

Exploring the Contextual and Symbolic Relationships between Mummies and Texts in Late Old Kingdom Pyramids

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the mummies and ritual texts within the pyramid chambers of Unis, last king of the 5th Dynasty, and his successors Teti, Pepi I, Merenre and Pepi II, in the Sixth Dynasty. All 5 pyramids share a similar internal layout and sarcophagus positioning, and have their walls covered with vertical columns of ritual texts (Pyramid Texts). The analysis looks at the contextual, spatial and symbolic relationship between the mummies and the texts by looking at and comparing: 1. The mummified remains. 2. The contextual positioning of the texts in relation to the mummy. 3. The textual references to mummification, body parts and related symbolism. The analysis concludes with a number of observations which may further our understanding of mummification rituals and techniques and which highlight the particular role of the text in relation to the royal mummy.

Introduction

This article looks at the pyramids of Unis, last king of the 5th Dynasty (c. 2367-2347) and his 6th Dynasty successors Teti (c. 2347-2337), Pepi I (c. 2335-2285), Merenre (c. 2285-2279) and Pepi II (c. 2279-2219; as dated by von Beckerath 1997), all located at the royal necropolis of Saqqara, close to the Old Kingdom administrative centre of Memphis and just South of modern day Cairo. It focuses particularly on the symbolic relationship between the king's mummy and the mortuary texts (the Pyramid Texts) inscribed on the funerary chamber walls within these pyramids. Following a description of the architectural layout of the funerary chambers and the format of the Pyramid Texts upon them, the article will give an overview of Old Kingdom

mummification practices and discuss the fragmentary mummified remains in the text-inscribed pyramids. The article then sets out to look at the symbolic relationships between the Pyramid Texts and the mummy, which relate to the protective and magical purpose of the Pyramid Texts vis-à-vis the mummy as well as to mummification practices and body symbolism alluded to in the Pyramid Texts.

The funerary chambers within the text-inscribed pyramids

The funerary chambers in all five of the text-inscribed pyramids shared a very similar architectural layout. An opening in front of the North façade of the pyramid leads down beneath, not within the pyramid superstructure, as had been the case in earlier pyramids. At the end of the Descent, a narrow Corridor opens out into a rectangular chamber, known as the Antechamber which was connected by a passageway on its East wall to a small chamber, commonly referred to as the *Serdab* (from the Arabic word for cellar). Its walls were roughly hewn and undecorated and it was sealed from the other chambers by a stone door (Labrousse 2000, 35). Maspero (1883, 78) reports that Unis' *serdab* was found full of alabaster fragments, wooden instruments and knives which he identifies as the equipment that had been used during the burial ceremony; it may also have been used to store items which would be used by the king after burial (Jequier 1936-40, 10; Leclant 1972). The focus of our attention here is not the *serdab* but the Antechamber and the Burial Chamber within which the king's sarcophagus lay, both of which were ornately decorated with Pyramid Texts.

The four walls of the Antechamber were entirely covered with Pyramid Texts arranged in vertical columns, from the point where the wall meets the ceiling down to the ground. The Burial Chamber which was reached through a small passage in the West wall of the Antechamber, was about twice as large as the Antechamber and had Pyramid Texts similarly arranged in vertical columns on all its walls, apart from a section of the West wall behind the sarcophagus which was taken up by the palace facade motif. Like the Antechamber, the Burial Chamber had an East-West alignment and a star-decorated vaulted ceiling (Labrousse 1996). The king's large rectangular greywacke

sarcophagus was positioned along the West wall of the Burial Chamber in a North-South orientation.

Old Kingdom royal mummification

In the Old Kingdom, mummification techniques still had a long way to go to reach the sophistication of bodily preservation that was achieved in the New Kingdom however, as far as the rituals were concerned, they were already highly complex (Fishman et al. 1980). Another notable difference from the New Kingdom is the scarcity of Old Kingdom mummies and thus evidence about Old Kingdom mummification techniques because of the very high percentage of tombs, particularly royal ones, which have been pillaged. Enough survives to show that by this time, the fundamental methods of evisceration and dehydration were already established (David and Tapp 1992). The earliest evidence for the removal of the internal organs and their preservation in a canopic chest with natron comes from the tomb of Queen Hetepheres, mother of the 4th Dynasty king Khufu (Fishman et al. 1980, 7) so it may be assumed that natron which is also mentioned in the PT 109 (Faulkner 1969) was used on these 5th and 6th Dynasty mummies. Burial chambers in Fourth Dynasty pyramids contain square indentations in the paving in a similar location to those in the pyramids with texts, however none of the contents survive (Dodson 1994) making the canopic material in the text-inscribed pyramids particularly valuable. Inscriptional evidence suggests that the Old Kingdom mummification process took significantly longer than in the New Kingdom. Dunham and Simpson (1974, 8) estimate on the basis of dates given on the entrance doorway of Queen Meresankh's tomb that her mummification took 273 or 274 days – considerably longer than the 70 day figure commonly suggested for the New Kingdom, though it is not entirely certain that this period is representative of normal practice.

With regard to the appearance of the final mummified body, the mummified arm of king Djer from Abydos (Spencer 1993, 81) was found wearing elaborate bracelets alluding to the richness of the adornments placed on royal mummies. Other mummified remains show how the outer layers of bandaging were designed to enclose the body in a mixture of linen and plaster that was modelled to reproduce the human figure with its intricate bodily details in a statue-like form (Fishman et al. 1980). This outer statuesque casing was painted with life-like colours and included details such as facial features (Moussa and Altenmuller 1971; Fishman et al. 1980; Adams 1984).

The mummified remains in the text-inscribed pyramids

In the case of all five kings, the lids of their sarcophagi had been removed and their mummies largely destroyed by tomb-robbers so that only fragmentary contents were

found when the pyramids were entered and cleared by Maspero in the early 1880s. Maspero (1882, 178) found fragments of Unis' bandaged mummy in his sarcophagus: the right arm, the tibia and fragments of the skull, however, he gives no further details about them, and Batrawi (1947, 108-9), writing over sixty years later, reported them lost. Of Teti's mummy only a shoulder and a badly deteriorated arm are recorded by Maspero (1884, 3). Fragmentary bones and large quantities of bandaging were also found in Teti's Burial Chamber (Leclant 1969). Pepi I's sarcophagus contained two 1 cm-long strips of gold, which probably adorned the mummy wrappings (Maspero 1884, 158). Maspero (1887) found the complete mummy of Merenre in its sarcophagus. Ridley's (1983) research through Maspero's excavation notes and other documentary evidence, reveals that Merenre's mummy was transported to the Cairo Museum, via Mariette's deathbed (Maspero's predecessor as Head of Egyptian Antiquities) and following a series of misadventures, it was reduced to such a state of disintegration that it could no longer offer any information. The head, separated from the rest of the body was reproduced in 1887 (Breasted 1905, fig. 77) and is still stored in the Cairo Museum, though recently Bucaille (1987, 23) did not succeed in finding it.

It seems likely that garments, surviving only in Pepi I's chambers, may have been worn by the mummy. The first of these garments is a large sandal for the left foot (approx. UK size 10) made of red wood and retaining traces of gold (Labrousse 1996, 160). Sandals are prominent in iconographic and textual symbolism (e.g. on the Narmer Palette). In the Pyramid Texts (e.g. PT 106; Faulkner 1969) we learn that the king's sandals guide him on the correct route to the afterlife, offer the king protection (as a barrier between his body and the ground) and could be used by the king as a weapon to stamp on his enemies. Also found in Pepi I's chambers was a fragment of inscribed fabric (not bandaging) containing the inscription: 'fabric made for the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Pepi I, who lives for eternity' (Labrousse 1996). This too may have been worn by the mummy above the layers of bandaging; the assertion in the text that the king lives for eternity indicates that it was made specifically for this context.

Information about the mummification process was yielded from an alabaster fragment of equipment found in Teti's burial chamber (Leclant 1969). It was part of a tablet for embalming oils used on the body in mummification inscribed with hieroglyphic labels (Leclant 1969, 53). Embalming tablets are mainly known from later tomb assemblages and consist of small rectangular slabs of stone (generally alabaster) with a row of seven impressions for the oils. Pyramid Text utterances 72-78 refer to them being presented to the king. Amongst those which have been identified are 'first quality pine oil' (PT 77; Faulkner 1969) and 'first quality Libyan oil' (PT 78; Faulkner 1969). Oils, resins and spices were applied to the body during mummification, prior to and also following bandaging, because of their preserving properties and were apparently also available to the king in his funerary chambers. In front of the sarcophagus stood the square alabaster

canopic chest whose original position of the chest is still visible as a square niche in the floor paving. Only Merenre's canopic chest was found complete, characteristically divided into four compartments, each containing a large jar, though they no longer contained any trace of the embalmed internal organs. In the case of Pepi I, neither the chest nor the lid were found; however, fragments of the canopic vases and remains of their embalmed contents were discovered in a crack in the paving to the East of its original niche (Labrousse 2000). They consist of the interior fragments of two vases and a roll of bandaging. Grinsell (1947, 143) reported that three of the four original alabaster vases were originally found. The contents of two of them are missing, the third contains very fine bandaging which still carries remains of embalming products (Lauer 1974, 582, fig. 2). The fourth is intact and preserves the interior form of the destroyed vase (Labrousse 1996, fig. 118) consisting of bandaging and remains of viscera which have traces of having been embalmed (Labrousse 1996, fig. 120b). Two rolls of bandaging made of fine linen were also found close to the niche (Labrousse 1996, 160). This evidence indicates that the removed internal organs were given the same treatment as the mummy, dehydrated with natron, embalmed and then wrapped in bandaging.

The symbolic relationship between the pyramid texts and the King's Mummy

The funerary chamber walls of earlier royal pyramids had no texts at all inscribed upon them and were completely plain and undecorated (Lehner 1997). Nonetheless, studies of the Pyramid Texts reveal that they had been composed at an earlier date and were most likely already used prior to their inscription in Unis's pyramid as a corpus of magical spells recited by priests during various stages of the mummification process (e.g. Guilhou 1997). This use of the texts highlights the fact that the association with the mummy goes beyond their contextual rapport within the funerary chambers. Baines (2004, 36) has suggested that the Pyramid Texts evolved from texts which were inscribed on the mummy's coffin and may have continued to be used in this form, while simultaneously appearing also on the walls. It is not possible to prove whether this was the case from currently available data, but what is indicated by the content of the Pyramid Texts themselves is their role in the practice of mummification. The Pyramid Texts speak of the eternity and divinity of the king; by naming the gods they invoke their presence and identify them with the king's mummy. It has been suggested for example, that PT 213, 135 (Faulkner 1969) quoted in the following lines, was recited during the prolonged bandaging rituals (Guilhou 1997):

Your arm(s) are Atum
 Your shoulders are Atum
 Your belly is Atum
 Your back is Atum
 Your hinder-parts are Atum
 Your legs are Atum
 Your face is Anubis

PT 215, 147-149 (Faulkner 1969) quoted below offers another example of a similar spell focusing on particularly body parts suggesting its recital during mummification, possibly also during bandaging rituals.

Your head is Horus of the Netherworld, O Imperishable.
 Your face is *Mhnt-irty*, O Imperishable.
 Your ears are the Twin Children of Atum, O Imperishable.
 Your eyes are the Twin Children of Atum, O Imperishable.
 Your nose is the Jackal [god],
 Your teeth are Sopd,
 Your arms (hands) are Hapy and Duamutef
 You demand that you ascend to the sky and you shall ascend
 Your legs (feet) are Imsety and Kebhsenuf
 You demand that you descend to the Lower sky and you shall descend
 Your members are the Twin Children of Atum, O Imperishable.'

Here, while the practice of bandaging ensured the physical preservation of the body, the recital of the Pyramid Texts served the equally necessary function of ensuring everlastingness for the mummified body parts by identifying them with various gods and thus deifying them. This indicates that the recital of the Pyramid Texts was considered as an intrinsic and highly significant part of the mummification process. While not all the body parts are mentioned in any one spell, a rhetorical technique is used in PT 215 to emphasise the completeness of the body. This is important because numerous spells in the Pyramid Texts indicate that the king's body had to be complete in order to go on the journey to the afterlife and live amongst the gods, and rule as a king in the afterlife. The preoccupation with completeness and intactness of the body seems to have been the primary motivation for mummification. In this spell nine body parts are mentioned and in Egyptian religious thought, nine is symbolically the number of the gods in the Ennead, and represent the concept of wholeness. Thus the whole body is referred to, even though only nine body parts are mentioned.

The inscription of the Pyramid Texts on the walls of the funerary chambers may be seen as an attempt to transform the transient rapport built up between the mummy and the recited spells into a permanent bond. In this way the protective and divine powers of the Pyramid Texts would have a continual effect on the king's mummy. Textual analyses of the Pyramid Texts reveal a thematic differentiation between those spells inscribed in the Antechamber and those inscribed in the Burial Chamber i.e. situated in the relative vicinity of the king's mummy, with the former focusing more on the king's celestial existence while the latter include a high number of spells mentioning body parts and relating to mummification practices and offerings (also see Osing. Accordingly, both PT 213 and PT 215 are found in the Burial Chamber, close to the Sarcophagus.

As was stated in the preceding section, the Pyramid Texts cover the entire wall surfaces of the Burial Chamber in an all-encompassing format, similar to that whereby the bandaging completely encompasses the mummy. Via this

spatial mirroring of one another, the bandaging and the Pyramid Texts perpetuate and reinforce their joint function in protecting and preserving the king, a function which begins with the transformative stages of mummification and which continues for eternity within the funerary chambers. The fact that from Pepi I onwards the Pyramid Texts are painted green, colour of fertility and rebirth (meanings which are made explicit within the Pyramid Texts themselves, see PT 350; Faulkner 1969), again points to the protective, preserving and life-giving force believed to have been exerted on the king's mummy by the Pyramid Texts.

Conclusion

By focusing on the rapport between the king's mummy and the Pyramid Texts in the late Old Kingdom pyramids, this article looks not solely at the mummy, for biological or cultural clues, a task which would yield limited results due to the very fragmentary state of the mummified remains. What is unique here is the corpus of Pyramid Texts which, through their content and contextual relationship to the king's mummy are able to shed light on some of the earliest ideological and religious meanings that the ancient Egyptians attributed to the practice of mummification. In doing they are also revealing about the ways in which the recently invented technology of writing was employed in this context via the magical spells of the Pyramid Texts.

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