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The Presentation of the Virgin

Attributed to Fra Carnevale, active 1450-1484

Charles Potter Kling Fund

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SUBSCRIPTION ONE DOLLAR



Fig. 5 (detail). Head of the Virgin's Mother

Montefalco, Florence, San Gimignano, and Pisa.

These two artistic elements, that of Piero and that of Benozzo, are found in the painter Lorenzo da Viterbo, whose name is worth mention in passing when considering the attribution of the two panels. Sir Charles Holmes<sup>1</sup> has associated this artist's name with the San Bernardino panels at Perugia representing *The Birth of the Saint*<sup>2</sup> and *A Miracle of the Saint*. The Boston and New York paintings have rather close stylistic analogies, not only with the former of these panels, but also with the one definitely established work by Lorenzo, namely the frescoes in the Capella Mazzatosta of the Church of Santa Maria della Verita at Viterbo. Not only is the general conception of the frescoes with their bright colors and ornate settings quite close to the two panels, but also the specific details, such as the painting of the heads and the drapery of the figures in the vaults, are strikingly similar. However, the facts of Lorenzo da Viterbo's life are so few<sup>3</sup> that it is impossible to assign to him the two panels on the basis alone of the Viterbo frescoes. Nevertheless his name cannot be completely passed over in discussing their authorship.

From the evidence, therefore, we can assume that the painter of the Boston *Presentation* certainly

<sup>1</sup>Sir Charles Holmes, *loc. cit.*

<sup>2</sup>The treatment of the scene of this panel, the painting of the figures and particularly of the landscape, is close in style to *The Birth of the Virgin* in the Metropolitan Museum.

<sup>3</sup>It is not known whether Lorenzo ever went to Urbino or Florence. The Viterbo frescoes in their overcrowding of figures and in their excessive use of portraiture resemble Benozzo Gozzoli's work. G. Galassi *L'arte*, vol. XVI, 1913, p. 107-112, states that Lorenzo was in Rome and holds him responsible for the frescoes of the evangelists in the Chapel of SS. Peter and Michael in Sta. Maria Maggiore, Rome, which many critics assign to Piero della Francesca.

worked in Urbino, was influenced strongly by Piero della Francesca, and was familiar with Umbrian architecture. We can suppose also that the artist knew the painting of the Marches, and was acquainted with the style of the Florentine painters Paolo Uccello, Domenico Veneziano, and Benozzo Gozzoli. As has been said before, the artist must have been trained as an architect as well as a painter. Whether the author of the paintings was Fra Carnevale or some other painter is impossible to say unless further information is brought to light. For want of a better name, therefore (and the use of a name at least evokes discussion), the attribution to Fra Carnevale may as well be continued for the present.

What is important, however, is the superb quality of the picture itself and its high position in the field of Renaissance painting. When one considers the fine draughtsmanship of the architecture, the rhythmic flow of figures in the composition, the dignity and feeling for form, especially in the foreground figures, and finally the modernity of the whole conception, one finds that the painting stands on its own merits without the accompaniment of a great name to enhance its prestige.

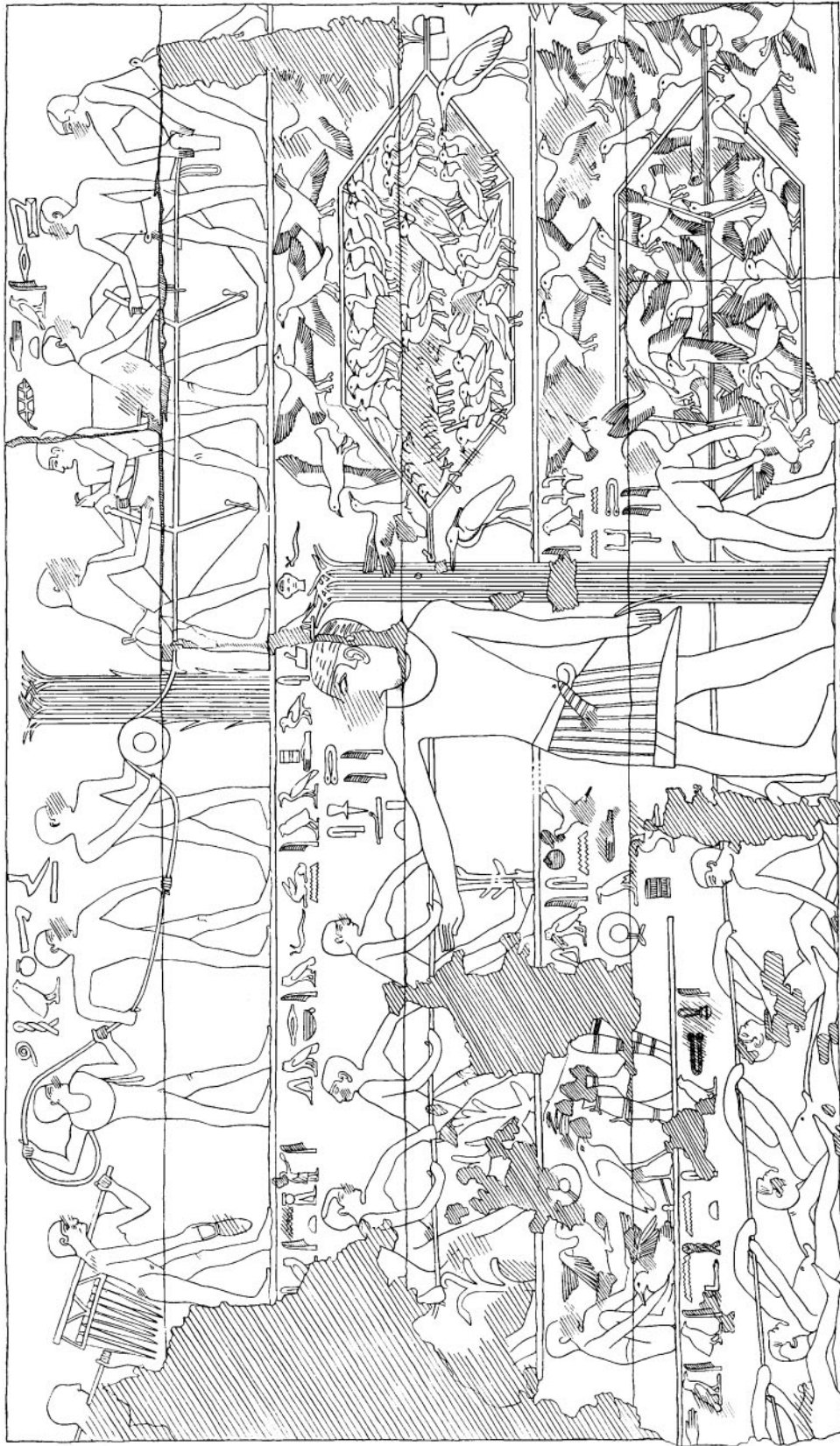
C. C. CUNNINGHAM.

### Two Parallels to Ancient Egyptian Scenes

THE scenes from daily life so commonly recorded in relief on the walls of Egyptian tomb chapels of the Old Kingdom are sometimes hard for the modern observer to understand. Our difficulty is due, first to the peculiar conventions of Egyptian two-dimensional representation, and second to our lack of familiarity with the subjects treated. To those who have had the good fortune to see something of the life of the modern peasant in Egypt many of the scenes are understandable because



Trapping birds, Italian engraving, Fifteenth Century



J. H. Johnson

Ancient Egyptian bird-trapping scene in the tomb of Ti at Sakkara, about 2800 B.C.

they represent activities which are carried on today much as they were four or five thousand years ago, and so, to put it colloquially, we "know what they are talking about." But for many of the subjects treated we have no such help, as the actions depicted are no longer to be found duplicated in modern peasant life along the Nile, and we are forced to rely on our native perspicacity and our knowledge of Egyptian conventions of drawing. It occasionally happens, however, that some other part of the world yields a valuable hint for the interpretation of little understood scenes, and this note is concerned with two instances of the sort observed by members of the Egyptian Department.

#### THE BIRD TRAP

IN January of this year the Print Department opened an anniversary exhibition of outstanding works from its collections. Among them was a Fifteenth Century Italian print<sup>1</sup> which attracted the attention of the writer because it showed a bird-trapping scene startlingly similar to those which are relatively common in the reliefs of early Egyptian tomb chapels. This scene, which occupies the upper right hand corner of the engraving, is reproduced here for comparison with one of the best preserved of the ancient examples, from the Fifth Dynasty tomb of Ti at Sakkara.

The Egyptian scene consists of three parts contained in three superimposed registers. In the first of these, at the top, men are setting up the trap, which is placed among the papyrus thickets frequented by aquatic birds and, as is indicated in many of the scenes, often surrounds a pool of water. In the second, the snare is set and is already full of birds unsuspectingly walking or swimming about in it, while still more flutter down to join their companions. In the third scene, below, the trap has been sprung and birds are seen struggling beneath its meshes, while others fly away in fright, and one of the hunters is already engaged in gathering in the catch. The trap is sprung by a gang of men who, at a signal from their leader—here represented of double size so as to occupy both of the lower scenes—pull violently on the long rope which controls its action. The three registers represent a time sequence which is perfectly clear; but our difficulties begin when we try to understand just how the trap worked, for there is no variation in the representation of its form, open in the central scene and closed in the lower one.

The Italian trap, drawn in a convention approximating our own, and being somewhat simpler than the Egyptian one, is helpful to an understanding of the latter. It consists of two rectangular panels of netting, each stretched between two poles which run vertically to the main axis. In the open position in which the trap is shown, these four poles have their inner ends fastened to the ground in some

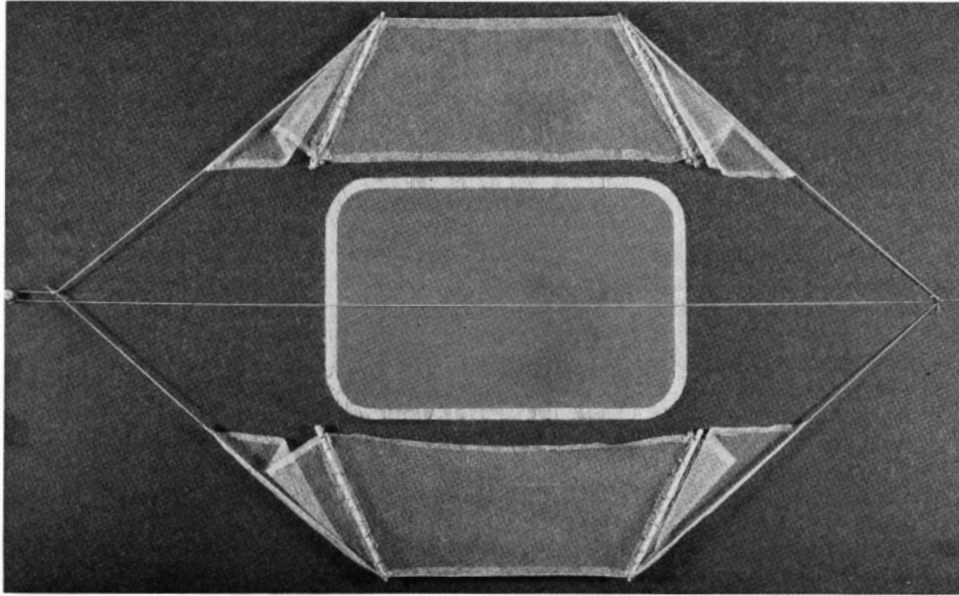
manner not indicated, so as to allow them and the nets which they support to turn on their long axes like the two leaves of a bulkhead door. Each panel is stiffened by guy-ropes at both ends, fixed to stakes driven into the ground on the prolongation of its turning axis. The motive power for springing the trap is furnished by two men concealed behind bushes, who, at the proper moment, pull on the two ropes which run diagonally from the near exterior corners of each of the panels. The two halves of the trap have to be placed sufficiently far apart so that the space between them when open will be fully covered by the nets when the trap is closed. Actually they are represented rather too close together. The guy-ropes at the distant end of the trap are essential to its closing, since they serve to brace the nets against the pull of the control rope, but those at the nearer end do not appear to be of much use.

The Egyptian trap is similar in principle though more complicated. It, too, consists essentially of two panels of netting fastened to four pivoting poles. In it, also, the motive power is supplied through two ropes running diagonally from the outer corners at the end nearest the hunters. These ropes are joined together and then pass through a screen of papyrus plants to the gang of men who pull the control rope to close the trap. In the Egyptian version the space which should be shown between the two panels when open is not represented, and therefore the trap appears to be of the same width in both positions. This is perhaps due to the desire of the artist for symmetry between the two superimposed scenes, and to a highly conventionalized representation of a thoroughly familiar scene, which was a standard subject for treatment in the tomb reliefs.

The essential differences between the Italian and Egyptian traps are two. The Egyptian device dispenses with the two stakes and guy-ropes at the further end of the trap, and substitutes for them a single heavy anchor-stake on the central axis, which is the key to the whole contrivance. A moment's consideration makes it obvious that guy-ropes could not be fixed to this stake, for in that case, if they were of correct length for the trap when open, they would be too long in the closed position, and the resultant slack when the trap is sprung would prevent it from closing properly. Actually the ropes starting from the exterior far corners of the two main nets must have been joined together and then led *around* this anchor-stake and back along the center line of the trap, to be united to the main control rope at the near end. Thus, when this rope was pulled, there would be a closing impulse on both the near and far corners of each net, the pull on the far corners being exerted in reverse direction, away from the hunters, through the pulley action around the anchor-stake. In a small, light trap handled by one or two men, such as the Italian one, a closing impulse applied at one end of the trap no doubt sufficed; but the Egyptian contrivances, being often large enough to require four or more men for their manipulation, would certainly have responded too slowly and heavily to

<sup>1</sup>Engraving, "Luna," Anonymous Italian, ca. 1460. Stroganoff and Brayton Ives Collections. Reg. No. M 25873





Reconstruction of Egyptian bird trap, open

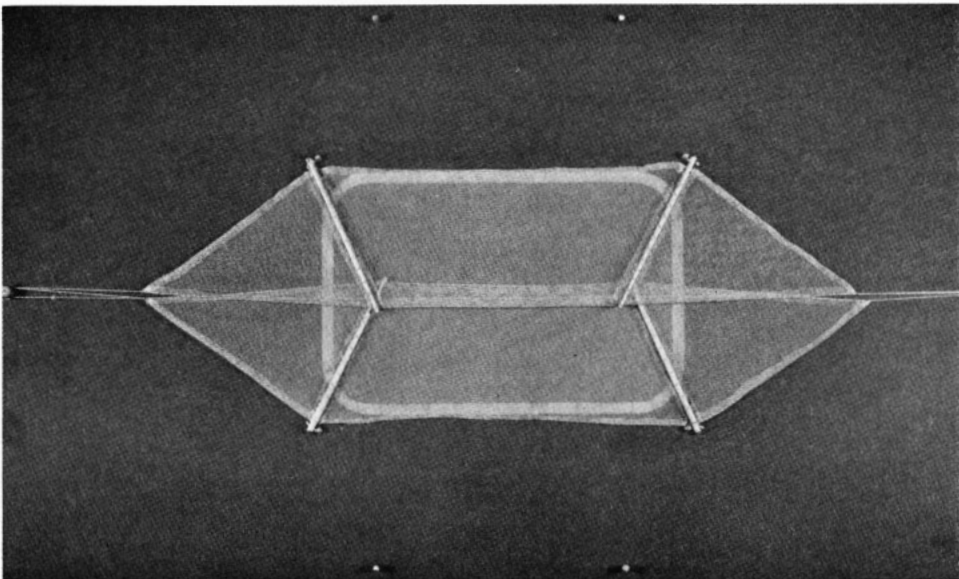
such an impulse, whereas the pull from both ends rendered them quick-acting and effective. In our drawing the rope which passed back along the central axis of the open trap is not indicated, and must be thought of as hidden by the birds. In the majority of examples, however, this rope is clearly shown in both the open and closed positions.

The second point of difference is that the Egyptian trap, in addition to the two main panels of netting, seems to have had a triangular wing piece at either end of each panel. These, when the trap was closed, enlarged its catching area and produced its characteristic diamond shape in both the open and

shut positions. That such supplementary nets were used is evident from the fact that birds have been caught within the triangular end area which such wing nets would have covered.

On the same wall in the tomb of Ti from which our drawing is taken, there is an instructive scene in which the hunter sits at home in his hut, the component parts of the trap being shown hanging against the wall.<sup>1</sup> These consist of the four poles which support the main panels of the net, each pole having a small stake attached to its lower end by a short cord. The large anchor-stake is also shown,

<sup>1</sup>Steindorff, *Grab des Ti*, Pl. 117.



Reconstruction of Egyptian bird trap, closed



Arab boys of Trans-Jordania high jumping

Photograph copyrighted by The American Colony, Jerusalem

and beside it four wedge-shaped stakes which were driven into the ground around the anchor to strengthen it, as may be seen in the middle register of our main illustration. This would doubtless be a wise precaution, since the entire strain of springing the trap would be concentrated at this point. Then there is a large bundle of netting and a generous coil of rope; and finally, under the rope, are four more stakes of moderate size. It is not quite clear to the writer just how these last were used, but two possibilities are apparent. Either these stakes served as additional fastenings for the lower edges of the main nets, or, more probably, they were placed in such a way as to hold the outer ends of the four poles slightly raised from the ground when in the open position. This would have the effect of making the trap easier to spring than would be the case if these poles lay flat.

In order to test the correctness of this reconstruction of the Egyptian bird trap, the writer has made a small model of the device just described, two photographs of which are given here. It has been found to function readily and very rapidly when the rope is pulled, and to close evenly along its entire length in such a way that birds might easily be caught in it.

DOWS DUNHAM.

#### AN EGYPTIAN HIGH JUMP

**T**HE games and activities of children have a universal appeal, even when they date from remote periods of man's history. For this reason a group of scenes sculptured on the walls of the Fifth

Dynasty chapel of Ptah-hotep at Sakkara and repeated with variations in the tomb of Mereruka, a vizier of the following dynasty, have always held the interest of scholar and layman alike. They picture in vivid fashion the boys and girls of the Old Kingdom engaged in the games and trials of strength which were common in those far-off times. The character of some of these sports is immediately recognizable: "tug-of-war" and "ring-around-a-rosy" have changed but little with the passing of centuries. Others can be identified with the help of the inscriptions running along above the pictured scenes, but a few remain utterly unintelligible to the modern spectator, although many and ingenious interpretations have been offered. It was, therefore, a stroke of good fortune when there appeared with a recent article in the *National Geographic Magazine*<sup>1</sup> an illustration which offers unmistakable evidence as to the nature of one of these hitherto misunderstood games. This photograph shows an Arab high jumper leaping a human "hurdle" made by two of his companions who sit on the ground facing one another. Each has the heel of one foot resting on the upturned toe of the other below, and his hands, also one above the other and with fingers outspread, touch the upper toe and complete the impromptu barrier. Now in the tomb of Ptah-hotep<sup>2</sup> we find among the playing children two boys sitting on the ground in precisely the attitude described above, while a third youth is running towards them. The accom-

<sup>1</sup>*National Geographic Magazine*, Vol. LXXI, No. 1, January, 1937, p. 62.

<sup>2</sup>Paget and Pirie, *Ptah-hotep*, Pl. XXXIII.

