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New Light on the Size Variation of Private Tombs at Giza and Saqqara in Late Old Kingdom Egypt

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Summary

A basic component of social organization is identifying categories into which different relatives can be placed, which are determined by the category to which they belong, kinship terminology is a way to identify and establish those categories.

Ancient Egyptian society was in all periods strictly hierarchical. High social status was regarded as absolutely positive and it can be observed that social hierarchies were even stressed in the language of funerary symbolism. In this context the enormous social inequality between the king and the other people, symbolized by gigantic pyramids versus smaller mastabas, has to be remembered. Offices in ancient Egypt were often inherited, this is best attested at the Nome level, where in certain period's local dynasties of monarchs or governors can be identified, the same is partly visible at the royal court, there are examples that viziers or high priests of Amun followed their father in office.

The tombs of Old Kingdom officials constitute a large proportion of the available source material from which a history of this period might be derived. The Egyptian elite regarded a tomb as an important place. It has long been known that tombs have two important functions: protecting the body of the deceased and as a place of funerary cult. Thus, the construction of their own tombs was an important task for the Egyptian elite during their lifetime.

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The conclusion corresponds to the results of my analysis of tomb-size the titles of the tomb owner reflecting his rank and status are one of the most important factors that might have affected the form of his tomb. There are other considerations that affect in determining the location and the size of the mastaba such as his family connections and the economic resources available to him in the construction of the tomb, either through his own wealth or the generosity of the king.

While the size of the tomb reflected the social status of its owner, the allocation of a piece of land in the cemetery does not seem to have been automatic and subject only to promotion to a certain level; it was probably through the special favors of the king.

The rank-titles of the tomb-owners are directly related to the size of their tombs, it could be shown that *jrj-p^c.t*, *h3tj-^c*, *htmtj-bjtj* and *smr-w^c.tj* are normally buried in large tombs, whereas people with the epithet *rḥ-njswt* can also be found in medium-sized tombs, and *šps/šps.t-njswt* can only be found in medium sized and small tombs.

Tomb size and type varied also as much with the fortunes of the times as with individual wealth and choice; in principle each ruler built his own mortuary complex, often on a new site. Many elite tombs were near those of their kings, and thus on different sites in succeeding generations. In terms of status, older cemeteries no doubt bore rather different meanings from current ones, and the discontinuities in location created by these patterns must have discouraged people from identifying with anything other than the most recent structures.