the position of porters relative to the poles finds support in the etchings and photos representing the same means transportation in more recent past, from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, although they also document some cases of a single row of porters striding between the poles which rest on their shoulders.⁴⁹

The number of porters was commented on by several authors. Heidi Köpp⁵⁰ objected that the number of four, moreover female, bearers of Watetkhet is surprisingly low, given the supposed weight of the woman and her son. Commenting on Washptah's autobiography, E. Brovarski observed that the number of ten bearers would be too high to

⁴¹ It is not clear whether a pole of a canopy or a perpendicular slat of the footrest frame is represented in front of Meryteti's feet.

⁴² NEWBERRY 1893, pl. 29.

⁴³ NEWBERRY 1894, 17, 38, pls. 13, 29.

⁴⁴ PETRIE and BRUNTON 1924, pl. 17.4. The carrying chair in the other model, from Saqqara and belonging to Karenen, was shown placed on the ground, without porters: QUIBELL 1908, pl. 16.

⁴⁵ Relief fragments from TT 311 show the tomb owner, Khety, the treasurer of Montuhotep II, under the elaborately made canopy of a carrying chair (Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession nos 23.3.49, 26.3.354d, 23.3.26; WINLOCK 1923, fig. 8; GRAJETZKI 2009, fig. 21g). It is not certain if the chair was carried or placed on the ground – to my knowledge no persons who could be porters are identified on the relief fragments. The third carrying chair in the tomb of Djehutyhotep, was placed under the canopy on the boat; only traces of the figure of Djehutyhotep, holding a fly-whisk in his hand, remained: P.E. NEWBERRY 1894, 27, 30, pl. 18.

⁴⁶ Beside the scene showing Senedjemib Inti in his carrying chair (cf. n. 52), the difference in numbers is attested in the scenes of Ptahshepses (VERNER 1986, 98–104, photos 90–97, pls. 53–55), Itisen (HASSAN 1944, 266–267, figs. 122–123), Hetepnptah (ALTENMÜLLER 1981, 15–16, fig. 2), Niakuisesi (KANAWATI and ABDER-RAZIQ, 2000, 44, pls. 24, 25 [a], 55), and Merinefer: Qar (SIMPSON 1976, 8, pl. xi [b], fig. 27).

⁴⁷ Old Kingdom-pets with keepers: Iymeri, Niankhkhnum, Ti, Senedjemib : Inti, Neferkhuwi, Ankhmare, Hetepnptah, Seshemnefer-tjeti : Tjeti, Niakuisesi, Mereruka, Shepsipumin : Kheni. Various, including personal attendants: Nimaetre, Seneb, Kagemni, Sabu: Ibebi, Kahep : Tjeti iqr(?); „Sänftenlied“: Djau. Middle Kingdom-dog under the carrying chair: Djehutihotep. On the funerary meaning of the ‘palanquin song’/‘Sänftenlied’: ALTENMÜLLER 1984–85; *contra*: VAN WALSEM 2006, 302–303.

⁴⁸ JUNKER 1953, 253.

⁴⁹ S. below.

⁵⁰ KÖPP 2008, 35.

space them out along the poles of the carrying chair of the type Hetepheres had, and proposes that the word *ḥwd.t* may be used for a chair furnished with a canopy with wooden decorated parts,⁵¹ i.e. for a heavier chair which requires higher number of porters, up to twenty-four.

The opinion that the number of the porters should have been higher than represented, occasionally led to a generalization, that a single row of the porters had to be understood as a double row, even though there is no indication for it in the drawing itself.⁵²

The lowest number of bearers carrying an occupied sedan chair is two, and there is only one such example, explainable by the small stature of the occupant, the dwarf Seneb. The complete sets of four bearers are preserved in four scenes, those representing Ptahhotep: Tjefi, Ptahhotep: Tjefu, Watetkhether: Seshseshet, and Djau. Whereas the number of the female bearers of Watetkhether, basing on the find of Hetepheres's carrying chair, may be seen as realistic, it could be objected that with the other three scenes the chosen scale of representation and limited available space, dictated the number of elements to be used in the scene. But, if iconographic reasons could cause the lower number of bearers, it could be the other way around too: they can be used to represent a higher numbers of bearers than were really used at a particular moment.

The only argument supporting the view that the four female porters of Watetkhehther carry two grown-ups is the kilt Meryteti is wearing. But Meryteti holds a bird, and has a side-lock as chil-

dren often do. In other scenes in Watetkhether's rooms, he is naked, i.e. he is undoubtedly a child, and in the father's part of the tomb he is again represented with the same signs, but in a kilt.⁵³ The representation of Watetkhether and her son is clearly based on Egyptian principles of art – the scale of representation of the occupants of the chair is the scale of importance (*Bedeutungsmaßstab*)⁵⁴ and the ambiguous representation of Meryteti's age may be understood in that fashion too – the fact of his being a son, i.e. child of Watetkhether is stressed here.

Who were the porters and their supervisors?

More often than not, the bearers of the carrying chair are dressed in a garment consisting of a sash bound around the waist and several loose strips hanging from it, and covering, at least partly, the genitals (figs. 2, 3). This simple garment is worn by king's Userkaf porters, but also by workers of various kinds,⁵⁵ particularly those having to do with water, marshes, and waterlogged areas. Another kind of porters' clothing, including those of king Niuserre, is a simple short kilt, also usual with workers.⁵⁶ Their hair is cropped short, sometimes covering the ears, as it does in porters of king Niuserre too. All Middle Kingdom porters wear simple kilts.

The porters of Kagemni, In-snefru-ishtef, Mereruka (scenes OK27a and OK27b), and Remni⁵⁷ all have short sticks in the free hand, and those of Seshemnefer short sceptre-like batons. With Seankhuipah, the first bearer has a loop of rope

⁵¹ BROVARSKI 1996, 134–135, 153.

⁵² JUNKER 1953, 253; VANDIER 1964, 341; KANAWATI and ABDER-RAZIQ 1998, 62; HARPUR 2001, 67f. Doubting the exactness of the Lepsius drawing for Senedjemib, E. Brovarski adds one porter in front of the chair, and then, accepting Vandier's opinion, doubles the number, thus obtaining 28 porters, i.e. the same number he presumes there were for Akhmare (BROVARSKI 2001, 47). Neither with Senedjemib nor Ankhmare is there a recognizable second outline indicating a double row of porters (for numbers of porters see Table 1), and in the same Lepsius's drawing (LD II, 78b) the double row of men dragging the statues is clearly indicated.

⁵³ KANAWATI and ABDER-RAZIQ 2008, pls. 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 61, 62, 64, 70; KANAWATI *et al.* 2010, pls. 66, 76, 84a; KANAWATI *et al.* 2011, pl. 89c.

⁵⁴ On the scale of importance: SCHÄFER 1974, 230–234; ASSMANN 1987, 30–31; ALTENMÜLLER 1995, 19–29, 27–28.

⁵⁵ STAEHELIN 1975, 385f.; VANDIER 1978, 56, fig. 34 (6); HALL 1986, 20; ROTH 1991, 141; BROVARSKI 2001, 47, 120, fig. 94b (e); GREEN 2001, 274. Gillian VOGELSANG-EASTWOOD 1993, 35f. classifies the garment as apron. Though poorly preserved, the garment of the first Shedus porters allows identification as a loincloth with straps (for identification of the scene as carrying chair scene, see SMITH 1946, 220; for identification of the Shedus "Sänftenlied": VASILJEVIĆ 1995, 20, 38f.). If the fragments from the Pyramid complex of Userkaf are identified correctly, the porters of the royal carrying chair may have been dressed in the same way (LABROUSSE *et al.* 2000, 122–123, figs. 266–268).

⁵⁶ STAEHELIN 1975, 386; STAEHELIN 1984, 745; VANDIER 1978, 56, fig. 34 (1b; 75). The representations are in the bad state, or the published drawings are unclear, so that it looks like as if the porters of Itisen, Senedjemib wear sashes with strips over a simple kilt. Lepsius's drawing of Hetepniphah's scene (LD Erg., × [a]) is insufficiently precise.

⁵⁷ KANAWATI 2009, Pl. 23, 25b, 48.

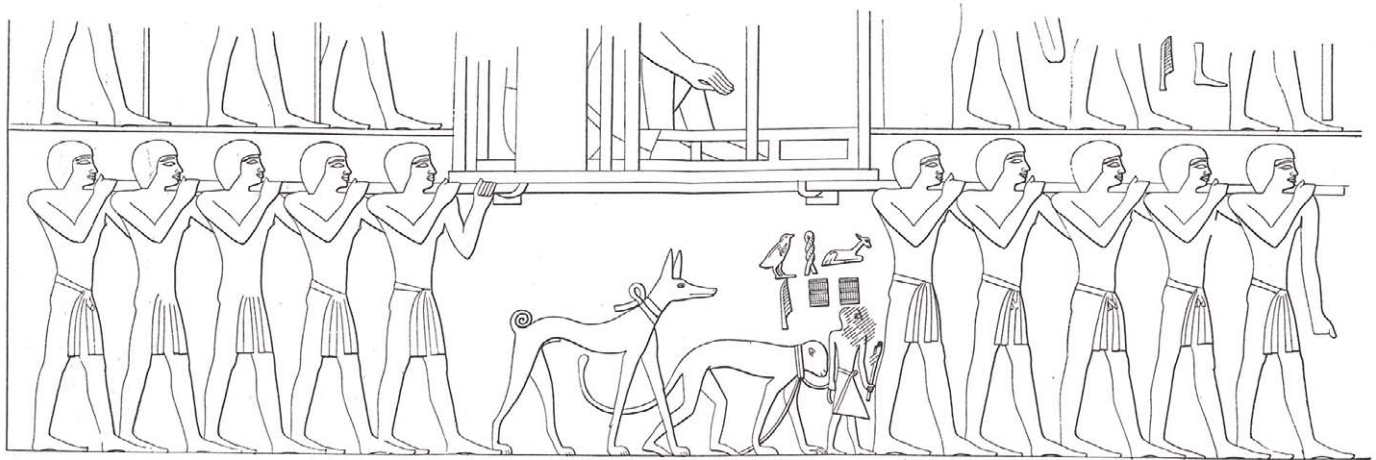


Fig.3 Scene from the tomb of Ty, D 22 (after ÉPRON and DAUMAS, T1, Fasc. I (1939), pl. xvi)

(?) in his free hand, as do all the porters of Meryteti on the north wall of room C1 (OK33a).

In the carrying chair scenes, the bearers are neither named as a group, nor – with few exceptions⁵⁸ – as individuals, even when the titles and names of the foreman of the bearers' crew, of the attendants, or the names of the pets walking by the carrying chair were inscribed (fig. 3). This indicates that the bearers were usually chosen among persons of lower standing who were at a disposal of an official, and not among men having other duties of a kind considered important enough to be mentioned. Thus the porters are deprived of any personal identity; they simply convey the idea of 'a crew of porters' together with their specific task.

The bearers of the carrying chair are mentioned as *nfr.w* in the auto-biographic inscription of Hetepherentah,⁵⁹ and the *jdw.w nw hnw* assigned to the anonymous official may have had the same task.⁶⁰ In the inscription of Washptah only the number of assigned men (ten) is preserved, unfortunately without specific titling.⁶¹ In all three texts, the carrying chairs, as well as the

crew of men with them, were provided by a king. The duties of *nfr.w* were (semi-) military, and the word is translated as recruits, conscripts, cadets, and mariners.⁶² The titles of *jdw.w* show that they were associated with the palace, residence and the word itself is translated as 'noble youths'; the range of their duties is less clear, though they seem to be of non-military character.⁶³ Common to *nfr.w* and *jdw.w* is that they were young people.⁶⁴ As it was the king who assigned the bearers for Washptah's carrying chair, it can be assumed that they were from the workforce under king's control, but with parts of inscription missing, it remains unresolved whether there was any, and if so, what kind of further specification concerned the bearers. The fact that the *nfr.w* and *jdw.w* were assigned by a king transformed them into an additional, valuable status marker, and were therefore, as a group, mentioned in the biographic inscriptions of the three officials.⁶⁵

Persons acting as supervisors, directly connected to bearers and taking care of their even pace,⁶⁶ are present in approximately one third of the

⁵⁸ The exceptions are the scenes of Seneb and Seshemnefer Tjeti (JUNKER 1941, 20–21, Abb. 20; JUNKER 1953, 135–136, Abb. 100) where the names of all the bearers were inscribed, but in their short form, without any titles (JUNKER 1953, 136). The first of the bearers in Nikauisesi's scene has his title and name inscribed *hrp jzt J..j*, but the overseer, *jmj-r jzwt*, who is striding in front of him stayed nameless (KANAWATI and ABDER-RAZIQ 2000, p. 44, pls. 24, 25 [a], 55).

⁵⁹ SETHE 1933, 231.14; KLOTH 2003, 228–229; BAUD and FAROUT 2001: 47–48.

⁶⁰ GOEDICKE 1959, 10; FISCHER 1960, 12; KLOTH 2002, 40–41, 150.

⁶¹ SETHE 1933, 43.16; KLOTH 2002, Abb. 4c; KLOTH 2003, 229.

⁶² JONES 2000, 483 (nos. 1807 and 1808); FISCHER 1960, 13, n. 52; EICHLER 1993, 181–182.

⁶³ JONES 2000, 347 (no. 1292); FISCHER 1960, 12–13, n. 48, 52. Because of the association with the palace, and presuming the military character of their duties, H. Goedicke recognized in *idw.w* a kind of guard (GOEDICKE 1959, 10).

⁶⁴ On *idw.w* as a stage between being a child and an adult man, in the autobiography of Ptahshepses: FISCHER 1960, 11–12; BAUD 2005, 120, 349, n. 717.

⁶⁵ On the low ranking of the position of a *nfr*, see also: EICHLER 1993, 181.

⁶⁶ JUNKER 1953, 255; VANDIER 1964, 342. The scenes from the tombs of Ptahshepses, Niankhkhnun, Neferkhui, Nikauisesi, with further examples of supervisors, were published after Vandier's analysis.

scenes preserved enough to be more closely examined in this respect.⁶⁷ There are up to three such foremen or supervisors, occasionally with a loop of rope in their hands⁶⁸, and they walk in front, behind or between two groups of porters. They usually touch (probably steady) the pole the porters are holding, and turn their heads to the porters when striding in front of them, indicating their role by these gestures (figs. 1, 2). The same role was probably played also by those who are in some cases represented in the register above the porters, touching the pole of the canopy or the seat within it.⁶⁹ Supervisors are distinguished from the porters by wearing kilts, or a different type of kilt, indicating their higher position. Only in tombs of Iymery and Ptahshepses, and probably also in the one of Seshemnefer-tjeti, the supervisors are dressed in a belt-sash with front strips as are the porters.⁷⁰ That the status of overseers is higher than that of the porters is supported by the fact that they are labelled with both titles and names in several tombs. The supervisors following and touching the palanquins of Niankhkhnun, and Neferkhui, are *hm-k3 h^ckw K3(j)-zbj*, and *snw H3j.f* respectively.⁷¹ The supervisor striding in front of Sabu/Ibebi's palanquin stayed nameless, the one behind the palanquin is *hm-k3 smsw whrt Jw.f-nj*,⁷² while the man striding between two groups of porters is *hm-k3 jmj-r sšr hm nb*. The

partly-damaged text concerning the supervisor and the first porter of Nikauisesi identifies an *jmj-r jzw* and a *hrp jzt J.j* respectively;⁷³ the person steadying the empty canopy of Mereruka (OK27a) is *jmj-r sšr Wrt*. Although the man who is standing inside the canopy, with a piece of cloth (?) over his shoulder and holding the staff to Pepiankh Henykem, touches the pole of the canopy with one hand, he is not a supervisor, and the inscription *jmj-r sšrw mrjj nb.fjrr ḥsst.fr^c nb S^cnhjj* identifies him as a (favourite) personal attendant of his master; the acting supervisor is the other man who is touching the same pole, *jmj-r jzwt Hnnjt*,⁷⁴ striding in front of the canopy with a 'sceptre-like baton' in his other hand, and calling out: *jm j wrt w3t nfrt pw* "Westwards, that is the good road!", as navigators address a boat's crew.⁷⁵ The persons either holding the title *jmj-r sšrw* 'overseer of linen/cloth' or who are acting in that capacity (recognizable by bags with linen they carry over a shoulder) are relatively often represented among personal attendants of the elite members, as the barbers are in few instances too.⁷⁶ The relatively low rank of overseers of cloth, combined with intention to commemorate them because of their personal relationship to their master due to the task they performed, may have resulted in ascribing their identity to supervisors of crews of porters in the scenes of Niankhkhnun, Sabu: Ibebi, Mereruka and Pepi-

⁶⁷ The scene OK 9 is unpublished, and in the scenes OK 3b, 8, 10b, 29, 32, the porters and/or the persons in their immediate vicinity (potential supervisors) are poorly or not at all preserved. Supervisors were thus identified in 14 scenes out of 42 scenes (48 scenes are listed in Table 1).

⁶⁸ Iymery, Ptahshepses, Kagemni, Mereruka (scene OK27b), Seshemnefer-tjeti (there dressed in belt-sash, in register above the porters), and the porter with a loop of rope in Seankhuiptah's scene acted probably in the same time as a foreman, whereas the foreman of Ipi's porters has a longer stick in his free hand. On the rope loop is a sign of a person overseeing the performing of certain task or who is in charge of men performing it: FISCHER 1959, 259, n. 60. One of the *nfr.w* in funerary complex of Sahure holds such loop in his hand, whereas the others from the same group hold short sticks: BORCHARDT 1913, Bl. 17.

⁶⁹ Persons touching/steadying the poles of the canopy, standing above the porters at the height of the carrying chair owner, are represented in scenes of Mereruka (empty carrying chair, OK27a), Iteti/Shedu, Ipi, Pepiankh Henykem and Shepsipumin, and may be supervisors, but their relationship to the porters is not clearly defined.

⁷⁰ The first porter of Seankhuiptah has a loop of rope in one hand and may be the leader of the crew.

⁷¹ MOUSSA und ALTENMÜLLER 1977, Tf. 58, 60; ROTH 1995, 145, pl. 191. It should be noted though, that the inscription of the barber is one of those that were not originally planned and were hewn by a less skilful hand.

⁷² JONES 2000, no. 3301: elder of the dockyard/workshop.

⁷³ KANAWATI and ABDER-RAZIQA 2000, 44. The authors of the publication did not comment on the damaged inscription above the heads of the two men. Overseer of the crew (*jmj-r jzw*): JONES 2000, no. 313; Director of the crew, director of the gang of workmen/boat crew (*hrp jz(w)t*): JONES 2000, no. 2559.

⁷⁴ *jmj-r sšrw mrjj nb.fjrr ḥsst.fr^c nb S^cnhjj*: Overseer of cloth/linen, loved by his master, one who does what he favours every day, Sanhy (JONES 2000, no. 864; DOXEY 1998, 131ff., 140ff.). The title *jmj-r jzwt*: Overseer of crews/gangs (JONES 2000, no. 313), 'master mariner' (BLACKMAN and APTED 1953, 40, Pl. 31).

⁷⁵ I am indebted to Prof. Dr. Hartwig Altenmüller for drawing my attention to the instruction Henenit is giving to the porters and to its parallels in the context of the boat navigation. For the phrase: ERMAN 1919, 53–55.

⁷⁶ JONES 2000, nos. 864, 2822; VASILJEVIĆ 1995, 78–80.

ankh Heny-kem. The physician (*snw H3j.f*) walking behind the porters of Neferkhuwi may have acted as supervisor out of similar reasons, but his presence also strongly reminds one of the accounts of Washptah and an anonymous official, how they were taken ill and have been provided with carrying chairs and porters by the king, who also engaged physicians for Washptah.

The carrying chair

Finds of carrying chairs could have been useful for conclusions on the weight that was to be carried, and on the number of porters necessary to do it, but only one actual carrying chair, owned by Queen Hetepheres, was found. The chair was meticulously reconstructed, whereby the length of the seat and the footrest was estimated at 99 cm, and poles at 206.05 cm. On the basis of representation from the tomb of Meresankh III, the seat was placed in the middle of the poles' length.⁷⁷ This meant that in front and behind the seat, just over 50 cm of the poles, together with palm capitals of gold at the ends,⁷⁸ was free to be grasped by bearers. If the bearers were standing between the poles, there could have been only two of them, and in the case they walked on the sides, two pairs at most could be engaged, which is consistent with the number of women who were represented carrying Mereruka's wife Watetkhether in the same type of sedan chair.⁷⁹

The representations of the poles of the carrying chair in several scenes of King Niuserre, as in those of Niankhhknum, Ptahhotep: Tjefu, Ptahhotep: Tjefi, Kagemni, Hesi, Seankhuptah (probably also Neferseshemre: Sheshi), all from Saqqara, and those of Seshemnefer from Dahshur and Iteti: Shedu from Dishasha show that the accuracy was not the main goal of the artisan: the poles are either shortened (on the back side of Niankhhknum's no poles, and very short in front), or non-existent, so that the palanquin with canopy looks

like a kiosk.⁸⁰ The same treatment is observed elsewhere: E. Brovarski noticed that because of the limited space, the poles of the *wtz* in offering lists of Neferhetepthuter, Rahotep, and Seshemnefer (I) were shortened.⁸¹ The *idea* of a carrying chair is still preserved, although not all parts of the object are represented accurately. Similarly, the act of carrying a palanquin had precedence over accuracy of details: the poles can be too short to be functional or even omitted in the scenes showing a palanquin on the shoulders of carriers.

The representations show several forms of the canopies.⁸² The canopy can be represented as simple low or high vault (type A), supported by two column-like poles. The vaulted canopy can be shown with protruding parts under the vault, on both sides of the outer poles, whose number may be two, four or six (type B). There is also a vault with a slope (Type C), or trapezoid roof combined, in all but one example with elaborate woodwork (Type D). The flat upper surface of the canopy also occurs (type E) and in one case the roof is represented as a triangle (Type F). Still, the representations do not inform us clearly on the form of some variants, on the position of the woodwork with others, nor on the size or proportions of the canopy.

In a number of represented carrying chairs the roof was supported by so-called tent poles, indicating that a light material was used, perhaps a cloth over the wooden frame.⁸³ The kind of poles is recognizable also on the upper side of the canopy of Kaihep: Tjeti iqer, which is having woodwork. The tent poles protruding from the woodwork probably mean that the cloth was the roof, and the woodwork on the sides provided additional shade, without blocking ventilation. The woodwork is represented only in six cases, all dated to the Sixth Dynasty. The two earliest ones are from Saqqara (Meryteti, Ipi), the others are from tombs in Deir el Gebrawi, Meir and el Hawawish.

Because of its importance, the main motive of the scene, the carrying chair and its occupant, are

⁷⁷ REISNER and SMITH 1955, 33–34.

⁷⁸ REISNER and SMITH 1955, fig. 34.

⁷⁹ KANAWATI and ABDER-RAZIQ 2008, pl. 69.

⁸⁰ It is also true for the Royal-Athena Galleries fragment (EISENBERG 1992, No. 328), which seems to belong to Ankhmahor: Zezi's carrying chair scene, as it was already presumed (Oxford Expedition to Egypt: Scene-details Database, scene 11.7.5.[35], accessed 6.8. 2013: http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/oe_ahrc_2006/; ADS: 686; doi:10.5284/1000009).

⁸¹ BROVARSKI 1996, 134. The treatment is usual for the carrying chairs placed on the ground; the only exception is the tomb of Meresankh (VASILJEVIĆ 1995, table on p. 62; VASILJEVIĆ 2012, 401; DUNHAM and SIMPSON 1974, fig. 8).

⁸² VANDIER 1964, 339–341; VASILJEVIĆ 1995, 58–60.

⁸³ VANDIER 1964, 340. Cf. the canopy of the Queen Hetepheres (REISNER and SMITH 1955, Pl. 5).

consistently represented on a larger scale (though in a various degree) than other elements of the scene (*Bedeutungsmaßstab*).⁸⁴ Thus the canopy sometimes equals the height of several registers. There, where the upper part of the canopy is preserved, in some cases enough space was provided for an inscription⁸⁵ above the head of the official, whereas in other cases, the roofing being immediately above the head of the chair's occupant, an inscription, if any, was placed in front of the official.⁸⁶

Excursus: On the porters of carrying chairs outside and after the Dynastic Egypt

In various cultures, regardless of time, the carrying chair was a means of transport for persons of status – the latter often coinciding with wealth – and was generally unaffordable for the poor.⁸⁷ The right to use a carrying chair may have been limited by customs, special permission⁸⁸ or regulated legally.⁸⁹ The history of the carrying chair is beyond the scope of the present article, and only a few examples providing some information on the porters will be mentioned here.

The so-called Palanquin Fresco from the Palace at Knossos can be mentioned only tentatively here. Only a few fragments of the fresco were identified and the proposed reconstruction of the palanquin representation was supported by the reconstructed terracotta model of a portable seat found among other cult objects in a sanctuary;⁹⁰ the number of (four) bearers appears to be arbitrary and cannot be verified by the remaining fragments of the fresco. Roman litters were car-

ried by two to eight slaves,⁹¹ and the Byzantine miniature from Madrid Chronicle of Ioannis Skylitzis shows a woman being carried in a litter by eight men too.⁹²

The subject of one Raphael drawing is the Procession of the Pope Sylvester I, presumably prepared for the Sala di Costantino in the Vatican Palace.⁹³ Though representing an event from the fourth century CE, Raphael probably relied on contemporary use of the carrying chairs by popes, as Pinturicchio did in one of the frescoes from Piccolomini Library in Siena, showing Pope Pius II in *sedia gestatoria*, or later Horace Vernet, representing Pope Pius VIII being carried into St. Peter's cathedral in 1829.⁹⁴ None of these three representations of certainly formal occasions shows clearly all the porters, but it can be concluded with some certainty that for the two older *sediae* not more than six men were engaged, whereas Pius VIII was probably carried by twelve men.

Nineteenth century travelling accounts contain some relevant information on the way a carrying chair was used.

In his book *Voyages and Travels to India, Ceylon, the Red Sea, and Egypt 1802–1806*, George Viscount Valentia, Second Earl of Mountnorris, mentions repeatedly travel by a palanquin. He gives only a brief description of a palanquin, considering it too well known, but gives more information on porters: on one occasion forty porters were obtained for three palanquins, and on the other occasion, sixteen men were hired to carry Henry Salt, who was to travel separately for a month.⁹⁵ Other passages of Viscount Valentia's account

⁸⁴ When compared with the size of porters or attendants, even the empty carrying chairs of Mereruka and Werirniptah are larger than they could have been in reality.

⁸⁵ In the tomb of Iymery one line (G 6020); two lines in the scenes of Niankhnum, Khnumenti (G 2374); Meryteti: Meri, scene I; Meryrener: Qar; Kaihep: Tjeti Iqer and Shepsipumin: Kheni.

⁸⁶ Inscription in front of the official: Seshemnefer from Dahshur; Ankhmare from Giza; Nefersehemre: Sheshi and also Ipi from Saqqara; Pepiankh: Heny-kem from Meir. Without an inscription under the canopy: Itisen; Kaemnefert, from Saqqara, Ptahhotep: Tjefi; Seshemnefer Tjeti (Giza), Seankhuptah/Hetepniptah; Djau, from Deir el Gebrawi.

⁸⁷ MCGINN 1998, 245–246, n. 21–23, 26.

⁸⁸ For ancient Egypt, s. above and RÖSSLER-KÖHLER 1984, 334.

⁸⁹ On the regulations in ancient Rome, including revoked right to use a litter for adulteresses: MCGINN 1998, 246–250.

⁹⁰ EVANS 1928, 770–773, figs. 490, 502, 503; EVANS 1921, 221, 224, fig. 166G; CASTLEDEN 2003, 115.

⁹¹ A brief summary, with references to the studies concerning the subject of the Roman lectica is given by T.A.J. McGinn (MCGINN 1998, 241, 245–247).

⁹² Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, Cat. No. 338, fol. 102r (a); probably 12th Century: ANTONOVA 2010, 39, fig. 2.2.

⁹³ Kept in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, Accession Number: 1.1.r.12. The drawing was also used by Giulio Romano, the pupil of Raphael (HARTT 1944, 79, n. 38; WOLK-SIMON and BAMBACH 1999, 171, n. 12, fig. 5).

⁹⁴ Pinturicchio: <http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?html/p/pinturic/siena/index.html>. H. Vernet's painting: Chateau de Versailles (<http://www.scholarsresource.com/browse/artist/2142561947>); the study for the painting: The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (<http://www.arthermitage.org/Vernet-Horace/index.html>).

reveal that the system of relay was used, with fresh sets of bearers waiting on different stages of the route, at posts placed at a distance that could be up to ten miles.⁹⁶ Eight bearers “formed a complete change”, which meant that two sets of four men rotated while carrying the burden, as another passage, on eight bearers agreeing to carry two palanquins only because of the short distance of two and half miles to be covered, implies.⁹⁷

Some sixty years later, in the book he published in 1870, James Sibree reports that he did not see any wheeled vehicle on Madagascar, and that for the longer journeys by land, except for walking, the only transportation means on the island was *filanzana*, a carrying chair.⁹⁸ He explained some details concerning its design and commented on the porters too: “Eight of the strongest and most active young men, accustomed to work together, were chosen to carry my palanquin. *These were divided into two sets of four each, and took the duty alternately.*”⁹⁹ Sibree explains how the two sets of porters exchanged without halting and almost unnoticeably, and furthermore, how the porters moved the pole from one shoulder to the other constantly while moving on, and describes their pace as “a quick trot”.¹⁰⁰ There where the situation demanded it, James Sibree would change several times from palanquin to a boat, whereby the bearers of the palanquin and the baggage were those who paddled than.¹⁰¹

The historical photographs from the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries from Madagascar, Congo, Cameroon, Ghana, Turkey, India, Korea, China etc. document the use of

carrying chairs by local chiefs and the elite, missionaries and colonial officers.¹⁰² Most of these chairs are of a modest size, the inner space made for just one occupant, and the roof of some sort, if present, was hanging relatively low above his/her

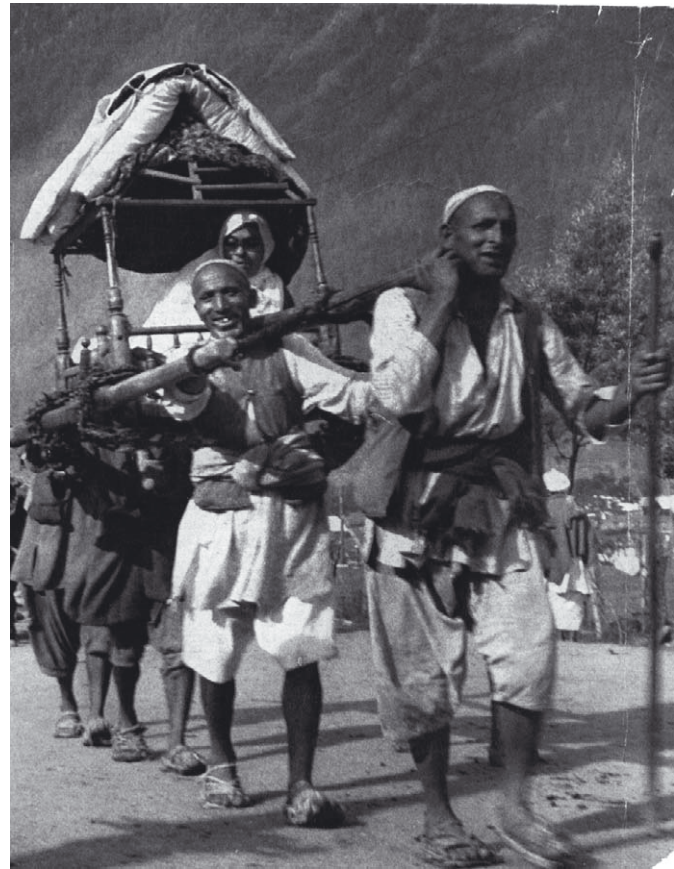


Fig. 4 Carrying-chair, India, 20th century
(from: Arthur C. Custance, *Does Science Transcend Culture?*, PhD Thesis, University of Ottawa 1958, Ch.3, fig. 18 – http://www.custance.org/Library/Thesis/part_1/chapter3.html)

⁹⁵ VALENTIA 1811a, 45, 335; VALENTIA 1811b, 95. Valentia (1811a, 379–388) included Salt’s report on the trip in his book. As a young man, Henry Salt accompanied Viscount Valentia on his journey, in capacity of secretary and draughtsman (MANLEY and RÉE 2001, 8, 10).

⁹⁶ VALENTIA 1811a, 38 (a footnote on the page), 44, 341, 355, 388, 398.

⁹⁷ VALENTIA 1811a, 44–45, 59. The comment “The first set of bearers was excellent, and carried me twenty-six miles in five hours...” (VALENTIA 1811a, 339) probably means that the men rotated over the distance, what would explain that they carried their burden at an average speed of 8 km per hour (26 miles = 41.84 km). The more modest 20 miles per day foreseen for Henry Salt’s journey, had a purpose: Salt was to visit some thirty-eight pagodas and was to be given “leisure to draw any thing that might be interesting” (VALENTIA 1811a, 335).

⁹⁸ SIBREE 1870, 42–43.

⁹⁹ SIBREE 1870, 36, 42–43, 46–49 (quotation: p. 46, cursive by V.V.). James Sibree (SIBREE 1870, 160) mentions, that in moments when the narrow path demanded it, only two bearers were carrying the palanquin.

¹⁰⁰ SIBREE 1870, 36, 79–80. James Sibree (loc.cit.) reports that the porters changed shoulders constantly, after a few minutes, while moving on, and he also observed that the exchange of sets of porters usually took place every fifteen to twenty minutes, but it was also more or less frequent depending on the terrain.

¹⁰¹ SIBREE 1870, 54, 68. George Viscount Valentia (VALENTIA 1811a, 42, 224) mentions also that the palanquins were loaded on boats, when a part of the journey was to be made by a boat.

¹⁰² University of Southern California Digital Library (<http://digitalibrary.usc.edu/>); Library of Congress <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/>.



Fig. 5 Bride in sedan chair, Masan, Korea, ca. 1920–1940
(Copyright Maryknoll Mission Archives)

head (figs. 4, 5). In some cases, the person was sitting on the floor of the carrying chair, in others in a seat, or was occasionally able to recline on the floor. Whether the chair is small and consists of carrying poles and seat, or has a roof, and more or less elaborately decorated sides, whether the poles are attached at the bottom or at the middle of the chair (approximately at height of the occupant's waist), the number of porters for carrying chairs which are used in everyday life remains consistent - four is the usual number, but two is frequent enough (Fig. 6). Even the lavishly-decorated and more spacious carrying chairs used on festive occasions are carried by four, six or – not so often – more men, but the crews of fourteen to twenty-four men seem to be not recorded.

Concluding discussion

The post-medieval representations of carrying chairs are based on perspective and tend to depict a particular moment of action and the participants in it as seen by the eye of an observer. They con-

¹⁰³ BISSING und KEES 1923, Bl. 15–22; KEES 1928, Beiblatt A.

¹⁰⁴ LYTHGOE and DAVIES 1926, 3, fig. 5.

¹⁰⁵ DAVIES 1905, pl. 13.



Fig. 6 „A Sedan chair, revived at the Turkish Village of the World's Columbian Exposition, 1893”
<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sedan-chair.jpg>

sistently record lower numbers of porters than do some Egyptian scenes from Old Kingdom private tombs. The same is true for modern travel reports, photographs and for known representations of the ancient Egyptian royal carrying chairs. Thus, the representations of carrying chairs of the king Niuserre predominantly show four bearers in single row, no matter if it is full or empty, or if the bearers are human or divine.¹⁰³ The number of royal porters increases after the Old Kingdom, though not exceeding a dozen. In the tomb of User (TT 131) eight porters, arranged in a double-row, carry Thutmose III, who is sitting high on the chair placed in a box-like litter.¹⁰⁴ Twelve bearers (in a double-row) were employed for Akhenaton's and Nefertiti's throne-like sedan chair in tomb of Huya in Tell Amarna,¹⁰⁵ and was also the case with Horemhab in Gebel el-Silsila, Ramses III in Medinet Habu, and Amenhotep III in Soleb, whereas six men carried Osorkon II.¹⁰⁶ The Luxor representation of Amenhotep III being carried by four divinities (in a double row) may have followed the Old Kingdom pattern.¹⁰⁷

It seems unlikely that the some of the Old Kingdom high officials needed more porters than their kings or other participants in royal ceremonies did. The performative nature of royal processions and the importance and status of the occupant of the chair called for maintaining a dignified

¹⁰⁶ VANDIER 1964, figs. 178.3, 181–183; CHAMPOLLION 1845, pl. 111; THE EPIGRAPHIC SURVEY 1940, pls. 196–197; NAVILLE 1892, pl. 6; LANGE 2008, 71, 201–202, Abb. II.2.2.3.

¹⁰⁷ GAYET 1894, pl. 74.

presentation of the person/statue¹⁰⁸ in the litter, and thus dictated the pace of the carriers. The distances depended on the defined route of the procession on the occasion of a festival, and it can be assumed that the processional roads used on the occasions were relatively broad and in good condition. Such a procession would allow coordinating the pace of higher number of porters, and still they were not shown. In contrast to this, a number of the Old Kingdom private owners of carrying chairs had let more porters to be represented than – according to the existing visual records – any of the kings used for the purpose. Whereas the number of royal porters may have been limited by the predetermined way of depicting the scene, the question remains: are the high numbers of porters of Old Kingdom non-royal carrying chairs an iconographic exaggeration or they still in some way correspond to the reality?–

For the private owners of a carrying chair, the goal was to travel a certain distance for a variety of reasons, probably prevalingly mundane ones (official or private, such as an inspection of the works in field, marshland, or on their tomb). Still, the travel should be comfortable, and also efficient, in the sense of covering some distances in a reasonable amount of time. It is doubtful whether a higher number of carriers used at the same time could provide it. Namely, with higher the number of the carriers, it is more difficult to synchronize their movements and to preserve an even pace, necessary for a relatively pleasant ride for the occupant of the chair without too much vibration, and therefore such travel would have been slow. Such a higher number of porters also seems to contradict some of the later records which are explicit on the similar use and on the velocity of that kind of transportation outside Egypt.¹⁰⁹ Further, the same records indicate that the height of

the canopy of the represented Egyptian carrying chairs, or the size of the chairs themselves should not be taken at face value, and with it, their overall weight and the strength necessary to carry them should not be overestimated.

The explanation for the high number of the represented porters of carrying chairs can be found in the principles of Egyptian art combined with the intentions to emphasize the status of the person who is being carried. The carrying chair scenes should not be understood as a statement that everything represented takes place simultaneously, as a moment frozen in time. For example, a representation of a metal-workshop is hardly to be understood as a representation of a production line with the exact number of artisans working at a particular moment shown, but rather as showing the different activities the workers have to perform in order to produce an object. This can be even reduced to one of the basic principles – all the characteristic views of an object are represented, though the eye cannot see them at the same time, i.e. the idea of an object is displayed. This can be applied to the scene in question here. The porters are generally left nameless and clearly reduced to their role, to the notion “those who carry NN”. The aim was to show the porters with a palanquin as a status attribute of an elite member, not as individuals. In some cases, the number of the represented porters corresponds to the number necessary for the task in a particular moment. That number would be probably four to eight men, if the data on Roman practice combined with those from the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries are taken into account as a relatively reliable testimony on the number of porters and the ways they were engaged.¹¹⁰ The scenes with more than eight or ten porters should be probably understood as a statement on the overall number

¹⁰⁸ Cf. n. 38.

¹⁰⁹ Heidi KÖPP-JUNK (2013, 11) presumed, that the speed of travel by carrying chair in Egypt was similar to the speed of walking, i.e. 4–6km per hour. This corresponds to the representations: the Egyptian porters and their foremen are always represented with both feet firmly on the ground, i.e. walking at a moderate speed; exceptionally, the supervisor of the Kagemni’s gang of porters is running. The sunshade carriers moving along them, represented occasionally in the scenes, are in some of the scenes shown running (Kagemni, In-snefru-ishtef, Hesi, Seankhuptah: Hetepniptah, Iteti: Shedu, Ibi, Ipi, Pepyankh: Heny-kem, as well as Nekhebu – MFA Boston, accession number Accession Number 13.5830.11) , thus

indicating that their velocity could have been higher than indicated by porters’ pace. It can be presumed, that the sunshade carriers had to move faster when they had to change their position in order to constantly provide the shade for the person in the litter, and that the supervisors had to keep an eye on all the porters as well as on the road ahead, and therefore sometimes swiftly changed their position. Sunshade carriers walking: Senedjemib, Seneb, Watetkhether, Djau.

¹¹⁰ Approximately 40% of Old Kingdom private carrying chairs fall into this group (16 out of 39 scenes, see Table 2). It should also be considered that in order to have enough room for 3–6 porters in front and so many behind the palanquin, the poles of carrying chairs would have been of

of porters that were at the disposal to an official. It does not necessarily mean that they are all carrying in the same time.¹¹¹ The intended viewers, ancient Egyptians, had knowledge of the real situation and the intended meaning of the representation.¹¹²

The porters could have been divided into groups that carry the palanquin in turn, i.e. the tired men have been replaced after certain distance. Such way to organize the similar kind of labour is recognized in the length measure *jtrw*, originating from expression *jtrw n skdwt*, used for the distance one gang of workmen had to haul a ship along the river before being replaced, and possibly also for workmen dragging building stone over the land roads.¹¹³ Whether the distance after which an exchange of the porters took place was a fixed one, or varied,¹¹⁴ depending on the terrain, distance to be travelled, weight of the carrying chair and its occupant, and the number of the men one set of porters consisted of, remains an open question. The question whether an official had several groups of porters all the time with him, or the fresh set of porters waited at prearranged spots,¹¹⁵ stays open too. Both systems could have been used, depending on circumstances.

In some scenes of the pyramid complexes of Sahure and Unas the men wearing belt-sash are identified as *nfr.w*,¹¹⁶ they reappear on some other fragments of scenes without a preserved inscription in these two complexes, and are present in at

least one scene in the funerary complex of Userkaf.¹¹⁷ According to A.M. Roth, there are not sufficient data to conclude whether these men were in that time still organized in gangs (*ꜥpr*), as one of the inscriptions may suggest, or the type of organization survived only as a motif in royal iconography,¹¹⁸ whereas E. Eichler recognizes the use of the word (*ꜥpr*) in other contexts throughout the Old Kingdom.¹¹⁹ During the Fourth dynasty the gangs (*ꜥpr*) consisted of phyles (*z3*), and though the precise data on the subdivision of phyles are absent, the hypothetical units of ten¹²⁰ do coincide with the ten (men) later appointed to carry Washptah.¹²¹ Although there is no written evidence – at least at present moment – that would directly connect the porters of private carrying chairs with one of the attested organizing units of work force, it can be assumed that a certain level of organization was necessary, and it could have reflected the forms existing in public sector of life. The units did not have to consist literally of ten men,¹²² but a ‘ten’ could be e.g. divided in two sets of four porters, with a foreman for each set, so that the sets could exchange. Even if we presume that the weight of carrying chairs with a canopy is substantially higher than the weight of those without it, that additional burden could be the reason to exchange sets of porters during a journey.

In the story of ‘King Cheops and the Magicians’,¹²³ upon his arrival by boat to Ded-Snefru, Hardedef continued his journey by land, sitting in

considerable length, and the whole difficult to use on any kind of path or curves. If the representations are accepted as reliable facts on the object, a number of Egyptian carrying chairs would have been unsuitable for the narrow and curvy spaces and paths (cf. n. 21). But if the principles of the Egyptian iconography are taken into account and the representations are understood as a conceptual image, a record of the idea of the journey of an elite member in a carrying chair, an image in which the exact representation of individual elements and their mutual relationships is subordinated to the intended meaning and the effect of the scene – it is then conceivable that the large carrying chairs with numerous porters, could have been in reality smaller, easier to be carried and manoeuvred in multifarious spaces.

¹¹¹ The number of the porters used could have varied depending on the length of the journey, and for the short distances one set of the porters could have been sufficient (cf. above, with n. 97).

¹¹² On the subject in broader sense, see: BRYAN 2009.

¹¹³ *Wb* I, 147; HELCK 1980, 1200; GRANDET 2001, 494; GRAEFF 2003, 162.

¹¹⁴ The distance did not necessarily have to do with measures of length. On variable distances designated by *jtrw*, depending on that how demanding are the terrain and the task of the workers: GRAEFF 2003, 162; GRAEFF 2004, 50–51.

¹¹⁵ Cf. GRAEFF 2004, 51, on two small buildings on Dahshur road, possibly used to accommodate up to ten workers.

¹¹⁶ BORCHARDT 1913, Bl. 9, 17, 52; LABROUSSE et MOUSSA 2002, 66–67, fig. 91.

¹¹⁷ LABROUSSE et LAUER 2000, 71–73, figs. 80, 83a–b; ROTH 1991, 141–142.

¹¹⁸ ROTH 1991, 141–142, n. 64.

¹¹⁹ EICHLER 1993, 167.

¹²⁰ ROTH 1991, 120–121; ROTH 1995, 43.

¹²¹ Ten porters of carrying chairs were represented in the tombs of Ty and Sabu: Ibebi, probably in those of Neferkhuwi and Seshemnefer-tjeti: Tjeti, whereas the number is doubled in carrying chair scenes of Kagemni and Khnumenti.

¹²² ROTH 1991, 121.

a carrying chair (7.12–14). The episode probably reflected the way of travelling appropriate and affordable for a member of royal family, but it may have been valid for the members of the elite at the time when the story was composed,¹²⁴ but also at the times the story was set in.¹²⁵ In the same text there is a reference to the too shallow water for the royal boat in a canal during the *pṛt*-season (9.15–18).¹²⁶ The condition could only worsen during the next season, and would cause longer distances to be travelled by land. The porters, who were not mentioned in the text, may have waited on the river bank or the boat crew was engaged to carry the king's son. In both cases the men would have been of the low rank and their costume could have consisted of the belt-sash.

The members of the elite presumably also combined, when necessary, travel by boat and in palanquin, and in their case it is probable that the boat crew was also used to carry the palanquin. Though occurring only in few scenes, the titles of the elder of the dockyard, overseer of the crew and director of gang of workmen (or boat crew)¹²⁷ held by foremen, seem to point in this direction, as does the 'sceptre-like baton', usual with those who direct the boats,¹²⁸ held by Henenit, one of the foremen of porters. Seen in light of written data mentioning *nfr.w* and *jdw* as porters, and their simple apparel in the context of royal representations, it is tempting to see the belt-sash worn by private porters not only as a reminiscence of originally royal prerogative of using a carrying chair,¹²⁹ but also as an indication of the type of duties the porters further on could have been allotted, depending on the wishes/needs of their superiors. It is true that in none of the carrying chair scenes are the porters labelled *nfr.w* or *jdw*, but for *nfr.w* it can be explained by Eichler's observations concerning boat-crews as a part of Old Kingdom expeditions. Translating *nfr.w* as "Matrosen", sail-

ors, Eichler notes that they were of such a low rank, that a person names the title among own titles only at obtaining a title at least one level above it (*shd nfr.w*).¹³⁰ The appearance of the men and the role they played in the scenes would have been sufficient for their contemporaries to identify them, to "read" who they were.

The representations of carrying chairs may have lost their importance in iconography already during the Middle Kingdom, either due to the increased number of persons using them (thus ceasing to be a status marker), or due to the shift in the concept of private tomb decoration. Other subjects, such as representations of funeral activities, obtained importance, and the symbolic value of the themes of travel and crossing water by boat was growing – the Journey to the beautiful West and journeys to sacred places, especially to Abydos, performed by boat.¹³¹ Though not explicitly documented, the carrying chairs could have been further on used in private daily life.¹³²

A note on iconography

The number of porters in the Old Kingdom carrying chair scenes in the elite tombs varies considerably, from two to more than twenty, and the initial question was do these numbers correspond to reality: does the scene in this respect represent what was perceived? An indication that the number of porters of private carrying chairs was exaggerated is the size of royal crews of porters, not exceeding a dozen of men in any of the preserved representations, although the royal appearance in a litter had strong ritual aspect (resulting probably in a dignified, slow pace, allowing easy coordination of higher numbers of porters), and displayed the power of the king too. It is unlikely that the elite members would in public display their power by the crews of porters larger than the royal ones were;

¹²³ SIMPSON 1977, 23.

¹²⁴ SIMPSON 1982, 744; JENNI 1998, 113–141; HAYS 2002, 20–30.

¹²⁵ The queen Meresankh III is represented sitting in a carrying chair placed on the boat deck (DUNHAM and SIMPSON 1974, fig. 5). For the Middle Kingdom, cf. P.E. Newberry's identification of the elaborately decorated seat represented on the boat as a sedan, meant to be used for Djehutihotep's journey on land (NEWBERRY 1894, 27, Pl. 18).

¹²⁶ SIMPSON 1977, 26; JENNI 1998, 124.

¹²⁷ See n. 74, 75.

¹²⁸ FISCHER 1978, 16–17, fig. 22.

¹²⁹ The sticks in hands of the porters of Kagemni, In-snefruishtef, Mereruka, and Remni (s. above) remind one too of sticks in hands of *nfr.w* in Sahure's reliefs; for the loops of rope s. above, n. 68.

¹³⁰ EICHLER 1993, 167, 181–182. On *nfr* and its descriptive quality, besides being used as a title, already FISCHER 1959, 258–259.

¹³¹ ASSMANN 2001, 400f.

¹³² H. Goedicke suggested that Sinuhe travelled back to Egypt in a carrying chair, the porters being provided by the local rulers at King's request on Sinuhe's behalf (GOEDICKE 1965, p. 41–42, 47).

beside that, the elite used the carrying chair for mundane reasons, and would therefore be interested to use an optimal size of crews not merely for comfortable, but also relatively fast journeys. The analysed data show that the porters of the elite could have been in reality divided into groups that carry the palanquin in turn, i.e. the tired men have been replaced after a certain distance, similar to the practice of gangs of workmen who hauled ships along the river. The movements of smaller groups of men are easier to synchronize, which would contribute to the comfort and stability of the occupant of the carrying chair, whereas the steady pace and – if necessary – a higher velocity could be obtained through the regular exchange of a tired group for a fresh one. In the Old Kingdom carrying chair scenes, the representations of the sets of porters consisting of two to six men certainly corresponded to the size of the crew engaged at one moment. This may have been the case with groups of eight to ten porters too, although these can be also understood as a sum of all sets of porters that were at the disposal of an official, shown as if they worked simultaneously, in spite of the fact that they in reality rotated, and could not be seen at work at the same time. In opinion of the present author, the latter explains the scenes showing large groups of porters – those consisting of more than eight or ten persons, and certainly those with twenty or more porters. In this way, by this kind of exaggeration, a number of Old Kingdom officials additionally stressed their power and status, already expressed by the very subject of the scene.

One possible way to describe the carrying chair scene is a *Sinnbild*, in the sense that it does not record a journey in a carrying chair as a copy of reality (rendered according to Egyptian principles of representation), devoid of any further meaning

except ‘transporting a person’, but it also has a symbolic level, expressing the high status of the person who is transported in this way.¹³³ At the same time, it is the example *par excellence* of the basic principles of Egyptian art in composition of a scene – it exhibits the division of the surface into the registers, representation of the elements that cannot be seen at the same moment or actions which do not happen simultaneously, as well as the emphasis of importance through size (*Bedeutungsmaßstab*), and the avoidance to overlap important elements by objects or minor figures. It is a good visual representative of the concept Emma Brunner-Traut named “aspective”.¹³⁴ The carrying chair scene represents the idea of the event with its characteristic components, a kind of a list of items the event consists of, it is not the visual record of an event as it happens and which would be represented by a selected moment frozen in time – it is a conceptual image of the event, not a perceptual one.¹³⁵ Therefore, the sets of porters who were rotating during a journey could be represented as a part of a single action. The action of the single set of porters was identical with the action of the set with which it exchanged, and thus they could be condensed in the image of one larger group, in one iconographic record which conveyed the idea of status of the elite member who had higher number of the porters at his disposal.¹³⁶

For the analysis of the way the governing principles of Egyptian art were used in practice, Heinrich Schäfer’s *Von ägyptischen Kunst*, first published in 1919, is further on the basic study on that aspect of research on the ancient Egyptian iconography.¹³⁷ The concepts underlying Egyptian art have since been under scrutiny, the debates on methodological issues intensified, and new approaches formulated.¹³⁸ Still, since the two-dimensional representations are often used as a

¹³³ The meaning of *Sinnbild* is here, for the purpose of the article, limited to the aspect of status. The expressions ‘*Sinnbild*’ (symbolic/metaphorical image) and ‘*Sehbild*’ (visual image) were used by KESSLER (1987, 64–65) in his interpretation of Old Kingdom representations, which promoted the religious meaning (*Sinnbild*) in contrast to and over the simple mundane one (*Sehbild*); Kessler’s conclusions and the terminology itself were criticized by VAN WALSEM (2005, 71–72, 80–81). A short overview on the subject: VERBOVSEK 2015, 147.

¹³⁴ BRUNNER-TRAUT 1974. On some limitations of Brunner-Traut’s “aspective” as a comprehensive concept underlying Egyptian thought: ASSMANN 2001, 34–35.

¹³⁵ “Conceptual”, as opposite to the “perceptual”, e.g.: SCHÄFER 1974, 109; BRUNNER-TRAUT 1974, 423–424; TEETER 1994, 16; LABOURY 2011, 10.

¹³⁶ The priority of the representation of an idea of an object or action over the visually accurate image is illustrated in the same scene by the representations of carrying chairs with very short or virtually no poles (s. above).

¹³⁷ SCHÄFER 1919. The fourth German edition, edited by E. Brunner-Traut in 1963, was translated into English and edited by J. Baines (SCHÄFER 1974); the revised edition was reprinted in 1986 and 2002.

¹³⁸ E.g. BRUNNER-TRAUT 1974; BAINES 1985. For a state-of-the-art overview of the various aspects of the subject, see the recent publication edited by Melinda Hartwig (HARTWIG 2015).

source of information on various aspects of Egyptian culture and society, but also in order to verify the validity of some long-standing conclusions concerning specific examples, it may be useful to re-examine – at least occasionally – the way we perceive and interpret the iconographic data, to observe critically our understanding of the princi-

ples of Egyptian art and especially the way they are applied by Egyptians, as well as to complement the visual information as far as possible with the data that could shed light on the knowledge the artist's contemporaries had from their experience of the real course of action, on the participants of the event and their mutual relationship.

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