

“Semantic Homicide” and the So-called Reserve Heads: The Theme of Decapitation in Egyptian Funerary Religion and Some Implications for the Old Kingdom¹

NICHOLAS S. PICARDO

Abstract

Funerary texts of pharaonic times indicate clearly that decapitation was one of the ancient Egyptians' most feared dangers during the post-mortem transition from earthly life to the afterlife. This theme is surveyed briefly to determine if similar concerns were held prior to the appearance of such religious literature. The result is a reconsideration of a unique corpus of Old Kingdom statuary: the reserve heads. Proceeding from a review of past interpretive studies, this article posits that several anomalous and oft-debated characteristics of the reserve heads are best understood by considering them in light of the theme of decapitation. Moreover, a reexamination of some fundamental assumptions about Old Kingdom religious beliefs, the disparities between royal and non-royal views of the hereafter, and the so-called “democratization of the afterlife” supports the hypothesis that the reserve heads reflect an emergent conception of a non-royal ba.

On the Theme of Decapitation

*To save the head and not suffer death.*² (rubric, CT 677)

The theme of decapitation appears numerous times in the primary corpora of both private and royal funerary literature of ancient Egypt, prominent examples of which will here include the *Pyramid Texts*, *Coffin Texts*, the *Book Going Forth by Day/Book of the Dead*, as well as an array of the royal Netherworld Books. Concerns about decapitation in these texts relate contextually to two closely associated aspects of mortuary religion. On one hand, loss of the head ranks among the most abhorrent of fates that could befall the ancient Egyptians' own spiritual manifestations in the otherworldly quest to attain the afterlife as envisioned in the texts themselves. In more practical, worldly terms, they reflect

¹ This article is an augmented presentation of ideas first raised in a talk delivered at the 53rd Annual Meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt (Baltimore, 2002), entitled “Semantic Homicide and Ritual Decapitation: the Theme of the Headless Dead in Private Funerary Religion,” and elaborated upon in a presentation entitled “Interpreting Negative Evidence: The Case for a Private (Non-royal) BA-concept in the Old Kingdom” at the 57th Annual Meeting of the ARCE (Jersey City, NJ, 2006). A brief summary of some material has appeared as Nicholas S. Picardo, “Dealing with Decapitation Diachronically,” *Nekhen News* 16 (Fall, 2004), 13–14. The author's most gracious thanks are extended to those who have assisted in the development and improvement of this study: David P. Silverman (University of Pennsylvania) and Denise Doxey (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) for comments and suggestions during each stage of study; Renée Friedman (British Museum) for insightful exchanges on the topic of decapitation; Peter Der Manuelian (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Giza Archives Project—www.mfa.org/giza) for several references and for making information so easily accessible through the Giza Archives; Rita Freed (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) for permission to study and/or publish photographs and files in her charge; members of the North Texas and Washington, D.C. ARCE Chapters who shared their interest and thoughts on preliminary talks that covered aspects of this subject matter; to Julie Huang for invaluable editorial assistance, unfailing support, and the line art illustrations that accompany this article.

² Adriann de Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts* 6, OIP 81 (Chicago, 1956), 304. See also R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* 2 (Warminster, 1977), 244.

concerns for the integrity and long-term survival of the corpse in the tomb. The intensely negative status of the act is stressed in funerary texts by its close association with other detrimental treatments of the deceased, such as incineration and inversion.³ Such fates represent the direst of outcomes because they violate the purpose of mortuary texts, rituals, and preparations that, in sum, were meant to facilitate the deceased's transition from an earthly existence into an eternal afterlife. For the ancient Egyptian these literally were fates worse than death. The consequence of decapitation amounted to a "second death" that terminated hopes for an afterlife and condemned the deceased to oblivion.⁴

Egyptian attitudes towards the act of decapitation in life seem to have mirrored its significance in funerary religion, in all likelihood based in part on the fear of its post-mortem consequences.⁵ Beheading (customarily connoted by the verb *hsk* 𓂏𓂏𓂏) was considered a demise so grisly and ideologically extreme that only the most reprehensible individuals deserved to lose their heads.⁶ First and foremost were the king's enemies, i.e., foreigners and rebels, towards whom a policy of beheading experienced a long history. Present in some of the earliest pharaonic iconography, such as the obverse of the Narmer Palette from the Early Dynastic Period, it was by late Ramesside times an established element of royal textual tradition.⁷ In addition to real-world application against these recipients, decapitation also was directed ritually against enemies and criminals in the symbolic "killings" invoked through execration magic (see below) and in "curses" or "threat-formulae" against robbers included in some tomb inscriptions.⁸ However, most of the more violent tomb threats likely were expected to be meted out in the afterlife, or perhaps after death but prior to the afterlife.⁹ Evidence for actual corporal punishment and punitive mutilation of Egyptian criminals dates primarily after Old Kingdom times. The most frequent textual attestations are for the New Kingdom; however, beheading as a consequence of crime as such is not attested definitively.¹⁰

³ Robert Kriech Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, SAOC 54 (Chicago, 1993), 168–69.

⁴ Numerous terms and phrases refer to decapitation and its consequences. For a collection of examples within a broader discussion of bodily mutilations in funerary texts, see J. Zandee, *Death as an Enemy According to Ancient Egyptian Conceptions*, Studies in the History of Religions 5 (Leiden, 1960), 147–158, following an equally useful introduction on 14–19. For additional comments on eternal punishments and tortures, see Erik Hornung, *Altägyptische Höllenvorstellungen*, ASAW 59/3 (Berlin, 1968), in which most attention to decapitation can be found on 19; Erik Hornung, *The Valley of the Kings: Horizon of Eternity*, translated by David Warburton (Zurich–Munich, 1982), 149–64.

⁵ In more practical terms, per Scott Morschauser, *Threat-Formulae in Ancient Egypt* (Baltimore, 1991), 103: "the threat of beheading probably carried an implicit warning of the loss of ritual burial, as a result of bodily mutilation."

⁶ The term *hsk*, though often applied to instances of beheading, can also refer more generally to the cutting off of other parts of the body. See *Wb.* 3, 168:14; Rainer Hannig, *Ägyptisches Wörterbuch 1*, Kulturgeschichte der Antiken Welt 98/Hannig-Lexica 4 (Mainz am Rhein, 2003), 887.

⁷ For the former, W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Ceremonial Slate Palettes*, BSEA 66 (London, 1953), pl. K. For the latter, K. A. Kitchen and G. A. Gaballa, "Ramesside Varia II," *ZÄS* 96 (1969–1970), 14–28, especially 24, 26–28, following Morschauser, *Threat-Formulae*, 103, n. 497. Especially when stock phrasing is used, it is not always clear whether a claim of decapitating enemies or dissidents is more likely propaganda, an apotropaic device, or a reliable chronicle of an actual deed.

⁸ Morschauser, *Threat-Formulae*, 145–57, demonstrates that while threats of the Old Kingdom tend to be mostly jural in nature, focusing on litigation, denial of tomb offerings, and revocation of mortuary contracts with the living, those of later date more frequently promise a host of violent penalties, including decapitation (103–4). Some injunctions that mention cutting implements and acts of "cutting off," "slaughter," and the like (102–9) probably refer also to decapitation, albeit indirectly.

⁹ See Morschauser's tabular presentation of terminology and chronological distribution of the injunctions in *Threat-Formulae*, 132–34 (table 2). The array of violent corporal threats diversifies along a timetable similar to the expansion of forms and access to ritual mortuary texts (in this case particularly the *Coffin Texts* and *Book of Going Forth by Day*), with many punishments paralleling the tortures of "the damned" mentioned in them (n. 4 above).

¹⁰ Several studies address corporal/capital punishment and punitive mutilation as well as the chronological limits of the evidence: A. G. McDowell, "Crime and Punishment," in Donald B. Redford, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* 1

Mortuary texts vary in methods of conveying the need for post-mortem retention of the head and the repercussions of not accomplishing it. Some spells merely mention the threat of decapitation or the agents who will carry it out. Others implore deities for rescue or make stolid declarations that the deceased will remain uninjured. Still others characterize the deceased preemptively as one already equipped to avoid decapitators or as the beneficiary of external protection against beheading.

EXAMPLES:

Apes who cut off heads, NN will pass by you in peace, he having tied his head to his neck.¹¹ (PT 254)

Save NN's head, lest it be lost.¹² (PT 415)

May you place for me my head on my neck . . . May you cause me to become an *akh* . . . May you rescue me from the fishers/fowlers of Osiris who cut off heads, who sever necks, and who carry off *bas* and *akhs* to the slaughter-house of those who eat of fresh meat. The head will not be cut off; the neck will not be severed; my name will not go unknown among *akhs*.¹³ (CT 229)

O decapitator who severs necks, . . . you will not decapitate me nor will you sever my neck.¹⁴ (CT 453)

Spell for a headrest . . . Your head will not be taken from you hereafter. Your head will not be taken from (you) forever.¹⁵ (BD 166)

You arise, while his head behind you has perished. Your head will not perish. You will not be annihilated.¹⁶ (BD 177)

O very tall mountain in the realm of the dead on which the sky rests, . . . on which is a snake whose name is Knife-hurler, who is 60 cubits as it moves, and who lives by means of decapitating *akhs* and the deceased in the realm of the dead . . .¹⁷ (BD 149d)

I have not been injured . . . my head has not left my neck.¹⁸ (BD 154)

Turnabout is fair play, it would seem, and both deities and the deceased employ the same violent tactic against their own enemies and would-be assailants.

(Oxford, 2001), 315–20; Harco Willems, “Crime, Cult and Capital Punishment (Mo`alla Inscription 8),” *JEA* 76 (1990), 27–54, especially 33–43; Wolfgang Boochs, “Religiöse Strafen,” in Ursula Verhoeven and Erhart Graefe, eds., *Religion und Philosophie im Alten Ägypten: Festgabe für Philippe Derchain zu seinem 65 Geburtstag am 24. Juli 1991*, OLA 39 (Leuven, 1991), 57–64; G. P. F. van den Boorn, *Duties of the Vizier: Civil Administration in the New Kingdom*, Studies in Egyptology (London and New York, 1988), 118–19; Wolfgang Boochs, “Strafen,” *LÄ* 6 (1986), 68–72; G. P. F. van den Boorn, “On the Date of ‘The Duties of the Vizier,’” *Or* 51 (1984), 373; Anthony Leahy, “Death by Fire in Ancient Egypt,” *JESHO* 27 (1984), 199–206; David Lorton, “The Treatment of Criminals in the Ancient Near East,” *JESHO* 20 (1977), 2–64, esp. 50–53.

¹¹ Kurt Sethe, *Die Altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte* 1 (Leipzig, 1908), 154. For translations, see also James P. Allen, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, SBLWAW 23 (Atlanta: 2005), 44; R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford, 1998), 64.

¹² Sethe, *Altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte* 1, 405. See also J. Allen, *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, 85; Faulkner, *Pyramid Texts*, 137.

¹³ CT 3, 295–96. See also R. O. Faulkner, *Coffin Texts* 1 (Warminster, 1994), 182–83.

¹⁴ CT 5, 322; Faulkner, *Coffin Texts* 2, 84.

¹⁵ Edouard Naville, *Das ägyptische Totenbuch der XVIII. bis XX. Dynastie* 1 (Graz-Austria, 1971), pl. 185. See vol. 2, 428, for a similar assurance in BD variant 151c, a “Spell for a secret (or mysterious) head.” For translations, see R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, (Austin, 1999), 145, 161; Thomas George Allen, *The Book of the Dead or Going Forth By Day*, SAOC 37 (Chicago, 1974), 148, 162.

¹⁶ Naville, *Totenbuch*, Pl. 201. See also Faulkner, *Book of the Dead*, 176; T. Allen, *Book of the Dead*, 186.

¹⁷ Edouard Naville, *The Funeral Papyrus of Iouiya* (London, 1908), pl. 31. See also Faulkner, *Book of the Dead*, 139; T. Allen, *Book of the Dead*, 143.

¹⁸ Dows Dunham, “A Fragment from the Mummy Wrappings of Tuthmosis III,” *JEA* 17 (1931), 209–10, pl. 33. See also Faulkner, *Book of the Dead*, 153; T. Allen, *Book of the Dead*, 154.

EXAMPLES:

This hand of NN that comes against you is the hand of the great fettering-goddess in the midst of the Enclosure of Life.¹⁹ The one it catches will not live; the one it hits, his head cannot join.²⁰ (PT 384)

Thoth's blade has been sharpened, and the knife that removes heads and cuts out hearts has been honed, and [it] will remove the heads and cut out the hearts of those who will cross NN when he goes to you, Osiris²¹ (PT 477)

Catch them [those who accompany Seth]! Remove their heads!²² Cut off their limbs! May you disembowel them. May you cut out their hearts. May you drink from their blood.²³ (PT 535)

Take for yourself your satchel, your staff, your bow, your loin-cloth, your sandals, and your arrow for the road, that you may cut off the head and sever the neck of all male and female enemies [var: malevolent dead persons] who would hasten your death.²⁴ (CT 23)

This NN will decapitate you who opposed his way, lifting up your head[s] upon his arms.²⁵ (CT 660)

I have decapitated every evil thing there is by means of the *mntyt*-knife in my hand.²⁶ (CT 820)

They [enemies of Horus] have been conducted to the place of execution of the East. They have been decapitated²⁷ (BD 19)

Yet another approach includes an element of contingency, promising restoration even in the event of decapitation:

Not taking a man's head from him: I am a Great One, son of a Great One . . . to whom was given his head after its cutting off. His²⁸ head was not taken from him after its removal, and NN's head will not be taken from him after it has been cut off.²⁹ (CT 390)

The most graphic pictorial depictions of the already decapitated dead appear in scenes of some royal Netherworld Books of the New Kingdom and later. For instance, they appear as either headless bodies or disembodied heads in the Second and Sixth Divisions of the *Book of Caverns* and the Seventh *Amduat* Hour (fig. 1a-c). Such figures serve internally in two major ways. They may be grouped with

¹⁹ J. Allen, *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, 95, n. 36 notes that this epithet is common to the goddess Mafdet. See C. Leitz, *CGG* 3, 235–236. Other allusions to Mafdet's participation in decapitation occur in *PT* 298 and 519.

²⁰ Sethe, *Altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte* 1, 367. The translation here favors that of J. Allen, *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, 89 over that of Faulkner, *Pyramid Texts*, 127, rendering the suffix pronoun *.s* as “it” to agree with the deceased king's hand (feminine *ḏrt*) rather than “she” to agree with the goddess. This is primarily an academic matter, since the identity between the king's hand and the goddess' hand effectively makes both referents of the pronoun. The essential sense of the passage is the same regardless of translation choice.

²¹ Kurt Sethe, *Die altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte* 2 (Leipzig, 1910), 961–63. The translation here is that of J. Allen, *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, 129. See also Faulkner, *Pyramid Texts*, 165. Thoth also decapitates enemies of the deceased in *PT* 367.

²² These severed heads are an offering to Osiris in *PT* 139.

²³ Kurt Sethe, *Altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte* 2 (Leipzig, 1910), 221; See also J. Allen, *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, 102–3, and Faulkner, *Pyramid Texts*, 203.

²⁴ Adriaan de Buck, *CT* 1, 71–72; Faulkner, *Coffin Texts*, 14–15. See also this spell's slightly more verbose descendent (*BD* 169e) in T. Allen, *Book of the Dead*, 176.

²⁵ *CT* 6, 280; Faulkner, *Coffin Texts* 2, 230.

²⁶ *CT* 7, 20; R.O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* 3 (Warminster, 1994), 11.

²⁷ Hermann Grapow, *Urk.* 5 (Leipzig, 1915–17), 143; Thomas George Allen, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead Documents in the Oriental Institute Museum at the University of Chicago*, OIP 82 (Chicago, 1960), 105, pl. 16.

²⁸ “His” here refers to Osiris, as is explicit in the nearly verbatim descendent of this spell in *BD* 43a.

²⁹ *CT* 5, 60–64; Faulkner, *Coffin Texts* 2, 18. For color-coding of the decapitated dead to signify non-existence, see Erik Hornung, *Valley of the Kings*, 161, fig. 120.

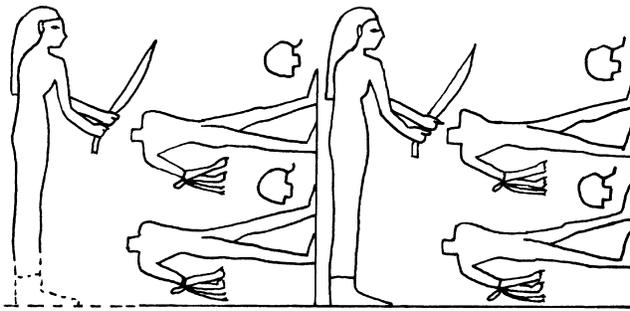


Fig. 1a. The decapitation of enemies in the 6th Division of the Book of Caverns (after Alexandre Piankoff, *The Tomb of Ramesses VI* [New York, 1954], fig. 20).



Fig. 1c. Decapitated enemies in the 7th Division of the Amduat (after Piankoff, *Tomb of Ramesses VI*, fig. 80).

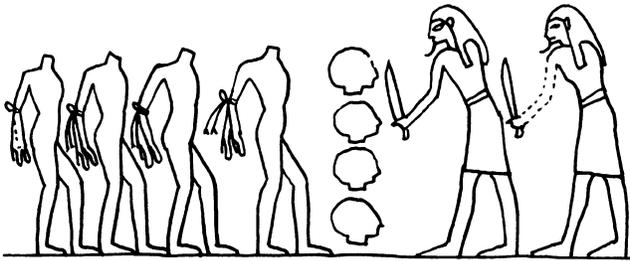


Fig. 1b. The decapitation of enemies in the 2nd Division of the Book of Caverns (after Piankoff, *Tomb of Ramesses VI*, fig. 11).

the several kinds of obstacles and “demons” that work against the deceased’s progress towards the ultimate objective of an afterlife. More broadly, however, they serve as cautionary emblems of a final state of being that one would do well to avoid. The underlying logic at work is not random. Deceased Egyptians who were deemed unfit to enter into the company of the gods effectively become enemies of *maat*—what

might be called “the damned”—and were subject to similar treatment as traditional enemies. Accordingly, the *Amduat*’s Eleventh Hour text also comments on the ultimate import of their inclusion, capturing the essence of the theme of decapitation in mortuary religion: “You have been decapitated, that you may not come into being.”³⁰

Explicit attention to decapitation is not distributed equally through all time periods. As suggested by the passages quoted above, the earliest period to which the need for post-mortem head retention can be traced textually is the latter part of the Old Kingdom, from which exclusively royal funerary literature—the *Pyramid Texts*—treat the theme of decapitation in a manner similar to later references.³¹ Comparable apprehension about decapitation is not to be found, at least via such direct textual evidence, in the private sphere. Old Kingdom private tombs carry mainly offering formulae and, in its

³⁰ Erik Hornung, *Das Amduat: Die Schrift des verborgenen Raumes* 1 (Wiesbaden, 1963), 189 and 2, 181; Erik Hornung, *Texte zum Amduat* 3, *Aegyptiaca Helvetica* 15 (Basel, 1994), 782. See also Ritner, *Mechanics*, 169.

³¹ See, however, G. R. H. Wright, “The Egyptian Sparagmos,” *MDAIK* 35 (1979), 345–58, especially 352–53, where Wright distinguishes dismemberment in the Pyramid Texts from treatments of later texts, proposing that Old Kingdom funerary customs approached decapitation and other dismemberment as necessary, ostensibly positive precursors to reconstitution and resurrection. Jan Assman “Death and Initiation in the Funerary Religion of Ancient Egypt,” in William Kelly Simpson, ed., *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt*, *YES* 3 (New Haven, 1989), 135–59, classifies (137–39) dismemberment as a component of a “biomorphic” mode of transformation and cites (135) as a precursor to Wright’s ideas the discussion of A. Hermann, “Zergliedern und Zusammenfügen. Religionsgeschichtliches zur Mumifizierung,” *NUMEN* 3 (1956), 81–96. Assmann argues that decapitation is always negative in literature. Roland Tefnin, “Les têtes magiques de Gizah,” *BSFE* 120 (1991), 30, characterizes the ancient perspective metaphorically, suggesting that death was viewed as a kind of dismemberment.

later phases, autobiographical narratives and moral statements, none of which are couched in the same ritualized terminology and content of the *Pyramid Texts*. Explanations for the stark division between royal and non-royal mortuary expression customarily adhere to the model of the “democratization of the afterlife.”³² By this model restrictions on access to and use of the ritual knowledge codified in the *Pyramid Texts* was initially sequestered for use only by the king in his burial monument, but these restrictions eased through time. Spreading first to the pyramids of some late Old Kingdom queens, the texts were appropriated gradually by some elite members of the non-royal population. An offshoot developmental trajectory then spawned the *Coffin Texts*, which appeared perhaps by the latest phase of the Old Kingdom, but became more widely available in the Middle Kingdom.³³

The point at which the migration of the royal texts into the private sphere can be documented is a pivotal issue in assessing Old Kingdom religion. The expectation of a divine, celestially-located afterlife existence accompanied this trickle-down dispersion, ostensibly narrowing the gap between king and private individual with respect to many religious prerogatives. This transition is thought to have gained its initial momentum during the First Intermediate Period. The private outlook was not devoid of afterlife aspirations prior to this era, of course. However, if disparities in mortuary material culture and text are interpreted accurately as signs of corresponding differences in afterlife ideology, up to this time the royal and private expectations for the afterlife contrasted more than in other periods of pharaonic history. Whereas the king anticipated an eternal, celestial, and otherworldly existence among his divine predecessors in the realm of the gods, the perceived continued existence of non-royals had an earth- and tomb-bound focus, grounded firmly in activities and environments of this world. Further, elite private individuals linked the quality of their sustained afterlife to that of their king to a great degree, a belief reflected in the desire to establish their tombs in mastaba fields of the Memphite royal necropolises.³⁴

It must be remembered that the democratization model is founded largely on the traceable transmission of texts. Care must be taken to distinguish between the formal, written codification of knowledge and the existence of the knowledge itself. Particularly when issues of decorum may have been a major force in creating the distributional pattern observed in the surviving record, the latter may precede the former by a considerable amount of time.³⁵ This is not to question the initial exclusivity of the Pyramid Texts for the king, nor of beliefs therein, but rather to suggest that strict lines need not be drawn as a matter of course between royal and non-royal belief systems and that overlap is not only possible, but probable even when documented expressions seem at first to exhibit rigid divisions. The trope of post-mortem decapitation serves here as a case in point. If texts comprise the sole basis of interpretation, the theme of decapitation appears to be isolated to the royal “version” of the

³² See James Henry Breasted, *The Dawn of Conscience* (New York, 1934), 223–49; Jorgen Pødemann Sørensen, “Divine Access: the So-called Democratization of Egyptian Funerary Literature as a Socio-cultural Process,” in Gertie Englund, ed., *The Religion of the Ancient Egyptians. Cognitive Structures and Popular Expressions: Proceedings of Symposia in Uppsala and Bergen 1987 and 1988*, Uppsala Studies in Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern Civilizations 20 (Uppsala, 1989), 109–25; and especially the recent discussion of James P. Allen, “Some Aspects of the Non-royal Afterlife in the Old Kingdom,” in Miroslav Bárta, ed., *The Old Kingdom Art and Archeology: Proceedings of the Conference, Prague, May 31–June 4, 2004* (Prague, 2004), 9–17. For a reconsideration of the model, see Harco Willems, *Les textes des sarcophages et la démocratie: éléments d’une histoire culturelle du Moyen Empire Égyptien* (Paris, 2008), 133–228.

³³ For a summary of this developmental history, see Erik Hornung, *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife*, translated by David Lorton (Ithaca–London, 1999), 1–12.

³⁴ This pattern, which became prominent in the Memphite region as of Dynasty 4, was likely based on practical social, political, and economic considerations and not just religious concerns. See the discussion of Ann Macy Roth, “Social Change in the Fourth Dynasty: The Spatial Organization of Pyramids, Tombs, and Cemeteries,” *JARCE* 30 (1993), 33–55, especially the conclusions of 52–55.

³⁵ On differential access to religious prerogatives and trends through time, see Sørensen, “Divine Access,” 112–17.

afterlife as portrayed in the *Pyramid Texts* in the Old Kingdom, not entering private contexts to an appreciable extent prior to clear non-royal appropriation of the *Pyramid Texts* or upon the advent of the *Coffin Texts*. Beyond the textual record, however, there are indeed indications that fears of decapitation were not lacking in the private funerary beliefs of the Old Kingdom. They are, in fact, detectable in a period earlier than the *Pyramid Texts* in the short-lived but well known phenomenon of the so-called reserve heads.

The Reserve Heads

Scholars have addressed the reserve heads of the Old Kingdom for several decades, yet there remains little agreement on the nature and function of this sculptural corpus. Wide ranging consensus is unlikely to be achieved soon. The ensuing treatment will venture slightly further along investigative avenues already traveled and highlight connections that are either necessary implications or logical extensions of earlier ideas. It is by no means intended as the final word on the topic of this odd, but intriguing, statuary. To some extent the following discussion is also a case study in the liberties that scholarship may take when superimposing source material post-dating earlier phenomena that defy satisfactory explanation through exclusively contemporaneous data. Roland Tefnin assesses the interpretive options aptly: “either we decide to ignore any explanation, or we agree to extrapolate, knowing the traditional character of Egyptian thought and myth.”³⁶ However, a strong foreword of caution accompanies this approach. A diachronic outlook, although unavoidable and justifiable when contemporary sources are insufficient on their own, must also guard against gross overestimation of religious or cultural conservatism. But, if enough compelling connective threads are spun, it is hoped that they will collectively form a web with sufficient tensile strength upon which to rest a reasonable burden of theoretical proof, if at least for the moment.

Most details of the assemblage have been covered duly by the relevant scholarly literature, so a recapitulation of the most essential points here is summary in scope.³⁷ Just over thirty reserve heads are recorded, distinguished typologically from other statuary by their head-only form (fig. 2). Eight disarticulated ears thought to have belonged to such heads have also been found. Most of the reserve heads date to the Fourth Dynasty reigns of Khufu (2551–2528 B.C.E.) and Khafre (2520–2494 B.C.E.) with many coming from Giza’s Western Cemetery. The earliest known example derives from Dahshur as early as the reign of Snefru (2575–2551 B.C.E.), and two heads dating to the Fifth and possibly Sixth Dynasty, respectively, were found at Saqqara and Abusir.³⁸ As known currently, then, the heads are a Memphite phenomenon with overwhelming concentration at the Giza necropolis.

³⁶ Roland Tefnin, “Reserve Heads,” in Redford, *Oxford Encyclopedia* 3, 145–47 quotation from 146.

³⁷ The most comprehensive catalogue and bibliography of the reserve heads remain those of the landmark study of Roland Tefnin, *Art et magie au temps des pyramides: L’énigme des têtes dites “de remplacement,”* MonAeg 5 (Bruxelles, 1991). To its bibliography may be added relevant studies that have appeared since its release, including Tefnin, “Reserve Heads,” 145–47; Catherine Roehrig, “Reserve Heads: An Enigma of Old Kingdom Sculpture,” in Dorothea Arnold, ed., *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids* (New York, 1999), 73–81; Nicholas Millet, “The Reserve Heads of the Old Kingdom: A Theory,” in Arnold, ed., *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids*, 233–34; Dietrich Wildung, “Technologische Bemerkungen zur Kunst des Alten Reiches: Neue Fakten zu den Ersatzköpfen,” *Les critères de datation stylistiques à l’ancien empire* (Cairo, 1998), 399–406; Friedrich Junge, “Hum-iunu, Ankh-ha-ef und die Sog. «Ersatzköpfe»,” in Rainer Stadelmann and Hourig Sourouzian, eds., *Kunst des Alten Reiches*, SDAIK 28 (Mainz am Rhein, 1995), 103–9; Dietrich Wildung, “Zerstörungsfreie Untersuchungen an ägyptischen Objekten,” *Jahrbuch Preußlicher Kulturbesitz* 29 (1992), 133–56; Elżbieta Dubis, “Some Remarks on Egyptian Reserve Heads,” *Studies in Ancient Art and Civilization* 4 (1992), 19–25; Heike Schmidt, “Zur Determination und Ikonographie der sogenannten Ersatzköpfe,” *SAK* 18 (1991), 331–48; Roland Tefnin, “Les têtes magiques,” 25–37.

³⁸ The only opinion to venture that examples outside of Giza are instances of reuse is Andrey O. Bolshakov, “New Observations on the Functions of the So-called ‘Reserve Heads’,” in Christopher Eyre, ed., *Seventh International Congress of Egyptologists. Cambridge, 3–9 September 1995. Abstracts of Papers* (Oxford, 1995), 21–23, esp. 21.

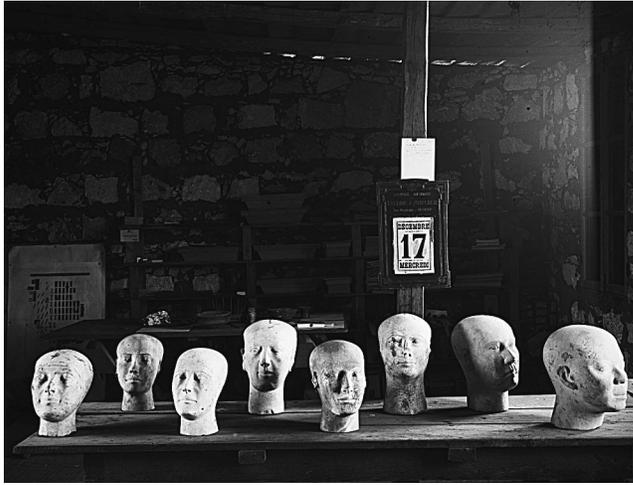


Fig. 2. Eight reserve heads excavated by George Reisner at Giza, assembled at Harvard Camp December 17, 1913. Left to right: JE 46216 (G 4640), Boston 2.1328 (G 4540), JE 46218 (G 4340), JE 46215 (G 4240), Boston 14.717 (G 4140), JE 46217 (G 4140), Boston 14.718 (G 4440), Boston 14.719 (G 4440). Photograph © 2007 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (C5443-NS; M. Shadduf, photographer).

The more skillfully crafted reserve heads are exemplars of the highly accomplished level of achievement of the plastic arts in the Old Kingdom. Most are sculpted of white limestone, with the few exceptions including two of clay and one with a substantial plaster shell. The existence of clay specimens allows that reserve heads may have experienced more widespread use than can be confirmed materially; if clay examples were common, some have likely have not survived or may have been destroyed during excavation.³⁹ Reserve heads are almost invariably life-sized and depict both women and men. Variations in facial features from one head to the next lead most scholars to discuss them collectively as akin to portraiture, if not portraiture in a strictly modern sense.⁴⁰ At the very least some degree of individualization was intended on the part of sculptors. Amid differences, some shared tendencies in the rendering of features have been interpreted

variously as hallmarks of distinct sculptural schools, familial relationships among the subjects, or ethnic background.⁴¹ It has been suggested that a comprehensive formal analysis of all examples and a refined typology of stylistic groups might lead to fruitful conclusions; however, poor accessibility and incomplete publication of several specimens hinders such analysis.⁴²

Reserve heads are tomb statues, and their inclusion with a burial appears to have been a prerogative of only certain high status members of the royal administration or family whom they depict.⁴³ Their distribution indicates that a reserve head was not an essential tomb fixture for the elite even during the florescence of their use in Dynasty 4.⁴⁴ While restriction to the upper socio-economic

³⁹ Roehrig, in Arnold, ed., *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids*, 235 (cat. 46).

⁴⁰ On the appropriateness of the term portraiture for Egyptian sculpture as well as the reserve heads specifically, see Edna R. Russmann, "Portraiture," in Edna R. Russmann, ed., *Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from the British Museum* (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 2001), 32–39, especially 33–35; Jan Assmann, "Preservation and Presentation of Self in Ancient Egyptian Portraiture," in Peter Der Manuelian, ed., *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson 1* (Boston, 1996), 565–71; Tefnin, *Art et magie*, 55–56, 64–73; Andrey O. Bolshakov, "The Ideology of the Old Kingdom Portrait," *GM* 117/118 (1990), 89–142; Junge, "Hem-iunu, Anch-ha-ef," 103–109; Donald Spanel, *Through Ancient Eyes: Egyptian Portraiture* (Birmingham, 1988), 1–37, 44–47; William K. Simpson, "A IV Dynasty Portrait Head," *BMMA* 7 (1948–1949), 286–292; Dows Dunham, "Portraiture in Ancient Egypt," *BMFA* 41 (1943), 68–72. Tefnin takes issue not with the identification of individualizing features, but rather the use of the term portraiture for the reserve heads. See *Art et magie*, 64–73.

⁴¹ Useful discussions of possible interrelationships and interpretations of stylistic trends are those of Roehrig, "Reserve Heads: An Enigma," 73–74; Junge, "Hem-iunu, Anch-ha-ef," 105–9; Tefnin, *Art et magie*, 62–69; Dubis, "Some Remarks," 22–23; Smith, *HESPOK*, 28–29; Hermann Junker, *Giza 1*, DAWW 69 (Wien & Leipzig, 1929), 63–65; George Andrew Reisner, "Accessions to the Egyptian Department during 1914," *BMFA* 13 (1915), 29–36, especially 32–33.

⁴² Roehrig, "Reserve Heads: An Enigma," 73.

⁴³ Royal favor is cited as one possible reason for the limited distribution; see William Stevenson Smith, *A History of Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom* (London, 1946), 25, and the opinion of Reisner in an unpublished manuscript quoted by Peter Der Manuelian, *Slab Stelae of the Giza Necropolis*, PPYE 7 (New Haven and Philadelphia, 2003), 136.

⁴⁴ Similarly with regard to other statuary, as per Bolshakov, "Ideology of the Old Kingdom Portrait," 132–33.

levels of Egyptian society does not itself distinguish the reserve heads from other types of tomb sculpture, their placement in an underground section of the tomb is unique. Opinions vary as to their exact location. All reserve heads come from disturbed contexts. An early suggestion of Hermann Junker is that they were installed behind a portcullis stone between the base of the tomb shaft and the burial chamber in a niche constructed within masonry blocking.⁴⁵ Though still receiving occasional support, this view has been dismissed more than once as untenable.⁴⁶ Other arguments have afforded substantial weight to a head found by Selim Hassan at Giza as a reliable indication of prescribed placement. This head was discovered “in the middle” of the burial chamber; however, the whole room had once flooded to the extent that it was filled completely with mud, with the head found lying on its side.⁴⁷ These circumstances do not qualify as undisturbed archaeological context. Additionally, no attention has been drawn to the layout of the tomb in question, which includes a sloped rather than a vertical shaft.⁴⁸ A convenient shaft base was not a problem-free option for placement of a head, since it would have to be propped somewhat awkwardly against the chamber blocking. In this instance the chamber was probably the most acceptable option. Find spots of the reserve heads suggest collectively that acceptable places of installation included multiple areas within fairly confined parameters. Reserve heads may originally have resided at the base of the tomb shaft, in the intervening space between shaft and burial chamber (where blocking and shaft orientation permitted), or in the burial chamber itself, probably near the entrance.⁴⁹ The contention that all reserve heads retrieved from outside the burial chamber were displaced by robbers implies both remarkably consistent practices and a universal sentiment among pilferers that the heads, often to the exclusion of other items, should be tossed to the shaft.⁵⁰ The weight of a life-sized head of stone is not negligible, so concerted effort would be required to move it any distance from its original placement. The proposition has been made, however, that the heads, as ritual objects, may have been discarded or damaged because they, or rather the souls of the tomb occupants depicted by them, could pose a vengeful threat to the robbers themselves.⁵¹

The reserve heads present a unique and confusing stylistic paradox. Though highly accomplished works, most examples also exhibit one or more types of damage that appear consistently enough to be considered intentional rather than the result of the rough handling by tomb robbers or the passage

⁴⁵ Junker, *Giza* 1, 144, 205 (abb. 4, taf. 10).

⁴⁶ Called into question especially by Kelley, “Reserve Heads: A Review of the Evidence,” 7–8 and Dubis, “Some Remarks,” 24. Accepting Junker’s reconstruction of a kind of “double blocking” that formed a reserve head niche are Claude Vandersleyen, *Das alte ägypten*, Propoläen Kunstgeschichte 15 (Berlin, 1975), 223; Tefnin, *Art et magie*, 51–52; Tefnin, “Têtes magiques de Gizeh,” 29; Bolshakov, “New Observations,” 22.

⁴⁷ Selim Hassan, *Excavations at Giza 7: The Mastabas of the Seventh Season and Their Description* (Cairo, 1953), 4–5.

⁴⁸ Hassan, *Excavations at Giza* 7, 4, fig. 3.

⁴⁹ Opinions vary widely as to the appropriate estimation of original reserve head placement. Some studies are confident in limiting the options to the burial chamber itself, including George Andrew Reisner, *A History of the Giza Necropolis* (Cambridge, 1942), 65; Cyril Aldred, *Old Kingdom Art in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1949), 30; Edward Brovarski, “Reserve Head,” in Sue D’Auria, Peter Lacovara, and Catherine H. Roehrig, eds. *Mummies & Magic: The Funerary Arts of Ancient Egypt* (Boston, 1988), 82–83; Dubis, “Some Remarks,” 25; Peter Lacovara, “The Riddle of the Reserve Heads,” *KMT* 8:4 (Winter 1997–98), 30–36, especially 31–33; Roehrig, “Reserve Heads: An Enigma,” 74–75; Smith, *HESPOK*, 23. Allyn L. Kelley favors the view that most reserve heads were deposited along with other offerings at the base of the tomb shaft; “Reserve Heads: A Review of the Evidence for their Placement and Function in Old Kingdom Tombs,” *BSSEA* 5:1 (1974), 6–12, especially 9–10. The possibility of an expanded zone of viable placement—from shaft base to inside the burial chamber—is favored here. Although in a minority opinion, it is the most inclusive view and is supported by find spots considered in total. See, for example, N. B. Millet, “The Reserve Heads of the Old Kingdom,” in William Kelly Simpson and Whitney M. Davis, eds., *Studies in Ancient Egypt, the Aegean, and the Sudan* (Boston, 1981), 129–31; Mohamed Saleh and Hourig Sourouzian, *The Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Official Catalogue* (Cairo: 1987), cat. 32.

⁵⁰ Roehrig, “Reserve Heads: An Enigma,” 79.

⁵¹ William K. Simpson, “IV Dynasty Portrait Head,” 288.

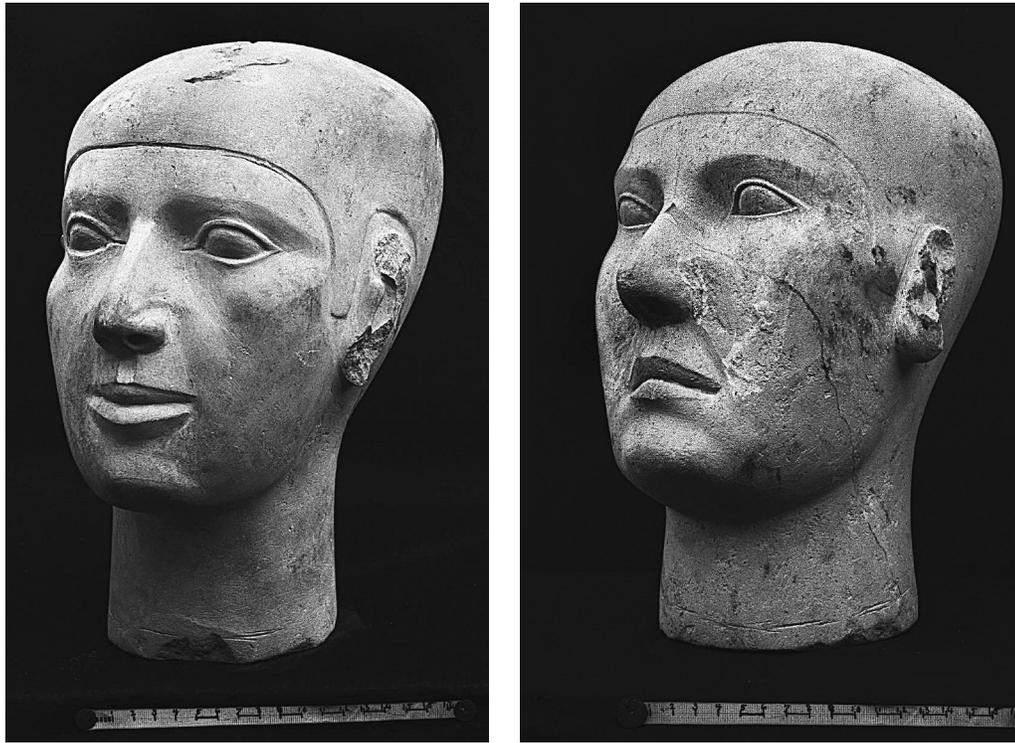


Fig. 3. Limestone reserve heads with damaged ears and incised lines along the lower portion of their necks. (Left): Reserve head of Snefruseneb from Giza tomb G 4240A (Cairo, JE 46215). (Right): Anonymous male reserve head from Giza tomb G 4440 (Boston 14.718). Photographs © 2007 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (C5344-NS, C5359-NS; M. Shadduf, photographer).

of time. Approximately a third of the heads have incised lines just above the base of the neck (fig. 3). About fifty percent exhibit an incised line or chiseled/retouched furrow running from the crown of the skull down the back of the head to the nape of the neck (fig. 4). About half also exhibit leveled, hacked, or entirely omitted ears (fig. 3). This last attribute includes examples that originally had ears sculpted from the same block of stone as the rest of the head as well as those with ears fashioned separately and affixed originally with dowels. Eyes and noses do not appear to have been targeted for damage as a rule.⁵²

The earliest and still prevailing interpretation of the reserve heads extrapolates from other funerary statuary in seeing them as *reserves*, or replacements for the deceased's actual head were it to be damaged or lost and, further, as vessels for the deceased's soul.⁵³ This perspective set the tone for most commentary produced until the 1970s, when discussions of reserve heads started to account for their odd patterns of damage. Allyn Kelley and Nicholas Millet interpret the reserve head as a prototype model, in Kelley's words "a short-lived artistic devise used by the stone workers designing

⁵² See, however, Spanel, *Through Ancient Eyes*, 46. Roehrig, in Arnold, ed., *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids*, 237 (cat. 47), feels that damage to the nose of Boston 21.328 is intentional and unique among reserve heads.

⁵³ For very early incarnations of this idea, see Ludwig Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs Ne-user-re* (Leipzig, 1907), 133; Junker, *Giza* 1, 57-61. Tefnin's thorough synthesis of early interpretations in *Art et magie*, 48-69, cannot be matched in an article-length work and should be consulted.

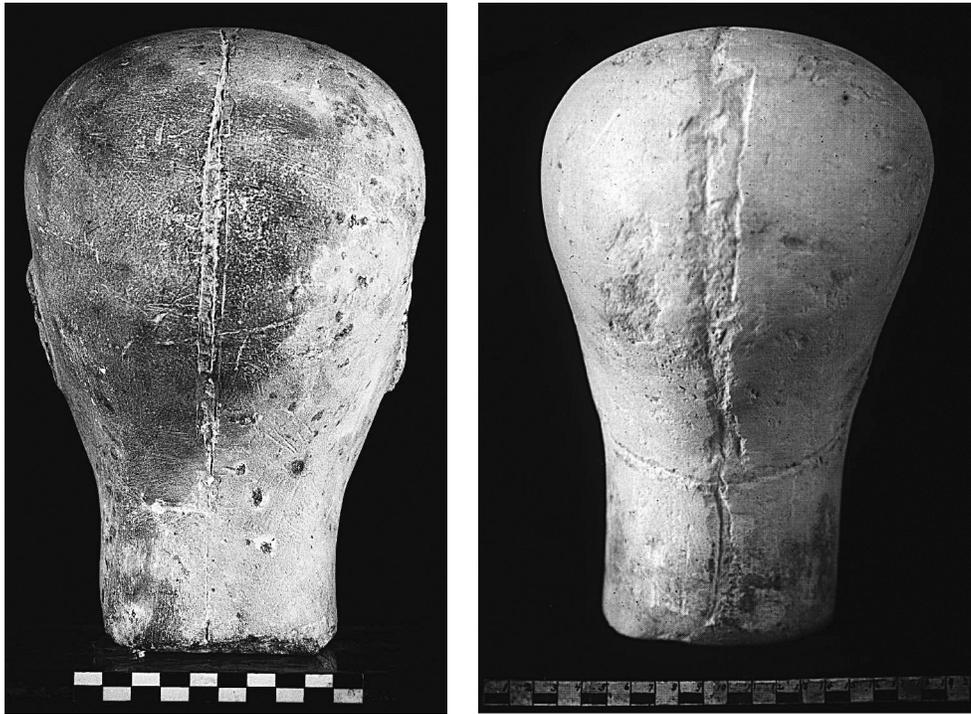


Fig. 4. The backs of two limestone reserve heads with scoring from the crown of the head down to the neck. (Left): Anonymous female reserve from Giza tomb G 5020-annex (Cairo JE67569). (Right): Reserve head of Seshemnefer I from Giza tomb G 4940 (Boston 21.329). Photographs © 2007 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (C 13520-NS; Dahi, photographer; D65-NS; Mohammedani, photographer).

tomb statues and tomb relief scenes.”⁵⁴ For Kelley the model heads were forms for shaping portable casts for easy transport and consultation at a work site, while for Millet the end products were rather plaster or linen funerary masks. Removal after the casting set caused the loss of ears and other damage. Undermining the latter theory is the fact that plaster funerary masks experienced their first significant popularity in Dynasties 5 and 6, thus after the period to which the majority of the reserve heads date. Surviving examples also attest that these were formed directly from the linen-wrapped visage of the deceased and exhibit no indications of reserve head use as templates.⁵⁵ Peter Lacovara also implicates the artisan’s workshop as the source of the enigmatic marks by contending that they are sculptors’ guidelines to assist in the initial shaping process. Topical applications of plaster and paint (discussed below), surface treatments that have not survived, would have originally concealed the most unseemly of these helpful marks.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Kelley, “Reserve Heads: A Review,” 9; Millet, “Reserve Heads of the Old Kingdom,” 129–31; Millet, “Reserve Heads of the Old Kingdom: A Theory,” 233–234. On the likelihood of such intermediate devices and their relationship to portraiture, see also Assmann, “Preservation and Presentation,” 60–61.

⁵⁵ Brovarski, “Reserve Head,” 83; Catherine Roehrig, “Mummy Mask and Body Covering” in Arnold, ed., *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids*, 476–477. For a useful catalogue and discussion of plaster masks, see Nikolaus Tacke, “Die Entwicklung der Mumienmaske im Alten Reich,” *MDAIK* 52 (1996), 307–36.

⁵⁶ Lacovara, “Riddle of the Reserve Heads,” 35–36. An objection raised by Roehrig, “Reserve Heads: An Enigma,” 79, expects that sculptors’ guidelines would be more controlled than the “haphazardly and/or violently executed” marks on several heads.

While such theories reject the premise that the damage to the reserve heads might have been intentionally injurious rather than a byproduct of sculpting methods or a secondary manufacturing process, one major line of reasoning has based itself in just that possibility. In the most thorough discussion of the reserve heads, Roland Tefnin takes a rather drastic new direction by arguing that the reserve heads, for which he prefers the label “*têtes magiques*,” were the targets of ritual mutilation.⁵⁷ In short, he believes the placement of the heads underground relates them to conceptions of the underworld that do not otherwise factor into interpretations of statues installed aboveground in a chapel or serdab. With respect to their characteristic marks, he argues that the incised lines on the necks of some heads link them to semantic notions of decapitation.⁵⁸ The removal, injury, or omission of ears ritually deafened the heads and deprived them of their senses, while the grooves down the back represent skull fractures and resultant blood flow.⁵⁹

Tefnin associates the head wounds with a moment of the “Opening of the Mouth” ceremony that includes a seemingly confrontational exchange between participants, one of whom wishes to strike the head of the mummified deceased. To this prospect the deceased’s son or the attending *sem*-priest protests: “I shall not allow you to make my father’s head become white (*shd*).”⁶⁰ This “whitened head,” then, is the reserve head, rendered so from the “bleeding out” of the head wounds.⁶¹ As reconstructed by Tefnin, violence to a reserve head was to have occurred separate from, but still as a complement to, the ceremony proper. This ritual was performed near the site of deposition of the head in the tomb, well after the departure of the deceased’s family who, although not privy to the acts, condoned them. The filling of the tomb followed immediately thereafter.⁶² This theory does not disavow the traditional view that the reserve heads were essentially spares for the deceased. Yet, Tefnin’s explanation ventures further by identifying them as devices that received prophylactic treatment during a very specific ritual act that had different objectives than those of the “Opening of the Mouth” ceremony. Whereas the head as statue-surrogate functioned to the benefit of the deceased, the follow-up ritual was prescribed rather for the living. Its purpose was execrative, intending ultimately to guard against malevolent influences that the tomb owner’s soul might later enact upon the living. To “bleed” and desensitize a head through ritual means was to debilitate the deceased from inflicting harm.

Some questions have been raised, however, as to whether the reserve heads were entirely white when buried. There is scant, but possibly revealing, evidence that at least some reserve heads originally had surface treatments that produced an exterior appearance much different than their current state.⁶³ If so, Tefnin’s theory must err in viewing the monochrome heads as finished products. At least five heads retain confirmed traces of paint or were purported to have had remnant pigment at

⁵⁷ Tefnin has produced what must be regarded by both proponents and dissenters alike as a milestone in reserve head study. Tefnin, *Art et magie*, is the most complete exposition. Shorter treatments include Tefnin, “Reserve Heads,” and Tefnin, “Les têtes magiques de Gizeh.”

⁵⁸ Tefnin, *Art et magie*, 78–83.

⁵⁹ Tefnin, *Art et magie*, 83–87. Taking this idea to an unlikely extreme is Andrey Bolshakov, “New Observations,” 22–23, who associates the cranial fissures with sensory deprivation via a less direct route: since the eyes could not be damaged overtly due to ideological importance, scoring of the head mimics the opening of the skull to induce blindness through injury to the brain’s occipital lobe, which is integral to vision.

⁶⁰ Tefnin “Reserve Heads,” 147; in the original French, Tefnin, *Art et magie*, 76, which also includes additional portions of the exchange: “*Je ne permettrai pas que tu fasses luire [litt.: shd, ‘rendes blanche’] la tête de mon père!*” Also elaborated in Tefnin, “Les têtes magiques de Gizeh,” 31. See the alternate discussion of this passage (*Szene 16*) by Eberhard Otto, who regards the meaning of *shd* in this ritual context as anything but straight-forward: *Das ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual 2*, ÄA 3 (Wiesbaden, 1960), 67–68.

⁶¹ For additional extensions of the meaning of *shd*, see Tefnin, *Art et magie*, 77 (n. 1), 84–85.

⁶² This sequence developed fully by Tefnin, *Art et magie*, 75–85.

⁶³ See the discussion of Lacovara, “The Riddle of the Reserve Heads,” 34–36.

one time.⁶⁴ Applications of plaster survive in the reserve head corpus as well. For example, the head of Seshemnefer I in Boston's Museum of Fine Arts (21.329) carries a mass of mud plaster near its nose that is customarily understood as correction for a defect in medium or workmanship, and the Giza head excavated by Selim Hassan (discussed above) carries smears of plaster on the left temple and back of the head, perhaps suggestive of significant surface coverage.⁶⁵ Yet, the application of these kinds of finishing treatments, whether done frequently or not, certainly does not itself preclude intentional administering of the scars that appear on the reserve heads, nor does it mandate that lines, grooves, and chipping would have been concealed prior to deposition in the tomb. Were there intent to render symbolic injuries as visible confirmations of a ritual procedure, the desired effect would have been more dramatic if exacted through surface detailing. Consistent with this possibility is the telling example of the reserve head of Kahotep (Berlin 16455), which is unique in being fashioned of a thick, modeled plaster shell over a stone core. It still exhibits both absence of ears and clear intentional scoring down the back of the head.⁶⁶

Multivalent Meaning and "Semantic Homicide"

A core issue in "reading" the reserve heads is one that Jan Assmann has characterized as a distinction between *somatic* versus *semiotic* realism, which is to say whether a depiction was composed to act as a "body" or as a "sign."⁶⁷ He favors the former as the probable ancient view of the reserve heads: a reserve head was viewed as a metonymic form for which the single constituent part signified the entirety. The full human body was present conceptually. So, Assmann asserts, there is no major distinction among the reserve heads, statue busts, and full-body sculptures of the Old Kingdom, all of which acted towards the preservation of the deceased as extensions of the actual body. Semiotic realism, to the contrary, presupposes an audience to whom a specific presentation of the deceased was communicated via image, itself an extension of the tomb as monument or "sign." In Assmann's view such an audience is irrelevant to the era of the reserve heads, since statuary was isolated from public view in either a serdab or subterranean chamber.⁶⁸

Another evaluation of the reserve heads proceeds from the notion that tomb occupants themselves constituted an audience of sorts. Henry Fischer, the first to bring ritual defacement to the topic of the reserve heads, posits that they were marred for similar reasons as dangerous hieroglyphs.⁶⁹ He refers specifically to a process of "killing" some hieroglyphic signs in the burial chambers of tombs, though not in the aboveground rooms of the same structures. Pierre Lacau established long ago that

⁶⁴ These are Berkeley 6-19767, Cairo JE 46216 and 44974 [= Port Saïd P4101], Boston 14.718 and 21.328. Only three customarily receive credit as dependable examples. For details of all five with references, see Tefnin, *Art et magie*, 12, 97–113 (cat. nos. 1, 5, 7, 14, 17), for interpretation of color symbolism of painted specimens, 85, n. 1. See also Brovanski, "Reserve Head," 83, for additional references on the study of paint residues. For doubts about their value as indicators of extensive treatment of the reserve heads, see Roehrig, in Arnold, ed., *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids*, 237 (n. 2; cat. 47).

⁶⁵ Millet views the application of plaster on the Boston head as too thick and haphazard for simple correction. See "The Reserve Heads of The Old Kingdom," 130–31. For complete documentation, see Tefnin, *Art et magie*, 104–5 (cat. 8), pls. 9c–d, 12 and 118–19 (cat. 24), pl. 22a–b. Roehrig identifies more subtle corrections in plaster on head 6-19767 of Berkeley's Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology in Arnold, ed., *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids*, 235 (cat. 46). It is likely that evidence for more regular use of plaster, if it once existed, has been lost to field and museum conservation priorities of years past. Compare, for instance, the pre- and post-conservation condition of MMA 48.156 in Simpson, "IV Dynasty Portrait Head," 288 (un-numbered figure), noting also Simpson's comments on 290.

⁶⁶ Tefnin, *Art et magie*, 98–99 (cat. 2), pl. 2a–d; Wildung, "Technologische Bemerkungen," 399–403.

⁶⁷ Assmann, "Preservation and Presentation," 60–63.

⁶⁸ Assmann, "Preservation and Presentation," 62.

⁶⁹ Henry G. Fischer, *L'écriture et l'art de l'Égypte ancienne: Quatre leçons sur la paléographie et l'épigraphie pharaoniques* (Paris, 1986), 130–32; followed by Bolshakov, "New Observations," 22; Tefnin, *Art et magie*, 78, 92–93.

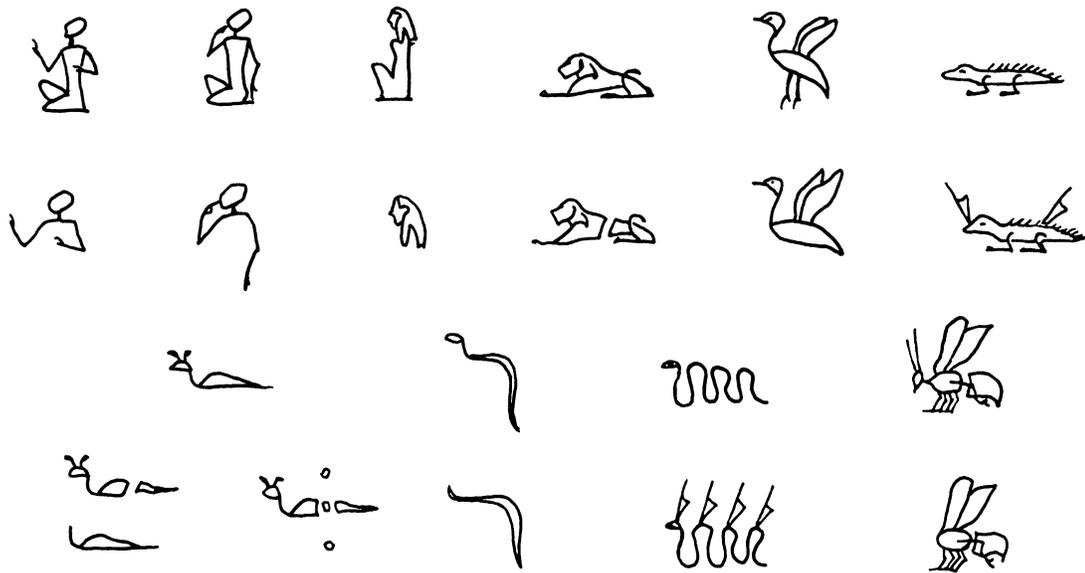


Fig. 5. A comparison of mutilated hieroglyphs and their unaltered, original forms (after A.A. Barb, "Mystery, Myth, and Magic," in J. R. Harris, ed., *The Legacy of Egypt* (Oxford, 1971), 156, fig. 3, with adjustments).

the practice was a response to the fear that certain human and animal glyphs could endanger the deceased if reanimated near the corpse.⁷⁰ Ritual mutilation of hieroglyphs is known as early as the Fifth Dynasty *Pyramid Texts* of King Unas (2353–2323 BCE). Early occurrences of hieroglyphic mutilation were mostly restricted to partial deletions or segmentation of objectionable signs, while more explicit means were used for later examples, such as depicting them as stabbed with knives (fig. 5).⁷¹ According to Fischer, the reserve head is a statue reduced effectively to hieroglyphic form. It acted like a determinative for the deceased's physical remains, signifying the dead person inasmuch as some isolated Old Kingdom writings of the deceased's name (or the word *k3*) included an ideogram of a person with bleeding head as a determinative.⁷² Injuries to a reserve head as a three-dimensional "sign" rendered it innocuous by "killing" it, in turn permitting the head to accompany the deceased into the next life presumably to fulfill the cephalic role for which it was created.

For both Fischer and Tefnin the perception of threat is integral to an understanding of the reserve heads. However, there are some points of concern in how each identifies the source of perceived danger. If left unqualified, Fischer's likening of the reserve heads to dangerous hieroglyphs carries the awkward precondition that the Egyptians viewed these statues, created as images of and for tomb

⁷⁰ P. Lacau, "Suppressions et modifications de signes dans les textes funéraires," *ZÄS* 51 (1913), 1–64.

⁷¹ For examples of mutilated hieroglyphic forms, see Lacau, "Suppressions et modifications," 1, 26–57; Paul J. Frandsen, "On Categorization and Metaphorical Structuring: Some Remarks on Egyptian Art and Language," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 7 (1997), 71–104, especially 83 (with additional references). For the use of knives, see Ritner, *Mechanics*, 163–67.

⁷² Fischer, *L'écriture et l'art*, 132–34 for discussion and references. Note that the type of figure cited (133) as spouting blood bears strong similarities to others that depict an arrangement of hair tossed forward. Proper classification is not always self-evident, especially with early or highly stylized examples. See Michel Baud and Marc Etienne, "Le vanneau et le couteau. Un rituel monarchique sacrificiel dans l'Égypte de la Ire dynastie," *Archeo-Nil* 10 (2000), 55–78; Sean P. Dougherty, "A Little More Off the Top," *Nekhen News* 16 (Fall, 2004), 11–12, especially insets. Fischer leaves little room for doubt in this case by noting that this attribute of the figures are rendered in red for blood. See also Georges Posener, "Les empreintes magiques de Gizeh et les morts dangereux," *MDAIK* 16 (1958), 252–70, especially 255–56. For another perspective on statuary as determinatives, see Florence Friedman, "On the Meaning of Some Anthropoid Busts from Deir el-Medina," *JEA* 71 (1985), 82–97.

owners, as dangers to the deceased—and *in their own* tombs, no less—specifically because of what (in this case, whom) they depict. Although Tefnin’s position sidesteps this problem by transferring the perceived threat instead to the living, the moment of interment is a terribly inopportune, not to mention unparalleled venue for preemptive strikes against a potentially troublesome spirit of the newly buried deceased. Both explanations run contrary to the positive intentions of ritual preparations for burial, so it is difficult to accept them as they are.⁷³ Equally problematic is the timing of a prescribed attack on a proxy for the deceased in close conjunction with the rites designed to restore their senses and subsistence faculties.⁷⁴ To be sure, the living sometimes regarded the dead as malevolent or mischievous, including them in execration texts and identifying them as the causes of negative events in some letters to the dead.⁷⁵ To explain the apparent selectivity of reserve head use toward this protective objective, Tefnin offers the tentative and very tenuous hypothesis that certain dead people harbored more danger to the living than others, perhaps because of circumstances of death.⁷⁶

Both explanations that advocate ritually motivated damage contradict the superlatively positive tone maintained towards the deceased in Old Kingdom funerary religion. Hence, might one pose this question: if the deceased themselves were not the targets of harm, might the target rather have been *how* they were depicted? To explore this subtle distinction adequately, it must first be recognized that an image may be read simultaneously as both body and sign, producing concurrent, yet still independent, valences of meaning that need not exclude or even necessarily relate to each other. Central to this reasoning is the premise, consistent with the views of Fischer and Assmann, that the statuary heads signified the deceased directly, the rendering of individualized features substituting for an inscription of the individual’s name that appeared on aboveground tomb components and/or statuary.⁷⁷ It is amid this essentially *somatic* relationship between the reserve head and the deceased person that concepts well askew of its primary use as statuary could interject, elevated to new *semiotic* levels by the ritually active setting of the burial chamber.⁷⁸

As mentioned above, Tefnin relates the reserve heads to the semantic field of decapitation via the incised lines on the necks of many examples. However, if an explicit injury is indicated, these marks seem to qualify more readily as throat and neck slashes than unequivocal signs of disarticulation of the head from the body. A blunter suggestion of decapitation is actually the very feature that defines the reserve heads formally: reserve heads *are* disembodied heads. They harbor potential to connote the semantic associations of the decapitated condition which, as noted above, was regarded as intensely negative by the late Old Kingdom. Reserve heads are essentially visual embodiments of decapitation. Whereas the reserve head as a body, signifying the deceased through mimicked features, was innocuous, the disembodied head as a sign of decapitation—the deceased in a decapitated state,

⁷³ Tefnin, “Têtes magiques de Gizeh,” 31, acknowledges the overtly positive subject matter.

⁷⁴ Noted by Schmidt, “Zur Determination und Ikonographie,” 338

⁷⁵ For instances that reveal how the living regarded the dead see Alan H. Gardiner, *The Attitude of the Ancient Egyptians to Death and the Dead* (Cambridge, 1935), 16–34; Ivan Koenig, “Un revenue inconvenant? (Papyrus Deir el-Médineh 37),” *BIFAO* 79 (1979), 103–119; Georges Posener, “Les ‘afârît dans l’ancienne Egypte.” *MDAIK* 37 (1981), 393–401; Edward F. Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt*, SBLWAW 1 (Atlanta, 1990), 211–17.

⁷⁶ Most recently Tefnin, “Reserve Heads,” 147. Tefnin also acknowledges a wider array of possibilities, though commits to none, in “Têtes magiques de Gizeh,” 34–35.

⁷⁷ On the distinction between and presumed functional equivalence of portrait statues with conventional statues made “portraits by name” see Andrey O. Bolshakov, *Man and his Double in Egyptian Ideology of the Old Kingdom*, *ÄAT* 37 (Wiesbaden, 1997), 157–60.

⁷⁸ For recent studies of the semiotic potential and complex dynamics of ancient Egyptian writing and iconography, see Orly Goldwasser, *Prophets, Lovers and Giraffes: Wor(l)d Classification in Ancient Egypt* (Wiesbaden, 2002); and especially Orly Goldwasser, *From Icon to Metaphor: Studies in the Semiotics of the Hieroglyphs*. (Fribourg, Switzerland, 1995). See also the eloquent discussion of Frandsen, “On Categorization and Metaphorical Structuring.” Assmann covers some similar points in “Preservation and Presentation,” 60–63 and in his discussion of “hieroglyphicity” on 66–67.

no less—surely was not. This reasoning does not apply to other kinds of truncated statue forms, such as well known examples like the bust of Akh-haf or engaged partial statuary in false door niches like those in the tombs of Nefer-seshem-Ptah and Idu.⁷⁹ Unlike the reserve heads, these figures are anchored physically and visually to full compositions that designated focal locations for the offering cult. This integration of a partial body into a scene easily supports a fully somatic and metonymic reality. These are also statues of the aboveground chapel. Patterns of hieroglyphic mutilation suggest that the underground areas of a tomb, particularly the burial chamber, were more sensitive to dangers introduced by images.⁸⁰ Even once subterranean tomb inscriptions became common, the Egyptians often distinguished between material recorded in public components of the tomb and that applied to sealed areas below. The former concentrated on themes relating to earthly existence—or at least stressed earthly life as the dominant metaphor—and the subterranean tomb was a venue mainly for religious and magical material of more overtly otherworldly significance.⁸¹ It can be surmised that, like hieroglyphs, if the reserve heads had been installed aboveground, the need for their characteristic treatment would have been unnecessary.

Further comparison to mutilated hieroglyphs can assist in fleshing out this provisional theory. A crucial point is that they were regarded as hieroglyphs first and foremost. Hieroglyphs are symbols that denote phonetic and semantic values that enable them to function as constituents of written language. As writing, they were not considered harmful. However, hieroglyphs also delimit and encompass categories of meaning, especially when employed as determinatives.⁸² As images drawn primarily from the visible world, their shapes had both concrete and conceptual referents with extra-linguistic existence and associations for the Egyptian viewer regardless of literacy. Some forms evoked semantic categories and entities that were menacing in the subterranean sector of the tomb either because of dangers and capabilities of their real-world archetypes or due to mythico-religious associations.⁸³ Alterations of the original hieroglyphic sign severed its link to the dangerous sphere of meaning, or, as J. P. Frandsen characterizes the process: “mutilation has deprived it/him of one or more of its/his inalienable properties, that is, parts of vital importance for the whole, and it/he does not, therefore, stand for the dangerous whole.”⁸⁴ Conspicuously, though, systematic alterations of hieroglyphic forms did not distort or divert their primary function. Words with mutilated signs are viable both orthographically and syntactically. But, by visibly inflicting “fatal” adjustments at the time of inscribing—a process here termed “semantic homicide”—the Egyptians negated a category of detrimental meaning

⁷⁹ For these figures and additional references, see Andrey Bolshakov, “What did the Bust of Ankh-haf Originally Look Like?” *JMMA* 3 (1991), 5–14.

⁸⁰ That the burial chamber was ultimately special in this sense may be reflected by the Fourth Dynasty tomb chapel of Queen Meresankh III (G 7530sub) in Giza’s Eastern Cemetery, which carries the earliest appreciably sized subterranean hieroglyphic inscriptions applied to walls. The signs show no mutilations. However, they appear not in a burial chamber but in a unique subterranean rock-cut chapel under the northeast corner of mastaba G 7530/7540. See discussions by Peter János, *Giza in der 4. Dynastie: Die Baugeschichte und Belegung einer Nekropole des Alten Reiches I: Die Mastabas der Kernfriedhöfe und die Felsgräber* (Wien, 2005), 323, 349–58; Dows Dunham and William Kelly Simpson, *The Mastaba of Queen Mersyankh III G 7530–7540*, Giza Mastabas I (Boston, 1974); George Reisner, “The Tomb of Meresankh, a Great-Granddaughter of Queen Hetep-Heres I and Sneferuw,” *BMFA* 25 (1927), 64–79. The somewhat exceptional nature of this chapel renders it a poor basis for broad generalizations. Several factors might explain the chapel’s absence of altered signs. They may not have been considered dangerous in a chapel regardless of its articulation vis-à-vis the rest of the tomb. It is also possible that hieroglyphic mutilation, an inconsistent practice, was simply not considered by those who applied the decoration, whether ignored deliberately or just unknown to them.

⁸¹ For related commentary see John Baines, “Society, Morality, and Religious Practice,” in Byron E. Shafer, ed., *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice* (Ithaca–London, 1991), 123–200, especially 149–50.

⁸² The type of sign most frequently “killed” was the determinative.

⁸³ There are also settings in which hieroglyphic signs were not mutilated programmatically, yet the meaning of a word contributed threatening status and required ritual response for at least one character. For example, see the “fatal” adjustments of writings of the names of Apophis and Seth in Ritner, *Mechanics*, 167 (figs. 14d–e), with references.

⁸⁴ “On Categorization and Metaphorical Structuring,” 84, within the very informative discussion of 83–84.

as well as its perceived harmful influences from the immediate proximity of the deceased in the burial chamber.

Hieroglyphic mutilation is related paradigmatically to execration magic, the basic act of which is the ritual destruction or defacement of either an image of a detested entity or an object with said entity's name applied to it.⁸⁵ These actions were thought to magically nullify the deleterious impact of the named offenders, who included traditional foes such as foreigners, for example, Nubians and Asiatics, or even intangible "enemies" such as threatening actions, sentiments, and intentions. Execration practices worked towards conceptual prophylaxis rather than empirically verifiable outcomes. Proof of its efficacy was inherent in the enactment of damage or destruction itself. As with hieroglyphic mutilation, the earliest archaeological evidence of execration practices dates to the later Old Kingdom.⁸⁶ A striking out of detrimental meaning and/or influence is indeed the probable motivation behind the damage to the reserve heads. They were undoubtedly funerary statues first and foremost, ones likely enough conceived as magical prosthetics in case of loss or damage to the physical head and as housing for a spiritual component of the deceased. But, secondary semantic associations with the decapitated condition had no business in the tomb, the environment in which it was dreaded most ardently. These required a response.

As a corpus the reserve heads exhibit a narrow and consistent repertoire of injury types that are clear parallels in sculpture to altered hieroglyphic shapes in writing. The hallmarks of "semantic homicide" in two-dimensional hieroglyphic forms—segmentation, partial deletion, and stabbing—translate into markings that signal the same process against the three-dimensional heads—slashes on the neck, cranial wounds, and disfigured or omitted ears.⁸⁷ With the cancellation of the semantic field of decapitation verified by symbolic marks, the heads remained intact enough for use as magical replacements. The Egyptians appear to have been careful to retain the functionality of all victims of "semantic homicide" by preserving ease of recognition. Idiosyncratic and easily identifiable characteristics remain even in cases of the most drastically altered hieroglyphs. Similarly, for all the intentional damage to the reserve heads they appear never to have been defaced beyond recognition.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ On the process of execration magic and related practices, including those in mortuary contexts, see Stephan J. Seidlmayer, "Execration Texts," in Redford, *Oxford Encyclopedia* 1, 487–89; Ritner, *Mechanics*, 136–72; Jan Assmann, "Spruch 23 der Pyramidentexte und die Ächtung der Feinde Pharaos," *Hommages à Jean Leclant* 1, BdE 106/1 (Le Caire, 1994), 45–59. For purposes here, note that symbolic cutting at the neck is found in the known corpus. See Posener, "Empreintes magiques de Gizeh," 257.

⁸⁶ Hermann Junker, *Giza* 8, 30–38; Abdel Moneim Abu Bakr and Jürgen Osing, "Ächtungstexte aus dem Alten Reich," *MDAIK* 29 (1973), 97–133; Jürgen Osing, "Ächtungstexte aus dem Alten Reich (II)," *MDAIK* 32 (1976), 133–86; Stefan Wimmer, "Neue Ächtungstexte aus dem Alten Reich," *BN* 67 (1993), 87–101. Tefnin's reconstructed ritual of mutilation is based upon the basic principles of execration magic. See *Art et magie*, 81–85, 92–93. A defining distinction between "pure" execration procedure and "semantic homicide" is that objects subjected to the former are in most, if not all instances created to be destroyed. Destruction was part of their primary function. For the latter process destruction was undesirable. Both cases share the necessary application of identifiable marks to indicate harm, destruction, or death as tangible documentation of otherwise invisible results.

⁸⁷ Omission was evidently equivalent to mutilation in some cases. See Lacau, "Suppressions et modifications des signes," and idem., "Suppression des noms devins les textes de la chambre funéraire," *ASAE* 26 (1926), 69–81. On a related note, another type of damage to reserve heads—included by some studies but not covered in detail here—is an often awkwardly executed, incised retracing of the hairlines. See Tefnin, *Art et magie*, 87–89, for tentative associations with scalping. For the moment, it may be best to maintain a less specific interpretation by regarding these incisions as perhaps one more viable alteration of a statue head's original form.

⁸⁸ Noting this care is Tefnin, *Art et magie*, 84–85, 87 (n. 3). In consideration of H. Fischer's view, he characterizes the reserve head mutilations as an attempt to convert them to three-dimensional versions of hieroglyph A14 of Gardiner's List of Hieroglyphic Signs, "man with blood streaming from his head." Sir Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar: Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs*, 3rd edition, revised (Oxford, 1988), 443. According to Tefnin, this emulation could not be entirely faithful to the hieroglyphic archetype because such would require frontal injuries that also would have impeded the statue's viability as surrogate for the deceased's spirit. See also the related commentary of Roehrig, "Reserve Heads: An Enigma," 79.

Incidentally, given that several methods of killing a hieroglyph were seen as equal in their homicidal efficacy, it is not problematic that the exact same injuries fail to appear on every reserve head or, for that matter, that some examples carry none at all.⁸⁹ Neither the general practice nor any single method of mutilating hieroglyphic signs was ever completely consistent.⁹⁰ It appears to have been an option invoked with varying frequency, not an indispensable ritual.

The Reserve Heads, The KA (*k3*), and an Inchoate Private BA (*b3*)?

The question follows, then, as to why the Egyptians permitted such statuary in the tomb when it ultimately required such a drastic response. Indeed, the somewhat troublesome aspects of the reserve heads may have been responsible for their relatively short lifespan as tomb contents. The need for ritual remedy likely was not realized upon the introduction of the sculptural form. However, apparently after a decrease in popularity in the Fifth or Sixth Dynasty the heads proved too cumbersome or perhaps were just outmoded. In the history of mortuary accoutrements they seem to comprise an ephemeral, regional “dialect” that was eventually dropped, possibly supplanted by less complicated or more acceptable accessories. This possibility will be explored below.

Any hypothesis for the reserve heads’ original function must consider why this new form of statue arose in the first place. Typical of the prevailing functional interpretations of all Old Kingdom tomb statuary is Andrey Bolshakov’s assertion that any image of an Old Kingdom tomb owner accommodated his/her *ka*, while multiple depictions in the same tomb each embodied different versions of this manifestation of the deceased.⁹¹ Assmann follows: “reserve heads may have served to attract and direct the indwelling *ka* by preserving the physiognomy and assuring the recognizability of the subject . . . The statues also belong to the sphere of self-preservation and not self-presentation; this means that they are hermetically blocked and protected against profanation much like the mummified corpse itself.”⁹² As partial explanation for the introduction of a new, truncated statue type for this well established purpose, Friedrich Junge suggests simply that the reserve heads document experimentation in approaches to rendering the human form.⁹³ It is possible that such experimentation led to a stand-alone head as a response to chronologically specific limitations on available space and permissible outfitting of mastaba buildings. Private tombs of Dynasty 4, the focal period of the reserve heads, exhibit markedly less aboveground chapel space relative to both earlier and later tomb plans. Khufu traditionally receives credit (or blame) for instituting a conscious, restrictive policy of reduced cultic areas in mastaba superstructures with less decoration and relative paucity of statu-

⁸⁹ Roehrig cites inconsistency as a problem for Tefnin’s theory of ritual mutilation (*Art et magie*) in “Reserve Heads: An Enigma,” 79: “In order to make his case, the author classifies four types of ritual mutilation, which one would expect to see with some consistency in contemporary heads found in the same area if such acts had been performed to protect the deceased. Yet among the heads found in core mastabas of cemetery 4000 at Giza, all of which were probably carved and buried within a generation or two, not a single example exhibits all of Tefnin’s forms of ritual damage.” The apparent problem rests in Tefnin’s localization of damage to a particular ritual sequence, i.e., one related to the “Opening of the Mouth” ceremony. If it were part of such a highly formalized ritual practice, strict adherence to a single protocol might be expected. However, it would also follow that after the reserve heads were phased out of use, another ritual object, related developmentally and suggestive of similar application, would be identifiable in the record. The “Opening of the Mouth” ceremony was an extremely long-lived funerary rite that was quite conservative in its basic structure. Ritual mutilation of hieroglyphs, which was looser in its range and consistency of implementation, is a less contentious comparative model for the reserve heads. See Tefnin, *Art et magie*, 78.

⁹⁰ For early trends and variability in the practice, see Edward Brovanski, “A Coffin from Farshūt in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,” in Leonard H. Lesko, ed., *Ancient Egyptian and Mediterranean Studies in Memory of William A. Ward* (Providence, 1998), 37–69, especially 57–58; additional examples in Lacau, “Suppressions et modifications de signes,” 26–41; Frandsen, “On Categorization and Metaphorical Structuring,” 83–84.

⁹¹ “Ideology of the Old Kingdom Portrait,” 128; “Ka” in Redford, *Oxford Encyclopedia* 1, 215–17, especially 216.

⁹² “Preservation and Presentation,” 62.

⁹³ “Hum-iunu, Ankh-ha-ef,” 108. See also Tefnin, *Art et magie*, 15–16.

ary.⁹⁴ More recently, however, the onset of this reduction in dedicated cultic space has been backdated to the reign of Snefru based on study of the necropolis of Dahshur.⁹⁵ Thus, the spatial conditions that might have prompted a truncated statue type and/or the relocation of statuary from the customary aboveground locations enter the material record as of the reign to which the first reserve head dates at the site from which it originates.⁹⁶

The seemingly straight-forward interpretation of reserve heads as *ka*-statuary encounters significant logistical problems when considered within the context of Old Kingdom offering practices. While several types of statue are known from aboveground chapels, the reserve heads are unique not only in form but also in their placement underground. This location removes the heads, supposedly devices provided for the *ka*, from the locus of the ongoing, *ka*-focused mortuary cult. The importance of the offering cult certainly had not diminished in Dynasty 4, and representations of the tomb owner did not disappear entirely from tomb superstructures, downsized or otherwise. Though use of statuary declined, most, if not all Giza tombs containing reserve heads would have been furnished with slab stelae adorning their superstructures to supply an additional representation.⁹⁷ Bolshakov interprets this dual coverage as a strategic attempt at optimal preservation: “The risk of the slab-stela being ruined was quite real, and therefore, to compensate for it, the individualized reserve heads began to be placed in the burial chamber.”⁹⁸ Both chapel statuary and slab stelae were devices of the offering cult, the principle activity of which was the deposition of offerings, real or through invocation, where the living could approach the dead at the tomb chapel on the surface.⁹⁹ The formulaic texts through which the cult was enacted through most of Egyptian history request offerings and attendance explicitly “for the *ka* of” (*n(i) k3 n(i)*) the deceased. Although during the period of reserve head florescence Giza slab stelae do not include this element of the offering formula, the ubiquitous scene of the tomb owner’s funerary meal signals that they functioned within the traditional framework of cultic offering practices.¹⁰⁰ The reserve heads were poorly situated for use in any form

⁹⁴ Summaries of stylistic trends under Khufu appear in Jánosi, *Giza in der 4. Dynastie*, 77–84; Bolshakov, *Man and his Double*, 37–39; Roth, “Social Change in the Fourth Dynasty,” 33–55. For how this change may relate to the reserve heads see, for example, Lacovara, “Riddle of the Reserve Heads,” 33; Kurt Lange and Max Hirmer, *Egypt: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting in Three Thousand Years* (London and New York, 1968), 408–9. Note that Jánosi, 323, suggests three-dimensional representations in rock-cut tomb chapels were more common than the archaeological record supports.

⁹⁵ Rainer Stadelmann, “Der strenge Stil der frühen Vierten Dynastie,” in R. Stadelmann and H. Sourouzian, eds., *Kunst des Alten Reiches*, 155–66, with particular attention to 160, 163–66; Der Manuelian, *Slab Stelae*, 168. This extended period coincides also with the simplification of the plans of Memphite private tomb substructures, as discussed by Roth, “Social Change in the Fourth Dynasty,” 42–43.

⁹⁶ Jaques de Morgan, *Fouilles à Dahchour, 1894*, 1 (Vienna, 1895), 9.

⁹⁷ Roehrig, “Reserve Heads: An Enigma,” 75; Spänel, *Through Ancient Eyes*, 44. For comparative archaeological distributions of reserve heads and slab stelae, including co-occurrence, see Peter Der Manuelian, “The Problem of the Giza Slab Stelae,” in Rainer Stadelmann, ed., *Stationen: Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte Ägyptens* (Mainz, 1998), 115–34 especially 119, fig. 2.

⁹⁸ “Ideology of the Old Kingdom Portrait,” 125.

⁹⁹ The principle features of the cult are summarized by Ronald J. Leprohon, “Offering Formulas and Lists,” in Redford, *Oxford Encyclopedia* 2, 569–72, especially 570.

¹⁰⁰ The phrasing *n(i) k3 n(i)* appears as of late Dynasty 6, prior to which offerings were rather said to be given to/for a specifically named individual. See Winfried Barta, *Aufbau und Bedeutung der altägyptischen Opferformel* (Glückstadt, 1968), 32–33; Gunter Lapp, *Die Opferformel des Alten reiches unter Berücksichtigung einiger späterer Formen*, SDAIK 21 (Mainz am Rhein, 1986), 208. Manuelian, *Slab Stelae*, 147–53, presents a thorough catalogue of repast scenes on slab stelae. On the isolation of the reserve heads from the offering cult and the probable adequacy of slab stelae in this purpose, see Roehrig, “Reserve Heads: An Enigma,” 75–77; Jan Assmann, “Die Gestalt der Zeit in der Ägyptischen Kunst” in Jan Assmann and Günter Burkard, *5000 Jahre Ägypten: Genese und Permanenz Pharaonischer Kunst* (Heidelberg-Nußloch, 1983), 11–32, esp. 15; Hellmut Brunner, “Altorientalische Gesichtsmasken aus Gips in ihrem Zusammenhang mit der Kunst,” *Forschungen und Fortschritte* 28 (1954), 330–32. Schmidt, “Zur Determination und Ikonographie,” 338–40, sees the absence of explicit request for invocation offerings (*pr.t hrw*) on slab stelae as a symptom of Khufu’s deliberate suppression of direct cult that accompanied the reduction of superstructural space in private tombs of Dynasty 4. According to Schmidt, the restrictive program included the hacking of the reserve heads’ ears so they would be incapable of hearing offerings voiced from above. This interpretation is not adopted here.

of direct cult enacted after burial. Rather, they were closer in space to the interred deceased than to living tomb attendants.

There is a case to be made that the differential location of reserve heads vis-à-vis aboveground stelae and statuary combines with their isolation from direct cult to suggest a corresponding functional division of labor. If the reserve heads could not viably “interact” with the living and benefit from mortuary provisions, then what perceived function might they have fulfilled? Considered in sum, the most distinguishing aspects of reserve head use—subterranean setting in the tomb and proximity to the corpse—align best with notions of not the *ka*, but the *ba* as it was conceived in the Old Kingdom as well as later periods. As early as the *Coffin Texts*, sources ascribe to the *ba* a strong presence underground with an emphasis on its connection to the properly buried deceased, from whom it emanated and to whom it returned.¹⁰¹ This assertion is consistent with the traditional use of tomb statuary as housing for a spiritual entity, but it reconsiders the identification of the specific entity in question. An integral component of a person’s composite constitution, the *ba* is most frequently understood as the personification of an individual’s post-mortem mobility and ability to act. By the New Kingdom this quality inspired the *ba*’s most characteristic depiction as a human-headed bird.¹⁰² During the Old Kingdom, though, the *ba*-concept seems to have been somewhat more abstract than in later periods, a quality possessed rather than a concretely personified manifestation. But the attribute “*ba*” initially included several defining aspects that would be elaborated later, including the essentially divine capacity to exert influence in this or the next world as well as the capability to assume a multitude of forms in the process.¹⁰³ Even as an abstraction, however, when applied to humans the *ba*-concept seems always to have incorporated unique identity.¹⁰⁴ It must be considered at least provisionally that a distinctly new statue form, one treated differently than types already in use, corresponds with an underlying belief in the ability of the deceased to assume a manifestation other than the *ka* after death.¹⁰⁵

The proposition that the reserve heads relate to a *ba*-concept will undoubtedly garner strong, immediate, and even violent skepticism from some readers. One tenet of the “democratization of the afterlife” model is that through most, if not all, of the Old Kingdom the king was the only earthly being who possessed a *ba*. This view is supported by Old Kingdom textual sources, which with one

¹⁰¹ Louis V. Žabkar, *Study of the Ba Concept in Ancient Egyptian Texts*, SAOC 34 (Chicago, 1968), 106–14. On the indwelling of the *ba*, see Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, translated by David Lorton (Ithaca–London, 2001), 42–47. Additional commentary on this relationship in later contexts is provided by Hans D. Schneider, “Bringing the BA to the Body: A Glorification Spell for Padinektnebef,” in *Hommages à Jean Leclant 4*, (Cairo, 1994), 355–62. The author is indebted to David P. Silverman for the latter reference.

¹⁰² For the *ba* in relation to other components of a person’s make-up, see Alan B. Lloyd, “Psychology and Society in the Ancient Egyptian Cult of the Dead,” in William Kelly Simpson, ed., *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt*, YES 3 (New Haven, 1989), 117–33, especially 117–22. Concise characterization and history of the *ba* itself can be found in the summaries of James P. Allen, “Ba,” in Redford, *Oxford Encyclopedia* 1, 161–62; Louis V. Žabkar, “Ba,” *LÄ I* Wiesbaden, 1975), 588–90. Also Jan Assmann, *Ma’at: Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Alten Ägypten* (München, 1990), 114–19.

¹⁰³ Elske Marie Wolf-Brinkmann, *Versuch einer Deutung des Begriffes ‘b3’ anhand der Überlieferung der Frühzeit und des Alten Reiches*. Ph.D. Dissertation (Freiburg, 1968), 7–8, passim. Elaborated by William A. Ward, *The Four Egyptian Homographic Roots B-3*, StudPohl: Series Maior 6 (Rome, 1978), 70–77, 85–88.

¹⁰⁴ For the social dimension of identity as it pertains to the *ba*, see Jan Assmann, “Persönlichkeitsbegriff und –bewußtsein,” *LÄ 4* (1980), 964–78, especially 966. Opinions vary on the nature of the progression from, or the balance between abstraction and personification of *ba* as quality and the *ba* as manifestation. See, for example, Žabkar, *Study of the Ba Concept*, 97–98; Ward, *Four Egyptian Homographic Roots*, 70, 86–88. Notably, Jan Assmann, *Egyptian Solar Religion in the New Kingdom: Re, Amun and the Crisis of Polytheism*, translated by Anthony Alcock (London–New York, 1995), 142–143, finds that the fundamental abstract concept was conserved in the late New Kingdom with the quality of “*ba*” still expressed as “the power that materializes in forms.”

¹⁰⁵ Bolshakov, *Man and His Double*, 107, leaves open the likelihood that specific cultic meanings, now lost, can also have applied to various statue types, particularly with respect to depictions of age distinctions. He stops short, however, of allowing for statuary that accommodated an aspect of personhood other than the *ka*.

exception (discussed below) do not mention a private *ba*, rather only the *bas* of kings, deities, and of places or objects.¹⁰⁶ The traditional model regards this absence of textual references as proof that non-royals of this time had not yet acquired *bas* of their own.¹⁰⁷ Rather, the non-royal version of the *ba* emerged later from ideological reinterpretation and expanded access to the concept. An increasing number of private individuals “obtained” a *ba* through the Middle Kingdom as attested primarily by the *Coffin Texts*.¹⁰⁸

As the argument against an Old Kingdom private *ba* is based largely upon negative evidence, it cannot be deemed too outlandish to entertain the opposing option that the private *ba* was recognized by some even as early as Dynasty 4 but was prohibited from open acknowledgement by rules of decorum that applied to the private tomb. Decorum, as discussed by Baines, imposes “a set of rules and practices defining what may be represented pictorially with captions, displayed, and possibly written down, in which context and in what form. It can be related to other constraints on action and reports on actions . . . and was probably based ultimately on rules or practices of conduct and etiquette, or spatial separation and religious avoidance.”¹⁰⁹ Some of the most conspicuous developments of the democratization process stemmed from the lifting of restrictions of earlier times.¹¹⁰ Both the reserve heads and the *ba*-concept fit two criteria outlined by Baines: they were neither subject to public display nor available to just anyone.¹¹¹ Exploring attributes of the *ba* (whether known formally as a “*ba*” or not) in the corpus of reserve heads invites speculation as to what lay beneath rules of decorum while they were still largely in place but beginning to ease, perhaps as early as Dynasty 4 and well in advance of full-scale democratization.

The suggestion of an early transition for the private *ba*-concept into the private sphere is meant to suggest neither a sudden, radical movement nor a dramatic paradigm shift. Mention of the *ba* alongside the reserve heads is an old, if not thoroughly explored idea, and it is worthy of reevaluation.¹¹² Although the non-royal *ba*'s appearances in the *Coffin Texts* comprise the first substantial confirmation of non-royal claim to a *ba*, the process by which this development occurred likely started much earlier and progressed gradually. The earliest reference to a private *ba* (which, as will be discussed below, is not in the *Coffin Texts*) is no more an insurmountable *terminus post quem* for the *ba*-concept's entry into the private sphere than the first occurrence of the *Pyramid Texts* in King Unas' late Fifth Dynasty monument may be regarded as the moment of genesis for all concepts and myths expressed therein, many of which have demonstrably longer histories.

Additionally, it should not be expected that the *ba* suddenly became available to many people at once. Even the *Coffin Texts*, it should be remembered, were employed primarily among the elite, while newly available religious prerogatives for the majority of the population are revealed rather in the proliferation of new types of burial goods and votive activities.¹¹³ The earliest private appropriation of this belief more likely began with a largely self-designated, privileged few, perhaps those with high

¹⁰⁶ Wolf-Brinkmann, *Versuch einer Deutung des Begriffes 'b3'*, passim.

¹⁰⁷ Briefly summarized by Jan Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*, translated by Andrew Jenkins (New York, 2002), 145.

¹⁰⁸ Eberhard Otto, “Die Anschauung vom *B3* nach Coffin Texts Sp. 99–104,” *Miscellanea Gregoriana* (Rome, 1941), 151–60.

¹⁰⁹ John Baines, “Restricted Knowledge, Hierarchy, and Decorum: Modern Perceptions and Ancient Institutions,” *JARCE* 27 (1990), 1–23, (quotation from 20).

¹¹⁰ Sørensen, “Divine Access,” 110–17.

¹¹¹ Baines, “Restricted Knowledge.”

¹¹² Hermann Junker was fond of the idea in his discussions of the reserve heads. See, for instance, *Giza* 5, 116–17, and *Giza* 12, 55. Though Tefnin links the *ba* with the reserve heads, he does not address the significant ramifications of doing so, namely the recognition of a private *ba*-concept at least two to three centuries prior to its appearance in the textual record. See especially *Art et magie*, 55–56, 69–72, 94.

¹¹³ See Willems, *Textes des sarcophages*, passim.

level cultic duties or affiliations.¹¹⁴ Though decorum still limited its public display even for the initiated few, use of the concept in tomb statuary might have contributed to their heightened status. While the sole right to use esoteric ritual texts emphasized the king's position at the top of the social spectrum, so too did real or perceived access to restricted knowledge bolster elite status among royal relatives and members of the upper elite as a kind of symbolic capital.¹¹⁵ To hold claim to such knowledge was to be closer to the divine.¹¹⁶

Though the disparities between royal and private funerary practices are prominent in Old Kingdom religion, these should not overshadow the essential recognition of an undercurrent of shared knowledge. Overlap between private and royal ideologies is implicated by what becomes visible in the record upon the emergence of the *Pyramid Texts*. For instance, Harold Hayes has found that during the time of the *Pyramid Texts* offering lists inscribed on elite private tombs were already "keyed into" the offering rituals contained in the royal funerary texts.¹¹⁷ Similarly, Deborah Vischak has demonstrated that the distribution of decorative scenes on walls of some private tombs delineates similar cosmographic locales as the thematic arrangement of *Pyramid Text* spells in the chambers of royal monuments.¹¹⁸ Such affinities confirm that royal and private practices were rooted in related ritual foundations, and it should not be considered too great a leap to posit that high status non-royals also acknowledged and experimented with a belief parallel, if perhaps precursory to the private *ba* of later funerary religion, one that stemmed logically from familiarity with the royal *ba* before it was acceptable to demonstrate this knowledge too openly.¹¹⁹

Louis Žabkar's classic study of the *ba* acknowledges indications that private individuals had begun adopting and adapting the *ba*-concept already in the late Old Kingdom.¹²⁰ The earliest record appears on an architrave of the Saqqara tomb of one Herimeru of the Sixth Dynasty:¹²¹

May he [Herimeru] reach land. May he ferry across the firmament.¹²² May he ascend to the great god.
May his *ka* be foremost under the king. May his *ba* endure under the god.¹²³

Two interpretations are possible for this passage. A literal reading seems to include the deceased's desire to reach the heavens. In a detailed analysis of this passage Hartwig Altenmüller favors a second

¹¹⁴ While Sørensen, "Divine Access," 110–14, identifies participation in temple ritual as one means of "accessing the divine," it is also the practical means by which high-ranking officials would have encountered restricted ritual knowledge.

¹¹⁵ Baines, "Restricted Knowledge," 7–13; Sørensen, "Divine Access," 110–17.

¹¹⁶ Essentially paraphrasing the comments of Sørensen, "Divine Access," 111.

¹¹⁷ See "Representations of Mortuary Ritual from the Old to the New Kingdoms," in *Program & Abstracts of the 53rd Annual Meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt* (Baltimore, 2001), 51.

¹¹⁸ "Common Ground between Pyramid Texts and Old Kingdom Tomb Design: The Case of Ankhmahor," *JARCE* 40 (2003), 133–57.

¹¹⁹ Contra Hartwig Altenmüller, "Sein Ba möge fort dauern bei Gott," *SAK* 20 (1993), 1–15. For the *Pyramid Texts* as a catalyst in shaping private elite mortuary needs, see Vischak, "Common Ground," 154–57.

¹²⁰ Žabkar, *Study of the Ba Concept*, 60–61, 76. Further comment to the effect that Old Kingdom private aspirations for an afterlife may have been somewhat grander than is often characterized can be found in Leprohon, "Offering Formulas and Lists," 570. The timing of this appearance is broadly coincidental with the possible earliest known inklings of the *Coffin Texts* at Balat, also dated to Dynasty 6. For these, see Michel Valloggia, *Balat I: Le mastaba de Medou-nefer 1: Texte*, FIFAO 31:1 (Cairo, 1986), 72–76.

¹²¹ For the tomb of Herimeru: *PM* 3:2 (1981), 626; Selim Hassan, *Excavations at Saqqara, 1937–1938* Vol. 3: *Mastabas of Princess Iemet-R' and Others*, re-edited by Zaky Iskander (Cairo, 1975), 69–81. See also Žabkar, *Study of the Ba Concept*, 60–61.

¹²² Here referring to the course of the sun-god on his daily journey across the sky, a prerogative of the deceased king in the *Pyramid Texts* in which Herimeru expects to share.

¹²³ For text, alternate translations, and discussion, see Hassan, *Excavations at Saqqara 1937–1938*, 76–77 (fig. 39, 1, 3), pls. 52 and 56; Žabkar, *Study of the Ba Concept*, 60–61. Altenmüller, "Sein Ba möge fort dauern," discusses this passage in great detail.

option, stressing that the concept of the *ba*, royal or otherwise, was not yet fully elaborated in the Old Kingdom. Consequently, the inclusion of a private *ba* cannot automatically signal a change in the non-royal vision of the afterlife.¹²⁴ Instead, the first three acts requested for Herimeru—reaching land, traversing the firmament, and ascending to the great god—are to be construed as describing metaphorically the deceased’s funerary journey to the tomb where his afterlife existence was confined. Corresponding to Barta’s *Bitte* 29–31, these requests are not unique to Herimeru’s tomb, and there are earlier occurrences.¹²⁵ Altenmüller draws attention to their structural ordering, which in other tombs fosters the interpretation that they relate to earthly burial rites rather than heavenly locales.¹²⁶ Altenmüller argues also that the king of Herimeru’s inscription need not be the deceased king in the heavens. Rather, he is the anonymous king mentioned in offering formulae recorded elsewhere in the tomb.¹²⁷ Likewise, the god is not a specific divinity in the celestial realm but instead the god of the necropolis who protects Herimeru’s tomb.¹²⁸ Altenmüller concludes that the mere addition of the *ba* to otherwise traditional mortuary requests does not in itself reflect democratizing tendencies.

A plausible rationale as to why the requests for the *ba* and *ka* were inserted into Herimeru’s text is lacking, yet it cannot have been without some purpose. Inclusion of the *ba* invites consideration of the possibility that the expected transition to the afterlife was, for the first expressed time, directed toward the heavens. Perhaps what was once viewed as a metaphorical journey began to assume a reality of its own for the private tomb owner in the same manner as it would be expanded in the *Coffin Texts*. The only justification for failing to consider this option is a hesitation to shed the *a priori* assumption that the private expectations for the afterlife could not extend beyond the tomb in the Old Kingdom. The possibility should be entertained if but for the fact that in the Old Kingdom and later the *ba* was the most important agent of the deceased for reaching beyond the tomb. Since Herimeru’s request is unique, Altenmüller argues correctly that a full-fledged transfer of royal ideology was not yet at work. However, it is possible that this text reveals that the underpinnings of democratization were taking root by the time of Herimeru or possibly even earlier.

A literal reading the Herimeru inscription provides that the seemingly early appropriation of the *ba* by a private individual would not have been so much the bold usurpation of a kingly prerogative as a natural extension of the earthly relationship between king and official already observed in Old Kingdom mortuary culture. As with success in life, the official’s prospects for the afterlife—and especially the quality of mortuary preparations—stemmed to a great extent from a relationship with the king. Cemetery layouts at Old Kingdom pyramid sites reflect the desire of high officials to be buried in the immediate environs of their ruler’s tomb complex, while offering formulae state that sustaining tomb provisions flowed from the “offering which the king gives” (*htp-dî-nsw*).¹²⁹ The prominence

¹²⁴ “Sein Ba möge fort dauern,” 13

¹²⁵ Winfried Barta, *Aufbau und Bedeutung der altägyptischen Operformel*, ÄF 24 (Glückstadt, 1968), 306.

¹²⁶ “Sein Ba möge fort dauern,” 12–15. On this point Altenmüller agrees with Barta, who also relates these movements to the funerary procession from the East to the necropolis in the West, following a route that often would have involved some travel by water. The journey is simply couched in symbolic terms of reaching otherworldly realms in the same manner as in the *Pyramid Texts*. See Barta, *Aufbau und Bedeutung*, 306–7.

¹²⁷ That is, the king from whose cultic offerings contributions were made to the official’s mortuary cult through contract and/or reversion. “Sein Ba möge fort dauern,” 8. For another interpretation as well as the logistics of royal contributions and allowances, see Christopher J. Eyre, “Work and the Organisation of Work in the Old Kingdom,” in Marvin A. Powell, ed., *Labor in the Ancient Near East*, AOS 68 (1987), 21–23.

¹²⁸ Altenmüller, “Sein Ba möge fort dauern,” 8, 11–12. Alternate options are discussed by John Baines, “‘Greatest God’ or Category of Gods?” *GM* 67 (1983), 13–27, esp. 15.

¹²⁹ The appearance of the *htp-dî-nsw* formula dates to the Fourth Dynasty, and substantial clustering of elite tombs into pyramid cemeteries is a prominent feature of the dynasty as well. See Roth, “Social Change in the Fourth Dynasty,” 48–55.

of the king in autobiographical tomb inscriptions as of Dynasty 5 highlights the importance of this relationship for reasons ranging from prosperity in life to equipping one's tomb.¹³⁰ Taken in total these phenomena allow that the novel clause in Herimeru's inscription likely is not a sterile introduction of the *ba*-concept with indefinite meaning. To the contrary, it seems to request for Herimeru the practical means to perpetuate the association between official and king after death while simultaneously gaining divine associations through his *ba*-manifestation, the aspect of personhood capable of the conversion from the mundane, earthly plane of existence to the supra-mundane, divine plane.¹³¹

Placement of the reserve heads can be related directly to the emerging afterlife expectations just posited for Herimeru's tomb. As stated above regarding this much debated matter, the most probable original locations range from the tomb shaft to inside the entrance of the burial chamber, and there is no compelling reason to contend that these various spots were mutually exclusive. This architectural zone comprises a liminal, or transitional section of the tomb, intermediate between the semi-public superstructure and the sealed environment of the burial chamber. The concept of liminality derives from the ritual paradigm of rites of passage, defined as "ceremonial patterns which accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another."¹³² An initiate who proceeds from a pre-liminal existence and through a liminal phase emerges to a post-liminal existence in an altered, newly defined state, the character of which is determined by that individual's socio-cultural milieu.¹³³ Throughout ancient times the Egyptians characterized their own posthumous passage to the afterlife in numerous ways. It could be variously a physical reconstitution, a birth or rebirth, a journey through otherworldly landscapes, a series of tests of knowledge or moral worth, among other things.¹³⁴

These conceptions inevitably found expression in the tomb, the purpose of which was to facilitate the deceased's transfiguration from a living state of existence to that of the redefined, revived deceased. For royal mortuary structures, James Allen distinguishes cosmological metaphors for subterranean chambers in the distribution of *Pyramid Texts* that effectively map a tripartite cosmogram: the burial chamber is the Underworld (*dw3t*); the antechamber is the Horizon (*3ht*); the access corridor is the Sky (*pt*).¹³⁵ Deborah Vischak draws heavily on Allen's work to demonstrate that the orientation of scenes in some private mastabas parallels this distribution of *Pyramid Texts*. She concludes that, what the royal funerary texts accomplish in word private decorative programs accomplish through image, the thematic arrangement of each outlining movement through ritually defined space that corre-

¹³⁰ Eyre, "Work and the Organisation of Work," 21–24; Nicole Kloth, *Die (auto-)biographischen Inschriften des ägypten Alten Reiches: Untersuchungen zu Phraseologie und Entwicklung*. BSAK 8 (2002), 128–211. The private individual's dependence upon the king is explicit in autobiographical passages that stress his generosity in providing large tomb components, well made equipment, or other goods for the individual's burial. Though the rhetoric of such inscriptions ascribe this generosity to the king's satisfaction for the recipient's exemplary service to the crown, these texts seem to do the king a degree of service as well. See Andrea M. Gnirs, "Die ägyptische Autobiographie," in Antonio Loprieno, ed., *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, Probleme der Ägyptologie (Leiden, 1996), 191–241, especially 220–23.

¹³¹ See the discussion of the *ba* as denoting "supra-mundane" capabilities in Ward, *Four Egyptian Homographic Roots*, 71–77.

¹³² The seminal treatment of the topic is Arnold van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago, 1960), 10.

¹³³ For more on the transformational nature and social significance of liminality, see Victor Turner, "Variations on a Theme of Liminality," in Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff, eds, *Secular Ritual* (Assen, 1977), 36–52.

¹³⁴ For a review of various approaches of the ancient Egyptian transition from an earthly life to the afterlife as rite of initiation/passage see Jan Assmann, "Death and Initiation," 135–59.

¹³⁵ James P. Allen, "Reading a Pyramid," in *Hommages à Jean Leclant* 1, BdÉ 106/1 (Cairo, 1994), 5–28, especially 23–26. Similarly, Joachim Spiegel, "Auferstehungsritual der Unaspyramide," *ASAE* 53 (1955), 339–49.

sponds to a personal vision of the afterlife that was patterned on the royal archetype.¹³⁶ Vischak's focus is necessarily on decorative programs in mastaba superstructures, as subterranean chambers remained undecorated for much of the Old Kingdom.¹³⁷

Allen's study has potential ramifications for underground chambers of a private tomb as well, for these provide the most direct correlates of the chambers that carry the *Pyramid Texts* in royal monuments.¹³⁸ The identification of the space immediately preceding the burial chamber as the Horizon is especially noteworthy. The corresponding location in the private tomb is the zone prescribed for the reserve heads—from shaft base to burial chamber entrance—as this area acts as an informal antechamber. Allen notes the spatially and cosmically liminal quality of the antechamber in a pyramid: “the Akhet [i.e., the antechamber] is more than a zone of passage . . . it is literally the ‘place of becoming an *akh*,’ where the deceased's *ba* and the sun together are transformed into a newly effective (*3h*) mode of existence.”¹³⁹ The connective components between superstructure and substructure in the private tomb similarly bridge not only one world and the next but also the transition from one state of existence to another for the deceased. Following separation from the surface world of the living through proper burial, the deceased entered the world of the dead from within the burial chamber. Once fully developed in later times, the mobile *ba* was the means by which one was able to ascend from the chamber to join the gods and attain the transformations necessary to function in the afterlife. Additionally, it had the capacity to navigate between these two worlds via the architecturally liminal mid-section of the tomb (fig. 6).

The reserve heads are ideal candidates for representations of an emerging conception of the *ba*: the deceased at a dire moment of transition when the *ba* became fully manifest, placed in the region of the tomb where that role would, by extension from pyramid layout, be most poignant. Observations of similarities between the reserve heads and a very well known object from the tomb of Tutankhamun (KV 62)—a painted wooden sculpture of the young king's head emerging from a lotus flower (JE 60723)—approach a similar assertion.¹⁴⁰ Most recently Catherine Roehrig posits that, like the Tutankhamun head, “it is quite possible that reserve heads served as symbols of the sun god or the god Atum appearing at the moment of creation on the primeval mound, which itself may even have been imitated by a mound of earth or sand on the floor of the burial chamber.”¹⁴¹ The head-and-lotus motif refers to the Heliopolitan cosmogony, one account of creation recognized in ancient Egyptian religion. A pivotal moment occurs when a lotus sprouts from the primeval mound of creation

¹³⁶ “Common Ground,” *passim*.

¹³⁷ The practice of including scenes or inscriptions on the walls of burial chambers did not become common until Dynasty 6, starting with the Giza tomb of Kayemankh. See Smith, *HESPOK*, 213; Hermann Junker, *Giza 4: Die Mastaba des K3jm'nh (Kai-em-anch)* (Wien-Leipzig, 1940), 43–45. The author is indebted to Peter Der Manuelian for the latter reference and very useful comments on this matter.

¹³⁸ Note the approach of Vischak, “Common Ground,” 137–38. The claim made here does not suggest that the correlations Vischak draws between pyramid chambers and aboveground rooms of the private mastaba are invalid, rather that a similar scheme of meaning may be superimposed upon the subterranean rooms as well.

¹³⁹ J. Allen, “Reading a Pyramid,” 27; Vischak, “Common Ground,” 150–51. See also J. Allen, “Cosmology of the Pyramid Texts,” 17–21.

¹⁴⁰ As with many objects from Tutankhamun's tomb this statue has been published many times, recently by André Wiese, “Tutankhamun—Just a Conventional ‘Tomb Treasure’ of the 18th Dynasty?” in André Wiese and Andreas Brodbeck, eds, *Tutankhamun: The Golden Beyond: Tomb Treasures from the Valley of the Kings* (Basel, 2004), 83–127, esp. 85, fig. 3.

¹⁴¹ Roehrig, “Reserve Heads: An Enigma,” 78. Note that the JE 60723 head was found in the entrance corridor of KV 62, not the burial chamber or antechamber. For the possibility that this find spot may reflect original placement rather than secondary relocation by robbery or re-housing by priests, see Wiese, “Tutankhamun—Just a Conventional ‘Tomb Treasure,’” 85–86.

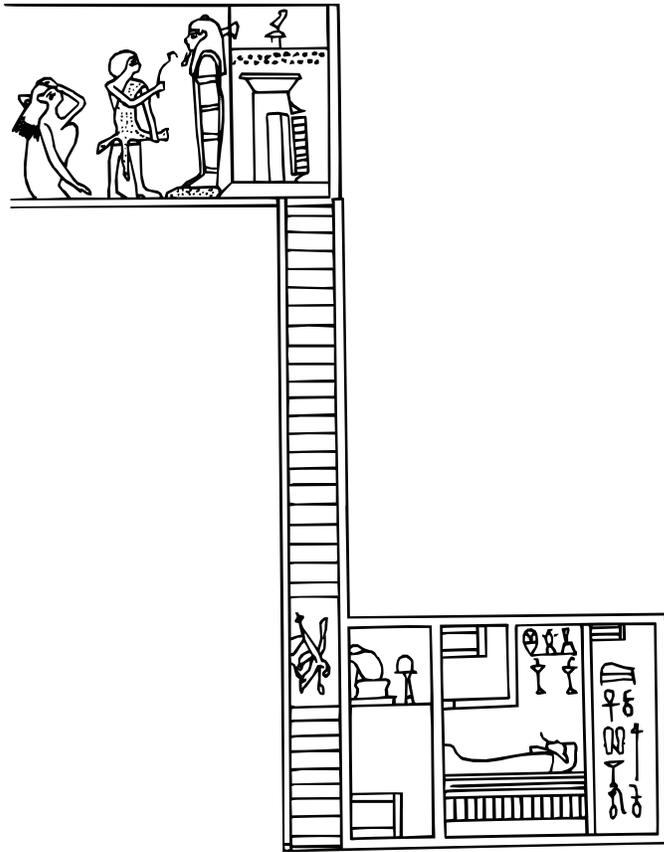


Fig. 6. The *ba* descending the tomb shaft towards the burial chamber as represented in the Book of Going Forth by Day of Nebqed (Louvre III.3) (after Edouard Naville, *Ägyptische Totenbuch*, pl. 4).

clear when one considers the texts with which the statues of kneeling worshipers of the early New Kingdom are inscribed. It is the sun. The Egyptian wanted to ‘see’ the sun and its rays.¹⁴⁶ A characteristic act of the *ba* has been identified as “to behold the sun and to adore it.”¹⁴⁷ Others have argued

and the sun-god emerges from it.¹⁴² The identification of the deceased with the sun-god at the moment of “the First Time” of creation was to imbue the former, in the act of re-creation, with the faculties to ascend from the tomb and accompany the god in the eternal cycle across the heavens, through the underworld, and to a daily rebirth.¹⁴³ This cosmically significant motif appears identically in the vignette of *BD* 81 (fig. 7), for which one version of the spell finds the deceased hoping: “may my *ba* go forth to every place that it wishes, without being held back from the presence of the Great Ennead.”¹⁴⁴

Another unique attribute of the reserve head corpus may relate to this aspect of solar theology as well. Many of the heads show a subtle tilting of the face that suggests a line of sight oriented slightly upwards rather than directly forward, a posture generally atypical for Egyptian sculpture.¹⁴⁵ By way of explanation, B. V. Bothmer offers: “In raising his sight, in lifting his face, the Egyptian committed an act of regarding, as expressed in the Pyramid Texts . . . and it is precisely in the Pyramid Age that apotheosis first appears. The object of his gaze becomes

¹⁴² The debate as to whether this lotus is to be equated with the god Nefertem as early as Old Kingdom times does not preclude the interpretation of the flower itself as a symbol of primeval creation and solar theology that envisions the sun-god as emerging from the lotus. For opinions on the matter, see Siegfried Morenz and Johannes Schubert, *Der Gott auf der Blume: Eine ägyptische Kosmogonie und ihre weltweit Bildwirkung* (Ascona, 1954), 14–22; Hermann Schlögl, *Der Sonnengott auf der Blüte: Eine ägyptische Kosmogonie des Neuen Reiches*. *Aegyptiaca Helvetica* 5 (Genève, 1977), 30–33; Rudolph Anthes, “Egyptian Theology in the Third Millennium B.C.,” *JNES* 18 (1959), 169–212, especially 176–78.

¹⁴³ Žabkar, *Study of the Ba Concept*, 126. This may be considered in light of statements like “your head is Re” (*CT* 761) and “My head is that of Re” (*BD* 82). For these, see Faulkner, *Coffin Texts* 2, 293; Faulkner, *Book of the Dead*, 80.

¹⁴⁴ Naville, *Ägyptische Totenbuch* 1, pl. 93; Faulkner, *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, 79.

¹⁴⁵ Described as a “slightly exaggerated tilt, the eyes looking up, and the chin at an angle” by Simpson, “IV Dynasty Portrait Head,” 289. For aesthetic commentary that sees the upturned nose contributing to “a supremely confident, even arrogant, expression,” see Spänel, *Through Ancient Eyes*, 46–47. Roehrig disagrees, arguing that the slightly raised chin of many reserve heads combines with angles of modern photography to create the mistaken impression in frontal views that the heads look upward when, in fact, profile views show they look forward; see Arnold, *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids*, 236–37, n. 7 (cat. 47).

¹⁴⁶ “Apotheosis in Late Egyptian Sculpture,” *KÉMI* 20 (1970), 36–48 (quotation on 48).

¹⁴⁷ Herman te Velde, “Some Remarks on the Concept ‘Person’ in the Ancient Egyptian Culture,” in Hans G. Kippenberg, Yme B. Kuiper, and Andy F. Sanders, eds., *Concepts of Person in Religion and Thought* (Berlin-New York, 1990), 83–101 (quotation on 92).

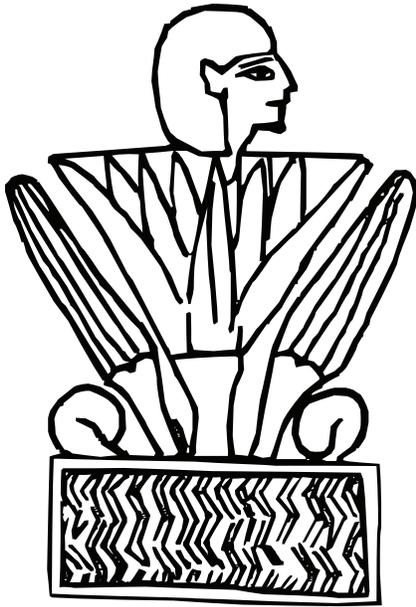


Fig. 7. Vignette of *BD Spell 81* (after Erik Hornung, *Das Totenbuch der Ägypter* (Zürich-München, 1979), 167, abb. 41).

that that the heads were aimed instead towards other celestial bodies, namely the circumpolar stars.¹⁴⁸ The multifaceted nature of Egyptian religion, with disparate and sometimes conflicting etiologies for a single phenomenon, allows that each explanation could have applied independently, the operative point being that this attribute of the heads may signal that non-royal Egyptians were looking skyward.

Indeed, at the core of the threat of decapitation in ritual and religion is the issue of this most important transition in the ancient Egyptian ideological system, or, more importantly, the potential denial of it. The *ba*'s role in this process was vital. The most integral human anatomical part of the fully developed *ba*-image of the New Kingdom is the head.¹⁴⁹ Loss of the head might have been taken as an infringement upon the *ba*'s potential to take viable form or as a disruption of the *ba*-corpse connection resulting from the *ba*'s inability to recognize the remains of the deceased.¹⁵⁰ In this regard the New Kingdom *Book of Caverns* presents a revealing address to the decapitated dead in which the loss of the head appears in parallel with the absence of the *ba*:

O decapitated ones, without their heads, foremost of the place of annihilation! O fallen ones, without their *bas*, foremost of the place of annihilation! O inverted ones, fettered ones, foremost of the place of annihilation! O inverted ones, bloody ones deprived of hearts, foremost of the place of annihilation! O enemies of the ruler of the underworld, Osiris-Foremost-of-the-West, behold, I have commanded you to destruction! I have assigned you to non-existence!¹⁵¹ (*Book of Caverns*, 2nd Division)

The positive antithesis of enemies thus described is none other than the successful *ba* itself, as presented already approximately a millennium earlier in the *Pyramid Texts*:

May you go to the sky; may you go forth to the gate of the horizon; may Geb present you, you being a *ba* as a god, you being strong as a god, you being powerful in your body as a god and as a *ba*, foremost of the living, and as a powerful one, foremost of *akhs*.¹⁵² (*PT* 690)

The centrality of the anatomical head in the fully formed *ba*-image also should be disassociated altogether from the often literal ancient Egyptian understanding of the transition to the afterlife as a

¹⁴⁸ H. Junker, *Giza I*, 44; Vandersleyen, *Das alte ägypten*, 223. As expressed particularly in *Pyramid Texts*, the king was to join his divine predecessors as one of these "imperishable" stars. Whitney M. Davis, "The Ascension-myth in the Pyramid Texts," *JNES* 36 (1977), 161-79; Raymond Faulkner, "The King and the Star-Religion in the Pyramid Texts," *JNES* 25 (1966), 153-61; Schmidt, "Determinations und Ikonographie," 333.

¹⁴⁹ On the use of the head to denote "personal, independent powers" (i.e., personification) in composite figures, see Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: the One and the Many* (Ithaca, 1982), 123-24.

¹⁵⁰ On the reserve heads and the importance of the face in preserving identity, Jan Assmann, "Preservation and Presentation," 58-61 and Tefnin, *Art et magie*, 55-56, 69-72, 94.

¹⁵¹ A. Piankoff, "Le livre des Quererts," *BIFAO* 42 (1944), 1-42, especially 13, pls. 24-25. The translation here follows Ritner, *Mechanics*, 168-169, with slight differences in choice of terminology. See also the discussion of "the unjust damned to nonexistence" by Erik Hornung, *Valley of the Kings*, 149-64, in which part of this passage is translated on 158.

¹⁵² Sethe, *Altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte* 2, 510-11; Faulkner, *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, 298; J. Allen, *Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, 294. For discussion, see Žabkar, *Study of the Ba Concept*, 52-53.

process of (re)birth. From the ancient Egyptian perspective a person essentially could be a newborn twice. Structural and symbolic parallels between childbirth and funerary rites have been noted, for example, by Ann Macy Roth in two studies of the rites and implements of the “Opening of the Mouth” ceremony and their analogous relationship to precautionary treatment of newborns.¹⁵³ The “Opening of the Mouth,” a ritual applied to the head of the deceased (or statue), was the most important rite of reanimation and, by extension, rebirth.¹⁵⁴ Turning, then, to the biological process that is the basis for the ritual analogy: in uncomplicated actual births the head is the first part of a newborn to emerge to the “outside” world. In ancient times it is unlikely that a high percentage of complicated births had positive patient outcome for child or mother.¹⁵⁵ If this recourse to human biology seems at first to be stretching a superficial detail, one need only recall that the *Book of Going Forth by Day* sometimes includes an allusion to birth at its most critical juncture in such a way as to weave together two major themes of all funerary texts: rebirth and justification for attaining the afterlife.¹⁵⁶ The tension that accompanies the moment of biological delivery is incorporated iconographically at a similarly uneasy and decisive moment of the “second” birth. The well-known “judgment scene” that accompanies Spell 125 often includes a depiction of Meskhenet (*Mshnt*) near the balancing scale that ultimately gauges if the deceased will continue to an afterlife or be destroyed by the fantastical, composite “Devourer” (*m.t / mm(y).t / m(.t) mwt.w*) who waits nearby (fig. 8).¹⁵⁷ Meskhenet is the personification of the birth brick, known textually and ethnographically as a ritual implement upon which mothers would stand or squat during delivery and upon which a newborn could be rested.¹⁵⁸ She is often joined (and in some cases replaced) by the goddess Renenutet (*Rnnt*) and the god Shai (*Ššy / Ššw*). Upon an individual’s birth these personifying deities declared several details of fate, including prescribed lifespan, quality of life, and circumstances of death.¹⁵⁹ All three figures appear either in

¹⁵³ “The *psš-kf* and the ‘Opening of the Mouth’ Ceremony: A Ritual of Birth and Rebirth,” *JEA* 78 (1992), 113–47, and the succeeding “Fingers, Stars, and the ‘Opening of the Mouth:’ The Nature and Function of the *Ntrw*-blades,” *JEA* 79 (1993), 57–79.

¹⁵⁴ Although the current discussion does not subscribe to the ritual sequence proposed by Tefnin (*Art et magie*; “Têtes magiques de Gizeh”), there is no objection to the possibility that the “Opening of the Mouth” could have been performed for a reserve head in keeping with its proposed function as housing for a spiritual manifestation of the deceased. It may not be simple chance that at least one reserve head was found in association with implements of the ceremony. See Simpson, “IV Dynasty Portrait Head,” 287–88.

¹⁵⁵ On infant and maternal mortality, see Gay Robins, “Women and Children in Peril: Pregnancy, Birth & Infant Mortality in Ancient Egypt,” *KMT* 5:4 (Winter 1994–1995), 24–35; Gay Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (London, 1993), 85.

¹⁵⁶ Assmann, “Death and Initiation,” 146–47; Rudolph Anthes, “The Original Meaning of *mš‘hrw*,” *JNES* 13 (1954), 22–51.

¹⁵⁷ On this scene in particular, see the classic study of Christine Seeber, *Untersuchungen zur Darstellung des Totengerichts im alten Ägypten* (München-Berlin, 1976). For judgment of the dead, see also Reinhard Grieshammer, *Das Jenseitsgericht in den Sargtexten* ÄA 20 (Wiesbaden, 1970). A summary and lightly annotated list of additional sources are provided by Stephen Quirke, “Judgement of the Dead,” in Redford, *Oxford Encyclopedia* 2, 211–14.

¹⁵⁸ The most well-known appearance by Meskhenet is the literary tale of P. Westcar, in which she assists in the delivery of the early kings of Dynasty 5. For a recent translation of “King Cheops and the Magicians,” see William Kelly Simpson in William Kelly Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies, and Poetry*, 3rd ed. (New Haven-London, 2003), 13–24, esp. 21–24. The first archaeological attestation of a birth brick is presented by Josef Wegner, “A Decorated Birth-brick from South Abydos,” *Egyptian Archaeology* 21 (2002), 3–4. For recent discussions of ritual bricks see Ann Macy Roth and Catherine H. Roehrig, “Magical Bricks and the Bricks of Birth,” *JEA* 88 (2002), 121–39, and David P. Silverman, “Magical Bricks of Hunuro,” in Manuelian, *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson* 2, 725–41, in which earlier studies are referenced.

¹⁵⁹ The participation of these deities in revealing a person’s fate at birth as well as their iconographic roles in the judgment scene are discussed at length by Seeber, *Untersuchungen zur Darstellung des Totengerichts*, especially 83–89; Jan Quaegebeur, *Le dieu égyptien Shai dans la religion et l’onomastique*, OLA 2 (Leuven, 1975), 152–55; Frank T. Miosi, “God, Fate and Free Will in Egyptian Wisdom Literature,” in Gerald E. Kadish and Geoffrey E. Freeman, eds., *Studies in Philology in Honour of Ronald James Williams*, SSEA 3 (Toronto, 1982), 69–111; Roth and Roehrig, “Magical Bricks,” 129–37.

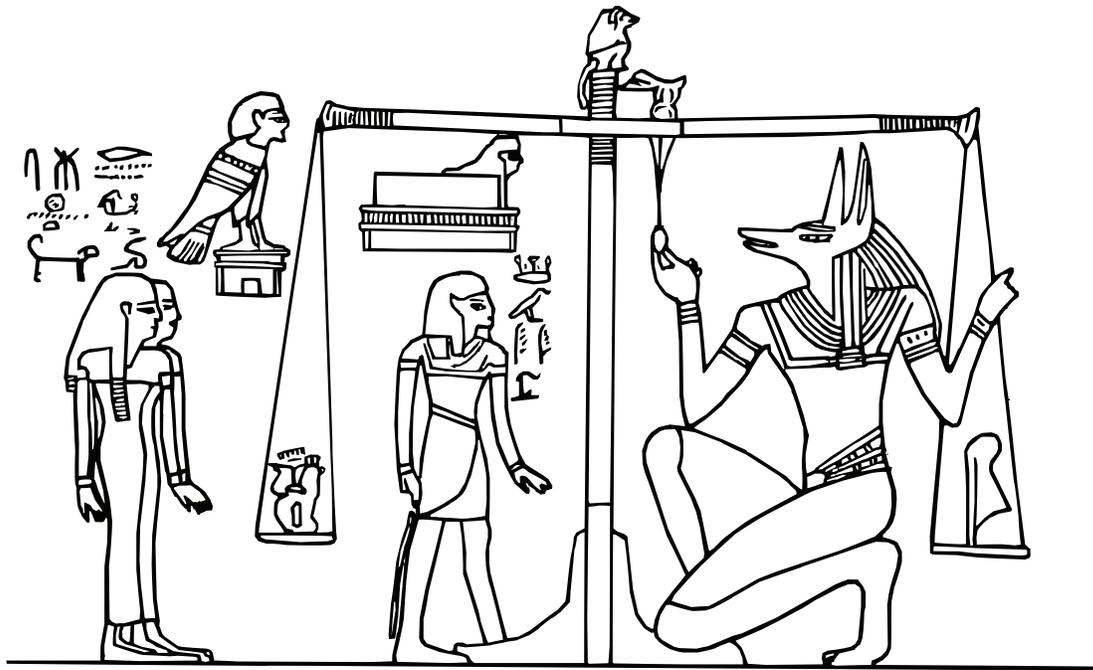


Fig. 8. Part of the “Judgment Scene” vignette for BD Spell 125 of Ani (BM 10470/3) (after R. O. Faulkner, *Book of the Dead*, 14, unnumbered fig.).

human form or as a personified brick comprised of a rectangle with human head, the latter sometimes set on a plinth.

In one of the most frequently reproduced renditions of the judgment vignette, the Nineteenth Dynasty papyrus of Ani (BM 10470/3), all three are shown as human with hieroglyphic labels, while an unlabeled, personified brick above them condenses the three into one icon (fig. 8). Next to the brick and above the brick-deities a *ba*-bird, the afterlife manifestation of the deceased whose survival is most immediately in jeopardy, awaits the pivotal verdict. For this crucial moment a scene is constructed in which uncertainty takes the form of a scale, and a pictorial opposition of divine figures signifies the only two possible consequences of the judgment scenario: successful rebirth (i.e., Meskhenet and company) or complete annihilation (i.e., the “Devourer”). Perhaps nowhere is this iconographic juxtaposition of outcomes oriented more poignantly than on a fragmentary papyrus (fig. 9) on display in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (1987.287).¹⁶⁰ This composition shows the human forms of Meskhenet, Renenutet, and Shai in an arrangement fairly similar to that of Ani’s scene, only in this case all three are placed beneath the left arm of the scale. Above them and set directly upon the arm are an unlabelled, personified brick along with a *ba*. These two figures face their antithetical counterpart, the “Devourer,” who sits atop the opposite arm of the scale. Compositionally, the showdown between success and failure is set with the scale as the staging ground and the afterlife prospects of the deceased hanging in the balance.

¹⁶⁰ A photograph only of a separate section of the “Gunn Papyrus” is included in Catherine H. Roehrig, “Book of the Dead Scenes,” in D’Auria, Lacovara, and Roehrig, *Mummies & Magic*, 143 (cat. 83), but this section is discussed.



Fig. 9. Part of the “Judgment Scene” vignette for BD Spell 125, owner unnamed. From a fragmentary papyrus in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (1987.287; the “Gunn Papyrus”). Likely Nineteenth Dynasty. Illustration by Julie Huang with reconstructions based partially on a rendition in MFA files by Yvonne Markowitz. Lacunae not indicated.

Some attention has been granted to this familiar scene from the *Book of the Dead* because it exemplifies a fundamental feature of mortuary literature. Treatments of the rebirth motif and fears of decapitation in the *Book of Going Forth by Day* (and contemporary royal Netherworld Books) are the products of many centuries of theological and literary development propelled by the fundamental purpose of such *sḥw*-texts (transfiguring, *sḥ*-promoting works). They share with the earlier corpora of *Pyramid Texts* and *Coffin Texts* the clear explication of the positive and negative outcomes available to the deceased. But, while these texts themselves provided the knowledge, protocols, and ritual magic necessary to avoid decapitation and similarly detrimental fates, the private funerary preparations contemporary with most reserve heads lacked such intricately tailored manuals.¹⁶¹ As presented here, the reserve heads could no less embody the positive and negative extremes of this very same dichotomy. They were set at junctures in the tomb through which the deceased would undergo part of a rebirth process for which the physical head was considered tremendously important, both for its

¹⁶¹ One may note the dramatic drop in reserve head use in Dynasty 5, during which the *Pyramid Texts* also appear in the record. Though it is impossible to prove that these developments are directly related, both are part of a general shift in preferred methods of preparing the deceased for the afterlife in both royal and non-royal built tombs.

metaphorical relationship to biological birth and for the personal link between the *ba* and the corpse preserved in their individualized facial features. However, a head-only form of statuary could also lend itself to “readings” that could encompass the semantic category of decapitation, implicating with it absolute dissolution after death. This notion will have been all the more unpleasant given that the reserve heads portrayed the deceased already in this dreaded state.¹⁶² The heads could be highly personal, individualized references to decapitation, specific to tomb owners because of likenesses captured in stone.

Private Egyptians of the Old Kingdom were subject to a harsher array of restrictions upon expression in the tomb than in succeeding historical periods, yet it was still the primary outlet for expressing what was permissible—or perhaps to test the boundaries of existing rules. Execration magic, a variant of which is the practice here called “semantic homicide,” was an available and acceptable remedy for the unfortunate secondary implications of the reserve head shape, as would be the case with dangerous hieroglyphs slightly later. The elaborate preventative measures supplied in later times by the spells of mortuary texts were achieved instead in this early era by the nullification of the conceptual domain of decapitation as it pertained to the individual tomb owner, thus on some level protecting him/her from dying again. If it is accepted that the reserve heads functioned as something resembling *ba*-statuary, then the deceased’s *ba* was prevented from becoming its negative alter-ego, one among the “damned,” decapitated dead of later texts.¹⁶³ This interpretation complements the traditional theory that the reserve heads were intended as magical prosthetics: they interceded not only physically, but also magically and conceptually against the loss of the head.

Epilogue

As for what equipment or mode of expression succeeded the reserve heads upon their departure from the archaeological record, the answer has rightly been considered within the context of early mummification practices.¹⁶⁴ The reserve heads have been discussed as parallels to plaster mummy masks and body coverings that together comprise an early developmental stage in methods of artificially preserving the body in a built tomb.¹⁶⁵ An evolutionary relationship is posited that sees them as having given way to plaster mummy masks, which, as noted above, date to the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties.¹⁶⁶ These masks have modeled facial features of varying degrees of realism and, along with the reserve heads, represent a general Old Kingdom trend among the elite that stressed techniques of

¹⁶² This specificity of identity may explain why reserve heads received violent treatment but hieroglyphic signs that depict just heads (e.g., *hr* and *tp*) were not among those commonly mutilated. Their generic quality may have carried no dangerous effect. An alternate possibility is that divine associations with these signs may have rendered them immune. See Karol Mysliwiec, “A propos des signes hiéroglyphiques ‘*hr*’ et ‘*tp*,’” *ZÄS* 98 (1972), 85–99.

¹⁶³ This polarity finds a lexical counterpart in the terms *bʿ* and *bʿw*, which denote positive/creative and destructive forces, respectively; see Assmann, *Mind of Egypt*, 145–46; Žabkar, *Study of the Ba Concept*, 85–89.

¹⁶⁴ Most recently Roehrig, “Reserve Heads: An Enigma,” 77; Spänel, *Through Ancient Eyes*, 44–46. Oddly, Édouard Naville once ventured that the personified heart amulet is a New Kingdom descendent of the reserve head in “Les amulettes du chevet et de la tête,” *ZÄS* 48 (1910), 107–11, especially 110–11. On these somewhat rare amulets, see Carol Andrews, *Amulets of Ancient Egypt* (London, 1994), 72–73, fig. 61.

¹⁶⁵ For plaster masks and mummy coverings of the Old Kingdom, see Tacke, “Entwicklung der Mumienmaske,” which includes more detail than Smith, *HESPOK*, 24–25, 27–28; Brunner, “Altorientalische Gesichtsmasken aus Gips,” 330–31; Ludwig Borchardt, “Mumienmasken aus Gips aus den letzten Zeiten des Alten Reiches in Ägypten,” *Amtliche Berichte aus den Königlichen Kunstsammlungen* 37 (1915–1916), 267–74. Surviving masks outnumber full-body coverings substantially.

¹⁶⁶ Hermann Junker proposes a functional equivalence between the reserve heads and the masks in *Vorläufiger Bericht über die 3te Grabung bei den Pyramiden von Gizeh* (Vienne, 1914), 169–71; also H. Junker “The Austrian Excavations, 1914: Excavations of the Vienna Imperial Academy of Sciences at the Pyramids of Gizah,” *JEA* 1 (1914), 250–53, especially 252–53. For supporting opinions, see also Brunner, “Altorientalische Gesichtsmasken aus Gips,” 331–32; Simpson, “IV Dynasty Portrait Head,” 290–91; Smith, *HESPOK*, 24–25. A summary within the framework of a dissenting opinion is Tefnin, *Art et Magie*, 56–64; also in disagreement is Tacke, “Entwicklung der Mumienmaske,” 315 (Exkurs A).

giving the deceased a somewhat lifelike appearance for entombment.¹⁶⁷ The two types of funerary equipment show similarly limited geographic distribution in the Memphite region and also shared basic attributes: preservation of individuality through reproduction of facial features, protection from harm, and proximity to the corpse. The survival of the masks over the reserve heads probably resulted from the latter's complications, a preference for trappings that were applied directly to the corpse as a "second skin" of sorts, or perhaps both.

Innovations in funerary headgear continued in the First Intermediate Period with the advent of more widely employed cartonnage mummy masks, eventually with elongated version that likely spawned the classic form of anthropoid coffins as of the late Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period.¹⁶⁸ Both types of mummy coverings included avian-inspired variants that became prominent in Dynasty 17 through the early New Kingdom. The dominance of feathered patterning on plumed "micro-face" mummy masks and the winged *rishi* coffins of this period present the deceased with avian attributes in all likelihood based upon the archetype of the *ba*.¹⁶⁹ Through the New Kingdom and later the material culture of the tomb would see a proliferation in the range of funerary accoutrements that carried representations of the *ba*. Thus, the reserve heads occupy an early stage in a long and distinguished material lineage that eventually referenced the *ba*-concept explicitly. These later incarnations make it all the more compelling to see a reflection of the private *ba* in Old Kingdom funerary religion, even if in a precursory form that, like mummification itself, was at a very immature and exploratory stage in its lengthy history.

No theory concerning the reserve heads is without its exceptions and due criticism. However, by evaluating them collectively in terms of the religious motif of the decapitated dead, the practice of "semantic homicide," and the consideration of an early inception of a private *ba*, their most cumbersome of apparent contradictions become considerably less daunting. Though the reserve heads will undoubtedly continue to incite lively discussion and debate, it is hoped that this approach might in some small way edge scholarship closer to consensus regarding their proper niche in the archaeology of ancient Egyptian funerary religion.

University of Pennsylvania
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

¹⁶⁷ See Russmann, "Portraiture," 35; Salima Ikram and Aidan Dodson, *The Mummy in Ancient Egypt: Equipping the Dead for Eternity* (London, 1998), 167.

¹⁶⁸ For a brief developmental history of these mummy trappings, see Ikram and Dodson, *Mummy in Ancient Egypt*, 166–70.

¹⁶⁹ Ikram and Dodson, *Mummy in Ancient Egypt*, 169, 204–10. The development of *rishi* coffin iconography prior to the late Second Intermediate Period has been discussed recently by Gianluca Miniaci, "Some Remarks on the Development of *rishi* Coffins," in Silke Grallert and Wolfram Grajetzki, eds., *Life and Afterlife in Ancient Egypt during the Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period*, Egyptology 7 (London, 2007), 94–99.