



P R A G U E  
E G Y P T O L O G I C A L  
S T U D I E S

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Mastaba of Queen  
Khentkaus III  
in Abusir

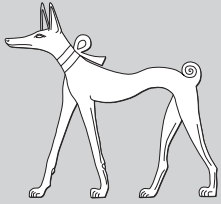


Tomb of the chief  
physician  
Shepseskafankh

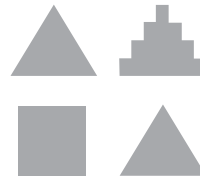
The miraculous  
rise of the Fifth  
Dynasty



Old Kingdom  
canopic jars from  
new perspective



# P R A G U E EGYPTOLOGICAL S T U D I E S



XV / 2015  
CZECH INSTITUTE OF EGYPTOLOGY



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### Photograph on the front page

A reconstruction of the offering place in front of the false door of Nefer in tomb AS 68d (photo M. Frouz)

## Dear readers,

It has been thirteen years since the first issue of *Prague Egyptological Studies* was published in 2002. Since then it has become an important and wide-selling journal, providing both the scientific and laymen audience with the latest results of our fieldwork and various studies in the field of Czech Egyptology dealing with the civilisations of ancient Egypt and Sudan.

After more than a decade of its existence, we are pleased to launch the first issue of the English edition of *Prague Egyptological Studies*. The English edition is dedicated exclusively to the history, archaeology and language of third millennium BC Egypt. Yet it also aims to include studies dealing with foreign relations during the period. At the same time, we also welcome publications on the latest advances in the study of the environment and studies evaluating the significance of applied sciences. Our principal aim is to accommodate studies concerning either primary research in the field or those that bring up theoretical inquiries of essential importance to the indicated scope and time frame of the journal.

The present issue is devoted to the excavations at Abusir, the principal field of research of the Czech Institute of Egyptology. The individual reports are dedicated to the excavation projects carried out in the pyramid field (Khentkaus III), as well as in the Abusir South area (tomb complex AS 68, the tomb of Shepseskafankh). In addition to these, you will also find more theoretical studies focusing on the "Khentkaus problem", which analyses the significance and importance of three women bearing the same name during the Fourth and Fifth Dynasties, a study dealing with model beer jars and their typological evolution, an interesting seal with a figure of Bes, and an interpretation of canopic jars bearing significant tokens of past treatment on their bodies.

We trust that the English edition of *Prague Egyptological Studies*, which will be produced once a year, will find a firm place among other Egyptological scholarly journals. We are convinced that a clearly defined profile of this scientific journal will attract not only the attention of many readers but also submissions of significant contributions from the scientific community and thus streamline major advances in the fields of third millennium BC Egypt history, archaeology and the like.

Miroslav Bárta and Lucie Jirásková

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Fig. 1 View of the tomb of Khentkaus I in Giza (photo M. Frouz)

## The miraculous rise of the Fifth Dynasty – the story of Papyrus Westcar and historical evidence

*Miroslav Verner*

**The decline of the powerful Fourth Dynasty and the rise of a new royal line, the Fifth Dynasty, left deep traces in the historical consciousness of generations to come, becoming the stuff of legends. These events have for a long time been shrouded in mystery, not only for ancient Egyptians but also for modern Egyptologists.**

The ascension of the Fifth Dynasty represented a time of major transition and sometimes dramatic change in the political, economic and social conditions of the country. The economy of Egypt was faltering under the burden of the construction of huge, prestigious pyramid complexes, while the efficiency of the state administration was compromised by the increasing centralisation and the associated growth of the bureaucracy, which was in turn gaining in wealth and influence at the expense of the previously absolute power of the monarch, conceived as a god on earth and guarantor of the order of the world. As shown by recent research, serious climatic changes in the course of the Fourth Dynasty and early Fifth Dynasty may also have contributed to the deterioration of the economy

and social conditions in the country. There was a need to develop a new model of social organisation and government more appropriate to the new realities.

Relevant historical sources referring to the ascension of the new dynasty have for a long time been only few and ambiguous. According to ancient Egyptian tradition, as it is presented by one of the stories recorded on the Papyrus Westcar, the Fifth Dynasty derived its origin directly from the sun god: the first three kings were born as triplets from the union of the sun god with an earthly woman Rudjedet, wife of the priest of the temple of the god in Sakhebu named Raweser. Sakhebu, probably what is today Zat el-Kom, is an as yet archaeologically relatively little known locality, situated in the Western Delta roughly

opposite Heliopolis in the Eastern Delta (Sauneron 1950: 1955; Goyon 1979: 43–50).

The tale of the divine birth of the first three kings of the Fifth Dynasty – Userkaf, Sahure and Kakai (Neferirkare) – presented on the Papyrus Westcar, was published first by Adolf Erman (Erman 1890a, 1890b), and since his edition it has been studied by a whole series of scholars (recently *e.g.* Bagnato 2006; Lepper 2008). The tale is primarily a literary not a historical work, but scholars have nonetheless considered the question of whether and to what extent it might contain some genuine historical elements. For example, present knowledge suggests there could be some historical basis to the prediction made by the narrator of the tale, Djedi, to King Khufu, at whose court the story takes place, that the three first rulers of the Fifth Dynasty will come to power, *i.e.* replace the line of Khufu, only after the reign of Khufu’s son (Rakhef), and Khufu’s son’s son (Menkaure).

A new impulse to the discussion on the end of the Fourth and the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty was given by the excavation of the so-called Fourth Pyramid in Giza (fig. 1), lying near the valley temple of Menkaure, by Selim Hassan (1943: 1–63) in the 1930s. The excavation showed that the monument was not a pyramid but a peculiar two-step tomb belonging to a hitherto unknown Queen Khentkaus who had a very unusual title “mother of the two kings of Upper and Lower Egypt”, which could theoretically also be interpreted as “King of Upper and Lower Egypt and mother of the king of Upper and Lower

Egypt” (fig. 2). According to Junker (1932: 131), the translation “both kings” in the title is more precise than “two kings” in terms of sense and grammar. The position of the monument of Khentkaus led some scholars to the belief that the royal mother was Menkaure’s wife or daughter. However, indirect evidence seems to suggest that Khentkaus, probably the daughter of Rakhef, was sister rather than wife or daughter of Menkaure.

Shortly after the excavation of her tomb, Ludwig Borchardt (1938: 209–216) linked the royal mother Khentkaus with Abusir. As a matter of fact, on a fragment of papyrus, which made up part of the archive of the mortuary temple of Neferirkare and was found at the end of the nineteenth century, the mortuary cult of the “royal mother Khentkaus” was mentioned in the context of this temple. Borchardt came to the conclusion (and following him other scholars) that Khentkaus was the mother of Neferirkare and Sahure and also the mother-founder of the Fifth Dynasty.

Up-to-date evidence, however, falsifies Borchardt’s theory (see the text below). On the other hand, some clues seem to indicate that Khentkaus’s sons were Shepseskaf and Userkaf, rather than Sahure and Neferirkare. Shepseskaf and Userkaf are connected by certain indications that their legitimacy was not entirely unchallengeable. For example, in their throne names the name of Re is strikingly omitted, which had been part of the throne names of their predecessors since Radjedef. The identity of their father, Khentkaus I’s husband, is

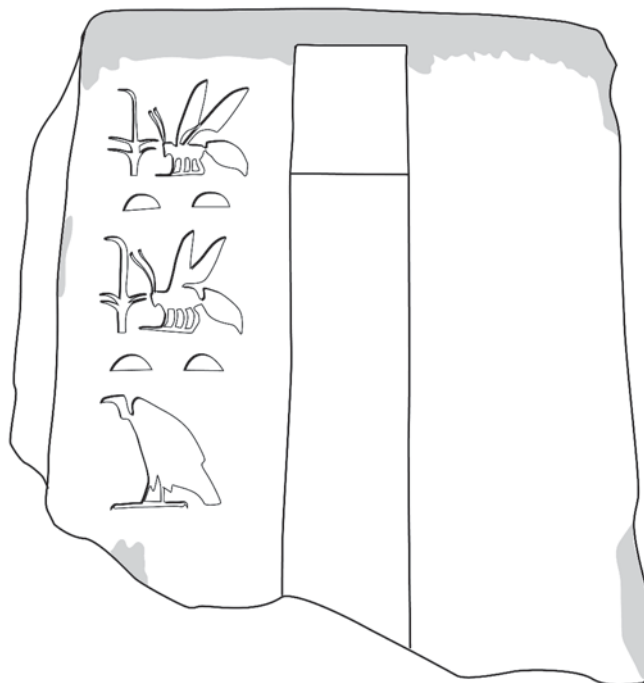
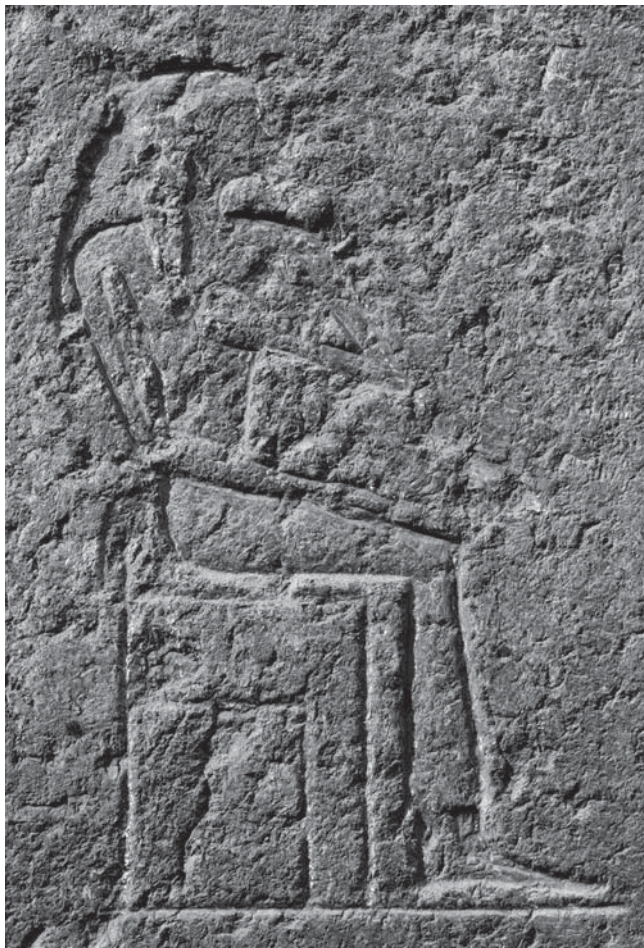


Fig. 2 The remains of the inscription on the gate in the tomb of Khentkaus I in Giza: Detail of the figure of the seated Khentkaus I and Khentkaus I’s title “mother of two (both?) kings of Upper and Lower Egypt” (photo M. Frouz, drawing J. Malátková)



Fig. 3 The figure of the eldest of Sahure's sons, Ranefer, has been altered into "King of Upper and Lower Egypt Neferirkare, granted life for ever" (Borchardt 1913: Bl. 33)

unknown. An assumption that Khentkaus I's husband was the high priest of Heliopolis (Moursi 1972: 22–23) is mere speculation based on the previously cited tale from the Papyrus Westcar (the first of the triplets "will be chief seer in Heliopolis") that cannot be proved one way or the other.

Borchardt's theory (1938: 209–216) relied on Kurt Sethe's older interpretation (Sethe 1913: 90) of secondarily modified reliefs in Sahure's mortuary temple, where the figure depicted immediately after Sahure had in all places been changed to Neferirkare and supplemented with the latter's name in cartouche and symbols of royal power (fig. 3). According to Sethe, who also argued from the previously cited tale in the Papyrus Westcar, Neferirkare was Sahure's brother. Neferirkare's ascent to the throne was thus not in harmony with the Osirian myth and so not entirely legitimate, so the king considered it essential to strengthen his legitimacy by making the alterations on the reliefs. The theory was further developed by Eberhard Otto (1966: 68–69), who argued that the Rudjdjedet of the story, the mother of the supposed royal triplets, was a pseudonym for the royal mother Khentkaus, believed to be a key figure at the end of the Fourth and beginning of the Fifth Dynasty. Otto's view was accepted by some other scholars (see *e.g.* Altenmüller 1970).

Khentkaus's tomb was probably built in at least two phases. However, the precise dating of the monument has not yet been established. Originally it may have been constructed as a rock mastaba in the form of a truncated pyramid, and a smaller superstructure in the form of a sarcophagus may have been added later. The substructure of the tomb showed parallels with that of Menkaure's pyramid (Maragioglio – Rinaldi 1967: 184, 186 no. 2, 188

no. 7). An opinion prevailed that the two building stages of the monument referred to the aforesaid two sons of Khentkaus, Sahure and Neferirkare. Mark Lehner (2015) assumes that the monument was built as a united project under Menkaure. The analysis of all available evidence, however, seems to indicate that the monument of Khentkaus was built by Shepseskaf and Userkaf and that the royal mother's unusual title refers to these two kings (see the text below). During the expansion of the monument a settlement for priests who served in the funerary cult of the royal mother was also built. The status of some of the priests, *hm-ntr* "god's servant", underlined the high social esteem which the royal mother enjoyed.

The prominent position of Khentkaus at the end of the Fourth Dynasty was very probably closely linked with the unexpected events in the royal family following Menkaure's death, caused by the absence of a legitimate male heir to the throne. It seems, that Khuenre, the son of Menkaure and Khamerernebtj II, either predeceased his father or was still far too young to succeed to the throne (Callender 2011: 132). The discontinuity in the royal family thus might have only become a catalyst in the accumulating political, economic and social problems of the country at the end of the Fourth Dynasty. Although after Menkaure's death other sons of Rakhef may well have still been alive at the time (for example Iunmin, Iunre, Nykaure, Nebemakhet), in the new situation in the royal family the person who came to the fore seems to have been the highest ranking woman, directly and unchallengeably related to the royal line: Khentkaus. To her, rather than to one of the male representatives of the royal family, fell the task of securing the continuity of the monarchy.

The long accepted view of the royal mother Khentkaus and the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty has been altered fundamentally by new discoveries made in the course of the archaeological research of the pyramid field in Abusir. At the end of the 1970s, a small pyramid complex of the wife of Neferirkare was discovered at the southern side of the king's pyramid (Verner 1995). Surprisingly, the written documents found in the pyramid complex showed that its owner had not only the same name as the royal mother Khentkaus in Giza but also the unusual title “mother of the two kings of Upper and Lower Egypt” (fig. 4). It took us some time to realize that there existed two royal mothers of the same name and unusual title, separated from each other by three generations – Khentkaus I from Giza and Khentkaus II from Abusir (Verner 1997: 109–117; 1999: 215–218). A detailed examination of the monument, including all discovered relevant written documents, showed that the monument was built in three stages, during which the principal title of Khentkaus II was changed three times: from the “king's wife” to the “king's mother” and, finally, the “mother of the two kings of Upper and Lower Egypt” (fig. 5; Verner 1995: 43 no. 1, 47 no. 13, 60 no. 314/A/78, 84 no. 200/A/78). Obviously, the construction of the first stage of the monument was commenced by the queen's husband Neferirkare and after his death completed by her

son Raneferef and, finally, enlarged by her second son Nyuserre. The monument eventually gained the status *hwt ntr* “god's abode” which only highlighted the exceptional social position that Khentkaus II achieved during the reign of Nyuserre (for the reasons for her cult, see the text below). The available written documents also proved that the royal mother Khentkaus mentioned in the papyrus archive found in Neferirkare's mortuary temple was definitely Khentkaus II, the king's spouse, and not Khentkaus I as Borhardt originally believed.

Further stone to the intricate mosaic of the historical events at the end of the Fourth and the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty was added by the discovery made by the Egyptian team during the cleaning of the causeway of Sahure in Abusir in the middle of the 1950s. The team unearthed several blocks with historically invaluable scenes and inscriptions, including Sahure's family celebrating the bringing of the rare frankincense trees from the remote land of Punt (fig. 6; El Awady 2009: 171, Fig. 83). Notably, the first two of Sahure's sons with the only known king's spouse Meretnebty, Ranefer and Netjeryrenre, both have the title “eldest king's son”. Judging by his position in the scene and one more title, namely the chief lector-priest, Ranefer was probably the first to see the light of the world. El Awady (2009: 250–251, Pl. 6) logically presumes that this gave Ranefer precedence over his twin brother and so it was he who succeeded Sahure to the throne under the name Neferirkare. Eventually, he was not succeeded by his twin, Netjeryrenre, but by his and Khentkaus II's son, who was called Ranefer just like his father before his ascent to the throne.

The discovery of the tomb of Neferirkare's wife Khentkaus II, and the find of new blocks with reliefs from the causeway to Sahure's pyramid, provided the basis for an alternative to Sethe's interpretation of the changed relief scenes in Sahure's mortuary temple. If El Awady's theory is correct, then the person whose figure was secondarily altered would be none other than Prince Ranefer, whose picture and name is also strikingly absent in the whole of Sahure's pyramid complex with the exception of the previously cited family scene (here, exceptionally, the technical and ideological reasons prevented the alteration of Ranefer's figure) from the causeway. It is likely, then, that it was Neferirkare who ordered the changes to the reliefs after his accession to emphasise the legitimacy of his succession, which his twin brother, Netjeryrenre, might theoretically have challenged. It is not impossible that Netjeryrenre tried to stake his claim later, after either the death of Neferirkare or Raneferef. According to the very few contemporary records, it was at some stage in this period that the rather mysterious King Shepseskare appears, and he might theoretically have been Netjeryrenre (Verner 2000: 581–602).

The unusual title “mother of two kings of Upper and Lower Egypt” was in the whole history of ancient Egypt shared by only two queens, Khentkaus I and Khentkaus II. In view of the probable occurrence of the twins in Sahure's family, it has been suggested (Verner 2011) that the unusual title “mother of two kings of Upper and Lower Egypt” may refer to the royal mothers who gave birth to two sons who



Fig. 4 Pillar in situ in the courtyard of the mortuary temple of Khentkaus II with the name and titles of the royal mother. Importantly, her forehead is adorned with a uraeus (photo M. Frouz)

then ruled successively. In both cases these sons may even have been twins, who in the case of Khentkaus I would most probably be Shepseskaf and Userkaf, and in the case of Khentkaus II Raneferef and Nyuserre. If this theory is correct, then at the transition from the Fourth to the Fifth Dynasty twins were delivered three times over four generations in the royal family: Khentkaus I, Meretnebtj (Sahure's wife, although only one of her twins became king, and therefore this queen did not have the title "mother of two kings of Upper and Lower Egypt") and Khentkaus II. Whether or not the two sons were twins in the cases of Khentkaus I and Khentkaus II, both these royal mothers seem to have played a very important role in securing the legitimacy of succession to the throne, for their second sons would not have succeeded to the throne in line with tradition and royal ideology, *i.e.* not as a son after a father, but as a brother after a brother.

Quite recently, a third Fifth Dynasty queen named Khentkaus was discovered in Abusir. In her largely

devastated tomb, lying south of Raneferef's mortuary temple, builders' inscriptions were revealed showing that the tomb's owner was "king's wife" and "king's mother" (see Krejčí in this issue). The position of the tomb may indicate that this royal mother, Khentkaus III, was the spouse of Raneferef and, very probably, daughter of Neferirkare and Khentkaus II. The discovery has highlighted once again how complicated the situation in the royal family could become after the unexpectedly early death of a king, this time Raneferef. If Khentkaus III had indeed been his wife, and if, indeed, she had had sons to Raneferef, their son may have been a very young child (about 5 to 8 years old), for the king himself was quite young (between 20 and 23 years) when he died. There is thus a hypothetical possibility that the child might have been the aforementioned ephemeral ruler, Shepseskare. Whether Shepseskare very briefly ruled or not, Raneferef was succeeded by his brother Nyuserre. However, there are also other possibilities for the events which might

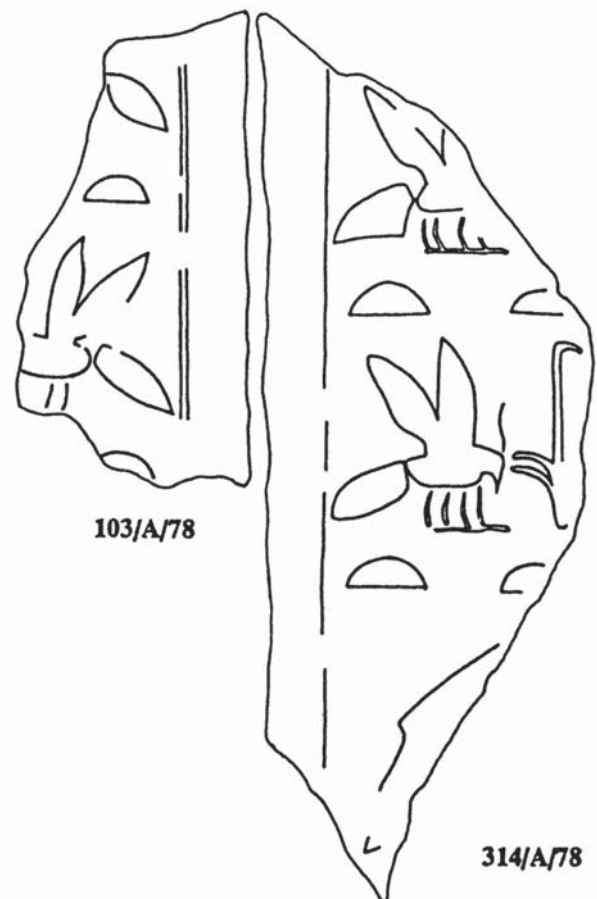
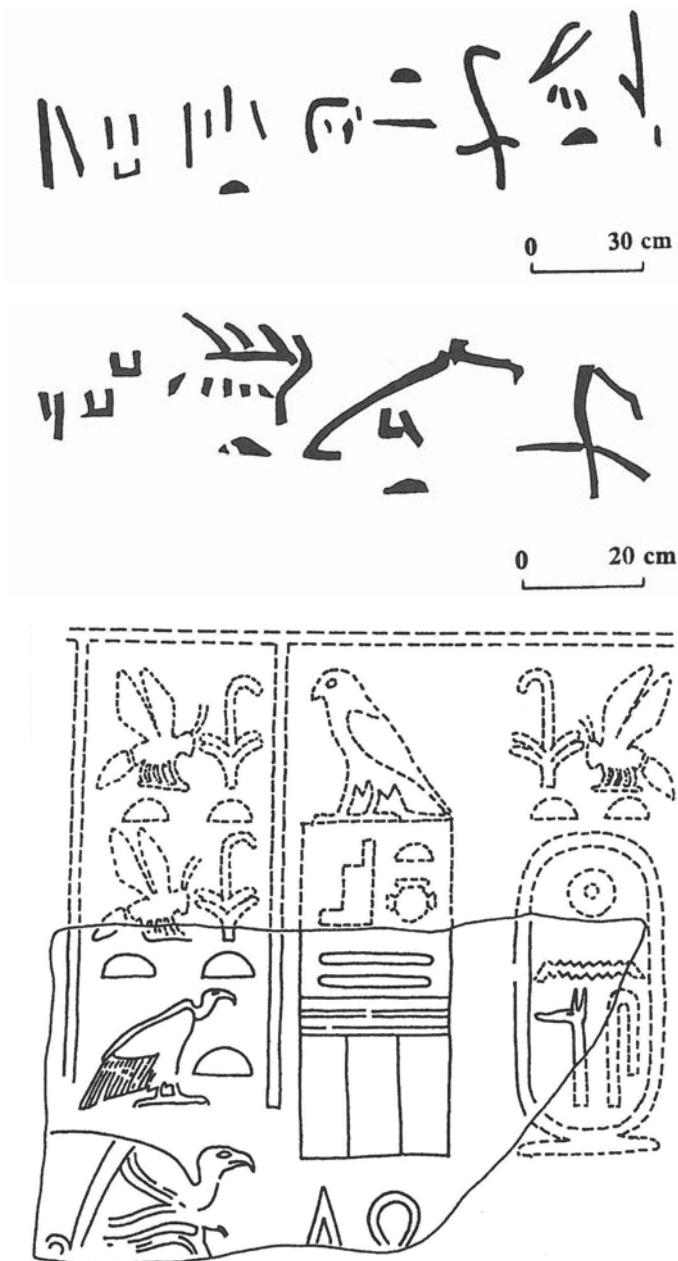


Fig. 5 Gradual development of the principal title of Khentkaus II:  
 – the original builders' inscription (no. 13) *hmt-nswt* "king's wife" on the corner block of the foundation platform for the queen's pyramid was additional, when her son (Raneferef) resumed work on it after Neferirkare's death, corrected by adding the title *mwt-nswt* "king's mother"  
 – the builders' inscription (no. 1) *mwt-nswt* "king's mother" on the casing block of the pyramid  
 – a fragment of relief (200/A/78) from the mortuary temple showing king Nyuserre standing in front of Khentkaus II, bearing the title "mother of two kings of Upper and Lower Egypt"  
 – a fragment of the false door of Khentkaus II (314/A/78) bearing her title "mother of two kings of Upper and Lower Egypt"  
 (drawing J. Malátková)

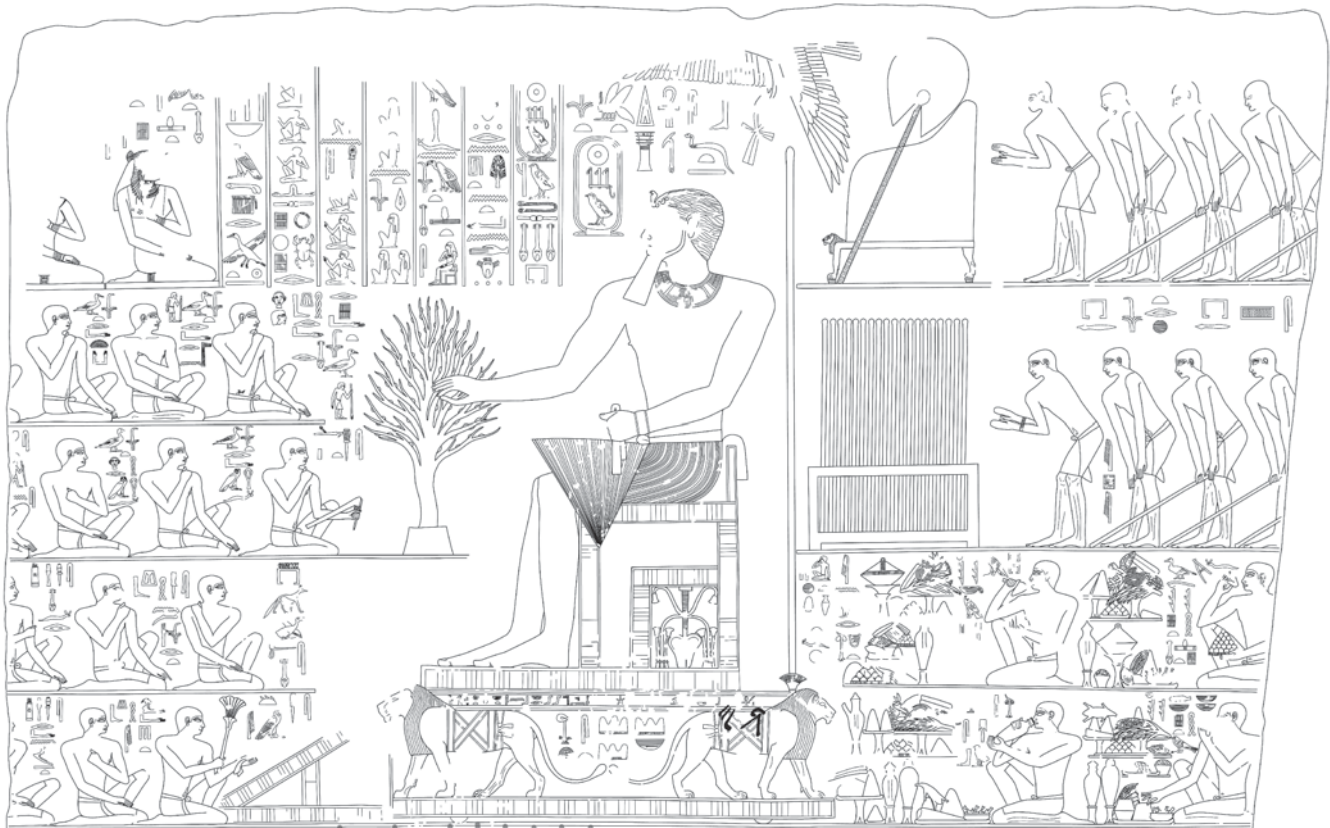


Fig. 6 King Sahure and his family admiring the frankincense tree from Punt. In the second register on the left side the two eldest of Sahure's sons, Ranefer and Netjeryrenre, are represented (drawing J. Malátková)

have followed Raneferef's early death. For example, Raneferef's brother Nyuserre could then have married Raneferef's widow, Khentkaus III, to strengthen his claim to the throne.

After Nyuserre's death the situation may have become even more complicated due to the early death of the king's eldest son, Werkaure, who very probably predeceased his father (Krejčí 2009: 32). If Khentkaus III was not the mother of Shepseskare, and if she survived Nyuserre, was she the mother of Nyuserre's successor Menkauhor, who may have been her and Raneferef's son? The diorite plates bearing Menkauhor's name, found in the mortuary temple of Raneferef (Vlčková 2006: 84–85), may have a deeper meaning in this context.

A no less intricate problem concerns Menkauhor's successor, Djedkare. Was Djedkare Menkauhor's or Nyuserre's son? Some clues may support the second option. Djedkare not only paid attention to the restoration of the funerary monuments of his ancestors buried in Abusir, but part of his family was buried there, in the area south of Nyuserre's causeway and east of the anonymous queen's pyramid, Lepsius no. 24 (Verner – Callender 2002). Was this anonymous queen Djedkare's mother?

As it often used to be, the solution (or, at least, a plausible theory) of one problem leads to another one which is no less intricate. Let us hope that future research on the as yet unearthed part of the Abusir royal cemetery will answer some of these questions. Certainly, the pyramid field at Abusir has not yet revealed all its secrets.

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### Abstract:

The decline of the powerful Fourth Dynasty and the rise of a new royal line, the Fifth Dynasty, have for a long time been shrouded in mystery and have become the stuff of legends. These events are referred to in the tale of the miraculous rise of the first three kings of the Fifth Dynasty, recorded on the Papyrus Westcar. However, relevant historical sources relating to the ascension of the new dynasty have for a long time been only few and ambiguous.

The mystery surrounding the ascension of the Fifth Dynasty has now been altered fundamentally by new archaeological discoveries, in particular in the course of the research of the pyramid field in Abusir. These discoveries and the role played by three royal mothers named Khentkaus in the events at the end of the Fourth and the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty, are discussed in the cited article.

Fifth Dynasty – Abusir – royal mother – Khentkaus

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