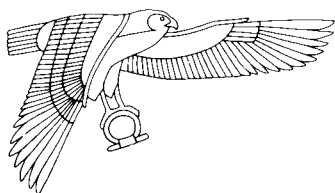


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QUEEN HETEPHERES I

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Macquarie University

Queen Hetepheres I lived during Dynasty IV, from the time of Sneferu to Khufu. What little we know about her comes from her tomb: G 7000x at Giza. This tomb lies close to the pyramid of her son, Khufu, in the eastern sector of the Giza cemetery (see Figure. 1). The queen's tomb, which is really only a burial chamber at the foot of a 27 metre deep shaft, close to the pyramid of Khufu, was discovered by the Harvard-Boston team, led by Dr. George Reisner, in 1925. The tomb had not been plundered by robbers, and its preservation was certainly due to the fact that the entrance to the burial shaft had been concealed in the pavement in front of Khufu's mortuary temple.

Inside the tomb were numerous funerary items, most of which were in a very poor state of conservation. The queen's canopic chest - one of the earliest to contain evidence for evisceration - and her alabaster sarcophagus were present in the sealed chamber, but no trace of any mummy was found. Several theories have been put forward as an explanation for this omission, for the tomb itself had not been plundered (see below).

The tomb contents had once contained some fine examples of wooden furniture, overlaid with gold leaf, as well as a quantity of silver and gold jewellery, inlaid with lapis lazuli and carnelian. Many gold, silver, copper, stone and pottery vessels were also stored in the tomb. Much of the material, however, had crumbled into dust - especially the wooden items. With great patience Reisner's team of experts made replacement wooden furniture, then reset the gold leaf and other inlays into the modern copies. The result of this rescue work can be seen in the display of the queen's furniture and jewellery in the Cairo Museum.¹

When Reisner sifted through the material in the tomb he discovered that the queen's body was missing, although packets containing her preserved organs remained in the four compartments of her canopic chest. Because the sarcophagus of the queen was empty Reisner suggested that Queen Hetepheres I had once been buried far away, at Dahshur, where the pyramids of King Sneferu had been built. He thought that this 'original' tomb had been plundered and her body removed by robbers.² He thought that the unmarked shaft of the queen's tomb had been intended to be a second, and secret burial place. This explanation has been accepted by many historians,³ but it may not be correct.

In 1985 Mark Lehner, publishing his detailed study on the queen's tomb, expressed his opinion that G 7000x was not the secret burial suggested by

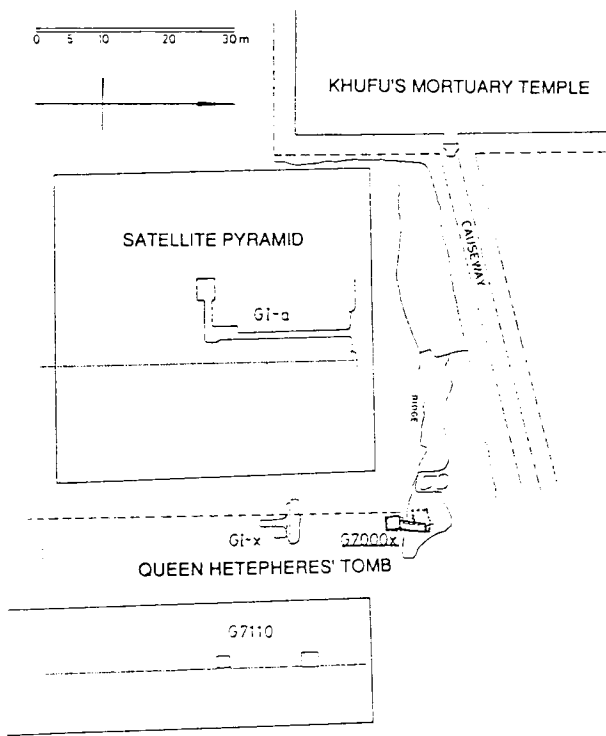


Figure 1. Section of the Eastern Cemetery of Khufu at Giza

Figure 2. The inlaid titles of Queen Hetepheres from her sedan chair

Reisner.⁴ Lehner prefers the idea that the underground tomb was an earlier version of a pyramid. He also thinks that Hetepheres' tomb was moved to one of Khufu's satellite pyramids, G 1a. He thinks that workmen had removed the queen's mummy from its sarcophagus, and taken it to a new site in the burial crypt of G 1a.⁵ Lehner says that such a removal would explain why there were many pottery vessels, crushed by the imprint of feet, on the floor, and why some of the furniture was displaced in the tomb when Reisner found it. The officials had to disturb the funerary equipment when they removed the queen's body. Lehner thinks that there is sufficient evidence to show that the so-called 'secret tomb' had been re-opened during Khufu's reign, and the queen's mummy had been taken out. As the shaft had been sealed with Khufu's seals any removal of the body must have taken place during his reign, and must have been done with the king's approval.

In his study Lehner provides a timetable of events that would explain the state of the shaft grave when it was found.⁶ He also calculates the way in which the furniture that was found in the shaft grave could have fitted into G 1a.⁷ Lehner's views differ markedly from those of Reisner.

So far, Queen Hetepheres I is the only 'King's Mother' known to have been buried near the tomb of her son. All the other known burials of queens who were designated 'King's Mother' were located near the pyramid tombs of their husbands. That is why, previous to Lehner's book, most scholars thought that Dr. Reisner's theory was possible.

Why would the mother of Khufu be buried so close to his tomb? Lehner's explanation for this is that the burial of the queen was designed to suit the religious and funerary needs of Khufu, with Hetepheres I playing the role of a mother-goddess - perhaps Hathor, Isis or Nut⁸ - to ensure the rebirth of the king in the afterlife; he thinks it was for this purpose, rather than any urgency prompted by the imagined disturbance of the queen's tomb, which caused the king to go against custom and bury his mother within his own cemetery.

Pyramid G 1a is accompanied by a boat grave on its southern side. There is a boat grave for the satellite pyramid G 1b as well.⁹ At this time such boats were the privilege of monarchs, not their wives, and even after the time of Queen Khentkawes I, with her boat grave, mortuary-boats seldom appear in the mortuary complexes of queens. We do not know why these boats were buried among these satellite pyramids in Khufu's cemetery, but it does indicate that the persons for whom these pyramids were intended were considered to be very important. The boat is thought to have been placed there to enable the deceased to travel with the sun god across the heavens. (As the Old Kingdom Egyptians did not know how to use the wheel, all their travelling was done either on foot, or by boat.) Apart from Queen Meritneith (who may have been a monarch during the First Dynasty), only the kings had boats buried beside their tombs up until this time.

The other interesting idea that Lehner had was that a pyramid was intended for Queen Hetepheres I. If this idea is correct, then Queen Hetepheres I would have been the **first** queen to have been buried in a pyramid. A recent study by Dr. Peter Jánosi¹⁰ demonstrates that the pyramids of queens in Old Kingdom times were not built for all of the king's wives, but only for the mothers of kings. The other wives of the king were buried either in mastabas or in rock-cut tombs.¹¹ If one of these small pyramids near Khufu's pyramid was intended for Queen Hetepheres I, then she would have been the first King's Mother to receive such a tomb. This would mean that a new religious concept had been introduced into Fourth Dynasty funerary practices; it also marks a substantial elevation in the status of the queen-mother in that period.

Jánosi also concludes that these tombs could not have been built by the queens' husbands, because no-one would know who would eventually be the next king. Queen's pyramids, therefore, must have been built by the reigning monarchs for their mothers. Contrary to general opinion, such satellite pyramids must have been additions to the cemetery complexes of kings, and not necessarily part of the architect's original design. Usually these pyramids were placed next to the father's pyramid but, in the case of Hetepheres I, Khufu buried his mother near his own tomb.

Every queen in Old Kingdom times carried a set of titles. These give us a little indication of how important each individual queen might be. Not all queens held the same titles. Queen Hetepheres' set of titles were: Mother of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Follower of Horus, Controller of the butchers of the Acacia House, All things that she orders are done for her, God's Daughter of his body.

All these titles were recorded in gold relief hieroglyphs on her carrying chair found in G 7000x (see Figure 2). The additional title of 'King's Wife' was discovered on a granite lid for a stone vessel.¹²

Not all of the queen's family details are known for certain. It has been suggested that Queen Hetepheres I was the daughter of a king, presumably King Huni (as suggested by Smith and others). We are not sure about this, however, because she does not carry the title of 'King's Daughter', but only of 'Daughter of the God'. Scholars are not really sure what this title means.

Because her title of King's Wife was not discovered until fairly recently, previous scholars¹³ had taken the lack of the title as an indication that her position in society was more important than that of her husband, and thus she did not display the title of 'King's Wife'. This might be so, but we are ignorant about the family background of this queen, so we cannot assume that this theory is correct. We assume that her husband was King Sneferu, since that king's name and some of his possessions were found in her tomb.

It is known that she was the mother of Khufu and, therefore, she must have been the grandmother of Prince Kawab (assumed heir-apparent to Khufu), Queen Hetepheres II, King Djedefre and King Khafre. She was the great-grandmother of King Menkaure and of Queen Meresankh III. Other relationships are less certain.

Although the name of Hetepheres (probably meaning 'One is pleased with her') was not common before the time of this queen, it became a very popular name for girls during the reign of Khufu and later. Many other women named their daughters after the queen, the most famous of these being her own granddaughter, Hetepheres II.

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- 1 T. G. H. James presents a stirring account of the discovery and preservation of these items in *The Archaeology of Ancient Egypt* (London, 1972), Chapter 4.
 - 2 G. A. Reisner and W. S. Smith, *A History of the Giza Necropolis* (Cambridge, Mass. 1955), pp. 1f.
 - 3 I. E. S. Edwards, *The Pyramids of Egypt*, rev. ed. (Harmondsworth, 1961), pp. 116f.; A. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Oxford, 1961), p. 80; H. W. Helck, *Geschichte des Alten Ägypten, Handbuch der Orientalistik* (Leiden, 1968), p. 54; James, *Archaeology*, pp. 50f.; W. S. Smith, "The Old Kingdom in Egypt and the Beginning of the First Intermediate Period" in *Cambridge Ancient History I 2A*, p. 168.
 - 4 M. Lehner, *The Pyramid Tomb of Queen Hetep-heres and the Satellite Pyramid of Khufu* (Mainz/Rhein, 1985) pp. 35-41.
 - 5 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
 - 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 35-40.
 - 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 42-44, fig. 8.
 - 8 *Ibid.*, p. 83.
 - 9 V. Maragioglio and C. Rinaldi, *L'Architettura della Piramide Menfite IV*, (Rapallo, 1965), p. 90.
 - 10 "Die Pyramidenanlagen der Königinnen des Alten und Mittleren Reiches" (unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Vienna, 1988).
 - 11 For example, the tombs of Queen Mersyankh III, Queen Khamerernebty II, Queen Rekhetre, Queen Bunefer, etc.
 - 12 P. Kaplony, *Kleine Beiträge zu den Inschriften der ägyptischer Frühzeit* (Wiesbaden, 1966), fig. 1114.
 - 13 For example, Smith in *CAH I 2A*, pp. 164f.; S. Hassan, *Excavations at Giza IV* (Cairo, 1943), p. 3.