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Edited by ZAHI HAWASS

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THE TREASURES OF THE PYRANIDS



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> 10-11 Scene showing the 'Meidum geese,' Egyptian Museum Cairo, Old Kingdom.

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Chapter

_The Mystery of Hetepheres

by Zahi Hawass

ne of the most spectacular discoveries at Giza was made in 1925 by Mohamadien Ibrahim, the Egyptian photographer who worked with the Reisner Expedition from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. One day, while Reisner was on vacation in the United States, Ibrahim was getting ready to take photographs on the east side of the Great Pyramid when one of the legs of his tripod hit an unusual patch of plaster. When he investigated this patch, he found that it served to seal off the entrance to a subterranean stairway. He reported the discovery to Alan Rowe, Reisner's assistant, who in turn sent a telegram to Reisner, who returned immediately.

The stairway, twelve steps long, led to a vertical shaft, about 27.5 m deep, which was filled to the top with limestone plaster blocking. This shaft, labeled G 7000x, took ten years to excavate. The shaft follows two vertical fissures in the rock, its walls were left rough. Various artifacts and pottery sherds were mixed with the fill, and near the bottom was a sealing bearing the name of Khufu's mortuary workshop. A niche in the west wall of the shaft, which had been blocked with plaster masonry, contained the remains of an offering: three leg bones of a bull wrapped in a reed mat; a horned skull that had been crushed; and two wine jars. Also mixed in with these remains were a limestone boulder, two chips of basalt, and some charcoal, which were probably not part of the original offering.

In the burial chamber at the bottom of the shaft, also left unfinished, were many beautiful objects. There were several items made of gilded wood, including a portable pavilion, a bed, two armchairs, and a carrying chair. There were also a curtain box, a leather case for walking sticks, several wooden boxes, some copper tools, and numerous other small objects, including twenty silver bracelets inlaid with turquoise, lapis lazuli, and carnelian. An alabaster sarcophagus lay against one wall of the chamber, but to everyone's great disappointment, it was empty.

Various inscribed objects from the tomb bore the names and titles of Sneferu and of Hetepheres, whose principal title was 'Mother of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt.' Mud sealings bearing the name of Khufu were also found in some of the boxes, the obvious conclusion is that Hetepheres was the wife of Sneferu and the mother of Khufu.

A sealed recess in the west wall of the burial chamber contained an alabaster canopic chest on a small wooden sledge. It was divided into four compartments, three of which contained

packages lying in a solution of natron and water; the fourth compartment contained dried

organic material. A mud

sealing, protected by a small pottery lid, was found on the lid of this box.

The style of the objects found in the tomb, including many fragments of pottery found scattered throughout the chamber, confirmed a Fourth Dynasty date. After the artifacts were restored by Hagg Ahmed Youssef, our great Egyptian conservator, they were divided between the Egyptian Museum in Cairo and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The Egyptian Museum objects now form one of the Museum's most important collections, the contents of the oldest intact royal tomb to be discovered in Egypt.

Reisner attempted to account for the condition of the burial chamber, the broken and scattered pottery, the chips from the sarcophagus found strewn about the chamber, the lack of a superstructure, and the lack of a body, with the following hypothesis: Hetepheres died during the first part of Khufu's reign (as indicated by sealings from his mortuary service) and was

152 Plan of the funeral equipment found inside the shaft of Hetepheres. Giza, Old Kingdom. Drawing from Reisner and Smith. 153 top Gilded wooden chariot, part of the funeral furniture found in the shaft of Hetepheres, Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Old Kingdom. 153 bottom Gilded wooden chair from the shaft of Hetepheres, Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Old Kingdom.

Chapter 13



154-155 Gilded wooden bed from the shaft of Hetepheres, Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Old Kingdom. 154 bottom Wooden box with beautiful inscriptions from the shaft of Hetepheres, Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Old Kingdom.

originally buried by him at Dahshur, near her husband Sneferu. At some point in Khufu's reign, her tomb was broken into and her body was stolen. Khufu found out that the tomb had been disturbed and had the burial dismantled and the remaining contents moved secretly to Giza, where shaft G 7000x was hastily dug to receive it. As further support for his theory, Reisner notes that the side of the alabaster sarcophagus against the wall of the burial chamber was damaged, which he believes could not have happened in G 7000x. He also believes that the contents of the Giza tomb were in the reverse order of their original positions at Dahshur. The equipment found in the body of the shaft would represent items that were forgotten and then thrown into the shaft at the last minute. Since an offering was made at this new tomb, Khufu presumably did not know that the body of the queen was missing. These events would have occurred while Khufu's upper temple was in the process of being paved, accounting for basalt fragments found in the offering niche.

Mark Lehner objects to this interpretation on a number of grounds. He thinks that robbers would have smashed the lid of the sarcophagus rather than lifting it carefully, and that they are unlikely to have missed easily portable valuables such as the silver bracelets. He believes that if Hetepheres had originally been buried at Dahshur (a theory for which there is absolutely no evidence), the reburial should also have been made there. He also objects to the idea that such a deep shaft could have been dug in secret, and points out that it is hard to imagine Khufu knowingly allowing his mother to be reburied with broken pottery and violated equipment.

As an alternative scenario, Lehner has suggested that Hetepheres died early in her son's reign and was buried in this hastily dug shaft. It was dug in the style of the Third Dynasty, then still current. A superstructure that would have overlain this shaft was started, again in the style of the Third Dynasty, but then abandoned when Khufu's cult was changed and the plan of the eastern field was modified because Khufu's upper temple would have interfered with it. Instead, the three small pyramids, G 1a, b, and c, were built. The queen mother's body was then taken from G 7000x and reburied with new funerary equipment inside either G 1a or G 1b.

Lehner deals with each of the points raised by Reisner, and comes up with alternative explanations that fit his new theory. For example, he suggests that the basalt fragments found in the offering niche might be tools, and proposes that the limestone boulder might have been thrown into the niche to crush the skull and invalidate the offering. Lehner suggests that the copper tools found in the burial chamber were left by the workmen, who pried off the lid of the sarcophagus and removed the body of the queen. He disagrees with Reisner's assessment of the damage to the sarcophagus, noting that the chipping of the lid is not just on the east side, but runs all the way around, and could easily have been done in G 7000x.

Both of these theories are very attractive, but neither accounts for all of the evidence. If the queen was originally buried at Dahshur, where is her first tomb? How could her burial equipment have been moved all the way from Dahshur to Giza in secret? If G 7000x represents the original burial, why was it left in such disorder? Why was the queen mother buried in such haste? Why would Khufu's officials have needed a completely new set of funerary equipment? Most importantly, why would Khufu's mortuary officials take the queen's body but leave her canopic material behind?

I believe that Hetepheres was originally buried in G 1a, the northernmost of the small pyramids. Lehner

has pointed out that the portable canopy and furniture found in G 7000x would have fit almost perfectly into the burial chamber of G 1a, which makes more sense if it was originally designed to go there rather than thrown hurriedly into G 7000x. But how and when was it moved into its final resting place?

We know that a great deal of vandalism was carried out on the Giza plateau during the upheaval of the First Intermediate Period-there is a lot of evidence suggesting that much of Khufu's complex was destroyed during this tumultuous time. It is likely that Hetepheres' burial was disturbed at this time, and perhaps her body was taken by thieves looking for jewels. Priests loyal to Khufu's cult might then have moved what remained of the burial equipment to hide it from pillagers. The architectural style of G 7000x points to a date in the Second or Third Dynasty, and this shaft could easily have been dug much earlier and abandoned before Khufu's complex was begun. Thus the priests would have found and used this ancient shaft to protect what was left of the burial of this important queen.

If my theory is correct, it accounts for a number of problems. As Reisner himself pointed out, the

objects in G 7000x were reversed, as if the equipment had been moved from one place to another. This reversal makes more sense if those responsible for the reburial were moving the equipment over a short distance, such as the distance between the burial chamber of G 1a and G 7000x. The offering in the niche would have been transferred hastily from its original location, and would have been disturbed in the process. The basalt chips found with this offering are most likely fragments from the destroyed pavement of Khufu's upper temple, and the limestone debris is probably residue from his vandalized temples. A later reburial would also account for the lack of an official seal over the entrance to the shaft.

This hypothesis still does not completely account for the fact that the queen's body is missing. As Lehner has pointed out, robbers are more likely to have broken the lid open than to have chipped around the edges. The priests responsible for the reburial must have known that the body was missing, yet they still took the trouble to move the queen's equipment, including her empty sarcophagus. Perhaps future discoveries on the Giza Plateau will someday shed more light on this ancient mystery.

155 top Bracelets discovered with the funeral equipment of Hetepberes, Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Old Kingdom.

155 bottom Gilded wooden bowls, part of the funeral goods found in the shaft of Hetepberes, Egyptian Museum, Cairo, Old Kingdom.

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THE PYRAMIDS OF THE FOURTH DYNASTY Text by Rainer Stadelmann

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THE SECRET DOORS INSIDE

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