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EGYPT AT ITS ORIGINS 5

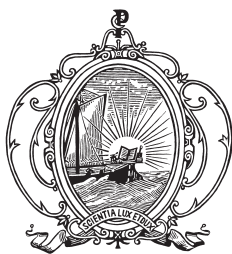
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edited by

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MONUMENTAL FUNERARY ARCHITECTURE AND RITUAL LANDSCAPE IN FIRST DYNASTY EGYPT

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Since the excavation of the 1st Dynasty mastabas at Saqqara in the first half of the 20th century, the main historiographic problem that these monuments have posed has been that of their ownership. The absence of any kind of definitive archaeological or epigraphic proof to settle it has split scholars into two groups: those who believe that they were royal tombs and those who assign them to high officials of the 1st Dynasty court. In some papers published between 2002 and 2011 I sided with the former. My approach to the problem has two main issues: the philological one and the archaeological and “topographical” one. In this paper I will deal with a new development of this second issue from a basic premise: the interpretation of the Saqqara mastabas must not be approached in an isolated way, but in the context of the whole 1st Dynasty cemeteries with monumental niched mastabas of the Memphite region. They share very meaningful features that make them a well planned and articulated “net”, an architectural and landscape “program”. On the other hand, from a sociological point of view, it is the “builder” instead of the “owner” of the tombs that we will emphasise.

Introduction

Since the discovery and the excavation of the 1st Dynasty mastabas at Saqqara in the first half of the 20th century, the main historiographic problem that these monuments have posed has been that of their ownership. On the one hand, the monumentality, the structural regularity, the niched ornamentation of the superstructures which evokes the royal motif of the palace façade and, above all, the iconographic and epigraphic evidence strongly suggested royal ownership. Written documents such as seal impressions and annalistic labels were typologically identical to (and sometimes duplicates of) those in the royal tombs at Umm el-Qaab, in Abydos, excavated at the very beginning of the century. On the other hand, the almost total absence of stelae with the names of the owners of the tombs in the Saqqara cemetery (the sole exception being the stela of Merka; see below) prevented any precise identification from being made. On the contrary, the recovering of stelae with both the *serekhs* of the kings and the names of private people at Umm el-Qaab made it clear that the main tombs in this cemetery were royal tombs.

The absence of any kind of definitive archaeological or epigraphic proof to establish the ownership of the Saqqara mastabas split scholars into two groups:

those who believed that they were royal tombs (the actual burial places of the kings or cenotaphs), as the main excavator of the tombs, Walter B. Emery (1938; 1939; 1949; 1954; 1958; 1961), and Jean-Philippe Lauer (1956) did, and those who assigned them to high officials of the 1st Dynasty court, following a suggestion made by Barry J. Kemp in a paper published in 1967 (see discussion and references in Cervelló-Autuori 2002: 27–29; Engel 2003: 41–42).

In the last decades of the 20th century, the discussion seemed neutralised and Kemp's suggestion was considered, almost always uncritically, as an established truth. The discussion however has been reopened in the last years. Between 2002 and 2011 I published some papers in which I sided with those who believe that the Saqqara mastabas were royal tombs, based on archaeological and especially philological and ritual reasons (Cervelló-Autuori 2002; 2006; 2011). In an article published in 2005, Rainer Stadelmann maintained that the cemetery at Saqqara was that of the “royal clan”, i.e. that of the “highest princes [not “officials”] and main queens”, and that the mastabas related to Meretneith and Andjib could have been royal tombs, a “second tomb” of this queen and this king buried at Abydos (Stadelmann 2005: 362, 367, 370). In this way, this scholar introduced some variety into his previous position on the matter, since two decades before, when the main epigraphic discoveries of the German Institute in Umm el-Qaab had not yet taken place, he was among those who believed that the kings of the First Dynasty were actually buried at Saqqara (Stadelmann 1985; 1987; 2005: 361, 363–364). In 2006, in his book on the archaeology of early Egypt, David Wengrow (2006: 229–231) also supported the idea that the Saqqara mastabas were of royal status and interpreted the duality Abydos-Saqqara as a form of “mapping the royal cult”, according to an expression taken from Stephan Seidlmayer and to which we will come back. In 2007, Ellen F. Morris made another contribution to the controversy by assigning the Saqqara mastabas, or at least part of them, to queens. Both, Wengrow and Morris consider that the Saqqara cemetery must be understood as a royal initiative.

For his part, in the year 2005 David O'Connor wrote a paper on the ownership of the subsidiary tomb closely associated with Saqqara mastaba S3505 and which the stela of the high official Merka – the sole stela found at the Saqqara cemetery – very likely comes from. These monuments date to the reign of Qaa. He concludes that “*the ascription of ownership to the elite First Dynasty tombs at Saqqara [should] be treated as a more open issue than is presently the case in much of the relevant scholarly literature*” (O'Connor 2005: 230). O'Connor observes that the high official Sabef, buried at Abydos in the complex of king Qaa, and the high official Merka were equivalent in status and rank; the former had a little tomb inside his master's complex, so the latter could have had the same. O'Connor prefers not to go further and not to draw a last conclusion, but it seems clear that, if the subsidiary tomb of the mastaba S3505 at Saqqara is that of Merka, the mastaba itself must be a monument of king Qaa (Cervelló-Autuori 2002: 42–44).

In 2008, Stan Hendrickx joined in the discussion by means of another paper in which he follows Kemp's position. He makes a detailed review of my 2002 paper (but not of the one published in 2006, with the philological issues) in order to refute my archaeological arguments in favour of the royal attribution. I agree with some of his objections to my first position in this matter, but not with his main conclusions, at least in the way in which he formulates them. Indeed, it seems to me that the author falls into a paradox when he writes: *"l'attribution de ces tombeaux aux rois de la I^{re} dynastie est exclue. Il s'agit des sépultures de hauts fonctionnaires, probablement tous issus de la famille royale, ou de tombes de reines. Mais ils renvoient certainement à l'iconographie royale, dont la façade à redans est l'exemple le plus évident. Ceci ne doit pas être interprété en termes de 'compétition' vis-à-vis des tombes royales d'Abydos, mais comme une expression du pouvoir des rois par les tombes de leurs serviteurs principaux. Pour les gens de l'époque, ces tombes monumentales, dont les immenses silhouettes dominaient la capitale Memphis, représentaient les rois."*

This phraseology means that the author admits that the niched mastabas cannot be explained by their simple attribution to high officials and that they must be related to the royal sphere somehow or other. I will argue that, if the tombs represented the kings, it is because they were *built by* the kings.

My approach to the problem of the definition and the identification of the Saqqara mastabas has two main issues: the philological one and the archaeological and "topographical" one. In this paper I will deal with a new development of this second issue.

Discussion

A funerary monument (tomb or ritual enclosure) is above all a "ritual artefact", that is, an anthropic creation with specific mythical and ritual motivations and purposes. Its ultimate significance cannot be inferred from its pure physical or material dimension or from its economic implications, but only from the funerary symbolism and ritual underlying it, which explain its location and structure and on which all its other formal and social aspects depend. The problem of the possible lack or scarcity of sources to inquire into the beliefs of the early Egyptians do not negate or invalidate this major premise. To come to conclusions may be difficult, especially with regard to historical contexts without writing, but the symbolic-ritual motivation of the monuments in question is always present.

In the history of the royal funerary monuments of ancient Egypt we can observe a meaningful alternation of two basic and originally opposite patterns. If we observe the question from the point of view of the "longue durée" as defined by Fernand Braudel (1958), we can recognise a "structure" which implies a mythological and ritual opposition. Indeed, on the one hand, we have a "chthonic" pattern which implies a tomb "non-marked" from the point of

view of the “visibility” in the landscape and located right in the desert (it is a “hidden” tomb), which is complemented by an enclosure for ritual purposes topographically separated from the tomb itself and located on the edge of the desert, in front of the cultivated land. The first one answers to the “mythical reason” of the funerary cult, whereas the second one obeys to its “social”, i.e. “ritual reason”. Well-known examples of this pattern are the Thinite complexes at Abydos and the Theban complexes of the New Kingdom. Regarding the latter, the great funerary royal books of this period, written on the walls of the tombs in the King’s Valley at Thebes, make it clear that the main mythological funerary topic is that of the dangerous journey through the chthonic Duat or netherworld. At Umm el-Qaab, the “hidden” nature of the mastaba-tombs, their topographical location and their structural link with the wadi which opens to the desert plateau, and the mention of the psychopomp god Khentiamentiu in the seal impressions with the lists of the kings of the 1st Dynasty (Dreyer 1986; Dreyer et al. 1996: 72–73), among other features, strongly suggest that the funerary mythology which underlies these tombs is already that of the “earthly journey” to the beyond.

On the other hand, there is an “air” pattern which implies a tomb “marked” from the point of view of the “visibility” in the landscape, and is located according to this need of visibility (in an escarpment of the desert facing the cultivated land, if it is a small monument, and right in the desert, if it is a huge monument), which is eventually complemented by funerary temples always located adjacent to the tomb itself. Examples of this second pattern are, of course, the pyramids, but also, as we will see, the Memphite great niched mastabas of the 1st Dynasty.

In his review of my 2002 paper, Stan Hendrickx (2008: 66–67) writes:

“L’affirmation [de Cervelló-Autuori] selon laquelle les tombes subsidiaires caractérisent la royauté exclusivement est (...) très discutable, puisqu’il y a une grande série de tombes subsidiaires à Giza, quelques exemples à Tarkhan et Abousir (...). Des tombes subsidiaires existent aussi à Naga ed-Deir (...). Il apparaît totalement exclu que toutes les tombes en question fussent des tombes royales. Les têtes de taureau trouvées devant quelques mastabas à Saqqara sont aussi considérées comme exclusivement liées aux tombes de rois, mais, bien qu’il s’agisse effectivement d’un symbole royal, une tête de taureau se trouve aussi devant le mastaba XVII à Abousir.”

It is inferred from this passage that Hendrickx agrees with the fact that the two mentioned features – that is, the presence of both subsidiary tombs and bull’s heads – are limited to a very few sites which are then specially distinguished by them. The problem, in his view, is that these two features also appear in other sites apart from Saqqara, although those are very few and singular sites. Surprisingly, when referring to the subsidiary tombs, he fails to mention Abu Rawash, where they are well documented for the two most important niched mastabas, but does mention Naga ed-Deir, where this feature is not clearly

attested. Indeed, one must understand the term “subsidiary tombs” as merely an orderly ensemble structurally and very clearly linked to the main mastaba, according to the principles of symmetry and regularity that characterise all these tombs. In Naga ed-Deir that link is more than unclear. All this results in a structural link – Saqqara-Abu Rawash-Giza-Abu Ghurab-Tarkhan – which is precisely what we are going to defend in the following pages.

Indeed, I consider now that the problem of the definition of the Saqqara mastabas must not be approached in an isolated way, but in the context of the whole 1st Dynasty cemeteries with monumental niched mastabas of the Memphite region. They share very meaningful features that make them a unique set, a well planned and articulated “net”, an architectural and landscape “program”, so that every part is defined from the whole.

We will start by remembering some data and features of these cemeteries.

Cemeteries concerned

The cemeteries concerned are, from the north to the south (Fig. 1): Abu Rawash cemetery M, with 21 tombs, 6 being niched mastabas (Montet 1938; 1946; Baud 2005; Tristant 2008); (South) Giza tomb V, a single monument (Daressy 1905; Petrie 1907: 2–7); Abu Ghurab tomb XVII, the sole monumental tomb at the 1st Dynasty site, separate from the rest of the tombs (Radwan 2000); North Saqqara 1st Dynasty cemetery, with 18 tombs, 12 being the great niched mastabas; and Tarkhan, with 4 niched mastabas (Petrie et al. 1913; Grajetzki 2008). The cemeteries at Abu Rawash, Abu Ghurab, Saqqara and Tarkhan include both monumental niched mastabas and less monumental tombs. At Saqqara, for example, 18 tombs were excavated: 12 great niched mastabas and 6 smaller tombs with plain walls or only one or two separate niches in the east wall. At Abu Rawash and Tarkhan, the cemeteries including the niched mastabas are separate topographically from the other contemporary cemeteries of the same sites and they are situated in the most elevated part of the sites themselves. We exclude from this list both, the cemetery at Helwan (Köhler 2008, with references), which lacks the main feature of high location and visibility in the landscape, and the cemetery at Naga ed-Deir (Podzorski 2008, with references). In these two sites, the existing niched mastabas are not more monumental than some of the other tombs and they are not located in a separate and special area but mixed in with the rest of the tombs. In addition, the niched tombs are not as monumental as in the other sites and do not have subsidiary tombs. In these cases we are then facing private cemeteries with only some tombs imitating the royal ones and where the royal palace façade prerogative is transmitted to some non-royal individuals as “a boon which the king gives” and always in a small scale. As it is well known, this use of niches in private tombs will continue all throughout the 2nd Dynasty and the Old Kingdom. As Stadelmann (2005: 370) states:

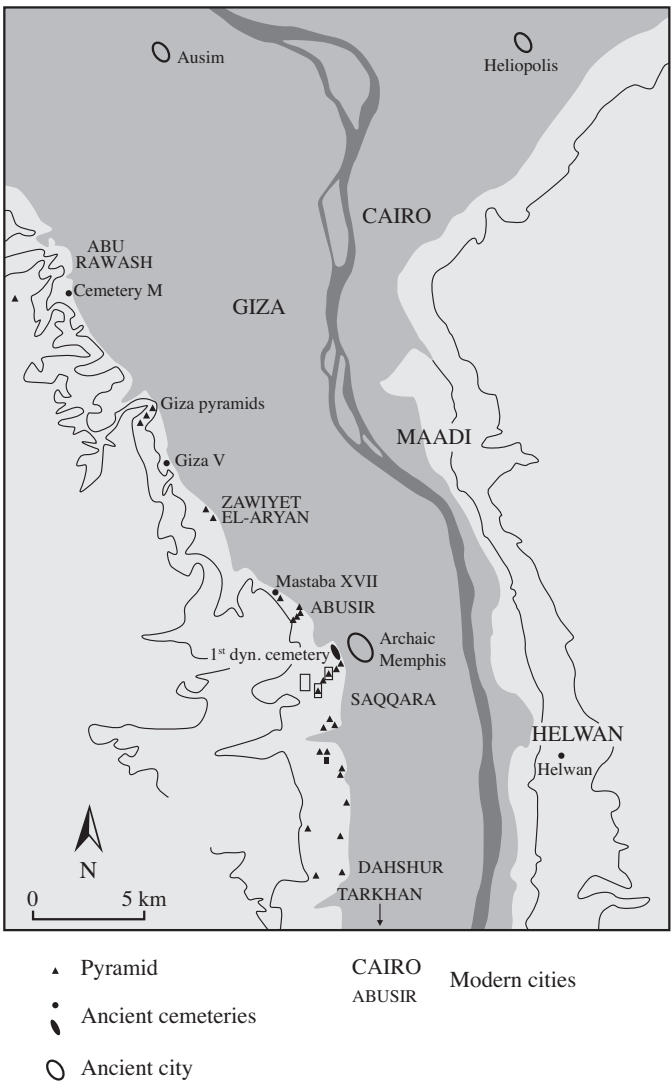


Fig. 1. Map of the Memphite region and its main cemeteries during the 1st Dynasty (© Bastien Ségalas).

“The nobles and high officials who were not members of the ruling Abydos clan were even excluded from these elite necropoleis [according to him: Nagada, Saqqara, Abusir and Giza]; they continued to frequent existing cemeteries in the country and to the east of the new residence Inebuheadj at Helwan.” All the cemeteries of the Memphite region concerned are then situated at the edge of the western desert.

Location

Contrary to what happens with the niched mastabas of the 2nd Dynasty and the Old Kingdom where high officials well identified by inscriptions were interred, all the Memphite monumental niched mastabas of the 1st Dynasty are located on the very edge of the desert (Fig. 2), almost all of them at the top of the desert escarpment (as at Saqqara and Giza) or on a hill (as at Abu Rawash and Tarkhan), the sole exception in this last respect being mastaba XVII at Abu Ghurab, “which is only a few metres away from the [present] cultivated land” (Radwan 2000: 509). The obvious aim of this arrangement is to increase the monumentality

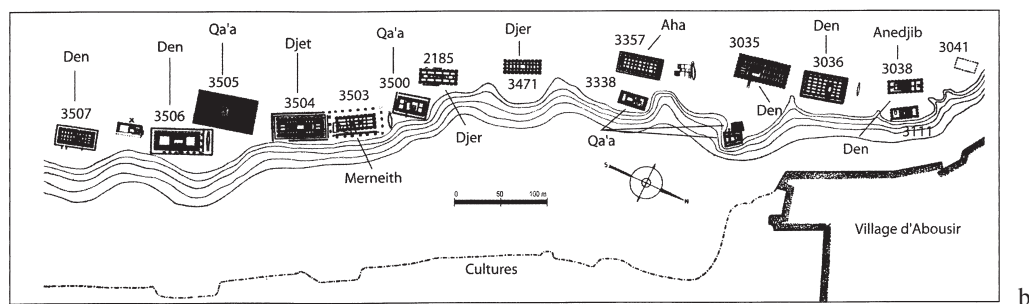


Fig. 2. The 1st Dynasty niched mastabas at Saqqara, located in the very edge of the desert (a- From Google Earth, 07/12/2013; b- Vaudou 2008: 150).



Fig. 3. The 1st Dynasty niched mastabas at Saqqara were built at the top of the desert escarpment in front of Memphis (author's photograph).

of the tombs and to make them more visible and more “aerial”, by integrating them into the natural monumentality of the landscape: “*Certainly in their location, the earliest recorded elite tombs at Saqqara capitalise on the natural topography by being ranged prominently along the highest part of the cliff top as a kind of parapet, or a conspicuous continuation of the coursed masonry-like sedimentary geological strata, visible even from the immediately adjacent section of the valley below*” (Jeffreys 2004: 838). About Saqqara and Abu Rawash it has been written: “*Comme, à cet endroit, le plateau s’élève d’une trentaine de mètres au-dessus de la plaine alluviale, les tombes monumentales étaient visibles de loin et sans doute de la capitale, Memphis, située approximativement à 4 km, d’où ils formaient une image imposante, riche de signification*” (Hendrickx 2008: 61) (Fig. 3); “[*Le mastaba avait la fonction*] de marquer d’autant plus le paysage qu’il se trouvait en bordure de colline. On imagine facilement l’effet que devait produire au sommet de la colline M ces constructions massives en briques crues, de belles dimensions, rehaussées de couleurs, et visibles depuis une grande distance” (Tristant 2008: 134–137) (Fig. 4). (For Giza and Tarkhan see Daressy 1905: 99; Petrie et al. 1913: 13; Grajetzki 2008: 108). As it has been said, the strongly “marked” situation in the landscape of these cemeteries and tombs implies a categorical and qualitative opposition with the panelled mastabas from the 2nd Dynasty onwards.



Fig. 4. The 1st Dynasty cemetery M at Abu Rawash is located on a hill in the edge of the desert (courtesy Yann Tristant).

Chronology (Table 1)

As it is well known, the 1st Dynasty cemetery at Saqqara is founded during the reign of Aha, the second king of that dynasty. After Aha, there is at least one great niched tomb dated for each reign of the dynasty, including the reign or regency of queen Meretneith and excepting the reign of king Semerkhet. The most monumental tombs are by far those dating to the reigns of Djet and Den, which are also those that have more subsidiary tombs associated with them. As for the rest of the cemeteries, the mastaba at Giza is dated to the reign of king Djet by seal impressions with his name (Daressy 1905: 103; Petrie 1907: 5, pl. IIIA), and those at Abu Rawash are dated to the reign of king Den for the same reason (Montet 1946; Tristant 2008: 134). Mastaba XVII at Abu Ghurab has been assigned by Radwan “to the middle of the First Dynasty” by pottery typology and the “special form” of a copper bowl (Radwan 2000: 511–512), that is to say, to the reigns of Djet and/or Den. The history of the Tarkhan cemetery is very interesting to our discussion (Grajetzki 2008: 111–112). It was founded during Dynasty 0, and the names of kings Ka and Narmer are well attested in the elite tombs of that period, on sealings or vase inscriptions, as in other cemeteries of Lower Egypt. After the reign of Narmer, the site seems to have been abandoned by the elite. But during the reigns of Djet and Den, at least

	Saqqara	Giza	Tarkhan	Abu Rawash	Abu Ghorab
NARMER					
AHA	S3357				
DJER	S3471 S2185 (S3507)				
DJET & MERETNEITH	S3504 S3503	Tomb V	1060 2038 2050 2055		Tomb XVII
DEN	S3035 S3506 (S3507)			M01 M02 M06 M07 M08 M12	
ANDJIB	S3038 S3111				
SEMERKHET					
QAA	S3505				

Table 1.

four monumental niched mastabas were built on a hill in the south end of the cemetery, separated from all the other tombs. No inscriptions were found in them, but the chronology is assured again by pottery typology and some architectural features, such as the stairway that in one case leads to the burial chamber, being stairs such as those first built under king Den (Grajetzki 2008: 110). After the middle of the 1st Dynasty there are no longer big niched mastabas at Tarkhan nor other kind of monumental tombs, and it seems that the site loses its importance. From all this data one can conclude that Saqqara is the main 1st Dynasty royal cemetery of the Memphite region, and that a far reaching architectural program based on monumental niched mastabas as in Saqqara was specifically carried out in this region by the kings Djjet and Den.

Superstructures and subsidiary tombs

The main feature of the superstructures of the monumental mastabas of these cemeteries is that they are decorated on the outside with the palace façade, a royal symbol also present, in two dimensions, in the *serekh* with the names of the kings. In origin, the *serekh* and the monumental niched buildings are the epigraphic and the architectural manifestations of the same symbol. As for the

Tomb	Measurements	Niches
S3504 (Djet)	49.50 × 20.00	11 × 4
S3035 (Den)	57.30 × 26.00 m	14 × 6
Rest of the tombs at Saqqara	approx. 47 to 35 × 25 to 13 m	
Giza Tomb V	48.18 × 21.10 m	10 × 4
Tarkhan mastaba 2050	35.38 × 15.10 m	10 × 5
Abu Rawash mastaba M07	25.55 × 14.00 m	8 × 4
Abu Ghorab mastaba XVII	17.30 × 08.20	5 × 2

Table 2.

dimensions (Table 2), the biggest Memphite niched tombs are by far the most monumental ones in Saqqara, that is to say, those of the reigns of Djet (S3504) and Den (S3035, the biggest for this reign and of all the 1st Dynasty niched mastabas), as well as the one in Giza. In height, according to Emery (1961: 131) the biggest Saqqara mastabas could reach 7 metres. This and their location made them well visible for some kilometres around. All the superstructures of the biggest tombs were plastered and painted with one or more bright colours, which made the tombs even more visible and spectacular – a bright mark in the landscape. At Saqqara, as it is well known, a very striking feature of the superstructure of some of the great tombs, especially tomb S3504, is a low bench surrounding it on which a series of bulls' heads modelled in clay with real horns is arranged. The bull is one of the most eloquent royal symbols of the Egyptian kingship, especially in this formative age, and the association of the bucranium with the palace façade is well documented in archaic royal iconography, as in a decorated elephant tusk from Hierakonpolis (Quibell 1900: 7, pl. xiv; Cervello-Autuori 2002: 45–46, fig. 7) or a seal impression from Tarkhan (Petrie et al. 1913: 21–22, pl. II.4; Wengrow 2006: 190, fig. 9.7e). It seems highly unlikely that a tomb with such a feature might be the tomb of someone other than the king. In mastaba XVII at Abu Ghorab a reduced version of this feature has been recorded: one bull's head modelled in clay with real horns was arranged on the low bench surrounding the superstructure in the middle of the projection between the first and second southern niches of the east wall. The fact that there is only one head and its precise situation close to the “offering niche” perhaps indicates that, in this case, more than a power symbol we are facing an offering symbol (Radwan 2000: 512, pls. 83–84). Finally, in all the cemeteries concerned the great niched mastabas have, or may have, associated

Main building	Subsidiary tombs
Saqqara S3504 (Djet)	62
Giza Tomb V (Djet)	52
Saqqara S3503 (Meretneith)	22
Saqqara S3507 (Den/Herneith?)	1
Saqqara S3035 (Den)	30
Saqqara S3506 (Den)	10
Abu Rawash M01 (Den)	7
Abu Rawash M07 (Den)	8
Abu Rawash M17 (Den)	9
Tarkhan mastaba 2038 (Djet/Den)	2
Tarkhan mastaba 2050 (Djet/Den)	3
Abu Ghorab tomb XVII (Djet/Den)	1
Saqqara S3111 (Andjib)	1
Saqqara S3505 (Qaa)	1
Saqqara S3500 (Qaa)	4

Table 3.

subsidiary tombs (Table 3; state of the art and references: Vaudou 2008), which seem to be again a royal prerogative. All the great niched tombs built during the reigns of Djet and Den have subsidiary tombs. The mastabas of the reigns of Aha and Djer at Saqqara do not have associated burials and those of the reigns of Andjib and Qaa have only between 1 and 4. This means that this is mainly a feature of the Djet-Den's architectural program.

Ownership and stelae

Another very meaningful feature of the Memphite 1st Dynasty monumental niched mastabas is that all of them are anonymous. No stela recording the name of the owner of a main niched tomb has been recovered, the sole preserved stelae being those of the individuals buried in some subsidiary tombs

(Merka from Saqqara included – see above; for Abu Rawash, see Tristant 2008: 138, 140). Of course, this lack of stelae might be due to the removal of stone from the sites in ancient and modern times or to looting. But this explanation seems unsatisfactory, because the absence of stelae, even a little fragment, is complete and general for all the concerned cemeteries and because there is also no trace of them from the antiquities market. This silence suggests that perhaps stelae never existed and that this inexistence may be a structural feature of these tombs, where the owner seems secondary with respect to the builder, to the landscape “mark” and to the symbol. O’Connor (2005: 226) very meaningfully suggests that we are facing a “rule of non-memorialisation”. However, regarding the Naqada royal tomb there is a general agreement among scholars that it could be the tomb of queen Neithotep, the consort of Narmer and mother of Aha; and mastaba V at Giza has been assigned to the consort of Djer or Djet (Wilkinson 1999: 70, 73–74). In this last tomb, a bracelet of blue glazed pottery with the beads in the form of the royal *serekh* was recovered; it is an imitation of the gold and turquoise bracelet found in the tomb of Djer at Abydos (Petrie 1901: pl. i; 1907: 6, pl. iii). This dramatically evokes the royal sphere. These attributions for the Naqada and Giza tombs agree with the suggestion made by Morris (2007) that the Saqqara mastabas were, at least in part, tombs for queens.

Final remarks

In the conclusion of his paper on the Saqqara mastabas, Hendrickx (2008: 82) writes: “*Si le nom des propriétaires des grands mastabas de Saqqara reste un sujet de discussion, l’attribution de ces tombeaux aux rois de la I^{re} dynastie est exclue.*” Let us disagree with this categorical statement, at least in the way and sense in which it is formulated. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that while king Aha was starting, continuing or finishing the construction of the royal palace at Memphis and the organisation of his court in the new capital of the unified State, an official of this same court, no matter how high his rank, was able to build for himself a monumental, high, aerial and spectacular tomb in the magnificent natural scenario of the Saqqara escarpment dominating the capital’s landscape, and that other officials of the following reigns did the same (see already Hoffman 1984: 286–287). It is hard to imagine too that these mastabas with their walls decorated with the palace façade, the same motif as in the royal *serekh*; with hundreds of bull’s heads protecting them (for ex. S3504), being the bull a royal symbol as Hendrickx himself states (2008: 67); with cult statues (it is highly improbable that the fragments of statues recovered in tomb S3505 do not correspond to a king: Cervelló-Autuori 2002: 44–45, fig. 6); with a complex temple attached to the north of the mastaba (again S3505); or with a stepped structure represented by a pictogram well attested in the royal epigraphy (Stadelmann 2005: 366–367; Cervelló-Autuori 2006; 2011), may not be royal

Tomb	Some features	Reign (King/Queen)
S3357	First niched mastaba built in the Saqqara cemetery and in the Memphite region	Aha
S3471	Traces of the oldest example of a tumulus inside the superstructure, made with sand and gravel faced with brickwork and not-stepped	Djer
S3504	More than 300 bull's heads; 62 subsidiary tombs – the largest number of them at Saqqara	Djet
S3035	The biggest tomb in the Saqqara cemetery; 30 subsidiary tombs	Den
S3038	Large stepped tumulus inside the superstructure	Andjib
S3505	Temple to the north containing statues; subsidiary tomb of the high official Merka	Qaa
S3507	Well preserved example of plane earthen tumulus faced with brickwork inside the superstructure	<i>Herneith?</i>
S3503	22 subsidiary tombs	<i>Meretneith</i>

Table 4.

monuments or monuments due to the royal initiative. I believe that the biggest and most peculiar of the Saqqara tombs can be regarded as the Memphite cenotaphs of kings Aha, Djer, Djet, Den, Andjib and Qaa, respectively (Table 4), and that the rest of the tombs are those of their queens or perhaps of some royal children, although not as high officials but in their royal condition (Stadelmann 2005: 370). The status of this cemetery is then comparable to the east cemetery at Giza, where queens, princes and princesses were buried as members of Khufu's royal family and not as members of the State administration (Morris 2007:187–188).

According to the present evidence, we could propose the following reconstruction of events. Aha, the second king of the 1st Dynasty, inaugurates the royal Memphite cemetery by building the first niched mastaba at Saqqara. He builds also the great “royal tomb” at Naqada, probably for his mother, queen Neithotep. The two tombs obey the same completely new architectural conception, which is very different from that which inspires the Abydos royal tombs. At least at Saqqara, where the tomb is located in a prominent high place, this conception must have been related to an ascending symbolism and an “aerial” funerary ritual. In addition, the same location makes the tomb a dramatic landmark in the territory. King Djer continues Aha's initiative by building two more great niched mastabas at Saqqara and perhaps planning a third that would be completed at the beginning of the reign of Den and would be the burial place of queen Herneith, the consort of Djer, who must have died an old woman (Emery 1958: 73).

But an important change takes place in the middle of the 1st Dynasty. Kings Djed and Den undertake a big and far reaching architectural program aimed at establishing a net of “royal marks” in the Memphite landscape in order to affirm the royal presence and power in this region, which the royal house of Upper Egypt that had unified the country had attained only recently. On the one hand, they build at Saqqara the two biggest and most complex mastabas of this cemetery (with bull’s heads and subsidiary tombs in their highest number), undoubtedly closely related to themselves, and king Den builds (or completes) four other mastabas there, two of them probably related to queens Herneith and Meretneith. On the other hand, they build niched mastabas in cemeteries of new foundation always located in high places, in sites already in use as burial areas, as it is the case with Tarkhan and Abu Rawash, or in new sites, as is the case with Giza and Abu Ghurab. These mastabas may be considered as “replicas” of the great tombs at Saqqara, sometimes being of great dimensions, as in Giza, sometimes of middle dimensions, as in Abu Rawash and Tarkhan, and sometimes of smaller dimensions, as in Abu Ghurab. All these tombs would have belonged to members of the “royal clan”, in the words of Stadelmann (2005: 370), by virtue of their blood and not of their office.

This large scale architectural program may be compared with a similar initiative carried out some centuries later by the last king of the 3rd Dynasty, Huni, and the first king of the 4th, Snofru (Fig. 5). As it is well known, they built seven small stepped pyramids (more or less between 10–16 m in height) along the Nile Valley from Elephantine, in the south, to Seila, on the same latitude as Meidum. Very meaningfully, five of the pyramids were located in some important cities and administrative centres of Upper Egypt (three of them also being the main centres of the Predynastic proto-kingdoms of Upper Egypt): Elephantine, Edfu, Hierakonpolis, Naqada and Abydos, while the other two are located in middle Egypt (Zawiyet el-Mayetin) and some kilometres south of Memphis (Seila), to complete the royal “presence” in the north of Upper Egypt. On these small pyramids, Stephan Seidlmayer (1996: 122, 124) writes: “*There can be no doubt that these pyramids must have marked the locations of an official cult centered around the person of the king. The finds from Seila: stelae with the name of Snofru, fragments of a naos, a royal statue and an offering table, afford tangible proof for this proposition. (...) They would represent a project of mapping the royal cult across the country.*” And Michel Baud (2002: 187) states: “*Miniaturisée, multipliée et dispersée sur le territoire, dépourvue d’installations cultuelles (Seila excepté) et de chambre funéraire, elle [= the pyramid] est clairement implantée pour manifester la présence royale.*” These two interpretations seem contradictory, but they are complementary in fact. They are useful to our purposes because they illustrate well the two defining aspects of the 1st Dynasty Memphite niched mastabas according to our interpretation: their condition of marks of the royal presence in the landscape and of tombs for the

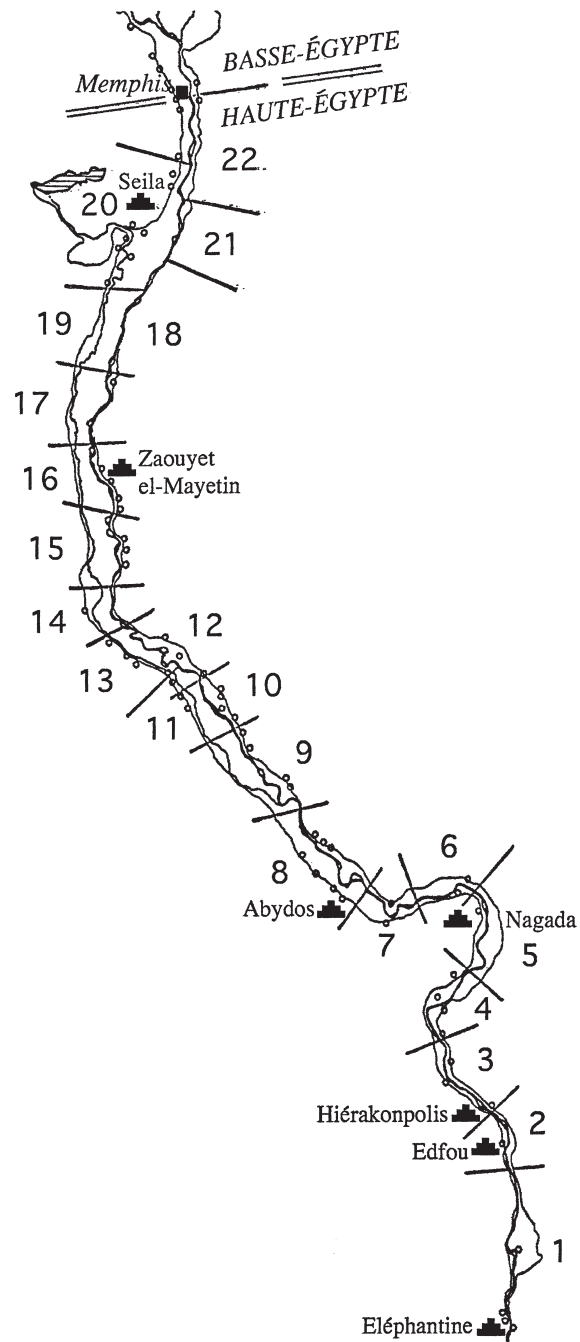


Fig. 5. Map showing the distribution along the Nile Valley of the seven small stepped pyramids built by Huni and Snofru (Baud 2002: 184).

royal cult. David Wengrow (2006: 229–231) resorts to Seidlmayer's concept of "mapping the royal cult" to explain the royal funerary architecture of the 1st Dynasty, but he applies it to the dichotomy between the Abydos and the Saqqara mastabas, which he proposes to read in geographical terms (Upper and Lower Egyptian royal tombs), as Lauer (1956) did. But that comparison is more pertinent to Djet and Den's architectural program for three reasons: a) because in the two cases all the concerned tombs are of the same type (niched mastabas and pyramids), and not of different types as in the case of the Abydos and the Saqqara mastabas; b) because both the niched mastabas and the pyramids are the result of a specific program, very limited in time (only two reigns in the two cases); and c) because both the niched mastabas and the small pyramids are "marks" of royal power in the landscape and monuments with an "aerial" structure and an ascending symbolism, which differ from the hidden and more chthonic nature of the Abydos mastabas.

After Den, no more great niched mastabas were erected in the cemeteries of Abu Rawash, Giza, Abu Ghurab and Tarkhan, but three of these sites, in their condition of places "marked" in the natural and cultural landscape, were reused by the kings of the Old Kingdom for their pyramid complexes or solar temples. Kings Andjib and Qaa built only in Saqqara, where they erected the two most singular monuments of the cemetery.

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