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The certainty of change : a research into the interactions of the decoration on the western walls of the cult chapels of the mastabas at Giza during the Old Kingdom

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Chapter IV

The western wall of the cult chapel

An inventory is made of the decoration placed on the sections of the western wall that are not taken up by its false door(s). From this inventory a number of separate (sub)themes are selected. For every tomb included in the relevant catalogue, the (sub)themes employed on its western wall are determined, and for every (sub)theme the overall frequency of occurrence (FO) is calculated. A chronological ordering is made of the chronological development of the (sub)themes. The FO/period values are calculated, and the chronological development of the (sub)themes is depicted in the form of FO/period diagrams. From these diagrams preliminary conclusions are drawn.

I. The (sub)themes on the western wall.¹

A compilation is made of (sub)themes placed on the western wall of the cult chapels included in the catalogues IV.1.Vol.2 and IV.3.Vol.2, and from the available literature an illustration is given as an example of the (sub)theme:²

1. The tomb owner, standing or sitting alone (plate IV.1).³
2. The tomb owner in physical contact with members of the family,⁴ standing or sitting (plate IV.2).⁵
3. The tomb owner sitting at the offering table (with or without family) (plate IV.3).⁶
4. Members of the family not in physical contact with the tomb owner who is present (plate IV.11).⁷

¹ The description of the (sub)themes on the western wall, together with the description of those employed on the false door and the entrance thicknesses, have been compiled in an appendix which has been separately added to this report (pages xxi - xxii).

² The table given by Harpur (Harpur, *DETOK*, 70) has been the template for this compilation. The (sub)themes given by Harpur are found in the tombs in the necropolises of Giza and Saqqara. This means that it is possible that some of the (sub)themes she mentions are not present in the chapels in the necropolis of Giza. All the examples given are placed on a western wall as defined for the research project.

³ Some depictions do not easily fit the defined (sub)themes. An example in tomb G 2100-I-annexe of Merib (PM, III¹, 71-2, plan XXIV) is the group on wall 5 (LD, II, 20). In Harpur, *DETOK*, 396-7, plan 43 this group is mistakenly called a table scene. The group consists of the following attributes:

1. The tomb owner sitting alone.
2. A standing person with a cloth (a strip of linen?) opened in front of the tomb owner.
3. A sitting scribe (?), offering a roll of papyrus (?).
4. A sitting person.

Although it could easily be mistaken for a combination of (sub)themes 1 (tomb owner sitting alone) and 7 (priests), it probably depicts a scene out of the daily (professional) life of Merib. Therefore, the scene is designated as (sub)theme 8 (the rendering of accounts).

⁴ Physical contact can be direct (the son touching, see plate IV.2), indirect (by means of the son holding the staff, see plates IV.2 and IV.10) or just standing together (plate IV.11).

⁵ In the cult chapels of all the tombs included in the catalogues the family consists of wife and/or children; in this (sub)theme other members of the family like the mother and/or the father are never included.

⁶ Harpur, *DETOK* 70 employs the term "table scene". The meal at the offering table is very often accompanied by bearers and/or priests. It is of no importance whether the tomb owner is sitting at the offering table with his wife or another member of his family or if one or two offering tables are used. This (sub)theme is in fact a conglomerate of the following components: the ideographic offering list, utensils to wash the hands, loaves on the table and sometimes heaps of food piled up in the vicinity of the table.

⁷ These are depictions of members of the family who are sitting or standing in front of the tomb owner, but without direct or indirect physical contact (direct meaning that the member of the family is actually

5. Servants bringing offerings (plate IV.4).⁸
6. Personified estates bringing goods (plate IV.9).
7. Priests (plate IV.10).
8. Scribes in a row or alone, writing, rendering of accounts, leading people (plates IV.6/IV.9).
9. Butchery scenes (plate IV.4).
10. Piles of food offerings (plate IV.8).⁹
11. The non-ideographic offering list (plate IV.3).¹⁰
12. Musicians, dancers (plates IV.6/IV.7).
13. Indoor diversion (plate IV.6).¹¹
14. Kiosk scene (plate IV.8).
15. Agricultural activities.¹²
16. Craftsmen (plate IV.5).
17. Hunting in the desert or in the marshes (plates I.6/I.7).¹³
18. Servants making a bed (plate IV.6).

The tombs studied are compiled in catalogues IV.1.Vol.2 (decoration western wall and false door present, in total 57 tombs) and IV.3.Vol.2 (decoration western wall present, decoration false door absent, in total 7 tombs). For the research of the (sub)themes on the western wall these two catalogues are combined into catalogue IV.1/3.Vol.2 (in total 64 tombs).

In table IV.1.Vol.2 the (sub)themes present on the western wall of all the tombs mentioned in catalogue IV.1/3.Vol.2 are compiled. The marking of the certain or uncertain presence or absence of the (sub)themes is carried out as discussed in chapter III.

touching the tomb owner, indirect here meaning holding the staff of the tomb owner) (see plates IV.10 and IV.11).

⁸ The offerings that are brought are animals, fowl, food, oils, garments and furniture.

⁹ These are the depictions of large piles of food for the deceased, sometimes even with bearers adding more to it. Also see Robins, *Offerings*, 151.

¹⁰ No distinction is made between the ritual and the inventory offering list (Barta, *Opferliste*, 7), because the ritual offering list, only placed on the panel in the vicinity of the offering table, is considered to be a attribute of (sub)theme 3.

¹¹ Harpur, *DETOK*, 69 calls the tomb owner sitting with dancers and musicians and sometimes playing a board game “the banquet scene”, although it does not depict a banquet but a period of recreation of the tomb owner (see plate IV.6). That which is called the “kiosk scene” also depicts the tomb owner sitting, but now under a canopy with in front of him/her (sub)themes that do not depict recreation but either the cult of the deceased or the tomb owner inspecting agricultural activities. Although a strong connection appears to exist between (sub)themes 12 and 13 because there are often (but not always) placed closely together (thus forming a group or scene), they are considered separately.

¹² Because (sub)themes 15 and 18 are not represented on the western wall of the cult chapels included in the catalogue, no example has been given.

¹³ These two scenes can be seen as a depiction of the tomb owner amusing himself; they can also be interpreted as a(n) (archaic) depiction of the tomb owner providing for his family and/or household.

II. Preliminary study.

II.1. The development of the number of (sub)themes placed on the wall.

In table IV.1a.Vol.2 in the column “total x” the number of (sub)themes placed on the western wall has been given for every tomb. Per period the mean of the “total x” is calculated for the western walls that are *complete* (determined in table IV.1.Vol.2), and a diagram is made of these values (figure IV.1).¹⁴ The chronological division is the same as in chronological ordering IV.1.Vol.2.

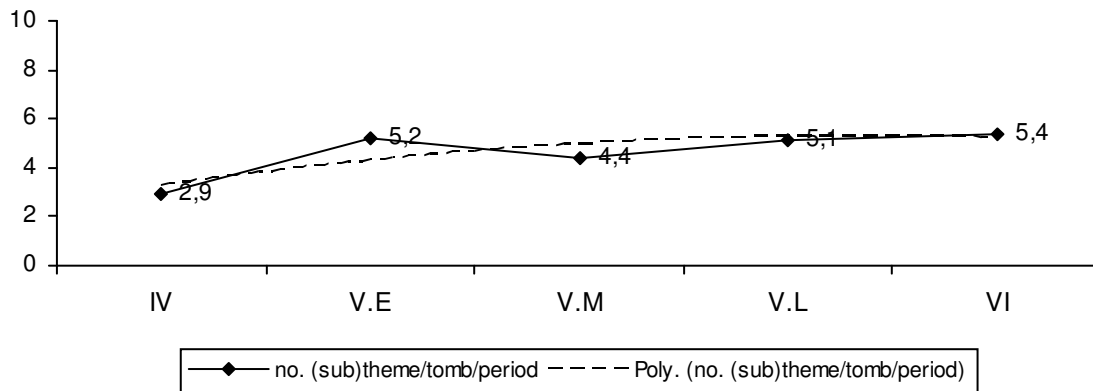


Figure IV.1: The chronological development of the number of (sub)themes on the western wall.

A possible interpretation of the development is given by means of the polynomial in figure IV.1. This line shows that in the period IV the repertoire of available (sub)themes increased (3 → 5), but that during the rest of the Old Kingdom no further development in the number of (sub)themes placed on the western wall took place.

II.2. The frequency of occurrence (FO) of the (sub)themes on the western wall.

In table IV.1.Vol.2 the number of (“x” + “-”) is counted per (sub)theme because both represent a certainty. The next step is the determination of the number of “x”, and from these two figures the FO is calculated as a percentage.¹⁵

Conclusions from the FO values in table IV.1.Vol.2:

1. The FO values of (sub)themes 12–18 are low (3% or less). The conclusion is therefore that their placement on the western wall is not frequent enough to allow valid conclusions. As a consequence, throughout the further research project these (sub)themes are no longer included in the list of (sub)themes.
2. (Sub)themes 3 (tomb owner at the offering table), 5 (offering bearers) and 7 (priests) have a high FO (resp. 73%, 90% and 73%) and it is evident that these (sub)themes play

¹⁴ In chapter III, section II.1.2. this is called the “popularity”.

¹⁵ The percentages are rounded up/down to figures with one decimal according to the rules described in chapter III, section III.1.2.

an important role in the total representation of the (sub)themes on the western wall. Seeing their high FO values, it is possible that there might be some kind of connection between the three (sub)themes. (Sub)theme 5 has a notably higher FO (90%) than (sub)themes 3 and 7 (both 73%), therefore, the role of (sub)theme 5 might be more than just a (sub)theme connected to the table scene.¹⁶

3. The relatively high and nearly equal FO values of (sub)themes 9 (the butchery scene), 10 (pile of food offerings) and 11 (the non-ideographic offering list) (resp. 62%, 56% and 57%), indicate that there could be a association between them.¹⁷

III. The chronological ordering of the (sub)themes.

III.1. The chronological ordering of the (sub)themes on the western wall.

The next step is to set up a chronological ordering.¹⁸ For the study at hand a chronological ordering is not of the utmost importance, but it not only allows a control of the dating of the tombs and the determination of the CP values of the interactions, it also shows whether an overall chronological development is present or not.

The original chronological ordering is made starting from the chronological order as given in table IV.1.Vol.2 and resulting in chronological ordering IV.1.Vol.2. It is obvious from the chronological ordering that on the remaining surface of the western wall a chronological development undeniably takes place.

III.2. The FO values (chronological ordering IV.1.Vol.2).

The difference between the chronological order of chronological ordering IV.1.Vol.2 and table IV.1.Vol.2 is due to the introduction of a “more refined” dating in chronological ordering IV.1.Vol.2.¹⁹ The FO/(sub)theme/period in chronological ordering IV.1.Vol.2 is calculated in the following way:

1. The resulting chronological order of chronological ordering IV.1.Vol.2 is introduced into table IV.1.Vol.2, which results in table IV.1a.Vol.2 (with 64 tombs).
2. The FO/(sub)theme/period values are calculated and these values are compiled in the table in figure IV.2.
3. For each (sub)theme a diagram of its chronological development is made (diagrams IV.1-11.Vol.2).

¹⁶ Part of the research project is to determine whether such special kinds of association indeed exist between (sub)themes.

¹⁷ According to Reisner, (sub)themes are concerned connected with the food supply for the *ka* of the tomb owner (Reisner, *Tomb Development*, 364).

¹⁸ Kemp, *Dating*. Different from the description given in chapter III, the point of first appearance has been chosen here instead of the midpoint because of the problematic incorporation of the use life of (sub)theme 1 in the chronological ordering.

¹⁹ For the term “finer dating”: see chapter II, section IV, point 3.

(sub)theme	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	population
IV ²⁰												11
x/-	4	8	4	3	10	7	4	5	8	4	4	
x	0	7	1	0	9	4	3	3	6	0	1	
FO	0	88	25	0	90	57	75	60	75	0	25	
V.E												15
x/-	10	12	10	10	14	11	11	11	10	10	10	
x	1	10	5	7	14	4	10	7	5	1	3	
FO	10	83	50	70	100	36	91	64	50	10	30	
V.M												12
x/-	9	9	11	10	11	9	11	9	10	10	11	
x	2	2	8	4	8	0	7	2	4	6	7	
FO	22	22	73	40	73	0	64	22	40	60	64	
V.L												13
x/-	9	8	11	9	11	8	10	8	10	11	10	
x	2	0	10	4	11	0	6	0	7	9	6	
FO	22	0	91	44	100	0	60	0	70	82	60	
VI												13
x/-	5	10	9	8	12	5	9	7	9	10	7	
x	0	6	9	5	10	0	7	3	7	9	7	
FO	0	60	100	63	83	0	78	43	78	90	100	
												64
total x/-	37	47	45	40	58	40	45	40	47	45	42	
total x	5	25	33	20	52	8	33	15	29	25	24	

Figure IV.2: FO values/period/ (sub)theme (after table IV.1a.Vol.2).

Conclusions from diagrams IV.1-11.Vol.2.

1. In some of the diagrams it is possible to draw a straight line ("linear") (diagrams IV.3, IV.5 and IV.7). In others a better fit might be reached by a polynomial (diagram IV.11), or by a line that follows the chronological development of the (sub)theme.
2. In diagram IV.1 the curve of (sub)theme 1 shows that this is a (sub)theme that, although taken up in the repertoire of the western wall, never became very "popular" (the FO never becomes more than 22%), and fell into disuse relatively soon.²¹ It is possible that the (sub)theme was introduced on the western wall solely for a purpose that shortly thereafter lost its significance.
3. (Sub)themes 5 (servants bringing offerings) and 6 (personified estates bringing goods) seem to serve the same purpose, both of them bringing goods which are possibly offerings for the cult. Yet, there is no resemblance between the FO/period curves of both (sub)themes (diagrams IV.5 and IV.6 show that (sub)theme 5 remained in the repertoire, while (sub)theme 6 fell into disuse in the middle of the 5th dynasty). This indicates that it is probable that they were placed on the western wall for different purposes.

²⁰ The periods IV and VI have not been divided up in sub periods E and L because the population of each of the periods would become too small.

²¹ After the period V.L the (sub)theme is no longer placed on the western wall.

4. The curves of (sub)themes 5 (diagram IV.5, servants) and 7 (diagram IV.7, priests) are nearly identical. It is probable that they served the same purpose on the western wall, but this resemblance is not irrefutable proof (figure IV.5).
5. When in the diagrams of (sub)themes 10 (piles of food) and 11 (non-ideographic offering list) the “linear” is introduced, it turns out that both of them have practically the same angle and are occurring much in the same place. This indicates that both (sub)themes are probably strongly connected (figure IV.3).
6. Figure IV.3 deals with the FO/period of (sub)theme 10 and 11 and the “linear” pertaining thereto; if the “linear” of the FO/period curve of (sub)theme 3 is introduced, the result is that all three lines have nearly the same angle and the same place, and it is probable that a strong connection exists between the three (sub)themes 3, 10 and 11.²²

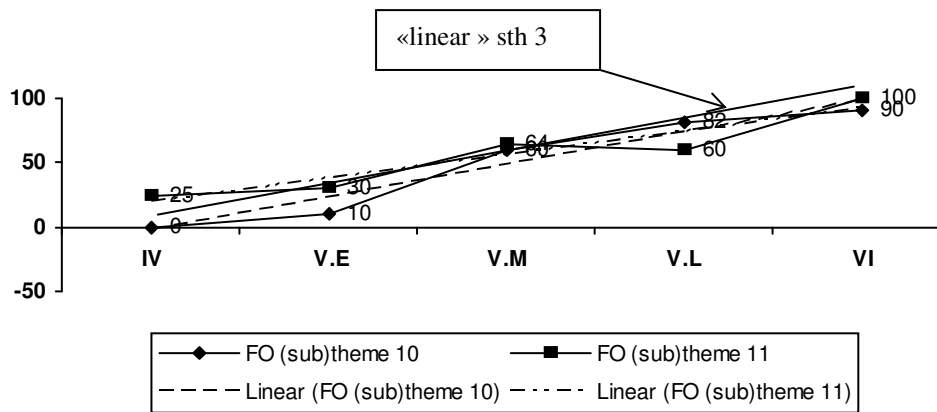


Figure IV.3:
Comparison of
(sub)themes 10
and 11.

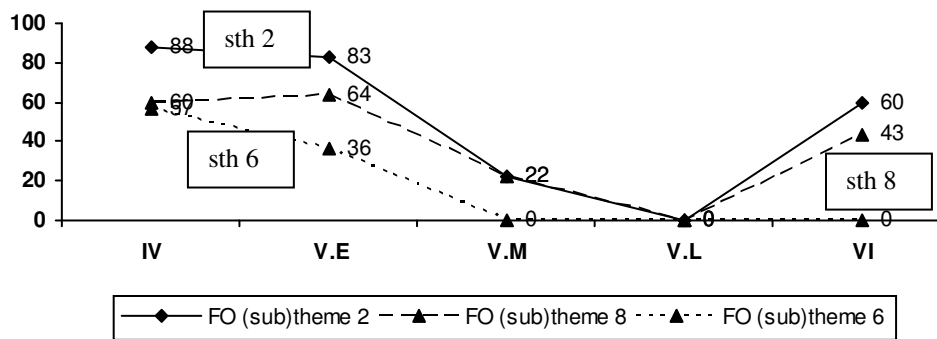


Figure IV.4:
Comparison of
(sub)themes 2, 6
and 8.

7. In figure IV.4 the curves of (sub)themes 2 and 8 have been gathered, and the resemblance between the two curves is evident. If the curve of (sub)theme 6 is added the conclusion is that a connection of (sub)theme 6 with (sub)themes 2 and 8 might be possible, but, according to chapter III, section VI, the similarity between these curves cannot be considered to be absolute proof of a connection.

²² The algebraic equation of a straight line is $y = ax + b$ (appendix III.3, section II) in which “a” gives the angle α of the curve with the horizontal axis. The a-values of the three lines are nearly equal (resp. 18.3, 18.4 and 24.5).

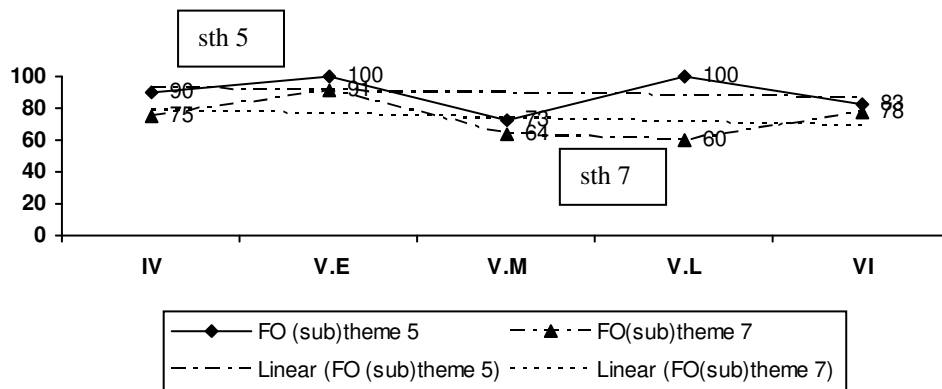


Figure IV.5:
Comparison of
(sub)themes 5
and 7.

8. In figure IV.6 the FO/period curves of (sub)themes 9, 10 and 11 are gathered. In figure IV.3 a close connection between (sub)themes 10 and 11 can be deduced. However, in figure IV.6, certainly during the first half of the Old Kingdom there is no indication of a connection between (sub)theme 9 on the one hand and (sub)themes 10 and 11 on the other. It is only beginning with V.M that a connection seems to exist between all three (sub)themes.

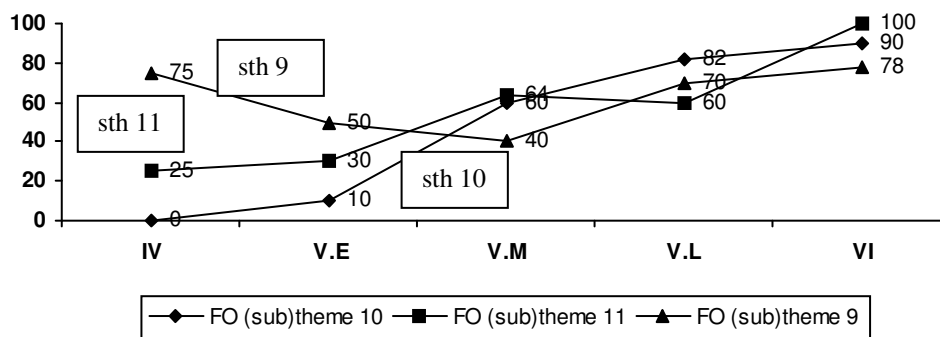


Figure IV.6.
Comparison of
(sub)themes 9, 10
and 11

9. Diagram IV.4.Vol.2 shows that the depiction of members of the family ((sub)theme 4) increases sharply during the beginning of the 5th dynasty (period V.E), to remain relatively stable during the rest of the Old Kingdom.²³

IV. Preliminary conclusions

1. (Sub)themes 3, 5 and 7 have a high FO (in table IV.1a.Vol.2, resp. 73%, 90% and 73%) and it is probable that these (sub)themes were considered important on the western wall.
2. (Sub)themes 3, 10 and 11 are probably closely connected.
3. The FO/period diagrams of (sub)themes 5 and 7 (figure IV.5) are practically identical and at the same time the only ones that are nearly horizontal. This indicates that the importance of both (sub)themes did not change throughout the Old Kingdom. This corroborates the possibility that these two (sub)themes serve a special purpose on the western wall (but not automatically the same one).

²³ Goedicke, *Darstellungen*, 61 infers that in the same period a similar development started in the royal pyramid temples.

4. (Sub)themes 5 (servants bringing offerings; plate IV.4) and 6 (personified estates, plate IV.9) both depict the bringing of goods to the tomb owner, it is evident that they are placed on the western wall for different purposes, because (sub)theme 6 gets into disuse relatively early in the Old Kingdom while (sub)theme 5 remains placed on the western wall throughout the whole period.
5. The FO/period diagrams of (sub)themes 9, 10 and 11 (resp. the butchery scene, piles of food and the non-ideographic offering list, figure IV.6).²⁴
 - a. The curves of (sub)themes 10 and 11 show some resemblance (see figure IV.3).
 - b. The curve of (sub)theme 9 shows a resemblance with the curves of (sub)themes 10 and 11 only from V.M on.
 - c. Chronological ordering IV.1.Vol.2 shows that each of the three (sub)themes 9, 10 and 11 is introduced in a different period.
 - d. A possible explanation might be that (sub)theme 9 served a certain purpose on the western wall until in V.M a change in the purpose of the cult made the introduction of first (sub)theme 11 and later (sub)theme 10 necessary. After this (sub)theme 9 adapted to the new type of cult in the chapel, and formed a connection with the two other (sub)themes. This association is plausible because all three were from then on connected with a new kind of supply of food for the *ka* of the tomb owner.
6. (Sub)theme 6 disappears from the repertoire around the middle of V.E. In the same period also the frequency of (sub)themes 2 and 8 diminishes strongly, although these two return in period VI (figure IV.4). Probably (sub)themes 2, 6 and 8 as a group form a scene from the daily life of the tomb owner showing his responsibility in managing his estates, at the same time stating their names and products.²⁵
7. (Sub)theme 1 first appears on the western wall at the very end of the period V.E and its last placement is early in the period V.L (chronological ordering IV.1.Vol.2). This means that possibly the (sub)theme has been introduced for a special purpose, which, due to other developments in the chapel, lost its significance after only a short use life.
8. It is evident that the end of the period V.M plays a key role in several changes that occur on the western wall.

²⁴ Harpur, *DETOK*, 57 specifies that the butchery scene appears on the western wall after V.6, which is contradicted by the chronological development shown in chronological ordering IV.1.Vol.2.

²⁵ Helck concludes that the produce of an estate could be brought to the tomb owner during his life time, because it was in his possession while he was still alive. This means that it is not obligatory to interpret the depiction of personified estates carrying produce to the tomb owner as the bringing of offerings for the cult of the deceased. (Helck, *Grabbesitz*, 71). The biography of Methen (PM, III¹, 193-4) mentions estates that have been founded on his behalf (*šrt-mṯn*), and also there is mention of the gift of a mortuary offering of 100 loaves per day (Breasted, *Ancient records*, 76-9). The fact that the gift of the 100 loaves is mentioned as a mortuary offering and the estates are not, might indicate that the latter are meant for the benefit of the tomb owner during his lifetime. Goedicke, *Darstellungen*, 58 details that the estates depicted in the chapels of Rahotep and Neferma'et at Maidum "...sind direkt im Irdische gebunden, d.h. als einfache Landleuten gefasst". Van Walsem, *Pragmatics*, 126 calls these scenes "stylised forms of selected real aspects of the ideal elite life".