Located on the eastern face cliff of Beni Hasan, which lies south of the modern town of Minya in Middle Egypt, the site certainly was the necropolis of the main city of the 16th Upper Egypt nome, the Oryx nome. The tomb belonged to the high official of the Oryx nome Khnumhotep II, who is the “Administrator of the Eastern Desert” during the first half of the 12th Dynasty, and presents fascinating wall paintings, the well known scene of the tribute of foreigners, and this peculiar scene, illustrating two aspects of the storage in Egypt on the north part of the West Wall.

The Role of Storage in Ancient Egyptian Economy

As ancient Egypt worked on the basis of collection and redistribution, storage had a central role in its economy. Since life depended on cereals, its storage whether for rapid consumption or long-term to prevent famines, was vital for all. The action of filling the granaries can be seen in elite tombs from the Old Kingdom to the end of the Middle Kingdom; this “topos” has a highly symbolic value as it stood for the granaries of the afterlife but also mirrored the landscape of the living.

The study of storage structures

Close examination of storage structures provides access to ancient economy, independently from the literary sources. An estimation of the granaries’ capacity can give an insight into the estate where the granary belonged. For example, the huge capacity of the Fortresses of the Second Cataract in Nubia and the period they were built point towards an aim that is more than just protecting the borders: they also provided grain supply for the deployed troops in Nubia.

Structure identified as a Treasury, pr-ḥd. Unique figuration.

Possible identification as an enclosure wall, suggesting that both structures are linked.

Porch within the Granary structure where the operations are recorded and supervised.

Structure identified as a Granary, Snwt. Access to the chambers through the roof and through shutter windows.

For each of these depicted features, it is possible to draw parallel with other storage structures from the same period, whether archaeological, or in model form.

The Block V in the Fortress of Uronarti is identified as a treasury. Its access could have been easily guarded as there was only one entrance, through the courtyard. Additionally, the long rectangular rooms recall the later ones, visible in the Ramessum.

The fortress of Uronarti is the best example to illustrate the close links between the granary (Block IV) and the treasury (Block V). They were surrounded by an enclosure wall, thicker than the rest of the structure. Block VI can be seen as an administrative part.

The model of Sepi III, Deir el-Bersheh, shows a roofed porch in the enclosure of the granary. Below, in its shade, two men are seated: one scribe and the supervisor or owner of the estate.

Problematic parallel: The outer coffin of Sepi III from Deir el-Bersheh. This foot panel presents an interesting detail: a porch standing in front of the granary structure. However, the granary is depicted in a different manner: the chambers are domed, recalling the round storage structures used during the Second Intermediate Period in Tell Edfu and Tell Hebua. As this depiction and the model are clearly from the same period and the same location, it raises the question of whether the quadrangular model displays reality or a shortcut to depict round silos.

This detail of the tomb of Meryre in Amanra is later, but it provides a good parallel for the facade of the structure displayed in the tomb of Khnumhotep II. The capital of the column is different but it could be due to the different periods of the structures.

This is a possible reconstruction for the roof of a granary from the Second Cataract Forts. It draws clear parallels with the one depicted on Khnumhotep II’s wall. Access was provided on the ground through the different rooms, but their filling was operated through openings in the roof.

Conclusions

Based on this, we can identify the main features of granaries in depictions: they were installed around a courtyard, possibly preceded by a columned hall; access to the roof could be gained through a staircase, possibly indoor; to retrieve the grain, two shutters’ windows were figured; they were surrounded by an enclosure wall, through which a door led; they might have been in close vicinity of the storerooms dedicated to goods, even part of the same estate. The scene of Khnumhotep II has the merit of displaying all these features with clarity.