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‘I Am the Champion Who Has No Peer!’: The Language of Dependency in the Tomb ‘Biographies’ of Two Ancient Egyptian Nomarchs

1 Introduction

This paper discusses the way two members of the provincial elite of the First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom Egypt are placed within a patron-client framework of dependency with the central regime as described within the context of their tomb ‘biographies’. The texts belong to Nomarchs, who were known as “The Great Headmen of the Nome”¹. The earlier text belongs to a local Nomarch of Upper (southern) Egypt, Ankhtifi, and is inscribed in his tomb at Mo’alla, dating to the early part of the First Intermediate Period (approximately 2160–2055 BC).² The later, more ‘standard’ text, belongs to Sarenput I of Aswan, also in Upper Egypt, dating to between 1956–1911 BC in the Middle Kingdom.³ The ‘biographies’ address asymmetrical dependency in that Nomarchs are in a social position of power as patron over many dependents in their respective districts, but that they themselves are also usually dependent on the Pharaoh, a point that is frequently stressed in such inscriptions, especially in times dominated by a strong central rule.⁴ In general, tomb ‘biographies’ detail the career and social standing of the tomb owner, emphasising the elements that they particularly want to be remembered for.⁵ Different factors inform the tomb owner’s biographies on their stance in the dependency framework; the time in which they were written, associated events

1 Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom: A Study and an Anthology*, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 84 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 1988): 21–22.

2 The chronology of the First Intermediate Period is difficult to determine with any real certainty. For discussions on the First Intermediate Period and issues with dating see: Stephan Seidlmayer, “The First Intermediate Period (c. 2160–2055 BC),” in *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Ian Shaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 118–47; Nigel Strudwick, “The Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Egyptology*, ed. Ian Shaw and Elizabeth Bloxam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020): 619–37.

3 Wolfram Grajetzki, “The Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Egyptology*, ed. Ian Shaw and Elizabeth Bloxam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020): 638–56.

4 Denise Doxey, “‘Autobiographical’ Texts,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Egyptology*, ed. Ian Shaw and Elizabeth Bloxam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020): 996–97.

5 Elizabeth Frood, “Biographical Monuments: Displaying Selves and Lives in Ancient Egypt,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Biography*, ed. Koen De Temmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020): 463–76.

of the time period, and the individual backgrounds of the tomb owners' impact to what extent they are presented as a local autonomous ruler, in which the expectations and social/moral obligations towards their dependents are apparent, or a loyal and dedicated client to Pharaoh (or both, to some degree).

The phenomenon of recording aspects of one's life for burial purposes was a dynamic process that continuously developed throughout Pharaonic history.⁶ The snapshots of views provided by the two texts which are the focus of this paper give insight into the elite attitudes towards the patron-client dependency framework. However, there is a rich history of establishing these elite ideologies which contextualise themes presented in both texts. With this in mind, I explore the history of so-called 'biographical texts' and its impacts on the 'tomb biographies' of Ankhtifi and Sarenput I through the following research questions:

- How do the ancient Egyptians communicate their lives?
- Can these inscriptions be counted as 'biographies'?
- Why are they different? Is it due to the personal choices and backgrounds of the individuals, the difference in time period and circumstance, or the decorum of the times in which they were composed?

Every aspect of the development of this genre of text from something extensively formulaic to something more individual and personalised impacts how the tomb owners (re)create their world, social standing, and relationships with other 'actors' that they mention. This history of development helps document the ideologies of the ruling elite that all others, especially other officials, were expected to abide by.⁷ The aim of this paper is not just to compare the varying attitudes that the tomb owners display towards their positions within the dependency framework, but also to examine how they use language to create a world in which they can emphasise the importance of their position, whether they are framing themselves as patron or client (or both, as the case often is, but with an emphasis towards one or the other).

2 Historical Background of 'Biographical' Texts

The practice of including elaborate decoration and texts within a tomb developed during the Old Kingdom and survived through to the Roman Period,⁸ with the so-called 'biographical' texts developing and changing as the politics and social dynamics of the

⁶ For extensive discussions on the evolution of 'biographical texts', termed self-presentations, see Hussein Bassir, ed., *Living Forever: Self-Presentation in Ancient Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2019); Doxey, "'Autobiographical' Texts": 994–1006.

⁷ Doxey, "'Autobiographical' Texts": 995.

⁸ Doxey, "'Autobiographical' Texts": 994.

ancient society continued to evolve.⁹ Fundamentally, the tomb 'biographies' of ancient Egypt are texts that aimed to highlight the attributes of a tomb owner that would endear him¹⁰ to both the gods and the living; ensuring access to the afterlife while securing the necessary maintenance for his mortuary cult which would sustain his soul after death.¹¹ They present the tomb owner as his ideal self, in accordance with the pre-established ideals and expectations of the mid to high elite 'patrons'.¹² These ideals demonstrate a close thematic link regarding appropriate behaviour towards one's patron or dependents with didactic or 'wisdom' literature,¹³ also first attested in the Old Kingdom.¹⁴ The intended audience is frequently addressed at the beginning of a 'tomb biography' as "ones who live, who are on earth who may pass by this tomb"¹⁵. As the focal point of continued socializing between the living and the dead,¹⁶ every aspect of the tomb – location, structure, decoration and text – serves to maintain the continuous reification of the tomb owner as an active participant of daily life after death, and as an "excellent spirit" in the afterlife.¹⁷

The terms 'biography' and 'autobiography' should both be considered problematic with these inscriptions; the texts do not usually form a complete narrative of the deceased's life, rather highlighting key events worthy of note, and although the tomb owners seem to have had some control over the content, it is unlikely that the protagonists of these inscriptions composed the texts themselves.¹⁸ A more accurate descriptor would be 'self-presentation',¹⁹ and the typical structure of these inscriptions lends credence to this term. Self-presentations tend to begin with a list of titles and epithets which identify the tomb owner through the social positions he held during his life,²⁰ completed with *dd=f* 'he says', formally introducing the main content as being presented by the tomb owner. The main body of the inscriptions typically consists of a

9 For a summary of the changes in tomb inscriptions throughout the Pharaonic period, see Andrea Gnirs, "Biographies," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Donald B. Redford, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 184–89.

10 Most biographies centre on the careers of mid- to high-ranking elite men, see Christopher Eyre, "Egyptian Self-Presentation: Dynamics and Strategies," in *Living Forever: Self-Presentation in Ancient Egypt*, ed. Hussein Bassir (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2019): 10.

11 Doxey, "'Autobiographical' Texts": 994.

12 Gnirs, "Biographies": 184.

13 Eyre, "Egyptian Self-Presentation": 10.

14 Doxey, "'Autobiographical' Texts": 995.

15 My own translation of line 2 of the self-presentation of Sarenput I: *ỉ 3nḥw [tpw] t3 sw3t(y)=sn ḥr is.pn*, "O! Ones who live upon the earth who may pass by this tomb"; Eyre, "Egyptian Self-Presentation": 11–12.

16 Eyre, "Egyptian Self-Presentation": 10.

17 Eyre, "Egyptian Self-Presentation": 11.

18 Doxey, "'Autobiographical' Texts": 994.

19 For a detailed discussion of ancient Egyptian self-presentation, see Hussein Bassir, ed., *Living Forever: Self-Presentation in Ancient Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2019).

20 Doxey, "'Autobiographical' Texts": 995.

presentation of the tomb owner's ethics towards his family, nameless dependents, and the king or present a career narrative highlighting the tomb owner's skill, character and effectiveness through snippets of his professional life.²¹ In this way, the identity of the tomb owner was constructed through the lens of his social and cultural context, and not through expressions of individuality or personality.²² This does not mean that these aspects were less significant to the tomb owner, rather that such emotive individuality was not appropriate for public discourse.²³ Their goal was to be remembered well, through their position in society and the social roles they would occupy, and thus the stress in their self-presentations was on their societal, and not personal, role.²⁴

2.1 The Evolution of Self-Presentations: Early Fourth Dynasty to Sixth Dynasty

Self-presentations from throughout Pharaonic Egypt draw on established concepts of 'justice' and 'appropriate' behaviour²⁵ which build on a repertoire of stock phrases and sentiments that are justified through the inclusion of elements of the tomb owners' professional careers or other noteworthy episodes of their lives.²⁶ We can see the beginnings of a written tradition of self-presentation during the Old Kingdom Fourth Dynasty²⁷ (2575–2450 BC),²⁸ a time where the royal aristocracy held the highest official positions of state administration.²⁹ Sneferu, the first king of the Fourth Dynasty, accomplished many changes to Old Kingdom culture and organisation, including an emphasis on solar-royal (political) ideology,³⁰ building on and adapting the

21 Doxey, "'Autobiographical' Texts": 995.

22 Gnirs, "Biographies": 184.

23 Eyre, "Egyptian Self-Presentation": 9–10.

24 Eyre, "Egyptian Self-Presentation": 9.

25 Doxey, "'Autobiographical' Texts": 994–96.

26 Gnirs, "Biographies": 184.

27 John Baines, "Forerunners of Narrative Biographies," in *Studies on Ancient Egypt in Honour of H.S. Smith*, ed. Anthony Leahy and John Tait (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1999): 23–37.

28 The dates for the Fourth Dynasty here follow Hend Sherbiny, "Self-Presentation in the Fourth Dynasty," in *Living Forever: Self-Presentation in Ancient Egypt*, ed. Hussein Bassir (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2019): 51. Alternative dates are often referred to as it is hard to pinpoint the exact timeline of the early Egyptian state. For a discussion on 'dating', see Nigel Strudwick, "The Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period," in *The Oxford Handbook of Egyptology*, ed. Ian Shaw and Elizabeth Bloxam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020): 625–26.

29 Miroslav Bárta, "'Abusir Paradigm' and the Beginning of the Fifth Dynasty," in *The Pyramids: Between Life and Death. Proceedings of the Workshop Held at Uppsala University*, ed. Irmgard Hein, Nils Billing and Erika Meyer-Dietrich (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2016): 51–74.

30 Sherbiny, "Self-Presentation in the Fourth Dynasty": 51.

pre-established concepts of order, prosperity and legitimacy to strengthen his status as a divine ruler.³¹ His extensive pyramid construction projects at Meidum, Seila and Dahshur marked the beginning of the “Pyramid Age”,³² and are taken, in addition to his successful military campaigns to Libya and Nubia,³³ to reflect the power of the ‘state’ in its control (monopoly) over resources.³⁴ Private tombs of officials during the Fourth Dynasty, which were usually built surrounding the tomb of the king, as seen in the Giza plateau,³⁵ can be taken to further demonstrate the power of the king as a ‘visual metaphor’ for state organisation;³⁶ the king wielded the power, and the officials benefited from proximity and good service.

While the private tombs of the Fourth Dynasty maintained the traditional shape and stature of the previous dynasty, it seems the funerary goods and equipment were less, but the decoration, barring a strict and brief decrease during the reign of Khufu, increased to incorporate new scenes that were previously not in use.³⁷ It appears as though, with the use of new royal ideology by Sneferu to reinforce his position of power, the decoration and texts of private tombs developed to emphasise power by association. The small non-royal self-presentations of the Fourth Dynasty show many variations of form and content³⁸ that, rather than showing a particular evolution from one style to another, show numerous styles co-occurring but also constrained by strict decorum.³⁹ Several forms of titulary list as well as an annalistic format have been identified as the dominant formats for action-/career-/event-based self-presentations, whereas the more moral-/ethics-based biographies, still in their embryonic stage at this time, took the form of ‘commented epithets’.⁴⁰ The titulary lists can be considered the predeces-

31 Miroslav Bárta, “Kings, Viziers, and Courtiers: Executive Power in the Third Millennium BC,” in *Ancient Egyptian Administration*, ed. Juan Carlos Moreno García (Leiden: Brill, 2013): 163.

32 Rainer Stadelmann, “The Pyramids of the Fourth Dynasty,” in *The Treasures of the Pyramids*, ed. Zahi Hawass (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2003): 112–37.

33 Rainer Stadelmann, “Builders of the Pyramids,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East 2*, ed. Jack M. Sasson, John Baines, Gary Beckman and Karen S. Rubinson (New York: Charles Scribner’s, Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1995): 719–34.

34 Sherbiny, “Self-Presentation in the Fourth Dynasty”: 53.

35 Ann Macy Roth, “Social Change in the Fourth Dynasty: The Spatial Organization of Pyramids, Tombs, and Cemeteries,” *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 30 (1993): 33.

36 David O’Connor, “Political Systems and Archaeological Data in Egypt: 2600–1780 BC,” *World Archaeology* 6, no. 1 (1974): 19–21.

37 Roth “Social Change in the Fourth Dynasty”: 42–43.

38 Sherbiny, “Self-Presentation in the Fourth Dynasty”: 55.

39 Michel Baud, “The Birth of Biography in Ancient Egypt: Text Format and Content in the IVth Dynasty,” in *Texte und Denkmäler des ägyptischen Alten Reiches*, ed. Stephan Johannes Seidlmayer (Berlin: Achet, 2005): 119–24.

40 Baud identified three main types of titulary: the intrinsic narrative titulary arranges titles and epithets in chronological order of titles and epithets, including all biographical information in the titulary, the commented titulary includes a lengthy list of titles interspersed with biographical or other information connected to the titles, and the appended titulary replaces generic epithets with epithet-

sors of ‘career self-presentations’, also termed ‘action biography’ (*Handlungsbiographie*), presenting the chosen noteworthy events chronologically, and ‘event biography’ (*Ereignisbiographie*), focussing on a certain feature of the tomb owner’s life.⁴¹ Inscriptions focused on tomb protection or builder’s rewards were likewise probably the beginnings of the ‘ideal self-presentation’ or ‘ethical biography’⁴² which place the tomb owner within the elite classification of ethical morals and values, portraying the protagonist as being wholly dependent on Pharaoh and in complete accordance with the morals and expectations of the ruling elites.⁴³

Towards the end of the Fourth Dynasty this monopoly of state offices by royalty changed, and many official positions began to be occupied by non-royal officials⁴⁴ who owed their position to their family background, their competency and, most importantly, their loyalty to the king.⁴⁵ The establishment of important cult centres in the provinces allowed for a (more or less) direct line between the state and its regional officials; temples of cultic centres were provided with land and people to work said land by the ‘state’, which would benefit from all resources collected from the land through the supervision of an official whose position was owed to the continuing functionality of the ‘state’ and monarchy.⁴⁶ With the administration being occupied by increasing numbers of non-royal officials, including the office of Vizier, the role of the king became less important in granting office as many of these official roles be-

like lines referring to a specific event. The annalistic format follows the style of annals which include vertical columns of text describing the event of the horizontal title-line overhead, and commented epithets emphasise loyalty to the king through titles justified with some biographical comments while justifying rewards received through general statements of loyalty and effectiveness. See Baud, “The Birth of Biography”: 91–124.

⁴¹ Baud builds on terminologies defined and discussed by Gnirs to further characterise the nature of biographical texts through labels based on form and content. See Baud “The Birth of Biography”: 91–124; Bassir, ed. *Living Forever: Self-Presentation in Ancient Egypt*; Andrea M. Gnirs, “The Egyptian Autobiography,” in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, ed. Antonio Loprieno (Leiden: Brill, 1996): 191–241.

⁴² Jan Assmann, *Stein und Zeit: Mensch und Gesellschaft im Alten Ägypten* (Munich: Fink, 1991): 179–80; Baud, “The Birth of Biography”: 91–124.

⁴³ Sherbiny, “Self-Presentation in the Fourth Dynasty”: 60–61; Baud, “The Birth of Biography”: 91–93.

⁴⁴ Wolfgang Helck, *Untersuchungen zu den Beamtentiteln des ägyptischen Alten Reiches*, Ägyptologische Forschungen 18 (Glückstadt: Augustin, 1954): 58; Klaus Baer, *Rank and Title in the Old Kingdom: The Structure of the Egyptian Administration in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960): 300; Bárta, “Abusir Paradigm”: 52.

⁴⁵ Hana Vymazalová, “Self-Presentation in the Late Old Kingdom,” in *Living Forever: Self-Presentation in Ancient Egypt*, ed. Hussein Bassir (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2019): 67.

⁴⁶ Juan Carlos Moreno García, “Building the Pharaonic State: Territory, Elite and Power in Ancient Egypt in the 3rd Millennium BCE,” in *Experiencing Power, Generating Authority: Cosmos, Politics, and the Ideology of Kingship in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia*, ed. Jane A. Hill, Philip Jones and Antonio J. Morales (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2013): 190–95.

came hereditary, making kinship the most important factor of dictating office.⁴⁷ This does not mean that the king lost all importance in delegating official duties. On the contrary, the shift in attainability of office would likely ensure that the officials were continuously tied to the success of the monarchy and the ruling elites. Through the increased practice of granting offices to influential provincial officials or curating beneficial arranged marriages of princesses or provincial women, the circulation of palace-culture in the provinces was facilitated with the aim of reinforcing the power (both symbolic and political) of the King.⁴⁸ This cycle of dependency maintains the position of the King and the 'state' through ensuring the dependence of officials to the regime. These close kinship ties were also reflected in burials, which would either emphasise their closeness with the king, through use of typically royal architecture within the tomb or close proximity to a royal tomb or monument, or stress a close familial relationship with a member of the royal family or another high-ranking official through proximity to their tomb, or decoration and text within their own tomb.⁴⁹ This led to the creation of 'family tombs', in which lower-ranking officials arranged to have one or more shafts stemming from the superstructure of their tomb, leading to the inclusion of several burial chambers where presumably members of a single family were buried over several generations,⁵⁰ a practice which continued well into the Sixth Dynasty.⁵¹ The change in the administration of the late Old Kingdom brought with it a greater emphasis on kinship ties that secured one's status within the tomb context, securing family cult, stressing familial ties and, therefore, highlighting the relationships between individual family members for the purpose of securing and justifying one's rank and office.⁵²

The titular lists of the Late Old Kingdom (Fifth and Sixth Dynasties) usually comprised of honorary, judicial, administrative and priestly duties, often including lower and higher ranking versions of the same office,⁵³ with the protagonist's closeness or

47 Bárta, "Kings, Viziers, and Courtiers": 166.

48 Juan Carlos Moreno García, "Building the Pharaonic State": 194.

49 Vymazalová, "Self-Presentation in the late Old Kingdom": 71–73.

50 Miroslav Bárta, "Egyptian Kingship during the Old Kingdom," in *Experiencing Power, Generating Authority: Cosmos, Politics, and the Ideology of Kingship in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia*, ed. Jane A. Hill, Philip Jones and Antonio J. Morales (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2013): 269; Miroslav Bárta, *Journey to the West: The World of the Old Kingdom Tombs in Ancient Egypt* (Prague: Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Arts, 2011): 185.

51 Vymazalová, "Self-Presentation in the Late Old Kingdom": 73; Hana Vymazalová, "Exploration of the Burial Apartments in Tomb Complex AS 68: Preliminary Report of the 2013 Fall Season," *Pražské Egyptologické Studie* 15 (2015): 57.

52 Bárta, "Egyptian Kingship during the Old Kingdom": 269.

53 This would reflect the career progression of the deceased as they worked their way from, for example, third priest of Amun to High priest of Amun. Vymazalová notes that while the highest ranking titles were emphasised in the hieroglyphic inscriptions of the tombs, the hieratic inscriptions of the masonry often used only one title, suggesting that it was not necessarily the highest ranking title that was the most important to the individual; see Hana Vymazalová, "Old Hieratic Inscriptions from the

importance to the King being more explicitly emphasised within a narrative frame of the self-presentation proper.⁵⁴ Several types of self-presentation can still be distinguished during this time, which develop from the Fourth Dynasty examples.⁵⁵ Some typically emphasise the tomb owner's just behaviour towards their family and dependents, their duties of office and more generally their adherence to *m3't*, the cosmic order of truth and justness,⁵⁶ and the ideals of the ruling elites, presenting in a more narrative frame the phrases that by the end of the Fifth Dynasty would develop into 'ideal self-presentations'.⁵⁷ Others emphasise their more personal relationship to the king, promoting their own status through mentions of work they have done for him, rewards they have received and, occasionally, the inclusion of letters from the king or narrations of specific personal experiences that highlight a close relationship with the king.⁵⁸ Towards the late Fifth Dynasty, tomb inscriptions sometimes mention, either generally or specifically, how the tomb owner fulfilled his duties to the king by carrying out their ascribed role,⁵⁹ and it is around this time that we can see that the focus of the tomb inscription is placed on the tomb owner himself.⁶⁰ This focal shift would appear both in the royal residence and in provincial cemeteries and continued into the Sixth Dynasty, as the language shifted from the third to first person singular to accommodate the individual owning their achievements and highlighting their honours.⁶¹ Self-presentation inscriptions centring on military exploits become more popular by the late Sixth Dynasty,⁶² with the emphasis of some self-presentations shifting to portray the tomb owner as the main agent of his inscription and an active histori-

Old Kingdom Tombs at Abusir," in *Ägyptologische 'Binsen'-Weisheiten III: Formen und Funktionen von Zeichenliste und Paläographie*, ed. Svenja A. Gülden, Kyra van der Moezel and Ursula Verhoeven (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2018): 185–216.

54 Vymazalová, "Self-Presentation in the Late Old Kingdom": 77.

55 Vymazalová, "Self-Presentation in the Late Old Kingdom": 77.

56 The concept of *m3't* corresponds to the ancient Egyptian concept of 'truth' or 'justness', the cosmic order against which all acts in life would be measured. It was an ideal that meant to represent fairness and goodness to those who embodied it, the Eloquent Peasant's appeals to the Chief Steward, Rensi, comment on the nature of *m3't* and what it means to be one who embodies its qualities. 'Tomb biographies' would centre passages around *m3't* as, in the afterlife, one's heart would be weighed against the feather of Truth (*m3't*) in order to see whether the individual had led a good life. The aim was not for the heart to be lighter than the feather, but equal, having led a conceptually balanced life of no intended wrongdoing.

57 Nicole Kloth, *Die (auto-)biographischen Inschriften des ägyptischen Alten Reiches: Untersuchungen zu Phraseologie und Entwicklung*, Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur, Beihefte 8 (Hamburg: Buske, 2002): 229–39.

58 Kloth, *Die (auto-)biographischen Inschriften des ägyptischen Alten Reiches*: 229–30.

59 Kloth, *Die (auto-)biographischen Inschriften des ägyptischen Alten Reiches*: 243–46.

60 Kloth, *Die (auto-)biographischen Inschriften des ägyptischen Alten Reiches*: 254.

61 Kloth, *Die (auto-)biographischen Inschriften des ägyptischen Alten Reiches*: 243–44; Vymazalová, "Self-Presentation in the Late Old Kingdom": 80.

62 Vymazalová, "Self-Presentation in the Late Old Kingdom": 81.

cal figure,⁶³ demonstrating a shift in the arrangement and content of self-presentations between the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties.⁶⁴ This reflects the changes in the power dynamics of the administration of the late Old Kingdom, with Sixth Dynasty self-presentations incorporating themes and motifs with a more local, provincial, focus which would become typical of the later First Intermediate Period.⁶⁵ The inclusion of non-royal officials in state administration gradually led to a shift in the focus of their self-presentations from state/king-focused to more personal/locally-focused, with this class of officials eventually gaining enough power to demonstrate some increasing levels of autonomy which resulted in the weakening of the “central state”.⁶⁶

2.1.1 Ankhtifi

It is with this context that we find ourselves in the First Intermediate Period, which saw local governors rise in prominence in the governance of their local areas in a time thought of by scholars to be defined by the political fragmentation of the “centralised state”.⁶⁷ Private tomb inscriptions of this time inform us that this fragmentation provided an opportunity for local rulers to control resources previously monopolised by the royal elites, for common men to climb the social ladder (locally), and for tomb owners to stress independence and individuality in their inscriptions through an emphasis on how their (own) actions ensured the prosperity and wellbeing of their people.⁶⁸ One such ruler was Ankhtifi, Nomarch during the Ninth Dynasty, whose long string of titles includes Governor of the Horus-Throne nome and Horus of Nekhen nome, Hereditary Noble, and military titles such as troop commander, and overseer of foreign lands.⁶⁹ His tomb is the largest of two decorated tombs at el-Mo’alla with an extensive and highly individual tomb biography detailing accounts of his actions taken to stabilise his area as a self-made ‘Big-Man’ and patron.⁷⁰

Horus brought me to the Horus-Throne nome for life, prosperity and health, to (re-)establish it, and I did . . .

⁶³ Kloth, *Die (auto-)biographischen Inschriften des ägyptischen Alten Reiches*: 247.

⁶⁴ Vymazalová, “Self-Presentation in the Late Old Kingdom”: 80–81.

⁶⁵ Kloth, *Die (auto-)biographischen Inschriften des ägyptischen Alten Reiches*: 254; Vymazalová, “Self-Presentation in the Late Old Kingdom”: 82.

⁶⁶ Vymazalová, “Self-Presentation in the Late Old Kingdom”: 68.

⁶⁷ Renata Landgráfová, “Self-Presentation in the Eleventh Dynasty,” in *Living Forever: Self-Presentation in Ancient Egypt*, ed. Hussein Bassir (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2019): 89.

⁶⁸ Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies*: 21.

⁶⁹ Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies*: 25.

⁷⁰ Marcelo Campagno, “Lo patronal, lo estatal y lo parental en la Autobiografía de Ankhtifi de Mo’alla,” *Antiguo Oriente* 9 (2011): 89–91.

I found the House of Khuu inundated like a marshland, abandoned by him who belonged to it, in the grip of a rebel, under the control of a wretch.

I made a man embrace the slayer of his father, the slayer of his brother, so as to (re-)establish the Horus-Throne nome.

No power in whom there is the heat of [strife] will be accepted, now that all manner of evil, whose doing people hate, has been suppressed.⁷¹

The event which this excerpt narrates details the takeover of the Horus-Throne nome by Ankhtifi in a likely exaggerated retelling of the state in which he found the area and what happened as a result of his intervention. In a phrasing traditionally associated with the King, Ankhtifi claims to have been directed by the god Horus of Edfu to establish order in the Edfu nome, where the temple and image of the god resided. The self-presentation displays a more intimate than usual relationship with the god for someone of his rank. Ankhtifi presents himself as emulating Horus, the solar god of kingship and therefore the one who establishes order, by re-establishing order himself. The term *grg*, ‘to (re)-establish’ or ‘to restore’ evokes the idea of ‘re-establishing order’,⁷² a motif that is reserved for officials, royalty or divinity.⁷³ Ankhtifi takes this motif one step further by portraying himself not only as a self-made big man, but as the acting instrument of the will of Horus, justifying his position as a patron through emphasising his efficacy and position of power.

His position is further justified through his description of the state in which he found the Edfu nome. Under the rule of the House of Khuu, in an apparent state of water mismanagement and having been abandoned by its local populous, Ankhtifi describes the area as being ‘in the grip of a rebel’, or *sbí*. Alternative translations for this term include ‘opposition’, or ‘to oppose’, which carry a connotation of resistance against the king and the established order, a traditional theme found in later Middle Kingdom didactic literature, which advises the eradication of all who oppose the king.⁷⁴ In rescuing the area from ineffective rule, Ankhtifi is identifying himself as The One who establishes order, at least on an extended local level, reaffirming his position as the instrument of Horus, and an autonomous and independent ruler.

The practicality behind this takeover demonstrates the control that Ankhtifi had over people and resources. Private tombs and inscriptions form the major sources of

⁷¹ This translation follows Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies*: 25.

⁷² Richard B. Parkinson, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant: A Reader's Commentary*, *Lingua Aegyptia Studia Monographica* 10 (Hamburg: Widmaier, 2012): 149.

⁷³ Elke Blumenthal, *Untersuchungen zum ägyptischen Königtum des Mittleren Reiches I: Die Phraseologie*, *Abhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-Historische Klasse* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1970).

⁷⁴ Georges Posener, *L'enseignement loyaliste: sagesse égyptienne du Moyen Empire*, *Centre de Recherches d'Histoire et de Philologie de la IVe Section de l'Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes* 2; *Hautes Études Orientales* 5 (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1976): 96–97.

the First Intermediate Period and tell us that nomes were frequently ruled by local men who enjoyed more autonomy than Middle Kingdom texts looking in retrospect would have us assume, with most self-presentations of this time emphasising the self-made nature of these local rulers. Ankhtifi's self-presentation, however, certainly demonstrates an enigmatically high level of individuality in the career aspects and boastful language.

Ankhtifi goes on to tell us how he made the people of the nome reconcile, having suppressed all evil in the area, boasting that he had done the impossible in bringing order back to a land which was in complete disarray, effectively carrying out the will of Horus:

I invited the Council of the Overseer of Upper Egypt . . . to confer with . . . (the) Great Headman of the nome of Nekhen, Hetep.

A thing I have not found done by other headmen who have been in this nome, (it was done) by my excellent planning, by my steady council, by my nightly vigilance.

I am the champion who has no peer!⁷⁵

In this passage Ankhtifi acknowledges royal control in the form of "the Council of the Overseer of Upper Egypt" with Ankhtifi inviting them to visit the third Nome, while another man, Hetep, ruled it. The passage is written in a way that emphasises Ankhtifi as the one who is facilitating a peaceful conversation that would otherwise be a (possibly) more volatile situation. Ankhtifi boasts how it was his fine qualities that facilitated a meeting that no one else had (apparently) attempted, or succeeded at, before. The term *šm*, translated here as 'planning', carries other notions of 'conduct' or 'council', implying the diplomatic expertise of Ankhtifi, who could not only violently eradicate *sbī* from his nome, but could also bring about peaceful resolution with skilful mediation. He represents himself as a kind of 'mythic' or 'messianic' figure whose prowess, diplomacy and efficacy were beyond compare.

After this mention of royal authority in his nome, the only authority mentioned in the biography is Ankhtifi's,⁷⁶ emphasising throughout his biography that he is more effective than any man: "I am the champion who has no peer" is repeated several times throughout Ankhtifi's biography. So much so that it is worth speculating over whether this particular line is the 'punctuation mark' between the narrations of episodes from his life, or in fact the main feature of the lengthy inscriptions. The root of the word *t3y*,⁷⁷ translated here as 'champion', is simply 'to be male', which gives the clause a sense of meaning 'I am a male unlike any other', and can be taken further to

⁷⁵ This translation follows Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies*: 26.

⁷⁶ Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies*: 25.

⁷⁷ Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian: Addenda and Corrigenda* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1972): 303.

mean something like ‘I am a masculine man unlike any other’.⁷⁸ The focus is always on what Ankhthifi has done to prove that he is a champion without an equal. He does not frame his position or power as something that he gained through anything other than his own actions. Most passivity in the clauses of his self-presentation tends to be used to describe other actors, not himself. He consistently frames himself, in a predominantly individual style, as a highly powerful patron who was more than capable of looking after his dependents, drawing on traditional themes and motifs to legitimise his boastful self-presentation.

2.1.2 Sarenput I

The reunification of Egypt during the Eleventh Dynasty of the Middle Kingdom, the beginning of the second millennium, brought with it a retinue of new officials who played active parts in consolidating the new regime.⁷⁹ An awareness of this key role that they played is demonstrated in the conception of a new style of self-presentation: the ‘encomiastic autobiography’, which combined a renewed sense of loyalty to the King with extensive epithets highlighting the fine character and social skills of the official.⁸⁰ The knowledge of the administrative organisation of the period is not extensive, but it has been suggested that during this time, there was a large degree of social differentiation with a “middle class”⁸¹ that enjoyed more social mobility than one would assume based on the self-presentations. The rise in this educated, “liberated ‘middle class’” has been connected to the creation and thriving nature of literature,⁸² which was facilitated by an “increased use of writing”⁸³. Writings of all genres thus form a physical testament to the value attached to eloquence and rhetorical sophistication: The Middle Kingdom was certainly, in part, characterised by its literature.

78 Ludwig Morenz, “Von pointierter Maskulinität im Ägypten des späten dritten Jahrtausends v. Chr.: Zur funerären Inszenierung des Potentaten Ankhthifi als übermenschlichem ‘Manns-Kerl’,” in *Geschlecht macht Herrschaft: Interdisziplinäre Studien zu vormoderner Macht und Herrschaft*, ed. Andrea Stiedorf, Linda Dohmen, Irina Dumitrescu and Ludwig D. Morenz (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2021): 154–55.

79 Gnirs, “Biographies”: 187.

80 Gnirs, “Biographies”: 187; Hussein Bassir, “Non-Royal Self-Presentation,” *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, ed. Anne Austin and Willeke Wendrich (Los Angeles: UCLA, 2021): 5.

81 Richard B. Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt: A Dark Side to Perfection*, Athlone Publications in Egyptology and Ancient Near Eastern Studies (London: Continuum, 2002): 65.

82 Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt*: 65; Antonio Loprieno, *Topos und Mimesis: Zum Ausländer in der ägyptischen Literatur*, Ägyptologische Abhandlungen 48 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988).

83 Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt*: 66; Ludwig Morenz, *Beiträge zur Schriftlichkeitskultur im Mittleren Reich und in der 2. Zwischenzeit*, Ägypten und Altes Testament 29 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996): 29.

These burgeoning traits of eloquence become a new attribute, among those already established, to be boasted in the epithets of self-presentations, along with intellect, diplomacy (likely stemming from First Intermediate Period examples), efficacy, firmness, and social standing.⁸⁴ The emergence of these new accepted attributes, at first glance, portrays the relationship between official and the King as far more reciprocal due to this awareness of their role in the re-unification of the country, but the presence of heavily loyalist themes is almost always present, and stands as a reminder of the dependency dynamics at play: reciprocal does not mean equal, and individual acts or qualities do not necessarily improve your social rank without the aid of a patron.

One such self-presentation belongs to Sarenput I, tomb QH36 at Qubbet el-Hawa, a Governor of Abu (contemporary Gezirat el-Aswan) during the reign of Senwosret I. His self-presentation appears twice in his tomb, with some differences between the two copies, and this text provides an example of a 'typical' self-presentation in that the individual acts in accordance with the King's wishes, demonstrating a "strongly affirmative attitude to authority"⁸⁵:

(I) made a tomb in the praise of the king, His majesty made me excellent on earth,
I was distinguished more than the governors of the nomes.
(I) have [preserved?⁸⁶] the laws of the ancient ones,
(and one) caused that I should reach the sky in a moment⁸⁷

In this decidedly traditional extract, Sarenput places himself in the shoes of dependent in stating that he built his tomb in praise of his king. The term 'praise' or 'favour', Hsi in Egyptian, infers a reciprocal relationship between the one who praises and the one who is praised,⁸⁸ but not an equal relationship. The direction of Hsi is always from a higher to lower rank,⁸⁹ so Sarenput here stresses the point that his

⁸⁴ Doxey, "'Autobiographical' Texts": 999; Gnirs, "Biographies": 187.

⁸⁵ Richard B. Parkinson, *Reading Ancient Egyptian Poetry: Among Other Histories* (Chichester/Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009): 23.

⁸⁶ The text here is missing; however, the suggestion of "preserved" follows Alan H. Gardiner, "Inscriptions from the Tomb of Si-renpowet I., Prince of Elephantine," *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 45 (1910): 123–40.

⁸⁷ The text here follows my own translation, based on the inscriptions of the two copies of Sarenput I's self-presentation found in Gardiner, "Inscriptions from the Tomb of Si-renpowet I", 123–40, lines 7–8 of the architrave and door posts and lines 6–7 of the inner chamber, North and West walls.

⁸⁸ Robert Parant, *L'affaire Sinouhé: tentative d'approche de la justice répressive égyptienne au début du IIe millénaire av. J.C.* (Aurillac: Robert Parant, 1982): 294–97.

⁸⁹ Parkinson, *The Tale of the Eloquent Peasant*: 83; Blumenthal, *Untersuchungen zum ägyptischen Königtum des Mittleren Reiches I*: 313–14; Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, trans. John Baines (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982): 201–2; Denise Doxey, *Egyptian Non-Royal Epithets in the Middle Kingdom: A Social and Historical Analysis*, *Probleme der Ägyptologie* 12 (Leiden: Brill, 1998): 137–40.

tomb was built with the support and favour of the king, who also made him ‘excellent’ on earth. To be excellent, *iqr*, can also be taken to mean ‘trustworthy’, ‘skilful’ or ‘superior in rank’,⁹⁰ with a sense of the latter seemingly emphasised here as Sarenput continues to describe how he was favoured by being “advanced, *stny*, more than the governors of the nomes”. This term is written in a stative grammatical form here, indicating that Sarenput was in a state of being *stny*; ‘advanced’, ‘distinguished’ or ‘honoured’ in relation to the other local rulers, who, according to his self-presentation, were not.

His emphasis throughout the biography and particularly in this passage is on his close relationship to the king, deriving his status from his dependence and loyalty to the king.⁹¹ The passive nature of Sarenput’s advancement more than the other governors of the nomes again puts the emphasis on his favoured position with the King. This position is backed up by the depiction of Sarenput before figures of local gods in his tomb chapel and accompanying texts which talk of Sarenput rebuilding the chapel of a local deified expedition leader, the theme of re-building similar to Ankhtifi’s re-establishment of the Horus-Throne nome, both motifs that are usually reserved for the King.⁹²

“Preserving the laws of the ancient ones” could allude to the Old Kingdom as a time of strength, stability, and inspiration for the early rulers of the Middle Kingdom who, through texts possibly distributed as propaganda, promoted the notion of the First Intermediate Period as being a time of chaos and desolation. In preserving the laws of the ancients, Sarenput is upholding the order of his Lord whom he again suggests is responsible for his good fortune in saying that “one caused” him to reach the sky, drawing on cosmological metaphor to express his entry to a higher social rank. The passive nature of the statement places Sarenput as the object of the un-named (yet implied) subject’s will. Here lies one key difference from the self-presentation of Ankhtifi: Sarenput upholds the order of the King, Ankhtifi upholds the order of Horus.

The following quote, although still demonstrating his dependence on the King, is not considered ‘standard’ due to the continuation of highly imaginative and quite beautiful cosmic imagery:

I rejoiced over my being caused to reach heaven,
my head pierced the sky, I grazed the bodies of the stars,
I won rejoicing, I shone as a star,
I danced like the planets,
my town was in festivity, my troops rejoiced at what was heard⁹³

⁹⁰ The translation suggestions for *iqr* follow Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*.

⁹¹ Parkinson, *Reading Ancient Egyptian Poetry*: 25.

⁹² Detlef Franke, *Das Heiligtum des Heqaib auf Elephantine: Geschichte eines Provinzheiligtums im Mittleren Reich*, Studien zur Archäologie und Geschichte Ägyptens 9 (Heidelberg: Heidelberger Orientverlag, 1994).

⁹³ Gardiner, “Inscriptions from the Tomb of Si-renpowet I”: 123–40.

The striking imagery of this quote grants a greatness to Sarenput which we would usually expect to refer only to gods and kings.⁹⁴ His expression of excitement, presumably at being granted a promotion by the king, is individual, though it is not unheard of for high officials of the Middle Kingdom to utilise such imaginative language to express particular aspects of their greatness during this time. He repeats that he rejoices, over being caused to reach 'heaven', with *h'ỉ*, 'rejoice' or 'joyful', first occurring here in a stative form; he was in a state of rejoicing at being caused to reach heaven.

If "caused to reach heaven" means receiving a higher rank as a result of his loyal behaviour, then to have his "head pierce the sky" and to "graze the bodies of the stars" could be the embellishment of his experience of this higher rank in gaining access to an environment that had previously been inaccessible. In gaining access to "the heavens", Sarenput is placed in the presence of "stars", which could refer to members of the high elite, royalty and/or the King. And he is not only among them, but he "shone as a star" himself, inferring his acceptance as a member of the high elite, an occasion which, according to Sarenput, would be a cause for "festivity", *hb*, for his dependents, a word that is also used to refer to religious festivals and royal celebrations.⁹⁵

However, the passivity of the phrase "my being caused to reach heaven" reminds us of the predominantly traditional themes utilised that place Sarenput as a loyal instrument of the re-established regime. Even though he has earned something worth celebrating, he still owes this to the King, and therefore still frames himself, predominantly, as 'dependent' in this way. In doing this, Sarenput demonstrates his reliance on the power of the king for him to maintain his position, who in turn will have been somewhat dependent on the loyalty of Sarenput.⁹⁶

3 Conclusion

We have seen that the practice of including self-presentations within a tomb was a dynamic process of continuous development, beginning with establishing the 'traditional' themes of loyalty to the ruling regime and highlighting aspects of one's career during the fourth dynasty. The fragmentation of the 'central administration' at the end of the Old Kingdom facilitated the inclusion of more unique and individual narratives which emphasise the less dependent, more autonomous nature of the local elites of the First Intermediate Period. While it does become more acceptable to boast independence during this time, Ankhtifi certainly demonstrates a higher level of individu-

⁹⁴ Maya Müller, "Egyptian Aesthetics in the Middle Kingdom," in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Egyptologists*, ed. Christopher Eyre (Leuven: Peeters, 1998): 785–92.

⁹⁵ Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*: 166–67.

⁹⁶ Parkinson, *Reading Ancient Egyptian Poetry*: 25.

ality through including rather detailed descriptions of events from his career that confirm him to be *The Patron* for his extended local area. He does this through both innovation and tradition: the assertion that he is a man unlike any other builds on traditional themes of masculinity, career, and adherence to the expectations of one's role. Traditionally, however, many themes presented in Ankhtifi's self-presentation, such as violent masculinity in establishing order, and being directed by a god, are reserved for the king. But it is this fragmentation of order facilitating a rise in self-presentation 'individuality' that continued the development of self-presentations in general; so by the Middle Kingdom, we see the beginnings of a new style of self-presentation that permitted the inclusion of themes that likely have roots in the First Intermediate Period, such as diplomacy, efficacy, or firmness. Although not stated explicitly in the previous quotes, Sarenput boasts his efficacy in relating his rewards; a fine tomb and higher rank, things he would not have achieved if he were not an able and effective client. The individuality demonstrated in Sarenput I's self-presentation mainly takes the form of beautiful metaphorical imagery that, even though it too is usually reserved for the king, is still used to emphasise the dependency of Sarenput I on the king for his social position. Even when Sarenput tells us how he acted as expected in his role of patron, it is always with a stress on this backdrop of loyalism that resurges with the re-unification of Egypt. When taking the language of dependency expressed in these biographies within the cultural and historical contexts of the times they were written, we can begin to understand that the emphasis, whether it be on autonomy or dependence on the king, did not develop in a vacuum, but was directly influenced by the practical realities of the dependency framework that ancient Egyptian officials operated in.

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