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Foreword

There can be no academic subject for which the general public has such an inexhaustible appetite as Egyptology, and no period more so than the age of the pyramids. But the popular writings in this area are notoriously variable. While there is no shortage of reliable and accessible surveys by leading scholars in the field, neither does one have to look far on book lists to find an abundance of ‘pyramidology’ and other nonsense which also finds a wide audience. It was therefore a very welcome opportunity that arose when Helen Strudwick proposed that the 2009 Old Kingdom Art and Archaeology conference be held at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge so as to coincide with our annual Glanville Lecture on Egyptology, thus bringing the fruits of recent excavation and research by leading scholars to a wide general audience. The resulting event, held on 20–23 May 2009, consisted of a three-day meeting of specialist researchers, followed by a day of talks by some of the foremost experts in the Old Kingdom, to which the public was also invited, all culminating that evening in the Glanville Lecture delivered by Dr Jaromir Malek on 'A city on the move: Egypt’s capital in the Old Kingdom'. This volume publishes all but three of the twenty-seven papers presented at the conference, plus one additional offering.

The Fitzwilliam Museum is fortunate to have one of the most important collections of Egyptian antiquities in the UK and thus provides a very appropriate setting for the OKAA conference. The earliest Egyptian object to arrive—a very fine Third Intermediate Period coffin set—was given in 1822, only six years after the bequest of Viscount Fitzwilliam created the museum, and a quarter century before the building erected to house its collections first opened its doors. Since then the Museum’s Egyptian collection has grown to nearly 17,000 objects, of which some one thousand are on display. The Egyptian galleries were refurbished in 2006 and remain the most popular in the museum.

Stephen Glanville, after whom the lecture is named, was Professor of Egyptology at Cambridge (1946–1956), as well as being Chairman of the Fitzwilliam’s Syndicate and Honorary Keeper of Antiquities. Glanville saw it as essential that the Museum’s Egyptian collections were actively used in teaching—as is still the case today—and that they continue to grow through acquisition. His commitment to engaging the public in the fascinating discoveries of professional Egyptologists has been continued by the Museum by the holding of a lecture bearing his name since 1977. We were delighted that Jaromir Malek accepted the invitation to give the 2009 lecture; and that so many distinguished scholars of Old Kingdom Egypt were able to attend the conference with which it was paired.

Special thanks are due to Helen Strudwick, at the time Senior Assistant Keeper, Antiquities, and Nigel Strudwick, the organisers of the conference, who have also edited the papers published here.

Timothy Potts
Director
The Fitzwilliam Museum
Cambridge
This volume presents twenty-five of the twenty-seven papers presented at the 2009 Conference Old Kingdom Art and Archaeology, generously hosted by the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. The history of these Old Kingdom meetings was admirably summarised by Miroslav Bárta in his Foreword to the proceedings of the 2004 conference, held in Prague, and it would be superfluous to repeat it here. The contents of the present volume show the wide range of subjects which this research group now embraces, from the Pyramid Texts through site reports, from the analysis of statue orientation to attempts to study the spatial arrangement of Old Kingdom cemeteries. Some of the papers are substantially the same as those presented at the meeting, but the editors have encouraged authors, where they feel it is necessary, to expand upon their ideas and to take them beyond the limited range of material which can be presented in a twenty-minute talk. One further paper which could not be presented at the conference is also included.

We were delighted to welcome to Cambridge colleagues from all over the Egyptological world, and they fairly represent where the Old Kingdom is studied most. We are delighted to be able to include the paper from Abdou el-Kerety (better known to his friends and colleagues as Hatem); visa problems meant that he was regrettably unable to be present at the conference, despite our best efforts with the UK authorities, but his contribution was read and appreciated in his absence. The paper of Gabriele Pieke could not be presented at the conference but we are happy to be able to include it. The longest paper presented here is by Mark Lehner and his co-authors and is a report on progress of his excavations at Giza; this has turned into a substantial publication and analysis and it is a great pleasure to be able to include it in this volume.

The final day of the conference was open to the public, focusing more particularly on papers relating to the archaeology and monuments of the Memphite region. This, and indeed the conference as a whole, formed a precursor to the thirty-third Stephen Glanville Memorial Lecture. This annual event, hosted by the Fitzwilliam Museum, has been an important fixture in the Cambridge and UK Egyptological calendar since 1977. In 2009, the Lecture was given by Dr Jaromir Malek on the subject 'A city on the move: Egypt's capital in the Old Kingdom'.

The editors would like to thank many persons without whose help and assistance the 2009 Old Kingdom Art and Archaeology meeting could not have taken place. First and foremost, we are deeply indebted to Dr Timothy Potts and all the staff of the Fitzwilliam Museum for enabling the events to take place so successfully, and for ensuring the efficient operation of everything from computer projectors through to the teas and coffees which sustained us. We also thank our colleagues whose enlightening papers and discussion made the meeting the success it was, and we acknowledge their efforts in enabling the completion of the manuscript just over two years since the meeting.

We are delighted to acknowledge the help and assistance offered by Oxbow Books in taking this publication into their archaeological series. To our editor, Clare Litt, and the head of production, Val Lamb, go our profound thanks for their advice and support.

Nigel Strudwick
Helen Strudwick
The ‘Reserve Heads’: some remarks on their function and meaning

Massimiliano Nuzzolo

Introduction

A full century has elapsed since Jacques de Morgan’s excavations at Dahshur unearthed the first reserve head (Cairo CG 591). Since then, many theories have been put forward to explain their anomalous shape and strange mutilations, but none has found a general consensus among scholars. My gratitude goes to those friends and colleagues who kindly assisted this study: Rosanna Pirelli (University of Naples ‘L’Orientale’; Director of the Italian Archaeological Centre in Cairo) for comments and suggestions during each stage of the study; Peter D. Manuelian (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: Giza Archives Project: www.mfa.org/giza) for several references on the topic and for making information so easily accessible through the Giza Archives; Harold M. Hays (Leiden University) who revised the English version of this paper. Any mistake remains, of course, my own responsibility. Special thanks also go to Nigel and Helen Strudwick for inviting me to join this wonderful and interesting meeting in Cambridge.

This situation of uncertainty is even more complicated by the lack of any textual evidence contemporary with the heads which could help us to uncover the secrets of the religious beliefs and funerary practices of the Egyptians of that period more than just the indirect archaeological evidence does. At the same time, however, we must beware of using later textual sources too freely to support our interpretations of much older archaeological data, unless these

1 My gratitude goes to those friends and colleagues who kindly assisted this study: Rosanna Pirelli (University of Naples ‘L’Orientale’; Director of the Italian Archaeological Centre in Cairo) for comments and suggestions during each stage of the study; Peter D. Manuelian (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston: Giza Archives Project: www.mfa.org/giza) for several references on the topic and for making information so easily accessible through the Giza Archives; Harold M. Hays (Leiden University) who revised the English version of this paper. Any mistake remains, of course, my own responsibility. Special thanks also go to Nigel and Helen Strudwick for inviting me to join this wonderful and interesting meeting in Cambridge.

2 J. de Morgan, Fouilles à Dahchour, mars–juin 1894 (Vienne 1895), 9, fig. 7.

Fig. 1: Map of the Giza Necropolis (after Jánosi, in Arnold (ed.), Egyptian Art, 28). In grey the mastabas built during Khufu's reign.
sources directly refer to the period in question. Indeed, despite the traditional, conservative character of Egyptian thought and myth, each period has its own peculiarities as to both religious and historical backgrounds.

Therefore, starting from a reconsideration of the whole corpus of artefacts and a comparison with other important archaeological, ideological and religious elements of the same period, I will try to show how these sculptures were closely related to the political theology of the beginning of the fourth dynasty and particularly to the figure of Khufu.

In doing so, however, I do not claim to offer any conclusive solutions. With this discussion, I simply wish to draw attention to some reservations and possible lines of research, hoping that these ‘magical heads’ may continue to receive such attention.

The corpus of the heads: artistic features and archaeological context

Carved in fine white limestone, although sometimes finished with substantial amount of plaster, the heads show unmistakable physiognomic features with clear portrait hints.

4 It appears to be a trend in recent theories to attempt to approach the subject via later textual and/or archaeological sources. This is the case, for instance, for Roehrig, in Arnold (ed.), *Egyptian Art*, 77–78 and Picardo, *JARCE* 43 (2007), 238 ff which will be discussed in detail later. Also in the present paper later texts will be occasionally used (Westcar Papyrus) but only because of their direct connection to the period/king we are dealing with, namely the fourth dynasty and Khufu in particular. As to the use of later sources, see also Tefnin, in Arnold (ed.), *Oxford Encyclopedia III*, 146, although he does not always appear to adhere to these strictures.

5 P.D. Manuelian, *Mastabas of Nucleus Cemetery G 2100* (Giza Mastabas 8; Boston 2009) appeared after this article has been submitted and it has not been possible to consult it. I am aware that it contains further references to the ‘Reserve Heads’.


7 According to most scholars, we can certainly speak of real portraiture in the case of the reserve heads: see for example D. Dunham, ‘Portraiture in Ancient Egypt’, *BMFA* 41 (1943), 68–72; Smith, *HESPOK*, 28–29; Junge, in Stadelmann and Sourouzian (eds), *Kunst*, 103–109; A. O. Bolschakov, Man and his double in Egyptian Ideology of the Old Kingdom (*ÄÄT* 37; Wiesbaden 1997), 234–260, especially 257–258; E. R. Russmann, ‘Portraiture’, in E. R. Russmann (ed.), *Eternal Egypt: Masterworks of Ancient Art from the British Museum* (Berkeley–Los Angeles 2001), 32–39, particularly 33–35. Assmann goes a step further by saying that: ‘The portrait has no apparent communicative and commemorative meaning. It is not meant as a “sign” but as a “body” to make a somewhat illegitimate use of the Platonic pun on soma (body) and sema (sign). “Body” and “sign”, soma and sema, can also be regarded as the two foci on which the tomb as a “bifocal” structure is centered. … The question arises as to which focus statutory belongs, and the answer can—with regard to the private sculpture of the Old Kingdom—obviously point only to the “body” focus. It is the body, and not the sign, which is extended by this type of tomb sculpture’. However, as we will see later, he seems wrong in comparing functionally the reserve heads and the mummy plaster masks of the same period. See J. Assmann, ‘Preservation and Presentation of Self in Ancient Egyptian Portraiture’, in P.D. Manuelian (ed.), *Studies in Honor of William Kelly Simpson I* (Boston 1996), 55–81 and particularly 58–62; the quote above is on p. 61. On other hand, Tefnin raises some doubt about the use of the term portraiture for the reserve heads because of their standardised nature as well as magical power and significance. See Tefnin, *Art et Magie*, 64–73. Based on the ‘individuality’ of these heads and their life-size scale, Reisner and Junker also stressed the possible familial relationships among the subjects and/or their ethnic background. See G. A. Reisner, ‘Accessions to the Egyptian Department during 1914’, *BMFA* 13 (1915), 29–36, and H. Junker, *Giza. Grabungen auf dem Friedhof des Alten Reiches bei den Pyramiden von Giza I* (DAWG 69; Wien–Leipzig 1929), 63–65. This idea, however, must be discarded as clearly demonstrated by Tefnin, *Art et Magie*, 62–69 and Roehrig, in Arnold (ed.), *Egyptian Art*, 73–74, 238–241 (cat. 48–49).

8 The problem of colour on the heads’ surface is indeed still much debated: very tiny traces of paint are visible on at least five heads, namely Berkeley 6-19767, Cairo JE 46216 and JE 44974, Boston MFA 14.718 and MFA 21.328 (for the complete depiction of the heads see Tefnin, *Art et Magie*, 12, 97, 101–110, 112–113 [cat. 1, 5, 7, 14, 17]). However, Roehrig casts many doubts upon a real, extensive treatment of the reserve heads using paint since traces of colour are never visible in those points where one would expect to find them, vis, in the deep lines around the eyes and the nostrils and at the corners of the mouth. See Roehrig, in Arnold (ed.), *Egyptian Art*, 237, n. 2. Tefnin does also agree with this statement: Tefnin, in Redford (ed.), *Oxford Encyclopedia III*, 145.


10 Vandersleyen, in *ÄÄT* II (1977), 11; Miller, in Simpson and Davis (eds), *Studies in Ancient Egypt*, 130; Tefnin, *Art et Magie*, 14–15; Miller, in Arnold (ed.), *Egyptian Art*, 233; Tefnin, in Redford (ed.), *Oxford Encyclopedia III*, 145. On the contrary, Roehrig argues that this is only a photographic effect: ‘The chin of the present example [Boston MFA 21.328] and a number of others is slightly raised, a feature that has led some scholars to assert that all reserve heads gaze
and the lack of any explicit indicator of gender—usually a very important concern in Egyptian statuary—seem to be further indications that these sculptures were produced in series in the same, probably royal, workshop.

However, of the thirty-six heads known, I will take only thirty-one into consideration, those from Giza. Almost upward. However, profile views of this piece and nearly every other reserve head reveal that they look straight ahead even if the chin is raised.' and 'Many photographs of Egyptian Museum, Cairo, JE 46217, the head of Meret-ites, are taken from below eye level and this creates the impression that she looks up. However, when the piece is seen in profile, she appears to look straight ahead' (Roehrig, in Arnold (ed.), *Egyptian Art*, 236, n. 7).

11 Contrary to Reisner’s and Smith’s opinion (Reisner, 1915), 32–35; Reisner, *Giza Necropolis I*, 64–65 and pls 52–55; Smith, *HESPOK*, 28–29; in this sense see also Assmann, in Manueilian (ed.), *Studies Simpson I*, 58–60, figs 3–7; Piccardo, *JARCE* 43 (2007), 228 no head shows clear indication of whether male or female is represented. Indeed neither the head from the Roemer- und Pelizaeus-Museum in Hildesheim (Inv. 2384) nor that from the Cairo Egyptian Museum (JE 46217) could have been certainly attributed to a female without the other explicit, archaeological references found in the respective tombs, i.e. the slab stelae with the name of the tomb’s owner (Roehrig, in Arnold (ed.), *Egyptian Art*, 237, n. 1). Based on Reisner’s suggestions, Junker proposed identifying two broad groups, one of more noble and one of more peasant origin (Junker, *Giza I*, 63–65). This idea is also very problematic and was criticised by Tefnin, *Art et Magie*, 62–69. For more details on the two above-mentioned heads see also Tefnin, *Art et Magie*, 113–134, 123–124 (cat. 18, 32).

12 The bibliography on this topic is extensive. Two of the most complete studies on portraiture in ancient Egypt are K. Lange, *Ägyptische Bildnis* (Munich 1957); E. Buschor, *Das Portrait. Bildniswege und Bildnisstufen in fünf Jahrhunderten* (Munich 1960). However, in this context, it is worth mentioning at least other three studies particularly devoted to the portrait in the Old Kingdom, viz. Dunham, *BMFA* 41 (1943), 68–72; A. O. Bolshakov, ‘The Ideology of the Old Kingdom Portrait’, *GM* 117/118 (1990), 89–142, particularly 126–134; M. Eaton-Krauss, *The representation of statue in private tombs of the Old Kingdom* (ÄA 39; Wiesbaden 1984).


14 For a complete list of the heads see Tefnin, *Art et Magie*, 149–150. This list omits the head ‘Cairo JE 89611’ (which is, however, mentioned in the catalogue with no. 22) since it comes from somewhere in the Giza necropolis (see PM II1, 305). This head will not be taken into account in this paper because of the lack of any information about its uncarving in the Giza necropolis, although it shows clear similarities (and thus probably also the same chronology) with the other heads which we consider. To these we must add one found in 1989 at Lisht by Dieter and Dorothea Arnold and dated to the early twelfth dynasty. This head, however, is completely different from the others as to both shape and size: it is only 10.25 cm high and seems to have been part of the debris from a sculptor’s workshop that was used as fill for a burial shaft. See Roehrig, in Arnold (ed.), *Egyptian Art*, 79, n. 2.


17 See n. 4 for the bibliography.


19 Bolshakov, in Eyre (ed.), *Seventh International Congress*, 21. As a matter of fact, no head was found in situ and this leads us to reject Bolshakov’s idea of a reuse of the head. Nevertheless, the head from Saqqara raises many doubts because of its different size (only 19.5 cm high) and confused archaeological context. Although the head should be in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, no photo and/or catalogue number exists for this artefact. Roehrig suggests that it could have been a sculptor’s trial piece that was discarded and became mingled with debris used to fill the shaft as in the case of the Lisht head (Roehrig, in Arnold (ed.), *Egyptian Art*, 80, n. 22). For the head from Abusir, it seems to be an isolated revival of the old fourth dynasty tradition. The reasons for such a ‘ideological reuse’ may lay in the strong solar aspect of the reign of Niuserre to which the head dates, an imprint which is directly linked in many ways to Khufu and his solar ideology; see H. Goedicke, ‘Abusir—Saqqara—Giza’, in M. Bärta, J. Krejčí (eds), *Abusir and Saqqara in the Year 2000* (ArSoP Supl. IX, Prague 2000), 405–408; M. Nuzzolo, ‘The Sun Temples of the V Dynasty: a reassessment’, *SAK* 36 (2007), 228–289, 238–240.

20 See n. 1 for the bibliography and Tefnin, *Art et Magie*, 108 (cat. 12).

21 Roehrig, in Arnold (ed.), *Egyptian Art*, 74 and n. 16. She also stresses the close similarities between the head from: Dahshur and Giza heads Berkeley 6-19767 and Cairo JE 46217 (Tefnin, *Art et Magie*, cat. 1, 18). According to her, these three heads may have been likely the first ones of the series, thus confirming the short chronological separation between the Dahshur head and the Giza ones. Stadelmann also pointed out that a completely new artistic style (‘Strenge Stil’) was already developing in Dahshur during the
The majority of the thirty-one reserve heads with which we are going to deal were unearthed in the so-called ‘Western Cemetery’ or ‘Western Field’ at Giza26 (Plate 7), and in particular in the three burial fields in this area extending west of Khufu’s pyramid and dating from his reign: cemeteries G 1200, G 2100 and G 4000.23 The first two cemeteries yielded one head each (G 1203 and G 2110)24 but twenty-two were found in cemetery G 4000,25 nearly all of them in the group of twenty-four mastabas that belong to the very first building phases identified by Reisner (Fig. 1, Plate 7).26 These structures form three rows of eight tombs to the east of the huge mastaba of Hemiunu (G 4000), certainly the most important of this cemetery in view of its size as well as its position.27

Seven heads were found outside cemeteries G 1200, G 2100 and G 4000. Two were found in the western field but in slightly later tombs (D 38 and G 5020)28 which were, however, very close to cemetery G 4000.29 Four other heads come from the so-called ‘Eastern Field’ G 7000, on the east side of Khufu’s pyramid, belonging to the most important members of the royal family.30 All of them, however, were found in very disturbed contexts and in mastabas not belonging to the core of the cemetery certainly built under Khufu’s reign but slightly to the south (Fig. 1).31 Indeed, three were found in mastaba G 7560 (two heads) and G 7650, while the last one (Boston 36-12-6) was found outside the tomb, laying in the street to the east of the large mastaba G 7510 of Ankhkhaf.

The last head found at Giza comes from the Central Field, more specifically from the so-called ‘Tomb of Khafre’s Daughter’ dated in a period spanning the reigns of Khufu and Khafre.32 This tomb, excavated by Selim Hassan at the end of the 1940s, had been penetrated by water and mud but was not plundered. The head was found in the middle of the burial chamber—not so far from the sarcophagus—lying on the floor in the mud that had filled the room.33 Both for its archaeological context and for other arguments we will look at later in detail, it seems to be the only one from somewhere near the likely original location of the heads inside the burial chamber.34

No tomb yielding a reserve head offered any other decoration or statuary35 aside from slab stelae, an item of funerary equipment that, as clearly demonstrated by Peter Manuelian, seems to be related to the heads more than their number might imply.36 Most of these stelae were found in

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28 Although the chronology of the mastaba of Hemiunu is still discussed by scholars, it seems to belong to the late reign of Khufu. See in particular Junker, *Giza I*, 132–162, especially 157–161; N. Strudwick, *The Administration of Egypt in the Old Kingdom: The Highest Titles and Their Holders* (London 1985), 117 (cat. 96). The style of his famous statue seems to further support this dating: see Junge, in Stadelmann and Sourouzian (eds), *Kunst*, 103–109; Marsha Hill, ‘Hemiunu seated’, in Arnold (ed.), *Egyptian Art*, 229–231 (cat. 44) with further bibliography.
30 On the basis of its archaeological context, Reisner was firmly convinced that the head could not have been come from the burial chamber of tomb G 5020 but belonged to a neighbouring mastaba of cemetery G 4000, having been later thrown into the shaft of the other tomb with the debris (Reisner, *Giza Necropolis I*, 466, pl. 56a).
31 See n. 21 in the present paper for the bibliography. See also Baud, *Famille et pouvoir*, 62–63.
32 See Tefnin, *Art et Magie*, 106, 107, 115, 126–127 (cat. 9, 11, 20, 35) with further bibliography. For their placement in the necropolis, see Tefnin, *Art et Magie*, pl. XXXII, to be compared with PM III2, pl. XVIII.
36 See also Picard, *JARCE* 43 (2007), 229.
37 All these tombs also lack a serdab; M. Bárta, ‘Serdab and Statue Placement in the Private Tombs down to the Fourth Dynasty’, *MDAIK* 54 (1998), 65–75, especially 70 ff. See also Jánosi, in Arnold (ed.), *Egyptian Art*, 29–32, fig. 14–15.
38 See P.D. Manuelian, ‘The Problem of the Giza Slab Stelae’, in
cemetery G 1200, where only one reserve head was discovered, while only four complete or fragmentary slab stelae were found in cemetery G 4000 (Plate 7). However, nine other mastabas of this cemetery, which contained reserve heads, did also have empty emplacements for the stelae.\(^{37}\)

Thus, it is quite possible that all the mastabas once housed both stelae and heads—all the more so, as many heads would have probably been made in mud (two examples are known—see the heads mentioned in n. 6 in the present paper) and could not have survived intentional or occasional damage during the centuries.

Therefore, the reserve heads and slab stelae appear to have been closely tied to Khufu and to his ambitious architectural project to arrange all the members of his court in a rigid, schematic hierarchy for the hereafter.\(^{38}\) From the titles engraved on slab stelae, we know that their owners did hold very important offices either in the bureaucratic-administrative sphere, or in the religious one.\(^{39}\) Moreover, they were often also linked to the pharaoh by family ties, the title of ss-ss-nswt being quite commonly found on them.\(^{40}\)

Their high rank seems to be further confirmed by the existence of very few distinctive tombs in cemetery G 4000 such as the above-mentioned mastaba of Hemiuunu. Among all priests and officials certainly dated to Khufu’s reign, Hemiuunu was the only one who possessed a ‘standard’ tomb with a serdab and a substantial decorative programme.\(^{41}\) We can only find similar, complete tombs endowed with large-scale statuary and elaborate figurative programmes in the eastern field, and these belong to some of the most important persons in the royal family like, for example, Kahub, Khafkhufu I, Herjedef and Ancakhaf.\(^{42}\) Thus, all the elements of our analysis seem to lead to Khufu to whom the riddle of the reserve heads should be traced back.

**Old and new theories on the value and meaning of the heads**

To explain this puzzle, I take a step backward starting from the very designation of these sculptures as ‘reserve heads’. This name, given by Borchardt at the beginning of the twentieth century\(^{43}\) and still in use nowadays, seems to imply a positive meaning: their purpose was to protect and/or replace the actual perishable head of the deceased should it be lost or destroyed. This theory, however, is not particularly convincing since the representation of a complete human figure is quite the norm in the Egyptian statuary which generally avoided, for magico-religious reasons, the depiction of incomplete bodies.\(^{44}\)

Even the reconstruction of the heads’ original position in the burial chamber gives rise to some doubts: Baud suggested the heads were placed in a niche in the burial chamber door blockage, very close to the shaft where many heads housed both stelae and heads—all the more so, as many heads would have probably been made in mud (two examples are known—see the heads mentioned in n. 6 in the present paper) and could not have survived intentional or occasional damage during the centuries.

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Therefore, the reserve heads and slab stelae appear to have been closely tied to Khufu and to his ambitious architectural project to arrange all the members of his court in a rigid, schematic hierarchy for the hereafter.\(^{38}\) From the titles engraved on slab stelae, we know that their owners did hold very important offices either in the bureaucratic-administrative sphere, or in the religious one.\(^{39}\) Moreover, they were often also linked to the pharaoh by family ties, the title of ss-ss-nswt being quite commonly found on them.\(^{40}\)

Their high rank seems to be further confirmed by the existence of very few distinctive tombs in cemetery G 4000 such as the above-mentioned mastaba of Hemiuunu. Among all priests and officials certainly dated to Khufu’s reign, Hemiuunu was the only one who possessed a ‘standard’ tomb with a serdab and a substantial decorative programme.\(^{41}\) We can only find similar, complete tombs endowed with large-scale statuary and elaborate figurative programmes in the eastern field, and these belong to some of the most important persons in the royal family like, for example, Kahub, Khafkhufu I, Herjedef and Ancakhaf.\(^{42}\) Thus, all the elements of our analysis seem to lead to Khufu to whom the riddle of the reserve heads should be traced back.

**Old and new theories on the value and meaning of the heads**

To explain this puzzle, I take a step backward starting from the very designation of these sculptures as ‘reserve heads’. This name, given by Borchardt at the beginning of the twentieth century\(^{43}\) and still in use nowadays, seems to imply a positive meaning: their purpose was to protect and/or replace the actual perishable head of the deceased should it be lost or destroyed. This theory, however, is not particularly convincing since the representation of a complete human figure is quite the norm in the Egyptian statuary which generally avoided, for magico-religious reasons, the depiction of incomplete bodies.\(^{44}\)

Even the reconstruction of the heads’ original position in the burial chamber gives rise to some doubts: Baud suggested the heads were placed in a niche in the burial chamber door blockage, very close to the shaft where many heads housed both stelae and heads—all the more so, as many heads would have probably been made in mud (two examples are known—see the heads mentioned in n. 6 in the present paper) and could not have survived intentional or occasional damage during the centuries.

First, the mastaba of Hemiuunu underwent a significant enlargement in a second building phase, receiving two serdabs—one of them endowed with his famous statue—and a long narrow corridor—with two false doors—on its west side. See Junker, *Giza I*, 132 ff, figs 18–20, pls 15–16, 18. Therefore the original project of the mastaba may have been completed slightly after or at the very end of Khufu’s reign with the addition of a sculptural as well as a figurative programme which had not been originally envisaged. This is all the more important if we consider that Hemiuunu is the only holder of the title *si-nswt n hff* (*son of the king’s body*) among males buried in cemetery G 4000.

Reisner, *Giza Necropolis I*, 15–17, 70–75, 115–120, 209–211; W. K. Simpson, *The Mastabas of Kawab, Khafkhufu I and II* (Giza Mastabas 3; Boston 1978). As far as the chronology of the mastaba of Ancakhaf (G 7510) is concerned, many architectural and archaeological elements seem to suggest a dating well into the reign of Khufu: see Strudwick, *Administration*, 77–78 (cat. 34); Baud, *Famille et pouvoir*, 424–425 (cat. 35). This dating seems to be also confirmed by the style of his famous bust. Contrary to this opinion is Reisner, *Giza Necropolis I*, 75, 212, 333, who dated his tomb to the reign of Khafr. For a brief overview of the history of the ‘Eastern Cemetery’ see also W. S. Smith, ‘Inscriptional Evidence for the History of the Fourth Dynasty’, *JNES* 11 (1952), 113–128, particularly 127–128; Janosi, in Arnold (ed.), *Egyptian Art*, 29–32.

Borchardt, *Ne-user-reţ*, 133, named them ‘Ersatzköpfe’. His idea was later largely developed by Junker, *Giza I*, 57–61.

W. S. Smith, *The Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt* (2nd ed. revised by W. K. Simpson), London 1981, 57; See also n. 12 in the present paper.

Fig. 2: Limestone reserve heads with completely different treatments of the ears: (above) the head Boston 14.719 from mastaba G 4440 with its ears intact; (below) the head Cairo JE 46217 from mastaba G 4140 with carefully chiselled off ears (after Tefnin, Art et magie, pl. VIII, XVIII)
of them were found.\textsuperscript{45} He also theorised that the round holes found in the stone portcullis slabs which sealed tomb entrances were for the reserve heads to look through as if it were a real serdab.\textsuperscript{46} If so, however, the heads should have been placed in the superstructure of the tomb, and not in the substructure where they could have received no funerary cult and offerings.

Furthermore, the portcullis slabs have a much longer history and wider distribution than the reserve heads themselves. The holes positioned at the top of these slabs, being often more than two, were almost certainly for insertion of the ropes used to lower the slabs into position in the tomb after the burial chamber was sealed.\textsuperscript{47} Moreover, Junker's alleged niche in the door blockage does not have any parallel in Egyptian architecture and would also weaken the original purpose of such blockings.\textsuperscript{48}

Theories explaining the heads as prototypes of cartonnage mummy masks (and perhaps even of later anthropoid coffins of the First Intermediate Period) or simply as sculptors' models like the famous Amarna pieces\textsuperscript{49} also appear to be quite unlikely. On the one hand, the mummy mask was generally modelled directly onto the face of the deceased, a practise which is clearly supported by archaeological evidence from Maidum and Giza itself, dating from the fourth dynasty.\textsuperscript{50} On the other hand, sculptors' models would have neither been made in the fine white limestone in which the reserve heads are carved\textsuperscript{51} nor would they have been brought into the tombs by their owners, where the heads would have been devoid of any cult significance while very dangerous for the deceased.\textsuperscript{52} Moreover, it seems quite odd that these heads would have served as sculptors' models for people who did not have any other statue in their tombs where in fact the only type of 'sculpture' ever found is the slab stela.\textsuperscript{53}

The most controversial aspect of the topic, however, is the presence of evident 'scratches' on the heads that appear to have been made intentionally.\textsuperscript{54} Of the fifteen heads that probably had sculpted ears, only one (Boston 14.719) has its ears still intact (Fig. 2 upper).\textsuperscript{55}

In some heads they have been carefully chiselled off close to the surface (Fig. 2 lower),\textsuperscript{56} on others they seem to have been chipped away rather hastily (Fig. 3 upper).\textsuperscript{57} Sometimes the ears were fashioned separately and attached with plaster or by means of small pegs\textsuperscript{58} (Fig. 3 lower). The rest (about twelve) - also including the Dahshur head, the first of the series - were created without any provision for ears (Fig. 4 upper).\textsuperscript{59} Another group of heads (about 15) show deep lines roughly chiselled into the surface, often extending from the crown of the head down to the base of the neck (Fig. 4 lower).\textsuperscript{60}

Many theories have been proposed to explain these features, without any being completely convincing. Millet suggested that these 'scratches' were made by the sculptors in removing the moulds from the reserve heads.\textsuperscript{61} While this removal could have caused the vertical scratch on the heads, it could not have been responsible for the damage to the ears.

On the other hand, Lacovara proposed that they were simply guidelines for sculptors for modelling the heads, comparable to the incised guidelines seen on the so-called 'trial pieces' of the Ptolemaic Period.\textsuperscript{62} However, the guidelines on the Ptolemaic Period pieces were always finely and precisely

\textsuperscript{46} Junker, \textit{Gisr l}, 144 ff, 205.
\textsuperscript{50} Miller, in Simpson and Davis (eds), \textit{Studies in Ancient Egypt}, 129–131; id., in Arnold (ed.), \textit{Egyptian Art}, 233–234.
\textsuperscript{52} Roehrig, in Arnold (ed.), \textit{Egyptian Art}, 78.
\textsuperscript{53} Tefnin, \textit{Art et Magie}, 50–52; Bolshakov, in Eyre (ed.), \textit{Seventh International Congress}, 22.
\textsuperscript{54} Tefnin, in Redford (ed.), \textit{Oxford Encyclopedia III}, 146.
\textsuperscript{55} See Tefnin, \textit{Art et Magie}, 19–39 for a complete catalogue of the mutilations.
\textsuperscript{56} Tefnin, \textit{Art et Magie}, 102–103 (cat. 6); Roehrig, in Arnold (ed.), \textit{Egyptian Art}, 238–239 (cat. 48).
\textsuperscript{57} See for example the heads Vienna 7787 and Cairo JE 46217: Tefnin, \textit{Art et Magie}, 113–114, 127–128 (cat. 18, 36); Roehrig, in Arnold (ed.), \textit{Egyptian Art}, 240–241 (cat. 49).
\textsuperscript{58} See for example the heads Berkeley 6-19767, and Boston 21.328: Tefnin, \textit{Art et Magie}, 97–98, 103–104 (cat. 1, 5, 7); Roehrig, in Arnold (ed.), \textit{Egyptian Art}, 235–237 (cat. 46–47).
\textsuperscript{59} See for example the heads Boston 21.329 and Cairo JE 46218: Tefnin, \textit{Art et Magie}, 104–105, 114–115 (cat. 8, 19).
\textsuperscript{60} Tefnin, \textit{Art et Magie}, 108 (cat. 12).
\textsuperscript{61} See for example the head Cairo JE 46216: Tefnin, \textit{Art et Magie}, 112–113 (cat. 17).
\textsuperscript{62} See for example the heads Cairo JE 37832, Boston 14.718 and Boston 21.329: Tefnin, \textit{Art et Magie}, 101–102, 104–105, 108–109, (cat. 5, 8, 13). Although largely ruined, the head Hildesheim 2384 also shows a deep vertical line along the nape of the neck: see Tefnin, \textit{Art et Magie}, 123–124 (cat. 32).
\textsuperscript{63} See n. 50.
\textsuperscript{64} Lacovara, \textit{KMT} 8/4 (Winter 1997–98), 35–36.
Fig. 3: Two other examples of the different 'ritual' treatments of the heads: (above) the limestone head Berkeley 6-19767 from mastaba G 1203 with hastily chipped away ears; (below) the limestone head Boston 21.329 from mastaba G 4940 which shows considerable use of plaster and small pegs to attach the ears. (after Tefnin, Art et magie, pl. I, IX)
carved on a flat, unfinished surface, not gouged into a finished one like most of the grooves on the reserve heads. A far more elaborate explanation has been set out in 1991 by Tefnin who believes that these scraps were 'ritual mutilations' intended to 'kill' the heads before placing them in the tombs in order to render them harmless to the deceased. He likens this practise to the mutilating of dangerous hieroglyphs in the Pyramid Texts or of animal figurines deposited in the tombs of the First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom.

Tefnin also linked this ritual mutilation to a specific, somewhat enigmatic moment of the ritual of the 'Opening of the Mouth', a moment of extreme tension among the participants, one of whom wishes to strike the head of the deceased. The eldest son of the deceased or the semi-priest protests against him: 'I shall not allow you to make my father's head become white' (shdp). This 'whitened head', thus, is the reserve head, rendered so from the bleeding out of the head wounds. According to Tefnin, this ritual, prophylactic violence to the reserve head had to be performed separate from, but still as a complement to, the actual, burial ceremony. In this sense he likens this practice to other execration rituals linked to the Osirian beliefs and well attested at Giza even in the New Kingdom.

Based on the first part of Tefnin's ritual mutilation theory, Bolshakov suggested that the heads could have been the first example of what seems to become the norm in the late fifth and sixth dynasty, when a number of tombs are provided with wall paintings in their substructures. Significant stylistic changes resulted during the reign of Khufu in the almost complete disappearance of statues in the superstructure, and so they have to be transferred to the burial chamber where, however, being dangerous in the vicinity of the dead man, they had to be made harmless in some way.

However, while convincingly explaining the mutilations, neither Tefnin nor Bolshakov have been able to clarify the meaning of the heads themselves and notably their placement in the substructure of the tomb where no other cult statue was kept. Nor have they come up with an explanation for the anomalous incompleteness of the sculptures.

Bolshakov's theory, stressing the k3 value of all the Egyptian statues—including the heads—seems to clash with the traditional funerary practices according to which the statue had to be placed in the tomb superstructure to be provided with both offerings and mortuary cult. Moreover, as to the position of the heads in the tombs, Bolshakov's theory replaces that of Junker, of the supposed niche between the burial chamber and the shaft, a theory which we have seen is not completely convincing for many reasons.

On the other hand, being aware of the weak points of his theory, Tefnin concludes:

On se posera bien sûr la question de savoir pour quoi, parmi tant de personnages illustres de l'entourage des grands Pharaons de la 4e dynastie, certaines seulement « bénéficien­rent »—si cela fut un bénéfice—d'une « tête magique ». La question reste sans réponse.

Very recently new interpretations have been set out by Catharine Roehrig and Nicholas Picardo. The first one compares the reserve heads with the wooden life-size head emerging from a lily found in the tomb of Tutankhamun. However, in spite of several similarities, the head of Tutankhamun implies a very clear solar symbolism which seems to be anachronistic for private people in the fourth dynasty, having been certainly a solely royal prerogative. Moreover, the head of the eighteenth dynasty king did not suffer any kind of 'mutilation' and was probably not put in the burial chamber.
Fig. 4: Head Cairo JE 46216 (above) from mastaba G 4640 with no provision for ears; (below) two examples of the scratches exhibited by the heads on the rear: (left) Boston 21.329 from mastaba G 4940, with a vertical, deep furrow; (right) Cairo JE 37832 from mastaba D 38, with a circular, sharp groove (after Tefnin, Art et magie, pl. XII, XVI. Head Cairo JE 37832: photo courtesy Cairo Museum)
On other hand, Picardo, not dismissing older theories, in particular the relationship between the evolution of the funerary mummy masks and reserve heads, has suggested that the heads would have represented the first attempt to embody, in three-dimensional representation, the concept of the $b\bar{s}$, which will be later more explicitly developed, both in literature and religion.\(^{76}\) However, this theory gives rise to doubts: first of all, the concept of the private $b\bar{s}$ as depicted by Picardo is neither archaeologically nor epigraphically attested during the Old Kingdom and simply mirrors a much later tradition, particularly supported by the funerary texts of the New Kingdom. Moreover, although I would be prepared to admit the existence of the concept of the private $b\bar{s}$ in the fourth dynasty—a fact which is still far from clear\(^{77}\)—we have to keep in mind, following Assmann, that the statues (and the reserve heads too in their being statues in a wider sense) were not linked to the $b\bar{s}$ but rather 'served to attract and direct the indwelling Ka by preserving the physiognomy and assuring the recognizability of the subject'.\(^{78}\)

Additionally, over the whole of Egyptian history, the $b\bar{s}$ was mainly expressed via textual and two-dimensional means rather than stauatory. Even when it was, as for example during the Meroitic Period in Lower Nubia, the $b\bar{s}$ statues were always put in the funerary chapel and not in the tomb substructure\(^{79}\) where, as admitted by Picardo from different points, Allen and Hays have demonstrated that many aspect of the royal afterlife were 'shifted' to the private context well into the fifth dynasty, particularly concerning the funerary offering formulae and rituals. (J. P. Allen, 'Some aspects of the non-royal afterlife in the Old Kingdom', in Bártta (éd.), Old Kingdom Art and Archaeology, 9–17; H. M. Hays, 'The Death of the Demarcatisation of the Afterlife', in the present volume). However, this phenomenon did not imply either any explicit elaboration of the concept of the $b\bar{s}$ or any representation of it, even less in its much later human-headed bird form.

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\(^{76}\) Picardo, JARCE 43 (2007), 238–252.

\(^{77}\) The most comprehensive study is L. V. Žabkar, A Study of the Ba Concept in Ancient Egyptian Texts (SAOC 34; Chicago 1968). He argues that the first attempt to adapt the concept of the $b\bar{s}$ to private people dates back to the late Old Kingdom, possibly the end of the fifth dynasty. However, the first real example is sixth dynasty (Žabkar, Ba Concept, 60–61, 76). On the contrary, Altenmüller suggests that in the whole Old Kingdom the concept of both royal and private $b\bar{s}$ had not yet been completely elaborated (H. Altenmüller, 'Sein Ba möge fortduern bei Gott', SAK 20 (1993), 1–15). More recently, starting

\(^{78}\) Assmann, in Manuelian (éd.), Studies Simpson I, 61–62; quotation from 62; The German scholar, however, continues by saying: 'There does not seem to be any functional difference between reserve heads, busts and entire statues'. The latter opinion is not adopted here. On the relationship between statue and $k\bar{s}$, see also Belshakov, Man and his Double, 106–110, 152–157.

\(^{79}\) See for example S. Wenig (éd.), The Arts of Ancient Nubia and Sudan II. The Catalogue (New York 1978), 89–90, 227–232 (cat
himself, ‘a head-only form of statuary could have also lend
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’. 80

Finally, this theory too, like all the others, does not
explain the major mystery which has also been pointed
out by Tefnin (see above): why did eminent individuals of
that period of the fourth dynasty not all have this kind of
‘privileged’ statue in their tomb? If the reserve heads would
have functioned as bs statues or actual mummy mask-like
statues of the deceased, we would expect to find them also
in the main tombs of the Giza necropolis dated to Khufu’s
reign, namely the so-called ‘Eastern Field’. However, as we
have seen, the situation is very different.

**Positive and negative implications: a new approach
to the issue**

Taking into account all the above-mentioned elements,
and particularly the last question, I believe that we should
consider another possibility, namely that the heads might
have had a different, in some respects ‘negative’ meaning.

In other words, they could not have represented a
positive funerary item for the deceased 81 (or at least not
completely positive) directed to replace or substitute the
actual perishable head of the person, but rather a negative
element intended to play down the resurrection power of
the deceased linking it to an ‘external factor’ upon which
their rebirth would have been depended. This element
should be examined in the particular archaeological and
historical-religious context in which the reserve heads were
made, that is, the reign of Khufu.

Rainer Stadelmann has suggested that Khufu actually
tried to achieve a merging with the sun-god during his
lifetime. 82 This new, absolute religious policy, probably culminating in his self-divinisation, seems to be demonstrated by many elements: the naming of his pyramid after the solar horizon (sht); the placing of the burial chamber within
and not under the pyramid; the definitive establishment of
the pyramid shape of the royal tomb in place of the old
stepped shape, and last but not least the introduction by
his son Djedefre of the xst R title, which seems to have
been meant, in its first formulation, very literally as ‘Son
of Re-(Khufu)’. 83 The building of a colossal statue, with
its solar temple, dedicated to him—the Sphinx—seems to
provide definitive confirmation of Stadelmann’s theory. 84

There is room for thinking that the very bad reputation
attributed to Khufu in later historical records was not
pure chance. Herodotus’s account particularly stresses the
architectural difficulties in the building of Khufu’s pyramid,
which he repute to have required an enormous cost in
human lives, as the main reason for his bad reputation. 85

However, his tale does not completely fit what we know
of the building techniques of the period and is even more
unlikely if we consider that Khufu’s father Sneferu was
responsible for the construction of three great pyramids
at least, whose overall volume is more than twice that of
Khufu’s pyramid. A later misunderstanding of Khufu’s
Horus and Neby names (mdw and mdw r-nbty) as ground for his bad reputation, 86 although plausible from
the philological point of view, seems to imply a very
complicated process and is not confirmed by reliable
archaeological or historical evidence. 87

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80 Stadelmann, *Pyramiden*, 125–126. See also Z. Hawass, ‘The
Programs of the Royal Funerary Complexes of the Fourth Dynasty’,
in D. O’Connor and D. P. Silverman (eds), *Ancient Egyptian Kingship*
*Egyptology at the dawn of the twenty-first century: proceedings of the*
eighth international congress of Egyptologists, Cairo 2000 I: *Archaeology* 
(Cairo 2003), 464–469. Stadelmann’s theory is not supported by
most scholars who strongly maintain that the Sphinx was built by
and dedicated to Khafre. For a complete discussion of the issue, see

82 Herodotus II, 124–6; A. B. Lloyd, *Herodotus Book II. Commentary*
99–192 (Leiden 1988), 62–63. Wildung also stresses the religious
impiety of the king as an explanation for his bad reputation: trying
to reach the gods with the impressiveness of his pyramid, Khufu was
guilty of hubris, an unacceptable behaviour for the Greek religious
mentality, particularly by a king (D. Wildung, *Die Rolle ägyptischer
Könige im Bewusstein ihrer Nachwelt* (MÄS 17, Berlin 1969), 188).
Likewise, there is Herodotus’ tale of Khufu’s daughter who was sent
to a brothel with instructions to charge a certain sum to complete
the building of the pyramid (Herodotus II, 126; see above for the
bibliography). The ultimate aim of the Greek writer was probably
to depict Khufu as a cruel, inhuman king.

83 Stadelmann, *Pyramiden*, 125–126. See also Z. Hawass, ‘The
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86 M. Baud, ‘Une Épitaphe de Radjedef et la prétendue tyrannie
the same idea was also supported by S. Morenz, ‘Traditionen um
Kheops. Beiträge zur überlieferungsgeschichtlichen Methode in
der Ägyptologie’, *ZÄS* 97 (1971), 111–118; E. Graefe, ‘Die Gute
Reputation des Königs Snofru’, in S. Israelit-Groll (ed.), *Studies in
Egyptology presented to Miriam Lichtheim* 1 (Jerusalem 1990), 258–259

87 For a different and sounder interpretation of Khufu’s names
Thus, I think that a different explanation has to be sought for this bad reputation, which probably can be found precisely in Khufu’s unusual and, in some respects, innovative religious policy, and in his attempt to identify himself with the sun-god changing the ordinary ‘dogma’ of kingship, as would be the case, mutatis mutandis, with Akhenaten over a thousand years later.

The archaeological data seems to lead in this direction: for the first time, a king intervened in the complete planning of the private tombs of his necropolis, restricting the decoration only to the most important offering scene (the one represented on the slab stelae) and allowing only the highest members of his court and family to have large scale and complete sculpture (like Hemiunu). Even the main royal cemetery for the king’s children, the ‘Eastern field’ G 7000, was originally erected and arranged in regular, anonymous rows of tombs not assigned to specific owners until the very end of Khufu’s reign.

Seen from the top of his solar horizon (the pyramid), the Giza necropolis in the time of Khufu would have reproduced, in the stone, the strict, hierarchical order of the state, levelling out the king’s dignitaries by means of a clear standardisation of their houses for the hereafter as well as their funerary equipment. Only Khufu himself, in his rising at the horizon as sun-god/sun-king, could have resurrected his dignitaries, whose ‘detached heads’ would have been magically rejoined to the body. Only then would the owner of the head have recovered his physical integrity with the benefit, in the superstructure of the mastaba, of the funerary offerings represented on the slab stelae.

In this sense, the ritual mutilations of the heads could have been a precautionary meaning for the deceased (as proposed by Tefnin) as well as for the king himself, who would have severely limited, in this way, the actual life and autonomy of his officials in the otherworld. Schmidt also points out that the absence of explicit requests for invocation offerings (pr-t hwj) on the slab stelae could be a proof of Khufu’s intentional suppression of the direct cult in private mastabas, a containment which was also accompanied by the reduction of space in tomb superstructure. This restrictive programme would have also included the hacking of the ears of the reserve heads in order to make them incapable of hearing offerings voiced from above.

Such a funerary belief does not appear entirely new since similar practices of head detachment and body dismemberment are certainly documented, although with unknown implications, since the very early Predynastic Period in many Upper and Lower Egyptian cemeteries.

Moreover, a close architectural and archaeological parallel to Khufu’s cemetery can also be found at Abydos in the so-called subsidiary burials of king Aha. The latter have not preserved any evidence of dismemberment of the body or head detachment, either on the real mummies or on artefacts, since these subsidiary tombs were found

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92 Stadelmann, in Sasson (ed.), *Civilizations* II, 730.
93 Schmidt, *SAK* 18 (1991), 338–340. A similar idea as to the mutilation of the ears was also supported by Tefnin, *Art et Magie*, 85–87; id., in Redford (ed.), *Oxford Encyclopedia* III, 147.
empty. Nonetheless, their anonymity and their rigid, geometric arrangement in the necropolis in close proximity to the tomb of their king-master seems to involve a similar, absolute idea of the king to whom all the minor tombs were evidently linked both in this world and in the afterworld.

This theory seems to be further supported by textual evidence: both the Pyramid and the Coffin Texts as well as the Westcar Papyrus provide some parallels. I start with the Pyramid Texts where many spells, dealing with the funerary rituals, appear to echo old practices of rejoining the head to the body before gaining access to the afterlife:

You apes who sever heads, Unis will pass by you in peace, for Unis has tied his head on his neck—and Unis’s neck is on his torso—in his identity of Head-Tier, in which he tied the head of the Apis on him on the day of lassoing the longhorneed bull. Since Unis has allowed them to eat from their cups and drink from their inundation, so shall Unis be protected in the same by those who see him. (PT 254: § 286–287)

Raise yourself, Teti, for you have received your head, your bones have been assembled for you, your limbs collected for you, the earth on your flesh cleared away from you and you have received your unmouldering bread and unrotting beer. (PT 373: § 654–655)

… awake Teti, Raise yourself! Receive your head, collect your bones and clear away your dust. (PT 413: § 735–736)

Your head has been placed for you. Your head has been set to the bones for you. Give him his eyes, that he may be content. (PT 13–14: § 9)

Similar requests and magic formulæ to avoid detachment of the head from the body are to be found in the Coffin Texts, in a non-royal context:

May you place for me my head upon my neck when you gather together life for the throat. May you make me into a spirit, may you envelop my members, may you knit on my face and build up my soul, may you save me from the fishers of Osiris who cut off heads, who sever necks, and who take souls (hrwn) and spirit (Aṣu) to the slaughterhouse of those who eat fresh (meat). My head will not be cut off; my neck will not be severed; my name will not be unknown among the spirits (Aṣu)... Hail to you, Lady of Goodness who raised up the head of Osiris and who walled over him in the Pure Place in this your name of Headrest (?) which is under my head. Place my head on my neck for me, gather up life for my throat for I am in the following of Osiris among the blessed ones, the possessors of offerings, for I have come equipped with my magic, I will not die, breath will not be taken away from my nose and I am a possessor of offerings. (CT 229: § 295–298)

Thus, both in royal and private contexts it is evident that the body lacking its head is completely deprived of all its vital forces and cannot achieve resurrection: only divine power, evoked through the proper magical formulæ, could change this situation.

A quite ambiguous but interesting allusion to this practice can be perhaps found also in the Westcar Papyrus and particularly in the tale of the magician Djedi: although this tale is much later than the historical events it recounts and has a clearly literary aim, it might refer to ancient oral traditions of somewhat historical character. Asked by Khufu to sever and reattach a prisoner’s head, the magician says:

Not indeed to a man, oh Sovereign (l.p.h.) my lord. For the doing of the like is not commanded unto the august cattle.

As implied by the text, such a thing could have only been done by a god, but Khufu is a god or at least he wants to present himself as a true god in his pyramid-horizon. Of course we are dealing with pure speculation and this might be a mere coincidence that has nothing to do with the historical truth. However it is quite surprising that such a record had been linked to this king amongst dozens of possible names of Old Kingdom rulers as it is surprising that

Coffin Texts because of its close semantic and textual relationship to the Pyramid Texts model, although in a private context.

For the translation see W.K. Simpson (ed.), The Literature of Ancient Egypt. An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, Stelae, Autobiographies and Poetry (Cairo 2003), 20.

The reference to the cutting off of heads not being commanded to humanity seems to implicitly mean that only a god could have done this. So, today it is said from the Christian point of view that life is sacred and that nobody should take it away (whether murder or suicide); the implication seems to be that only God can do it.

In this sense we can also understand the meaning of the following question by Khufu to Djedi, namely the number of the shrines of the enclosure of Thoth whose knowledge, likely to be embodied in the architectural layout of his pyramid, would have certainly given divine power to the king. See also W.K. Simpson (ed.), Literature, 20, n. 13.

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96 In this sense, see also Roth, JARCE 30 (1993), 50. According to O’Connor the main difference between the two types of planned, regular cemeteries is that the fourth dynasty mastabas were arranged in patterns centred upon the pyramids while the predynastic subsidiary tombs were ordered in clusters around the main royal tomb. See D. O’Connor, ‘New Funerary Enclosures (Talbezirke) of the Early Dynastic Period at Abydos’, JARCE 26 (1989), 51–86, particularly 59, n. 23. However, this does not seem to be completely true for the tomb of Aha which resembles (with its subsidiary tombs) the planned, rigid Giza cemetery in Khufu’s time more than the other predynastic royal tombs. See also Wilkinson, Early Dynastic Egypt, 230–232 and fig. 7.1.

97 For the translations see J.P. Allen, The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts (Writings from the Ancient World 23; Atlanta 2005), 44, 83, 87, 251 respectively.

98 For the translations see R.O. Faulkner, The Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts I (Warminster 1974), 182–183. Although much later than the period under discussion, we also included here one sample of the
The 'Reserve Heads': some remarks on their function and meaning

The tale of the divine birth of the three sons of Ra, although with predictable historical inaccuracies, was referred to the fifth dynasty kings who brought the solar cult to its climax with the building of the sun temples. The story of Djedi also contains another intriguing detail that might be useful to understand where the heads were actually placed inside the burial chamber; a detail that seems to confirm the archaeological find in the above-mentioned ‘Tomb of Khafre’s daughter’ (see above). The papyrus says: So there was brought to him a goose and its head was severed. Then a goose was placed on the western side of the pillared court and its head on the eastern side of the pillared court. Djedi said his say of magic words. The goose arose and waddled and likewise its head. After the one (part) reached the other the goose stood up and cackled.

It is likely, thus, that the heads were placed neither in the burial shaft (where many of them were found) nor in a supposed niche in the burial chamber door blockage but rather on the east side of the mortuary chamber, likely facing eastward towards the rising sun and waiting to be rejoined to the mummified body placed in the sarcophagus on the west side of the chamber.

In particular, I suggest that all the heads (and in general all the statues like Hemiunu’s as well as the funerary equipment endowed with autonomous vital forces like the slab stelae) would have been arranged facing toward Khufu’s pyramid, which is to say towards the actual horizon, since all the mastabas of cemetery G 4000 where reserve heads were found were quite perfectly orientated along the same east-west axis as Khufu’s pyramid (Fig. 1, Plate 7). Thus we can imagine that at dawn, the shadow of Khufu’s pyramid, as it shrank, would have gradually allowed the sunlight to illuminate the mastabas, from the furthest to the nearest to his pyramid. As it did so, each reserve head would have been ‘resurrected’ by the shining of its lord Khufu embodied by the pyramid.

Although not explicitly supported by literary or epi-graphic evidence, this symbolism perfectly fits the Egyptian religious beliefs and the absolute solar nature of the king in that period. Moreover, it seems to be also confirmed by the visual evidence in the western field at Giza where this optical phenomenon is clearly observable (Fig. 5), particularly during the solstices, crucial points of the Egyptian religious ‘calendar’.

By means of a complex magico-religious system, strengthened by the peculiar, rigid plan of his necropolis, Khufu combined old traditions and new solar features to construct a mystical, absolute image of his person which finally integrated and indissolubly linked, in a single place, his destiny to that of his state and society.

On the other hand, his dignitaries, although ‘levelled down’ and ‘made uniform’ in their standardised mastabas, would have perpetually benefitted from the king’s favour and of his funerary offerings consecrated through his shining glory.

Placed in the funerary chamber and ritually mutilated to make them harmless, the reserve heads were, thus, waiting for their resurrection in the shadow of the pyramid of their god–master.

102 The historicity of the Westcar Papyrus has often been questioned. This is not the place to discuss this issue in detail. However, I would stress that a real, historical background is to be found in the tale and this certainly means that the compilers of the story had direct access to both historical documents and literary material on which to ground their account. On the historicity versus literary value of the tale see: H. Goedicke, ‘Thoughts about the Papyrus Westcar’, ZAS 120 (1993), 23–36; H. M. Hays, ‘The Historicity of Papyrus Westcar’, ZAS 129 (2002), 20–30.

103 For the translation see Simpson (ed.), Literature, 20.

104 See also Lacovara, KMT 8/4 (Winter 1997–98), 31 and fig. at page 33.

105 A similar reverse process can be imagined for the mastabas of the Eastern Field at the sunset. Indeed, they would have been the first ones to disappear at dusk in the shadow of Khufu’s pyramid, from the nearest to the furthest to his pyramid.

106 Indeed many Pyramid Texts seem to refer indirectly to such a kind of ritual belief: see, for example, the last sentence of the above-mentioned PT 254 (§ 287): ‘Since Unis has allowed them to eat from their cups and drink from their inundation, so shall Unis be protected in the same by those who see him’, or PT 217 (§ 159): ‘Horus, go, announce to the bas of the East as well as their akhs: “This Unis has come, an imperishable akh. The one he wants to live, he will live; the one he wants to die, he will die.”’ (translations from Allen, Pyramid Texts, 44, 33).

107 In this regard, the summer solstice seems to be of primary importance. As to the astronomy of the Giza Plateau and the specific alignments of the pyramids and the sun, see M. Lehner, The complete pyramids (London 1997), 129–130 with further bibliography. See also the very recent paper by G. Magli, ‘Akhet Khufu: Archaeoastronomical Hints at a common project of the two main pyramids of Giza, Egypt’, Nexus Network Journal 11/1 (2009), 35–50.

108 We can suppose that the manufacture of reserve heads would have been originally planned for all the tomb owners of both the eastern and western cemeteries. Later on, after Khufu’s death, the heads fell out of fashion with tomb owners who, in some cases, also changed the layout of their respective mastabas. As to the development of the Giza necropolis under Khufu and Khafre see also Jánosi, in Arnold (ed.), Egyptian Art, 27–39, particularly 29–33.)
Plate 7: Map of cemeteries 2100, 4000 and 5000 at Giza, showing location of reserve heads and slab stelae/emplacement for the slab stelae (readapted by M. Nuzzolo after Roehrig, in Arnold (ed.), Egyptian Art, 76) (Nuzzolo)

Plate 8: Line linking south-east corners of the Giza pyramids with Heliopolis. The measuring is based on Google Earth. For measurements based on maps see Fig. 3 (Verner)
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Recent research on all aspects of the Old Kingdom in Egypt is presented in this volume, ranging through the Pyramid Texts, tomb architecture, ceramics, scene choice and layout, field reports, cemetery layout, tomb and temple statuary. The contributions also show how Egyptology is not stuck in its venerable traditions but that newer forms of technology are being used to great effect by Egyptologists. For example, two papers show how GIS technology can shed light on cemetery arrangement and how 3D scanners can be employed in the process of producing facsimile drawings of reliefs and inscriptions.

The authors cover a wide range of sites and monuments. A large part of the work presented deals with material from the great cemeteries of Saqqara and Giza of the Old Kingdom capital city of Memphis but all the smaller sites are discussed. The book also includes a paper on the architecture of mastabas from the lesser-known site of Abu Roasch. The provinces are by no means overlooked, with articles on material from Deir el-Bersha, el-Sheikh Said and Akhmim. Between them, the authors discuss material from the milieu of the king right down to that which concerned the tomb workmen and those who supplied their basic needs, such as bakers, brewers and potters.


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