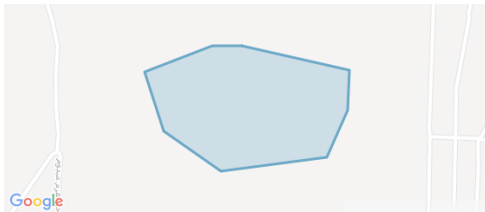


Tomb of Nefermaat and Itet (Meidum 16)

By Morgan Moroney, Johns Hopkins

Entry tags: Tomb, African Religions, Religious Group, Ancient Egyptian Religion, Egyptian Religions, Religious Place

In the desert necropolis of Meidun sits the large early Old Kingdom mudbrick mastaba of prince Nefermaat and his wife Itet. Nefermaat was the son of a king, probably Sneferu, the first king of the Fourth Dynasty, while Itet's familial origins are unknown. Meidum is located near the Fayum Oasis in northern Middle Egypt, about 100 km south of Cairo. The site includes several other Old Kingdom mastabas, and the remains of the Meidum pyramid, which was probably built by Sneferu. Nefermaat's and Itet's mastaba is situated less than 1 km north of the Meidum pyramid. Their monument included two stone-lined niche chapels, one designated to each of the deceased, and likewise two burial shafts. The chapels' decorations demonstrate a significant development in the expansion of scene types featured in elite Egyptian tombs. These include some of the earliest outdoor scene types, and images of family members and other individuals participating in rituals and other activities.



Date Range: 2613 BCE - 2589 BCE

Region: Tomb of Nefermaat and Itet (Meidum 16)

Region tags: Africa, Northern Africa, Egypt, Meidum

The location of the tomb of Nefermaat and Itet in the cemetery of Meidum, Egypt.

Status of Participants:

✓ Elite

General Variables

Sources and Excavations

Print Sources

Print sources used for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Mariette, A. *Les Mastabas de l'Ancien Empire. Fragment du dernier ouvrage.* F. Vieweg, Libraire-Éditeur. Paris, 1889.
- Source 2: Petrie, W. M. Flinders. *Medum.* London, 1892.
- Source 3: Harpur, Y. *The Tombs of Nefermaat and Rahotep at Maidum: Discovery, Destruction and Reconstruction.* Egyptian Tombs of the Old Kingdom, Vol. 1, Oxford, 2001.
- Source 1: Petrie, W.M. Flinders, Ernest Mackay, and Gerald Wainwright. *Meydum and Memphis (III).* BSAE 18. London, 1910.
- Source 2: Petrie, W.M. Flinders, Ernest Mackay, and Gerald Wainwright. *The Labyrinth, Gerzeh and Mazghuneh.* BSAE XXI. London, 1912.
- Source 1: Rowe, A. "A Treasure from Meydum covering 35 centuries." *ILN* (April 9, 1932), 536-9.

- Source 2: Rowe, A. "New Light on Egypt about 3000 B.C. Important discoveries among Fourth Dynasty mastabas near Meydum pyarmid: a prince's tomb; and records of a unique wooden coffin." ILN (November 7, 1931), 740-742.
- Source 3: Smith, W. S. "The paintings of the chapel of Atet at Medum." JEA 23 (1937), 17-26.
- Source 1: el-Khouli, A. Meidum. Reports 3. Edited by G. T. Martin. The Australian Centre for Egyptology: Sydney, 1991.

Online Sources

Online sources used for understanding this subject:

- Source 1 URL: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums-static/digitalegypt/meydum/nefermaat/index.html>
- Source 1 Description: UCL entry on the tomb of Nefermaat and Itet.
- Source 2 URL: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544531?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=nefermaat&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=1>
- Source 2 Description: Entry on tomb paintings from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Source 3 URL: <https://oi-idb.uchicago.edu/id/12ce5b64-f942-44ef-84c6-79fceed2e0aa>
- Source 3 Description: Information from the Oriental Institute in Chicago.
- Source 1 URL: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA69015
- Source 1 Description: Tomb painting fragment from Itet's chapel. (EA69015)
- Source 2 URL: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA69014
- Source 2 Description: Tomb painting fragment from Itet's chapel. (EA69014)
- Source 3 URL: <https://www.penn.museum/collections/object/158631>
- Source 3 Description: Fragment from the tomb of Nefermaat. (E641)
- Source 1 URL: <https://www.penn.museum/collections/object/495179>
- Source 1 Description: Wall fragments from Itet's chapel. (E16141.1; E16141.3; E16141.4; E16141.7)
- Source 2 URL: <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010010054>
- Source 2 Description: Scene from Nefermaat's chapel.

Has this place been the focus of excavation (pre-modern, illicit, or scientific):

Answer 'Yes' for each period or type of excavation.

– Yes



Type of excavation:

– Scientific

Notes: A team under Mariette cleared the chapels, and Mariette sketched the scenes in both Nefermaat's and Itet's chapel.

Reference: Auguste Mariette Edouard. *Les Mastabas de l'Ancien Empire. Fragment du dernier ouvrage.* Paris: F. Vieweg, Libraire-Éditeur. isbn: 3487059878.

– Scientific



Years of excavation:

– Year range: 1871-1872



Name of excavation

– Official or descriptive name: Excavation of the tomb of Nefermaat and Itet.

– Yes



Type of excavation:

– Scientific

Notes: Petrie and his team cleared the chapels and burials chambers, and meticulously recorded the reliefs and paintings.

Reference: W. Petrie M. Medum. London:



Years of excavation:

– Year range: 1890-1891



Name of excavation

– Official or descriptive name: Excavation of the tomb of Nefermaat and Itet.

– Yes



Type of excavation:

– Scientific

Notes: Rowe and the University of Pennsylvania worked at Meidum. Clearance of the chapel occurred during the excavations, but this tomb was not the focus of work.

Reference: A Rowe. New Light on Egypt about 3000 B.C. Important discoveries among Fourth Dynasty mastabas near Meidum pyramid: a prince's tomb; and records of a unique wooden coffin.



Years of excavation:

– Year range: 1929-1932



Name of excavation

– Official or descriptive name: Excavations at Meidum.

– Yes



Type of excavation:

– Scientific

Notes: After excavation, the workers dismantled and removed the blocks from Nefermaat's and Itet's chapels, as well as those from the nearby mastaba of Rahotep and Nefret. They were shipped to the Cairo Museum, and to museums across the world.

Reference: Petrie , Wainwright , Mackay. The Labyrinth, Gerzeh and Mazghuneh. London: BSAE XXI.

Reference: Petrie , Mackay , Wainwright. Meydum and Memphis (III). London: BSAE.



Years of excavation:

– Year range: 1909-1911



Name of excavation

– Official or descriptive name: Excavation of the tomb of Nefermaat and Itet.

– Yes



Type of excavation:

– Scientific

Notes: Ali el-Khouli led a project mapping and surveying the Meidum necropolis. As part of the project, Edwin Brock recorded the remaining blocks of the mastaba still in situ.

Reference: A el-Khouli undefined. Meidum. Sydney: The Australian Centre for Egyptology.



Years of excavation:

– Year range: 1985-1988



Name of excavation

– Official or descriptive name: Excavation of Meidum.

– Yes

Reference: Ali el-Khouli. Meidum. Sydney: Australian Centre for Egyptology: Reports 3.



Type of excavation:

– Scientific

Notes: The Polish-Egyptian Preservation missionn reconstructed and conserved the mastaba.

↳ Years of excavation:
– Year range: 1986-1988

↳ Name of excavation
– Official or descriptive name: Restoration and conservation of Nefermaat's and Itet's tomb.

Topographical Context

Is the place associated with a feature in the landscape

– Other [specify]: The (man-made) pyramid of Meidum.

Does the place involve human-made features besides structure:

Other features might be ground clearing, terracing, other modifications of the local environment.

– Yes

↳ Type of feature
– Other [specify]: Mastaba Tomb

Is the place situated in an urban or significantly urbanized area:

– No

Is the place situated in a rural setting:

– Yes

↳ Are there settlements in close proximity to the place:
– Yes

↳ Are there routes of travel in close proximity to the place:
– Yes

Is the place situated far removed from non-religious places of habitation:

– No

Structures Present

Are there structures or features present:

Instructions: Answer once for each structure/feature or group that can be differentiated.

– Yes

↳ A single structure

– Yes

↳ The structure has a definite shape

– Rectangular

Notes: The structure is a mudbrick mastaba tomb.

↳ One single feature

– Water channel

↳ A group of structures:

– No

Notes: There were about 18 mastaba tombs preserved at the site, but this is a single mastaba tomb.

↳ A group of features:

– No

↳ Is it part of a larger place/sanctuary:

– Yes

Notes: It is part of the necropolis of Meidum. It is generally associated with the pyramid at Meidum, which probably belonged to Sneferu, and is located less than a kilometer to the south.

↳ What is the function of the structure/feature or group:

Answer "Yes" once for each distinct function

– Memorial

↳ Is the structure/feature finished:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature intended to last beyond a generation:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature modified through time:

– Yes

Notes: Both natural and human forces have affected the state of this tomb.

↳ Was the structure/feature destroyed:

– No

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature intended to last beyond a generation:

– Yes

↳ Was the structure/feature modified through time:

– Yes

Notes: There were architectural changes made to the structure, but this probably happened during Nefermaat's and Itet's lifetime. Other destructive changes also occurred, but when and how is uncertain until modern exploration and excavation.

↳ Was the structure/feature destroyed:

– No

↳ Has the structure/feature been reconstructed:

– Yes

↳ In antiquity

– Once

Notes: The architectural scheme of the tomb changed during the building process, presumably while Nefermaat and Itet were still alive.

↳ In modernity

– Post-Renaissance

Notes: Parts of the structure have been preserved by a Polish-Egyptian mission. Within museum contexts, some of the reliefs have been reconstructed.

Reasons for Creation/Construction/Consecration

Is the place used for the worship of/communication with non-human supernatural beings:

– No

Is the place used for the worship of a semi-divine human being:

– Yes

↳ Is it a cenotaph:

– No

↳ Does it commemorate a family/clan/group:

– Yes

Notes: The tomb celebrates the family of Nefermaat and Itet in its decoration. The Kas (souls) of the deceased were believed to inhabit the space.

Is the place used for the worship of non-divine ancestors:

– No

Was the place commissioned/built by an official political entity:

A political entity is a local power structure that leverages a workforce.

– Yes

↳ Specify

– Private individual

Notes: This tomb was probably built by Nefermaat for him and his family. However, there is no direct evidence that specifies exactly who built, paid for, or designed the tomb and its decorations.

Were the Structures built by specific groups of people:

– Yes

↳ Groups:

– Priests

– Corvee labourers

– Men

– Specialized labourers/craftspeople

– Other [specify]: Although there is no direct evidence preserved regarding exactly who worked on Nefermaat's and Itet's tomb, based on the design of the structure, and the content and skilled execution of the decoration, specialized laborers and craftspeople, as well as priests with religious and ritual knowledge were included. The use of these individuals, as well as corvee labourers, may also be assumed based primarily on the evidence from the slightly later pyramid and tomb workers' village of Heit el-Ghurab at Giza, which dates to the reign of Sneferu's successor Khufu.

Was the place thought to have originated as the result of divine intervention:

– No

Was the place created to mark or commemorate the birthplace of a supernatural or human being:

– No

Was the place created as the result of an event:

– No

Notes: Only if you consider the deaths and burials of Nefermaat and Itet an event.

Was the creation of the place sponsored by an external financial/material donation:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: It is uncertain if Nefermaat paid for the construction of the monument, or if it was a gift from his father.

Was the establishment of the place motivated by:

–Other [specify]: The burial of a royal prince and his family.

Was the place built specifically for housing scriptures/sacred texts:

– No

Design and Material Remains

Overall Structure

Is the place made up of multiple built structures:

– No

Notes: It is a single mastaba with two separate chapels and two separate burial chambers.

Is monumental architecture present:

Monumental architecture is defined here as a built structure that surpasses average human proportions and in general is larger and more complex than is necessary to fulfill the structure's utilitarian function(s). Examples of monumental architecture include Mesopotamian Ziggurats, Egyptian Pyramids, Greek and Roman temples, Mesoamerican Pyramids, North American and Aegean burial mounds, etc.

– Yes



In the average place, what percentage of area is taken up by built monuments:

– I don't know

Notes: This is the largest mastaba at the site of Meidum, and the Meidum pyramid is the only other structure at the site larger than this tomb. There is evidence for about 18 mastabas preserved in the landscape of Meidum, in addition to smaller tombs, and the distribution of the tombs are relatively spread out.

↳ Footprint of largest single religious monument, square meters:

Please add dimensions in the comments, if known.

– Square meters: 8160

Notes: The mastaba was enlarged three times, with a final size of 120 x 68 meters.

↳ Height of largest single religious monument, meters:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The original height of the mastaba is not preserved, but might have been greater than 10 meters.

↳ Size of average monument, square meters:

– I don't know

↳ Height of average monument, meters:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Due to preservation, it is uncertain how tall the structures at the Meidum cemetery originally stood.

Is the structure/feature made out of natural materials:

Answer [Yes] for each material type

– I don't know

Notes: The tomb is built of mudbrick, with limestone lined interior chapels. Limestone, wood, and mudbrick were also utilized in the burial chambers. I am uncertain if these would be considered natural materials.

Is the structure/feature made out of human-made materials

– I don't know

Notes: The tomb is built of mudbrick, with limestone lined interior chapels. Limestone, wood, and mudbrick were also utilized in the burial chambers. I am uncertain if these would be considered natural materials.

Decoration

Is decoration present:

– Yes

↳ Is decoration part of the building (permanent):

– Yes

↳ On the outside:

– Yes

Notes: The exterior of the monument was decorated with a mudbrick niche facade.

↳ On the inside:

– Yes

Notes: Both Nefermaat's and Itet's chapels contained decoration mainly executed in sunken stone relief filled in with colored plaster. A few scenes were also painted, and at least one carved in raised relief. Each chamber includes a false door, each depicting the designated deceased at their offering table. There are also so called "Daily Life" scenes including hunting in the desert and boating in the marshes, as well as rituals and offerings.

↳ Is decoration attached to the building, i.e. movable reliefs or tapestries

– No

Notes: Most of the reliefs have now been removed from the tomb, however, and are in museums worldwide.

↳ Is the decoration figural:

A figural representation is defined here as one that contains the depiction of discernible human, anthropomorphic, animal, or zoomorphic forms. In general, it differentiates between animate and inanimate beings, as well as between narrative compositions and still life, landscapes, abstraction, etc. Answer [Yes] for each type of figure depicted

– Yes

↳ Are there gods depicted:

– No

↳ Are there other supernatural beings depicted:

– No

↳ Are there humans depicted:

– Yes

Notes: Nefermaat, Itet, their children, and other unnamed figures are depicted in tomb.

↳ Are there animals depicted:

– Yes

Notes: A variety of birds, cattle, antelope, oryx, leopards, dogs, and baboons are all included.

↳ Are there animal-human hybrids depicted:

– No

↳ Is the decoration non-figural:

– Yes

Notes: In addition to the figures there are hieroglyphic inscriptions.

↳ Is it geometric/abstract

– No

↳ Floral motifs

– No

↳ Is it writing/caligraphy

– Yes

↳ Other [Specify]

–Other [specify]: There are also animals and natural features creating outdoor settings in the decoration such as the desert and marsh.

↳ Is the decoration hidden or restricted from view:

– Yes

Notes: At some point in antiquity, possibly during Nefermaat's lifetime, a stone blocking was built obstructing much of the chapel to visitors. This was possibly to create a serdab for statues. A stone blocking was also probably constructed in Itet's chapel as well.

↳ Can the decoration be revealed:

– No

↳ Are there statues present:

– No

Notes: There might have originally been statues in the tomb, such as the contemporary statues of Rahotep and Nefret found at Meidum (Tomb 6), however none have ever been identified.

↳ Are there reliefs present:

A relief as opposed to sculpture carved on the round is a work of sculpture in which the figures project from a background support, generally a flat surface. Reliefs can be carved out of stone, clay, or a similar material.

– Yes

↳ Reliefs representing the god(s) worshipped at the place:

– No

↳ Reliefs representing mythological narratives:

– No

↳ Reliefs representing human/historical narratives:

– No

↳ Other [Specify]

–Other [specify]: The reliefs depict funerary rituals, offerings, hunting, fowling, fishing, and family scenes.

↳ Are there paintings present:

– Yes

↳ Are they panel paintings [movable]:

– No

↳ Are they wall paintings:

– Yes

Notes: The few painted segments are poorly preserved and fragmented.

↳ Type

–Other [specify]: tempera relief

↳ Paintings representing the gods worshipped at the place:

– No

↳ Paintings representing mythological narratives:

– No

↳ Paintings representing human/historical narratives:

– No

↳ Other [Specify]

–Other [specify]: Ritual offerings and scenes.

↳ Are there mosaics present:

– No

↳ Are there inscriptions as part of the decoration:

– Yes

↳ Are the inscriptions ornamental:

– I don't know

↳ Are the inscriptions informative/declarative

[e.g. historical narratives, calendars, donor lists etc...]

– Yes

Notes: The hieroglyphic inscriptions include short labels of individuals and actions within scenes. They also name offerings, and signify funerary spells and rituals.

↳ Are the inscription a formal dedication:

– I don't know

Notes: The texts are used to identify the figures, however there is no formal dedication included in the text.

↳ Other [Specify]

–Other [specify]: Most of the inscriptions are labels identifying individuals within the tombs, the names of funerary estates, various activities enacted by individuals, rituals, and offerings.

↳ Other type of decoration:

–Yes [specify]: This tomb includes several artistic techniques, including: sunken relief filled with plaster, medium to high relief, and tempera painting.

Iconography

Are there distinct features in the places iconography:

– Yes

↳ Eyes (stylized or not)

– Yes

↳ Supernatural beings (zoomorphic)

– No

↳ Supernatural beings (geomorphic)

– No

↳ Supernatural beings (anthropomorphic)

– No

↳ Supernatural beings (abstract)

– I don't know

Notes: Nefermaat was a priest of the goddesses Bastet and of Shezmett, so both are named in the tomb but are not depicted.

↳ Portrayals of afterlife

– Yes

↳ Aspects of doctrine (e.g. cross, trinity, Mithraic symbols)

– Yes

Notes: Some of the inscriptions probably refer to spells known from the later Pyramid Texts.

↳ Humans

– Yes

↳ Supernatural narratives

– No

↳ Human narratives

– Yes

Notes: Funerary rituals and scenes of elite humans are depicted.

Beliefs and Practices

Funerary Associations

Is this place a tomb/burial:

– Yes

Notes: This is the tomb of Nefermaat and Itet.

Is this a place for the worship of the dead:

– I don't know

Notes: It is very possible that family members and other individuals came to make offerings for the deceased in this tomb, however there is no preserved evidence for this. Also, Nefermaat and Itet blocked off much of their chapels, further preventing visitors from interacting with much of their decorated chapels.

Is this a place for treatment of the corpse:

– I don't know

Notes: There is no preserved evidence that embalmers worked near or in the tomb, however this does not mean that the body was not prepared on site or nearby. There is simply not enough evidence to know.

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

Co-sacrifices are animal/human sacrifices prompted by the death of the primary occupant of the tomb/burial.

– No

Are grave goods present:

– Yes



Personal effects:

– I don't know

Notes: No grave goods are known.



Valuable/precious items:

– No



Other

– Yes [specify]: Fragments of decorated relief and stone.

Are formal burials present:

– Yes

↳ As cenotaphs:

– No

↳ In cemetery:

– Yes

↳ Family tomb/crypt:

– I don't know

Notes: Nefermaat and Itet each have their own burial chamber. However, none of their children who are depicted in the tomb seem to have been buried here as well.

↳ Domestic context:

Interred beneath floors of house, or in areas of domestic activity

– No

↳ Other

–Other [specify]: The mastaba contained two burial shafts, one for Nefermaat (south shaft) and one for Itet (north shaft).

Supernatural Beings

Is a supreme high god is present:

– No

Does the supreme high god communicate with the living at this place:

– No

Are previously human spirits present:

– Yes

↳ Human spirits can be seen:

– No

↳ Human spirits can be physically felt:

– No

Do human spirits communicate with the living at this place:

– Field doesn't know

Notes: Visitors may have come to present offerings to Nefermaat and Itet in their individual chapels, however there is no preserved evidence of this.

Are nonhuman supernatural beings present:

– Field doesn't know

Do nonhuman spirits communicate with the living at this place:

– Yes

↳ In waking, everyday life:

– No

↳ In dreams:

– No

↳ In trance possession:

– No

↳ Through divination practices:

– No

↳ Only through religious specialists:

– No

↳ Only through monarch:

– No

↳ Other

–Other [specify]: Potentially through rituals and offerings.

Are mixed human-divine beings present:

– No

Do mixed human-divine beings communicate with the living at this place:

– No

Is the supernatural being/high god present in the form of a cult statue(s):

– No

Supernatural Interactions

Is supernatural monitoring present:

– No

Do visitors communicate with the gods or supernatural beings:

– No

Ritual and Performance

Sacrifices, Offerings, and Maintenance

Are sacrifices performed at this place:

– I don't know

Notes: There is no physical evidence of sacrifice--i.e. animal or human bones--however, there are several depictions of animals being slaughtered in the decoration.

Are there self-sacrifices present:

– No

Are material offerings present:

– No

Is attendance to worship/sacrifice mandatory:

– No

Is maintenance of the place performed:

– No

Pilgrimage and Festivals

Are pilgrimages present:

– No

Is this place a venue for feasting:

– No

Are festivals present:

– No

Divination and Healing

Is divination present:

– No

Is healing present/practiced at this place:

– No

Do rituals occur at this place:

Rituals are visibly enacted behaviors by one or more people for the purposes of religious observance.

– I don't know

Notes: It is uncertain if funerary rituals were performed within the space during burial, and if other mortuary rituals occurred after deposition, however it is highly possible.

Institutions and Scriptures

Religious Specialists

Are religious specialists present/in charge of this place:

Religious specialists are individuals who's primary duties within a population group are not concerned with subsistence or craft production but the maintenance of the religious landscape and culture of the group.

– Yes



Present full time

– No



Present part time

– No



Are the religious specialists of specific sex/gender:

– I don't know

Notes: No priest or official is identified through text in the decoration of this tomb, however the individuals performing rituals are male.

↳ Are the religious specialists of specific ethnicity:

– No

↳ Are the religious specialists of specific class/cast:

– Yes

Notes: They were elite members of society.

↳ Are religious specialists dedicated to the place for life:

– No

↳ Are the religious specialists stratified in a hierarchical system:

– I don't know

Does this place incorporate a living space for religious specialists:

– No

Is this place used for the training of religious specialists:

– No

Are there formal institutions for the maintenance of the place:

Institutions that are authorized by the religious community or political leaders

– No

Bureaucracy

Is there a formal bureaucracy present at this place:

A bureaucracy consists of a hierarchical system of accounting and rule maintenance primarily concerned with material wealth.

– No

Does this place control economic resources (land, goods, tools):

– No

Notes: However, in Nefermaat's chamber there is a list of funerary estates which presumably helped pay for the building and/or maintenance of his and Itet's cult.

Public Works

Does this place serve as a location for services to the community:

– No

Writing/Scriptures

Is non-religious writing stored at this place:

Economic documents, records etc.

– No

Are there scriptures associated with this place:

– Yes

↳ Are they written:

– Yes

↳ Are they written at this place:

– Yes

Notes: Some of the text probably refer to spells and rituals, some of which appear in the later Pyramid Texts.

↳ Are they oral:

– Yes

Notes: It is very possible that oral rituals were performed in the space.

↳ Is there a story associated with the origin and/or construction of this place:

– No

↳ Are there religious specialists in charge of interpreting the scriptures:

– No

↳ Are the scriptures part of the building/place:

– Yes

↳ Attached to the structures as decoration:

– Yes

Notes: Hieroglyphic writing on the walls denote spells and rituals, or at least signifiers of performed rituals.

↳ Housed within the place/structure:

– No

↳ As dedicatory inscription(s):

– I don't know

Bibliography

General References

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Reference: W. Petrie M.. Medum. London:

Entry/Answer References

Reference: Auguste Mariette Edouard. Les Mastabas de l'Ancien Empire. Fragment du dernier ouvrage. Paris: F. Vieweg, Libraire-Éditeur. isbn: 3487059878.

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