Art as Ritual Engagement in the Funerary Programme of Watetkhethor at Saqqara, c. 2345 BC

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Cover: Watetkhethor playing the harp before her husband Mereruka (Duell, 1938: 1, Plate 94)

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Preface

Art as ritual engagement is examined through a case study of feminised funerary representation in the repertoire of Watetkhethor, an elite woman interred in the mastaba tomb of her spouse, Mereruka, at Saqqara, c.2345-2181 BC. The focus is centred upon the functionality of a particular form of gendered imagery in a ritualised, funerary context.

The spaces and images in which Watetkhethor is featured alone, or in support of her spouse, indicate something of an elite woman's afterlife expectations at this particular time. Contemporaneous examples as detailed as Watetkhethor's are rare. Her high-elite status may have permitted Watetkhethor's personal involvement in her own funerary programme. Her funerary arrangements would have been 'state-of-the-art', meeting the requirements of a woman identified as the eldest daughter of King Teti, c. 2300-2181 BC.

The assumption of modern twentieth century anachronisms, attitudes and biases appear to have all but dismissed the rich iconographical programme of specifically feminised arrangements within this shared tomb. Indeed, Watetkhethor's schematic patterns appear to have been treated largely as secondary to those of her spouse in the detailed reports of this tomb's earliest excavators.

Analytical examination of women's funerary art, particularly at this relatively early period, remains critical to our developing knowledge of a nascent, gender- specific Egyptian funerary programme. Whilst degradation and destruction of Old Kingdom sites and materials have made this task difficult, modern technologies may yet reveal critical evidence from even poorly preserved locations and materials. Questions remain: what may have been missed; what, if anything has been overlooked and, just as critically, what yet remains in plain sight, waiting to be understood.

Chapter 1: Introduction

One of the most significant tendencies in archaeological thought at present, as well as in the humanities in general, involves the rejection of modernist dichotomies, a turn toward ontology over epistemology, and a critique of anthropocentrism (Thomas, 2020:152).

Ancient Egyptian funerary imagery can be understood as a complex, multi-faceted medium through which an ancient culture addressed matters of collective concern. In attempting to interpret the material record of a culture no longer fully available to us it is vital to pursue all means of understanding the significant effort invested in funerary space and related imagery. The visible and inaccessible components that comprised the ancient Egyptian funerary programme served as more than mere instruments of human purpose. These arrangements were designed to function beyond life. Indeed, the main purpose of the mortuary cult was to sustain the deceased in the afterlife (Van Walsem, 2005: 2).

The 'New Materialism' movement in archaeology referenced in the opening quote, reflects a consideration of materiality as ritually active and in flux (Thomas, 2020:152). That is to say, the concept of materiality may have assumed an absence of inseparability between, in this context, Ancient Egyptian people and their funerary materials. This sense of materiality has been described as a tangled cultural nexus that, sometimes quite literally, binds together people and their culture (Knappett, 2014:4702; Nyord, 2020:28). Representation within the tomb served to indicate movement between the actual and the virtual; between the real and the irreal (Alberti, 2007: 219; Nyord, 2020: 26). This view supports the notion of materiality as an entanglement of things with their human interlocutors (Hodder, 2011). Material Engagement Theory examines the environment in which the representation of an individual occurs in order to understand something of the intentionalities valid at the point of creation. It is a useful methodology to apply to Watetkhethor's tomb in the chapters that follow.

The phenomenology of ancient materiality recognises that the ways in which modern peoples consider existential elements may bear little similarity with ancient forms of thinking (Malafouris and Ihde, 2019; Overmann, 2020a; Hodder, 2016). In order to facilitate an individual's viability in death, a range of ritualised devices including iconological motifs and associated liturgical texts were arranged throughout the tomb, placed there in order to mitigate against a host of dangers believed to exist in the liminal space between death and what followed. Everything inside the tomb contributed to a particular form of afterlife. As is argued throughout, strategies dependent upon the gender of the deceased functioned as a fundamental component within this arrangement (Roth, 1999:37-38; Gilchrist, 1999; Cooney, 2008:1-26; Angenot, 2015:98-119; O'Neill, 2015:31-36; Budin, 2018:25-38).

Until recently, the archaeological exploration of materiality, a structure that incorporates two-dimensional, three-dimensional and related theoretical components (including metaphor, intertextuality and other linguistic elements), has been considered from within a predominantly Western perspective that separated subject from object and mind from matter (Hodder, 2010:155; Malafouris, 2013:246). This assumption often failed to acknowledge that ancient cultures maintained complex relationships with forms of materiality that reflect little of 'modern' constructs (Malafouris and Ihde, 2019: 196).

Aims and Objectives

The primary aim of the work that follows, is to examine gender as a fundamental component of funerary imagery as employed in the representational programme of Watetkhethor, in the tomb of her spouse, Mereruka, at Saqqara. Watetkhethor is believed to have died around the early 6th Dynasty, c.2345-

2181 BC. [1] Using a methodological approach with tools formulated within Malafouris's (2013) theory of material engagement and through Panofsky's (1955) three level system of iconology (see Chapter 3.1) it is possible to construct an analytical framework that reaches beyond the surface materiality of architectural arrangement, painted walls and carved stone. A largely descriptive record of this tomb's décor, with an elite male as its focus, has formed the basis of earlier examination (Duell,1938; Kanawati and Abder-Raziq, 2008; Pieke, 2011). However, by this 6th Dynasty period, funerary iconography had already developed increasingly diverse forms as a form of insurance (or assurance) in expectations of an afterlife commensurate with aspects of lived life (Dann, 2013: 133-134).

This study explores the ways in which Watetkhethor's funerary strategies were integrated through image and text with precise placement in particular areas of her funerary chambers (section B, Figure 5). All of these components are understood as enhanced with properties beyond singular functionality. A range of purposes, intentionalities and aspirations created complex ritualised programmes of representation in funerary contexts.

In various contexts, the image of a deceased woman may have represented;

- the power of the deified deceased (of both genders) over chaos or creation;
- or may have directly indicated the involvement of a deceased woman in facilitating the rebirth of male relatives;
- and finally, as enabled to act for herself in her own journey of transformation.

The notion that an image or an object, or indeed, an aspect of either, has specific meaning in a given context must be viewed cautiously. As argued by Nyord (2017: 339) the ritualised 'role' of the deceased, or, more particularly, of their representation, should not be regarded as static.

The gendered image schemas that form the focus of this study were created during a tumultuous period of social change, evidenced within a necropolis expressly constructed for high status individuals (Kanawati and Swinton, 2018:3,35). Ensuring the viability of the deceased resulted in a range of embodiment strategies that amalgamated aspects of the deceased with those of the divine. Ideology associated with the funerary cult 'altered' the status of deceased men and women into forms that encompassed a range of magically empowered roles (Meskell, 1999:2-3). The transition to an eternal state and to the next level of existence was understood as jeopardous; and in particular, the liminality of death. Myriad spells attempted to reintegrate and unify elements of the potentially disembodied self (Meskell and Joyce, 2003:23). 'Your arm is that of Atum; your face is that of Anubis; your head is that of Horus' (Faulkner,1969: PT Utterances 213,148). In funerary liturgies, an individual is described as transfigured in death, associated with elements that are both male and female (Cooney, 2010:235).

Closely associated with the phenomenology of perception, 'affordance' has been described as not simply discovered or projected upon meaningless things, but as something 'negotiated', reconstructing human agency through time (Costall and Richards, 2013:91). If, as argued here, perceptual affordances exist between the perceiver and the perceived, how then can we understand the qualities of affordance encapsulated within complex, ancient imagery (Gibson 1979:353)? To apprehend a material pattern as a representation of something is to engage in culturally-shaped perceptual processes (Hutchins, 2010:429). Affordances, in the context of this work, are caught up in processes whereby a material pattern becomes something enacted; something ritualised; something sacred. Over time, the development of funerary iconography introduced and then reinforced a range of nuanced perceptual affordances. The representations of deceased men and women embodied these developments through imagery that acted

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[1] Throughout, all dates follow Shaw, 2013: 740

as a medium for recreating and replicating postmortem expectations. It is perhaps simplistic to assume that only fifty percent of elite individuals made use of these strategies in what was fundamentally a life or death context, even in an androcentric society. As argued in the work that follows, feminised strategies are evidenced through iconological development, perhaps accurately described as hiding in plain sight. That these iconographical materials are only now the subject of precise examination perhaps reflects the *zeitgeist* of the period in which these early pictorial formats were first discovered by modern scholars. [2]

As noted earlier, in order to initiate a close examination of gendered representation this work takes as a single case study the funerary iconography of Watetkhethor, who shared a tomb with her husband Mereruka and their son, Meryteti. Their mastaba was constructed within the Teti pyramid field at Saqqara. The specific objective of this study is centred upon the ontological function of gender as a key element within Watetkhethor's funerary programme.

The following section provides a socio-cultural overview of the period in which Watetkhethor's funerary programme was designed and implemented. Whilst it has long been recognised that funerary imagery was intended to ensure the security of an individual in a well-supplied afterlife, what this description fails to characterise adequately, is the agency of material forms. That these forms may have been predicated on the gender of the deceased lies at the centre of the analysis that follows.

The role of visual culture in ancient Egypt

Funerary 'art' in any culture encompasses complex social practices, whilst illuminating how death, and existence beyond life, were understood. In ancient Egypt, funerary imagery indicated embodied engagement of the living with material culture intended for the deceased (Van Walsem, 2005:9-11). Image and text were inseparably intertwined; both were considered as efficacious and ritually powerful in the journey to the afterlife (Meskell, 2002:10). In the context of tomb décor, images served as bearers of the owner's identity, personality, and social status and could be called upon as referents in the afterlife (Meskell, 2002:10-11).

Humans have leveraged a range of material forms for a range of unique cognitive purposes for as long as we have existed (Overmann, 2020a:1). The materiality of representation; the stone; the associated texts; the visual canon through which funerary imagery was organised, all constitute an interconnectivity between physical objects and that which they represented. Ancient Egyptian ontologies went beyond mnemonic representation in any modern sense. Representative strategies emergent from Egyptian, Mesopotamia and Assyrian contexts shared a view of the image as 'an act of creation' (Bahrani, 2014:168). Such ontologies were ingrained within the cultures from which they emerged:

> [t]his is no mere ascription of agency, a projection of life on to an inanimate thing by the viewer through a primitive mentality ...these are things with a different status ... parts of ontologies and technologies that are different from those we take as being logical and rational, but they are nevertheless real (Bahrani, 2014:201).

The tomb and its liminality indicate two concurrent worlds; a cultic space in this world, and the locus of preservation of identity and its transformation after death in an 'other-worldly' setting (David, 2014:243). The tomb's imagery and texts were meant for its deceased owner, not for the living. Those who directed aesthetic principles were elite members of society and in their eyes, the ultimate beneficiaries were the gods (Baines, 2015:5).

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[2] The mastaba of Mereruka remained hidden from view until discovered and excavated by Jacques de Morgan, of the Egyptian Antiquities Service in 1892. The first major publication on this tomb, by Prentice Duell, did not occur until over 40 years later in 1936.

Image and text formed two interconnected, parallel processes that enabled the deceased to be reborn into the afterlife (McCarthy, 2002:173). The first of these involved metaphysical union with the sun-god; the second, union with the most important of the funerary gods, Osiris, the god of regeneration and rebirth (Roth, 1999:40). The emergence of Osiris into an already complex funerary repertoire appears to have opened up the possibility for a more nuanced role for gender in the underlying principles that structured tomb iconography. Whilst individuals maintained their gendered identity in death, when joining Osiris, all the deceased assumed what Roth (1999:51) refers to as 'an active male sexual role in begetting their own rebirth'.

From the 5th Dynasty of the Old Kingdom and the emergence of Osirian aspects of religion, the deceased were understood as assimilated with this god in the netherworld (Roth, 1999:51). A developing relationship between Osiris and the deceased saw the god play a direct role in their regeneration (Nyord, 2007:10). Whereas a woman's gender was material to her husband rebirth, her spouse's role in 'her' regeneration appears to have become somewhat redundant; even viewed as 'unnecessary' at the point of feminised transition (Roth, 1999:51; Cooney, 2008:15). [3]

The funerary programme of Watetkhethor represents one of the earliest realised examples of an iconographical schema in which alternative models of gender relations are indicated. That is to say, there appears to have been adaptations relevant to the gender of the deceased as indicated in the arrangement of particular scenes. This includes the so-called 'Offering Table Scenes' in which, during this period in particular, the deceased was often represented alone (O'Neill, 2015). Gender-specific patterns are evidenced both in the orientation of imagery within Watetkhethor's burial chambers and elsewhere in scenes shared with her spouse.

Contextualising the early 6th Dynasty: An Overview

The period in which Watetkhethor lived and died was one marked by intervals of social and political turmoil (Kanawati and Swinton, 2018:3,35). This was often the case when the right of succession to the Egyptian throne was uncertain, as may have been the case during the transition between the 5th and the 6th Dynasties, c.2345 BC (Malek, 2000: 104,106; Kanawati and Swinton, 2018:35-37). The material record and titularies of 5th Dynasty rulers indicate their close ties with the cult of Re. Although the succession of the 6th Dynasty kings is well established, the latter's relationship with this important solar deity appears to have vacillated (Kanawati and Swinton, 2018:8). This may have caused significant socio-political and religious issues with powerful priesthoods, particularly when kings of the early 6th Dynasty chose to move their necropolis away from Abusir, the centre of the cult of Re, in what may have been a direct challenge to priestly authority (Kanawati and Swinton, 2018:9).

More broadly, this period was marked by the rise of a provincial nobility, a crippled treasury and periods of unsatisfactory inundations all of which added to the woes of kings, their officials and people of this era (Seidlmayer, 2000:113; Kanawati and Swinton, 2018:3). All of these factors may have played a role in the choice of particular iconological structures utilised throughout the tomb of Mereruka. As Assmann (1996:81) notes, at times of social and religious distress ancient Egyptian funerary imagery can be seen to 'react' and 'reflect' through innovative and creatively productive schematic forms. New arrangements of representation became available, particularly in provincial areas, using schematic iconography indicating 'risky innovation' (Roth, 1999:37-53; Callender, 2011:41). In Watetkhethor's tomb such innovations may be indicated in a scene where she is borne on a palanquin carried exclusively by women reflecting a funerary structure more usually found in male contexts (Figure 22). Indeed, this gendered scene is also present in Mereruka's and Meryteti's burial chambers (Duell, 1938; Kanawati and Abder-Raziq, 2008). [4]

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[3] Contra this view see Smith, 2017:211

[4] Traces of Watetkhethor borne on a palanquin by female servants appears on the North Wall of her burial chamber, B5 (Figure 22).

This then was the situation during which King Teti assumed the throne of Egypt with the State struggling to deal with issues that challenged economic and social stability (Kanawati and Swinton, 2018:1,8-9). Teti's predecessor, Unas, had constructed his pyramid at Saqqara, electing to build at a site that had been in use for many centuries as a royal necropolis (Kanawati and Swinton, 2018:8). Teti, who may have been a son, or, more likely, a son-in-law of Unas, followed his example, although by this period, the available area for the construction of elite tombs was 'extremely limited' (Kanawati and Swinton, 2018:19).

Security and harsh men?

It was common practice at this time to appoint family members to the Vizierate; such was the case with Teti's sons-in-law Kagemni and Mereruka who served him consecutively as viziers. Both men's tombs were constructed close to Teti's pyramid complex at Saqqara (Kanawati and Swinton, 2018:23). Teti is said to have appointed experienced men to key roles within his administration (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq, 2008:28). Both Kagemni and Mereruka are described as 'harsh older men' whom Teti married to his young daughters (Kanawati and Swinton, 2018:28). Teti's apparent preoccupation with security is described as evidenced through 'the harshest scenes of physical punishment' and of 'excessive aggression' in the tomb iconography of his viziers.

Kanawati and Swinton's (2018:32) opinion that punishment scenes in Mereruka's tomb, 'reveal an authoritarian and ruthless personality' must be tempered with the possibility that scenes of brutality

Figure 1: Officials about to be punished, tomb of Mereruka (Kanawati and Swinton, 2018: 28). That Teti's efforts ultimately ended in failure is suggested through the possibility that he may have been murdered by his bodyguards sometime between the eleventh and twelfth year of his reign (Kanawati, 2000; Kanawati and Swinton, 2018:37).
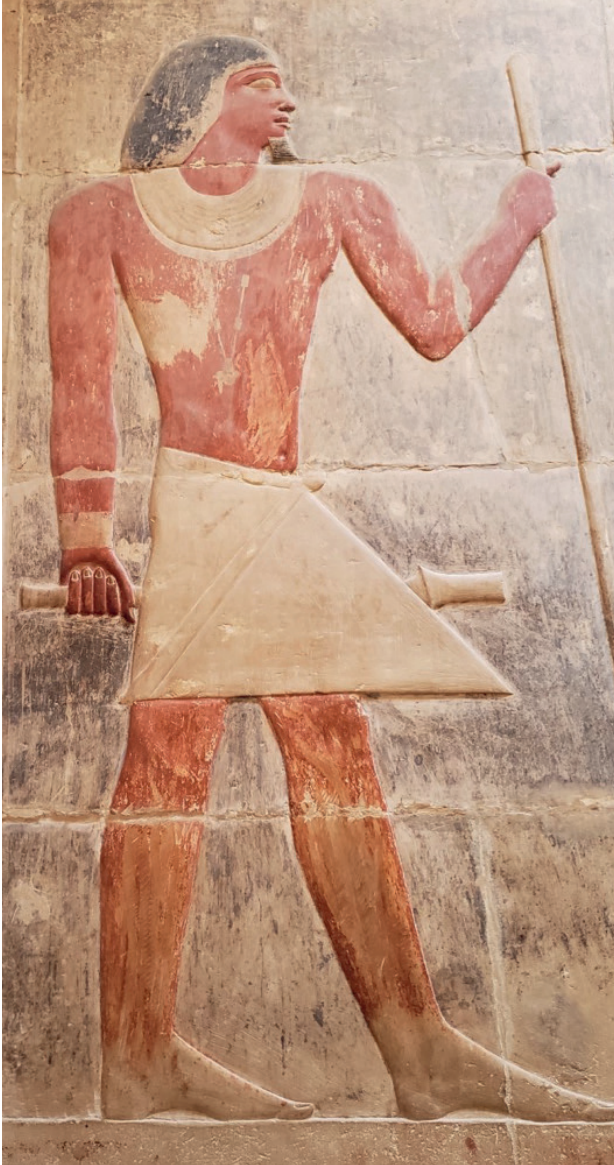
Figure 2: Image of Mereruka. Interior, looking west; mastaba of Mereruka, Saqqara (photo credit: J. Gayle, used with permission).

against human and non-human foes may function in reflecting aspects of uncertainly, perhaps indicating the taming of chaotic elements associated with the socio-political milieu of the period in which this tomb was constructed. That such images were placed alongside others depicting elaborate scenes of commodity and food production, with many goods designated as coming from the king's own estates, indicates an overarching sense of continued dependence on loyalty between the king and his most senior officials (Kanawati and Swinton, 2018:29-29).

Watetkhethor's status as the eldest daughter of Teti, is supported through the use of unusual motifs within her funerary representation. Funerary emblems and objects appear to support her royal status (Kanawati and Swinton, 2018:32). However, Duell (1938:1-3), author of the tomb's original, and most thorough excavation report to date was uncertain that Watetkhethor was Teti's daughter. The situation is complicated further by the fact that during this period, those who may have been 'of royal blood' either with a direct, or through a lesser degree of familial connection to the king, may have claimed titles 'son' or 'daughter' of the king's 'body' *z3t nswt nt ẖt.f*, without the requirement for close biological affiliation (Fischer, 2000:47).

That Mereruka predeceased both Teti and Watetkhethor is suggested through the chronologies of other individuals who assumed the role of vizier under this king. More tentatively, Mereruka's death is evidenced through the presence of a daughter, Ibenebu, depicted once in Watetkhethor's (B1) section of the tomb (Kanawati 2008:12).

This is the only scene in which Watetkhethor's daughter, Ibnebu, appears. She is positioned alongside her mother and her sibling, Meryteti (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq, 2008:12). Elsewhere, Ibenebu is absent from family scenes in which Mereruka's brothers, Meryteti (his son by Watetkhethor), and other sons by another wife, are all depicted (Duell, 1938:3). It is probable that Ibnebu either predeceased her mother or had not yet reached adulthood upon Watetkhethor's death. There is no evidence that she was buried in the family tomb. It has been suggested that she may have been born to Watetkhethor following Mereruka's death (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq, 2008:12).

Although Ibenebu was probably still a child and younger than her brother, her depiction displays sexualised signifiers of female adulthood. However, throughout Watetkhethor's chambers,

*Figure 3: Left to Right, Meryteti, Watetkhethor and Ibenebu, Watetkhethor's Chamber B1
(Kanawati and Abder-Raziq, 2008: Plate 16).*

representations of Meryteti maintain the iconography of a male child. He is usually portrayed naked with a side-lock. Unlike his sister, Meryteti is iconographically infantilised (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq, 2008:43). The opposite dynamic is in place for Ibenebu who wears the slim-fitting sheath-like gown of an adult female, with one breast exposed. The siblings wear hair decorations and menat necklaces associated with dance and gymnastics scenes evidenced elsewhere in Mereruka's chambers (Duell,1938). Further nuanced hints at a sexualised role are suggested in Ibenebu's headdress, a style associated with ḫnr dancers, musical performers represented elsewhere in scenes within Mereruka's chambers (Kanawati and Abder-Raziq, 2008). [5] In funerary iconography, female sexuality represented a continuum, often without the age demarcations of childhood common to other cultures (Voss, 2006: 388).

The material engagement underpinning the functionality of gendered elements in funerary iconography indicates that daughters usually appear as ritually effective, sexually enabled adults in postmortem contexts. In similar contexts, male offspring are more usually infantilised in their iconographic arrangement. In this manner, children of either gender are rendered alternatively as sexually ineffective (male), or as effective females in the ongoing regenerative ritual enacted for the deceased in gendered spaces. Iconographically, the portrayal of a male child did not affect the ritually efficacy of either an adult male or an adult female in ritualised contexts. The portrayal of a young woman functioned ritually as a means through which an adult male (usually the tomb owner) could transition to his afterlife.

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[5] These funerary dancers are associated with rejuvenative ritual in a role dominated by female performers until the final stages of the Old Kingdom (Graves-Brown, 2010:92, 96).

Archaeological Background: The Tomb of Mereruka

The mastaba tomb of Mereruka is one of the largest private funerary complexes at Saqqara (Duell, 1938: xiv). The tomb abuts the mastaba of Teti's vizier, Kagemni, which may also indicate that Mereruka followed Kagemni into this role (Kanawati, 1996). In spite of space 'restrictions' and perhaps indicative of Mereruka's importance, the tomb's original excavator estimated that at the time of its construction this tomb was over 1,000 metres square (Firth & Gunn, 1926). Mereruka's mastaba has long been considered as particularly important in the archaeological record of this Old Kingdom Period for a number of reasons, not least of which is its finely decorated chambers with detailed themes and motifs, some of which appear here uniquely, or possibly for the first time (Daressy, 1896:3; Pieke, 2011:216). Whilst the chambers assigned to Watetkhethor date to its original construction, other parts assigned to Meryteti are of a slightly later date, probably added following the death of both parents.

The representation of gender in this tomb, as in any shared tomb of this period, was of vital importance and a key element underpinning the framework of ritualised cult implemented through the interplay between image, text and the deceased individual who formed the focus of that activity. Within this context, embodied strategies, whether masculinised or feminised, were relevant to the nuanced and fluid categorisation which 'gender' fulfilled (Roth,1999:47; McCarthy, 2002:195; Cooney, 2010:235). This is particularly evidenced in Watetkhethor's own quarters where the use of gendered structures in ritually significant scenes remains one of the most salient sources of information available to us from tombs of this Old Kingdom period (Roth, 1999:47, 2000:198-199).

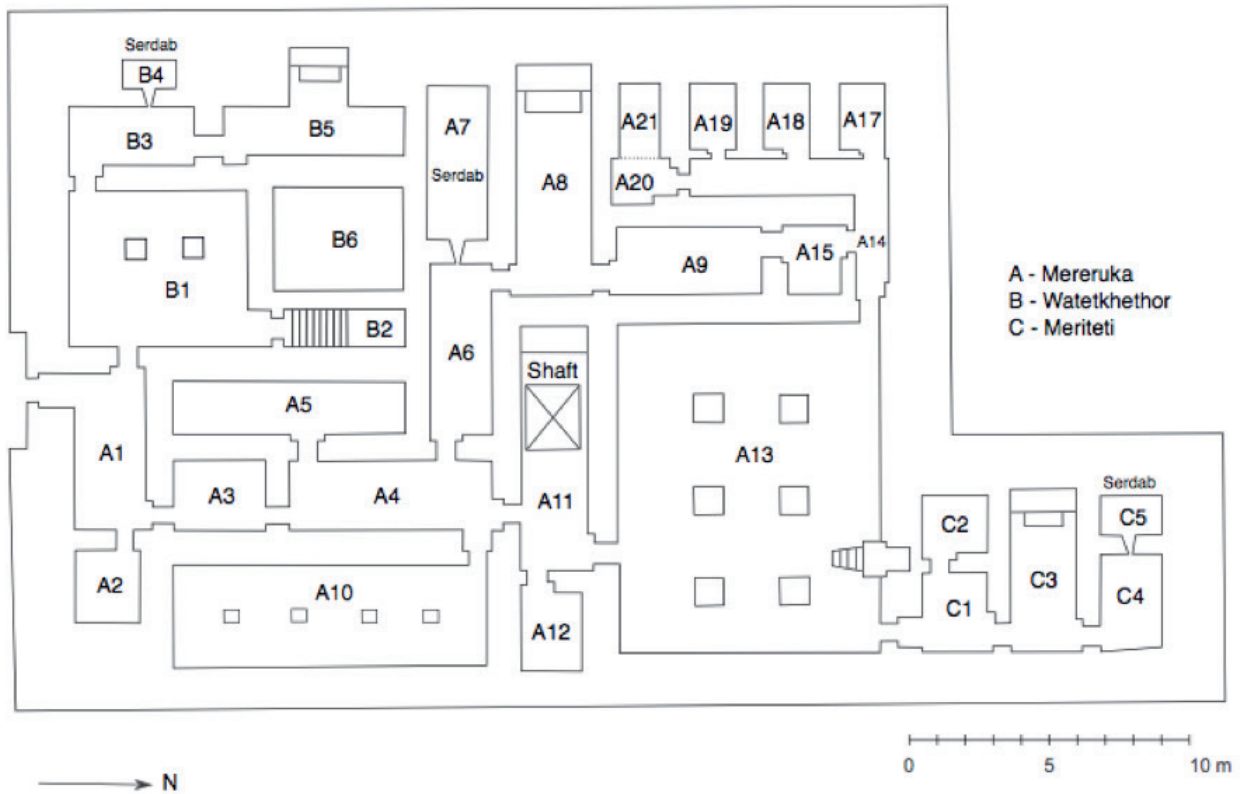Figure 4: The mastaba of Mereruka at Saqqara (Duell,1938: Plate 3b).

Figure 5: plan of the internal layout in the tomb of Mereruka, sections A, indicating sections dedicated to Watetkhethor, sections B, and to their son, Meryteti, sections (Cooke, 2020:44, figure 1.18).

The Funerary Chambers of Watetkhethor

Watetkhethor's burial occupies six interconnected areas in the south-west section of Mereruka's tomb (Figure 5, B1-B6). Funerary chambers, and other areas allocated to her funerary cult, represent spaces in which Watetkhethor was the primary beneficiary of rituals designed to sustain and safeguard. These areas include:

- a pillared hall (B1);
- a stairway that originally provided access to the roof (B2);
- a serdab niche in an antechamber to the chapel (B3, B4);
- a large offering chapel containing a false door (B5).

What can the spaces and imagery in which Watetkhethor appears in her husband's funerary chambers and in her own, tell us about her afterlife expectations and the role of gender in effecting these? Chapter 4 examines a range of representational evidence that addresses these questions.

The Research Focus

Having established the context of the time and place in which Watetkhethor lived and died, this study will analyse funerary depictions that present Watetkhethor in a range of scenes within her husband's section of this large, elaborately decorated tomb. Of equal focus are scenes related to funerary cult in Watetkhethor's funerary chambers. The ritual function of this imagery is analysed contextually in order to address:

- the structure of imagery in which Watetkhethor appears as facilitator in scenes relevant to the funerary cult of her spouse;
- the functionality of scenes in which Watetkhethor appears with her son, or in the company of retainers;
- the purpose of imagery in which Watetkhethor appears in areas assigned to her own funerary cult;
- the broader role of material engagement and of gendered ontologies in funerary imagery of this period.

Rationale: Why this study?

Despite significant inroads into the broad and complex subject of gender in ancient culture, many significant tombs and associated materials, particularly those of the early chronological phases in the vast span of ancient Egyptian culture, wait to be re-examined in the light of critical developments in 'gender archaeology' (Scott, 1986; Conkey and Gero, 1997; Gilchrist, 1999; Eller, 2000; Meskell, 2000). Much remains to be fully understood.

Figure 6: Watetkhethor, as depicted on the north wall of Mereruka's tomb, Room A13, Figure 5 (Duell, 1938: II, Plate 160).

In archaeological terms, gender manifests itself visibly, either intentionally, who is represented and how, and through other sources, that is to say, particular people or events are more likely to be included within gendered scenes than others (Arnold, 2006:151). Interpretative difficulties remain. Like all archaeological research, investigations of gender often interpret the past through the lens of the present, even if there are few contemporary analogues (Voss, 2006:367). Up until the relatively recent past, Egyptological scholarship viewed the presence of women in funerary iconography as largely secondary; supportive of and complementary to that of male tomb owners. The role of women in an ancient Egyptian representative context was understood (legitimately) as vital to the ultimate protection and successful regeneration of a male partner (Roth,1999). However, what of 'Her' rebirth?

The question as to how a woman achieved her own state of transition, functioning beyond serving to facilitate the regeneration of a male partner, has sometimes surfaced in scholarship focused upon the Egyptian afterlife and access to this divinised state (Kroeter, 2009:47-49; Cooney 2010:224; Graves-Brown, 2010:35). On occasion, there is an apparent dismissal of the issue altogether (Robins, 1993:175; Wilfong, 2010; Smith, 2017:211). Indeed, the question as to how transition into the afterlife worked for women remains open to question:

> [r]ebirth into the afterlife was a literal process: after death, the male tomb owner was thought to impregnate a woman, generally his wife, with his own spirit in order to birth himself into the next world ... The stimulation of fertility, is likely the reason for the erotic portrayal of women[6] in so many tombs throughout ancient Egyptian history (Kroeter 2009:47-49).

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6 As argued here, this included wives, mothers, daughters and other females depicted in funerary imagery.

Kroeter's attempt to address this rather one-sided view of postmortem rebirth is accompanied by an almost apologetic footnote, indicating a level of continued uncertainty: '[t]his concept was necessarily problematic when the tomb owner was female' (2009:57). This view was largely maintained within Egyptological scholarship until Roth addressed the issue in 1999. A key element in her work was the funerary iconology of women from the 5th to the 6th Dynasty, including that of Watetkhethor (Roth, 1999:37-53).

Perhaps the most ubiquitous image-type that promoted this rather one-sided view of gendered functionality is imagery in which the tomb owner (usually male) is identified as the 'larger than life' object of regenerative cult. Positioned as the dominant figure in the scene, the deceased is shown with a scaled-down, diminutive figure of a woman (wife, mother or daughter, sometimes all three) close to his feet. The notion of women as a hierarchically secondary feature of funerary iconography indicates an incomplete and misleading view of the evidence.

Within the broader scope of visual culture and of material studies within archaeology, there is as yet, no consistent understanding of image as semiosis/code, or as mimesis/imitation of reality in funerary contexts (Angenot, 2015:100; Bahrani, 2014:34). Understanding art as ritualised action requires that attention is paid to form, to schematic patterning, and to what can be observed, albeit with equal

Figure 7: Watetkhethor, positioned to the left/front of Mereruka with his mother on his right, behind in image, (Duell 1938: II: Plate 159).

attention to what might be absent. All of these factors must be considered within discrete historical contexts in order to better understand why a particular type of funerary object, or pattern, or image-type was intentionally produced for use in specific socio-religious contexts:

> art as a form of intentional human action can only be understood in the context of the relationships and objectives of human beings acting in the social world (Morphy, 2010:268).

Those in charge of arranging the décor within this tomb, ensured that particular image sequences were placed within discrete, ritually significant, areas. The execution of these scenes was prioritised and placed in the hands of master craftsmen (Pieke, 2011:223). Ritual significant scenes often display a higher standard of workmanship and are in a more advanced state of completion (Pieke, 2011:223). Spatial arrangement and context mattered. Within this tomb, the west walls of each chamber, ontologically significant spaces associated with the land of the dead, were carved in a more 'sophisticated' way than the east walls (Pieke, 2011:223). These image sequences show Mereruka at various stages in his funerary 'journey'; seated at offering tables, or with Watetkhethor as the couple survey the production of funerary commodities provided by the king (Duell, 1938: Plate 94). Given however, the undeniable circumstances of our limited, etic-level access to meaning in placement choice, an awareness of assumptions levelled through less rigorous (i.e. earlier) examination of women's funerary representation, must remain the

subject of interrogatory approaches. As set out in the case study that follows, a detailed examination of funerary iconography provided for Watetkhethor permits an opportunity to redress elements of these oversights (Chapter 4).

Watetkhethor's burial complex indicates that she was an important person in her own right, with a spouse who held one of the most important positions in the royal administration. Her representational record (that which remains extant) provides an ideal context through which to analyse the role of gender within women's funerary imagery as evidenced through the decorative programme of this significant tomb. The next section of the study examines the ways in which both 'art' and 'ritual' are defined.

Contextualising terms: Art and Ritual

Throughout this study, funerary art is construed as the product of aesthetically ordered activity in a society, indicative of a particular worldview (Baines, 2015:2-3). This is not to imply that aesthetics was a primary concern in an Egyptian context, rather this aspect was just one element within a complex schema (Müller, 2015:78-79). Van Walsem (2005:2) defines 'art' as the term for individual and/or collective products of human behaviour by means of images, artefacts and performances beyond the purely functional (Van Walsem, 2005:2). In the hermeneutic of Egyptian art, it is necessary to extend image to the ritualistic, mythological themes to which it might belong; this includes the subject-matter, position and location of a representation (Müller, 2015:79).

The nature of funerary art has been described as multifunctional, encapsulating cultural history, religion and ritual (Franke, 2002:8). The agents, purveyors and recipients of ancient Egyptian funerary art would not have understood the concept of 'art' in any modern sense (Angenot, 2015:109). 'Art' was accepted as an aspect of 'religious experience' (Baines, 2015:5).

One of the main characteristics of developments within elite funerary representation in some Old Kingdom tombs, is found in what Lemos (2016:125) refers to as 'the opening of space'. A burgeoning provision of architectonic elements within the funerary programme widened and developed throughout this era. Such provisioning included false doors and offering chapels containing expansive tomb imagery, evidenced in better preserved examples from both non-elite and elite contexts (Richards, 2005:41-42). Larger, more elaborate tombs, allowed individuals to extend a range of ritualised strategies with programmes that permitted a particular use of gendered space: again, the given proviso was that the ultimate audience, and indeed the beneficiaries, were not of this world.

Changes in the decorum of funerary representation and an apparent loosening of the 'rules' which, up until this period, had prevented the use of particular motifs within the funerary programme of non-royal individuals was always gradual. The impetus for stylistic change is hard to determine as there was never explicit reference made to artistic arrangement in funerary representation at any period in Egyptian history (Hartwig, 2015:45). Rather, we are left to probe the cultural and religious climate in order to piece together a range of representational exemplars that provide evidence of these strategies.

The definition of ritual should be understood in similarly broad terms. This study broadly follows Bell's definition where 'ritual' exists in a variety of contexts with multiple systems of interpretation (1997:x, 301). Ancient Egyptian ritual (and related cultic activity) was based on a tripartite distinction between action, iconic representation and recitation (Assmann, 1992:87). When ritual was internalised into imagery and script carved, or painted within a funerary scene, representation served as 'a sacred text' (Assmann,1992:87). This dynamic created a sacerdotal semiosis in which objects, ritual performance and once orated liturgies were transformed into imagery and scripts that functioned as powerful signifiers of cultic symbolism (Assmann, 1992:89). It was through the performance of ritual that the dead were

able to make the necessary transitions that enabled individual access to the afterlife (Nyord, 2009:1-2; Willems, 2010:85). This process entailed a sequence of metaphysical transformations facilitated through complex engagement between art, script and magically charged, perpetually re-enacted mortuary cult (Hays, 2011:120-121; Bárta, 2011:188).

Morphy (2010:266) speaks of the discomfort with which the disciplines of anthropology and archaeology (to which one must add, Egyptology) have neglected the broader subject of ancient art as a research resource. Non-Western art in particular, has been somewhat neglected through 'definitional issues' entangled with questions of what is art, and what does it do (Morphy, 2010:266)? Indeed, as explored throughout this study, retrieving essential aspects of a particular socio-cultural background through the analysis of representative schemas is vital to accessing 'meaning' (Panofsky, 1955: 55). Ideally, Egyptian representation should be viewed contextually, albeit that given the challenging history of artefact collection, original context is not always retrievable.

The Structure of the Study: Chapter Overview

Chapter 1 sets out the aims and objectives of this study, alongside a rationale as to why the analysis that follows is relevant to understanding the role of gender in funerary imagery at this time. Watetkhethor's funerary record is contextualised within the socio-political and ideological milieu in which she lived and died. Chapter 2 explores the literature that constitutes prior exploration of this tomb, providing something of the theoretical pathways through which gendered imagery is explored within this study. The methodology applied throughout is examined in detail in Chapter 3, whilst Chapter 4 comprises the analytic discourse of this case study. This chapter examines the concept of ritualised engagement through an analysis of scenes in which Watetkhethor serves as the means through which her husband, and ultimately, the deceased herself, sought rebirth into the afterlife. Chapter 5 gathers the strands of each part of the case study in order to substantiate the role of gender as a key element in the materiality of funerary representation. A literature review, examining original and more recent reports on this tomb, follows