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KNH Centre for Biomedical Egyptology: Certificate in Egyptology



**Keeping up appearances: beauty, ageing and realism and its symbolism in art
and literature in ancient Egypt**

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I hereby declare that the materials contained in this essay are entirely the product of my own work, that sources used are fully documented and that the whole has not previously been submitted for any other purpose.

Dedicated to my loving husband

Greg Ellis

**With my love, gratitude and sincere thanks for your unending supporting in my lifetime
studies of Egyptology.**

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INTRODUCTION

This paper will attempt to explain that despite an abundance of artworks depicting ancient Egyptians as eternally youthful and beautiful, realistic images of old age did exist throughout their history of both royalty and the commoner. However, there was an alternative to painting an entirely old person by merely adding the symbolism of age. For this, the artist had a repertoire of tools at his command, grey wigs for unlined and youthful faces, adding corpulence to body parts denoting success through office or painting or carving an extra fold on the eyelid and a drooping, aged eyebrow. Such images were proudly represented or subtly hinted at, thus acknowledging the older individual in society.

Acutely aware of the ageing effects of the environment over time on the face and the body, both physicians and magicians sought the means to remedy these maladies, attesting to them in their ancient writings. The literature of the eras also celebrated the beauty of the gods and of the people themselves, capturing the essence of both and considered the positive and negative consequences of ageing.

The notion of beauty and one's appearance in life and death is also explored for both men and women. Beauty in the form of symbolism versus the realistic portrayal of such is also considered, in an endeavour to understand if the ancient artist drew realistically or not what he saw at the time, versus our perceptions of realism in our own era. The evidence under discussion will consider the portrayal of the human figure on wall decorations in tombs, votive objects and statues from funerary or religious perspectives. Reference is made to the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms and Amarna period for ageing, beauty, realism and literary examples.

CHAPTER 1 - BEAUTY IN ART

NOTIONS AND IDEALS OF BEAUTY

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder of course, and what the author considers to be beautiful may be average to the interpretation of another. The examples of men and women that follow have been selected on the basis of having ‘a certain something’ about them – youthfulness, smooth unwrinkled skin, enchanting eyes, a lithe or muscular body. In representation of beauty in the Amarna age however, the criteria is different given that the depiction of the human image changed dramatically for this time, with the era celebrating a more fuller figure for women.

From the perspective of the ancient Egyptians, the ideals of beauty were perhaps at times tethered – constrained to the ideals of the ruler of the day. Keeping to an artistic convention throughout Egyptian history, the portrayal of people ‘*had always followed the artistic model of the king of their time*’ (Van Dijk 2003, p.272). Looking to tomb wall paintings as a source of the symbolic ideal of womanly beauty for instance, Watterson (1994, pp101-102), notes that a slim figure rates highly and is often featured within a long and tight sheath dress. This rather impractical style may be more of an artistic ideal to reveal the shape underneath (Stead 1991, p.47). However, considering evidence provided by skeletal remains of Dynastic women of their bodily size and proportion, one author (Nunn 1997, p.20) noted that in these cases, their pelvises were significantly narrower in ratio to the shoulder girdle when compared to modern women, thus prompting Nunn to suggest that the graceful and willowy artistic depictions are not mere symbolism but ‘*based on sound anthropometric data*’. This opens the way for a discussion of symbolism versus realism. Are we viewing the realism of an ancient representation or the imputed realism of modern day interpretation? Given the small size of the abovementioned

pelves, and considering the rather slim, long body that the artist tended to portray for many of his subjects of the day, are we actually viewing the natural state of a person? As such, did the Egyptian artist conform to a symbolic artistic convention or portray realism as he saw it? In the opinion of Smith (1978 p.xiii) the inspiration of functional art was brought about by the practical nature of the Egyptian artist and '*...his aims were naturalism and enduring qualities*'. In the current author's opinion, we view the realism of a subject in the same manner as the Egyptian artist viewed their subjects, where possible, with realistic elements but excluding the specific symbols of ageing that are considered further on.

DAILY BEAUTY AND FOR THE AFTERLIFE

Keeping up the appearance of his subject, the ancient Egyptian artist fashioned his creation, be it a sculpture, wall painting or carving into an object of eternal quintessential beauty, one intended to please both the subject and all those who came to gaze upon it. Often the end result was beauty and youth, a fitting symbolic legacy for how one wanted to be remembered for millennia. We know that keeping up appearances extended past the subject's lifetime – and included the deceased itself. The lady Hatnofer from Dynasty XVII had brown plaits woven into her grey hair after death (Roehrig 2002, p.25). This process had been used throughout her life with her own natural brown hair to increase the volume and appearance, and therefore after her death the symbolism of her youth and beauty went with her to the grave. Hatnofer was not alone in her desire to have her crowning glory at its best for eternity, being represented as beautiful in death as in life, a symbol employed by Egyptian women of all classes in society (Watterson 1994, p.115). The mummy of Queen Tetisheri from Dynasty XVII had white thinning hair but the clever use of false braids entwined in own her hair covered a bald patch and gave her the

appearance of having a good thick, healthy head of hair that was beautifully coiffured. Although having almost no hair on the top of her head and only sparse locks elsewhere, the mummy of Hontimihou from Dynasty XVIII had her dignity restored by black tresses woven with strands of a brilliant reddish stain into her remaining hair (Smith 2000, p.19).

Keeping up one's appearance and cleanliness was of paramount importance for the ancient Egyptians, with priests bathing up to four times a day and having a clean shaven body (Manniche 2006, p.44). It was for more than appearance sake however, as the hair of mummies has been analysed and found to contain the eggs of hair lice within the strands (David 1978, p.41). The ancient Egyptians were proactive in caring for their appearance, applying moisturising balms to their skin to arrest the drying consequences of a hot and dusty environment (Tyldesley 1995, p.152). Compounding the problematic drying effects of the environment was the use of a 'soap' that mostly contained natron, by its very nature a dehydrating substance. It was not only women who put on a 'face' for the day, painting the outline of the eyes with the cosmetic kohl which also offered some protection from the glare of the sun, staining their hands with henna and rubbing rouge into their lips and cheeks (Scott 1973, p.156). Both men and women had toiletry containers that included razors and creams for removing body hair. The male butler Kemuny from the Middle Kingdom, had in his tomb a magnificent cedar cosmetic case overlaid with ivory and ebony measuring some 20cm high, containing alabaster cosmetic jars, a sliding section and a bronze mirror which is now housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The idea of men wearing makeup and owning a cosmetic case has been considered carefully by Tyldesley. She recognizes that the purpose was in no way effeminate as it created attractiveness for both males and females; and in addition to having a medicinal purpose, it had '*magical and amuletic*

benefits' (1995, p.159). Further to this, the symbolism of well applied makeup communicated a high social standing. The cosmetic used for the eyes was kohl and malachite, a form of green ore of copper, and galena, a dark grey lead ore which eventually became the most common form used (Lucas 1930, p.2). Although the Egyptians thought of it as medicinal, we now know of the dangers associated with lead ore, especially if it was to get into the eye.

BEAUTY FROM THE OLD TO THE NEW KINGDOM

One of the icons of the Old Kingdom, the seated statues of husband and wife Prince Rahotep and his wife Nofret were found at Meydum and are now housed in the Egyptian museum, Cairo (figure 1 below). They are a widely accepted symbol of beauty and consequently display a lifelike persona, successfully captured under the capable hands of its artist. Dating to Dynasty IV, this couple have *'the vivid appearance of life'*, with their inlaid rock crystal eyes within metal eye frames (Aldred 1980, p.58).



Figure 1

Rahotep and Nofret (Malek 2003, p.47)

This double statue is of particular interest given that it has almost retained its full original painted colour (Malek 2003, p.46). Their faces have the unlined fullness of a young age with an almost mirrored pose of harmony and balance. Rahotep's right arm is crossed over his chest in a show of strength, purposefulness and virility. His wife wears a tight white sheath dress, outlining a shapely figure, full breasts and erect nipples representative of fertility and sexual allure. Her thick, large wig is held in check by the elegance of a decorated diadem and the added splendour of a large necklace. Although they exhibit a bulky form with thick ankles, the artist has delineated the muscles in the leg, arms and pectorals of Rahotep, and carved thin, feminine hands with painted nails on Nofret, adding a beauty and realism to both forms. As always, beauty is a subjective attribute and the author Montet (2005, p.256) acknowledges the '*slender curves*' [and] '*beautiful eyes full of tenderness*', but also states that during this period of time female images were not portrayed with any remarkable natural beauty, whereas in the later Middle and New Kingdoms a more feminine beauty was expressed in sculpture.

Queen Kawit from Dynasty XI is depicted on her sarcophagus as having her hair dressed with a pin by one her servants, while reflecting upon her own appearance using a hand held bronze mirror (figure 2 below). This item is now in the Egyptian museum, Cairo. The inclusion of cosmetics and a cream cleanser, consisting of a lime and oil mix were among the royal grave goods found in the burial chamber of three women of the court of Tuthmosis III (Manniche 2006, p.44) and date to around 1400 BCE. In the current author's opinion, so important was the attendance to one's appearance, it appears that its inclusion as subject matter on a sarcophagus demonstrates the point that beauty was held in high esteem both in life as well as in the hope for eternity.



Figure 2

Attending to Queen Kawit (Riefstahl 1956, p.14)

In the New Kingdom, (Dynasty XVIII - XX) a new artistic school emerged wherein artists became liberated, creating a more impressionistic style of painting (Malek 2000, p.241). An example is in the decoration of the tomb of Rekhmire, vizier of Thutmose III, where a '*new sensuality*' was added to female figures. One example shows a female with her back to the viewer and is this is unlike any previous known depictions which would have had her facing the front, her feminine, long curvaceous legs and buttocks now put on view, creating a natural illustration (see figure 3 below). Malek further asserts that under the administration of Amenhotep III, a prominent pharaoh of the era, a variation of this 'freer' style appeared wherein the depiction of beauty and a youthful, idealized face took on a new symbolism. For women a noticeable change in the eyes occurred, these becoming over sized, dominant and almond-shaped and offset by slightly pouting lips. In representations of men the usual sombre look was substituted with a sanguine expression.

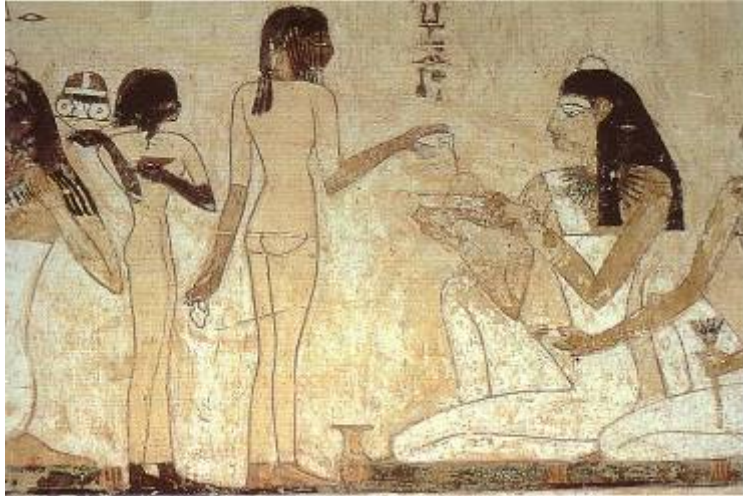


Figure 3

Rear view of a feminine beauty, New Kingdom (Malek 2000, p.241)

A new inference upon the symbolism of statues and paintings of feminine beauty through the ages is brought into discussion with the elegant wooden female statue in figure 4 below, in the Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon. Malek (2003, p.154) surmises that in addition to the usual references to child bearing and fertility capacities for which these female funerary statues were employed, this style of tomb statue (and popular variations of it) have an '*erotic element*' for possible use in the afterlife. These are examples of female symbolism of beauty in the mid to late Dynasty XVIII that underwent innumerable adaptations, partly as a result of increased demand from customers through this period and the affluence of Egypt itself.



Figure 4

Erotic funerary statue (Malek 2003, p.154)

A strikingly beautiful woman from the tomb of Menna dates from the New Kingdom and is displayed in figure 5 below. She wears a finely pleated dress and a heavily decorated necklace, while a section of her wig is playfully parted at her ear to reveal a large round gold earring. Her overly dominant eye is balanced with a heavy eyebrow, while sensuous plump lips, a small nose and full cheeks has enthused the author Mekhitarian (1978, p.91) to ponder over her beauty. He notes that the depiction of this woman has such a lifelike quality about her it is more than symbolic; perhaps it could be viewed through the eyes of the painter, his perception of '*the woman of his dreams*'.



Figure 5

Beauty from the Tomb of Menna (Mekhitarian 1978, p.94)

AMARNA: BEAUTY AND AGEING ICONS

The notion of beauty and ageing under the direction of the pharaoh Akhenaten during the Amarna period resulted in a unique artistic revolution. Some aspects of the period harken back to the pre-dynastic period and even included elements of symbolism that would have normally represented foreigners, herdsman, old people and those who stood apart (Arnold 1996, p.20). This is demonstrated where the iconic images of the royal family incorporated artistic conventions that had up to that time represented individuals who were on the fringes of society (Arnold p.20). Previously recognisable artistic standards of hooded eyes, strong or hollowed cheek-bones, vertical lines and skin folds from the nose down to the corner of the mouth were now incorporated and developed in the early Amarna period art for the delineations of the royal family. It has been observed by Smith (1998, p.173) that Amarna artistic depictions displayed a

new facet in naturalism in *'an attempt to express a view of humanity and its frailties'*, and this is apparent in both moderate and radical compositions. Further, the author adds that this naturalism was a progression after coming to terms with the strict artistic compositions that had been in place since the Middle Kingdom. Artistically, the change that Amarna brought to the pantheon of the Egyptian pallet and sculpture was a departure from the previous inflexible mainstream and is recognized for its *'realism and spontaneity and movement'* (Weatherhead 2007, p.xxi).

Many statues of the royal family in the Amarna period display a swelling of the thighs, buttocks and belly, recalling the artistically elongated hips of a far earlier time in Egyptian history, the pre-dynastic era, when funerary Mother Goddess statues were created. These similarities are more noticeable when in profile and can be observed when comparing figure 6 with figure 7 below (Arnold 1996, p.24). Created from terracotta, the Mother Goddess statue (figure 6) is 29.3 cm high and hails from el-Mamariya. A simplistic but graceful statue despite the unusual beak-like face, it is nonetheless a feminine beauty with pronounced breasts, thin waist and sweeping arms.

The change in depicting royalty is quite significant when we compare the artistic convention of the time just prior to, and in the first years of Akhenaten's rule ruled. So significant was the change for its time in the New Kingdom, Arnold (1996, p.24) explains *'...this was as unusual an ideal of beauty [then] as it is today'*.



Figure 6

Predynastic Mother Goddess

(Metropolitan museum 2008)



Figure 7

Torso of a princess

(Arnold 1996, p.28)

One of the more iconic and recognisable beauties of the Amarna period is the bust of Nefertiti from the Altes museum, Berlin (see figure 8 below). Although the bust is of a mature woman, her perpetual beauty reverberates over the centuries and is timeless. Nefertiti is represented as having a long, slender neck with high, arched brows and large expressive eyes (despite one missing), high cheekbones, a willowy nose and a sensuous mouth. More recent analysis, however, of the Nefertiti bust using X-ray pictures by computer tomography have revealed that over the limestone core the artist amended the face four times in an attempt to make it more realistic (World Archaeology News 28 April 2008). The addition of soft wrinkles to the face and eyes resulted in an icon that was '*...more individual and expressive*'. The suggestion of mature age given that it was created in the Amarna era, would have indicated '*... a source of prestige*'. Wrinkles in previous eras had always been an icon of wisdom.



Figure 8

Bust of Nefertiti (Altes museum, 2008)

Renowned for her beauty, Nefertiti was bestowed an extra name, the epithets extolling her magnificence - Nefer-neferuaten-Nefertiti 'Beautiful are the Beauties of the Aten'. 'A Beautiful Woman Has Come' (Tyldesley 1998, p.64). It may seem incongruent then that the epitome of feminine beauty and allure for its time, symbolised by the bust of Nefertiti, could be matched in life by the depiction of the pharaoh that many would say was not the male equivalent of such royal beauty (figure 9 below). Indeed, Aldred (1980, p.182) has described Akhenaten as having a '*peculiar physique ... elongated and distorted into a new symbol of godhead*'. Yet the royals obviously approved of the artistic style that symbolised their unique sovereignty. It was noted by the sculptor Bak that it was Akhenaten himself who taught him the unique method of art and architecture, thus becoming the student of the ruler (Weeks 1998, p.233).



Figure 9

Akhenaten in quasi-feminine form (Aldred 1991, p.101)

If beauty can be attributed to a male, then in the opinion of the current author an example is illustrated in the colossal statue of Akhenaten represented above, which is to be found in the Cairo museum. The artistic representation that Akhenaten orchestrated is unlike any ruler before him or since and was restricted to the Amarna period. The pharaoh has an elongated face, thick pouting lips, slit-like eyes and a prominent jaw. The body displays generous hips, while a drooping rounded belt only serves to emphasise his protruding belly. His pleated skirt also emphasises his ample hips, fans out not unlike the sunrays that Akhenaten was embraced by in his adoration of worshipping the sun. While the similarities to a feminine form are obvious, there is a suggestion here of Akhenaten as a representation of '*the mother and father of creation*' (Aldred 1991, p.100.) If we view the statue as it had been intended when originally located in the pharaoh's

temple in Karnak, to be seen from the ground looking upwards, it becomes a far more imposing and compelling figure, perhaps his desired intention. The alteration to Akhenaten's face from this position is significant and described by Reeves (2001, p.95) as '*the impression ...of unadulterated power*'. Whether the depictions of the royal family in these extreme forms early in the reign are a natural interpretation is a debate often put by scholars, and until the bodies are eventually found we can only speculate over the reality of same.

CHAPTER 2 - AGEING AND BEAUTY IN LITERATURE

WRITTEN REMEDIES FOR THE SKIN

A recipe for removing the symbols of age and wrinkles, can be seen in the Papyrus Edwin Smith dating to the sixteenth century BCE and translated by Breasted (1930, p.498). The author notes that although the face cream eliminates signs of age, it does not prompt or restore the declining vigour of an old man and so therefore its value lies in as an external therapeutic measure: *'Beginning of the Book of Transforming an Old Man into a Youth. Anoint a man therewith. It is a remover of [wrinkles] from the head. When the flesh is smeared therewith, it becomes a beautifier of the skin, a remover of [blemishes], of all [disfigurements], of all signs of age, of all [weaknesses] which are in the flesh. Found effective myriads of times'.*

The Ebers Medical Papyrus (E716) dating to Dynasty XVIII confidently gives the formula to remove wrinkles as well and masks the blemishes of leprosy and small pox as noted by Tyldesley (1995, p.152): *'To remove facial wrinkles: frankincense gum, wax, fresh balanitis oil and rush-nut should be finely ground and applied to the face every day. Make it and you will see!'*

Oils, recognised early for their important role in protecting the skin, were paid as part of wages as evidenced in New Kingdom tomb workers and from Deir el-Medina workers accounts and receipts (Manniche 1999, p.134). A mixture of sesame oil, *neheh*, and castor oil was used by the workers, along with the anointing oil *segenen*, a sweet variety that was applied to the skin to protect against drying winds, the hot sun and as a preventative of complaints due to dry and cracked skin. As a fundamental part of the wages for the workers at Deir el-Medina (Stead 1991,

p.51), their non arrival was one of the principal complaints that lead to the first recorded strike in history. This event is evidenced in writing on a potsherd (P.10633 in Berlin) and according to Edgerton (1951, p.140), the strike occurred in Year 29 of Ramses III and is noted as such: '*...it was because of hunger and because of thirst that we came here. There is no clothing, no ointment, no fish, no vegetables ...*'

The basis for beauty treatments were moisturising oils and were given as advice to a husband for '*preserving his wife's beauty*' (Fontaine 1981, p.3) and are noted in the 'Instructions of Ptahhotep', lines 325-30 dating from the Old Kingdom: '*If you are well off, then you should establish your house, and love your wife in (your) home (according to good custom). Fill her belly; clothe her back. Oil is the prescription for her body. Make her heart glad during the time of your living, for she is a profitable field for her lord*'. Potions in the form of a body scrub are noted by Manniche (2006, p.44) and are found in H 154 = E 715 = Sm 21, 6-8 and include the prescription: '*Powdered calcite 1; red natron1; Lower Egyptian salt1; honey 1; is ground to a paste and rubbed into the body*'.

WRITTEN POTIONS FOR THE HAIR

The symbolism and portrayal of human hair is not to be overlooked for its importance and the *'erotic symbolism conventionally connected with hair'* (Manniche 2006, pp.45-46). The care of one's own natural hair was very important even when wigs were used in festive events, and remedies abound in the Ebers Medical Papyrus which dates to the reign of Amenhotep I from Dynasty XVIII, for arresting grey and balding hair. In a belief of sympathetic magic, whereby the colour of the product or animal part used was transmitted to the user, black ox or black calf blood was boiled in oil, and to avert grey hairs, the black horn of a gazelle was ground into an unguent with oil and applied. Remedies that help the hair grow are attested to in Ebers Medical Papyrus as well to help one to retain the symbolism of youth and allure by anointing frequently with the dressing: (Watterson 1994, p.112) *'The fruit of the dgm [castor oil plant], pounded and kneaded into a lump; the woman must then put it in oil and anoint her head with it'*.

Further to this, Watterson also notes another recipe for growing the hair and allegedly made for the mother of the Dynasty VI Pharaoh Teti, Queen Shesh was recorded as follows: *'A leg of a greyhound, one date-stone, the hoof of a donkey. It shall be cooked in oil in a pot. Then one shall anoint well with it'*.

BEAUTY IN POETRY

Poets, have course, have written for centuries of life, love and the beauty of women. Egyptian scribes extol the beauty of women and one such poem dates to the Ramesside period Dynasty XVIII – XIX in the Papyrus Chester Beatty 1. Watterson (1994, pp.9-10) notes that in the following contemporary love poem, the symbol of ultimate feminine beauty is written:

*'Of surpassing radiance and luminous skin,
With lovely, clear-gazing eyes,
Her lips speak sweetly
With not a word too much.
Her neck is long, Her breast is white,
Her hair is true lapis lazuli.
Her arm surpasses gold
And her fingers are like lotus buds.
With rounded thighs and trim waist,
Her legs display her beauty when,
With graceful gait, she treads the earth'.*

A woman's yearning to have a child and the realism of the passing of time, what we would now call 'the body clock ticking', is a concern reflected in the writings of the New Kingdom. The Hittite ruler Hattusili III wrote personally to Rameses II requesting that an Egyptian doctor be sent to his sister's aid to help facilitate a concoction so she could become pregnant. Ritner notes (2000, pp107-117) that Rameses II's written reply is rather sarcastic: *'Is she fifty years old? No! She is sixty. And look a woman who is fifty years old, nay, one who is sixty. One cannot prepare for her a remedy to let her become pregnant. However the Sun god and the Weather god may give a command. And the order that they issue will be executed for her at length. And I the King, your brother will send to you a capable exorcist priest and a capable physician and they will prepare remedies for her toward her pregnancy'.*

As Harris and Weeks (1973, p.153) note, Rameses II was the ruler who laid claim to having the most children, over one hundred sons. Given this boastfulness, the pharaoh is still aware of the effect that age has on a woman's body and the subsequent lack of ability to conceive, so he offers to send both an exorcist priest and a physician possibly in the hope that either sympathetic magic or medicine itself could help correct what is almost certainly an impossibility of becoming pregnant.

YEARNING FOR OLD AGE

In an example of the love poetry of the New Kingdom, a woman desires to spend a lifetime with her man, living a long life in peace and attaining an old age with him (Foster 1974, p.18):

*'Your love, dear man, is as lovely to me
...as fragrance of incense to one coming home
...while unhurried days come and go,
Let us turn to each other in quiet affection,
Walk in peace to the edge of an old age'.*

Beholding the beauty of the god Amun and wishing for a long life is expressed in a prayer by the twin brothers Suti and Hor and dates to Dynasty XVIII, and is translated according to Lichtheim (1976, p.89) as follows:

*May you give me old age in your city,
My eye [beholding] your beauty;
A burial in the west, the place of heart's content,
As I join the favoured ones who went in peace.*

Legal manuscripts attest to the need of being provided for in old age by one's family or inheritor, a real concern in ancient Egypt where there were no pensions provided by the ruler for his people. An example of this is the deed of conveyance of Mery UC 32037, a legal document from Lahun that dates to around 1818 BCE (Collier and Quirke 2004, p.101). The deed notes that the man called Mery asks in return for his son Intef taking over Mery's employment in the temple of Senwosret II, that the son then provide for Mery's '*staff of old age*', a term used in the Middle Kingdom denoting the support that one's family would provide for their elders: '*Year 39, month 4 of flood, day 29. Deed of conveyance made by the controller of the watch Intef's son Mery ...I am giving my [position of] controller of the watch Mery's son Intef ... in exchange for (being) staff of old age, because I am now grown old. Let him be appointed at once*'.

An example of a member of the elite who had attained a remarkable old age, given the rather low life expectancy in ancient Egypt was the scribe Amenhotep, son of Hapu (figure 10 below.) He hailed from the New Kingdom and was proud and boastful of his age (Fletcher 2000, p.155). Amenhotep is shown as an aged scribe with deep furrowed lines either side of his mouth with his body portrayed in the symbolic largesse of office. Carved on his statue was a yearning for an even longer life: '*I have reached the age of 80 years, I am greatly praised by the king, and I will complete 110 years*'.



Figure 10

Amenhotep, son of Hapu, as an old man (Malek 2003, p.170)

POETRY TO THE GOD AND PHARAOH

During the Amarna period the pharaoh Akhenaten composed the Great Hymn to the Aten praising the one god he acknowledged. He wrote of the god's beauty filling the land and poetically and romantically ended the hymn with the desire that his beautiful wife Nefertiti not only live forever, that she remain young, as noted by Reeves (2001, pp.142-144): *'Beautifully you appear from the horizon of heaven, O living Aten who initiates life – For you are risen from the eastern horizon and have filled every land with your beauty; For you are fair, great, dazzling and high over every land...Until you set, all eyes are upon your beauty but all work is put aside when you set on the western side...And the Great Royal wife, his beloved, the lady of Two Lands, Nefernefruat-en-Nefertiti – may she live and be young forever continually'*.

A wall inscription in the unfinished tomb of the Royal Scribe Ay expresses the devotion of the loyal servant to Akhenaten. While he yearns to follow him after his death, he expresses a desire no less than three times for attaining an old age before he ‘... *kisses the holy ground*’ (Lichtheim 1976, pp. 95-96):

*‘Grant me a lifetime high in your favour!
When the ka of the Ruler is with him forever,
He will be sated with life when he reaches old age.
Grant me a good old age as you favour me,
I being your favourite who follows your ka,
That I may go with your favour when old age has come’.*

PHARAOH’S LIKENESS

A discussion on the purpose of creating statues in the likeness of a pharaoh is put forward by Bryan (1992, pp.127-128) and delves into the word that the Amenhotep III used when he requested statues of himself for his Theban temples, specifically ‘*tut*’. The root of this word is ‘*to be like/to complete or perfect*’ and when applied as a noun it takes the meaning as ‘*likeness/perfected likeness*’ and is relevant to paintings, relief sculpture and statues. This likeness is of utmost importance when we consider that as the ruler he was the living embodiment of the gods on earth. His symbolism needed to be recognisable, while keeping to within the artistic confines of the day. The text that accompanies the images of the divine birth of Amenhotep III is a command from Amun to the creator god Khnum, ensuring that the pharaoh and his *ka* were created in a perfect likeness: ‘*Make him together with his ka from this flesh*

within me. Distinguish his appearance before all the gods. For he is (to be) the image (tut) of this son whom I am begetting for myself.

Bryan states that the individual portrayal of pharaohs may partly be influenced by this symbolism of statuary, and notes that as far back to Dynasty II, statues of Khasekhem are recognisable by his individual elements - facial disposition, bodily proportion and artistic approach and these fundamentals may even have previously applied to the royal statuary of Dynasty I. By dynasty V, a new phrase in funerary literature was brought into play - '*statue after the life*' (Aldred 1980, p.70), indicative of an intentional attempt to create a portrait of the person. Therefore this phrase may indicate that an attempt of realism was imputed into the artwork that portrayed kings.

OLD AGE IN HIEROGLYPHS AND LITERATURE



Figure 11

Hieroglyphs of old age in a man and woman (Janssen 2006, pg.3)

The progression of becoming aged is rarely represented in literature or art and for women in particular (Janssen 2006, pp.3 - 6). In a culture that celebrated life and wished to relive it again in the afterlife it may be understandable, however, there is a specific hieroglyph used for old age

even though the references to it were few. The symbol for old age for male and females is demonstrated in figure 11 above, portraying an old man and a woman with significantly curved backs who both hold a stick for support. Janssen notes (p. 4) that it has been observed only in one instance where the determinative of female ageing was used - in the Mastaba of Ti at Saqqara.

The definition of Egyptian old age is best narrated by the ancients themselves from The Instructions of Ptahhotep dating to Dynasty IV, as translated by Erman (1966, p.55). The realism of old age was observed to be an un-glorified and sad existence as follows: *'So spake he unto the majesty of King Issi: Old age hath come and dotage hath descended. The limbs are painful and the state of being old appeareth as something new. Strength hath perished for weariness. The mouth is silent and speaketh not. The eyes are shrunken and the ears deaf The heart is forgetful and remembereth not yesterday. The bone, it suffereth in old age, and the nose is stopped up and breatheth not. To stand and to sit down are alike ill. Good is become evil. Every taste hath perished. What old age doeth to a man is that it fareth ill with him in all things'*.

However, the Instructions of Ptahhotep also acknowledged a positive aspect of old age, this being wisdom. While not born with wisdom one can attain this aspect with the knowledge and understanding of life that becomes only possible with the passage of time, usually many years. Thus the literature of the Instructions shows both the pessimistic and affirmative sides of old age, as translated by Digital Egypt for Universities (2008b):

*'Teach him then the speech from the past
that he may provide the example for the children of the great.
May hearing enter into him, the measure of every heart.
Speak to him. For no one can be born wise'.*

CHAPTER 3 - AGEING IN ART

GAINING OLD AGE

If the old proverb says ‘The eyes are the window of the soul’, then surely the ancient Egyptian artist had captured its essence. Often the statues, paintings and representations of the ancient Egyptian pharaohs, queens and commoners would show the individual at their best – with large, expressive and youthful eyes, a lithe body and a serene or bold countenance. In short, a person in the prime of their life. This artistic interpretation may have been in contrast to their actual health with life expectancy suggested by Fletcher (2000, p.160) of around 35 by the New Kingdom. The life style and social conditions for young and old preserve the sad reality of a disease-ridden life (David and Archbold 2000, p.170). They note that mummy autopsies have exposed attrition of the teeth (a result of sand in the bread) causing abscesses of the gums as well as other conditions that seriously affected the body such as lung disease and parasites. However, the Egyptian ideal length of life as evidenced on wall tombs and in the literature of the times, could not have been at greater variation – one hundred years with an additional ten to twenty years in order to have the fulfilment of ‘*ultimate earthly knowledge and wisdom*’ Meskell (2000, p.424).

Consequently, if one had defied the odds and lived to a grand age, why not express this achievement in the portraiture, artwork and literature that articulated one’s life? Perhaps celebrate and acknowledge that one had attained a long existence? Why not be proud of the old age one achieved, despite the ravages of ill health that plagued royal and non-royal alike? A general précis may be stated that over the entire three thousand year artistic history of ancient Egypt, the individual was persistently depicted as youthful, even if he or she had lived to a relatively old age in real life. Why then do so many representations of their culture, from formal

tomb paintings, carvings and statuary through to simple graffiti, tend to symbolise people in their prime? Put simply, the image of the deceased in two and three dimensions was *'first and foremost functional'* and was the catalyst for the cults of the gods and the dead (Robins 2000, p.12) The image acted as a go-between, receiving offerings from the living to ensure that the deceased would then survive into the next life. A second principle function of an image according to Roehrig (2000) was *'to ensure an ordered existence - maat'* - as the symbol of order and truth. Old age and deformities were rarely portrayed, although almost every period of Egyptian history had its artistic examples (Riefstahl 1951, p.66). The intention of artwork, particularly in the Old Kingdom *'was made for and to serve the purpose of eternal life'*, according to Wilson (1947, p.18) and in a culture of almost unchanging doctrine art was the means to express this validation.

The rationale behind all aspects of Egyptian art was threefold – religious, political or social, an *'enormous system of communication'* and as such art was used as the primary medium to impart communications to the gods (Johnson 1978, p.172). In short, the representation of the deceased was how the ancients believed they would be presented to the gods in the afterlife. It then followed that an ideal image denoted a healthy, strong and lithe body, free from the ravages of time and ready to live again, an *'idealised portrait'* that would symbolically prepare the deceased for an everlasting life (Lesko 1991, p.7). The presentation of the mummy was so important (Ikram 2003, p.23), the intention was to be *'more perfect and eternal'* than when the person was living. Depicted in official tomb art, according to Janssen (2006, p.6), are optimistic images *'...of infinite youth and the denial of decrepitude'*. Robins (1993, p.180) elaborates on the importance of the idealised image, the very act of its creation and its end result was parallel to that same

plane existing in the afterlife. Thus, a non-ideal image was neither befitting nor desired. Encapsulating perfection for eternity was the objective of formal art, with most individuals shown as youthful and in their prime (Digital Egypt 2008a).

EGYPTIAN ART AND OLD AGE

Whether the person was depicted as royalty or not, a set framework of grids was applied, creating a canon of proportion wherein the body parts were depicted (Hobson 1987, p.148). Within this constraint the subsequent individual or the idealised and symbolic portrait was represented. Malek (2000, p.240) concedes that the artistic approach of building up the human figure from individual elements to represent the human form had the effect of creating an image that was a '*cold and impersonal impression*'. To take this a step further, Schafer (2002, p.18) gives details where a generic statue or picture of a person can be claimed by another, simply by changing the name attributed to it. He cites the example where a pharaoh usurps a statue formerly belonging to a previous ruler and only changes the name, thus allegiance is given to the name rather than in a facial resemblance. One such usurped statue was that of Amenemhat III from Dynasty XII which had an exceptionally individual face. In the latter Dynasty XIX, when rulers were only portrayed as youthful, Merenptah appropriated this very statue as his own, only adjusting the creases in the face without changing the form. The symbolism of pharaohs was taken to such an extreme that even in the situation wherein a female took the throne, as in the case of Hatchepsut, we see her symbolised by a male's body and attire (Tyldesley 1998, p.92).

According to the Detroit Institute of Art (2008) '*Egyptian art was highly symbolic and a painting or sculpture was not meant to be a record of a momentary impression*'. Artistic convention held to a standard set of rules for over three thousand years. Therefore any distinctions that do appear are a result of an aberration caused by an individual, not because of changes in symbolism in art or its purpose in the Egyptian civilization. Depictions in tomb scenes of the deceased that show the person in the afterlife, *djet*, are in a state of '*eternal time*' (Johnson 2001, p.86), as opposed to the recurring seasons of nature and real life, *neheh*.

STEREOTYPES FOR MEN AND WOMEN

The stereotype for women was that of a youthful, slender beauty regardless of whether the woman's waistline had spread through pregnancy or as a consequence of age. When painted, a woman's skin was coloured a light yellowish-brown that most likely represented an occupation inside the home and out of the sun (Robins 1993, p.180). An exception to the colour of female skin was only found in the Amarna period (1372 -1350 BCE) where representations of Queen Nefertiti and the royal princesses were created from reddish brown or dark quartzite (Arnold 1996, p.51). In the current author's opinion, as the Amarna period was a unique artistic and unconventional religious era, perhaps the skin colour of royal females was darkened in some depictions to match the consequence of the natural effect of worshipping the Aten, i.e. tanning, and in celebration of the natural Egyptian skin colour itself. To take this a step further, it may be possible that the darkening of the royal women as apposed to Akhenaten's lighter colouration, may subtly symbolise a longer time in the sun to show their uncompromising devotion to the pharaoh himself.

According to Watterson (1994, p.4) the conventions of the female symbolic image can be explained as '*idealised...by men's perceptions of women*'. This representational image can limit a woman's age, often the mother of a tomb owner is shown as the same age as the man's wife. Indeed, as Robins (1993, p.27) explains, it is only the accompanying text that makes a distinction between the older mother and the younger wife.

In contrast, the depiction of ageing in men could not be more different. Age was '*a desirable quality in a man but not in a woman*', (Watterson 1991, p.5). Another viewpoint by the author Sweeny (2004, p.67) who considers this 'desirable' quality for a man regarding ageing, has observed that all eras of Egyptian history show ageing women, both elite and non-elite with the ageing symbols of wrinkles. Sweeny suggests that the older woman image may be an endeavour to denote the female equivalent of influence and experience that ageing males represented. The ideal male image, with its muscular and youthful body, is found in images in the Old Kingdom and early Middle Kingdom (Robins 1993, p.181). The male form was painted a darker reddish-brown that depicted an outside occupation. In contrast, several paintings of Old Kingdom officials are shown with a lighter skin tone associated with one who worked indoors, possibly indicating their higher station in life.

In the Old Kingdom there were two distinct genres for the portrayal of pharaohs, those subjects that simulated royal features into an image of their own, and those that had a more individual portrayal. Both categories were of a funerary nature; the image simulated of the ruler being placed in a funerary temple, while the statues of private person were placed within a sealed tomb. In the tombs of two officials of the pharaoh Djoser, their own images take on the pharaoh's

characteristics, incorporating his thin mustache and heavy profile. This trend to imitate the current pharaoh's image by the everyday man was to continue into the Late Period (Russmann 2001, p.33).



Figure 12

Thin elderly man with offerings, Old Kingdom (Schafer 2002, p.495)

In the Old Kingdom, no two private portrayals are the same, adding to the credibility that they have elements of realism. It is noteworthy that while the pharaoh's face is youthful, the examples of his subjects are shown to be at least in their middle age (Russmann 2001, p.35). For the non royal, depiction in the Old Kingdom of an aged face and body was portrayed and in one particular instance shows the harsh reality of a life less pampered, where age, labour and suffering have taken their toll (Riefstahl 1951, p.66). In the mastaba of Kaiemankh at Giza, the image shows nomads, suffering the emaciating effects of famine, the torso with protruding ribs, small waist and haggard, aged face. The everyday peasant's image is displayed in figure 12 above and shows the realism of ageing with his thin body and deep wrinkles on his face. The

tomb of User, vizier to Tuthmosis I and II of the XVIII Dynasty, New Kingdom, displays a wall carving of the aged vizier with a rather gaunt body (figure 13 below). Adding to this, his bent body posture and symbolic slippers epitomize *'the burden of years'* he has spent seeking in his quest for a coadjutor from the pharaoh, as the literature above him implores.



Figure 13

Aged vizier User XVIII Dynasty (Lythgoe & de Garis Davies 1926, p.6)

The lines of life have left their impression and are clearly observable on a New Kingdom limestone fragment of an old man in figure 14 below. His facial expression is astute, and despite a shrunken upper lip his smile is one of confidence (Riefstahl 1951, p.70). Deep furrows on his cheek and forehead, slumped facial muscles and protruding collar bones on his thin body imply a realistic look. He has thin fingers where the joints appear to only have a fine layer of skin stretched over them, and a scrawny wrist with tendons that seem to lie on top. The artist has

achieved a realistic image of the individual as he may have appeared in life, with wisps of hair showing from under his wig on his forehead indicating an indifference to his appearance. This is a far cry from the earlier described youthful form.



Figure 14

Portrait of an old man, New Kingdom (Riefstahl 1951, p.73)

REPRESENTATIONS OF PHARAOHS

The limestone statue of the pharaoh Djoser from the Old Kingdom found in his Step Pyramid and now housed in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, shows a resemblance to the reliefs that were found engraved upon his tomb walls. All high-quality images of Djoser have the same identifiable likeness - broad face, thick lips and thick nose (Malek 2000, p.91). Further to this, the author Montet (2005, p.237) notes that on the same statue of Djoser is an inscription that refers to '*... a guarantee of true likeness*'. This is another example of a realistic portrait, as opposed to an idealised image, and shows a personality being captured rather than a symbolic icon.

Schafer (2002, p.17), explains that apart from the Amarna period and a group of Middle Kingdom royal statues the representation of a pharaoh's body is almost always kept to the ideal standard of the time, despite how the ruler may have appeared in life. The ideal symbol is a well-rounded body, even when allowing for variations of the individual as being slender, stocky or a more developed figure. Only the face may have a suggestion of portraiture. This is in contrast with the everyday man's image (see figure 12 earlier) that we find the evidence of why the pharaohs wanted an ideal of their own portrayal, to elevate themselves as the representation of the gods on earth '*above what is human, imperfect, and subject to change*'. True to this ideal, the pharaoh Ramesses II who lived to over ninety years of age and reigned for sixty seven years, kept his image in the prime of his early manhood throughout his long sovereignty (Johnson 1978, p.179). Within the confines of this standard, however, we do find occasional examples of individual differences as depicted in the statue of the pharaoh Senwosret III, Dynasty XII, figure 15 below. He is shown with deep, heavy set eyes under furrowed brows, sunken cheeks and thin lips, giving him an aged and '*brooding expression*' (Metropolitan museum 2007). This is unlike the portrayal of many pharaohs who were epitomised as eternally youthful. Given the importance of an image as mentioned previously, it appears that Senwosret III has made a conscious decision to be represented as he was in a reality, in life, rather than in an idealised fashion like his predecessors.



Figure 15

Aged face of Senwosret III (Metropolitan museum 2007)

Aldred (1980, p.72) determined that this particular piece is outstanding in both its portrayal of the person's character and '*a certain introspective melancholy*', a quality that is not observed again until the later Middle Kingdom. He elaborates further upon this portrait of Senwosret III where age is clearly upon him, and the possible reason for its representation. In his early years Senwosret III displayed the dynamism of youth, crushing the increasing power of the nobles so that they were reduced to being his servants, he also structured the Egyptian holdings in Sudan and Nubia, a feat which led these countries to pay tribute and to worshipping Senwosret III as their protector. These supreme efforts and political manoeuvrings show on the aged face, and indicate a ruler with '*all passion spent, [who] has become the careworn shepherd of his people*' (Aldred 1970, p.20). Russmann (2001, pp. 35-36) deliberates on the '*character or personality*' aspect of statues of both Senwosret III and his son Amenemhat III, and has determined that the appearance of both '*are meant to reflect the mood of the period, which was one of pessimism and distrust*'. Another more recent rationale for this aged and possible realistic portrait is from the

author Malek (2003, p.113) who believes that Egyptian sculpture was not created to express eternal emotion. Rather, he states, the plausible explanation is that the artists created a new sculptural approach of realism that dissociated itself from the earlier part of the XII Dynasty when far more idealised statues were created.



Figure 16

Ageing eyes on statues of Amenhotep III (Fletcher 2000, p. 127)

A specific artistic symbol used to represent the ageing process is the eye, featuring varying nuances of its shape and style. Of particular interest are those of Amenhotep III from the New Kingdom which shows him ageing over the thirty-eight years of his reign. Early in his rule his eyes were drawn larger with his eyebrows shown thick and elongated, continuing past his eyes providing a youthful and open appearance as can be seen in the top two images of figure 16 above; whereas later in his reign we see an extra fold appear upon the upper eyelid and shorter, drooping eyebrows as a possible indication of his advancing age, see bottom two images of figure 16 (Fletcher 2000, p.127).

In the latter half of his long reign, Amenhotep III is shown as quite rotund, reflecting his increasing size (Wilkinson 1999, p.50). Realism can be interspersed with idealism as in the case where even after 30 years of his reign, some images of Amenhotep III after his rejuvenating jubilee festival show him as youthful and slender, while yet other images retain the obese portrayal. The symbolism of obesity at this stage may be a demonstration of divine fecundity or possibly a natural rendering, but is nonetheless a direction of the image the pharaoh allowed to be created. In the fourth decade of his reign Amenhotep was now portrayed as *'more youthful looking'* (Johnson 2001, p.84) with larger-than-life eyes, puffy lips, smaller nose and ears while displaying a broader waist and thickening of the body in a new style at the time. Although his grandfather and father had been portrayed as thicker set (Tyldesley 1998, p.96) the author notes that Amenhotep III was the first pharaoh to discard to normal icon of pharaoh as a god, and allowed his image to reveal him as a *'fat and frail human being'*.

REALISM PORTRAYED IN FIGURES OF AUTHORITY

In the Old Kingdom, Dynasties III to VI, figures of authority show a vitality of manhood and command about their person. In depictions of middle age in these dynasties, the figures of authority take on a larger persona, with thicker necks and larger breasts but rarely with an aged face or individual resemblance. Riefstahl (1951, p.66) explains that *'Living has not left its lines upon them'* wherein a person of importance is rarely characterised by old age. Artists of this era, however, have no qualms about depicting bodily deformities in the peasants, often drawing notice to it and Schafer (2002, p.285) cites an example of this is a large protruding navel empathised in the outline of a figure.



Figure 17

Obese figure of Heimunu, Dynasty IV (Metropolitan Museum, 2008)

For the non-royal, but a person of standing nonetheless, Heimunu's title was "Overseer of every kind" which is understood to mean architect. As a possible nephew of Khufu he would have administered the construction of the Great pyramid in Dynasty IV. Given that he held one of the most important positions in the kingdom it is even more notable that this statue shows his '*proud obesity*' as shown in figure 17 above, emphasized with rolls of fat under his large, sagging breasts (Metropolitan museum 2008). The accomplishment of age and a good life is symbolised by an overweight figure, a result of a life of easy living in comparison with the everyday life of others that could be harsh and ageing. Robins (1993, p.180) agrees, citing images of a corpulent body, rolls of fat, larger breasts and thicker ankles in a man that relate to the social standing of officials. Heimunu's obese portrayal does not represent a fat or lazy person as such, but rather one who has successfully achieved maturity and wisdom from his role as an official, and who is enjoying a relaxed lifestyle with its requisite abundance of food.

In Dynasty XIII another example of ‘*stately corpulence*’ is that of Sobkemsaf, now held in the Kunsthistorisches museum in Vienna (Smith 1998, p.120). Viewed in profile, his long skirt is projected forward from his waist in the representation of obesity, another symbolism of success through office. Robins (1993, p.180) explains importantly that as women could not hold office, the symbolism of a corpulent body denoting success is not associated with the female figure.

AGEING SYMBOLS

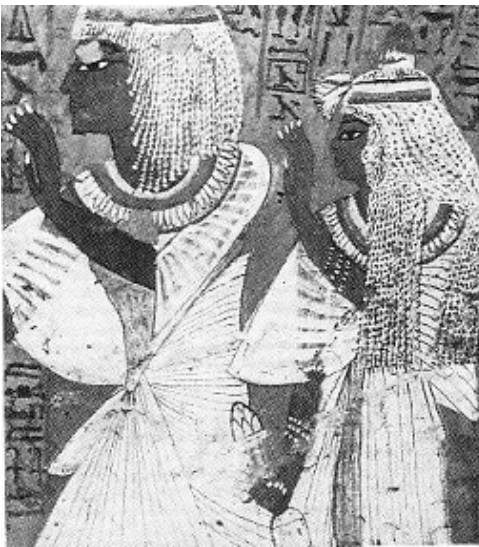


Figure 18

Grey wigs denote old age (Manniche 1987, p.82)



Figure 19

Detail of grey and white wigs symbolising old age (Tosi & Nasar 2001, p.11)

The depiction of age did not necessarily have to depend on showing an aged face. There were other symbols that the artist could make use of. An innovative, rare and subtle interpretation for those ‘*who have reached blessed old age*’ was achieved by the use of grey wigs as painted in the Theban tomb 290 of Irinfufer in the Ramesside period, New Kingdom, figure 18 above (Manniche 1987, p.82). Irinufur’s parents are shown with beautifully coiffured but stark grey

wigs and, rather than detracting from the wall scene, the wigs add an elegance and dignity to the aged couple. Their youthful face, slim body and manicured nails belie the fact that old age is upon them.

Another example of grey and white hair denoting old age is in the tomb of Pashedu, Western Necropolis at Deir el Medina, Theban Tomb 3, again from the Ramesside period (figure 19 above). Pashedu's aged relatives are depicted with varying shades of black, grey and white on their wigs. In the top register his father's wig is white and his mother's is grey, the middle register shows his father-in-law with black hair marbled with grey, while his mother-in-law's wig is entirely grey, all representing the symbolism of old age (Meskell 2000, p.16). This ageing is apparent despite the significance of their youthful bodies and unwrinkled appearance, the image defying the odds. The current author would suggest further that the thin, spindly arms shown on Pashedu's relatives are yet another symbol of ageing, i.e. possible muscle wasting through old age.

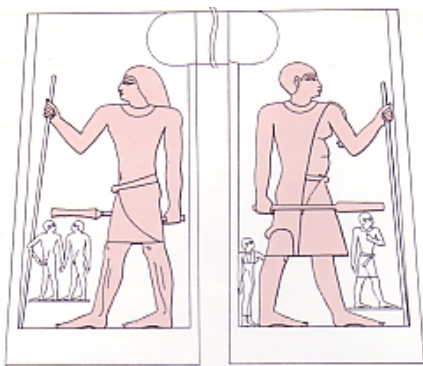


Figure 20

Dual image of Rakhaefankh

(Wilkinson 1999, p.58)



Figure 21

Dual image on funerary stele of Setib

(Etienne 2006, p.7)

Yet another artistic interpretation and symbolism for old age was achieved through the use of dual portraits of an individual. Two images representing the same person at different stages of their life show one portrayed as a young man and the other as an older, rotund person and can be seen on the walls of several Old Kingdom tombs. An example of this is shown in figure 20 above wherein the tomb owner Rakhaefankh, from Dynasty V of the Old Kingdom, is symbolically shown in two stages of his life, the younger man on the left at his peak, masculine and healthy, contrasted with the older and successful official with '*status-enhancing fat*', (Wilkinson 1999, p.58). That the larger depiction is only symbolic is evidenced by the larger torso and chest, the remainder of the body retaining the size and youthfulness of the younger illustration.

A further example of a symmetrical study of an individual appears on the funerary limestone stele of Setib, from a later period, the First Intermediate Period, now located in Musee du Louvre, Paris (see figure 21 above). The mature Setib is on the left and is comparable with the previous Old Kingdom artwork shown in figure 20, wherein only the torso and chest are represented as thickset. The younger account is on the right in a mirrored stance holding the staff and sceptre of office. Thus the two ages of Setib are a symbolic testimonial to his success in life (Etienne 2006, p.7).

The representation of ageing is taken a step further with three symbolic ages in a woman's life being decorated on a false door in Hemira's tomb at Saqqara, dating to the Old Kingdom, and now housed in the Fitzwilliam museum, Cambridge (Kinney 2007, p.146). In the first register (see figure 22 below) a young Hemira is represented with a long piece of hair, a disc-weight holding the tress together at the bottom. In the next register, her breasts are portrayed frontally

twice, a very rare example in Egyptian art where this illustration is normally restrained to servants; her first image has the high full breasts in the symbol of a woman's prime, and the other with drooping breasts, an indicator of ageing. Kinney observes that as the young Hemira is seated while the older portrayals of her are standing; the artistic suggestion is one of a woman who is proud to have attained old age while retaining the vitality of life.



Figure 22

Three stages of Hemira's life (Kinney 2007, p.146)

Another illustration of the unashamed effects of ageing is clearly delineated in figure 23 below from Theban Tomb 155 of Intef, from Dynasty XVIII. A painted wall fragment depicts an old man with a balding spot on his head, rolls of fat and entrenched age lines around the eyes and under the cheek. Adding to this naturalism is not only the use of detailed brush strokes that represent body hair, but also the fact they are painted in black and grey, thereby adding to the fading representation of life (Smith 1998, p.142).



Figure 23

Aged man New Kingdom (Smith 1998, p.142)

AGEING IN AMARNA ART

An image that is in stark contrast to the enigmatic and beautiful bust of Nefertiti (see figure 8 earlier) is the aged version of her in a small limestone statuette shown in figure 24 below from the Altes museum, Berlin. Although unfinished, it still manages to illustrate that her youth has passed and that matters of state and the passage of time have wearied her. Her body displays obvious signs of age with sagging breasts and abdomen; the cheeks are slumped and add heaviness in the form of creases to the sides of her mouth. Unfortunately, this gives her face a *'slightly bitter expression'* as Arnold (1996, p.79) puts it, and compares to the statue of Queen Tiye in figure 25 below. As this statue of Nefertiti has realistic features of ageing, it is apparent to the current author that artists of the Amarna period made a deliberate attempt to show the

passing of age in an individual's life, with the consequence of incorporating elements of realism into their art.



Figure 24

Aged Nefertiti (Arnold 1996, p.78)



Figure 25

Queen Tiye (Arnold 1996, p.31)

The plaster head of an old woman that appears to be '*sculpted from life*' was found in the Thutmose workshop at Amarna (Arnold 1996, p.47) also located in the Altes museum, Berlin, see figure 26 below. She has deep incised lines that seem to support her large slumped cheeks while wrinkles around her eyes extend into the bags that form underneath. Smith (1998, p.194) has studied this bust closely, along with the old man also shown in figure 26, observing that the wrinkles around the woman's eyes and on her forehead, and those on the brow of the man are features that are '*unprecedented in earlier sculpture*'. In the current author's opinion, the portrayal of the aged man and woman is a refreshing and arresting change from the usual constraints of the period and display the realism of age.



Figure 26

Aged man and woman in Amarna period

(Smith 1998, p.194)



Figure 27

Protruding belly on the sculptor Bak (Aldred

1972, p.193)

As had been done in previous eras, artistic conventions followed the preferred style of the pharaoh of the day. In the case of Amarna era, people of status had themselves depicted with sagging breasts, large stomachs and with an indolent body stance resonating the royal family's style. As an artistic example of the new style, the royal sculptor Bak had himself represented with an overly-large pot belly, as shown on figure 27 below and from the Altes museum, Berlin. However, the everyday person continued to have themselves depicted as they actually were in life (Tyldesley 1998, p.102). Depictions of both royals and commoners in the Amarna period showed the realistic and accurate representations of ageing. With the examples of Nefertiti discussed above, both of her extraordinary and unique beauty and the later aged version, we are privileged to witness two extreme ages in her life. Whether they are a realistic portrayal is subjective but in the current author's opinion, it was an artistic convention that was as unique as Akhenaten's religious beliefs and vision and the religious literature that was produced for the era.

CONCLUSION

In an era when life expectancy was relatively low, beauty and age were both admired - the former for its youth, vitality and allure and the latter for its wisdom and long life. As the artist drew upon his palette he could simply and conveniently add the symbolism of age without creating a completely old body or face. The addition of wrinkles was a symbol of wisdom and influence and was used in both male and female interpretations. Elements of realism are found not only in the everyday person's representation, they are also incorporated into royal images. One's appearance in life was just as important as one's presentation in death, where belief held that the body should be even more perfect, thereby symbolically preserving the deceased's prime state for an everlasting life.

The literature of the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms and the Amarna period celebrated the beauty of the gods and of the people themselves. The ancient Egyptians acknowledged the realism of ageing, and recognised both its negative and positive aspects. On the negative side, they observed and recorded the loss of one's senses and abilities with age; and on the positive side, they recognised that wisdom can be attained with the passage of time. Consequently, in this area the writings of the Egyptian sages are as relevant and instructive today as they were all that millennia ago. Their literature also documented many other aspects of daily life and included prescriptions for arresting the maladies of ageing, the drying effects of the sun on skin, recipes for turning old age into youth, removing signs of age and countless others. We also read of concoctions for covering grey hair where the colour or quality of the animal or product was believed to be imparted to the user.

The yearning for reaching old age and being provided for at that stage of one's life is also preserved in their writings. For the purpose of looking younger or more attractive, beauty and cleanliness remedies also had a practical use in warding off bacteria. Therefore if they did not necessarily feel better or younger for having used a particular concoction, the ancients may have still have achieved the look of being better or younger, thus keeping up appearances in life as in death.

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