

# Old Hieratic inscriptions from the Old Kingdom tombs at Abusir

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## Abstract

This paper presents an overview of the types of hieratic inscriptions found on the limestone masonry of Old Kingdom tombs in the Abusir necropolis. Different purposes of the inscriptions can be traced in the material. Among the recorded hieratic examples, it is possible to identify not only quarry marks and construction marks, but also inscriptions intentionally identifying the owners for visitors. Research has shown a clear difference in the variety of the inscriptions between the tombs at the Abusir royal necropolis and the tombs of officials in the southern part of the cemetery at Abusir South.

Since the beginning of its archaeological activities in the 1960s, the Czech Mission in Abusir, headed by Zbyněk Žába, Miroslav Verner and currently by Miroslav Bárta, has uncovered and documented a large number of old hieratic inscriptions on the walls of tombs dating to the Old Kingdom period. Two parts of the Abusir necropolis have been systematically explored, including the royal cemetery in the central part of Abusir with the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty pyramid complexes and the non-royal cemetery in Abusir South, located near the so-called Abusir Lake.<sup>1</sup> The present paper aims to summarise and analyse the evidence and to point out the specific features typical for each part of the cemetery (fig. 1).

Hieratic inscriptions on walls of a tomb's or a temple's masonry are usually referred to as *dipinti* or *graffiti*, both of which refer to secondary inscriptions, written in paint or engraved, added onto the walls of tombs or temples.<sup>2</sup> These terms are well suitable, for instance, for inscriptions left by New Kingdom visitors on the walls of the Old and Middle Kingdom monuments.<sup>3</sup> If we, however, focus on the old hieratic inscriptions under discussion, these terms can only be used for a small

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1 For an overview of the work in the Abusir necropolis in the last decades, see e.g. VERNER, *Abusir. Realm of Osiris* and its new, revised edition VERNER, *Abusir. The Necropolis*. In addition, the Czech team has also explored the western part of the Abusir cemetery, which differs both in the dating and types of tombs and therefore is not included in this present study. It is a cemetery of Late Period Saite-Persian shaft tombs, including the tombs of Udjahorresnet (BAREŠ, *Abusir* IV), the tomb of Iufaa (BAREŠ & SMOLÁRIKOVÁ, *Abusir* XVII), the tomb of Menekhibnekau (BAREŠ & SMOLÁRIKOVÁ, *Abusir* XXV), and other tombs (e.g. COPPENS & SMOLÁRIKOVÁ, *Abusir* XX).

2 For the terms, see e.g. VERHOEVEN, in: VERHOEVEN (ed.), *Ägyptologische „Binsen“-Weisheiten I–II*, 30.

3 For instance, NAVRÁTILOVÁ, *Visitors' Graffiti*; VERHOEVEN in: KAHL et al. (edd.), *Seven Seasons at Asyut*.

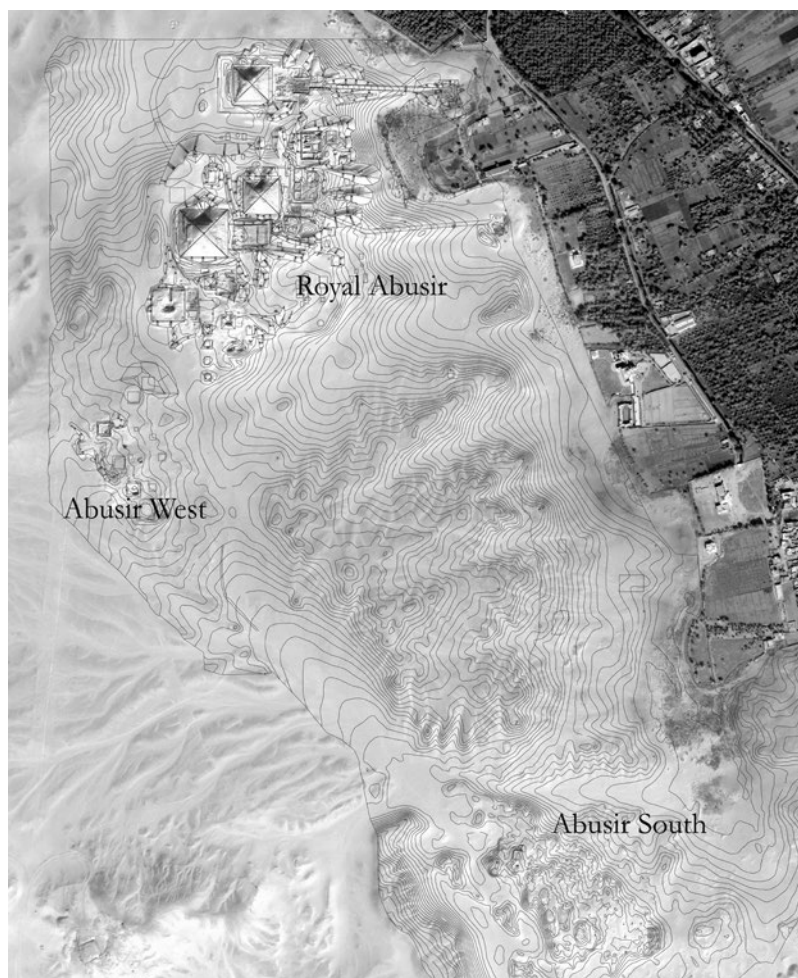


Fig. 1: Plan and satellite image of the Abusir necropolis (Czech Institute of Egyptology FF UK, Vladimír Brůna).

part of them, if any, because none of these inscriptions in Abusir was secondary in its character.

The majority of the inscriptions concerned were written on individual blocks of stone before or during the construction of a tomb, which is clearly indicated by the frequent upside-down or  $\pm 90^\circ$  position of these marks. They were closely associated with the construction itself; they were not an intentional part of the final construction, but rather a technical (but not accidental) by-product. The German expression

*Baugraffiti* seems to be the most proper term for this type of inscriptions.<sup>4</sup> In English, we prefer to use “builders’ inscriptions”, “masons’ marks” and “quarry marks” as the best explanatory terms for this type of Old Kingdom epigraphic evidence.

Other types of inscriptions, however, were made on the tomb walls after the tomb’s completion either by the owner himself or a close relative of his/hers who took care of his/her burial. These inscriptions were very closely related to the operation of the tomb and the associated funerary cult.

### Old Hieratic inscriptions in the tombs at the royal cemetery at Abusir

The central part of the Abusir cemetery was the burial place of four kings of the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty, their family members and the highest, especially privileged, officials (fig. 2). Early information on the Abusir pyramids, including some sketches and interpretations of old hieratic inscriptions, was provided by the expedition of J. S. Perring.<sup>5</sup> The inscriptions, which contained dates, the names and titles of high of-

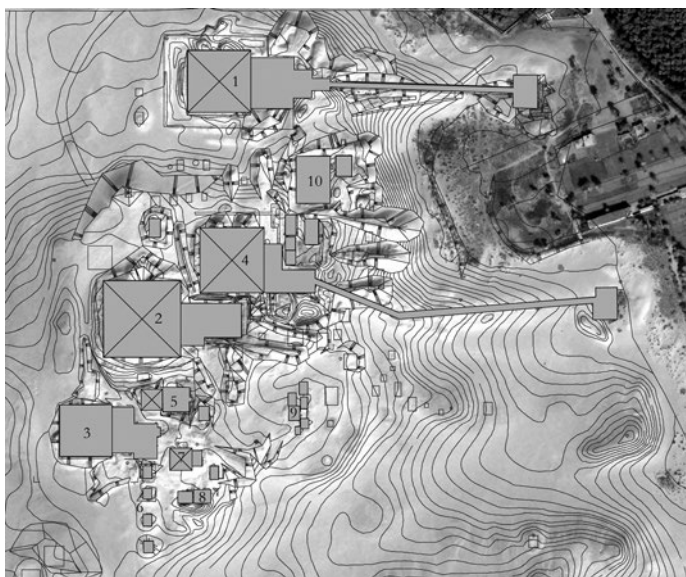


Fig. 2: Schematic plan of the royal necropolis at Abusir: 1-Sahure, 2-Neferirkare, 3-Neferefre, 4-Nyuserre, 5-Khentkaus II, 6-Nakhtsare, Kakaibaef, Kahentkaus III, AC 31 (from N to S), 7-Lepsius no. XXIV, 8-Lepsius no. XXV, 9-Djedkare’s family cemetery, 10-Ptahshepes (Czech Institute of Egyptology FF UK, Vladimír Brůna, Hana Vymazalová).

4 VERNER, *Abusir* II, 19–20.

5 PERRING & VYSE, *The Pyramids of Gizeh* III, 12–37.

ficials, as well as the names of work crews, were noticed on blocks of masonry of the substructures and superstructures of the three pyramids of Kings Sahure, Neferirkare and Nyuserre (fig. 3).<sup>6</sup> The first interpretation of these inscriptions was provided by S. Birch, along with more precise information on their location within the monuments.<sup>7</sup>

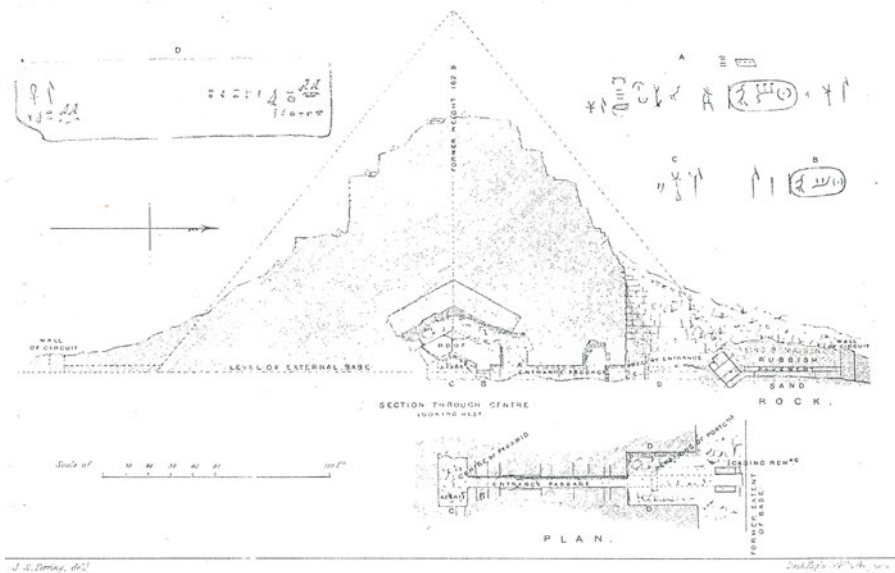


Fig. 3: Early records of old hieratic inscriptions on the pyramid of Sahure (after PERRING & VYSE, *The Pyramids of Gizeh III*, 14).

In the early 1900s, the expedition led by L. Borchardt explored the three above-mentioned pyramids in more detail and recorded numerous hieratic inscriptions from both the superstructure and the substructure of the monuments, as well as from the associated temples. These contained dates, various construction lines, axes and measurements as well as the names of work crews and gangs. In addition, it is possible to identify numerous names and titles of high officials who were responsible for or involved in the construction of the royal monument. For instance, “he of the curtain and legal official [and vizier]” (*tꜣy.ty zꜣb*) Minnefer, the “sole companion” (*smr-wꜣ.ty*) Ptahshepses and the “sole companion” (*smr-wꜣ.ty*) Ti are attested on a block of Neferirkare’s pyramid complex.<sup>8</sup> All these three officials held the title of the

6 PERRING & VYSE, *The Pyramids of Gizeh III*, 17, 18 and 20, and drawings on pp. 14, 17 and 20.

7 PERRING & VYSE, *The Pyramids of Gizeh III*, 22–37.

8 BORCHARDT, *Nefer-Ir-Ke-Re*, 46–47, 53–54.

“overseer of all works of the king” (*imy-r; k3.t nb.t n.t nzwt*), confirming their close association with the construction of royal monuments.<sup>9</sup> The “expedition leader” (*imy-r; wp.t*) Kaswedja is attested in hieratic inscriptions on Sahure’s pyramid masonry,<sup>10</sup> and an individual holding the same name and title is depicted in the reliefs in the same king’s causeway.<sup>11</sup> We can presume that this inscription and the reliefs most probably refer to the same individual, who was responsible for quarrying material for Sahure’s monument. Besides the officials, some royal sons and the name of Sahure’s sun temple and Nyuserre’s pyramid complex are also attested in the hieratic inscriptions on Neferirkare’s pyramid,<sup>12</sup> and the name of *ḥwt-wr.t*, probably associated with the vizier’s office, occurs on some blocks of Sahure’s pyramid.<sup>13</sup>

Borchardt provided very little information concerning the location of the inscriptions on the masonry of the pyramids and associated buildings, except for mentioning some of their approximate positions in height.<sup>14</sup> Several more inscriptions were found on the external walls of Sahure’s causeway during the work of the Egyptian mission headed by T. El-Awady in the early 2000s, but only one photograph has been published until today.<sup>15</sup>

Borchardt’s recordings in Abusir have shown that the hieratic inscriptions on the tomb masonry are a valuable source of information as they provide indications concerning the history of the construction of the monuments, its dating and participation of the owner’s successors, as well as evidence on individuals, some of whom are unattested elsewhere. Decades after Borchardt, the Czech (at that time Czechoslovak) mission started to work in royal Abusir in the 1960s. During its archaeological activities, it has collected a large group of old hieratic evidence in the tombs of royal family members as well as high officials. In each archaeological season, new hieratic inscriptions are revealed.

The fourth royal monument in Abusir is the unfinished pyramid of King Nefer-efre (Raneferef).<sup>16</sup> The blocks of this pyramid show many lines, axes and measurements, as well as construction and quarry marks. In addition, hieratic inscriptions

9 HELCK, in: *MDAIK* 15, 94; VYMAZALOVÁ, *Administration and Economy*, 85–86. For the complete titulary of Ti, see STEINDORFF, *Das Grab des Ti*, 6; for the complete titulary of Ptahshepses, see VERNER, *Abusir* I, 124–129; Ptahshepses also later became vizier under King Nyuserre.

10 BORCHARDT, *Sahu-Re*’, 90 M48.

11 EL-AWADY, in: VYMAZALOVÁ & BÁRTA (edd.), *Chronology and Archaeology*.

12 BORCHARDT, *Nefer-Ir-Ke-Re*’, 54–55.

13 Interpreted as the name of the Tura quarry in BORCHARDT, *Sahu-Re*’, 88 M27, M38, M40 and M45.

14 BORCHARDT, *Nefer-Ir-Ke-Re*’, 53–55; BORCHARDT, *Sahu-Re*’, 85–96.

15 EL AWADY, *Abusir* XVI, 134, fig. 77.

16 VERNER et al., *Abusir* IX.

contain some dates, the name of the royal owner, the names of worker gangs and phyles, as well as the name of the pyramid complex, a few personal names and even names of some other institutions of the state.<sup>17</sup> The variety of the inscriptions is similar to those from the pyramid complexes of the other kings in Abusir, mentioned above.

The pyramid complex of Khentkaus II<sup>18</sup> is located to the south of the funerary temple of King Neferirkare and to the north-east of the monument of Neferefre. Many hieratic inscriptions were documented on blocks from the core of the pyramid. These comprised the name and titles of the queen, including the “king’s wife” (*hm.t nzw.t*) and “king’s mother” (*mw.t nzw.t*) Khentkaus, as well as dates and labrys marks, probably referring to phyle sections (*tz*) and often accompanied by a number.<sup>19</sup>

The row of four *mastabas* to the east and south-east of the pyramid of Neferefre has been explored in recent years. These *mastabas* were relatively small and quite simple, each comprising a not very deep burial shaft and a small chapel. Some of these tombs have casing made of huge, partly preserved limestone blocks. The tombs belonged to the presumed offspring and a wife of Neferefre, who died after Nyuserre’s ascension to the throne.<sup>20</sup> In the very badly preserved tomb of the king’s son Nakhtsare, the name and title of the tomb owner are attested in a single hieratic builders’ inscription in the shaft.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, the walls of the shaft in the tomb of Khentkaus III contained a variety of inscriptions;<sup>22</sup> it is particularly worth mentioning that some of the inscriptions with the name and title of the queen were written on the foundation blocks of the burial chamber,<sup>23</sup> which is rather surprising because the name of the queen was stepped on during the construction of the tomb. Besides the owners’ titles and name, also other types of inscriptions are attested in this tomb, including construction lines, axes and masons’ marks. The two remaining tombs in this group include the *mastaba* of the king’s son Kakaibaef and another, anonymous tomb AC 31, in which some hieratic inscriptions were documented as well.<sup>24</sup>

To the east of these tombs lie the tombs of the presumed family members of King Nyuserre. These include the pyramid Lepsius no. XXIV and the tomb Lepsius

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17 VERNER et al., *Abusir IX*, 187–204.

18 VERNER, *Abusir III*.

19 *Ibid.*, 43–54.

20 VERNER, *Sons of the Sun*, 58–59; KREJČÍ, *Abusir XVIII*, 187–188.

21 KREJČÍ, in: KREJČÍ, CALLENDER & VERNER et al., *Abusir XII*, 65. The owner’s name was originally read Nakhtkare by the excavator; both readings are possible, in my opinion.

22 KREJČÍ, ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ & ODLER, in: *PES* 15, 2015, 28–41; KREJČÍ, in: *Sokar* 32, 2016.

23 KREJČÍ, ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ & ODLER, in: *PES* 15, 2015, 33–35.

24 KREJČÍ, in: *Sokar* 27, 2013, 34; Abb 13; KREJČÍ, in: *PES* 17, 2016, 19.

no. XXV in which probably a queen and two other royal females were buried.<sup>25</sup> The variety of inscriptions in these tombs can be compared to those from the pyramid of Khentkaus II. In addition, some of the inscriptions contain the name of Userkaf's pyramid complex.<sup>26</sup>

A large group of hieratic inscriptions has been documented in the *mastaba* of Prince Werkaure, perhaps the eldest son of King Nyuserre.<sup>27</sup> Most of its fine limestone casing is lost today, exposing many hieratic marks and inscriptions on the irregular blocks of the core (fig. 4). The name of the tomb owner and his titles, the "king's son" (*z3 nzw*) and the "eldest king's son" (*z3 nzw smsw*), are attested only in the hieratic inscriptions located mainly on the blocks of the *serdab*.<sup>28</sup> Quarry marks and possibly also the names of worker gangs were quite numerous in the tomb<sup>29</sup> and can be found on the blocks of the casing of the walls in both the superstructure and the substructure, and on the irregular stones from the core of the tomb. In addition, numerous lines and axes marking various levels can be found in the badly damaged substructure as well as on preserved walls of the chapel. Some of these lines were



Fig. 4: Upside down builders' inscriptions with dates, a quarry mark and a line marking the floor level in the burial chamber in Werkaure's tomb (photograph Czech Institute of Egyptology FF UK, Jaromír Krejčí).

25 For these tombs, see KREJČÍ, CALLENDER & VERNER et al., *Abusir* XII.

26 VERNER, in: KREJČÍ, CALLENDER & VERNER et al., *Abusir* XII, nos. 23, 31, 34, 44, 47, 52, and 227–228, 230.

27 For the tomb, see KREJČÍ & ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ, *Abusir* XXIV; for the identity of the tomb owner, see pp. 295–297.

28 Almost every block in the *serdab* bears the owner's name, but the name is not attested in other parts of the tomb.

29 VYMAZALOVÁ, in: KREJČÍ & ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ, *Abusir* XXIV, 280–281.

associated with dates.<sup>30</sup> Besides the owner's name, other individuals left their marks in the tomb. The most striking is the name of Menkauhor, who most likely was the future king and successor of Nyuserre.<sup>31</sup> It is possible that Menkauhor was the next king's son in the line of succession. Other officials are also attested in the inscriptions in this tomb, including an official with the title “*d-mr*-official of the Jackal” (*zḥ d mr*) and an “overseer of the granary” (*imy-r; šnw.t*), but other functionaries are mentioned as well.<sup>32</sup>

Further to the east of Werkaure's tomb, one can find a group of *mastabas* known as the Djedkare's family cemetery.<sup>33</sup> These are tombs of several princesses, a prince and a few associated officials, who were buried during the reign of King Djedkare.<sup>34</sup>



Fig. 5: Inscriptions from the tomb of the king's daughter Hedjetnebu (photograph Czech Institute of Egyptology, Milan Zemina).

30 VYMAZALOVÁ, in: KREJČÍ & ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ, *Abusir* XXIV, 268 no. 36.

31 VYMAZALOVÁ & COPPENS, in: BÁRTA & KÜLLMER (edd.), *Diachronic Trends*, 125–128; VYMAZALOVÁ, in: KREJČÍ & ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ, *Abusir* XXIV, 266 no. 23, 278–279; for the evidence of Menkauhor's reign, see e. g. VYMAZALOVÁ & COPPENS, in: *Sokar* 17, 2008.

32 VYMAZALOVÁ, in: KREJČÍ & ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ, *Abusir* XXIV, 277–279.

33 VERNER & CALLENDER, *Abusir* VI.

34 For the dating of this cemetery, see VERNER, in: VERNER & CALLENDER, *Abusir* VI, 105–108.





The builders' inscriptions were found in the chapel and also in the substructure of Princess Khekeretneby's tomb.<sup>35</sup> Several were found in the shaft of Princess Hedjetnebu's tomb,<sup>36</sup> showing the names and titles of the princesses written repeatedly on the blocks of masonry (fig. 5). In addition, one inscription with a date was found on a loose block from the cemetery.<sup>37</sup> In the tomb of scribe Faaf Idu, a long hieratic inscription was found on one side of his limestone sarcophagus. This is not a builders' inscription, but constitutes a unique piece of evidence referring to the quarrying of this sarcophagus in the Tura limestone during the reign of King Djedkare.<sup>38</sup>

The largest corpus of hieratic inscriptions so far has been collected in the *mastaba* of the vizier Ptahshepses, explored in the early 1960s.<sup>39</sup> Over 400 hieratic inscriptions from this tomb have been published<sup>40</sup> and some more have been documented in all parts of the tomb. These inscriptions show a great variety, including quarry marks, the names of worker gangs, phyles and their sections, dates and inscriptions related to the construction (lines, axes and measurements), as well as the personal names of officials, who also bore such titles as the "ḏ-*mr*-official of the Jackal" (*z3b ḏ-*mr**) or the "manicurist of the Great House" (*ir n.t pr-ꜥ*),<sup>41</sup> and other titles (fig. 6).

The large number of the hieratic inscriptions and marks recorded in this tomb is partly caused by the above-average size of the *mastaba* as well as its good state of preservation.<sup>42</sup> Also, the variety of the inscriptions is well comparable to those from royal monuments, confirming the special status of the owner.<sup>43</sup> It is worth mentioning that Ptahshepses was himself involved in the construction of other monuments

35 VERNER & CALLENDER, *Abusir* VI, 18, 20.

36 *Ibid.*, 90–91, 93. This reading of her name has been preferred by the excavator, but the shape of the first sign rather seems to correspond to Gardiner's M13  than to T3 , and thus to the name Wadjetnebu – see also DOBREV, VERNER & VYMAZALOVÁ, *Old Hieratic Palaeography* I, xxv, 28, 49.

37 VERNER & CALLENDER, *Abusir* VI, 103.

38 *Ibid.*, 68.

39 For the tomb, see KREJČÍ, *Abusir* XI; also VERNER, *Preliminary Report*; VERNER, *Abusir* I; CHARVÁT, *The Pottery*.

40 VERNER, *Abusir* II.

41 JONES, *Index*, 308 no. 1122.

42 Many tombs in the royal necropolis of Abusir have been badly affected by ancient stone robbers. The *mastaba* of Ptahshepses belongs to the best-preserved tombs at the site.

43 Despite the non-royal origin of Ptahshepses, the tomb is located at the royal cemetery near Nyuserre's pyramid complex. The tomb indicates that Ptahshepses enjoyed unusual privileges from the early part of his career onwards: it was enlarged several times, reflecting the owner's rise in status. Ptahshepses even married one of the king's own daughters and he included in his tomb features reflecting the architecture of royal pyramid complexes, adapted for a tomb of a non-royal person (e.g. a room for boats, a chapel with three niches, an open courtyard with pillars). For the tomb's architecture, see KREJČÍ, *Abusir* XI.



Fig. 6: Upside down inscription on a block in situ showing the title and name of the tomb owner found in the *mastaba* of Ptahshepses (photograph Czech Institute of Egyptology, Miroslav Bárta).

on the royal site. In addition to the above mentioned pyramid of Neferirkare, his name is attested in the builders' inscriptions in the pyramid Lepsius XXIV<sup>44</sup>, and the title usually associated with this high official (*smr-w.ty*) also occurs among inscriptions from Lepsius XXV.<sup>45</sup>

Looking at the evidence from the tombs at the royal necropolis at Abusir, we can notice some common features. The tombs belonged to the kings and the members of their family, and several high-ranking officials had the privilege to be buried there. The special status of the owners of these monuments is naturally reflected in the variety of the hieratic inscriptions recorded. One can find not only the name of the tomb owner, but also the names and titles of a number of other individuals. The officials of the highest level with honorary titles, including the vizier and overseer of all works of the king, appear mostly in inscriptions from the king's pyramids, but sometimes also in those from the tombs of the royal family members (e.g. Lepsius XXIV and Lepsius XXV).<sup>46</sup>

44 VERNER, in: KREJČÍ, CALLENDER & VERNER et al., *Abusir* XII, 141 no. 28, 142 no. 29, 143 nos. 38 and 40.

45 *Ibid.*, 219 no. 19.

46 *Ibid.*, 145, 228.

Many of the explored tombs contain inscriptions mentioning the *ḥw.t-wr.t*, which is sometimes interpreted as a temple, but other times as the vizier's office.<sup>47</sup> This latter interpretation would go very well together with the responsibility of the highest officials of the state for royal constructions. Other interpretations of the term have been proposed as well.<sup>48</sup>

Many of the inscriptions refer to individuals with administrative titles: the “*ḏ-mr*-official of the Jackal” (*z3b ḏ-mr*), the “speaker of Nekhen of the Jackal” (*z3b r3 Nḥn*), and other functionaries. Some of these titles can be associated with the *ḥw.t-wr.t*, and thus it is possible that these officials worked in some way for this institution, i. e. possibly for the vizier's office.<sup>49</sup> Other inscriptions attest people who were associated with economic sources, like the “overseer of granary” (*imy-r3 šnw.t*). The inscriptions of the officials in the tombs of the royal family members are most likely connected with the participation of these individuals in the construction of the tombs – and this participation might have had various forms.<sup>50</sup>

Some officials attested in these inscriptions might have been responsible for the organisation of the construction work and control of its progress, which is probably attested in the dated inscriptions from Ptahshepses' tomb: these inscriptions seem to reflect inspections of the “spent material”.<sup>51</sup> As Ptahshepses held the title of the “overseer of all works of the king” (*imy-r3 k3.t nb.t n.t nzw.t*),<sup>52</sup> he surely paid careful attention to his own tomb construction. Other individuals might have donated blocks of limestone as a sign of their respect to the owner; about a third of the individuals attested in the hieratic inscriptions in Ptahshepses' tomb are also depicted in the tomb reliefs, confirming their close relation to the owner.<sup>53</sup> It would be particularly interesting to make a similar comparison between the individuals attested in hieratic inscriptions and relief decoration also in other tombs in the Abusir royal necropolis. This is, however, impossible because no or not enough reliefs have survived in most of the monuments.

In addition to the hieratic inscriptions, large geometrical marks occur in all the tombs in the royal necropolis. The most common include a grid, a cross in a circle, a cross alone and a star. These signs are often interpreted as quarry marks denot-

47 For further discussion and the bibliography, see VYMAZALOVÁ, in: KREJČÍ & ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ, *Abusir* XXIV, 280.

48 VYMAZALOVÁ, in: KREJČÍ & ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ, *Abusir* XXIV, 280, with further references.

49 *Ibid.*, 280.

50 VERNER, in: KREJČÍ, CALLENDER & VERNER et al., *Abusir* XII, 277–278.

51 VERNER, *Abusir* II, 187.

52 For an overview of Ptahshepses' titles, see *ibid.*, 124–129.

53 *Ibid.*, 187.

ing the individual quarries, gangs of workers in the quarries, stonecutter marks, or craftsmen marks, related to the control of the work process.<sup>54</sup>

One block sometimes bears two or even more different marks, which makes the interpretation of these signs rather unclear, also reflecting our limited knowledge of the actual processes during the work in the quarries, as well as during the transportation and distribution of the blocks at the cemetery.<sup>55</sup> The exposed core in the tomb of Werkaure has made it possible to study the spatial distribution of these marks, showing that there is no specific connection between a particular sign and a specific part of the tomb. This has indicated that the signs are perhaps not related to the construction gangs (if we suppose that each gang had its position on the construction site)<sup>56</sup>, but rather to control of the work during the process of quarrying, transportation and distribution of the material.<sup>57</sup>

The names of phyles and their sections also occur in the monuments, confirming a formal organisation of the construction site and the works pursued there.<sup>58</sup> Dated inscriptions, which usually contain only the season, month and day, but no reference to any king are especially worth mentioning. Dates can often indicate interesting details concerning a tomb's construction. In Werkaure's tomb, for instance, dated inscriptions were documented in both the superstructure and the burial pit. They show that the superstructure of the tomb, including the casing of its walls, was built very soon after the burial pit. The tomb of Prince Werkaure seems to have been built very quickly, only around the time of his death, based on these builders' inscriptions.<sup>59</sup>

The builders' inscriptions moreover reveal that building material with the name of one monument was often used in the construction of another tomb.<sup>60</sup> Inscriptions referring to the name of Userkaf's pyramid complex have been found in the tombs of Lepsius XXV and AC 31,<sup>61</sup> indicating that leftover construction material from this monument was available on the royal construction site still many years

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54 VERNER, *Abusir* II, 167–169; see also the discussion and the possible interpretation suggested in ANDRÁSSY, in: HARING & KAPER (edd.), *Pictograms or Pseudo Script?*, 5–48 (especially 22–25).

55 See also ANDRÁSSY, in: HARING & KAPER (edd.), *Pictograms or Pseudo Script?*, 22–24.

56 VYMAZALOVÁ, in: KREJČÍ & ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ, *Abusir* XXIV, 262–281.

57 Also ANDRÁSSY, in: HARING & KAPER (edd.), *Pictograms or Pseudo Script?*, esp. 22–25, 26.

58 See also discussion in *ibid.*, 7–25.

59 The prince who, according to his title, was the heir to the throne, probably died unexpectedly, VYMAZALOVÁ, in: KREJČÍ & ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ, *Abusir* XXIV, 276.

60 *Ibid.*, 278, 279; KREJČÍ, in: KREJČÍ, CALLENDER & VERNER et al., *Abusir* XII, 223–230.

61 VERNER, in: KREJČÍ, CALLENDER & VERNER et al., *Abusir* XII, 220 no. 23, 221 no. 31, 222 no. 34, 224 nos. 44, 47, 225 no. 52, 227–228, 230; KREJČÍ, in: *PES* 17, 2016, 19, 22.

later. Similarly, the name of the pyramid Lepsius XXIV<sup>62</sup> was among inscriptions from the tomb of Nakhtsare and Lepsius XXV,<sup>63</sup> an inscription with the name of an unknown monument was found in the tomb of Werkaure,<sup>64</sup> and probably the name of Nyuserre's pyramid complex was mentioned in inscriptions from Ptahshepses' *mastaba*, confirming the special status of its non-royal owner.<sup>65</sup>

It is worth mentioning that in many of the *mastabas* at the royal Abusir necropolis, no relief decoration, false doors or other inscribed objects have survived, and therefore the builders' inscriptions are often the only evidence of the name and title(s) of the tomb owner. As we have seen, however, many individuals can be mentioned in the builders' inscriptions in a tomb of a royal family member or a high official. Therefore, to identify the owner, one needs to consider the hieratic evidence, the frequency of the name and its position in the tomb's masonry, as well as the form and meaning of the name itself, within the wider picture of the position of the tomb in the necropolis, its architectural features, preserved anthropological material, etc. For instance, a king's daughter Hanebu is attested among the inscriptions from the tomb Lepsius XXV<sup>66</sup> in which two females were buried,<sup>67</sup> but a clear connection between this name and one of the owners of this tomb cannot be confirmed at this moment.<sup>68</sup>

### Old Hieratic inscriptions in tombs at Abusir South

The southern part of the Abusir necropolis, which has been explored by the Czech mission since the early 1990s, was reserved for burials of non-royal officials beginning in the early Old Kingdom (fig. 7). The oldest structures uncovered there include the mud-brick *mastaba* of Hetepi<sup>69</sup> and the recently uncovered large anonymous tomb AS 54, next to which a burial of a wooden boat has been found.<sup>70</sup> Both

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62 VERNER, in: KREJČÍ, CALLENDER & VERNER et al., *Abusir* XII, 136 no. 4, 138 no. 13, 139 nos. 14, 16, 142–143 no. 34, 144 no. 41, and 144 discussion.

63 KREJČÍ, in: KREJČÍ, CALLENDER & VERNER et al., *Abusir* XII, 65; VERNER, in: KREJČÍ, CALLENDER & VERNER et al., *Abusir* XII, 219 no. 22, 226 no. 54, and 227.

64 VYMAZALOVÁ, in: KREJČÍ & ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ, *Abusir* XXIV, 279.

65 VERNER, *Abusir* II, 65 no. 4, 178.

66 VERNER, in: KREJČÍ, CALLENDER & VERNER et al., *Abusir* XII, 217 no. 6.

67 STROUHAL & ČERNÝ, in: KREJČÍ, CALLENDER & VERNER et al., *Abusir* XII.

68 For a discussion, see KREJČÍ, in: KREJČÍ, CALLENDER & VERNER et al., *Abusir* XII, 230–231.

69 BÁRTA, COPPENS & VYMAZALOVÁ et al., *Abusir* XIX, 3–56.

70 BÁRTA et al., in: *Ā&L* 24, 2014, 17. The tomb is yet unpublished, only a short piece of information concerning the boat can be found in VERNER, in: *Sokar* 33, 2016, 25.



Fig. 7: Schematic plan of the cemetery at Abusir South: 1-AS 54, 2-Hetepi, 3-Kaaper, 4-Kaisebi and Ptahter, 5-Kaaper Jr., 6-Iymery, 7-AS 31, 8-Ptahhetep and Neferherptah, 9-Sheretnebry, 10-Nefershepes, 11-Shepseskafankh, 12-Inpunefer, 13-Inpuhetep, 14-Qar, 15-Inti (Czech Institute of Egyptology FF UK, Vladimír Brůna, Hana Vymazalová)

date to the late 3<sup>rd</sup> or early 4<sup>th</sup> dynasty.<sup>71</sup> Most of the explored tombs in Abusir South date to the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> dynasties. They often had limestone casing suitable for the hieratic builders' inscriptions.

A cluster of tombs has been uncovered on top of a prominent hill in the southern part of the site. On top of this hill, the 3<sup>rd</sup> dynasty anonymous tomb AS 54 was constructed. Later during the 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty, the *mastaba* of Kaaper was built just to the south-east of this large tomb,<sup>72</sup> and many smaller structures were subsequently added between the late 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> dynasties. The tomb of Kaaper Jr. is located to the north of the tomb of Kaaper, and hieratic inscriptions with the name of the owner and his title have been found on the western wall of the tomb and inside the *serdab*.<sup>73</sup>

A group of several tombs has been uncovered to the west of the tomb of Kaaper and to the south of the *mastaba* AS 54. Some of them were built of mud-bricks and

71 For the dating of these tombs, see BÁRTA, in: BÁRTA, COPPENS & VYMAZALOVÁ et al., *Abusir* XIX, 56; BÁRTA, in: CALLENDER et al. (edd.), *Times, Signs and Pyramids*, 42; JIRÁSKOVÁ, in: BÁRTA, COPPENS & KREJČÍ (edd.), *Abusir and Saqqara 2010*, 460.

72 For this tomb, see BÁRTA, *Abusir* V, 143–191.

73 The exploration of the tomb was finished in 2016, the tomb is yet unpublished.

only two had limestone casing, which could bear hieratic inscriptions.<sup>74</sup> The tomb of Kaisebi shows inscriptions on the external southern wall, and on the eastern and western walls of the *serdab*, containing mostly the name and title of the tomb owner.<sup>75</sup> The adjacent tomb of Ptahwer shows inscriptions on the northern wall as well as on the walls of the corridor chapel, and these include the tomb owner's name and title as well as a date.<sup>76</sup> Several inscriptions in Ptahwer's tomb were, unlike the others, apparently written after the completion of the tomb, possibly to mark the ownership.

In the eastern part of the site, a group of small and simple tombs has been uncovered in one of the access *wadis* leading from the Abusir Lake to this part of the necropolis. Only the tomb of Iymery had limestone casing and several inscriptions have been found on the western wall of this tomb to the west of the owner's shaft.<sup>77</sup>

In the northern part of the site, hieratic inscriptions were recorded on the limestone casing in the tombs of Hetepi and Fetekti from the late 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty.<sup>78</sup> In the tomb of Hetepi, the hieratic inscriptions containing the titles and the name of the tomb owner were written on the casing of the tomb's western wall.<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, Fetekti's inscriptions have been found on the southern wall of his tomb's *serdab*. They are hardly legible, but seem to have contained the owner's name and titles as well.<sup>80</sup>

A major part of the hieratic inscriptions documented in Abusir South comes from the central part of the site where a cemetery of the mid-5<sup>th</sup> dynasty to the late 6<sup>th</sup> dynasty has been explored in the last decades. The central structure at this necropolis is the large anonymous tomb AS 31, which comprised a *mastaba* superstructure and a rock-cut chapel with an open courtyard located underneath, and which dates to the mid-5<sup>th</sup> dynasty.<sup>81</sup> The sidewalls of the *mastaba* were cased with large limestone blocks, but most of this casing is covered today, because a mud-brick coating was added over it. Besides, later tombs are attached on the northern, western and southern sides of this tomb.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, only a few inscriptions have been documented on the exposed parts of the eastern wall. One can notice here a

74 For a preliminary report, see DULÍKOVÁ, JIRÁSKOVÁ & ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ, in: *PES* 16, 2016.

75 The tomb's western wall could not be uncovered as it adjoined another structure. DULÍKOVÁ et al., in: *PES* 19, 2017, 17–18; DULÍKOVÁ, JIRÁSKOVÁ & ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ, in: *PES* 16, 2016, 30.

76 DULÍKOVÁ et al., in: *PES* 19, 18–19.

77 VYMAZALOVÁ, in: BÁRTA, COPPENS & VYMAZALOVÁ et al., *Abusir* XIX, 201–204.

78 BÁRTA, *Abusir* V, 55–60, 107–118.

79 *Ibid.*, 60–61.

80 *Ibid.*, 117–118.

81 BÁRTA, in: STRUDWICK & STRUDWICK (edd.), *Old Kingdom, New Perspectives*.

82 Above all the 6<sup>th</sup> dynasty tombs of the vizier Qar and judge Inti.



Fig. 8: Builders' inscriptions and a levelling line on the western wall of Inpunefer's tomb (photograph Czech Institute of Egyptology FF UK, Hana Vymazalová).

date referring to the 7<sup>th</sup> occasion of the cattle count, and some masons' marks. The sidewalls of the courtyard show some masons' marks in red paint as well.

To the east of the tomb AS 31 is a 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty cemetery, including the tomb of the "inspector of physicians" (*šḥd zwnw(.w)*) Ptahhetep,<sup>83</sup> which contained hieratic inscriptions in red paint and charcoal on the northern, southern and western walls of the tomb's casing. Most of the inscriptions contained the name and title of the tomb owner, but one also mentioned the date: the year of the 8<sup>th</sup> occasion of the cattle count.

Other 5<sup>th</sup> dynasty tombs have been explored along the access route to this part of the cemetery, which comes from the north-east through one of the *wadis*. At the edge of the hill, one can find the tomb of Shepsepkafankh of which only the western and northern walls have been uncovered.<sup>84</sup> Hieratic inscriptions with the name of the tomb owner have been discovered on its northern wall where the entrance to the corridor chapel was located.

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83 The tomb is as yet unpublished.

84 BÁRTA, in: *PES* 15, 2015, 15–27.



To the west of this tomb, the *mastaba* of Inpunefer is situated.<sup>85</sup> The limestone casing of this *mastaba* features hieratic inscriptions with the name and title of the tomb owner on the northern and southern walls as well as on many blocks of the western wall.<sup>86</sup> Although the inscriptions on the northern and western walls were written on the limestone blocks before these were used for construction (fig. 8), the inscription on the southern wall was quite different. It was recorded after the completion of the tomb, and spreads over several blocks of the casing. Moreover, this inscription refers to a different title of Inpunefer from the one used in the other hieratic inscriptions. This indicates that it is not a typical builders' inscription, but rather an identification inscription intended for the tomb's visitors.<sup>87</sup>

To the south of Shepseskafankh's tomb lies the *mastaba* of Nefershepes.<sup>88</sup> The western, southern and eastern walls have mud-brick coating added over the limestone casing, which makes it impossible to explore possible inscriptions there. Hieratic inscriptions have, however, been found on the walls of the entrance passage and the corridor chapel, and they include names of the phyle sections.<sup>89</sup> In addition, numerous hieratic inscriptions have been documented on the limestone casing of the owner's burial chamber, where the name and title of the owner have been found beside the name and title of another individual, Memy.<sup>90</sup>

Between the tombs of Ptahhetep and Nefershepes, there is an unusual tomb complex of Princess Sheretnebty with its courtyard and four rock-cut tombs: a burial place of a family of officials, one of whom married a king's daughter.<sup>91</sup> A superstructure built on a higher level above two eastern rock-cut tombs is likely to have belonged to this tomb complex as well.<sup>92</sup> The limestone casing of the courtyard shows no marks or inscriptions, but one can find inscriptions in one of the rock-cut tombs. The tomb of Shepesuptah contains hieratic inscriptions on some blocks of its original Tura limestone casing, but also on the roughly hewn walls of its rock-cut

85 BÁRTA et al., *Abusir* XXIII. The reading Neferinpu is preferred by the excavator for the name of this tomb owner.

86 VYMAZALOVÁ, in: BÁRTA et al., *Abusir* XXIII, 71–80.

87 *Ibid.*, 71, inscription 1.

88 BÁRTA et al., in: *Ä&L* 24, 2014, 17–20.

89 *Ibid.*, 18.

90 *Ibid.*, 19.

91 VYMAZALOVÁ & DULÍKOVÁ, in: *ArOr* 80, 2012; VYMAZALOVÁ & DULÍKOVÁ, in: *ArOr* 82, 2014; BÁRTA et al., in: *Ä&L* 24, 2014, 20–33; VYMAZALOVÁ, in: *PES* 15, 2015; VYMAZALOVÁ, in: *ArOr* 84, 2016; VYMAZALOVÁ & HAVELKOVÁ, in: *ANPM* 37, 2016; VYMAZALOVÁ & ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ, in: BÁRTA, COPPENS & KREJČÍ (edd.), *Abusir and Saqqara 2015*.

92 VYMAZALOVÁ & MEGAHED, in: *PES* 10, 2012; BÁRTA et al., in: *Ä&L* 24, 2014, 33–34; VYMAZALOVÁ & MEGAHED, in: *PES* 19, 2017.

chapel.<sup>93</sup> The latter contain the title and names of the tomb owner, while the former shows a date referring to an inspection in the year after the 20<sup>th</sup> cattle count.<sup>94</sup> The inscriptions on the bedrock might be considered masons' inscriptions. Nevertheless, the casing bore an additional piece of information, which might have been related to the construction, the burial or another event in the tomb.<sup>95</sup>

Further evidence comes from the 6<sup>th</sup> dynasty tombs. Presumably, their owners were related to earlier tomb owners either through family connections or through professions.<sup>96</sup> To the south of Ptahhetep's *mastaba* lies the tomb of the chief physician Neferherptah, whose name and title were written in hieratic in red paint and charcoal on the walls of the tomb's corridor chapel.<sup>97</sup> To the north of the anonymous tomb AS 31, a small *mastaba* of Inpuhetep has recently been uncovered, showing the name and title of the tomb owner in hieratic inscriptions on the western wall of the tomb's casing. A few inscriptions have also been found on its northern and southern walls.<sup>98</sup> Many of the other 6<sup>th</sup> dynasty structures on this site were built of mud-bricks. No hieratic inscriptions have been documented in the larger tombs of the vizier Qar and judge Inti, located to the west of AS 31.<sup>99</sup>

Overall, it can be said that the builders' inscriptions can be found on almost every tomb in Abusir South that is constructed of limestone or has limestone casing. There are only a few exceptions of 6<sup>th</sup> dynasty date, and naturally none of the mud-brick tombs has any inscriptions of this kind. The architecture and the archaeological context of these tombs reveal a great deal of information on the status of the owner and the date of the tomb, but in most cases the decorated parts such as false doors and reliefs from the chapel have been lost since antiquity. Therefore, in more than half of these tombs, the hieratic inscriptions are the only evidence to provide the name and title(s) of the tomb owner.

It is worth noting that the hieratic inscriptions are mostly concentrated on the western walls of the tombs, while the other walls bear a smaller number of inscriptions. In many tombs, one or more walls cannot be exposed, either because of the state of preservation, a lack of time, or the existence of adjoining structures. In general, the builders' inscriptions can occur on any wall of a tomb, but the western

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93 VYMAZALOVÁ & HAVELKOVÁ, in: *ANPM* 37, 2016, 102–103.

94 *Ibid.*, 102–103, fig. 12.

95 *Ibid.*, 103.

96 See, for instance, BÁRTA & VYMAZALOVÁ, in: KURASKIEWICZ, KOPP & POPIELSKA-GRYBOWSKA (edd.), *Old Kingdom Art and Archaeology*, forthcoming.

97 DULÍKOVÁ, ODLER & HAVELKOVÁ in: *PES* 8, 2011; JÁNOSI, in: *PES* 19, 2017, esp. fig. 3.

98 The tomb is yet unpublished.

99 BÁRTA et al., *Abusir* XIII; BÁRTA & VACHALA, *Abusir* XXI, forthcoming.

wall seems to contain hieratic inscriptions systematically. Moreover, these are usually written at the bottom-most layers of the masonry, as is clearly apparent in the well-preserved tombs of Inpunefer and Inpuhetep. The western wall of Inpunefer's tomb had nine layers of masonry preserved of which only the bottom three layers featured inscriptions.<sup>100</sup> Similarly, in Inpuhetep's tomb the bottom three of the six preserved layers of masonry of the western wall contain inscriptions.<sup>101</sup> The evidence from Abusir thus shows that the western walls of tombs are worth exploring. Ancient, medieval or even modern tomb robbers were usually interested in chapels and shafts, which sometimes remained exposed over long periods, but they hardly ever cared about the western walls. For this reason, the builders' inscriptions are often better preserved here than on the other walls of the tomb, where they have often faded.

The reasons for this concentration of the builders' inscriptions and the emphasis on the western wall are unclear. The western side of the tomb is the one located above the burial chamber if the chamber is to the west of the shaft, and it is of course directed towards the realm of the dead, but we can hardly confirm that this was the reason. It is also possible that the western wall was the least exposed to visitors and therefore might have been used by the builders to "sign" the tomb. When the construction of the casing started, they placed some blocks with the tomb owner's name visible at the bottom of the wall.

Generally, the builders' inscriptions in the Abusir South tombs comprise the name and one main title of the tomb owner, with the exception of Hetepi and Feteki of whom we can find two titles. Thanks to the preserved false doors of Shepseskafankh and Inpunefer and the inscribed false door lintel of Iymery, it is known that the titles in the builders' inscriptions are not the highest attested titles of the tomb owners.<sup>102</sup> The masonry thus seems to reflect the most usual title, specific for the tomb owner during his lifetime, but not his highest function, which can be found only on the tomb decoration and false doors.

Most of the hieratic inscriptions were written on a single block of limestone before this block was placed in the tomb. They were marks of ownership associated with quarrying and the distribution of masonry blocks in the cemetery. It is worth mentioning that these builders' inscriptions must have affected the visual design of the tombs, as they gave a chaotic impression for being randomly distributed disrup-

100 VYMAZALOVÁ, in: BÁRTA et al., *Abusir* XXIII, 72, fig. 5.3.

101 The tomb is yet unpublished.

102 For the false doors, see BÁRTA et al., in: *PES* 15, 2015, 20–21, figs. 8a–b, 23–24; BÁRTA et al., *Abusir* XXIII, 64–69, figs. 4.12–28; COPPENS & VYMAZALOVÁ, in: BÁRTA, COPPENS & VYMAZALOVÁ et al., *Abusir* XIX, 193, and figs. 4.1.3–4.

tive red or black marks on otherwise uniform white or yellow limestone walls. Many builders, however, apparently did not worry about this result.

Nevertheless, a few of the attested inscriptions were written on the walls after the construction of the tomb and were intended to be seen by visitors to the cemetery. Such was the inscription on the southern wall of Inpunefer's tomb, a wall that was passed by visitors to the large tomb AS 31 as well as visitors of the tomb complex of princess Sheretnebtu on their way out of the cemetery.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, some of the inscriptions in Ptahwer's tomb served to identify his tomb for the visitors, perhaps because of the unusually oriented entrance of this tomb and its close connection with another *mastaba*, which might have confused some of the visitors.<sup>104</sup>

The inscriptions on the walls of Shepespuptah's rock-cut chapel are quite specific, without any direct parallel among the other attested inscriptions from Abusir South. The walls of the chapel bear a list of five titles and the name of the owner, written directly on the rock-hewn wall.<sup>105</sup> All the inscriptions are directed towards the entrance of the tomb, written from the left to the right on the eastern wall,



Fig. 9: Inscriptions in red paint on the western wall of Shepespuptah's rock-cut chapel, which was originally covered with limestone casing (photograph Czech Institute of Egyptology FF UK, Martin Frouz).

103 VYMAZALOVÁ, in: BÁRTA et al., *Abusir* XXIII, 71.

104 DULÍKOVÁ et al., in: *PES* 19, 2017, 18–19.

105 VYMAZALOVÁ & HAVELKOVÁ, in: *ANPM* 37, 2016, 102.

and from the right to the left on the western wall. The eastern-wall inscriptions were written in nice and carefully shaped semi-hieratic signs and apparently were to remain exposed to the visitors of the chapel. The western-wall inscriptions were written in more cursive hieratic and were originally hidden behind the limestone casing of this wall (fig. 9). It is possible that the limestone casing contained the same inscriptions carved in hieroglyphs to mirror the ones on the east wall.<sup>106</sup>

The dates that can be found in the Abusir South tombs (as well as in royal Abusir) usually give only the season, month and day; therefore, they cannot be used for the proper dating of the tombs. Rather, they were additional pieces of information concerning the tomb's construction (as mentioned above for Werkaure's tomb). Only exceptionally do we find dates mentioning years of the cattle count. Such can be found on the masonry of the *mastaba* AS 31 and the neighbouring tomb of Ptahhetep (fig. 10), where the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> occasions of cattle count help to date the construction of these tombs to the reign of Nyuserre or Djedkare.<sup>107</sup> Another date, the 20<sup>th</sup> occasion of cattle count, is preserved on the casing of Shepesuptah's rock-cut chapel. It refers to the reign of Djedkare, although we are not sure due to the above-discussed character of the inscription: whether it was associated with the construction of the tomb, the burial of Shepesuptah or, for instance, with a



Fig. 10: Date on the western wall of the tomb of Ptahhetep (photograph Czech Institute of Egyptology FF UK, Hana Vymazalová).

106 VYMAZALOVÁ & HAVELKOVÁ, in: *ANPM* 37, 2016, 102–103.

107 The former seems more likely considering the archaeological situation and the architecture of the tombs. For the tomb AS 31, see the discussion in BÁRTA, in: STRUDWICK & STRUDWICK (edd.), *Old Kingdom, New Perspectives*, 12–21.

robber's activities after the burial.<sup>108</sup> If correct, these dates correspond well to the dating of these tombs based on archaeological circumstances, architectural features, pottery finds and other data.

The most apparent difference between the builders' inscriptions from tombs in the Abusir royal necropolis and those from the tombs of non-royal officials in Abusir South is their variety. The tombs of kings and royal family members include numerous masons' marks, levelling lines, and names and titles of many individuals, who were in one way or another involved in the construction. The numerous lines and axes in these tombs indicate the precise planning of the tombs, whereas the names of construction gangs and phyles show that the works in the royal necropolis were well organised and formally controlled. This corresponds to the fact that these tombs were a part of royal construction projects. The same variety can be found in tombs of those non-royals who had the unique privilege of being buried next to their kings, like Ptahshepses.

On the other hand, the builders' inscriptions in the tombs of officials in Abusir South contain the name and title of the tomb owner, but not of other individuals. In addition, the tombs very rarely contain marks related to the construction, such as lines, axes or marks of height, even though levelling lines can occasionally be found (e. g. on Inpunefer's tomb). This difference in the variety of the builders' inscriptions naturally reflects the status of the owner of the tomb, but also the complexity or the requirements of its construction. In comparison with the royal necropolis of Abusir, the non-royal tombs at Abusir South were built by smaller-scale groups of workers hired individually by the tomb owners based on their needs, which is reflected in the builders' inscriptions.

Therefore, while marks referring to the crews (*pr.w*), phyles (*z.w*) and their sections (*tz.w*) can be found in all the tombs at the royal necropolis Abusir, only two tombs in Abusir South feature such marks: the names of phyle sections *wsr*, *nfr* and *h<sup>c</sup>* appear on many blocks in the corridor of Nefershepes' tomb,<sup>109</sup> and a quarry mark in the shape of a grid can be observed in the courtyard associated with the large anonymous *mastaba* AS 31. Its owner undoubtedly played an important

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108 VYMAZALOVÁ & HAVELKOVÁ, in: *ANPM* 37, 2016, 102–103. Evidence shows that the tomb complex of Sheretnebtj was used for burials until the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> dynasty, when the chapels and shafts were robbed, damaged and neglected – and still people continued to be buried here (VYMAZALOVÁ, in: *PES* 15, 2015; VYMAZALOVÁ & ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ, in: BÁRTA, COPPENS & KREJČÍ (edd.), *Abusir and Saqqara 2015*).

109 These marks are comparable with inscriptions from the royal monuments. The signs *wsr* and *nfr* can be found on blocks from Sahurē's pyramid where they appear together with the sign for *gs*. See BORCHARDT, *Sahu-Re'*, 92. See also the discussion in JUNKER, *Giza* I, 157–158, and VERNER, *Abusir* II, 169–173.

role in the king's life: as a priest associated with the House of Life and the House of Protection,<sup>110</sup> he might have been one of the respected scholars of the time.<sup>111</sup> It is worth mentioning that one inscription on the northern wall of his tomb reads *ms.w nzw*t ("king's children"), confirming a close relation to the king's own family. The same inscription is sometimes found in the tombs of the royal-family members in the central part of Abusir (e. g. in the tomb of Werkaure<sup>112</sup>). The builders' inscriptions from the tomb AS 31 and the tomb of Nefershepes highlight the special status of the owners of these two tombs; it seems very likely that the king in one way or another was involved in the construction.

## Acknowledgements

This paper was written within the Programme for the Development of Fields of Study at Charles University, no. Q11: Complexity and Resilience: Ancient Egyptian Civilisation in Multidisciplinary and Multicultural Perspective.

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110 BÁRTA, in: STRUDWICK & STRUDWICK (edd.), *Old Kingdom, New Perspectives*, 19.

111 VYMAZALOVÁ, *Administration and Economy*, 28–35.

112 VYMAZALOVÁ, in: KREJČÍ, & ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ, *Abusir XXIV, 272*, inscription no. 64. Another official associated with the king's children, Faaf Idu, was buried in royal Abusir in the so-called Djedkare's family cemetery, VERNER & CALLENDER, *Abusir VI*, 63–69, confirming his privileged social standing.

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