

# The Bearded Lady of Giza: Appropriation, Conspiracy, and Veiled Protest in the Pyramid Texts of Unas\*

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## Abstract

We report here a thus far unrecognized, unusual hieroglyphic icon, ostensibly created by a scribal error on the north wall of the Sarcophagus Chamber inside the pyramid of the late Fifth Dynasty, ancient Egyptian King Unas. We present hieroglyphic, textual evidence that what looks like an accident of hieroglyph carving into the limestone wall instead appears to be an intentional, albeit veiled, reference to the couchant lion goddess Mehit with a bent rod above her back, an iconic symbol of the royal writers' and archivists' guild at the dawn of Egyptian civilization. While this combination of lioness and rod appears in sealings and title records from the first four dynasties of ancient Egypt, it disappeared from the known record after Fourth Dynasty King Khafre, more than a century before the time of King Unas. Thus, its reappearance, and ostensibly intentional placement within the earliest known version of the Pyramid Texts in Unas' pyramid prompted us to search for further evidence why this may have been done. Scanning the Pyramid Texts for other veiled references, we show that invoking what was, by then, the archaic lioness cult of Mehit was part of a wider subtext apparently embedded by the texts' composer into Unas' hieroglyphic afterlife utterances using ancient Egyptian phonetic invocations called Heka Magic. We define and apply four criteria to amplify detection of veiled composer intent and reconstruct the theme of this subtext as a lament by the composer at the desecration of a preexisting lioness statue at Giza into the Great Sphinx, the expungement of the cult associated with Mehit, and the side-lining of the older cult of Thoth-Moon, both in favor of a new cult of the Sun dedicated to Re and Atum. We identify what may have been at issue in the mind of the composer, i.e., a fundamental violation of prevailing convention by the royal house

\*The transliterated hieroglyphic spelling is *wnjs*. This can be written in English as Unis, however, in this paper we will use the more commonly known, however less accurately spelled, name Unas.

during the Fourth Dynasty in re-carving the statue of a female lion goddess into the likeness of a living king wearing the divine beard, as if he was a living god-king. We conclude that by the time of King Unas, there must have been an influential faction at the royal court that opposed the cults of Atum and Re, the Sphinx, and above all, the claim of the royal rulers to divinity while still living. We suggest that this cadre of dissent against the state-ordained cult of the living Sun god kings must have been willing to risk their lives and conspire to sabotage the royal funerary corpus of texts with a veiled record of this opposition and its pretext that we have reconstructed. As evidence, we present our prime suspect to have masterminded this conspiracy to subvert the Pyramid Texts. We thus offer a novel explanation for the absence of explicit references to the Great Sphinx in the Old Kingdom for over a thousand years after its creation and provide new written evidence that this statue was remodeled from an older lioness monument.

### Keywords

Great Sphinx, Giza, Lioness, Mehit, Moon, Thoth, Pyramid Texts, Unas, Divine Beard

## 1. Introduction

**The Pyramid Texts.** Carved into the chamber and corridor walls of King Unas' (*wnjs*; late 25<sup>th</sup> to early 24<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., late Fifth royal Dynasty of ancient Egypt) pyramid at Saqqara are hieroglyphic texts written in Old Egyptian that form part of what is collectively referred to as Pyramid Texts. Various versions, both expanded and condensed, appear inside the later pyramids of Sixth Dynasty kings and queens (Allen, 2005), and tombs and coffins from the Middle Kingdom (Allen, 2006), where they form part of what is collectively called Coffin Texts. One such later version, identical to that of Unas, appears in the private tomb of a certain Imhotep from Lisht (*jm htp*; version L-JMH1). This copy allows for verbatim reconstruction of the few damaged sections of texts inside the pyramid tomb of Unas, and demonstrates its canonical character (Allen, 2005). Given their age, the Pyramid Texts of Unas are the oldest known body of written religious texts in recorded history.

They were initially transcribed and translated by Gaston Maspero (Maspero, 1894) who supervised excavations of five inscribed Old Kingdom Saqqara pyramids (Kings Unas/*wnjs*, Teti/*ttj*, Pepi I/*ppj*, Merenre/*mr.n r'*, Pepi II/*ppj*) between 1880 and 1882 (Bauval & Gilbert, 1994: Ch. 3), and further transcribed after that by Gustave Jéquier (Queens d'Oudjebten/*wlbt n.j*, Neit/*nt*, Apouit/*jpwt*, and King d'Aba/*q3 k3 r' jbj*; Jéquier, 1938) in various publications between 1928 and 1936. Translations were published into German by Kurt Sethe (Sethe, 1908), into French by Louis Speleers (Speleers, 1934), into English from Sethe's German by Samuel Mercer (Mercer, 1952), into English by Alexandre Piankoff (Piankoff,

1968),<sup>1</sup> Raymond Faulkner (Faulkner, 1969), and James Allen (Allen, 2005; Allen 1986). Various interpretations have been offered by, for example, James Breasted (Breasted, 1912: Lecture III) focusing on the Sun cult, Joachim Spiegel (Spiegel, 1953) focusing on rituals performed inside the pyramids, Rolf Krauss (Krauss, 1997) focusing on the astronomical underpinnings of the texts, and Susan Morrow (Morrow, 2015) focusing on poetic themes related to observations of nature in the sky and on Earth.

The ancient Egyptians believed that when a person dies, that which animates and makes the body alive could survive and separate from its bodily vessel to live ethereally in the afterlife. At the literal level, the Pyramid Texts read as written down rituals, protective spells, and metaphorical narratives that paint the afterlife as a dangerous journey through Earth, at the end of which awaits rising into the sky, i.e., ascension. To succeed, the ethereal aspects of a person, the “Ba”-soul, and the “Ka”-force, had to first be replenished and favorably judged, and secondly, rejoined as an “Akh”-spirit, which then had to acquire mastery of the language of divine creation, called Heka. The presence of protective and invocative spells in the Pyramid Texts implies that it was this verbal skill which would enable the king’s resurrected, reformed, and reunited spirit to revisit the place of original creation, pass the final barrier that separates the netherworld from the skyworld, and attain eternal life.

While the overall purpose of inscribing these texts into the walls of pyramids, tombs, and coffins appears to be a straight-forward recipe for the king to resurrect after death, the meaning of many phrases and passages remains obscure, even non-sensical, leaving them open to equivocal interpretation. The primary reasons for this seem to be that the original rituals, beliefs, and observational insights of the ancient Egyptians into the workings of the world that led to the composition of the Pyramid Texts are largely unknown,<sup>2</sup> and because the metaphorical nature and epithets used do not make it easy for the modern reader to identify unequivocally the entities described, be they real or imagined.

A good working model used as a basis from which to interpret the Pyramid Texts is observational astronomy. For example, once it is understood that the crescent of the waxing and waning Moon was believed to be two sky ferries that shuttle gods and resurrected spirits across the sky, it is possible to gain insight into otherwise impenetrable metaphors. These metaphors describe certain places and zones in the sky where the ferries travel, such as the ecliptic, the Milky Way, and the star zones near the north celestial pole and south of the ecliptic arc. Similarly, it may also be possible to learn which star signs the ancient Egyptians recognized, and how those may have played a role in influencing their afterlife beliefs that form the basis of the Pyramid Texts.

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<sup>1</sup>For online access, hosted by Mr. Vincent Brown, to an English translation by J. D. Degreeef, based on Speleers and Piankoff, as well as images of all walls with hieroglyphic texts please visit URL: [www.https://pyramidtextsonline.com/index.html](https://pyramidtextsonline.com/index.html). Images of individually numbered text columns organized by PT numbers are also available by Allen (2013b, 2013c).

<sup>2</sup>An exception may be the more primordial Statuette Making Ritual from which the more stylized, later Mouth Opening Ritual mentioned in the Pyramid Texts may have originated.

**The Pyramid of Unas.** To the south of Djoser’s Step Pyramid complex sits the pyramid of Unas (**Figure 1**). Its architecture has been published by Gaston Maspero (Maspero, 1894) and Audran Labrousse (Labrousse, 1996). It is the smallest of the Fifth Dynasty pyramids, originally 110 royal Egyptian cubits (r.c.; 0.524 m, 20.62 in) at the base, and 43 m (82 r.c.) high (Lehner, 1997: p. 155). It is oriented to the cardinal directions to within 17 arcminutes (Puchkov, 2019: p. 20). The pyramid of Unas is the second to incorporate a tripartite eastern serdab into its interior architecture (**Figure 2**) after its predecessor, the pyramid of Djedkare Isesi, whose interior limestone walls were found to be largely removed. Thus, there is no evidence of Pyramid Texts, even if originally present, inside of that pyramid (Megahed & Brůna, 2017: p. 167).

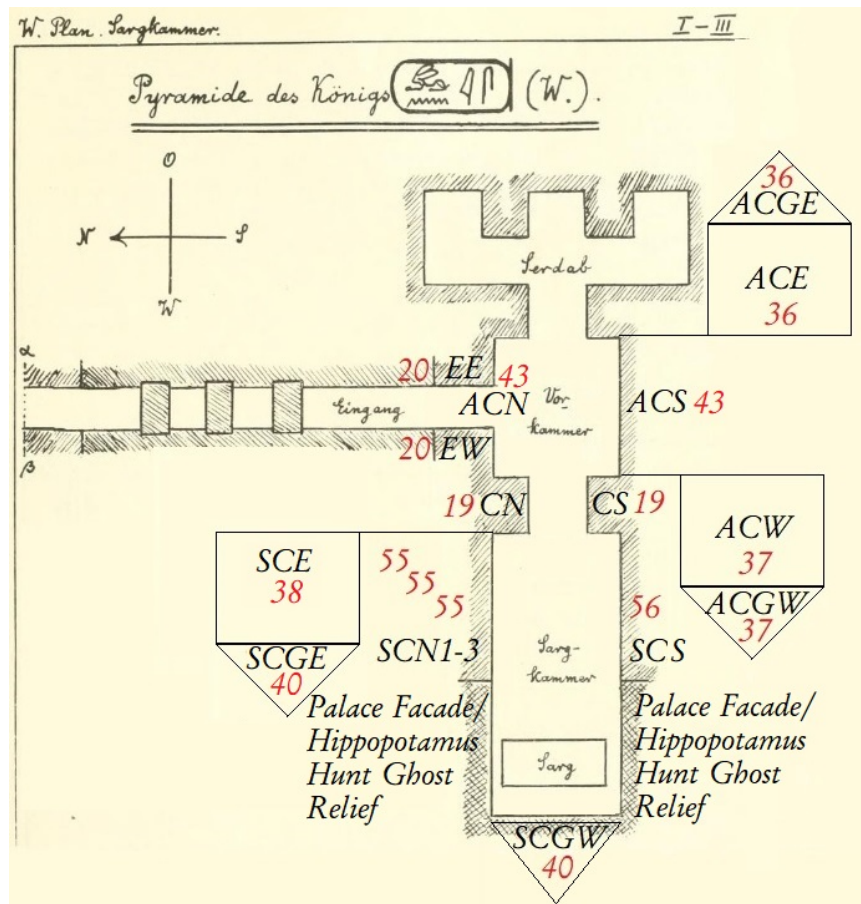
The interior otherwise conforms to the architectural themes of the period (**Figure 2**). The inner chambers are accessed through a granite-lined entry passage from the north that also holds three portcullis bays. The entrance shaft opens into a limestone-constructed antechamber with a gabled stone ceiling. To the east of the antechamber is the serdab. To the west is a short connecting passage leading to the sarcophagus chamber. The sarcophagus chamber is also constructed with a gabled ceiling and an alabaster-lined niche. An important archaeological detail of Maspero’s 1882 discovery is that he found the pyramid entrance breached with no trace of the blocking stones (Brabin, 2010: p. 40).

The Pyramid Texts of Unas are inscribed into the walls of the sarcophagus chamber (**Figure 2**) at the west and east gables (SCGW, SCGE), and at the north, south, and east walls (SCN, SCS, SCE); at the north and south walls of the chambers-connecting corridor (CN, CS); into the antechamber at the west and east gables (ACGW, ACGE), and at the west, south, east, and north antechamber walls (ACW, ACS, ACE, ACN); into the terminal limestone section of the entry corridor at the west and east walls (EW, EE).



**Figure 1.** The remnants of the Pyramid of Unas called “Beautiful are the Places of Unas.” View from the east. The entry is on the north face. The original height at 82 royal cubits (circa 43 m, 169 ft) can be visually approximated with the top edge of the image. Saqqara, Egypt, February 2022.





**Figure 2.** Interior layout of corridors and chambers of the pyramid of Unas showing hieroglyphic text column numbers on each of the walls and gables. The total number of text columns is 649. Eingang = German for English “entry”; Serd-ab = Persian Farsi for English “cold water” and Arabic “cellar”; Vorkammer = German for English “ante-chamber”; Sargkammer = German for English “sarcophagus chamber”. For the background on the hippopotamus hunt ghost relief see [Youssef, 2011](#). Illustration adapted from [Sethe, 1922: p. 116](#), modified.

There are approximately 26,000 hieroglyphs divided into 649 demarcated text columns. There is much scholarly disagreement regarding the sequence and flow of Unas’ Pyramid Texts; however, according to the most recent consensus ([Allen, 2005](#)) the texts flow from west to east, in the following manner (numerals indicate number of columns; text segments occupying only partial wall space indicated by the nearest chamber corner; based on [Allen, 2005](#); [Piankoff, 1968](#)): SCGW (40)-SCN (3 × 55, top to bottom)-SCE (5, NE)-CN (19)-CS (1, SW)-SCGE (40)-SCS (56)-SCE (33, SE)-CS (18, SE)-ACGW (37)-ACW (37)-ACS (43)-ACGE (36)-ACE (36)-ACN (43)-EW (20)-EE (20) (**Figure 2**, column numbers in red).

The entire body of texts can be divided into what may be thought of as thematic chapters (based on [Allen, 2005](#); column number totals in parentheses):

- 1) Protective Spells upon Entering the *dw3t*-Netherworld (40).
- 2) The Offering Ritual, Invocation of Offerings and Regalia, Reversion of, and Response to Offerings (3 × 55 + 5 + 19 + 1 + 40 = 230).

- 3) The Resurrection Ritual (56 + 33 + 18 = 107).
- 4) Leaving the *dw3t*-Netherworld (37).
- 5) Entering, Crossing, and Leaving the *3ht*-Horizon into the Sky to the East (37 + 43 + 36 + 36 = 152).
- 6) Rising into the northern Sky (83).

Chapters 1 - 3 are written into the Sarcophagus Chamber and Corridor, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 are written into the Antechamber, and Chapter 6 is written into the Antechamber and Entry.

**Hieroglyphic.** The evidence presented in this paper is in Old Egyptian hieroglyphic, but to evaluate phonetic values we are using the standard phonetic transliteration convention from hieroglyphic into extended Latin (see Appendix), and transcription/transliterations by Allen (Allen, 2013a). The text is read in vertical columns from top to bottom against the direction of the symbols (with the symbols facing the reader). In all but one case on the Antechamber North Wall (ACN), this means moving forward as one reads the text. The symbols are largely phonograms encoding sounds, i.e., sound signs. Some symbols act as logograms, i.e., word signs, and many act as determinatives, i.e., context signs. The chapters are subdivided into utterances whose beginnings, almost without exception, are marked with the phrase *ld mdw*, “spoken words”, and which end with a horizontal line below the last hieroglyph. These utterances form the basis for Sethe’s original Pyramid Text (PT) numbers, whose sequence however, is not completely in concordance with the consensus flow described above. In this paper we have therefore listed both, Allen’s Recitations (R), and Sethe’s PT numbers.

Our analysis, for the most part, does not involve grammar. Generally, verbal predicates are read with focus on aspect and state, rather than tense. Unlike gender and number, mood (as in imperative) and voice (active versus passive) are less often, if ever, marked and must be interpreted from context or the type of verb (transitive or intransitive), or verb form (active or passive participle). At times, we highlight one grammatical category; adjectives, specifically (Allen, 2014: pp. 75, 112-113), secondary adjectives derived from verbs (participles, active and passive; Allen, 2014: pp. 383, 403), and adjectives derived from nouns and prepositions (*nisbes*). We also focus on the suffix “*tj*” and its multiple uses in the second person masculine or feminine (2s) stative verb form, and third person feminine (3fs) stative, the false dual (e.g., *hr 3htj*/Horakhty), and the masculine *nisbe* (e.g., *phjtj* for “strengthy”, i.e., “strong one”).

**Heka.** The function of Heka is defined in Recitation 21/Pyramid Text 32 (R 21/PT 32) that contains the invocation formula *mj pr.tj n.k hrw*, pronounced [my-per-ty-en-ek-khe-roo], and translated into English as “Be come forth! You are called upon!” To the ancient Egyptians, Heka was an acquired, verbally uttered skill that could be captured in, and conveyed with written text. Heka mastery meant to be equipped and effective in overcoming the trials and tribulations encountered in the afterlife, both in the Earth and in the sky. It is possible that the Heka method based on written text is a stylized version adapted from a more

ancient, non-written ritual method, but this paper will focus on the written verbal method of how the invocation was activated.

Heka explores phonetic similarities between hieroglyphic words that may otherwise have no semantic relationship to each other, for example *phṯj* [pe-het-y] for “strength”, *ṯphṯ* [the-pe-het] for “cavern”, and a yet untranslated, perhaps “magical” word used in R 187/PT 281 written as *ptṯj* [pe-the-ty]. On the three registers of the north wall of the Sarcophagus Chamber (SCN), there are many examples of offerings whose names are phonetically imitated by short invocation phrases. Jubilation oil *ḥkaw*, for example, is anagrammatically invoked in the second column of the second register in R 47/PT 73 with the phrase “Osiris Unis, accept [to you] the foam that is from his face (Allen, 2005: p. 22; Figure 3)”, *jsjr wnjs m n.k ḥnqj m ḥr.f*. The first letter “ḥ” of the word “foam” *ḥnqj* and the preposition “to you” *n.k*, read backwards, anagrammatically encode the word *ḥ-k-n*. There is no obvious semantic relationship between jubilation oil and foam, let alone the meaning of the entire phrase. Yet, the phonetic mimicry via an anagram spanning across the three words *n.k ḥnqj*, confirmed by the mention of the unveiled reference jubilation oil, demonstrates the Heka technique was used with intent by the composer of these texts.



**Figure 3.** The seven unguents mentioned on the second register of the SCN (SCN2). Framed in white is the Jubilation Oil Heka-invocation. Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, February 2022.

While a pun may be a useful way to describe the technique casually, the intent was apparently not humor, but to mention someone or something without actually saying the word for he, she, or it, but yet induce awareness of its existence. This invocative utterance without directly naming amounted to creating its presence, as it was believed to then come forth and manifest in an ethereal sense.

In this sense of the technique, Heka earned the attribute of being called magical, i.e., Heka Magic. Rather than conjuring, however, the more compelling comparison is the idea of LOGOS,<sup>3</sup> because it is Heka Magic that was used by the creator god Ptah to intellectually conceive through perception (hieroglyphic: *sj3*), and then utter (hieroglyphic: *hw*) into existence the world according to the beliefs of the ancient Egyptians. The added nuance of Heka in the creation context is that a thing is uttered into existence by referring to it cryptically without naming it. In part, this may explain why Heka was a learned skill that required mastery to be used to imitate creation.

Thus, Heka may be thought of as a form of induced gnosis obtained only by the initiated who were aware of the phonetic bridges between words that could be uttered and words that could not be carelessly invoked. The key association, therefore, as it pertains to the Memphite creation myth (cosmogony) based on “Egyptian LOGOS”, is between the Heka masters' patron goddess, the lioness Mehit (*mh t*), Heka Magic (*hk3*), Perception (*sj3*), Utterance Hu (*hw*), and Creation Ptah (*pth*).

Identifying a Heka invocation within a hieroglyphic text is complicated by the fact that many hieroglyphic words have identically, or similarly spelled homophones. Identifying a homophone in a hieroglyphic text does not by itself prove a Heka invocation of something other than what the text ostensibly speaks. In this paper, we have developed a more stringent standard of proof to identify Heka invocations as “potentially veiled references” (PVR). Our methodological approach employs a higher evidentiary standard of proof, as we will demonstrate case-by-case. Our approach variously incorporates homophony, multiplicity (more than one homophone in a text passage), ostensible non-sense as a clue to look for more sensible homophonic content, positional topography of textual elements otherwise not related by syntax or position within identical text columns, and overall context of potentially veiled content.

**The Great Sphinx.** The Great Sphinx is an animal-human chimeric statue carved from the three Mokattam limestone beds that make up most of the Giza Plateau in Egypt. Its true age remains a subject of controversy because Egyptological evidence places its original creation into the 26<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., sometime during the latter half of the Fourth Dynasty (Reisner, 1912: p. 13; Hassan, 1949: p. 88; Ricke, 1970: p. 32; Lehner, 1991: pp. 405-411; Hawass, 1993: pp. 180-182; Lehner & Hawass, 2017: pp. 240-241), while some geological observations and data indicate a greater age from 5 to 12.5 Ky B.P. (Schoch, 1992; Dobecki & Schoch, 1992; West & Schoch, 1993; Reader, 1997: p. 13; Schoch *in* Schoch & Bauval, 2017: appendices 6 and 7). The lay-out of the Sphinx and the

<sup>3</sup>The creative principle of intelligent design in Abrahamic religions.



Giza pyramids also suggests a prehistoric age for a masterplan when interpreted within the context of astronomical precession, in agreement with the upper bound of the geological age (Bauval in Schoch & Bauval, 2017: Chapter 6; Hancock & Bauval, 1996).

More recent examination of early dynastic written records also suggest an older age of this monument than the reign of Khafre, the Fourth Dynasty ruler to whom most Egyptologists attribute its original creation (Seyfzadeh et al., 2017; Seyfzadeh & Schoch, 2018). These records suggest that the original statue was in the likeness of the lioness Mehit mentioned in sealings used to secure doors and precious goods containers as early as the reign of Horus-Aha (circa early 30<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.; Adams, 2019: p. 39), and Horus-Narmer (circa late 31<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E.; Kaplony, 1963: Tafel/Plate 40-47), respectively.

Sculptural evidence (Neyland, 2019) has demonstrated that the head of the Great Sphinx could have been carved from a larger lioness head that, together with the neck, would have been a naturally proportioned statue, unlike the Great Sphinx whose head appears too small for its torso and limbs. A remnant of the original statue's neck can still be observed on the back of the monument. The identity of the face of the Great Sphinx is still debated today.<sup>4</sup> While the context of the monument east of Khafre's pyramid suggests it is that of Khafre, this has been ruled out by facial analysis when compared to his likeness on the Khafre Enthroned gneiss-made statue at the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities in Cairo, Egypt.<sup>5</sup> However, it is possible that this statue shows a more mature, older adult than is represented by the face of the Great Sphinx. Indeed, a younger Khafre with more rounded facial features may have modeled for the face on this and other statues.<sup>6</sup> Regardless of the identity, our analysis does not depend on who is shown in the face, only on the royal regalia that frame it.

Based on evidence unearthed by modern era excavations, the Sphinx at Rostau (ancient Giza) that Unas knew in the Fifth Dynasty had a red face, wore a nemes head dress with pleated folds and a bundled cloth tail laying on its back. On its forehead, it wore a cobra head (uraeus), and under its chin was a braided beard, patterned in stone like a plaited cord that was curved or coiled at the tip, like a serpent or scorpion tail. This beard, called *dw3 wr*, was the symbol of divinity in artistic representations, reserved exclusively for gods and god-kings in the after-life (Figure 4). By contrast, living kings were represented, for example during their Heb Sed 30-year Jubilee, with a pleated, tapering square beard without braiding or coiling at the tip. This symbolic convention of marking the divine afterlife status of the royals with the type of beard can be documented to at least the beginning of the Third Dynasty, more than a century prior to the reign of Khafre.

## 2. Initial Observations, Pretext, Rationale, and Method

**Accidental or intentional Lioness with Rod.** When examining in King Unas'

<sup>4</sup>For highlights of the debate see URL: [https://www.worldhistory.org/Great\\_Sphinx\\_of\\_Giza/](https://www.worldhistory.org/Great_Sphinx_of_Giza/).

<sup>5</sup>NYPD Detective Frank Domingo. URL: <https://youtu.be/ANTWp4X-xj0>.

<sup>6</sup>For example, at The Met, URL: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/329858>.





**Figure 4.** King Djoser, dead and alive. On the left, bas-relief representing divine King Djoser in the afterlife (commonly believed to be Horus-Netjerikhet, early 27<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., Third Dynasty) on remains of Djoser’s Temple at Heliopolis. The divine beard is plaited into a braided cone, coiled at the end. The hieroglyphic texts reads “Given life, stability, power, and happiness forever.” Image by DEA/G. Dagli Orti, De Agostini Collection/Getty Image # 122220870. On the right, relief of Djoser from his Step Pyramid complex showing him in a pose from his Heb Sed Jubilee. The secular beard is plaited into a pleated, straight-edged trapezoid with a squared end, tapering towards the chin. Photo by Juan R. Lazaro, cc by 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>>, via wikimedia commons; modified (cropped).

pyramid what appears to be a scribal error in the 27<sup>th</sup> column of the second register of the north wall of the sarcophagus chamber (SCN2), we observed a couchant lioness symbol from whose back a rod emerges (**Figure 5**). This combination resembles a two-symbol combination known from an exclusive title carried by top officials of the royal court from the first four dynasties of ancient Egypt. The name of the lioness is Mehit, an early dynastic and Old Kingdom icon associated with the royal administration of scribes, accountants, and archivists (**Figure 6**).

Mehit was also associated with the practice of Heka Magic, as evident in the title sequences of Neferseshem-Re, Hesy-Re, and Wepemnefret (**Helck, 1987: p. 260**). One of us (M.S.) has translated the combination of rod and lioness as “Opener of Mehit” (**Seyfzadeh, 2021: pp. 214-218**). The last known use of the Mehit symbol, including the bend rod above her, dates to the time of Mery, a royal master scribe who served during the reign of Khafre over a century before the reign of Unas. The lioness and rod were used in a two-title sequence written in tandem, each beginning with the sign for “master”, the carpenter’s axe representing the hieroglyphic word *mdh*.

We therefore wanted to know if this lioness-rod combination in column 27 of the SCN2 was truly the product of a scribal error, or if it was made intentionally, and only disguised as a scribal error. A lioness with rod icon appearing by pure chance and error in the Pyramid Text of King Unas of the Fifth Dynasty containing the quintessential Heka formula, when three of five known Third and



**Figure 5.** Magnified view of the lioness and bent rod, the result of what ostensibly appears to be a scribal error of corrective over-carving of symbols. From the SCN2, column 27; R21/PT 32 invocation formula. Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, February 2022.



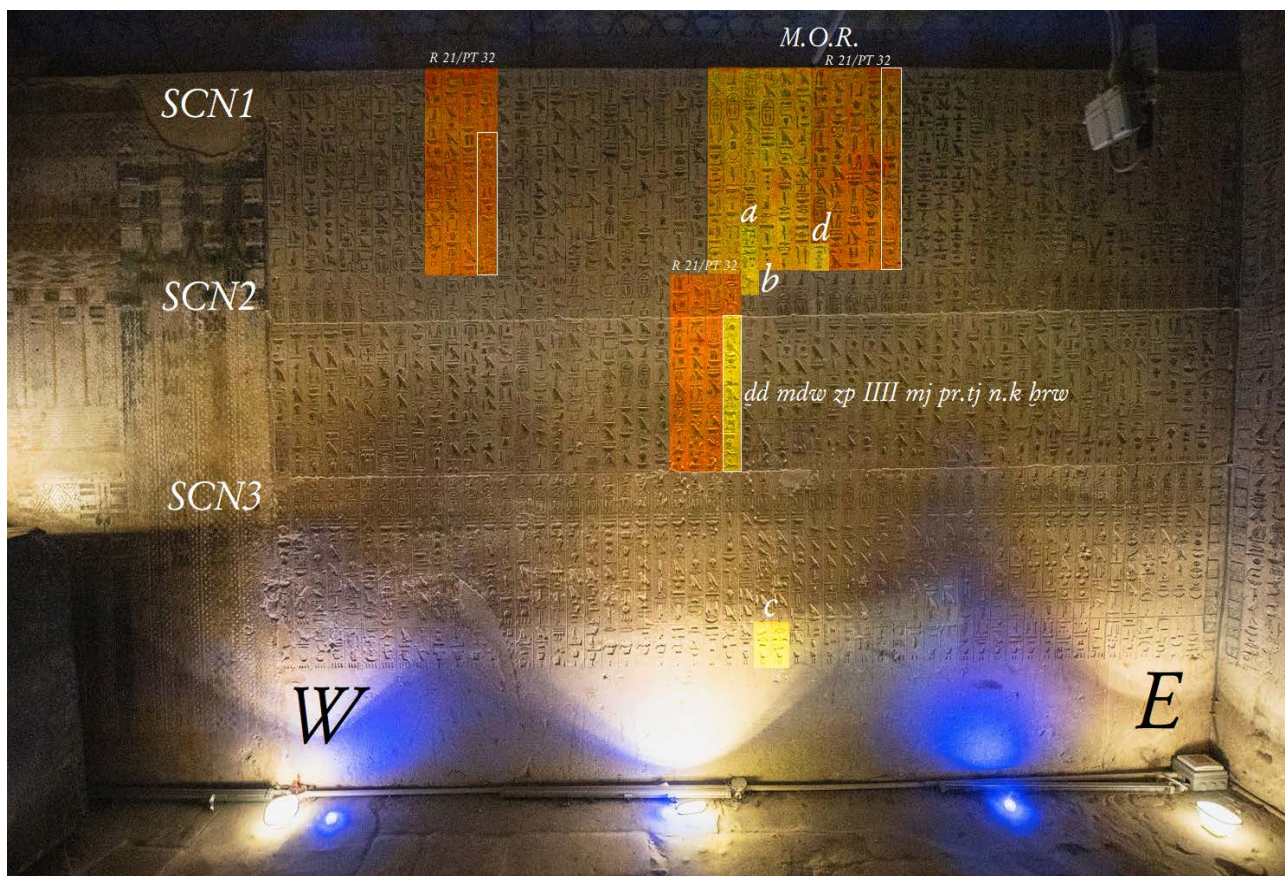
**Figure 6.** A wooden panel from the tomb of Hesy-Re showing two Mehit titles, framed in white. To the right, “Heka Mehit” *hk mht* (the vulture sign omitted after *hk*; compare to same title on Wepemnefret’s stele spelled *hk3 mht*), and at the bottom center “Master Babu/Opener Mehit” (Seyfzadeh, 2021: pp. 214-218). The Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, Cairo, Egypt, September 2018; modified.

Fourth Dynasty high officials were Heka masters of Mehit, would be a remarkable accident.

However, the initial evidence (Figure 7) argued against a harmless error of chance, and instead, for intentional design for the following reasons: 1) The 27<sup>th</sup> column is also the 82<sup>nd</sup> column of the Offering Ritual. 82 is the number of royal



Egyptian cubits (r.c.) the pyramid of Unas can be reconstructed to have reached in height, 2) 82 is also the lowest integer number of whole days that pass before the Moon can be observed to return to the same spot on the ecliptic with the unaided eye<sup>7</sup> (three times 27.32 days = 81.96 days), combined with the fact that Thoth-Moon is mentioned at the top of the 28<sup>th</sup> column in the second register (Figure 7(b), Figure 8(b)), 3) the 27<sup>th</sup> column displays a lighter hue of grey that draws attention. Together with the adjacent 28<sup>th</sup> column it defines the exact center of the written part of the north wall, 4) at the bottom of the third register, two columns to the east (columns 29 and 30), are two offerings: red beer and



**Figure 7.** The north wall of the Sarcophagus Chamber (SCN) has three registers, each inscribed with 55 text columns (SCN1, SCN2, SCN3) for a total of 165 columns. Read west to east, they comprise the bulk of the Offering Ritual including the Mouth Opening Ritual (M.O.R.). There are three instances of R 21/PT 32, highlighted in color. Framed in white is the invocation formula “Word spoken four times: Be come forth! You are called upon!”, *dd mdw zp IIII m pr.tj n.k hrw*. The copy of this invocation with the unique lioness and bent rod in column 27 is highlighted in bright yellow on the second register. Textual elements are (a) a PVR to the double lion *rwjtj* via natron salt “*zrw*” from north and south, (b) Thoth-Moon *dhwtj*, (c) two offerings topographically placed two columns to the east and below the lioness with bent rod, “red beer” *dšrt*, and “whipped milk” *jttrt*, and (d) the word “Mehit” used here as “northern marshes”, or “the Delta” *mht*. Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, February 2022. Image courtesy of John L. Lundwall, February 2022; modified.

<sup>7</sup>Three times 27.3216 days = 81.965 days. A sidereal lunar period is longer than 27 days, and shorter than 28 days. Hence, the numerical significance of the text column numbers in the lunar context is established by the mention of Thoth-Moon at the top of column 28 of the second register on the SCN.



**Figure 8.** Magnified view of textual elements a-d from **Figure 7**. (a) the upper right column literally reads *zrw šm' zrw mhw* for “Natron pellets from the south, Natron pellets from the north”; (b) is the Ibis-on-a-standard symbol of the Egyptian Moon-god *dhwtj* (Thoth); (c) the left column reads *dsrt hnt II* for “two cups of red beer”, and the right column reads *jrt dsrt hnt II* for “two cups of swept milk”; (d) literally reads *djt qbḥ mḥt* for “giving cool water of the Delta”. Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, February 2022.

whipped milk (**Figure 7(c)**, **Figure 8(c)**). Elsewhere, these identical two offerings uniquely are listed two columns to the right and under the spelled-out name of Mehit on the stele of Wepemnefret from Giza mastaba G 1201 (**Figure 9**). 5) Finally, at the bottom of the 28<sup>th</sup> column of the first register, up and to the right of the lioness and rod symbol, there are two prominent couchant lioness signs that form part of the Mouth Opening Ritual text (MOR), where they ostensibly are used as phonetic symbols “*rw*” to spell the hieroglyphic word for natron salt (*zrw*) from the Delta and Nile Valley (**Figure 7(a)**, **Figure 8(a)**). The MOR finishes with the second of four instances of R 21/PT 32. Finally, the word “Mehit” is used in only this version of R 21/PT 32 within the MOR, placed at the bottom of the seventh column (**Figure 7(d)**, **Figure 8(d)**), where it is used in “giving cool water from the North”, *djt qbḥ mḥt*.

The lioness with rod uniquely appears once in the third instance of the Heka invocation formula—*mj pr.tj n.k ḥrw*, “Be come forth! You are called upon!”





**Figure 9.** The slab stela of Wepemnefret from his West Field tomb in Giza, G 1201. Framed in white are the name of the lioness goddess Mehit at the top, and two offerings below to the right, “red beer” *dsrt*, and “milk”, *jrt*, each one thousand cups. Mehit together with the bent rod is also mentioned in the rightmost column together with the patron goddess of archives and libraries Seshat whose name is written here with her emblem Gardiner R20. Image courtesy of the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology and the Regents of the University of California—catalog 6-19825.

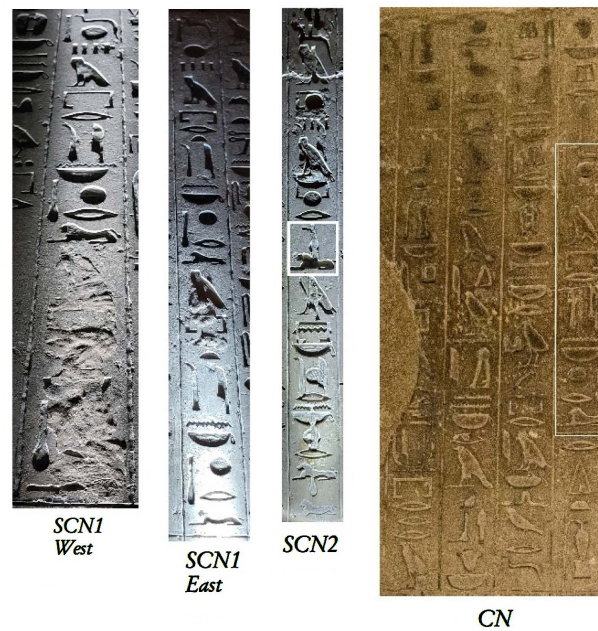
—that is embedded at the end of all four instances of R 21/PT 32 in the PTs, either as one copy, or two tandem copies (**Figure 10**). The formula is always preposed with the phrase *zp IIII* for “four times”, indicating it was to be uttered a total of four, or eight, times. R 21/PT 32 reads like a ritual washing and cleaning of the mummified king Unas with cool water and natron salt, performed after food and drink offerings are made, while a ritual formula is being recited. It is written from the first-person perspective, from son prince to father king, reenacting Horus giving funeral rites to his father Osiris.

Of the above four instances of R 21 in the Pyramid Texts (**Figure 10**), two are on the SCN1, one on the SCN2—the one with the lioness and rod—and one on the north wall of the corridor between the SC and AC (CN). In none of the other three instances can a lioness with rod from her back be detected, intentionally made, or in error. In the first instance (SCN1, Column 13), a second copy of the invocation formula seems to have been completely obliterated by patching over carved symbols with stone cement.

In the second instance (SCN1, Column 36), a second copy is partially obliterated and corrected by over-writing the incised symbols with newly carved symbols. In the third, instance (SCN2, Column 27), with the lioness and rod, there is both obliteration by cement-patching, and over-writing by carving symbols over others resulting in illegible text.

In the fourth instance (CN, Column 6), there is only one copy and no detectable error or correction. However, there is an unusually gross scribal error immediately





*R 21/PT 32*

**Figure 10.** Magnified view of the four instances of the invocation formula, part of R 21/PT 32, showing ostensible scribal errors of symbol carving, and corrective action taken, if any. Framed in white is the lioness with bent rod in column 27 of the SCN2. Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, February 2022.

next to the lioness symbol involving the cartouche of King Unas (**Figure 11**). There are over 700 instances of the throne name *wnjs* written inside a cartouche in his Pyramid Texts. Of these, we found ten with gross scribal errors: six on the SCS (Columns 43 and 53), two on the CN (Columns 6 and 8), one on the ACS (Column 43), and one on the ACE (Column 6).

It appears, therefore, as if the second copies of all three instances of the invocation formula inside the SC were modified after an initial attempt to carve them into the limestone northern wall, and the modification resulted in three different outcomes—complete erasure without correction, partial erasure with correction, and partial erasure and non-corrective over-carving, resulting in overlapping symbols and illegible text. Even the fourth copy on the CN, although intact, is topographically tainted with a rare miswritten mention of the name of the king himself.

Both the tandem copies of the invocation formula, and the inconsistency as to how a repeatedly made, and thus suspect error was handled draw the attention of an observer who is familiar with the Mehit iconography that was unmistakably part of a royal bureaucratic titulary sequence held by the highest court officials of the first four dynasties. This would still have been known by a royal scribe of the Fifth Dynasty alive 150 years after Khafre, especially since three Old Kingdom holders of the Mehit title—Neferseshem-Re, Hesy-Re, and Mery—were all buried at Saqqara within walking distance from the Pyramid of Unas.



**Figure 11.** The north wall of the Corridor (CN), containing the final recitations (see recitation and utterance number designations at the top and bottom in white) of the Offering Ritual, including the fourth instance of R 21/PT32 with the invocation formula at the end. Framed in white are the word *hrw* for “called upon” in column 6, and the over-written cartouche of Unas in column 7. The SCN appears in the background on the west side and the ACN to the east. Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, February 2022. Image courtesy of John K. Lundwall, February 2022.

We wondered, for example, why any potential reference to Mehit, if it had occurred due to a *bona fide* error, was not completely obliterated afterwards using wall cement, especially since its prominent position near the center of the north wall inside the Unas’ sarcophagus chamber, and the lighter color hue of the 27<sup>th</sup> text column, would have drawn attention.

We therefore asked the contrarian question: if the lioness with rod in column 27 of the SCN2 were made intentionally, why was this intent disguised as a scribal error?

#### Rationale

With these initial observations at hand, we searched for more evidence of references to a lion, a lioness, and Mehit in a scribal context to prove that the lioness and rod in PT 32 on the SCN2 was intentional and not a corrected scribal mistake that occurred during carving of the hieroglyphic text. We also paid attention to possible Heka-invocations (PVR) of the name Mehit including any textually recognizable, embedded sequence of the three hieroglyphic consonants *m*, *h*, and *t* in *mht*, such *mth*, *hmt*, *h tm*, *thm*, or *tmh*. Additionally, we searched for the Mehit-related name *mhn*, i.e., *mmh*, *nmh*, *nhm*, *hnm*, and *hmn*.<sup>8</sup>

Included in our examination was evidence for any veiled invocation of the sphinx cult. Like Mehit, the Great Sphinx—a part lion part human chimeric sta-

<sup>8</sup>Mehen is the name of a predynastic board game played with lion figurines on a coiled or concentric circular path representing a snake, and the name of a Middle Kingdom coffin painting called the *Roads of Mehen*, also known as the *Vignette of R*’.

tue at Giza considered by some Egyptologists to represent King Khafre as a Sun god—is not unequivocally mentioned by name until over a thousand years later in the New Kingdom (Dynasties 18-20, circa mid-16<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. to 1077 B.C.E.) when she is called Horemakhet, Horakhty, and even *hw* or *hwrn* on various votive steles including the Dream Stele left between her paws by Thutmose IV (Hassan, 1953: 221 ff.). This complete absence of mentioning the Great Sphinx in Old and Middle Kingdom written funerary texts is difficult to understand given the unprecedented scale and grandeur of the statue as an iconic guardian of one of the main cities of the dead (Necropolis) in ancient Egypt at that time. Unless it was taboo, for example, or deliberate.

Consequently, we looked for any cryptic mention, i.e., PVR, of these two names in addition to other names proposed such as *hw*,<sup>9</sup> or *hwrn*. We also looked for any reference to recognizable features of the Great Sphinx statue such as the plaited (*n'w*, *swt* or *nbd*) headdress (*nms*), the cobra “uraeus” at the forehead (*rnn wtt*, or *dnwtt*) the scarf-like lapels (*j3qs*), the braided (*hnskt* or *hnkt*) divine beard (*dw3 wr*, *mrt*, or *hbswt*), its elongated (*3w*) body, the natural Major Fissure in the rock that runs through the floor of the Sphinx ditch and hip area of the Sphinx (*hw* as in “struck”, for example, or *zp3*, as in the centipede-like simulacrum<sup>10</sup> that the fissure’s appearance on the ditch floor may have suggested to its ancient beholders).

We also searched for references to *hnb* or *qrj*, as in “lightning bolt”, that may have damaged the Sphinx and Sphinx ditch, and the nearby *nh̄t* “Sycamore” grove, as told on the Inventory Stele), the statue’s tail (*sd*), the statue’s proverbial eastward orientation (*j3bt*), the potential water basin created by the Sphinx ditch (*š* as in “lake”, for example) and the enclosure walls around it created by the Sphinx quarry limits (for example *jnb*), the two temples to her east—Sphinx Temple and Valley Temple (for example courtyard *h*, or enclosure *hw̄t*)—the boating quays or bridge ports in front of the Valley Temple (*m3d*), her location in Giza (*r st3w*, ancient Rostau), and the hawk-deity guardian of Rostau Zokar (*zkr*), an Earth- and cavern-dwelling (*gbb* or *kbb*; *qr̄rt*, *qr̄qt*, *rwh̄tt*, or *tp̄ht*) protector of the divine that traverses the netherworld in the afterlife before resurrecting in the eastern sky.

Finally, included in our evidentiary search was any mention of a Moon cult of Thoth (*dh̄wty*) that may have been sidelined and superseded by the new sun cult of *R̄* in the Fourth Dynasty.<sup>11</sup>

We asked if the composer of the PTs wanted to intentionally invoke Mehit but did so only cryptically for ritual reasons. The precedence for such ritually moti-

<sup>9</sup>Contested by Hassan, 1953: p. 222.

<sup>10</sup>At ancient Napata by the Nile in today’s north Sudan, for example, ancient Egyptians from the New Kingdom recognized a cobra head and neck, called uraeus, in the pillar-like promontory of the Jebel Barkal mountain, and, to wit, depicted it as such in the Temple of Mut partially cut into that mountain near this pillar.

<sup>11</sup>*R̄* is mentioned by name as early as the Second Dynasty as part of the Horus name of King Raneb/Nebra, but the iconography of these early records suggests that he was still subordinated to nature’s power of kingship personified by the royal falcon Horus atop the palace symbol.

vated encryption may be found in the way a predynastic, more archaic, and more original Statuette Making Ritual was textually embedded in the later Mouth Opening Ritual. This was derived from it by Heka-invoking key elements of the former ritual with unrelated words used to narrate the latter. In this way, a new, more stylized ritual designed for the royal funerary rites may have been adapted from an older shamanic funerary cult with the statuette now represented by the mummy, and the shaman now represented by the crown prince performing the funerary rites in the role of a lector priest.<sup>12</sup>

This would be an example of “nesting” (Roth, 2010: p. 28), where an older ritual is honorifically embedded in a newer one by a process of stylization and abstraction, rather than discarded. Another possible reason to not explicitly mention Mehit, but only make veiled references to her may be that, contrary to nesting, her cult was no longer practiced or observed. Indeed, it may have been outlawed by the time of Unas. Explicitly mentioning Mehit in a royal tomb in violation of a royal decree may well have put the composer at risk of prosecution. Rather than nesting, this could be described as expunging. If the original lioness head was remodeled into a sphinx head by Khafre, or another king of his era, elevating himself to a god by having his stone sculptors carve a divine braided and coiled beard under his chin, any lingering mention of Mehit would have drawn attention to the true origin of the monument and delegitimized Khafre’s claim to divinity.

The word Mehit was possibly taboo in the PTs for some other reason related to the meaning of the PTs themselves. However, we ruled out this latter possibility because the “Great Flood” *mh̄t wr̄t* incorporating a synonym, “Flood”, of the word Mehit “she, the northern one”, is explicitly mentioned twice at the end of the west side of the entry corridor of Unas’ pyramid (EW), near the end of the PTs of Unas on the opposite east wall (EE). Nevertheless, there is no instance of an explicit mention in the entire Pyramid Texts of the name Mehit in her original context as a patron lioness goddess that guards the guild of royal bureaucrats and record keepers. In fact, there are no known written historical references to Mehit or the Great Sphinx at all until the time of Thutmose IV over a thousand years later.

#### **Investigative Approach/Method.**

The rationale described above constitutes our initial examination of the Pyramid Texts of Unas searching for cryptic, PVR to lions, sphinxes, and the Moon using phonetic mimicry, i.e., Heka, or descriptive passages that directly refer to any of our criteria: recognizable physical features of the Great Sphinx or Mehit, without phonetic invocation. English, for example, is fraught with such phonetic similarities, such as “There, Their, and They’re.” The fact that phonetic similarities between words were explored by the ancient Egyptians, even in the Pyramid Texts, has been established before, however the main interest to us was why this was done.

<sup>12</sup>The co-called *hr̄j ḥb̄*.



The simple identification of individual words matching our initial criterium does not sufficiently rise to the standard of proof required to demonstrate the Pyramid Text composer's intent. To identify veiled references to the Statuette Making Ritual within the MOR, for example, multiple context-matching words pertaining to the former had to be identified that were phonetically embedded in the words describing the latter (Helck, 1987: pp. 21-30; Seyfzadeh & Schoch, 2018: pp. 138-140). We therefore sought to amplify any potential signal of veiled composer intent against a background of incidental, or accidental occurrences due to other textual factors, or random chance. To this end, we defined four criteria in addition to PVR, whose satisfaction would indicate a higher likelihood of the author's intent to make a veiled reference not obvious to a casual reading of the words used, i.e., an embedded subtext.

**1) Ostensible Non-sense.** We looked for text that might be characterized as nonsensical, impenetrable, or even ridiculous when literally or superficially read at face value. For example, the phrase *ḥw zp3 jn ḥwtj ḥw ḥwtj jn zp3* "The centipede is struck by the two enclosures, the two enclosures are struck by the centipede" in columns 6 and 7 of the ACE makes no logical sense.

An example of ridiculous humor we may characterize as "cartoonish" is a confirmed marker of a Heka invocation written into the fourth column of the third register on the SCN (SCN3). The phrase *m n.k jrt ḥrw m shbnbn.s* "Take to you the Eye of Horus, don't cause it to bounce around" invokes *ḥbnt* bread, phonetically mimicked by the verb *shbnbnj*.

While passages like this may only appear nonsensical due to insufficient current insights into the hieroglyphic language and its translation into modern languages, others may represent satirical humor, *ad absurdum* word plays, and puns intended to say one thing, but mean another. However, it is also possible that non-sense was a textual roadside marker to alert the reader to look for a nearby or embedded PVR. It is also possible that the composer could not find a sensible way to create a Heka-invocation, and thus chose a string of words he knew produced no meaning and were used only as a phonetic vessel to refer to other words.

**2) Topography/Text Position.** We looked for topographic clues that may indicate a veiled reference by analyzing where on the walls certain words are written and how they may interact with other words in their vicinity, even though they are not connected through the direct flow of the texts in vertical columns, or by syntax. To illustrate topography with an example, the words "Arise Thoth" *j.q3 ḏḥwtj* are positioned such that *j.q3* is written at the bottom of the column 21 of the SCGE, and *ḏḥwtj* at the top of the next column to visually enhance the idea of "rising".

Another example is the placement of the word *ḥrwt* "portal", determined with a square corner symbol, at the top of the last column (43) of the ACS (Figure 12). The same word is used several times in the log entries discovered at the Wadi El-Jarf where it appears to refer to the forecourt of a temple near both a river and the royal residence called Ankhu Khufu, suggested to be the Valley



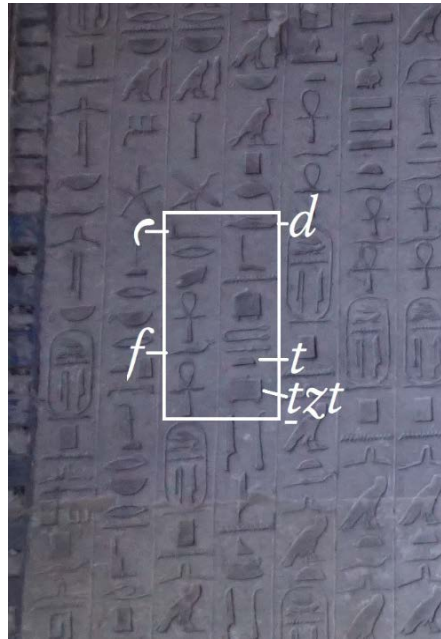


**Figure 12.** Left, the word *'rrwt* for “portal” or “gate”, determined with the corner sign, is written at the top of the southeast corner (Column 43) of the antechamber of the Pyramid of Unas, as part of the phrase *'rrwt nt nw* for “Portal of Nu”, or “Sky Portal”. On the right, the same word is used to designate two celestial gates, the Gate of Fire, and the Gate of Darkness (white frames), on the map section of the Book of Two Ways painted onto the floorboard of a Middle Kingdom coffin (B<sub>1</sub>C) from a grave in the rock-cut mountain cemetery at Deir El-Bersheh belonging to a certain General Zepi. Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, February 2022, and the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, Cairo, Egypt, September 2021, respectively; modified.

Temple of Khufu (Tallet & Lehner, 2022: pp. 276-277). It is also used in the Coffin Texts to designate the celestial gates in the map section of the Book of Two Ways (Figure 12). The related words *'ry* or *'rwt* mean “gateway”, *'ryt* means “lintel” and “sky”, and *'rrw*, significantly in the context of this paper, refers to a lion-faced being (Vygus, 2015: pp. 159-164).

**3) Multiplicity/PVR Clusters.** We looked for clusters of phonetically mimicked words, or clusters of symbols, within a sentence or a short passage, or a limited section of inscribed wall space with relevance to the text nearby. A good example of this is the word for the portable archive *'fdt* mentioned in the context of creation in the Coffin Texts (e.g., *'fdt hrt*, “Archive under the Forearm”, CT 695, Sherbiny, 2017: p. 136), spelled out at the four corners of a rectangle that encompasses the word for wooden chest *tzt*, a synonym of *'fdt* in R 152/PT 219, the Litany of Identification with Osiris, part of the Resurrection Ritual written on SCS (Allen, 2005: p. 37; Figure 13).

**4) Veiled Context.** We looked for a context-appropriate references, i.e., references to a consistent subtextual theme, analogous to the subtextual theme of the Statuette Making Ritual inside the ostensible Mouth Opening Ritual. In other words, we wanted to identify PVR that supports a veiled subtext which pervades, perhaps even subverts or sabotages the ostensible theme of the Pyramid Texts to continually resurrect and reunite the life force and soul of the dead King Unas, and justify him in front of the living and the divine as the orchestrator of cosmic order.



**Figure 13.** The word for “portable archive” *‘fdt* [af-det] is spatially spelled out at four corners in the context of the word *tzt* for “wooden chest”. Columns 53 and 54 of the SCS, near the southeast corner of the chamber. Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, September 2021.

The rituals and instructions of the Pyramid Texts served to equip the king’s justified spirit with the masterfully magical language of creation called Heka to overcome the physical obstacles of life and afterlife, and to propel him into the sky from the cavernous point of original creation as a divine companion of nature’s divine powers, i.e., what we call “gods”. This overall purpose was accomplished by symbolically simulating this continual journey on the interior walls of the king’s pyramid representing a material enactment of something observed in nature, specifically in the sky.

Based on these four criteria—homophony, recognizable features, non-sense, topography, homophone multiplicity, and veiled context—we have identified the following potentially veiled references as clues that the composer of the Pyramid Texts may have intentionally referred to and memorialized the lunar cult of Mehit, and to lament her conversion into the Sun cult of a god-king, represented by the Great Sphinx, adorned with the braided, divine beard.

### 3. Results

**Sarcophagus Chamber West Gable.** The Pyramid Texts of Unas begin here with Recitations 1-18/PT 226-243. The general idea is to provide spells to ward off attacks by snakes (*n’w*, *hpnw*, *dt*, *hf3w*), scorpions (*srqt*, *wh’t*), monsters (*h3w*) as the deceased enters the netherworld (*dw3t*) and abode of Osiris (Figures 14(a)-(c) and Figure 14(h)). These first eighteen utterances are among the most difficult of the entire Pyramid Texts of Unas to interpret. However, once Heka, topography, and context are applied, four PVR emerge



**Figure 14.** The west gable of the sarcophagus chamber of Unas (SCGW). Textual elements with potentially veiled references (PVR) are highlighted. Transliterations are: (a) *n'w jn n'w*, (b) *h'jw*, (c) *srqt* or *wh't*, (d) *pn' tw h'bh*, (e) *n'w*, (f) *n'w jn n't pzh n't jn n'w*, (g) *srqt* or *wh't*, (h) *jsjr*, (i) *drw jwnw*, (j) *h'mn*, (k) *mtj mtj m'tj m'tj 3w mjw.f*, (l) *mjtj mjtj*, (m) *dt prt m t3 hr sdt prt m nw*, (n) *rjt.f*, (o) *n3wt.f h'm.n h'knt*, (p) *m h'rwj snw*, (q) *3w jm gs h'w jm gs h'w*, (r) *jttj*, (s) *hj tjtj bjtj*, (t) *tf j.tm jmj jbw zkr jr pr n mjw.f h'jw sdr*, (u) *dt jr pt zp3 m jr t3*, (v) *n3wt.f s3.tj jmj-tph.t.f h'nft h'rw h'tt t3 j jmj h'jw zbn*, (w) *q'mw*, (x) *rw*, or *mj*, and (y) *j h'm tf* Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, September 2018; modified.

that are not apparent upon a literal, casual reading of these passages. The first PVR is the word *n'w* for “plait”,<sup>13</sup> mentioned multiple times both on SCGW (Figure 14(a) and Figure 14(e) and Figure 14(f)), on the east wall of the antechamber (ACE), where an association is created with navigation on water by boat, and on the east wall of the entry (EE). This makes sense insofar as the plaited pattern of snakeskin is reminiscent of rope- and boat-making using braided reed bundles. The confirmation of the boat theme is the context sign of “turn over” *pn'*, a cap-sized boat, and the homophone embedded inside the words “turn over, crawl...” *pn' tw h'bh*, i.e., *h'bw* for barque (Figure 14(d); Vy-gus, 2015: p. 840).

The second PVR (Figure 14(f), Figure 14(g), and Figure 14(o)) is generated by a phonetic similarity between the words for “bitten plaited serpent” *pzh n't* and “scorpion” *wh't* in columns 18 and 19, confirmed in column 23 by the similar sounding word for “thicket” *n3wt*, and “she who jubilates” *h'knt*, a word that resembles *h'nkt* for “scorpion tail”, and “braid”. In other words, the phonetic values of the words chosen set the reader up to associate a plaited serpent with the curved tail of a scorpion, and the curved beard of divinity worn by the gods and deceased kings (Figure 4). Further confirmation of this theme of a coiled serpent-like beard called *n'w* comes from the word for coil, *rjt*, which is located

<sup>13</sup>To plait is to interlace three or more strands into a braid, or to make double folds, as in pleats. For example, the back of a cobra snake appears braided, while the belly appears pleated. Both can be construed as “plaited” by this definition.

higher up in the same column (Figure 14(n)).

The third PVR consists of four visual and phonetic clues to read the name Mehit. First, in column 20 (Figure 14), a lioness symbol *rw* is used to spell out the word for “limit”, *drw*. Then, in column 21, the name of the southern falcon god *hmn*/Hemen is mentioned (Figure 14(j)). *hmn* is an anagram of *mhn*/Mehen. To confirm this initial impression, a word play follows: “*mtj, mtj, m’tj, m’tj*”, for “vascular, vascular, seminal, seminal (Figure 14(k))”. This is followed by another homophonic word, *mjtj mjtj*, in column 22 (Figure 14(l)), and a further confirmation is spelled with the verbal predicate *hm.n* for “retreat”, resembling *mhn*.

The phonetic quality of these three columns entrains the reader to imagine a phonetic space between *m* and *t*, and this space is then filled with an *h*. A lioness symbol provides the visual cue to associate this animal while going through this verbal training.

The fourth PVR, shown in red, is a physical description of several distinguishing features of the Great Sphinx: a face grafted on another face (Figure 14(p)), an elongated body, and a side that looks struck by a force leaving a fissure through the hip: “Face on your face... elongated one, side-struck one, side-struck one.” (Figure 14(p) and Figure 14(q)). There is a confirmation that the face is royal (Figure 14(r) and Figure 14(s); *bitj*), that the location is in ancient Giza, the place of Zokar (Figure 14(t); *jbw zkr*). There is a PVR to the major fissure through the statue and ditch, the centipede *zp3*, in Figure 14(u). Finally, a PVR points to a cavern *tph t* (Figure 14(v)), and a monster *h jw*.

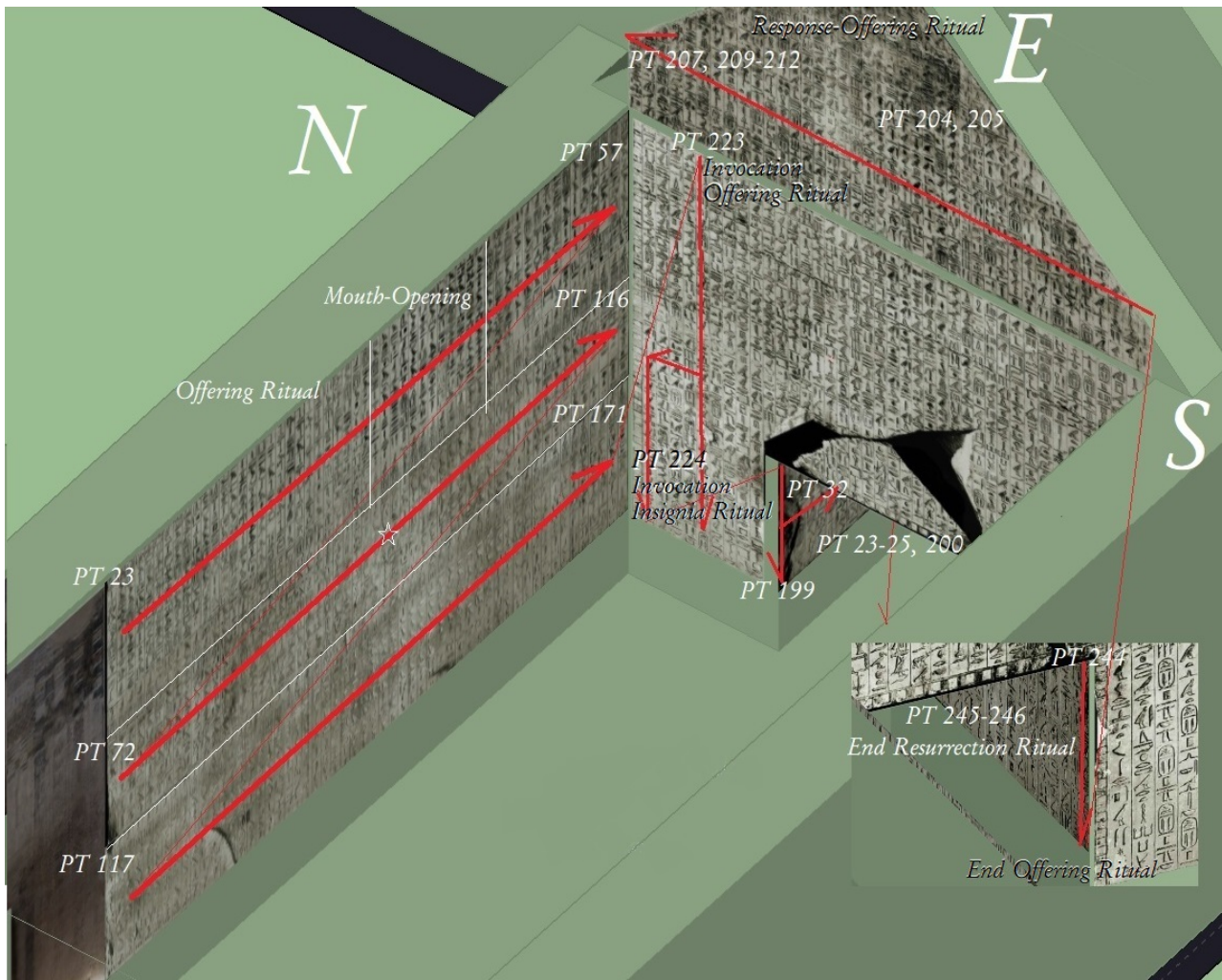
The association between these four themes produces the idea of Mehit, a scorpion tail-shaped coiled beard represented by a serpent with a plaited skin pattern called *n’w*, and the Great Sphinx statue, a lion with a human face that was adorned with a curved, braided beard of divinity.

Another textual clue at the end of the SCWG (Figure 14(y)) confirms that Mehit, the guardian of the scribes was being invoked earlier. In columns 38 - 40, two papyrus strips (Figure 14(w)) are mentioned with an unnamed lion (Figure 14(x)) in a text passage that makes little sense when read at face value: “...two papyrus rolls, two times, flattened bread, leave lion! If here or there, oh spit, servant.” In the last phrase *j h m t f* anagrammatically embeds the name *m h t* Mehit via *j h m t f*.

**Corridor South Wall.** The Offering Ritual occupies the SCN1-3, the five northern-most columns of the SCE, the CN, and the first, westernmost column of the CS (Figure 15). Since the CN houses the fourth instance of R 21/PT 32, we asked if the opposite wall, CS, might also have PVR to Mehit. The first column is occupied by R 138/PT 244, the tail end of the Offering Ritual (Figure 16). This is a one-line phrase that confers the Eye of Horus onto Unas, followed by a ritual smashing of red vessels. The last words are *sd dšrwt* for “smash red ones” (Figure 16(a)).

A homophone of *sd* for “smash”, however is “tail” (Vygyus, 2015: p. 505). The reason this may be a PVR to “tail” is that homophony is corroborated here by





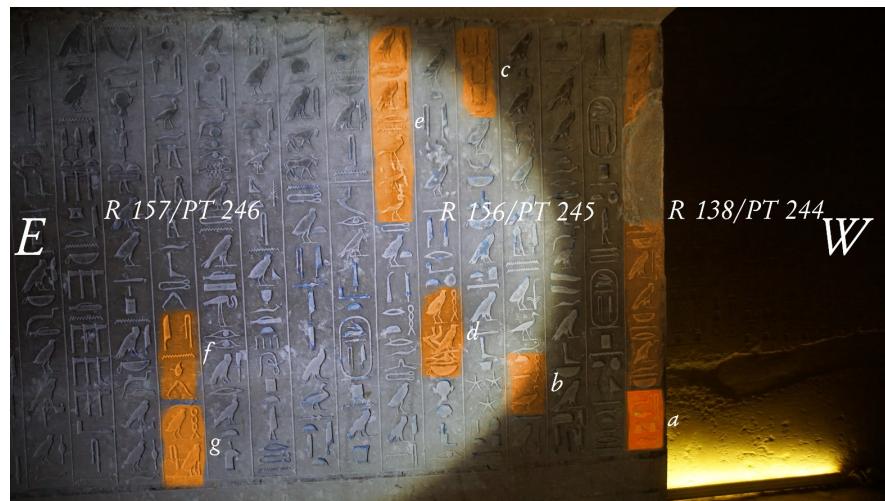
**Figure 15.** Topographic lay-out of the Offering Ritual, showing Sethe’s PT numbers. The position of the Mouth Opening Ritual (M.O.R.) is indicated. The final column of this ritual, its tail end, is inscribed into an orphan column on the south wall of the corridor (CS), after which follows the Response to the Offering Ritual on the SCGE. The text flows from west to east, or south to north (red arrows). 1) Offering Ritual (PT 23-171), 2) Invocation Offering Ritual (PT 223), 3) Invocation Insignia Ritual (PT 224, 199, 32, 23-25, 200, 244), 4) Response Offering Ritual (PT 204-205, 207, 209-212). The Resurrection Ritual ends on the CS with PT 245-246 (inset on the lower right). The star symbol on the SCN2 marks the location of the lioness with rod. Graphic rendition courtesy of Ali Reza Samsami. Hieroglyphic images courtesy of Pyramid Texts Online; modified.

the topography of the final recitation of the Offering Ritual placing it into an orphan column on the CS. This “tail” may refer to a lion tail because the “red ones” could also be an epithet of lions, related to their bloody snouts during a meal.

The confirmation that this PVR refers not only to a lion’s tail, but the lioness Mehit and Heka are invoked in the phrase “... has provided him with his Heka Magic” *ḥtm.n sw ḥk3w.f* (Figure 16(b) and Figure 16(c)), with Mehit *mḥt* embedded anagrammatically into *ḥtm*, and Heka *ḥk3* used explicitly in the plural here.

In the next columns (6 and 7, Figure 16(d) and Figure 16(e)), Ptah’s creative Heka facility of “Utterance” is mentioned as the exclamation “utter!/strike!” *ḥw*,





**Figure 16.** The south wall of the connecting corridor (CN) between the sarcophagus chamber to the west, and the antechamber to the east. In the first column on the west end is the tail end of the Offering Ritual, R 138/PT 244 that ends with the phrase (a) *sj dšrwt* for “smashing the red vessels”. Columns 2-19 are occupied by the final two recitations of the Resurrection Ritual R 156/PT 245, and R 157/PT 246. Textual elements (b) highlights the verbal predicate “provide” *htm*, (c) says “magic” *hk3w*, (d) says “utter”, or “strike” *hw* followed by an ostensible scribal error that says “you shall see” *m3.k*, (e) says “command words to the Akh-spirits” *wj mdw n 3hw*, (f) says “runners” *sjn*, and (g) says “they will announce” *hw.sn*, this second instance of *hw* also marked by an ostensible scribal error. Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, September 2021; modified.

followed by a double struck “you shall see” *m3.k*. This is an ostensible scribal error, but it may instead be an artistic way to underscore *hw*. Topographically, this *hw m3.k* in column 6 of the CS is exactly across the corridor from the fourth instance R 21/PT 32 and the lioness symbol of the invocation formula in column 6 of the CN (Figure 11).

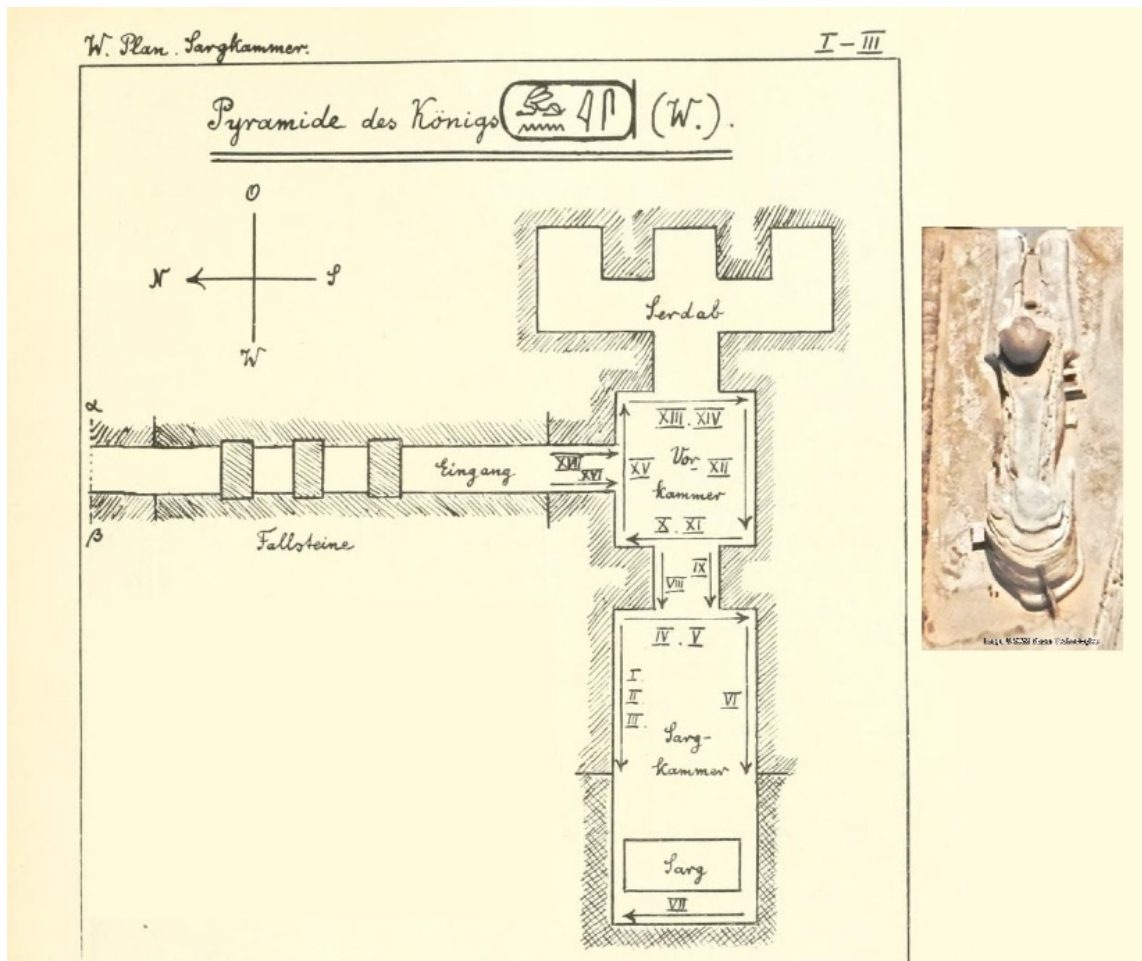
The confirmation that it is indeed Ptah, whose creative powers are being invoked using veiled references can be demonstrated in column 12 (Figure 16(f) and Figure 16(g)). The phrase “... his runners, they will announce” *sjn.f hw.sn* embeds the word “Perception” *sj3* within the word “runner” *sjn*, and, immediately after, “Utterance” *hw* mentioned explicitly, perhaps since it is already invoked earlier in column 6.

Given this interplay between PVR to Mehit, Heka, and Ptah on the CS, and the allusion to “tail”, we wondered if this might not be an architectural simulation, captioned with Heka invocations of the Heka symbol, which is the hind part of a lion including its tail (Figure 17). To test this model, we wanted to know if there are similar references combining the interior chamber design and veiled textual references to simulate a lion, or sphinx on the walls of the antechamber (Figure 18), the architectural equivalent to the Akhet-Horizon inside the pyramid. The opening salvo on the ACW, R 165/PT 254, for example, addresses an unnamed, sole Lord (Allen, 2005: p. 43):

*j ntr 3 hymm rn.f ht hr jst n nb w'*  
*j nb 3ht jr jst n wnjs pn*



**Figure 17.** The hieroglyphic symbol for Heka Magic is the hind part of a lion on a standard. To the left, for comparison, is a wooden relief of Mehit from the Saqqara tomb of the Third Dynasty Heka Mehit master Hesy-Re. Above is a photo of the hind part of the Great Sphinx as seen from the south. The Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, Cairo, Egypt, September 2018, and Giza, Egypt, May 2019.



**Figure 18.** Interior architecture of the pyramid of Unas based on Sethe 1922: p. 116. An aerial view of the Great Sphinx is shown to illustrate the proposed model that the corridor, antechamber, and serdab simulate the statue. Image by Google Earth © Maxar Technologies 7/2021.

*O great god whose identity is unknown, a meal in place for the sole lord!  
O lord of the Akhet, make a place for Unis.*

The Lord of the Akhet could be Atum, Horus, or an Earthly counterpart. In the latter case, Horus of the Akhet-Horizon, *ḥrw ʒḥty* (Hor-akhty), is explicitly mentioned on the ACS. We looked for a PVR to his counterpart *ḥrw m ʒḥt* (Hor-em-akhet), the name of the Great Sphinx, although this was not known to have been in use until the New Kingdom. However, one of us (M.S.) has previously shown evidence that both names, Horemakhet and Horakhty, can be derived from another unique title known only to have been held in the Fourth Dynasty by Mery under Khafre, *ḥrwj jm ḥ3stj*. This title is on the same architrave of his tomb from Saqqara, where is written the last known instance in history of the “Master of the Opener of Mehit” title (Seyfzadeh, 2021: pp. 193-197).

**Antechamber West Wall.** Further clues to the identity of this unnamed horizon lord can be gleaned from the theme of the texts written on the ACW. Leaving the corridor (CS), the Pyramid Texts continue through the ACGW, and then below it on north side of the ACW. The ACW contains R 165-170/PT 254-260 written into 37 columns. The first 18 columns in the northern half contain R 165/PT 254 and deal with Unas’ Ka-force in his identity as the Bull of Nekhen.<sup>14</sup>

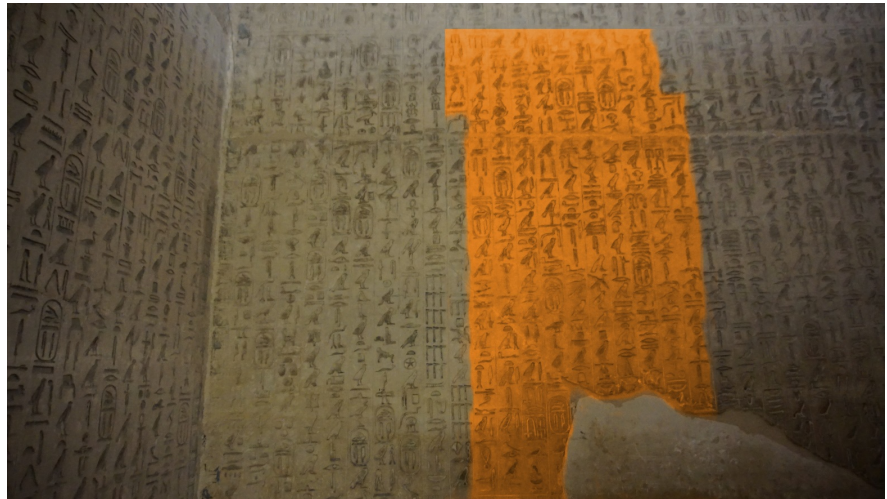
The final 19 columns deal with Unas in his Ba-soul identity, as Horus the Nekhenite in R 166-170/PT 255-260. The primary theme of both halves involves Unas demanding that an obstacle be removed (i.e., “*make a place for Unis*”) so that he may enter the Akhet-Horizon, represented by the antechamber. Should the obstacle not be removed, Unas threatens with a curse in R 165/PT 254, and a fire blast from his uraeus in R 166/PT 255. Several key descriptions of the obstacle reveal its identity. For example (Allen, 2005: p. 43):

*Unis will make a curse on Father Geb, (saying) “The earth has no spokesman; Geb has no guard,”...*

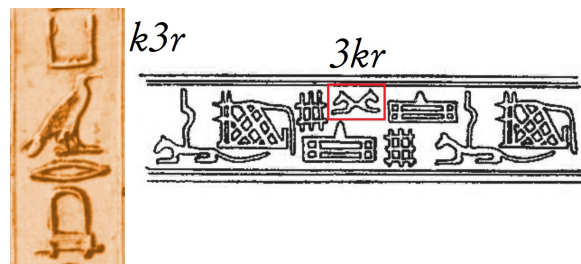
R 165/PT 254 goes on to describe the consequence of the curse: Mountains, riverbanks, and roads will be blocked; no one passes, no one goes up, presumably up to the sky (Figure 19). In R 166/PT 255 (Figure 19), the unnamed Lord resides inside of a shrine called *k3r* and appears to have both male and female gender: “great goddess” *wrt* (feminine), and “the great one will stand up inside his shrine” *ḥ‘ r.f wr m ḥnw k3r.f* (masculine).

Thus, the Lord of the Akhet-Horizon, blocking Unas to enter, is a son of Earth-Geb, and a guardian with a male-female double identity. His/her name can be derived as a PVR via an anagrammatic conversion from the *k3r* “shrine” (Figure 20), mentioned once in R 165/PT 254, and twice in R 166/PT 255: Aker *3kr*, the conjoined double lion. This iconograph, who is not mentioned explicitly in any of the Pyramid Texts, is however shown as early as the First Dynasty, for example on one sealing together with Mehit (Kaplony, 1963: Tafel 43, abb. 151; Figure 20).

<sup>14</sup>Hierakonpolis, a major city in the south of ancient Egypt whose beginnings date to predynastic times, and whose chief deity was a falcon called Horus of Nekhen.



**Figure 19.** South half of the ACW highlighting R 166/PT 255 and 167/PT 256. The ACS begins to the left. Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, September 2021.



**Figure 20.** The hieroglyphic word “shrine” *k3r* is an anagram of the name of the conjoined double lion “Aker” *3kr*, whose hieroglyphic icon is framed in red on this sealing dated to the First Dynasty. From Piankoff, 1968: Plate 17, and Kaplony, 1963: Tafel 43, abb 151; modified.

Even though Aker is not directly mentioned, the idea of a lion couple is corroborated in column 10 of R 165/PT 254 with the citing, by names, of Tefnut-Moisture *tfnt* and Shu-Air *šw*, Atum’s children in the Heliopolitean cosmogony (Piankoff, 1968: Plate 15). In New Kingdom netherworld imagery, Aker forms the Earthly canal through the netherworld, including its west inlet and east outlet, on which the resurrecting Sun-god travels by night.<sup>15</sup> Aboard the night boat *msktt* are also Perception-*sj3* at the prow, and Utterance-*hw* near the stern.

In this navigation context, they metaphorically personify Ptah’s creative intellectual facilities as sensing the chaotic and unknown waters ahead, and then striking the water to command and create direction, based on this perception. Unlike on the CS, where they are merely invoked, both are mentioned explicitly in column 24 or R 166/PT 255, now marked as deities (Piankoff, 1968: Plate 15), confirming the context within which Aker would be invoked. The text explains Unas’ passage past the Lionsgate with his acquiescence of *sj3* and *hw* (Allen, 2005: p. 45).

<sup>15</sup>For the association between Aker and the Great Sphinx, see Hassan, 1953: pp. 227-230.



The night boat context is also corroborated by the ending of R 167/PT 256 (Figure 21), where references to rowing and rope-pulling from a harbor are mentioned (Allen, 2005: p. 45). It appears, therefore, that the Pyramid Texts of the CN and ACW are textually simulating the movement of the night boat out of the Netherworld-*dw3t* and its docking at the port of the Akhet-Horizon, and that this passage is guarded by the double lion Aker.

The night boat *msktt* is represented by conjoined snakes in New Kingdom Netherworld imagery, and this can also be seen together with Mehit on a First Dynasty sealing (Kaplony, 1963: Tafel 43, abb. 154). Considering the two PVR of a boat and the divine beard with the term “plaited serpent” *n'w* (see SCGW, above), the combination of lion and plaited serpent is a symbol of divine emergence from the Netherworld (*dw3t*) having been equipped with the divine power of creation, Heka, through Perception and Utterance.

**Antechamber South Wall.** R 170/PT 260 continues from the last, 37<sup>th</sup> column of the ACW, across the SW corner of the antechamber, into the ACS for another 8 columns. The remaining 35 columns (43 total columns) read from west to east are occupied by R 171-179/PT 261-263, PT 267-272.

The themes written on the ACS are the successful judgement of Unas and his restoring of order of Earth and Sky (R 170/PT 260), his plan to cross the sky (R 171/PT 261), rising up while passing five familiar gods (R 172/PT 262), crossing to the eastern Akhet-Horizon to Sun-*R'* and Horakhty (R 173/PT 263), leaving Osiris and his wish to join Sun-*R'* in his day boat at dawn (R 174/PT 267), cleansing Unas' Ka-force (R 175/PT 268), rising up to the sky as incense (R 176/PT 269), encounter with the ferryman (R 177/PT 270), uniting the lands and climbing up a ladder into the sky (R 178/PT 271), and arriving at the sky portal (R 179/PT 272).



**Figure 21.** The solar night boat *msktt* being roped through the netherworld by the four Akhu-spirits *3hw sj3* is at the prow behind *wpw3ut* path opener. *hw* and is at the stern. Image of KV9, tomb of Ramses V/VI. ©, Manna Nader, Gabana Studios Cairo, Egypt.

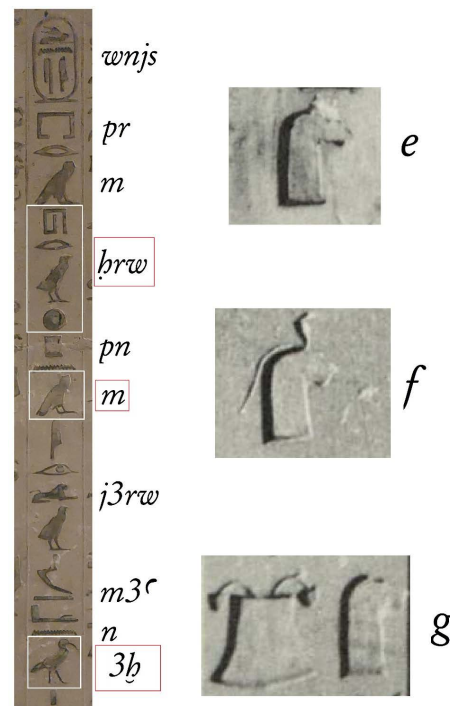
Topographically, the journey to the east to join Horakhty and Sun-*R*<sup>c</sup> is mapped onto the west side of the ACS via two textually unrelated ibis signs used in the words “Horakhty” *hrw 3htj* (R 173/PT 263; **Figure 22(b)**) in column 19 and “Akh-Spirit” *3h* in column 3 (R 170/PT 260; **Figure 22(a)**). The intent to make this topographic connection across 16 columns of text is further corroborated by three ibis signs placed in column 21, two columns east of Horakhty, and a lioness head used in the word “fiery” *3zb* in column 8 (**Figure 22(e)**).



**Figure 22.** The west side of the ACS encompassing part of R 170/PT 260, and R 170-173/PT 261-263. Framed in white are the names of Tefen *tfn*, Tefnut *tfnt*, and Shu *šw*. Topographic alignments show the Akhu ibis sign at the end of phrase (a) “Unas emerges on this day in the true form of an Akh-spirit” *wnjs pr m hrw pn m jr w m3<sup>c</sup> n 3h*, and (b) the name of Horakhty *hrw 3htj*, Thoth-Moon *dhwtj* (c) and (d) the couchant lioness in the word “form” *jr w*, and three lioness heads, (e-g) with the couchant lioness (d). The lioness head in (f) wears a cobra uraeus. Near (a) is a PVR to Mehit with “Northerners” *mhtjw*. Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, February 2022. Image courtesy of Erfan Samsam Shariat; modified.

Having drawn attention to “Akh-Spirit”  $\mathfrak{3}h$  in column 3, a thematically appropriate PVR to a name of the Great Sphinx “Hor-em-akhet”  $h\text{r}w\ m\ \mathfrak{3}h\text{t}$  can be recognized in the phrase “Unas emerges on this day in the true form of an Akh-Spirit”  $w\text{n}j\text{s}\ pr\ m\ h\text{r}w\ p\text{n}\ m\ j\text{r}w\ m\mathfrak{3}^c\ n\ \mathfrak{3}h$ , (Figure 23). It should be noted that “day”  $h\text{r}w$  uses the courtyard sign Gardiner O4 (Vygus, 2015: p. 1471), and “Horus”  $h\text{r}w$  uses the twisted rope/wick sign Gardiner V28 (Vygus, 2015: p. 2196). Phonetically these two words, both transliterated with extended Latin letter  $h$ , may have been pronounced slightly differently.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, there are examples of Heka using phonetic similarities despite different orthography. An example of this is the verbal predicate  $h\text{n}f\text{t}.n.f$  for “he has carried off” written in column 4 of the SCN3. The sound “ $h\mathfrak{3}$ ” at the beginning of this word is spelled here with the biliteral seashell sign Gardiner L6, while the word invoked by it,  $h\text{n}f\text{w}$  bread, begins with the sound “ $h$ ”, Gardiner Aa1.

Three topographic PVR further enhance the recognition of  $h\text{r}w\ m\ \mathfrak{3}h\text{t}$  as intentionally invoked by this phrase: First, there is a PVR to Mehit in the word “Northerners”  $m\text{h}tjw$  (Figure 22); second, there is a line of lioness head symbols (Gardiner F9) pointing to the lioness hieroglyph in the word “form”  $j\text{r}w$  (Figures 22(d)-(g)); and third, a mention of Thoth-Moon  $d\text{h}w\text{t}y$  appears horizontally across from this lioness symbol in column 12 of R 172/PT 262; Figure 22(c) and Figure 22(d)).



**Figure 23.** Invocation of the name  $h\text{r}w\ m\ \mathfrak{3}h\text{t}$  from  $pr\ m\ h\text{r}w\ p\text{n}\ m\ j\text{r}w\ m\mathfrak{3}^c\ n\ \mathfrak{3}h$ . The three lioness hieroglyphs e-f are shown in magnification to single out (f), uniquely wearing a cobra uraeus. From Piankoff, 1968: Tables 21 and 23, modified. Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, February 2022.

<sup>16</sup>François Olivier Maresquier, personal communication.



One of the lioness heads wears a cobra headdress (**Figure 22(f)**, **Figure 18(f)**). This instance of three on the ACS, is translated as “wrath” in “the Great Lake’s wrath has missed him” *nh.n sw 3t šj wr* (Allen, 2005: p. 47). The use of this unusual version of the lioness head symbol is a PVR of possible significance about what the Pyramid Texts may be implying between the lines. The typical sign for the sound *3t* is Gardiner F9 (Vygus, 2015: pp. 419-420), a lioness head otherwise featureless, as shown in **Figure 23(e)** and **Figure 23(g)**.

This veiled reference, therefore, appears to be to a lioness in place of Horakhty<sup>17</sup> and Horemakhet, i.e., the Great Sphinx statue. The Great Sphinx was also once adorned with a stylized cobra head, neck, and tail in the form of a nemes headdress, though key features of this are no longer intact on the statue today.

**Antechamber East Wall.** If the gable above (ACGE) could be summarized as King Unas’ Heka learning experience, metaphorically presented as the Cannibal Hymn (R 180a-b/PT 273-274), then the ACE below it is the combat zone where his thus-acquired Heka skill is put into action. There are three major textual zones, mapped onto the ACE from south to north: Columns 1 - 25 contain a series of 23 short recitations (R 183-204/PT 277-299) that read like a rapid-fire bombardment of Unas’ afterlife Ka-force by, and his defense against, various underworld demons in the form of snakes, worms, lions, monsters, a centipede, and entities that cannot be identified despite their epithets.

These, mostly single column recitations are a continuation from one similar utterance at the north end of the ACGE (Columns 35 - 36; R 182/PT 276) that begins the entire demon combat sequence. Allen entitles it “Spells against inimical Beings” (Allen, 2005: p. 52).

Columns 26 - 27, containing R 205/PT 300, describe an encounter with a ferryman, Unas’ travel to, and docking at, a pier in Rostau (ancient Giza), and to its guardian Zokar. The rest of the ACE comprises Columns 28 - 36, inscribed with R 206/PT 301. This final segment describes Unas Ka-force’s passage through the shadowy cavern of the primordial creator gods in Rostau, from where he emerges with the Eye of Horus after making bread offerings. In exchange for giving the eye back to Horus, he asks to ascend from the Akhet-Horizon into the sky on the fume of incense.

The ACE contains 10 instances of the word “lion” out of 11 total in the entire Pyramid Texts of Unas. The only other mention occurs on the SCGW (**Figure 14(x)**). The fact that this statistically non-random cluster of lion references occurs on this east-facing wall is topographically demonstrated in columns 6 and 7 with a PVR to Mehit (**Figure 24**). The word sign for “lion” *rw* in the form of a couchant lioness in column 7 faces the word “east” *j3bt* in column 6 (**Figure 24(f)**).<sup>18</sup> The association between the lioness Mehit and the patron goddess of

<sup>17</sup>Robert Bauval has proposed that Horakhty was the Old Kingdom name for the Great Sphinx’s counterpart in the sky, the constellation Leo (Schoch & Bauval, 2017: pp. 174-210).

<sup>18</sup>Mehit is shown facing east on a First Dynasty sealing dated to the reign of Horus-Djer (Kaplony, 1963: Tafel 43, abb. 148).





**Figure 24.** The ACE facing due east with the tripartite serdab below. The transliterated hieroglyphic textual elements highlighted are (a) *jr tj jr tj s3 tj s3 tj hr.k h3.k z3 tw ry wr*, (b) *j.zz h.k w kbb h 3w bj*, (c) *rw n phtj rw n ptj phtj ptj*, (d) *n'y n'y n'y n'y*, (e) defective Unas cartouche, (f) *j3bt*, (g) *pzh tm mh.n.f*, (h) *h hwtj jn zp3*, (i) *pf rw m hnw pn rw h3 j.k3wj m hnw th.n*, (j) *šs3w*, (k) *rw m mw 3w 3w 3 htt jb.j tj*, (l) *3w šy 3w šy*, (m) *nhpw and rw*, (n) *sdj rw sdj*, (o) *nhpw*, (p) *hmt sn nj hmt*, (q) *nh t*, (r) *zkr nj r st3w*, (s) *m3dw*, (t) *tm hn' rwtj jrwtj ntrwj.sn dt.sn ds.sn šw pw hn' tfnt*, (u) *rwht šzp*, (v) *trw.s*, (w) *j3qs ntr*, (x) *h3tt trwrw.k*, (y) *rnn-wtt*. The topographic combination of “east-lion-Seshat” is framed in white at the top right encompassing three adjacent *Columns* 6 - 8. In the lower right corner, another topographic relation is highlighted with white frames: the homophones ‘*nn*’ for “coil”, and *n'y* for “plaited serpent”. Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, September 2021; modified.

libraries and archives Seshat (**Figure 9**, rightmost column, sign of Mehit immediately above the sign of Seshat, Gardiner R20; **Figure 25**), is likewise maintained in this PVR with the emblematic sign of Seshat (Gardiner R 20) in column 8 (**Figure 24(j)** and **Figure 25**), immediately adjacent to the couchant lioness. A synonym for “headband” *bbnt*, mentioned immediately before her emblem (**Figure 25**), is the hieroglyphic word *mdht* spelled with the headband hieroglyph Gardiner S10. A *mdh* was a hewer of timber or stone, and a ship maker (Vygus, 2015: p. 1719). The word also designated an initiate vested with insignia. As an official title at the royal court, the same word, spelled with the carpenter axe sign Gardiner T7, harkens to the academic tandem titular sequence “Royal Master Scribe, Master Opener Mehit”, *mdh zšw nswt mdh 'babu' mht*, known from the Third and Fourth Dynasty to have been vested in only five individuals. The Mehit title disappeared from ancient Egyptian records with its last known carrier, the scribe Mery who served under Khafre.



**Figure 25.** Magnified view of textual element (j) from the previous figure highlighting the sign of Seshat and the lioness. Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, February 2022. Image courtesy of Erfan Samsam Shariat. Below, Mehit and Seshat from the stele of Wepemnefret. Cropped Image courtesy of the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology and the Regents of the University of California—catalog 6-19825.

A clue that this lioness herself is in the west, or yonder, is the demonstrative pronoun “that” lion *pf rw*, in contrast to “this” lion *pa rw* (Allen, 2014: p. 65), with *pf* referring to a place of passing on and mourning (Vygus, 2015: p. 1655). This is consistent with a location west of the Nile, in a necropolis.



We have identified multiple PVR that refer to various features of the Great Sphinx, some likewise, associated with Mehit. In column 18, at the midpoint of the ACE of 36 total columns, the word “dawn” *nhpw* is mentioned (Figure 24(o)). The significance of this PVR is that the Great Sphinx faces nearly due east and the sunrise point at dawn on an equinox. The following three tandem recitations create an association between the lion, the Moon, and features of the Great Sphinx.

Reference is made in R 186/PT 280 to an evil deed done addressing “you of the wall” who is commanded to set “your face behind you”, and “Beware of the great mouth” (Allen, 2005: p. 53; Figure 24(a)). This utterance follows R 185/PT 279 in which Thoth-Moon is in position *h3j* behind Unas. “Your face behind you” is reminiscent of the epithet “Face-in-the-back”, a reference to the waning Moon crescent. When the Moon wanes, it appears to wander backwards opposite in direction to its face or Moon shadow, and towards the sunrise point on the ecliptic (Krauss, 1997: p. 75). The great mouth, in this interpretation, is the Sun awaiting to “swallow” the Moon at New Moon.

In the following R 187/PT 281 (Figure 24(b)), reference is made to an “Earthen”, and “long” one “of the courtyard”. This is followed by a phonetic word play: Lion of *ph tj* lion of *pt tj*, *ph tj pt tj* (Figure 24(c); Figure 26). In other words, the reader is asked to conflate the “*h*” sound with “*t*”. *ph tj* means “strong one”, but the meaning of *pt tj* is unknown. Vygus lists it as a magical word (Vygus, 2015: p. 1673). Its single use in the text qualifies it as a *hapax legomenon*. However, it could be a homophonic PVR to the word “cavern” *tph t*, mentioned three times in the Pyramid Texts of Unas, on the SCGW, the ACGW, and on the ACE (see below).

The three recitations could therefore be understood as a veiled reference to the unusually extended statue of the lion body of the Great Sphinx, sitting behind its enclosure walls as if emergent from the Earth, and next to the courtyard of the Sphinx Temple.



**Figure 26.** Detail from the upper south side of the ACE showing textual elements (c), (e), and (h). Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, February 2022.

The evil deed is unclear in isolation, but the rest of R 187/PT 281 suggests that it has to do with the divine beard called here “plaited serpent” *nꜥy* (see also second PVR SCGW above). The connection between plaited serpent and the divine beard is the other meaning of *nꜥy* mentioned in the nonsensical word play *nꜥy nꜥy nꜥy nꜥy nꜥy* (Figure 24(d); see also Figure 33), related to navigation by boat. The proof of this conflation with intent is that *nꜥy* is contextualized either with a boat sign, or a snake. The divine beard appears to represent the rope, called a plaited serpent, used to pull the divine boat through the afterlife.

Further confirmation that *nꜥy* is used here to refer to the coiled and plaited divine beard is the word “coil” *ꜥn*, topographically positioned two columns to the left (Figure 24(g), white frames). In other words, the evil deed mentioned in the beginning of this recitation appears to relate to the divine beard in association with the Great Sphinx lion.

Of note, while the uraeus may have been thought of as the prow of the divine boat on which the king travels the netherworld as demonstrated by the name of one of Khufu’s work gangs—The Escort Team of “The Uraeus of Khufu is its Prow” (Tallet & Lehner, 2022: p. 228)—the symbol of the rope used to pull this boat has not been identified. The PVR here suggest this may be the coiled beard of royal divinity, since the rope used to pull the boat is also coiled (Figure 21).

In fact, there is a written tomb record from Giza’s Central Field, south of the Great Sphinx, dated to the early Fifth Dynasty referring to the “Day of receiving the Prow Rope of the Divine Boat” *ḥrꜥw n šꜥꜣ ḥꜥtt nꜥr dꜣt* (Allen, 1992). This may have been a solemn ceremony in honor of a dead king attested as early as the Third Dynasty (Allen, 1992: p. 16) and indicates that the rope to pull the boat of a resurrecting king had special significance as did the ones who ritually pulled it to enact this journey during a funerary ceremony.

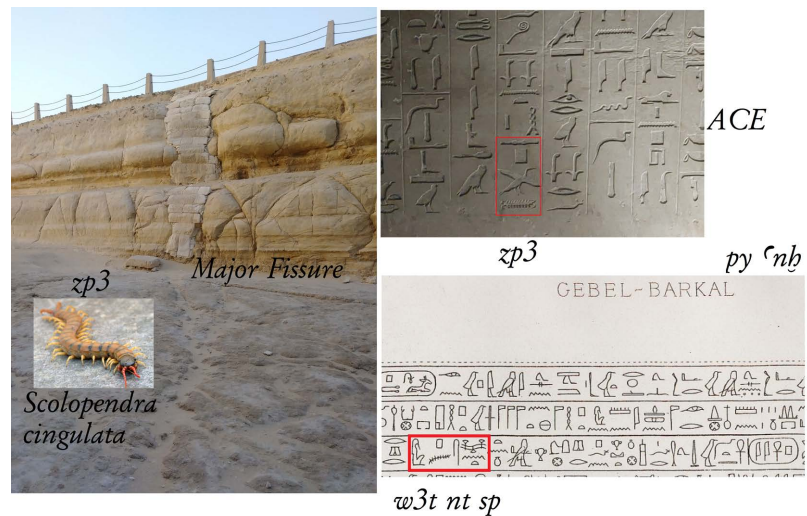
A PVR to Mehit is suggested in relation to the previous three recitations in the non-sensical phrase “The one Atum has bitten has filled his mouth...” *pꜣḥ tm mḥ n.f*, which is an embedded anagram of *mḥt* and *mḥn* (Figure 24(g)).

R 190/PT 284 continues with PVR to the two temples in front of the Great Sphinx, the major fissure that courses through the Sphinx and Sphinx ditch, the notion of a lion inside of a lion, and two bulls fighting inside an ibis (Allen, 2005: p. 53; Figure 24(h)).

*The centipede has been hit by him of the enclosure, he of the enclosure has been hit by the centipede: that lion is inside this lion; the two bulls shall fight inside the ibis.*

The nonsensical nature of this recitation suggests to us that this is cryptic text referring to something other than what is ostensibly stated. For example, it is known that the ancient Egyptians attributed divinity to natural rock features, such as the uraeus-like pillar of the Jebel Barkal Mountain. In keeping with the subtext of the Great Sphinx statue and its features, the centipede *ꜣꜣ* may be a reference to a sedan chair, being “beared” (Vygus, 2015: p. 1594), and possibly the major fissure (Figure 27). Evidence in support of the latter is that *ꜣꜣ* is the divine name of the Road of the Gods to a place called “Khereha” *ḥꜣ ḥꜣ* on the





**Figure 27.** The Major Fissure courses through the Sphinx ditch and Great Sphinx. View to the south of the floor and enclosure wall. For comparison, *Scolopendra cingulata*, the Mediterranean banded centipede, a common centipede found around the Mediterranean zone. To the right, in the upper pane, is the mention of **zp3** the centipede at the bottom of the 6<sup>th</sup> column of the ACE, framed in red. In the lower pane, also framed in red, is the mention of the Road of the Divine Sep **w3t nt sp**, determined with a centipede sign and the sitting god sign. From the Victory Stele of Py-Ankh, founder king of the 25<sup>th</sup> Kushite Dynasty, 101<sup>st</sup> register (Mariette, 1872: Pl. 5; modified). Inserted Image on the left by Eran Finkle, *Scolopendra cingulata*-D7-08-2291.JPG. CC BY-SA 3.0. Giza, Egypt, May 2019, and the pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, February 2022.

way to Heliopolis, as told on the Victory Stele found at Napata of the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty Kushite founder King Py-Ankh **py ʿnh**, mentioned on the 101<sup>st</sup> register (Mariette, 1872: Pl. 5). This **sp** is determined both with a centipede sign and a sitting male god sign on the stele (Figure 27, right lower pane) who wears a curved beard.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> register of 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty King Thutmose IV's Dream Stele in front of the Great Sphinx, this road is also mentioned. There, it is written that Thutmose and his two companions rested in the noon shade at the sanctuary of Horemakhet, i.e., the Great Sphinx enclosure, next to Zokar of Rostau, at the sacred place of the "First Time" **zp tp** [Zep Tep-ee], near the gods of Khereha, on the Divine Road of the Gods **w3t ntrw** towards the western horizon **3ht jmtt** and, or of, Heliopolis **jwnw**.

The centipede appears to be a reference to both a place near the Great Sphinx, and the First Time, Zep Tepe. In other words, this road may have gotten its name because of something the ancient Egyptians associated with the beginning of their creation. This, we propose could be the mark of a strike on the ground symbolized by a centipede. The Divine Road of the Gods, in this model, leads to the Giza Necropolis, i.e., The West, and towards Heliopolis, northeast from Rostau in two directions. The origin of the road may have been the mark of the centipede inside the Sphinx ditch and through the statue, believed to be the mark of Zep Tepe and the mark of primordial divinity.

Following this interpretation, the recurrent phrase “Cobra, to the sky! Horus’s centipede, to the earth!” (SCGW: R 15/PT 240, and ACE: R 204/PT 299), combined with “Horus’s sandal is treading on the enclosure’s lord, the cavern’s bull”, (ACE: R 204/PT 299) makes more sense now as a description of the Sphinx ditch including the fissure that split open its southern and northern walls, the ground, and statue between. In other words, the cobra uraeus points to the sky above, and the divine beard to the earth below, where the strike of divinity left the mark of the centipede *zp3* on the ground.

In the SCGW, a PVR likewise refers to a side-struck, elongated one, and the topography suggested a royal context with *bjtj* (Figure 14(p) and Figure 14(q); Figure 14(r) and Figure 14(s)).

Confirming these potential references to the Sphinx ditch is another textual element from R 191/PT 285 (Figure 24(k)). Here the lion is called “dangerous with (his) water” (Allen, 2005: p. 53). Next to this column is a mention of the “lake-long-one” *3w šjy* (Figure 24(l)). Together, they recall the appearance of the Sphinx ditch as a dry lake from which the elongated Great Sphinx statue has emerged. The idea that it is a couchant lioness facing dawn in the east is suggested by textual elements near the center of the ACE (Figures 24(m)-(o)). First, the word for “dawn” *nhpw* is mentioned immediately next to the lioness sign in columns 16 and 17 of R 200/PT 294. “Dawn” *nhpw* is repeated at the top of column 18, the center of the ACE directed at due east.

A further instance of the lioness sign below in column 16 is bracketed by two signs in columns 15 and 17 that represent “recline” *sdr* (Figure 24(n)). As in the prior example of Figure 24(d) and Figure 24(g), here too, a corroborating PVR to Mehit *mht* near this lioness sign in column 16 can be found in the phrase “Unas is the Hemeth snake, brother of the Hemethet snake”, *wnjs pj hmt sn n hmt* (Figure 24(p)). In the line that follows at the top of column 20 (R 202a/PT 296) “dead is your father *d*“*mju* (Djaamiu)”.

This phrase makes no sense as a statement of fact. However, embedded within the word *d*“*mju* is the word *d*“*m* for electrum staff and determined with the *w3s* scepter sign. This staff is mentioned on the ACS in column 22 of R 173/PT 263 in the context of being wielded by the four foremost of the braid beard-wearing Akh-spirits. They plead with the Sun and the Ka-force assigner to allow Unas to cross the Akh-Horizon (Allen, 2005: p. 48). In our reconstruction, these four spirits are the same four who drag the royal night boat through the netherworld (Figure 21). The braided rope they use to drag the boat is symbolized by the plaited and coiled beard of divinity.

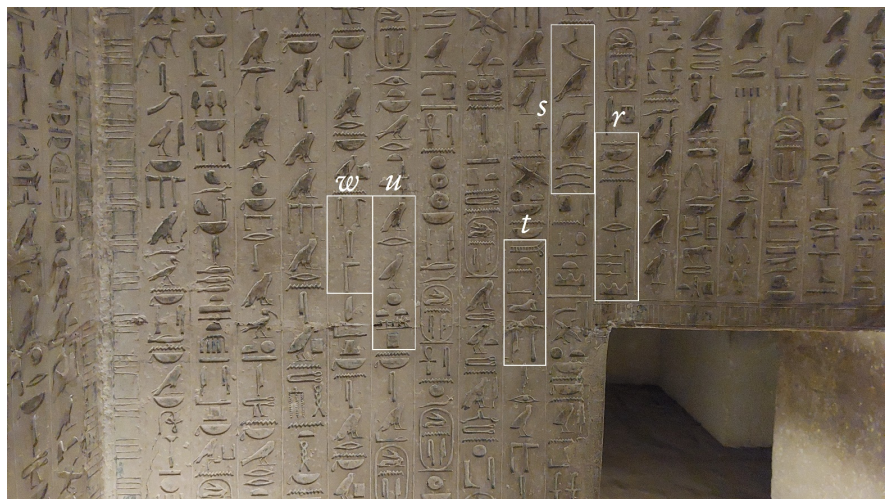
And so, within this context of the divine beard, the phrase “dead is your father Djaamiu”, carries the possible connotation of a lament that an old rite is no longer alive. This rite could be the ceremonial rope pull of the night boat to escort and honor a dead king reenacting events thought to happen in the sky. At this point, we began to suspect that the common denominator of the PVR we identified may be a lament of an extinguished night cult and Mehit was part of

it. The Sphinx cult, on the other hand, was a day cult of the Sun. This apparent conflict may explain the veiled nature of the references. We therefore wanted to find further corroboration that the Great Sphinx was referenced on the ACE.

Further evidence that the ACE is textually simulating the area around the Great Sphinx at Rostau/Giza can be obtained from the northeast section of the wall (**Figures 24(q)-(t)**). A Sycamore tree is mentioned (**Figure 19(q)**). Such a tree grove may have grown to the south of the Great Sphinx (Hassan, 1953: p. 116). In column 26 (R 205/PT 300), Unas identifies with Zokar of Rostau, “foremost of the stretched lake” referring to ancient Giza, where the Great Sphinx is located (**Figure 28(r)**). In the next column of the same recitation, two ferrymen are asked to bring bridge ports for Unas (**Figure 28(s)**). This could be a reference to the piers that can still be seen today at the Valley Temple of Khafre (**Figure 29**). The pyramid complex was a sacred port from which the god-kings embarked for the Netherworld (Hawass & Lehner, 1994: p. 34).

In column 28 of Recitation 206/PT 301, Sun-Atum is mentioned together with the two lions Shu and Tefnut, who self-created and made the gods (Allen, 2005: p. 55). The second lioness has a dagger-like tip through the waist in what appears to be a scribal error ostensibly (**Figure 30**) but could also be an intentional allusion again to the major fissure that cuts through the hip of the Great Sphinx. Selim Hassan, citing Édouard Naville who based his reasoning on the Book of the Dead, also believed that reference may have been made here to the Great Sphinx (Hassan, 1953: pp. 222-223).

The remaining textual elements in **Figure 24** confirm that it is indeed the Great Sphinx to which the ACE refers (**Figures 24(v)-(y)**). At the beginning of this passage of R 206/PT 301, the statue with its out-stretched forepaws offering the resurrecting Akh-spirits of the Sun and Unas to the sky is being indirectly addressed. Nevertheless, her two known names Horemakhet and Horakhty are being invoked with Horus (Allen, 2005: p. 55):



**Figure 28.** Detailed of textual elements r-u, and w from the northern half of the ACE. Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, February 2022.





**Figure 29.** Upper pane: View of the Valley Temple of Khafre from the east showing the two piers. Lower pane: The piers seen from the south. Giza, September 2021 and 2018, respectively.

*He whose arms are a weapon, Horus at the sky's starry ceiling, who brings the sun to life every day, shall build Unis and bring Unis to life every day.*

*Unis has come to you, Horus of Shat; Unis has come to you, Horus of Shezmet; Unis has come to you, eastern Horus.*

Textual element (u) invokes “statue” *šzp* with “cavern, receive...” *rwh tt šzp* (Figure 24(u); Figure 28(u)). The red color of the statue is invoked with “gore” *trw* written with the inkwell sign for red ink (Figure 24(v)), further confirmed with “... first class oil, you should redden with it...” *h3tt trw.k* (Figure 24(x)). The lapels of the Nemes headdress are invoked with “god’s shawl” *βqs ntr* (Figure 24(w); Figure 28(w)). And finally, the uraeus on the forehead of the Great Sphinx is invoked with “Renentutet” at the top of column 34 (Figure 24(y)).

**Entry East.** The Pyramid Texts of Unas conclude on the east wall of the entry corridor from the north. Inscribed into the last 20 columns are R 223-226/PT 318-321. Rather than the Sun-*R* and Atum, however, this final section is almost





**Figure 30.** Column 28 from the ACE showing textual element (t). The phrase reads “Atum with Ruti, the two lions, who made their bodies themselves.” The second lioness sign has the tip of a reed sign piercing her waist. Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, February 2022. Image courtesy of Erfan Samsam Shariat.

entirely about the Moon in its manifestation of Babi. In fact, in R 223/PT 318, Unas, as the “plait snake” *nʿw*—the same snake we have reconstructed to represent

the divine rope of the night boat symbolized by the coiled and braided divine beard—swallows the seven uraei and, instead, grows seven neck bones in an act of usurping the very same power symbol placed on Unas' forehead on the ACE. With this act, Unas turns into Babi, the Full Moon (Figure 31). He claims power over all the gods and will take their power away. He will cultivate Lapis Lazuli, the color of the night sky. The final words (Allen, 2005: p. 61) of the Pyramid Texts leave little doubt that Unas is the Moon, and that it is the night, not the day, that is being celebrated. Unas, as Moon, rules the night, as no star can be seen near the Moonlight. As Moon, he climbs into sky on the back of Osiris, and escorts the Sun:

*Unis is the son of her who does not know (him): she bore Unis to yellow-face, lord of the night skies.*

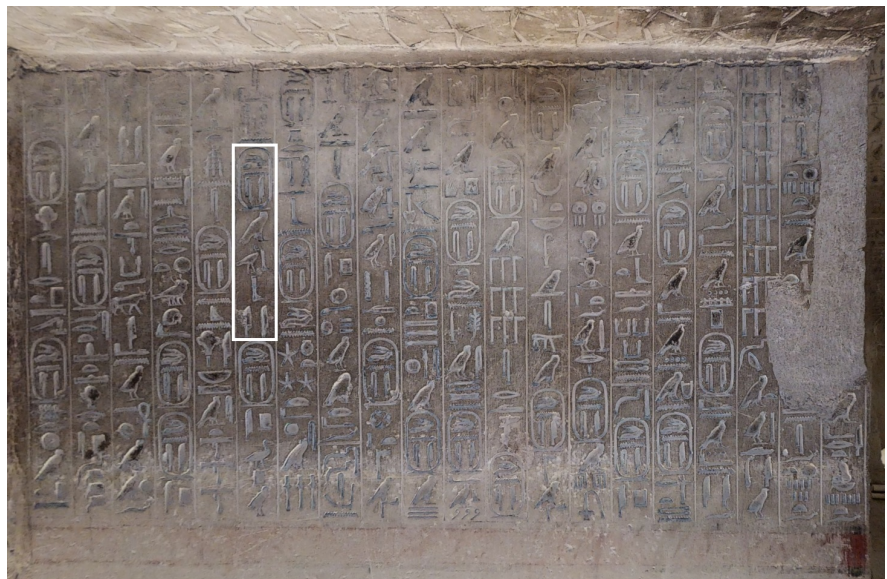
*(He is) your greater, lords! Hide yourselves, subjects, before Unis!*

*Unis is Baboon, lord of the night sky, the bull of baboons, in whose absence one lives.*

*O you (ferryman) with the back of his head behind him, get for Unis (the ladder called) "Salve of Contentment on Osiris's Back", that Unis may go forth on it to the sky and Unis may escort the Sun in the sky.*

#### 4. Discussion

**The accidental lioness symbol is not an accident.** Our investigation began when we noticed what looks like a scribal error imitating what was a no longer used symbol of the lioness Mehit with bent rod inside the pyramid of Unas. Given that the Pyramid Texts demonstrably make use of Heka invocations, we wondered why Mehit was not explicitly mentioned by name, and only through



**Figure 31.** The east wall of the Entry corridor from the north (EE). Framed in white is the phrase “Unas is Babi”, referring to the Full Moon. Screenshot from Virtual Unas, courtesy of Egypt Exploration Society at <https://www.ees.ac.uk/burial-chamber-of-unas-saqqara>.

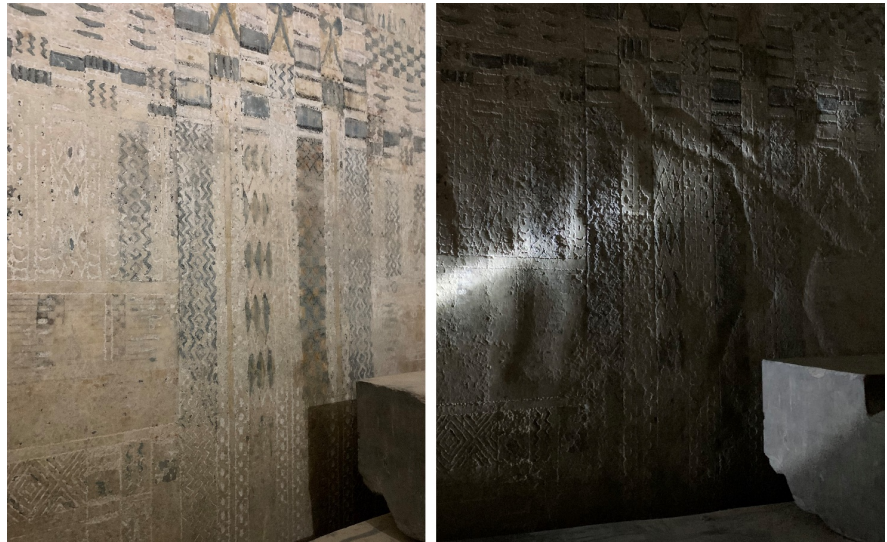
veiled reference, even though the Heka-Mehit title was prominently displayed by high officials of the early Old Kingdom as a mark of royal scribal and archival distinction. The lioness with bent rod icon was a bureaucratic brand mark that distinguished the early royal administration established by Horus-Narmer. Its iconography was carried forward to the time of Khafre almost five centuries later, when it disappears with the scribe Mery (Seyfzadeh, 2021: pp. 192-198).

Our initial break-through came when we also identified several candidates for veiled references to not only Mehit, but also the Great Sphinx. These references cluster on two walls inside the Sarcophagus Chamber (SCGW and SCN2), and on four walls inside the Antechamber (ACW, ACS, ACE, EE). We then applied several criteria to increase the likelihood that what we define as Potentially Veiled References (PVR) may indeed reflect the intent of the composer to obliquely refer to Mehit and the Great Sphinx. The most significant of these is topography, i.e., how the texts are positioned over the surface of the walls to allow symbols not immediately related within the vertically read text columns to enhance the meaning of the text or produce an alternate content. We also looked for PVR clustering, and an overarching theme to explain the need for veiled references, if they are indeed intentional.

**Our method identifies a Heka-embedded subtext thus far undetected.** While our PVR identification method does not prove incontrovertibly that the composer of the Pyramid Texts of Unas sought to convey alternate content not ostensibly revealed with the literal meaning of the words, we note the precedent of veiled content in the hidden images whose contours were embossed into the palace façade ornamented alabaster north and south walls of the Sarcophagus Chamber. These possibly show King Khufu identifiable by his *srh* banner name *hrw mdw*, or a later king from the Fifth Dynasty in a pose typical of the royal hippopotamus hunt (Youssef, 2011: p. 821, Plate 44)—and not visible unless illuminated at the right angle (Figure 32). The significance of another king’s ghost-like appearance inside the pyramid of Unas is unknown, though it may be due to appropriation from another monument and incomplete erasure.

However, our method to identify PVR and reconstruct from them a subtext intentionally embedded in the Pyramid Texts explains some passages that have previously perplexed those who sought to understand the full import of the Pyramid Texts, especially those parts not yet satisfactorily interpreted or seemingly nonsensical. At this point, we want to distinguish such subtext from veiled references to, for example, certain entities like Perception-*sj3* and Utterance-*hw* on one wall (CS), or the many ritualistic food and drink offerings on the SCN, followed by their explicit mention on another (ACW, and immediately below the invocation, respectively).

It is possible that the rules of religious writing demonstrated in its earliest known form in the Pyramid Texts meant that an entity must first be Heka-invoked before it can be explicitly mentioned. It is also possible that certain entities could not be mentioned explicitly in certain places, represented by certain walls of the interior architecture of the pyramid, while in others they could.



**Figure 32.** Veiled image of a figure whose contour was imprinted into alabaster walls of the Sarcophagus Chamber, only visible when illuminated at a sharp angle. This figure, like its counterpart on the north wall appears to show the king, possibly Khufu, during the royal hippopotamus hunt ritual (Youssef, 2011). Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, February 2022.

By contrast, the Heka-invoked subtext we detect is never overtly revealed. It therefore appears as if the composer used the same Heka method, including topographic amplification of textual meaning, to invoke and reveal, but also to invoke and leave behind the veil of insinuation.

Regarding the lion goddess Mehit and the Great Sphinx statue on the ground, for example, we find that they are invoked, but never explicitly mentioned by name inside the Pyramid of Unas—unlike the sky lion Horakhty (ACS, R 173/PT 263) in Robert Bauval’s reconstruction (Schoch & Bauval, 2017: pp. 174-210), and “Double Lion” Ruti *rwjtj*, identified as the first divine couple of creation, Shu and Tefnut on the ACE (R 206/PT 301). In our reconstruction, they are only indirectly circumscribed, or invoked using Heka, i.e., Aker *3kr(w)* on the ACW (R 165/PT 254, R 166/PT 255), and Horemakhet *hrw jm 3ht* on the ACS (R 170/PT 260). This omission is difficult to understand without the benefit of a missing context, given the importance of Mehit’s association with Heka-invocations, and the fact that Unas’ Ka-force travels to the primordial cavern of creation in Zokar’s Rostau (Giza) for its final passage to the sky, a place intimately associated with the Great Sphinx.<sup>19</sup>

**The missing context to explain the subtext arises with the role of Thoth-Moon.** It is therefore understandable, despite what we believe falsifies their proposals, that Egyptologists like Ludwig Borchardt, and researchers like Robert and Olivia Temple have reasoned that the Sphinx head is a Middle Kingdom creation (Temple & Temple, 2009: pp. 166, 168), and that the body may have been a jackal instead of a lion, thereby explaining the absence of any

<sup>19</sup>Mentioned, for example, on the Dream Stele’s 6<sup>th</sup> register.



overt reference to a sphinx in the Pyramid Texts. This absence contrasts with explicit mentions, by name, of the jackals Anubis<sup>20</sup> *jnpw* and “Path-Parter” *wp-w3wt*,<sup>21</sup> within the context of what might reasonably be constructed—in some mentions and absent other evidence to the contrary—as a partly submerged statue resting like an island in its ditch basin, surrounded by enclosure walls (e.g., R 146/PT 213; Temple & Temple, 2009: p. 289)<sup>22</sup>. This context of a jackal statue converted into a sphinx, however, cannot explain the reason for invoking Mehit and the Great Sphinx without explicitly mentioning them in the Pyramid Texts. The clue to this paradox, however, can be gleaned from the role of the Moon in the afterlife journey of the king’s spirit, relative to the ostensible importance of the Sun.

Regarding Thoth-Full Moon, we note that—in a surprising turn of events at the conclusion of the Pyramid Texts—the king discards, by engulfing them, the chief solar power regalia represented by the erect cobras *j’rwt*, and instead becomes the Full Moon represented by Babi *b3bj*, the bull of the baboons *k3 j’nw*. This is a fundamental departure from the commonly understood main theme of the Pyramid Texts, which, on the surface, is about the resurrection of the Heliopolitan creator god Re-Atum *r’ jtm*, the then recently elevated Sun god of the Old Kingdom.

Another passage suggests that Thoth-New Moon, likewise, overpowers the Sun in what can only be a solar eclipse, a rare celestial spectacle when the Moon, at conjunction with the Sun, happens to blot out the disc of the Sun from the perspective of observers located in that zone on Earth covered by the lunar shadow. This passage is unique to the Pyramid Texts of Unas and Teti, besides one other instance in the Middle Kingdom. It encompasses the first 13 columns on the ACGE, the opening lines of the so-called “Cannibal Hymn”, R 180a/PT 273. The key themes of this passage are the sky- and Earth-shaking appearance of Unas who lives from his forefathers and foremothers and who consumes the Heka magic of the gods from the “Island of Fire”, being judged by an invisible judge “Amun” *jmn*. The suggestion here is that the Island of Fire describes the appearance of the eclipse during which the normally invisible New Moon can be seen to “engulf” the Sun.

Historically, this unusual side-stepping away from the Sun cult near the end of the texts aligns with the rise of the Osirian cult and the gradual decline of the Sun cult as the Old Kingdom came to an end. This is demonstrated by the fact that Sun Temples were no longer built beginning with Unas’ predecessor Djedkare-Isesi, in whose pyramid the eastern *serdab* also first appears. This decline of the Sun cult paralleled a general decline of royal power in favor of the private elite, initially those near the royals, but later even those of the provinces. We

<sup>20</sup>Recitations 54 (PT 80), 135 (PT 224), 146 (PT 213), 150 (PT 217), 209 (PT 304).

<sup>21</sup>Recitations 143 (PT 210), 206 (PT 301), 207 (PT 302).

<sup>22</sup>In support of an original Anubis statue instead of a lion, Temple and Temple also cite the Book of Caverns, and various Coffin Texts such as CT 33, 35, 255, 292, 335, 336, 551, and 1185 (Temple & Temple, 2009: pp. 298-300, 306-307).

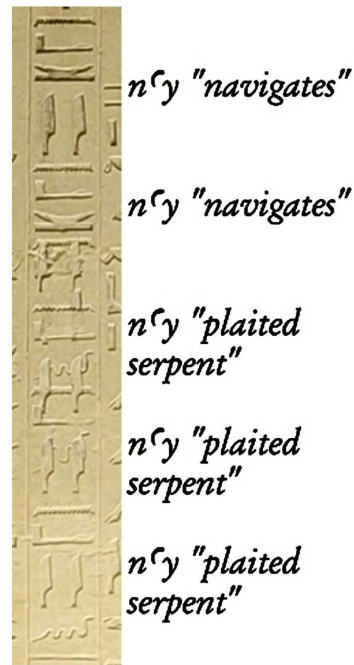
consider that this may have been the predicate for the subtext we detect in the Pyramid Texts reflecting this very trend, but there seems to be an even more sinister motivation explaining the cryptic nature of its composition without an overt revelation.

While the ostensible theme may be about the day cult of the Sun, the veiled subtext of the Pyramid Texts, in our final analysis, is about memorializing and paying homage to a night cult that featured two major gods of ancient Egypt: Mehit and Thoth, the Moon. In fact, the final passage written on the EE reads like an act of outright sabotage by the composer undermining the massive bulk of the texts that precede it inside the chambers. R 223/PT 318 begins with the phrase: “Unis is Plait-snake, the lead bull” *wnjs pw n'w k3 j.šsm...*”, bringing back once more the plaited serpent *n'w* in the context of this very usurping of the seven cobra-uraei solar insignia and their replacement with the seven neck bones of the mammalian baboon, who represents none other than Thoth-Full Moon in the netherworld. The question remains: why did the composer feel compelled to do this?

**The motivation behind the subtext.** One explanation is that the author of the Pyramid Texts of Unas wanted to make a critical statement and was motivated by disdain. The composer, however, was not at liberty to overtly do so. Quite possibly this person was in a powerful position and could have lost their life for blasphemy. Therefore, this critique had to be embedded into the texts as veiled references and, at times, accentuated using the sarcasm of absurdity. A revealing example of this is the seemingly ridiculous phrase “navigates, navigates, plaited serpent, plaited serpent, plaited serpent” *n'y n'y n'y n'y n'y* written on the antechamber east wall (ACE), also corrected by obliteration and over-writing (Figure 33), and positioned below the phrasing that “the evil deed that has been done”. It is as if the composer wanted to draw attention to the crux of his/her lament by resorting to utter nonsense to not get caught by lampooning the braided beard.

What we propose here is that the Pyramid Texts of Unas were not merely intended to be read solely by the resurrecting soul of the deceased King Unas, but that the composer ultimately hoped that they would be read by posterity, i.e., by those who would eventually breach this pyramid and read the texts. This desire to memorialize the expunged night cult of Mehit and the defiling of her monument may explain why the texts were for the very first time carved into the walls of the chambers, rather than written on perishable papyrus to be placed with the king's mummy.

Using the Pyramid Texts made solely for the king to send a message to those who might one day intrude the sanctuary of the deceased king implies foreknowledge of previous such intrusions by tomb robbers and vandals into older royal cemeteries, a practice which appears to have become widespread by the time of Unas. However, this may also explain the complete absence of any trace of the tomb's blocking stones, beside stone robbing. It is even possible that the entry was never sealed.



**Figure 33.** Column 4 of the ACE from R 187/PT 281 containing the repetitive phrase  $n'\gamma$   $n'\gamma n'\gamma n'\gamma n'\gamma$ . Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, February 2022.

In the subtext of the Pyramid Texts, we detect the ripples of a desecration that occurred more than a century before Unas lived. This emphasizes the perceived affront to some in powerful positions, of a royal act that violated a long-held aspect of Egyptian culture: preservation of traditions and older beliefs by assimilation and nesting into newer beliefs instead of erasure and expungement. We detect footprints of the disdain triggered by this act in the avoidance to directly mention Mehit and the Great Sphinx, both lion gods, and in the rebellious nature by which the solar theme of the Pyramid Texts is subverted by the older Moon cult of Thoth and Babi at the conclusion. Babi, for instance was a known commoner's name used at the time of Khufu (Kuhlmann, 2005: pp. 244, 248). One way to test our hypothesis that the Moon-cult was side-lined is to look for occurrences of this name after Khafre. We predict that it may no longer have been used.

What may have motivated the composer to use a subtext critical of the prevailing Sun and Sphinx cult of the Fourth and Fifth Dynasty revolves around a pivotal element of the Pyramid Texts mentioned at the very beginning on the SCGW, on the ACE, and near the conclusion on the EE: The plaited serpent  $n'\omega$ . The take-away from our analysis is that this entity, and what it represents, is the key element to explain the composer's disgruntled protest and disdain, and the reason for creating a subtext critical of the Sun and Sphinx cult of the time.

**Protest and retaliation by the baboon.** In our reconstruction, the plaited serpent is a veiled reference to the curved and braided beard of divinity. We argue that the composer's disdain stemmed from the presumptiveness of the self-proclaimed god kings of the Fourth and Fifth Dynasties who, beginning with

Djedefre, referred to themselves as sons of  $R^c$ . Our model explains the apparent absence of any direct mention of the Great Sphinx in the Old Kingdom since its presumed creation under Khafre, combined with the disappearance of any mention of Mehit, also under Khafre: The new Sphinx statue and its older lioness precursor were taboo. This can now be explained with a specific insult possibly perceived by some members of the powerful clergy, officials at the royal court, or within the ranks of the king's family: a defilement of an older night cult by physical disfiguring its icon, and then expunging this older cult from the records. Such an act would be in violation of the tradition of nesting, in which older cults were incorporated, rather than expunged.

This defilement, we propose, was the carving of a divine beard onto the face of the king, fashioned out of the head and neck of an older lioness statue, the statue of the lion goddess Mehit. This may have been an affront to some in the priesthood who still revered the icons of an older night cult of their ancestors to whom this symbol of divinity on the likeness of a mortal, even if royal, would have been a sacrilege.

The remodeling of the Mehit statue into a sphinx included the nemes headdress. We propose that this was meant to represent a stylized hooded cobra neck with tail. The act of swallowing the seven uraei and instead growing the seven neck bones of a primate ruler of the night at the end of the Pyramid Texts could symbolize the tacit and veiled rejection of this act of desecration. The ardor of the silent protest and retaliation implied by this textually invoked replacement of the cobra's neck with that of a baboon may still be sensed today by some. To wit, one of us (R. N.) has felt compelled to call the expungement and conversion of the Moon-lioness into a Sun-sphinx the most profound identity theft in history. Since both the hood of the cobra and the face and neck folds of a baboon may be represented by the nemes headdress seen on the Great Sphinx, this retaliatory conversion back from sphinx to baboon, simulated by the concluding Pyramid Text passage on the EE, may restore for us the missing context to explain the subtext we detect and the composer's motivation for embedding it inside the Pyramid Texts. In other words, this passage could be interpreted as Thoth-baboon slipping on the nemes headdress of the Great Sphinx to avenge the prior desecration of the lioness statue.

In effect, the protest targets the insult perpetrated by Khafre, or another king of his time, in "bearding" the colossal lioness of Giza. He defiled a venerated ancient monument by remodeling her head into his likeness, and by adorning it with the divine braided beard. He thus elevated himself from a mere mortal Earth king and divine representative to a living god incarnate. He replaced a long-established Moon cult with a new sphinx cult of the Sun. Rather than merging old with new, any mention and memory of Mehit became taboo and was extinguished.

This desecration would have been a dramatic and abrupt transformation in the ideology of kingship that had been honored and revered from at least the early Third Dynasty. The ripples of camouflaged disdain and protest of it appear



inscribed into the walls of Unas pyramid tomb 150 years later as the sarcasm of absurdity of some of the passages that are part of the oldest known religious writings from the Old Kingdom.

The priesthood and scribal classes would have been the most uprooted by this new theological landscape devoid of its traditional roots, erased together with their ancient icon that was remodeled into the Great Sphinx. Yet, they would not have been able to rebel and express their discontent openly. Even though priests and scribes authored and safe-guarded the royal archives, they were likely not at liberty to make them accessible to all but the royal house. Rather, it is in omissions and veiled messages where we may find these historians' true expression of discontent. For example, only one vaguely written reference from the New Kingdom on the Dream Stele of Thutmose IV (dated to circa 1400 B.C.) connects Khafre with the Sphinx. During the intervening twelve hundred years between Khafre and Thutmose IV, no known record was created that unequivocally referred to the Great Sphinx. One way to explain this extraordinary silence of the ancient Egyptians about their greatest statue is that it was indeed taboo and shunned. Despite its grandeur, the Sphinx statue and temple complex was never completed. "It is clear they simply stopped work shortly after Khafre's death to turn their attention to the monuments planned for his successor, Menkaure" (Hawass & Lehner, 1994: p. 38).

**The sacrilege of the divine beard and the plaited serpent.** The divine braided beard is pivotal to this discussion (Figure 34). The premise that Khafre, or whoever's face is shown on the Great Sphinx, presented himself as a living god may be extraordinary enough for some Egyptologists to have concluded that the beard must have been added later, or that the statue was originally conceived as a sun god, and not the king. For example, the fragments of a long, braided, and curled beard that Caviglia found at the base of the Sphinx's chest were central to Ricke's argument that the Sphinx was conceived as a sun god, as opposed to depicting a king in the profane role as a cemetery guardian (Ricke, 1970: p. 33). He argued that the pieces of the beard are the same limestone as the natural rock of the Sphinx body, that there are no flat surfaces or seams to indicate that the beard was later attached to the statue, and that it would not have been technically feasible anyways to attach a 5 - 6-meter beard to the statue after it was carved. In other words, there is no evidence that the beard is a later modification (see also Lehner, 1991: p. 364).

The fact that the extant beard fragments seem less eroded than the body of the Sphinx and enclosure can be explained by the fact that the rock from which it was carved is the same as that of the head and neck of the monument, i.e., the harder Upper Member, and that the beard may have broken off early on and been protected from weathering by the inevitable sand build-up that ended up covering most of the Sphinx. To wit, the face of the Great Sphinx, likewise, shows little erosion from weathering. While the reliefs shown on the side of the beard stylistically appear to date to the New Kingdom, they may represent later modifications to the original feature made in the Old Kingdom.



**Figure 34.** Reconstruction of the divine beard of the Great Sphinx from discovered fragments of Upper Member Mokattam limestone layers making up part of the Giza Plateau. Photos of fragments A, B (upper right), and D (upper left) are shown. Lower right, image showing the rock beds of the Upper (Gauri designation 7a-8d), and part of the Middle (Gauri designation 3ii-6ii) Member of the Mokattam limestone formation as a visual guide to identify the *Operculina* fossil-containing beds from which the Sphinx neck and beard were carved. Indicated in red is the limit, between beds 6ii and 7a, below which the reconstructed beard would not have extended. Upper left image, © The Trustees of the British Museum, Asset number 396590001, (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0), URL: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/396590001>. Upper right image, the Museum of Egyptian Antiquities, Cairo, Egypt, February 2022. Illustration and photo below by Lehner 1991: Figure 9.7 and Plate 5.3; both modified.

Therefore, the divine mark on the Great Sphinx, its *dw3 wr* that is, was an original feature of its facial sculpting. If the face is that of Khafre, or another king or queen, the conclusion is that the statue presents Khafre as a living god since he was still alive when the head was carved. This self-proclamation of living divinity appears to be without precedent in the Old Kingdom. We agree with Ricke and Lehner that the plaited and curled beard appears to be original to the carving of the head of the Sphinx—re-carved in our reconstruction, however, from the head and neck of a prior lioness statue representing the goddess Mehit.

Discussing the lower fragments (A and B) of the Sphinx beard (**Figure 34**), Lehner observes: “The stone is very similar to that of bed 7a, the lowest layer of Member III in the natural rock of the Sphinx. Thus, it appears to contain many operculina, the tiny spiral fossil that is abundant in this bed” (Lehner, 1991: p. 366).<sup>23</sup> Member III is the uppermost layer of the Mokattam formation as it courses through Giza. Among the few remnants of it are the head and neck of the Great Sphinx.

We propose that the impact of the Khafre’s image as a living god in the form of a giant lion statue was significant, even long after the Fourth Dynasty came to its end. So significant a break from tradition was this image that the composers of the Pyramid Text may have felt prompted to obliquely mention it by referring to its divine beard icon as the plaited serpent. In other words, our evidence suggests that the plaited serpent in the Pyramid Texts is the composer’s chosen cryptic representation of the divine beard. This device was chosen, we argue, to lament the desecration and still be able to escape prosecution.

In summary, we have presented evidence here that leads us to propose that a subtext exists within the Pyramid texts, which has escaped previous translations. Understandably, it would escape anyone who assumed the Sphinx was an original creation by Khafre, or another king of the Old Kingdom. The model of a conspiracy by the composer of the Pyramid Texts to sabotage a textual ritual meant to help the king resurrect in the afterlife is one way to explain the veiled references we have observed. By avoiding explicit mentions of Mehit, the Great Sphinx, its environs, and the beard of divinity, and instead referring to these using Heka, textual topography, and a cryptically crafted subtext, the composer would have been able to maintain plausible deniability, avoid the charge of blasphemy, and be held harmless during their lifetime. If the ultimate intent was to memorialize an old belief system and decry the sacrilege of its expungement without being caught doing it, then the author(s) may indeed have succeeded for more than four thousand years after they lived. Our findings compel the question: Were the Pyramid Texts meant to be nothing but afterlife instructions for the lone deceased King Unas entombed in his pyramid, or were they intended for an audience of the living, alive perhaps long after they were written, as a hidden record of an otherwise expunged history?

**The suspect who conspired to sabotage the Pyramid Texts.** Finally, we asked ourselves if a conspiracy-minded composer plotting to sabotage the Pyramid Texts with a veiled subtext recording otherwise expunged history would leave his hidden signature somewhere on the walls of Unas’ Pyramid’s interior. To that end, we initially looked to the ten occurrences of bungled Unas-cartouches (see Initial Observations above). One especially drew our attention because it shows the profile of a head, Gardiner D1 (**Figure 35**, right pane), pronounced [tp] or [dp]. It is near the bottom of the last, easternmost column (43) of the ACS, part of the curious phrase *nj wnjs pn dpj ntrw tjh tjh*, “... this

<sup>23</sup>The reference is to fossils of *Operculina ammonoides*, a planispiral large benthic foraminifera.



**Figure 35.** Left, first column of the ACGE, framed in white, spelling the word *ḥy* for “obscured” in the opening line of R 180a/PT 273 (Cannibal Hymn) “The sky has grown cloudy, the stars obscured.” On the right is the bottom of the last column (43) of the ACS showing the ninth instance of ten total, in our count, of a misspelled, or bungled Unas-cartouche with the head profile Gardiner D1, the folded cloth Gardiner S29 inside. The entire phrase shown reads [*nj wnjs pj*] *tpj nṯrw tḥj tḥj*, “[Unas is not] at the head of the gods of disturbance”, with which R 179/PT 272 ends of the ACS. The two phrases are contiguous in the sequence of the Pyramid Texts. The cartouche in this case is superfluous and has no meaning. Pyramid of Unas, Saqqara, Egypt, February 2022.

Unas is not at the head of the gods of disturbance” (Allen, 2005: p. 50). This is the same column at the top of which is written the word for (lion-)portal, *ṯrwt*, in the upper southeast corner of the ACS where the sequence of the Pyramid Texts takes the reader to the ACGE, on which the Cannibal Hymn begins with R 180s/PT 273 (see Investigative Approach above, 2) Topography).

What is interesting about this ostensible Unas-cartouche error at the end of the ACS is that the cartouche is superfluous, since another with the correct name of Unas is written just above it. However, *dps*, or *tps* did not appear to amount to a known name. The phrase “at the head of the gods of disturbance”, on the other hand, could be a pointer to guide the reader to the gable above (ACGE),



and to its southernmost, first column, where R 180a/PT 273 commences (Figure 35, left pane). The phrase *dpj ntrw tjh tjh* could thus be a clue that amounts to “[look] atop [where are] the gods of disturbance”.

This connection is confirmed with the first line of the Cannibal Hymn written into the first column of the ACGE, “The sky has grown cloudy, the stars obscured;” *gp pt jhy sb3w* (Figure 35, left pane; Allen, 2005: p. 50). Indeed, R180a/PT 273 goes on to describe a disturbance of the sky and Earth, culminating in what we interpret to be a solar eclipse, as mentioned earlier in this discussion. The key word in this opening salvo is *jhy* literally “darkened”, “Systrum<sup>24</sup> player”, and, significantly, a code name for both the god of chaos and evil Seth, and the snake monster of the netherworld Apep underscoring the idea of a disturbance (Vygyus, 2015: p. 1159). But *tjh tjh* is also phonetic invocation of *tjh* for *thj* “plummet” and Thoth, a further confirmation that it is the Moon that is being alluded to as the cause of the disturbance we believe was the experience of a solar eclipse, i.e., the Moon’s encroaching of the Sun disk.

Surprisingly, *Ihy/jhy* [ay-hee] was also the name of Unas’ vizier, a powerful man with multiple titles that included the Overseer of the royal Scribes *jmj r’ zš’ nswt*—the descendant title of the *mdh zš’ nswt* title associated with Mehit and phased out by the time of Mery under Khafre—and the Overseer of all royal works *jmj r’ k3t nbt nt nswt* (Strudwick, 1985: p. 63). He was to Unas, what Hemunu was to Khufu. He likely oversaw both the composing and arranging of the Pyramid Texts for his king, and the entire pyramid building project.

Ihy was also the *hrj tp nswt*, the “Chamberlain of the royal House”, literally the “Under-the-royal-Head”. The placement of this cartouche containing a head on the bottom of the 43<sup>rd</sup> column of the ACS, followed by the word *Ihy* in the first column of the ACGE high above, could not be a better textual and topographic admission of, and signature under *Ihy*’s usurping of Unas’ final passage rite to further his ulterior motive. *Ihy* was buried nearby the pyramid of Unas. In an ironic twist of fate and unusual case of an intrusive burial by a contemporary, his grave was usurped by Unas’ daughter Sesheshet Idut for reasons unknown (Strudwick, 1985: p. 63).

We therefore suggest that it was Unas’ vizier *Ihy* who perpetrated the conspiracy to subvert the Pyramid Texts with a veiled subtext to record the true history of the origin of the Great Sphinx, the cults of Thoth-Moon and the lioness Mehit, the desecration of her statue at Giza, and the expungement of her cult by a mortal royal of the Fourth Dynasty, who wanted to be worshiped as a living god.

## 5. Conclusion

The Pyramid Texts of Unas ritually guide the dead king through the afterlife and into the sky, but there may be deeper layers of meaning hiding behind these textually simulated rituals. Here, we have presented evidence for one such subtext.

<sup>24</sup>A systrum was a percussive instrument that had a ritually calming effect.

It reveals the author's disdain, even repudiation, of the entire the royal claim to divinity during life emerging during the Fourth Dynasty, as it relates to the Sun gods and their monumental image on the ground at Giza, the Great Sphinx. We conclude that over a century after the fact, veiled references point to an older lioness statue predating the Great Sphinx in the world's oldest known religious writings, thanks to a vigilant priest and composer. We finally have a model to explain the perplexing absence of explicit and overt references to the most famous statue in the world for over a thousand years after we are told she was made: She was remade, and the remake was offensive to the ones who deliberately left us with a historical record, albeit in cryptic format, hoping the knowledge would survive to posterity and set the record straight. Perhaps, this message encapsulated by the Pyramid Texts of Unas has, at last, been read over 4000 years later.

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### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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## Appendix

**Transcription.** As an aid to those readers not familiar with the extended Latin consonant set used by Egyptologists, we list here the European convention commonly used to represent the sound values of Egyptian hieroglyphs:

- ʒ: As the “uh” in umbrella
- ʃ: As the “aw” in awning
- b: Boat
- d: Day
- ɟ: Jim
- f: Firmament
- g: Gate
- h: Hot
- ħ: Try to say “shoe” while making a smile.
- ɦ: A snoring sound
- j: Substitutes for any vowel, though usually pronounced “eye”
- k: Calendar
- m: Moon
- n: Night
- p: Pendulum
- q: Try to say “go” with your mouth wider open.
- r: Ray
- s: Solar
- š: Shine
- t: Tilt
- ʈ: Thunder
- w: Woo
- y: Yonder
- z: Zodiac with a lisp