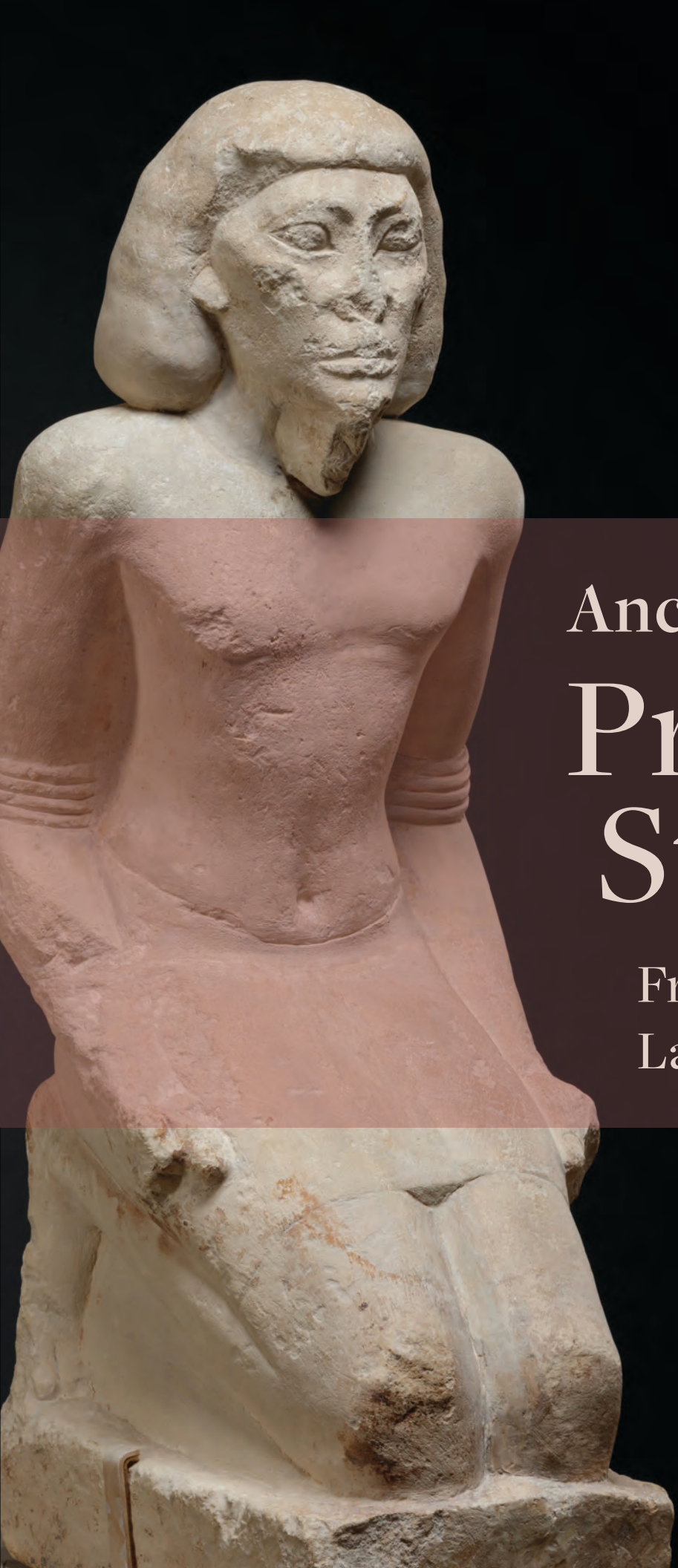

Ancient Egyptian Prisoner Statues

Fragments of the Late Old Kingdom

Tara Prakash

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN PRISONER STATUES

MATERIAL AND VISUAL CULTURE OF ANCIENT EGYPT

Series Editors
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NUMBER EIGHT

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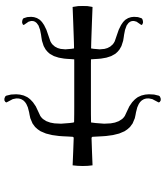

LOCKWOOD PRESS
COLUMBUS, GEORGIA
2022

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN PRISONER STATUES
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ISBN: 978-1-948488-87-7

Cover design by Susanne Wilhelm. Front cover image: A reconstructed prisoner statue probably from the pyramid complex of Pepi II in Saqqara; Sixth Dynasty. New York, MMA 64.260. Photograph: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Louis V. Bell Fund, 1964. Back cover image: Reconstructed prisoner statue from the pyramid complex of Pepi II in Saqqara; Sixth Dynasty. Cairo, GEM 1101. Photograph by Tara Prakash, courtesy of the Grand Egyptian Museum.

Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Names: Prakash, Tara, author.
Title: The ancient Egyptian prisoner statues : art and culture in the late Old Kingdom / Tara Prakash.
Other titles: Material and visual culture of ancient Egypt ; 8.
Description: Columbus : Lockwood Press, 2022. | Series: Material and visual culture of ancient Egypt ; 8 | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2022030984 (print) | LCCN 2022030985 (ebook) | ISBN 9781948488877 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781948488884 (adobe pdf)
Subjects: LCSH: Sculpture, Egyptian. | Prisoners in art.
Classification: LCC NB75 .P735 2022 (print) | LCC NB75 (ebook) | DDC 732/.8--dc23/eng/20220715
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2022030984
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2022030985

This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).

Contents

Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the help and support of many different individuals and institutions. It grew out of my PhD dissertation, which I completed in 2017 at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, and is a much revised and expanded version of my initial study on the prisoner statues. I would like to thank my dissertation advisor, David O'Connor, and the members of my committee, Ann Macy Roth, Ogden Goelet, and Marsha Hill, who provided endless advice and support throughout both the dissertation process and far beyond it.

My research was generously supported by a fellowship from the American Research Center in Egypt (funded by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs), a Francis Haskell Memorial Fund scholarship from the Burlington Magazine, and several grants from the Institute of Fine Arts and New York University. Portions of the book were written while I was a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at The Johns Hopkins University, an Andrew W. Mellon Research Fellow in the Department of Egyptian Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the W. Benson Harer Egyptology Scholar in Residence at California State University, San Bernardino. My sincere thanks go to these institutions and all of my friends and colleagues within them for their support and help.

I am indebted to Philippe Collombert and the Mission archéologique franco-suisse de Saqqâra (MAFS) for graciously permitting me to use all of the MAFS' archival records on the Pepi I prisoner statues and for inviting me to join the team in 2015 so that I could study and document the unpublished fragments in their storeroom. I am also grateful to the Supreme Council of Antiquities for granting me permission to conduct my research in Egypt. Throughout this project, I visited many museums and archives, and I would like to acknowledge the various curators, directors, and archivists who welcomed me to their institutions and assisted me. I am also grateful to those institutions for allowing me to publish the materials that I collected during my visits. In this regard, my sincere thanks go to Isadora Rogger and the Musée d'ethnographie in Neuchâtel; Patrizia Piacentini, Christian Orsenigo, and the Egyptological Library and Archives at the Università degli Studi di Milano; Mahmud El Halwagy and the Egyptian Museum in Cairo; Assayed el Banna and the Suez National Museum; Dr. Sanaa and the Luxor Museum; Nadia Khider and the Alexandria National Museum; Tarek Tawfiq and the Grand Egyptian Museum; the Military Museum at the Cairo Citadel; Emad Khadter and the Imhotep Museum in Saqqara; Mohamed Hassan Abdel Fattah and the SCA Documentation Center; Nadine Cherpion and the Institut français d'archéologie orientale; Luc Delvaux and the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels; Klaus Finneiser and the Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung, Berlin; the Department of Ancient Egypt & Sudan at the British Museum; Cat Warsi and the Griffith Institute, University of Oxford; Edward Bleiburg, Yekaterina Barbash, and the Brooklyn Museum; Sheldon Cheek and the Image of the Black Archive & Library at the Hutchins Center, Harvard University; Denise Doxey and the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston; and Nancy Thomas and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

The scope of this book would not have been possible without the help of numerous individuals who aided me in locating prisoner statue fragments and archival records, and I appreciate all who answered my inquiries and emails. I am indebted to Mohamed Megahed for generously sharing his research with me and for all of the interesting conversations on Djedkare. I am also grateful to conservators Anna Serotta and Ann Heywood, Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Michele Marincola, Institute of Fine Arts, for teach-

ing me more about the qualities of limestone and discussing the condition of the prisoner statues with me. Indeed, my thanks go to all of my colleagues who have discussed the prisoner statues with me over the years. Niv Allon, Kate Liszka, Marion Mazzone, Barry Stiefel, Mary Beth Heston, Mary Trent, and Brigit Ferguson graciously read portions of this book and provided valuable feedback. Moreover, I am indebted to two anonymous reviewers who read chapters at an early phase and provided useful commentary that enabled me to reimagine the manuscript in extremely productive and beneficial ways. Christina Geisen and Joshua Roberson were enthusiastic about this book from the start, and I am grateful to them and Billie Jean Collins for guiding it through the publication process. I would also like to thank my colleagues at the College of Charleston for all of their encouragement and support.

I am very lucky to be surrounded by incredible friends and family, who have always been willing to listen to me talk about the prisoner statues and have provided constant inspiration and reassurance. This is particularly true for Sheela Prakash and Jason Barr, who may have had to hear about the prisoner statues the most! Finally, I am so thankful to my mother and father for all that they taught me and have done for me. I dedicate this book to them.

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Supplementary Material

A supplementary Open Access catalogue of all material available on the prisoner statues can be found online at: https://doi.org/10.5913/2022877

Abbreviations

ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
AAWWien	Anzeiger der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse
AegHelv	Aegyptiaca Helvetica
AfO	*Archiv für Orientforschung*
ÄgAbh	Ägyptologische Abhandlungen
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ASAE	*Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte*
ASAE-Suppl.	Supplément aux Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte
AulÆg-Stud	Aula Ægyptiaca – Studia
BACE	*Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology*
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BeitrÄg	Beiträge zur Ägyptologie
BIE	*Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte*
BiEtud	Bibliothèque d'étude
BIFAO	*Bulletin de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale*
BMMA	*The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*
BMPES	British Museum Publications on Egypt and Sudan
BMSAES	*British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan*
BN	*Bibliothèque nationale*
BSEG	*Bulletin de la Société d'égyptologie de Genève*
BSFE	*Bulletin de la Société française d'égyptologie*
CASAE	Cahiers. Supplément aux ASAE
CdE	*Chronique d'Égypte*
CGC	Catalogue général du musée du Caire
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
CRAIBL	*Comptes rendus de l'Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*
CRIPEL	*Cahiers de recherches de l'Institut de papyrologie et égyptologie de Lille*
DÖAWW	Denkschriften der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften Wien
DOG	Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft zu Berlin
ENiM	*Égypte nilotique et méditerranéenne*
ERA	Egyptian Research Account
FIFAO	Fouilles de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale
FouillesSaqq	Fouilles à Saqqarah, Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte
GM	*Göttinger Miszellen*
GOF	Göttinger Orientforschungen
HÄB	Hildesheimer Ägyptologische Beiträge
HdO	Handbook of Oriental Studies: Section 1, Ancient Near East
HES	Harvard Egyptological Studies

IFAO	Institut français d'archéologie orientale
JARCE	*Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*
JEA	*Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*
JESHO	*Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
KAW	Kulturgeschichte der Antiken Welt
LÄ	*Lexikon der Ägyptologie*
MAFS	Mission archéologique franco-suisse de Saqqâra (Previously Mission archéologique française de Saqqâra)
MÄS	Münchner Ägyptologische Studien
MÄU	Münchner Ägyptologische Untersuchungen
Menes	Menes: Studien zur Kultur und Sprache der ägyptischen Frühzeit und des Alten Reiches
MDAIK	*Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo*
MDOG	*Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft zu Berlin*
MEES	Memoir of the Egypt Exploration Society
MIFAO	Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale
MMAEE	The Metropolitan Museum of Art Egyptian Expedition
MMJ	*Metropolitan Museum Journal*
MoTA	Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
MVCAE	Material and Visual Culture of Ancient Egypt
NEA	*Near Eastern Archaeology*
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OIP	Oriental Institute Publications
OIS	Oriental Institute Seminars
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
OrMonsp	Orientalia Monspeliensia
PAe	Probleme der Ägyptologie
PM	Bertha Porter and Rosalind L. B. Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs, and Paintings*, 8 vols. Oxford: Clarendon, 1960–.
RACE	Reports of the Australian Centre for Egyptology
RAPH	Recherches d'archéologie, de philologie et d'histoire
RdE	*Revue d'Égyptologie*
RGRW	Religions in the Graeco-Roman World
SAE	Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte
SAK	*Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur*
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization
SCA	Supreme Council of Antiquities
SDAIK	Sonderschrift des deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo
Urk.	Kurt Sethe et al. *Urkunden des ägyptischen Altertums*, 8 vols. Leipzig: Hinrich, 1903–1957.
UUÅ	Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WVDOG	Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft
ZÄS	*Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*

Chronology

Modified from Hornung, Krauss, and Warburton, *Ancient Egyptian Chronology*, 490–95. All dates are BCE and approximate.

Early Dynastic period	**2900–2593**
Old Kingdom	**2592–2153**
Dynasty 3	**2592–2544**
Dynasty 4	**2543–2436**
Snefru	2543–2510
Khufu	2509–2483
Radjedef	2482–2475
Khafre	2472–2448
Menkaure	2447–2442
Shepseskaf	2441–2436
Dynasty 5	**2435–2306**
Userkaf	2435–2429
Sahure	2428–2416
Neferirkare	2415–2405
Raneferef	2404
Shepseskare	2403
Niuserre	2402–2374
Menkauhor	2373–2366
Djedkare-Isesi	2365–2322
Unas	2321–2306
Dynasty 6	**2305–2153**
Teti	2305–2279
Userkare	?–?
Pepi I	2276–2228
Merenre	2227–2217
Pepi II	2216–2153
First Intermediate period	**2118–1980**
Middle Kingdom	**1980–1760**
Second Intermediate period	**1759–1539**
New Kingdom	**1539–1077**
Third Intermediate period	**1076–723**
Late period	**722–332**

Chapter 6
Conclusion

The prisoner statues were evocative symbols of ancient Egyptian kingship. In their form, they vividly illustrated one of the most important duties of the king, namely, to defeat any and all threats to Egypt and the cosmos. At the same time, the various developments that the genre underwent throughout the late Old Kingdom reflect contemporaneous changes in the conception of kingship. For example, the number of prisoner statues that kings set in their pyramid complexes increased as their role in society shifted. A king's pyramid complex was the primary building project that he commissioned during his reign. Significant resources, labor, and planning went into its execution. As such, it is not surprising that these monuments, and the statuary set inside of them, reveal contemporary concerns. They were not conventional construction projects, but enormous undertakings that were of upmost importance to the king.

The prisoner statues demonstrate how dynamic these monuments were throughout the late Old Kingdom. The architecture, decoration, and ritualization of each complex were distinct and diverse. Today, the scanty archaeological remains can obscure this variability; as piles of stone and rubble lying in the desert and surrounded by varying amounts of debris, the late Old Kingdom pyramid complexes do all look somewhat alike. But enough remains to indicate that back in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties, when cult was still being performed within the temples, statuary still stood in its original place, and the paint on the walls remained bright, each king's complex was unique and reflected his individual priorities and interests, as well as those of his architects and artists. Some of the variations and changes between pyramid complexes may appear minor through the lens of thousands of years. But this does not mean that they were minor or meaningless to those who initiated them.

For this reason, there is a need for future studies that evaluate each pyramid complex separately, and to fully understand the monument, studies must take into consideration all that remains of the complex's architecture and decoration. Furthermore, the archaeological remains need to be situated against the historical backdrop and what is known about the king who commissioned the monument and the society in which he lived; this approach sheds light on the choices that were made for his funerary complex and the factors that influenced them. The prisoner statues are part of this scholarly endeavor. They were important elements of these monuments, and in this way, they contribute to our understanding of the late Old Kingdom. This volume is only an introduction in this regard; by showing some of the new interpretations of and insight into late Old Kingdom art and culture that the prisoner statues make possible, it aims to initiate future inquiries.

There were major differences between the earliest prisoner statues that were in the pyramid complexes of Niuserre and Djedkare-Isesi and the prisoner statues of Pepi I and Pepi II, who were the last kings to commission prisoner statues. A particularly notable one concerns the backs of the statues. The back pillars of the Niuserre and Djedkare prisoner statues emphasize these statues' close relationship with the two-dimensional decoration of the pyramid complex. When the prisoner statues first appeared in the mid-Fifth Dynasty, they were innovative three-dimensional representations that the artists carved based on a traditional two-dimensional motif, namely, the bound captive. The back pillars emphasized their decorative

function within the pyramid complex, and these prisoner statues stood close to reliefs featuring similar themes, namely, the king triumphing over his enemies, in Niuserre's valley temple and in Djedkare's mortuary temple.

Over time, the form of the prisoner statues evolved, and the prisoner statues also took on additional roles within the pyramid complex. While they continued to embellish mortuary temples, they were used in other ways as well, and they developed new meanings. By the reign of Teti, artists were no longer carving back pillars, and throughout the Sixth Dynasty, the artists experimented with ways to better convey the discomfort and pain of the prisoner statues' bound and kneeling position. At the same time, the facial features of the prisoner statues began to show the influence of the expressive Second Style, through attributes like wide eyes, slight smiles, and prominent nasolabial folds. Doing away with the back pillar may also be tied to the Second Style. Statues carved in this style tend to have any stone representing negative space carved away, making the bodies appear more active and lively. While the negative space of the Sixth Dynasty prisoner statues is not carved away, the full carving of their backs may reflect an interest in further freeing the form from the stone, which is consistent with the aims of the Second Style. Additionally, the change in the treatment of the backs could reflect a new position for the statues within the pyramid complex.

By the reign of Pepi I, the back-pillar-less prisoner statues had developed a more active role within the pyramid complex, as they became part of the mortuary temple's ritual life as well as its decoration. The artists decapitated these prisoner statues in order to complete them. The heads and bodies were then ritually offered to the king. In their decapitated form, the Pepi I prisoner statues were also monumental images of the deceased king's annihilated enemies who are frequently referenced in the Pyramid Texts.

This change in the treatment of the prisoner statues coincided with an increase in the number of statues and a change in the representation of their ethnicity; in this way, the reign of Pepi I was a pivotal period for the prisoner statues. As I discussed in chapter 2, Pepi I had at least sixteen to twenty prisoner statues; this is significantly more than the number of statues that his predecessors had. Additionally, the prisoner statues of his predecessors had the stereotypical facial features and hairstyles with which the Egyptians traditionally depicted foreigners.[1] On the other hand, the artists of Pepi I mixed and matched different, non-Egyptian hairstyles and facial features among the heads in order to create a variety of imaginary foreigners. Both in their number and in the treatment of their ethnicity, the Pepi I prisoner statues demonstrate an interest in multiplicity. For the first time at this complex, there was a desire to show many different and distinct enemies of the king. In doing this, the power of the king was also emphasized. Not only had he defeated the known foreign world, which was typically categorized into Nubians, Libyans, and Asiatics, but he also triumphed over all imaginable foreigners.

Indeed, reimaging the ethnicity of the prisoner statues may have also been a way to more comprehensively visualize the king's enemies in this world and the next. These prisoner statues could have simultaneously represented living foreigners and otherworldly rebels and evil beings, such as those who threaten the deceased king in the Pyramid Texts. In this regard, it seems significant that the change in ethnicity first occurred at the same complex in which the prisoner statues were decapitated, namely, the complex of Pepi I. As mentioned above, the decapitation linked these prisoner statues to the deceased kings' enemies who are described in the Pyramid Texts. The statues' ambiguous foreignness, if it symbolized inimical beings in all realms of the cosmos, may have been another way to strengthen this association.

1. As I discussed in ch. 3.3, the change in the treatment of the prisoner statues' ethnicity might be evident among Teti's prisoner statues, but this is inconclusive. It is more likely that the new treatment began at the complex of Pepi I.

Yet, the new treatment of ethnicity among the Pepi I prisoner statues primarily was a result of the change in the nature of foreign interactions that occurred during the Sixth Dynasty. The Egyptians, particularly the elite, were more aware of and engaged with foreigners at this time than they had been previously in the Old Kingdom. This impacted conceptions of ethnic and cultural identity, and the generic and imaginary foreignness of the prisoner statues reflects this. The prisoner statues demonstrate the artists' desire to visualize the increasingly broad and culturally complex world in which they lived.

Consequently, the capital must have still been in close contact with the provinces despite the gradual decentralization that occurred during the Sixth Dynasty, as I described in chapter 2. In the Sixth Dynasty, foreign relations were increasingly the purview of the elite, particularly provincial high officials, as I outlined in chapter 3. Yet, the prisoner statues show that the royal artists, who were working and living in the capital, had knowledge of and were affected by events happening in more remote places. Therefore, despite their increasing independence, provincial officials were still communicating with the central administration and regularly traveling to the capital, where they would have shared news of foreign affairs and their experiences with the elite who lived there, including the artists. Indeed, tomb inscriptions directly reference this; for example, the letter from Pepi II that the high official Harkhuf had inscribed in his tomb in Qubbet el-Hawa, near Elephantine, instructs Harkhuf to travel to the capital directly after returning from his expedition to Yam.[2] As discussed in chapter 2, status and power was slowly moving into the hands of high officials in different parts of the country, but this process initially occurred under the direction of the king. The gradual decentralization, which occurred throughout the late Old Kingdom, particularly during the Sixth Dynasty, did not result in the capital's loss of authority until following the reign of Pepi II, and the prisoner statues further testify to this. Even if the king's power was diminishing as his role shifted, the capital was aware of and involved with events happening throughout the country.

The artists of Pepi II's prisoner statues chose to depict the ethnicity of these statues in the same fashion as that of the Pepi I prisoner statues, namely, with mixed and matched hairstyles and facial features in order to portray a large assortment of generic foreigners. Indeed, Pepi II had dozens of prisoner statues, more than any of his predecessors. At the same time, the ritualized context of Pepi II's prisoner statues shifted. These statues, which were set in not only this king's mortuary temple but also his valley temple and possibly parts of his causeway, were not decapitated but instead subjected to something akin to a royal smiting ritual during which they were violently smashed apart. This ritual likely took place as part of a broader ritualized sequence or event, such as one of Pepi II's *sed* festivals. The change in their treatment may demonstrate increasing emphasis on the mundane in regard to the prisoner statues rather than the religious realm, which was so important for Pepi I's prisoner statues. The "smiting" of the Pepi II prisoner statues was apotropaic and had stronger execrative overtones than the decapitation of the Pepi I prisoner statues. Moreover, execration rituals became much more common during the reign of Pepi II than they had been before, as I mentioned in chapter 5. This also seems to be a reflection of the increasingly complex world in which the Egyptians lived, and the growing hostility between them and Nubians living to the south. The prisoner statues, like the execration figurines, testify to a more bellicose environment by the end of the Sixth Dynasty.

***

The prisoner statues reflect the agency of those who were responsible for commissioning, designing, and carving them. They are the products of beliefs, conversations, and decisions that particular ancient Egyptians had and made. It can be easy to overlook this when we study static monuments from the distant past. For example, we may note similarities and differences between pyramid complexes and question their

2. Strudwick, *Texts*, 331–33.

significance, but we sometimes forget that people, not time periods or regions or styles, were responsible for the variations. Certainly, time and place, and many other factors, influenced individuals' decisions and choices, but we cannot lose sight of the ancient Egyptians in our analyses of ancient Egypt.

Throughout this volume, I have frequently referred to the artists of the prisoner statues. Although the king was responsible for commissioning the statues and the statues were made for him and to his liking, one should not dismiss the role of the artists in determining how the prisoner statues ultimately looked and functioned inside the pyramid complex. The relationship between the king, the high officials overseeing the monument's construction, the architects and engineers designing and building the monument, and the artists decorating it, would have been complex and multifaceted. Some kings may have been more involved and interested in the process than others. But in all cases, the artists also had a degree of agency as they were the ones who actually carved the statues.[3]

There are certain decisions regarding the prisoner statues that we can conclude, with a relatively strong degree of confidence, the king must have made. For example, the increasing numbers of prisoner statues at the complexes of Pepi I and Pepi II must have been at the request of these kings. More prisoner statues required additional resources, and the king's approval would have been necessary to acquire these. Moreover, the statues were symbols of kingship, and they were a way for Pepi I and Pepi II to emphasize their authority and status visually, ideologically, and magically at a time when this was fading in reality, as I discussed in chapter 2. The fact that the large number of prisoner statues coincided with the change in the nature of foreign interactions that occurred in the Sixth Dynasty may also reflect the king's knowledge of and concern with new foreign threats. Ultimately there were a larger number of prisoner statues at the pyramid complexes of Pepi I and Pepi II than at the complexes of previous kings because Pepi I and Pepi II wanted or felt that they needed more statues.

On the other hand, the artists of Pepi I were responsible for the change in the treatment of ethnicity among these prisoner statues, as I argued in chapter 3, and the artists of Pepi II's prisoner statues chose to employ this same technique rather than using the traditional Old Kingdom foreigner stereotypes. The king probably approved these decisions, either directly or via his high officials who oversaw the monument's construction, but the artists initiated them. And this new technique for depicting foreignness reflected the artists' experiences, particularly the increasingly diverse world in which they, as elite Egyptians, lived, just as the increasing number of prisoner statues were a repercussion of the king's own interests and concerns.

It is more difficult to ascertain who was responsible for the change in the original placement of the prisoner statues over time. One might imagine that the monuments' architects had a say in this, as well as the artists and the kings. Similarly who decided on the treatment of the prisoner statues at the pyramid complexes of Pepi I and Pepi II and developed their ritualistic roles in these monuments? These were major changes; they were much more radical than the change in the method of representing the prisoner statues' ethnicity, which was innovative but did not fundamentally alter the statues since they still depicted foreigners and enemies. Therefore, even though the artists carried out the decapitation of the Pepi I prisoner statues, it seems unlikely that they conceived of it on their own. Ritualists and priests must have been involved, and the king undoubtedly had a say in the matter as well. Indeed, the "smiting" of the Pepi II prisoner statues might be more attributable to the king than the decapitation of the Pepi I prisoner statues

3. In regard to the question of tradition and creativity in ancient Egyptian art, which is relevant to my comments here, see Dimitri Laboury, "Tradition and Creativity: Toward a Study of Intericonicity in Ancient Egyptian Art," in *(Re)productive Traditions in Ancient Egypt: Proceedings of the Conference Held at the University of Liège, 6th–8th February 2013*, ed. Todd Gillen, Collection Ægyptiaca Leodiensia 10 (Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2017), 229–58.

since smiting was a royal prerogative. Regardless, it is perhaps best to understand the change in the treatment of the Pepi I and Pepi II prisoner statues as the result of conversations and collaboration between multiple individuals.

How was knowledge of the prisoner statues passed down from generation to generation? Theories of cultural memory and intericonicity/interpictoriality are significant in this regard, and the prisoner statues deserve further study within these theoretical frameworks than what is possible here.[4] In this book, I have aimed to show that the prisoner statues changed over time and to consider why this was the case by analyzing the larger historical context of these changes. But an additional line of inquiry, which would productively build upon this volume, would be the mechanisms through which these changes occurred. In other words, how did the Egyptians decide what was traditional and what could be changed, and how was this information communicated over time? This question is relevant not only for the prisoner statues but also for the late Old Kingdom pyramid complexes in general. The reign of a king was not a single moment in time. It spanned years, and in the case of particular kings, such as Pepi II who probably reigned for at least sixty years, more than a single generation. When during Pepi II's reign were his prisoner statues carved? Were they all carved at a single time, or did he repeatedly commission prisoner statues? When was the decision to "smite" them made? His sculptors used the technique to depict the statues' foreignness that the sculptors of Pepi I had invented. How did the sculptors of Pepi II know about this technique and how to execute it? Did certain artists work on the prisoner statues of more than one king? Future studies on the identities and working processes of Old Kingdom artists might help answer some of these questions.[5]

In this way, more work remains to be done on the prisoner statues. This book was intended to open doors to this rather than to serve as the final word on the statues. There is no doubt that the prisoner statues were meaningful and important to the late Old Kingdom Egyptians because they dedicated significant labor and resources to carving them and these statues were primary features of the late Old Kingdom pyramid complexes. Consequently, it is only through including the prisoner statues in our analyses of the late Old Kingdom that we will be able to move closer to unraveling this dynamic period of ancient Egyptian history.

4. In regard to cultural memory, see further Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*, trans. David Henry Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). For intericonicity and interpictoriality, see recently Laboury, "Tradition and Creativity," 247–54 and Gabriele Pieke, "Lost in Transformation: Artistic Creation between Permanence and Change," in Gillen, *(Re)productive Traditions*, 259–304.

5. Recent studies in this regard for later time periods include Dimitri Laboury, "Designers and Makers of Ancient Egyptian Monumental Epigraphy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Egyptian Epigraphy and Paleography*, ed. Vanesssa Davies and Dimitri Laboury (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 85–101 and Gianluca Miniaci et al., ed., *The Arts of Making in Ancient Egypt: Voices, Images, and Objects of Material Producers 2000–1500 BC* (Leiden: Sidestone, 2018).