Headless Men and Shattered Bodies: The Destruction of Prisoner Statues during the Late Old Kingdom

Six pharaohs of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties erected nearly life-size statues of kneeling bound foreigners in their pyramid complexes. These unique statues, which are known as prisoner statues, have only ever been discovered in fragments. This has led scholars to question whether the statues had been intentionally broken for ritualistic reasons. However, only the prisoner statues from two pyramid complexes actually show evidence of intentional damage in antiquity; those from the complex of Pepi I were methodically decapitated while those from the complex of Pepi II were violently smashed apart. In this talk I will explore the ritualized context of this destruction and how its significance developed from one complex to the other.

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