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A Group of Unique Statues Discovered at Giza

I. Statues of the Overseers of the Pyramid Builders¹

By ZAHI HAWASS

(Plates 29–32)

During the excavation of the cemetery of the workmen of the pyramids and their overseers, an interesting group of statues was found. The cemetery was discovered by accident in the area south-east of the Sphinx, known as «El Gebel El-Kebly», the southern mountain, when a horse and rider stumbled into a hole, revealing a small mud brick wall.²

The excavation began in May 1990 and continued until March 1993.³ The site is located at Giza about 2 km south of the Sphinx and about 300 m south of the Christian cemetery, immediately west of the concession of the Egyptian-American Expedition (Pl. 29).⁴ SELIM HASSAN had dug test trenches to the east of the site and to the south of the wall known as «Heit el-ghorab» in 1943–1944. He reported his results in a single paragraph.⁵ GAUTHIER referred to HASSAN's work and noted that mud seal impressions of Khufu and Khafre were associated with settlement remains, as well as in situ pottery and flint tools.⁶

The site lies along the base of the east-facing ridge of the Maadi formation outcrop at Giza, on the low desert (elevation 25 to 18.5 m above sea-level) between the escarpment and the modern town. This area has long been used by the nearby stables for riding trails and fodder storage.⁷

The excavation began near the mudbrick wall revealed by the horse. An area 64 m long was divided into 4×4 m squares. In the first season in 1990–1991, 11 large tombs and about 100 small graves were found.⁸

The large tombs were associated with small graves, located in front of or around the tombs. These graves were rectangular, square or oval shaped (Fig. 1). Also found were tombs which, although not having four distinct sides, were approximately «pyramidion» shaped, perhaps representing the primeval mound. It seems that these people wanted to imitate their kings. This is the first time that tombs of this shape have been found dating to the Old Kingdom.

¹ This is the first of a series of 8 articles about the statues found recently during the excavations west of the Great Pyramid and southeast of the Sphinx which will be published during 1994–5 in different journals.

² This is the second time that a horse was responsible for an archaeological discovery. The first occasion was in 1900, when HOWARD CARTER was riding a horse at Deir-el-Bahri. The horse fell down and CARTER discovered the statue of Mentuhotpe II. The place of the discovery is known as «Bab el-Hosan», «the door of the horse».

³ The excavation team consisted of the following: ZAHI HAWASS, director; MANSOUR BORIAK, MAMDOUH TAHA, MOHSEN KAMEL, archaeologists; ASHRAF EL SENOUSY, pottery specialist; ZAGLOUL IBRAHIM, architect and surveyor; EMAN RASHID and AMANI ABDEL HAMID, epigraphers; HASABALA EL TAIB, photographer. I

would also like to thank Mr. DIETER JOHANNES, the photographer of the German Institute.

⁴ Excavation here was carried out by MARK LEHNER in co-operation with the author of this paper, revealing administration buildings and poor burial shafts which seem to be related to this cemetery.

⁵ S. HASSAN, *Excavations at Giza* Vol. VI, Cairo 1943, p. 42.

⁶ H. GAUTHIER, *Les Fouilles en Egypte en 1932–33*, RdE I, 1933, p. 298.

⁷ See preliminary report on this excavation by Z. HAWASS, «*The Workmen's Community at Giza*», in: M. BIETAK (Hg.), *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Archäologie und deren Nachbargebiete*, 1994.

⁸ The report of the excavation of this cemetery will be published in a separate volume entitled *Excavation south-east of the Sphinx: The Workmen's Community at Giza* (forthcoming).

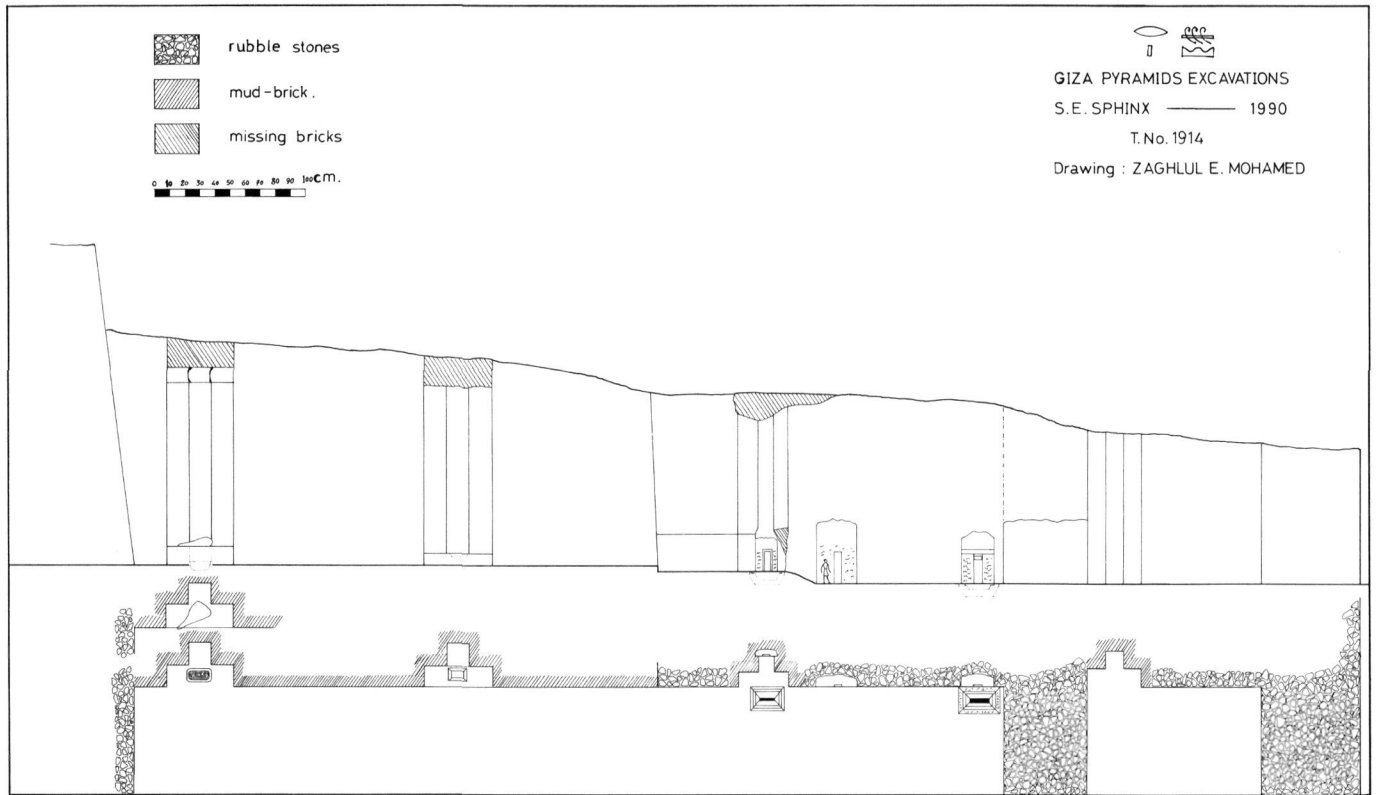


Fig. 1

One of the features of this cemetery is the variety of different tomb shapes; as well as the «pyramidion» shaped tombs, there are «stepped pyramidion», bee-hive, vaulted and mastaba tombs. They were built mainly of mudbrick with some roughly-worked basalt, granite and limestone blocks, probably left over from building the pyramids.

Below the superstructure were the shafts with the burials. All the bodies in the large tombs and in the shafts were in a foetal position, with the head directed to the north and the face to the east, an orientation possibly connected with the sun cult. Sometimes a wooden coffin made of sycamore wood was found inside the shaft. This was a local Egyptian wood and was cheap to use.⁹ The people who were buried in this cemetery worshipped the goddess Hathor. Perhaps there is a religious purpose in using sycamore wood in connection with Hathor, Lady of the Sycamore.¹⁰

Grave No. G 7:

This tomb contained three statues which were found in a small, rectangular niche without a ceiling. The tomb itself was a mudbrick mastaba, 1.31 by 0.80 m and 0.65 m high. The niche on its south-eastern corner was made of three rough limestone slabs set on edge and measured 0.40 by 0.28 m and 0.21 m high. In this niche, the statues were found, along with a limestone vessel. Two false doors on its eastern face were covered with white gypsum. A wall of rough blocks of limestone, granite and basalt separates this tomb from No. 1909 (Fig. 1).

⁹ See A. LUCAS, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries*, edited by J. R. HARRIS, London 1962, pp. 429–456 for the use of sycamore wood in coffins, etc.

¹⁰ S. ALLAM, *Beiträge zum Hathorkult (bis zum Ende-*

des Mittleren Reiches), MÄS 4, Berlin 1963; C. J. BLEEKER, *Hathor and Thoth: Two Key Figures of Ancient Egyptian Religion*, Leiden 1973.

1. The statue of *Hp.n(y)-k3w.s* (Pl. 30 a–d):

This statue represents a lady seated on a chair. When found, the face was turned to the east. She wears a black wig with the hair parted in the middle and reaching to her shoulder. Salt has damaged the better part of her face and the neck, but the rest of her body is in a good condition (Pl. 30 a). The features of the face where still visible, such as the eyes, are typically Old Kingdom because they are large.

The lady is shown with her hands on her knees. Her body is well modeled under a white robe which covers all of her, except her two feet. She sits on a backless chair of dark brown colour (Pl. 30 c).

On the right side of the chair is a hieroglyphic inscription which reads: *jm3b hr ntr Hp.n(y)-k3w.s*; Honoured before the god, *Hp.n(y)-k3w.s*.

Below the left side was found the following inscription: *mjtrt*¹¹ *Hp.n(y)-k3w.s*.

Dimensions:

Height of statue, top to base:	30 cm
Width:	7.5 cm
Height of head:	9 cm
Maximum width of back of base:	9.5 cm
Depth of chair:	11.5 cm
Width of chair:	11.5 cm
Height of chair:	20 cm

2. The statue of *K3j-ḥp* (Pl. 31 a–b):

A second statue found inside the niche is of a standing man, perhaps the husband of *Hp.n(y)-k3w.s*. It is also made of limestone and again has been damaged by salt, activated by the high humidity of the tomb. The details of the face are completely obliterated and the neck, hair and hands are badly pitted. The statue stands on a base with the left leg advanced and a back pillar reaching almost to his shoulder (Pl. 31 a).

There are remains of black colour on the base and dark red paint on his feet. In his hands he holds a rolled object and he wears a wig and a knee-length tunic. Beside his right leg his name is written in hieroglyphs: *K3j-ḥp*.

Dimensions:

Height:	39 cm
Height of pillar:	28 cm
Width:	11.5 cm

3. Statue of a woman grinding grain (Pl. 31 c and Pl. 32 a–b):

This statue, of painted limestone, represents a kneeling woman grinding grain. It was found broken into several pieces and has been completely restored.

The woman wears a short black wig held in place by a band of white cloth tied round the forehead. The locks of the wig are carefully indicated. There is evidence of a little salt damage to her face, but on the whole, it is well defined. The eyes are black but the right eye has lost most of its colour and the left eye is broken. The nose is straight. The lips are well formed with some red colour still visible at the time of discovery.

¹¹ The translation of *mjtrt* is not clear yet. However, see D. NORD, *Some Aspects of the Origins of the Harem in Ancient Egypt* (unpublished paper); G. ROQUET,

BIFAO 77, 1977, p. 125; T. G. H. JAMES, *HTBM* 12, p. 49; H. G. FISCHER, *BiOr* 19, 1962, p. 243.

The artist has achieved a very realistic model, as if the woman was alive and really grinding grain. Her arms and shoulders suggest the strength needed for her work. Her right arm is longer than the left one, perhaps to indicate that she is using more pressure on the left side. Parts of her fingers are lost. She wears a red bracelet on her right wrist which may be a rope tied round to protect her hand from the movement of the grinding.

Around her neck is a bead collar with a pendant hanging down between the breasts. The left breast is larger than the right one. She wears only a short kilt which leaves her upper torso bare, a garment typical of Old Kingdom statues of this type, and which conveys the idea of the hard, hot work she does.¹²

The oval shaped quern slants away from the woman and its lower part is damaged. It has traces of red paint, probably to represent granite. The middle of the quern is painted white to indicate the ground flour which is being collected into a sack held between her legs. The statue base is damaged but still has some black colour.

This type of statue was first placed in tombs dated to Dynasty 4 and became very common in Dynasty 5. No statues of this type can be dated to the 6th Dynasty.¹³

It has been suggested that these figures represent servants performing work related to food preparation. Other known servant statues represent potters, butchers, beer makers and so on.¹⁴ These servant statues were replaced by wooden models during the First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom.¹⁵ Many such Old Kingdom servant statues were found at the cemeteries of Giza and Saqqara. The most famous of them are the statue from Giza now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and two other statues from Saqqara in the Cairo Museum.¹⁶ It has been suggested that this type of statue was made to provide the deceased with food in the afterlife and also to help with any work there.¹⁷ However we should not apply the term «servant» to all these statues because they frequently represent the wife, daughters or relatives of the deceased. The statue found in the workmen's cemetery is well carved and beautifully made and the fact that she is wearing a wig and a bead collar around her neck suggests that this is a statue of the lady of the house *Hp.n(y)-k3w.s* and not a servant.

The tombs found in this cemetery are relatively poor tombs built for the overseers and workmen of the pyramids. In the present instance, the woman represented is not a princess or wife of a high official, rich enough to hire a servant to do these tasks. She would do the work herself in her house in this life, as well as in the other life. Therefore, all the above evidence strongly suggests that the term servant statues is not applicable here and we should consider this statue as the statue of the wife of the deceased.

Dimensions:

1. Statue

Height from head to base:	20.5 cm
Height on back to base:	14 cm
Height of the head:	5.3 cm
Length of the left arm:	9.8 cm
Length of the right arm:	10.2 cm

¹² M. SALEH and H. SOUROUZIAN, *Official Catalogue: The Egyptian Museum Cairo*, Mainz 1987, fig. 52.

¹³ see W. S. SMITH, *History of Egyptian Sculpture and Painting in the Old Kingdom*, 1949, p. 95 ff.

¹⁴ see L. BORCHARDT, in: *ZÄS* 35, 1897, p. 119 ff.; A. EG-
GEBRECHT, in: *LÄ* I, 1975, pp. 1080–1083.

¹⁵ see H. WINLOCK, *Models of Daily Life in Ancient Egypt*, Cambridge 1955.

¹⁶ see S. D'AURIA, P. LACOVARA and C. H. ROHRIG, *Mummies and Magic. The Funerary Arts of Ancient Egypt*, Boston 1988, pp. 90–91, No. 21 from tomb G 2185. The two statues at Cairo Museum are CG 114, CG 115.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

2. Base

Length of the base:	28 cm
Width from front:	8.8 cm
Width from the back:	8.3 cm
Height:	2 cm

3. Quern

Length:	13.5 cm
Width:	5.8 cm
Height from front:	1.8 cm
Height inside:	2.5 cm
Length of the grinding tool:	6.5 cm

Date:

It is difficult to date these three statues because this cemetery is unique and as yet has no parallel from the Old Kingdom.

The only archaeological evidence found in the tombs were pottery sherds and remains of bird bones. The majority of the pottery vessels found, such as storage jars with curved rims, platters and a bowl, dates to the end of Dynasty 4. This is good evidence to date the three statues found also to Dynasty 4.

The statue of the lady grinding grain is well carved and shows a very impressive style. This style compares with the art of Dynasty 4, rather than Dynasty 5. However, this comparison with known Old Kingdom private statues may not fit here because these new statues belong to a special stratum of Egyptian society, as yet without parallel. Therefore we depend on the pottery for dating these statues to Dynasty 4.



The cemetery of the workmen of the pyramids and their overseers at Giza (view from south).



a)



b)



c)



d)

a-d) Statue of *Hr.n(y)-k3w.s.*



a)



b)

a-b) Statue of *K3j-hp*.



c) Statue of a woman grinding grain.



a)



b)

a-b) Statue of a women grinding grain.