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# Categorizing archaeological finds: the funerary material of Queen Hetepheres I at Giza

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*The undisturbed shaft deposit G7000x in front of the Great Pyramid at Giza has been regarded as the tomb of Queen Hetepheres I, even though it did not contain a mummy. The absence of the mummy has posed problems for the finds categorization as a tomb and has given rise to elaborate hypotheses. As shown here, these difficulties can be largely eliminated if the find is understood as a funerary deposit and not a tomb. The new categorization is also significant for the understanding of Old Kingdom funerary practices.*

*Key-words:* Giza, Old Kingdom, G7000x, Hetepheres, tomb, funerary deposit

In this article I present a problematic case in Egyptian archaeology that exemplifies some pitfalls in the categorization of archaeological remains and their indirect effects on interpretation. The find itself has been known for more than 70 years; the new interpretation is based on a rethinking of its categorization, following clues suggested by some features that do not fit our general understanding of Egyptian élite burials. My aim is to offer an interpretation of 'Hetepheres' tomb' that explains more of its features than previous accounts although not all of them. I also hope to show another face of Egyptology to a wider archaeological audience, which often laments the field's conservatism and lack of interest in theory.

## **G 7000x and previous interpretations**

The 'tomb' of Queen Hetepheres I, probably the widow of King Sneferu (c. 2640–2600) and the mother of King Khufu (c. 2600–2580), was found in a deep shaft in front of the east side of the Great Pyramid of Khufu at Giza and designated G7000x by the American Egyptologist George A. Reisner, who directed its excavation in 1925 (FIGURE 1). The find is in many ways unique in the funerary archaeology of the Old Kingdom (c. 2700–2210); for its social background, the objects it contained — such as splendid jewellery and furniture — as well as for the problems of interpretation that it poses (FIGURES 2–3). The find remains a mystery because it exhibits

other unique features, notably the lack of the mummy in what is presumed to have been a burial. These features cannot fit the identification of the find as a tomb unless further, hypothetical assumptions are made; consequently no definitive interpretation has been reached. As Peter Jánosi (1996: 13–19) has shown, these strictures apply both to the initial interpretation of Reisner (Smith & Reisner 1955) and to that of Mark Lehner (1985).

Reisner and his team soon realized that some aspects of the find did not fit with their presupposition that G7000x was an undisturbed élite tomb. In their interpretation these features were marked as 'anomalies' and explained by hypothetical events that lay outside the archaeological find. Reisner's most important hypothesis was that Hetepheres' hypothetical original burial near her husband's pyramid at Dahshur had been violated and the mummy perhaps completely destroyed. After officials discovered this violation, they reburied her funerary equipment at Giza. To prevent further robberies the whole action was carried out in secrecy and great haste. Reisner's hypothetical reconstruction was treated as established fact until 1985, when Mark Lehner published a critique and proposed a different explanation. In contrast to Reisner, Lehner suggests that Hetepheres had originally been buried at Giza and not at Dahshur. In his interpretation, G7000x was the first construction to occur in the east field, to

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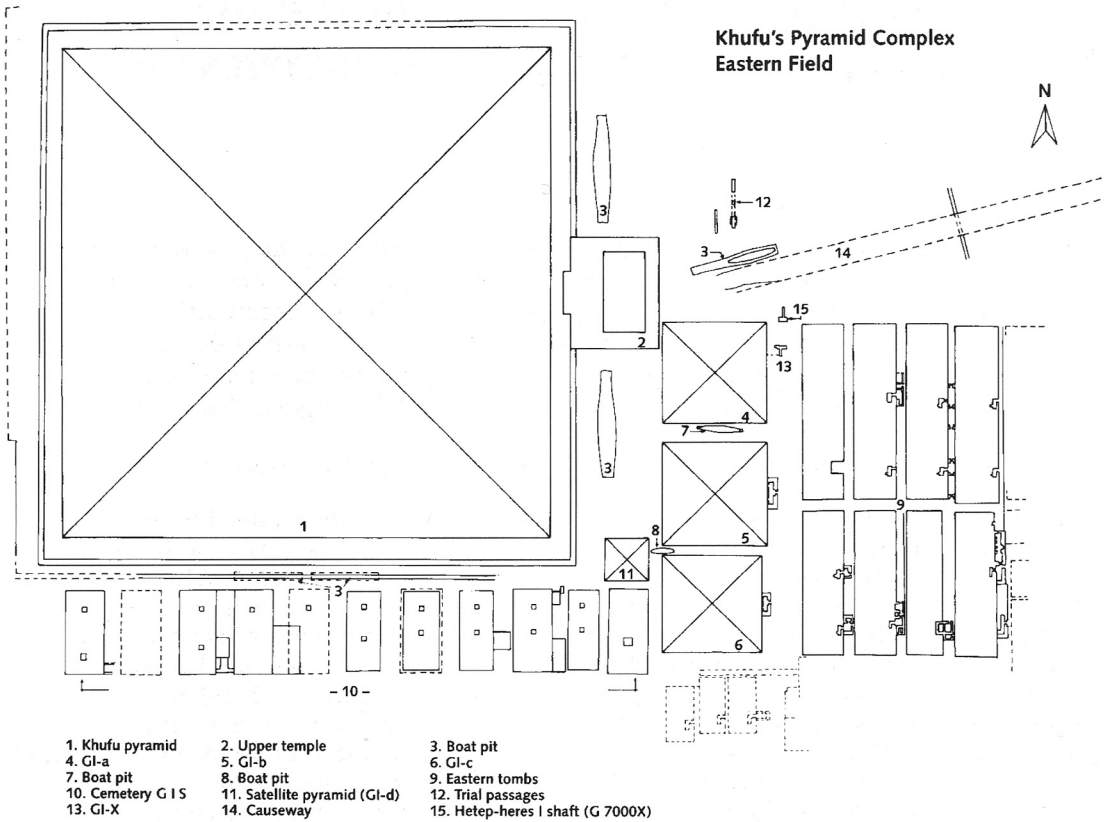


FIGURE 1. Overview plan of the Great Pyramid and Eastern Cemetery at Giza, showing the location of G7000x (no. 15). (Reproduced from Hawass 1996: 380, by kind permission of the Department of Egyptian Art, Museum of Fine Arts Boston.)

the east of the Great Pyramid, and was the Queen's original burial place. His main hypothesis is that repeated changes in the architectural plan for the Great Pyramid led to the abandonment of the tomb, so that Hetepheres' body, but not her burial equipment, was reburied elsewhere, leaving behind the assemblage of material in the chamber.

Peter Jánosi (1996) has criticized these interpretations on a variety of grounds. His main objection to Lehner's explanation, as well as to Reisner's, is the lack of proof for the suggested sequences of events. In Lehner's case either the postulated changes in plan are not clearly visible in the archaeological record or they have been shown to be incorrect by more recent finds at Giza; notably the satellite pyramid of Khufu, which was discovered by Zahi Hawass (1996). Jánosi is the first scholar to question whether G7000x should be understood as a tomb, but he does not give an alternative

interpretation, concluding instead that no satisfactory explanation of the find is available or likely to be so. Both Jánosi's conclusion and all the difficulties in analysing G7000x relate to just a few unique features, which must be taken into account in any satisfactory interpretation of the find. I list these features below, indicating why they pose problems for the interpretation as a tomb.

**The unique features**

*A The empty sarcophagus*

The closed and completely empty calcite sarcophagus was found on transport rollers next to the entrance, on the east wall of the chamber. There was no indication that it had ever contained a body. Its shape and size (2.00x0.85x0.80 m) are common in the Old Kingdom but there is an unusual light chipping around the rim (Smith & Reisner 1955: 16; figure 4b). Furthermore, its material is unexpected

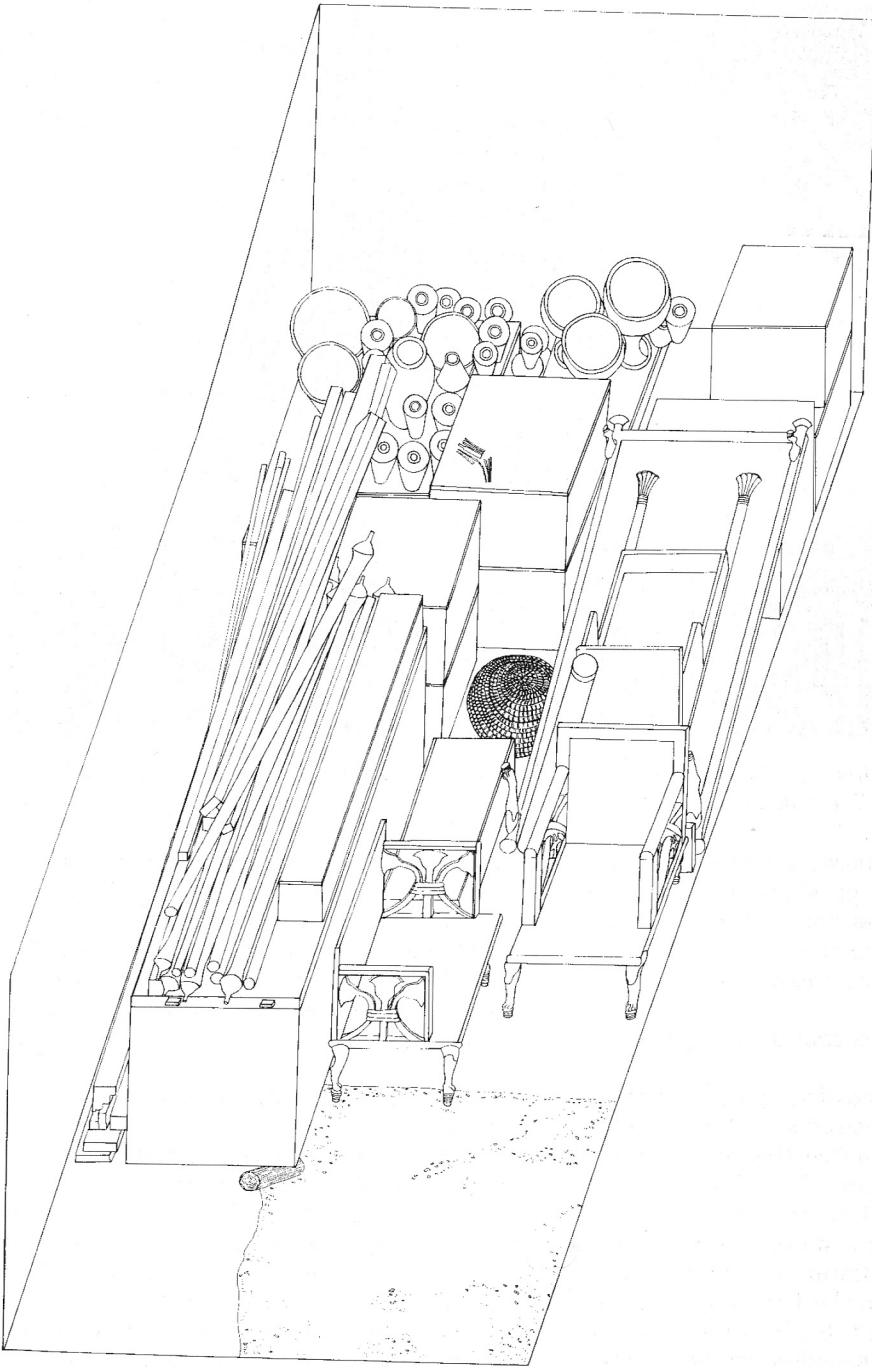


FIGURE 2. *Isometric drawing of the chamber looking south from the pit with objects restored to their assumed original positions. (Reproduced from Reisner & Smith 1955: figure 20, by kind permission of the Department of Egyptian Art, Museum of Fine Arts Boston.)*

in the burial of a queen, most of whom had granite sarcophagi.<sup>1</sup> The presence of a sarcophagus without a mummy or any remains of the

corpse in what Reisner and Lehner see as an otherwise undisturbed 'tomb' is incompatible with the general understanding of Egyptian élite

1 E.g. Mersyankh II (Donadoni Roveri 1969: plates 30–31); Mersyankh III (Dunham & Simpson 1974: plate XV); Khentkaus II (Verner 1995: 18); Ankhnes-Pepi (Jéquier 1933:

plate XL). For a probable double sarcophagus, the inner one of limestone and the outer one of granite, see Hassan 1943: 26.



FIGURE 3. Chamber as first seen; looking south. (Reproduced from Reisner & Smith 1955: plate 4a, by kind permission of the Department of Egyptian Art, Museum of Fine Arts Boston.)

burials as the place where the deceased reposed and was perpetually provided for. Moreover, the lack of a body does not fit in with our own general understanding of a tomb's function as the disposal place for human remains.

#### *B The lack of a superstructure and a cult stela*

There was no evidence of a superstructure or a cult stela on the surface above G7000x; all that remained was the intact sealing of the shaft. In Reisner's interpretation, there was no superstructure because of the secrecy of the reburial. He suggested that as a substitute for the cult stela an 'everlasting offering' consisting of wine jars, charcoal and the skull of a bull had been deposited in the shaft. Such assemblages are very common in Old Kingdom tombs, but most are found next to superstructures (e.g. Alexanian 1998), so that it is implausible to identify one as a substitute for the other. Lehner assumes that there had originally been a superstructure and that it had been destroyed as a result of changes in the architectural plan of the Great

Pyramid complex. A cult stela, like a mummy, is a core constituent of an Egyptian élite tomb and can be understood as a 'monumental' marker that is intended for interaction between the living and the deceased in order to ensure his or her continued existence through the cult (e.g. Manuelian 1998).

#### *C The unusual placing of the objects in the chamber*

The arrangement of some of the objects is not typical of Old Kingdom burials: the sarcophagus stood on the east instead of the west wall and the 'canopic chest' in a carefully closed gallery in the west wall and not to the south of the sarcophagus. Reisner (1927: 23) noted these unusual placings and explained them as resulting from transportation from the hypothetical original tomb at Dahshur. Lehner demonstrates that Reisner's reconstruction of this action is problematic and instead explains the placing as a rearrangement of the assemblage in the course of the queen's reburial at Giza. Neither scholar suggests why the officials did not ar-

range the objects in the order that was normal for tombs of the period.

Four additional features are relevant for the interpretation of G7000x. These are not as problematic for an interpretation of the find as a tomb, but they are very atypical of undisturbed elite tombs.

#### D *The apparently unfinished state of the shaft and chamber*

G7000x was far from being neatly finished. In addition to the undressed surface of the walls and floors, not all the overburden had been removed. Reisner (1927: 31–2) and Lehner (1985: 35–6) explain this feature as being due to the haste with which the objects were placed in the chamber. But the hypotheses of speed due to the secrecy of the reburial (Reisner) or Hetepheres's sudden death (Lehner) are problematic: Lehner has shown that the first is unlikely, while Hetepheres' death was to be expected since she was old in the time of Khufu.

#### E *The destroyed state of the pottery*

Over 280 largely crushed pots were found in the southeast corner of the chamber (Smith & Reisner 1955: 60). As has been inferred from potsherds found scattered though the tomb, they must have been destroyed before the pottery was deposited in its final position and the assemblage put in the chamber. Whereas Reisner believed that the distribution of the pottery provided evidence of looting, Lehner explains it as a result of careless rearrangement. In his view, at first the pottery was placed next to the entrance, suffering damage from falling stones during the reopening of the shaft for the reburial of Hetepheres. He bases this conclusion principally on the presence of some sherds near the entrance, but this distribution is not conclusive since the broken pottery must in any case have been transported across the whole chamber. Since there were so many sherds, it would not be surprising if some had been dropped on the way to their final position in the southeast corner of the chamber. Finally, a question that neither Reisner nor Lehner answered is why the damaged pottery was not replaced. Damaged pots are not uncommon in undisturbed tombs, but normally the majority of them are intact (e.g. Münch 1997). Pottery is generally assumed to have been used to trans-

port food that formed part of the tomb equipment, so that it needed to be intact. As Smith pointed out (Smith & Reisner 1955: 67–8), most of the pottery assemblage had been made exclusively for the burial. Therefore it is unusual that almost all of it was broken.

#### F *The unsealed boxes*

The chamber contained between 8 and 10 almost completely decomposed wooden boxes, as well as a calcite one in the west wall that has been tentatively identified as a canopic chest (compare M below). Stratigraphic evidence suggested that the boxes on the south wall had contained mostly linen, while those on and next to the sarcophagus contained parts of the canopy, jewellery, toilet items and calcite objects. Only the calcite container was sealed. Two groups of broken mud seals, which may have belonged with some of the boxes, were found at the bottom of the shaft and in a box on the south wall of the chamber together with other objects that were taken to have been rubbish (compare L below). The seals' position by the south wall indicates that they were prised off and collected before the assemblage was deposited, since the wooden box was one of the first items placed in the chamber. Lehner, in contrast to Reisner, explains the lack of sealed containers not as a result of the activities of robbers but as a consequence of the officials' having browsed through the boxes during the reburial. This action, however, is inconsistent with the rest of Lehner's explanation, because he hints that the reason why objects were left in G7000x was that the funerary equipment was 'contaminated' (Lehner 1985: 17). If the objects were seen as 'contaminated', it would be very surprising for the officials to sort through some of them: either the assemblage was usable or it was not. Furthermore, if the assemblage shows that the find was an abandoned tomb — which on Lehner's interpretation would surely have been why it was not treated carefully and no damaged object was replaced — one would not expect the small gallery with the calcite container in the west wall to have been closed carefully after the officials had checked that area. The fact that the boxes were unsealed is unexpected, since in general seals would presumably be prised off only when the contents they safeguarded were needed. Use of the equipment placed in a burial chamber is not normally to be expected.

### Interim summary

Each of the six features reviewed above is problematic in a different way for the interpretation of G7000x as a tomb. Some do not fit in with our understanding of élite tombs (A and B), while others are quite exceptional for Old Kingdom burials (C–F). As has long been recognized, the most problematic points are the lack of a mummy and a stela, but I suggest that the methodological consequences of this absence significantly impact the interpretation to the find. In principle an archaeological find cannot be categorized as an élite tomb if it never contained a mummy and a cult stela. This does not mean that an archaeological find cannot be a tomb if the mummy or the cult stela is missing, but it does apply if a find is intact, as G7000x was.

In terms of method, the point of departure for an analysis should then be that the find does not constitute a tomb; to proceed otherwise would be to disregard our definition of Egyptian tombs as well as our common understanding. Earlier studies recognized this incompatibility between the archaeological record and categorization but nevertheless did not alter the point of departure for their interpretations. The context and the assemblage of objects convinced them that the find was a tomb, so that instead of taking the general anomaly as an opportunity to reconsider the nature of the find, they explained all the features of G7000x in terms of their preconceived categorization, formulating a number of problematic hypotheses to explain specific anomalies. Interpretive hypotheses, however, are essential to research. But previous interpretations of G7000x have involved too many assumptions about placing, treatment, condition and class of objects that were all derived from the overall hypotheses of robbery or reburial. This problematic categorization is thus the chief weakness of Reisner's and Lehner's interpretations. If there are difficulties with the initial hypothesis, then problems are encountered at all later stages.

### G7000x reconsidered

Thus, the categorization of G7000x as a tomb is doubtful. The sarcophagus and the 'canopic chest' appear at first sight to support that identification, but the lack of the mummy and cult stela weigh heavily against it. But if the find was not a tomb, what could it have been? Since

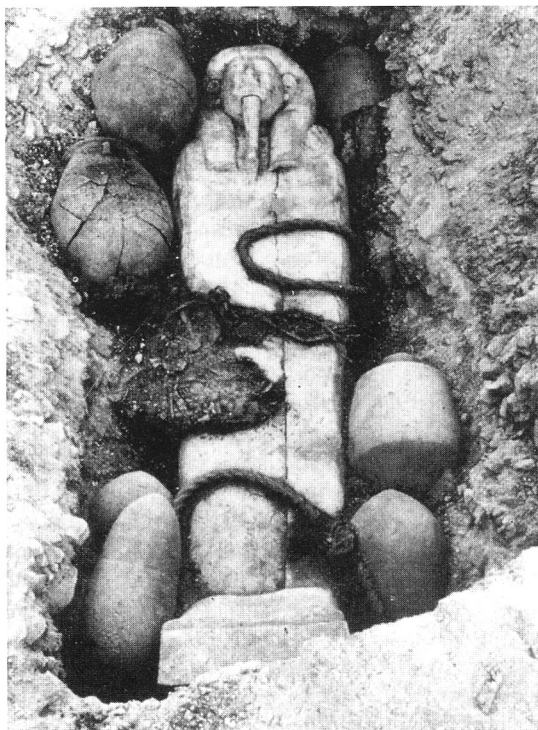


FIGURE 4. Jars and coffin containing embalming materials. Thebes, c. 700 BC. (Reproduced from Winlock 1924: 28, by kind permission of the Department of Egyptian Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art New York.)

it is unique, it cannot be analysed on the basis of a close parallel. If we do not wish to surrender in the face of singularity, we must ask how it can be set in a context that will make it comparable to others. I believe that the best way to do this is to focus not on the assemblage but more holistically on the dichotomy between what I suggest is the non-tomb character of G7000x and its assemblage of what is normally considered to be burial equipment.

If one examines other site reports with this difference in mind, much material comparable to G7000x is found in funerary deposits of later time periods. Deposits of this kind mostly consist of objects used in the process of mummification, like linen and pottery filled with natron (Winlock 1922: 34). In some cases they also include objects that we identify primarily as tomb equipment, such as coffins or miniature mummy masks for the viscera containers (see FIGURE 4; Winlock 1941: figure IIb). Alongside these deposits with a clear connec-

tion to the mummification process, a few contained an identifiable statue of a particular person together with grave goods (e.g. Arnold 1974: 51–3; Pumpenmeier 1998). The exact motive for making such interments of statuary is uncertain, but they can perhaps best be explained through the Egyptian belief in a close link between representation and named individuals. If these buried statues had such a representational significance, their initial function would seem to have been quite different from those of funerary deposits with their collections of discarded material that had played a part in the burial ritual. I therefore separate deposits with statues from those I discuss in this article.

The presence of the same categories of material in funerary deposits and in élite tombs can be confusing, but funeral deposits can be identified quite easily because they lack corpses or mummies and cult stelae. In addition, they have no constructed architecture or form such as a neat grave pit, and exhibit no discernible pattern in the arrangement of material. Major features of G7000x correspond with these patterns or absences of pattern, suggesting an initial assignment of the find to that category. To make this point clear and to show the advantage of the new categorization, I review the problematic features in light of the assumption that G7000x was a deposit of objects used in the burial ritual of Hetepheres. Textual and iconographic sources document various activities that could be performed around élite burials (e.g. Altenmüller 1975). Few of these are known from archaeological traces (e.g. Alexanian 1998). Some former objects cannot be related to any known part of the burial ritual but still show signs of handling that is unusual for 'pure' burial equipment (see G below). Their location and treatment suggest that they should be connected with virtually unknown phases in the burial ritual, as I propose also for G7000x.

### **G7000x as a deposit**

#### *G The empty sarcophagus*

As is clear from the presence of coffins in deposits, objects of this category were not used only in tombs. Therefore, the presence of a coffin provides no definitive identification of a find as a tomb, especially in intact finds such as G7000x. It is, however, uncertain why an empty sarcophagus was placed in G7000x. Two interpretations seem reasonable. First: the sarcophagus

was part of a coffin assemblage that was never used due to a change in the furnishing of the burial equipment. Second: the sarcophagus was never intended to serve as part of the real tomb assemblage but as part of a ritual, like the dragging of the coffin, an action that is attested in texts and iconography. The ritual use of the sarcophagus might be indicated further by the presence of the rollers: John Baines (1997: 144) has drawn attention to an Old Kingdom relief in which rollers are shown in ritualized actions around the king. The light chipping around the rim is a striking and seemingly unique feature of the sarcophagus. As Lehner (1985: 28–30) has pointed out, this treatment is both too careful and too innocuous for it to be connected with looting. The only objects from Old Kingdom tombs that exhibit a partly similar treatment are the 'reserve heads' (e.g. Roehrig 1999). The find of a reserve head in an undisturbed burial at Giza shows that the damage must have been inflicted before the tomb chamber was closed (e.g. Hassan 1953: 1–5). The precise reason for such chipping remains unknown.

#### *H The lack of a superstructure with a cult stela*

The absence of a stela fits with the deposit hypothesis, since deposits lack this object, which has a different function. The purpose of deposits is not the future interaction between the living and the dead but the disposal of used objects.

#### *I The unfinished condition of the shaft and chamber*

This fact also fits with the deposit hypothesis: all deposits known to me were in roughly worked surroundings.

#### *J The unusual distribution of the objects in the chamber*

The distribution of objects also fits the deposit hypothesis, since most deposits do not show any recognizable pattern in the placing of materials. The distribution also fits with the disposal function of deposits. In G7000x the objects were deposited in such a way as to minimize energy expenditure, notably in the case of the sarcophagus, which stood next to the stone blocking of the entrance on the east wall of the chamber. If G7000x was a tomb, it would be very surprising that the coffin was not moved into its normal position on the west wall, par-



ticularly since it was still standing on its transport rollers. Rather, the chosen position will have seemed satisfactory.

#### K *The nearly complete destruction of the pottery*

The custom of breaking pottery is well-known in Egyptian funerary rituals, notably in the rite anciently known as 'breaking the red pots' (Ritner 1993: 144–53). I therefore suggest that the pottery in G7000x had been smashed in the course of a ritual.

#### L *The unsealed boxes*

Since the only mud seals that were found were inside one of the wooden boxes and on the bottom of the shaft, these had probably been opened outside the chamber. This pre-deposit use could be inferred from one of the boxes near the south wall, which contained linen, broken pottery, plaster, mud seals and calcite chips from the sarcophagus. The box's position shows that it must have been one of the first objects placed in the chamber, so that its contents must have been reduced more or less to their state as found before it was put in the chamber, including the smashing of the pottery, the prising off of the seals and the chiselling of the sarcophagus, as well as the use of the plaster for an unknown purpose. In Reisner's view the contents consisted of litter from the tomb violation which the officials accidentally picked up. On the deposit hypothesis, they can be seen as showing great care in gathering material that had been used in ritual. In view of the large amount of linen and like fragments of plaster in the box, I suggest that they held objects that were mostly by-products of the mummification of Hetepheres' body. In contrast to later periods, the technique of embalming was different in the Old Kingdom, using mostly plaster and linen to preserve the body and model a quasi sculptural form for it.

#### **Possible difficulties with the deposit hypothesis**

##### M *The 'canopic chest'*

The calcite box found in the west wall of the chamber is separated into four compartments. Each contained one bundle of black cloth; three of the bundles were in a 3% solution of natron. This object is always referred to as the canopic chest of Hetepheres and its identification con-

tributed to the belief that G7000x was a tomb, because canopic chests are normally part of tomb equipment. However, the identification was not based on a scientific analysis of the bundles but only of the solution; its purpose could therefore have been different (Lehner 1985: 30–31). For example, the solution and the bundles might be residues of the mummification process that were buried away from the body, as is known for later periods. But even if the container was used as a real canopic chest, the object could still be part of a deposit, because the only known used canopic jars from the Old Kingdom were in the VIth dynasty pyramid of King Pepi I (c. 2335–2285; Labrousse 1999: 27). The absence of used canopic jars earlier when mummies already had their viscera removed, leads to the assumption that they were deposited separately, but the location and manner of their treatment remain unknown. The implications of the chest, and information about it, are thus too uncertain for it to be used in identifying the purpose of G7000x.

##### N *The furniture*

The furniture has been thought of as typical of tomb equipment. However, small boxes constitute the only furniture that has been found in the Old Kingdom royal necropolis of Memphis. This is true of 18 undisturbed high-status burials at Giza (Münch 1997) and of the very extensive excavations of Hermann Junker and George A. Reisner.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, furniture seems not to be a feature of Old Kingdom tomb equipment and cannot be used toward the identification of a find as a tomb. Its discovery in G7000x is unique and striking. A possible explanation for its presence in a funerary context is that it could have been used in the burial ritual. This idea might seem surprising, but it may be supported by Old Kingdom tomb reliefs showing furniture, from approximately the same date as G7000x. An example is the 'bed-making' scene that is sometimes placed close to depictions of craftsmen at work (e.g. Hassan 1943: 140, figure 81). Such scenes are usually understood as depicting members of the tomb

2 Junker (1934: 73) stated explicitly that no furniture of any kind had been found in non-royal tombs. For the Harvard–Boston excavation the situation is not quite clear because the records are mostly unpublished, but they do not seem to mention furniture (Peter D. Manuelian pers. comm.).

owner's household at work, but a comparison with the funerary ritual of the Middle Kingdom Papyrus Ramesseum E (c. 2000–1650 BC) suggests that they can also be interpreted as part of the funeral process (Helck 1981). This text, which may go back to the Old Kingdom, shows that craftsmen at work featured in burial rituals of its period. The idea of a connection between craftsmen and the ritual is further supported by the proximity of some tomb scenes of craftsmen to those of the transport of statues or of the mummy, where the connection with the funeral ritual is evident (e.g. Dunham & Simpson 1974: figure 5). If the depiction of craftsmen can be understood in relation to the funeral ritual rather than as reflecting household activities or those of the afterlife, associated scenes such as that of 'bed-making' may belong in the same context (e.g. Baines 1999).

#### *O Where was Hetepheres buried?*

If G7000x is a deposit of objects used in the burial ritual, Hetepheres should have been buried not very far from the findspot, as is the pattern with other funerary deposits. I therefore suggest that she was buried in the pyramid complex of Khufu at Giza. A possible burial place could be in one of the three smaller pyramids on the east side of the pyramid of Khufu. These are normally considered to be the tombs of queens; since none of them can be assigned to a specific owner, one could be attributed to Hetepheres (Jánosi 1996: 9–11).

#### *P Energy expenditure*

Although the structure of G7000x is not neatly finished, the find shows a great expenditure of energy in cutting a shaft more than 25 m deep. This fact might be seen as arguing against the identification of G7000x as a deposit, since other deposits often exhibit much less effort. However, other Old Kingdom objects that we might consider not to be of great value have been found deposited in extravagant architectural settings. The best example for this is an enigmatic object found to the south of the pyramid of Chephren (Lehner & Lacovara 1985). This dismantled wooden 'transport shrine' was the only object placed in an undisturbed chamber, blocked by three huge granite stones in a sloping passage, c. 8 m long, that is otherwise an architectural feature of high-class burials (Reisner 1942: 101). In this case there is no clear connection be-

tween the energy expended on the architectural setting and the material value of the object deposited but, there may have been a connection with its former function as a vehicle for a significant object, such as a statue or mummy. Since the 'value' attributed to an object is not always manifest in its material cost, differences in energy expenditure do not in themselves help to identify the function of an archaeological location.

#### **Discussion**

As argued in the previous section, no feature of G7000x causes undue difficulties if the find is interpreted as a deposit rather than a tomb. Features such as the smashing of the pottery or the chipping of stone objects as a sign of ritual use can be understood by reference to finds or practices of the same period, which is not the case with most of the hypotheses advanced by Reisner and Lehner. This difference, however, is not in itself decisive. In my opinion the most significant difference between the two interpretations is that the categorization of G7000x as a deposit is a more parsimonious hypothesis since, unlike the identification as a tomb, it does not require support from the secondary and tertiary hypotheses of robbery and/or reburial to explain the absence of a mummy and cult stela. The categorization as a deposit is supported by these features of a find that otherwise contained typical 'tomb' objects.

It might be argued that the fact that Hetepheres belonged to the royal circle neutralizes the value of the new hypothesis because special standards must be applied. I believe that this objection is unfounded. The definition according to which a findspot is characterized as a tomb is the same in both royal and non-royal cases. In addition to this, we lack any definite information from the Old Kingdom about the classes of objects that were deposited in burials of the inner royal circle. Only a few objects survived and they seem to indicate that royal objects deposited in burials differed in material and quality rather than in typology (e.g. Labrousse 1999).

Thus, I propose that my categorization of G7000x as a funerary deposit solves more problems and poses fewer than its interpretation as a tomb. This is most evidently the case with the lack of the mummy and stela, but it applies also to the treatment and placing of the objects in the chamber.

## Conclusion

In addition to burials, other groupings of funerary materials exist in the Egyptian mortuary sphere; all of these find categories may contain objects of the same types. The presence of those types outside tombs causes problems in analysis because they are usually assumed to be distinctive of tombs.

Apart from this mistake two further factors influenced the categorisation of G7000x as a tomb: analogy and extrapolation. Furniture is commonly depicted on the walls of Old Kingdom cult chapels, so that it has been concluded that it must have formed part of burial assemblages. Since most tombs were looted, this assumption has never been checked. But as noted, neither furniture nor some other objects depicted on tomb walls featured in tomb equipment; both the analogy with and the differences between iconographic and archaeological sources are thus evident. In contrast to the Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom, furniture is a well-known feature of New Kingdom high-status burials (c. 1550–1070 BC), as at Deir el-Medina (e.g. Meskell 1999). Therefore, the categorization of G7000x as a tomb seems to have depended to a great extent on extrapolating features known from elaborated later funerary contexts backward to those of an earlier period. This transfer is also the reason why some people believe that there

are secret rooms in the pyramid of Khufu: they have Tutankhamun in mind. It is naturally perilous to interpret a find, or to go in search of one, on the basis of parallels from more than a millennium later, since beliefs surrounding death and the afterlife change through time. Here, as always, the meaning of material culture depends on the historical and social context. Not only must we consider differences between our culture and that of the Egyptians, in addition to making our own expectations and preconceptions explicit, we must also take into account the wide variations within Egyptian culture.

What has hitherto been termed the 'tomb of Hetepheres I' is an excellent instance of the difficulties in analysing archaeological finds that postprocessual archaeologists have recognized and formulated. It also demonstrates that Egyptian material is not too alien to have a bearing on other areas of archaeological research, as non-Egyptologists sometimes think. On the contrary: due to the great variety and sophistication of the ancient data, Egyptology can complement the theoretical advance of archaeology.

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