Article

Artistic Production in a Necropolis in Motion

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Abstract: The present article studies aspects of the artistic production at New Kingdom Saqqara, a necropolis of the ancient Egyptian royal residence city Memphis. Following a brief review of the functions of ancient Egyptian tombs, this article will first set out to scrutinize the tomb-making section of society (e.g., size, membership). Second, the corpus of tombs will be reviewed to uncover the diverse nature of the tomb owners and to investigate access to resources required for tomb making. Third, the article will proceed to place the tombs in spatial and temporal context and reflect on the artistic production in a necropolis in motion.

Keywords: New Kingdom; Memphis; Saqqara; tombs; elite; tomb decoration; monumental self-commemoration; artists; graffiti

1. Introduction

The burials of a very small minority of the ancient Egyptian population were marked with a structure aboveground. We may draw the simple conclusion from this observation that a superstructure was not an absolute necessity for a grave to perform its primary function (that is, to keep the body of the deceased). However, a superstructure (rock-cut, freestanding, or a combination of both) added much to advance a grave's memory function or biographical representation (Assmann 2003, p. 46). A superstructure marked a place of burial in the landscape, and its decorative program shaped the (funerary) iconographic "personality" of its owner—a competitive personality, moreover, because tomb owners were preoccupied with competition with their peers (Van Walsem 2020, pp. 124–25; also Den Doncker 2017). Significantly, not everyone had equal means to utilize and adjust variables such as location, size, material, and quality of craftsmanship to express their competitive personality. Resources (material and imaginative—that is, knowledge) were not distributed evenly within the ancient Egyptian population. A tomb with texts and images thus visualized differences in status and rank within society, and since tomb chapels remained accessible to visitors (ideally in perpetuity), the effect lasted until long after the owner of a tomb had been buried in it. Funerary art, then, could be understood as a means to grant one's persona monumental and (ideally) eternal agency amongst the future members of (primarily) local communities, being anchored in a lived cultural landscape forever in the making. This way, art acted upon the ancient Egyptian society as a tool of power that promoted one's success for an *earthly* afterlife. Moreover, we should be careful not to underestimate (funerary) art as a tool of power *during* the lifetime of a tomb's commissioning patron. After all, structures that were to mark a burial were made during life, and being able to tap into the human and material resources required for realizing monumental commemoration signaled one's social status. And since tomb making was a social undertaking that required the leveraging of existing power dynamics to access resources and mobilize a workforce, the making of monumental funerary art could be understood as a performance that could be seen, heard, and experienced by members of the community.

This article will explore various aspects of the Saqqara New Kingdom (c. 1539–1078 BCE) necropolis of the royal residence city Memphis—one of the most important urban centers of the ancient world in the Late Bronze Age (Figure 1). There are a number of

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problems that have, in the past, affected the study of Memphis and its necropolis at Saqqara and which modern scholars are also facing today. One major problem is that there is a scarcity of surviving, standing monuments. Another major problem is that the necropolis exists largely in public and private collections around the globe—a result of large-scale and uncontrolled excavations during the 19th century.

Figure 1. Map of Egypt, the East Mediterranean littoral, and Near East with a selection of the most important sites during the Late Bronze Age (c. 1500–1200 BCE) (topographic map after Wikimedia Commons, public domain; adapted by the author).

By joining a great deal of the dispersed material to the archeological remains uncovered during more recent systematic excavations, I have gathered information of more than 500 tombs built on the North Saqqara plateau (Staring 2023) (Figure 2).[1] In the present article, I will further scrutinize the tomb-making section of Memphite society: what was

the size of this group and who formed part of it (Section 2)? I will then review the corpus of tombs to uncover the diverse nature of tomb owners and investigate access to resources required for tomb making (Section 3). Because any monument is meaningful only within the larger landscape that provides its context, I will conclude this article by placing the tombs in spatial and temporal context and reflect on artistic production in a necropolis in motion (Section 4).

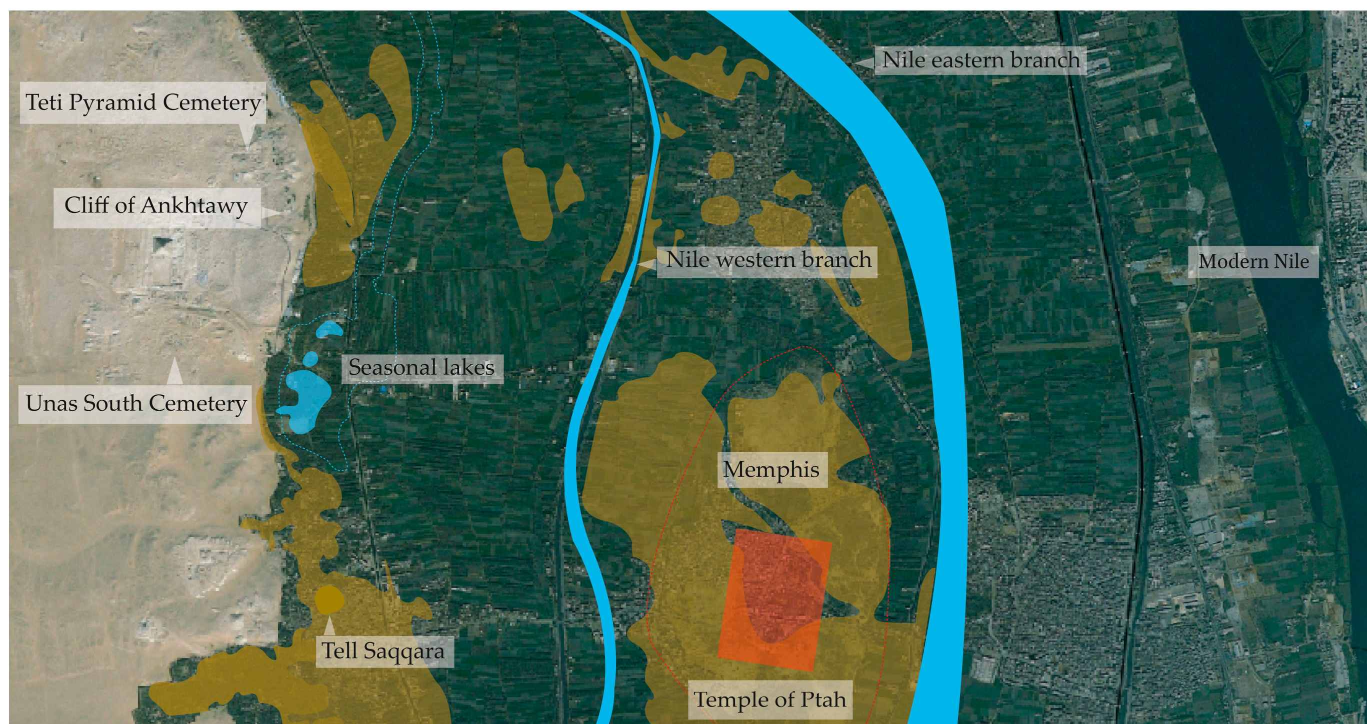

Figure 2. Memphis and the North Saqqara plateau during the New Kingdom (c. 1539–1078 BCE) (satellite image after Google Earth, 2022; adapted by the author).

2. Inhabitants of Memphis with Access to Monumental (Self-)Commemoration

2.1. Assessing the Tomb-Making Section of Memphite Society

One means to probe the living population is to scrutinize all available epigraphic sources. The corpus of prosopographic material collected and studied by Anne Herzberg-Beiersdorf (2023) provides the data to help assess this topic. The epigraphic material accounts for a total number of 2366 persons attested at Memphis during 360 years of the New Kingdom.[2] This group of people represents a very small percentage of the total number of people that lived at Memphis during the period of study. Herzberg-Beiersdorf (2023, pp. 50–53) identifies them as members of court society (cf. Raedler 2006, p. 84). They are estimated to represent no more than 1% of society at large (Baines and Yoffee 2000, p. 16). This means the total number of people resident at Memphis during the study period amounts to approximately 236,600.[3] This number represents roughly eighteen generations of c. 13,144 people.[4] Since approximately 2.5 generations were alive at any given time, and taking note of the numbers fluctuating throughout the period of study, Memphis would have seen an average population of c. 32,860 people throughout the New Kingdom (Herzberg-Beiersdorf 2023, pp. 50–53). This might seem a conservative estimate compared to the 50,000 inhabitants thought to have lived at Tell el-Amarna, ancient Akhetaten (Stevens 2018, p. 103; Kemp 2012, pp. 271–72), which is, like Memphis, a royal residence city, though inhabited for the duration of less than one generation.

The 236,600 inhabitants of Memphis built a minimum number of 511 tombs at Saqqara (Staring 2023).[5] This number comprises the (remains of) structures recorded in excavation (a significant number of which are no longer extant) plus all known decontextualized and

dispersed stone elements held in museums, such as stelae, reliefs, pyramidions, etc.[6] The total number of tombs built during the New Kingdom was certainly (much) higher than 511. We might be able to approximate this number if we accept that the tomb-making elite section of Egyptian society consisted of the actual tomb owners plus potential tomb owners not attested with an actual tomb of their own at a ratio of 1:2 (Baines and Eyre 1983, p. 65). If we take Herzberg-Beiersdorf's 2366 people attested in epigraphic documents (the members of court society) to represent the joint pool of potential tomb owners, one-third of them represent actual tomb owners, which comes down to 789 people.[7] This figure suggests that 278 tombs (789 minus 511) are still missing from our record.

The commissioning patrons of the total minimum number of known tombs at Saqqara (n = 511) represent 21.6% of the members of Memphite court society attested in epigraphic sources (n = 2366), or 4.6 members of the elite for every one tomb. The 511 Saqqara tombs span 360 years, which means they were built at a rate of 1.4 per year or 28 per generation of 13,144 individuals (130 of whom were members of the elite).[8] Thus, as little as 0.2% of each generation of Memphites owned a tomb at Saqqara (Table 1).

Table 1. Key figures for assessing the tomb-making section of Memphite society during the New Kingdom.

Total number of Saqqara New Kingdom tombs	511
Members of Memphite court society (elite)	2366 (=max. 1% of total population)
Total population of Memphis during study period	~236,000 (2366 × 100)
Ratio of elite/tomb	4.1 (21.6%)
Study period	~360 years
Tombs/year	~1.4
Tombs/generation (20 years)	~28/13,144 individuals
Share of tomb owners/total Memphite population	0.2%

2.2. The Memphite Tomb-Making Elite Not Attested with a Tomb of Their Own

The remaining 1577 members of the tomb-making elite (two-thirds of 2366 people) are not attested with an actual tomb, even though a substantial number of them are known to us from funerary monuments such as tomb stelae. Their names were recorded in the tombs of others. The "other" could be a member of their family or someone whom they were professionally affiliated with. It is not a given that the individuals thus depicted and named were also buried within such tombs. Even for some of the largest monuments built at Saqqara this scenario is ruled out. Take, for example, the 18th-Dynasty monumental tomb of Maya (028/USC), overseer of the treasury and all the king's works (Martin 2012). The tomb's iconographic program depicts and names several dozen individuals: a small number of family members plus a much larger number of people who were professionally affiliated with Maya in life (Herzberg-Beiersdorf 2023, Figure 74). The skeletal material retrieved from the comparatively small burial chamber located more than 20 m underground suggests that it only held a small family group (Strouhal 1992).

The archeological evidence from the Theban necropolises paints the same picture. There too, the tombs of the 18th Dynasty tended to house individuals, couples, or small family groups, whereas those of the 19th and 20th Dynasty were complexes that contained larger numbers of individuals, including several generations of the same family and extended households (Meskell 1999). While the skeletal material is usually insufficiently preserved in Saqqara tombs, the underground burial spaces are certainly suggestive of the same development. The skeletal remains of 43 individuals uncovered from the burial chambers of the 20th-Dynasty chapel of the merchant of the king's treasury, Khay (050/USC) (Strouhal and Horáčková 2001), cannot be matched with the smaller number of individuals depicted and named in the aboveground chapel. They might represent members of a single family spanning multiple generations, though this need not necessarily be the case.

The prevailing patrimonial household structure of Egyptian society in the New Kingdom (Schloen 2001, pp. 255, 313–16) suggests that the group could have included individuals with no blood relation to the tomb's commissioning patron.

Let us for a moment return to the tomb of Maya (028/USC; Figure 3). Some of the people depicted and named in the tomb's iconographic program had a tomb of their own. Amenemone the goldsmith (213/TPC) is a case in point (Lepsius 1897–1913, pl. III.241b; Ockinga 2004). His son Ptahmose, Maya's letter scribe (personal secretary), is also named in the tomb of Maya (Figure 4; see further below for a second attestation). He might have been buried in one of the underground spaces of his father's tomb, or perhaps near the monumental tomb of his superior in office. A similar scenario could be proposed for Nebre, scribe of the treasury and, as a subordinate of Maya, also named in the tomb of his superior. He might have been buried in the tomb of his father Pay (017/USC), located south of Maya's, where he is depicted and named on a stela along with other members of the family. Another son of Pay, Raia (not named in Maya's tomb), added a forecourt to his father Pay's tomb (042/USC), and made structural changes to the subterranean spaces to accommodate his own interment in a large stone sarcophagus, thus turning the tomb into a multi-generational family complex.

Select Tombs:

004/USC Urkhiya
009/USC Iniuia
017/USC Pay
027/USC Ptahmose
028/USC Maya
042/USC Raia
046/USC Horemheb
050/USC Khay
057/USC Tia
087/USC *NN*
511/USC Yuyu

Legend:

Old Kingdom
18th Dynasty Pre-Amarna
18th Dynasty (post-)Amarna
19th Dynasty, early Seti I-Ramses II
19th Dynasty Ramses II, first half
19th Dynasty Ramses II, second half
20th Dynasty

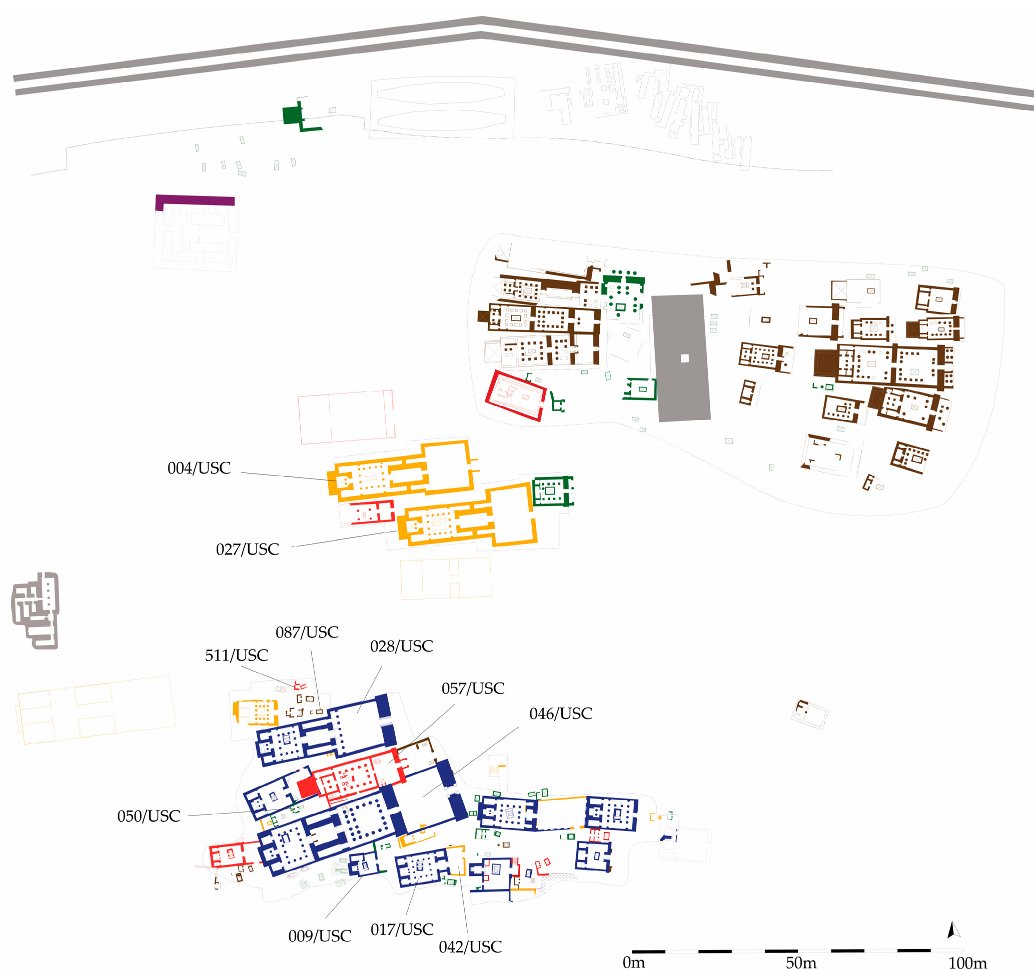

Figure 3. The Unas South Cemetery at Saqqara, showing the location of tombs mentioned in the text (image by the author).

Figure 4. Offering bearers in the tomb of Maya, pylon gateway, north wall. A secondary inscription identifies the figure in the center as Ptahmose, h: 54 cm (photograph by Leiden-Turin Expedition to Saqqara/Nicola Dell'Aquila).

The remaining group of individuals depicted and named in Maya's tomb must have also been buried elsewhere, perhaps with chapels of their own or in pit burials not marked with a structure aboveground. Their places of burial might just as well have been located farther away, possibly even at a cemetery outside Memphis. Since a superstructure was not necessary for a grave to perform its primary function, we may hypothesize that the tomb of Maya also served as the chapel of all the others depicted and named in its iconographic program. Their image and name in the tomb of Maya secured their permanent presence in the following of a powerful patron and ensured that they would benefit from the magical efficacy offered by the tomb's decoration program. This reminds one of the separation of tomb and chapel as a phenomenon well attested at Thebes during the New Kingdom. Non-royal individuals buried in shaft tombs in the Valley of the Kings/Queens not marked with a structure aboveground may have had a cult place elsewhere, perhaps near the memorial temple of the respective king they served (Dorman 1995, p. 143). It has also been suggested that the sacred landscape of Abydos fulfilled the role of "central cult place" for those buried in shaft tombs at Thebes not connected to an aboveground chapel (Polz 2007).

The suggestion of a separation of tomb and chapel gains credit with the recent discovery of a secondary inscription (graffito) and ditto burial in the monumental Ramesside tomb of Urkhiya (var. Iurokhy; 004/USC), a general of Ramses II of Hurrian descent (Hassan 2023). The individual named Heriherneferher was secondarily interred in one of the lateral chapels of the tomb's superstructure. He could be identified by his shabtis; his burial was not marked aboveground. The same individual could be linked to a graffito carved into the south wall of the tomb's pylon gateway (Figure 5). The graffito depicts the man carrying offerings suspended from both ends of a yoke; the man depicted to his right is identified with the title of 'servant' (sDm-aS, 'call listener').[9] They probably formed part of the service personnel responsible for the general upkeep of the building and the daily provisions of the mortuary cult. Inscriptions (usually secondary) naming such personnel and others professionally associated with the tomb owner are common in New Kingdom tombs. Previously anonymous offering bearers forming part of the original tomb decoration were turned into specific individuals with the addition of a name plus title (see Figure 4). The individuals thus identified cannot usually be linked to actual buried bodies: even though secondary burials are a common feature in the superstructures of Saqqara New Kingdom tombs, the deceased are usually unnamed. The case of Heriherneferher illustrates that by inscribing his image and name into the fabric of the tomb of Urkhiya, he secured his permanent presence in the following of a particularly powerful patron whom

he had served in life. The graffito was strategically positioned: it was well visible on the c. 30 cm high undecorated dado of the south wall of the entrance portal, where it confronted future visitors who would see his image and read his name—a wish often expressed in addresses to the living (see also Section 3, below). Heriherneferher was eventually buried in the same tomb of Urkhiya, but this was not necessary for his graffito to be effective for attaining monumental commemoration.

Figure 5. Graffito of Heriherneferher and colleagues in the tomb of Urkhiya (photograph by the author, courtesy of Khaled Hassan).

3. New Kingdom Tombs at Saqqara

Figure 6 displays a cross-section of tombs (plans) built during the New Kingdom, divided over the three main cemeteries located on the North Saqqara plateau (see Figures 2 and 3).[10] The different sizes and layouts reflect the diverse nature of this elite group of people (representing 0.2% of the population). The tomb owners included some of the most powerful administrators of the kingdom as well as those wielding much less power on a markedly local scale. The largest tomb was built for the commander-in-chief of the Egyptian army and Tutankhamun's regent Horemheb (046/USC). The accessible monument measures no less than 65 m long. It had an extensive and personified iconographic program made by the best artists of their time and carved in top-quality limestone. On the other end of the spectrum are chapels such as those made for the unnamed owner of 087/USC approximately three generations after Horemheb (19th Dynasty, *temp.* Ramses II). The chapel had an interior floor surface of less than one meter square (80 × 80 cm) and measured less than a meter high (Del Vesco et al. 2019, Figure 2). The iconographic program was compiled of stock images revealing little about the owner's "personality".

The owners of some of the largest monuments displayed in this cross-section—the Memphite equivalents of the "super tomb owners" at Thebes (Olsen 2018)—leveraged their professional affiliations at the construction site of their private funerary monuments. Ptahmose (027/USC) was the 'great mayor of Memphis' and he was charged with the grand construction works in the city's temple of Ptah during the reigns of Seti I and Ramses II. He also managed the king's Memphite temple of Millions of Years. One generation before Ptahmose, Maya (028/USC) occupied a privileged position as overseer of all the king's work(shop)s and the state treasury. He was responsible for the large-scale and kingdom-wide restoration campaign initiated after the Amarna period and he supervised

the making of more than one royal tomb in the Valley of the Kings at Thebes. A selection of the artists (e.g., a builder, a scribe of forms, and a sculptor) probably employed by the king (through Maya) to work on the Theban royal tomb of Horemheb, KV 57 (Hornung 1971), were depicted in Maya's Memphite tomb (Figure 7). It is possible the same group of people were also responsible for making the Memphite tombs of Horemheb and Maya. The scenario compares well to that of the Theban painter of Amun, Userhat, who was the artistic creator of the tomb of his employer, the second high priest of Amun, Amenhotep Sise, TT 57 (Laboury 2015). The uncovered networks of iconographic correspondences between the tombs of officials that were professionally closely associated, for example, in the temple of Aten at Memphis, are suggestive of a linear relationship between one's office and access to skilled art-producing personnel (Staring 2021). Such relationships suggest that tomb making (which included art production) required the leveraging of existing power dynamics to access resources and mobilize a workforce.

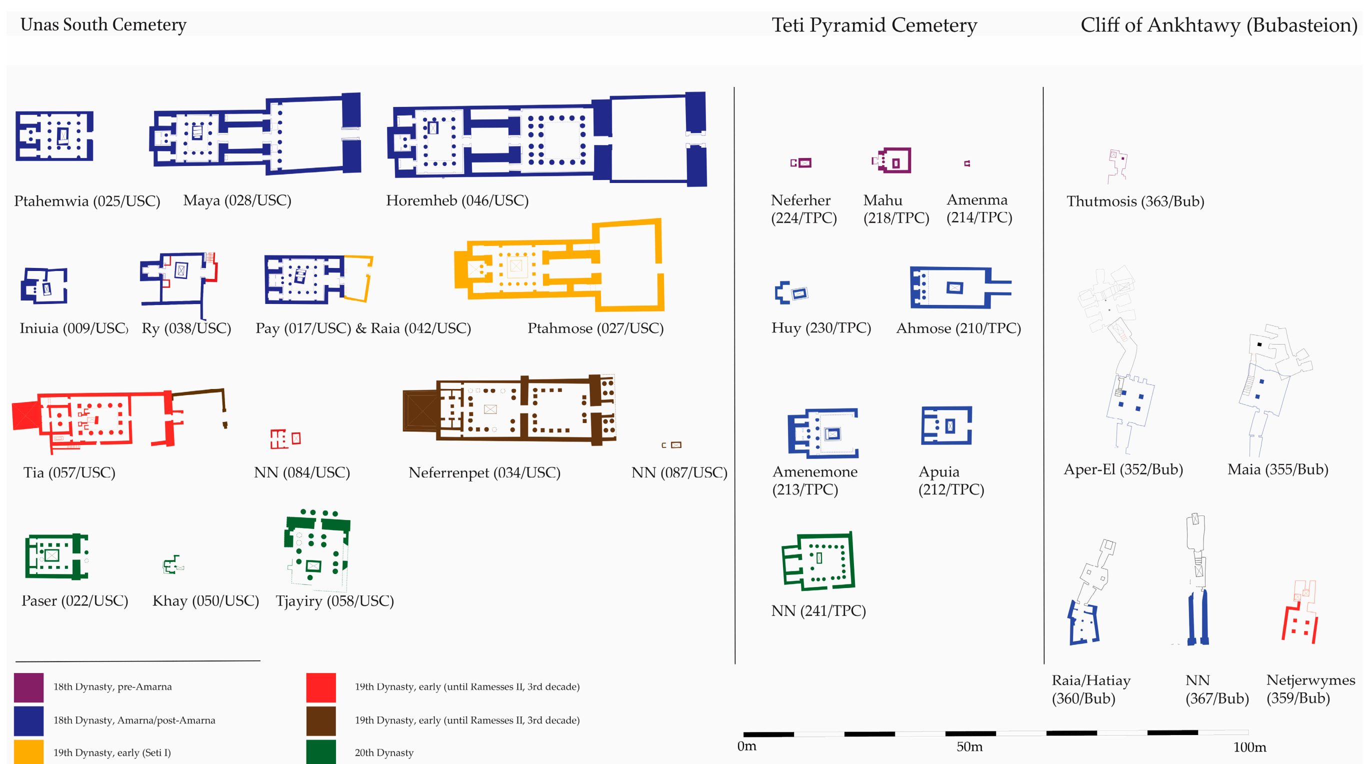

Figure 6. Cross-section of the tombs built at Saqqara during the New Kingdom (image by the author).

The fact that Maya and Ptahmose held responsibilities in different branches of administration might suggest that both had access to different groups of artists: Maya was responsible for those employed by the palace and Ptahmose was responsible for those employed by the temple of Ptah. Yet their access to a (supposedly) different pool of artists did not materialize in distinct styles in tomb decoration (e.g., "court style" versus "temple style": Hartwig 2004). This might not be too surprising, because the king was the main employer of all skilled craftsmen professionally affiliated with either temple or court. Maya personifies the confluence of both spheres, because in addition to his offices already mentioned, he was also responsible for work on the second, ninth, and tenth pylons of the temple of Amun at Karnak (Van Dijk 1993, p. 78). And the Memphite temple of Millions of Years of Ramses II, which fell under the responsibility of Ptahmose, was administratively attached to the domain (pr) of Ptah.

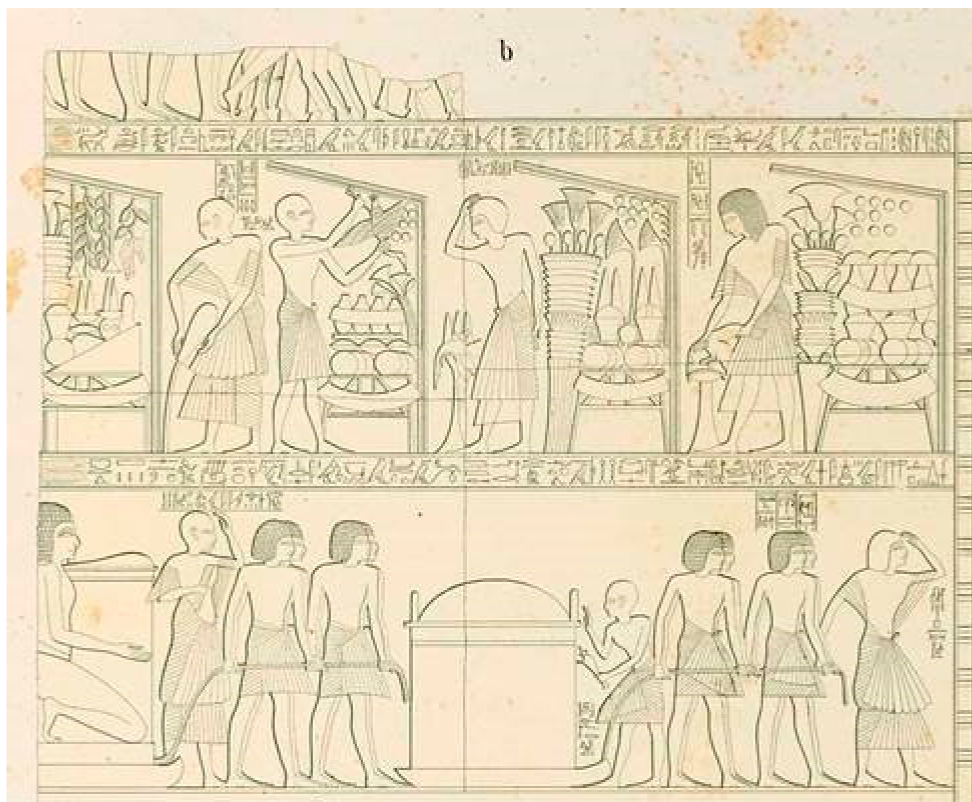

Figure 7. Scene in the tomb of Maya (courtyard, now lost) depicting episodes of the funeral attended by artists that were professionally associated with him (image after Lepsius 1897–1913, pl. III.242b).

Maya and Ptahmose, and others like them, managed to direct material and human resources that they controlled as part of the office they held toward their private tomb building projects. Their ability to carry this out would have been amongst the fringe benefits of their respective offices. For others it might have been connections in certain social or professional networks (both not mutually exclusive) that enabled them to attain monumental self-commemoration. Simply put, one's position in a social network affected one's "catchment area". It might be surprising that none of the tomb owners have put in writing how their position and power within a social network enabled their tomb commissions. On the other hand, one may add that social power, which is indeed often veiled as obfuscation, is one of the best ways to maintain power. Despite the veil that covers the practical pathway to organizing monumental self-commemoration, some of the "super-tomb owners" attributed their ownership of a funerary monument to the king. An example is found in the autobiography of Maya:

> *"He* (i.e., *Maya) says to the people who come and wish to divert themselves in the West and walk about in the District [of Eternity* (i.e., *necropolis): "O you all who pass (?) by] my [tomb, do not be indifferent to what I have done, but listen to] these words of mine and rejoice because of them, [and read out (?)] my name on [my] monument which [the King (?)] made for me (. . .)"."* (Martin 2012, scene [5], pl. 13)

An inscription in the tomb of Ptahmose (027/USC) suggests the ownership of a tomb should be evaluated in context of royal favor:

> *"Welcome to the West* (i.e., *necropolis), may you unite with your house/temple of eternity, your tomb of everlastingness, may you be buried in it after an old age, you being in royal favor (Hs.wt nsw.t) to rest in Ankhtawy* (i.e., *Memphite necropolis)."* (Staring 2023, p. 255)

Presenting one's ownership of a tomb as royal favor—as something arranged by the king personally—would have further increased the patron's prestige.

An inscription in the tomb of Tia (057/USC), like Maya an overseer of the treasury, states that the king (Tia's brother-in-law, Ramses II) built the tomb as a temple for his father Osiris (Martin 1997). As such, the king may have provided the material and human resources necessary for the tomb's construction (see Eyre 2010 for temples). It is also telling that the making of tombs for select high officials (such as priests of the Aten) was mentioned in texts carved on boundary stelae at Akhetaten proclaiming King Akhenaten's construction projects (Murnane and Van Siclen III 1993).

The owners of sizable tombs built in the Unas South Cemetery and in the Cliff of Ankhtawy have in common that they held one or more honorific titles or epithets that emphasize the close relationship they enjoyed vis-à-vis their king. The owners of the more modest tomb chapels in the Teti Pyramid Cemetery (amongst whom was the goldsmith Amenemone, 213/TPC, mentioned earlier; see also Figure 6) held no such titles—though some, like Amenemone, are depicted wearing the Gold of Honor (Binder 2008) awarded by the king.

Taking note of the prevailing patrimonial household structure of Egyptian society (Section 2.2), it is possible that the highest court officials (those awarded royal favor) used their access to resources to realize not just their own tombs, but also those of their subordinates by way of redistribution. The Memphite necropolis offers plenty examples of people belonging to socio-professional categories who were, in the words of Dimitri Laboury (2023, p. 134), "not naturally meant to gain access to monumental death". Laboury supports his argument with examples including the tomb of the gardener of Amun, Nakht, TT 161 (*temp.* Amenhotep III), and suggests Nakht and the unnamed artist—who invented three new hieroglyphic compositions to write the main title of Nakht—were closely connected, both being professionally affiliated with (the temple of) Amun. Nakht may have had (a combination of) two means to attain monumental commemoration by pulling strings in his socio-professional network. He may have used his power to commandeer artists in his network,[11] or he may have gained access to the resources required for his tomb through "freelance work" (Laboury 2023, p. 131 n. 94), a practice often associated with the community of workmen at Deir el-Medina (termed "informal workshops": Cooney 2008; 2007, pp. 131–75). Members of the community used their talents, skills and resources to create funerary equipment and tombs for themselves and their colleagues. While Memphis had no such community of dedicated necropolis workmen (*pace* Navrátilová 2018), it is interesting to note that the 18th-Dynasty tombs built in the Teti Pyramid Cemetery belonged mainly to individuals engaged in artistic production, all professionally affiliated with the crown or the local temple of Ptah (Staring 2023). Among them were also people not naturally meant to gain access to monumental death, such as the interpreter of Babylonian, Pakana, the sole interpreter with a tomb in all of ancient Egypt (Youssef and Staring Forthcoming). He was connected to individuals engaged in artistic production, and they all worked under the charge of Maya who, together with Horemheb, practically governed Egypt in tandem during the late-18th-Dynasty reign of Tutankhamun.

4. The Saqqara Necropolis in Motion

At Saqqara today, the past is omnipresent. This situation differs little from that experienced by the inhabitants of Memphis during the New Kingdom. It is not surprising to find that in this landscape artists looked to the past for inspiration when producing new art (Pieke 2022). The false-door stelae of the vizier and high priest of Ptah, Ptahmose (Leiden AM 1-a, *temp.* Thutmose III)[12], and the vizier Thutmose (Florence inv. No. 42565–ME2565, *temp.* Thutmose IV–Amenhotep III; Staring 2023, Figure 35) present good examples. The stelae have the outward appearance of much older specimens, but the texts and iconographic motifs are updated to answer contemporary needs. By adopting Old Kingdom-styled tomb stelae, Ptahmose and Thutmose consciously forged a link to the past and inscribed themselves into an ancient tradition. The awareness of and reverence towards the (local) past is aptly illustrated in a tomb relief from Saqqara dated to the Ramesside period, namely the now-lost *fragment Daressy* (Mathieu 2012). The relief depicts rows of

venerated ancestors, including Old Kingdom kings, viziers, and high priests of Ptah (one of whom also named Ptahmose). One late-18th-Dynasty Memphite official with a tomb at Saqqara made it on the list. He was Amenhotep III's chief steward of Memphis and builder of the king's Memphite temple of Millions of Years, Amenhotep Huy (141/USC, tomb now lost).

The tombs of Iniuia (009/USC), Maya (028/USC), and Ptahmose (027/USC)—officials of equal rank to Amenhotep Huy—were located in close vicinity to their illustrious ancestor (see Figure 3). All three took part in a vast network of competing peers, adopting innovations in tomb architecture and iconography, while also creating by imitation, emulation, and reinterpretation of previous works (a process of "intericonicity": Laboury 2017; also Devillers 2018). The early Ramesside official Ptahmose was an early adopter of so-called *djed* pillars, while the rectangular panels decorating his tomb-pyramid forged a link with the tomb of Maya, where this specific feature was introduced. Also, certain iconographic motifs forged a link to the latter's tomb and to that of Iniuia, a court official who directed royal artistic production during the post-Amarna period and who later in his career served as steward of Memphis, an office later held by Ptahmose. The iconographic programs of all three tombs include variations of a motif centered on the tomb owner overseeing certain activities at his office. Thus, Ptahmose is depicted performing tasks associated with his office in the temple of Ptah. (Figure 8). He sits on a lion-legged chair as he receives poultry and fish. A scribe sitting before him keeps record. The motif presents a new take on an old motif well-attested in Old Kingdom *mastaba* tombs, depicting the tomb owner overseeing agricultural works on the fields. The composition of Ptahmose's scene also bears close resemblance to that found in the chapel of Iniuia's tomb (Figure 9). Iniuia oversees the unloading of amphorae from Syro-Canaanite-type seagoing ships (lower scene) and the administration of amphorae and their contents (upper scene). Despite the differences in content, the overall composition of the scenes of Iniuia (upper) and Ptahmose is comparable. Certain details such as the scribes squatting in front of Iniuia and gazing up at their superior, the pose of the official approaching Iniuia and extending his hand to indicate speech, and the monkey under the patron's chair, all re-emerge in the novel composition crafted for Ptahmose's tomb. The similarities are subtle but meaningful, as these forge a link between Ptahmose and his distinguished predecessor in office (cf. to what (Den Doncker 2017) defines as an "identifying-copy"). Inspiration for the subdivision into multiple registers of the scene playing out before Ptahmose might have been taken from a scene in the tomb of Maya (Figure 10). It depicts Maya standing as the recipient of cattle and living captives from Western Asia given to him by the king. Two scribes before him, sitting and standing, keep record (one of whom is Ptahmose, son of Amenemone the goldsmith; see Section 2.2 and Figure 4). Unlike Ptahmose, Maya is depicted standing, leaning on his staff-of-office, while the scribe standing before him writes on a sheet of papyrus. These features are reminiscent of the lower scene observed in the slightly earlier tomb of Iniuia—a scene that can be further traced back to the Amarna tomb of Meryre II, AT 04 (Staring 2021). The artistic creator of the tomb of Maya also played with the same iconographic motif rooted in the Old Kingdom, this time depicting the tomb owner accounting cattle. One example of an early performance of the motif is in the mastaba of Sabu called Ibbi (Mariette E1–2), a 6th-Dynasty high priest of Ptah (Figure 11). Sabu sits on a chair as the recipient of cattle; a scribe sits before him, keeping record. The scenes in the tombs of Sabu, Maya, Iniuia, and Ptahmose (and a number of their competitive peers not discussed in this article) adhere to a number of key elements inherent to the particular iconographic motif (tomb owner observing, men bringing produce, scribes keeping record). The later compositions are no mere copies but variations, created by the imitation, emulation, and reinterpretation of previous works, illustrating the artistic productions in a necropolis in motion. Access to funerary art had successfully granted these tomb owners monumental and lasting agency amongst the future members of the local Memphite communities. The examples cited in this paper illustrate how art acted upon ancient Egyptian society as a tool of power that promoted one's success for an earthly afterlife—one that extends to the present day.

Figure 8. Scene in the tomb of Ptahmose. Egyptian Museum Cairo TN 25.6.24.6 (drawing by Geoffrey T. Martin © The Geoffrey Thorndike Martin Memphite New Kingdom Archive).

Figure 9. Scenes carved on the north wall of the inner chapel of Iniuia, including Egyptian Museum Cairo TN 25.6.24.7, TN 3.7.24.13, and Saqqara NK 4 (photographs courtesy Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden; image by the author).

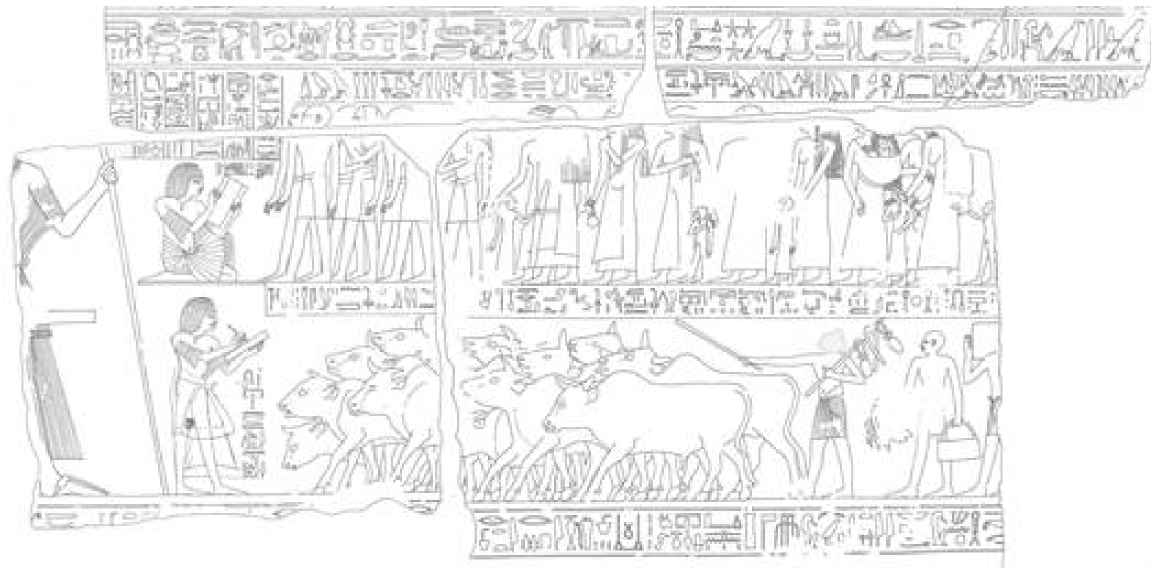

Figure 10. Scene in the tomb of Maya. Egyptian Museum Cairo JE 43274d (drawing after Martin 2012, pl. 29.38, courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society).

Figure 11. Scene from the tomb of Sabu called Ibbi, 6th Dynasty. Egyptian Museum Cairo CG 1418 (photograph after Capart 1907, pl. 106).

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Notes

1 During the New Kingdom, Memphite tombs consisted of (1) a superstructure that remained accessible to the living after burial and (2) a substructure that was accessed exclusively during funerals to deposit a dead body. The two parts of a tomb were connected by means of a vertical tomb shaft that usually measured several meters deep. After burial, heavy stone slabs were laid across the shaft's aperture to close access to the subterranean complex. Unlike the superstructures, the underground burial complexes were usually not decorated. To date, only two exceptions to this rule have been attested in New Kingdom tombs at Saqqara: the tombs of Maya (028/USC) and (much less elaborately) Horemheb (046/USC) (both tombs and their owners will be introdued further below).

2 The study period of 360 years is less than the total number of years in the New Kingdom (1539–1078 BCE = 461 years) because of the earliest and latest datable tomb elements, ranging from Amenhotep I in the early 18th Dynasty to Ramses VI in the late 20th Dynasty: (Herzberg-Beiersdorf 2023, p. 51, n. 180).

3 Ancient Memphis should not be conceptualized as a single city, but rather as a dispersed urban conglomerate between the eastern branch of the Nile and the desert ridge in the west.

4 Each generation spans an average of 20 years, spanning the years between the birth of parents to that of their children.

5 Staring 2023 lists 509 tombs. Two more tombs have been found in excavation since publication: Menkheperre, priest of Kadesh (510/Bub), and Yuyu, maker of gold foil (511/USC). The total number of 511 tombs includes burial chambers without preserved superstructures and decontextualised tomb elements for which no associated burial chambers have yet been found (termed "lost tombs").

6 Funerary objects such as shabtis are problematic, as these objects could have been deposited (by the living) in the tombs of others, or they could have been deposited elsewhere in the necropolis for non-funerary reasons (Staring 2017, p. 595, with further references). Therefore, a personal name inscribed on such a statuette need not necessarily be indicative of a (lost) tomb of that individual.

7 Herzberg-Beiersdorf (2023, pp. 51–52) calculates the tomb-making elite based on the total number of tombs instead.

8 Note that the majority of archeologically attested tombs were built between the reigns of Amenhotep III and Ramses II, which accounts for a period of 165 years. If we situate all 511 tombs in that period, we arrive at a rate of three tombs built every one year.

9 For the title sDm-aS, see, e.g., *Wb* 4, (Erman and Grapow 1971, pp. 389.13–90.4). Note that in the context of the Theban royal necropolis workmen resident at Deir el-Medina, the title sDm-aS m s.t mAa.t, 'servant in the Place of Truth', designates funerary artisans.

10 Note that the (underground) burial spaces are not displayed due to limited availability of the data in publication.

11 Compare to the examples of the Deir el-Medina leadership as documented in the official (royal) necropolis journal records: Cooney 2007, pp. 60–62. Making a tomb together or exacuting other craftwork for their superior has been listed as one reason for one's absence at their primary workplace.

12 See the online collection database of the RMO Leiden: https://www.rmo.nl/collectie/collectiezoeker/collectiestuk/?object=18480 (accessed on 28 June 2023).

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