

KINGS OF THE SUN

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KINGS OF THE SUN

Studies

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KINGS OF THE SUN

Studies

Editor

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Light and shadow of the kings of the sun

MIROSLAV BÁRTA

It is impossible to count how many places in Abusir were touched by a hand or foot of a Czech Egyptologist for the first time since the ancient Egyptians. Crumbling stone or mudbrick walls of temples and tombs, ancient floors of chapels and corridors paved with stone slabs or coated with mud, decoration of cult chambers with inscriptions, which can be read today only by a few hundred specialists in the world, burial chambers hidden deep under the ground, robbed since antiquity. Thousands of objects at the Abusir cemetery have been successfully saved from the time and elements thanks to modern archaeological excavations. Abusir as a part of the famous pyramid fields of the Old Kingdom rulers constitutes one of the main sources for our understanding of ancient Egyptian history, and above all of the Fifth Dynasty. In those times, four pyramid complexes were constructed in Abusir for Pharaohs Sahura, Neferirkara, Raneferef and Nyuserra. Not far from them, on the site known today as Abu Gurab, the Fifth Dynasty rulers built temples dedicated to the sun god Ra. The sun and the significance of the god Ra played an important role in the Fifth Dynasty. It witnessed perhaps the greatest progress of the era of the pyramid builders when the world became global for the very first time due to international trade including the search for and import of copper, the main metal of the time, which required a high level of international cooperation.

The three largest Abusir pyramids and a number of tombs in their vicinity were explored by the German Egyptologist Ludwig Borchardt. He also worked in the descending corridor leading to the burial chamber of King Raneferef, but he stopped this work prematurely because he came to the conclusion that it was a less important non-royal tomb. A number of Borchardt's unique finds was transported to Germany and many of them can be seen in this exhibition.

Shortly after the Czechoslovak Institute of Egyptology was established at the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University in Prague and Cairo, Zbyněk Žába, the director of this institute, gained the permission to document and later to excavate the mastaba of Ptahshepses, which is the largest non-royal tomb complex of the Old Kingdom.

In 1976 Miroslav Verner, Žába's successor, was assigned a concession which extended over the major part of the Abusir pyramid field. It did not take long to reach the first discoveries. With the use of modern archaeological methods, the pyramid complex of the royal mother Khentkaus II was soon discovered, as well as the above-mentioned funerary complex of King Raneferef. It was here that not only the best preserved funerary equipment of an ancient Egyptian ruler was discovered, in addition to the unique remains of papyrus archives, royal and non-royal statuary, stone and pottery vessels, and many other objects. A cemetery of family members of King Djedkara was uncovered as well, and at the western edge of the concession were found tombs from the mid of the 1st millennium BCE, including the tombs of the military officials Udjahorresnet and Menekhibnekau, or the intact tomb of the priest Iufaa who badly suffered from fate as well as poor health. In the heart of the pyramid field, the tombs of the members of the family of King Raneferef (so-called Nakhtsara's cemetery) were explored. Not far from them, quite recently, a tomb was unexpectedly found, which belonged to the sage Kairsu, known until then only from written sources.

In 1991 the archaeological concession was extended towards the south, reaching virtually to the beautifully decorated tomb of Ti. The cemetery around Ti's tomb then became a part of the Czech excavation site in 2018. The cemetery of Abusir South, which lies in the shadows of the Abusir and Saqqara pyramids, gradually revealed evidence on dozens of important ancient Egyptian dignitaries who lived and worked at the royal court of Old Kingdom rulers. Among many, we can mention the king's physician Shepseskafankh who founded a large family cemetery where unique groups of statues of priest Nefer and Princess Sheretnebtj were found. These statues together with many other finds from this cemetery, form one of the main cores of this exhibition.

The "Kings of the Sun" exhibition tells us the story of ancient Egypt through dozens of artifacts and art pieces. Each object is a unique piece of evidence of its time, showing that besides or behind the "great history" told by the monumental royal complexes we can find traces of life stories of individual men, women and children. To trace them we need to combine the fields of archaeology, history, and philology in cooperation with a number of technical and natural history specialists. This is the current story of scientific research. Through science we can try to understand – better than ever before – the past processes which lay at the basis of the development of not only the ancient Egyptian civilisation but also all the other cultures and civilisations all over the world, as well as the place and the role of an individual person within. This exhibition thus in its own way tells the stories which seem to us far away at first sight, but actually they are closer to us than we would perhaps like to acknowledge.

Enough of words now – let us take the path through time towards the civilisation which has been re-created through the intensive work of several generations of Egyptologists from the Czech Republic and abroad.

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PAVEL ONDERKA | MIROSLAV BÁRTA | MOHAMED MEGAHEH

The “Kings of the Sun” exhibition, for which this publication was prepared, was organized with assistance of many museums and scientific institutions all over the world. All these institutions connect through their interest in the legacy of the pharaonic civilisation and their honest efforts to protect and present to the public the enormous cultural heritage which lies today within the borders of the Arab Republic of Egypt, but which undoubtedly – due to its importance – reaches far beyond those borders.

The site of Abusir to which this exhibition is dedicated was a place of activities of the Egyptian, German, and Czechoslovak, later Czech expeditions. All these missions contributed to our knowledge of this important cemetery, and the results of their works are presented together in the exhibition “Kings of the Sun”.

The wish to present this exhibition in the Czech Republic in order to introduce the site of Abusir and the history of the Fifth Dynasty of ancient Egyptian kings, focusing mainly on the results of the work of the Czech mission in Abusir, dates back almost three decades. However, only in 2020 it was possible to successfully organize it thanks to the kind support and assistance of all the international partners, and above all the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of Egypt, Supreme Council of Antiquities, and other sectors of the Egyptian antiquities service. The exhibition would never be possible without the financial support of the Czech government, especially the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic. The two main organizing institutions are the National Museum and the Charles University, the Czech Institute of Egyptology of the Faculty of Arts.

The authors of the exhibition and of the present volume would like to express their gratitude to Michal Lukeš, Director General of the National Museum, and Michal Stehlík, Deputy Director General for Collections and Exhibitions. Their thanks also belong to Tomáš Zima, Rector of the Charles University, Michal Pullman, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and to all the members of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, especially to Miroslav Verner and the director Jiří Janák. We also highly appreciate the invaluable help and advice of Gabriele Pieke on German Egyptological collections.

Special thanks go to many of our Egyptian colleagues and friends. The loans from Egyptian institutions would not be possible without the support of H.E. Khaled El-Enany, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Mostafa Waziri, Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Mahmoud El-Damaty, former minister, Moamen Othman, head of the Museum Sector of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Elham Salah, advisor of the minister for the museum affairs, and Sabah Abdel-Razeq, Director of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

Sincere thanks belong to all the colleagues from the Saqqara antiquities area, whose help and support is essential for our long-term exploration of Abusir. Our thanks extend also to the members of the Permanent Committee of the Supreme Council of Antiquities of Egypt, and the Supreme Committee for Exhibitions.

Our heartfelt thanks belong to our friend, Zahi Hawass, the Egyptologist and archaeologist whose friendship and support for the Czech Institute of Egyptology of the Faculty of Arts, Charles University lasts for more than 30 years. Zahi Hawass was a witness of many of our discoveries in Abusir, including – among others – the intact tomb of Iufaa.

The authors of the exhibition would like to thank the embassies of the Czech Republic in Cairo and of Arab Republic of Egypt in Prague, and especially His Excellency Jan Fulík and His Excellency Saïd Hindam for their fundamental support and help, especially during the pandemic period of Covid 19 when travelling between both countries was very challenging.

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Besides the world-famous museums, also Czech institutions participated in this exhibition, including the Buchlov State Castle (National Heritage Institute, Regional Office in Kroměříž; Libuše Mikulová, Rostislav Jošek), Regional Museum in Mikulov (Petr Kubín), and the Institute for Classical Archaeology of the Faculty of Arts, Charles University (Peter Pavúk, Lenka Vacínová). Their collections are presented to the international public for the first time within the exhibition.

The present volume profited also from assistance and skills by Jolana Malátková, Martina Bardoňová, Mohamed Megahed, Marie Peterková Hlouchová, and from the Czech Institute of Egyptology, and the principal author and curator of the exhibition *Kings of the Sun*, Pavel Onderka, as well as other colleagues from the National Museum, namely Zuzana Krouchalová, Jaroslav Richter, Gabriela Vrtalová, Dana Bělohoubková, Radek Podhorný and last but not least Adam Grubner.





MEDITERRANEAN SEA

LOWER EGYPT

SINAI

Fayum

EASTERN DESERT

WESTERN DESERT

UPPER EGYPT

RED SEA

Gilf Kebir Plateau

Lake Nasser

LOWER NUBIA



0 20 40 60 80 100 km

Central Abusir and Abu Ghurab

AN 1	sun temple of Userkaf
AN 2	unfinished pyramid of Shepseskara?
AC 1	pyramid complex of Sahura
AC 2	pyramid complex of Neferirkara
AC 3	pyramid complex of Raneferef
AC 4	pyramid complex of Nyuserra
AC 5	mastaba of Userkafankh
AC 6	anonymous mastaba
AC 7	mastaba of Djadjaemankh
AC 8	mastaba of the vizier Ptahshepses
AC 9	mastaba of Ptahshepses Jr. II
AC 10	mastaba of Princesses
AC 14	pyramid complex of Khentkaus II
AC 15	mastaba of Khekeretnebt
AC 16	mastaba of Neserkauhor
AC 17	mastaba of Faaf (good name Idu) and Khenit
AC 18	mastaba of Mernefu
AC 19	mastaba of Hedjetnebu
AC 20	anonymous mastaba
AC 22	pyramid complex Lepsius no. XXIV
AC 23	mastaba of Nebtyemneferes
AC 24	tomb complex Lepsius no. XXV
AC 25	mastaba of Nakhtsara
AC 26	mastaba of Werkaura
AC 27	area around Nyuserra's valley temple
AC 28	Nyuserra's causeway
AC 29	mastaba of Kakaibaef
AC 30	mastaba of Khentkaus III
AC 31	anonymous mastaba
AC 33	mastaba of Kairsu

Abusir West

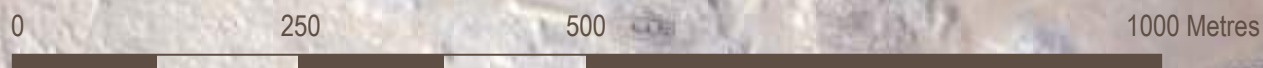
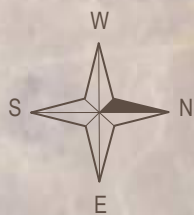
AW 1	shaft tomb of Udjahorresnet
AW 2	shaft tomb of Iufaa
AW 3	shaft tomb of Padihor
AW 4	anonymous shaft tomb
AW 5	shaft tomb of Menekhibnekau
AW 6	anonymous shaft tomb

Abusir South

AS 1	mastaba of Kaaper
AS 4	tomb of Rahotep and Isesiseneb
AS 6	anonymous tomb
AS 7	tomb of Gegi
AS 10	mastaba of Ity
AS 11	anonymous tomb
AS 12	tomb of Shedu
AS 13	anonymous tomb
AS 14	anonymous tomb
AS 15	anonymous tomb
AS 16	mastaba of the vizier Qar
AS 20	tomb of Hetepi
AS 22	tomb of Inti
AS 31	anonymous tomb
AS 33	tomb MM
AS 34	tomb of Iymery
AS 37	mastaba of Neferinpu
AS 39	mastaba of Shepseskafankh
AS 43	Lake of Abusir Square 1
AS 47	ASW 1
AS 50	tomb MM East III
AS 54	anonymous tomb from the end of the Third Dynasty
AS 61	tomb of Kaaper Junior
AS 67	tomb of Usernefer?
AS 68	complex of Princess Sheretnebt
AS 68a	tomb of Duaptah
AS 68b	tomb of Shepespuptah
AS 68c	tomb of Sheretnebt
AS 68d	tomb of Nefer and Neferhathor
AS 69	anonymous structure
AS 70–73	New Kingdom temple and mastaba from Old Kingdom
AS 76	tomb of Kaisebi
AS 76b	tomb of Ptahwer
AS 77	anonymous tomb
AS 78	anonymous tomb
AS 78b	anonymous tomb
AS 80	wooden boat
AS 82	tomb of Hemshesemet
AS 84	anonymous tomb
AS 85	tomb of Inpuhetep
AS 91	anonymous tomb
AS 98	tomb of Ankhires
AS 103	complex of four small mudbrick tombs
AS 104	mastaba of Nyankhseshat
AS 108	anonymous tomb

North Saqqara

D 21	mastaba of Ti
D 71	mastaba of Ptahwer
E 7	cultic installation





Chronological table

Based on Hornung, Erik – Krauss, Rudolf – Warburton, David A.: 2006 *Ancient Egyptian Chronology*; Leiden – Boston: Brill [Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section One. The Near and Middle East 83], pp. 490–498; and on Verner, Miroslav – Bareš, Ladislav – Vachala, Břetislav: 2007 *Encyklopedie starého Egypta*, Praha: Libri, pp. 516–521.

Predynastic Period	c. 4500–3150 BCE
0 Dynasty	? – c. 3150
?	?
Ro (?)	?
Sereq	?
Qa	?
Early Dynastic Period	c. 2900–2545 ⁺²⁵ BCE
1st Dynasty	c. 2900–2730 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Narmer	c. 2900–? ⁺²⁵ BCE
Aha	?–2870 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Djer	2870–2823 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Wadji (formerly Djet)	2822–2815 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Den	2814–2772 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Anedjib	2771–2764 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Semerkhet	2763–2756 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Qa'a	2755–2732 ⁺²⁵ BCE
2nd Dynasty	c. 2730–2590 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Hetepsekhemwy	2730–? ⁺²⁵ BCE
Raneb	?–2700 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Nynetjer	2700–2660 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Peribsen	2660–2650 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Sekhemib	2650–? ⁺²⁵ BCE
Sened	?–2610 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Khasekhemwy	2610–2593 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Old Kingdom	c. 2592–2120 ⁺²⁵ BCE
3rd Dynasty	c. 2592–2544 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Djoser (Netjerikhet)	2592–2566 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Sekhemkhet	2565–2559 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Khaba	2559–? ⁺²⁵ BCE
Nebka	?
Huni	?–2544 ⁺²⁵ BCE
4th Dynasty	c. 2543–2436 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Snofru	2543–2510 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Khufu	2509–2483 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Djedefra	2483–2475 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Baufra?	2474–2473 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Khafra	2472–2448 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Menkaura	2447–2442 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Shepseskaf	2441–2436 ⁺²⁵ BCE

5th Dynasty	c. 2435–2306 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Userkaf	2435–2429 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Sahura	2428–2416 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Neferirkara	2415–2405 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Raneferef	2404 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Shepseskara	2403 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Nyuserra	2402–2374 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Menkauhor	2373–2366 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Djedkara	2365–2322 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Unas	2321–2306 ⁺²⁵ BCE
6th Dynasty	c. 2305–2152 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Teti	2305–2279 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Userkara	?
Pepy I (Meryra)	2276–2228 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Merenra I	2227–2217 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Pepy II (Neferkara)	2216–2153 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Merenra II	2152 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Nitiqret	
8th Dynasty	c. 2150–2118 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Neferkaura	2126–2113 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Neferkauhor	2122–2120 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Neferirkara	2119–2118 ⁺²⁵ BCE
First Intermediate Period	c. 2118–1980 ⁺²⁵ BCE
9th and 10th Dynasty	c. 2118–1980 ⁺²⁵ BCE
Local rulers from Herakleopolis Magna	
Middle Kingdom	c. 1980 ⁺¹⁶ –1760 BCE
11th Dynasty	c. 2080–1940 ⁺¹⁶ BCE
Mentuhotep I	1980–? ⁺¹⁶ BCE
Intef I (Sehertawy)	?–2067 ⁺¹⁶ BCE
Intef II (Wahankh)	2066–2017 ⁺¹⁶ BCE
Intef III (Nakhtnebtpefer)	2016–2009 ⁺¹⁶ BCE
Mentuhotep II (Nebhepetra)	2009–1959 ⁺¹⁶ BCE
Mentuhotep III (Sankhkara)	1958–1947 ⁺¹⁶ BCE
Mentuhotep IV (Nebtawra)	1947–1940 ⁺¹⁶ BCE
12th Dynasty	1939 ⁺¹⁶ –1760 BCE
Amenemhat I (Sehetepibra)	1939–1910 ⁺¹⁶ BCE
Senusret I (Kheperkara)	1920–1875 ⁺⁶ BCE
Amenemhet II (Nubkaura)	1878–1843 ⁺³ BCE
Senusret II (Khakheperra)	1845–1837 BCE
Senusret III (Khakaura)	1837–1819 BCE
Amenemhet III (Nimaatra)	1818–1773 BCE
Amenemhet IV (Maakherura)	1772–1764 BCE
Queen Sobekneferu (Sobekkara)	1763–1760 BCE

13th Dynasty	1759–c. 1539 BCE
Wagaf	1759–1757 BCE
Amenemhat VII	c. 1753–1748 BCE
Sobekhotep II	1737–1733 BCE
Khendjer	c. 1732–1728 BCE
Sobekhotep III (Sekhemrasewadjtawy)	c. 1725–1722 BCE
Neferhotep I (Khasekhemra)	c. 1721–1710 BCE
Sobekhotep IV (Khaneferri)	c. 1709–1701 BCE
Sobekhotep V	c. 1700–1695 BCE
Ibiya	c. 1695–1685 BCE
Aya	c. 1684–1661 BCE
Ini	c. 1684–1661 BCE
Suadjtu, Ined, Hori, Dedumose	c. 1660–1659 BCE
Second Intermediate Period	1759–c. 1630 BCE
14th Dynasty	?
15th Dynasty (Hyksos rulers)	?–c. 1530 BCE
Khyan (Seuserenra)	
Apepi (Auserra)	c. 1575–1540
Khamudi	
16th and 17th Dynasty	?–1540 BCE
Sobekhotep VIII, Nebiriau, Rahotep, Sobekemsaf I and II	?
Intef (Nubkheperre)	?
Taa I (Senakhtenra)	?
Taa II (Sequenenra)	?
Kamose (Wadjkheperre)	?–1540 BCE
New Kingdom	c. 1539–1077 BCE
18th Dynasty	c. 1539–1292 BCE
Ahmose I (Nebpehtyri)	c. 1539–1515 BCE
Amenhotep I (Djeserkara)	1514–1494 BCE
Thutmose I (Aakheperkara)	1493–1483 BCE
Thutmose II (Aakheperenra)	1482–1480 BCE
Hatshepsut (Maatkara)	1479–1458 BCE
Thutmose III (Menkheperre)	1479–1425 BCE
Amenhotep II (Aakheperura)	1425–1400 BCE
Thutmose IV (Menkheperura)	1400–1390 BCE
Amenhotep III (Nebmaatra)	1390–1353 BCE
Amenhotep IV/Akhenaten (Neferkheperurawaenra)	1353–1336 BCE
Smenkhkara/Nefernefruaten	1336–1334 (?) BCE
Tutankhaten/Tutankhamun (Nebkheperura)	?–1324 BCE
Ay (Kheperkheperura)	1323–1320 BCE
Horemheb (Djeserkheperura)	1319–1292 BCE

19th Dynasty	1292–1191 BCE
Rameses I (Menpehtyra)	1292–1291 BCE
Sethi I (Menmaatira)	1290–1279 BCE
Rameses II (Usermaatira Setepenra)	1279–1213 BCE
Merenptah (Baenra)	1213–1203 BCE
Sety II (Userkheperura Setepenra)	1202–1198 BCE
Amenmessu (Menmira)	1202–1200 BCE
Saptah (Akhenra Setepenra)	1197–1193 BCE
Tausret (Sitrameritamun)	1192–1191 BCE
20th Dynasty	1190–1077 BCE
Sethnakhte (Userkhaura Meryamun)	1190–1188 BCE
Rameses III (Usermaatira Meryamun)	1187–1157 BCE
Rameses IV (Hekamaatra Setepenamun)	1156–1150 BCE
Rameses V (Usermaatira Sekheperenra)	1149–1146 BCE
Rameses VI (Nebmaatira Meryamun)	1145–1139 BCE
Rameses VII (Usermaatira Setepenra Meryamun)	1138–1131 BCE
Rameses VIII (Usermaatira Akhenamun)	1130 BCE
Rameses IX (Neferkara Setepenra)	c. 1129–1111 BCE
Rameses X (Khepermaatira Setepenra)	c. 1110–1107 BCE
Rameses XI (Menmaatira Setepenptah)	c. 1106–1077 BCE
Third Intermediate Period	c. 1076–723 BCE
21st Dynasty	c. 1076–944 BCE
Nesbanebdjed (Hedjkheperira Setepenra) / Smendes	c. 1076–1052 BCE
Psusennes I / Pasbakhaenniut I (Aakheperira Setepenamun)	c. 1051–1006 BCE
Amenemnisu (Neferkara)	c. 1005–1002 BCE
Amenemope (Usermaatira Setepenamun)	c. 1002–993 BCE
Osorkon the elder (Aakheperira Setepenra)	992–987 BCE
Siamun (Netjerkheperira Setepenamun)	986 – c. 968 BCE
Psusennes II / Pasbakhaenniut II (Titkheperura Setepenra)	c. 967–944 BCE
22nd Dynasty (Libyan)	943 – c. 746 BCE
Sheshonq I	943–923 BCE
Osorkon I	922 – c. 888 BCE
Takelot I	c. 887–874 BCE
Sheshonq II	c. 873
Osorkon II	c. 872–842 BCE
Sheshonq III	841–803 BCE
Sheshonq IIIa	?–790 BCE
Pimay	789–784 BCE
Sheshonq V	783– c. 746 BCE

23rd Dynasty (Upper Egypt and rival rulers)	845–812 BCE
Takelot II	845–821 BCE
Iuput I	820–809– BCE
Osorkon III, Takelot III	c. 780 ± 20 BCE
Pedubastis I (Usermaatra)	834–812– BCE
Sheshonq IV, Rudjamon, Iny	
23rd Dynasty (Lower Egypt)	c. 730 BCE
Padibastet II (?), Osorkon IV	
24th Dynasty	c. 736–723 BCE
Tefnakht	c. 736–729 BCE
Bakenrenef / Bocchoris	728–723 BCE
Late Period	c. 722–332 BCE
25th Dynasty (“Nubian”)	c. 722– c. 655 BCE
Piy/Piankhy	c. 753–723 BCE
Shabaqo (Neferkara)	c. 722–707 BCE
Shabitqo (Djedkaura)	c. 706–690 BCE
Taharqo (Khunefertemra)	690–664 BCE
Tanutamani (Bakara)	664 – c. 655 BCE
26th Dynasty	664–525 BCE
Psamtek I (Wahibra)	664–610 BCE
Nekau II (Wehemibra)	610–595 BCE
Psamtek II (Neferibra)	595–589 BCE
Haaibra / Apries	589–570 BCE
Ahmose II (Khnemibra)	570–526 BCE
Psamtek III (Ankhkaenra)	526–525 BCE
27th Dynasty (Persian)	525–404 BCE
Cambyeses	525–522 BCE
Darius I	521–486 BCE
Xerxes	486–466 BCE
Artaxerxes I	465–424 BCE
Darius II	424–404 BCE
28th Dynasty	404–399 BCE
Amenardis / Amyrtaios	404–399 BCE
29th Dynasty	399–380 BCE
Nepherites I / Nefaarudj I	399–393 BCE
Pasherimut	393 BCE
Hakor (Khnemmaatra)	393–380 BCE
Nepherites II / Nefaarudj II	380 BCE
30th Dynasty	380–343 BCE
Nectanebo / Nakhtnebef (Kheperkara)	380–362 BCE
Teos / Djedhor (Irmaatenra)	365–360 BCE
Nectanebo II / Nakhthareheb (Senedjemibra Setepenanhur)	360–343 BCE

“31st Dynasty” (Second Persian Rule)	343–332 BCE
Artaxerxes III	343–338 BCE
Arses	338–336 BCE
Darius III	335–332 BCE
Macedonian rulers	332–305 BCE
Alexander III Great	332–323 BCE
Philip Arrhidaeus	323–317 BCE
Alexander IV	317–306 BCE
Clashes of diadokhs	
Ptolemaic Period	305–30 BCE
Ptolemy I Soter I	305–283/282 BCE
Ptolemy II Filadelfos	285/284–246 BCE
Ptolemy III Euergetes	246–222/221 BCE
Ptolemy IV Philopator	222–205/204 BCE
Ptolemy V Epifanes	205/204–180 BCE
Cleopatra I	180–176 BCE
Ptolemy VI Philometor	186–145 BCE
Ptolemy VII Neos Philopator	
Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II	145–116 BCE
Cleopatra II	175/174–115 BCE
Cleopatra III	142–101 BCE
Ptolemy IX Soter II	116–106, 88–80 BCE
Ptolemy X Alexandr I	106–88 BCE
Berenike III	81–80 BCE
Ptolemy XI Alexander II	80 BCE
Ptolemy XII Neos Dionysos	80–51 BCE
Berenike IV	58–55 BCE
Cleopatra VII Philopator	51–30 BCE
Ptolemy XIII	51–47 BCE
Ptolemy XIV Philopator	47–44 BCE
Ptolemy XV Kaisarion	44–30 BCE
Roman Period	30 BCE – 395 CE
Byzantine Period	395–640 CE
Conquest of Egypt by Arabs	640 CE

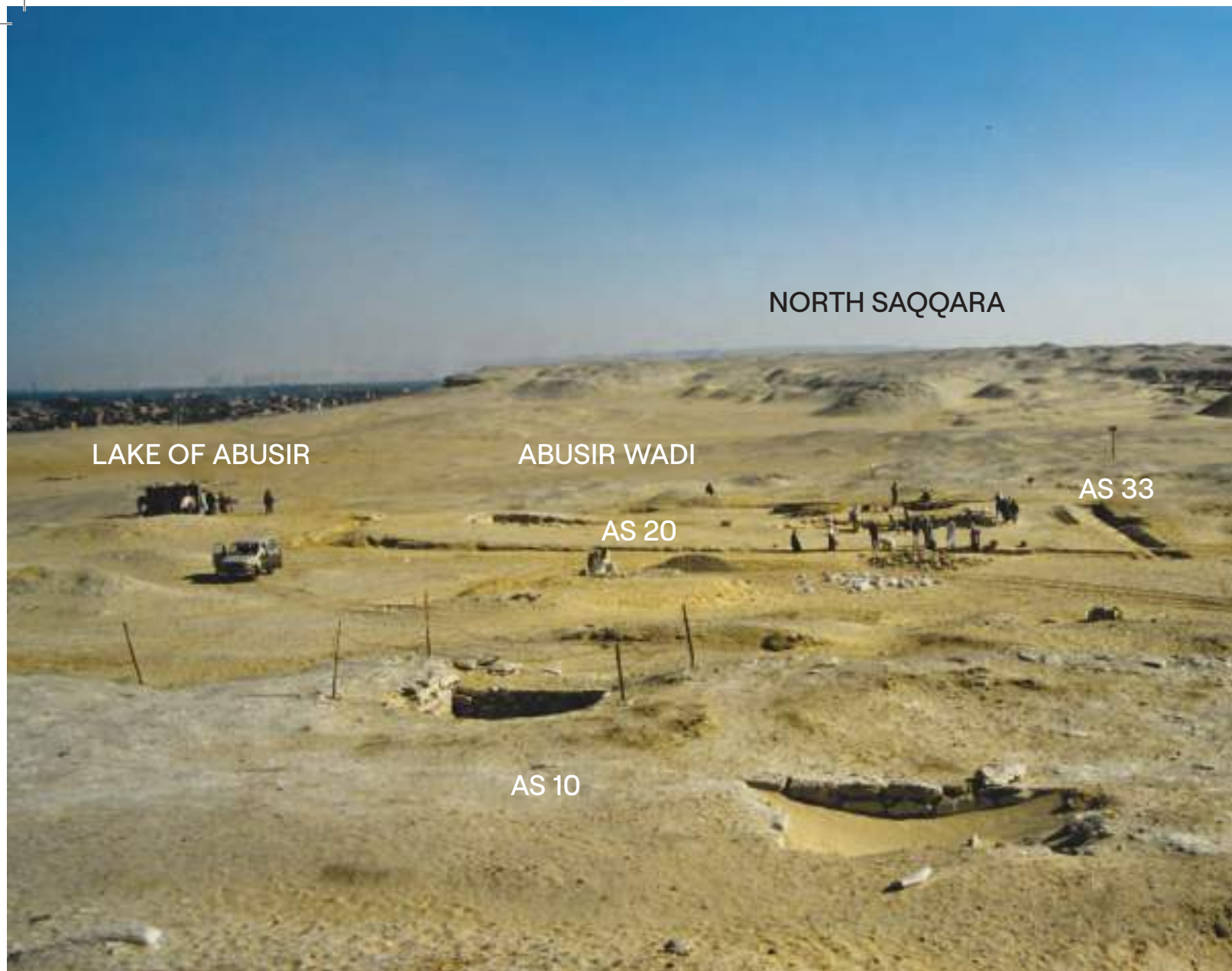


Fig. 1:
View of Abusir South, with the tomb
of Hetepi in the centre (AS 20). Beyond it,
Abusir Wadi stretches from northeast to
southwest, with the rock massif of Saqqara
North on the horizon (archives of the Czech
Institute of Egyptology, photo: M. Bárta).

The world of the non-royal tombs in Abusir

MIROSLAV BÁRTA

II.3

The modern interdisciplinary exploration of ancient Egyptian burial sites represents one of the major trends of contemporary archaeological research in Egyptology. Cooperation among representatives of the natural, technical and social sciences is imperative if we are to understand the information collected during the excavation process. The ancient Egyptians believed in an afterlife similar to the life they had lived on earth, and their tombs – in terms of their location, architecture, decoration, inscriptions, and burial equipment – reflected many aspects of their world, including the administration of the state, the social standing of tomb owners and their families, the realities of everyday life, religious ideas, the anthropology of the population of that time, and the state of (and changes in) the environment.

Over time, four royal complexes of Fifth-Dynasty kings were built in the Abusir pyramid field during the Old Kingdom. In addition, members of the royal family and the state's high officials constructed their tombs here (see Chapter II.2). In their shadow, lower-ranking officials, along with their wives and children, would be buried. All of these monuments tell thousands of multifaceted stories, from which we can reconstruct the history of the world's oldest territorial state (Bárta 2013a; Verner 2017a).

As the Abusir burial ground is so vast, it comes as no surprise that several different non-royal burial sites gradually arose independently of each other in this widespread area over the course of the third millennium BCE. While the factors influencing their position, nature and time of origin varied, key considerations would undoubtedly have been the location of the Old Kingdom's capital, White Walls, the evolution of the network of settlements, the local cult topography, and the main communications connecting the necropolis with the Nile valley. Although much of the site remains unexplored, current knowledge and archaeological research offer a relatively detailed awareness and description of how it developed in time and space. Each of the burial sites tells, in its own specific way, the story of its time and of the owners of the individual tombs. These monuments reflect the dynamics and transformations of ancient Egyptian society. The following text provides a very limited description of some of these sites, drawing on the enormous wealth of sources known to date (Fig. 1).

Burial grounds from the dawn of history

Egypt was unified at the beginning of the third millennium BCE. Almost as soon as the agglomeration of the new capital, White Walls, started to develop, significant burial sites sprang up nearby on the outskirts of the Western Desert. On the Saqqara North plateau, there is the Emery's North Saqqara Cemetery and Quibell's Archaic Cemetery, reserved for the highest officials of the time. Further north, on the east bank of Lake of Abusir, lies the Bonnet's Cemetery, which belonged to the lower-ranking officials of the First and Second Dynasties. This is where the oldest history of the Abusir necropolis begins. This burial site was explored by Leipzig University's Georg Steindorff (1861–1951) and Uvo Hölscher (1878–1963) in 1910, after it was targeted by modern-day tomb robbers. It was fleetingly examined for a second time by the staff of the Saqqara Monuments Inspectorate at the end of the 1980s (under the guidance of Holeil Ghaly) and, finally, briefly in the autumn of 2010

Fig. 2:
Bonnet's Cemetery tomb with a burial
chamber accessible via a stairway,
discovered by a Saqqara Inspectorate
expedition in 2016 (archives of the Czech
Institute of Egyptology, photo: M. Bárta).



and 2016 (Bonnet 1928; Blaschta 2006: 60–79). Although this unique part of the necropolis has disappeared under a modern Muslim cemetery over the past hundred years, it is a unique testament to the nascent ancient Egyptian state.

Four types of tombs can be distinguished here by their formal features. “Shaft tombs” with a burial chamber located at the bottom of the shaft or in a side chamber represent the majority of the seventy structures explored here. Another type (with three representatives) is the simple grave pit, in which the side walls are lined with mudbrick. Then there are the stairway tombs (four in number), which are fitted with stairs leading to a burial chamber carved in the bedrock. This type occurs from the middle of the First Dynasty and lasts until the Second Dynasty. The grave goods documented here identify them as tombs of the highest-ranking individuals in the entire burial ground. The fourth type, comprising just one tomb, has a recessed brick chamber lined with mudbrick and a storage magazine for grave goods on its shorter side. Burials have been preserved only in eight tombs. The bodies were originally placed on their left sides in wooden coffins and would face south or southeast. The categories of artefacts that have been documented – some 300 large stone vessels, wine amphorae, scribes’ palettes, cosmetic palettes, numerous types of pottery, stone knives, seals, and more – show that these were often the tombs of scribes, who were shouldered with the fledgling ancient Egyptian administration (Blaschta 2006: 60–65; Fig. 2).

Besides this burial site, we should also mention the Macramallah Cemetery located southwest of Abusir South, consisting of 231 pit (predominantly male) graves arranged in six groups and covering an area of approximately 300 × 120 m (Macramallah 1940). There is much to indicate that this was a sacred precinct of the pharaoh Den, who probably ruled the country from Memphis and therefore – although he was interred at the burial ground in Abydos – a part of his funerary ritual could have taken place here (Kaiser 1985).

Finally, at the northern end of the Abusir necropolis, another small group of brick tombs was built in the Early Dynastic Period. These have been recorded and partially published by a Cairo University expedition (Radwan 2000).

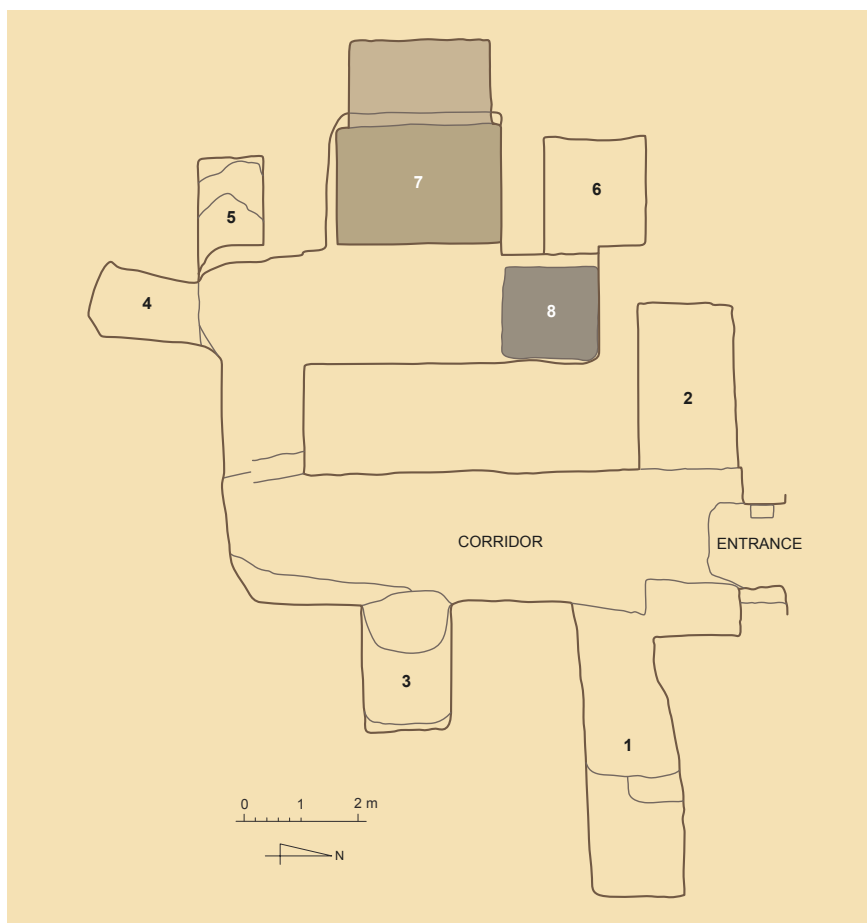


Fig. 3:
Ground plan of the subterranean section of tomb AS 33, U-shaped with storerooms (1–6), a burial chamber (7) and a well (?) (8) (archives of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, drawing: L. Vařeková).

Tombs in the shadow of the Step Pyramid

In many respects, the reign of Netjerikhet represents a major turning point in the history of the Old Kingdom, as reflected in ancient Egyptian official sources (Baud 2002; Bárta 2016a). Thanks to the mythical sage Imhotep a completely new type of royal complex built entirely of limestone appears, massive leaps and bounds are made in state administration and, last but not least, non-royal tombs become more common. During the Third Dynasty, a new trend in the development of burial sites made its way from Saqqara North to Abusir: tombs of a “transitional” type, which combine a staircase and a shaft leading underground (Bárta 2005b). Tombs from this time are represented by quite large mastabas built predominantly of mudbrick, with limestone starting to feature, for example, in the decoration of the chapel.

The oldest tomb in this group is mastaba AS 33 (unfortunately, the owner has not been identified). Artificial landscape modelling is evident in its superstructure. The access to the chapel in the southeastern part of the tomb led from the east and took the form of several small terraces hewed into the bedrock, which reached as far as the surface of the desert. On the approach, people must have had the sensation that they were ascending and that the tomb was the highest reachable point on their journey. Although the chapel itself was completely destroyed, one may observe that the tomb as a whole was large, measuring some 52.5×25.3 m, and covered an area of $1,330$ m². The elaborate underground section, built with a U-shaped ground plan, occupied an area of almost 70 m². A total of seven rooms, including a recessed burial chamber, branched off the underground passageway. Parallels suggest that this subterranean system probably reproduced the individual spaces of a residential building and was designed for the comfortable afterlife of the deceased (Bárta – Coppens – Vymazalová 2010: 57–81; Fig. 3).

Fig. 4:
Façade decoration of the tomb of Hetepi,
Third Dynasty (archives of the Czech
Institute of Egyptology, photo: M. Bárta).



Another classic example of a transitional type of tomb is that of Hetepi (AS 20). This is one of the first tombs anywhere in the area to have a chapel built of white limestone blocks and two separate underground structures, reached via multi-flighted stairways ending in shafts. The tomb's only decoration was on its façade, the northern part of which depicts the owner seated at a table with bread loaves and other offerings. Above Hetepi's head is an inscription containing his name and titles. We can infer from the unusual location of this offering scene, which was iconic in Old Kingdom tombs, that the emerging decoration of non-royal tombs from this time was gradually expanding from the front of the tomb to the chapel walls within. In this particular case the chapel was completed, but has not been decorated at all (Fig. 4) (Bárta – Coppens – Vymazalová 2010: 3–24).

Hetepi's tomb also contains the unique remnants of a “missing link” that evidences the birth of the cult stele known as the false door. False doors were usually made of limestone, less commonly of wood, and very rarely of Aswan red granite. They stood in the western wall of the chapel and bore the name, titles and representations of the owner. This door – the stele – was not only the focal point of the cult of the deceased, but also a sort of membrane that separated the world of the living from the world of the dead, through which the soul of the deceased could move back and forth. In this case, however, the western wall was protected by a genuine double-wing door, beyond which there was probably a simple niche with a depiction of Hetepi. It gave the impression that the owner entered the chapel through a real door during cult ceremonies and, when they ended, returned to the hereafter in the west. It took several decades for false doors to be created that combined both of these originally separate elements – the double-wing door and a depiction of the owner (Bárta 2019i).



Fig. 5:
Funerary boat discovered south of tomb
AS 54, late Third Dynasty
(archives of the Czech Institute
of Egyptology, photo: M. Bárta).

In stark contrast to tomb AS 33 and its subterranean part, there is a very small burial chamber with a ground plan measuring 3.70×1.50 m. The underground part, housing Hetepi's burial and the second burial chamber were reached via two multi-flighted stone stairways that began on the tomb's surface, were open to the west, and ended with a shaft. Thanks to this specific architecture, we can reconstruct the path followed by the spirit of the deceased into the afterlife. It began in the burial chamber, continued up the shaft, and ascended the stairway opening out to the west as it headed for the realm of the dead (Bárta 2019i).

Another unique tomb (AS 54), dating back to the reign of Huni, occupies the highest point of the Central Mound in Abusir South. Again, it is a mudbrick mastaba built on a ground plan measuring 52.60×23.80 m. A small chapel with a cross-shaped ground plan and dimensions of 1.55×2.00 m was left completely undecorated and, by the time of excavation, the false door for the cult was missing. The burial chamber was located in the northern part of the tomb. A nearly 13 m deep shaft led into it. The chamber entrance, in a southerly direction from the bottom of the shaft, was originally protected by a limestone block measuring $2.20 \times 1.10 \times 0.25$ m. The chamber itself consisted of a long corridor in its eastern part, and a recess in the west that originally contained the burial of the tomb owner. A fragment of a stone vessel contained Huni's name, a find backed up by radiocarbon dating, which confirmed that the tomb can be dated to his reign (Bárta 2011a). The unique burial of a real wooden boat was found south of this tomb. Built of local acacia wood, this vessel was about 18 m long. The fact that it is here, and the fact the southern brick façade of the tomb, with its combination of black Nile mudbricks and dark-beige tafla bricks, imitates the enclosure wall of the Netjerikhet complex, suggests that the tomb's owner must have been a quite extraordinary figure of the time (Fig. 5).

The rise of officials

For most of the Fourth Dynasty, the area of the Abusir and Saqqara necropolis remained unused because the country's political centre had moved to the broader environs of Giza, Abu Rawash, and Zawyet El Aryan. It was there that not only the rulers and members of their family, but also most court officials, were buried. The end of the Fourth and the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty was another pivotal moment in Egyptian history. It was at this time that officials of non-royal origin began to enter all levels of the ancient Egyptian administrative apparatus. This was mainly because state administration became much more complex and necessitated far greater numbers of officials than was the case until the end of the Fourth Dynasty, when most administration was in the hands of members of the royal family. At the same time, the pendulum of development swung back to the region of Abusir and Saqqara, where we can see a gradual increase in the number of non-royal tombs. During the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties, the burial grounds here experienced an unprecedented boom. This was particularly true of the Abusir burial grounds, which are vital to our understanding of the history of the Fifth Dynasty (Bárta 2013b; Bárta 2016b).

The beginning of the Fifth Dynasty is represented in Abusir by the tomb of Kaaper, the “chief of the army”, “priest of Heket” and “border guard”. Broadly speaking, after several decades of interrupted development in this area, the typology of the tombs here is consistent with the Giza tradition of the previous Fourth Dynasty. They tend to be distinguished by relatively large above-ground parts, which include a shaft leading into a small burial chamber and a small cult chapel, both located in the southeastern part of the superstructure, with a *serdab* to the south or west of the chapel. A *serdab* is an inaccessible room in the immediate vicinity of the chapel that was used to house statues of the deceased, ensuring that he would take on an idealised form in his life in the hereafter. It was connected to the chapel by a narrow aperture.

Kaaper's tomb, built from blocks of limestone on a ground plan measuring 41.20 × 19.20 m, contained a small L-shaped chapel in its southeastern part (3.40 × 1.55/1.35 m). At the southern end of its western wall, there was originally a limestone false door, behind which was the *serdab*. This tomb's inscriptions and decoration are part of what makes it unique. An important feature of the tomb decoration is the depiction of Kaaper on the northern wall of the chapel. He is portrayed as a corpulent man with sagging breasts, which at this time was a typical representation of a financially secure member of the elite. Kaaper's burial chamber was at the bottom of a 24 m deep shaft leading underground from the top of the mastaba. Sadly, the chamber contained only meagre remnants of what would have originally been spectacular burial equipment (Bárta 2001: 143–191).

Tombs in the shadow of the Fifth-Dynasty Kings of the Sun

During the reign of King Nyuserra in the mid-Fifth Dynasty, there were many ground-breaking changes that were reflected not only in state administration and religion, but also in the architecture and decoration of non-royal tombs (Bárta 2005c; Bárta – Dulíková 2015).

Some officials built tombs that clearly revealed their growing independence from the king, their powerful social status, and the importance of their families in the machinery of state administration. It is at this time that we come across the phenomenon of offices being passed down from father to son. This trend was probably initiated by the dignitary Ti, whose tomb is located at the point where the Abusir and Saqqara

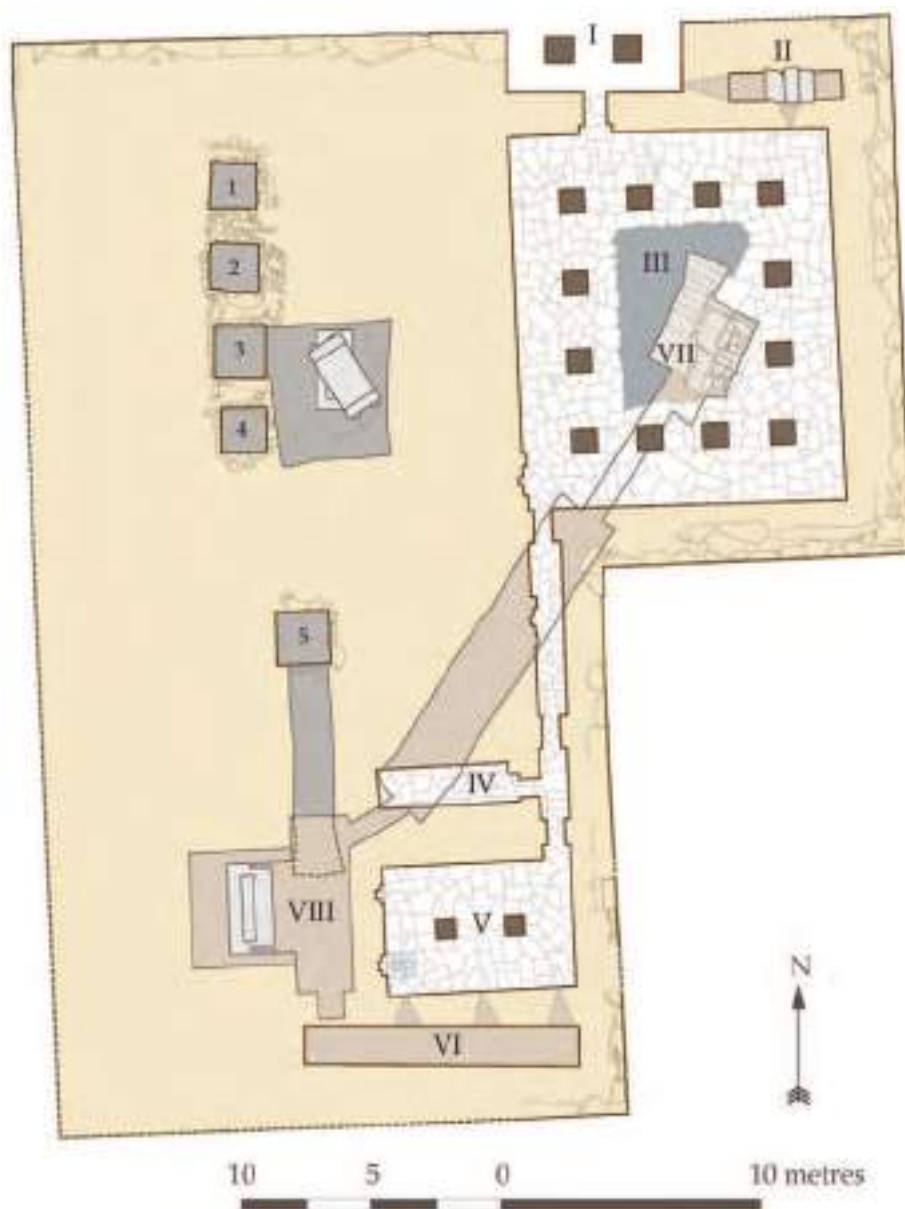


Fig. 6:
Ground plan of the first monumental tomb, which belonged to the high-status official Ti and was built during the reign of Nyuserra:
I – pillared portico;
II – *serdab*;
III – pillared courtyard;
IV – storeroom;
V – cult chapel;
VI – *serdab*;
VII – entrance to the corridor leading into the burial chamber;
VIII – Ti's burial chamber; 1, 2 and 4 – unfinished shafts; 3 – burial chamber of Ti's son Demedj;
5 – burial chamber of Ti's wife Neferhetepes (archives of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, V. Brůna, J. Malátková).

burial grounds meet.¹ Its final appearance, covering a total area of 1,126 m², included a big two-pillared portico and a large open pillared courtyard, where Ti's broader household would have gathered to make offerings to his spirit and from where the burial chamber was entered prior to the burial. From the courtyard, a long corridor led south into a monumental cult chapel with two stelae – Ti's false doors. A large storeroom was also accessed from the corridor via a side entrance. Besides the owner himself, Ti's wife Neferhetepes and eldest son Demedj were also buried in his complex. In addition to Demedj, Ti had three more sons and a daughter, but their burial sites have yet to be discovered. Ti's tomb is a monumental stone testament to the leap that contemporary society made into an era where the ruler may still have had the final word, but where the families of powerful dignitaries, such as Ti and his descendants, were gaining more and more power and influence. The beginning of a new trend where the sons of high-ranking dignitaries would follow in their footsteps and assume many of the positions their fathers had held can also be traced back to this specific period. The importance of nepotism and the inheritability of office grew rapidly, as is also evident in sacral architecture (Fig. 6; Bárta – Dulíková 2020).

¹ In 2018, the Czech Institute of Egyptology was granted a licence to explore this tomb, which is one of the reasons why it has been included in this text.



Fig. 7:
Pillared courtyard of vizier Ptahshepses
(archives of the Czech Institute
of Egyptology, photo: M. Bárta).

This jump to monumentality and ostentatious flaunting of status and power is best documented in Abusir by the tomb of the vizier Ptahshepses. Coincidentally, works of the Czech (originally Czechoslovak) Egyptology in Abusir started with the exploration of this tomb. Ptahshepses was a dignitary who began his career at the royal court as a hairdresser and personal servant of the royal family. Eventually, he became a royal confidant and, on the strength of his abilities, was ultimately appointed to the office of vizier (similar to a prime minister in modern-day thinking). He enjoyed the rare privilege of marrying a royal daughter. The king evidently hoped to secure his loyalty in this way. Ptahshepses's rise is also reflected in the three major building phases of his tomb, which eventually ended up with a 56×42 m ground plan. The entrance was decorated with 10 m high lotiform columns (the lotus symbolised the sun god and alluded to the idea of rebirth). Beyond this entrance was the original smaller entrance and a chapel with three cult niches. The southern door led into a large open pillared courtyard. From here, there was access to a complex of storerooms to the south, while to the west were the east-west oriented cult chapels of Ptahshepses and his royal wife, Khamerernebt, and a room whose curved north wall evidently traced the side of a boat for voyages in the afterworld. Not far away, there was an entrance with a descending corridor leading to the burial chamber, where Ptahshepses and his wife were buried in red granite sarcophagi (Krejčí 2009; Fig. 7).

Thus, in Nyuserre's time, the policy of marrying royal daughters to families of influential figures was firmly established. It had been started by another member of the elite, also named Ptahshepses, when he married Khamaat, the daughter of Userkaf, the founder of the Fifth Dynasty. Beginning with Nyuserre's reign, this practice became the norm, since it was viewed as a way of securing the king's position while also cultivating the loyalty of the increasingly powerful families of high-ranking officials (Bárta 2016a).

The two above-mentioned tombs of the officials Ti and Ptahshepses stand in sharp contrast to the much smaller and "archaic" mastabas of the late Fourth and early Fifth Dynasty that had been built for the royal family, as evidenced by the burial site of Raneferef's family members in Central Abusir (see Chapter II.2).

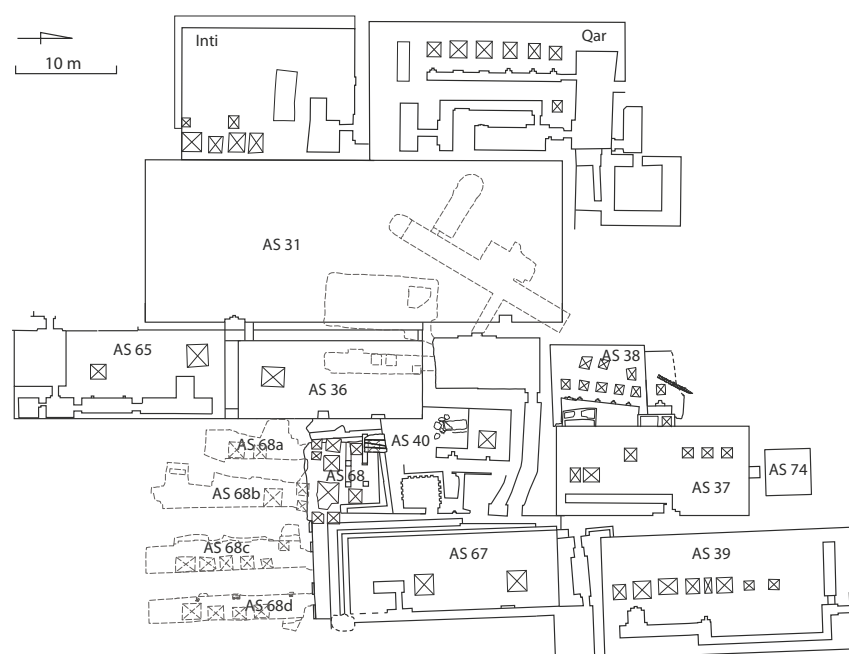


Fig. 8:
Ground plan of the physician
Shepseskafankh's family cemetery:
AS 37 – Neferinpu;
AS 39 – Shepseskafankh;
AS 67 – Nefershepes Memi;
AS 68c – Sheretnebt;,
AS 68d – Nefer
(archives of the Czech Institute
of Egyptology, drawing: L. Vařeková).

The family burial site of the priest Shepseskafankh

One burial site belonging to several generations of members of the same powerful family in Abusir South was founded by Shepseskafankh – priest, chief physician, and personal physician to the king (tomb AS 61). Following in his footsteps were the unknown owner of tomb AS 31, perhaps his son, and Nefershepes Memi (AS 67). A complex of four rock chapels (AS 68) was subsequently built to house the tombs of Princess Sheretnebt, the daughter of King Nyuserra, and Nefer, the priest and overseer of granaries and the treasury, along with tomb AS 36, the owner of which is unknown, and, finally, the mastaba of priest Neferinpu (AS 37). Neferherptah, another physician and the owner of tomb AS 65, may also have belonged to the family. This is a typical family burial site where, in a short time (during the reigns of Nyuserra and Djedkara), several separate tombs sprang up that were either mastabas or combined chapels carved into the bedrock (AS 31, AS 36 and AS 68), above which a mastaba superstructure was built. All these tombs were largely independent cult units. The central space of the compound was taken up by a cult space – a courtyard with brick walls decorated with niches (AS 40), where family members of this undoubtedly influential clan – one of the officials of which had married another daughter of King Nyuserra, Sheretnebt – would gather (Bárta *et al.* 2014; Fig. 8).

The founder of the burial site, Shepseskafankh, built himself a tomb with a 22 × 11.5 m ground plan that had an entrance facing towards the Lake of Abusir. The corridor chapel ended with a niche in the south, where the tomb owner's monumental, almost 4 m high false door stood, decorated with unfinished inscriptions containing his name and titles. These inform us that he was the “overseer of physicians of all of Egypt”, the “physician of the royal palace”, the “priest of Hathor, Ra and Khnum”, and a holder of several other titles. The owner and other members of his family were buried at the bottom of a north-south oriented row of shafts located to the west of the chapel (Bárta 2015).

The owner of the large mastaba AS 31 built a type of tomb that can be found only sporadically in Abusir – he built the above-ground part on the bedrock in the shape of a mastaba, while the cult chapel was hewn in the bedrock. Despite its impressive

Fig. 9:
Nefer's false door (reconstruction with
pottery from the tomb; archives of the Czech
Institute of Egyptology, photo: M. Frouz).



size (19.60 m long, 2.25 m wide and 3.40 m high), only fragments of its decoration have been preserved. There are two important details that make this tomb stand out from Old Kingdom practices in the building of non-royal tombs – the entrance façade into the rock chapel takes the form of a false door, and the entrance corridor leading to the chapel is shifted at approximately 18 degrees towards the southeast, so that the chapel could be illuminated by the rays of the rising sun (Bárta 2011b).

The set of four rock chapels in the southeastern part of complex AS 68 belonged to other high-ranking members of the royal court. This section begins at the end of a descending staircase with an open courtyard featuring four pillars with inscriptions relating to the royal daughter Sheretnebty. From here, a corridor ran eastwards, the southern wall of which was decorated with four groups of naoform statues belonging to the family of Sheretnebty and the official Nefer, who owned rock chapels AS 68c and AS 68d, which were entered from this corridor. For the most part, these chapels – along with the individual burial chambers into which shafts led from the floor of the chapels – were looted and damaged in antiquity. Only one of the niches in the chapel of the official Nefer has a false door with well-preserved original colours (Fig. 9). In its appearance and design, it is one of the most beautiful of its kind from the Age of the Pyramid Builders. Nefer held high administrative titles such as “overseer of granaries and treasury” and “priest of the god Ra”. Unique finds have also been made

in the *serdabs* belonging to the chapels of Sheretnebtj and Nefer: a magnificent set of ten statues and sculptures of high artistic quality, with their polychromy intact, in Sheretnebtj's case, and another four in Nefer's case. The most beautiful examples include a statue of Nefer portrayed as a scribe with an unrolled papyrus scroll in his lap, and a statue of an official named Iti that exhibits traits of the finest sculptures from the royal workshops. This Iti may have been the husband of Princess Sheretnebtj and, as such, a royal son-in-law (Vymazalová – Dulíková 2014; Vymazalová – Pieke 2017).

Finally, mastaba AS 37 belonged to the sun priest Neferinpu and his family (Bárta *et al.* 2014). The corridor chapel, accessible from the east, contained four cult places with false doors. Of these, it has been possible to fully assemble only the tomb owner's false door. To the west of the chapel, there was a row of six burial shafts. The most important shaft in the southern part belonged to Neferinpu and his wife. At the bottom of the 10 m deep shaft were entrances in the east and west walls that led to two burial chambers. The eastern one, Neferinpu's, was discovered intact. It was dominated by a 2.40 m long, 1.06 m wide and 0.80 m high limestone sarcophagus complemented by a 0.20 m high lid of similar dimensions, with two handles on the shorter northern and southern sides for ease of handling. The fact that the chamber was found intact does not mean that it was a "treasure trove". Even so, it is scientifically significant because the various findings here shed light on the funerary practices of that time. To the west of the sarcophagus, there were ten sealed beer jugs and stone containers for symbolic offerings. To the north of the sarcophagus, there were cattle bones, the remains of food offerings, while to the south there was a completely decayed wooden box originally containing four canopic jars made of limestone. These should have contained the mummified organs of the deceased, but they were found empty, evidencing that Neferinpu was only pretending that he had the means for costly mummification, when in fact his body was merely dried with natron and coated with a layer of stucco to maintain its shape for eternity. The body was found in the sarcophagus, lying on its back, with the head to the north. Among the items discovered inside the sarcophagus were a wooden headrest, a gilded walking stick made of wood, faience jewellery, a simple gold necklace and a travertine *kohl* container. An anthropological analysis indicates that Neferinpu died between the ages of about 35 and 50 years, while his (probable) wife, interred in the sarcophagus in the western chamber, lived to around 40.

The exploration of the whole burial site founded by Shepseskafankh ended with the discovery of the small 5 × 5 m brick structure AS 74. Adjacent to the tomb of Neferinpu from the north, this is a discovery unique in the archaeology of Old Kingdom cemeteries. It is the precinct where the wake of the priest Neferinpu was held and where, at the end of the celebrations, all the vessels were ritually smashed with stone hammers. The complete remnants of this ritual, which the ancient Egyptians called the "breaking of the red pots", were found on the floor, along with hammers, the remains of fireplaces and the leftover bones of animals, including cattle, pigs and fish, that had been consumed during the feast (Bárta– Arias Kytmarová – Odler – Šůvová 2017).

The tomb of an ancient Egyptian sage

The Abusir necropolis has recently given up another surprising secret – the tomb of an official named Kairsu. According to ancient Egyptian tradition, Kairsu was considered one of the earliest ancient Egyptian sages and an author of moral (ethical) admonitions. His burial complex, covering an area of more than 500 m², consists of the tomb *per se* and several other rooms for the cult and the ritual cleansing of the priests before they entered the tomb proper. The architecture of the cult chapel itself is unique for non-royal tombs from the third millennium BCE because it was paved with basalt blocks. As the use of black basalt was reserved exclusively for kings,



Fig. 10.
Burial chamber of Kairsu with his standing
statue (archives of the Czech Institute
of Egyptology, photo: P. Košárek).

its presence here is one of several examples pointing to the extraordinary status enjoyed by Kairsu. Regrettably, only a few granite fragments have been preserved from the cult stele – the false door. Even so, this material also attests to the importance of the owner.

Although the burial chamber was plundered in antiquity, Kairsu's red granite statue, with remains of green paint and his titles, has been preserved where it was originally installed in front of the limestone sarcophagus. It is from these titles that we can glean what an illustrious career this official had. Kairsu was the “sole companion (of the king)”, the “overseer of all royal works”, “keeper of the secrets of the Morning House”, “steward of the royal palace”, “overseer of the House of Life”, “inspector of priests” serving in the pyramid complex of Kings Sahura and Neferirkara, “priest of the goddess Hathor, Lady of the Sycamore, in Kush” (a city in southern Egypt), and “custodian of the two thrones” (meaning of southern and northern Egypt). The Morning House was a specific place where the king came to have breakfast and dress in the morning. The House of Life was a complex where Egyptians kept texts that were recorded on papyrus scrolls and contained their knowledge and passages on religious and philosophical matters (Fig. 10).

Another unique feature is the design of the burial chamber. It was built in an open pit. After the sarcophagus had been lowered and the side walls lined with limestone blocks, the chamber was sealed with several giant limestone ceiling blocks, each weighing at least 8-9 tonnes. Above it was a smaller chamber, which was intended to ease the pressure of the mass of masonry and evidently contained parts of the burial equipment, especially pottery. Kairsu's mastaba also incorporated a number of other shafts with burial chambers, in which other members of his family appear to have been buried (Bárta 2019j; Bárta – Jirásková *et al.* 2020).



Fig. 11.
Judge Inti's façade (archives of the Czech
Institute of Egyptology, photo: M. Frouz).

The end of the Age of the Pyramid Builders

In the Sixth Dynasty, the complex of the vizier Qar and his sons was built in Abusir. In its formal features, this complex continues the trend that had begun back under the reign of Nyusera – it is the family burial site of three generations of officials, with inscriptions indicating that their main titles – offices – were passed down from father to son. There are even some indications that this may have been a family linked to some of the figures buried in the Shepseskafankh family cemetery. As things stand, it is one of the last great burial complexes constructed in Abusir South by the end of the Old Kingdom.

Vizier Qar, the founder of this burial site, which flanks tomb AS 31 from the west, saw his career peak during the reign of Teti. Originally a judge, Qar first built a simple north-south oriented undecorated chapel, which was entered from an open courtyard to the south. Towards the end of his career, however, he was unexpectedly promoted to the office of vizier. We can only guess the reasons behind this success, but what is certain is that this change of circumstances and social decorum of the day required him to build a new chapel. The tomb was enlarged and its second (this time east-west oriented) chapel has been preserved with almost complete decoration and a false door painted red to imitate red granite. This decoration included important scenes depicting priests during sacrificial ceremonies in the chapel, as well as Qar's four sons – Qar Junior, Inti, Senedjemib and Tjenti bringing offerings to their father. The vizier's burial chamber, containing a monumental limestone sarcophagus, was accessed from the open courtyard through a descending corridor. Other burial shafts of members of Qar's family were located in the western part of the tomb (Bárta *et al.* 2009).

Going by the size of his afterlife dwelling, vizier Qar's favourite son was Inti, a judge who built his tomb south of his father. It was entered from the west, and its façade, in front of which four limestone obelisks – symbols of the sun god – originally stood, was oriented towards his father's tomb to the north. The façade was decorated with sunk relief of the exquisitely rendered figures of Inti standing and his sons making offerings. The accompanying texts are in the form of the literary composition known as "appeal to the living", in which the owner asks the visitors not to dismantle his tomb, not to enter it unclean, and to make offerings to him. The passage, which leads into an open court, is decorated with offering bearers. The east-west oriented chapel is located to the west of the court. Its west wall is completely taken by a red-painted false door imitating red granite. The chapel side walls depict the owner sitting at a table with offerings, accompanied by his beloved wife Merut and favourite dog Idjem. A scene with musicians playing and singing a song – probably the oldest known love song – has been preserved on the north wall (Fig. 11).



Fig. 12.
Judge Inti's burial chamber with
a stone stela in the form of a false door
(archives of the Czech Institute
of Egyptology, photo: K. Voděra).

The biggest surprise came when his burial chamber was entered. Despite the fact that it was located at the bottom of a 22 m deep shaft the fill of which had remained intact, the chamber itself had been looted and damaged, which means that the ancient thieves got in before the shaft was filled in, i.e. essentially just after the burial. Besides a large limestone sarcophagus, the chamber also housed a stela in the form of a false door at its eastern wall. It was meant to serve as a symbolic gateway so that, during offering ceremonies, Inti's spirit could move freely between his sarcophagus, the *serdab* south of the chapel, the chapel itself, the open courtyard and the shaft (Fig. 12).

The remaining three sons built small chapels to the northeast of Qar's open courtyard, which was also their point of entry. Their chapels were completely destroyed, probably amid the turbulent situation prevailing in the country during the Sixth Dynasty. However, the burial equipment in their burial chambers contained many valuable artefacts. Of particular note, alongside the copper tools, stone vessels, headrests and tablets of the seven sacred oils, was a set of imported Syro-Palestinian wine vessels, one of the largest finds of this kind ever made in Old Kingdom Egypt (Sowada – Ownby – Bárta 2021).



The nameless ones

The Abusir cemeteries are not only the site of spectacular pyramid complexes and the glory-seeking monumental tombs of the highest ranking officials in the country. Hundreds of other much smaller mudbrick tombs, or even just shafts, of people – men, women and children – whose names we no longer know were also built in the surrounding area. For the most part, these are unobtrusive, plain structures, sometimes with offering altars and white-painted cult niches, and, to the west of them, the burial shafts of their owners. The only clues to their relative status are the depth of the shafts and the size of the burial niches or chambers (Bárta 2002a).

The burial equipment in these cases consisted of just a few pieces of pottery, and the deceased themselves were interred wrapped in linen or reed mats, usually in a contracted position on their right side, their head to the north. The deceased would be looking westwards to the realm of death, rebirth and eternal life. Starting in Nyuserra's reign, family-type tombs became common even in this social stratum. They consisted of a corridor chapel with several cult niches in the western wall, usually devoid of decoration, to the west of which there was usually a row or several rows of shaft openings leading to the burial chambers of the individual family members. Some shafts were unfinished, i.e. they had been "pre-excavated" to a depth of just one or two metres. This means that their originally intended owners did not use them and ended their life's journey elsewhere. The common ratio shows that for every three male burials there is evidence of two female ones and one belonging to a child. Surprisingly, in some family tombs of this type the deepest shafts and the largest burial chambers belonged to women – perhaps mothers, who appear to have had a prominent status within the family, which was then manifested in perpetuity in the place of their eternal rest. Perhaps that is all that can be said of the people who, for almost five hundred years, built their eternal dwellings within sight of the pyramids of the famous rulers of the Old Kingdom in Saqqara and Abusir (Fig. 13).

Above all, the story of ancient Egyptian tombs from the Old Kingdom's Age of the Pyramid Builders is a testament to the wish of their creators and owners to attain the afterlife and bears out their belief in eternal existence after their life on earth. Although today, as scholars, we are confronted with tombs built in a vast array of forms and styles, none of which is identical, their story is similar. Life does not end in death, and immortality can be achieved if our names and deeds are preserved in the memory of the following generations.

Fig. 13:
Mudbrick family tombs on the shore
of the Lake of Abusir, second half
of the Fifth Dynasty (archives of the Czech
Institute of Egyptology, photo: M. Bárta).