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Andrés Diego Espinel

Around the Columns. Analysis of a Relief from the Causeway of Unis Mortuary Temple.

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Around the Columns
Analysis of a Relief from the Causeway of Unis Mortuary Temple

ANDRÉS DIEGO ESPINEL[I]

HISTORY AND RITUAL IN OLD KINGDOM MORTUARY TEMPLE ICONOGRAPHIES

The recent publication of the reliefs from the causeway of Unis mortuary complex at Saqqara is very welcomed[2]. It offers an important quantity of long-waited and suggestive epigraphic and iconographic documentation which includes unattested or badly-represented themes in other royal complexes. Along with the recently discovered –and therefore not yet fully published– reliefs from the causeway of Sahure, the repertoire of subjects represented along both corridors is surprisingly wide. Some of them seem to record contemporary facts and/or to commemorate distant events or *historicizing* themes into the canonical and ideal reign that every pharaoh desired to recreate on the walls of his mortuary building[3].

1 I should like to thank J.M. Galán and H. Hays for their corrections and comments on the draft. My thanks are also due to J. Málek for his permission to study the notebooks of J. Černý kept in the Griffith Institute, Oxford, and his comments on the term *spt*. I am also very grateful to L. Gabolde for his remarks and bibliographical references on the obelisks erected by Hatshepsut. Finally thanks are due to Ana García Martín for the line drawing of fig. 1.

2 Labrousse and Moussa 2002. Despite of its importance and quality, it is necessary to underline an important gap in this publication. It does not include the information collected by J. Černý in his notebooks, currently kept in the Griffith Institute, Oxford (a publication of Unis blocks documented by the Czech scholar is being prepared by the author). His notes, mentioned but not used by the authors, register many inscriptions now totally or partially lost that could have been very helpful for reconstructing texts and scenes. For a picture of Černý's notebook, see a page partially published in Baines 1985, p. 89, fig. 54 (= Černý *Notebook* 120, p. 73).

3 Recent studies on the iconographic programs in Old Kingdom mortuary temples are: Stockfish 2003; Ćwiek 2003; regarding some ideas on *historicity* see *ibid.*, p. 201, n. 836.

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The separation of actual historic representations from far remembrances or conventional and regular iconography is very problematic. Despite the fact that our knowledge of decorative programs in mortuary temples is sparse and most incomplete, the historical nature of scenes does not seem to be conditioned or related to their emplacement in specific parts of the monuments (i.e. the causeway as recipient of *historical* themes, and the upper temple as posting of religious ones). As Traunecker states, plan and, especially, decoration seem to be separated from –or at least not tightly related to– ritual[4]. It does not mean that the iconographic themes along the temple did not play precise symbolic roles and display concrete messages[5]. Their changing arrangement can be explained because of the continuous development and enrichment of architectural plan and iconographic subjects in mortuary complexes along the time.

The so-called "Libyan Family" is a good example for raising doubts or fixing ideas on the *historical* and ritual values of some of the themes sculpted in the mortuary complexes. This representation is attested on the Memphite royal complexes of Sahure, Niuserre (both temples had, at least, two versions of the scene), Unis (?), Pepi I, Pepi II, the Theban complex of Mentuhetep II (?) and, more than a millennium and a half after Sahure, on a temple built by Taharqa at Kawa[6]. Placed in different locations in every building[7], the "Libyan Family" theme, comprising the smiting and booty scenes, could be a highly canonized reflection of a real deed during the reign of Sahure or a predecessor of him. It could even be a remembrance of (or in some way an idea inspired by) a much older event. Perhaps, it was already commemorated on the recently discovered bone(?)-tag of Narmer from Umm el-Qa'ab, at Abydos, referring to a victory over Tjehenu; or the slightly earlier *Cities Palette*, which apparently reckons on one of its sides the booty taken from that western region[8].

In the course of the Old Kingdom, the mortuary complex as a polysemous entity evolved and was enriched, developing a wide range of functions and meanings that probably went beyond ritual rules, firm architectural plans and an established set of scenes[9]. The latter ones probably knew some additions in certain parts of these buildings, inspired both in the iconographic programs from other types of sanctuaries (such as those from the *Weltkammer* of Niuserre's sun temple),[10] and in *historical* events; or, in other words, mementos (i.e. evocations, re-creations)

4 Traunecker 1991; see also O'Connor 1998, p. 138.

5 See, for example, Ćwiek 2003, p. 292-348.

6 Regarding this subject, see Stockfish 1996. A second (fragmentary) representation of the *Libyan Family* in the complex of Sahure can be seen in Borchardt 1913, pl. 2 (bottom right, a fragment mentions the name of the Libyan mother *[ḥ]wt-ỉ[t=s]*). On possible attestations of this scene in Unis complex, see Labrousse, Lauer and Leclant 1977, p. 89-92, pl. 32 (docs. 39-44); Stockfish 2003, p. 316. On the scene from the mortuary temple of Mentuhetep II, see Naville 1913, pl. 13 (2-3); 14 (2). In this case the woman on pl. 13 (3) is very similar to those represented in Sahure, Pepi I and Pepi II temples.

7 The known location of Old Kingdom scenes are the following: Sahure, North wall of peristyle hall; Niuserre, North wall of end of the lower part of the causeway; Pepi II, South-eastern wall of central transverse corridor (just after the peristyle hall).

8 Concerning Narmer's tag see, for example, Dreyer 2000. A wooden cylinder from Hierakonpolis (Oxford, Ashmolean Mus. E3915) depicts the same victory (?) on Tjehenu; see Whitehouse 2002, p. 434, 449, fig. 4. For the *Cities Palette* (Cairo CG 14238), see Baines 2003.

9 On a similar phenomenon in the decoration of Old Kingdom mortuary chapels, where the search of originality and a relative freedom in the planning were important shaping factors, see Van Walsem 2005.

10 Ćwiek 2003, p. 257-260; a block possibly from a similar scene comes from Isesi's complex, see Grimm 1985; *id.* 1988.

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of past deeds, and facts happened during the life of the reigning pharaoh. Some scenes from the mortuary temple of Sahure could be celebrations of events which had happened during his reign. Leaving aside some long-known possible examples, such as the so-called "Syrian Booty" or a fleet returning from Asia (with a close parallel in Unis causeway)[11], some recently discovered blocks show the return of an Egyptian mission from Punt and the mention of an expedition to the Eastern Desert (maybe Sinai). Both representations could be a reflection of the expeditions recorded on the Palermo Stone for the last year of his reign; being, therefore, very fresh news and inspiring themes for the ideologists and artists working in the complex of the king[12]. These kind of scenes, whether actual, remembered or imagined, fit well with the role of the temple as an expression of the *Geschichte als Fest* idea; celebrating various achievements of the king or, more precisely, of the royalty[13]. Concretely, these subjects, related to Eastern foreign countries rich in *exotica* –known subsequently under the label "Land-of-God"– could be used, among other ideas, as an exotic expression of the power of pharaoh over their neighbours, as a way of legitimating his authority and lordship everywhere, and a subtle reference to the solar connotations of his power because of the eastern location of Sinai and Punt[14].

The possible presence in the temple of Snefru of a scene recording in a very compressed way some parts of the Sahure's Punt expedition[15] suggests the intermingling and/or coincidence of remembrance, celebration and canonization of ancient deeds with similar contemporary facts. The mixture of past and present events could also be the origin of other motifs, such as the returning of the fleet from Asia (Sahure and Unis), the combat between Egyptians and Asiatics (Userkaf and Unis, see below), or the already mentioned "Libyan Family".

In the recently published blocks of Unis there are other possible examples of *historical* documents such as:

a. Long and, apparently, narrative texts mentioning, among other topics, some unspecified expeditions[16];

b. Reliefs displaying a (victorious) battle against Asiatics (a similar scene was also included in Userkaf's mortuary temple)[17];

c. Texts related to the provisioning and equipment of the mortuary complex[18];

d. The already well-known images and inscriptions describing the transport by ship of granite architectural elements of the temple from Elephantine[19].

11 For the "Syrian Booty", see Borchardt 1913, pl. 3; PM III² 329 (13); for the fleet see *ibid.*, pl. 12-13. Concerning Unis' reliefs of the fleet, see Labrousse and Moussa 2002, p. 27-28 (doc. 15); Bietak 1988.

12 For preliminary information about them, see Hawass and Verner 1996; el Awady s.d.a; *id.* s.d.b.; *id.* 2006. Regarding the Palermo Stone record on the Punt and Sinai expeditions, during the last year of his reign see, for example, Wilkinson 2000, p. 168-171 (PS v.IV.1).

13 On the meaning of Old Kingdom mortuary complexes, see Arnold 1997, p. 31-85; O'Connor 1998; Ćwiek 2003; regarding the idea of *Geschichte als Fest*, see Hornung 1992, p. 147-164.

14 On the universalistic power of the pharaoh during the Old Kingdom, see Diego Espinel 2006, p. 231-237.

15 Edel 1996, p. 200-204, fig. 1.

16 Labrousse and Moussa 2002, p. 25 (doc. 12, probably related to the transport of architectural elements, see n. 29); 29 (doc. 16); 48-9 (doc. 46); 108-109 (docs. 122-4); and less possibly, 63-64 (doc. 66); Labrousse and Moussa 1996, p. 86 (doc. 49); 100; Goedicke 1971, p. 24-26 (8) (= Labrousse and Moussa 2002, p. 111). For a similar text, probably from a later royal complex, see Goedicke 1971, p. 82-84 (46); Strudwick 2005, p. 91-92 (12B).

17 Labrousse and Moussa 2002, p. 21-3 (docs. 5-10); Labrousse and Lauer 2000, 134 (docs. 238-9).

18 Labrousse and Moussa 2002, p. 108-109 (docs. 122-124); see also Roccati 1981, p. 131-132 (§§101-5); Strudwick 2005, p. (12A).

19 Labrousse and Moussa 2002, p. 25 (doc. 12); 29-32 (docs. 16-20), with bibliographical references; see also Roccati 1981, p. 131-132 (§§101-105).

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The historicity of this last subject is underlined by the content of an incomplete biographical inscription of a man called Khenu probably from Saqqara and, maybe, by the presence of a royal rock-inscription of Unis at the gates of Elephantine. These transport scenes have already been the subject of research and commentary, and now the publication of Labrousse and Moussa offers some interesting unpublished or partially-published blocks[20]. One relief from this scene, the so-called Document 16 (fig. 1), is the subject of the present article. Its inscription contains two interesting and intriguing pieces of information: an alleged *hapax legomenon* (*zp.wt*), and a reference to the dimensions of some columns from the Unis mortuary complex which do not correspond with the architectural data from the archaeological record.

1. DOCUMENT 16: PHILOLOGICAL STUDY

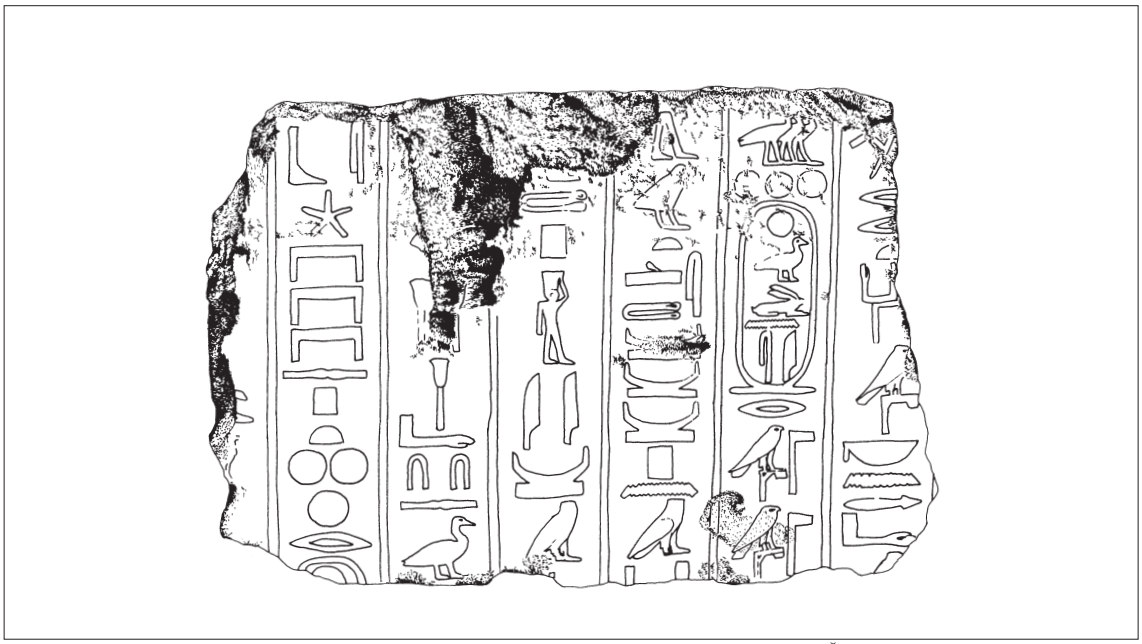


FIG. 1. The inscription of doc. 16. Drawing of Ana García Martín after the collation of Černý *Notebook* nr. 121, 61 (30) with the line drawing and photograph of Labrousse and Moussa 2002, 148 (fig. 28), pl. II (c).

20 Regarding the inscription of Khenu, see FISCHER 1975, p. 33-5; *id.* 1977, p. 175; EDEL 1981, p. 72-5; ROCCATI 1981, p. 133 (§§106); STRUDWICK 2005, p. 292-293 (218). A possible connection between this block and Cairo CG 1433 has been suggested by FISCHER 1975, p. 33; see, also STRUDWICK 2005, p. 321 (237). Recently, S. SEIDLMAYER has found at Elephantine a rock-inscription mentioning a person called Khenu which probably dates around the beginning of the Dynasty VI, see SEIDLMAYER in DREYER *et al.* 2005, p. 35-37, pl. 11a-b. It is difficult to identificate this individual with the one probably buried in Saqqara. Their titles are different and the name is relatively common. Regarding the cartouche of Unis, see *Urk*. I, 69, 5-10; PETRIE 1888, pl. 12 (312); for a recent photograph of the inscription, see SEIDLMAYER 1999.

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[x+1] (←↓) *[...] mrrt kꜣ=k n ꜥꜣ[t n (?)] [...]* [x+2] *[...] bꜣ.w nḫn zꜣ rꜥ wnỉs r nṯr.[w] [...]* [x+3] *[...] ỉwt/ỉnt sꜣṯ.w pn m ꜣ[bw]/s[bꜣ] (?) [...]* [x+4] *[...] [ꜣ]ṯpy m [mꜣṯ (?)][...]* [x+5] *[...] [wḫꜣ.]w mḥ 20 zꜣ[...]* [x+6] *[...] sbꜣ.w zp.wt r [nfr z.wt zꜣ] r[ꜥ] [wnỉs] [...]* [x+7] *[...] [=f mꜣꜣ] [...]*

[x+1] *[...] which your* ka *desires because of (?) [...]* [x+2] *[...] the* bꜣ.w *of Nekhen, the son of Re, Unis, to/more than the god[s] [...]* [x+3] *[...] the arrival of this cargo-ships*[a] *from Elephantine/with doors (?) (*ꜣb[w])/sbꜣ*)*[b] *[...]* [x+4] *[...] a ship loaded with [...] [of granite (?)]*[c] [x+5] *[column]s*[d] *of 20 cubits and* zꜣ*[...]*[e] *[...]* [x+6] *[...] doors*[f] *and* zp.wt *to [the (pyramid called) "Perfect are the places of the son] of Re, [Unis]" [...]* [x+7] *[...] [seeing (?)]*[g] *[...]*[21]

a. Labrousse and Moussa 2002, p. 29 read here an *hapax*: "navires *séchetj*". It is clear that the text refers to *sꜣṯ*-ships, see *Wb.* IV 27, 12; Jones 1988, p. 143 (58); Hannig 2003, p. 1071 {26140, 47464}. This kind of ship, well-known in Old Kingdom texts, is a cargo-boat clearly related to the verb *sṯꜣ*, "to pull, to drag, to bring", see *Wb.* IV 351, 7 - 354, 4; Hannig *op. cit.* p. 1267-8 {31393,31402, 31404, 31405, 31415, 31416, 31418, 31420}.

b. Gramatically, it is better to read the last signs as *ꜣbw*, "Elephantine", than *sbꜣ*, "door(s)", not like Moussa and Labrousse 2002, p. 29. In these inscriptions the preposition *m* + architectural element is always preceded by the verb *ꜣṯp/ṯpꜣ*, "to transport", "to load", as can be seen in the following column and note.

c. Černý *Notebook* nr. 121, 61 (30) records the beginning of Gardiner's sign U1/U2 allowing the reading *m mꜣṯ*. The formula *ꜣṯp m mꜣṯ* + architectural element is frequent in Unis reliefs, see Labrousse and Moussa 2002, p. 141, fig. 30 (doc. 18 A & B). Regarding the formula *ꜣṯp m* + architectural element + *n mꜣṯ* see *ibid.* p. 140, fig. 29 (doc. 17); 141. fig. 31 (doc. 19).

d. Černý *Notebook* nr. 121, 61 (30) records the phonogram *w* (Gardiner's sign G 43)

e. *zꜣ*[...] can be restored in this "architectural" context in different ways. It can be read as *zꜣt.w/zꜣṯ.w*, "floor slabs" as does Roccati 1981, p. 132 (§§102). See also Hannig *op. cit.*, p. 1068 {26111}; 1071 {26135}. Another possibilities are: *zꜣṯw*, "threshold (?)", *ibid.*, p. 1071 {26123} or, less possibly, *zꜣ.w*, "beams", see *ibid.*, p. 1055 {25888}. By means of the architectural evidences from the temple, however, a more probable translation can be inferred: "wall" or, more precisely, "orthostat", see Spencer 1984, p. 267-270.

f. Labrousse and Moussa *op. cit.*, p. 140, fig. 28, have drawn the sign *ꜣb/mr* instead of the phonogram *s*, which can be seen clearly on their pl. II (c).

g. Černý *Notebook* nr. 121, 61 (30) reconstructed in this column, probably by means of traces now lost or not well documented, the reading *[...]=f mꜣꜣ*.

2. AN OLD KINGDOM HAPAX? ZP.WT = BASE-COLUMN

Leaving aside its historical content, the main interest of this block is the mention of the plural noun *zp.wt* (sing. **zpt*), which has been interpreted usually as an *hapax*. Few attempts have been made to translate it. Roccati took it, without giving any explanation, as "area". Labrousse and Moussa, and Ćwiek[22] do not give any interpretation, leaving the word untranslated.

21 Labrousse and Moussa 2002, p. 29 (doc. 16), 140 (fig. 28), pl. II (c); Roccati 1981, p. 131-2 (§§101-5). The current drawing pretends to be just orientative since the copy is taken from the photos and drawings from Labrousse and Moussa, *op. cit.*

22 Ćwiek 2003, p. 253.

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Considering the *historicity* of the relief which mentions it, later similar texts, the determinatives used, and the archaeological and architectural context of Unis complex, it is possible to determine its meaning despite the brevity of the text and the absence of contemporary parallels. First of all, none of the scholars who have studied these reliefs seem to have noticed that the word , *zpt*/*spt*, "base column" is attested from the New Kingdom on[23]. Even though their occurrences are written with different semagrams (Gardiner's signs D24, F42, N11, N12, , , , ), a relation between this term and the alleged *hapax* from Unis causeway is clear despite the disjunction between *zpt* and *spt*. The only building elements from the complex of Unis (and from other Old Kingdom royal mortuary temples) with a similar round shape are the base-columns. However, the different semagrams employed suggest different semantic grounds and, therefore, an evolution of the basic and original meaning of the word.

New Kingdom examples probably understood the base-columns literally as the "lips" or "borders" (*sp.wt/sp.ty*) protruding at the bottom of the columns. Words with the same etymology such as , *spt*, "rim of a vase"[24]; , *spt*, "bank, shore"[25], are already known during the Old Kingdom. However, the example from Unis causeway seems to be related to a different homonym term due to its determinatives: three rounded signs apparently with no decoration, but clearly related to the *zpt*-logogram Gardiner sign O50 () because of the phonographic sequence they determined[26]. This sign is the logogram and semagram employed for the word *zpt*, "threshing" or "threshing floor"[27]. In this case, the stone-bases were probably named not after the "lips" sticking out the columns, but after their shape recalling, *grosso modo*, threshing floors or, at least, their logogram in Egyptian writing. Similar to the hieroglyphic sign, base-columns are circular in shape and contain an internal circular hollow or a rough-hewn area in order to facilitate adherence with the bottoms of the columns.

Unlike the New Kingdom writings of the word, the only Old Kingdom attestation shows the most striking feature of the base-columns: their round plan. This way of representation based on an "aerial-view" is also common in the representations of other circular areas and objects, as it is the case for a homonym rounded-object related to temple cult[28] during the New Kingdom. Examples of similar circular areas in Old Kingdom reliefs are the spaces surrounding two musicians clapping (*mꜣḥ*) sticks in some agricultural scenes[29], or the *mḥn*-game board[30].

Turning back to the temple of Unis, it is still possible to see some of these base-columns on its floor[31]. Since document 16 seems to mention the transport of architectural elements from Elephantine, probably the *zp.wt* cited were made of pink-granite. There are, at least, two

23 *Wb.* IV, 100, 18: *Basis (einer Säule, einer Stele*); Spencer 1984, p. 249-250.

24 Posener-Kriéger 1976, p. 187-188 (C1); Hannig 2003, p. 1101 {27287}.

25 Hannig 2003, p. 1101 {27288}.

26 Concerning that sign, see Gardiner 1969³, 498 (O 50); for some examples of this sign see Griffith 1898, p. 27-28, pls. 3 (32); 7 (87); Betrò 1996, p. 173.

27 *Wb.* III, 434, 12-4; Hannig 2003, p. 1101 {27294}.

28 For this kind of representation, see Schäfer 1974, p. 95-96; for the homonym object see Málek 1978.

29 See, for example, PM III², 531 (66) (Mereruka); 638 (2, IV) (Neferherenptah).

30 See, for example, PM III², 186 (5) and Simpson 1976, fig. 38 (Idu); PM III², 131 (7, III) (Kaiemankh).

31 Few base-columns have been found in the complex. Labrousse, Lauer and Leclant 1977, p. 24, mention that the columns probably *reposa[ie]nt sur des bases circulaires qui devaient être également en granit*. Those bases were placed on a quartzite floor, see *ibid.*, 23. Some fragmentary examples have been found in the lower temple, see Labrousse and Moussa 1996, p. 33 (a pink granite palmiform capital reused as a column base in the east portico of the lower temple); 40 (two column bases made, curiously, in quartzite in the North portico); 46 (two pink granite column bases in the South portico).

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base-columns *in situ* made of this kind of stone. They were placed in the south portico of the lower temple. There were probably more placed in other parts of the temple but nowadays nothing remains of them. Other ones, made in quartzite, have been found in some areas of the peristyle *wsḫt*-court of the upper temple and in the north portico of the lower temple[32]. The use of these materials was related to their symbolic meaning. Because of their reddish colour, they probably had solar connotations and a protective role in the accesses to the temple[33]. Beside these significances, the various uses of granite and quartzite probably were related to geographic connotations too. In this sense, pink granite comes from the south and quartzite probably from the north, perhaps from Gebel el-Ahmar, near Cairo (however, there are quartzite mines in the area of the First Cataract area too)[34]. Unfortunately, a symbolic geographical arrangement is impossible to ascertain with certainty because of the scarcity of the architectural remains in the complex. The main columned spaces (i.e. the east portico in the lower temple and the peristyle court in the upper temple) do not preserve enough remains to yield other examples of the hypothetical contrast between "southern" and "northern" materials.

3. THE HEIGHT OF UNIS COLUMNS

This relief, and probably a similar one, mention columns 20 cubits (10.4 metres) tall[35]. It is an imposing height for granite monolithic blocks. Actually, the highest Old Kingdom granite columns from a mortuary temple found *in situ* come from the Sahure complex. They are around 13 cubits tall (6.45 metres)[36]. Four re-used columns from the sanctuary of Amun at Tanis, coming possibly from an Old Kingdom building, reach a height of *circa* 11 metres (22 cubits)[37]. The architectural data from Unis' temple indicate, however, by the dimensions and number of preserved base-columns, that this building was not their original place. According to Labrousse and Moussa, the diameter of the base columns in the mortuary complex is not big enough to support such big monoliths. Known columns from this building are 5.21, 6.30 and ±7.5 metres tall (around 10, 12 and ±15 cubits respectively)[38]. If this is so, is it necessary to consider the written evidence from document 16 as an exaggeration?

32 The quartzite bases found in the peristyle court actually were slabs carved as round bases. For this kind of base columns, see ARNOLD 1991, p. 145-147. The bases found in the lower temple, however, have a clear round shape.

33 Red was related to prophylactic practices, see AUFRÈRE 1991, p. 553-556; regarding the symbolism of quartzite and granite, see *ibid.*, p. 698-700; 702-703; for other symbolic use of stones in temples, see *ibid.*, p. 693-707; *id.* 2001; BARRE 1993.

34 On quartzite sources, see DE PUTTER and KARLSHAUSEN 1992, p. 94-99 ; BARRE 1993, p. 73-78; ASTON, HARRELL and SHAW 2000, p. 53. Regarding the use of other stones in order to create a geographical duality, see ĆWIEK 2003, p. 321-324; for other ways of express the duality in the mortuary complexes *ibid.*, p. 307-321.

35 LABROUSSE and MOUSSA 2002, p. 25 (doc. 12) cites, according the reading given by ČERNÝ's *Notebook*, columns of 10 + x cubits that probably, because of the space of the column, has to be restored as 20.

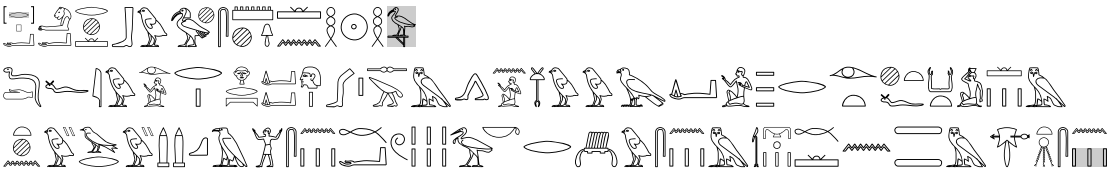
36 ARNOLD 1996, p. 48.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 40, fig. 1,5; 41; 44.

38 Regarding these dimensions and the calculation of the height of the tallest columns see LABROUSSE and MOUSSA 1996, p. 34-37, 49 ; fig. 19; LABROUSSE, LAUER and LECLANT 1977, p. 24.

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The disagreement between text and archaeological evidence recalls a later similar example from the "Northampton stelae", in the mortuary chapel of Djehuty (TT 11), currently excavated by the Spanish-Egyptian archaeological mission working at Dra Abu el-Naga. In that biographical inscription it is stated that:



[12a] (←) *ỉry-pʿt ḥɔty-ʿ rḫ bw ɔḥ s.mnḫ n nḥḥ [ḏḥwty] ḏd=f*
[12b] (↰) *ỉw ỉr=ỉ r ḫry rdỉ tp rd sšm.n=ỉ ḥmwty.w r ỉrt ḫft kɔt m*
[12c] (←) *tḫn.wy wr.wy ḳ[[ɔ=s]]n mḥ 108 bɔ[[k r ɔw=sn m ḏʿ]]m mḥ n (sic) tɔ.wy m st.(w)t=sn*

(…) the ỉry-pʿt, hɔty-ʿ, *who knows what is useful; who makes excellent for eternity, [Djehuty], who says: I acted as a chief giving instructions, I led the artisans regarding the action concerning the work on two big obelisks. Th[[eir]] hei[[ght]] is 108 cubits (56.16 metres), cover[[ed in their height with electr]]um, filling the Two Lands with th[eir] rays*[39].

Even though there are evidences mentioning higher obelisks, the height given to these ones is clearly an exaggeration[40]. The highest obelisk known, currently in Rome, is *only* 32.18 metres high (almost 62 cubits) and, as Engelbach pointed out, there are big difficulties in erecting monoliths as those mentioned by Djehuty because of the very nature of granite[41]. Actually, the known obelisks erected during the joint reign of Thutmes III and Hatshepsut were considerably shorter.

There are different possibilities to match the data given for both archaeological and textual evidence. The aforementioned dimensions can be taken just as hyperboles. However, they can be the consequence of an unusual scribal accounting system. For example, the biography of Djehuty mentions a pair of obelisks but just gives one figure. Therefore it is possible that the data given in it is the addition of the height of both obelisks: 54 + 54 cubits or, in other words, 28.08 + 28.08 metres, as Barguet already suggested[42]. This height is considerably more realistic and fits well with the estimated dimensions of any of the three known pairs of obelisks erected during the joint reign of Thutmes III and Hatshepsut at Karnak (all of them around 27/28 metres high)[43].

39 *LD* III pl. 27, 10; Spiegelberg 1900, p. 118-119, lines 12, 17 and 28; *Urk.* IV 425, 13-426, 2 (a fourth column of text at the end has been omitted). Currently the inscription is partially lost as has been indicated with double square brackets in the text. I would like to thank the director of the Spanish-Egyptian mission, José M. Galán (CSIC), for the opportunity to collate this inscription.

40 *P. Anastasi* I 14, 8 – 16, 5 mentions, in a mathematical exercise from a satirical letter, an obelisk measuring 110 cubits (57.20 metres) high, see Gardiner 1964, p. 54; Fischer-Elfert 1986, p. 133-142. Probably such dimensions are more an imaginative mathematical problem than a real technical matter. Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis* XXXVI 36, 14, mentions obelisks of 140 cubits (61.6 metres, if Pliny used the Roman cubit of 0.44 metres) and 120 cubits (52.8 metres) high erected in Heliopolis by "Rhamsesis, who was reigning at the time of the capture of Troy". On the calculations with Roman cubits in Pliny, see Gitton 1975, p. 100.

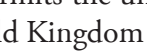
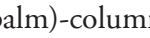
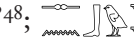
41 Engelbach 1922, p. 42-43 (43-43).

42 Barguet 1962, p. 100, n. 1; see also Breasted 1906, p. 156 (§ 376), n. h.

43 For a brief introduction to the three pairs of obelisks erected during that period in Karnak, see Gabolde 2000. I owe to this author an estimate of the height of the obelisks of the festival

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A similar solution can be postulated for the information given by the document under study. The height of 20 cubits could refer to two columns of 10 cubits (5.20 metres), a dimension that, as noted above, is attested among the architectural remains of the temple, and more precisely in the southern portico of the lower temple where pink granite base-columns have also been found[44]. There are, however, some difficulties for this interpretation since the text mentions "columns" in plural (with three column semagrams) and not in dual, and since only the shortest columns of the complex would be mentioned in the reliefs. If the latter problem cannot be answered, the former one could be solved by observing the relief-scenes from the causeway. There, every cargo-ship carries two columns, disposed one after the other along the vessel[45]. The shipping by pairs of long architectural elements seems to have been common. Actually, the reliefs from Unis temple recall a similar scene related, again, to Queen Hatshepsut: the transport of two obelisks on one ship represented in the temple of Deir el-Bahari. The measurement taking into account pairs of columns is, furthermore, logical, since such architectural elements, like the door jambs, are generally placed in Old Kingdom mortuary temples and are transported in pairs[46].

To sum up, the analysis of this block offers new light on the history of Unis complex building and the *historicity* of some of its scenes. The new interpretation proposed here permits the understanding of a problematic word in an important and homogeneous list of Old Kingdom architectural terms comprising , *sbȝ.w*, "doors"[47]; , *wḫ(ȝ).w*, "(palm)-columns"[48]; , *znb.w*, "lintels"[49]; , *zȝ[ṯ.w]/zȝ[w.w]*, "orthostats (or less probably, floor slabs/thresholds/beams?)"[50] and, of course, *zp.wt*, "column bases"[51]. Given that pieces made of Assuan pink granite of all these elements have been found in the mortuary temple of Unis[52], the *historical* nature of the information of this set of reliefs seems clear. In fact, the correspondence between their real measurements and materials with the data and

court (around 27/28 metres) and the Eastern obelisks, just behind the Akhmenu (around 28 metres) (personal communication, 15/3/2007). Regarding the obelisks of the festival court, see *id.* 1988; *id.* 2003. The obelisk still *in situ* measures 29.56 metres according to Habachi 1984, p. 116-117, fig. 33, and Arnold 2003, p. 166; and 28.52 metres according to Gabolde 2000, p. 42.

44 Labrousse and Moussa 1996, p. 34-37, fig. 19.

45 For a technical study on the features of cargo-ships see Goyon 1971.

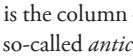
46 The only exception in these complexes, at least from the reign of Niuserre on, is the column –or pillar– erected in the so-called *antichambre carrée*; for an example see Goyon 1987.

47 *Wb.* IV 83, 9-17; Hannig 2003, p. 1096 {27061, 27062}; Spencer 1984, p. 205-211.

48 *Wb.* I 352, 12-16; Hannig 2003, p. 369 {8196}; Spencer 1984, p. 243-247; Labrousse and Moussa 2002, p. 30 (doc. 17); 140, fig. 29 ; 143, fig. 34; 31 (doc. 18 a); 141, fig. 30 a; 142, fig. 33.

49 Goyon 1971, p. 34, n. 1; Hannig 2003, p. 1157 {28477}; see also Labrousse and Moussa 2002, p. 29 (doc. 18 b); 141, fig. 30 b; 142-3, figs. 33-34. Spencer 1984, doesn't mention this term.

50 See above note c of section 1.

51 Another term should be added: , *bnbnt*, "pyramidion", (*Wb.* I 459, 13-14; Hannig 2003, p. 421 {9808}) included in an unpublished relief documented by Černý (*Notebook* 120, p. 67) and currently under study by the author. This mention does not seem to be connected to the aforementioned scenes. It could be in relation with the famous Unis *affamés*, as it happens in one of the recently discovered scenes from Sahure's causeway, see Hawass and Verner 1996, p. 180, 182-184; block Sc-3; fig. 2 a and pl. 55 b. Regarding the *affamés*, see Labrousse and Moussa 2002 p. 85-86 (docs. 93-4); 175, figs. 117-118.

52 Regarding the granite orthostates, there are no evidences of such elements in the complex. However, huge blocks of pink granite in the pyramid corridor or even forming part of the five-niche camera could fit perfectly with the meaning of *zȝṯ.w* because of being part of walls.

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images given by the inscriptions from the temple, together with possible external information such as the incomplete inscription of Khenu or Unis cartouche at Elephantine, forms a rare case of an early historical event well documented by different contemporary pieces of information. Furthermore, this set of data sheds some light on the many difficulties and very few possibilities of separating *history* (comprising here contemporary events, mementos and even historized ideas and concepts) from *ritual* (religious and mythical scenes) in the iconographic program of Old Kingdom mortuary temples.

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