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THE KA-HOUSE AND THE SERDAB

BY AYLWARD M. BLACKMAN, M.A.

AMONG the numerous Old Kingdom mastabas uncovered by Dr JUNKER in the course of his excavations in the Pyramid-field of Gizeh, during the season 1912-13, was one of rather unusual design, belonging to a courtier named Rawēr. A full description will be found in JUNKER, *Vorbericht über die zweite Grabung bei der Pyramiden von Gizeh vom 16 Dezember 1912 bis März 1913*, pp. 10-13. Parallel to Rawēr's mastaba, on the east side of it, and so close as to leave only a narrow lane between them, lay a mastaba of somewhat earlier construction. The south wall of Rawēr's mastaba was prolonged so as to join on to the south-west corner of this other mastaba (see fig. 1 in text), thus blocking one end of the lane. In the thickness of

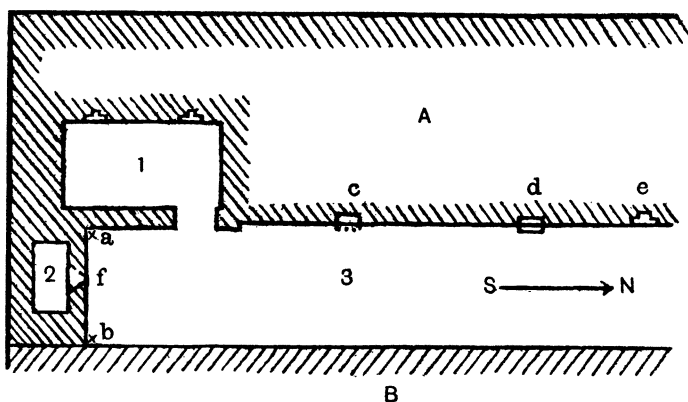



Fig. 1.

- | | |
|---|--|
| A. Mastaba of Rawēr. | 3. Lane between the two mastabas. |
| B. The mastaba lying to the east of it. | a—b. Position of the inscribed frieze. |
| 1. Cult-room. | c—e. Offering-places. |
| 2. Serdab. | f. Serdab-squint. |

this connecting wall is the serdab belonging to Rawēr's mastaba, with the usual squint (e.g. L., *D.*, ii, Pls. 5, 25; STEINDORFF, *Das Grab des Ti*, Pl. 132) in the north side. Above the squint, forming the frieze on the north face of the wall, was an inscription in large and deeply cut signs. According to JUNKER, *op. cit.*, p. 12, the inscription consists of the titles of Rawēr followed by $\square \Delta \sqcup \text{ h-t } k3$, "house of the ka." JUNKER tells us that the frieze was not in position when found, but that it had fallen down and lay close to the wall of the serdab, "exactly beside the place where it had formerly

stood, so that there could be no doubt about the original position." Since this inscription was above the serdab-squint, JUNKER infers that "house of the *ka*" is the name for the serdab; he accordingly comes to the conclusion that MASPERO's theory about the *ka* and its relationship with the statue is, after all, correct.

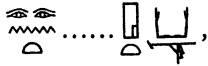
MORET, however (see *Ä.Z.*, 52, p. 88), examined the inscribed blocks in question, which had been deposited in the Cairo Museum, and found that in front of Rawēr's titles and name was a group of signs that JUNKER has not recorded in his *Vorbericht*.

The whole inscription reads:— "Eyes of the *ka*-house of the scribe of the king's records in the presence, the king's acquaintance¹, Rawēr."

It would appear, therefore, that the Egyptian name for the serdab-squint is "eyes of the *ka*-house."

MORET, on the contrary (*Ä.Z.*, 52, pp. 88-9), thinks that if "eyes of the *ka*-house" were the name for the serdab-squint, the inscription would have been, not upon the frieze, which runs the whole length of the north side of the serdab, but around the squint itself. Surely this demands greater exactitude on the part of the ancient architect than one can reasonably expect?

MORET (rightly as I think) also holds STEINDORFF's view (*Ä.Z.*, 48, pp. 154-5), that the *ka*-house is the whole mortuary building, not one particular portion of it.

He therefore argues that if by , "eyes of the *ka*-house," the squint were meant, then the *ka*-house would have to be the serdab, which, in his as in my opinion, it is not. He accordingly maintains that "eyes of the *ka*-house" is not the name for the serdab-squint, but for the serdab itself.

Since writing that article, MORET has published in *Comptes rendus*, 1914, p. 538 ff., a most interesting and important text, in l. 42 ff. of which we read: "These *ka*-servants shall do their business in the matter of the little fumigation and every good thing appertaining thereto, (and) they shall not tarry sitting² in the *ka*-house." It is quite obvious that here "*ka*-house" cannot mean "serdab." Indeed the serdab, apparently, could not be entered when once it had been roofed over, and it was so small that no *ka*-servants would ever want to "tarry sitting" in it. In short, this passage combined with one quoted by STEINDORFF in *Ä.Z.*, 48, p. 155³, shows pretty clearly that the *ka*-house is nothing more or less than the chamber, or collection of chambers, forming the entire tomb-chapel.

If we adopted the view, which MORET rejects, that the "eyes of the *ka*-house" are the serdab-squint, would that necessarily involve our taking the *ka*-house to be the serdab, which, in my opinion, it cannot be?

¹ Or perhaps "guardian of the king's afterbirth" (see SETHE ap. BORCHARDT, *Grabdenkmal des Königs Sahu-rē*, ii, p. 77).

² This makes one think of the bench in the open court of Mena's mastaba at Denderah (PETRIE, *Denderah*, p. 6).

³  "I made excellent...my grave in my *ka*-house" (MORGAN, *Cat. mon.*, I, p. 177).

At this juncture it would be as well to recall the fact that the cap-stone of Amenemhêt IIIrd's pyramid has two eyes carved upon it (BREASTED, *History of Egypt*, fig. 94), and that two eyes, painted or inlaid,—often with the representation of a door or of a "façade-stele" (see VAN GENNEP-JÉQUIER, *Le Tissue aux Cartons*, p. 27) beneath them,—are frequently found upon the head-end of the left side¹ of Middle Kingdom coffins—the part to which the face of the dead would be turned (ERMAN, *Handbook of Egyptian Religion*, pp. 128–9; JUNKER, *J.E.A.*, i, p. 251). Similar eyes are also common on so-called false doors² and stelae, especially those of the periods of the Middle Kingdom and XVIIIth Dynasty (fig. 2 in text; VAN GENNEP-JÉQUIER, *op. cit.*, p. 34, fig. 35; DAVIES, *Five Theban Tombs*, Pls. III, V, XX; DAVIES-GARDINER, *The Tomb of Amenemhêt*, Pl. XXV, and cf. Pl. XXVII; *Egyptian Stelae in the British Museum*, ii, Pl. 32, iii, Pl. 20). In the tomb-chapel of Ukh-hotp, son of Ukh-hotp and Hêni the Middle, at Meir (BLACKMAN, *Rock Tombs of Meir*, i, pp. 9, 12, 13, 17), there are three pairs of eyes upon the west wall, one to the north of the statue recess, and two to the south of it. The eyes, each pair of which is in a yellow rectangular enclosure, are placed in the middle of scenes depicting Ukh-hotp spearing fish and hurling his boomerang at wild-fowl; but they clearly have no connection with these scenes. There is also a pair of eyes on the west wall of the statue recess³.

The eyes on the pyramid cap-stone and the coffins were not protective, but, as we learn from the inscription which accompanies them on the cap-stone and also on one coffin, enabled the dead to see the light of day⁴ (BREASTED, *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt*, p. 73; ERMAN, *Handbook of Egyptian Religion*, p. 129). I cannot help thinking, however, that the main object of the eyes on the west wall of Ukh-hotp's tomb-chapel, and of those on the false doors and stelae, was to enable the deceased to look out of the spirit-world into the tomb-chapel⁵, see all the visitors

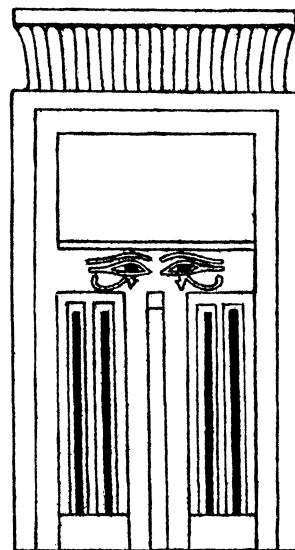


Fig. 2.
False door in tomb-chapel B,
No. 3 at Meir (see BLACKMAN,
Rock Tombs of Meir, p. 8).

¹ Sometimes on the interior (LACAU, *Sarcophages antérieurs au nouvel Empire*, i, Pl. I ff.), sometimes on the exterior, surface (*op. cit.*, Pls. XXIV, XXVII–IX).

² In certain VIth Dynasty examples, e.g. the sculptured false door in the cult-room, and the frescoed false doors in the burial chamber, of Mena's Mastaba, the eyes are on the folding doors themselves, one on either flap (PETRIE, *Denderah*, Pls. I and III).

³ The lower half of the wall is occupied by a "façade-stele." In the upper half, which is surmounted by a *kheker*-frieze, are the usual seven vases of ointment. Above these are two of Ukh-hotp's wives squatting on a mat, and above them again, the two eyes between the symbols for Upper and Lower Egypt.

⁴ The actual words of the text are:—"The face of N. is opened, that he may behold the face of the Lord of the Horizon when he sails across the sky." GRIFFITH was evidently unaware of these two inscriptions when he wrote his contribution to PETRIE's *Denderah* (see p. 42 of that work).

⁵ Just as the false door enabled the deceased to enter the tomb-chapel (DAVIES-GARDINER, *The Tomb of Amenemhêt*, p. 74; CAPART, *Une Rue de Tombeaux*, Pl. XCIV; MASPERO, *Dawn of Civilization*, pp. 253–4), so the "eyes" would permit him to see into it.

who entered it from time to time, and watch the progress of the funerary services periodically performed therein. MORET could surely raise no objection to calling such eyes as these the "eyes of the *ka*-house"?

The eyes seem generally to have been placed where the presence of the dead was located in a special degree. They are on the coffins, because the coffin was the repository of the corpse; on the west wall of Ukh-hotp's tomb-chapel, because the abode of the dead was situated in the West; on the false doors and stelae, because in and about them the presence of the dead was felt especially to reside¹. In a mastaba the presence would naturally be located in the serdab, for it contained the statue, the substitute for the corpse². The wall of the serdab, therefore, is just the place where one would expect to find eyes.

But apart from every other consideration, if we bear in mind, what MORET accepts, but momentarily seems to have forgotten, that the *ka*-house is the *whole* tomb-chapel building, of which the serdab is but a small *part*, the only serious objection to the view that the serdab-squint is the "eyes of the *ka*-house" is removed³. The fact of the term "eyes of the *ka*-house" being applied to the serdab-squint does not imply that the serdab is the *ka*-house. The "eyes of the *ka*-house" just happen to be placed in that *part* of the *ka*-house where the presence of the deceased was especially located, and, when the *ka*-house was a mastaba, that part naturally enough would be the serdab.

There are several good reasons for the serdab-wall being furnished with a slit instead of with a pair of sculptured or painted eyes, though these would, it is true, be all that the spirit would require to enable it to see into the tomb-chapel. But in some of the periodical funerary services performed therein it was desirable for the deceased's body, or its substitute the statue, to be in close proximity to, if not in actual contact with, the mystic implements and offerings of the mortuary priests; it was particularly important for the incense smoke to envelop the statue (*Ä.Z.*, 50, p. 71 ff.). The serdab-squint would make the fumigation of the statue possible, and would allow the priests to make their magic passes close to its face, before which the offerings could be held up in the manner prescribed (MASPERO, *La Table d'Offrandes*, pp. 11, 12). Again the squint would enable the priests and visitors to see the dead in bodily form,


¹ The false door was usually in the west wall of the cult-chamber (e.g. STEINDORFF, *Das Grab des Ti*, Pls. 45, 139, 140; CAPART, *Une Rue de Tombeaux*, Pl. IX). As the deceased was imagined to be behind it, in the spirit-world, many of the periodical funerary ceremonies took place in front of it (DAVIES-GARDINER, *op. cit.*, pp. 74, 77). The deceased could be actually immanent in his stele, and offerings were therefore brought to it (DAVIES-GARDINER, *op. cit.*, pp. 99—100; cf. *Egyptian Stelae in Brit. Mus.*, ii, Pls. 9, 18).

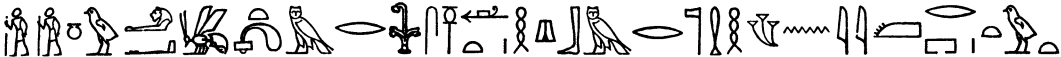
² See DAVIES-GARDINER, *op. cit.*, pp. 57—8. To what lengths this substitution could be carried appears from the contracts made by Zefaihap with the priests of Anubis and Upwawet at Asyut, for the maintenance of the cult of his four statues (BREASTED, *Records*, i, §§ 535—93; ID., *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt*, p. 259 ff.). Of these statues, one was placed in the temple of Anubis and one in the temple of Upwawet, so that Zefaihap might participate in the festivals of these gods, the third in, or near, his tomb-chapel, and the fourth in a garden. As we have recently learnt, Zefaihap's tomb at Asyut was a cenotaph, his corpse being buried hundreds of miles away in the Sudan (REISNER, *Ä.Z.*, 52, p. 43). See also ERMAN, *Handbook of Egyptian Religion*, pp. 134—6; JUNKER, *J.E.A.*, i, p. 253.

³ If, as has been suggested, the object of the "eyes" was to enable the dead to look *into* his tomb-chapel (*ka*-house), we have more reason than ever for supposing the "eyes of the *ka*-house" to be the serdab-squint.

and this would give to all their actions a reality that they would otherwise lack. Thus the serdab-squint would have served as "eyes" for the living no less than for the dead.

To clinch the whole matter, the Egyptian word for serdab is actually preserved to us.

In the bottom register of the scenes on the east wall of one of the rooms in the tomb-chapel of the youngest of the three Pepionkhs at Meir (BLACKMAN, *Rock Tombs of Meir*, i, pp. 6, 10), there is a mutilated scene depicting a row of that nomarch's statues (Pl. XXXIX, fig. 1). The explanatory inscription reads:—


"Arrival(?) of the statues of the nomarch, treasurer, superintendent of the South, confidential friend, lector, superintendent of the priests, Hēni the Black, at the statue-house." That *pr-twt* "statue-house" is the word for serdab is proved conclusively by the following fact. When the scene was complete the statues faced, and were in close proximity to, the now destroyed squint-hole belonging to the actual serdab of Pepionkh's tomb-chapel. The floor of the serdab is considerably lower than that of the room adjoining it, and what remains of the ceiling does not permit a man to stand upright beneath it. That this chamber was the serdab is shown by the fact that its walls are covered with rows of representations of statues (Pl. XXXIX, fig. 2). Each statue is depicted as standing upon the usual pedestal, and has a name and title of Pepionkh written in front of it.

After the serdab and the room adjoining it had been decorated with reliefs, Pepionkh changed his mind and replaced the serdab with a large room, the east and west walls of which are covered with remarkable funerary scenes (BLACKMAN, *Rock Tombs of Meir*, i, p. 6). This alteration necessitated the partial destruction of the serdab and the cutting of a door, which absorbed the squint², through the left ends of the reliefs on the east wall of the outer room. Fortunately the greater portion of these reliefs is intact, including the right end of the bottom register (see Pl. XXXIX, fig. 1), where the Egyptian name for what archaeologists call the serdab is preserved.

Thus we now know definitely that the Egyptian name for the serdab, anyhow in the VIth Dynasty, was *pr-twt* "statue-house," and, at the same time, we have good reasons for believing (α) that the squint was called the "eyes of the *ka*-house," and (β) that "*ka*-house" was a term for the chamber, or group of chambers, forming the tomb-chapel.

¹ As GARDINER has pointed out to me, neither *shp-t* nor *šms* (cf. STEINDORFF, *Das Grab des Ti*, Pls. 62—70; NEWBERRY, *Beni Hasan*, i, Pl. XXIX) is likely, since there is no trace of the rope or ropes for pulling. I therefore suggest *spr*; the statues have arrived at the statue-house and have been taken off the sledges, which have been removed along with the ropes attached to them.

² There must have been a sufficient opening to admit the statues, which, however, were not necessarily very large. Probably the opening was subsequently reduced by masonry work to the dimensions of an ordinary squint.

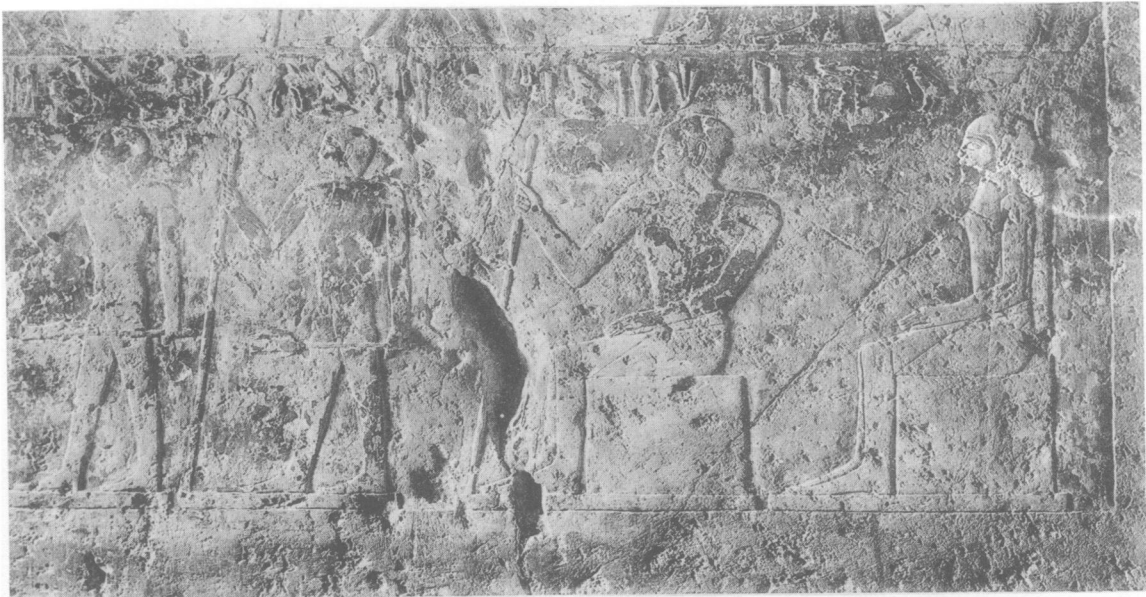


Fig. 1. STATUES OF PEPIONKH THE YOUNGEST

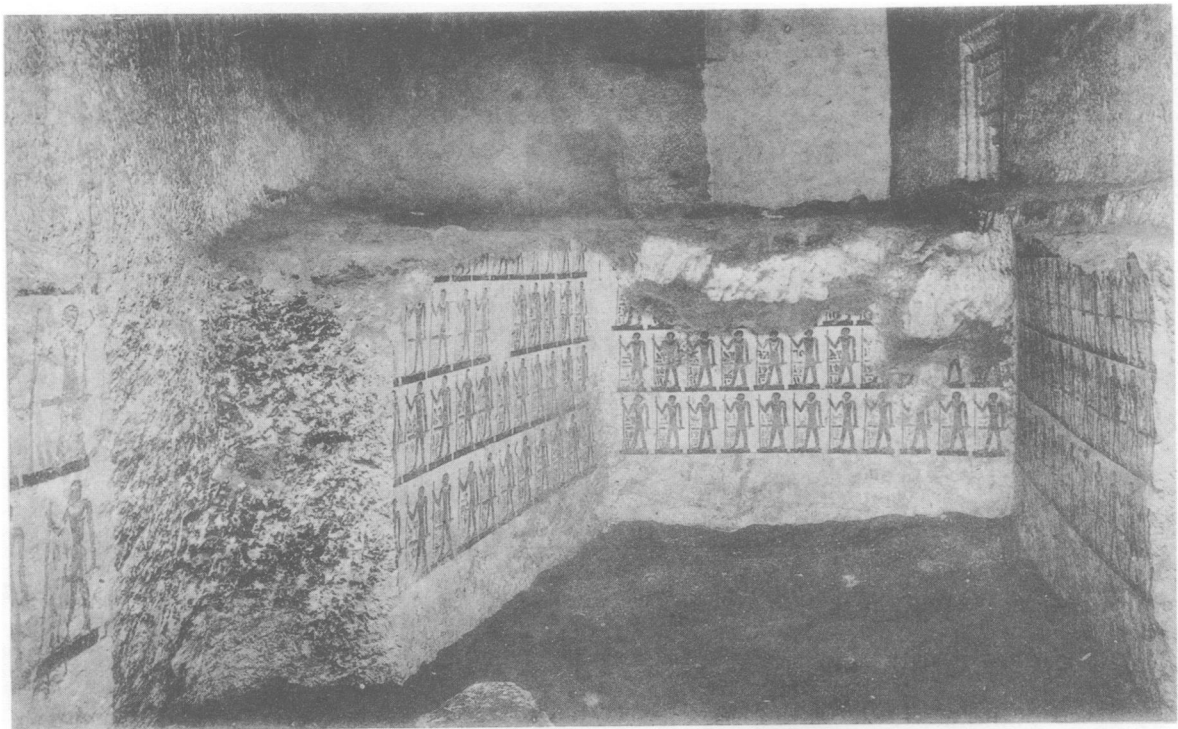


Fig. 2. "STATUE-HOUSE" OF PEPIONKH THE YOUNGEST