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# THE *PSŠ-KF* AND THE 'OPENING OF THE MOUTH' CEREMONY: A RITUAL OF BIRTH AND REBIRTH<sup>1</sup>

By ANN MACY ROTH

In archaeological and textual evidence alike, the *psš-kf*-knife consistently occurs as part of the same collection of objects. In the Pyramid Texts, these objects are presented in a sequence that is the earliest attested form of the 'opening of the mouth' ceremony. The speeches accompanying the presentations suggest that the *psš-kf* and the objects associated with it were the equipment for a ritual mimicking birth and childhood, and that the role of the *psš-kf* in this process was to cut the umbilical cord of a newborn baby. Further archaeological, textual, and iconographic evidence is adduced to support this interpretation.

ONE of the more enigmatic types of artifact to survive from ancient Egypt is the *psš-kf*-knife, a flake of flint, usually between 10 and 20 cm in length, that broadens to a fork at one end. Sometimes also called 'fish-tail knives', 'forked lances', or 'fish-tail lance heads', they are best attested in assemblages of the Predynastic period. Although flint *psš-kfs* are rare after the beginning of the First Dynasty,<sup>2</sup> models of the implement, often made of other types of stone, are known from Old Kingdom tombs and continue to occur occasionally as late as the Eighteenth Dynasty.<sup>3</sup>

The *psš-kf* is best known for its role in the 'opening of the mouth' ritual,<sup>4</sup> a sequence of speeches and actions that allowed a mummy or a cult statue to partake of offerings. Some sources even identify the *psš-kf* as an instrument used in the principal act,<sup>5</sup> although that interpretation is based upon New Kingdom versions, where the *psš-kf* seems to have been confused with other implements used in the same ritual. In the earliest redaction of the ritual, that preserved in the Pyramid Texts,<sup>6</sup> the *psš-kf* is offered to the deceased in the spell immediately before the spell for the opening of the mouth.

<sup>1</sup> The interpretation proposed here emerged from catalogue entries I wrote for S. D'Auria *et al.*, *Mummies and Magic: The Funerary Arts of Ancient Egypt* (Boston, 1988), 81, 224–5. I am grateful to Ms Sue D'Auria, for preliminary bibliography, and Mr Stephen P. Harvey, for bringing to my attention two previously unnoticed *psš-kf* amulets in the storage collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. I have benefited from audience comments on presentations of earlier versions of this paper at the 1988 ARCE meetings in Chicago, at the Fall 1989 meeting of a study group on ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean cultures at the University of California, Berkeley, and at the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at Yale University. Dr James P. Allen was kind enough to correct my interpretation of some of the Pyramid Texts, and to offer me many useful criticisms and additional references. I am very grateful to Dr Rene van Walsem for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper, which clarified my understanding of his own article on the topic and raised useful questions. Dr Arnold Cohen, director of the Division of Maternal Fetal Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, has kindly answered several questions about the technical processes of modern childbirth for me. Two anonymous reviewers for the *JEA* also offered useful suggestions. Any remaining errors are, like the conclusions, all my own responsibility.

<sup>2</sup> Only one flint example has been dated after the Sixth Dynasty, according to R. van Walsem, *OMRO* 59 (1978), 231, table 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 224–5.

<sup>4</sup> See E. Otto, *Das ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual* (Wiesbaden, 1960), *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> Notably, *Wb.* 1, 555, 2.

<sup>6</sup> The texts preserved in the first register of the offering ritual in the pyramid of Unas, spells 16–40, are recorded photographically in A. Piankoff, *The Pyramid of Unas* (Princeton, 1968), pls. 58–62.

The original function of the *psš-kf* has been the subject of considerable speculation. W. M. F. Petrie identified it as a hunting weapon. One of the examples he found was wrapped with a cord with two alabaster knobs at the outer end, which he explained as a leash that would allow it to be retrieved easily by a hunter without leaving his position in ambush.<sup>7</sup> E. J. Baumgartel, however, disagreed with this interpretation and argued that the cord was not sufficiently long for this purpose. She regarded the cord wrapping as haft, although she had no explanation for the alabaster knobs.<sup>8</sup> H. Schäfer proposed that knives of this shape served as ordinary table knives during the Predynastic period;<sup>9</sup> this suggestion is unlikely, given their painstaking workmanship and their concave edges, which would rule out common applications such as sawing and chopping. O. H. Myers<sup>10</sup> pointed out the remarkable similarity of their shape to the instrument traditionally used in the Jewish ritual of circumcision, but he rejected this interpretation himself on the basis of the occurrence of the *psš-kf* in tombs. The presence of both models and the implement itself in tombs of women<sup>11</sup> makes this hypothesis even more untenable, as does the representation of circumcision performed with a knife of a different shape.<sup>12</sup>

The most extensive investigation into the *psš-kf* is that of R. van Walsem, who has collected the basic artifactual and textual information in a comprehensive article that must surely serve as the point of departure for all future work on the problem.<sup>13</sup> His study concludes that the *psš-kf* was used in the terminal Predynastic and early Protodynastic periods not as a knife, but as a wedge to hold the jaw of a corpse closed during the process of mummification. His interpretation is based principally upon the spell in the Pyramid Texts where the *psš-kf* is said to 'make firm (*smn*) the lower jaw' of the deceased, a passage that survived intact in later funerary texts. The models of the *psš-kf* and the bottles and jars associated with it, van Walsem argues, are models of an early embalming kit, placed in the tomb as evidence of proper mummification.

Despite its aptness to the mortuary texts, however, van Walsem's interpretation does not accord well with the forms of the *psš-kf* or the archaeological context in which examples have been found. Even the textual references, when seen in their larger setting, suggest an alternative explanation. Using primarily the evidence that van Walsem has collected, it can be argued that the *psš-kf* had both a practical and a ritual use in the process of childbirth and, by extension, a ritual function in the rebirth of the dead.

### The *psš-kf* set

The *psš-kf* does not normally occur in isolation. In the Old Kingdom, it was consistently grouped with a set of other objects. In tombs, these objects were sometimes stored in a

<sup>7</sup> W. M. F. Petrie, *Nagada and Ballas* (London, 1896), 50-1. The knife, of Nagada I type, was found in tomb 1388 at Nagada, and is drawn on plate 73.

<sup>8</sup> E. J. Baumgartel, *The Cultures of Prehistoric Egypt*, II (London, 1960), 31.

<sup>9</sup> H. Schäfer, *ZÄS* 43 (1906), 67 n. 1.

<sup>10</sup> O. H. Myers, in R. Mond and O. H. Myers, *Cemeteries of Armant*, I (London, 1937), 37.

<sup>11</sup> E. Massoulard, *RdE* 2 (1936), 152, notes the presence of models in a woman's tomb. For examples of flint *psš-kfs* found with female remains, see E. J. Baumgartel, *Petrie's Nagada Excavation, a Supplement* (London, 1970), pl. 42 (Nagada tomb 1417); W. M. F. Petrie, *Diospolis Parva: Cemeteries at Abadiyeh and Hu, 1898-1899* (London, 1901), 33, pl. vi (tomb B 109).

<sup>12</sup> A. Badawy, *The Tomb of Nyhetep-Ptah at Giza and the Tomb of Ankhmehor at Saqqara* (Berkeley, 1978), pl. 30.

<sup>13</sup> Van Walsem, *OMRO* 59, 193-249.



depression in the top. This would not, of course, prevent their use in ritual presentations; but they clearly had no practical function.

The recesses in most slabs are symmetrical, with the implements arranged in three columns parallel to the long sides. The *psš-ḳf* is placed above the pair of blades in the centre, and the bottles and cups divided on either side. Some slabs omit the blades, while others have recesses for additional objects. Slabs containing *psš-ḳf* sets have been found in private tombs of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties and somewhat later, in both the Memphite and provincial cemeteries. Associations of the same group of objects without a slab are known from as early as the Fourth Dynasty: a collection of the bottles, cups and a *psš-ḳf* inscribed for Khufu was excavated in the Menkaure valley temple area.<sup>15</sup> These are presumably already models, because the vessels are too small to be practical. No blades were recorded in this collection.

### The *psš-ḳf* in temple inventories

The *psš-ḳf* occurs in the same context in written sources. The Abu Sir papyri group the elements of the *psš-ḳf* set in inventories of temple equipment that record their state of repair as they are handed over to a new phyle of priests.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the names of the objects themselves, the temple inventories provide names for their parts, since the location of damage is specified. (The hieroglyphic forms of these names are shown with the objects in fig. 1.)

The name of the *psš-ḳf* has clearly been shown to have had two parts. The word *ḳf*, which occurs first in some contexts, refers to its material, which is either flint in general or a special type of flint.<sup>17</sup> *psš* is a participial form of the verb 'to divide', and refers to either the instrument's shape ('that which is divided'), or to its purpose ('that which divides'). The two tips are called *tpwḳ*, 'the two heads', and the handle is called the *sd*, 'tail'. The notch between the tips, or, more probably, the entire forked part, is called *ḥpd*, 'bottom' or perhaps literally, 'buttocks'.

The flat blades directly precede the *psš-ḳf* in these inventories. They are called *sbj*, 'the two stars', a name that may be related to the fact that they are said to be made of *bj*, perhaps meteoric iron.<sup>18</sup> One part of these implements is also described as a *ḥpd*, probably the curved edge, as Posener-Kriéger has suggested.<sup>19</sup> The other objects in the *psš-ḳf* sets are listed immediately following these implements and are said to be made of *mnw*, 'hard stone'. The narrow-necked bottles are called *ḥst*: one black and one white bottle are noted in each inventory. The cups are called *ḥnwt*, but in contrast to the model sets, only three are listed, one white and two black cups. Two similar cups of *bj* (meteoric iron) and *htm* (galena) follow; the extra white cup may have been intended to represent one or both of these.

<sup>15</sup> G. A. Reisner, *Mycerinus* (Cambridge, 1931), pls. 65 a,b; 61 f (*in situ*). These objects are now in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

<sup>16</sup> P. Posener-Kriéger and J.-L. de Cenival, *The Abu Sir Papyri* (London, 1968), pls. 21-4. These terms are summarized and identified in P. Posener-Kriéger, *Les archives du temple funéraire de Néferirkarê-Kakaï*, I (Cairo, 1976), 190-1.

<sup>17</sup> J. R. Harris, *Lexicographical Studies in Ancient Egyptian Minerals* (Berlin, 1961), 228, and W. Helck, *MDAIK* 22 (1967), 38-9.

<sup>18</sup> Harris, *Lexicographical Studies*, 166-8.

<sup>19</sup> Posener-Kriéger, *Néferirkarê-Kakaï*, I, 190.



### The 'opening of the mouth' ritual

E. Otto argued that it is impossible to trace the history of the 'opening of the mouth' ritual prior to the New Kingdom version, which he saw as a jumble of spells taken from six separate rituals.<sup>20</sup> A statue ritual, he argued, formed the oldest, most fundamental part of the 'opening of the mouth' ceremony; it was augmented by an offering ritual, an embalming ritual, a funerary ritual, a slaughtering ritual, and a temple ritual. Otto suggested that the spell that deals with the *psš-*kf** might be associated with the embalming ritual, since he could not reconcile it with the statue ritual.

Van Walsem concurs.<sup>21</sup> He points out that, in the Pyramid Texts, the *psš-*kf** occurs near spells that mention natron and bodily efflux, which are both involved in the process of mummification. The reference to the 'opening of the mouth' in the spell after the Pyramid Text *psš-*kf** spell, he argues, cannot be the 'original statue (= opening of the mouth) ritual',<sup>22</sup> since there is no reference to the woodcarving adze that is so essential in the New Kingdom version. Since the model *psš-*kf** sets also lack woodcarving tools, they, too, are assigned to another ritual. He concludes that the equipment grouped with the *psš-*kf** should be completely disassociated from the 'opening of the mouth' ritual and explained instead as for an embalming ritual.

The centrality of the statue ritual and the adze is, however, difficult to support for the Old Kingdom. The 'opening of the mouth' ritual was well established by that period,<sup>23</sup> hence the ritual equipment must be among the objects recorded in the temple inventories from the mortuary temple of Neferirkare at Abu Sir. Yet there is no mention of an adze anywhere in these papyri,<sup>24</sup> certainly not in the equipment inventories. Since the adze is not present, the *sbj*-blades, said to be of meteoric iron like later mouth-opening implements, must have been used to perform the ritual. These blades, then, must have been the precursor of the adze and a central element in the earliest 'opening of the mouth' rituals, rather than part of an embalming ritual accidentally incorporated at a later date.

The adze is unattested as an 'opening of the mouth' tool in the Pyramid Texts before the pyramid of Mernere.<sup>25</sup> The earliest redaction of the Pyramid Texts, dating to Unas, attributes this function to the two *sbj*-blades (although they are there called *ntrtj*),<sup>26</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Otto, *Das ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual*, II, 2.

<sup>21</sup> Van Walsem, *OMRO* 59, 220.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 222.

<sup>23</sup> The 'opening of the mouth' is part of the mortuary ritual as early as the Fourth Dynasty tomb of Metjen (Otto, *Das ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual*, II, 1). There is no explicit mention of the ritual in the Abu Sir papyri, unless the phrase *wn r* that occurs in the equipment inventories as part of the notations of damage can be connected with this ritual. Posener-Kriéger, *Néferirkarê-Kakai*, I, 198–9, argues that this phrase is not related to the ritual, but indicates a hole. It is, however, used only in connection with the implements associated with the *psš-*kf** (twice with a white *hst*-vase and once with a black; and once each with a galena *hnwt*-cup and a silver offering table that directly follows the sequence).

<sup>24</sup> The paleography of the Abu Sir papyri gives only one example of an adze of any kind, Posener-Kriéger and de Cenival, *The Abu Sir Papyri*, pal. pl. xii, U20. This sign occurs as a phonetic sign in the word *nwh*, 'rope', *ibid.*, pl. 19A.

<sup>25</sup> Pyr. 13, as cited in K. Sethe, *Die altägyptischen Pyramidentexte*, I (Leipzig, 1908), first occurs in the pyramid of Pepi II; however, parts of the same spell occur on fragments from the pyramid of Mernere, J. Leclant, *Or* 42 (1973), pl. 15, fig. 20. On this fragment, it directly precedes the beginning of the sequence given on the north wall of the burial chamber of Unas.

<sup>26</sup> The evolution of this term for the blades into *sbj* was discussed by Helck, *MDAIK* 22, 39–40. The Pyramid Texts uniformly write *ntrj*, omitting the feminine *t* ending. The transliteration *ntrtj* is adopted here for purposes of consistency.

which are said explicitly to open the mouth. These are clearly the two blades from the *psš-ḳf* set and are offered immediately after the *psš-ḳf* in the text of this ritual.

### The Pyramid Text sequence

These spells occur in the top register of the 'offering ritual' on the north wall of the burial chamber of Unas (fig. 2).<sup>27</sup> The offerings that accompany this ritual are given in compartments at the end of the first line of each spell. All of the vessels and implements that are offered in this top register, except for perishable items of food, can be found in the *psš-ḳf* set; none of the items of the set is omitted from the text. It is clear that the *psš-ḳf* set contains the durable objects needed to perform this single ritual. Any explanation of the *psš-ḳf* spell and the 'opening of the mouth' spell, therefore, should also be consistent with the spells connected with the other elements of the set, as well as those connected with the intervening perishable commodities.

While some spells that directly precede the spell that offers the *psš-ḳf* could be connected with mummification, as van Walsem argues, based on their references to purification and bodily efflux, there are many other offerings in the register which are inconsistent with such an explanation. These same spells could also represent the purification rites and the bodily fluids associated with birth. The context of the surrounding spells clearly favours this second interpretation. Taken together, the spells of the first register of the Unas 'offering ritual' can be seen to be a coherent sequence, reflecting a progression from birth through the childhood development of a human being.

The register in question begins with a spell in which Osiris and Thoth are called upon to seize all those who hate Unas and then admonished not to loosen themselves from such enemies (Pyr. 16). The verb used, 'loosen' (*sfhḥw*), is a geminated form of the verb *sfh*, which is normally applied to the separation of a child from the womb of its mother.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps this represents a pun on the fact that Unas is now himself loosened, and magically prevents inimical beings from participating in his rebirth. This sequence is accompanied by *stj*, the poured offering. Significantly, the substance of this offering is left unspecified: it is the pouring that is important. This pouring is probably an example of sympathetic magic used to expedite birth. When a baby was born, it was said by the Egyptians to *wʿrt*, 'flee', the same word used to describe the rush of the waters of inundation.<sup>29</sup>

The second spell, accompanied by the burning of incense, reminds Unas that 'The one who has gone, has gone with his *ḳʿ*', beginning a sequence that reassures Unas of the continued closeness of his *ḳʿ*. Four gods associated with the four cardinal points,<sup>30</sup> Horus, Seth, Thoth, and Dewen-'anwy, as well as Osiris and Khenty-irty, are each said to 'go forth with his *ḳʿ*' and Unas is told 'you also, will go forth with your *ḳʿ*' (Pyr. 17). The repetition again indicates sympathetic magic, creating a sort of 'peer pressure'; such a formula may have been used to entice a child from its mother's womb. The closeness of

<sup>27</sup> Piankoff, *The Pyramid of Unas*, pls. 58–62. They occur in the same place in the pyramids of Pepi II and Queen Neith, although other spells have been added before them. In the pyramids of the intervening kings, Teti, Pepi I, and Mernere, the corresponding area of the burial chamber wall has been lost.

<sup>28</sup> P. Ebers 800, as quoted in H. Deines, H. Grapow, and W. Westendorf, *Grundriß der Medizin* IV/1 (Berlin, 1956), 291.

<sup>29</sup> *Wb.* I, 286, 16 and 18.

<sup>30</sup> R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford, 1969), 5.



FIG. 2. The top register of Pyramid Text spells on the north wall of the burial chamber of Unas. (Drawn from photographs in the publication.)

the king to his *kꜣ* is further emphasized by a passage which describes an embrace: 'The arm of your *kꜣ* is before you, the arm of your *kꜣ* is behind you; the leg of your *kꜣ* is before you, the leg of your *kꜣ* is behind you' (Pyr. 18a-c). In conclusion, the eye of Horus is offered (Pyr. 18d). These spells are distinguished by the prominence and apparent physical nature of the *kꜣ*, the double, who is (by the interpretation offered here) in the womb along with Unas. The *kꜣ* continues to be prominent in the spells immediately following, but it is not mentioned in the spell accompanied by the *pss-kf* or in the nine spells following it.

Cold water and two pellets of natron are offered next, and Unas is urged to go forth to his son, Horus, who has brought him the eye of Horus, and to take to himself the efflux

that has come forth from him. The spells that accompany this offering end with the phrase, repeated four times: 'Come, you have been summoned' (Pyr. 22-3).<sup>31</sup>

The next two offerings probably represent the actual birth. Five pellets of southern natron from el-Kab are offered (Pyr. 26) and the king is directed to open his mouth. The spit of Horus and Seth is mentioned in connection with the mysterious *zmjn*, a word that is similar in sound to the word 'natron', *hzm̄n*,<sup>32</sup> which is being offered and which is carefully spelled out in the following line. In later periods, *zmjn* is sometimes determined with a sun-disk, which suggests a relationship with *mjn*, 'today';<sup>33</sup> it may have been a reference to the day of birth. Next, five pellets of northern natron from Wadi Natrun are offered to the mouth of the deceased. They are associated with the same group of gods cited in Pyr. 17 (Pyr. 27a-c, e). Then the mouth of Unas is compared with the mouth of a nursling calf on the day of his birth (Pyr. 27d), again suggesting that Unas is a newborn at this point in the sequence. Incense is then offered, and identified with the incense of the four gods associated with the cardinal points, of the *k* of Unas, and of itself.<sup>34</sup> Unas's fellow gods are then said to cleanse all his limbs (Pyr. 28, 29c) and the eye of Horus is offered once again (Pyr. 29a-b). These spells represent the birth and the cleaning of the newborn.

The *ps̄-kf* is offered, and is said to fix the lower jaw of the deceased (Pyr. 30a). The mouth is opened with two *nrtj*-blades that are identified with Upper and Lower Egypt. As in the Abu Sir papyri, where they are called *sbj*, these blades are said to be made of *bj* (Pyr. 30b). Pellets of incense (again southern and northern) and an unknown substance called *šjk*<sup>35</sup> are presented (Pyr. 31). Two containers that represent the breast of Horus and the breast of Isis are offered; oddly, the former contains milk while the latter is empty (Pyr. 32). These two spells mimic the nursing of the newborn child.

After this, there is a repetition of the lines calling upon Unas to come forth before his son, Horus, and presentation of the eye of Horus (Pyr. 22-3), this time accompanied by cold water from Lower Egypt rather than natron. Since these lines again contain references to efflux, they may refer to the birth of the placenta, which occurs some time after the birth. It would be appropriate to use the same spells here as were used for the actual birth, given the symmetrical nature of the events.

Two bottles, black and white, are lifted up and identified with the black and the white eyes of Horus (Pyr. 33a-b). Their light and dark colour may serve further to distinguish the newborn and his placenta. The Unas spells do not call these vessels *h̄ts*-bottles, but they are so called in later Pyramid Texts and offering lists,<sup>36</sup> and it is safe to assume that these are the bottles associated with the *ps̄-kf* in the model sets. In the next three lines the

<sup>31</sup> Literally, 'the voice has gone forth for you' (translation suggested by Dr Allen). The phrase *pr.tj n.k hrw* has usually been related to invocation offerings. It is, of course, possible that invocation offerings themselves are related to a summons to rebirth.

<sup>32</sup> The word *hzm̄n* also occurs in medical texts as a word for menstruation, an association which may be relevant here. (*Wb.* III, 163, 8.)

<sup>33</sup> *Wb.* III, 453, 5-6. The entry notes that the Hebrew and Arabic roots *z-m-n* also relate to time.

<sup>34</sup> I am again indebted to Dr Allen for this interpretation.

<sup>35</sup> Several equivalents have been suggested for this word, including fat (G. Maspero, *Etudes de mythologie et d'archéologie égyptiennes* (Paris, 1893), 313), a kind of grain (W. Barta, *Die altägyptische Opferliste* (Berlin, 1963), 79), cheese balls (S. Hassan, *Excavations at Giza*, VI/2 (Cairo, 1948), 80), and pellets of perfume (*ibid.*). Its determinative, three little circles, suggests something small and granular.

<sup>36</sup> Barta, *Die altägyptische Opferliste*, fig. 5. This parallel is discussed below.

deceased is described as surrounded by offerings and is presented with a 'fresh' cake (*pꜣt wdꜣt*) (Pyr. 34), which was probably chosen because it was soft.

Five cloves of garlic<sup>37</sup> are then given to Unas and are said to be 'teeth' (Pyr. 35a). A 'cake of offering' or, more likely, a 'cake of weight' (*pꜣt nt wdn*) is presented (Pyr. 35b-c); then wine is offered in the black and white *hꜣts*-bottles (Pyr. 36).<sup>38</sup> This sequence of the ritual represents the weaning and teething of a child. Wine can be used to numb the gums during that painful process, and the heavy cake was, like zwieback, something tough and hard for the baby to cut his teeth against. In the final part of the register, the deceased is given a full meal, including meat, with wine and beer in *hnt*-cups (Pyr. 37-40).

The dead person had to be reborn to participate in the afterlife<sup>39</sup> and this sequence suggests that, like other newborns, he could not at first eat adult food. In view of the extreme importance of food in Egyptian mortuary religion, an efficient ritual was needed for 'bringing up baby'. The initial sequence of spells in the offering ritual of the Pyramid Texts performed this function, taking the deceased through his (re)birth and the developments necessary to allow him to enjoy his funerary banquet. Passing quickly through the transitions of birth and childhood, the ritual focuses primarily on the developments that will allow him to eat. Thus, the firmness of the jaw that allows the child to nurse and the teething process that allows him to eat solid foods are emphasized, while other developments, such as walking and talking, are not mentioned. Some parts of the sequence may be based on actual rituals of birth and childhood transitions, while others are probably purely mortuary; however, the underlying metaphorical unity and purpose of the sequence is clear.

Van Walsem's contention that the implements of the *pss-*kf** set represent the equipment for an embalming ritual ignores the presence of the *hꜣts*-bottles and *hnt*-cups in the Pyramid Texts, where they are explicitly described as containing wine and beer, rather than more conventional embalming materials. Moreover, the contents of these vessels are clearly offered to be consumed along with the other food offerings, rather than to be used in embalming. By their position, the intervening offerings must have belonged to the same ritual, and many of these elements are difficult to reconcile with a ritual of embalming, notably the metaphorical breasts and teeth.

The connection of this first register of the offering ritual with birth and rebirth is particularly interesting in view of the observation that the cosmological premise of the Pyramid Texts was the king's daily rebirth with the sun.<sup>40</sup> If the deceased king was seen

<sup>37</sup>The word used, *hꜣw*, is normally translated 'onions'. However, three commodities, *thwj*, *jꜣkt*, and *hꜣw*, are frequently interchanged, and may have been varyingly defined as garlic, onions, and leeks. See K. R. Weeks and M. Mosher, *JARCE* 16 (1979), 187-8. In the late Old Kingdom private offering lists, the offering of five *hꜣw* is determined by a clump of green onions, although it is also called *trw* there, which normally implies a pellet or a little round thing of some kind (S. Hassan, *Excavations at Giza*, VI/3 (Cairo, 1948), pl. 137). The determinatives in the royal offering lists and the Pyramid Texts are small ovals (ibid., pl. 144). The shape of a clove of garlic, when peeled, is clearly a better analogue for a tooth than a green onion.

<sup>38</sup>These appear to be the same bottles as those described shortly before as the black and white eyes of Horus. The same bottles, presumably, could be used more than once during the ritual.

<sup>39</sup>J. Assmann, in *Religion and Philosophy of Ancient Egypt*, ed. W. K. Simpson (New Haven, 1989), 140, has cited several passages to support his argument that the dead, though reborn, are not actually delivered: 'O Great Mother, whose children are not delivered!' (referring to the sky goddess) and 'I shall never give birth to thee'. (spoken by the same). As I understand his interpretation, however, these passages by no means deny the rebirth of the deceased, but only his delivery from the sky goddess, i.e. his rebirth upon earth.

<sup>40</sup>J. P. Allen, in *Religion and Philosophy in Ancient Egypt*, 14-23, has made this point most recently.

as being reborn every day, the *psš-ḳf* and the other implements used in this ritual would clearly have served to facilitate the process.

### The *psš-ḳf* set in late Old Kingdom offering lists

The unity of the Pyramid Texts sequence is apparent from the fact that the commodities and implements that it associates with the *psš-ḳf* occur in the same order in the offering lists of Barta's type A/B.<sup>41</sup> This sequence of offerings began to be inserted into offering lists in private tombs, as a complete unit, at the end of the Sixth Dynasty, about 150 years after the first occurrence of the same offerings in the Pyramid Texts. The new sequence was inserted at the beginning of the list. Its first two offerings, poured offerings and incense, duplicate the beginning of the traditional form (Barta's type A). The seven sacred oils that previously followed the incense directly now follow the funerary meal. The lists thus represent the equipment and commodities required for a single ritual that was performed for both royal and non-royal dead, using the implements that composed the *psš-ḳf* set, and other, perishable, commodities.

The Pyramid Texts spells outlined above were also followed directly by a ceremony of anointing with the seven sacred oils that begins the second register in the Unas pyramid. These oils were apparently dispensed from the seven depressions in special limestone oil slabs (see fig. 3).<sup>42</sup> Like the *psš-ḳf* sets, oil slabs are frequently found in tombs of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties. It is likely that these two similarly-shaped limestone tablets, one holding the *psš-ḳf* assemblage and the other with depressions for the oils, represented the durable equipment required for two successive rituals. The ritual involving the *psš-ḳf* was thus performed in non-royal cults long before it appeared on the walls.<sup>43</sup>

Interestingly, although the older offering lists in private tombs (Barta's type A)<sup>44</sup> omit the offerings that correspond to the *psš-ḳf* ritual in the Pyramid Texts, they include what may be a related sequence of offerings. This sequence also occurs in the late Old Kingdom offering lists (type A/B) and in the Pyramid Texts, after the offering of the seven oils. In this older sequence, several types of bread are offered, followed by the presentation of four *ḥḏw*, 'onions'. Although they are determined with a bunch of green onions in both royal and private contexts, the accompanying Pyramid Text spells describe them as 'teeth'. These onions (or garlic?) are followed immediately by offerings of various cuts of meat and a sequence of poultry, so that again teeth are offered before solid food.<sup>45</sup> The varieties of bread that precede the *ḥḏw* in this sequence may represent

<sup>41</sup> Barta, *Die altägyptische Opferliste*, 94–5 and fig. 5. This form of the offering list is comparatively rare, according to S. Hassan's study of the type, *Excavations at Giza*, vi/2, 135–42. It occurs in eight tombs, five of which are at south Saqqara, in the cemeteries surrounding the pyramid of Pepi II. The correspondence of these lists with the offering spells of Pyramid Texts has long been known. See, for example, H. Junker, *Giza*, II (Vienna, 1934), 69–96.

<sup>42</sup> D'Auria *et al.*, *Mummies and Magic*, 81–2, no. 12.

<sup>43</sup> The adoption of this sequence into the offering lists is thus not necessarily a result of the oft-cited 'democratisation of the afterlife', as Otto suggested (*Das ägyptische Mundöffnungsritual*, II, 2). It may instead have been a function of the rarity of decorated burial chambers in private tombs in the late Old Kingdom, since both the Pyramid Text ritual and most of the type A/B offering lists occur in inaccessible underground chambers.

<sup>44</sup> Barta, *Die altägyptische Opferliste*, fig. 4.

<sup>45</sup> This is not, of course, the first meat offered, since the A/B type includes the *psš-ḳf* ritual and the meat included in it has already been listed before this sequence. Further, in both A and A/B types, some meat offerings are included in a sequence of offerings between the seven sacred oils and the sequence under discussion. I would suggest, however, that these sequences each represent a separate ritual, perhaps further variant versions of the same ritual.

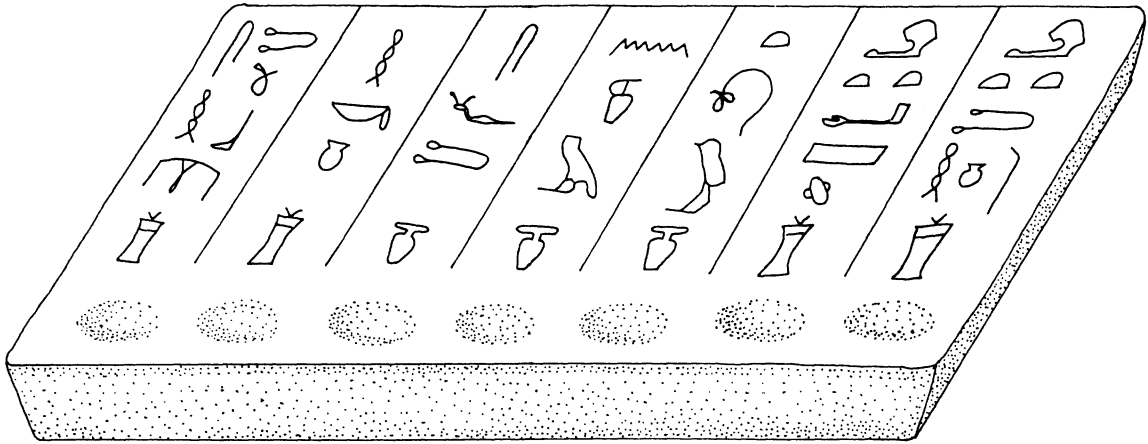


FIG. 3. An Old Kingdom oil slab with indentations for the seven sacred oils. A composite drawing.

actions in the ritual rather than food, the names of the varieties making puns on the actions that would have accompanied the offering. One of these varieties is *rth*-bread, which is determined with a sign that resembles the *psš-kf*:  $\leftarrow$ . The *rth*-bread is preceded indirectly by natron (*bd*), with which the mouth of Horus is said to be cleansed (*bd*) in the Pyramid Text spells. The ritual here may be an earlier, more metaphorical, version of the same ritual of birth and child development that occurs more explicitly in the *psš-kf* ritual.

In view of the conservatism of Egyptian mortuary religion, the retention of an older version alongside a new variant would hardly be surprising. The same phenomenon would explain the addition of Pyr. 12–15, the first spells to mention the adze and the *hps* as implements of opening the mouth, in the later versions of the Pyramid Texts. In the Pyramid Texts of Mernere, these spells were placed on the wall just before the offering sequence, and probably represent a further development of the same idea.<sup>46</sup>

### The practical and magical function of the *psš-kf*

The *psš-kf* and the *nrtj* are offered in the Pyramid Texts ritual after the spells that mimic the king's passage through the birth canal and before he begins to nurse. This would imply that they were used soon after the birth of a child. In view of the fact that the *psš-kf* has a cutting edge, its most likely role in birth would have been to cut the umbilical cord. The umbilical cord is rubbery and slippery, and since ancient Egyptian women gave birth in a squatting position, raised on a stool of bricks, it probably required some dexterity to tie and cut it. A knife with a concave cutting surface would have kept the cord from slipping away while it was being cut, while the serrated points and curved outer edges would offer the midwife the possibility of cutting the cord from a number of different angles as circumstances might dictate.

The principal problem with this interpretation is the fact that the *psš-kf* is associated with the jaw. It is 'to fix the jaw' that the implement is offered in the Pyramid Text and

<sup>46</sup> These texts are only preserved in fragments, but their relative position is clear (Leclant, *Or* 42, pl. 15, fig. 20). They are first preserved on the wall in the burial chamber of Pepi II, again on the north wall of the burial chamber.





Perfective, but translated it as a clause of result in order to arrive at a translation in which the *psš-kf* opens the mouth rather than closes it: 'I have established for you your jaws, so that they are divided (= open)'. Van Walsem argues that this use of the Old Perfective is unattested.<sup>55</sup>

Van Walsem correctly rejects the possibility of taking this word as a passive participle on the grounds of the fully written *.tj* ending in several post-Old Kingdom examples. He also contends that an Old Perfective describes a 'special situation' of the jaw, and is thus more suitable to the case than a passive participle which describes a 'characteristic circumstance'.<sup>56</sup> Like Otto and Maspero, he would like to take *psš.t(j)* as a third person feminine dual Old Perfective, but adopts a more conventional translation: 'they having been divided', which he interprets as a sagging of the lower jaw. (He notes correctly that the dual *rtj* refers not to the upper and lower jaws, but to the two halves of the lower jawbone.)<sup>57</sup>

The difficulty with both translations is that Edel<sup>58</sup> gives no writing of the third person feminine dual form with a single *t* ending. Van Walsem counters this problem with the arguments that (1) Edel lists only the most characteristic spellings and not necessarily all possible spellings and (2) that the Old Perfective is an adverbial form, not an adjective, and thus need not agree with antecedent nouns. The first argument ignores the fact that, if this writing of the third person feminine dual occurs at all, it is extremely rare.<sup>59</sup> A rare writing would be less troubling were it not the only writing of the verb attested in this context: it occurs in all eight of the Old Kingdom examples van Walsem cites.<sup>60</sup>

The second argument is correct insofar as the Old Perfective is an adverbial form and need not agree with the antecedent noun; but it is also a verb and must have a subject that makes sense. If the Old Perfective is not an anomalous dual, but an independent third person feminine singular, consistent with its morphology, it must be translated as 'she having been divided', which, though grammatical, makes no sense, as no feminine singular noun precedent exists to which this adverbial form might refer. The only possible antecedent subjects for the Old Perfective *psš.t(j)* mentioned in the spell are the feminine dual 'jaws', which creates morphological difficulties, or Unas himself, who is addressed in the second person. This suggests a more productive approach. The word *psš.t(j)* would be a normal writing of the second person Old Perfective: 'you having been divided'. If the *psš-kf* was an instrument that cut the umbilical cord, clearly what has been divided is not the jaw, but Unas himself from his placenta and his mother. The passage can then be translated in accordance with the many examples cited in Edel's §587.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>55</sup> J. P. Allen, *The Inflection of the Verb in the Pyramid Texts* (Malibu, 1984), 405-6, §589, cites three examples, however, of which at least the first seems impossible to interpret otherwise.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 201.

<sup>57</sup> Van Walsem, *OMRO* 59, 197-202.

<sup>58</sup> E. Edel, *Altägyptische Grammatik*, 1 (Rome, 1955), 271, §572. According to Edel's chart, the only forms of the Old Perfective written with a single *t* ending are the second person singular and the third person feminine plural.

<sup>59</sup> Allen, *The Inflection of the Verb*, 387, §564 I, cites only three occasions where the third person feminine dual Old Perfective is written with a single *t* ending: *psš.t* (the case under discussion), *wꜥd.t* (Pyr. 55d), and possibly *tm.t* (Pyr. 304e). *wꜥd.t* could also be parsed as a second person, however (Allen, pers. comm.).

<sup>60</sup> *OMRO* 59, 199. The possible exception is N, the version from the pyramid of Pepi II, where Dr Allen informs me that a trace under the *š* of *psš.t(j)* might represent the top of a tall *tj*-sign. The spacing of the text, as shown in van Walsem's copy, would not allow this; however, even if the copy is in error, the remaining seven spellings are consistently anomalous.

<sup>61</sup> Edel, *Altägyptische Grammatik*, 1, 283; similarly, Allen, *Inflection of the Verb*, 404-5, §588.

'I have made firm for you your lower jaw (to your face), you having been divided: the *psš-ḳf*'.

Unfortunately, there is another problem that also exists in van Walsem's interpretation. The verb *psš* cannot mean 'separate from', but only 'divide into two or more pieces'.<sup>62</sup> In van Walsem's interpretation, this would not imply that the lower jaw had been divided from the upper (or sagged), but that it had been divided into two or more pieces, which, as van Walsem points out, occurs in animal jaws, but not in human ones.<sup>63</sup> In the interpretation offered here, Unas must himself be in two pieces, if he is to be described as *psš.t(j)*. One might argue, as van Walsem does, that the meaning of the word has been stretched in order to make a pun on the name of the implement, but this is unlikely. More probably, the name and the divided tip itself are reflections of the function it performs.

### The *psš-ḳf* and the *ḳ*

The use of the modifier *psš.tj* can be explained by returning to the observation, made in the analysis of the Unas texts above, that the *ḳ* of Unas is especially prominent in the first few spells of the register and seems to have a physical existence in the womb along with Unas. This relationship suggests that the *ḳ* was identified with the placenta, an identification that has been proposed previously on other grounds by A. M. Blackman and H. Frankfort.<sup>64</sup> As the scenes of divine birth at Deir el-Bahari, Luxor temple, and the later mammisi show, the god Khnum forms both the child and his *ḳ* of clay on his potter's wheel at the time of conception; and the goddess of birth, Meskhenet, places them both in the womb of his mother.<sup>65</sup> The word *ḳ* is related to the word *ḳw*, 'food, sustenance', and the placenta is the source of that sustenance in the womb.<sup>66</sup>

By this reconstruction, Unas is embraced by his placenta before birth ('the arm of your *ḳ* is before you, the arm of your *ḳ* is behind you'). After the spell offering the *psš-ḳf*, the *ḳ* is not mentioned again until the 'teeth' have been presented, although the spells summoning Unas may have been repeated to induce the birth of the placenta. If it is the

<sup>62</sup> J. P. Allen, personal communication.

<sup>63</sup> Van Walsem, *OMRO* 59, 200. The example he cites to circumvent this difficulty, in which Horus is said to be *psš* with respect to his side-lock, is isolated; furthermore, the translation 'the being sagged of his sidelock' does not seem 'feasible' to me. The passage works better as a parallel to the cutting of the umbilical cord: cutting off the side-lock marked a major transition in life, and the operations are quite similar in some respects. But one would like a more general explanation for the use of the term.

<sup>64</sup> A. M. Blackman, *JEA* 3 (1916), 241 n. 3, first proposed the equivalence. It was argued more fully by H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago, 1948), 70-4. Both base their ideas on accounts of kingship among the Baganda of Uganda and contemporary Egyptian attitudes towards the placenta. Frankfort believed that only the king's placenta served as a *ka*, the personified life force that protected the king and preceded him, immediately after birth, into the afterlife. U. Schweitzer, *Das Wesen des Ka im Diesseits und Jenseits der Alten Ägypter* (Glückstadt, 1956), 15, has argued that the appearance of the king's *ka* in ritual scenes taking place on earth contradicts this hypothesis. In the modified view adopted here, any thing or being or conception that supports and sustains a person's life can be regarded as his *ḳ*. Thus the *ḳ* is not limited by the physical location of the placenta.

<sup>65</sup> H. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1971), 458.

<sup>66</sup> It is not at all clear whether the Egyptians were aware of the role of the placenta, which is not explicitly identified in any of the medical texts. The term *mwt-rmṯw*, 'mother of people', which is sometimes translated 'placenta' and which might be used to support this argument, seems more likely to mean 'uterus'. This is not only because it can be said to belong to the woman (*mwt-rmṯw.s*) but because *rmṯ* is plural: one would expect a placenta to serve as the 'mother' only to the child to which it is attached. It is perhaps significant that half of the women who nurse the newborn child in the Deir el-Bahari birth scenes (E. Naville, *The Temple of Deir el Bahari*, II (London, 1896), pl. 51) are identified as *ḳ*, perhaps because they are giving him sustenance. The adjective *bk* (*Wb.* I, 481), 'pregnant', may also be related.

placenta that is summoned as 'Unas' in this repetition of the earlier spells, this would support the assumption that the *psš-kf*, in cutting the umbilical cord, has divided Unas in two, justifying the use of the verb *psš*.

An identification of the placenta with the *kꜣ* would also explain the use of the phrase 'to join the *kꜣ*' as a euphemism for death. At least in the Predynastic period, death clearly meant a return to the womb. The deceased was buried in an oval womb-like grave, with the limbs arranged in a fetal posture.<sup>67</sup> In later periods, the goddesses Isis and Nephthys are placed at the head and foot of coffins, duplicating their position with respect to the royal triplets in the description of birth in P. Westcar.<sup>68</sup> Here too, they are ready to assist at (re)birth, after the deceased has joined his *kꜣ*. This rebirth, as the antithesis of joining the *kꜣ* (= death), would again require a division from the *kꜣ*. The great quantities of food that are provided in Egyptian mortuary ritual could be seen against this background as providing *kꜣw* that would sustain independent life after death at those times when the deceased is again separated from his *kꜣ*.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, in addition to having a divided tip, the *psš-kf* served to divide the child from the placenta, his 'double', and also from his mother. The nature of both the form and the function of the knife are reflected in its name, since the participle *psš* could mean either 'the divided one' or 'the divider' or possibly both simultaneously (at least in unvowelled textual references). Such a pun would have appealed to the Egyptians for religious reasons as well as practical ones. The beginning of independent existence that is marked by the cutting of the umbilical cord is probably one of the most momentous transitions in life. It is at this moment that food begins to be needed for sustenance and thus that the individual begins to exist independently. Given the importance of this transition at birth, it is not surprising that it was repeated and marked by ritual during the process of rebirth.

The tradition of cutting the umbilical cord with something that had itself been divided may have survived even into Islamic times. A tenth century Andalusian physician, ʿArīb ibn Saʿīd al-Kātib al-Qurṭubī, in a treatise on childbirth, made special mention of the fact that in Egypt it was traditional to cut the umbilical cord with a reed split into two.<sup>70</sup> Whether this was a misunderstanding of some ritual connected with birth, or whether Egyptian midwives retained the ancient custom of 'dividing with a divided thing', this reference is quite possibly an echo of the original use of the *psš-kf*.

### The form and evolution of the predynastic *psš-kf*

The sequence recorded in the Pyramid Texts derives from a very old ritual, to judge from the occurrence of *psš-kfs* and other elements of the ritual as early as the Nagada I

<sup>67</sup> M. A. Hoffman, *Egypt before the Pharaohs* (New York, 1979), 110.

<sup>68</sup> P. Westcar 10, 7-8. Isis sits before the mother and Nephthys sits behind her. When the children are born, Isis receives them; when she lays them down on the bricks, their heads would thus be towards Nephthys, while Isis would be positioned at their feet. This would explain the position of these goddesses on coffins, where Isis is placed at the foot and Nephthys at the head, seemingly contradicting Isis' primacy with the deceased. In fact, however, the mummy, like the children in P. Westcar, is facing her.

<sup>69</sup> The common phrase *n kꜣ n X* would then have to be understood as 'for the sustenance of X'.

<sup>70</sup> *Kitāb Khalq al-Janīn wa-Tadbīr al-Ḥabāla wa'l-Mawlūdīn* (Le Livre de la génération du foetus et le traitement des femmes enceintes et des nouveau-nés), translated and annotated by H. Jahier and Noureddine Abdelkader (Algiers, 1956), 51 (Arabic text) and 56 (French translation). I am grateful to Dr John Hayes and Professor Everett Rowson for discussing the Arabic text with me. The latter suggests that although the Arabic seems to imply that the reed has been completely separated, the two pieces must have remained at least partially attached so they could be used jointly in the cutting.

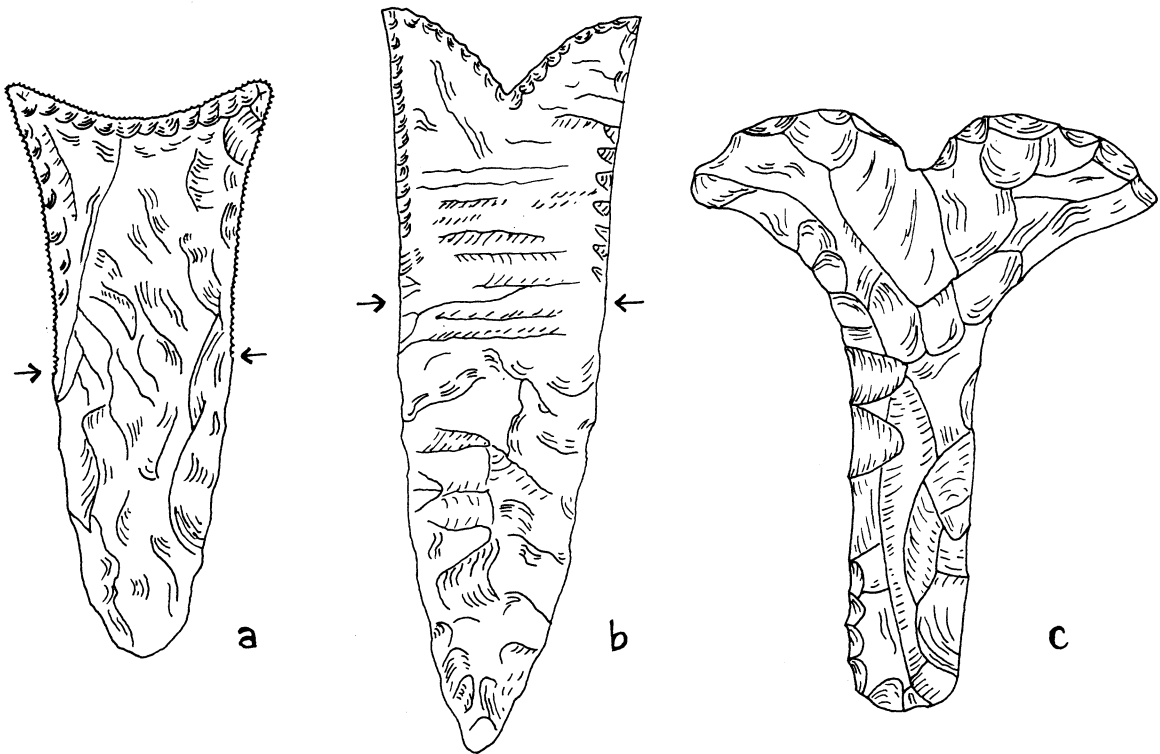


FIG. 4. *pss-kf* knives (a) of the Nagada I-IIb period (CG 64.857); (b) of the Nagada IIc-III period (CG 64.864); and (c) of the middle First Dynasty (Petrie, *Abydos*, pl. 51). The arrows mark the end of the fine retouching on the blade. Drawn from the publications.

period. The flint *pss-kf* occurs in both tombs and settlements during the Predynastic period,<sup>71</sup> principally in Upper Egyptian sites but also at Maadi<sup>72</sup> and in the Fayum.<sup>73</sup> The predynastic *pss-kf* was clearly hafted on the end opposite the fork, since on most examples the retouching of the edges stops at the point where the stone would have been covered by a handle (this point is indicated by arrows on the examples shown in fig. 4). Often, all of the exposed edges were sharpened and evenly serrated, including the inner faces of the notch. However, in one model example,<sup>74</sup> only the inner edges of the notch

<sup>71</sup> See Baumgartel, *Cultures*, II, 31. Mond and Myers, *Cemeteries of Arment*, I, pl. 68, give examples found in a settlement, as does J. Garstang, *Mahasna and Bet Khallaf* (London, 1903), pl. 4.

<sup>72</sup> I. Rizkana and J. Seeher, *MDAIK* 41 (1985), 243 and fig. 8.1. See also O. Menghin, *MDAIK* 5 (1934), pl. 20a. The more complete of the two *pss-kfs* found at Maadi appears to have been manufactured differently than the southern examples: it is extensively retouched only on one side, after preliminary grinding, while the other surface has the smooth face of the original flake, retouched only around the edges and to reduce the bulb of percussion. The same type of unifacial edge retouch with grinding (albeit of cortex rather than a worked surface) is seen on tabular scrapers from the same site, thought to be of Palestinian inspiration and possibly of Palestinian flint: I. Rizkana and J. Seeher, *Maadi II: The Lithic Industries of the Predynastic Settlement* (Mainz am Rhein, 1988), 29. This would suggest that the *pss-kfs* found at Maadi were locally manufactured rather than imported from the south.

<sup>73</sup> H. W. Seton-Karr, 'Flint Implements of the Fayum, Egypt', *Report of the United States National Museum for 1904* (Washington, 1906), 751, pl. 12.

<sup>74</sup> W. M. F. Petrie, *The Labyrinth, Gerzeh, and Mazghuna* (London, 1912), 24. This is a tiny serpentine model (about 3.25 cm in length, including its ivory handle); however, the pattern of sharpening may be significant.

were sharpened, while another flint tool that was retouched only on the interior of its forked edge may have been a less elaborate *psš-kf* meant for practical rather than ritual use.<sup>75</sup>

These examples would be consistent with the hypothesis above, in which the notch is seen as the main site for the cutting of the umbilical cord. The care and skill demonstrated in the knapping of most of these flints suggests a ritual function even at this early period when it probably still had a practical function as well.<sup>76</sup> Red ochre is associated with two flint *psš-kfs* at Nagada,<sup>77</sup> and probably represented blood in a ritual context.

An evolution in the *psš-kf* is shown in the predynastic assemblages described by Kaiser.<sup>78</sup> In the periods he calls Nagada I and Nagada IIa, it is roughly the shape of an isosceles triangle, with a slight concave curve to the long sides, and a more marked concavity on the short side, between the two points of the divided tip (fig. 4a). The Maadi examples are of this earlier type. Beginning in the Nagada IIb period, Kaiser's corpus shows a *psš-kf* with a sharp notch flanked by two convex edges that curve up to the two tips. The long sides were more parallel; and, although slightly concave towards the tips, they were essentially straight, and even convex in the area that was covered by the haft (fig. 4b). These later examples only occasionally exhibit the careful serration that is so striking on the earlier examples. These changes are, if anything, intensified in the Archaic period example found in the tomb of Den at Adydos (fig. 4c), which has widely curving tips and a deeper central notch.<sup>79</sup> The Old Kingdom models are generally of the later form, with a sharp notch and convex curves between the notch and the out-turned tips, and no serration at all.

The change from the earlier, smooth, concave curve to a notch probably represents a refinement of the shape that would have rendered it more effective in securing and cutting the umbilical cord. At the same time, it was probably noticed that the triangular shape of the *psš-kf* corresponded to the shape of a uterus, a similarity that would have increased its magical significance and its restriction to this particular use. Since the Egyptians tended to use bovine body parts as substitutes for those of humans in their representations,<sup>80</sup> the convex curves that resulted from the development of a notch may have been emphasized and turned outward to increase the resemblance to the bicornate uterus of a cow. The changes seen in the shape of the *psš-kf* thus probably have both practical and symbolic explanations.

<sup>75</sup> Petrie, *Nagada and Ballas*, pl. 73 no. 70.

<sup>76</sup> A use-wear analysis of these knives has failed to show use of the cutting edges, T. R. Hester, *Journal of Field Archaeology* 3 (1976), 346–51. However, D. L. Holmes, in *The Human Uses of Flint and Chert* (Proceedings of the 4th International Flint Symposium, April, 1983), G. de G. Sieveking and M. H. Newcomer, eds. (Cambridge, 1987), 91–6, argues that the microstructure of Egyptian flint differs from that of European flints. Her experiments show that sustained use is required before any detectable polish appears. Artifacts that were used only sporadically will thus normally show no use-wear, and this is probably true of the *psš-kf*. (I am grateful to Ms Renée Friedman for bringing the latter article to my attention.)

<sup>77</sup> Baumgartel, *Cultures*, II, 31.

<sup>78</sup> W. Kaiser, *Archaeologia Geographica* 6 (1957), 69–78, pls. 21–2.

<sup>79</sup> W. M. F. Petrie, *Abydos*, I (London, 1902), pl. 51 no. 22.

<sup>80</sup> For example, the hieroglyphs for jaw, tongue, and ear (see A. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*<sup>3</sup> (Oxford, 1957), 463, F19, F20, and F21). The bicornate uterus of a cow is also used to represent the female sex in general (Ibid. 466, F45), for example, of ducks. It seems not to be applied to humans, except as a specific medical term for 'uterus'.

Although van Walsem does not deny that the *psš-*kf** was used as a knife originally,<sup>81</sup> he does suggest that one *psš-*kf** of the early type was ‘a probable first use of a prehistoric *psš-*kf** as a support for the chin’, because it was covered with a woven sheath that could not be removed without destroying it,<sup>82</sup> which he argues was intended to protect the skin from damage.<sup>83</sup> If this was a problem, however, it would have been simpler not to have sharpened the edges in the first place; it is more probable that this covering was a temporary sheath, intended to prolong the knife’s sharpness. Furthermore, the Nagada I-IIa *psš-*kf** would have been badly adapted to the role of wedge, since the tips of the fork are quite sharply angled and would almost certainly have lacerated the skin under the chin had they been positioned as van Walsem suggests (perpendicular to the face with the handle wedged in the collarbone, one tip under the chin and the other above it).<sup>84</sup>

The development of the *psš-*kf** over time would have intensified these problems. The later shapes had increasingly pointed tips and new convex edges. As the weight of the jaw pressed into the central notch, the upper convex edge would scrape the skin of the soft front part of the chin. The resulting disfigurement of the face would have been directly contrary to the basic tenets of mummification, which stressed the recognizability of the face. Beginning in the Fourth Dynasty, van Walsem has argued, the tips of the *psš-*kf** were more rounded, to prevent damage to the skin beneath the jaw and to fulfil better their function as a prop to the jaw.<sup>85</sup> But this development occurred only in models, which were often made of stones other than flint and were rarely sharpened.

The principal problem with van Walsem’s reconstruction is that it posits a change in function from knife to jaw-prop just as the functional flint *psš-*kf** is disappearing from the archaeological record. This hypothetical second function is assigned to a period when few examples of the implement are attested,<sup>86</sup> and those few are of expensive materials and probably already served a principally ritual function. Yet from this ephemeral second function, van Walsem has attempted to derive the long-lasting ritual importance of the *psš-*kf**.

### The placement of the *psš-*kf** in predynastic tombs

Despite the connection with the jaw in the Pyramid Texts, according to Petrie, the most common position for the *psš-*kf** was behind the pelvis of the contracted burials.<sup>87</sup> Tables 1 and 2 give the placement of the two different forms in the predynastic tombs where this

<sup>81</sup> Van Walsem, *OMRO* 59, 243 and especially nn. 209–10.

<sup>82</sup> O. H. Myers, *JEA* 19 (1933), 55, pl. 11, 1. Myers gives no provenience or accession number for the piece, which is in the collection of the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art. The white cross-lined bowl which is published with the *psš-*kf** was not accessioned at the same time. (I am grateful to Dr Catharine Roehrig for checking this point for me.)

<sup>83</sup> Van Walsem, *OMRO* 59, 243.

<sup>84</sup> Van Walsem’s demonstration of the placement he proposes was made using a replica of the *psš-*kf** of Khufu (Reisner, *Mycerinus*, pl. 65b), which is a polished flint model and, at 18 cm in length, is longer than most of the predynastic examples. A photograph of this experiment is published in van Walsem, *OMRO* 59, pl. 38.4.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* 230.

<sup>86</sup> Van Walsem lists only one ‘historic’ *psš-*kf** prior to the Fourth Dynasty (*ibid.* 227). There are noticeably fewer in the later Predynastic phases as well.

<sup>87</sup> Petrie, *Naqada and Ballas*, 30. The placement within the tomb of most of the *psš-*kf**s excavated by Petrie at Nagada cannot be determined from published sources, which makes his general overall impression significant.

has been recorded.<sup>88</sup> Models are cited along with flint *psš-kfs*, since presumably in the context of a tomb their purpose was the same.

TABLE I. *Placement of the psš-kf of the Early Predynastic Type*<sup>89</sup>

Site	Tomb	Placement
Abadiyeh	B109	in front of the body
	B86	behind an intact body (nine examples)
Abydos	E132	forked tip at shoulder, end to west
El-Amra	b143	before face (which is turned away)
Matmar	3073	at south end of tomb (two examples)
Nagada	223	behind pelvis
	271	north of feet
	1388	at feet
	1416	mid east wall
	1417	mid east behind pelvis of the eastern body
	1676	behind pelvis of western body (three examples)
	1773	behind pelvis
	1821	before chest
	1909	between arms, wrapped in leather
	Naga el-Der	N7014
N7016		lying on ankles
N7120		at the tip of the left knee
N7625		between pelvises of two bodies (wooden haft under handle)

*Summary:*

Seventeen behind body, usually behind pelvis, or east  
 Five in front of the body (west)  
 Three near feet (usually north)  
 Two before face (west, near face)  
 Two at head (south)

It is normally assumed that the tools and other objects buried with the dead in the Predynastic period were placed in accordance with the way in which they were used. For example, the drinking cup was set next to the face and the palette and grinding stone near the hands. The *psš-kf* was most often placed behind the body, especially in the earlier period. This was the normal position for knives and other potentially dangerous weapons. Like these other flint implements, the *psš-kf* was often intentionally broken before the burial,<sup>90</sup> which supports the assumption that it had a similar function.

The later tombs, however, show placements predominantly in front of the body, usually at the level of the chest or abdomen, but rarely also in front of the face. In this latter position, the implement is twice associated with a bowl that has flaring sides,<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup>The sample given in these tables is neither complete nor necessarily representative. They list only the published tombs in which the placement of the *psš-kf* was recorded.

<sup>89</sup>Sources for this table are: Abadiyeh: Petrie, *Diospolis Parva*; Abydos: E. Naville, *Abydos*, 1 (London, 1914); El-Amra: D. Randall-Maciver and A. C. Mace, *El-Amrah and Abydos* (London, 1902); Matmar: G. Brunton, *Matmar* (London, 1948); Nagada: Petrie, *Naqada and Ballas*; Naga el-Der: A. M. Lythgoe and D. Dunham, *The Predynastic Cemetery N 7000* (Los Angeles, 1965).

<sup>90</sup>Hester, *Journal of Field Archaeology* 3, 349.

<sup>91</sup>Naga el-Der tombs 7014 and 7271; see tables 1 and 2.

TABLE 2. *Placement of the psš-*kf* of the Later Predynastic Type*<sup>92</sup>

Site	Tomb	Placement
Armant	1523	centre of north side of tomb (no body)
El-Amra	ag6	in front of body, resting on legs (five examples)
Gerza	G21	in front of hands, with galena (serpentine model)
Hierakonpolis	100	middle west side, opposite partition wall
El-Mahasna	H83	on south ledge (no body)
	H85	at south-east corner (body disturbed) (metal model)
Nagada	178	mid east side (two examples)
	218	behind neck of body furthest to the east
	218	north (three examples)
	414	south end (no body)
	430	middle south end (no body)
	T22	before knees (two examples)
	1237	middle east side (no body)
Naga el-Der	7271	forked end outside bowl at west; handle at missing face

*Summary:*

Five behind body, usually behind pelvis, or east

Nine in front of the body (west)

Four near feet (usually north)

One before face (west, near face)

Three at head (south)

presaging the way it is sometimes presented in New Kingdom 'opening of the mouth' rituals.<sup>93</sup> Presentation in a bowl occurs only at Naga el-Der, but it is attested during both periods. The use of a bowl suggests that liquid might have dripped from the *psš-*kf** in the course of the ritual. The red ochre staining on some examples cited above suggests that the liquid was blood, which confirmed to the newborn his detachment from his mother.

One further example of the role of the *psš-*kf** as a signifier might be cited. As mentioned above, an example of the early type from tomb 1388 at Nagada was found wrapped with a cord.<sup>94</sup> This cord, with two alabaster knobs on its outer end, has never been satisfactorily explained. In view of the interpretation proposed here, the cord might be seen to represent a model umbilical cord, wrapped around the knife as a further demonstration of its detachment.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Sources for this table additional to those in n. 89 are Armant: Mond and Myers, *Cemeteries of Armant*, 1; El-Mahasna: E. R. Ayrton and W. L. S. Loat, *The Pre-dynastic Cemetery at el-Mahasna* (London, 1911); Gerza: Petrie, *The Labyrinth*; Hierakonpolis: J. E. Quibell and F. W. Green, *Hierakonpolis*, II (London, 1902).

<sup>93</sup> Van Walsem, *OMRO* 59, 232, fig. 2, numbers 10 and 17.

<sup>94</sup> Petrie, *Nagada and Ballas*, 51 and pl. 73 no. 66.

<sup>95</sup> Dr Helen Whitehouse of the Ashmolean Museum very kindly sent me a photograph of this *psš-*kf**, which is registered as Ash.1895.1001. (I am also grateful to Dr Barbara Adams for alerting me to the present whereabouts of the knife.) The photograph and Dr Whitehouse's description also show fragments of leather and wood inside the cord which are presumably the remains of an original haft. The cord was thus not itself the haft, and it is far too long to have served to attach one.

A human umbilical cord measures between 30 and 100 cm in length. The cord wrapping the *psš-*kf** is now fragmentary; but using the photograph as a guide to the pattern of wrapping, I loosely wrapped a scale model of the handle with cord of the same thickness as that in the photograph (about 3 mm). This wrapping



If these circumstances are interpreted correctly, the *psš-ḳf* was already used in a ritual to communicate the severing of the umbilical cord by the Nagada I period. The change in the placement to the front of the body that took place in the later period may signify the *psš-ḳf*'s increasing ritual associations and the lessening of its use as a knife. Both the placement and the evolution of the *psš-ḳf* in predynastic burials are thus consistent with the interpretation suggested by the analysis of the Pyramid Text spells above.

The placement of the *psš-ḳf* argues against its use as a prop for the jaw. The fact that no intact *psš-ḳf* was found where it might have fallen from such a propping position makes it almost certain that it was not used for this purpose in predynastic burials. The frequent occurrence of more than one *psš-ḳf* with a single body is a further argument against this interpretation.<sup>96</sup> Van Walsem therefore limits this hypothetical use of the *psš-ḳf* to 'historic' *psš-ḳfs*.<sup>97</sup> He suggests that the *psš-ḳf* became a part of the embalming toolkit during 'late prehistoric to protodynastic times'.<sup>98</sup> However, by this period, the use of the *psš-ḳf* as an amulet and as a model, as well as its ritual presentation in a bowl, seems to have been well-established. The ritual use thus was at best contemporary with, and probably prior to, the development of the function from which he derives its ritual meaning and to which it is not very well suited.<sup>99</sup> It is much simpler to assume that the instrument's ritual associations were acquired in connection with its clearly attested use as a knife. To postulate an ephemeral change in function during a period from which the implement itself is almost unattested, based on texts of a much later date, seems unnecessarily elaborate.

The fact that the flint *psš-ḳf* is no longer frequently attested in the Old Kingdom suggests that it evolved into a purely mortuary implement, and that umbilical cords began to cut with ordinary knives, or perhaps with forked knives made of less durable material than flint, such as the split reeds mentioned by ʿArīb ibn Saʿīd.

### Models

The *psš-ḳf* knife appears as a model implement already in predynastic contexts, usually made of clay or pottery.<sup>100</sup> All four of the predynastic models cited by Petrie are drilled at the base and probably served as amulets. The only example to which he was able to

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required about 130 cm of cord, which exceeds the maximum length of a human umbilical cord, but not egregiously.

The alabaster knobs are no longer with the object. They may have represented handles at either end of a short second cord wrapped around the umbilical cord to stop the flow of blood before cutting it. (This possibility was suggested to me by Dr John G. Roth.) The obstruction would have been placed between the baby and the point where the cord was cut and thus should not appear on the cord that was removed. However, as an implement involved in the operation, it might have been included in the model for the sake of completeness.

<sup>96</sup> This circumstance does not argue against the use of the implement to assist in rebirth, since birth occurred daily for the sun and may have also been seen as a repeated event for people in this period. That remummification was also required every night is possible, but it seems less likely. Even if this were the case, it is hard to imagine that this aspect of the cycle would be emphasized by the provision of specialized funerary equipment.

<sup>97</sup> Van Walsem, *OMRO* 59, 243.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* 225.

<sup>99</sup> '[It] is not surprising that the instrument as such went out of use, since the *psš-ḳf*, being placed under the chin, did not possess great stability'. *Ibid.* 225.

<sup>100</sup> Petrie, *Prehistoric Egypt*, pl. xxviii, nos. 14, 15, 16 and 18.

assign a clear provenience was found at Hierakonpolis, and belongs to the post-Nagada IIb type. Its shaft is painted a buff colour with wide black bands at top and bottom, presumably to imitate some sort of wrapping; and the edges and tips of its forked end are coloured with red ochre,<sup>101</sup> as with the flint *psš-*kf**s, probably to indicate blood. Petrie illustrates very similar models of more conventional knives, also with red staining on the blade, further confirming the association of the *psš-*kf** with knives.<sup>102</sup>

A triangular piece of sandstone also stained with red ochre was discovered in tomb 1457 at Armant, in association with a flint *psš-*kf**.<sup>103</sup> Other early stone models were of serpentine and alabaster.<sup>104</sup> A single copper model, carefully serrated to resemble the flint prototype, was discovered at el-Mahasna.<sup>105</sup> Although the tomb in which it was found is of the later Nagada II period, the shape of the copper knife corresponds to the earlier form. Like the clay models, it was drilled and may have been worn as an amulet. Although they are capable of functioning as knives, many other predynastic and early dynastic examples were probably also models for the tomb, especially those made of expensive materials. Examples include two obsidian knives<sup>106</sup> and the *psš-*kf** with an embossed gold handle in the Cairo Museum.<sup>107</sup>

Another element of the *psš-*kf** ritual, the garlic cloves that represent teeth, is also attested as a model in predynastic tombs: white-painted pottery models of clumps of garlic have been identified in tombs from both the Nagada I and Nagada II periods (see fig. 5).<sup>108</sup> Since teething is one of the most important transitions in the Pyramid Texts ritual, they suggest that a form of the growing-up ritual was already being practiced in these early periods.

The model sets dating from the Old Kingdom have been discussed above in connection with the Pyramid Text ritual. The slabs with depressions for model

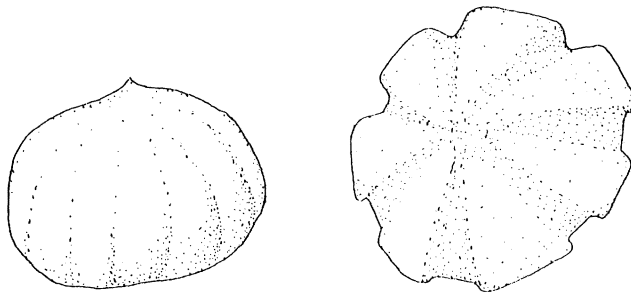


FIG. 5. White-painted clay models of a cluster of garlic. After Petrie, *Prehistoric Egypt*, pl. 46, nos. 23 and 24.

<sup>101</sup> Quibell and Green, *Hierakonpolis*, II (London, 1902), 51, pl. lxxvii.

<sup>102</sup> Petrie, *Prehistoric Egypt*, pl. 28, nos. 12, 13, 17, 19 and 20.

<sup>103</sup> Myers, in Mond and Myers, *Cemeteries of Armant*, I, 37, pls. xv, xiii.

<sup>104</sup> Petrie, *Prehistoric Egypt*, pl. 9, nos. 32-3.

<sup>105</sup> Ayrton and Loat, *Pre-dynastic Cemetery at el-Mahasna*, pl. xix no. 5.

<sup>106</sup> Massoulard, *RdE* 2, pls. 1-2.

<sup>107</sup> J.-P. Corteggiani, *The Egypt of the Pharaohs at the Cairo Museum* (Paris, 1986), 21-2, has argued that this knife (purchased at Gebelein in 1906) is probably genuine.

<sup>108</sup> Petrie, *Prehistoric Egypt*, 43, noted that there are seven examples in the University College collection alone, from excavations at Nagada (tomb 260) and Mahasna (tombs H41 and H85). For a complete listing of the finds so far identified, see V. Täckholm, *The Flora of Egypt*, III (Cairo, 1969), 102-3.

implements are not attested after the early Middle Kingdom, but full-sized stone models of the *psš-ḳf* continue to appear occasionally. Van Walsem<sup>109</sup> has cited two examples from the Middle Kingdom, and two from the New Kingdom, all but one carved of granite.

There seems to have been a minor vogue for these models at the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty, perhaps as a result of the connection made between the sun cult of that period and that of the Fifth Dynasty.<sup>110</sup> The two New Kingdom models that van Walsem lists come from the Amarna area. Further models, which he cites but omits from his list because of their obscurity, include two models of 'greyish schist' that were discovered in a foundation deposit in KV 55, one of which was inscribed with the name and titles of Queen Tiy,<sup>111</sup> and a bronze model found just outside the gold burial canopy in the northeast corner of the burial chamber of Tutankhamun, mounted on a wooden platform between two little shrines<sup>112</sup> (see fig. 6). Each shrine contains two faience cups that are the same shape as the four *hnt*-cups in the Old Kingdom sets, one serving as a lid for the other. One of these pairs contained natron and the other resin.<sup>113</sup> This model set represents the only example I know of in which the *psš-ḳf* is clearly associated with the substances used in mummification. The fact that the vessels associated with the *psš-ḳf* are used in the Pyramid Text spells to present wine and beer, rather than natron and resins, would suggest that the understanding of their function had become somewhat muddled by the late Eighteenth Dynasty, perhaps because the *hnt*-cups had no role in the New Kingdom 'opening of the mouth' ritual. Their association with the *psš-ḳf* here, long after the metamorphosis of the Pyramid Text ritual, demonstrates the closeness of the original association of the objects that made up the *psš-ḳf* set.

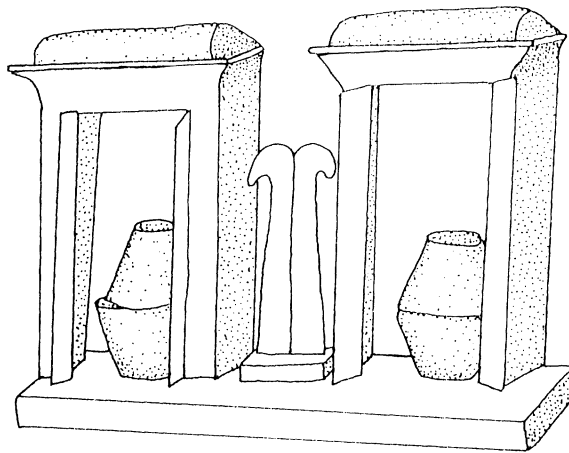


FIG. 6. Model of a bronze *psš-ḳf* from the tomb of Tutankhamun, flanked by shrines containing four faience cups that hold natron and resin. After Carter and Mace, *The Tomb of Tutankhamen*, II, pl. 53b.

<sup>109</sup> Van Walsem, *OMRO* 59, 229, nos. 35, 37 and 38.

<sup>110</sup> The version of the 'opening of the mouth' ceremony in the tomb of Seti I, which is otherwise quite complete, omits the offering of the *psš-ḳf* and several subsequent scenes (37-42). Along with the absence of *psš-ḳf* models from post-Eighteenth Dynasty contexts, this suggests a reaction against the earlier vogue.

<sup>111</sup> T. M. Davies *et al.*, *The Tomb of Queen Tiyi* (London, 1910), 30-1. There is no drawing or photograph of these examples.

<sup>112</sup> H. Carter and A. Mace, *The Tomb of Tutankhamun*, II (London, 1927), 234, pls. liiib and v (*in situ*).

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 214-15, (2) and (5).

***psš-*kf** amulets**

In the First Intermediate Period and early Middle Kingdom, the *psš-*kf** is attested rarely as an amulet in which the forked blade hangs from a human head. All seven known examples are illustrated in fig. 7.<sup>114</sup>

In all cases but one, the head has a long wig and appears to be female. In the earliest example, that from Qau (fig. 7a), the head wears no wig and, according to Brunton, is 'surely intended to be male'.<sup>115</sup> Its baldness, however, when taken together with the gaping mouth, the large, squinting eyes, and the general proportions of the head, suggests a newborn baby rather than a man. The position of the *psš-*kf**-blade in these amulets is the reverse of the position that would be expected from the use van Walsem has proposed: the forked end is not placed under the chin, but at the opposite end. If the fork of the *psš-*kf** was seen as analogous to the ovaries, however, the head might seem to be emerging from the womb.

In the later amulets, the head is female. The examples from Lisht and Sheikh Farag (fig. 7e and 7g) have protrusions for rivets that, in addition to attaching the *psš-*kf** to the head, presumably represent breasts and confirm the femininity of the heads. In the Lisht example, probably the latest of the group, the head surmounting the blade seems to be wearing a tripartite wig with curls associated with the goddess Hathor. These curls may reflect the curled ends of the *psš-*kf** which would have extended below them. The amulets were often made of very rare and expensive materials: gold, silver, carnelian, and even meteoric iron. All of them were found in burials.

In the two cases where the sex was recorded, the occupant of the tomb was a woman, and two others were probably also female.<sup>116</sup> Brunton indicates that men are almost never buried with amulets during this period.<sup>117</sup> While this undercuts the argument that such amulets are exclusively feminine, it does not contradict that hypothesis, and in fact makes it more probable that all seven amulets were buried with women.

Van Walsem passes over these amulets cursorily, arguing that 'their small number, their peculiar shape and the fact that they were found almost exclusively in female contexts, give them a completely separate place among the total phenomenon of the *psš-*kf**'.<sup>118</sup> In fact, all of these attributes correlate well with the connection of the *psš-*kf** with childbirth proposed here. These amulets of rare and expensive materials were probably given to women to ensure a safe delivery, extravagant displays of concern being a common instinct at such times. Whether their appearance in burials implies that the

<sup>114</sup>The five examples at the top of the figure (a-e) are taken from G. Brunton, *ASAE* 35 (1935), 213-17. The two examples at the bottom (f and g) were excavated by Reisner at Mesheikh, tomb 2122, and Sheikh Farag, tomb 162, along with other amulets and beads. These last examples are now in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (12.1264 and 13.3920). They were identified as *psš-*kf** amulets by Stephen P. Harvey, and are published in D'Auria *et al.*, *Mummies and Magic*, 224-5.

<sup>115</sup>Brunton, *ASAE* 35, 261.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid. 213-16. Brunton's number 1 (= a in my figure) and 4 (= d) clearly belonged to women; he also attributes number 2 (= b) to a woman, based on the other objects in the find, and number 5 (= e) likewise on the basis of probability. Of the thirteen individuals in the tomb, eight were identified as women and only three as men by the excavator, and thus the burial seemed to be principally of women. This latter argument may be stronger than it appears, since early analysts of human remains in Egypt frequently misidentified women as men, but rarely made the opposite error, a circumstance pointed out to me by Dr Lane Beck of the Peabody Museum at Harvard University.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid. 216.

<sup>118</sup>Van Walsem, *OMRO* 59, 236-7.

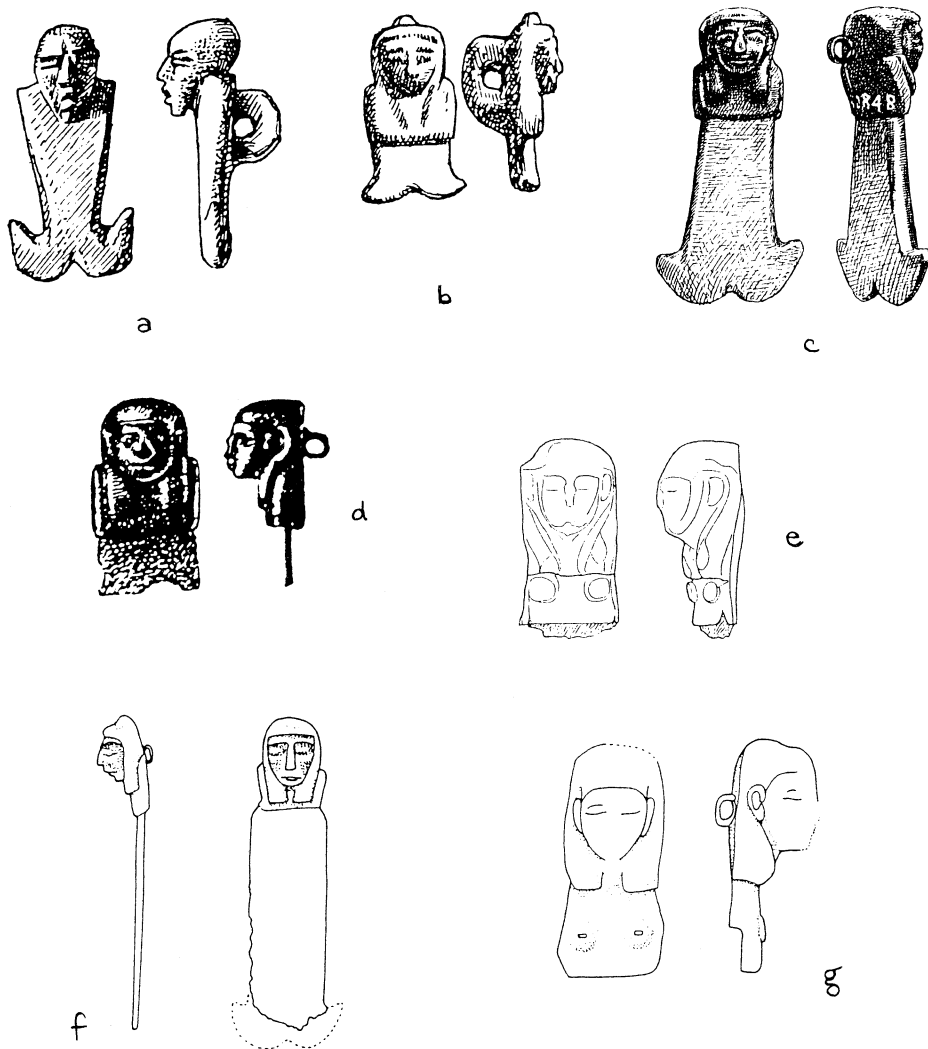


FIG. 7. Human-headed *psš-kf* amulets from the First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom: (a) Qau 970 (an adult female burial), of green glazed steatite; (b) Gurna A4 (probably female burial), of faience; (c) Hu Y61, of gold, with a carnelian blade; (d) Eleventh Dynasty temple at Deir el-Bahari, tomb of Ashayit, of silver with a blade of meteoritic iron; (e) Lisht 954 (predominantly female burial), of gold, with a blade of copper-silver alloy; (f) Mesheikh 2122 (extended burial of undetermined sex), of silver or bronze with traces of gilding at neck, with bronze blade; (g) Sheikh Farag 162 (skull only), of gilded silver. a-e are taken from Brunton, *ASAE* 35 (1935); f-g are taken from *Mummies and Magic*, 224, Cat. no. 177, and from tomb cards in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

women died in childbirth or before their children were born is impossible to tell without an analysis of the mummified remains, which has not been done in any of the cases yet excavated. Should similar amulets be found in the future, such analyses might clarify their purpose. The use of meteoric iron in example 6d may have mortuary connotations, since the 'opening of the mouth' is often performed with iron; but this material may also simply have been selected for its rarity.

Other *psš-ḳf* amulets, without the human head, are cited by Petrie.<sup>119</sup> These are in many cases almost indistinguishable from the ‘two plumes’ amulet, and it seems clear that the two types were confused by the Egyptians themselves. Although he did not give specific dates for the ‘forked lance’ amulets, Petrie cited an example from the reign of Ramesses II, and placed the ‘two plumes’ type in a range between the Nineteenth Dynasty and the Ptolemaic period. Petrie’s account of the placement of these amulets shows that of the 17 amulets of both types, 2 were worn around the throat of the mummy like the human-headed examples, while 12 were placed on the chest and 3 on the stomach.<sup>120</sup> These lower locations would also argue against the connection of the *psš-ḳf* with the jaw and for a connection with the navel.

Three anomalous forms of this amulet are especially interesting (fig. 8a, 8b and 8c).<sup>121</sup> Example 8c was found by Mariette in the tomb of Ramesses II’s son Khaemwase, with whose name and titles it is inscribed. Petrie<sup>122</sup> suggested that the bulky appearance of these amulets results from the imitation of a cloth, wrapped around the *psš-ḳf* as a handle. Such wrapping is otherwise attested only in the very schematic painted clay model from Hierakonpolis discussed above. Particularly on the bronze amulet (fig. 8a), the wrapping is thicker than a cloth; and on that of Khaemwase (8c), its two ends are clearly round in section. These amulets appear to be related to the *psš-ḳf* from Nagada discussed above,<sup>123</sup> which was wrapped in a cord that may have served as a model umbilical cord. The chronological distance between the Nagada example and the New Kingdom amulets makes this connection somewhat tenuous; however, there is a parallel to these amulets in the representation of a *psš-ḳf* in a Sixth Dynasty offering list,<sup>124</sup> and the motive is parallel to that proposed for the phenomenon of red staining. Interestingly, in this connection, the Khaemwase amulet is of red carnelian. (Khaemwase’s known interest in the past may also be a relevant factor here.)

A further type of New Kingdom amulet (fig. 8d) has been identified as a ‘Bogen-ähnlich’ variant of the *psš-ḳf* amulet by C. Müller-Winkler.<sup>125</sup> The twelve examples she illustrates differ markedly from the other types, in that the two halves are clearly separate at both top and base, and attached only by the binding. These amulets resemble nothing so much as two reeds bound together, and are reminiscent of the ‘split reed’ cited by ʿArīb ibn Saʿīd as the implement used to cut the umbilical cord in tenth century Egypt. While the examples illustrated has curved tips, like the earlier *psš-ḳfs*, other examples show the split tips bent down at an acute angle, so that the amulet resembles the hieroglyph  $\uparrow$ .

### The umbilical cord as the snake of chaos

Stricker has equated the umbilical cord with Apophis, the snake-formed god of chaos and non-existence.<sup>126</sup> In order for a potential human being to come into existence, he must

<sup>119</sup> W. M. F. Petrie, *Amulets* (London, 1914), 16, pl. 4.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. 16. The distribution of the two types is almost identical.

<sup>121</sup> Petrie, *Amulets*, pl. 4, g and h; A. Mariette, *Le Sérapéum de Memphis*, III (Paris, 1857), pl. 20.

<sup>122</sup> Petrie, *Amulets*, 16.

<sup>123</sup> Petrie, *Nagada and Ballas*, 50–1; Baumgartel, *Cultures*, II, 31.

<sup>124</sup> G. Jéquier, *Tombeaux de particuliers contemporains de Pepi II* (Cairo, 1929), 112.

<sup>125</sup> C. Müller-Winkler, *Die ägyptischen Objekt-Amuletten* (Freiburg, Schweiz, 1987), 405–13.

<sup>126</sup> B. H. Stricker, *De Geboorte van Horus (III)* (Leiden, 1975), 287–8. Stricker’s idea and its relevance to my explanation of the *psš-ḳf* was kindly brought to my attention by Dr Huub Prag.

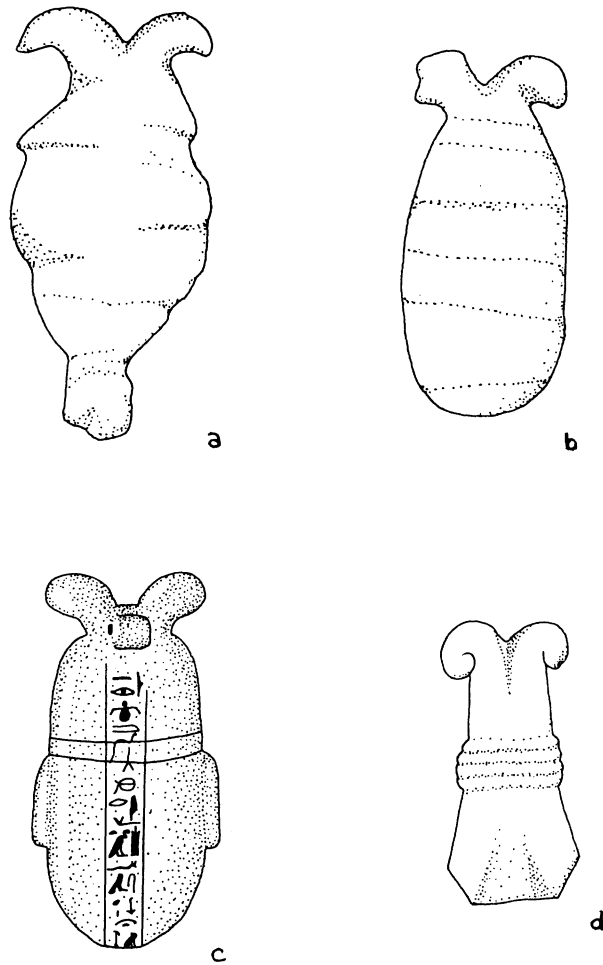


FIG. 8. Four peculiar *pss-kf* amulets of the New Kingdom. Examples (a), of bronze, and (b), of green glass, are in the University College collection, London, and published in Petrie, *Amulets*, pl. 4. Example (c), of carnelian, was discovered by Mariette in the burial of Khaemwase (Mariette, *Sérapéum*, III, pl. II). Example (d), one of twelve similar amulets published by Müller-Winkler, *Die ägyptischen Objekt-Amuletten*, 405-14, seems to represent a different variant. Drawn from the publications.

defeat the undifferentiated non-existence that Apophis represents. To change the amorphous non-existent into something that exists, according to Egyptian conception of existence, the non-existent must be differentiated and made specific.<sup>127</sup> In birth, this differentiation is accomplished by cutting the umbilical cord that attaches the newborn child to the primeval waters of the womb, thus making him something separate and specific. The creation of the child thus mimics the creation of the world, which is accomplished daily by cutting the snake's body of Apophis in two.

In vignettes attached to Chapters 7, 15B and 39 of the Book of the Dead, the deceased is shown spearing Apophis, sometimes with a stick that is forked at the tip.<sup>128</sup> This action

<sup>127</sup> E. Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, trans. J. Baines (Ithaca, 1982), 172-85.

<sup>128</sup> For example, in the papyrus of Ani, E. Rossiter, *The Book of the Dead Papyri of Ani, Hunefer, and Anhai* (London, n.d.), 49.

is comparable to that of the god Seth, who stands at the prow of the sun bark and attacks the Apophis snake every morning so that the sun can rise (be born). Seth's role as a divider of the undifferentiated (and hence uncreated and chaotic) snake, Apophis, into two different (and therefore extant) parts may be reflected by his forked tail. The fork of the *psš-ḳf* thus acquires still another explanation: a forked stick is used to attack snakes, and the umbilical cord represents a snake, the primeval snake of chaos, which must be divided in order for creation (birth) to occur. Like the *psš-ḳf*, the forked stick is not only the divider, but is itself divided, as a symbolic representation of its function.

Although Seth is usually seen as a force inimical to childbirth, because of his role as an opener of the womb and instigator of abortion and hemorrhage, the opening of the womb can also be a good thing that is necessary for the purpose of impregnation and birth.<sup>129</sup> His undeniable presence as a beneficent force at the daily rebirth of the sun god demonstrates that a positive role in childbirth is, at least, not out of the question.

### Dance troupes and the sign ξ—

An implement resembling the *psš-ḳf* is used as a determinative sign in the word for dance troupe (*ḥnrt*).<sup>130</sup> The use of the forked sign in this word is still problematic.<sup>131</sup> There is some evidence, however, that the female dancers who composed these troupes often took on the role of midwife. The *psš-ḳf*, as an implement used in facilitating a birth, might be connected with them for that reason and be used in the writing of their name.

The sign that is most commonly used to determine the word *ḥnrt* is a long fork with two angled prongs, also used in the words for baker, for the *rth*-bread that occurs in offering lists (as has been discussed above), and for words connected with restraint, such as prison. In his sign list, Gardiner suggests that this sign was an implement used in baking, and he notes that the form used in the Third and Fourth Dynasties was curved rather than angled at the ends.<sup>132</sup> This early form of the sign (which occurs only in connection with bread, since the word *ḥnrt* does not survive in monumental texts from this early period) very closely resembles a *psš-ḳf*. (See fig. 9 for a Third Dynasty example.)

<sup>129</sup>R. Ritner, *JNES* 43 (1984) 214–21, although in the later evidence with which Ritner is mostly concerned, the god Khnum is generally responsible for opening the womb when such an opening is desirable. Seth does preside in at least one instance (*ibid.* 217), however, and it does not seem unlikely that in earlier periods, when the reputation of Seth was more balanced, he played a positive role in childbirth.

<sup>130</sup>Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*<sup>3</sup>, 519, sign U31. For examples of the writing of the word and the demonstration of its meaning 'dance troupe' rather than 'harem', see D. Nord, in *Studies in Ancient Egypt, the Aegean, and the Sudan: Essays in honor of Dows Dunham*, W. K. Simpson and W. Davis, eds. (Boston, 1981), 137–45.

<sup>131</sup>B. Bryan, *BES* 4 (1982) 49–50, has suggested that the sign derives from the two curved sticks used as clappers. The occurrences of the sign with a double handle, suggesting crossed clapping sticks, tend to be later provincial examples, suggesting that this was a reinterpretation rather than the original explanation for the use of the sign. The principal association of the implements seems to have been with the dancers rather than their accompanists, the clapping women. These women were in some cases separately designated, by the word *mšwt*: *Wb.* II, 30, 14; and W. Wreszinski, *Atlas zur altägyptischen Kulturgeschichte*, III (Leipzig, 1936), pl. 29 (upper left). This word is never, to my knowledge, given the sign in question as a determinative.

<sup>132</sup>Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*<sup>3</sup>, 519 (U31), especially n. 1, as cited above in connection with an offering of bread written with this sign, which perhaps served as a metaphor for the role of the *psš-ḳf*.





FIG. 9. False door panel from the Third Dynasty tomb of Khabausokar, with the hieroglyph U31 highlighted. From M. Murray, *Saqqara Mastabas*, 1 (London, 1905), pl. 1.

The dancers of the *hnrt* are clearly connected with childbirth in a scene in the Sixth Dynasty Saqqara tomb chapel of Princess Watetkhethor.<sup>133</sup> (See fig. 10.) In the five surviving registers, female dancers perform before the mistress of the tomb, accompanied by a song that makes several references, explicit and implied, to childbirth. The second register from the bottom begins 'But see, the secret of birth! Oh pull!' The register above continues with related phrases:

See the pot, remove what is in it!  
 See, the secret of the *hnrt*,  
 Oh Four!<sup>134</sup> Come! Pull!,  
 It is today!<sup>135</sup> hurry! hurry!  
 See,...<sup>136</sup> is the abomination of birth.

<sup>133</sup> Wreszinski, *Atlas*, III, pl. 29. The drawing of this wall that appears in fig. 8 is adapted from a facsimile made in 1986 as part of an epigraphic and iconographic study of this chapel supported by a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities supported by the American Research Center in Egypt.

<sup>134</sup> The four bricks of the birthing stool.

<sup>135</sup> The word used here, *mjn*, may be related to the enigmatic term *zmjn*, discussed in connection with the Pyramid Texts sequence above.

<sup>136</sup> The word seems to have originally been carved *jkjkh* and changed to *hkkj* in paint. I can suggest no meaning for either spelling, unless the consistent doubled *k* is related to *kkw*, 'darkness'.

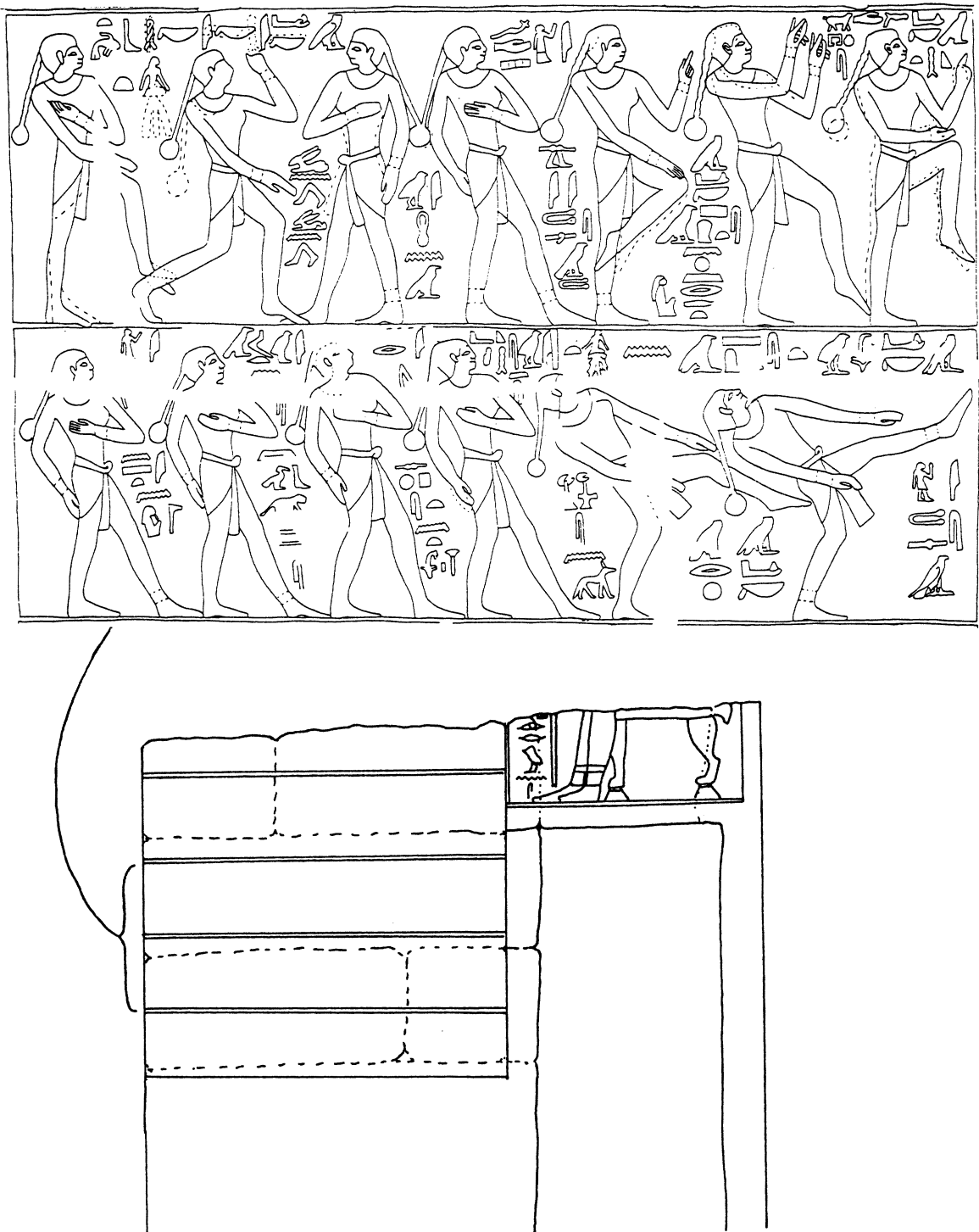


FIG. 10. The dancers in the chapel of Watetkhehor, north wall of room B3 of the chapel of Mereruka. Detail of second and third registers from the bottom. Copied by the author and collated by R. Ritner. Inset: entire wall.

Although the figure of Watetkhethor is only preserved below the knees, it is clear that she is watching this dance by herself; her son, who is present in all the other scenes of daily life in the tomb, is absent here. Such dances, referring as they did to purely feminine concerns, were thus probably done for women only. Both modern dancers and anthropologists have suggested that there is a connection between the physical movements of modern Middle Eastern dancing and childbirth;<sup>137</sup> if the connection exists, this scene from the tomb of Watetkhethor demonstrates that it has a long history.

A further reference to a connection between dancers and childbirth can be found in the fictional account of the birth of the first three kings of the Fifth Dynasty preserved in P. Westcar.<sup>138</sup> Dating from the Second Intermediate Period, this papyrus contains the most extensive description of childbirth that has survived from ancient Egypt. The birth is supervised by the god Khnum<sup>139</sup> and four goddesses, Isis, Nephthys, Heqat and Meskhenet, who disguise themselves as members of a dance troupe in order to gain admission to the expectant mother. When they assure her husband, 'we understand childbirth', they are immediately invited to assist. This story can be used to argue that the women of a dancing troupe were often experienced midwives, not only because the distraught husband admits them without question (for he is clearly desperate), but because it is this disguise that the goddesses chose as the most likely to inspire his confidence. The geographical range of a travelling dance troupe and the many associations of such dancers could have given these women a reputation for being especially knowledgeable about the problems of childbirth. Moreover, the movements of their dance, as seen in the chapel of Watetkhethor, may have been used to encourage women in labour, although the goddesses in the papyrus Westcar story did not resort to this expedient.

If assisting at births was a role of the *hnrt*, and the *psš-*kf** was a principal tool in that profession, the occurrence of this sign in the word *hnrt* becomes clear. The angled ends in all surviving occurrences of the word would be explained by the circumstances that when the form of the baking tool changed in the later Fourth Dynasty, the *psš-*kf** was viewed as a purely mortuary implement. In other contexts, its form may have been puzzling, at least to male scribes. Its similarity to the baking tool may have caused the sign in *hnrt* and related words to be changed along with examples in the words connected with baking.

Another possible explanation is suggested by some of the latest type of amulets discussed above, which are angled like the *hnrt* determinative. The sign may simply have changed to correspond to a change in the form of the implement in practical use for the

<sup>137</sup> Most notably by a late nineteenth-century dancer in her memoirs, who describes belly dancing as 'a poem of the mystery and pain of motherhood': Armen Ohanian, *The Dancer of Shamahka*, trans. R. W. Lane (New York, 1923), 261, as cited in L. Wood, *Arabesque* 5 no. 5 (Jan.-Feb. 1979), 12. Wood dismissed this statement as an apologetic 'attempt to give her art some meaning beyond the obvious'. She argued that it had been overstressed by feminist historians of dance in attempts to find evidence for a ritual of motherhood. Nonetheless, such a statement by an indigenous practitioner of the dance should perhaps not be so lightly dismissed, in view of the Watetkhethor scene. (I am grateful to Ms Barbara Siegel for locating these references for me.)

<sup>138</sup> P. Westcar 9,27-11,4.

<sup>139</sup> H. Goedicke, *Varia Aegyptiaca* 1 (1985) 23-6, has suggested that Khnum waited outside with the husband of the mother.

cutting of the umbilical cord. The implement used in mortuary rituals, in keeping with the conservatism of religious contexts, would have remained the same.

The occurrence of the sign as a determinative in words for restraint might be explained by the homonymic relationship between the words for ‘dance troupe’ and ‘prison’ (both *hnrt*) and between the words ‘baker’ and ‘restrain’ (*rthtj* and *rth*, respectively). It is clear, however, from the account in P. Westcar<sup>140</sup> that a fourteen-day period of purification restricted the movements of a woman after giving birth; and one is reminded of the use of the word ‘confinement’ as a euphemism for the period of childbirth until comparatively recent times.<sup>141</sup> The connection between the words may be closer than an accidental occurrence of the same consonants.

A final illuminating context where the sign  $\Upsilon$  appears is a late writing of the word *mwt*, ‘mother’, in epithets of goddesses and female priestly titles.<sup>142</sup> Enigmatic writings of the Ptolemaic and later periods often contain references to arcane associations from the earliest periods of Egyptian history. It has been suggested<sup>143</sup> that this writing is a ‘debased’ version of the sign  $\Upsilon$ ,<sup>144</sup> representing the bicornate bovine uterus, whose shape may also be related to the shape of the *psš-*kf**. Nevertheless, since this writing is used exclusively in connection with female divinities, it is more likely to be a reference to an archaic tool of childbirth, thought to be appropriate to such primeval beings, rather than an anatomical reference common to females of all species.<sup>145</sup>

### Meskhenet

A final confirmation of the connection of the *psš-*kf** with birth is provided by the headdress shown on the goddess Meskhenet, the patroness of childbirth, who is depicted as part of the ‘divine birth’ scenes at the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari (see fig. 11).<sup>146</sup> The emblem has been identified as the uterus and uterine horns of a cow.<sup>147</sup> However, the hieroglyphic form of bovine uterus usually has a rather more undulating vertical and a deeper central notch than is shown in the Deir el-Bahari headdress.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, although this sign is used to indicate the sex of various animals, it is not usually applied to female human beings.<sup>149</sup> The sign Meskhenet wears is probably a *psš-*

<sup>140</sup> P. Westcar 11, 18–19.

<sup>141</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* (Compact Edition, Oxford, 1971), 806, gives as its fourth definition of ‘confinement’: ‘being in child-bed; child-birth, delivery, accouchment (the ordinary term for this in colloquial use)’, citing examples from the 1770s through the 1870s.

<sup>142</sup> *Wb.* II, 54, 1–17. The *Belegstellungen* gives this writing for *mwt* in *mwt ntrw*, an epithet of Hathor (Dendera, Mar. IV 27b); in *mwt ntr nt Wnn-nfr*, an epithet of Nut (Edfu I 157); and perhaps also in a title of a priestess (Edfu I 330).

<sup>143</sup> F. Ll. Griffith, *PSBA* 21 (1899), 277.

<sup>144</sup> Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*<sup>3</sup>, 466, sign F45.

<sup>145</sup> The same sign is a standard writing of the phoneme *m* in the Ptolemaic period, as Griffith has noted (*PSBA* 21, 277). This equation cannot explain its appearance as the word *mwt*, since that usage is limited to religious contexts. However, as Griffith also suggests, the connection with the word *mwt* may be an explanation for the broader application of the sign.

<sup>146</sup> Naville, *Deir el-Bahari*, II, pl. 51. The figure is my own drawing, based on a photograph.

<sup>147</sup> See H. Frankfort, *JNES* 3 (1944), 200, for a discussion of the theories about this headdress, and for the suggestion of a possible connection with the Mesopotamian goddess Ninghursag.

<sup>148</sup> Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*<sup>3</sup>, 466 (F45), is a simplification; more paleographically correct versions are shown in *Wb.* III, 76, 1, and G. Möller, *Hieratische Paleographie*, I (Leipzig, 1909), 17 no. 182.

<sup>149</sup> *Wb.* IV, 76, 1–14, gives the words for ‘female’ when applied to animals (*hmt*), in which the sign occurs frequently as a determinative. In the following words, dealing with women (*hmt*), *ibid.* 76, 16–78, 15, the sign never occurs. (It does occur in the specific word ‘uterus’ in medical texts, however.)

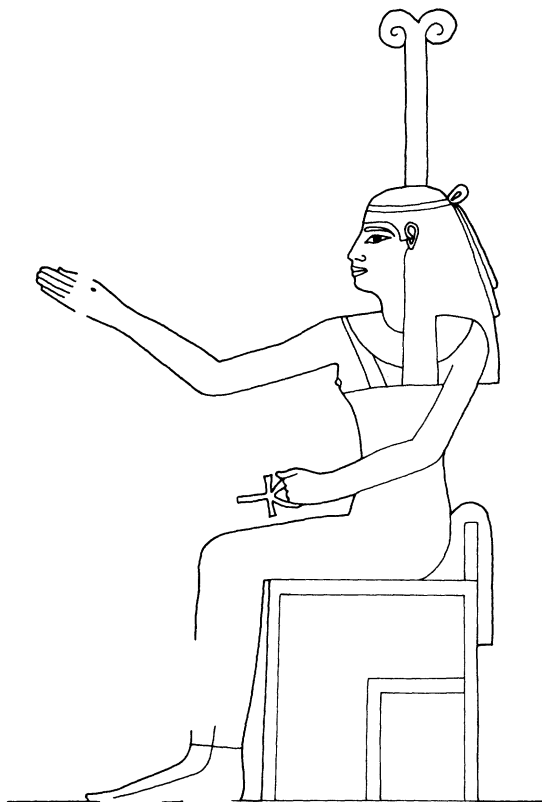


FIG. 11. The goddess Meskhenet from the temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahari.  
From a photograph by the author.

*kf*, which is well attested in offering lists of the early Eighteenth Dynasty.<sup>150</sup> The *pss-kf*, as the divider that definitively separates the mother and child, is a more appropriate emblem for the goddess of birth than a bovine uterus that simply indicates femaleness.

The goddess Meskhenet is, at least in the Middle Kingdom, a personification of the four birthing bricks (*mshnt*, literally 'place of causing to alight'), upon which the mother squats to give birth, and on which the newborn baby is placed after it has been washed and its umbilical cord cut.<sup>151</sup> Meskhenet is present in P. Westcar as one of the disguised goddesses helping with the birth. She is entirely passive during the birth (possibly because she is the bricks on which the mother is squatting); but after the newborn child has been cleaned, and its umbilical cord cut, and been placed on the bricks,<sup>152</sup> she comes forward to pronounce his future kingship.<sup>153</sup> Meskhenet's role as a goddess of fate is well




<sup>150</sup> Van Walsem, *OMRO* 59, 209, nos. 43-9.

<sup>151</sup> Interestingly, Meskhenet is later divided into four separated goddesses, each identified with one of the goddesses of the Heliopolitan Ennead: Meskhenet-weret (Tefnut), Meskhenet-aat (Nut), Meskhenet-neferet (Isis) and Meskhenet-menkhet (Nephthys) (M.-Th. Derchain-Urtel, *LÄ* IV, 107.) These identifications with goddesses whose functions are so closely connected with mortuary rites again reinforces the associations of birth with those same rites.

<sup>152</sup> I would here take *jfd m jdbt* as 'four bricks', referring to the well-known four bricks of birth.

<sup>153</sup> In the last repetition of the procedure, P. Westcar 10,22-11,3, she appears earlier, immediately after the description of the newborn child, and before the cleaning.

known; in this role she is frequently associated with the harvest goddess Renenutet. The *psš-ḳf* on her head is also appropriate to her role as a determiner of fate, since it is only when the umbilical cord is cut that the child's fate diverges from that of its mother.

The pronouncement made by Meskhenet in the papyrus Westcar story is strikingly similar to the speech she makes at the birth of Hatshepsut in the scenes recorded at Deir el-Bahari. Hatshepsut demonstrably consulted earlier prototypes for her temple's architecture, the language and orthography of its inscriptions, and its iconography. The 'divine birth scenes' themselves, though they have no surviving Old Kingdom prototype, have the same underlying religious premise as papyrus Westcar and presumably the same underlying political purpose: to legitimize an irregular succession, the monarch is said to be the physical child of a divinity. The roots of the story must lie in the Fifth Dynasty, since such propaganda would have been purposeless in later periods, and Hatshepsut may have adapted her 'divine birth' scenes from lost scenes dating to that period. Supporting this assumption is the fact that Meskhenet is depicted with a headdress similar to that in the Deir el-Bahari scene in a passage in the Pyramid Texts (Pyr. 1183-5).<sup>154</sup> There, the word *mshnt* is determined with the signs , , and  in the pyramids of Pepi I, Mernere, and Pepi II, respectively. That the latest version substitutes two ostrich feathers for the earlier headdress confirms that this headdress is the *psš-ḳf*, which is known from other sources to have metamorphosed into two feathers, and not the cow's uterus, which is not known to have done so.<sup>155</sup> The hypothetical source of Hatshepsut's scenes must then predate the metamorphosis.

The word *mshnt* is not determined with a brick or bricks until the Middle Kingdom.<sup>156</sup> It has been suggested that *mshnt* in these early examples can refer not only to the place of birth but to birth itself.<sup>157</sup> Like the *psš-ḳf* in the Pyramid Text offering ritual, however, it seems to follow birth, and could perhaps be applied to a related transition: the separation from the mother by the cutting of the umbilical cord and the birth of the placenta. Meskhenet's later character as a brick may be connected with the clay out of which the child and its *ḳr* are formed by Khnum. It is interesting that a potter occurs in the obscure spell (Pyr. 1183-5) cited above.

### Conclusions

The 'opening of the mouth' ceremony seems to have derived from a ritual sequence of actions and spells ensuring the ability of a newborn and developing child to partake of nourishment. By analogy, the same ritual would have allowed the newly-reborn deceased person to eat the real and symbolic food that Egyptian mortuary customs went to such great lengths to provide. This ritual could also be extended to a newly-carved cult statue, since the verb for making such a statue is *ms*, 'to give birth'. The statue-like characteristics of the Old Kingdom mummy, and even more the anthropoid coffin before

<sup>154</sup> These spells are not included in the pyramid of Unas, so the forms of the signs are taken from Sethe, *Die altägyptische Pyramidentexte*, which was based on squeezes.

<sup>155</sup> M. Derchain-Urtel, *Synkretismus in ägyptischer Ikonographie: Die Göttin Tjenenet* (Wiesbaden, 1979), 6-12, discusses the occurrence of the same headdress in the late New Kingdom and later periods on the goddess Tjenenet, the consort of Montu, who is also connected with childbirth. It is difficult to determine whether this headdress is a continuation of that worn by Meskhenet or an interpretation of it.

<sup>156</sup> *Wb.* II, 148,9.

<sup>157</sup> *Wb.* II, 148,14.

which the New Kingdom rite was performed, would have favoured the reinterpretation of many of these spells as statue spells, and thus led to the prominence of the adze in the New Kingdom ritual. This later prominence, and the mistaken assumption that the statue ritual held an analogous place in the Old Kingdom ritual, has led scholars to dismiss too quickly the evidence for earlier mouth-opening implements of a different type. When the Pyramid Text spells are examined without reference to later developments, their associations with birth and childhood are indisputable. These associations can then be found in the later ritual as well.

That the *pss-kf* played an important role in the earlier versions of the 'opening of the mouth' ritual is clear from its position between the coming forth of the reborn person from the womb and his beginning to take nourishment. If that role was the cutting of the umbilical cord, both its connection with rebirth and its name would be explained. The most problematic aspect of this interpretation, the connection of the *pss-kf* with the jaw, can be explained as a reinterpretation of a ritual gesture. The brandishing of the blood-stained *pss-kf*, perhaps wrapped in the umbilical cord itself, in front of a baby's face to demonstrate that he had been separated from his mother and needed to eat to survive, was reinterpreted as a ritual that ensured his ability to do so by giving his jaw the firmness required for nursing. The distinctive shape of the *pss-kf* may be connected with the shape of the bovine womb, with the hieroglyph used in the word *hnrt*, with the headdress of Meskhenet, the goddess of childbirth, with the curls of Hathor, with the forked sticks used to attack the serpent Apophis, and with the tail of Seth. All of these associations reinforce its meaning and suggest the richness of the symbolism relating to childbirth and rebirth.

The implements used for the actual 'opening of the mouth' in the earliest version of this ritual, the *nrtj*-blades, must also be reconciled with this interpretation. I will argue in a future article that the central ritual of the 'opening of the mouth' represents a metaphorical enactment of the midwives' clearing of the child's mouth with their little fingers, and that the *nrtj*-blades are ritual substitutes for these fingers.<sup>158</sup> Another interesting consequence of this interpretation of the 'opening of the mouth' ritual is the support it gives the suggested equation of the *k* with the placenta. The nature and duration of this equation also clearly require more research.

The ancient Egyptians saw birth and rebirth after death as closely related events, both of which were regarded as dangerous transitions. Given their importance, we should not be surprised by the variety and complications of the rituals, symbols, and implements used to ensure their successful completion. The fact that this fundamental metaphor for rebirth is referred to exclusively by allusion and indirection is puzzling, and can only be attributed to a conscious reticence regarding the messy operation of earthly childbirth. The connection of childbirth with women, sex, and blood is viewed with alarm in many societies, and discussion and depiction of the process is avoided for the same reasons that it is considered powerful and mysterious. The extent of such taboos in ancient Egypt itself deserves further study, as does the general question of the Egyptian connection of resurrection with birth.

<sup>158</sup> This argument was presented in a preliminary form at the Sixth International Congress of Egyptology at Turin in September 1991, and is outlined in the abstracts of that congress. Although I had initially planned to present these arguments as a part of the present paper, considerations of space and the necessity for further work on the question favoured a separate presentation.