"WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH ARCHAEOLOGY?"

Essays on the Occasion of the 65th Birthday of Reinhard Bernbeck

EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE

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HERAUSGEBER*INNENKOLLEKTIV

Aydin Abar, Mette Bangsborg Thuesen, Georg Cyrus, Vera Egbers, Jana Eger, Ilia Heit, Benjamin Irvine, Christine Kainert, Johannes Köhler, Moslem Mishmastnehi, Birgül Öğüt, Sarvenaz Parsa, Giulia Russo, Julia Schönicke, Stefan Schreiber, Francelin Tourtet, Lisa Wolff-Heger

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Negotiating Space at Dahshur, Egypt

Lea Rees

Reinhard Bernbeck is a most inspiring teacher – not only for students of Ancient Southwest Asia, but also for those of other archaeological and historical disciplines. By applying theoretical approaches to the archaeological record, by questioning "common sense" assumptions, and by critically assessing the empirical basis for far-fetched interpretations, he has very much influenced the way of thinking of many of his students, including myself. With this small contribution to his Festschrift, I would like to thank him for his constant support throughout my studies, my PhD research, and with some of my publications. I hope he will enjoy this case study which – for a change – comes from Pharaonic Egypt.

Introduction: On authoritative control and central planning

In all of Pharaonic history, certain occupational groups were bound closely to the state (i.e., the ruler, the ruling elite, and a large apparatus of officials) by material dependence: When soldiers, workers, craftspeople, farmers, or priests were involved in state-f(o)unded projects, not only their salaries but also their board and lodging was provided for. Soldiers as well as the masses of workers on monumental construction sites, for instance, were both referred to as *mšʿ*, "troops", and were housed in barrack-like structures for the time of their duty (Seidlmayer 2009, 160). Thus, Ancient Egypt is often portrayed in popular as well as scientific literature as a monolithic, authoritative state seeking all-encompassing control over its population. In Egyptology, it is primarily the Middle Kingdom (2055–1650 BCE) which has been referred to as the culmination of central planning, governance, and surveillance. Most notably, Barry J. Kemp has argued that the ruling elite of the time created a "provider state" (Kemp 2006 [1989], 161), resulting in a "prescriptive society" (Kemp 2006 [1989], 241), aiming to micro-manage everyone's life, work, and home. This has mainly been argued on the basis of meticulous administrative sources implying an increased level of bureaucracy (Kemp 2006 [1989], 163–92), and on the evidence of state-founded settlements like Tell el-Dabʿa, Lahun, Wah-sut, and Qasr el-Sagha, which all show a high degree of central planning with their grid-like structure, long orthogonal streets, and repetitive house layouts (Kemp 2006 [1989], 193–244; Moeller 2018 [2016], 249–333, 378–79). Without questioning the narrative of a control-seeking state in its essence, the question to what extent the state actually influenced people's lives arises. The archaeological site of Dahshur offers a particularly suitable case study to demonstrate how a more nuanced view on authoritative control and central planning can be gained by factoring in planned cemeteries as well as earlier planned settlements, and by looking for "spaces of possibilities", in which space was negotiated by different entities.

Lea Rees
University College, University of Oxford – Lady Wallis Budge Junior Research Fellow in Egyptology

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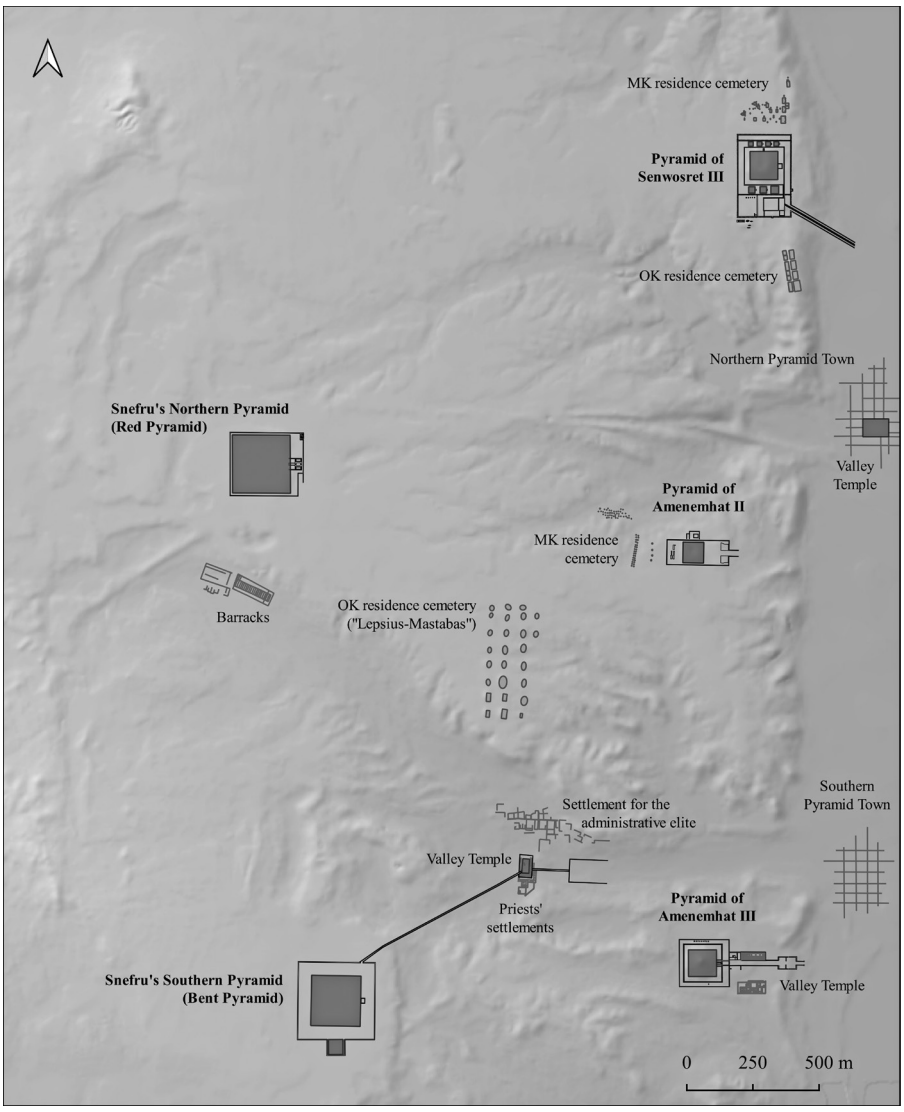

Fig. 1. Map of Dahshur with features mentioned in the text. Basemap IGN H24-26, projected in WGS 84. Topographic model by the Institute of Geographical Sciences, Freie Universität Berlin. GIS Project of the German Archaeological Institute: D. Blaschta, G. Rees, L. Rees. Map © L. Rees.

What Dahshur can add to the discussion

The site of Dahshur forms the southernmost part of the Memphite necropolis, which served as a royal and elite burial ground in Early Dynastic times (3000–2613 BCE), and in the Old Kingdom (2613–2160 BCE). With a shift of the capital from Memphis to *Itj-t3.wj* near Lisht, the residence cemeteries of the Middle Kingdom lay in the area of the Fayum, with Dahshur forming their northernmost extension. Dahshur thus holds an unrivalled cultural prominence as a centre of intense building activity in both periods.

Centrally planned cemeteries and the expression of social hierarchies in the landscape

What has so far been missed in this discussion is the fact that not only settlements founded by the Middle Kingdom rulers were centrally planned, but also some of their residence cemeteries. This may be due to the fact that this phenomenon is solely attested at Dahshur, whereas the residence cemeteries of Lahun and Lisht seem to have been arranged more freely. At Dahshur, however, a cemetery consisting of clearly structured rows of shaft tombs arranged in a right angle was constructed for the courtiers of king Amenemhat II west of his pyramid, whereas a checkerboard-style arrangement of shaft tombs with mastaba superstructures was erected north of the pyramid of Senwosret III for the members of his court (see **Fig. 1**). While not as obvious as the extensive planned cemeteries of the Old Kingdom (e.g., the so-called Lepsius-Mastabas at Dahshur, **Fig. 1**), these two Middle Kingdom cemeteries demonstrate that royal control may have not only encompassed the life of the people buried here, but also their afterlife.

This can also be deduced from the arrangement of monuments within the funerary landscape of Dahshur

(Alexanian and Seidlmayer 2000, 293–96). The pyramids of the Old Kingdom were placed at the highest point of the landscape far into the desert, while the residence cemeteries for family members and the highest elites were placed in a distance of at least 850 m towards them. The pyramids of the Middle Kingdom (that of Senwosret III, as well as Amenemhat II and III, **Fig. 1**), on the other hand, were placed much closer to the fertile land and its settlements, while family members were buried inside the pyramid complex and members of the court in its vicinity. Thus, social hierarchies could be communicated through the vertical and horizontal arrangement of the funerary landscape. The central role of the kings of the Middle Kingdom can either be interpreted expressing the "approachable" and "benevolent" character of the kings – in a similar way as royal statuary of the time has often been interpreted as showing their "melancholic" and "sorrow-stricken" facial features (Vandier 1958, 184–95; Assmann 1999, 26–32) – or rather as a material manifestation of authoritative control in life as well as in death (Kemp 2006 [1989], 243–44).

Egypt's earliest centrally planned settlements

Contrary to the general assumption of the Middle Kingdom being the culmination of central planning, a similar degree of control can already be found in the Old Kingdom. Along with the above-mentioned construction of planned residence cemeteries, the foundation of planned settlements is widely attested, too – the workmen's barracks of Heit el-Ghurab (the harbor and construction site for the great pyramids of Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure at Giza) being the most prominent example (Lehner and Tavares 2010). Yet, this site can no longer be considered the earliest attestation of this phenomenon (e.g., Moeller 2018 [2016], 20), since Dahshur comprises a number of planned settlements, which were already created under the reign of the preceding king Snefru (2613–2589 BCE), the founder of the 4th Dynasty. These settlements fulfill different functions: The rectangular barrack complexes, south of the Red Pyramid (**Fig. 1**), may have served as barracks for the workers on the construction site or miners of the nearby quarries (Alexanian and Herbich 2014/15). Another settlement stretching along a long east-west running street with large house layouts of a similar size lies northeast of the Valley Temple of the Bent Pyramid (**Fig. 1**), and probably accommodated the administrative elite involved in the pyramid building process (Rosenow 2021). A third settlement was located south of the Valley Temple (**Figs. 1–2**) and housed the priests working for the king's mortuary cult, comprising a number of similar shaped houses along a right-angled street and larger structures to the south (F. Arnold 2021, 131–37). Most of the priests were only living in these small but functional houses temporarily, for one month during their roster duty. Thus, it is under the reign of Snefru that the earliest known planned settlements of Pharaonic history were built, and further barracks dating to his reign have been discovered at the construction site of a dam in Wadi Garawi (Garbrecht and Bertram 1983), as well as the Red Sea port of Wadi el-Jarf (Tallet and Lehner 2022, 123–25).

Measures to control life in the settlements – and failing to do so

The barracks south of the Red Pyramid at Dahshur were surrounded by enclosure walls, making it possible to monitor closely who was entering and leaving the site (similar means of control have also been observed at the site of Heit el-Ghurab: Lehner and Tavares 2010, 171–74, 192–202). Similarly, life inside the priests' settlements seems to have been strictly supervised. The papyri from the funerary temple of king Neferikare at Abusir from the 5th Dynasty give an insight into the high level of control: It is striking how many guards are listed, who are supposed to watch day and night over the doorways of the temple, its magazines, the shipping pier, an abattoir, and a pottery workshop (Posener-Kriéger 1976, 27–47, 512).

How the state authorities tried to regulate life in settlements is also demonstrated by the so-called Dahshur Decree, the most complete document of Old Kingdom royal decrees concerning the type of settlements called pyramid towns. Although no pyramid town has yet been excavated (in the case of Dahshur because both pyramid towns of Snefru are buried deep under inaccessible agricultural land), official documents and titles inform us about the life in those long-lived settlements, which have often been occupied for 1–4 centuries. It is assumed that most priests lived here with their families when they were not on duty in the temple (during which they would have lived in the priests' settlement). The Dahshur Decree issued by king Pepi I of the 6th Dynasty was found at the Valley Temple of the Red Pyramid (Borchardt 1905). The text ensures certain rights and tax advantages to the inhabitants of Snefru's pyramid towns which made those settlements extremely attractive places to live. In order to stop an uninhibited influx of people into the pyramid towns, however, those privileges were only granted to certain groups of people. A group specifically excluded from these privileges are the *nḫs.jw ḥtp.w*, which can be identified as Nubian soldiers recruited as mercenaries by Egyptian army forces (Seidlmayer 2002, 96–97). Yet, the fact that it was deemed necessary to prevent those people from settling in the pyramid town by royal decree, demonstrates that exactly this must have happened before or elsewhere (Seidlmayer 2002, 96–97). This implies that the *nḫs.jw ḥtp.w* tried to integrate themselves into the local community, and tried to become funerary priests themselves, but were prohibited to do so by highest order.

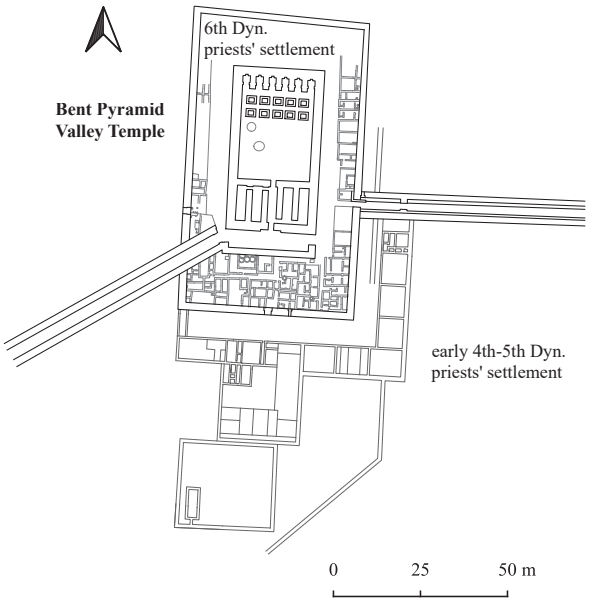

Fig. 2. Priests' settlements of the 4th–6th Dynasty in and around the Valley Temple of the Bent Pyramid at Dahshur, based on F. Arnold 2021, p. 133, Fig. 83, p. 138, Fig. 88. Plan © L. Rees.

The Nubians then seem to have started to undermine their imposed marginalization by finding flaws in the system, which the official decree tried to eliminate. The state thus interfered in social processes by trying forcefully to keep up an artificial social structure.

Modifications of planned settlements

While sacral and profane space was clearly separated in the case of the first priests' settlement at Dahshur, this division was abandoned when a new settlement was erected inside the temple's enclosure wall at the beginning of the 6th Dynasty (F. Arnold 2021, 137–40, **Fig. 2**). Thus, the space intended for the cult of the king became a domestic space for the people carrying out his cult. The original layout of this settlement seems to have been rather regular, with standard sizes for the houses abutting the temple walls and straight streets running through them. Hence, it seems likely that this cult establishment may have been initiated or at least tolerated by the state. Over time, however, a more and more dense and irregular settlement developed in the southern part of the temple enclosure: Houses were enlarged or reduced in size, parts of the streets were used to extend the dwellings, and silos were erected. This resulted in a dense cluster of individual houses along curvy streets. The same phenomenon can be found in nearly all mortuary temples of the Old and Middle Kingdom (Kemp 2006 [1989], 203–10; Moeller 2018 [2016], 119–25). Thus, the funerary priests found a subtle way of appropriating space for themselves inside a highly sacred space. The most extreme example is the case of the Menkaure Valley Temple at Giza, where the king's sanctuary was reduced to a small chamber, while the stone walls of the temple were partly demolished to make space for mudbrick domestic architecture (Kemp 1983, 93). Moreover, royal statuary seems to have been destroyed in order to produce smaller objects by reusing this precious material for stone vessels etc. According to Barry J. Kemp (1983, 92), this craft may have formed an additional source of income for the priests who we assume to have been specifically employed to safeguard these objects and the continuation of the royal cult.

Criminal activities and subversive behavior

The example of the funerary priests shows that people did not necessarily follow the rules that we imagine having existed at the time. The same is true for the act of tomb robbing, which probably most of us would consider somewhat sacrilegious today. Certainly, it was considered a substantial threat for the Pharaonic rulers, since so many precautions were taken to hide the entrances to royal burials. The robbing of a royal tomb would have been severely punished: Spell 534 of the pyramid texts of the Old Kingdom names expropriation and expulsion as a punishment for robbing a royal pyramid; and the famous "Tomb Robber's Papyri" from the New Kingdom even issue a death penalty (Müller-Wollermann 2004, 66–69). These few sources, however, suggest that tomb robbing was considered a worldly offence, rather than a religious sacrilege (Müller-Wollermann 2004, 69).

While the state probably saw tomb robbers as criminals, it is less clear how they were regarded by other parts of society. Overall, it seems that tomb robbing – also that of less monumental and well-equipped tombs – happened on a daily basis and must thus have been accepted to a certain degree (Müller-Wollermann 2004, 180). Moreover, the great number of spells aimed at protecting the tomb from such evil demonstrates that people at the time were well aware that this common practice was barely ever sanctioned. Hence, magical precautions were the only hope to protect the body and the objects needed for the deceased's well-being in the afterlife (Müller-Wollermann 2004, 173–80). For settlements located close to a large necropolis, tomb robbing may have even been a common source of income, as Felix Arnold (1996, 20) suggests for the 20th–22nd Dynasty settlement at Lisht-North. Similarly, Dorothea Arnold (1987, 94) has noticed that the pottery left behind by tomb robbers in the pyramid of Amenemhat III at Dahshur very much resembles that found in the rubbish of a settlement close to the valley temple of that pyramid (**Fig. 1**). Thus, she assumes that the local inhabitants may have been involved in the robbing activities, since the repeated reopening of

the pyramid for secondary burials probably did not go unnoticed. In the case of the pyramid of Amenemhat III, a whole series of robbing events can be reconstructed, the first of which must have been carried out by people who were involved in the building process, since they knew were the hidden cover stone was placed and knew the labyrinthine interior chambers of the pyramid by heart (Di. Arnold 2002, 94).

This also explains why the few tombs that are discovered intact with an undisturbed burial are mostly those which bear no or few grave goods: Their contemporaries probably were very much aware which tombs were worth targeting (Seidlmayer 2003, 71). In this context, the question arises which role social relations played. Would people have targeted the tombs of their own family members? Was it easier to justify the robbing of elite tombs because the social distance between them and others may have been greater? If so, the robbing of elite and royal tombs may potentially be considered an "everyday form of resistance", as defined by James C. Scott (1989, 34), and thus a subversive action by the population, as suggested by Lynn Meskell (2004, 160–63). Subversive behavior, however, is quite difficult to trace in historical sources as well as the archaeological record. Nevertheless, indications can be found, even in official sources which do not tend to document events like these (for examples, see Meskell 2004, 156–60, Figs. 6.1–6.2; Rees and Schreiber 2019, 127–29, Figs. 8–11).

On the other hand, the extensive robbing of comparatively "poor" cemeteries shows that also "simple" burials were robbed. Most likely, the "culprits" were people, who were themselves involved in burying the deceased, thus coming from the same social sphere (Seidlmayer 2003, 71). Was it acceptable to simply remove the objects deposited in a grave and to reuse them in the lives of the living? Or was tomb robbing basically a pragmatic source of income, regardless of the religious – and thus abstract – sanctions? Inside Egyptian society, a diversity of attitudes towards this common practice may have existed, ranging from people believing it to be a sacrilege which will be punished by the souls of the dead; those deeming it superstition; and those, who were aware of their wrongdoing but still hoped to get away with it, in this life and in the afterlife (Seidlmayer 2003, 71; Meskell 2002, 206–7).

Conclusion: Spaces of possibilities

Overall, these case studies show how space at Dahshur was centrally planned and how these plans were implemented, but also how these plans failed to succeed. As many other case studies suggest, people started modifying the original layout of allocated houses as soon as they moved in (see Rees and Schreiber 2019, 124–25, Figs. 6–7, for Tell el-Dabʿa), and it is specifically the "planned" architectural features that were changed first into more "organic" layouts (Bußmann 2010, 133, for Ayn Asil). Often, the phase of modified use lasted much longer than a building fulfilled its original function: In the case of the priests' settlement in the Menkaure Valley Temple, for instance, over a period of ca. 400 years. As Reinhard Bernbeck (2019, 9) has proposed for "squatter"-settlements of the Median Empire, the question whether we should "perhaps call the 'main phase' rather a 'pre-squatter' phase, followed by the temporally more substantial squatting levels?" can be raised here.

After erecting a planned settlement somewhere, it seems that central authorities had little interest in how the houses were used and altered by their inhabitants. The same is true for planned cemeteries, where laid out tombs were sometimes not occupied at all, were used much later, or were altered to house multiple burials (see Jánosi 2005, 36–39 for various case studies from the residence cemetery at Giza). Concludingly, the planners and architects creating those spaces (which could be referred to as *le conçu*, as defined by Henri Lefebvre (2000 [1974], 15–16, 21–23, 46) seem to have been more interested in the mere ideal of organizing people in space, than in doing so in reality (what could be seen as Lefebvre's lived space, *le vécu*). Similarly, Barry J. Kemp (1983, 92) has pointed towards the "gap that could develop between plans and practice".

It is in that gap that "spaces of possibilities" were created, which allowed for people to mould spaces – in the case of mudbrick architecture, quite literally so – according to their specific needs. Stefan Schreiber and I have argued that people in the past have used such "spaces of possibilities" (in German: "*Möglichkeitsräume*") to act and to articulate themselves (Rees and Schreiber 2019). By modifying and appropriating space, social relations were negotiated on a day-to-day basis. The restructuring of the built environment resulted in restructuring daily life and work (Bußmann 2014, 68), and also worked the other way round. Consequently, differing spatial practices may have evolved gradually through frequent repetition in everyday life, but also through counter-cultural, subversive, or resistant behavior (for examples, see Rees and Schreiber 2019, 114–30). Such "spaces of possibilities", however, only become traceable in the archaeological record, when archaeologists allow for the possibility of their existence, as well – when they factor in the possibility of dissent, counter-movements, and ambiguity. After all, these spaces do not necessarily appear as architectural spaces, but rather as anomalies, as deviations from common spatial practices and cultural norms.

It has to be kept in mind here, however, that the large extent of social control implied by written sources as well as the archaeological evidence is likely to be distorted, since provincial towns or villages (often located in the fertile land, subsumed under massive layers of Nile

sediments) remain largely unknown to us. Therefore, artificial planning seems to play a much larger role than organically developing neighborhoods (Bußmann 2014, 70). Along with natural taphonomic processes which influence what is preserved and what is not, there is also a "political taphonomy" at play – a term coined by Reinhard Bernbeck (2005, 113) to describe how the archaeological record is distorted by the sheer quantity and quality of material remains by hegemonic parts of society. Just like textual sources in ancient societies are limited to a literate elite – who at the same time are limited to record only what is allowed to be documented – archaeological remains are limited to what was allowed to be used, processed, and seen at the time. Thus, marginalized parts of society only had less obvious opportunities to express themselves, which makes it extremely difficult to trace spatial practices differing from the hegemonic (re-)production of space (Lefebvre's *reçu*) in the material record. Additionally, the mechanisms of hegemonic knowledge production in our times often result in those social groups being marginalized once again (Rees and Schreiber 2019, 115–18). It remains open for discussion whether those "spaces of possibilities" open up ways of articulation even for subaltern groups of society (as argued in Rees and Schreiber 2019, 129–30) – or whether subalterns by their very definition are unable to speak and to be heard (see the discussion in Bernbeck and Egbers 2019, 61).

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