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Egyptian Art and Archaeology 2750–2150 BC

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Nigel Strudwick and Helen Strudwick

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A new Old Kingdom rock-cut tomb from Abusir and its Abusir-Saqqara context

Miroslav Bárta

The aim of this contribution is to summarise and discuss some recent evidence for previously unknown rock-cut tombs situated in the area of Abusir. It results from an autumn 2004 discovery of an extensive rock-cut tomb in Abusir South. The tomb type to which this belongs represents only a minor category, but one which is indispensable for our understanding of Old Kingdom funerary culture. This contribution does not attempt to supply a detailed study of rock-cut tombs at Abusir and Saqqara. Rather, my wish is to outline the basic characteristics of this largely neglected yet promising field for future study.¹

North Saqqara

When searching for possible precursors of the rock-cut tombs so far known in the area of Abusir and Saqqara, it becomes evident that the known sources are limited and biased. One of the oldest attestations for their existence is preserved in the archives of the Griffith Institute and consists of two handwritten pages by W. M. F. Petrie from his visit to the North Saqqara plateau. There were perhaps as many as three tombs that he was able to observe.² Judging

by the notes made by Petrie, it may only be estimated that the tombs are of post-Sneferu date since at least one of them contains the *hetep di nesut* formula, complemented by an offering list.³ Based on circumstantial evidence, it may be supposed that they represent more or less contemporary appendages to the known tombs, most likely of the late fifth–sixth dynasty date (Fig. 1).

The Cemetery of Unas

During the fifth dynasty an important group of tombs developed in a trench south of the causeway of Unas. The cemetery started in what originally used to be a quarry established by Djoser. During the fifth dynasty, several rock-cut tombs were built in its southern slope. These tombs are unevenly distributed into two eastern and western parts and are situated at two different levels.⁴ They represent, however, only the proverbial tip of the iceberg since large sections of the trench have never been excavated. Yet this cemetery contains by far the largest number of rock-cut tombs in the whole area.

The lower level tombs were built from the west to the east and, besides many uninscribed tombs, there belong

¹ General literature on the rock-cut tombs of the Old Kingdom may be found in: Brunner, H., *Die Anlagen der ägyptischen Felsgräber bis zum Mittleren Reich* (Glückstadt, New York [etc.] 1936); G. A. Reisner, *A History of the Giza Necropolis* (Cambridge 1942); P. Elsner, *Die Typologie der Felsgräber: strukturanalytische Untersuchung altägyptischer Grabarchitektur* (Frankfurt am Main 2004); P. Jánosi, *Giza in der 4. Dynastie: die Baugeschichte und Belegung einer Nekropole des Alten Reiches* (Wien 2005), 297–435. For a more detailed overview of individual Old Kingdom sites with rock-cut tombs see *ibid.*, 297, n. 1855 and most recently also E. Edel, K.-J. Seyfried, G. Vieler, *Die Felsgräbernekropole der Qubbet el-Hawa bei Assuan. I. Abteilung* (Paderborn 2008).

² D. Jeffreys, A. Tavares, 'The Historic Landscape of Early Dynastic

Memphis,' *MDAIK* 50 (1994), 147.

³ Petrie, in Sayce Mss., 27 a and b (Archives of the Griffith Institute, Oxford). I am indebted to J. Malek for letting me to use this unpublished material.

⁴ PM III², Plan LXII, 637–645. On the history and chronology of the quarry and its subsequent development see H. Altenmüller, 'Remarques sur la datation de la tombe d'Irou-ka-Ptah à Saqqara', *Actes du XXIXe Congrès International des Orientalistes. Egyptologie* (2 vols, Paris 1975), I, 1–5; *id.*, 'Arbeiten am Grab des Neferherenptah in Saqqara (1970–1975)', *MDAIK* 38 (1982), 1–16; A. M. Moussa, H. Altenmüller, *Das Grab des Nianchchnum und Chnumhotep* (AV 21; Mainz am Rhein 1977), 13–14.

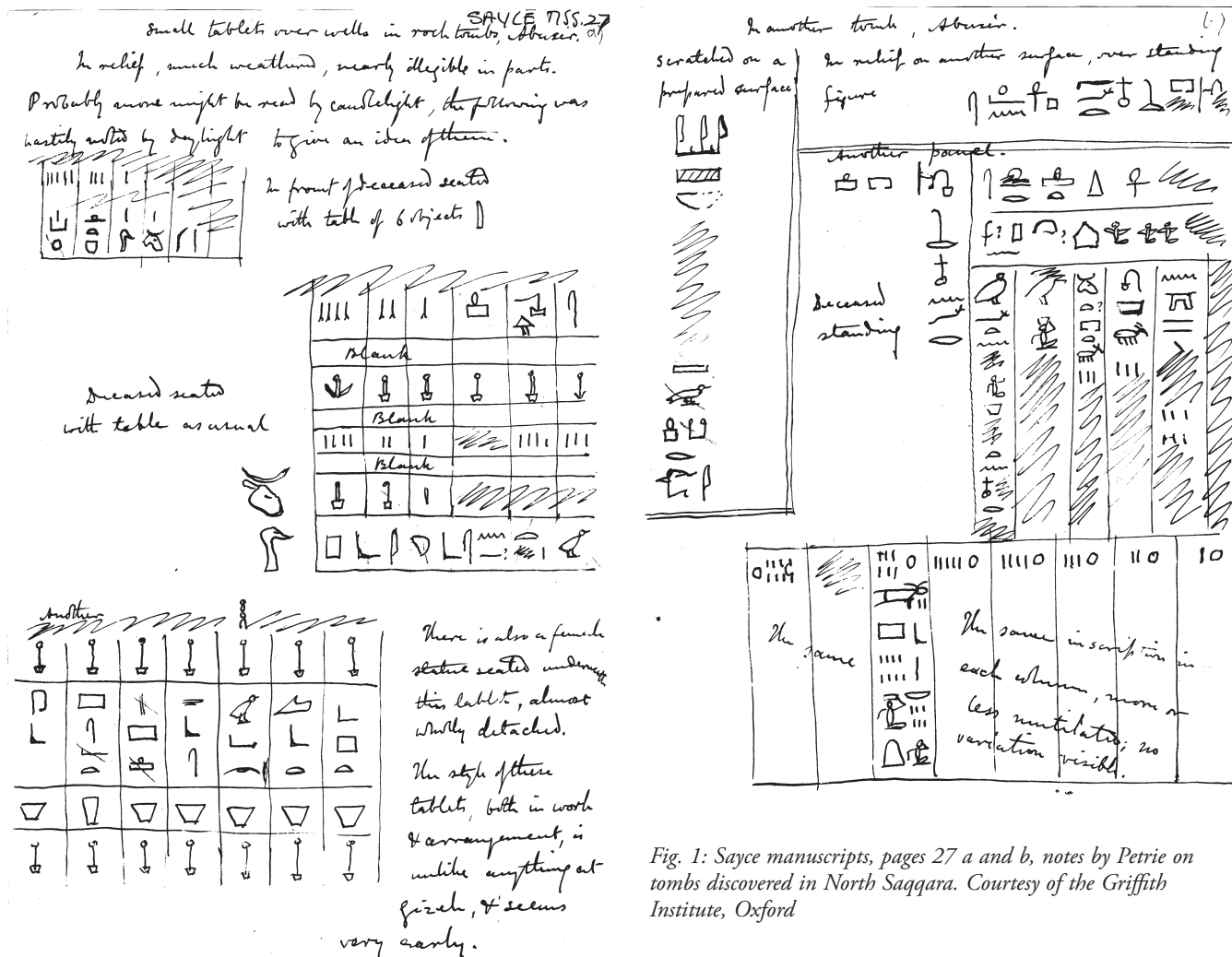


Fig. 1: Sayce manuscripts, pages 27 a and b, notes by Petrie on tombs discovered in North Saqqara. Courtesy of the Griffith Institute, Oxford

the tombs of Niankhra, Akhtihotep, Irukaptah, Ankh and Bunefer. Then follows an as yet unexcavated middle part of the cemetery, which continues on the east with the tombs of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, Irienkaptah, Sekhentiu and Neferseshemprah.

The upper terrace seems to have existed only in the eastern part of the quarry. The tombs situated here were also built from the west to the east and in addition to some uninscribed chapels, they include the tombs of Nefer and Kahay, Ankhirptah and Nikaankh.

The eastern as well as the western ends of the cemetery are demarcated by a north-south orientated slope within the quarry. On the west, there is the tomb of Neferherenptah that was built shortly before the construction of the Unas causeway. During its building, the causeway was erected over two uninscribed tombs that existed at this location prior to the building project of Neferherenptah. On the east, there are several further undecorated and uninscribed rock-cut tombs, all of them concentrated on the lower terrace of the quarry.

There is even a possibility that there were three terraces.

Nowadays, however, only two of them, the upper and the lower are discernible. The uninscribed tombs in this cemetery are located on the lower terrace. From the occurrence of shafts and false doors it seems probable that at least some of these were in use. In the south-eastern corner of the cemetery, to the east of the tomb of Sekhentiu and Neferseshemprah, there is a tomb with a preserved architrave bearing an offering formula but without the name of the tomb owner. To the north of it is another one, with a wall covered with rough plaster with red lines designed to facilitate the composition process of the decoration. Further north there is an additional tomb with a transverse room and two roughly-cut false doors in the western wall. In the close vicinity of this tomb are preserved the remains of a mud-brick chapel with an offering bench in the eastern part. According to Altenmüller, it is very possible that some more tombs existed near here.

The rock-cut tombs situated on the lower terrace, in the south-eastern part of the quarry, represent the latest layer of the tombs that were built here shortly before the reign of Unas. These were accessible from the same level. In front of



Fig. 2: Rock-cut tombs cemetery south of the pyramid of Unas (M. Bárta)



Fig. 3: Bubasteion cemetery with location of the former Old Kingdom rock-cut tombs (M. Bárta)

their entrances is a stretch of levelled bedrock. In contrast, the tombs to the west of the tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep are accessible from a depth of about 1.70 m. Given the fact that the terrace slopes steeply to the right in front of the tomb of Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep, a considerable amount of work was necessary to develop the terrace prior to the construction of this tomb. (Fig. 2).

The cemetery of Merefnebef

Over the past few years the work of the Polish mission west of the Step Pyramid complex has shed new light on the sixth dynasty history of this part of the cemetery. Their most important work includes the discovery of the mastaba/rock-cut tomb of the vizier Merefnebef called Fefi, and dated by the excavator to the mid-sixth dynasty (Pepy I) though an earlier dating to the early sixth dynasty makes more sense to me.⁵ More recently, several new rock-cut tombs were discovered north of the tomb of Merefnebef, among them the rock-cut chapels of Nyankh-Nefertem-Temi,⁶ Chapel 13 belonging to Seshemnefer,⁷ Chapel 14 of Ikhi,⁸ and the anonymous Chapel 16⁹ and Chapel 17.¹⁰

Merefnebef built his final resting place as a rock-cut tomb topped by a mastaba on the surface. Moreover, on the eastern side of the mastaba he decided to add an external cult chapel with a decorated false door.¹¹ These features make his tomb relevant for our better understanding of the Abusir tomb AS 31 (see below).

Tabbet al-Guesh

There are a number of rock-cut tombs in the area of Tabet al-Guesh in South Saqqara, a cemetery situated on a 15 ha plateau.¹² The tombs discovered there are of late Old Kingdom date (reign of Pepy I–Pepy II included; at least one of them dates to the First Intermediate Period) and most of their owners held the title of lector priest and had also other titles such as *khenti-she* priest, chief of a priestly

phyle, noble of the king, and unique friend. On the surface, the tombs are characterised by large mud-brick enclosures reaching a height of some 3 m and covering areas of 4 × 9.5, 6.5 × 9 and 6 × 9.5 m. These three enclosures delineate the funerary complexes of Khnumhotep (TG1), Pepyankh (TG2) and Khui (TG3), respectively.

Below ground, the respective cult chapels were cut in the rock, most of them of sixth dynasty date, some of them associated with specific tomb holders. Thus, tomb TG1 belonged to Khnumhotep, T5 to Haunefer and TG6 to Pepyankh. Each tomb complex consists of an enclosure and a flight of steps that leads to an open courtyard from where one can enter the funerary chapels where the burial shafts are located. In some cases, however, the shafts were also cut in the floor of their respective courtyards. In one case, the tomb of Pepyankh (from the entrance decoration), there is a direct reference to this specific type of funerary complex referred to as *pr-dt*.¹³

The 'Bubasteion' Cemetery

Of this cemetery only several walls of the original tombs were preserved and documented recently.¹⁴ The survey was done in connection with work on the New Kingdom tombs. Their later construction caused almost complete destruction of preexisting Old Kingdom structures. The analysis of these tombs is rendered more complex due to the very complicated underground system, with shafts of uncertain date. Within this framework, the present author had an opportunity to document these Old Kingdom tomb remains during the 2002 season. Several days of epigraphic work permitted all available and visible remains of the wall decoration to be copied and described. From what has remained in situ, it is difficult to establish any ground plan of the tombs. It is estimated that there existed at least three tombs, orientated in a north–south direction and facing south. Today, their remains may be found adjoining the west wall of the recent 'house' of the famous envoy of Ramesses II, Netjerwedjmes (Fig. 3).¹⁵

A new rock-cut tomb from Abusir

In 1995, during the course of a rescue excavation, the Czech mission discovered a previously unknown sixth

⁵ M. Bárta, 'The title "Inspector of the Palace" during the Egyptian old Kingdom,' *ArOr* 67.1 (1999), 15–16.

⁶ K. Myśliwiec, 'West Saqqara archaeological activities, 2003', *PAM* 15 (2004), 116; K. O. Kuraszkiewicz, 'The owner of chapel 15 and his family', *PAM* 15 (2004), 123–125.

⁷ id, 'West Saqqara in 2002', *PAM* 14 (2003), 121.

⁸ *ibid*, 123–124.

⁹ K. Myśliwiec, 'West Saqqara archaeological activities, 2003', *PAM* 15 (2004), 120.

¹⁰ *ibid*, 111–122.

¹¹ K. Myśliwiec et al., *The tomb of Merefnebef (Saqqara I; Warsaw 2004)*, 56–59.

¹² Vassil Dobrev, personal communication. For the recent excavations of IFAO led by V. Dobrev, see V. Dobrev, 'Tabbet al-Guesh', *BIFAO* 102 (2002), 524–526; *BIFAO* 103 (2003), 568–571; *BIFAO* 104 (2004), 661–665; *BIFAO* 105 (2005), 423–426; *BIFAO* 106 (2006), 351–354; *BIFAO* 107 (2007), 265–267 and *BIFAO* 2008, forthcoming.

¹³ V. Dobrev, 'A new necropolis from the Old Kingdom at South Saqqara', in M. Bárta, ed., *The Old Kingdom Art and Archaeology. Proceedings of the conference held in Prague, May 31–June 4, 2004* (Prague, 2006), 127–131; *ibid*, 'Old Kingdom tombs at Tabet al-Guesh', in M. Bárta, F. Coppens, J. Krejčí, eds, *Abusir and Saqqara in the Year 2005* (Prague 2006), 231–232, pls 4–6.

¹⁴ A survey undertaken by the present author who was invited by A. Zivie, director of excavations.

¹⁵ A. Zivie, P. Chapuis, *Les tombeaux retrouvés de Saqqara* (Monaco 2003).

Table 1: Sizes of individual rock-cut chapels

Unas Cemetery	Length	Width	Height
Irukaptah	13.35–13.55	2.15–2.25	2.35 ¹
Nefer/Kahay	8.45	1.86	2.25 ²
Irienkaptah	irregular 5.00–5.10	2.00–3.55	1.90 ³
Sekhentiu/Neferseshemptah	8.70	1.82/1.94	2.06 ⁴
Neferherenptah	8.90	2.00	2.40 ⁵
Cemetery of Merefnebef			
Chapel 13, Seshemnefer	7	3	1.70 ⁶
Chapel 14, Ikhi	2.5	2.5 (western part), 4.5	3.8 (eastern part), heights missing
Merefnebef	6.26	2.44	2.25
Chapel 15, Nyankhnefertem	6.53 (NS)	2.65–2.80 (EW)	1.83–1.89
Chapel 16	9.00	2.40	
Chapel 17	4.16	2.40	
Tabbet al-Guesh			
Haunefer, main chapel T5	1.90	3.30	1.90
Khnumhotep, chapel 1	5.40	1.80	1.80
Abusir South			
AS 31	19.60	2.25	3.50
AS 41	10.30	1.80–2.15	2.50–2.00
AS 42	4.93	3.23	2.45

¹ For this tomb see A. MacFarlane, *The Unis Cemetery at Saqqara. Volume I. The Tomb of Irukaptah* (ACER 15; Sydney 2000), 21.

² A. M. Moussa, H. Altenmüller, *Old Kingdom tombs at the causeway of king Unas at Saqqara. The tomb of Nefer and Kahay* (AV 5; Mainz am Rhein 1971), 10.

⁴ A. M. Moussa, F. Junge, *Old Kingdom tombs at the causeway of king Unas at Saqqara. Two tombs of craftsmen* (AV 9; Mainz am Rhein 1975), 13.

⁵ Altenmüller, *MDAIK* 38 (1982), 4.

⁶ K. Myśliwiec, 'West Saqqara in 2002', *PAM* 14 (2003), 121.

dynasty cemetery in the area of South Abusir.¹⁶ The oldest, completely examined mastaba so far belongs to the vizier Qar. It abuts the western face of an earlier, possibly late fifth dynasty, anonymous rock-cut tomb originally labelled as 'Mastaba KK' (now AS 31).¹⁷

In front of AS 31 is situated a large open courtyard

¹⁶ M. Bárta et al., *Abusir XIII : Abusir south 2 : tomb complex of the vizier Qar, his sons Qar Junior and Senedjemib, and Iykai* (Prague 2009).

¹⁷ Since the beginning of the Czech excavations in Abusir, an alphabetical system for numbering individual archaeological entities was used. However, it was subsequently decided to change away from this system for its apparently non-diagnostic labelling and to renumber individual objects respecting a chronological order according to archaeological seasons and individual areas of the Abusir pyramid necropolis, using AS for Abusir South.

measuring approximately 10.80 × 5.00 m, accessible by a ramp that runs from the north-eastern corner parallel to its east wall. The ramp is 5.90 m long, 1.40 m high on the north where it starts, and 2.35 m wide, and is built of mud-bricks. It descends to the south. Cut in the south wall of the court are two rock-cut tombs, AS 41 and AS 42, both of which have north–south orientated chapels. These tombs were found void of any decoration and the meagre finds were only some pottery fragments and some parts of the statuary (Fig. 4).

AS 41 (KK IV) (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6)

The tomb is entered from the floor of the court by way of a small ascending ramp 0.70 m long, 1.20 m wide and reaching a height of 0.30 m above the ground. It gives way to the entrance of the tomb, 1.30 m long, 1.55 m wide and 2.44 m high. Both sides of the doorway were



Fig. 4: Cemetery in Abusir South with the tomb AS 31 at the background (M. Bárta)



Fig. 5: View of the court with entrances into tombs AS 41 and 42 on the south (M. Bárta)

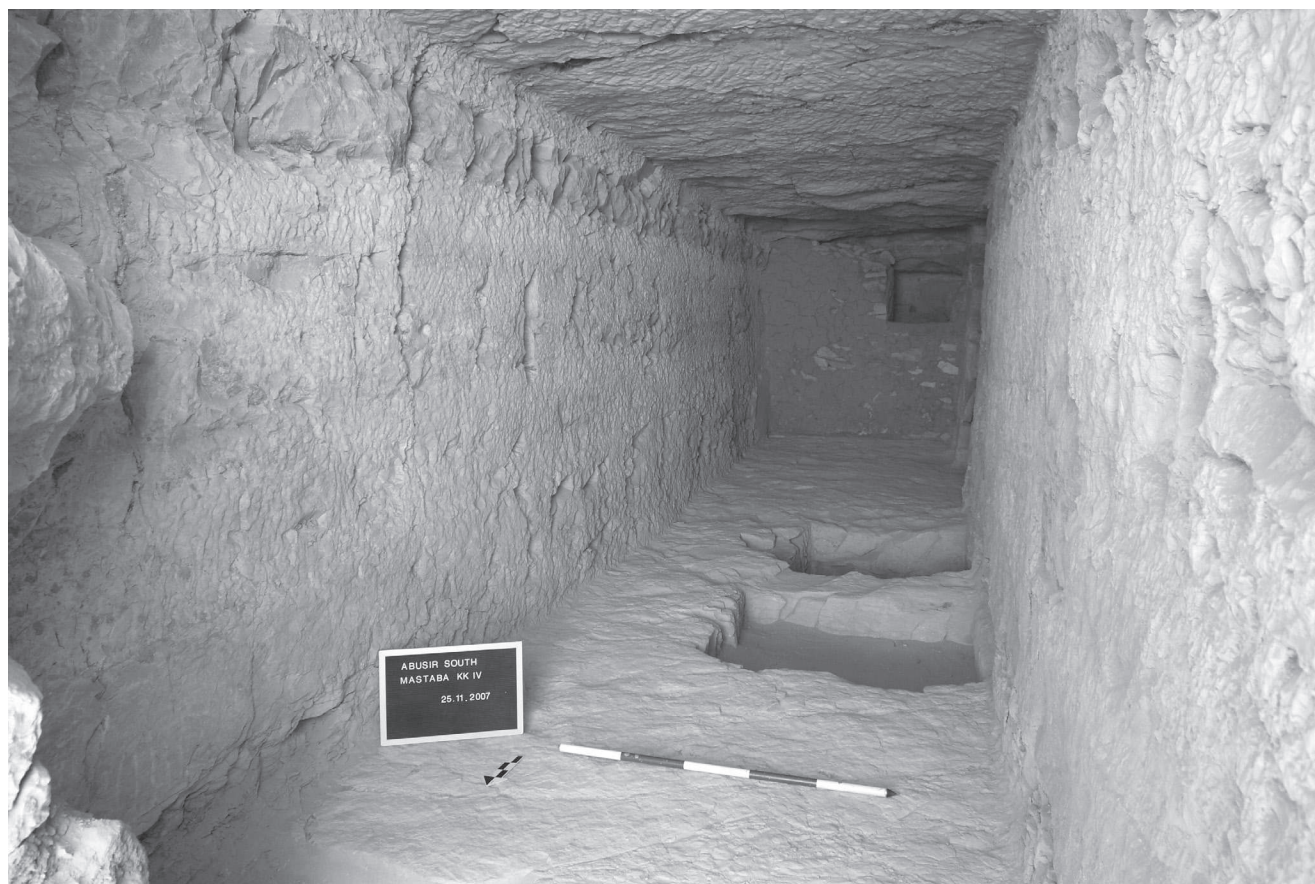


Fig. 6: View of the tomb AS 41 chapel, view from the north (M. Bárta)

narrowed down by means of two mud-brick walls to a passage 0.84 m long and 0.60 m wide. The entrance opens into a 10.30 m long, 1.80–2.15 m wide and 2.50–2.00 m high (diminishing southward) corridor chapel. At the south end, embedded in the west wall is a recess 1.55 m wide and 0.40 m deep in which a false door originally stood. At the south end of the corridor is a stone wall behind which is found a serdab, 0.85 m deep.

In the floor of the chapel are three shaft openings.

Shaft 1 (proceeding from the north) 0.90 × 0.90 m, 2.40 m deep

Shaft 2 1.10–1.15 × 1.10–1.15, 2.70 m deep; at the bottom, to the west of the shaft, is a shallow burial chamber 0.72 m deep, 1.80 m long and 0.63 m high, without finds.

Shaft 3 1.10 × 1.10 m, 3.40 m deep, at the bottom, to the west of the shaft a chamber, 0.80 m deep, 1.90 m long and 0.70 m high. On the floor were found the imprints of a wooden coffin which originally measured 1.76 × 0.50 m. No finds.

AS 42 (KK III)

This tomb has a single chamber, entered through an entrance 0.66 m wide and 2.13 m high, 0.80 m above the floor of the court. It is a north-south orientated chamber, roughly hewn in the bedrock, measuring 4.93 m long,

3.23 m wide and 2.45 m high with an irregular shaft opening in the north-western corner measuring about 1.20 × 1.30 m (unexcavated as yet). In the west wall, about 1.0 m to the north of the south-west corner, some 1.40 m above the floor level, is an irregular niche 1.00 m wide, 1.10 m high and some 0.70 m deep.

AS 31 (Fig. 7, Fig. 8, Fig. 9, Fig. 10)

Tomb AS 31 was excavated to some extent during the autumn seasons of 2002 and 2004 and is by far the most impressive of the three rock-cut tombs in the court. The tomb measures 41.30 × 17.20 m and consists of two different parts. The first part, built over the native bedrock, has the typical form of a mastaba built of local limestone blocks with a northern and southern cult niche. The superstructure of the tomb is still preserved to a height of more than 4 m. The essential components indicate that the architect strictly followed the mastaba pattern of the tomb, disregarding the fact that the most important and functionally essential components were situated in the rock-cut part of the tomb. The shell masonry is built of medium-sized blocks containing the loose filling of the body of the mastaba. It is above all the south cult niche of the tomb that is important for the dual concept of the tomb. This was built as an open cult place dominated by a

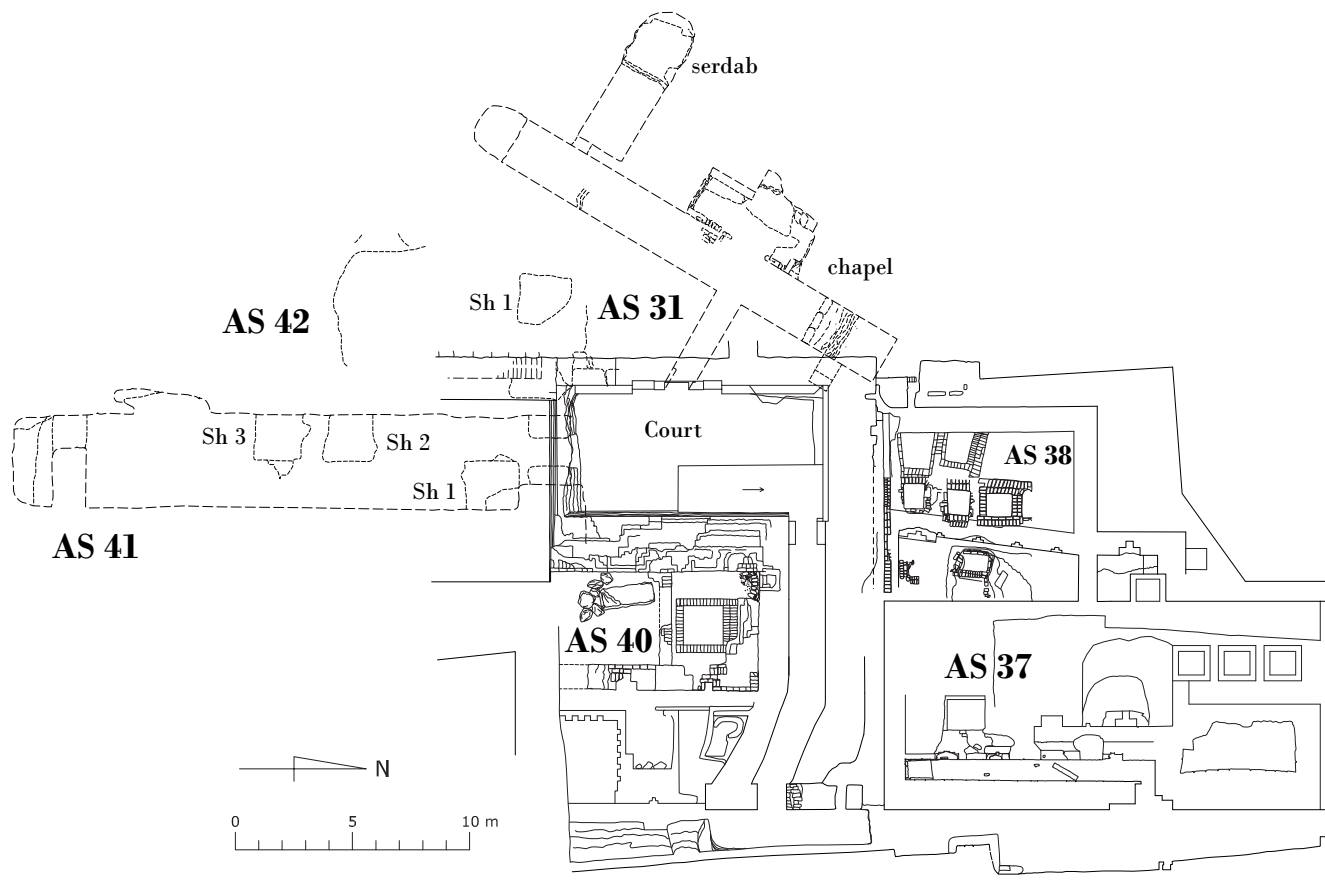


Fig. 7: General plan of the cemetery in front of AS 31 entrance (L. Wellner)

monolithic false door. It is this feature that emphasises the unique dual character of the tomb concept. The double-recessed false door was 2.10 m wide, 1.00 m deep and max. 2.38 m high, embedded in a 0.50 m deep recess and made of white limestone but devoid of any decoration. In front of it was built an open cult place 2.10 m wide and 2.40 m long. It seems that this chapel was built in two phases, the first one being only 1.00 m long (together with the niche making up 1.50 m) and open to the east. Later on, the chapel was enlarged to the present dimensions. There were no artefacts whatsoever found here. The necessary northern niche was found totally destroyed, not far away from the entrance into the underground section of the tomb. Only the width of the niche has been preserved; it was 1.74 m wide; the depth may be estimated at 0.50 m, in accordance with the southern niche.

Chapel

The second, more intricate part has been cut in the bed-rock below the northern niche of the tomb. This has the form of an inclined façade dressed with locally procured limestone blocks. This part is 11 m wide and 4 m high containing an entrance into a rock-cut chapel. In its centre is a monumental limestone block shaped in the form of

a false-door providing access into the tomb. The chapel is entered by a 2.80 m high and 4.10–4.80 m long entryway (1.00 m wide) giving passage into a north-south orientated chapel. Its ground-plan measures 19.60×2.25 m and it is 3.50 m high. In the western wall was a decorated cult niche of which only fragments could be recovered. The original dimensions of the niche may be estimated at 4.20 m (width) and 1.44 m (depth). The western part of the chapel floor was taken up by a large limestone platform block which supported the original false door or a decorated niche. Fragments of this niche were found in the southern part of the corridor. From the imprint on the floor it may be supposed that the niche originally had three recesses. The side walls of the niche were cased with limestone blocks and the floor plastered with a mud layer. Between the corridor and the niche proper stood a partition mud-brick wall of which only the lowermost course was preserved on both sides, in each case 1.06 m long and 0.26 m wide, leaving a 2.08 m wide space in the centre.

By sheer size comparison, the chapel of tomb AS 31 with its 19.60×2.25 m ground plan is by far the largest known rock-cut tomb known in the necropolis (Table 1) and indicates the architect's predilection for large dimensions.



Fig. 8: South chapel of AS 31 (M. Bárta)

Burial apartments

As for the decoration, the only positive evidence for it was found in the southern part of the corridor and consisted of several fragments originating from the false door. The imprint of the false door was found on the floor of the chapel and from the fragments it appears that this was the only decorated element of the tomb. The walls of the corridor were finely polished and in places, when required by the poorer quality of the rock, cased with limestone blocks. A closer look at the quality of the work shows that the smoothing was carried out carefully and was followed by white plastering which is still preserved in many places.

The burial installations were discovered to the west of the cult niche (an 8 m deep shaft with a burial niche) and to the west of the corridor chapel (taking the shape of a niche with a robbed limestone sarcophagus). According to

the preliminary anthropological results it seems that there were at least two persons buried within the tomb (both male and female).

The shaft started on the top of the mastaba and descended south-west of the cult niche in the rock-cut part of the tomb. At its bottom, cut in the west wall, was a small chamber measuring $2.90 \times 2.00\text{--}2.20$ m, accessible by a 1.00 m long and 1.30 m wide entryway. It is interesting that this shaft begins at the level of the bedrock and there were no built side walls that might have protected the open shaft during the building stage of the mastaba's superstructure.

Another burial installation was discovered in the northern part of the corridor. This section of the tomb consists of several components, all of them carefully executed. It is above all a niche of unknown purpose with a slot to admit light in the eastern wall, close to the northern end of the

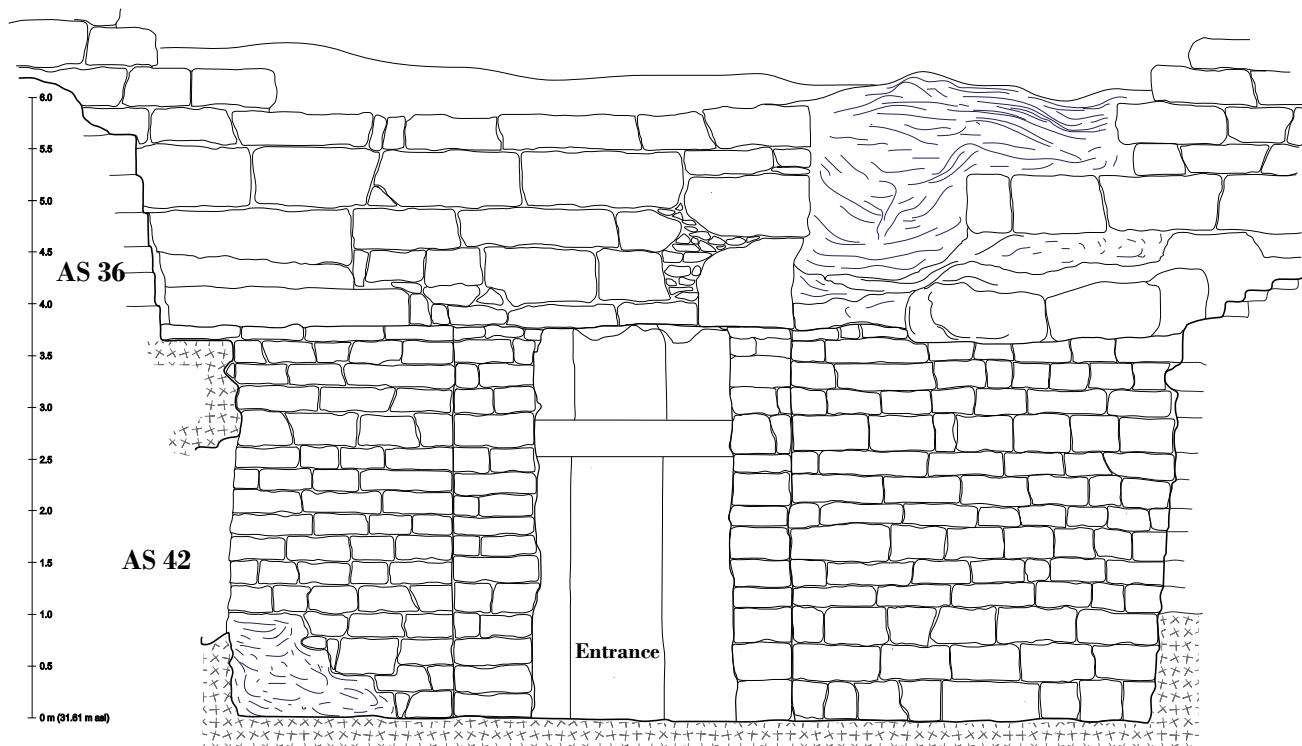


Fig. 9: View of the facade of mastaba AS 31 (L. Wellner)



Fig. 10: View of the chapel of AS 31, looking south (M. Bárta)



Fig. 11: Restored part of an inscription from the chapel with some titles of the anonymous owner of AS 31 (M. Frouz)

corridor. The whole section of the corridor north of the tomb entrance has a lower ceiling, another indication of the great care invested into the final shaping of the inner space.

In the northern part of the corridor was a limestone wall cutting off the northernmost section, with a sealed entrance into a corridor leading to another unfinished burial apartment. The partitioning wall dividing the corridor in an east–west direction into two asymmetrical parts begins 3.25 m south of the north end of the corridor. Originally it reached the ceiling. The empty space between the partition and the north wall was originally filled with a dense layer of destroyed mud-brick. Opposite the niche in the east wall was an entrance giving way to a narrow corridor starting in the west wall and running for some 4 m to the west. It opens into an anteroom of about 5 × 3 m in ground plan. From there, opening in the west wall, an opening leads into a burial niche.

The burial niche with its sarcophagus gives the impression that its incorporation into the tomb's concept was only secondary. The niche itself is some 3.90 m deep and 2.10 m wide. The limestone sarcophagus is 2.30 m long and 1.08 m wide, with its lid moved to the side. The specific feature is the east–west orientation of the whole burial. The room was found robbed and only one canopic jar made of calcite could be found to the west of sarcophagus.¹⁸

Serdab

The serdab was cut in the west wall of the corridor, south of the cult place. It is a wide and long room orientated in an east–west direction, 7.50 m long and 2.14 m wide. The first 4.60 m of the side walls are fairly well cut whereas the back part of the room seems to have been left unfinished. Between the room and the corridor was built a massive wall of local limestone lumps, the wall being 0.90 m wide. At a height of 1.00 m above the floor level a narrow slot began. In front of the serdab wall, in the corridor, was traced a L-shaped bench used probably for the offerings for statues originally placed in the serdab (of which nothing has remained).

Preserved titles (Fig. 11 and Fig. 12)

Establishing at least a provisional dating for the tomb is essential since this is the oldest structure in this part of the cemetery, directly preceding the tomb complex of the vizier Qar. In this respect, several cult niche fragments with hieroglyphic inscriptions uncovered in the chapel of AS 31 provide some evidence. Among the titles two are of high importance. The first one is *hm-ntr hnmw hnt(j) pr-z3* 'priest of Khnum who is foremost/first of the House of protection', a title to my knowledge so far unattested from the Old Kingdom¹⁹ and *ꜥ-Nmtj* 'assistant of Nemty'.²⁰ The latter title has been attested for Mereruka (reign of Teti),²¹ in the tomb of Udjhateti (reign of Teti–Pepy I),²² and in the tomb of Tjetju (Pepy I).²³ All three tombs are situated in the Teti Pyramid Cemetery. The final attestation of the title comes from the 'Louvre' mastaba of Akthiotept south-east of the complex of Djoser, equally dated to the late fifth–early sixth dynasty.²⁴ Another interesting feature is found in the title '(priest) of Anubis, who is in front of Sepa, west of his places...' with its citation of the locality Sepa, the existing evidence for which has been collected by Zibelius. From her list it follows that with regard to Saqqara, most cases are

¹⁹ But see Hannig, *Lexica* 4, 454, *pr-s3*, 'Haus des Schutzes' and *hnt(j) m pr-s3*, 'der erste im Haus des Schutzes'.

²⁰ D. Jones, *An Index of Ancient Egyptian Titles, Epithets and Phrases of the Old Kingdom*, (2 vols, BAR International Series 866; Oxford 2000), 347–348, No. 1295. For the reading proper of the title consult O.D. Berlev, "Сокол плывущий в ладье", иероглиф и бог, *Вестник древней истории* 1 (1968), 3–30. I owe the improved reading of the title to Nigel Strudwick.

²¹ P. Piacentini, *Les scribes dans la société égyptienne de l'Ancien Empire. Vol. I. Les premières dynasties. Les nécropoles Memphites* (Études et Mémoires d'Égyptologie No. 5; Paris 2002), 581ff–G.Sa.28.

²² *ibid*, 569ff–G.Sa.17.

²³ *ibid*, 633ff–G.Sa.73.

²⁴ B. Begelsbacher-Fischer, *Untersuchungen zur Götterwelt des Alten Reiches im Spiegel der Privatgräber der IV. und V. Dynastie* (OBO 37; Freiburg/Göttingen 1981), 221; PM III², 634; Ziegler, C., *Le mastaba d'Akhetetep* (Paris 2007), 24.

¹⁸ Excavation No. 10/LL/2004.

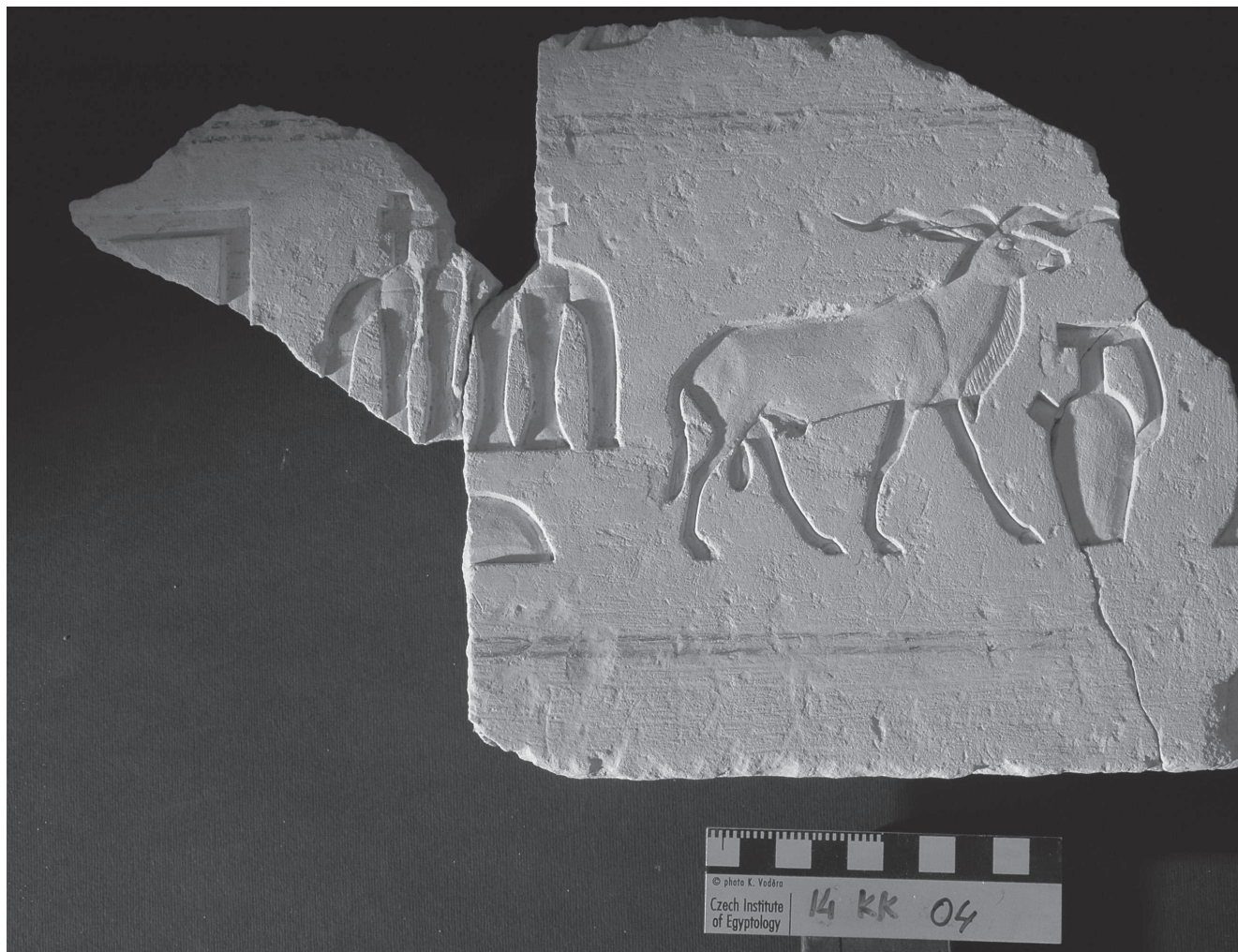


Fig. 12: Detail of the inscription (M. Frouz)

dated to the sixth dynasty, a significant number of which originate from the cemetery of Pepy II in South Saqqara.²⁵

Conclusions

Taking into account all evidence at our disposal at the moment, one can suggest that tomb AS 31 dates to the late fifth or very early sixth dynasty (with reservations). Its location shows clearly that this tomb was built as the first in this part of the remote Abusir-Saqqara cemetery. The question of whether there existed any connection with the subsequently built tombs of Qar and his family must be left open for the lack of evidence at present time.

Within the scope of this contribution, only a tentative comparison of the Giza and Abusir-Saqqara building traditions can be attempted. First of all, despite all previous accounts, there is no firm evidence for rock-cut tombs in

Abusir-Saqqara prior to the fifth dynasty.²⁶ Thus the oldest rock-cut tombs on the pyramid fields developed in Giza, probably as early as during the reign of Khafre.²⁷ Another major difference lies in the fact that unlike Giza (where the tombs belonged to the highest members of the royal family, including the queens and royal children), the rock-cut tombs built close to Memphis belonged, with only one known exception, to lower rank officials. Concerning the social status of the tomb owners, more than sixty different titles of seventeen tomb owners were noted. Generally speaking, they have almost nothing in common except for the title 'property custodian of the king' which is attested in as many as eleven cases and 'intimate of the king' (attested five times).²⁸ On a general level, it may be said that most of the tomb owners were employed at the royal court and as lower ranking priests.

²⁵ K. Zibelius, *Ägyptische Siedlungen nach texten des Alten Reiches* (BTAVO, Reihe B, Nr. 19; Wiesbaden 1978), 209–211.

²⁶ Compare P. Jánosi, *Giza in der 4. Dynastie*, 297.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 305ff.

²⁸ Jones, *Index I*, 449, No. 1681.

Without any further details, all evidence at our disposal from Abusir and Saqqara indicates that the fashion in rock-cut tomb building appears here by the end of the fifth dynasty, perhaps in connection with a resurrected 'link' between Giza and Abusir and Saqqara re-established some time during the reign of Niuserre. This, as well as most of the features mentioned earlier, necessitates, however, further examination and testing. What seems to be clear, however, is the conclusion that the rock-cut tombs known from Abusir and Saqqara appear suddenly and probably only as a modified import from Giza during the second half of the fifth dynasty. I am aware of just one parallel to AS 31 which is represented by a rock-cut tomb of Kaunesut at Giza. His tomb also features a regular mastaba-superstructure with southern and northern niche and with a chapel cut in the rock. Despite the official dating of the tomb to the late-fourth/fifth dynasty, the titles of Kaunesut allow for a possible later date (second half of the fifth dynasty).²⁹

We may speculate as to the reasons that led to their introduction: there was certainly enough space to build standard mastaba-type tombs elsewhere. Perhaps at the beginning we

have here another example of the emulation of the material culture of higher officials by the lower officials, as was the case with imported and imitated Levantine pottery in some Abusir and Saqqara tombs during the sixth dynasty.³⁰ At the same time, it may be assumed that they were cheaper and quicker to build and did not require additional building material. This may have been yet another important factor in Saqqara as titles of the rock-cut tomb owners in this area indicate their somewhat lower status at the court.

Last but not least, at the present there is no explanation for a strong axis deviation of the entrance into the chapel of AS 31. The entrance is orientated to the south-east by about 30° which makes it rather unusual. There may be several factors to take into account: the orientation of the tomb towards the rising sun at a specific time of the year, the orientation towards another principal monument in this direction or some other, so far unknown, factors.

Many problems remain to be solved – the origin of rock-cut tombs in the area of Abusir and Saqqara, their social, spatial and perhaps religious specific significance. Most questions only can be answered with a hoe and a basket.

²⁹ I owe this reference to Peter János. S. Hassan. *Excavations at Giza II* (Cairo 1936), 75–86, 76, fig. 81 – façade of the tomb, 77, fig. 82 – ground plan. Dating: PM III², 274.

³⁰ Bárta et al., *Abusir XIII*, 307.