

## *hkr* (*Kheker*) frieze in ancient Egypt

Dr. Naglaa Fathy Ahmed Shehab\*

### **Abstract:**

A frieze is either a "frame / border" that involves a picture or "structure" that contains fragments and refers to a perception, imagination or idea. The Egyptian frieze is one of the most beautiful works of Egyptian civilization from the Early Dynastic Period until the end of the Late Period. The development of the imagination of the ancient Egyptian artist was inspired by his love of nature and his history and beliefs. He influenced the formation of different units, including the "friezes" in all fields of art, such as architecture or fine arts such as sculpture, engraving and drawing, or small arts such as jewelry and amulets. These models have reached far-reaching horizons of creativity and have influenced the arts of the ancient world. This research is concerned with  *hkr* "*Kheker*" frieze as one of the most famous friezes in Ancient Egypt. The study deals with determining the source from which the ancient Egyptian derived this shape of the eaves, identifying its types and tracking its evolution through the historical ages and sheds light through artistic description and analysis on any technical or religious implications that the *Kheker* may reveal.

### **Key words:**

*Kheker* - Frieze - Decorative designs - Architecture element - Reeds-Ornament

---

\* Al Alson Higher Institute Of Tourism and Hotels - Nasr City  
[shehab\\_n73@hotmail.com](mailto:shehab_n73@hotmail.com)

## Introduction

A frieze is a prominent bar in the proportions of the wall of the building, formed by certain floral or geometric images, repeated along the parts of the building, and is used in architectural decoration, furniture, and decoration. In addition to the aesthetic function eaves, it can also be used to emphasize the proportions and fit the front of the building. Frieze can be smooth or embossed with decorations, most of which have floral or geometric shape. A frieze was simply a long band of painting or sculpture on a wall. Most were carved or painted directly on the wall.

The frieze is one of the most popular pieces of art that Egyptians created. There are many types of famous friezes found in ancient Egyptian temples, tombs and funerary equipment. The *hkr* *Kheker* frieze is one of the most important friezes in ancient Egypt that the Old Egyptians used to personalize their buildings from the Early Dynastic Period until the end of the Late Period.

The friezes are common decorative designs, simply depicting stylized bundles of reeds or plant stem they are typical of the mat hanging on the walls of ordinary houses. Even today, such reeds are used for the decoration of modern Egyptian wall tops. The friezes were originally used only in the royal tombs but were later adopted by private people as well.<sup>(1)</sup>

---

<sup>(1)</sup> S.H.Hoernes, Life and Death in Ancient Egypt , pp.28-29

## 1- Various descriptions of the *Kheker* frieze

*Kkeker* friezes known to a considerable lot of the definitions by many archaeologists are as per the following:

The form of the *Kheker* seems to represent a series of reed or plant stems tied together at the tops and gathered in again close above the base, below which they spread out once more. Another suggestion for the meaning of this decoration is that it represents the fringe or tassel of a carpet or mat, the roundel above the base being a knot.<sup>(2)</sup>

*Kheker* ornament is a papyrus trunk that was linked by gangs from the top and bottom of the heads of friezes simulates woven stretched sheets to each other in a manner axis.<sup>(3)</sup>

*Kheker* is the upper decorative element on decorated walls; the *Kheker* derives from early wall hangings, and consists of a row of upright bundles and knots of the fringe of a carpet or bundles of reeds. The main variants are pointed at the top and plain inside with detailed patterning inside (sequence of colors: red, green, blue) and with an open calyx-like top.<sup>(4)</sup>

*Kheker* is a name of a decorative motif common in ancient Egyptian architecture. The motif consists of rows of knots in decorative carved or painted friezes around the upper edges of buildings.<sup>(5)</sup>

The word *Kheker* occurs fairly often both in the Old Kingdom and in later hieroglyphs in connection with adornment, and also in the plural form as *Khekeru*, meaning ornament, in which this word has the figure of a *Kheker* as its determinative. It is this

---

<sup>(2)</sup> E.Mackay, " *Kheker* friezes" , p.111

<sup>(3)</sup> B.A.Kipfer, Encyclopedic Dictionary of Archaeology , p.277

<sup>(4)</sup> D.Arnold, The Encyclopedia of Ancient Egyptian Architecture, p.122

<sup>(5)</sup> B.A.Kipfer, Encyclopedic Dictionary of Artifacts , p.164

word of ornament that has given name to this distinctive variety of Egyptian ornamentation.<sup>(6)</sup>

According to Gardiner's sign list (Aa 30)  *hkr* is the Egyptian word for ornament (sometimes  written horizontally). It is ideogram or determinative in  *hkr* "be adorned" ;   *hkrw* "ornament" and "adornment" and also sign (Aa31) is older or archaic type , different usage .<sup>(7)</sup>

*Kheker* derives from the equivalent of the sign as hieroglyph in inscription. This only means "to cover" or "to ornament" and therefore refers to the position of the decoration and not to its origin.<sup>(8)</sup>

## 2-The history of *Kheker* frieze

The clue to the real nature of the *Kheker* is given in a tomb of *Ptah-Hotep*<sup>(9)</sup> in the IVth dynasty, where we see the *Kheker* ornament not as a mere painting, but represented as standing up solid around the tops of the cabins of boats. It cannot therefore be anything very heavy or solid, such as spear-heads, as has been proposed. It probably results in some way from the construction of the cabins. They must have had roofs of very light material. Papyrus was generally used for building boats, and therefore for cabins also. This gives us the clue to interpret it. (Fig.1)

The plant theory is probably the more satisfactory explanation of the form and was first suggested by Prof. Petrie, who wrote:

"Suppose a screen of papyrus stem; the roofing stems tied on to the uprights; and the loose wiry leaves at the head tied together, to keep them from straggling over and looking untidy. Here we

---

<sup>(6)</sup> E.Mackay, "Kheker friezes", p.111

<sup>(7)</sup> A.Gardiner, Egyptian Grammar, p. 543

<sup>(8)</sup> W.M.F.Petrie, Egyptian Decorative Art , p.101

<sup>(9)</sup> K.R.Lepsius, Denkmaler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien , II ,101 b

have all the details of the *Kheker* ornament simply resulting from structural necessity. The leaves are gathered together at the lower tying; there the end view of the concentric coats of the papyrus stem of the roof are seen as concentric circles; above which the leaves bulge out and are tied together near the top. Though this structural decoration is seen on the top of boat" cabins as early as the IVth dynasty, yet we have not found it as decoration on a flat surface until the XIIth dynasty.

Then it is very common; but its meaning became confused in the XVIIIth dynasty, and in Ptolemaic times it is seen in absurd positions, as on a base, and on architraves above an empty space, where no stem below it were possible.<sup>(10)</sup>

A peculiar headdress sometimes worn by dancers in the tombs of  *Tti-Ky* (Teta-Ky) - dates back to the Middle Kingdom- is also suggestive of the *Kheker* ornament, especially its upper portion. (Fig.2,3)<sup>(11)</sup>

*Kheker* frieze can be traced back to the third Dynasty. King *Djoser* was the first king who is certain to have used the stylized reed-mat decoration. Its first occurrence has nothing in common with the decoration of the wall of a room, but the frieze is executed in relief and certainly should not be ignored.<sup>(12)</sup>

The *Kheker*-frieze decorated once the façades of the south and north buildings and was restored above the entrance of the former. It represented a rope of knotted grass but is more likely to have been based on the fringe of a mat or carpet. The frieze is executed in low relief. The bundles of reeds are of pointed type. It cannot be excluded that they were polychrome, given that the

---

<sup>(10)</sup> W.M.F.Petrie, *Egyptian Decorative Art* , p.101-103

<sup>(11)</sup> W.M.F.Petrie, *Egypt in Africa* , p.126; E.Mackay, " *Kheker* friezes", p.112 ; Carnarvon and H.Carter, *Five years' explorations at Thebes* , p.14,15, 127,135

<sup>(12)</sup> B.Brier & H.Hobbs, *Daily Life of the Ancient Egyptians* , p.200; D.Arnold, S.H.Gardiner, H.Strudwick & N.Strudwick , *The monuments of Egypt* , p.122

façades of the buildings were painted. A symbolic meaning of the frieze should be taken into consideration, as almost no architectural feature in the complex (no matter how ‘decorative’ in appearance) seem to have a value of pure ornament.<sup>(13)</sup>

One of the most memorable of the IVth dynasty was *Kheker* from Sneferu's pyramid at Meidum. (Fig.4) No evidence on a possible decoration was found, except for a limestone fragment with a large splay-topped *Kheker* in relief, discovered in the vicinity. This singular finding seems to be, however, of much importance. Its style and, especially, the size (the reed bundle is c. 0.52 m = one cubit high) points strongly to its provenance from a royal building.<sup>(14)</sup>

We may also note here that the block of *Kheker* ornament, which was found was reused in a grave. From the fine curves of it, and the delicacy of the relief lines, it appears to be earlier than any other examples, and may well have belonged to a temple of Sneferu that is now destroyed. (Fig.5)

In the tomb of *Ptah-hetep*, a *Kheker* with the base is used for the sign *wsh*t<sup>(15)</sup>. According to Gardiner's sign list (O15) , it means "walled enclosure with buttresses", and with the sign  and <sup>(16)</sup> (Fig.6)<sup>(17)</sup>

In the tombs of the Old Kingdom no example is known of the use of a *Kheker* frieze to ornament the upper portion of the walls of a tomb, although it is employed to decorate the tops of shrines and

---

<sup>(13)</sup> A Ćwiek, Relief decoration , p.23, 69-70

<sup>(14)</sup> W.M.F.Petrie, E.Mackay, G. Wainwright, Meydum And Memphis (111) , pl.vi.22

<sup>(15)</sup> N. de. G. Davies, The Mastaba of Ptahhetep and Akhetetep at Saqqareh , pl.xviii

<sup>(16)</sup> A.Gardiner, Egyptian Grammar

<sup>(17)</sup> The external face of the plan of courtyard is flanked with kheker ornament rabatted, so that it must be restored as a peak at the top of the walls, similarly as the dura-stalks or piles of dried mud disks in oases or country mud architecture today.

A.Badawy , A History of Egyptian Architecture Vol. 1, p.52 , Fig.37, 2,3

doorways <sup>(18)</sup> but the extreme upper portions of the walls of painted and sculptured tombs in the XIIth and XVIIIth dynasty, and also more rarely in later times, were usually finished off with a peculiar form of decoration, commonly known as the *Kheker* ornament. <sup>(19)</sup>

In the decoration of Middle Kingdom tombs and temples *Kheker* was a common element; however, it occurred rarely on private stelae. <sup>(20)</sup> It began to be employed as a frieze for tomb wall. <sup>(21)</sup>

During Ramesside times, the pointed form reappears again as a frieze, but only in the Royal Tombs, The splay-topped form still remaining in use in the private tombs.

Some temples reduce the tied-reed motif to a pictorial representation *Kheker*-frieze. One late example, 'Temple T,' dating to the Twenty-fifth or Nubian Dynasty (c. 747-656 BCE), has an encircling façade which mimics the appearance of the reed shrine in stone with the corners marked with stone-carved reed bundles topped with the *Kheker*-frieze.

Moreover, this architectural appeal to the ideal type is present at the end of Ancient Egyptian history in the Ptolemaic period. For two reasons there is a marked emphasis in the reed-woven ideal type at this time. Firstly, Ptolemaic Greek interlopers were keen to legitimise their right to rule by arrogating the most archaic traditions of Egypt. Also, Ptolemaic Egypt was in the midst of a *Kulturkampf*; wherein the religious establishment of Egypt perceived a serious threat to its traditions and, following the principle that ideology arises from conflict of ideology, sought to bolster its influence by appealing to the ideal type. A

---

<sup>(18)</sup> A.Oppenheim , Ancient Egypt transformed , p.211

<sup>(19)</sup> E.Mackay, "Kheker friezes" , p.111

<sup>(20)</sup> R.E.Freed, Studies in honor of William Kelly Simpson , p.298-9 ; to see some private stelae with *Kheker* frieze at the top:

<http://docslide.us/documents/late-middle-kingdom-stelae-workshops-at-thebes.html>

<sup>(21)</sup> A.Dodson & S.Ikram ,The Tomb in Ancient Egypt , p.124

consequence of this dynamic is witnessed in the architecture and texts of the temple of Horus at Edfu (273 BCE).<sup>(22)</sup>

### 3-The types of *Kheker* frieze

In ancient Egypt several types of *kheker* frieze are used in temples, tombs as applied motifs.

#### 3.1-Pointed *Kheker*-frieze

The *Kheker* is always of the pointed variety, very similar in shape but not in colour, but usually with two roundels at the bottom, placed one below the other, of which the lower one takes the place of the base of an ordinary *Kheker*. In the tombs of the Old Kingdom no example is known of the use of a *Kheker* frieze to ornament the upper portion of the walls of a tomb, although it is employed to decorate the tops of shrines and doorways, when such are depicted on the tomb walls. King *Djoser* was the first king who it is certain used the *Kheker* frieze, in the south house of his tomb complex. (Fig.7) During Ramesside times, the pointed form reappears again as a frieze, and it was the only form used in the royal tombs, except in that of *Sety I*. It is also met with the nine of the tombs of nobles (39,40,42,78,85,93,106,178 and 253) ,but , with the exception of four of these tombs (42,78,106 and 253) , it occupies a very subordinate position. The pointed form first appears in this Necropolis as a frieze in tombs of about the time of *Amenophis II*.<sup>(23)</sup>

It is representing a shrine framed with the block-pattern and topped with the pointed *Kheker*-frieze in the centre of the fragment.<sup>(24)</sup> (Fig.8) It is curious that none of the roundels of the pointed *Khekers* in the royal tombs are wholly painted yellow,

---

<sup>(22)</sup>[https://www.academia.edu/1986040/Woven\\_of\\_Reeds\\_Genesis\\_6\\_14b\\_as\\_Evidence\\_for\\_the\\_Preservation\\_of\\_the\\_Reed\\_Hut\\_Urheiligtum\\_in\\_the\\_Biblical\\_Flood\\_Narrative](https://www.academia.edu/1986040/Woven_of_Reeds_Genesis_6_14b_as_Evidence_for_the_Preservation_of_the_Reed_Hut_Urheiligtum_in_the_Biblical_Flood_Narrative)

<sup>(23)</sup> E.Mackay, "Kheker friezes", p.112; A.Badawy , A History of Egyptian Architecture Vol. 1, p.86 , Fig .62,4

<sup>(24)</sup> A Cwiek, Relief decoration in the royal funerary complexes of the old kingdom, Fig.48

seeing that this colour was so popular for the purpose in the *Kheker* –frieze with sun disks. Yellow was also never used as the dominant color in a pointed *Kheker*, but was solely employed as an edging. In no case, either, was a ball or disc placed on the top of pointed *Kheker* as is so common with the *Kheker* –frieze with sun disks.<sup>(25)</sup>

### 3.2-Open and splay-topped *Kheker*– frieze

Here we can determine the difference between two kinds of *Kheker* frieze. The opened one is shorter and wider than the middle but the splay-topped form differs from the previous one in its style and, especially, the size. In addition, its upper end is more inclined towards the outside. The splay-topped form was that most commonly in use. This variety is also the most common in tombs of the XVIIIth dynasty in the Theban Necropolis, though the pointed variety is still employed in minor position. During Ramesside times, the splay-topped form still remaining in use in the private tombs. (Fig. 9, 10, 11)<sup>(26)</sup>

In the tomb Complex of  *sn nfr* (*Sennefer*) on the southern hillside of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna -18th dynasty, the south wall and the southern part of the east and west walls of the burial chamber however conform to the usual convention, that of being topped with *Khekher* frieze. The decorated area beneath this is also, as usual, separated from the *Khekheru* with an Egyptian frieze of coloured rectangles.

### 3.3-splay-topped *Kheker* –frieze with sun disks

From the new Kingdom imaginative variant appears crowned with a ball. This curious addition was made to the *Kheker* at the close of the XVIIIth dynasty. There seems no doubt that this ball at the top of *Kheker* represented the sun, or rather the disc of the

---

<sup>(25)</sup> E.Mackay, "Kheker friezes", p.118

<sup>(26)</sup> A.Ćwiek, Relief decoration , Fig 93 ; E.Mackay, "Kheker friezes" , p.112; V.Angenot , "Les Peinture de la Chapelle de Sennefer", p.21-32

sun, and on that account it was invariably painted red or yellow and was always undecorated. This curious addition was probably due to Aten influence shortly before. The earliest date at which this is met with in this Necropolis is that of the tombs of Surere *Ramose* and *Ramose* being of the time of Amenophis III, and of one tomb in which the name is erased b of the time of Amenophis IV. The new addition to the *Kheker* came into general use in Ramesside times, when the *Kheker* ornament, used in conjunction with other friezes, was a common feature in tombs, especially in those of the period of Ramses II. (Fig .12)

From the tomb of  *nfr shrw* (Nefersekeru) which is located among the southern tombs of the Khokha district, at the top of the east and west walls, above the top picture register, is the header frieze of open *kheker* (bound colored bundles of reeds) which have a red disk on top and a gold disk near the base.<sup>(27)</sup>

### 3.4-Two, three or five bundles of *Kheker*-signs inside an alternating group

At the end of the XVIIIth dynasty the *Kheker* ornament often appears in conjunction with other symbols. When it is used in this manner, the splay-topped form is always the one employed, there being but two examples in Thebes where the pointed variety of *Kheker* is used.<sup>(28)</sup> This frieze pattern seems to be a variant of those applied in near-contemporary tomb chapels as opposed to the earlier hegemony of the *Kheker* friezes. Mackay analyzed some variants of the friezes<sup>(29)</sup>. Describing the combinations and sequences of these main elements, he pointed out the following types of recurring patterns:

---

<sup>(27)</sup> E.Feucht, Das Grab des Nefersecheru (TT 296) , Tafel LXXXI.

<sup>(28)</sup>E.Mackay, " Kheker friezes" , p.118; Z. Fábíán, Friezes in post-Amarna tombs of Thebes , p.35

<sup>(29)</sup>E.Mackay, "Theban borders of lotus and grapes" , p.40-41

### 3.4.1-Kheker ornament used in conjunction with Hathor heads

In the tomb of  *djwty* (Djehuty) and a new occupier  *djwty m hb* (Djehutyemheb), during the period of Amenhotep II, we found that the frieze of the south wall is formed by an alternation of three *Khekeru* on red background, and of a head of the goddess Hathor wearing a feather headdress on a yellow background. On the left and right extremities, a column with texts contains the name and the title of the dead. (Fig.13) <sup>(30)</sup>

### 3.4.2-Kheker ornament in conjunction with representations of the God Anubis couchant on a pedestal

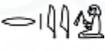
From the transverse chamber -south wing (left) -east wall in the tomb of  *hnsu* (Khonsu) also called  *to* or *ta* , which is located in the necropolis of Sheikh Abd el-Qurnah and dates back to the 19th Dynasty, Anubis, in the shape of a black canine, reclines on the roof of a chapel. He wears, as usual, a red ribbon around the neck and a golden whip which extends from the middle of his back. Between each chapel are two *Khekeru*, this is an ancient plant motif, surmounted here by a solar disk. Under the actual frieze, is a thick blue line edged with red. This motif has already been seen in the entrance passageway. (Fig.14) This motif occurs elsewhere, with Anubis, in the shape of a canine reclining on the roof of a chapel. On this wall he faces right, towards the entrance. He wears, as usual, a ribbon around his neck and a whip which extends from the middle of his back. Between each chapel are again two *Khekeru*, the ancient plant motif, surmounted here by a solar disk. (Fig.15) <sup>(31)</sup>

---

<sup>(30)</sup> N.de.G.Davies & A.Gardiner (ed) , Seven Private Tombs at Kurnah , p.1-10, pl.VII

<sup>(31)</sup> N.de.G.Davies, "A Peculiar Form of New Kingdom Lamp", p.9-14;  
[http://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/nobles/roy/e\\_roy\\_01.htm](http://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/nobles/roy/e_roy_01.htm)

### 3.4.3-Kheker ornament in conjunction with Hathor heads and Anubis couchant on a pedestal, with or without vertical bands of inscriptions.

From the tomb of  Ry (Roy), dates back to XIXth Dynasty, after the reign of Horemheb, there were two bundles of *Kheker*-signs inside an alternating group from this tomb. The commonest design in friezes where *Kheker* are used with other figures is a Hathor head alternating with figures of Anubis couchant on a pedestal, the figures and heads separated from each other by two or more *Khekers*. Next in order of popularity is row of figures of Anubis on a pedestal, the figures being divided by groups of *Khekers*. (Fig.16)

Its very lively colors make it one of the most beautiful civilian tombs preserved in the region of Dra Abu el Naga. The frieze runs all along the south wall where it could be finished, which wasn't the case on the north wall. It includes an alternating group which is normally only seen in the XIXth Dynasty:

Two columns of hieroglyphs, the emblem of Hathor, two bundles of *Kheker*-signs (red, blue, and green, tied with yellow) are surmounted by solar disks and the image of Anubis. <sup>(32)</sup>

From the tomb of  Nfr *shrw* (Nefersekeru), after the reign of Horemheb, we can see three bundles of *Kheker* frieze-signs inside an alternating group decorated the outer lintel and vertical borders in the north wall and statue niche. The *Kheker*-frieze of the east and west walls is replaced on the architrave above the niche with godly symbols. The human face of the head of Hathor, The head surmounts a nb-sign, the hieroglyph for "t" and finally the district sign. The various symbols of the frieze are in mirrored order. A yellow sekhem-sceptre precedes Anubis

---

<sup>(32)</sup> M.Baud & É.Drioton, "Tombeaux Thébaines ", Tombeau de Roy, *MIFAO* 57, p.14-17 ; C.Graindorge, "Les oignons de Sokar", *Revue d'Égyptologie* 43, 1992 , p. 87-105

on his shrine and an udjat-eye hovers over the canine and three open *Kheker*-signs. (Fig.17) <sup>(33)</sup>

### 3.4.4- *Kheker* ornament in conjunction with figures of deceased adoring Anubis

The tomb of  *djhwty ms* (*Djehutymose*) is located in El-Khokha, the frieze of the front aisle in the pillared transverse hall, two constant elements alternate divided by three *hkr*-signs. One is the squatting figure of Djehutymose adoring in front of Anubis on the shrine-formed alter , with the *wdjt* -eye above.(Fig.18) <sup>(34)</sup>

### 3.4.5-*Kheker* ornament in conjunction with *dd*(djed-pillar) and *tjt*(tjet-signs)

In tomb of  *Imy sb3* (Imiseba/Nebamon), Sheikh Abd el-Qurna-Hatshepsut, 18th Dynasty, there was a frieze of alternating 5*Kheker*- 2*djed*- 2*tjet* and 2*djed* signs at the western end of the axial corridor. (Fig.19) <sup>(35)</sup>

## 4-The significance and use of the *Kheker* frieze

According to Mackay, these *Kheker*, which we find - as a rule - only at the top of walls, represent "reeds or the stems of another plant bound together at the top and gathered once more just above the base, then widening under this knot". The "small disc" which one sees on the lower part of the ornament would therefore be a folded back knot. According to Petrie it would be necessary to see in the *Kheker* motif a principle of representation intended to convey the idea of the junction of a vertical wall and a roof;

---

<sup>(33)</sup> E.Feucht, Das Grab des Nefersecheru (TT 296)

<sup>(34)</sup> Z.Fábián, Friezes in post-Amarna tombs of Thebes , Fig.2; See also, TT134 The tomb of  *Taw-nnj* , *Thauenany*, XIXth Dynasty-XXth Dynasty , Shaykh 'Abd al Qurnah . M.Chermette, "La tomb de Tjaouenany TT 134 à Thebes" , pl.II

<sup>(35)</sup> T.Bács, The last New Kingdom tomb at Thebes: The end of a great tradition, p.1-46., Fig.24

the small discs would represent the section of the horizontal stems of papyrus that form the roof.<sup>(36)</sup>

Interpreting the *Kheker*-frieze as funerary, because it is frequently found in funerary complexes (the earliest being that of *Djoser*), does not make it an attribute with a typical funerary “charge”. This completely overlooks the fact that it originates in the mat-and wood building methods of ancient Egypt, and as such it is a completely neutral, architectural element.

The appearance of funerary complexes refers to the actual architecture, so it is obvious that such a detail, besides the cavetto and torus moldings, is included without any metaphorical implications. Taking a funerary context as the basis on which to ascribe a funerary meaning to a *Kheker*-motif on a shrine reverses the order of things. This is not contradicted by the *djed*, *sa* and *tyt*-signs, which simply indicate “durability”, “protection”, and “life”. They could be easily integrated as useful and desirable elements in architecture and “architectonised” furniture, without construing those artifacts as religious or funerary objects.<sup>(37)</sup>

In a description of the architecture within the temple complex at the Step Pyramid of *Djoser*, Kemp highlights three distinct styles of later temple architecture which are influenced by the ideal of the reed-shrine. Each of these styles incorporates the reed-hut motif in one form or another. The most frequent example is the carving in stone of bundles of reeds, reed-matting and tied reed ends intended to evoke the architecture of the reed shrine. Some temples reduce the tied-reed motif to the *Kheker* frieze. One late example, ‘TempleT,’ dating to the Twenty-fifth or Nubian Dynasty (c. 747-656 BCE), has an encircling façade which mimics the appearance of the reed shrine in stone

---

<sup>(36)</sup> E.Mackay, "Kheker Friezes", p. 111-122

<sup>(37)</sup> [http://www2.rz.hu-berlin.de/nilus/net-publications/ibaes6/publikation/ibaes6-van\\_walsem.pdf](http://www2.rz.hu-berlin.de/nilus/net-publications/ibaes6/publikation/ibaes6-van_walsem.pdf)

with the corners marked with stone-carved reed bundles topped with the *Kheker* frieze.<sup>(38)</sup>

The presence of the *Kheker* –signs in the upper frieze, almost exclusive in the pre-*Amarna* tradition, clearly marks the upper edge of the walls. Davies drew attention to the change in the tradition emphasizing the role of *Amarna* break and pointed out that the *hkrs* had then been replaced "by straight colored bands or by a blue sky". Later, *Khekeru* survive with the same meaning usually combined with other elements, however, Anubis and Hathor seem to have taken the inevitable main role in friezes.<sup>(39)</sup>

The Anubis-Hathor frieze "assumes the character of a prescribed top register" and the "adoration of these divinities by the figure or the name of the owner brings the frieze into harmony with the religious tone which now prevails in the scene". The pure *Kheker* friezes still appear, but gradually seem to be out of fashion.

The occurrence of Anubis and Hathor preserves or revives, perhaps paraphrases an emphasized non-frieze tradition also common in royal mortuary temples of previous periods. The adoring figures of the deceased person seem to be additional elements to Anubises and Hathor-heads. The inscriptions always identify the applied elements, or may explain the whole adoring scene. Different combinations can appear in the same monuments in different rooms (shrines), but also on different walls of the same room. Almost all the possible variants applying the main elements were worked out in the monuments of the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasties. One can conclude that the long surviving *Khekeru*, however, may still preserve the same exclusive position in certain friezes, but can also be added to the new protagonists.<sup>(40)</sup>

---

<sup>(38)</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/1986040/Woven\\_of\\_Reeds\\_Genesis\\_6\\_14b\\_as\\_Evidence\\_for\\_the\\_Preservation\\_of\\_the\\_Reed\\_Hut\\_Urheiligtum\\_in\\_the\\_Biblical\\_Flood\\_Narrative](https://www.academia.edu/1986040/Woven_of_Reeds_Genesis_6_14b_as_Evidence_for_the_Preservation_of_the_Reed_Hut_Urheiligtum_in_the_Biblical_Flood_Narrative)

<sup>(39)</sup> N.de.G.Davies & A.Gardiner , Seven Private Tombs at Kurnah , 3, esp.note4

<sup>(40)</sup> Z.Fabián, Friezes in post-*Amarna* tombs of Thebes , p.37

The appearance of the *Kheker*-sign and adoring deceased, when present, tend to exclude or replace each other, for instance. It also seems to represent a further variant in separating the deceased person from his wife and in joining them to Anubis and the Hathor-head respectively. These features and the precise inscription not only identify the deceased and, as a consequence of the couple's separation, the wife as well, but they also refer to the action of adoration or praise which indicates a rather deliberate "redaction".

The tendency seems to show that the artistic intention was - as in other decorative assemblies of tomb-chapels - to create an individual work of art by applying a given stock of decorative elements.

The artist of the monument seems to have brought the plan and arrangement of the variant into harmony with its function in the decoration system of the tomb-chapel. His intention may not only have been to create a new variant applying the elements of the newly formed tradition, but also to indicate the context the frieze was placed in. Thus, external features and the context to other decorative, mainly frieze-like elements of the tomb-chapel can with good reason be taken into account in the attempt of understanding the function of the frieze.<sup>(41)</sup>

## Conclusions

The real nature of the *Kheker* demonstrates it not as a negligible painting, but rather spoke to as standing up strong around the tops of the cabins of boats.

The first appearance is given in a tomb of *Ptah-Hotep* in the IVth dynasty. Although King *Djoser* was the first king who is certain to have used the stylized reed-mat decoration we have no

---

<sup>(41)</sup>Z.Fábián, Friezes in post-Amarna tombs of Thebes, p.42

example known of the use of a *Kheker* frieze to ornament the upper portion of the walls of a tomb but it is employed to decorate the tops of shrines and doorways. It was a common element in the decoration of Middle Kingdom tombs and temples; however, it occurred rarely on private stelae. During Ramesside times, the pointed form reappears again as a frieze, but only in the Royal Tombs, The splay-topped form still remaining in use in the private tombs.

Several types of *Kheker* frieze are used in temples and tombs as applied motifs: pointed *Kheker*-frieze, open and splay-topped *Kheker*-frieze, splay-topped *Kheker*-frieze with sun disks and two, three or five bundles of *Kheker*-signs inside an alternating group. This type of recurring patterns is divided into; *Kheker* ornament used in conjunction with Hathor heads, representations of the god Anubis couchant on a pedestal, Hathor heads and Anubis couchant on a pedestal, with or without vertical bands of inscriptions, figures of deceased adoring Anubis and *Kheker* ornament with *dd* (djed-pillar) and *tjt* (tjet-signs).

From the time of the Old Kingdom to the pre 'Amarna period *Kheker*-frieze assumed a vital architectural role. They could be effectively incorporated as useful and attractive components in architecture, without interpreting those antiquities as religious or funerary objects, however consideration must be given regarding the adjustment in the convention underlining the part of Amarna break, as by appearance of Anubis-Hathor frieze and the adoration of these divinities by the figure or the name of owner brings the frieze into agreement with the religious tone which now wins in the scene.

## Bibliography

- A.Badawy, A History of Egyptian Architecture Vol. 1: From the Earliest Times to the End of the Old Kingdom , (Egypt ,1954).
- A.Ćwiek, Relief decoration in the royal funerary complexes of the old kingdom studies in the development, scene content and iconography, Warsaw: Institute of Archaeology, Faculty of History, Warsaw University, (2003).
- A.Dodson & S.Ikram, The Tomb in Ancient Egypt , Thames & Hudson , (London , 2008).
- A.Gardiner , Egyptian Grammar, Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs. 3rd Ed., pub. Griffith Institute, (Oxford , 1957).
- A.Oppenheim, Dorothea Arnold, Dieter Arnold, Kei Yamamoto, Ancient Egypt transformed, the Middle Kingdom: the Metropolitan Museum of Art, (New York , 2015).
- B.A.Kipfer, Encyclopedic Dictionary of Archaeology, (New York , 2000).
- , Encyclopedic Dictionary of Artifacts , by Blackwell publishing , (Oxford , 2007).
- B.Brier & H.Hobbs, Daily Life of the Ancient Egyptians , 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. , The Greenwood Press , (London , 2008) .
- C.Graindorge, "Les oignons de Sokar" , Revue d'Égyptologie 43, (1992) , p. 87-105
- Carnarvon & H.Carter, Five years' explorations at Thebes. (London , 1912).
- D.Arnold, S.H.Gardiner, H.Strudwick, N.Strudwick , The Monuments of Egypt , (London , 2009).
- , The Encyclopedia of Ancient Egyptian Architecture, Princeton University Press, (2003).
- E.Feucht, Das Grab des Nefersecheru (TT 296), (Mainz am Rhein , 1985).
- E.Mackay, "Kheker friezes", Ancient Egypt , I , (London and New York , 1920) , p.111-122
- ,"Theban borders of lotus and grapes", Ancient Egypt , II , (London , New York) , 1921, p.39-41
- K.R.Lepsius, Denkmaler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien , II, (Berlin ,1849).
- M.Baud & É.Drioton, "Tombes Thébaines", Nécropole de Dra Abou-Naga, Le Tombeau de Roy, MIFAO 57 (remerciements à Renaud de Spens) ,(Le Caire , 1928) , p.14-17.
- M.Chermette, " La tomb de Tjaouenany TT 134 à Thebes", Rapport préliminaire 1996-1997 , ASAE , 77 (2002) , pl.II.
- , The Mastaba of Ptahhetep and Akhethetep at Saqqareh , I , (London , 1900).

- N.de.G.Davies, "A Peculiar Form of New Kingdom Lamp", JEA 10, N°1, (1924) , p.9-14.
- N.de.G.Davies & A.Gardiner (ed) , Seven Private Tombs at Kurnah (= Mond Excavations at Thebes, 2), (London, 1948).
- R.E.Freed, Studies in honor of William Kelly Simpson, Museum of Fine Arts, (Boston , 1996).
- S.H.Hoernes , Life and Death in Ancient Egypt: Scenes from Private Tombs in New Kingdom Thebes, Translated by David Warburton , Cornell University Press , (Ithaca and London , 2000).
- T.Bács, "The last New Kingdom tomb at Thebes", The end of a great tradition, BMSAES 16, (2011) , p. 1-46.
- V.Angenot , "Les Peinture de la Chapelle de Sennefer", Revue Égypte, Afrique & Orient N°45, (2007) , p.21-32.
- W.M.F.Petrie, Egyptian Decorative Art , (London , 1895)
- , "Egypt in Africa", Ancient Egypt , I , (London & New York ,1914-1917) , p.126.
- W.M.F.Petrie., Mackay Ernest, G.Wainwright, Meydum And Memphis (111), (London ,1910).
- Z.Fábián, Friezes in post-Amarna tombs of Thebes, Specimina Nova Universitatis Quinqueecclesiensis, XIX , (2005) , p.42

**Websites:**

[http://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/nobles/khonsou31/e\\_khonsou31\\_02.htm](http://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/nobles/khonsou31/e_khonsou31_02.htm)  
[18.12.2016]

[http://www2.rz.hu-berlin.de/nilus/net-publications/ibaes6/publikation/ibaes6-van\\_walsem.pdf](http://www2.rz.hu-berlin.de/nilus/net-publications/ibaes6/publikation/ibaes6-van_walsem.pdf) [20.3.2017]

<http://docslide.us/documents/late-middle-kingdom-stelae-workshops-at-thebes.html> [as of 30.3.2017]

[https://www.academia.edu/1986040/Woven\\_of\\_Reeds\\_Genesis\\_6\\_14b\\_as\\_Evidence\\_for\\_the\\_Preservation\\_of\\_the\\_Reed](https://www.academia.edu/1986040/Woven_of_Reeds_Genesis_6_14b_as_Evidence_for_the_Preservation_of_the_Reed)

[Hut Urheiligtum in the Biblical Flood Narrative](#) [as of 8.4.2017]



Fig. 1- *Kheker* plant  
(Petrie, Egyptian Decorative Art, London, 1895, p.101)

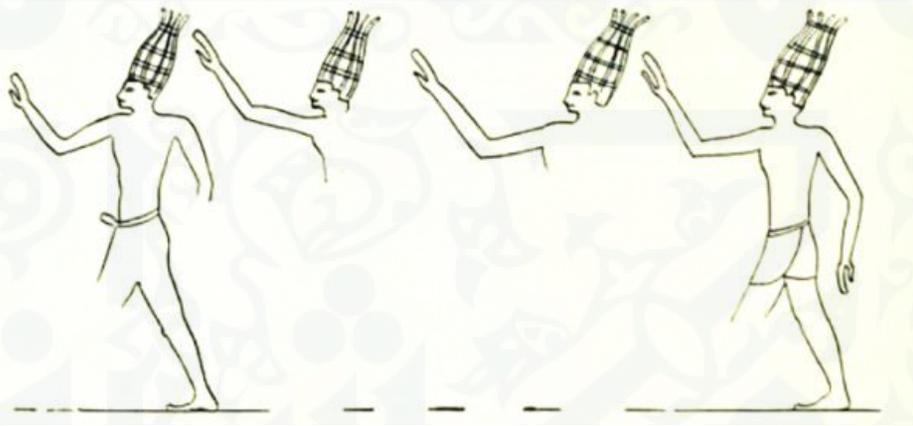


Fig. 2-Dancers at a funeral wearing tall hats of straw or rushes  
Tomb of XIIth dynasty.  
(Petrie , Egypt in Africa , 1914, p.126)



Fig.3-Dancers from the tombs of  Tti-Ky (Teta-Ky)  
(Carnarvon and Carter , Five years' explorations at Thebes , p.135)



Fig.4- The base of a *Kheker* sign ,Meidum, Pyramid quarry marks. (Petrie,  
Meydum And Memphis , 1910, pl.vi.22)



Fig.5- *Kheker* from Meidum The fragment is now in the Petrie Museum (UC 31114). (Petrie, Meydum, p.5, pl.20,3)



Fig.6- Using *Kheker* with the base for the sign *wsht* (N.de.G. Davies, The Mastaba of Ptahhetep, pl.xviii)

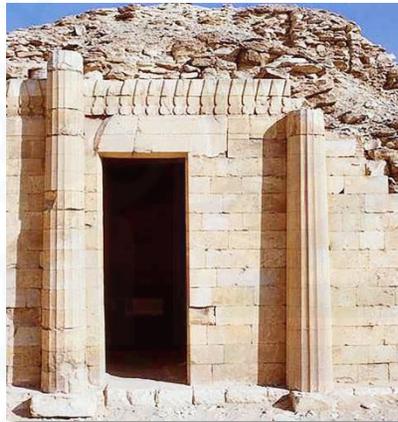


Fig.7- South House, Step Pyramid of Djoser, Necropolis of Saqqara, Memphis Old Kingdom, Dynasty III , photo by:  
<http://www.gettyimages.com/detail/photo/building-from-funerary-complex-of-djoser-high-res-stock-photography/479634185>

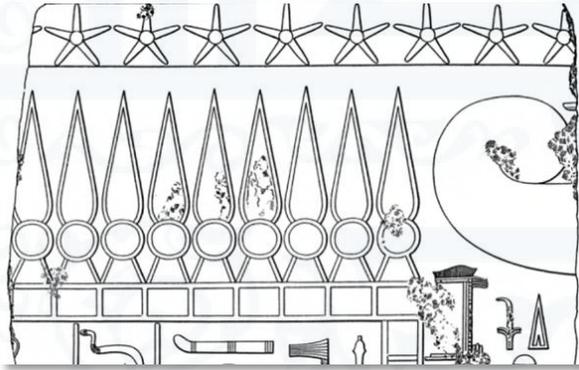


Fig.8-A fragment from the courtyard of *Sahura*'s mortuary temple  
(A.Ćwiek, Relief decoration, Fig 48)

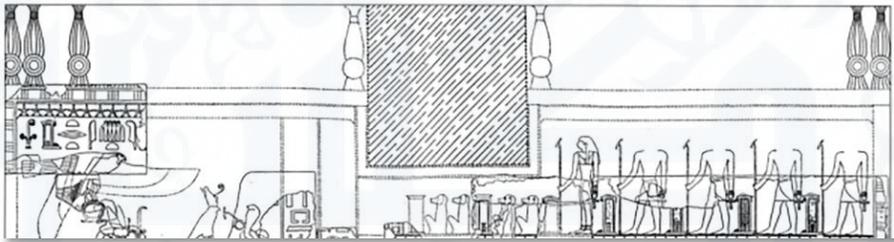


Fig.9 – Open *Kheker* from the wall of the antechamber in *Pepy II*'s mortuary temple  
(A.Ćwiek, Relief decoration, Fig 93)

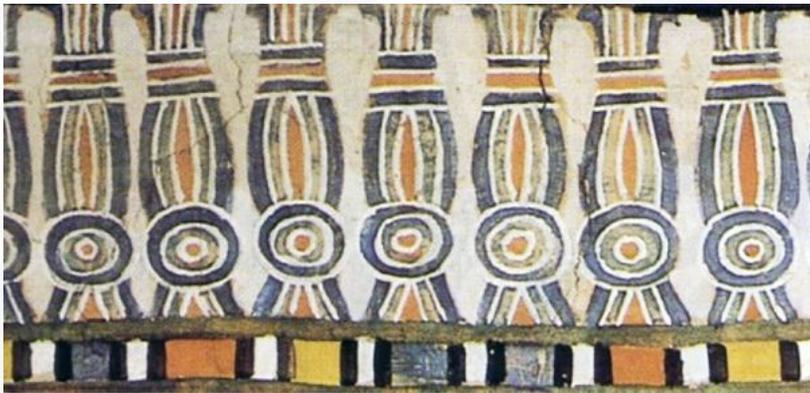


Fig.10- TT 96-Open *Kheker*-frieze  
(Photo by: [commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cheker\\_sennefer.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cheker_sennefer.jpg))



Fig. 11- KV34-Splay-topped *Kheker* from the tomb of Tutmosis III at the Kings Valley.photo by:  
<http://valleyofthekings.wikifoundry.com/page/Tombs+KV32+-+KV35>



Fig.12 TT296- *Kheker*-frieze with sun disks  
(E.Feucht, Das Grab des Nefersecheru ,Tafel LXXXI)



Fig.13- TT45 the frieze of the south wall is formed by an alternation of three *Khekeru* on red background, and of a head of the goddess Hathor (Davies, Gardiner, Seven Private Tomb, pl.VII)



Fig.14-TT31. This motif has already been seen in the entrance passageway. Anubis and between each chapel are two *khekeru* surmounted here by a solar disk.

Photo by:

[http://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/nobles/khonsou31/e\\_khonsou31\\_02.htm](http://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/nobles/khonsou31/e_khonsou31_02.htm)

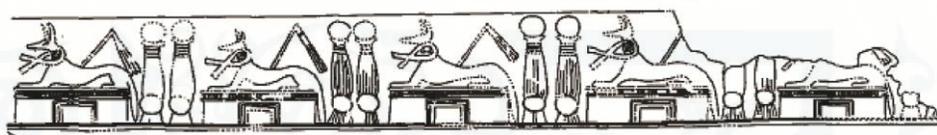


Fig.15-TT31. The transverse chamber -the north wing (right) - east wall

Photo by:

[http://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/nobles/khonsou31/e\\_khonsou31\\_02.htm](http://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/nobles/khonsou31/e_khonsou31_02.htm)



Fig.16- TT255 Two bundles of *Kheker*-signs inside an alternating group

Photo by:

[http://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/nobles/roy/e\\_roy\\_01.htm](http://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/nobles/roy/e_roy_01.htm)

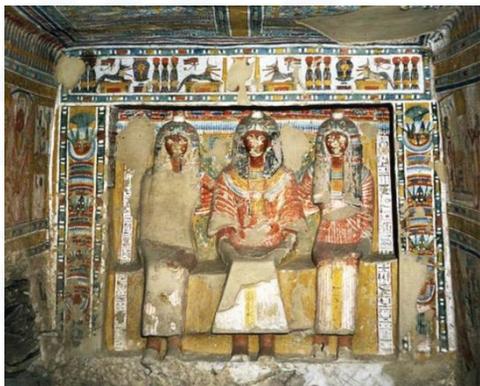


Fig.17- TT296 Statue niche , the frieze are in mirrored order. A yellow Sekhem-sceptre precedes Anubis on his shrine and an udjat-eye hovers over the canine and three open *Kheker*-signs

Photo by:

[http://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/nobles/nefersekherou/e\\_nfrskhru\\_04.htm](http://www.osirisnet.net/tombes/nobles/nefersekherou/e_nfrskhru_04.htm)



Fig.18- TT32. Remains of the frieze on the front wall of the front aisle in the pillared transverse hall

(Z.Fábíán, Friezes in post-Amarna tombs of Thebes, Fig.2)



Fig. 19- TT65 A frieze of alternating 5*Kheker*- 2*djed*- 2*tjet* and 2*djed* signs (T.Bács, The last New Kingdom tomb at Thebes, fig.24)

## إفريز (الخكر) *hkr* في مصر القديمة

د. نجلاء فتحى أحمد شهاب\*

### الملخص:

يمثل الإفريز إما "الإطار/الحدود" التي تتطوى على صورة أو الهيكل أو "البنية" التي تحوى أجزاء وتشير إلى تصور أو تخيل أو فكرة. ويعد الإفريز المصرى من أجمل ما خلفته لنا فنون الحضارة المصرية القديمة منذ بداية الأسرات وحتى نهاية التاريخ المصرى القديم. وكان لنمو خيال الفنان المصرى القديم مستلهما حبه للطبيعة و متمسكا بتاريخه وعقائده أثر في تكوين وحدات مختلفة يتضمنها "الإفريز" فى جميع مجال الفن سواء العمارة أو الفنون التشكيلية كالنحت والنقش والرسم، أو الفنون الصغرى كالحلي والتمايم . وقد بلغت تلك النماذج آفاقا بعيدة من الإبداع والقت إشراقاتها أثارا على فنون العالم القديم ومن هذا المنطلق يتناول البحث دراسة "إفريز الخكر" *hkr* وهو أحد أشهر الأفاريز فى مصر القديمة وتتناول الدراسة تحديد المصدر الذى استمد منه المصرى القديم هذا الشكل من الأفاريز، وتحديد أنواعه وتتبع تطورها عبر العصور التاريخية، ثم القاء الضوء على ما يعسكه أفريز "الخكر" من نواحي فنية ودينية.

### الكلمات الدالة :

الخكر، إفريز، وحدة زخرفية ، عنصر معمارى ، القصب ، زينة