

MILITARY OFFICERS AND MANPOWER
IN THE EARLY MIDDLE KINGDOM EGYPT:
THE DATA FROM THE NECROPOLIS OF BENI HASSAN

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The evidence from the necropolis of Beni Hassan allows the identification of a lineage of local rulers with military titles that survived the reunification in the Middle Kingdom. Data on the nomarchs of the Oryx Nome and their officers shed light on some features of coeval political and social history.

Keywords: Beni Hassan; Middle Kingdom; nomarchs; army; 12th dynasty

1. THE 16TH NOME OF UPPER EGYPT AND THE MILITARY BETWEEN THE FIRST INTERMEDIATE PERIOD AND THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

Focusing on the evidence from the archaeological site of Beni Hassan, located 20 kilometres south of the modern-day city of El-Minya, has always been of paramount importance for scholars involved in the study of Middle Kingdom Egypt.¹ Beni Hassan has indeed provided fundamental data for being the most important necropolis of the governors and provincial élite of the 16th nome of Upper Egypt during this period. The “Oryx Nome” (*m3-hd*), whose heraldic symbol is represented by the scimitar-horned oryx, has been mentioned since the Old Kingdom. In fact, the first evidence relating to the governors of this area dates back to the time of the Step Pyramid, in the 3rd dynasty.² Its importance is not a simple matter of the wealth of historical sources. Located in one of the most fertile areas of Middle Egypt, the province extended along the Nile for about 45 km, with large floodplain (particularly on the Eastern bank) and access to the mining areas of the Eastern Desert. The reshaping of the landscape, lasting four thousand years, makes it difficult today to place on the map the main towns of the province (Hebenu, Menat-Khufu, Her-Wer, Neferusy). Instead, for a long time they had a crucial role as administrative capitals and worship places, as it can be deduced from the much more conspicuous evidence deriving from the cemetery areas of the nome.³ While the earlier rulers of the province chose the northern site of Zawyet el-Maiyitin (also known as Zawyet Sultan) as their burial place,⁴ the cemetery of the ruling elite since the First Intermediate Period shifted southern to Beni Hassan. Here, in the limestone cliffs overlooking the east bank of the Nile, thirty-nine rock tombs were cut, only twelve of which contain hieroglyphic texts and depictions.⁵ The architectural and artistic richness of these tombs caught the attention of many scholars. Since J.F. Champollion⁶ scholars have provided descriptions of the burial places and, in the last decade of the 19th century, the excavations of the Egypt Exploration Fund led by P.E. Newberry resulted in the publication of four volumes, still valuable and employed sources of evidence concerning the

¹ Junge 1975.

² Graves 2017, 44; Helck 1974, 109.

³ Graves 2017; Orel 1993.

⁴ Graves 2017, 56-60; Piacentini 1993.

⁵ Porter - Moss 1934, 141-163.

⁶ Champollion 1889, 334-346.

rock tombs.⁷ More recently, the archaeological missions of the Australian Centre for Egyptology led to a re-examination of the rock tombs and a new set of publications concerning their written and pictorial decoration.⁸ At the bottom of the cliffs, a large area was allocated to the burial of many officers and élite members, forming the households of the local rulers. The archaeological excavation directed by J. Garstang at the beginning of the 20th century led to the discovery of 888 shaft tombs, most of which had already been plundered. However, the artefacts found and later analysed have brought about the knowledge of an amount of data relating to the funerary customs of the Middle Kingdom, as well as to the features of a wealthy necropolis of a province.⁹ The amount of data from Beni Hassan concerning the history and culture of Middle Kingdom stands invaluable, and those related to the regional warfare and military titles are unique too. Written evidence from rock tombs sheds light in part on the real power of local war leaders before and after the Egypt's political reunification in the Middle Kingdom. Previously, the First Intermediate Period (ca. 2160-2055 BC) saw the weakening of royal authority, with the result of several upheavals and clashes between local rulers, up to the wars between the kings of Thebes and Herakleopolis.¹⁰ The evidence acquired by scholars suggests that during the period considered, hostilities between armies and fleets were common.¹¹ Warriors and marines were at the disposal of the “nomarchs”, who had full access to local manpower. Although there is no full agreement on the exact definition of what a nomarch was,¹² between the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom an élite of regional rulers is recorded to have led, holding administrative, religious, and military titles, several Egyptian provinces.¹³ Indeed, the rulership of a province means control over the manpower and this power, in times of war, can be used against rival governors. The fragmentary inscriptions from the rock tombs of Asyut (13th Nome of Upper Egypt) allude to battles, including naval ones,¹⁴ as do the inscriptions from the Hatnub quarries linked to the activities of the nomarchs of Hermopolis (15th Nome of Upper Egypt).¹⁵ Moreover, the evolution of Egyptian military during the First Intermediate Period appears to be meaningful, as the evidence from several sites, such as Mo'alla, Asyut, Gebelein and Naga Ed-Deir, attests.¹⁶ While the title of “overseer of troops” (*jmj-rꜥ mꜥꜥ*) is the most recorded and used by local rulers to indicate their military agency,¹⁷ the number of words referring to specific categories of soldier spreads in records: that is the

⁷ Newberry 1893a; 1893b; Griffith 1896; 1900. The numbering of the rock tombs is still that established by Newberry.

⁸ Kanawati 2001; Kanawati - Evans 2014; 2016; 2018; 2020; Kanawati - Woods 2010; Lashien - Mourad 2019.

⁹ Garstang 1907; Orel 1993.

¹⁰ Moreno García 2022.

¹¹ Moreno García 2013, 148-149.

¹² Moreno García 2013, 85-87; Willems 2013, for an updated analysis of the matter between First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom.

¹³ Favry 2004, for an overview of Egyptian nomarchs during the Early Middle Kingdom (mainly in the reign of Senwosret I).

¹⁴ Griffith 1889.

¹⁵ Shaw 2010.

¹⁶ Spalinger 2013, 437-460.

¹⁷ Ward 1982, 29(205). “Overseer of troops” is a widespread military title during the history of military in Ancient Egypt: Chevereau 1987, 21-23, for the records known in the First Intermediate Period; 1991, 46-56, for those in the Middle Kingdom.

case of “troops” (*ḏzmw*),¹⁸ “recruits” (*nfrw.w*),¹⁹ armed “retainers” (*šmsw.w*).²⁰ It is noteworthy that, as was the case of Beni Hassan, the military power of some rulers remained intact even after the reunification of Egypt by Mentuhotep II (ca. 2061-2100 BC). Probably, as the records suggest, the reunification must have been also the outcome of agreements between the nomarchs and the crown. Just as it cannot be ruled out that some defeated nomarchs have been overwhelmed by the winning side. This could be the case of the rulers of Asyut (13th Nome of Upper Egypt), whose rock tombs are known to host depictions of military scenes.²¹ The biographical inscription of Khety II (Tomb N12.2) hints at war destructions²² and the tomb of his successor Iti-Ibi-Iqer (Tomb N13.1), “overseer of troops of the entire 13th Nome of Upper Egypt” (*jmj-rꜥ mšꜥ n ndft hntt mj ḳd=s*) was completed by his son Mesehti-Iqer. Iti-ibi-iqer might have been a leader who died during the hostilities.²³

2. WARFARE SCENES AND MILITARY TITLES: THE RULERS OF THE ORYX NOME BETWEEN THE 11TH AND THE 12TH DYNASTY

Despite many research on Beni Hassan, the chronology of the upper and lower necropolises, as well as officials buried there, is still doubtful. Archaeological data suggest that the use of the lower necropolis began during the First Intermediate Period.²⁴ The dating of the first rock tombs with inscriptions varies from the end of the First Intermediate Period²⁵ to the reign of Mentuhotep II;²⁶ it is likely that many of the rulers of the Oryx Nome were buried in some of the shaft tombs of the lower area, many of which had already been plundered by the time of the Garstang excavation. All rock tombs have been classified according to architectural characteristics into three types, which appear to have followed an evolution between the 11th and 12th dynasty.²⁷ On the walls of the rock tombs the nomarchs are represented with their titles and the members of their household. Moreover, beyond the inscriptions, mainly scenes of daily life and warfare are painted, displaying, with the richness of the decoration, the wealth and power of these provincial governors.²⁸ The warfare scenes are recorded in the tombs of Baqet III, Khety, Khnumhotep I and Amenemhat, and consist of two themes, developed in different ways in the decoration designs: the wrestling scenes and the siege of a fortified city. As depictions of a sport much appreciated by Egyptians, wrestling scene are not uncommon in tomb decorations, but at Beni Hassan are numerous and noteworthy.²⁹ In the west wall of the tomb of Baqet III, the number of wrestlers count even to 220 pairs, arranged in six rows.³⁰ Although the enjoyment of this sport by Egyptians is

¹⁸ Stefanović 2007a.

¹⁹ Ward 1982, 99(829).

²⁰ Ward 1982, 175(1517).

²¹ Khadragy 2012.

²² Khadragy 2008.

²³ Khadragy 2007.

²⁴ Bommas 2012.

²⁵ Brovanski 2010.

²⁶ Seidlmayer 1990, 233; Ismail 2023, 113-174.

²⁷ Badawy 1966, 128-136 (three types of rock tombs); Shedid 1994.

²⁸ Kanawati 2001; Kanawati - Woods 2010.

²⁹ Newberry 1893a, pls. XIV-XVI (tomb BH 2); 1893b, pls. V (tomb BH 15), XV (tomb BH 17); Lashien - Mourad 2019, pls. XXVI-LII (tomb BH 14).

³⁰ Newberry 1893b, pl. V; Kanawati - Evans 2018, pls. XVII-XXXIX.

undeniable, its importance for the ancient military training cannot be overlooked. Therefore, the couples of wrestlers represented could very well be part of the ruler's armed retainers, or members of the local militia, which had to be trained in hand-to-hand fighting in times of wars.³¹

Unlike the wrestling scenes, the meaning of the siege scenes, depicted on the east walls of the four tombs, has been a matter of debate since decades. With little differences between the samples, a fortress with high walls and battlements is depicted, facing an attack by a force of infantrymen and archers.³² The defenders try to rebuke the assault while the foes hit them with arrows and slingshots; moreover, a canopy with three soldiers operating with a long pole against the wall is represented. The older interpretations of these siege machines, never depicted again, as a "battering ram" or a "mantelet", have been rejected in favour of a light structure for infantry, manned by a crew to hit the defenders atop the walls.³³ The opposing sides are not ethnically characterised: Egyptians, Libyans and Nubians are depicted between attackers and defenders, although the formers apparently made up the bulk of the defending force, as it can be seen in the siege scenes of tomb BH 17.³⁴ Therefore, the debate brought up many times by scholars is if these siege scenes could represent real war events. Schulman, highlighting the "remarkable degree of homogeneity" of the Beni Hassan examples, has explained this theme as the depiction of the victorious siege of Herakleopolis laid by the Theban forces of Mentuhotep II. An event of paramount importance for the history of Middle Kingdom would therefore become part of the repertoire of the artists in the Oryx Nome for decades.³⁵ Moreover, Brovarski has seen in the depictions in the tomb of Baqet III and Khety hints of their involvement in a civil conflict. The nomarchs of Beni Hassan, alongside the Theban soldiers and Nubian mercenaries, would face the forces of Herakleopolis, supported by Asiatic auxiliaries and the army of the nomarchs of Hermopolis.³⁶ In his analysis of burial customs Kanawati also points out that the presence of such "incidental themes" in the decoration asserts the real existence of events in the life of the tomb owner.³⁷ Nonetheless, neither the symbolic meaning of the funerary decorations, nor the importance of military prowess as part of the elite identity during this period, should be underestimated. Bestock has well remarked how a connection between siege scenes and accounts of wars and sieges lacks in the four rock tombs, even in the biography of the nomarch and military commander Amenemhat. The ambiguity and uniformity of depictions would speak against the historical accuracy of these records.³⁸ Given the evidence, it would be difficult to refuse that the warfare scenes are not the outcome of an artistic repertoire reproduced in series. After decades of infighting, the nomarchs of the Oryx Nome must have been accustomed to fighting scenes, if not having taken part in them directly. Besides the examples from Beni Hassan, the scenes

³¹ Decker - Herb 1994, 535-536; see 549-555 for the examples of wrestling scenes dated to the Middle Kingdom.

³² Kanawati - Evans 2016, pls. XL-XLIII (tomb of Amenemhat, east wall - north panel); 2018, pls. XXVII-XXXIX (tomb of Baqet III, east wall); 2020, pls. XLIV-XLIX (tomb of Khety, east wall); Lashien - Mourad 2019, pls. XXVI-LII (tomb of Khnumhotep I, east wall).

³³ Wernick 2016

³⁴ Newberry 1893b, pl. V; Kanawati - Evans 2020, pls. XLIV-XLIX.

³⁵ Schulman 1982.

³⁶ Brovarski 2010, 63-68.

³⁷ Kanawati 2001, 108.

³⁸ Bestock 2018, 241-259.

of soldiers marching in rows in the rock tombs of Asyut³⁹ and in that of Ankhtifi in Mo'alla,⁴⁰ as well as the local soldiers in the burial place of Djehutihotep in El-Bersheh,⁴¹ show that warfare depictions matched with the funerary decorum in the Early Middle Kingdom. The «pictorial map (...) within which the existence of tomb owner (...) was conceptualised», citing Seidlmayer,⁴² had war as one of the most important features.

The rulers of the so called “Baqet group” (Baqet I - Khety I)⁴³ held all the title of “great chief of the Oryx Nome” (*hrj-tp ʿz n m3-ḥd*),⁴⁴ that made them the chiefs of the province, but Khety I is pointed out also as “overseer of troops in all difficult places” (*jmy-r mšc m st nbt st3t*).⁴⁵ This title, recorded only once in this shape, takes on an important meaning in connection with the warfare depictions of his tomb. If the chronological placement of this ruler towards the end of the 11th dynasty is thought to be correct, this would frame his military skills in the troubled time that marked the rise of Amenemhat I (ca 1991 - 1962 BC). The fragmentary evidence suggests a new moment of turmoil and fights in this period. Several upheavals probably troubled the first years of Amenemhat I's reign, perhaps a dynastic crisis.⁴⁶ The founding of a lineage of independent Nubian rulers can also be suggested by scarce but meaningful data.⁴⁷ Furthermore, even the famous burial of slain archers in Deir El-Bahari could be dated back to these fights.⁴⁸ War events could have also involved the Oryx Nome and his rulers, leading the nomarch Khnumhotep I to power (tomb BH 14). It is hard to say whether this governor was a new man appointed by the king, a minor noble of the nome or a second born of the ruling family, with unclear kinship ties. However, the recent re-examination of the burial shafts of Khety I's tomb (tomb BH 17) by the Australian Archaeological Mission may have led to the likely discovery of the bone remains of his son and heir Khety II.⁴⁹ Analysis reveals that this nobleman's body, with gnaw marks made by carnivores, may have been exposed in the open like a corpse left for a period on the battlefield. The premature death of the province's young ruler in fighting would pave the way for the younger brother or relative Khnumhotep I. Moreover, even the latter ruler may have achieved a leading position thanks to his military skills.⁵⁰ A point in the autobiographic inscription of tomb BH 14, although fragmentary, gives a suggestion about the involvement of Beni Hassan ruler in the upheavals marking the beginning of the 12th dynasty:

h3j.kw ḥnʿ ḥmʿ r jm [ʿh]ʿ.w n ʿš dp(.w)t 20 ʿhʿ.n.f.jw ḥr-s (...) dr.n.f [s]w m [j]db.wy nḥs.jw [3]ry sbj(.w) stt.jw ḥr(.w) n ʿbt-f t3 ʿ-h3st m jdb.wy

“I sailed north/descended with his majesty together with twenty ships of cedar wood then he (his majesty) came upon it [...] and expelled it/him (the enemy) from the two banks, the

³⁹ Khadragy 2007, 110; 2008, 226-229; Abdelrahim 2020, 18-19.

⁴⁰ Vandier 1950, 96-100.

⁴¹ Newberry 1891, pl. XV.

⁴² Seidlmayer 2007, 356.

⁴³ This is how the rulers before Khnumhotep I are sometimes described, to set them apart from those of the 12th dynasty; Newberry 1893b, 2-23; Gestermann 1987, 180-189.

⁴⁴ Ward 1982, 124(1055).

⁴⁵ Newberry 1893b, 53; Ward 1982, 30(213).

⁴⁶ Grajetzki 2006, 25-29.

⁴⁷ Williams 2013.

⁴⁸ Vogel 2003 (tomb MMA 507).

⁴⁹ Ismail 2023, 167-172.

⁵⁰ Ismail 2023, 172-177. The unfinished tomb BH 18 was probably intended for the ruler died before time.

Nubians, who have been driven away, have perished, and the Asiatics have fallen when he filled(?) the land and the desert region at the riverbanks”.⁵¹

In view of this statement, a small fleet of the Oryx Nome joined an Amenemhat I's campaign. A previous cartouche in the inscription surely identifies this king, but the aim of the campaign cannot be stated for sure: the enemies could be Asiatic invaders in the north of Egypt or Egyptian pretenders to the throne. The depiction in the tomb of the siege scene, as well as of a group of Asiatic and Nubian soldiers, should not be forgotten.⁵² Regrettably, it is impossible to identify neither which factions were fighting, nor if the ethnic backgrounds had implications in the depicted clashes. It would not be wrong to presume that the appointment of Khnumhotep I as “mayor of Menat-Khufu” (*ḥꜣtj-ꜥ n mnꜥt-ḥwfw*) by Amenemhat I (recorded in the autobiographical inscription of his grandson Khnumhotep II),⁵³ and the later “promotion” to “great chief of the Oryx Nome” (*ḥrj-tp ꜥꜣ n mꜣ-ḥd*), could be the reward for the military support to this pharaoh. It is undoubtedly noteworthy that, as late as the Early Middle Kingdom, rulers may have needed the military aid of nomarchs to shore up their power.

3. THE “GREAT CHIEF OF THE ORYX NOME” AMENEMHAT AND THE “OVERSEERS OF EASTERN DESERT”

The most important “military man” between the rulers of the Oryx Nome appears to be Amenemhat/Ameny (tomb BH 2),⁵⁴ who was at the head of the province during the reign of Senwosret I (ca. 1971-1926 BC). As in the case of Khnumhotep I, his kin relationships are in some way unclear. His father's name is unknown, and the mother seems non to relate to the ruling family of the province. The main clue to his origins lies in his military title “chief overseer of troops of the Oryx Nome” (*jmj-rꜣ mꜣꜥ wr n mꜣ-ḥd*), recorded in his biographical inscription⁵⁵ and held also by his son Khnumhotep.⁵⁶ On his involvement in a military campaign of Sesostri I against Kush the nomarch claims to have taken part as “son of the nobleman” (*sꜣ ḥꜣtj-ꜥ*) “replacing/representing his aged father” (*m jdn s jt=f jꜣww*).⁵⁷ The last ruler before him to be recorded as “overseer of troops” was Khety I. It has been supposed that Amenemhat was the son and successor in office of Khety I or Khety II.⁵⁸ A more likely candidate might be Khnumhotep I himself: he would have named his son after his ruler and benefactor Amenemhat I, and his son would have in turn given his name to his grandson. Favry points out that the military title “chief overseer of troops” is no longer recorded in the tomb inscriptions other than in the biographical one, and this would suggest that the task of a military leader was a temporary mission rather than part of the task of the nomarch.⁵⁹ However, it is good to remember that three rulers of the Oryx Nome (Khety I, Ameny and his son), not counting the anonymous father of Amenemhat, are recorded to have been

⁵¹ Newberry 1893a, pl. XLIV; Lashien - Mourad 2019, 23.

⁵² Newberry 1893a, pl. XLVII.

⁵³ Kanawati - Evans 2014, 31-36, pls. VII-XIII.

⁵⁴ Newberry 1893a, 9-38; Kanawati - Evans 2016.

⁵⁵ Newberry 1893a, pl. VIII; Kanawati - Evans 2016, 24-27.

⁵⁶ Kanawati - Evans 2016, pls. XLVIII-LV.

⁵⁷ Newberry 1893a, pl. VIII (biographical inscription, southern jamb).

⁵⁸ Ismail 2023, 153-154.

⁵⁹ Favry 2016, 119.

holders of the title. Therefore, it is difficult to deny that in the Early Middle Kingdom there was no long-established tradition of command of manpower in the Oryx Nome, even at war.

The first involvement in an expedition recorded in the Amenemhat's biography should match one of the Nubian campaigns of Senwosret I, perhaps that of the 18th year of his reign.⁶⁰ The nomarch claims to have reached Kush and to have no losses between his men. Unfortunately, the strength of his army is unknown. As with Khnumhotep I, Ameny may also have obtained, for his services in war, the royal appointment as "great chief of the Oryx Nome", thus succeeding Khnumhotep I's son, Nakht (tomb BH 21) in the leadership of the province. The following expeditions recorded in the biographical inscription, although not marked by a war context, deserves attention because the nomarch describes when and how many men were enlisted in his forces. In the first expedition, managed to bring gold to Pharaoh, Ameny claims to have travelled in the company of the king's son Ameny, with a small force:

hnt.n.j m ḥsb 400 m stp.w nb n mš^c=j

"I sailed south with a number of 400 (men), (consisting) in every chosen man of my army".⁶¹

It has been suggested that the expedition may have been headed to Lower Nubia or to the gold-bearing areas of the Eastern Desert.⁶² In the second expedition Ameny travels together with the visir Senwosret, "to bring treasures (*bjz.w*)"⁶³ to the city of Koptos:

hnt.n.j m ḥsb 600 m kn(.w) nb n mš-ḥd

"I sailed up with a number of 600 (men), (consisting) in every brave man of the Oryx Nome".⁶⁴

It is not clear what these treasures consisted of. Likely, as Cooper argued, these were the precious goods coming from Punt that landed in a port on the Red Sea, probably Mersa Gawasis. The relevance of these products would certainly have justified the need for a large armed escort for the journey across the eastern desert, up to Koptos.⁶⁵ The evidence from Ameny's biographical inscription is of paramount importance in understanding how in this time frame a nomarch could still claim the privilege of recruiting and commanding a force of hundreds of men at his disposal. This situation should not be considered extraordinary for the Early Middle Kingdom, as there is evidence also for other Middle Egypt sites.⁶⁶ In the north wall of the main chamber, Amenemhat is shown attending to livestock census escorted by four "retainers" (*šmsw.w*) armed with shield, axes, bows, and arrows (three of them are recorded with title and names).⁶⁷

"Overseer of troops" is not the only title held by the nomarchs of Oryx Nome in their task of maintaining the security of the province. Khnumhotep I is also recorded for being appointed by Amenemhat I as "overseer of the Eastern Desert".⁶⁸ This title shows a clear

⁶⁰ Obsomer 1995, 311-335.

⁶¹ Kanawati - Evans 2016, 26-27.

⁶² Obsomer 1995, 290-291.

⁶³ Newberry 1893a, 26 (biographical inscription, lines 14-15).

⁶⁴ Kanawati - Evans 2016, 26-27.

⁶⁵ Cooper 2014.

⁶⁶ See Newberry 1891, pl. XV (the colossus scene with the crews of soldiers and recruits from the Hare Nome).

⁶⁷ Newberry 1893a, pl. XII; Kanawati - Evans 2016, 37.

⁶⁸ Newberry 1893a, 58-59 ("biography" of Khnumhotep II, lines 24-53); Kanawati - Evans 2014, 31-36.

connection with the control of this area, exposed to marauding by nomadic people, sometimes putting trading and mining activities at risk. At least three members of the Nome’s ruling family (Khnumhotep I, Netjernakht and Khnumhotep II) are designated with the title “overseer of the Eastern Desert”. In the well-known scene of the procession of the Asiatics depicted in the tomb of Khnumhotep II (tomb BH 3) the group of foreigners is introduced to the nomarch by a scribe and an “overseer of hunters”.⁶⁹ The “overseer of hunters”⁷⁰ was certainly charged with the security and support of expeditions, as well as with the watch of desert areas, commanding the troops of desert policemen/scouts.⁷¹ There is no doubt that the nomarchs, who already controlled the Eastern Desert, were also dominating this type of armed force and their officers.⁷² Furthermore, a stele found in Mersa Gawasis and dated to the first year of the reign of Senwosret II (ca. 1897-1878 BC) recalls the presence of a “interior overseer” (*jmy-rꜥ ḥnwṯj*)⁷³ named Khnumhotep, probably sent by the pharaoh to supervise harbour and trading activities.⁷⁴ Genealogy and titles bring likely to the identification with Khnumhotep III, son of the ruler of the Oryx Nome and the last known member of this important family. The same officer, as it can be deduced from the fragmentary funerary inscription of his mastaba in Dahshur, was subsequently involved in an Egyptian military expedition related to a conflict between the Levantine cities of Byblos and Ullaza.⁷⁵

3.1. *Military/security titles of the rulers (and their relatives) of the Oryx Nome*

<i>Title Holder</i>	<i>Dating</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Translation</i>	<i>Burial Place</i>
Khety	Late XI dynasty	<i>jmy-r mšꜥ m st nbt stꜣt – jmy-r ḥꜣswt jꜣbtt</i> ⁷⁶	“overseer of troops in all difficult places” - “overseer of the Eastern Desert”	BH 17
Netjernakht	Late XI dynasty	<i>jmy-r ḥꜣswt jꜣbtt</i>	“overseer of the Eastern Desert”	BH 23
Khnumhotep I	XII dynasty (Amenemhat I)	<i>jmy-r mšꜥ - jmy-r ḥꜣswt jꜣbtt</i>	“overseer of troops” - “overseer of the Eastern Desert”	BH 14
Amenemhat	XII dynasty (Senwosret I)	<i>jmy-r mšꜥ wr n mꜣ-ḥꜥ</i>	“chief overseer of troops of the Oryx Nome”	BH 2
Khnumhotep (son of Amenemhat)	XII dynasty	<i>jmy-r mšꜥ</i>	“overseer of troops”	BH 2?
Khnumhotep II	XII dynasty (Amenemhat II)	<i>jmy-r ḥꜣswt jꜣbtt</i>	“overseer of the Eastern Desert”	BH 3
Nefer (son of Khnumhotep II)	XII dynasty	<i>jmy-r mšꜥ</i>	“overseer of troops”	BH 3?

⁶⁹ Newberry 1893a, pls. XXX-XXXI.

⁷⁰ Ward 1982, 32(226).

⁷¹ Altenmüller 1980.

⁷² Aufrère 2002.

⁷³ Ward 1982, 14-15(72).

⁷⁴ Sayed 1977, 140-146 (Stela Durham EG 577).

⁷⁵ Allen 2008.

⁷⁶ See Newberry 1893b, pl. XIV (north wall, east half). The reading is uncertain and Khnumhotep I is usually thought to be the first holder of the title.

3.2. *Holders of military titles in the households of rulers in the rock tombs in Beni Hassan*

<i>Title Holder</i>	<i>Dating</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Translation</i>	<i>Depiction in the tomb</i>
Hetankh	XII dynasty (Senwosret I)	<i>šmsw</i>	“retainer”	BH 2, Main Chamber, North Wall
Hetep	XII dynasty (Senwosret I)	<i>šmsw</i>	“retainer”	BH 2, Shrine, North Wall
Khnum	XII dynasty (Senwosret I)	<i>šmsw</i>	“retainer”	BH 2, Main Chamber, North Wall
Shesobek	XII dynasty (Senwosret I)	<i>šmsw</i>	“retainer”	BH 2, Main Chamber, North Wall
Jw	XII dynasty (Amenemhat II)	<i>jmj-r mš^c</i>	“overseer of troops”	BH 3, Main Chamber, North Wall
Ankeku	XII dynasty (Amenemhat II)	<i>šmsw</i>	“retainer”	BH 3, Main Chamber, North Wall

4. HOLDERS OF TITLES WITH MILITARY AND POLICE TASKS: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FROM THE LOWER NECROPOLIS

Located in a lower level than the cliff of the rock tombs, the shaft tombs of the officers’ necropolis have provided an amount of evidence, helping to understand the features of the provincial élite during the Early Middle Kingdom.⁷⁷ The resting place is directly related to the history of the ruling family of the nome: the number of burials seems to decline from the reign of Senwosret III (ca. 1878-1839 BC) and gradually fades during the Second Intermediate Period.⁷⁸ There is no doubt that many of the military officers in the nomarchs’ household, even those depicted in the tombs, were buried here. Unfortunately, most of the shafts were found plundered by the excavators, and it is likely that much information regarding the burials, including many titles, has been lost, or omitted in Garstang’s excavation report.⁷⁹ However, between the shafts of the necropolis, four burial places of a “warrior” (*ḥ3wtj*),⁸⁰ one of an “overseer of hunters” (*jmj-r3 nw.w*)⁸¹ and one of a “disputes overseer” (*jmj-r3 šnt*)⁸² were at least recorded.⁸³ Noteworthy, among them, is the burial ground of the “warrior” Userhat (Garstang Tomb 132): the quality of the funerary goods suggests that this officer had a noteworthy social status and a close connection with the provincial court.⁸⁴ Between them, the inner and the outer coffin stand out for their fine quality. The inner coffin (Cambridge Fitzwilliam Museum E.88.1903), a remarkable example of a wooden anthropoid type, depicts the deceased black-skinned with a multi-coloured collar and a line of blue hieroglyphics on top of the case, recording the name and the title of

⁷⁷ Seidlmayer 2007.

⁷⁸ Orel 1993, 486.

⁷⁹ Orel 1993, 451.

⁸⁰ Ward 1982, 76(618-624); see Stefanović 2007b about the military title and Stefanović 2006, 178-181, for the attestations known during the Middle Kingdom.

⁸¹ Ward 1982, 32(226-228).

⁸² Ward 1982, 50(390).

⁸³ Garstang 1907, pls. VII-VIII; Seidlmayer 2007, 354 (list of objects found in tombs).

⁸⁴ Grajetzki 2022, 140-144.

Userhat.⁸⁵ The outer coffin (Liverpool Garstang Museum E.512), rectangular-shaped, shows dedications to several funerary deities and the depictions of Isis and Nephys, respectively at the head and at the bottom of the coffin.⁸⁶ Archaeological evidence (including the pottery found in the shaft tomb) dates this burial to the mid/second part of the 12th dynasty. It is regrettable how, apart from the titles, the grave goods of the officers do not provide any information on their real task and ranking position within the administration of the nome; furthermore, the burials did not contain weapons. These tools did not lack elsewhere: for example, a bow and its case were found in the shaft 183,⁸⁷ and a battle axe in the shaft 511,⁸⁸ but both burials were not linked to holders of military/security titles. As Seidlmayer has properly underlined, «funerary symbolism is largely insensitive to the professional occupations of the deceased».⁸⁹

4.1. *Men with military/police titles known buried in Beni Hassan shaft tombs (according to Garstang's report)*

<i>Title Holder</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Translation</i>	<i>Burial place</i>
Nefer	<i>jmy-r nw.w</i>	“overseer of hunters”	Shaft Tomb 61
Netjernakht	<i>jmy-r šnt</i>	“disputes overseer”	Shaft Tomb 393
Khnumhotep	<i>ḥꜣwtj</i>	“warrior”	Shaft Tomb 16
Userhat	<i>ḥꜣwtj</i>	“warrior”	Shaft Tomb 132
Nakht	<i>ḥꜣwtj</i>	“warrior”	Shaft Tomb 135
Usernakht	<i>ḥꜣwtj</i>	“warrior”	Shaft Tomb 283

Finally, it is thanks to the written evidence from tomb inscriptions and funerary goods that data can be accessed on the military in Beni Hassan during the Early Middle Kingdom. Between the end of the 11th and the first half of the 12th dynasty seven nomarchs and their kins, six members of their households and six officials from the shaft tombs are known to have held military or security titles. Evidence suggests the involvement of these men in royal wars and campaigns, but reveals little facts about local military organisation. Even the correlation between the military officers depicted in rock tombs (mostly “retainers”) and those buried in the lower cemetery (mostly “warriors”), although reasonable, is hard to support.⁹⁰ In the Early Middle Kingdom, the title of “retainer” is connected to a large area of tasks linked to the administration and not only to the army.⁹¹ Furthermore, the sample of local military officers may be reduced by coeval practice of not including the deceased’s title or titles on grave goods.⁹²

⁸⁵ Bourriau - Quirke 1988, 90-91; Orel 1993, 618.
⁸⁶ Bourriau - Quirke 1988, 91-92; Orel 1993, 614.
⁸⁷ Garstang 1907, 218.
⁸⁸ Garstang 1907, 227.
⁸⁹ Seidlmayer 2007, 353.
⁹⁰ Seidlmayer 2007, 361.
⁹¹ Berlev 1978, 206-229.
⁹² Grajetzki 2021.

5. CONCLUSION

Evidence from Beni Hassan, as from other Egyptian nomes, points out how a powerful family of provincial rulers, holders of high administrative and religious titles, had the power to recruit and lead small armies, in an independent way from the royal power. However, this could not fail to collide with the growing strength and relevance of the monarchy, which could not tolerate the presence of autonomous military powers at a certain point. The last ruler in Beni Hassan to hold the title “great chief of Oryx Nome” was Amenemhat, and the construction of the rock tombs ended between the reigns of Senwosret II and Senwosret III.⁹³ As for the lineage of rulers, its fate is well defined by the “ladder of offices” of Khnumhotep III. The son of Khnumhotep II had a brilliant career at the royal court, reaching the title of vizier and being buried in a large mastaba in Dahshur. Instead of sudden and radical actions against the provincial elites, the kings turned the heirs of the nomarchs into rich and powerful members of the court. Furthermore, the centralisation of power and wealth in the hands of the monarchy deprived the governors of all powers, even of having built monumental tombs.⁹⁴ With the end of elite cemeteries in the second part of the Middle Kingdom, the military control of manpower by provincial rulers, with their political influence and wealth, cannot be longer recorded. However, data for the previous part of the Middle Kingdom show how the stability of the Egyptian state was based also on the balance between the royal authority and the provincial rulers. The reunification of Egypt, an event which perhaps caused the ruin of some foe between nomarchs, did not undermine the power of the rulers who pledge their allegiance to the Theban kings. Some nomarchs continued to control their provinces, have their courts and their militias, if their right to rule and that of their offspring was confirmed by the king. Their armies took part, as seen, even to Nubian campaigns. Later, the ongoing strengthening of Egyptian crown collided with these local chiefs, and the regional militias were replaced by what appears to be a standing army of professional soldiers.⁹⁵ Employing the type of focus concerning “warfare” in the Oryx Nome to records from other provinces could add useful data to the knowledge of military organization in the Middle Kingdom. The real impact of local rulership on the military effectiveness of the Egyptian state in this period could be further proved.

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⁹³ Ismail 2023, 188-194. The last cut rock tomb, left incomplete, seems to have been that of Khnumhotep IV, son of Khnumhotep II (tomb BH 4).

⁹⁴ Franke 1991.

⁹⁵ Spalinger 2013, 421-437.

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