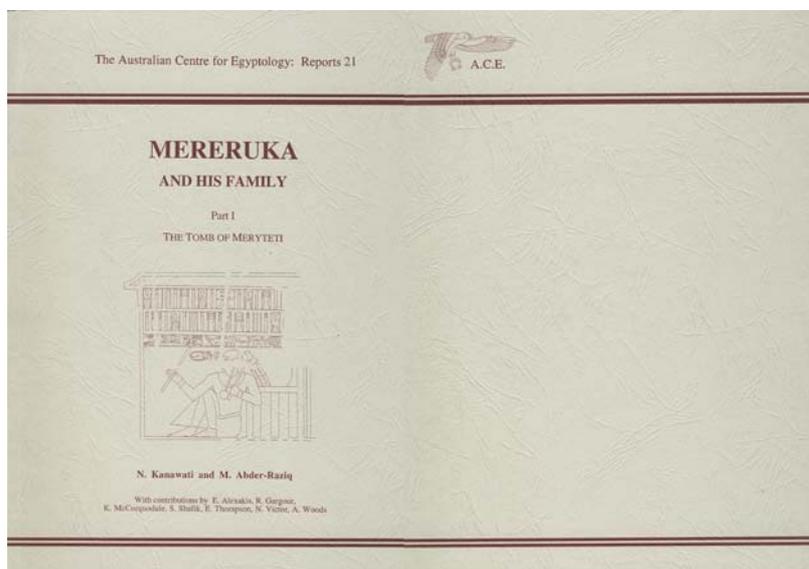


**Kanawati, N. & M. Abder-Raziq. 2005. Mereruka and his Family. Part I: The Tomb of Meryteti. – Oxford, Aris and Phillips (The Australian Centre for Egyptology: Reports 21)**

Book review by V. Chauvet



The mastaba of Mereruka is without any doubt one of the best known monuments in the necropolis of Saqqara. The accessibility of the tomb, however, overshadows the fact that this funerary complex is only partially published. Daressy (1900) focused exclusively on the edition of the main inscriptions and Duell's magnificent publication 'The Mastaba of Mereruka' (1938) does not cover the sections of the complex dedicated to Mereruka's wife and son. The 21<sup>st</sup> report of the Australian Centre for Egyptology co-authored by Naguib Kanawati and Mahmud Abder-Raziq is the first of several books meant to complete the publication of the monument: architecture, inscriptions and scenes.

This volume is devoted to the tomb of Meryteti, Mereruka's son, whose funerary apartments lie to the north of his father's quarters. A second volume dedicated to the tomb of Watetkhether/Zeshzeshet, Mereruka's wife and Meryteti's mother, which occupies the south-west corner of the mastaba, is in preparation. A study of Mereruka's family, which we are told will provide additional information about his sons and their respective occupation of the complex should follow.

The 'Introduction' (p. 11–12) is probably the most important section in the publication as it succinctly presents an overview of the key features pertinent to the analysis of the history of the monument. Kanawati & Abder-Raziq follow the conclusions first presented by Nims (1938: 638–647) that Meryteti, despite his title "king's eldest son of his body," was the son of Mereruka and Watetkhether "king's eldest daughter of his body." They briefly review the evidence testifying to the various occupation phases of the monument. The tomb which was originally designed for Meryteti was 'usurped', in phase two, by another son of Mereruka named Pepyankh. The new tomb owner substituted his name and removed only Meryteti's distinctive title "king's eldest son of his body." In a third and final phase, the tomb reverted to Meryteti; his name was re-inscribed, and the name Pepyankh incorporated into a new title "inspector of the priests of the pyramid of Pepy." An abbreviated title "king's son" was also restored. Relying on Nims' analysis, Kanawati & Abder-Raziq finally explain the change of ownership as being directly related to the unusual dynamic of Mereruka's family. Meryteti was Mereruka's designated heir because of his royal lineage (grandson of the king), but was not in fact his eldest son (phase 1). The balance of power within the family seems to have shifted during the reign of Pepy, and Mereruka's first-born son, by a previous marriage, claimed Meryteti's heritage and his tomb as his due (phase 2). For reasons which remain to be clarified, ownership of the tomb finally reverted to Meryteti (phase 3). Particular attention needs to be paid to the 'Introduction' as those important points are for most part not reiterated later in the volume.

The first section of the volume (p. 13–17) identifies the names and titles of Meryteti and of the members of his household. Forty-nine titles are listed for Meryteti. It should be noted that the titles listed in this section reflect the third and last occupation phase, not the original. Thus the 'restored' title *z3 nswt* "king's son" (# 39) is given, instead of *z3 nswt smsw n ht.f* "king's eldest son of his body", the original title of Meryteti which is also found in Mereruka's chapel (p. 11). Similarly the title *shd hm ntr Mn-nfr-Ppjj* "inspector of priests of the pyramid of Pepy" (# 45) was added when the monument reverted to Meryteti. As to the title [*shd*] *hntj-s Mn-nfr-*

*Mrj-j-R* "inspector of the guards of the pyramid of Meryre" (# 47), it occurs only once in the monument, in the thickness of the entrance doorway which was decorated last (Nims, 1938: 642).

Meryteti inherited most of his titles from his father Mereruka. The fact noted in the Introduction (p. 11) – that none of the administrative titles originally given to Meryteti were erased when the tomb was taken over by Pepyankh – is central to the interpretation that the shift of ownership coincided with Pepyankh taking over those offices, in a fratricidal struggle for succession. Considering the importance of this debate, it is surprising that no distinction is made here between the inherited titles and the titles singular to Meryteti. Notwithstanding the titles added later (those with the name of Pepy), the positions that Meryteti did not inherit are: *hm-ntr Nḥbt* 'priest of Nekhbet' (# 19), *hm-ntr Hr Jnpw ḥntj pr šmswt* 'priest of Horus–Anubis who presides over the Suite' (#20), *hm-ntr Hr ḥrj-jb ḥ* 'priest of Horus who is in the ḥ-palace' (#21), and *ḥtmj-ntr m wj3wj ʿ3(wj)* 'god's sealer in the two great barks' (# 35).

Several relatives of Meryteti are identified in section I: his wife Nebet and two sons Ihy/Ihyemsaf and Niankhmin. As noted by the authors (p. 16), the identification of Ihy with Ihyemsaf is fairly secured by an inscription written in two columns in front of the small figure at the feet of Meryteti on the east wall of room C4 which reads (p. 43, pls. 36, 55a): "his eldest son, his beloved, the lector priest, he who is privy to the secret of the house of morning, Ihy, the honoured one before the great god, Ihyemsaf." What is not mentioned in section I is the fact that Ihy/Ihyemsaf's filiations with Meryteti is only presumptive (as is Niankhmin's, and Nebet's connection to Meryteti). The figures and associated inscriptions are not part of the original decoration of the tomb, but were added later 'in surcharge'. Evidence of re-carving is clearly visible on the photographs (pls. 3, 4b, 5a, 36a. Although no photograph of the figure of Niankhmin in the second register of the south wall of Room C3 is available, the tracing [pl. 49] shows that his name and titles were squeezed into an already existing procession of offering bringers). While Kanawati & Abder-Raziq refer, in the description of the relevant scenes, to Ihy/Ihyemsaf as "presumably his [Meryteti's] son" (p. 24), they do not justify why, considering the re-carving, he could not just as likely be Pepyankh's son.

The second section of this volume (p. 18) presents a brief discussion of the date of the monument which the authors place between the end of the reign of Teti and the middle of the reign of Pepy I. First Kanawati & Abder-Raziq convincingly reject the suggestion that the completion of the tomb of Meryteti may have dated to the reign of Pepy II, since the name Pepy only occurs in the name *Mn-nfr-Ppjj* which designates the funerary complex of Pepy I. Even if the funerary institutions which Meryteti served outlasted the death of the king for several generations, it is unlikely that the career of Mereruka's son would have extended that late into the 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.

Kanawati & Abder-Raziq then point out that the stylistic analysis of the decoration also suggests a date under Pepy I. It is noteworthy that Cherpion's stylistic criterion 36 (1989: 183–84) – the long chain with an amulet – which is unattested after the reign of Pepy I, appears on the south wall of room C1 which was decorated during the original phase of the monument. Similarly, Cherpion's criterion 31 (1989: 180–81) – the long wig exposing the ears – which only becomes common after the reign of Teti, only appears in the entrance thickness which was decorated last. Finally the authors attempt to secure the date of the final occupation phase to the middle of Pepy I's reign by noting that, unlike the unpublished mastaba of Inumenu, the tomb of Meryteti does not use Pepy I's earlier name, Nefersahor, but only the name Meryre which was adopted in the first half of his reign.

The idea to which the authors allude to throughout the volume – that the original phase of the tomb of Meryteti dates to the reign of Teti – is not actually documented and therefore remains conjectural. The decoration sequence in the mastaba of Mereruka clearly indicates that Meryteti was not yet born when the original core of the mastaba was decorated. While Watetkhehther, Meryteti's mother and Mereruka's second wife, is represented in every scene by her husband's side, Meryteti is not depicted among his children. His figure was added at a later date, in surcharge, after his birth. He would be portrayed yet later as a young adult (without beard) in the original decoration of room A10; the distinctive style of this room validates that it was a later addition (Duell, 1938: 4).

The depiction of the tomb owner as a beardless man in the original decoration of the tomb of Meryteti (in contrast with the scenes added in phase 3, particularly the entrance thickness where he has a beard) suggests that he was at an early stage of his adult life when the monument was built. The well known scene from the tomb of Ankhmahor (Kanawati & Hassan, 1997: pls. 19, 55) shows that circumcision, which marked the entrance into adulthood for boys, was performed during puberty (Brewer & Teeter, 1999: 98) although later texts indicate that it might have taken place as early as 7 or 11 years old (Jansen-Winkel, 1993: 224). It should be stressed that the depiction of Meryteti in a palanquin chair (north wall of room C1 – p. 26, pls. 7a, 47), does not feature him "as a child with side-lock" (Nims, 1938: 641), but as a beardless adult with a braid ending in a disk or ball. This iconographic feature, most commonly seen on women and dancers, has been identified as a symbol of youth (Kanawati, 1999: 290–294). Yet attestations of married women with this hairdo mean that these were pubescent individuals. Finally, the fact that the original decoration scheme did not include wife and children further

suggests that Meryteti may not yet have been married. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the tomb of Meryteti was built no earlier (*terminus post quem*) than ten to fifteen years after the original mastaba of Mereruka. If, as Kanawati argues, the reign of Teti did not exceed 11 years (Kanawati, 2000; 2003: 141), then it is difficult to see the tomb of Meryteti being built during the reign of this king.

Also arguing against a date in the reign of Teti is the fact that Meryteti is presented as an office-holder. The evidence we have about the administrative curriculum depicts a progressive promotion system over the course of one's lifetime (Eyre, 1994: 110–116; Jansen–Winkel, 1993). While priestly offices may have been assumed at an early age, there is no indication that administrative offices were assigned before an individual reached adulthood.

Kanawati & Abder–Raziq circumvent this issue by suggesting that the decoration was designed when Meryteti was still a child “*in anticipation* of his attainment of manhood” (p. 11). Surprisingly, the authors do not seek to substantiate this hypothesis with evidence. They might have mentioned that another document from Saqqara presents similar circumstances. The false-door of Hemmin (CG1417) which was set up in the tomb of his father Tepemankh [II] (Saqqara No. 76, D11) reads: “It is for (my) eldest son, the seal-bearer of the divine book, Hemmin, that I made this, when he was a child” (Urk I [19 B]: 33, 10–13). Yet, on the monument Hemmin is depicted as an adult, and accompanied by a string of titles, some of which were inherited from his father. Like Meryteti, however, Hemmin has titles of his own which testify to his being old enough to hold such positions.

In conclusion, Kanawati & Abder–Raziq's suggested sequence places the construction of Meryteti's tomb, as an extension to Mereruka's mastaba, during the reign of Teti. They suggest that Pepyankh's takeover of the monument coincided with a change of fortune linked with the accession of Pepy I to the throne. They finally place the return of the tomb to its original owner some years later after the king adopted the name Meryre, a change which is evidenced in the string of titles linked to the third phase of occupation.

There is clearly more to this discussion than what is presented in this volume. The authors (p. 12) mention that evidence pertaining to Pepyankh's “appointment to an important provincial position” may provide further insight into the history of Mereruka's family and consequently this monument. We trust that the upcoming volumes in this series will bring further clarification on this issue.

Part III (p. 19–20) presents the architectural description of the monument. The presentation is very detailed, but also very limited. Soon after its discovery in 1893 by Jacques de Morgan, the funerary complex of Mereruka was roofed to provide shelter for the wonderfully preserved wall decoration (Duell, 1938: xiv–xv). Daressy seems to have been the only one to record the monument prior to its restoration; the plan he published gives some architectonic details which have since been concealed (Daressy, 1900: 520; Duell, 1938: 9).

Kanawati & Abder–Raziq (p. 28) frequently refer to Meryteti's chapel as being “located within Mereruka's mastaba”, a view which undoubtedly reflects the authors' belief that Mereruka was directly involved in the construction of his son's tomb (p. 11). While visually part of the funerary complex of Mereruka, the tomb of Meryteti remains, structurally, a later addition to his father's original mastaba. The current state of preservation of the complex may not allow a detailed investigation of the monument's masonry, yet the evidence at hand is unquestionable: access to Meryteti's apartments was gained by removing already decorated ashlar from the north wall of Mereruka's pillared hall A13 (pl. 1).

The key feature in section III is the discussion of the junction of the masonry of Meryteti's tomb with the adjoining tomb of Kagemni on the east. Kanawati & Abder–Raziq note that the east walls of rooms C1, C3 and C4 have a batter. This feature is important since it confirms that the extension on the north side of Mereruka's original mastaba for Meryteti was built against the pre-existing slanted casing wall of Kagemni's mastaba. It is uncertain why the inclination of the east wall varies from 5° to 10°, from room to room, and even within the same room; the idea which is suggested by the authors, that the east wall of Meryteti's tomb may not actually be the casing to Kagemni's mastaba, but a sequence of walls built against it, could explain that peculiarity.

One should keep in mind that no one has yet been able to make a detailed architectural study of the mastaba complexes of Mereruka and Kagemni. Duell (see discussion of the architecture of hall A 10, Duell, 1938: 9–10) suggested that, to some extent, the two monuments might have been built in conjunction. Saad (1943: 451, pl. 36) noted that the masonry of the back outer walls of Kagemni and Mereruka (in fact Meryteti) was joined, indicating contemporaneity. Baer (1960: 82 [197]), on the contrary, sees the back wall of Meryteti's tomb abut Kagemni's. Kanawati and Abder–Raziq do not express an opinion in this regard.

The burial apartment of Meryteti is briefly discussed in section IV (p. 20–21, pls. 37–38, 43). It is unclear when access to the underground burial chamber was first gained. In his 1938 publication, Duell (1938: 2) notes that the tomb chamber had not yet been excavated. Kanawati & Abder–Raziq do not give reference to any prior work in this area. They state that “the burial chamber was found plundered and held some human remains and pottery” (p. 20). The material, twelve vessels and a mud jar seal, is published in section VII (p. 45–47, pls. 39–40, 56–57) of this volume, but no further mention is made of the human remains.

Unlike the tomb of Mereruka, a shaft built in the core of the mastaba of Meryteti led to the burial chamber. At the bottom of the shaft, the burial chamber opened to the south, placing the sarcophagus in line with

the false-door in room C3. The authors describe with some precision, how the underground section was completed after lowering down the limestone sarcophagus: the lower portion of the shaft was lined with irregular limestone blocks, the floors of the shaft and the burial chamber were raised and paved, burying the sarcophagus up to the lid (p. 20–21). Evidence of alteration in the inscriptions on the lid of the sarcophagus reflects the three phases of ownership of the tomb (p. 44, pls. 37–38, 55b).

Section V (p. 21–44) of the publication deals with the decoration of the tomb. Room by room, wall by wall, the scenes are identified and described with the transliteration and translation of the adjoining inscriptions. In many regards, the decoration of the tomb of Meryteti is not out of the ordinary. The nature of the scenes is in keeping with the layout and function of the rooms that we have come to expect in private tombs of this time period (Harpur, 1987; Van Walsem, 2005). Thus Kanawati & Abder-Raziq stress that the scenes related to the 'Fishing and Fowling' theme are expectedly located in the outermost room (p. 23). They underline the fact that the scenes of butchery on the east wall of room C3 are in keeping with the layout of offering rooms (p. 38). Finally, they note that the scenes in room C4 are typical of the decoration of magazines which are similarly located in tombs of this time period (p. 40 and note 174). The fact that this room is directly connected with the serdab (C5) does not appear to have played a role in the decoration program.

Kanawati & Abder-Raziq's description and references draw the reader's attention to the themes and scenes that have parallels in the tombs of Mereruka and Watetkhether, in the contemporary Teti Cemetery, or in the mastaba of Tjy which, one should not forget, served as a direct source of inspiration for the decoration of the mastaba of Mereruka (Edel, 1944: 59–70). Thus, for instance, the publication mentions that scenes of 'poultry farm' (room C1, east wall) are first attested in the tomb of Tjy, and becomes a popular motif in the tombs of the Teti Cemetery (p. 28). The 'desert hunt' is another theme which is singled out and discussed in detail (p. 23–26). The authors note that, while this theme derives from the funerary temple of Sahure and has been known in private mortuary settings since the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, the viciousness and graphic nature of the scene is a novel and local feature. The absence of a fenced-off enclosure which is singled out as a unique feature in the publication, is in fact paralleled in the tomb of Raemka (MMA 08.201.1), where the scene is similarly laid out on a narrow wall (MMA, 1999: 400–401 [147]). Finally, the publication stresses the prominence given to fish and live geese in the procession of offering in room C1 (south wall) and suggests that this theme might parallel the dragnet scenes which are similarly prominent in the decoration of the chapels of Watetkhether and Mereruka (p. 23). In so doing, they integrate the tomb of Meryteti in the decoration program of the whole complex.

The lack of information regarding style and craftsmanship in this section dedicated to the decoration of the tomb is unfortunate because these features relate directly to the discussion of the decoration sequence. In the 'Introduction', Kanawati & Abder-Raziq identify the basic alterations made to the name of the tomb owner for each occupation phase (see above); they state on p. 12 that "no changes were made to the [original] scenes", but that each of the three stages "show considerable variation in style, with the second being the most inferior and the last the best". At the beginning of section V, they state that the quality of the reliefs declines as one progresses towards the back of the tomb (p. 21). No reference is made here to Nims' (1938: 641) observations regarding the decoration sequence, namely that "at the time of the original decoration, the west wall and west portion of the north and south walls of chamber C4 were left unfinished", to be completed during phase two, and that the decoration (Nims, 1938: 642) "of the entrance jambs and probably the majority, if not all, of the names of the servitors" belonged to the final phase. Actually Kanawati & Abder-Raziq's (p. 27) description of the decoration of the east wall of room C1 as "a continuation of the eastern thickness of the chapel's entrance doorway" appears to contradict this earlier analysis. The text does not include comments regarding the style of the carving and rarely mentions when evidence of re-carving is visible. Only the photographs included at the end of the volume (pls. 1–36) show the distinctive stylistic differences and the clear signs of alteration and re-carving. Unfortunately large segments of the wall decoration are not included in the photographic coverage such as, for instance, the west section of the north and south wall of chamber C4, which according to Nims were carved by Pepyankh.

In conclusion, Kanawati & Abder-Raziq's publication of the mastaba of Meryteti fills a significant gap in the documentation of one of the most important monuments of the 6<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. While the analysis of the material is still under way, this first volume in this series dedicated to the mastaba of Mereruka reveals that the monument holds key information which might provide new insight into the history of the time period, more specifically the transition between the reigns of Teti and Pepy I. Our understanding of the Teti cemetery is already significantly improved by the publication, in this volume, of a new plan of the northern part of the Teti Cemetery (pl. 41) including the architectural outlines of all the tombs excavated by Kanawati and his team over the last twenty years.

Kanawati, N. & M. Abder-Raziq. 2005. Mereruka and his Family. Part I: The Tomb of Meryteti. – Oxford, Aris and Phillips (The Australian Centre for Egyptology: Reports 21). 52 pp. ISBN 0–85668–816–9. Price £ 20.00 (paperback).

**Cited literature**

- Baer, K. 1960.** Rank and Title in the Old Kingdom. The Structure of the Egyptian Administration in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties. – Chicago, The University of Chicago Press.
- Brewer, D.J. & E. Teeter. 1999.** Egypt and the Egyptians. – Cambridge/New York, Cambridge University Press.
- Cherpion, N. 1989.** Mastabas et hypogées d’Ancien Empire: le problème de datation. – Bruxelles, Connaissance de l’Égypte ancienne.
- Daressy, G. 1900.** Le mastaba de Mera. – Mémoires présentés à l’Institut Égyptien 3: 520–574.
- Duell, P. 1938.** The Mastaba of Mereruka, 2 vols. – Chicago: University of Chicago Press (The University of Chicago Oriental Institute Publications XXXI, XXXIX).
- Edel, E. 1944.** Untersuchungen zur Phraseologie der ägyptischen Inschriften des Alten Reiches. – Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo 13: 1–90.
- Eyre, C.J. 1994.** Weni's Career and Old Kingdom Historiography. In: **Eyre, C.J., A. Leahy & L. Montagnon Leahy. Eds. 1994.** The Unbroken Reed. Studies in the Culture and Heritage of Ancient Egypt in Honour of A.F. Shore. – London, The Egypt Exploration Society: 107–124.
- Firth, C.M. & B. Gunn. 1926.** Excavations at Saqqara: Teti Pyramid Cemeteries. – Le Caire, Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale.
- Harpur, Y. 1987.** Decoration in Egyptian Tombs of the Old Kingdom. Studies in Orientation and Scene Content. – London/New York, KPI.
- Jansen-Winkel, K. 1993.** The Career of the Egyptian High Priest Bakenkhons. – Journal of Near Eastern Studies 52, 3: 221–225.
- Jones, D. 2000.** An index of ancient Egyptian titles, epithets and phrases of the Old Kingdom. – Oxford, Archaeopress.
- Kanawati, N. 1999.** Some Iconographic Peculiarities in the Teti Cemetery. In: **Ziegler, Ch. Ed. 1999.** L’art de l’Ancien Empire égyptien. – Paris, Documentation française: 281–310.
- Kanawati, N. 2000.** A new *ḥ3t/rnpt-zp* for Teti and its implication of Old Kingdom chronology. – Göttinger Miszellen 177: 25–31.
- Kanawati, N. 2001.** The Tomb and Beyond. Burial Customs of Egyptian Officials. – Warminster, Aris & Phillips.
- Kanawati, N. 2003.** Conspiracies in the Egyptian palace, Unis to Pepy I. – London/New York, Routledge.
- Kanawati, N. & A. Hassan. 1997.** The Teti Cemetery at Saqqara, Volume II: The Tomb of Ankhmahor. – Warminster, Aris & Phillips (The Australian Centre for Egyptology: Reports 9).
- MMA. 1999.** Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids. – New York, Metropolitan Museum.
- Nims, C.F. 1938.** Some notes on the family of Mereruka. – Journal the American Oriental Society 58: 638–647.
- Saad, Z.Y. 1943.** Preliminary Report on the Excavations of the Department of Antiquities at Saqqara 1942–43. – Annales du Service des Antiquités Égyptiennes 43: 449–486.
- Strudwick, N. 1985.** The administration of Egypt in the Old Kingdom: the highest titles and their holders. – London/Boston, KPI.
- Vandier, J. 1964.** Manuel d’archéologie égyptienne, Tome IV: Bas-reliefs et peintures. – Paris, A. et J. Picard.
- Walsem, van, R. 2005.** Iconography of Old Kingdom Elite Tombs. – Leiden, Peeters (Mémoires de la Société d’Étude Orientales “Ex Oriente Lux” 35).