

Diplomatical Studies in the Old Kingdom

HANS GOEDICKE

The beginning of Egyptian history is for us concomitant with the emergence of writing in the Nile Valley. It not only brought a means of recording, but must be considered an essential tool in the organization and administration of a large and diverse dominion. There is little direct evidence that the kings made use of writing during the Archaic Period,¹ but any conclusion drawn from this situation would be as unfounded as arguments *ex silentio* usually are. In the III Dynasty the position of scribe for the king develops into an established office, and the appearance of a "leader of the king's scribes"² suggests the formation of a royal chancery. The early holders of this position, to judge from their burials, were persons of highest social status. From this early title subsequently develops a more specific *zš 'nswt*, "scribe of the king's documents," a title of which various compounds are attested.³

As indicated by the designation *'nswt*, "royal document,"⁴ the usual form of royal document was written on papyrus. Although the Egyptian climate is generally most advan-

tageous for the preservation of even very delicate materials, this is only true of tombs on high desert ground. In the zone of cultivation the yearly inundation left little chance for a material like papyrus to survive natural decay. As royal documents were primarily of concern to the living, it is only natural that save some minor indistinct fragments none of the products of the royal chancery have survived. That we nevertheless are in a position to investigate the problems of the diplomatics of the Old Kingdom is due to the copying of papyrus documents onto stelae. More instances are known dating to the Old Kingdom than to any later period; and since the early copyists in most cases were careful in following the originals,⁵ we are in a position not only to establish the documentary form, but also to trace some developments during a period of approximately 400 years, from the end of the IV Dynasty into the beginning of the Heracleopolitan Period.

Two kinds of copies can be distinguished according to their provenance: first, those found in cult installations, which shall be termed "official," and second, those from private tombs where they are part of the inscriptions, labelled "private." The second group consists of copies of royal letters written in the tomb by special permission granted as an expression of

¹ The existence of the appropriate tools is demonstrated by the discovery of an unused roll of papyrus in a tomb dating to the time of king Den; cf. Emery, *Archaic Egypt* 233f.

² For the title, cf. Helck, *Untersuchungen zu den Beamtentiteln des Alten Reiches* 75; Kaplony, *Die Inschriften der ägyptischen Frühzeit* 583.

³ Cf. Helck, *op. cit.* 71f.

⁴ For *'nswt*, cf. Junker, *Giza VI* 209; Vandier, *RdE* 2 (1936) 46; Seidl, *Einführung in die Ägyptische Rechtsgeschichte* 24; Harari, *Contribution à l'étude de la procédure judiciaire dans l'Ancien Empire Egyptien* 29.

⁵ Copies of later royal letters do not follow their originals exactly, but incorporate the text in indistinct form, as in the Story of Sinuhe (B 178-199), the inscription of *'It-hr-nfrt* (Sethe, *Lesestücke* 70, 14ff.) and Sen-nefer (*Urk.* IV 532). The situation is different with the decree of Apries contained on a stela at Mitrahine, which is a faithful copy like those of the Old Kingdom (cf. Gunn, *ASAE* 27 [1927] 211ff.).

grace.⁶ Of the five letters preserved, directed to three different officials, two are letters of commendation⁷ and the others concern various matters and were written in reply to reports previously sent to the king.⁸ Except for the famous letter of the juvenile Pepi II to Ḥr-ḥw.f about the dancing dwarf,⁹ all documents are from King Izezi-Djedkare.

The first group, the official copies, cover a much wider range, in date as well as in content. The oldest document copied was issued by King Shepseskaf at the end of the IV Dynasty.¹⁰ The V Dynasty is represented by only one text, that by King Neferirkare.¹¹ Thirteen texts date to the VI Dynasty, and represent copies of documents issued by Teti (1),¹² Pepi I (2),¹³ Pepi II (8),¹⁴ and Merenre II (2).¹⁵ A special group, a kind of family archive, was found at the gateway of the temenos of Min at Coptus; of the nine documents dating to the VIII Dynasty, eight were issued by King Neferkauhor.¹⁶ The latest inscription of this kind is issued by Horus Demedj-ib-tawy,¹⁷ and should be assigned to the Heracleopolitan Period.

⁶ Reporting in the tomb events in which the king was involved required royal permission, as expressed in *Urk.* I 43, 2; 44, 6; 232, 16 etc.

⁷ *Urk.* I 60f.; 179f.

⁸ *Urk.* I 61ff.

⁹ *Urk.* I 128ff. The fragmentary inscription of *Ki-m-ḥnt* (*Urk.* I 182f.) possibly contains the copy of a royal letter. Another reflection of a royal document is contained in the inscription of Metjen (*Urk.* I 4).

¹⁰ *Urk.* I 160; Reisner, *Mycerinus* 278f., pl. 19 b, d; Daressy, *ASAE* 13 (1913) 109ff.

¹¹ *Urk.* I 170ff.; Petrie, *Abydos* II pl. 14; 18, p. 42.

¹² *Urk.* I 207f.; James, *Hieroglyphic Stelae in the British Museum* I² pl. XXXI.

¹³ *Urk.* I 209ff.; Borchardt, *AZ* 42 (1905) 1ff.; *Urk.* I 214; Weill, *Décrets royaux* pp. 40ff., pl. VII.

¹⁴ *Urk.* I 279f.; Petrie, *Abydos* II pls. XIX, XXI; p. 42f.; *Urk.* I 280-295; Weill, *op. cit.* pls. 1ff.; *Urk.* I 277f.; Reisner, *op. cit.* pl. A 1.

¹⁵ *Urk.* I 274ff.; Reisner, *op. cit.* (supra n. 10) pls. A; 19 e-i; *Urk.* I 307; Jéquier, *Les Pyramides des Reines Neit et Apouit* p. 5, fig. 2.

¹⁶ *Urk.* I 295-304; Weill, *op. cit.* (supra n. 13) pls. Xff.; Hayes, *JEA* 32 (1946) 3ff.; pls. 1ff. Moret, *Comptes Rendus* 1914, 565ff.

¹⁷ *Urk.* I 304ff.; Weill, *op. cit.* pls. IV, IX.

The majority of the inscriptions of this group concern administrative matters, especially the exemption from imposts, others concern the establishing of offerings or the founding of estates. Another well-represented class are letters of appointment, and there are deeds in favor of a virtuous official, and official letters which could be considered official notifications.

The distribution of the texts in contents, date and provenance is no doubt a matter of chance and cannot be considered a true or exhaustive reflection of the original situation. It is necessary to underline the extent of the activity of the royal chancery, as far as we can estimate it; the fact that all eleven decrees of Neferkauhor contained on eight stela were issued the same day might give some idea of the activity in that department of the administration. Among them is the confirmation of an official in his high position after the ascent of a new king,¹⁸ which also indicates the volume of documents issued from the chancery; equally prodigious in scope is the notification of high officials of the appointments of subalterns, also evidenced.¹⁹

Considering the number of texts which must have been produced by the "scribes of the royal documents," it is understandable that certain formulae were early developed within which the specific contents were placed. It cannot be established when this formulary was developed. The earliest text copied already contains the elements typical of the later documents, indicating that a tradition existed as early as the end of the IV Dynasty.²⁰ Earlier forms, or a gradual development of the documentary form, cannot be detected by means of the material available. Although the formulary is fully developed when first we meet it, it nevertheless shows some changes in the period

¹⁸ Moret, *ibid.*

¹⁹ The instances preserved (*Urk.* I 300f.; 301f.) might very well be of a special nature and do not necessarily reflect a general practice.

²⁰ The quotation of a royal decree in the inscription of Metjen (*Urk.* I 4) does not follow the original closely enough to be used in this context.

in which we can follow it, which will concern us in the following.

Both groups of texts are copies of royal communications, and not declarations.²¹ As such they share two basic features, mention of the issuing king and the name of the addressee. For these two elements a specific arrangement exists, identical with that found in private letters.²² The issuing king is indicated with his Horus-name in a "palace facade" in a vertical column at the right edge, the beginning of the document.²³ The titles and name of the addressee are written in a horizontal line on the upper edge of the document.²⁴ The use of

²¹ This type, basically represented by the historical stela, is not attested from the Old Kingdom. It is hard to decide whether this situation is due to the hazards of preservation; consideration could be brought forth which would suggest that it was the product of a period when the mythological basis of kingship was no longer as predominant as in the Old Kingdom.

²² The parallelism in the lay-out of royal and private communications is a great help in settling the sometimes tricky question of sender and recipient. Thus in Pap. Berlin 8869 (Smither, *JEA* 28 [1942] 16ff.) the relation of them is opposite to that postulated by Smither. Iru, whose name is written in a vertical column at the right edge of the papyrus, is the sender, while the addressee is indicated on the upper edge of the text. His name should be read *Hrw*, as results clearly from the sportive writing of the name on the verso, which has been completely misunderstood by Smither. Iru again is the sender, while *Hrw* (written only with the sun-disc) is addressee. For him the titles *ḥsty-ꜥ smr-w'ty imy-r ḥm-nṯr* are listed.

²³ Small fragments of a calligraphic display of the Horus name among the Abusir papyri might be the only remains of a royal document in its original form; cf. Borchardt, *Allerhand Kleinigkeiten*.

²⁴ In the testament of *Wp-m-nṯrt* (Selim Hassan, *Excavations at Giza* II fig. 219) no addressee is listed but the writer of the document is indicated in a horizontal line at the beginning of the text. Different from the other documents concerned, the document represents a unilateral act which fact is probably responsible for the special arrangement. Another instance where no addressee is indicated is the well known letter from Saqqara (Cairo *JdE* 49623; Gunn, *ASAE* 25 [1925] 242ff., pl. I; Gardiner, *JEA* 13 [1927] 75ff.; Grdseloff, *ASAE* 48 [1948] 505ff.). Only the writer is mentioned at the very right, whose name

the Horus-name in the palace facade is found only in this place, and that only in the official copies, while the private copies omit this line altogether. The Horus-name was an official insignia used as an indication of the origin of the document, and not to be used by private persons; it denotes the king as successor of Horus and reflects the mythologically founded power of the ruler.²⁵ When a formal reference is required in the body of the text, the royal prenomen is used.

The indication of the addressee on the upper edge of the formulary, common to royal decrees and private letters, occurs first under Neferirkare,²⁶ but is presumed to be older. In the period we can survey, a gradual change takes place. While the earliest available instance names only one person with one title, later cases extend this entry. In the decree of Pepi I for the exemption of the pyramid towns of Dashur, all those persons are listed in the address who were concerned in any way by the contents of the document and who therefore had to be notified.²⁷ This points to the use of a collective address comprising all addressees of the various copies to be made of the document, without making any distinction of the original recipient. This rather confusing system seems to have been abandoned in the later reign of Pepi II. In a decree issued in the year of the 31st count only the main addressee is named at the head of the inscription, while three further recipients of copies are listed separately.²⁸ The

should be read *Rhw*. The absence of an address in this kind of administrative letter is probably to be linked with the indication found in *Urk.* I 128, 6 (similar 61, 17) of the sending of a letter *r izt* "to the administration"; cf. Goedicke, *Die Stellung des Königs im Alten Reich* 56.

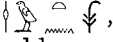




²⁵ It is significant that cylinder seals, as instruments of administrative function, primarily state the Horus name while other name-forms of the king occur less frequently on them; cf. Goedicke, *MDIK* 17 (1961) 69ff.; Hugo Müller, *Die Entwicklung der Königstitulatur* 33f.


²⁶ *Urk.* I 170, 12; Petrie, *Abydos* II pl. 14.

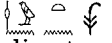

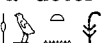
²⁷ *Urk.* I 209, 12-16; Borchardt, *AZ* 42 (1905) 1ff.

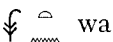

²⁸ Reisner, *Mycerinus* pl. A. Sethe, *Urk.* I 277, 11-18 is totally misleading and full of errors.

later texts are all personal and thus directed to one individual,²⁹ so nothing can be said about later developments. The absence of any co-addressees in the administrative decrees of Neferkauhor, however, might suggest that the tendency discernible under the late reign of Pepi II was continued and that co-recipients of copies were no longer mentioned, the various copies being issued individually.

The two components of issuing king and addressee official are connected by the group , which precedes the mention of the addressee in the horizontal line across the upper margin of the inscription.³⁰ The sequence of signs shows some peculiarities. While the indication of the addressee always faces to the right, the signs  face in the opposite direction. The two signs  are ambiguous, but  occurs facing left and facing right. What might seem an insignificant detail might very well be a reflection of a scribal tradition. The sign  facing right occurs only in documents of Pepi I and Pepi II,³¹ but not in earlier or in later examples.³² That this is not to be considered merely a coincidence is indicated by the consistency of the evidence covering both official and private copies.

The initial group  is usually considered nominal and accordingly rendered as “command of the king” or “royal command.”³³ Such an explanation is inappropriate, however, as it confuses the term applied to the docu-

ment with its contents, the actual decree. The term for the document is *wḏw n nswt*, with the normal word order of the indirect genitive.³⁴ This fact weighs against Edel’s interpretation of the initial group of the royal documents.³⁵ He conjectures the “Genetiv ‘könig’ aus Ehrfurcht vorangestellt,” a situation which he considers possible even in regard to  in *Urk.* I 289, 2 which for him is an indirect genitive; despite the fact that the attested mention of the Egyptian term for “royal decree” does not show any “honorific transposition.” An equally convincing argument against such an interpretation is of an epigraphic nature. The noun *wḏ*, “command,” is determined with a book roll () throughout the inscriptions of the Old Kingdom;³⁶ on the other hand, the verb *wḏ*, “to command,” lacks such a determinative.³⁷ Consequently the group  is to be taken as a verbal clause, and accordingly to be rendered “the king commanded.”

The interpretation of this group as a verbal clause also provides an explanation for the curious arrangement of the signs. Gunn,³⁸ who dealt with the question in connection with Saitic documents which are modelled on Old Kingdom patterns, saw the probable origin of the arrangement of the signs in the suggestion that “when the letter had been folded and sealed,  was written on one side of the packet and  on the other, each word being written more or less in the abnormal direction as though to draw attention to its complement on the other side.” This explanation, which is not supported by any parallel in Egyptian orthography, presupposes that the group was originally placed on the verso of the papyrus original. This assumption not only cannot be corroborated, but also assumes a major alteration in the arrangement of the text in the process of its copying on stone. Only one of the

²⁹ An exception is *Urk.* I 295, 17–18 which lists only a collective address in the form of people of a certain rank or office without specifying any individual. It is unclear if this document should be considered a circular or if individual addresses were attached to it.

³⁰ The group is missing in the document of Shepseskaf (*Urk.* I 160) and Pepi I (*Urk.* I 214); the latter is clearly a compilation of excerpts.

³¹ This holds not only for the “official” copies (*Urk.* I 209, 12; 280, 15; 277, 10 etc.) but also for the letter of Pepi II to *Hrḥwḥ* (*Urk.* I 128, 9).

³² In addition to the decrees of Neferirkare (*Urk.* I 170, 12) and Teti (*Urk.* I 209, 12) this arrangement is also attested in the “private” copies of letters of Izezi (*Urk.* I 60, 14; 62, 14; 179, 12).

³³ Just to quote one, *Wb.* I 396, 19.

³⁴ *Urk.* I 21, 10; 283, 6.


³⁵ *Altägyptische Grammatik* § 87.

³⁶ The occurrences are numerous: *Urk.* I 65, 2; 66, 10; 1314; 212, 15; 282, 4, 15, 18 etc.

³⁷ *Urk.* I 210, 2; 213, 7; 282, 17 etc.

³⁸ *ASAE* 27 (1927) 234.

Old Kingdom letters,³⁹ dating to the late VI Dynasty, is labelled on the verso, while two others are left blank. The one example, like later parallels, states both sender *and* addressee on the verso, as would seem logical. To mark a writ only as "royal decree" would seem pointless, since it was probably delivered individually so that the contents could hardly be confused with ordinary letters.

The verbal interpretation of the group eliminates the uncertainty in the understanding of the nature of the document, and also brings the royal writs in parallel with the arrangements found in private letters. In the latter, the mention of the sender is followed by *ddw* or *dd.f*, "he says," thus indicating the contents of the letter to be the transcription of a verbal statement.⁴⁰ The situation in the royal documents is different insofar as the issuing king, who in the arrangement corresponds to the sender of private letters, is referred to by his Horus name; and so the royal document uses a different way of indicating that the contents of the document are a transcription of the verbal decree, the formula , even using, in one case (*Urk.* I 289, 2), the form *wḏ.n nswt*, "the king has commanded." The reversal of the verb to face the person addressed has a parallel in those tomb inscriptions which are formulated as addresses to the visitors of the tomb.⁴¹ With this graphic juxtaposition the Egyptian reflects the actual situation, with the speaker on one side and the addressee on the other, facing.

The fact that the introductory statement of the royal documents is to be understood as a verbal clause allows important conclusions to be drawn concerning the nature of the document. It implies that the document *per se* is

³⁹ Berlin 8869 (Möller, *Hieratische Papyrus Berlin* III, 2). Pap. Boulaq 8 is pasted on a piece of paper. Neither the letter from Saqqara nor Berlin 11301 is inscribed on the verso.

⁴⁰ So in the Saqqara letter and Boulaq 8, but missing in Berlin 8869.

⁴¹ Instances are: *Urk.* I 18, 9; 71, 16; 203, 1; 229, 16; Junker, *Giza* VI 110, Abb. 32; *idem*, IX 75, Abb. 30 etc.

not legislative, but is rather the codification of a verbal act which is to be understood as the actual legal process. Thus the "law" comes about through the verbal commandment by the king in his capacity as ruler. Since the royal document only records the verbal act, it is not in itself law, but is only evidence of the royal intent. Only in the sealing of the document by the king is the legal character of the decree established. This process confirms the transcription of the verbal act as being identical with the latter, and thus becomes its substitute.

The need to confirm the contents of the writing is restricted to the original document, and there only to those of royal issue. The sealing is an exclusively royal instrument, while the private document is either officially verified by being submitted to an institution,⁴² or receives its confirmation through the naming of witnesses.⁴³ The royal sealing of documents appears to be an introduction of the V Dynasty. The only earlier document, issued by Shepseskaf, certifies the contents of the document with the words *irw r-gs nswt ḏs.f*, "made in the personal presence of the king."⁴⁴ With one exception⁴⁵ the formula indicating the sealing of the document is *ḥtmw r-gs nswt ḏs*, which is to be rendered, as Gunn suggested, "sealed in the personal presence of the king."⁴⁶ The emphasis on the physical presence of the king is interesting, and has its equivalent in the assertion *nhw hr rdwy.fy*, "when he lived upon his feet," in private legal documents.⁴⁷

The four elements, the Horus-name of the issuing king, the addressee, the declaration of

⁴² E.g. *Urk.* I 158, 4.

⁴³ The testament of Wepemnofret lists 15 witnesses; cf. in this connection also Pap. Berlin 9010 and the request of citing witnesses in a legal dispute (Sethe, *AZ* 61 [1926] 67 ff.)

⁴⁴ *Urk.* I 160. As the documents delivered to the addressee were presumably copies and not the "Urtext", this passage does not necessarily provide a decisive indication about the development of the formula.

⁴⁵ *Urk.* I 288, 1 which reads *irw ḥs mi ḥ*.

⁴⁶ *ASAE* 27 (1927) 230. Similarly Edel, *Altägyptische Grammatik* § 179.

⁴⁷ *Urk.* I 8, 17; 11, 8; 29, 2; 72, 13; 89, 11; 187, 8 etc.

royal commandment (*wḏ nswt*) and the verification, form the basic framework of the formulary. There are three further elements needed to complete the fully developed version in use at the end of the Old Kingdom. The first is the dating, which belongs to the document but is not always indicated. It occurs in two different forms; as the dating of the document itself, and as the date of its verification. The use of the two forms is not consistent, and it is difficult to establish a firm rule. The preserved documents of Shepseskaf, Pepi I and the earlier Pepi II have the first form,⁴⁸ while those of Neferirkare, Teti and all the documents of the VIII Dynasty have the second form.⁴⁹ This situation suggests a gradual increase in emphasis upon the verification. Its origin, however, lies in the necessity to establish the sequence of the issue of various decrees. Originally this seems to have been connected with the indication of the issuing king by his Horus-name. The gradual shift from the legislative verbal act to the document as a legal instrument made it desirable to note the dates of the issuing and the verification, though the two acts did not have to be simultaneous. The indication of the month under Neferirkare is probably to be taken as an intermediary stage in which the year was given with the Horus-name, while the specific date to month and year was listed with the confirmation. With Pepi II⁵⁰ the trend in favor of the dating of the sealing is completed, and later documents give here the entire date, including the year.

The second expansion of the formulary to be mentioned appears to be an innovation of the VI Dynasty. It is an indication of the contents of the document, which appears first in the late reign of Pepi I⁵¹ and is to be found in most of the later texts. Its occurrence is only under-

standable in respect of the papyrus original, where it obviously was designed to meet the needs of the royal chancery by naming the object of the document's concern. Its survival in the stone copies of the documents is quite superfluous, but does show the exactitude with which the texts were reproduced. The place of this element in the papyrus original is not certain, but on the copies it is placed between the addressee and the actual text. Such a position makes little sense for the papyrus original if it had to be opened to be read, as would be the case after the wide format superseded the high format (see below). Thus it is tempting to presume that this entry, obviously designed to indicate the contents of the document in concise form, was placed on the outside of the papyrus in order to obviate the necessity of constantly opening it.

In the formulation of this heading, particularly in the decrees concerning specific objects, a system is clearly indicated. The subject matter is listed in the sequence of district, town and object, thus proceeding from the general to the more specific.⁵² This arrangement is easily explained by the practical needs of the chancery and the necessity of orderly filing in the archives.⁵³ As far as can be surmised, the basis of the organization of the archive followed the division of Egypt into administrative districts, which in turn were subdivided according to the settlements located there.

The last element to be added to the formulary is an entry concerning the delivery of the document reading *iw rdw iwt N r.s.*, "caused was the coming of N concerning it."⁵⁴ The indication appears first in the late reign of Pepi II, but does not occur in earlier decrees of this king.⁵⁵ In later documents it is always

⁴⁸ *Urk.* I 160; 209, 11; 280, 14; 277, 9 (cf. Smith, *JNES* 11 [1952] 113).

⁴⁹ *Urk.* I 172, 11; 208, 8; 296, 17; 299, 18 etc. The decree of Horus Demedj-ib-tawy bears no date.

⁵⁰ The decree from the year after the 22nd count has both indications (*Urk.* I 284, 4 and 288, 1).

⁵¹ *Urk.* I 210, 1; 280, 17-281, 1; 300, 16.

⁵² Especially clear *Urk.* I 214, 11.

⁵³ A reference to the existence of extensive archives is contained in *Admonitions* 6, 7-6, 11.

⁵⁴ Cf. Edel, *Altägyptische Grammatik* §§ 555 c; 481; also Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar* § 301.

⁵⁵ *Urk.* I 292, 12. The decrees from the year of the 11th and the year after the 22nd count lack this entry.

placed at the end of the texts, usually with the name of the father of the messenger.⁵⁶ Here too the origin of the entry might be traced to the royal chancery, where the means of delivery of a document apparently was registered in the event of possible complaints. Its inclusion on the stela again appears superfluous, as the name of the delivering messenger was hardly relevant to the contents of the document. The time at which this element was added to the formulary is not without significance, as the late part of the reign of Pepi II apparently was marked by internal strife.

The features of personal letters preserved in private copies accord in most respects with the documentary form. Considering their more intimate character it is understandable that the wording is less formal than that of the official documents. The fact that the available material is with one exception from King Izezi-Djedkare must also be considered. The two letters of commendation which this king wrote to his vizier Ra-shepses and his architect Senedjem-ib⁵⁷ are not only extremely flowery, but use language which is very affectionate and flattering. Even in such personal communications, however, the similarities of the two letters are striking. Especially noteworthy are the expressions of praise, which convey the king's commendation by a fixed formula. These elaborations are restricted to the body of the letter, however, and are not used as epithets of the addressee.⁵⁸ A survey of the royal documents thus leads to the recognition of many recurrent elements in their formulation, which we have attributed to the development of a formulary in the royal chancery.

We noted above that the texts found on stone are copies made from an original written on papyrus, an original which is either the actual

⁵⁶ *Urk.* I 296, 16 and the other decrees of king Neferkauhor; *Urk.* I 306, 13.

⁵⁷ *Urk.* I 60f.; 179f.

⁵⁸ The use of laudatory epithets in the address appears to be a development of the Heracleopolitan Period, a time of great interest in eloquence and *bel esprit*, as well demonstrated by the Story of the Eloquent Peasant.

document with the royal seal, or a copy made in the royal chancery. While there is no explicit indication in favor of either of these alternatives, it appears unlikely that the original was ever sent away from the royal archives. In *Urk.* I 282, 10, for instance,⁵⁹ it is ordered that "a copy of this command be brought, which is to be placed upon a stela of firm limestone . . ." From this text we learn not only of the use of copies, but also that their transfer to stone was intended. As the transfer was a kind of "publication"⁶⁰ of the document, close adherence to the original was crucial. How slavish and exacting this adherence was is shown, as noted above, by the incorporation of elements which are completely without point in a stone copy, such as the indications of the contents and the delivering messenger. This close rendering of the originals allows us to draw conclusions from the stelae about the format and arrangement of the papyrus documents.

With respect to format, only in two instances is a royal document placed on a round-topped stela, the traditional royal form, and in neither case is the document a literal copy of the original. One, the decree of Pepi I for the funerary chapel of his mother Iput at Coptus,⁶¹ is only an excerpt of various stipulations from the decree, while the other, the decree of Shepseskaf for the temple of Mycerinus, was copied at a much later date.⁶² An attempt was

⁵⁹ Similarly *Urk.* I 286, 2; 292, 8.

⁶⁰ A clear indication of the motives for the transfer onto a stela is given *Urk.* I 282, 12 (similarly 286, 4) "...that the functionaries of this district see, that they shall not take these priests to any labor of the royal administration." The "commandment" becomes effective at once, as can be deduced from *Urk.* I 283, 13, and is not dependent on the "publication". This situation is only logical when one takes into consideration that the legislative act is the verbal "command" and not the document in which it is codified.

⁶¹ *Urk.* I 214. That the text is an excerpt is certain in view of the absence of vital elements of the "formulary", like the Horus-name and the introductory formula.

⁶² *Urk.* I 160. The absence of the wish '*nh-dt*' after the mention of the king's name is only one of the arguments. Sethe's restoration of '*nh-dt*' after Menkaure's name is completely wrong.

made to fit the Shepseskaf document into the rounded form of the royal stela, thus combining incompatible elements.

All other documents use the rectangular format. The two oldest documents, dating to Neferirkare and Teti, are in the shape of an upright rectangle. The placement of the decree of Shepseskaf on an upright stela suggests the same format for this text. Although it is possible that the setting of the stelae determined their form,⁶³ it is more likely that they directly reflect their original. The peculiarity of the two texts is the use of the long vertical columns, conforming to the narrow oblong format, an arrangement common to other texts of the same period. Thus the same form is found in the private copies of the royal letters of Izezi in the tombs of Senedjem-ib and Ra-shepses,⁶⁴ such private legal documents as the testament of Wepemnofret and the so-called "sale of a house,"⁶⁵ and is further represented by the Papyrus Berlin 11301 from the reign of Izezi.⁶⁶

The uniformity of format is unlikely to be so extended by mere chance, and thus is better considered a simulation of the papyrus used in the original. As the average height of the papyrus used in the Old Kingdom has been estimated on the basis of extant specimens as between 21 and 24 cm.,⁶⁷ the writing in long columns on an oblong format indicates that the roll of papyrus was not used crosswise, but lengthwise. In other words, the scroll would not be spread across the lap with the unused part held by the left hand, the technique indicated by later depictions of men reading or writing. Instead the unused portion would have to be kept in the lap while the left hand holds the upper edge. This practice is

confirmed by, and also explains, depictions of the IV and V Dynasty which show scribes writing in this position.⁶⁸ They hold the papyrus in front of them lying up and down, a practice also attested from the representation in the temple of Sahure of the goddess Seshat taking count of the Lybian spoil.⁶⁹ The particular format and its handling also is shown in the presentation of opened writing scrolls for inspection, as shown in scenes of the house administrator reporting to his lord.

The decree of Pepi I for the pyramid towns of Snofru at Dashur is the first instance of the distinct transversal format, which continues in the large decrees of Pepi II. Its peculiarity is the shortening of the columns, found also with shorter documents, making the difference more conspicuous. It is also represented among the private copies of the letter of Pepi II to Herkhuf⁷¹ and by several papyri of the VI Dynasty or later.⁷² The consistency of the available material can be taken as decisive evidence for a change not only in the format, but even more in the handling of the document. Instead of writing parallel to the unrolling papyrus, the changed technique involved placing the papyrus roll at right angles to the script. This in turn considerably facilitated the handling of a large document, an increase in convenience which is probably responsible for the change. Hand in hand with the changing technique probably went a change in the use of the papyrus; in order to keep a lengthy piece of papyrus sufficiently flat to write on, one would have to use the outside of the roll, the verso, so there would be support for the pen. This was not necessary after the shift to crosswise writing, as only a small section had to be unrolled at a

⁶³ They were set up on either side of a doorway; cf. Petrie, *Abydos* II pl. 52.

⁶⁴ Cf. LD II 76 d, f; Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara* 1907/08 pl. 61, 2.

⁶⁵ Selim Hassan, *Excavations at Giza* II fig. 219; *Urk.* I 157f. (Steindorff in Hölscher, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs Chephren* III f., Abb. 164).

⁶⁶ Möller, *Hieratische Paläographie* I Taf. I, 2.

⁶⁷ Černý, *Paper and Books in Ancient Egypt* 14f.

⁶⁸ E.g. Junker, *Giza* II 152, Abb. 19.

⁶⁹ Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs Sahure* II Bl. 1; cf. also W. St. Smith, *A History of Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom* 284, fig. 127 b.

⁷⁰ E.g. Junker, *op. cit.* II 128, Abb. 11.

⁷¹ *Urk.* I 128ff.; de Morgan, *Catalogue des Monuments* I 169.

⁷² Boulaq 8; Berlin 9010 (Möller, *Hieratische Paläographie* I, Taf. II); Cairo JdE 49623 (Gunn, *ASAE* 25 [1925] 242ff., pl. I).

time. The obvious advantages of this technique led to its uniform adoption.⁷³

Other than the indication of the addressee, the writing is mainly arranged in vertical columns. The use of horizontal lines is first attested in the decree of King Neferirkare from Abydos, and later in a large decree of Pepi II for the temple of Min from the year after the 11th count,⁷⁴ but both texts also use vertical columns. The two other large documents of the reign of Pepi II maintain the use of vertical columns, although there is another text of the same time arranged horizontally; and the documents of Neferkauhor are likewise vertical in arrangement. Although there is a remarkable decree of ambiguity, this might be explained by the peculiarities of the individual inscriptions, especially since some texts indicate considerable repetition. The use of horizontal lines, restricted for us to the reign of Pepi II, is quite provocative, since otherwise only vertical arrangement is attested in papyrus inscriptions into the XII Dynasty.⁷⁵ We might hypothesize that the ambivalence in the VI Dynasty is connected with the changeover in the handling of the papyrus.

In summary of the investigation to this point, we have found ample evidence of the existence of an established tradition in the royal chancery in the issue of royal decrees. These traditions concern not only the formulations, but also the physical structure or layout of the document, including the development of a formula for the proclamation in writing of what "the king commanded."

All the documents dealt with so far are introduced by the formula *wḏ nswt*, "the king commanded," and are referred to as *wḏ nswt*, "king's commandment." All the available

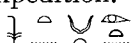

⁷³ Černý, *op. cit.* (supra n. 67) 17f. takes only the later handling of the papyrus into consideration, but disregards completely the early technique.

⁷⁴ Cf. Weill, *Décrets royaux* pl. V. It is tempting to assume that the change of direction in the last section is to indicate that the text was originally written on the verso. The other horizontally inscribed document is *Urk.* I 293f. (Weill, *op. cit.* pl. XI).

⁷⁵ Cf. Černý, *op. cit.* 17.

inscriptions were found within Egypt and concern domestic affairs. Though so obvious as to be a truism, this reminder is justified insofar as it indicates the realm within which the Egyptian king was able to issue commands with expectations of obedience. This leads naturally to the question of whether there are any royal decrees dating to the Old Kingdom attested out of Egypt, or if any other form of royal document is mentioned there. The answer to the first question is negative, but it is positive for the second.

In the inscriptions found in the Wadi Maghara in Sinai the term *wpt* or *wpt-nswt* is attested since the reign of Menkauhor,⁷⁶ while the earliest occurrence in the Wadi Hammamat dates to the later reign of Pepi I.⁷⁷ That the word is determined with a book roll indicates that it is to be understood as some kind of document and its contents, justifying the rendering of *Wb.* I 313, 10 of "Auftrag des Königs," confirmed by *Urk.* I 296, 4, 8, 12.⁷⁸ While the *Wb.* rendering keeps the association with writing, Černý's translation of "mission" or "royal mission"⁷⁹ is misleading in its implication of a group of people carrying out an order abroad, a royal expedition, which apparently left a random inscription commemorating its visit.

In the desire to interpret the inscriptions dating to the Old Kingdom as reports of activities carried out, in keeping with later inscriptions, these graffiti were considered as records "of the names of the leaders and the chief officials taking part in the expedition." The introductory words of the graffiti,  or , were accordingly rendered "the royal expedition made by" or "sent with." Such a translation is the consequence of taking the verb as a relative. What we know of the social structure of the times mitigates against

⁷⁶ Sinai 12-17 (Gardiner-Peet-Černý, *Inscriptions of Sinai* pl. VII ff.).

⁷⁷ Wadi Hammamat 61-63; 103 (Cuyat-Montet, *Inscriptions du Ouâdi Hammâmât* pls. XVI; XXV); Goyon, *Wadi Hammamat* pl. VIII, no. 21.

⁷⁸ Cf. Goedicke, *JNES* 15 (1956) 30.

⁷⁹ *Inscriptions of Sinai* II p. 28.

this interpretation. The individual awareness of personal merit which such an inscription presupposes is very different from the attitude found in the tombs of the time, where in general the individual achievements are concealed behind a rather ritualistic or formalized biography. This view is also unsatisfactory in view of the designations used for the king. In general, private inscriptions are very cautious in the use of royal names, and in no instance is the Horus or *nbtj*-name used. When royal documents were copied in the tombs of noblemen, these names were omitted, and likewise in commemorative inscriptions, which were usually private, there was no listing of the royal titulary.

An interpretation much more in accord with the social tenor and royal customs can be found if *wpt* or *wpt-nswt* is taken as an independent element which is not connected with the following passages, but rather designates the character of the document. For instance a large graffito in the Wadi Maghara from the year of the 2nd count of Pepi II⁸⁰ is arranged in such a way as to substantiate this interpretation. The texts consist of several sections which are separated from each other by lines, as in letters. In the upper half are found the date, Horus-name, royal prenomen and the name of the mother of the reigning king. The lower half is occupied primarily by the lists of names which constitute the actual text. Separated from both as an independent element is *wpt-nswt*, clearly not to be connected with the text, but rather a caption or designation of the document or its contents. In this respect the inscription is parallel to the heading *wḏ-nswt* of the royal decrees. This parallel in arrangement corroborates the philological implication of the term as denoting a document, and thus the rendering of "expedition" is to be rejected in favor of one more in accord with the documentary associations of the term.

Once the term *wpt-nswt* is understood as a designation of a kind of document, it becomes

⁸⁰ *Urk.* I 112ff.; Sinai no. 17.

necessary to revise our interpretation of those graffiti in which the term occurs. A reference to a royal document could not be placed at the head of such a document as these texts are usually envisaged to represent, a memorandum by the leader of the expedition and a list of the participants.⁸¹ Rather, the nature of the introductory caption, plus the use of royal titulary, indicates that the graffiti from Menkauhor to Pepi II are excerpts of the royal documents which instigated the journey abroad, rather than personal statements. The inscriptions do not give the complete commissions, but only the main features of the document's formulary and the name of the person or persons to whom it was issued or who were concerned by it.⁸²

To recognize *wpt-nswt* as a designation of a royal document further clarifies the opening words. The two instances where it is opened by *hꜣbt* (*Urk.* I 56, 3 and 113, 4) are easily explained, and no connection with the designation exists. The opening passage can be understood as an infinitive, "to be sent out with the captain . . . to the turquoise country," or as an impersonal, "one shall send out with the captain. . ."⁸³ The formulation with *iri*, however, is less clear; graphically it is less separated than the other. It is probably to be understood as "commission made for . . ." or "commission to be made by . . ." The essential feature to note is that the text is not a command, but rather a royal request. The position of the high official in several cases demands some scrutiny in this respect. It would seem rather curious if such a

⁸¹ In *Hatnub Gr.* 3, 6, and 7 we have the curious case of a transformation of a royal document into a private memento by adding *ḏḏ* after the name of the addressee. This is possible as the ending *.k* could be used for the second person singular as well as for the first person of the Old Perfective.

⁸² It seems that the quotations were restricted to the proper names occurring in the document, even without worrying about repetitions. In this form of selection the geographical lists of the New Kingdom, as extracts from official records, represent a parallel.

⁸³ In either case the object of the action is the people representing the party and not the documents, as would be otherwise required.

high official as the king's architect was personally sent to the Wadi Hammamat to quarry some blocks, as one of the texts might suggest.⁸⁴ Perhaps in such cases we might better consider the name a mention of the person in charge of the execution of the task, for which he had royal *pouvoir*. The document by which it was conferred is thus the *wpt-nswt*, publicized because it contained the names of the commissioned persons. As this sort of text is with the exception of Hatnub attested only outside of Egypt, the "royal commission" might well be interpreted as a "letter of credit."

The fact that the graffiti in Sinai and Wadi Hammamat represent excerpts from royal documents leads us to question if this type of document too was characterized by the formula discussed earlier. The two more complete texts from Sinai, numbers 13 (*Urk.* I 55 ff.) and 17 (*Urk.* I 112 ff.), would suggest so. They differ in their format, Izezi's text using the wide oblong format while Pepi II's inscription is more square. The arrangement of the entries, according with the arrangement of the royal commands, is clearer in the latter text. The date occupies the first column, followed by the Horus name in the next and the royal prenomen. The use of horizontal lines in the inscription of Izezi is curious; but the later text shows the typical short columns. This difference combined with our earlier hypothesis suggests that the change of format and handling of the papyrus might have already begun in the V Dynasty.

These excerpts of documents of the royal commissions on the whole replace the earlier form of graffiti, consisting of heraldic representations of the king smiting a foreigner.⁸⁵ This scene appears in graffiti dating to the III Dynasty. In two Sinai instances those scenes appear in connection with the royal commission.⁸⁶ The question immediately arises whether

those scenes were merely artistic expressions of the loyalty of the members of the party; but two points speak strongly against considering them mere spontaneous or freelance drawings. First, it is most unlikely, and contrary to all traditions, that a private person would be allowed to depict the king. Second, the quality of the carving is such that it is unlikely to be the work of an amateur, but would require the hand of a trained artist,⁸⁷ and preferably one with a design for the depiction. Considering these facts, the conclusion is clearly indicated that these scenes were commissioned works, for which artists had to be sent from Egypt, and for which designs were supplied.

It is tempting to assume that the design to be copied was part of the royal commission of the party. While no actual texts can corroborate this assumption, it is strengthened by the fact that the excerpts of a decree of Pepi I are connected with a figurative scene. A case for comparison, although of a much later, Saitic, date, is the Papyrus Brooklyn 47.218.3, where a legal instrument is fitted with a pictorial scene at the beginning of the scroll.⁸⁸ Considering the strength of traditions in Egypt, the gap of two millennia between the only instance and the conjectured earlier occurrence does not seem an insurmountable obstacle; indeed, the antiquating tendency so typical of the XXVI Dynasty, and its conscious imitations of the Old Kingdom, can be counted as support for our conjecture. This would explain the high quality of painting on papyrus when first attested at the beginning of the XVIII Dynasty.⁸⁹ Thus the royal chancery is not to be seen only as a scribal institution where documentary traditions were developed, but also as an artistic center where those documents were in some cases given a truly regal appearance.

Johns Hopkins University

⁸⁷ A comparison of these scenes with some of the doodling shows this clearly.

⁸⁸ Parker, *A Saite Oracle Papyrus from Thebes* pl. 1, pp. 3 ff.

⁸⁹ Cf. Pieper, *Die ägyptische Buchmalerei*, *JDAI* 48 (1933) 40 ff.

⁸⁴ This seems particularly clear in *Urk.* I 148, 16.

⁸⁵ Cf. Černý, *Inscriptions of Sinai* II 24 ff.

⁸⁶ Sinai no. 14 (Izezi) and no. 16 (Pepi I); cf. also Wadi Hammamat nos. 62–63 (Couyat-Montet, *op. cit.* [supra n. 77] pl. XVI).