Neferti, the fictitious sage living under King Snefru, not only predicted the advent of a successful ruler—Amenemhat I—who would restore peace and order in the land, but also openly admitted the king’s humble origin. Without mentioning her name, Neferti simply stated that the king’s mother was a woman from the first Upper Egyptian nome (tꜣ-ṣnty).1 Historians are in general agreement concerning Amenemhat I’s descent from that part of Egypt as well his plebeian origin.2 While no contemporary monuments referencing Amenemhat I’s father have survived, the mother, Nefret, is recorded on an offering table discovered in the pyramid precinct of her son at Lisiert-North (figs. 1, 2).3 Despite the recognition by archaeologists4 of its historical implications and repeated mention in scholarly literature since its discovery,5 the object has never received the proper discussion it deserves. It is my great pleasure to dedicate this essay on the offering table to Jack A. Josephson in appreciation for his tremendous connoisseurship in Egyptian art and his abiding friendship.

The offering table was found in secondary position in one of the houses of the later settlement period (Second Intermediate Period or New Kingdom) at the southwest corner of Amenemhat I’s pyramid.6 Because of the altar’s later reuse, the surface shows considerable wear in certain parts. The upper-left corner is lost, and on the left side, heavy abrasion obscures the line of text. Numerous holes and grooves in the limestone indicate that the piece was exposed to water or was used for holding liquids for a considerable period of time. The overall current condition of the object is

1 W. Helck, Die Prophетеиzung des Nfr.tj (Wiesbaden, 1970), 49, XIIlb; W. K. Simpson, ed., The Literature of Ancient Egypt (New Haven and London, 1972), 239. The text goes on to say of Amenemhat I that “he is a child of Khen-Nekhen” (i.e., Upper Egypt). Consequently, a supposed Nubian origin, absent the king’s mummy, remains doubtful, since neither the peculiar facial features noted in Amenemhat I’s reliefs—see H. Junker, “The First Appearance of the Negroes in History,” JEA 7 (1921), 124 n. 2—not his mother’s origin necessarily allow us to infer African roots. See G. Posener, Littérature et politique dans l’Égypte de la XIIe dynastie (Paris, 1956), 47f.; T. Säve-Söderbergh, Ägypten und Nubien: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte altägyptischer Aussenpolitik (Lund, 1941), 64; L.M. Berman, Amenemhat I (PhD diss., Yale University, 1985), 10.


3 I thank Dr. Dorothea Arnold, Lila Acheson Wallace Chairman, Department of Egyptian Art of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, for very kindly giving me permission to publish this piece and to make extensive use of the Department’s archive. My thanks are also due to Liza Majerus, who skillfully prepared the line drawing (fig. 2), and Bill Garret, for his professionally produced photographs (figs. 1, 3-4). For corrections of the English text, I am indebted to Elizabeth Powers.

4 A.C. Mace, “Excavations at Lisht,” BMMA 17, no. 12 (Dec. 1922), pt. II, 12, fig. 11.


6 This was during the Museum’s last (7th) season at Lisht-North (1921-22). See Mace, “Excavations at Lisht,” 4-18. The exact findspot of the piece was not recorded, and the tomb cards reveal only “radim, S.W. corner of Pyramid.” The archaeological map of that area shows a dense cluster of small mud-brick buildings and compounds completely covering the area between the pyramid’s southwest corner and the mastaba of Rehuerdjersen. As to the houses and different settlement layers at the pyramid site, see F. Arnold, “Settlement Remains at Lisht-North,” in House and Palace in Ancient Egypt, ed. M. Bietak, International Symposium in Cairo, April 8 to 11, 1992, Untersuchungen der Zweigstelle Kairo des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts 14 (Vienna, 1996), 13-21.
Fig. 1. The offering table of the King's Mother Nefret (MMA 22.1.21) (Photo: Bill Garrett).

Fig. 2. The offering table of the King's Mother Nefret (MMA 22.1.21) (Drawing: Liza Majerus).