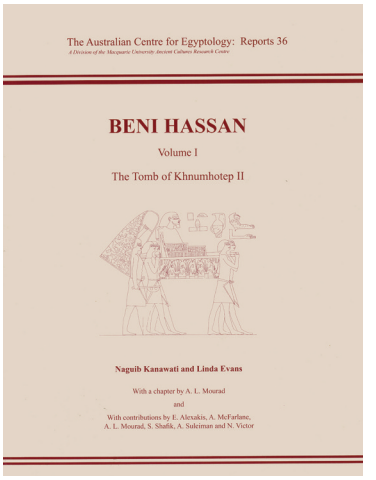
Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections

REVIEW

BENI HASSAN VOLUME 1: THE TOMB OF KHNUMHOTEP II

by Naguib Kanawati and Linda Evans
with a chapter by A. L. Mourad
and with contributions by E. Alexakis, A. McFarlane,
A. L. Mourad, S. Shafik, A. Suleiman and N. Victor
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Of all the tombs cut into the cliff overlooking the east bank of the Nile at Beni Hassan, the most familiar to readers of the *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* is likely No. 3, that of Khnumhotep II, created as the tomb owner's "first noble deed" (p. 35, "Autobiography" line 170). Its modern fame was virtually guaranteed by his decision to include among its spectacular array of scenes—a number of which are rightly acclaimed even beyond Egyptology—a group of *ꜣꜥmw* ("Asiatics") that has provided tinder for Egyptological and biblical speculation ever since. First noted by Europeans in the 18th century, the tomb has been published to one extent or another several times. For 121 years, the description and images in Percy E. Newberry's 1893 volume remained the most complete presentation,[1] albeit seriously deficient, with plates that show most of the painted human figures and hieroglyphs largely or entirely as silhouettes. Comparing these to what actually exists one sees that Newberry published little more than elaborate sketches (cf. Figs. 1A and 1B). Later efforts, discussing the overall decorative scheme (e.g., Janice Kamrin, *The Cosmos of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hasan* [London: Kegan Paul International, 1999]) or particular details (e.g., concerning the *ꜣꜥmw*: Susan Cohen, "Interpretive Uses and Abuses of the Beni Hassan Tomb Painting," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74.1 [2015]: 19–38[2]), relied on Newberry or reproduced anew only a few scenes or figures.[3] This situation has changed entirely for the better with re-excavation of the tomb in 2010–2012 and 2014[4] by the Australian Centre for Egyptology. The result, *Beni Hassan Volume 1: The Tomb of Khnumhotep II*, by Naguib Kanawati and Linda Evans and several other contributors, is a useful new work with modern epigraphy and photography that supersedes the myriad weaknesses of previous publications.

After a preface (pp. 9–10) and list of abbreviations for citations (pp. 11–14), in chapter I (pp. 15–24) the authors introduce the reader to the names and titles of Khnumhotep II, his family, and his many dependents, as well as the "Distinguished Asiatic," each with annotations to standard reference works (Ranke's *Personennamen*,[5] Ward's *Index*,[6] etc.). Conclusions regarding the relationships and status of the tomb owner's family members—particularly those of his ancestors, his concubine/wife *T̲ꜣt*, and his two sons called "eldest"—follow in chapter II (pp. 24–25).

Chapter III (pp. 26–28) considers the location and architecture of Beni Hassan Tomb No. 3.[7] Accounts—chiefly dimensions—of the bural chambers/shafts, not all of which could be examined because of logistical circumstances (pp. 9, 28), appear in the very brief chapter IV (p. 28).[8]

In chapter V (pp. 29–72), the real "meat" of the volume begins to appear. The authors present Khnumhotep II's "Scenes and Inscriptions" as the visitor would encounter them, room by room, wall by wall, register by register. Each is provided with transliterations and English translations, as well as descriptions of the figure(s),







Figure 1: Detail from Beni Hassan Tomb No. 3 (Khnumhotep II), chapel, west wall, north of the entrance, register 5: grape harvest. A: Newberry 1893, pl. 29 (detail); B: Kanawati and Evans 2014, pl. 18b; C: Kanawati and Evans 2014, pl. 122b.

scene(s), and/or other decoration (e.g., imitation of stone [p. 30]). Translations are lightly annotated with footnotes to indicate scribal errata or irregularities, comparata, and other observations, but regrettably they provide only grouped, rather than specific, line numbers for lengthy texts (most notably the "autobiography," pp. 31–36). Even more, the reviewer wishes that the text referred to specific plates with the mention of each register and/or detail; instead, ranges of plate numbers are given at the beginning of the description of each wall.

In the last chapter, VI (pp. 72–78), A. L. Mourad (the only author particularly credited with a section of the volume) analyzes "The Procession of Asiatics," of particular interest to the readers of this journal. Mourad points out that "the redrawing of the foreigners' procession clarifies several details that will surely enhance our current understanding of the scene and its significance" (p. 72), and indeed the same can be said for all of the other epigraphic drawings in the book. She treats this scene carefully, with references (including *contras*) to previous interpretations, and offers comparata overlooked by others (e.g., for the child spear-bearer; pp. 75–76). As do the other authors who contributed to the volume, Mourad exercises caution in her interpretations of details and offers or cites viable alternatives (e.g., "Abi-shai," "Abi-shar," and "Abi-sharie" for *Jbš*^{3}, without choosing from among them; p. 74). But this does not mean she comes to no conclusions, as indeed she does regarding both the historical event portrayed and the symbolic role it played in Khnumhotep II's tomb (pp. 77–78).

The text portion of the volume concludes with a short index (pp. 79–80) comprising references to deities, kings, individuals, and titles. There is no general index, and private names and titles are indexed in the original language, not their English translations.

The plates begin with 104 photographs printed as full-color halftones: views of the tomb exterior and interior, surfaces (walls, ceilings), scenes and texts, and details (small groups, single figures, and even smaller details of particular interest, such as text on scrolls held in hand [pls. 39b, 43a], the "bellows" [pls. 46a, 48a], and the lyre [pl. 48b]). Image quality is uneven: compare, for example, "crisp" pl. 85b with "muddy" pl. 55a. Preservation must have played a role in this (cf. pls. 26a and 26b), but the high quality of some of the images, as well as some of those published elsewhere,[9] suggest that improvements could have been made, whether during photography (better exposure; use of a camera with better high-ISO capabilities), post-processing, or printing.

With plates 100–104 the reader encounters useful comparisons between paintings of some of the vertebrate animals and photographs of living representatives of the species, demonstrating the ancient artists' powers of observation and interpretation of the natural world.

Plates 105–106, plans of the tomb, are the first of a good many folding plates. Next are the major texts: those on the elements of the doorways (pls. 107–109) and Khnumhotep II's "autobiography" (pls. 110–114). Overall views of each wall come next (pls. 115–116), after which are larger-scale presentations of the registers, with selected details shown separately at yet larger scale (pls. 117–147). The epigraphic drawings are clear and well detailed, even at the smaller scale—note, for example, the feathering of the *m* barn owl in the hieroglyphic texts of pl. 126. The stippling for the goat's hair (pl. 125), "scale patterns" given to birds' feathers (e.g., pls. 125–126, 143e), geometric designs on the Asiatics' clothing (pl. 128), and stubbly skin of a plucked waterfowl (pl. 138) reflect the care of the ancient artists as well as that of the modern epigraphers.

The last plate (pl. 148) offers a nod to those who published the tomb first, if not well: photographs of handwritten notes from Newberry and his collaborators, G. W. Fraser and M. W. Blackden. Newberry's message, which gives a date of April 21, 1891, includes a slight misquote of two apropos lines spoken by Ulysses in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* (Scene III, lines 187–188):

> Instructed in [*sic*; "by" in the original] the antiquary times,
> He must, he is, he cannot but be wise.

Comparing the color photographs and epigraphic drawings created for this 21st century publication to those of Newberry's 19th century one is unfair and unnecessary (nonetheless, cf. Figs. 1A–C). The challenges faced by the epigraphic team, and the success they achieved, can be readily observed in the difficult image of the grape harvest, in which the ancient artist has hidden figures behind leaves of the vines (Figs. 1B–C). Still, as almost always must be the case when translating areas of paint into drawn lines, the modern epigraphic drawings do have shortcomings; if relying on fine details for their own work, the reader will want to closely consult the photographs as well. The lines of the drawings seem, generally, to represent black lines anywhere and outlines/distinctions of any color between figure/object and background; divisions between colors within a single figure/object are not necessarily indicated. In the photograph of the boatbuilding scene (pl. 26b), the left ("forked") end of the hull begins as yellow, but after a short distance this color ends and brown begins, a distinction absent in the drawing (pl. 120). This sort of omission is also visible in the carpenter working with an adze in the register above the boatbuilders: in the line drawing (pl. 120) he would appear naked were it not for the line drawn across each of his legs to indicate the bottom edge of his kilt, although the red and white areas of paint clearly differentiate between body and garment also at the waist (pl. 25b). And there is inconsistency in this apparent convention. In the text above the boatbuilders the epigrapher has indicated the red at both corners of the eye and also the yellow head of the griffon vulture (pl. 120), although both of these areas of color border white directly (pl. 26b). These are minor details—but they are details, and sometimes (as in the case of the boat hull) details matter.

The fact that the book includes the very color

photographs that allow the reader to note such epigraphic decisions cannot be overlooked: the value of both forms of presentation must not be underestimated. A reader might wish, in fact, for the ability to view simultaneously both sets of images, or, likewise, to read the descriptions and translations while looking at the plates. Perhaps a DVD featuring the plates—including photographs at full resolution—would have been economically feasible and might be considered for future volumes in the series.

Lastly, it bears noting that description, discussion, and epigraphy in the volume address only those features contemporary with the tomb owner and omit later amendations (cf. photographic pl. 95b, epigraphic drawing pl. 141, and the description of this register on pp. 68–69). This was the case with Newberry (1893, pl. 35) as well. Perhaps these might someday form the focus of a separate study.

Minor publication shortcomings notwithstanding, Kanawati and Evans's *Beni Hassan Volume 1: The Tomb of Khnumhotep II* completely eclipses Newberry's *Beni Hasan Part I*. This long-overdue definitive publication of an important primary source for Middle Kingdom and other topical studies is highly recommended and will no doubt contribute substantially to the ongoing discussion of its texts and many iconographic details. *Beni Hassan Volume 2* et seq. will be welcomed.

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1 Percy E. Newberry, *Beni Hasan Part I* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner and Co., 1893), frontispiece, 39–72, pls. 2, 22–38.

2 The publication schedules of the volume under review and Cohen's article precluded citation of one by the other.

3 A worthwhile bibliography of such works would be too lengthy to include here. Many are found in the reference list of the volume under review (pp. 11–14), but the reviewer would like to specify one omitted source that features good color photographs of some of the scenes and details (including the *ꜣꜥmw*) in Tomb No. 3: Abdel Ghaffar Shedid, *Die Felsgräber von Beni Hassan in Mittelägypten*, Zaberns Bildbände zur Archäologie Band 16 (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1994), 11 Abb. 15, 52–65 Abb. 89–111, 67 Abb. 112–113, 72–73 Abb. 119–232, 87–93 Abb. 142–150.

4 Kanawati and Evans 2014, 9.

5 H. Ranke, *Die ägyptischen Personennamen*, 3 volumes (Glückstadt: Augustin, 1935–1977).

6 W. A. Ward, *Index of Egyptian Administrative and Religious Titles of the Middle Kingdom* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1982).

7 For a more extensive discussion of the pool/pond feature by one of the contributors to the volume under review, see Sameh Shafik, "Interpreting a Curious Architectural Element in the Tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hassan," *Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 25 (2014): 89–100.

8 And here the reviewer must point out two typographical errors: the text labels the very brief fourth chapter, "Burial Apartments," as "V" (p. 28) and the next, "Scenes and Inscriptions," as "IV" (p. 29). The table of contents numbers these correctly, IV and V, respectively (p. [5]).

9 For example, compare Kanawati and Evans 2014, pl. 31 or pl. 32a with Shedid 1994, 11 Abb. 15. Working some two decades earlier, Shedid was able to employ multiple studio lights (see Shedid 1994, 55 Abb. 89), a photographic luxury perhaps not available to Kanawati and Evans either out of concern for the preservation of the pigments or because of logistics (during the excavation, the tomb remained open to visitors [pp. 9, 28]).