

5 th Dynasty Kings - Part I

Userkaf

Userkaf was the founder of the Fifth dynasty of Egypt and the first pharaoh to start the tradition of building sun temples at Abusir. Userkaf's name means "his Ka (or soul) is powerful." He ruled from 2465-2458 BCE. He constructed the Pyramid of Userkaf complex at Saqqara. Userkaf's mother is known to be a certain Queen Neferhetep but his father is unknown although Userkaf was a grandson of Djedefre, the immediate successor of Khufu.

A bust of Userkaf is displayed in the Egyptian Museum. The head was found in the first (of five) sun temples at Abu Ghurob built by the rulers of the Fifth Dynasty. The head of Userkaf is 45 cm high and carved from greywacke stone. The sculpture is considered particularly important as it is among the very few sculptures in the round from the Old Kingdom that show the monarch wearing the Red Crown of Lower Egypt. The head was uncovered in 1957 during the joint excavation expedition of the German and Swiss Institutes of Cairo.

It is believed that he was father of two pharaohs: Sahure and Neferirkare Kakai, who both succeeded him to the throne. Another less common view, in concordance with a story of the Westcar Papyrus, is that first three rulers of the Fifth dynasty were all brothers, the sons of queen Khentkaus I. He is given a reign of 7 Years by both the Turin King List and Manetho; according to the less reliable Eusebius, Manetho says Userkaf was killed by his bodyguards but no archaeological evidence exists to support this statement.

Egyptian Nobel Prize for Literature-winner Naguib Mahfouz published a short story in 1938 about Userkaf entitled *Afw al-malik Usirkaf: uqsusa misriya*. This short story was translated by Raymond Stock as *King Userkaf's Forgiveness* in the collection of short stories *Voices From the Other World* in 2003.

Ahure

Ahure was the second king of ancient Egypt's 5th Dynasty. He was a son of queen Khentkaus I, who, in her tomb at Giza, is said to have been the "mother of two kings". His father probably was Userkaf. There are no wives or children known to him and no children of his appear to have outlived him, since he was succeeded by his brother, Neferirkare, the first king known to have used separate names.

His birth name means "He who is Close to Re" His Horus name was Nebkhau, and it is believed he ruled Egypt from around 2487 BC to 2475 BC. The Turin King List gives him a reign of twelve years while the contemporary Palermo Stone Annal preserves Years 2-3, 5-6 and the final year of Sahure's reign. The document notes six or seven cattle counts, which would indicate a reign of at least 12 full years if the Old Kingdom cattle count was held biannually (ie: every 2 years) as this Annal document implies for the early Fifth Dynasty. If this assumption is correct and Sahure's highest date was the Year after the 6th count rather than his 7th count as Wilkinson believes, then this date would mean that Sahure died in his 13th Year and should be given a reign of 13 Years 5 Months and 12 days. This number would be only one year more than the Turin Canon's 12 year figure for Sahure.

It is probable that Khentkaus I was the character of Redjedet in the Papyrus Westcar, who according to the magician Djedi, was destined to give birth to the children of Ra and the first kings of the 5th Dynasty. But if Khentkaus I was his mother, a scene in her tomb at Giza showing her with the royal uraeus and beard might indicate that she may have acted as a regent for Sahure.

His pyramid complex was the first built at the new royal burial ground at Abusir a few kilometres north of Saqqara (though Userkaf had probably already built his solar temple there) and marks the decline of pyramid building, both in terms of size and quality, though many of the surviving fragments of reliefs which decorated the temple walls of both Sahure's and other Fifth Dynasty's kings are of high quality.

His pyramid provides us most of the information we know of this king. The reliefs in his mortuary and valley temple depict a counting of foreigners by or in front of the goddess Seshat and the return of a fleet from Asia, perhaps Byblos. This may indicate a military interest in the Near East, but the contacts may have been diplomatic and commercial as well. As part of the contacts with the Near East, the reliefs from his funerary monuments also hold the oldest known representation of a Syrian bear.

When it was excavated in the first years of the 1900s, a great amount of fine reliefs were found to an extent and quality superior to those from the dynasty before. Some of the low relief-cuttings in red granite are masterpieces of their kind

and still in place at the site. The construction of the pyramid was on the other hand (like the others from this dynasty) made with an inner core of roughly hewn stones in a step construction held together in many sections with a mortar of mud.

While this was under construction, a corridor was left into the shaft where the grave chamber was erected separately and later covered by leftover stone blocks and debris. This construction strategy is clearly visible from two unfinished pyramids and reflects the older style from the Third dynasty now coming back into fashion after being temporarily abandoned by the builders of the five great pyramids at Dahshur and Giza during the Fourth dynasty.

Today only the inside construction remains of his pyramid remain partly visible in a pile of rubble originating from the crude filling of debris and mortar behind the casing stones taken away a thousand years ago. The whole inner construction is badly damaged and not possible to access today. The entrance at the north side is a short descending corridor lined with red granite followed by a passageway ending at the burial chamber. It has a gabled roof made of big limestone layers and fragments of the sarcophagus were found here when it was entered in the early 1800s.

Few depictions of the king are known, but in a sculpture he is shown sitting on his throne with a local nome deity by his side.

Most foreign relations during the reign of Sahure were economic, rather than combative. In one scene in his pyramid, we find great ships with Egyptians and Asiatics on board. It is believed they are returning from the port of Byblos in Lebanon with huge cedar trees. For this, we have corroborating evidence in the form of his name on a piece of thin gold stamped to a chair, as well as other evidence of Fifth dynasty king's cartouches found in Lebanon on stone vessels. Other scenes in his temple depict what we are told are Syrian bears. We also have the first documented expedition to the land of Punt, which apparently yielded a quantity of myrrh, along with malachite and electrum, and because of this, Sahure is often credited with establishing an Egyptian navy. There are also scenes of a raid into Libya which yielded various livestock and showed the king smiting the local chieftains. The Palermo stone also corroborates some of these events and also mentions expeditions to the Sinai and to the exotic land of Punt, as well as to the diorite quarries northwest of Abu Simbel, thus, far into Nubia.

However, this same scene of the Libyan attack was used two hundred years later in the mortuary temple of Pepi II and in a Kawa temple of Taharqa. The same names are quoted for the local chieftain. Therefore, we become somewhat suspicious of the possibility that Sahure was also copying an even earlier representation of this scene.

He apparently built a sun temple--as did most of the 5th Dynasty kings--called Sekhet-re, meaning "the Field of Re" but thus far its location is unknown. We know of his palace, called Uetjesneferusahure ("Sahure's splendor soars up to heaven"), from an inscription on tallow containers recently discovered in Neferere's mortuary temple. It may have been located at Abusir as well. Under Sahure, the turquoise quarries in the Sinai were exploited (probably at Wadi Maghara and Wadi Kharit), along with the diorite quarries in Nubia.

Sahure is further attested by a statue now located in New York's Museum of Modern Art, in a biography found in the tombs of Perisen at Saqqara and on a false door of Niankhsakhment at Saqqara. He is also mentioned in the Twelfth dynasty tombs of Sekhemkare and Nisutpunetjer, in Giza.

Sahure's successor to the throne was not his eldest son and intended heir, Netjerirenre, but rather Neferirkare Kakai whose origins are unknown. On some reliefs from Sahure's mortuary temple, a secondary inscription gives one of the persons depicted in this king's entourage Neferirkare's name, royal insignia and royal titles; on this basis, some Egyptologists have concluded that Neferirkare and Sahure were brothers.[6] If true, this would be evidence that Neferirkare usurped the throne at the expense of his nephew Netjerirenre, who was apparently still a child at Sahure's death. This may indicate certain dynastic and internal political problems with the royal succession during this time.

Neferirkare Kakai

Neferirkare Kakai was the third Pharaoh of Egypt during the Fifth dynasty.

His prenomen, Neferirkare means "Beautiful is the Soul of Ra." His Horus name was Userkhau,[2] his Golden Horus name Sekhemunebu and his Nebti name Khaiemnebtj.

Neferirkare was probably the brother of pharaoh Sahure and son of pharaoh Userkaf, the founder of the dynasty.

Little is known about his reign. Manetho's Kingslist assigns Neferirkare a reign of 20 Years but verso 5 of the damaged Palermo Stone preserves the Year of his 5th Cattle Count (Year 9 on a biannual count). His following years were lost in the missing portion of the document but the Czech Egyptologist Miroslav Verner states that it cannot have been as long as 20 years due to the unfinished state of his Abusir pyramid complex. Since the annals in the Palermo stone terminate around Neferirkare's rule, some scholars have suggested that they might have been compiled during his reign. However, evidence from the other side of the stela implies that the document covered the reigns of later Old Kingdom kings. Hence, it is possible that these Annals were composed during the time of Nyuserre Ini who had a long reign and was the

third successor to Neferirkare, after the the ephemeral Shepseskare Isi and the short-lived Neferefre.

A decree, exempting personnel belonging to some temple from doing compulsory labour shows that taxation was imposed on everybody as a general rule.

From the large size of his mortuary complex at Abusir, he was an important king, but since the Palermo stone fragments after his rule, little is actually known about his reign. The Pyramid of Neferirkare Kakai (burial place) of the king was initially designed as a 6-step pyramid 52m high, but later it was extended to the form of a typical pyramid and it reached a height of 72m. The mortuary complex is unfinished, and only part of the lower mortuary temple was completed before, it is supposed, the abandonment of the project.

An important cache of Old Kingdom administrative papyri was discovered from Neferirkare's mortuary temple between 1893 and 1907 which date primarily to the reigns of Djedkare Isesi and Unas. One of the documents is an actual letter by king Djedkare to the Temple Priests provisioning Neferirkare's funerary temple.

Neferirkare's reign was unusual for the significant number of surviving personal details which describe him as a kind and gentle ruler. When Rawer, an old nobleman and royal courtier, accidentally touched the king's mace during a religious ceremony--a sin which could have caused this official's death or banishment from court since the Pharaoh was viewed as a living God in Old Kingdom mythology--Neferirkare quickly pardoned Rawer and requested that no harm should occur to the latter for the incident.[4] As Rawer gratefully states in an inscription from his Giza tomb:

Now the priest Rawer in his priestly robes was following the steps of the king in order to conduct the royal costume, when the sceptre in the king's hand struck the priest Rawer's foot. The king said, "You are safe". So the king said, and then, "It is the king's wish that he be perfectly safe, since I have not struck at him. For he is more worthy before the king than any man." [5]

Similarly, Neferirkare gave the Priest of Ptah Ptahshepses the unprecedented honor of kissing his feet.[6] Finally, when the Vizier Weshptah suffered a stroke while attending court, the king quickly summoned the palace's chief doctors to treat his dying Vizier. When Weshptah died, Neferirkare was reportedly inconsolable and retired to his personal quarters to mourn the loss of his friend. The king then ordered the purification of Weshptah's body in his presence and ordered an ebony coffin made for the deceased Vizier. Weshptah was buried with special endowments and rituals courtesy of Neferirkare.[7] The records of the king's actions are inscribed in Weshptah's Tomb itself and emphasize Neferirkare's humanity towards his subjects.

Shepseskare Isi

Shepseskare Isi, also spelt Shepseskare, (in Greek known as Sisiris), was a Pharaoh of Egypt during the Fifth dynasty, who is thought to have reigned from around 2426 BC – 2419 BC. His throne name means "Noble is the Soul of Re." However, he is the most ephemeral ruler of this dynasty and some Egyptologists such as Miroslav Verner have strongly argued that Shepseskare's reign lasted only a few months at the most based upon the evidence of an unfinished fifth dynasty royal pyramid at Abusir, whose base was barely completed before it was abandoned as well as the very small number of objects identifying this king. The state of the unfinished Abusir pyramid tells us that this king's reign was unexpectedly cut short. However, both the Turin King List and Manetho state that Shepseskare ruled Egypt for seven years.

The only artifacts known for Neferefre's reign are several clay sealings from Abusir, where the king may have been buried, and two cylinder seals, according to the respected Czech Egyptologist Miroslav Verner. Verner advocates the hypothesis that Shepseskare succeeded, rather than preceded, Neferefre based upon the archaeological context of the 1982 discovery of several new clay seal impressions bearing this king's name--Horus Sekhemkau--"in the oldest part of Neferere's mortuary temple [at Abusir], which was not built" until Neferefre's death.[3] This appears to show that Shepseskare ruled after--rather than before--Neferefre. As Verner observes, while Shepseskare is noted as the immediate predecessor of Neferefre in the Egyptian king-lists, "this slight discrepancy can...be attributed to the [political] disorders of the time and its dynastic disputes." Shepseskare may have been a son of Sahure who briefly seized power after the premature death of Neferefre. Verner stresses that the progress of Shepseskare's intended pyramid at Abusir, which is unfinished and is situated just north of Sahure's own pyramid,

"was interrupted [and] corresponds to the work of several weeks, perhaps no more than one or two months. In fact, the place was merely levelled and the excavation of the pit for the construction of the underground funerary apartment had only commenced. Moreover, the owner of the building obviously wanted to demonstrate by his choice of place (half-way between Sahure's pyramid and the sun temple of Userkaf) his relationship to either Sahure or Userkaf. Theoretically, only 2 kings of the 5th Dynasty whose pyramids had not yet been identified can be taken into consideration – Shepseskara or Menkauhor. However, according to a number of contemporaneous documents, Menkauhor ... probably completed [his] pyramid elsewhere, in North Saqqara or Dahshur. Shepseskara, therefore, seems to be the likelier owner of the unfinished platform for a pyramid in North Abusir. Anyway, the builder of the platform [ie: Shepseskare] must have reigned for a very short time."

In Verner's view, Shepseskare was a son of Sahure who attempted to continue his family's royal line; hence, the close proximity of his pyramid next to Sahure's. His claim to the throne was thwarted by Niuserre, Neferefre's younger brother and the younger son of king Neferirkare and Queen Khentkaus II. Khentkaus II's pivotal role in Niuserre's eventual accession to the throne might explain her high esteem in Egyptian folklore and "the additional enlargement and upgrading of her mortuary temple" by Nyuserre.

The contemporary sources also show that this king's reign was extremely short: the stela of the 5th dynasty official Khau-Ptah lists an uninterrupted sequence of kings whom he served under namely Sahure, Neferirkare, Neferefre and Niuserre. No mention whatsoever occurs for a king "Shepseskare" between Neferirkare and Neferefre. Since the Turin King-list was a later New Kingdom document from the reign of Ramesses II while the Manetho's Epitome dates from the 3rd century BC under Ptolemy II, Khau-Ptah's contemporary account can be regarded as a more accurate reading of the political situation during the 5th dynasty. If Shepseskare had ruled Egypt for 7 years between Neferirkare and Neferefre, it seems inconceivable that Khau-Ptah would have failed to list his service under this king--especially since Neferefre had a reign of only between 1 to 2 years. Consequently, the monumental record points to a reign lasting no more than a few months for Shepseskare.