

The evolution of *shm- i3h* during dynasties I-III

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The aim of this communication is to analyze the evolution of the *shm- i3h* title during the three first dynasties of the history of Egypt and its relationship with other titles from the beginning of the Old Kingdom.

The title *shm- i3h* appears for the first time during the first dynasty in some seals from Saqqara (Tombs: 3503, 3504 and 3506) Abou Roash (Tomb: VI) and Umm el-Qaab (Tombs of Merneith, Den, Qaa, etc.) as well as in some private funerary stelae from Umm el- Qaab from the reign of Den. It is also found in two later stelae from Helwan (II-III dynasties)

I would like to stress that many of these early materials belonged to women (almost half of the stelae from Umm el- Qaab and one of the two stelae from Helwan). It is also outstriking that many of the seals found in Saqqara were found at the subsidiary tombs around Tomb 3503, which actually belonged to a woman: Merneith. Did this fact have a connexion with the creation of more women titles during Den's reign?

As for the functions of the *shm.w - i3h.w* some authors think that they were funerary priests, but why do we find this title with many other titles at the same time? And how can we explain the disappearance of this title at a time when many official titles in mortuary contexts were proliferating? Does the appearance of this early title in the Papyrus of the Ramesseum mean a re-appearance of this kind of elite officials? As W.M.F. Petrie said in 1925,¹ it could not be explained at the moment of the apparition of these early dynastic objects but I hope to suggest some new insights about interpretation, translation and evolution of one of the first titles that appeared in the courtesan environment of the kings of the first dynasties.

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¹“It cannot be explained at present” (Petrie, W.M. F., *The Tombs of the Courtiers*, *BSAE* 37, 1925, p. 3)

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