

The Sun Temples of the V Dynasty: a reassessment.

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Abstract

In this paper, that represents the core of my graduation thesis, I give an overall picture of the sun temples, showing how their meaning and evolution in the architectural and religious history of the Old Kingdom were closely connected to the defining process of the royal ideology during the IV and V dynasty.

Introduction.

One hundred years on from the first discovery of a sun temple, the *^sp-ib-Ra* of Niuserra¹, the study of this particular type of royal monument of the Old Kingdom has known alternating fortunes. The 1950s represented the period of greatest interest, with the systematic excavation of another temple, the *Nxn-Ra* of Userkaf², and some detailed analyses including in particular those by Kaiser³ and Winter⁴. Thereafter the study of the temples once again “lay dormant”, apart from a brief revival in the mid-seventies with the publication of the so-called Abusir Papyri by Posener-Kriéger⁵.

These researches, providing a first analysis of the epigraphic and historical sources of the period and the archaeological data, make it possible to establish the main features of the temples. Nevertheless a great deal of matters still require close examination, especially the issue of whether the temples had a solely funerary nature. The term “funerary” usually indicates a sphere of multiform semantic and religious value, mainly concerning the afterworld in the cult of the pharaoh. However, as we will try to demonstrate, the sun temples did not have a simple funerary aim, like the pyramids⁶. Rather they accomplished a variegated set of cult demands, linked as much to the afterworldly as to the wordly aspect of the celebration of kingship.

¹ F. W. von Bissing, *Das Re-Heiligtum des Königs Ne-Woser-Re I. Der Bau*, 1905; II. *Die kleine Festdarstellung*, 1923; III. *Die grosse Festdarstellung*, 1928.

² H. Rieke, *Das Sonnenheiligtum des Königs Userkaf I. Der Bau*, *BeiträgeBf.* 7, 1965; II. *Die Funde*, *BeiträgeBf.* 8, 1969.

³ W. Kaiser, in: *MDAIK* 14, 1956, 104-16.

⁴ E. Winter, in: *WZKM* 54, 1957, 222-33.

⁵ P. Posener-Kriéger, *Les archives du temple funéraire de Néferirkarê-Kakä (Les Papyrus d'Abousir): Traduction et commentaire*, *BdE* 65, 1976, I-II.

⁶ As regards the pyramids the question is if anything even more complicated. Analysing the titles of the priests of the Old Kingdom, Klaus Baer concluded that the cult of the pharaoh was celebrated in the pyramid even during his lifetime (K. Baer, *Rank and Title in the Old Kingdom. The Structure of the Egyptian Administration in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties*, 1960, 45-46. On the contrary, Junker thought that the worship of the king and/or his pyramid complex was celebrated only after his death (H. Junker, *Giza: Grabungen auf dem Friedhof des Alten Reiches*, Bd. VI, 1943, 7-15). As is widely documented by the Abusir Papyri concerning Neferirkara's pyramid temple, the pyramids, although meant mainly for a funerary purpose, must have been cult places for many kinds of daily and extra-ordinary rituals performed by the king during his lifetime. Another crucial issue is whether the cult that took place in these royal buildings was devoted solely to the pharaoh, as

Even recent publications have dealt with these monuments only in part, focusing exclusively on the evolution of the architectural patterns and the religious and historical problems linked to the pyramids⁷. While the recent work by Susanne Voss devotes a good deal of attention to the temples, it stops short, in my opinion, of tackling all the ideological-religious problems, above all the reasons that led the kings of the V dynasty to adopt this new architectural type and then to abandon it⁸. The close examination and exact definition of the symbolic and cult value of these structures can contribute to clarify the reasons for such a fast building programme whose short span (only six temples were built in about 60 years) has still to receive a comprehensive explanation.

To this end I shall start by examining the two best known sun temples, go on to consider the other temples which have not yet been located, and conclude with a survey of the ideological-religious aspects. In doing so, I shall not attempt a complete, detailed analysis of these temples, focusing, on the contrary, on the points that still represent a matter of debate among scholars, and that are the core of my PhD research project.

suggested by some scholars, or rather to many other deities linked to the ideas of kingship. This problem would need a separate treatment, but I can stress the lack of important, monumental temples for the gods in this period apart from a few cases, still not completely excavated, investigated by archaeologists in the southernmost part of the country (Elefantina, Tod, Armant, Medamud). Only from the VI dynasty onwards do provincial temples and *Hwt-ka* seem to have multiplied significantly (Hierakonpolis, Abydos, Bubastis), and this may have been due to new ideas of the kingship that evolved in that period, leading rulers of the later Old Kingdom to build these new temples of the gods to complete and support cult practices and rituals previously performed in the pyramids and sun temples. For further details about the nature and “status” of the temples in the Pre-dynastic Period and Old Kingdom see also: B. J. Kemp, *Ancient Egypt: Anatomy of a Civilization*, 1989, 64-107; D. O’Connor, in: B. Adams, R. Friedman (eds.), *The Followers of Horus. Studies dedicated to Michael Allen Hoffman 1944-1990*, 1992, 83-98. The question of the “funerary” value of the so-called “mortuary temples” has also been dealt with by Gerhard Haeny referring to the New Kingdom “Mansions of Millions of Years”. See G. Haeny, in: B. E. Shafer (ed.), *Temples of Ancient Egypt*, 1997, 86-126.

⁷ Among the latest studies see: R. Stadelmann, in: M. Barta, J. Krejci (eds.), *Abusir and Saqqara in the Year 2000*, *ArOr Supplementa IX*, 2000, 529-42; H. Goedicke, in: M. Barta, J. Krejci (eds.), *op. cit.*, 379-412; A. Cwiek, *Relief Decoration in the Royal Funerary Complexes of the Old Kingdom*, 2003, 25-43, 349-55; M. Rochholz, in: R. Gundlach, M. Rochholz (eds.), *Ägyptische Tempel – Struktur, Funktion und Programm (Akten der Ägyptologischen Tempeltagungen in Gosen 1990 und in Mainz 1992)*, *HÄB 37*, 1994, 255-80.

⁸ S. Voss, *Untersuchungen zu den Sonnenheiligtümer der 5. Dynastie*, 2004, 176-83. As far as Userkaf’s sun temple is concerned, Voss suggests that it would have been conceived as a “filter” to legitimate his non-royal lineage directly linking himself to the sun god by means of the divine birth, as also recorded in the tales of the Westcar Papyrus. This theory is not completely convincing, particularly for the doubtful political and historical value of the tale (that is supported by no reliable proof) and for the great chronological distance from the events it speaks about (for a different explanation of the Westcar Papyrus tale see also: C. Barocas, in: S. Schoske (ed.), *Akten des Vierten Internationalen Ägyptologen Kongresses München 1985*, Bd. III, 1990, 121-29; Goedicke, in: *ZÄS 120*, 1993, 23-36).

Userkaf's sun temple Nxn-Ra

Only scanty ruins remain today of the first sun temple, the *Nxn-Ra* of Userkaf, situated on a hillock around 500 metres north of Sahura's pyramid in Abusir. The reasons for building it on a site which up until then had been quite disregarded, and lay approximately 3 km. north of his own pyramid complex in Saqqara, are far from clear.

Although it was the southernmost point from which a direct visual connection with the temple of Ra in Heliopolis could be made⁹, such a visual bond can hardly be decisive. The sun temple was not seen as a mere "twin" of the east one, but rather as a "cult complex"¹⁰ strictly connected with both the pharaoh and the celebration of kingship, and as such it was situated on the west bank¹¹. Moreover, a topographical motivation alone could not have played a key-role since there were any number of other sites available for building a temple with a direct visual connection to Heliopolis.

The intriguing suggestion of the alignment of the two major complexes of Userkaf, the pyramid and the sun temple, with the pyramid complex of Khufu at Giza may possibly provide a comprehensive explanation, but it's difficult to understand in the context of the religious ideology of the ancient Egyptians¹².

We may conclude, therefore, that his consciousness of the absolute religious and political innovation of his new temple led Userkaf to chose a "virgin" site. Similarly the decision to build his own pyramid complex close to that of Djoser, in spite of the critical topographical position, seems to have been motivated by specific religious

⁹ Kaiser, in: MDAIK 14, 1956, 114, n. 6; D. Jeffreys, in: H. Guksch, D. Polz (eds.), *Stationen. R. Stadelmann gewidmet. Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte Ägyptens*, 1998, 63-71.

¹⁰ Since I shall define in more detail below the "funerary" character of the sun temples, I prefer here to use the more general term of "cult complexes" for the king.

¹¹ Voss has pointed out that the cult of Ra in Heliopolis can be attested only from the reign of Unis onwards, as regards the epigraphic sources, and from the beginning of the VI dynasty, on the archaeological evidence (Voss, *op. cit.*, 165-69). The site may have been connected to the cult of Atum and the "Heliopolitan Ennead" rather than to the cult of Ra, as seems to be also testified by the famous relief fragment of Djoser in the Turin Egyptian Museum (See also: W. Helck, in: *Fs Säve-Söderbergh, BOREAS* 13, 1984, 69-70). This does not mean, however, that Heliopolis was not a very important place in the sun cult since Ra and Atum appear to have been strictly associated, both at the cult and textual levels (PT §§ 482-483), by the common semantic meaning of creative and absolute deities (see also K. Mysliwiec, in: *SAK* 10, 1983, 297-306). Moreover, I can suggest that the sun cult was substantially linked to the religious tradition and customs of the northern part of the country as a whole (Lower Egypt) rather than to one specific site, however important, like Heliopolis (see also: J. Cervellò Autuori, in: R. Pirelli (ed.), *Egyptological Essays on State and Society, Serie Egittologica* 2, 2002, 46-47).

¹² Goedicke, in: *BACE* 6, 1995, 46; *id.*, in: Barta, Krejci (eds.), *op. cit.*, 406. Goedicke believes that the building of Userkaf's sun temple was caused by specific religious requirements which Khufu had previously met differently. This would have led the first king of the V dynasty to align its monumental complexes with that of Khufu, which in that period could have represented a cult "reference" for the idea of kingship. The sun temple may be located, then, in the only point where a direct visual bond was still possible between the pyramid of Khufu northwards and his own pyramid complex southwards. Nevertheless he concludes: "Explaining it is more difficult as it is not certain to which degree the ancient Egyptians rationalized this design".

implications. I can also point out that the location of the sun temple north of the pyramid of the same pharaoh seems to have been a crucial element in the architectural planning of the latter.

As we shall see in more detail below, the two monuments represented an integrated cult-complex whose role was to celebrate the “complementary” natures of the king, the solar one linked to Heliopolis and the funerary one linked to Abydos, and this may account for the anomalous north-south layout of the pyramid complex. The open court and the cult place for the statues (Verehrungstempel) were placed on the south side, while the most important cult place in all the pyramid temples, the chapel for the funerary offerings (Totenopfertempel), was located on the east side (fig. 1). This is where the daily sacrifices for the maintenance of the pharaoh in the afterworld were made: in other words, the place exclusively destined to the cult of the king risen again as Ra¹³. On other hand, a new, specific sun cult place (sun temple) was built to the north, on the east-west axis¹⁴ (fig. 2).

In spite of Ricke’s detailed archaeological excavation, some architectural elements of the temple have to be still clarified, such as the unusual layout of the valley temple. The presence of at least five cult chapels¹⁵, besides the discovery of the greywacke statue head of Userkaf bearing the Lower Egyptian crown¹⁶, leads me to think that the valley temple was a real cult place for the statues of the king in which the ruler was worshipped as Horus in accordance with the same rituals as the pyramid funerary temples, and with a similar architectural layout (fig. 3). King-Horus, then, would have gone up the causeway to be glorified in his identification with Ra on the top of the pedestal building where there was the “obelisk”, the new shining symbol of the sun religion¹⁷.

¹³ In doing so Userkaf clearly reaffirmed his will to be celebrated as the living Horus who extends his royal power over the whole country, from north to south, according to the traditional features of the architecture of the III dynasty and, above all, of Djoser. A more in-depth analysis of Userkaf’s pyramid complex is being prepared by the present author.

¹⁴ With the definitive establishment, in the reign of Sahura, of the “new” sun temple, the funerary temple also reverted to the east-west axis. It was probably no longer necessary to insist on cult implications, now fully affirmed, or perhaps this simply underlines once again the “complementary” nature, rather than opposition, of the two royal complexes.

¹⁵ Ricke, Userkaf-SH I, 35-41. For both architectural and cult reasons I believe that the temple had five cult shrines rather than seven as Ricke (op. cit. II, 140) thought. The five chapels fit perfectly into the narrow space behind the open court (maybe with a passage that went all round the niches as we can see in many pyramid complexes) as well as the cult rituals performed in the temple in accordance to the five names of the king, the five chapels of the pyramid’s upper temple and the five “ranks” of the priests usually attending the worship of the pharaoh beginning from the reign of Khafra.

¹⁶ Ricke in: Ricke, Userkaf-SH II, 139-48.

¹⁷ Quite recently it has been suggested that the valley temple was oriented according to some specific stars seen in the sky just before sunrise in that period, so that the temple could be a kind of astronomical clock for sacrifices (R. Wells, in: SAK Beihefte 4, 1990, 95-104). Although astronomical observation was of great importance in every kind of religious ceremony throughout the Old Kingdom, it would not itself have justified the building of the temple, since we can find valley temples in almost all the royal complexes of the Old Kingdom.

This hypothesis might be confirmed by some rituals performed in the contemporary pyramids, and maybe in sun temples too. From the Abusir papyri we learn that one of the most important religious festivities, the festival of Sokar, involved the visit of the divine statue to the pyramid complex of the ruler, in this case that of Neferirkara¹⁸. Here the god was received by some priests who brought two particular “standards” of the king, namely two emblems (*wX*) comprising a papyrus flower surmounted by a sun disk with two *urei*. These emblems, named “he who ascends to Ra” (*&wt n Ra*) and “he who unites with Ra” (*la n Ra*), probably represented two manifestations of the revived king assimilated to Ra after the visit of Sokar, a deity with clear funerary meanings, frequently associated with Osiris¹⁹.

Before leaving the necropolis of Abusir the divine boat visited other royal complexes among which the names of the pyramids of Sahura and Niuserra are preserved, and also that of the king’s most important estate, the *BA-KAKAi*. The sun temple does not seem to have been included in the divine visit, although we know that Niuserra’s sun temple held at least ten of these *wX* emblems²⁰, whose shapes and names are unfortunately unknown to us.

Important cult symbols related to the rebirth of the king and to his solar assimilation appear to have been located in both the pharaoh’s pyramid and sun temple. Was the latter used for similar religious celebrations, or for different ceremonies linked to the various natures of the king celebrated in his two major cult complexes?

I would suggest that the celebration of the solar rebirth of the pharaoh passed through two phases: the first one solely representing the funerary aspects of the kingship, strictly associated with the ceremonies of death and rebirth of the king performed in his funerary complex²¹, to the *sd* festival and to the image of the king as earthly embodiment of the god Horus; the second one representing the identification of the king with the supreme god Ra that could be realized in his pyramid complex only in some occasions and was better suited to a specific place for the sun cult like the sun temple. The valley temple of Userkaf’s sun temple may have been conceived as a “copy” of the pyramid’s upper temple, a starting point for the rituals of celebration of the king’s different divine natures in his sun temple²². Only under the

¹⁸ Posener-Kriéger, op. cit. I, 59-76 ; II, 550-53.

¹⁹ This cult association between Sokar and Osiris is even more apparent in the titles of many priests who attended to the worship of the ruler in the sun temples. For further information see also the conclusions.



²⁰ Bissing, *Re-Heiligtum III*, 50 and pl. 32, nr. 501.

²¹ Among these ceremonies the most important was the mock burial of a *kA* statue of the king that was probably performed in the satellite pyramid of his funerary complex. This seems to be indicated by some archaeological discoveries made inside Khafra’s satellite pyramid and maybe also by a relief fragment from the tomb of Khufu’s granddaughter, Meresanchk III (see Z. Hawass, in: D. O’Connor, D. P. Silverman (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian Kingship*, 1995, 247, 249-50; M. Lehner, *The Complete Pyramids*, 1997, 126).

²² The anomalous and “experimental” status of the first sun temple could be the reason for such a particular layout, also considering that the innermost cult room in the upper temple of his pyramid lacks any archaeological evidence of the traditional five shrines for the statues of the king that we

next kings were the valley temples planned according to the “standard” layout of a pyramid’s valley temples, viz. Niuserra’s sun temple.

Finally I would call attention to the evolution of the four building phases established by the archaeologists (fig. 2); this is a key point, as we will try to underline, also for the location of the four missing temples. Two elements must be considered: the correct understanding of the inscriptions recorded on four limestone tablets discovered among the debris of the temple²³, and the analysis of the determinatives following the name of the sun temples in the contemporary “titles” of priests and officials²⁴ (plate 1; the seal-prints often miss the determinatives and are only considered in plate 2).

The limestone slabs record the carrying out of building work in the temple, maybe simply of “restoration” or “enlargement”, which lasted around 17 months and began in the year of the “5th cattle count” (9th-10th year of reign) of an unspecified king. In these inscriptions the temple is determined by a sign with the shape of a mastaba surmounted by a vertical element²⁵. Kaiser, however, ascertained that two ways of indicating Userkaf’s temple feature in the epigraphic sources of the period: either a raised base in mastaba shape without any obelisk , or a standard obelisk on a low base  (pl. 1).

Confronting the archaeological and epigraphic evidence, he concluded that the limestone slabs would have recorded this important building and cult “change” of the temple, which is also documented, although in an indirect way, in the titles of the priests. Userkaf’s temple had thus been left unfinished, and was completed by a subsequent king who provided it with an obelisk, because the latest date we know from Userkaf’s reign goes back to the “3rd cattle count” (5th - 6th year of the reign)²⁶, while the limestone slabs date back to the “5th cattle count” for the beginning of the work²⁷.

can find in every pyramid complex of the V dynasty. See also Ricke, *Bemerkungen zur ägyptischen Baukunst des Alten Reiches II*, Beiträge Bf. 5, 1950, 67-69.

²³ E. Edel, in: Ricke, *Userkaf-SH II*, 2-22.

²⁴ Kaiser, in: *MDAIK 14*, 1956, 110-16 and pl. 1. This part of Kaiser’s study has not been completely updated, not even by Voss in her recent work. For this reason it represents the most important part of my PhD research.

²⁵ This is a highly stylized sketch of a pedestal building with a pole that Ricke explains as the first shape of the cult symbol of the temple (maybe made of perishable material) replaced, in the second stage, by the real obelisk. This hypothesis was questioned by Edel (id., in: Ricke, *Userkaf-SH II*, 8, n. 9) who pointed out that this shape of the hieroglyphic name of the temple would be simply due to the cursive character of the hieroglyphic writing on the limestone slabs, that is like the hieratic writing of the Abusir Papyri (see also Möller G., *Hieratische Paläographie*, Bd. I, 1917, nr. 350, 33).

²⁶ Palermo Stone, see H. Schäfer, *Ein Bruchstück altägyptischen Annalen*, 1902, 33-35; *Urk. I*, 241; T. A. H. Wilkinson, *Royal Annals of Ancient Egypt*, 2000, 152-59, 259. Also the Turin Canon gives Userkaf a short seven year reign. See J. Beckerath, *Chronologie der pharaonischen Ägypten*, *MÄS 46*, 1997 153-55.

²⁷ Whether it was Sahura or Neferirkara who completed the temple is still a matter of debate. Kaiser (*MDAIK 14*, 1956, 109-11) believes that it was Neferirkara. See also Ricke, *Userkaf-SH I*, 15-18.

Taking into account these elements, Stadelmann has recently proposed that Userkaf's temple must have been restored, enlarged and finally "usurped" by Sahura and later by Neferirkara²⁸, serving for their cult needs under different names. But this clashes with the lack of any archaeological evidence coming from the temple of Userkaf and belonging for certain either to Sahura or Neferirkara. Moreover, these hypotheses fail to account for the shape of the determinatives following the name of the sun temples in the contemporary epigraphic sources.

The sun temple of Sahura is quoted only five times and always with the simple basement in mastaba shape without the obelisk (pl. 1). It is difficult to believe that Sahura would have been willing to finish his predecessor's temple, converting it into a large monument with an obelisk, while neglecting his own sanctuary. We know from the Palermo Stone that he began building his sun temple in the year of the "3rd cattle count" at the latest²⁹, meaning around the middle of his reign.

As to Userkaf's sun temple, the question is even more complicated: if the obelisk had been erected by a king coming after Userkaf, it would always be indicated by a sign in mastaba shape in the epigraphic sources dating from his reign. On the contrary we can list several mastabas where the temple is determined with the obelisk but we cannot find any other royal name apart from Userkaf³⁰, without taking into account analogous but fragmentary records coming from false doors, tables, offering basins and other archaeological material of uncertain origin (pl. 1).

Furthermore, for cult reasons we will return to later, I believe that each king needed his own sun temple to carry out the essential rituals of the worship of his own person, and the presence of six different, distinct names of temples should suggest the existence of six different, distinct buildings. Thus it may be that the limestone tablets refer to building work for restoration dating from Userkaf's own reign. There is no

Quite recently Verner (KMT 14/1, 2003, 50) has questioned this hypothesis suggesting it was Sahura.

²⁸ Stadelmann, in: Barta, Krejci (eds.), op. cit., 541-42.

²⁹ Schäfer, op. cit., 36-37; Urk. I, 244; Wilkinson, op. cit., 159-73.

³⁰ Saqqara, mastaba D 51 of *PtH-Htp* (PM III², 581; Mariette, Mastabas, 314-16; Baer, Rank and Title, 74, nr. 157; the name of the temple is also written on the statue "Cairo CG 156", see Borchardt, Statuen und Statuetten von Königen und Privatleuten, CG 1-1294, Bd. I, 1911, 113); Saqqara, mastaba D 49 of *Enm-Htp* (PM III², 578; Mariette, Mastabas, 311-12; Baer, op. cit., 119, nr. 406; the name of the temple is also written on the false door "London 1143", see P.D. Scott-Moncrieff (ed.), Hieroglyphic texts from Egyptian stelae, etc., in the British Museum I, 1911, 18, plate 18); Saqqara, mastaba S 915 of *Nj-kAw-@r* (PM III², 498; J. E. Quibell, Excavations at Saqqara III, 1907-08, 25, pl. 53, 55; Baer, op. cit., 89, nr. 245); Saqqara, mastaba H 6, fragmentary inscription written on a false door (PM III², 762; Mariette, Mastabas, 445). The name of the owner remains uncertain. *KAj-pw-Inpw* quoted by Voss (op. cit. 44), seems to be a mistake; Saqqara, false door of *Nfr-xww*, now kept in Louvre Museum, E 17233 (PM III², 568; S. Weibach, Morphologische Studien zur Entwicklung und Bedeutung der Hauptkultstelle in den Privatgräbern des Alten Reiches, 1981, 261, nr. 280; C. Ziegler (ed.), Musée du Louvre. Catalogue des steles, peintures et reliefs égyptiens de l'Ancien Empire et de la Première Période Intermédiaire, 1990, 176-86).

certainty about the real length of his reign³¹, but the completion of two monumental complexes like the sun temple and the pyramid would probably have required a longer reign than the seven years attributed to him by the Turin Canon. This hypothesis would also explain in a clear and simple way the strangeness and apparent contradictions of the determinatives employed in the titles of the priests if we consider that, ever since Userkaf's reign, for the reasons mentioned above, the *Nxn-Ra* appeared in its "second shape" endowed with the obelisk.

Niuserra's sun temple ^sp-ib-Ra

The sun temple of Niuserra, named *^sp-ib-Ra*, represents a key-point in the study of the sun temples for the great amount of archaeological material uncovered and for its good state. The temple consisted of the same architectural elements as Userkaf's but is distinguished by its greater size and monumentality (fig. 4). Rather than give a detailed account of each part of the building (for which I refer to Borchardt's study³² and to the wide available bibliography³³) I shall point out the elements that introduced new cult-ideological implications, for these are decisive in understanding the meaning of the temples.

Crucial elements of the complex are represented by two cult rooms known as the "chapel" and the "room of the seasons", both placed at the base of the obelisk, on the south side, and characterized by a wide, rich decorative program. The reliefs of the chapel give a representation of the *sd* festival, the first organic record of this ancient ritual in the history of Egyptian Art³⁴. The decorative programme of the room of the seasons³⁵ celebrated the god Ra (perhaps represented on the north side of the east and west walls of the room). A procession of offering bearers led by the king moves into his presence, followed by personifications of the seasons and scenes of nature animated by the sun god (or better, as we will see below, by the king in his

³¹ Palermo Stone is just broken up in the last part of Userkaf's reign while Turin Canon is dated to over 1000 years after the end of the Old Kingdom. None of these historical sources seems, then, completely reliable.

³² See note 1.

³³ Among them see: Lehner, *Complete Pyramids*, 151-2; Stadelmann, in: *LÄ V*, 1984, 1095-98; id., *Die ägyptischen Pyramiden. Von Ziegelbau zum Weltwunder*, 1985, 178-79; J. Vandier, *Manuel d'Archéologie Egyptienne III*, 1959, 583-94; Verner, *Abusir: Realm of Osiris*, 2002, 77-84; id., in: *KMT 14/1*, 2003, 54-56; Voss, *op. cit.*, 60-117.

³⁴ This is the so-called "kleine Hebseddarstellung"; see Bissing, *Re-Heiligtum II*; Bissing, H. Kees, *Untersuchungen zu den Reliefs aus dem Re-Heiligtum des Rathures*, 1922, 59-115; Kaiser, *Die kleine Hebseddarstellung im Sonnenheiligtum des Niuserre*, *BeiträgeBf.* 12, 1971, 87-105. It is also important to remember the presence of two an-epigraphic round-topped stelae (with low purifying basins) placed in front of the chapel, maybe on the model of the stelae set in front of the offering places in the pyramid complexes of Snefru at Medium and Dahshur (Bent Pyramid). See Stadelmann, in: *MDAIK 39*, 1983, 237-42.

³⁵ Bissing, in: *ASAE 53*, 1956, 319-38; Edel, *Zu den Inschriften auf den Jahreszeitenreliefs der Weltkammer aus dem Sonnenheiligtum des Neuserre*, *NAWG 8*, 1961, 209-55; Edel, St. Wenig, *Die Jahreszeitenreliefs aus dem Sonnenheiligtum des Königs Ne-User-Re*, *Mitteilungen aus der Ägyptischen Sammlung 7*, 1974.

identification with the sun god). This is thus a figured repertoire personifying time (the Seasons) and space (the Nomes), both aspects of the world which the sun god presides over as “Creator” of the Cosmos.

In the back wall of the room of the seasons, that separated this chamber from the pedestal building, the remains of a granite door were found to which the fragments of an inscription might have belonged, found next to the altar on the southern side, commemorating the royal crowning and recording the name of the temple³⁶. This door, thought to be the entrance to the winding corridor leading up around the base of the obelisk, may have had a simple symbolic value, representing a kind of “false door”. The climbing corridor, in fact, has not yet received a valid explanation³⁷. It may have been intended mainly as a symbolic ascending passage by which the king could reach the god Ra after being identified with him in the room of the seasons, exactly as the opening in the pyramid’s north wall (in some complexes also masked by a stela in the north chapel) was not a real doorway but a symbolic exit for the king, through which the pharaoh can rise again, assimilating himself to the everlasting North Stars.

What seems obvious, however, is that the chapel and the room of the seasons, with their iconographic programmes, recall the same two ideas that are reflected in the pyramid complexes: the transformation and renewal of the royal power (*sd* festival) and the nourishment and supply (scenes of the life of nature)³⁸, the latter connected, in the sun temple, with the identification of the king with the sun god Ra. This relationship between the ruler and the sun god is even more emphasized by the discovery, outside the temple on the south-east corner, of the great mudbrick sun boat by means of which the king can share the daily journey of death and rebirth of the sun god across the ocean of the sky enjoying the eternal life as Ra.

³⁶ Bissing, *Re-Heiligtum I*, 54; III, 41.

³⁷ It has been assumed that the climbing corridor was meant to reach the terrace of the pedestal building for performing cult rituals during important religious festivals such as the so-called “Night of Ra” often quoted in the Abusir Papyri (Posener-Kriéger, *op. cit.* I, 116-18; II, 552-53; *id.*, in: *RdE* 22, 1970, 131-137), but there is neither archaeological nor epigraphic evidence in this sense. The similarity with the descending passage that leads to the burial chamber of the pyramid is clear but the sun temple lacks a real burial chamber and this contradicts an interpretation of the sun temple as a mortuary complex of Ra, or a cenotaph, suggested by some scholars (for instance Stadelmann, in: *LÄ V*, 1984, 1096; *id.*, *Pyramiden*, 164; Rochholz, in: Gundlach, Rochholz (eds.), *op. cit.*, 276-77). The fact that the ascending corridor to the obelisk was directed southwards, towards the entrance of the pyramid of the pharaoh, suggests a symbolic and cult “passage” between the two royal complexes, a kind of reciprocity intertwining the king and the sun god as well as their own cults, even more stressed, to my mind, by the likeness and “repetitiveness” of their respective decorative programs.

³⁸ There is a great difference, however, between sun temple and pyramid: in the first case, the sun god (here identified with the king) gives life to nature “supplying” it with his daily rising, namely during his earthly reign represented by the pharaoh. In the second case, instead, the king (who is going to become Ra) receives life through food supplies given to him after his death, for his afterlife and eternity. The different meaning of these decorative programs is further proof of the multiform nature of the sun temples which represented a cult place where the king and the sun god could “join” each other even during the reign of the ruler.

Taking into account these ideological similarities between pyramid and sun temple, some scholars have suggested that the room of the seasons was a real offering place for the sun god³⁹ like the offering room that concludes the funerary temple to the west, identifying it with the southern *IpHt* listed on a decorated fragment coming from the south corridor of the temple, where an offering to the god Ra seems to have been performed⁴⁰. However, the terms *IpHt* and *rsj* are put on two different registers and it is not really obvious that the caption “southern” would refer to the *IpHt*. Moreover, if a close architectural similarity of the two royal complexes really existed, I should identify this *IpHt* with the chapel rather than with the room of the seasons.

Indeed the term *IpHt* is used in the Abusir Papyri, regarding the funerary temples, to indicate the chapel with the five niches for statues of the king, while the offering room that concludes the funerary complex westwards was named *SH*⁴¹. The presence of a door, or false door as previously said, in the back wall of the room of the seasons seems to further confirm this “parallelism”. As in the funerary temples we would have found an axial sequence of a cult chapel for the pharaoh, or for a statue of him (in this case completed by the scenes of the *sd* festival) and a following “offering room” (room of the seasons) devoted, in the case of the sun temple, to the god Ra in his earthly “parting” embodied by the king.

To conclude, we can consider the general significance of the temple’s figurative programme: the decorative fragments of the *sd* festival in this cult context seem to have two semantic values. The first one concerns the regeneration of the power of the king who “offers” himself to the whole community to carry out such “legitimation”; the second involves the presentation of the king’s “behaviour” to the god and the subsequent preparing of his divine assimilation, particularly symbolized, in my opinion, by the “iconography” of Niuserra in some scenes. We can consider, for instance, the ones (some of which to be found only in the relief carvings of the south corridor⁴²) where the king is represented with the *Atf* crown⁴³ or where he is borne in procession on a litter named “boat”⁴⁴, to receive the cult tribute from the entire

³⁹ Cwiek, op. cit., 349-52, contrary to Arnold’s assertion (Encyclopedia of Ancient Egyptian Architecture, 2003, 51, tr. of: Lexicon der ägyptischen Baukunst, 1994) that this room was only an antechamber in the approach to the base of the obelisk.

⁴⁰ Bissing, Re-Heiligtum III, pl. 22, n. 359.

⁴¹ Posener-Kriéger, op. cit. I, 68-69; II, 441, 449, 501-05.

⁴² This is the so-called “grosse Festdarstellung” (Bissing, Re-Heiligtum III; Bissing, Kees, Untersuchungen zu den Reliefs aus dem Re-Heiligtum des Rathures, 1922, 1-59).

⁴³ Bissing, Re-Heiligtum III, pl. 22, nr. 352-53. In the Old Kingdom the *Atf* crown, commonly related to Osiris in the New Kingdom, occurs long before the god of Abydos is attested and represents, according to me, a distinctive trait of the deified king as Ra both in his pyramid complex and sun temple. The presence of the ram’s horns seems to further contribute to the concept of king’s solar divinity. Moreover, still during the Middle Kingdom, Osiris is mainly shown with the White Crown (E. Staehelin, Untersuchungen zur ägyptischen Tracht im Alten Reich, MÄS 8, 1966, 150ff.).

⁴⁴ Bissing, Re-Heiligtum II, 7, pl. 19-20, nr. 45a, 46. The fact that the litter is named “boat” means that the divinization of the monarch took place in the sun temple, since only certain deities could be borne in procession by boat, viz. Amon in the New Kingdom.

“Establishment” of the country and from several deities who assisted and presided over the ceremony.

Having fulfilled all his duties, the king can be finally assimilated to the sun god, maker of life and prosperity, in the room of the seasons before reaching (through the false door) the pedestal building on which the obelisk stood. Some of these representations, above all those of the *sd* festival, are not at all an innovation in the figurative “repertoire” of the Old Kingdom Art: they can be found in many pyramid complexes too⁴⁵, although with some thematic differences. They are usually limited to the ritual running of the pharaoh around the “consecrated field”, as better testified by the decorations of Djoser south tomb, but they never present the detailed scenes with the foundation ceremony of the temple, the washing of feet, the procession of Upper and Lower Egypt and the other variegated images that characterize the *sd* festival depiction in the sun temple (fig. 5).

I can suggest that in the case of the funerary temples those parts of the ritual were chosen which had a specific funerary, “regenerative” symbolism, like the ritual running. Moreover, if the funerary temple was “conceived for use” after the death of the ruler⁴⁶, the sun temple became “operative” even during the king’s reign, as recorded by the Palermo Stone⁴⁷ and the Abusir Papyri⁴⁸.

The decorative programs of pyramids and sun temples appear to have answered different purposes: the first concerning the funerary aspect of the royal cult, the king’s victory over death as the living Horus who prepares himself to join his father Ra again; another one involved the worldly aspect of kingship, the identification of the pharaoh with the transcendent and eternal sun god Ra whose destiny the king will share only after his death, but whose “divine nature” he already shares during his lifetime, *hic et nunc*⁴⁹.

As happened in the first two dynasties, and above all as was to happen during the New Kingdom, in the V dynasty a split seems to take place in the cult sphere between the real tomb (the pyramid complex) and the so-called “funerary temple” (the sun

⁴⁵ Similar scenes have been found in the pyramid temples of: Djoser, Snefru, Khufu, Userkaf, Sahura, Niuserra, Unis, Teti, Pepi II and possibly Djedkara. In the pyramid upper temples of Niuserra and Sahura we can also find depictions of the king with the *Atf* crown in its Lower Egyptian shape (Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs Ne-user-Re*^c, 1907, 16-17, pl. 16; id., *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs Sahu-Re*, Bd. II, 1913, 49-51, pl. 35, 37-38). For further information about the different shapes of the *Atf* crown see: A. M. Abubakr, *Untersuchungen über die ägyptischen Kronen*, 1937, 7ff.

⁴⁶ In spite of the doubts put forward in note 6, and while waiting to dedicate greater space to this important problem in the future, we will continue using the traditional “funerary” meaning of the pyramid complex.

⁴⁷ The offerings Userkaf and Sahura devoted to their own temples dated from around the middle of their reigns (3rd cattle count for Userkaf; the year before the 3rd cattle count for Sahura). See Schäfer, *Ein Bruchstück altägyptischen Annalen*, 1902, 36-39; *Urk. I*, 241, 244; Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, 153-66.

⁴⁸ Posener-Kriéger, *op. cit.*, 519-26.

⁴⁹ To better understand this aspect of the royal worship we could compare the king with the figure of Jesus Christ who is real man and real god at the same time. The ideological-cult “dualism” of the Egyptian religion may have represented a kind of dogma as is still the case today, with different features, for Christianity.

temple). The latter has a multiple nature and different roles, functioning as a place where the king was worshipped both in his “person”, as a representative of the kingship of divine origin (the Horus NN), and in his “institutional essence”, as phenomenal shape and earthly embodiment of the sun god.



For these reasons I would suggest that the “funerary” meaning usually applied to sun temples is misleading because the temple was certainly connected to the funerary cult of the pyramid of each pharaoh, granting the largest part of his food supplies, but it was mainly intended for the cult of the living king as *sA-Ra*⁵⁰.

In this connection I would draw attention to the presence of some hieroglyphic inscriptions carved on masonry blocks of the sun temple on which names and titles of several private persons were written⁵¹. Judging from the kind of titles, their “owners” do not seem to have been overseers or inspectors of the building-work in the temple, since there are many titles also involving priestesses with no bearing on the building activities of the sanctuary. Since a similar anomalous “practice” occurs only in the masonry of the pyramid complex of Niuserra⁵² in the whole panorama of Old Kingdom architecture, the simplest hypothesis is that they were private symbolic “offerings” both for the temple and for the burial of the king-god, a kind of *ex-voto* so that the memory of their “donors” could survive during the daily ceremonies performed in the sun temple as well as after the death of the pharaoh, in his pyramid complex, during the funerary rituals, for ever.

The pharaoh appears to have acquired a new socio-religious meaning as “sun-king” and “sun-god”, and this seems to further confirm the twofold nature and aim of the sun temple.

The other sun temples.

The sun temple of Sahura %xt-Ra

The sun temple of Sahura is known only from a very few epigraphic records where it is always determined with the simple basement in the mastaba shape  and never with the obelisk  (pl. 1). The only archaeological evidence of its existence

⁵⁰ Goedicke suggested that, by building the first sun temple, Userkaf (and maybe also the subsequent kings) wanted to separate the religious aspects of the kingship from its eschatological expectations. However, in doing so the scholar defined the sun temple as a “...marker solely for the setting of the sun which is no longer associated with his afterlife”. On the contrary, I think that the relationship between the sun temple and the pyramid temple (and the eschatological aspects of king’s cult performed here) would have played a key-role in the ideas of kingship: this is demonstrated by the fact that Neferirkara’s sun temple continued in use at least until the end of Djedkara’s reign, as is clearly shown by the Abusir Papyri. Moreover, as will be explained more in detail below, the sun temple was intended for the sun cult as a whole and we cannot consider it only “...as a place concerning the sun’s setting, an event which has significance for mankind only in its desire of a renewed rising the next day” (Goedicke, in: M. Barta, J. Krejci (eds.), op. cit., 406, and with some differences also Stadelmann, in: LÄ V, 1984, 1096).

⁵¹ Bissing, *Re-Heiligtum I*, 59-60.

⁵² Borchardt, *Ne-user-Re^c*, 71-75.

consists in some limestone blocks reused in the pyramid of Niuserra which have the name of the temple engraved on⁵³. Near the pyramid of Niuserra, in the north-east corner, near the massive tower-like (proto-pylon?) structure at the corners of the court defined by Borchardt “Eckbau”⁵⁴, numerous fragments of an obelisk of red granite were found in the seventies, including the *pyramidion* once plated with copper and possibly gilded⁵⁵.

These findings led some scholars to think that Sahura’s sun temple, never finished and subsequently dismantled for reuse as building material, might actually have been located where the pyramid of Niuserra was built later⁵⁶, but there are several flaws in this hypothesis. First of all, the mention of at least three priestly offices, two of *Hm-nTr Ra*⁵⁷ and one of *wab Ra*⁵⁸ (pl. 2), would mean a significant development in the cult offices in the complex, even if only for a short period. Secondly, we have to consider that the sun temple of Sahura has always been determined with the simple basement and never with the obelisk, and so, if this temple had really been located where the pyramid of Niuserra stands now, we would have the contradiction of an obelisk (the one found by the Czech archaeological team) which, on the contrary, never appears in the epigraphic sources.

The recent hypothesis by Stadelmann⁵⁹ that the two temples of Sahura and Neferirkara coincide with that of the founder of the V dynasty, the *Nxn-Ra* of Userkaf, seems to me similarly unconvincing. In Userkaf’s temple, apart from some seal prints, the archaeologists have not found any archaeological evidence referring to Sahura, who would have gone on using the sanctuary for at least another ten years. But the greatest problem, as recalled above, is the determinative used in the hieroglyphic writing of the name of the temple: it is always determined, both in the Palermo Stone⁶⁰ and in the few known mastabas⁶¹, with the simple basement in mastaba shape whereas there are several records where the temple of Userkaf is determined with the obelisk and no other king’s name appears apart from that of Userkaf⁶².

⁵³ Indeed Borchardt speaks about “graffiti” more than real hieroglyphic inscriptions, and for this reason they might have been quarry-blocks intended for the temple but never used, remaining in the place of origin and later reused. Moreover, these blocks were found during the archaeological excavation at the pyramid of Neferirkara but attributed, for their closeness to Niuserra’s complex, to the pyramid of the latter. The German scholar suggested they were remains of the sun temple of Neferefra. See Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs Nefer-ir-ka-Re*^c, 1909, 54-55.

⁵⁴ Borchardt, *Ne-user-Re*^c, 22-3, 97-98.

⁵⁵ Verner, in: *RdE* 28, 1976, 111-18.

⁵⁶ Kaiser, in: *MDAIK* 14, 1956, 111-13; Verner, *Abusir*, 82-83.

⁵⁷ Saqqara, mastabas D 22 of *Ši* (PM III², 468-78; Mariette, *Mastabas*, 331-34; Strudwick, *Administration*, 158-59; Baer, *Rank and Title*, 152, nr. 564); Saqqara, fragment of the statue “Cairo CG 99” (PM III², 722; Borchardt, *Statuen I*, 77-78; Baer, *op. cit.*, 65, nr. 102a). The name of the owner can no longer be clearly read, maybe *a(Im)A*.

⁵⁸ Saqqara, mastabas C 15 of *Ši*. See PM III², 450; Mariette, *Mastabas*, 137-42.

⁵⁹ Stadelmann, in: M. Barta, J. Krejci (eds.), *op. cit.*, 541-42.

⁶⁰ Schäfer, *op. cit.*, 36-37; Urk I, 244; Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, 159-65.

⁶¹ See notes 57-58.

⁶² See note 30.

If we were to trust in the hieroglyphic inscriptions we would have the absurdity of a temple (Userkaf's) with an obelisk which, when reused by the next king, is determined without the obelisk itself. Moreover, it is very strange that among the few people who held cult offices in the temple of Sahura, there was no one who had previously held office in the temple of Userkaf. If there had been a complete reusing of the temple of the previous king, we would expect a continuity of priest offices between the two complexes for which, on the contrary, there is no evidence. If there was a "usurpation" or better a "reuse" of the temple of Userkaf by Sahura, this was only temporary, until Sahura started building a sun temple of his own in the 4th - 5th year of his reign, as stated by the Palermo Stone.

This could also explain two "strange" mentions of Userkaf's sun temple inscribed on two seals (fig. 6), one found among the debris of the same temple by Borchardt during a survey in the area in 1913⁶³, and the other one preserved in the Berlin Museum and coming from the area of Abusir (Berlin ÄM 20380). On the first there is an inscription of a "*prophet? of Sahura in the (Nxn)-Ra - (Hm-nTr)? %AH.w.Ra (Nxn-)Ra*"; on the second an inscription of a "*prophet? of Ra in the Nxn-Ra of Sahura - (Hm-nTr)? Ra m Nxn-Ra %AH.w.Ra*"⁶⁴. These are the only two quotations of the cult of a ruler inside the sun temple of another pharaoh.

Taking into account all these elements, we may think that Sahura, coming to the throne, had reused the sun temple of his predecessor without changing its name. Only later would the king have decided to start building a sun temple of his own, maybe because the ideological "necessity" had developed that each king should have a place of his personal cult united to the god Ra and parallel with his pyramid complex. Sahura did not manage to complete the temple, giving it an obelisk⁶⁵, perhaps

⁶³ There is no publication but only the excavation diaries of this survey, that took place before the systematic excavation in the area led by Rieke in the years 1954-57. All the seals found were classified with the mark Abusir IV-2; most were kept in the Berlin Museum, like the one we are dealing with, a small number in the Cairo Museum.

⁶⁴ For the images of these seals and the related discussion, see: P. Kaplony, *Die Rollsiegel des Alten Reichs II*, *Monumenta Aegyptiaca* 3A-B, 1981, 190-93, pl. 60-61, nr. 19, 24. The original seals have got lost during the II world war. I'm very grateful to Prof. Dr. Dietrich Wildung and Dr. Klaus Finneiser, Director and Curator of the Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung zu Berlin respectively, for permission to consult the inventory book.

⁶⁵ If this supposition turns out to be true, the remains of the obelisk may be the ones found in the north-east corner of the pyramid of Niuserra by the Czech archaeological team. Taking into account the presence of the blocks reused in the pyramid of Niuserra with the name of Sahura's sun temple, the quarry of the temple may have been located there. Nevertheless, the remains of the obelisk may have had no pertinence with a sun temple, being something similar to the obelisks that were found in front of the entrance of the funerary temples of the VI dynasty queens Iput, Neit and Inti (about these last pyramids see A. Labrousse (ed.), *Les Pyramides des Reines*, 1999, 114-22.). Although we know that this obelisk represents a cult and architectural *unicum* in a pyramid complex of the Old Kingdom, we have to remember that also the presence of the so called "pylons" (Eckbau) outside the funerary enclosure of Niuserra's pyramid represents a novelty, later attested only in the pyramid complex of Djedkara.

because he was busy finishing his mortuary complex⁶⁶, or simply because he did not want to give it an obelisk for cult reasons⁶⁷.

The question now is, where was the new sanctuary that Sahura decided to build? Below the sun temple of Niuserra the remains of a large, brick-built structure were found, quite similar in layout to the subsequent stone-built temple. It is usually identified with the sun temple of Neferefra⁶⁸ but, considering the very short length of his reign (his pyramid complex had only just been started when he died) and the great size of the complex we are considering, I would suggest identifying this building with the sun temple *%xt-Ra* of Sahura. This hypothesis may gain support from a little limestone fragment coming from the remains of the pedestal building of the obelisk and found together with further fragments which were probably part of official inscriptions of restoration of the sanctuary by kings coming after Niuserra⁶⁹ (fig. 7). On the fragment we are considering, classified with the letter *i* but completely neglected by Borchartd, we can clearly read the remains of a royal cartouche with the sign *SAH* and the legs of a bird, maybe the *waw* or the sign for *bit*. Although the fragment presents some difficulties in the disposal of the signs⁷⁰, it may have been part of an official inscription of Niuserra in which the existence of a previous building of Sahura was recalled. The existence of this older complex is also recorded in a consecration inscription (*Weihinschrift*)⁷¹ coming from the valley temple, where the king is said to have found an early brick-built building whose name and “paternity” have not been preserved (*sk gmi n Hm.f...qd m Dbt*)⁷².

This location of a sun temple to the north of the respective pyramid in at least three cases suggests a precise “geographical” layout of the two royal complexes, in relation to their distinct and complementary cult aims, the solar one and the funerary one. The same thing occurs in the “Temples of Million of Years”, in the New Kingdom, where the chapel of the sun cult is always located to the north of the main east-west axis of the temple, while that of the funerary cult is always to the south, a

⁶⁶ After several years of “formal uncertainty”, or perhaps “experimentation”, with the funerary complexes of Shepseskaf and Userkaf, Sahura had taken again that architectonical pyramid “shape” which had got stronger and stronger during the IV dynasty.

⁶⁷ Kaiser, in: MDAIK 14, 1956, 111-12. According to the German scholar the shape of the basement should insist mainly on the symbolic representation of the primeval hill, associated with the so-called “high sand” of Heliopolis (see also Ricke, in: ZÄS 71, 1935, 107-11), while the obelisk, such as the pyramidion, could be associated with the mythological *bnbn* stone, considered the first ray of the petrified sun after the birth of the cosmos. Therefore, the choice of the basement rather than the obelisk may not have been determined by the impossibility of completing the sanctuary, but simply by cult-religious reasons.

⁶⁸ Kaiser, in: MDAIK 14, 1956, 113; Verner, in: KMT 14/1, 2003, 53-54; id., in: BIFAO 87, 1987, 293-97.

⁶⁹ Bissing, Re-Heiligtum I, 72-75 and pl. 61.

⁷⁰ Unfortunately we no longer have the original fragments, but only the picture drawn by Borchartd.

⁷¹ Helck, in: SAK 5, 1977, 47-77.

⁷² This is certainly the brick building found by Borchartd. See Bissing, Re-Heiligtum I, 26-27, 66-71; III, 49, pl. 28-29, nr. 427, 440.

clear reference to the related cult places of solar and osirian matrix, Heliopolis in the north, and Abydos in the south.

The sun temple appears always to have been located to the north of the pyramid of the same king⁷³, making me rule out the possibility that the sun temple of Sahura or anyone else could have been situated under Niuserra's pyramid. I would suggest that all the other undiscovered sun temples will come to light either in the area between the two temples of Userkaf and Niuserra⁷⁴ or to the north of the most northern of the two, that of Niuserra, in a place where no systematic archeological research has yet been done.

The sun temple of Neferirkara %t-ib-Ra

With more than 40 records in the historical sources of the time⁷⁵ (pl. 1-2), the sun temple of Neferirkara, called *%t-ib-Ra*, is the best known of the six. Nevertheless, the remains of the temple have not been found and the most important information related to it comes from the so-called Abusir Papyri. These records tell us how the daily administration worked both in the sun temple and in the funerary temple of the same pharaoh. One element which seems to be particularly important concerns the way in which goods were moved from the sun temple to the funerary one: two daily journeys appear to have been made by a little boat (*bit*) that could not have more than four men as crew⁷⁶. This detail led some scholars to think that the distance between the two temples was neither so short as to be covered by carriage on land, nor so long as to require a single daily transport. They concluded, thus, that the temple of Neferirkara must have stood in the area of Abusir- Abu Gourab, where the other two sanctuaries were discovered⁷⁷.

⁷³ See also Stadelmann in: Barta, Krejci (eds.), op. cit., 540.

⁷⁴ During a survey of the site of Abusir, carried out in December 2006, I could verify the presence of, at least, one big mound of sand (*tell*) which might be "the remains" of a sun temple, possibly that of Neferirkara considering the great size of the *tell*. I would like to thank Dr. Magdy el Ghandour, General Director of Foreign Missions Affairs and P. Committee of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, for permission to visit the site.

⁷⁵ The exact number of the temple records varies from author to author: Kaiser (MDAIK 14, 1956, 107, pl. 1) mentions the names of 29 private persons who held offices in the temple although he did not take into account the seal prints, collected and published by Kaplony only in 1977. On the other hand Voss (op. cit., 141-51) has collected the titles from the tombs of 31 people beyond 11 prints of seals. In my unpublished graduation thesis (M. Nuzzolo, *I templi solari: tra culto solare e testi delle piramidi*, 2004) I collected the titles from the tombs of 33 people and 9 seal prints. There is a lot of uncertainty above all concerning the seal prints, some of which (Bruxelles 7128, Berlin ÄM 16305, 16556, 16558, 16559, London UC 21931, 21958) have been classified and interpreted by Kaplony (and by Voss too, in some cases) as related to the sun temple although they are too doubtful to be taken into account. For images of the seals see: Kaplony, *Rollsiegel II*, 208-09, 219-20, 231-33, 322, pl. 65-67, 69-70, 87, nr. 2, 12-14, 36-37, 16.

⁷⁶ Posener-Kriéger, op. cit. II, 519-20; id., *Les barques du temple funéraire de Néferirkarê*, *Mitteilungen Ägyptischen Sammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin*, Bd. VIII, 1974, 205-09.

⁷⁷ Posener-Kriéger, *Les archives du temple funéraire de Néferirkarê-Kakä (Les Papyrus d'Abousir): Traduction et commentaire I*, *BdE* 65, 1976, 20; Verner, in: *KMT* 14/1, 2003, 52-53.

On the contrary, on the basis of this observation and other historical and religious implications, Stadelmann inferred, as recalled above, that the temple of Neferirkara coincided with that of Userkaf, usurped or better used and reconsecrated by Neferirkara with another name⁷⁸. This hypothesis could be supported by further elements beyond those cited by Stadelmann: firstly, if the little limestone slabs found among the debris of Userkaf's temple do refer to Neferirkara⁷⁹, we would have an exceptional concordance between this epigraphic record and the Palermo Stone in fixing in the year of the 5th cattle count (9th – 10th year of the reign) both the restoration work in the temple of Userkaf (perhaps to make it his own temple) and the consecration of three sun boats in his own sanctuary.

Secondly, from the analysis of the titles of the privates we can ascertain an extraordinary continuity of offices between the two temples of Userkaf and Neferirkara. This would indeed seem to attest a real cult (and therefore also architectural?) similarity between the two temples.

In this respect I would point out another element: in the inscriptions of all the priests and officials who held cult offices in the sun temple of Neferirkara but not in that of Userkaf, neither Userkaf nor his pyramid complex is never mentioned. On the contrary, in the inscriptions of the people who held important offices in both the temples, both Userkaf and his pyramid complex are almost always recorded. This suggests that the servants who started their priestly career during the reign of Neferirkara, working in his sanctuary, interrupted the cult offices related to Userkaf and his pyramid, since the sun temple, used again by Neferirkara, was no more "active".

Nevertheless, in spite of the aforesaid elements, we can raise at least three objections against this identification of Neferirkara's *%t-ib-Ra* with Userkaf's *Nxn-Ra*:

1. the lack of handworks, seals or other archaeological material coming from the temple of Userkaf and attributable for certain to Neferirkara;
2. the inscription coming from Sinai, Wâdi Maghâra, apparently confirming the existence of the sanctuary *Nxn-Ra* of Userkaf still in the period of king Djedkara⁸⁰;
3. the record, coming from the tomb E 1-2 of *%Abw-ibbi* in Saqqara⁸¹, of Userkaf's temple, together with those of Neferirkara and Niuserra, at the beginning of the VI dynasty, in the reign of Teti.

The identification between the *Nxn-Ra* and the *%t-ib-Ra* seems, thus, to be

⁷⁸ Stadelmann, in: Barta, Krejci (eds.), op. cit., 541-42.

⁷⁹ Kaiser, in: MDAIK 14, 1956, 109-11. See also note 27.

⁸⁰ A. Gardiner, T. E. Peet, *The Inscriptions of Sinai I*, 1917, pl. VII, nr. 13; J. Èerny, *The Inscriptions of Sinai II*, 1955, 60-61. The interpretation of this rock inscription is made very unsure by the serious erosion of the rock, and was questioned by other scholars who suggest a different reading (see for example S. Birch, in: ZÄS 7, 1869, 26-27). Unfortunately the relief is no longer visible today.

⁸¹ PM III², 460-61; Mariette, *Mastabas*, 373-85; Strudwick, *Administration*, 130; Baer, *Rank and Title*, 121, nr. 421. Sethe (ZÄS 27, 1889, 117, n. 5) has put forward serious doubts about the authenticity of the titles of the tomb's owner, considering it a copy of the inscriptions of the mastaba C 1 of *Pth-Spss*.

excluded.

Apart from its location, the sun temple of Neferirkara is striking above all for its cult and ritual traits, for example the presence and importance of the worship of Hathor that is an absolute novelty in a sun temple. In spite of the 21 quotations of Hathor's cult in the *%t-ib-Ra*, 12 of which belong to priests and 9 to seal prints, we have only four quotations, not without doubts, of a similar cult in the other sanctuaries, two related to the temple of Userkaf, one to the temple of Sahura and one to the temple of Niuserra (pl. 2).

In the case of Userkaf⁸² and Niuserra⁸³ the records of the cult of Hathor refer to priests also active in the temple of Neferirkara, and it may have been a simple "writing mistake", namely a "projection" of a cult office, which existed only in one of the sun temples, onto another one, without taking into account the real chronological sequence. In the case of Sahura too, although the record comes from the Palermo Stone⁸⁴, we may raise some doubts about the importance of the cult of Hathor. The small number of offerings the king ordered to be consecrated to the goddess in his sun temple, four per day, is really puzzling with respect to the numbers provided for other deities, such as Nekhbet of the *pr-wr* with 800 offerings per day or Wadjet of the *pr-nlr* with 4800 offerings per day⁸⁵. Moreover, no specific cult place for the goddess seems to be attested in the sun temples⁸⁶, and this makes all these records even more difficult.

The cult link between Hathor and Ra had always been particularly meaningful in the funerary complexes of the pharaohs, as testified, for example, by the triads of Menkaura found in his valley temple. In the case of the *%t-ib-Ra*, however, it seems evident that the king wanted to emphasize the cult link between Ra and Hathor as the god's daughter, as well as mother and wife of the king, going in this way beyond the "usual" and "implicit" worship of the goddess related to the sun cult developed in the other sun temples, in the pyramid complexes and in the specific cult places devoted to her, namely the river chapels *mrt*.

⁸² Fragment of statue (Cairo CG 55) of *^pss-Ra* and *Nj-anx-Ra-wr*. See PM III², 723; Borchardt, *Statuen I*, 48-9; Baer, *op. cit.*, 85, nr. 215A. Kaplony includes also two prints of seals (Berlin ÄM 16537 and Cairo US 28) where the cult of Hathor in the temple may be attested, but they are unsure. See Kaplony, *Rollsiegel II*, 456-57, pl. 120, nr.36 and Ricke, *Userkaf-SH II*, 96. Voss (*op. cit.* 52) considers them valid.

⁸³ Seal print (Berlin ÄM 20386); see Kaplony, *op. cit.*, 327-28, pl 88, nr. 23. Another print of seal (Berlin ÄM 16284) where the cult of Hathor in the sun temple seems to be attested remains too doubtful. On the contrary, Voss (*op. cit.* 123) considers it valid together with two other prints which are still more doubtful, Berlin ÄM 16282 and Berlin ÄM 16293. For the images of these last three prints see Kaplony, *op. cit.*, 344-45, 319-20, 449-50, pl. 94, 87, 119, nr. 3, 12, 23.

⁸⁴ Schäfer, *op. cit.*, 36-37; Urk. I, 244; Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, 159-65.

⁸⁵ Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, 160. The number of offerings sacred to the goddesses Nekhbet and Wadjet is evidently too high for a single day, raising doubts about the historical value of these records. Taking into account such an "exaggeration", however, the mention of the goddess Hathor is still more problematic.

⁸⁶ A cult or a real statue of the goddess might have found room in one of the two chapels on the sides of the altar in the sun temple of Userkaf, but so far no archaeological evidence has come to light. See Ricke, *Userkaf-SH I*, 19-25.

In doing so, the king seems to anticipate developments in the VI dynasty when the concept of Hathor as mother of the king was combined with the name of the king as *sA-Ra* in the official iconography and titles⁸⁷.

Nevertheless, the motivation which led Neferirkara to stress this cult may be bound to other symbolic-religious features which can be seen in his monuments: the building of his pyramid according to the archaic step shape⁸⁸; the layout of his funerary temple reproducing that of Shepseskaf⁸⁹; the increasing presence of the cult of Osiris in the funerary prayers of the private contemporary mastabas⁹⁰ as well as in the funerary temple of his own pyramid⁹¹. The king's intention may have been to concentrate the cult of the goddess of Dendera in the sun temple because of her cult closeness to the god Ra, whereas in his funerary complex greater attention might have been given to other cult needs, namely the funerary rites associated with the figures of Osiris and his relationship with the king as Horus.

Another crucial aspect in this issue is the presence of the cult of Ra in his morning shape, namely Ra rising at the horizon (*Ra-@r-Axty*). Although it is recorded only twice in the contemporary titles⁹² (pl. 2), this epiphany of the sun god, associated to Horus, must have been the focus of the cult of all the sun temples, as we can see from several representations of this deity found inside the temple of Niuserra, both in the room of the seasons and in other rooms of the sanctuary, where the god is always represented as *Ra-@r-Axty*, with falcon-head surrounded by the sun disc⁹³. This different shape of Ra, united to the god Horus, seems further supported by another peculiarity of Neferirkara's sun temple, confirmed by the Palermo Stone, namely the presence of three boats named "evening and morning boat", *msktt* and *mandt*⁹⁴.

⁸⁷ We can consider, for example, the beautiful statue group of king Pepi II in the arms of the queen mother, an iconographic pattern of absolute artistic and ideological novelty that we will find again in the history of the Egyptian art only in the Amarna period. For the titles see: Helck, *Untersuchungen zu den Beamtentiteln des ägyptischen Alten Reichs*, ÄF 18, 1954, 107-33; S. Roth, in: *ÄAT* 36/2, 1999, 111-123; M. Nuzzolo, in: *Proceedings of the II International Congress for Young Egyptologists*, Lisbon 23-26 October 2006, forthcoming.

⁸⁸ Verner, in: *MDAIK* 47, 1991, 411-18

⁸⁹ Ricke, *Bemerkungen zur ägyptischen Baukunst des Alten Reiches II*, *BeiträgeBf.* 5, 1950, 75-78.

⁹⁰ Kaiser, in: *MDAIK* 14, 1956, 115, n. 1.

⁹¹ It's important to remember that the first quotation of a statue of Osiris, or better of the king as Osiris, inside a pyramid complex comes from the Abusir Papyri with regard to the pyramid of Neferirkara. See Posener-Kriéger, *op. cit.* II, 449, 502.

⁹² Saqqara, mastaba C 1 of *PtH-^pss* (PM III², 464; Mariette, *Mastabas*, 110-14; Baer, *Rank and Title*, 72, nr. 164); Saqqara, mastaba E 1-2 of *%Abw-ibbi* (PM III², 460-61; Mariette, *op. cit.*, 373-85; Strudwick, *Administration*, 130; Baer, *op. cit.*, 121, nr. 421).

⁹³ Bissing, in: *ASAE* 53, 1956, pl. VI, nr. b; Bissing, *Re-Heiligtum III*, pl. 20, nr. 318; pl. 21, nr. 346-7; pl. 22, nr. 359; pl. 27, nr. 424; pl. 31, nr. 481; pl. 32, nr. 526.

⁹⁴ Schäfer, *op. cit.*, 40-41; *Urk. I*, 248-9; Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, 179-80. Although the presence of these boats fits perfectly to the features of the sun cult, the record of the Palermo Stone should be taken more cautiously. The reading of the last lines, commonly accepted by the scholars, attributed to the year of the 5th cattle count (9th-10th year of the reign) of Neferirkara, dates back to Schäfer's study in 1902, when the state of conservation of the Stone was surely better than today. Nevertheless, from the photos of the period we can clearly read neither the quotations of the boat named *MAat* nor that of the two boats of 8 cubits and, above all, the name of the sun temple has not been preserved at

These elements lead me to think about the development of the sun cult inside the temples, testifying to the complexity and “comprehensive nature” of such rituals that, in all likelihood, and not only in the case of Neferirkara, followed the cycle of the sun from dawn to sunset. In these cult rituals, a key-role was played by the king, not as a simple “co-head”, “priest” of the god, or his “representative”, but as a main element of the cult, associated in a real triad with Ra and Hathor. It is surely no coincidence that all the priests associated with the cult of Ra in a sun temple were almost invariably priests (above all *Hm-nTr*) of the ruling king and of one or more previous kings⁹⁵. The cult of Ra seems to be completed by that of the king, just as the cult of the father may be completed by the prosecution of the cult tribute to the son.

Thus, it is not the worship of the dead king which predominates in the sun temples (or at least not only this), nor that of the sun god in his “dying” shape at the sunset, as has been supposed⁹⁶, but the constant confirmation, renewing and rebirth of the kingship, viewed in the sun temple as an eternal and immutable institution which “realizes” itself in the person of the single, specific pharaoh. For this reason, each temple continued in use even after the death of the king who had built it, being used, sometimes, also for cult needs of more than one king, such as the sun temple of Neferirkara which was used instead of Neferefra’s, never completed⁹⁷.

The sun temple of Menkauhor Axt-Ra

As in the case of Sahura’s and Neferefra’s temples⁹⁸, there are also very few epigraphic records of the last sun temple to be built, the *Axt-Ra* of Menkauhor (pl. 2). This temple seems to be the most enigmatic one of them all, since its location is completely unknown. Although we may recognize in the sanctuary of Userkaf the temples of Sahura and Neferirkara, as suggested by Stadelmann, and in the brick building below the temple of Niuserra the sanctuary of Neferefra, as Kaiser and Verner believe, the *Axt-Ra* of Menkauhor is still without a precise location. Neither does it seem possible that it may coincide with the *^sp-ib-Ra* of Niuserra, reused for a short period by Menkauhor. In the few contemporary titles the temple is sometimes



all. At the moment that part of the Stone is no more readable, as confirmed by recent Wilkinson’s study. While waiting to be able to dedicate in a future a greater space to a reading again of the Palermo Stone, and in the absence of a valid alternative, we will go on using the traditional reading by Schäfer.

⁹⁵ See also Kaiser, in: MDAIK 14, 1956, 112-13; Winter, in: WZKM 54, 1957, 227-231.

⁹⁶ See note 37 and 50.

⁹⁷ Communication by Professor Miroslav Verner (“Topographical Data in the Papyrus Archives of Abusir”, in print) on the occasion of the II International Congress “Abusir and Saqqara in the Year 2005”, Prague 27-30 June 2005, regarding the new discoveries carried out in the papyrus archives coming from the mortuary temple of the pyramid of king Neferefra.

⁹⁸ The lack of archaeological material as well as epigraphic sources should lead us to consider the possibility that Neferefra’s sun temple, if it was ever finished, was never used. This seems to be confirmed by the absence of records in the papyrus archives of Neferefra’s pyramid, unlike Neferirkara’s temple which had a leading role in the food supply and in the funerary cult devoted to Neferefra. See also note 97 and Verner in: BIFAO 87, 1987, 293-97.

determined with a basement in mastaba shape  ⁹⁹ and at other times with the obelisk ¹⁰⁰  (pl. 1), which is to say the least an oddity, considering that the temple of Niuserra was always determined with the sole obelisk and it was certainly still in use during the reign of Menkauhor. Thus if we can rely on the use of one hieroglyphic determinative rather than another as corresponding to the exact architectural shape of the temple, we can be sure that Menkauhor's temple is still to be found.

Another meaningful element is that this king, intent on building a sun temple, did not build his tomb in the same necropolis as the previous kings. Whether we identify it with the so-called “headless pyramid” in Saqqara north ¹⁰¹, or with the pyramid Lepsius L in Dahshur ¹⁰², it is evident that the pharaoh chose as his resting-place the “old” necropolis in the area of Saqqara and not Abusir.

It is possible that the sun temple was also situated in the necropolis of Abusir, but the location of his burial towards Saqqara shows that this ruler gave less importance to the sun cult ¹⁰³ which had developed in the area of Abusir during the V dynasty. Since the ideological planning of the sun temple required it to be located next to the pyramid complex of the same pharaoh, we cannot exclude that the *Axt-Ra* may also have been placed in the area of Saqqara.

In any case, it seems clear that the attention given to the sun cult by the first kings of the dynasty was in such decline that the successors of Menkauhor no longer started building such temples.

From the reign of Unis the role the sun temples played in celebrating the sun kingship seems to have found a new expression, a viaticum for the eternity entrusted to written “means”, whose power, as recalled in a later wisdom text of the Ramessid period, surpasses any great architectonical production.

⁹⁹ Saqqara, mastaba D 53 of *Nfr-irt-Pth* (PM III², 582; Mariette, Mastabas, 322; Baer, Rank and Title, 90, nr. 255); seal print “Berlin ÄM 16760” (Kaplony, Rollsiegel II, 297-99, pl. 83, nr. 2) found on a pottery fragment near one of the pyramids of the princesses on the north-eastern side of the pyramid of Niuserra. See also: Borchardt, *Ne-user-Re*^c, 132.

¹⁰⁰ Giza, mastaba not numbered of *@mw* (PM III², 245; S. Hassan, Excavations at Giza VI³, 1950, 81; Baer, op. cit., 104, nr. 332); Saqqara, mastaba D 40 of *anx-ma-Ra* (PM III², 455; Mariette, Mastabas, 280-84; Baer, op. cit., 64, nr. 93); Giza, mastaba G 7211 of *KA-m-anX* (PM III², 191; Goedicke, in: ASAE 55, 1958, 35-55).

¹⁰¹ V. Maragioglio, C. A. Rinaldi, *L'architettura delle piramidi menfite VIII*, 1977, 58-62; J. Berlandini, in: BSFE 83, 1978, 24-34.

¹⁰² Borchardt, in: ZÄS 42, 1905, 1-11; Stadelmann, *Pyramiden*, 179.

¹⁰³ According to some scholars, this element seems to be further confirmed by the name of the king. Beckerath (*Handbuch der Ägyptische Königsnamen*, MÄS 49, 1999, 58-59), following a statement by Mariette (Mastabas 335-39), also records a different shape of the name of the temple in *Axt-@r*. However, this quotation seems to be wrong since the sign of the Horus falcon should be a variation of the hawk on the perch used many times in the inscriptions with the value of Ra rather than the usual sun disc. Moreover the supposed name of the temple of Menkauhor does not show any determinative. Taking into account these elements I think we are not dealing with the name of a priest (*Hm-nTr*) of *Ra-Axty*. See also D. Jones, *An index of Egyptian Titles, Epithets and Phrases of the Old Kingdom*, BAR International Series 866 (II), 2000, 533, nr. 1994.

Conclusion.

To conclude this analysis I wish to focus on some points related to the cult-religious and historical aspects which characterized the sun temples. These elements, at least in part, must have been at the origin of the building of these structures and their rapid disappearance.

Throughout the Old Kingdom, and particularly in the IV dynasty, kingship assumed more and more evident and absolute solar traits, culminating in the great architectural project of the Giza plateau. This is where we find the first “experiment” with a sun temple, the Sphinx temple¹⁰⁴, a place solely devoted to the celebration of those cult prerogatives that led the king (in this case Khufu) to achieve the merging with the sun god, or better that showed the solar nature of the pharaoh who represented the only link between the divine and human world, son of Ra (*sA-Ra*), but “spiritually” and “conceptually” he himself Ra.

This first deifying attempt of Khufu, abandoned by his immediate successors¹⁰⁵, was “taken up” at the beginning of the V dynasty in a different way: the new triumphant Heliopolitan theology tries to reconcile the two main cult poles related to the king, the funerary and the solar, attributing to each its own “stage”. The pyramid was designed to celebrate the earthly kingship of the single monarch, perpetuating in its overall decorative programme his nature of Horus and assuring the continuous development of the funerary rituals. The sun temple, on other hand, was intended to enshrine for ever the image of the king as the primeval god Ra, or rather as the parting, the phenomenal shape and expression of the god Ra on Earth, the eternal and incorruptible image of the idea of the solar kingship, surely the main element in ensuring the rising of the king.

In this way, the different features of the mythical role of the king, developed

¹⁰⁴ The hypothesis of the Sphinx temple as sun temple, suggested by Ricke for the first time (*Der Harmachistempel des Chefred in Giseh, BeiträgeBf. 10, 1970, 1-43*; S. Schott, *Ägyptische Quellen zum Plan des Sphinxtempels, BeiträgeBf. 10, 1970, 49-79*), is now shared by all the scholars. Most think that both the Sphinx and its temple were built in the reign of Khafra (R. Anthes, *Was veranlasste Chefred zum bau des Tempels vor der Sphinx?, BeiträgeBf. 12, 1971, 47-58*; Hawass, in: *Atti del VI Convegno Internazionale di Egittologia, vol. II, 1993, 177-95*; Hawass, in: D. O'Connor, D. P. Silverman (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian Kingship, 1995, 227-28, 249-53*; Lehner, *Complete Pyramids, 127-33*) but some Egyptologists disagree, suggesting that the Sphinx was built by Djedefra (Wildung, *Ni-user-re. Sonnenkönig-Sonnengott, 1984, 18-20*; V. Dobrev, in: *Egypte, Afrique et Orient 15, 1999, 17-18*), or by Khufu (Stadelmann, *Pyramiden, 124-26*; id., in: Hawass (ed.), *Egyptology at the dawn of the twenty-first century: proceedings of the eighth international congress of Egyptologists, Cairo 2000, vol. I: Archaeology, 2003, 464-69*). In my opinion Stadelmann's hypothesis is likely to be correct, both for cult reasons and stylistic ones. As far as the Sphinx temple is concerned, the question is much more complicated and would require separate treatment. It is important to point out, however, that the cult celebrated in the Sphinx complex was surely devoted to Khufu risen as Ra at the horizon, to whom the name itself of the king's pyramid, *Axt-#wfw*, refers.

¹⁰⁵ According to me, the reign of Djedefra, and for some aspects also that of Khafra, marked a continuation of this deifying trend of the pharaoh, finished or better re-elaborated according to different cult features, with the last two reigns of the IV dynasty and above all, as already said, with the reign of Userkaf. See also: M. Nuzzolo, in: *Proceedings of the IX International Congress of Egyptologists, Grenoble 6-12 September 2004, OLA 150, 2007, 1401-1410*.

until then in the sole pyramid complex, were “systematized” in two different and specific places with a perfect symbolic-cult syncretism which characterizes the whole of Egyptian religious history. And that this dualism was an element of primary importance for the new divine image of the pharaoh is clearly shown by the analysis of the titles of priests and officials who worked inside the temples. The fact that a lot of people held cult offices both in the sun temple and in the pyramid of the same king (or of many previous kings) seems to testify to the indissolubleness of these complexes.

Moreover, as far as the pyramid temple of Neferirkara is concerned, we know from the Abusir Papyri that two types of food offerings were involved in the cult of the pharaoh: the divine one, the *Htp-nTr*, and the specifically funerary one, the *pr.t-Xrw*¹⁰⁶. If we scrupulously observe their tabular organization we note that the divine offering, made up essentially of bread and drinking, came only from the sun temple of the same king, whereas the funerary one was given both by the sun temple and the residence of the king in office. The most important part of the latter, in both substantial and religious terms, namely the bovine meat, came exclusively from the sun temple¹⁰⁷, which also kept a not well defined part for itself. A similar offering appears to be destined to the king in two different places where the two complementary, but indissoluble, natures of him were celebrated. Thus we can state that the sun temple was a real *alter ego* of the tomb of the pharaoh, a place where the noblest part of the offerings, which later came to be the ritual food of the sovereign for eternity in his resting-place, was consecrated to the king¹⁰⁸.

Cult links, as steady and frequent, are seen for some divine “characters” too: the case of the joint cult of Ra and Hathor is surely the most evident but not the only one. For example, the people who attended the cult of Ra and the king in the sun temple were very often also linked with the cult practices related to Anubis, Sokar and, above all, to Osiris (pl. 1). This association of cult offices connected with the god of Abydos became very frequent from the period between the reigns of Neferirkara and Niuserra, when also in private mastabas the presence of the cult of Osiris is more evident in the funerary prayers¹⁰⁹. In Neferirkara’s reign, we also have the first mention of the presence of a statue of the king as Osiris inside a pyramid complex¹¹⁰.

This element deserves great importance in our analysis: Osiris is completely absent in the decorative programmes both of the sun temples and, especially, of the

¹⁰⁶ Posener-Kriéger, in: E. Lipinsky (ed.), *State and Temple Economy in the Ancient Near East*, Or 5, 1979, 145-46.

¹⁰⁷ The royal residence provided fruit and sometimes game, food of evidently less cult and nutritional value than the bovine meat.

¹⁰⁸ This gives an idea of just how complex and ambivalent the rituals regarding the pharaoh were, combining, as he did, cult, symbolic and mythological aspects of different origins and functionality. Although they were often represented in different cult places, these rituals appear never to have been completely separated and distinct.

¹⁰⁹ Kaiser, in: *MDAIK* 14, 1956, 114-5 and n. 1.

¹¹⁰ See note 91.

pyramid complexes up until the end of the V dynasty. Nevertheless Barta's study has shown that the appearance of Osiris dates back to the middle or even the beginning of the IV dynasty¹¹¹. The name by which Osiris is invoked in these formulas, *irj st irjt*, is related to the ritual of deposition and embalmment of the dead which assured his victory over death and future rising again¹¹². But it is reasonable to think that the figure of Osiris might be associated with a dead person in a private ritual and funerary context since he had long been associated with the king. This hypothesis seems to be further supported by the *Htp di nswt* formula itself¹¹³, where king Horus, still living, refers to his dead father, associated to Osiris, sacrificing for the wealth of the tomb owner.

This so-called "popularizing", or better diffusion, of the funerary cult, with the consequent affirmation of Osiris, was completed in the reign of Djedkara: the first representation of the god of Abydos known to us comes in fact from his funerary pyramid temple¹¹⁴. But it is above all in the pyramid texts that the god of Abydos, and no longer, or rather and not only the god Ra, plays a central role in the eschatological expectations of the pharaoh¹¹⁵, appearing for the first time, at least according to the written sources, as the dead father of the living king Horus¹¹⁶.

It seems evident that at the end of the V dynasty the "character" of Osiris has been definitely "canonized" and "mythicized", receiving a full theological legitimacy and becoming a paradigmatic myth of kingship, intended to assure, at the same time, the earthly claims to the succession to the throne and the promise of eternal life.

Thus just when the sun cult seems to reach its climax, during the V dynasty, a deep religious transformation comes about focused on the figure of Osiris and on the solely funerary aspects of the ritual of the rising of the monarch, surely the weak point in the architectural-decorative programme of all the previous royal monuments; a religious transformation which culminates in the introduction of the pyramid texts. The written word, which accompanies the afterlife journey of the pharaoh in the intimacy of his burial chamber, proves able to summarize the king's essence and attributes as a whole, filling in the evident ideological and cult gaps.

Although the sun temple rapidly goes into decline, certainly by the beginning of the reign of Teti¹¹⁷, the ideological values it had expressed are not lost or forgotten: they are absorbed and incorporated in the new "communicative" aspects of the VI dynasty, namely the pyramid texts. From the time of Snefru and Khufu the expression and manifestation of the kingship becomes once again an affair contained within a

¹¹¹ W. Barta, *Aufbau und Bedeutung der altägyptischen Opferformel*, ÄF 24, 1968, 287-88.

¹¹² H. Altenmüller, in: Barta, Krejci (eds.), *op. cit.*, 310-16.

¹¹³ See also Voss, *op. cit.*, 182.

¹¹⁴ J. G. Griffith, *Origins of Osiris and his Cult*, 1980, frontispiece and 236-37.

¹¹⁵ PT 308a, 167b-172d, 173b-193c, 574d.

¹¹⁶ PT 466a, 2115a.

¹¹⁷ The last record of a sun temple is that of the mastaba E 1-2 of *%Abw-ibbi* in Saqqara (PM III², 460-1; Mariette, *Mastabas*, 373-85; Strudwick, *Administration*, 130; Baer, *Rank and Title*, 121, nr. 421) about whose authenticity Sethe (*ZÄS* 27, 1889, 117, n. 5) has put forward serious doubts, regarding it a copy of the most authentic mastaba C 1 of *Pth-^ps*. If we consider this source reliable, as I do, at the beginning of the reign of Teti three temples must still have been in use, namely those of Userkaf, Neferirkara and Niuserra.

single monumental complex¹¹⁸, the pyramid, whose monumental “panoply” finds in the pyramid texts its complete and final sublimation.

¹¹⁸ From the reign of Unis also the sun boats on the sides of the causeway of the pyramid complex appear again. Such boats, that we find in the two greatest pyramid complexes of Giza and in the unfinished one of Abu Roash, disappear from the reign of Menkaura and are absent in the funerary complexes of the six rulers who built a sun temple. The presence of two small boat pits, completely empty, located on the north and south sides of the pyramid of Neferirkara, and of five even smaller boat pits found inside the funerary temple of Neferefra (Verner, *Il mistero delle piramidi*, 2002, 262, 270, tr. of: *The Pyramids*, 2001) does not seem to clash with the previous statement. It is possible that they were not linked to the sun god Ra, as the boats found outside the pyramid complexes of Khufu and Khafra were in the IV dynasty, but rather to the mythical pilgrimage to Abydos that the king had to accomplish as a tribute to the god Osiris (see also what said about the cult of Osiris in Neferirkara’s pyramid), a pilgrimage better known from later epigraphic and literary sources. Furthermore, funerary boats also appear to have been placed near the so-called “funerary-enclosure” of the I and II dynasty at Abydos and Hierakonpolis (O’Connor, in: *JARCE* 26, 1989, 51-86; id., in: *EA* 6, 1995, 3-7) and they do not seem to have had an exclusively solar meaning and nature. See also Altenmüller, in: *Archív Orientální* 70/3, 2002, 269-290.

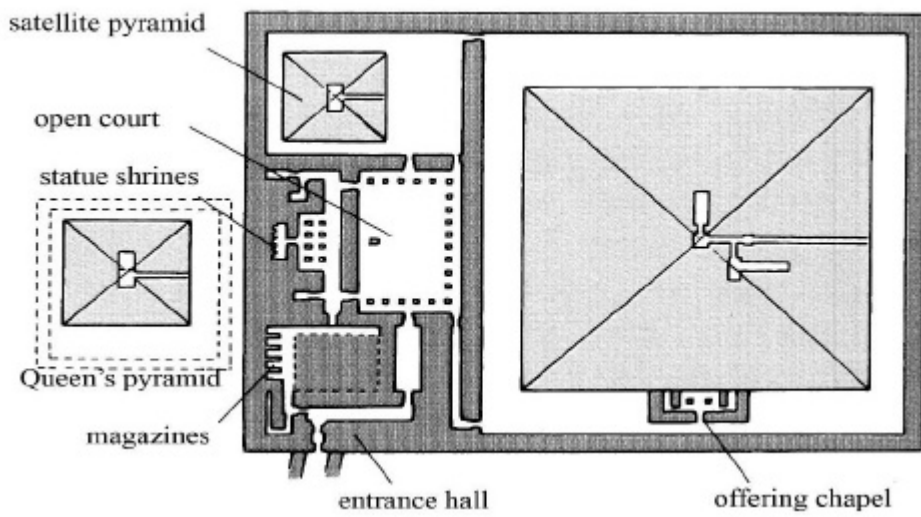


Fig. 1. Plan of Userkaf's pyramid complex: the funerary temple is located on the south side while the offering chapel is on the east side.

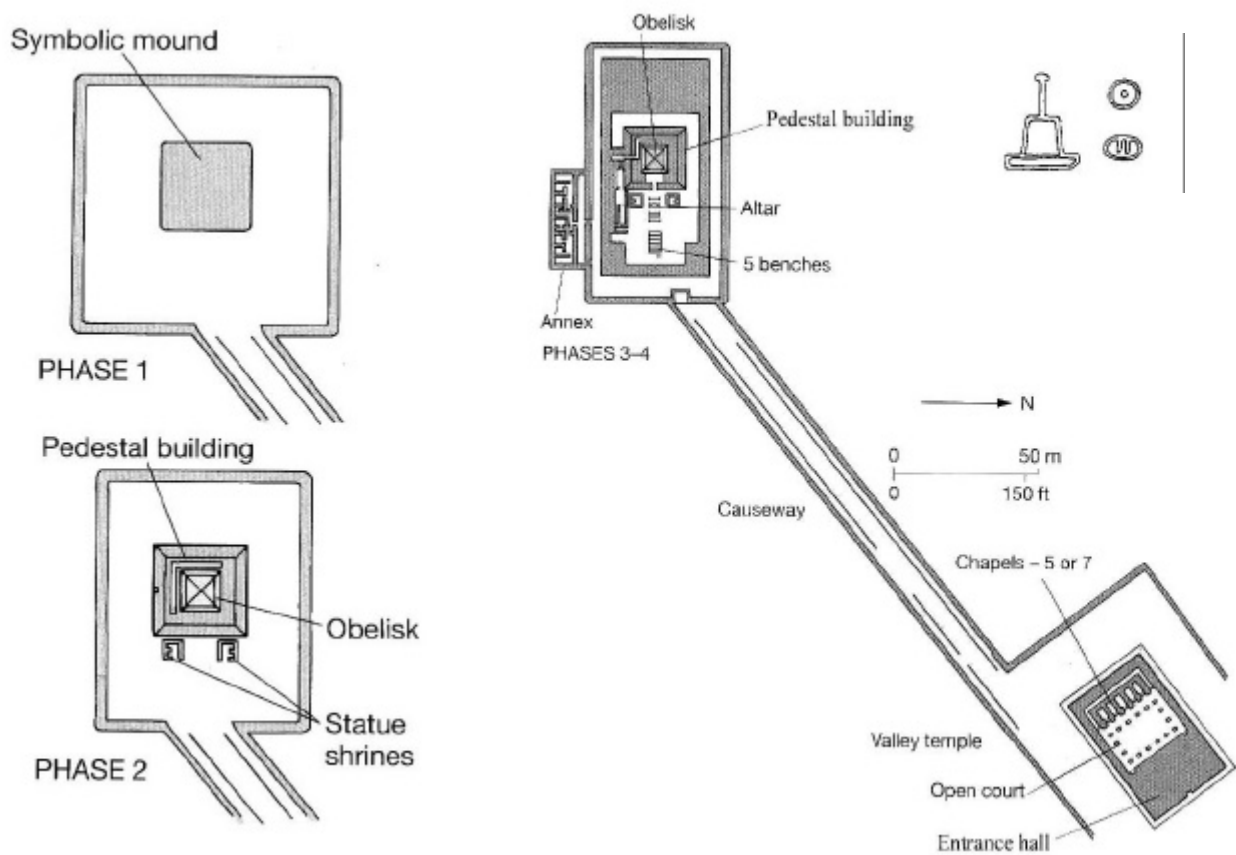


Fig. 2. Four phases of Userkaf's sun temple. (Right on the top) The early form of the hieroglyphic name of the temple including a mound surmounted by a perch.

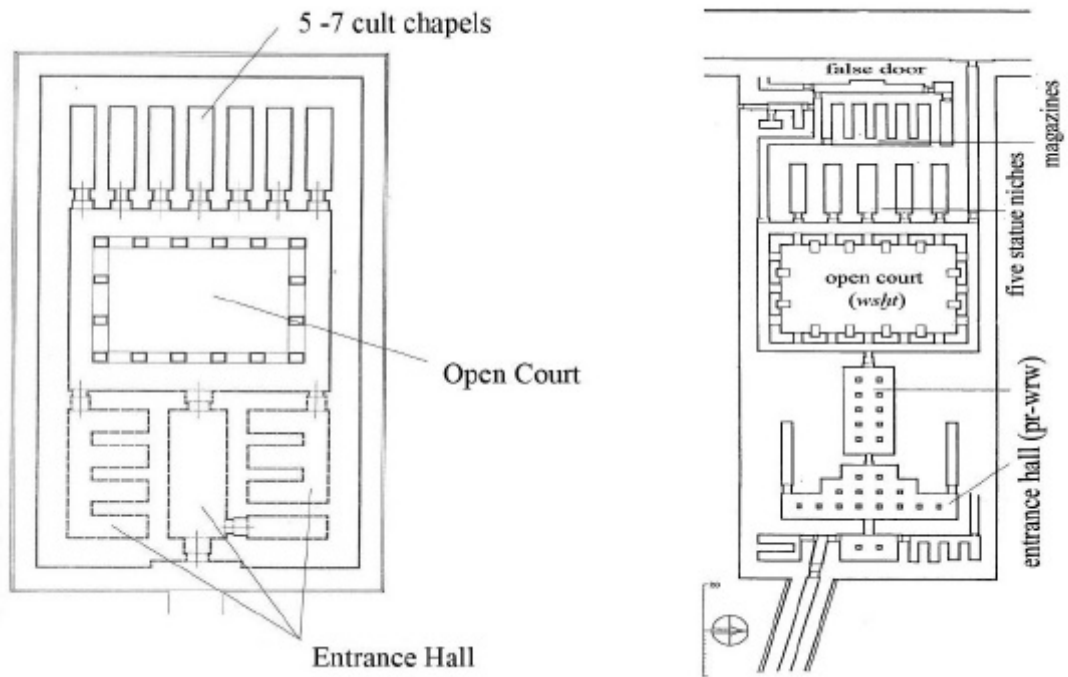


Fig. 3. The valley temple of Userkaf's sun temple (left) and the upper temple of Khafra's pyramid (right).

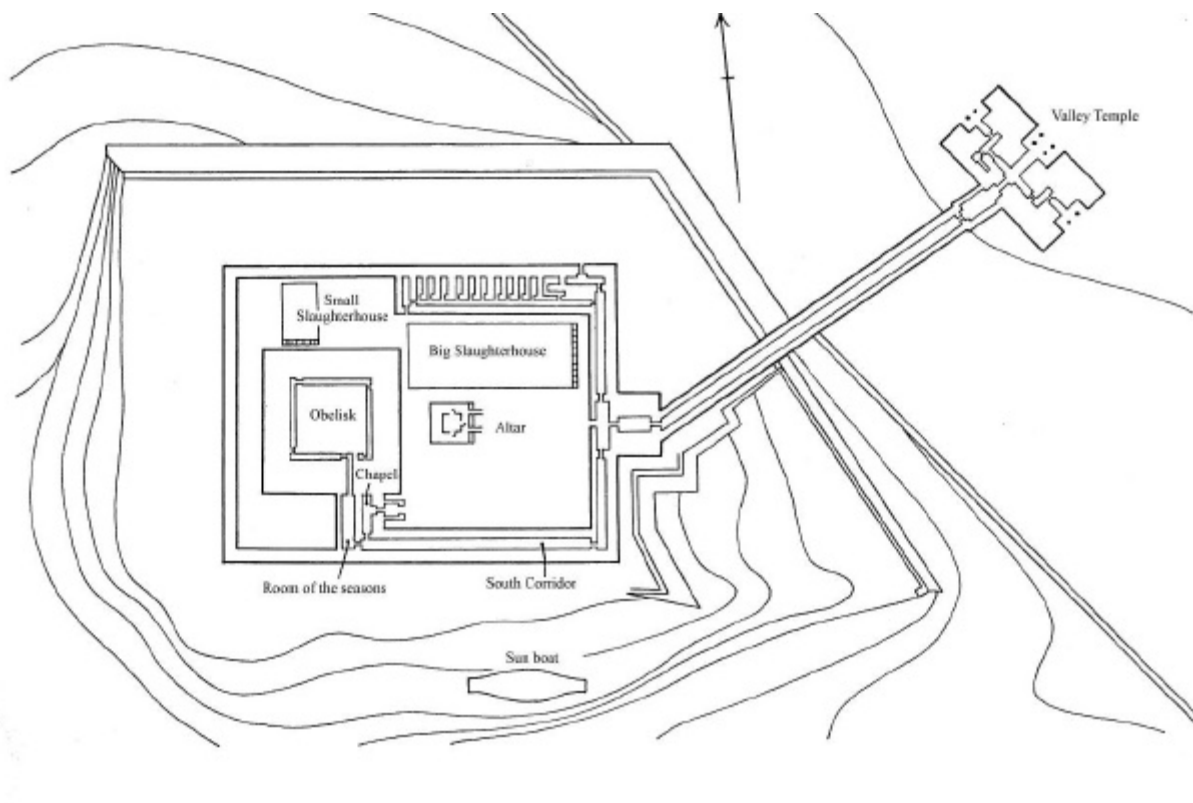


Fig. 4. Plan of Niuserra's sun temple.

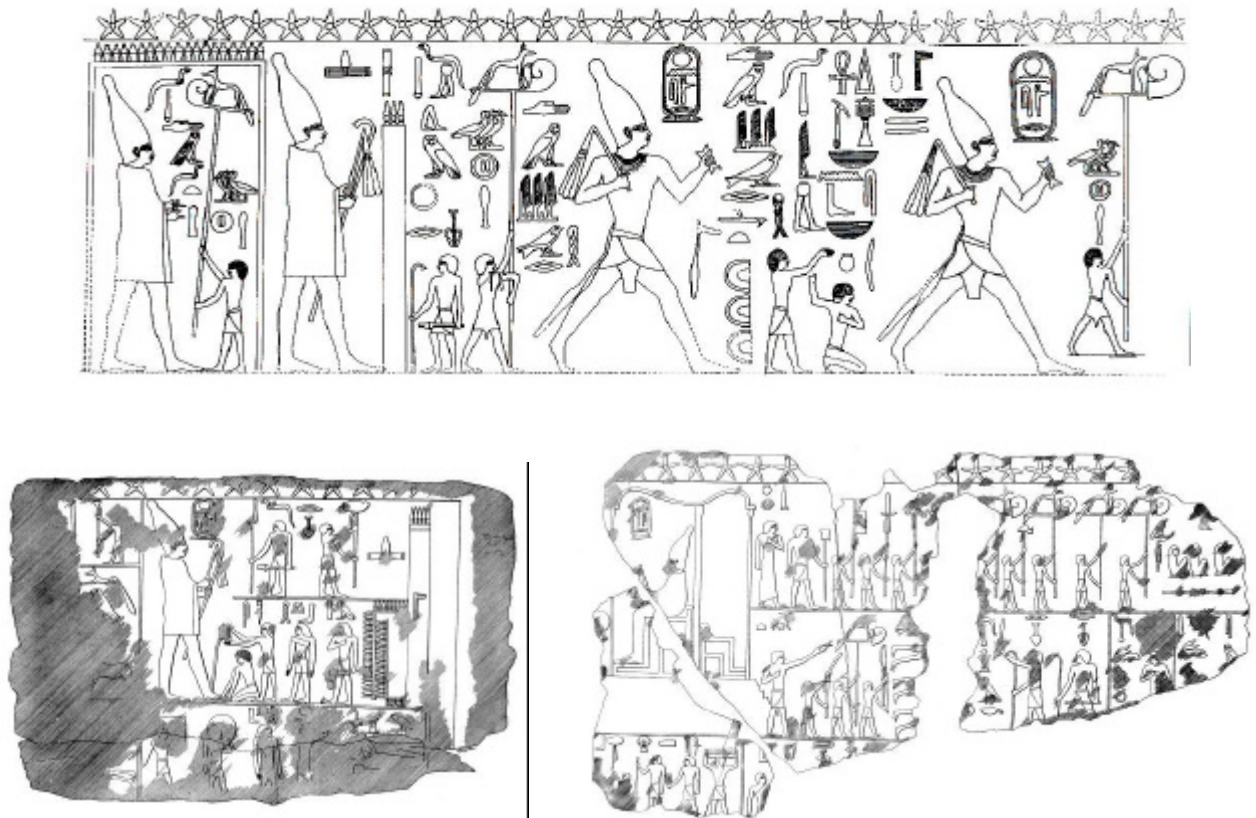


Fig. 5. Some fragments of the *sed* festival depiction from the "chapel" of Niuserra's sun temple. (On the top) The ritual running; (below on the left) the washing of feet; (below on the right) the final procession of Upper Egypt.



Fig. 6. Two seal-prints found in the area of Userka's sun temple before the archaeological excavations by Ricke in 1954-7: "Berlin AM 20380" (on the left); "Abusir IV-2" (on the right). They may testify the cult of Sahura into Userkaf's sun temple.

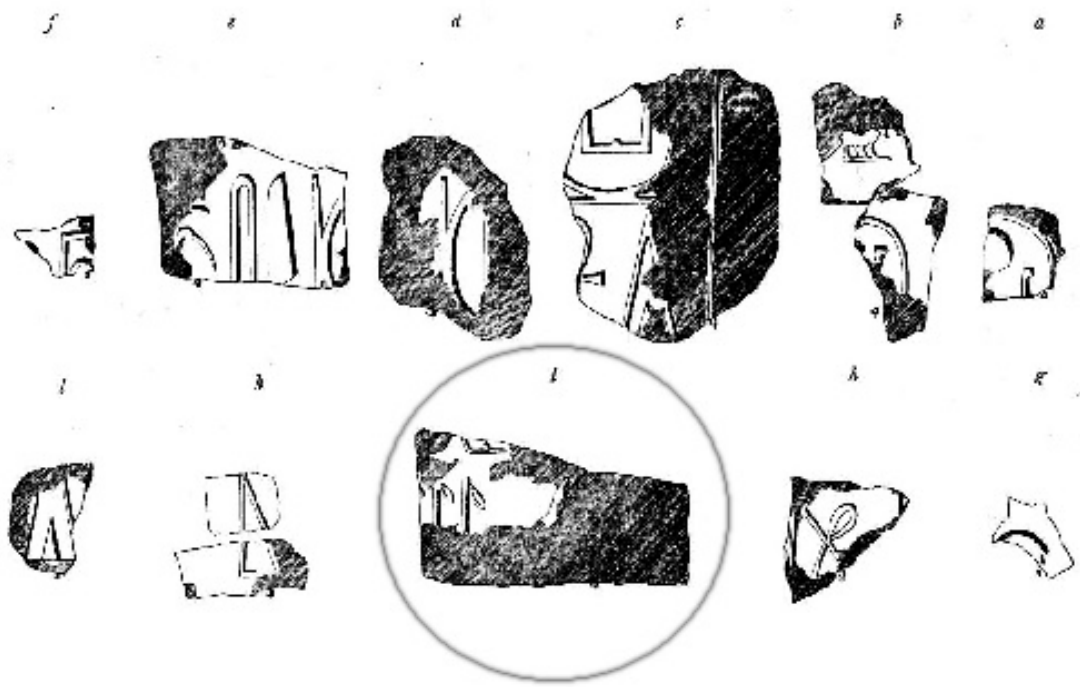





























































Fig. 7. Limestone fragments coming from the remains of the pedestal building of the obelisk of Niuserra's sun temple. The fragment circled out may have been part of a royal inscription recording the existence of a previous building of Sahura.

Schäfer, <i>Ägypt. Inschrift.</i> Berlin ÄM 11664			○													<i>Ni-ᵛnh-ḥnmw nmḥw</i>
Borchardt, <i>Denkmäler</i> I Cairo CG 1462			○													<i>Nfr</i>
Mariette, <i>Mastabas</i> D 49	○						●									<i>Ḥnm-ḥtp</i>
Mariette, <i>Mastabas</i> H 6	○		○ ○				●									(Unknown)
Quibell, <i>Saqqara</i> III, S 915	○	○					●									<i>Ni-k3w-Ḥr</i>
PM III, 541	○	○														<i>Pḥr-nfr</i>
Mariette, <i>Mastabas</i> D 11	○	○	○	○ ○ ○ ○			● ○									<i>Tp-m-ᵛnh</i>
Mariette, <i>Mastabas</i> D 11	○		○		○		●									<i>Ḥm-mnw</i>
Borchardt, <i>Denkmäler</i> I Cairo CG 1389	○			○			● ○									<i>Dw3-Rᵛ</i>
Mariette, <i>Mastabas</i> D 47	○		○				● ○									<i>Nn-ḥft-k3</i>
Mariette, <i>Mastabas</i> D 52	○		○				● ○									<i>Sn-nw-ᵛnh</i>
Manchester 10780 – Sethe, <i>Urk.</i> I, 227			○				○									<i>Ni-k3w-Pth</i>
Junker, <i>Giza</i> IX, G 1012	○		○				○									<i>Sd3wg</i>
Wilkinson, <i>Annals</i> , 159ff		●					●									Palermo Stone
Wilkinson, <i>Annals</i> , 159ff							●					●				Palermo Stone
Mariette, <i>Mastabas</i> C 15	○															<i>Ty</i>

Borchardt, <i>Statuen I</i> Cairo CG 99	○						●					ϵ _(tm) 3
Wilkinson, <i>Annals</i> , 177												Palermo Stone
Wilkinson, <i>Annals</i> , 179												Palermo Stone
Schäfer, <i>Ägypt. Inschrift.</i> Berlin ÄM 18171												Pyramid Neferirkara
PM III, 190, G 7150	○	○	○	○		○						H ^c f-Hwfw
Borchardt, <i>Statuen I</i> Cairo CG 310												ϵ _{nh-ir.s}
Borchardt, <i>Denkmäler I</i> Cairo CG 1349												H _{p-dr}
PM III, 492, LS 5	○											Sšmw
PM III, 494, LS 14	○			○								K3-m- <u>kd</u>
Mariette, <i>Mastabas D</i> 54	○	○	○									Š _{pss-Pth}
Mariette, <i>Mastabas D</i> 61	○			○								Dw3-n-R ^c
Hassan, <i>Giza V</i> , LG 95	○	○	○	○		○						Wr-hww
Firth, Gunn, <i>Teti I</i> , 31-36	○			○								S _{htpw}
Mariette, <i>Mastabas D</i> 55	○			○		○						N _{fr-irt-n.f}
Mariette, <i>Mastabas D</i> 20	○											Wr-ir-n
Borchardt, <i>Statuen I</i> Cairo CG 55	○		●									Š _{pss-R^c}

Borchardt, <i>Statuen I</i> Cairo CG 55	○	●			●	●									<i>Ni-ḥ-R^c-wr</i>
Mariette, <i>Mastabas D 48</i>	○	●	○ ○		●						●				<i>Ni-k3-ḥ</i>
Mariette, <i>Mastabas D 24</i>	○	○	○			●									<i>Ni-M3^ct-Pth</i>
<i>PSBA XXVII, 1905, 32</i>	○					○									<i>Sr-nfr</i>
Scott-Moncrieff, <i>Hiero Texts</i> , London 80/710	○	○	● ○ ○												<i>Wr-ir-n-Pth</i>
Borchardt, <i>Denkmäler I</i> Cairo CG 1416	○	○	● ○ ○												<i>Ni-k3w-R^c</i>
Murray, <i>Saqqara I</i> , E 9	○	○	● ○ ○					○							<i>Šm-k3</i>
Mariette, <i>Mastabas D 16</i>	○	○	○ ○			○		○							<i>ḥ-m-^c-k3</i>
Firth, Gunn, <i>Teti I</i> , 31-36	○	●	○			○	●	○							<i>K3-m-snw</i>
PM III, 174, G 6030	○	●	○			○	●	○							<i>Tti</i>
Mariette, <i>Mastabas D 28</i>	○		○ ○		●	●		○							<i>Sndm-ib</i>
Mariette, <i>Mastabas D 42</i>	○	○	● ○			○	●	○ ○							<i>Ḥ^c-b3w-Pth</i>
Mariette, <i>Mastabas D 56</i>	○	○	● ○				●	○ ○							<i>Ni-m3^ct-sd</i>
Bissing, <i>Re-Heiligtum I</i> , 54 - III, 41								●							Sun temple Niuserra
Mariette, <i>Mastabas C 1</i>	○	○ ○				○ ○									<i>Špss-Pth</i>
Mariette, <i>Mastabas D 22</i>	○		○ ○		○		● ●	●							<i>Ti</i>

Mariette, <i>Mastabas</i> D 23	○	○	○		○ ● ●							<i>K3-m-nfr.t</i>
Cooney, <i>BMB</i> 13/3, 1952, 8					○ ● ●							<i>Ni-k3-R^c</i>
Mariette, <i>Mastabas</i> D 67	○		○ ○									<i>Nht-s3s</i>
Mariette, <i>Mastabas</i> D 59	○	○	○ ○		● ●							<i>Dw3-ḥp</i>
Quibell, <i>Saqqara</i> III, S 916	○	●	○									<i>Pth-m3^c-ḥrw</i>
Junker, <i>Giza</i> IX, 154-69	○		○		○ ●							<i>Ḥpw-ḥtp</i>
Hassan, <i>Giza</i> II, 202-25	○		○ ○									<i>Ni-M3^ct-R^c</i>
Mariette, <i>Mastabas</i> D 60	○	○	○ ○		○							<i>Ḥtp-Ḥr-3thy</i>
<i>PSBA</i> XXVII, 1905, 34 - PM III, 52, G 1151	○				○							<i>Nfr-ḳd</i>
Reisner, <i>Giza</i> I, G 1029	○		○		○							<i>Shm-k3</i>
Altenmüller, Moussa, E 17	○		○									<i>Ni-ḥnh-Ḥnmw</i>
Altenmüller, Moussa, E 17	○		○									<i>Ḥnm-ḥtp</i>
Scott-Moncrieff, <i>Hiero Texts</i> , London 1136			○									<i>Snnw</i>
Scott-Moncrieff, <i>Hiero Texts</i> , London 65953			○									(Unknown)
Mariette, <i>Mastabas</i> D 53	○											<i>Nfr-irt-Pth</i>
Mariette, <i>Mastabas</i> D 40	○		○ ○		○ ●							<i>ḥnh-m^c-R^c</i>

Nxn-Ra Userkaf

@m-nTr	4
@m-nTr Ra	25 ₂₁₊₍₄₎
@m-nTr Ra @wt-@r	2
@m-nTr @r	2
Imy-r pr-Sna	2
Imy-r Hwt-Smat	1
Imy-r sS	1 ₍₁₎
%HD wab	2 ₁₊₍₁₎
%HD wab Ra	1
Wab Ra	2 ₁₊₍₁₎
@ry-sStA Ra	1 ₍₁₎
%S nswt m sDAwt nbt ntt	1

^sp-ib-Ra Niuserra

@m-nTr	4 ₃₊₍₁₎
@m-nTr Ra	12 ₁₁₊₍₁₎
Imy-xt Hm-nTr	1
Imy-r	1
Imy-r wpwt	1 ₍₁₎
%HD pr-Sna	1
Wab	2 ₁₊₍₁₎
@ry-sStA Ra @wt-@r	1 ₍₁₎

%t-ib-Ra Neferirkara

@m-nTr Ra	17 ₁₆₊₍₁₎
@m-nTr Ra @wt-@r	16 ₁₂₊₍₄₎
@m-nTr Ra-@r-Axt	2
Imy-xt Hm-nTr	1 ₍₁₎
Imy-xt Hm-nTr Ra	1
Imy-xt Hm-nTr Nfr.ir.kA.Ra Ra	1 ₍₁₎
@wt-@r	
%HD Hm-nTr	1
Imy-r	1
Imy-r pr-Sna	1
%S mDAt StAt nswt bity	1 ₍₁₎
Nfr.ir.kA.Ra Ra @wt-@r	
Imy-xt wab Ra	1 ₍₁₎
Imy-xt wab Ra @wt-@r	1 ₍₁₎
@ry-sStA Ra	1
@ry-sStA Ra @wt-@r	2 ₍₂₎

%xt-Ra Sahura

@m-nTr Ra	2
Imy-r	1
Wab Ra	1

@tp-Ra Neferefra

@m-nTr Ra	1 ₍₁₎
Imy-r	1

Axt-Ra Menkauhor

@m-nTr Ra	3 ₂₊₍₁₎
Imy-xt Hm-nTr Ra	2

Pl. 2. Priest offices in the sun temples according to the epigraphic sources coming from private funerary context and seal-prints (the latter put in brackets).