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FAMILY TIES AMONG THE OWNERS OF THE LARGE LATE PERIOD SHAFT TOMBS AT ABUSIR (EGYPT)

ABSTRACT: At the Czech archaeological concession at Abusir (Egypt), a number of Late Period shaft tombs, dating from about 530–500 BCE., have been unearthed. In some of them, skeletal remains of people that were buried there have been found. For the most part, their skeletal remains have been examined by E. Strouhal who suggested possible family relations between some of them. In the present paper, an alternative system of family ties between the owners of Late Period tombs at Abusir and other people buried in the lesser burial chambers there is proposed. Quite hypothetically, all those people might have belonged to one and the same lineage.

KEYWORDS: Egypt – Late Period – Shaft tombs – Family ties

More than forty years ago, when I started to study Egyptology at Charles University in Prague, I met Eugen Strouhal for the first time who, at that time, taught me Prehistory of Northern Africa. Later on and until very recently, we spent many weeks together on archaeological work in various places at Abusir, be it the Unfinished Pyramid complex of King Raneferef of Dynasty 5 (Verner *et al.* 2006) used later on as a huge burial ground for the inhabitants of nearby villages or, most importantly, the large shaft tombs where high dignitaries of the late Dynasty 26 and early Dynasty 27 were buried together with some members of their families. In a way, Eugen Strouhal has thus remained my teacher until now, especially in matters concerning Physical Anthropology and Palaeopathology, and I deeply appreciate his co-operation in the study of the Late Period shaft tombs at Abusir and their owners. I hope, therefore, that he will find pleasure in this short reflection dealing with a topic that is so closely connected with his own work and to which he has contributed so much.

At Abusir, three large Late Period shaft tombs and two medium-size structures of the same type have so far been unearthed (Bareš 2007a). In addition to that, at least two (or even three) large and three to five smaller tombs of

such kind have only been located by archaeological and geophysical survey and still await excavation (Verner 1992). Originally, the Late Period cemetery, situated in the south-western part of the ancient Egyptian necropolis at Abusir, might have consisted of five or six larger tombs and five to seven such structures. After thirty years of exploration, we have every reason to believe that all those tombs are more or less contemporaneous and were built during the very last years of Dynasty 26, i.e. most probably between 530 and 525 BCE. (Bareš 2009), although they might have been partly enlarged and used even much later, perhaps until about 500 BCE. (Bareš *et al.* 2008: 109).

Among the tombs that had been excavated so far, the large tombs of Udjahorresnet (Bareš 1999) and Menekhibnekau (Bareš *et al.* 2010), as well as the smaller tomb of Padihor (Coppens, Smoláriková 2009), were only used for the burials of their owners. All those tombs have been robbed and badly destroyed in antiquity, so that skeletal remains that could have been quite unambiguously attributed to the original owner have been found only in the tombs of Padihor and Menekhibnekau. Because of their very bad state of preservation, however, the anthropological examination of the remains from the tomb of Menekhibnekau (done by

our colleague P. Malá) gave only rather limited results. In the anonymous tomb R 3, also robbed and damaged in antiquity, two large niches adjoining the shaft have been unearthed that might have been used for additional burials. In those niches, as well as in the unfinished burial chamber situated at the bottom of the huge shaft, no skeletal remains were found, although tiny remnants of badly damaged human bones were found in desert sand in the vicinity of that tomb (Strouhal 2009). In the tomb of Iufaa, four more burials were found in addition to the owner of that structure who was buried in its main burial chamber. By coincidence, all those burials, i.e. priest Iufaa buried in the main burial chamber, a lady Imakhetkheretresnet and an anonymous elderly man, both buried in a sloping underground corridor adjoining the main shaft of the tomb from the south (Bareš, Smoláriková 2008: 97–115), and priests Nekau (Bareš, Smoláriková 2008: 116–145) and Gemenehorbak (Bareš, Smoláriková 2008: 156–162) buried each in a separate chamber adjoining the western lateral shaft in the tomb, have been found undisturbed by the tomb robbers, even if they were badly damaged by the excessive humidity.

So far, only the skeletal remains of five individuals who were buried at different places in the complex tomb of Iufaa could have been anthropologically examined in a thorough way (Strouhal, Němečková 2008). On the basis of his observation and analyses, E. Strouhal came to the conclusion that all those five people were more or less related to each other and belonged to one family (Strouhal 2002a, Strouhal 2002b, Strouhal, Klír 2006). According to him, Iufaa and lady Imakhetkheretresnet were siblings, while the very old anonymous man could have most probably been their father; also Nekau and Gemenehorbak were probably brothers and sons of the same man, but from another mother (or mothers?) than Iufaa and Imakhetkheretresnet (Strouhal, Němečková 2008: 281). The very close family relationship between Iufaa and Imakhetkheretresnet is, moreover, supported by the fact that they both mention a lady Ankhtisy as their mother (Bareš, Smoláriková 2008: 94–95, 103–105). Notwithstanding a rather theoretical possibility that there might have existed two ladies of the same name at one time, there is no reason to believe that this is the case, especially in view of the relative rarity of this female name. The name of the father is mentioned for neither Iufaa nor Imakhetkheretresnet; because of that, we are not able to decide whether they were full-blood or only half-blood brother and sister. Strange as it may look in view of the ancient Egyptians' "obsession" with genealogies, the absence of the father's name is rather common in their tombs (Valbelle 1993, Bochi 1999).

In spite of the fact that the old anonymous man, who was buried in the same corridor as the lady Imakhetkheretresnet, seems to be closely related to both her and Iufaa (Strouhal, Němečková 2008: 269–273), some alternative options for his position in the broader family of people buried in the complex tomb of Iufaa should perhaps be considered. In view of the Egyptian marriage pattern, he might have been a cousin to both Iufaa and Imakhetkheretresnet and,

at the same time, her husband. Until very recently, the marriages between direct cousins were quite common in Egypt, especially in the more traditionally orientated communities in Upper Egypt (Chelhod 1965, Kronenberg 1965, Hilal 1972, Cole 1984), following the ancient Egyptian traditions (Černý 1954, Robins 1993: 74, Wilfong 2001); on marriages between relatives in ancient Egypt see now especially Frandsen (2009). Judging from the horizontal stratigraphy, the anonymous old man must have been buried only after Imakhetkheretresnet; the time span between their burials cannot be, however, ascertained with any precision. In view of the long-time use of the whole cemetery, it may have been used for several years or even more, and the anonymous old man could have even been the last person to be buried in this complex tomb.

Unfortunately for us, neither the name of the anonymous old man nor any clue to his ancestry have been preserved on his coffin and canopic jars, as all of them have been badly damaged by humidity. Anyway, there are some additional hints that seem to speak against his identification with the father of Iufaa (and also Imakhetkheretresnet). Generally speaking, the almost solely attested title of Iufaa "Administrator of Palaces" was at that time, around mid-First millennium BCE., not important enough to allow its owner to build such a magnificent tomb (el-Sayed 1976). Iufaa himself died rather young, at about 25–30 years, so that the costly construction of his tomb must have been financed and administered by his family, i.e. most probably by his father (if still alive) who, in that case, would procure at least a comparably rich tomb for himself. Certainly, Iufaa's father might have died long before this dignitary and might have nothing in common with building of his tomb, but in this case again, he cannot be identical with the anonymous old man. There might be some other suggestions concerning his relation to Iufaa and Imakhetkheretresnet, e.g. him being a (paternal?) uncle to them and/or, e.g., father of Nekau and Gemenehorbak buried in the lesser burial chambers inside Iufaa's tomb but, in view of the scarcity of sources, this question should perhaps be left open.

The incomplete and damaged skeletal remains of Padihor, a man buried in a separate medium-size shaft tomb situated some 30 metres to the east from Iufaa's tomb complex, have also been examined by E. Strouhal (Strouhal, Němečková 2008, Strouhal 2009). According to him, Padihor was not a blood relative of Iufaa and the other members of his family who had been buried in Iufaa's tomb. Again, the name of Padihor's father is never mentioned in his tomb, and the name of his mother Nedjem-Bastet-en-iret is not attested elsewhere at Abusir. Also the sole title of Padihor ("The Royal Acquaintance") appears among all people buried in the shaft tombs at Abusir only here and, because of that, it doesn't connect this man with any other personality in Abusir in view of the ancient Egyptian habit of inheriting titles from father to son. Certainly, Padihor might have been married into the broader family of Iufaa but in absence of any relevant source or hint, such a possibility can be neither proven nor rejected.

As mentioned above, all the larger and smaller shaft tombs at Abusir seem to have been built during a rather short period of time, most probably between 530 and 525 BCE. The lesser burial chambers that appear in the tombs of Iufaa and the anonymous tomb R 3 might be either contemporary or only slightly younger than the tombs in general (Bareš 2007b). Because of that, most probably, all the people buried in the tombs at Abusir might have more or less belonged to one and the same generation, even if their age at the time of their death (and, consequently, the burial) might differ considerably. The owners of the tombs must have shared a certain reason (or reasons) for choosing Abusir as their burial ground. In a way, they were connected by the offices they had held at the court of the last independent Egyptian Pharaohs of Dynasty 26 (Bareš 2006) but another possibility cannot be excluded *a priori*, namely that they were all related by either blood or marriage. In the absence of exact anthropological data for some of them (especially Udjahorresnet, Menekhibnekau and the anonymous owner of the tomb R 3), such a hypothesis can be considered only at the basis of indirect hints, especially their names and genealogies and, to a certain degree, also their titles.

The career of Udjahorresnet, also sometimes called "collaborator" (Lloyd 1982) or "traitor of Egypt" (Verner 2002: 177–191) because of his cooperation with the Persian conquerors of his native land, is relatively well known from a long biographical inscription on his statue now kept in the Vatican Museum, inv. no. 22690 (Bareš 1999: 31–43). On his statue, as well as on other monuments to him, the names of both his parents are mentioned, his father being Peftjauemauneith, his mother Amenirdis. While the name of Peftjauemauneith is rather common during Dynasty 26 (Guermeur 2005: 108–109, 111–114, el-Sayed 1975: 230, 235, 245, 266), the name of Amenirdis is quite rare. Certainly, none of those names appears in the genealogy of any other person who had been buried at Abusir. On the other hand, Udjahorresnet's father held the same title "Administrator of the Palaces (of the Red Crown)" as Iufaa, Menekhibnekau and Gemeneffhorbak; in addition

to that, Udjahorresnet and Menekhibnekau held the same title "Overseer of the (Royal) *kbnwt* vessels". These, however, are the only (and very vague) hints that connect Udjahorresnet with other people who had been buried at Abusir in about the same time.

In the case of Menekhibnekau, son of Gemeneffhorbak and the lady Sathapi, there is one more connection between him and the family, whose members were buried in the complex tomb of Iufaa. In spite of the fact that the name of Gemeneffhorbak was fairly common during Dynasty 26 (el-Sayed 1975: 113) the appearance of two men of the same name in the neighbouring and contemporary tombs at Abusir can hardly be accidental. Certainly, the father of Menekhibnekau (Gemeneffhorbak A) must have been much older than his namesake (Gemeneffhorbak B) who had been buried in a lesser burial chamber in the tomb of Iufaa, all the more so because this Gemeneffhorbak B seems to have been the last but one or even the last of all the burials inside the tomb of Iufaa. Moreover, the titles of both men named Gemeneffhorbak were quite different. Given the Egyptian habit of giving a firstborn son the name of his paternal grandfather, both men might have been related in such a way. If so, Menekhibnekau was related to Iufaa, being perhaps his half-brother (?) or cousin. In addition to that, a certain Iufaa (certainly another than the man buried at Abusir) is known as the father of the vizier Gemeneffhorbak whose magnificent inner sarcophagus inv. no. 2201 is now kept in Turin (Buhl 1959: 120–122, el-Sayed 1975: 108–129); both men held, among many other offices, the same (and relatively rare) title *Wr-Hw* "Charged with ointment" (Goyon 1971; el-Sayed 1975: 115) that is attested for Menekhibnekau's father as well. Considering the Egyptian traditions of keeping the same names and titles for several subsequent generations of a family it is very conceivable that the men buried at Abusir might have belonged to the same lineage as those mentioned on the Turin sarcophagus.

Summing up, we have perhaps good reasons to believe that at least the owners of two large shaft tombs excavated so far at Abusir, i.e. Iufaa and Menekhibnekau, including

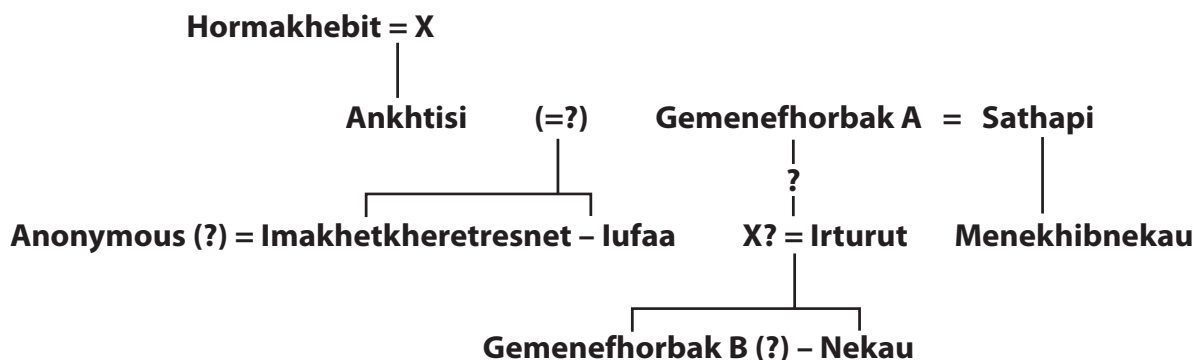


FIGURE 1. The tentative family tree of people buried in the tombs of Iufaa and Menekhibnekau.

other people who were buried in the complex tomb of Iufaa, were blood-related; their hypothetical family connection to the owner of the remaining large shaft tomb known from Abusir, i.e. Udjahorresnet, can be neither proven nor rejected. Their relationship to Padihor and the anonymous owner of the structure R 3, to whom the lesser shaft tombs at Abusir belonged, is uncertain at the moment and most probably will remain so in the future. Only future excavations can show whether the owners of other, yet unexplored tombs at Abusir might have belonged to the same lineage as Iufaa, Menekhibnekau and, perhaps, also Udjahorresnet.

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