Acts of Official Grief on the Berlin Museum
“Trauerrelief” (AMP 12411)

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Grief is a human feeling that accompanies sad events or the loss of dear ones. Acts of grief were represented in ancient Egyptian funerals for both males and females. Attendants of a funeral vary between family members, friends, professional mourners, official representatives - in case of high officials- and priests who were involved either in mummification or recitation of prayers. The current study is analyzing a scene of the funeral of the High Priest of Ptah, Ptahemhat-Ty. The relief came from Saqqara and is now a famous piece in Berlin Museum (AMP 12411). Grief on this relief came in two levels: the family level and the official level. The acts performed in the funeral vary between emotional acts and conservative acts. The sons of the deceased acted in distress and deep sadness while officials were sad in discreet and demure way. Both acts were expressed in gestures and facial features. Employing a descriptive analytical methodology it is deduced that official grief is conventional and conservative probably to maintain the image of the state with the exception of one or two officials turning the other way to hide their emotions of sadness from the public. Similar scenes of funerals of high officials show in most cases the same gestures represented on the Berlin Trauerrelief.

Keywords: mourners, funeral, official grief

Introduction

Representations of grief and mourning are depicted in tomb paintings and reliefs. Scenes of weeping and winning accompanied the funerary procession which was an important phase to transport the deceased from the earthly life into the afterlife (Colazilli 2018, Millward 2013).

The main attendants in the funeral were the deceased’s family members among whom the son played an important part in performing funerary rites for the deceased acting like Horus did to his father Osiris. There were mainly two women acting like Isis and Nephtys lamenting the deceased as Osiris. Mourners were family members, relatives, friends, neighbours and sometimes professional mourners. They expressed sorrow and grief through gestures and spoken words. The participants included priests performing certain rituals and royal representatives in case of important funerals (Zeinelabdein 2016).

Both males and females were apparent in the funeral procession; though females acted in more affectionate performance: weeping, throwing dust on their heads or exposing their breasts in many cases, fainting, throwing themselves on the ground or gripping other mourners for support (Figure 1). Some of these

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gestures were natural others were just a requirement of the job (Riggs 2013, Millward 2013).

The expression of male grief was more conservative; they settle for just raising their hands over their heads in sorrow or close to their mouth or ears. In some scenes when they closely related to the deceased, they are shown falling on the ground out of despair as in the scene of Ankhmahor’s funeral dating to the 6th Dynasty (Figure 2).

**Figure 1. Female Mourners Wailing in Grief, Papyrus of Ani (British Museum EA. 10470.5), 19th Dynasty**

![Female Mourners Wailing in Grief](image1.png)

*Source: Budge 1913.*

**Figure 2. Males and Females Grieving at the Funeral of Ankhmahor, Saqqara, 6th Dynasty**

![Males and Females Grieving](image2.png)

*Source: Wilson 1944.*

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Describing gestures of grief on the studied relief.
2. Clearing the idea of official attendees at funerals.
3. Studying similar scenes to identify similar and different gestures.
Literature Review

A number of articles studied the famous relief known as Trauerrelief (Berlin 12411). Most of them were interested in the titles of the personnel attending the funeral. These works represented a starting point to study the scene and the details examined in the current study. Others discussed mourning as a practice in Egyptian funerals both for males and females.

Schulman (1965) focused on the officials represented in the relief trying to reveal the characters of the unnamed personnel.

Gressler-Löhr (2012) while describing the relief discussed the location of the deceased’s tomb and his family members relating the relief to other findings of the family.

Barthelmess (1992) discussed the different episodes of the funeral through the scenes of the Theban Ramesside Tombs. This included scenes of both male and female mourners. Barthelmess pointed out some different gestures of male mourners.

Methodology

The study employs a descriptive analytical methodology where the scene of the funeral is described and grief gestures are analyzed within context. Similar scenes are described as well to understand various gestures of mourning of similar officials attending funerals.

Discussion and Results

Description of the Relief

The Trauerrelief (Berlin 12411) dated to the Late 18th Dynasty, reign of Tutankhamun-Ay; is representing the funeral procession of “The High Priest of Ptah”, Ptahemhat-Ty (Figure 3) (Porter and Moss 1979, Berlandini-Grenier 1985, Maystre 1992, Raue 1999, Gressler-Löhr 2012). The scene comes in two registers. The first register represents various male and female grief gestures. The lady on the extreme right is wailing while kneeling raising her hands and bending her head backward. She is followed by the “chief of the retainers of the high priest, Neferhotep” who is bald and pouring libation (Schulman 1965).

Four men are raising their hands on their heads in sorrow while the fifth is crouching. The rest three men are holding funerary objects in the procession. Their baldness refers to their posts as priests. The names of these men are indicated without giving their titles; thus they are probably of lesser clergy of Ptah or priests conducting some ceremonies in the funeral (Erman 1895, Schulman 1965).

In the second register with a larger scale a number of officials and priests are as well represented mourning the deceased in different gestures. The first man from the right is bald, raising his hands and bending his body as if going to fall. He is raising his head with features of sorrow. He is followed by another bald priest
but this time he is putting his hands on his back-returned head in act of tragic grief. Those two personnel are most probably the sons of the deceased. The first is named Say (Gressler-Löhr 2012). The third person is Hormoheb. He is topped by the title “Hereditary prince and General یر-پت and یر-ر3 مس).” He is followed by two doubled bald men. Both men following Hormoheb are titled “Overseer of the city and the Vizier” (یر-ر3 نیت تی). Both viziers can be identified with the famous Nakhtmin and Maya (Schulman 1965). Following are nine persons interspersed by other bald men. The titles are inscribed above them (Raue 1999): the “Royal scribe and Overseer of the house, ست نسیت یر-ر3پر), the “Royal scribe and Overseer of the Treasury, ست نسیت یر-ر3 یتمت/ یدیس”) (Ward 1982), “Overseer of the Law-Court, یر-رآ ری.ت”) (Ward 1982), “Overseer of the Army, یر-ر3 مس”), “The Chamberlain, یر-ر3 یحنی.ت”) (Ward 1982), “Overseer of the Treasury, یر-ر3 پر-ید”) (Faulkner 1991), the “High Priest of Heliopolis, یر می و”) (Raue 1999), “The High priest of Memphis, Sm, “the Mayor, یتمت-س”). Those are followed by a group of other men of a smaller scale of whom only the heads appear.

Figure 3. The Trauerrelief (Berlin 12411) the Funeral Procession of “The High Priest of Ptah”, Ptahemhat-Ty, Late 18th Dynasty

Source: Schulman 1965.

Official Representatives in Grief

As the funeral was of a high priest; who was very important personnel in the ancient Egyptian state; a variety of posts appeared in the funeral ranging between military, civil and religious posts. They attended as representatives of the state participating in an important funeral just like in modern and contemporary periods. Hormoheb -probably here the chief of the official delegation at the funeral- is putting his right hand flat under the chin while his arm rests on the left. The overseer of the law court is making the same gesture with his left hand. This gesture is repeated by the overseer of the army though putting his chin on the back
of his hand. The chamberlain is turning back raising his hand to the back of his hair. The overseer of the treasury is approaching his hand to his chin. He seems to be chatting with the chamberlain. The sorrow of the rest of the officials is expressed through the looks in their eyes and the expressions of their faces. The mayor at the end is looking the other way raising his right hand near his eyes probably to hide his tears.

Showing official representatives in this manner is a kind of keeping the prestige of the state. Probably the only time when this was broken was in the scene of Akhenaten and Nefertiti mourning the death of their daughter from Amarna (Figure 4) (Martin 1989). It is their duty to attend but they have to be discreet in expressing their emotions in public.

Figure 4. The Funeral of Meketaten, the Royal Tomb, Amarna, 18th Dynasty

The famous funeral procession of the vizier Ramose (TT55), 18th Dynasty is followed -as referred in the text- by a group of fifteen officials (Figure 5). They are wearing mantels on top of regular clothes. Their titles appear on top of them as in the Berlin Tauerrelief (Figure 3). They are divided into groups; the first four each is assigned by a title: the King’s son of Kush, the Chief messenger of the king, the Chief overseer of treasury, the Second messenger of the lord of the two lands. The second four are: the Companions (smrw) and the Greats of the palace. A group of seven officials described as: the noblemen (srw) and the greats of the city (Davies 1933).

Of the first group; three are raising their hands close to their ears perhaps in a final goodbye or perhaps reciting some prayers for the deceased, one of them is supporting his right hand with his left, and the fourth is raising his hands near his mouth. One of the second four is raising his hands near the mouth like the one in
the first group. Two of the last seven; the first and the last are making the same gesture. The rest of the fifteen are just walking in silent movements (Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Official Delegation in the Funeral of Ramose TT55, 18th Dynasty**

[Image: Official Delegation in the Funeral of Ramose TT55, 18th Dynasty]

Source: Davies 1941.

On the papyrus of Ani is turning his head backward perhaps to hide his emotions (Figure 6) (Budge 1913). It is the same manner of the mayor on the studied relief (Figure 3). It looks like both men on Ani’s papyrus and the Berlin Trauerleif are lamenting the departure of the deceased to his tomb but are trying to hide it from the public. It is a natural human gesture shown until nowadays by men who in some cultures not supposed to show their emotions and feelings.

**Figure 6. Male Mourners in the Funeral of Ani, 19th Dynasty**

[Image: Male Mourners in the Funeral of Ani, 19th Dynasty]

Source: Budge 1913.

Ani was a royal scribe, assessor of divine offerings of all the gods, overseer of granaries of the lords of Abydos, scribe of the divine offerings of the lord of Thebes (Budge 1913). Perhaps he was not of a high rank like the high priest of Memphis, Ptahemhat-Ty, but sure he was considered as a high official. His body was followed by eight men wearing white long garments, the names and titles of
whom are not mentioned. They could be high officials following the funeral or members of his family. His wife Tutu is kneeling beside his dead body raising her left hand to her forehead with bare chest. The gestures in the funeral of Ani are conservative but different from that of the funeral of the High Priest of Memphis. Only one is raising his hand on his head in grief, while the frontal persons are raising their hands as if greeting Ani for the last time. One of them has a white hair probably from the perfumed grease used to cent hair (Figure 6). Others seem to chat together like in the Trauerrleif.

The males following the funeral of Roy TT255 -the Royal scribe, Stweard of the estates of Hormoheb and of Amun (Porter and Moss 1927)- are expressing different levels of sorrow (Figure 7). The first three men are showing deep sadness with their arms raised to their head to express sense of loss; the same gestures of the following group of female mourners. Another group of men are making similar gestures to Hormoheb (Figure 3) with their hands under their chins as an expression of sadness. The person in the middle has his hair whitened just like Ani’s funeral (Figure 6). The expression of mourning men here is different from another group of officials following the same funeral (Figure 10).

**Figure 7. The Funeral from the Tomb of Roy TT255, 18th Dynasty**

Almost the same gestures of the Tauerrleif with hands under the chin and the last person turning the other way raising his hands close to his face to hide his tears (Figure 8) appeared in the tomb of Amonmos TT 19, the First prophet of Amenophis of the court.
Male mourners attended the boat funeral procession of Nefer-Hotep (TT49), the Divine father of Amun-Ra (Porter and Moss 1927) (Figure 9). Their gestures of lamentation are more compassionate with their arms raised in wailing. One of them looks like beating on his head. They are mostly bare chest and bold except two. From their expression of severe sadness they seem to be his family members (Zienelabdein 2016).

In the boat procession during the funeral of Nedjemger TT138, the Overseer of the Ramessesum garden on the estate of Amun, 19th Dynasty; two groups of mourning men appear (Zienelabdein 2016, Barthelmess 1992, Feucht 2006). The first group are approaching the coffin in intimate gestures while one of them
wailing by putting his hand on his forehead. Those seem to be closely related to the deceased probably his sons. The other group is waiting ashore raising their hands on their foreheads. They seem to have a group gesture of the traditional act of sorrow (Figure 10).

**Figure 10.** *Two Groups of Male Mourners, Tomb of Nedjemger TT138, 19th Dynasty*

![Two Groups of Male Mourners, Tomb of Nedjemger TT138, 19th Dynasty](source: Barthelmess 1992, *Der Übergang ins Jenseits in den thebanischen Beamtengräbern der Ramessidenzeit*, p.18, Abb. 2, Taf. 3)

From the tomb of Thay called also To (TT 23), 19th Dynasty -royal scribe of the dispatches of the lord of the two lands- came his funeral scene (Figure 11). A group of men are following the funeral. Two viziers are attending the funeral, and the rest of male mourners are his colleagues (Porter and Moss 1927, Barthelmess 1992). Two of the mourners seem to be priests from their bald heads; one of them is resting his right arm on his left while putting on the ear with the same attitude in the scenes of Ramose (Figure 5). He is followed by two men making the same gestures. Others are putting their hands on their mouths; the last one is raising his right hand to the forehead.

**Figure 11.** *Male Mourners in the Funeral of Thay (TT23), 19th Dynasty*

![Male Mourners in the Funeral of Thay (TT23), 19th Dynasty](source: Barthelmess 1992).
Conservative people escorting funerals in some scenes are called the “Nine Smrw”. Srw or Smrw, official nobles/royal companions/courtiers or friends (Erman and Grapaw 1930). They wore extensive mantels holding sticks (Figure 12). Their attitude of walking in dignity holding their sticks is a reminder of modern military funerals where officials walk in a systematic way in a line. They were probably friends of the deceased, colleagues or official representatives as can be seen in the tomb of Huy TT 54, 18th Dynasty (Porter and Moss 1927), the tombs of Haremhab TT78, Late 18th Dynasty (Porter and Moss 1927), the tomb of Roy TT255, Late 18th Dynasty (Porter and Moss 1927, Foucart et al. 1928). They first appeared during the Old Kingdom but appeared more during the New Kingdom. The Smrw usually followed the coffin and carried out some rites as carrying the statue to the shrine prepared for purification (Zeinelabdein 2016). But they were not always nine in number, sometimes less or more than nine as can be seen from the previously discussed scenes. They were two groups of four and seven men in the tomb of Ramose TT55 (Figure 5).

**Figure 12. The Smrw, Tomb of Roy TT255, 18th Dynasty**

*Source: Zeinelabdein 2016.*

**Conclusion**

Women are more emotional than men in showing their grief and pain for their beloved ones. Males were shown grieving in different phases of the funeral either on land or on boats used to transfer the corpse to the tomb. It seems that grief gestures of males following the funerals are divided in the scenes into three categories; relatives and close friends who grief their beloved ones in an expressive way, colleagues and official representatives who show their grief in almost repeated expressions and finally the Smrw who probably are official representatives as well but with special outfit walking in homages and perhaps reciting some prayers.

Official representatives in funerals are more conservative than family members and friends. Their gestures and movements perhaps are being observed
by the public, so they are required to behave in a kind of protocolled manner being an image of the state. The ancient Egyptian artist was able to show various degrees of sorrow and grief that one can tell who is an official or a colleague attending the funeral out of duty or a son, a relative or a close friend saddened by the death of his loved one. This was clear in the gestures of hands and expressions of the face.

On the Trauerrelief (Berlin 12411) being a general—an extremely high official—Hormoheb who headed the official delegation in the funeral of the high priest of Memphis had to balance his grief over a deceased that he may have known at the court and being a representative of the state. Together with his colleagues; they were able to well represent their king and offices. Though the mayor failed somehow to control his tears as the funeral was taking the deceased away.

References


