The Tombs of Senwosret III

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For Wafaa El-Saddik, remembering the long-gone Viennese Years!

Abstract

Several monumental tombs were built for King Senwosret III at Dahshûr and Abydos, causing complications not only for the modern viewer but apparently also for the pharaonic builders. This article tries to review the nature and chronological succession of these measures based on archaeological observations in the king's pyramid at Dahshûr.

Pharaonic life and culture underwent a significant development in the second half of the Twelfth Dynasty, which impacted religious concepts, the arts, administrative institutions and, last but not least, the funerary customs.[1] The royal funerary architecture of this period was marked, in addition to other innovations, by the sudden appearance of additional rooms inside the kings' and queens' pyramids, which seems to represent empty, symbolic tombs.[2] The creation of symbolic royal tombs originated in the First and Second Dynasties and followed a complex progression over the centuries.[3] One may recognise the satellite pyramids of the kings and queens of the Fourth to the Sixth Dynasties as a connecting link to the Middle Kingdom. The explanation of this practice is much debated, but one might follow M. Lehner's convincing interpretation that they address the king's or queen's *ka*.[4] Some of these tombs indeed contained a specific *ka*-statue but otherwise replicated a 'real' burial by including an empty coffin, a canopic chest and other grave goods.[5]

It seems that during the Twelfth Dynasty, the kings' and queens' *ka*-tombs were transferred from the separate satellite pyramid into the interior of the main pyramid, turning the satellite pyramids obsolete. None was built after the reign of Senwosret III. This transformation was, however, not binding and consistent: The pyramids of Amenemhat I and Amenemhat II have – as far as we know – neither a satellite pyramid nor an internal *ka*-tomb. The pyramid complex of Senwosret II at Lâhûn contained a satellite pyramid but no *ka*-tomb. The designers of Senwosret III complicated the situation for the modern viewer by not only constructing a pyramid at Dahshûr with a traditional satellite pyramid[6] but also built another, totally different burial complex a far distance away at Abydos.[7] The pyramid of Amenemhat III at Dahshûr lacked a

1 See L. Gestermann, *Der politische und kulturelle Wandel unter Sesostris III. – Ein Entwurf*, in: L. Gestermann/H. Sternberg El-Hotabi (eds.), *Per aspera ad astra. Wolfgang Schenkel zum neunundfünfzigsten Geburtstag*, Kassel 1995, pp. 1–8; A. Oppenheim, *Introduction: What was the Middle Kingdom?*, in: A. Oppenheim et al. (eds.), *Ancient Egypt Transformed. The Middle Kingdom*, New York 2015, pp. 1–8.

2 See Di. Arnold, *Royal cult complexes of the Old and Middle Kingdoms*, in: B. E. Shafer (ed.), *Temples of Ancient Egypt*, Cornell 1997, p. 267 n. 114; Di. Arnold, *Buried in two tombs? Remarks on 'cenotaph' in the Middle Kingdom*, in: Z. Hawass/J. Richards (eds.), *The Archaeology and Art of Ancient Egypt. Essays in Honour of David B. O'Connor* 1, in: *CASAE* 36 (2007), pp. 55–61 (hereafter Di. Arnold, *Buried in two tombs?*).

3 See e. g. J.-P. Lauer, *Sur le dualisme de la monarchie égyptienne et son expression architecturale sous les premières dynasties*, in: *BIFAO* 55 (1955), pp. 153–171; T. A. H. Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt*, London 1999, pp. 230–260; D. Wengrow, *The Archaeology of Early Egypt. Social Transformations in North-East Africa, 10,000 to 2,650 BC*, Cambridge 2006, pp. 218–258.

4 M. Lehner, *The Pyramid Tomb of Hetep-heres and the Satellite Pyramid of Khufu*, *SDAIK* 19, Mainz 1985, p. 79, pp. 74–85. See also P. Jánosi, *Die Pyramidenanlagen der Königinnen. Untersuchungen zu einem Grabtyp des Alten und Mittleren Reiches*, in: M. Bietak (ed.), *Denkschriften der Gesamtakademie*, *Untersuchungen der Zweigstelle Kairo des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts* 13, Wien 1995, pp. 161–164, pp. 182–183.

5 The major examples are those of the queens of Senwosret III and Amenemhat III, see Di. Arnold, *The Pyramid Complex of Senwosret III at Dahshur. Architectural Studies*, *Publications of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Egyptian Expedition* 26, New York 2002, pp. 77–79 (hereafter Di. Arnold, *Senwosret III at Dahshur*), and Di. Arnold, *Der Pyramidenbezirk des Königs Amenemhet III. in Dahshur* 1: Die Pyramide, *AV* 53, Mainz 1987, pp. 99–103 (hereafter Di. Arnold, *Amenemhet III. in Dahshur*). One should also consider in this connection the so called "*Bāb al-Huṣān*"; see Di. Arnold, *Der Tempel des Königs Mentuhotep von Deir el-Bahari* 1: *Architektur und Deutung*, *AV* 8, Mainz 1974, pp. 51–53.

6 J. De Morgan, *Fouilles à Dahchour en 1894–1895*, Vienna 1903, pp. 87–97, figs. 131–141 (hereafter J. De Morgan, *Fouilles à Dahchour en 1894–1895*); J. De Morgan, *Notebook. Archival Material in the Museum of Art and History Baron Gérard*, Bayeux/France, o. J., p. 72, p. 74 (personal research); Di. Arnold, *Senwosret III at Dahshur*, pp. 32–43; K. Hamilton, *The Pyramid Complex of Senwosret III. A Layman's guide* 1, May 2020, pp. 7–52, see https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341727249_The_Pyramid_Complex_of_Senwosret_III_A_Laymans_Guide_Part_1 <last access March 2025> (hereafter K. Hamilton, *Senwosret III.*).

7 A. E. P. Weigall, *Tomb and Cemetery of Senusret III*, in: E. R. Ayrton et al. (eds.), *Abydos* III, London/EES 1904, pp. 11–28/section 21–43, pls. 39–41, pl. 43 (hereafter A. E. P. Weigall, *Senusret III*); J. W. Wegner, *The Mortuary Temple of Senwosret III at Abydos*, *Publications of the Pennsylvania-Yale Expedition to Egypt* 8, New Haven/Philadelphia 2007, pp. 365–392 (hereafter J. W. Wegner,

satellite pyramid but included a large number – about 20 – of additional, symbolic rooms for the king and two queens.[8] After disaster struck this pyramid and a new funerary complex was built at Hawâra, the new pyramid may also have included a satellite 'south tomb'.[9]

The integration of satellite tombs with the traditional 'real tomb. into the ritual and architectural programme of a pyramid sometimes created complications for the builders. The 1990 study of the pyramid of Senwosret III by the expedition of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, offered an opportunity to examine such issues.[10] One has to admit, however, that the following considerations remain conjectural as long as we do not know the precise purpose of empty, symbolic tombs and the motivation of those who made them. This uncertainty is also increased by the suspicion that the pyramid might hide unidentified rooms or pre-existing structures connected to a cemetery dating to the Third Dynasty[11] and the Old Kingdom.[12]

The Displacement of the Burial Chamber and Pyramid Entrance

The designers of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties had developed a generally accepted programme for the underground apartments of the royal pyramids.[13] This prototype disappeared during the First Intermediate Period and may only have been revived under Senwosret I. However, the underground rooms of his pyramid are submerged, and their organisation is unknown.[14] The builders of the pyramids of Amenemhat II and Senwosret II created individual solutions; only those of Senwosret III finally produced a Twelfth Dynasty adaptation of the Old Kingdom programme (**Fig. 1**). The burial chamber with its antechamber and a "*sirdāb*"[15] closely followed the Old Kingdom examples.[16] However, a major deviation was the displacement of the underground apartment from the pyramid centre into the northwest quadrant of the pyramid. The reason for this move is unknown but one might suggest that the planners intended to avoid the central and southern half of the pyramid because other installations were intended to be built there, the tomb of Queen Weret II being one of them.[17]

Connected with this innovation was the transposition of the pyramid entrance, an innovation introduced under Senwosret II at Lâhûn. Instead of approaching the burial chamber straight and directly from the northern side, the access was transferred to the northern end of the west court. This deviation required a considerably longer corridor and a sharp 90º turn in order to join the antechamber. The entrance consisted of a 12 m deep shaft, a narrow and roughly carved corridor – or rather tunnel – leading through the northwest quadrant of the pyramid to the east. The passage was certainly carved out starting from the west. After 32 m, the tunnel joined another stone-cased section, which was certainly carved out and constructed from the east. This access is only 90 cm wide, too narrow for construction purposes and even awkward for the introduction of a coffin or a mummy. One wonders why the builders did not add a few centimetres to prevent such difficulties.

The replacement of the traditional sloping, granite-cased entrance passage by an inconspicuous, narrow shaft is remarkable. Generally, entrances to royal Middle Kingdom tombs were heavily fortified with granite plugs and portcullises or had at least some other blocking devices.[18] The entrance shaft to the tomb of Senwosret III remained entirely unprotected. Consequently, tomb robbers could simply empty the shaft and walk unobstructed into the burial chamber. One must, therefore, conclude that the shaft was designed and built at a time when there was no plan for a real burial envisaged inside and no valuable funerary equipment had to be protected against robbers.

Senwosret III at Abydos); J. W. Wegner, *Reopening the tomb of Senwosret III at Abydos*, in: *EA* 30 (2007), pp. 38–41; J. W. Wegner, *Protection and Restoration of the Tomb of Senwosret III at South Abydos*, in: *JARCE* 203 (2013), pp. 10–25; J. W. Wegner, *Revealing a Hidden Tomb. A Look at Excavations inside the Tomb of Senwosret III*, in: *Expedition Magazine* 56.1 (2014), pp. 8–15; K. Hamilton, *Senwosret III.*, pp. 7–52.

8 Di. Arnold, *Amenemhet III. in Dahshur*, pp. 53–61, pp. 99–103.

9 Di. Arnold, *Buried in two tombs?*, p. 60, footnote 13.

10 Di. Arnold, *Senwosret III at Dahshur*, pp. 25–43.

11 Di. Arnold, *Senwosret III at Dahshur*, pp. 107–108.

12 The pyramid complex is surrounded by Old Kingdom tombs in the north, east and south. There is even the possibility that older structures were integrated into the Senwosret III project, see again Di. Arnold, *Senwosret III at Dahshur*, p. 58.

13 A. Labrousse, *L'architecture des pyramides à textes* 1, *Mission archéologique de Saqqara* III, *BdÉ* 114 (1996), two volumes; A. Labrousse, *L'architecture des pyramides à textes* 1 (1996) (hereafter A. Labrousse, *L'architecture des pyramides à textes* 1), another (second) edition, in: *BdÉ* 131 (^{2}2000) (hereafter A. Labrousse, *L'architecture des pyramides à textes* (^{2}2000).

14 Di. Arnold, *The Pyramid of Senwosret I.*, The *South Cemeteries of Lisht* 1, *Publications of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Egyptian Expedition* 22, New York 1988, pp. 69–70.

15 The usage of the term "*sirdāb*" in Egyptology hides the fact that the purpose of the chambers is enigmatic. For a convincing theory as the mysterious dwelling of the god Osiris in the *dw3.t* (Duat/Netherworld) see B. Mathieu, *La signification du serdab dans la pyramide d'Ounas. L'architecture des appartements funéraires royaux à la lumière des textes des pyramides*, in: D. C. Berger/B. Mathieu (eds.), Études sur l'Ancien Empire et la nécropole de Saqqâra dédiées à Jean-Philippe Lauer, *OM* 9.2, Montpellier 1997, pp. 289–304.

16 R. Stadelmann, *Das Dreikammersystem der Königsgräber der Frühzeit und des Alten Reiches*, in: *MDAIK* 47, Mainz 1991, pp. 373–387.

17 The two pyramids of Amenemhat III at Dahshûr and Hawâra also include additional apartments in the southern half of the pyramid square.

18 J. W. Wegner, *Senwosret III at Abydos*, pp. 389–390.

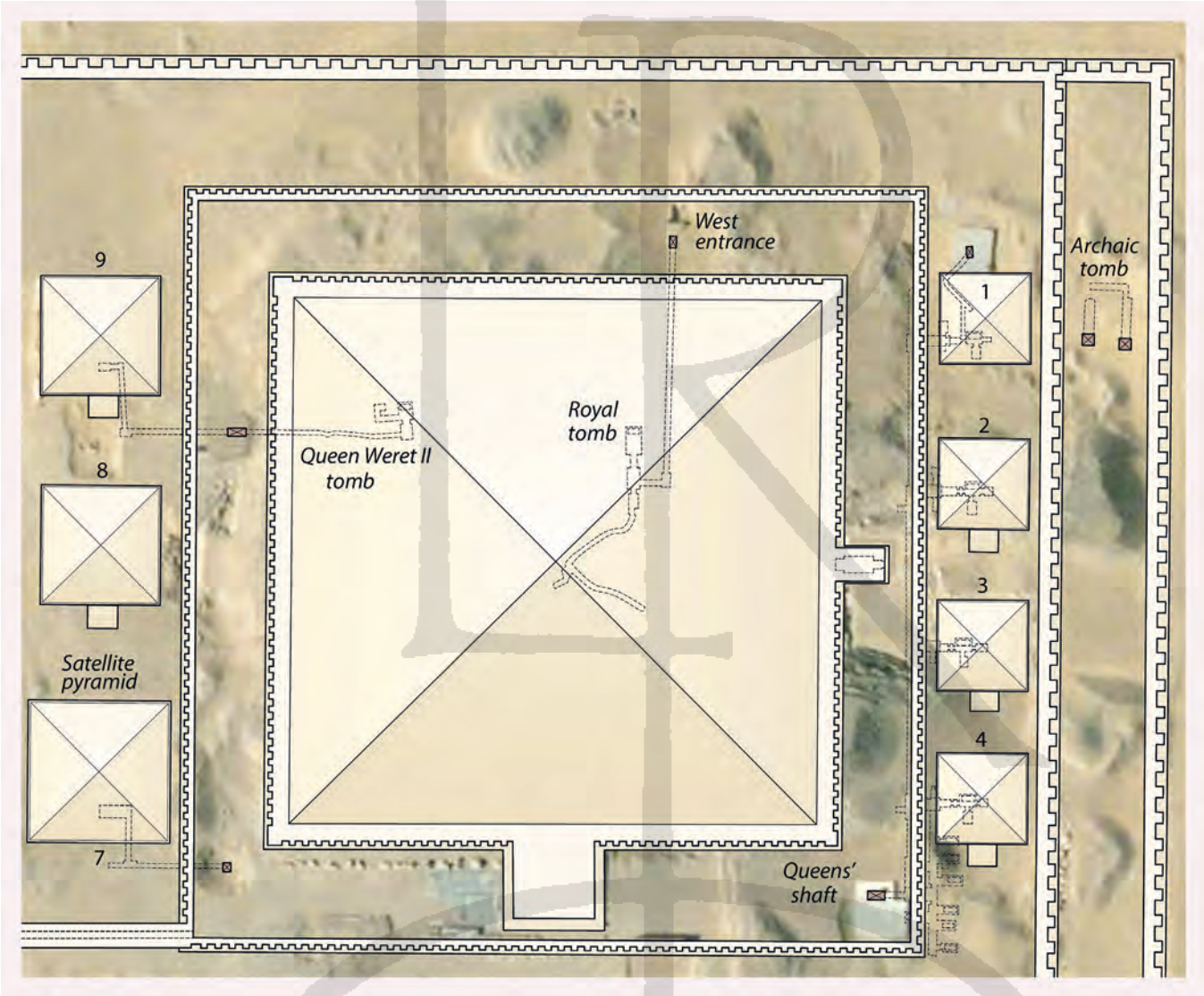

Fig. 1 Plan of the original pyramid complex of Senwosret III at Dahshûr. (© The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Drawing by Sara Chen)

The Addition of a Sarcophagus

The building blocks for the funerary apartments in the Senwosret III pyramid could not be brought in through the aforementioned western corridor; they were lowered into a wide, open-air construction pit accessed from the south before the construction of the pyramid. After the completion of the chambers, the pit and its access ramp were filled up to the ground level of the desert, leaving the western entrance as the only access to the burial chamber. Amazingly, the crypt did not contain a stone sarcophagus from the beginning. Since poor planning cannot be the reason, one must conclude that no burial was intended, and the emptiness of the crypt was planned. The granite tomb chamber would therefore represents a "*ka*-tomb". This would imply that another, real tomb was constructed at the same time. Of course, the Abydos tomb of the king comes to mind (see below). However, the studies by J. Wegner seem to confirm that the Abydos tomb was not planned as a counterpart to the Dahshûr tomb but as an innovative, later supplement.[19]

However, a major change occurred at Dahshûr in the narrow time window between the completion of the underground chambers and the beginning of the construction of the pyramid. A directive may have been given to modify the function of the tomb chamber by introducing a granite sarcophagus and installing a wall niche, perhaps for a statue. This surprising alteration may suggest that the other, as-yet-unidentified main tomb had become defunct, the construction had encountered a problem or had been delayed. The introduction of a sarcophagus into the existing but closed chamber was not easy. The simplest way would have been to enlarge the western entrance shaft and corridor to fit the sarcophagus. This

19 For the date of construction of the Senwosret III complex at Abydos see J. W. Wegner, *Senwosret III at Abydos*, pp. 35–40.

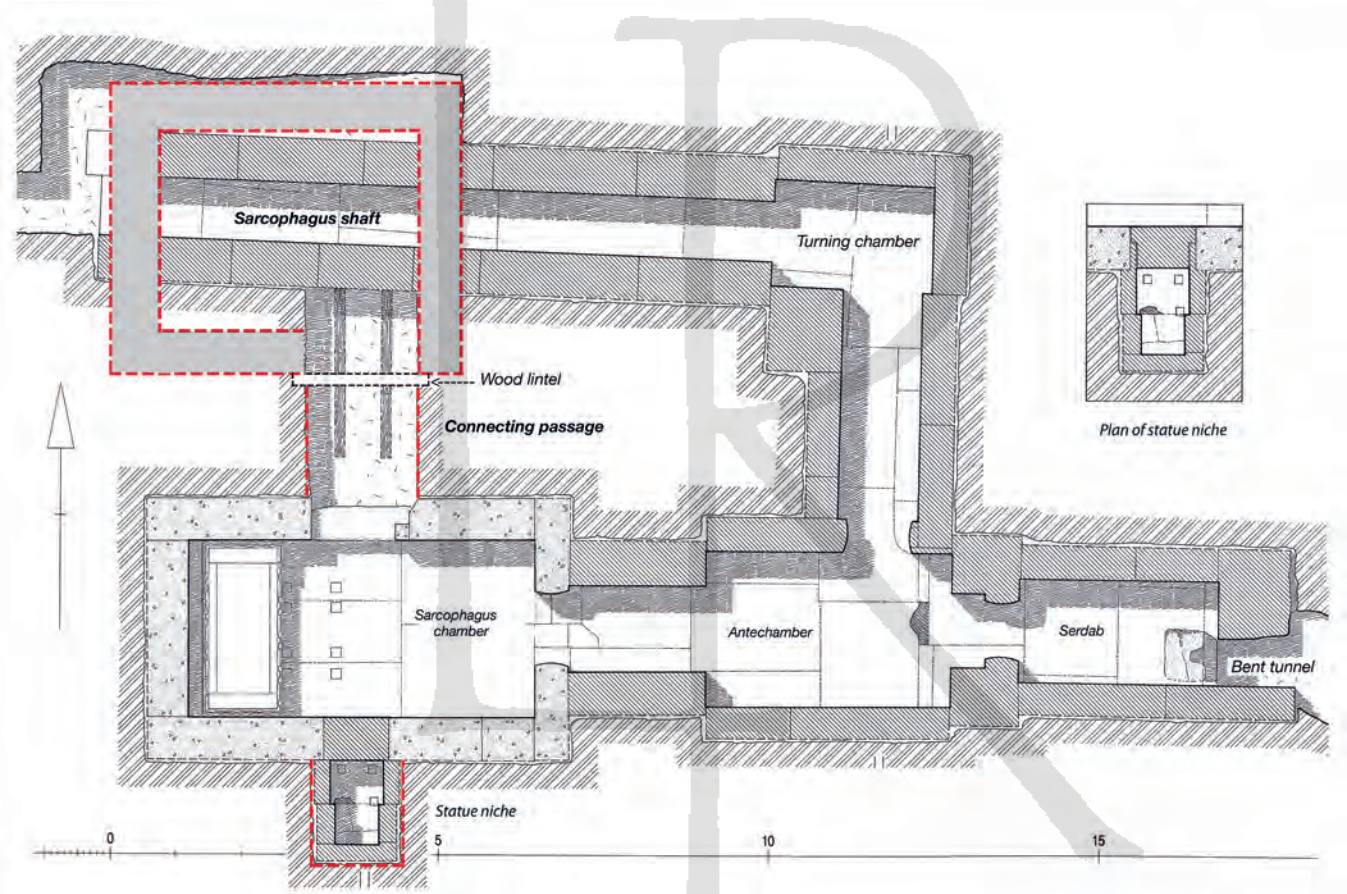

Fig. 2 Plan of the burial apartments in the pyramid of Senwosret III at Dahshûr. Added sarcophagus shaft and changes in red. (Di. Arnold, *The Pyramid Complex of Senwosret III at Dahshur. Architectural Studies*, *Publications of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Egyptian Expedition* 26, New York 2002, pl. 15)

project could have been carried out from the western court and would not have interfered with the pyramid construction. The builders would probably have dismissed this option since the stability of the corridor could not be ensured after such an enlargement, preferring instead to dig a new shaft from the top and reach the crypt through the northern or southern side wall. The south side would have been excluded because no shaft could be dug through the loose material that filled the construction ramp south of the chamber. Another important consideration was the question of where to break into the crypt so as not to risk the collapse of the chamber roof. The builders chose a block in the north wall of the crypt to position the new shaft (**Figs. 2–3**). This project had to overcome a serious obstacle because the shaft cut into the roof of the front part of the stone-cased western entrance passage. In order to have a flat workspace, six roofing beams and two blocks of the corridor's south wall were temporarily removed.[20] From the shaft, a connecting passage was dug to the south into the crypt (**Fig. 4**).

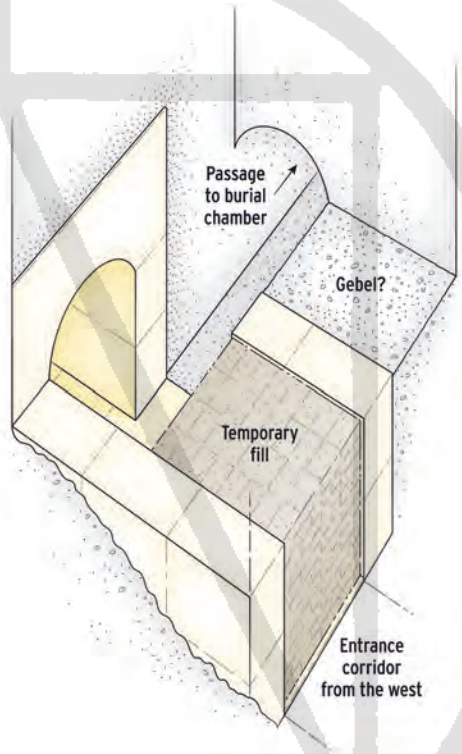

Fig. 3 The lower end of the sarcophagus shaft as it may have looked ready for the lowering of the sarcophagus. (Drawing by Sara Chen)

20 This gap in the corridor wall is – despite careful reconstruction work of the ancient builders – still detectable by the format of the replacement blocks and open joints.

Fig. 4 The burial chamber of Senwosret III with the granite sarcophagus and the openings in the side walls for the statue niche (left) and the connecting corridor (right). (© The Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA excavation photo T. Ling)

J. De Morgan excavated this passage and found two guidance beams still inserted into the floor (**Fig. 5**).[21] The arrangement of the blocks in the wall of the crypt was so fortunate that the builders only needed to lever out two superimposed blocks from the lower tier (**Fig. 6**). After these laborious provisions, a sumptuous sarcophagus was lowered into the shaft and rolled over the guidance beams into the crypt. Since the sarcophagus was 2.55 m long and the chamber only 2.69 m wide, the remaining 7 cm at each ends suggests that the sarcophagus was not dimensioned for this room but intended for another, wider chamber. The sarcophagus lid arrived first and was lifted with great effort onto a narrow stone bench behind the space the sarcophagus would occupy, placed in an open position. To close the burial, the end of the lid pointing up was lowered down.[22] The construction works certainly disfigured the appearance of the crypt and had to be concealed. The opening in the north wall was closed with the original two granite blocks and all granite surfaces in the crypt were covered with a fine coating of white plaster coating that made the granite look like limestone. The white colour not only made the crypt visually similar to the appearance of the other rooms but also may have been required as part of the new function of the crypt as a 'real' burial chamber.[23]

21 J. De Morgan, *Fouilles à Dahchour Mars–Juin 1894*, Vienna 1895, pp. 89–90, figs. 133–134 (hereafter J. De Morgan, *Fouilles à Dahchour Mars–Juin 1894*); Di. Arnold, *Building in Egypt. Pharaonic Stone Masonry*, New York, Oxford 1991, fig. 6.33; K. Hamilton, *Senwosret III.*, pp. 9–14.

22 Had the bottom arrived first, the lid would have been placed on the floor in front, preventing the closing of the connecting passage. For Old Kingdom examples how to store the lid see A. Labrousse, *L'architecture des pyramides à textes* 1, figs. 14, 39, 111–112, 115, 129; A. Labrousse, *L'architecture des pyramides à textes* (^{2}2000), figs. 91, 164, 169, 171.

23 For that reason, the sarcophagus chamber of the pyramid of Amenemhat III at Dahshûr was constructed with white limestone.

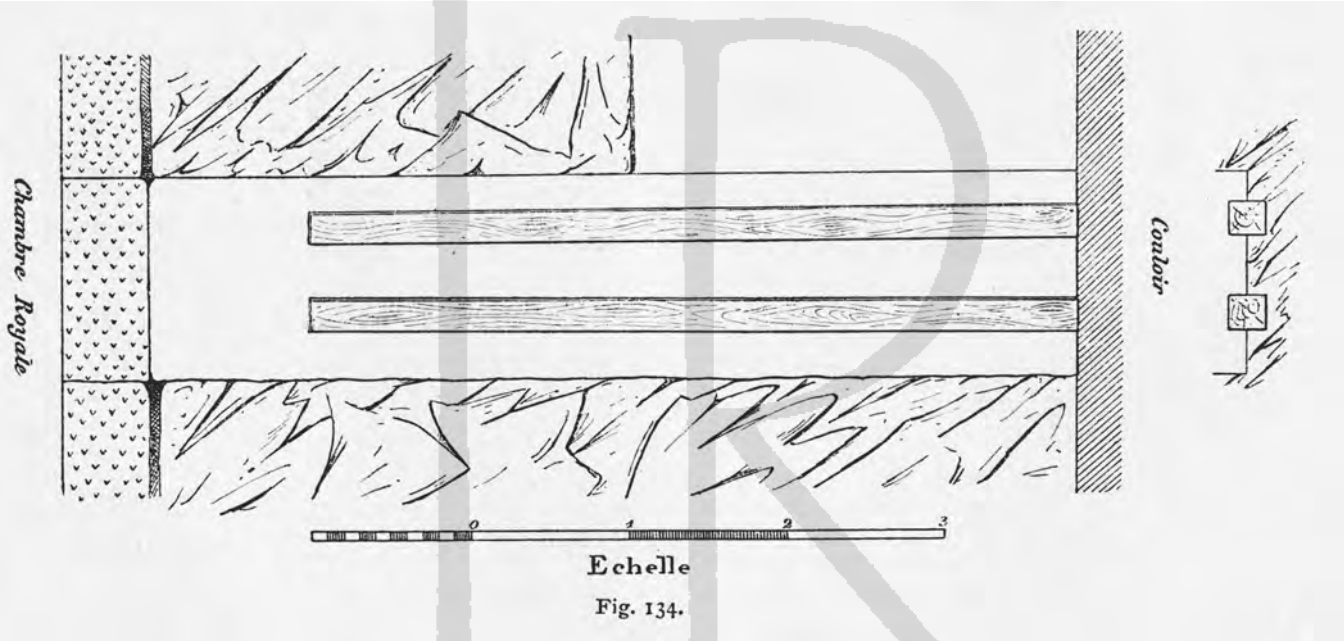

Fig. 5 J. De Morgan's sketch of the skid poles in the floor of the connecting corridor. Proportions and scale wrong. (J. De Morgan, *Fouilles à Dahchour en 1894–1895*, Vienna 1903, Fig. 134)

Fig. 6 The opening of the connecting corridor into the crypt after removal of the upper block with remains of whitewashing. (© The Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA excavation photo DH90: 130)

Fig. 7 The pavement of the statue(?) niche. (© The Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA excavation photo DH90: 320)

Thereafter, the stone casing around the western entrance corridor had to be rebuilt, and the sarcophagus shaft filled up.

Around the same time, the organisers not only objected to the absence of a sarcophagus but also requested a deep, chapel-like wall niche for an object measuring about 1.40 m in height and 0.60 cm in width.[24] Again, the engineers found a suitable spot in the south wall that could be opened safely. This part of the wall consisted there of two courses and the lower course surprisingly included a narrow block that could be extracted. The wall block broke during its extraction and was disposed of. The niche has a wider front and a narrower and slightly lower rear part (**Fig. 7**), all encased and roofed with relatively thin limestone slabs, which differ from the otherwise monumental construction of the main crypt, clearly showing a hasty improvisation. Especially the ceiling blocks were so thin that they cracked under the weight of the southern gable roof blocks. The location could suggest that the niche was meant to house a canopic chest. However,

24 Di. Arnold, *Senwosret III at Dahshur*, pp. 35–36, pls. 14–17, pl. 21a; K. Hamilton, *Senwosret III.*, pp. 21–25.

the dimensions contradict this assumption because canopic chests of the period were sizeable monuments, resembling a small sarcophagus.[25] In addition, a chest could have been easily placed in front of the sarcophagus. One therefore must assume that the object was different, perhaps a half-life-sized statue? Satellite tombs indeed seem to have included *ka*-statues. However, such a statue niche would be exceptional[26] and why would such a statue need a difficult-to-construct wall niche? A free-standing wooden naos would have been appropriate.

Nonetheless, the object was never placed there or was removed without a trace. We noticed plaster lines in the inner part of the niche, which clearly show that the niche was once filled with stones set in mortar. Confusing the situation further, this blocking was soon removed and instead, the opening of the niche closed with four limestone blocks placed on top of each other (**Fig. 8**). A fifth one needed for closing the remaining gap apparently never arrived or was later chiselled away by tomb robbers.

Fig.8 The blocking of the statue niche of the crypt lacking the topmost block. (© The Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA excavation photo DH90: 128)

The Burial Cancelled?

When J. De Morgan entered the crypt on November 23, 1894, he found the sarcophagus "*robbed to a degree that not even dust was left*".[27] We were able to check and confirm that the interior of the sarcophagus was completely empty and had apparently never been used for a burial. The reason for this unexpected situation is unknown and one can only propose unverified theories. One could assume that the king had been buried in the crypt, but that his mummy and equipment were later carefully relocated without leaving a trace. However, why would Amenemhat III have ordered such an extraordinary undertaking? Another explanation would be that a more suitable burial place had been prepared, which would have made the crypt superfluous. But then, where is the other burial place?

P. Tallet suggested that Senwosret III died in regnal year 19 during a campaign in Nubia and that this catastrophe was concealed from the public.[28] Had the king's body even been lost in the Nile? This theory would appear to explain the lack of a burial in the Dahshûr crypt but is rather difficult to accept. The death of a commander normally leads to the defeat of the entire army. Such a catastrophe could not have been concealed, and any survivors would not have dared to return to Egypt empty-handed without the king's body. In 2014 J. Wegner discovered an enormous boat pit southeast of the entrance of the Abydos tomb of Senwosret III.[29] The pit was robbed but still contained nine wood planks, which indorse the presence of a boat. 120 sketches scratched into the mortar coating of the side and end walls represent vessels, certainly not as 'solar' boats but as Nile boats with ten persons depicted on each side. The orientation of the pit – not east-west but *north-south* – further supports the assumption that the boat was not a symbolic 'solar' boat but a real, full-sized sailing boat with a cabin. May one assume that the ship transported the mummy of the king from his Lower Egyptian residence at Itjtawj (*Jtj-tꜣ.wj*) to Abydos? Is this discovery evidence that the body of the king was not buried in his

25 The king's canopic chest in the Abydos tomb measures 1.37 m square with a box of 1.06 m height, after J. W. Wegner, *The Tomb of Senwosret III at Abydos. Considerations on the Origins and Development of the Royal Amduat Tomb*, in: D. P. Silverman/W. K. Simpson/J. Wegner (eds.), *Archaism and Innovation. Studies in the Culture of Middle Kingdom Egypt*, New Haven, Philadelphia 2009, p. 127 (hereafter J. W. Wegner, *Development of the Royal Amduat*).

26 The niche in the middle chamber of the Kheops pyramid comes to mind, see G. Dormion, *La chambre de Chéops. Analyse architecturale*, Paris 2004, pp. 136–38, pl. 6 [8]; M. Haase, *Am Rande des Horizonts. Zur Funktion der mittleren Kammer in der Cheops-Pyramide*, in: *Sokar* 40 (2021/2022), pp. 14–16, fig. 15.

27 J. De Morgan, *Fouilles à Dahchour Mars–Juin 1894*, p. 97.

28 P. Tallet, *Sésostris III et la fin de la XIIe dynastie*, *Le Grands Pharaons*, Paris [1]2005, pp. 50–52.

29 J. Wegner, *A Royal Boat Burial and Watercraft Tableau of Egypt's 12th Dynasty (c. 1850 BCE) at South Abydos*, in: *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 46.1 (2017), pp. 5–30.

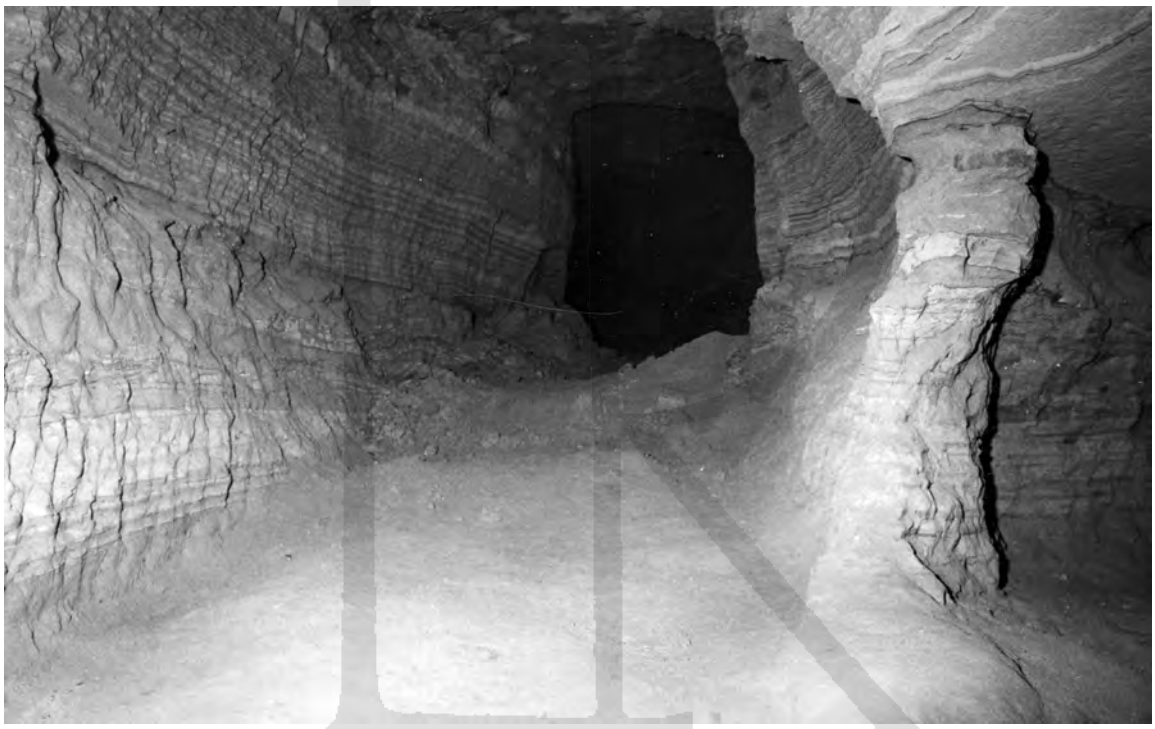

Fig. 9 The curved tunnel in the pyramid of Senwosret III. (© The Metropolitan Museum of Art, MMA excavation photo DH97: 288)

Dahshûr tomb but was transported or even relocated to Abydos? Whatever happened, the officials in charge did not leave the crypt at Dahshûr in the state of futile expectation but undertook some concluding measures. Most importantly, they covered the empty sarcophagus with its lid.[30] This last measure suggests that the room was not considered as a useless, empty space but that the crypt probably regained its original status of a satellite tomb, requiring some degree of respect. We do not know if the western entrance shaft was also filled in.

The so called 'Sokar-Tunnel'

Probably after a short time, miners and stone masons re-entered the tomb from the western entrance in order to carry out an unexpected and currently enigmatic project. They cut a rectangular, upright opening into the east wall of the "*sirdāb*"-chamber and, for easier access, cut a step into the floor slab.[31] Behind this opening, they made a spacious but rough tunnel, which extended 14 m in the direction of the centre of the pyramid before turning at a 90º angle to the northeast and running for another 19 m (**Fig. 9**).[32] It was suggested, that the purpose of this peculiar enterprise was to create an underground dwelling for the god Sokar, "Lord of the *qrr.t*-cavern",[33] since a sketch of a falcon-like bird (inside a square?) appears on the south wall of the "*sirdāb*", near the entrance into the tunnel.[34]

The bird sketch is surrounded by a group of roughly made portraits,[35] representing about 45 non-Egyptian persons, including a markedly smaller, complete figure of an Egyptian official with a broad collar and a typical Middle Kingdom kilt, perhaps representing the overseer of the team. The miners had piled up part of their excavation debris in the crypt and the antechamber, suggesting that, at that point, the crypt was not considered sacrosanct anymore and thus the workmen dared to defile the area with *graffiti*. Like the other earlier projects, the bothersome tunnel excavation was abandoned, probably when the king died before a potential

30 J. De Morgan, *Fouilles à Dahchour en 1894–1895*, p. 97 describes the sarcophagus "*open, robbed and even clean of dust.*".

31 Noticing solid bedrock behind the wall, tomb robbers would not have continued and dug a long and wide tunnel.

32 J. De Morgan, *Fouilles à Dahchour en 1894–1895*, pl. 25; Di. Arnold, *Senwosret III at Dahshur*, pp. 40–41, fig. 12; K. Hamilton, *Senwosret III.*, pp. 38–40. This tunnel guided J. De Morgan 1895, when he tunneled the ground under northeast quadrant of the pyramid, to the royal burial chamber.

33 E. Naville, *The Temple of Deir el-Bahari* 2, London 1896, pl. 45.

34 Di. Arnold, *Senwosret III at Dahshur*, pl. 25 lower left; J. De Morgan, *Fouilles à Dahchour en 1894–1895*, fig. 138.

35 J. De Morgan, *Fouilles à Dahchour en 1894–1895*, pp. 92–96, figs. 137–140. The sketches were redrawn by A. Oppenheim, see Di. Arnold, *Senwosret III at Dahshur*, pp. 42–43, pls. 23c–d, 24–26a and studied by Do. Arnold, *Image and Identity. Egypt's Eastern Neighbours. East Delta People and the Hyksos*, in: M. Marée (ed.), *The Second Intermediate Period (Thirteenth–Seventeenth Dynasties). Current Research, Future Prospects*, *OLA* 192, Leuven u. a. 2010, pp. 183–221.

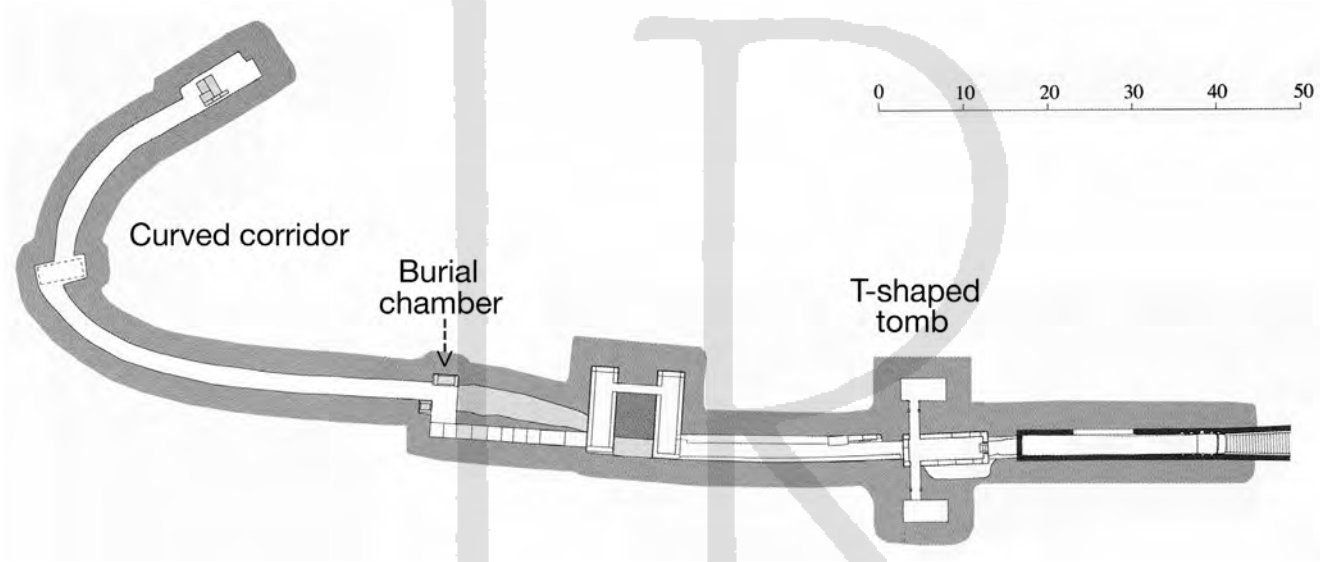

Fig. 10 Plan of the tomb of Senwosret III at Abydos. (redrawn and © by Di. Arnold from J. W. Wegner, *The Mortuary Temple of Senwosret III at Abydos*, in: *Publications of the Pennsylvania-Yale Expedition to Egypt* 8, New Haven, Philadelphia 2007, p. 384, fig. 167)

end chamber or any other recognisable feature had been completed.

The second royal tomb complex of Senwosret III at Abydos is enormous and multifaceted, and it also underwent numerous alterations and additions that were not included in the original concept. Their chronology and development have been discussed in detail by J. Wegner.[36] One detail is especially interesting for the procedures at Dahshûr. The Abydos tomb incorporated several distinct architectural units, which may be interpreted as self-contained tombs (**Fig. 10**). The first, frontal part of the tomb may have presented a symbolic, cenotaph-like structure. Its T-shaped plan and tree-trunk ceiling clearly relate it to a corresponding, symbolic tomb in the Dahshûr complex of Senwosret III.[37]

The second tomb, containing the granite sarcophagus, followed the first one and was located further inside. It still remains unclear if the chamber where the gigantic sarcophagus was found lying on its side on top of a pile of construction debris was the final destination or just a temporary station on the way into the end chamber further inside.[38] One would expect that there would be some remains of the funerary equipment for a powerful king and tomb builder like Senwosret III. However, Ch. T. Currelly only found about a dozen fragments of polished alabaster duck-vessels, which hardly seem to represent such a burial.[39] However, the passages leading to the chamber with the sarcophagus were comprehensively blocked,[40] suggesting that something of considerable importance had to be protected against intruders: the real burial or a symbolic one. From the sarcophagus room, a 50 m long, curved corridor leads to a final chamber, which was cased with quartzite slabs.[41] This feature corresponds to the curved tunnel in the Dahshûr pyramid, which might also have had a stone-cased end chamber, but which was abandoned unfinished when the king died. It seems possible that both curved corridors were designed simultaneously, adding an important symbolic aspect that was not sufficiently addressed by the earlier parts of the tombs.

One may ask how the above-described alterations of the underground apartments in the Dahshûr pyramid were reflected by corresponding changes to the above-ground buildings. The most striking innovation was the extension of the originally square pyramid complex to the north and to the south.[42] The southern extension involved adding a large none-funerary temple, which seems to have addressed aspects of the royal cult that were not sufficiently represented in the original concept of the traditional pyramid complex.

36 J. W. Wegner, *Senwosret III at Abydos*, pp. 80–84, 372–375, 379–381; K. Hamilton, *Senwosret III*.

37 Di. Arnold, *Senwosret III at Dahshur*, pp. 57–58, pls. 68, 72a–b.

38 J. W. Wegner, *Development of the Royal Amduat*, pp. 124–127, figs. 17, 18; K. Hamilton, *The Pyramid of Userkaf. A Layman's guide*, see https://www.researchgate.net/publication/363579860_The_Pyramid_of_Userkaf_A_Laymans_guide 2022, pp. 51–55, fig. 52 <last access March 2025> (hereafter K. Hamilton, *The Pyramid of Userkaf*). The question is discussed in J. W. Wegner, *Senwosret III at Abydos*, pp. 392–393.

39 A. E. P. Weigall, *Senusret III*, p. 27, pl. 40; J. W. Wegner, *Senwosret III at Abydos*, p. 393.

40 J. W. Wegner, *Senwosret III at Abydos*, p. 385; K. Hamilton, *The Pyramid of Userkaf*, pp. 17–19, pp. 43–50.

41 J. W. Wegner, *Senwosret III at Abydos*, p. 385, figs. 167, 169; J. W. Wegner, *Development of the Royal Amduat*, p. 127, figs. 20–24; K. Hamilton, *The Pyramid of Userkaf*, pp. 56–58.

42 Di. Arnold, *Senwosret III at Dahshur*, pp. 89–108.

One might think of a sanctuary that is especially dedicated to the cult of royal statues.[43]

The surprising architectural alterations of the interior of the Dahshûr pyramid presented here, mainly occurred during an early construction phase of the pyramid, probably during the first years of the king's reign. However, the south temple was certainly built after the completion of the original complex, apparently disconnected from the earlier events undertaken for a different reason.[44] Yet one may suspect a connection. Did the aforementioned decision not to bury the king's body in the prepared pyramid chamber change the character and function of the entire pyramid complex in such a way that the south temple had to be added to comply with the new situation? Was the funerary cult reduced or even replaced by a royal statue cult?

This analysis of the development of the underground rooms of the Dahshûr pyramid of Senwosret III underscores an unexpected aspect of Egyptian funerary architecture. Its form and function did not develop along as a predictable continuum but were frequently obstructed by technical difficulties, the demands of new religious interpretations and changing cultic requirements. The monuments of Senwosret III are no exception. Detailed studies by K. Hamilton of the fabric of funerary complexes of the Old and Middle Kingdoms show that probably most of these monuments shared this fate.[45]

43 Di. Arnold, *Ein Kulttempel Sesostris' III. in Dahschur*, in: *Sokar* 36 (2018), pp. 54–55. As a parallel, one may mention the statue cult sanctuary that was constructed at the south side of the pyramid of king Userkaf. However, the reason for that location may have been different, see A. Labrousse/J.-P. Lauer (eds.), *Les complexes funéraires d'Ouserkaf et de Néferhétepès*, *BdÉ* 130.1, Cairo 2000, two volumes, pp. 37–40; K. Hamilton, *The Pyramid of Userkaf*, pp. 53–58.

44 For the date of the Dahshur and the Abydos complex see J. W. Wegner, *Senwosret III at Abydos*, pp. 35–40, p. 390.

45 K. Hamilton, *Senwosret III.*; K. Hamilton, *The Pyramid of Userkaf*, and numerous other studies of the same author are available on the www; see https://independent.academia.edu/KeithHamilton <last access March 2025>.