

STRUCTURE AND SIGNIFICANCE

THOUGHTS ON ANCIENT EGYPTIAN ARCHITECTURE



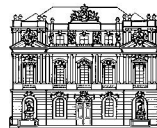
VERLAG DER ÖSTERREICHISCHEN AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN

ÖSTERREICHISCHE AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN
DENKSCHRIFTEN DER GESAMTAKADEMIE, BAND XXXIII

UNTERSUCHUNGEN DER ZWEIGSTELLE KAIRO
DES ÖSTERREICHISCHEN ARCHÄOLOGISCHEN INSTITUTES

HERAUSGEGEBEN IN VERBINDUNG MIT DER KOMMISSION FÜR ÄGYPTEN
UND LEVANTE DER ÖSTERREICHISCHEN AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN
VON MANFRED BIETAK

BAND XXV



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WIEN 2005

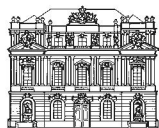
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Editor
Peter Jánosi



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Vorgelegt von w. M. MANFRED BIETAK in der Sitzung am 15. Oktober 2004

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data
A Catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library

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Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften
Wien

Grafik, Satz, Layout: Béatrice Boileau-Hassoun
Druck und Bindung: Börsedruck, A-1230 Wien

<http://hw.oeaw.ac.at/3552-1>
<http://verlag.oeaw.ac.at>

Printed and bound in Austria

Contents

Abbreviations of Publications and Institutions IX
General Abbreviations XV
Preface XVII
 Dorothea ARNOLD	 <i>The Architecture of Meketre's Slaughterhouse and Other Early Twelfth Dynasty Wooden Models</i> 001
 Felix ARNOLD	 <i>Baukonstruktion in der Stadt Kahun Zu den Aufzeichnungen Ludwig Borchardts</i> 077
 Miroslav BÁRTA	 <i>Architectural Innovations in the Development of the Non-Royal Tomb During the Reign of Nyuserra</i> 105
 Manfred BIETAK	 <i>Neue Paläste aus der 18. Dynastie</i> 131
 Jean-François CARLOTTI	 <i>Considérations architecturales sur l'orientation, la composition et les proportions des structures du temple d'Amon-Rê à Karnak</i> 169
 Georges CASTEL	 <i>Le mastaba de Khentika dans l'oasis de Dakhla (fin VI^e dynastie) Étude architecturale</i> 209
 Eugene CRUZ-URIBE	 <i>The Ancient Reconstruction of Hibis Temple</i> 247

Vassil DOBREV	<i>Evidence of Axes and Level Lines at the Pyramid of Pepy I ..</i> 263
Josef DORNER	<i>Das Basisviereck der Cheopspyramide</i> 275
Peter GROSSMANN	<i>Frühe fünfschiffige Kirchen und die Anfänge des Kirchenbaus in Ägypten</i> 283
Zahi HAWASS	<i>Khufu's National Project. The Great Pyramid of Giza in the year 2528 B.C.</i> 305
Salima IKRAM	<i>A Monument in Miniature. The Eternal Resting Place of a Shrew ...</i> 335
Horst JARITZ	<i>Die Tribünen vor ägyptischen Tempeln der 18. Dynastie bis zur Römerzeit. Ein Deutungsversuch zur Funktion.....</i> 341
Jack A. JOSEPHSON	<i>The Use of "Sand-Box" Foundations in Ancient Egypt</i> 401
Audran LABROUSSE	<i>Les tracés directeurs dans la pyramide de la reine Inenek/Inti</i> 407
Geoffrey T. MARTIN	<i>The Egyptian Temple in the Mosaic of Palestrina</i> 415
Salah EL-NAGGAR	<i>Les couvrements de granit dans les pyramides de Giza</i> 429
David O'CONNOR	<i>The Eastern High Gate. Sexualized Architecture at Medinet Habu?</i> 439
Adela OPPENHEIM	<i>Decorative Programs and Architecture in the Pyramid Complexes of the Third and Fourth Dynasties</i> 455
Joachim ŚLIWA	<i>Der <i>hnrt</i> von Qasr el-Sagha</i> 477
Rainer STADELMANN	<i>Die Wiederbelebung religiösen Gedankenguts des Alten Reiches in der Architektur des Totentempels Sethos' I. in Qurna</i> 485
Nabil SWELIM	<i>G I-a, -b, -c and -d Ashlars.....</i> 493

Christian TIETZE	<i>Pyramiden in Brandenburg</i>	505
Miroslav VERNER	<i>Abusir Pyramids Quarry and Supply Road.....</i>	531
Pierre ZIGNANI	<i>Remarques sur le fil à plomb pharaonien et les techniques de ravatement. À propos de tracés, de la forme d'un outil et d'une fonction</i>	539

Architectural Innovations in the Development of the Non-Royal Tomb During the Reign of Nyuserra*

Miroslav
BÁRTA

ONE OF THE MOST important achievements of Dieter Arnold is his contribution towards the interpretation of architecture in terms of function, significance and meaning. The following discussion is intended to show how meritorious his approach can be when applied to monuments of the Old Kingdom, in this particular case to those of the reign of the Fifth Dynasty King Nyuserra¹.

This article will endeavour to highlight several major changes in non-royal tomb architecture² and in society during the reign of Nyuserra which lasted approximately 31 years³. In this respect, the interplay between architecture and ancient Egyptian society is fundamental inasmuch as social development seems to be directly reflected in the architecture and decoration of tombs. The spread of the non-royal tomb and its decoration will be discussed in the context of several other components of ancient Egyptian society, such as state administration and religion. Rather than discussing individual monuments, the emphasis here will be on general trends and the way the evidence under review has been put together. The main reason for this is that, even nowadays, almost every new excavation seems to throw some new light on the world of the Ancient Egyptians. As a result, it may be preferable to attempt to deal, not only with individual monuments, but also to focus on more general trends and conclusions that hopefully will apply to what is a statistically significant number of tombs.

* For assistance with English I thank Jane Jakeman and Jaromír Málek. For discussion of various problems connected to this article, I wish to thank V.G. Callender, P. Jánosi, J. Málek and M. Verner. This article was written with support of the Academy of Science Grant Agency, postdoctoral grant no. 404/98/PO87.

1. W.S. Smith, «The Old Kingdom in Egypt», in: *The Cambridge Ancient History (CAH)* I, XVI, Cambridge 1962, 43, 62f.; J. von Beckerath, «Niuserre»,

in: *LÄ* IV, 1983, 517f.; P. Kaplony, «König Niuserrê und die Annalen», *MDAIK* 47, 1991, 195-204; T. Schneider, *Lexikon der Pharaonen*, München 1996, 281f.

2. I think the expression “non-royal tomb architecture” is preferable to “private architecture” or “private tomb” since it much better conveys the status of ancient Egyptian officials and their position in the state.

3. J. von Beckerath, *Chronologie des pharaonischen Ägypten*, *MÄS* 46, 1997, 155.

1. ARCHITECTURE

Nyuserra is well known for his achievements in royal monumental architecture. He built his sun temple at Abu Ghurab, famous for the scenes depicting the individual seasons of the year⁴. His funerary complex at Abusir included several innovations which influenced the subsequent development of the royal complexes (pl. I.1)⁵. It was, above all, the pyramid temple of Nyuserra that included several modifications and new elements: the transverse hall that was guarded by a towering lion-like statue (perhaps a sphinx); the first example of the “antichambre carrée” on the way to the offering chapel; as well as the so-called “Eckbauten” that bordered the whole rear part of the mortuary temple north and south. Nyuserra is also famous for his twin-statue depicting him as a young god and elderly king, symbolising his union with the sun god and thereby showing the dual nature of his kingship⁶. Last but not least, it was he who rebuilt the pyramid complex of his mother Khentkawes [II] at Abusir and put into it a cult pyramid that, prior to this time, had been the exclusive preserve of royal mortuary complexes⁷. These features on their own are a sure sign of changes and developments that had been taking place during his reign.

Far less well known are the history and spread of non-royal funerary architecture that had been taking place under the same king. It was during this period that entirely new types of tombs emerged⁸. The following section will therefore endeavour to provide a number of possible explanations of the phenomenon and to show that these changes were part of a much broader shift within society. This will include review of several tombs that are most distinctive of the trends of the time because it is the tombs of the wealthiest officials of the time that are believed to be the most typical and the best representatives of their kind⁹. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that an identical “input” (shift within society for our purpose) might have resulted in entirely different architectural forms. This will be backed up with a discussion of contemporaneous family tombs of lower-ranking officials.

4. F.W. Von Bissing, H. Kees, *Das Re-Heiligtum des Königs Ne-Woser-Re (Rathures)*. Bd. I, *Der Bau*, Berlin 1905; *id.*, *Re-Heiligtum*. Bd. II. *Die kleine Festdarstellung*, Leipzig 1923. Now, see also Do. Arnold, (ed.) *When the Pyramids were built. Egyptian Art of the Old Kingdom*, New York 1999, 90f., with a computer reconstruction of the sun-temple complex.

5. For his pyramid see L. Borchardt, *Das Grabdenkmal des Königs Ne-user-re*, *WVDOG* 7, 1907; R. Stadelmann, *Die ägyptischen Pyramiden. Vom Ziegelbau zum Weltwunder*, Mainz 1991², 175-178, I.E.S. Edwards, *The Pyramids of Egypt*, London 1991, 177; M. Lehner, *The Complete Pyramids*, London 1997, 148f.; M. Verner, *Die Pyramiden*, Hamburg 1998, 346-355.

6. München, ÄS 6794, D. Wildung, *Ni-user-Rê. Sonnenkönig – Sonnengott*, München 1984, figs. 3-6.

7. P. Jánosi in: M. Verner, *Abusir III. The Pyramid Complex of Khentkaus*, Prague 1995, 160f.

8. Y. Harpur, *Decoration in Egyptian Tombs of the Old Kingdom. Studies in Orientation and Context*, Oxford 1987, 106-110 (“multi-roomed mastaba chapels”) and P. Jánosi, «The Tombs of Officials. Houses of Eternity», in: *Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids*, New York 1999, 34-36 with a representative overview of the tomb of Ptahshepses. On the origins of a new tomb type during the reign of Nyuserra at Abusir see now the study by M. Bárta, «The Tomb of Ptahshepses Junior II at Abusir», *Ä&L* 10, 2000, 45-66 and P. Jánosi, «“Im Schatten” der Pyramiden – Die Mastabas in Abusir. Einige Beobachtungen zum Grabbau der 5. Dynastie», in: M. Bárta, J. Krejčí (eds.), *Abusir and Saqqara in the Year 2000*, Prague 2000, 445f.

9. G.A. Reisner, *A Provincial Cemetery of the Pyramid Age. Naga-ed-Dêr*, part III. University of California Publications. Egyptian Archaeology, vol. VI, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1932, 5.

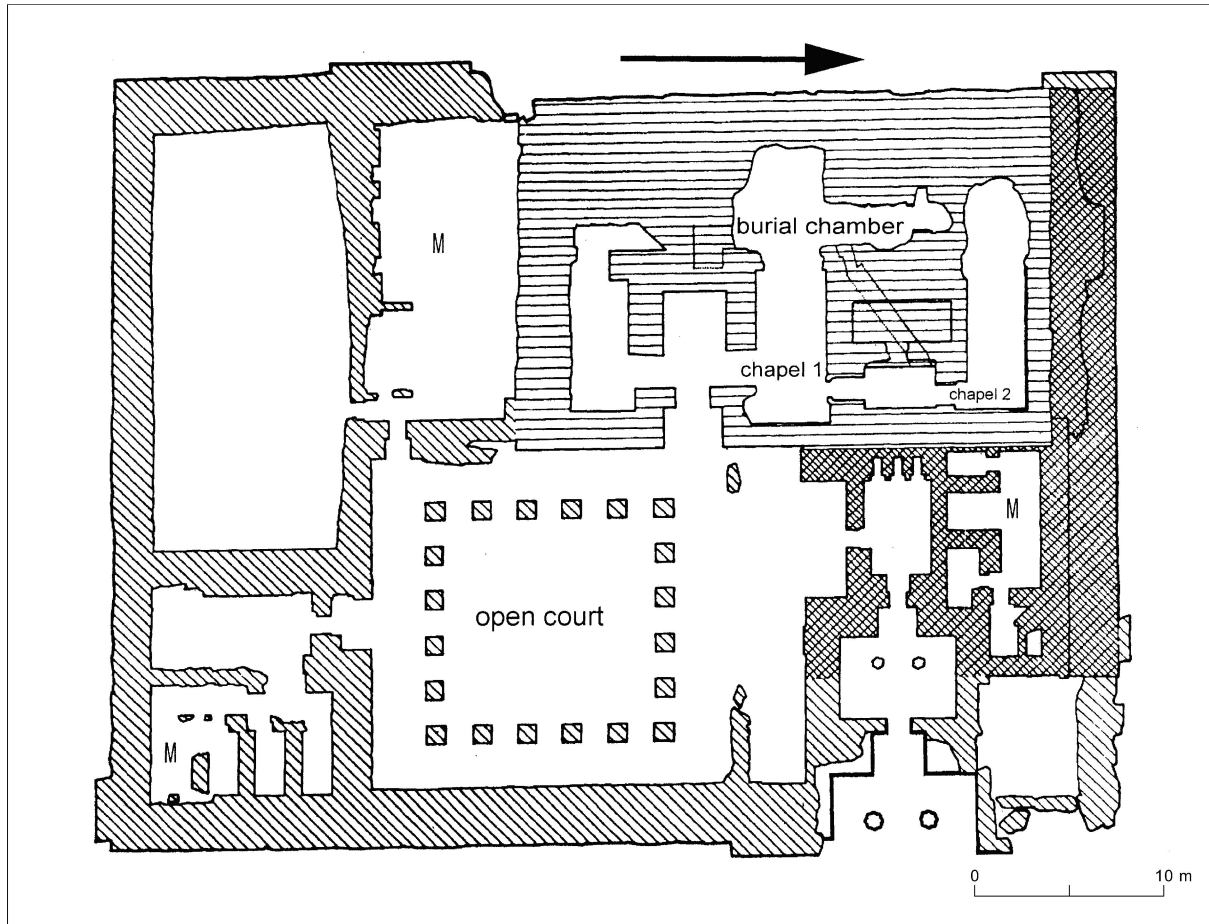


Fig. 1. Groundplan of the tomb of Ptahshepses at Abusir. M = magazines (Archives of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, Prague).

The onset of the new direction taken within non-royal architecture may be best highlighted by the tomb of the vizier Ptahshepses at Abusir (fig. 1, pls. I.2, II). It will be argued that may have been this official who was the first to adopt a wide variety of architectural elements from royal mortuary complexes and apply them to the non-royal sphere, whilst has to be acknowledged that he had wherewithal to do so. He married a daughter of Nyuserra, Princess Khamernernebt, bringing the reflected glory royal dignity onto himself and all he did¹⁰.

The excavations carried out by the Czech Institute of Egyptology at Abusir have shown that Ptahshepses incorporated the following royal elements into his tomb: a monumental columned portico almost 10 m high (pl. II.3); a statue room with three niches; a large-scale, open offering court (pl. II.4); an east-west offering chapel with a bench along the northern wall (it has been argued that the tomb of Persen D 45 at Saqqara was the first to have this kind of chapel, but it is equally feasible that it is somewhat later in date – see

10. M. Verner, *Forgotten Pharaohs, Lost Pyramids. Abusir*, Prague 1994, 173-192.

Remark 1)¹¹; a boat-room and a pointed-roof ceiling over the burial chamber¹². Even the sarcophagi of Ptahshepses and his wife Khamernernebtj were styled the same way as the ones prepared for the Abusir kings¹³. Some of the innovations introduced by Ptahshepses were, in their turn, adopted by other viziers and high-ranking officials, for example by Ty in his Saqqara tomb even before the end of Nyuserra's reign (Ty went so far as to emulate the columned entrance in his pillared portico that went on to become more widespread, fig. 2)¹⁴. It was only slightly later than Nyuserra's reign that Senedjemib Mehi and Senedjemib Inty at Giza (fig. 3) starting turning to account the innovations introduced by Ptahshepses. The size of tombs belonging to the highest-ranking officials also saw a substantial increase during this period (when compared with what went on before) and the same holds true of the number of rooms and the area set aside for wall decoration. One of the most prominent and significant architectural features introduced by Ptahshepses was a large and spacious courtyard.

As an innovative trait of non-royal tomb architecture, courtyards used to take up a considerable part of the tomb compound (see Table 1). It was there that important ceremonies for the afterlife of the tomb-owner are likely to have taken place. This is backed up by the presence of offering altars (structurally, it is possible to compare their function and significance with courts in the pyramid temples of the Fifth and the Sixth Dynasty kings)¹⁵. Courts were also very closely associated with statues of tomb-owners (most of the courts were intreconnected with a statue room, through squints with one or more serdabs; in some cases there were shrines with statues in the courts). The reason for doing so was the need to assure the tomb-owner's participation in offering rituals. This was achieved by fitting up statue shrines with statues in the court (for instance Ptahshepses II Junior at Abusir and the much later Sixth Dynasty tomb of Mereruka at Saqqara, figs. 4-5, pls. III.5, IV.8)¹⁶ or by building a serdab next to the court and linking it with the court by means of narrow squints (Ty, Senedjemib Inty, Senedjemib Mehi).

11. This element was introduced into royal architecture by Sahura – see the detailed study by P. Jánosi, «Die Entwicklung und Deutung des Totenopferraumes in den Pyramidentempeln des Alten Reiches», in: R. Gundlach, M. Rochholz (eds.), *Ägyptische Tempel - Struktur, Funktion und Programm. Akten der Ägyptologischen Tempeltagungen in Gosen 1990 und in Mainz, 1992*, *HAB* 37, 1994, 156-163. For the chapel in individual tombs see G.A. Reisner, *A History of the Giza Necropolis*. vol. 1, Cambridge (Mass.) 1942, 260-272 (type 7).

12. See the discussion by Jánosi, in: *Egyptian Art*, 34-36.

13. M. Verner, «Newly discovered royal sarcophagi

from Abusir», in Bárta, Krejčí (eds.), *Abusir and Saqqara*, 561-580.

14. One cannot exclude, however, a slightly earlier date of this tomb (Neferirkara – Neferefra), see M. Verner, «Remarques sur le temple solaire *Htp-R* et la date du mastaba de Ti», *BIFAO* 87, 1987, 297.

15. For the courts with altars in royal mortuary complexes see J. Málek, «The "Altar" in the pillared court of Teti's pyramid-temple at Saqqara», in: J. Baines, T.G.H. James, A. Leahy, A.F. Shore (eds.), *Pyramid studies and other essays presented to I.E.S. Edwards*, EES Occ. Papers 8, London 1988, 23-34.

16. For the tomb of Ptahsepses Junior II at Abusir see Bárta, *Ä&L* 10, 2000, 45-66.

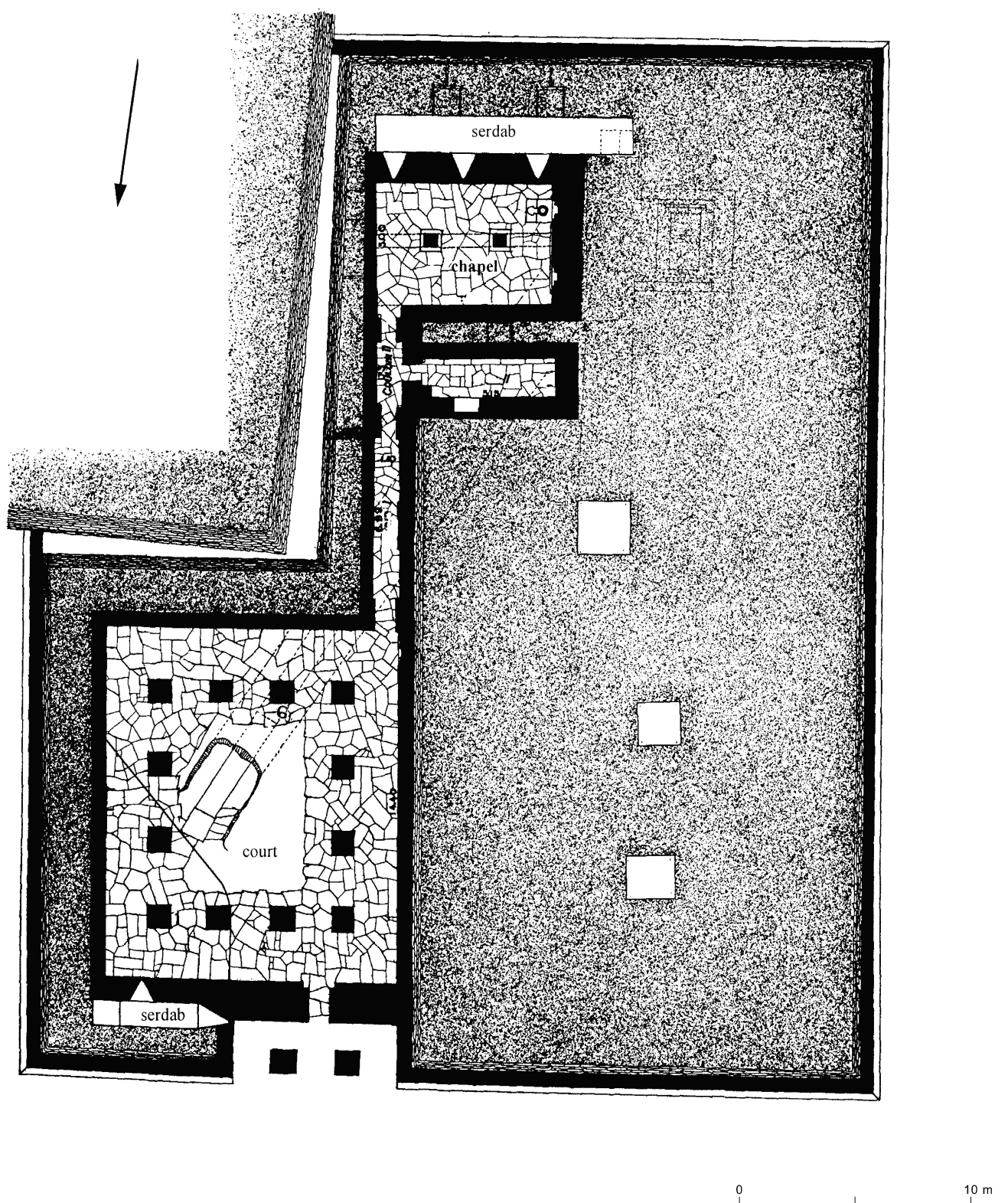


Fig. 2. Groundplan of the tomb of Ty at Saqqara (after Épron, Wild, Tombeau de Ti, I, pl. 1).

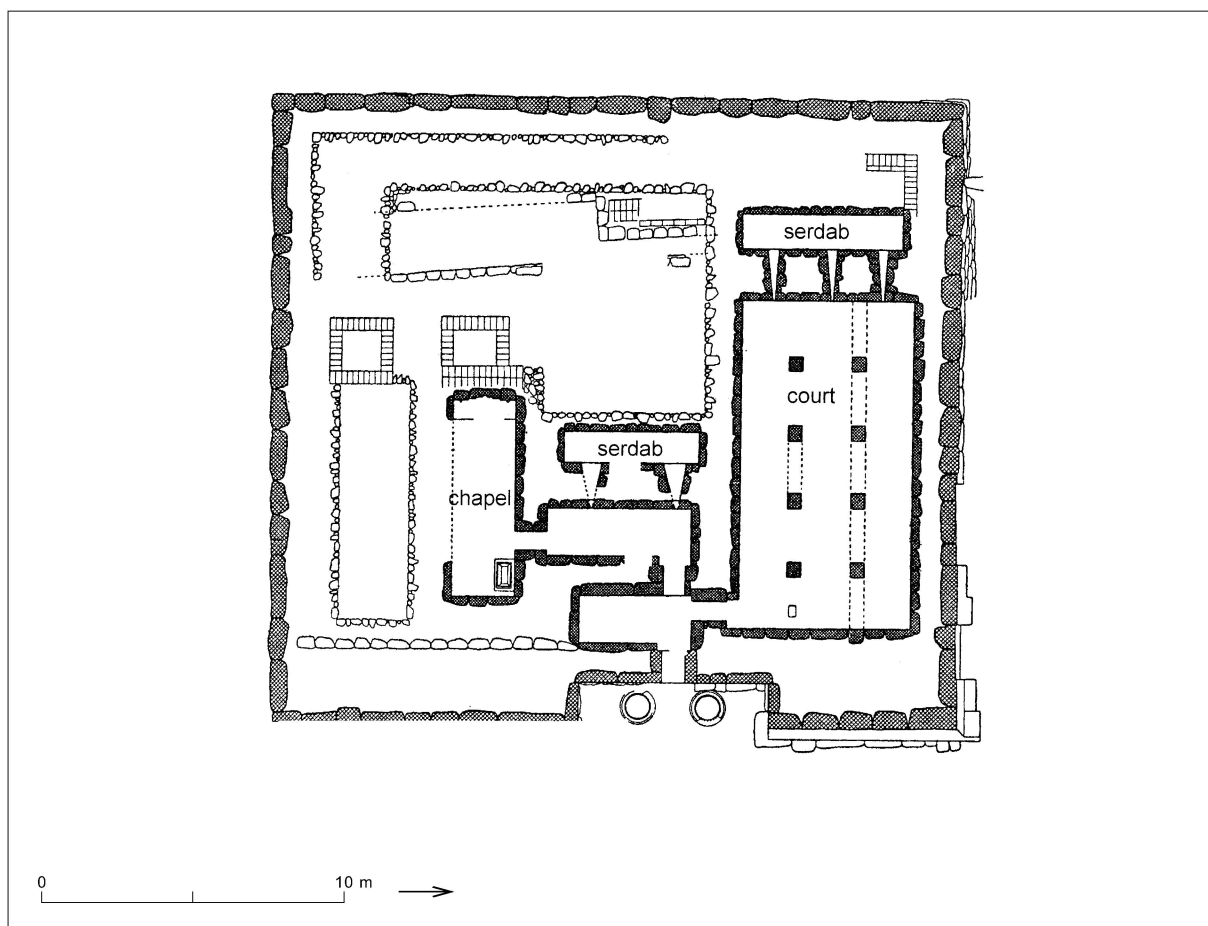
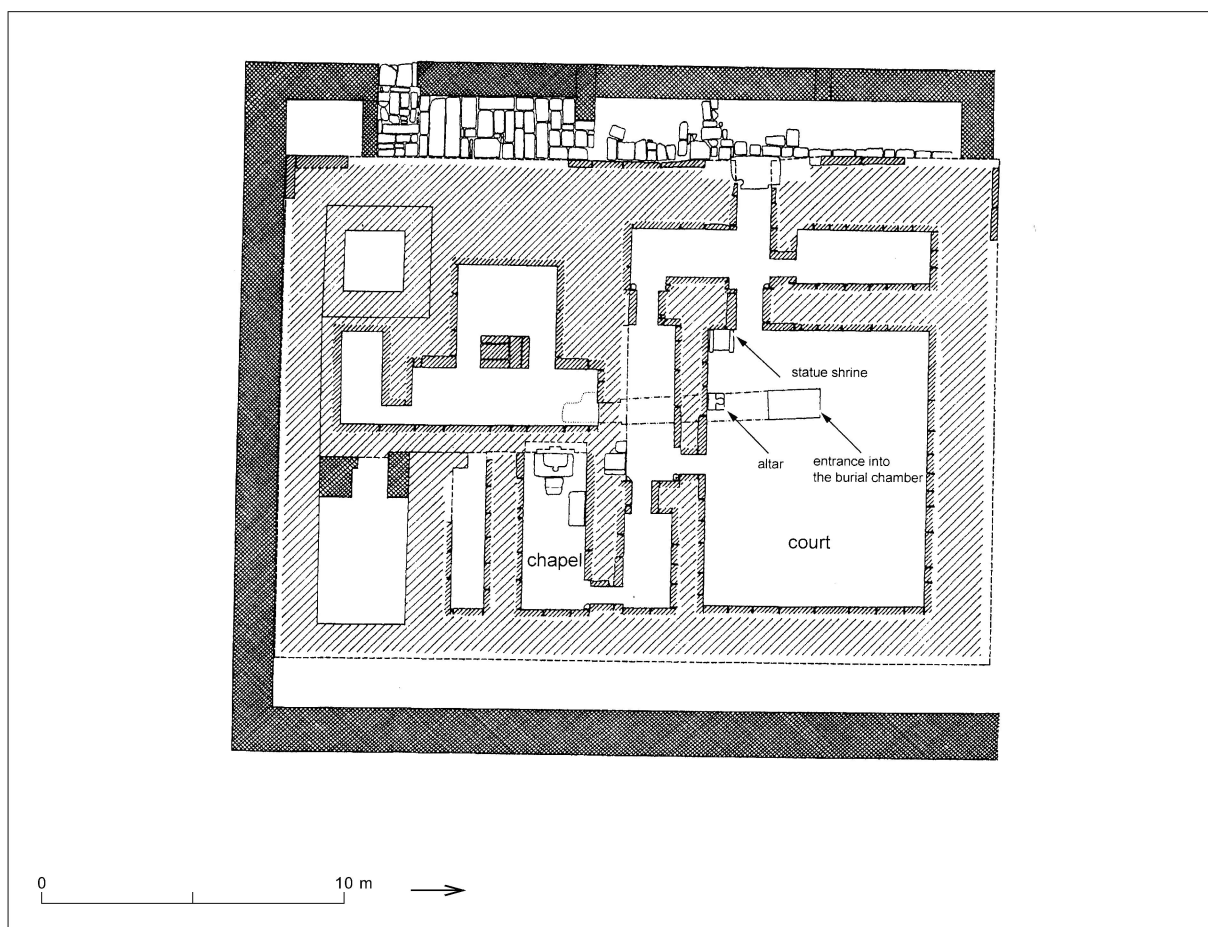
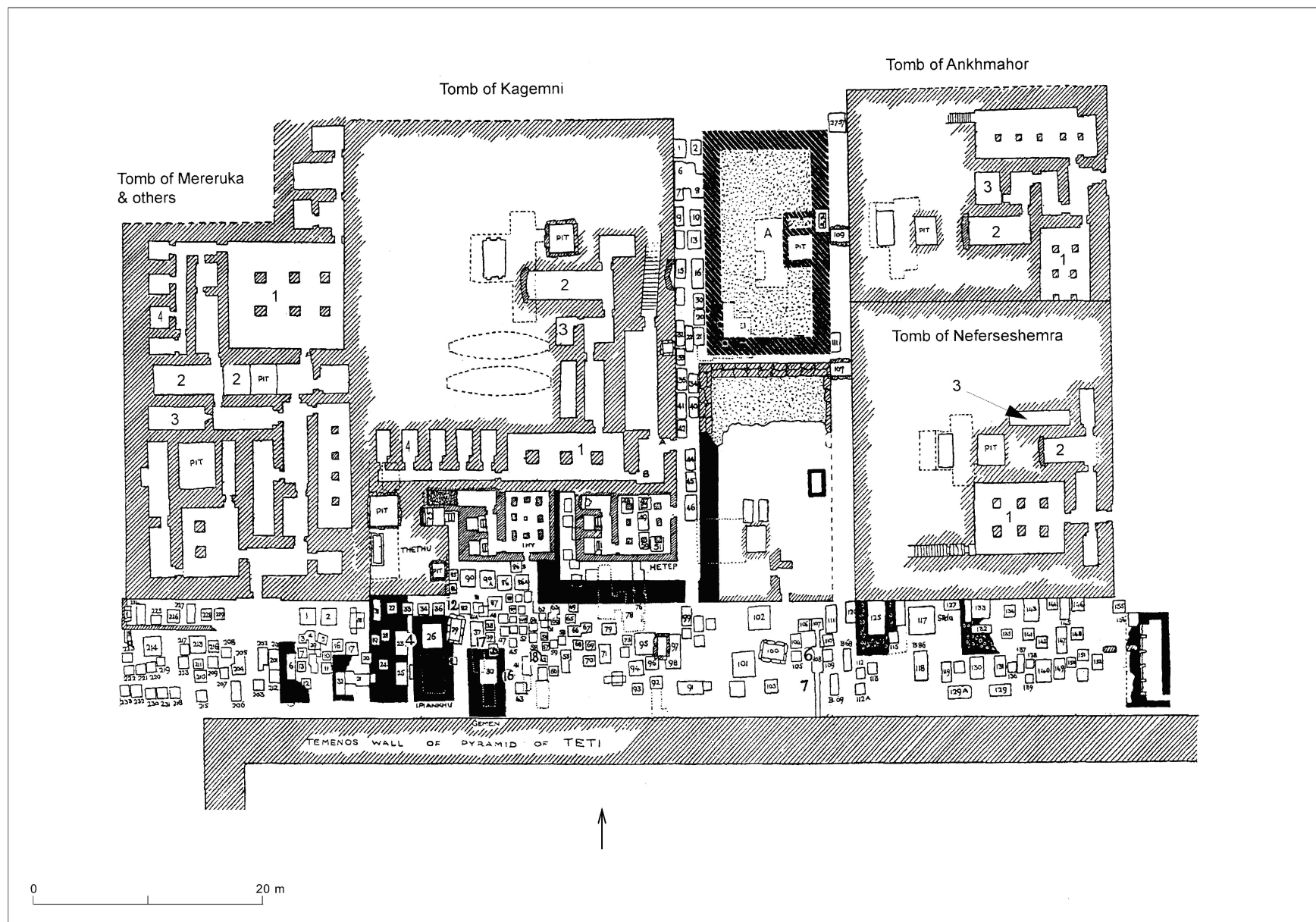


Fig. 3. Groundplan of the tomb of Senedjemib Inty at Giza (after Reisner, Giza I, fig. 162).

Fig. 4. Groundplan of the tomb of Ptahshepses Junior II at Abusir (Archives of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, Prague).





M. BARTA

Fig. 5. Groundplan of the tombs of Mereruka, Kagemni, Ankhmahor and Neferseshemra at Saqqara. 1 = courts, 2 = chapels, 3 = serdabs, 4 = magazines (after Firth, Gunn, Teti Pyramid Cemeteries, II, pl. 51).

Several signs of this trend are discernible as early as the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty. The tomb of Babaf at Giza (G 5230) was a mastaba (covering an area of 651 sq.m.) of Reisner's type 6c with external chapels in a cruciform layout. Two external chapels, each with four serdabs were built east of the tomb¹⁷. These serdabs contained about twenty-four statues. According to Reisner, the serdabs may originally formed a part of a large open court arrangement. Nowadays, unfortunately, no traces of such a structure are identifiable. The tomb of Nenkhefotka at Saqqara (MM D 47) that is slightly later in date¹⁸ contained more than ten statues. Originally, it consisted of an internal chapel with a false door and with a serdab to the south. Two rooms came to be added to the eastern front of the tomb. In this case, however, there was no open court associated with the tomb.

The increasing importance of the cult of statues in the middle of the Fifth Dynasty can be best be seen in the tomb of Rawer at Giza, traditionally dated to the reign of Neferirkara¹⁹. This tomb is famous mainly due to the fact that, originally, it must have contained more than a hundred statues of Rawer. The tomb complex consisted of corridors and several rooms furnished with more than twenty-five serdabs and twenty niches that housed statues of the tomb-owner²⁰. The tomb of the Vizier Ptahshepses at Abusir contained no less than nineteen statues made of stone (including four female statues)²¹.

The increasing number of rooms and statues within the tomb compound shows quite clearly the increasing importance and independence of tomb-owners during the Fifth Dynasty, as reflected in the decoration of their tombs: it is not the monumentality in terms of size of tombs but the symbolism as manifested in their architecture, decoration and equipment. In this connection, it is interesting to note a comparable trend in the royal sphere: from the reign of Nyuserra onwards, the volume of the pyramid of the king remained more or less the same and it is not the size of the pyramid itself, but rather the intrinsic elaborateness of the mortuary complex and its decoration that started playing key-roles²².

17. See H. Junker, *Giza*. Bericht über die von der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien auf gemeinsame Kosten mit Dr. Wilhelm Pelizaeus unternommen Grabungen auf dem Friedhof des AR bei den Pyramiden von Giza, vol.VII, 19, 151-157; Reisner, *Giza I*, 248, 250, fig. 153, *PM III*², 155-157.

18. M. Mariette, *Les mastabas de l'ancien empire*. Fragment du dernier ouvrage de A. Mariette, publié d'après l manuscrit de l'auteur par G. Maspero, Paris 1889 (reprint Hildesheim/New York 1976), 304-309; *PM III*², 580, reign of Sahura or later.

19. *PM III*², 265 and S. Hassan, *Excavations at Giza*, vol. I, Oxford 1932, 1-61.

20. Therefore it would be unsurprising if the tomb were slightly later date (perhaps Nyuserra?).

21. B. Patočková, *Fragments of Statuary from the Mastaba of Ptahshepses* (unpublished M.A. thesis, Prague 1994, used with kind permission of the author) and *id.*, «Fragments de statues découvertes

dans le mastaba de Ptahchepses à Abousir», in: N. Grimal (ed.), *Les critères de datation stylistiques à l'Ancien Empire*, *BdE* 120, 1998, 227-233.

22. The pyramid of Neferirkara with as much as 257, 250 cu.m., but Nyuserra 112, 632 cu.m., Djedkara 107, 835 cu.m., Unas 47, 390 cu.m., Teti 107, 835 cu.m., Pepy I 107 835, Merenra 107 835 cu.m. and Pepy II 107 835 cu.m., see Lehner's calculations, *Complete Pyramids*, 17. It should be added that the ever-increasing symbolism is marked by the growing number of magazines in royal mortuary complexes from the early Fifth Dynasty onwards. More symbolism encouraged more extensive offering rituals calling for rich supplies of products and utensils. On symbolical "administration" of the royal mortuary temple during this period see M. Baud, «Le palais en temple. Le culte funéraire des rois d'Abousir, in: Bárta, Krejčí, (eds.), *Abusir and Saqqara*, 347-360.

This trend is discernible right at the start of the Fifth Dynasty when the decorated area of the royal mortuary temples increased in size. At the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty, Sahura had 370 sq.m. of his temple walls covered with decorations. This contrasts sharply with what had gone on before: Sneferu, the greatest pyramid builder in Egyptian history, had only 64 sq.m. of his temple decorated; Khufu 100 sq.m. and Userkaf, Sahura's predecessor on the throne, only managed 120 sq.m.)²³.

The courts were either roofed (Senedjemib Inty) or left open-canopied (Ptahshepses, Ptahshepses Junior II and Userkafankh at Abusir), pillared or unpillared. Many of these courts contain openings to descending corridors leading into the burial chambers of the tomb-owners (pls. III, V.9)²⁴. These traits, together with statues and serdabs, only go to emphasize the cult and symbolic function of these courts. It is difficult to escape the notion that the general idea behind these tombs was to proclaim the elevated and wealthy status of officials (and their families) who could afford to build them. Statue rooms connected to the court as well as the "exit" from the burial chambers were probably intended to enable the tomb-owner to take a direct part in offering rituals since it was the courts where most of the family members and priests are likely to have carried out a part of the offering ceremonies²⁵. This made it necessary to secure the attendance and participation of the dead by means of statues of himself (pl. IV.8). Moreover, in some instances, the idea of going forth into the court was emphasized by placing a painted or sculpted motif of palace façade decoration ("Prunkscheintür") above the opening in the court of the descending corridor (for instance, Seshemnefer IV at Giza, pl. V.9)²⁶.

The entrances to burial chambers in the courts can therefore be interpreted as channels through which the deceased official left the burial chamber to go on and take part in offerings in the courts. In the tomb of Ptahshepses Junior II there is a close axial correspondence between the altar and the lip of the descending corridor in the open court (fig. 4). Moreover, the altar is situated in such a position that the statue of the deceased was due west of it.

Last but not least, these tombs of the wealthiest officials of the day were also characterized by a large number of magazines – another innovation that appeared only during the second half of the Fifth Dynasty. For some reason, these magazines occur only in Saqqara tombs and are virtually unknown at Giza.

23. Arnold, *Egyptian Art*, 98.

24. These sloping corridors are unlikely to have been introduced until the reign of Nyuserra and made their first appearance in several tombs at Abusir: Ptahshepses, Ptahshepses Junior II, Userkafankh, Djadjaemankh and an anonymous tomb, see Reisner,

Giza I, 154f. and Bárta, *Ä&L* 10, 2000, *passim*.

25. Compare M. Verner, *Abusir I. The Mastaba of Ptahshepses I/1. Reliefs*, Prague 1986, 117.

26. Junker, *Giza XI*, fig. 49, 94-119, pls. 13 a, b and Jánosi, in: Bárta, Krejčí (eds.), *Abusir and Saqqara*, 460f.

Table 1. Some large tombs from the reign of Nyuserra (or shortly thereafter)

Tomb/Site	Tomb size (in sq.m.)	Size of the courts (in sq.m.)
Ptahshepses/Abusir ²⁷	2 376	333
Ptahshepses Junior II/Abusir ²⁸	376	70
Senedjemib Inty/Giza ²⁹	476	60
Senedjemib Mehi/Giza ³⁰	276	10
Ty/Saqqara ³¹	1 234	205
Ptahhotep/Saqqara ³²	376	94
Seshemnefer (III)/Giza ³³	307	14

This same development led to the appearance of yet another new tomb type. These large and richly decorated tombs, with courts designed for the mortuary cult of high officials, appeared at the very same time as *family tombs*. Although the largest tombs discussed above may have contained chapels and burial arrangements for several members of the official's family, there were only a few burials in each of them. The term "family tomb" refers to tombs with a row (or several rows) of burial shafts embedded in the masonry of the superstructure and designed for burials of the whole family (and in most cases containing a higher number of burials)³⁴. These tombs usually belonged to lesser officials. The shafts in these tombs were usually sited west of a single offering chapel devised for the cult of the whole family. An excellent illustration of this would be the tomb of the official Shedufound at Abusir (fig. 6)³⁵.

The tomb of this official who was "Overseer of the sweets" in the pyramid complex of Nyuserra displays the typical features of a family tomb and also shows how such a tomb was used over several generations. The tomb measured only 7.6 x 9.0 m. In its eastern part, there was a small court entered from the south and measuring 4.6 x 2.2 m, with a central wooden column supporting the roof. The west wall of the court contained three

27. For the tomb see *Preliminary Report on Czechoslovak Excavations in the Mastaba of Ptahshepses at Abusir*, Prague 1979; Verner, *Abusir I*; *id.*, *Forgotten Pharaohs*, 173-192.

28. Bárta, *Ä&L* 10, 2000, 45-66.

29. G 2370: Reisner, *Giza I*, 264f., fig. 162.

30. G 2378: *op.cit.*, 267, fig. 164.

31. L. Épron, F. Daumas, G. Goyon, *Le tombeau de Ti*. Fasc. I, *Les approches de la chapelle*, MIFAO 65, 1939; H. Wild, *Ti*. Fasc. II, *La chapelle* (première partie), MIFAO 65, 1953; Fasc. III, *La chapelle* (deuxième partie), MIFAO 65, 1966.

32. Mariette, *Mastabas*, 351-356.

33. Junker, *Giza III*, 192-215.

34. This had already been pointed out by A. Bolshakov (review of the publication by K. Kromer, Nezlet Batran. *Eine Mastaba aus dem Alten Reich bei Giseh [Ägypten]*. Österreichische Ausgrabungen 1981-1983, DÖAW 12, Vienna 1991), *BiOr* 51, 1994, 62: "... mastabas with numerous shafts are characteristic of the late Old Kingdom."

35. For the preliminary report see M. Verner, «An Early Old Kingdom Cemetery at Abusir», *ZÄS* 122, 1995, 78-90.

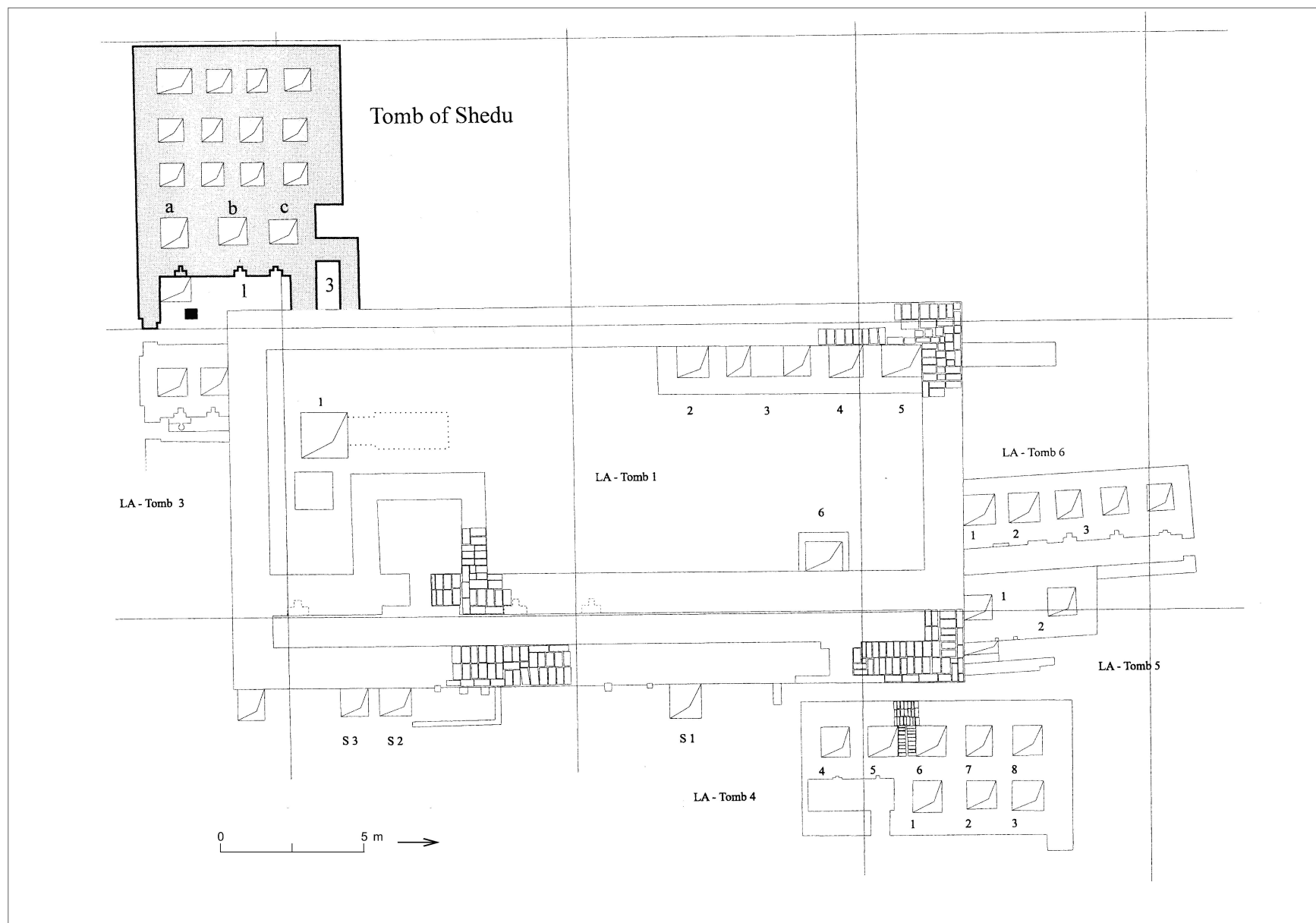


Fig. 6. Groundplan of the tomb of Shedu at the Lake of Abusir, Abusir (Archives of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, Prague).

double-recessed niches that were for three shafts west of them. Three statues – probably belonging to Shedu himself, his wife and the son (likely from the archaeological and anthropological examination of the burials) were found in the chapel. West of the court there were four rows totaling fifteen burial shafts. The first row contained three principal shafts designed for the burials of Shedu and his family. The burials reflected the different status of individual members of the family. Two burials in wooden coffins belonged to Shedu and his wife (Shaft 2-5.8 m deep, male burial *maturus* I and Shaft 3-4.8 m deep, female burial, *maturus* I-II). The third shaft (Shaft 1, 7.90 m deep, *adultus* II) belonged to their son wrapped only in mattings. The shafts arranged in the remaining three rows were far less deep (about 3 m) and some of them contained male and female adult burials wrapped in mattings. Some shafts were just 0.5 m deep and seem in these cases to have been prepared for a later burial (this suggests that the full depth of the shaft and the burial niche at its bottom were not excavated until the time of the actual burial). This single tomb gives rise to a number of conclusions. It shows that a family tomb may have been used for several generations of the same family, including both male and female members; that the superstructure was filled with shafts, some of them unused; and that even their depth and the burial might have been indicative of the social status of the deceased. Even though there was formal uniformity of individual burials in the tomb, marked differences existed. Only the father and mother of Shedu possessed an elaborate burial chamber (Reisner's Type 4a[1])³⁶. For the son there was a far simpler burial niche. All three of the quite deep shafts were deeper than the rest of the shafts. In the remainder of the shafts, simple burial niches were predominant (Types 6 and 7)³⁷.

Aside from these two principal types of tombs associated with two distinctive echelons of society, there was yet another way of creating a family tomb – individual tombs or chapels were arranged around a single gathering place, in most instances an open court, provided that the family members were wealthy enough to afford their own tombs/chapels (pl. V.11)³⁸. Once again, the purpose of such a facility was to secure the family cult and stress family bonds. The emphasis put on kinship – that found its material expression in family tombs of the period – might perhaps be explained by the fact that many offices at various levels of state administration became hereditary at this time. This made it necessary to highlight the relationship between individual family members (and in many cases these people used to be holding the same offices).

This can be confirmed by evidence of a series of titles of several officials of the time. For instance, a cluster of tombs in cemetery G 6000 at Giza that belongs to the same family and dates to the second half of the Fifth Dynasty, shows the hereditary principle operating in the functions and titles of individual officials. These men were primarily engaged in sustaining the funerary cults of kings buried at Giza and Abusir. The titles of

36. Reisner, *Giza I*, 94.

37. *Ib.*, 95ff.

38. See for Abusir: M. Verner, «Excavations at Abusir. Season 1978/1979 – Preliminary Report», *ZÄS* 107, 1980, 167f., fig. 10; for Giza: K.R. Weeks,

Mastabas of Cemetery G 6000 including G 6010 (Neferbauptah); G 6020 (Iymery); G 6030 (Ity); G 6040 (Shepseskafankh), *Giza Mastabas 5*, Boston 1994, fig. 2.

(j)r(j)-(j)ht nswt, w^cb nswt, (j)m(j)-r pr hwt-^c3t, zš pr-md^c3t, (j)m(j)-r pr, hm-ntr-Hwfw, hm-ntr S^c3hwr^c, hm-ntr Nfrjrk^c3r^c, hm-ntr Njwsrr^c were the most commonest titles shared by Shepseskafankh, Iymery and Neferbaupthah³⁹.

Further evidence can be found in a small section of the Giza cemetery only recently published in full by A.M. Roth⁴⁰. This cemetery belonged to “palace attendants”, officials whose titles were connected with the office of hntjw-š. Their tombs were built within a confined space close to each other, most of their owners part of the same social group. The majority of the tombs are family tombs. The two factors that influenced their inclusion in this cemetery were family relationship and the similarity of duties performed at court. It therefore seems that the cemetery was deliberately organized along these two lines – kinship and the sharing the same offices/duties of state. It is no accident that cemetery G 6000, as well as the Giza cemetery of palace attendants, did not appear until under Nyuserra. The operation of the hereditary principle became widespread in state office during his reign and was probably widely considered a token of legitimacy⁴¹. This is consonant with the evidence of the family of the vizier Ptahshepses himself whose son, Hemakhty, may have been appointed to the office of hrp ‘h (originally held by his father) as a young man⁴².

2. ADMINISTRATION

The situation reflected in the architecture of tombs belonging to different social categories of officials can be further borne out by their titles. Nyuserra (and after him other kings also) tried to curb the ever-increasing independence of wealthy officials as shown by the growing number of private landholdings⁴³. Nyuserra and his successors also seem to have reduced their number of officials – a trend that is discernible in long series of titles of high-ranking officials of the time. Of equal significance is that, from the reign of Menkauhor or Unas onwards, viziers started acting as inspectors of the priests who performed funerary rites in royal pyramid complexes⁴⁴. This gives the impression that an increasing number of duties was concentrated in the hands of several powerful officials. Pepy I was probably one of the last kings during whose reign large tombs were still being built, for example

39. Weeks, *op.cit.*, see also the review by M. Bárta, «A Family of Funerary Priests from G 6000 Cemetery», *ArOr* 65, 1997, 389-395.

40. A.M. Roth, *A Cemetery of Palace Attendants including G 2084-2099, G 2230-2231, and G 2240, Giza Mastabas* 6, Boston 1995.

41. An interesting study by A.M. Roth, «Patterns and Taboos in Egyptian Tomb Decoration», *JARCE* 36, 1999, 37-53, has shown that during the reign of Izezi representations of female consorts of tomb-owners disappeared from the decorative programme. According to Roth, this may have been due to some new taboos in society. It must therefore be wondered whether this feature was connected with

the increasing importance of women within the family?

42. Verner, *Ptahshepses*, 65, no. 69; 76, nos. 94-95; M. Bárta, «The Title Inspector of the Palace during the Egyptian Old Kingdom», *ArOr* 67, 1999, 16.

43. W. Helck, «Wege zum Eigentum und Boden im Alten Reich», in: S. Allam (ed.), *Grund und Boden in Altägypten. Rechtliche und sozio-ökonomische Verhältnisse. Untersuchungen zum Rechtsleben im Alten Ägypten*, Bd. II, Tübingen 1994, 12.

44. N. Strudwick, *The Administration of Egypt in the Old Kingdom. The Highest Titles and their Holders*, London 1985, 308-309, Tab. 29.

those of Mereruka, Ankhmahor, Ptahhotep and Mehu. This explains why family tombs were so popular – more and more wealth, influence and offices were concentrated in the hands of families of high-ranking officials.

This development probably had its roots in a sudden “opening-up” of state administration. Whilst, during the Fourth Dynasty the highest offices of state and court were reserved for the privileged members of the royal family, from the Fifth Dynasty onwards members of the royal family seem to have been excluded from state affairs and therefore an ever-increasing officials of non-royal origin were entrusted with offices in state administration⁴⁵. This is reflected most notably in the rank of viziers. Whereas, down to the end of the Fourth Dynasty, it was exclusively a member of the royal family who used to hold office as vizier, from the early Fifth Dynasty onwards it was associated with officials of non-royal origin⁴⁶. Interestingly, these changes went on to be mirrored almost immediately in what is commonly called “material culture”. Aside from the tombs, there was from the very beginning of the Fifth Dynasty a noticeable and significant increase in the number of the so-called “scribe statues” that seem to have originally been designed for the highest-ranking officials of the state, starting with the statues of Kawab from the reign of Khufu⁴⁷. The situation changed from the early Fifth Dynasty onwards when more and more “non-royal” officials were came into the possession of scribe statues. According to G.D. Scott, there are about 35 examples of this type known for the Fifth Dynasty period⁴⁸. This number contrasts sharply with the preceding dynasty, even though both periods are estimated to have lasted for approximately the same time span⁴⁹.

The increasing symbolism (manifested in a preference for decoration rather than monumentality) and the quest for exclusivity discernible in the royal mortuary complexes went hand-in-hand with the growing number of rights and privileges attributed to an even greater number of officials during the Fifth Dynasty. This phenomenon found its counterpart in a sudden decrease in the size of the pyramids during the transition from the Fourth to the Fifth Dynasty⁵⁰. This was made up for by an immense increase of the decorated wall spaces of pyramid temples (64 continuous metres during the reign of Sneferu, 100-120 m during the reign of Khufu and Userkaf, sharply contrasting with some 370 m of Sahura)⁵¹.

Several royal titles gained in importance during the administrative reform at the very beginning of the Fifth Dynasty. In line with the increase in the number of officials in charge of state offices, there was a clearly diversified spectrum of individual offices during this period. Whereas previously (down to the Fourth Dynasty) there was a limited and relatively homogenous group of high-ranking officials, the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty witnessed a sudden increase in offices at the court that were held by lower-ranking officials (as their tombs attest)⁵².

45. W. Helck, *Politische Gegensätze im alten Ägypten*, HÄB 23, 1986, 18-23.

46. E. Martin-Pardey, «Wesir, Wesirat», *LÄ* VI, 1227.

47. From the Fourth Dynasty there are only 13 examples of this statuary – G.D. Scott, *The History and development of the ancient Egyptian scribe statue*, Yale University 1989, UMI Dissertations, Ann Arbor, vol. I, 1ff. and vol. II, 2-35, nos. 1-13.

48. *Ib.*, vol. I, 45; vol. II, 36-119, nos. 14-48.

49. Von Beckerath, *Chronologie*, 153-159.

50. Khufu 2,583,283 cu.m., Kheops 2,211,096 cu.m., Menkaure 235,183 cu.m., Userkaf 87,906 cu.m. and Sahure 96,542 cu.m., according to Lehner's calculations, *Complete Pyramids*, 17.

51. Calculated by Do. Arnold, «Royal Reliefs», in: *Egyptian Art*, 98.

52. M. Bárta, «The Title Property Custodian of the King during the Old Kingdom Egypt», *ZÄS* 126, 1999, 79-85.

One of the most indicative titles illustrating this trend was that of the “keeper of the secrets”. Down to the end of the Fourth Dynasty, members of the royal family and high-ranking officials recruited from their ranks took for granted their job to keep the secrets of the king and his court. That is why we know only eleven holders of this title from this period⁵³. The need to pass on this duty in titles arose only when persons of non-royal origin and lower status became associated with service to the king, doing so sporadically as early as during the latter half of the Fourth Dynasty, and then with full commitment from the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty onwards. We know about 96 holders of the title from the Fifth Dynasty⁵⁴, but their number decreased during the Sixth Dynasty when the king tried to regain his authority and curb the influence and power of the officials⁵⁵.

The title “Inspector of the palace” indicated another trusted office that, to begin with, was held by royal princes only. From the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty onwards, it was taken right over by middle-ranking officials⁵⁶. These undoubtedly were attendant factors that contributed, not only to the increasing number of officials’ tombs but, above all, to the more elaborate and sophisticated decoration of individual tombs, bearing out the self-assured status of their owners.

During the reign of Nyuserra the wealth of individual officials increased enormously. At the same time, the king created the office of “Overseer of Upper Egypt”, probably out of the need to gain more effective control over remote regions of the country and officials there (or, according to Martin-Pardey⁵⁷, as a result of an administration reform that in fact may be the other side of the same coin)⁵⁸. Thus, during his reign, we can trace two opposite trends: one towards the usurpation of ever more power and influence by officials and their families, and the other towards the king’s attempts to curb the power of these officials. R. Müller-Wollermann’s study bears out the point that this shift had effectively started in the reign of Nyuserra. She takes the view that these trends point to a crisis in the level of participation and access that came to a head around this time⁵⁹.

3. THE FUNERARY REPAST SCENE AND TOMB DECORATION

During the reign of Nyuserra some aspects of ancient Egyptian ideas relating to the afterlife also changed: the traditional scene of the funerary repast (sometimes called the

53. K.T. Rydström, «HRY SŠT3 “In Charge of Secrets”: The 3000-year Evolution of a Title», *DE* 28, 1994, 86, enumerates fifteen holders of this title dating to the Fourth Dynasty, but – according to *PM* – four of them are misdated to the Fourth Dynasty: Niankhra (#6), *PM* III², 234: probably Fifth Dynasty; Netjeraperef (#8), *PM* III², 879: mid-Fifth Dynasty or later; Khufukhaf (II) (#10), *PM* III², 190: the age of Nyuserra; Seshathotep (#12), *PM* III², 149: early Fifth Dynasty. On the other hand, the tomb of Debeheni at Giza, which is traditionally dated to the Fourth Dynasty (*PM* III², 235), is dated by Rydström to the Fifth Dynasty (89).

54. Rydström, *DE* 28, 1994, 86-89.

55. *Ibid.*, 89-91.

56. Bárta, *ArOr* 67, 1999, 1-20.

57. E. Martin-Pardey, *Untersuchungen zur altägyptischen Provinzialverwaltung bis zum Ende des Alten Reiches*, *HÄB* 1, 1976, 152.

58. The earliest holder of this office was Kai during the reign of Nyuserra, see Strudwick, *Administration*, 142-144.

59. R. Müller-Wollermann, *Krisenfaktoren im ägyptischen Staat des ausgehenden Alten Reichs*, Tübingen 1986, 69f., 96f.

banqueting scene)⁶⁰ gained – after several centuries of unchallenged form and meaning – a new symbolic interpretation. Loaves of bread placed on the offering table were transformed into reeds⁶¹ which referred to the fields of offerings and *iaru* associated with Osiris. These fields represented the mythical region in the Delta where Osiris was born. This suggests that each official had a false door fitted with a kind of “gateway” through which it was necessary to pass in order to attain the afterlife⁶². Thus, what we have here is an attempt to use a papyrus thicket in order to evoke life after death (one of the earliest examples of this kind is in the tomb of Ty, from the reign of Nyuserra, at Saqqara)⁶³. From then on, reeds became a common feature, at least at Saqqara, in the decorative programme of tombs and in the scene of the funerary repast⁶⁴. The important thing about it is the entrance to the netherworld symbolized by a papyrus thicket evoking the idea of rebirth of Osiris thereby enabling identification of the deceased with Osiris⁶⁵. This seems to be in line with the fact that, only a short while after the reign of Nyuserra, we find the first explicit attestations of the cult of Osiris⁶⁶.

Tombs from the reign of Nyuserra had new motifs in their decoration that bore out the independent statuts of their owners: the market and the palanquin scenes. The market scenes can be interpreted as indicating that the tomb-owner was able by his own endeavours to obtain all of the necessary funerary equipment for his tomb and burial⁶⁷. The palanquin scene is a result of a similar approach⁶⁸. Given the meaning of the scene (depiction of the tomb-owner being carried in a palanquin during a visit to his tomb to check the progress of the work), it is only logical that the main purpose was identical, namely to record the fact that the tomb-owner (= tomb builder) had the wherewithal to afford such a tomb⁶⁹. The reign of Nyuserra also saw – with the tomb of Ptahshepses at Saqqara – the first appearance of true autobiography⁷⁰. This finding may be another sign of the increasing independence of high-ranking officials.

60. For the summary of the discussion see M. Bárta, «Archaeology and Iconography: *bd3* and *prt* bread moulds and ‘Speisetischszene’ development in the Old Kingdom», *SAK* 22, 1995, 21-35 with literature.

61. See *criterion* 19 and 20 by N. Cherpion, *Mastabas et Hypogées d’Ancien Empire. Le Problème de la Datation*, Bruxelles 1989, 48.

62. This idea is further confirmed by the introduction of a new type of false door with a cornice and torus.

63. Wild, *Ti* III, pls. 182, 184.

64. Harpur, *Decoration*, 191.

65. H. Altenmüller, «Nilpferd und Papyrusdickicht in den Gräbern des Alten Reiches», *BSEG* 13, 1989, 19-21; M. Eliade, *Die Religionen und das Heilige. Elemente der Religionsgeschichte*, Salzburg 1954, 374-376.

66. J.G. Griffiths, *The Origins of Osiris*, *MÄS* 9,

1966, 21, 67-68; W. Barta, *Aufbau und Bedeutung der altägyptischen Opferformel*, *ÄF* 24, 1968, 15, 287; J.G. Griffiths, «Osiris», *LÄ* IV, 625.

67. M. Bárta, «Die Tauschhandelszenen aus dem Grab des Fetekty in Abusir», *SAK* 26, 1998, 19-34.

68. A.M. Roth, «The practical economics of tomb-building in the Old Kingdom: a visit to the necropolis in a carrying chair», in: D.P. Silverman (ed.), *For his Ka. Essays offered in memory of Klaus Baer*, *SAOC* 55, 1994, 227-240.

69. The first attestation of this scene is in Giza tomb G 6020 of Iymery, Weeks, *Giza Mastabas*, 5, fig. 32.

70. See Mariette, *Mastabas*, 110-114, tomb C1; for its analysis and discussion see N. Kloth, «Beobachtungen zu den biographischen Inschriften», *SAK* 25, 1998, 194f., 200f. This autobiography is written in the 3rd person singular and emphasizes the personal relationship of the official with the king.

4. AFTER NYUSERRA

The changes that had take place under Nyuserra, were of great importance for subsequent tomb development down to the Sixth Dynasty. *De facto*, two new tomb types that appeared during this reign (large tombs of wealthy officials and family tombs) remained typical non-royal mortuary monuments for the rest of the Old Kingdom. They represent the last major innovations in the line of tomb development. Only one other change that complemented the Old Kingdom tomb evolution took place early in the Sixth Dynasty. Wealthy tombs were still being built (Mereruka, Ankhmahor, Kagemni, fig. 5)⁷¹, but it was the burial chamber and the underground parts of the tomb that gained in importance. Decoration now started appearing in this part of the tomb. The walls of the burial chamber were plastered and decorated with extensive offering lists and depictions of funerary equipment. From the late Fifth Dynasty onwards, statues of servants also found their way into the funerary equipment. Their purpose was to serve and assist their owner during his afterlife. It was as if tomb development had come full circle. As in the First, Second and the early Third Dynasties, there was a preference for elaborate underground structures that were safer for eternity. Thus, the situation during the Sixth Dynasty forewarns of the troubled times of the First Intermediate Period still to come. The officials began having doubts about their safe future after death, the underground part of the tomb appearing to have been the best guarantor of their “life after life”.

In pyramid fields, the Old Kingdom tomb development finds its logical conclusion in two groups of tombs sited east (Cemetery M) and north (Cemetery N) of the pyramid complex of Pepy II at South Saqqara⁷². The architecture of the tombs in these cemeteries shows the hallmarks that came to be ingrained during the latter part of the Fifth and the early Sixth Dynasty, such as family tombs with courts designed for the cult of the deceased and decorated burial chambers. Nevertheless, all of these traits were added in a very casual way betraying – as it does – a general decline that, in its turn, manifested itself in the decrease of the power and wealth of central administration under Pepy II.

Tomb “N V”, with an almost square superstructure and a burial chamber accessible from the north by means of a descending corridor, can be regarded as typical (fig. 7). The burial chamber was lined with decorated limestone blocks. Adjoining the eastern face of this tomb was an entrance hall with a central pillar. An open court lay north of it and – in the middle of this pillared court – stood a purification basin. The court had originally been decorated with reliefs and contained a wooden statue⁷³. This tomb belonged to the vizier Pery who also was “Seal bearer of the king” and “Overseer of Upper Egypt”. Although he may have been one of the highest-ranking officials buried in this cemetery, the apparent

71. For the tomb of Ankhmahor see N. Kanawati, A. Hassan, *The Teti Cemetery at Saqqara*. vol. II. *The Tomb of Ankhmahor*, *ACER* 9, 1997; for the tomb of Mereruka and Kagemni C.M. Firth, B. Gunn, *Teti Pyramid Cemeteries*, 2 vols., Cairo 1926, F.W. von Bissing, *Die Mastaba des Gem-ni-kai*,

2 vols., Berlin 1905 and 1911, P. Duell, *The Mastaba of Mereruka*, *OIP* 31 and 39, 1938.

72. G. Jéquier, *Tombeaux de particuliers contemporains de Pepi II*, *Fouilles Saqq.*, 1929.

73. *Ib.*, 106-109, figs. 120-122.

simplicity of his tomb is striking. Most of the remaining tombs were even simpler and scantier – with small chapels and many shafts arranged within their superstructures, showing clearly that primary attention was being paid to the decoration of underground chambers – a trait that continued at Saqqara well into the First Intermediate Period.

5. OVERVIEW

What I have attempted is to show that the spread of non-royal tombs cannot be assessed accurately if its context in society is neglected. This development was not uniformly linear: a sudden introduction of new elements into tomb architecture, or even the appearance of new tomb types, was always influenced by contemporary and prevalent social trends. During the reign of Nyuserra, tombs became very palpable indicators of social change and also accurately reflected contemporary social preferences. These underlying trends can be understood by looking at contemporary religious ideas and the economic as well as political situation, as reflected in the titles and status of individual officials and in their tomb decoration. We must then correlate the development of the tombs themselves with these very factors.

6. REMARK 1

In discussion of the first appearance in non-royal tombs of chapels facing east-west, it has often been claimed that one of its earliest examples is to be found in the Saqqara tomb of Persen dated to the reign of the King Sahura⁷⁴. However, a closer look at the tomb and its decoration shows that a later date is more likelier. There are several features around the tomb making it possible to date it to the reign of Nyuserra⁷⁵ or slightly later, although a definite conclusion is unlikely to be reached, given our insufficient knowledge about the tomb:

1. The location of the tomb to the east of the Djoser pyramid enclosure amongst late Fifth Dynasty tombs points to a similar date⁷⁶. Saqqara tombs of the first half of the Fifth Dynasty are concentrated in the area north of the Step pyramid⁷⁷.
2. The chapel facing east-west (measuring only 2.30-2.40 m x 1.40 m) is otherwise attested only from the reign of Nyuserra onwards. So Persen's chapel would be the only example of this kind prior to that reign. Moreover, the east-west chapels were

74. The tomb has been somewhat under-published: *PM* III², 577; Mariette, *Mastabas*, 299-301; H.F. Petrie, M.A. Murray, *Seven Memphite Tomb Chapels*, *BSEA* 65, 1952, pl. 9: the false-door, pl. X – the south and the north wall, pl. XXII and Harpur, *Decoration*, 107.

75. Nowadays, several other authors are inclined to accept a later date for the tomb: see M. Baud, *Famille royale et pouvoir sous l'Ancien Empire égyptien*, tome 2, *BdE* 126/2, 1999, 447f.: reign of Neferirkara.

76. For the position of the tomb see A.J. Spencer, «Researches on the Topography of North Saqqâra». *Or* 43, 1974, tab. 1. In the close vicinity of Persen are the tombs D 48 and D 46.

77. M. Baud, «Aux pieds de Djoser. Les Mastabas entre fossé et enceinte de la partie nord du complexe funéraire», in: C. Berger, B. Mathieu (eds.), *Études sur l'Ancien Empire et la nécropole de Saqqâra dédiées à Jean Philippe Lauer*, *OrMonsp* 9, 1997, 86, fig. 3a.

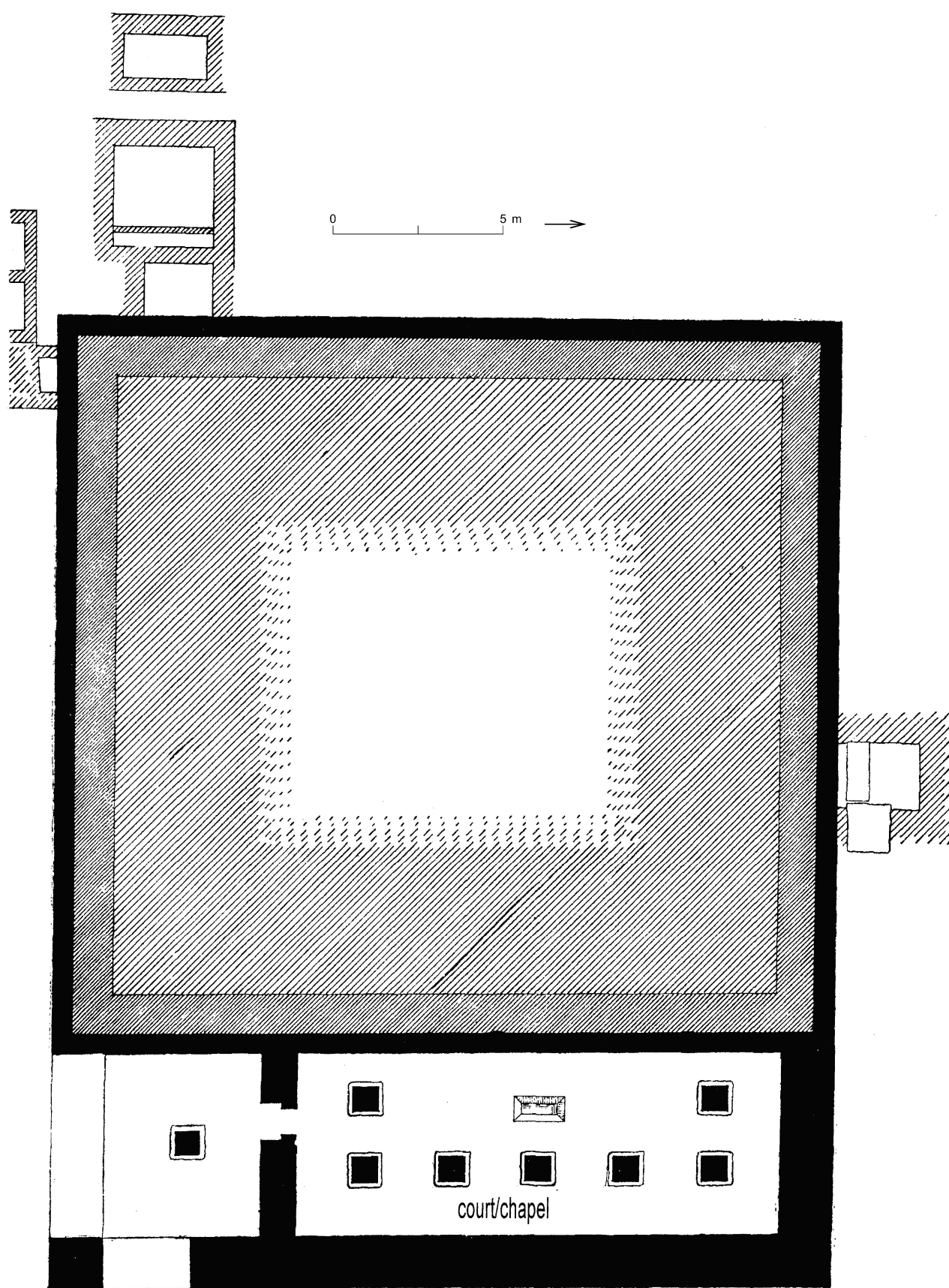


Fig. 7. Groundplan of the tomb of Pery at Saqqara South (after Jéquier, *Tombeaux de Particuliers*, fig. 120).

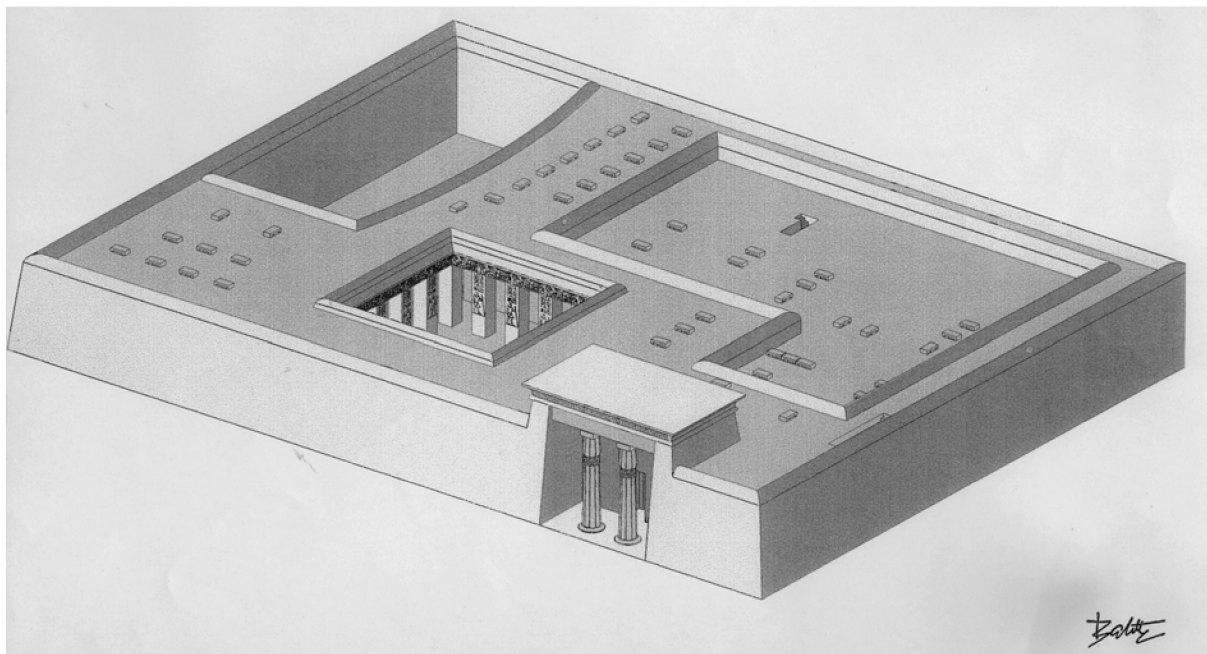


Fig. 8. A hypothetical computer reconstruction of the mastaba of Ptahshepses at Abusir (Courtesy M. Balík).

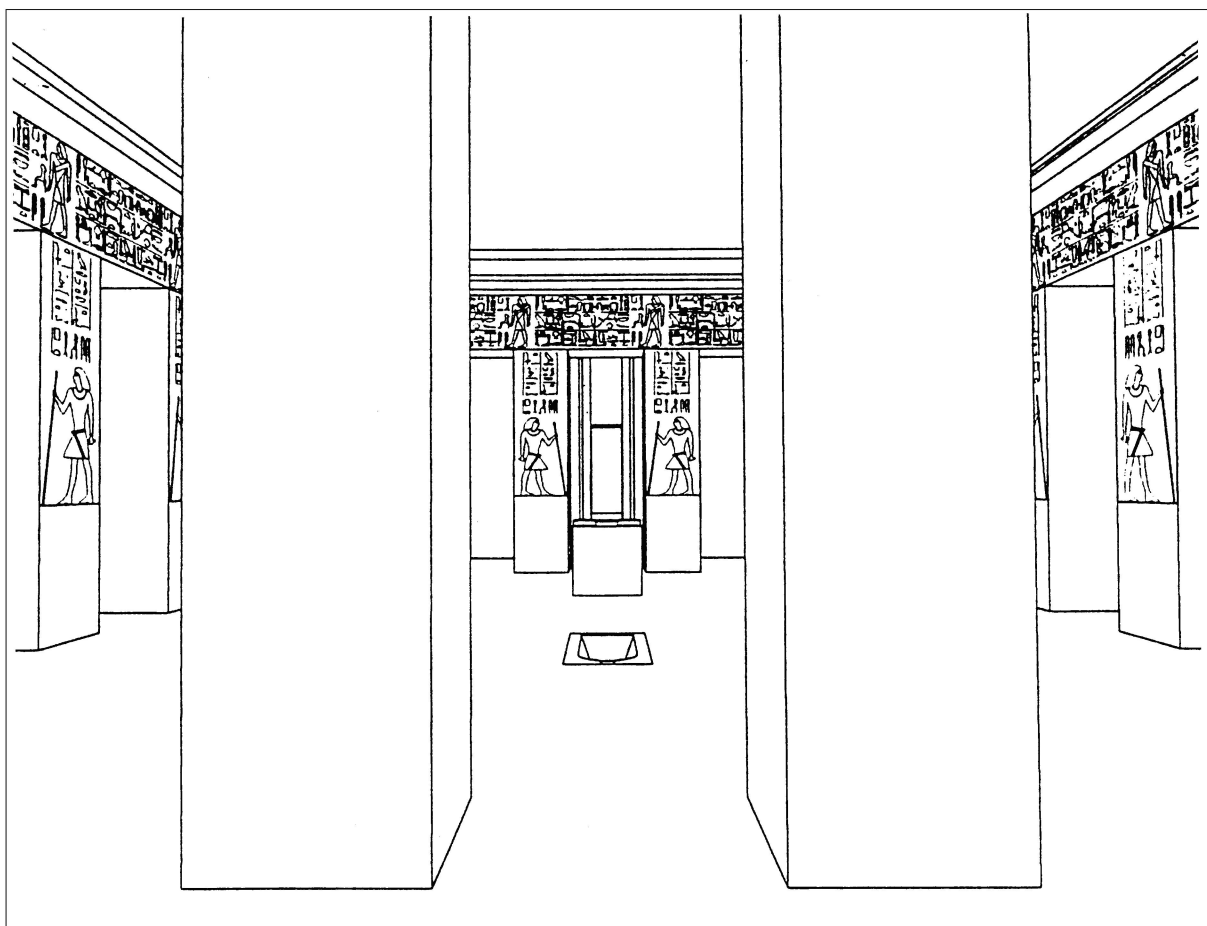


Fig. 9. A hypothetical computer reconstruction of the pillared court in the mastaba of Ptahshepses at Abusir, looking south (Courtesy M. Balík).

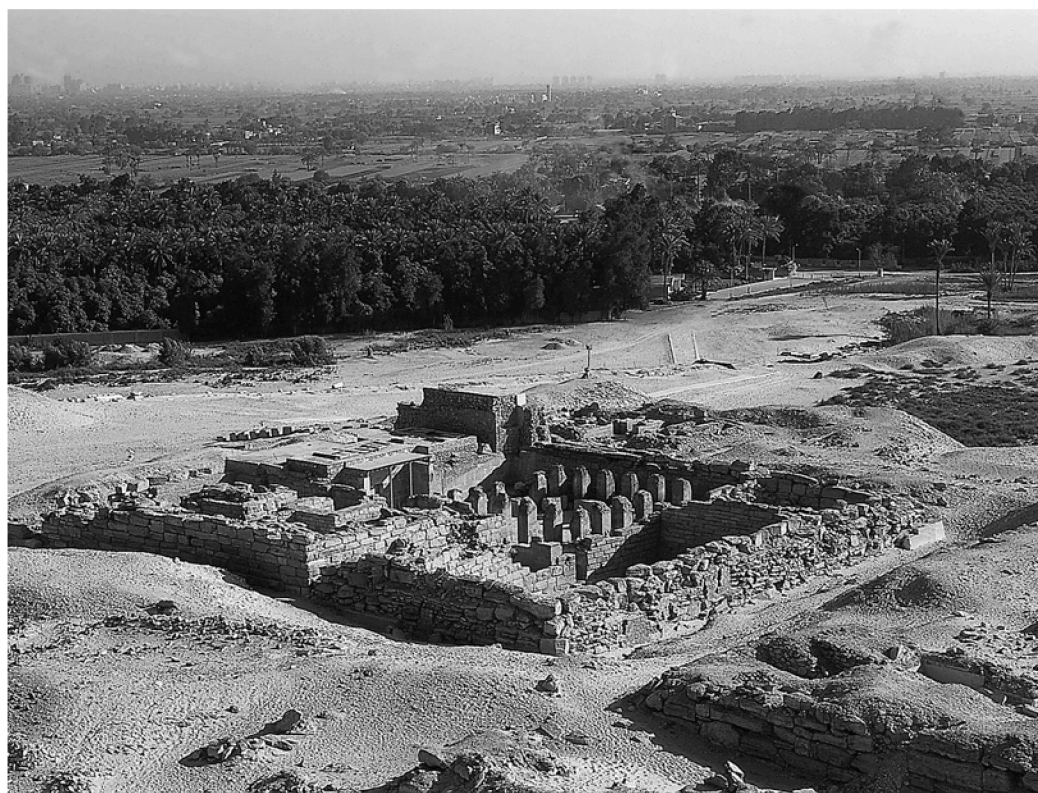
initially reserved for the highest-ranking officials of state, though this certainly was not true of Persen.

3. The false door stele with torus moulding (and the cornice) is also a distinctive trait of the period starting with the reign of Neferirkara/Nyusera⁷⁸.

78. Strudwick, *Administration*, 15 and 35 and Cherpion, *Mastabas*, 75, *criterion* 54.



1. The pyramid temple of Nyusera at Abusir, looking northeast.



2. The mastaba of Ptahshepses at Abusir, looking southeast (photo K. Vodera, Prague).

3. The restored and reconstructed portico in the mastaba of Ptahshepses.



4. The pillared court in the mastaba of Ptahshepses, looking northwest.



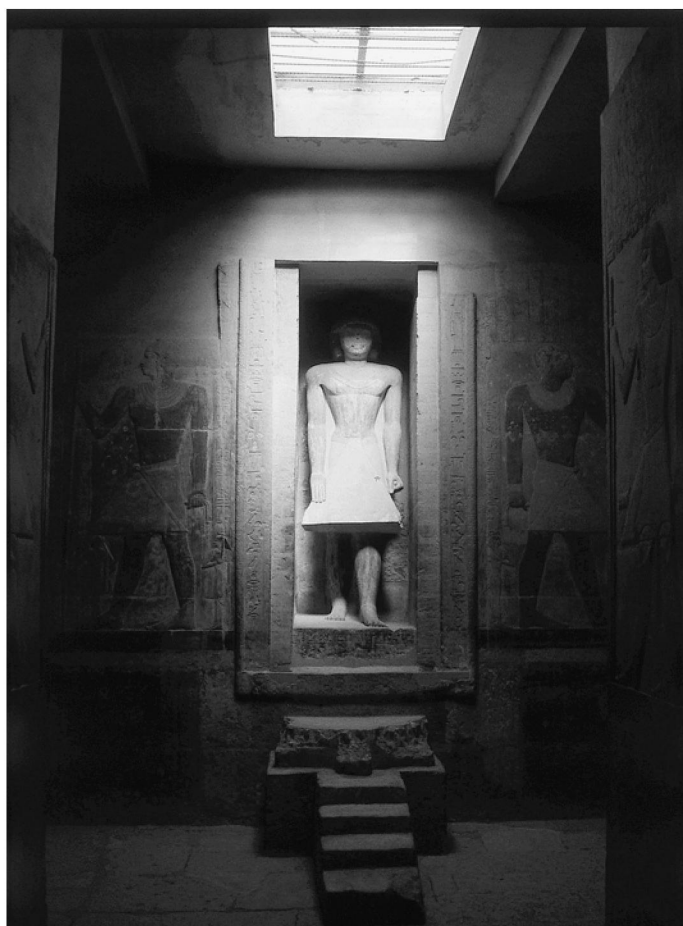
5. The open court in the tomb of Ptahshepses Junior II at Abusir, looking south.



6. The pillared court in the tomb of Ty, looking southwest.



7. The open court in the tomb of Userkafankh at Abusir, looking northwest.

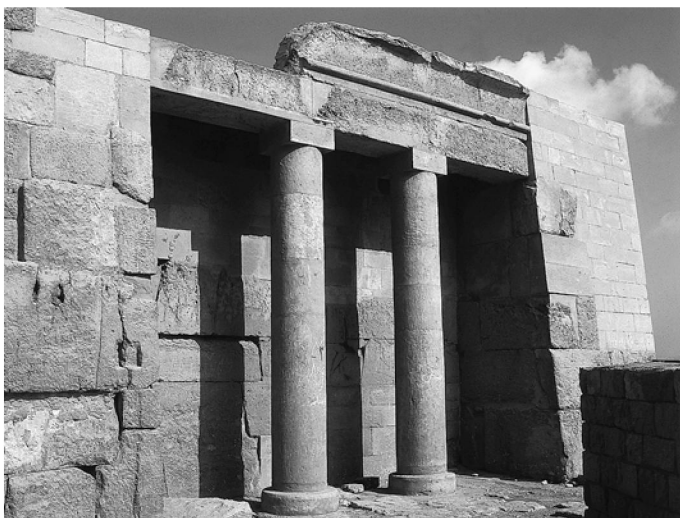


8. The court in the tomb of Mereruka, looking north.



9. Court in the tomb of Seshemnefer IV at Giza with a palace façade niching, looking northwest.

10. Portico of the tomb of Seshemnefer IV at Giza.



11. Place of a centralized mortuary cult with five mudbrick offering altars at Abusir (Archives of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, Prague).

