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## PYRAMIDS AS DIVINITIES

(Figs. 1–13)

Archaism is a well-known phenomenon of Late-Egyptian civilization.<sup>1</sup> Priests and scholars who studied the past of their native land took a great interest in the monuments of the Old Kingdom. The wide use of the Pyramid Texts is in itself evidence for the respect for the tombs of the Monarchs of the Old Kingdom. Besides the copying of the funerary texts, examination of the architectural features of the monuments was also carried out. It will suffice to mention two cases of tangible evidence: the Step Pyramid of Djoser and the Pyramid of Mycerinus in Giza. Although the secondary tunnel on the south side of the Step Pyramid cannot be dated with certainty, it must be at least as late as the New Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> It is most probably a product of the exploratory zeal of the Saite Period. The grid pattern on two of the reliefs<sup>3</sup> demonstrates the desire to copy and imitate pictures located in such a highly esteemed place. The mass of Late Period pottery found there can probably be taken as an indication of the re-use of this building.<sup>4</sup> Whether the remains of a gilded mummy, which have been found there and were destroyed soon in a shipwreck, were parts of the mummy of Djoser or belonged to an intrusive burial, may be a matter of debate.<sup>5</sup> I would give preference to the second possibility in view of the vogue of gilding mummy-cartonnages in the Late Period.

In the burial chamber of the Mycerinus Pyramid a wooden coffin was found in the last century which cannot have been contemporary with the original burial equipment. It may have been placed there during the Saite Age when a search was made inside the pyramid.<sup>6</sup>

The admiration and nostalgia felt for the splendour of the past, obviously accompanied by feelings of inadequacy to create similar works as those of the Old Kingdom, resulted in a flourishing cult of the builders and led to the personification of some of the pyramids as divine entities.

In these article three sarcophagi in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo will be discussed. All of them are from the Ptolemaic Period.

1. The lid of the sarcophagus of Bat-ijti (*Bꜥ.t-ijlꜥ*)<sup>7</sup>, a piece of fine workmanship, is made of schist and its surface is carefully polished. The upper section of the representations is of high importance in our context. In

the middle, beneath the false beard of symbolic meaning, a winged scarab is engraved. Directly below it, there is a bird with the head of Ptah. His female counterpart is the goddess Khuit (*Hwy.t*). Her kneeling figure has wings and she holds the Maat-feather in her hands.

The middle section is flanked on both sides by two other groups of representations consisting of three deities each. On the right side (from the point of view of the sarcophagus) the uppermost deity is labelled as Nekhbet. She is a winged snake wearing the crown of Upper-Egypt. The next goddess is Isis and, below, a mummiform god with a feather-crown is named Men-Ankh (*Mn-nh*). This is the name of the pyramid of Pepi II in South Saqqāra.<sup>8</sup>

The other side offers conclusive evidence that a pyramid is impersonated here indeed. The left group begins again with a goddess in the form of a snake. In conformity with her name, Wadjet (*Wꜥd.t*), here she bears the red crown of Lower-Egypt. The next deity is Nephthys with a sail in her right hand. Last in the group is a goddess with an obelisk on her head and again with a sail in her right hand. She is called Men-Nofer (*Mn-nfr*) which is the name of the pyramid of Pepi I in South Saqqāra.<sup>9</sup> Since obelisks and pyramids were closely related to each other — the top of the obelisk is a small pyramid —, she is unequivocally characterized as a pyramid-goddess not only by her name but also by her head-dress.

#### *Inscriptions*

The *horizontal line* on both sides of Khuit reads as: "Words spoken by Khuit: I am protecting Osiris Bat-ijti, justified."

*Vertical lines.* While the figures of Nekhbet and Wadjet are provided with their name only, Isis and Nephthys are both accompanied by one short sentence "Words spoken by Isis: (I) give you the gentle breeze of the north wind" and "Words spoken by Nephthys: (I) give you the gentle breeze of the north wind", respectively.

*The texts of the pyramids.* "Men-Ankh, the Lord of the Two Lands, he is pleased with Osiris Bat-ijti."

„Men-Nofer, the mistress of the Two Lands, the lady of what is in it for ever." The feminine suffix must refer here to Memphis, the city named after the pyramid of Pepi I. For the scribe they were amalgamated as deities with each other.

The nine gods in the decorated part of the sarcophagus seem to constitute three triads each of them having at least one god of prominently Memphitic character. In the middle section (scarab, bird, Khuit) it is the Ptah-bird, in the groups on the right and the left the two pyramid-divinities.

The eight vertical lines contain various funerary texts. They are divided into two halves. The right one opens with chapter 89 of the BD which is followed, in line 3, by an abbreviated version of BD 26. This section was obviously intended to guarantee the possession of the soul and the heart of the deceased. The other funerary text is a compendium of wishes concerning, afterlife and at the same time, an assurance of divine protection.<sup>10</sup>

The horizontal line, below these texts, gives once again the name of the deceased: "Osiris B<sub>3</sub>.t-ij<sub>tj</sub>, justified, born by T<sub>3</sub>.n.t-Km.t, justified." (Fig. 1-5).

The sarcophagus is dated by Buhl to the first half of the second century B. C. (Cairo, Egyptian Museum, no.  $\frac{20}{12} + \frac{1}{2}$ , exhibition no. 1302).

2. Another sarcophagus with similar representations is that of Ptah-hotep (*Pth-hotp*), made of white limestone.<sup>11</sup> The decorated field is again crowned by a winged scarab. Lower down, after a horizontal line with the name and the titles of the deceased, a text in vertical lines is flanked by two groups of gods. On the right the first one is a mummy with a head-dress made up of two horns and two feathers. This god is a counterpart of the figure of the pyramid Men-Ankh on the sarcophagus of B<sub>3</sub>.t-ij<sub>tj</sub>, that is the pyramid of Pepi II. Below Nephthys with a sail, there are Amset and Duamutef. (Fig. 6-9)

The opposite line begins with a female figure. There is an obelisk on her head, thus she is a replica of the goddess Men-Nofer (the pyramid of Pepi I) of the former sarcophagus. She is followed by Isis, with the sign of *nh*, and Hapi and Kebehsenuf.

The vertical lines contain chapter 26 of the BD and are closed by a horizontal one giving again the name and the title of the deceased. The lower section of the inscriptions, in vertical lines, is identical with chapter 72 of the BD.

The sarcophagus was made for „Osiris, the beloved of God, the *sem* priest of Ptah, the *hry-sst* of the temple of Ptah, the *hry-sst* of the *R-sstw*, Ptahhotep, the justified, born by *Nht-s(j)*,<sup>12</sup> justified.”

While Nekhbet and Wadjet are not present here, they are replaced by the four sons of Horus, the two personified pyramids are again closely associated with Isis and Nephthys. Anyway, the pairing was made here in a reversed form, that is Nephthys came to be associated, instead of Men-Nofer, with Men-Ankh and Isis became the partner of Men-Nofer.

An interesting case of superstition attached to the hieroglyphs (cf. *P. Lacau*, in: ZÄS 51 (1913) 1 ff.) should not go unnoticed. In line 1 and 4 in the upper section the sign *f* seems to be rendered harmless by a small pointed engraving on the neck (*ibf nf* and *iw nf r:f*). (Cairo, Egyptian Museum, without number).

3. The third sarcophagus to be discussed is that of Padiharnedjitef (*P:dj-Hr-nd-itf*). Limestone.<sup>13</sup> The decorated area is surmounted by the sign of heaven (pt) and a winged scarab. On both sides of the inscriptions three gods appear. On the right, a mummiform god who is, beyond doubt, again the pyramid Men-Ankh. He is followed by Amset and Duamutef. On the left, the first in the group is the goddess wearing the obelisk, that is Men-Nofer. Hapi and Kebehsenuf are placed below her. The inscription again contains chapter 26 and 72 of the BD. Padiharnedjitef was "the overseer of the treasury, the prophet, the chief of the craftsmen." His mother's name is Ta-Rud (*T<sub>3</sub>-Rwd*). (Fig. 10-13 Cairo, Egyptian Museum no.  $\frac{15}{21} + \frac{1}{6}$ )

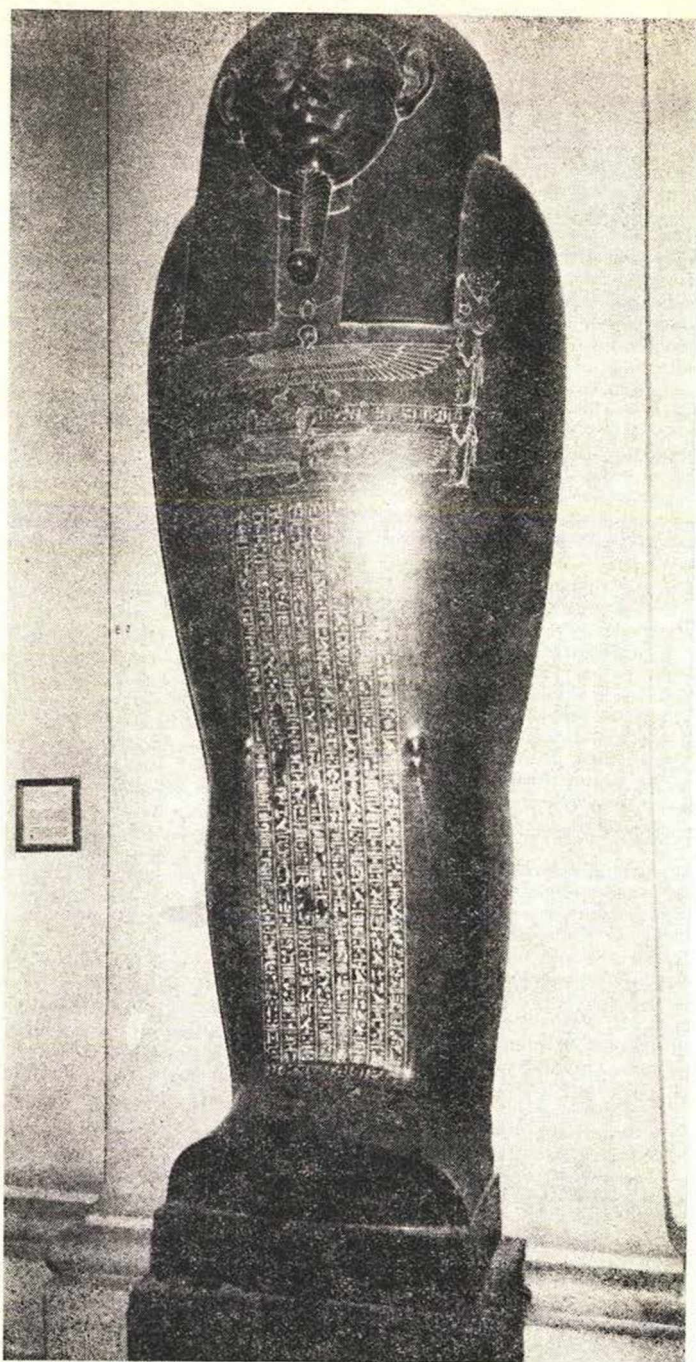
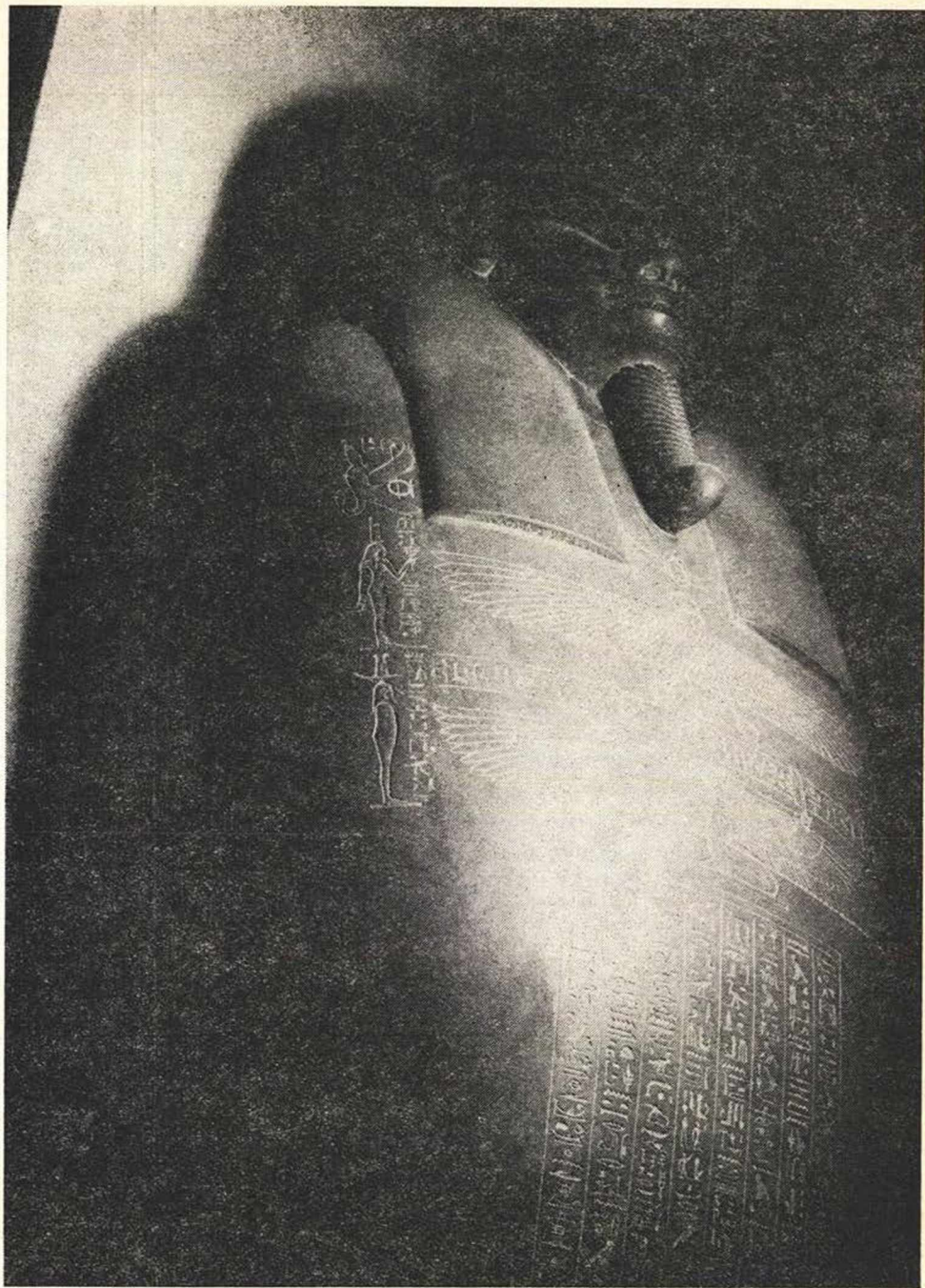
*Fig. 1.*



Fig. 2.





*Fig. 3.*

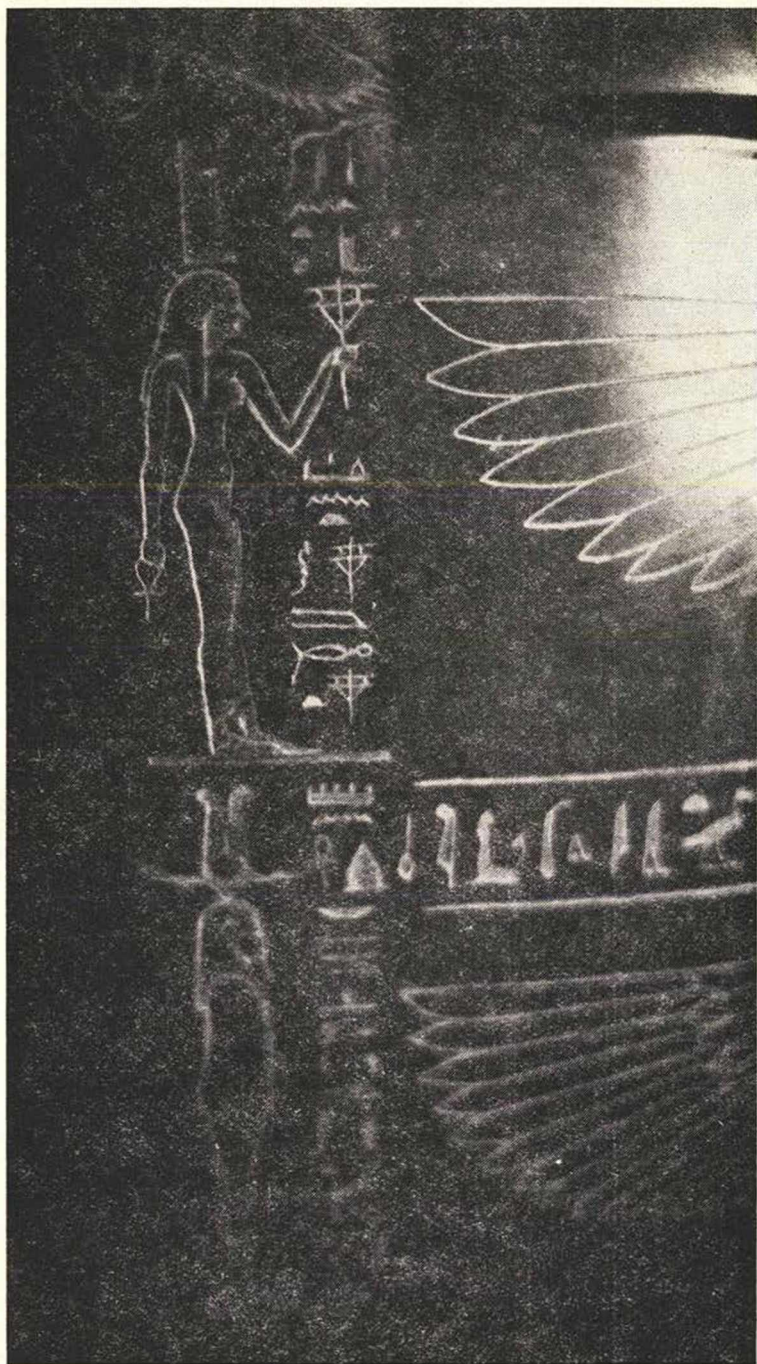


Fig. 4.







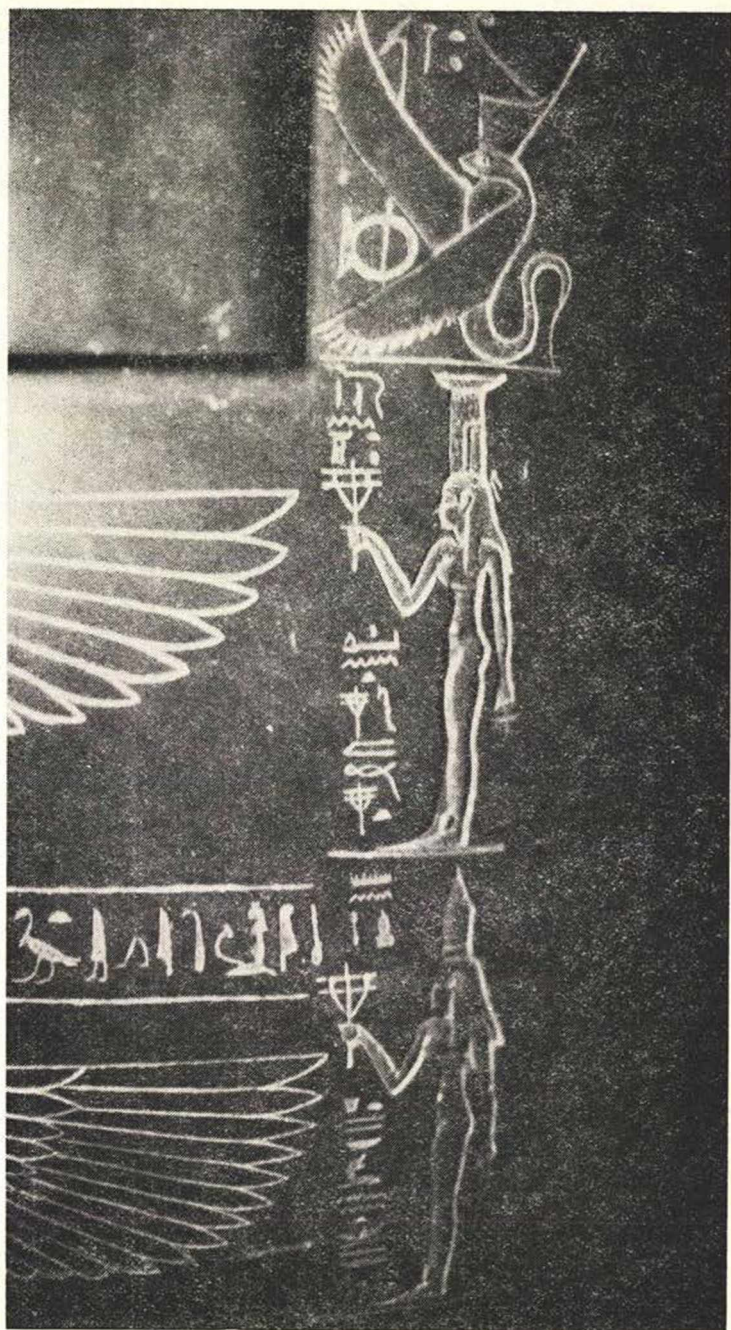
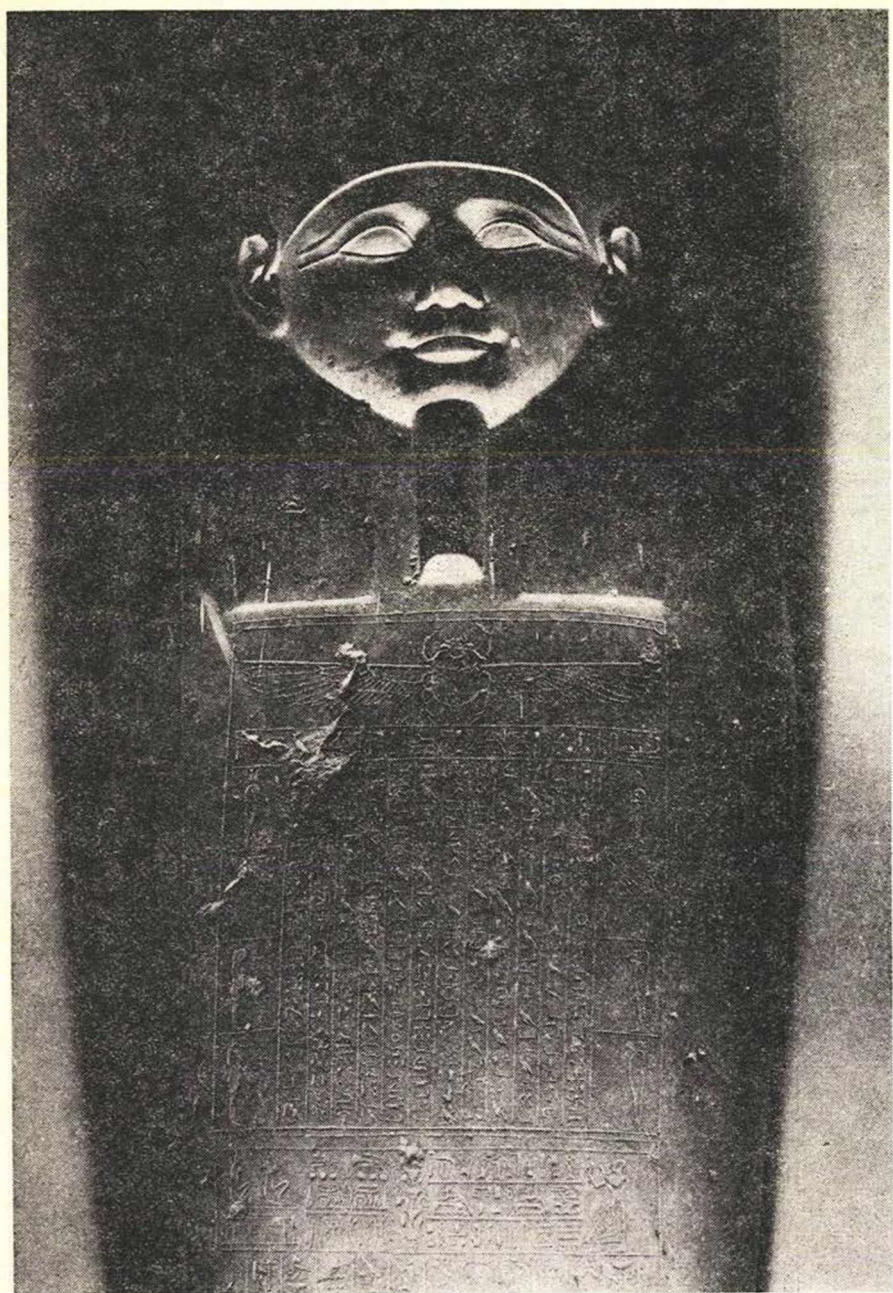
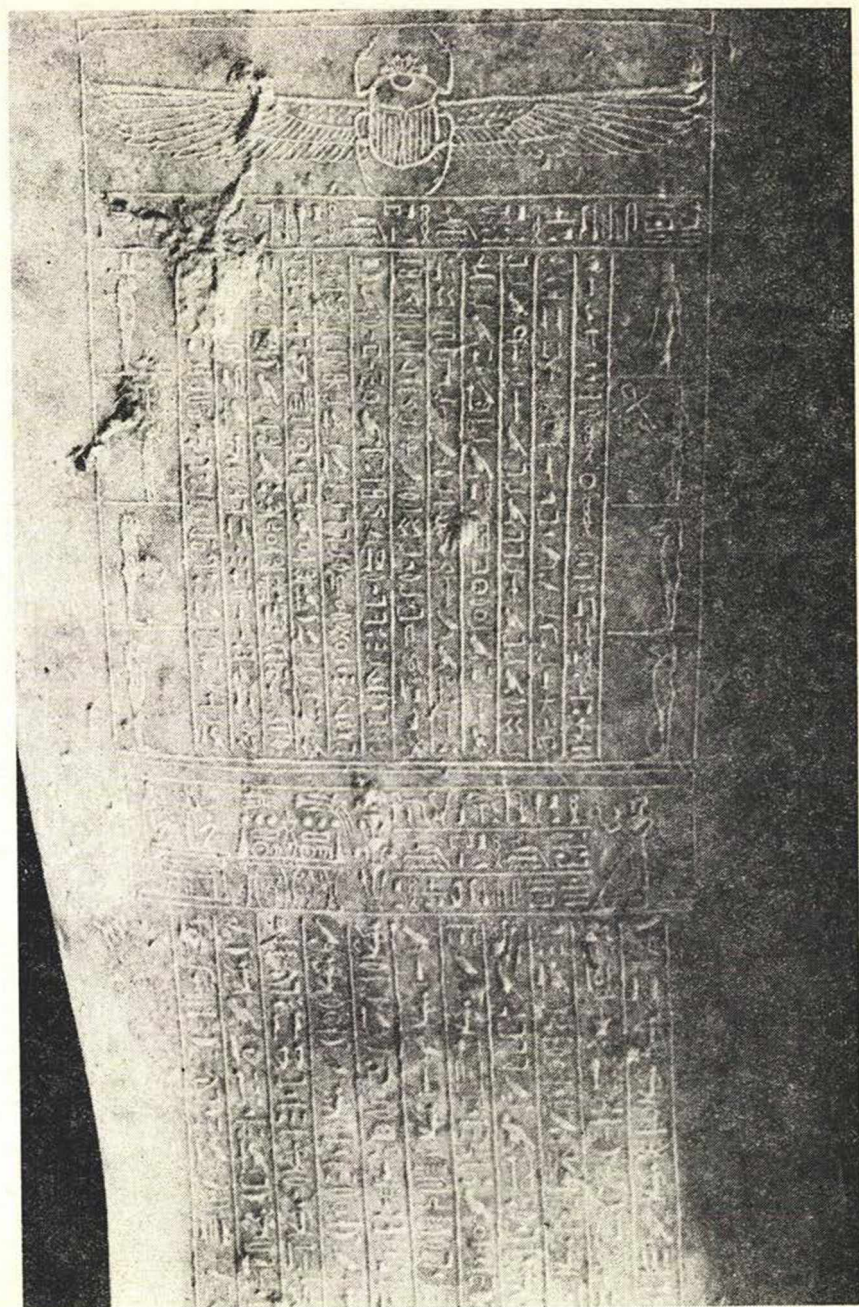
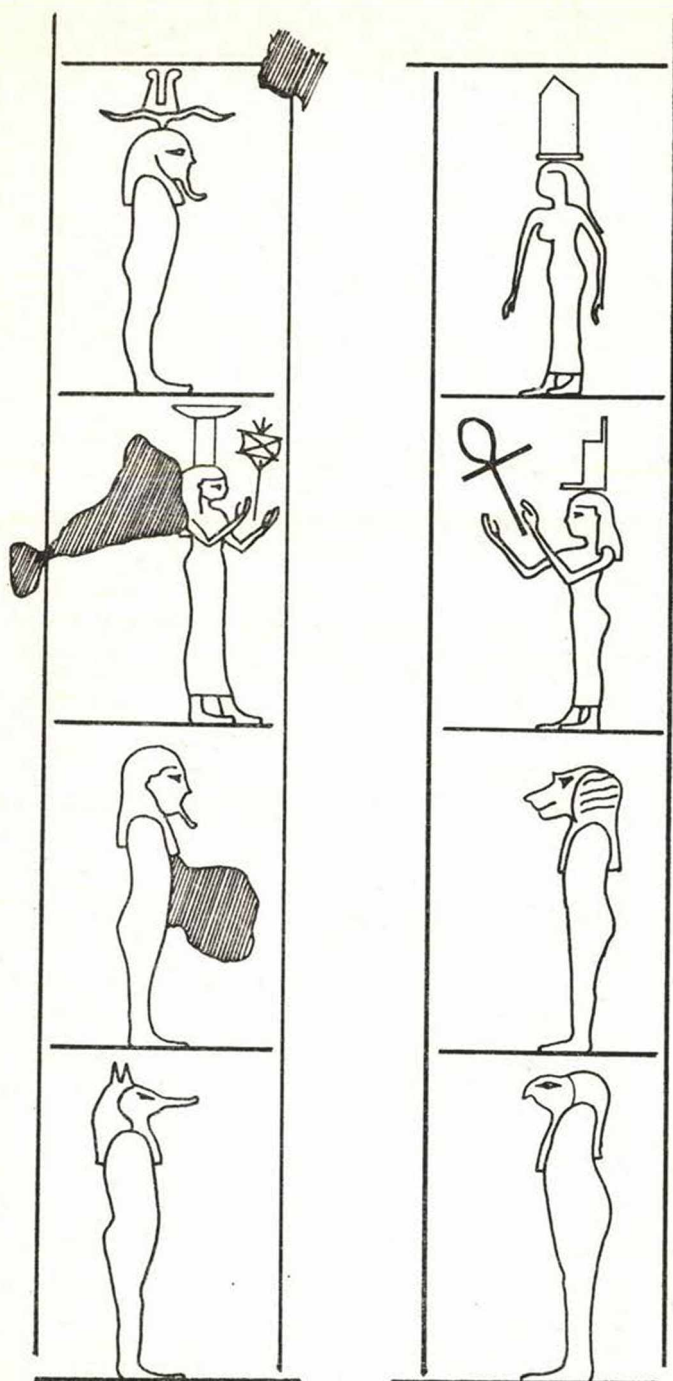


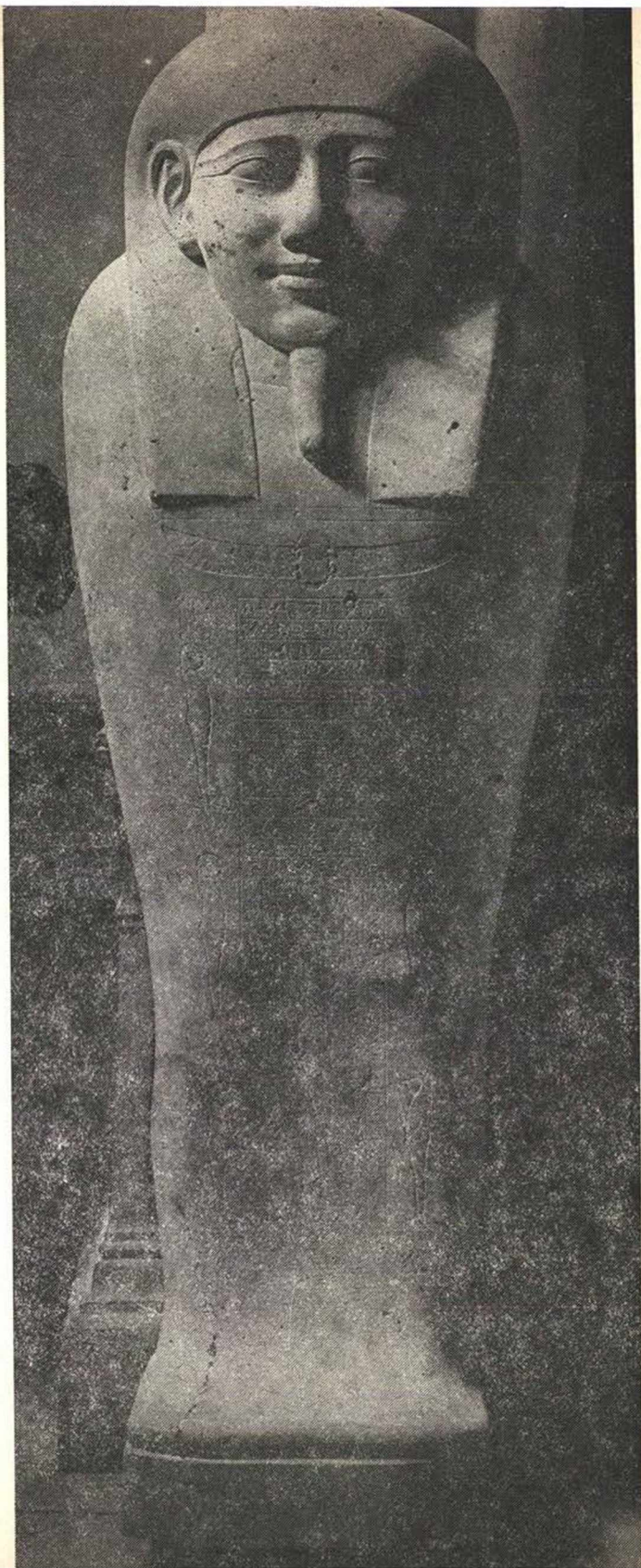
Fig. 5.

*Fig. 7.*



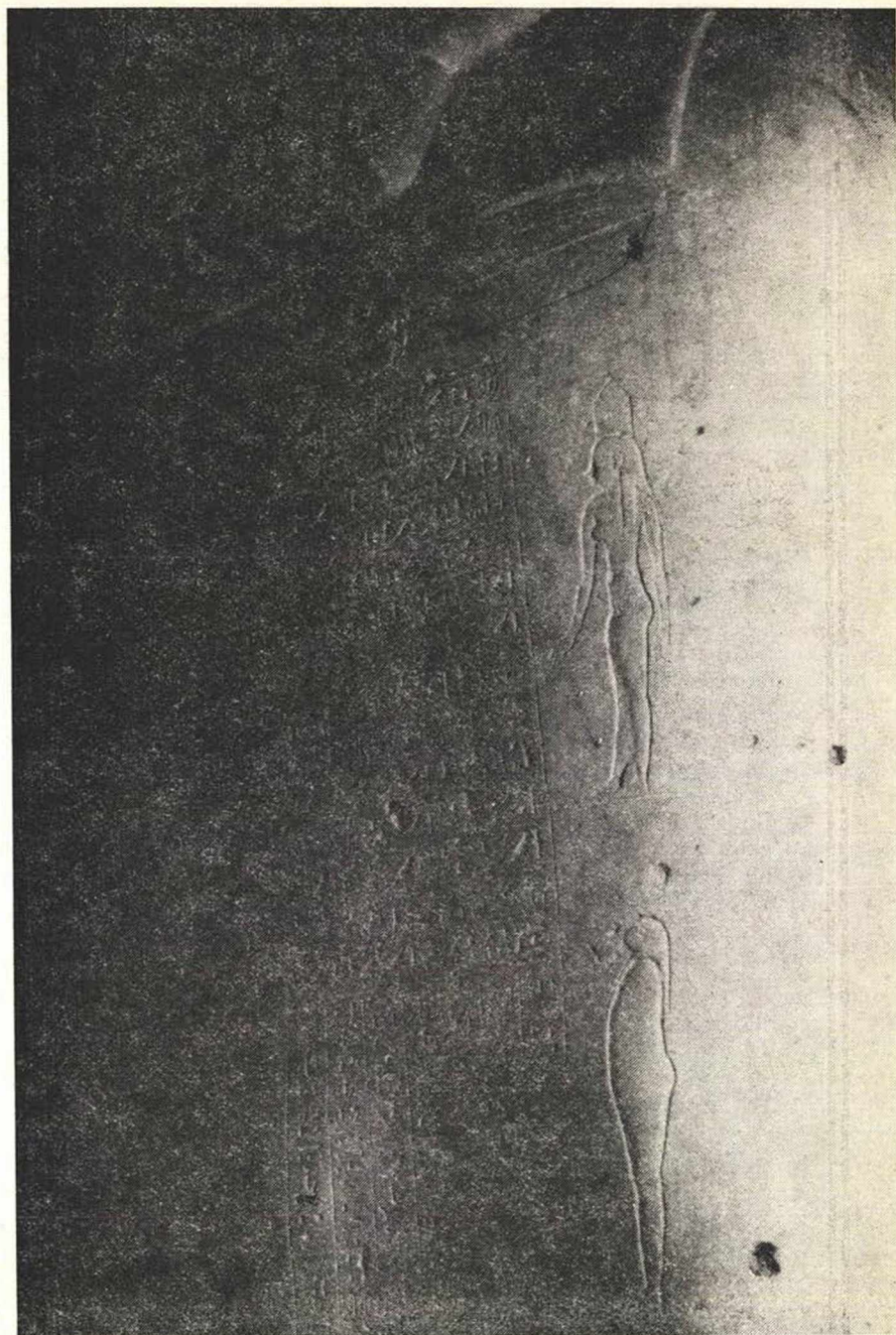
*Fig. 8.*

*Fig. 9.*









*Fig. 11.*



Fig. 12.

The three sarcophagi are not unique in providing evidence for the cult of the pyramids. A sarcophagus of this kind is in the possession of the Metropolitan Museum in New York. The owner is Isetirdis (*ḥs.t-ir-djs*). The two personified pyramids are accompanied by Isis and Nephthys.<sup>14</sup>

Since most of the Ptolemaic anthropoid sarcophagi are still unpublished, it goes difficult to make conjectures as to the number of representations of this type. The known pieces seem to display common features. In two cases (Bat-Ijti and Isetirdis) the provenance is Saqqāra and there is little doubt that the others also come from the same necropolis.

The personification of pyramids was not a completely new phenomenon at the Ptolemaic Age. Looking for the first instance, we can go back as far as the Old Kingdom. In a passage of the Pyramid Texts, attested in the tomb of Merenre and Pepi II, the pyramid was identified with Osiris.<sup>15</sup> Although the word for the pyramid (*mr*) was masculine, remarkably enough, pyramids came to be associated with some female members of the royal family during the second half of the Old Kingdom.<sup>16</sup> While this may be regarded as a noteworthy antecedent to the female Men-Nofer pyramid, it would be unwise to assume a direct connection, since it is difficult to trace historical links. It must be taken into consideration that geographical names are often feminine and so is the word *town* (*njw.t*). It is no wonder, then, that the eponymous pyramid of Memphis takes the shape of a goddess. Men-Nofer seems to be represented as a gooddes in a chapel of Sethos I in Memphis.<sup>17</sup> If the interpretation is right, it can be a representation of Memphis as town more than that of the pyramid of Pepi I; a pyramid represented as a goddes would be strange at that time.

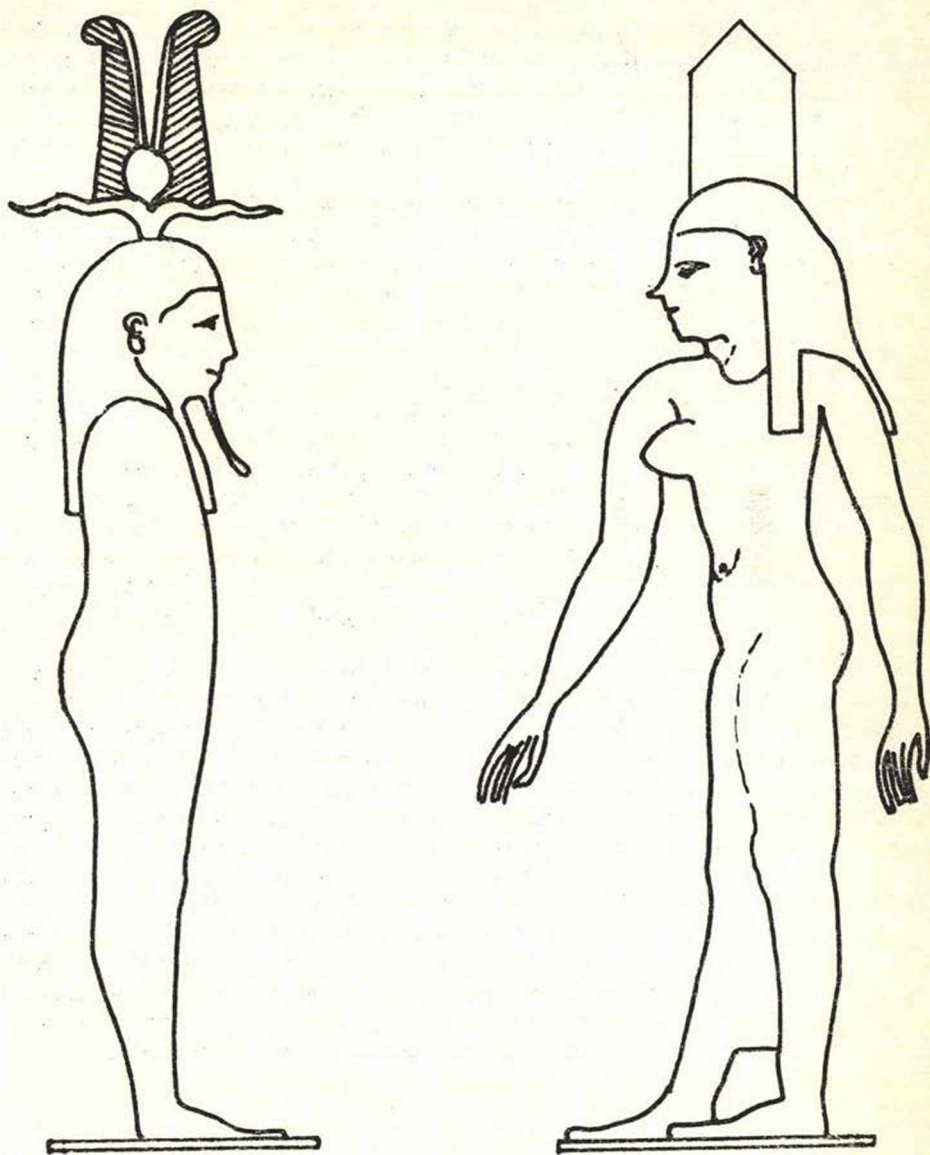


Fig. 13.

Since the pyramid Mn-Nfr-Ppy gave its name to Memphis, there was some curiosity among the people of the city as to its builder, Pepi I. The cult of the kings of the Old Kingdom in the Late Period was discussed by E. Otto.<sup>18</sup> Outside Memphis he enjoyed some cult in Thebes<sup>19</sup> and especially in Dendara.<sup>20</sup>

Pepi II had a high reputation as early as in the First Intermediate Period. Numerous kings bore the name Noferkare, and his pyramid had a priest in Aswan during the eighth dynasty<sup>21</sup>. Although there is no evidence for a flourishing cult at the Late Period, the fabulous length of his rule, attested in Manetho's work,<sup>22</sup> may have contributed to his fame in Ptolemaic Memphis.

The place of the two pyramids within the necropolis — they lay rather near each other — may perhaps account for their coupling. As to the reasons of their appearance in the funerary beliefs, all we can be sure of is that they were imagined as patrons of the deceased in the necropolis of Memphis. Their cult was probably never elaborated in a theological form, on the whole they remained tutelary deities with only vaguely defined traits. Their association with Isis is probably due to the role played by the goddess in Giza where she was venerated, at least since Dyn. XXI as "Isis, mistress of the pyramid"<sup>23</sup> in a temple built beside the southern satellite pyramid of that of Cheops, that is the pyramid of Henutsen.<sup>24</sup>

If the Osirian concept of the pyramids was still alive, the presence of Isis and Nephthys must have seemed natural to the priests who made the drafts for the decorations of the sarcophagi. One has the impression, however, that it was more a funerary than a mythological Osirian religion which dominated these sarcophagi. The strongest Osirian features emerge in the Bat Ijti decoration.

We need not go into details as to the funerary role of the four sons of Horus who were given a prominent place in the representations of the sarcophagi. A shift in beliefs concerning these gods must have started as early as in the Ramesside Period.<sup>25</sup> Their protective power came to be stressed in the Late Period in a more emphasized form than before. They were regarded as impersonated forms of the organs placed into the canopic jars and became to a certain extent divine aspects of the human personality.<sup>26</sup>

In view of the scanty evidence relating to the cult and use of pyramids in the Ptolemaic Period<sup>27</sup> this group of sarcophagi gains some importance. It would be necessary to have more data about the tombs of the members of the Ptolemaic dynasty. Unfortunately, we do not have reliable information on the royal necropolis in Alexandria. In any event, a passage in Lucan refers to the Ptolemaic royal tombs as pyramids.<sup>28</sup> Whether true or not, this statement shows that the pyramid was held to be the most adequate form for a royal tomb in this period as well.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I. Nagy: *Acta Antiqua Hung.* 21 (1973), 53 ff; H. Brunner: *Saeculum* 21 Heft 2-3 (1976), 151 ff; H. Brunner: *Archaismus*, in: *LÄ* I, 386 ff; P. Der Manuelian: *SAK* 10 (1983), 220 ff.

<sup>2</sup> H. Vyse - J. S. Perring: *Operations carried out at the Pyramids of Gizeh III*, London 1842 pl. D (at p. 44); J. Ph. Lauer: *La pyramide à degrés I*, Le Caire 1936, 43, II. pl. XIX.

<sup>3</sup> C. N. Firth - J. E. Quibell: *The Step Pyramid I*, Cairo 1935, 5, II. Pl. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Lauer: *op. cit.*, I 45. The numerous mummies found in the pyramid belonged to the intrusive burials. Vyse-Perring: *op. cit.* III, 44-45, cf. Lauer I, 43.

<sup>5</sup> *H. von Minutoli*: Von Reise zum grossen Tempel des Juppiter Ammon..., Berlin 1824, 298-9.

<sup>6</sup> *A. Fakhry*: The Pyramids, Chicago 1961, fig. 85; *K. Sethe*: ZÄS 30 (1892), 12.

<sup>7</sup> *M. L. Buhl*: The Late Egyptian Anthropoid Stone Sarcophagi, Kobenhavn 1959, 135-136; *G. Maspero*: Guide<sup>4</sup>, Le Caire 1915, p. 270 no. 1302; *K. Piehl*: Inscr. I, LVI-LVIII, 61-63.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. *W. Helck*: Pyramiden, in: LÄ IV, 1253 (*Mn-nfr-Ppy*).

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.* 1252 (*Mn-nfr-Ppy*).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Buhl*: op. cit. 136. The texts will be treated in a later article.

<sup>11</sup> *Buhl*: op. cit., 95-96.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *H. Ranke*: PN I, 211 (12).

<sup>13</sup> *Buhl*: 137.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, 126.

<sup>15</sup> Pyr. 1657 a-b; cf. pyr. 1267-1274.

<sup>16</sup> *P. Montet*: Kêmi 14 (1957), 92-101.

<sup>17</sup> *J. Berlandini*: BSFE 99 (Mars 1984), 28-52. It is supposed by the author that the goddess Memphis may have had a similar head-dress as Men-Nofer on the Ptolemaic sarcophagi (p. 39).

<sup>18</sup> MDAIK 15 (1957), 200-201. The two pyramids as objects of cult were first mentioned by *C. Wilke*: ZÄS 70 (1934), 71-73.

<sup>19</sup> *Otto*, 200; the statue was dated by *F. Daumas* (BIFAO 65 [1967], 213-214) to the Old Kingdom.

<sup>20</sup> Dendara III, 85, pl. 197, V. pl. 443; *A. Mariette*: Dend. III, pl. 78n; *Otto*, 200.

<sup>21</sup> *W. S. Smith*: Art and Architecture of Ancient Egypt<sup>2</sup>, Harmondsworth 1981, 152.

<sup>22</sup> *W. G. Waddell*: Manetho, London 1956, 54.

<sup>23</sup> *D. Wildung*: Die Rolle ägyptischer Könige in Bewusstsein ihrer Nachwelt I (MÄS 17), Berlin 1969, 177-188.

<sup>24</sup> *W. Helck*: Pyramiden, in: LÄ IV, 1230.

<sup>25</sup> *J. Assmann*: JEA 65 (1979), 67-75.

<sup>26</sup> *L. Kákosy*, in: Religions en Égypte hellénistique et romaine, Paris 1969, 64-68 (reprint: *Studia Aegyptiaca* VII [1981], 202-205.)

<sup>27</sup> *W. M. F. Petrie*: Roman Portraits and Memphis IV, (London 1911), 19, pl. XVII, XXI; *G. Möller*: Archiv für Papyrusforschung 7, 65-66; *L. Mitteis-U. Wilcken*: Grundzüge und Chrestomathie der Papyruskunde I (II. Hälfte), Leipzig - Berlin 1912, 578-579.

<sup>28</sup> *Pharsalia* VIII, 696-697; *P. M. Fraser*: Ptolemaic Alexandria I, Oxford 1972, 16.

<sup>29</sup> At the end of this article let me express my best thanks to Dr. Mohammed Mohsen, former director of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo for his permission to discuss these sarcophagi. My thanks are due also to Dr. E. Gaál who was kind enough to make the drawings.