

GÖTTINGER MISZELLEN

Beiträge zur ägyptologischen Diskussion

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AN EXCEPTIONAL FAMILY OF PRIESTS
OF THE EARLY FIFTH DYNASTY AT GIZA

The mastaba of Akhethotpē is built south of that of Rē¹-wer, in the Kh¹afre¹ Cemetery at Giza, and it seems to be the first of a series known as the "Street of Priests".¹ K. Baer² suggested a date between "early V-early VI", that is, a period covering the whole Fifth Dynasty and a bit more. A more precise date, however, may be obtained after closer scrutiny. Moreover, some interesting conclusions may be drawn about the owners of the tomb.

Among his several administrative and priestly titles, Akhethotpē held that of imy-r3 hm(.w)-k3 mwt n(y)swt, "overseer of the ku-priests of the King's mother", without mention to the queen in question.³ According to the disposition of the titles in the diverse parts of his tomb, Akhethotpē considered this one as the most important of all his charges, whether honorary or effective. This fact is suggested by the following data: it is the only title mentioned on the lintel of the entrance to the mastaba;⁴ it is the first title mentio-

ned in the architrave of the cult-chamber⁵ and the lintel of his false-door stela (no. 3) in the same room;⁶ and, finally, it is the title chosed to appear on the eastern side of the single square pillar of the cult-chamber itself, precisely that facing towards the entrance-access.⁷

In this connection, it is worth noting also that his wife, Nykauhathor, privileged the title hm(t)-k3 mwt n(y)šwt in the funerary slab of her false-door stela, placed in the façade of her husband's sepulchre, some 2.65 mts to the right of the doorway of the cult-chamber.⁸

More interesting is the fact that the mother of Akhet-hotpē, Pešshet, was already a imy(t)-r3 hm(.w)-k3 mwt n(y)šwt, as shown on the false-door stela (no. 2 of the cult-chamber) she shared with her husband, the rk-n(y)-šwt⁹ Kanofrē.¹⁰ On the other hand, Pešshet was the only woman in Egyptian History who held the title imy(t)-r3 šnw.w, "overseer of physicians".¹¹ This extraordinary status of Pešshet deserves closer attention, since such a title is indicating the happening of something unusual and worthy the fact to make a woman an "overseer of physicians": that such a rank could only

have been conferred to Peššes due to a relevant act or service on her behalf is evident by itself. An indication of this is the fact that her son Akhetḥotpē inherited the title imy-r3 hm(.w)-k3 mwt n(y)šwt, perhaps after her mother's death. The favourable position of their sepulchre, which suggests a date quite early in the Fifth Dynasty, is also an evidence of the remarkable status of this family.


There are not means to ascertain exactly when the tomb was erected, but considering the afore-mentioned evidences it seems probable that the responsible for its construction was Akhetḥotpē, who erected it for his parents' burial, planning it from the beginning as a family-tomb, as shown by the lacking of additions. If this is thus, as we believe, then Peššet should have flourished during the reign of the latest king of the Fourth Dynasty: Shepseskaf. This precision in the date of Peššet active years also leads us to propose that the unnamed queen served by Peššet was none other than the famous Khentkawés, the daughter of Mycerinus and the mother of the first two monarchs of the Fifth Dynasty, who are credited in the "Tale of Kheops and the Magicians" to have been of divine origin.¹² And we wonder how far it was not the participation of Peššet in this marvelous event what accounted for her

attaining the rank of imy(t)-r3 snw.w and, perhaps, of imy(t)-r3 hm(.w)-k3 mwt n(y)swt.¹³ At least, it is a very suggestive solution for the exceptional titles she held and for the status of her family.

Centro de Investigaciones Egiptológicas
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JORGE ROBERTO OGDON

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1. S. Hassan, Excavations at Giza, I (Oxford, 1932), 73-86 and pll. XLVII-LI.
 2. K. Baer, Rank and Title in the Old Kingdom (Chicago, rep. 1973), 53 no. 11.
 3. This is not an exceptional case; cp. S. Hassan, o.c., 91-5: mastaba of 'Imby, the last tomb on the south of the same "Street of Priests". K. Baer, o.c., 57 no. 37, dates this tomb to the end of the Fifth Dynasty or later, as it would be expected due to its location.
 4. S. Hassan, o.c., 75 fig. 132.
 5. Id., 77 fig. 136.
 6. Id., 82 fig. 142.

7. Id., 80 fig. 139 and pl. XLVIII.
8. Id., 85 fig. 144.
9. On the reading of the title , see now H.G. Fischer, Varia (New York, 1976), 8 n. 15; Id., in JNES 18/4 (1959), 237 n. 12. Cp. Brumen, in SAK 1 (1974), 58.
10. Id., 83 fig. 143.
11. H.G. Fischer, Varia, 71 no. 21.
12. A. Erman, Die Märchen des Papyrus Westcar (Berlin, 1890), 58 ff. = Papyrus Westcar, 9,21 ff. For a recent study of this section about Rudjedet's delivery of the divine sons of Rē^t himself, see now H. Goedicke, "Rudjet's [sic] Delivery", in Varia Aegyptiaca 1/1-2 (1985), 19-26.
13. The latter was not necessarily assumed after the queen's death, since the hm.w-k3 had duties that went beyond the funerary service. As owners of special abilities due to their knowledge of magic and their control of the ku, they were apt to act especially as protectors of the living beings. This faculty of the hm.w-k3 is more profoundly studied in our unpublished The Protection of Life. An Everyday Magical Practice in Ancient Egypt, Sections Four and Seven.