



Fig. 1 Figure of Ptahshepses in the decoration of the funerary chapel with three niches (photo M. Zemina)

## The household of an Egyptian dignitary – the case of Ptahshepses

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Tomb reliefs primarily inform us of the means the tomb owner employed to secure his eternal existence. The titles present provide information about the social status of the tomb owner. In a much similar manner, the subordinates depicted on the walls are also of particular importance. These individuals constitute an integral part of the specific decorative pattern depicted on the tomb's walls, in which the tomb owner is surrounded by his family, dependents, functionaries or servants who were embodied in his household. As Seidlmayer (2007: 356) stated, one can understand the relief decoration as a pictorial map of the social matrix within which the tomb owner was conceptualized. The aim of this article is to focus upon the sociological perspectives of the tomb reliefs. On the grounds of identified individuals, distinguished by titles and/or names, the present author would like to describe and analyse what the household of one high-ranking dignitary from the time of Nyuserre – Vizier Ptahshepses (fig. 1) – looked like.<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The prevailing view of ancient Egypt, especially during the Old Kingdom, remained among Egyptologists until recently as a highly centralized state dictating the economic activity by means of redistribution (Janssen 1981: 59–77; Altenmüller 2005; Bleiberg 1995: 1373–1385). However, new monographs and studies have accentuated a slightly different model. Though Hratch Papazian (2013: 41–83) sees the royal house as the dominant authority as well, he stressed the geographical aspect of the centralization and redistribution of resources – certain aspects necessitate, according to him, local control and standards, e.g. regulation of irrigation and basins<sup>2</sup> or resource management, such as granary maintenance. Juan Carlos Moreno García (2013: 89), on the other hand, considers the basic pillar of Egyptian society an informal, self-structured system of patronage.<sup>3</sup> Mark Lehner, in his ground breaking study, assumes the Egyptian state to be managed by local affairs through the use of its complex adaptive system (Lehner 2000: 275–353). Lehner's view of the society is far more complex than that suggested by redistribution; all sectors of society are understood to be mutually dependent, composed of and linked through face-to-face networks which integrate the society system (Lehner 2000: 275–276). He refers to Max Weber's patrimonialism (Weber 1978: 357–381) and David Schloen's work dealing with patrimonial households in Ugarit and the Near East (Schloen 2001). Schloen stressed the role of a patrimonial household as a fundamental economic unit for the whole Mediterranean region in antiquity. In a similar manner, Lehner pointed out the importance of the institution of the household for ancient Egypt, in particular for the Old Kingdom (not only for the intermediate periods of Egyptian history, which was generally accepted by Egyptologists).

The topic of the Ph.D. thesis of the present author was inspired by the above-mentioned works and referred to the patrimonial household model. For purposes of the study, the household is viewed from a sociological point. It includes not only the nuclear family (*h3w*), with people linked by family ties, but is defined as the extended household (*3bt*), consisting also of servants, clients, subordinates/colleagues and friends.<sup>4</sup> Members of this "extended" household are recorded in the iconography of Egyptian tombs as personal attendants, household servants, offering bearers, etc. The main aim of the thesis is (on the basis of identified persons in the tombs) to record the changing structure of the Old Kingdom (especially the growth in the complexity of the Egyptian household in connection with the number and diversity of titles its members held). In this introductory article, the author will show what a particular household of an Egyptian high dignitary looked like based on the case study of Vizier Ptahshepses. Possible interpretations will be given of the positions which the minor figures portrayed in the reliefs held within the vizierial household, and some problematic aspects of this topic will be pointed out.

The author of this study decided to describe the household of Vizier Ptahshepses for several reasons. The mastaba of Vizier Ptahshepses is the first archaeological location in Abusir that the Czech (former Czechoslovak) Institute of Egyptology have been excavating for almost

sixty years. At the same time, it is one of the largest and architecturally most complicated non-royal tombs dated to the Old Kingdom (fig. 2; see also Krejčí 2009; Krejčí 2011: 253–276). Ptahshepses, as a vizier, held the post at the head of the state administration.<sup>5</sup> As a rule, the number of household members depended on the status of their master. The higher the position in the administration of the Egyptian state the tomb owner held, the higher the number of dependents were involved in administering his household and were subsequently depicted in the decoration of the tombs with their name and titles (Bárta 2011: 275). Thus, it can be supposed that Ptahshepses had the most elaborate household among redundant high officials at that time.

Another important role was played by the chronological aspect. The number of dependents as well as the number and variety of their titles varied significantly during the Old Kingdom. Even a brief survey indicates that in the first half of the Fourth Dynasty, there is scarce evidence of identified individuals – only family members are recorded in the iconography of modest chapels, for instance the tomb of Nefermaat (Harpur 2001) or Hemiunu (Junker 1929: 132–162). A slight change can be seen at the turn of the Fourth to Fifth Dynasty. The highest positions in the state administration came step by step into the hands of officials of non-royal origin (Helck 1954: 18–22; Bárta 2013: 270). This had an impact on the number of tombs, not only of wealthy officials but also on the sudden increase in tombs of the middle and lower classes of Egyptian society. From the beginning of Fifth Dynasty, the middle and lower strata also began to record their dependents with labels of their names and titles in the iconography of their tombs. These changes resulted in a fundamental transformation during the reign of King Nyuserre (Bárta – Dulíková 2015). He reformed many sectors: religious, social, administrative, architectural etc. (Dulíková 2016b). In fact, Ptahshepses embodies these changes, as will be elaborated further in the text.

Last but not least, the core masonry of Ptahshepses mastaba bears more than 400 hieratic inscriptions, which can serve as complementary material for this study. Such a high number of graffiti is unique even in the royal mortuary complexes (e.g. Perring – Vyse 1842: 22–37; Borchart 1909: 46–46, 53–54; Borchart 1910: 90; Verner *et al.* 2006: 187–204).

## The tomb of Ptahshepses

Great, multi-chambered tombs of the elite emerged during the Fifth Dynasty as a result of the above-mentioned changes in society (Jánosi 2000: 445–466). The tomb of Ptahshepses is very illustrative of such monuments. It was constructed in three building phases, probably reflecting the growth of Ptahshepses' position within the state administration.<sup>6</sup> At the end of the construction works, it consisted of forty rooms (see fig. 2) and acquired dimensions of 42.24 × 56.24 m (Krejčí 2006: 150–51). Apart from its immense size, the tomb was innovative in incorporating elements of royal architecture in its architectural design: monumental portico, pillared courtyard, room with three niches, east-west oriented cult chapel, room for boats, saddle roof of the burial chamber, etc. (Verner 1986;

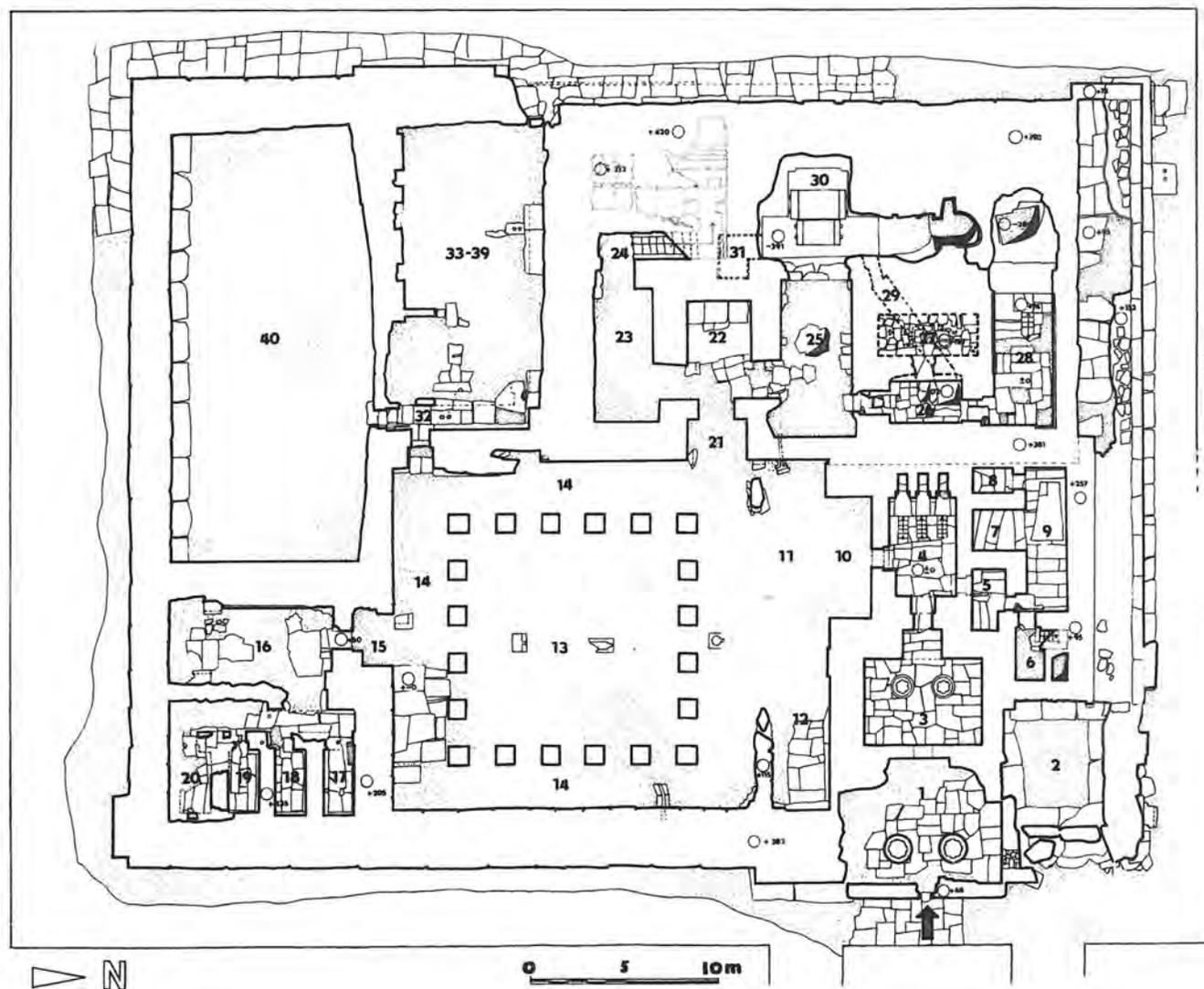


Fig. 2 Archaeological plan of the mastaba of Ptahshepses (after Verner 1986: pl. 1)

Krejčí 2009; Bárta 2005: 105–130; Bárta 2011: 175–179). In a similar manner, two granite sarcophagi are exceptional, both installed in the burial chamber of the mastaba – one belonging to the vizier and one to his wife, Khamerernebtj.<sup>7</sup> These are comparable to their royal counterparts, not only in material but also in dimensions (Verner 2000: 574; Bárta 2011: 175).<sup>8</sup>

The size of the tomb, its architecture incorporating elements that had previously been exclusive to royal mortuary monuments, its situation in the most prominent place in the cemetery of Nobles near the pyramid complexes of Nyuserre and Sahure, the high number of storerooms indicating the large number of rituals that were once carried out there and the statue collection found in the mastaba<sup>9</sup> all reveal the high status of the tomb owner.

### Wall decoration

The original relief decoration of the mastaba of Ptahshepses is preserved fragmentarily; according to Verner (1992: 187), only about one sixth has survived up to the present.<sup>10</sup> It covers the walls of six rooms of the mastaba: especially Room 3 (served as the entrance to the tomb before the first great enlargement), Room 4 (chapel with three niches), Room 10 (junction of the three building stages of the

mastaba), Room 11 (adjacent to the pillared courtyard), Rooms 13–15 (walls in the pillared courtyard) and Room 16 (the only decorated storeroom of the mastaba) (see Verner 1986; also fig. 2).<sup>11</sup>

The tomb reliefs primarily inform us of the nuclear family of Ptahshepses. Unfortunately, his family background is not recorded in the decoration of the tomb. This is unknown to us, as is similar to other high officials, for instance Ti of Saqqara (Épron – Daumas 1939). Though we do not know the rank and position that the father of Ptahshepses probably held at the royal court, Ptahshepses' titles show that he, himself, started his career as the king's hairdresser (Verner 1994: 173–192). To work in close proximity to the king in his private sphere, indicates that Ptahshepses must have come from a trustworthy family, which is supported by the fact of his later marriage to the king's daughter, Khamerernebtj.<sup>12</sup> The depictions show Ptahshepses' wife and his offspring: seven sons, and two daughters (Verner 1986). The situation among his sons is rather puzzling. Three different sequences of Ptahshepses' sons are recorded on three different places in the mastaba, which probably reflect Ptahshepses' second marriage to Nyuserre's daughter Khamerernebtj – her sons were given preference to

sons born to the supposed first of Ptahshepses' wives, who was of non-royal origin (Verner 1986: 103).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in all three cases, the figure, name and titles of the first born son, Khafini, were thoroughly erased; nevertheless, there is no doubt of the original inscription. As Verner stated, it is even more startling because to erase his name meant also to completely remove the name of the king (Nyuserre) Ini (Verner 1986: 103), but there are no clues to explain this situation. One can only surmise that Khafini fell into disgrace.<sup>14</sup>

Apart from family members, a great number of anonymous people (priests, scribes, craftsmen, household servants, *etc.*) appear in the decoration of the tomb. If persons are labelled (identified with name and title), we can assume a certain relationship of intimacy between the portrayed individual and the tomb owner. There seems to be no rules in the representation of the identified persons in certain types of scenes. They are recorded in different contexts – offering table scene, craftsman's workshop, cattle count, *etc.* Some of them bear specific objects that have symbolism closely connected to a particular profession/title. However, I will not follow up and elaborate on this topic, but look more closely at analysing the relations Ptahshepses had with his dependents.<sup>15</sup>

There are a lot of questions to be asked. Are the people portrayed in the tomb servants in a labour-law relationship, collaborates/friends of lower position, dependants based on patron-client bonds or distant relatives?<sup>16</sup> It might be further asked whether these particular officials are part of the tomb owner's private staff or members of central administration, which asks the question, were allocated by the state or by the tomb owner, himself? Were all household members represented in the tomb or only a selection of them?<sup>17</sup> To answer some of these questions, the biographical inscription of a Middle Kingdom official, Khnumhetep II, recorded in his large tomb at Beni Hassan, can help us (Newberry 1893; Seidlmayer 2007: 357).<sup>18</sup> Khnumhetep states that he made enduring not only his name but also the names of his council and of excellent members of his household, whom he singled out from his dependants (Newberry 1893: 57–67, pl. XXV). Certain selection and personal preferences are also confirmed by the fact that several persons occur on the wall decoration several times – mostly two times (9 persons occur more than once in the tomb of Ptahshepses, for correlation of their titles, see tab. 1).<sup>19</sup> It is essential that any other occurrence stressed the importance of this person for the tomb owner. On the other hand, it is necessary to point out

Occurrences in total	Name	Titles
3	Memi	<i>šḥd ḥm(w)-k3</i> <i>ḥm-k3</i> <i>šḥd ḥmwt(yw)</i>
3	Ptahshepses	<i>šḥd kšty(yw)</i> <i>kšty</i> <i>ḥm-k3</i>
3	Seshemnefer	<i>z3b zš, šḥd ḥm(w)-k3</i> <i>ḥk3 ḥwt</i> <i>zš šnwt, ḥm-k3</i>
3	Khnumhetep	<i>ḥk(w) pr-ᜀ3, ḥm-k3</i> <i>ḥk(w) pr-ᜀ3, ḥm-k3</i> <i>ir(w)-ᜀnt pr-ᜀ3, šḥd ḥm(w)-k3</i>
2	Nyankhkhnum	<i>šḥd ḥm(w)-k3, ir(w)-ᜀnt pr-ᜀ3</i> <i>šḥd sd3wt(yw)</i>
2	Kaihep	<i>ir(w)šn pr-ᜀ3, šḥd ḥm(w)-k3</i> <i>ir(w) šn pr-ᜀ3</i>
2	Ankhhaf	<i>ir(w)-ᜀnt, ḥm-k3</i> no title
2	Pehernefer	<i>z3b (zš), ḥm-k3</i> no title
2	Nyankhmin	<i>ḥm-k3, imy-r3 ššr</i> <i>ḥm-k3</i>
2	Tjesef	<i>šḥd zš(w) ḥry ḥtm, šḥd ḥm(w)-k3</i> <i>zš nzwt, šḥd ḥm(w)-k3</i>
2	Irenre	<i>kšty</i> no title

Tab. 1 Individuals occurring several times in the iconography of Ptahshepses' mastaba

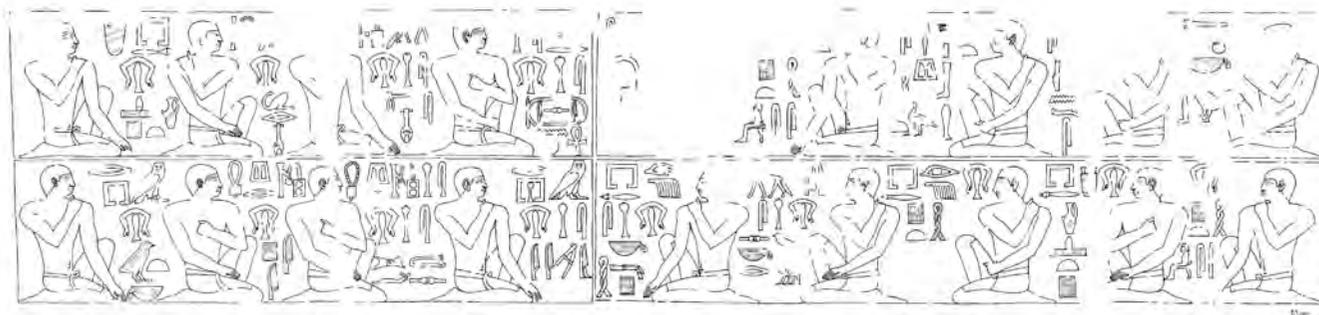


Fig. 3 Depiction of Ptahshepses' sons and his closest subordinates, Room 10, east wall (after Verner 1986: pls. 51, 52)

that it is not certain whether two people with the same name and different titles were identical or were two different people. In some cases, the titles for both names are not preserved, or they vary to a certain degree. It is even unclear whether people with the same title and the same name are identical, especially in instances where a person has a common name and equally common titles.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the identification is also questionable in cases in which one person with the same name and titles appears in the same scene, for instance an individual named Khnumhetep is depicted two times bearing identical titles in a single scene of seated subordinates (see fig. 3).

Small, blank squares smoothed in front of particular figures, which are reserved for inscribing a name and/or a title (clearly visible, for instance, in the tomb of Akhethetep; see Davies 1901; Ziegler 2007; see fig. 4) indicate intentional and elaborated layout of a scene, in which every single person had his exactly defined place

and a special sequence of the dependents was presumably required. Nevertheless, there are numerous cases of names scratched additionally in reliefs against the original plan of the tomb owner as possible additions of poorer members of the next generation of the same family (Vymazalová, *forthcoming a*) (see also fig. 4). But we should be very cautious concerning the dating of such additions and rewrites.

#### The “extended” household of Vizier Ptahshepses

There are 76 different persons not linked with family ties to Ptahshepses who are portrayed in the tomb as minor figures. They provide a distinct picture of the vizierial household. It contains both a significantly high number of dependents and a considerably great diversity among their titles (32 different titles are evidenced). The titles range from priestly, scribal, craft and the administrative/managerial sphere to titles of various household servants, servants engaged in the sphere of body care, *etc.* (see tab. 2).

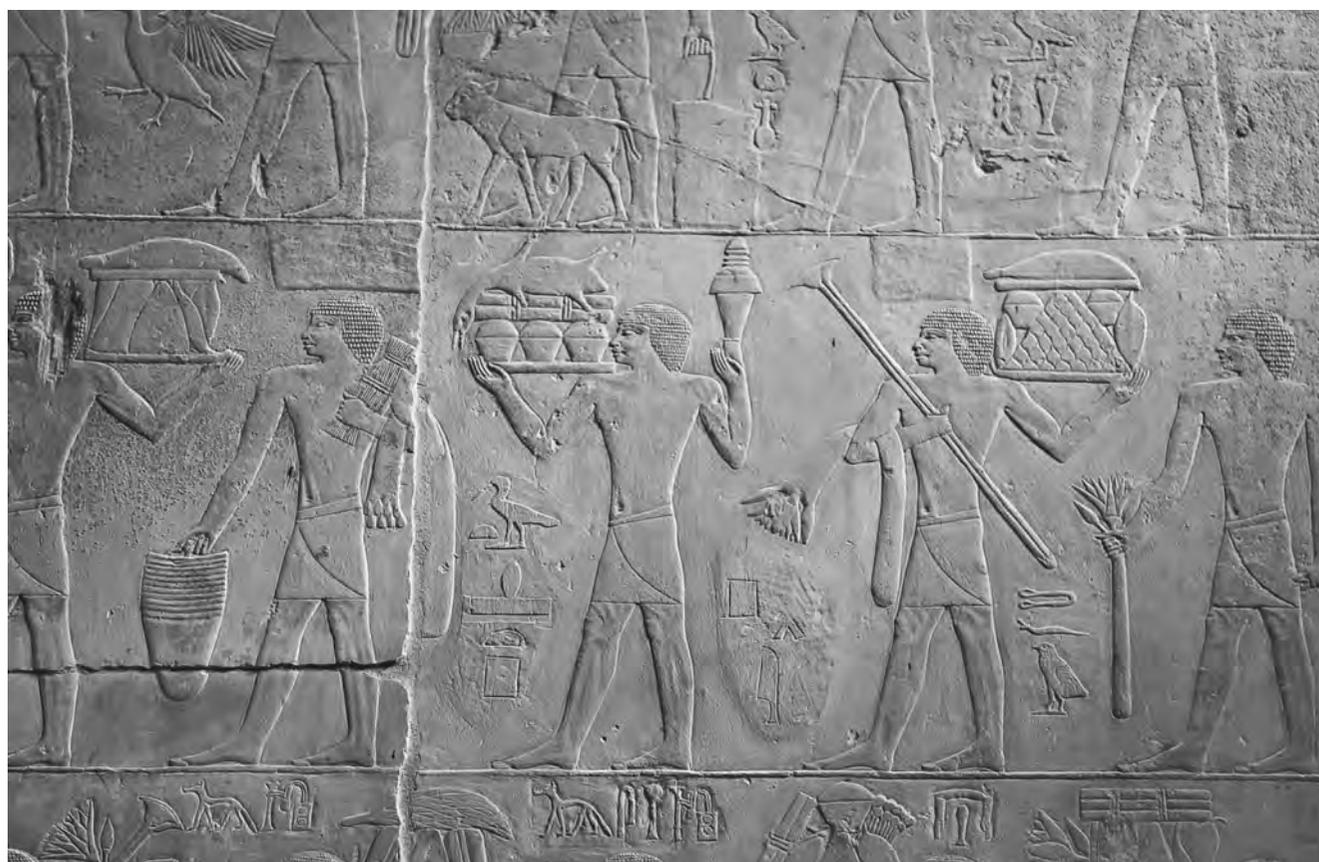


Fig. 4 Scene of a procession of offering bearers in the chapel of Akhethetep's tomb (photo H. Vymazalová)

A crucial scene in identifying the most important persons of Ptahshepses household is the scene of the seated tomb owner accompanied by family, personal attendants and subordinate officials on the east wall of Room 10 (see fig. 3). Two registers of dependents below the seated tomb owner are headed by four of his sons.<sup>21</sup> Holding a prominent position, the physician Kaiwedja sits immediately behind Ptahshepses' sons (first from the right in the first upper register). In fact, we do not know if Ptahshepses suffered from any diseases and to what extent he needed the care of a physician,<sup>22</sup> but the position of the physician in the scene indicates closeness and a special relationship with the tomb owner, presumably reflecting the intimate character of his profession.

Scribes, a large group of individuals regularly depicted in the tombs, constitute an essential part of a household of a high-ranking person.<sup>23</sup> We encounter "scribes", "inspector of scribes" and "seal-bearers" as well as "juridical scribes" in the above-mentioned scene in the mastaba of Ptahshepses (see fig. 3). These were probably in charge of operations of household income and legal matters. They were highly likely to be members of Ptahshepses' household because each of these persons simultaneously took care of the funerary cult of the deceased as "*k3*-priest"/"inspector of *k3*-priest", indicating a personal relationship with the tomb owner.

On the other hand, scribes with slightly different titles occur in the tomb reliefs, e.g. "scribe of the Treasury". This person could be, contrary to those scribes who were members of Ptahshepses' household, Ptahshepses' direct subordinate in his function of a vizier, or "overseer of the two Treasuries", respectively. In the overall decoration in the tomb, other potential direct subordinates of Ptahshepses are present. They are persons employed in the field of organization of works under the supervision of Ptahshepses as holder of the title "overseer of all works of the king" (see tab. 2). These officials are pictured in the scenes of the procession carrying the deceased in a palanquin or dragging the statues of the tomb owner – portrayed viewing or accompanying the tomb owner (Verner 1986: Pl. 54, Insc. No. 155; Pl. 55, Insc. No. 144; Pl. 60, Insc. No. 169; Pl. 82, Insc. No. 184). There are several other persons who held titles connected to the central institution, state or the king himself in the above-mentioned scene on the east wall of Room 10 as well as on other places of the tomb (see tab. 2). They are, for instance, individuals with the titles "overseer of the two Treasuries" Iymeri and "inspector of the Great House" Izyankh (see fig. 3); or two "scribes of the granary" preserved in the scene of bringing offerings are presumably transporting fruits from a state granary (see Verner 1986: Pl. 9, Insc. No. 19, 20).<sup>24</sup> Two of the above-mentioned individuals are present not only in the iconography of the vizier's tomb, but they are also recorded on the royal monuments, stressing thus their connection to the royal court.<sup>25</sup> However, it is essential to say that the situation in the case of a vizierial household is rather peculiar. In fact, all Egyptian officials were direct or indirect subordinates of the vizier. Thus, officials with given titles were most likely both executive court officials and at the same time loyal subordinates of their master.

Interestingly, minor figures in the iconography who held titles connected with central administration do quite often

occur in the tombs of the viziers, contrary to tombs of other strata of society where they are almost missing.<sup>26</sup>

Among the minor figures in Ptahshepses' tomb, there are also individuals employed in the sphere of body care depicted. Five persons holding titles of ordinary "manicurists" or "barbers," who without doubt carried out their profession within Ptahshepses' household, are exhibited. Another nine persons are labelled with the titles of "hairdresser or barber of the Great House". A part of their title *pr-ḥ* refers to the "Great House".<sup>27</sup> They were more likely employed in the sphere of body care of the king rather than the vizier. It is possible that the king provided services in the form of these specialists to the vizier or other high officials as is attested within the craftsmen specialists with an epithet *pr-ḥ* or *nzwt* (Eyre 1987: 5–47). But it seems this is not the case, as the situation within Ptahshepses' household is more complex (see below).

It is of certain importance that a numerous group of persons employed in the sphere of body care is depicted in the mastaba of Ptahshepses, which was not usual in other officials' tombs. It could be put down to the fact that this is the same professional sphere in which Ptahshepses began his career as royal hairdresser. It seems likely that these persons were his colleagues. Within the same group of people, we also find the well-known brother "manicurists of the Great House", Nyankhkhnum and Khnumhetep (Moussa – Altenmüller 1977). We can presume a friendship or similar special relationship between them and the vizier. Nyankhkhnum and Khnumhetep occupy prominent places in the iconography in the vicinity of the tomb owner. They occur on several places in the tomb and both appear several times even in the hieratic inscriptions collected on the core masonry of the mastaba (see tab. 3). Moreover, the household of the vizier and these brother manicurists are linked together with the official named Ankhhaf. And possibly three other persons with identical names occur in the iconography of both the tombs of Ptahshepses and Nyankhkhnum and Khnumhetep.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the name of one of Khnumhetep's sons was Ptahshepses, which can be further proof of close relations and possible patron-client bonds between both families.

To proceed with describing the structure of Ptahshepses' household, an important person was a "steward/overseer of the house/estate" who stood as the head of the household servants. Moreover, a total of four different overseers of the house are identified in the iconography.<sup>29</sup> One of them is recorded among the important officials on the east wall of Room 10 (see fig. 3). He is presumably the chief "overseer of the house", sitting in the close vicinity of the tomb owner. The other three "overseers of the house" are depicted as commanders, each portrayed on one of three ships transporting various products from estates into the tomb (fig. 5). They appear in the same register, which can indicate that they carried out their functions in parallel rather than succeeding each other in a chronological order. They were probably administrators of Ptahshepses' estates, being responsible for providing food from the estates to the vizierial household, because the title *hk3 hwt* "estate manager" is simultaneously attached to each of these three persons. Their number probably reflects the size of the vizierial household.

	<b>Titles</b>	<b>Number of occurrences</b>
Scribal professions	<i>z3b zš</i> , “juridical scribe”	7
	<i>zš</i> , “scribe”	4
	<i>imy-r3 zš(w)</i> , “overseer of scribes”	2
	<i>šḥḏ ḥtmt(yw)</i> , “inspector of the seal-bearers”	2
	<i>zš šnwt</i> , “scribe of the Granary”	2
	<i>zš pr-ḥḏ</i> , “scribe of the Treasury”	1
	<i>šḥḏ zš(w) ḥry ḥtmt</i> , “inspector of scribes of the registry”	1
	<i>zš md3(w)t</i> , “document scribe”	1
Household management	<i>imy-r3 pr</i> , “overseer of the house/estate, the Steward”	4
	<i>ḥk3 ḥwt</i> , “estate manager”	3
	<i>imy-r3 ššr</i> , “overseer of the linen”	1
Organisation of labour	<i>imy-r3 ḥprw</i> , “commander of the ḥpr-detachment”	2
	<i>imy-r3 izwt</i> , “overseer of crews/gangs”	1
	<i>ḥrp izwt</i> , “director of the gang of the workmen”	2
Specialists	<i>zwnw</i> , “physician”	1
Craftmen	<i>kšty</i> , “sculptor”	4
	<i>šḥḏ kst(yw)</i> , “inspector of sculptors”	1
	<i>imy-r3 ḥmwt(yw)</i> , “overseer of craftsmen”	1
	<i>šḥḏ ḥmwt(yw)</i> , “inspector of craftsmen”	1
Sphere of body care	<i>ir(w) šn pr-ḥ3</i> , “hairstylist of the Great House”	3
	<i>ḥḥk(w) pr-ḥ3</i> , “barber of the Great House”	3
	<i>ḥḥk(w)</i> , “barber”	3
	<i>...ḥḥk(w)</i> , “... barber”	1
	<i>ir(w)-ḥnt pr-ḥ3</i> , “manicurist of the Great House”	2
	<i>ir(w)-ḥnt</i> , “manicurist”	1
	<i>iry mrḥt pr-ḥ3</i> , “keeper/custodian of the oil/salve (?) of the Great House”	1
Food supply	<i>ššm(ty)</i> , “butcher”	1
	<i>ššm(ty) n pr-dt</i> , “butcher of the funerary estate”	1
	<i>imy-r3 šdw-3pd(w)</i> , “overseer of the poultry-feeders”	1
Priestly services	<i>ḥm-k3</i> , “k3-servant”	26
	<i>šḥḏ ḥm(w)-k3</i> , “inspector of funerary-priests”	16
	<i>wḥb nzwt</i> , “wab-priest of the king”	4
Titles connected with state/central institution/king	<i>šḥḏ pr-ḥ3</i> , “inspector of the Great House”	1
	<i>imy-r3 pr-ḥḏ</i> , “overseer of the Treasury”	1
	<i>štp-z3</i> , “protector, court councillor”	2
	<i>šḥḏ šmsw n(w) ḥnw</i> , “inspector of the retainers of the Residence”	1
	<i>ḥry-ššt3</i> , “one who is privy to the secret”	1
	<i>imy-r3 pr-šnḥ nzwt</i> , “overseer of the royal department of stores”	1
	<i>zš nzwt</i> , “scribe of the king”	1

Tab. 2 Structure of Ptahshepses' household

Titles in iconography	Name	Titles in graffiti	Number of occurrences in graffiti	Graffito no. (name)	Graffito no. (name+title)	Graffito no. (name+date)
<i>imy-r3 mr-hit pr-3</i>	Nyankhra	<i>šḥd pr-3;</i> <i>šmr wšny</i>	14	13, 15	200, 201	60 39, 89, 91, 93, 116, 299*, 305, 404, 408
<i>ḥʿk(w) pr-3, ḥm-k3; ir(w)-5nt pr-3, šḥd ḥm(w)-k3</i>	Khnumhetep	without a title	13	386		27, 79, 115, 253, 262, 367, 371, 372, 376, 418, 420, 421
<i>šḥd ḥm(w)-k3, ir(w)-5nt pr-3</i>	Nyankhkhnum	<i>šḥd ḥm(w)-k3,</i> <i>ir(w)-5nt pr-3</i>	10	22, 23	98, 117, 301, 378, 400, 401, 406, 412	
<i>imy-r3 izwt</i>	Hetepi	<i>imy-r3 izwt</i>	8	109		106, 123*, 125, 128*, 409, 414
<i>imy-r3 pr, ḥk3 ḥwt</i>	Khenu	<i>imy-r3 izwt</i>	5	122, 402#		102*, 124 148
<i>šḥd ḥm(w)-k3, wʿb nzwt, zš</i>	Nymekhinepu	<i>z3b zš</i>	3		34, 52, 81	
<i>ḥry šš3, wʿb nzwt, šḥd ḥm(w)-k3, z3b zš</i>	Duahep	<i>z3b zš</i>	3		28, 43	120
<i>šḥd ḥm(w)-k3; ḥm-k3; šḥd ḥmwt(yw)</i>	Memi	without a title	1			385*
<i>ḥʿk(w) pr-3, šḥd ḥm(w)-k3, wʿb nzwt</i>	Ankhhaf/Nekhhaf	without a title	1	33		
without a title	Ti: Kai	<i>ḥry tp nzwt, z3b</i>	1		163	

\* two names on a graffito  
# three names on a graffito

Tab. 3 Hieratic inscriptions with personal names of individuals appearing in both sources – iconography and graffiti

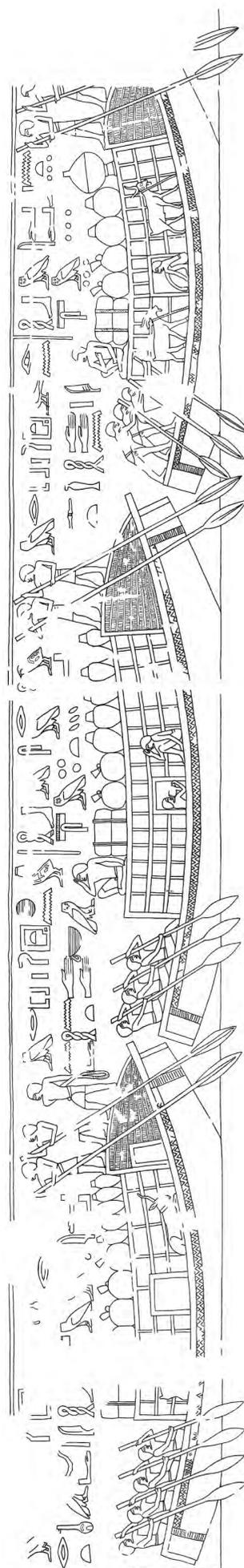


Fig. 5 Scene of cargo-ships in the mastaba of Ptahshepses, Room 3, south wall (after Verner 1986: pl. 3 and 4)

10 cm

To compare the repertoire of scenes in the mastaba of Ptahshepses with tombs of some high officials from the second part of the Fifth Dynasty, e.g. the tomb of Senedjemib Inti (Brovarski 2001) or the tomb of Akhetetep (Davies 1901), we markedly lack the “daily-life” scenes which make the picture of the household members more complex. There are only a few scenes with gardeners on the chapel’s north wall and scenes with fishermen, herdsmen milking cows and an overseer of poultry on the south wall of the chapel in the tomb of Ptahshepses that have survived up to the present. As a result, some common professions absent are as follows: washers, farmers or people who had to tend to the needs of Ptahshepses in the area of food and drink – bakers, brewers, as well as *wdpw*-servants. Household servants are in Ptahshepses’ household represented by several “butchers”, and managerial functions then are represented by the “overseer of the linen” and the already mentioned “overseer of the poultry” (see tab. 2).

Another group of individuals depicted in the tomb can reflect the patron-client relationship. Marcelo Campagno (2014: 13) states that the large households depicted in some Old Kingdom tombs, such as those of Ti, or Nyankhkhnum and Khnumhetep, probably included not only a kinship group but also friends or dependents of different types likely related to the tomb owner through patronage ties. In this category, Christopher Eyre (1987: 5–46) includes craftsmen with titles connected with the royal court (designated with “*pr-ꜥꜣ*” or “*nzwt*”).<sup>30</sup> Eyre stressed that they had higher status than the ordinary workmen. He also pointed out that they were only available by allowance of the state. Nevertheless, no such title is attested in the iconography of Ptahshepses’ tomb, but we can ascribe it to the fragmentary preservation of the wall reliefs. Within the group of ordinary craftsmen, Drenkhahn ascribes a slightly higher status to sculptors, who are represented in Ptahshepses’ tomb (see tab. 2), and to a certain extent also painters (Drenkhahn 1995: 331–343). According to her study, sculptors made up a distinct group among craftsmen, which she deduced from details in scenes of craft work, such as their designation as *mhnk*, “rewarded”, and because their work was produced exclusively to furnish tombs. As such, they were employed only for the duration of their commission, not being permanent members of an official’s estate.

Other individuals appearing in elite tombs can be considered clients of the tomb owners. They are persons labelled with the title *sn-dt.f*, “his brother of the funerary estate”, as Moreno García (2007: 117–136) referred to them in one of his articles. But it is questionable if these persons are not rather contract workers (Martina Bardoňová, personal communication). Moreover, individuals with such titles are completely missing in the tomb of Ptahshepses, but they are figured in other vizirial households, for instance in the tomb of Senedjemib Inti (Brovarski 2001: 75, 87, fig. 61), or they are recorded in the Abusir papyri (Posener-Kriéger 1986: 397–398, 472–475). Hints of patronage can also be seen in scenes in which a person occupies an honourable position among family members/important officials/household managers but is not identified with a corresponding title (for instance *k3*-priest Ptahshepses;

see fig. 3); or if an individual appears on the walls of the tomb several times, for instance, a certain Hezy in the tomb of the vizier, Seshathetep Heti (G 5150), although other persons clearly of higher position do not appear in the mastaba repeatedly (Kanawati 2002: 28, Pls. 9, 47). However, it is important to say that these persons can, at the same time, reflect a distant/unsaid kin relation.

### Hieratic inscriptions

For reconstruction of the social network around Vizier Ptahshepses, we have a great opportunity to use another preserved source – the hieratic inscriptions recorded as builders’ or masons’ marks on the core walls of the vizier’s mastaba (see Verner 1992). It is the largest corpus of hieratic inscriptions which has so far been assembled in the Abusir necropolis (Vymazalová, *forthcoming b*). It amounts to more than 400 graffiti. This corpus contains a great variety of inscriptions: not only building and phyle signs, quarry marks, dates and geometric marks, but also about 30 different personal names (Verner 1992: 186, tab. 5). In this type of inscription, a name alone, a name and a title, a name and a date, or all three – a name, a title and a date, is recorded.

There are several possible interpretations of graffiti with a personal name/s. Some scholars consider graffiti with a name to be a donation the subordinate voluntarily provided or was obliged to provide to his master, in particular with regard to graffiti recorded on the walls of royal monuments, while personal names recorded in a non-royal tomb were regarded to be the designation of the tomb owner or persons closely associated with him (Borchardt 1907: 146; Borchardt 1909: 46).<sup>31</sup> Petra Andrásy (2009: 6–8) suggests the blocks of stones inscribed with personal names could have been leftover material collected from the Abusir necropolis and then used for the construction of Ptahshepses’ tomb. As holder of the title “overseer of all works of the king”,<sup>32</sup> Ptahshepses could have used material originally intended for constructing tombs of his subordinates; or contrarily, these persons might have given the blocks of material as a sign of their respect for their master, as was usual in a royal context (Vymazalová 2014: 278). In contrast, Miroslav Verner (1992: 185) stressed the connection of personal names with the supervision, inspection and control mechanism of the construction works, in cases where several persons and a date are recorded (see tab. 3).<sup>33</sup>

An important role in interpreting graffiti is played by the orientation of an inscription. In the collection of given graffiti, we find inscriptions on blocks *in situ* oriented upside-down (for instance, see Verner 1992: No. 43, 106 or 163), indicating that the record was created before the block was installed in its place. But we can only speculate whether the inscription was inscribed on the stone in a quarry, in a storeroom directly on the necropolis, or on some other occasion.

There are ten persons occurring in both the iconography and graffiti of the mastaba (see tab. 3).<sup>34</sup> Similar to the reliefs, the frequency of titles connected with the sphere of body care is quite startling. Persons with such titles occur altogether on 53 blocks from a total number of 141 graffiti bearing a personal name and a title.<sup>35</sup> In the

rest of the collection, we encounter other functional titles, most of which also appear in the iconography of the tomb. Moreover, ranking titles such as *iry iht nzw* and *šmr w<sup>c</sup>ty* are recorded, which is common within the royal complexes and tombs of members of the royal family (Borchardt 1909: 27, 46–47; Verner 1992: 185; Krejčí – Callender – Verner *et al.* 2008: 145, 228), but are quite unusual in the context of non-royal tombs.

Another interesting piece of information about the graffiti in Ptahshepses' tomb which is based on the distribution of the graffiti is that the majority of graffiti with personal names were found on the blocks of the third building phase of the mastaba (Verner 1992: 184). Jaromír Krejčí, in his work, considers the mastaba not fully finished for the reason of Ptahshepses' possible death or even the death of Nyuserre (Krejčí 2009: 188). It can be supposed that some of the leading members of Ptahshepses' household, his colleagues/subordinates or friends were highly likely supported by the king and carried on their shoulders the responsibility to finish the construction of the mastaba after his death (Verner 1992: 184–185). The dependents could have used material originally intended for their own monuments,<sup>36</sup> under the circumstances of Ptahshepses' sudden death, for the urgent completion of the vizier's tomb. Ptahshepses's and Khamernebtj's oldest son, Ptahshepses Junior II, could have led or at least supervised the organisation of the works in such case, similar to the attested participation of the king's sons in the royal construction projects (Borchardt 1909: 54–55; Vymazalová 2014: 278), but judging only by the graffiti, it is hard to testify this.<sup>37</sup>

None of the above enumerated possibilities can be, on the given repertoire of hieratic inscriptions, excluded. Nevertheless, the high number of mentioned personal names, the few titles connected to the organisation of the works and the quite large number of identical persons appearing in both the iconography and hieratic inscriptions make the interpretation of graffiti as a token of respect of the loyal dependents for their master more plausible.

## Conclusion

The tomb of Ptahshepses belongs among one of the largest (covering an area of *ca.* 2,376 m<sup>2</sup>) and architecturally most elaborated non-royal tombs (with features of royal architecture) dated to the Old Kingdom. Its relief decoration (though only fragmentarily preserved) and its great number of hieratic inscriptions (over 400) provide a lot of information about the nucleus of the family of Ptahshepses, his career, the chronology of the building and Ptahshepses himself. Moreover, it enables us to establish Ptahshepses' position within the larger framework of individuals not linked to him with family ties and to outline a pictorial map of the social network of relations of the vizier. Altogether, this gives us an insight into the size, importance and structure of the vizierial court dated to the reign of Nyuserre.

Almost 80 persons identified with a name and/or title were recorded in the iconography of the mastaba of Ptahshepses. In addition, another 20 different persons were inscribed in hieratic inscriptions – almost a hundred people

who formed the social network of Ptahshepses. Nevertheless, the type of relations these persons had with the tomb owner is never explicit. Certain images show a visible hierarchy within the portrayed people, but more often the information is obscure. The situation makes the problematic identification of individuals with the same names and varying titles more difficult. Moreover, we can suppose (on the grounds of the biographical evidence of Khnumhetep of Beni Hassan) that a certain selection among the dependents was made to guarantee the eternal provisions only for the “excellent members of the household.” Administrative sources often accentuated only members of the nuclear family. Some spells of Coffin Texts and the Heqanakht Papers give us a glimpse of different variants of relations within the “extended” family (Moreno Garcia 2012; Allen 2002; Willems 2015: 447–472). Unfortunately, in the iconography of tombs such information is missing. One can only presume who the people depicted on the walls in the tombs and inscribed in hieratic were by analysing titles attached to particular personal names.

The labelled persons (identified with a name and a title) in the wall decoration of Ptahshepses' mastaba highly likely form a mixture of all the proposed groups. They were members of Ptahshepses' household: his servants (*e.g.* “butchers”), people employed in the sphere of body care (*e.g.* “barbers” or “manicurists”), all of them headed by an “overseer of the house” and other managers who were in charge of different segments of the household (for instance “overseer of the linen” or “overseer of the poultry”). Another essential part of Ptahshepses' household was composed of different “scribal” professions – persons who were in charge of operations of household income and legal matters and *k3*-servants who secured the funerary services to the tomb owner.

Apart from these, there seems to be people who were apparently not members of Ptahshepses' household. They were Ptahshepses' colleagues/direct subordinates (persons employed in the sphere of “organization of works” and “administration of the Treasury”). A significantly great number of individuals are people connected to the central administration, the court or the king, which reflects the particularity of the vizierial household.

Importantly, another large number of represented officials are people connected to the body care of the king (“hairstylist/barber/manicure of the Great House”). These individuals were employed in the same professional sphere in which Ptahshepses began his career as royal hairstylist. Some of them were presumably Ptahshepses' colleagues or even friends rather than subordinates, although they were ranked under him (*e.g.* brother manicurists Nyankhkhnum and Khnumhetep).

Other portrayed people who were employed only for the duration of their commission (*e.g.* sculptors) can reflect the patron-client relationship or were Ptahshepses' distant/unsaid relatives.

The hieratic inscriptions confirm the social network of Vizier Ptahshepses portrayed in the iconography (the great number of people connected to the body care of the king, individuals with scribal titles, as well as people employed in the organisation of works). The great number of personal names and presented honorific titles both stress

the importance of the vizierial court. It can be supposed that selected members of Ptahshepses' large court, for whom he guaranteed a comfortable life after death by depicting them in the iconography of his tomb, reciprocally gave material for building the tomb of their master as a token of their respect.

Hopefully, an analysis of a greater corpus of high officials' tomb decoration and further study of the development of the "extended" household will provide a better understanding of the social patterns underlying the iconography.

#### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> This study was written within the project for GA ČR, No. 16-07210S: "Complex network methods applied to ancient Egypt data in the Old Kingdom (2700–2180 BC)". I would like to express my gratitude to two anonymous peer-reviewers and especially to Hana Vymazalová and Veronika Dulíková who provided me with stimulating comments on the presented issue.
- <sup>2</sup> For a detailed study of a system of irrigation in ancient Egypt, see Eyre (2004: 157–186).
- <sup>3</sup> For the term patronage in general, see Wallace-Hadrill (1989: 1–13); Westbrook (2005: 210–233); for ancient Egypt in particular, see *e.g.* Eyre (2011: 701–711).
- <sup>4</sup> For a more detailed definition of a household and the term used in ancient Egypt, see Moreno García (2012) and for the particular term of *3bt* group, see Willems (2015: 447–470). Anthropologists use the term "social house" rather than "household" (*e.g.* Lévi-Strauss 1987). A social house consists, apart from the nuclear family, of servants, clients, subordinates/colleagues and friends similar to an "extended household", but is not defined by the dwelling, which is typical for the household. Moreover, the social house may include more than one household, and some of its members belong to other social houses, in some cases as leaders of them. In fact, it better reflects the nature of relations between the identified persons in the tomb and the tomb owner himself (see further). This concept has also been adapted by Egyptologists (*e.g.* Picardo 2015: 243–287; Nelson-Hurst 2015: 257–272).
- <sup>5</sup> For general information on the vizierate in the Old Kingdom, see Strudwick (1985).
- <sup>6</sup> For a detailed analysis of the architecture of the mastaba, see Krejčí (2009) and most recently Krejčí (2017: 52–63). Ptahshepses's career in comparison with his contemporaries is dealt with in an article by Dulíková (2017: 64–71).
- <sup>7</sup> Khamerernebty was originally intended to be buried in the Mastaba of Princesses, where a limestone sarcophagus was installed for her, nevertheless she was presumably buried in the tomb of her husband in the end (despite some inconsistency in the identification of the skeletons found in the burial chamber of Ptahshepses' tomb and the impossibility of a later investigation of the anthropological material, see Krejčí 2009: 73–74, no. 269). Two people buried together in one burial chamber was unique during the whole period of the Old Kingdom. Women of royal blood were usually buried in their own tombs, for instance Meresankh III (Dunham – Simpson 1974) or Iput I (Firth – Gunn 1926: 11–14); wives of high officials were buried separately in the northern shaft in the tombs of their husbands: *e.g.* the wife of Seshemnefer III (Junker 1938: 200, fig. 38) or the wife of Djadjaemankh (Borchardt 1907: 22–27, 112, Pl. 20a). Verner has mentioned even fragments of a third sarcophagus found in the area of the burial chamber, which so far has no parallel, but this might be an intrusion for several reasons (Verner 2000: 568, no. 31). To emphasize just one – there was not enough space for the third sarcophagus in the single burial chamber (Krejčí 2009: 74).
- <sup>8</sup> These two sarcophagi were manufactured in red granite, which was, in the middle of Fifth Dynasty, reserved almost exclusively for the king and members of the royal family. Only a few high dignitaries were privileged to equip their burial chambers with a sarcophagus made of granite. The majority of officials carved their sarcophagi of limestone (see Štěpánová 2011); for the development of stone sarcophagi in general, see Donadoni Roveri (1969); for study focusing on the sociological perspective of sarcophagi, see Nováková (*forthcoming*).
- <sup>9</sup> The fragments of the statues found in the tomb were published in an article by Barbora Patočková (1998: 227–233).
- <sup>10</sup> The estimations with regard to the portion of preserved decoration slightly vary between one fifth (Bárta 2011: 175) and one sixth (Verner 1992: 187), which he in his later study modified to 10% of the original reliefs that are preserved up until now (Verner 1994: 173–194).
- <sup>11</sup> Many fragments (over 500) of the original wall decoration were assembled and published by Břetislav Vachala (2004).
- <sup>12</sup> The first attested non-royal official who married into the royal family was the priest, Ptahshepses, buried in tomb C1 in Saqqara (Dorman 2002). A royal marriage policy is analysed in detail in the article of Miroslav Bárta and Veronika Dulíková (Bárta – Dulíková 2015: 31–47).
- <sup>13</sup> For the most recent article focusing on the situation in Ptahshepses family see Verner (2017: 42–51).
- <sup>14</sup> In her article, Vivianne G. Callender offers new insight into the chronology of the mastaba and the family relations. She considers Khamerernebty to have been more likely Nyuserre's sister rather than his daughter and speculates on the possibility of bringing together the two halves of Ptahshepses' family by giving Khamerernebty's daughters in marriages to Ptahshepses' sons from the first marriage. She assumes that Khafini was disgraced, died early or his name was removed as a consequence of the jealousy of his sibling (Callender 2011: 101–119).
- <sup>15</sup> For the special relationship between titles of the dependents and the type of offerings they carried, see Vasiljević (1995: 41–71).
- <sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the existence of patronage in the Old and Middle Kingdoms, see Barďoňová – Nováková (2017: 74–89).
- <sup>17</sup> The Ph.D. thesis of Hans-Hubertus Münch, *Wer sind die Meinen?* (defended in Oxford in February 2010, but not yet published) deals with the sociological aspect of the tomb reliefs (*cf.* Münch 2010); unfortunately it was not at the present author's disposal at the time of writing this article. Some of the main issues of Münch's work were published in his article (Münch 2013: 1–16).
- <sup>18</sup> Seidlmayer (1987: 211) noticed the changes which the tomb decoration underwent between the Old and Middle Kingdoms. He states that in the early and high Old Kingdom, the tomb owner used to be depicted in the context of his family, while from the later Old Kingdom up to the early Middle Kingdom, the deceased is represented surrounded by functionaries, servants and armed men.
- <sup>19</sup> All titles in the text are cited according to Jones (2000).
- <sup>20</sup> For a further discussion of this topic for the Middle Kingdom, see Grajetzki (2012: 142).
- <sup>21</sup> The first of the sons is carefully erased though the name is visible – it is one of the places in the tomb where the first born son, Khafini, was damaged.
- <sup>22</sup> The anthropological remains of Ptahshepses have not been identified with certainty during the excavations (see note 7).
- <sup>23</sup> For the fundamental work on Egyptian scribes, see Piacentini (2002).
- <sup>24</sup> For the role of state/private granaries during the Old Kingdom, see Barďoňová (*forthcoming*).
- <sup>25</sup> Iziankh is portrayed among court officials in the mortuary temple of Nyuserre (Borchardt 1907: 72); the name of Iymeri is recorded in a fragment of Raneferef's papyrus archive (Posener-Krieger – Verner – Vymazalová 2006: 302, Pl. 78 E). I am grateful to Veronika Dulíková for

- data supplied with regard to identification of some persons of Ptahshepses' household.
- <sup>26</sup> This information is derived from the database assembled by the author within the larger framework of her Ph.D. thesis.
- <sup>27</sup> For the term *pr-ʿ3*, see Goelet (1982: 536–651).
- <sup>28</sup> The data is based on the information of *Maat*-base – a database created and assembled by Veronika Dulíková.
- <sup>29</sup> It is interesting that outside the residential necropolises, the occurrence of the overseers of the house significantly differs. For instance, in the tombs of Meir, there is a high occurrence of this title in a single tomb. For instance, in the tomb of Pepyankh Kheriib, 21 different individuals appear bearing this title (Kanawati 2012). On the other hand, in the necropolis of Qubbet el-Hawa persons with such a title are completely missing (Vishak 2004).
- <sup>30</sup> For instance, in the tomb of Akhetetep a craftsman is depicted with the title *mdh whrt ʿ3t pr-ʿ3*, “carpenter of the great shipyard/workshop of the Great House” (Davies 1901: 28–30).
- <sup>31</sup> Gerhard Haeny noticed another aspect of graffiti. For the Fifth Dynasty onwards, he sees graffiti written in the royal mortuary complexes as a type of reciprocal relation – *quid pro quo* – the official expects as his gift compensation in the form of various privileges (Haeny 1969: 39).
- <sup>32</sup> For the title “overseer of works”, see Krejčí (2000: 67–75).
- <sup>33</sup> In the hieratic inscriptions on the walls of the mastaba of Ptahshepses, not many titles connected to organisation of labour appear, as one would expect providing that the graffiti should reflect the control mechanism during construction works (with the exception of two persons named Khenu and Hetepi, both with the title *imy-r3 izwt*, “overseer of the crews”). In the iconography of the mastaba, the evidence is also given by a certain Khenu, here with the titles *imy-r3 pr* and *hk3-hwt* (see tab. 3). Nevertheless, it is problematic to identify these two persons for certain. In graffiti, usually not all titles but the one most typical is recorded, if the title is written at all (Vymazalová, *forthcoming b*).
- <sup>34</sup> With regard to the fragmentarily preserved wall decoration, we cannot exclude the possibility that the other 20 names recorded in the hieratic inscriptions once appeared in the original wall decoration.
- <sup>35</sup> Neither in Ptahshepses mastaba nor in their tomb at Saqqara are the names of Nyankhkhnum and Khnumhetep attached with titles connected with the organisation of labour, which supports the interpretation of graffiti as a gift. But their father, Khabaukhufu, was employed as “director of crews” (Dulíková 2016b: ID number 2455). Taking into account the non-existence of formal education in Egyptian society, it is highly likely that his sons were experienced in their father’s work.
- <sup>36</sup> Several members of Ptahshepses’ household can be identified as owners of the tombs at Saqqara. For instance, the official called Duahep is the owner of the mastaba of Duahep at Saqqara (Dulíková 2016a) or Nyankhre is highly likely the same individual as the owner of mastaba F1 in Saqqara (James 1961: 26–27).
- <sup>37</sup> According to the titles appearing on the graffiti (*h3ty-ʿ*, *smr wʿty* and *iry nfr h3t*), it is not possible to distinguish between Ptahshepses – father and son. The titles presented could designate both. Both had the ranking title *smr wʿty* and title connected with the king’s privacy *iry nfr h3t*, “keeper of the headdress” (Verner 1986: Ins. Nos. 69, 95, Pls. 31, 38). Ptahshepses Junior II was ranked by the title *h3ty-ʿ*, as his father in his tomb (Bárta 2000: 45–66), but it is questionable whether he held this title at the moment of the death of his father or construction of the tomb of his father.
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### Abstract:

The Old Kingdom tomb images have been frequently studied, especially on the basis of their orientation and content in relation to tomb architecture; and also theoretical and methodical aspects of their interpretation have been scrutinized. This paper aims to focus on the specific sociological perspective of the tomb reliefs, which has not yet been elaborated. The author of this study concentrates on the identified individuals in the tomb of Ptahshepses – a vizier from the time of Nyuserre and husband of his daughter, Khamernernebt. An analysis of the titles given to particular persons portrayed on the walls, as well as an examination of the social hierarchy reflected in the scenes, was undertaken in order to reconstruct the vizierial household/court and to present possible interpretations of its composition. The data from a large corpus of mason’s marks preserved herein, which includes personal names and titles, is also taken into account, enabling to record a more complex and precise image of the society at that time.

Old Kingdom – Nyuserre – household – Ptahshepses – iconography – graffito – title

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