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HERMAN TE VELDE**

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Some Remarks on the Wooden Statues from Nezlet Batran

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Although this paper may lie somewhat outside the usual field of the scholar to whom it is dedicated, I hope that it will nevertheless be of some interest to him. It gives me great pleasure to be able to dedicate it to Herman, an esteemed colleague and friend, in honour of his retirement and as inadequate thanks for the warm welcome and kindness shown to me by both him and his wife Gerrie since I first came to live in Groningen.

Karl Kromer's publication of a mastaba to the south of the Great Pyramid, in an area called Nezlet Batran,¹ mentions that the remains of three wooden statues were found in a serdab on the eastern side of the mastaba. These statues were in a very poor state of preservation, and only some parts of them could be removed and conserved. With the aid of the photographs taken in situ, a hypothetical reconstruction was made of the tomb group, and this is presented on p. 35 of the publication. As a result of my research into nonroyal wooden statues of the Old Kingdom,² I believe that I am able to add some information to that already presented by Kromer.

The statues were found in a serdab built in an extension to the east of the original mastaba, and located immediately behind a wall which apparently originally contained several false doors (Fig. 1). Kromer convincingly dates this extension, which in addition to the serdab also includes four shafts, to Dynasty V on archaeological grounds.³ This combination would suggest that this extension was used as a family tomb, with family members adding shafts and false doors as necessary over a period of time. The serdab with the statues, for example, was partly built over the edge of Shaft 4, and thus probably postdates it.⁴ Bolshakov, in his review of the publication,⁵ draws attention to the fact that "mastabas with numerous shafts are characteristic of the late Old Kingdom", and points out that serdabs close to shafts are also a late feature. In this instance, however, the serdab is clearly built over part of Shaft 4. It is thus unlikely to have been a deliberate part of the original design of that particular shaft. As such the date suggested by Kromer is to be preferred.

Bearing in mind a putative date of Dynasty V for the extension and the shafts, an interesting discovery was part of the original lintel of a false door partway down Shaft 2. The inscription on the lintel was examined by H.G. Fischer⁶ who ascribes it on stylistic grounds to Dynasty V. The owner of the lintel is a certain *Hmw*, an Overseer

¹ Karl Kromer, *Nezlet Batran. Eine Mastaba aus dem Alten Reich bei Giseh (Ägypten). Österreichische Ausgrabungen 1981–1983*, DÖAW 12 (Vienna 1991).

² J. C. Harvey, *A Typological Study of Egyptian Wooden Statues of the Old Kingdom* (PhD London 1994) [in preparation for publication].

³ *Op. cit.*, 24–36.

⁴ Kromer does not rule out the possibility that the serdab is associated with Shaft 4, despite the overlap (*op. cit.*, 25), although he prefers to associate it with Shaft 2.

⁵ A. Bolshakov, *BiOr* 51 (1994), 62.

⁶ In Kromer, *op. cit.*, 47–51.

of the Gang(s?) of Craftsmen, and Kromer suggests that the shaft, too, should be ascribed to *Hmw*. This suggestion certainly deserves consideration, but the finding of the lintel partway down this particular shaft may only be coincidental. After all, we should not forget that this shaft is the only one of the four that was robbed in antiquity and considerably disturbed. As Kromer himself suggests, the lintel may have been accidentally dropped during 'quarrying' activities of a much later date, implying that the shaft at that time was not completely filled. The suggestion that the serdab is also to be ascribed to *Hmw* because he must have been a man of substance seems to me to rest on nothing more than a lack of other possible candidates. The possibility still remains that Shaft 2 and/or the serdab originally belonged to someone other than *Hmw*, and that *Hmw*'s tomb was one of the other shafts.

The statues were found in the remains of the serdab which measures 80 cm × 100 cm. The upper parts of the walls are missing so the original height is not determinable. The fact that the upper parts of the walls are gone is the direct cause of the poor state of preservation of the statues inside: their upper parts were exposed and as a result completely rotted away. Of the three statues found in the serdab, one was extant from the feet to the waist, one was preserved from the head to the hips, and the third was present only as rotting traces in the sand. Sadly the remains could not be preserved intact, and the excavation records are all that now remain of the statues. Kromer reconstructs them as a family group of tomb owner, wife, and young boy,⁷ the tomb owner being the large statue extant from the waist down, the wife being the disintegrated remains, and the boy the upper part of a smaller statue which had fallen down in antiquity and was found lying across the feet of the other statues. Kromer infers the presence of a fourth statue because there is space to the left of the main figure, but I see no reason to assume this. The small figure found lying on the ground could originally have stood to the left of the large statue.

In his dating discussion Kromer draws comparisons between this tomb group and some wooden statues from the tombs of Akhtihotep and Kaemsenu at Saqqara.⁸ As a result of these comparisons he dates the statues to either Dynasty V (Akhtihotep – reign of Unas) or Dynasty VI (Kaemsenu), inclining to Dynasty V in the end because of the archaeological evidence. The dating of the tomb of Kaemsenu to Dynasty VI is not certain, however. The discussion by Strudwick⁹ provides a useful summary of research so far, and concludes that the end of Dynasty V is a more likely date in accordance with all the evidence (including the design of the chapel and false doors). This conclusion has recently been supported by Harpur's research, among others.¹⁰ I would like to add a statue in Cairo of a man called Kahif¹¹ to the group of comparative

⁷ Ibid., 35, fig. 10.

⁸ PM III/2², 638 and 541, resp.

⁹ N. Strudwick, *The Administration of Egypt in the Old Kingdom* (London 1985), 150–151.

¹⁰ Y. Harpur, *Decoration in Egyptian Tombs of the Old Kingdom. Studies in Orientation and Scene Content* (London 1987), 276 [526]. See also N. Kanawati *et al.*, *Excavations at Saqqara. North-west of Teti's Pyramid I* (Sydney 1984), 8. C.M. Firth & B. Gunn, *Teti Pyramid Cemeteries I* (Cairo 1926), 31; H. Kees, "Eine Familie kgl. Maurermeister aus dem Anfang der 6. Dynastie", *WZKM* 54 (1957), 91–100; and K. Baer, *Rank and Title in the Old Kingdom* (Chicago 1960), 143–144 [528] support a date at the beginning of Dynasty VI. N. Cherpion, *Mastabas et hypogées d'Ancien Empire. Le problème de la datation* (Brussels 1989), 136–137 proposes a date in the reign of Nyuserre on the basis of the presence of that king's name in the tomb.

¹¹ JE 26645 = CG 268: L. Borchardt, *Statuen und Statuetten von Königen und Privatleuten im Museum*

material. It is wearing a similar skirt to the large male, and is also standing on an inscribed base. It is dated to the reign of Nyuserre.

There may be something to be learned from the features of the statues themselves, however. My research into dating criteria for wooden statues from the Old Kingdom is based on a catalogue of 127 statues which are dated by external criteria. This corpus was analysed and over time several features, such as dress, coiffure, and the manner of holding the arms, were found to have changed in relation to each other, and were thus capable of indicating a date for a statue. Although this did not prove possible for the vast majority of individual criteria, when two or more of the criteria are present a reliable date may be ascribed to the statue in question. Although the statues under discussion here do not provide more than a couple of definite criteria, and therefore cannot with certainty be ascribed to a particular reign on stylistic grounds alone, they do nevertheless provide some interesting information which has been used as the basis of the reconstruction in Fig. 2.

The skirt worn by the large male figure is the so-called projecting-panel kilt, and if Kromer's reconstruction is correct, i.e. that it only reaches knee-length, that style was only worn between the reigns of Nyuserre and Unas,¹² although it was revived again at the very end of the reign of Pepi II.¹³ The earlier instances are all plastered and painted, as is this example, whereas the later examples are unplastered. Further, all statues wearing this kilt have their arms in the position for holding a staff and sceptre, that is, the left arm is bent forward to hold a long staff the end of which rests on the base in front of the left foot, and the right is held alongside the body with the shaft of the sceptre passing through the fist. Sadly, the upper surface of the base is too sandy (or too worn) to see whether there is a small indentation for the point of the staff.¹⁴ An additional feature that this group of statues has in common is the striated close-cut coiffure, something that is confined to Dynasty V. The remaining information concerning this statue is revealed by the inscribed base, which will be dealt with below.

As the statue of the female was reduced to pulp – Kromer says that only its size and position could be determined – I can only make some very general comments concerning female statues from Dynasty V. From this period no nude female statues have survived, therefore I assume that this statue was clothed in a long, ankle-length sheath dress. The wig was probably a heavy, shoulder-length wig with striations. The statue will have been standing on a base, that is, the feet will have been together, and the arms will have been held parallel to the body with the hands open (see Fig. 2).

The third statue in the group is probably not a child or a youth (i.e. the son of the tomb owner) as Kromer suggests, but rather the tomb owner himself once again. The most common features of a boy are missing from this statue – boys are depicted shaven-headed, with a peg or hole for a sidelock on the side of the head. Further, they usually have one finger held to the mouth.¹⁵ This figure clearly has an echelon-curl

von Kairo I (Berlin 1911), 170–171, pl. 57.

¹² Cairo JE 26645 (see n. 10); JE 93171 (PM III/2², 638); New York MMA 26.2.4 (PM III/2², 632).

¹³ Ashmolean 1896–1908 E 1881: W.M.F. Petrie, *Deshasheh*, EEF Memoirs 15 (London 1898), 31; Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek ÆIN 3: O. Koefoed-Petersen, *Catalogue des statues et statuettes égyptiennes* (Copenhagen 1950), pl. 9.

¹⁴ Kromer, *op. cit.*, pl. 16, fig. 2.

¹⁵ See for example Berkeley, PHMA 6–19768: R.A. Fazzini, *Images for Eternity. Egyptian Art from*

wig, covering the ears (the most common type throughout the Old Kingdom). Kromer states that no traces of plaster were found on the statue, which perhaps implies that the figure was nude, but this in itself is not sufficient to designate it a boy. As can be seen by the composition of other tomb groups from the Old Kingdom, it was common for the tomb owner to depict himself in various costumes (or even nude) and various sizes, and even at various ages.¹⁶ The photograph in the publication¹⁷ has a curious light-coloured section around the midriff, terminating in a straight line. This cannot be plaster (see above) but may perhaps be a break line along an original carved line indicating the upper part, or belt, of a (gala) kilt. This is in keeping with the costumes worn by comparable statues, although a nude figure is also perfectly possible. The remains indicate further that the right arm was parallel to the body, but there is no information available about the left arm, which therefore could have been either held forward in the staff position, or else parallel to the body like the right arm (see Fig. 2). The legs would almost certainly have been in the striding position as the standing position for male statues first appears in the reign of Pepi II.¹⁸

My research has revealed that groups of wooden statues from the period preceding the reign of Unas often consist of two to three statues, one of which may be female. During the reign of Unas the average number of statues per group could increase to as many as nine or ten of the tomb owner and up to three of his wife.¹⁹ The average number in a group then declines again to two or three until the reign of Pepi II, when as many as twenty statues may be found in a single burial, although at this stage the average size of the statues is much smaller.²⁰ Sadly, during the last century and most of the present one, mere traces of wooden statues were not usually noted, and often only the complete or virtually complete statues were recorded. Thus much potential information about the original size of tomb groups has been lost forever. Further, damaged statues were often 'tidied up', missing limbs replaced and jagged edges removed.²¹

The geographical location of the mastaba may provide a further piece of circumstantial evidence in favour of a date in the reign of Unas. The earliest datable

Berkeley and Brooklyn (Brooklyn 1975), 36, No. 26 and Cairo JE 17331 = CG 128: Borchardt, *Statuen I*, 96–97, pl. 29, among others.

¹⁶ See, for example, the Meryrehashetef statues from Sedment: Cairo JE 46992, British Museum EA 55722 and Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek ÆIN 1560: M. Mokhtar, *Ihnâsya El-Medina (Herakleopolis Magna). Its Importance and its Role in Pharaonic History*, BdE 40 (Cairo 1983) pl. XIV; Giza G2378, Senedjemib Mehi, Boston MFA 13.3465 and MFA 13.3466 (PM III/2², 87–89); and Saqqara, Tomb of Metri, Cairo JE 93165, JE 93166, JE 52081, JE 51738, New York MMA 26.2.2–6, Medelhavsmuseet MM 11410 (PM III/2², 632), among others, all of which have nude figures among the group.

¹⁷ Kromer, *op. cit.*, pl. 16, fig. 1.


¹⁸ For example, Cairo JE 52564 (PM III/2², 682); Cairo CG 516: J. de Morgan, *Fouilles à Dahchour en 1894–1895* (Vienna 1903), 21 [18], pl. IV, among others.

¹⁹ For example the tomb groups from the tombs of Akhtihotep and Metri at Saqqara. For references see PM III/2², 638 and 632 respectively.

²⁰ For example Saqqara Tomb 6001, Tjeteti (PM III/2², 566); and Naga ed-Dêr N43, Tjetji (G.A. Reisner, *ASAE* 5 [1905], 105–109). The average size of these statues is 40–50 cm, whereas that of the earlier groups is 100–150 cm.

²¹ A probable example of this is Cairo JE 10177. The fact that the statue is missing from partway through the skirt indicates to me that it was probably once a full-length statue whose legs had disintegrated and which was 'tidied up' by the discoverers. See Capart, *JEA* 6 (1920), 225–233 and M. Saleh and H. Sourouzian, *The Egyptian Museum Cairo* (Mainz 1987), No. 42.

nonroyal wooden statues from the Giza necropolis can be attributed to that reign.²² It is possible that there were earlier statues but the state of preservation at Giza is generally very poor and any that there may have been have not survived. In addition, the style of burials at Giza is usually more conservative than at Saqqara,²³ and unless other evidence strongly supports it, great care should be employed when assigning a wooden statue from the Giza area to a very early date. The statues under discussion here show features that correspond to parallels from Saqqara dating to the reigns of Nyuserre and Unas. However, on balance the characteristics which indicate the later reign outweigh those indicating the earlier and I would suggest, therefore, that the statues from this tomb may be dated to the reign of Unas.

There remains only the problem of who the owner of these statues can be. As mentioned above, Kromer attributes them to *Hmw* on the basis of a lack of other candidates. However, the traces on the inscribed base belonging to the large statue are sufficient to decipher a name that is not that of *Hmw*, see Fig. 3.²⁴ Bases of this period are usually inscribed with one or two vertical lines of hieroglyphs running alongside the left foot, and a horizontal line containing the name along the front of the base. This base has the one horizontal line along the front, and appears to have four or five short horizontal lines in the area alongside the left foot. The traces on the front of the base are sufficient to enable us to read the name Rahepef ²⁵ and a search in Ranke²⁶ and Porter & Moss²⁷ reveals the existence of a single known Rahepef (or Hepefra). This Rahepef is the owner of an inscribed offering-table now in the University of Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia (# B2923), found by Petrie in 1907 at Nezlet Batran, and published by him in *Gizeh and Rifeh*, p. 9, pl. VIIB. The archaeological information about the find spot for this offering-table is rather vague, but it appears to have been found lying loose on a ridge of hill to the south of the Sphinx, that is, close to the mastaba under discussion. If, as seems likely, this is the same Rahepef, then his original burial was probably in the mastaba complex excavated by Kromer, perhaps even Shaft 2, and the offering-table must have been removed from the area at some point, possibly as a result of clandestine activities.

The University of Pennsylvania offering-table²⁸ (Figs. 4 & 5).— H. 51.4 cm, W. 70.2 cm, Th. 6.2 cm — is a plain, rectangular block of limestone with three lines of inscription, one horizontal line along the top of the offering surface, and two vertical lines, one running down each side of the offering surface. The horizontal line consists of an offering formula and a list of festivals reading: *ḥtp-dī-nsw (ḥtp-dī) Inpw ḥnty T3-Dsr (di.f) krs(t) nfr(t) wr(t) (m) ḥrt-ntr smyt imntt nb im3ḥ ḥr ntr ʕ3 pr n.f ḥrw (m) wpt-rnpt Dḥwty(t) w3g ḥb wr prt-Mnw ʕbd s3d*. This offering formula is typical for Dynasty

²² G 2738, Mehi, MFA 13.3465 and MFA 13.3466 (see n. 15).

²³ Cf. the discussions on the placement of the serdab and the presence of statues in shafts and in the burial chambers in H. Junker, *Giza VII* (Vienna 1944), 86–87, 125–126; M.A. Shoukry, *Die Privatgrabstatue im Alten Reich*, SASAE 15 (Cairo 1951), 191 ff.


²⁴ After Kromer, op. cit., pl. 16, fig. 2.

²⁵ The reading of the name is due to Dr J. van Dijk.

²⁶ *PN I*, 219, 13.

²⁷ *PM III/2*², 296.

²⁸ I would like to express my thanks to Dr D. Silverman of the University of Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia, for permission to publish this offering-table here.

V and figures in Barta's discussion.²⁹ Of all the elements in the line of text, only one is rare by Dynasty V, the epithet *hnty T3 Dsr*, but the relative conservatism of Giza would probably account for this. The two vertical lines contain the name and titles of Rahepef in combination with the epithet *im3hw hr ntr 3*, an epithet that appears on one wooden statue from the corpus, Kapunesut, dating to the Unas/Teti period.³⁰ The titles in the left column are *rh-nsw* and *w^cb-nsw*, and in the right column are *rh-nsw* and one(?) other title. The title *rh-nsw* is known throughout the Old Kingdom.³¹ It was originally given to courtiers involved in provisioning the palace, but by the end of Dynasty V it had become merely honorific. The title *w^cb-nsw*,³² on the other hand, does not appear on a wooden statue before the reign of Unas. Once again it is Kapunesut who bears it. When we examine the plate illustrating the base found by Kromer (see Fig. 3), we can clearly make out the remains of a *w^cb*-sign in the second line, and *im3hw hr ntr 3* below that. The next line is again obscure, but luckily the signs making up the name of Rahepef are clear along the front of the base. It is a shame that the title in the right-hand column of the offering-table is not clearer (Figs. 4 & 5) as it seems that the same title also appears on the base, directly above the name. The first group of this title on the offering-table is almost certainly *shd* "inspector", followed by what looks like ,³³ as in *i^cw-r*, "breakfast",³⁴ but in titles this word always occurs in association with *nsw* which is absent here.³⁵ The following group appears to read *h3t* (?), but the meaning of this word is obscure and I have not been able to find any parallels for this title.

To conclude, it appears that the owner of the wooden statues discovered by Kromer in a serdab located to the east of a mastaba at Nezlet Batran is a man called Rahepef, who is also the owner of an offering-table found nearby. This man can very probably be dated to the reign of Unas on the basis of the style of the offering formula on the offering-table, and on the style of the wooden statues. The archaeological evidence also points to a date in Dynasty V. The balance of probability tends towards Kromer's Shaft 2 being the original burial place of this man, with the serdab associated with it. This shaft was the only one of the four in this area which was robbed in antiquity, implying that it contained the burial of a person of some substance. The man *Hmw* is probably the owner of one of the other shafts.

²⁹ W. Barta, *Aufbau und Bedeutung der altägyptischen Opferformel*, ÄgFo 24 (Glückstadt 1968) 17, Bitte 4 (d) and note 2.

³⁰ Cairo JE 67369, PM III/2², 542.

³¹ W. Helck, *Untersuchungen zu den Beamtentiteln des ägyptischen Alten Reiches*, ÄgFo 18 (Glückstadt 1954), 107.

³² Helck, *Beamtentiteln*, 30.

³³ Suggested to me by Prof. G.T. Martin.

³⁴ *Wb.* I 39, 23.

³⁵ Cf. H.G. Fischer, *JAOS* 82 (1962), 75 with n. 1.

Fig. 1 The extension on the east flank of the mastaba (after Kromer, *Nezlet Batran*, Abb. 3).

Fig. 2 Hypothetical reconstruction of the tomb group (Drawing by J. van Dijk).

Fig. 3 Traces of the inscription on the base revealing the name Rahepef (Drawing by J. van Dijk).

Fig. 4 Offering-table # B 2923, University of Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia (Neg. # S4-141908).

Fig. 5 Offering-table # B 2923, University of Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia (Drawing by J. van Dijk).

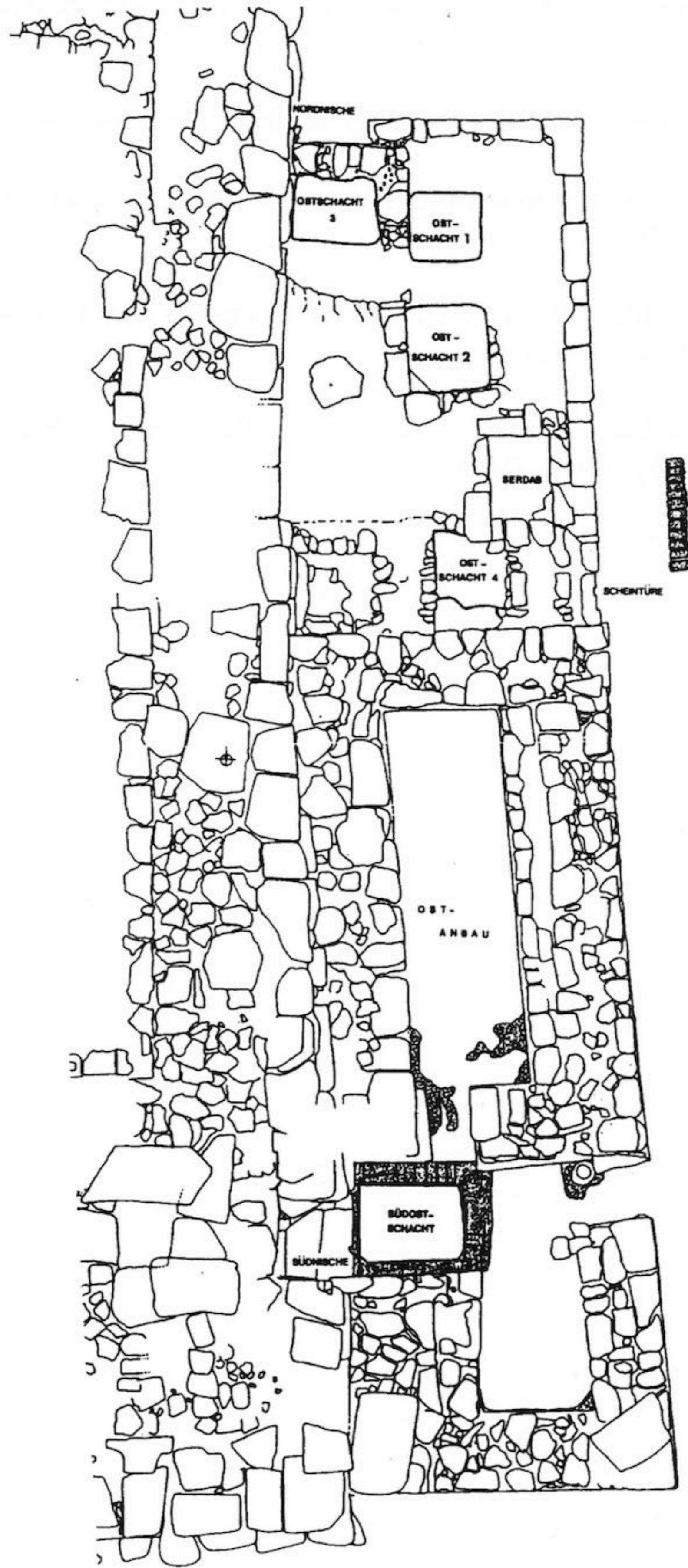


Fig. 1

Fig. 2

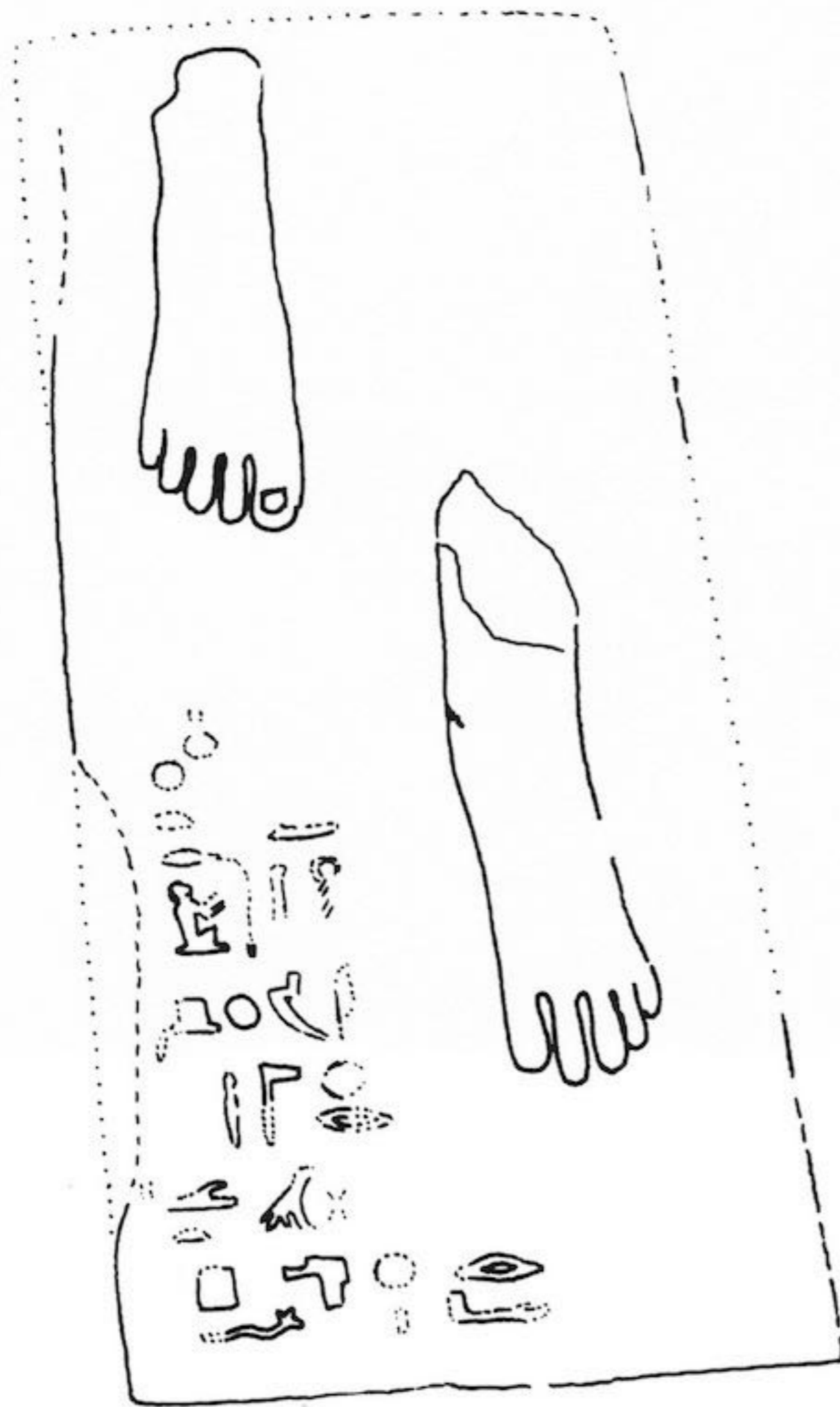
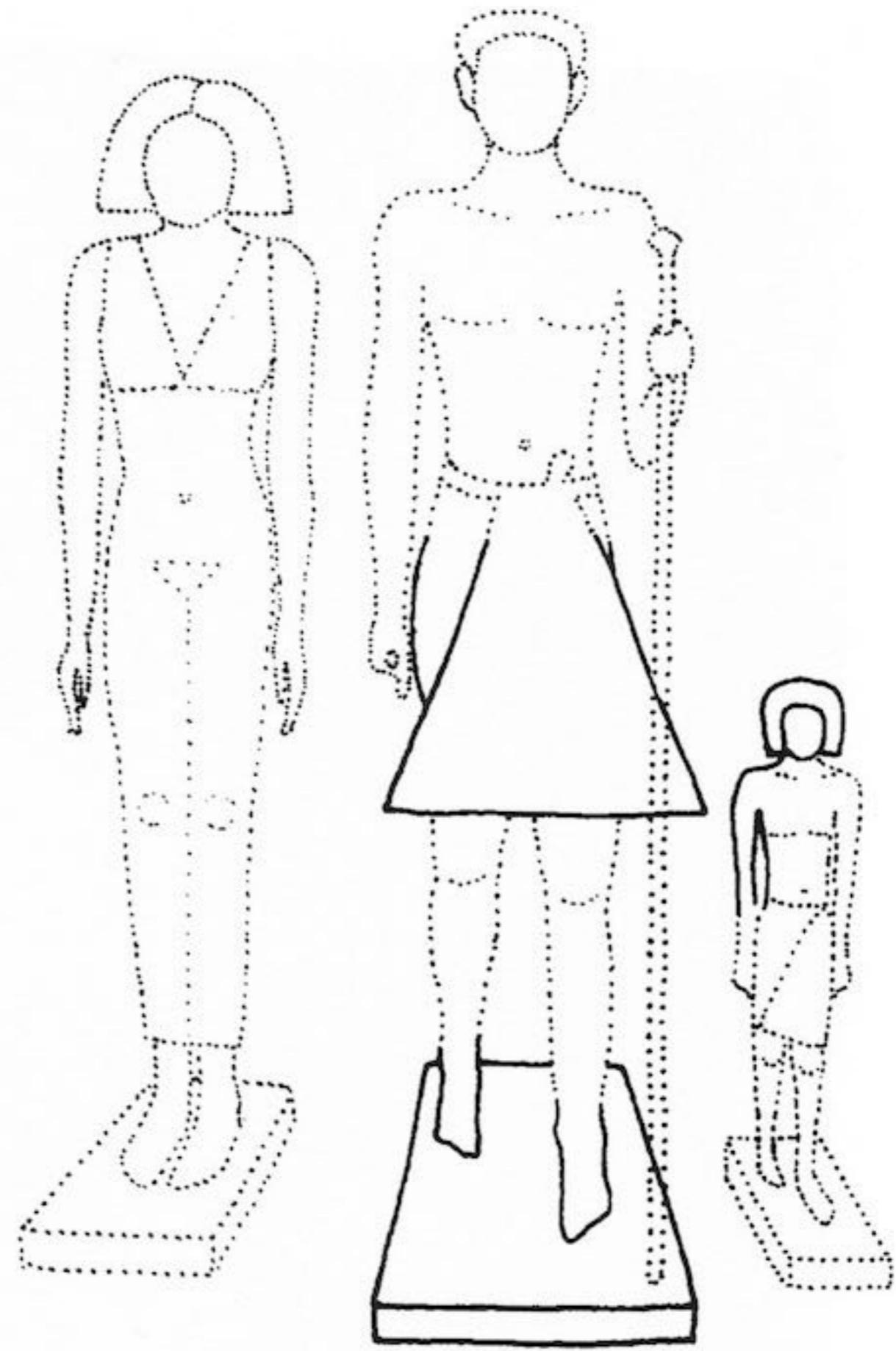


Fig. 3



Fig. 4

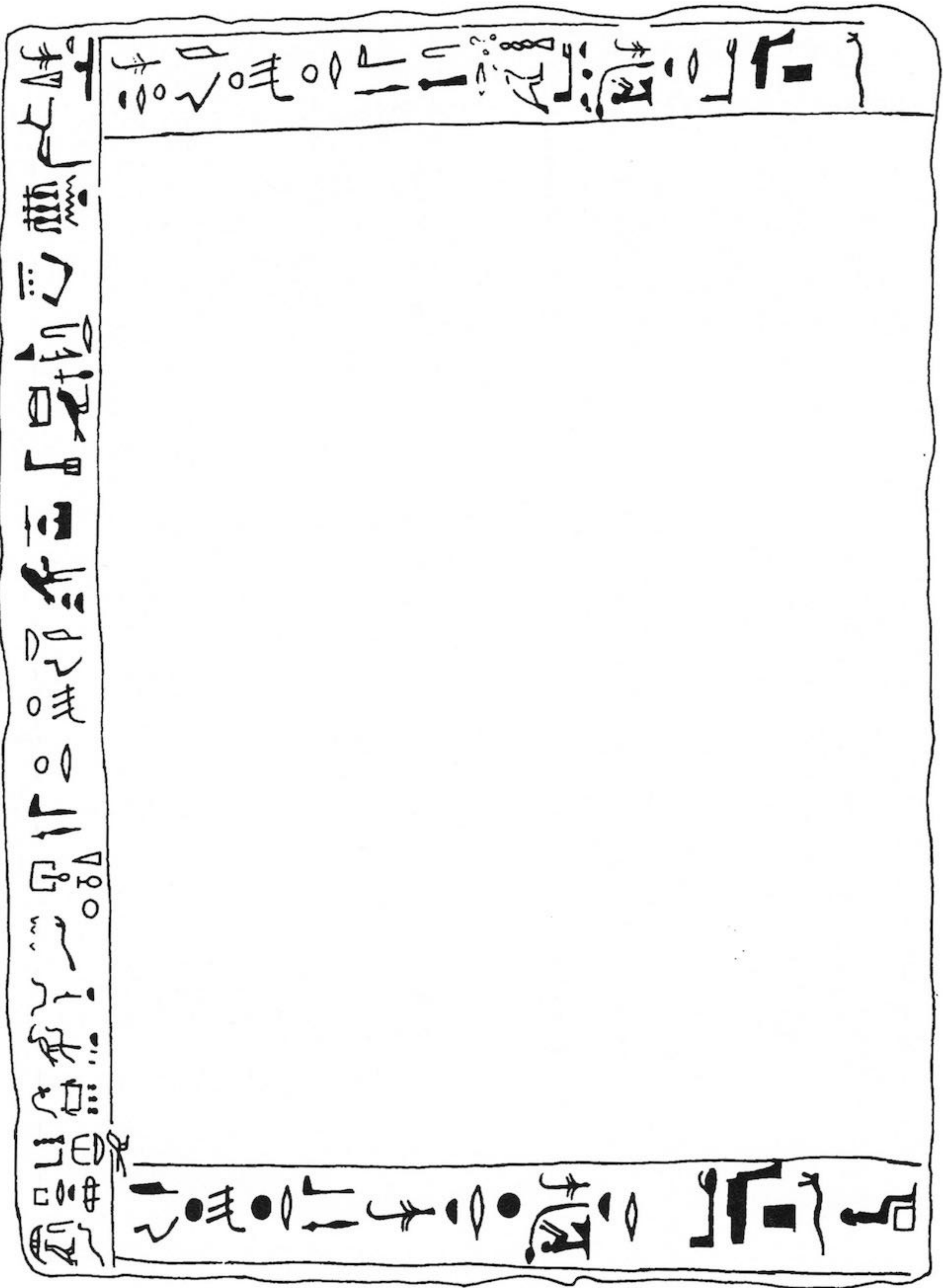


Fig. 5