

THE JOURNAL OF  
Egyptian  
Archaeology

VOLUME 100  
2014

PUBLISHED BY  
THE EGYPT EXPLORATION SOCIETY  
3 DOUGHTY MEWS, LONDON WC1N 2PG  
ISSN 0307-5133

JEUX DE LA NATURE EN DÉPÔTS VOTIFS ET FUNÉRAIRES DANS LES ROYAUMES NUBIENS . . . . .	Vincent Francigny and Alex de Voogt . . . . .	233
THE CASE OF THE THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD 'SHABTI-MAKER (?) OF THE AMUN DOMAIN' DIAMUN/PADIAMUN AND THE CHANGE IN CONCEPTION OF SHABTI STATUETTES . . . . .	Gianluca Miniaci . . . . .	245
SELF-REPRESENTATION IN OLD KINGDOM QUARRYING INSCRIPTIONS AT WADI HAMMAMAT . . . . .	Deborah Sweeney . . . . .	275
A FRESH LOOK AT THE BAAL-ZAPHON STELE . . . . .	Eythan Levy . . . . .	293
URBANISM AND TEMPLE RELIGION IN EGYPT: A COMMENT ON HIERAKONPOLIS . . . . .	Richard Bussmann . . . . .	311
HERACLES AND THE HONE: ABOUT A FOUNDATION DEPOSIT FROM THE TEMPLE OF THONIS-HERACLEION . . . . .	Anne-Sophie von Bomhard . . . . .	339
DREI VERLORENE SCHENKUNGSSTELEN IN DER ÄGYPTISCHEN SAMMLUNG BERLIN . . . . .	Malte Römer . . . . .	357
A NEW DEMOTIC TRANSLATION OF (EXCERPTS OF) A CHAPTER OF THE <i>BOOK OF THE DEAD</i> . . . . .	Joachim Friedrich Quack . . . . .	381
RAMSES II HELPS THE DEAD: AN INTERPRETATION OF <i>BOOK OF THE DEAD</i> SUPPLEMENTARY CHAPTER 166 . . . . .	Jan-Michael Dahms, Martin Pehal, and Harco Willems . . . . .	395
THE NETJERIKHET STELA AND THE EARLY DYNASTIC CULT OF RA . . . . .	Colin Reader . . . . .	421
THE 'HORHOTEP LETTERS' FROM THE SACRED ANIMAL NECROPOLIS AT NORTH SAQQARA . . . . .	H. S. Smith, Cary J. Martin, and Sue Davies . . . . .	437

# THE NETJERIKHET STELA AND THE EARLY DYNASTIC CULT OF RA

By COLIN READER

This paper presents an assessment of a distinctive standing stone which is currently on display in the Imhotep Museum, Saqqara. The prominent snake decoration of the stela is compared with other examples of snake stelae from Ancient Egypt, leading to the proposed identification of the monument as part of an Early Dynastic *senut(i)* shrine, a shrine associated with the cult of Ra.

## كولين ريدير لوحة نثرى خت وعبادة رع أوائل الأسرات

يقدم هذا البحث تقييماً لحجر قائم متميز، ومعرض حالياً بمتحف إيموحتب بسقارة. حيث تشبه زخرفة الثعبان البارز على اللوحة أمثلة أخرى للوحات تحمل ثعباناً من مصر القديمة، و اقترح أن هذا الحجر جزء من مقصورة *senut(i)* المرتبطة بعبادة رع من أوائل الأسرات

### Introduction

IN one of the central exhibition galleries of the Imhotep Museum at Saqqara is a single tall standing stela, which has a slightly tapering square cross-section.<sup>1</sup> This monument was found in 1992-93 during excavations of the pyramid complex of Teti at Saqqara and first published by Zawi Hawass in 1994.<sup>2</sup> The age of the monument is securely attested to the Third Dynasty on the basis of the serekh of Horus Netjerikhet (Zoser), two examples of which are inscribed in raised relief on one face of the monument.<sup>3</sup>

Given that this stela (referred to in this paper as the 'Netjerikhet stela') had been re-used in the pyramid complex of Teti, the context in which it was found reveals little of its original purpose or function. Hawass offered four possible interpretations for the original location of the monument and the role it may therefore have played as part of the pyramid complex of Netjerikhet.<sup>4</sup> In the current paper, an alternative interpretation of the stela is presented that is based on an interpretation of the decoration applied to the monument. As a result of this interpretation, the current author proposes that the Netjerikhet stela is associated with the cult of Ra and, as such, is a rare surviving 'solar' monument from the Early Dynastic Period.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The monument was found in two parts with the maximum width of the upper fragment reported as 26.9cm and the maximum width of the lower fragment given as 30.5cm. See Z. Hawass, 'A Fragmentary Monument of Djoser from Saqqara', *JEA* 80 (1994), 45-56.

<sup>2</sup> Hawass, *JEA* 80, 45.

<sup>3</sup> Hawass, *JEA* 80, 51.

<sup>4</sup> Hawass, *JEA* 80, 51-6.

<sup>5</sup> In the current article, the Early Dynastic Period is considered to include the First, Second and Third Dynasties. See also D. Wengrow, *The Archaeology of Early Egypt* (Cambridge, 2006), table 2, 273.

### The Netjerikhet Stela

Although broken when found, the Netjerikhet stela was substantially intact and it was possible for Hawass to reconstruct its original appearance.<sup>6</sup> Of the four faces of the stela, one was undecorated, leading to the conclusion that ‘...the fragments were attached to a wall or served as a jamb at the entrance to a building’.<sup>7</sup> Hawass speculated that the structure with which the stela was originally associated would have been decorated with a pair of these stelae, possibly linked by a lintel.<sup>8</sup> Opposite the undecorated face, the front face of the stela is divided into two registers which are arranged vertically (fig. 1, left). Each register features the serekh of Horus Netjerikhet, beneath which is an alternating sequence of recumbent jackals and lions.

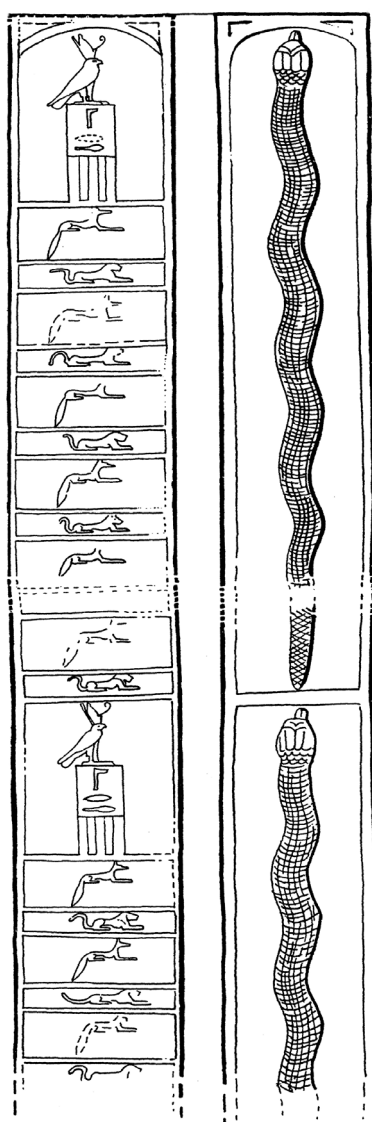


FIG. 1. The Netjerikhet stela (after Hawass, *JEA* 80, fig. 3).

<sup>6</sup> Hawass, *JEA* 80, fig. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Hawass, *JEA* 80, 51.

<sup>8</sup> Hawass, *JEA* 80, fig. 3.



The two remaining faces of the monument<sup>9</sup> share what is essentially identical decoration. Each side panel is divided into two registers, one above the other, in which prominent snakes have been carved in raised relief (fig. 1, right). As Hawass notes, the relief carving of the snakes is deeper than the carving of the other elements of the decoration (including the serekhs), suggesting that the snakes were a dominant element of the overall composition.<sup>10</sup> Although he does not offer any identification for the snakes on the stela, Hawass considered that they had been carved in a threatening pose and compared them with the snakes at the south end of the Step Pyramid court.<sup>11</sup> Although the stela had been re-used within the pyramid complex of Teti, Hawass reasoned that originally it would have formed part of the Step Pyramid complex of Netjerikhet. When considering the nature of the structure with which the stela was originally associated, Hawass identified four possible locations, namely:<sup>12</sup>

1. In the *heb-sed* court—one of the buildings associated with the festival of the rejuvenation of Netjerikhet.
2. In the largely unexcavated area to the north of the Step Pyramid.
3. Close to the find-spot in the later Teti pyramid complex, some distance to the north-east of the Step Pyramid complex.
4. Close to the later Unas valley temple, some distance to the south-east of the Step Pyramid complex.

On the basis of locations 3 and 4, Hawass considered that the gateway or ceremonial entrance that included these snake stelae may have been located at the distal end of an early form of pyramid causeway.<sup>13</sup> Given the decorative regime applied to the Netjerikhet stela, however, particularly the emphasis given to the relief carving of the snakes, the current author has considered an alternative interpretation for this distinctive standing stone.

### Snake stones and the cult of Ra

A number of stelae with prominent snake decoration are known from Ancient Egypt, including examples from Athribis (Eighteenth Dynasty)<sup>14</sup> and from the wall decoration of the Festival Hall of Osorkon II at Bubastis (Twenty-Second Dynasty, fig. 2).<sup>15</sup> Taking evidence from the Pyramid Texts and later sources, Kees presented a thorough discussion of these *Schlangensteine*,<sup>16</sup> identifying them as a rounded form of standing stone with prominent snake decoration that was used as a determinative when referring to a religious structure known as the *senut(i)* shrine. Kees also noted that the entrance

<sup>9</sup> Referred to in the current article as the 'sides'.

<sup>10</sup> Hawass, *JEA* 80, 49.

<sup>11</sup> Hawass, *JEA* 80, 51.

<sup>12</sup> Hawass, *JEA* 80, 51–6.

<sup>13</sup> Hawass, *JEA* 80, fig. 4. For an alternative discussion on the influences that led to the development of the pyramid causeway, see C. D. Reader, 'On Pyramid Causeways', *JEA* 90 (2004), 63–71.

<sup>14</sup> Anon. *Catalogue of Egyptian Civilisation Exhibition* (Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art, c.2001), pls 68, 190; a damaged stela attributed to the reign of Amenhotep III.

<sup>15</sup> E. Naville, *The Festival-Hall of Osorkon II in the Great Temple of Bubastis* (EM 10; London, 1892), pl. IV: 4.

<sup>16</sup> H. Kees, 'Die Schlangensteine und ihre Beziehungen zu den Reichsheiligtümern', *ZÄS* 57 (1922), 120–36.

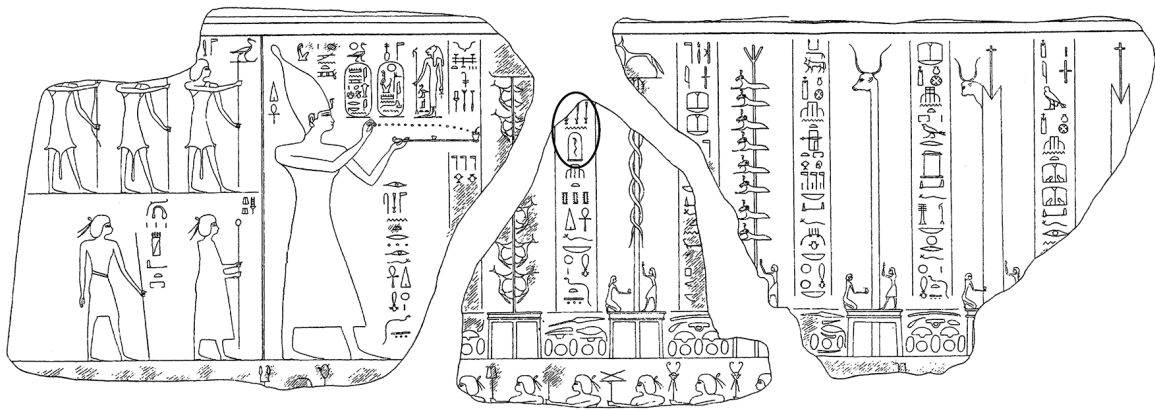


FIG. 2. Part of the wall decoration from the Festival Hall of Osorkon II (Twenty-Second Dynasty) showing a damaged reference to a *senut(i)* shrine and rounded snake-stone determinative (circled). (After Naville, *Osorkon II*, pl. IX: 7–9).

to the *senut(i)* shrine appeared to have been guarded by a pair of these rounded snake stones.<sup>17</sup>

Nothing certain is known regarding the location of the *senut(i)* shrine. Noting references in Chapter 115 of the *Book of the Dead* to the erection of serpent stones in front of the Sanctuary of Ra, Kees identified links between the *senut(i)* shrine and Heliopolis, Ancient Egypt's pre-eminent site of solar worship, concluding that the entrance to the Sanctuary of Ra had been decorated by a pair of rounded snake stones.<sup>18</sup> Kees suggested, however, that many of the mythological events associated with Heliopolis were transplanted there from other locations in order to represent Heliopolis as the city of the unification.<sup>19</sup> Given these considerations and the fact that *Schlangensteine* are known from sites other than Heliopolis, the evidence suggests that *senut(i)* shrines may have been established at more than one location.<sup>20</sup>

With its prominent snake decoration and indications that it was one of a pair of stones used to decorate the entrance to a structure, the Netjerikhet stela has many of the attributes that Kees associated with *Schlangensteine*. Recent authors have also drawn comparisons between the Netjerikhet stela and *Schlangensteine*, albeit without reaching firm conclusions.<sup>21</sup> However, given that the Netjerikhet stela is very different in shape from the rounded stelae described by Kees, the current author initially concluded that no definitive link could be established between the two.

<sup>17</sup> Kees, *ZÄS* 57, 121.

<sup>18</sup> Kees, *ZÄS* 57, 124–5. See also T. A. H. Wilkinson, *Royal Annals of Ancient Egypt: The Palermo Stone and its Associated Fragments* (London, 2000), 138; and N. Strudwick and R. J. Leprohon, *Texts from the Pyramid Age* (Atlanta, 2005), 508.

<sup>19</sup> Kees, *ZÄS* 57, 124.

<sup>20</sup> In addition to the example of a snake stone from Athribis discussed above, other possible examples have been identified by Kees (e.g. the Southern Chapel of Neuserre). In the context of other possible locations for the *senut(i)* shrine, Kees also discusses the likely association of the shrine with palaces and royal residences in ancient Egypt: see Kees, *ZÄS* 57, 123.

<sup>21</sup> Wilkinson, *Royal Annals*, 138; and Strudwick and Leprohon, *Texts from the Pyramid Age*, 508.

### References to the *senut(i)* shrine in the Royal Annals

The Royal Annals span the period between the First Dynasty reign of Aha and the reign of the early Fifth Dynasty pharaoh Neferirkara.<sup>22</sup> Despite being fragmentary and subject to some interpretation, the Royal Annals have been described as ‘one of the most important historical sources for the Early Dynastic Period and Old Kingdom’,<sup>23</sup> which provide ‘invaluable evidence for the concerns of the royal court, the ideology of the divine kingship and aspects of early religion’.<sup>24</sup>

The *senut(i)* shrine is one of only a small number of sacred buildings mentioned in the Royal Annals and although clearly a distinct structure, the tendency to refer to it in close association with the national shrines of Upper and Lower Egypt (the *per-wer* and *per-nu*) emphasises the relative importance of the *senut(i)* shrine.<sup>25</sup> The surviving sections of the Royal Annals support the links between the *senut(i)* shrine and the cult of Ra. The Royal Annals entry for the fifth year in the reign of Sahura records the pharaoh as having made endowments for ‘Ra in the *senut(i)* shrine’.<sup>26</sup> The Royal Annals also support the links identified by Kees, between the *senut(i)* shrine and Heliopolis. An entry from the reign of Neferirkara describes the pharaoh making endowments for the ennead in the *senut(i)* shrine,<sup>27</sup> the ennead being a group of nine gods that was most closely associated with Heliopolis.<sup>28</sup>

As discussed earlier in the current paper, Kees noted that in the Pyramid Texts and later documents, *senut(i)* shrine was written with a determinative that took the form of the rounded *Schlangenstein*;<sup>29</sup> however, no examples of this rounded determinative appear in the Royal Annals. From a total of six references to the *senut(i)* shrine,<sup>30</sup> three entries in the Royal Annals are written without any determinative,<sup>31</sup> whilst the three remaining entries are written with a determinative that takes the form of a pair of standing stones remarkably similar in shape to the Netjerikhet stela (fig. 3).<sup>32</sup> Significantly, when the references to the *senut(i)* shrine in the Royal Annals are analysed further, a clear temporal distribution is apparent. The three references to *senut(i)* shrine that are written without a determinative are from the later periods represented in the Annals (from the reigns of Shepseskaf, Sahura and Neferirkara). The three references that use the determinative of the rectilinear stelae are the earliest, from the First to the early Fourth Dynasties (the reigns of Den, Netjerikhet and Snefru). Whilst there is

<sup>22</sup> Wilkinson, *Royal Annals*, 258–9. For consistency, when referring in this article to specific entries in the Royal Annals, the system of reference used by Wilkinson has been adopted.

<sup>23</sup> I. Shaw, ‘Introduction’, in I. Shaw (ed.), *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 2000), 4.

<sup>24</sup> Wilkinson, *Royal Annals*, 81.

<sup>25</sup> The Annals from the reign of Snefru for instance, list the *per-wer*, the *per-nu* and the *senut(i)* shrine as closely related, but nevertheless separate structures. See Royal Annals entries PS v.III.1 and CF4 r.U.2, Kees, *ZÄS* 57, 134 and Wilkinson, *Royal Annals*, 70, 234, 243.

<sup>26</sup> Royal Annals entry PS v.III.1.

<sup>27</sup> Royal Annals entry PS v.IV.3.

<sup>28</sup> J. Cervelló-Autuori, ‘The Sun-Religion in the Thinite Age: Evidence and Political Significance’, in R. F. Friedman and P. N. Fiske (eds), *Proceedings of the Third International Conference ‘Origin of the State. Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt’* (Leuven, 2011), 1128.

<sup>29</sup> Kees, *ZÄS* 57, 121.

<sup>30</sup> Royal Annals entries PS r.V.9, PS v.I.2, PS v.III.1, PS v.IV.3, CF4 r.U.2 and CF5 r.L.3.

<sup>31</sup> Royal Annals entries PS v.I.2, PS v.III.1, PS v.IV.3. See also Wilkinson, *Royal Annals*, fig. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Royal Annals entries PS r.V.9, CF4 r.U.2 and CF5 r.L.3. See also Wilkinson, *Royal Annals*, figs 1, 9 and 10.

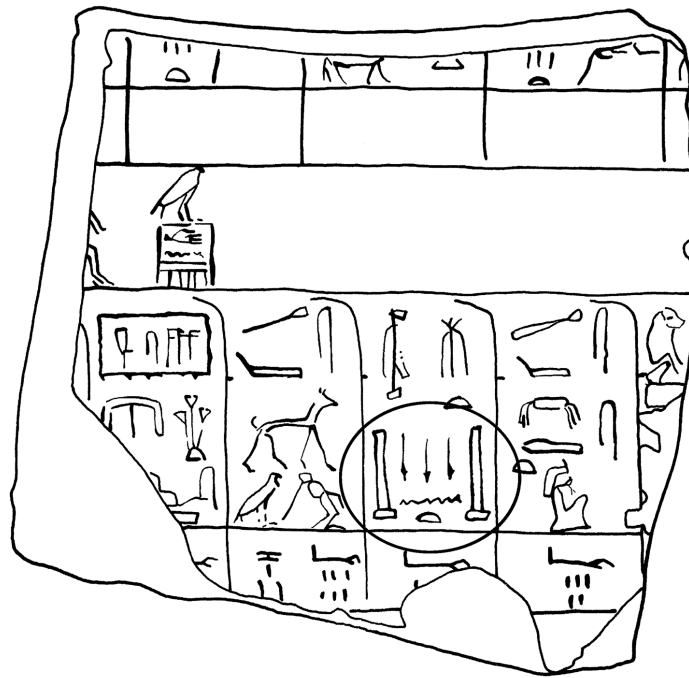


FIG. 3. The Royal Annals, Cairo Fragment V (Recto) from the reign of Den (First Dynasty), showing a reference to the *senut(i)* shrine (circled) with tall rectilinear stelae used as a determinative.  
(After Wilkinson, *Royal Annals*, fig. 10).

no evident snake decoration on the early rectilinear determinatives, this can be readily explained by the diminutive size of the individual elements of the Royal Annals inscriptions.<sup>33</sup>

On the basis of the Royal Annals, therefore, it can be concluded that the *senut(i)* shrine was a building of some religious significance, which, as entries from the reign of Den indicate, existed from the very earliest parts of the pharaonic era. A number of the Royal Annals entries also confirm the links between the *senut(i)* shrine and the worship of Ra that were identified by Kees. Unlike Kees's rounded form of *Schlangenstein*, however, the Royal Annals suggest that the earliest form of snake stone was a tall rectilinear monument very similar in shape to the stela in the Imhotep Museum. On the basis of the evidence provided by the Royal Annals, therefore, the current author proposes that the Netjerikhet stela should be regarded as an early form of snake stone and, as such, a monument associated with the Early Dynastic cult of Ra. This, however, raises an additional issue: that of the relationship between the institution of kingship and the cult of Ra in Early Dynastic Egypt.

### The cult of Ra in Early Dynastic Egypt

It is generally assumed that links between the cult of Ra and the institution of kingship were not fully established until the mid-Fourth Dynasty. It was only from the reign of Djedfra that Ra was consistently referred to in royal names and the epithet 'Son

<sup>33</sup> Each of the stelae given in the Palermo Stone entry from the reign of Netjerikhet, for example (PS r.V.9), are estimated to be no bigger than 4 mm high and 2 mm wide. These estimated dimensions are based on the maximum width of the Palermo Stone, which is given as 25 cm (Wilkinson, *Royal Annals*, 18 and fig. 1).



of the Sun' was adopted as part of the formal pharaonic title.<sup>34</sup> Whilst a number of authorities have identified evidence for the increasing dominance of the solar cult in the Third Dynasty, there appears to be little acceptance that the sun god was significant in a royal context in the preceding periods.<sup>35</sup>

Amongst the disputed evidence for pharaonic association with Ra in the Second Dynasty is the name of the pharaoh who succeeded Hotepsekhemwy. Although this pharaoh's serekh clearly contains a sun-disk symbol, there is no agreement as to whether this represents the sun god or simply the sun itself. Opinion has tended to consider that it is the sun's disk that is represented and that the king's name should be read as 'Lord of the Sun', i.e. Nebra.<sup>36</sup> This issue has been re-addressed recently by Jochem Kahl, however, who argues that the alternative reading of the name, 'Ra is my Lord' (i.e. Ra'neb) is the most appropriate.<sup>37</sup>

Kahl's thesis is based on the evidence provided by an Early Dynastic pot sherd found at Umm el-Qaab, Abydos.<sup>38</sup> This sherd is inscribed with the serekh of Horus Ninetjer, which is positioned alongside an incompletely erased serekh of his assumed predecessor Ra'neb/Nebra. Ninetjer's serekh is, however, inscribed over an earlier name, which Kahl has identified as that of an ephemeral ruler of the Second Dynasty, Weneg. The position of Weneg in the succession of the Second Dynasty is not clearly established, though according to Kahl, the evidence provided by the British Museum artefact suggests that Ra'neb/Nebra and Weneg (the two names that were originally inscribed on EA 35556 before it was effaced and Ninetjer's name added) are the same individual. According to Kahl, this pharaoh had the Horus name Ra'neb/Nebra and the *nswt-bit*i name Weneg,<sup>39</sup> an association that Kahl considers to be significant in terms of the Early Dynastic worship of Ra. The name Weneg is mentioned in two utterances from the Pyramid Texts and in both of these, Weneg is described as a subordinate of Ra.<sup>40</sup> As Kahl argues, it would not be logical for an individual to be referred to in the Pyramid Texts as a subordinate of the sun god and yet to have a Horus name 'Lord of the Sun', which suggests he was superior to that deity.<sup>41</sup> Kahl's thesis and the evidence on which it is based therefore suggest that the subservient 'Ra is my Lord' is the correct reading of the Horus name Ra'neb.<sup>42</sup> On this basis, Kahl argues that during the Second Dynasty reign of Ra'neb, the sun god enjoyed an elevated position within the Egyptian pantheon.<sup>43</sup>

It is apparent that Ra'neb's associations with the sun god do not represent an isolated example of sun worship amongst the elite of Early Dynastic Egypt. There is evidence

<sup>34</sup> H. W. Müller, 'Der gute Gott Radjedef, Sohn des Ré', *ZÄS* 91 (1964), 132. R. J. Leprohon, *The Great Name: Ancient Egyptian Royal Titulary* (Atlanta, 2013), 36 n. 35.

<sup>35</sup> J. Kahl, *Ra is my Lord: Searching for the Rise of the Sun God at the Dawn of Egyptian History* (Wiesbaden, 2007), table 1. See also T. A. H. Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt* (London, 1999), 316.

<sup>36</sup> Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt*, 84, 293.

<sup>37</sup> Kahl, *Ra is my Lord*, 13. See also Leprohon, *The Great Name*, 28, where the Horus name of Ra'neb is given as 'My lord is the sun god'.

<sup>38</sup> British Museum accession no. EA 35556.

<sup>39</sup> Kahl, *Ra is my Lord*, 12.

<sup>40</sup> Kahl, *Ra is my Lord*, 13. See R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts* (Oxford, 1969): Weneg is described as a 'follower of Ra' in Spell/Utterance 363 and as the 'son of Ra' in Spell/Utterance 476 (emphasis added).

<sup>41</sup> Kahl, *Ra is my Lord*, 13.

<sup>42</sup> Kahl, *Ra is my Lord*, 13.

<sup>43</sup> Kahl, *Ra is my Lord*, 62–3.

for a developing interest in sun worship during the subsequent reign of Ninetjer, as well as during the reign of Peribsen from the late Second Dynasty.<sup>44</sup> A range of additional evidence to support the Early Dynastic origins of the sun cult has been presented recently by Josep Cervelló-Autuori, who concludes that royal associations with Ra developed throughout the Early Dynastic Period,<sup>45</sup> beginning in the middle of the First Dynasty.<sup>46</sup> Kahl also demonstrates that a significant proportion of scribes that are known from the Early Dynastic Period included a reference to Ra in their name. Importantly, according to Kahl, these are typically amongst the highest-ranking scribes and, as such, can be regarded as individuals close to the royal court.<sup>47</sup> Kahl concludes therefore that in addition to the sun god's royal patronage during the reign of Ra'neb, the cult of Ra existed throughout much of the Early Dynastic Period.

This emerging view, that the cult of Ra was important throughout much of the Early Dynastic Period, should not be regarded as inconsistent with the longer-established view of sun worship in Ancient Egypt. It does however, require a reconsideration of the relationship between pharaoh and the sun god. For example, rather than Djedfra being considered as the first pharaoh to associate himself directly with the sun god, his Fourth Dynasty reign should perhaps be regarded as the end of an evolutionary phase during which an increasingly strong relationship developed between the king and the cult of Ra. That such an evolution in religious thought and practice was underway during the Early Dynastic Period and Old Kingdom has been recognised by others,<sup>48</sup> and it is argued that elements of this evolution may be reflected in the changing use of determinatives when referring to the *senut(i)* shrine. The three references to the *senut(i)* shrine in the Royal Annals that use the tall rectilinear stela as determinatives all pre-date the reign of Djedfra (from the reigns of Den, Netjerikhet and Snefru). The Royal Annals entries that do not use any determinative when referring to the *senut(i)* shrine all post-date Djedfra (from the reigns of Shepseskaf, Sahura and Neferirkara). Given that they are based largely on references to the Pyramid Texts and later documents, it can be argued that the rounded snake-stela determinatives discussed by Kees were in use no earlier than the late Fifth Dynasty.<sup>49</sup> On this basis, it is concluded that the tall square stela that were used in the Royal Annals as the determinative for the *senut(i)* shrine represent the earliest form of snake stone, which after a period of transition from the mid-Fourth to the mid-Fifth Dynasty was supplanted by Kees's rounded *Schlangensteine*.

<sup>44</sup> Wilkinson, *Royal Annals*, 125; Kahl, *Ra is my Lord*, 44–6; and Cervelló-Autuori, in Friedman and Fiske (eds), *Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt*, 1132: 3. Compare with Müller, *ZÄS* 91, 132.

<sup>45</sup> Cervelló-Autuori, in Friedman and Fiske (eds), *Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt*, 1125–49.

<sup>46</sup> Cervelló-Autuori, in Friedman and Fiske (eds), *Predynastic and Early Dynastic Egypt*, 1144.

<sup>47</sup> Kahl, *Ra is my Lord*, 38. When addressing the use of 'Ra' in names of the royal family, the earliest such reference identified by Begelsbacher-Fischer is from the reign of Snefru: see B. L. Begelsbacher-Fischer, *Untersuchungen zur Götterwelt des Alten Reiches im Spiegel der Privatgräber der IV. und V. Dynastie* (OBO 37; Freiburg, 1981), 156.

<sup>48</sup> K. A. Bard, 'The Emergence of the Egyptian State', in I. Shaw (ed.), *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 2000), 87.

<sup>49</sup> Although the Pyramid Texts are widely believed to draw on earlier documentary sources, they are considered by some as a 'redaction' that was not compiled into a single corpus until the late Fifth Dynasty at the earliest. See M. Lehner, *The Complete Pyramids* (London, 1997), 31; S. A. B. Mercer, *The Pyramid Texts in Translation and Commentary* (New York, 1952), 8–9; and S. E. Thompson, 'Textual Sources, Old Kingdom', in K. A. Bard (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Archaeology of Ancient Egypt* (London, 1999), 801. A somewhat different view is expressed by Hays, who refers to the 'advent of the mortuary literature tradition in the late Old Kingdom' and suggests that if the Pyramid Texts were based on earlier manuscripts, such manuscripts are unlikely to

### Interpreting the decorative regime of the Netjerikhet Stela

Having presented evidence with which to link the Netjerikhet stela with the *senut(i)* shrine and the emerging Early Dynastic royal cult of Ra, the current author has sought to identify the various animal deities that are represented on the monument in the Imhotep Museum. There are considerable difficulties when attempting such an identification, particularly in the absence of accompanying texts, such as in the case of the Netjerikhet stela. These difficulties have been recognised by others and stem from the current limited understanding of the manner in which Predynastic or Early Dynastic deities or fetishes evolved into the principal state gods of later times.<sup>50</sup> Given these difficulties, any identification of the deities on the Netjerikhet stela is to be regarded as tentative, however, such efforts are considered important in developing an understanding of the monument and its possible significance for the Early Dynastic Egyptians.

Hawass's identification of the jackals on the Netjerikhet stela<sup>51</sup> is consistent with the generally accepted view that a recumbent jackal on an Ancient Egyptian artefact represents Anubis. Furthermore, the manner in which the jackal is portrayed on the Netjerikhet stela is particularly reminiscent of other portrayals of Anubis from the same reign.<sup>52</sup> The possibility that the recumbent jackal on the Netjerikhet stela was intended to represent Anubis may also be strengthened by evidence from the Royal Annals in which the First Dynasty ruler Den is credited with the creation of an *imiut* fetish in the *senut(i)* shrine.<sup>53</sup> The *imiut* fetish was closely associated with the god Anubis.<sup>54</sup> Kaplony, however, suggested that in some contexts, apparent references to Anubis may be references to Wepwawet,<sup>55</sup> and in his recent and exhaustive review of jackal deities from Ancient Egypt, Terence DuQuesne made it clear that the posture of the jackal cannot be used as a reliable indicator of the specific jackal deity being portrayed.<sup>56</sup>

Hawass considered the possibility that the recumbent leonine figure on the Netjerikhet stela is a male lion, but firmly rejected this in favour of the representation being of a lioness.<sup>57</sup> A number of lioness deities are discussed, many of which were considered to perform the role of a mother or nurse, thereby offering protection to the king. As Hawass stated, the lions on the Netjerikhet stela closely resemble examples depicted on the wooden panels from the Third Dynasty tomb of Hesy-Ra,<sup>58</sup> however, there are potentially significant differences in the way these various lions are rendered.

have predated the Texts themselves by any significant period of time; see: H. M. Hays, *The Organization of the Pyramid Texts: Typology and Disposition* (Leiden, 2012), 3.

<sup>50</sup> Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt*, 261–4.

<sup>51</sup> Hawass, *JEA* 80, 49.

<sup>52</sup> See for example J. Kahl, N. Kloth, and U. Zimmermann, *Die Inschriften der 3. Dynastie: Eine Bestandsaufnahme* (Wiesbaden, 1995), 18–19, ref Ne/Be/13. For later Old Kingdom examples, see P. Kaplony, *Die Rollsiegel des Alten Reichs* (Brussels, 1977), table 80:4 and 285 and tab 87:11 and 317. See also P. Kaplony, *Die Inschriften der ägyptischen Frühzeit* (Wiesbaden, 1963), 51.

<sup>53</sup> Wilkinson, *Royal Annals*, 242.

<sup>54</sup> Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt*, 281.

<sup>55</sup> Kaplony, *Die Rollsiegel*, tab 83:2 and 299.

<sup>56</sup> T. DuQuesne, *The Jackal Divinities of Egypt: From the Archaic Period to Dynasty X* (London, 2005), 390.

<sup>57</sup> Hawass, *JEA* 80, 50.

<sup>58</sup> J. E. Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara (1911–12): The Tomb of Hesy* (Cairo, 1913), pl XXIX et seq.

In a number of instances, the Hesy-Ra panels show a lioness with the tail fully draped over the haunches of the animal. The most frequently depicted form of recumbent lion in the tomb of Hesy-Ra, however, is shown with the base of the tail held erect to the rear of the lion and with the tip of the tail curving forward. If, as has been suggested, these detailed differences were intended to distinguish between the various lion deities being represented (perhaps *Mehit* and *Matit* in the tomb of Hesy-Ra),<sup>59</sup> it may be significant that the lions on the Netjerikhet stela are presented with the base of the tails held erect but the tip of the tail curved towards the rear.<sup>60</sup> By contrast, however, in the Fourth Dynasty tomb of Wepemnefret, accompanying texts make it clear that largely identical representations are used to portray quite different lioness deities,<sup>61</sup> suggesting that the manner in which a lioness is rendered does not provide a reliable means to identify the particular deity being portrayed.

Whilst the identification of the individual deities represented on the Netjerikhet stela is problematic, the current author has noted distinct parallels between the overall composition of the front face of the Netjerikhet stela (namely the royal serekh accompanied by lions and jackals) and similar, tri-partite motifs on First Dynasty clay seal impressions found by Petrie at Abydos (fig. 4).<sup>62</sup> It is considered that these similarities can be used to propose a series of identifications for the deities on the Netjerikhet stela, as discussed below.

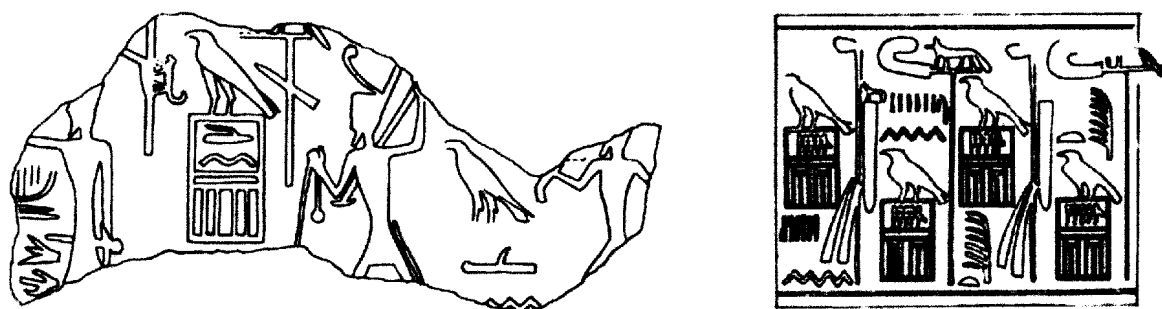


FIG. 4. First Dynasty clay seal impressions showing serekhs, lions and jackal deities (After Petrie, *Royal Tombs I*, pl. X xxii 39 (left) and *Royal Tombs II*, pl. XV.109 (right).)

The presence of the *šdšd* device together with a distinctive mace placed obliquely across the vertical shaft of the upright standard, makes it clear that the jackal represented on the First Dynasty clay seal impressions is Wepwawet.<sup>63</sup> In the Pyramid Texts, Wepwawet is seen as a solar deity, linked via the *šdšd* standard to Horus.<sup>64</sup> The origins

<sup>59</sup> C. de Witt, *Le Rôle et le sens du lion dans l'Égypte ancienne* (Leiden, 1951), 194.

<sup>60</sup> In this respect the lions on the Netjerikhet stela most closely resemble an example from the later Sixth Dynasty, which Kaplony identifies as 'Rwj', see Kaplony, *Die Rollsiegel*, tab 101:12 and 376–7.

<sup>61</sup> H. Junker, *Giza I: Die Mastabas der IV. Dynastie auf dem Westfriedhof* (Wien, 1929), 149–50. Both de Witt and Der Manuelian identify the deities on the Hesy-Ra panels and the Wepemnefret slab stela as lionesses, based primarily on the presence of the feminine 't' hieroglyph. See de Witt, *Le Rôle et le sens du lion*, 194 and P. Der Manuelian, *Slab Stelae of the Giza Necropolis* (New Haven, 2003), 32.

<sup>62</sup> W. M. F. Petrie, *The Royal Tombs of the Earliest Dynasties - Part 2* (EM 21; London, 1901), pls VIa.18, XV.109; see also: H. Hall, *Catalogue of Egyptian Scarabs etc. in the British Museum* (vol. 1) (London, 1913), 287, note to item 2756; and W. M. F. Petrie, *The Royal Tombs of the First Dynasty - Part 1* (EM 18; London, 1900), pl. XXXII.39.

<sup>63</sup> Most commonly associated with Wepwawet, this standard is also associated with Wepiu, with the

of Wepwawet are unclear, with some authorities suggesting that Wepwawet originally represented either the Thinite or Lycopolitan nomes in Upper Egypt.<sup>65</sup> By the end of the First Dynasty, however, there is evidence that Wepwawet was no longer considered as a local deity, having become firmly established as the protector of the king of the two lands.<sup>66</sup> Further links between Wepwawet and the Netjerikhet stela (as part of a *senut(i)* shrine), are provided by the wall decoration from the Festival Hall of Osorkon II (Twenty-Second Dynasty, fig. 2), which clearly identifies the jackal deity associated with the *senut(i)* shrine as Wepwawet.<sup>67</sup>

As with the identification of the jackal deity, the presence of distinctive standards and fetishes on the First Dynasty seal impressions from Abydos identifies the lion deity as the lioness Mafdet, an identification consistent with Hawass's conclusion that the lion on the Netjerikhet stela is female.<sup>68</sup> The origins of Mafdet are discussed in detail by Wolfhart Westendorf,<sup>69</sup> who considers the deity to be a panther or leopard. Westendorf indicates, however, that during the pharaonic era, Mafdet was variously associated with a range of felids, from genet to lioness.<sup>70</sup> Significantly, Westendorf presents a lengthy discussion on the links between Mafdet and the sun, arguing for the ancient origins of these associations.<sup>71</sup> Pyramid Text Utterance 297 [§440-441] describes Mafdet as the protector of the pharaoh and a deity who may have been responsible for the well-being of the king.<sup>72</sup> Of greatest potential significance in terms of understanding the overall decorative regime of the Netjerikhet stela, however, is Pyramid Text Utterance 295 [§438], in which Mafdet is described as a killer of snakes.<sup>73</sup>

It is generally assumed that the inclusion of snakes on the *senut(i)* shrine stelae was intended to be protective of the king,<sup>74</sup> possibly on the basis that these snakes are considered to be representations of the cobra goddess, Wadjet. Indeed, as already stated above (p.3 n. 11), Hawass compared the snakes on the Netjerikhet stela with the frieze of cobras in the southern court of the Step Pyramid enclosure. Such comparisons can, however, be questioned. Sally B. Johnson describes the serpent Wadjet as 'With

differentiation between the two jackal deities only made clear in accompanying texts. DuQuesne, *Jackal Divinities*, 398-400.

<sup>64</sup> DuQuesne, *Jackal Divinities*, 397.

<sup>65</sup> DuQuesne, *Jackal Divinities*, 392.

<sup>66</sup> DuQuesne, *Jackal Divinities*, 112, 396. It has been argued that in order to serve Lower Egypt, Wepwawet may have adopted the functions of the closely related jackal deity Wepiu, who as well as also being a solar deity, is described in the Pyramid Texts as 'Foremost in Heliopolis'; see: DuQuesne, *Jackal Divinities*, 397-8. An alternative view is that Wepwawet may originally have been simply an epithet of Anubis that developed its own identity from some early stage in the pharaonic period; again, see: DuQuesne, *Jackal Divinities*, 391, 397.

<sup>67</sup> Naville, *The Festival-Hall of Osorkon II*, pl. IV:4.

<sup>68</sup> Although the identification of the quadruped as a lion on the First Dynasty clay seal impressions is somewhat difficult, the form of the standard makes it clear that it is Mafdet being depicted; see also Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt*, fig. 8.6. More carefully executed representations of Mafdet confirm the identification of the deity as a lioness; see Petrie, *Royal Tombs II*, pls VII.7, VII.10 and Petrie, *Royal Tombs I*, pl. VII.4. See also Hawass, *JEA* 80, 50, fn 8.

<sup>69</sup> W. Westendorf, 'Die Pantherkatze Mafdet', *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 118 (1968), 248-56.

<sup>70</sup> Westendorf, *ZDMG* 118, 248.

<sup>71</sup> Westendorf, *ZDMG* 118, 250.

<sup>72</sup> Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt*, 290. It is noteworthy perhaps that Mafdet appears to have enjoyed a period of some prominence during the First Dynasty reign of Den, the earliest of the six pharaohs noted in the Royal Annals to be associated with the *senut(i)* shrine; see Wilkinson, *Royal Annals*, 118.

<sup>73</sup> Faulkner, *Pyramid Texts*, 88.

<sup>74</sup> Wilkinson, *Royal Annals*, 138 and Kees, *ZÄS* 57, 123.



head raised and hood expanded' and quite distinct from other snake deities, which she suggests are described and depicted 'very differently from the uraeus cobra'.<sup>75</sup> Unlike the cobra frieze in the Step Pyramid enclosure or other examples of uraei, neither the snake on the Netjerikhet stela or the snake stones represented in the wall decoration of Osorkon II (figs 2 and 5) are depicted with a cobra-like hood,<sup>76</sup> suggesting they are not, therefore, depictions of Wadjet. Johnson also makes reference to the Gebel Tarif knife handle,<sup>77</sup> of which one side is decorated by a pair of undulating serpents, quite reminiscent of the snakes on the Netjerikhet stela (fig. 6). Johnson is quite clear that the serpents on the knife handle are not cobras.<sup>78</sup>

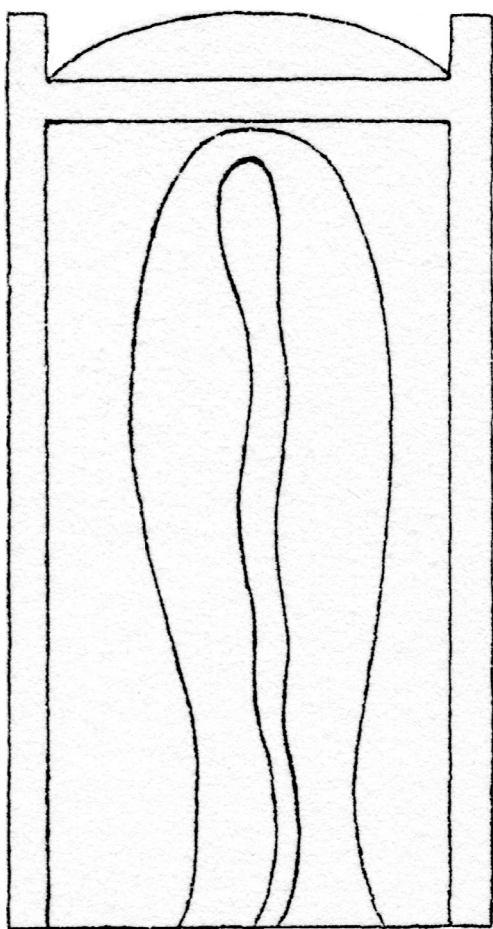


FIG. 5. Rounded snake-stone from the wall decoration of the Festival Hall of Osorkon II. (After Naville, *Osorkon II*, pl. IV:12).



FIG. 6. Undulating serpents on the Gebel Tarif knife handle. (After Johnson, *The Cobra Goddess*, fig. 66).

<sup>75</sup> S. B. Johnson, *The Cobra Goddess of Ancient Egypt* (London, 1990), 3.

<sup>76</sup> Naville, *The Festival-Hall of Osorkon II*, pl. IV:12

<sup>77</sup> Cairo Museum accession no. CG 14265.

<sup>78</sup> Johnson, *The Cobra Goddess*, 38 and fig. 66.

Both Wepwawet and Mafdet can be regarded as deities that were protective of pharaoh and although a protective role for the snakes on the Netjerikhet stela is consistent with this,<sup>79</sup> the current author considers that the use of separate registers and more pronounced relief carving on the Netjerikhet stela was a deliberate attempt to distinguish the snakes from these other deities. As such, the current author agrees with Hawass that the snakes on the Netjerikhet stela should be interpreted as representing a threat to the institution of kingship.<sup>80</sup> When the snakes on the Netjerikhet stela are regarded in this way, it becomes possible to fully reconcile the role of Mafdet as ‘protector of pharaoh’ with the descriptions given in the Pyramid Texts of this lioness deity as a ‘killer of snakes’. Given the solar associations already identified for the Netjerikhet stela and the clear separation of the snake from the other elements of the overall composition (the serekh, jackal and lioness), the current author considers that the snake on the stela should be identified as Mehen.<sup>81</sup>

Mehen was one of the closest companions to Ra in the theology of the Old Kingdom<sup>82</sup> and is generally considered to protect the sun god by encircling him in the coils of her body.<sup>83</sup> In the Coffin Texts,<sup>84</sup> Mehen is depicted as guarding four ‘roads of fire’ that lead to Ra and this may be reflected by the depiction of four snakes on the Netjerikhet stela. Further links between the Netjerikhet stela, Mehen and Ra are provided by the Middle Kingdom Coffin Texts which discuss Mehen in the context of ‘the rejecting gates’ and doors to ‘the protected place of shining Ra’,<sup>85</sup> descriptions that are consistent with the use of snakes as guardian deities at the entrance to the *senut(i)* shrine. The theology of the deity Mehen also appears to be reflected in an Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom board game of the same name, in which the playing board represented the coiled body of a snake.<sup>86</sup> As currently understood, the objective of the board game was for the players’ gaming pieces to travel along or through the body of the snake to reach the sacred barque of Ra,<sup>87</sup> with the player represented in the game by ivory playing pieces in the shape of recumbent lions.<sup>88</sup> In the board game, therefore, the snake and lion are cast in mutually adversarial roles,<sup>89</sup> consistent with the interpretation given in the current paper for the contrasting roles of Mafdet and Mehen as represented on the Netjerikhet stela.

Previous researchers have concluded that ancient board games such as Mehen incorporated important religious concepts.<sup>90</sup> Whilst it has been argued that the board

<sup>79</sup> The idea that the role of the lion and jackal is to protect pharaoh is not new. Petrie discussed the complementary protective roles that these animal deities played in the theology of Early Dynastic Egypt; see Petrie, *Royal Tombs* II, 50.

<sup>80</sup> Hawass, *JEA* 80, 51.

<sup>81</sup> B. Rothöhler, ‘Mehen, God of the Board Games’, *International Journal for the Study of Board Games* 2 (1999), 10–23.

<sup>82</sup> Rothöhler, *International Journal for the Study of Board Games* 2, 15.

<sup>83</sup> Rothöhler, *International Journal for the Study of Board Games* 2, 16.

<sup>84</sup> P. A. Piccione, ‘Mehen, Mysteries and Resurrection from the Coiled Serpent’, *JARCE* 27 (1990), 44.

<sup>85</sup> Coffin Texts, Spell 758; see Rothöhler, *International Journal for the Study of Board Games* 2, 17.

<sup>86</sup> Rothöhler, *International Journal for the Study of Board Games* 2, 12. As with the snakes on the Netjerikhet stela, the snakes depicted on the known examples of Mehen playing boards are generally not depicted as cobras with open hoods; see Piccione, *JARCE* 27, figs 2 and 3.

<sup>87</sup> Rothöhler, *International Journal for the Study of Board Games* 2, 16.

<sup>88</sup> Rothöhler, *International Journal for the Study of Board Games* 2, 11–16.

<sup>89</sup> Rothöhler, *International Journal for the Study of Board Games* 2, 20–1.

<sup>90</sup> Rothöhler, *International Journal for the Study of Board Games* 2, 10; and Piccione, *JARCE* 27, 48.

game was possibly the source of later religious beliefs,<sup>91</sup> the current author considers it more likely that the board game and the related religious ideas ‘originated in the same well-spring of Egyptian religious thought’.<sup>92</sup> As such, both the Netjerikhjet stela and the board game Mehen can be seen to represent elements of the same theological concepts: the spirit of pharaoh engaged in a quest through the underworld in order to reach the sacred barque of Ra. As part of a *senut(i)* shrine, the composition of the Netjerikhjet stela indicates that when undertaking this quest, pharaoh is accompanied by Wepwawet, a jackal deity with clear solar associations and as ‘Opener of the Ways’, a deity capable of ‘making safe paths for the king’.<sup>93</sup> The board game Mehen perhaps represents the most critical phase of this quest, in which Mafdet assists the king in overcoming the snake god that encircles and protects Ra. This does not necessarily take the form of the outright hostility implied by the description in the Pyramid Texts of Mafdet as a ‘killer of snakes’, but is perhaps to be regarded in more subtle terms, in which Mehen represents a necessary challenge to the pharaoh. Only when, with the assistance of Mafdet, this challenge is overcome and pharaoh eventually reaches the sun god, can the king’s soul be regarded as ‘justified’ and pharaoh will have achieved the ultimate goal of eternal life.<sup>94</sup>

The role played by Mehen in these proceedings can be regarded as somewhat ambiguous because the snake god takes on both a protective role (with respect to the sun god) and an aggressive persona (from the perspective of those engaged in the quest to reach Ra). The distinction between the protective and aggressive characteristics of the snake god becomes increasingly imprecise if, as discussed by Hawass, the Netjerikhjet stela is considered as a possible component of the Step Pyramid enclosure: the mortuary complex of Netjerikhjet. In the context of a funerary monument, it can be argued that the perception of the role of the snake deity changes as the king’s spirit approaches and then assimilates with the sun god.

### Discussion and conclusions

As discussed in the current paper, on the basis of the prominent snake decoration and the indication that the Netjerikhjet stela was part of an entrance or gateway, the exhibit in the Imhotep Museum has been identified as an Early Dynastic snake stone, a protective stela that was placed at the entrance to the *senut(i)* shrine. The proposed links between the Netjerikhjet stela and the *senut(i)* shrine are also considered to be consistent with evidence provided by the Royal Annals, in which the earliest references to the *senut(i)* shrine are written with a determinative which has the same tall rectilinear shape as the stela in the Imhotep Museum.

The Royal Annals suggest that the *senut(i)* shrine was an important focus of cultic activity in Egypt’s earliest dynasties and the shrine has well-established associations with Ra and with Heliopolis.<sup>95</sup> The location of the shrine has not, however, been established beyond doubt, nor is it known with any certainty whether there was more

<sup>91</sup> Piccione, *JARCE* 27, 48.

<sup>92</sup> Piccione, *JARCE* 27, 48.

<sup>93</sup> DuQuesne, *Jackal Divinities*, 390, 396.

<sup>94</sup> Rothöhler, *International Journal for the Study of Board Games* 2, 21–2.

<sup>95</sup> Kees, *ZÄS* 57, 124.

than one such shrine. As discussed earlier in this paper, Hawass considers that the Netjerikhet stela originally formed part of a gateway which was either associated with a form of early causeway (serving the approach to the Step Pyramid enclosure) or marked the entrance to a building within the Step Pyramid enclosure itself. The current author does not favour the links with causeways proposed by Hawass, preferring to consider the Netjerikhet stela as part of a structure located within the Step Pyramid complex, perhaps within the largely unexcavated northern area. Evidence for a solar temple in the northern area of the Step Pyramid enclosure has been presented by Altenmüller,<sup>96</sup> although this was later challenged by Stadelmann.<sup>97</sup> A stone vessel found in the underground galleries of the Step Pyramid, however, makes reference to ‘*Seket Ra*’ in close association with the Sed festival, suggesting the two are closely connected.<sup>98</sup> *Seket Ra* has been translated as ‘Setting of Ra’ and may be related to a festival attested in the Abusir papyri.<sup>99</sup> This raises the possibility that the *senut(i)* shrine may have been located in the vicinity of the Sed festival court of the Step Pyramid enclosure.

Given the established links between the *senut(i)* shrine and the cult of Ra, the carved snake decoration of the Netjerikhet stela has been interpreted as portraying Mehen. In the theology of Ra, this snake deity is identified as a protector of the sun god and as guardian of the sacred barque of Ra, a concept that developed into an Early Dynastic board game. When considered in this context, the decoration of the front face of the Netjerikhet stela (the pharaoh’s serekh and the recumbent lions and jackals) can be interpreted as a representation of the spirit of pharaoh engaged in a quest through the underworld to reach Ra. Accompanying pharaoh on this quest are two solar deities, the jackal deity Wepwawet and the lioness Mafdet, the ‘killer of snakes’.

On the basis of the arguments presented in this paper, the current author considers that the monument in the Imhotep Museum can be identified as a rare surviving architectural element of a *senut(i)* shrine, the focus of the cult of Ra and one of the most important religious buildings to serve Egypt’s earliest dynasties. As discussed in the current article, there is increasing evidence for the importance of the cult of Ra in a pharaonic context during the Early Dynastic Period and the great significance of the Netjerikhet stela should be considered as part of this ongoing debate.

<sup>96</sup> H. Altenmüller, ‘Bemerkungen zur frühen und späten Bauphase des Djoserbezirkes in Saqqara’, *MDAIK* 28 (1972), 8–12.

<sup>97</sup> R. Stadelmann, ‘Das vermeintliche Sonnenheiligtum im Norden des Djoserbezirkes’, *ASAE* 69 (1983), 373–8.

<sup>98</sup> Kahl, *Ra is my Lord*, 54.

<sup>99</sup> Kaplony, *Inschriften: I*, 408, as referenced in Kahl, *Ra is my Lord*, 55 n. 241.