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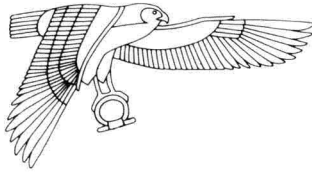
THE AUSTRALIAN CENTRE
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THE QUEENS OF THE OLD KINGDOM AND THEIR TOMBS*

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Over the last decades, the study of Old Kingdom queens and the institution of queenship in general has attracted considerable interest.¹ One aspect of this study, the burials of queens, is particularly difficult, not only because of architectural problems but because of historical and religious uncertainties as well. Historical records are few and many of the conclusions are based on the different titles of queens and the significance of these titles in the course of history. Investigations in the religious aspects of queenship are largely inconclusive and often speculative.² What little we know about the subject is derived mainly from the funerary monuments of royal women. The fact that for a number of queens we possess no tombs but only their names or, even worse, neither tomb nor name makes a comparative investigation difficult. In dealing with the architecture, the tomb type in particular is commonly used to explain assumptions or changes in the history and the religious background of queenship. Our available records are too incomplete to achieve a clear synthesis, but a new approach should be attempted.

The nearly complete lack of historical records for queens is due to their status and relationship to the king: the institution of queenship during the Old Kingdom was only possible through the male counterpart. Except for the reign of Queen Nitocris at the end of the Old Kingdom, for whom no contemporary evidence is known, independent female sovereigns did not exist. As far as we know, it would have contradicted the Old Kingdom institution of kingship. Within this royal institution queens only played a fixed role. A simplified definition of kingship is that the king was the overall and maintaining power of order in the world. His wife was his female counterpart (but without royal power) and mother of the future king.

In contradiction to this definition is the fact that a king could have had more than one wife who carried the titles of queenship. One might suppose that these wives may not have been contemporary but sequential, especially when the king reigned for a long period. The explanation seems logical but cannot be proved since hardly anything is known about the lives of the queens. On the other hand, the few facts we have about queens show that some of them must have been contemporaneous.

The next question connected to the above-mentioned problem is to determine which of the numerous queens can be regarded as the main royal wife of the king. But this question might wrongly imply that some queens were of lesser

rank than others. Not only is the available material too meagre to make such differentiations, but the approach is probably misleading. Maybe no such distinction as 'main queen' and 'concubine' existed and we are misled by our own terminology. We cannot determine from the titles available what the functions and characteristics of any 'main queen' might have been.³ It seems likely, therefore, that the important factor was not the title 'wife of the king' (*hmt nswt*), as such (which could have been bestowed upon more women), but the immediate relationship to the king and fulfilment of certain duties.

There is clearer evidence that the woman who carried the title 'mother of the king' (*mwt nswt*) played an important part in the royal institution. She was the woman who gave birth to the successor; she ensured the royal line. It is obvious that she could only have received this title after her son ascended the throne. Thus, in fact, the son was responsible for the change in position of the 'wife of the king': at the moment of his coronation, she also became 'mother of the king'.⁴

Bearing all these considerations in mind, it seems as though the funerary monuments of queens reflect to a certain degree either the individual decisions of the sovereign or unexpected historical events. It should also be indicated that the known funerary monuments might give a somewhat distorted picture, since not all the tombs of the queens of the Old Kingdom are known yet. For a better understanding, the queens and their tombs from the Fourth to the Sixth Dynasty are listed below. The names of the kings given in brackets are the commonly accepted marriages.

4TH DYNASTY

(Sneferu)	Hetepheres I	shaft-tomb G 7000x
(Khufu)	Meretites I(?)	pyramid G 1-a ⁵
	[...?...]	pyramid G 1-b
	Henutsen	pyramid G 1-c
(Djedefre)	Khentetenka	tomb unknown (probably in Abu Roash)
(Khafre)	Hetepheres II	mastaba G 7350 ⁶
	Khamerernebti I ⁷	tomb unknown (probably in Giza)
	Heknuhezet ⁸	tomb unknown (probably in Giza)
	Meresankh II	mastaba G 7410
	Meresankh III	mastaba/rock-cut tomb G 7530/40
(Menkaure)	Per[senet]	rock-cut tomb LG 88
	[...?...]	pyramid G 111-a ⁹
	[...?...]	pyramid G 111-b
	[...?...]	pyramid G 111-c
	Khamerernebti II	rock-cut tomb
Rekhetre	rock-cut tomb	

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(Shepseskaf?) (king?)	Bunefer Khentkaus I	rock-cut tomb rock-cut tomb/mastaba LG 100
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5TH DYNASTY

(Userkaf)	Neferhetepes	pyramid
(Sahure)	Nefrethanebti	tomb unknown (probably in Abusir)
(Neferirkare)	Khentkaus II	pyramid
(king?)	Nimaathep II	mastaba G 4712
(king?)	Nebunebti	mastaba D 18/No.64
(king?)	Khuit I	mastaba D 14/No.70
(king?)	Meresankh IV	mastaba D 5/No.82
(king?)	?	pyramid L XXIV
(king?)	?	pyramid L XXV
(Niuserre)	Reputnebu	tomb unknown (probably in Abusir)
(Djedkare)	?	pyramid (?) ¹⁰
(Unis)	Nebet	mastaba
	Khenut	mastaba
	Seshseshet	tomb unknown ¹¹ (probably in Saqqara)

6TH DYNASTY

(Teti)	Khuit II	pyramid
	Iput I	pyramid
	Khentet-[?] ¹²	tomb unknown (probably in Saqqara)
(Pepy I)	[...?...] Nebwenet	pyramid
	Ankhenesmerire I	pyramid
	Ankhenesmerire II	tomb unknown, pyramid(?)
(Merenre)	? ¹⁴	tomb unknown, pyramid(?) ¹³
(Pepy II)	Neit	pyramid
	Iput II	pyramid
	Udjebten	pyramid
	Ankhnepespy	buried in one of the magazine rooms of Queen Iput II's temple

The list given above clearly shows the alternation between pyramids and mastabas or rock-cut tombs. This is especially true for the Fourth Dynasty. The most fundamental effect on the burial of queens was the building of pyramids for royal wives under Khufu.¹⁵ One would expect that such an innovation would be adopted by his successors, but the contrary is the case. Neither Djedefre nor Khafre seem to have built pyramids for their wives.¹⁶ Menkaure erected pyramids for his queens,¹⁷ but they were step pyramids and never received casings.

The most obvious question raised by the different tomb types of the Fourth Dynasty is whether there was a special reason for burying one queen in a pyramid and the other in a 'simple' rock-cut tomb or mastaba. The answer seems to be yes. The monuments differ not only in their architecture but also in the sense that the pyramids had a specific symbolic meaning which was clearly derived from the royal pyramids. Moreover, the mortuary temples of these pyramids had a characteristic layout and special rooms which were missing in mastabas and rock-cut tombs. In this respect a close look at the above list shows a remarkable fact. As far as can be judged by the presently available material, it seems as if no king built pyramids and mastabas or rock-cut tombs for his wives: the style of architecture remained constant under each ruler but varied from reign to reign. The reason for this variance is unknown.

As indicated above, queens who carried the title 'mother of the king' (*mwt nswt*) held an outstanding position, which was due to their sons' ascension to the throne. It is certain that this event had an effect on the mother's tomb. The change in status must have been reflected in the decoration and inscriptions of her funerary monument. Thus, the son was responsible for the alteration or completion of his mother's tomb. At two funerary monuments these changes can be observed clearly; moreover, it can be shown that in these two cases the alterations of the tombs were necessitated by reasons of legitimation.

One of these two cases is Khentkaus I, who bears the remarkable title 'mother of two kings' (*mwt nswt bjtj nswt bjtj*). Niuserre, her grandson, established the cult of this queen within the mortuary complex of his mother, Khentkaus II, at Abusir. He changed the original layout of the latter's temple considerably and enlarged the whole mortuary complex for the venerated status of the older queen. At Giza the outward appearance of Khentkaus I's tomb was also altered and received a step on top of the old structure.

The second case is Iput I, who was buried as a 'simple' wife of the king (*hmt nswt*)¹⁸ in her tomb. In the course of events her son, Pepy I, who probably was not originally designated as heir, became king.¹⁹ The inscriptions in her mortuary temple stress the fact of her being the mother of the king.²⁰ Not only the inscriptions but also the architecture of her pyramid demonstrates this change in the queen's position. It can be shown that her tomb originally was a mastaba which was later altered into a pyramid.²¹

In both cases the importance of stressing the status of the 'mother of the king' is evident. It is interesting, therefore, to investigate whether this title had any relation to the architecture of the tombs of the other queens. Could it be possible that the 'mother of the king' was granted a pyramid as a final resting-place and thus her outstanding status was visibly shown? The resemblance of

indicate that the unity of the king and the queen was exemplified by the funerary architecture.

The list of the known mothers of kings and their tombs shows the following:

4TH DYNASTY

Hetepheres I (Khufu) ²²	G 7000x
Khamerernebti I (Menkaure?)	tomb unknown
Khentkaus I (Neferirkare)	LG 100

5TH DYNASTY

Neferhetepes (Sahure?)	pyramid
Khentkaus II (Neferefre and Niuserre)	pyramid
[wife of Neferefre (son?)]?]	pyramid L XXIV(?)
[wife of Niuserre (son?)]?]	pyramid L XXV(?)

6TH DYNASTY

Iput I (PepyI)	pyramid
[wife of Pepy I (son?)]	pyramid
[Nebwenet (son?)]	pyramid
Ankhenesmerire I (Merenre)	pyramid (?)
Ankhenesmerire II (Pepy II)	pyramid (?)
Neit (Antjemsaf Merenre)	pyramid
Ankhespepy (Neferkare)	magazine room of pyramid complex

In the list above a connection between a king's mother and her pyramid can certainly be observed in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties. The association is only made questionable by the fact that some queens who were not mothers of kings (like Iput II, Udjebten and probably the two other owners of the newly discovered pyramids at the complex of Pepy I) also possessed pyramids.

For the Fourth Dynasty no conclusions seem possible in this respect. Two of the three known mothers of kings were buried in tombs other than pyramids. The only two known tombs are exceptional in layout and architecture and merit a detailed investigation. On the other hand, the pyramids G 1 a-c and G 111 a-c were certainly erected for queens. Their owners are not known with certainty and there is no evidence that they all were mothers of kings.

In conclusion it can be said that the architecture of the tomb does not necessarily give a clue as to the status of a queen. Queens buried in pyramids cannot be shown to have been 'main queens'; it is improbable that Khafre had no 'main queen' and that Pepy I and Pepy II had four each. Likewise, a royal woman possessing a pyramid was not necessarily a mother of a king. The assumption that the queens buried near the pyramids of Khufu, Menkaure,

Pepy I and Pepy II were all mothers of kings would create serious historical problems. Future excavations of the cemeteries around the royal pyramids will hopefully provide more data and help to solve these puzzling questions.

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- * This article is based on the author's doctoral thesis "Die Pyramidenanlagen der Königinnen des Alten und Mittleren Reiches" (Vienna, 1988). The present study concentrates on different problems connected with the burials of queens in the Old Kingdom. I am indebted to Mary E. Scarvalone for correcting my English. To Gae Callender who prepared a thorough study on the queens I owe thanks for many encouraging discussions on various problems of queenship over the previous years. It is to her that I would like to dedicate this article.
- 1 The works by B. Mertz, "Certain Titles of the Egyptian Queens and their Bearing on the Hereditary Right to the Throne" (Ph.D. Chicago, 1952), G. Robins, "Egyptian Queens in the 18th Dynasty up to the reign of Amenhotep III" (Ph.D. Oxford University, 1981) and L. Kuchman Sabbahy, "The Development of the Titulary and Iconography of the Ancient Egyptian Queen from Dynasty One to Early Dynasty Eighteen" (Ph.D. Toronto, 1982) remain unpublished. See also W. Seipel, *Untersuchungen zu den ägyptischen Königinnen der Frühzeit und des Alten Reiches: Quellen und historische Einordnung* (Diss. Hamburg 1980).
 - 2 One of the most recent works, L. Troy, *Patterns of Queenship in Ancient Egyptian Myth and History* (Uppsala, 1986), tries to give an overall explanation stressing the mythological and religious background of queens. In some cases her arguments are, because of the lack of firm evidence, difficult to accept.
 - 3 The practice of using the title 'great royal wife' (*hmt nswt wr.t*) to give one queen a dominant position came into existence only from the Thirteenth Dynasty onwards.
 - 4 It is a problematic question what effect this had on the internal affairs of the royal house. There can be no doubt that other royal women had sons as well, or one woman had more than one son. Was it only the king's decision which of his sons should follow him? What happened if there was an heir who died unexpectedly before he ascended the throne? What happened if one particular queen did not bear a son to the throne to ensure the royal line? Was she dismissed and replaced by another woman?
 - 5 For a recent study on the ownership of Khufu's satellite pyramids see M. Lehner, *The Pyramid Tomb of Hetep-heres and the Satellite Pyramid of Khufu* (Mainz/Rhein, 1985).
 - 6 The problems connected with the final resting place of this queen are not yet solved. According to G. A. Reisner and others, at least three tombs in the Eastern field at Giza belonged to this queen, see G. A. Reisner and W. S. Smith, *A History of the Giza Necropolis II. The Tomb of Hetep-Heres the Mother of Cheops* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), pp. 6f.; W. S. Smith, "Inscriptional Evidence for the History of the Fourth Dynasty" in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 11 (1952), pp. 124f.; W. K. Simpson, *The Mastabas of Kawab, Khafkhufu I and II* (Boston, 1978), pp. 3f.; D. Dunham and W.K. Simpson, *The Mastaba of Queen Mersyankh III G 7530-7540* (Boston, 1974), p. 7; W. Seipel, *Königinnen*, pp. 114-117 and *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* II, pp. 1173f.

- 7 She is supposed to be the mother of Menkaure, see E. Edel, "Inschriften des Alten Reichs: IV. Die Grabinschrift der Königin H^cj-mrr-nbtj" in *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientalforschung* 1 (1953), pp. 333-336; "Inschriften des Alten Reichs: V. Zur Frage der Eigentümerin des Galarzabrabes" in *MIO* 2 (1954), pp. 183-187.
- 8 This queen is only attested in the tomb of her son Sekhemkare (LG 89), see S. Hassan, *Excavations at Giza IV* (Cairo, 1943), pp. 104, 115-117.
- 9 Initially this pyramid was built as a so called 'Ka-' or 'Cult-Pyramid' for the king and was later altered to house a burial.
- 10 Based on architectural observations the pyramid complex north-east of Djedkare's pyramid was probably not the tomb of a queen, see P. Jánosi, "Die Pyramidenanlage der 'anonymen Königin' des Djedkare-Isesi" in *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 45 (1989), pp. 187-202.
- 11 This queen is supposed to be the wife of Unas and the mother of Teti.
- 12 For the problems concerning this queen see W. Seipel, *Königinnen*, pp. 244-247.
- 13 It is very likely that two of the four newly-discovered pyramids near Pepy I belonged to these sisters.
- 14 The pyramid complex of this king and the surrounding area are still insufficiently explored and published.
- 15 R. Stadelmann, "Königinnengrab und Pyramidenbezirk im Alten Reich" in *Annales du service des antiquités de l'Égypte* 71 (1987), pp. 255f. The queens of Sneferu - except for Hetepheres I - were presumably buried in mastabas at Dahshur.
- 16 The satellite pyramids within the precincts of these two royal tombs belong to the group of the so called 'Ka-' or 'Cult-Pyramids'.
- 17 None of the owners are known by name. In G 111-b a skeleton of a young woman was found, see H. Vyes, *Operations Carried on at the Pyramids of Gizeh in 1837: With an Account of a Voyage into Upper Egypt and an Appendix II* (London, 1840), pp. 47f.
- 18 See her funerary equipment from her pyramid in C. Firth and B. Gunn, *Teti Pyramid Cemeteries I* (Cairo, 1926), p. 13, fig. 7.
- 19 Regarding the problems of the ephemeral king Userkare and the events at the beginning of the Sixth Dynasty, see N. Kanawati, "New Evidence on the Reign of Userkare?" in *Göttinger Miszellen* 83 (1984), pp. 31-37; idem, "Saqqara Excavations Shed New Light on Old Kingdom History" in *Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology I* (1990), pp. 60-63.
- 20 C. Firth and B. Gunn, *Teti Pyramid Cemeteries II*, pl. 55.
- 21 P. Jánosi, "Pyramidenanlagen", pp. 42f, 127f.
- 22 The names in brackets are those of the sons, though these are not always established with certainty.