



4.5. Fragments of a pseudo-group statue found in the serdab of Sheretneby's tomb, imitating the statue of King Nyuserre (Archive of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, photograph by Martin Frouz)

was discovered in the neighboring tomb of Nefershepes, but this time with one figure striding and the other figure standing with an arm bent across his chest.<sup>59</sup>

Besides the tomb owner himself, some of the figures shown in his tomb might have been presented with their names. This includes not only the members of his family, but identifications were sometimes added to the figures of the offering bearers, craftsmen, and other figures. In this manner, poorer members of the family and of the owner's household received their share of eternity, fully depending on their master. In other tombs, however, no names are given in such scenes, and we might find numerous cases

of names scratched additionally in reliefs by those who desired to present themselves for eternity and insisted to do so even against the plan of the tomb owner.

#### Tomb Inscriptions

Tomb inscriptions are perhaps the richest, or the most assorted, source relating to the self-presentation of officials. Various types of inscriptions were carved in tombs, among which above all the titular strings and the self-presentational inscriptions provide us with relevant information.

The titles of the tomb owner usually consisted of various types of offices, combining honorary, administrative, judicial, and priestly duties. The lists of titles carved in a tomb often included lower- and higher-ranking variants of the same office, reflecting the stages in the tomb owner's career. It is worth mentioning that while the hieroglyphic inscriptions in tombs emphasized the highest offices and titles, the hieratic inscriptions on the tomb's masonry often included only one, perhaps the most common or most typical of the titles. In Neferinpu's tomb in Abusir, for instance, we can hence find his numerous middle- and high-ranking titles, including "overseer of all works ordered to him," "property custodian of the king," "speaker of Nekhen of the king," "priest of Maat and Horus," "priest of kings Neferirkare and Nyuserre," "wab-priest of the pyramid complex of Nyuserre," and other titles, carved on his fine limestone false door. The hieratic inscriptions on the masonry of Neferinpu's tomb, however, include mainly his middle-ranking title of the "elder of the (judicial) court of the king" and only once the title of the "wab-priest."<sup>60</sup> The hieroglyphic inscriptions served the eternity and were intended to include all that the tomb owner considered important for his presentation for eternity, while the hieratic texts were related only to the construction of the tomb. The hieratic inscriptions, however, provide evidence that the highest-ranking titles attested for the owners did not necessarily have to be the most important ones during their lives.<sup>61</sup>

Attachment to the king is, however, more clearly expressed in the biographical inscription where the importance of an official was fabricated into a story with a narrative frame. In the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties, it is possible to distinguish several different types of biographical inscriptions, which developed from the early examples of the Fourth Dynasty. Some of the inscriptions refer mainly to the principles and qualities of the tomb owners. Various phrases of this kind had developed by the end of the Fifth Dynasty into the so-called ideal-biographies.<sup>62</sup> These inscriptions promote the tomb owners' fairness in relation to their family, other people, the tomb owner's office duties and their general respect for the principle of *m3ʿt*.<sup>63</sup> For instance Mehu wrote:

I came forth from my town, I went down into the afterlife . . . I carried out *maat* which is what the god loves; I propitiated the god in respect of all that which he loves; I made invocation offerings to the *ankhs*; I was respectful of my father and kind to my mother. I buried him who had no son; I ferried him over who had no boat; I rescued the wretched man from the (more) powerful one; I gave the share of the father to his son.<sup>64</sup>

To promote themselves, some officials tried to show a more personal link to the ruler in their biographical inscriptions by mentioning the king's satisfaction with their work and the king's gifts for them.<sup>65</sup> Donations from the king, like for instance Debehni's inscription on the donation of his whole tomb by King Menkaure,<sup>66</sup> occur in the tombs in Giza and Saqqara during the Fifth Dynasty and later even in the provinces. Many of the inscriptions concern the equipment, mostly sarcophagi or false doors, which the king donated to a lucky official, or to his sons who equipped his tomb.<sup>67</sup> The false door of Nyankhsekhemet bears a rare detailed description of how the official asked for and received this false door from King Sahure, who personally looked after its decoration: "His majesty had two false doors of Tura stone brought for him . . . The great controller of craftsmen and a workshop of craftsmen were then set to work on them in the presence of the king himself . . . His majesty arranged for pigments to be placed on them and they were decorated in blue."<sup>68</sup>

Other officials mention rewards that they received from the king during their lives as a manifestation of the king's satisfaction with their work and loyalty. For instance, Akhetetep in his inscription recorded that the king donated to him precious jewelry and oxen after being satisfied with the manners of his son "as a reward for having educated him to the satisfaction of the king."<sup>69</sup>

Some tomb inscriptions, however, mention a more personal relationship with the king and refer to a very special, unusual deed that the king performed on the owner's behalf. In one of the early biographical inscriptions, the vizier Washptah describes a great privilege allowed by King Neferirkare during an inspection to the pyramid construction site where Washptah collapsed (or was injured)<sup>70</sup> and the king said to him: "Do not kiss the ground. Kiss my foot!" Later on in the palace, the king called his chief doctors and lector priests to treat Washptah, he prayed for him, all the royal children and companions feared for him, and afterwards he gave him many gifts for his tomb.<sup>71</sup>

Another exceptional event was recorded in the tomb of Rower, who hit (or was hit by) a scepter of the king but was not punished for it: "His

majesty said: 'It is the desire of my majesty that he be very well, and that no blow be struck against him.'" Moreover, Rower was given permission by the king to carve this event in his tomb.<sup>72</sup> This, too, happened in the reign of Neferirkare, and it is difficult to say whether the events reflect the increasing power of the highest officials or just the exceptionally kind character of the king.

Those biographical inscriptions that describe the career of the officials also highlight their special bond to the king(s).<sup>73</sup> The early Fifth Dynasty inscription of Ptahshepses from Saqqara demonstrates that he received education together with the king's children in his palace and lists his credits that led the king to reward him:

He grew up among the royal children in the palace of the king . . . His majesty gave him his eldest royal daughter, Khamaat, as his wife, for his majesty wished that she be with him more than with any other man . . . When his majesty favored him because of the things (which he had done), his majesty allowed him to kiss his foot.<sup>74</sup>

Some other high officials raised their importance by including in the inscriptions carved in their tombs the king's entire letters or decisions in which the kings express their appreciation to the officials. An early example of this kind might be the inscription that was carved on the facade of the tomb of Iaib in Deir el-Bersha.<sup>75</sup> It is a hieroglyphic copy of an assignment decree, in which King Neferefre assigned some high-ranking offices to Iaib.<sup>76</sup>

The other attested royal letters, which date to a later part of the Fifth Dynasty, are more elaborate and were usually incorporated into the biographical inscriptions of the tomb owners. The tomb of the vizier Rashepses<sup>77</sup> contains the king's letter,<sup>78</sup> which is a reply to a report sent to the king by the tomb owner: "Seeing this letter of yours is what my majesty desired above all else, for you indeed know how to say what my majesty loves . . . O, Rashepses, I say to you millions of times: (You are) one whom his lord loves, one whom his lord favors, one who is close to his lord."<sup>79</sup> Inscriptions in the tomb of Senedjemib Inti in Giza<sup>80</sup> are more extensive and describe the favors that the king did for his vizier, rewarding him for his duty with jewelry and cosmetic treatment by the king's personal hairdresser but also with documents written by the king: "Iseti made for me a decree which his majesty wrote with his own hand in order to favor me for everything which I had done nobly, perfectly and excellently in relation to his majesty's wish concerning it."<sup>81</sup> In these letters, the king assures his vizier

of his satisfaction with Senedjemib's work, and of his fondness of him: "O Senedjemib the elder, I do love you and it is known that I love you."<sup>82</sup> In both of these cases, it was King Djedkare who sent these letters to Rashepses and Senedjemib Inti and apparently allowed them to use these writings for the presentation of their own importance. Interestingly, yet another letter concerns the favors done by Djedkare for his officials, but indirectly. It is the Sixth Dynasty inscription with another letter by the king from the tomb of Harkhuf, which includes the remark: "When you draw to the residence, and this pygmy in your charge is alive, prosperous and healthy, my majesty shall do great things for you, more than what was done for the seal-bearer of the god Werdjedba in the time of Izezi."<sup>83</sup> The same official is referred to also in the Sixth Dynasty inscription of Iny, probably from Saqqara:<sup>84</sup> "I was more valuable in the sight of his majesty than the sealbearer of the god Werdjedba in the time of Isesi."<sup>85</sup> Werdjedba thus appears to have been especially favored by the king and was used by the later officials for comparison of their own importance.

Since the late Fifth Dynasty, we can find inscriptions that mention how the tomb owner fulfilled his duties to the king.<sup>86</sup> Some of them do it in a more general manner, like Hesi, who claims that:

His majesty permitted that (this) be done for me as his majesty knew my name from when I took (the office of) scribe from his hands . . . I carried out the role of a scribe in the presence of his majesty actually at the forefront of the scribes, and I carried out the role of an official in the presence of his majesty actually at the forefront of the officials.<sup>87</sup>

Other officials mention even specific duties, which they were so proud of themselves to have fulfilled, like Kaiemtjenenet, who refers to his technical skills. His inscription describes that he proposed a way to move a sphinx onto its pedestal in the pyramid temple of King Djedkare: "Then his majesty said 'Look at what is the matter with this sphinx.' [I gave the answer] so that it was as when the shadows run away at daybreak . . . [I took over the work] likewise, constructing it of bricks."<sup>88</sup> It is at this time that we can notice the tomb owner placing himself in the focus of the inscription.<sup>89</sup>

This type of biographical inscription, where the tomb owner comes to the front, continued to appear in the Sixth Dynasty in both the residence and in the provincial cemeteries. As the cited inscriptions show, the tomb owners changed from the third to the first person singular and highlighted their honors and privileges guaranteed by the offices and thanks to their achievements.<sup>90</sup> One of the best-known biographical inscriptions is that of

Weni the Elder,<sup>91</sup> who lived in the time of Teti, Pepy I, and Merenre. He presents himself as the most trusted of the king's men: "When there was a legal case in secret in the royal harem against the royal wife, the 'great of affection', his majesty had me proceed to hear it on my own. No vizier or official was present apart from myself because I was excellent, I was rooted in his heart, and his heart was full of me."<sup>92</sup> Besides the achievements in the residence and promotion in offices which Weni describes in his inscriptions, he also lists his own capabilities in military expeditions: "His majesty sent me to lead this force five times, with these same troops, to drive away the Sand-dwellers each time they rebelled . . . Only after I had apprehended them all, slaughtering every insurgent among them, did I return."<sup>93</sup> His military success brought to Weni more professional promotion. He also adds information concerning several expeditions to quarries, where he was sent to bring stone for the equipment of the king's pyramid complex, and he boasts over his capability to conclude the mission successfully and quickly:

His majesty sent me to Hatnub . . . and I organized that this offering table was brought down (after) seventeen days of quarrying at Hatnub. I had it travel north in a barge. I made for it (this) barge . . . assembled in seventeen days in the third month of the Shemu season. Despite there being no water on the sandbanks, I moored successfully at the pyramid of Merenre.<sup>94</sup>

In the late Sixth Dynasty, we can find more-numerous biographical inscriptions referring to military activities outside of Egypt in the tombs of officials who were responsible for the southern border of the country, for instance in the tombs of Pepynakht, Harkhuf, and Sabni at Elephantine.<sup>95</sup> These officials present in their inscriptions their experience with the foreign lands and their military dominance. In addition, the abovementioned inscription of Iny records his expeditions to the east, which seem to have been of a trading character:

I was sent to Byblos under the majesty of Merenre, my lord . . . I brought back lapis lazuli, lead/tin, silver, *sefetj*-oil and every good product his ka desired.<sup>96</sup>

The above-presented examples show that there was an apparent shift in the form and also the content of the biographical inscriptions between the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties, which undoubtedly reflects the increasing

independence of the officials. While in the Fifth Dynasty the biographies emphasize the king as the one who gives favor and gifts to the official in return for the fulfillment of his duties, in the Sixth Dynasty the tomb owner became the central focus and the main agent of the inscriptions, presenting himself as an active historical figure.<sup>97</sup> In the Sixth Dynasty, moreover, some new motifs occur in the biographical inscriptions, including a special emphasis on the themes of the province and especially its economic welfare.<sup>98</sup> It can be noticed since the reign of Pepy I in the inscriptions of provincial officials like Kar of Edfu.<sup>99</sup>

I was taken to Pepy (I) to be given an education among the children of the chiefs . . . . Then the majesty of Merenre had me go south to the second nome of Upper Egypt . . . . I measured out the grain of Upper Egypt from my funerary estate for a hungry man whom I found in this nome . . . . I buried every man of this nome who had no son with linen from the property of my estate.<sup>100</sup>

These inscriptions followed the pattern of the earlier biographies, but they also started to contain features that later became typical of the inscriptions of the local rulers in the First Intermediate Period<sup>101</sup> and that clearly demonstrate that the officials in provinces considered the local politics to be more important for themselves than the king's interests.

## Notes

- \* This study was written within the Programme for the Development of Fields of Study at Charles University, no. Q11: "Complexity and Resilience: Ancient Egyptian Civilisation in Multidisciplinary and Multicultural Perspective".
- 1 For the changes that occurred during this period, see above all, K. Baer, *Rank and Title in the Old Kingdom: The Structure of the Egyptian Administration in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties* (Chicago, 1960); W. Helck, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte des Alten Ägypten im 3. und 2. Jahrtausend vor Chr.* (Leiden, 1975); J.C. Moreno García, *Études sur l'administration, le pouvoir et l'idéologie en Égypte, de l'Antiquité au Moyen Empire* (Liège, 1999); N. Kanawati, *Conspiracies in the Egyptian Palace: Unis to Pepy I* (London, New York, 2003); J.C. Moreno García, "Building the Pharaonic State: Territory, Elite and Power in Ancient Egypt in the Third Millennium BCE," in J.A. Hill, P. Jones, and A. Morales, eds., *Experiencing Power, Generating Authority: Cosmos, Politics, and the Ideology of Kingship in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia, 2013), 185–217; and other works cited below.
- 2 M. Bárta, "Egyptian Kingship during the Old Kingdom," in J.A. Hill, P. Jones, and A. Morales, eds., *Experiencing Power, Generating Authority: Cosmos, Politics, and the Ideology of Kingship in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia, 2013), 261.

- 3 W. Helck, *Untersuchungen zu den Beamtentiteln des ägyptischen alten Reiches* (Glückstadt, 1954), 58; Baer, *Rank and Title in the Old Kingdom*, 300; Helck, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte des Alten Ägypten*, 18–22; Bárta, "Egyptian Kingship during the Old Kingdom," 270; M. Bárta, "Kings, Viziers, and Courtiers: Executive Power in the Third Millennium B.C.," in J.C. Moreno García, ed., *Ancient Egyptian Administration* (Leiden, Boston, 2013), 85–151.
- 4 The teaching itself was perhaps composed in the early Middle Kingdom, see for instance, E. Eichler, "Zur Datierung und Interpretation der Lehre des Ptahhotep," *ZÄS* 128 (2001), 97–107; P. Vernus, "Le discours politique de l'Enseignement de Ptahhotep," in J. Assmann and E. Blumenthal, eds., *Literatur und Politik im pharaonischen und ptolemäischen Ägypten: Vorträge der Tagung zum Gedenken an Georges Posener 5.–10. September 1996 in Leipzig* (Cairo, 1999); R.B. Parkinson, *Poetry and Culture in Middle Kingdom Egypt: A Dark Side to Perfection* (London, New York, 2001), 314–15; all provide the reader with further bibliography on this subject. For translations of the teaching of Ptahhotep, see for instance, M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature I: The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1975), 61–80.
- 5 Bárta, "Kings, Viziers, and Courtiers," 156. For the concept of *m3't*, see above all, J. Assmann, *Ma'at: Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im alten Ägypten* (Munich, 1990).
- 6 Bárta, "Kings, Viziers, and Courtiers," 156.
- 7 Bárta, "Egyptian Kingship during the Old Kingdom," 264.
- 8 For the sun temples, see above all, H. Rieke, *Die Sonnenheiligtümer des Königs Userkaf* (Cairo, 1965); S. Voss, "Untersuchungen zu den Sonnenheiligtümern der 5. Dynastie: Bedeutung und Funktion eines singulären Tempeltyps im Alten Reich" (PhD Diss., Univ. Hamburg, 2010). Recently, also, M. Verner, *Sons of the Sun: Rise and Decline of the Fifth Dynasty Sun Temples* (Prague, 2014). Newly also M. Nuzzolo, *The Fifth Dynasty Sun Temples: Kingship, Architecture and Religion in Third Millennium BC Egypt* (Prague, 2018).
- 9 See, for instance, J. Janák, H. Vymazalová, and F. Coppens, "The Fifth Dynasty 'Sun Temples' in Broader Contexts," in M. Bárta, F. Coppens, and J. Krejčí, eds., *Abusir and Saqqara in the Year 2010*, I (Prague, 2011), 430–42.
- 10 M. Nuzzolo, "The V Dynasty Sun Temples Personnel: An Overview of Titles and Cult Practice through the Epigraphic Evidence," *SAK* 39 (2010), 289–312.
- 11 For the expansion of the administration, Baer, *Rank and Title*, 296–302; Helck, *Untersuchungen zu den Beamtentiteln*, 29–44, 106–19; Bárta, "Kings, Viziers, and Courtiers," 169–70.
- 12 V.G. Callender, "À propos the title of *r Nhn n z3b*," in M. Bárta and J. Krejčí, eds., *Abusir and Saqqara in the Year 2000* (Prague, 2001), 361–80, with a summary of the previous discussion and further bibliography. N. Strudwick, *The Administration of Egypt in the Old Kingdom: The Highest Titles and Their Holders* (London, 1985), 202–203; P. Andrassy, "Zur Struktur der Verwaltung des Alten Reiches," *ZÄS* 118 (1991), 1–10.