

Ancient Egyptian tombs in the digital age: painting semantic landscapes

Nicky van de Beek

Questions

- How did the ancient Egyptians perceive, classify and depict their natural environment?
- How can network visualization be used for the analysis of iconographic and textual sources?

Sources

Representations of landscape in ancient Egyptian private tombs from the Old to the New Kingdom (ca. 2700-1050 BCE).



< Fig. 1: Hetepherakhty spearfishing in the marshes (ca. 2445 BCE)



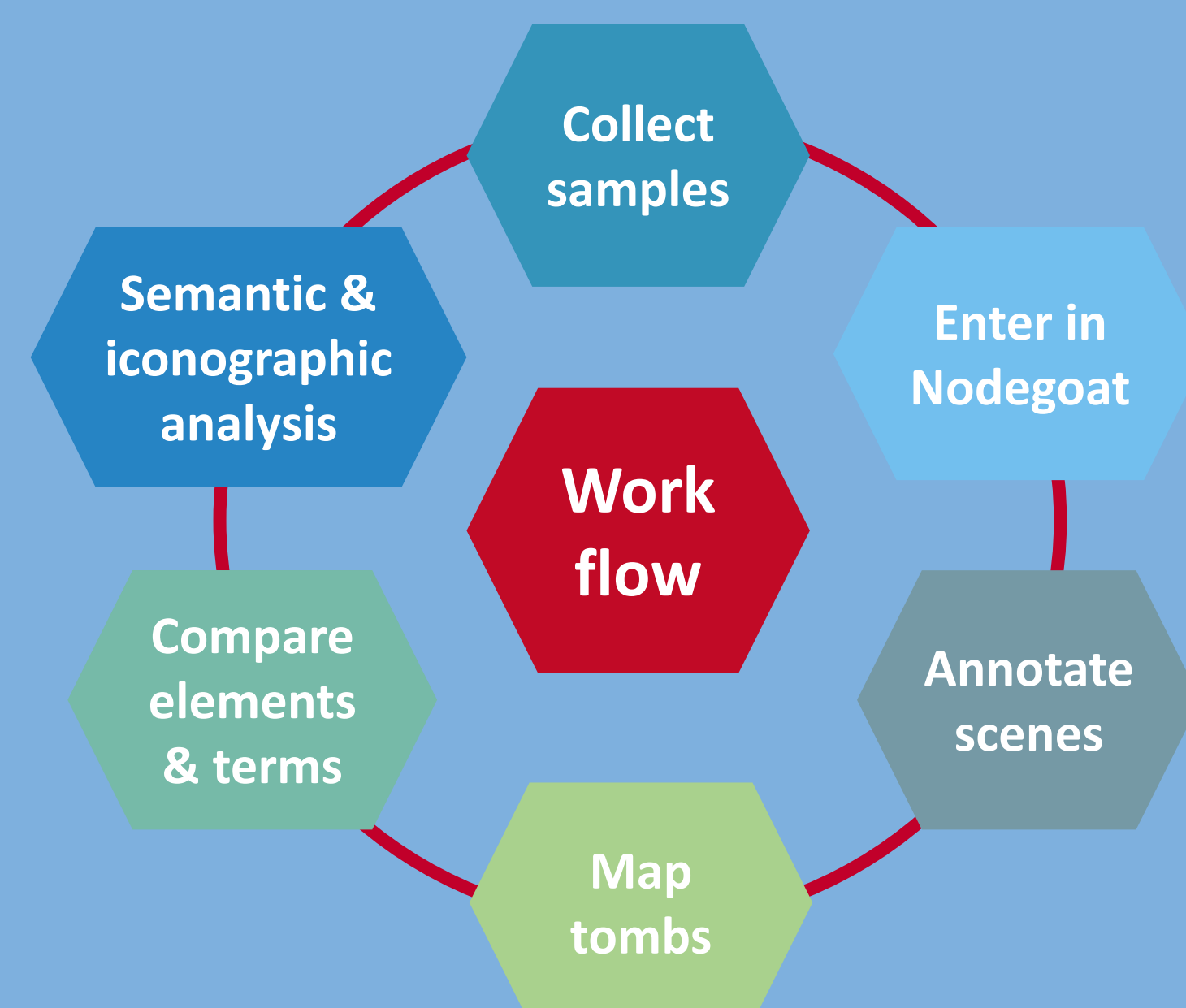
Fig. 2: Nebamun fowling in the marshes (ca. 1350 BCE) >

'Scenes of daily life'

Ancient Egyptian elite tombs were decorated with a large corpus of 'scenes of daily life', depicting the tomb owner engaged in activities befitting his status, such as fowling in the marshes and inspecting the harvest. These are often set against a stylized landscape of hills, water, vegetation and animal life.

The scenes are accompanied by hieroglyphic captions explaining the activities taking place, revealing the (emic) terminology used by the ancient Egyptians to classify the world around them.

Methodology



Case study: marsh terminology

Analysis of terminology used in sample scenes shows that the ancient Egyptians distinguished between various 'types' of marshland:



ph.w

backswamp



š3.w

marsh/meadow



zš.w

swamp/bird pond



mḥ.t

Delta marshes

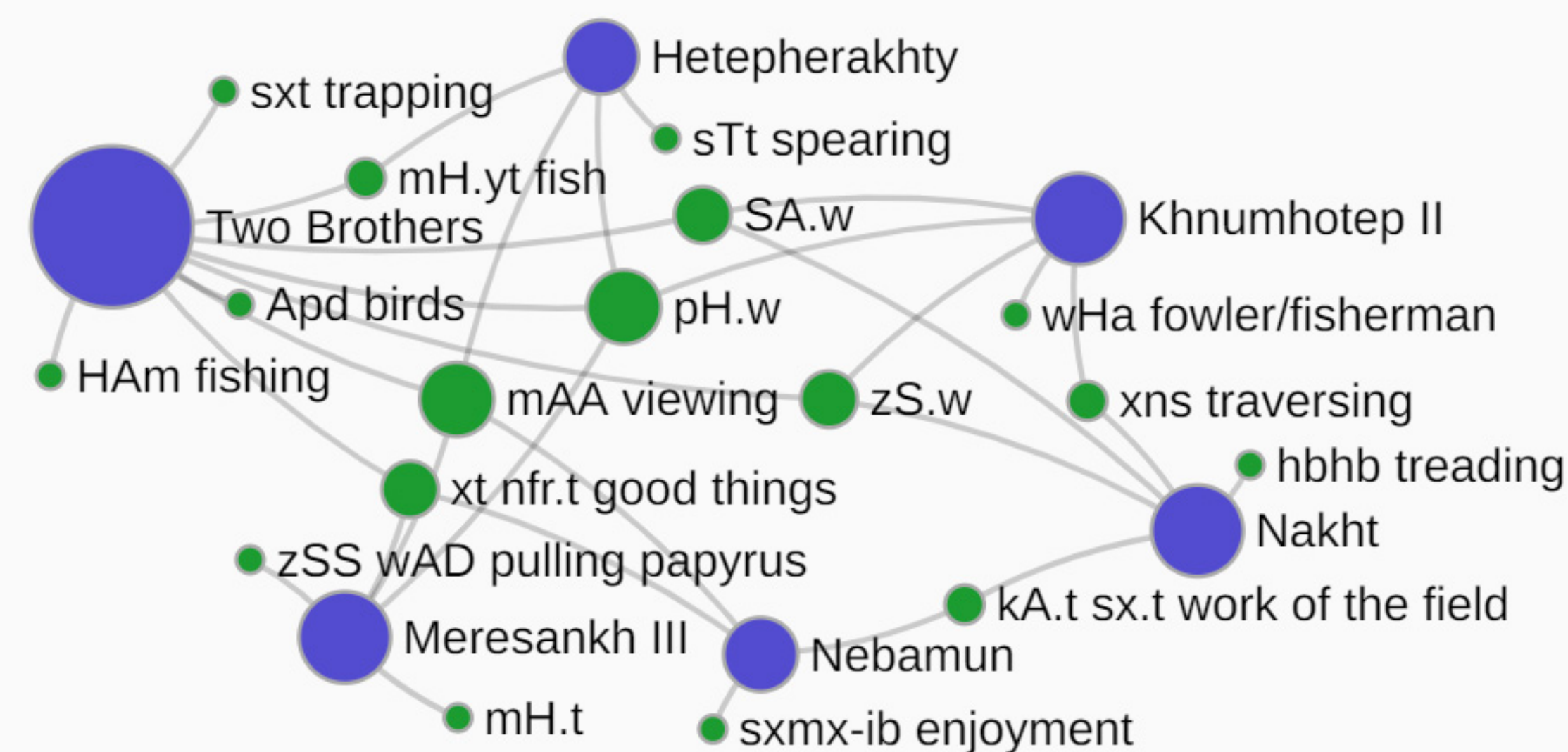


Fig. 3: Network graph showing terminology shared between marshland scenes in different tombs (node size = degree centrality).



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Image credits:

Fig. 1: © Rijksmuseum van Oudheden

<https://www.rmo.nl/collectie/collectiezoeker/collectiestuk/?object=22603>

Fig. 2: © The Trustees of the British Museum

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA37977