

## A Fragmentary Carrying Chair Scene in Salt Lake City, Utah

EDWARD BROVARSKI

**Abstract:** In the collections of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts in Salt Lake City is a fragmentary limestone relief of a chair carrying scene. The relief fragment in Salt Lake City was a gift to the museum from Natacha Rambova (née Shaugnessy), a dancer, spiritualist, Hollywood costume and set designer, and one-time wife of Rudolph Valentino, who developed an interest in ancient Egypt. Such chair carrying scenes in the Old Kingdom are generally accompanied by a porters' ditty, a so-called Sänftenlied. The fragmentary scene in Salt Lake City is unusual in substituting commands to the porters for the ditty.

**Keywords:** carrying chair scene, 'Sänftenleid', Natasha Rambova, Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Metjetji, Pepy I

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In the collections of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts in Salt Lake City is a fragmentary limestone relief showing seven porters carrying the chair of an Old Kingdom noble (**Figs 1–2**). The relief bears the accession number UMFA 1958.001. That this is indeed part of a chair carrying scene is clear from the attitude of the bearers, whose arms are raised to support the pole of the chair. In front of and behind them are the figures of two officials who are giving commands to the porters. The unusual content of their speeches will be discussed further below.

Only a small portion of the foremost official survives. He may or may not have had his head turned back to address the porters. The forward portion of the body of the rearmost official is preserved. He raises his arm in a gesture of address.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that both officials wore a short kilt with a projecting front panel. This is apparent in the first instance from the segment of selvedge preserved on the official's kilt.

The porters of the chair are wigless and have their hair close-cropped. For modesty's sake, they are wearing a long belt sash whose loose ends hang down in front.

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<sup>1</sup> Müller 1937: 69–70, Fig. 10.

The carrying chair was a sign of high social rank and importance.<sup>2</sup> The motif of the tomb owner transported in a carrying chair or a more elaborate palanquin recurs in a fair number of tombs of Old Kingdom date, beginning with a portrayal in the tomb of prince Nefermaat at Medum in the early Fourth Dynasty.<sup>3</sup> Written evidence suggests that the use of a carrying chair was a privilege granted by the king, who also assigned youths of the Residence to carry the chair. Carrying chairs were used for visits and inspections of every sort.<sup>4</sup>

The relief fragment in Salt Lake City was a gift to the museum from Natacha Rambova (née Shaugnessy), a dancer, spiritualist, Hollywood costume and set designer, and one-time wife of Rudolph Valentino, who developed an interest in ancient Egypt. Having studied briefly under S.R.K. Glanville and met Alexandre Piankoff, she recorded religious texts in the royal tombs under the latter's direction and helped with the publication of the texts in the Bollingen series.<sup>5</sup> The former director of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Mr. Sanguinetti, talked with Rambova before her death, but she kept no accession records, and he was unable to gather much information from her (Letter August 2, 1982 from William Balken, Registrar). Thus, the original provenance of the Utah chair carrying scene relief is unknown.

An anonymous gallery label of which Mr. Balken kindly sent me a copy suggests the tomb of Niankh-nesut as a possible provenance, although no other fragments of such a scene are known to have survived from his tomb.<sup>6</sup> It occurs to me that another possible source might be the tomb of Metjeti. A fragment of limestone relief from the latter tomb that shows the upper part of a chair carrying scene at present resides in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (acc. no. 55.6.2) in Richmond, Virginia.<sup>7</sup> It is nevertheless difficult to envision a join between the Richmond and Salt Lake City fragments because one is damaged at the bottom and the other at the top. In support of the putative join is that both pieces are in medium-high relief of good quality and both have extensive traces of paint. If the fragment indeed comes from the tomb of Metjeti, it would date to the first half of the Sixth Dynasty, since Metjeti seemingly served Pepy I in office.<sup>8</sup>

## INSCRIPTION

The speech on the left seemingly reads as follows:

*Try nfr! Thr! Hr.k m tpt-<sup>c</sup>wy.k*  
*Do well! Be calm! Your face straight ahead of you.*

<sup>2</sup> Goedicke 1959: 9.

<sup>3</sup> Petrie 1892: Pl. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Brovarski 1996: 134–135.

<sup>5</sup> Bierbrier (Ed.) 2012: 154, 431–432.

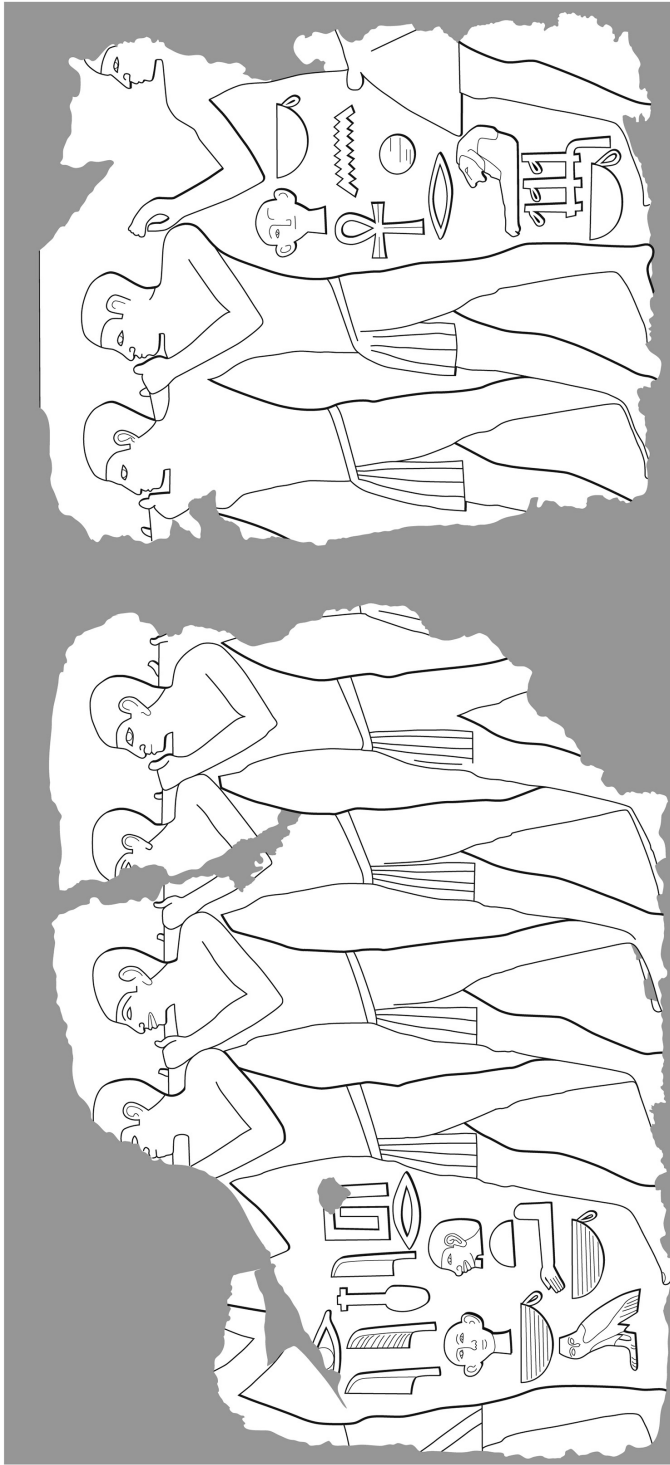
<sup>6</sup> Leahy, Mathieson 2001: 33–42.

<sup>7</sup> Kaplony 1976: no. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Brovarski 2010: 85–139.



1. Chair carrying scene, UMFA 1958.001 (Courtesy of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts).



2. Chair carrying scene, UMFA 1958.001 (Drawing: T. Bower).

## COMMENTARY

- a) Note that E. Edel (1955: § 602), lists imperative (w)dj with a single or a double reed leaf under the heading of third weak and irregular verbs. The writing of (w)dj alternately as imperative dj and djj provides a clue to the reading of jrjj as an imperative form, even though Edel (1995: § 602), lists only three possibilities for that form of jrj: jr, jr(r), and jrj (with a single read leaf).
- b) For imperative jhr with prothetic -j, see: Edel 1955: § 602.
- c) The verb hr means ‘be satisfied, be calm, be peaceful, rejoice’; see: *AnLex* 2: 232 (78.2510); Hannig 2003: 751 [19068].
- d) Hr.k m tpt-ꜥwy.k, recurs in the tomb of In-sneferu-ishtef at Dahshur (Morgan 1903: 19–21 = Borchardt 1964: 190, Pl. 102). For m tpt-ꜥwy.k, see: *Wb* VI, 284 (12).
- e) ꜥwy is written with the arm with palm downwards, which is regularly employed for the dual; see: Fischer 1996: 180–186.

Given that the speech on the left is a command, it is logical that the right-hand speech would be also.

hr.k ꜥnh(w) r-h3(t) s3h.k,  
*Be vigilant to the front of your feet* (lit. ‘toe’)!

## COMMENTARY

- a) The construction is a subject stative with hr.k ꜥnh(w) a nominal subject with a following third person singular stative. The translation of the phrase evidently is: ‘Your face lives’, that is, ‘Be vigilant!’. Edel 1964: § 906bb, in fact, provides a close parallel to hr.k ꜥnh(w) in the chapel of Kai-em-rehu in Copenhagen (Mogensen 1921). For the relationship between the stative and the imperative, see: Edel 1955: § 592.
- b) Hannig 2003: 761 [19454] provides references to both r-h3(t) and jr-h3t with the meanings ‘nach vorn’ and ‘vorwärts.’
- c) For s3h, ‘toe’, see: Lefebvre 1952: 59; Hannig 2003: 1066 [26025].

\*

Chair carrying scenes in the Old Kingdom are generally accompanied by a porters’ ditty, a so-called Sänftenlied, which has been discussed at some length by H. Altenmüller.<sup>9</sup> The fragmentary scene in Salt Lake City is unusual in substituting commands to the porters for the ditty. In fact, to my knowledge, it is unique in this regard.

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<sup>9</sup> Altenmüller 1984: 7–14; 1984–1985: 15–30.

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The existence of the relief was pointed out to me by Mr. Lynn H. Holden some years ago, for which I thank him. I would also like to express my appreciation to Mr. William Balken, Register of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts in 1982, for the photograph of the relief reproduced here and permission to publish it.

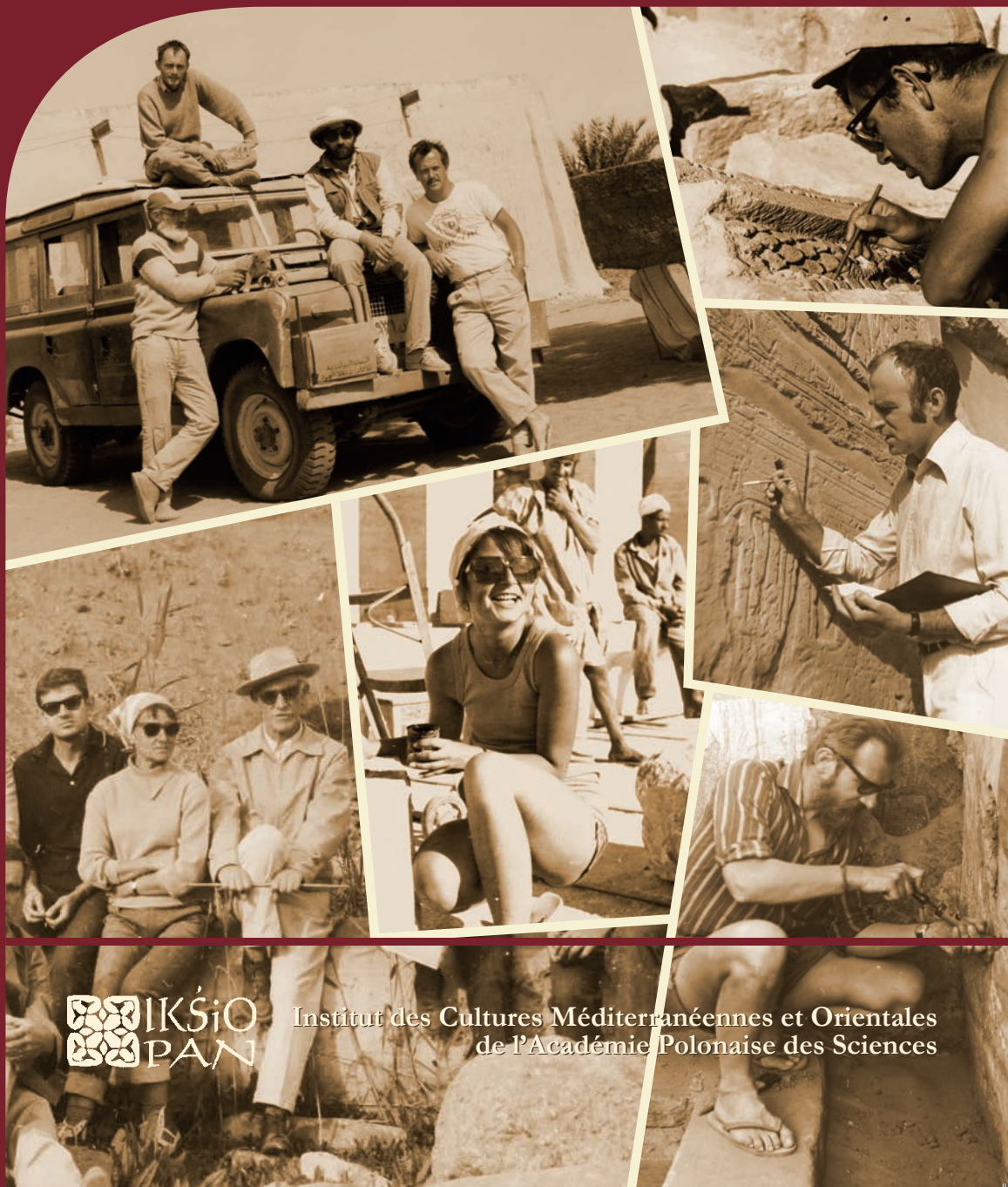
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