

Observations on the *ibw*-tent: preliminary results

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1 figure

Abstract

The preliminary results of a study on the Old Kingdom *ibw*-tent are presented. The physical appearance of the tent itself will be discussed as well as the function the tent might have had: it was both the entrance to the actual necropolis and the gateway to the netherworld.

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1. Introduction

Several Old Kingdom tombs show representations of the funeral of the tomb-owner. Some of these representations include an oblong tent, referred to as '*ibw*' in the accompanying text. This *ibw*-tent also occurs in the Coffin Texts, but in the New Kingdom it has disappeared from the burial-ritual.

The first to study this tent was Grdseloff (1941), who is the author of the only monograph on the subject. Grdseloff states that the *ibw*-tent was used twice; one time as the location of the mummification and one time as the location of the 'Opening-of-the-Mouth'-ceremony. Hassan (1943) refers to the *ibw*-tent as 'washing-tent' and claims to have found remains of it in front of Cheprens valley temple. Schott (1950) relates the *ibw*-tent to the ritual morning bath and situates the tent somewhere in the valley temple. Kees (1956) suggests that in the *ibw*-tent the embalming is symbolically re-enacted and that the tent is located in the vicinity of the valley temple. Settgast (1963) identifies the *ibw*-tent as the place where the *Stundenwachen* were held. Barguet (1972) argues that the *ibw*-tent is the location of the mummification, Brovarski (1977) also states the tent is the scene place for a ritual cleansing and washing-ceremony, whereas Hoffmeier (1981) suggests that the *ibw*-tent is a representation of the 'Field-of-Rushes.' Barta (1985) suggests that the *ibw*-tent was a mere storage-tent for the supplies needed in rituals and Willems (1996) argues that the tent was located on the quay of valley temples.

Unfortunately these combined efforts have little increased our understanding of the subject. In general, the authors agree on the fact that some sort of cleansing ritual took place in the tent, and that valley temples are somehow related to the *ibw*-tent, but what the aim of the ritual was and what exactly the relation to the valley temples was, remains unclear. In the present work a review of the available evidence is presented; in the first part attention is given to the physical appearance of the tent, whereas its function will be determined in the second part. The relation of the *ibw*-tent to the other structures of the burial ritual and parts of this ritual itself will not be discussed. For this, the reader is referred to the forthcoming study, which also include a more elaborate review of the discussion on the tent, a comparison of the tent to other structures in the Old Kingdom-burial ritual, a discussion on this burial ritual and an analysis of the relevant Coffin Text spells (Roode, in review).

2. Physical appearance

2.1. The *ibw*-tent in Old Kingdom representations

Only five tombs contain representations of the *ibw*-tent; they all date to the 6th Dynasty. Two tombs in Giza, those of Qar and Idu, show an *ibw*-tent. In Saqqara the tomb of Mereruka has an *ibw*-tent. According to Grdseloff (1941) and Badawy (1978) the tomb of Anchmahor in Saqqara also featured an *ibw*-tent. They base their conclusion on the similarity between the lay-out of the depiction of the burial scene in this tomb and that in the tombs in which the depictions of the *ibw*-tent can still be observed. Furthermore one tomb in Meir, that of Pepi-Anch, contains depictions of the *ibw*-tent. The tent is shown twice in this tomb.

In the tomb of Qar, the tent is shown as an oblong construction with clearly plaited texture (see Simpson, 1976). On both ends a simple door can be seen, which is probably fitted with a cavetto-ornament. From each door a road, indicated by the word *w3.t*, runs to the waterfront. Furthermore, an elongated structure, which is decorated with fine zigzag lines, runs from the centre of the tent, also to the waterfront. The function of this structure is unknown. An open space is depicted between the tent and the waterfront in which some objects are shown. To the left, two chests are standing with the text *dbḥ.w n ḥm.t ḥry-hb.t*. To the right two loaves of bread, a vase and a thigh-bone are depicted, accompanied by the text *dbḥ.w n iw d3.t-r*. Above the tent, the inventory of the tent is shown; this inventory will be discussed below.

In the tomb of Idu, the tent is also depicted as an oblong structure, but without any details (see Simpson, 1976). This makes an identification of the material of which the tent is constructed, impossible. On both ends a simple door is shown, without any decoration or ornaments. From each door, a road runs to the waterfront. The roads are placed at an angle, which indicates that the roads in reality are sloping rather than actually placed at an angle to the door. From the middle of the tent again the unknown element protrudes. The inventory is shown above the tent.

The representation of the tent in the tomb of Mereruka is slightly different (see Duell, 1938). Here, the tent is shown as an oblong construction as well, but on the ends a doorwing is shown, which is directed towards the middle of the tent. The roof of the tent is depicted as an elongated *p.t*-sign. The elongated structure in the centre is again present although the inventory is missing.

In the tomb of Pepi-Anch the tent is represented twice (see Blackman, 1953). In both depictions the tent is shown as an oblong structure. The details of the construction are clearly visible; the tent is made by a row of tent poles sustaining a beam. A door with a clear cavetto-ornament is present on both ends. The construction in the centre is depicted as well, although slightly different from the other representations because it appears to be split in two separate parts. The inventory is not shown except for several objects, which are being carried by men in the register to the right of the tent.

Summarizing, on the basis of the representations of the tent, the *ibw*-tent was an oblong structure, with a door on each end and two pathways leading from each door to the waterfront. Several objects are connected to the tent or its function, because they are consequently shown in association with the tent.

2.2. Textual references to the tent

The *ibw*-tent is also mentioned in the Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts. These texts are partly adapted from the Pyramid Texts and intended for royal use only. In the Pyramid Texts the *ibw*-tent is referred to as *sh-ntr* (PT 2100, spell 690; PT 130, spell 210). In the Coffin Texts the *ibw*-tent is mentioned in spells 44 and 60. Spell 44 states that the deceased will cloak himself in the *w^cb*-shroud of the *ibw*-tent, together with ‘He-who-lives-in-its-curtain.’ Spell 60 identifies several parts of the tent with gods. The beams are identified as the arms of Nut, and its curtain is the cloak of Ptah, which Tayt herself has woven. In spell 60, the tent itself is called ‘the portal of the horizon’ and it is said that ‘the portal of the horizon is the calculation of the difference.’ Again, the references lead us to believe that the *ibw* is indeed a tent-like construction.

The interpretation as a tent-like construction is supported by some determinatives of the word ‘*ibw*.’ In the tomb of Pepi-Anch at Meir, the word is determined with an obvious tent-like construction: a series of tent poles supporting a beam. In the tombs of Qar and Idu, a particular determinative is used. It represents the *ibw*-tent itself, together with the structure protruding from the centre. As already remarked, it is unclear what this structure exactly is. Because it is a regular part of the determinative, it apparently is a characteristic part of the tent, without which the tent would not be complete.

2.3. Archaeological evidence

The *ibw*-tent probably was a light construction of temporary nature. The chances of finding any archaeological evidence are little because of the material used. However, Hassan (1943) published certain features, which were uncovered during his 1938/1939 excavation season, directly in front of the valley temple of Chephren. He concluded that these features were remains of an *ibw*-tent. The rather simple map of the alleged *ibw*-tent shows a series of socket holes in a platform in front of the temple, together forming a rectangular ground plan. No other socket holes or any other archaeological remains are shown on the map. Furthermore, the map has no scale. Finally, the map of Hassan differs on essential points from the an earlier map by Hölscher (1912), who had excavated the area in front of the valley temple many years before. A comparison of own observations of the remains in Giza, presented schematically in figure 1, with the Hölscher map revealed that these are identical; the Hassan map proved to be completely different and inaccurate. First, the plan of socket holes as drawn by Hassan does not exist. Second, there is a distinction between circular socket holes and rectangular socket holes. Hassan however, did not include the rectangular socket holes in his map. Instead, he concentrated on the round socket holes he said to have excavated. Hölscher on the other hand included the rectangular socket holes as well, and suggests these might indicate the presence of four sphinxes. This suggestion is based on the characteristic shape of sphinx-statues: semicircular at the hind part and straight at the part where the front paws are located. No remains have been uncovered of the sphinxes. In the middle of the platform a shallow rectangle was found, hewn in the stone of the platform. This feature is also not included in the Hassan map, but it does appear in the map of Hölscher. Furthermore, the Hassan map is the only basis for the claim that an *ibw*-tent has stood in front of Chephrens valley temple. It has been shown the map is incorrect, and the assumption based on this map that there actually was an *ibw*-tent is also incorrect. Later authors, however, based their research time and again on this publication. The assumption that there was an *ibw*-tent on the platform is also questioned by another problem that arises from the survey and Hölschers map: the sphinxes. These sphinxes would have been eight meters in length and almost 2,4 meters in width. They would have taken up most of the space available in the would-be *ibw*-tent, leaving little room for anything else.

However, there is other evidence on the Giza Plateau that does point to the presence of an *ibw*-tent. In front of the valley temple, two sloping pathways lead down from the platform. These pathways are characteristic for an *ibw*-tent, as suggested by the representations, which all show these pathways (see above). Because the possibility of an *ibw*-tent on the platform in front of the valley temple seems highly unlikely as explained above, it is the valley temple itself that attracts attention. According to Edwards (1947) the shape of the portal of the valley temple is derived from a pavilion that was made of tent poles and reed matting. The facade is oblong, with doorways at the ends, and equals the representations of *ibw*-tents in tombs. It is possible that Chephren owned an monumental *ibw*-tent in stone. The only representations of *ibw*-tents, however, are from private tombs. In order to determine whether the valley temple was the royal equivalent of the private *ibw*-tent, a closer look at the function of the *ibw*-tent and whether this function can be related to a royal funerary complex is inevitable.

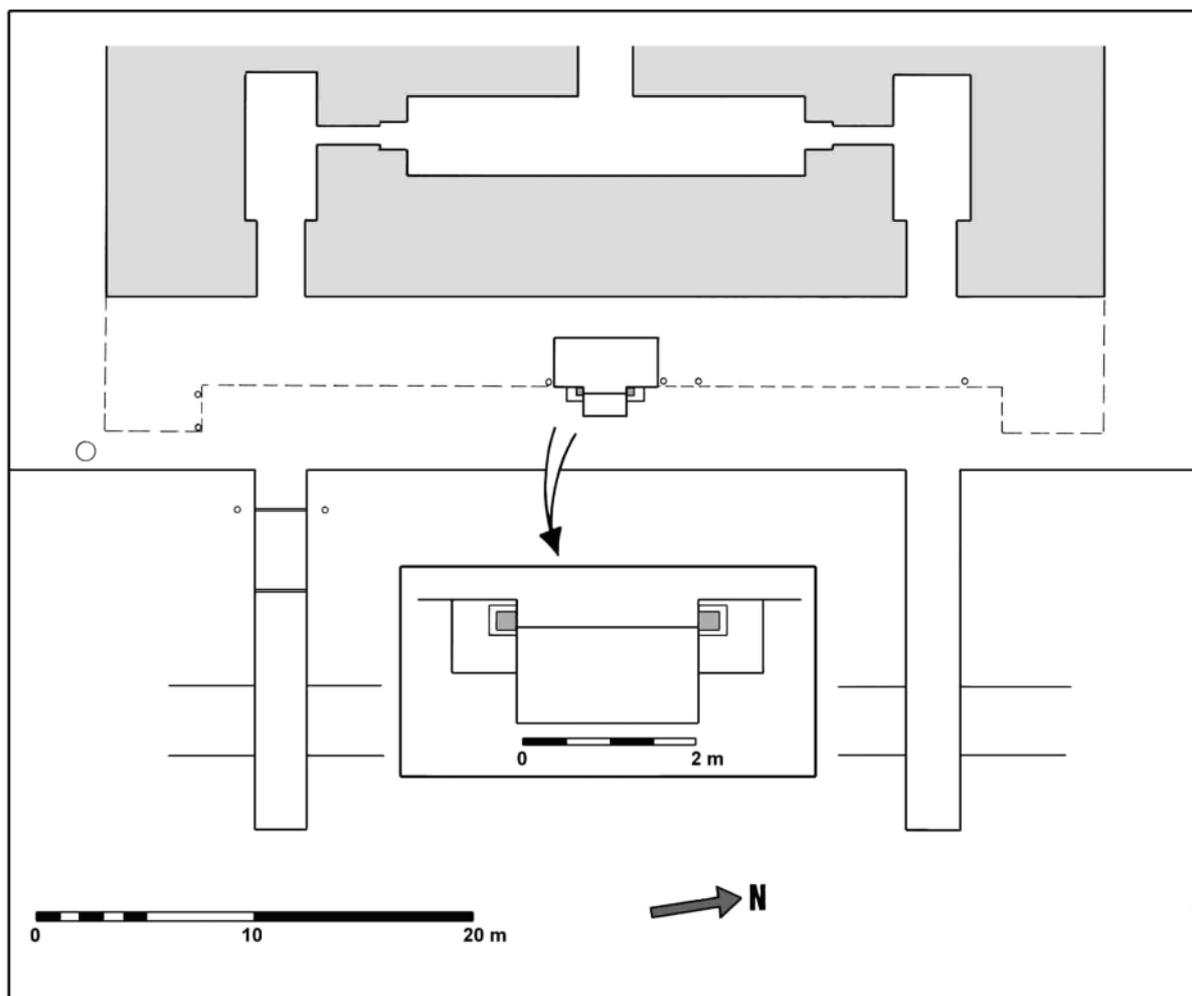


Figure 1. The archaeological remains in front of the valley temple of Chephren, Giza. Drawing by A.M. Hense.

3. Function

3.1. Inventory of the tent

In the representations of *ibw*-tents a series of objects is always included. The recurrence of the same objects in different representations suggests that these objects together form the inventory of the *ibw*-tent, which would have been used in the rites that took place in the tent. Consequently, the objects might shed some light on the nature of these rituals.

In the 6th Dynasty, the *ibw*-tent and its inventory are represented on the walls of the tomb. No representation of the tent nor any textual reference to the tent is known from the First Intermediate Period and in the Middle Kingdom some of the objects of the inventory appear in the decoration of sarcophagi, together with spells related to the *ibw*-tent. From these spells however, it becomes clear that this tent was no longer a standard part of the burial rites, as it had been at the end of the Old Kingdom.

The *snw*-vase is seen in all representations of the inventory of the *ibw*-tent. It looks similar to a large vessel used in two representations of a cleansing ritual in the New Kingdom. In one of these, the deceased is shown seated on a large *snw*-vase while water is poured over him. This might point to an identical ritual being carried out in the *ibw*-tent. However, an Old Kingdom-representation needs not have a direct relation to a New Kingdom-representation. Furthermore, the size of the object indicates that these two similar-looking vases are in fact two different ones. In the scenes of the New Kingdom, the vase obviously is large, in order for the deceased to be seated on. In the Old Kingdom-scenes, the vase is much smaller. Of course this could be contributed to the nature of Egyptian art, in which playing with dimensions and scaling is common. For instance, in the tomb of Pepi-Anch, the sarcophagus is shown being carried by three men. This seems rather a small number of bearers to carry a coffin; in reality there must have been more. The scene shows, however, the *idea* of the coffin being too heavy to be carried by just one person. In depicting three, the ancient artist wants to say that many people were

needed to carry such a heavy sarcophagus. The same tomb shows a depiction of the *snw*-vase, which is carried by one man on his shoulder, together with other men carrying various other items of the inventory. But another *snw*-vase, containing wine, is depicted in this tomb as well. This time it is a large vessel, compared to the person standing next to it. This indicates that if a representation of a large *snw*-vase was necessary, it would be depicted as such. Thus, it can be argued that the *snw*-vase, which was used in the rituals in the *ibw*-tent, was not exceptionally large and therefore not the same as the one in the New Kingdom scenes.

Retracing the New Kingdom-ritual of cleansing the deceased on a large *snw*-vase directly to the Old Kingdom-representations of the *snw*-vase in the inventory of the *ibw*-tent is not a logical course of action, given the time span between the Old and the New Kingdom. There is however an indication for the use of this vase. In the Coffin Texts (spell 235), the body fluid is returned to the deceased. The spell is located directly underneath a representation of a *snw*-vase in the object frieze. In the ritual the vase probably was used and contained water or another liquid, symbolizing the body fluid of Osiris. In this way, the mummified body of the deceased was complemented with the necessary fluids (Willems, 1996). This could very well be the purpose of the *snw*-vase in the *ibw*-tent: to restore ones body fluid to him.

Different types of vessels figure in the inventory, next to the *snw*-vase. The *mrg*-vase is always shown next to the *snw*-vase. Apparently, there is a logical relation between the two. It is conceivable that the fluids in the *snw*-vase were poured out using the *mrg*-vase, because the *snw*-vase looks more like a container.

The inventory further consists (among other items) of *nms.t*-vases and *dšr.t*-vases. The *nms.t*-vases are mentioned in the Pyramid Texts, where they are part of a cleansing ritual. The *dšr.t*-vases are often shown together with the *nms.t*-vases and are probably used in a cleansing ritual as well.

3.2. Textual references

Clear statements on the function of the tent are not found in the Coffin Texts. In spell 60 it is said that ‘the portal of the horizon is the calculation of the difference.’ Although ʕ.w originally means ‘excess,’ in mathematical context it generally means ‘difference.’ It might be that this statement refers to the difference between the mummy and a living person, *i.e.* the body fluid that was taken from the body during the mummification process. The ‘portal of the horizon’ evidently is the *ibw*-tent, given the representation in the tomb of Mereruka where the tent is constructed of the hieroglyphs ʕ.w.y p.t, which identifies it as ‘the doors of heaven.’

In the Pyramid Texts the *ibw*-tent is referred to als *sh-ntr*. The word *ibw* is never used. This points to a difference between the royal *ibw*, called *sh-ntr*, and the private *ibw*. The *sh-ntr* is a lightly built, temporary construction as well, as is said in the Pyramid Texts (PT 2100, spell 690): ‘Horus has woven his booth on your behalf.’ It is also said in the Pyramid Texts (PT 130, spell 210) that: ‘My booth is plaited with rushes (in the field of rushes).’

4. Discussion

In order to determine the function of the *ibw*-tent, a brief review of the evidence is presented. First, the tent is a temporary construction, made of tent poles and matting (as is depicted in and shown as such in the tombs of private persons). Second, the tent is mentioned in the Pyramid Texts and the Coffin Texts. Third, the tent is constructed of hieroglyphs naming it the ‘doors of heaven’ in the tomb of Mereruka. Fourth, the Coffin Texts (CT 44) state that the tent is the ‘portal of the horizon’ and that this portal is ‘the calculation of the difference.’ Fifth, the tent has an inventory of objects, that can be related to restoring ones body fluid and to cleansing the deceased. Finally, the valley temple of Chephren bears a striking resemblance to an the *ibw*-tent.

The denotation of the *ibw*-tent as ‘doors of heaven’ and ‘portal of the horizon’ suggests that the *ibw*-tent was the entrance to the netherworld on a metaphysical level. It was the first stop on the day of the funeral, as is mentioned in the tomb of Pepi-Anch. It could therefore be located at the entrance to the necropolis. In the *ibw*-tent the deceased was prepared to enter the netherworld; he was given back his body fluid which was taken from him during the mummification process. Probably, the statement ‘the calculation of the difference’ is referring to adding that one substance to the mummy that it was lacking, *viz.* the body fluid, thereby restoring the mummy’s completeness and making him ready to enter the netherworld to begin his journey.

The valley temple of Chephren could very well be a royal equivalent to the private *ibw*-tent or even its predecessor. Located at the edge of the necropolis, the burial cortège would enter the necropolis here. It is likely that this entry-point also had a deeper meaning, because as a gateway to the necropolis it separated the world of the living from the world of the dead and thus marked the transition of the deceased from the world of the living to the realm of the dead. In this gateway that separated two worlds, the deceased was prepared to enter the other world by restoring him to a complete individual and by ritually cleansing him so that he might enter the netherworld purified and complete.

The *ibw*-tent depicted in tombs and mentioned in the Coffin Texts is not, as sometimes is claimed, the location of the actual embalming of the corpse. It is however conceivable that the ritual *ibw*-tent, the gateway to the netherworld, is derived from such a tent. Ritually giving back the body fluid to a mummy in the same environment where it was taken from him during mummification seems an acceptable example of Egyptian thinking. It is, however, for now no more than a thought that needs further investigation.

5. Acknowledgments

I thank A.M. Hense and C.H. van Zoest for their assistance in the field. A.M. Hense is also thanked for preparing the figure. H.D. Schneider (National Museum of Antiquities, Leiden, The Netherlands) and R. van Walsem (Leiden University, The Netherlands) are thanked for reviewing an earlier draft in Dutch from which this is the preliminary paper. A.J. Veldmeijer is thanked for reviewing the present work.

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Submitted: 4 April 2003.

Accepted: 26 April 2003.

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