

ROYAL STATUES IN PRIVATE TOMBS: A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED STATUES

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Abstract

While most royal statues and inscriptions have traditionally been in expected sites such as temples or funerary complexes, a notable number have been discovered in unanticipated sites, including private tombs. This phenomenon prompts inquiries into their original provenance, the circumstances of their placement, and the implications of royal presence within private tombs. In the Old Kingdom, the royal presence in private tombs was restricted to the king's name, without any accompanying depictions or sculptures. During the Middle Kingdom, the royal presence became more prominent in tomb decorations, coinciding with the discovery of royal statues in some private tombs. In the New Kingdom, depictions of the king in tomb decorations became more pronounced, further establishing the presence of royal statues in private tombs. This study investigates the occurrence of royal statues found outside their original funerary contexts, particularly within private tombs, with the aim of assessing their historical and civilizational significance and analyzing the nature of royal statues within these tombs across the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms.

Keywords: Royal statues, private tombs, non-royal tombs, Royal Sculpture.

التمائيل الملكية في مقابر الأفراد: دراسة حالة لتمائيل مختارة

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ملخص البحث

على الرغم من أن غالبية التماثيل والنقوش الملكية كانت بصورة تقليدية موجودة في أماكن متوقعة مثل المعابد أو المجمعات الجنائزية، فقد تم اكتشاف عدد ملحوظ منها في مواقع غير متوقعة، بما في ذلك مقابر الأفراد. ويثير هذا الاكتشاف تساؤلات حول أصلها الأصلي، وظروف وضعها، ودلالات الحضور الملكي داخل مقابر الأفراد. في عصر الدولة القديمة، اقتصر الحضور الملكي في مقابر الأفراد على اسم الملك فقط، دون أي تصوير أو تماثيل مصاحبة. أما في عصر الدولة الوسطى، فقد أصبح الحضور الملكي أكثر وضوحًا في زخارف مقابر الأفراد، بالتزامن مع اكتشاف بعض التماثيل الملكية داخلها. وفي الدولة الحديثة، أصبح تصوير الملك في زخارف المقابر أكثر بروزًا، مما عزز وجود التماثيل الملكية في مقابر الأفراد.

تتناول هذه الدراسة ظاهرة التماثيل الملكية المكتشفة خارج سياقاتها الجنائزية الأصلية، وبخاصة داخل مقابر الأفراد، بهدف تقييم أهميتها التاريخية والحضارية وتحليل طبيعة التماثيل الملكية داخل هذه المقابر عبر عصور الدولة القديمة والوسطى والحديثة.

الكلمات الرئيسية: التماثيل الملكية، مقابر الأفراد، المقابر غير الملكية، النحت الملكي

0. Introduction

In ancient Egypt, royal presence in private tombs is depicted in three distinct ways: firstly, through the king's name, a practice evident in Old Kingdom tombs¹; secondly, via pictorial scenes, which became prevalent during the Middle Kingdom² due to societal shifts after the First Intermediate Period, then continued till the New Kingdom³; and thirdly, through sculptural depictions of the king, which is the primary focus of this study.

Some studies have examined royal depictions in private tombs, notably Ahmed Ebied's study (2016); the present study aims to fill the research gap concerning sculptural representations of the king in private tombs.

Despite the importance of the study's subject, it faces several challenges. The study of royal statues differs fundamentally from that of royal depictions in tombs, even though both address the royal presence in private tombs. Royal depictions form an integral part of the tomb's original design, whereas royal statues may either be part of the initial layout or added at a later stage. Moreover, many studies have examined royal statues from an artistic perspective, focusing on their stylistic schools across different periods, while research on their findspots remains limited. Therefore, the present study concentrates on royal statues in terms of their locations, particularly those discovered outside temples or royal mortuary complexes, that is, in private tombs.

Building on this, the study is titled *"Royal Statues in Private Tombs: A Case Study of Selected Statues"*, aiming to examine royal statues discovered in private tombs across different periods, focusing on their discovery and context, description, and comment. The study seeks to determine whether a statue was part of the tomb's original design or added at a later stage, as well as to explore the reasons for the presence of the royal statue within the tomb. This is accomplished by examining the spatial, temporal, and functional relationship between the tomb owner and the king represented by the statue.

1. Group Statue of Djoser and his family, the tomb of Userefre, Saqqara.

1.1. Discovery and Context

During recent excavations at the Saqqara archaeological site, a joint Egyptian mission uncovered an exceptional collection of royal statues inside the tomb of Prince Userefre. For the first time, archaeologists discovered statues depicting King Djoser, his wife, and their ten daughters in a context that is not directly associated with his well-known mortuary complex (*Fig. 1*). Preliminary reports suggest that these statues

¹ Cherpion, N. (1989), pl.4, 13, 17, 24, 32; Dodson, A., Ikram, S. (2008), 121 (fig. 112).

² Ebied, A. (2016), 22 (fig.1).

³ Ebied, A. (2016), 21-54.

were originally placed in a chamber adjacent to Djoser's Step Pyramid and were later moved to the tomb of Prince Userefre during the Late Period⁴.



(Fig. 1.) The recent findings were uncovered at the Saqqara archaeological site in the Giza Governorate of Egypt. (Credit: Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Egypt)

1.2. Description (Fig. 1.)

However, based on the published images via the different reports and media images by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, it is likely that the discovery pertains to a group statue of Djoser and his family. All the figures in the group are headless, except for a central figure whose head remains intact. This figure is not of Djoser himself and has not been identified. Djoser is seated to the left of this recognizable figure. The statue is considered one of the largest, if not the largest, group statues in ancient Egyptian art. It includes Djoser, his wife⁵, and his ten daughters⁶ in a single composition. All the women in the statue wear tightly fitted robes, their right hands placed over their lefts, resting on their lap, while Djoser is depicted wearing a kilt. The statue is carved from red granite. The way of cutting the heads indicates that the heads of Djoser and the women were deliberately destroyed.

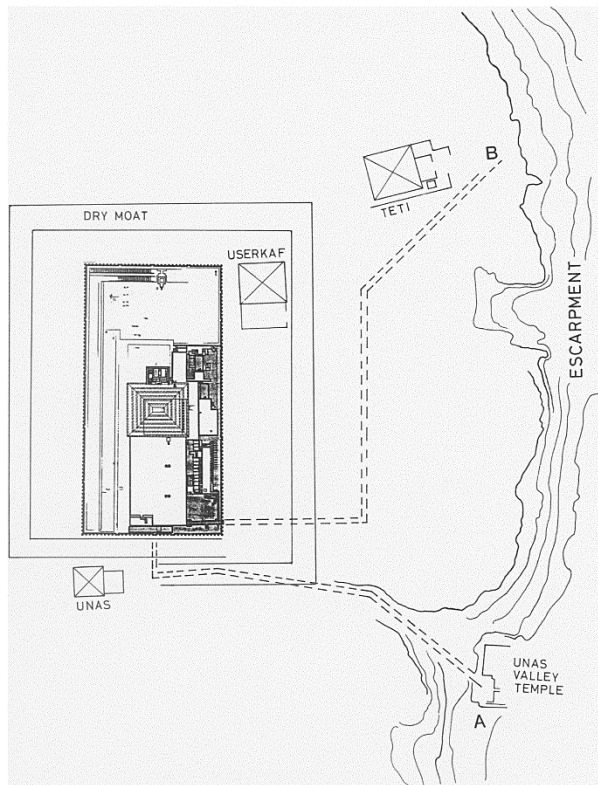
⁴ <https://egy monuments.gov.eg/en/news/discovery-of-the-tomb-of-prince-userefre-son-of-king-userkaf>. Last access: 22/5/2025

⁵ More likely Hetephernebti. Dodson, A., & Hilton, D. (2004), 48.

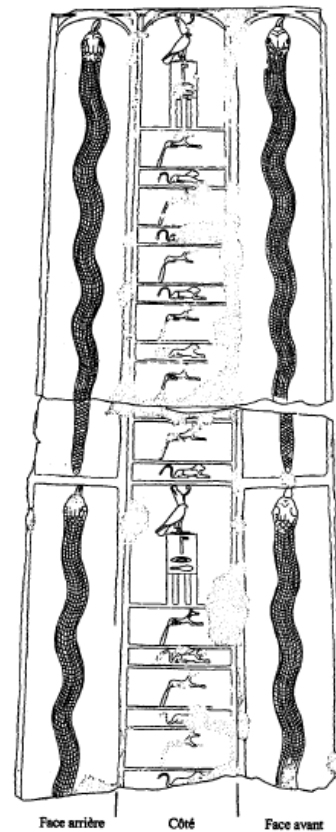
⁶ This statue corrects the information derived from a fragment of relief from Heliopolis (Turin 2671/21), which depicts the lower part of a seated statue of King Djoser, accompanied by his wife Hetephernebti and his two daughters, Inetkaes and another whose name has not been preserved. Dodson, A., & Hilton, D. (2004), 48.

1.3. Comment

The statues were discovered near the entrance to King Djoser's ceremonial way. They were possibly moved from a side chamber of his funerary complex to their current location (*Fig. 2.*). However, their proximity to the entrance of Djoser's ceremonial way suggests that they were moved from a nearby location. This is further supported by the discovery of the ceremonial gate (*Fig. 3.*), which was also reused in the pyramid complex of Teti, situated along Djoser's ceremonial way⁷.



(*Fig. 2.*) Suggested location for Djoser's ceremonial way. Hawass, Z. (1994), fig.4



(*Fig. 3.*) The gate of Djoser's ceremonial way. Hawass, Z. (1994), fig.3.

This indicates that the reuse of Djoser-related artifacts in later constructions was not unprecedented. The ceremonial gateway bearing Djoser's name was reused in Teti's funerary complex⁸, which was built on a spot that was considered a sacred space associated with Djoser. Djoser's ceremonial way extended beyond Teti's complex and reached the First Dynasty tombs located to the northeast of Djoser's funerary complex⁹. This way emphasized Djoser's connection with Egypt's earliest kings, thereby reinforcing his legitimacy to rule. Furthermore, the ancient capital, *Inb-ḥd*, was situated to the northeast of Djoser's pyramid complex¹⁰.

⁷ Hawass, Z. (1994), 45-56.

⁸ Hawass, Z. (1994), 45-56.

⁹ Tavares, A. (1999), 854–859

¹⁰ Hawass, Z. (1994), 56.

Since Djoser's ceremonial way passed by, or possibly through, the tomb of Userefre, it is possible that the statues were originally part of Djoser's ceremonial way. As a royal prince¹¹, Userefre was granted the privilege of being buried in the area of royal necropolis at Saqqara. In his tomb, a royal cartouche of Neferirkare was found¹², along with statues of Djoser placed within his burial precinct.

Assuming that Djoser's statues were moved to this tomb during the Later Periods, despite bearing his name, the statues could have been produced later due to Djoser's enduring religious significance in the subsequent periods. The dedication of statues to King Djoser appears to have originated in the Middle Kingdom, when King Senusret II dedicated a black granite statue of Djoser (*Fig. 4.*), of which only the lower part survives, Height 30.5 cm, in Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum, 7702¹³.



(*Fig. 4.*) Lower part of seated statue of Djoser (Netjerikhet). Berlin, Ägyptisches Museum, 7702. Evers, H. G. (1929), fig.19.

It is worth noting that the famous statues of Djoser were typically carved from limestone, such as his famous statue in Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 49158¹⁴; and the other statue base in the same museum JE 49889 A, B¹⁵. In contrast, the statue dedicated to him by Senusret II was made of black granite¹⁶, while the statue discovered in Userefre's tomb was carved from pink granite. Moreover, all known statues of Djoser are

¹¹ The report published by the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities states that Userefre was the son of King Userkaf. However, upon examining the inscriptions published from the tomb, it became clear that Userefre bore the title *s3 nswt*, which, during the Fifth Dynasty, was held by many individuals who were not the king's biological sons but were instead considered "adopted sons" of the king. Lee-Joe, S. (2019), 4. Therefore, I believe that Userefre was not a royal prince, but rather a member of the upper class during the Fifth Dynasty, particularly in the reign of King Neferirkare.

¹² It is worth noting that the presence of the king in private tombs of the Old Kingdom is indicated only by his name, not through depiction or sculpture. A good example of this is the tomb of Mereruka at Saqqara. Dodson, A., Ikram, S. (2008), 121 (fig. 112).

¹³ Vandier, J. (1958), 184.

¹⁴ Egyptian Museum, Cairo, JE 49158.

¹⁵ Egyptian Museum, Cairo, JE 49889 A, B.

¹⁶ Malek, J., Magee, D., & Miles, E. (2002), 800-204-900.

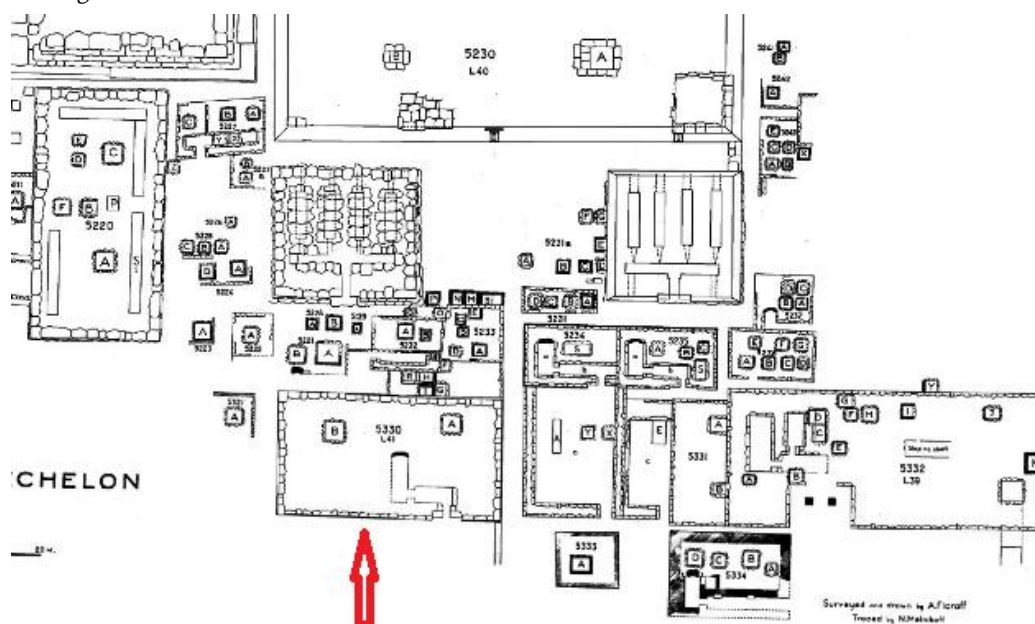
individual representations, whereas the statue of Djoser under study is one of the largest group statues in ancient Egyptian art—perhaps the largest ever created.

The discovery of a black granite statue inside the tomb, dated to the Late Period—specifically the 26th Dynasty¹⁷—may indicate that the statue of Djoser was either transferred to the tomb during this period or perhaps even sculpted at that period. The period of 26th dynasty is known for its revivalism and reuse of Old Kingdom artifacts¹⁸, particularly those associated with great kings like Djoser and Khufu. For example, an ivory statue of Khufu was made during the 26th Dynasty¹⁹ to emulate the glory of past rulers, whose reigns were regarded as a golden age worthy of imitation and reverence.

2. Alabaster Head of Khafre, Boston Museum of Fine Arts (MFA 21.351)

2.1. Discovery and Context

The statue's head was discovered among the debris at the northeast corner of the tomb of Ihy, *Mastaba* G 5330, in Giza. This mastaba is located in the west field (*Fig. 5.*) and is dated to the sixth dynasty. The head was found alongside other statue fragments bearing the cartouche of Khafre²⁰. This suggests the presence of a sculptor's workshop in the area, reinforcing the idea that the statues' production took place near the royal funerary complexes. The excavation was conducted in 1914 by the Harvard University–Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition, and as part of the division of finds by the Egyptian government, the artifact was later assigned to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.



(*Fig. 5.*) Plan of the “Cemetery en Echelon”: cemetery G 5000, showing *Mastaba* G 5330.

<http://giza.fas.harvard.edu/mapsandplans/5652/full/> Last Access: 25/10/2025.

¹⁷ <https://egymonuments.gov.eg/en/news/discovery-of-the-tomb-of-prince-userefre-son-of-king-userkaf>. Last Access: 25/10/2025.

¹⁸ Hawass, Z. (1985), 379–394.

¹⁹ Egyptian Museum, Cairo, JE 36143: Hawass, Z. (1985), 379–394.

²⁰ PM III¹, 24; Ziegler, C. (1999), 255.

2.2. Description (Fig. 6.)

The head is made of travertine, also known as Egyptian alabaster, a translucent and highly prized stone in ancient Egyptian sculpture. Its dimensions are 20.4 cm in height²¹, 12.5 cm in width, and 10 cm in diameter.



(Fig. 6.) Alabaster Head of Khafre, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, (MFA 21.351).

<https://collections.mfa.org/objects/143606>. Last Access: 25/10/2025.

The alabaster head exhibits several signs of damage, including a chipped nose, a broken-off beard, and missing ears, with only the lobe of the right ear remaining²². The top of the head is also broken, though a surviving fragment suggests that it was once part of a larger statue²³. The facial features reflect the idealized realism characteristic of Old Kingdom royal portraiture, as evidenced by the smoothly modeled eyelids, the well-defined cheekbones, and a strong, symmetrical face. The presence of unfinished areas, such as the missing uraeus and the rough lower portion, indicates that the statue may have been either incomplete or part of an ongoing sculptural process.

2.3. Comment

This statue has been attributed to Khafre based on the presence of nearby fragments bearing the king's cartouches. Alabaster was a common material during the reigns of Khafre²⁴ and Menkaure, and the evident similarity between the statue's facial features and those known from statues of Khafre like Egyptian Museum, Cairo CG 14²⁵. It provides valuable insight into sculptural workshops and artistic techniques of the Old Kingdom regarding the production of royal statues. The use of alabaster, instead of the more commonly seen diorite in Khafre's representations, may suggest a different purpose or function for this statue.

²¹ Ziegler, C. (1999), 255 (No. 58) mentions that the height of the head is 20.5 cm.

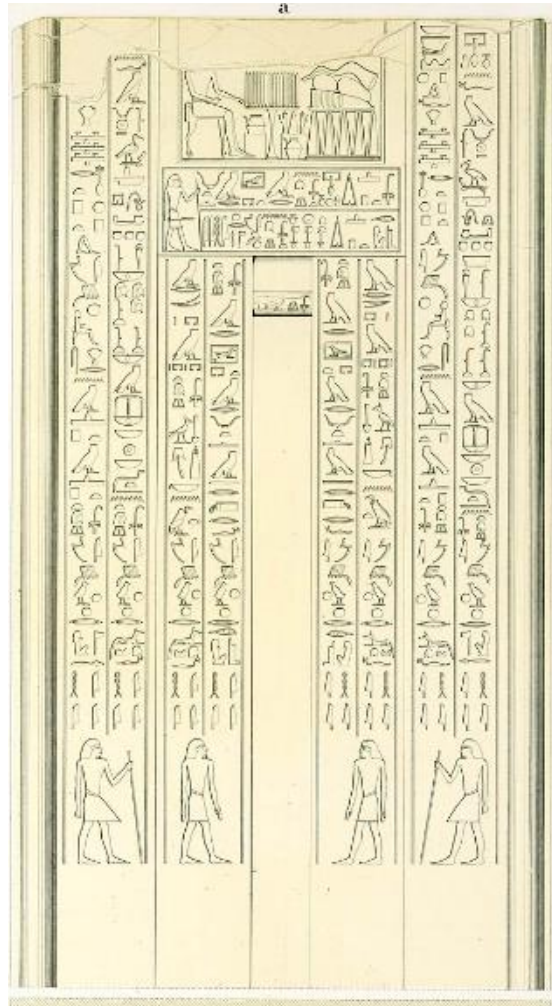
²² Ziegler, C. (1999), 255.

²³ <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/143606>. Last Access: 25/10/2025.

²⁴ For example, Alabaster Statue of Khafre, probably from Memphis, now in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, CG 41.

²⁵ Egyptian Museum, Cairo, CG 14; Ziegler, C. (1999), 255.

Ihy was a high-ranking official of the Sixth Dynasty. The titles of Ihy inscribed on the false door of his tomb (Fig. 7.), identifying him as *hrj-tp nswt* "royal chamberlain"²⁶, *jmj-r wpwt m t3 r dr.f* "overseer of commissions in the entire land"²⁷, *imi-r hwt-wrt* "overseer of the great court/hall of justice"²⁸, and *imi-r gs-pr m prwy* "overseer of the troop houses in the two houses/domains (i.e. Upper and Lower Egypt)"²⁹ indicate his close connection to the royal authority.



(Fig. 7.) the false door of the tomb of Ihy. LD II 88.

The royal statue head belongs to Khafre of the Fourth Dynasty, while the tomb dates to the Sixth Dynasty and is located near the Pyramid of Khufu³⁰. Therefore, there is no historical connection between the tomb

²⁶ Wb 3, 396.2; Jones, D. (2000), no. 2874.

²⁷ Wb 1, 303.14; Jones, D. (2000), no. 416.

²⁸ Jones, D. (2000), no.628. For Hwt-wrt: Wb 3, 4.7-10.

²⁹ Jones, D. (2000), no. 972; Wb 5, 198.2-16 mentions that *gs-pr* means "troop houses of workers" or "work-center".

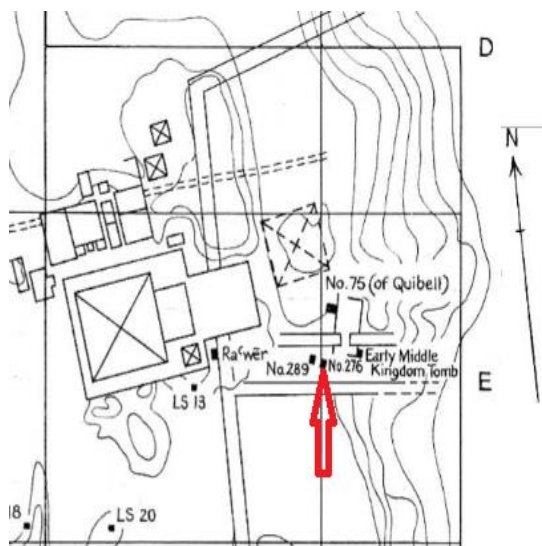
³⁰ The same phenomenon evident in the tomb of Idu (G7102), which was discovered by the joint Harvard University–Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Expedition on January 10, 1925. During the clearance of the shafts east of the tomb of Qar, the burial chamber of Idu and his stone sarcophagus were uncovered. While removing the debris above the entrance, the remains of a life-sized royal statue's head—possibly of Khufu?—were found. It was made of alabaster and depicts the protective

and the royal statue head. Spatially, it is possible that the tomb was built on the site of a workshop to produce royal equipment later.

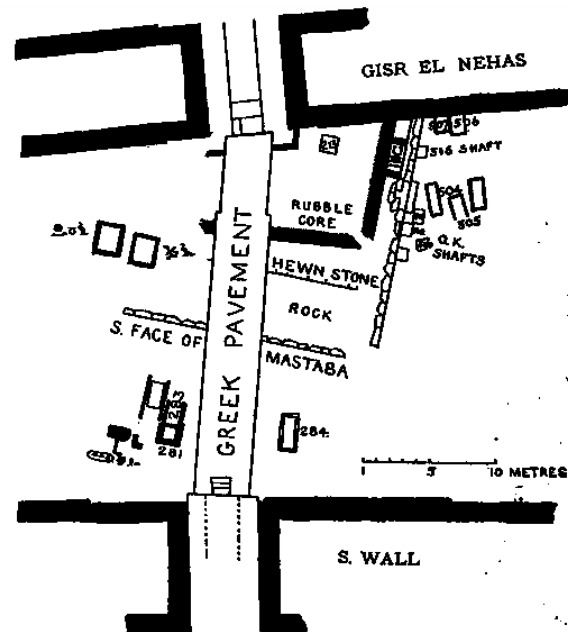
3. Red Granite Statue of a King, Egyptian Museum, Cairo (JE 39103)

3.1. Discovery and Context

The statue was discovered by James Edward Quibell³¹ during his excavations at Saqqara in 1906–1907 (Fig. 8a-b.). It was found in shaft No. 276 of  T3³², which had intrusively cut through the fill of a large Old Kingdom mastaba³³. This shaft was situated beneath the massive Ptolemaic walls in the eastern area of Teti's pyramid at Saqqara³⁴. While Quibell's excavation provided key insights³⁵, additional sources, such as the *Description sommaire des principaux monuments - Musée du Caire*, suggest that the statue may have originally come from Teti's pyramid temple³⁶. The shaft itself is dated to the Early Middle Kingdom, and its owner was likely an overseer of expeditions and a regulator of a phyle, an important administrative unit of the time³⁷.



(Fig. 8a.) Location of the Shaft no. 276 east of Teti pyramid, Saqqara. PM III 2¹, Map. LI



(Fig. 8b.) Plan of the area between the great walls. Quibell, J. E., & Lacau, P. (1908), 20.

falcon embracing the king from behind in a manner reminiscent of the famous statue of Khafre housed in the Egyptian Museum. Simpson, W. K. (1976), 19, fig. 43.

³¹ Quibell, J. E., & Lacau, P. (1908), 19, 77.

³² Quibell, J. E., & Lacau, P. (1908), 19, 77.

³³ Smith, W. S. (1949), 82.

³⁴ Smith, W. S. (1949), 82.

³⁵ Quibell, J. E., & Lacau, P. (1908), 19, 77.

³⁶ Musée Égyptien. (1954), No. 6185.

³⁷ Quibell, J. E., & Lacau, P. (1908), 19; PM III 2¹, 562.

3.2. Description of the Statue (Fig. 9.)

The preserved portion of the statue stands at a height of 74 cm³⁸, representing approximately three-quarters of life size³⁹. However, the lower section below the knees is missing⁴⁰.

The statue portrays the king in a striding pose, with his left leg stepping forward. His arms are positioned along his sides, with fists clenched. The figure is depicted wearing a royal kilt, *shendyt* and the white crown of Upper Egypt. Additionally, the statue is supported by a back pillar⁴¹.

Despite being described as coarse, the face is delicately modeled, featuring full cheeks, a large nose, and a broad mouth. The eyes and eyebrows are meticulously crafted in relief, while a well-defined swelling throat line further enhances the facial details⁴². Notably, the statue lacks a beard, adding to its distinct appearance⁴³.



(Fig. 9.) Granite statue of a king, Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 39103.

Quibell, J. E., & Lacau, P. (1908), 77; Weigall, A. E. P. Brome. (1924), 77

3.3. Comment

The absence of a royal cartouche or inscription makes it difficult to date the statue, prompting researchers to explore alternative methods for determining its chronological placement. No inscriptions were found on the statue's back pillar⁴⁴ or base. However, based on stylistic analysis and contextual evidence, the statue is dated to the First Intermediate Period⁴⁵. Additionally, the painted burial chamber of shaft 276 is

³⁸ Egyptian Museum, Cairo, JE 39103. Height from break at right knee to top of crown, 73 cm., height from break at back pillar to top of crown, 74 cm. The measurements are given by Bernhard V. Bothmer. Steindorff, G. (1951), 15.

³⁹ Quibell, J. E., & Lacau, P. (1908), 77; Weigall, A. E. P. Brome. (1924), 77.

⁴⁰ Weigall, A. E. P. Brome. (1924), 77; Smith, W. S. (1949), 82.

⁴¹ Smith, W. S. (1949), 82.

⁴² Steindorff, G. (1951), 16.

⁴³ Smith, W. S. (1949), 82.

⁴⁴ Quibell, J. E., & Lacau, P. (1908), 77.

⁴⁵ Quibell, J. E., & Lacau, P. (1908), 77.

stylistically aligned with either the First Intermediate Period or the early Middle Kingdom⁴⁶. Regarding its attribution to Teti⁴⁷, James Quibell speculated that the statue might represent Merykara, a king from the First Intermediate Period, but this hypothesis lacks definitive evidence⁴⁸. Later, William Smith attributed the statue to Teti based on its proximity to Teti's funerary temple, suggesting a contextual link⁴⁹. Additionally, the statue's craftsmanship surpasses the typical quality of works from the First Intermediate Period⁵⁰. Through comparative analysis, Smith noted similarities between the facial features of this statue and those found on the triads of Menkaure. Additionally, Steindorff observed that while the artist may have attempted to make a portrait of the king, it is difficult to distinguish the characteristic elements of the period's general style from those that depict the king's individual characteristics⁵¹.

4. Two Wooden Statues (Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 44951 & Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA 14.3.17)

4.1. Discovery and Context

Discovered in 1914 by A. Lythgoe for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, an archaeological assemblage from the 12th Dynasty was found near the pyramid of Senwosret I at Lisht⁵². This includes the mastaba of the official Imhotep, who held high-ranking titles *H3ty-ꜥ*, *iry-pꜥt*, and *imy-r sd3wt*. Excavations revealed four large model boats buried in floor niches within the complex. Recent re-excavation has redated the site and artifacts, including two royal statuettes (JE 44951 and MMA 14.3.17), to the reign of Amenemhat II based on diagnostic pottery⁵³. The statuettes were concealed within a chamber built into the southern wall of a mudbrick enclosure surrounding the mastaba, likely after being used in a dramatic funerary ceremony.

4.2. Description of the statues (Figs. 10-11)

Figures 10 and 11 exhibit similar dimensions, with slight variations in height. Figure 10 measures 56 cm in height⁵⁴, 11 cm in width, and 26 cm in depth⁵⁵, while Figure 11 stands at 57.6 cm in height, maintaining the same width and depth⁵⁶.

⁴⁶ Smith, W. S. (1949), 82.

⁴⁷ Musée Égyptien. (1954), No.6185 ; PM III 2¹, 562.

⁴⁸ Quibell, J. E., & Lacau, P. (1908), 19, 77.

⁴⁹ Cf : Musée Égyptien. (1954), No.6185.

⁵⁰ Smith, W. S. (1949), 82

⁵¹ Steindorff, G. (1951), 16.

⁵² PM IV, 84.

⁵³ Tooley, Angela M. J. (1989), 53.

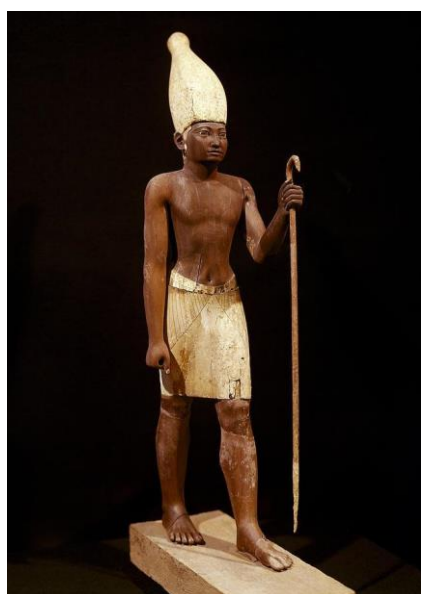
⁵⁴ Egyptian Museum, Cairo, JE 44951.

⁵⁵ <https://egypt-museum.com/statue-of-senusret-i/>. last access: 27/1/2025.

⁵⁶ <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/543864>. last access: 27/1/2025.

Each statue consists of several pieces joined together with wooden pins. Their bodies are muscular and their feet, attached to a rectangular base, are bare. The exposed skin is painted a dark reddish-brown. The sculptures are in excellent condition, and they are almost completely intact.

The figures are wearing the white *Hedjet* crown of Upper Egypt (Fig. 10.) and the red *Deshert* crown of Lower Egypt (Fig. 11.) and holds in their left hand the *Heka*, crook-shaped scepter of the ruler, while their right hand might have held the *Sekhem* scepter, symbol of authority. Their kilts are plastered and painted white. Striding statues left legs forward are fashioned out cedar wood. The figures are uninscribed. The features of the faces are regular, with the eyes painted with black irises and white sclera. The kings wear a knee-length 'shendyt' kilt, painted white, with the pleated side flaps, the pleats indicated in red pigment.



(Fig. 10.) Wooden Statue of a king, Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 44951. <https://egypt-museum.com/statue-of-senusret-i/>. last access: 27/1/2025



(Fig. 11.) Wooden Statue of a king, Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA 14.3.17. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/543864>. last access: 27/1/2025

4.3. Comment

The *Journal d'Entrée* attributes the wooden statue (Fig. 10.) to Senwosret I⁵⁷, while the *MMA data-base* mentions that the other wooden statue (Fig. 11.) wears the red crown of Lower Egypt and the face appears to reflect the features of the reigning king, most probably Amenemhat II or Senwosret II⁵⁸. As Dorothea Arnold explained in detail, these statuettes differ considerably in terms of style from representations of Senwosret I and are much closer to royal images of the time after that pharaoh. She demonstrated that the statuettes date to the reign of Amenemhat II according well with the stylistic features⁵⁹.

⁵⁷ Egyptian Museum, Cairo, JE 44951

⁵⁸ <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/543864>. last access: 27/1/2025

⁵⁹ Arnold, D. (2008), 34.

The two wooden statues were found in the tomb of the official Imhotep, located near the pyramid of Senusret I⁶⁰, while the evidence indicates that the statues date to the reign of Amenemhat II, who built his pyramid in Dahshur about ten miles north of Lisht⁶¹. The official Imhotep held the following titles⁶²:

1. <i>iry-p^ct</i>	member of the pat (masc.) (rank title)
This title indicates a high position in the administrative hierarchy ⁶³ .	
2. <i>h3ty-^c</i>	Governor
This title most often appears between the ranking titles <i>iry-p^ct</i> and royal sealer (<i>htmty-bity</i>) and was therefore a sign of an extremely high status among officials in Ancient Egypt ⁶⁴ .	
3. <i>htmty-bity</i>	Seal-bearer of the <i>bjty</i> -king
During the second half of the Twelfth Dynasty, the title of royal sealer was revived as the main ranking title for the highest officials, beneath the titles of <i>iry-p^ct</i> and <i>h^cty-^c</i> , which were thereafter reserved for the few most prominent officials in the court ⁶⁵ , and above the title of <i>smr-w^cty</i> ⁶⁶ .	
4. <i>smr-w^cty</i>	sole (king's) friend
a court title: 'sole companion' of the king ⁶⁷ .	
5. <i>hry-hbt hry-tp</i>	Chief lector-priest
The title "Bearer of the Ritual Book" or "lector Priest" was given to the priest whose primary duty was the recitation of spells and prayers during religious rituals in temples and funerary practices. These priests were known for their role in preserving and maintaining religious texts and sacred manuscripts within the temples. The ancient Egyptians believed that these priests possessed extraordinary magical powers. This title is considered one of the earliest religious titles in ancient Egypt, with attestations dating back to the First Dynasty ⁶⁸ . Imhotep's high religious title as Chief Lector Priest indicates an important funerary role toward the king.	
6. <i>sm</i>	<i>Sem</i> -priest
The <i>sem</i> -priest position was associated with the cults of Abydos, Heliopolis, and Memphis, as well as the worship of various gods. The <i>sem</i> -priest duties included personally performing the important Opening of the Mouth ritual on the god's image, alongside other activities related to clothing and adorning the	

⁶⁰ Arnold, D. (2008), 33.

⁶¹ Hamilton, K. (2019), 2.

⁶² Arnold, D. (2008), 33-34; <https://pnm.uni-mainz.de/5/inscription/16204#54149>. Last Access: 30/6/2025.

⁶³ Grajetzki, W. (2009), 5.

⁶⁴ Quirke, S. (2004), 111-112.

⁶⁵ Grajetzki, W. (2013), 224; Shirley, J. J. (2013), 540.

⁶⁶ Willems, H. (2013), 372.

⁶⁷ Wb 1, 278.11-12; 4, 138.11; Jones, D. (2000), no. 3268

⁶⁸ Ritner, R. K. (1993).220–222.

deity, and duties connected to the king's Sed-festivals. Such responsibilities and positions were held by the top elite nobles, including royal princes ⁶⁹ .	
7. <i>sm3-ḥr</i>	Stolist of Horus
This title was common in the Old Kingdom ⁷⁰ , and its importance is demonstrated by the fact that Djefaihapi, the governor of the Assiut province, held this title in the period of Senusret I ⁷¹ .	
8. <i>sm3-mnw</i>	Stolist of Min
This title was common in the Old Kingdom, carried by the priest who clothes the god Min ⁷² .	
9. <i>[šs n] mdw-nṯr</i>	[scribe] of god's words
This title referred to Imhotep as a scribe of hieroglyphs ⁷³ , known in ancient Egyptian as <i>mdw-nṯr</i> .	
10. <i>sš n mḏ3t nṯr</i>	Scribe of god's book
This title was common in the Old Kingdom ⁷⁴ , used on a small scale in subsequent periods.	
11. <i>ḥry sš3t n ///</i>	Master of secrets of (?)..
The text after the preposition "n" is damaged, making it difficult to determine whether the title's associated function was religious or administrative. According to the presence of title <i>ḥrp šndyt nbt</i> , it may be <i>ḥry sš3t n {pr dw3t}</i> or <i>ḥry sš3t n {sw m swt.f nbt}</i> ⁷⁵ .	
12. <i>mḥ-ib nswt [ḥnt] t3wy</i>	King's confident [at the fore of] the two lands
This title was mentioned by Arnold ⁷⁶ , but the text in the Mainz project database doesn't include it ⁷⁷ . This title indicates his close relationship with royal authority.	
13. <i>imy-r3 3ḥwt</i>	Overseer of fields
This title represents the highest career progression for a "scribe of the fields" (<i>sš 3ḥwt</i>). It first appeared in the Old Kingdom and continued into later periods, playing a prominent role in resolving disputes over agricultural lands. This was done by surveying and reviewing their boundaries and ensuring that boundaries weren't manipulated. Many provincial governors held this title, which underscores its importance. It was also associated with the title <i>ḥry wḏb</i> and the title of seal bearer ⁷⁸ .	
14. <i>ḥry-wḏb m3ʕ</i>	true master of distribution

⁶⁹ Enany, A. (2022), 424- 425.

⁷⁰ Jones, D. (2000), no. 3255.

⁷¹ Urk. VII, 62-64

⁷² Jones, D. (2000), no. 3252.

⁷³ Wb 2, 181.2.

⁷⁴ Wb 2, 188.3: Jones, D. (2000), no. 3132.

⁷⁵ Abdelwahab, W. W. (2010), 1-18.

⁷⁶ Arnold, D. (2008), 34.

⁷⁷ <https://pnm.uni-mainz.de/5/inscription/16204#54149>. Last Access: 30/6/2025.

⁷⁸ Mohamed, R. F. E. (2016), 116-119.

the word of *m3c* ensure that the title is functional not honorary. This title refers to the handling and distribution of foodstuffs or agricultural products. This includes items offered as offerings to gods, temples, and the deceased, as well as those related to the royal palace and the provisions for the royal table⁷⁹.

15. *Imy-r3 k3t nbw*

Overseer of all works

This title was common in Old Kingdom and used on a small scale in subsequent periods⁸⁰. It indicates a high-ranking official who was responsible for managing the construction and maintenance of royal projects.

16. *hrp šndyt nbt*

Controller of every kilt

This title is characteristic of high ranks, and its holder is responsible for all of the king's clothing, and thus responsible for this part of his daily life. It may also be a temporary title specific to serving the king during the Sed festival coronation ceremonies⁸¹.

17. *wr m3w*

greatest of seers (a priest)⁸²

This priestly title mentioned in the Mainz project database⁸³, but was not mentioned by Arnold⁸⁴.

According to Arnold, Imhotep held numerous and important offices, most of which were religious. His titles suggest that Imhotep had risen from a priestly background to the high secular rank of a "Royal Sealer"⁸⁵. Imhotep's seventeen titles can be divided into three categories: honorary, administrative, and religious. Many of these titles indicate a close relationship with the king during his lifetime and a role concerning the king after his death. These titles explain why his tomb is located near the royal funerary complex, and even the presence of royal statues in his tomb. As for the function of these royal statues inside Imhotep's tomb, the divine kilt of royal statues suggests that the statuette was not merely a representation of the living ruler. Together with its counterpart wearing the white crown of Upper Egypt, now in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, the figure was discovered standing behind a shrine that contained an object sacred to the god Anubis, the so-called *Imiut* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA 14.3.18⁸⁶ and .19), and the two figures could be understood to have functioned as guardians of the *Imiut*⁸⁷.

⁷⁹ Mohamed, R. F. E. (2016), 122.

⁸⁰ Wb 5, 101.7; Jones, D. (2000), no. 945.

⁸¹ Abdelwahab, W. W. (2010), 18.

⁸² Wb 1, 329.7-10; Jones, D. (2000), no.1428; <https://pnm.uni-mainz.de/5/inscription/16204#54149>. Last Access: 30/6/2025.

⁸³ <https://pnm.uni-mainz.de/5/inscription/16204#54149>. Last Access: 30/6/2025.

⁸⁴ Arnold, D. (2008), 33 – 34.

⁸⁵ Arnold, D. (2008), 33.

⁸⁶ <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/545546>. last access: 27/1/2025

⁸⁷ <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/543864>. last access: 27/1/2025

Accordingly, the presence of the royal statues inside Imhotep's tomb can be attributed to his close relationship with the royal authority, as indicated by his titles. Moreover, the statues' location, alongside a shrine containing a sacred object of the god Anubis known as the *Imiut*, suggests that their function was to serve as guardians of this sacred symbol.

5. A Shelly limestone head of Amenemhat III (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, E.2.1946)

5.1. Discovery and Context

The head was found in rather unusual circumstances by Lord Grenfell, who was commander-in-chief of the British garrison in Egypt between 1882 and 1892⁸⁸. Grenfell unearthed this fragment of a royal statue in the unlikely context of a private tomb. It is thought that it might have been accidentally deposited there when the tomb was robbed, either in antiquity or in modern times, and was bequeathed to the museum by Oscar Charles Raphael in 1946⁸⁹.

5.2. Description (Fig. 12)

The head measures approximately 12 cm in height, 14.3 cm in width, and 9.7 cm in depth. Despite its modest size, the sculpture captures a striking presence through its detailed craftsmanship and expressive features⁹⁰.

This small but forceful head is a fragment of a statue representing one of the most important monarchs of Egypt's Twelfth Dynasty.

Amenemhat III here wears the royal *nemes* headdress, made of striped linen and bound tightly round his head, with uraeus on his brow.

Though small, the sculpture manages to convey the great power of the individual represented. The king's eyes look down as though from an elevated position.

However, the sculptor here also brilliantly suggests the fleshly qualities of Amenemhat. His ears are large and protruding, lines run from his nose to the corners of his mouth, the lips are full and prominent, and there is a sense of the bone structure beneath the skin.

But while the modern viewer might imagine that the statue is a faithful reproduction of the king's actual features, this is unlikely. Egyptian portraiture was concerned more with presenting the idea of a king, than with any facts about his physical appearance. Facial lines, for instance, might suggest wisdom through age. Rolls of fat on statues of private individuals might indicate wealth. This portrait of the king is psychological rather than realistic.

⁸⁸ Metropolitan Museum data base gives different dates "....Lord Grenfell, who is said to have excavated the head in Egypt, 1885–95; Sotheby's sale, 1917; bequeathed to the museum by Oscar Raphael, 1941; entered the museum, 1945–46." <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/591284>. last access: 27/1/2025

⁸⁹ <https://data.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/id/object/61606>. last access: 20/4/2025

⁹⁰ <https://data.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/id/object/61606>. last access: 20/4/2025



(Fig. 12.) Shelly Limestone head of Amenemhat III, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, E.2.1946.

<https://data.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/id/object/61606>. last access: 21/4/2025

5.3. Comment

There are no details regarding the findspot of the statue, except for the Fitzwilliam Museum's note that the piece came from a private tomb.

6. Wooden amuletic figure of a king (British Museum, EA22896)

6.1. Discovery and Context

The object was field collected by Sir Ernest A. T. Wallis Budge from the Tomb of Ani in Thebes, the artifact was acquired by the British Museum in 1891.

6.2. Description (Fig. 13)

The wooden amuletic figure, measuring 5.57 cm in height, 1.15 cm in width, and 2.04 cm in depth, represents a king wearing the double crown of Upper and Lower Egypt⁹¹.



(Fig. 13.) Wooden amuletic figure of a king. British Museum, EA22896.

https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA22896?selectedImageId=420789001. last access: 21/4/2025

6.3. Comment

Although this amulet was found in the Tomb of Ani, which dates to the New Kingdom, its precise dating remains uncertain; it is not known whether it belongs to the New Kingdom or to the Late Period. The matter

⁹¹ Andrews, C. (1994), 19.

is very difficult because the exact geographical location was not identified as this tomb was lost. Notably, the figure stands with the heads of two black Africans beneath his feet, symbolizing domination. The top of the back-pillar is pierced, indicating that the piece was designed for suspension, likely as a protective or symbolic amulet⁹².

7. Limestone Group Statue of Ramesses II under Hathor Divine Cow (The Tomb of Netjerwymes, cliffs underneath the Bubasteion in Saqqara)⁹³

7.1. Discovery and Context

The tomb of *Netjerwymes* was discovered in 1996 by the French expedition led by A. Zivie (cliffs underneath the Bubasteion in Saqqara). While advancing deeper into the tomb and after removing the masonry added in the last centuries B.C., something astonishing was discovered: a statue of a king beneath the head of a cow. The tomb's walls, as fragile as dry clay, were on the verge of collapse. With great caution, the stone blocks and debris covering the statues were removed, until the monument was fully revealed (*Fig. 14.*)⁹⁴.



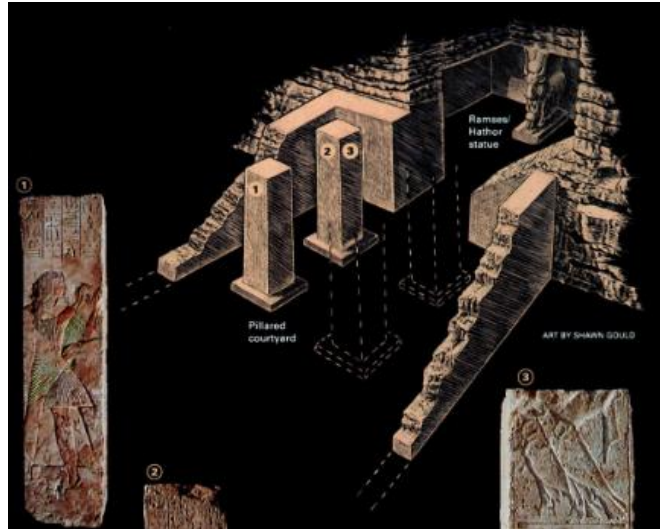
(*Fig. 14.*) the rock-cut room that contains the group-statue of Hathor cow and Ramesses II. Chapuis, P., & Zivie, A. (2002), 30 ; Sourouzian, H. (2020), 31.

Once all its parts were revealed, the tomb consists of a limestone front courtyard with two pillars bearing inscriptions of the tomb's owner in a worshipping position. The western wall has colorful scenes typical of the Ramesside art depicting daily life and religious rituals. Many cartouches bearing the name of "Ramesses II" are also exist. The courtyard leads to a rock-cut room that contains a rock statue of "Hathor" and Ramesses II (*Fig. 15.*).

⁹² Andrews, C. (1994), 19.

⁹³ The tomb has Inv. number 359/Bub according to Staring, N. (2023), 247; while other references give the tomb an Inv. Number Bub. I.16 as <https://www.meretsegerbooks.com/gallery/1027/tomb-of-netjerwymes>. Last Access: 7/17/2025.

⁹⁴ Chapuis, P., & Zivie, A. (2002), 30; Sourouzian, H. (2020), 31.



(Fig. 15.) The Tomb of Netjerwymes. Chapuis, P., & Zivie, A. (2002), 30 Sourouzian, H. (2020), 29.

7.2. Description (Fig. 16.)

An uninscribed rock-cut group-statue of the goddess “Hathor” represents it sorting from the mountain to protect a king. Hathor appears in the form of a cow, protecting or nurturing a pharaoh. Hathor can be identified by her horns encircling a sun disk and her characteristic *menat*-necklace. Under the neck of the goddess “Hathor”, the king represented with round face, hands, facing inwards, puffy cheeks, and very thick legs.



(Fig. 16.) the rock-cut statue representing the Hathor cow and Ramesses II. Chapuis, P., & Zivie, A. (2002), 30 ; Sourouzian, H. (2020), 30-31.

7.3. Comment

The statue of Ramesses II under the protection of the Hathor cow in the tomb of a high-ranking official reflects the relationship between the king and this official on one hand, and between the king and the goddess on the other.

Netjerwymes/Parekhnu who was connected to the diplomatic service of Ramesside Egypt, he is also mentioned in the inscriptional material from Pi-Ramesse. Netjerwymes was probably the most important

diplomat involved in both the peace treaty with the Hittite Empire and the negotiations for the marriage between Ramesses II and a Hittite princess⁹⁵. He held the following titles (*Tab. 1.*)⁹⁶:

Titel	a) Bubasteion I.16	b) Pflanzensäule	c) Plakette	d) Türpfosten	e) Model
<i>jr.j-p 't h3.tj- 't</i>	x	x			
<i>smhr-w 'tj</i>	x				
<i>zh3.w-nsw</i>	x / <i>m3 'mry-f</i>	x	x		x
<i>t3.y-hw-hr-wnm.j-n-nsw</i>	x	x	x		
<i>jm.j-r'-pr-hd</i>	x	x / <i>n-nb-t3.wj</i>	x / (<i>n-nb-t3.wj?</i>)	<i>n-nb-t3.wj</i>	<i>n-hd-nbw</i>
<i>jm.j-r'-pr-wr</i>	x / <i>n-nsw</i> / <i>n-Mn-nfr</i>				
<i>jm.j-r'-k3.t-nb.t-n.t-nsw</i>	x				
<i>s3m-h3b-n-Pth</i>	x				
<i>wpw.tj-nsw</i>	x / <i>r-h3s.t-nb.t</i>				

(*Tab. 1.*) Correspondence of the Titles and Monuments of *Ntr.wj-ms*

The titles attested on his five known monuments indicate his close relationship with Ramesses II, he eventually rose to the rank of Royal Envoy to all foreign lands. This explains his role in the Treaty of Kadesh and in securing the political marriage of Ramesses II to the daughter of the Hittite king. Accordingly, it is no longer surprising—after having borne all these titles—that a statue of Ramesses II was placed in his tomb. Although statues of the king beneath the sacred cow have been known since the reign of Thutmose III (Egyptian Museum, Cairo. JE 38575), the presence of a statue of Ramesses II beneath the sacred cow Hathor in this tomb carries a special symbolism, particularly in the Bubasteion area, stemming from the relationship between Hathor and her son, the sacred Apis bull.

⁹⁵ Franzmeier, H. (2024), 180.

⁹⁶ Auenmüller, J. (2016), 175.

8. Discussion

8.1. The relationship between the royal statue and its findspot

Through the analysis of a selected group of royal statues, the researcher was able to distinguish many statues found in private tombs that were not part of the original design of these tombs across different historical periods, while other statues formed an integral part of the tomb's original design, dating back to the Middle and New Kingdoms. It is noteworthy that all the royal statues included in the study are uninscribed, which deserves attention (*Tab. 2*).

Royal Statue	Inscriptions	Findspot	Date of the tomb	Notes
Group Statue of Djoser and His Family	Uninscribed	The tomb Userefre, Saqqara	5 th dynasty, Neferirkare	The royal statue was added to the tomb in subsequent periods
Alabaster Head of Khafre, Boston Museum of Fine Arts (MFA 21.351)		The tomb of Ihy (Mastaba G 5330), Giza	6 th dynasty	
Red Granite Statue of a King, Egyptian Museum, Cairo (JE 39103)		Shaft of <i>T3</i> No. 276, East area of Teti's pyramid, Saqqara	1 st Intermediate Period or Early Middle Kingdom	
Two Wooden Statues (Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 44951 & Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA 14.3.17)		The tomb of Imhotep, near the pyramid of Senwosert I, Lisht	Early 12 th dynasty	The royal statues were part of the tomb's design
A Shelly limestone head of Amenemhat III (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, E.2.1946)		Unidentified	Unidentified	No Context
Wooden amuletic figure of a king (British Museum, EA22896)		The tomb of Ani	New Kingdom	The geographical location is unidentified
Limestone Group Statue of Ramesses II under Hathor Divine Cow		The Tomb of Netjerwymes, cliffs underneath the Bubasteion, Saqqara	New Kingdom, Ramesses II	The royal statue is part of the tomb's design

(*Tab. 2*.) The relationship between the royal statue and its findspot.

It is inferred that the statues dating to the Old Kingdom were later moved to the tomb or their findspot, whereas the statues from the Middle and New Kingdoms were likely part of the tomb's original design. This is related to the nature of royal authority, which was reflected in the form of royal presence within private tombs.

The fact that all royal statues discovered in private tombs are uninscribed raises two principal issues: first, the challenge of accurately dating the statues themselves, and second, determining their chronological relationship to the tomb to establish whether the burial context is original or whether the statue was added at a later stage. Nevertheless, the absence of inscriptions may have been intentional, serving to express royal presence without specifying the identity of a particular king.

8.2. Royal presence in private tombs

There are three types of royal presence within private tombs, the first of which is the presence of the king through his name in the tombs of Old Kingdom officials. This was due to the strength of royal authority. Two cases can be identified for the presence of the royal name in private tombs of the Old Kingdom: the first occurs when the royal cartouche appears independently within the texts or scenes, for example:

- The false door of Nihotepkhnoum from his mastaba in Giza⁹⁷, which shows the royal cartouche of Khufu in several places.
- The false door of the funerary priest Sheri (CG 1384) in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo, originally from his tomb at Saqqara, dates to the Fourth Dynasty and shows the royal cartouches of Peribsen or Sened⁹⁸.
- The false door of the overseer of the pyramid of Khafra, Tjetji, now in the British Museum (EA 157), originally from his tomb at Giza, shows the royal cartouche of Khafra⁹⁹.
- The false door of Neferirtenefer from his mastaba (D 55) at Saqqara, now in Brussels (E 2465)¹⁰⁰, shows the royal cartouche of Sahoure.
- The tomb of Userefre in Saqqara shows the royal name of Neferirkare. (See above)
- Mastaba of Qar (G7101) at Giza shows the royal names of Meryra (Pepi I), Menkaura, Khafra and Khufu¹⁰¹.

The second case occurs when the king's cartouche forms part of the tomb owner's own name, for example:

- the mastaba of Khufukhaf (G 7140) in Giza, which shows the royal cartouche of Khufu as part of the name of the tomb owner¹⁰².

⁹⁷ Cherpion, N. (1989), pl.4.

⁹⁸ Cherpion, N. (1989), pl.24

⁹⁹ Cherpion, N. (1989), pl.32; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA157. Last Access: 25/10/2025.

¹⁰⁰ Bruffaerts, J.-M. (2005), 5-36.

¹⁰¹ <http://giza.fas.harvard.edu/sites/1516/full/>. Last Access: 25/10/2025.

¹⁰² Cherpion, N. (1989), pl.13.

- The funerary stela of Khufunakht from his Mastaba (G 1205) in Giza, now in the Hearst Museum, Berkeley (HM_6-19786)¹⁰³.

During the Middle Kingdom, because of the weakening of divine kingship, the royal presence within private tombs was manifested through both relief and sculpture, with only a limited number of scenes depicting the king in non-royal contexts. A notable example is the tomb of Intefiker (TT 60) at Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, which portrays the tomb owner approaching the throne of King Senusret I during the celebration of the royal jubilee¹⁰⁴. This exceptional depiction reflects Intefiker's distinguished status as the king's vizier. It may therefore be inferred that the representation of the king in private tombs during this period was closely connected to the phenomenon of royal statuary appearing in the tombs of high officials, as exemplified by the statues of King Amenemhat II (Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 44951; Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA 14.3.17) discovered in the tomb of Imhotep at Lisht. The same phenomenon is attested during the New Kingdom¹⁰⁵.

Accordingly, the presence of the king in Old Kingdom tombs being limited solely to the mention of his name, without any accompanying pictorial or sculptural representations, suggests that all royal statues discovered within private tombs of that period were likely found outside their original funerary contexts or were later inserted as intrusive elements. For example, the Statues of Djoser in the tomb of Userefre, Saqqara; an alabaster head of Khafre, Boston Museum of Fine Arts (MFA 21.351); the red granite statue of a King, Egyptian Museum, Cairo (JE 39103).

In the Middle Kingdom, however, the appearance of scenes depicting the king in some private tombs, along with the discovery of royal statues in other private contexts, indicates a close relationship between sculpture and relief in expressing royal presence during this period. This suggests that some of these statues were originally placed within their intended tomb contexts ((Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 44951; Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA 14.3.17), while others were removed from their original settings at a later stage.

As for the New Kingdom, royal presence became more prominent through depictions of the king within private tombs, making the possibility of royal statues being placed in New kingdom private tombs quite plausible (Limestone Group Statue of Ramesses II under Hathor Divine Cow (The Tomb of Netjerwymes, cliffs underneath the Bubasteion in Saqqara). Thus, it may be concluded that there is a correlation between the depiction of the king in tomb scenes and the presence of royal statues within private tombs across these different periods.

¹⁰³ Cherpion, N. (1989), pl.17; <http://giza.fas.harvard.edu/objects/45780/full/>. Last Access: 25/10/2025.

¹⁰⁴ Ebied. A. (2016), 22 (fig.1).

¹⁰⁵ Ebied. A. (2016), 21-54.

However, it should be noted that the royal presence within a private tomb—whether through the royal cartouche, depiction, or sculpture—essentially reflects the close relationship that linked the individual to the king and the distinguished status he attained at the royal court, which granted him the exceptional privilege of featuring the royal presence in his private tomb in any of its forms.

Based on the prominence of the king's presence through his name in Old Kingdom tombs and through pictorial representation in the New Kingdom, it can be concluded that his sculpture in private tombs through statuary represents the rarest form of royal presence, with the statues included in this study serving as the primary examples of expressing the king's presence in such tombs through sculpture.

9. Conclusion

The representation of the king through statues in private tombs is considered the rarest form of royal presence within ancient Egyptian private tombs. This research has explored the original sites of various ancient Egyptian royal statues, uncovering two distinct patterns of origin: those that remained in their initial funerary environments and those that were later moved to different sites. The conclusions suggest that the wooden statues (Egyptian Museum, Cairo JE 44951; Metropolitan Museum of Art 14.3.17) and the limestone statue of Ramesses II from Saqqara were specifically created for their respective tombs, with their archaeological contexts representing their intended original placements. The statues portraying the king as the “guardian of *Imut*” imply that royal imagery could serve a protective and ritualistic role associated with the afterlife. Conversely, the Saqqara statue of Ramesses II, which shows the king under Hathor's protection within the sacred area of the Apis bull at the Bubasteion, illustrates a unique theological aspect where the royal figure acts as a mediator between the deceased and the divine.

The careers of Imhotep and Netjerwymes—both high-ranking officials closely linked to the king—further shed light on the socio-religious context in which these statues were created. Imhotep's numerous priestly and administrative titles demonstrate a strong connection to temple service and funerary rituals, highlighting his integration into the sacred realm of the royal cult. In contrast, Netjerwymes held significant roles in state administration and diplomacy during Ramesses II's reign, notably as Royal Envoy and Overseer of the Treasury, positions that connected him to international relations such as the Hittite treaty and royal marriage alliance. Although both men were privileged to include royal statues in their private tombs, their different career paths—Imhotep's in the religious sphere and Netjerwymes's in the political—underscore the complex nature of royal representation in non-royal funerary context.

Several royal statues were also discovered in the vicinity of royal funerary complexes, particularly around the pyramids. Among the most notable examples are the group statue of King Djoser's family from the tomb of Prince Userefre, the alabaster head of Khafre found in a Sixth Dynasty tomb (G 5330) near the pyramid of Khufu, and a red granite statue uncovered in Shaft 276 east of the pyramid of Teti. Although confirming

these locations as the original funerary contexts of these statues may weaken the view that royal presence in Old Kingdom tombs was limited solely to the mention of the king's name, the overall evidence indicates that such statues were originally integral components of the royal funerary installations within these sacred precincts. Their later appearance in private tombs constructed within the same complexes reflects a deliberate act of religious appropriation, underscoring the enduring role of the king as a divine and protective force in the afterlife.

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