



BET KHALLAF, MASTABAS K1-K6

Known name: K, mastabas, Bet Khallaf.

Arabic name: Bet Khallaf.

G-R name of the site: Thinis?

Geographical information of the site:

The site of these monuments is on map (1:100 000) SOHAG sheet 40/66 of 1937.

Their coordinates, on the UTM kilometer grid are 402 N, 693 E (=26° 17' N 31° 47' E). The course of the Nile at this area between the towns of Bardis and Awlad Hamza flows NW for a distance of 23 km. The monuments are located 13 km to the west of the city of Girga which is also the shortest distance to the river and 20 km south of Abydos in the western desert near the cultivation at the village of Bet Khallaf. On the opposite side of the river at the edge of the eastern Desert are the sites of Nag ed Deir and Nag el Mashaikh.

History of exploration, dates

In Egyptological literature the monuments at Bet Khallaf have been repeatedly mentioned for the importance of the written material, stone vessels and mud brick architecture; the latter receiving the least attention. It was investigated by John Garstang from January to May 1901 and published in 1903. There is little doubt about the dating to the 3rd Dynasty. Bernard Bothmer visited the site of Nag el Mashaikh on the opposite side of the river, on Feb. 15 1950. In his diary, he reported a cemetery similar to Nag ed Deir 7000, below rock cut tombs and a brick structure similar to mastaba K1 at Bet Khallaf, which measures 8x6x8 meters.

Body of the subject

Six tombs K1-K6 yielded material with the names of kings Peribesen, Sadjeser, Sanakht and Netjeryket. The name of the latter appears in K1-K5 while the name of Peribsen and Sanakht appear in K1 and K2 respectively, and sadjeser in k3. The tombs K1 and K2 are at a distance of 300 meres from each other; a little wadi runs across that distance. The edge of the cultivation is at a distance of a little less than 2 km. K1 can be seen from all directions as far as the eastern side of the valley.

i- Mastaba K1.

This brick monument measures 85X45X8 m with the longer axis bearing 16° west of true north. The north side of the mastaba is covered by a mound of rubble. The other sides of the monument are fairly clear. Some destruction can be seen on the southern and western sides, through it one can see that the brickwork was containing a tumulus of desert gravel set in mortar. The rounded form of this tumulus was not noticed by Garstang, nevertheless he mentions that the mastaba was filled with desert gravel mixed with large stones.

The substructure of mastaba K1 is reached by a stairway passing through the superstructure into the desert gravel below it. A mud brick barrel roof was built to support the tunnel roof. The steps of the stairway were built of mud bricks. The stairway starts from the top mastaba in north direction which turns to the west then to the south; the average width of the corridor is 2 m. The latter portion starts at desert level and descends at an angle of 30° to a depth of twenty seven meters below the summit of the mastaba. The stairs are interrupted at five places by large stone portcullis' ranging in weight from eight to thirteen tons. This stairway contained hundreds of stone vessels (models and functional) set in mud with a brick covering which concealed the upper part of the corridor. At the end of this incline stairway the corridor becomes horizontal with 18 chambers branching out of it. The burial chamber walls were lined with large stones carefully dressed and the roof was worked in the gravel to give the shape of a dome. It contained skeletal remains of a man, sacks of grain, wine jars, stone vessels and other contemporary offerings which seemed to have been disturbed in Roman times. The famous impression with the name of the mother of king of upper and lower Egypt Nymaathap came from this chamber. The fact that the skeletal remains belong to a man exclude the possibility of this tomb belonging to Nymaathap; and the question of the ownership of this great tomb remains unanswered.

ii Mastaba K2

This is the second largest of the “K” mastabas the superstructure is not as well preserved as K1. It was built on a mud brick pavement having the same orientation of k-1. It measures 64.9X23.6 m. At the southern side are two walls which could have retained a ramp. The nucleus of this mastaba differs from the tumulus of K1 by being composed of a stepped mud brick structure; similar to Mastaba 17 at Meidum, except that this mastaba #17 was composed of a stepped nucleus of embankment walls of stone chipping with a rubble filling and cased with a thick facing of bricks.

In mastaba K2, 2 stairways lead to independent substructures. The northern is the smaller and more simple, with the same layout as K1, the stairway descends towards the north, west and south at a steep angle of 51° to a depth of 11.5 m. At the end of the slope a portcullis which had never been lowered is still suspended. a horizontal corridor with 2 easterly chambers branch off this corridor. The southern is the more sophisticated, unfortunately the upper part of the stairway is not preserved because of the destruction of the superstructure, the portion descending towards the west and south are preserved and the latter descended at an angle of 41° to the same depth of 11.5 m, with 2 portcullises, one halfway and the other at the end. This corridor was built in a trench open to the sky and roofed by a brick vaulting. A horizontal corridor with 8 compartments. The largest branches off in a westerly direction and contained a decayed wooden coffin with bones of a man who was 1.86 m tall.

iii Mastabas K3-K6

Mastabas K3 and K4 are east of K1 close to each other, K5 is located east of them and much closer to the cultivation, K6 which appears on Garstang's map is east of and closer to K2.

K3-5 are of the brick stairway descending corridors at angles 35° and 45° with one portcullis at the beginning of a horizontal passage with the chambers branching off on both sides, the burial chambers however are on the west side. Of these K5 is the most sophisticated and nothing is mentioned about K6.

Bibliography

Garstang J, *Mahasna and Bet Khallaf* (London 1903)3-4, 8-14, pl., ii, vi-xviii.

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Reisner G, *The development of the Egyptian tomb down to the accession of Cheops*, (Cambridge Mass. 1936)172-175.