



RICH and GREAT

Studies in Honour of Anthony J. Spalinger
on the Occasion of his 70th Feast of Thoth

edited by Renata Landgráfová
and Jana Mynářová

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Charles University in Prague
Faculty of Arts
2016



The book was published through a non-investment subsidy of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic for the purpose of the development of international cooperation with the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Republic of the Sudan.

Reviewed by G. Pieke and B. Vachala

Contributors: L. Bareš, M. Bárta, V. G. Callender, F. Coppens, L. Depuydt, T. Dobbin-Bennett, E. Frood, O. Goelet, Jr., C. R. Hamilton, J. Hellum, C. A. Hope, J. Hsieh, D. Kahn, M. I. Khaled, R. Landgráfová, A. von Lieven, E. A. Mackay, J. Malek, M. Megahed, J. Mynářová, H. Navrátilová, A. Niwiński, J. F. Quack, K. Smoláriková, D. Sweeney, K. Szpakowska, M. Verner, H. Vymazalová

Cover: Drawing of the image of Amun-nakht in the gateway at Ayn Birbiyeh, Dakhleh Oasis, courtesy of Olaf Kaper; a photo of a statuette of an Asiatic captive, Abusir (Archive of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague).

Type-setting layout: Agama® poly-grafický ateliér, s.r.o., Praha
Print: TISKÁRNA PROTISK, s.r.o.

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ISBN 978-80-7308-668-8

Role-play and Group Biography in Ramessid Stelae from the Serapeum

ELIZABETH FROOD*

During his excavation of the Serapeum from 1851–1854, Auguste Mariette recovered ten stelae from the passage leading to the tomb chamber which held the remains of the Apis bulls buried in years 16 and 30 of Ramesses II. These stelae show a range of people who were involved in some way in these burials, from a temple scribe to a professional mourner. Distributed across three of them, dedicated by the lector priest Piay, are images and texts which evoke ceremonies surrounding the deposition and transfiguration of the deceased Apis, particularly the Opening of the Mouth ritual. The texts are at the limits of what might be considered biographical and are not included in discussions of biography – including my anthology (Frood 2007) – yet they relate closely to the roles and actions of the priests involved in the burial of the Apis. Compositions such as these, which seem to be on the edge of our definition of a genre, can help with reassessing such boundaries and with exploring categorisations of texts and monuments, as well as highlighting the potential for innovation in ancient contexts.

Piay's stelae were dedicated as part of a variety of ritual, funerary, and votive practices associated with the Apis of year 30. I use them to explore ideas relating to role-play, voice, and group participation in biography. The analysis of relationships of image to text, and text to context, that I develop for these monuments has been inspired by Tony Spalinger's work on related themes (e.g. Spalinger 2009; Spalinger 2011a), just as my interest in Ramessid Egypt has been inspired by his research and teaching more broadly. I began my work in Egyptology with Tony as an undergraduate at the University of Auckland, and undertook my first advanced research there as a graduate student. This Ramessid study is a small thank you for his support, guidance, and friendship throughout my time as a student in Auckland and ever since.

THE APIS BURIALS IN YEARS 16 AND 30 OF RAMESSES II

The modern term “Serapeum” designates the area of North Saqqara associated with the burial of the Apis bulls, encom-

passing individual tombs, gallery tombs, and temples. The first attested Apis burial in the area is a chamber tomb with freestanding aboveground chapel dating to the reign of Amenhotep III (fig. 1, A; *PM* III, 2: 780; cf. Devauchelle 1994: 96). The subsequent four “isolated tombs” (fig. 1, B–F) belong to a second burial perhaps also under Amenhotep III, and burials in the reigns of Tutankhamun, Horemheb, and Seti I, identified from scenes in their chapels and tombs, canopics and coffins, votive objects and, in the case of the second Amenhotep III tomb, three non-royal stelae (Devauchelle 1993; Dodson 1995; Desti 2004b with related catalogue). The stelae I treat here were associated with the last of the Apis bulls to be buried in separate tomb chambers, in years 16 and 30 of Ramesses II. All subsequent burials were incorporated into subterranean galleries, the “Petits souterrains”, and, from the reign of Psamtik I, the “Grands souterrains”.

Any superstructure that may have existed above the tomb used for Apis burials in years 16 and 30 of Ramesses II was not recorded by Mariette. Elements possibly from such a chapel are known, although they could also derive from the Serapeum temple proper (e.g. Desti 2004a: 64, cat. 14). The tomb comprised a rock-cut sloping passage oriented east-west, described by Mariette (1857: 12; 1882: 61) as open to the sky, leading to two rooms. The first room or “niche”, designated “H” by Mariette, was cut out from the south side of the passage and may have served as a canopic chamber for the bull of year 30 (fig. 1; Dodson 1999: 64–65). Although the room had been almost entirely robbed out in antiquity, a single canopic jar was recovered, bearing the name of the king's son Khaemwaset (Mariette 1857: 13, pl. 10, 2; 1882: 61–62; *KRI* II: 368, 7–10). The second room, Mariette's “G”, contained two intact burials of bulls, dated to year 16 and year 30 by the stelae of Piay. Mariette (1857: 12–13; 1882: 62–65) vividly described these burials, from the remains of the corpses in their coffins to the votive objects in and around the wooden sarcophagi. I use “G–H” to designate the tomb as a whole.

* I would like to thank Guillemette Andreu for permission to publish images of the Serapeum stelae and Audrey Viger for arrangements. I am grateful to Elsa Rickal for retrieving documentation about the stelae and for discussion. Christoph Bachhuber, John Baines, and Angela McDonald offered many crucial comments on drafts. Thijs 2014–2015 came to my attention too late to be incorporated.

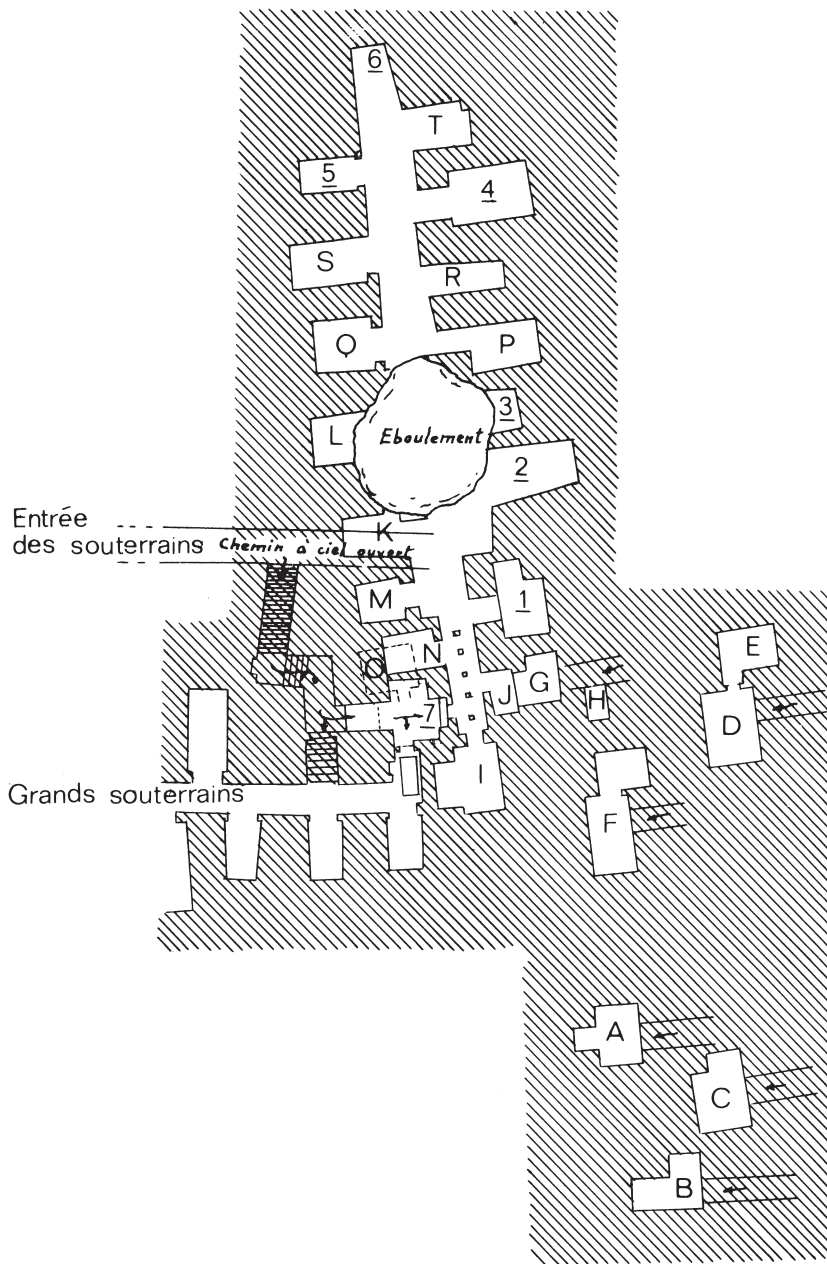


Fig. 1. Map of the isolated tombs and the "Petits souterrains" of the Serapeum (from Malinine – Posener – Vercoutter 1968: I, plan B).

Large numbers of objects bearing names of members of the inner court as well as people probably involved in the burials were included in the tomb, distributed in the chamber or mixed in with the bitumous mass of mummified bones of the bull buried in year 30. This latter group included shabtis of Khaemwaset and another royal son, Ramesses (Desti 2004a: 82, cat. 29; 84, cat. 31), as well as

a shabti of the royal scribe and steward Ptahmose (Desti 2004a: 88–89);¹ he is probably the same man as the mayor and treasury official Ptahmose, owner of a very substantial tomb at Saqqara (Greco 2011 with refs.). The same Ptahmose also dedicated a stela in the passage outside the tomb (fig. 2; Berlandini 1982: 102). Although he bears only the titles royal scribe and steward (*sh njsw, jmy-r3 pr*) on the

¹ The copies of part of Mariette's inventory in the handwriting of M. M. Emery, wife of W. B. Emery, in the Griffith Institute, Oxford, confirm this findspot: MSS. Mariette NB I and V, no. 2870. My thanks to Vincent Razanajao and Cat Warsi for access to this material.

stela and shabti, the name of his wife on the stela, Inehyt, is the same as on reliefs from the mayor's tomb, with variant orthography (Berlandini 1982: 102, n. 3). Ptahmose seems to be the only individual attested both on an object dedicated within the tomb chamber and on a stela from the passage outside. He is the highest ranking person attested in the stela group. Although his premier titles were not displayed in the Serapeum context, *sh njsw* is a ranking title in the New Kingdom (Onasch 1998; Ragazzoli 2011: 509–510). Ptahmose and Piay are the only holders of this or any other ranking title among those depicted on the stelae.

Mariette (1882: 140, n. 1) also recorded finding 247 stone and faience shabtis belonging to some 80 different people, men and women, in holes cut into the floor of the chamber (Aubert – Aubert 1973: 85–86, 90–92). Among the individuals represented were craftsmen probably responsible for the production of the tomb and its contents, including the chief sculptor Hatiay, who is known from a number of other objects (Kitchen 1999: 222; cf. Frood 2007: 117), and a draughtsman, Khaemwaset (*KRI* II: 369, 6–7). The range of offices represented among these votives is comparable with those held by people depicted on the stelae which were set up outside the chamber, discussed below. However, priestly titles, in addition to that of high priest (e.g. Mariette 1857: pl. 10), seem rare: a mourner of Apis, Horsiaru, and a *wab*-priest and temple goldworker, Neferhor, are among the few published examples (*KRI* II: 369, 6–7).²

The individual most frequently and prominently represented in tomb G–H is Khaemwaset, although he probably did not become high priest of Ptah and thus primarily responsible for the burial and cult of the Apis until after the year 16 interment (Gomaà 1973: 39, 41; cf. Fisher 2001: I, 95–96, 103–104). He was depicted with Ramesses II on the walls of room G (Gomaà 1973: 41). The best preserved and recorded of this decoration is the painted and gilded double scene on the south wall showing Ramesses II and Khaemwaset censuring and libating before anthropomorphic effigy-form, bull-headed figures of Apis in shrines (Mariette 1857: pl. 8; Desti 2004a: 55). A niche holding two large shabtis of Khaemwaset with a picture of an *imiut* below separated the scenes. His name was also found on the coffin of the year 30 Apis and on numerous objects recovered from the tomb, including stone and faience shabtis and semi-precious stone amulets (Gomaà 1973: 40–41, 77–78, cat. nos. 14–22; Fisher 2001: II, 115–119).

All Apis bulls that died after year 30 of Ramesses II were buried in large catacombs, an innovation often attributed to

Khaemwaset on the basis of the amount of material bearing his name found in the “Petits souterrains” and the inscriptions in which he claims a role in embellishing the associated temple (e.g. Gomaà 1973: 42; Fitzenreiter 2013: 76). Only shattered fragments survive from the Ramessid temple structure, elements of which were reused in the extensive rebuilding of Nectanebo II over eight centuries later.

Khaemwaset's dedicatory inscription from the Serapeum, inscribed on a statue found in Nectanebo's temple and republished by Christophe Barbotin (2001), addresses, among other people, the “assembly of priests and lector priests of this temple” and describes the temple's physical and performative environment: “I erected a *st-wrt* in stone for him (Apis) in front of his temple, in order to rest in it, awakened, after performing the burial (*r htp jm.s wrš m-ht jrt sm3-t3*). I made a great altar of Tura limestone for him in front of the *st-wrt*, inscribed with divine offerings and all the perfect rituals (*ht ntr nbt nfrt*) which were performed in the Opening of the Mouth, every part of his body [complete?] (rest of col. lost)” (Barbotin 2001: 31–36, with fig. 1). As Barbotin observes (2001: 38, with n. 76), elements of the inscription resonate with the presentation of the Opening of the Mouth ritual on Piay's stelae, as well as with a scene fragment, probably from the temple, showing Khaemwaset performing the Opening of the Mouth for the Apis (Barbotin 2001: pl. 12; Desti 2004a: 78–79). While it is plausible that the priestly group connected with the Apis would model their self-presentations on the preeminent individual among them, the designers of both were quite probably drawing on common and established sets of texts and images (cf. Spalinger 2011b: 368).

THE STELAE FROM TOMB G–H: CONTEXT AND CONTENT

The precise circumstances of the discovery of the Ramessid stelae associated with Mariette's tomb G–H are not very clear. The entry for G–H in the *Topographical Bibliography* (*PM* III, 2: 783–84) lists thirteen stelae. This agrees with the total in Mariette's 1857 account of the discovery of the tomb of the year 30 Apis: “[t]reize stèles ont été trouvées près de sa tombe” (1857: 15; cf. 1882: 142). That number almost certainly includes the nine stelae recorded in Mariette's inventory for January 7 and/or 8, 1853 as having been found “au milieu des décombres qui bouchaient la porte d'entrée de la chambre des canopes

² The copies of the inventory in the Griffith Institute, MSS Mariette NB I and V, record a number of shabtis and “statuettes” found “En face de la salle de Scha-em-djom [Khaemwaset]” (= room G). I wonder if this location refers to the passage leading to the room. For pertinent comments on the restricted, role-oriented, and overtly political context of large-scale ceremonials, such as the burial of the Apis, see Spalinger 1998: 244–245.

Fig. 2. Stela of Ptahmose (IM 5269; from Malinine – Posener – Vercoutter 1968: II, pl. 3, cat. no. 9).



brisés”, i.e. room H.³ The tenth must be the stela of Merihu which, although not included in the inventory, was captioned as belonging to this group in Mariette’s 1857

publication (pl. 17).⁴ To arrive at the number thirteen, Mariette may have conflated these ten with another three that were recorded in the inventory for 6 May 1853 as

having been found “dans la chambre des petits souterrains entre celles de Ramsès III et de Bocchoris”.⁵ Thus the published evidence points to ten stelae as having been found in the passage of G–H (with Malinine – Posener – Vercoutter 1968; *KRI* II: 369–375).

The most detailed description of the discovery is in Mariette’s report on the excavations, partly taken from his now-lost *Journal des fouilles*, and published posthumously by Gaston Maspero in 1882. Mariette’s description of the contents of room G is followed by a note on the discovery of two stelae in the entrance passage leading to the two rooms:

“Il est bien entendu que la tranchée a été déblayée tout entière avec le plus grand soin. Cette opération n’a pas été sans résultat. Deux belles stèles ont été trouvées appuyées contre la paroi sud. L’une mentionne deux Apis morts en l’an 16 et l’an 26 de Ramsès II, l’autre un Apis mort en l’an 30.” (Mariette 1882: 64–65)

The first of the two is IM 4963, dedicated by Piay, the lunette of which depicts the Apis bull buried in year 16 and the Mnevis bull buried in year 26, which Mariette identified as another Apis. The second must be Piay’s stela IM 5936, which also bears the year 30 date, even though it may have already been in pieces when recovered; Piay’s third stela survives only in three fragments, and the place where the date would have been inscribed is lost. Mariette’s description suggests that the stelae were set up on one or other side of the entrance to room H, which lay on the south side of the entrance corridor. Because this room had been almost entirely robbed out, the position of two of Piay’s stelae in the passage, as described by Mariette, could have been secondary, although it is perhaps unlikely that thieves would have moved stelae and propped them carefully against the wall.

Although none of the other stelae are mentioned in this account, it is possible to imagine the ten stelae set up against, or even set into, the walls of the passage and the entry-blockings of rooms G and H. In this their arrangement could be a precursor for the 1st millennium stela niches in the “Grands souterrains” (fig. 3) and in the galleries for other sacred animals in North Saqqara (e.g. Davies 2006: 32–34, fig. 7, pl. 9; Smith – Andrews – Davies 2011: figs. d–f). For Mariette

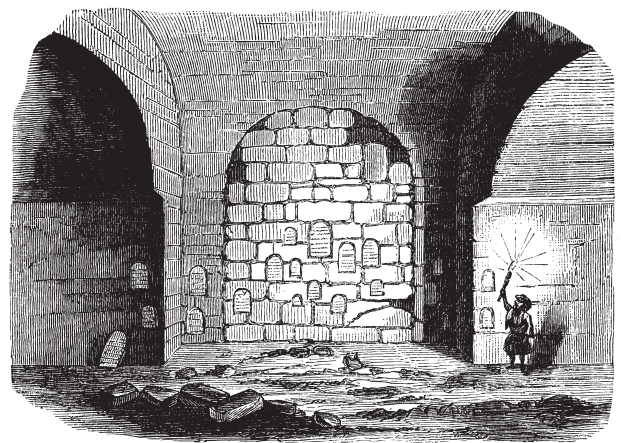


Fig. 3. Mariette’s drawing of stela niches in the walls and door-blockings in the “Grands souterrains” (from Mariette 1882: 119, fig. 3).

(1882: 118), these Ramessid stelae represented the transition from the display of votive stelae in niches, which he posited as set into the podiums of the aboveground chapels of the 18th Dynasty Apis tombs (Mariette 1882: 117, fig. 1; Desti 2004a: 54), to their incorporation into the subterranean complexes. And, as noted by Mariette, this change raises questions of access and audience (see below).

The ten stelae seem to form a coherent group in composition and content, and in the titles and roles of those depicted on them. Piay’s three stelae are discussed below. The other seven, which do not bear dates, were dedicated by a range of people who may have been involved in either of the two burials. Although it is tempting to understand them as a single, year 30 group, some may have been dedicated with the year 16 burial (implied for Ptahmose’s by Berlandini 1982: 102).

Five of these seven stelae include family members as well as colleagues, and the titles or gestures of some of these other individuals suggest their participation in the burial. One dedicant, the mourner of Apis (*ḥt n ḥp*) Sekhmetnefret, was a member of the priestly group, like Piay (fig. 4; IM 6153, *KRI* II: 373, 10–15). She offers a bouquet to the Apis, who stands on a plinth with a winged eye above him. In the reg-

³ IM 4963; IM 5936; IM 6154 (?) = SN 84; IM 4964; IM 6153; IM 5269; IM 5268; IM 5270; IM 5271 (Malinine – Posener – Vercoutter 1968: cat. nos. 4–10, 12–13). The entry from Mariette’s inventory (IM) is quoted or referred to under “Provenance” for each entry in the 1968 catalogue. See, for example, the entry for IM 4963, a stela of Piay: Malinine – Posener – Vercoutter 1968: I, 3, cat. no. 4, with p. xvi. The museum documentation kindly provided to me by Elsa Rickal gives the same inventory entry for each of these stelae.

⁴ SN 81: with Malinine – Posener – Vercoutter (1968: I, 11, cat. no. 11); SN = “sans numéro”: any previous number had been lost before registration in the Louvre (Malinine – Posener – Vercoutter 1968: xv).

⁵ With Malinine – Posener – Vercoutter 1968: I, 15–16; II, pl. 6, cat. nos. 15–17. As they note (1968: I, 15), Mariette (1857: pl. 17) illustrated the stelae and assigned them to the G–H group. This attribution contradicts the record in his inventory. These three are also smaller than the other Ramessid stelae and stylistically distinct; for example, all three represent the Apis as a man with bull’s head, while all but one of those from G–H depict him as a standing bull.

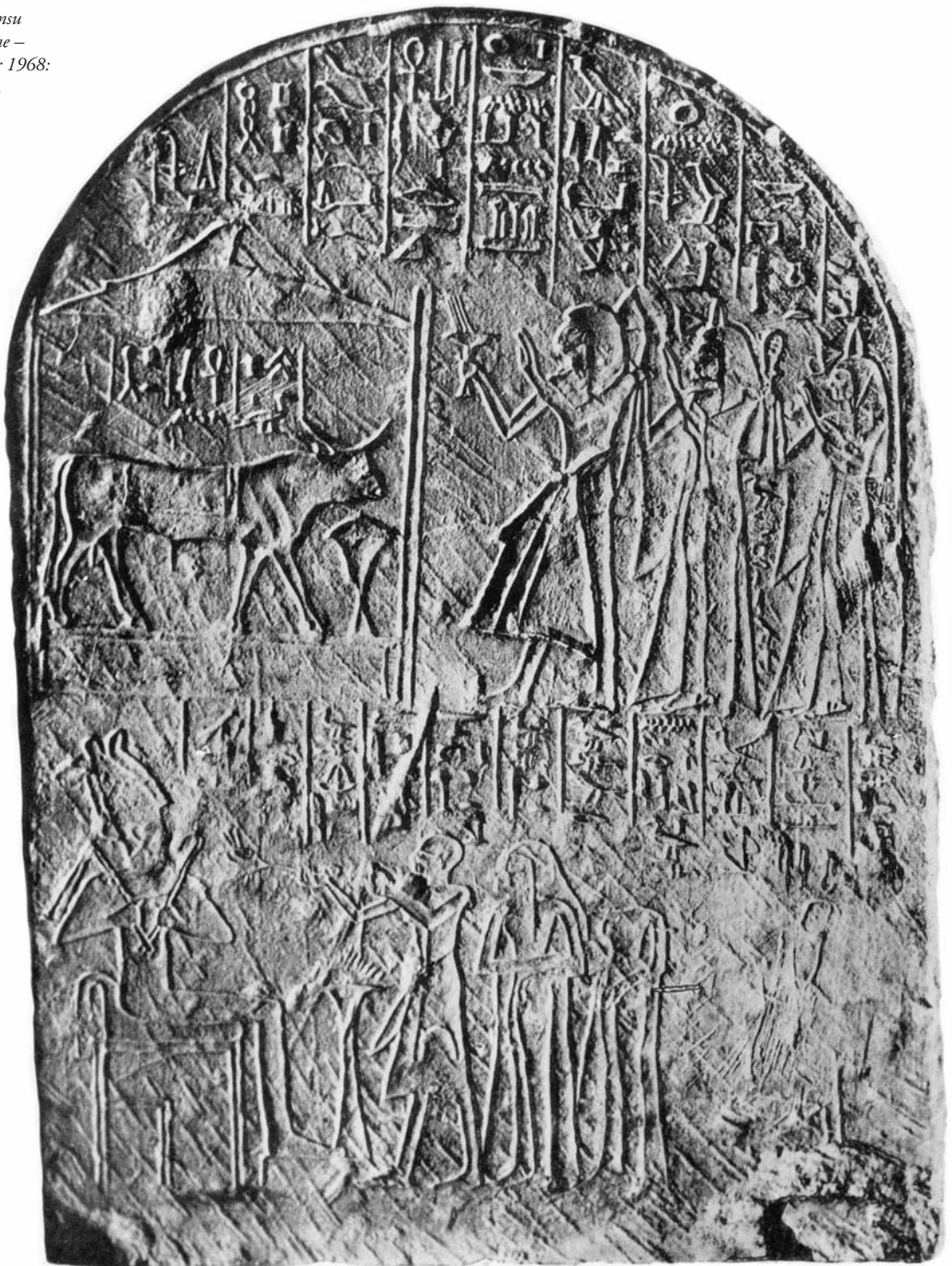


Fig. 4. Stela of Sekhmetnefret (IM 6153: from Malinine – Posener – Vercoutter 1968: II, pl. 4, cat. no. 8).

ister below, a lector priest of Apis Hoteptah censes and offers a small spouted vessel to a seated figure of Osiris. Two untitled women stand behind Hoteptah. The first holds

her left hand out in front of her face, palm upward, while the second holds a bouquet. Both have their right arms lowered and outstretched before their bodies in a gesture of re-

*Fig. 5. Stela of Khonsu
(IM 4964; Malinine –
Posener – Vercoutter 1968:
II, pl. 3, cat. no. 7).*



spect. Such striking specificity of gestures (cf. Spalinger 2011a: 108), asserting participation especially through mourning, is also displayed by other women depicted on the

stelae: at least one of those in the unfinished lower register of the stela of Khonsu has her arms folded across her body (fig. 5), while the women seated in the lowest register of

Ptahmose's stela cup their right hands in front of their faces (fig. 2: cf. Dominicus 1994: 20–21, 65–75; e.g. Werbrouck 1938: figs. 5–12, 17, 70).

At least three of the seven stelae were dedicated by people who probably had a provisioning role in the burial (Prévot 1992: 217): the chief of the magazines of Ptah Nehehendisu (IM 5270: Malinine – Posener, and Vercoutter 1968: cat. no. 12; *KRI* II: 374, 14–375, 8), the temple scribe of Ptah Ipy (IM 5271: Malinine – Posener – Vercoutter 1968: cat. no. 13; *KRI* II: 375, 9–12), and the chief of merchants Khonsu (fig. 5; IM 4964, *KRI* II, 373, 3–9). Khonsu's son, Amenemope, a lector priest, is depicted in the lower register of his stela. In the lower register of Nehehendisu's stela, the second figure before Osiris, with an oryx and bearing offerings, is a servant of Ptah (*sdm-ḥ n pth*). Two stelae belonged to people connected with the palace and the king: the overseer of the royal apartments of the harem in Memphis Amenmose (IM 5268: Malinine – Posener – Vercoutter 1968: cat. no. 10; *KRI* II: 374, 1–4), and the follower of His Person Merihu (SN 81: Malinine – Posener – Vercoutter 1968: cat. no. 11; *KRI* II: 374, 7–13). The former's title also suggests a role in provisioning, as does the simple overseer title, *jmy-r3 pr*, displayed by the highest ranking owner in the group, the mayor of Memphis and overseer of the treasury Ptahmose (with Kitchen 1999: 225–226).

All ten stelae are limestone and some bear traces of paint (e.g. the description of Sekhmetnefret's stela: Malinine – Posener – Vercoutter 1968: I, 8). Their dimensions are broadly similar, ranging between 51cm (Sekhmetnefret) and 63cm in height (Nehehendisu). They are compositionally diverse. Eight are round-topped, while two, those of Merihu and Nehehendisu, are rectangular. Nehehendisu's has a cavetto cornice; the top of Merihu's is lost. Most are divided into two registers – the stela of Ptahmose has three (fig. 2). His stela is also oriented differently with the gods shown on the right facing left, perhaps indicating it was designed for a specific position. Almost all depict the Apis as a standing bull on a plinth in one register. The iconography of Khonsu's is closest to Piay's stelae as the bull is shown within a shrine (fig. 5). Four include figures of Osiris sitting or standing on separate registers, and that of Ptahmose has a seated figure of Ptah in the upper register. Nehehendisu's stela is the only one to show the Apis in human form with a bull's head, while Merihu's combines Osiris and Apis by overlapping the bull's body with the standing effigy figure

of Osiris. Piay's three stelae bear the most extensive texts; the other seven are composed largely of captions with names and titles, as well as offering formulae.

PIAY'S STELAE: VISUAL AND TEXTUAL INTERPLAY

Among the ten stelae, the three dedicated by Piay (figs. 6–8) are distinctive in their more elaborate depictions and the inclusion of long texts detailing ceremonials surrounding the burial of the Apis, especially the Opening of the Mouth (cf. Prévot 1992: 217). Although “[b]oth scene and text are self-enclosed” (Spalinger 2011b: 353), something like a sequence is discernable visually and textually across them. Their layouts are very similar. All three stelae have two registers, with Piay and a colleague before a figure of Apis in a shrine in the upper register. The lower registers bear columns of text on the left, and the two best preserved stelae show two additional colleagues standing on the right. There are significant differences of detail on the stelae, from the rendering of the bull's shrine, through subtle distinctions in clothing, wigs, and accoutrements, to the main texts. While some passages in the latter are paralleled in all three, such as the introductory formulae and verses concerned with wrapping the body,⁶ each stela seems to display distinct phases in the preparation of the bull's body for the next life, thus “individual scenic events were discrete building blocks, all interconnected, and all contributing to certain dramatic events” (Spalinger 2011a: 14). I do not edit these highly complex stelae, but rather observe some key features. To highlight the sense of sequence, I describe the scenes in the upper registers and then the long texts, with the following discussions attempting to integrate both elements.

All three draw on texts and vignettes of the Opening of the Mouth ritual, which is well-known for humans from scenes and texts in temples, non-royal tombs, funerary manuscripts, coffins, and stelae (Otto 1960; Assmann 2001: 408–431; Smith 2009: 354–356). Comparable representations of individuals performing the Opening of the Mouth on sacred bulls are known: remains of a scene in the Theban tomb of Tjaenro (TT 101, temp. Amenhotep II) show a priest wielding ritual objects before a sacred bull in a shrine (*PM* I, 2: 215; *Urk.* IV: 1474–1475; Davies 1935: 53–54, fig. 8). On Piay's stelae, image and text are combined to present different parts of the ritual, from purification and cens-

⁶ The first stela, IM 4963, describes the body “in cloth of (?) the covering of the one who is in Sais, the wrapping of the Resenet and Mehnet shrines” (*m mnht nt? db3w n jmy s3w dmd n rsnt hn mhnt*: *KRI* III: 370, 8), while the second, IM 5936, reports enveloping the body with “shrouds of (?) she who is in Sais; it is a mystery of the Resenet and Mehnet shrines” (*t3yt [nw ...?] jmyt-s3w s3t3 [pw] n rsnt hn mhnt*: *KRI* III: 371, 6); the fragment of IM 6154(?) (= SN 84) also includes this latter verse (*KRI* III: 372, 4). For these shrines and their association with cloth production, see Smith 2005: 191 with refs.

ing to the enlivening of the body and offering. This conflation of episodes is a feature of the representation of the ritual in non-royal tombs and on stelae (e.g. Schulman 1984; Barthelmess 1992: 93–120).

The Opening of the Mouth was performed at least twice on the deceased Apis: during the embalming (Vos 1993: 52–53) and at the entrance to the tomb. While texts on Piay's stelae focus on the ritual in relation to embalming, the location of the stelae outside chamber G means that the ritual was perpetually performed there. This location is also associated with one of the most common vignettes of the Opening of the Mouth for humans which shows it taking place at the tomb entrance (e.g. Schulman 1984; Barthelmess 1992: 97). The iconography of Apis as a standing bull also evokes temple statues, integrating the rituals performed for the corpse with temple rituals performed for statues (with Barbotin 2001: 38; Prévot 1992: 217).

Piay, royal scribe and lector priest, is the chief performer. He is depicted on all three stelae, standing in the premier position in the upper register before Apis in a shrine. These shrines have different forms on the three stelae, although all have cartouches of Ramesses II and *wedjat*-eyes over the bull's back.⁷ The other people shown on the stelae bear, among other titles, that of lector priest in connection with different ritual places. Three people are depicted on the first stela (IM 4963), one of whom, who is frontmost in the lower register, is the son of the priest standing behind Piay in the upper register. On the second (IM 5936), the lector priest and embalmer in the perfect house (*pr-nfr*), Reya, is shown in both registers; the caption for the second figure in the lower register was never carved.

The lunette of the first stela (fig. 6: IM 4963; Malinine – Posener – Vercoutter 1968: cat. no. 4) bears miniature figures of recumbent bulls flanking cartouches of Ramesses II, captioned as the Apis who died in year 16 on “this day” (left) and the Mnevis of year 26, “this day” (right). The arrangement relates to conventional emblematic lunettes, such as the small pictures of recumbent jackals and other deities characteristic of stelae from Abydos (Baines 2009: 5). The bulls' inclusion asserts the priests' involvement in these burials in a manner partly comparable to the double royal dates on the scallops of the cavetto cornice of the 12th Dynasty Abydos stela of Wepwawetaa (Leiden V, 4; Simpson 1974: pl. 30, ANOC 20.1), which probably had significance for the owner's biography.⁸ One of the titles held by the frontmost priest in the lower register of IM 4963 is “*jmy-js* in the place of Mnevis” (*KRI* II: 370, 10; Raue 1994: 192–193).

Below the year 16 Apis is a right-facing figure of Apis with a small figure of a standing king beneath his head, evoking a type of temple statue (e.g. Verbovsek 2003: esp. 438–439; Fitzenreiter 2013: 47–48); the forward foot of the king crosses the threshold of the shrine. This is a plain rectangular structure with a frieze of uraei on the roof and a low plinth. In the corners next to the *wedjat*-eyes are the names of Isis and Nephthys, signalling their mourning of the corpse and their role accompanying the rite (cf. Vos 1993: 164–165).

Piay stands in front of the kiosk, a laden offering table before him. The title string in his caption is the fullest of all those on the stelae: “royal scribe, lector priest and expert, overseer of the lower and upper embalming place, overseer of the god's seal, overseer of embalming” (*sh-njsw hry-hbt hry-tp jmy-r3 w^cbt hrt hrjt jmy-r3 htmty-ntr jmy-r3 wt*: *KRI* II: 370, 1–2). He wears a short pleated kilt with long overgarment which reveals his legs. This clothing distinguishes him from the other men on the stelae, who wear long pleated robes with full aprons. He holds a papyrus before him in a gesture of recitation, characteristic of lector-priests, that associates him implicitly with the speeches inscribed on the stela, including the text below. Behind him stands another priest, Djehutymose, wearing a leopard skin and holding a censer and a *nemset*-vessel before him. Both wear sandals. The caption states that they are “performing the opening of the mouth of the Osiris of Apis”, and is followed by an abbreviated version of a purification formula that often accompanies Opening of the Mouth scenes (e.g. Schulman 1984), addressed to Apis and “spoken” by Piay: “Your purification is the purification of Horus, your purification is the purification of Geb” (*KRI* II: 370, 1). The caption for Djehutymose's action is incorporated into his title string as an epithet: “expert and lector priest in the perfect house, giving water to the one upon the bier (*rdjt mw n hrjt*) (*t nmjt*), Djehutymose called Ramose” (*KRI* II: 370, 2).

In the lunette of the second stela (fig. 7), the bull is shown within a shrine with a high, stepped podium. The curved roof of the shrine evokes the *per-nu*, and is topped by an effigy-form falcon with two uraei, a combination of elements which is elsewhere associated with the Abydos fetish and Osiris (Coulon 2011: esp. 99, with n. 46 for Piay's stela); the *per-nu* shrine form with falcon is also depicted on Khonsu's stela (fig. 5) and on the temple block showing Khaemwaset performing the Opening of the Mouth for Apis (Barbotin 2001: pl. 12). A processional context for the picture, suggestive of the funeral, is conveyed perhaps through

⁷ Only one cartouche is depicted over the bull's back on the third stela.

⁸ My thanks to John Baines for suggesting Wepwawetaa's stela as a point of comparison and for discussion.



Fig 6. "First" stela of Piay (IM 4963; © 2004 Musée du Louvre/Christian Décamps).

association of this iconography with the fetish, but also by the jackal standard at the front of the shrine and the *imiut* behind; the latter is sometimes shown being carried in pro-

cession (e.g. Frood 2006: 251 with refs.). An *imiut* is also prominent in the scene on the south wall of room G. All these ritual elements on this stela seem to point toward

Fig. 7. "Second" stela of Piay (IM 5936: from Malinine – Posener – Vercouter 1968: II, pl. 2, cat. no. 5).



a more divinised, specifically Osirian context and status. This is reinforced by the fact that the two priests before the shrine are barefoot; Piay's foot crosses in front of the podium

steps, attaching him to this divinised realm. He again holds a book but also has a basket(?) over his shoulder. Behind him the lector priest of the perfect house, Reya, wears a leopard

skin and holds a *nrtj*-chisel (Otto 1960: 17–18, episode 26) and a *wr-ḥk3w*-tool (Otto 1960: 19–20, episode 27). Their caption describes “performing the opening of the mouth in the mansion of gold”; this title is followed by a fuller version of the purification formula and a statement that is perhaps spoken by Reya: “I open your mouth for you, and your eyes four times” (*KRI* II: 370, 15–16).

The detail of the scene on the damaged third stela (fig. 8) is difficult to determine. The lower section of the bull’s body and shrine are lost. The flat roof of the kiosk shows a row of at least six uraei in the front part and a recumbent jackal over the rear. Here Piay is shown censng, captioned *jrt sntr*, rather than reciting. Behind him, the lector priest and embalmer in the perfect house Yey is libating. Instead of ritual utterances, the caption is immediately followed by an address (*jnd-ḥrk*) to the living Apis, who is given the fullest set of epithets attested for him on the stelae: “complete of forms, foremost for Wenennefer, sacred *ba* who is in the west, Osiris, sovereign of the underworld”. This address is a voice offering for the benefit of Piay (*m prt-ḥrw*: *KRI* II: 371, 13–14). Such features give a sense of completion and culmination.

The texts in the register below each scene, which probably relate to the book Piay is shown reciting from, describe the mummification and burial of the Apis. As with the captions in the upper registers, these texts incorporate phrases from the Opening of the Mouth and other ritual texts. Some of the places, materials, and actors are attested, for example, in the Late Period biographies of priests involved in the Apis burials (Vercoutter 1962) and in the 1st to 2nd century BC manuscript of the Apis Embalming Ritual (Vos 1993) among others. The priests shown to the right of the texts, on the two stelae where this section survives, wield objects used in the ritual. The frontmost on the first stela, who is wearing sandals, holds the *nrtj*- and *wr-ḥk3w*-tools. The priest in this position on the second stela wears a leopard skin and holds forelegs, one of which breaks into the text; only his rear ankle survives but his feet may have been bare. The second priest on both stelae is barefoot and holds the *psš-kf*-tool (Otto 1960: 16–17, episode 37). The distinctions between the figures implies that they draw together different times and spaces from the performance.

An opening formula is repeated, with some variation, across the stelae, after the date (year 30, 3 *shomu* 21): “This day, the person of the Apis proceeded to *qbḥw*⁹ in order to

rest (afterwards) in the embalming place (*wḥt*) before Anubis *jmy-wt*.¹⁰ He (Anubis) mummified his (Apis’) corpse ...” (*KRI* II: 370, 5; 371, 3). The third stela, which does not preserve the date, has Apis proceeding to *qbḥt* “to join the place of the one who begot him” (*KRI* II: 372, 2). Thus in all three the primary actor at the start of the text is Anubis, who may be identified with Piay, the primary depicted actor. This makes play with conventional Opening of the Mouth scenes in which Anubis, or a priest in an Anubis mask, stands in support of the body (e.g. Assmann 2001: 409; Barthelme 1992: 100, n. 565; Schulman 1984). All three stelae follow this statement with descriptions of actions undertaken in relation to the bull’s corpse.

These next verses on the first stela are as follows:

sdwh.f-ḥ3t.f dr.f-rdw.f

He (Anubis/priest) mummified his corpse, he expelled his fluids,

bḥn.f-jww.f r-mst.f

he sliced out his putrification in order to fashion him

ḥr-šs-wḥ hnt-ḥwt-nbw

upon the pure alabaster slab before the mansion of gold,

r-wpt-r3.f m-bd ḥr-sntr

in order to open his mouth with natron and incense,

r-djt-3bḥ-ntyw ḥr-ḥw.f

to cause that myrrh suffuse his body,

r-sntr.f m-jrt-ḥr

to divinise/cense him with the eye of Horus,

ḥrw n-wpt-r3

on the day of opening the mouth. (*KRI* II: 370, 5–7)

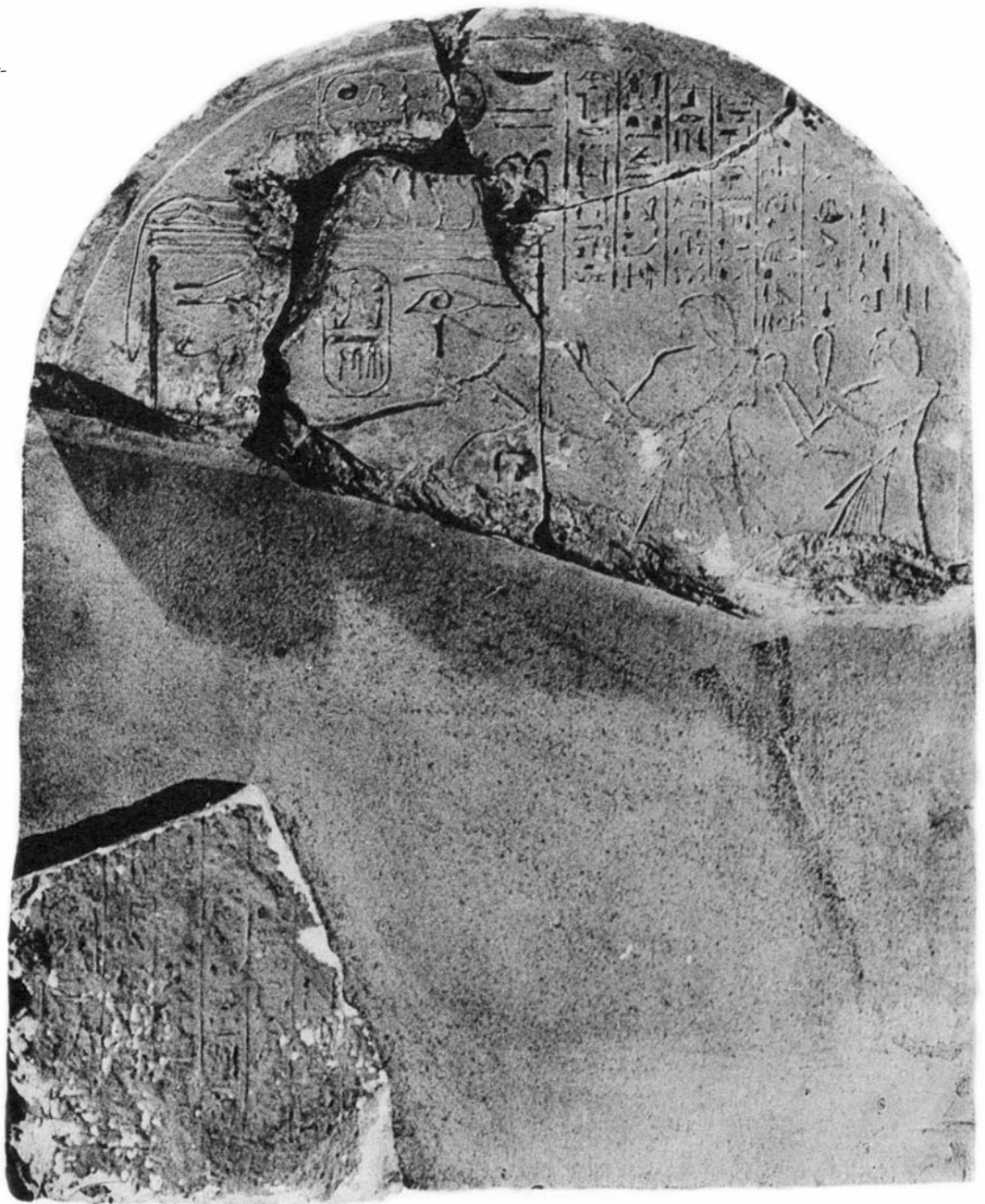
A description of the cloth-wrapped body coming to rest in the coffin (“the body of Nut”) comes next. The final stanzas concern the receipt of offerings, both for the Apis and for, it seems, the speaker(s). There is an unmarked shift in voice here, from third person descriptions of actions to an address to Osiris-Apis “that you may give bread, water, breath, libations ...” (*KRI* II: 370, 8–9). This closing prayer links the anticipated transformation of the god with anticipated benefits, perhaps also for the priests depicted on the stela.

The text on the second stela also describes the treatment of the corpse, but encompasses others involved in the procedures. Anubis is again the first actor:

⁹ Var. *qbḥt* on the second and third stelae. Jean Vercoutter (1975: 346–347) convincingly suggested that *qbḥw* in these texts refers to a place where the corpse was purified just after death and before it went to the embalming workshops (cf. Vos 1993: 153–154).

¹⁰ For possible distinctions between the perfect house (*pr-nfr*) and the embalming place (or “place of purification”), see Smith 2009: 305 with refs.

Fig. 8. “Third” stela of
Piay (IM 6154 (?) = SN
84: from Malinine – Pose-
ner – Vercoutter 1968: II,
pl. 1, cat. no. 6).



sdwh.f-h3t.f mswt-hr wts.sn-sw

He (Anubis/priest) mummified his corpse, the children of
Horus bearing him up,¹¹

hry-hbt šdy.f-s3hw

the lector priest pronouncing transfiguration spells.

wp-r3.f m-pr-dw3t [js]-sp-tpy

His mouth was opened in the house of morning,
the [chamber] of the first time,

hr-šs-w^cb hnt-pr-nfr

on the pure alabaster slab before the perfect house.

¹¹ I read Horus (*hr*) in this verse (with Malinine – Posener – Vercoutter 1968: I, 6), *contra* KRII: 371, 3. I am grateful to Elsa Rickal for her photographs of details from the stela which seem to confirm this reading.

jmy-ht n-nmjt [*dj.f-ʿwy.fy-hr.k*]

The *jmy-ht* of the bier [placed his hands] on you,

dmd.f-tw n(n)-hnn-jm.k

and he made you whole without corruption.

s3q.f-jwf.f nwh.f-ʿwt.f

He gathered up his flesh and bound his limbs,

tm r-jrwt.sn

complete according to their functions. (*KRI* II: 371, 3–6)

As on the first stela, the following (and here final) two stanzas describe the purification of the body and close with its wrapping and burial, however without any offering formula or address at the end. While the text on the first stela centres on the actions of Anubis/priest-Anubis, on this stela the field of action opens up to other individuals, including those who are divine or taking a divine role such as the children of Horus who protect the body during mummification (Smith 2009: 222). This effect is heightened by anticipatory emphasis in some of the verses.¹² The priestly title *jmy-ht* (*Wb*. III: 347, 4–6; cf. Otto 1960: 12) may also refer to Anubis since the designation “one who is behind” indicates his position in scenes of the preparation of the body; an epithet “who placed his hands on NN” is attested for him in scenes of the Opening of the Mouth and preparation of the body (Schulman 1984: 183, doc. 11, cf. 185, doc. 15; Bruyère 1928: pl. 3; cf. Assmann – Bommas – Kucharek 2005: 299–300). The mentions of priests and gods resonate with the ritual proper, which describes the tasks and speeches assigned to different actors (e.g. Otto 1960: 10–14). On Piay’s stela these are closely associated with specific, named people in a context of personal and group claims to role and status.

Traces of seven columns of the lower left corner of Piay’s third stela survive (*KRI* II: 372, 1–5). What is legible is very similar to the texts on the other two stelae, including references to Anubis, his treatment of the corpse (*sdwh.f h3t.f*), and the mystery of the Resnet and Mehnet shrines. The variation in the opening formula which describes Apis proceeding to *qbhyt* “to join the place of the one who begot him” could perhaps be read as marking completion.

VOICE AND ROLE-PLAY

Taken together, Piay’s texts read as a group of closely related, occasionally parallel, ritual texts, albeit fuller and more descriptive than those that normally accompany Opening of

the Mouth scenes (e.g. Assmann 2001: 418–419, 422, 425; Barthelmess 1992: 100–113). The texts are distinctive in extent and elaboration and in their integration with their iconographic and monumental contexts. The notion of a connecting “narrative” is reinforced by the scenes, which move priests and god through increasingly divinised spaces and culminating actions.

The unmarked shifts between third-person description and second-person address on the first stela heighten the immediacy of the performances, relating closely to the image of Piay reciting in the upper register and the other priests who hold ritual objects. This mixing of voice, and the lack of specificity in reference on all three stelae, open performance and speech out to other people, as well as evoking role-play as gods. The third-person voice distances the texts from most Egyptian biographies, as does the lack of specific reference to the actions and character of a single individual. An obvious point of contrast is the biographical texts on Late Period stelae from the Serapeum, which vividly describe, in the first-person, the activities of priests involved in Apis burials, including dramatic expressions of mourning (Vercoutter 1962; Jansen-Winkel 1994). But Piay’s texts are included on stelae that are, in terms of overall composition, in keeping with forms of non-royal self-presentation, especially those attested from the New Kingdom that show ritual before gods. The inclusion of dates at the start also associates them more closely to, for example, contemporaneous biographies that begin with or incorporate dates (e.g. Frood 2007: nos. 1, 7, 22a, 41b; Boraik 2007; cf. Seidlmayer 2001), as well as to the recording of lifespans and timings for the preparation of the body which are widely attested for sacred bulls (e.g. Vercoutter 1962; Smith – Andrews – Davies 2011).¹³

The use of the third-person is rare in biographical texts and is most characteristic of its earliest phase of development (e.g. Baines 2013: 249; Stauder-Porchet 2011). It is attested in a few Ramessid compositions (Frood 2007: nos. 11a, 17; Boraik 2007), notably the tomb text of Samut which is framed as a third-person fictional “tale” (Vernus 1978). A productive comparison with Piay’s texts is the late 19th Dynasty Abydos stela text of the high priest of Isis Wenennefer (Forgeau 2010: pl. 29). It is introduced as a tale addressed to the people of Tawer: “I will cause you to hear something good concerning the plan of the god which he carried out for the servant of his domain”, which then continues as a third-person presentation of the celebrations surrounding Wenennefer’s initiation, including descriptions of

¹² My thanks to Angela McDonald for this suggestion and discussion.

¹³ Verses on Piay’s second stela record that: “The embalming place completed 70 (days) for him with [incense (?)] and natron” (*km n.f wʿbt 70 [snr?] hsmn*: *KRI* II: 371, 6).

groups of young people who “drew near to him” and “turned their faces to him” (*KRI* IV: 297, 8–9; Frood 2007: 105–106). The effect of the third person is to give a “god’s-eye view” that encompasses the presence and actions of other people in relation to the central figure. On Piay’s stelae the central figure is Apis (almost) as much as Piay himself.

In Wenennefer’s text, the third-person seems also to enable the protagonist to take on the divine role of Ihy and perhaps Horus the child (Forgeau 2010: 344). At the start of the text, Wenennefer is likened to “Ihy in the flood”, and a divine persona is maintained for the later initiation in which the goddess seems to command that Wenennefer’s form (*jr.w*) be revealed (*bsj*; *KRI* IV: 297, 9–10), *jr.w* being normally restricted to gods (Hornung 1967: 126–128). In Piay’s stelae, the third-person voice enables Piay, and perhaps the other priests, to be identified with Anubis, but the identity of the actors nevertheless remains fluid. Divine role-play was central to ritual and magical performances, as, for example, with the keeper of secrets (*hry-sšt3*) who is Anubis in the Apis Embalming Ritual (Vos 1993: 37). This capacity is claimed more widely in biographical texts (Baines 2013: 242, 249–250), especially those describing participation in the Osiris mysteries at Abydos. Individuals such as Ikhernofret in the 12th Dynasty and Nebwawy in the 18th claim to act as Horus in the revivification of Osiris (Hays 2009; Frood 2003: 73–74). In these texts, the role-play is “marked” – “I performed as His-Beloved-Son (*jw jr.n.j s3-mr.f*)” – whereas in Piay’s texts there is no comparable signalling of shift in role.

As Stephen Houston (2006: 146) emphasises for “deity impersonation” in Mayan contexts, such role-play “appears to involve a *concurrence* rather than a displacement of identities”. Ramessid texts such as Wenennefer’s, and especially those of Piay, make play with the implications of this concurrence. Egyptian texts normally contour identity strongly; even ritual and magical texts, where role-play and divine concurrence is central to efficacy, assert identity as part of recitation: “I am Horus”, “I am Thoth”. In Piay’s texts delineations between performer–recipient, worshipper–worshipped, subject–object are blurred: the Apis is recipient, then actor and provider; the priests/gods are actors, then recipients.

Comparable concurrences are mobilized in other contexts that blur both identity and distinctions between biography and other text-types. A stela of the offering scribe of the temple of Seti I at Abydos, May, includes a hymn to Osiris that is ostensibly uttered by Horus, but spoken by

May and linked with statements characteristic of non-royal afterlife wishes: “I am your son Horus (*jnk s3.k hr*); I have come that I might smite your enemies for you ... may you be merciful to me, perfect on this day, may you drive away any opposition against me, may you listen when I call to you ... By (or: for) the one excellent of fingers, effective for his lord, apprentice whom His Person taught ...” (*KRI* I: 344, 5–8). A biographical aspect is developed here in the interplay between the hymn and the frame (Gnirs 1996: 234, n. 233). As with Piay, the text may allude to conventions and potentials of different genres, in an effect that is heightened by the recitation and perhaps by a colophon of sorts (cf. Lenzo Marchese 2004: 363, 365–366, with nos. 40–41). As Martin Stadler (2009: 234) observes for the relationship of the aretology of Thoth in spell 182 of the Book of the Dead with biography, the identities of speaker and deity are fused through recitation. The second-person speeches of purification and those requesting offering on Piay’s stelae seem instead to emphasize the voice and presence of the human actors, in a pictorial composition in which role and relative status are quite evident.

GROUP BIOGRAPHY

The processes of transformation shown across the three stelae involve the human actors and the god. The distributed presentation and “narration” of identity within a space using texts and media that parallel one another is an ancient strategy. Instances that incorporate biographies include the late Middle Kingdom stelae of Amenisonbe (Baines 2009) and the statues of the 19th Dynasty high priests of Amun Bak-enkhons and Roma – monuments that might have been set up some distance apart (Frood 2007: nos. 2a–b, 3a–c). Piay’s stelae present more people as having roles in the events while foregrounding him as chief actor. There are numerous parallels for this strategy of display, not least among which are the Middle Kingdom ANOC groups from Abydos (Simpson 1974; Baines 2009: 9–10). For example, the stelae set up with that of Ikhernofret constitute a hidden participation in the mysteries which are described on his; although none of these other stelae incorporate details of the ceremonial, some bear dates and references to royal decrees, and one reports travelling to Abydos “in order to fashion (a statue of) Osiris” after a Nubian campaign of Senusret III (Geneva D 50; Simpson 1974: pl. 4; Baines 2013: 252), resonating with the Nubian gold mentioned in Ikhernofret’s stela as being part of the king’s ordained gift to the temple.¹⁴

¹⁴ A detailed study of implications of agency among the ANOC groups is Olabarria 2014.

On Piay's stelae, the participation of more people in the ritual is made explicit and extends to the other stelae in the G–H group, both through their location – at least some were designed to sit together – and through their content. That specifics of this biography are shared and mobilised by the wider group of stelae, which are otherwise more conventional in composition, is emphasised by elements such as the mourning gestures of some of the women as well as features of the iconography of the Apis. The longer texts on Piay's stelae, with their lack of specificity in voice and reference, also involve the people included on the G–H group as a whole. This is a social as much as a monumental distribution of personhood (see Kjølby 2009), and can perhaps be characterised as “group biography”. People are neither subsumed into collective action (Baines 2013: 243–244) nor effaced by divine role-play (*contra* Hays 2009). Rather, self-presentations are arranged in ways that are ultimately unifying so that different lives – different biographies – are focused around central events that privilege those people and foster a sense of group experience and participation in addition to asserting individual identity, presence, and agency.

The interpretation I offer here is close to that developed for Ramessid votive stelae by Karen Exell (2009), who argues that particular clusters of stelae commemorate specific events and emphasize the agency of individuals and groups. Among her case-studies, the group of seven stelae dedicated by the viceroy of Kush under Ramesses II, Setau, and his entourage, found in situ against the north wall of the second court of the temple of Wadi es-Sebua, is particularly relevant (Exell 2009: 115–119, 128; Barsanti – Gauthier 1911; further stelae were found elsewhere in the court). Setau's stela is almost twice the size of the others and bears a long first-person biography of something like a traditional type (Frood 2007: no. 41b). Two of the smaller stelae also bear narratives, the better preserved recording a military action connected to but different from that described in Setau's text (Frood 2007: no. 42). Like the G–H group, the Wadi es-Sebua stelae are similar in format but differ in iconography, especially of deities (Exell 2009: fig. 5.5). They also mobilize a partly comparable involvement in processional and ceremony. The adoring figures of Setau's entourage on the smaller stelae faced toward the temple sanctuary, from which the gods would have symbolically emerged. The processional context is emphasized by portable shrines depicted on some of them. On Setau's stela, by contrast, he and the king face outward, perhaps welcoming the dedicators of the other stelae and mediating between them and the deities in the temple (cf. Exell 2009: 132). These processional depictions display how Setau and the king are aligned in their provision of temple space for the deities – a theme highlighted in Setau's narra-

tive – as well as for human worshippers who are represented by the stelae of his group.

Among the Wadi es-Sebua stelae, Setau is preeminent through the scale of his own monument, the lengthy biography centred on his achievements, and the dedications made to him on each of the stelae of his soldier-clients (Exell 2009: 136). The G–H stelae do not claim any patron–client relationship but rather evoke a social and ritual context created for, and perhaps restricted to, the funeral. On these stelae hierarchies are more subtly encoded or not overtly asserted, as suggested by the short, non-specific titles borne by Ptahmose on his stela.

The Wadi es-Sebua stelae, like other sets studied by Exell, were designed for semi-public display, a point that is crucial to her analysis of their function. The G–H group, by contrast, was not intended to be visible in the longer term. Although Mariette described the passage leading to rooms G and H as open to the sky, it was probably not generally accessible and is likely to have been filled in after the funeral. In this respect, these stelae can be compared with the biographies discussed by Alexandra von Lieven (2010), which were incorporated into spaces and on objects, such as shabti boxes, sarcophagi, and funerary manuscripts, that were inaccessible (see also Baines 1992: 252–254). As in her examples, any human audience for the G–H stelae was short-term, focused around the process of their creation and the ceremonies for the bull's interment. For the G–H stelae we can imagine an audience of hundreds for the funeral (cf. Spalinger 1998: 250), as indicated by the eighty-odd people who claimed participation through the deposition of votives in the main chamber. Among this large range of people, the dedicators of the stela are distinguished through their inclusion in this exclusive group. Their status, as indicated by titles, seems equivalent to and in some cases lower than those who dedicated the votives. Unlike the material treated by von Lieven, the dedicators commissioned a widespread medium of non-royal monumental display for a large-scale semi-public event, pointing to the salience of this medium for ceremonial performances, as well as the potential meanings borne by monuments even when a human audience was no longer relevant.

Little on Piay's stelae is new, but their iconography and textual content are extended, elaborated, and reconfigured to different effect. “Group biography” is a way of characterising some of their implications as monuments. Biographies of more traditional types from the Ramessid period are relatively rare, but among them a few, including the tomb text of Samut, use and elaborate biographical potentials in ways that mean our definition of what constitutes a biographical text needs nuancing and extending (with von Lieven 2010:

69). Piay's stelae can be related to this group, focusing as they do on a ritual event rather than the course of his life. Here I offer a complementary position to Maria Michela Luiselli's argument (2011: e.g. 224–225) that some such texts, including the “confessional” stelae from Deir el-Medina, are not (auto)biographies and that it is limiting to approach them from a biographical perspective (cf. Baines 2013: 244, n. 4). Ancient designers of monuments and composers of their texts were very aware of the genres they were using and their associations (e.g. Spalinger 2011a–b). These Ramessid monuments deploy and elaborate biographic traits to create innovative self-presentations. “Biography” (or “autobiography”) highlights how their textual and visual content was fundamental to individual self-fashioning, contouring their protagonists' life and experience – that is, biography in the broadest sense – in this case in relation to divine worlds and restricted ritual practices, in addition to social spheres.

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