

# Towards a New History for the Egyptian Old Kingdom

*Perspectives on the Pyramid Age*

*Edited by*

Peter Der Manuelian and Thomas Schneider



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# The Entextualization of the Pyramid Texts and the Religious History of the Old Kingdom

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## Abstract

Flaws in the historical model called “the democratization of the afterlife” give cause to re-assess the role played in Old Kingdom history by the Pyramid Texts, because they are central to any understanding of events in religion at that time. This essay crystallizes the democratization theory and the chief points against it. It then situates the Pyramid Texts in the context of Old Kingdom history.<sup>1</sup> Its argument is that the Pyramid Texts, meaning the corpus of hieroglyphic religious texts found in royal tomb chambers in the latter part of the Old Kingdom, participated in a contemporaneous, growing interest in religious knowledge. Inquiry is made here as to how the Pyramid Texts were converted, or *entextualized*, from portable scrolls to hieroglyphic monumentalizations. Of importance is entextualization, meaning something having to do with the transfer of an orally delivered text (scrolls bearing the recitations reflected in the Pyramid Texts) to a more durable medium (hieroglyphic writing on stone). Consideration of the transfer of media, from ritual script to monumental decoration, leads to the perception of a shift in purpose: the text went from being something held in the hands during the performance of cult and became an ornate representation of words on an architectural surface. The text became more of a text as such, stripped of its accustomed ritual contexts of performance. This was a shift from the deed of ritual to the word of text. Just such a shift can be found, *mutatis mutandis*, in a completely different register of texts, a set of statements from elite tombs in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties—to be encountered more than once in what follows.

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1 This essay highlights some of the major points from two works by the author: Hays “The Death of the Democratisation of the Afterlife” and *Organization of the Pyramid Texts*.

## 1 The End of the Democratization Theory

According to the old model, the Pyramid Texts were intended for exclusively royal use, and the beliefs they represent were applicable only to those who displayed them. The key reason for this notion was that Pyramid Texts were not used as decoration by elites in their tombs during the Old Kingdom, though they were later on, in the Middle Kingdom. This later body of texts was dubbed the *Coffin Texts* by James H. Breasted, a term chosen for the typical medium on which the later corpus appears. In similar fashion, the term *Pyramid Texts* alludes to the location where the Old Kingdom corpus appears. Returning to the differing demographics of textual attestation, one may only say that they constitute both the support and the object for the theory. During the Old Kingdom, when the Pyramid Texts appear in royal tombs, there is a lack of such texts in non-royal tombs. Afterwards in the Middle Kingdom, Pyramid Texts finally occur in non-royal tombs, often in the immediate proximity of newer Coffin Texts. The democratization theory interprets this disparity of display by asserting an exclusivity of access in the Old Kingdom. Here is where it goes beyond the evidence, precisely in adducing negative evidence. Thereby, it excludes the king's subjects from the ideas in the Pyramid Texts and, indeed also, from whatever practices they might have been associated with. That is how the old democratization theory gave the Pyramid Texts a history. As a corpus, what they signify is social exclusion. They make a story of "Haves and Have Nots." Later on, in the Middle Kingdom, as with an expanded right of suffrage, the exclusion is dissolved, and the "Have Nots" now have, too. Now, putatively, all may benefit from the beliefs and practices with which the Pyramid Texts were concerned.<sup>2</sup>

That is the theory *in nuce*. But a series of scholars have recently written forcefully against it, notably Mark Smith, Harco Willems, Bernard Mathieu, Katarina Nordh, David P. Silverman, and Peter Jürgens.<sup>3</sup> They have drawn attention to several crucial points that do not fit the theory.

2 For the original presentation of the theory, see Gardiner, in Davies, *The Tomb of Amenemhēt* (No. 82), 55; Breasted, *Development of Religion and Thought*, 99, 257, and 272–73; Sethe, *Die altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte* I, vii–viii. For further detail on the theory as presented by these three scholars, see Hays, "The Death of the Democratization of the Afterlife," 116–17.

3 Smith, "Democratization of the Afterlife"; Willems, *Les Textes des Sarcophages*, 131–228 and "Die Frage"; Mathieu, "Que sont les Textes des Pyramides?," 20 and "La distinction entre Textes des Pyramides et Textes des Sarcophages," 256–58; Nordh, *Aspects of Ancient Egyptian Curses*, 168–72; Silverman "Nature of Egyptian Kingship," 80–82 and "Coffin Texts," 140–41; Jürgens, *Grundlinien einer Überlieferungsgeschichte*, 86.

(1) To begin with, the old model does not fully take into account the fact that in the Middle Kingdom there is a reverse demographic with the display of mortuary texts. During the Middle Kingdom, only elites use religious texts to decorate surfaces in close proximity to the dead; no king established such a tradition. If the logic of the democratization theory were applied to this circumstance, one would have to understand, strangely, that the king now had no access to such texts, since not he, but some other social group, was displaying them.<sup>4</sup> But that can hardly be so. Instead of struggling around this point, as one must with the old democratization theory, a proposal may be made that is consistent with all the facts, including the reversal: differences in display between social groups reflect processes of social distinction,<sup>5</sup> and the differentials of display can certainly change over time, even as fashion changes. Simply this: certain kinds of iconography and certain kinds of texts were not shared between the classes in decorating certain areas of the tomb, as a matter of what John Baines would call *decorum*.<sup>6</sup> Governed by opportunity and fashion, the differences changed over time. During the Old Kingdom, elites did not decorate their tombs with Pyramid Texts simply because that kind of decoration was particular to the royal family (while some other things were common for elites, *e.g.*, stereotyped scenes of mortuary service; see below). The First Intermediate Period disrupted this royal practice. After that hiatus, mortuary texts again appear in Middle Kingdom tombs, but now they were not in the tombs of kings, but in those of queens and high officials.

(2) Figure 5.1 seeks to show the intensity of interest in having mortuary texts during the Middle Kingdom, based on dates given to coffins and tombs by Harco Willems.<sup>7</sup> It was during the Eleventh Dynasty that such collections of texts began to appear, most notably in the Deir El Bahri tombs of two queens of Mentuhotep II, Ashayt (T3C)<sup>8</sup> and Nefru (TT

4 Mathieu, "Que sont les Textes des Pyramides?," 20 and "La distinction," 257.

5 Cf. Alexanian, "Tomb and Social Status," 8, with n. 24.

6 See Baines, *Fecundity Figures*, 277, referring to a set of rules which "bar certain types of representation from associating freely and occurring freely in different contexts."

7 *Passim* in Willems, *Chests of Life*.

8 The coffin of Ashayt was found "under walls belonging to the third building phase of Mentuhotep II at Deir el-Bahri, and is thus dated firmly to the period shortly before the unification of Egypt by that king," according to the remark of Willems, *The Coffin of Heqata*, 1–2.

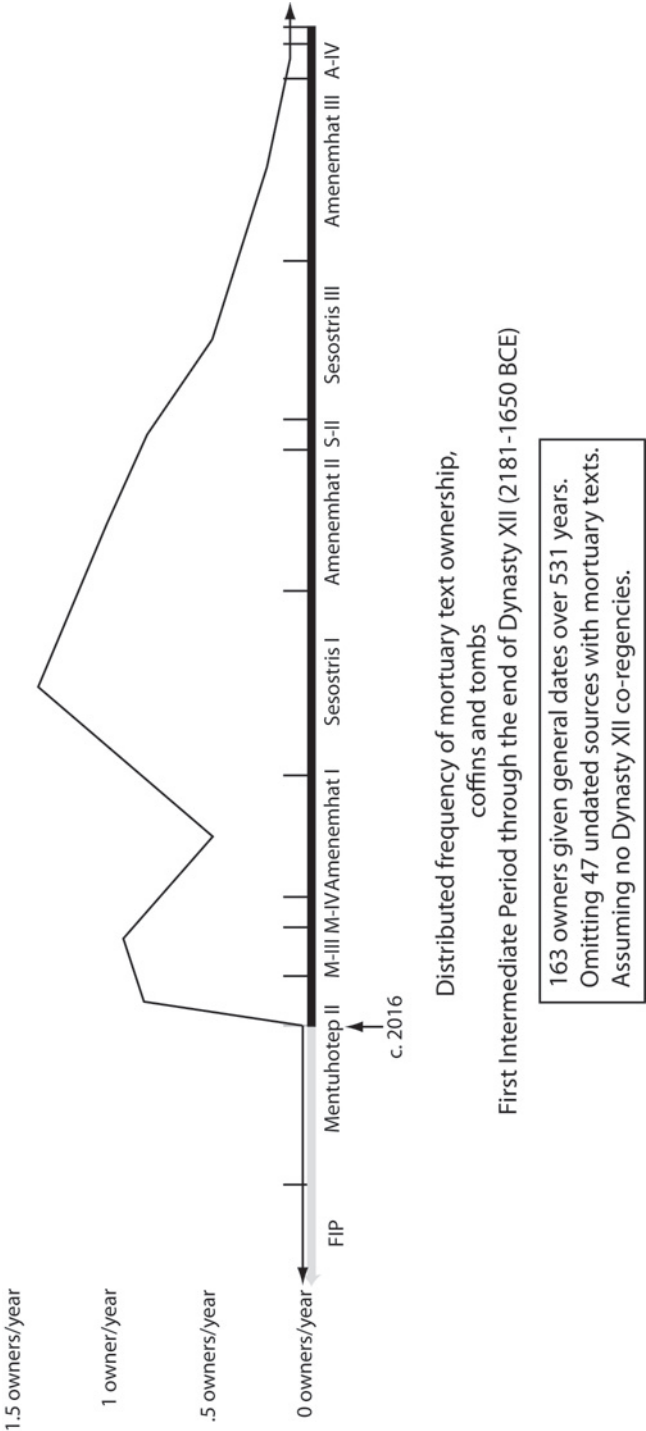


FIGURE 5.1 *Distribution of Middle Kingdom mortuary texts over time.*

319),<sup>9</sup> along with the high official Meru (TT 240).<sup>10</sup> But there are others from this same period; from Thebes alone in the Eleventh Dynasty there are also the tomb of Harhotep (TIC), the tomb and coffin of Ima (TIL), the limestone coffin of Dagi (T2C), and the coffin of Buau (T9C). For knowledge of the contents of kingly sepulchers, one must look toward pyramids of the Twelfth Dynasty. They did not decorate their subterranean chambers with Pyramid Texts or Coffin Texts, and one may suppose that this was simply because non-royals had already taken up that practice vigorously. It would have been to imitate a custom wedded to a lower social level.

(3) Furthermore, the theory does not take into account the fact that some Pyramid Texts were evidently drawn from non-royal collections of texts. The ones I refer to are those that use the term *ni-sw.t* “king,” to refer to someone other than the royal text owner.<sup>11</sup> Those Pyramid Texts are meaningful only when it is understood that they were drawn from an archive intended to serve not just kings, but his literate subjects as well. The contents of an archive are what one sees with these kinds of texts, an archive to which non-royal elites had access, and to which they contributed. The authors and originally intended audience of these kinds of texts? Non-kingly.

(4) Further still, the democratization theory is in conflict with the fact that scenes of mortuary service are of the same stereotyped structure for both elite and king already in the Old Kingdom. Here one sees the deceased presented at the center of on-going religious practice above-ground. An example of the pictorial formula that is meant can be found in a Fourth Dynasty image of Khafkhufu (Fig. 5.2). The formula consists of the seated tomb owner, table with offerings, and offering items, often with an accompanying grid-like offering list and ritualists. Such scenes with these generic components are found for both kings and elites throughout pharaonic history. For the Old Kingdom, the most clearly preserved royal instance stems from the pyramid temple of the Sixth Dynasty

<sup>9</sup> See the bibliography in Allen, “Some Theban Officials,” 18–19, with nn. 80 and 84.

<sup>10</sup> Allen, “Some Theban Officials,” 18, with Fig. 3, sees Meru as active from the years 41–51 of Mentuhotep II through years 1–10 of Amenemhat I.

<sup>11</sup> Wente, “Mysticism in Pharaonic Egypt?,” 176, n. 118. See also Smith, “Democratization,” 7; Eyre, *The Cannibal Hymn*, 66; Kákosy, “The Pyramid Texts and Society,” 4–5, 9–10.





FIGURE 5.2 *Mortuary service for Khafkhufu. After Simpson, *The Mastabas of Kawab, Khafkhufu I and II*, fig. 32.*

King Pepi II (Fig. 5.3), whose tomb also happens to offer up copious Pyramid Texts. The above-ground cult-place was the site of these stereotyped scenes. Their position at the cultic focal point is a common denominator among mastabas and pyramid temples:<sup>12</sup> the scenes occur at the *sanctum sanctorum*, the principal sanctuary for the person concerned. These are obvious connections across social boundaries. Though a king was abundantly different in so many other ways from his subjects, in this particular instance he was on level ground.

12 On the architectural and iconographic components of the pyramid temple sanctuary in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties, see János, "Die Entwicklung und Deutung des Totenopferraumes," 156–57.

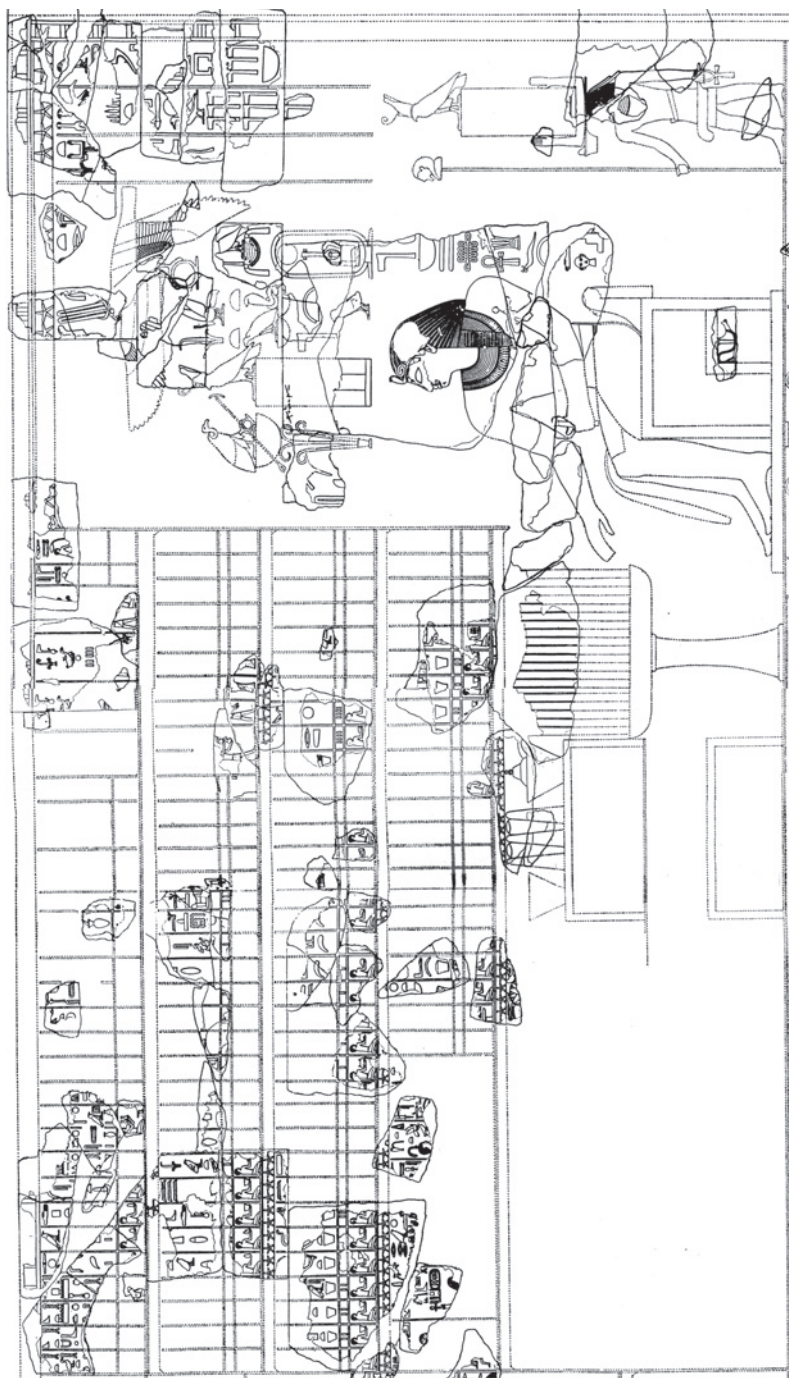


FIGURE 5.3 Mortuary service for Pepi II. After Jéquier, C. *Le monument funéraire de Pepi II*, pl. 61.

(5) And finally, statements in several non-royal Old Kingdom tombs assert that their owners knew the means of becoming an *ꜥḥ*, or “spirit,” and that the rituals by which one attains that state had been performed for them.<sup>13</sup> One such statement deploying concern for both ritual and knowledge is from the tomb of Shenay, at the latest datable to the end of the Sixth Dynasty:

*ink ꜥḥ iqr | iw(=i) rḥ.k(i) ḥkꜥ nb ꜥḥ n=f m hr̄it-n̄tr | iw ir n(=i) ḥ.t nb(.t)  
ꜥḥ(.t) n(y)*

for I am an effective *Akh*, and I know all the magic by which one becomes an *Akh* in the necropolis, and every ritual has been performed by which one becomes an *Akh* has been performed for me.<sup>14</sup>

The two critical statements both deploy an instrumental *n* “because of (which),” thereby hinging ritual (*iḥ.t*) and knowledge (*rḥ*) instrumentally to the status of being an *Akh*. The speaker, Shenay, knows how to attain the desired state, and what needs to be done to achieve it has been done for him. As a rule, these kinds of statements appear in the above-ground parts of the tomb. Unlike the sealed-off Pyramid Texts, they were meant to be read by any literate visitor, often as the substantiation of a threat.

Their sphere of encounter was different than the Pyramid Texts, and that means the term *Akh* is deployed differently here than in the pyramids. But far more important is that the term, in the Pyramid Texts, appears frequently and is what designates their main goal. It appears about 175 times throughout the corpus, making it very significant indeed.<sup>15</sup> In effect, the non-royal statements

13 On statements of this kind, see Edel, *Untersuchungen zur Phraseologie*, 25 and “Inscription des Jzj aus Saqqara,” 113; Englund, *Akh*, 128; Demarée, *The ꜥḥ iqr n R<sup>c</sup>-stelae*, 193, 210; Silverman, “Nature of Egyptian Kingship,” 81; Nordh, *Aspects of Ancient Egyptian Curses*, 171; Kloth, *Die (auto-)biographischen Inschriften*, 116–19; Smith, “Democratization of the Afterlife,” 3, 7–8.

14 *Urk.* I, 263: 13–15 = Frankfort, “Cemeteries of Abydos,” pl. 20.3.

15 The passages most clearly styling the text owner in that state are: PT 216 §151d; PT 217 §152d, 154d, 156d, 158d; PT 222 §212a; PT 224A §221a; PT 260 §318c; PT 274 §413a–b; PT 364 §621b; PT 365 §623a; §625b; PT 366 §633a; PT 422 §752b, 754c PT 437 §793b; PT 457 §859d; PT 468 §903d; PT 473 §930f; PT 506 §1095a; PT 512 §1167c; PT 513 §1172b; PT 553 §1354a; §1357a; §1360a; PT 556 §1385c; PT 582 §1567a; PT 593 §1637a; PT 603

lay claim to instrumentalities for reaching the main goal found in the Pyramid Texts—just as one might otherwise have assumed, based on the shared stereotypical scenes of mortuary service. But the democratization theory has no explanation for the convergence. It would have to assume that somehow the instrumentality of attaining *Akh*-hood was different between classes. In that case, the means for the elites would be something lost, and here once again one would find the theory pointing into a maw of negative evidence, but this time saying something must have once been where now there is nothing: the somehow different manner by which elites were supposed to become an *Akh*.

To view the glass from the other perspective attains an easier and more satisfying result. The elite tomb owner lays claim to knowledge and ritual by which one becomes an *Akh*, and the Pyramid Texts constitute that very knowledge and represent the rituals concerned. So as with the stereotyped mortuary ritual scenes, so also here. Some cultural practices and beliefs were shared between king and elite. Understanding the Pyramid Texts to be the objects of knowledge and instruments of ritual mentioned in the statements allows the religious life of elites to be better understood.

The display of religious texts in below-ground tombs is not the same as above-ground access to archives, ritual performances, and memory. The Pyramid Texts preserved in royal tombs must constitute only part of a wider body of literature, one whose currency must have interfaced with more perishable manners of transmission. The Pyramid Texts, a fraction of a larger body, happen to have been preserved because they were recorded in stone and below-ground. Meanwhile, the source documents from which they were transcribed, the recited words of priests in the cult-place (like that of Pepi I or Debeheni), and everything in between, has been lost. Fortunately, the Pyramid Texts can still yield information about their situation in the Old Kingdom world around them. The general shape of much of their meaning can be sketched out by what has survived.

The Pyramid Texts had circulated in different media, a detail known with certainty since the hieroglyphic Pyramid Texts contain transcriptional errors showing that they had been converted from hieratic source documents.<sup>16</sup> It

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§1676c; sPT 627A §1771a; fPT 634 §1793; fPT 665A §1911b, 1912d; fPT 666 §1921b, 1921d; fPT 666A §1929b; PT 670 §1986b; fPT 691 §2120b–c; §2121b, 2123b–c, 2124b; sPT 694A §2145c; fPT 717 §2228a; fPT 718 §2233d.

16 On mistakes in the Pyramid Texts showing that they had been transcribed from hieratic, and therefore from papyrus or leather master copies, see Sethe, *Die altaegyptischen Pyramidentexte* iv, 125–27.

is by an accident of preservation that the Pyramid Texts have survived at the expense of other, more perishable forms. The recent discovery of a fragment of an inscribed wooden chest with a Pyramid Text of a queen of Pepi I serves as a reminder of how much has been lost.<sup>17</sup> In short, while we are necessarily transfixed by the hieroglyphic display of the Pyramid Texts, it is crucial to remember that they were transcribed to monumental walls from perishable and portable source documents. These source documents would have been suitable for use in the actual ritual practices they concern. Remembering that the Pyramid Texts were circulated in a portable form apart from their monumentalizations, one can make a distinction between a) now-lost operative scripts, documents for recitation in order to bring about some circumstance or event, and b) monumental documents—the Pyramid Texts we actually have—which would have served a different purpose than their operative progenitors.<sup>18</sup>

The differences may be accounted for by the differences in media. The operative ritual script is a document serving as cue to a performance, and on a scroll it is eminently readable. In contrast, the hieroglyphic, monumental inscription has more to do with visual aspect, hence the graphic details imparted to individual signs in carved stone. And the monumentalization is much more difficult to read, since now writing is being applied to a surface whose shape was not determined by readability. One would need lamps and a ladder to read texts in a pyramid's gables, for instance. Less read word-by-word, monumental inscriptions are concerned with large-scale visual effect.

The democratization theory is rightly regarded as obsolete. But a problem emerges now concerning the social significance of their advent. Previously they played a role in a social history: first only the king had exclusive access to the afterlife and then, later on, non-royal persons had access, too. Now that this story is gone, the Pyramid Texts lose the main role they used to play on the historical stage. Countless histories of the Old Kingdom, when introducing the Pyramid Texts, immediately remark upon their exclusivity of afterlife beliefs and practices. What can now be said about the Pyramid Texts if that is no longer true? If not as a mark of exclusion, then what does their advent mean? This

17 Leclant and Labrousse, "Découvertes récentes," 108, Fig. 4. See also PT 217 on *face A* of MafS Papyrus T 2147, with a possible date in the area of the Sixth through Eleventh Dynasties; Berger-el Naggar, "Textes des Pyramides sur papyrus," 85–89, with n. 13 and Fig. 1.

18 Cf. Roeder, "Rituelle Texthandlungsklassen," 27, for the division between "operative Texte" and "Schrifttexte."



space can be filled, and it is toward that end that the rest of the present essay now turns.

## 2 The Entextualization of the Pyramid Texts

To find out about the meaning of the Pyramid Texts, large-scale phenomena must be taken into account. The connection between Pyramid Texts and an important kind of offering list will first be discussed. Then the grammatical person of the texts corresponding to the lists will be considered, and connections made to other Pyramid Texts. Next, facts about changes wrought on another category of texts will be presented. Finally, two different categories of texts will have been isolated. For reasons differing between the two categories, it will emerge that the subterranean chambers where the texts happen to be attested were not the first place they were used. They had been entextualized from ritual scripts to serve a new purpose, in monumental decoration. The historical significance of this detail is worth pursuing. Getting at the ritual component is important, since it provides useful background knowledge concerning origins, and it also helps understand the effect of transposing texts to the tombs.

### 2.1 *Offering Lists and Sacerdotal Texts*

For the majority of the Pyramid Texts, there is a fundamental difficulty in situating their real-world meaning for the ancient Egyptians, and that is a lack of editorial comment. This is to say that the individual texts receive neither titles nor notes as to their meanings and uses. However, there is one set of texts that is well anchored to a particular social situation, and through their characteristics one can associate many other texts to similar settings. Since the time of Gaston Maspero,<sup>19</sup> scholars have noted the intimate connection between a set of texts found on the north walls of the royal sarcophagus chamber and items named in Old Kingdom offering lists, like that shown in Figure 5.4.<sup>20</sup> The texts

19 Maspero, "La table d'offrandes," 276–77.

20 Tomb of Debeheni (Giza, LG 90). For the tomb, see Hassan, *Excavations at Giza* IV, 159–84, esp. 176, Fig. 122 for the particular scene. The specific type of list which Debeheni has is dubbed the "Listentyp A" by Barta, *Die altägyptische Opferliste*, 47–50. Precursors to this list already occur in Dynasty Four, with one example given above as Fig. 5.2; see Hays, *Organization of the Pyramid Texts*, 128–29; Smith, "Democratization of the Afterlife," 9; Barta, *Die altägyptische Opferliste*, 47–50; Junker, *Giza II*, 85–96.

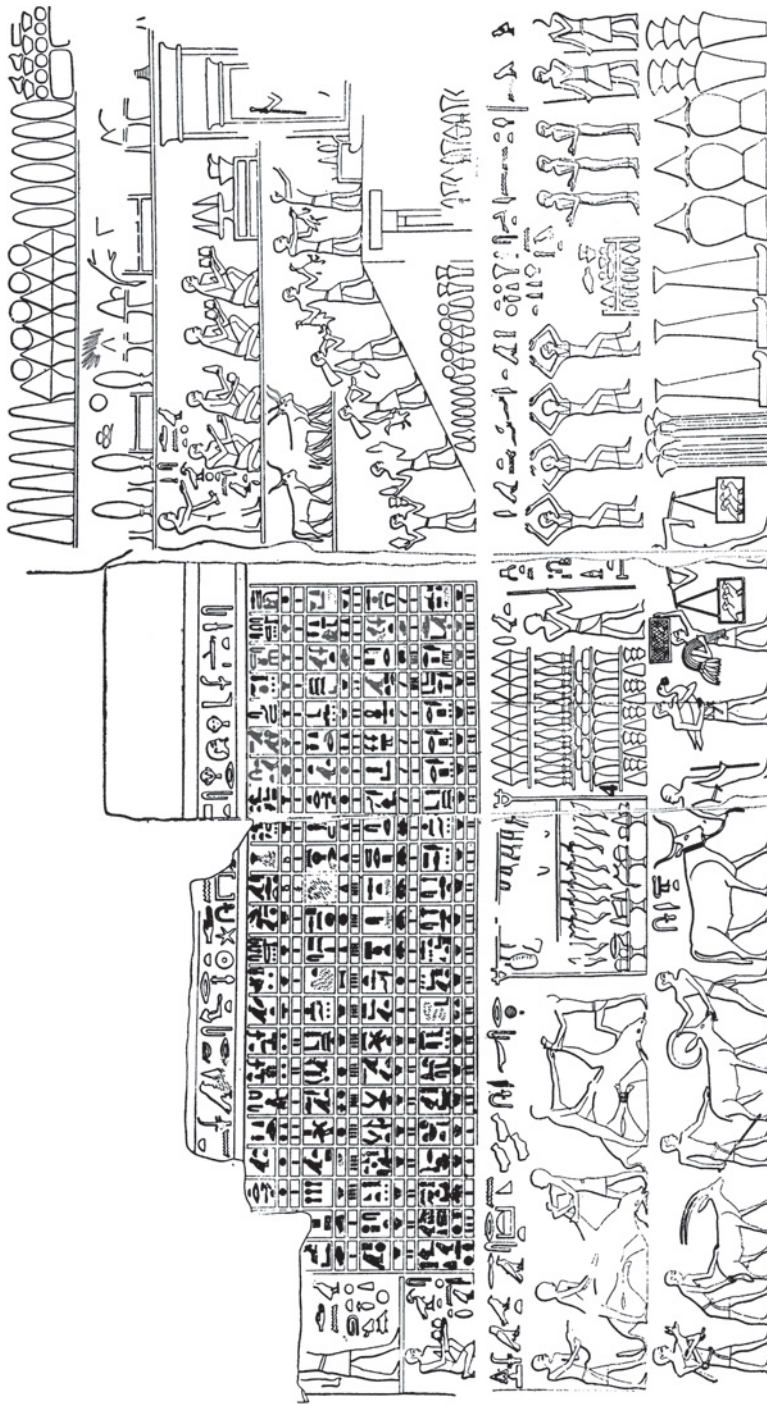


FIGURE 5.4 *Funeral rituals for Debeheni. Tomb of Debeheni (Giza, LG 90); after Lapp, Die Opferformel, in turn after LD II, pl. 35*

include what is to be recited and then instructions, namely the specification of items to be manipulated. For example, PT 72 and 73:

O Osiris Unas, with oil have I filled your eye for you.  
Ceremonial-scent oil.

O Osiris Unas, take the outflow from his face.  
Hikenu-oil.

The items *sti-ḥ3b* “ceremonial-scent oil,” and *ḥiknw* “Hikenu-oil,” key in with two items consecutively named in the offering lists. Beginning with PT 72 and going on to finish with PT 171, the specifications of the texts occur in the same order as in the offering lists. The connection is crucial, because the normal location for the offering lists is in the above-ground cult-place of tombs, for king and subject alike, as part of the stereotyped scenes discussed above. Since the offering lists are generally accompanied by pictorial representations of priests performing ritual acts such as reciting from scrolls and presenting vessels and bread, and since the lists are regularly found juxtaposed to false doors and offering slabs, the meaning is unmistakable on two points. First, the Pyramid Texts represent the recitative dimension of the rites specified in the lists. Consequently the lists are themselves representations indicating not merely desired items, but rather they enumerate what rite is supposed to be performed when. An offering list, in short, represents a ritual consisting of many individual rites.<sup>21</sup> Second, the place where those rites were performed was exactly where the lists are found, in the above-ground cult-place.

These texts had their original use in practices performed above-ground as part of the cult. Since the lists predate the Pyramid Texts—with precursors already occurring in the Fourth Dynasty (see Fig. 5.2)—it follows that their transferal to the below-ground burial place was an adaptation and expansion of practices that had already enjoyed use for, indeed, centuries.

One may go further still. Careful examination of the texts matching the items of the offering lists reveals that they refer to the beneficiary in the second person (*e.g.*, O Unas . . . for you), or sometimes in the third person “he.” What is excluded is to situate the beneficiary in the first person “I.” Upon reflection this seems natural enough: during the cult rituals the living priest addresses a deceased beneficiary in the second person or speaks about him in the third, but the deceased, being dead, has no speaking part.

21 Similarly, Willems, “Social Aspects of Funerary Culture,” 350 and *Chests of Life*, 203; Hassan, *Excavations at Giza IV*, 157.



Grammatical person is not a trivial detail. In directing a statement at another person, a speaker makes him into a listener, while the lexical elements of a statement are shaped according to the situation. Though the attributes of participants in a communication act are more complex than those constructed by the dyad of speaker and addressee, it is still true that natural languages encode these two roles in simple pronominal systems—"I" and "you."<sup>22</sup> The voicing of a text, its format of interpersonal deixis, contributes to its centering, the place to which a text is culturally anchored.<sup>23</sup> The position of the speaker in respect to grammatical person creates a poetical *lexis*, speech, the situation of enunciating, to which Plato refers in the third book of the *Republic*, and in which the ultimate substrate of classical discussions of genre is to be found.<sup>24</sup>

In seeking for a setting in life for other Pyramid Texts, one has a solid anchor with the set matching the offering lists. As they were originally meant to be performed in an above-ground place, it stands to reason that other Pyramid Texts similarly casting the beneficiary in the second person had a similar place of performance. Leveraging this detail, along with history of transmission and shared propositional content, one can associate 494 texts to a category that may be called "sacerdotal." It is called that since the term alludes to the manner of performance: living ritualist acting as priest for an inert, non-speaking beneficiary.

It is important to highlight their ritual character. As best seen from the use of the imperative in the texts quoted above—"O Osiris Unas, take the outflow from his (sc. Osiris's) face"—Pyramid Texts were not meant to inform or communicate so much as they were intended to bring about a result. The imperative was to coerce an ostensible effect, and the application of oil tied in with the recitations had a situational meaning. With ritual texts, the performed, situational sense is more prominent than the communicative or informative. The recitation of the text becomes more of an act by a ritualist on a patient than a transmission of information from a sender to a receiver. It is subjective, because it fashions a (one-way) dialogical situation, and because something

22 See Halliday, *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 551: the first and second persons normally refer to people in the field of perception shared by speaker and listener; "their meaning is defined by the act of speaking."

23 Hanks, "Texts and Textuality," 106–07.

24 See the discussion and critique thereof in Genette, *The Architext*, 8–23, 33–34, and 61, esp. p. 12. To be precise, he shows that the classical division of poetry into three genres is the result of a collective misreading of Plato and Aristotle, and is, in his opinion, a manner of analysis which should be dispensed with. But his bold assertion does not hold for the Pyramid Texts.

is expected to happen to a particular person as a result of the text's recitation. This is in distinction with, and contrast to, objective texts, like textbooks for instance, which are expressly meant to inform. With objective texts the author will rarely address his or her audience, and, if this occurs, it will be for discursive effect. Moreover, the change the textbook seeks is in the knowledge level of a wide audience, not a singled-out person as with the Pyramid Texts. This is all to say that, in their original contexts of performance, sacerdotal texts had comparatively less interest in objectively informing and comparatively more in subjectively performing. They were not teachings but coercions.

Returning to the burial chambers where the Pyramid Texts are inscribed, one is struck by a disjunction. While the co-presence of list, image, and cultic door above-ground lets one see that the Pyramid Texts' recitations were to be done there, it is difficult to imagine that the same texts could have been performed in the below-ground part of the tomb. For one thing, aside from the monumental presence of the texts themselves, there is no solid evidence to suggest it, and neither should one expect there to be. Standard representations of the offering ritual often show a great many officiants involved, manipulating a plethora of instruments and objects. A performance below-ground is not possible for practical reasons.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, any performance of rites in the burial chambers would have ceased from the moment stone portcullises were dropped to seal off the subterranean apartments. Meanwhile, the significance of their above-ground performance would have been regularly reinforced after the burial through the continuous execution of rites in the cult-place.

It is imperative to have underscored this disjunction—to separate our knowledge of how sacerdotal texts were once performed versus their below-ground manifestations. The role played by a text cannot have been quite the same between the two places. The ritual script has a meaning different than the monumentalization in hieroglyphs, and that is precisely due to a recontextualization—the transposition from archival scroll to tomb wall. More below will be said on how the meaning of a text changes depending on where it is deployed.

## 2.2 *Personal Texts and Their Entextualization*

As sacerdotal texts form one category of Pyramid Texts, personal texts form another. The most obvious sign that one is reading a sacerdotal text is when it figures the beneficiary in the second person “you.” Meanwhile, the personal texts originally figured the beneficiary in the first person “I.” For instance in PT 227:

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25 Cf. similarly Barta, *Die Bedeutung der Pyramidentexte*, 18.

Recitation.

The head of the bull, the great black one, will I cut off.

O serpent, against you do I say this.

O god-beaten one, O scorpion, against you do I say this.

Overturn yourself; slither into <the earth>, for I have said this against you.

In this text the speaker is the one who expects to gain from the performance of the text, unlike PT 72 and 73, cited above. In those PT, someone else was meant to recite them, and their recitation was meant to benefit the “you” mentioned in them. But here, as written, the speaker addresses himself to a hostile being, and he secures the benefits of the recitation through his own action, his speech, applying coercion against an enemy. Since such a recitation requires the beneficiary’s own action, it can be said to possess a personal structure. This same structure is to be found in most texts of New Kingdom Books of the Dead.

But as simple as it may seem from the example of PT 227, things are considerably more complicated in the pyramids. As is well known, many originally first-person Pyramid Texts were edited, especially to the third person. As a result, texts uniformly casting the beneficiary as the speaker are actually quite rare in the pyramids. Only a few Pyramid Texts preserve it throughout.

To understand the history of the corpus, the texts which were edited away from the first person must be identified. There are two steps to the process. First is the isolation of texts with tangible signs of editing. The second step is predicated by the very existence of the program of editing. Since we only know about the program through scribal error—the source of the signs of editing—it must be assumed that some texts had been edited completely, leaving no trace. These must be identified through consultation of their history of transmission and shared propositional content.

The phenomenon of editing is well attested through four signs. By them one is able to identify many texts which were originally composed in the first person: 1) The clearest indication that a text was edited is where a passage was physically recarved. After its initial chiseling upon a tomb wall, a passage could be reworked, leaving a final version superimposed upon the earlier. 2) Some texts slip back to the first person from the third, vacillating in grammatical person. Incomplete editing overlooked or did not grasp the significance of the slender reed leaf or absence of pronoun and mistakenly let the text stand. 3) A related phenomenon is the doubling of the first person pronoun with the third person pronoun of the proper name. In such instances, the first person of the transcriptional source was inadvertently maintained alongside an added proper name or third person pronoun. 4) A phenomenon closely akin to doubling is residue of the original first person, evidenced in the expressed final -y

or *-i* of verb forms from third weak verbs, which otherwise show a third person subject; these forms generally appear when the subject is the first person.

With several texts showing more than one sign of editing, altogether there are 98 Pyramid Texts that were certainly originally in the first person. But are there connections among these texts beyond their structure of performance? Yes. Edited texts are often found together in the same recurring series, short fixed units of transmission, in which none of the sacerdotal texts appear. Furthermore, they share propositional content which is utterly absent from sacerdotal texts. There are numerous important motifs—stock phrases—which are repeated in great abundance among them, and which are completely absent from sacerdotal texts. As a result of the correlations, it is evident that a differentiation initially made on the basis of grammatical form actually also concerns transmission and content: different avenues of analysis converge. It is a matter of a genre of discourse morphologically distinguishable along three empirically perceivable dimensions of analysis: person of the beneficiary, history of transmission, and shared content. The personal texts are distinct from the sacerdotal ones.

Since we only know about the program of modification due to scribal error, it must be assumed that many texts were completely edited and now stand in the third person. Leveraging the phenomenon of transmission history and exclusive propositional content, 215 additional texts can be assigned to the personal category, alongside those exhibiting signs of editing, for a total of 313 texts.

Taking into account the performed status of the personal texts, one observes that a text like PT 227, in its original form, was done by someone who was simultaneously the beneficiary of that performance. But the program of modification had the effect of converting such texts so that the text owner was no longer either ritualist or beneficiary. Instead, he was represented only as the object of benefit. This was achieved by conversion of the first-person pronoun almost always to the third person, either the proper name or pronoun. In the pyramids, the text's performance was no longer dependent on the beneficiary's involvement.

It is also of crucial importance to observe that the personal texts cannot have been composed for the purpose of decorating subterranean chambers. If that had been the case, there would have been no reason for their wholesale modification once they were put to that purpose. The fact of their ubiquitous conversion is the sufficient proof of their having been transposed from another situation into the tomb. Like the sacerdotal texts, the personal texts were not conceived of and composed to be monumental, subterranean decoration; that role was an adaptation.

What, then, was the place of the personal texts in their prior forms? To answer this question, one has a culturally emic, interpretive lens in the New Kingdom Book of the Dead. Its paratextual notations make it clear that learning and performing its texts in life were done in preparation for a desired after-life. The same may be asserted for the personal Pyramid Texts: if not composed originally for the dead in the tomb, then they were for the living in anticipation of death. Prior to their transposition, the living learned personal Pyramid Texts through their recitation in order to become an *Akh* after death. This activity was separate from cultic action of the sort seen through sacerdotal texts. Whereas sacerdotal texts like those corresponding to the offering list were performed by teams of priests at a designated place, the personal texts belonged to the domicile or an appropriated public place.

These points coalesce as follows: the texts we have attested did not serve the same function on the subterranean wall as they did in living practice outside of the tomb. Inside the closed sepulcher, no priest was to approach the deceased, address him, or lift objects to him. More importantly, no eyes were to read the carved lines of hieroglyphs to remember what was to be said and done during the course of a rite. This is the crucial conclusion from the distinction between subterranean place of attestation and above-ground point of origin: although derived from operative scripts, ones meant to be recited, the texts chiseled in stone were not themselves operative scripts, were not meant to be recited. They are monumental *entextualizations* of rites that were done above-ground. They became representations of ritual in their monumental environment, rather than the instruments whereby rites were performed. In short, in the burial chambers, the Pyramid Texts no longer served as supports to the performances of their origin. The ritual script had become a decontextualized expression of ritual, something transformed into the visual medium of hieroglyphs.

Herein enters a paradox of paramount importance. While sacerdotal and personal texts were originally scripts for ritual performances, and in that capacity their coercive and performative components were at the fore, once removed from the ritual scroll to the stone monument, the role of the text shifted. It had gone from being a script for a rite to being a representation of it, a function now independent of human performance. In this way, the Pyramid Texts in their physical attestations are precisely akin to monumental presentations on coffins and chapel walls. Recontextualized as monumental adornment, their efficacy shifted from the spoken utterance during the event to the representational permanence of the word. Once the rite was frozen as a textual snapshot, it was removed from the play on all the senses as experienced in the flow of time. The significance of the texts was displaced: their performed perspective

was transmuted into an idealized conceptualization. Monumentalized in the tomb, the text went from being a deed to an idea.

This is in the nature of writing, since writing as such appears autonomous and stripped of context. Indeed, all written texts have a monumentality foreign to spoken language. Writing is hardened language, and it leads an existence independent from the act. Because context must be supplied by an individual reader, it always appears symbolic, with a solidity and apparent autonomy which defers its meaning. This is achieved through being moved out of the human context of face-to-face contact—away from being a script in a group or individual ritual performance. Outside of its original ritual role, where its social context was established by tradition, in the pyramid the text demanded a greater degree of interpretation on the part of any reader. He or she must construct communicative circuits around it. Simply put, writing is more detached from experience than the spoken word. By its nature, it pushes further into the abstract world than spoken language does.

The anthropologist Jack Goody has proposed that the development of writing has an impact on religious practices. For instance, it can have the effect of shifting the accomplishment of rites of passage and other collective changes in state from the act into written forms. In short, the proliferation of textuality can lead to a decay of ceremony, a movement from the practical accomplishment of religiously significant events to their metaphorical accomplishment.<sup>26</sup> It is a shift from the deed to the idea. It is the case that the Pyramid Texts made their advent at just the moment when monumental applications of writing were expanding, achieving their acme in Sixth Dynasty autobiographies, precisely during their flourish. The advent of the Pyramid Texts can be seen as part of the proliferation of uses of writing, paralleled in non-royal tombs by the introduction of offering lists to non-royal sarcophagus chambers at exactly the same time.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps not coincidentally, one of the effects of transcribing a ritual text to a monumental surface must be a shift from the act to the word just as Goody supposes.

### 3 From Ritual to Knowledge

Above it was argued that the Pyramid Texts were derived from ritual scripts, originally performed outside the tomb. The entextualization of these texts

<sup>26</sup> Goody, *The Logic of Writing*, 42–44.

<sup>27</sup> Dawood, “Animate Decoration,” 109–10, and further discussed below.

from hieratic source documents to the massive stone walls of the subterranean chambers of pyramids was a decontextualization, a removal of the texts from their original place of experience. And the effect of that was to move the texts away from acts of performance and over to an idea. The shift proposed, then, is one away from deeds and over to words. In that change, the Pyramid Texts as encountered below-ground became more of an object of knowledge rather than an instrument of practice.

This proposal keys in with evidence from outside the pyramids. Miroslav Bárta has noted the growing complexity of above-ground tomb design from the reign of Neferirkare onwards, with a reverse trend emerging in the reign of Teti. From Teti onwards, increasing attention is devoted to subterranean areas.<sup>28</sup> It is significant in this context to observe that the earliest decorated burial chamber for an elite is from the tomb of Senedjemib Inti, datable to the reign of Unas. Attention to the above-ground portions of the tomb suggest greater attention to the collectively performed ritual that took place there: more space was made available to the living who would come to perform cultic services for the dead. To shift attention to the burial chambers was to move focus to areas sealed off from the world of the living. Their decoration was in the close proximity of the deceased and his or her personal world. This trend appears to have reached its zenith in the reign of Pepi II, when above-ground cultic installations are stunted or absent from elite tombs, with more attention paid to the substructure.<sup>29</sup>

Both royal and non-royal subterranean walls begin to be decorated during the reign of Unas, and from Teti onward there is increasing attention to subterranean areas. And now a further pivot for the reign of Teti: assertions by elite persons concerning efficacious rituals versus efficacious knowledge. At the beginning of this essay it was noted that many Old Kingdom elites made explicit claims to the instruments by which one became an *Akh*. It turns out that there is a temporal pattern to these statements.

There are two different kinds of statement. The first are those where it is claimed that *ritual* by which one becomes an *Akh* has been done (*iry iḥ.t ʒḥ.t ny*), for instance:

28 Bárta, "Architectural Innovations," 112, 117–18, 120.

29 Jéquier, *Tombeaux de particuliers*, 1–3.



One whom the king and Anubis loves is the lector priest who will perform for me the rite by which an *Akh* becomes an *Akh* according to that secret writing of the craft of the lector priest.<sup>30</sup>

Six statements laying claim to efficacious ritual appear up to and including the reign of Teti, with only two thereafter. Sources bearing statements like these are:

Ti:<sup>31</sup> Fifth Dynasty, second half; Saqqara  
 Nima'atre:<sup>32</sup> Fifth Dynasty, second half; Saqqara  
 Kaikherptah:<sup>33</sup> Djedkare or later; Giza  
 Nihetepptah:<sup>34</sup> Djedkare or later; Saqqara  
 Ankhmahor:<sup>35</sup> Teti; Saqqara  
 Mereruka:<sup>36</sup> Teti; Saqqara

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Merefnebef:<sup>37</sup> Userkare/Pepi I; Saqqara  
 Shen'ay:<sup>38</sup> late Sixth Dynasty (?); Abydos

The second type of statement are those where it is claimed that *knowledge* by which one becomes an *Akh* is known by the elite (*rh ih.t 3h.t ny*), for instance:

I am an *Akh* more skillful than any *Akh*; I am an *Akh* more equipped than any *Akh*: I know everything skillful, by which an excellent *Akh* becomes skillful, and by which an *Akh* who is in the necropolis becomes an *Akh*.<sup>39</sup>

Seven statements laying claim to efficacious knowledge come after Teti, with only two before. Sources bearing these kinds of statements are:

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- 30 Kaikherptah; see below with n. 35.
  - 31 Edel, *Untersuchungen zur Phraseologie*, 66–67.
  - 32 Hassan, *Excavations at Giza* II, fig. 231.
  - 33 Junker, *Giza VIII*, fig. 56.
  - 34 Badawy, *The Tomb of Nihetep-Ptah*, 7, fig. 13, and pl. 13.
  - 35 Urk. I, 202: 15–18.
  - 36 Edel, *Untersuchungen zur Phraseologie*, 66–67.
  - 37 Myśliwiec, *Saqqara I*, 72–73 and pl. 33.
  - 38 Frankfort, “Cemeteries of Abydos,” pl. 20.3.
  - 39 Hezi; see below with n. 43.



Ti:<sup>40</sup> Fifth Dynasty, second half; Saqqara

Hezi:<sup>41</sup> Teti; Saqqara

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Merefnebef:<sup>42</sup> Userkare/Pepi I; Saqqara

Nekhbu:<sup>43</sup> Pepi I; Giza

Ibi:<sup>44</sup> Pepi II; Deir el-Gebrawi

Idu Seneni:<sup>45</sup> Pepi II or later; el-Qasr wa'l-Saiyad

Tjetu I:<sup>46</sup> late Sixth Dynasty; Giza

Shen'ay<sup>47</sup> late Sixth Dynasty (?); Abydos

Bebi:<sup>48</sup> Sixth Dynasty or later; Giza

To judge by these accounts, there was more concern that ritual be done up to the reign of Teti, while afterwards there was comparatively less interest in that and more interest in laying claim to knowledge. In short, the elite discourse shifted its focus from action to knowledge as the crucial component in soteriology. This shift, taking place immediately after the advent of the Pyramid Texts, corresponds precisely with the effects of their entextualization: the ritual script was separated from action and made into an object of knowledge. What emerges, then, is that the elaborate display of religious texts in royal tombs was an authoritative center of changes relevant to elite and king alike.

#### 4 Summation

The Pyramid Texts do have a history again. They were transposed from settings of ritual performance, and made into visual, hieroglyphic monumentalizations. They were made into representations of the events to which they had originally served as scripts. In that entextualization, their focus shifted from coercive performance and over to being a decontextualized thing to be

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40 Edel, *Untersuchungen zur Phraseologie*, 66–67.

41 Silverman, "Threat-Formula," 5, fig. 4b.

42 Myśliwiec, *Saqqara I*, 73–74 and pl. 33.

43 *Urk.* I, 218: 4–6.

44 Davies, *Rock Tombs of Deir el Gebrawi I*, pl. 23, with Edel, *Untersuchungen zur Phraseologie*, 23, and Kanawati, *Deir el-Gebrawi. Volume II*, 54 and pl. 54.

45 Edel, *Hieroglyphische Inschriften*, fig. 4.

46 Simpson, *Mastabas of the Western Cemetery: Part I*, fig. 15.

47 Frankfort, "Cemeteries of Abydos," pl. 20.3.

48 Capart, *Chambre funéraire*, pl. 5.

admired and read outside of ritual. It was a shift from deed to word, from practice to knowledge.

In the reign of Teti there is a shift in interest away from the elaboration of the above-ground parts of elite tombs, where ritualists would have gone. A growing lack of interest culminates in the reign of Pepi II, when cultic emplacements are comparatively perfunctory, compared to what may be seen in the Fifth Dynasty from Neferirkare onwards. Recontextualized from being ritual scripts into objects of displayed knowledge, the Pyramid Texts fit right in with the archaeological trend.

With Unas, Pyramid Texts appear right when an interest emerged in decorating the subterranean parts of elite tombs. The Pyramid Texts emerge at a time when religious interest was shifting away from ritual practice over to religious knowledge, as registered in statements made by elites. They were elaborate displays of archival texts, demonstrations of knowledge. Archives of ritual texts were transposed—and transformed—in the process.

### Abbreviations

All abbreviations not included in this list follow those used in the *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*.

ÉAO	<i>Égypte Afrique et Orient</i>
LD	C.R. Lepsius. <i>Denkmäler aus Ägypten und Äthiopien</i> . 6 vols. Berlin: Nicolaische Buchhandlung, 1849–1859
PT	Pyramid Texts
Urk. I	K. Sethe. <i>Urkunden des Alten Reiches</i> . Urkunden des ägyptischen Altertums I. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1932–33

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