
CHAPTER 1: =

INTRODUCTION

In the Westcar Papyrus, preserved in the Berlin Museum, is an interesting legend concerning the transition of one dynasty to another. With the Fifth Dynasty a new family came to the throne, and this fact found an echo in the legend where the Sun-god Re is claimed as being the father of the three children who, each in turn, became King of Egypt. It was during the reigns of these three children that the Heliopolitan sun-cult became the State religion.¹

The events told in the Papyrus Westcar concerning the divine parentage of the first three kings of the Fifth Dynasty have led many scholars to conclude that the change in dynasty was assisted by the priests of Re, who supported a usurper to the throne and arranged for the elevation of the cult of Re to the state religion of Egypt. This concept was first suggested by Breasted in 1905,² and has been largely accepted since that time.

Breasted interpreted the theophoric Re-names of Djedefre and Khafre as an indication of “the political influence of the priests of Re at Heliopolis”,³ and extrapolated from that interpretation that the changeover to the Fifth Dynasty was brought about by those same priests of Re, as told in the Papyrus Westcar.⁴ He also suggested, without elaborating, that the sun-temples of the Fifth Dynasty were based upon the temple at

¹ S. Hassan, *Excavations at Giza* vol. IV (Cairo, 1943), 4. For Papyrus Westcar, see Simpson’s article in *LÄ IV* (1982), 744–746, and references contained therein.

² J. H. Breasted, *A History of Egypt from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest* (London, 1905), 121–131 and again in his *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt* (New York, 1912), 15.

³ Breasted, *A History of Egypt*, 120.

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Heliopolis.⁵ These statements have been accepted by many generations of Egyptologists, and are only now being questioned.⁶

Examination of Fourth Dynasty Egypt sheds new light on Breasted's explanation of the rise of the cult of Re, as shown in the establishment of a series of Fifth Dynasty temples dedicated to his worship. In fact, examination of this suggestion raises more questions than it answers. If the first king of the Fifth Dynasty was put on the throne by a powerful priesthood, a number of conditions would be expected:

- The cult would have existed in its full form in the Fourth Dynasty, with all ranks of priesthood serving in its temples.
- For the priests to force the taking of the throne from the legitimate royal line, they would have had to be exceptionally powerful within Egyptian society and the court, and of high rank.
- The cult of Re, already powerful in the Fourth Dynasty, would be expected to become even more powerful under the kingship of the son of one of its members. This would be shown in an increase in the number of Re-priests, the number of Re-temples, and the number and amount of donations to the Re-cult.
- The legend states that the first three Fifth Dynasty kings were born to the wife of a priest of Re. Identification of this priest may be possible if this were an historical fact.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 121–124.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁶ Scholars who used this interpretation in their general histories include M. A. Murray, *The Splendour That was Egypt* (London, 1963), 119; S. Hassan, *Excavations at Giza* vol. IV, 63; N. Grimal, *History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 1992), 75, 89–90. Acceptance that the Fifth Dynasty sun-temples were built along the lines of the “original” sun-temple at Heliopolis include Grimal, *ibid.*, 75; H. Bonnet, *Reallexikon der Ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1952), 736 (not 763 as printed in E. Winter, “Zur Deutung der Sonnenheiligtümer der 5. Dynastie”, *WZKM* 54 [1957], 222); W. Kaiser, “Zu den Sonnenheiligtümern der 5. Dynastie”, *MDAIK* 14 (1956), 104–116. See also the references in Winter, *WZKM* 54 (1957), 224 n. 11.

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- The royal family would have had little official connection with the cult of Re before the usurpation of the new Fifth Dynasty line.
- Temples dedicated to Re dating from the Fourth Dynasty or earlier would be expected to exist, and to be continued and perhaps expanded under a king whose throne depended on the goodwill of their priests.
- The first king of the Fifth Dynasty would have had no legitimate claim to the throne.

These conditions should be noticeable from archaeological and textual evidence. The influence and power of priests of Re can be discerned from their titularies; the numbers of temples and increases or decreases in priestly offices can be seen through excavation. Royal connections with the cult of Re should be evident in royal names and titles, donations of land, temples and resources to the cult, and the appointment of highly regarded men to the Re-priesthood.

A. *Historical Overview*

Royal association with the sun-god Re is first attested in the name of a Second Dynasty king 𓆎 . The last king of the same dynasty also compounded his name with Re: *Nfr-k3-R^c*.⁷ In the following dynasty, two kings had theophoric names compounded with Re, *Nb-k3-R^c* and *Nfr-k3-R^c* (Khaba), and in the Fourth Dynasty not only were three kings named after Re,⁸ but the same three kings called themselves Son of Re as well.

⁷ J. von Beckerath, *Handbuch der ägyptischen Königsnamen* (Munich, 1984), 48, 174, assigns Neferkare as the eighth king of the Second Dynasty, although T. A. H. Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt* (London, 1999), does not mention him. Perhaps von Beckerath's *Nfr-k3-R^c* was the Khaba of the next Dynasty.

⁸ Djedefre, Khafre, Menkaure.

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The builder of the first Fourth Dynasty pyramid at Giza, Khufu, considered himself to be a manifestation of the sun-god Re from the fifth year of his reign,⁹ and his son and successor, Djedefre, was the first Egyptian king to name himself *z3 R^c*, son of Re. This title was the fourth title added to the royal titulary, and was included in royal titularies thereafter. Five of the six kings of the Fourth Dynasty built pyramids as their burial places, and these constructions may have had either solar or stellar connotations.¹⁰ Pyramid complexes included the pyramid, an upper temple and a mortuary temple. The sixth Fourth Dynasty king did not build a pyramid, but was buried in a large, mastaba-shaped structure, which has been interpreted as an attempt on his part to distance himself from the Re cult.

The first king of the Fifth Dynasty, Userkaf, introduced a new type of temple with a different layout to previous royal temples. Five kings of the same dynasty followed his lead, and built their own versions of this so-called “sun-temple” or “solar temple”. Each sun-temple was built separate from the royal mortuary temples and pyramid complexes, had a name compounded with the name of the sun-god Re, and named its priestly ranks as “priests of Re”. It has been assumed therefore that Re was the deity to whom they were dedicated.

To date only two of the six known sun-temples have been identified by excavation, the others being known at this stage only from textual evidence. Situated at the edge of the desert at Abu Ghurob, south of modern Cairo, they form a second group

⁹ Z. Hawass, “The Programs of the Royal Funerary Complexes of the Fourth Dynasty” in D. O’Connor and D. Silverman (eds.), *Ancient Egyptian Kingship* (London, 1995), 227.

¹⁰ See for instance, A. Badawy, “The Ideology of the Superstructure of the Mastaba-Tomb in Egypt”, *JNES* 15 (1956), 183; I. E. S. Edwards, “Do the Pyramid Texts suggest an explanation for the abandonment of the subterranean chamber of the Great Pyramid?” in *Hommages à Jean Leclant*, vol. I (Cairo, 1994), 161–165.

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of royal monuments at Abusir, the first group consisting of four pyramid complexes.¹¹ Both temples were excavated early in the 20th century.¹² Attempts to locate the four missing sun-temples have been so far unsuccessful, although several theories have been put forward.¹³

The existence of the sun-temples was short-lived, being confined to six kings of the Fifth Dynasty only, but was vital to the development of ancient Egyptian religious thought. The last king to build a sun-temple was Menkauhor. His successor, Djedkare Isesi, does not appear to have instigated major changes in the religious life of Egypt, but the next monarch, Unas, caused an entirely new genre of religious texts to be carved in his pyramid. These Pyramid Texts, which were later transferred with modifications to non-royal mortuary equipment (the Coffin Texts), include prayers and theology concerning the afterlife of the king which mixed the doctrine of several divinities, including Re and Osiris. The religious life of Sixth Dynasty Egypt was markedly different from that of the Fifth Dynasty, although the royal title of Son of Re continued to be held throughout the rest of ancient Egyptian history. The sun-temples of the Fifth Dynasty remained unique until the Amarna Period, when Akhenaton closed all temples except those dedicated to Aton, the visible manifestation of Re.

¹¹ Those of Sahure, Neferirkare, Neferefre and Neuserre.

¹² See L. Borchardt, F. W. von Bissing and H. Kees, *Re-Heiligtum des Ne-woser-re (Rathures)*, 3 vols. (1905, 1922, 1923); H. Ricke, "Erster Grabungsbericht über das Sonnenheiligtum des Königs Userkaf bei Abusir", *ASAE* 54 (1956), 75–82, 305–316, H. Ricke, "Zweiter Grabungsbericht über das Sonnenheiligtum des Königs Userkaf bei Abusir", *ASAE* 55 (1958), 73–77; H. Ricke, *Beiträge zur ägyptischen Bauforschung und Altertumskunde*, vols. 7–8 (Wiesbaden, 1965, 1969).

¹³ See, for instance, R. A. Wells, "Astronomical detection of missing Egyptian 5th dynasty sun temples", in David W. Reed (ed.), *Spirit of Enterprise. The 1987 Rolex Awards* (Wokingham, 1987), who suggested that the sun-temples were built as star clocks and may be located using astronomical observation; M. Verner, "Remarques sur le temple solaire *Htp-R^c* et la date du mastaba de Ti", *BIFAO* 87 (1987), 293–297, who discusses the existence and possible location of *Htp-R^c* by examining the inscriptions of *Tjj*; Borchardt, *Re Heiligtum Ne-Woser-Re (Rathures)* I, 68, who suggests the construction of *Šzp-jb-R^c* over an earlier sun-temple.

B. Previous Research into the Fifth Dynasty sun-temples

In 1889 Kurt Sethe published the first synthesis of known information about the Fifth Dynasty temples dedicated to the worship of the sun-god Re.¹⁴ After listing the names of these temples and some examples of offices in each, he noted that there were five types of priestly office, similar to those found in the pyramid cults, as well as some administrative titles. He discovered that some officials held priestly titles in more than one sun-temple, and used these simultaneous priesthoods as the basis of sequencing the three temples concerned.¹⁵ He also noticed that sun-temple names and titles were repeatedly mentioned in parallel with titles in specific pyramid and royal cults, and it became clear that the sun-temples were associated with, and probably built by and for, the owners of specific pyramid cults.¹⁶ Sethe was thus the first scholar to allocate a sun-temple to four Fifth Dynasty kings with some certainty. Of the remaining known sun-temples, *Sh̄t-R^c* and *H̄tp-R^c*, he suggested that one of them could have belonged to Neferefre, but was unable to ascertain which one.¹⁷ The list of Fifth Dynasty sun-temples, as published by Sethe, has been accepted and emended by all subsequent scholars, and is shown at Table 1-1:

Table 1-1: Fifth Dynasty Sun-temples and their Builders

Reign	King	Sun-temple
5.1	Userkaf	<i>Nhn-R^c</i>
5.2	Sahure	<i>Sh̄t-R^c</i>
5.3	Neferirkare	<i>St-jb-R^c</i>
5.4	Shepseskare	no sun temple known: <i>H̄tp-jb-R^c?</i>
5.5	Neferefre	possibly <i>H̄tp-R^c</i>
5.6	Neuserre	<i>Šzp-jb-R^c</i>
5.7	Menkauhor	<i>3ht-R^c</i>
5.8	Djedkare Isesi	no sun temple built
5.9	Unas	no sun temple built

¹⁴ K. Sethe, “Die Heiligtümer des Re‘ im alten Reich”, *ZÄS* 27 (1899), 111–117.

¹⁵ *Nhn-R^c*, *St-jb-R^c* and *Šzp-jb-R^c*, *ibid.*, 116.

¹⁶ This information was used to identify the owner of the last sun-temple as Menkauhor, *ibid.*, 117.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* The identification of *Sh̄t-R^c* as the sun-temple of Sahure was possible from information contained on the Palermo Stone, leaving *H̄tp-R^c* as the sun-temple of either Shepseskare or Neferefre.

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Later scholars have added to Sethe's research in two main areas of enquiry: the sun-temples themselves; and the titles of their officials. The research regarding the sun-temples has focused largely on their construction, layout and excavation, and the possible locations of the missing temples. These issues are not addressed in this study except in passing. A smaller number of studies has been conducted concerning the personnel of the sun-temples.

In 1956, Werner Kaiser published a long article on the sun-temples, drawing on Sethe's previous research, and proffering some new theories.¹⁸ He theorised that the original sun-temple, built by Userkaf, was constructed in the form of a mastaba, as had been the tomb of his predecessor, Shepseskaf, and that the determinative of his sun-temple was therefore also in the shape of a mastaba. It was not until the alterations to *Nḥn-R^c* by Neferirkare that an obelisk was introduced. Kaiser attempted to show therefore that the determinatives in sun-temple titles could be used as a dating tool, the ones showing a mastaba shape being earlier than the ones showing an obelisk.

In the following year, Erich Winter published a discussion on the meaning of the Fifth Dynasty sun-temples.¹⁹ He noted the mention in the Abusir Papyri, which date to the reign of Djedkare Isesi, of the reversion of offerings from the sun-temple of Neferirkare to the pyramid of the same king, and thus concluded that the sun-temple cult was probably meant to last for eternity, as were the pyramid and royal mortuary cults.²⁰ His major contribution to the discussion of the Fifth Dynasty Re-cult was the notion that the sun-temples were meant as monuments to the king as the bodily Son of Re, rather than to the sun-god himself, a suggestion strengthened by the fact that the sun-temples

¹⁸ W. Kaiser, "Zu den Sonnenheiligtümern der 5. Dynastie", *MDAIK* 14 (1956), 104–116.

¹⁹ E. Winter, "Zur Deutung der Sonnenheiligtümer der 5. Dynastie", *WZKM* 54 (1957), 222–233.

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were never explicitly named as “temples of Re”, although they all included a Re-component in their names.²¹

Shortly after Kaiser’s and Winter’s publications, Klaus Baer attempted to show the relative ranking status of titles at different periods in the Old Kingdom using the sequences in which titles appeared in tombs.²² He included a study of sun-temple titles in his work, and listed 63 officials connected to them. Baer noticed a larger number of titles connected with the sun-temples than Kaiser’s 50, but was more concerned with their ranking than with their occurrence and meaning for the importance of the Re-cult itself.

In 1972 Mohamed Moursi published a study of the high priests of Re, which spanned the entire history of the office from the earliest times to the New Kingdom.²³ His treatment of Old Kingdom material is cursory, since the majority of his evidence dated to later periods. The Westcar story is treated at face value in his work.

Most recently, Stephen Quirke’s 2001 general work on the cult of Re is a synthesis of research into the cult throughout ancient Egyptian history.²⁴ In it he argues that the connection between the sun-god and the Egyptian monarchy first appeared in the Third Dynasty with the first occurrence of a royal cartouche and the innovative pyramid complex of Djoser at Saqqâra. He sees the Step Pyramid as the “first great monument equating the single earthly king with a single power in heaven, the sun”.²⁵

²⁰ Winter, *ibid.*, 225.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 232.

²² K. Baer, *Rank and Title in the Old Kingdom. The Structure of the Egyptian Administration in the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties* (Chicago, 1960).

²³ M. I. Moursi, *Die Hohenpriester des Sonnengottes von der Frühzeit Ägyptens bis zum Ende des Neuen Reiches* (München, 1972).

²⁴ S. Quirke, *The Cult of Ra: Sun-worship in Ancient Egypt* (London, 2001).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

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Kaiser detailed 50 officials in the sun-temples, and gave numbers for each sun-temple. In 1981, Barbara Begelsbacher-Fischer listed Old Kingdom Re-priests as part of her larger study of cult titles and names, but missed some previously mentioned by Kaiser and Baer. Excavations since then have uncovered more holders of Re-titles. A comparison of the numbers of titles mentioned by previous scholars with those studied in this thesis is shown in Table 1-2 below:

Table 1-2: Numbers of High Priests and officials in each sun-temple²⁶

Sun-temple	Moursi's Numbers	Kaiser's Numbers	Baer's Numbers	Begelsbacher-Fischer's Numbers	Numbers in this study
High Priests	20	-	-	-	24
<i>Nhn-R^c</i>	-	24	30	12	45
<i>Sh-t-R^c</i>	-	3	3	1	4
<i>St-jb-R^c</i>	-	29	30	20	46
<i>Htp-jb-R^c ?</i>	-	-	-	-	1?
<i>Htp-R^c</i>	-	1	1	-	3
<i>Šzp-jb-R^c</i>	-	12	14	6	25
<i>3ht-R^c</i>	-	3	3	2	6
<i>R^c-Hr-3htj</i>	-	-	-	-	2
Non-aligned	-	-	-	1	32
Total officials	20	50	63	34	149

Three recent studies of pertinence to this thesis were not available to me. Susanne Voß recently completed a Ph.D dissertation,²⁷ on the sun-temples of the Fifth Dynasty,²⁷ but unfortunately I was unable to contact her or consult her work. Dietrich Raue studied Heliopolis for his Ph.D,²⁸ but has only published information from later periods. Again, I was unable to consult his thesis. A recent collection of essays on Abusir and Saqqara in the Fifth Dynasty was discovered too late for any of its discussions to be included here.²⁹

²⁶ References: Moursi, *Hohenpriester des Sonnengottes*, 12–37; Kaiser, *MDAIK* 14 (1956), 107, Table 2; Baer, *Rank and Title*, 255, Table III; B. L. Begelsbacher-Fischer, *Untersuchungen zur Götterwelt des Alten Reiches* (Göttingen, 1981), 168–169.

²⁷ S. Voß, *Untersuchungen zu den Sonnenheiligtümern der 5. Dynastie. Bedeutung und Funktion eines singulären Tempeltyps im Alten Reich* (Hamburg, 2000).

²⁸ D. Raue, *Heliopolis und das Has des Re, eine Prosopographie und ein Toponym im Neuen Reich* (University of Heidelberg, 1996).

²⁹ M. Bárta and J. Krejci (eds.), *Abusir and Saqqara in the Year 2000* (Prague, 2000).

C. Focus of this Research

In the four decades since the publication of Kaiser's and Winter's studies, more discoveries have been made, and dating methods have been refined. This thesis studies the chronological development of the cult of Re through the titularies of its priests and administrators, and attempts to establish its role in the ideology and economy of Old Kingdom Egypt. After an examination of the high priesthood, the titles in each sun-temple are investigated for patterns of occurrence, types of office, orthography and relationships with other cults and departments in the administration of Egypt. A discussion of the theology of the Re-cult is beyond the scope of this study, as is an examination of the physical remains of the cult from the excavated ruins of the sun-temples at Abusir. Nor are the daily duties of officials at the sun-temples discussed in detail.

The aims of this work, therefore, are primarily to trace the career paths of Re-priests and their roles in the religious life of Egypt, and secondly, to examine the impact of Re-titles and other textual evidence such as the Palermo Stone on the historical reliability of the Westcar Papyrus. The research sheds light on the administrative reforms of several Fifth Dynasty kings, and on the period when the monarchy was aligned most purely with the sun-god.