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## RADJEDEF TO THE EIGHTH DYNASTY

## عصر رع جدف حتى الأسرة الثامنة

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## RADJEDEF TO THE EIGHTH DYNASTY

### عصر رع جدف حتى الأسرة الثامنة

Miroslav Bárta

Von Radjedef bis zur 8. Dynastie  
Radjedef à la huitième dynastie

*Our sources for the chronology of the Old Kingdom comprise a mere handful of contemporary written documents, supplemented by radiocarbon dates, some of which have recently been recalibrated by Oxford University. The bulk of historical evidence, deriving primarily from residential cemeteries of the ruling kings and the elite, as well as from provincial sites, shows that during large portions of the Old Kingdom Egypt represented a relatively centralized state with a well-structured administrative system. Until the end of the Fourth Dynasty Egypt's royal family exercised a role of complete authority, exemplified in the monumental construction of pyramids, such as those on the Giza Plateau. Fourth-Dynasty king Radjedef broke with tradition, building his pyramid at Abu Rawash, nearer the major cult center of Heliopolis. Evident from the Fifth Dynasty onward is a steady decline in the royal family's dominant role in the state administration, concomitant with the rising importance and authority of non-royal officials and provincial administrators. Tomb motifs accompanied by various proxy data, particularly from the reign of Niuserre, are suggestive of changing environmental conditions and climatic stress, supported today by scientific data. The so-called "status race" became yet more explicit in the Sixth Dynasty, which was marked by instability and court intrigue, the provincial nomarchs ultimately succeeding in combining powers of both the administration and priesthood. The Seventh Dynasty represents a fleeting period of political upheaval wherein, according to the historian Manetho, 70 kings reigned during a period of 70 days. By the Eighth Dynasty—the ultimate closing stage of the Old Kingdom—the powers of the formerly centralized government had become territorial and personal.*

ت تكون مصادرنا المتعلقة بالتسلسل الزمني الخاص بالدولة القديمة من عدد قليل من الوثائق المعاصرة المكتوبة ، التي يتمتها عملية التاريخ بواسطة الكربون المشع، وبعضها تمت إعادة تقييمه مؤخراً من قبل جامعة أكسفورد. يشير الجزء الأكبر من الأدلة التاريخية المستمدة في المقام الأول من الجبانات الخاصة بالملوك والنخبة، وكذلك من الواقع ، إلى أنه خلال فترة زمنية طويلة من عصر الدولة القديمة كانت مصر تعتبر دولة مركزية ذات نظام إداري منظم. وكانت الأسرة الحاكمة في مصر حتى نهاية الأسرة الرابعة تمارس دور السلطة الكاملة، كما هو ظاهر في عملية البناء الضخم للأهرامات مثل تلك الموجودة على هضبة الجيزة. وخلال عصر الأسرة الرابعة وتحديداً عهد الملك رع جدف تم كسر تلك التقاليد، حيث بنى الملك هرم لنفسه في منطقة أبو رواش الأقرب إلى مدينة الشمس "هليوبوليس".

تشير الشواهد من عصر الأسرة الخامسة فصاعداً أن تلك الفترة هي فترة ضعف ثابت في الدور الملكي للأسرة المهيمنة على إدارة البلاد، ويصاحب ذلك ويتزامن معه تزايد أهمية وسلطة المسؤولين غير الملكيين والإداريين المحليين. وتشكل زخارف المقابر ولا سيما من عصر الملك ني-وسر-رع تغيرات في الظروف البيئية واختلاف في المناخ، تدعيمها اليوم البيانات العلمية. وأصبح ما يسمى بـ"سباق الأعراق" أكثر وضوحاً خلال الأسرة السادسة، وقد نجح الحكام في نهاية المطاف في الجمع بين السلطة الإدارية والدينية. وتتمثل الأسرة السابعة فترة عابرة من الاضطرابات السياسية. ووفقاً للمؤرخ مانيتون ، فإنه حكم 70 ملك خلال فترة 70 يوماً. ومع بداية الأسرة الثامنة - المرحلة الأخيرة للدولة القديمة - تحولت السلطات السابقة للحكومة المركزية إلى سلطات إقليمية وشخصية.

Contemporary written sources for the chronology of the Old Kingdom are limited to a mere handful. They nevertheless form the backbone of our current knowledge of the reign of Radjedef to the Eighth Dynasty and are therefore evaluated here in some detail. (The First and Second dynasties are covered in this publication by Wilkinson 2014, as are the Pyramid-Age reigns of Huni to Radjedef by Bussmann 2015, and the end of the Old Kingdom by Müller-Wollermann 2014. The dates provided by these authors, and by the current author, may vary from those of the UEE chronology.) Absolute radiocarbon dates are also limited, both in number and quality, though the gap between the relative and absolute chronologies has recently been reduced to several decades—a formidable achievement given the obstacles prohibiting finer chronology.

The so-called Palermo Stone is of primary importance to the present discussion (Wilkinson 2000). It begins with the first king of the First Dynasty (the king's name is missing; it is probably Narmer or Hor Aha) and concludes with the Fifth Dynasty king Neferirkara. It is annalistic in style, enumerating principal feats and events during individual reigns and including references to the annual Nile flood. Though probably composed in the Twenty-fifth Dynasty, it was very likely based on Old Kingdom sources. A somewhat later historical source, the so-called Stone of South Saqqara, originally a free-standing block of stone, was secondarily converted into a sarcophagus lid of the Sixth

Dynasty king Ankhesenpepy IV. The particular importance of this historical source lies in the fact that it lists all the rulers of the Sixth Dynasty and provides the lengths of their respective reigns (Baud and Dobrev 1995).

The major problem with our analysis of these contemporary and other traditional, mostly post-Old Kingdom, sources is that unlike the ancient Egyptians, modern Egyptologists apply the template of the "dynasty"; indeed Egyptology traditionally recognizes thirty dynasties. The dynasty paradigm, however, was not introduced until the third century BCE, during the rules of Ptolemy I Soter and Ptolemy II Philadelphus, by the historian Manetho (Waddell 1940; Dillery 1999), probably as a consequence of the so-called axial thinking that grew in importance during the first millennium BCE. This new conception basically meant that history was no longer thought of as a cyclical process. What became increasingly dominant instead was a linear approach implying that history has a progressive trajectory and that events and processes never return to their incipient stage (Jaspers 1949).

Manetho's *Aegyptiaca* was written in Greek (Waddell 1940 provides an English translation in addition to the Greek text) and was certainly based on much earlier historical sources. The work was originally divided into three parts. The first commenced with a series of gods, demi-gods, and spirits of the dead, who ruled Egypt as kings since the beginning of time, followed by the individual Egyptian kings of the First to Eleventh dynasties. The second and third parts listed rulers of later dynasties.

In his approach, Manetho worked from the concept of “ruling houses,” which he used as a tool in setting up a relative periodization of ancient Egyptian history, divided into the now familiar dynasties. He did not necessarily define a dynasty on the basis of blood relationship but rather according to the geographical ruling center.

An additional significant post-Old Kingdom source is the Turin King List, written on papyrus and dating to the Ramesside Period (Gardiner 1959). In a section referring to the third millennium BCE, the text contains valuable indications of how the Egyptians viewed the division of their own history. The author of the list does not introduce any artificial division between the first king of the First Dynasty, Menes, and Unas, the last king of the Fifth Dynasty. This indicates that the era was considered to be more or less continuous, without any significant break. The last listed ruler of the Sixth Dynasty is Queen Nitokret. Her entry is followed by a note that can be interpreted as “seventy kings, who ruled seventy days,” which certainly refers to the prevailing political havoc after the end of the Sixth Dynasty, also referenced by Manetho.

Damaged sections of the Turin King List may be reconstructed in a way that has significant bearing on Manetho’s specific divisions of Egyptian history. According to Málek (1982), column four starts with the first king of the Second Dynasty, Hetepsekhemwy; column five starts with Nebka; column six begins with the founder of the Fifth Dynasty, Userkaf, and his successor, Sahura; and column seven commences with the names Merenra Nemtyemsaf and Nitokret, known rulers from the beginning of the Seventh Dynasty. Manetho’s list implies (based on his divisions) that he worked from a document very similar in structure to the Turin King List. Every beginning of a new column was for Manetho an incentive to introduce a new dynasty: the result was the structuring of the history of the third millennium BCE in the dynastic form we know today. In any case, there are in the ancient Egyptian sources numerous indications that the Egyptians themselves considered their

history to be marked by significant turning points associated with specific outstanding kings, a concept supported today with scientific data (Bárta 2015a and 2016b).

Results of a large-scale radiocarbon dating project carried out by the Oxford University 14C laboratory and published in 2013 provide some new or recalibrated dates pertinent to the period of the Old Kingdom (Shortland and Ramsey, eds. 2013). These new dates correspond fairly closely with the relative chronology, differing by a margin of only about two decades (Bárta 2013a). Since radiocarbon dates do not reliably cover all periods under discussion here, however, the following, based on both the available radiocarbon and relative dates, can now tentatively be considered our most reliable chronology of the Old Kingdom: Fourth Dynasty (2543 – 2436 BCE); Fifth Dynasty (2435 – 2306 BCE); Sixth Dynasty (2305 – 2150 BCE); Seventh Dynasty (duration of only a few weeks/months); and Eighth Dynasty (2150 – 2120 BCE) (Hornung, Krauss, and Warburton, eds. 2006).

### History

Of the primary civilizations of the third millennium BCE, Egypt’s Old Kingdom may be considered the apogee. During large portions of the Old Kingdom Egypt represented a strictly territorial state run by a well-structured administrative system whose considerable social dynamics are reflected in texts, artifacts, architecture, art, ideology, and religion. The bulk of historical evidence of the period derives from the major sites of Giza, Abu Rawash, Abusir, Saqqara, and Zawyet el-Aryan—all principal residential cemeteries of the ruling kings and the elite (Bárta and Brůna 2006). For the late Fifth and the Sixth dynasties, provincial sites such as Aswan, Edfu, Abydos, Meir, Kom el-Hisn, and others supply a wealth of data elucidating the nature of the societal and state dynamics (Wenke 2009; Bussmann 2014; in this publication see Moeller 2013 on Edfu).

Until the end of the Fourth Dynasty, Egypt’s royal family exercised a role of

complete authority. Starting in the Fifth Dynasty, the complexity of the state evolved, leading to a decline in the dominant role of the royal family in the central administration, which instead became increasingly represented by officials of non-royal heritage. This phenomenon is well mirrored in the administrative operations of the state and in administrative titles. It should be noted that, given the prevailing absence of a clear-cut division between the executive and priestly spheres, most high-level administrative officials appropriated offices in both (Bárta 2013b).

Yet to be clarified is the mechanism by which kings were appointed in the Old Kingdom, since a direct father-son succession is unverifiable. It is most likely that a new king originated from within the close circle of the reigning king's family. The study of family relationships and the mechanisms of the division of power in the Old Kingdom, both at the court level and in the royal family, is a field of research deserving further attention, especially since the available evidence is more often than not biased and open to multiple avenues of interpretation (for good overviews see Baud 1999 and Jánosi 2005). Fortunately a wealth of epigraphic and historical documents, in combination with iconographic sources, may nowadays be assigned with impressively high precision—often to the reigns of individual kings (Harpur 1987; Spalinger 1994).

*The Fourth Dynasty from Radjedef to Shepseskaf*

Important milestones were set by the founder of the Fourth Dynasty, Sneferu, and elaborated on by his son, Khufu. The reigns of these two pharaohs saw the mastery of monumental architecture, the establishment of the classical components of the royal mortuary complex, consisting of the valley temple, causeway, mortuary temple, and pyramid, and the reorganization of the mortuary cults, thereby significantly changing the material and symbolical culture of the day (Borrego Gallardo 2014; Bárta 2015a). These early Fourth-Dynasty innovations had a major

impact on the rest of the dynasty, as well as on the following Fifth and Sixth dynasties.

Following Khufu's establishment of the Giza necropolis, his son Radjedef reigned for approximately 11 years. Radjedef is traditionally known as the king who introduced the fifth element essential to the official royal titulary—namely, the epithet “son of Ra,” emphasizing the link between the king and his mythical father, the sun god Ra. Similarly, the name “Radjedef” (or “Djedefra”, “Enduring is Ra”) itself expresses the king's close ties with this deity. Radjedef chose to build both his pyramid complex, and the necropolis of his high officials, further to the north, at what is today the site of Abu Rawash (Vallogia 2011). The unusual location of his pyramid complex further symbolizes his connection to the solar god, being situated at the highest elevation of any royal pyramid complex and closest to the (assumed) center of the cult of Ra in Heliopolis. Although the cult of Ra is archaeologically attested at Heliopolis only from the Sixth Dynasty, predicated by possible evidence for the worship of Geb and Atum, future excavation may support the deity's earlier prominence (Helck 1984).

At Abu Rawash was found the earliest sphinx known to date from ancient Egypt. It belonged to Radjedef's consort Hetepheres II. At Giza, Radjedef was in charge of finishing the boat burial of his father, as attested by the graffiti on the sealing blocks of the boat pit. Radjedef is also attested at areas outside the Nile Valley. The site of Water Mountain (or the Mountain of Radjedef), located 50 km southwest of Dakhla, bears the names of both Khufu and Radjedef (Kuhlmann 2005). It is significant that Radjedef's cult lasted to the mid-Fifth Dynasty and that several members of his family were buried at Abu Rawash (Cemetery F) (Bisson de la Roque 1924).

Radjedef was succeeded by his brothers Khafra and subsequently Menkaura (also sons of Khufu), both of who placed their mortuary complexes back at Giza (for Giza in general see Lehner 2008). Khafra is known as the pharaoh who commissioned the famous Sphinx at Giza

and the “solar” temple located between this monument and his valley temple. A gneiss statue of the seated king is unique for its three-dimensional representation of a ruler in the protection of the falcon god Horus. Khafra’s reign lasted approximately 25 years. Khafra’s son Menkaura was the last pharaoh to build his mortuary complex at Giza. His valley temple was finished in mud-brick and provides a unique archaeological record of its use, together with a rich trove of artifacts. Among the most prominent are the magnificent triad statues, of which five are known, representing the king together with the goddess Hathor and a personification of an Egyptian nome.

The topography of the Giza Plateau reveals that the ground plans of the three major pyramids (of Khufu, Khafra, and Menkaura, respectively) were precisely aligned such that their southeastern corners pointed toward the cult center of Heliopolis. In addition to the pyramids, the Giza site comprises a cemetery of hundreds of tombs belonging to the Fourth-Dynasty royal family and also to non-royal members of the state’s administration (Jánosi 2005).

Following Menkaura, whose reign possibly lasted as long as 22 years, Shepseskaf, most likely a son of Queen Khentkaus I, moved his mortuary residence to South Saqqara. Instead of a pyramid, he commissioned a structure resembling a giant mastaba or sarcophagus for reasons that elude us; it can be only supposed that he lacked full legitimacy due to the queen’s marriage to a high official. The reign of Shepseskaf clears the way for the rise of the Fifth Dynasty, during which religion, art, architecture, the administration, and even the kingship underwent major changes (for treatment of the Fifth Dynasty in detail, see Verner 2014).

#### *The Fifth Dynasty (2435 – 2306 BCE)*

Shepseskaf’s brother Userkaf, also a son of Khentkaus I, was the first king of the Fifth Dynasty (Verner 2014: 29-36). He built his mortuary complex just to the northeast of Djoser’s complex at Saqqara (fig. 1). At Abu

Ghurab he innovated a new type of construction, the sun temple, which came to an end in the reign of Djedkara. Userkaf’s Horus name, meaning “He who has established order,” prompts us to surmise that he acceded to the throne under uneasy circumstances and sought symbolic support from the venerated pharaoh Sneferu, whose Horus name read “Lord of Maat.” Indeed Userkaf’s reign saw major changes—in the concept of the administration, in the economy, in religion, and in the royal funerary complexes—that altered the character of the period (Bárta 2005 and 2016a).



Figure 1. Mortuary complex of Userkaf, located at the northeast corner of Djoser’s precinct, Saqqara.

With the onset of the Fifth Dynasty the function and importance of provincial temples and religious foundations increased in significance (Moreno García 1999; Bussmann 2010). It seems that by putting more explicit emphasis on temples, distributed now throughout Egypt, along with their endowments, rulers aimed at greater control of the country by expanding their political and economic supremacy. The temples became an indispensable part of the state’s economy and administrative structure. They also played a major role in maintaining the status of the king, helping especially to preserve his supremacy in the provinces, far from the administrative center of Memphis. Hand in hand with this trend went the building of new settlements, a phenomenon that seems to gain in intensity starting with the reign of Userkaf and is best illustrated by the emergence at this period of two new official titles, “Chief” and “Overseer

of New Towns,” which occur in the tombs of several high officials (Papazian 2012). Similarly, the innovation of the sun temple—dedicated not only to the deities Ra and Hathor but to the cult of the living king himself—was likely a strategy on the part of the ruling king to control, economically and politically, the religious affairs of the state. It is certainly no accident that during the coming Abusir-era of Fifth Dynasty kings, virtually no priesthood of Heliopolis is known (Bárta 2016a; on the sun temples and their possible roles see Janák, Vymazalová, and Coppens 2011).

One of the most important officials of the Fifth Dynasty was Ptahshepses (not to be confused with an individual of the same name who served as vizier later in the dynasty), who married Userkaf’s daughter Khamaat (Ptahshepses’s tomb C1 lies at Saqqara; Dorman 2002) and is, in fact, the first official known to have married a king’s daughter. This political act was likely prompted by the onset of the new dynasty, with its concomitant major changes in administration. The office of the vizier, for example—viziers being the highest officials under the pharaoh and themselves members of the royal family—was now for the first time represented by officials of non-royal origin, while a number of former viziers, of royal origin, acted in the office only symbolically. After this transitional period, only one vizier, of non-royal origin, held the office (Bárta 2016a).

Userkaf’s son Sahura (by his wife Neferhetepes) established a residential necropolis at Abusir, and his mortuary complex is one of the best preserved of the Old Kingdom (for the site’s history in general see Verner 2002). Its royal reliefs, the largest collection known from the third millennium BCE, include not only traditional religious and symbolic scenes, but also representations of historical events, including an expedition to Punt, and gatherings of the royal family, listing the names of a number of family members and representatives of the state elite (fig. 2) (El-Awady 2009). Sahura’s marriage to Meretnebty, probably a daughter of Neferhetepes, produced twins: Ranefer (later to take the

throne) and Netjeryrenra. The Palermo Stone references Sahura’s rich endowments to various gods throughout Egypt. Archaeological evidence indicates that Sahura was active both in the provinces—Coptos, Elkab, and Karnak—and abroad, in Byblos or Ebla. He also dispatched mining expeditions to Sinai to procure turquoise, and left traces of activity in the Eastern and Western Deserts and Lower Nubia (Brinkmann, ed. 2010).

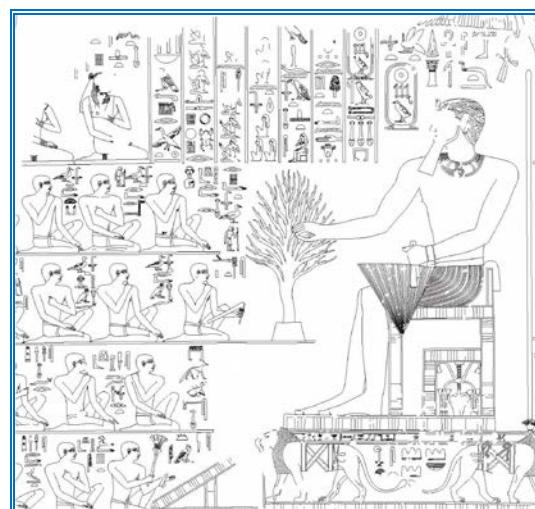


Figure 2. A recently discovered scene from the causeway of Sahura: the king in the company of his sons, mother, and wife.

Sahura was succeeded by his eldest son, Neferirkara Kakai, the twin originally named Ranefer. Neferirkara is known for providing rich endowments to various deities—particularly Ra, Horus, Hathor, and souls of Heliopolis. Neferirkara’s wife Khentkaus II probably gave birth to twins, Ranefereref and Niuserre Isi, and their respective monuments complement the history of the royal necropolis of Abusir. From Neferirkara’s complex originates the first so-called Abusir papyrus archive. Additional archives were discovered in the mortuary complex of Khentkaus II and in the unfinished complex of Ranefereref. These archives provide a wealth of information on the daily cults and religious life in the royal Abusir complexes. They also shed new light on the principles of the economy and administration of the Old Kingdom (Posener-

Kriéger 1976; Posener-Kriéger, Verner, and Vymazalová 2006).



Figure 3. Statue of king Raneferef.

Egypt's economy in the Old Kingdom was based on the combined workings and resources of the central administration, which certainly was not capable of controlling the entire country, and of private and temple properties, which were largely independent of the state and were steadily growing through royal donations. Both state (royal residence) and temple economies were largely redistributive, collecting and subsequently redistributing resources and products according to needs and requirements (Goedcke 1970; Moreno García 2008; Papazian 2012).

Neferirkara's son Raneferef (fig. 3) reigned too briefly to complete a pyramid at Abusir; the monument was instead converted into a mastaba. His temple was hastily finished in mud-brick but is nevertheless known for the rich archaeological finds discovered there. Apart from the papyrus archive, royal statuary,

statues of prisoners, pottery, stone vessels, seal imprints, faience inlays, and numerous other categories of artifacts—including, moreover, remains of his mummy from the burial chamber of his pyramid—provide us with a detailed picture of his reign (Verner et al. 2006).

The reign of Raneferef's brother, Niuserre, marked a major change in aspects of both the society and state. Niuserre's reign was one of the longest of the Fifth Dynasty and lasted perhaps more than thirty years, as scenes from the *sed*-feast in his sun temple at Abu Ghurab indicate (fig. 4). The vizier Ptahshepses, a contemporary of the king, built for himself at Abusir a unique tomb complex (fig. 5), adopting architectural elements that had heretofore been exclusively royal (Krejčí 2010). Similarly, his sons attained high official positions, though not the vizierate, in their own right. It is from this point that one perceives the growing influence of the hereditary principle in the country's administration. In the tombs of several officials of Niuserre's reign we find the first attestations of the cult of Osiris. As a consequence of the tendencies toward increasing independence in the provinces, Niuserre created the office of "Overseer of Upper Egypt," whose primary role was to control the country south of Memphis. The king's activities are attested from Byblos, Sinai, and the Eastern Desert, and he probably also fought Libyan tribes (Sowada 2009).



Figure 4. The sun temple of Niuserre, Abu Ghurab.

During Niuserre's reign the concept of the family tomb came into being, and monumental, multi-chambered, non-royal

tombs were now being built and lavishly decorated. Moreover, new motifs appeared in tomb decoration, including market scenes and representations of the desert, the latter possibly an indicator of changing environmental conditions. The available proxy data of the period—e.g., beetles found at Abusir; the long-term drop in Nile flood levels recorded on the Palermo Stone; settlement drift on the island of Elephantine; and recent paleoclimatic studies of climate fluctuations in northeast Africa and of the hydrogeological regime of the Nile River—all suggest that a major climatic deterioration took place around 2200 BCE, known as one of the Holocene Bond events (Bell 1971; Bond, Showers, and Cheseby et al. 1997; Bárta 2015b; Bárta and Dulíková 2015; and see Dalfes, Kukla, and Weiss 1997 on climate depredation attested outside of Egypt, as well, around 4.2 kiloyears BPE).



Figure 5. Monumental pillared court of the mastaba of Ptahshepses, Abusir.



Figure 6. Pyramid necropolis of the Fifth Dynasty, Abusir.

Recent explorations indicate that Niussara was reasonably active at Giza (personal communication: Mark Lehner 2017) and paid considerable attention to the completion of earlier, unfinished monuments at Abusir belonging to his father, Neferirkara, his mother, Khentkaus II, and his brother, Raneferef. He himself was the last king to be entombed at Abusir (fig. 6).

After the apparently uneventful and relatively brief rule of Menkauhor, who was buried in Central Saqqara, it was Djedkara Isesi who ascended the throne. As a consequence of the serious centrifugal trends experienced by the previous Fifth-Dynasty central administration, Djedkara was compelled to introduce significant reforms (Kanawati 1980). These included a new policy stipulating that each nomarch was now responsible exclusively for his own nome. Previously, an official held responsibility for several nomes simultaneously (Martin-Pardey 1976). The king moreover established three administrative centers for the control of the most economically important nomes of Upper Egypt: 10, 15, and 20. It was also in Djedkara's reign that high administrative officials began to be buried in their hometowns, rather than at the royal residence. There are indications that, from this time on, the office of vizier was held by two individuals, one of them only titular, a probable indication of conflict between the king and powerful courtiers. Djedkara's funerary complex was built at South Saqqara and is known for its unique representations, such as the royal birth scene, a typical component of the *Königsnovelle* in the New Kingdom (Megahed 2016).

Djedkara's successor, Unas, temporarily tightened his control over the central administration; no nobles are known to have been buried in the provinces. Unas also continued the policy of employing two viziers, both of them now residing in Memphis. Simultaneously he significantly cut the number of mortuary priests officiating in the royal funerary complexes, likely as a consequence of the introduction of the Pyramid Texts in his pyramid. It is probable that these texts,

composed of spells, were introduced into the pyramid's decoration as a strategy to strengthen royal power in the face of the ongoing "status race" between the king and wealthy officials (fig. 7) (Bárta 2016b). The primary function of the spells was to ensure the king's resurrection and his safe journey to, and acceptance into, the realm of the gods (Allen 2005). It is mainly due to the presence of the Pyramid Texts that Unas has been identified by some scholars as the first king of the Sixth Dynasty. The recent discovery in his burial chamber of two alabaster blocks showing king Khufu engaged in a hippopotamus hunt shows that Unas dismantled some constructions of his predecessors (Youssef 2011).

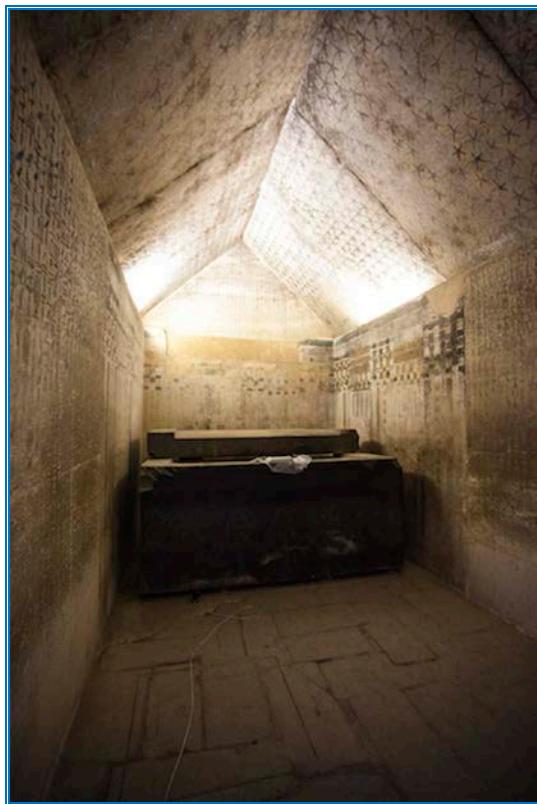


Figure 7. Burial chamber of the Saqqara pyramid of Unas, the first pyramid to feature Pyramid Texts.

Little is known about Unas's political activities, except for his presence at Elephantine, trade contacts with Byblos, possible clashes with bedouins of the Sinai, and limited military incursions into Syria and Palestine, as reflected in two reliefs showing

besieged Asiatic settlements. A cylinder seal, inscribed with the Horus name "Djedkara" and bearing a representation of a priest serving in the complexes of both Djedkara and Unas, suggests that there may have been a co-regency of these two kings (Verner 2014)—probably a strategic measure to ensure stability and continuity during the upcoming Sixth Dynasty.

#### *The Sixth Dynasty (2305 – 2150 BCE)*

During the Sixth Dynasty the Old Kingdom began to disintegrate (for the latest summary of the period see Gourdon 2016 with references). Indications are that the state administration was weakening, and the role and importance of the central government was decreasing, while local centers were becoming more powerful—a fact already acknowledged by most rulers of the Fifth Dynasty—the dominance of provincial officials and their families exhibiting a steady rise (see Richards 2002 and Moreno García 1998 for the families of Weni and Djau in Abydos, and of Qar in Edfu). The king's office as well as his divine status were increasingly compromised as the struggle for power and influence at the royal court gained in importance and currency; indeed court intrigues are reported (Kanawati 2003). The state, or rather the ruling king, responded to this development by constantly introducing changes to the administrative system, which yet grew less and less effective. The so-called status race, an omnipresent feature in Egyptian history, became more explicit (Bárta 2015a and 2016b).

Nonetheless, for the duration of the Sixth Dynasty, the backbone of the state's administration was able to maintain control over most of the country and oversee the running of the mortuary cults and major temple installations. Moreover, the state remained capable of financing and organizing expeditions to the Sinai Peninsula, Hatnub in the Eastern Desert, Syria, Palestine, and the more distant regions of Nubia (Eichler 1993), though increasing troubles abroad are attested, including explicit attacks on Egyptian expeditions, and even the destruction of sites (Mumford 2006).

Teti was the first king of the Sixth Dynasty. It is relatively certain that his mother was queen Sesheshet I (Callender 2011). That a degree of instability marked the early stage of his reign is suggested by the ravages of *damnatio memoriae* evident in the tombs of a number of dignitaries of his time—the names of their owners erased forever—and by one of his royal names, Sehetepawy, meaning “He Who Pacifies the Two Lands.” Teti ruled for not more than twelve years, as confirmed by the South Saqqara Stone (Baud and Dobrev 1995). According to a report related by Manetho, an alleged attempt to assassinate the king was successful (Kanawati 2003).

Teti’s principal wives included Iput I, daughter of Unas and mother of Pepy I (one can observe here the continuity between the Fifth and the Sixth dynasties), and Khuit, evidently the mother of his ephemeral successor, Userkara. His reign saw the careers of two notable viziers, Kagemni and Mereruka. Both were his sons-in-law, Kagemni having married the king’s daughter Sesheshet Nubkhetnebt and Mereruka having married the king’s daughter Sesheshet Waatetkhethor; thus, in evidence here is a continuation of the Fifth Dynasty policy in which kings married their daughters to influential courtiers of the period.

It is significant that the tombs of several of Teti’s officials incurred *damnatio memoriae*. Moreover, the presence in his pyramid of Pyramid Texts that were not painted, in contrast to the painted texts in other royal pyramids, together with the fact that Teti’s sarcophagus is still lying on the wooden beams employed to install it, indicate that Teti passed away suddenly and that his burial was necessarily finished in haste—a scenario perhaps lending credence to Manetho’s later report of assassination.

The reign of Teti’s successor, Userkara, constituted an insignificant *intermezzo* of only two to four years, and his rule left no lasting influence on Egypt’s history. It should be noted, however, that his name indicates an attempt to return to Radjedef’s policy of incorporating the name of the sun god Ra in

the royal titulary. Userkara was succeeded by Pepy I, the son of Teti and Queen Iput.

Indications point towards a conflict between Pepy I and the family of Teti. Pepy I ordered the dismantling of the complex of his grandmother, Queen Sesheshet, the mother of Teti, reusing the blocks in his own complex. He also added the epithet “Daughter of the King of Upper and Lower Egypt” posthumously to his mother’s name (Iput) and thus made explicit his adherence to the Fifth Dynasty royal line. That the early reign of Pepy I was not free of problems may also be perceived in the writing of his Horus name, “Beloved of the Two Lands,” which contains a subtle message: The sign for “beloved” is atypically placed before, rather than after, the sign for “The Two Lands”—that is to say, Egypt—perhaps indicating the symbolic dependence of the king on his country, represented locally by powerful officials. This detail is a minute, yet heretofore unheard of, feature of the king’s titulary (Gourdon 2016).

Pepy I’s pyramid complex at South Saqqara, *Men-nefer-Pepy*, “Enduring is the Beauty of Pepy,” gave the name to the capital of Egypt, *Men-nefer* (the Greek “Memphis”), which at that time existed east of the complex. It is in Pepy I’s reign that the official titulary of the Egyptian king finally assumed its standard form. The king took in marriage two daughters of the Abydos dignitary Khui, evidently as a strategy to retain (or regain) control over southern Egypt. They are known respectively by their royal names, Ankhenespepy I and II. Their brother, the dignitary Djau, became vizier, probably as a consequence of the union between the royal family and the Abydos family of influential local dignitaries. In addition to these marriages, Pepy I is known to have taken at least six other wives, as eight pyramid-complexes of royal wives stand close to his own mortuary complex and were the foci of cults that endured for several generations (Legros 2016). It is at this point that the Pyramid Texts lose their exclusivity, no longer being the prerogative of the king but now also appearing in the queens’ pyramids.

Some contemporary sources indicate that Pepy I reverted to a coregency with Merenra (who was later to succeed him), perhaps in an attempt to secure stability and continuity within the family (Gourdon 2016). Court intrigue was a feature of Pepy I's reign, as it was of the reign of his father, Teti (Kanawati 2003). Reports of high official Weni's investigation into an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate the king show that Pepy I was apparently the target of a harem conspiracy initiated by one of his wives (Sethe 1933: *Urk.* I: 98-110). The fate of the king's opponents is not known.

Pepy I's reign was long, probably more than fifty years, and witnessed significant changes, one of them being the replacement of his Horus name, Nefersahor, with "Meryra" ("Beloved of Ra"). The replacement applied even to his Pyramid Texts, the change evidently having been made during his lifetime. Moreover, Pepy I emphatically expressed his veneration for Atum of Heliopolis and Hathor of Dendera, labeling himself as their son.

Pepy I's successor, Nemtyemsaf Merenra, was the son of Queen Ankhenepepy I. After his succession to the throne, Merenra married Ankhenepepy II, former wife of Pepy I. She was to become the mother of Pepy II. Merenra's rule is marked by the emergence and development of numerous local necropoleis of high officials in the provinces south of Memphis, the most important of which were Elephantine, Qubbet el-Hawa, Edfu, Hierakonpolis, Dendera, Abydos, El-Hagarsa, El-Hawawish, El-Hammamiyah, Deir el-Gebrawi, Meir, Quseir el-Amarna, Sheikh Said, and also Balat in the Dakhla Oasis (fig. 8). These provincial tombs (with the exception of those at Balat) were rock-cut and architecturally very different from the mastabas in the residential cemeteries (Elsner 2004). Their abundance reflects the fact that many local centers were politically active in Egypt during Merenra's reign, though most of the related settlements have not been attested archaeologically.

After the relatively short reign of Nemtyemsaf Merenra, Pepy II acceded to the throne, and the possibility of a coregency

between Pepy II and Merenra cannot be excluded. Pepy II became the ruler whom Egyptologists traditionally associate with the official end of the Old Kingdom and the Sixth Dynasty, around 2150 BCE. A short inscription found on the island of Elephantine indicates, through its mention of the second anniversary of his *sed* festival (Sethe 1933: *Urk.* I: 115), that his rule was a lengthy one of at least 60 years. There are claims that he ruled for up to 90 years, but the figure of 60 years would certainly seem more realistic (Hornung, Krauss, and Warburton 2006).



Figure 8. Provincial cemetery of wealthy officials of the Sixth Dynasty, Qubbet el-Hawa, Aswan.

The reign of Pepy II was marked by administrative reforms, which can tentatively be divided into three stages. During the first half of his rule the office of the vizier was held by members of the dignitary Khui's family in Abydos. This was clearly a continuation of the policy put in effect under Pepy I, who married two daughters of that family. In years 25-35 of Pepy II's reign, the office of Overseer of Upper Egypt, held by a single individual, was abolished; rather, from then on the title was applicable to all the nomarchs of southern Egypt, who were now subordinated to a "Vizier of the South." In the final stage of Pepy II's rule the nomarchs also assumed the office of Overseer of Priests, which indicates that they had succeeded in combining the powers of both the administration and the priesthood under their control.

These shifts in the administrative structure of the country suggest that the state was incessantly changing its strategy in governing

remote provinces in the south. On the other hand, that these measures were in fact implemented uniformly indicates that the state did exercise a substantial degree of executive power. Supportive texts from the time of Merenra describe an expedition, led by Merenra himself, to the southern border of Egypt, the region of what is now Aswan. Here the king met with chiefs of the Nubian tribes of Ircet, Medjat, and Wawat to receive their homage and tribute (Strudwick 2005: 133–134, Nos. 50 and 51).

Significantly, at the end of Pepy II's reign and probably earlier, Khui, the local chief of Abydos (the 13<sup>th</sup> Upper Egyptian nome), began to insert his name in a royal cartouche, indicating that he considered himself an autocratic ruler. Moreover, he had himself buried at the site of present-day Dara in a tomb that conspicuously resembles a pyramid. Khui brought under his authority the provincial administrative and religious centers at Meir and Deir el-Gebrawi (nomes 8, 12, and 14), formerly governed by local noble families. If the duration of Khui's career is correctly dated, this constitutes proof that the royal office—its symbolism and its uncontestedness—was unprecedentedly challenged already during the reign of Pepy II (Kanawati and McFarlane 1992: 151–152).

#### *Seventh and Eighth Dynasties* (c. 2150 – 2120 BCE)

During his very long reign of at least 60 years, Pepy II took a large number of wives, who gave him a large number of offspring and potential male aspirants to the throne. Following his reign came a period of instability, marked by frequently changing rulers who represent the Seventh Dynasty. According to tradition as related by the historian Manetho—or more precisely, by later authors who preserved a part of Manetho's history of Egypt—the Seventh Dynasty lasted 70 days, during which 70 kings reigned. According to another extant source, five rulers reigned for a total of 75 days (Papazian 2015). It is understandable that the Seventh Dynasty left no lasting mark on Egyptian history.

The Eighth Dynasty, however, can be officially considered a part of the political history of the Old Kingdom. This period is demarcated by the years 2150 – 2118 BCE, a stretch of 32 years or, in practical terms, a little longer than one human generation. The reasons for considering the Eighth Dynasty a part of Old Kingdom history are clear-cut. According to the available sources, the kings of the Seventh and Eighth Dynasties continued to reside in the vicinity of *Men-nefer-Pepy*, and at least some of them continued to build pyramid complexes, especially at South Saqqara (Papazian 2015). Apparently they were also able to maintain control, for the most part, over southern Egypt with the help of their Abydos “relatives,” and to issue royal decrees applicable to some of the temples in the provinces (primarily Coptos), which made them economically independent.

That Pepy I and II entered into many marriages may have increased instability at the court and created factions and interest groups that ultimately weakened the effectiveness of the state apparatus. Pepy II's eight known marriages alone produced at least four kings of the Eighth Dynasty: Neferkara (II) Nebi, Nemtyemsaf Merenra II, Netjerkara (sometimes erroneously referred to as Nitokris), and Nefer Neferkara (Callender 2011: Genealogies 7 and 8; Labrousse 2010).

#### *Decline of the Old Kingdom*

It is interesting to observe that the factors formerly representing the backbone of ancient Egyptian kingship and the state—that is, the growth of the elite class of administrators, the penetration of the state administration by non-royal officials, the centralization of the government, and the management of resources by means of redistribution—gradually became negative factors from the Fifth-Dynasty reign of Niuserre onward. These negative factors, all centered around the malfunction of both the central administration and the royal residence, manifested themselves in the following forms: as a crisis of identity (i.e., the degree to which the ruling group was accepted); as a crisis of participation (i.e., which individuals took part

in the state's administration and in what capacity); as a crisis of the ability of the state's executive power to control the administration and economy; as a crisis of legitimacy (i.e., which individuals had the authority and ability to enforce decisions); as a crisis of distribution (i.e., the effectiveness of the redistribution of economic sources) (Kaufman 1988; Müller-Wollermann 1986, 2014); and, finally, as a two-fold economic crisis (i.e., while worsening climatic conditions had a direct bearing on agricultural output, the intensive transfer of landholdings from the state to the non-taxable funerary domains—the purpose of which was to provide an economic base for both royal and non-royal cults and the plethora of officials involved—constituted a maneuver that led to the eventual exhaustion of the economic capacities of the country) (Gundlach 1998). Generally speaking, by the end of the Old Kingdom the powers of the formerly centralized government had become territorial and personal (Bárta 2013b).

### *Concluding Remarks*

Despite the efforts of Egyptologists active in the field and in libraries and museums, however, much more is needed to complete our knowledge of the Old Kingdom and overcome major deficiencies in our understanding of it. Not enough information is available, for example, on the major residential cemeteries of the late Fourth to early Fifth dynasties; there is still very limited evidence related to the appearance and evolution of two major deities, the sun god Ra (who probably became dominant only during the Sixth Dynasty) and the god of the netherworld, Osiris (Smith 2008, 2017); it remains difficult to establish the precise role of Memphis, and to track its changing geographical location, during the Fourth through Eighth dynasties; our view of the rise and decline of the complexity of the state's administration is biased due to disproportionate evidence (Bárta 2013c); and last but not least, a major gap in our knowledge is represented by the paucity of evidence for settlements (Moeller 2016).

### *Bibliographic Notes*

The chronology of the Old Kingdom has been treated by Hornung, Krauss, and Warburton, eds. (2006), and further refined within the scope of Oxford University's recent radiocarbon project (Shortland and Ramsey, eds. 2013). Important reference works on the Old Kingdom pyramid and sun-temple complexes include Verner (2002), Lehner (2008), El-Awady (2009), and Brinkmann, ed. (2010), while Moeller (2016) provides an up-to-date account of settlement evidence of the period. Spalinger (1994), Strudwick (2005), and Allen (2005) are accessible publications on Old Kingdom documents, writing, and literature. For the state administration, see, for example, Martin-Pardey (1989), Posener-Kriéger (1976), Posener-Kriéger, Verner, and Vymazalová (2006), and Papazian (2012), while Martin-Pardey (1976), Kanawati (1980), and Bussmann (2010) deal exclusively with provincial administration and the role of the Egyptian state in the provinces. The role of the emergence of the elite in the disintegration of the Old Kingdom is elucidated in Chase and Chase, eds. (1992) and Moreno García (2005). History of the Old Kingdom in general is treated by Baud and Dobrev (1995), Wilkinson (2000), and Bárta (2015a and 2016b), whereas Verner (2014) and Gourdon (2016) treat specifically the Fifth and the Sixth dynasties, respectively. Genealogies of the royal families have been addressed by Baud (1999) and Callender (2011). Sowada (2009) summarizes Egypt's foreign relations during the Old Kingdom. State complexity is discussed by Wenke (2009) and Lehner (2000). For Egyptian religion in the Old Kingdom see, for example, Allen (2005). Specific studies on Old Kingdom art may be found by Harpur (1987). For discussions of climate and environment in Egypt during the third millennium BCE, see Bell (1971) and Bárta (2015b). The above references contain extensive bibliographies.

## External Links

The Giza Plateau Mapping Project  
 Ancient Egypt Research Associates, Inc. (AERA)  
[\(http://www.aeraweb.org/\)](http://www.aeraweb.org/). Accession date: July 2017.)

The Giza Archives  
 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston  
[\(http://www.gizapyramids.org/\)](http://www.gizapyramids.org/). Accession date: July 2017.)

Dahshur Project  
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 Abou Rawach, Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire  
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- Figure 1. Mortuary complex of Userkaf, located at the northeast corner of Djoser's precinct, Saqqara. (Photograph by the author.)
- Figure 2. A recently discovered scene from the causeway of Sahura: the king in the company of his sons, mother, and wife. (Courtesy of T. El-Awadi.)
- Figure 3. Statue of king Raneferef. (Courtesy of the archive of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, J. Brodský.)
- Figure 4. The sun temple of Niuserre, Abu Ghurab. (Photograph by the author.)
- Figure 5. Monumental pillared court of the mastaba of Ptahshepses, Abusir. (Photograph by the author.)
- Figure 6. Pyramid necropolis of the Fifth Dynasty, Abusir. (Courtesy of the archive of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, M. Frouz.)
- Figure 7. Burial chamber of the Saqqara pyramid of Unas, the first pyramid to feature Pyramid Texts. (Photograph by the author.)
- Figure 8. Provincial cemetery of wealthy officials of the Sixth Dynasty, Qubbet el-Hawa, Aswan. (Photograph by the author.)