

The linen-bearers procession carrying straps in both hands in the private tombs of the old kingdom

Abstract

This article deals with the scene of the procession of linen-bearers carrying straps in both hands in the private tombs of the Old Kingdom. This scene is collected from the tombs. The positions of representations of the scene, numbers of processions in the tomb, and numbers of linen bearers in the procession are studied. Direction of the procession and distribution of this scene in the cemeteries are introduced. Identity of the tombs owners who depicted linen bearers and inscriptions accompanying the linen bearers are identified. Dating of the scene is studied.

Keywords: old kingdom, saqqara, tomb decoration, linen, linen bearers, linen straps

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Introduction

The Ancient Egyptians decorated their tombs in the Old Kingdom with different scenes and writings. One of these is the linen offering, which may mean the presentation of new or clean clothing,¹ and which appeared in different contexts, including linen production,² filling the boxes with linen, a separate list for linen,³ inside the traditional long offering list,⁴ inside the thousand offering list,⁵ inside packages and boxes depicted on the walls of the tomb super and sub-structures,⁶ a priest holding and presenting it among the funerary meal rites which are divided into seventeen rites,⁷ linen-bearer with other offering bearers⁸ and processions of linen bearers in closed boxes⁹ or in hands.

Procession of linen-bearers carrying straps in both hands

This last context, procession of linen bearers in hands, is the subject of this article. It represents more than one person, standing in a horizontal procession, directed to the tomb owner or to the store-room. Each person holds with each hand a strap of linen in front of him. The

procession was found in about eight tombs from the Old Kingdom.¹⁰ We will start our study by organizing them in a table according to their dating, followed by comment (Table 1) (Figure 1–8).



Figure 1A Linen-bearers, Nebet's tomb (Munro, Unas-Friedhof, Taf. 29).



Figure 1B Linen-bearers, Nebet's tomb (Munro, Unas-Friedhof, Taf. 43).

¹Hassan S. Excavations at Giza, VI [2], Plates, Cairo, 1946, p. 96.

²<http://www.Oxfordexpeditiontoegypt.com/Database.php?Scene=details> Database: Scene: 10.2.

³Smith WS. The Old Kingdom Linen List, ZÄS 71(1935), p. 134–135, 140.

⁴Ibid, 136; Hassan, Giza, VI [2], Plates, pls. ix, xvii, xxv, xxxiii, xli, xlix, lvii, lxx, lxxiii, Lxxxi, lxxxix, xcvi, cxv, cxxiii; Barta, W. Die altägyptische Opferliste von der Frühzeit bis zur griechisch-römischen Epoche, MÄS 3, Berlin, 1963, p. 14, 17–23, 26–28, 30, 32, 36, 45, 48, 53, 56, 89, 97, 107.

⁵Simpson WK. Giza Mastabas, vol. 3, The Mastabas of Kawab, Khafkhufu I and II, Boston, 1978, fig. 28.

⁶Smith, Linen List, Harpur Y, Scremin P. The Chapel of Kagemni-Scene Details, Oxford, 2006, p. 136, 480–481, pls. 509, 512, fig. 35.

⁷Junker H. Graubünden auf dem Friedhof des Alten Reiches bei den Pyramiden von Giza, Band III, Vienne, 1938, p. 100–110; Hassan S. Excavations at Giza, VI [2], Text, Cairo, 1948, p. 84–99.

⁸Junker H. Grabungen auf dem Friedhof des Alten Reiches bei den Pyramiden von Giza, Band II, Vienne, 1934, Abb. 11.

⁹Smith, Linen List, p. 140.

¹⁰Harpur and Paolo, Kagemni, p. 483.

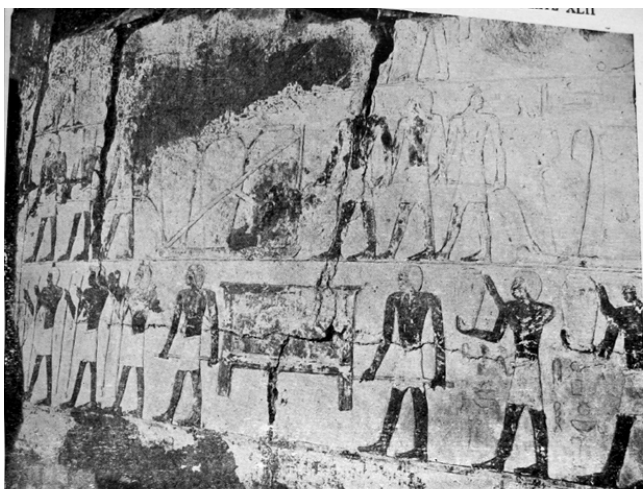


Figure 2A Linen-bearers, Akhethetep's tomb (Hassan, Saqqara, I, pl. xlii).



Figure 2B Linen-bearers, Akhethetep's tomb (Hassan, Saqqara, I, pl. xliii).



Figure 3A Linen-bearers, Ptahshepses's tomb (Soleiman and El-Batal, Ptahshepses, I, pl. 59).



Figure 3B Linen-bearers, Ptahshepses's tomb (Soleiman and El-Batal, Ptahshepses, I, pl. 60).



Figure 4A Linen-bearers, North wall- room VIII, Kagemni's tomb (photo by the authors).



Figure 4B Linen-bearers, South wall- room VIII, Kagemni's tomb (photo by the authors).



Figure 4C Linen-bearers, East wall- room VIII, Kagemni's tomb (photo by the authors).

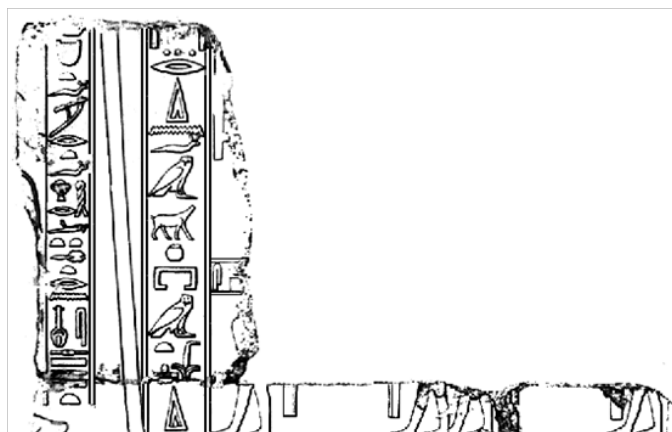


Figure 5A Linen-bearers, Mereruka's tomb, North wall- room A 9 (Duell, Mereruka, I, pl. 73).

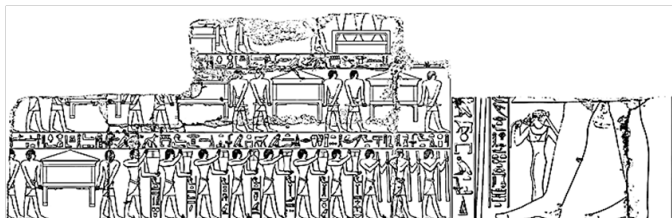


Figure 5B Linen-bearers, Mereruka's tomb, West wall- room A 9 (Duell, Mereruka, I, pls. 71, 72).

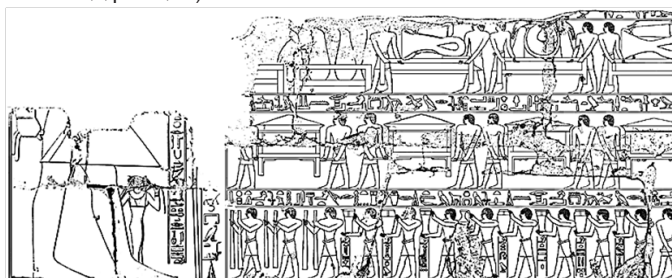


Figure 5C Linen-bearers, Mereruka's tomb, East wall- room A 9 (Duell, Mereruka, I, pls. 71, 75).

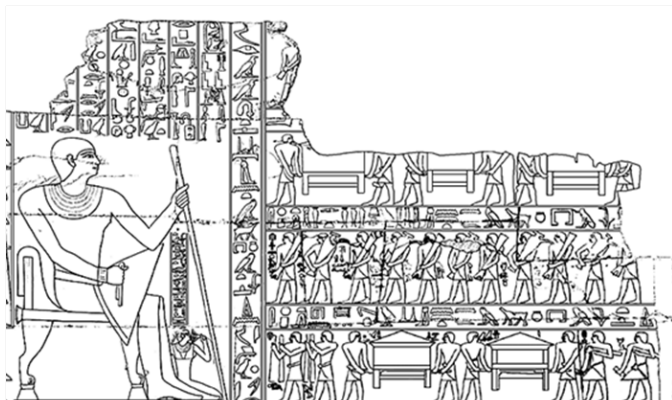


Figure 5D Linen-bearers, Mereruka's tomb, West wall- room A 10 (Duell, Mereruka, I, pls. 96, 99).



Figure 5E Linen-bearers, Mereruka's tomb, East wall- room A 12 (Duell, Mereruka, II, pl. 117).



Figure 6A Linen-bearers, Nikauisesi's tomb, East wall- room IV (photo by the authors).



Figure 6B Linen-bearers, Nikauisesi's tomb, West wall- room IV (photo by the authors).

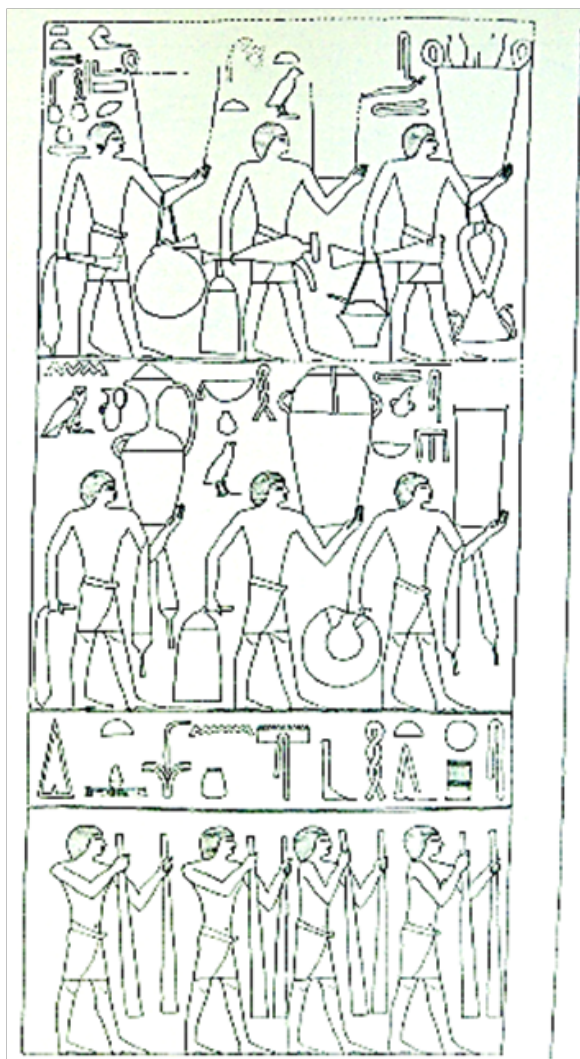


Figure 7A Linen-bearers, Ankhamahor's tomb (Badawy, Nyhetep-Ptah, fig. 43).



Figure 8A Linen-bearers, Tetiankh's tomb (photo by the authors).

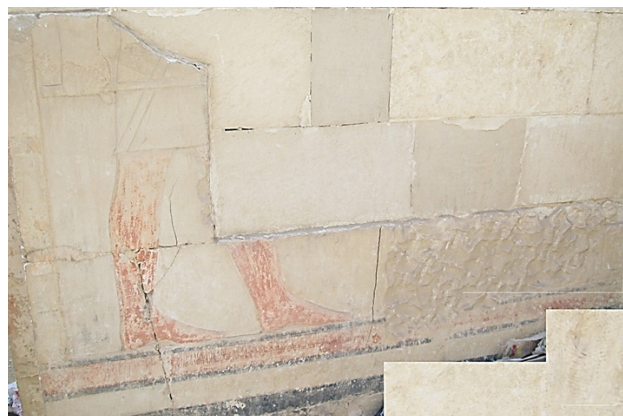


Figure 8B Linen-bearers, Tetiankh's tomb (photo by the authors).

Commentary

Positions of representations of the Scene

This scene was usually inscribed in the tombs' super-structures in one room (Nebet, Nebkauhor, Ptahshepses, Kagemni, Nikauisesi, and Tetiankh). It was rarely depicted in several rooms as in the tomb of Mereruka where it is shown in three rooms. That room or these rooms were usually store-rooms and were usually connected to the offering room. This scene can be also seen, rarely, in the chapel as in the tomb of Ptahshepses because the chapel of the tomb has only one room including all the scenes. The reason for the multiplicity of the scene in the tomb of Mereruka is the large area of this tomb and the number of its side rooms and stores, which are dedicated to depict this scene. It is the largest tomb for a noble in the Old Kingdom in terms of the number of rooms and stores.

This scene was depicted in the room on one wall (Nebet, Ptahshepses, and Mereruka-rooms 10 and 12) or two walls, usually the opposite walls (Akhethotep/Hemi, Nikauisesi, and Tetiankh?), or three walls (Kagemni and Mereruka-room 9). These walls were north, south, east and/or west. The scene was rarely inscribed on the entrance thicknesses of the tomb store-rooms (Ankhamahor). The thickness of the doorway is not a suitable place and is not common to depict the scene which needs a large space to show the procession of linen-bearers and the deceased who is watching and receiving the procession and this is appropriate to the walls and not with small positions such as the thicknesses of entrances, jambs of false doors, and faces of pillars. It was represented in either a separate register (Kagemni, Nikauisesi, Ankhamahor and Tetiankh), or neighboring other scenes (Akhethotep, Ptahshepses, and Mereruka). It was frequently the bottom register (Nebkauhor, Kagemni, Mereruka-rooms 9, 10, Nikauisesi, Ankhamahor, and Tetiankh), and rarely in the middle register (Ptahshepses and Mereruka-east wall of room 12).

The scene was sometimes connected with other scenes; preceded by perfume (Mereruka-east wall of room 12), topped with perfume (Ptahshepses, Kagemni, Ankhamahor, Nikauisesi), perfume and eye-paint (Kagemni), or boxes of cloth (Mereruka, east and west walls-room A 9) or followed by perfumes and boxes of cloth (Akhethotep and Mereruka- west wall of rooms 9, east and west walls of room 10), or wine (Ptahshepses). Harpur suggested that linen-bearers are associated with perfume or oils bearers because both of cloth and oils

were essential requirements for the deceased's funeral preparations and his transformation after death.¹¹ We think that linen-bearers are mainly preceded, followed, topped by the perfume in order to follow the organization of the offering list where the linen is usually preceded by the perfume and eye-paint. This scene is always depicted in the chapel and is never shown in the burial chamber because the necropolis and period of depicting this scene are Saqqara and the reigns of Unas and Teti. There is no decorated burial chamber with animate figures

(because the linen-bearers include animate figures) in Saqqara from the reigns of Unas and Teti. There are only two decorated burial chambers with animate figures in Saqqara. These tombs are not dated to the period of representing this scene. The first tomb is the recent discovered decorated burial chamber of king Isesi's vizier, Reshepses LS 16 (S 902), which is dated to the middle of the reign of Djedkare.¹² The second tomb is Kairer's tomb which is dated to Pepy I's reign¹³ or Pepy I's-Merenre's reigns.¹⁴

Table I Positions of representations of the tomb

No.	Tomb	Location	Dating	Representations position	References
1	Nebet Figure 1	Saqqara Unas' Cemetery	Fifth Dynasty	North wall of the magazine G	PM. III ² , 624-25; Munro, P., <i>Der Unas-Friedhof Nord-west, Mainz/ Rhein</i> , 1993, Taf. 29, 43
2	Akhethotep/ Hemi Reused later by Nebkauhor Figure 2	Saqqara Unas' Cemetery	Fifth Dynasty	North and south walls of the store-room	PM. III ² , 627-29; Hassan, S., <i>Excavations at Saqqara, I</i> , Cairo, 1975, 53-55, pls. xlii-xliv
3	Ptahshepses Figure 3	Saqqara Unas' Cemetery	Late Fifth Dynasty and beginning of Sixth Dynasty	East wall of the chapel	Soleiman, S. and El-Batal, A., <i>The Gisir el-Mudir Cemetery at Saqqara</i> , vol. IV, <i>The Tomb of Ptahshepses</i> , part I, <i>The Tomb Owner, Architecture and Dating of the Tomb</i> , Cairo, 2015, pls. 59, 60.
4	Kagemni Figure 4	Saqqara Teti's Cemetery	Sixth Dynasty	The south, north and east walls of the store-room	PM. III ² , 521-25; Harpur, Y. and Scremin, P., <i>The Chapel of Kagemni-Scene Details</i> , Oxford, 2006, 483, 485-87, 538, 539, pls. 523, 530, 538, 539, figs. 35, 36, 38.
5	Mereruka Figure 5	Saqqara Teti's Cemetery	Sixth Dynasty	The store-rooms (north east and west walls of room 9, west wall of room 10, east wall of room 12)	PM. III ² , 525-34; Kanawati, N. et al., <i>Mereruka and his Family</i> , part 3: <i>The Tomb of Mereruka</i> , Oxford, vol. I, 2010, pls. 92, 93, 100, 108.
6	Nikauisesi Figure 6	Saqqara Teti's Cemetery	Sixth Dynasty	East and west walls of the store-room	Kanawati, N. and Abder-Raziq, M., <i>The Teti Cemetery at Saqqara</i> , vol. VI, <i>The Tomb of Nikauisesi</i> , Warminster, 2000, 51-52, pls. 63, 65
7	Ankhemahor Figure 7	Saqqara Teti's Cemetery	Sixth Dynasty	The south thickness of the doorway between rooms III, V (the store-room)	PM. III ² , 512-15; Badawy, A., <i>The Tomb of Nyhetep-Ptah at Giza and the Tomb of cAnkhemahor at Saqqara</i> , Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1978, fig. 43; Kanawati, N. and Hassan, A., <i>The Teti Cemetery at Saqqara</i> , vol. II, <i>The Tomb of Ankhemahor</i> , Sydney, 1997, 47, pl. 52.
8	Tetiankh Figure 8	Saqqara Teti's Cemetery	Sixth Dynasty	The north of the store-room (perhaps also the damaged south wall)	Unpublished

Numbers of processions in the tomb

It is noticeable that the tomb could include from one to five scenes of linen processions. These tombs included one procession of the linen-bearers (Ptahshepses and Ankhemahor), two (Nebet, Akhethotep, Nikauisesi, and Tetiankh?), four (Kagemni), or five (Mereruka). The tombs dated to Unas' reign usually include one (Ptahshepses) or two processions (Nebet, Akhethotep). The tombs dated to Teti's reign usually include one, two, four, or five processions.

Numbers of linen bearers in the procession

The number of bearers in the procession varied as follows;

1. Nebet: The scene of Nebet is broken and missing many parts, so we are not sure how many processions were shown. There are remains of only two persons in each procession.
2. Akhethotep: three persons in each procession.

¹¹Harpur and Paolo, Kagemni, p. 483.

3. Ptahshepses: five persons.
4. Kagemni: five persons (twice), seven and eleven.
5. Mereruka: two, three, five (twice).
6. Ankhmahor: four persons.
7. Nikauisesi: four and six persons.
8. Tetiankh: eight persons.

It is noticeable that each procession consists of two to eleven persons according to the allocated space to this scene in the tomb.

Direction of the procession

Most of the processions faced towards the deceased on the same wall or on the neighboring wall (Nebkauhor, Ptahshepses, Kagemni, Mereruka, Nikauisesi, and Tetiankh?) in order to be examined by the deceased to be happy and to ensure the requirements of his eternal life. A few were directed to the store-room itself (Ankhmahor) in order to be stored for the benefit of the deceased.

Distribution of this scene in the old kingdom cemeteries

This scene was depicted only in Saqqara. It was found in two Cemeteries: Unas' Cemetery (Nebet, Akhethotep/Hemi, and Ptahshepses), and Teti's Cemetery (Kagemni, Mereruka, Nikauisesi, Ankhmahor, and Tetiankh). We believe the existence of this scene in that area and those two cemeteries is that the procession only appeared in the era of Unas and Teti and is therefore linked to their cemeteries in Saqqara.

Identity of the tombs owners who depicted linen bearers

This scene was inscribed in the Fifth Dynasty by the royal family members: Nebet was a queen and wife of Unas; Akhethotep-Hemi was a prince, chief of justice and minister.¹⁵ Also the high officials depicted it: Ptahshepses was inspector of the royal domain, inspector of the great house, inspector of the robing-room, lector priest, overseer of the two granaries, overseer of the two treasuries, overseer of the two houses of gold, overseer of the two workshops, overseer of the linen house, overseer of the commissions of the great house, *hm-ntr* priest of (the pyramid) 'perfect-is-Izezi', *hm-ntr* priest of (the pyramid) 'perfect-are-the-places-of-Wenis', and *hm-ntr* priest of (the pyramid) 'steadfast-are-the-places-of-Teti'.¹⁶ In the sixth Dynasty the members of the royal family (Tetiankh) and four high officials depicted that

¹²PM. III², 494–96; Baer K. Rank and Title in the Old Kingdom, Chicago, 1960, p. 101, 292; Strudwick NC. The Administration of Egypt in the Old Kingdom, London, 1985, p. 94–95; Harpur Y. Decoration in Egyptian Tombs of the Old Kingdom, Oxford, 1987, p. 336; Cherpion N. Mastabas et hypogées d'Ancien Empire – Le problème de la datation, Brussels, 1989, p. 229; El-Tayeb H. The burial chamber of Rashepses at Saqqara, EA 44 (Spring 2014), p. 8–9.

¹³Harpur, Decoration. p. 197–98, 276.

¹⁴Dawood K. Animate decoration and burial chambers of private Tombs during the Old Kingdom, New evidence from the Tomb of Kairer at Saqqara, in: Pantalacci L. et Berger-el-Naggar C. editors, Des Néferkarê aux Montouhotep. Travaux archéologiques sur la fin de la VI^e dynastie et la première Période Intermédiaire, Lyon, 2005, p. 116.

¹⁵PM. III², 624, 627.

¹⁶Soleiman S. and El-Batal A. The Gisir el-Mudir Cemetery at Saqqara, vol. IV, The Tomb of Ptahshepses, part I, The Tomb Owner, Architecture and Dating of the Tomb, Cairo, 2015, p. 21–37.

procession; three of them were also chiefs of justice and ministers (Kagemni, Mereruka, and Ankhmahor); the first two of them married two daughters of king Teti. Nikauisesi was a count, Overseer of the two houses of the gold, Overseer of the two workshops, Overseer of Upper Egypt etc...¹⁷ The linen bearers' procession started as a royal tradition then the high officials imitated it.

Inscriptions accompanying the linen bearers

There are inscriptions above the linen procession in the tomb of Ptahshepses consisting of:

1. The short offering formula:

htp di nzw nzw-sšr: an offering that the king gives the royal linen.

2. Types, names and numbers of the linen. The inscriptions are not in good condition, so we are not sure if the linen is divided into one or two groups (*sšr*, *št*). It is of w-name. The numbers are from 5000 to 9000.

There is a horizontal line above the procession in the tombs of Sixth Dynasty describing the action. This line does not exist in the tombs of the Fifth Dynasty. So the scene of the linen procession scene in the tomb of Ptahshepses is dated to the Fifth Dynasty, not to the Sixth Dynasty because this line is not present (the decoration of this tomb started in the reign of Unas and continued during the reign of Teti so some scenes are dated to Unas and others dated to Teti).

The horizontal line consists of;

1. The infinitive *shpt* which means bringing, to describe what the linen bearers are doing.
2. The linen types:
 - a. *sšr nswt/ šst sšr nswt*, the royal linen/ the best royal linen (Kagemni, Nikauisesi, and Mereruka).
 - b. *šstiw* (Kagemni).
 - c. *hbs* clothe (Mereruka and Ankhmahor).
 - d. *Wnhw* clothes material (Kagemni)
3. The origin of this linen is from the residence as a royal offering. We have this information from the reign of Isesi in the tomb of Kaemthenet who mentioned in his autobiography that the king rewarded him with linen from the residence after his safe and successful journey with the king.¹⁸
4. The titles and name of the tomb owner, to whom this linen was brought.

Dating

This scene appeared since late Fifth Dynasty and continued in the early Sixth Dynasty.

A. Late fifth dynasty: it appeared in three tombs dated to Unas' reign; Nebet,¹⁹ Akhethotep/Hemi,²⁰ and Ptahshepses.²¹

¹⁷Kanawati N. Nikauisesi, p. 11–12

¹⁸Strudwick NC. Texts from the Pyramid Age, Leiden/Boston, 2005, p. 284–285.

¹⁹Cherpion, Mastabas, p. 233.

²⁰Kanawati N. The Egyptian Administration in the Old Kingdom, Warminster, 1977, p. 152; Strudwick, Administration, p. 56–57; Harpur, Decoration, p. 274.

²¹Soleiman and El-Batal, Ptahshepses, I, p. 77–100.

B. Early sixth dynasty: This scene continued in five tombs dated to the Sixth Dynasty. Kagemni,²² Mereruka,²³ Nikauisesi,²⁴ and Tetiankh are dated to Teti's reign and tomb of Ankhmahor is dated to the reign of Teti or Pepy I.²⁵ It is clear, regardless of the tomb which the scholars differ on its dating, that this scene is related to the reigns of Unas and Teti.

²²Harpur, *Decoration*, p. 276 [534]; Baer, *Rank*, p. 295 [548]; Kanawati, *Administration*, p. 155 [361]; Strudwick, *Texts*, 154–55 [151]; Cherpion, *Mastabas*, p. 230.

²³Ibid, 230; Baer, *Rank*, p. 82 [197]; Strudwick, *Administration*, p. 100–101 [68]; Harpur, *Decoration*, p. 274 [420]; Kanawati, N. et al., *Mereruka and his Family*, part 3, *The Tomb of Mereruka*, vol. I, Oxford, 2010, p. 32–33.

²⁴Kanawati and Abder-Raziq, *Nikauisesi*, p. 17–23.

²⁵Baer, *Rank*, p. 64 [94]; Strudwick, *Administration*, p. 75 [30]; Harpur, *Decoration*, p. 273 [374]; Cherpion, *Mastabas*, p. 153, 232; Kanawati and Hassan, *Ankhmahor*, p. 18.

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Conflicts of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.