

# Khaemwaset

NOZOMU KAWAI

Khaemwaset was the son of Rameses II by his second great wife Isisnofret, who was also the mother of king MERENPTAH. He was born during the reign of Sety I (*see* SETY (SETI) I-II), when his father was prince regent. A study of a series of princes in procession reliefs in Rameses II's temples proposed that he was the fourth son of Rameses II (Fischer 2001).

Although Khaemwaset took part in a Nubian campaign, as represented in a scene in the temple of Beit el-Wali, and accompanied his father to war in Syria, shown in the Ramesseum in Thebes, his career does not seem to have included a post in the army, since he does not bear any military title (Fischer 2001). Instead, he entered into the service of the god PTAH of Memphis as a youth. He had at least five titles associated with this profession, including "Sem of Ptah" (High priest of Ptah) and "Chief of the Artisans."

One of his first official duties was to participate in the burial of the APIS bull, the sacred animal of Ptah, in year 16 of Rameses II's reign. The Apis bull was a symbol of fertility and later was regarded as the earthly manifestation of Ptah, mediating between god and humans (Gomaà 1973; *see* ANIMAL MUMMIES). Under his supervision, the Apis bull was embalmed for burial. After the mummified body was decorated, the animal was placed in a huge wooden coffin in a specific rock-cut tomb, with underground burial chamber and a funerary chapel above, in the SAQQARA necropolis. On the death of an Apis bull, a new Apis bull had to be found (Gomaà 1973). A new Apis was duly found and in turn died fourteen years later, in year 30. Again, Prince Khaemwaset interred the deceased bull in the same tomb as its predecessor. After that, Khaemwaset introduced a special underground gallery under the desert plateau of Saqqara, instead of a simple rock-cut tomb. This new burial arrangement of the Apis bull initiated by Khaemwaset continued

for thirteen centuries. It is known as the Serapeum, and was discovered by August Mariette in 1852. Khaemwaset also built a Temple of Apis as a focus for the cult of the dead Apis, instead of funerary chapels for each bull's isolated rock-cut tomb.

Khaemwaset had a special interest in the past. He was obviously impressed and entranced by the Old Kingdom monuments in the Memphite necropolis. In his late thirties, he set about visiting, inspecting, and restoring the pyramids and sun temples of the Old Kingdom kings. On each monument he investigated, he left a standard inscription with the names and titles of their owners, the name of his father Rameses II, and his own name carved to record his work. While conducting this tour of inspection, Khaemwaset even carried out a small-scale excavation and was rewarded with a remarkable discovery of a statue of Kawab, prince of King Khufu of the 4th Dynasty. He engraved an inscription on its three sides and erected it in the temple of Ptah at Memphis (Gomaà 1973). Although Khaemwaset is considered as a restorer of the monuments of his ancestors, he actually reused the blocks from Old Kingdom pyramids and mastabas for his own monument (Yoshimura and Kawai 2002). Probably, this was due to his obsession with the past.

During his long tenure as high official in Memphis, Khaemwaset assumed various responsibilities in administration, especially relating to the temple and estates of Ptah in Memphis. Several official letters passed to and from the royal palace at Per-Rameses and Khaemwaset at Memphis. In a ship's log of year 52 of Rameses II, a series of letters were sent off "to the Sem-priest." In these letters, Khaemwaset's eldest son, Rameses, was accorded the courtesy title of "Prince" (Janssen 1961); by year 52, Khaemwaset himself seems to have been crown prince and aged almost sixty. He was also entrusted with many important projects, such as the construction of the temple of Ptah at Memphis (Gomaà 1973).

As High Priest of Ptah, Khaemwaset was responsible for the proclamation and celebration

of the *sed*-festival or jubilee festival of his father, Rameses II. He supervised the announcement of Rameses II's first five jubilees as far as Aswan in the south and left records commemorating them in years 30, 34, 37, 40, and 43 of Rameses II. During his tours, Khaemwaset recorded the jubilees and placed his own statues in many temples.

Khaemwaset also became famous as a magician and was the subject of stories for his wisdom and power, especially in Demotic papyri from the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. In the Demotic *Story of Setna*, Khaemwaset was featured as the hero.

Little is known about the private life of Khaemwaset. His wife's name is unknown. He may have had at least three children: Rameses, Hori, and Isisnofret. Gomaà doubts that Hori was a son of Khaemwaset; rather he believes that he was a local official who took part in construction work at Gebel el-Silsila (Gomaà 1973). The tomb of Khaemwaset's daughter Isisnofret was recently discovered by a Japanese team from Waseda University, near the monument of Khaemwaset on an eminent outcrop at Saqqara (Kawai and Yoshimura 2009).

Khaemwaset had probably died by year 55 of Rameses II, as his younger brother Merenptah became heir to the throne. The location of the tomb of Khaemwaset is unknown. Some scholars have suggested that he was buried in the Serapeum with the Apis bulls (cf. Kitchen 1982). Gomaà suggested that his tomb, probably not far from the Serapeum, must have been destroyed when the catacombs were enlarged during the 30th Dynasty or later in the Ptolemaic period (Gomaà 1973). However, a Japanese team from Waseda University found Khaemwaset's funerary chapel on the summit of an outcrop in the desert approximately

1.5 km to the northwest of the Serapeum (Yoshimura and Takamiya 2000). This is a perfect place for Khaemwaset's own monument, which commands a view of all the pyramids in the Memphite necropolis.

SEE ALSO: Memphis, Pharaonic; Rameses I–XI.

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