APPENDIX 13

PYGMIES AND DWARFS IN NILOTIC SCENES (Ch. V, n. 15)

In the course of the first century B.C. it became a popular fashion to depict the population of the Nile valley in Nilotic scenes as dwarfs or pygmies. These two types are not identical but must be clearly distinguished. On the one hand we find negroid people of a reduced stature who presumably represent pygmies. On the other hand we find dwarfs of the pathological type with the disproportionate limbs, large heads and projecting buttocks, which are characteristic of achondroplasia. There are also cases where the distinction is unclear and the artist simply depicted small people with large heads like children. In each case the intention was obviously to enhance the exotic character in Nilotic scenes by these strange inhabitants. The origin of this fashion will have been the vague knowledge, expressed already in Homer, of the existence of pygmy races in Aethiopia, where the Nile has its source. Lack of knowledge of real pygmies, who will have been seen only rarely, may easily have led to confusion between the fabulous pygmies and real dwarfs. Pathological dwarfs seem to have been more common in Egypt than they are now, owing to inbreeding. Although the distinction in physiognomy may be

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1 For examples see Ch. V, nn. 13, 14, 16 bis, e.g. figs. 34, 35; for earlier examples see n. 5, and Ch. III, n. 17.
2 See e.g. the frieze in the Casa dello Scultore, see Ch. V, n. 14; and in general J.P. Cèbe, La caricature et la parodie dans le monde romain antique des origines à Juvenal (1966) 347 ff., pl. 5–15.
3 For this distinction and the respective characteristics see LÀ VI, 1432 ff., s.v. Zwerge; Whitehouse 1977, 66; Tybout 347; A. Rupp, Der Zwerg in der ägyptischen Gemeinschaft, CdE 40 (1965) 260 ff.; W.R. Dawson, Pygmies and Dwarfs in Ancient Egypt, JEA 24 (1938) 185 ff.; V. Dasen, Dwarfism in Egypt and Classical Antiquity: Iconography and Medical History, Medical History 32 (1988) 253 ff; and most recently V. Dasen, Dwarfs in Ancient Egypt and Greece (1993) which I have not been able to read.
4 See e.g. Schefold 1962, fig. 144.
5 The confusion between dwarfs and pygmies is found at an early date. Thus the geronachy on the François vase shows negroes whereas Etruscan versions of the theme show negroes whereas Etruscan versions of the theme show pathological dwarfs, see Ch. III, n. 17, and in general EAA VI, 167 ff., s.v. Pigmei.
6 See R. Jackson, Doctors and Diseases in the Roman Empire (1988) 175 ff.
blurred and variable, the two kinds are essentially different and they seem also to have been employed in Nilotic scenes to represent different categories of people. Pygmies and naked black dwarfs usually appear in simple landscapes with reed huts, and are engaged in conflict with hippopotami and crocodiles. Dwarfs of a lighter colour, often dressed in Greek style, appear in scenes which show more sophisticated kinds of buildings and they are engaged in all kinds of activities which belong to the time of the inundation. The first kind apparently represents the poor indigenous population of Egypt and Aethiopia. The second kind represents the Hellenised and Greek population.

However, besides indicating differences in the population and enhancing the exotic character of Nilotic scenes, there may have been additional reasons for depicting the inhabitants as pygmies and dwarfs. Pygmies were occasionally brought to ancient Egypt as servants and are known to have performed ritual dances. Dwarfs too were popular as servants and as entertainers who danced and made music; besides, they were associated with gods like Ptah and Bes. The connection with Ptah may have given them apotropaic powers, while the connection with Bes, who is himself represented as a pathological dwarf, may have made them symbols of fertility. In the classical world, too, performing dwarfs had been a popular form of entertainment in virtue of their status as objects of ridicule. The ridiculous appearance and behaviour of the dwarfs in Nilotic scenes may therefore have given Roman spectators a sense of superiority and power over that exotic world.

In the classical world dwarfs could be associated with satyrs and Dionysus. Because of their ridiculous appearance and miserable situation they were chosen by Ptolemy IV to take part

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7 Cf. the Trogodytes and marshdwellers discussed in Ch. III, nn. 16 and 125; for both kinds together in one scene see e.g. figs. 34, 35).
8 For pygmies, dwarfs and these associations see n. 3; Rupp (o.c. in n. 3) 298 ff.; LA I, 720 ff., s.v. Bes, esp. 722: Bes dancing and making music in the train of Hathor; Whitehouse 1977, 66f.; A. Adriani, Microasiatici o Alessandrini i grotteschi di Mahdia, RM 70 (1963) 80 ff., esp. 86, pls. 32-41; G. Glenc, Une figure phallique de Palaepaphos, RDAC 1988-2, 53 ff.
9 See W. Binsfeld, Grylloi, ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der antiken Karikatur (1956) 27 ff., 43 ff.; Cèbe o.c. in n. 2; Laubscher (o.c. in Ch. VII, n. 20) 72 ff.
10 Cf. McDaniel 271.
11 See Dasen 272 (o.c. in n. 3); Wrede 97.