

Karol Jan Myśliwiec

In the Shadow of Djoser's Pyramid

Research of Polish Archaeologists
in Saqqara



PETER LANG

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The book presents the discoveries made by the Polish Archaeological Mission in Saqqara, the central part of the largest ancient Egyptian royal necropolis. The area adjacent to the Pyramid of King Djoser on the monument's west side, so far neglected by archaeologists, turned out to be an important burial place of the Egyptian nobility from two periods of pharaonic history: the Old Kingdom (the late third millennium BC) and the Ptolemaic period (the late first millennium BC). The earlier, lower cemetery yielded rock-hewn tombs with splendid wall decoration in relief and painting. The book also describes the methods of conservation applied to the discovered artefacts and episodes from the mission's life.

The Author

Karol Jan Myśliwiec, since 1969, has been a member of archaeological missions in Egypt, Syria, Sudan and Cyprus. He was the director of Polish-Egyptian rescue excavations at Tell Atrib (ancient Athribis) (1985–1995) and the head of Polish-Egyptian excavations in Saqqara (1987–2015). He is also the author of 300 publications concerning archaeology, art and religion of Ancient Egypt.

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Introduction

“How long will archaeologists continue to dig in Egypt?” Egyptophiles tend to ask impatiently.

“Till the end of the world,” I answer. And this is no joke. Not because – according to some estimations – the land of the pharaohs is believed to have one third of all the monuments in the world, but rather because the human approach to history is subject to constant change, shifting the very questions that archaeologists ask and are asked.

Many artefacts, which not so long ago seemed to have little historical significance, today are not only an object of intense research but also – as it turns out – have enormous cognitive value. It is no longer merely the lives of rulers that interest us today. For we are willing to better understand our own role in the history of the world, which is why we seek to gain knowledge about how societies and human individuals – as the basic element of this evolution – developed. The first 150 years of the development of Egyptology, from the moment when hieroglyphs were first deciphered and systematic excavations began to be conducted, led archaeological research towards the search for texts, especially those written down on papyrus, and for artworks to enrich museum collections.

The minimal or complete lack of interest in other source materials led to huge, sometimes irreversible losses for the entirety of our knowledge about the ancient world. Modern-day archaeology needs to bridge, at least to some extent, the gaps created by centuries of negligence. One such example could be the huge ancient cemeteries, where the human skeletons were never subjected to anthropological studies, or the very rich ceramic material, from which only vessels preserved fully intact or lavishly decorated were selected for publication. The changes introduced at the turn of the twentieth-first century included such that no archaeological mission conducting excavations in a necropolis can today do research without an anthropologist and a paleozoologist present. A ceramologist has become an essential participant of any excavation, or – increasingly more frequently – a group of ceramologists with various specialisations to correspond to both the richness and diversity of the material.

The conservation of artefacts has become a whole new chapter in this saga. This refers not only to those artefacts that make their way to various museums around the world but also those that remain at the site. For many decades, archaeological missions were least interested in the latter type of artefacts. Rather, they focused on copying texts and documenting the architecture for publication purposes. Some consequences of this were not

only the disintegration of many, sometimes monumental specimens of stone architecture, but also – and above all – the decay of the polychromy on relief and statue surfaces. Sacral architecture today forms a monochromatic landscape consisting of a grey conglomerate of stone blocks but, in reality, it was the richness of colours that cast the most fascinating allure.

Nowadays, a precondition for conducting an excavation are immediate professional conservation activities aimed at preserving the artefacts in the same state in which they were discovered. This is a difficult task since, before conservation is initiated, the material used by the ancient peoples must be subjected to laboratory tests, which determine the selection of a research methods. Thus, experiments that develop conservation as a science are constantly being conducted on the basis of new archaeological discoveries.

Research methods are also dictated by the particular natural conditions. In these terms, sandy Upper Egypt differs radically from the damp earth of the Nile Delta. Most of all, it is much easier to remove sand than to lead a persistent struggle against underground water. Furthermore, artefacts made from organic materials, e.g. papyrus or wood with a polychrome surface, are not preserved at all in wet soil, or at least not in a very good shape. That is why, for many years, archaeological excavations were focused mainly in Upper Egypt, where the layer of dry sand has long functioned as a natural preservative for the artefacts lying beneath. There were only few excavation missions in the Nile Delta. The pioneers included the 1950s archaeological mission directed by Professor Kazimierz Michałowski in Tell Atrib (the ancient Athribis). The scientific significance of the Delta increased once geophysics was introduced, as it turned out to be the best method of distinguishing the walls built from (dried) mud brick from the damp soil surrounding it. For example, thanks to applying this method, the Austrian excavations in Tell el-Daba brought fantastic results.

However, even at those archaeological sites which were the subject of many archaeological expeditions over the course of more than one hundred years, there are huge ‘blank spots’ that appeared, among other things, as a result of the false conviction about the ‘barrenness’ of certain areas. These would include a large part of the necropolis of the ancient city of Memphis, located at the head of the Delta, on the western side of the Nile. This land of royal pyramids and mastabas (or the tombs of the noblemen) is today one of the two largest concentrations of excavations in Egypt. The second is the Theban district with its centre on both sides of the Nile in Luxor, a few hundred kilometres south of Memphis. In the middle of the Memphite necropolis, one can find Saqqara, symbolised by the ‘step pyramid,’ i.e. the oldest Egyptian pyramid, erected by the legendary architect Imhotep, divinised for centuries. Even though excavations took place near this pyramid in the middle of the nineteenth century, considered to be the very beginnings

of science-based archaeology, no one continued the research on the western side of the pyramid, in the spot located south of the famous Serapeum, the underground galleries containing the burials of the holy Apis bulls.

It is precisely in this area where the author of this book directed the Polish and then Polish-Egyptian excavation missions. I was a student of Professor Kazimierz Michałowski, who initiated the “Polish school of Mediterranean archaeology” focused on Egypt in 1937–1939, when he directed the French-Polish excavations in Edfu (Upper Egypt). The experiences gathered by this school, in which the conservation of artefacts played an especially important role, include work done not only in such ancient metropolises as Alexandria, Thebes (Egypt), Faras and Dongola (Sudan), Palmyra (Syria) or Nea Paphos (Cyprus) but also cooperation with international excavation missions in the Nile Valley, such as the English mission in Qasr Ibrim, the German-Swiss mission in Elephantine or the German mission in the Theban necropolis (the Seti I Temple).

This book presents the results of the first twenty years of work done by Polish archaeologists in Saqqara.

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Full bibliography on the topic from the moment when Polish research was initiated in Saqqara until 2012 can be found in the first five volumes of the series “Saqqara. Polish-Egyptian Archaeological Mission,” which is a source publication for the discoveries made there by the Polish archaeological mission:

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Chronological table

(Based on J. von Beckerath, *Chronologie des pharaonischen Ägypten. Die Zeitbestimmung der ägyptischen Geschichte von der Vorzeit bis 332 v. Chr.*, Mainz am Rhein 1997).

Predynastic period

dynasty 0, about 150 years

Early dynastic period

dynasty I, ca. 2982–2803 BC

including pharaohs named Hor Aha (= Menes), Hor Dewen, Hor Semerkhet

dynasty II, ca. 2803–2657 BC

including pharaohs named Hor Hotepsekhemwy, Hor Nynetjer, Hor Sekhemib

Old Kingdom

dynasty III, ca. 2657–2589 BC

including pharaohs named Nebka, Djoser (= Hor Netjerikhet), Djoser-tety (= Hor Sekhemkhet)

dynasty IV, ca. 2589–2454 BC

including pharaohs named Snofru, Cheops (= Khufu), Chephren (= Khafre), Mykerinos (= Menkaure), Shepseskaf

dynasty V, ca. 2454–2297 BC

including pharaohs named Userkaf, Sahure, Neferirkare Kakai, Shepseskare, Niuserre Ini, Djedkare Izezi

dynasty VI, ca. 2297–2166 BC

pharaohs named Teti, Userkare, Pepi I, Nemti-em-saf I (= Merenre), Pepi II, Nemti-em-saf II, Queen Nitokris

ephemeral dynasties VII-VIII: dynasty VIII, ca. 2166–2120 BC

First Intermediate Period

dynasties IX-X (in Herakleopolis), ca. 2120–2020 BC

Middle Kingdom

dynasty XI (first in Thebes, later in the whole of Egypt), ca. 2119—1976 BC
including pharaohs named Mentuhotep I-IV, Antef I-III

dynasty XII, ca. 1976–1793 BC

including pharaohs named Sesostri I-III, Ammenemes I-IV, Queen Nefrusobek

Second Intermediate Period, ca. 1793–1550 BC

ephemeral dynasties XIII–XVII, including the Hyksos dynasty
(1645–1536 BC)

including pharaohs named Khyan, Apophis, Khamudi

New Kingdom

dynasty XVIII, 1550–1292 BC

including pharaohs named Amenhotep I–IV, Thothmes I–IV, Queen
Hatshepsut, Akhenaton (= Amenhotep IV), Tutankhamun, Ay, Horemheb
dynasty XIX, 1292–1185 BC

including pharaohs named Ramesses I–II, Seti I–II, Merenptah, Siptah,
Queen Tawosret

dynasty XX, 1185–1069 BC

Setnakht and nine pharaohs named Ramesses: Ramesses III–XI

Third Intermediate Period

dynasty XXI, 1069–945 BC

including pharaohs named Smendes, Psusennes I–II, Amenemopet,
Osorkon, Siamun

dynasty XXII, 945–735 BC

rulers of Libyan origins named Shoshenq I–V, Osorkon I–III, Takelot I–III
dynasty XXIII (in the Delta area), ca. 756–712 BC

including the rulers Iuput (in Leontopolis), Pedubastis (in Bubastis/Tanis),
Osorkon IV

dynasty XXIV (in Sais), ca. 740–712 BC

two rulers: Prince Tefnakht and Bokchoris

dynasty XXV (originating from Kush (modern-day northern Sudan), and
thus referred to as the “Kushite” dynasty), ca. 746–664 BC

including rulers named Shabaka, Shebitku, Taharqa

Late Period

dynasty XXVI, 664–525 BC

including rulers named Psamtik I–III, Apries, Amasis

dynasty XXVII, 525–401 BC

Persian rulers named Cambyses, Darius I–II, Xerxes I–II, Artaxerxes

dynasty XXVIII, 401–399 BC

only one ruler – Amyrtaeus

dynasty XXIX, 399–380 BC

Nepherites I–II, Achoris

dynasty XXX, 380–342 BC

three rulers: Nectanebo I, Teos, Nectanebo II

dynasty XXXI, 342–332 BC

Persian rulers named Artaxerxes III Ochus, Arses, Darius III

Macedonian kings, 332–305 BC

Alexander the Great, 332–305 BC, Philip III Arrhidaeus (Ptolemy, son of Lagos, rules as a satrap), 323–317 BC, Alexander IV, son of Roxanna, 317–305 BC

Ptolemaic period, 305–30 BC

twelve subsequent rulers bearing the name Ptolemy and Queen Cleopatra VII, 51–30 BC

Roman rule, 30 BC–323 AD

Byzantine period, 323–641 AD

Muslim Egypt, 641 AD–



II. 1. Map: Location of Saqqara at the border of Lower Egypt (the Nile Delta) and Middle Egypt (the Nile Valley).

Chapter 1. History and archaeology: Saqqara in Egyptian history

Abstract: An outline of the site history from the earliest times of human activity to present days. A diachronic presentation of the greatest discoveries made there by archaeological missions from various countries, along with the scientific research and restoration work done in Saqqara.

Keywords: the Old Kingdom, pyramids, mastabas, the Ptolemaic period, Serapeum.

The oldest part of the largest royal necropolis in the world, located on the western side of the River Nile at a distance of about 30 km south of Cairo – Saqqara – derives its name from the god Sokar, considered by the ancient Egyptians to have been the guardian of this huge cemetery.

It is situated on a rocky plateau, with the Sahara extending to the west (Fig. 1). The rock surface is today covered by a thick layer of sand blown in from the desert over the course of the last four millennia. The silhouettes of pyramids, pharaohs' tombs, and mastabas, much smaller sepulchral structures meant for the courtiers, rise up out of the sand.



Fig. 1. Western side of Djoser's pyramid: area before Polish excavations.



Fig. 2. Between Djoser's pyramid and the 'Dry Moat:' the same area after Polish excavations (2010), cf. Il. 6.

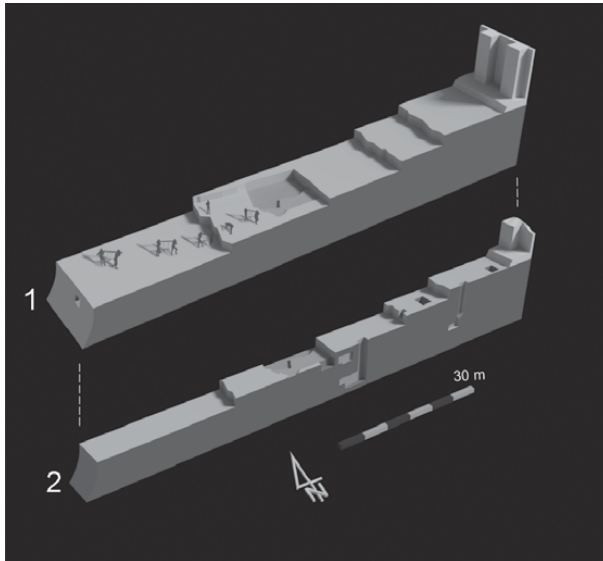


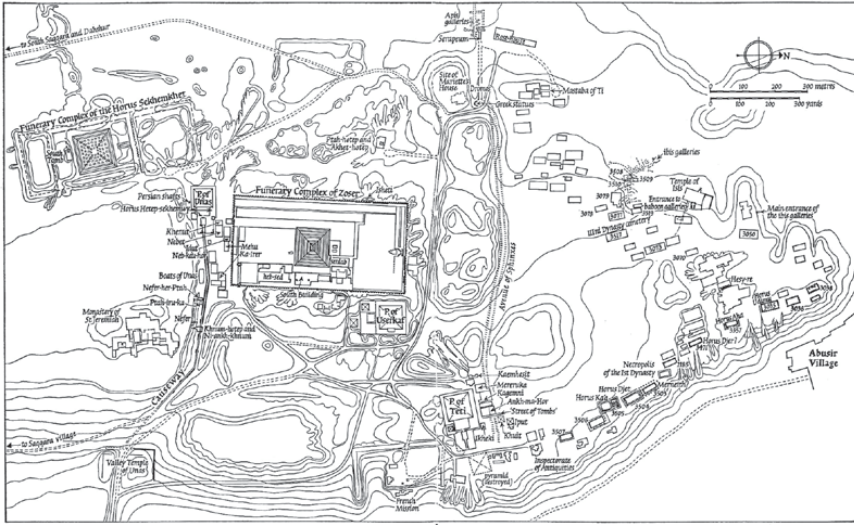
Fig. 3. Quarry terraces left after exploitation during the construction of Djoser's pyramid – photograph of the model.



Fig. 4. Façade of Vizier Merefnebef's funerary chapel (early Sixth Dynasty).



Fig. 5. Corridor in a collective tomb from the final phase of the Old Kingdom, hewn into the eastern wall of the 'Dry Moat.'



II. 2. Plan: Saqqara around the pyramid of Djoser.

The eastern edge of the plateau lies adjacent to a wide streak of fertile land, hydrated with canals, a dense network of which leads to the edge of the Nile's bank. Monumental buildings, temples and the palace of Memphis, the capital of Egypt in the third millennium BC, lay between the river and the necropolis. The largest of these was the temple of the god Ptah, who stood at the top of the local pantheon of deities. This was where the pharaohs were crowned, even if they resided far from Memphis and even if they were not native Egyptians, as occurred frequently in the first millennium BC.

The ruins of this large cosmopolitan metropolis have been preserved to this day in fragmentary form. Here and there, among the cultivated fields or palm groves, a stone block decorated with hieroglyphs or a part of an enormous abode brick wall protrude from the earth.

The ancient cemetery, covered with a thick layer of sand, has been preserved in much better shape. In antiquity, this city of the dead was full of 'life.' During the day, priests would hurry about in between the tombs, carrying out their duties related to the cult of the ancestors, especially that of the pharaohs revered as holy. The families of various dignitaries, who had departed on their journey to the Land of Osiris, i.e. the afterworld, would also come to visit. The tombs currently being discovered by archaeologists were frequently silent witnesses to the tragedies that played out in even the most noble of households after its head had departed. The beautiful bas-reliefs and paintings decorating the walls enable reading between the lines of

the hieroglyphic inscriptions and sequences of idyllic scenes about what was actually going on in the land of the pharaohs.

Already in antiquity, the dignified atmosphere of this place frequently transformed at night, when well-organised bands of thieves looted the necropolis. Their main objects of interest were the sarcophagi containing the bodies of the deceased, but primarily the artefacts made from precious metals which belonged to the tomb's endowment. The looters were completely uninterested in the deceased's body; usually they had not even a grain of respect for this incarnation of the god Osiris. Dismembered body parts are sometimes found outside the place a person had been buried, for example on the lid of the sarcophagus, or sometimes once again placed in the original spot but in fragments. All of this indicates that the looters were not only exceptionally knowledgeable about the topography of the tombs but also masters of camouflage.

Along with profaning the corpse, they were also capable of scoffing at the cemetery guardians, and – indirectly – at present-day discoverers. When a dried bouquet of flowers was found by archaeologists almost 100 years ago on a sealed stone sarcophagus of one of the Third-Dynasty rulers, they had expected to find an intact burial. The sarcophagus turned out to be empty. Things were none the different a few dozen years ago, when the most famous of all currently living Egyptian archaeologists rallied television stations from around the world to make a direct transmission of the opening of a sarcophagus in one of the tombs next to the pyramids from the Old Kingdom period in Giza, not far from Saqqara. Everything seemed to indicate that the sarcophagus was intact. When the heavy sealed lid was lifted, the millions of people gathered in front of their TVs across the continents were presented with an empty interior. A similar surprise but in connection to a tomb 500 years younger awaited Polish archaeologists conducting excavations in Saqqara. This time the object of our hopes for finding an intact corpse and funerary equipment was a coffin elaborately plaited from Nile reeds, standing in a rock burial chamber at the bottom of a deep shaft. The lid was attached to the trunk with a wide ribbon tied into a bowknot. What did we find inside? Three ossicles as reminiscences of the dismembered corpse. Observing the various pieces of evidence testifying to the cunning and cynicism of the ancient treasure hunters, who seem to have gone about 'redistributing' the goods placed in the tomb next to the body of the deceased very soon after the funeral, we would be justified in thinking that they not only scoffed at the Egyptian world of the gods but also cooperated, if in secret, with the professional guardians in charge of protecting the peace and quiet of the dead. In these respects, not much has changed to this day.

The choice of a location for Egypt's capital at the beginning of the Old Kingdom era was not random. Somewhat further to the north, the life-giving

Nile, after having travelled in solitude through modern-day Sudan and Egypt, branches out into multiple arms, forming the vast Delta. This huge plain with exceptionally fertile and well-hydrated soil is Lower Egypt, which in the last centuries of antiquity and the first centuries of our era was considered to be ‘Rome’s granary.’ The area located south of the Delta is Upper Egypt. Life here was concentrated in a narrow, few-kilometre-large stretch of fertile land, adjacent to both banks of the Nile, and in a few oases lying among the desert sands in the western part of the country. This is where the great centres of administration, religion and culture came into being, such as Thebes (today’s Luxor), Abydos, Edfu, Dendera or Elephantine (an island on the Nile in modern-day Aswan).

Located at a spot connecting Upper and Lower Egypt, Memphis was an ideal setting for the central seat of power. This was the function it performed from the beginnings of the reign of the Third Dynasty, following the consolidation of the state formed from the merging of the two parts of the country. However, already a few centuries earlier, at the turn of the fourth and the third millennia, an important administrative centre had developed here, evidence of which is the necropolis for those in power during the reign of the First and the Second Dynasties.

Saqqara’s landscape looked completely differently than it does today. In the northern part of the territory, there was an extensive lake, which today is only recalled by a depression covered with sand. Settlement developed around the lake, and a *wadi* (hollow), the area’s main traffic route, ran southwards. The rocky plateau was interspersed with gullies running from the east to the west, down which streams periodically would flow, escaping finally out into the lakes located in spots where today there are only cultivated fields.¹

The plateau, situated in the middle of this terrain, was used since the earliest times for sepulchral purposes. During the reign of the First and the Second Dynasties, i.e. in the first centuries of the third millennium BC, enormous tombs were built here, which archaeologists for a long time considered as having belonged to the first pharaohs (II. 2). Up until the 1960s, Egyptologists were divided into two groups: those that believed the oldest royal necropolis of united Egypt was located in Saqqara and those attributing the monumental tombs erected in the Upper Egyptian Abydos with housing the first rulers. To be sure, supporters of the first of these theories included the discoverers of the archaic necropolis in Saqqara, i.e. the Englishmen James

1 F. Welc, J. Trzciński, “Geology of the Site,” in: K. Myśliwiec (ed.), *Old Kingdom Structures between the Step Pyramid Complex and the Dry Moat* (Saqqara V, Part 2), Warsaw 2013, pp. 323–343, pl. CLI–CLXI.

E. Quibell (1867–1935) and Cecil M. Firth (1878–1931), who conducted excavations between 1920 and 1930, and later Walter B. Emery (1902–1971), who continued with their work between 1936 and 1956. The dispute was only finally resolved by the studies done by two prominent researchers from the younger generation. The first of these was the Englishman Barry Kemp, who in 1967, after analysing the entire archaeological context, opted for the Upper Egyptian Abydos as the burial place of the first pharaohs, as confirmed by the excavations conducted there by the German researcher Günter Dreyer (1943–2019) from 1977. The ‘royal’ tombs in Saqqara turned out to be ‘only’ the burial places of some of the many noblemen of that time.²

However, this necropolis bears enormous significance to the development of our knowledge about the role Memphis performed since the very beginnings of Egyptian statehood. The site is also crucial for expanding our understanding of the further evolution of tomb architecture in Saqqara. The courtiers’ tombs were monumental structures consisting of an aboveground part and an underground one. The walls of the largest tomb, made from mud brick, were forty to fifty metres long and three to five metres high. They were covered with rich polychromy. Since they were built on the surface of a ca. 50-metre-high scarp, they must have been visible from afar, most probably also from the country’s capital, located 4 kilometres away. The underground part of these tombs was in the form of a rectangular chamber carved into the rock, divided into a number of smaller rooms by brick walls.

The oldest of these mastabas is dated to the period during which the king named Hor Aha, the second ruler of the First Dynasty, was in power. It contained exceptionally rich funerary equipment, including hundreds of pottery vessels with the king’s name written in black ink, wooden labels, stamps, furniture, flint tools, paddles and stone tools. It was surrounded by a double fortified wall, behind which, on the northern side, the remains of a wooden ritual boat were found, inserted into a hollow of the appropriate size and shape.³

One mastaba (no. 3504), attributed to the period in which a king by the name of Djet was in power, was uniquely decorated. From the exterior, the base of its walls was adorned with almost 300 bucrania, i.e. bull’s heads. Even though they were modelled in clay, they had authentic animal horns and these were associated with the ruler. Such symbolism survived until the end of the age of the pharaohs, taking on a variety of forms.

2 G. Dreyer, “The Tombs of the First and Second Dynasties at Abydos and Saqqara,” in: Z. Hawass (ed.), *The Treasures of the Pyramids*, [Cairo 2003], pp. 62–77; Y. Tristant, “Saqqâra à l’époque thinite,” *Dossiers d’Archéologie* 20 (avril 2011): *Saqqâra. Des trésors inépuisables*, pp. 8–13.

3 G. Drayer, “The Tombs,” pp. 70–71.

A series of further innovations, both in the administration of the state and in the architecture of the mastabas, began during the reign of a king called Dwen. Imitating the tomb of the ruler erected in Abydos, the architecture of Saqqaran mastabas was enriched through the addition of stairs leading to the sepulchral chamber. Following the funeral, the entrance to the tomb was blocked with a single slab or a few heavy stone plates (Eng. *portcullis*). Towards the end of the reign of the First Dynasty, the risalit (avant-corps, i.e. divided into niches) wall façade began to be replaced by a smooth front in which two recesses in the shape of ‘false doors’ were retained, located in the northern and southern part of the eastern wall. Similarly to the royal tombs in Abydos, some mastabas designated for the nobility in Saqqara are surrounded by additional burials. For example, 62 burials of servants placed in rows on three sides of the main structure were discovered next to mastaba no. 3504.

The tomb-house concept appears during the early period of the Second Dynasty’s reign. It is completely carved out in rock, while the layout of the chambers should be reminiscent of the interior of a house. In three tombs from this period (nos. 2302, 2307 and 2337), archaeologists even recognised chambers performing the functions of baths and toilets. The life of a nobleman in the afterworld must have met the highest standards possible.⁴

During the Second Dynasty’s reign, Saqqara became a royal necropolis. This period is one of the darkest in the history of Pharaonic Egypt. The kings resided in Memphis and built their tombs in Saqqara. However, in the last phase of this dynasty’s reign, a political schism occurred which led to its last two pharaohs, Peribsen and Khasekhemwy, being buried in the necropolis in Abydos. The inscriptions on the statues of this latter ruler mention the suppression of an uprising in Lower Egypt.

So far two royal tombs have been found in Saqqara, belonging to rulers from the Second Dynasty. These are enormous structures attributed to the pharaohs Hotepsekhemwy (the first of this dynasty’s rulers) and Nynetjer (its third ruler). Their underground parts are similar – they both have a long corridor with a few dozen side rooms (most probably used for storage purposes) leading to the funerary chamber. Their aboveground parts, in the shape of huge rectangular mastabas from mud brick or stone, were destroyed by the later funerary structures built for Unas, the last ruler of the Fifth Dynasty. The tomb attributed to Hotepsekhemwy (based on the stamp impressions found in its interior), the larger of the two, 130 × 46 metres in dimension, with a corridor located five metres below the earth’s

4 Y. Tristant, “Saqqâra,” p. 13.

surface, came to be discovered under the foundations of Unas's mortuary temple adjacent to the pyramid, while Nynetjer's tomb, situated somewhat to the east, was later covered by the ramp that led to the temple. The first royal tomb was discovered in 1901 by Alessandro Barsanti (1858–1917), while the second was explored in 1937–1938 by Selim Hassan (1887–1961). In turn, Günter Dreyer from the German Archaeological Institute in Cairo studied the much smaller (40 × 45 m) tomb belonging to Nynetjer.⁵

An even smaller (15 × 15 m) but similar in shape underground structure, discovered quite recently by the Dutch mission in the close vicinity of the two tombs mentioned above, might have belonged to one of Nynetjer's ephemeral successors, bearing the names Weneg, Senedj and Nubnefer. During the New Kingdom period, i.e. about 1500 years later, the ancient tomb was incorporated into a new one, dedicated to a nobleman called Merneith. It cannot be excluded that the underground part of one of the royal Second-Dynasty tombs was later included into the sepulchral complex of the Djoser pyramid, as thought by the German researcher Rainer Stadelmann (1933–2019).⁶ Such a structure might have been located in the area adjacent to the pyramid on the latter's west side, i.e. in the direct neighbourhood of the Polish excavation concession. According to another, equally plausible hypothesis, one of the royal Second-Dynasty tombs lies a few or a couple of dozen metres further to the west, i.e. inside the area of the Polish concession. Such a hypothesis would be confirmed by some of the more recent discoveries, which I shall discuss in more detail further in this book.

While the last two rulers of the Second Dynasty abandoned the Saqqara necropolis and, undoubtedly due to political divisions, ordered that they be buried in Abydos, the second of these, bearing the name Khasekhemwy, left a permanent trace in Saqqara in the form of a mysterious structure gigantic in size, the outlines of which are visible today on the desert surface on the western side of the Djoser pyramid. In the place called Gisir el-Mudir in Arabic, a mighty stone wall with niches lies hidden underneath the sand, enclosing a rectangle 650 × 200 metres in dimension, meaning that this area is almost twice as large as the surface of the funerary complex of the oldest pyramid. The recent studies carried out by the Scottish mission directed by Ian Mathieson (1927–2010) have not solved the mystery of this unique monument. They only made it possible to establish that in later times its terrain was re-used both for sacral and sepulchral purposes.

In ca. 2650 BC, i.e. at the beginning of the reign of the Third Dynasty, a tomb was built in Saqqara, marking one of the breakthrough moments in

5 G. Dreyer, "Aktuelles von der Grabanlage des Ninetjer," *Sokar* 14 (2007), pp. 6–7.

6 R. Stadelmann, *Die ägyptischen Pyramiden. Vom Ziegelbau zum Weltwunder*, Mainz am Rhein 1985, pp. 37–40.

the history of monumental architecture. This is the famous ‘step pyramid,’ the work of the legendary architect, priest and doctor called Imhotep. The first pyramid in the world.

The revolution began with the introduction of stone into the construction of mastabas, i.e. the aboveground part of the royal tomb. It had been initially assumed that this would be the shape that the Djoser tomb would take. However, the mastaba was expanded a few times widthways and upwards, which resulted in the tomb acquiring the shape of a ‘step pyramid’ (Figs. 1–2). This exceptional structure became the object of special cult in Pharaonic Egypt, while its creator was worshipped for thousands of years as a holy sage. He must also have been buried in the vicinity of his achievement; however, Imhotep’s tomb has thus far not been found, even though archaeological missions from a variety of countries have searched for it.⁷ It cannot be excluded that it had been located on the western side of the pyramid, in the area currently being studied by Polish archaeologists.

Even though the oldest pyramid owes its final shape to the gradual expansion of the initial mastaba, it might have been inspired by earlier, much smaller cult structures similar in form. Some researchers want to see an archetype in the holy *benben* stone, which was located in the cult centre of the sun god, Heliopolis, on the opposite, eastern side of the Nile. A closer analogy is presumed by other Egyptologists in the *tumuli*, which crowned the tombs of the elites from the archaic period in the above-described necropolis in northern Saqqara and the tombs of the rulers from this era in the royal necropolis in Abydos. One of the Saqqara tombs (S 3038), dated to the reign of a ruler named Anedjib, was in the form of steps, reminiscent of the Djoser pyramid.⁸

This pyramid is only the main point of a huge funerary complex encompassing many aboveground stone structures, the functions of which in many cases remain to this day a mystery, as well as a complex system of underground chambers and corridors carved into rock. The function of the sarcophagus containing the ruler’s body was performed by a granite chamber (1.6 × 2.9 m) at the bottom of a deep (27 m) shaft underneath the pyramid. Understanding the functions of the individual elements of this conglomerate is not made any easier by the fact that after Djoser’s death, the insides of his pyramid were re-used as a burial site for various people, which led to a mixing of archaeological contexts. It was also not left untouched by looters in modern times.

7 A. Labrousse, “Imhotep divinité emblématique,” *Dossiers d’Archéologie* 20 (avril 2011): *Saqqâra. Des trésors inépuisables*, pp. 36–39.

8 G. Dreyer, “The Tombs,” p. 72.

Systematic scientific studies of the Djoser complex have been conducted since 1924. They were initiated by two English archaeologists, James E. Quibell and Cecil M. Firth, later joined by the Frenchman Jean-Philippe Lauer (1902–2001). The last of these devoted 75 years of his long life to Saqqara. He conducted excavations here up until his death, reconstructing some elements *in situ*, while simultaneously publishing the results of his work. He also instigated the construction of a monographic museum in Saqqara called the Imhotep Museum, which for 20 years has been one of the greatest tourist attractions locally, regularly exhibiting the most valuable moveable objects discovered by archaeological missions from various countries.

Following the 1992 earthquake, which led to the collapse of many weaker elements of the pyramid, the biggest challenge for Egyptologists in Saqqara has been securing this venerable building from further disintegration. The conservation activities are accompanied by archaeological research aimed at gaining a better understanding of its structure and history. This is being conducted by a Latvian mission under the direction of the French archaeologist Bruno Deslandes. Using the most modern apparatus, including three-dimensional scanners, GPS, 3D geographic information systems (3D GIS), etc., the multidisciplinary team of specialists has identified the construction's structural pathologies, with its seven-kilometre-long underground labyrinths. It has discovered four new corridors dropping diagonally down underneath the so-called South House, re-established the coherence of the whole funerary complex's original concept and proven that the pyramid complex was in fact one big cemetery, in which, for example, the ruler's two daughters had been buried. The owners of the remaining 11 galleries have not yet been identified.⁹

The entire Djoser funerary complex was surrounded by a mighty wall (reaching a height of 10.5 m), referred to as a risalit or avant-corps wall, with its front lined with snow-white limestone blocks and a sequence of recesses moulded into it similar to the royal palace façades or the façade of the wall surrounding the nearby Memphis, the country's capital. At a distance of about 100 metres from this wall, the so-called 'Dry Moat,' a 40-metre-large and 20-metre-deep groove cutting into the rock, forms a rectangular shape around the pyramid. The latest studies done by the Polish mission have proven that the area between the risalit wall and the 'Dry Moat' was a quarry, the source of the raw material used in the construction of the

9 B. Deslandes, "La pyramide à degrés de Djéser révélée. Les dernières découvertes," *Dossiers d'Archéologie* 20 (avril 2011): Saqqâra. *Des trésors inépuisables*, pp. 30–35.

Djoser funerary complex (Fig. 3). A similar function was most probably performed by the 'Dry Moat'.¹⁰

In all probability, Imhotep designed one other pyramid, which was supposed to have been similar in shape to the Djoser pyramid. Located to the south-west, it was meant to have housed Sekhemkhet, Djoser's son and successor. Only the construction of its lower part was completed, with a tunnel leading to the funerary chamber from the northern side. A unique sarcophagus with a sliding posterior wall has been preserved in its interior. When it was discovered, it was sealed shut and there was a bouquet of dried flowers lying on its lid. However, it turned out that the inside of the sarcophagus was empty. Was it a cenotaph (a false tomb) or rather camouflage left behind by looters? Jean-Philippe Lauer put forward the hypothesis that the body of Djoser's prematurely deceased son was not in fact put to rest in the unfinished pyramid, but rather in the so-called South Tomb, a part of his father's sepulchral complex. This is by no means the only mystery linked to Sekhemkhet's tomb. To this day, no one has managed to solve the mystery of the death of the Egyptian archaeologist, Zachary Goneim (1905–1959), who discovered the structure in 1950. His body was found in the waters of the Nile.

The construction of the first pyramid was most probably one of the largest breakthroughs that ever occurred in the history of architecture. The idea for the monumental form of the pharaoh's tomb soon found its mimics among Djoser's successors. Each subsequent ruler wanted to have his own pyramid, while the first pharaoh of the next, i.e. Fourth Dynasty, Snofru, erected three of them, probably due to the technical problems he encountered during construction. The royal necropolis expanded further to the north and south of Saqqara, along the desert plateau neighbouring a belt of cultivated land.

The final resting places of yet another two Old Kingdom kings were also found in the direct vicinity of the Djoser pyramid. The first of these belonged to Userkaf, founder of the Fifth Dynasty. This ruler left a significant mark on the whole dynasty due to his initiation of the construction of so-called sun temples, which were reminiscent of funerary complexes for rulers – but instead of pyramids they had obelisks, symbols of the Sun God. This testifies to the growing significance of the cult of this deity, whose main centre was Heliopolis, a city located on the opposite side of the Nile, at a relatively small distance from Memphis. Sun temples, dedicated to the cult of the Sun God, with whom the pharaoh was associated already at that time, were erected in the area north of the Djoser pyramid. This is also where the pyramids and

10 F. Welc, "The Third Dynasty Open Quarry West of the Netjerykhet Pyramid Complex (Saqqara)," *Études et Travaux* 24 (2011), pp. 271–304.

funerary complexes were built for Userkaf's successors, the constructors of yet more sun temples.

Locating his pyramid, a structure named 'Pure are the [Cult] Places of Userkaf,' in the shadows of Djoser's pyramid, just next to its north-eastern corner, the founder of the new dynasty was most probably searching for a way to legitimise his power by basking in the reputation attached to the great pharaoh from 200 years earlier. While much smaller than Djoser's pyramid, this structure stands out due to the originality of the architectural solutions applied. It catches one's attention due, for example, to the harmony between the colours of the various types of stone used to build the courtyard with the pillars, which is the main part of the sepulchral temple adjacent to the pyramid from the south. The black basalt paving of the floor contrasted with the pink of the granite pillars encircling the courtyard from three sides and the whiteness of the walls made from the best-quality limestone. There was a statue of the king made from pink granite standing in the southern part of the courtyard. While only his head has been preserved, its dimensions make it possible to conclude that the whole sculpture must have been about 5 metres high. This is the oldest known colossal statue representing an Egyptian ruler, alongside the famous sphinx carved out in rock in front of the pyramids in Giza, dating from the Fourth Dynasty.¹¹

On the opposite side of the Djoser pyramid, near its south-east corner, Unas, the last ruler of the Fifth Dynasty, erected his sepulchral complex. A ramp has been preserved to this day, linking the sepulchral temple next to the pyramid to the so-called lower temple, to which barges would arrive via a canal leading from the River Nile. On the ramp's lateral walls, fragments of some beautiful bas-reliefs have been preserved with very original subject matter, depicting, among other things, a group of starving Bedouins, which until recently was interpreted as evidence of the impoverishment of the Egyptian population towards the end of the Old Kingdom era.

However, Unas's pyramid is famous primarily for the *Pyramid Texts*, which were first carved onto its walls. This is the oldest written text of Egyptian religious literature, one of the first literary works in human history. The content of the *Pyramid Texts* indicates clearly that they were supposed to have made it easier for the deceased pharaoh to enter the world of

11 M. Verner, "The Pyramids of the Fifth Dynasty," in: *The Treasures of the Pyramids*, pp. 237–240; Userkaf's statue: K. Michałowski, *L'art de l'ancienne Égypte*, Paris 1968, p. 364, fig. 214; V. Brinkmann (ed.), *Sahure. Tod und Leben eines großen Pharaos. Eine Ausstellung der Liebighaus-Skulpturensammlung, Frankfurt am Main, 24. Juni bis 28. November 2010*, München 2010, pp. 77, 79, fig. 49.

the gods and transform into a divine being. Thus, they ensured his passage from death to life. These texts were supposedly recited by the priests during the pharaoh's funeral proceedings, but their magical effects also crossed over into the afterworld. The particular places in the tomb corresponded to specific regions of the realm of the dead. The *Pyramid Texts* were a collection of various types of texts, e.g. prayers, hymns, myths, litanies, spells, etc., which undoubtedly must have been created much earlier. They might also have been recorded on unpreserved papyrus, but they were first recorded on stone on the walls of the burial chamber and its adjacent rooms. Inside Unas's pyramid, the text is in the form of a compact sequence of vertical strips, in which the hieroglyphs were modelled using the sunken relief technique, then covered with blue paint, which contrasts with the snow-white limestone surface.¹²

The idea was imitated during the next period, that of the Sixth Dynasty. Towards the end of this dynasty's reign, the pyramids of subsequent pharaohs and of their wives were similarly decorated. In later versions of the *Pyramid Texts* completely new literary themes appeared, sometimes very surprising ones.

The finding of a block in the Pyramid of Pepi I with a text alluding to a legend about the homoerotic rape of the god Horus by the god Seth caused quite a stir in the scientific world. This episode had only been known up until then from documents written a few hundred years later and it did not cross anyone's mind that it had been present in Egyptian theological consciousness as early as in the Old Kingdom era, and perhaps even earlier.¹³ With time, the form the hieroglyphs took on to write down the *Pyramid Texts* also changed. During the reign of the Sixth Dynasty, such solutions were preferred as – for example – light green monochrome, symbolizing the rebirth and eternal perpetuation of the deceased, i.e. the main theme of this compendium of theological knowledge.

The *Pyramid Texts* were discovered in 1880 by the French Egyptologist Gaston Maspero (1846–1916), Auguste Mariette's successor and the organiser of the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation. He was also the first translator of the texts. His work was continued by the Swiss Egyptologist Gustave Jéquier (1868–1946), who added such discoveries as that of the *Pyramid Texts* inside the queens' pyramids, located south of Saqqara. In

12 M. Verner, "The Pyramids," p. 259; cf. The *Pyramid Texts* in King Pepi I's funerary chamber in Saqqara: A. Labrousse, "The Pyramids of the Sixth Dynasty," in: *The Treasures of the Pyramids*, p. 26

13 W. Barta, "Zur Reziprozität der homosexuellen Beziehung zwischen Horus und Seth," *Göttinger Miszellen* 129 (1992), pp. 33–38.

light of subsequent discoveries and research, new translations of the texts and interpretations of their function appear every so often. The author of the newest translation is the American Egyptologist, James P. Allen. The discoveries made towards the end of the twentieth century by a team of French Egyptologists, led over the course of a few decades (from 1963) by Jean Leclant (1920–2011), were a milestone in research into the *Pyramid Texts*. The newest studies on the architecture of the pyramids were conducted by Audran Labrousse.¹⁴

Similarly to Unas, the last ruler of the Fifth Dynasty, Teti, the first pharaoh of the next dynasty, and the last during the Old Kingdom era, also ordered that he be buried in Saqqara. He chose a place for himself near the Djoser Pyramid, on a plateau located to the north-east, not far from Userkaf's building. His reign began a turbulent period in history, characterised by plots against subsequent pharaohs, sometimes inspired by the highest dignitaries at their courts. The newest research is confirmed by the ancient historical text (Manetho), according to which Teti was murdered by his own courtiers. Some researchers consider Teti's ephemeral successor, shrouded in mystery, to have been the organiser of this assassination. His name, Userkare, is completely absent from the autobiographies of the dignitaries of the time, carved into the walls of their funerary chapels, but it appears in some of the kings' registers, even in much later times.¹⁵ Not all Egyptologists believe in the historical sources which suggest the ill fame of this ephemeral person. One of the French researchers from the younger generation, Vassil Dobrev, is even convinced of the existence of an unfinished pyramid belonging to this ruler, which Dobrev is currently looking for a few kilometres to the south of the Djoser Pyramid. Everything seems to point to it being precisely the short reign of this 'usurper,' whose exact relationship to the Pharaoh Teti's family remains a mystery, to which we should date the most beautiful tomb discovered so far in Saqqara by the Polish archaeological mission directed by this book's author.¹⁶

At least two conspiracies against Pepi I, Teti's son and rightful heir to the throne, are attested by the inscriptions carved into the walls of his courtier's tombs. Following in the footsteps of the dignitaries from the first

14 A. Labrousse, *L'architecture des pyramides à textes*, vol. 2: *Saqqara sud*, Le Caire 2000.

15 Ch. Theis, "Userkare. Ein ephemerer Herrscher des Alten Reiches," *Sokar. Geschichte & Archäologie Altägyptens* 30 (2015), pp. 56–67.

16 K. Myśliwiec, "Dating the Tombs of Merefnebef and Nyankhnepfertem," in: M. Bárta, F. Coppens, J. Krejčí (eds.), *Abusir and Saqqara in the Year 2010*, Prague 2011, pp. 651–663.

three dynasties, whose expansive tombs were located in the northern part of Saqqara, the court aristocracy from the final phase of the Fifth Dynasty and the reign of the Sixth Dynasty were also buried at the Saqqara necropolis. The largest and most beautiful of the preserved mastabas from this period neighbour the ‘step pyramid’ on its northern and southern sides. Increasing numbers of new tombs have been discovered since the middle of the nineteenth century by archaeologists from various countries. However, not all of them were properly explored and published by their discoverers; some have been waiting to be discussed in an academic publication for almost 100 years. As a result, a special challenge for the Egyptologists of our generations is to finish this work. Among the researchers who in recent decades have performed an especially significant role in terms of the scientific exploration, documentation and publication of tombs from the Old Kingdom period in Saqqara, two deserve special distinction: Hartwig Altenmüller from the University in Hamburg and Naguib Kanawati, the creator of Egyptology on the Australian continent with its main research centre at Macquarie University in Sydney.¹⁷

The hieroglyphic texts and scenes adorning the walls of these tombs (Figs. 4–5) are testimony to these turbulent times, during which grandeur and sophistication are interwoven with the first signs of the gradual decomposition of the country of the pharaohs. However, delving into these events is reminiscent of a trial based on circumstantial evidence, as the texts do not speak of them directly. Instead, rich information about the era can only be found in what can be read between the lines. The participants of the conspiracies against the king were punished severely, either by losing their rights to tombs at the royal necropolis or through the intentional destruction of their images and inscriptions in the tombs that had been carved earlier.¹⁸ Among the titles associated with the dignitaries and their progeniture, the *xntj-š* (pronounced ‘henti-esh’) function appears increasingly more frequently, the meaning of which has been intensely debated among Egyptologists for a long time, and which – as it would seem in light of the newest sources – refers to a type of custodian of public order serving the ruler, perhaps a type

17 Cf., for instance, the following source publications on the Saqqara tombs by these authors: H. Altenmüller, *Die Wanddarstellungen im Grab des Mehu in Saqqara*, Mainz 1998; N. Kanawati et al., *Mereruka and His Family*, Part 3:1: *The Tomb of Mereruka* (“The Australian Centre for Egyptology. Reports” 29), Oxford 2010.

18 N. Kanawati, *Conspiracies in the Egyptian Palace: Unas to Pepy I*, London–New York 2003; M. Afifi, “The Conspiracies in the First Half of the Sixth Dynasty,” *Études et Travaux* 26.1 (2013), pp. 25–29.

of police service to maintain the *status quo*.¹⁹ A general feeling of lack of security and fear of tomorrow can be discerned even in the new arrangement and functions of the rooms in the particular tombs and in their decoration. At the same time, however, it is clearly visible that the ambitions of the dignitaries increasingly extended towards royal prerogatives. The forms of some of the inscriptions adorning the walls of their tombs could easily be confused for the *Pyramid Texts*, while individual elements of the architecture of these tombs are overlaid with polychromy imitating granite, a valuable building material characteristic for the temples of the gods and kings' tombs.

The largest noblemen's tombs from the end phase of the Fifth Dynasty and the beginnings of the Sixth Dynasty are located in Saqqara near the pyramids of Unas and Teti. The mastaba of Vizier Mereruka stands out within this second group due to its size and the wealth of decorations. The impressive number of rooms (49!) in the aboveground part is to some extent reminiscent of the slightly earlier Ptahshepses' tomb from the period of Pharaoh Niuserre's reign (Fifth Dynasty), located near the royal pyramids in Abusir, a few kilometres north of Saqqara.²⁰ In many respects, each of these monumental buildings imitates the royal sepulchral complexes. It contains, for instance, rooms for solar barges, which were to have been used by the tomb's owner to travel to the afterworld, as in the case of the dead pharaoh. The walls of each of the tombs were decorated with beautiful reliefs showing idyllic scenes from the life of the deceased. Some are faithful representations of the daily life of Egyptians, even including surprising humoristic elements. Many of the bas-reliefs repeat the motifs known from the decorations of the pharaonic sepulchral temples and the solar temples of the period. It is highly likely that they were made by the artists who served at the royal court.

However, it is not only art that expressed the close relationship between the highest noblemen and the pharaoh. Many of their careers were based on marriages with a pharaoh's daughter, which is a specific *signum temporis* for the end phase of the Old Kingdom era. This testifies to the courtiers' growing role and the conciliatory politics of the rulers, who were becoming increasingly more dependent on their subjects. In the case of Mereruka's marriage to King Teti's daughter, it resulted in a family conflict with very serious repercussions. This was mainly due to the fact that the princess was not his first wife. He had already had children with her predecessor, including 'the oldest son,' as the firstborn was called in Egyptian nomenclature, traditionally considered to be the tomb owner's heir. The new marriage forced

19 N. Kanawati, *Conspiracies in the Egyptian Palace: Unas to Pepy I*, pp. 14–24.

20 M. Verner, *The Mastaba of Ptahshepses. Reliefs*, Prague 1977; J. Krejčí, *The Architecture of the Mastaba of Ptahshepses* ("Abusir" 11), Prague 2009.

Mereruka into a propagandist lie, sure to lead to new conflicts, when his next male descendant was born, the king's grandson. The young man's name says it all: Meri-Teti ('Teti's beloved'). Part of Mereruka's huge mastaba was at that time designated for a funerary chapel for the young favourite, who usurped the title 'oldest son' in the inscriptions carved into its walls.²¹ One lie soon led to another. The very same inscriptions also refer to Meri-Teti as 'the son of the king from his body.' We can only imagine what feelings this must have evoked in his eldest half-brother.

These emotions soon found a material outlet when the ruling pharaoh passed away, the favourite's grandfather. The genuine 'oldest son' destroys Meri-Teti's images and his name on the bas-reliefs on the walls of his chapel, leaving behind his titles. His half-brother's reviled name is replaced with his own, which he then changes immediately after the new pharaoh, Pepi I, ascends the throne. He euphemistically takes a new name, Pepi-anch ('Long live King Pepi!'). Lopsided hieroglyphs were used to write this name in place of the hammered-out original inscriptions. Was the flattery deducible from this new basilophoric (i.e. one that contains the king's name) name enough to gain the new pharaoh's favour and recover his original rightful position in the family? It is hard to say, all the more so as the new ruler, Pepi I, was also Teti's son, and thus the uncle of the young man upon whom such painful *damnatio memoriae* (condemnation of memory) was inflicted. The new ruler might have limited room for manoeuvre, due to – for instance – the fact that he only came to power after Userkare was overturned. This latter's short term in power, which remains shrouded in mystery, need not have been a period of idyllic peace at the court. This can be confirmed by the conspiracies that mark the period of the first two pharaohs from the Sixth Dynasty named Pepi – this can undoubtedly be seen as expression of the intrigues that shook up the court. Almost all of the tombs belonging to the most distinguished noblemen from this period bear the silent traces of political conflicts fuelled by arguments over issues of inheritance that divided the families into opposing factions. We can trace this in detail in the funerary chapels of two dignitaries from this period, recently discovered by Polish archaeologists in Saqqara.

Special testimony of the rising role of the courtiers, as well as of the pharaoh's increasing dependency on the administration, comes in the form of a long autobiographic inscription preserved in the Upper Egyptian Abydos on the walls of the tomb belonging to a dignitary called Uni. We can find out that

21 N. Kanawati et al., *Mereruka and His Family*, Part 1: *The Tomb of Meryteti* ("The Australian Centre for Egyptology. Reports" 21), Oxford 2004, pp. 7–44.

the tomb's owner obtained increasingly higher privileges and offices during the reigns of three subsequent rulers: Teti, Pepi I and Merenre I. According to the most shocking information, Uni was appointed by Pharaoh Pepi I to pass judgement on his wife, the queen, implicated in a palace conspiracy against her own husband. Uni boasts, "The clandestine process against the king's wife, his favourite, took place at the harem. His Majesty told me to pass judgement myself, without the presence of any other vizier or clerk aside from myself ..., because His Majesty trusted me Never in the past had anyone of my status learnt any of the secrets of the harem." None of the preserved written records makes it possible to presume that any such situation took place at any other time in the history of Egypt.

Based on the preserved historical sources, it is nowadays assumed that at least two such plots against the king occurred during Pepi I's reign, resulting in progressing political anarchy. Subsequent administrative reforms led to an increase in civil service employment while simultaneously weakening the pharaoh's power. As already mentioned, there was a noticeable rise in the importance of the dignitaries referred to as *xntj-š*.

Despite various signs of the progressing weakening of central authority, the last dynasty of the Old Kingdom (VI) period ruled for about 150 years. It left behind four pyramids in Saqqara, the burial places of the rulers Teti, Pepi I, Merenre I and Pepi II. The last three of these are located in the southern part of the area today called Saqqara. However, they were not the first royal tombs in this area. The earliest ruler who had himself buried there was Shepseskaf, the last pharaoh of the Fourth Dynasty. For unknown reasons, he abandoned the tradition followed by his predecessors, for whom monumental pyramids were erected in Giza. The reasons must have been so important that not only was the place of burial changed but also the shape of the tomb. Karl Richard Lepsius (1810–1884), one of Saqqara's first researchers, defined this shape as a huge sarcophagus (95 m long, 67 m wide, 18 m high) with a vaulted (= convex) lid and vertical walls made from mud brick. Placed on a huge foundation platform, it initially had diagonal walls, covered with limestone in their upper parts, and with granite in the lower ones. The burial chamber was in the shape of the letter T, approached via a corridor with three stone blockades. The architectural innovations introduced into the burial chamber of this unique monument later became typical for pyramids from the end of the reign of the Fifth (beginning with Djedkare Izezi) and the Sixth Dynasties. Partially discovered by Auguste Mariette in 1858, Shepseskaf's tomb was later (in 1924–1925) excavated by Gustave Jéquier, who interpreted the originality of its form as an expression of the profound changes in the political theology of the period, the attempt to break with the Heliopolitan dogma, and what follows – with the overpowering influence of the sun god's clergy. The hypothesis can also not be excluded

according to which this building's form was a type of archaism with references to the ancient tradition of the Lower Egyptian religious centre of Buto. The unfinished interior of this monumental sarcophagus and the lack of any sort of funerary equipment enable putting forward the supposition that the tomb's owner was never actually buried there.

The pyramids of Sixth Dynasty rulers, erected not far from Shepseskaf's tomb, were not equal in terms of their size and construction techniques to the monumental funerary architecture of the Fourth dynasty, i.e. the largest pyramids (belonging to Cheops, Chephren and Mykerinos) located in Giza, the northern part of the Memphis necropolis. However, the bas-relief decoration of the walls in the funerary temples adjacent from the east to the pyramids of the Sixth Dynasty belong to the greatest works of Egyptian art.

Right next to Pepi I's pyramid, similar though much smaller ones were erected for the pharaoh's six wives and his son named Hor-Netjerikhet, who had probably died before he could ascend the throne. Among the queens' pyramids, Ankhesenpepi II's structure stands out. She was the wife of two subsequent pharaohs and the mother of a third ruler, as well as the regent queen until her son came of age. Her tomb was the first queen's pyramid to be decorated with the *Pyramid Texts*. She was bestowed this honour usually set aside for rulers. A similar decoration was later given to three of the four wives of the Sixth Dynasty's last pharaoh, Pepi II.

The reign of this last ruler marks the end of the Old Kingdom era, the first of three long periods of the might of ancient Egypt. The reasons behind its fall might have been very diverse. The changes in the political and social structure of the country, undoubtedly resulting from the expansion and increasing significance of the civil service, were also influenced by the climate fluctuations that occurred towards the end of the third millennium BC. Periodic droughts alternately with periods of torrential rain might have caused periods of famine, while the disruption of the traditional system of the redistribution of material goods gradually impaired the pharaoh's authority. For the first time in history, the mighty and well-organised country fell apart into a number of smaller centres ruled by local dynasties. Memphis, once the capital of the country, becomes one of such centres. A particularly telling sign of this collapse at the royal necropolis are the meagre tombs, frequently lacking in any type of decoration, with their underground parts forged into the rock, while the aboveground parts were made from adobe brick. There are also numerous collective tombs, containing larger numbers of primitively made shafts and chapels. The lack of inscriptions does not enable establishing whether families were buried there or anyone who could afford to think about the afterlife.

In the so-called First Intermediate Period, i.e. the turn of the third and the second millennia BC (the Seventh to the Tenth Dynasties), the royal

necropolis in Saqqara continued to be the place of burial of dignitaries, but they could no longer compare either in terms of their size or interior decoration with the mastabas from the Old Kingdom period. Most of them are anonymous tombs. Their aboveground part, made from adobe brick, were usually destroyed, while the burial chambers, dug into the rock at the bottom of shafts, were often looted by ancient thieves. There were frequent cases of collective burials, such as those discovered recently by Polish archaeologists to the west of Djoser's pyramid. One of them is in the shape of a long corridor with six rooms, irregular in shape, performing the function of cult chapels, and with over 20 shafts dug into the floor.²² The only decoration in the chapels are 'false doors' by the western wall, and sometimes also an offering table. The funerary equipment accompanying the deceased usually consists of a few pottery vessels, sometimes also a stone or bone headrest. Some of the deceased were buried in tombs from an earlier period. This situation was maintained for a few hundred years, even though a group of cult chapels decorated with bas reliefs have been preserved from the Middle Kingdom period, especially that of the Twelfth Dynasty. The bas reliefs contain inscriptions with the names of the tomb owners.

It is not until the middle of the second millennium BC, i.e. the beginning of the New Kingdom, that the Saqqara necropolis regains the position it held in the third millennium BC. This is primarily connected to the increase in the significance of Memphis as a religious, administrative and military metropolis. The beginnings of this renaissance occurred during Totmes III's reign, when Memphis became the seat of the Lower Egyptian vizier. It should however be noted that the northern part of the New Kingdom Saqqara necropolis began to develop slightly earlier, at latest during Hatshepsut's time in power. This development lasted without interruption until the reign of the Ramesses. Scientific research of the New Kingdom necropolis in Saqqara began in 1975, when the archaeological mission of the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden (the Netherlands) initiated excavations at the plateau running from the southern side of the 'step pyramid.' It was initially conducted with the participation of the London-based Egypt Exploration Society, while as of 1999 the excavations were pursued with the cooperation of the Institute of Egyptology at the Leiden University. The works were directed in turn by: Geoffrey Martin, Maarten Raven and René van Walsem. The mission's greatest achievement involved locating General Horemheb's tomb, the last ruler of the Eighteenth Dynasty.²³

22 K. Myśliwiec, "Fragen an eine Nekropole in Sakkara," *Sokar* 13 (2006), pp. 11–14, Abb. 15–16.

23 G. T. Martin, *The Memphite Tomb of Horemheb, Commander-in-Chief of Tut'ankhamūn*, Part 1: *The Reliefs, Inscriptions and Commentary*, London

Since 1980, the northern New Kingdom necropolis has also been systematically explored, encompassing rock tombs dug into the scarp of the Saqqara plateau on the southern side of Pharaoh Teti's pyramid. The French mission working under the direction of Alain Zivie has uncovered 15 new tombs. Both the above-listed teams have so far discovered about 50 noblemen's tombs from the New Kingdom period. In terms of their size and rich adornment, these tombs are frequently comparable to the monumental mastabas from the Old Kingdom period, though their form is completely different. Among the tombs of dignitaries buried in Saqqara during the New Kingdom period, the enormous structures erected during the final phase of the Eighteenth Dynasty, i.e. after the collapse of Akhenaton's 'religious revolution,' have huge historical significance. Memphis continued at the time to perform the administrative function of the capital of the country, even though in many terms it had to compete with the mighty Thebes (today's Luxor), where subsequent rulers from this period were buried in the Valley of the Kings. A naturalist artistic style, which somewhat earlier had been typical for Akhenaton's court art, can be found in the decorations of many Saqqaran tombs of Memphis noblemen. This ruler's monotheistic reforms were and continue to be considered by some as heresy, by others as a 'religious revolution,' while by still others – as the highest form of sophisticated theological thought, a kind of synthesis that moved towards monotheism. After the fall of Akhenaton and of the Egyptian capital he had established, which bore the name 'Aton's (god's) Horizon' (a place in Middle Egypt today called Tell el-Amarna in Arabic), his court was scattered between Memphis (north Egypt) and Thebes (the south of the country). Those buried in Saqqara at that time included a vizier called Aper-El, his son named Hui and the dry-nurse of the later Pharaoh Tutankhamun, a lady by the name of Maia, depicted in the bas relief with the young prince seated in her lap. Their tombs have beautifully decorated cult chapels, dug into the eastern façade of the Saqqara rock massif. This place was later called the Bubasteion from the name of the goddess Bastet, whose holy animals, cats, were buried here in large numbers in the form of mummies. The French mission discovered 15 tombs dug into the scarp of the Saqqara plateau.²⁴

1989; idem, *The Hidden Tombs of Memphis: New Discoveries from the Time of Tutankhamun and Ramesses the Great*, London 1991; M. J. Raven et al., *The Memphite Tomb of Horemheb, Commander in Chief of Tutankhamun*, Part 5: *The Forecourt and the Area South of the Tomb with Some Notes on the Tomb of Tia*, Turnhout 2011.

24 A. Zivie, *La tombe de Maia: mère nourricière du roi Toutânkhamon et grande du harem (Bub.I.20)*, Toulouse 2009; *The Lost Tombs of Saqqara*, [Toulouse] 2007; *Découverte à Saqqarah: le vizir oublié*, Paris 1990.

On the plateau extending on the southern side of the ‘step pyramid’ belonging to Netjerikhet (Djoser’s name recorded in inscriptions from the period of his reign), monumental tombs were built for the most important noblemen during the period from the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty’s reign throughout the entire Ramesside era (the Nineteenth and the Twentieth Dynasties). They were exceptionally majestic in appearance, with the above-ground cult structures built in the form of miniature Egyptian temples, but having an adobe brick core, overlaid with white limestone slabs. The wall surface was richly decorated with bas-reliefs and paintings, which in stylistic terms constitute an imitation of the Amarna period’s style. The most beautiful of these tombs was constructed for a general of the Egyptian army named Horemheb. He commanded the army during an exceptionally difficult period, when the country of the pharaohs, weakened by the ‘religious revolution,’ could easily have fallen prey to aggressive neighbours. While he was preparing the place of his eternal sleep in Saqqara, it most probably did not cross his mind that he would spend the last years of his life and die as a pharaoh. When he became the ruler of Egypt, he funded himself a new tomb; however, this time in a rock massif of the Theban Valley of the Kings, next to the tombs of the New Kingdom’s greatest rulers. That was also where he was ultimately buried, even though the decoration of the tomb in Thebes was never actually finished.²⁵

During the reign of the first Ramesses (Nineteenth Dynasty), Saqqara retained the splendour due a necropolis in which holy bulls were laid to rest. A person who especially expressed his predilection for this place already during his lifetime was one of Ramesses II’s oldest sons, Khaemweset. Instead of pursuing a political career and becoming entangled in the royal court’s intrigues, he settled with taking on the function of main priest in the Memphite temple of the local demiurge, the god Ptah. Everything indicates that he was an intellectual and aestheticist, who became passionate about the conservation of ancient monuments from the Old Kingdom period, especially in the Saqqara area. The renovator left behind a number of hieroglyphic inscriptions with his name, for example on the southern wall of Unas’s pyramid.²⁶ His mother, Ramesses II’s first wife, who bore the name Iset-nofret (‘Isis is beautiful’), was his life companion. She ceased to be ‘the Great Royal Wife’ when the famous Nefertari appeared on the scene, for whom Ramesses built a temple in the far-off land of Nubia (one of the two rock temples at Abu Simbel) and a beautifully decorated tomb in the Theban

25 E. Hornung, F. Teichmann, *Das Grab des Horemheb im Tal der Könige*, Bern 1971.

26 F. Gomaa, *Chaemwese: Sohn Ramses’ II. und Hoherpriester von Memphis* (“Ägyptologische Abhandlungen” 27), Wiesbaden 1973.

Valley of the Queens. To this day, we do not know where Iset-nofret was buried. We have cause to believe that her tomb is located in Saqqara and that her son made sure it was a place fit for a queen.²⁷

Among other structures, two funerary cult chapels also come from the Ramesside period. They belong to the priests of the Memphis temple of the god Ptah and were discovered by the Dutch mission in the last decade.²⁸ Unfortunately, the plundering of the tombs at the Saqqara necropolis began already at the beginning of that period, and it continues to this day.

The next period of prosperity in the history of ancient Memphis occurred during the reign of the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, which originated from the distant Kush, i.e. modern-day North Sudan. Pharaohs with negroidal features imitated the pharaonic traditions, especially those that were linked to the place of their coronation, Memphis. They willingly took on the names of Old Kingdom rulers as their enthronement names, built new temples to the Egyptian gods and renovated old ones, while their favourite headdress was a type of closely fitted cap, similar to the one worn by the Memphis god Ptah.²⁹ An especially valuable piece of evidence showing their renovative ambitions is a text Egyptologists refer to as the ‘monument of Memphite theology’ or (from the ruler’s name) the ‘Shabaka Stone.’ Carved into a large stone slab, it contains a unique presentation of the local theology of Memphis, much more abstract than the theologies from other religious centres. To begin with, Shabaka boasts that he had the text carved into stone, because insects might eat the papyrus on which it was initially written. Unfortunately, at a later date the slab was re-used as a mill wheel and for this purpose it was appropriately cut out. A significant part of this valuable document has not been preserved.³⁰

The archaïcising tendencies, visible in the religion, literature and art of this period, are characteristic for the next dynasty (XXVI). The rulers originating from the Lower Egyptian Sais were able to reunite the country under

27 M. I. Aly, “À propos du prince Khâemouaset et de sa mère Isetneferet. Nouveaux documents provenant du Sérapéum,” *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 49 (1993), pp. 97–105.

28 M. J. Raven, “La nécropole de Saqqâra au Nouvel Empire,” *Dossiers d’Archéologie* 20 (avril 2011), *Saqqâra. Des trésors inépuisables*, pp. 46–49; “Les serviteurs d’Akhénaton,” pp. 50–51.

29 K. Myśliwiec, “Ramesside Traditions in the Arts of the Third Intermediate Period,” in: E. Bleiberg, R. Freed (eds.), *Fragments of a Shattered Visage. The Proceedings of the International Symposium on Ramesses the Great*, Memphis 1991, pp. 111–113.

30 H. Altenmüller, *Denkmal memphitischer Theologie*, in: *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*. Bd. 1: A–Ernte, Wiesbaden 1972, col. 1065–106

an indigenous sceptre. As this occurred after a few hundred years of foreign rule, fascination with the ancient Egyptian culture was even more magnified. The tombs of the noblemen from the Twentieth-Fifth and the Twentieth-Sixth Dynasties discovered in various parts of Saqqara refer back to the best traditions of the previous époques. The tomb of Bakenranef, a vizier from the times of Psamtik I, the first ruler of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, was located in the scarp enclosing the plateau from the east. Discovered in 1820 and later visited by subsequent great Egyptologists of various nationalities (Jean-François Champollion, Ippolito Rosellini, Karl Richard Lepsius), it has been the subject of systematic studies done since 1974 by the Italian archaeological mission directed by Edda Bresciani.³¹

The originality of this tomb is linked not only to the exceptionally extensive architecture of the underground galleries but also the wall decorations, which constitute a real compendium of religious texts from various periods. Aside from the *Pyramid Texts*, we can find here the so-called *Netherworld books* from the New Kingdom, known mostly from the Theban tombs, as well as other texts, probably written by Memphite theologians. A text written in demotic script (i.e. very simplified script from the Late Period) onto the wall of the southern gallery, called the vizier's gallery, provides information that this part of the tomb was reused as late as during Nectanebo I's reign, the first ruler of the last local (XXX) dynasty, i.e. almost three hundred years after the death of the tomb's owner.

The tradition of burying noblemen in the Saqqaran necropolis was maintained until the Ptolemaic period. The largest collections of Egyptian art in the entire world contain enormous stone sarcophagi, with their surface densely adorned with hieroglyphic texts and religious scenes.³² Even though their exact provenience has not always been established, it is known that almost all of them come from Saqqara. In turn, the middle class was most often buried in wooden coffins with the surface beautifully decorated with paintings and inscriptions. Due to a lack of space at the necropolis, they were frequently gathered at the spacious tombs from the Old Kingdom period. An exceptionally rich conglomerate of such burials has recently been discovered by the archaeological mission of the Louvre museum, which has been conducting excavations under the direction of Christiane Ziegler since 1981 between the ramp of Unas's pyramid and the south-east corner

31 E. Bresciani, "Saqqâra à l'époque tardive," *Dossiers d'Archéologie* 20 (avril 2011): *Saqqâra. Des trésors inépuisables*, pp. 54–57; E. Bresciani et al., *Saqqara I. Tomba di Boccori. La galleria di Padineit visir di Nectanebo I*, Pisa 1983.

32 G. Maspero, H. Gauthier, *Sarcophages des époques persane et ptolémaïque*, vol. 1–2, Le Caire 1914–1939.

of the Djoser funerary complex. This rich material enables tracing the development of sepulchral practices since the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty until the Ptolemaic Period.³³ Up to four generations of men, women and children are represented in a group of about 60 deceased persons buried in this spot. Their genealogy can be reconstructed thanks to the inscriptions on the coffins. Among the inscriptions, scripts of various languages have been found, including Proto-Cyprian, Aramaic and Phoenician, which emphasises the cosmopolitan nature of the Memphite society during this period.

However, the greatest mark on the Saqqara necropolis during the period from the New Kingdom to the Graeco-Roman era was left not by the burials of noblemen but rather by those of holy animals. During Amenhotep III's reign, whose son, the famous 'heretic' called Akhenaton, rose to fame as a reformer of the Egyptian religion, holy bulls called Apis began to be buried. This holiest among all the animals revered within the Egyptian pantheon had its seat at the temple of the god Ptah in Memphis. The burial of each subsequent Apis was a great event of state importance. The mummified bull was buried in a stone sarcophagus placed in one of the underground chambers in the galleries carved into the rock not far from Netjerikhet's pyramid, on its north-western side. During the Ptolemaic period, i.e. over 1000 years after the New Kingdom, the Graeco-Roman god Serapis was equated with Apis. The gigantic tomb of the holy bulls was called the Serapeum in reference to this god's name. However, no remains of any of the buried animals have been preserved to this day. Nonetheless, the artefacts found in the direct vicinity of their sarcophagi are extremely important for the reconstruction of the history of ancient Egypt. This group primarily includes votive stelae placed there by the 'sponsors' of subsequent burials.³⁴ The inscriptions written on the stelae include, among other information, the date of the funerals provided in reference to the reigns of subsequent rulers, as well as the genealogies of the noblemen. It would be hard to overestimate the significance of this source for the reconstruction of history, especially for establishing the chronology of the so-called Third Intermediate Period (Dynasties XXI–XXV), encompassing almost the entire first half of the first millennium BC, i.e. from the fall of the New Kingdom until the renaissance of Egyptian statehood under the reign of local rulers (the Twenty-sixth Dynasty).

The moment of the discovery of the Serapeum in 1850 by the Frenchman Auguste Mariette (1821–1881) is a very special date for Egyptology. In

33 Ch. Ziegler et al., *Les tombes hypogées de Basse Époque: F7, F17, H, j1, Q, n1* ("Fouilles d du Louvre à Saqqara" 2), Paris–Louvain 2013.

34 M. Malinine, G. Posener, J. Vercoutter, *Catalogue des stèles du Sérapéum de Memphis*, vol. 1, Paris 1968.

less than 30 years after the deciphering of the hieroglyphs by Jean-François Champollion, the archaeology of ancient Egypt was born as an academic field with a methodology that went far beyond the realm of simply collecting objects. This refers to both the observation of the archaeological context during excavations and the precise documentation of the artefacts. The methods used in the middle of the nineteenth century of course differed, especially in technical aspects, from the methods applied by modern-day archaeology in Egypt; however, it was at that time when the academic foundations of the approach to the object of study were formulated.

The area surrounding the Serapeum was the most important part of Saqqara in the fourth century BC, i.e. during the reign of the local pharaohs (the Thirtieth Dynasty) and in the early Ptolemaic period. Between the Serapeum and Teti's pyramid, slightly to the north of Djoser's pyramid, a road ran that doubtless performed an important ritual function. The roadside was decorated with statues, while close to the Serapeum an unusual monument was located, referred to today as the Ptolemaic exedra. A few dozen large statues depicting famous Greek poets and philosophers, made from local, extremely fragile, grey-coloured limestone, were placed on a plinth in the shape of a horseshoe. What were Greek figures doing standing nearby the mummies of holy bulls? The research done by the Polish archaeologist, Michał Pietrzykowski, who passed away prematurely (1946–1993), showed that the hemicycle (another Greek name for the exedra) was made in the first half of the Ptolemaic period, while the statues, unfortunately only fragmentarily preserved, portrayed ancient philosophers and poets, whom Alexander the Great considered to be his most important figures of authority.³⁵ Was this then a monument to commemorate the place of burial of the great commander, considered in Egypt to have been not only its liberator from the Persian yoke but also a pharaoh and a god? In one of the following chapters of the book, we shall see that such an interpretation fits some of the discoveries made by Polish archaeologists at a distance of only a few hundred metres from this site.³⁶

On the northern side of the above-mentioned *dromos* (road), running from east to west, lies the area of the holy animals, mummified and buried here in the underground galleries for the entire final one thousand years of the history of ancient Egypt, and especially in the second half of the first millennium BC. It was precisely these mummies that were the greatest attraction for the first European explorers, who in modern times have made their way

35 M. Pietrzykowski, *Rzeźby greckie z Sarapeum memfickiego. Studium ikonograficzne*, Warszawa 1976, especially pp. 135–145.

36 See chapter 10 of this book, fn. 53–64.

to Saqqara. These included, for example, Richard Pococke (1704–1765), who described his visits to ‘ditches’ and ‘shafts’ containing birds. Systematic academic research has been done here by English archaeologists, first – in 1962–1971 – under the direction of Walter B. Emery (1903–1971), and since the 1990s – that of Harry S. Smith, Sue Davies and Paul T. Nicholson.³⁷

However, Emery was not interested in birds; it was his ambition to discover the tomb of Imhotep, the creator of the first pyramid. He therefore focused on the tombs of the noblemen from the Third Dynasty located in the western part of the Saqqara plateau, north-east of the entrance to the Serapeum. When he found a large amount of votive pottery from the Late Period and pottery sherds that served as the coffins for mummified birds, he considered them to be a hint indicating where the tomb of the deified architect might be located. However, instead of finding the tomb of the legendary Imhotep, he came across the entrance to a catacomb with mummified monkeys, which – similarly as in the case of the ibis – were a zoomorphic incarnation of the god of wisdom, Thoth. In contrast to the ibis, which were mostly buried in thousands of terracotta vessels, each of the monkeys had its own individual niche. The animal mummy lay in a wooden reliquary, around which the hollow was fully filled with gypsum.³⁸ The chamber was closed off with a limestone block with the animal’s biography inscribed onto it. Live holy monkeys resided in their seat inside the temple of the god Ptah in Memphis.

One of the newest revelations concerning this gallery involved the discovery of a camouflaged passage to a ‘new ibis gallery,’ which turned out to be a place dedicated to the burial of... falcons, the holy animals of the god Horus. Through such means, cosmic balance was maintained between the solar element (Horus) and the lunar element (Thoth).³⁹

Continuing excavations in the northern direction from the described galleries, the English researchers discovered a series of graves secondarily used as burials of cows associated with Isis, the goddess considered to have been the mother of the holy bull Apis. One such tomb was the departure point for the ‘Mother of Apis Catacombs,’ as the next gallery was called, this time reminiscent in its shape to the Serapeum. Similarly as the place of rest for the holy bulls, the Iseum contained numerous stelae dedicated, amongst others, by the stoneworkers and priests responsible for caring for these graves. The inscription on one of them mentions that the queen was visiting Syria

37 P. T. Nicholson, “Nécropole des animaux sacrés: dernières découvertes,” *Dossiers d’Archéologie* 20 (avril 2011): *Saqqâra. Des trésors inépuisables*, pp. 62–67.

38 Nicholson, “Nécropole,” pp. 63–64.

39 Nicholson, “Nécropole,” p. 64.

when the funeral took place, which can only be a reference to the famous Cleopatra VII and her meeting with Marc Anthony in 41 BC, which occurred after the Battle of Philippi in 42 BC. The oldest of the dated burials in this gallery happened in ca. 393 BC.⁴⁰

At the northern edge of the plateau, yet another 'ibis catacomb' was discovered. However, studies into the animal mummies indicated that various bird species had been buried there. Most of them had been soaked in tar or resin and wrapped in canvas; some had been treated with greater care and adorned with a painting or applique. The heads of several birds bear gypsum masks with polychrome surfaces. One of these is unique as it has the facial features characteristic for the Egyptian rulers of that period. The bird mummies from this gallery were also usually placed in ceramic vessels. In total, over a million mummified birds have been found in Saqqara over the course of the excavations done so far. They were proffered by ancient pilgrims and placed in sealed clay jugs. Among the other objects found in the bird catacombs, the most important is the archive of documents written in Demotic and Greek by an interpreter of dreams by the name of Hor, associated with the administration of the ibis cult.⁴¹

In 2009, excavations were initiated in the dog catacombs. These galleries were placed as early as in 1895 on the plan of Saqqara drawn by Jacques de Morgan. Current work done there is the joint venture of two institutions: the Egypt Exploration Society and the University of Cardiff. Dogs were buried on the eastern side of the Saqqara plateau. Long galleries run from the main corridor on both sides, sometimes entering the noblemen's mastabas from the archaic period. Everything indicates that the dogs were buried in a hurry, as in the majority they were lying crowded one on top of another. However, some belonged to dog elite, considered to be the incarnation of the god Anubis. As 'temple animals' they were granted the honour of being buried in special niches carved into the gallery walls. In turn, the mummies of the dog plebs performed the function of votive sacrifices. As the dog was considered to be the holy animal of Anubis, the patron of mummification, the galleries of dog mummies were named Anubieion.

During the excavations conducted by James E. Quibell in 1906–1907 in the northern part of the Anubieion funerary complex, the remains of a unique temple constructed for Bes, the patron god of women in labour, were discovered. Its walls were decorated with clay statues depicting the dwarfish Bes in the company of a naked goddess. The archaeological context of this

40 Nicholson, "Nécropole."

41 J. D. Ray, *The Archive of Hor*, London 1976; cf. *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, Bd. 5: *Pyramidenbau–Steingefäße*, Wiesbaden 1984, col. 427, fn. 84.

room also contained a group of votive figures of an erotic nature, including representations of men with huge phalluses. It is assumed that this was a place connected to the fertility cult or the location of the oracle.⁴²

The excavations in the holy animal catacombs are far from finished, among other things, due to the exceptionally poor type of rock in which the galleries and funerary chambers were carved. The research and publications on the discovered material will definitely last many more decades.

Saqqara was an important religious centre also in the first centuries of Christianity. South of Djoser's pyramid, a huge monastery dedicated to St Jeremiah was erected in the fifth century AD, one of the most beautiful buildings of Christian Egypt. In use from Justinian times until it was closed in 990, the monastery was beautifully designed architecturally, elements of which can be seen today in the Coptic Museum in Cairo.⁴³

Saqqara was never forgotten. Ancient authors, such as Herodotus or Strabo, listed it among the most important travel destinations in Egypt. Treasure seekers were attracted by the tombs of kings and noblemen even in the early Muslim period. Around 820, the Caliph Al-Mamun himself entered some of the pyramids. As late as in 1024, the inhabitants of Cairo made pilgrimages to places called 'Joseph's prisons,' located at the edges of the Saqqara necropolis. Saqqara was also visited by intellectual elites, including mayors, doctors, biologists, cosmographers, diplomats, mathematicians, etc.⁴⁴

In medieval Europe, an expedition to Saqqara was in good taste, especially as part of the pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Mummies became a trading item as belief in their therapeutic properties was common. Either a 'sticky' mixture with the addition of bitumen and tar or powdered mummy or even a piece of the mummy could help with stomach problems, wounds or ulcers. The medicinal use of mummies was mentioned in 1363 by Guy de Chavillac, Pope Clement VI's surgeon. A European in Saqqara would have a few of the graves opened in order to choose the right goods and expediate them off to Alexandria, from which they were sent by sea to Europe. 'Apothecaries'

42 J. E. Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara (1905–1906)*, Le Caire 1907, pp. 12–14, pl. 26–28.

43 J. E. Quibell, *Excavations at Saqqara (1908–1909, 1909–1910)*. *The Monastery of Apa Jeremias*, Le Caire 1912; R. Habib, *The Coptic Museum: A General Guide*, Cairo 1967, p. 162; C. Wietheger, *Das Jeremias-Kloster zu Saqqara unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Inschriften*, Altenberge 1992.

44 G. Lacaze, "Momies, idoles et pérégrinations aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles," *Dossiers d'Archéologie* 20 (avril 2011): *Saqqâra. Des trésors inépuisables*, p. 69.

would compete against each other to monopolise the ‘goods’ and dictated horrendous prices.⁴⁵

Yet the looting of Egyptian graves was not a European idea as the Egyptians themselves had been involved in such acts at least since the New Kingdom times (the middle of the second millennium BC), mainly in search of gold treasure. Trade in looted Egyptian artefacts continues to this day.

‘Visiting the mummies’ was a saying often used by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European travellers. With time, the hobby of collecting memorabilia developed: no private collection could go without its own mummy. Huge fortunes were made in a flash from trading in embalmed corpses. Among the precursors of mummymania, we should include the Polish explorer, pilgrim and diarist Mikołaj Krzysztof Radziwiłł ‘the Orphan’ (1549–1616), who made the pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1582–1584. He did not omit Egypt. Aside from the mummies, he was also interested in small items, such as *ushabtis* and amulets. For collector purposes, he also studied the tombs in Saqqara, as we can read in the diaries he wrote in Latin, later translated into a few other languages.

At the time, Saqqara was referred to as the Plain of the Mummies or the Sands of the Mummies. In 1615, it was visited by Pietro Della Valle, who left behind one of the most vibrant traveller’s accounts from the seventeenth century. He bought two richly-adorned mummies from the Roman period, which after many peregrinations finally made their way to the office of the Saxon elector, currently held in the Dresden State Art Collections. The multi-lateral fascinations of Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680), a Jesuit collector, led him to Saqqara, about which he wrote providing extensive quotations with long descriptions of the Saqqara necropolis written by Tito Livio Burattini, the chamberlain of the Polish king in 1638–1639. Kircher was the first traveller to publish a copy of the bas-relief from the Old Kingdom period. It depicts a scene in a slaughterhouse, which is typical for the noblemen’s tombs from the Fifth to the Sixth Dynasties at the Saqqara necropolis.⁴⁶

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the gallery of mummified birds in Saqqara was entered by, for example, Pèrre Vansleb (in 1672–1673) and Paul Lucas, the royal antiquarian (journeys to Egypt in 1699–1702, 1707, 1716–1717). The last of these also noted the bull’s heads, and even entire such embalmed animals buried in a wooden coffin adorned with gilding and polychromy. Next to the coffin, there were eight canopic jars, which Lucas considered to have contained the bodies of girls sacrificed to Apis.

45 F. Janot, “Le trafic des momies de Saqqâra,” *Dossiers d’Archéologie* 20 (avril 2011): *Saqqâra. Des trésors inépuisables*, pp. 74–75.

46 G. Lacaze, “Momies,” pp. 70–71, bottom illustr. on p. 71.

Today we know that the jars were filled with the entrails of mummified bodies. It is obvious from Lucas's account that at that time travellers entered the interior of the Memphite Serapeum.⁴⁷

The 1737 account by the English cleric Richard Pococke has become an important source for gaining some knowledge of Saqqara's topography. Whenever he was only able to snatch himself away from the prostitutes in Dahshur (a town located south of Saqqara), he would prepare detailed documentation of the artefacts in Saqqara. He measured the pyramids, described their state of preservation, provided their Arabic names and legends about them. His description of the necropolis specified the topography of the tombs, while also containing scrupulous records of the bird gallery and one of the noblemen's tombs.⁴⁸

The texts by the above-mentioned travellers are full of scientific hypotheses and fanciful interpretations. Hieroglyphs had not yet been deciphered. The next step forward was made by the prominent mathematician Carsten Niebuhr, who in 1776 called for more comprehensive studies of the tombs in Saqqara and Upper Egypt. He suggested that the hieroglyphic texts be copied, without changing even the slightest details, so that these faithful reproductions could be later used by researchers. Niebuhr can be considered to have been a scientific precursor of Egyptology.⁴⁹

What proved to be a breakthrough moment in its development was Napoleon Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt in 1798–1801. A large group of researchers of various specialisations joined the army as it travelled to the Nile, with the task of documenting everything they found worthy of note, especially artefacts from bygone eras. As a result, the monumental *Description de l'Égypte ou Recueil des Observations et des Recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'Expédition de l'Armée Française* (*Description of Egypt, or Collection of Observations and Research Conducted in Egypt during the Expedition of the French Army*) came into being, with subsequent volumes published in 1809–1828.

This work later found many imitators, especially in Italy and Germany. Similar compendia of knowledge about Egyptian monuments were soon created by Ippolito Rosellini (*I monumenti dell'Egitto e della Nubia*, Pisa 1832–1844) and Karl Richard Lepsius (*Denkmäler aus Aegypten und Aethiopien* – 12 volumes – Berlin 1849–1859; Leipzig 1913).

The deciphering of hieroglyphic writing by Jean-François Champollion in 1822 became a milestone in the formation of Egyptology as a scientific

47 Lacaze, "Momies," p. 72.

48 Lacaze, "Momies."

49 Lacaze, "Momies," p. 73.

discipline. Alongside Egyptomania, which did not cease for a moment and turned into the mass plundering of artefacts in Egypt, Egyptology as a science about the language and culture of pharaonic times began to develop. Researchers of the writing and language, which became an increasingly larger group, distinguished subsequent phases of their development. The Rosetta Stone became a point of departure in this research, found in the town of this name by Napoleon's soldiers and later handed over to England as the result of the peace treaty. The very same text is inscribed on the stone three times: once in Greek and twice in Egyptian, but using two different forms of writing – hieroglyphs and demotic script. Beginning with the reading of the names of rulers, which were almost identical in all three texts, step by step Champollion reconstructed the complicated system of hieroglyphic writing and the Egyptian language. Research into Egyptian language and literature continues to this day and is the domain of increasingly more highly specialised philologists.⁵⁰ Many mysteries still remain to be solved in this field; perhaps archaeologists will have to come to their aid by discovering yet another multilingual document.

Archaeology followed in the footsteps of philology. After the excavations at the Memphite Serapeum, initiated by Auguste Mariette in 1850, the Antiquities Service was formed in Egypt, which later took on the name of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, with the goal of putting an end to secret excavations, as well as to the trade in mummies and other artefacts. This was not achieved all at once. Fertiliser producers began to make money from embalmed corpses, used, for example, to fertilise the magnificent English gardens. Mummies were also used in the sugar refinement process, while the bandages from mummies served to produce paper. It was not until the twentieth century that Egyptian mummies ceased to function as an industrial good.⁵¹

In 1858, the viceroy of Egypt, Said Pasha, appointed Auguste Mariette to be the *Maamur*, i.e. the head of all work related to antiquity. His successor to the role of director of the Egyptian Antiquities Service was Gaston Maspero, who had discovered the *Pyramid Texts*. The Egyptian Museum was created, which in 1891 moved from its original seat in the part of Cairo referred to as Bulak to one of the former private residences of the Khedive Ism'ail Pasha in Giza, a neighbourhood located close to the great pyramids from the Old Kingdom period. In 1902, it received a building at

50 *Textes et langages de l'Égypte pharaonique. Cent cinquante années de recherches, 1822–1972. Hommage à Jean-François Champollion*, vol. 1–3 (“Bibliothèque d'Étude “ 64), Le Caire 1974.

51 F. Janot, “Le trafic,” p. 75.

Tahrir Square, constructed especially for this purpose. Nonetheless, despite its enormous size, it has long been too small, as for decades this was where all the most important artefacts discovered by archaeologists throughout the entire country, including in Saqqara, were deposited. The exposition is bursting at the seams, while the underground rooms are filled with chests containing thousands of valuable artefacts. Over the last half a century more and more regional museums of a monographic nature have been built, i.e. ones that only contain items discovered in a given area. Among the youngest, as well as most modern ones, we can include the small Imhotep Museum in Saqqara, owing its name to the creator of the first pyramid. Two new, impressively sized museum buildings are currently being built outside Cairo's centre, which are to relieve the Egyptian Museum of some of the burden, itself already being an architectural monument. The 2011 and 2013 political events have however delayed their construction.

Chapter 2. From Edfu to Saqqara: Polish archaeology in the Nile Valley

Abstract: Polish contributions to the archaeology of Ancient Egypt and Sudan alongside the Nile Valley. Seventy years of the “school of Mediterranean archaeology” created by Kazimierz Michałowski.

Keywords: Edfu, Alexandria, Faras, Tell Atrib, Theban temples, Naqlun.

Between the 21st and the 23rd of October 2007, an important international event took place in Cairo, entitled “Seventy years of Polish archaeology in Egypt.” It was inaugurated with the opening of an exhibition entitled “Polish archaeology in Egypt” (Fig. 6) in the Egyptian Museum, the same one in



Fig. 6. Polish-French excavations in Edfu (1937–1939). Professor Kazimierz Michałowski, director of the mission, with the French Egyptologist Jean Sainte Fare Garnot and Polish historian Jerzy Manteuffel next to Tell Edfu Hill.

which the mummies of the most famous pharaohs and the treasures from Tutankhamun's tomb are presented. The exhibition showed a few dozen of the most important artefacts discovered by Polish archaeological missions in this country throughout history. This provided a real cross section of Egypt's almost five-thousand-year-long history.¹

The second act of the event took place in front of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, next to the tomb of Auguste Mariette, whose pioneering achievements for the archaeology of the country have already been described in the previous chapter. Following the decision of the Egyptian authorities, a bronze bust of Professor Kazimierz Michałowski, the founding father of the Polish school of Mediterranean archaeology, was placed in the exedra containing the busts of the most famous researchers of ancient Egypt. The Polish scholar, and – along with him – Polish Egyptology, archaeology and science as a whole were awarded a symbol suited to the rank of our achievements in the field. The bust is the work of the sculptor Ewa Parandowska, one of the most prominent restorers to have worked with the archaeologists of the Polish school in various countries over the course of many years. Ewa captured his facial expression with great precision, portraying the most typical features of our master's character: his energy, discipline, curiosity and creative passion.

That same day, I returned to the museum in the afternoon to take a closer look at the exhibition as it had been difficult to squeeze my way through to the display cases during the morning celebrations. Much to my surprise, in front of the exposition of the artefacts from the Polish excavations, I saw a solitary figure, elegantly dressed, who turned out to be the museum director, Dr Wafaa El Saddik. "What are you doing here at this time of day? Have you already become so attached to the new artefacts?," I asked my dear friend. "I'm waiting for the president of Austria and his wife, who are in Egypt on a state visit," answered Wafaa. I have no idea how many more presidents, prime ministers, secretary generals and directors have since visited the exhibition. One thing is sure: aside from its high scholarly significance and museum value, archaeology also performs an important opinion-forming function that can hardly be overestimated.

The following day, in the headquarters of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities, an international symposium took place, during which renowned scholars from various countries talked about the significance of

1 A. Majewska (ed.), *Seventy Years of Polish Archaeology in Egypt, Egyptian Museum in Cairo, 21 October–21 November 2007*, Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw 2007.

the Polish discoveries and the cooperation between their missions and Polish archaeologists in Egypt. As a result, those gathered at the symposium came to the realisation that currently archaeological research is becoming more and more international. Many renowned Polish specialists in various fields are invited to join the excavations conducted by French, German, American and other missions. Our ceramologists and restorers are especially ‘popular.’

The latter group brings us the most glory, as Polish conservation – especially in light of the post-war reconstruction of our country – has the reputation of being one of the best restoration schools in the world. The Egyptians were able to discover this for themselves, in particular in Deir el-Bahari (Upper Egypt), where – thanks to the joint efforts of our Egyptologists and restorers – two temples from the period of the Eighteenth Dynasty ‘are being brought back to life’ from thousands of fragments: the temples of the female pharaoh’s named Hatshepsut and her stepson, one of the greatest rulers of the country, Thothmes III (Figs. 25–28).²

Another showcase of Polish conservation activity in Egypt are the buildings from the Graeco-Roman and Byzantine periods in the centre of present-day Alexandria in the place called Kom el-Dikka in Arabic (Figs. 13–17). The anastylosis of the monumental colonnade accompanying the ancient buildings was the result of the work done by the prominent architect Sc.D. Wojciech Kołataj. Thus, it comes as no surprise that when, at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, Egypt was undertaking one of the riskiest tasks related to activities aimed at rescuing the monuments of Nubia from being flooded by the waters from the lake formed south of the newly-constructed Great Aswan Dam, Professor Michałowski was entrusted with the most responsible of the tasks. He directed the international committee of experts supervising the pioneering work of carving out two enormous temples (dedicated to Ramesses II and his wife Nefertari) from the rock in the Nubian Abu Simbel, near the border with Sudan.

Following the remarkable success of Polish restorers during the so-called Nubian campaign, organised by UNESCO to rescue the monuments in the area to be flooded after the construction of the Great Aswan Dam, when Poland – as the press wrote all around the world – “won the lottery” and performed “the Faras miracle” by discovering an Early Christian cathedral situated on top of the ruins of a Pharaonic temple, as well as separating a few layers of paintings decorating its walls (Figs. 7–8), and finally transporting them in part to the Sudanese National Museum in Khartoum and in part

2 Z. E. Szafrński, “Deir el-Bahari – Temple of Hatshepsut, and J. Lipińska, Deir el-Bahari – Temple of Tuthmosis III,” in: *Seventy Years*, pp. 91–114.



Fig. 7. Polish excavations in Faras (Sudan). Professor Kazimierz Michałowski supervising the removal of paintings from the cathedral walls.



Fig. 8. *Saint Anna*. Painting from the Faras Cathedral, currently in the National Museum in Warsaw.

to the National Museum in Warsaw,³ the international reputation of our school of conservation reached such heights that it obscured the academic achievements of Polish archaeologists. It was not until the anniversary exhibition at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo that the younger generation was made aware and the older generation reminded that the creative input of Poles into the archaeology of Egypt had not only involved rescuing monuments but also their discovery, academic research and publication, which in their majority had been done in the international languages.

Discussing the Nubian campaign and the discoveries in Faras, it is worth mentioning that the artefacts from Sudan, and especially the famous Faras frescoes, have become some of the most valuable exhibits in the collections in the National Museum in Warsaw, almost its showpiece. It may perhaps not house *The Gioconda* or any other works of European art of this class, but it does have *Saint Anne with a finger on her lips*, a masterpiece of Christian art in north-east Africa, captivating in its very simplicity.⁴ This piece painted by a Nubian artist was for years the emblem of our National Museum. No other European or American collection has at its disposal such valuable collections of Early Christian paintings from the Nile Valley. Both the Warsaw- and the Khartoum-based paintings from Faras are systematically subjected to conservation works by Polish specialists. The newest, most modern exposition of the Faras gallery in the National Museum in Warsaw opened its doors in October 2014.

Let us nonetheless return to Egypt. It is time to explain why a few years ago we celebrated the seventieth anniversary of Polish archaeological studies in this country. This was in fact the round anniversary of the first campaign of the French-Polish excavations in Edfu (Upper Egypt), directed in 1937–1939 by Kazimierz Michałowski (Fig. 6).⁵ The professor of the University of Warsaw had at the time received an academic scholarship to the French Institute for Oriental Archaeology in Cairo. Even then, he was already highly renowned in international research circles. The outbreak of the Second World War meant that only three excavation campaigns to Edfu took place; nonetheless, the significance of these studies was enormous, both for the archaeology of Egypt and for the Polish school of Mediterranean archaeology.

The ruins of the ancient Apollinopolis Magna fill today's Tell Edfu, a high hill located right next to the huge, well-preserved temple of the god Horus,

3 K. Michałowski, *Faras – malowidła ścienne w zbiorach Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie*, inscriptions translated by S. Jakobielski, Warszawa 1974.

4 Michałowski, *Faras*, pp. 78–80.

5 J. Aksamit, "Tell Edfu," in: *Seventy Years*, pp. 31–40.

constructed and then enlarged during the reign of the Ptolemaic Dynasty, i.e. in the final centuries BC.⁶ Before beginning the Polish and French excavations, the hill had been explored primarily with the aim of acquiring new texts written down on papyrus. Professor Michałowski initiated scientific excavations at this spot. The stratigraphy of the hill, encompassing a sequence of layers from the moment of the formation of the land of the pharaohs until the Arabic era, i.e. 4000 years, was finally meticulously investigated and subjected to analytical exploration. The archaeological context of all the findings, even the tiniest of them, and not only the papyri, was studiously recorded. The artefacts from all the subsequent periods were treated with the same attention, including those which had previously been ignored, such as the Arabic Middle Ages. Groups of artefacts previously barely noted by researchers have finally become an object of scholarly studies; for instance, pottery, a very important criterion in the dating of subsequent layers and testimony to everyday life in various eras. The bone material from the cemeteries was meticulously studied, which was a bit of a novelty, as even just a few years earlier enormous necropolises, including some in Nubia, were unearthed without any anthropological research done whatsoever. It can without a hint of exaggeration be stated that Professor Michałowski became the precursor of modern methodologies in the archaeology of Egypt.

One other, exceptionally important but rarely noticed, aspect of Professor Michałowski's excavations deserves to be emphasised as it played a primary role in acquiring new excavation concessions, when – 20 years later, after the end of the Second World War – the Polish researcher and scholar returned to Egypt. The professor was well-known for his natural kindness to the local workers. He talked with them, asked about their problems, advised them and – if he could – he would help them. He was very much liked and respected. They reacted immediately when word reached Egypt after the war had erupted that the professor was a prisoner of the Oflag in Woldenburg. The *rais*, or the boss of the Egyptian labourers employed at the excavations in Edfu, immediately packed some dried dates and rusks, after which he sent them by post to the German camp in occupied Poland. The package reached the addressee and lifted his spirit. He was actually more cheered by the very fact of receiving the parcel than by its contents.⁷ The professor was

6 K. Myśliwiec, "Edfu – zszanse archeologii," *Meander* 6 (1981), pp. 309–314.

7 K. Myśliwiec, "Five Wives & A Girlfriend. Exploring the Fabulous Tomb of a High-Living Politician," *Discovering Archaeology* (July–August) 1999, p. 65 (paragraph *Anonymous Experts*); V. Rezler-Wasielewska, "Profesor Kazimierz Michałowski (1901–1981), *Łambinowicki Rocznik Muzealny. Jeńcy wojenni w latach II wojny światowej* 32 (2009), Centralne Muzeum Jeńców Wojennych w Łambinowicach-Opolu, Opole 2009, pp. 54–55.

quite reluctant later to talk about the war period, but – if he did – he most frequently referred to this event.

The war and its political consequences deprived Professor Michałowski of twenty of the best years of his academic life. When he was finally able to return to Egypt towards the end of the 1950s, the exceptionally favourable disposition of the authorities of the Egyptian Antiquities Service also returned. This turn of events coincided with the propitious political situation for Poland after the revolution led by Gamal Abdel Nasser. The professor could have received practically any archaeological site he dreamt of. He was of course offered the option of returning to Edfu, which he refused out of loyalty to his French colleagues. The French Institute restarted work there thirty years later, but without the participation of the Poles. However, in 1996, a Polish and French academic symposium took place in Cairo, during which the researchers from both countries presented the results of their most recent studies concerning the artefacts from the French and Polish excavations in Edfu, considered to be the beginnings of the Polish presence among the pioneering countries of Egyptology and the archaeology of ancient Egypt.⁸

The presence of Poland should not be mistaken for the presence of Poles. Many of our compatriots, especially during those times when the country did not exist on European maps, travelled to Egypt and left behind abundant records in the form of descriptions and drawings, which sometimes – similarly as in the case of the testimonies of the journeys made by the French, English, Germans, Italians or the Austrians – are the only traces left of artefacts and monuments that no longer exist. These Egyptophiles even include such people as Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849), one of the greatest Polish poets.⁹ It is also worth mentioning the activities of the Count Michał Tyszkiewicz, a collector, who in 1861–1862 visited Egypt and returned with some magnificent artefacts that are today housed by museums in various countries, including France (the Louvre in Paris) and even Poland.¹⁰ The first Polish

8 *Tell-Edfou soixante ans après. Actes du colloque franco-polonais, Le Caire – 15 octobre 1996* (“Fouilles Franco-Polonaises” 4), Le Caire 1999.

9 J. Śliwa, *Badacze, kolekcjonerzy, podróżnicy. Studia z dziejów zainteresowań starożytnych*, Kraków 2012, pp. 401–402, fn. 2–7.

10 A. Niwiński, “Wyprawy Michała Tyszkiewicza do Afryki i jego kolekcja zabytków staroegipskich,” in: A. Niwiński (ed.), *Papirusy, mumie, złoto – Michał Tyszkiewicz i 150-lecie pierwszych polskich i litewskich wykopalisk w Egipcie (Papyri, mummies and gold – Michał Tyszkiewicz and the 150th anniversary of the first Polish and Lithuanian excavations in Egypt)*, *Wystawa w Muzeum Archeologicznym w Warszawie, 12 grudnia 2011 r.–31 maja 2012 r. (Exhibition, State Archaeological Museum in Warsaw, 12 December 2011–31 May 2012)*, Warszawa 2011, pp. 9–22.

Egyptologist to read hieroglyphs was Tadeusz Smoleński (1884–1909). He studied and participated in the excavations of Gaston Maspero, the discoverer of the *Pyramid Texts*. Unfortunately, Smoleński died young, leaving behind a legacy in the form of some very competent academic articles.¹¹ Bolesław Prus's book *The Pharaoh* merged ancient Egypt with our national culture. This text was in fact based on the most recent written sources available at that time and portrayed the spiritual culture of the pharaonic civilisation in such a way that requires few significant revisions today.¹²

The land of the pharaohs became such an important part of our own cultural identity that without any hesitation Professor Michałowski answered the question asked by some journalists of whether our country could afford to conduct excavations in Africa using the following words: “Poland cannot afford not to conduct excavations in Egypt.” The voice of reason led him to immediately add that “Poland could not afford to dig anywhere.” For this reason, he chose archaeological sites especially important from both the historical and opinion-forming perspective. The excavation *chantiers* of the founder of the Polish school of archaeology were and still are the object of much envy for many a foreign archaeologist. As a patriot, he also considered the possibility of enriching Polish museum collections by adding new artefacts. In these terms, the choice of Faras as the location of his excavations within the framework of the international action to rescue the artefacts of Nubia was a real bullseye.

One of the most important cultural layers uncovered at Tell Edfu by Professor Michałowski's mission dates from the Old Kingdom.¹³ This important administrative and religious centre, the capital of one of the provinces (*nomes*) of Upper Egypt, situated a few hundred kilometres south of the capital of the country, Memphis, took on special significance during periods when the authority of the pharaohs was weakened and their prerogatives, especially in more provincial areas, passed into the hands of the noblemen, who frequently created local dynasties, almost completely independent of the central authorities. One such period was the final phase of the Old Kingdom, during the reign of the Sixth Dynasty. The number and quality of the artefacts and monuments from this period, discovered during the excavations

11 J. Śliwa, *Tadeusz Samuel Smoleński (1884–1909) i początki polskiej egiptologii*, in: J. Śliwa, *Badacze*, pp. 61–71.

12 Cf. newest bibliophile edition: B. Prus [actual name A. Głowacki], *Faraon. Wydanie analityczno-krytyczne z ilustracjami Edwarda Okunia*, ed. by A. Niwiński, Warszawa 2014.

13 B. Bruyère et al., *Tell Edfou 1937* (“Fouilles franco-polonaises. Rapports” 1), Le Caire 1937, pp. 2–58; K. Michałowski et al., *Tell Edfou 1939* (“Fouilles franco-polonaises. Rapports” 3), Le Caire 1950, pp. 1–62.

in Edfu, are impressive. By virtue of the ‘partage’ (division) done following the last excavation campaign, the preserved part of the mastaba belonging to a high-level nobleman named Izi¹⁴ made its way to Warsaw. This was one of the most important artefacts, which following the excavations in Edfu formed the beginnings of the Egyptian art gallery in Warsaw. In turn, other unique artefacts from this period remained in Egypt, such as an exceptionally fine alabaster vessel of a ritual character, mesmerising in the elegance of its simplicity, adorned with hieroglyphic inscriptions engraved onto its surface. The inscriptions contain such elements as King Teti’s name indicating that the vessel was a special gift from the ruler to a high-ranking nobleman from this province.¹⁵ Today we would say this was a tangible material benefit of the best kind. It was precisely this vessel that represented Edfu at the exhibition at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of Polish archaeology in Egypt.

The quality of these artefacts reminded those visiting the exhibition of the Old Kingdom – the first apogee of Pharaonic culture, famous not only for its pyramids that were the burial places of kings but also for the exceptional level of its art in all its fields. One would think that after the discovery in Edfu of such important artefacts from the third millennium BC, the Polish school of Egyptology would have developed its research into the Old Kingdom after the war. However, the opportunity to deepen our knowledge about this period through making new archaeological discoveries appeared only towards the end of the 1950s, when the University of Alexandria invited Professor Michałowski as visiting professor. At that time, the Egyptian Antiquities Service offered him an excavation concession in Abusir, a place located a few kilometres north of Saqqara. This is an archaeological site at which rulers and noblemen were buried during the times of the Fifth Dynasty, the former in pyramids, while the latter in mastabas. The fact that Abusir was a necropolis that had been studied earlier only to a very small extent gave high hopes there would be great discoveries.¹⁶

However, at the time the Professor deemed the Polish academic staff underprepared for such a serious task. At Kazimierz Michałowski’s side, Tadeusz Andrzejewski, a real genius in the field of the language of ancient Egypt, had developed; yet, nonetheless, the entire Polish school of Egyptology, taking its first steps in the field, could not compete either in

14 J. Aksamit, *Tell Edfu*, in: *Seventy Years*, pp. 34–38.

15 J. Aksamit, *Squat Globular Vase with Inscriptions of King Teti*, in: *Seventy Years*, pp. 78–79.

16 J. v. Beckerath, “Abusir,” in: *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, Bd. 1: *A–Ernte*, Wiesbaden 1972, col. 27.

academic aspects or logistics with the large archaeological institutions that had long existed in Cairo, primarily the French and German institutes. As a result, Abusir became the domain and the showcase of Czech (at the time – Czechoslovakian) Egyptology, which was already legitimised by a considerable and uninterrupted scholarly tradition.¹⁷ In turn, Professor Michałowski modestly chose the Pharaonic province, if this is the term one can use to refer to the capital of one of the Lower Egyptian *nomes*, one of the most important administrative and religious centres from the Old Kingdom to the Byzantine era.¹⁸ Tell Atrib, the present-day Arabic name for this place, which is an eastern suburb of Benha, an industrial town in the Nile Delta, comes from the Greek name Athribis, which functioned for 1000 years (the Graeco-Roman and Byzantine periods), and which was the Hellenised version of the Old Egyptian Hut-(ta)-heri-ib(et), meaning ‘abode [located] at the heart’ or ‘abode in the middle’ (implicitly – in the Nile Delta).¹⁹ Like almost all the ancient cities located in the Nile Delta, once vibrant, teeming with life, creative and cosmopolitan, Athribis has been destroyed in modern times, to a large extent due to its climatic and geological conditions (the earth permeated by water from the thousands of canals cutting through the fertile land of the Delta), as well as by rapidly expanding industrialisation and chaotic urbanisation, especially at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. While archaeologists dug up the temples and tombs in Upper Egypt, which owed their relatively good state of preservation to the best conserving factor in existence in nature, i.e. dry sand, the Nile Delta, discouraging to archaeologists due to the complete lack of papyri and monumental buildings that had simply fallen apart, was for many decades a target for looters and hasty construction activities. The situation of the monuments in the northern part of Egypt became so dramatic that in 1979, during the second International Congress of Egyptologists, Labib Habachi, at the time the most renowned Egyptian Egyptologist, made an appeal that every academic institution applying for an excavation concession in Upper Egypt be

17 Among the numerous academic publications by the Czechoslovakian (later Czech) archaeological mission in Abusir, the twenty-five volumes of source material published in Prague in 1977–2011 under the direction of Professor Miroslav Verner merit special note. On the latest discoveries made by the Czech archaeological mission in Saqqara, see J. Krejčí, “Das Grab des Kakaibaef in Abusir,” *Sokar. Geschichte & Archäologie Altägyptens* 27 (2. Halbjahr 2013), pp. 26–37.

18 F. Leclère, *Les villes de Basse Égypte au Ier millénaire av. J.-C. Analyse archéologique et historique de la topographie urbaine*, Le Caire 2008, pp. 233–278.

19 P. Vernus, *Athribis – Textes et documents relatifs à la géographie, aux cultes et à l’histoire d’une ville du Delta égyptien à l’époque pharaonique*, Le Caire 1978, pp. 337–356.

additionally obligated to also undertake research in the Nile Delta. The significance of this proposal was heightened by the fact that the congress took place in Grenoble (France), i.e. the homeland of Jean-François Champollion, the founder of Egyptology.

Of course, the draconian principles proposed by Labib (as we referred to him in archaeological jargon) were never imposed. Nonetheless, his speech brought to the limelight the tragedy of this part of Egypt, which in antiquity had housed the most creative centres, open to other cultures of the Mediterranean, both Asiatic ones and European.²⁰ New civilisational trends flowed from here southwards, all the way to Nubia, where they merged with African cultural elements.

Undertaking excavations in the Lower Egyptian Athribis, Professor Kazimierz Michałowski once again turned out to be a precursor. He anticipated Habachi's appeal by almost 20 years. At that time, few archaeological missions conducted works in the Nile Delta area, exceptionally difficult in terms of the logistics (the high, fluctuating level of subsoil water), but extremely important from the academic perspective.²¹ The choice of Athribis as the first excavation field after the war was dictated not only by the historical role of the ancient city, which had disappeared underneath the foundations of modern-day Benha, but also by the field survey on the eastern edges of today's metropolis. In the 1950s, this was still an area completely lacking in buildings, while its surface looked like a battlefield following a long devastating war, on which many monumental temples – testaments to various époques – had perished. Granite blocks and fragments of statues with inscriptions bearing the names of the Ramesses lay alongside the remains of later structures, from Ptolemaic and Roman times. They were proof that for at least 1500 years Athribis had been an important centre of administration, religion and art.

However, the excavations initiated by Professor Michałowski in 1959 showed that the blocks lying on the surface must have been dragged to this empty area from other places, probably at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, when this ancient city centre was rapidly turned into the industrial city of Benha. Traces of former glory could be found almost everywhere, but who had then thought, while digging ditches for the foundations, about any kind of documentation, much less about excavations? Obstacles

20 F. Leclère, *Les villes*.

21 K. Myśliwiec, T. Herbich, "Polish Archaeological Activities at Tell Atrib in 1985," in: E. C. M. Van Den Brink (ed.), *The Archaeology of the Nile Delta: Problems and Priorities*, Amsterdam 1988, pp. 177–203.

in the form of inscribed stone blocks were removed, carried beyond the construction site, or shattered into pieces.

A similar fate awaited the small ancient pyramid recorded already at the turn of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries by the authors of *Description de l'Égypte*.²² It seems that this was one of a few buildings of this type constructed using mud brick, probably from the beginnings of the Third Dynasty, in different parts of the country, perhaps as a kind of cenotaph (false grave) similar to an authentic royal tomb, but fulfilling a political function, i.e. of consolidating the capital with the provinces in a recently established state organism. Only traces of the lowest layers of brick from the pyramid in Athribis, visible underneath the new hospital building located not far from the site of the Polish excavations, have been preserved to this day. A trace has also been left behind in the contemporary name of this part of the city: Atrib. This is yet one more piece of evidence of how urgent rescue excavations are becoming in the Nile Delta, especially in places that have not yet been subjected to construction activities or transformed into cultivated fields.

Professor Michałowski's first excavation campaigns in Tell Atrib led to the discovery of an enormous complex of public bathhouses from the Graeco-Roman period. Their extent, monumental architecture and rich décor (e.g. elaborately sculpted column capitals) confirm the information available in the written sources, especially from the Roman period, that Athribis was a large and popular health resort.²³ One would go there 'for the waters.' Only here and there have remains of earlier structures been preserved, for example, a foundation deposit of a small temple from Taharqa's times (Twenty-Fifth Dynasty).²⁴

In turn, surprising research results were obtained from the rescue excavations conducted in the eastern part of Tell Atrib in 1985–1999 (Fig. 9). A small hill, called Kom Sidi Yusuf, is located there, while at the top – a slowly disintegrating tomb, which is an object of cult among the local Muslims. However, written tradition claims that in Christian times, preceding the Islamisation of Egypt, one of the first Egyptian churches was located there, within which various miracles were supposed to have occurred before it disappeared

22 F. Leclère, *Les villes*, p. 234, fn. 7.

23 K. Myśliwiec, "Baths from the Ptolemaic Period in Athribis (Tell Atrib, Lower Egypt)," in: B. Redon (ed.), *Collective Baths in Egypt, 2. New Discoveries and Perspectives*, Editions de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, Cairo 2017, pp. 65–82.

24 B. Ruszczyc, "Taharqa à Tell Atrib," in: E. Endesfelder et al. (ed.), *Ägypten und Kusch* ("Schriften zur Geschichte und Kultur des alten Orients" 13), Berlin 1977, pp. 391–395.



Fig. 9. Rescue excavations at Tell Atrib (Nile Delta). Ruins of ancient Athribis from the Ptolemaic period.

underground, where – according to what is believed by many Copts (Egyptian Christians) – it supposedly functions to this day. Independently of the legends, the fact remains that as early as in the first centuries of Christianity, Athribis was the seat of the bishopric and played such an important role that it was included in a unique mosaic map from the middle of the sixth century AD adorning the floor of a church in the town of Madaba in Jordan.

In the 1960s, the Coptic Committee decided to dig up the legendary temple. The Polish mission already working in Tell Atrib, directed at the time by Dr Barbara Ruszczyc, was invited to join the excavations near the Sidi Yusuf hill. The remains of a sacral building from the first centuries AD were discovered there, including stone capitals with a gilded surface, ritual items, large numbers of coins and Coptic pottery.²⁵ As shown by later works conducted by the Polish mission, the church dedicated to the Holy Mother was most probably constructed here on the ruins of an earlier temple, dating from the reign of the Ptolemies, in the last centuries BC.²⁶ We found numerous limestone block

25 B. Ruszczyc, *Kościół pod wezwaniem Świętej Dziewicy w Tell Atrib* (“Rozprawy Wydziału I Nauk Społecznych PAN. Archeologia” 1), Warszawa 1997.

26 K. Myśliwiec, “L’acquis des fouilles de Tell Atrib pour la connaissance de l’époque ptolémaïque,” in: H. Meyza, I. Zych (eds.), *Classica Orientalis. Essays Presented*

fragments decorated with bas relief and polychrome hieroglyphic inscriptions both in the vicinity of the Sidi Yusuf hill and inside the nearby lime kilns from the Roman period, in which the material evidence of ‘pagan’ cults was eagerly remade into lime. Our mission was able to put two such fragments together to make a whole, on which we could read the inscription Setep-en-Re-meri-Amon (‘Chosen by [the god] Re, beloved by [the god] Amon’), or the Egyptian name of Alexander of Macedon, compiled by local theologians based on two different names attached to Ramesses II, the great pharaoh-warrior from 1000 years earlier.²⁷ The scale and breadth of Alexander’s conquests matched the military feats of the most famous of the Ramesses, with the latter even being perceived as an ideal prototype for the pharaoh-god, who in turn drove the reviled Persians out of Egypt and whose embalmed body was as a result laid to rest on Egyptian soil. The small temple, with walls that many years later were used as raw material for the production of lime, might have been constructed at the beginnings of the Ptolemaic period and dedicated to one of the most important local deities, e.g. Isis or Osiris, in any case frequently equated with Greek gods similar in character. Was the Ptolemaic temple the first sacral building erected at this spot? The tradition of the resacralisation of select places, once hallowed by the cult of one god or another, was extremely widespread in Egypt, even though the religions and deities would change.

From the academic point of view, the results of the Polish rescue excavations in the area adjoining the Sidi Yusuf hill to the east and south turned out to be even more interesting (Figs. 9–12). Excavations were initiated in 1985, when the area was handed over by the Egyptian Antiquities Service to one of the richest Egyptian banks. They rapidly built two residential blocks there. It was only then that the Egyptian authorities asked the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw in Cairo to conduct a rescue mission.

However, the new owner of the land did not give in that easily. When the mission first arrived in Tell Atrib, its members saw a pyramid consisting of old equipment thrown out of office buildings, scattered on those parts of the archaeological area on which nothing had yet been built. Disintegrating cabinets and drawers had become tangled into a single ‘archaeological layer’ with toilets, tables and chairs with broken legs. The Antiquities Service was powerless. To avoid wasting time, we began negotiations with the bank. It took a long time before we were able to come face to face with the director, who – in accordance with Egyptian hospitality – first offered us some superb

to *W. Daszewski on his 75th Birthday*, Warsaw 2011, pp. 389–390; K. Myśliwiec, “Rescue Excavations,” in: *Tell Atrib 1985–1995*, Vol. 1, Warsaw 2000, p. 32.

27 K. Myśliwiec, “Contexte archéologique,” in: *Tell Atrib 1985–1995*, Vol. 2, Warsaw 2009, p. 22 (figs. 4–5), 24 (fig. 7) and 29, fn. 31



Fig. 10. Head of a marble Aphrodite figurine found in a sculptor's workshop from the early Ptolemaic period (the third century BC) in Athribis (modern-day Tell Atrib).



Fig. 11. Golden earring from goldsmith's workshop in Ptolemaic Athribis (the third century BC).

coffee. The rest did not run so smoothly. Slightly surprised by our stubbornness, nonetheless, after a month of fruitless conversations, the director agreed to a 'compromise:' he promised to clean the area up in a few places, where we could do some surveys, but under one condition. That we would not find 'anything important' there and the bank would be able to continue building on 'its' land. As the director of the mission, I of course made such a promise,



Fig. 12. Terracotta votive figurine from a coroplast's workshop in Ptolemaic Athribis (the second century BC).

mainly so that we could quickly forget about it and get to work. It was also made clear that this would be the first and last excavation campaign. Every year after that it was 'really' the last campaign. One can easily imagine what conditions this provided for planning and organising our work.

If we dedicate so much space to this tragicomic situation within a description of the rescue excavations, this is mainly with the aim to make the reader realise the importance of one of the fundamental skills of any archaeologist: diplomacy. There were times when diplomats became archaeologists; nowadays, every archaeologist, especially the mission director, must be a diplomat.

When part of the archaeological terrain in Tell Atrib was liberated from under the bank's 'occupation,' we initiated our research. It began with geophysical prospection, the first survey of this type to be conducted on Polish excavations in Egypt.²⁸ The instigator and executor of this pioneering

28 K. Myśliwiec, "Archaeology Meeting Geophysics on Polish Excavations in Egypt," *Studia Quaternaria* 30/2 (2013), pp. 45–60.

activity was Tomasz Herbich, currently one of the best and most experienced geophysicists within international archaeological circles. Both geophysical prospection and the first surveys done at a few points in the area brought us to the realisation that the archaeological layers here contain artefacts and monumental buildings from the Ptolemaic, Roman and Byzantine periods, i.e. they represent over 1000 years of ancient history.

What we did not yet realise during this first campaign was the fact that the sequence of layers in a few important spots was completely undisturbed, which is extremely rare in the archaeology of the Nile Delta.²⁹ We also did not know that these layers were saturated with rich dating material, i.e. artefacts that allow for a precise attribution to specific historical periods, e.g. the reigns of particular rulers. This was especially true of the early Ptolemaic layers, in which, thanks to numerous coins and stamped amphorae imported from various regions of the Mediterranean, we can distinguish the archaeological contexts corresponding to the reigns of Ptolemy I and II (305–246 BC) from deposits originating from the period of the reign of Ptolemy III–V (246–180 BC), not to mention that of Ptolemy VI (180–145 BC), forming a layer especially distinct, which stands out morphologically from neighbouring layers. None of the earlier excavations in the Nile Delta area had provided the opportunity for such a clear stratification of the Ptolemaic period, and – as a result – for the precise dating of various groups of artefacts based on the objective criterion of the archaeological context and not just on the subjective analysis of stylistics.

The scientific consequences of this fact exceeded all the expectations previously held by the discoverers. It turned out that similar artefacts (terra-cotta figurines (Fig. 12), oil lamps, pottery vessels, items made from faience, etc.), exhibited at various museums around the world (e.g. in the Parisian Louvre or the British Museum in London), had to be ‘re-dated,’ sometimes by even as much as over 500 years, which simultaneously led to the changing of the captions under the items in light of our discoveries. I even noted that the replacement of such labels sometimes occurred during the night after I had given a lecture at a museum.

However, not all the places in Tell Atrib were suitable for geophysical prospection. Especially one spot, striking due to its regular square shape and complete lack of vegetation, resisted the electromagnetic apparatus. It did not react at all to the stimuli. Despite the fact that the reason behind the resistance was later established and turned out to be very trivial, i.e. the strong salination of the thick layer of excrements left by camels belonging to the Bedouins, who had at one time camped there, I decided to check

29 K. Myśliwiec, “Rescue,” pp. 28–38; “Contexte archéologique,” pp. 27–63.

what was concealed by the earth in this banal spot. The sondage brought a revelation already at a depth of sixty centimetres under the surface. First, a beautiful marble figurine, depicting the half-naked Greek goddess Aphrodite (Fig. 10), emerged from the muddy earth (this was the beginning of the wet season), and then fragments of other figurines made from similar material, imported from Greece and betraying the style of one, doubtless Greek, sculptor.³⁰ On many of them, the polychromy had been preserved, e.g. the blue on the goddess' robe and the russet red of her hair. There was no doubt that these could only be the remnants of the *atelier* of a good artist, who must have settled here during the reign of the first Ptolemies. The numismatic (coins) and epigraphic (stamped pottery) material, which was very homogeneous, dated the context very clearly.³¹

During the excavations, it turned out that we had discovered a whole district of craftsmen and artists producing diverse artefacts from different materials.³² Most of them bear the traits of ritual items, probably used in the cult of the deities revered in a nearby temple, perhaps the one once located on the Sidi Yusuf hill. This is indicated by the fact that another structure of a ritual character has been preserved between the workshops and the supposed temple, i.e. public bathhouses dated to the times of Ptolemy VI. Both the architecture of this building and the items found inside, bear hints of having religious connotations, most probably related to the fertility cult personified by the old local Egyptian deities, Isis, Hathor and Osiris. These gods were associated with the Greek Aphrodite and Dionysus – the dynastic deity of the Ptolemies. The fertility cult is witnessed primarily by the terracotta and faience figurines of an erotic character, e.g. anthropomorphic representations of deities with exaggerated sexual traits, i.e. a large phallus or an overly prominent female bosom.³³

30 K. Myśliwiec with contributions by Z. Sztetyło and A. Krzyżanowska, "Remains of a Ptolemaic Villa at Athribis," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 44 (1988), pp. 183–197.

31 Coins: A. Krzyżanowska, "Les monnaies," in: *Tell Atrib 1985–1995*, Vol. 2, pp. 75–210; stamped pottery: Z. Sztetyło, "Pottery Stamps," in: *Tell Atrib 1985–1995*, Vol. 1, pp. 53–163.

32 K. Myśliwiec, "Les ateliers d'Athribis ptolémaïque," *Archeologia* 47 (1997), pp. 7–20.

33 K. Myśliwiec, "Phallic Figurines from Athribis, in: *Warsaw Egyptological Studies*, Vol. 1: *Essays in Honour of Prof. Dr. J. Lipińska*, Warsaw 1997, pp. 119–137; K. Myśliwiec, "Fruchtbarkeitskult und erotische Kunst im ptolemäischen Athribis (Unterägypten)," in: H. Felber, S. Pfisterer-Haas (eds.), *Ägypter-Griechen-Römer, Begegnung der Kulturen* ("Kanobos. Forschungen zum griechisch-römischen Ägypten" 1), Leipzig 1999, pp. 47–81.

One of the discovered terracotta figurines is particularly diagnostic in character: it depicts a naked woman with a marked bosom, sitting in a pool, which has precisely the same oval shape as the small pools we discovered in the public bathhouses. The woman is pouring water over her body, holding a bowl in her hand identical in form to the hundreds of vessels we discovered near the pottery kilns, frequently not yet fired. The figurine in the bathhouse clearly illustrates the function of the structure, which might have been similar to the role of the above-mentioned chamber with Bes's figurines, discovered 100 hundred years ago by the English mission in Saqqara.³⁴ Pregnant women might have come here for hygienic, magical or ritual purposes, or perhaps women participated in rituals aimed at ensuring they would soon be in the family way. The figurine is lacking its head, but it can easily be reconstructed based on the analogies with other terracotta items found in the vicinity of the bathhouses. Some also depict a naked woman squatting, indicating her prominent bosom with her hand. She is wearing a flower diadem on her head. Others portray a woman standing, wearing a long robe, raised so high in the front that it uncovers her naked bosom.³⁵

The discoveries made by the Polish mission in Tell Atrib have very much enriched our knowledge about the life of Graeco-Egyptian society in the last centuries BC, consisting of indigenous Egyptians and settlers who came to Egypt with Alexander the Great's army, a community ethnically, religiously and culturally diverse. The symbiosis of Egyptian, Hellenic and Oriental traditions bore fruit in the form of an eclectic culture, usually referred to as the Hellenistic *koine*. This culture was adopted without any drastic changes by Roman Egypt, and was then modified by Christian Egypt.³⁶

This Graeco-Roman-Christian millennium, during which Hellenistic culture and the Greek language competed with old native Egyptian civilisational elements, is the period predominant within the Polish studies conducted in the Nile Valley. Almost simultaneously to the excavations in Athribis, works were initiated in Alexandria, one of the most important metropolises of the Hellenistic world. The Egyptian authorities offered Professor Michałowski

34 See footnote 42 in chapter 1.

35 K. Myśliwiec, "Fruchtbarkeitskult," pp. 63–66; "Plastyka erotyczna w okresie ptolemejskim. Nowe odkrycia archeologiczne w starożytnym Athribis," in: T. Hrankowska (ed.), *Sztuka a erotyka – Materiały Sesji Stowarzyszenia Historyków Sztuki, Łódź, listopad 1994*, Warszawa 1995, pp. 85–86.

36 K. Myśliwiec, "Quelques aspects du syncrétisme dans l'oeuvre des artisans de l'Athribis ptolémaïque," in: G. Tallet, Ch. Zivie-Coche (eds.), *Le myrte & la rose. Mélanges offerts à Françoise Dunand par ses élèves, collègues et amis*, Montpellier 2014, pp. 161–170.



Fig. 13. Alexandria. Ruins of the ‘theatre’ in the centre of the city after it was discovered by the Polish archaeological mission.

excavations in the centre of the present-day city, on a hill bearing the Arabic name Kom el-Dikka.³⁷

The ongoing research and conservation works have enriched our knowledge about Roman and Byzantine Alexandria, underneath which the archaeologists reached as far as the architectural remains from the Ptolemaic period. Joined by a monumental colonnade, two ancient buildings are predominant in the landscape of this sophisticated neighbourhood: the enormous public baths (Figs. 15–17) and the theatre or Odeon, whose function was a point of contention from the moment it was discovered in 1964 (Figs. 13–14). It would have come as quite a surprise for Professor Michałowski, who at the beginnings of his post-war activities in Egypt rescued this monument from the ‘creative’ activities of the bulldozers boring a deep ditch under the modern building, if he had lived to see the discovery made by his students at the beginning of the twentieth-first century. The excavations next to the ‘theatre’ surprised everyone with a

37 Z. Kiss, “Alexandria – Past Research,” G. Majcherek, “Alexandria – Current Research,” in: *Seventy Years*, pp. 115–134.



Fig. 14. The same building currently.

sequence of rooms architecturally characteristic for lecture halls at ancient universities (Fig. 15). The amphitheatre building turned out to be a university aula, which was secondarily ‘decorated’ with *graffiti* carved into the walls here and there, indicating a fierce ideological struggle between representatives of various political and religious groupings at the turn of the sixth and seventh centuries AD.³⁸

A valuable supplement to our knowledge about ancient Alexandria was provided by excavations conducted from 1986 onwards a few dozen kilometres west, in the town of Marina el-Alamein, not far from the place of a famous battle during the Second World War (Fig. 18). Among various other discoveries, the archaeological mission directed by Professor Wiktor Andrzej Daszewski unearthed a necropolis containing the tombs of noblemen carved into the rock, similar in architectural shape to the Alexandrian tombs. The stone monuments constituting the aboveground cult part of the tombs have

38 Z. Borkowski, *Inscriptions des factions à Alexandrie* (“Alexandrie” 2), Varsovie 1981.



Fig. 15. The Late Antique university with the 'theatre' as an aula.



Fig. 16. Anastylosis of the colonnade in the ancient public bath complex near the university (Fig. 15).



Fig. 17. Underground and aboveground part of the late Antique baths.

been well preserved, while such elements were completely destroyed in similar structures in Alexandria.³⁹

The activities of Professor Michałowski's students over the last 30 years, i.e. after our master passed away, have also enriched our knowledge about Christian and Muslim Egypt. The final phase of the Mamluks' reign (the turn of the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries AD) is represented within Polish studies by a conservation and reconstruction mission, which between 1972 and 2000 conducted works in the unique burial complex of the great Amir Qurqumas in the Cairo North Necropolis. The excavations in Naqlun in the Fayum oasis, directed by Professor Włodzimierz Godlewski were hugely

39 W. A. Daszewski with contribution of I. Zych, "Marina El-Alamein," in: *Seventy Years*, pp. 145–158.



Fig. 18. Marina el-Alamein. Tombstones in the necropolis from the Hellenistic and Roman periods, discovered and reconstructed by the Polish archaeological mission.

significant, inspired by the research done by Professor Ewa Wipszycka-Bravo into early monasticism in Egypt.⁴⁰ A few dozen hermitages, i.e. monks' residences carved into rock, as well as the ruins of a monastery located not far from a still active church, have turned out to be an invaluable source of information, provided not only by written documents but also countless testimonies of material culture (Fig. 19). Among the documents, there are texts written in Arabic, Greek and Coptic. This last group of sources is extremely

40 W. Godlewski, "Naqlun," in: *Seventy Years*, pp. 171–182; E. Wipszycka, *Drugi dar Nilu, czyli o mnichach i klasztorach w późnoantycznym Egipcie* ("Źródła Monastyczne. Monografie" 3), Kraków 2014, pp. 233–234; E. Wipszycka, "Moines et communautés monastiques en Égypte (IVe–VIIIe siècles)," *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology*, Suppl.11 (2009), pp. 3–4.



Fig. 19. Naqlun. Chest with Arabic inscription, made in Sicily, reworked in Egypt. Currently in the Museum of Islamic Art in Cairo. Twelfth century AD.

significant not only for historians but also for philologists studying the final phase in the development of the language of ancient Egyptians.

During the early Christian period, many monks used the rock tombs preserved at the necropolises of the pharaonic period as residences. Such cases are especially numerous in Western Thebes, in the vicinity of the temple of Queen Hatshepsut from the Eighteenth Dynasty, which became a Christian monastery during its last phase of use. This is where today's Arabic name for the place, Deir el-Bahari ('Northern Monastery'), comes from. One of the tombs of the noblemen from the New Kingdom, studied in recent years by Tomasz Górecki (1951–2017) from the perspective of its secondary usage by the monks, revealed the spiritual and material world of a servant of God living in the desert. The most valuable findings from this spot included some Coptic manuscripts from the ninth to the tenth centuries AD, written down on papyrus and parchment, containing, for example, a canon of laws regulating the life of the Christian community in Egypt (Fig. 20). Polish restorers are currently working on unsticking the pages of these priceless documents.⁴¹

41 T. Górecki, "Sheikh Abd El-Gurna," in: *Seventy Years*, pp. 183–190; and the reports by the same author in *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 20 (2011) and 22 (2013).

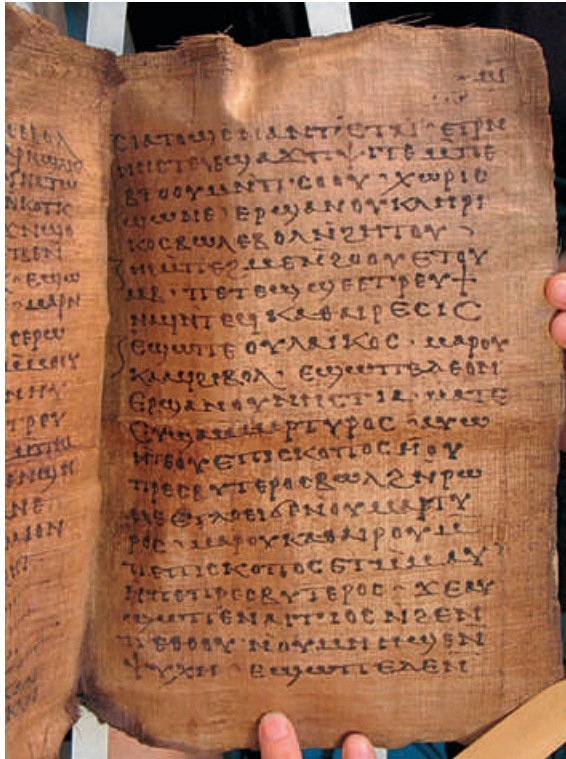


Fig. 20. Gurna (Western Thebes). Coptic manuscript found in a tomb from pharaonic times, later inhabited by a Christian monk (the ninth to the tenth century AD).

The excavations at the site of Marea, located some 45 kilometres southwest of Alexandria, are just as important for expanding our knowledge of the history of Egypt in the first centuries AD (Fig. 21). They were initiated in 2000 by Professor Hanna Szymańska (1944–2010), through the unearthing of a Christian basilica located on the ruins of earlier buildings, including a huge pottery kiln.⁴² The most recent sensational discovery, made by the mission subsequently directed by Krzysztof Babraj, and presently by Tomasz Derda consisted of a large set of ostraca with Greek texts, which have shed new light on the construction process of this temple (Fig. 22). At the southern edges of Graeco-Roman Egypt lies Berenika, an important port commercially and strategically, located on the western coast of the Red Sea,

42 H. Szymańska, K. Babraj, with contributions by T. Derda et al., *Marea*, Vol. 1: *Byzantine Marea. Excavations in 2000–2003 and 2006*, Cracow 2008.



Fig. 21. Marea. The apse of the basilica constructed on the ruins of an earlier (the second or third century AD) pottery kiln.

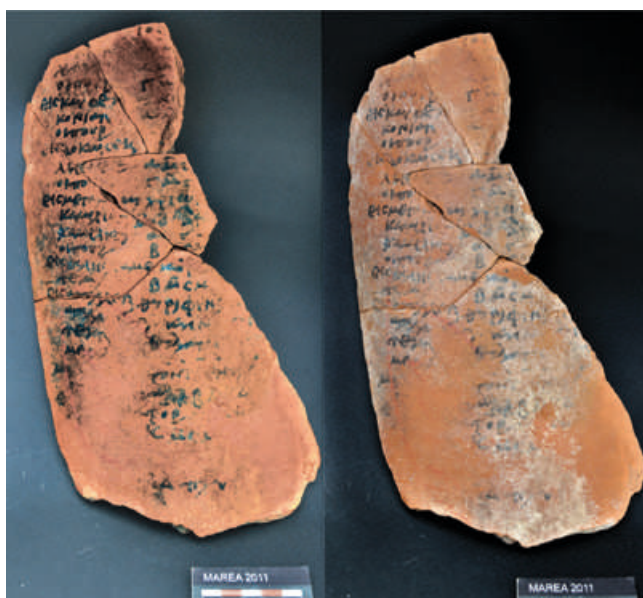


Fig. 22. Marea. An ostracon with a text in Greek concerning the pay of labourers who worked on the construction of the basilica (probably the fifth to the sixth centuries AD), before and after conservation.

at which American and Polish excavations have been conducted since 2008, directed by Iwona Zych.⁴³

In Nubia, in northern Sudan, the research conducted by Polish archaeologists into early Christianity is being continued. After the waters of the Nubian Lake (also called Lake Nasser) covered the Polish excavation field in Faras, our team of Nubiologists moved to the capital of the Christian kingdom of Makuria, which later merged with Nobadia to become the United Christian Kingdom of Nubia. This is Dongola, a city of medieval churches, monasteries and pilgrim shelters (Fig. 23). One of the centres of early Christianity lying furthest inland on the African continent, in which Greek was used at least for ritual purposes,⁴⁴ Dongola has provided unique discoveries, sacral and sepulchral buildings decorated with paintings and inscriptions: unparalleled testimony to the mutual permeation of Mediterranean culture and local ‘pagan’ traditions. Research into this area was conducted by renowned Nubiologists of various specialisations, such as



Fig. 23. Polish excavations in Dongola (Sudanese Nubia).

43 S. E. Sidebotham, I. Zych (eds.), *Berenike 2008–2009. Report on the Excavations at Berenike, Including a Survey in the Eastern Desert*, Warsaw 2011.

44 S. Jakobielski, P. O. Scholz (eds.), *Dongola-Studien. 35 Jahre polnischer Forschungen im Zentrum des makurischen Reiches* (“Bibliotheca nubica et aethiopica” 7), Warszawa 2001.

Stefan Jakobielski, Włodzimierz Godlewski, Bogdan Żurawski and Adam Łajtar. In 1998–2002, 2004–2009 and 2013, Professor Bogdan Żurawski also directed the archaeological prospection and excavations connected to rescue activities between the Third and Fourth Cataract, preceding the construction of subsequent dams on the Nile, this time in Sudan.⁴⁵ The most interesting discoveries from these campaigns include not only monuments of early Christianity but also the remnants of cult and sepulchral buildings from earlier periods, frequently completely unique with respect to the architecture, paintings and religious literature of the area (Fig. 24).



Fig. 24. Medieval church in Banganarti (Sudanese Nubia) discovered by the Polish archaeological mission.

45 B. Żurawski et al., *Nubia II: Southern Dongola Reach Survey 1. Survey and Excavations between Old Dongola and Ez-Zuma. Southern Dongola Reach of the Nile from Prehistory to 1820 AD Based on the Fieldwork Conducted in 1997–2003 by the Polish Archaeological Joint Expedition to the Middle Nile*, Warsaw 2003. See also reports on the excavations in Banganarti and at other archaeological sites located in the area between Third and Fourth Cataract of the Nile in “Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean” 16 (2005)–22 (2013).



Fig. 25. Deir el-Bahari (Western Thebes). A complex of temples including the terraced temple of the female pharaoh Hatshepsut (in the foreground) and the ruins of the Temple of Thothmes III (adjacent to the latter).

Only a few archaeological sites that were the object of the research of the Polish school of Mediterranean archaeology in the second half of the twentieth century represented *époques* preceding the reign of the Ptolemies. At the beginning of the 1960s, Professor Michałowski brought his 'school' to the above-mentioned Deir el-Bahari in Western Thebes, where a temple dedicated to Hatshepsut, one of the few female pharaohs, was preserved at the bottom of a rocky scarp (Fig. 25).⁴⁶ These were the first Polish excavations in Egypt with a *par excellence* Egyptological profile. Before initiating conservation works in the temple, it was necessary to first clear the adjacent area of the rubble remaining after earlier excavations, mainly French and American. To the enormous surprise of the archaeologists, it soon turned out that this 'rubbish dump' was covering yet another temple, 'squeezed in' between the building of Mentuhotep II, a ruler from the Middle Kingdom, and the structure dedicated to Queen Hatshepsut. The previously unknown temple was erected for Hatshepsut's stepson, the third king from the Eighteenth Dynasty to bear the name Thuthmosis.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See fn. 2.

⁴⁷ See fn. 2 in this chapter (J. Lipińska).



Fig. 26. Deir el-Bahari. Fragment of the wall decoration from the temple of the pharaoh Thothmes III.

The newly discovered temple was preserved in thousands of larger and smaller fragments, which were quite a ‘puzzle’ to put together as some parts of the decorations had been destroyed or they might perhaps have been re-used as raw material for construction purposes (Figs. 26–27). What does make it easier to put the stone blocks together into a larger whole is the polychromy, well preserved on the surfaces of the bas reliefs. There are few temples in Egypt from the pharaonic period on which the colours have remained intact to this degree, as if the painter had just completed his work of art. The huge importance of the new temple discovered in Deir el-Bahari results from the fact that its polychromy has fully revealed the richness of the important details rendered by the painter, which in turn had been omitted by the sculptor in the relief used as its base. For over 50 years, Polish Egyptologists have been working on the reconstruction, interpretation and conservation of this unique building. The team of researchers was directed by Professor Jadwiga Lipińska (1932–2009) for many years, while it is currently directed by Dr Monika Dolińska.⁴⁸ The value of this temple as a historical source is additionally increased by the secondary decorative elements. *Graffiti* were left behind by pilgrims, who a few dozen years later, during the Ramesside period (the Nineteenth and the Twentieth Dynasties), visited the nearby temple of Hatshepsut in large numbers, and even slept there,

48 M. Dolińska, “Temple of Tuthmosis III in Deir el-Bahari in 2008 and 2009: Work in the Stores and Field,” *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 21 (2012): *Research* 2009, pp. 261–267.



Fig. 27. Statue of Thothmes III from his temple discovered by the Polish archaeological mission at Deir el-Bahari.

believing in the magical effect of the gods. These inscriptions, written on the temple's columns and walls using hieratic script (a simplified form of the hieroglyphic script), were translated and published by Dr Marek Marciniak (1937–1996).⁴⁹

Belief in the magical or sometimes medicinal influence of the deities worshipped in the Hatshepsut temple survived over the centuries, and in the Ptolemaic period it was even institutionalised. It was merged with the cult of a saint, the legendary architect Imhotep (creator of the Djoser pyramid), equated in Graeco-Roman Egypt with the healer Asclepius, and included into the framework of the royal cult. To put it shortly, he was made into an instrument of political theology. The temple sanctuary was then modified

49 M. Marciniak, *Les inscriptions hiératiques du temple de Thoutmosis III* ("Deir El-Bahari" 1), Varsovie 1974.



Fig. 28. Deir el-Bahari. Façade of the temple of Hatshepsut; Osirian pillars.

and became an actual sanatorium. Research into the Ptolemaic part of the temple was conducted and published in a separate monograph written by Professor Ewa Laskowska-Kusztal.⁵⁰

Reconstructing the history of the temple erected by the female pharaoh in Deir el-Bahari is especially challenging for researchers of ancient Egypt (Fig. 28). While it was created as a classical example of a ‘Temple of Millions of Years,’ linked to the posthumous cult of every ruler buried on the other side of the ‘mountain,’ i.e. the famous Valley of the Kings, she herself, and especially her gender, required original solutions from the general concept

50 E. Laskowska-Kusztal, *Le sanctuaire ptolémaïque de Deir el-Bahari* (“Deir El-Bahari” 3), Varsovie 1984.

to the most minute details. The design was modified many times, which signifies that – in order to understand the intentions of its creators – an Egyptologist must first conduct a virtual ‘delaying’ of the temple into subsequent alteration phases. For 100 years, many researchers from various countries have puzzled over this, creating many theories, which attempt to capture the ideas of the ancient architects, theologians and artists.

This task is made no easier by the fact that the thousands of decorated blocks from the temple are today located outside their original context. A *lapidarium* of larger and smaller fragments awaiting the establishment of their original spot within the temple are today lying in front of the temple, while museums in various countries house other blocks from this spot, exhibited as outstanding works of art. Just the recording of these materials, and then the theoretical reconstruction of the walls preserved only partially, will take years of work. Not all the seemingly logical solutions turn out to be so during attempts at placing a particular block in a preserved part of the decoration. In light of the 50-year-long research conducted here by Polish Egyptologists, many reconstructions made by earlier missions to this place turned out to have been mistaken. Close cooperation between Egyptologists and architects is necessary. This was well understood by the longstanding director of the Polish mission, Eng. Zygmunt Wysocki (1923–2013), whose work was later continued by the distinguished Egyptologist, Dr Zbigniew Szafranski, as well as by Professor Janusz Karkowski, one of the leading epigraphers studying the decorations in this exceptional building.⁵¹ The spectacular ending to an important stage of this mission’s work involved the opening of the upper terrace in the Temple of Hatshepsut to tourists in 2002. For many years, this building had been the object of the Benedictine work of Egyptologists, architects and restorers.⁵²

While tons of sheets of paper have been printed around the world, in all the possible languages, containing subsequent attempts at a comprehensive interpretation of this unique monument of political theology conceived for the female pharaoh by the greatest minds among the Egyptian priests, the full truth remains a mystery. Will the Poles have the last word on this topic? In the meantime, the struggle the younger generation of researchers are involved in with the thousands of unattributed blocks gathered years ago in one of the storehouses in Deir el-Bahari has led to... the discovery of yet

51 J. Karkowski, *The Temple of Hatshepsut. The Solar Complex* (“Deir El-Bahari” 6), Varsovie 2003.

52 F. Pawlicki, “From Edfu to Saqqara. Polish Archaeological and Conservation Activities in Egypt 1937–2007,” in: *Seventy Years*, pp. 38–39.

another temple from the early Thuthmoside period. Its virtual assemblage is one more ‘puzzle’ to solve, this time for Jadwiga Iwaszczuk.⁵³

The history of the Temple of Hatshepsut in Deir el-Bahari knows no end. During the New Kingdom, its decorations were ‘amended’ many times, i.e. chipped off and then re-carved in accordance with the current political and theological trends, especially during those times when the female king became the victim of neither the first nor the last *damnatio memoriae* the history of Egypt. In the first millennium BC, the temple was changed into a cemetery, i.e. the burial place of many Theban noblemen, while in the Ptolemaic period it functioned mainly as a type of sanatorium and simultaneously the centre of the cult of Imhotep, at that time associated with Asclepius. In Christian Egypt, a monastery was built on top of the temple ruins; a monastery which was still partially preserved when the first European researchers (towards the end of the nineteenth century) became interested in its original form and function.⁵⁴

The search for graffiti, i.e. inscriptions carved into the rock surface in the area around the royal temple in Deir el-Bahari, was a valuable contribution made by Polish Egyptology into the research of the history of the Theban necropolis. Initiated by Professor Andrzej Niwiński, and then continued by Professor Sławomir Rzepka, this research – frequently requiring from the epigraphers skills similar to mountaineering acrobatics – enriched our knowledge both about the actions of the personnel responsible for the safety of the tombs and about the pilgrims, who were so willing to visit this holy place. A study of the new inscriptions, recorded here by the Polish mission, is one of the newest achievements of Polish Egyptology.⁵⁵ Professor Niwiński, responsible for initiating this research, also conducts excavations on the rock ledge located behind the temple of Hatshepsut. In turn, his student, together with some young Slovakian Egyptologists, have initiated rescue excavations in the eastern part of the Nile Delta, in a town now called Tell Rataba, which played an important political and religious role during the reign of the rulers named Ramesses and their successors from the so-called Third Intermediate Period.

Similarly, the Middle Kingdom, considered to be the classical period of Old Egyptian culture and represented in Western Thebes by the tombs of

53 J. Iwaszczuk, *Sacred landscape of Thebes during the reign of Hatshepsut. Royal construction projects*, Vol. 1: *Topography of the West Bank*, Varsovie 2016, pp. 137–145; Vol. 2: *Topographical bibliography of the West Bank*, pp. 256–260.

54 W. Godlewski, *Le monastère de St Phoibammon* (“Deir El-Bahari” 5), Varsovie 1986.

55 S. Rzepka, *Who, Where and Why: The Rock Graffiti of Members of the Deir el-Medina Community*, Warsaw 2014.

noblemen, recently became a point of interest for Polish archaeologists. A group of young researchers decided to continue the work initiated by the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art many years earlier, where they are recording the architecture of these monumental sepulchral complexes with the aid of the most current technologies. We have the impression that the Netherworld has ‘come to life.’

In turn, another team representing the youngest generation of Polish Egyptologists has begun studies in an important, but archaeologically neglected administrative and religious centre, located south of Thebes, referred to today in Arabic by the name Gebelein (‘Two Hills’). It played an especially significant role in the beginnings of the pharaonic civilisation. The work by the Polish researchers in this spot is of a rescue character, as the local population is gradually changing subsequent parts of the ancient cemetery into cultivated fields.

The times preceding the New Kingdom, i.e. the first 1500 years of dynastic Egypt, until recently constituted a huge gap in the academic research of the Polish school of Mediterranean archaeology, even though two research teams made a very significant contribution to our knowledge of the processes shaping Egyptian statehood. Two important sites located on the antipodes of pharaonic civilisation became the object of their excavations. The first of these was Kadero, situated not far from Khartoum, where in 1970–2003 Professor Lech Krzyżaniak (1940–2004) conducted pioneering studies at a cemetery from the final phase of the Neolith. Both in methodological and content-related terms, these excavations became a model for the next generation of researchers interested in this period, while the discoverer, at the time the director of the Archaeological Museum in Poznań, always so full of energy and ideas, but who unfortunately passed away prematurely, turned the capital of Greater Poland into an international centre of research into the Nile Valley during the formation period of the Egyptian state.⁵⁶

The last great achievement of this tireless, well-liked and highly valued Poznań-based researcher was gaining a concession for Poland in the Nile Delta, where the Italian archaeological mission had relinquished continuing excavations in the ‘not-too-promising’ site of Tell el-Farkha (‘Chicken Hill’) in the eastern Delta. His extensive knowledge and field experience led Krzyżaniak to conclude this was a place of particular importance from

56 See also the acts of the international symposia organised by Lech Krzyżaniak and Michał Kobusiewicz in Dymaczewo near Poznań: *Origin and Early Development of Food-Producing Cultures in North-Eastern Africa* (9–13.09.1980), Poznań 1984; *Late Prehistory of the Nile Basin and the Sahara* (11–15.09.1984), Poznań 1989; *Environmental Change and Human Culture in the Nile Basin and Northern Africa until the Second Millennium B.C.* (5–10.09.1988), Poznań 1993.

the academic perspective. Could he imagine at the time that it would be as important as it later turned out to be? I think no one expected such a turn of events.

From the moment when the Kraków-Poznań mission, directed by Professor Krzysztof Ciałowicz (the Jagiellonian University) and Dr Marek Chłodnicki (the Museum of Archaeology in Poznań), began its work here in 1998, one sensation followed another (Fig. 29).⁵⁷ The exceptionally rich and clear sequence of archaeological layers, containing large amounts of pottery, i.e. an inestimable source of information about the period, allowed the Polish researchers to first answer a question that had for decades troubled Egyptologists: how did statehood form here, developing a country with imperial ambitions? Did – as many thought – two parts of the country, i.e. Upper Egypt (the Nile Valley and oases) and Lower Egypt (the fertile Nile Delta), merge as a result of the conquest of one area by the other, or perhaps – as others claimed – this occurred as the result of gradual evolution? Detailed studies based on the stratigraphy of Tell el-Farkha left no doubts concerning this



Fig. 29. Tell el-Farkha (Nile Delta). Excavations by the Polish archaeological mission in an important centre of power from the beginnings of Egyptian statehood.

⁵⁷ K. M. Ciałowicz, “Tell El-Farkha,” in: *Seventy Years*, pp. 67–78.

issue: the gradual merging of separate political organisms into one country took place by way of the mutual infiltration of Upper- and Lower-Egyptian elements, the exchange of achievements between various centres.⁵⁸

However, at the turn of the fourth and third millennia BC, trade took place not only between the Delta and the Nile Valley but also extended to areas of Asia, as attested, for example, by some elements of the jewellery, e.g. raw material for the production of necklaces, or by sherds from ceramic vessels imported from the East. It was a genuine archaeological sensation when a bunch of twisted golden foil was found. Unbent, it turned out to be part of statuettes representing nude men, doubtless local rulers (Figs. 30–31). Another rarity came in the form of the contents of one clay vessel: a few dozen miniature figurines made from hippopotamus bone, representing various deities venerated at that time, including a hybrid linking anthropomorphic and zoomorphic elements (Figs. 32–34).⁵⁹ Both the form and the

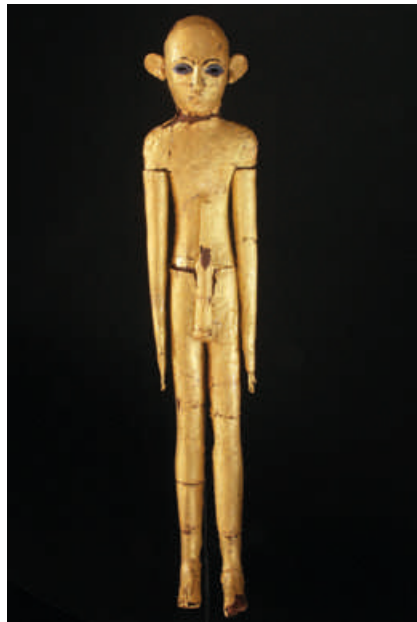


Fig. 30. Tell el-Farkha. Image of a local ruler, made from gold foil, which was the cladding of a figurine from the Late Predynastic period.

58 M. A. Jucha, *Tell el-Farkha II. The Pottery of the Predynastic Settlement (Phases 2–5)*, Kraków–Poznań 2005.

59 M. Chłodnicki, K.M. Ciałowicz, A. Mączyńska (eds.), *Tell El-Farkha I. Excavations 1998–2011*, Poznań–Kraków 2012, pp. 201–243.



Fig. 31. Gold foil modelled into the image of a ruler or his son, similarly as Fig. 30.



Fig. 32. Tell el-Farkha. Clay vessel containing a deposit of miniature votive figurines, *in situ*.



Fig. 33. Representation of animals carved into the surface of the vessel (Fig. 32).



Fig. 34. Assemblage of unique figurines made in majority from hippopotamus teeth, found in the vessel.

content of these masterpieces of local handicraft clearly indicate that already in the period preceding the formation of the pharaonic state, the spiritual and material development of the society inhabiting the Nile Delta was much higher than had previously been imagined. The beginnings of this evolution should probably be shifted by a few hundred years back. Many elements of Egyptian civilisation had reached a mature form before the state was constituted, usually referred to as 'Two Lands' in the hieroglyphic inscriptions, probably in reference to its genesis.

It also cannot be excluded that the Kraków-Poznań mission, functioning – similarly as the other above-mentioned missions – under the auspices of the Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw, also unearthed one of the oldest known temples from this period. Among the buildings made from dried brick, one especially stands out both in terms of its size and exceptionally sturdy construction.⁶⁰

The most interesting items from the Polish excavations at Tell el-Farkha were first presented in 2007 at the anniversary exhibition in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. They evoked such rapture due to their originality and fineness that the Egyptian authorities decided to include them into the permanent exhibitions of this museum. This is currently one of the first display cases, greeting anyone entering the museum, placed right next to the famous statue of Djoser from Saqqara.

Nonetheless, research into the formation period of the Egyptian state, i.e. the turn of the fourth and the third millennia BC, has not filled the enormous hole in the academic profile of the Polish school of archaeology, i.e. the period of the construction of the first and largest pyramids, during the Old Kingdom. Our academic community has matured enough to bring its own contribution to research into an époque that lasted 500 years and was one of the three apogees of Egyptian civilisation. This was the period during which the foundations were formed for all later scientific and artistic achievements in the Two Lands.

To fill this gap, a group of young Egyptologists under the direction of the author of this book conducted a survey in 1985 in the necropolis of ancient Memphis, i.e. a many-kilometre-long strip of pyramids, stretching from the north to the south on the western bank of the Nile, where a rocky scarp, lying adjacent to some cultivated fields from the west, marks the eastern edge of the immense Sahara. Starting from the north, i.e. from the three largest pyramids in Giza, we moved along the desert in a southern direction. We reached Zawyet el-Aryan, where a relatively small pyramid is located that remains to

60 M. Chłodnicki, K. M. Ciałowicz, "Tell El-Farkha (Ghazala) Season 2009," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 21 (2012), pp. 135–140.

this day a mystery for Egyptologists.⁶¹ It remains unknown for which ruler of the Old Kingdom it was constructed. As it is a 'step pyramid,' it seems almost obvious that it was created during the times of the Third Dynasty. However, the technique used in its construction is completely different from that of the Djoser Pyramid in Saqqara. While the latter gradually 'matured' to its final form by way of a multistage expansion of the original mastaba, the pyramid in Zawyet el-Aryan was from the very beginning planned in its final shape. It can be seen as a copy of the Djoser pyramid; therefore, it is a later structure than its prototype. However, neither the pyramid nor its nearest surroundings had ever been the subject of thorough scientific research.

As a result, we approached the structure with many expectations. We were so fascinated we did not notice the barbed wire surrounding it in wide arch, leaving only an entrance through which we had accidentally entered, nor did we notice the soldiers, tents and military equipment deployed not far from the monument. Inadvertently, we found ourselves in the middle of a military camp. The predicament we had stumbled into could be explained by the encroaching night and the lack of any fires in the camp. Who was thinking of such technicalities as the recently ended war with Israel!? Our imagination was caught up in the time horizon of the twentieth-sixth century BC.

A moment later, a soldier appeared with a rifle pointed straight at us. Since we were well behaved, the situation simply ended with us being led to face the camp commander. The middle-aged officer, with an affable countenance, was so amused by our valour that as soon as he had ceased choking with laughter, he offered us some fantastic coffee and conducted a short, rather sociable interview, after which we were asked not to repeat our little adventure as in the best-case scenario it would end with us having to sleep somewhere other than our own beds.

The next day, we continued our hike in a southern direction. We crossed Abusir, the necropolis of the kings and noblemen of the Fifth Dynasty, with unfeigned envy admiring the discoveries of the Czechoslovakian mission who had been working there for 20 years. We finally reached Saqqara, a place studied by archaeological missions from various countries for 130 years. However, by some fortunate coincidence, our route took us through an area adjacent to Djoser's tomb complex on its western side. It was completely empty and silent. If any tourists ever reached this place, it was usually only because they had lost their way. The whole tourism traffic was concentrated on the eastern side of the pyramid, where the entrance to the extensive tomb complex was located, but also by its northern and southern sides, where the

61 N. M. A. Swelim, *Some Problems on the History of the Third Dynasty*, Alexandria 1983, pp. 15–16, 77–82, 125–177.

tombs of other kings and noblemen were visited. The western side had been forgotten not only by tourists but by archaeologists, who for decades had thought that any monuments and artefacts worthy of attention were located elsewhere.

Standing right behind the pyramid, we looked far into the distance across the sandy desert, where no contours of any structures could be seen. The surface of the sand showed no traces of any kind of human activity. Had any archaeological mission ever done anything here? With this question written on our faces, after a long period of silence, we looked at each other. Two young Egyptologists, my first PhD students, Franciszek Pawlicki and Maciej Witkowski, were standing next to me. None of us could recount this sandy area stretching out beneath our feet to have ever been subjected to systematic archaeological research. I finally broke the silence and said to Franek and Maciek, "We will dig here." But in archaeology, the road from words to deeds is often quite long, also in Egypt.

Chapter 3. First steps

Abstract: The beginning of excavations on the west side of the “step pyramid.” Surprising results of first trial pits. Between diplomacy and friendship.

Keywords: geophysical survey, first mummies, mysterious walls.

Various factors determine the choice of a location for excavations. If they are rescue excavations, there is no choice. You need to dig where a motorway, a factory or a house is to be built. But sometimes, e.g. in the case of the construction of another dam on the Nile, which is going to flood an enormous area with the waters of an artificial lake, you get to choose the site. This is what happened at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, when a new dam was being built in Aswan. The whole archaeological world rushed to help rescue the monuments and artefacts. Not only because the great international campaign was under UNESCO patronage but also because of the extraordinary rules concerning the division of the excavated relics, put in place due to the especially difficult work conditions caused by haste, the insufferable climate, and complicated desert logistics. And so, every country participating in the campaign could receive half of the archaeological material it excavated, or its equivalent. By such means, several countries accumulated new wealth, acquiring small Nubian shrines, taken out of their original contexts, then reconstructed and placed in honorary locations. One such shrine stands today on a hill next to the Royal Palace in Madrid, two others were placed in the great museums: the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden, the Netherlands.¹

1 The Temple of Debod (Madrid): F. J. Martín Valentín et al., *Debod: Tres décadas de historia en Madrid*, Madrid 2001. The Temple of Dendur (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York): C. Aldred, *The Temple of Dendur*, New York 1978. The Temple of Taffah (Museum of Antiquities in Leiden): H. D. Schneider, *Taffeh: rond de wederopbouw van een Nubische tempel*, Leiden 1979; M. J. Raven, “The Temple of Taffeh: A Study of Details,” *Oudheidkundige mededeelingen van het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden* 76 (1996), pp. 41–62; M. J. Raven, “The Temple of Taffeh,” *Oudheidkundige mededeelingen van het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden* 79 (1999), pp. 81–102. See also: D. Arnold, *Temples of the Last Pharaohs*, Oxford 1999, p. 193 (Debod), p. 240 (Taffah), p. 244 (Dendur); and K. Myśliwiec, *Herr Beider Länder. Ägypten im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, Mainz am Rhein 1998, figs. 56–57, p. 215, figs. 82–83; K. Myśliwiec, *The Twilight of Ancient Egypt. First Millennium B.C.E.*, Ithaca–London 2003, pp. 195–196, fig. 56, 57.

Having completed the prospection of the whole area destined to be flooded by the waters of the Nubian (or Nasser) Lake, Professor Kazimierz Michałowski chose Faras located in Sudanese Nubia, close to the Egyptian-Sudanese border. On the surface of the hill lay blocks from a temple of the New Kingdom period, decorated with hieroglyphic inscriptions.² The professor believed that the hill's interior concealed this very temple. Reality surpassed all his expectations. He found something that the global media immediately proclaimed to be the "Faras miracle," and about the discoverer it was written that he had "drawn the best ticket at the [Nubian] lottery:" a giant early-Christian cathedral, the walls of which were covered with several layers of magnificent paintings, reflecting centuries of the development of Nubian art.³

Polish research in Alexandria also began with rescue excavations. When bulldozers tried in vain to soak their teeth into the resistant matter of white marble blocks, arranged in a sequence with an oddly rounded edge, Kazimierz Michałowski, luckily lecturing at the time at the University of Alexandria as a visiting professor, was summoned immediately. With no hint of hesitation he announced, "This is an ancient theatre!" He saved a whole district of the cosmopolitan metropolis from the first centuries AD. Soon systematic Polish excavations commenced there, and they continue to this day.

A great role in the choice of a location for an excavation site is played by written sources. In many cases, they identify with a significant degree of probability where one can expect to find the ruins of an ancient city, and even provide its name. However, sometimes the opposite occurs, when one knows the toponym but not the city's location. Even more frequently, one excavates the remains of impressive architecture, not knowing the name of the city which has revealed a fragment of its past glory. It was on the basis of studies into a papyrus mentioning a previously unknown yet important monastic centre in the Fayum Oasis that Professor Ewa Wipszycka-Bravo initiated research in modern-day Naqlun, where Professor Włodzimierz Godlewski's archaeological mission later discovered countless riches of Early Christian culture.⁴

2 J. Karkowski, *The Pharaonic Inscriptions from Faras* ("Faras" 5), Warszawa 1981.

3 K. Michałowski, "Polish Excavations at Faras 1961," *Kush. Journal of the Sudan Antiquities Service* 10 (1962), pp. 220–244 and Kazimierz Michałowski's reports in *Kush. Journal of the Sudan Antiquities Service* 11 (1963), pp. 233–256; 12 (1964), pp. 195–207, 13 (1965), pp. 177–189; cf. W. Godlewski, *Pachoras – The Cathedrals of Aetios, Paulos and Petros. The Architecture* ("PAM Supplement Series" 1), Warszawa 2006.

4 W. Godlewski, "Naqlun," pp. 171–203.

Archaeological identification of sites previously known only from written sources happens increasingly more often thanks to modern Arabic names. Oftentimes, they conceal a transformed ancient toponym. Present-day Naqlun bears the echoes of the ancient Naqloni, and Tell Atrib is nothing but the Coptic Atrepe, created from the Greek Athribis, which, in turn, is derived from the Old Egyptian Hut-(ta)-heri-ib(et). This later name can be translated as ‘the abode [located] at the heart,’ which would be an allusion to the local relic upon which the whole local theology was constructed in pharaonic times. According to primaeval beliefs, here stored was the heart of Osiris, the god dismembered by his mortal enemy, Seth.⁵ It is in search of such associations, combining language, religion and topography, leading to the identification of ancient towns, that Egyptologists organise excursions to various provinces of modern Egypt. The researchers visit small villages, talk to the inhabitants, listen to their tales, while simultaneously closely observing whether the walls of the simple huts might not contain a stone block with the remains of a text in one of the ancient languages. Even just a few so preserved hieroglyphs can point in the right direction, enabling the identification of an ancient city.

In the case of Saqqara, there was no need to play the role of detectives starting an investigation from ground zero. Rather, from the very beginning we were surprised that at a site where archaeological research in Egyptology had begun 150 years ago, where teams of researchers from the whole world had fought to receive excavation permits, no one had so far expressed interest in the area neighbouring the oldest pyramid in the world from the west. It surprised us even more so that in general in ancient Egypt the west side was the domain of the dead. Necropolises were located on the west sides of cities, and the god of the dead was referred to using the epithet ‘one who is at the forefront [of the inhabitants] of the west.’ It was difficult to imagine that there would be an archaeological desert on the west side of a pyramid especially venerated as the creation of the deified architect Imhotep.⁶ Even the thought seemed so ridiculous that I decided to discuss the problem first with the biggest scientific authorities in Saqqara archaeology. And there was no bigger expert on Saqqara at the time than Jean-Philippe Lauer.⁷ After I asked

5 P. Vernus, *Athribis*, ch. 2, fn. 19.

6 D. Wildung, *Imhotep und Amenhotep: Gottwerdung im alten Ägypten*, Berlin 1977, pp. 1–244; B. Jamieson, M.D. Hurry, *Imhotep: The Egyptian God of Medicine*, Ares Pub. 1978; M. K. Asante, *From Imhotep to Akhenaten: An Introduction to Egyptian Philosophers*, Menaibuc 2004; K. Ryholt, *The Life of Imhotep (P. Carlsberg 85)*, in: G. Widmer, D. Devauchelle (eds.), *Actes du IXe Congrès International des Études Démotiques*, Le Caire 2009, pp. 305–315.

7 J.-Ph. Lauer, *La Pyramide a dégrés*, Vol. 1–2: *L’architecture, Fouilles à Saqqarah*, Le Caire 1936; Vol. 3: *Compléments*, Le Caire 1939. See the bibliography of

him what he thought about the potential excavations on the west side of the ‘step pyramid,’ he replied succinctly, “If you don’t have plenty of time and money to lose, don’t go digging there. There might be an ancient rubbish heap and perhaps a quarry at best.” His thinking was based, I assume, on the premise that if the frontal part of Djoser’s tomb complex was located on the eastern side of the whole *temenos*, then only the ‘tool shed’ could be situated on the opposite side, and it – of course – had to be somewhere.

There was no need for better encouragement. Being acquainted with the mentality, eschatology and funerary customs of the Ancient Egyptians, I could not doubt for a second that the area adjacent to the pyramid complex from the west had to be an important part of the royal necropolis, used for sepulchral or sacral purposes at least at one stage of its history encompassing 4,000 years. I immediately began to prepare the grounds for our excavations. From the logical point of view, it seemed absolutely impossible. Egypt had just issued a decree that foreign missions would not be provided with new excavation licenses in the Memphite Necropolis pyramid belt. The whole area, covering several dozen kilometres in length, would be researched exclusively by Egyptian missions.

One needs great faith not to give up despite such a decision reached by the government. When students ask me today what is most important in science, I always give the same reply: faith. It might have been Professor Michałowski who implanted this in me, he who always repeated “Nothing is impossible.” And who did not tolerate defeatists among his team.

The head of the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation at the time (in 1987) was Professor Abdel Halim Nur el-Din (1943–2016), an excellent Egyptologist who specialised in reading the most simplified Egyptian script, from the first millennium BC, called demotic writing. He was not only an accomplished scholar but also a human being of wide intellectual horizons and uncommon powers of perception, allowing him to easily separate wheat from chaff. He felt friendship and respect towards Polish archaeologists ever since our excavations had been led by Professor Michałowski. He valued the achievements of the Polish research and conservatory teams in Deir el-Bahari and Alexandria highly. He knew that by giving an archaeological site into the hands of the Polish school of archaeology, he would rid the host country of at least one concern: worrying about the conservation of the discovered monuments and artefacts. I confided my ‘Saqqara dreams’ to

Jean-Philippe Lauer’s texts and studies on the researcher, in: C. Berger and B. Mathieu (eds.), *Études sur l’Ancien Empire et la nécropole de Saqqâra dédiées à Jean-Philippe Lauer* („Orientalia Monspeliensia” 9), Montpellier 1997, pp. IX–XVIII.

Nur el-Din. He agreed to a reconnaissance of the area extending to the west of the pyramid. Even though he could theoretically do as he pleased being the head of the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation, his decision was an act of great bravery. More than one of his predecessors had paid for their ill decisions with their job. For the following ten years, I was able to return the favour to some small extent at the University of Warsaw, where I supervised the PhD project of his assistant from the University of Fayum.

It should also be mentioned that our mission was also treated with extraordinary goodwill by Abdel Halim Nur el-Din's successor, an archaeologist of unique imagination and charisma, famous internationally beyond the Egyptological world, Professor Zahi Hawass. Years earlier, as a beginning inspector in the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation, he was also able to meet with the creator of the Polish school of archaeology. As the head of the Polish mission to Saqqara, I had to pay him a visit for the first time after he had been promoted to the position of director managing the whole belt of the Great Pyramids. His office was located in Giza, right next to the Pyramid of Cheops. Oblivious to the attitude this globetrotter with an American degree might have towards our modest mission, I entered his office with somewhat shaky knees. He looked at me with his penetrating gaze, which one could just as well call piercing, and a moment of silence ensued, long enough a moment for me to see what was lying on his desk. It was the first issue of a new glossy American archaeological magazine, in which an article about Zahi was followed by my publication on Saqqara.⁸ The journal was open on the page of my text where a story was included in an embedded box about the gift Professor Michałowski had received during the war at the POW camp in Woldenberg. As already mentioned, the *rais*, the supervisor of the Edfu excavation workforce, sent a package with dates and biscuits to his imprisoned boss as a humble expression of his gratitude for the friendly treatment of the Egyptians during the excavations.⁹ Instead of "Good morning," Zahi said, "You wrote it well." Once again, I could witness how sensitive our Egyptian colleagues are to the treatment they receive from foreigners, and how much depends on that.

But in archaeology it is not only sentiments that matter. An excavation mission, especially a beginning team at a site as prominent as Saqqara, needs to legitimise itself quickly with scientific achievements to prove its competence and maintain its permit. One such measure of the proper qualifications are publications in the most popular international languages, particularly

8 S. Jenkins, "Profile: Zahi Hawass, The Keeper of the Pyramids," *Discovering Archaeology* (July/August) 1999, pp. 26–31.

9 K. Myśliwiec, "Five Wives," p. 65 (paragraph *Anonymous Experts*).

a monograph which must be published no later than five years after a discovery. Some more ‘lingering’ missions know that they can get away with slight deviations from this rule, yet even then this can sometimes cost them dearly. A mission which has just come into existence and has not yet proven anything is observed closely not only by the Egyptian authorities but also by the whole Egyptological world. As a result we put a lot of effort into ensuring that we publish a monograph presenting the research to the international scientific scene as soon as possible after the first great discovery. Zahi Hawass’s attitude towards our mission would no doubt be less courteous today if not our publications. It is also an expression of recognition and cooperation that one of the famous Egyptian’s closest long-term colleagues came nowhere else but to Poland, first to obtain her master’s degree (published in book format),¹⁰ and then to prepare her PhD dissertation, also at the University of Warsaw.

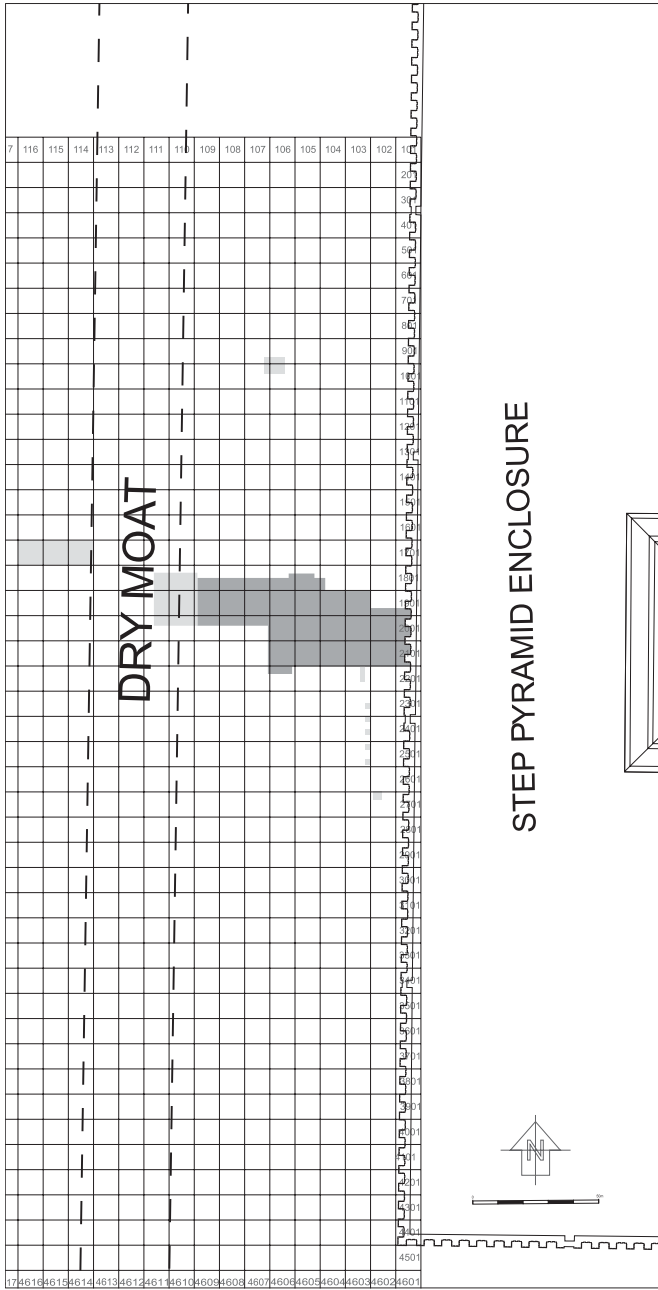
After receiving permission for excavations on the western side of the pyramid, we set out for our first campaign in 1987. As in Tell Atrib before, we began with a geophysical survey and trial pits. Tomasz Herbich, our geophysicist, did not expect much from the electromagnetic resonance at this spot as the sand did not contrast visibly with the stone which we hoped to encounter in the upper layers of this area, thus far neglected by archaeologists. When, however, after two weeks of surveying, the geophysical map was created, it consisted almost exclusively of anomalies¹¹ – as geophysicists refer in their jargon to lines reflecting the presence of contrasting materials underground, something that practically always foreshadows the presence of archaeological structures. This caused utter astonishment. We did not yet know that mud brick was responsible for these contrasts, a material commonly used for the above-ground part of mastabas during the Old Kingdom.

Amid this unexpected *embarras de richesse*, the choice of spots for conducting further sondages was not at all obvious. We decided to follow archaeological premises and carry out three tentative trial pits determined by the logic of the topography.¹² Each of them consisted of making a small trench (5x5m) and keen observation of the sequence of archaeological layers. We placed the first trial pit almost exactly on the extension of the pyramid’s axis in the western direction, at a distance of about 100 metres from the

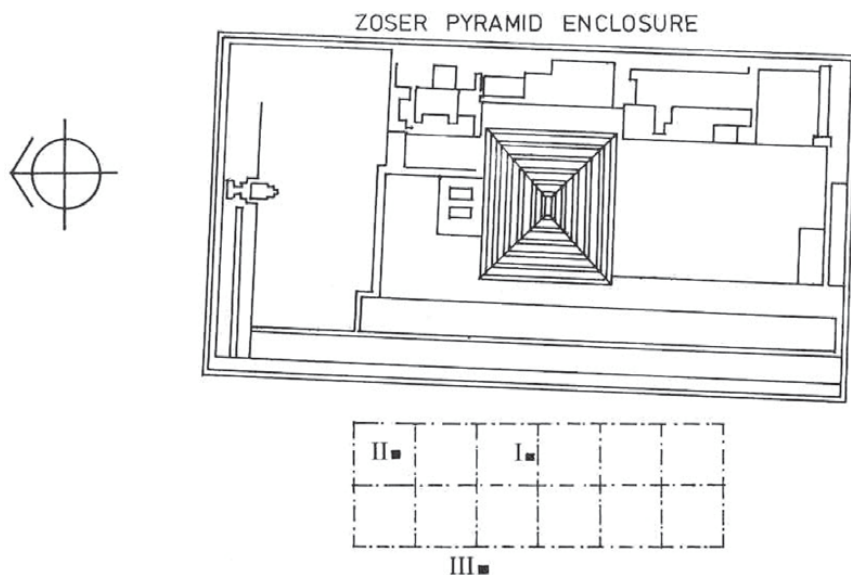
10 N. Gaber, *The Tomb of Ia-Maat in Saqqara*, University of Warsaw, Institute of Archaeology, Department of Archaeology of Egypt and Nubia, Warsaw 2013.

11 K. Myśliwiec, “Archaeology Meeting Geophysics on Polish Excavations in Egypt,” *Studia Quaternaria* 30/2 (2013), pp. 45–59.

12 K. Myśliwiec, T. Herbich with a contribution by A. Niwiński, “Polish Research at Saqqara in 1987, *Études et Travaux* 17 (1995), pp. 178–203.



II. 3. Area of Polish excavations on the western side of the pyramid.



II. 4. Location of three initial trial pits in the area studied geophysically in 1987 on the western side of Djoser's pyramid.

monument. Symmetry was one of the fundamental rules of spatial thinking in Ancient Egypt, both in architecture and in figural art. The second survey we placed on the northernmost edges of the researched area, expecting to discover the posthumous neighbours of the Ptahhoteps, a famous family from the top of the social ladder towards the end of the Fifth Dynasty and the owners of a stunning mastaba which is one of Saqqara's biggest touristic attractions. Finally, we decided to carry out the third trial pit on the slopes of a sandy oblong hill, running from the Ptahhoteps' tomb in the southern direction. We wanted to see if there were any natural geological formations located under the layer of sand, or perhaps another monumental structure built in Saqqara by human hands.

Every single one of the three trial pits resulted in a surprise. The first revealed a wall, meridionally parallel to the west side of the Djoser Pyramid.¹³ Already the construction of the wall suggested that it was an architectural structure from the Old Kingdom. These were irregular stone blocks, connected with mud mortar, and on the surface of the wall: a column drum in a shape characteristic for the period. Since we did not reach any of the wall's ends, we could not dismiss the possibility that it might have surrounded

13 Myśliwiec, Herbich, Niwiński, "Polish Research," pp. 186–195.

the entire holy pyramid complex, outside of its *temenos* enclosed by the giant risalit wall.¹⁴ This would thus have been yet another obstacle scaring away any unwanted visitors from the royal necropolis. We even considered whether it might not be a wall from the times of the pyramid's construction, i.e. from the beginning of the Third Dynasty, as the layer of sand stuck to it contained a significant number of small faience tiles, similar to those decorating the walls of some of the underground chambers in the Djoser complex.¹⁵ Ten years later, we were to discover that all of these hypotheses were wrong.

The second trial pit surprised us with a thicket of little grave shafts, cut into the rock and leading to tomb chambers, undoubtedly from the late Old Kingdom period.¹⁶ In one corner of the courtyard located between these shafts, carefully crafted entrances to two larger chambers emerged, filled with sand almost up to the ceiling. On the surface of the deposit, there were remains of cartonnages, i.e. gypsum mummy 'casings,' covered with polychrome paintings characteristic for the Ptolemaic period.¹⁷ Years later, it would come to light that this discovery, connecting elements of third-millennium BC architecture with the ragged mummies from a period over 2,000 years later, was diagnostic for the unusual stratigraphy of the area we were researching.

The third pit showed us that the mound of sand hid a natural hill of extremely fragile limestone which had been perforated by the Old Kingdom grave shafts.¹⁸ Precisely in the middle of our small hole, there lay a larger shaft, with the remains of a mummy buried in the sand, and – to the side – a piece of a large amphora from the Early Christian period, also containing human remains. Hence, we learned the necropolis on the west side of the oldest pyramid was still in use when an enormous monastery, one of the

14 See the fragment of the western part of the Djoser pyramid's risalit wall, discovered by the Polish archaeological mission in 2001 at the eastern edge of the Polish concession: K. Myśliwiec, "West Saqqara. Excavations, 2001," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 13 (2002): *Reports 2001*, pp. 135–142.

15 Myśliwiec, Herbich, Niwiński, "Polish Research," pp. 186–189; K. Myśliwiec, *New Faces of Sakkara. Recent Discoveries in West Sakkara*, Tuchów 1999 (also published in Polish as *Nowe oblicza Sakkary. Rewelacyjne odkrycia polskich archeologów w Egipcie*, Tuchów 1998), fig. 13; cf. F.D. Friedman (ed.), *Gifts of the Nile. Ancient Egyptian Faience*, New York 1998, pp. 66, 72–73, 180–181.

16 Myśliwiec, Herbich, Niwiński, "Polish Research," pp. 195–201.

17 Myśliwiec, Herbich, Niwiński, "Polish Research," pp. 200–201, fig. 24–26.

18 Myśliwiec, Herbich, Niwiński, "Polish Research," pp. 202–203, fig. 27.

biggest centres of Christian culture in Egypt, was functioning on its southern side.¹⁹

The conclusion resulting from our first excavation campaign was straightforward: for at least 3,000 years, starting from the construction of the first pyramid, there was a necropolis on the west side of the monument, in which initially pharaohs' courtiers had been buried, and then members of the middle class. No one doubted that the discovery required further research. With this conviction, we left Saqqara in 1987. None of us suspected that we would have to wait nine years to continue our work.

Our research generated the most interest abroad. As there was now certainty that the western part of Saqqara was not archaeologically sterile ground, missions from various countries, especially those richer than Poland, started to spring up there like mushrooms. The Japanese were the first to appear, entering the hill deserted by the Egyptian army, in the north-western part of Saqqara. In spite of the 'archaeological' activities of the army, architectural structures from different periods had been preserved – primarily the remains of a splendid building erected from blocks of snow-white limestone for the aforementioned Khaemweset, one of the oldest sons of Ramesses II, a famous restorer and admirer of funerary monuments from the times of the Old Kingdom.²⁰ The quality of the reliefs preserved on these blocks proves that the elegant building was the creation of the best Memphite artists from the Ramesside period.

In the immediate proximity of our findings, a Scottish mission commenced research under the direction of the geophysicist, Ian Mathieson (1927–2010). They first carried out geophysical surveys, and then archaeological studies on the western side of the hill where we had conducted our trial pit no. 3. They subsequently included the whole Saqqara in their geophysical prospection, with the intention of publishing a detailed archaeological map of the huge area. In the last years of his activities, Mathieson focused on the area located north of the Djoser Pyramid.²¹ Could he have gotten envious of his fellow countryman, Walter B. Emery, who had once searched for Imhotep's grave in this part of Saqqara? On the last of the geophysical plans he made, on which one can see the outlines of underground structures, the Scottish geophysicist noticed two large, parallel rectangular

19 C. Wietheger, *Das Jeremias-Kloster zu Saqqara unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Inschriften*, in: *Arbeiten zum spätantiken und koptischen Ägypten*, Michigan 1992.

20 See fn. 27 in chapter 1.

21 J. Mathieson, unpublished report from the last campaign of the geophysical work conducted by the Scottish archaeological mission in Saqqara, which the author made available to the director of the Polish excavations at Djoser pyramid.

buildings, and announced them to be Imhotep's grave.²² Soon afterwards he died, like Emery after discovering a gallery of mummified animals.

The foreign missions, which – influenced by our discoveries – began working in this area of Saqqara were soon joined by Egyptian archaeologists. They chose the area to the south-west of the Djoser Pyramid, behind the Pyramid of Unas, the first ruler whose funerary chamber walls had been decorated with the *Pyramid Texts*.²³ The necropolis of the noblemen from the dusk of the Old Kingdom was researched there under the direction of Dr Zahi Hawass. Their graves stand out due to their original architectural and iconographic features.

Polish research in Saqqara began at an unfortunate time of the increased activities of tomb robber gangs in the Memphite necropolis, pillaging especially the ancient graves closer to the desert. The Egyptian authorities decided to secure the safety of the discovered relics by obliging all active foreign missions to construct their own storehouses in the vicinity of the excavated area. New parameters were introduced for the storehouses. Unfortunately, this was a cost beyond our resources. We had to make peace with the thought we would not be coming back to Saqqara in 1988.

These were particularly difficult times for Polish science. The communist state, cemented in an ideological shell and by economic scarcity, had hardly any financial capabilities and was declining quicker by the day, while the capitalist system of sponsorship had not emerged yet. When I explain this to Polish trips visiting us sometimes at the excavation site, I tell a joke overheard in childhood from the unrivalled joke-teller Kazimierz Rudzki (n.b. a fellow inmate of Professor Michałowski from the Oflag in Woldenberg) in the radio program *Wesoły kramik* (Happy Booth) – probably the only joke I have ever remembered: “A famous New York painter announces an exhibition for his newest piece. The social elites gather, everyone holding glasses of champagne, the huge painting is covered by a white sheet of material. The anticipated moment arrives, the artist energetically pulls the sheet off and reveals ... the whiteness of an empty surface. Having finished her champagne, one of the ladies brings herself to ask the master: ‘And what does this painting represent?’ ‘What do you mean by “what”!,’ he replies. ‘It is crystal clear: the crossing of the Red Sea by the Jews.’ ‘Where are the Jews?’ ‘They have already crossed.’ ‘And where are the Egyptians?’ ‘They have not arrived yet.’ ‘Then where is the sea?’ ‘Where! But obviously, it has been parted!’ This was precisely the situation of Polish science during the political

22 Mathieson, unpublished report.

23 N. Gaber, *The Tomb*, pp. 13, 15, 50 (fig. 1).

transformation. In turn, following the transformation, changes in the financial sector did not take place immediately.

Years were passing by and colleagues would mock, “So when are you going back to your hole in Saqqara?” Help came finally from the least expected direction. In 1995, I was asked about Saqqara by the priest (not yet a prelate) Wiesław Niewęglowski, the national pastor of the creative community. I have always admired his faith in the Holy Spirit, and especially the practical implications of this faith, visible particularly when, as a sign of resistance against communist hopelessness, we would meet at Miodowa Street in the headquarters of the Warsaw Curia, to give talks and discuss all possible and ‘impossible’ topics. He kept infecting us with his incorrigible optimism. He was happy to see lecturers from the archaeological community as he believed this discipline to be an important part of our national identity. I wryly answered his question about Saqqara with a few dry facts, feeling rather hopeless about this bringing any effects. Not thinking much, he then took me to the editorial office of *Rzeczpospolita* (one of the most popular Polish newspapers), in which he was a columnist at the time. Amidst the clouds of smoke billowing from the pipe of the sorely missed and unforgettable editor-in-chief Dariusz Fikus (1932–1996), we had a 15-minute-long conversation, embellished by the man’s hearty laughter, all of which was concluded with a decision: *Rzeczpospolita* would finance our next campaign in full. It is hard for me to compare this moment to any other in my life. It had occurred a few other times that some formerly unknown people would suddenly appear out of the blue, in a *deus ex machina* turn of events, to offer me help absolutely altruistically. Yet in this case, I simply could not believe my own luck; I was so shocked that I probably did not even cough up a ‘thank you’ to *Padre* Wiesław after we left the office.

Let us thus get back to Saqqara. It was 1996. We decided to focus completely on our old trench no. 1, the one closest to the pyramid. We first wanted to check how far the mysterious wall parallel to the pyramid stretched northward and southward. Here we encountered our first surprise: at a distance of less than a metre behind each of the opposite edges of the trench, the wall turns at a right angle to the east, that is – towards the Djoser Pyramid.²⁴ Thus, our first hypothesis that the wall could have encompassed the whole pyramid turned out to be incorrect. It had probably encircled a structure from the Old Kingdom, but what structure would it have been? This question determined the direction of our subsequent work.

24 K. Myśliwiec, *New Faces of Saqqara*, fig. 17 and 22; K. Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb of Merefnebef* (Saqqara I), Warsaw 2004, pls. VI, XXVI a, d, f, XXVII a–d, XXVIII a–b, XXIX a.



Fig. 35. Burial from the Ptolemaic period in the courtyard of Merefnebef's tomb: a mummy shrouded in a cartonnage inside a clay coffin.

We had to move further to the east to see what structure it could be. From the thick layer of sand and the rubbish heap beneath, an immense amount of Old Kingdom pottery and some more faience tiles with a sky-blue surface began to emerge.

We also encountered 'our' first human skeletons.²⁵ Some were lying in the sand without any casings, some were placed on mats woven from Nile reed, others yet in reed coffins preserved in fragments. When we finally uncovered an adult mummy deposited in a terracotta chest, covered with a plastically modelled lid,²⁶ we had no doubts that we were operating in a cemetery site from the Ptolemaic Period, i.e. from the last three centuries BC (Figs. 35–36 and 37–38). This was confirmed by the specific cartonnage decoration in which the mummy was shrouded. We subsequently discovered the next mummy with a cartonnage within an anthropoid hollow forged into the rock surface (Fig. 39).²⁷ The depression was much larger than the

25 Myśliwiec, *New Faces of Saqqara*, figs. 4, 11, 15, 18.

26 Myśliwiec, *New Faces of Saqqara*, figs. 4, 5, 6, 7.

27 Myśliwiec, *New Faces of Saqqara*, fig. 8.



Fig. 36. Torso of the mummy (Fig. 35) with a beard in the shape characteristic for Egyptian deities.

mummy, which, as a result of anthropological studies, was found to be that of a teenage youth. The burial, untouched by grave robbers, was covered with a reed mat fixed with large stone blocks. A gilded surface was preserved in the mask part of the cartonnage, as well as some beautiful polychromy on the trunk portion, on which the goddess of the sky, Nut, is represented stretching her wings out over the deceased.²⁸

However, of even more importance than the mummy was the vertical cross-section through the rock in which the anthropoid hollow had been made (Fig. 40). It clearly showed that at the moment when the stonemason was carving out this place of eternal rest into the rock for the young person the rock was by no means still not unscathed. Its levelled surface was covered with a thick layer of mud, in which one could observe with the naked eye thousands of tiny animal bones. Upon closer inspection, it turned out there was not one but manifold layers, and palaeozoological research enabled identifying the various animals, which had no doubt ended up here

28 Myśliwiec, *New Faces of Saqqara*, figs. 9, 10.



Fig. 37. A pair of wooden coffins from the Ptolemaic period, deposited in a layer of sand on a rock surface.

via a sacrificial table.²⁹ That the place was once used for ritual purposes we found promptly after revealing the first portions of the mud floor covering the rock. On the surface of the earthen floor, traces of mobile altars remained, on which offerings had been burnt as part of the cult of the dead and the gods.³⁰ These remains are in the shape of circular bands fired red, with a black circular spot inside. The latter consists of ashes, which would fall from the altar following the incineration of various plants and animals. From which follows that the courtyard we unearthed, encircled by a simple

29 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pl. XXVIII c; S. Ikram, “Faunal Remains. Preliminary Report,” *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 10 (1999): *Reports* 1998, p. 106.

30 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pl. XXV g and XXVI a–d.



Fig. 38. Detail of Fig. 37.

stone-mud wall, had originally, i.e. in the times of the Old Kingdom, been a cult place before it became a cemetery 2,000 years later. But who exactly had been worshipped here?

The mystery was not resolved even by the next discovery made during the slow and careful exploration of the gigantic wall of sand covering the eastern part of the courtyard. At one point, under the layer containing the mummies, a mud-brick ruin emerged. The further east we moved, the more compact, regular and taller this brick curtain was. The diagonal orientation of the brick layers suggested, however, that this ‘wall’ was not at its original location, but instead belonged to some collapsed construction.³¹ The original context and function of the latter could not be inferred from the ruin’s morphology. Some of my colleagues even wondered if this could not have been a kind of brick pyramid miniature, e.g. a model for Djoser, or its copy for ritual purposes. Nonetheless, we were not to test this bold hypothesis during this campaign. With a mystery in the bag, we returned to Poland.

31 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pl. XXV b, e, f, XXVII b, d, XXVIII a, d; Myśliwiec, *New Faces of Saqqara*, fig. 16, 18, 23, 24 a–b, 25 b, 26.



Fig. 39. Cartonnage from the beginnings of the Ptolemaic period found in an anthropoid-shaped rocky hollow in the courtyard of Merefnebef's tomb. A winged solar disc on the jaw of the mask.

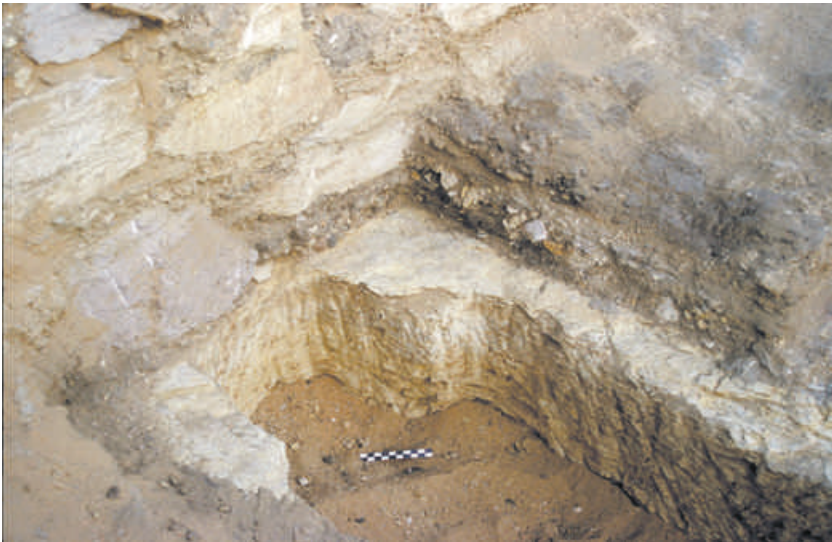


Fig. 40. Profile of the wall of the anthropoid-shaped hollow (Fig. 39) with multi-layered pugging containing the remains of offerings burnt in the courtyard of the tomb from the Old Kingdom.

This 'advance' on an important discovery caused much excitement among the Polish archaeological community for a year and inspired decision-makers to generosity larger than before.

However, there is a lot more to an archaeologist's work than science alone. At the beginning of my excavation 'career,' a certain American colleague told me that, from the moment he became head of an archaeological mission, he would spend three quarters of his time every year looking for money, devoting merely one quarter to academic matters. Back then I had taken it for a joke. But one always pays a cost for naivety, as I have already described above. Once you find the funds, another problem arrives on the horizon: the logistics. Every archaeological mission has to solve this issue individually, depending on thousands of possible conditions. At times, you need to seriously rack your brains, and that is the case with Saqqara.

In Saqqara, every inch of ground is either a historic area or farmland, or else is covered by buildings. There is no way to pitch tents to set up a camp, which would seem the most natural solution when excavations are being carried out in a desert, far from any larger human settlements. In Saqqara, you need to put a lot of effort first into finding a place to work and rest for the team of researchers. Archaeological missions operating here for years have built houses for their own use in the historic area, especially on the eastern slope of the Saqqara plateau. The French have their headquarters here next to the ancient Bubasteion (the place of worship of the holy cats, i.e. zoomorphic incarnations of the Goddess Bastet), and the English in a more discrete spot to the north, right next to an archaic necropolis. Over ten years ago, the Egyptian Antiques Organisation forbid similar practices; moreover, they even started to demolish the already existing houses.

After a long search before our first campaign, we finally found accommodation for our mission. It was located about 10 km from our excavation site, right next to the canal by the only road at the time connecting Cairo with Luxor, that is, the north with the south of the country. No matter that the house stood at the crossing of two roads, so that right next to our ears all the trucks carrying the heaviest cargoes cross-country overnight would stop with the loudest of clamour. No matter that, as soon as the first lamp was lit, millions of mosquitoes would fly over from the canal metres away and no clothing on the victim's body would pose a barrier for them.

One could even come to enjoy the roar coming from behind the second wall, where the owner of the house, a smith, had his workshop. He of course only worked at night, because in the daytime he would not have been able to cope with the synthesis of air and anvil temperatures. It was for these kinds of experiences that I had prepared myself for during my 10 years in Tell Atrib (the Nile Delta), where we had rented the ground floor from a numerous family, in a house by a street where hundreds of children played

during the night. There, in turn, our neighbour had been a carpenter, who naturally had to rest during the day. Nothing I could say would amuse our host more than my request to perhaps discreetly influence the working hours of the valued craftsman. "Have a cup of tea in the evening, you'll sleep well then," Mohammed advised. But of course, if he had worked different hours, the carpenter would not have heard the incessant stream of gossip flowing in through all the nearby windows and doors! The biggest asset for us of living there was its location right next to the excavation site.

As a result, at Tell Atrib I had the luxury that, after a short break from work, which enabled the Egyptian laborers to consume their breakfast at 10:30 am, I could open the window of our dining room, functioning simultaneously as our storage and living room, after which I would call to our Egyptian inspector called Naga, luckily a lady with a great sense of humour, "Madame Naga, ana gowah" ("Mrs. Naga, I'm inside;" both words, 'naga' and 'gowah,' meaning 'nude' in Polish). This meant, no more no less, that I was waiting for her inside the house to fulfil our daily duty: write the newly-discovered artefacts down in the Egyptian registry, she in Arabic and I in English. At Tell Atrib, we had not blamed the mosquitoes, flies, fleas, bedbugs, rats, mice, lizards and other creatures for their regular visits. Such is the law of the jungle. But the rooster was a bit of a problem. Due to the building's architecture, he was its most important inhabitant. For the middle of the house was a kind of a well with a gap at the top and the bottom situated at street level. The rooster would begin his 'concerts' at the least expected times between midnight and dawn. The 'well' was too narrow to reach the animal from above, and the key to the gate, invisible from above, was protected by the host as if it was his most prized possession. We proposed that we would pay for him to make chicken soup for the family, but to no avail. Mohammed was apparently an animal-lover, very much attached to his rooster.

In turn, in Saqqara the function of the rooster was performed by the rats, or in fact by the rat king, as it was to transpire towards the end of this tragic story. The rats also worked exclusively at night. Whenever we went to sleep in our dormitory, a room shared by all the mission members, pawing on the outside surface of the wooden door would begin immediately. With time the hole at the bottom edge of the door was so large that it was our opinion it would enable a rat to enter the room. But not even then did the music stop. Maybe the rat had a toothache or maybe he was giving some acoustic signs to his underlings. In any case, we were ripe for the ultimate solution. We placed micro-sandwiches filled with poison in a few spots around the room. Several rats fell for them right away but the nightly scratching on the door did not cease. We increased the dosage and waited patiently for several days. Finally, one day, as I stood in the middle of the room, I noticed a sturdier

rat, who slowly waddled out of a hole in the floor, stopping at a distance of less than a metre from me, after which he raised his head, looked me in the eye, nodded twice, and died. How did he know I was the murderer? No one had ever said goodbye to me in such an honourable manner. But how much he would have had to say to me! I stood silent and dumbstruck. I understood then why medical experiments requiring simulations of human behaviour are carried out on rats.

During the next several campaigns, we rented out different apartments, all of which left no space for boredom. A beautiful palace, gleaming with the whiteness of its columns and walls, erected in the middle of farmland by the ex-wife of an important dignitary to the Security Office, turned out to be a mock-up of a house, much the same as some patent-leather shoes that can only be worn by the dead. Inside there was one large room, a kind of hangar, in which the mission members slept in a pile. It soon turned out the sewage system did not work, and so one had to exhibit a lot of creativity in looking for secluded places, which nonetheless did not save us from the stink of the constantly reviving stagnant puddle by the wall of the house.

We were relieved to find a house in the desert for our next campaign, or actually on the border of the desert and adjacent to a palm grove in the Saqqara village, from which you could promptly reach, although uphill all the way, the Djoser Pyramid on foot, if only we did not have to carry our equipment and if only the Security Office would have allowed for such 'shortcuts.' We drove a car instead, cutting through the enormous rubbish dump that stretched out among the palms in the romantic grove. As we were renting this house from a European woman, also the ex-wife of an important Egyptian personage, we were lulled by some sort of irrational sense of security. Until one night, right before falling asleep after a hard day's work, the idea popped into my head to look at the full moon. Instead of one, I saw two moons. The second moon was the reflection of the first in the lake that had suddenly appeared in the palm grove, almost entirely covering the junkyard, through which the only road to the excavation site ran. An anonymous person from the local government had ordered the unclogging of a segment of the canal running through the village nearby our house.

I immediately run across the desert to the house of Tareq, one of our best workmen, who lived close by. We could always count on his help in any difficult situations. Seeing that we were at risk of being flooded, by some miracle, even though it was already after midnight, Tareq managed to get us a bulldozer and tractor which prepared a levee for our car. Tareq is a whole separate chapter in the history of our mission. While he was incredibly reliable during our first several seasons, he later fell under the influence of his more cunning friends, who used up their whole, undeniable intellect on conspiring what to do in order to do nothing. I gave the nickname

‘madrasa OPR’ to this peculiar lazybones’ trade union. The first part of the name is Arabic and means ‘school,’ the second is Polish, an abbreviation for a verb-derived noun, which today would probably even be used in our Parliament (where verbal decency is progressively disappearing) without hesitation. The verb I have in mind is ‘opierdalać się,’ which literally means ‘to bugger about,’ but which is much more vulgar than its English counterpart. Twenty years ago, I would have been uncomfortable uttering the word even in the company of Arab labourers, who I assumed did not understand any of it. I underestimated the linguistic and onomatopoeic intuitions of the Egyptians. The word ‘o-peh-er’ (pronounced /ɔ-pɛ-ɛr/) immediately appealed to the workmen, as they rightly sensed what it could mean. It came into common usage. More than that, it even became an indispensable part of the excavation’s jargon. Any time someone would fake a stomach ache, his colleagues would wink at me, whispering ‘o-peh-er.’

No means of persuasion helped and we had to part ways with Tareq. However, remembering his past services, I gave him a recommendation letter when we parted ways. While saying goodbye, I tore a piece of paper out of a notebook and jotted down several not-so-true sentences. I believed that Tareq would not even care to carry these ‘doodles’ as far as his house. Yet I was wrong again. He set off from Saqqara to Cairo bright and early the next day and went straight to the German Archaeological Institute. He was taken in by the head of the institute himself. Having read the recommendation, he hired the ‘OPR-er’ straight away to work with the German missions. A year later, I accidentally ran into Tareq on the street. He had gained weight considerably. He invited me to his house for tea and told me about his work with the Germans. He made five times as much as with our mission. Of course, I did not tell him that we were very familiar with these proportions from our own experiences. Still, he had no mental barriers in reminding me, “It’s thanks to you.”

It took us years to find accommodation where the mission could work and rest. In the quiet back part of an Arabic house, located between the road leading to the historic area and the farming fields, we found a sequence of nine small rooms as if created for our mission. Each one contains two beds, a table and a washbasin. Except for the rats, the mosquitoes and the flies, there are no unwanted guests. Birds oftentimes stroll on the lawn in front of the house, mostly colourful hoopoes and white ibises. However, this ‘luxury’ turned out to be very costly. After much haggling with the house owner, I dropped by with a final farewell visit. I told him that unfortunately we could not afford the negotiated price. “Just a moment,” Mr. Bakr interrupted, “we have a common friend. I learned about this just yesterday when your friend Sherif, my classmate from the American University of Cairo, visited me. We started talking about the Polish mission and Sherif begged

me to rent you the place at a price you could afford.” I was dumbfounded. Yet again, I realised that anything is possible in Egypt, you only need to hit the rock bottom of despair for an invisible helpful hand to reach out to you, according to the *deus ex machina* principle. Sherif El-Hakim is the son of one of the most famous Egyptian architects, the designer of the museum in Luxor.³² His father later designed the Nubian Museum in Aswan, and when the project was stolen from him by the state, he died of a heart attack. Sherif El-Hakim was one of the first Egyptians I met after arriving in the country in 1969. I was invited to the El-Hakims’ house when the father was still alive, brought there by our great, sorely missed Arabist, Barbara Czerniak (1936–2010). We now stay at Mr Bakr’s property every year during the excavations, and I had the opportunity to return Sherif’s favour a few years ago when I wrote an introduction to his book of poetry published in France.³³ You need friends in life – in Egypt as well. Maybe especially there.

When I think about these predicaments today, I recall an episode from the life of a friend of mine, who worked for over ten years at our Station (the old name of the Centre) in Cairo, doing such odd jobs as making beds for visiting fellows, managing the key to the warehouse, caring for the cleanliness of the rooms, and so on. It does not especially matter that she is the daughter of Jan Zamoyski, the last representative of one of the most meritorious families of Polish nobility, and the wife to the ex-secretary general of the Station, the head of the Centre after Professor Michałowski’s death. For us, fellows in the Centre at the time, it mattered that Elżbieta carried out these duties incredibly diligently, with happiness, and a conviction that she was serving a common cause. Moreover, she was exceedingly humble and shy. She would have never thought to demand anything for herself. When after many years she took her first holiday, which she officially had the right to do every two years, and decided to visit Poland, someone prompted her to go to the Ministry since she should also receive a plane ticket. She went and stood in front of an important official who, hearing the question, raised her voice, “If I were like you, people permanently vacationing under the palm trees, it wouldn’t even cross my mind to ask for some ticket.”

32 *Das Museum für altägyptische Kunst in Luxor (Katalog)*, Mainz 1981, Abb. 2 (opposite the title page).

33 Sh. El-Hakim, *Songs to the Morning Horizon. Jacasseries du Babouin*, Paris 2011.

Chapter 4. The vizier's revenge

Abstract: The discovery of Vizier Merefnebef's mastaba. Joy and horror in the chapel. A difficult challenge for the Polish restorers.

Keywords: false doors, offering tables, slaughterhouse, processions.

Autumn 1997. After ten months break, we once again stood in front of the embankment of mud bricks that filled the eastern section of the trench, in a courtyard surrounded from three sides by a low stone wall. We now knew that there would be a structure from the times of the Old Kingdom beyond the brick curtain. But what exactly would it be? From subsequent layers of the deposit, we carefully removed each brick, piece by piece, making sure that not even the smallest detail be missed. Every lump of earth could contain an item of diagnostic value. From time to time, new human skeletons would appear along with the remains of reed-woven coffins. These had to be scrupulously recorded *in situ* (i.e. in their original spot), and then handed over to the anthropologist for further studies. Each clay vessel sherd was kept as it might turn out to be enormously significant for the dating of the archaeological layer we were exploring.

When I touched the first brick lying so loosely there could be no doubt that there was an empty space on the other side, a sand storm instantly broke out, so intense as I had never experienced in Egypt before and never have since. It hit us with such a mass of sand that we immediately had to cover our eyes and ears so that we would be able to open them again later. The wind tore two huge tents, which had been set up right next to the trench, out of their foundations and carried them far off into the distance. In the wink of an eye, all our measuring equipment and professional photographic cameras were covered in a thick layer of sand. It later took us a week to clean them. At the same time, as our car was driving to the village for wicker baskets to carry the earth from the trenches, it took part in a serious accident involving a collision with a coach full of tourists. For a few days, we had no means of transport of our own. It was hard to decide what to save first.

If anyone still has doubts as to the revenge exacted by invisible forces, I hasten to explain that at precisely that same moment two different groups of people appeared at the trench simultaneously, and, as if not knowing what was going on, asked to be shown around the area where we were working. One consisted of our archaeologist colleagues from the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology, and the second was made up of employees from the Polish embassy in Cairo. I was so disoriented by the whole situation that

I was incapable of refusing. Throughout my entire life I had never consumed as much sand as during that one morning.

Greatly dispirited, and not knowing what was awaiting us, we returned the next morning to our trench. It was perfectly calm, not a gust of wind blowing, the air so crystal clear that the great pyramids of Giza almost 30 km away were as visible as if they were standing right next to us. Timidly, I approached the brick that I had managed to remove before the storm broke out, I moved it aside and looked through the hole that had appeared beneath. I could not believe my own eyes. At a distance of no more than a metre from me, I could see two human heads of almost natural size, carved into the surface of the rock and covered with well-preserved polychromy:¹ a man with a woman behind him, holding him by the shoulder with her hand, both looking in my direction. The subtle modelling of the relief and crispness of the colours enabled me to discern the faint smiles and expression of dignity and calmness on their faces.

However, the joy resulting from the discovery did not last long. When we widened our window slightly, it turned out that some parts of the bas reliefs had bulges and were cracked. They could fall away at the slightest touch of a finger. It would not be possible to uncover further fragments of the walls without the presence of a restorer.

We finally found out what we were unearthing: the tomb of a nobleman from the Old Kingdom (Fig. 41–42). This was indicated both by the style of the relief and by the hieroglyphic inscriptions accompanying the depicted people. The bas relief presenting the natural-sized man and woman adorned the lateral wall of a very narrow entrance to a tomb chapel, hewn into rock. Even though the place was still buried under brick rubble up to the height of the torsos of the depicted people, it was already clearly visible that there was an identical representation on the parallel wall, located at a distance of as little as sixty centimetres.² There was of course no talk of attempting to enter the chapel through the small hole between the ceiling and the surface of the backfill; even someone very slim would barely have fit. I suspended work to inform the local antiquity inspectorate about the discovery.

I had not even managed to return to the dig when our Egyptian inspector, barely wheezing from excitement, caught up with me, “Doctor, we’ve discovered Fifi’s tomb.” My first thought was that it had to be some stupid joke cooked up by my colleagues, who – of course – knew that 10 years earlier I had come up with such a nickname for myself during the excavations in Tell Atrib. When crowds of children had day in and day out gathered in

1 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, Warsaw 2004, pl. XLVI d.

2 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pl. XLIV a, c.



Fig. 41. Fragment of polychromed reliefs decorating the eastern wall of the façade in the cult chapel of Vizier Merefnebef.



Fig. 42. Portrait of the vizier in sunken relief on the northern wall of the façade.

front of my window, asking for various things, calling to me in Arabic, “Ya doctor Karol...” (“Doctor Karol...”), I had decided to chasten them a bit and told them that I was not “Doctor Karol” but “Habilitation Doctor Fifi.” I had even come up with my own etymology of the word, similar to an existing Arabic name. In Arabic, *fī* means “there is,” so Fifi could mean “there is doubly.” The Egyptian children did not let themselves be dismissed so easily, and they also learnt this term quickly. They only began to falter, when, in the course of creating levels of difficulty, I told them to refer to me as “Professor Re-habilitated, Doctor Fifi.” And that is how it remained. As a person who does not believe in coincidences, I was not at all surprised that after many years my first Egyptian doctoral student at the University of Warsaw was a

man called... Affi. This was simply fate. And that is what was also meant to occur in Saqqara.

Still, our inspector was not joking at all. As his curiosity was too intense to let him await my return, he had squeezed in through a small opening below the ceiling of the doorway and read the name of the tomb owner, written on the wall with hieroglyphs. In accordance with the convention adopted within Egyptology, today we read it as 'Fefi,' adding the missing vowel 'e' wherever a few consonants meet. This is one of the major difficulties in reading hieroglyphs. As the ancient Egyptians did not mark vowels, we only know an approximate version of the phonetics of Egyptian words. The greatest Egyptological minds continue to work on its reconstruction.

We were soon to find that Fefi was not the only name of the owner of this tomb.³ However, for the moment we were fascinated by the social position he had held. Just above the entrance to the tomb chapel, we uncovered an architrave carved into the rock, which formed the roof of the monumental tomb façade. The inscription on the architrave listed the nobleman's most important titles.⁴ The titulature began with a word translated today by Egyptologists as 'vizier,' signifying the highest dignitary in Egypt's administrative hierarchy. This more or less corresponded to the present-day function of Prime Minister of the Cabinet. What a surprise! We had discovered the tomb of the first person in the kingdom aside from the pharaoh himself. But which ruler had he served? For a long time, this question remained one of the many mysteries surrounding the tomb adjacent to the precinct of the oldest pyramid in the world.

Yet we had to immediately forfeit any further uncovering of the tomb façade. This was because its rich decorations (Figs. 41–42 and 176–177) were carved into exceptionally fragile rock, which would break up into tiny pieces at the slightest change in climatic conditions. To our dismay, we found that the ancient sculptors must have had even graver problems with the rock. Large stretches of the wall's front surface disintegrated while they worked on it, forcing the artists to fill the cavities with gypsum mortar of a colour similar to that of the rock.⁵ Sculpting in such a diverse surface must have been quite an ordeal. Be as it may, the excavations by the façade walls had to be done very slowly, with both an archaeologist and restorer present. Centimetre by centimetre, one had to immediately react to the smallest crack or loosening of the bas relief. However, we had no time for this as the

3 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 47–48.

4 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 70–74.

5 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XXXI–XXXIX.

discovery of the tomb occurred in the last week of the excavation campaign. If there are any rules at all in archaeology, it is without a doubt the fact that the most important discoveries are always made during the excavation's last days, when the archaeologists literally have no time to do anything at all. We soon reached the understanding that one restorer in our team in Saqqara would not be enough. At the time of the discovery of the vizier's tomb, we were joined by Ewa Parandowska, who conducted the initial conservation of the bas reliefs and paintings in the chapel's interior; however, the unveiling of the façade would require the permanent presence of at least one other person. We had to postpone this to the following year, while – in the meantime – we left the layer of brick, sand and stone rubble untouched, adjacent to the façade. Provisionally, we encased it from the exterior with a thick stone wall so that it would not collapse accidentally.

We first had to remove the rubble at the entrance to the chapel, which was the place of the cult of the deceased. In antiquity, it had been visited by priests responsible *ex officio* for religious rituals, but also by the family of the deceased. As we were soon to discover, the latter group had only come here to argue. Even in those times, the death of the head of the family entailed certain economic implications, which could turn even the closest of relatives into the most vehement of enemies. But we were to find this out only sometime later.

In the meantime, a group of police officers of various ranks, the security forces and other important people with not-too-clearly defined functions had gathered, alarmed by the Egyptian Antiquities Service. The chief of police, dressed in a snow-white suit, could no longer take the pressure. As soon as a slightly larger opening was formed in the upper part of the narrow entrance to the chapel, his sense of duty led him to squeeze inside and check if by any chance there was any gold treasure lying around. The corporal testimony of his prosperity grazed the delicate polychromy. We froze, closing our eyes in terror. Of course, our protests would not have amounted to much. Fortunately, the damage turned out to be much lighter than could have been expected.

The chapel's interior was stunning⁶ (Figs. 43–59). The polychromy on the fragile reliefs had been preserved here in much better shape than in any other tomb from the Old Kingdom period in Saqqara. One could almost imagine the artist had just left the wall. Were we capable of conserving these works of art in their current state and recording them in such a way that the scholarly publication on the tomb would do justice to the original? It went without

6 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XLIX, LIV, LXII, LXVII, LXXII.



Fig. 43. Interior of the vizier's cult chapel: west wall with two 'false doors.'

saying that the publication should be in one of the world languages, preferably English, as a discovery of this scope belonged among other such examples of world cultural heritage. This is the kind of book any academic library would be glad to have. These issues were constantly on our minds for the next few years, until finally the tomb conservation demonstrated permanent stability, and the two-volume monograph was scattered across the world.

For the time being, however, we remained in silent stupor at the sight of the masterpieces of art from over 4000 years ago. One could see right away that aside from the iconographic schemes that were copied onto the walls of many tombs from the third millennium BC, the wall decoration in the vizier's cult chapel contained many unique motifs, indicating his exceptionality and that of the times in which he came to live.

In accordance with tradition, the western wall of the tomb chapel contained elements guaranteeing the deceased existence in the afterworld (Fig. 43).⁷ Similarly like the Christians today, the ancient Egyptians believed in life after death. In contrast to their earthly episode, this existence was to

⁷ Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XLIX–LI, LXXII.



Fig. 44. Decoration of the east wall in the vizier's cult chapel: wild bird fowling scene (original decoration) and fishery scene (added later after original relief had crumbled away).



Fig. 44. continued

last all eternity. During one's lifetime, everything was done to ensure this came to pass. Primarily, one's own tomb was prepared, i.e. accommodation for all eternity. A guarantee of eternal life was provided by such things as the survival of the deceased's name and representations in his tomb. Therefore, the cult chapels and burial chambers of the wealthiest Egyptians received rich decorations fulfilling this condition. The more inscriptions with elements of the tomb owner's biography and representations there were, the better this was for his eternal existence. In addition, there were many scenes from his 'daily life.' Let us nonetheless not be deceived that this was a faithful depiction of his life on Earth, but rather a vision of his existence in the afterworld. Even though the value of these scenes is primarily symbolic, they were most often naturalistic, sometimes idealised or stylised reflections of authentic episodes, especially those that were repeated cyclically and as a result gained the rank of iconographic topoi. The higher a depicted person was placed in the social hierarchy during his lifetime, the more he was subordinated to the iconographic patterns proper to his position. The plebs, including craftsmen and the entire service staff of the court, were represented in a way that was more realistic, frequently directly caricatural. Aside from the fineness in execution, Egyptian artists demonstrated a huge sense of humour. Subtle mockery, even at the expense of the tomb owner, was common practice.

The main element on the western wall in every cult chapel were the 'false doors,' in the shape of a multistage, rectangular niche, richly decorated with inscriptions and representations of the deceased (Figs. 43, 83, 100, 108–109, 135–138, 150–152, 155 and 191; Il. 29).⁸ In front of these doors, there was an offering table, on which everything the deceased would need in the Afterlife was placed. This primarily included food, which came from the estate lands dedicated to maintaining the tomb owner's cult. The 'false doors' were thus a place where the dead person was believed to come in contact with the realm of the living. Huge significance was attached to these rituals. To such an extent that, as a principle, scenes illustrating the meal of the tomb owner were placed next to the 'false doors' (Figs. 100–101 and 193), as were registers in which the size, quality and quantity of individual dishes were provided with mathematical precision. On the western wall in Fefi's tomb, two groups of 'culinary' scenes were depicted, separated by the entrance to the chapel. In each of them, we can see the nobleman seated at a table supported by a high cylindrical base, with a table top on which lays – or rather stands – a row of tall hunks of bread.⁹ These last items are at times so stylised that they are more reminiscent of reeds than half loaves

8 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XLIX–L, LXXXII–LXXXIII.

9 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XLIX, LII, LIV, LXXXII.



Fig. 45. Procession of offering bearers depicted on the western wall of Vizier Merefnebef's funerary chapel.

of bread. The deceased reaches out for the bread with one hand. There are ritual vessels under the table, and in front of it – some kind of still life – seemingly chaotic, in some scenes a pile of victuals that should be located on the sacrificial table¹⁰: meat – very frequently large beef haunches – and birds, fruit – including figs and grapes filling any gaps formed among the other offerings, vegetables – including onions and lettuce, various baked goods, vessels containing drinks – especially beer and wine, etc. (Figs. 44–45 and 101–104). If anyone were to have any doubts about the quantity and quality of the offerings made, it is enough to glance upwards, to the level of the upper register: above the scene, there is a list of the offerings in the shape of

10 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XXIII, LXXIV e.

a large rectangle divided into several dozen windows, in which the name of each item, its shape and the number of units due the deceased are recorded (Figs. 93–94 and 175).¹¹ Some ‘lists of offerings’ are enormous, such as, e.g., in the scene of the offering table depicted on the northern wall of the vizier's tomb.¹² Here the statistics of the offerings cover almost half the wall. The contents of the ‘list’ and its diachronic development have been the subject of research of many an Egyptologist. Its content and form cannot only say a lot about the deceased but also contribute to specifying the tomb's dating, which in some cases is very difficult.

The two ‘lists of offerings’ carved into the walls (the western and the northern ones) in Vizier Fefi's chapel differ not only in terms of their size but also their form. The smaller one (on the western wall) stands out due to the exceptionally rich colouring of the hieroglyphic signs (Fig. 175), while the larger one (the northern wall) is almost completely monochromatic – most of the signs are a celadon colour, which in connection to the show-white background of the ‘list’ is very similar to the form of the *Pyramid Texts*.¹³ We shall soon see that in the vizier's tomb this is not the only element similar to the decorations found in the interior of the royal pyramids from this period. How extensive and widespread the fascination with this innovation (the *Pyramid Texts*) must have been at the time among the courtiers that some even went so far as to imitate them in the decorations of their own tombs!

Supplying the deceased with food was also the subject of two other types of scenes repeated in almost all the courtiers' tombs. Primarily, these were the processions of the offering bearers (Figs. 43–44, 106 and 153–154), which sometimes look as if they have no end. They carry various offerings in the direction of the table, not only those that were included in the ‘list of offerings’. In most cases, the sons of the deceased marched at the head of such processions, bearing enormous cattle haunches in their arms. Behind them, other noblemen advanced, frequently priests of the posthumous cults, bearing either birds, trays and vessels containing various victuals or armfuls of flowers, usually lotuses. At times, they also led live animals by leashes, among which we can frequently see gazelles. In the vizier's tomb, the longest procession of this type contains three rows of figures, located right behind the entrance to the tomb, before the ‘false doors’ in the northern part of the western wall.¹⁴ The perfectly preserved polychromy of this scene presents all the colour nuances of the depicted figures and items.

11 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XXIII, LXXV.

12 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XIX, LIII.

13 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pl. LIII a.

14 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XLIX–L a.

The representation of a slaughterhouse is a second topos frequently encountered in the decoration of tomb walls (Figs. 100–101 and 106–107). A few episodes of the important ritual involving the slaughtering and quartering of an ox became an iconographic scheme repeated in different variants, such as cutting its belly with a knife, the taking out of the animal's entrails or its haunch being hacked off.¹⁵ Occasionally, if there was not enough space on the wall for the entire cycle, at least one episode which took on a symbolic significance was 'squeezed in' among other scenes. The bloody naturalism of these compositions is emphasised by short hieroglyphic inscriptions accompanying the butchers and their assistants. "Slaughter valiantly, my friend, I am tired," one of them would say to his companion. Ritual slaughter – as we would refer to it today – is thus depicted and described in a technical manner, without any of the official or propaganda-based swank typical for other elements of the décor in the noblemen's tombs. Similarly as in the representations of people carrying offerings, the scenes of slaughter belonged among the repertoire of those motifs that could fill every fragment of the surface left to the artist on the chapel wall after the most important topoi had been deployed. For instance, there could be three offering bearers or one hundred; thus, they could be incorporated accordingly to the size of the space made available. The artist could similarly make use of the episodes depicting the butcher's work.

A special type of procession showed a sequence of human figures symbolising the lands (in Egyptological jargon referred to as domains) from which the victuals necessary for the cult of the deceased nobleman were derived. These personifications took the form of marching women, robed in long dresses with suspenders and bearing baskets or other containers on their heads with various produce of the land, undoubtedly specific for each of the domains. However, it is not the figures themselves that are important for an Egyptologist, but rather the inscriptions that accompany them. They provide the name of each of the land properties represented here symbolically, and almost each of these names contains the name of a king. At times, the names of the domains forming one procession bear the names of as many as a few rulers. From the point of view of chronology, this is invaluable information as it enables determining the *terminus post quem*, i.e. the date after which the tomb came into existence, and thus – the period during which its owner was alive. Fifteen domains were depicted on the eastern wall of the cult chapel in Vizier Fefi's tomb.¹⁶ Their names consist of simple sentences such

15 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XX, XXI, LV, LIX, LX.

16 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 136–138, pls. XX, LIV–LV, LVII, LIX.

as: “It is good what Ptah does for Unas,” “The lady [of the city of] Pe wants Izezi to live,” “Sakhmet wants Teti to live,” “Maat makes Teti live,” etc. The names of three rulers appear repeatedly within these inscriptions: Izezi (Fifth Dynasty), Unas (the last ruler of the Fifth Dynasty) and Teti (the first ruler of the Sixth Dynasty). The last two are predominant. Thus, it is doubtless that the tomb owner was alive at the beginning of the Sixth Dynasty, most probably during Teti's time in power.

The scenes showing the supply of produce of the land, especially food, to the deceased take up more than half the decorated surface in the vizier's cult chapel: the entire western and northern walls and half of the eastern one.¹⁷ The last of these is like the tomb owner's showcase. It is located directly opposite the entrance, hewn into the western wall. Anyone entering the chapel first saw the scene carved into the middle of the eastern wall. Fefi was also very much aware of this, placing especially important information here. The symmetrically composed scene shows him twice in the company of his mother, who bore the name Tjezet.¹⁸ The future vizier's parent is portrayed twice as a figure kneeling at her son's feet, once with youthful facial features and the other with mature ones. Why did Fefi not present his wife here even once? It would soon come to pass that he had had four of them and all of them had been artists.

The dominant role of the mother among the women depicted in the tomb of the Egyptian dignitary is thought-provoking. In order to establish one's origins, an Egyptian most often referred to his mother rather than his father, unless the latter was the king. Despite this, in the tombs of the courtiers, who during their lifetimes could influence the content of the representations in their ‘houses of eternity,’ in principle the most important woman was the wife, especially as the mother of his children, and primarily that of his oldest son and heir. It was only with this last mentioned person that the wife sometimes had to compete for the favour of the man of the house, as we will see later in another tomb. Things are somewhat different in Vizier Fefi's tomb: his mother plays first fiddle. Perhaps, this is the root of the family issues the consequences of which we will read about in the next chapter.

In the meantime, let us enjoy the beauty of the reliefs and paintings in the part of the vizier's chapel where the courtiers' favourite forms of entertainment are presented: hunting and banquets (Figs. 44 and 46–54). These scenes stand out due to the beauty of the composition, wealth of details and fineness of the colours. Right next to the propagandist scene, presenting the tomb owner with his mother, the artist depicted a fowling in a papyrus

17 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 93–140, 160–174.

18 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 115–117, illustr. 8, pls. XX–XXI, XLI, LXI.

thicket.¹⁹ Fefi, wearing a short apron, is standing in a boat woven from reeds or papyrus stems. There are two female figures, much smaller in size, standing between his legs, each one touching his calves with one hand. In accordance with the conventions of Egyptian painting, the man's body is an intense red colour, almost light brown, while the delicate body of the woman is marked with yellow paint. Each of the women is described as 'his beloved wife,' and they differ only in their names. This already sheds some more light on the internal relations and the balance of power within the vizier's family.

Fefi is holding a boomerang in one hand and three birds he had hunted down in the other, most probably Egyptian geese (Fig. 44). He is accompanied by courtiers, among whom – thanks to the inscriptions – we can identify the oldest son of the tomb owner, Manefer. His descendant's name is preceded by his title: 'Inspector of the Great House,' which shows that already during his father's lifetime he had begun his move up the career ladder at the pharaoh's court. The background of the entire scene consists of papyrus thickets, which reveal the luxuriance of Egyptian fauna. In a symmetrical arrangement, a picture was composed that from the scientific point of view could be considered an encyclopaedia of Egyptian zoology, if the artist did not have to place all the birds and predators onto frail papyrus stems, which – of course – could never have borne such weight (Figs. 46–47). The central motif of the composition consists of two nests with chicks, with two well-known predators sneaking up to them (along the papyrus stems!): an ichneumon on the left side, the incarnation of a snake-catcher, ready to pounce on the Egyptian goslings, and on the right – a genet, almost touching the frightened kingfisher offspring with his mouth (Fig. 46). Above this last nest, the chicks' parents are desperately flapping their wings, attempting – to no avail – to alert all the observing birds to the ongoing tragedy. But the heron and other water birds prefer to play the role of spectators, with dignity flaunting their silhouettes and plumage. Above the scene filled with tragic tension, the *Danaus chrysippus* majestically spreads its wings, a butterfly whose image in Fefi's tomb is the only representation of a butterfly from the Old Kingdom with such well-preserved polychromy (Fig. 48).²⁰ Few Egyptologists today remember the name of the owner of this tomb, but all know that this is the 'tomb with the butterfly.' It is thus the butterfly that has become the Prime Minister's calling card.

Similar representations of Egyptian nature are repeated in the Saqqara necropolis in the mastabas of the highest dignitaries from the period of

19 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 122–134, pls. XXI, LXII–LXV.

20 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. LXIII, LXV j.



Fig. 46. Tragedy of kingfisher chicks being raped out of their nest by a genet-fowling scene (Fig. 44) detail.

the late Fifth and the Sixth Dynasties; however, in none of them has the polychromy been preserved to this day. In these terms, Fefi's cult chapel is unique, even though the papyrus thickets accompanying the hunting and fishing scenes in a few other tombs are iconographically richer. A classical representation of rushes, the largest and most diverse in its content and finest stylistically, is found in the tomb of a dignitary named Ti, who lived towards the end of the Fifth Dynasty.²¹ His tomb is situated just a few hundred metres north of Fefi's mastaba. It is not difficult to imagine what this masterpiece of Egyptian bas reliefs looked like in the period when its polychromy was still intact. One element of the virtuosity characterising the artist who

21 K. Michałowski, *L'art de l'Ancienne Égypte*, Paris 1968, p. 184, fig. 76; K. Myśliwiec, "The Tombs of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties at Saqqara," in: *The Treasures of the Pyramids*, p. 305 (bottom).



Fig. 47. Naturalistic modelling of animals in the hunting scene; detail from Figs.44 and 46.



Fig. 48. Butterfly (*Danaus chrysippus chrysippus*) in a papyrus thicket-fowling scene detail.

had decorated the tomb we discovered is the ability to shade the colours in such a way as to render the three-dimensionality of the depicted object. The colour palette employed by Egyptian painters towards the end of the third millennium BC has thus turned out to have been much more abundant than we had so far imagined.



Fig. 49. Egyptian goose; fowling scene detail.



Fig. 50. Still life, a pile of offerings made during rituals. Polichrome relief in the vizier's funerary chapel.

The representation of a banquet in which the tomb owner had participated, taking up the larger part of the southern wall in Fefi's chapel, is just as rich in details (Figs. 51–54).²² Unfortunately, we will never discover the name of the lady accompanying him in this scene as the part of the wall containing the relevant hieroglyphic inscription had crumbled away already in antiquity. It cannot be excluded that this was his mother as a woman is represented here who equalled her companion in height, and thus was much larger than the images of his wives on the walls of this same chapel. Only in the narrow and short doorway leading to the chapel is one of Fefi's spouses portrayed as a figure of the same height (Figs. 55–56). The lady accompanying the tomb owner in the banquet scene is wearing garments for a special occasion: a long dress with the texture of a fishnet consisting of thousands



Fig. 51. Portrait of Merefnebef and one of his four wives in the banquet scene on the south wall of the cult chapel.

²² Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 152–159, pls. XXII, LXVII–LXIX, LXXI.

of faience beads strung onto intersecting threads. In later times, 1500 years into the future, i.e. during the so-called Third Intermediate Period, mummies were clothed in a similar robe, with various religious motifs woven into the thick beaded net, especially representations of deities linked to the Netherworld.

The feasting couple is savouring the performance of the musicians and female dancers (Figs. 52–53). The latter are clad only in a short apron at the hip, while presenting either acrobatic figures that involve hoisting one leg as high as if they were dancing the cancan or a serene gambol with arms raised above the head. The dancers' hair is worn in a long ponytail falling down onto their backs, ending in a pompon. While Fefi's eyes are fixed on these arousing figures, the gaze of the Egyptologist rests primarily on the harpists crouching in front of the dancers. This is not due to the graceful movement of their fingers as they caress the strings with an exceptional sense of musical matter, but rather as a result of the inscriptions accompanying each of them. The harpist quartet consists of ladies bearing different names: Seshseshet, Nebet, Iret and Metjut (Fig. 53). Every one of them is described as the tomb owner's spouse. They each even bear the title of 'his beloved wife.' The quartet composed of the wives-harpists is one of the most important pieces of information that can be surmised from the decoration of the tomb chapel. These same ladies are depicted together once again in two other places on



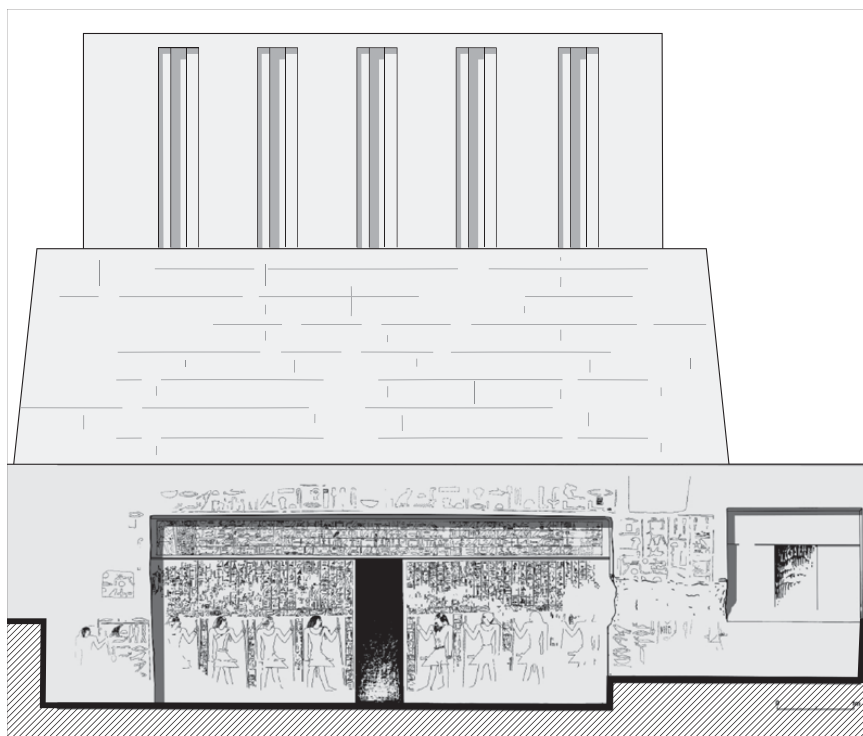
Fig. 52. Performers in an acrobatic dance before the tomb owner: banquet scene detail.



Fig. 53. Female harpist quartet in the banquet scene.



Fig. 54. Dog and monkey – the vizier's favourite pets under his throne.



Il. 5. Reconstruction of the façade of Merefnebef's mastaba.

the walls of its interior. If Fefi had as many as four wives, as everything seems to indicate, his house must have been similar to a harem, and – thus – been a miniature of the pharaoh's court. We will be able to note on more than one occasion that this fun-loving nobleman had a tendency towards usurping the prerogatives due a ruler.

In the meantime, following some slow and toilsome exploration, we had managed to unearth the chapel façade (Il. 5; Figs. 41–42 and 176–177).²³ This was also to surprise an Egyptologist with the originality of its decorations. It has the shape of a cuboid hollow stretching the entire width of the chapel. Under the thick ceiling hewn into the rock, with its front performing simultaneously the function of an architrave with an inscription carved into a deep sunken relief, a long wall runs bearing carefully thought-through, rich and diverse decoration. There are two adjacent shorter lateral walls,

23 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 65–86, pls. VIII, IX, XI–XII, XXX–XXXII.

adorned by a deep sunken relief of enormous propagandist significance (Figs. 176–185).²⁴ The preserved polychromy fragments show that the original décor must have been fascinating primarily due to its exquisite colour scheme. The façade ceiling, similarly as that of the entire chapel, was painted red (Fig. 41), imitating by such means granite, a material imported from Aswan in the southern antipodes of Egypt and in principle reserved for royal buildings.

The long back wall of the façade is divided into three horizontal strips, of which the top two are filled with hieroglyphic inscriptions of special significance. As in the case of most Egyptian texts, we read them from the right side to the left. The upper strip, stretching the entire length of the façade above the entrance to the chapel, is a type of inner architrave. In the four horizontal lines, the sunk relief technique was used to carve a so-called ideal biography, which is a type of text repeated in a few variants on the lintel of many Old Kingdom tombs.²⁵ It contains the most important information and instructions for those visiting the tomb. This is something like a guide to the cult of the deceased. Immediately following the standard offering formulas, addressed to Anubis and Osiris, the main gods of the Netherworld, a panegyric begins listing the many virtues of the tomb owner: "... after he has become exceedingly old, in peace, in peace by the great god [as] one who caused peace, one who lived in a state of reverence, one who spoke that which is good and thought of his burial, honoured one by Osiris, [and] who is in the king's heart in his every place" We find out later in the text on which holy days the deceased should be venerated: "... on the Opening of the Year Festival, on the Festival of Thoth, on the Beginning of the Year Festival, on the *Wag* Festival, on the Great Festival, on the [Festival of] Burning, on the Beginning of the Month and the Beginning of Half Month Festival, on the *Sadj* Festival, on every Festival, every day, in eternity." For an Egyptologist, it is surprising to note the omission of a few holidays present in similar inscriptions from other tombs, such as the days dedicated to the gods Sokar and Min. This probably means no more than the fact that space was lacking to include a full register of all the holidays, which was not hugely detrimental to the deceased as he was to receive offerings "every day."

The third line contains a warning addressed to the people visiting Fefi's tomb: "... As for all people who will enter this tomb in a state of impurity after they have eaten the abominations which the glorious spirit who has gone to the necropolis abominates, without removing their impurity, as they

24 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 66–69, pls. XII–XIII.

25 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 70–74, pls. XI, XIV, XXX–XXXIV.

[should] purify themselves for the temple of god, their impediment which is very evil will be caused by the great god because of this”

The last line once again brings us to musings on the virtues of the deceased: “... Moreover, I am initiated in the secrets of every god. Moreover, I know all the things through which the glorious spirit who has gone to the necropolis becomes glorious as honoured one of the great gods and by the king. Moreover, I know all the things through which he ascends to the great god”

However, the most important information for us has been included in the endings of each of the four lines. They all end with the name of the owner of the tomb. To the surprise of those reading, it turns out that the vizier has as many as three names: his ‘great name’ Merefnebef (“[He] is loved by his lord”), his ‘beautiful name’ (sobriquet) Fefi and Unas-ankh (“Unas is living”). Admittedly, this last one appears in the vizier’s tomb most rarely out of the three names, but its meaning for the dating of this structure is especially important. This is because it contains the name of the last ruler of the Fifth Dynasty and in a context suggesting that he had recently passed away. This is yet another indication allowing for the claim that the vizier with such a basilophoric name (containing the king’s name) had lived during the reign of the next ruler, Teti, i.e. at the beginning of the reign of the Sixth Dynasty, all the more so as he had performed administrative functions in the pyramid of this last ruler.

We learn of the links with Teti’s pyramid from the ‘calling card’ that closes the inscribed architrave on the northern side, just after the above-cited text.²⁶ We can see there the vizier in the company of his oldest son, Manefer, and his wife standing behind him. The inscription accompanying Fefi lists some of his titles, including “under-supervisor of the god’s servants of the Meret temple of king Teti,” “attendant of the pyramid of Teti,” “director of the *ah*-palace.” Therefore, even if we were to assume that the future vizier was born during Unas’s reign, the prime of his life fell during the beginning period of the Sixth Dynasty.

Below the inner architrave, on both sides of the entrance to the chapel, there is a long text with its form contrasting in every way to the above-described ‘ideal biography’ (Fig. 41).²⁷ It is written down not horizontally but vertically, in 51 columns, and not using a sunken relief but slightly

26 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XIV, XXXIII.

27 D. Czerwik, F7 A–B: *The Inscription in the Middle Register*, in: Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 74–83, pls. XI, XV–XVI, XXX–XXXII, XXXIV–XXXVI, XXXVIII, XL g–j, XLI; H. Willems, “Philological Remarks on the Autobiography of Merefnebef,” *LingAeg* 16 (2008), 293–302.

convex. It is especially striking to note the contrast in the colour scheme: all the hieroglyphic signs in the above-described architrave were covered with a type of greenish-blue paste, preserved here and there on the surface of the relief, standing out from the snow-white background of the inscription. Once again, we can note here the influence of the stern stylistics of the *Pyramid Texts*, already observed on one of the two 'lists of offerings' in the chapel interior. Each of the convex hieroglyphs in the vertical inscription stands out due to the richness of its colours rendering with exceptional naturalism even the slightest details of the depicted humans and animals, as well as those of the various objects. How enchanted any Egyptian must have been who gazed at this kaleidoscope of colours in their original intensity if today we stand in silent admiration in front of its faded remains, whipped by winds, sands and rain over the course of many centuries!

The interpretation of this long text under the architrave is fraught with philological and semantic difficulties. Most generally, it can be referred to as an appeal to the living or a type of testament characterising such things as the tomb owner's approach to his own family. What is best remembered is primarily the fragment informing that no one, not even the children or siblings of the deceased, has the right to place his or her tomb within Merefnebef's 'house of eternity.' In general, this reflects on the character of the tomb owner and his approach to his own progeniture, who probably came from the wombs of different wives. In this context, it becomes easier to understand the dominant role of his mother, portrayed, as described above, twice in symmetrical scenes on the tomb's axis.

The third, bottom strip of adornments in the tomb façade also stands out due to the originality of the idea behind it.²⁸ In a convex relief, the owner of the tomb is portrayed eight times, as he strides towards the entrance to the chapel (Il. 5; Fig. 41). Each of these figures can be seen as the *ka* of the deceased, or his afterworld incarnation. In this symmetrical arrangement, they form two four-person processions placed on both sides of the entrance. The figures differ only in the shape of the hairstyles, the details of the clothing and in the content of the inscriptions, which enclose each one from three sides constituting a rectangular frame. Similar compositions consisting of representations of the deceased were thus far only encountered in architraves above passages situated on the axis of sacral and sepulchral structures, as well as in the 'false doors' in the tombs of noblemen, in which each of the symmetrically placed jambs contained a representation of the deceased in its lower part, underneath a vertical inscription. Intrinsically,

28 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 83–86, pls. XI, XV–XVI, XXX–XXXII, XXXIV–XXXVI, XXXIX, XLI.

these were images small in size. Thus, we can see a large-format version of such a composition in the decoration of the tomb walls for the first time at the Memphite necropolis here in Merefnebef's tomb. This is yet another innovation that has no precedence in Egyptian art. As we will soon see, the idea was well received and found an imitator even in the direct neighbourhood of the discussed tomb.

Even a short overview of the decorations of the walls in the vizier's tomb chapel leads to the conclusion that we are dealing here with a high-level state official with an enormous ego, out of snobbery adopting the symbols of royal might. Wherever it was only possible, he attempted to imitate the pharaoh. This is observable even in his three names, four wives, the red colour of the polychromy of the 'false doors' and ceiling, with black spots characteristic for Egyptian granite, and – finally – in the monochromatic inscriptions in the sunken relief imitating the form of the *Pyramid Texts*. Snobbery worthy of a *nouveau riche*. But was this really who he was? We will try to answer this question in the next chapter.

Be as it may, this is where the idyll ends, envisioned by Merefnebef during his lifetime, when he still had a decisive influence on the decorations in his tomb. A harbinger of future misfortunes and conflicts was revealed in the next parts of the unusual monument we unearthed. First, there was the courtyard in front of the chapel façade. Much the same as the chapel itself, this was carved out into the rock, as if 'inserted' into the hollow with walls one metre high (Il. 22). It forms a single whole with the adjacent upper courtyard, stretching out further to the west and surrounded by a not-too-high wall, the same one that we had unearthed during our first excavation campaign. Each of the two parts of the courtyard is covered in a layer of mud containing bone aggregate, left over from animal sacrifices. But the sediment accumulation in the upper courtyard is much thicker than in the bottom courtyard.²⁹ In addition, along the edge of the rock wall separating the courtyards, there is a strip of variously-sized stone fragments, inserted to level the unnaturally crooked edges of the line of the wall. All this indicates the alteration of an earlier tomb, which had left behind only part of the upper courtyard with a multi-layered mud floor. The eastern part of this flooring had been destroyed to hack out the bottom courtyard, which was located at the same level as the entrance to the chapel of the new tomb. Thus, the vizier's tomb had not been erected on 'virgin' territory, but at the expense of an earlier tomb structure. Who and when had been buried there? Had anyone been? This we will never find out.

29 Cf. Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pl. XXVIII c, with pl. XXXI.

Behind the chapel's opposite wall, i.e. the eastern one, at the same level as the chapel's ceiling, we unearthed the entrance to the underground part of the tomb (Il. 6 and 22). This was a camouflaged shaft within the mastaba with walls made from mud brick, surrounding a stone, mud-brick and sand fill. At the northern wall of the mastaba, on its inner side, there was the entrance to a burial shaft over 14 metres deep.³⁰ Carved into rock, it had a superstructure built from stone blocks in the massif of the mastaba. At the bottom of the shaft, on its western side, lies an entrance to a large funerary chamber, lacking any kind of adornment. A huge, unfinished sarcophagus from white limestone is located at its western wall. Its walls are unevenly cropped, and it has no inscriptions or other decoration. Even the stone surface has not been smoothed and it bears numerous traces of variously-sized chisels. A few large ceramic vessels, in which undoubtedly offerings were placed after the heavy lid had closed the sarcophagus, have been left leaning against the sarcophagus, but... the lid itself does not adjoin the case. In one corner, it has been raised and propped up with a stone of such a size as to make the opening large enough to pull out the corpse, though not without some damage to its integrity. We look inside: the sarcophagus is empty, with tiny fragments of golden foil lying here and there. When we carefully continue our exploration of the upper layer of the backfill, slowly moving in the direction of the chamber's western wall, we discover the ragged fragments of the skeleton of an adult male, lying haphazardly on the lid of the sarcophagus. "He was about 48 years old and he was very handsome," states Professor Maria Kaczmarek, our anthropologist.³¹

Thus, the vizier shared the same fate after death as most of the 'inhabitants' of this necropolis. Everything indicates that this plundering was done a short time after the funeral. We find another body in the secondary backfill of the shaft. Perhaps some of the looters had incorrectly calculated the statics of the thick layer in which they had made their vertical canal leading to the funerary chamber, so that the rubble had collapsed on top of them and they had accidentally also found their own burial place in the vizier's tomb? We will see later more than once that even thieves experienced their own personal tragedies during their work, usually as a result of making some error.

As excavations proceed, increasing amounts of archaeological material appear for which space has to be found. This includes not only 'tons' of pottery (Il. 19–20; Figs. 83–87), an invaluable source for the reconstruction of

30 K. Kuraszkiewicz, "Eastern Part of the Complex," in: Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 54–56.

31 M. Kaczmarek, "Skeletal Remains (Burial 45)," in: Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 185–189.

burial customs and for dating the tomb, but also the remnants of funerary equipment, including items made from stone, wood or copper, i.e. raw material of no significance for the gangs who plundered the tombs (Figs. 76–82). To have enough space for all these artefacts a storehouse is needed, which simultaneously performs the function of a workshop, where an anthropologist can unwrap the mummy and examine the bone material, while a photographer can set up his professional equipment to take photographic records of the highest class, suitable for a scholarly publication. All this has to take place during the excavation campaign for the next such occasion may only come along a year or more later, especially if the internal situation in Egypt temporarily makes it impossible to conduct research. In contrast to the majority of archaeological missions, we try to leave after every campaign with complete documentation concerning the ongoing excavations, so that no external factors make it impossible to publish the results.

The construction of a new warehouse at a historical site was out of the question. We focused our attention on a small storehouse (Fig. 205) standing right next to our excavation site, constructed from fired brick during a time when it had not crossed anyone's mind that tourists of any sort might venture as far as the area on the western side of the pyramid, considered to be part of the desert, which – in fact – it had until recently been. This area, as I have already mentioned above, had been deemed archaeologically barren and – as a result – no Egyptologist had touched it for over 150 years. A solid storehouse had thus been erected there, with a very specific function, marling the view of the pyramid from the west. It was supposed to hold the sacks containing the 'financial records' of the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation, more specifically the stubs from the entrance tickets to the historical area, which remained fastened together with a clasp after the tourists had been sold their proper entrance cards. The storehouse quickly filled up as Saqqara was visited by millions of tourists, and no one had been to check on the place in years. Could these 'priceless' documents not be evicted and the small room of the architectural eyesore transformed into our workshop? This idea kept nagging at us and for a few years we proceeded with diplomatic actions aimed at the local antiquities inspector. This was an exceptionally honest man and any sort of corruption was absolutely out of the question. He was also unusually stubborn and scrupulous. No one believed we would have even the slightest chance of succeeding in our talks with him. Irritable to a degree much above the average, he was known throughout Egypt for his favourite word: "No." He kept repeating it to us over the first few years just as frequently as he had with all other archaeological missions, even though their problems were much more trivial.

The discovery of Merefnebef's tomb had a miraculous effect on Mr H.'s psyche. He suddenly turned into our closest and dearest friend and gave us

the sacramental “yes,” if restricted by various conditions. We had to burn the contents of the sacks, but not all of it. Part of the unique records, treated as a *signum temporis* (sign of the times) were to find their way to the roof of the building, fastened in place with boards and iron rods, and then covered with cement – for posterity. This is exactly what we did. The hundreds of remaining sacks were carried out in front of the building, and the thus erected pyramid was burnt over the course of a few stages. The royal necropolis of Memphis had surely never seen such a fire from the moment it had come into existence, i.e. for more than 4000 years. It could even be stated that this long overdue fumigation was worthy of the pyramid standing nearby, the oldest in the world.

As we agreed at the very beginning of the chapter that the terrible sand storm at the moment of discovering the vizier's tomb was his revenge for disturbing his eternal rest, the acquisition of the storehouse should be seen as his attempt at achieving expiation. Perhaps, in the meantime, his confused *ka* had come to the realisation that a scholarly publication on the tomb, in a world language and containing wonderful records of the finds, kept on the shelves of the largest libraries in the world, would grant him immortality for longer than would the reliefs and paintings in the cult chapel of his ‘house of eternity.’

Chapter 5. A testimony to stormy times

Abstract: Conflicts in the family of the upstart vizier. Four wives and a dominating mother. Iconoclasts at work. Political problems with heritage jealousy. The cadet takes everything.

Keywords: harem, harpists, fowling, banquet, usurpation, *damnatio memoriae*.

The idyll described in the previous chapter, conceived by Merefnebef during his lifetime and depicted on the walls of his cult chapel by the best artists from the turn of the Fifth and the Sixth Dynasties (ca. 2300 BC), also presents the sources of the tragedy that was to ensue at latest at the moment when the tomb owner was appointed to be the vizier. He was quite an exceptional vizier.

The fact that a person of such a social status had such a small tomb already gives rise some surprise (ll. 22). The dignitaries bearing this title at the turn of the Fifth and the Sixth Dynasties buried in Saqqara had enormous mastabas, made from highest-quality limestone blocks and consisting in the aboveground part of a few dozen chambers with diverse functions. The largest of these, which was the tomb of Mereruka and a few members of his family, has over forty such chambers.¹ Merefnebef's place of rest seems exceptionally meagre in comparison, with its one-chamber chapel hewn into the rock and mastaba made from mud brick. As already mentioned, one of the most renowned American Egyptologists considered this to be proof that the vizier had lived towards the end of the Sixth Dynasty, when the impoverishment of the upper layers of society had reached such a point that even those who held similar titles were buried in equally modest tombs.² The relatively simple form of the 'false doors' sculpted in the interior of Merefnebef's cult chapel was supposed to have been evidence for such a dating. However, the researcher did not notice that at the time when the tomb was being dug out in the rock and the bas reliefs carved into the walls of his chapel, Merefnebef was not yet a vizier.

1 N. Kanawati et al., *Mereruka and His Family*, Part 1: *The Tomb of Meryteti*, Oxford 2004; N. Kanawati et al., *Mereruka and His Family*, Part 3:1: *The Tomb of Mereruka*, Oxford 2010.

2 E. Brovarski, "False Doors and History: The Sixth Dynasty," in: M. Bárta (ed.), *The Old Kingdom Art and Archaeology. Proceedings of the Conference held in Prague, May 31–June 4, 2004*, Prague 2006, p. 93.

While the chapel façade and the short narrow corridor leading to its interior are decorated with inscriptions, with the title of vizier in an initial position, this very title is not present at all in the inscriptions inside the chapel. It is not even present in the inscriptions sculpted on the ‘false doors,’ the place where attempts were made in every tomb to provide as full an image of the deceased as possible. The conclusion is simple: the chapel interior was decorated first, at a time when Merefnebef did not yet hold the title of vizier. The only inscription in which this word has been found inside the chapel is located on its southern wall, which was most probably decorated last. Thus, a middle-ranking official made a surprising career only when the work on his relatively modest ‘house of eternity’ was nearing its end. This is no novelty in the history of the Old Kingdom. It sometimes happens that in some of the tombs the highest titles are only to be found on the sarcophagus of the deceased; thus, they were a kind of farewell merit, not implying any political consequences. Even when the word ‘vizier’ sometimes appears in isolation on the courtyard columns in the tomb of a high dignitary, researchers are inclined to consider this to be an honour bestowed posthumously.³

But Merefnebef’s case was different. He became a vizier when the external part of his tomb did not yet have any decorations. Every inscription on the façade and narrow doorway (Figs. 55–56) begins with the word ‘vizier.’ Everything indicates that the modest official was possessed at this time by the megalomania of someone who had unexpectedly become a member of the nouveau riche. To suddenly become the first person in the country after the pharaoh! – it would go to anyone’s head. The new ‘prime minister’ went on to build up his tomb, so that its architecture testified to the owner’s new social position. He extended the tomb southward. Right next to the front wall of his chapel, the façade of a second, smaller chapel started being hewn out into the rock (Il. 5).⁴

Who was it for? Perhaps for his mother, who – as we could see earlier – played the most important role in Merefnebef’s life, or perhaps for his oldest son, i.e. his heir and successor. The inscription on the façade of Merefnebef’s chapel, which is something like the last will of the deceased, clearly stating that the tomb owner does not want anyone to be buried within his ‘house of eternity,’ would speak out against this second hypothesis. Unless he changed his mind or someone forced him to do so at the moment when this

3 H. Altenmüller, *Die Wanddarstellungen im Grab des Mehu in Saqqara*, Mainz 1998, p. 82 (no. 6).

4 K. Kuraszkiewicz, “Western Part of the Complex,” in: Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, p. 61, pls. XXVI g, XXIX b.

‘testament’ had already been carved into the wall.⁵ It seems highly unlikely that the new chapel was meant for one of his ‘beloved wives,’ since their place in the family – as attested by their images on the tomb walls – was rather at the harp during various festive occasions or beside the tomb owner in a papyrus boat during hunts.

The construction of a new chapel was disrupted almost immediately after it had been initiated. Even the doorpost of the future entrance was not fully carved out. One could think that the sculptors were discouraged by the exceptionally poor limestone rock in this place, crumbling at the slightest touch. But this was the type of problem with which they had dealt ideally, if not easily, in the main chapel façade. One would therefore think that it was rather the death of the owner that wrecked his daring plans. A bizarre testimony to the planned alterations is a large cuboid block of original rock left behind by the builders right opposite the monumental inscription carved in deep relief in the southern part of the façade.⁶ In a way that offends the monumentalism of the architectural context, as the block stands close to the wall, covering part of the inscription and leaving next to it only a very narrow passageway left between the two courtyards in front of the façades of the parallel chapels. It seems obvious that a change in the architectural concept occurred in the course of work. But this block also never saw the moment when it would perform an important bearing function. It remained a half-product as the base for the future portico that was supposed to have been constructed between the courtyards of the neighbouring chapels. This is indicated by the rectangular excision in the upper part of the façade, directly opposite the unfinished colonnade. This nest was supposed to have held the end of an architrave supported by columns. The entablature would also surely have been decorated with inscriptions crafted in deep relief, bearing the titles of the deceased, in which the word ‘vizier’ would have been at the beginning.

None of these ambitious plans were ever realised. Not even the wall was ever finished, which was supposed to have encircled the upper courtyard in front of Merefnebef’s cult chapel. Our excavations have shown that it never reached a height of more than a few dozen centimetres. This is indicated clearly by the profile of the trench adjacent to the wall from the west

5 H. Willems, “Philological Remarks on the Autobiography of Merefnebef,” *Lingua Aegyptia* 16 (2008), p. 302; K. Myśliwiec, “Dating the Tombs of Merefnebef and Nyankhnefertem in Saqqara,” in: M. Bárta, F. Coppens, J. Krejčí (eds.), *Abusir and Saqqara in the year 2010/2*, Prague 2011, p. 658, fn. 1.

6 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XXV d, XXVI f–g, XXVII b, d, XXVIII a, XXIX a, XXX, XXXI.

and the north. Similarly, the passageways between the two courtyards, the upper and the lower one, were left in a state unbefitting the position of a vizier. There are no ramps or stairs between them, while – as already mentioned – the edge of the rock wall separating the courtyards from each other was patched up with stones in a way that taunts any elementary sense of aesthetics. The only connecting element between the levels consists of a few irregular blocks in the corner of the courtyard adjacent to the unfinished chapel, which can at most be classified as a ‘back’ staircase, most probably used by the stonemasons during the work that was suddenly interrupted. The fact that these blocks were never even removed confirms the presumption that the work was done very quickly and chaotically, while the deceased embarked on his journey to the land of Osiris before it was completed. At the moment of his death, the tomb was simply a huge construction site.

This upstart turned out to be a real Pandora’s box. The testimony of this tragedy can be observed at every step in the decoration of the tomb. Who was the pharaoh who elevated an average official to the highest function in state administration? We encounter the first premises for solving this mystery right upon entering the tomb chapel. The lateral walls of the narrow (only sixty centimetres wide) doorway leading to its interior are decorated with majestic bas reliefs presenting Merefnebef with a clean-shaven head, wearing a long robe, striding westward, i.e. towards the tomb’s exit.⁷ Both scenes have an identical composition and the same inscriptions (Figs. 55–56). In each of them, the vizier is accompanied by a wife and by two sons depicted as much smaller than their father. While the tomb owner’s name and that of the two ladies bearing different names remained untouched, the images depicting most of the sons and the accompanying inscriptions were carefully hammered out. There can be no doubt that the sons were the victims of *damnatio memoriae*. In order to understand the ethical value of such an act, we must remember that the soul of the dead remained alive in the afterworld for as long as their names and images were preserved.

The consequences of the iconoclasts’ activities on the corridor’s southern wall are especially diagnostic, as there – in contrast to the northern wall – only one and not both representations of the sons were hammered out (Fig. 56). The *ka* of the son standing closer to his father was annihilated, which in the sepulchral iconography of this period was primarily the image of the oldest male descendant, i.e. the heir. In turn, the son portrayed standing

7 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XIII, XXX–XXXI, XXXVII c–d.

further away, on the other side of a long staff held in the tomb owner's hand, is younger. His image remains untouched as the only one among the four representations of the male progeniture in these scenes. The inscription identifying him has also not been destroyed: the youngster bears one of his father's names, Fefi. This scene provides grounds for speculations that it was the eldest son, or perhaps the older sons, who were the main aim of the attack of the iconoclasts, while the youngster, whose *ka* evaded a similar fate, must have been in opposition to his older brothers, and was presumably even the inspirator behind the destructive act. He strides, turning his head in the direction of his father and older brother, of which only the contours of the bas relief have remained. One has the impression that he is smiling slightly. We can also encounter him inside the tomb, where his role is more pronounced.

For now, we are more interested in the destroyed part of the inscription above his father's head (Figs. 55–56). In both parallel inscriptions, i.e. on both sides of the entrance, the exact same fragment of Merefneber's titula-ture was hammered off, or rather it was scratched off with a chisel: *jm3hw hr...* ("honoured (= celebrated) by ...") (Figs. 57–58).⁸ In the fragment of this epithet that was chipped off, we would have expected the presence of a word which most frequently was the name of a god. If also in this case it was the name of one of the gods of the Netherworld, who could this have bothered? However, a more careful investigation of the furiously hammered off spot, done in various lighting, enable the identification of the contours of another word: 'king.'

Who was annoyed by this neutral word and why? In and of itself, it is not the carrier of any political content though. It is obvious that the iconoclasts were acting on the orders of someone, whose actions were aimed at a specific pharaoh and his favourite. Who could have been a reviled king at the beginning of the Sixth Dynasty? Had the object of the attack been the first of its rulers, bearing the name Teti, the iconoclast might have been subject to a severe punishment, even if this act of vandalism had only occurred during the reign of his son, called Pepi, the first of two pharaohs to bear this name. Even though royal conspiracies against the ruler were organised during Pepi I's reign,⁹ inscriptions bearing his name were not destroyed; thus, it is all the more probable that a word not having any direct connection with him would have been left alone.

8 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XLII, XLIV c–d, XLV, XLVI c, XLVII f, h.

9 N. Kanawati, *Conspiracies in the Egyptian Palace. Unas to Pepy I*, London 2003, pp. 48–137, 169–182.



Fig. 55. North wall of the doorway in the vizier's tomb chapel with the representations of his two sons (hammered off the wall). Fragment of inscription above Merefnebef's head that had been erased by iconoclasts.



Fig. 56. South wall of the doorway with the erased representation and inscription of the eldest son and the unscathed figure of a younger son bearing one of his father's names, Fefi.



Fig. 57. Fragment of inscription in the doorway leading to the vizier's funerary chapel that was erased by iconoclasts. North wall.

Nonetheless, the period between Teti's reign, who was probably murdered as the result of a palace plot, and that of his son and rightful heir was interrupted by the short reign of a usurper, about whom we know little. We know that his name was Userkare ("Strong is the *ka* of [the god] Re"); however, we have no insight into whether any type of family ties connected him to his predecessor. He was ignored by the highest dignitaries of the period: his name is not even mentioned in their biographic inscriptions. It seems obvious that he was condemned to *damnatio memoriae* during his lifetime. The name sometimes appears in the kings' registers written down in later times. We do not know how long he was in power. Most researchers



Fig. 58. Damaged and secondarily inscribed part of hieroglyphic text, identical as in Fig. 57, located on south wall (cf. Fig. 56).

think that the historical sources do not make it possible to consider him as having reigned for more than a year or two, while a few extend this period to six years.¹⁰ Userkare is the only candidate for such a ruler that the very mention of him, if only in the allusion contained in the word ‘king,’ could have evoked such strong emotions, especially at a moment when the rightful pharaoh, Pepi I, had already ascended the throne.

If we assume this hypothesis, Merefnebef’s surprising career forms a logical pattern. A middle-ranked official, suddenly brought to the top of the administrative hierarchy, must have had special ties with this self-appointed ruler, even before the latter came to power for a short period. One of his

¹⁰ Theis, “Userkare,” pp. 56–67.

titles, “the one with a pleasant hand,” indicates Merefnebef’s ties with the royal harem, even though the exact meaning of this epithet remains unestablished to this day.¹¹ If it is true that the owner of the tomb we discovered had performed an important function in the harem, he must have known many secrets highly important for the pharaoh in power. We would not at all be surprised if he had played some role in the conspiracy against Teti and in Userkare’s coming to power. These might even have been especially important services, seeing as the new ‘pharaoh’ suddenly promoted him to the highest post in the kingdom. Merefnebef felt himself to be so important and independent that he even usurped a number of prerogatives normally reserved for the ruler, including stylising some elements of his tomb chapel according to patterns borrowed from the royal sphere. The most striking such aspect is the fact that he bears as many as three names and has four wives. Each of these is depicted as a harpist (Fig. 53). These unusual circumstances, very strongly emphasised in the tomb, allow for the supposition that the atmosphere in Merefnebef’s house was similar to that of a harem, which might have been an ‘implant’ from the royal courtyard. The quartet of harpists, each with a different name and each bearing the epithet of “his beloved wife,” appears on the walls of the chapel three times, always with the same names of the musicians, either in scenes occurring at the offering table or during a feast.

After clearing Merefnebef’s tomb chapel of the ancient rubble, it became possible for us to ascertain that the iconoclasts were not satisfied with just destroying the images of the vizier’s oldest sons in the corridor leading to its interior. In the chapel itself, the representations of the eldest son and the accompanying inscriptions were also chipped off the walls (Fig. 59). These include two scenes closing off the decorations of the western wall from the northern and southern side.¹² In accordance with the principle of symmetry, in each case they accompany a ‘false door,’ which is carved into this wall twice. In each of them, the representation of the tomb owner’s wife has not been damaged; the anger of these frustrates is focused on the eldest son, who – according to Old Egyptian custom – was to be the heir.

If we take a closer look at the decorations of tombs from the Old Kingdom, we can see that not only Merefnebef’s progeniture had a problem with the privileged first-born male descendant. In many of these mastabas, it is precisely those fragments of the reliefs which doubtless depicted the eldest son or can be suspected of having portrayed him that have been hewn off, more

11 K. Kuraszkieicz, *Titles*, in: Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, p. 48 (Titles, no. 1).

12 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 100 (scene 10) and 163 (scene 45).

or less meticulously.¹³ The most ancient known deliberate destruction of this type has been attested in the mastabas of the noblemen from the beginning of the Fourth Dynasty, and thus tombs over 200 years older than the one we discovered. Conflicts between the sons did not elude even the noblest and wealthiest of families. One such testimony of this would be the chiselled off fragments of a scene in Ptahshepses's tomb from the Fifth Dynasty, located in Abusir, only a few kilometres north of Saqqara.¹⁴ In terms of its architecture and decorations, this tomb remained an unparalleled model for later viziers buried in Saqqara.

An exceptional example of the activities of iconoclasts in Merefnebef's tomb chapel would be the fishing scene, located at the end of the eastern wall on its southern side (Fig. 44).¹⁵ It shows a person named Merefnebef receiving gifts in the form of fish caught in a water reservoir, next to which a harvest scene has been portrayed. We were struck by the stylistic distinctiveness of this scene as soon as we cleared the rubble from the chapel interior – the faded colours contrasting with the bright polychromy of the remaining reliefs; the different composition of the scene presenting the tomb owner seated near his wife; not portrayed sitting next to each other, but one beneath the other, with her seated on a separate chair below the man. Both figures are identical in size, but disproportionately smaller than in the remaining scenes depicting the tomb owner in the company of one of his four wives. The contours of the silhouettes were carved schematically, lacking the fineness of the modelling characteristic for the neighbouring bas reliefs. It is quite shocking to note the thematic and stylistic discrepancies between the fishing scene and the motifs carved out beneath, forming, somewhat like the frames of a film, a cycle of preparations for the feast depicted on the adjacent southern wall (Figs. 51–54). To put it shortly, the mysterious scene makes the impression of having been 'implanted' into an already existing frame, much too cramped for its content.

The inscriptions accompanying the seated couple are even more puzzling. While he is described using one of the tomb owner's names, Merefnebef, she bears the name Hemi, which is not present anywhere else in the tomb. None of the four harpists described as "his beloved wives" has such a name.

13 K. Myśliwiec, "Father's and Eldest Son's Overlapping Feet; an Iconographic Message," in: Z. Hawass, P. Der Manuelian, R. B. Hussein (eds.), *Perspectives on Ancient Egypt. Studies in Honor of Edward Brovarski* ("Supplément aux Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte" 40), Le Caire 2010, pp. 315–318.

14 M. Verner, *Abusir I, The Mastaba of Ptahshepses, Reliefs*, Prague 1977, pp. 43–45, 204 (40), inscription 44, pls. 24–25, 98, 100, 251 (94), inscription 148, pl. 54.

15 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 141–146.

Could the tomb owner have had another, fifth wife with this name? Maybe she became his beloved in the final phase of his life after the four artists had been dismissed?

However, closer observation of the fishing scene suggests a completely different explanation. The whole relief is covered with cracks, corresponding to the outlines of a few irregular stone plates, hastily inserted into a large opening that formed in this part of the wall after its original decoration had chipped away. Gypsum was placed on the surface, which – however – quickly chipped away along the crevices between the plates. Initially, a composition, rich in content but poor in form, was carved into the layer of gypsum using the shallow relief technique, after which it was covered with a very scarce coat of paint. This scene is thus obviously a secondary element in the design of Merefnebef's tomb, included some time after the carving of the original decoration.

Why was the original décor modified and who came up with the idea for these changes? It cannot be excluded that the exceptionally brittle rock disintegrated in this spot and a large hole formed that had to be filled. However, if this was the case, why did the author of the retouches not restore the original decoration but instead inserted a motif that did not fit in terms of its content to the other scenes? While it is true those who made the secondary décor did attempt to introduce formal links with the damaged original scene, of which only the bottom part of the legs of a few figures were left behind, and they placed the representation of the harvesters in such a way that their limbs were connected with the 'old' calves into a whole, this did not fully mask the intentions of the retouchers. From afar, we can sense a propaganda aim, which is confirmed by the names of the depicted couple. The man bearing the name Merefnebef need not be the owner of the tomb, but one of his sons. The practice of giving male descendants their father's name was a custom extremely common in Egypt during the discussed period. Whole dynasties of noblemen with one and the same name were formed, an illustration of which would be the huge Ptahhotep tomb, expanded in stages, located not far from Merefnebef's grave and slightly older than it.

Already at the entrance to the tomb chapel of our vizier, we could see a remarkably preserved image of a younger (most probably the youngest) son, who bore his father's 'beautiful name,' Fefi (Fig. 56). It is highly likely that he also inherited from his father or perhaps usurped the 'great name' Merefnebef, using it when – upon beating the older progeniture, and especially after destroying his eldest brother's images – he felt himself to be the genuine heir to the tomb owner's inheritance. The use of this name in the fishing scene had the additional advantage that it could fool the one looking at it, making him think that it depicts the image of his father. However,

there can be no doubts about the wife's name in this scene, differing from the names of all of the four 'beloved wives' attested in the original chapel decoration. It seems almost certain that the author of the new décor was the youngest son boasting his father's names. He must have felt very at ease in his role as victor over his brothers, since he did not hesitate to represent his own life companion in this scene and not one of his father's four wives. The conclusion is immediately obvious: Fefi/Merefnebef Junior 'took it all.' What did he do to his older brothers in real life if he had annihilated their *ka* (spiritual element) depicted in their father's tomb? This we will probably never know.

We also do not know whether the original decoration later modified by the youngest son had naturally crumbled away or whether someone had 'helped' the process along for political reasons. The destruction of the older brothers' images might have been more than just an expression of a ferocious struggle over their father's legacy. During the discussed period, when conspiracies among the courtiers against their rightful ruler were almost an everyday occurrence, particularly during the reign, even if short, of the usurper, political preferences could have played an important role. During Pepi I's reign, there were at least two conspiracies in which part of the highest officials in the royal court participated, including the supreme doctor of Upper and Lower Egypt, Seankhuptah, Vizier Hesi and the overseer of the arsenal, bearing the name Mereri.¹⁶ All three were punished, not only by their images and names being erased but also by losing their tombs at the royal necropolis in Saqqara. The decorations of these tombs were modified to accommodate other, probably more loyal, courtiers.

The certainty with which Fefi Junior ran rampant in his father's tomb, probably already after the latter's death, allows for the supposition that the youngster probably earned himself an irrefutable position, also in the countenance of the pharaoh. There can be no doubt that this ruler, Pepi I, was the rightful heir to the throne, and not his predecessor with a dubious reputation, Userkare, who Fefi Senior had apparently served. Probably the family of the vizier-upstart split in political terms into two feuding camps: the father, owing his career to 'Pharaoh' Userkare, and his oldest son named Manefer, supported the ephemeral ruler, for which they had to pay dearly after their protector was overthrown, while the youngest son, obviously sly and an opportunist, found his way into the camp of Pepi I's supporters, which enabled him to later behave with impunity in his father's tomb, as if it were his own 'house of eternity.' In this context, it becomes clear why the neutral word 'king' in his father's inscription might have evoked such violent

16 N. Kanawati, *Conspiracies in the Egyptian Palace. Unas to Pepy I*, pp. 165–166.

emotions that it had to be destroyed wherever it was most visible. This must have been perceived as a type of political declaration. Equally without any consequences, the young Merefnebef could reshape part of the decorations in his father's tomb chapel into a scene depicting him with his wife.

It should be noted that the zeal of the iconoclasts inside the chapel was not as intense as in the entrance to it, i.e. the place where it would be impossible for it not to catch the attention of any person participating in the cult of the deceased. In one of the less visible inscriptions, the word 'king' has not been removed as an element of this same epithet 'honoured by the king,' while in the procession of the offering bearers depicted in the lowest strip of the decoration on the eastern wall, just above the chamber's floor, we can see the untouched representation of the eldest son carrying a huge ox haunch.¹⁷ It was thus – similarly as in our times – primarily about propaganda and not the essence of things.

One other inscription on the eastern wall, located in such a spot that it is barely visible, has enormous significance for the reconstruction of Merefnebef's unexpected but rather short career.¹⁸ A very important part of the tomb owner's titlature was carved with tiny hieroglyphs in the least expected place: in the wild bird hunting scene (Fig. 44). It is divided into three parts that fill the remaining space left around the head of the hunting tomb owner: in front of his head, behind it – in front of the raised hand holding a boomerang, and behind the hand. Each of these fragments is arranged differently: the first, in front of his head, consists of one horizontal line and two vertical columns, while the last, behind his hand, is composed of three vertical columns. The middle element, the most interesting one, has three horizontal strips. While the back part of the inscription, which has been well preserved, contains Merefnebef's banal titles, constantly repeated in the chapel ("honoured by Anubis, who-is-on-his-hill, hereditary prince, count, the only companion, main lector-priest"), the content of the two remaining fragments is original. In front of the tomb owner's head, there is the above-discussed title "honoured by the king," which in this case escaped the hands of the iconoclasts probably only because it was barely visible. New titles, not attested anywhere else inside the chapel, appear in the middle part of the inscription, which today is barely visible under the layer of dark grey paint that later covered it, probably when the youngest son was placing an image of himself in the fishing scene, right next to the representation of the hunt. What could have annoyed him in this part of the inscription?

17 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, p. 135, pls. XX, LXI.

18 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 123–124, pl. LXIV a, c, d, e.

The part of the inscription that has been painted over can be reconstructed on the basis of the preserved fragments. It goes as follows: “Under-supervisor of the *hem-netjer* priests [in] the *meret* temple [of King] Teti; attendant [of the pyramid] Steadfast-are-the-Places-of-Teti [i.e. King Teti’s pyramids]”.¹⁹ On this basis, we can see that Merefnebef performed an important function in the cult of the first Sixth-Dynasty ruler, linked directly to his pyramid. The placement and shape of the inscription show that it was not among the original decorations in the chapel. It was ‘squeezed’ into the only available space that was still suitable for such an inscription. Thus, the functions listed in the middle part of the inscription can be counted among the honours that Merefnebef received during the apex of his career, probably during the reign of his protector Userkare, but probably before he had even been given the title of vizier, mentioned for the first (and only) time inside the chapel on the southern wall.

The youngest son of the vizier-opportunist, supporter of the rightful dynastic line, might not have liked the titlature linking his father with such a holy place as Teti’s pyramid. All the more so, as this honour came thanks to the grace of a pseudo-pharaoh who had possibly played a huge role in Teti’s death. He apparently decided to destroy this shameful inscription, especially since the mentioned honours had in the meantime surely fallen to someone else. The inscription was so small and was located in such a barely visible spot that a chisel was unnecessary – it was enough to place a bit of grey paint. However, the same titles were preserved untouched in Merefnebef’s showcase closing his ‘ideal biography’ on the already-mentioned inner architrave crowning the entrance to the tomb.²⁰ It was also barely visible there: the inscription located right next to the ceiling also consists of small hieroglyphs.

Given all the presented ‘anomalies’ and messages between the lines, one could attempt to reconstruct Merefnebef’s turbulent career. His biography emerges from his titlature written down in various parts of the tomb. His beginnings were modest. When he was building and carving out his tomb typical for the middle class of the period, i.e. the beginning of the Sixth Dynasty, he was responsible, among other things, for the royal wigs and the ruler’s hairdos. He also performed cult functions as the main lector-priest, playing an important role in rituals. However, this role simultaneously linked him with the royal court, which is attested by the position of “inspector of the Great House (= the royal palace).” There are especially numerous

19 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 123–4.

20 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, p. 74 (F 6, A), pls. XIV, XXXIII.

titles describing him as “secretary,” a trusted person in various ways granted access to the ruler’s secrets. Among his various titles, he was “secretary of the king’s every order,” “the secretary of the king in each of his cult places,” but primarily “the secretary of the Morning House,” which probably described him as the person accompanying the pharaoh in the preparation of divine rituals. This is the highest title in the secretary sequence. We do not know what things he was able to tell the king during these ‘secret’ meetings: but it is a fact that it was enough to boost his brilliant career.

His titulature is also listed on the ‘false doors,’ undoubtedly constituting the most important point in the tomb for the owner in the afterlife and probably made as the first decorative element on the walls (Fig. 43), and it was expanded over time. The apogee of his career came after the pharaoh, ignored completely by his contemporaries and only mentioned in passing by next generations, ascended the throne. First, the titles linked to the posthumous cult of King Teti, who had recently passed away, appeared on the chapel’s eastern wall. Later, on the southern wall, the title of ‘vizier’ appeared for the very first time, duplicated repeatedly in the external part of the cult chapel. At that time, Merefnebef decided to expand his tomb, in line with his new social position. However, his ambitious plans for the monumentalising of his place of eternal rest never came to be executed.

Along with the title of ‘vizier,’ other titles appear in the upstart’s biography that are linked to the highest level of the administrative hierarchy. On the façade of his tomb chapel, Merefnebef is described as “overseer of the scribes of royal records,” which in the times of the Sixth Dynasty was a function to which almost exclusively viziers were entitled. We can also find there the title of the “director of the palace of *ah*,” the importance of which had decreased during the reign of the dynasty preceding Merefnebef’s times and which had disappeared almost completely in the beginnings of the reign of the Sixth Dynasty. However, its presence on the wall indicates the search for distinction according to the best traditions of times gone by.

After Merefnebef’s death, his house goes to hell. The fierce rivalry between the sons, who could have been the children of different wives, ends with the victory of the youngest descendant, Fefi/Merefnebef Junior. He destroys the images of his brothers (Fig. 59) and ‘corrects’ the tomb chapel decoration in such a way as if the tomb were his own property. The reasons behind this conflict might have been both economic (his father’s fortune) and political. The last act of this tragedy is the collapse of the frontal wall in the brick mastaba, which had originally reached the external edge of the chapel hewn out in rock.

At the time when the tomb was discovered, the entire façade was buried under a veritable pyramid of bricks. Some of the brickwork that had initially risen above the front of the tomb chapel was preserved in its original layout



Fig. 59. Tomb owner in the company of one of his four wives and eldest son, whose representation has been hammered off the wall. West wall in the vizier's funerary chapel.

but in an inverse position. For the 4000 years preceding our excavations, no one had penetrated the rubble or entered the chapel interior, even though the dead began to be buried atop the surface of the brick ruin towards the end of the Old Kingdom. The place once again became a cemetery 2000 years later, during the reign of the Ptolemies (Fig. 62).

It is difficult to establish with any certainty the reason behind the frontal collapse, i.e. that of the western wall of the great mastaba erected above the vizier's grave. Some researchers think that this happened due to torrential rainfall, which sometimes struck the Memphis necropolis towards the end of

the Old Kingdom. We have abundant evidence that at the time fast-flowing streams formed, which would run in a western direction from the plateau of Djoser's pyramid over the rock terraces left behind by former stone quarries and probably linked to the construction of this pyramid. In the case of Merefnebef's tomb, this theory encounters certain difficulties. The water running from the east towards the vizier's mastaba would primarily have had to hit its eastern wall, and, while flowing around its side walls, i.e. the northern and southern ones, it would have eroded the structure from these three sides, leading to its gradual disintegration. Meanwhile, these three walls have in fact been preserved in good shape to a height of about one metre, while the wall least exposed to the effects of the flowing mass of water collapsed. It could also be presumed that the interior of the mastaba, filled with earth, sand, stone and vessel sherds, pushed against this structure more than against the remaining walls. Still, the accumulation of collapsed elements in front of the chapel was very homogenous, consisting almost exclusively of bricks.

It is cause for thought that a low wall made from irregular stone blocks was unearthed underneath the brick backfill, directly on the floor of the courtyard adjacent to the front wall of the mastaba, parallel to the edge of the architrave closing off the façade from the top. It gives the impression that someone might have wanted to cushion the expected impact of the mass of brick before the cataclysm was to occur.²¹ Perhaps this person had been preparing the deliberate destruction of the mastaba's frontal wall? It is difficult to exclude such a possibility if we consider the scandals witnessed by the vizier's tomb after his death. An argument in favour of this hypothesis is the astounding fact that no one later attempted to remove the rubble from the entrance to the chapel and reactivate its cult functions, even though it contained such beautiful and rich decorations. It would have taken a small group of people no more than a day's work.

Instead, sometime after the calamity, but still during the Old Kingdom, the decision was reached for a new place of cult to be built for Merefnebef, this time on the eastern side of the mastaba.²² The new chapel, much smaller and more modest than the previous one, was inserted into the brick wall of the mastaba (ll. 22; Figs. 60 and 88). In actuality, we should refer to this rather as a place of cult than a chapel, as it consists of a miniature courtyard surrounded from three sides by a low brick wall and the place of cult itself. As already mentioned before, the western wall inside this miniature cult chapel contains a huge 'false door,' made from a hard type of limestone and only partially preserved, inserted into a hollow hewn out into the surface

21 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls., VII a–b, XXV d.

22 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 56–60, illustr. 1.



Fig. 60. Architrave from Merefnebef's eastern cult chapel, erected at the east wall of his brick mastaba after the vizier's death.

of the brick mass. This fragment of the 'false door' was the first element of Merefnebef's tomb discovered by our mission. It was lying just beneath the surface; thus, we had thought it was a block from one of the plundered graves, lugged here, despite its huge weight, by some band of looters. We had not even suspected that we were standing on the roof of the vizier's tomb.

However, it is the enormous architrave made from very brittle local limestone that turned out to be the most substantial element of the eastern chapel (Fig. 60).²³ This block, 3.2 m in length, 0.63 m in height and 0.25 m thick, was initially located above the 'false door,' crowning the façade of the secondary cult place. Only the hard mass of the 'false door' was able to support such an enormous weight. It is difficult to say when the architrave fell to the ground. At the moment when it was discovered, it was lying in front of the chapel, with the decorated surface face down, partly on a layer of sand and partly on a rammed clay floor, which at the time must have been at ground level. Upon falling, it cracked into three parts, which required a few weeks of initial conservation work on site before we could turn it over, with its decorated surface facing upwards. A stone altar without any decoration

23 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, p. 57 (illustr. 1), 59, pls. LXXXII a, LXXXIII a, LXXXV d-f.

lay in front of the ‘false door,’ where the vizier’s second- or third-generation relatives and the priests could place their offerings.

The decoration of the architrave, made using the sunken relief technique, is practically a copy of the lower strip of bas reliefs in the façade of the western chapel (Il. 5).²⁴ Eight figures of the tomb owner form two four-person processions arranged symmetrically on both sides of the axis of the representation. Each of the figures is wearing a long wig, a wide necklace and an apron reaching down to his knees. Each of them is holding a *kheryp* sceptre in one hand, and a long staff in the other. They are all accompanied by inscriptions differing from those in the façade of the earlier chapel. Here, new titles are ascribed to the deceased vizier, not attested in the main chapel. They identify him as “Under-supervisor of the Great House,” “keeper of the linen of the Great House” and “inspector of the artisans’ workshops of the Great House.” It is hard to imagine that such prosaic functions were entrusted to the vizier posthumously. Were they forgotten during the decorating of the main chapel or were they omitted intentionally? Or perhaps this is not the place of the posthumous cult of Merefnebef Senior, but rather his youngest son bearing the same names?

However, this hypothesis is contradicted by the presence of the title ‘vizier’ next to two of the eight figures represented on the huge architrave. There is nothing to indicate that the tomb owner’s youngest son was to later also receive a similar distinction from the king. Unless he unscrupulously not only usurped his father’s cult chapel but also all his titles, including that of ‘prime minister’ (as one would define a ‘vizier’ today). Even such audacity would not surprise us in the biography of the juvenile troublemaker. However, the hammering out of one word in the epithet “honoured by ...” speaks for the attribution of the new chapel to the vizier-father. Based on the above-described analogy, i.e. the damaged inscriptions in the entrance to the main chapel, we can assume the word ‘king’ used to be here. If this was the case, we have conclusive evidence that even for some time after the vizier’s death, his supporters who built him a new cult chapel, in many respects reminiscent of the buried (western) chapel façade, clashed with his enemies, who supposedly had not forgotten his ties with the reviled, ephemeral ruler called Userkare.

It remains a mystery why the new chapel was located by the northern edge of the western mastaba wall. Why not in the middle of it, in accordance with the principle of symmetry, widespread in Egypt? It can be presumed that there had been the intention of placing the new ‘false door’ and offering table as close as possible to the masked grave shaft, leading to the

24 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 83–86, pls. XI, XV, XVI, XXX–XXXII, XXXIV–XXXVI, XXXIX, XLI.

sarcophagus containing the body of the tomb owner, while the shaft was situated in the mastaba by its northern wall. We would not be surprised if the constructors of the new chapel were linked somehow to the people who had robbed the sarcophagus earlier, leaving the massacred body of the vizier on its cover. Such was the spirit of the times.

Nonetheless, we have evidence that the constructors of the new chapel felt the localisation lacked symmetry. They clearly wanted it to be situated in the middle of the brick wall. To this purpose, they extended the eastern wall of the mastaba northward, connecting it with... the identical wall of the neighbouring mastaba (Fig. 88). Both mastabas stood right next to each other. In this way, we found out that Merefnebef's posthumous neighbour to the north was the owner of a similar tomb. However, we did not rush to unearth it. As we did not know the state of preservation of the neighbouring mastaba's cult chapel, we decided to unearth it only after the documentation of the vizier's mastaba would be ready for publication in the form of a monograph, and restoration work in this tomb was able to secure the stabilisation of the reliefs and painted masterpieces adorning its walls. This took six years. During this time, we covered the mastaba with a shelter made from hard stone blocks, and the bas reliefs were professionally recorded, i.e. photographed, drawn and described. We also unearthed the part of the necropolis extending between Merefnebef's mastaba and the enormous recessed wall surrounding Djoser's pyramid enclosure.²⁵

25 M. Radomska et al., *The Catalogue with Drawings* (Saqqara III, Part 1), Warsaw 2008, p. 33, fig. 1 (sector V), 42–45, figs. 10–13.

Chapter 6. In the realm of Osiris

Abstract: The “forest” of burial shafts. A sanctuary of Osiris in the middle of the cemetery? A unique harpoon and wild animal deposit. The dead in reed coffins imitating the dismembered god.

Keywords: burial shaft, burial chamber, coffin, sarcophagus, inscriptions.

At the head of the enormous pantheon of deities, who the ancient Egyptians entrusted with the eternity of the afterworld, stood Osiris and Anubis. The first of these, anthropomorphic and mummy-form, was a symbol of rebirth. The other, almost always depicted with a jackal’s head or that of an animal from the canine family (Figs. 172–173), was responsible for the mummification process. The inscriptions written, engraved or painted onto the walls of the tombs, as well as on the various funerary equipment items, usually began with certain formulas, such as: “The offering the king gives to Anubis, Master-of-the-Divine-Cabin, who-is-in-the-place-of-embalmmnt, who-is-on-his-hill, the Lord of the Holy Land and [Lord of] Sepa, so that [the tomb owner] can be buried in the necropolis in the Western Desert, when he has grown old, in peace ...” or “Honoured by Osiris ...,” “Honoured by Anubis ...,” etc.¹ Of course, the king appears here in a symbolic role as an intermediary between the dead and the gods, as a protector of the tomb owner. Nothing may happen without the will of the pharaoh as it is thanks to his grace that a courtier receives a place for his grave, preferably near the ruler’s pyramid.

This was also the case in the necropolis situated west of Djoser’s pyramid enclosure. We excavated the cemetery in stages after having discovered Merefnebef’s tomb, which later turned out to be the oldest mastaba preserved to this day within the area of the former quarry.² However, this was not the burial of someone linked to Djoser. Merefnebef lived over 300 years later, at the beginning of the Sixth Dynasty, marking the end of the so-called Old Kingdom. What had gone on with this area during the rule of the three previous dynasties? Our research made it possible to state that the entire

1 For example, in Merefnebef and Nyankhnefertem’s tombs in the necropolis under discussion: Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 70–73, 83–84, 95–96, 104, 124, 135; K. Myśliwiec, K.O. Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex of Nyankhnefertem* (Saqqara IV), Warsaw 2010, pp. 135, 139, 163, 166, 186, 190, etc.

2 K. O. Kuraskiewicz, *Architecture and Development of the Necropolis* (Saqqara V, Part 1), Warsaw 2013, pp. 275–279.

area, extending from the recessed wall encircling the ‘step pyramid’ to the so-called ‘Dry Moat,’ had been an enormous quarry during the construction of the first royal pyramid (Fig. 3).³ An extensive surface layer of the rock had at that time been cut off and used as building material. Rock terraces gradually descending westward remained, reaching the gigantic moat encircling the pyramid and seemingly also being also a remnant of the quarry. The unimaginable mass of stone used for the construction of both Djoser’s tomb and the adjacent structures, including the huge wall, rectangularly enclosing the holy complex (Fig. 61), is of local origin, as indicated by the geological research conducted by our team. The highest dignitaries from Djoser’s entourage constructed their monumental tombs in the area adjacent to the pyramid *temenos* from the north. The terraces left behind by the quarry neighbouring the complex from the west were used for sepulchral purposes only a few hundred years later. Thus, people who had never had anything to do with this ruler were buried in the shadows of Djoser’s pyramid.

Why then did this area become their ‘house of eternity’? It is enough to cast a glance at a map of Saqqara (Il. 2) to see that the necropolis we have been excavating is situated between the pyramid of Unas, the last ruler of the Fifth Dynasty, and the pyramid of Teti, the first king of the subsequent dynasty. These two monuments neighbour Imhotep’s masterpiece, i.e. the ‘step pyramid,’ diagonally, south-west/north-east, and the latter had for a long time functioned as an object of special cult. To be buried in the vicinity of Djoser’s tomb must have been considered a great distinction, even though it was practically a must due to the lack of space in the direct neighbourhood of the two above-mentioned pyramids. The highest noblemen from the courts of both rulers had already found their place of eternal rest there. The middle class was left with the quarry. This might have been the only location that was available. Of course, Merefnebef also belonged to this social stratum, before gold, in the form of the vizierate, ‘rained down’ on him towards the end of his life. The *éminence grise* from Teti’s times reached a deal with the very suspect, ephemeral man named Userkare ignored by his contemporaries, most probably by making use of his harem connections and confidential information to which he had access as secretary.⁴ The necropolis that later became the subject of our research developed around the tomb of the vizier-upstart (Il. 6). The type of burials indicates that it was used

3 F. Welc, J. Trzciński, “Geology of the Site,” in: K. Myśliwiec (ed.), *Old Kingdom Structures between the Step Pyramid Complex and the Dry Moat* (Saqqara V, Part 2), Warsaw 2013, pp. 333–336.

4 K. Myśliwiec, “Dating the Tombs,” pp. 655–660.

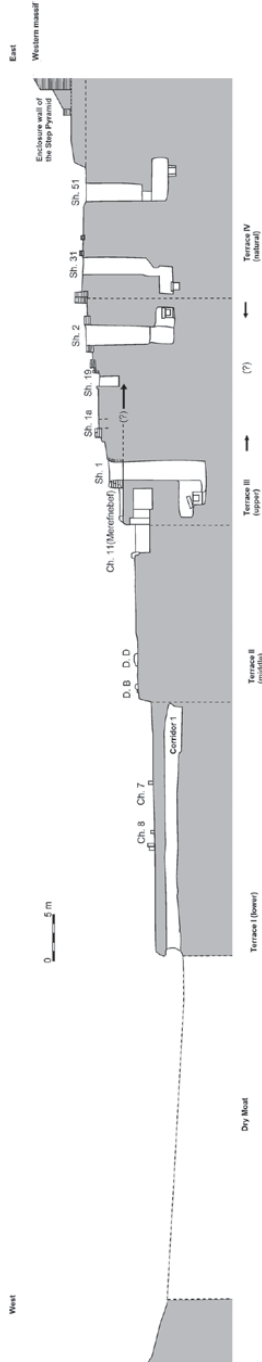


Fig. 61. Profile of the stone foundations below the recessed wall encircling the *temenos* of Djoser's pyramid, with the remains of a monumental earlier building (Second Dynasty?), on top of which this wall was founded.

continuously up until the so-called First Intermediate Period (Dynasties VII–X), i.e. until the turn of the third and the second millennia BC.

We investigated this necropolis in a strip of land about thirty metres wide in the area between Merefnebef's place of rest and the pyramid, and also about twenty metres between the vizier's tomb and the 'Dry Moat'.⁵ The

⁵ Kuraskiewicz, *Architecture*, photograph on the cover and pp. 21–26, fig. 2.



II. 6. E-W section of the excavation area: from Djosser's pyramid in the east to the 'Dry Moat' in the west.



Fig. 62. A conglomerate of Old Kingdom burial shafts hewn out into the rock and anthropoid-shaped hollows for mummies from the Ptolemaic period.

most serious obstacle was the state of preservation of the mastabas, i.e. the aboveground parts of the tombs (Fig. 62 and 86–87, Il. 6). The majority of the brick walls had been destroyed already in antiquity, while the substance that had filled the brick wall structures had dissolved or fallen away.⁶

The preserved brickwork attests to the cramped circumstances in the necropolis. Some of the tombs were expanded by adding new elements to them so that further burials could be taken in; new walls were sometimes placed on top of the destroyed part of old ones. In this way, a conglomerate was created of very diversified graves in terms of their size, architecture and décor. Establishing their chronological sequence, and thus determining the direction in which the necropolis developed in relation to the changing political, economic and social situation, was an exceptionally difficult task, requiring a synthesis of very diverse premises. This was undertaken by Dr Kamil Kuraskiewicz. His research resulted in a monograph published in 2013 in English as the fifth volume of the publishing series entitled “Saqqara”.⁷ Another equally important function performed by Dr Kuraskiewicz at the excavations in Saqqara involved drawing the bas reliefs

6 Kuraskiewicz, *Architecture*, pp. 224–245.

7 See footnote 2.

and paintings preserved on the tomb walls. This task was all the more difficult as copying the inscriptions and scenes on the foil adhering to the brittle surface of the walls could result in the disintegration of large parts of the decoration. To this purpose, the ingenious epigrapher constructed an original device, a type of metal stand with a rectangular frame stabilising the foil at a minimal distance from the wall, enabling the copying of all the details of the bas reliefs in a scale of 1:1 without touching them. The device, based on the Egyptologist's idea, was made in a workshop owned by friends in his hometown of Świdnica in Poland.

The underground part of the Old Kingdom tombs revealed themselves to the archaeologists as a conglomeration of shafts with a rectangular horizontal cross section (Il. 7 and 8).⁸ Each of them had once been covered by a brick mastaba. In principle, each of the mastabas had at least two shafts. One of them, the deeper one, was the proper grave, the posthumous abode of the tomb owner. It was located in the northern part of the mastaba and was sometimes even over a dozen metres deep. Its horizontal section was slightly larger than the dimensions of the coffin or sarcophagus, which was supposed to be let down to the bottom of the shaft, from where it would be moved to the interior of the chamber.

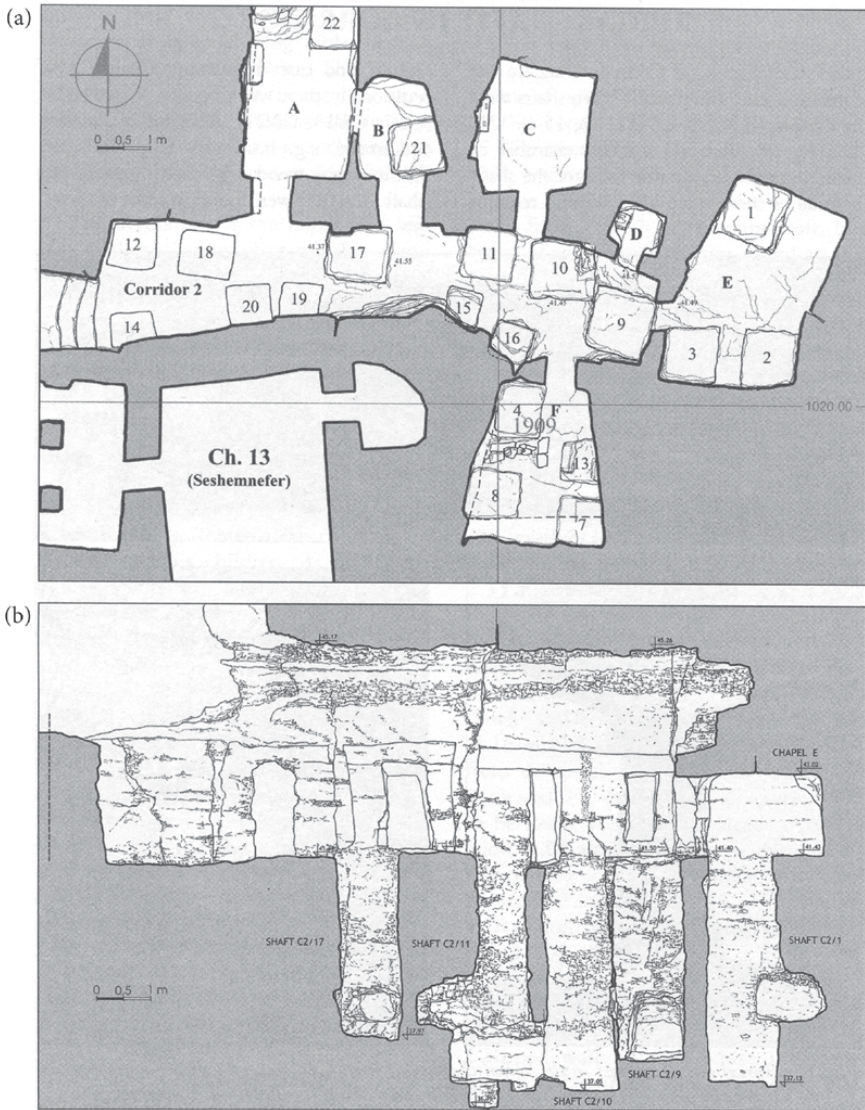
The size of the other shaft, usually located in the southern part of the mastaba, was significantly smaller. It did not have a chamber and only contained the equipment used during the funeral ceremony, including large amounts of pottery, usually vessels with their surface painted red.⁹ These last items were what was left after the ceremony of "breaking the red vessels," which played an important role in the funerary ritual. Such a deposit was preserved in full in a tiny shaft located in the south-east corner of Merefnebef's mastaba. The pottery found there confirmed the dating of the grave deduced from the inscriptions sculpted on the walls of the funerary chapel.¹⁰

The tradition of such 'ritual storage areas' in or next to the graves of noblemen goes back to a period almost 1000 years earlier, i.e. to the times of the forming of Egyptian statehood. Caves containing utensils used in funerary rituals in the necropolis from this period were discovered by Polish

8 Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, pp. 246–271.

9 T. I. Rzeuska, "The Necropolis at West Saqqara: The Late Old Kingdom Shafts with no Burial Chamber. Were they False, Dummy, Unfinished or Intentional?," *Archív Orientální* 70/3 (2002), pp. 377–402.

10 T. I. Rzeuska, "The Pottery," in: Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 207–208.



II. 7. Plan (a) and vertical section (b) through a collective tomb hewn into rock.

archaeologists in the Lower Egyptian settlement now bearing the name Tell el-Farkha.¹¹ This place has already been discussed in chapter two.

But some tombs at the necropolis we were excavating contain more than two tomb shafts (Il. 7). Based on their shape and size, it can be observed that they were added to the already existing mastabas with subsequent members of the family in mind. Over a few generations, such a maze of tomb shafts and chambers was developed that the owners of new mastabas and the stonemasons working there often became disoriented as to the location, depth and shape of the structures dug earlier. It happened frequently that as they went lower down they would encounter older structures, which forced them to change the size and shape of the planned rooms. As they moved deeper into the rock, they had to cope with its variable consistence: hard stone would sometimes transition into limestone with a shale texture or even something like rock aggregate, underneath which compact and hard rock would once again appear. This would also foil their plans. The walls of most of the shafts are neither vertical nor smooth, while their width at times changes quite abruptly.¹² Some of the shafts and chambers partly overlap, creating irregular openings through which one can enter the interior of the neighbouring tomb (Il. 10–11).

To descend to the burial chamber was in antiquity a feat requiring almost acrobatic skills. In the two adjacent walls of the shaft, a vertical sequence of small hollows was hewn the size of human feet.¹³ Holding onto ropes, the stonemasons, sculptors and people responsible for the funerary ceremony could go down even as deep as twenty metres using these steps. Archaeologists observe today's workers using this ancient 'ladder' with some awe. They make their way to the bottom of the shaft with incredible speed, frequently without even using the hollows, clinging to the rough rock surface with their feet. Nowadays, archaeologists usually go down the deep shafts using a machine called a *tambour* from French. At the crown of the shaft, a floor is constructed using boards with an opening in the middle. A wooden barrel is installed on top of it, turned manually by the workers. A rope unwinds from the drum, at the end of which a rubber basket or one made from natural palm fibre is attached. As he or she holds the rope, the passenger of the 'Netherworld vehicle' stands with one leg in the basket and

11 J. Dębowska-Ludwin, "The Cemetery," in: M. Chłodnicki, K. M. Ciałowicz, A. Mączyńska (eds.), *Tell el-Farkha I. Excavations 1998–2011*, Poznań–Kraków 2012, pp. 56–57.

12 For example, the shafts published in: Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, pp. 30, 35, 50, 53, 63, 77, 80, 106, 114, 129, 134, 140.

13 Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, pp. 249–250.

the other serves as the rudder. This same vehicle transports rubble from the excavations in the shaft and burial chamber in the opposite direction.

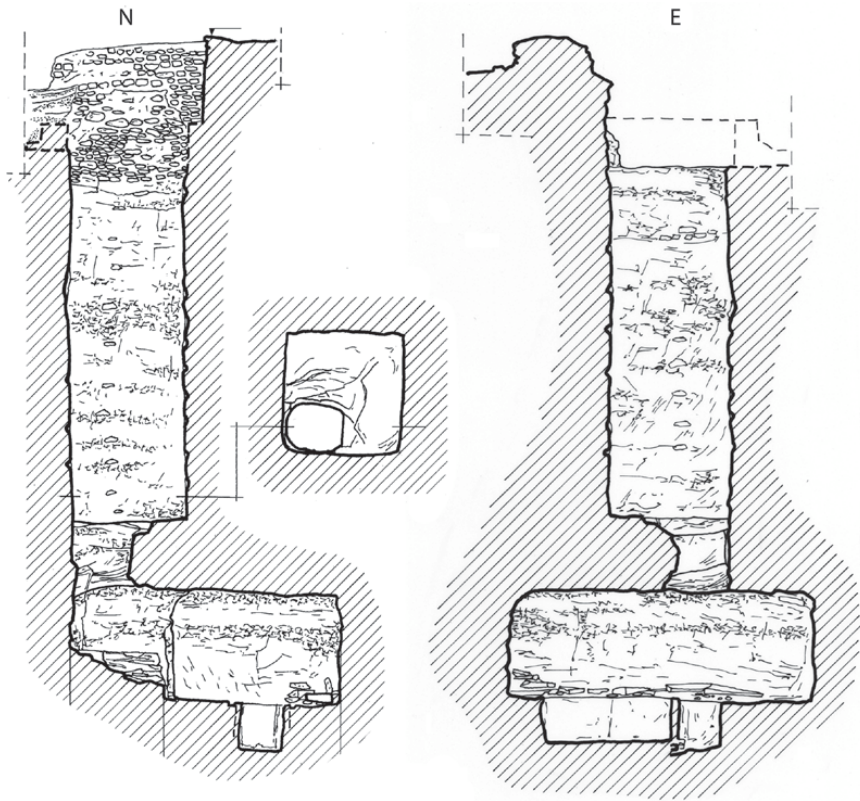
The mutual relation between the shaft and the chamber is by no means random. The architects of the tombs had to consider a variety of dangers lurking in wait for the deceased underground. The state of the preservation of the bodies and various items belonging to their funerary outfit, as well as the cracked surface of the thick layer of clay covering the floor in some chambers, clearly indicate that the water flowing from the direction of the pyramid in the rainy season was a great threat. The area of the former quarry, descending in the western direction, must have changed into the bottom of a turbulent stream during such periods, flowing partly into the underground parts of the tombs and further, as far as the 'Dry Moat,' displacing a significant part of the mastaba's ritual furnishings along the way. In order to prevent the devastation of the tombs and the dampness that would later linger long inside the chambers, the architects resorted to various ideas, among which the most effective turned out to be locating the burial chambers not at the bottom of the shaft, but rather in one of the walls, slightly above the floor.¹⁴ In this way, the water flowing in through the top into the underground part of the mastaba gathered in a 'container,' formed by the lower part of the shaft, thus not flowing into the chamber itself. Apparently, the 'false bottoms' found in some of the shafts might have also performed a protective function (Il. 8–9). When, at a considerable depth, we touch a horizontal rock surface and do not ascertain the entrance to a burial chamber, ready to consider this to be an unfinished or ritual shaft, suddenly a large opening leading deeper into the shaft appears in this 'floor,' and directly beneath it either the entrance to a burial chamber or the lower part of the shaft with the chamber located even lower down.¹⁵ Such a solution implied, of course, the form of the burial, as no coffin would have fit through the irregular opening in the pseudo-floor, and this is all the more true of an enormous sarcophagus made from stone. In some shafts, triangular rock projections left behind by the stonemasons in one or more corners of the shaft constitute a reduced version of ceiling-floors.

The forms of the burials are also diversified. Only the very few, most important and richest courtiers could afford to have their bodies placed in a huge stone sarcophagus weighing even as much as over a dozen tonnes (Figs. 63–64).¹⁶ At the cemetery we were excavating, we discovered only a few such burials and

14 Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, p. 252, fig. 115 (nos. 88, 113, 50, 32, 22).

15 Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, pp. 251–253.

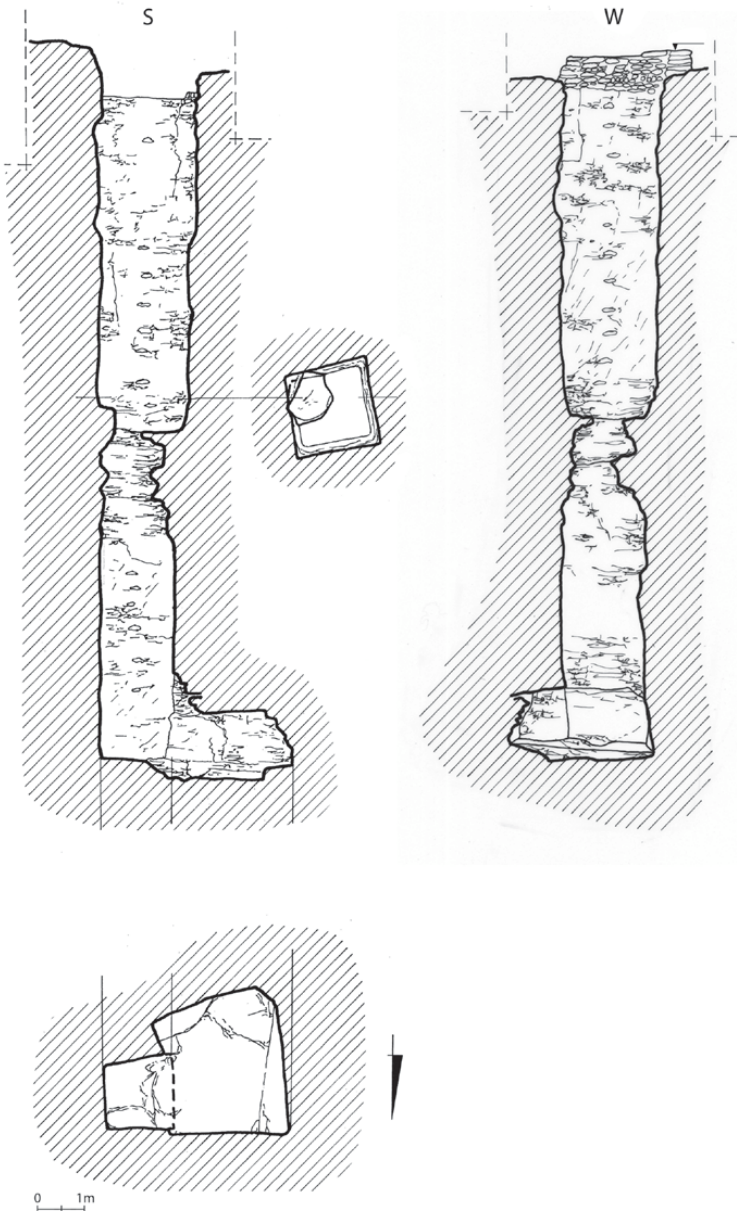
16 A. Kowalska, "Sarcophagi and Coffins," in: K. Myśliwiec (ed.), *Old Kingdom Structures between the Step Pyramid Complex and the Dry Moat* (Saqqara V, Part 2), pp. 423–424.



II. 8. Sixth Dynasty burial shaft.

none of them contained a finished sarcophagus. Even the Vizier Merefnebef's sarcophagus had irregular, rough walls with an unsmoothed surface, lacking any sort of decoration. A sarcophagus found in an anonymous tomb, which had clearly never been used as a place of eternal rest, turned out to be especially interesting for studies on the stone working technique used on stone blocks and the way in which the work was organised when such a huge mass of stone was being placed in the funerary chamber. Thanks to the fact that this sarcophagus was abandoned in a relatively early phase of the stone working, it was possible to reconstruct its path from the quarry to the grave chamber. Primarily, it became clear that it was not a ready sarcophagus that was lowered down into the deep funerary shaft from the surface, but rather a heavy block of stone similar to a rectangular cuboid in shape.¹⁷ It was lowered down using rope, after

17 F. Welc, "Installing a Stone Sarcophagus in the Burial Chamber of an Old Kingdom Shaft," *Études et Travaux* 23 (2010), pp. 179–207.



II. 9. Burial shaft from the final phase of the Old Kingdom.

an amortising material in the form of sand had been placed along the bottom of the shaft. For the workers, who had to manoeuvre this colossus in a very cramped space, small hollows were dug into the shaft's rock walls bordering the chamber, which must have saved them on many an occasion from death as a result of the mistakes made by one of the two teams, i.e. the one working on the ground and the one retrieving the 'goods.' The appropriate height and angle of the ceiling in the entrance to the chamber was planned in advance in such a way so the huge stone block could squeeze through. To avoid any severe jolts, stone and clay diagonal ramps were constructed, along which the 'sarcophagus' was moved until it reached the western wall of the chamber, i.e. the place of destination. Small fragments of the ramp remained preserved in the chamber we studied.

At that point, the stone working could begin. First, the enormous block was cut horizontally into two parts. The upper, smaller one, was to be the lid of the sarcophagus. But where was it placed during the crafting of the inside that would become the case for the body of the deceased? To this aim, a hollow similar to a drawer was carved into the west wall of the burial chamber, i.e. at the place where the sarcophagus adhered to the wall, and this was where the lid was temporarily inserted. This is precisely where the sarcophagus cover was still lying in the chamber we had explored. In order to move it back when the decedent was put inside the trunk, wooden rollers were installed underneath the lid. They had also been preserved in the anonymous tomb. But the lid had remained forever in its provisional location. The crafting of the interior of the trunk had barely been commenced, the work had been interrupted. There is nothing allowing us to guess the reasons behind it being abandoned. In these stormy times, which we have already taken a closer look at based on the example of the vizier's tomb, anything was possible. Perhaps the wealthy courtier had fallen from the king's grace and lost the right to a burial corresponding to his social position, or perhaps he had run out of the financial means necessary to complete the monumental 'house of eternity.' On the coarse surface of the unfinished trunk, there are traces of stonemasons' chisels of various calibres, but not a single inscription was sculpted.

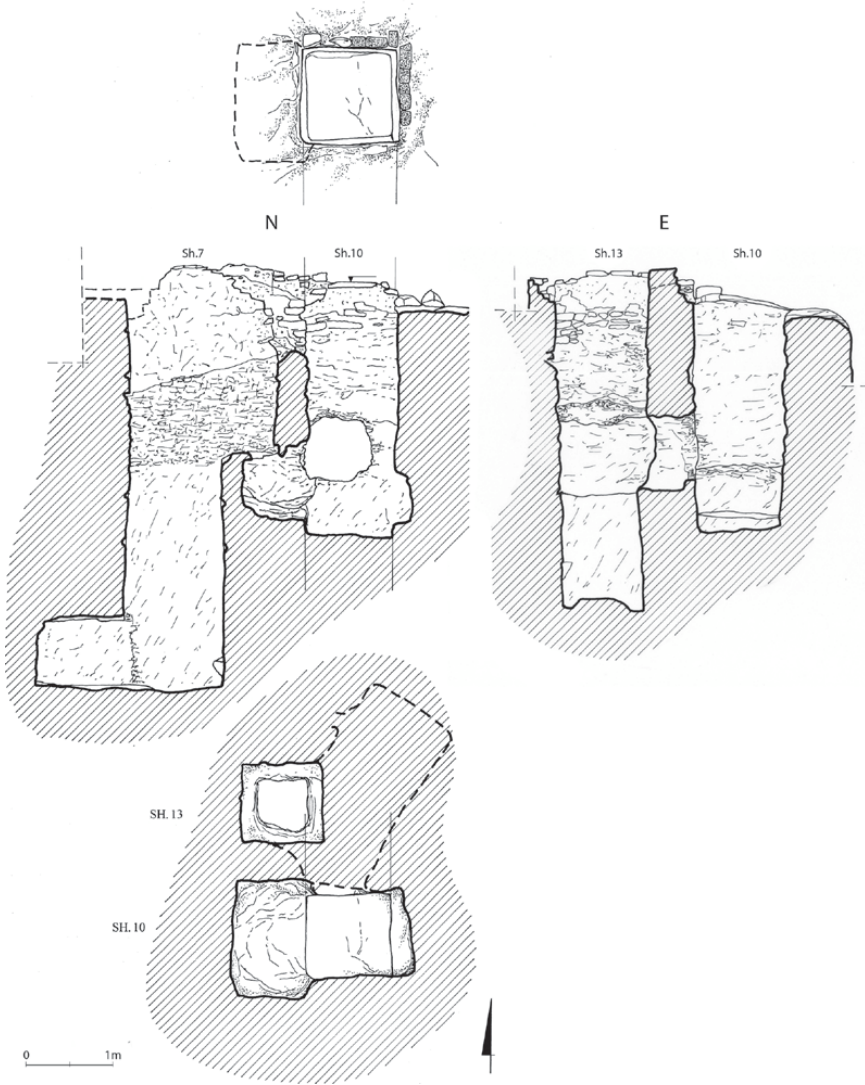
As at the majority of the Old Kingdom tombs at the Memphite necropolis, similarly as in the described case, the stone sarcophagi remained unfinished, it did not seem to us that we had made a unique discovery (Figs. 63–64). It was not until an account of the newest research done by our mission was published in one of the most popular Polish newspapers that there was an uproar in academic circles. It turned out that our publication was the first attempt at such a precise reconstruction of the toilsome work preceding the placement of the body of a deceased Egyptian in his 'house of eternity.' Information about this also made its way to the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation, which



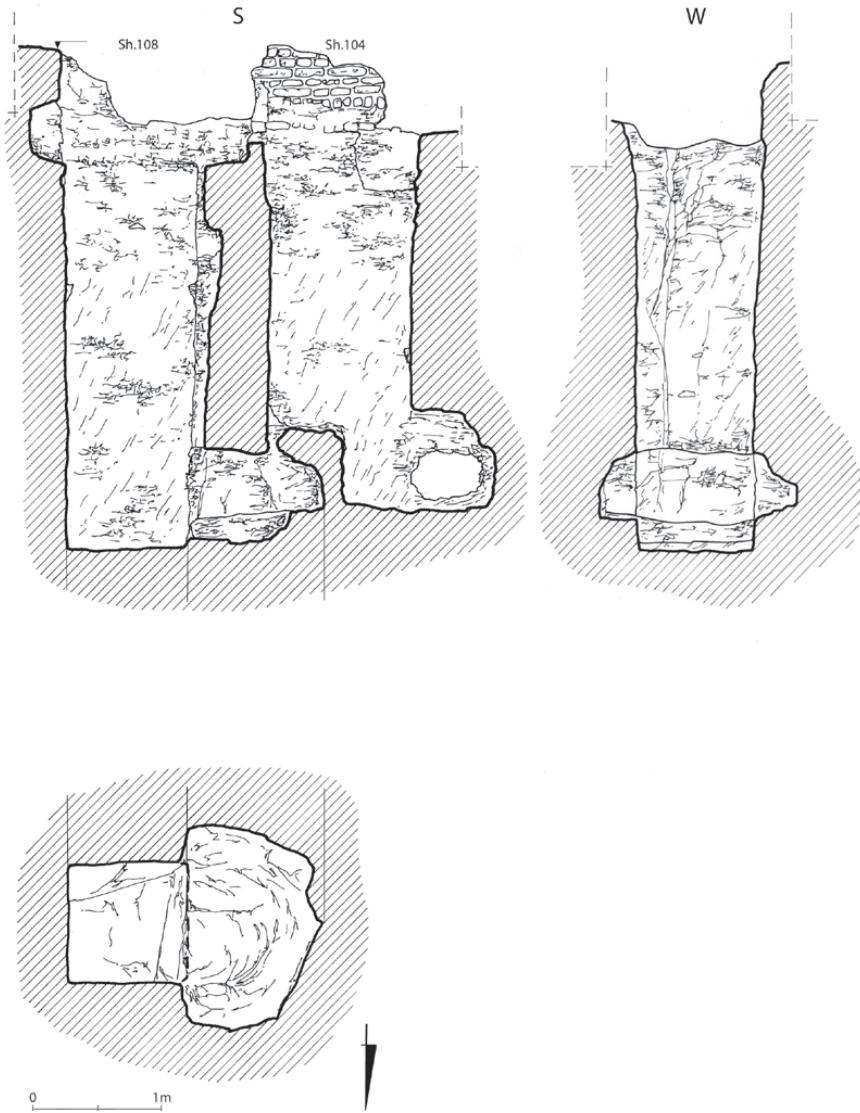
Fig. 63. Unfinished limestone sarcophagus in the burial chamber of a nobleman from the final phase of the Old Kingdom.



Fig. 64. Lid of unfinished sarcophagus (Fig. 63) inserted provisionally into a 'drawer' hewn out into rock.



II. 10. Joint underground structures (burial shafts and chambers) from the Sixth Dynasty.



II. 11.

demanded an immediate explanation in writing why – against binding regulations – it had not been informed first about such a grand ‘discovery.’ We had simply not noticed the discovery. We were not the first to do so, as even in archaeology too many truths are considered to be ‘obvious.’

A burial in a stone sarcophagus was a luxury only a very few could afford. Frugality forced many noblemen, even of the highest ranks, to find alternative solutions. We discovered one of them in the burial chamber of Ni-ankh-Nefertum, the vizier's closest posthumous neighbour. The sarcophagus was replaced by a rectangular cuboidal hollow dug into the floor of the room, covered by a stone lid so gigantic that it imitated a sarcophagus lowered into the ground.¹⁸ In the middle of the frontal wall of the lid, a barely visible inscription made using black ink has been preserved. It contained only the tomb owner's sobriquet, Temi, written in hieratic script, which was a simplified form of the hieroglyphs. We will return to the owner of this pseudo-sarcophagus in subsequent chapters.

Similar hollows in the floor of burial chambers sometimes had walls lined with stone plates. In exceptional cases, wooden cuboid coffins, tightly fitted to the walls, were placed inside these hollows. On one of these coffins, a 'list of offerings' was engraved, such as is usually present on the walls of cult chapels and funerary chambers.¹⁹ However, the wooden coffins were usually placed directly on the floors of the burial chambers. Even simpler burials did not have any type of container at all, with the body placed in the chamber on the bottom surface. The deceased was sometimes wrapped in a linen shroud, and in exceptional cases – in a gypsum casing. In one of the discovered tombs, the fragments of a plaster mask have been preserved that belonged to a young woman, whose skull bears a large rectangular opening attesting to a conducted trepanation. It seems that the operation did not help her much, even though the ideally preserved set of teeth of the woman in her twenties is reminiscent of a broad smile (Figs. 201–203).²⁰ In another tomb, we found over 100 fragments of the plaster crust that had covered the entire body, next to the skeleton of an older man (Figs. 199–200). Some of the details of the face, e.g. the eyes, were additionally accentuated using black paint, which emphasised, perhaps intentionally, the effect of naturalistic plasticity.

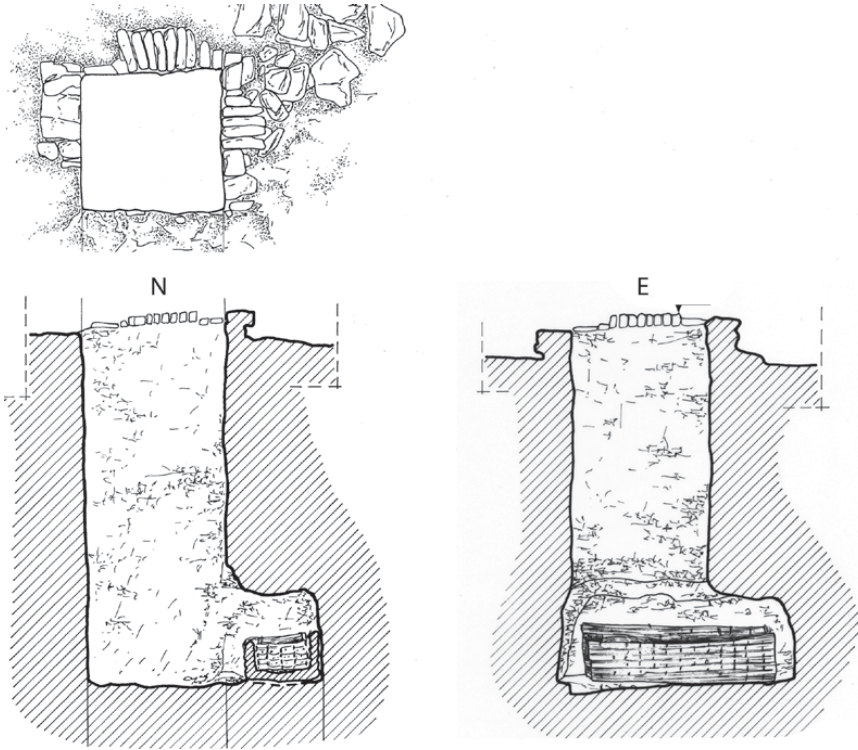
Among the coffins, the most numerous group consists of containers woven from Nile reed (Il. 12–15; Figs. 65–68).²¹ In these terms, the necropolis that was the subject of our research differs from other cemeteries dating

18 K. Myśliwiec, K. O. Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex of Nyankhnefertem* (Saqqara IV), Warsaw 2010, pp. 88–89, fig. 32.

19 Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, p. 64 (shaft 73); Kowalska, "Sarcophagi and Coffins," pp. 425–427.

20 The photograph on the cover of Saqqara V, Part 2.

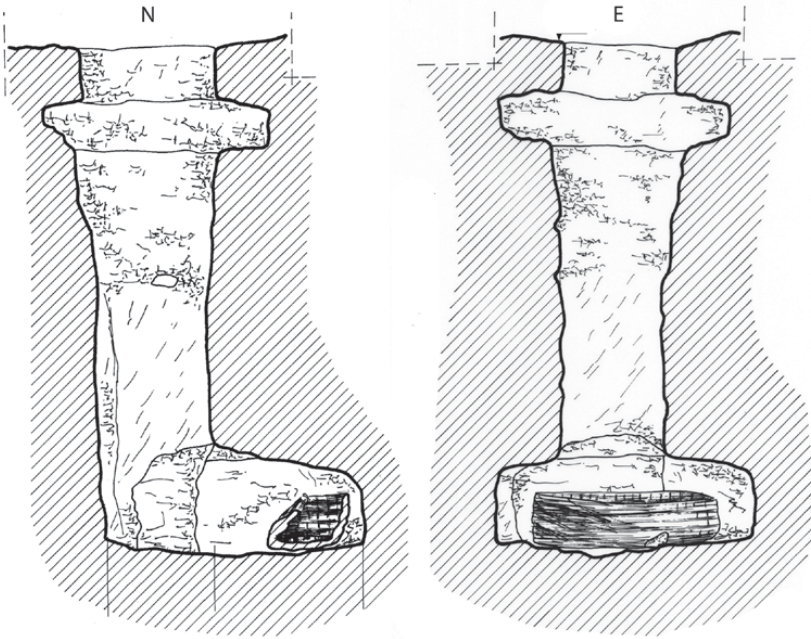
21 A. Kowalska, "Reed Coffins," in: *Old Kingdom Structures*, p. 433, Shaft 41; K. Myśliwiec, "Old Kingdom Coffins Made of Cyperus Papyrus," in: V. G. Callender et al. (eds.), *Times, Signs and Pyramids. Studies in Honour of Miroslav Verner*, Prague 2011, pp. 300–304; K. Myśliwiec, "The Dead in the Marshes – Reed



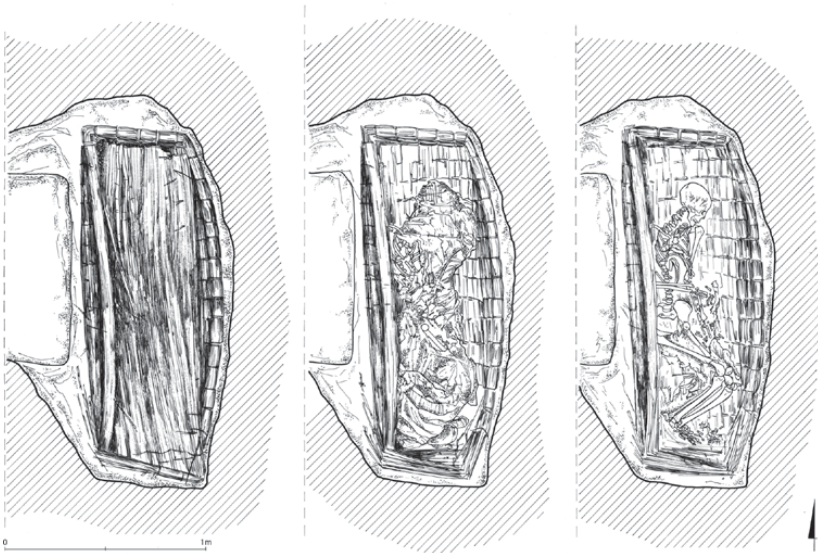
II. 12. Burial chamber with reed coffin.

from the same period. At least every fourth ‘inhabitant’ was buried in a cuboidal chest made from long rush sheaves, thickets of which were the dominant element of the boggy landscape of the Nile Delta. Among this raw material, it is possible to find also papyrus stalks, so strongly associated with northern Egypt that they became the heraldic plant symbolising this part of the Two Lands. Hunting for wild birds and fishing in papyrus thickets belonged to the favoured forms of entertainment among the Egyptians, and they were frequently represented on the walls of the funerary chapels belonging to the highest dignitaries. One of the most beautiful images of this type is the previously described scene in the tomb belonging to Vizier Merefnebef.

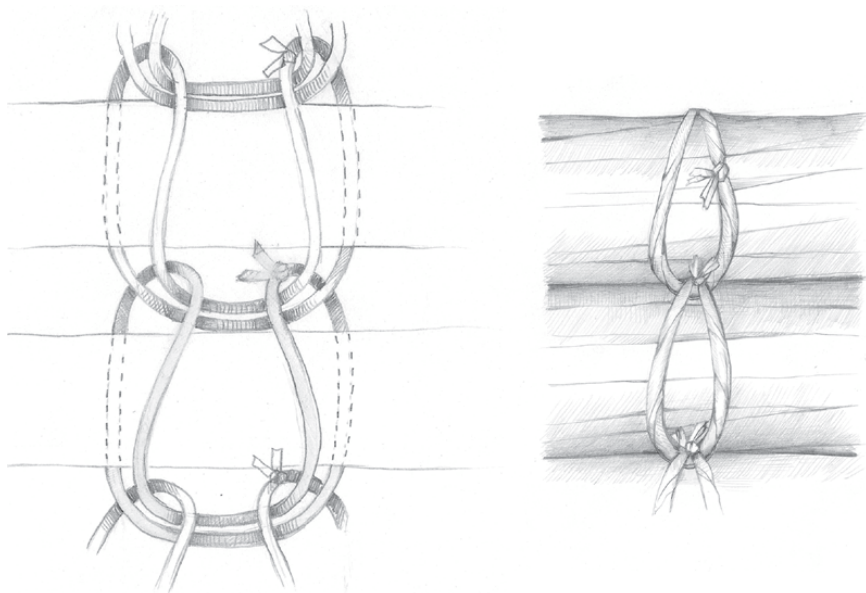
Coffins Revisited,” in: M. Jucha, J. Dębowska-Ludwin, P. Kołodziejczyk (eds.), “*Aegyptus est imago caeli.*” *Studies Presented to Krzysztof M. Ciałowicz on his 60th Birthday*, Kraków 2014, pp. 105–113.



II. 13. Reed coffin in the undergrounds of a Sixth Dynasty mastaba.



II. 14. Reed coffin: three phases of exploration.



II. 15. Technique of joining reed sheaves forming the walls of the coffin.



Fig. 65. Reed coffin in a Sixth Dynasty burial chamber. The remains of a burial left behind by looters.



Fig. 66. Human skeleton in a reed coffin. Final phase of the Old Kingdom.



Fig. 67. Texture of reed coffin walls.



Fig. 68. A live architect inside a coffin: the only position enabling precise recording of a burial chamber. A mask covers Beata Błaszczuk's face.

The construction of coffins woven from rushes indicates that they were only made after the raw material had reached the burial chamber. If things had turned otherwise, the readymade chest would have been destroyed in the bend of the narrow passageway from the shaft to the chamber. In fact, the size of the latter did not make any sort of manoeuvring possible with such delicate containers. The best-preserved reed coffin stood in a room made from clay and small stone blocks, with a low ceiling of identical material, no doubt made only when the container with the body of the deceased had already been covered with the reed lid woven using the same technique as in the case of the trunk (Figs. 65–66).²² The coffin filled the burial chamber

²² Kowalska, “Reed Coffins,” p. 433 (tomb XXVI, burial 393).

almost completely, and it was only possible to reach it through the narrow shaft, which like a chimney clung to the shorter side of the room.

The constructors of these coffins showed a lot of mastery in working with this pliable material. All of the chests were made up of a few dozen stalk sheaves placed horizontally in a vertical sequence and connected many times over with loops from thin rope or even twisted plant material (Il. 15; Fig. 67).²³ Each of the sheaves was a length equal to one long wall and the adjoining short wall, bent in such a way so as to form one of the coffin's corners. Thus, the cuboidal container was formed from connecting vertical walls of reeds, which in turn were made from horizontal segments of a thickness sometimes amounting to as much as ten centimetres. The more sheaves there were, the more solid and compact the entire structure. The bottom of the coffin and its lid constituted a type of flat mat woven using the same technique. The edges of the wall were frequently fortified with additional sheaves or thicker stalks stabilising the delicate structure. This was especially used in the case of the two opposite corners, in which the two 'prefabricated' reed walls came together.

Of course, the quality of the execution of these chests is quite varied, which probably points to the difference in the technical level of those making them, or else the tomb owner's social position, and thus – his economic status, and finally – the burial customs corresponding to the spirit of the times, and which were usually an expression of the society's affluence.²⁴ The most primitive burials in reed coffins more reminiscent of mats than of a cuboidal chest were found... on the roof of Vizier Merefnebef's funerary chapel. The brick ruin was an ideal place of burial for the poor. It was enough to take a few bricks out of the rubble in order to form a small hollow simultaneously imitating a shaft and burial chamber. The only architectural element of these tombs was a small wall arranged around the body usually made from reused bricks, and reed matting. Even though they were anonymous, these burials can with certainty be dated to the final phase of the Old Kingdom (the end of the Sixth Dynasty) or even to the First Intermediate Period, when various circumstances, including violent climate change, led to the impoverishment of society and the first political collapse of the pharaonic State in history. The vizier's tomb was already then a historical ruin, while the beautiful paintings on the walls of his cult chapel had been hidden behind the curtain of debris in the form of a brick pile. No one even felt like digging out of a slightly deeper hollow to bury the dead. At this once fashionable

23 Kowalska, "Reed Coffins," p. 430, fig. 149.

24 Myśliwiec, "Old Kingdom Coffins," pp. 305–306.

necropolis, bodies were buried wherever, preferably just below the surface of the ground, and without any funerary equipment.²⁵

These symptoms of social differentiation also have a huge significance for the interpretation of burials in reed coffins. Despite the popular hypothesis, it turns out that they do not characterise just the burial customs of the poorest layers of society, who could not afford wooden coffins, not to mention stone sarcophagi. The size and form, as well as the location of the tombs with such containers, clearly indicate the middle class, who were the main users of this cemetery during the Sixth Dynasty. This is confirmed by numerous stone stelae of the ‘false-door’ type, frequently found outside their original context, but on which hieroglyphic inscriptions have been preserved, enabling the identification of both the names and the social rank of the tomb owners. As already mentioned, these were usually courtiers performing various administrative and religious functions, e.g. secretaries, priests and the artisans’ superiors, but also highborn ladies belonging to the large group of priestesses of the Goddess Hathor.

Why were the dead buried so willingly in reed coffins at this particular necropolis? It is amazing that French archaeologists, who almost 100 years ago conducted excavations in an extensive cemetery from the same period, located in south Saqqara, at a distance of only a few kilometres from the necropolis under discussion, did not record a single burial in a chest made of a similar material.²⁶ It cannot be excluded that the reed coffins had been destroyed to such an extent during subsequent phases of looting that any potential remains were not identified as such by the researchers. However, in one of the tombs from that necropolis, a wooden coffin was found, used – as indicated by the inscriptions carved into its surface – at least twice, with its bas-relief decoration imitating a reed chest. The external face of its walls looks therefore like an imitation of a plaiting reminiscent of wickerwork, which clearly indicates the symbolic meaning of this material.²⁷

It seems that the exceptionally high frequency of reed coffins in the necropolis we were studying in Saqqara resulted from certain specific reasons. In the direct vicinity of the tombs containing such burials, we discovered an underground fragment of a structure with a mysterious ritual function, hewn out into the rock (Il. 6 and 16; Figs. 69–75). Nothing had foretold yet another mystery, when a rectangular opening leading further into the rock appeared

25 K. Myśliwiec, *New Faces of Saqqara. Recent Discoveries in West Sakkara*, Tuchów 1999, pl. 18.

26 G. Jéquier, *Tombeaux de particuliers contemporains de Pepi II*, Le Caire 1929.

27 The coffin of a dignitary called Imapepi, later usurped for Ipi/Raherka; G. Jéquier, *Tombeaux*, pp. 123–125, pl. XVII



Fig. 69. East wall of the 'Dry Moat.' In the foreground of the entrance to a corridor ending in a crypt.



Fig. 70. Exploration of the corridor leading to a crypt.



Fig. 71. Wild animal skeleton deposit on the surface of the backfill in the crypt (Fig. 70).

in the wall of the ‘Dry Moat,’ bordering this deep trough from the east, just underneath the architrave, which was its upper edge. We thought that it was the entrance to yet another tomb, all the more so as we had uncovered some funerary shafts right in front of the ‘Dry Moat’s’ façade in this same spot. However, this turned out to be a strange structure. We had to bend over double to get inside. The entries to the funerary chapels from the Old Kingdom sometimes tended to be very narrow (e.g. sixty centimetres wide in Merefnebef’s tomb). But their height usually allowed one to remain upright. Here, in turn, one had to bend over more the deeper one went forward inside the long, relatively wide corridor running behind the entrance straight in the direction of Djoser’s pyramid.²⁸ From the beginning, we saw that the corridor was exceptionally long, as it was not filled with sand and brick rubble up to the ceiling. We could discern a distant abyss above the surface of the sand. At one point, we even had the idea that the corridor might run as far as the underground part of the ‘step pyramid,’ which would have caused quite a stir in archaeological circles. We explored the fill very meticulously so as to not miss even the smallest of artefacts.

28 K. Myśliwiec, “West Saqqara. Excavations, 2000,” *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 12 (2001): *Reports 2000*, pp. 111–116.



Fig. 72. Ritual harpoon underneath the animal bone deposit in the crypt (Fig. 71).

The flooring of the corridor was yet another surprise. Paved with irregularly-shaped stone plates, it ascended towards the east. The thickness of the layers of blocks covering the floor increased, while the width of the corridor decreased. We began to wonder whether this was meant to make it easier or more difficult to reach the destination. Or perhaps both purposes at the same time. After twenty metres of our slow exploration of the backfill, we arrived at a rock wall. Similarly as in the case of the lateral corridor walls, it was not smoothed or overlaid with pugging, plaster or stone plates, as was frequently the case in other tombs. Its rough surface exposed subsequent layers of local rock, in turn hard and very brittle, also varied in terms of its colour. A veritable geological sandwich.



Fig. 73. Front part of the harpoon and its sheath (Fig. 72).



Fig. 74. Back part of the harpoon and its sheath.

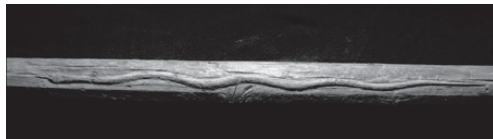
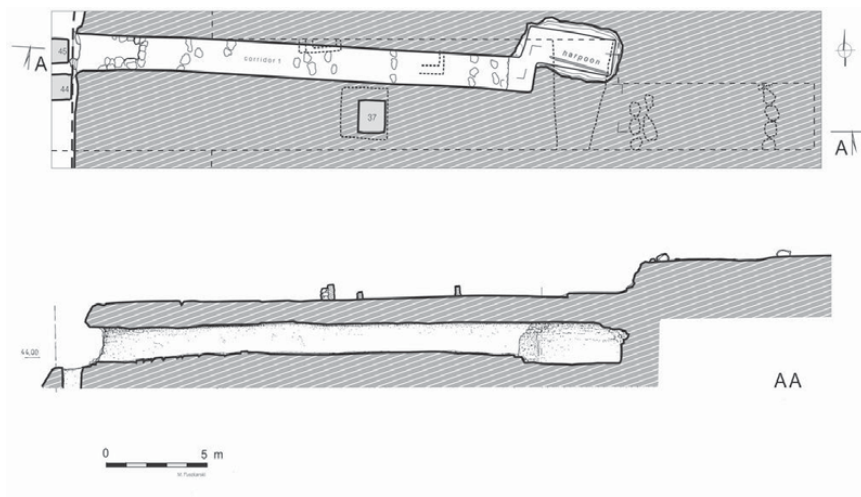


Fig. 75. Bas-relief depicting a snake poised to attack, on both lateral sides of the harpoon.



II. 16. Plan and vertical section through the corridor and crypt, i.e. the underground part of the sanctuary that was probably a cult place dedicated to Osiris.

But the underground structure did not end at the wall closing off the corridor from the east. In its north-eastern corner, there was a narrow irregular entrance to a rectangular room that continued on in an eastern direction, i.e. towards the pyramid. It soon turned out that it was only a few metres long and was in fact the last in this strange sequence of underground rooms. At the time, we had the idea that this was the tomb's cult chapel with an unusual shape, perhaps concealing the entrance to a funerary shaft containing a chamber with the burial of a nobleman. Yet we soon had to bid farewell to this hypothesis as well.

It was already food for thought that a room with such a regular rectangular shape was not located on the axis of the corridor, but was intentionally 'displaced' a few dozen centimetres northward (II. 16).²⁹ It is further difficult to understand why the room is not linked to the corridor by a regularly-shaped entrance, but rather by an opening in the corner of the room, suggesting that it was possibly the work of later looters than of the Old Kingdom architects of this necropolis. What is more, the entrance was fenced off to a certain height with blocks that continued the slope of the corridor floor. Everything seemed to indicate that the creators of this unique structure were interested in concealing the contents of the barely accessible chamber. What was in there?

²⁹ Myśliwiec, "West Saqqara. Excavations, 2000," pp. 113–116, fig. 5.

We soon spotted the first surprise on the surface of the backfill. It was an extensive deposit of wild animal bones (Fig. 71):³⁰ from the skeletons of huge catfish to beautiful antelope antlers, preserved along with their callous crust. Salima Ikram, our mission's paleozoologist, was awestruck. The professor of the American University in Cairo had to record this agglomerate of bones, crawling into the small crevice left between the ceiling of the room and the surface of the backfill on her belly. "This is incredible," "there has never been anything like this," she would shout out from time to time from behind the white mask covering her respiratory tract. Yet again in her academic career she could make use of her slim and nimble figure of the first dancer during the *soirées* in the Cairo Egyptological *milieu*, which would be hard to guess when she arrives at the excavation field wearing the Pakistani national attire.

The zoological deposit remained a mystery to us for a long time. It was not until an item was found a few dozen centimetres deeper, almost at the bottom of the backfill, that we arrived closer to understanding the religious symbolism of the animal skeletons. This item was an enormous wooden harpoon (Fig. 75).³¹ It was lying deposited at the southern wall of the chamber, placed inside a cylindrical sheath made from identical material. The size and weight of this object indicated that it could not have been a genuine weapon used at any time by the pharaoh or his acolytes to hunt hippos, as can frequently be seen in the reliefs decorating the walls in the funerary chapels of the highest dignitaries and in the funerary temples near the Fifth- and Sixth-Dynasty royal pyramids.³² Such hunting also took part in papyrus thickets, where the hunters moved around in light reed-woven boats. In their upraised hands, they held the thin spar of a harpoon, to which a mobile rope was attached, ending in a metal or bone blade, aimed at the animal's trunk. Such scenes find their place among the masterpieces of the sculpting and painting art from this period, as they are full of dynamism expressed by the arrangement of the bodies and tension of their muscles. The god Horus was also portrayed in a similar way, attacking his mortal enemy, the god Seth, represented as a hippopotamus.

30 S. Ikram, "Preliminary Zoological Report, 2000," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 12 (2001): *Reports 2000*, pp. 127–132.

31 K. Myśliwiec, "Le harpon de Sakkara," in: H. Győry (éd.), "*Le lotus qui sort de terre*". *Mélanges offerts à Edith Varga* ("Bulletin de Musée Hongrois des Beaux Arts, Supplément"), Budapest 2001, pp. 395–410.

32 H. Altenmüller, "Magische Riten zur Beeinflussung von Naturereignissen: Der Fall der Nilpferdjagd," *Études et Travaux* 26.1 (2013), pp. 44–55; K. Myśliwiec, "The Dead in the Marshes – Reed Coffins Revisited," pp. 105–113.

From the moment our mission discovered the largest harpoon ever found in Egypt, there was not even the slightest doubt that this was not a utility item. Two robust people are needed in order to simply pick it up. It is 260 centimetres long, while its wooden container twenty centimetres longer. The spindle-like shape of the artefact differs from the light, relatively short pole, known from Egyptian bas reliefs, down which a rope equipped with a blade slid. Such a harpoon was found, for example, in the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun, younger by 1000 years. The sophisticatedly crafted surface of the Saqqara harpoon, similarly as its relief, clearly indicates that this was a cult object with a purely ritual function, symbolising the victory of the pharaoh – as the incarnation of the god Horus – over his enemies. In the front part of the staff, a snake poised ready to attack, with his tongue sticking out, is depicted twice in a sophisticated half-relief/*mezzo-relievo* (Fig. 75).³³

We immediately wanted to find out during whose reign this unique object had been crafted. Unfortunately, this magnificent harpoon is currently anepigraphic. There are no inscriptions either on the item itself or on its wooden etui. It cannot be excluded that at least the sheath had initially had the name of the pharaoh written or painted on it. However, traces of polychromy have only been preserved on the round stopper used to close the container in the front. They are best visible in places in which its walls meet. It is possible to discern the remains of white, yellow and red paint. One element of the painted decorations might have been the unpreserved name of the pharaoh.

In order to establish the approximate date of the item, an archaeologist resorts in such situations to stylistic criteria. By a lucky coincidence, over ten years earlier, Egyptian archaeologists under the leadership of Professor Zahi Hawass, at the time the director of the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation, had been conducting excavations within the funerary temple by the pyramid of one of the wives of Pharaoh Teti, the first ruler of the Sixth Dynasty. This building is located not far from the north-eastern corner of the Djoser pyramid complex, at a distance of only a few hundred metres from where we had our excavations. They noted that the flooring in this temple was arranged, among others, from secondarily-used architectural elements originating from cult buildings belonging to the *temenos* of the ‘step pyramid.’ Some of them are decorated with bas reliefs containing inscriptions with Djoser’s name. One of these elements is a type of cuboid pillar made from snow-white limestone, bearing a unique representation sculpted in a very flat

33 For bibliography on the subject, see K. Myśliwiec, “Trois millénaires à l’ombre de Djéser: Chronologie d’une nécropole,” in: Ch. Zivie-Coche, I. Guermeur (éd.), *“Parcourir l’éternité” – Hommages à Jean Yoytte*, Vol. 2, Brepols 2012, pp. 855–856, fn. 15.

relief: two attacking snakes have been depicted on its opposite walls, with identical iconography to what can be found on the surface of the discussed harpoon (Fig. 75).³⁴

The style of both bas reliefs also betrays their artistic kinship, even though they were sculpted in different material – wood and a very soft type of limestone. The identical plasticity of the scales on the animal's skin is especially striking. It can be assumed with a high degree of probability that the harpoon had also been made during Djoser's reign and was a richly symbolic ritual object, perhaps initially located in one of the sacral buildings belonging to this ruler's funerary complex. In later times, probably in the first half of the Sixth Dynasty, it would have been transferred from its original spot to the underground crypt we had discovered. Such a dating of its secondary usage is indicated by a small but very homogeneous pottery deposit found under the harpoon, in the thin layer of clay that separated it from the room's floor. This pottery has been dated to the Sixth Dynasty.³⁵

However, it cannot be excluded that the harpoon was located in the underground crypt from the very beginning, i.e. from the moment it was made. This was in fact a room hewn into the eastern wall of the 'Dry Moat,' a structure belonging to the remains of the quarry from which material had been taken for the construction of Djoser's pyramid and the surrounding recessed wall. There can be no doubt that – similarly as in the case of many other quarries throughout Egypt – immediately after the stone exploration had been completed, the area was used either for sacral or sepulchral purposes. It is probably also no coincidence that the underground corridor ends at exactly the same spot where the rock threshold is found on the surface of the ground, separating two subsequent terraces located on different levels, also remnants of the quarry.³⁶

The higher of these terraces, situated closer to the pyramid, is lined with very weathered mud brick, while there is a sequence of irregularly-shaped limestone blocks on its surface. These might be the remnants of a building of a cult nature, which formed a whole with the underground crypt containing the harpoon and deposit of wild animal remains. In this way, the sacral character of the area directly adjacent to the pyramid would have been enriched by the content expressed in the sanctuary located just beyond the enclosure wall. In the final phase of the Old Kingdom (the Sixth Dynasty), certain architectural retouches might have been made to this structure, or it might

34 For bibliography on the subject, see Myśliwiec, "Trois millénaires," p. 856, fn. 17.
35 Rzeuska, "The Pottery," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 12 (2001): *Reports* 2000, p. 140.

36 See fn. 28: "Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean" 12 (2001): *Reports* 2000, p. 114, fig. 6.

only have been slightly modified to correspond to the spirit of the time. Such a chronology of events would be indicated by the pottery deposit found underneath the harpoon.

A more precise analysis of the animal skeletons, conducted by a paleozoologist, enabled stating that only the front parts of the animals were located there. The rear fragments of their trunks were completely missing.³⁷ For an Egyptologist, this evokes associations with a certain philological phenomenon attested from this same period. It is linked to the writing of some hieroglyphic signs in the *Pyramid Texts*, portraying dangerous animals, primarily reptiles, especially snakes. Shocking modifications in these hieroglyphs were introduced during the reign of the first ruler of the Sixth Dynasty, Teti. Instead of depicting the whole animal, the sign portrayed its half or the body hacked to pieces.³⁸ It is difficult today to establish the reasons behind this astonishing zoophobia. It might have resulted from magical grounds, linked to theology, or perhaps simply from normal human fear of the dangers lurking in wait for a person in the animal kingdom. In later times, this phobia led to the creation of numerous magical texts, written down on objects with apotropaic properties, e.g. on stelae, or even stone 'healing' statues. Especially abundant numbers of this type of artefacts have been preserved from the first millennium BC.³⁹

The dismemberment of the bodies of wild animals in the deposit lying on the surface of the backfill in the crypt we had discovered might be an expression of this same phenomenon. However, in the context of the ritual harpoon, they take on an additional religious and political significance. The harpoon expressed Horus's victory, and thereby that of the pharaoh identified with him, over his enemy. This last was Seth, 'god of confusion,' usually associated with the wild animal kingdom.⁴⁰ The comparison of these two symbols brings us into the domain of Old Egyptian mythology, in which the conflict between Horus and Seth was one of the most popular founding

37 S. Ikram, "Typhonic Bones: a Ritual Deposit from Saqqara?," in: *Behaviour Behind Bones. The Zooarchaeology of Ritual, Religion, Status and Identity. Proceedings of the 9th Conference of the International Council of Archaeozoology*, Durham 2002, pp. 41–46.

38 P. Lacau, "Suppressions et modifications de signes dans les textes funéraires," *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 41 (1913), p. 1 (fn. 4) and 38–49.

39 The most famous of these is the statue of a dignitary from the fourth century BC with the name Djed-Hor, found in the Lower Egyptian Athribis: E. Jelinkova-Reymond, *Les inscriptions de la statue guérisseuse de Djed-Her-le-sauveur*, Le Caire 1956.

40 H. te Velde, *Seth, God of Confusion*, Leiden 1967.

topoi of pharaonic Egypt, with countless variants present in Egyptian literature of all periods.⁴¹ Many motifs, very mature in form, found their way into the *Pyramid Texts*, the oldest text in Egyptian literature, even though this compendium of the theological wisdom of that time did not contain a systematic exposé of any single myth. One such exemplary thread is the homosexual episode, depicting Seth anally raping Horus as an act of vengeance – a subject that was frequently revisited, even in humorous form, in subsequent versions of the myth.⁴²

The continuous struggle between the god symbolising harmony and order (Horus) and his impetuous adversary, inclined to violence (Seth) constituted only part of the myth, in which the main hero was in fact Osiris. It was him who was underhandedly cut up into pieces by his own younger brother, Seth, while the individual fragments of his body were in the imagination of the Egyptians attributed as relics to the most important religious centres located in various parts of the country. It has already been noted earlier that, for example, Osiris's heart was the relic of the Lower Egyptian city of Athribis, and on this basis their rich local theology developed. The Goddess Isis gathered the scattered limbs and hid them in the rushes in a reed-woven basket. The reborn Osiris fathered a son by her, Horus, who decided to exact revenge on the evildoer. Harendotes ('Horus, avenger of his father') was one of his most popular mythological hypostases.

Even though Seth appears in Osiris's myth as a murderer, his reputation was nonetheless not definitely negative. His cunning and energy led him to sometimes bask in the glory of a hero's fame, e.g. as the defender of the sun god from enemies. Some pharaohs were just as willing to be associated with Seth as with Horus. As early as during the Second Dynasty, this dualism characterised a ruler named Peribsen, who is attributed with a political conflict with the Memphite centre of power, an expression of which would have been his burial in the Upper Egyptian Abydos, and not, in according with earlier tradition, at the Saqqara necropolis. This pharaoh first bore the name Sekhemib, which he later changed to Peribsen. As a result of mysterious political events (a revolution?), he moved from Memphis to Abydos, while changing the form of his name. Initially, it included the images of the

41 H. te Velde, "Horus und Seth," in: *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, Vol. 3: *Horhekenu-Megeb*, Wiesbaden 1980, col. 25–27; M. Broze, *Mythe et roman en Égypte ancienne. Les aventures d'Horus et Seth dans le Papyrus Chester Beatty I*, Leuven 1996.

42 W. Barta, "Zur Reziprozität der homosexuellen Beziehungen zwischen Horus und Seth," *Göttinger Miszellen* 129 (1992), pp. 33–38; B. Schukraft, "Homosexualität im Alten Ägypten," *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 36 (2007), p. 30.

animals symbolising both gods, Horus (a falcon) and Seth (a jackal?), while later only the latter was retained.⁴³

The militant deity enjoyed particular popularity during the reign of the Ramesses (the Nineteenth and the Twentieth Dynasties, the end of the second millennium BC). Two rulers from the Nineteenth Dynasty bore the name Seti, derived from the name of the god. The first of these was the father of the greatest warrior in the history of Egypt, the famous Ramesses II (sometimes referred to as Ramesses the Great), on which Alexander of Macedon modelled himself.⁴⁴ Even more distinct is the political and religious manifesto contained in the name of the first king from the next dynasty, Setnakht (“Seth is mighty”). A form of expressing esteem for both mythological adversaries can be seen in the division in political theology of the whole of Egypt between the two, attributing Horus with the fertile Nile Delta and Seth with the barren Upper Egypt, i.e. the southern part of the country, and foreign lands. When a pharaoh was called “The Lord of the Two Lands,” he was being identified with both Horus and Seth.⁴⁵ This dualism was reflected in the even more universal philosophical and cosmological concepts of the Egyptians. They believed that every harmonious whole should consist of two contrasting concepts, which in the plastic arts was usually expressed through the antithetic composition of opposing elements. These representations also had their colour aspects: Horus was associated with the colour white or yellow, while Seth – with red.⁴⁶ Were the Egyptians not closer to the philosophical truth about the cosmos, including the psychological truth of the

43 G. Dreyer, “The Tombs of the First and Second Dynasties at Abydos and Saqqara,” in: *The Treasures of the Pyramids*, p. 75; W. Helck, “Peribsen,” w: *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, Bd. 4: *Megiddo–Pyramiden*, Wiesbaden 1982, col. 937–938.

44 See Alexander the Great’s throne name compiled from elements of Ramesses II’s two names: K. Myśliwiec, “Contexte archéologique,” in: *Tell Atrib 1985–1995*, Vol. 2, Warsaw 2009, p. 22 (fig. 5), 29 (fn. 31); in this special case, it probably functioned as Ptolemy I’s throne name: F. Bosch-Puche, “The Egyptian Royal Titulary of Alexander the Great, I: Horus, Two Ladies, Golden Horus, and Throne Names,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 99 (2013), p. 143, fn. 82.

45 K. Myśliwiec, *Pan Obydwu Krajów. Egipt w I tysiącleciu p.n.e.*, Warszawa 1993, p. 18–21; K. Myśliwiec, *Herr Beider Länder. Ägypten im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, Mainz am Rhein 1998, pp. 14–16; K. Myśliwiec, *The Twilight of Ancient Egypt. First Millennium B.C.E.*, New York–London 2000, pp. 1–6.

46 K. Myśliwiec, “The Red and Yellow; an Aspect of the Egyptian “Aspective,” in: E. Czerny et al. (eds.), *Timelines. Studies in Honour of Manfred Bietak* (“Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta” 149), Vol. 1, Leuven–Paris–Dudley 2006, pp. 225–238; K. Myśliwiec, “Epigraphic Features of the hr-face,” in: D. Polz, S. J. Seidlmayer (eds.) *Gedenkschrift für Werner Kaiser* (“Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo,” 70–72/2014–2015), pp. 323–238.

human being, than the authors of the later concepts dividing the world into ‘black’ and ‘white’?

The main character of the founding myth, Osiris, made his career as god of the dead. He was one of the most universal and timeless Egyptian deities, the symbol of rebirth. In ancient Egyptian art, his body was mummy-form, while eschatological texts hand the dead over into his care. During the Old Kingdom, the deceased pharaoh was the embodiment of Osiris, which ensured the latter would be resurrected and spend his eternal life among the gods. This dogma was the fundamental theological message contained in the *Pyramid Texts*.⁴⁷ Of course, the remaining characters in the Osiris myth also appear in the *Texts*, primarily Horus and Seth. They also, especially Horus, are associated with the pharaoh. The landscape in which they move are primarily the swampy shrubs of the Nile Delta. One of the elements of this scenery are the floating islands, probably similar to the ones inhabited today by the residents of Lake Titicaca in South America. Repeatedly, the terms “the marshes of Horus” and “the marshes of Seth” are mentioned next to each other.⁴⁸

However, the snippets of the Osiris myth included in the *Pyramid Texts* also contain reminiscences of the rituals forming part of the pharaoh’s posthumous cult. Some of them commemorate the victory of Horus over Seth, an element of which is the killing of an animal associated with the latter.⁴⁹ The harpoon is mentioned in this context as Horus’s weapon. These allusions reverberate like echoes of a celebration that could have taken place in the sacral building erected above the crypt containing the harpoon and the wild animal bones, i.e. symbols of the mythological adversaries. Almost nothing has been preserved of the sanctuary that once stood on the surface of the ground, while its underground crypt has remained intact.

The arrangement of the crypt must have been finalised in the first half of the Sixth Dynasty; however, it cannot be excluded that the chamber was hewn into the rock much earlier, even towards the end of Djoser’s reign. One thing is sure: from the beginning it had a strictly sacral character, not sepulchral, as there was no funerary shaft and there are no traces of ‘false doors’ on its western wall.

47 L. Bène, “Les hiéroglyphes de Saqqara: Textes des Pyramides et inscriptions des mastabas,” *Dossiers d’Archéologie* 20 (avril 2011): *Saqqâra. Des trésors inépuisables*, p. 28.

48 See the bibliography on the subject in: Myśliwiec, “The Dead in the Marshes – Reed Coffins Revisited,” pp. 105–113.

49 *PT* § 1543–1550, utterance 580; see Myśliwiec, “The Dead in the Marshes – Reed Coffins Revisited,” pp. 105–113.

If our reconstruction of its function is correct, this place was associated primarily with Osiris as the father of Horus, and indirectly with the deceased pharaoh. The genesis of the sanctuary should perhaps even be linked with a specific ruler. Only a few hundred metres separate it from the pyramid of Unas, the oldest one in which the *Pyramid Texts* were sculpted in stone, and not much more from Teti's pyramid, where the new, unusual notation of zoomorphic hieroglyphs first appeared, reminiscent of the intentional mutilation of the animals in the above-described deposit. The presence of Djoser's pyramid, which had been constructed 300 years earlier and revered as the work of the deified Imhotep, between the tombs of these two pharaohs, in and of itself sanctified any place located in its direct neighbourhood, especially on its western side, making it ideal for the erection of an architectural structure linked to the posthumous cult of the pharaoh as Osiris.

Who would not want to be buried near such a sanctuary and be merged posthumously into the Osiris doctrine constituting a philosophy of resurrection? The neighbouring noblemen's necropolis abounds in proof of the continuous reuse of mastabas and the constructing of new ones on the ruins of old ones, up until the fall of the Old Kingdom, and even during the First Intermediate Period. The burying of the dead in this place afterwards ceases for almost 2000 years, to be reborn with similar intensity during the times of Alexander the Great.⁵⁰ Did the necropolis at that time also owe its attractiveness to its exceptional neighbourhood? We will return to this question in one of the subsequent chapters.

The place of Osiris's cult at the royal necropolis must have been associated with the reed container into which Isis gathered and thus saved the god's corpse. In the *Pyramid Texts*, a "reed kiosk" is mentioned as the seat of the deceased. By burying the dead in reed coffins, woven from fresh wicker, the Egyptians identified them with Osiris, and thus expressed hope that the person would be resurrected. It seems that this is how the exceptional popularity of plaited 'baskets' at the necropolis located between Djoser's pyramid and the 'Dry Moat' should be interpreted.

Not only men had hopes that they would be resurrected but also women and children. In a group of 92 burials from the Old Kingdom discovered by our mission up until 2012, while the majority were in fact the remains of men's bodies (45 individuals), the skeletons of 30 women were identified, as well as 5 children of unidentified sex, and 12 adults whose sex and age it was not possible to establish.⁵¹ The higher proportion of men over women

50 K. Myśliwiec, *Trois millénaires à l'ombre de Djéser*, p. 861, fn. 56–62.

51 M. Kaczmarek, I. Kozieradzka-Ogunmakin, "Anthropology. Demographic, Metric and Palaeopathological Study of Human Remains Recovered from the Lower

might be ostensible as the bones of the female sex, which are more delicate, are more easily damaged or subject to decompose (Figs. 201–203). Most certainly, the number of children's skeletons who died between the age of 2 and 10 does not reflect their percentage in the population. We know from other sources that half of the Egyptians born in those days died before the age of five.⁵² They were decimated by epidemics and infections. It was widespread practice to bury small children in places other than the cemeteries for adults and adolescents. The small number of children's burials (Figs. 196–198) might also result from the particular impermanence of their bone material.

Interesting conclusions can be reached by determining the age of the deceased people based on the osseous material we discovered. While 11 men and 16 women died at the age of between 18 and 35, 19 male and 4 female individuals belonging to the next age group (35–50 years old) departed from this world.⁵³ Among the people who were over 50 years old, there were 3 men and 6 women. Despite their natural immunity to the hardships of life, women usually died earlier than men, while the main reason behind these deaths at a young age were childbirth-related complications. In turn, the skeletons of men, especially their spines and limbs, indicate more broken bones and injuries caused by aggressive behaviour, including those linked to war, as well as hard physical labour. The average lifespan for a person buried at the Old Kingdom necropolis amounted to almost 38 years for men and 32.5 for women.⁵⁴

Only 27.2 % of the unearthed bodies, i.e. 28 individuals, had been preserved in their anatomical arrangement. It seems that these burials had not been devastated by looters.⁵⁵ In the remaining cases, the bones were displaced, sometimes mixed with the remains of the skeletons of other people. A few skeletons were lying in an unusual position, i.e. on their stomachs with their heads facing downwards. Unwanted visitors had doubtless tipped them out along with all the contents in the coffins, although the bodies had been of least interest to them. In all probability, at the moment of these 'visits' this had been almost exclusively already a skeleton. None of the burials from this period found by us in Saqqara bore traces of any sort of embalment. In turn, on some of the intact corpses, the remains of a linen shroud

Necropolis at Saqqara," in: K. Myśliwiec (ed.), *Old Kingdom Structures between the Step Pyramid Complex and the Dry Moat* (Saqqara V, Part 2), pp. 354–357.

52 Kaczmarek, Kozieradzka-Ogunmakin, "Anthropology," plate 2, fig. 131.

53 Kaczmarek, Kozieradzka-Ogunmakin, "Anthropology," p. 357, fig. 131.

54 Kaczmarek, Kozieradzka-Ogunmakin, "Anthropology," p. 357.

55 Kaczmarek, Kozieradzka-Ogunmakin, "Anthropology," p. 350.

were preserved, in which the deceased had been wrapped, or at least with which he had been covered at the time of the funeral.⁵⁶ One of these sheets, bearing traces of torn pieces having been sewn together, had been preserved almost fully intact, perhaps because the unwanted visitors had rolled it into a ball and left it behind in the burial chamber.⁵⁷ The remnants of some textile, carefully arranged in pleats, was lying on one woman's skeleton.⁵⁸ In a few cases, the shroud had been substituted by a reed mat.

In turn, we found fragments of gypsum masks with plastically shaped surfaces next to two skeletons (Figs. 199–203). As already mentioned, one of them had initially covered the head of a young woman, hiding a large rectangular opening in the side of her skull, left after a trepanation that had probably not been successful in attaining the results hoped for (Figs. 201–203). The serious expression of the face moulded in the plaster paradoxically contrasts with the smile the woman's ideally preserved dentition have settled into, even though she probably had a painful death. The second mask, stylised almost into a portrait with individualised facial features, was the upper part of a plaster case that had covered a dead man's body from head to toe (Figs. 199–200). It was possible to reconstruct almost the entire casing from hundreds of smaller and larger fragments scattered around the skeleton. It can easily be guessed who had smashed the gypsum shell and to what purpose.

The majority of the intact burials contain the remains of bodies arranged in a side position, with the limbs bent at the knees and elbows.⁵⁹ They are commonly lying on their left side so that the deceased person, with the head on the northern side, could gaze eastward, i.e. in the direction of Djoser's pyramid and the rising sun. However, there are some bodies arranged on the other side, while some are lying on their back with hands crossed on their chests or laid unbent at their sides. All intermediate forms, e.g. varied arrangements of the individual limbs, have also been attested.⁶⁰ A lot depended on the place of burial, its geographical orientation, and – finally – on the space available in the burial chamber and coffin. As the necropolis grew, new shafts were dug out in the tombs, as were burial chambers hewn at various levels of the shaft. Due to

56 Burial 475: Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, p. 149.

57 Burial 555 in shaft 110 of anonymous grave XXIX: Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, p. 159, pl. CXXI b, CXXXII a–d; see the photographs on the covers of both volumes of Saqqara V; in reference to the conservation of this object, see Z. Godziejewski, "Conservation," in: *Old Kingdom Structures*, p. 544.

58 Burial 475 in shaft 86 of anonymous grave XXVIII; Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, p. 149.

59 Kaczmarek, Kozieradzka-Ogunmakin, "Anthropology," p. 350, table 1.

60 Kaczmarek, Kozieradzka-Ogunmakin, "Anthropology," p. 350–354, table 1.

lack of space, subsequent bodies were even added to earlier burials.⁶¹ A comfortable ‘home’ in the land of Osiris was becoming more and more of a luxury.

The Egyptians believed that the dead live in the afterworld, for all eternity, as long as his body is not destroyed, and neither are his representations and his names engraved into the walls of the tomb. The entire structure of the tomb was frequently referred to as *per-djet*, i.e. house of eternity. Some Egyptologists even think that the shape of many tombs, including the courtyard leading to the cult chapel and the deep shaft within it, was supposed to be similar to the hieroglyphic notation of this concept. Nonetheless, this life, eternal *in spe*, was governed by its own rules. Primarily, one had to secure imperishable food and the equipment necessary to fulfil the fundamental functions of life. Due to the lack of space, the burials were equipped with symbolic miniatures made from material sometimes more durable than the originals. As looters were not interested in such items, the remains of original funerary equipment were frequently preserved in the backfill covering the coffin. We discovered the most complete such set of artefacts in the tomb of a dignitary from the final phase of the Sixth Dynasty, probably the reign of the second pharaoh bearing the name Pepi (Figs. 76–82).⁶²

How do we know that Ni-Pepi was living at that time and not during the reign of his namesake almost 100 years earlier? Even though the hieroglyphic inscriptions engraved onto this tomb’s stone architectural fragments have been preserved, i.e. on its ‘false doors’ and their casing in the form of an architrave and one out of two jambs,⁶³ we would not have had this certainty if wooden figurines depicting a naked man, most probably the owner of the tomb,⁶⁴ had not been preserved in the burial chamber (Figs. 76–78). Such figurines hold a special place in the sepulchral art characteristic for the final phase of the Old Kingdom. In accordance with the rules of the so-called second style in Old Kingdom art, identified and wonderfully documented some decades ago by Edna Ann R. Russmann, an American researcher specialised in the history of Egyptian art,⁶⁵ these statuettes have unusually,

61 Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, pl. CXVIII (c), fig. 78 d.

62 Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, pp. 100–107; A. Kowalska, “Small Finds,” in: *Old Kingdom Structures*, pp. 449–456.

63 Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, pp. 102–105, pl. LXXIV–LXXV.

64 K. Myśliwiec, “A Contribution to the Second Style in Old Kingdom Art,” in: S. H. D’Auria (ed.), *Servant of Mut. Studies in Honor of Richard A. Fazzini*, Leiden–Boston 2008, pp. 170–178; Kowalska, “Small Finds,” pp. 453–456.

65 E. Russmann, “A Second Style in Egyptian Art of the Old Kingdom,” *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo* 51 (1995), pp. 269–279.

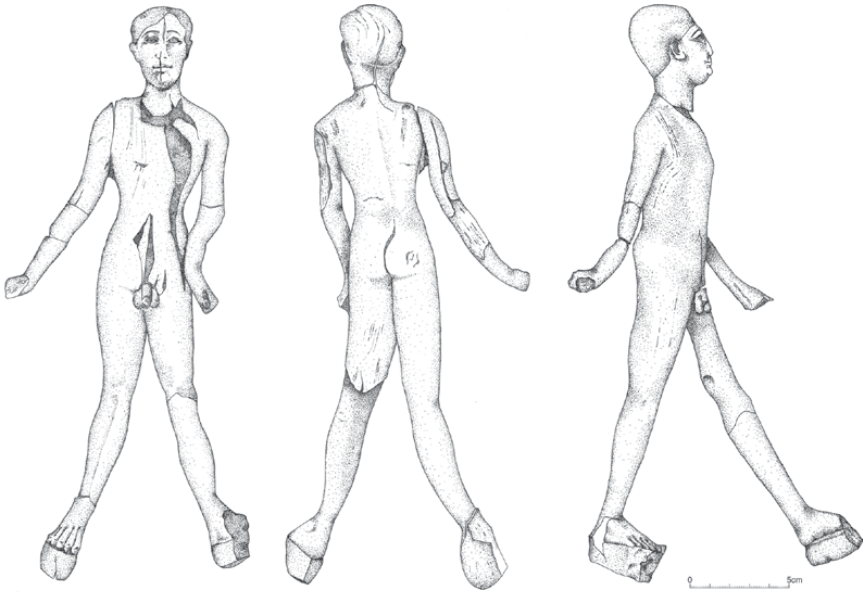


Fig. 76. Wooden figurine of a man from the funerary outfit of a dignitary named Ni-Pepi (end of the Sixth Dynasty) Cf. Il. 17.

almost unnaturally elongated limbs, a very narrow waist, naturalistically modelled facial features, as well as a characteristically tilted torso.

These features have their closest analogies in the figurines found in another Saqqara tomb, much better preserved than Ni-Pepi's, and as a result dated with precision to Pepi II's reign.⁶⁶ With a high level of probability, it can be assumed that the equipment deposited in both tombs was the work of the same workshop. Even though each of the three representations of Ni-Pepi has very individual facial features, they are similar in their naturalism connected to a stylistic mannerism frequently encountered in the art from this period. The depiction of the naked tomb owner is not an exception in Old Kingdom sepulchral art. Nudity was one of the most common symbols of the rebirth of the dead, though it should be noted that all

⁶⁶ Figures from the tomb of the dignitary named Tjeteti: J.C. Harvey, *Wooden Statues of the Old Kingdom; A Typological Study*, Leiden 2001, pp. 278–315 (A83–A101); in reference to dating, see: *Ibid.*, pp. 74–78.



II. 17. Drawings of one of the wooden figurines found in the burial chamber of a nobleman named Ni-Pepi, cf. Figs. 76, 78.

the wooden figurines of women found by our mission in the Saqqara tombs portray them wearing ankle-length robes, while their breasts are emphasised by two shoulder straps, which could perhaps be seen as the archetype of today's bra.⁶⁷

Other miniatures from Ni-Pepi's grave include a set of copper vessels and tools (Figs. 79–81).⁶⁸ The tiny vessels have a variety of shapes, typical for the repertoire of ceramic dishes. They include a set of two containers, a bowl and a jug with a funnel, primarily used for the ritual washing of the hands. However, the most original feature of these small vessels is that an inscription was carved out on the walls of almost every piece: “major-domo of the royal palace, Ni-Pepi.” Apparently, the dignitary thought of his function as his ‘visiting card,’ enabling him to stand out among other contemporary courtiers. The title of *major-domo* also appears among the other distinctions listed in the above-mentioned inscriptions that any person could read on the ‘false door’ upon visiting the aboveground part of the tomb.

67 Kowalska, “Small Finds,” p. 457 (pl. CCIV c) and 465 (pl. CCVIII b).

68 Kowalska, “Small Finds,” p. 450–452.



Fig. 77. Figurine with naturalistic facial features found in Ni-Pepi's burial chamber.



Fig. 78. Head of figurine (Fig. 76) with idealised facial features.



Fig. 79. Set of miniature metal vessels from Ni-Pepi's burial chamber.

Even though they are rarely attested in the tombs we have discovered, metal vessels were frequently used in ancient Egypt.⁶⁹ Before the Bronze Age, they were made primarily from copper. Generally, ritual vessels were usually metal, while the fact that disproportionately a lot less such vessels have been

⁶⁹ A. Radwan, *Die Kupfer- und Bronzegefäße Ägyptens (von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn der Spätzeit)*, München 1983.



Fig. 80. Miniature vessels (Fig. 79) after conservation.



Fig. 81. Set of miniature tools from Ni-Pepi's burial chamber.



Fig. 82. Miniature limestone models from Ni-Pepi's burial chamber.

preserved than, for example, ceramic ones, results from them having been frequently remelted into raw material, from which other artefacts were made. These were not only utility items but also works of arts, e.g. statues and figurines, of which very few from the early pharaonic period have been preserved to our times. Special attention is due the deposits of miniature copper vessels and tools found in the tombs of court doctors. One such tomb, dated to the final phase of the Fifth Dynasty, was recently discovered by Egyptian archaeologists at the necropolis adjacent to the pyramid of Pharaoh Unas from the west,⁷⁰ and thus neighbouring the area we are studying.

The miniatures of many other items, also found at the necropolis neighbouring the 'step pyramid' from the west, were made using limestone (Fig. 82).⁷¹ They include models depicting doors, querns, an oven with loaves of bread, baskets, vessels for brewing beer and pitchers to drink this beverage, so exceptionally popular in Egypt. As evidence of the mass consumption of beer may serve a miniature set we found, consisting of 10 such containers arranged on a flat base with small vertical walls along its three edges.

The remains of necklaces made from a wide variety of material have been especially frequently attested, both in the graves of men and women.⁷² Kauri-type shells are often encountered among the various faience and stone

70 K. Myśliwiec, *The Tombs of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties at Saqqara*, pp. 316–317.

71 Kowalska, "Small Finds," pp. 436, 443, 452–453, 460–461, 465–467, 471–472.

72 Kowalska, "Small Finds," pp. 436, 443–445, 447–450, 456, 459–462, 465, 471, 473–475.

elements. There were probably also golden objects or ones coated in gold foil. However, scant traces remain of adornments made from this precious metal, usually in the form of leaves of thin gold foil. It was precisely this noble metal that was the most sought-after goal of the thieving expeditions into tomb interiors. Robbing the ‘wards’ of Osiris has never actually ceased. As already mentioned, looters were capable of making a mockery of the dead and – *nolens volens* – of archaeologists. On the surface of the huge secondary backfill occupying the entire chapel in a rock-hewn tomb on the western side of the ‘Dry Moat,’ as a farewell gift they left behind one of their most valuable tools: an oil lamp from the twelfth century AD.⁷³

One surprising, though quite frequent find in the mixed backfills of the funerary chambers, shafts and chapels are fragments of faience tiles covered with blue enamel used at the beginning of the Third Dynasty to decorate some underground chambers of the Djoser funerary complex.⁷⁴ Even if we were to assume that they made their way into the noblemen’s tombs younger by over 300 years along with a secondary backfill, it would be difficult to imagine that they had all been torn out of their original context, i.e. from the underground areas of the ‘step pyramid,’ and lugged here by thieves. A more probable theory is that somewhere close to our excavation area or just above it, there used to be a workshop which mass-produced such artefacts, located here at the beginnings of the Third Dynasty. This location seems to be very much logical if we consider that the raw material for the production of ‘Egyptian faience’ is pure sand, the closest source of which was the nearby desert. The quarry located on the western side of the ‘step pyramid’ was the ideal spot for a logistics base, as the frontal representative face of the *temenos*, including the entrance to the holy complex, was situated on its opposite, i.e. eastern side.

Even the smallest, seemingly most insignificant items found during excavations within the archaeological material must be carefully recorded, because they might suddenly turn out to be a prime historical source in the context of other unearthed artefacts. The exact spot where it was found must be registered, while the artefact itself must be measured, described, drawn and photographed, following which analogies and interpretations of similar items in earlier scholarly literature should be established. It is also necessary to immediately begin the conservation process, so that the material – weathered, corroded or penetrated by pests and fungi – does not fall apart into little pieces or disintegrate into ashes.

73 Rzeuska, “The Pottery, 2002,” *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 14 (2003): *Reports 2002*, p. 144, fig. 1.

74 Kowalska, “Small Finds,” pp. 441, 444–447, 449, 461–465, 469, 472, 475.

Our archaeologists and restorers prefer to work in underground spaces, i.e. in one of the rock-hewn, but undecorated and never used funerary chapels (Figs. 174 and 181–182). There the artefacts can ‘breathe’ in the dampness and temperature similar to the conditions in which they had survived thousands of years. In turn, the anthropologists organised a workshop in the fresh air, in front of the entrance to the small, previously-mentioned storehouse, once constructed by the Egyptian authorities at the top of the embankment adjoining the recessed wall of Djoser’s pyramid from the west. There they lay out all the preserved bones and reconstruct the original shape of the whole skeleton, on the basis of which they can identify not only the dead person’s age, his or her appearance and probable cause of death, but also their culinary habits, lifestyle, health, etc. Frequently, the sounds of anthropological enthrallment reach us from this workshop, e.g. “Ah, what wonderful rheumatism” or “My God, prostate cancer did a number on all his bones.” An archaeologist translates this immediately into his own language, “How they must have all suffered.”

Chapter 7. Cult of the dead

Abstract: Funeral ceremonies. A posthumous cult. Ritual pottery as the source of historical information. Who consumed the offerings from the offering table? White is sacred. Who is afraid of the dead?

Keywords: offerings, offering list, procession, burning, red pots, beer jars.

The underground part of a tomb, encompassing the burial chamber and shaft leading to it from the surface of the mastaba, was the ‘home’ of the dead in the afterworld. Theoretically, no living person had the right to disrupt his peace. However, as we have already seen, theory had little in common with practice as most of the funerary chambers were robbed shortly after the funeral. The temptation was too strong, since the coffin and its surroundings were equipped with a large number of various items needed by the deceased for his life in the land of eternity. These included objects made from gold or silver, which were the most attractive items for any unwanted visitors. To us, it sometimes seems that the looters were exceptionally knowledgeable about the underground parts of the mastabas, as they did not remove the entire fill from the shaft, but – at least in the lower parts of the larger shafts – drilled a vertical tunnel right next to the wall that ended at the burial chamber at the bottom.¹ Let us not, however, overestimate their knowledge. The location of the burial shafts in the middle of the northern part of the mastabas, and in many cases even the content of the burial chambers must have been an open secret, even if for the simple reason that an important part of the funerary ceremonies took place on the roof of the mastaba near the open shaft into which various offerings were thrown.² The ceremony was also attended by offering bearers and priests, and thus a group of people whose discretion was by no means guaranteed.

Many of the shafts bear traces of being reused when the next member of the family passed away. At that time, the shaft was deepened and adapted to the new burial. This involved either a second burial chamber or simply a hollow of a size just large enough to place a coffin or a body wrapped in a shroud.³ We do not have any proof that the eternal peace of the first tomb

1 T. I. Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom. Funerary Pottery and Burial Customs* (Saqqara II), Warsaw 2006, p. 429.

2 Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, pp. 485–492.

3 Kuraszkievicz, *Architecture*, pp. 280–283 (phases FE–FG).

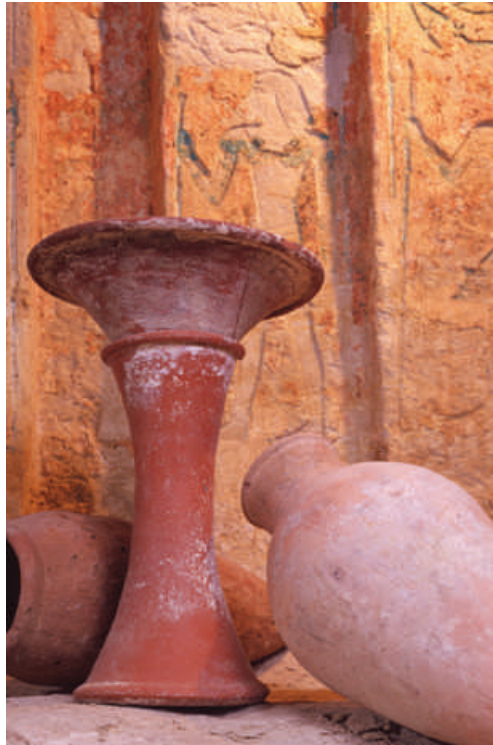


Fig. 83. Ritual pottery from Merefnebef's tomb in front of the 'false door' in his cult chapel.

owner was disrupted during the secondary burial. This had usually already been done earlier by thieves.

In turn, the aboveground part of the tomb was the place of the cult of the deceased. It included the mastaba with the cult chapel and courtyard, where some of the rituals were performed.⁴ Both during the funeral and later, people gathered here in order to venerate the inhabitant of the afterworld. To enter the interior of the chapel, one had to maintain a state of purity, which was achieved, for example, by following certain dietary rules. A long inscription sculpted into the rock above the entrance to the chapel warned against breaking these instructions.⁵ In the interior, the most important things were

4 Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, pp. 232–240.

5 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 70–74; K. Myśliwiec, K. O. Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex of Nyankhnefertem* (Saqqara IV), Warsaw 2010, pp. 92–94, 134–136.

the ‘false door’ and the offering table situated in front. It was here that offerings were placed for the tomb owner’s spiritual element, referred to as *akh* by the Egyptians. Even though the essence of the *akh* is not today fully understood, it is certain that it was attributed with many supernatural, almost divine features, even though the deceased was not yet identified with any god during the Old Kingdom.⁶ Only the pharaoh was entitled to deification, about which the *Pyramid Texts* provide the most precise information. As already noted earlier on the example of Vizier Merefnebef’s tomb, the highest dignitaries dreamt of being similar to the dead ruler, which they expressed in a variety of ways in the decoration of their tombs. It seems that this was especially desired by the *nouveau riche*.⁷

The essence of the *akh* is a separate subject in the considerations of Egyptologists. The tomb owner’s relatives and acquaintances not only venerated him, but might also have felt fear of him. This is best attested by the letters to the deceased, written usually on clay vessels, especially bowls, most probably deposited in the place of his cult.⁸ It was expected that the omnipotent *akh* would help solve various problems of daily life, such as infertility or disputes over property. The *akh* could wreak vengeance if it decided that it was not awarded the veneration it was due or not given worthy offerings. Fear of revenge exacted by the deceased gave additional motivation to practise his cult.

6 E. Otto, “Ach (jAx),” in: *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, Bd. 1: A–Ernte, Wiesbaden 1972, col. 49–52; G. Englund, *Akh – une notion religieuse dans l’Égypte pharaonique* („BOREAS” 11), Uppsala 1978; R. J. Demarée, *The Ax ikr Ra – Stelae. On Ancestor Worship in Ancient Egypt*, Leiden 1983; F. Friedman, “The Root Meaning of Ax: Effectiveness or Luminosity,” *Serapis* 8 (1984–1985), pp. 39–46; K. Jansen-Winkel, “Horizont” und “Verklärtheit”: Zur Bedeutung der Wurzel Ax,” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 23 (1996), pp. 201–215; A. Niwiński, “The Double Structure of the Entity. The Ancient Egyptian Conception of the Human Being Reconsidered,” in: J. Popielska-Grzybowska, J. Iwaszczuk (eds.), *Proceedings of the Fifth Central European Conference of Egyptologists: Egypt 2009: Perspectives of Research, Pułtusk 22–24 June 2009* (“Acta Archaeologica Pułtuskiensia” 2), Pułtusk 2009, pp. 153–160; J. H. Taylor, *Death and Afterlife in Ancient Egypt*, London 2001.

7 Myśliwiec, “The Dead in the Marshes – Reed Coffins Revisited,” pp. 105–113.

8 R. Grieshammer, “Briefe an Tote,” in: *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, Bd. 1: A–Ernte, col. 864–870; A.H. Gardiner, K. Sethe, *Egyptian Letters to the Dead Mainly from the Old and Middle Kingdoms*, London 1928; W. K. Simpson, “A Late Old Kingdom Letter to the Dead from Nag’ ed-Deir N 3500,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 56 (1970), pp. 58–62; H. el-Leithy, “Letters to the Dead in Ancient and Modern Egypt,” in: Z. Hawass (ed.), *Egyptology at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century. Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Egyptologists, Cairo 2000*, Cairo–New York 2002, pp. 304–313.

However, one would be mistaken to think that the deceased's cult chapel was only an auditorium for idyllic scenes full of religious content. The preserved chapels of Old Kingdom dignitaries also bear witness to family feuds, expressed most pointedly in the reliefs and paintings decorating the chapel walls. This can especially be observed in the tombs from the Sixth Dynasty, though proof of resentment and conflicts have also been discovered in much earlier mastabas, even from the beginning of the Fourth Dynasty, i.e. the period of the construction of the largest pyramids, when the social order was much more stable than later.⁹ The destruction of representations of reviled members of the family or re-carving of the accompanying inscriptions to present new content were common occurrences. The oldest son, who – according to Egyptian custom – would become the main heir, most frequently fell victim to the activities of iconoclasts. The younger male progeniture were incapable of reconciling with this succession, and the best way to express frustration was precisely the destruction of the older brother's effigies (Figs. 55–56). It can only be imagined what 'generic' scenes this evoked in real life. In all probability, important episodes in the conflict must have taken place in the cult chapel of the father who had passed away or right in front of it.

The geographic orientation and shape of the chapel were conditioned to a large extent by the location and topography of the necropolis. The latter is located on the western side of Djoser's pyramid considered to be a holy place, while the subsequent terraces of its contemporaneous quarry, in which the necropolis was founded, are facing westwards. On one of the terraces, the two wealthiest tombs in the cemetery were constructed: the burial place of Merefnebef, the *éminence grise*, who at a critical moment in history was elevated to a senior official rank in the State, and the neighbouring structure, which was equally interesting and which we will discuss in the next chapter (Il. 5 and 22).¹⁰ The beautiful cult chapels of these two dignitaries from the beginnings of the Sixth Dynasty, hewn out in the rock, both had entrances from the west side. However, when the façade of Merefnebef's chapel was blocked by a pile of bricks from the collapsed (perhaps intentionally) front wall of his mastaba, the family of the controversial nobleman did not decide

9 K. Myśliwiec, "Father's and Eldest Son's Overlapping Feet; an Iconographic Message," in: Z. Hawass, P. Der Manuelian, R. B. Hussein (eds.), *Perspectives on Ancient Egypt: Studies in Honor of Edward Brovarski* ("Supplément aux Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte" 40), Le Caire 2010, pp. 315–318.

10 Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, pp. 175–178; K. Myśliwiec, "Fefi and Temi: Posthumous Neighbours (Sixth Dynasty, Saqqara)," in: Kh. Daoud, Sh. Bedier, S. Abd El-Fatah (eds.), *Studies in Honor of Ali Radwan* ("Supplément aux Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte" 34), Vol. 2, Le Caire 2005, pp. 197–211.

to remove the rubble, even though this would have cost them at most one day of work. In order to not further annoy his enemies, a more modest solution was selected. A new chapel was added onto the opposite eastern wall of his mastaba, which had a place of cult monumental in size, but standing adjacent to a tiny courtyard surrounded by a very feeble mud-brick wall (Figs. 60 and 88).¹¹

The next generations of courtiers buried in this necropolis until the end of the Old Kingdom, i.e. for almost two centuries, must have liked this new model of the chapel. It was much cheaper than the decorated chapels hewn into rock, and also had an eschatological advantage, as the deceased's *akh* exited the tomb in an eastern direction, i.e. straight towards the holy complex of Djoser's pyramid. This type of small cult chapel appears repeatedly in all the mastabas built after Merefnebef's death.¹²

In the initial phase of the expansion of the necropolis, the mastabas were arranged in such a way that the space between them formed a network of small roads and paths. As it expanded, this plan was dropped. More elements were added onto the existing tombs, while new structures were erected on the ruins of older mastabas, limiting the free space and increasingly complicating the layout. As the brick walls of the mastabas, if they have even been preserved at all, are currently in a fragmentary state, establishing the original borders of the individual structures and attributing each shaft to a specific whole is quite a challenge for any Egyptologist.¹³ One requires abundant amounts of knowledge and experience to unravel this puzzle credibly. As already mentioned, this work was executed at our excavations by Dr Kamil Kuraszkiewicz, who not only integrated the scattered material and isolated the subsequent phases in the development of the necropolis but also attributed to particular structures the architectural fragments extracted from their original context and scattered across the entire area either by looters or by the streams that in the rainy period flowed rapidly down from the direction of the pyramid dominating over the entire landscape.

A precise study of the architecture of the fragmentarily preserved tomb structures enabled the isolation of six main phases in the development of the necropolis, and even associating them to the political, economic and social history of the Sixth Dynasty. These stages were then correlated with the four periods that it was possible to distinguish based on the exceptionally rich

11 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 56–60.

12 Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, p. 232 (3.2.3.).

13 Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, pls. I–X.

pottery assemblage discovered during our excavations.¹⁴ In the case of this material, difficulties resulted not only from the enormous number of vessels requiring analysis using scientific methods but also the mobility of pottery artefacts. They are very easily moved, which signifies that they are not always found *in situ*, but rather in a secondary deposit. However, in order to arrive at some historical conclusions based on this material, it is necessary to study them in detail within the context of the architecture and other findings. It is only then possible to determine their function and accurately establish their significance within the material culture of ancient Egypt. This extremely ambitious but exceptionally difficult task was undertaken by the mission's ceramologist, Dr Teodozja Rzeuska.¹⁵ It should be emphasised that her in-depth and comprehensive Egyptological knowledge aided her strongly in selecting the appropriate method. The results of her research exceeded all expectations, not only ours, the members of the mission, but also those of the entire archaeological world. To put it shortly, she proved that appropriately studied Egyptian pottery can be a historical source of the highest quality, parallel to hieroglyphic inscriptions and the scenes depicted on the walls of Egyptian tombs and temples. At this point, however, we are most interested in the significance her studies have for the reconstruction of rituals practiced within the framework of the cult of the deceased.

In order to properly understand the significance of these discoveries, one should first understand the general state of research into Egyptian pottery. Scientific studies of clay vessels, which in terms of their number are the best represented material found at all excavations in Egypt, belong among the youngest fields of Egyptology. In its beginnings, i.e. in the 1970s, ceramology paved its way towards being treated seriously with some difficulty within an academic field considered primarily to be a philological one; today, ceramology constitutes a separate branch of Egyptology, to which philologists and historians often refer in search for material confirmation of their hypothesis, as do archaeologists – even more frequently, expecting pottery to be the material capable of determining the dating of the studied object or archaeological layer. Close cooperation between an archaeologist and a ceramologist is the basis for the success of excavations.

The fact that Egyptology is lagging behind in this area is all the more striking if we compare the archaeology of Egypt with that of ancient Greece or Rome. While classical archaeologists had already distinguished the

14 Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, pp. 23, 276–283; Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, p. 427; T. Rzeuska, “Pottery,” in: *Old Kingdom Structures*, Warsaw 2013, p. 518.

15 Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, pp. 477–532.

characteristic types of pottery, production centres and techniques, ways in which they were decorated and distributed, and – finally – established the dating of the particular types, making ceramology not only an important tool for archaeologists but also a separate field of archaeology, Egyptologists were preoccupied with some sort of amateurish collectorship, recording and publishing only the most beautiful and best-preserved vessels, without making even the slightest effort to establish their cultural significance. It was not until the work of three researchers from three different academic traditions, Helen Jacquet-Gordon (Egyptologist-archaeologist), Janine Bourriau (Egyptologist-museologist) and Dorothea Arnold (classical archaeologist), that this shameful tradition was abandoned.¹⁶ Each of these researchers proved that pottery, if studied using a multi-disciplinary approach and set in the context of other findings, can explain many other issues about which written documents are silent and iconographic sources very fragmentary.

Nonetheless, the enormity of the pottery material found during almost every excavation makes it quite a feat to provide precise descriptions of the individual vessel types, determine their production technique and the date of their making. The majority of ceramologists working at excavations simply do not have the time to pose broader cultural studies questions, i.e. ones which go beyond the scope listed above. In the case of every sherd found, and there are sometimes hundreds of thousands of them, one has to answer a multitude of questions: to which group should it be qualified; should it be kept in hopes that further fragments making up an entire vessel will be found or rather thrown away after its existence has been noted; how should the statistics of the individual types of clay and decorations be made; should the sherds sullied by clay be washed or cleaned without using water, so as not to wash off any potential decoration painted on after it was fired; which fragments should be submitted for costly technological testing and what can be expected from such tests, etc.? Few ceramologists have enough patience to cap their work by publishing it.¹⁷ Many studies on the pottery from excavations are only in the form of catalogues attempting to date the individual types. Even this is enough to win the gratitude of the archaeologist, even if in many cases he or she treats the ceramologist instrumentally, as a medium for determining the approximate dating of the archaeological layers.

16 D. Arnold (ed.), *Studien zur altägyptischen Keramik*, Mainz 1981; J. Bourriau, *Umm el-Ga'ab. Pottery from the Nile Valley before the Arab Conquest*, Cambridge 1981.

17 For example K. Myśliwiec, *Keramik und Kleinfunde aus der Grabung im Tempel Sethos' I. in Gurna*, Mainz am Rhein 1987, pp. 13–26.

Teodozja Rzeuska made an important step forward. While working on the catalogue of pottery vessels, she did not for a moment part with the question concerning their cultural function. She conducted the analysis of entire assemblages, especially so-called closed deposits, i.e. intact groups of objects preserved in their original context. There are few such deposits, but their cognitive value is enormous. She subjected representative types of vessels to various technological analyses, while also studying in great detail their content or its remains and, most importantly, she compared these data with the information contained in written and iconographic sources. The shortest way of referring to this method would be that it was a holistic approach.

The pottery linked to the cult of the dead can generally be divided into two groups: vessels used in various phases of the funerary ceremonies and ritual vessels connected to the later cult, which in some cases could have been upkept for many years. Before the funerary procession arrived at the mastaba, there were rituals attested in hieroglyphic texts from various époques. From the period of the Fourth to the Sixth Dynasties, scenes depicting the funerals have been preserved in at least eighteen tombs belonging to various noblemen. However, the most complete written source is the so-called Ramesseum E Papyrus (name derived from its find spot), containing a copy of the funeral liturgy. Many fragments of this valuable document remain unclear to this day. It is only natural that, over the course of 3000 years of the development of ancient Egyptian civilisation, these rituals evolved, individual episodes were added or disappeared, the function of the priests changed, etc. However, the basic scheme of the ceremony remained the same.

The body of the deceased was carried in a procession from his place of residence to the “pure place” (*wabet* in Egyptian).¹⁸ Preserved in the tombs of Mereruka, Ankhmahor and Idu (Old Kingdom), representations of these processions depict the family of the deceased and two female mourners, of which one, referred to as the “great mourner,” was associated with Goddess Isis weeping over the death of Osiris. Behind them marched “the bearer of god’s stamp” (*hetemti netjer*), the lector-priests (*heryu habet*) and embalmers (*utyu*).

After crossing over onto the “western side” (or the “western bank”), they would continue on to the “purification tent” (*ibu en wab*), where the body of the deceased was subjected to ritual cleansing. Due to the Egyptian climate, this ritual could not have lasted too long. Next, the procession moved on to the place called the “place of embalmment” (*wabet net ut*). There the body would remain the longest, until the grave had been prepared. This probably involved the appropriate equipping of the burial chamber, as the

18 Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, p. 431.

decorations in the cult chapels in many cases were never actually completed. It is also slightly anachronistic in reference to the Old Kingdom to use the word ‘embalment’ as the custom of mummifying the body was only in its beginning stages at that time.

From in front of the *wabet*, the procession with the body of the deceased marched in the direction of the grave, visiting holy places called Sais and Buto along the way, representing two important religious centres in Lower Egypt bearing these same names. However, this episode has not been attested for the period preceding the Fifth Dynasty. Here, the procession was welcomed by the ritualists referred to as *muu*, dressed in characteristic attire. One of the elements of the ceremony that occurred then was a march with papyrus stalks.

Until recently, the rites performed by the grave were the least studied part of the funeral ritual. Only three scenes are known from Old Kingdom tombs that depict ceremonies taking place at that spot.¹⁹ It was possible to fill this gap in our knowledge about the cult of the dead thanks to the Polish excavations in the necropolis on the western side of Djoser’s pyramid. Until not so long ago, Egyptologists believed that the gifts listed in the so-called offering lists, depicted on the walls of the cult chapel (Fig. 175), were deposited before the body was placed inside the grave. Archaeological records made it possible to state that the situation was in fact the exact opposite. This was shown by the analysis of the material from our excavations, primarily the pottery assemblages unearthed in burial chambers, by the blockage at the entrance to these chambers, and at the bottom of tomb shafts, as well as the ceramic deposits found inside the shafts – which later turned out to be most important element. Each of these spots was distinguished by specific content unattested in other parts of the tombs.

In the burial chamber, the deceased was accompanied by all the items needed for his or her life in the Netherworld: furniture, jewellery, cosmetic utensils (including mirrors and palettes for grinding paint), stone and metal vessels, wood and stone figurines, and – finally – pottery vessels.²⁰ Many items were small in size as they were put there in place of the originals, which would not have fit in the chamber. Such miniatures, made from clay or stone, depicted, e.g. bread and other baked goods, meat, vessels to hold beverages, etc. (Fig. 82). They are referred to as ‘models’ in archaeological jargon. In reference to pottery vessels, we found six intact specimens near Vizier Merefnebef’s sarcophagus, on its eastern side.²¹ Two sealed jugs stood

19 Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, p. 431.

20 Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, p. 434.

21 Rzeuska, “The Pottery,” in: Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 205–206.

leaning against the wall of the sarcophagus, while two plates, one bowl and one mould for baking bread were found next to them (Il. 19–20, Fig. 85). Each jug was sealed off with a clay stopper comprised of two parts: an inner egg-shaped part and a cylindrical cover reaching the shoulders of the vessel. Made from wet mud, the seal was supposed to close off the vessel's opening tightly, but it was very brittle. Its presence at the spout attests that the vessel was found intact.

The content of the jugs turned out to be surprising. The characteristically-shaped container (Il. 19), meant to hold beer, was filled with... dry clay, which doubtless must have been poured inside in liquid form. In turn, inside the bread mould, we found charcoal cubes. The contents of the vessels were thus symbolic. Even though similar pottery sets, sometimes in fragmentary state, were also found in the burial chambers of other mastabas, the pottery from the vizier's burial set is unrivalled in terms of the quality of its execution. These vessels, made from a better, very homogeneous type of clay, have a surface overlaid with a clay coating, meticulously polished. In addition, they are excellently fired. The difference between these and the vessels from the funerary chambers of other noblemen buried at this necropolis confirm the intense social and property-based diversification of the Old Kingdom civil servant class. It is worth emphasising that among the vessels found in the context of a coffin or sarcophagus, vessels used in the cult are lacking, for which various kinds of jugs would be typical (with such names as *hes*, *kebeh* or *nemset*), while frequently various specimens of kitchen ware are encountered (such as bread moulds), as are storage vessels (simple jugs, mainly for beer) and luxury pottery with red slip on their surface.

Researchers have for a long time puzzled over the symbolic contents of these vessels, primarily the clay mass filling the jugs. Until recently, some believed that this was a remnant of rain, which had changed the clay into a liquid mass that secondarily adapted to the shape of the containers. What then would the clay stopper preserved on the intact vessels have been for? Some considered the vessels to have been containers for mortar, but there are no traces of such material inside. Others thought that this was an intentional filling of the container, e.g. in order to increase the weight of the vessel. However, it is difficult to establish the reason behind such a procedure.²² Since the predynastic period, such jugs have been present in burials and they were doubtless deposited there on purpose. Only one interpretation seems logical: clay replaced beer in the funerary cult, which is why jugs meant for this beverage were filled with it. No other material, such as sand, was ever used for this purpose.

22 Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, p. 442, fn. 57.

The bread moulds containing charcoal crumbs have so far not had any analogies. They probably represent pastry, as we know dough was only poured inside after the moulds had been heated. Thus, this involved making sure the deceased was permanently prepared for the baking of bread, the basis of his existence, like other models guaranteed him his daily meal, clothing, cosmetics and adornments. Another piece of evidence presenting concern for facilitating his consumption needs is the fact that the vessels were placed on the eastern side of the coffin, right next to the head of the deceased, so that, when awoken in the morning by the rays of the rising sun, he had a meal lying opposite his mouth. This can be considered to have been one of the signs of the increasing role of solar imagery, and thus of the eschatological orientation towards the sun, beginning with the Fifth Dynasty. Another *signum temporis* is the gradual impoverishment of the funerary equipment, and especially of the number of vessels in the burial chambers of Sixth-Dynasty noblemen. The difference between the burials of the richer and the poorer also becomes more drastic, visible both in the architecture and in the funerary equipment.²³

After placing the body in the coffin and supplying it with all the goods needed in life, the funerary chamber was supposed to be closed off with stones or bricks. Egyptian texts are silent about this part of the funeral. In turn, the archaeological material indicates clearly that this was a moment of huge significance both for the deceased and for the living, for whom this was the moment when they bade him farewell forever. The sealing of the chamber was linked with a ritual act attested by various objects found by archaeologists at the bottom of burial shafts, opposite the blocked entrance and in the blockage itself. If the grave had never been robbed, the blockade is sealed with plaster and additionally covered with a white coating.²⁴ Numerous traces of this paint have been preserved next to the entrance to chambers also in tombs which had since fallen prey to looters. Vessels, sherds or baskets with remains of mortar or white paint are also frequently found near the blockade or inside the shaft, slightly above the entrance to the chamber. The mortar was also used to seal the sarcophagus and vessels deposited earlier inside the burial chamber, as well as to paint the walls of the shaft.

In addition, the finds in the ritual deposit at the bottom of the shaft also frequently include the bones of animal offerings, ceramic vessels (especially miniature ones), incense burners with traces of fire on them, flint tools and shells. Similar items are sometimes stuck in the blockade. However, few traces of sealing the burial chambers have been left behind at the necropolis we

23 Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, pp. 275–283.

24 Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, p. 444.

excavated. Only in one case did we find the remains of an animal offering at the bottom of the burial shaft. This was the skull of a bull with its bones preserved in its anatomical layout, which proves that the burial was never compromised.²⁵ In other deposits, the bones of the animals were scattered; thus, it was difficult to establish whether they originated from the interior of the burial chamber or whether they were the remains of the ritual of sealing the entrance. Even though it was very important, this rite was necessarily an intimate event, as at best only two people could fit at the bottom of the burial shaft, while retaining enough freedom of movement needed to perform the cult activities.

The vessels found at the bottom of burial shafts primarily include beer jars and incense burners. Were they placed there intentionally? The white paint on their surface is a sign of the sacred, as this colour, especially in the ritual context, signified purity, dignity, stateliness. It appears everywhere where the two realms, that of the living and that of the dead, meet. The ‘false doors’ were also in many cases secondarily coated with white paint, while the sunken relief of the hieroglyphs was originally full of more vibrant colours, e.g. green and red. The spirit of the deceased also passed into the realm of the living through such doors, in order to consume the offerings placed on the altar by the priests. The custom of painting various ritual objects white spread especially during the Sixth Dynasty. This colour was also applied to emphasise the sacral character of the ceramic vessels standing in front of the ‘false doors,’ used repeatedly during the delivery of the offerings.

The walls of the burial chambers and shafts were also white-coated. In the narrow entrance to Merefnepes’s cult chapel, we unearthed a few layers of mud flooring with a white surface, forming a thick floor pugging.²⁶ The plaster coating also covered the lower register of the reliefs on the lateral walls of this entrance.²⁷ Only after it had been delicately removed by the restorers were we able to see the richly-detailed, once polychrome scenes, which depicted sailing boats carrying a funeral procession.

Incense burners with traces of fire on them, found in the same context, bring to mind a scene known from the *Pyramid Texts*: the path to the heavens was guarded by flames.²⁸ It cannot be excluded that their magical power was supposed to purify and sanctify this special place, fortifying and protecting it.

25 Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, p. 444, pl. 173 (2).

26 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, plate 44 b and 48 a, d–f.

27 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 86–87, plate 48.

28 T. Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, p. 449, fn. 99.

It is also worth noting the animal offerings were found here along with clay vessels. Their presence has been attested at various Old Kingdom necropoles, with bones belonging to calves and bulls. They differ fundamentally from the animal deposits found in burial chambers, belonging to the 'menu' of the deceased in the Netherworld. It is surprising that only the heads and legs of the calves were deposited at the bottom of the burial shafts, without other parts of the bodies.²⁹ Therefore, the meat had a purely symbolic significance, it was not part of the items meant for consumption. The bones are sometimes dismembered and even embedded into the blocks of the entrance, while the head was deposited with the horns pointing downwards. Such an arrangement suggests the apotropaic nature of the offering. Its aim was to magically secure the entrance from all evil powers.

The ceremonies that took place in front of the entrance to the burial chamber after it was closed off seem to have evolved during the Old Kingdom. We have evidence that already during the Fourth Dynasty, i.e. the period during which the largest pyramids were constructed, the entrance to the chamber was painted white, while miniature stone and clay vessels were placed in front of it. The placing of animal offerings and burning incense only became widespread in the second half of the Old Kingdom, i.e. during the Fifth and the Sixth Dynasties.³⁰

Nonetheless, the meticulous exploration of the burial shafts brought the least expected results. It turned out that above the burial chambers, the shafts were filled after the funeral not only with rock chips that had been formed during the hewing of the chamber but also with extensive deposits containing enormous amounts of pottery.³¹ What kind of pottery was this? Who had thrown it into the shaft and when? In order to fit it in, sometimes special niches were carved into the rock walls of the shafts. This in itself gives rise to the suspicion that in this case we are not dealing with pottery that was accidentally thrown into the shaft by uninvited guests, e.g. looters during the rushed, secondary filling of the gap left after they 'had finished their work.' This observation is confirmed by the fact that the mysterious pottery deposits in the larger-sized shafts are lying in the part of the fill that is intact, i.e. in the pile of stone chips, and not in the aeolian sand which the looters used to fill the channel they had hollowed out. This was, for example, the case in one of the first tomb complexes we unearthed, right next to Vizier Mernefer's tomb. Judging by its size and architecture, this was the burial place of one of

29 T. Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, pp. 449–451.

30 T. Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, p. 452.

31 T. Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, pp. 453–465.

the high officials in the early phase of the Sixth Dynasty. Unfortunately, none of the inscriptions enabling the identification of the tomb owner has been preserved. In turn, in the intact part of this shaft, there was a deposit containing, among other things, at least 29 beer jars (as indicated by the number of diagnostic vessel sherds), 129 bread moulds (Fig. 85), 14 trays painted white with profiled edges, and – finally - fragments of some luxury bowls of the Meidum type, referred to as such by archaeologists based on the place from which the first identified specimens originate.³² Some of the jugs were filled with ash, and one had a surface covered with white paint. The majority of the vessels were preserved intact, which is especially surprising in the case of the unfired, very fragile bread moulds, which constitute the most abundant group. Two types of moulds are represented here, referred to by the Egyptians as *bedja* (for baking bread with a conical shape) and *aperet* (for flat pastries).

This set of vessels already clearly indicates that this pottery was supposed to satisfy the two basic culinary needs of the deceased, listed repeatedly in the inscriptions on the walls of the tomb chapel: bread and beer. The formula “offering of a thousand of breads and a thousand of beer” accompanies almost every scene depicting the tomb owner at the offering table. On the table itself, there is always a representation of half-loaves of flat bread, sometimes so enlarged and stylised that they are more reminiscent of tall feathers or stalks than baked goods.³³

However, the distinguishing feature of these deposits is primarily the presence of beer jars filled with ash and charcoal lumps (particles). They are also frequently sealed with clay overlays. They have been found at various necropolises, and have turned out to be the key to understanding an exceptionally important ritual in the cult of the deceased. The Polish ceramologist noticed that ash was frequently stuck to the bottom surface of the stoppers, which means that the latter were formed while wet, when the vessel had already been filled.³⁴ On the reverse side of some jugs, i.e. on the top of the conical bottom, she noticed holes made using a finger or a stick before the vessels were fired. It was excluded that these vessels could have served as containers for liquids at any point. It was probably production waste that the potter put aside so that they could later serve sepulchral purposes. Our friend decided to subject the contents of the ash to precise testing. As macroscopically it was possible to state the presence of small particles of various

32 T. Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, p. 455.

33 N. Cherpion, *Mastabas et hypogées d’Ancien Empire. Le problème de la datation*, Bruxelles 1989, pp. 42–52.

34 T. Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, pp. 468–469.

burnt plants (e.g. stems, pedicels, seeds, kernels), she brought over an experienced paleobotanist from the University in Szczecin to Saqqara.

After weeks spent at the microscope, Dr Jarosław Zieliński revealed to us a whole world of Egyptian flora (Il. 18a-b).³⁵ The ash from the beer jars was filtered through a strainer with a mesh aperture diameter of 0.5–3.0 mm. All of the vessels among the seven tested contained wheat, while some had pearl barley – usually in fragmented form. But only five vessels contained the remnants of thorns and chaff, predominantly crumbled, among the wheat particles. In addition, the remains of oats, African millet, wheatgrass, lupin and other weeds growing among the cereal grass and difficult to eradicate were also attested. The remains of fruit were also isolated out, such as figs, grapes, as well as spices and edible plants, including celery, black cumin, balanos, marigold, poppy rattle, chicory, flax, camomile, sweet reseda and safflower. In the case of celery and black cumin, these are the oldest known testimonies of their existence.³⁶

The remains of burnt wood (acacia and palm trees) were found in three jugs, while in four others – the leftovers of burnt stems. This suggests that there were two types of burnt piles: in one wood was burnt, in the other – straw (Il. 18a–b). The pieces of burnt wood were accompanied by a lot of seeds from weeds and wild wheat, but there were no thorns or chaff among them. The pile here only contained threshed grain. In the context of the burnt straw, there are large amounts of whole grain. The absence of wood in this case is understandable. While the straw pile could only have been burnt in late spring and early summer (March – June), when the grains were still growing in the field and – of course – could not have been threshed; in turn, the wood piles can only be dated to winter, when the grain had already been sieved. Based on the analysis of the ash in the beer jars, it is thus possible to establish with high probability the season during which the deceased had been buried. What a shame this does not enable determining the date of the burial!

Thanks to the conducted botanical analysis, it was possible to reconstruct the composition of each of the two types of piles.³⁷ First, fruit was placed on a tray or bowl, especially figs and grapes, after which flowers and grains were added, as well as probably fragments of animal offerings. The ready pile was placed on a fire, and when it changed into ash, jars were filled with the substance, which included charred plant remains and the sherds of the pottery used in the burning. The full jars were then sealed. This composition

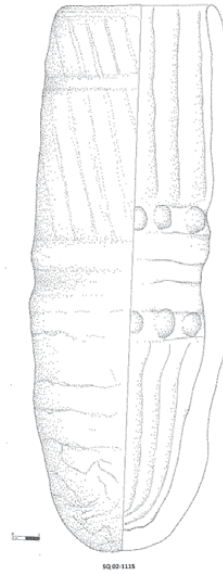
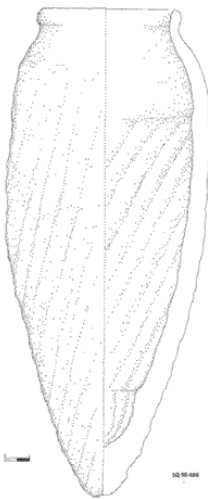
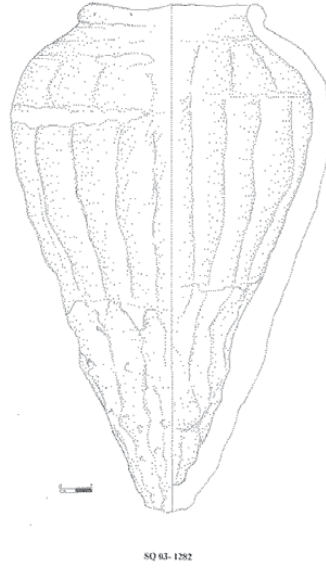
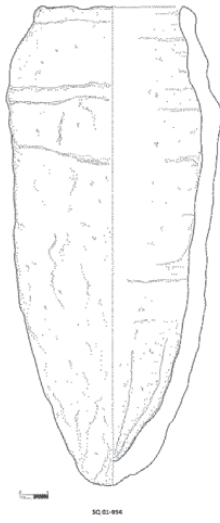
35 T. Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, p. 472.

36 T. Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*.

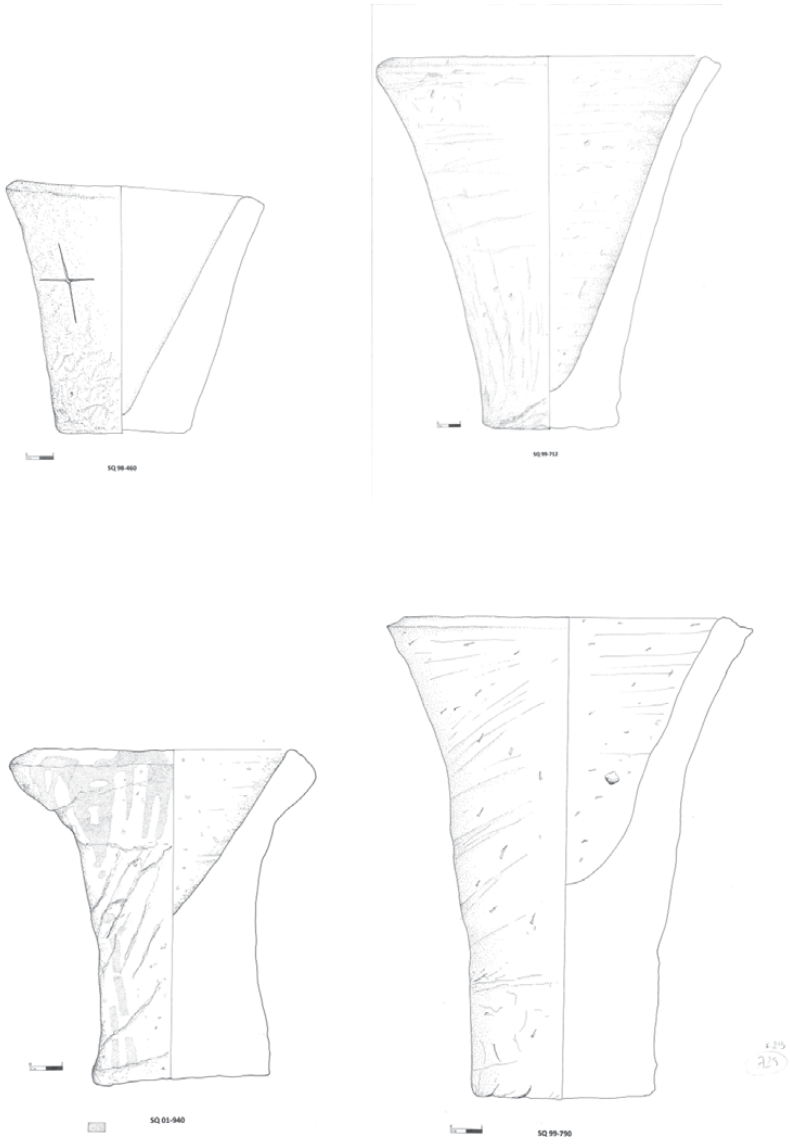
37 T. Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, pp. 471–473.



II. 18. Plants burnt on the offering pile in the summer (a) and in the winter (b).



II. 19. Different shapes of beer jars from the Old Kingdom necropolis in Saqqara.



II. 20. Various shapes of the moulds for baking bread from the Old Kingdom necropolis in Saqqara.

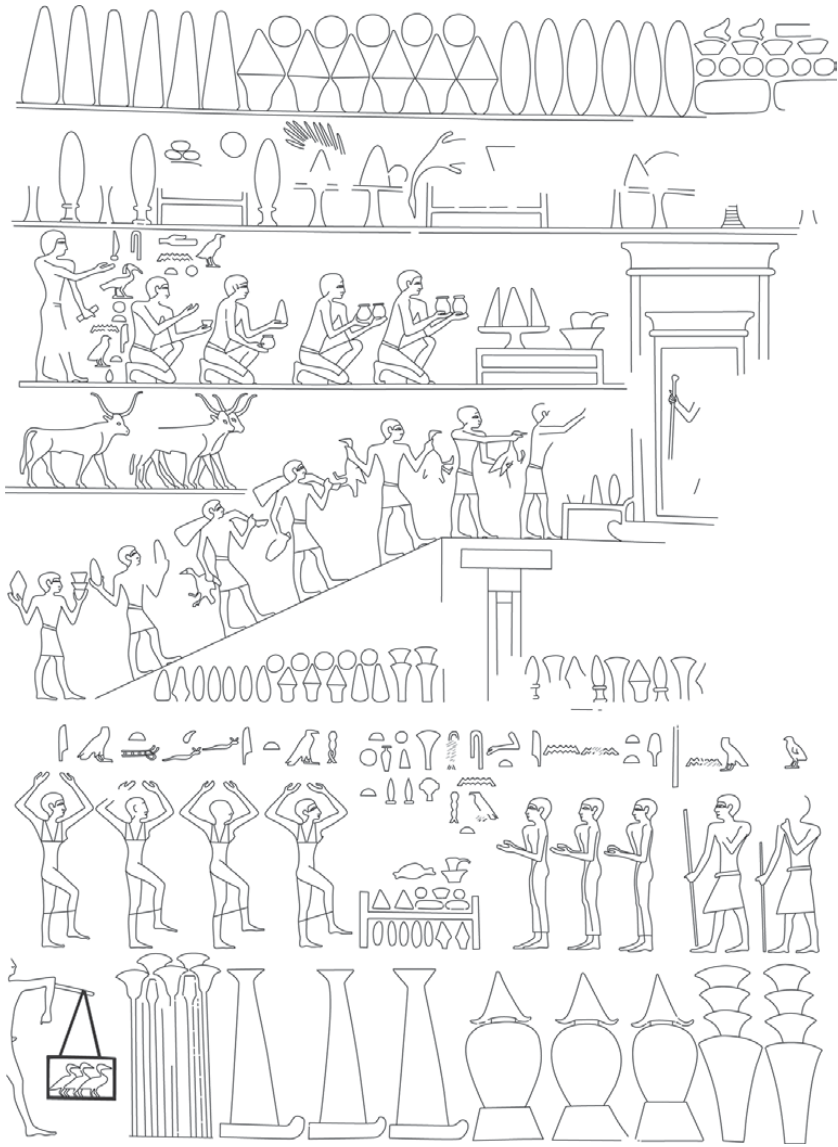
shows very far-reaching analogies with the representations of offerings lying on the offering tables in the scenes decorating the walls of tomb chapels, even though the images never show any fires. The plates and bowls found along with the jugs in burial shafts frequently have surfaces covered with soot. These are surely the vessels on which the plant and animal offerings were burned.

Where did the burning of these offering piles take place? We discovered numerous traces of ritual hearths in the courtyard in front of Vizier Merefnebef's cult chapel.³⁸ They are in the form of rings burnt red into the surface of the flooring, i.e. multiple layers of mud covering the rock, levelled in this pot. The inside of each of the hearths is black. The size of the rings, i.e. ten to twenty centimetres in diameter, corresponds approximately to the size of the ceramic stands on the tops of which offerings were placed. The motif of such offerings is depicted in numerous scenes carved onto the walls of the tomb chapels. In this context, the analysis of subsequent layers of the flooring is especially diagnostic. Each of them contains countless numbers of tiny animal bone fragments, doubtless the remains from the offering rituals that took place in the courtyard in front of the chapel. One surprising aspect, even for such an experienced paleozoologist as the one cooperating with our mission, i.e. Professor Salima Ikram, was the presence of pig bones in this context.³⁹ Of course, this abundance of game animals attests that not only funerary rituals but also the posthumous cult of the dead were practiced, sometimes over the course of many years. We should not be surprised by this amount upon reading the so-called ideal biography of the tomb owner, carved above the entrance to his cult chapel. Offerings should be given on the occasion of all the most important special days, preferably every day. The authors of such instructions were, of course, the priests; they had to somehow make a living. In turn, no traces of burning offering piles have been found inside the chapel.

The identification of the places where the burning of offerings was conducted enabled a better understanding of some fragments of Egyptian texts concerning the funerary liturgy. They have been preserved in the above-mentioned Ramesseum E Papyrus and in the unique scene depicting a funerary ritual, found in Giza in the tomb of a nobleman called Debeheni (II. 21). In these texts, the word *djadjat* seems to signify something that is 'in front' and which can be considered as the head or front side of an object. From the times of the New Kingdom on, i.e. almost 1000 years later, this expression

38 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, p. 62 (court 1A), pls. 25 g, 26 b–c, 27 b.

39 S. Ikram, "Faunal Remains. Preliminary Report," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 10 (1999): Reports 1998, p. 106.



II. 21. The relief from the tomb of a nobleman named Debeheni (Fifth Dynasty) in Giza, depicting the funeral rituals by the mastaba.

referred to the courtyard or the space in front of the temple, while in the Ptolemaic period, i.e. 2000 years later, it was used as the name of one of the buildings within the temple.⁴⁰ Until recently, its significance in the context of Old Kingdom tombs remained a mystery. If we assume that it referred to the courtyard in front of the tomb chapel where offerings were burned, the inscriptions accompanying the funeral scenes in Debeheni's tomb become clear. One of them refers to the ceremony of "placing offerings in the courtyard," while another to that of "standing up, mourning and walking around the courtyard." *Djadjat* was thus a courtyard in front of the mastaba, more precisely – in front of the cult chapel. The entrance to this chapel is visible in the relief in Debeheni's tomb, which also depicts people walking around the courtyard. The lector-priest reads the liturgical text, after which – as suggested by the text preserved on papyrus – there are some unspecified activities linked to burning fire. At the moment, based on archaeological material, we know that these activities involved the burning of an offering pile.

The procession of the offering bearers is represented in Debeheni's tomb as a sequence of people ascending on a platform to the top of the mastaba. They are carrying birds, cattle haunches, beer jars, loaves of bread and pastries. Only one action could have taken place on the roof of the mastaba (II. 21): throwing the offerings into the burial shaft, which until that moment was only partially filled. It was these gifts, in majority pottery vessels filled with ash, that form the deposits unearthed nowadays by archaeologists in intact shafts. Thus, this ritual was part of the funerary ceremonies. What religious concepts accompanied these actions? Perhaps the necessity to ensure the existence of each of the elements that made up the nature of the deceased, i.e. his body, his soul and his name. Everything indicates that the offerings were thrown into the shaft from the roof of the mastaba to satisfy the *akh*, or the spiritual element, while the offerings placed earlier in the funerary chamber were meant for the body.⁴¹ Therefore, ceremonial burning of the offering piles during the funeral belongs to the ritual of the 'transformation [of the deceased] into *akh*.' The food was burnt to avoid its 'redistribution' by the priests and labourers employed at the cemetery. While the fruit and other plants given as offerings might have been considered to be food elements, the grains had a purely symbolic meaning as they were never eaten in raw form. They might have symbolised rebirth, as every year cereal would grow from the grains. This symbol was so closely linked with the resurrected Osiris, the god of the dead, that in later times a type of pot was produced in

40 T. Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, p. 476.

41 T. Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, pp. 490–492.

the shape of the mummified deity, filled with earth and grains from which new plants would grow.

The ‘transformation into *akh*’ ritual was one of the most important elements of the funeral, as it carried the deceased onto a higher level of existence, referred to as *akhbet*. This rite was first attested in the tomb of Metjen from the beginnings of the Fourth Dynasty, in scenes depicting the standing figure of the deceased with two *uti* embalmer-priests in front of him.⁴² The inscription accompanying the scenes states that they are conducting the rituals of the ‘opening of the mouth,’ ‘transformation into *akh*’ and the ‘offering ritual.’ An identical sequence of rites has been attested in Saqqara with an inscription on the ‘false door’ in the tomb of a nobleman called Neferseshemre. His mastaba is located not far from the pyramid of Teti, the first ruler of the Sixth Dynasty. Among other things, we can read in this inscription that “the invocation offering consisting of oxen, bread and beer on the top of the mastaba after passing the lake, after he had been transformed into *akh* by lector-priest.” It is difficult to have a better punchline for the interpretation of the deposits in burial shafts.

Some researchers believe that both the offerings at the blockade to the burial chamber and the offerings placed in the shaft were supposed to enable the deceased, and especially his *akh*, to leave his grave and even to exact revenge on the living. Could fear have had some influence on the quantity and quality of the offerings to the same extent as nowadays the most expensive, most richly decorated tombs tend to be an expression of the desire for expiation towards the deceased, usually much delayed, after a life marked with hatred? The described vizier’s tomb, as well as the burial place of his posthumous neighbour that we will soon visit, do not make it possible to exclude such conclusions.

It is worth drawing attention to the fact that aside from the pottery vessels filled with ash in the deposits in the burial shafts, other items with rich symbolism have been found. These include, e.g. beer jars filled with a red powder mixed with pottery sherds, particles of burnt plants, small pieces of charcoal and overburned bones.⁴³ These are the remains of animal offerings, with the admixture of sand and hematite, which were added after the animal had been burned in order to put out the fire. It is difficult to exclude that the red colour of the hematite could have been associated with Seth, similarly as the name of this controversial god was sometimes written down with red paint contrasting with the black colour of the remaining parts of the texts

42 T. Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, p. 488.

43 T. Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, pp. 480–482.

immortalised on the papyri. Could this symbol have also had some apotropaic significance? At the necropolis we excavated, only one shaft contained the remains of burnt animals used as offerings, and the only analogy was found near the Old Kingdom mastabas in Giza.

Colour symbolism is also attributed to the stones whose surfaces were covered with green paint. They could have served to grind the pigments. Some of them bear the image of an eye. This brings to mind the green eye paint called *wadju*, present among the items included in the offering lists on the walls of tomb chambers.⁴⁴ Green was the colour of life, fertility and rebirth. Similar symbolism should be linked to the palettes for grinding paint, green or black, found in analogical contexts.

To sum up, it is possible to reconstruct a sequence of rituals that took place in the final phase of the funeral, at the tomb of the deceased nobleman. Until recently, it was assumed that the ceremony began with the bringing of the items enumerated with mathematical precision in the offering lists carved into the walls of the cult chapel. Along with the coffin containing the body of the deceased, these offerings would have been brought into the burial chamber, after which protective rituals were to ensue. The deposits from the shafts disproved this theory. It was in fact the exact opposite. First, the body of the deceased was carried into the funerary chamber, where a sarcophagus or coffin was awaiting. The entrance to the chamber was blocked and only later did the 'offering ritual' take place. The victuals that had been burned on the piles, turned into ash and placed inside the jars were thrown into the shaft whose bottom part had been filled earlier. Such a sequence of events could be reconstructed only on the basis of the archaeological material, as none of the representations of the funeral on the tomb walls shows the entire ceremony. They show only its part or an impressionistic vision of the whole event. As already mentioned, the most detailed image is the one preserved in the tomb of a nobleman called Debeheni. The bottom registers of this scene depict an offering ritual from the final phase of the funerary ceremonies. We can see four kneeling *uti* priests bearing gifts: the two first ones are holding small juglets, the third – a pastry and a small vessel called a *nu* in Egyptian, while the fourth – only a *nu* vessel. The fifth priest is standing, holding a *kebeh* vessel in his hand. They are accompanied by an inscription which spells the message out clearly: "Feeding the *akh* by the embalmer-priest." In this scene's next register, offering animals have been depicted just above the representation of a ramp, across which the offering bearers ascend to the top of the mastaba. Such a sequence of offerings indicates that the ash-filled jars were thrown into the shaft not for the deceased but for his *akh*.

44 T. Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, pp. 482–483.

Until recently, a fascinating mystery for the archaeologists excavating the necropolis of ancient Memphis involved the small shafts without a burial chamber, not containing any burials, but integrated into the mastaba, usually to the southern side of the burial shaft. The first such miniature shaft was uncovered in Vizier Merefnebef's tomb, precisely in the south-eastern corner of his mastaba.⁴⁵ It was barely one metre deep, while this nobleman's burial shaft was over 14.5 metres deep. We were surprised not only by its size and simple shape but also by its intact contents. In the compact mass of rock debris, there was a deposit of broken pottery vessels with an exceptionally elaborate texture. In total, 36 bowls and plates of various types were found there. Our attention was especially caught by one 'Meidum'-type bowl, which stood out due to its beautiful form, homogenous and well-fired clay, and red coat on its surface. All the vessels had a surface painted red, in many cases polished (Fig. 84). The filling of the shaft, in which there was absolutely no aeolian sand, i.e. a sure sign of the activities of intruders, suggested that the depositing of the vessels occurred during a single occasion and was linked to the funerary ceremonies.⁴⁶

Both the five other shafts of this type discovered by us at the necropolis in Saqqara and the many shafts without burial chambers known from earlier excavations had common features. All of them remained untouched by looters and had similar contents, with a predominance of broken vessels with a surface coated with red paint. The robbers must have known that such shafts did not contain any material that would be of interest to them. The homogeneous, always similar type of pottery forming the deposits in these shafts indicates conclusively that this was a specific ritual linked to the funerary ceremonies.

Until now, archaeologists have not paid an appropriate amount of attention to 'underdeveloped' elements of the tomb architecture. Many had thought that these were unfinished shafts, meant – perhaps – for members of the first tomb owner's family. However, the lack of a burial chamber with the body of the deceased reduced the scientific value of this hypothesis to zero. No one wasted time on investigating what they contained. It was our ceramologist who took the trouble to do so, intrigued by the fact that these beautiful vessels were always broken. She put the sherds together and searched for analogies, including in written sources.

It turned out that in pharaonic Egypt there was a funerary ceremony that mainly involved the breaking of pots. It would be difficult to come up with a more naturalistic name than "breaking of red pots" (in Egyptian – *shed*

45 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, p. 56, fn. 8; T. Rzeuska, "The pottery," pp. 207–208.

46 T. Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, p. 494.

desherut). This is how it was described in Egyptian texts.⁴⁷ It appears on 'lists of offerings' on the walls of Old Kingdom tomb chapels, where the determinative (the hieroglyphic sign added at the end of a word to determine its meaning) of this term is the image of a fragmentary jug depicted in a reclining position. This is how one of the complementary acts in the 'ritual of offerings' is referred to. In the *Pyramid Texts*, but also in the *Ramesseum E Papyrus*, a 'bearer of red pots' – *heryu-desherut* – is attested.

Symptomatically enough, the pottery from such deposits consists almost exclusively of open forms, plates and bowls, i.e. tableware. They are accompanied in the shaft by pieces of fabric, boards (probably the leftovers of chests), the remains of organic substances, shells (used as cutlery?), flint tools, but also miniature beer containers in the form of juglets made from unfired clay. Given the fact that the sherds from such deposits constitute entire vessels, it should be concluded that they were smashed on the spot. These were doubtless vessels used during the funeral banquet by the grave. Due to their function, they transited into the sphere of the sacred, and as such could not be thrown away. By smashing them, their secondary usage was avoided. It also cannot be excluded, as some researchers believe, that they were smashed because they were red, and thus commonly associated with the god Seth, who was Osiris's and Horus's enemy. However, one explanation does not exclude the other. It is puzzling whether the ritual smashing of the vessels had an ecstatic load of an intensity similar to the rapture experienced in the fumes of divine tippie today, accompanying the smashing of a pile of clean crockery in Greek taverns as a tribute to the dancers' skills. Be as it may, we can be sure that the funeral of a highborn Egyptian ended with a feast that belonged to the sphere of the sacred, which is best attested by the respect shown for the vessels used during the event.

The excavations of the Polish archaeological mission in Saqqara enabled determining that the small shafts without a burial chamber, containing red vessel sherds, had from the very beginning been planned to function as containers for the items used during the funerary ritual, as a result of which we gave them the name 'ritual shafts.' Aside from their eschatological function, especially important for the ancient Egyptians, the content of these deposits has enormous importance for archaeologists as they constitute intact 'closed deposits,' the dating of which determines the moment of the funeral better than any other pottery found in tombs. The materials deposited in the burial chambers and shafts were frequently mixed together by looters, while the ritual pottery in the tomb chapel and around it originates from various

47 T. Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, pp. 509–511.

phases of the posthumous cult, which sometimes lasted for many years. Only the 'ritual shafts' contain vessels dating the death and funeral of the tomb owner. As a result, the study of this very pottery assemblage has special significance for dating the tomb.⁴⁸

Determining the exact date of the Old Kingdom mastabas remains an open question to this day. Usually, stylistic criteria and information contained in the texts carved into the tomb walls are applied. Nonetheless, in both the first and the second case, it is easy to make a mistake. Egyptian art shows a special predilection for archaisms, sometimes even involving the copying of motifs developed by artists hundreds or even thousands of years earlier. These tendencies are especially marked in the late pharaonic epoch (the first millennium BC), when the art was patterned on the masterpieces of the Golden Age, as can be used to refer to the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms, encompassing the third and the second millennia BC.⁴⁹ However, the stylisation of the reliefs according to conventions from bygone years becomes much more emphasised in the second half of the Old Kingdom, especially during the Sixth Dynasty, when pharaonic Egypt slowly neared its first fall. Thus, determining the date of the tomb on the basis of the iconographic repertoire and the style of the reliefs requires a lot of caution.

Hieroglyphic inscriptions come to the rescue, especially those containing royal names. Nonetheless, here is yet another trap for the researcher. Some rulers enjoyed a posthumous cult, which lasted for hundreds and sometimes thousands of years, with their names appearing in inscriptions much later than the periods during which they had reigned. As one such example may serve the names of so-called domains, or estates from which the victuals indispensable in the posthumous cult were derived, belonging to people from the highest ranks of society. A procession of figures personifying these estates were frequently depicted in the tombs of the highest dignitaries, and each of these figures was accompanied by an inscription containing the domain's name. The majority of these names are constructed on the basis of royal names. It would seem there is nothing simpler: 'the youngest' chronologically name of a pharaoh designates the dating of the tomb. However, in practice it turned out that over time a certain scheme was formed in the naming of the domains, which with great delight was repeated for many decades. Therefore, the name of the ruler occupying the last place in a chronological series of royal cartouches written into the names of the estates can be treated only as a *terminus post quem*, or the bottom limit of the possible

48 T. Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, pp. 510–512.

49 P. Der Manuelian, *Living in the Past: Studies in Archaism of the Egyptian Twenty-Sixth Dynasty*, London 1994; Myśliwiec, "Ramesside Traditions," pp. 108–126.

dating, while it has no significance in determining the absolute date. Most of the tombs from the Old Kingdom divide Egyptologists into proponents of various chronological attributions, depending on the criteria they have adopted as the most certain. Of course, such a fate was also not avoided by the tomb we had discovered belonging to Vizier Merefnebef.

As we already know, based on various criteria, we dated the construction and the initiation of decorating this mastaba to the final phase of the first ruler from the Sixth Dynasty, Teti, while the apogee of the tomb owner's career fell during the short reign of the next ruler, the alleged usurper named Userkare, a person as suspect as he remains little known.⁵⁰ Immediately after our publication was issued, two foreign researchers, specialists on the Old Kingdom, negated such a dating, basing exclusively on stylistic criteria. One decided that the representations personifying the domains, which had been preserved in the vizier's chapel, had nothing in common with Sixth-Dynasty art. The tomb had to be earlier, while the name of the first ruler of this dynasty, occurring repeatedly in the names of the depicted domains, must – in his opinion – have been added later into the empty cartouches.⁵¹ Why the cartouches would have been left empty when the reliefs were being carved into the chapel walls remains unclear. Almost simultaneously, another Egyptologist, using different criteria, moved the dating of the construction of the tomb over 100 years in the opposite direction.⁵² He, in turn, had concluded that both the modest size and design of the tomb chapel and the shape of the 'false doors' at the chapel's west wall would not have been suitable for the rank of a vizier during the early phase of the Sixth Dynasty. The tombs of other viziers from this period are much larger, while their 'false doors' are more developed. Similar 'deprivation' does not mark the tombs of viziers until the final years of this dynasty. However, this researcher did not notice that at the moment of carving the decoration of the chapel's interior, the owner was not yet a vizier. The inscriptions sculpted on his 'false doors' present him as a middle-ranked courtier, perhaps linked to the royal harem, or at least a confidant of some of the ruler's secrets. When he was unexpectedly promoted to the top of the hierarchy of officials, it was too late to change the shape of the tomb. He could at best exhibit his promotion in the inscriptions carved on the walls of the façade and the narrow entrance to the chapel, thus far undecorated, which he readily did. Admittedly, he began to frantically expand the tomb in front of the chapel façade, but never finished the work, because it seems he shared his benefactor's fate.

50 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 246–250.

51 Myśliwiec, "Dating the Tombs," pp. 651, 657.

52 Myśliwiec, "Dating the Tombs," pp. 651–654.

The dating of the construction of the vizier's tomb we proposed is today accepted without question by the authors of the newest publications.⁵³ This date was conclusively confirmed by ceramological studies, conducted in the archaeology of Saqqara with respect to this very period for the first time with such precision. They indicate that in the necropolis we excavated, this was one adjacent to the west to the precinct of the oldest pyramid in the world, this was one of the first tombs, if not the first. The neighbouring tomb, which turned out to be yet another archaeological sensation, was slightly later. I shall discuss it in the next chapter.

The ceramological studies at the discussed cemetery showed what an important source of archaeological and historical knowledge this abundant material can become if only it is appropriately investigated and documented, from the moment excavations begin. It is hard to imagine how much important information has eluded Egyptologists in previous centuries only because the pottery material at their excavations was completely disregarded. Thanks to our newest studies, it was possible to distinguish four phases in the development of pottery only during the Sixth Dynasty, thanks to which such the scholarly publication of this material has risen to become one of the most important tools of an archaeologist's work at many excavations in Egypt. All the more so, as these phases were correlated to the six stages of the development of the necropolis distinguished on the basis of other criteria, primarily the architecture of the tombs, their stratigraphy and their contents.⁵⁴

Let us nonetheless get back to the cult of the dead. After the funeral, the place designated for cult ceremonies was the tomb chapel and the courtyard in front of it, surrounded by a small wall, usually erected from mud brick. The rituals, mainly involving making offerings and the recitation of prayers by the priests of the funerary cult were focused in the spots adjacent to the 'false door' built into the western wall of the mastaba or simply carved into it. In order to ensure some sort of intimacy and integrity to the ceremonies, the altar containing the 'doors,' their frames and the offering table were as a rule not located opposite the entrance but rather slight to the side.

In tomb chapels that were rooms hewn out into the rock, the remains of ritual equipment have been preserved. The pottery found in this context is different from the one in the deposits made during the funeral.⁵⁵ The vessels found in the direct neighbourhood of the offering place are characteristic as

53 A. Kanawati, *Conspiracies in the Egyptian Palace: Unas to Pepy I*, New York 2003, pp. 134–135; T. Stasser, *La mère royale Seshseshet et les débuts de la VIe dynastie*, Bruxelles 2013, pp. 48–49, 55–57.

54 See fn. 14.

55 Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, p. 512.

they are of the highest quality. They include stands, bowls, plates and variously shaped jugs (Figs. 84–85). Made from well-worked and fired clay, they had red coating, sometimes also additionally polished. Some of them might have been used only once, while the placement for others in front of the ‘false doors’ was probably permanent. This second case doubtless applies to the stands and plates on which the offerings were deposited.



Fig. 84. Set of pottery vessels for the ritual washing of the hands, from the Old Kingdom necropolis in Saqqara.



Fig. 85. Set of clay jugs and bread-baking moulds from Old Kingdom tombs in Saqqara, cf. IIs. 19–20.

The majority of the cult vessels from our excavations bear traces of a white coating on the outer and inner surface, sometimes even a few layers of paint. This contradicts widespread theories that the vessels with their surface painted white were supposed to have been an imitation of stone vessels.⁵⁶ Were this the case, why would the white paint in many cases overlie a red slip? The white paint obviously has nothing in common with the original function of the vessel. It is a secondary element, raising the significance of the vessel to the level of being a holy item, just as in the case of the white paint on the surface of the chapel walls, floors and 'false doors.' This custom must have been of a purely sepulchral character, as thus far no traces of pottery painted white have been found in settlements. The date of the production of ritual pottery found inside the chapel is an important chronological indicator, as it informs us about how long the posthumous cult of its tomb owner lasted.

The vessels found abundantly outside the cult place, i.e. the chapel, have a completely different character than the ritual pottery painted white from the chapel interior. The other vessels are of much worse workmanship than the whitewashed ones, and they were most probably used only to bring offerings, after which they were put aside. They include beer jugs, clay corks, bread moulds, trays and miniature vessels.

However, it seems that despite the exceptionally practical approach characteristic for almost all the actions of the ancient Egyptians, the enormous mass of pottery used during the funeral and in the later cult of the dead consists of vessels produced especially for this purpose, and they were not used earlier in daily life. This is indicated by the number of unfired or badly-fired pots found in this context. Doubtless, the production of pottery exclusively for funerary purposes was developed to an industrial scale. Among this material, there are no imports from Upper Egypt, which additionally proves their local production. It can even be assumed that the pottery workshops were linked to the facilities called *wabet*, in which the body of the deceased was prepared for the funeral.⁵⁷ All this confirms the huge significance attached to life in the Netherworld, in accordance with the belief that this would be eternal life. Based on a number of various security measures introduced, especially in the burial shaft, it can be assumed that the Egyptians were well aware of the threats lying in wait and that any potential fear of the deceased's *akh* leaving the grave was not the only cause for concern that kept them awake at night.

⁵⁶ Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, p. 514.

⁵⁷ Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, p. 516.



Fig. 86. Amphora imported from the Greek island of Samos, used secondarily for ritual purposes in one of the Ptolemaic period tombs in Saqqara.

Who then were the inhabitants of Memphis who were so meticulously prepared for eternal life? Thanks to various hieroglyphic inscriptions on the walls of two well-preserved tomb chapels, as well as on a few ‘false doors’ and fragments of their stone frame, and finally on small moveable items (e.g. small ritual basins) also made from stone, it was possible to learn the names and titles of 58 individuals.⁵⁸ At least 20 of them were definitely buried in the part of the cemetery we have unearthed so far. Further excavations will doubtless enable the identification of the place of eternal rest of other noblemen and members of their families. A few names are attested here for the first time in Egyptian prosopography. These include such names as Ikhti (female), Idu-iker (male), Pedenu (male), Fafa (male) and Temi (male). In total, there are 41 male names and 18 female ones. Only two women’s graves have been identified. Most women were probably buried in the tombs belonging to their husbands, in which new tomb shafts, chambers or just niches were added on.

Getting to know the titlature of the tomb owners is of special significance for characterising the social group frequently buried during the Sixth Dynasty on the western side of Djoser’s pyramid. Some titles appear repeatedly, and these are the most symptomatic. The most frequently used (seven

58 Kuraskiewicz, *Architecture*, pp. 294–295.



Fig. 87. Stamp on the amphora's handle (Fig. 86).

times) is a title that in Egyptian is pronounced *khenti-esh*, the significance of which, not yet fully determined, has in recent years been the subject of heated academic discussions.⁵⁹ It probably refers to someone like the administrator or leaseholder of royal estates,⁶⁰ but its rising popularity in periods of social unrest during the reign of the first Sixth-Dynasty rulers has led some researchers to the conclusion that the bearers of this title must have been involved in issues of security, or perhaps they might have even been something like guardians of the public order.⁶¹ Other titles held by the men buried here,⁶² such as “inspector of the Great House” (attested five times); “privy to the secrets [among others, of the “House of the Morning]” – four individuals; “under-supervisor of the Great House,” “overseer of linen,” “district official,” “administrator of the Estate,” “Majordomo of the King’s house” (attested twice), show the middle level of the court administration, *éminences grises* with their eyes locked on the majesty of the king, probably also not lacking in some talent for scheming. Only one was able to rise above his station in life and immediately make his way to the top of the court official hierarchy. By what means? In all probability, by means not much

59 Kuraskiewicz, *Architecture*, p. 295.

60 A. M. Roth, *A Cemetery of Palace Attendants, Including G 2084–2099, 2230–2231 and 2240* (“Giza Mastabas” 6), Boston 1995; Kanawati, *Conspiracies*, pp. 14–24.

61 Kanawati, *Conspiracies*, p. 19.

62 Kuraskiewicz, *Architecture*, p. 295 (4–10).

different from today's pathways leading to swift and shocking political careers.

The presence of women among the personages honoured by a burial near Djoser's pyramid beckons attention. They frequently bear the title of "priestess of [the goddess] Hathor," attested six times, and "acquaintance of the king," which we noted to have appeared seven times.⁶³ As Hathor priestesses were sometimes also referred to by using the epithet "the king's only adornment," some Egyptologists suggest that the function of these ladies at the pharaoh's court might not have been purely religious.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, given the respect they were shown by having their own burial, it seems that this title refers rather to their aristocratic origins, sometimes even kinship or another relationship with the ruler, rather than their lifestyle. Among the 'false doors' from the excavated necropolis, there are three limestone stelae of this type dedicated to women bearing the names Kheti, Khekeret and Djesti.⁶⁵ On the door jambs, the deceased is depicted as a slim figure in a long robe with suspenders, sniffing a lotus flower. As they had their own cult places, they must also have had individual burials. It was possible to identify the grave of one of them, Khekeret; it did not differ at all from the mastabas of men buried at this same necropolis. This and other evidence of the emancipation of women during the Old Kingdom do not surprise us in the least. A woman of noble birth could become a vizier and even come to rule over the country, especially towards the end of the dynasty, when the male progeniture ceased to ensure the continuity of power. It is a shame that these ideas always came too late.

63 Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, p. 295 (2–3).

64 D. Nord, "Xkrt-nswt = King's Concubine?," *Serapis* 2 (1970), pp. 1–16.

65 Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, p. 292 (44, 45), 294 (55); K. Myśliwiec, K. O. Kuraszkiewicz, "Two More Old Kingdom Priestesses of Hathor in Saqqara," in: K. M. Ciałowicz, J. A. Ostrowski (eds.), *Les civilisations du bassin méditerranéen. Hommages à Joachim Śliwa*, Cracovie 2000, pp. 145–152; K. Myśliwiec, "Nobility Marrying Divinity in Pharaonic Egypt," in: K. Myśliwiec, K. Pachniak, K. Nabożna, E. Wolny-Abouelwafa (eds.), *Egypt Yesterday and Today: Between Tradition and Modernity*, Warsaw 2019, fig. 4.

Chapter 8. The vizier's posthumous neighbour

Abstract: The discovery of Temi's eternal abode. Unfinished reliefs and paintings unveil the artist's workmanship. One wife and many sons. A family panorama without daughters. Clever but vain calculations of the tomb owner.

Keywords: progeny, iconography, catastrophe, polychromy, preliminary drawing.

We had not yet finished the exploration of Vizier Merefnebef's tomb as we already knew that he had a neighbour. In addition, it had to be a neighbour of similar rank for the preserved brickwork wall of his mastaba corresponded in terms of its size and structure to a similar but better-preserved fragment of the first mastaba's superstructure (Fig. 88). The dried bricks were of an identical size and texture, and they had also been laid in the same way. We uncovered the first course of brickwork from the new mastaba while cleaning the surface of the ground at the northern face of Merefnebef's tomb (Il. 22).¹ The surface betrayed a beautifully modelled recessed wall, i.e. with sequences of niches looking like a brick miniature of the facing in the colossal stone wall encircling Djoser's pyramid. A few beer jars were lying right next to the vizier's mastaba, while – at a distance of less than a metre from it – the bottom layer of the bricks from an identical sepulchral structure.

In the course of further cleaning, it turned out that both tomb structures were connected with each other by a row of bricks extending the eastern face of the vizier's mastaba northwards.² The method of linking the two aligned walls left no doubts that the integration of the mastabas into a single whole was secondary and was done when the new cult chapel was being connected with the east wall of Fefi's tomb. In the process of extending this wall northward and integrating it with the wall of the new mastaba, care was shown to maintain the aesthetics of the vizier's tomb. As a result, its secondary chapel, described above (chapter 5), came to be located in the middle of the long wall, not in the corner of his own mastaba. Even these seemingly insignificant details gave us a lot of food for thought. It could immediately be assumed that the owner of the new tomb stood slightly lower in the social hierarchy than his southern neighbour, since the descendants of the latter could make use of the former's place of eternal rest in a way that was at the very least flippant if not simply ruthless.

1 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, Warsaw 2010, pl. LX a.

2 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, p. 44, pl. LXXXVI g; Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, p. 97.



Fig. 88. Remains of brick walls of Merefnebef and Nyankhnefertum's mastabas with traces of the wall linking their eastern faces.

Soon, yet another element of the new tomb was revealed. In the spot where the layer of loose sand met the surface of a vertical rock wall, a small hollow had formed, in which it was possible to note a sculpted corner. Its shape suggested that the two adjoining walls of the structure, the horizontal and the vertical one, formed a corner in this spot.³ A few swings of the hoe would suffice to expose part of the architrave, perhaps immediately identifying the owner of the tomb. Instead, we hurriedly encased the spot in

³ Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pl. LX b, pl. LX b.

fragments of rock and covered it with sand, so no one's fevered imagination would lead them to succumb to temptation. We decided to wait with revealing the new mastaba until Merefnebef's tomb was stably secured by conservators, studied, documented and prepared for scholarly publication by archaeologists. If it were to turn out that the mastaba's bad state of preservation required the immediate work of many restorers and Egyptologists, this might have exceeded our possibilities. We had in our mind's eye images of the countless monuments, including tombs and ancient temple ruins from various periods, which had at one point disintegrated almost completely after being discovered, simply due to their hurried exploration not accompanied by conservation work. If Egyptian reliefs sometimes seem monotonously grey or white, in many cases this is because no one thought to secure the rich polychromy right after they had been discovered.

Testing our archaeological patience, but also our imagination, lasted six years (Figs. 88–90). In 2003, Merefnebef's tomb had been excavated, its documentation finished and the publication was ready. We had prepared comprehensive documentation in the form of illustrations, photographs (both black and white and in colour) and descriptions. The rock, mortar and pigments had been analysed from every possible angle in the specialised laboratories of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, the National Museum in Warsaw, the Warsaw University of Technology and the University of Warsaw, as a result of which the restorers could choose the appropriate chemicals and methods to secure the art works from thousands of years ago.⁴ Thorough Egyptological studies into the epoch and the monument enabled the reconstruction of the role played by this exceptional person, Merefnebef, in the final period of the Old Kingdom. After six years of the painstaking work of many experts from various academic fields, a two-volume monograph in English was ready to go to print.⁵

Finally, we could indulge in the luxury of unearthing the neighbouring tomb. We knew already that it had been hewn out into the same rock ledge running meridionally in which the vizier's grave was located, on the latter's northern side (Il. 22; Figs. 91–92). However, as everywhere else at the cemetery we were excavating, the Lower Necropolis was covered by a thick layer or aeolian sand, containing hundreds of burials dated to a period later by 2000 years, i.e. to the epoch of the Ptolemies.⁶ It took us a few weeks to unearth and record the mummies, sometimes shrouded in polychrome

4 Z. Godziejewski, "Conservation Work," in: Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 237–243.

5 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, passim.

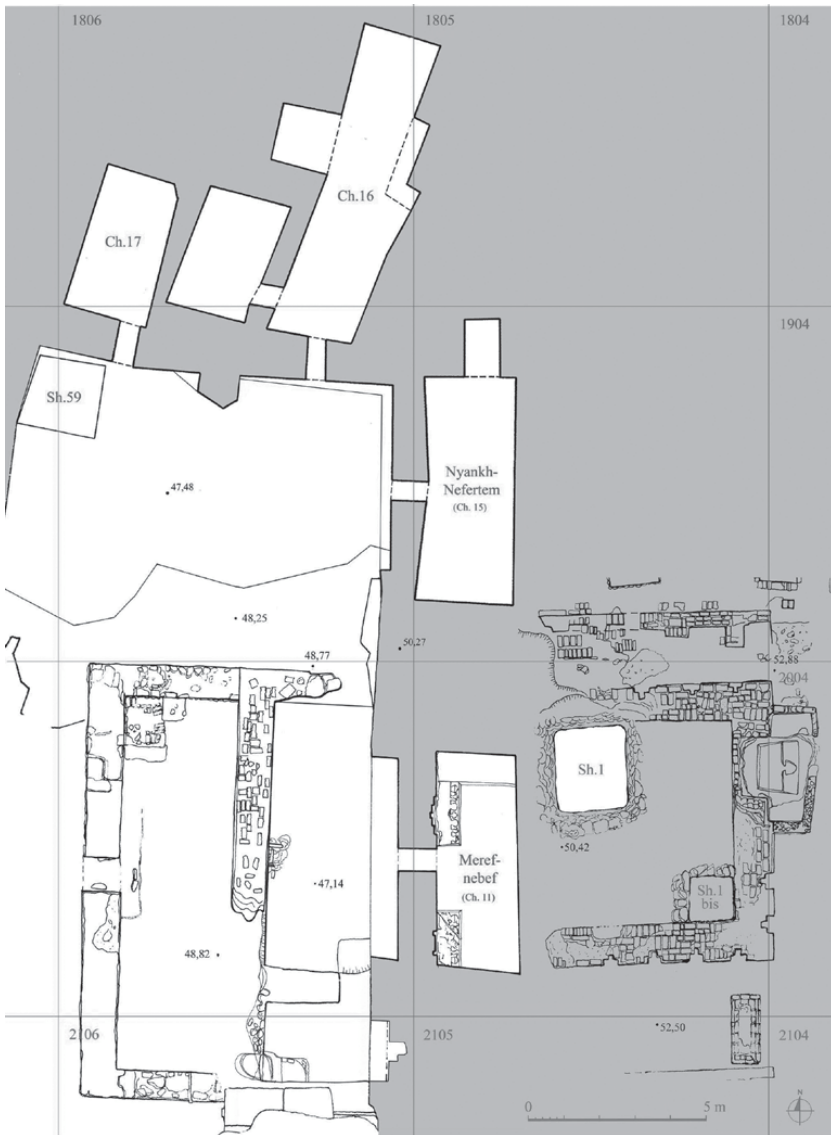
6 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 25–80, pls. I–XXXI.



Fig. 89. Only the patience of an archaeologist and anthropologist can save the anonymous inhabitants of the necropolis from being forgotten.



Fig. 90. Reaching into the depths of knowledge also requires one to be physically fit.



II. 22. Plan of the tombs belonging to Merefnebef and Nyankhneferterem.

cartonnage, frequently deposited in anthropoid-shaped wooden coffins. The state of preservation of some burials made it impossible to move the mummies to our anthropological field laboratory before they were consolidated by the restorers, which in the case of some bodies and coffins lasted a few

days. The slightest breeze could in a second transform the colourful paintings on the surface of the thin plaster coating into powder.

When we finally reached the Old Kingdom layer (Fig. 91), we took the greatest care to analyse every lump of earth, sand or rock so as not to miss even the smallest artefact that might aid us in gaining and understanding the monument that was being unearthed. At one point, the upper edge of a rock surface was revealed, hewn in the shape of an architrave crowning a cult chapel. Its form and size were similar as in the case of the vizier's tomb, but the state of preservation was much poorer than its neighbour's. The inscription on the inner architrave, which – as in Fefi's tomb – runs the whole length of the façade, just above the narrow entrance to the tomb chapel, was also much more damaged than in the case of the tomb found first.⁷ We should be able to read the tomb owner's name at the end of this inscription (Figs. 157–158). As luck would have it, precisely this fragment was covered by a large piece of rock that had broken away from the outer architrave and was only leaning against the upper surface of the backfill in front of the façade. Any attempt to move it on our part might have caused the breaking away of further fragments. Once again, we had to summon up a little patience.

Thus, we learned the tomb owner's name not thanks to an inscription on the architrave (Fig. 92), which in antiquity greeted every visitor entering the tomb, but through a small crevice in the backfill at the level of the upper jamb of the upper edge of the entrance to the chapel. With a lamp in hand, we looked into the dark interior and saw the main scene, situated opposite the entrance, carved onto the eastern wall (Fig. 95). The two symmetrically designed representations of the deceased were accompanied by his name written with hieroglyphs: Nyankhnepetum, or “[One] who is the life of Nefertum”.⁸

This exceptionally rare theophoric name (containing the name of a god) bears that of a youthful deity, Nefertum, who in the Memphite triad of gods was the child of the god Ptah and the Goddess Sekhmet. Similarly as many other important religious centres of ancient Egypt, Memphis – the country's capital during the Old Kingdom – created its own cosmogony and pantheon of deities, at the head of which stood the divine couple. Ptah, guardian of artists and artisans, was portrayed as a mummiform figure with characteristic headwear reminiscent of a swimming cap. He was the Memphite demiurge, while Sekhmet, a goddess with the head of a lioness, was his spouse. Their son Nefertum was associated with a child crouching on a lotus flower or was simply depicted as a lotus flower. As we were soon to find out, the owner

7 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 132–136, fig. 49, pls. LXI–LXV.

8 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 143–149, fig. 52, pl. LXX.

of this newly discovered tomb, identified with Nefertum through his name, also expressed this religious kinship in his iconography. Aside from the tomb we discovered, the name Nyankhnepfertum has only been attested once, on an architectural fragment originating from the tomb of another Memphite nobleman, found today in the university collection in Strasbourg.⁹ We do not know where he was buried.

When we finally revealed the entire architrave with the 'ideal biography' above the entrance to the tomb chapel (Figs. 157–158), we discovered that the tomb owner also had a so-called 'beautiful name,' Temi, which was something like a nickname, an abbreviated version of his main name. It appears in the scene which is a type of 'calling card' sculpted at the end of the inscription (Fig. 156).¹⁰ The scene depicts the deceased walking forward carrying a long staff, a symbol of his stateliness. Temi is accompanied by his wife holding him by the shoulder and the oldest son shown as a small figure turning his head towards his parents and gripping his father's staff with his hand. This can be interpreted as a visible sign of the passing down of his father's inheritance. The son's name was Meruka.

The inscription on the architrave is constructed similarly to the 'ideal biography' sculpted in his neighbour's tomb.¹¹ It was arranged in four lines read from right to left. The style of the hieroglyphs also betrays the source of inspiration. The signs carved into the sunken relief are lacking in almost any inner modelling. Even though no traces of polychromy have been preserved, it can be assumed that – similarly as in his neighbour's case – the hieroglyphs were monochromatically blue or celadon in colour, contrasting with the white background, following the pattern used for the *Pyramid Texts*. The composition of the inscription, similarly as the size of the signs and their style, betray that this was one and the same sculpting workshop in the case of both tombs, and perhaps even the same artist.

However, the message contained in the inscriptions is different in each of them, even though some formulations typical for this category of text are repeated. The first two lines contain an invocation to various deities, which along with the king were considered to be the 'sponsors' of offerings and graces given to the deceased.¹² Through his offering, Anubis, "who is in the embalming place, who is upon his hill, Lord of the Sacred Land," is to

9 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, p. 127, fn. 2.

10 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 135–136, fig. 49, pls. LXIII a–c, LXIV h, LXV d.

11 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 70–74, pls. XIV, XXX–XXXVII, XLI; Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 134–136, fig. 49, pls. LXI–LXIV.

12 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 135–136.

secure the burial of the deceased in the Western Desert, “after he has become exceedingly old, as an honoured one by the Great God.” The offering from Osiris, Lord (of the town of) Busiris, will ensure that the tomb owner “may travel upon the beautiful roads upon which honoured ones used to travel before the Great God.” This same Osiris will guarantee that offerings for the deceased be brought “on the Opening of the Year Festival, on the Festival of [the God] Thoth, on the Beginning of the Sacred Year Festival, on the *Wag* Festival, Festival of [the God] Sokar, the Great Festival, the Festival of [the God] Min, the Beginning of the Month and Beginning of Half Month Festival, ... on [every] Festival, every day, in eternity, as for an honoured one by Anubis, Lord of Burial in the necropolis.”

In the next part of the text, we can read that the tomb owner, “honoured by the king and by the Great God, is one who is loved among the people, the one who does justice beloved by the god”.¹³ Next, the deceased states, “I was the one who spoke well and reported well, the one who did what the god likes. I was the one who caused peace and who lived in a state of reverence. I revered my father and my mother”.¹⁴

The inscription ends with the deceased's most important titles: “God's servant at the pyramid of Unas, the sole companion, privy to the secrets of the king in his every cult place, inspector of the Great House, companion of the house, privy to the secrets of the House of the Morning ... overseer of the king's repast, overseer of the noble places of the Great House ... overseer of linen.” In the scene ending the inscription, the tomb owner is described as the “Companion of the Great House, Temi”.¹⁵

The differences between the texts written on the architrave in the two neighbouring tomb chapels are small but significant. Fefi focuses on himself, boasts and threatens others; Temi is more modest, while his ‘ideal biography’ is primarily filled with religious content. He does not flaunt his own virtues but rather presents his titulature in a detached manner, as these in fact are not titles of the highest rank. While the vizier *in spe* lists one of his three names at the end of each line, his neighbour never uses his ‘great name,’ exclusively referring to his sobriquet, which introduces an atmosphere of some ease. We see the first as a bit of a buffoon, while the other man seems more like an *éminence grise*, the pharaoh's trusted man, who knows his place in line.

13 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, p. 136 (c).

14 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*.

15 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, p. 136 (e), pl. LXIII a–c, LXIV h.

Nonetheless, their tombs are similar in size and shape (Il. 22).¹⁶ It is obvious that their owners began their careers at the same level. As a result, we expect not only the architraves above the entrance but also the remaining elements of the decoration on the façade's frontal wall to be similar. What a surprise for an archaeologist when, in the course of further exploration, a plain wall is revealed, without a single relief. Beneath the architrave, two parallel planes have been prepared for a relief, which, however, was never sculpted (Fig. 158). The uneven surface of the rock was levelled with a layer of white plaster, identically as was done in the vizier's tomb, but not a single hieroglyph was carved into this surface.¹⁷ The size of both panels prepared for decoration is almost the same as in his neighbour's chapel; thus, we could expect that the concept for decorating the wall would have been identical in both cases (Fig. 92). Already in the façade of Temi's cult chapel, we can see that its creators were inspired by the shape of the slightly earlier tomb, which also belonged to a priest responsible for the funerary cult at a pyramid. In this respect, the owners of both tombs were colleagues. They remained such until the older one, Fefi, made an unexpected career as a vizier at the court of the enigmatic pharaoh with a dubious reputation. At that point, they must surely have parted ways.

If the decorations on the front wall of Temi's tomb had been finished, its middle register would doubtless have also contained a text with the features of a testament, while at the bottom we would have seen two symmetrical processions consisting of representations of the tomb owner, as was originally conceived in Fefi's tomb. So why was the realisation of this part of the decoration abandoned? Had Temi passed away early, before the sculpting work was completed? Suffice to enter the interior of the cult chapel to discover that this might not have been the only reason.

As we removed the rubble from the chapel interior, the entire eastern wall was revealed, located opposite to the entrance (Figs. 95–99).¹⁸ It was hard to believe that – against all the contemporary canons of decoration – the whole surface of the wall was filled with a scene portraying a procession that we had expected to find in the bottom register of the façade. Eight figures of almost natural height were depicted in two four-person groups, arranged symmetrically on both sides of the axis in the form of two vertical columns

16 K. Myśliwiec, "Fefi and Temi: Posthumous Neighbours (Sixth Dynasty, Saqqara)," in: Kh. Daoud, Sh. Bedier, S. Abd El-Fatah (eds.), *Studies in Honor of Ali Radwan* ("Supplément aux Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte" 34), Vol. 2, Le Caire 2005, pp. 197–211.

17 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 132–134, fig. 48.

18 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. LX b–d, LXI a–c, LXVII a, LXIX a–b, LXX–LXXXVII.

of text (Figs. 96–97). In terms of its composition, the image is a copy of the bottom register in the façade of the vizier's cult chapel.¹⁹ However, it is much larger than the original, and with much richer iconography. While Fefi is portrayed eight times alone (Il. 5; Fig. 41), Temi appears always with his family members, but exclusively his sons and his only wife, bearing the name Seshseshet, very popular among the court aristocracy of this period. In particular, this difference between the original scene (Fefi) and its copy (Temi) seems to be a diagnostic for understanding why – upon copying the prototype – the owner of the younger tomb did not locate this scene on the chapel façade, even there was prepared space.

We have some evidence leading us to believe that the atmosphere in the Temi's numerous monogamist family was completely different than that in Fefi's household, where as many as four wives competed for the favour of the man of the house, who was probably officially connected to the royal harem (Fig. 53). We have also seen earlier how much impact on the male progeniture and especially on the vizier's oldest descendant had the bitter conflict between the sons that arose after their father's death. It seems that this conflict was both a struggle over their father's inheritance and a clash between two opposing political groups. Temi, who at the time must have been quite young and was preparing his 'house of eternity' in the direct vicinity, must have been witness to the scandalous family scenes that played out in front of his neighbour's tomb. In order to protect his own family from a similar tragedy and his tomb from the blasphemous activities of iconoclasts, he decided to move his 'family portrait' from the façade to the cult chapel interior, enlarging it and enriching it by adding new content. Did he manage thus to 'trick the winds of history,' which along with the progressing political decomposition carried the collapse of ethical norms and the disintegration of the family? I shall try to answer this question right after presenting the tomb.

At the moment of discovery, the interior of Temi's funerary chapel was to a large extent covered in rubble (Fig. 93).²⁰ However, this was not normal debris. It became a testimony to the tragedy that must have taken place here at some point after the funeral, probably towards the end of the Sixth Dynasty, if we consider pottery records. First, we saw an enormous hole in

19 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 83–86, pls. XV–XVI, XXX–XXXII, XXXIV–XXXVI, XXXIX, XLI; K. Myśliwiec, "The Scheme 2 × 4 in the Decoration of Old Kingdom Tombs," in: Z. Hawass, J. Richards (eds.), *The Archaeology and Art of Ancient Egypt, Essays in Honor of D.B. O'Connor* ("Supplément aux Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte" 36), Vol. 2, Le Caire 2007, pp. 191–205.

20 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. LXVII a, LXIX a.

the northern wall of the chapel and – in front of it – a stone and mudbrick pile of rubble, from which the lid of a reed-plaited coffin protruded.²¹ To be sure, this was not the coffin belonging to the tomb owner, as the deceased had not been buried in the cult chapel but in the underground part of the tomb. At first, we thought that this had to be a secondary burial from a later period, perhaps even younger by hundreds or thousands of years. The reuse of graves, even royal ones, was in ancient Egypt a widespread practice, while the rubble filling Temi's chapel was ideal for the purposes of such a burial.

However, when we removed the upper layer of rubble adjacent to the north wall, it turned out that the enormous hole in the rock led directly to... the burial chamber of another 'house of eternity,' doubtless later than Temi's mastaba (Fig. 94).²² The latter's cult chapel was separated from his anonymous neighbour's chamber and shaft only by a thin wall hewn out in very brittle rock, left – intentionally or not – by the constructors of the later tomb. As the rock's thickness between the two structures was additionally weakened in this spot by a few deep vertical clefts, it collapsed into the chapel interior under the pressure of the rubble filling his neighbour's burial chamber. The reed coffin containing the body of the deceased unexpectedly made its way into the cult place of a person placed much higher in the social hierarchy than the owner of this modest burial. Of course, the cult pottery deposited next to the coffin during the funeral was brought over along with it, carried by the wave of debris. This pottery is highly important for the dating of the coffin.

At this point, a methodological trap appears for the ceramologist or archaeologist: a temptation of dating Temi's tomb on the basis of these vessels, which nevertheless must be avoided. This challenge is all the more difficult as, more-or-less in the middle of the chapel, rubble from the context of the coffin mixes with the debris left over in this room after the last phase of the cult practiced here after Temi's death. Separating these two contexts belongs among those moments in the work of an archaeologists when the precise observation of even the smallest of details might be decisive for dating the most important events from the perspective of Old Egyptian eschatology. All the more so, as even a few minutes later, it would not be possible to seize this opportunity once again! One false move of the spatula suffices to squander it. These are precisely those moments when knowledge has to be supplemented by the researcher's imagination. One without the other is not enough.

21 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkievicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. LXVII a, LXVIII a–f.

22 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkievicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. XXXVII a–b, XXXVIII.

Everything indicates that the collapse of the chapel wall was not a random event caused by the exceptionally bad quality of the rock. The event had obviously been 'aided' by looters who at some point after the funeral – but still during the Old Kingdom – had decided to conduct the 'redistribution' of treasures they expected to find in Temi's burial chamber. However, they made a few professional errors, or they perhaps gave in to the temptation of reaching conclusions *per analogiam*, which in our times has led astray many an archaeologist. Noting that among the three 'false doors' carved into the chapel's west wall, only one had actually been completed by the artists, including its magnificent polychromy, and that it was precisely in front of this 'door' that a heavy stone slab in the shape of an offering table with bas-relief hieroglyphic inscriptions was located (Fig. 100), they must have assumed that the masked entrance to the shaft with the burial chamber at its bottom must be located underneath this slab. All the more so as there were no cult places or outlines of any shafts on the surface of the rock in front of the remaining 'false doors' (Figs. 135–136).²³ The thieves uprooted the very heavy slab of the offering table from under the 'door,' located in the north-western corner of the chapel, carried it a few metres away and deposited it in the opposite corner.²⁴ When they began removing the thick mud pugging covering the surface of the rock in front of the beautifully polychromed 'false door,' the adjacent north wall of the chapel could no longer take the tremors caused by their violent actions. It collapsed and shattered into hundreds of smaller and larger pieces. The looters probably managed to escape the deadly avalanche or, at any rate, we did not find any skeletons in the debris, which would have testified to the additional tragedy that sometimes occurred during the exploration of burial shafts. The displaced offering table, partially buried under the rubble, survived in its secondary position for four millennia, until the tomb was discovered by our mission. Its conservation lasted two years, after which we placed it back in its original spot in front of the richly polychromed „door” (Fig. 100).²⁵

It must be objectively stated that we, the discoverers, also succumbed to the hope that the pugging on which the offering table slab had originally been located might conceal the crown of the burial shaft. However, our logic turned out to be just as erroneous as the false hopes of the ancient looters. However, in our turn, we considered it to be a tragedy for academic research that in the process of shattering into hundreds of pieces, the northern wall had lost the middle part of its decoration, containing an especially important

23 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. CXII–CXIII.

24 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pl. LXIX a–b.

25 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. XCIII–XCV.

document. This was an enormous offering list, with great care carved out in a style reminiscent of the *Pyramid Texts*, already encountered in some of the inscriptions decorating the walls of the cult chapel belonging to Fefi (= Merefnebef).²⁶ The names of individual offerings and rituals were written with hieroglyphs using the sunken relief technique and filled with a greenish-blue paint that was very distinct against the white background of the inscription. The larger fragments of the shattered decoration enabled the – partly purely theoretical – reconstruction of a large fragment of this ‘list,’ but many small elements of these ‘puzzles’ to this day remain the object of the painstaking work of our Egyptian colleague, a beginning restorer named Ragab Mohammed Ragab.

Only the western part of the north wall, which depicts a typical scene of an offering table, is well preserved (Fig. 94).²⁷ The deceased is seated on a sophisticated chair, with legs stylised as lion paws. A cushion lies on the backrest. Temi's long wig is shoulder-length, while his short, rectangularly-ended goatee seems to be a miniaturised version of the beard characteristic for representations of the pharaohs, but also for those of one of the Egyptian gods, the Memphite demiurge Ptah. It cannot be excluded that this detail characterises the deceased's *akh*, i.e. his posthumous incarnation in many ways similar to a divine being. Temi is reaching for the offering table with his right hand, on which a row of half-loaves of bread is depicted, stylised to such a degree that they are more reminiscent of long bird feathers than delicious baked goods. They are standing on the extensive top crowning a tall cylindrically-shaped stand. The space on both sides of the stand is filled with a schematic inscription: “a thousand alabaster vases, a thousand [pieces of] linen” and “a thousand *te* breads, a thousand *pat* breads, a thousand [jars] of beer, a thousand cattle, a thousand birds.” This concept of culinary perfection is repeated in the tombs of many Egyptian dignitaries.

So that no one should have any doubts as to what items are referred to in the ‘offering list,’ they were illustrated in a frieze depicting the sequence of gifts, located just underneath the ‘list’.²⁸ It begins with the representation of two sets of ritual vessels used to wash the hands. Each of them contains a tall bowl, called a *shauti* in Egyptian, and a juglet with a long-curved funnel, referred to by the name *hezmeney*. This set is frequently encountered within the archaeological material we found in the tombs of

26 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 169–175, fig. 57–58, pls. LXVII a–b, CIII–CVIII.

27 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. CIII–CV.

28 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 175–176, fig. 58, pls. CIII–CIV, CV b, CVI, CIX c.

the noblemen (Fig. 84). It appears both among the luxury red-slip pottery vessels with meticulously polished surfaces,²⁹ as well as among the miniature vessels made from copper.³⁰ The middle part of the frieze was destroyed along with the middle fragment of the 'offering list;' however, a fragment of its ending has been preserved.³¹ We can see a decorative semi-globular vase, with flowers growing out of it, in turn lotus buds and fully developed lotus calyxes. The vase has a high base which becomes thicker as it nears the bottom. Bales of canvas are standing next to this beautiful vessel, with the sequence ending in a small offering table with a slender leg, on top of which there is a pile of fruit and vegetables (?). Near the table we can see two vessels: a characteristic tall beer jar and beaker most probably filled with berries.

The bottom register of the relief and polychrome decoration on the northern wall has also not been damaged (Fig. 94 and 153–154).³² It contains a seemingly banal scene in terms of its content and composition, but extremely important due to the accompanying hieroglyphic inscriptions. It depicts a procession of twelve men bearing various offerings for Temi. Each of the figures is described in short, but upon closer observation, we can see that these are not inscriptions made at the same time as when the sculptor was working on the images of the offering bearers. At that point, the figures had remained anonymous, while the empty surface around them was painted black. It looks as if the artist was afraid of conclusive attribution, which raises the suspicion that it was created during a time of confusion, perhaps even characterised by volatile public opinion and an ambiguous situation within Temi's seemingly model family. The inscriptions were added on later, while their content is somewhat surprising in the context of the remaining parts of the decoration. In terms of their form, the hieroglyphs betray a certain haste and chaos, while it seems that in terms of their content they respond to a specific order placed. The first five figures were described as the tomb owner's sons, while the remaining are *hemu-ka*, i.e. priests of the funerary cult. In accordance with adopted iconographic patterns, the two

29 Rzeuska, *Pottery of the Late Old Kingdom*, Warsaw 2006, p. 397 (forms 35–38), pl. IX, 2.

30 A. Radwan, *Die Kupfer- und Bronzegefäße Ägyptens (von den Anfängen bis zum Beginn der Spätzeit)*, München 1983, pp. 38–43, Taf. A–D, 9–13, 16–21, 27–44; K. Myśliwiec, with an appendix by Z. Godziejewski, "Saqqara 2010–2011," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 23 (2013): *Research* 2011, p. 37, fig. 3.

31 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, p. 176, pl. CVI.

32 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 176–181, fig. 57, 58, pls. CIX–CXI.

first figures carry the most important offerings, i.e. oxen haunches, while the five subsequent ones bear live geese held one hand by the throat and with the other at the base of the wings, while the remainder are carrying various victuals and flower bouquets. The last in line is carrying a small gazelle on his shoulders. It is interesting that he bears the tomb owner's 'beautiful name,' Temi.³³ This in itself suggests that the identification of each of the offering bearers has been carefully thought through.

The anachronism of the inscriptions in relation to the representations deserves at this point a digression concerning the royal sphere. A similar phenomenon has been attested as occurring 1500 years later in the beautiful reliefs made by one of the first rulers of the Twenty-Sixth dynasty.³⁴ They were discovered over a hundred years ago within the palace constructed in ca. 580 BC for the Pharaoh Apries in Memphis, i.e. nearby Saqqara. Sculpted with exceptional finesse on limestone blocks of the best quality, they depict episodes from scenes linked to a royal jubilee, organised in general on the thirtieth anniversary of the pharaoh's reign. Every detail of these reliefs has been refined with exceptional precision and mastery. They lack only one element: the royal names in the cartouches. These oval figures, normally performing the function of the ruler's 'visiting card,' in this case have remained empty, while the blocks containing these masterpieces of art, subsequent parts of a monumental gate that would lead to the palace or temple, were deposited in an underground cache in front of the royal residence.

To this day, we do not know for which of the two rulers competing at the time for the Egyptian throne it was made, Apries or Amasis. The artist clearly did not wish to risk a hurried attribution. The identification of the pharaoh is today additionally made more difficult by the fact that the reliefs from Memphis are evidence of the archaising tendency characterising the art of its period. Their style suggests that this artefact was something like a copy of a prototype from the Middle Kingdom, i.e. earlier by 1000 years. However, the person who discovered 'Apries's gate' did not know anything about the widespread archaisation in the art of the so-called Saite period (the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty). He interpreted and published his discovery simply as an object from the Middle Kingdom, more specifically that of Pharaoh Sesostris I.³⁵ It took decades of research to arrive at the truth, which still does

33 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, p. 181 (12), fig. 57, pl. CXI e.

34 K. Myśliwiec, *Royal Portraiture of the Dynasties XXI-XXX*, Mainz 1988, p. 48 (D.4) and 58, pls. LVIII-LIX a.

35 W. M. F. Petrie, *The Palace of Apries, Memphis II*, London 1909, pls. II-IX.

not explain the issue fully. Perhaps the situation was similar in the case of the anachronism of the inscriptions labelling the procession of offering bearers in Temi's tomb? However, here finally someone appeared who without a hint of hesitation added legends to an uncertain reality. Who was this daredevil? Let us set aside this case based on circumstantial evidence until the next chapter.

The decoration on the two adjacent walls in the north-western corner of Temi's cult chapel looks much like two adjacent sides of an open book (Fig. 100).³⁶ Similar in their composition, they supplement each other in terms of their content. As on the above-mentioned north wall, the main motif in the relief sculpted on the northern part of the west wall is the scene of the offering table, while everything surrounding it concerns the problem with the deceased's diet.³⁷ Temi, also depicted here with a long wig and a short beard, is wearing an apron, while his neck is adorned with a broad necklace. He is seated on an identical chair as in the previous scene and is reaching with his right hand for a chunk of bread lying on the table.



Fig. 91. Courtyard linking the cult chapels in Nyankhnepfertum's tomb complex, cf. Il. 22.

36 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. LXVII a, LXXXVIII, XCV.

37 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 153–169, fig. 53, 54, pls. LXXXVIII–XCV.



Fig. 92. Façade of Nyankhnefertum's cult chapel; the tip of Djoser's pyramid visible in the background.



Fig. 93. Interior of Nyankhnefertum's cult chapel at the moment of discovery. View of the collapsed north wall.



Fig. 94. The same spot following archaeological exploration.



Fig. 95. Nyankhnepfertum's (= Temi's) funerary chapel. The central scene on the east wall.



Fig. 96. Eightfold representation of the deceased on the chapel's east wall. Northern part.



Fig. 97. Southern part of the scene.



Fig. 98. Temi in the company of two of his sons. Southern segment of east wall.



Fig. 99. The tomb owner with his eldest son. Relief ending the northern sequence of scenes on the east wall.



Fig. 100. North-west corner of Nyankhnefertum's cult chapel. Polychrome 'false door' and offering table in front.

However, his hand has moved slightly further than in the antithetic scene. Is it the next frame in the same paused film? This is an impression we have frequently looking at the sequences of scenes decorating the walls of Egyptian tombs and temples.

However, the 'offering list,' accompanying the scene of the offering table on the north wall, was replaced here with an image illustrating identical content with exceptional precision (Figs. 102–104).³⁸ In three parallel registers,

³⁸ Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 155–159, fig. 54, pls. LXXXVIII–XCI c.



Fig. 101. Polychrome reliefs decorating the northern part of the west wall. Scenes depicting offering table and slaughterhouse.

the entire diet of the deceased was depicted, a wealth of gifts squeezed most often into large ritual vessels with fanciful shapes, but always having a short foot, sometimes placed on low stools with rectangular contours, with cross bars beneath the top surface. The fruit, among which we can identify figs, grapes and berries, are intermingled with pastries in various shapes, pieces of meat, among which calf heads stand out, and also vegetables, flowers and ritual vessels. Some motifs already known from the frieze underneath the ‘offerings list’ on the neighbouring wall have been repeated, including the hemispheric bowl from which lotus flowers grow, but also a small table, on which sets of hand-washing vessels stand. Everything is depicted



Fig. 102–103. Polychrome reliefs decorating the northern part of the west wall. Frieze of rituals vessels.



Fig. 104. Frieze of ritual vessels in offering table scene. Relief details (Fig. 101).



Fig. 105. The eldest son of the deceased in front of the offering pile. Relief detail.



Fig. 106. Taking out oxen entrails. Episode in slaughter scene.



Fig. 107. Cutting off the haunch and its transport. Second episode of slaughter scene.

in accordance with the Egyptian principles of aspectivism, i.e. such a view that the diagnostic features of each object enable its immediate identification. Every group of offerings is composed in such a way that they seem to tightly fit a square or rectangle surface, in which a real *horror vacui* prevails, i.e. a sense of fear of empty space. Even the smallest fragment of decorated surface has been filled completely. The first group clings to the chunks of bread found at the offering table, which suggests that in fact these offerings

have also been gathered on the table. The sequence then goes on to develop further in three strips from the bottom to the top, again like the frames of a long, and very boring, film.

The pile of offerings depicted on the offering table clashes with the order characterising the pile depicted below it (Fig. 101).³⁹ Similar victuals lie here in apparent disarray, but the impressionistic *horror vacui* does not stop the artist from rendering every detail with exceptional precision. Aside from the items already portrayed on the table, we see a few specimens of birds, mainly geese, such as the ones carried by the offering bearers in the scene on the adjacent wall. Their dangling necks attest that they had also moved on to the realm of Osiris. Other new elements include the enormous oxen haunches and ribs given as offerings. However, this 'still life' is not another repetition of the offering list or its supplement, but rather an abbreviated, symbolic depiction of the next episode of the funerary ceremony, i.e. the burning of the offering pile. We can see entire bales of linen, the remains of which we find in the archaeological material as scraps accompanying burnt plants in the beer jars filled with ash and sealed, thrown into the burial shaft towards the end of the ceremony.⁴⁰

The tomb owner's eldest son is standing opposite him in front of the pile of offerings, depicted as a small figure carrying a goose (Figs. 101 and 105).⁴¹ The gesture made with the hand with which he is holding the bird by the neck shows that this is the moment of taking the goose's life in offering to his deceased father. The hieroglyphic inscription which fills the space between this figure and the pile of offerings identify him as "his eldest son, *wab* priest [in] the Great House." We should take note of this person. The modest size of his silhouette in the described scene does not even begin to suggest the important role he played in the family's history after his father's death.

The episode preceding this ceremony has been depicted in the bottom register of the scene, beneath the offering table. As usual in Egyptian reliefs, one should begin the reading of the iconographic and textual 'comic book' providing an account according to its chronological sequence from the lowest register. In this case, it is a scene of ritual slaughter depicting two episodes of quartering an ox (Figs. 106–107),⁴² as if cut out of a longer film, which in its full version sometimes appears on the walls of the tomb. The

39 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 155–156, fig. 54, pl. XCI d.

40 See chapter 7, fn. 34–37.

41 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 154–155, fig. 54, pls. LXXXVIII–LXXXIX and XCI d.

42 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 159–161, fig. 54, pls. LXXXVIII–LXXXIX and XCII a–b.



Fig 108. Cartouche with the name of Pharaoh Unis on the ‘false door’ (Fig. 100).

inscriptions accompanying these representations and other genre scenes are completely different from the schematic, pompous inscriptions concerning the tomb owner. They are more reminiscent of a dialogue and stage directions in a theatrical play. In the first episode, a man is standing behind a bull, sharpening a knife on a whetstone. The inscription reads “sharpening a knife.” The bull is lying with his back legs tied together, while one of his front legs is being cut off at the base by a butcher wearing a short apron, who is telling his friend to “hold [it].” The second man is pulling the haunch with all his might, supporting his leg against the animal’s horn. In the second frame of the ‘film,’ entitled “Pulling out the heart,” the butcher is putting his hand deep into the open innards of the bull, while his companion is yet again sharpening the knife for the next operation. The scene ends with an offering bearer carrying a huge severed haunch. His name has been provided: Khekhi. This probably refers to one of Temi’s son’s, who went by this name, i.e. one of Meruka’s younger brothers.

Both described scenes of the offering table are separated by a beautifully polychromed ‘false door,’ the same one from underneath which robbers had



Fig. 109. Another cartouche with the name of Pharaoh Unis on the ‘false door’ (Fig. 100).

later pulled out the above-mentioned stone slab (Figs. 100 and 108–109).⁴³ At first sight, the richness of the polychromy is mesmerising. Each hieroglyph in the long inscriptions containing the titlature of the tomb owner is varied in terms of the colours used. They have a symmetrical layout, as do the four figures depicted in the bottom part of the doorjambs and the vertical inscriptions filling their upper part. The middle columns begin with the most important titles: “Servant of god [= priest] of the pyramid of Unas, the sole companion, inspector of the house of the king, privy to the secrets of the divine word.” The oval cartouche containing the name of King Unas, the last ruler of the Fifth Dynasty, has been especially beautifully executed (Figs. 108–109).⁴⁴ The

43 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 165–169, fig. 54, pls. LXXXVIII, XCIII–XCV.

44 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pl. CXLIV a–b

intensely blue frame contrasts with the yellow background of the interior, from which the red, celadon and black hieroglyphs clearly stand out.

However, when we compare Temi's 'false door' with an identical element in the decoration of Fefi's tomb (Fig. 43),⁴⁵ the form of the first seems to be quite coarse. How elegantly the celadon monochromy of the hieroglyphs presents itself against the red background with red dots, imitating Aswan granite, in the tomb of the vizier-upstart! This style shows ties with the classical tradition from the preceding dynasty.⁴⁶ In the course of less than one generation, the pauperisation of aesthetic preferences has occurred, an expression of which is the motley of bright colours against a yellow background, attested on the 'false door' in the north-western corner of Temi's chapel. As usual, this folk style does however introduce a certain freshness and naiveté, visible, for instance, in the very varied modelling of the male face depicted *en face*, which is a hieroglyph with the phonetic value *her* (Figs. 110–120).⁴⁷ Wherever the polychromy of this sign has been preserved, the facial features are modelled to a level of seeming almost a caricature. In some cases, the painter even added something like a 'barber's moustache,' which departs significantly from the classical model of the sign *her* (cf. iconographic variety of another hieroglyph in the same tomb (Figs. 121–131)). The artist's lack of constraints is all the more surprising as this head could be associated with the name of the god Horus, which is indicated not only by its phonetic value but also by the yellow colour of its skin, in the convention of Egyptian art characterising in principle the female sex or associated with gold.⁴⁸ To this day, Egyptologists cannot agree to an unequivocal interpretation of this exception to the rule, which in today's times we would without hesitation categorise as *gender-bending*. If we are indeed to see a feminised feature in a male face, there would be no problems in finding its source: it is enough to bring to mind the homosexual episode in Horus's mythological biography, known from the *Pyramid Texts*. If, however, the yellow colour of the face was instead to have suggested connotations of gold, the explanation is even more obvious: "golden Horus" was a term so rooted in the religious imagination of the Egyptians that even one of the five names of the pharaoh was referred to as "the name of golden Horus."

However, the artist who covered the reliefs with paint in Temi's cult chapel went even further. He also rendered Osiris's body yellow in the sign

45 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, p. 93 (pls. XVIII, XLIX, L b) and 160 (pls. XXIII, LXXII, LXXIII a, b, f).

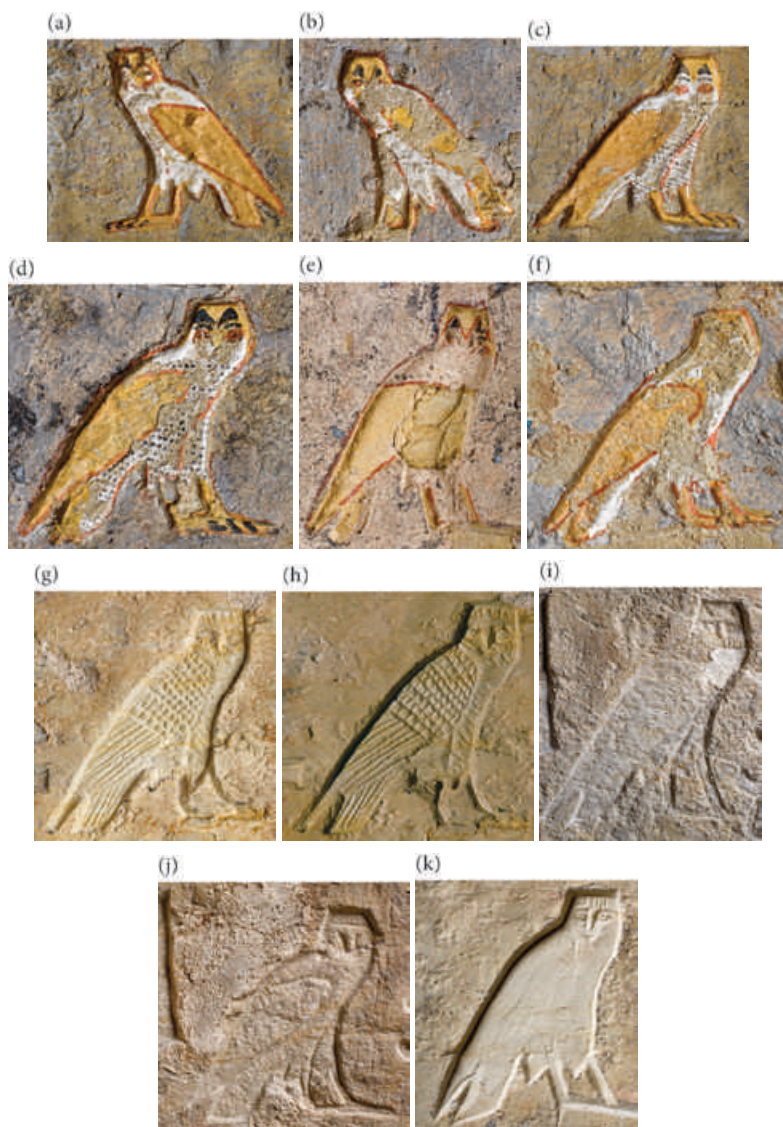
46 For example in Mehu's tomb: H. Altenmüller, *Die Wanddarstellungen im Grab des Mehu in Saqqara*, Mainz 1998, p. 200 (Taf. 75) and p. 247 (Taf. 95).

47 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. CXXXIII–CXXXIV.

48 K. Myśliwiec, "The Red and Yellow: An Aspect of the Egyptian "Aspective," pp. 225–238.



Figs. 110–120 (a-k) Various epigraphic versions of the hieroglyph *her* in the inscriptions on the walls of Nyankhnefertum's cult chapel.



Figs. 121–131 (a-k) The hieroglyph *m*, i.e. a representation of an owl, in various epigraphic versions of this tomb.

determining the name of this god, which is yet another derogation from the rule (Figs. 132–134).⁴⁹ This hieroglyph depicts the profile of a squatting male figure with the forward-curving beard characteristic for Egyptian gods. Did the painter's imagination lead to a desire to remind others of the corporal and spiritual ties linking Osiris and Horus, i.e. father and son, representing the same 'lobby' in Egyptian mythology?



Figs. 132–133. The name of the god Osiris with an anthropomorphic determinative with yellow skin. Epigraphic rarity.

49 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pl. CXXXV a–c.



Figs 134. The name of the god Osiris with an anthropomorphic determinative with yellow skin. Epigraphic rarity.

However, original artistic ideas are features not only of the polychromy of the ‘false door’ in Temi’s chapel but also of its composition. Artists also searched for new solutions in this aspect. Two vertical strips of representations adjacent to the ‘door,’ one on the left side, one on the right, are a classical feature of the decoration in the tombs of this period. These columns contain representations and hieroglyphic labels of the holy oils used in the sepulchral ritual. The composition of both strips is usually symmetrical, frequently even analogous. The creator of the decoration in Temi’s chapel decided to add some diversification to this element. On one side of the ‘door,’ he depicted a vertical sequence of four rectangular stools, on which a group of vessels was placed,⁵⁰ while on the other, he portrayed four offering bearers carrying large vessels with oil (Figs. 100 and 148–149).⁵¹ The original inscriptions accompanying these figures have not identified them, as they only contain the schematic formula “Bringing oil [+ name].” However, it turns out that certain retouches were done here later, the content and form of which betray the same culprits as we have already encountered in the alterations made in the bottom register of the decoration on the chapel’s north wall. We shall take a closer look at them later in a wider context. This

⁵⁰ Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 163–164, fig. 54, pls XCIII–XCV and CI a–d.

⁵¹ Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 164–165, fig. 54, pls. XCIII–XCV and CII.

shows that the tomb continued to 'live' also after the death of its owner, not only on the occasion of the official cult rituals conducted here.

Even more original solutions were introduced by the creators of Temi's tomb in the southern part of his chapel. When, upon entering through the narrow entrance to this exceptional interior, we turn our eyes to the right, we are surprised by the monochromy of its entire southern part.⁵² The painter did not manage to complete his task before the tomb owner's death. The southern wall, as well as the southern parts of the east and west walls have no colours, while abundant traces have been preserved of the original sketches and corrections to them, but also of reliefs left at various stages of their execution. There can be no doubt that half of the chapel was decorated later than the northern part, and Temi's death had startled the contractors. Did it surprise them completely? If we take a look at the graphic jokes that they indulged in while sculpting these inscriptions, we have the impression that they no longer anticipated any sort of supervision, either from their master or from members of Temi's family, and definitely not from the tomb owner. This has been taken advantage of by archaeologists and art historians, who can now trace the subsequent stages in the creative process of ancient sculptors and painters. Primarily, the southern part of the west wall makes a shocking impression (Figs. 135–138).⁵³ As if there were an insufficient number of richly polychrome 'false doors,' as described above, in the northern part of this wall, the entire southern part has been completely filled with even more of them, also carved into rock. However, there are no offering tables in front of them; thus, we remain unsure whether any sort of ceremonies took place here. It can be assumed that these 'false doors' had more of a propagandist character than a cult one. The first surprise is the asymmetrical composition of two adjacent 'doors' forming a whole and, as indicated by the analysis of their decoration, supplementing each other in terms of their content.

With some distrust, we discovered that the twin 'doors' did not so much adhere to each other, but rather they overlapped. While the northern segment constitutes a classical 'false door' with three doorjambs on each side of the axis (Fig. 136),⁵⁴ the southern one lacks one jamb, i.e. the one that would have made it adjoin the neighbouring 'door'.⁵⁵ This cannot be explained as resulting from lack of space on the wall, as its northern edge is a large empty

52 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pl. CXX

53 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 181–191, fig. 59, pls. CXII–CXIX.

54 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, fig. 59, pl. CXIII.

55 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, fig. 59, pl. CXVII.



Fig. 135. Double ‘false door’ spanning the southern part of the west wall. Nyankhnepfertum’s cult chapel.

surface, exactly the same size as could have fit yet another doorjamb. The choice of an asymmetrical composition was thus intentional and was supposed to serve to present specific content.

While in the Saqqara tombs of the noblemen from the turn of the Fifth and Sixth Dynasty, we can find a few examples of ‘twin false doors,’ the presence of which is motivated by the family relationships of the given mastaba owner, a symmetrical layout is nonetheless always maintained, even when the narrow central jamb is shared by both segments. In such a case, it is divided in half with a vertical line into two fields, of which each belongs to a different ‘door’.⁵⁶ Temi’s tomb constitutes an exception in these respects. The doorjamb that could be considered to have been the central one, i.e. common for the two segments, belongs only to the north ‘door.’ It was not divided into two symmetrical columns, and its decoration is parallel to the external jamb on the other side of this door’s axis. Why was such an unusual solution applied?

⁵⁶ K. Myśliwiec, “Father’s and Eldest Son’s Overlapping Feet; an Iconographic Message,” in: Z. Hawass, P. Der Manuelian, R.B. Hussein (eds.), *Perspectives on Ancient Egypt. Studies in Honour of Edward Brouvarski* (“Supplément aux Annales du Service des Antiquités de l’Égypte” 40), Le Caire 2010, pp. 318–319.



Fig. 136. Northern part of double 'false door' sculpted on the west wall of Temi's chapel.



Fig. 137. Temi with his eldest son. Relief in the southern part of the double „false door.”

We can find a clear message contained in the content of the reliefs decorating the surface of the asymmetrical ‘false doors.’ In the northern segment, i.e. in the fully depicted ‘door,’ Temi always appears alone, six times in the bottom part of the doorjambs, underneath the inscriptions bearing his titlature and name (Fig. 136). The latter is written horizontally just above the figure’s head, while the titlature fills the vertical column. Four among the six representations show Temi with a sceptre in his hand, which emphasised his position. His figure on this ‘false door,’ predominant, is also taller than in the neighbouring one. This is clearly about emphasising his greatness and dignity.

On the southern ‘door,’ covered in part by the neighbouring ‘door,’ the tomb owner is always shown in the company of one of two members of his family, his wife named Seshseshet or the oldest son bearing the name Meruka, whom we have already encountered above (Figs. 137–138). The married couple appears both on the miniature offering table scene sculpted in the rectangular panel in the upper part of the ‘door’ and – thrice – in the



Fig. 138. Temi with his wife. Relief on one of the doorjambs in the southern part of the double ‘false door.’

bottom part of the doorjambs. Seshseshet is described as a priestess of the Goddess Hathor. In each of these scenes, the wife is shown embracing her husband with her arm. The tiny figure of the son accompanies his father in the scenes in the two symmetrical middle doorjambs. In a gesture parallel to his parent's one, Meruka is grasping Temi's long staff with his hand, as if taking his father's place in the mortal world. The father's feet overlap those of his son's: only the oldest male descendant was portrayed in this way.

The significance of the whole is very legible: thanks to his relationship with his life companion, the tomb owner continues his earthly existence through his first-born son, much the same as the god Osiris was regenerated through Isis in the form of his son, Horus. This is the earthly aspect of Temi's programme for immortality. In order to accentuate this correlation, the ‘family false door’ was attached to the tomb owner's solo ‘false door,’ in which one of the jambs overlaps with the former one. A similar though purely symbolic highlighting of the oldest son is repeated in the decoration



Fig. 139. The same couple (Fig. 138) in a large-sized scene on the south wall of Temi's chapel.

of Temi's chapel many times over (Fig. 99). In life, it must have been translated into material values, and this could not have been well received by his younger brothers. This is best observable in the panoramic family scene taking up the entire east wall.

This exceptional panorama (Figs. 96–97),⁵⁷ the first scene we can see upon entering the tomb chapel, has supplanted various important and beautiful motifs decorating this same place on the east wall in Fefi's tomb (Figs. 44 and 46–50),⁵⁸ which was in fact the prototype for Temi. We have neither the procession of female figures personifying land estates nor the butchery with episodes of slaughtering animals, and not even scenes of hunting for wild feathered game or a Nilotic landscape and fishing. Only the symmetrical central motif has been retained, which – however – has acquired here completely new content (Fig. 95).⁵⁹ Similarly as in the case of Fefi's tomb, the tomb owner has been represented twice in a symmetrical arrangement. Only the accompanying figures are different, and – as a result – they are all the more significant. While in Fefi's tomb, his mother was predominant, represented on both sides of the axis of symmetry as a person crouched at her son's feet,⁶⁰ in Temi's case, a different person has been portrayed in each of the two symmetrical scenes: on one side (the northern) – his only wife, while on the opposite one – his oldest son. This difference in emphasis says a lot about the family of each of the noblemen neighbouring each other after death. In the family of the polygamist with four harpist spouses, the main role was played by his mother. His talented life companions, competing, perhaps even brutally, for the favour of their husband whose career had suddenly skyrocketed, had been clearly eclipsed by the mother. Their mother-in-law had probably treated them as a family harem; thus, it would be difficult to expect currents of affection to have flowed between the women. In all probability, the politics of the tomb owner's overbearing mother had been the source of the conflicts that had borne such tragic fruit following Fefi's death.

In the decoration of Temi's cult chapel, his mother does not appear at all. Not only has she been omitted in the 'family panorama' on the east wall but she has also been ignored completely in other scenes and inscriptions. Her monogamous son must have repressed her from his memory, perhaps mindful of the ill-fated role the tomb owner's mother had played in his neighbour's family. We should remember that the iconographic programme of the reliefs and paintings in the tomb chapel was chosen personally by its owner as such decorations were made during his lifetime. There should be no doubt that he would have wanted to immortalise his family in accordance with his own wishes; thus, this is rather an image of an idyll than a reflection

57 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 139–152, fig. 50–51, pls. LXVII, LXIX–LXXXVII; Myśliwiec, "Nobility Marrying Divinity," figs. 6–7.

58 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 115–149, pls. LIV–LXVI.

59 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 139–140, fig. 52, pl. LXX.

60 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 116–117, pls. XX, XXI, XLI, LXI.

of the actual relations in place in the household. In Temi's case, two people we have already encountered on a 'false door' on the west wall clearly share pre-eminence, i.e. his wife and his oldest son. Despite what might appear to be the case at first glance, these two did not play equivalent roles in the family. On the east wall, Temi's wife has been depicted once again (Fig. 96), in an identical crouched position, perhaps under the influence of the prototype of the two representations of the mother in the middle of the east wall in Fefi's chapel; however, this time she is depicted once in a secondary scene, ensuing immediately after the symmetrical middle image (Fig. 96).⁶¹ This is the second segment in the northern sequence of the four representations of the tomb owner. In none of the two scenes is his wife Temi's only companion as always one of the younger sons is standing on his other side.

The oldest male descendant is treated in a completely different manner. Meruka is portrayed within this gigantic 'family portrait' four times, always one-on-one with his father (Fig. 99),⁶² as if this representation was supposed to illustrate one of the most frequently applied epithets in the titulare of the noblemen: "sole companion." Therefore, half of the eight segments constituting this panorama have been dedicated to the first-born son. As if this was not enough, the location of these four elements is by no means accidental. The logic behind the choice of the figures is clearly visible in every pair of symmetrically arranged scenes. Whenever the composition presents the tomb owner with two figures on one side of the axis, i.e. two sons or his wife and one of his male descendants, in an analogous spot on the opposite side only the father with his oldest, first-born son is depicted. Not once do the two symmetrical scenes contain an analogous motif, for example, only the first or only the second of the two above-listed iconographic variants. Thus, this was about maintaining a certain equilibrium of power, as if in fear that the first-born might feel resentful as a result of the favour shown to his younger brothers. He controls everything.

This is a programmatic emphasis with a message more powerful than the presence of this son on the above-described 'false doors.' It is clear that he played the dominant role in the family, and that the entire inheritance would fall to him. Out of all of Temi's male progeniture, only he is depicted in one of the segments of the east wall in such a way that his feet overlap his father's, while his hand clasps the long staff, the symbol of power and dignity, held by the latter

61 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 146–147 (scene 3), figs. 50–51, pls. LXXIV–LXXV.

62 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 145–152 (scenes 5, 6, 7, 8), figs. 50–52, pls. LXXVIII–LXXXV; Myśliwiec, "Nobility Marrying Divinity," figs. 6a.

(Fig. 99).⁶³ This is nothing else but an enlarged copy of the iconographic motif from the above-described overlapping 'false doors' (Fig. 137). This copy is the first image to the left in the sequence of scenes on the east wall.⁶⁴ It appears here almost as if as a manifesto. It is yet another piece of evidence of how precisely each detail of the decoration was addressed before work on its making was initiated. It can be interpreted as an attempt by the tomb owner at petrifying his own vision of reality, corresponding to his wishful thinking.

But history does not like to stand still. *Panta rhei*, as Heraclitus of Ephesus, one of the greatest Greek philosophers, was to state many centuries later. The current reality is not the reality of tomorrow. As we shall soon find out, even the provident Temi could not evade this truth.

Nonetheless, the design of the east wall in the tomb chapel of this nobleman leads us first to another thought: what happened to the beautiful and important scenes that were sculpted into the east wall of its prototype, i.e. Fefi's tomb chapel (Figs. 44 and 46–49)? Had Temi dispensed completely with them in the new version of the decoration? Reminiscences of some motifs can be found on the south wall, which became something like a synthesis of the content included in the predecessor's chapel in the reliefs of two walls neighbouring each other, the east and the south one. As in the prototype, the image of the tomb owner seated next to his wife, observing preparations for a feast, constitutes the main motif (Figs. 51 and 139).⁶⁵ A procession heading towards the couple has been depicted in three horizontal registers. In the upper one, three papyrus boats have been shown carrying a huge load of geese (Figs. 140–141).⁶⁶ In each of them, three men described as "fowlers" stand; the first and the third are shapely oarsmen with long poles in their hands, while a slightly portly nobleman stands between them, described as "overseer of the hunting of wild birds," holding in his hands birds with flapping wings. In each boat, at least one cage full of geese has been depicted. It can be assumed that the procession is returning from a hunt. This is as if the next episode, following the magnificent scene of the fowling in the rushes, portrayed in Fefi's tomb on the east wall (Fig. 44), an echo of the theme lacking in Temi's chapel.⁶⁷ The procession of boats carrying the hunters dominates in terms of its size and dynamism over the compositions represented in the lower registers.

63 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 148–149 (scene 5), figs. 50–51, pls. LXXVIII–LXXIX.

64 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, figs. 50–51.

65 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 192–194, fig. 61, pls. CXX, CXXI and CXXIII.

66 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 194–196, fig. 61, pls. CXXII, CXXIV–CXXV.

67 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 122–134, pls. XXI, LXII–LXV.



Fig. 140. A papyrus boat carrying birds as an offering for the tomb owner. The upper register of the scene in front of the couple seated on a throne (Fig. 139).



Fig. 141. Second boat with a similar load.



Fig. 142. Two daughters and probably one of his sons offering the deceased an armful of lotus flowers. Middle register of scene in front of couple seated on a throne (Fig. 139).



Fig. 143. Live pets of the tomb owner: a dog and a monkey. Fragment of the relief in the bottom register of the scene on the south wall (Fig. 139).



Figs. 144–145. Fragments of sketches in the decoration on the south wall in Nyankhnefertum's cult chapel: a) a rower's head; b) geese in a cage.

The middle one presents a procession of nine people also bearing live geese. It begins with two women in long robes, presenting not only live birds but also an armful of lotus flowers (Fig. 142).⁶⁸ Only these two figures are accompanied by hieroglyphic inscriptions sculpted into the surface of the rock; each of the two ladies is described as “his beloved daughter, the king’s acquaintance.” The first woman’s name is Khenut, the second’s – Metjut. It is interesting that space was lacking for them to be included in the huge ‘family *tableau*’ on the east wall. Clearly, they did not have as much significance for the tomb owner as his male progeniture; perhaps they should even have been glad they were included at all in their father’s chapel. They form a group with the male figure striding behind them, who – like them – is carrying a goose and an armful of lotus flowers. In front of this offering bearer, a protruding rock surface has been preserved with a clearly outlined contour, doubtless prepared for the sculpting of the inscription/visiting card. However, the inscription was never actually made. This might be the representation of one of the sons accompanying their father in the subsequent segments on the east wall (Figs. 95–98). But it also cannot be excluded that yet another of his children has been portrayed here, so insignificant that the artist did not go to the trouble of identifying him with an inscription. Or perhaps he had justified doubts whose name should be written here? If this was the case, then this surely could not have been a depiction of the oldest son.

The offering made of lotus flowers presented by Temi’s three children is significant. As mentioned above, this flower was the attribute of Nefertum, the child-god in the Memphite triad, whose name appears in Temi’s ‘great name:’ Nyankhnepfertum meaning “The one who is Nereftum’s life.” Therefore, the lotus flower identified the tomb owner with the son of the Memphite demiurge, the god Ptah. The fact that in the described scene Temi, seated in the company of his spouse, is sniffing this particular flower should be treated as a clear allusion to these associations (Fig. 139).⁶⁹ This is probably one of those he received from his children.

We are dealing with one of the rare cases in Old Kingdom art when a man was depicted holding a lotus in his hand, as this is usually characteristic for a woman, e.g. a priestess of Goddess Hathor. The sequence of offering bearers in the middle register of the decoration on the southern wall, a motif very rare in Temi’s tomb chapel, might bring to mind associations with the numerous processions depicted in his neighbour’s tomb, e.g. the sequence

68 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 196–197, fig. 61, pl. CXXVII.

69 See fn. 65.

of females personifying the land estates from which victuals were taken to upkeep the cult of the deceased.⁷⁰

The bottom register of the decoration on the south wall is the longest as it spans the entire width of the wall, even reaching under the chair on which the married couple is seated. It contains a very compressed image of the feast, stripped of details, while its sumptuousness had delighted in the banquet scene on an analogous wall in Fefi's chapel (Figs. 51–54, 139 and 143).⁷¹ In Temi's case, it was limited to showing two female singers clapping out the rhythm with their hands, seven dancers making the simplest dance steps, a type of 'walked' dance with their arms raised upwards, a quartet of crouching musicians, including two harpists, and a dwarf leading the tomb owner's favourite pets, a monkey and a dog. The importance of the latter is confirmed by the fact that his name was carved into the wall, Iakhi.⁷²

Each of the three registers of this monotonous, linear decoration was left by the artists at a different stage of incompleteness. The work by the upper register of the relief, depicting the boats, was left at the earliest phase (Figs. 140–141 and 144–145). The contours of the figures bear many traces of the original sketch, made on the surface of the rock, which has not even been carefully smoothed. We can see that the first drawing was made with a brush that has left behind a thick red line. The artist then ran a thin stylus on this base, which specified the contour of the figures with a black line for the sculptor (Figs. 144–145).⁷³ This last person had only managed to cut out a layer of rock to the level of the background, so that the relief of the figures has angular, rectangular edges, while numerous traces of the chisel have been preserved in the surface of the background. In the middle register of the decoration, the sculptors went a step further. They removed traces of the original sketch and smoothed the contours of the convex relief, but they did not have time to model all the details in the layer of stone (Fig. 142). For example, the protrusion from which the inscription identifying the son carrying the goose and armful of lotus flowers should have been carved has remained as a block.

The relief in the lowest register, representing the artistic part of the feast (Fig. 143),⁷⁴ can be considered almost completed, even though the sculpting of the relief just above the floor required an almost reclined position during the work. This hindrance took its toll on the artistic level of the relief. Even

70 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 136–138, pls. XX, LIV–LV, LVII, LIX.

71 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 149–159, pls. XXII, LXVII–LXXII.

72 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 198–199, fig. 61, pl. CXXI, CXXX a.

73 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. CXXII, CXXIV–CXXIX.

74 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 198–200, fig. 61, pls. CXXX–CXXXII.

though all of the figures have naturally rounded contours and a smooth surface, the details have been done in a very cumulative manner. The sensual dancers are almost completely lacking breasts, which in other Egyptian reliefs emphasise their beauty and grace. The facial details have been almost completely left out in the sculpting. In these respects, the sculptor had probably been counting on the painter, who would have filled in these details with polychromy. Unfortunately, the artist never even made it to this part of the chapel before the tomb owner's death.

In accordance with the conventions of Egyptian relief, the lowest register of representations should be read as the scene taking place next to the seat on which we can see Temi and his wife (Fig. 139). Their silhouettes dominate over the whole scene in terms of their size, but they do not even begin to rival analogous compositions on the south wall of the vizier's chapel in terms of the finesse of style and wealth of details (Figs. 51–54).⁷⁵ The somewhat formulaic modelling was imposed by the material, as the wall is split in this spot by a deep vertical crack that had to be filled with a thick layer of plaster in order to even enable the sculpting of anything at all.⁷⁶ An original detail of this relief involves Temi sniffing a lotus flower.⁷⁷ An inscription was carved out in front of him containing the tomb owner's most important titles. In first place in each of the two columns of this standard inscription we have of course the title describing his function as priest at the royal pyramids. This was what he was most proud of. We can read the following: "God's servant [= priest] at the pyramid of Teti, deputy supervisor of the god's servants at the pyramid of Unas, inspector of the king's house, beloved by his lord, inspector of the Great House, privy to secrets, Nyankhnepfertum".⁷⁸ This is a great testimony of loyalty: primarily of his good relations with the pharaohs, both those who had already passed away (Teti, Unas), and the one still alive (doubtless Pepi I). We shall soon raise the question of whether this loyalty did not go too far.

The epithets describing his wife in the three short columns of text located above her head are equally diagnostic: "His wife, whom he loves, revered by her husband, Seshseshet."⁷⁹ None of her honourable functions as the priestess of the Goddess Hathor have been evoked, such as "only adornment of the king," but the warmth of feelings between the married couple is emphasised. Had someone doubted the strength of their love? Or, perhaps, there was a need

75 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 152–155, pls. XXII, LXVII–LXVIII, LXIX, LXXI.

76 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. CXX–CXXI and CXXIII.

77 See fn. 65.

78 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, p. 194.

79 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, p. 194, fig. 61.

to mask some episode that would have cast a shadow over the intimate sphere of their relationship? At any rate, this triggered our imagination.

It would be worthwhile to also take a look at Temi's burial place, seeing as both the ancient looters and experienced archaeologists living almost 4000 years later were deceived by the hope that the shaft with the burial chamber was hewn into the rock below the offering table near the only one of the 'false doors' that had been completed by the decorators of the cult chapel. Our excavations showed that, similarly as in the case of his neighbour's tomb, the large burial shaft, though slightly shallower (over 10 m) than in the vizier's tomb, was located underneath the mastaba, on the eastern side of the chapel.⁸⁰ However, there was no sarcophagus in the burial chamber, just a cuboidal hollow in the floor that performed such a function.⁸¹ Nonetheless, the pseudo-sarcophagus was covered with a heavy stone slab, made from local limestone, probably in the hopes that it would be resistant to potential looters. However, what was such a trifle for experienced professionals?! The slab was smashed into a few fragments, and one was removed, after which they emptied the inside almost completely. In the difficult times that ensued towards the end of the Sixth Dynasty, the practical Egyptians used this hollow for a secondary burial. The analysis of the pottery preserved next to the very damaged skeleton showed that this might have occurred during the reign of Pharaoh Pepi II, i.e. in the last phase of the Old Kingdom.⁸² Only the remains of a laconic inscription written using black paint on the frontal face of the sarcophagus lid enable identifying the first owner of this grave. On the uneven stone surface, someone had written the deceased's 'beautiful name,' Temi, in lopsided hieratic script.⁸³

The secondary usage of the shaft, which had originally performed the function of a ritual shaft dug out at a distance of only one metre to the south of the burial shaft, is testimony to the progressing impoverishment of Memphite society in the final phase of the Sixth Dynasty.⁸⁴ As all shafts of this type, in the original version it did not have a chamber. When later the decision was reached to use it for a burial, an L-shaped hollow was hewn into the rock to fit a body wrapped in bandages. The skeleton along with the remains of its

80 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 89–91 (shaft 77), fig. 32, pls. XXXIX–XLIV a.

81 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. XL–XLI.

82 T. Rzeuska, "The Pottery," in: Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 222–223.

83 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pl. XL.

84 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, p. 91, fig. 33, pls. XXXIX a, XLIV–XLV.

expedition to eternity were found by the east wall of the hollow. In accordance with tradition, the entrance to this primitive chamber was closed off, this time using blocks cut from local rock. The remains of other burials have been preserved in the upper part of this shaft, where they were lying in a pile of sand and pebbles. They are the silent witnesses of the progressing degeneration of Egyptian society, ending with the first fall of the pharaonic state in history.

How did the male progeniture of Temi, of whom the loyal servant of the rulers and deities was so proud, behave during these difficult times?

Chapter 9. Behind the scenes of family bliss

Abstract: Mysterious Mereris, sons of Nyankhnefertum. Who is the father of the two: the tomb owner or the pharaoh? Unusual features in the decoration of the cult chapel. An iconographic and textual message left by iconoclasts.

Keywords: secondary inscriptions, unusual epithet, priestess of Hathor, sledge as phallus, silly jokes.

Temi could die in peace. Aside from having the reliefs decorating the walls in the southern part of his chapel painted, he had managed to do everything to petrify order and harmony in his large family. He had informed posterity about how much he loved his wife, about how he was immensely devoted to both kings who had passed away and the one still alive, but also to the deities, with the youthful Nefertum – the symbol of rebirth – at the forefront. Temi had showed every member of his closest family their place in line, not forgetting even for a moment about his *alter ego*, i.e. his eldest son, who was to ensure the continuation of the earthly idyll after Temi as the head of the family had moved on to the afterworld. It seems, however, that he overdid the exposure of the special role to be performed by his firstborn son, while – as we know – the devil is in the detail. He might also have perhaps shown excessive caution when wanting to protect his closest ones from the tragedy that had devastated the family of his posthumous neighbour, the vizier-parvenu with the ‘beautiful name’ Fefi, whose tomb had in fact been the prototype for Temi’s ‘house of eternity.’

When one stands in awe in front of the panoramic ‘family portrait’ immortalised on the chapel’s east wall (Figs. 95–97),¹ a few deviations from the rules draw one’s attention. This does not necessarily refer to the obtrusive exposure of the eldest son’s position at the expense of his beloved wife but rather to the iconographic distinctiveness of one of the eight scenes (Fig. 146) forming this seemingly very monotonous scene, in which symmetry and harmony dominate over all other principles. Such an impression of symmetry is invoked already by the representations of the deceased in each of the eight segments, a figure of almost natural height. In each case, he is striding forward, holding a long staff, a symbol of his stateliness, in his outstretched hand. His naked torso is adorned by a wide necklace, which in reality would have consisted of a large number of pearls strung onto threads forming concentric circles.

1 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkievicz, *The Funerary Complex*, Warsaw 2010, pp. 139–152, fig. 51, pls. LXX–LXXXVII.



Fig. 146. Nyankhnefertum with his two youngest sons. One of the segments of the ‘family panorama’ in relief on the east wall.

The short, probably artificial beard with an almost rectangular contour is yet another sign of his stateliness. He wears a wig on his head, made up of horizontal rows of small locks, but their shape and length are varied. Alternately, alongside the short wig, fitted to the shape of his nape, there is a long wig, shoulder-length, which broadens out towards its bottom.

The remaining details of the clothing are identical in seven scenes, while the eighth segment (Fig. 146) stands out due to its original iconography.² It

² Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 147–148 (scene 4), fig. 51, pls. LXXVI–LXXVII; Myśliwiec, “Nobility Marrying Divinity,” figs. 6b.

is located in the second position from the north side (i.e. from the left, as would perceive it an observer of the scene), and thus it is the next one after the above-mentioned image, in which the feet of the father and the eldest son overlap, which constitutes yet another exception in the whole composition, a type of *manifesto* with the features of a testament (Fig. 99).

Aside from the mentioned details, everything in this segment is different. Primarily Temi's attire, consisting of an apron ending in its upper part in a belt with a knot below his navel. While the aprons in the case of the remaining seven figures always have the same shape, characterised by a stiff front, protruding strongly away from the body and triangularly ended, with a diagonal fold between the stomach and the back of the knee, the apron of this last figure is much more elegant. It fits the body tightly from all sides, with a seemingly neatly pleated surface, as can be seen in representations with a more detailed modelling. Such attire appears among high-ranked Egyptian dignitaries during especially ceremonial situations, possibly linked to the ritual of the transition of male progeniture from childhood into adulthood. However, the exact symbolism of this element of clothing remains unclear to this day.

Another attribute that makes this original scene stand out is the *khrep* sceptre held by Temi in the hand in which in the seven remaining scenes he is holding something like a folded handkerchief with drooping corners. What do these unique attributes of stateliness mean in a composition depicting the tomb owner with his two youngest sons? One of them, probably the older one, is portrayed with a so-called lock of youth (or, rather, of childhood) falling to the side of his head with otherwise short-cropped hair.³ In one hand he is holding the wings of a live hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), while grasping his father's tall staff with the other. This gesture is highly symptomatic, as in the discussed family *tableau* in principle it is characteristic for the eldest son named Meruka (Fig. 99). Meanwhile, the boy from the analysed scene is called Mereri. It is striking that the second child accompanying his father is also described using the same name. The clearly marked variation in height and different attributes suggest that these are not two representations of the same child, but rather a depiction of two brothers, of which one is slightly older than the other. The younger one, shown behind his father, i.e. as a figure striding alongside him, is touching Temi's leg with his hand. Even though no elements of their clothing have been marked on the relief, the microscopic bump above the crotch might be interpreted as a symbolic marking of their members or as a knot at the belt of their invisible aprons.

3 Ch. Müller, "Jugendlocke," in: *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, Vol. 3: *Horhekenu-Megeb*, Wiesbaden 1980, col. 273–274.

The bird in the hand of the older of the two Mereris probably characterises him as a novice hunter, for which the younger one is not yet mature enough.

Nothing indicates that this scene depicts a special ceremony; thus, Temi's unique, festive appearance in this specific spot should be attributed rather to the presence of his adolescent sons than to any other context. Are the sceptre and the elegant apron attributes meant to emphasise the hierarchic distance between the youngest sons and their father, the exceptional respect that is due a parent? Or perhaps the exact opposite – which at first seems almost impossible – this is an expression of special respect shown by the tomb owner towards the two children, of whom one is described as “his son, his beloved, Mereri,” while the second as “son, his beloved, Mereri.” But who must these boys have been for their father to feel obligated to express such reverence?

It is possible to contemplate many hypotheses. We should, however, focus on the facts. The first of these is the name of the youths. They both bear the same one, which was nothing out of the ordinary in the discussed period. Similar cases have been confirmed in the tombs of a few of the high dignitaries buried at the Saqqara necropolis. There are even sometimes whole family dynasties with all the members bearing the same name, the most known example of which are the noblemen with the name Ptahhotep from a magnificent mastaba, expanded numerous times, located not far from Temi's tomb. It should come as no surprise that in Memphis, the centre of the god Ptah's cult, the theophoric name meaning “Ptah is happy” (=satisfied) was so popular.

The same was true, though for different reasons, for the name Mereri. Its exceptional popularity during the Sixth Dynasty and directly after the fall of the Old Kingdom has been attested for the whole of Egypt.⁴ Many dignitaries from the middle layers of the social hierarchy bore this name. This is in fact one of a few different names constructed on the basis of the root *mer*, which simply means “to love.” It was used to build nouns, verbs and adjectives in various forms, such as through the reduplication of the elements of the root, which intensifies the value of the emotion it contains. Given the frequent brevity of the notation, it is sometimes difficult to establish what shade of love is being referred to in a specific case. It can be stated generally that such terms as “loved,” “beloved,” “loving,” etc. were especially popular in Egyptian onomastics during those stormy times. Searching for the reasons

4 K. Myśliwiec, “The Mysterious Mereris, Sons of Ny-anekh-Nefertem (Sixth Dynasty, Saqqara),” in: A. Woods, A. Mc Farlane, S. Binder (eds.), *Egyptian Culture and Society. Studies in Honour of Naguib Kanawati* (“Supplément aux Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte” 38), p. 71, fn. 1.

behind this popularity, one could probably find grounds in the political and social situation, forming particular premises for the human psychological sphere. One always searches for that which one is lacking. In the turbulent times at the turn of the two last dynasties of the Old Kingdom, and later, up until the first fall of the pharaonic state, such values as love, friendship, loyalty or honesty must have been quite rare, though highly valued.⁵

However, the exceptionality of Temi's family is based on the fact that there are as many as three Mereris. Aside from the two boys in the exceptional scene we are attempting to understand (Fig. 146), the family portrait on the east wall of the tomb chapel depicts another person, this time an adult bearing the same name. He appears in the last segment of the southern sequence (on the right side from the perspective of the observer) of this panorama with a symmetrical composition (Fig. 98).⁶ He is one of two brothers depicted in this scene standing on both sides of their father. Behind the middle figure, i.e. the side closer to the observer, there is a man named Tjetji, described as "his son, his beloved, functionary and attendant of the Great House." As the only one of the male descendants depicted in the 'family panorama,' he walks with his hands lowered, touching neither his father's staff nor his leg. It seems that his relationship with his father was marked by reserve, at least in the opinion of the latter, who was in fact the instigator behind the decoration. Judging by the titulature, his son's career must have been quite advanced; therefore, he might have been chronologically the first son after the eldest descendant. If this was in fact the case, he would have had more reasons to be frustrated than any of his younger brothers, as the chance to be the first had slipped through his fingers. It is almost like fourth place at the Olympic Games.

The son walking on his father's other side, Mereri, is presented in a completely different manner (Fig. 98). With a resolute gesture, he grasps his father's staff with one hand, as if he felt himself to be the oldest male descendant. Even though he is described identically as his adolescent namesake holding the hoopoe in the mysterious image on the other side of the axis of symmetry, "his son, his beloved, Mereri" (Fig. 146), this is definitely not the same person. In the Egyptian art of this period, there were no scenes depicting the same person a few times at different stages of his life. This is evidenced by the four representations of the eldest son in the described 'family panorama.' In each one, Meruka is portrayed identically, as an adult of the same age. Therefore, Nyankhnefertum had three sons named Mereri.

5 K. Myśliwiec, "Pierwszy upadek państwa faraonów," *Nauka* 4 (2009), pp. 43–66.

6 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, p. 151 (scene 9), fig. 51, pls. LXXXVI–LXXXVII.

However, one would be wrong to think the name Mereri appears only in the tomb's original decoration. It is just as frequently present in the inscriptions added or redone after the head of the family passed away. And it is precisely these inscriptions which reveal the other side of the coin, or the real image of the family that differs from the father's idealistic vision.

We discovered the first retouch of the reliefs made by iconoclasts in one of the two middle scenes that come together at the axis of symmetry (Fig. 95).⁷ On the northern side of this axis, the tomb owner is depicted in the company of his wife and one of his sons touching his father's calf (Fig. 147). It is precisely the representation of this descendant that fell victim to one of the Mereris. The upper part of his torso was hewn off, including the head, as was the bottom part of the inscription accompanying this image.⁸ No attempts were even made to remove the traces left by the chisel. On the uneven surface, a new face was sculpted, while in front of it, red paint was used to write the barely visible name "Mereri." He must have been the one to order this act of vandalism. This was in addition a grave sin, as the destruction of one's image and name were tantamount with annihilating him or her. We do not know the name of Temi's son portrayed primarily in this segment. The usurpation was probably done by one of the two adolescent Mereris depicted as children in the mysterious scene sculpted somewhat further. Upon reaching maturity, probably after their father's death, he asserted his alleged or actual rights, which he expressed by destroying the image of his brother, whom their father had placed higher in the family hierarchy. This elevation was expressed by his presence alongside his parents in the middle scene. Even if the anonymous brother had no longer been alive at that time, erasing him from human memory was an unforgiveable crime.

The Mereri clan was not satisfied with just these retouches. More modifications were discovered on the opposite wall, i.e. the west one. In the vertical strip of decoration that accompanies the polychrome 'false door' on its northern side, the figures of two offering bearers carrying holy oils was labelled with new content (Figs. 147–149).⁹ As noted above, these figures were originally accompanied by schematic inscriptions naming the depicted action, but without listing any names. The two Mereri brothers decided to immortalise themselves also here. They added something to the inscriptions

7 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 145–146 (scene 2), fig. 51, pls. LXXII–LXXIII.

8 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. LXXII–LXXIII c–d; Myśliwiec, "Nobility Marrying Divinity," figs. 7.

9 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 164–165 (scene 14), fig. 54, pl. CII; Myśliwiec, "Nobility Marrying Divinity," figs. 8.



Fig. 147. Fragment of scene (Fig. 95) with a re-carved representation of one of the sons.

located next to the two anonymous middle representations depicting offering bearers. The new inscriptions can be identified immediately, as they were exceptionally sloppy and made using a different technique than the one applied in the original text. In contrast to the precisely modelled hieroglyphs from the first phase of decorating, made as a bas relief and evenly arranged, the later additions have all the features of a hurried and careless job. The name Mereri was written in red paint in front of one of the offering bearers.¹⁰ We immediately recognise the hand of the same scribe who had

10 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pl. CII b, c.



Fig. 148–149. The bearers of holy oils and secondary inscriptions identifying them as the tomb owner’s sons. Relief adjacent to the northern „false door” on the west wall.

executed the iconoclast’s order in the modified representation of one of the brothers on the east wall.

More content was added to the offering bearer depicted slightly lower down (Fig. 149). In the surface of the rock, using the sunken relief technique, lopsided hieroglyphs were carved out without retaining any proportions, skipping one word in the short titlature: “his son ... Great House, Mereri.” In both added inscriptions, the direction of reading the signs was also altered. The original inscriptions had maintained the classical principle that hieroglyphs should be turned in the direction in which the depicted figure is looking or walking. The iconoclast did the opposite: he directed the inscription towards the figure. One important conclusion results from these observations: it was not one but two frustrated brothers bearing the name Mereri who had decided to rewrite their family history, probably after their father’s death.

Traces of the activities of this partnership have also been preserved on the north wall of Temi’s chapel (Figs. 93–94 and 153–154). This time, the brothers made use of the procession of anonymous offering bearers depicted in the bottom register of the decoration. They presented their own vision of

the family hierarchy, adding hieroglyphic inscriptions to each of the twelve depicted people. The first five, bearing animal offerings, were described at the tomb owner's sons.¹¹ As expected, the figure located at the beginning was provided with the name of the oldest male descendant. In the shallow sunken relief, a short inscription was sculpted, spread across one horizontal line and two vertical columns underneath: "his eldest son, inspector of the king's house, Meruka."

The second figure was provided with surprising identification (Fig. 153).¹² "His son from his body, his beloved, Mereri," states the accompanying inscription. What is surprising is not so much the fact that one of the Mereris was promoted to such a high position in the family hierarchy, but rather that such an unusual epithet appears in his titulature. The term "his son from his body" is derived from royal titulature and was used during the Fourth Dynasty, i.e. in the period of the construction of the largest pyramids, as a means to refer to the pharaoh's male progeniture.¹³ Use of this epithet was later expanded to include the children of other high dignitaries, perhaps linked in various ways to the royal family, but by the beginnings of the Sixth Dynasty it had disappeared almost completely. It is absent in the titulature of any member of Fefi or Temi's families. Why then does it appear unexpectedly in a short secondary inscription carved, probably at the request of this Mereri, after his father's death?

There is only one answer: the author of the inscription considered himself to be someone special, with at least traces of royal blood in him, which might also have applied to the other of the younger sons, depicted as a child in the mysterious segment on the east wall (Fig. 146). If this was in fact the case, the tomb owner must have known about it at the moment when the large 'family *tableau*' was being composed for this wall, probably in cooperation with the graphic designer. Such affinity would explain the iconographic distinctiveness and the especially ceremonial character of the scene with the two children.¹⁴ It cannot be excluded that Seshseshet,

11 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkievicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 177–179, fig. 57, pls. CIX–CX a–d; Myśliwiec, "Nobility Marrying Divinity," figs. 9a.

12 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkievicz, *The Funerary Complex*, p. 177, fig. 57, pl. CX a–b; Myśliwiec, "Nobility Marrying Divinity," figs. 9b.

13 M. Baud, *Famille royale et pouvoir sous l'Ancien Empire égyptien*, Le Caire 1999, pp. 159–160; cf. Myśliwiec, "The Mysterious Mereris," p. 76, fn. 29.

14 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkievicz, *The Funerary Complex*, p. 147–148 (scene 4), fig. 51, pls. LXXVI–LXXVII.

Temi's only wife, was of royal origins,¹⁵ but why then would this have not been noted in any way except for labels in the representation of the tomb owner with his youngest children? If Seshseshet were in fact the daughter or at least the granddaughter of Pharaoh Teti, would she have been treated with such a lack of ceremoniousness as we can see on the east wall, where she is clearly competing for priority with the eldest son? And if in fact royal blood ran only in the veins of the youngest siblings, could this not be primarily something to credit 'the ideal wife' with, who had perhaps, in the last phase of her marriage to Temi, interpreted her titles of "acquaintance of the king, priestess of the [Goddess] Hathor, Lady of Sycamore" too literally and enriched her own family by adding offspring, who – on the one hand – brought the tomb owner somewhat dubious honour, but were also a fact difficult to debate? He made the best of a bad situation and included the two boys, if in a somewhat original manner, among his own offspring.

In this context, it is worth remembering that 1000 years later, an analogous ethical approach was canonised on the royal and divine plane. In the political theology of the beginnings of the Eighteenth Dynasty, the motif of the ruler's 'divine birth' appeared, a concoction invented for Queen Hatshepsut when it was necessary to legitimise the reign of a female pharaoh. The need arose to show that she had been born out of a relationship between an earthly queen and the god Amon, and thus, she was obviously predestined to accede to power in the Egyptian state. Theologists invented an iconographic topos in the form of a series of scenes and texts providing a summarised account of this exceptional theogamy. The oldest known version of this religious and political comic book is a sequence of scenes in one of the porticos in the famous Hatshepsut Temple in Deir el-Bahari (West Thebes),¹⁶ where in fact Polish Egyptologists have been working for years. The terrace is called the 'Portico of Birth' from the

15 T. Stasser, *La mère royale Seshseshet et les débuts de la VIe dynastie*, Bruxelles 2013, pp. 55–57 (Seshseshet c).

16 H. Brunner, "Die Geburt des Gottkönigs, Studien zur Überlieferung eines altägyptischen Mythos," *Ägyptologische Abhandlungen* 10 (1964), 2. Aufl. – 1986, pp. 22–89; W. Waitkus, *Untersuchungen zu Kult und Funktion des Luxortempels* ("Aegyptiaca Hamburgensia" 2), Vol. 1, Gladbeck 2008, pp. 66, 72–81; J. Iwaszczuk, *Sacred Landscape of Thebes during the Reign of Hatshepsut. Royal construction projects*, Vol. 2: *Topographical bibliography of the West Bank*, Warszawa 2016, pp. 50–58; S. Bickel, "Worldview and Royal Discourse in the Time of Hatshepsut," in: J. M. Galán, B. M. Bryan, P. F.

series depicting the divine birth decorating the walls of this part of the temple.

The story begins with an erotic miracle. The bedchamber of an earthly queen, an authentic historical figure, is visited for procreational reasons by the god Amon, without asking for permission from her husband, who was of course also a historical figure. In one of the last episodes of the series, a female child is born into the world, the undisputable king of Egypt. None of the theologians seem to have paid much attention to the pharaoh's reputation, even though he was the queen-mother's actual husband. The moderator of this *ménage à trois* was the god of wisdom, Thoth, who appears a few times in various episodes of the story, conversing either with the queen-mother or, at other times, with the god-father.¹⁷ Let us hope that he also talked with the pharaoh, if at all the latter's opinion mattered to anyone in light of the higher *raison d'état*. Everything took place *lege artis* (in compliance with law) and there were no injured parties. It is hard to imagine that Egyptian theology would have allowed for such a solution if such relationships had not been sanctioned much earlier within the mores of the upper class. The pharaoh was in fact also the incarnation of a god: during his lifetime he was associated with Horus; after death with Osiris. At his own request, he could also become any of the other deities, e.g. Seth, considered to be the incarnation of confusion, and yet still reigning – at least in the imagination of the Egyptians – over half the country. If our main character, the loyal priest named Nyankhnepfertum (= Temi), had to share his marital rights with the reigning pharaoh for some reason, it is difficult to judge if this would have caused him grief, especially if this occurred towards the end of his life. Does this not evoke associations with an intimate episode from the history of Poland during Napoleonic times?

If this was actually the situation, the two boys bearing the name Mereri must have known about their unusual origins, even if this was knowledge they only gained after their father's death. This would explain why one of them, probably the elder of the two, not only moved to the top of the family hierarchy but also made clear allusions to his origins in the inscription carved hurriedly next to one of the offering bearers depicted on the north wall.

Dorunan, *Creativity and Innovation in the Reign of Hatshepsut, Papers from the Theban Workshop 2010* ("Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization" 69), Chicago 2014, pp. 23–25.

17 Compare with similar scenes in Luxor: B. Porter, R.L.B. Moss, *A Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs and Paintings*, 2nd ed., Oxford 1972, p. 326 (152, II/1 and III/2–3).

The second of the descendants named Mereri only took fifth place in this race.¹⁸ On top of the concise, modified inscription that had originally been sculpted into the rock surface and contained another name, currently illegible, the name Mereri was written using red paint, without any titles. The graphics of the secondary inscription are again reminiscent of the notation of this name in two other places, i.e. in the middle segment on the east wall and next to one of the two holy oil bearers on the west wall. Thus, the program of modifications on the chapel walls was a one-time action, meticulously thought through and consistently executed. It is clearly visible that one of the boys with this name had been placed in the back seat by being depicted behind four other rivals present on the subsequent segments of the east wall. These would be: Meruka (the eldest son), Mereri I, Djawy and Tjetji. Even if, like his namesake and almost peer, he also had royal blood flowing in him, he had already been dropped from the competition.

The secondary inscriptions next to the twelve offering bearers sculpted on the north wall contain a manifesto so transparent that one is tempted to identify the author of these retouches. Due to the epigraphic distinctiveness of the technique and style, as well as the precision with which the relief was executed, the ninth figure draws attention: the fourth priest from the end, bearing the name Nefer (“The Beautiful One;” Fig. 154).¹⁹ In contrast to the remaining inscriptions, hurriedly carved into the rock surface or only dabbed on using red paint (as in the case of the second Mereri), the name and titles of this participant of the offering procession have been made as a bas relief, with its surface bearing traces of black paint placed there after the inscription was sculpted. Even though only the lower part of this figure’s head has been preserved, the contours of his face show modelling superior to the execution of the remaining figures. Does all this not show that first the author of the retouches was supposed to have been emphasised and then his identity masked? He was no ordinary person as next to his title of priest, he also held the function of “under-inspector of the Great House,” meaning that he had connections in the royal palace that might have facilitated the career of the adolescent Mereris. Ironically, the last of the offering bearers depicted in this procession bears the tomb owner’s name, Temi.

It is worth taking a closer look at the winners. Even if little is stated about them *expressis verbis* (directly), we have certain grounds to develop a case based on circumstantial evidence. After their father’s death, one of the Mereris, probably the elder of the two adolescent children, became

18 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 178–179, fig. 57, pls. CIX b, CX d; Myśliwiec, “Nobility Marrying Divinity,” figs. 9a.

19 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, p. 180, fig. 57, pl. CXI b.

important enough that he felt like he was in his own home in the cult chapel belonging to his parent. No one was capable of stopping him from making free-formed, coarse modifications to the chapel walls, aimed at accentuating his own significance. It is possible that this path was paved by the authentic or perhaps only alleged royal blood flowing in his veins, to which he alluded in the above-mentioned inscription. If in fact his closest surrounding had accepted his pretensions, he might have gone far in his court career.

The search for further traces led us to the famous large and exceptionally beautiful tomb of the Ptahhotep family from the end of the Fifth Dynasty, located at a distance of only two-hundred metres north-west of Temi's mastaba. In one corner of this splendid tomb complex, a modest chamber was added during the Sixth Dynasty, which turned out to be the chapel of a vizier named Mereri.²⁰ Any vizier who did not build his own tomb but was satisfied with an extension to an earlier mastaba must have been exceptionally poor. What is more, part of the flooring in this modest cult place was paved with secondarily used, decorated stone blocks, most probably derived from Pharaoh Teti's sepulchral complex. Egyptologists concluded that the dismantling of architectural structures in the royal tomb complex from the beginnings of the Sixth Dynasty could not have been conducted earlier than towards the end of this dynasty, and – thus – the poor Vizier Mereri must have lived and died in the final phase of the Old Kingdom.²¹

It is hard to agree with such reasoning. We have evidence that some of the royal buildings, even the sacral ones, were sometimes at least partially dismantled during the lifetime of the ruler who had erected them, especially if his reign was long. The stone blocks from such a disassembly were immediately reused as valuable building material in monumental architecture. As a classic example of this procedure may serve the group of architectural elements finely decorated with reliefs bearing the names of Amenhotep III, used along with other stone blocks as material filling the interior of a gigantic pylon erected by this same pharaoh in the famous temple complex in Karnak.²² These blocks obviously originate from another building founded earlier by this same ruler, which was dismantled – perhaps for ideological reasons – at the dawn of the 'religious revolution,' the culmination of which were the reforms proposed by Akhenaten (Amenhotep III's son) with distinct features of solar monotheism. It should also be remembered that the workshops of

20 Myśliwiec, "The Mysterious Mereris," pp. 79–81; "Nobility Marrying Divinity," figs. 10–11.

21 Myśliwiec, "The Mysterious Mereris," p. 80, fn. 54, 55.

22 K. Myśliwiec, *Le portrait royal dans le bas-relief du Nouvel Empire*, Varsovie 1976, p. 68, figs. 129, 132.

Egyptian sculptors must have had an abundance of waste of various types, e.g. pieces of excellent reliefs that had never made their way to their designated spot, for such reasons as cracked stone during sculpting or a sudden change in the concept of the decoration. Not all of the fragments were necessarily destroyed. It is hard to imagine a more honourable use of these works than inserting them into the structure of another sacral or sepulchral building, e.g. into the floor of a tomb chapel, of course after the decorated part has been turned to face downwards.

Therefore, the reliefs probably originating from Pharaoh Teti's tomb complex, inserted into the floor of the cult chapel of a poor vizier named Mereri, cannot be premise for dating this tomb to much later times. The style of the reliefs decorating the walls of this chapel, as well as the tomb owner's titlature suggest a time just after Teti's death; thus, the period in which his sons named Mereri had lived and died. Among the titles of the not-so-well-off vizier, there are some of Teti's, encountered in his tomb, which would correspond to the custom of inheriting a part of the father's official functions, commonplace in the discussed time period.²³ We can thus assume that Vizier Mereri, who added his modest place of eternal rest to a majestic tomb belonging to a famous family from a slightly earlier period and located not far from Teti's sepulchre, is one of the three sons bearing an identical name; probably the eldest one from among those depicted on the east wall next to their father as two adolescents, and thus also the same one who on the north wall legitimised himself with an epithet suggesting he was a royal child. Without such connections, even if these were only alleged, it would have been difficult for him to become the vizier. However, the relative poverty of his tomb suggests rather an honorary title than the authentic exercising of such a high official function. He could not have outranked another *nouveau riche* buried in this vicinity, Vizier Merefnebef, even if the latter was probably his role model for his approach to life.

A lot indicates that we have also been able to identify the tombs of Vizier Mereri's two namesakes, i.e. his brothers depicted on the east wall of their father's cult chapel. These mastabas are located in the cemetery surrounding the pyramid of Pharaoh Teti,²⁴ at that time already filled with the tombs of the highest dignitaries from this ruler's period in power. They might have acquired burial places thanks to the patronage provided by their "father," Teti, who was in fact one of the priests at this pyramid. Neither of them made such a career as their brother; nonetheless, they maintained quite a high level in material terms. One became, e.g., the "secretary of the

23 Myśliwiec, "The Mysterious Mereris," p. 79, fn. 49.

24 Myśliwiec, "The Mysterious Mereris," pp. 82–84.

Toilet-House,” while the second – the “overseer of the Noble Places of the Palace.”²⁵ Their kinship with Temi seems suggested by their titlature, which partially corresponds to the functions performed by their alleged father. The tomb of the first of the sons is especially interesting, with its cult part containing two rooms, each with a ‘false door’ dedicated to a person with the same name – Mereri. In one of them, iconoclasts hammered off the heads of all the images of the tomb owner,²⁶ while in the other, everything remained intact.²⁷ Did they not have time to finish their work before the necropolis guards arrived? As the style of the reliefs in this second interior differs significantly from the reliefs decorating the walls of the first, and – in addition – the inscription on the ‘false door’ contains different titlature than in the neighbouring chamber, it should be assumed that these are the cult places of two different Mereris, father and son, which would be confirmed by the fact that the remains of a few skeletons were found in the burial chamber of this mastaba, including a person much younger than the man who could have been the tomb owner.²⁸

In the case of such an interpretation, it becomes clear why the chapel of the younger of the Mereris, slightly later from the posthumous cult place of the parent, did not fall prey to the conflict: it was either decorated only after the wave of brutal acts of retaliation had passed, or the iconoclasts could distinguish perfectly well between the chapel of the controversial father and the cult place of the blameless son. The reliefs in the son’s chapel are done carelessly, more scratched out into the rock than sculpted, in a very shallow relief, while the style of the decoration on the walls in the neighbouring chapel are comparable to the final phase of sculpting in Temi’s tomb. We have the impression that the crew who did not finish their work in the latter’s tomb was immediately transferred to the son’s place of eternal rest after the father’s death. In neither the first nor the second case did the quality of the workmanship make a good impression.

When we take a look at the unfinished reliefs in the southern part of Temi’s chapel, we are struck by the enormous difference between the workmanship of the master sculptor and what was made by his apprentices, whom he had clearly entrusted with the execution of a large majority of the scenes and inscriptions. It seems that he left them without any supervision. This is

25 Myśliwiec, “The Mysterious Mereris,” p. 82 (fn. 75–78) and 83–84 (fn. 95–96).

26 Myśliwiec, “The Mysterious Mereris,” p. 83, fn. 87.

27 Myśliwiec, “The Mysterious Mereris,” pp. 82–83.

28 E. Strouhal, “The Human Remains from the Tomb of Mereri,” in: W. V. Davies et al., *Saqqâra Tombs, Part 1: The Mastabas of Mereri and Wernu*, London 1984, p. 35.



Fig. 150. Representations of the tomb owner and his names in the northern segment of the double ‘false door’ (Figs. 135–136).

especially visible in the double ‘false doors’ sculpted onto the southern part of the west wall (Figs. 135–138 and 150–152).²⁹ The work done by the master can be identified immediately due to the precise execution characterising the central relief of the three jambs found on the right side of the north segment (Figs. 150–151).³⁰ The hieroglyphs stand out due to the classical elegance of their proportions and the precision of the rendered details, characterising, e.g., a male head shown *en face* in a specimen of the above-mentioned sign with the phonetic value *her* (Figs. 110–120), or the austere modelling of the owl’s body constituting the phoneme *m* (Figs. 121–131). The inscription’s composition, similarly to the orientation of the hieroglyphs on this jamb, is a model of exactitude. The modelling of the face in Temi’s representation at the bottom of this vertical decorative sequence is especially meticulous (Fig. 151).³¹ Similar virtuosity in the execution of details and noble facial expression is present in the reliefs in the most magnificent tombs from the turn of the Fifth and

29 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 181–191, fig. 59, pls. CXII–CXIX.

30 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 184–188, fig. 59, pls. CXIII, CXV a, c.

31 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pl. CXV c.



Fig. 151. Portrait of Nyankhnepfertum sculpted in the northern segment of the ‘false door’ by a master sculptor (Fig. 150).

the Sixth Dynasties. We can easily identify the hand of one of the masters of the Saqqara school.³²

Unfortunately, this is the only part of the double ‘false doors’ executed with such perfection. The master left behind a model to imitate and disappeared. His deputies did not have such artistic competences nor even the desire to imitate his work (Fig. 152). They did, however, boast a specific sense of humour, revealing a fondness for contrariness and bawdy associations incongruous with the gravity of the tomb. We can note the schematic contour lines and careless execution of details in the modelling of Temi’s face on the remaining jambs. Yet another deviation from the canon is the inaccurate

32 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkievicz, *The Funerary Complex*, p. 185, fn. 96; K. Myśliwiec, “A ‘School’ of Kagemni’s master?,” in: P. Jánosi, H. Vymazalová (eds.), *The Art of Describing. The World of Tomb Decoration as Visual Culture of the Old Kingdom. Studies in Honour of Yvonne Harpur*, Prague 2018, pp. 263, fig. 1.



Fig. 152. ‘Portrait’ of tomb owner done by apprentice stoneworker (Fig. 150).

notation of the hieroglyph with the phonetic value *tem*, depicting a sled, and present in the name Nyankhnepfertum and Temi’s ‘beautiful name.’ These last two appear alternately, like two versions of a calling card, atop each of the six representations of the tomb owner in the bottom part of the ‘doors’ (Fig. 136).³³ Only in one case is the notation of the sign *tem* correct, i.e. in the above-described model jamb (Fig. 150). In the five remaining representations of the sled, they were inverted back to front, i.e. in the opposite direction to the correct arrangement of the other hieroglyphs. However, this graphic joke was not enough to satisfy the sculptors. They knew that they could take more liberties. They over-stylised the hieroglyph *tem* on the southern ‘false door’ forming a pair with the above-described one. The sled was turned into a phallus (Fig. 155),³⁴ which in fact functions in hieroglyphic script, but as a

33 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkievicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. CXIV a, CXV a.

34 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkievicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. CXLIII k, CXXIII b; K. Myśliwiec, “Silly jokes of a Master’s deputy (Sixth Dynasty, Saqqara),” in: Z.



Fig. 153. Fragment of the procession of offering bearers in the bottom register of scenes on the north wall of Temi's chapel (Figs. 93–94): individual labelled as Mereri, in the inscription added later using red paint.

plus – preserves the sign's original phonetic value *met* and content linked to the act of copulation. If we were dealing with poets instead of stonemasons, we could suspect them of a much more sophisticated joke: that the simultaneous change in both the orientation of the hieroglyph, as in the case of the first 'door,' and the modification of its shape to render the phoneme *met*, as



Fig. 154. Another person from this procession, an individual named Nefer. His name written using the bas relief technique contrasts with the palaeography of his companions' names, hieroglyphs carved in sunken relief.



Fig. 155. Obscene stylisation of a hieroglyph in the inscription carved onto the 'false door' by an apprentice stoneworker: the representation of a sled (the sign *tem*) shaped as a phallus (the sign *met*).



Fig. 156. Evidence of the activities of the apprentices-jokesters in the façade of Nyankhnepfertum's cult chapel: re-carved hieroglyph *tem* (a sled) in the tomb owner's name.

in the second one, form a double inversion, which – similarly as two minuses in arithmetic calculations equal a plus – restores the sign to its original value.

Throughout the long Pharaonic epoch, Egyptian writing abounded in various graphic jokes, which we today refer to generally as cryptography. There is no lack of rebuses and charades, including completely chaotic scatterings of signs.³⁵ However, they appear almost exclusively in texts of a sacral or sepulchral character, linked to the royal sphere, where they could be understood by a narrow group of priests. In the case of Temi's tomb chapel, these are rather the products of the artisans' bawdy imagination, who decided to make a mockery both of their master's artistic perfection and the seriousness of the place and moment. They probably knew that the tomb owner's death was nearing and that his numerous progeny did not monitor at all the

35 K. Myśliwiec, *Święte znaki Egiptu*, 2nd ed., Warszawa 2001, pp. 134–154.



Fig. 157. The junction of two inscribed architraves at the meeting point of two adjacent chapels: one belonging to Temi and the other to his eldest son (?) (Il. 22).

progress made in the decorating of their father's tomb, busy mainly with their quarrels over the inheritance he was to leave behind. As confirmation of this hypothesis may serve the fact that the inscription with the obscene shape of the *tem* sign is present only in those two scenes where Temi is portrayed in the company of his wife. These scenes adjoin antithetically in the south-western corner of the chapel. There is a large representation of the seated couple on the south wall (Fig. 139),³⁶ while the 'false door' at the end of the decoration on the west wall contains a miniature motif of the walking couple repeated a few times,³⁷ always in a warm embrace (Fig. 138).

It seems that the authors of these jokes were so happy with their work that they decided in a similar spirit to retouch the earlier made inscription, classically correct in its form, located in the lintel of the tomb façade (Figs. 156–158). They must have thought it was worth their while to crown it with a modification of the *tem* sign in Temi's name sculpted, probably by the master himself, in the next miniature with the representation of the tomb owner, his wife and eldest son. This scene constitutes a 'calling card' at the end of a long 'ideal biography' sculpted above the entrance to the

36 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. CXXI, CXXIII b.

37 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. CXVII–CXIX.



Fig. 158. The façade of Temi's chapel, northern part. Underneath the architrave, the anepigraphic part of the wall is visible, with the remains of plaster prepared for the unexecuted decoration.

chapel(Fig. 156).³⁸ The pranksters hammered off the correctly sculpted hieroglyph in the shape of a sled and, without even taking the trouble of smoothening the rock surface, they re-sculpted it into a similar sign but inverted from left to right. Observing the consistency with which they attempted to mock the family idyll the father had imagined into creation, one can wonder whether the authors of these ideas were not actually Temi's younger sons, who long before their parent's death must have been very

38 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pl. LXV d.

agitated by the domination of the eldest brother. The only weapon they could use at that moment was mockery. However, at some point after their father's death, they went a step further, as we have already observed above. Perhaps once again this was one of the younger Mereris?

On the wave of the graphic jokes, inscriptions were also carved into the above-mentioned offering table that accompanied the polychrome 'false door' in the northern part of the west wall (Fig. 100).³⁹ This heavy slab, hewn out of limestone of the best quality, has two rectangular pools sculpted into the middle of its surface, and next to them – hieroglyphic inscriptions executed so sloppily that their author could even be suspected of wanting to sabotage the original concept. These inscriptions contain various elements of the deceased's titlature and names. Arranged asymmetrically, they consist of hieroglyphs with skewed proportions sculpted in the form of a very shallow sunken relief. The dimensions of some signs are miniaturised to a caricatural level or enlarged in relation to the neighbouring hieroglyphs, while their contours display the erratic handwork of the sculptor.⁴⁰ Once again, the modelling of the sled in the *tem* hieroglyph displays exceptional diversity and deviations from the classical form. One has the impression that this important element of the tomb furnishings was executed during the last phase of work, probably by the same crew who had made the unfinished reliefs in the southern part of the chapel.

Nonetheless, it must be stated that the creative imagination of the sculptors employed here also allowed for the introduction of a series of original ideas, especially in terms of the composition of the individual scenes. For example, filling the entire east wall with a family portrait in the form of two symmetrical sequences depicting the tomb owner eightfold (Figs. 95–97) should be considered an act of great artistic courage.⁴¹ Previously attested only on architraves and 'false doors' on which the figures were much smaller, this motif was monumentalised already on the façade of Merefnebef's tomb, where it was placed in the bottom register of the decoration (Il. 5; Fig. 41). The only logical explanation of the decision made by Temi to transfer this decorative element to the chapel interior seems to be an attempt at saving the figures of his wife and sons, obviously important for him, from the brutal actions of iconoclasts, prey to which had fallen the reliefs in the chapel of

39 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 161–163, fig. 55, pls. LXIX b, XCIII–XCVIII; Myśliwiec, "Silly jokes," figs. 22–28.

40 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. XCVI–XCVII, CXLVIII h, i, m, n, o.

41 See fn. 1; K. Myśliwiec, *L'aspectivité au service de la perspective; à la recherche de la troisième dimension sur le plan*, Fs. A. Labrousse – forthcoming, fig. 3.

his posthumous neighbour. As we have already seen, this was not enough to avert misfortune. Temi's male progeniture were visibly consumed by conflict after his death.

In some of the formal solutions applied, one can see a search for three-dimensionality in the two-dimensional image carved onto the surface. Whenever the tomb owner is depicted in the company of two male descendants walking at his sides, the son portrayed from the front is standing a level higher than the two remaining figures, as if floating in the air (Figs. 95–98 and 146). This emphasises its distance, and thus its presence on the other side of the main figure. The son depicted behind this figure is walking on the same plane as his parent; therefore, he is located closer to the observer.⁴² The 'false doors' with overlapping jambs at their point of connection is the most original iconographic idea, so far unattested anywhere else (Fig. 135).⁴³ Even if this solution resulted purely from the content of the scenes, deviating from symmetry in favour of three-dimensionality should be considered revolutionary in Old Kingdom reliefs.

When finally, after six years of patient waiting, in 2003 we began the process of unearthing Temi's cult chapel hewn into the same rock shelf as Fefi's chapel, we had expected it to be the second in a sequence of at least a few similar tombs running in a straight line from north to south. However, at that time we still had no idea that we were exploring a secondarily-used quarry originating from the times of the construction of the world's oldest pyramid and that the rock formations in which later tombs were made could take on such surprising forms, dictated by this very function of the plateau during a period 300 years earlier than the tombs.⁴⁴ To the surprise of the archaeologists, it turned out that just beyond the northern edge of Temi's tomb, the face of the rock wall veers at a straight angle to the left, i.e. westward, forming something like a rectangular courtyard (Il. 22; Figs. 91 and 157).⁴⁵ More chapels and burial shafts had been dug into its north wall. However, all the remaining ones had not been completed.

The first adjoins Temi's chapel as if they were to form an inseparable whole (Fig. 157).⁴⁶ This is reminiscent of the idea for the double 'false

42 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, fig. 51, pls. LXX–LXXII, LXXIV, LXXVI, LXXX, LXXXII, LXXXIV, LXXXVI.

43 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 181–191, fig. 59, pls. CXII–CXIII, CXVII.

44 F. Welc, J. Trzciniński, "Geology of the Site," in: *Old Kingdom Structures*, pp. 333–334; see Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pls. XXXII–XXXV.

45 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pl. XXXV.

46 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz, *The Funerary Complex*, fig. 30, pls. LXII a–b, LXIII a, c.

doors' described above, but also of the north-western corner in Temi's chapel, where on two adjoining walls two scenes depicting the offering table meet, and – finally – of the south-western corner of this same chamber with adjoining scenes portraying the tomb owner with his spouse. The logic of the layout suggests that this tomb should belong to Temi's eldest son. It was supposed to be almost a copy of his father's tomb in terms of its size and shape. Similarly to the case of the previous one, an architrave runs above the narrow entrance, in which an 'ideal biography' has been carved with similar content as in Temi's chapel. It provides the same formula and the same special days for the performance of rituals and bringing offerings.⁴⁷ The preserved fragments of the titlature mention some function performed by the tomb owner at the pyramid of Pharaoh Unas, located nearby.⁴⁸ He might perhaps have inherited this honour from Temi, who was a priest of Unas's posthumous cult and had positioned this pharaoh at the beginning of his titlature.

Unfortunately, our hopes of identifying the owner of this 'house of eternity' were dashed by the fact that the left (i.e. western) part of the inscription on the architrave had crumbled away already in antiquity due to the exceptionally poor structure of the rock.⁴⁹ We can only guess for whom this tomb was intended, while also having no certainty the addressee was even buried here. The bottom part of the façade was not decorated, while the interior of the oblong chapel, along with the alleged cult place, continues to bear numerous traces of various stone-working chisels.⁵⁰ The short corridor leading to this room is not perpendicular to the front wall and the shape of the chapel is irregular.⁵¹ The remains of later arrangements of the interior indicate that it might have been used as a cult place. However, nothing implies that any of the shafts dug in the vicinity of the chapel were directly linked to it.

The next tomb, adjacent to the described chapel from the west, is at an even earlier stage of completion. Much smaller than the previous one, it also has a never-completed slanted chapel (II. 5).⁵² A mass of rock was removed in the upper part of the planned interior, determining its contours, but there

47 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 92–94, fig. 34, pls. XLVII–XLVIII.

48 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, p. 93, fig. 34.

49 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pl. XLVII b–d, XLVIII d–f.

50 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, p. 94, pls. XXXV b, XLVII d, XLIX–LI.

51 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, fig. 30.

52 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 94–96, fig. 30, pl. LII.

was not enough time to hew out the bottom part of the chapel. In its current form, the room is little more than a metre high and one would have to crawl inside it rather than walk upright. The only burial shaft one might be able to associate with this chapel was hewn into the rock in the north-western corner of the courtyard linking all the three described structures, which together form Temi's sepulchral complex.⁵³ However, neither the burial shaft nor the burial chamber was ever completed. Even if the latter was used for a burial, it is certain that the chapel adjacent to the shaft was never used as a place for revering the deceased as it remained anepigraphic. Not a single hieroglyph was carved into its façade. However, it might have been the next chapel, with the crumbled name of the owner carved into the architrave in the pediment, which was the actual cult place of the person buried here. This was indicated by traces of burnt offering piles in front of the chapel.

The architecture of these tombs from the final phase of the Old Kingdom completes the image of the gradual decline of Egyptian society towards the end of the third millennium BC, which has been outlined based on an analysis of the scenes and inscriptions sculpted in the tombs of the noblemen from this period.⁵⁴

53 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, p. 96 (shaft 59), fig. 30, pls. XXXII–XXXIII, XXXV a, LIII.

54 Myśliwiec, "Pierwszy upadek państwa faraonów," pp. 43–66.

Chapter 10. Renaissance of the necropolis after two thousand years

Abstract: Upper necropolis: a cemetery from the Ptolemaic Period. Cartonnages in art and religion. Surprising epaulettes. Reminiscences of the provisional tomb of Alexander the Great?

Keywords: mummification technology, Ptolemies, cosmopolitan Memphis, anthropology, bones as witnesses, diseases.

There are few places in Saqqara with such a clear stratigraphy as the cemetery located on the western side of Djoser's pyramid. Two layers meet here between which lies a chronological gap amounting to 2000 years. Towards the end of the third millennium BC, when, probably as a consequence of violent climate change, the burial of the dead in the depths of the former quarry was abandoned, sand blown in from the desert began to gradually cover the necropolis (Fig. 1). Over the centuries, enough of it accumulated that its layer in some places – especially in the 'Dry Moat' – became more than five metres high. It was only towards the end of the fourth century BC that the inhabitants of Memphis once again began to be buried here, this time on a mass scale. Tombs were no longer constructed. Hollows in the ruins of the mastabas from the Old Kingdom sufficed or even pits hurriedly dug in the sand.¹ At times, especially in the beginnings of this period, anthropoid-like hollows were hewn into the rock surface for the dead (fig. 62). These structures were usually covered with stone blocks or mud brick, originating, of course, from the disassembly of 2000-year-old tombs, for this purpose using even the masterfully processed white limestone ashlar, which had originally belonged to the recessed wall surrounding the pyramid *temenos*. The products of the stone-working masters, who had once worked under Imhotep, found a secondary usage, if among the lower levels of the social ladder.

The excavations conducted up until 2015 revealed almost 600 burials at this late necropolis, which for stratigraphic reasons has been named the Upper Necropolis (Fig. 159). The first to be unearthed was the mummy of a

1 K. Myśliwiec (ed.), *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), Part 1; M. Radońska et al., *The Catalogue with Drawings*, Part 2; M. Kaczmarek et al., *Studies and Photographic Documentation*, Warsaw 2008; Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, Warsaw 2004, pp. 38–39, 42, pl. XXIV a, c–f, LXXXV a–e, h; Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, Warsaw 2010, pp. 25–78, pls. I–XXXI.



Fig. 159. Archaeologists unearthing the skeleton burials in the Upper Necropolis before recording them.

teenage person (Figs. 39–40).² Untouched by looters, it lay in a spot we did not yet know was the courtyard in front of Vizier Merefnebef's cult chapel. Underneath the layer of sand, we unearthed a hollow hewn into a levelled rock surface. There was a clear outline of the part meant for the mummy's head, then it moved on to the broad rounded shoulders, and – finally – the body, gradually narrowing towards the feet. This hollow with an anthropoid contour had been prepared for an adult as its size significantly exceeded what was needed to fit the dimensions of the adolescent buried there. The mummy had been covered with a mat, secured in place with heavy stones along the edge of the hollow.

We wondered about the clear outlines of two layers visible in the profile of the grave's walls: the bottom one, made of solid rock, and a coating on top with the structure of a very thick clay pugging containing a large number of animal bone particles inside the mass (Fig. 40).³ The pugging was also clearly stratified into thinner layers, which indicates that it was formed in multiple stages. When we found out that the youth had been buried in the courtyard of a high dignitary's tomb that was 2000 years older, it became

2 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XXIV e–f, XXVIII a, c; M. Radomska et al., *The Catalogue with Drawings* (Saqqara III, Part 1), pp. 48–52, pl. CC a–c.

3 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XXVIII a, c, XXVI a–d.

clear that the osseous material constituted the remains of offerings made earlier and burnt in front of the chapel as part of the tomb owner's posthumous cult. The thickness and multiple layers of the pugging turned out to be very important. This contrasted with the thin layer of clay covering the rock surface in the so-called lower courtyard, hewn directly in front of the entrance to the chapel and located a metre lower than the upper courtyard adjacent from the west, with its distinctively thicker pugging.⁴ This allows for the conclusion that Merefnebef's tomb was dug within an area occupied by an earlier sepulchral complex, of which only traces have been preserved, e.g. the surface of the courtyard which had been in use for a long time. If this in fact was the case, the unusual location of the burial shaft within Merefnebef's mastaba, without any correlation to the 'false door' sculpted into the west wall of his chapel, would be understandable (Il. 22). This shaft would have originally been part of another sepulchral structure. This once again proves how much can be concluded from the tiniest of details if we observe the terrain carefully during archaeological explorations.

Thus, the mummy of a young person lay in a rock hollow, shrouded in a polychrome cartonnage, with its form suggesting the burial date: the early phase of the Ptolemaic period, probably the third century BC (Figs. 39–40). The 'envelope' covering the entire mummy, made from a few layers of hardened canvas and with a stucco surface, was fitted to the shape of the body. During the reign of the Ptolemies, it was made primarily from a few separate overlapping elements, connected skilfully using, e.g., transverse bands to seem like one continuous surface.⁵ The child's face was covered with yellow ochre with a shiny texture, which could easily be confused with gold foil. The huge, carefully modelled eyes with clear contours express peace and contemplation. The outline of the lips is accentuated by a thin black line. The chin is encompassed from ear to ear by a representation of the winged solar disc, while the entire head is covered by a type of wig or scarf with two sheets falling to the chest and a wider one onto the back. The head attire is an intense blue colour, also encountered in other parts of the decoration on the cartonnage.

After having studied a larger number of mummies at this necropolis, we were to find out that these were precisely the features that characterised a workshop, or perhaps even a 'school,' responsible for preparing the dead for their journey into the Netherworld. The winged solar disc encircling the deceased's jaw, sometimes replaced with a scarab, has only been attested at

4 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 62–63, pls. XXV g, XXIX a–d, XXXI.

5 A. Schweitzer, "Étude des parures de cartonnage de momies de la nécropole ouest de Saqqara," in: *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), p. 523.

this one cemetery from the Ptolemaic period, while the predominance of intense blue, covering a white foundation, and the yellow ochre imitating gold are features so diagnostic for the cartonnage in the necropolis we had discovered that without fear of making a mistake one can attribute to Saqqara any similar mummies of unknown provenience that have made their way to various world museums, sometimes inherited from treasure seekers.⁶

The presence of the winged solar disc or scarab clearly indicates the influences of the Heliopolitan religion. The sun, revered under various forms and names, was the main deity in the local pantheon of one of the largest religious centres of ancient Egypt, referred to as Heliopolis by the Greeks, i.e. the 'City of the Sun.' Located at a distance of only about 30 km from Memphis, on the opposite, i.e. eastern, side of the Nile, Heliopolis played a leading role in shaping the religious consciousness of the Egyptians, and even in the political history of their country. The ruler was associated with the sun, i.e. the god Re, while the solar disc, referred to by the name Aton, became one of the deities revered by the 'heretic-pharaoh,' Akhenaten, towards the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty. The self-resurrecting sun, called Khepri, depicted in the form of a scarab, would every morning crawl out of the body of the winged goddess of the sky, Nut. The setting sun was called Atum, and one of his many hypostases was a necklace, either offered to him or identified directly as being him. It was believed that this adornment on the neck reanimated the dead and secured their bodies from decaying. Both attributes, the multi-layered necklace and the representation of the Goddess Nut as a female with extended wings, are yet further elements of most cartonnages from the Ptolemaic period. They appear in the upper part of the torso.

However, the head was the most important part of the body.⁷ The Egyptians were consumed by a fear that it would be torn off the body, while simultaneously hoping that the gods would help it find its proper position in the case of such a misfortune. Such ideas appear earlier, in the *Pyramid Texts* (third millennium BC), which were in fact a transcript of much older texts, and later also in the *Coffin Texts* and *The Book of the Dead* (second millennium BC), i.e. in the most important compendia of religious knowledge that accompanied the dead to the afterworld over the course of Egyptian history. The head was protected by a mask. The idea for such a veil is attested already for the Fifth Dynasty (the Old Kingdom), when a shroud was modelled to cover the deceased's face. The use of a mask became widespread as of the Middle Kingdom (the first half of the second millennium BC). Its colour imitated gold identified with the skin of the gods. This shows the

6 Schweitzer, "Étude," pp. 538–542.

7 Schweitzer, "Étude," pp. 521–522.

democratisation of religious imagery in the sepulchral sphere that occurred at the turn of the epochs. While earlier only the pharaoh was identified with Osiris, the god of the dead, at that time any Egyptian became him after death. During the New Kingdom, masks made from authentic gold or silver only appeared in royal circles, while cartonnage masks covered the faces of the growing numbers of dignitaries. Their mummies were deposited inside 'envelopes' enshrouding the entire body. After the New Kingdom, this custom spread to even broader social circles. The corpses were placed inside a stiff 'shell' attached with a thread to the back. Its entire surface was covered in paintings with rich polychromy. This decoration contained mainly mythological scenes with magical content, enabling the deceased to live and avoid any dangers in the Netherworld. With time, the cartonnage began to compete with coffins, because not everyone could afford a chest made from metal, stone or even wood, while the date of the burial was pressing.

Innovations in the techniques used for the production of cartonnage were introduced at the beginning of the Ptolemaic period: the 'envelope' encompassing the entire corpse was replaced with a few separate elements which were either applied as a set and partly overlapped, as if forming a whole (Figs. 160–164), or they constitute separate, smaller or larger plaques applied to the linen surface of the mummy in its various parts (Figs. 172–173).⁸ Many mummies received only some elements of this cladding; however, all of them had masks, the most important part of the cartonnage. Separating the mask from the other elements could awaken the fear of tearing the head off the rest of the body. Thus, it comes as no surprise that magical shields were added to some of the masks in Saqqara in the form of the symbol of the Heliopolitan god of the sun, i.e. a solar disc or scarab spreading its wings on the jaw of the deceased. To some, it must have seemed even more effective to attach the head to the torso with a hard stick inserted into the body during mummification. We found a few examples of such stiffening. It cannot be excluded that they were necessary due to the state of preservation of the corpses.

The scarab, which sometimes replaced the solar disc on the chin, also frequently appears in the upper part of the chest, i.e. in the vicinity of the heart. The association of the symbol of the regenerating sun with this organ in a dead person's body had a long tradition in pharaonic Egypt.⁹ The *Pyramid Texts* already contained a formula expressing fear of the heart being ripped out of the body of the deceased. The heart performed the role of one's conscience during the day of judgement when one stood before Osiris. Towards the end of the First Intermediary Period, i.e. at the turn of the third and the

8 Schweitzer, "Étude," p. 522.

9 Schweitzer, "Étude," pp. 539–540.

second millennia BC, the first ‘heart scarabs’ appear, i.e. a large amulet in the shape of the beetle, placed on top of the mummy near the heart muscle. It contained a magical text carved onto its flat side. This inscription is a fragment of a chapter from *The Book of the Dead* most frequently recorded on papyri. The quotation from chapter 31A repeated on the scarabs refers to the heart: “My heart of my mother, my heart of my mother, my heart muscle of my incarnations, do not stand against me as witness, do not speak against me in front of the tribunal, do not show hostility towards me in the presence of the guard of weights.” This last association was illustrated in *The Book of the Dead* with a scene of weighing the heart. Even in the Roman period, the last works of Egyptian religious literature, e.g. *The Books of Breathings*, attest to the special significance of this organ for the dead.¹⁰ Therefore, associations with heart amulets inspired the creators of cartonnages in the Ptolemaic period to depict the scarab, sometimes protectively spreading its wings, in the vicinity of the deceased’s heart muscle.

Exceptionally rich symbolism is attached to the large necklace, portrayed just underneath the neck of the cartonnage mask, frequently between the long sheets of the head attire (Il. 25; Figs. 160–161).¹¹ In accordance with its Old Egyptian name (*wesekh*, “wide”), in some cases the necklace covers the entire upper part of the torso. It is made up of numerous, sometimes even over a dozen concentric rows of pearls in various shapes. The majority of its elements are various symbols of rebirth and resurrection. Floral motifs are frequently repeated, such as lotus flowers and buds of papyrus plants, but also beads in the shape of teardrops or geometric patterns. Rows of beads representing the *udjat* eye, one of the most popular symbols in Egyptian religion, are an original feature of some necklaces adorning the chest part of the Ptolemaic cartonnages in Saqqara. The eye was associated with the wound inflicted on Horus in his contest against Seth, Osiris’s enemy, and thus with the resurrection of the god of the dead. This same idea is expressed by the clasps locking the necklace at both its ends. It usually has the shape of a falcon’s head with a solar disc on it, sometimes originally stylised (Fig. 161). Thus, this takes us into the sphere of the Osirian myth, as this bird is usually associated with Horus. The solar disc emphasises his role as the lord of the heavens, in which he appears an infinite number of times in the scenes sculpted or painted onto the walls of temples and tombs, spreading his protective falcon’s wings above an action, usually playing out between a king and the gods. It is almost as if the heavens were expressing their acquiescence to everything that was happening on earth.

10 J.-Cl. Goyon, *Rituels funéraires de l’Ancienne Égypte* (“Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient” 4), Paris 1972, p. 191.

11 Schweitzer, “Étude,” pp. 524, 527, 532, 535, 540.



Fig. 160. Mummy in a cartonnage (early Ptolemaic period) 'sitting' on the edge of a 2000-year earlier tomb.

Fragments of authentic necklaces are found in many tombs. They show the variety of materials used in the production of the thousands of pearls, from faience, through colourful stones, glass paste, fired clay and shells, to gold and silver. At times, these are masterpieces of Egyptian craftwork. The presence of each of these elements, its shape and colour had a specific meaning in sepulchral magic, the aim of which was to ensure the benevolence of the gods towards the deceased in the afterlife.

Untouched by looters, the burial of the teenager from the beginnings of the Ptolemaic period, discovered during our first excavation campaign in the courtyard of the vizier's tomb from 2000 years earlier, turned out to be a harbinger of what awaited us in the upper layer of the cemetery. For the Ptolemaic necropolis, it was just as symptomatic as Merefnebef's tomb was for the Old Kingdom cemetery lying beneath it. The first to be discovered, the vizier's tomb turned out to be the most beautiful and representative testimony of its times. Similarly, the beautiful cartonnage from the beginnings of the



Fig. 161. Decoration of mummy cartonnage (Fig. 160).

Ptolemaic period, found in the same area as that occupied by the vizier's tomb, can be considered the first link in an evolution that lasted a little longer than 300 years, more or less from the times of Alexander the Great until the death of the famed Cleopatra VII, and perhaps even slightly longer. The agglomeration of burials of the cosmopolitan community which at that time inhabited Memphis, the ancient metropolis of pharaonic Egypt, competing with philhellenic Alexandria for the favour of the Ptolemies, residing in the latter, turned out to be a valuable source of various information about this society, beginning with the anthropological and demographic sphere and ending with burial customs, which appear to have been the sum of various traditions rooted in the pharaonic epoch. History led the Greeks and Romans to extinguish the lights of a great civilisation, which had fascinated them to such an extent that they brought about its symbiosis with Mediterranean culture.

Few of the burials at the Upper Necropolis have been preserved in such a good state as the grave of this young person in the courtyard of the vizier's tomb. The majority had been plundered already in antiquity by



Fig. 162. Fragment of cartonnage (Fig. 160): segment decorating the legs.

‘professionals,’ who knew perfectly well what to expect from the mummies. They were interested primarily in the amulets, frequently made from precious materials. The repositories of these artefacts were located in the vicinity of the heart, i.e. the mummy’s torso; to be more precise, the layer of bandages and shrouds wrapping the embalmed body, among which the magical miniatures were inserted. They were not as easily accessible as it might seem, since the linen encasings were in many cases so hardened with resin that they had to be cracked using hammers. Not the entire mummy was torn apart; it sufficed to break open its upper part, while also ripping open ‘Osiris’s’ torso just to be sure. The thieves developed a quick technique, even constructing a ‘workshop’ that saved time and energy. After unearthing the hollow covered with stone blocks, they would take out the mummy, place it on a slanting platform constructed using stones, in such a way that the torso protruded beyond its upper edge. Using a hammer or a heavy stone they smashed open the upper part of the body, which would immediately give them some idea of the contents of the studied object. We discovered



Fig. 163. Chest for the mummy's feet.



Fig. 164. Sandals seen from underneath (the soles): painting on the chest (Fig. 160).



Fig. 165. Burial from Ptolemaic period with funerary equipment *in situ*: canopic chest and figurine of Ptah-Sokar-Osiris.

one such ‘workshop’ in the middle of the western part of the necropolis.¹² A mummy was still lying on the platform, but without its upper part. The mangled corpse or just its fragment was then deposited back into the rocky hollow and hurriedly covered with stone slabs.

Only a few mummified bodies managed to escape this fate. One of the most beautiful cartonnages found at this necropolis covered a corpse that had fallen into a hollow atop a burial shaft from the Old Kingdom, probably just after the funeral as it had still been flexible enough to bend in the middle and ‘sit down’ at the edge of the shaft (Fig. 160).¹³ As a result, the polychromy was perfectly preserved on a few stucco-linen cartonnage segments sewn onto the surface of the mummy (Figs. 161–164). An enormous necklace covering almost the entire torso, made up of sixteen rows of pearls in a large variety of shapes, is especially impressive. On the middle part of the body, the crouching Goddess Nut with a solar disc on her head spreads her wings, surrounded by miniature figures of deities and demons accompanying the deceased in the Netherworld.

12 M. Radomska et al., *The Catalogue with Drawings* (Saqqara III, Part 1), pp. 291–292, pl. CXLVII a–c.

13 Radomska et al., *The Catalogue with Drawings*, pp. 531–534, pl. CCXXIV–CCXL.



Figs. 166–167. Two faces of the canopic chest (Fig. 165).

In a few cases, burials left alone by the looters contain not only corpses shrouded in cartonnage with fabulously colourful polychromy but also artefacts belonging to the standard equipment of a tomb for a middle-class dignitary during the Ptolemaic period (Figs. 165–168). This primarily included a tall wooden canopic chest, which originally might have contained the inner organs of the embalmed body, as well as a mummiform figurine of the god Ptah-Sokar-Osiris, made from the same material (Figs. 166–167). Both these items were also richly polychromed, while the iconography and style of the motifs that adorned them indicate that the same workshop produced them, if not in fact the very same person responsible also for making the cartonnage. We also sometimes find beautiful amulets next to the mummies, usually from



Fig. 168. Figurine of Ptah-Sokar-Osiris (Fig. 165).

Egyptian azure- or green-glazed faience. They depict various deities, whose benevolence might come in useful for the deceased in the afterlife. Other frequently encountered items include figurines representing the god of wisdom, Thoth, with the head of a monkey or human, as well as depictions of the patron of mummification, Anubis, with a canine head, or the benevolent Goddess Thoeris in the form of a crocodile-headed hippopotamus.¹⁴

In the context of the Upper Necropolis, but without any link to a specific grave, we also found an assemblage of bronze figurines, among which the dominant motif, aside from Osiris, was that of the Apis bull.¹⁵ They probably came here to the cemetery designated for humans from the Serapeum, the nearby necropolis of holy animals, which played an exceptionally important role in the religion, especially the political theology of pharaonic Egypt. It seems that the origins were the same for a statue, of which we found the stone base with a carved demotic inscription identifying the ‘sponsor,’ probably an item of a votive nature, discovered in the Upper Necropolis, where it was used secondarily in the brick casing of a cult place.¹⁶ There is a lot to

14 A. Kowalska, “Catalogue of Finds from Outside the Burial Chambers,” in: *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), pp. 388–399, 403, 410–415, pls. CCLV–CCLVII.

15 Kowalska, “Catalogue of Finds,” pp. 403–410, pl. CCLIX.

16 J. K. Winnicki, *Base of a Statue with Demotic Inscription*, in: *The Upper Necropolis*, pp. 383–388, pl. CCLIV.

indicate that in the beginnings of the Ptolemaic period a special ideological affinity developed between the neighbouring places of eternal rest designated for bulls and humans, the sources of which were not necessarily religious.

However, the majority of people were buried much more modestly during this period than holy animals. The graves of the former did not have any architecture aside from the anthropoid hollows hewn into rock, usually covered with irregularly shaped stone blocks. In turn, the monumental structures of Old Kingdom noblemen's tombs preserved until the final centuries BC were willingly used as spots for secondary burials. As if into an envelope, some mummies were slipped inside the crevices that had formed over the course of millennia between or underneath the brick walls of the mastabas. The upper parts of many ancient burial shafts were used in a special way. If they were broad enough, the mummies were simply deposited into the ancient backfill. In turn, if they were too narrow for a secondary burial, hollows were made in the two opposite walls of the shaft, one for the head, the other for the feet, in order to slip the deceased inside the thus prepared frame. The body would rest on the backfill, which could later turn out to be unstable, e.g., during the next earthquake. In the eastern part of the necropolis, closer to Djoser's pyramid, in the Ptolemaic period almost every centimetre of the levelled rock surface between the burial shafts had been used for hewing out anthropoid pits to take in increasingly more 'Osirises' (Fig. 62).¹⁷ After being unearthed by archaeologists, the copse of these holes seems like the surface of Swiss cheese. It is very obvious that the area directly adjacent to the recessed wall encircling the oldest building was the most desired burial place, not only during the Old Kingdom but also 2000 years later.

It even seems one other architectural structure was erected here at that time, meant to evoke an impression of might; however, it soon collapsed as, from the perspective of its construction, it was a colossus with feet of clay.¹⁸ Just behind the vizier's mastaba, we discovered a long wall built from superbly worked white limestone brickwork, doubtless brought here from the façade of the recessed wall encircling the oldest pyramid was located just a few metres further east. The new wall lay parallel both to the eastern wall of the brick mastaba and to Imhotep's stone masterpiece. However, only its bottom layer has survived, i.e. a row of blocks placed on a thin layer of pure sand, supported only by a *dakka*, a compact clay and stone mass left behind after the destruction of the mastabas. The lateral walls, which divided this extensive structure into a few smaller rooms, must have had an identical

17 *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), pls. X–XI.

18 *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), pls. XXXVI, CCII; Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, p. 42, pl. LXXXV a–e.

structure. However, these walls fell apart completely and only some sequences of loose blocks indicate that there once used to be a structure here. The building did not have any real foundations. Unfortunately, the preserved elements are anepigraphic; thus, it is difficult to date the structure. Nonetheless, we found many burials from the Ptolemaic period within these walls, including some beautifully decorated wooden coffins. One of them stands out due to its original bishop's purple monochromy.¹⁹ A few mummies were deposited here without coffins or cartonnages, but instead in a simple stone casing, for which, e.g., elements of the neighbouring Old Kingdom mastabas were used. For example, a double burial containing a man and a child was covered by a huge offering table made from fine limestone, lacking any inscriptions.²⁰

Closer to the pyramid, we discovered a grave covered with the sherds of two large Greek amphorae, which put together formed almost complete vessels (Figs. 86–87).²¹ Their clay, shape, and the stamp on the handle of one of them attest that they were made by a pottery workshop from Samos Island, with their production dated at the fourth to the second centuries BC. Their sepulchral function is doubtless secondary. They might perhaps have contained some offerings to the deceased, who did not in fact have to be Greek, while the amphora had made its way to Egypt much earlier with some imported goods. A lot indicates that the building without foundations, whose ruins became a cemetery, was erected hurriedly, probably towards the end of the fourth century BC, for ritual purposes. If it had ever been used, we would have found at least the slightest traces of cult activities in the area, or several ceramic vessels. However, as there was only pure sand and clay from the decomposition of Old Kingdom bricks lying here, it can be presumed that its construction was never completed, and that, even if it was, this new cult place quickly collapsed due to its poor construction, giving way to the cemetery.

The Upper Necropolis began to expand quickly in various directions, primarily to the west, where the desert extends, covering the tombs of the noblemen from the Old Kingdom. West of Merefnebef's mastaba, there are no anthropoid hollows hewn into the rock, even though the levelled terrain left after the quarry would be ideal for such a purpose. The mummies, some of them beautifully decorated, lay here chaotically scattered in the mass of earth and sand (Fig. 159), frequently one on top of another, crowded into

19 *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), pl. CCVII.

20 *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), pp. 86–88, pls. XXXIII–XXXV a–c.

21 Rzeuska, “The Pottery,” in: *The Upper Necropolis*, pp. 440–441, pls. CXCIX b–c, CCLXIII c–d.

groups by looters from later epochs, who no longer adhered to the good manners of the ancient professionals.²² It turned out that an ideal place for burials was a thick layer of sand blown into the 'Dry Moat' over the centuries. The loose material could be brushed aside without the slightest effort to make a pit for the deceased's body. The layers of sand accumulated in the depression between both rock façades, the east and the west ones, were especially popular, as the structure of the gigantic trench functioned as an additional frame for the burials, primarily its upper edge hewn in the shape of a massive architrave, similar somewhat to a mushroom cap.

However, the archaeological material indicates that the two-millennia-old 'Dry Moat' structure was treated, at least in the beginnings of the Ptolemaic period, as a not-too-elegant part of the cemetery, since in the deepest layer bodies frequently lay that had not been mummified at all or only subjected to superficial embalment. These are often group burials, sometimes containing as many as four people lying next to each other. It seems that mainly the poor were buried here, perhaps those who served the group that could afford coffins and cartonnages. However, as the necropolis expanded, representatives of the middle class also began to be buried here. Beautiful anthropoid-shaped coffins were found in the surface layer of the Upper Necropolis by the western wall of the 'Dry Moat.' One of them was characterised by finesse in the depiction of the face sculpted into the surface of the lid covering a container with an oval section.²³ The whole was made from a single tree trunk. The modelling of the face was reminiscent of the best stone sculptures from the first half of the Ptolemaic period. The slightly uplifted corners of the lips gave the face a smiling expression, while the almond-shaped eyes were modelled above the protruding roundness of the cheekbones.

Two coffins lying next to each other received a very peculiar shape (Figs. 37–38).²⁴ Put together using a few boards, they were similar in form to a cuboidal chest, but with a clearly distinguished part for the head. The sharp contours of the facial features, expressed through resolute cuts in the wooden surface, especially the deep-set eyes, disappearing into the shadows formed by the protruding eyebrow arch, have given one of the two masks a very serious, almost severe expression. At a short distance from them, just underneath the surface of the layer of sand, another pair of coffins was

22 *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), pls. LI–LII, LIV e–LV, LVIII, LX, LXXIII a, LXXVI, C, CII b–d, CCVIII.

23 *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), pp. 216–221, pls. CVI b–c, CVII a–c, CCXV–CCXVI.

24 *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), pp. 239–242, pls. CXVI c–CXVII a–c, CCXVII a–b.

unearthed, this time – terracotta ones.²⁵ The clay was fired to a light red colour. Gradually becoming wider as they near the faces, their flat lids had schematic masks with outlines made with a few strokes of a rather blunt tool. This type of coffin has been frequently attested in the eastern part of the Mediterranean for the early Roman epoch. It cannot be excluded that the Saqqara burials in containers of this type also come from the first decades of our era.

It is interesting to note that the southern sector of the western part of the necropolis, adjoining the find spot of these beautiful coffins, was almost completely lacking any burials of the rich. While conducting excavations here in 2014, we discovered over thirty skeletons and poorly crafted mummies, doubtless representing the lower layers of society, including relatively large numbers of children's skeletons, which has not occurred often at the studied cemetery. Such a striking contrast leads us to take a closer look from the anthropological and demographic perspective at this huge agglomeration of burials.

In contrast to the burials from the Old Kingdom, which in this necropolis do not show any traces of mummification, the majority of the deceased from the Ptolemaic period were embalmed. Among the 324 studied skeletons originating from this period, as many as 75.3 % bore signs of having been secured from decomposition, while only 8.6 % (twenty-seven individuals) did not show any traces of having undergone embalming procedures.²⁶ The actual situation might have slightly deviated from these numbers, as the state of preservation of some skeletons did not enable providing a definitive result.

The number of men and women in the studied material is also approximate, since the more delicate skeletons of the ladies were more susceptible to damage. In all certainty, the number of child burials discovered is not representative for the percentage of people who died before reaching adulthood. It is doubtless that many children were not buried at the cemetery, while the bones of the buried ones decomposed easily. It is presumed that about 50 % of the children born in those times died prematurely, mainly as a result of various infections and parasitic diseases. The highest adolescent mortality rates have been attested for the 3–7 age group (33.8 %, i.e. 5.9 % more than for the range of 0–3-year-old children).²⁷ It is assumed that such a rapid weakening of the young organisms was linked to weaning the children up to the age of 3. After this critical period, the mortality rate decreases again for the 11–15 age group (about 10.3 %), and then rises somewhat in the 15–18 range (16.2 %).

25 *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), pp. 247–250, pls. CXXI a–b, CCXX a–d.

26 M. Kaczmarek, “Human Remains,” in: *The Upper Necropolis*, pp. 459–460.

27 *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), p. 472, fig. 3.

While the Saqqara cemetery makes it possible to suggest a certain predominance of the number of men over the number of women (126 men as compared to ninety-nine women, which would amount to 1.3 men to 1 woman), this proportion might actually have been ca. 1:1, since the state of preservation of female burials is frequently worse than that of the male ones.²⁸

Statistically, women lived shorter than men. The highest mortality rate of the former encompassed the 20–30 age group (59.2 %), while the death rate for men was evenly distributed between the 20–30 and 30–40 age groups (32.5 % for each of these them).²⁹ Without a doubt, the main reason for the catastrophic statistics for women resulted from pregnancy-related fatalities. In consequence, the average age for men at the moment of death was 35.4 years, while the average for women was around 32.7 years old.

The skeletons of the dead provide some idea about the state of health and lifestyle of the inhabitants of Memphis in the Ptolemaic period. The studied group is diagnostic primarily for those illnesses that leave behind permanent traces in the skeletal system and dentition.³⁰ Numerous broken bones or deformations of the spine and limbs attest to heavy physical labour, linked with carrying significant loads. The dentition, even though sometimes preserved perfectly, betrays widespread tooth enamel erosion and dental abscess, probably caused by a raw diet, not without grains of sand in what they ate. The low level of dental caries is attributed to the lack of refined carbohydrates, primarily saccharose, in their sustenance. The structure of the studied bones testifies to a life in constant stress, which must have shortened the path to the realm of Osiris.³¹

The mummies from the Ptolemaic necropolis in Saqqara are an invaluable source for learning about the methods of preparing and securing the body after death (Fig. 174). In addition, the material clearly indicates social stratification, which we could observe on the example of the coffins and cartonnages. One mummy does not equal another mummy. The embalmers individualised the way they treated their ‘patients,’ similarly as in our times some doctors divide their clients into categories according to criteria that is difficult to determine. The meticulousness of the execution and the amount of used material fills one with admiration, at times due to the ingenuity applied, and – at others – the lack of means. The basic material used

28 *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), p. 473, fig. 4.

29 *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), fig. 2.

30 *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), pp. 504–514.

31 *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), p. 516.

in mummification was resin. It sometimes saturated and joined the layers of bandage wrapping the body so strongly that this compact mass had to be smashed with a heavy tool.³²

A few methods of mummification can be distinguished, attested by the embalmed corpses in Saqqara. One involved wrapping a dead body in strips of linen dipped in resin. A well-made mummy had sometimes over a dozen layers of bandages; some showing signs of secondary usage, while others were new. The external strips were generally wider and made from a better sort of linen. Bandages with a width of ten centimetres were usually cut into pieces, which made the whole longer and enabled the more precise modelling of the cloth surface of the body. The head and neck were wrapped separately, as were the arms and legs, and the fingers and toes. The head was first wrapped in a sheet of cloth, then in layers of bandage that in total were a few metres in length. The external strips of linen on the trunk and legs were arranged diagonally and intersected, forming a plait-like pattern. The entrails were most frequently taken out, more rarely left inside the body. In the second case, they later turned into black or dark brown powder. By using this method, the bones retained their pale colour, while the individual layers of the linen packaging were easily accessible. The brain was removed through the nostrils or left inside, which also meant it eventually changed into powder. There is nothing to indicate that it might have been taken out by another route. The skull was either filled with resin or left with its natural contents.

A synthesis of two bodies was sometimes practiced in the embalment workshop, connecting, e.g., the trunk of one person with the limbs of another. This was done because the 'Osiris' prepared there had to correspond to anthropological standards. We observed this on the example of a child's mummy, who lived no longer than six to nine months.³³ The legs below the knees belonged to another individual, whose age was judged by an experienced anthropologist to have been about 6.5-years-old. In this way, the body had been lengthened by a few centimetres. Such practices were more frequent in provincial centres other than Saqqara. In Hawara, a case was even noted in which the embalmed corpse of a child received an adult head.³⁴ A composite baby's mummy in Saqqara was additionally reinforced with a palm-leaf ribbing, almost twenty centimetres long and inserted along the spine, reaching down to the last vertebra.

32 *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), p. 461.

33 *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), p. 468.

34 *The Upper Necropolis* (Saqqara III), p. 468, fn. 2.

Another method of mummification involved pouring ample amounts of resin on the surface of the body multiple times, which in consequence formed a stiff, compact mass, which could only be shattered mechanically.³⁵ The abdominal and thoracic cavities were then filled with packages dipped in resin and wrapped in bandages. It is presumed that they contained the internal organs of the deceased. Such an amount of resin coloured the bones black or dark brown. The black surface layer frequently makes it impossible to conduct precise anthropological studies. However, it has been established that when using this method, the head was also filled with resin, of course after the brain had been removed through the nostrils.

During our excavations, all of the mummies were unwrapped by our anthropologist, who studied each skeleton, regardless of its state of preservation (Figs. 172–174). However, a few perfectly preserved embalmed corpses, especially those of children, were first subjected to radiology examinations using a portable apparatus brought to the excavations by Professor Salim Ikram from the American University in Cairo. One of the individuals to be x-rayed was an eighteen-month-old child.³⁶ After the bandages were unwrapped, it turned out that the body had also been reinforced during mummification with palm-leaf ribbing, appropriately longer than in the above-described case. It was thirty-nine centimetres long and connected the head with the body. The child had been buried along with a man, who had died at the age of 30–35. Inside the child's body, we found a ball of white fluff, which was tested microbiologically. It turned out that it was composed of three different types of fungi that had developed due to the insufficient desiccation of the inside of the body, which should be perceived as a serious error in the art of embalment.

The examination of the mummies and skeletons involves the joint efforts of archaeologists, anthropologists and conservators (Figs 89, 90, 159, 174 and 178–180). When the bodies of the deceased are still lying in the sand, they require a lot of dusting with various brushes so that they can be recorded *in situ*, i.e. in the find spot. This demands a lot of patience and gentleness. In these respects, true virtuosity was achieved by two archaeologists responsible for the study and publication of the Upper Necropolis, Małgorzata Radomska and Agnieszka Kowalska. When the subject of study has been measured, described, drawn and photographed, it is moved to the anthropological field lab, where it is taken care of by prominent specialists in the

35 See fn. 32.

36 Kaczmarek, "Human Remains," pp. 469–470.

fields of anatomy and palaeopathology. For the first few years, this function was performed by Professor Maria Kaczmarek from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, while currently it has been taken over by Dr Iwona Kozieradzka-Ogunmakin from the University of Manchester (UK). Thanks to the publications concerning this research, each of the four listed specialists became an authority in her respective field. Their work would perhaps have not been so ideal if it were not for their cooperation with brilliant drawers and photographers, whose creative effort is sometimes reminiscent of an acrobat's work. For many years, two brilliant professionals have collaborated with our mission, the architect Beata Błaszczuk (Fig. 68) and the photographer Jarosław Dąbrowski.

The methods of bandaging the corpses were precisely studied on the example of two well-preserved child mummies. Let us take a look at these specimens through the eyes of an anthropologist put to the test of patience during its unwrapping. The mummy of a ten-year-old (burial 183) had a cross-like pattern of 1.5–2-centimetre-wide strips on its external surface, which lengthwise covered a shroud 123.5 centimetres long and forty centimetres wide.³⁷ It covered the entire body and was attached with two long strips twelve centimetres wide, running on both sides of the head. Underneath the shroud, there was once again a network of intersecting strips, this time 3–3.5 centimetres wide, entwining the mummy from head to toe at regular intervals. Beneath these, there was yet another shroud, covering the next layer of strips, this time five to six centimetres wide, also encompassing the entire corpse. It was especially dense between the legs, as this enabled modelling the classical mummy shape. To this purpose, numerous pieces of material were arranged on the chest and neck, to achieve the shape of a living person.

In this layer, the bandages were already coloured black and dark brown due to being saturated with resin. Continuing the journey towards the child's body, the anthropologist encountered a sheet encompassing the entire head and tied with bandages at the neck. Pieces of a linen sheet were used to model an element in the shape of a nose, depositing it in the hollow left behind by the actual nose. After removing yet another layer of bandages, it turned out that the cover of the corpse was made up of three sheets of canvas. All of them were saturated with resin, coloured black and tightly fitting the body. Almost only the skeleton has been preserved. The dead child was laid down supine, with its arms positioned on the trunk of the body and hands adjacent to each other. In some spots, the delicate black bones were torn away from the rest of the body.

37 Kaczmarek, "Human Remains," p. 469.

Yet another show of embalming mastery and phantasy was revealed by the mummy of an eighteen-month-old child (burial 418).³⁸ The external layer of the bandages consisted of a sequence of creamy white strips 5–5.6 centimetres wide, intertwining the body slightly diagonally and intersecting on the chest. Underneath this layer, there was a shroud with the dimensions 71.5 × 32 centimetres, covering the corpse from head to heel. The shroud was cut into two parts in the fragment running from the chest to the feet. Underneath, there was yet another layer of bandages, i.e. twelve strips arranged diagonally in uneven intervals. Next, we encounter a smaller shroud and once again a thick casing of bandages arranged alternately with pieces of a linen sheet. Dark brown and black colouring of the material appears here, while the irregular arrangement of the linen elements serves to render the anthropoid shape. The shroud forming yet another layer is once again creamy white, while the two sheets attached to it are wrapped around the lower parts of the legs, from the knees to the feet. The torso and head were extremely damaged. A support was installed under the head, made from bandages glued together using resin. The whole upper part of the body was filled with copious numbers of linen fillers in various shapes, impregnated with resin and coloured black. Linen was also used to make artificial feet which ended the anthropoid figure from the bottom.

While the embalmed corpses were usually laid on their backs, their arrangement differed in details, primarily the positioning of the arms.³⁹ Many bodies had arms bent at the elbows and crossed on the chests, in the image of the god of the dead, Osiris, depicted for centuries as a mummy. In the Ptolemaic period, the hands were placed flat on the shoulders. However, some mummies had their arms positioned along the bodies in their front part, with the hands on the hips or joined at the lap. The positioning of the hands was not dependent on the person's sex. In the case of the arms crossed at the chest, the right hand lay on top of the left one. The left was clenched with the thumb protruding, while the right had outstretched fingers, but the thumb bent inwards. Onions were placed in the left hand of some of the deceased, a talisman sporadically also found in other parts of the body, e.g. on the lap, between the legs or in the vicinity of the feet.⁴⁰ It cannot be excluded that aside from a magical function, linked to rebirth and the functioning of the deceased in the afterlife, this natural strong-smelling antibiotic might also have played a role as a conserving substance. A type of garland or aureole made from twisted bandage canvas was sometimes placed on

38 Kaczmarek, "Human Remains," pp. 469–470.

39 Kaczmarek, "Human Remains," pp. 460, 463.

40 M. Radomska, "Saqqara: Some Remarks on Flora from Funerary Contexts," *Studia Quaternaria* 30/2 (2013), pp. 96–97.

the mummy's head.⁴¹ Was this a reminiscence of the Old Egyptian 'crown of justification,' playing an important role in sepulchral magic, or was this only a type of vestiary jewellery made from the remains of bandages used for the embalmment? Such a custom was probably practised much earlier and its reminiscences can be found in the nineteenth chapter of *The Book of the Dead*: "Atum, your father, wraps your body in this beautiful garland of triumph, so that you may live and triumph over your enemies, oh Osiris!"

The corpses of the wealthier representatives of the middle class were additionally covered with a linen-stucco cartonnage composed of a few separate parts or at least they were decorated with some of its elements sewn onto the external layer of bandages. We learned about the most frequently repeated, classical elements of such cladding on the example of a mummy from the beginnings of the Ptolemaic period, unearthed in the courtyard of Merefnebef's tomb. These are primarily a mask covering the head, a necklace in the upper part of the torso and an image of the winged goddess of the sky, Nut, positioned in the middle part of the body. As indicated by the inscription, the deceased was considered to be the child of this goddess,⁴² which implied his or her identification with the god of the sun, born from her womb every daybreak.

Yet this does not exhaust the possibilities of the imagination shown by the creators who were contracted to make the cartonnages. The two remaining elements belonging to the standard repertoire of cartonnage appliqués also present a huge diversity of shapes and polychrome decorations, i.e. the cladding of the legs and the chest for the feet (Figs. 162–164). Before we move on to discuss them, let us focus our attention on a unique cartonnage produced by the Saqqara 'school' with an element that has no other analogy throughout Egypt. These are two epaulettes complementing the upper part of the cartonnage, to the sides of the mask and necklace (Il. 23–24; Figs. 169–171).⁴³ This unique 'costume' belonged to the burial recorded in our documentation under the number 406. It was precisely this 'Osiris,' a 40–50-year-old man, who had been saved thanks to the fact his mummy had fallen into an Old Kingdom mastaba and was 'seated' on the edge of its burial shaft. Scraping against the wall of the narrow crevice led to some elements of the cartonnage being torn off; however, all of them were lying next to the embalmed corpse. Both the shoulder straps were among these pieces.

41 M. Radomska, "Funerary Equipment," in: *The Upper Necropolis*, p. 377 (F., wreaths).

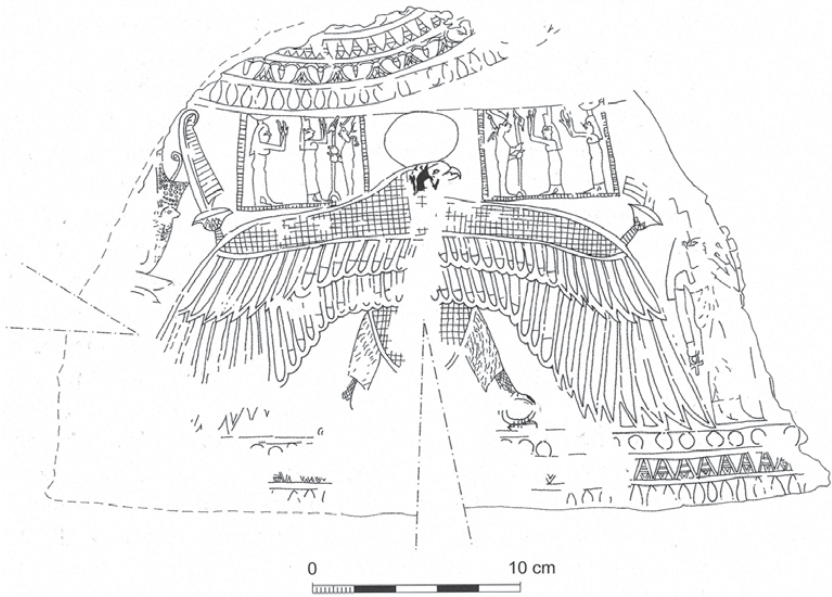
42 Schweitzer, "Étude," p. 541.

43 Schweitzer, "Étude," pp. 532, 538, pls. CCXXVI–CCXXIX.

Fitted tightly to the shoulders, both epaulettes overlap with the bottom part of the mask, which in this place was not completed on purpose to give the impression of an organic connection with the shoulder straps. They overlap its linen edge, on the part lacking stucco. A large falcon with wings outstretched to protect the deceased is painted on each of the epaulettes. The head of each of the two birds is turned towards the mummy's face. Papyrus tendrils grow out of the wings, and a feather of the Goddess Maat, symbolising order and justice, is stuck into each of them. The falcon's head is crowned with a solar disc, and its claws hold the *shen* sign, expressing the cohesion of the world and performing a protective function within Egyptian magic. In the back part of the epaulettes, on the surface covering the back of the body, Isis and Nephthys have been depicted, holding in one hand the *ankh* sign and making a gesture of greeting with the other. Symmetrically, on the other side of the bird, two uraei have been depicted sitting on the papyrus tendrils, one with the crown of Lower Egypt on its head, the other with that of Upper Egypt. Representations of Isis, Nephthys and Osiris appear above the falcon's wings. While the modelling of the bird is very detailed, the human figures have been depicted with maximum simplicity. Linking chthonic motifs with solar ones and intertwining symbols of integrity and order, the decoration of the epaulettes defines the deceased as an element of a world full of harmony and cohesion.

The remaining elements of this cartonnage also stand out due to the exceptional fineness of the composition (Fig. 161).⁴⁴ Atop the extended wings of the Goddess Nut, there are two rectangular fields, repeating the motif of Isis and Nephthys adoring the mummiform Osiris, while miniature crouching figures with the heads of Horus's sons were depicted underneath her wings. Each of the sons is shown bearing the feather of the Goddess Maat. One can see that the authors of the decoration placed special emphasis on the symbolism of truth and justice. Did the deceased lack these goods during his lifetime? A mummy is depicted in the upper register of the large rectangle covering the legs. It is lying on a bed in the shape of a stylised lion, underneath which four vessels stand for the deceased's internal organs. These containers have, as usual, lids in the form of the heads of Horus's four sons. In turn, the bottom, high part of this rectangle has the shape of a multi-layered *bebet* necklace, which frequently appears in ritual scenes, where the king offers it to a god. The column of an inscription with stereotypical content runs through the middle: "May the king give an offering to Osiris, who is the

44 Schweitzer, "Étude," pp. 533–534.



II. 23–24. Left and right epaulettes from the cartonnage of a mummy. Ptolemaic Period. Cf. Figs. 169–171.



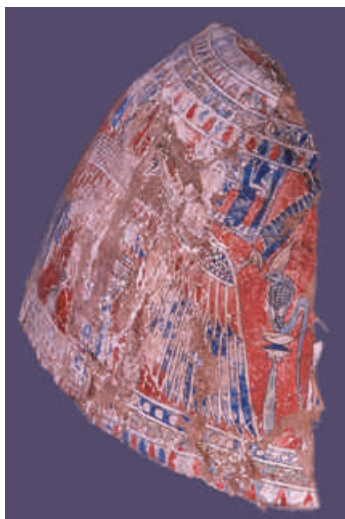
Fig. 169. Cartonnage mummy epaulette *in situ*.

Lord of the West [= the realm of the dead], the great god, the lord of Abydos, to ensure a beautiful funeral and give an invocation offering of bread, beer, meat and birds, and every good and pure thing, for Osiris Hor-Sheri, born of Wadjet, true of voice.”

In this multipart cartonnage, the chest for the feet is especially originally and richly decorated, covering the limbs not only from the top but also from the sides and bottom (Figs. 163–164).⁴⁵ The central part of the upper surface consists of three parallel columns of inscriptions with content almost identical to the text presented above. On both sides of the inscription, a ‘path opener’ was depicted, a zoomorphic canine-shaped deity lying on a shrine, underneath which a large group of uniform miniature figures was presented in a few registers, probably accompanying the deceased to the Netherworld. Each of them held the feather of the Goddess Maat, which doubtless meant that he was already ‘justified of voice.’ Today, we would say that he is in heaven. On the external side of both feet, the soles of sandals were depicted naturalistically, and between them a column in the shape of a stylised papyrus sheaf.

Other original elements of the decoration draw one’s attention in the cartonnage from burial no. 483, preserved along with a canopic chest and

45 Schweitzer, “Étude,” p. 534, pls. CCXXXVIII–CCXXXIX a.



Figs. 170–171. Painting on the epaulettes, cf. Il. 23–24.



Fig. 172. Fragment of mummy: plaques with representation of Anubis on the feet of the deceased.

a figurine of Ptah-Sokar-Osiris, made from wood and richly polychromed (Figs. 165–168).⁴⁶ Next to the stereotypical motifs on this mummy’s cartonnage, twice a scene was attested depicting figures wearing the royal *khepresh* crown and an apron typical for pharaohs giving an offering to Osiris (Il. 25–26). Was this supposed to provide a literal illustration of the first words, cited above, of the usual wishes: “May the king give an offering to Osiris, who is the Lord of the West?” In iconographic terms, the canopic chest from

46 Schweitzer, “Étude,” pp. 534–536, pls. CCXLI–CCXLIX; Kowalska, “Catalogue of Finds,” pp. 325–335.



Fig. 173. Anubis (detail of Fig. 172).



Fig. 174. Documentation work at a coffin from the Ptolemaic period in the field laboratory adjacent to the vizier's cult chapel.

this burial is somewhat like a synthesis of the motifs present on the cartonnage, with a predominance of the vision of the Netherworld filled with rows of tiny crouching figures, each with the Maat feather in its hand.⁴⁷ On the back wall of the chest, the main motif is a falcon with extended wings and the same attributes as its homologue on the above-described shoulder straps of another cartonnage.⁴⁸ On its front, two goddesses have been depicted, mourning in front of a *djed* pillar, a symbol of Osiris,⁴⁹ while on the lateral walls, the deceased has been portrayed several times in a posture of adoration before Horus's sons. The style of the paintings decorating the chest, cartonnage and the base of the Ptah-Sokar-Osiris statuette, all coming from one burial, betrays the workmanship of the same artist, probably one of the many forming the 'Saqqara school.'

Even though during the Ptolemaic period every deceased person was considered to be an incarnation of the god Osiris, only one cartonnage among those discovered in Saqqara so far contains elements expressing this identification *expressis verbis*. This is the artificial beard of a mummy buried in a terracotta coffin not far from Merefnebef's tomb (burial no. 29) (Figs. 35–36).⁵⁰ Its mask ended in its lower part with a beard narrowing towards the bottom and its tip curving outward. Its structure, rendered in the painting, is reminiscent of a braided plait. This type of beard characterises the Egyptian gods, in contrast to the typical royal beard, which broadens out towards the bottom and is clipped horizontally at the tip. Only one god was portrayed almost always with a royal beard: the Memphite demiurge Ptah. Perhaps one should search for reminiscences of the fact that Memphis was the traditional venue for the coronation of kings?

In contrast to the Old Kingdom burials, in which the bodies of the deceased were almost always aligned north-south with the head on the northern side, mummies from the Ptolemaic period show an east-west orientation with the head on the western side.⁵¹ The abundance of mummies and contemporaneous skeleton burials in the Upper Necropolis seems quite mysterious in light of the fact that for 2000 years this area was either forgotten or remained unused for other reasons, difficult to establish now. What led the inhabitants of Memphis from the end of the dynastic period to suddenly return to an area which had for a long time been covered by sand? It seems

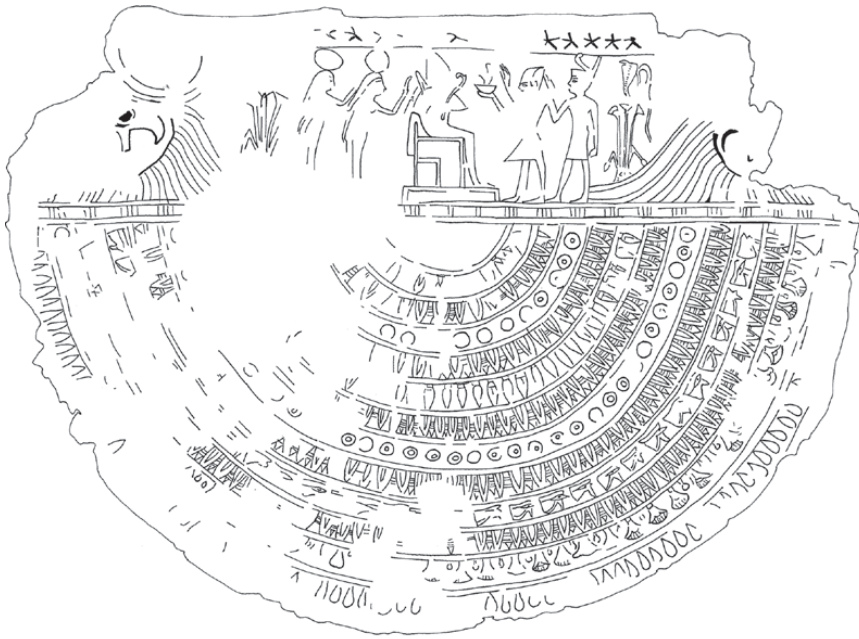
47 Kowalska, "Catalogue of Finds," pp. 335–343, pls. CCXLIV–CCXLVIII.

48 Kowalska, "Catalogue of Finds," pls. CCXLIV b, CCXLV b.

49 Kowalska, "Catalogue of Finds," pls. CCXLIV a, CCXLV a.

50 Kowalska, "Catalogue of Finds," pp. 81–85, pl. CCI a–c.

51 Kaczmarek, "Human Remains," pp. 459–460.



II. 25. Fragment of a cartonnage: necklace with a panel depicting two pharaohs.

that hints should be searched for in a place located about 300 metres north-west of Djoser's pyramid.

As already mentioned, Auguste Mariette initiated excavations here in 1850 after seeing the head of a large stone sphinx protruding from the sand, which he linked with the description of this part of Saqqara from Strabo's text. Guided by ingenious intuition, he came up with the idea that this might be the place where the famous *dromos* was located, i.e. an avenue of sphinges linking two opposite areas of particular religious significance. At the two ends of this avenue, running from the Serapeum (the burial place of the holy bulls), next to Djoser's sepulchral complex, up until the eastern edge of the plateau, i.e. the vicinity of the Anubieion (the necropolis of the holy dogs) and the pyramid of Pharaoh Teti, ruler of the Sixth Dynasty, the pharaohs of the Thirtieth Dynasty (mid-fourth century BC), erected sanctuaries and decorated the *dromos* with a row of sphinges made from white limestone. Each sphinx had the head of a pharaoh and hieroglyphic inscriptions with the name of the 'sponsor' carved onto its base. The sponsor was Nectanebo I, one of two pharaohs of the last indigenous dynasty bearing this name. This part of Saqqara was the cult centre of the necropolis in the final phase of the dynastic period.



II. 26. A king giving offerings to Osiris: scene on a fragmentary cartonnage decorating the feet.

It was precisely next to this *dromos*, not far from the entrance to the Serapeum, that Auguste Mariette unearthed a monument, whose location and iconographic repertoire to this day remain quite a puzzle.⁵² Over a dozen statues of famous Greek poets and philosophers, sculpted from local, very poor-quality limestone, were placed on a base in the form of a horse-shoe. Despite their bad state of preservation, it was possible to identify the figures or at least suggest an attribution to specific historical persons. Even though the inscriptions are probably younger than many of the sculptures,

52 A. Mariette, *Choix de monuments et de dessins découverts ou exécutés pendant les déblaiements du Sérapeum de Memphis*, Paris 1856; A. Mariette, *Le Sérapeum de Memphis découvert par Aug. Mariette-Pascha, publié d'après le manuscrit de l'auteur par G. Maspero*, Cairo 1882; J. Ph. Lauer, Ch. Picard, *Les statues ptolémaïques du Sarapieion de Memphis*, Paris 1955; K. Myśliwiec, "Hole or Whole? A Cemetery from the Ptolemaic Period in Saqqara (Egypt)," in: T. Derda, J. Hilder, J. Kwapisz (eds.), *Fragments, Holes and Wholes. Reconstructing the Ancient World in Theory and Practice, Journal of Juristic Papyrology Supplement*, 30, Warsaw, 2017, pp. 363–367, 377.

the ones that have survived on some of the statues have made it possible to almost definitely identify Pindar, Protagoras and Plato.⁵³ There is also not much doubt raised about the attribution of one to Homer.⁵⁴ The interpretation of two statues as portraits of Hesiod and Tales remain hypotheses, even though all their features suggest such an identification.⁵⁵ The figure once considered to be a representation of Heraclitus seems rather to be a depiction of Diogenes.⁵⁶

Two statues of rulers were also included among the group of famous Greeks; unfortunately, their state of preservation enables only making certain assumptions concerning their attribution. One of them probably depicted Alexander the Great, while the other – Ptolemy I or Ptolemy IV.⁵⁷ One renowned researcher even suggested that between the statues of the famous poets and philosophers, the representations of all the rulers from the first half of the Ptolemaic period had been placed there, up until Ptolemy VI, who in such a case could be considered to have been the funder of this monument.⁵⁸ The statues were sculpted in the Greek style; thus, the author must have been a Hellene. Despite certain controversies with respect to the dating of this unique monument, it is generally now agreed that it was created during the Ptolemaic epoch, doubtless in the first half of this period, probably in its beginnings. It is today referred to as the Ptolemaic exedra or hemicycle.

The outskirts of the *dromos* near the exedra were simultaneously enriched by adding other stone statues presenting mythological motifs from the Greek world of eschatological imagery, frequently of a Dionysian tinge. These include: a sculpture of Dionysus riding a panther (2.25 m high), two figures of the same god seated on a peacock (1.80 m and 1.75 m high), two statues of Greek-version sphinges, i.e. in the form of a winged fantastic female animal, two representations of dancing mermaids playing a lyre or another instrument (one of them is currently found in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo), or

53 M. Pietrzykowski, *Rzeźby greckie z Serapeum memfickiego – Studium ikonograficzne*, Warszawa 1976, pp. 10–13, 29–34, 39–40, 129; see also M. Bergmann, “The Philosophers and Poets in the Serapieion at Memphis,” in: P. Schultz, R. von den Hoff (eds.), *Early Hellenistic Portraiture. Image, Style, Context*, Cambridge–New York, 2007, pp. 246–263; F. Queyrel, “Alexandrinisme et art alexandrin: nouvelles approches,” in: P. Ballet (éd.), *Grecs et Romains en Egypte. Territoires, espaces de la vie et de la mort, objets de prestige et du quotidien*, Le Caire 2012, pp. 246–247.

54 Pietrzykowski, *Rzeźby greckie*, pp. 22–28, 131.

55 Pietrzykowski, *Rzeźby greckie*, pp. 17–20, 35, 129.

56 Pietrzykowski, *Rzeźby greckie*, pp. 35–39.

57 Pietrzykowski, *Rzeźby greckie*, p. 125.

58 Pietrzykowski, *Rzeźby greckie*, p. 126.

sculptures portraying Dionysus riding a lion and Cerberus (or rather a variation of a griffin with a lion's head).⁵⁹ In this same context, there was also a series of Egyptian-type statues, e.g. a falcon with a human head (it is currently almost completely destroyed),⁶⁰ a representation of the god Onuris, four marble lions (currently in the Louvre), a depiction of the god Horus in the form of a falcon with the crown of Upper and Lower Egypt on its head, a representation of the dwarfish god Bes, two sphinges with the cartouches of the last indigenous ruler of Egypt, Nectanebo II, and other statues.⁶¹

Close to this gallery of sculptures, there were two chapels, one in the Greek style and the other in the Egyptian style. This last one was adorned by a polychrome statue of Apis.⁶² The Greek sanctuary parallel to it bore the name Lykhnaption, which probably described its role.⁶³ This would have been the collegium of the *lykhnaptai*, i.e. the functionaries responsible for lighting the cult celebrations. Contrary to appearances, this was a logistic function with considerable ideological significance, which in particular cases could take on political meaning. It is enough to bring to mind the fate of a contemporary Pole, who during the imposition of martial law in 1981 in Poland was responsible for the sound management of the New Year's speech made by the head of state and transmitted on television. He lost a lucrative job as the result of the 'accidental' lack of sound.

What are these monumental representations of famous Hellenes doing between the oldest pyramid in the world and the largest underground gallery for the mummies of the holiest animals, i.e. bulls? The complex analysis of the statues, done by the prematurely deceased Polish archaeologist Dr Michał Pietrzykowski, showed that the sculptures were primarily prominent Greeks linked in various ways to Alexander the Great.⁶⁴ The latter was the only person for whom a monument of such connotations could have been created, located in a spot that had previously had no connections with Hellenic culture. In addition, these are not sculptures imported from Greece, but made on the spot, in Memphis, which is clearly indicated by their material. Michał Pietrzykowski's studies into this unique assemblage of statues and their find spot showed that the source of inspiration for its creators might have been either votive groups with representations of legendary and historical rulers, popular in the Hellenic world, or sepulchral representations

59 Pietrzykowski, *Rzeźby greckie*, pp. 48–60.

60 Pietrzykowski, *Rzeźby greckie*, p. 46.

61 Pietrzykowski, *Rzeźby greckie*, pp. 61–62.

62 Pietrzykowski, *Rzeźby greckie*, p. 43.

63 Pietrzykowski, *Rzeźby greckie*, pp. 41–43.

64 Pietrzykowski, *Rzeźby greckie*, pp. 132–142.

of poets and philosophers. Thus, the exedra would have been a monument linked to the Dionysian cult with important political significance for the Lagidae residing in Alexandria, who had raised the Greek god of wine to the rank of a dynastic deity. Everything indicates that it simultaneously performed the function of a sepulchral and commemorative monument, a memorial to the first provisional burial of the great commander, through an outspoken reminiscence of his achievements in the field of culture.

It is a historical fact that the mummified body of Alexander, whom the Egyptian population idolised as liberator from under Persian subjugation, but also as a pharaoh and god, was stolen and taken to Egypt at the order of Ptolemy I, founder of the Lagid dynasty. Still, it did not make its way to Alexandria immediately, because no tomb fit for such an outstanding person had been made ready yet. The only place suitable for a provisional burial of such a persona was the Memphite necropolis. If in fact his body was deposited there for a short period, the most important and honoured spot in the ancient royal cemetery must have been chosen. This is precisely what the vicinity of the Serapeum and avenue of sphinges leading eastward was at that time.

Thus, it seems very probable that this part of Saqqara became the location of the first, short-term burial of the most famous of all the mummies of that time. Where was it deposited? It could not, of course have been in some specially prepared tomb as the Memphites would not have had time to construct one or hew it out into the rock. It was probably not among the holy bulls in Serapeum, even though from the perspective of Egyptian political theology, Alexander was also a 'mighty bull.' It was also rather not in the middle of the city of Memphis, as had in fact happened earlier during the so-called Third Intermediary Period to some dignitaries, especially priests of the god Ptah, legitimised by their royal origins.⁶⁵ With a high dose of probability, it can be assumed that Alexander was buried temporarily in one of the earlier tombs of the highest Old Kingdom dignitaries, perhaps already long emptied by looters, and also that the tomb was located not far from the Serapeum. It seems rather unlikely that this first, provisional burial of Alexander the Great would have left any sort of permanent trace of his short stay in such a tomb. Without a doubt, from the moment that his dead body

65 For example, the tomb of Shoshenq, son of Osorkon II: A. Badawy, "Das Grab des Kronprinzen Scheschonk, Sohnes Osorkon's II. und Hohenpriesters von Memphis, *Annales du Service des Antiquités Égyptiennes* 54 (1957), pp. 153–177; B. Porter, R. L. B. Moss, *Topographical Bibliography of Ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphic Texts, Reliefs and Paintings*, Vol. 3, Memphis, Part II/3, 2nd ed., Oxford 1981, p. 846; K. Myśliwiec, *Herr Beider Länder. Ägypten im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, Mainz 1998, p. 70.

arrived in Egypt, a magnificent tomb – in ancient literature referred to as “Soma” – started being constructed in Alexandria for the great Macedonian. But it is also difficult to assume that the first stop of Alexander’s posthumous journey left no material trace at all. Such a place almost begged for a commemorative monument, and it was probably precisely the discussed hemicycle located near the Serapeum that performed this function, the remains of which are barely noticed today by the crowds of tourists heading at a trot to the sarcophagi of the holy bulls. The memorial exedra was probably constructed at some point after the embalmed body had been transferred to Alexandria, to commemorate the Macedonian’s short stay at the Memphite necropolis.

One can imagine what a terrific impression this noble place made on the inhabitants of Memphis. Even in our times, a throng of snobs from various parts of the world willingly buy places at cemeteries or even purchase tombs located near the place of eternal rest where famous people lie. Such a phenomenon would explain the sudden renaissance of the necropolis adjacent to the Serapeum from the south, forgotten or considered unattractive for 2000 years, i.e. from the First Intermediary Period until the end of the dynastic epoch. This is precisely what the beginnings of the Upper Necropolis discovered by us might have been. It cannot be excluded that the basilophoric reminiscences of this cemetery’s genesis inspired the maker of one of the cartonnages to depict the above-described scenes of giving offerings to Osiris on a mummy’s feet, but it is not the person who was buried here that was the offering bearer, but rather a figure wearing a royal apron and crown (Il. 26). In such a case, could it have come as a surprise that this was the *khepresh* crown, usually associated with victory in battle and with the coronation ceremony?

Chapter 11. *Primum non nocere*, or the medicine of artefacts

Abstract: Conservation activities on the Polish excavations in Saqqara. Technology in the service of art. Restoration from original elements. When will the conservation of an art object be finished? Natural conditions vs antiquity. Ecology in archaeology and vice versa.

Keywords: artificial stone, examination and diagnosis, fungi, salts, porosity, hygroscopic, chemicals, instruments.

A few months after discovering Merefnebef's tomb, the Polish edition of *Scientific American* (*Świat Nauki*) published an extensive, richly illustrated article about the event.¹ The text was immediately translated into a few languages and published in West European versions of the journal, as well as in the Japanese edition.² We did not have to wait long for the results. I soon received a letter from a professor I had never met from one of the largest academic centres in Europe. The scholar did not in fact reveal the academic field he specialised in; however, he did categorically appeal to me to cease 'conservation' practices that have long been denounced and abandoned. He had observed a 'clear boundary' between the original polychromy and the part painted on by our restorers in one of the published photographs. He had probably been referring to the famous paintings of the Minoan culture in Knossos on Crete, which have become a symbol of the overly extensive reconstruction of a work of art, while for a long time now the convention has been followed of securing only the preserved original parts of a work *in situ*.

The author of the letter claimed to have found proof of the forbidden practices our mission had supposedly adopted in a photograph showing the 'offering list' on the west wall in the vizier's funerary chapel (Fig. 175).³ The rich polychromy covering the not-too-deep relief has been preserved in this part of the tomb so exceptionally well that almost no one believes that these could be the original colours. The blue is a shade so intense and vivid that it is as if the painter had just walked away from the chapel wall. The layer of rock on which this 'offering list' was executed has an exceptionally hard

1 K. Myśliwiec, "Nowe odkrycia przy najstarszej piramidzie świata, *Świat Nauki* 8 (1999), pp. 28–37.

2 See the bibliography in Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, Warsaw 2004, pp. 33–35.

3 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 167–170, pls. XXIII, LXXV.



Fig. 175. 'Offering list' on the west wall of Merefnebef's cult chapel.

and dense structure, which made it impossible for the salts to travel through the walls and crystallise on its surface, which would have led to the disintegration of the relief and painting. In turn, the layers located lower down show a higher porosity, which – of course – facilitated the migration of salts and their crystallisation on the surface of the paintings. It could be stated that the 'offering list' was in this case lucky, the exact opposite of the afore-described, even larger 'list' on the north wall in the 'neighbour's' funerary chapel (Figs. 93–94), which had smashed to pieces when the dividing wall collapsed under the pressure from the material filling the chamber and shaft of the tomb neighbouring the chapel from the side opposite to that of the vizier's chapel.⁴

I did not have to explain to the sender of the letter that Polish restorers had not added even a drop of paint to the over 4000-year-old original painting because I had at my disposal the English-language conservation report handed over to the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities towards the end of each excavation campaign, and then published in Poland, usually in the annual *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean*, providing up-to-date information about the activities of the Polish school of Mediterranean

4 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkievicz, *The Funerary Complex*, Warsaw 2010, pp. 85–87, 169–181, figs. 57–58, pls. CIV, CVI–CVIII.

archaeology.⁵ I sent a copy of the report, with the faint aroma of printing ink still permeating it, to the letter's author and invited him to visit our excavations, so that he could personally take a look at the methods used by our restorers. He never contacted me again.

However, this event makes one realise the importance of the conservation of artefacts in archaeological activities. Never in my fifty-year-long experience in excavations in Egypt did I realise this better than in the autumn of 1997, when, after removing yet another brick from the huge pile of rubble left after the front mastaba wall had collapsed, through the small opening in this clay massif I saw a relief with magnificently preserved polychromy, depicting the tomb owner and his wife.⁶ The accompanying inscriptions soon told us that this was Merefnebef, while pulling out the next bricks from the clay curtain made us realise that this was a relief adorning the north wall of the narrow entrance to the vizier's funerary chapel. When scandalmongers ask me today what I felt at the time, I do not have to make up an answer, because I think I had never before experienced such an emotional rollercoaster of contrasting emotions: five minutes of joy and many hours of dread. This was because we quickly realised of what fragile matter these reliefs and paintings were made. In many spots, their link with the bedrock was so weak that the most delicate touch with the tip of a finger could have led to the decoration falling apart into tiny pieces or even turning into powder. Some of the most beautiful fragments of reliefs were only attached to the wall by a tiny surface (for example the dancers, Fig. 52): we held our breaths so that not even the smallest movement of air would cause them to fall away. It was not much of a consolation that in some parts of the chapel the state of preservation of the polychromy was surprisingly better, which should be considered as exclusively caused by the rock, which has a slightly different structure in every spot.

In conservation terms, everything required immediate intervention. We were saved then by Ewa Parandowska, already mentioned here multiple times, who should be considered the real heroine of those early days. Ewa is one of those people whom nothing motivates more to action than challenges considered 'impossible' to overcome. After receiving the permission of Professor Włodzimierz Godlewski, director of the archaeological mission

5 See conservation reports by Zbigniew Godziejewski in the following volumes of *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean*: X, pp. 97–100; XI, pp. 107–108; XII, pp. 120–126; XIII, pp. 143–146; XIV, pp. 128–132; XV, pp. 126–130; XVI, pp. 161–164; XVII, pp. 190–193; XVIII, pp. 190–194; XIX, pp. 224–228; XXI, pp. 167–174; XXIII/1, pp. 159–162; XXIV/1, pp. 224–228 (with Urszula Dąbrowska).

6 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 87–88 (1 – North Thickness), pls. XVII a, XLII, XLIII a, XLIV d, XLVI.

in Naqlun, which at the time was dealing with the conservation of Christian frescoes, she immediately came to Saqqara, rapidly evaluated the dramatic situation we were in, and with the highest degree of dedication set about doing what was necessary to ensure the masterpieces of Egyptian art from 2300 BC could survive until our next excavation campaign without the slightest amount of damage. What is more, she passed the torch on to her colleague, who – thanks to his knowledge, experience and artistic sensitivity – turned out to be destined for the struggle to achieve the ‘undoable.’

This person was Zbigniew Godziejewski, an archaeologist and conservator from the National Museum in Warsaw (Figs. 179 and 182). It is difficult to overestimate his skills and his contribution to the excavation mission in Saqqara. As its director, I cannot fail to mention his exceptional personality, radiating calm, in many difficult situations salutary for the atmosphere in the mission at least to the same extent as his professional approach was for the artefacts. Zbigniew is an unrivalled ‘therapist,’ capable of quickly determining the type and scope of the ‘illness,’ as well as the reasons behind it and the possible consequences. He also has the intuition and workmanship of an artist, applied in his practical activities with artefacts. Finally, he is capable of choosing the appropriate team consisting of colleagues from his field, who understand each other perfectly and cooperate in harmony, also with the archaeologists responsible for taking many of the content-related decisions. Every year, a tercet, or even sometimes a quartet of conservators, depending on the quantity and quality of the unearthed material, participates in the excavations alongside the group of archaeologists and documentalists.

The effects of their work are brilliant (Fig. 181). The reliefs and paintings in all the decorated Old Kingdom tombs we have discovered so far have had their state of preservation stabilised. When, after ten months of break, the mission returns to Saqqara and opens the funerary chapel sealed during the last minutes of the previous campaign, it does not find even the tiniest speck of decoration that would have fallen away from the wall in the meantime. This inspires the admiration of our Egyptian colleagues, as well as of other conservators of various nationalities cooperating in this area with archaeological missions. In many cases, one can communicate with them in Polish, because foreign missions preferably employ restorers from Poland. It has happened in the past that one of the Japanese missions working in Saqqara was made up exclusively of Poles. It only had an Egyptian inspector. Frequently, their Egyptian colleagues also come in the character of observers, students or apprentices. Some of them show extraordinary patience, sensitivity and spatial imagination, others would prefer to receive a simple ‘skeleton key,’ which would quickly open all the doors. Amid the repertoires of schemes that have been invented by conservation schools from various countries around the world, this field primarily remains a form of art since it



Fig. 176. Plaque inserted by the decorators of the vizier's tomb into the crumbled part of the façade.

is difficult to find two identical cases – similarly as in medicine, even though many doctors do not seem to realise this. An artefact has to be observed from various perspectives and taking into account all the details. Every fragment of the surface undergoing conservation has a slightly different structure, so it is varied in how it is ‘sick’ and requires different medicine, or at least at diverse dosages. The question of “when the conservation of object X will be completed,” a conservator can only answer by stating that “it never will be.” The state of the artefacts must be constantly monitored, even if it seems stable after prolonged conservation, since relapses sometimes occur or



Fig. 177. Fragment of the destroyed inscription carved in deep relief in the northern part of the façade in the vizier's cult chapel (Fig. 176).

new threats appear, as the conditions in which we all function – we ourselves and our work – continue to change.

A special problem that revealed itself during the discovery of Vizier Merefnebef's funerary chapel involved its façade (Il. 5; Figs. 41 and 176–177).⁷ The dismal quality of the rock in this spot had already in antiquity led to the chipping away of whole patches of the surface, even before work was initiated on carving the reliefs. Without wanting to, the creators of the tomb became its first conservators, and – at that – even before work on it had been completed. It was possible to supplement the larger part of the uneven surface with a light pink mortar, best visible in those spots where the relief has been preserved the worst, e.g. in the inscription adjacent to the entrance from the south.⁸ Research done using a stereoscopic microscope

⁷ Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 69–86, pls. XI–XV, XXX–XLI.

⁸ Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XXX–XXXI, XXXIV–XXXVIII.



Fig. 178. Fragment of cartonnage from the Ptolemaic period at the moment of its discovery.



Fig. 179. Conservators at work on the cartonnage (Fig. 178).



Fig. 180. Cartonnage (Fig. 178) after conservation.

has shown that the basic component of this filler was plaster, which simultaneously performed the function of an adhesive. The samples also contained small amounts of loamy materials, illites and montmorillonite.⁹ This last substance is characterised by a significant increase in volume when subjected to the influence of water. The presence of chalk or proteins was not determined in the mortar; however, very scattered grains of vegetable black appeared in each of the samples taken. Next to this robust mortar, used to fill the decrement in the rock, there is a layer of caustic lime on the entire surface of the decorated walls, the main component of which is calcite, i.e. calcium carbonite.¹⁰ It constitutes the direct foundation for the painting.

⁹ Z. Godziejewski, "Conservation Work," in: Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, p. 239.

¹⁰ Godziejewski, "Conservation Work," pp. 239–240.



Fig. 181. Underground workshop of the archaeologists and conservators.



Fig. 182. "To be or not to be." Zbigniew Godziejewski in the role of Hamlet.

But not all the losses in the levelled surface of the rock were suitable for being filled with mortar. An extensive (41 × 34 × 14 cm) hole, which formed in the broad frontal surface of the northern doorjamb, where the sculptor was supposed to have made an especially deep relief, in some spots reaching even as deep as three centimetres into the rock, was only suitable for the insertion of a filling consisting of another material (Fig. 176, 177).¹¹ The hole was cut to form the shape of an almost regular rectangle and a slab was inserted made from a better, harder type of limestone. The appropriate part of the hieroglyphic inscription was sculpted into its surface, and then extended further around the filling, this time carved into the original rock surface. This did not help much. The part of the text sculpted into the rock had chipped away completely, while a deep crevice had formed around the filling. It is only thanks to this small preserved fragment that we can with high probability reconstruct a larger part of the text containing the tomb owner's titlature.

The high craftsmanship of the sculptor is attested by the bottom part of the inscription, carved in the layer of rock with an exceptionally dense structure. The hieroglyph depicting a vulture can be counted among the palaeographic masterpieces of this period (Fig. 177). It has the phonetic value *mut* and is the notation of the word 'mother' in a sequence of epithets: "the one who was loved by his father, praised by his mother."¹² Every detail of the bird's plumage was modelled with exceptional precision, even though manipulating a chisel on the small surface located a few centimetres deeper than the plane of the relief can be categorised as equilibristic of the same type as an operation on the human eye. It cannot be excluded that part of the inscription sculpted into the inserted slab was done by a different artist since the depth of these hieroglyphs does not exceed 0.7 centimetres.

Another restoration method was chosen in the case of a huge cavity in the rock substance formed during work on the external architrave crowning the façade (Il. 5; Fig. 41).¹³ This was precisely in the spot where a few hieroglyphs of a large-format inscription with a special propagandist significance were supposed to have been located. This text could be seen from afar by any passer-by. This time, the filling was not made from better-quality limestone, but from 'artificial stone,' with its shape adapted precisely to the irregularity and size of the crevice. Perhaps the decision to choose this solution was made for aesthetic reasons, as the colour of the mortar used for the production of the 'stone' could be more easily adapted to the natural colouring of

11 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 66–69, pl. XII.

12 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 67–68, pl. XXXVII b.

13 Godziejewski, "Conservation Work," p. 243, pls. XXXIII a–c, XL b–c, e–f.

the rock it was to supplement than if it had been white limestone contrasting with the rock's greyness. It seems that already ancient aesthetes avoided the 'golden tooth' effect of one area shining more or less than the other yellowed incisors. Thus, the huge filling was modelled extremely meticulously, with hieroglyphs impressed into its flexible, still wet surface forming part of the monumental inscription, which in its first words provide information that we are dealing with a vizier. This proves that the inscription on the architrave, also sculpted in deep relief, was one of the last elements added to the original decoration of the tomb.

These actions also did little to aid the situation. The filling soon fell victim to a deep transverse crack in the wall.¹⁴ During the 1997 excavations, fragments of the filling were found in the pile of rubble adjacent to the architrave. After various laboratory tests were conducted, they were taken care of by modern-day conservators under the direction of Zbigniew Godziejewski. They were first consolidated for a long time by being saturated with a 2 % or 3 % solution of Paraloid B72 in toluene. They were then glued together with UHU Epoxy Quick and prepared to be reattached in their original spot. This is when the most difficult part of the operation began. How does one attach such a block to the empty space formed after the crumbling away of a derelict cavity? This was actually a dental intervention on a macro scale. First, the surface of the cavity was dusted of rock crumble. Next, a specially prepared supporting structure was installed in the niche, made from a net of stainless steel covered with a mass of epoxy resin. Fragments of the 'artificial stone' were attached to it, glued together earlier using Viscasid Epoxx. Such a constructed niche was then closed off using fragments of 'artificial stone.' Despite the significant weight of the inserted steel elements, the scaffold ensures their stability. What remained were only a few cosmetic interventions in the bottom part of the architrave, so that the empty spaces left behind next to the inserted material would not be visible. Looking today at this propagandist lintel, with its surface very homogeneous in every respect, nobody would guess how much creative technical thinking of Polish origin is hidden inside its interior.

There is a completely different story behind the cavity that formed, probably already after the tomb owner's death, inside the vizier's cult chapel (Fig. 44).¹⁵ As already mentioned when presenting this tomb, in the southern part of the east wall, it was possible to observe an exceptional modification of the decoration, introduced by one of Fefi's younger sons. This person is

14 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pl. XL e–f.

15 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 141–149, pls. LXII, LXVI.

sometimes difficult to differentiate from his father since he bears two of the latter's names, Merefnebef and Fefi.

If his wife was not also present in this modified scene, whose name, Hemi, differs from the names of the four harpists depicted in the chapel many times and labelled everywhere as 'his beloved wives,' we would be inclined to think that also in this case we were dealing with the tomb owner and his new, fifth wife.

However, the entire context, beginning with the iconography and style of the modified relief, indicate conclusively that the clever youngster benefitted from the crumbling of the rock in this part of the wall, which originally contained a vertical sequence of generic scenes portraying various craft workshops in the course of preparing the great feast represented on the neighbouring south chapel wall. When the upper part of this kaleidoscope was destroyed due to the poor quality of the rock, the adolescent Fefi, who at the time was busy destroying the representations of his older brothers on the walls of his father's funerary chapel, decided to play the role of 'conservator.' He supplemented the destroyed part of the wall with a few irregular blocks of limestone, unfitted to each other, filling the crevices and covering the surface with plaster, in which he ordered the sculpting of a new scene with entirely different content than the original composition. In terms of its iconography and style, the retouch contrasted completely with the spirit of the original decoration. It portrays the idyll of a Nile landscape, with a fishing scene as its main motif.¹⁶ The addressee of the offering in the form of the fish just taken out of a net is, of course, Merefnebef Junior and his life companion, depicted in a way defying all artistic conventions adopted not only in the decorations of the vizier's tomb but also more generally in the sepulchral art of that period. This is an example of how to make clever use of the natural disintegration of rock in a decorated part of a wall. The thoughtful descendant 'restored' his father's tomb, and the fact that he used it mainly to promote himself would not surprise many even in today's times. One additional benefit from the described modification is the fact that the piece created by the son-usurper did not cause much trouble to our conservators.

Let us however get back to the façade of the vizier's funerary chapel, which we had abandoned for a year, even before it was unearthed. At the moment of the discovery of the tomb, the entire frontal wall was covered by a pile of rubble consisting of mud brick and clay formed as a result of the collapse of the mastaba's west wall, which had primarily risen above the chapel, running along the edge of its external architrave, the same one into which the 'artificial stone' was inserted. In this way, the brick wall extended

16 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 141–146.

the mastaba by at least two and half metres upwards (Il. 5).¹⁷ It was a blessing in disguise that this wall did not survive very long. For unknown reasons, it collapsed onto the tomb's courtyard, covering the chapel façade for over 4000 years. Until our excavations, nobody had ever entered the chapel interior, as a result of which its reliefs and paintings were better preserved than in the majority of Egyptian tombs. However, their unearthing could have turned out to be a Pyrrhic victory if the discoverers had not immediately undertaken conservation activities. The newly discovered works of art would have then shared the fate of those masterpieces of architecture, sculpture and painting which over the course of the last two centuries have been hurriedly uncovered but not conserved, because the 'archaeologists' were more interested in breaking scholarly news, its publication and possibly taking the treasures away to some museum than in the fate of the artefacts. Subjected to destructive changes in atmospheric conditions, especially fluctuations in the humidity and temperature, they quickly lost their layer of polychromy, frequently along with the relief underneath. Is this a modern version of the same egoism that guided the vizier's son when he was 'correcting' the decoration on the walls of his father's tomb? His parent had been of the least interest to him in the whole situation.

Already the first steps undertaken in order to uncover the chapel's frontal wall made us realise that we had to forget this intention immediately. Subjected centuries ago to the effects of sun and rain, exposed for at least a few years to gusts of wind bearing sand, the decoration of the façade turned out to be so weak that after removing every lump from the adjacent pile of rubble, the relief immediately would fall apart into little pieces. We realised that uncovering further parts of the façade's long east wall with preserved polychromy was impossible until an archaeologist and a conservator could sit next to each other, remove the rubble centimetre by centimetre and immediately secure the decoration, consolidating the layer of paint and gluing the fragments of the relief that had fallen away. This was only possible during the subsequent campaign, when we came with a larger group of conservators. Up until that moment, we had not explored the protective layer, which is what the ca. one-metre-wide wall of rubble adjacent to the façade had become. On the external side of this 'curtain,' we built a solid but makeshift wall from large blocks of stone, so that in the meantime unwanted guests would not decide to come finish the job for us. Of course, from that moment onwards, our excavations were also monitored day and night by an Egyptian guard, for whom we erected a booth not far from Merefnebef's tomb. Additional security for the artefacts we were unearthing was provided

17 Kuraszkiwicz, *The Architecture*, p. 55.

by the close neighbourhood of Djoser's pyramid, with the holy complex (*temenos*) monitored constantly by the tourism police. It seems that it is to these circumstances that we owe the fact that during the revolutionary turmoil in January 2011, the area of our research remained almost unscathed, while the artefacts discovered by a few other archaeological missions in the Memphite necropolis were partially devastated and some of their artefact storage facilities plundered.

The chapel unearthed in 1998 had to be immediately covered by a permanent building erected from blocks of artificial stone. The construction took place simultaneously to the slow exploration of the protective layer in front of the chapel's frontal wall. Under the roof of the new pavilion, not only the entire cult chapel found shelter but also the lower courtyard in front of its façade, which is so extensive that it can today serve as a conservation and photographic laboratory (Fig. 174). In the ceiling of the 'shelter,' a few rectangular skylights were left behind, permanently covered with plexiglass. During the excavations, they make it possible to continue conservation and documentation work in the 'laboratory' in front of the chapel without using artificial light, harmful for the reliefs. When the mission is absent, the skylights are covered from the outside with stone blocks and a layer of sand.

It is not only the polychromed reliefs on the long east wall that are subjected to permanent conservation care in the façade of the vizier's cult chapel but also the very poorly preserved lateral wings of the fronton, on which the tomb owner was portrayed in deep relief and his titlature was sculpted, bringing to the foreground his highest, most lately acquired title of vizier (Figs. 176–177).¹⁸ As already mentioned, part of this decoration was made in an especially brittle layer of rock, which led to a substantial part of the relief completely crumbling away. No traces of polychromy have been preserved in the lateral wings of the façade. The efforts of the conservators focus in this case on the consolidation of the stone in the fragmentarily preserved parts of the architecture and relief. In the initial phase of the work, a preparation called Funcosil Antihygro was used, which blocks the hydration-induced swelling of clay materials.¹⁹ In the subsequent stages, Funcosil Steinfestiger 300 was applied, meant to be used for fortifying natural stone with weakened internal structure, and finally – Funcosil Steinfestiger KSE 300 E and KSE 500 STE, which enter into a reaction with the moisture accumulated in the pores of the rock, and also with atmospheric humidity.

Due to the special sensitivity of these preparations to water during the impregnation process, the weather conditions are exceptionally important.

18 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 66–69, pl. XII.

19 Godziejewski, "Conservation Work," p. 242.

This entails, among other things, the precipitation of a silicon dioxide gel, which works as an adhesive. The air temperature must then remain at the level of twenty degrees Celsius, while the humidity cannot fall below 50 % RH.²⁰ All the impregnation actions are done with the use of a low-pressure sprayer. The small cult chapel described previously became the most spectacular field for these activities. It was added onto the east wall of the vizier's mastaba, doubtless already after the tomb owner's death, probably shortly after the brick mastaba fronton had collapsed onto the façade of the earlier, beautifully decorated western chapel (Il. 22; Figs. 60 and 88).²¹

However, the new and much more modest chapel had a monumental architrave in the form of a long-inscribed block installed above the 'false door' (Fig. 60). While this last element was made from good-quality limestone, the architrave was a long (3.2 m) and thick (0.25 m) rectangular monolith hewn out of very brittle local rock.²² When this chapel fell apart, or perhaps was destroyed on purpose, the architrave collapsed to the ground with the decorated surface facing downwards, cracking into three separate pieces. Its southern part hit rocky ground, while the northern – a sandy surface, which during the excavations had a tendency to slide away. As a result, we were able to find out that the surface we had not been able to see earlier was decorated with a relief. Before any attempt was made at turning the block over, it had to be subjected to a time-consuming reinforcement process by impregnating it repeatedly. In order to maintain the appropriate temperature and humidity, we had to cover the block for a few weeks with something like a tent and constantly monitor the atmospheric conditions, repeatedly adding or taking out containers with water. When the architrave was finally ready to show its decorated face, with bated breath we looked on, wondering into how many smaller pieces it would break. But not even a single crack appeared. Our emotions were then transferred to a relief carved into the surface of a long block. It turned out to be a copy of a motif known from the façade of the western chapel, i.e. a symmetrically composed procession of eight figures labelled with Merefnebef's name and epithets.²³

Let us nonetheless go back to the western chapel, the main cult place in the vizier's tomb. Its conservation is a separate chapter in the history of our research. Upon entering it, we saw magnificent reliefs covered with

20 Godziejewski, "Conservation Work," p. 243.

21 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pp. 56–60, drawing 1, pls. LXXXI–LXXXIII, LXXXV f–g.

22 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, p. 59, pls. LXXXII a, LXXXIII a, LXXXV a–b, d–f.

23 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, p. 83–86, pls. XI, XV, XVI, XXX–XXXII, XXXIV–XXXVI, XXXIX, XLI; see Myśliwiec, "The Scheme 2 × 4," pp. 191–205.

polychromy of exceptionally intense shades of colour, but – unfortunately – hanging over an abyss. Some of the most beautiful ones were so loosened from the rock surface that we were afraid to breathe and talk so that we would not turn them into powder at the slightest vibration of the air. Paradoxically, like all great discoveries during my fifty-year experience in the field in the Near East,²⁴ this discovery surprised us in the last days of our excavation campaign, so that only preventative conservation was on the table, enabling the reliefs and paintings to survive without damage until the next campaign.

Before undertaking more radical steps, it was necessary to conduct a series of tests encompassing each of the technological elements of this decoration, beginning with the rock, through the mortars, whitewash, adhesives, pigments, and – finally – the pests that had settled on the surface of the polychromy.²⁵ From the tiny elements that had dropped away from the wall earlier and lay in the brick rubble, we took samples that were immediately handed over to specialised laboratories. Petrographic, mineralogical and microstructural tests were done at the Institute of Geology of the University of Warsaw, while others were conducted at the Faculty of Conservation at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, in the laboratories of the National Museum in Warsaw and also at the Faculty of Chemistry at the Warsaw University of Technology.

The results of the tests conducted on the pigments and adhesives separated out from the layer of polychromy were especially interesting. While both the decorated tombs, Merefnepf's and Nyankhnepfertum's, are adjacent to each other, and the chronological difference between them amounts to no more than ca. twenty years, the painting techniques show surprising technological differentiation, primarily a significant lowering of the level of execution. The pigments are similar in both tombs. A layer of polychromy lies on a layer of whitewash, which contains mainly calcium carbonate (exceptionally also huntite, a white mineral occurring in Africa). The raw material for the production of red was red ochre, while yellow ochre was used for yellow. The difference between the tombs is visible, for example, in the black paint. While in the vizier's tomb, the earlier one, only vegetable black was used,

24 I must count among those the Syrian Palmyra, where we uncovered the tomb of a dignitary named Alain in 1970 under even more dramatic circumstances, containing, among other things, a group of magnificent statues of the family portrait type (A. Sadurska, *Le tombeau de famille de 'Alainê, Palmyre 7*, Varsovie 1977).

25 Godziejewski, "Conservation Work," pp. 238–240; A. Zatorska, "Examination of Pigments and Binders from the Chapel of Nyankhnepfertem," in: Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 213–215.

the polychromy of the later tomb also shows the presence of carbon black (soot).

Green is a colour of special significance in both tombs. The tests made it possible to establish the difference between the green present on the lintel in the façade of the vizier's tomb and the one that was used inside his cult chapel. The first of these is so-called glass green, containing wollastonite, as well as probably copper compounds formed as a result of the ageing of Egyptian blue (e.g. malachite, atacamite, paratacamite). It cannot be excluded that the hieroglyph paint in this long inscription was originally blue, similarly as in the *Pyramid Texts* from this period. The change of blue into light green as a result of the effect of various external factors has been attested in Egyptian artefacts from various periods, usually in the case of wooden items.

In the sample of the green colour originating from the chapel interior, malachite was no longer the product of later transformations, but the original pigment. Testing two shades of blue, light and dark, showed that this was a high-quality Egyptian blue.

Clear differences between the two tombs are observable primarily in the adhesives. In the vizier's tomb, this function was performed by bird egg yolk, which enables referring to this technique as egg tempera. Only the black and light blue showed additives: gluten glue in the case of the first one, and wax for the second. In Temi's chapel, the adhesives are very diverse. There is linseed oil, starch and egg white, which makes it possible to conclude that a strict technological regime was no longer followed.²⁶

It turned out that Merefnebef and Nyankhnefertum's greatest enemies after their deaths was and still is salt, or rather salts, as this pest undergoes mutations worthy of malignant cancer or HIV. The presence of salts dissolvable in water and insoluble salts has been established.²⁷ In the case of the sample from the chapel ceiling, 50 % of its content consisted of insoluble salts, while there were lower amounts, 10–20 %, in the remaining cases. These are usually sulphides and chlorides, with small amounts of nitrates. The closest 'ally' of the salts was the type of mud limestone in which the tomb was hewn and the wall decorations carved. It was defined as a biomicrite fine-grained rock from the marl group of pelitic limestones, in which the adhesive are illites, and to which the iron components give it its creamy

26 Z. Godziejewski, "Zatrzymać przeszłość," *Archeologia Żywa* (special issue) 1 (2010), pp. 58–59.

27 Z. Godziejewski, "Conservation Work in the Funerary Chapel of Nyankhnefertem," in: Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 211–212; Godziejewski, "Conservation Work," p. 239.

colour.²⁸ In this extremely soft type of stone, the illite fraction constitutes from 19.7 % to 22.1 % of the whole. Such is the geological structure in the upper part of the vizier's tomb. *Calcium smectites*, the main component of these illite materials, are exceptionally hygroscopic, and can expand their capacity even by a few times. The content of kaolinites in this rock is significantly lower. The types of mutual connections and microconnections of the various ingredients have also been studied, as has their distribution, and also the level and character of the dispersal of the clay material. The pores are an exceptionally important feature of this rock's microstructure. Their shape and sizes have been determined, establishing the predominance of micropores with a small number of medium pores with a split shape. The salt content was established using the x-ray method. It varied in the individual samples, from 0.7 % to 3 %. Rock salt was predominant, which mainly forms halite, with a small amount of gypsum and trace amounts of bassanite, i.e. chlorides and sulphides.

Armed in such knowledge and precise macroscopic observations of the 'patient,' the conservators under the direction of Zbigniew Godziejewski initiated the systematic many-year-long therapy, the effects of which are annually monitored at the beginning of every excavation campaign. Even though after six years of this painstaking process, the state of preservation of the reliefs and their polychromy was stabilised to such an extent that we could initiate the exploration of the neighbouring mastaba without fearing what would befall the vizier's tomb, some conservation procedures are repeated there to this day, mainly prophylactically, whenever the surface of the decorated rock signals that the 'enemy no longer slumbers.'

The therapy of the reliefs was begun with the removal of the contaminants from the decorated surface, after which the polychromy was safeguarded from falling away from the wall.²⁹ Fragments, underneath which air bubbles had formed as a result of salt deposits, were reattached to the foundation. Larger pockets of air were filled with putty, the composition of which was selected individually, depending on the type and size of the damage, as well as on the structure of the foundation. The surface, which showed a tendency to transform into powder as a result of salt deposition, was fortified. At times, it was necessary to take out an entire fragment of the wall for conservation purposes, either due to the crumbling of the rock foundation and its stratification or in order to provide special reinforcement of the decorated surface. Precisely such was the case of the scene depicting the half-naked dancers in acrobatic positions in front of the vizier, carved onto the chapel's

28 Godziejewski, "Conservation Work," p. 238.

29 Godziejewski, "Conservation Work," p. 241.

southern wall, strongly threatened by the exceptional brittleness of the rock (Fig. 52). The magnificently preserved polychromy of this fragment's surface was first secured with Japanese paper using Paraloid B72 (acrylic resin). Following long-lasting 'treatment,' the fragment was reinserted into its original spot. It was attached to the bedrock with a thick layer of putty specially made on the base of Primal E330, which also filled the cavity in the rock, and thus simultaneously isolating the work of art from the further influx of salt from inside the bedrock. The putty was made on a Primal AC33/E330 base. Another product applied in similar circumstances is Paraloid B72. This preparation is first dissolved in toluene, after which the solution is enriched with fillings, such as chaulk, desalinated and sieved fine-grained sand, calcium carbonate, as well as products from the Remmers brand, including Funcosil KSE Füllstoff A and B. In some cases, a small amount of pigment (natural sienna) is added to standardise the colouring, especially in the visible edges of the filling substance.

The entire geological structure of this part of Saqqara facilitates the migration of salts soluble in water and their deposition on the surface of the reliefs.³⁰ They are aided not only by the silty, hygroscopic rock with a porous structure but also by the numerous, frequently very deep cracks and broad crevices visible on the surface of the rock. Many of them existed already at the time of the construction of the tomb, which is attested by thick layers of binding mortar of a shade similar to the colour of the rock. The fact that these procedures were not always effective is evidenced by the tragedy that befell the northern wall in Nyankhnefertum's tomb. Under the pressure of the material filling the burial shafts and chamber of yet another structure in the series of mastabas, the middle part of this wall collapsed precisely along the vertical crevices, whose preserved edges still bear the traces of the original paste.³¹ In order to reinforce the ancient mortar, especially in those spots where they bear decorations, a 5 % solution of Paraloid B72 in toluene is applied.³²

Some cracks were formed in later times, probably not without the participation of the earthquakes that frequently struck this region. The largest of these crevices cuts the vizier's chapel almost in the middle of its width, passing through the walls, floor and ceiling, and even through the preserved *in situ* fragment of the brick mastaba erected on top of the chapel's roof.³³ These cracks intersect on the chapel's ceiling, dividing it into a series of

30 Godziejewski, "Conservation Work," p. 242, pl. XXXIII; Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pl. LXIV d, CXLIX c.

31 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 169–181, pls. CIII–CXI.

32 Godziejewski, "Conservation Work," p. 242.

33 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XXXI–XXXIII, XXXVI a, XL e, LIV, LXII, LXXII.

plates, the stability of which is by no means guaranteed. As a form of monitoring, enabling the determination of any potential dislocation of these huge masses of stone, in 1998 we installed a sequence of plaster seals across the cracks.³⁴ None of them have fallen off as of yet. No vertical movements have been identified either, which would threaten the safety of the people present in the chapel.

The salts that have achieved their destination in their journey through the rock and have settled on the surface of the decorated walls, sometimes take the form of such fantastically shaped crystals and compositions that an archaeologist is sometimes close to feeling the urge to treat them like a work of modern art. Meanwhile, they must be gotten rid of as quickly as possible, as they lead to the cracking of the surface and the falling away of fragments of the decoration. Some have been petrified and formed a shell so resistant that scalpels must be used to remove them. They also frequently take on the form of barely visible fluff on the surface of the painting or a delicate thread similar to the head of a dandelion. It is then necessary to remove it with some soft-bristled brushes. Nonetheless, every cloud has a (relative) silver lining. The comparatively high level of salination protects the works of art from the formation of mould spores.

Every season of work of the archaeological mission in Saqqara begins with a conservation inspection in all the tombs we have discovered containing even just the remains of some decoration. Any damages identified are immediately repaired. The surface of the relief is moistened with a small amount of an aqueous solution of 96 % ethyl alcohol in a 1:1 proportion, with the purpose of decreasing the surface tension, which serves to improve the absorbency of the binding substance.³⁵ Depending on the specific case, the conservator introduces this substance either by injecting it into the surface of the relief or with the aid of especially delicate paintbrushes. Next, the loosened fragments of the polychromy are pressed onto the bedrock using tampons. The next actions are done with the help of sprayers. They are used to introduce the Primal AC33 or Primal E330 aqueous solution with a concentration amounting, depending on the particular case, to 6–8 %, onto the surface of the relief. In places with especially high salination, where the polychromy is flaking or slowly transforming into powder, the conservator sprays the surface with a 3 % Paraloid B72 solution in toluene.

This method got our mission dragged into an unexpected adventure involving alcohol. We use quite a lot of it for conservation purposes and until 2011 there were generally no greater problems with purchasing it in

34 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, pls. XLIX, LIV.

35 Godziejewski, "Conservation Work," p. 241.

Egypt. Any desired amount could be bought in special stores, or even in pharmacies. This changed after the revolution, which in consequence, if only for a year, brought the Muslim Brotherhood to power in the country. They were interested not so much in fighting alcoholism, which would be understandable in light of Koranic principles, but rather in the fact that the enemy (whoever it might be) uses amateur bombs for the production of which alcohol is used. It reached a point in 2014 when we had to purchase this rare product in some warehouse outside Cairo and we could not bring it to the excavations ourselves. Only the representative of the distributor was authorised to do this, and he turned out to be a very nice, well-educated young man. The only thing was that we could not determine the criteria based upon which he had decided that we do not cooperate with terrorists.

Thanks to our mission's systematic conservation procedures, repeated many times over, the state of preservation of the wall decoration in Fefi and Temi's tombs stabilised and achieved a satisfactory level. The dynamics of the salt migration decreased significantly, which does not mean that it has been eliminated completely. As they depend primarily on the climate conditions inside the chapel, which – if they change – immediately activate the salts, we installed a year-long monitoring system of these conditions using a small instrument of Swiss production. The thermo-hygrometer turns on automatically every two hours throughout the entire period we are gone, registering the current level of humidity and the temperature. It makes a chronological graph, which we read on a computer upon our return to Saqqara. The dependency of these parameters on the seasons, diurnal changes, as well as violent weather fluctuations is provided here precisely in numbers.

The torrential rainfalls that sometimes occur during the winter season are especially harmful to the microclimate inside the chapel. The observation of this correlation enabled us to make certain corrections to the protective pavilion covering this tomb, as well as to use different materials and parameters in the construction of a similar shelter above Temi's tomb, neighbouring the vizier's mastaba.³⁶ This pavilion is L-shaped since it in fact covers two funerary chapels hewn out into rock, adjacent to each other at a right angle (Il. 22; Fig. 157). Even though the owner's name is not preserved in the inscription carved onto the architrave, the only decorated element of the unfinished chapel 'hugging' the other structure, based on the entire context it is possible to assume that it had been foreseen for Temi's eldest son. Even though the shelter we built covers two tombs, we installed only one pair of iron gates. They do not lead directly to Temi's richly decorated chapel, but

36 Godziejewski, "Conservation Work in the Funerary Chapel of Nyankhnepferem," p. 207.

rather they are located near the entrance to the unfinished structure. As a result, the change in the climate conditions due to the frequent opening of the door leading to this complex has almost no influence on the beautiful reliefs and their polychromy. Another effective method of combatting the salts has been the filling of the burial shafts with sand after we have excavated them. The salts quickly change the direction of their migrations along with the humidity.

Despite the exceptional originality of the sepulchral complex encompassing the mastabas belonging to the vizier, his neighbour and the latter's eldest son (?), and even despite the unbelievable amount of effort put into their conservation and securing, our mission is categorically against opening this complex of monuments to tourists. Even the breathing of larger groups of people, not to mention verbal commentary and expressions of admiration, would cause such radical changes in the temperature and humidity inside the chapel that after a few months the migration of the salts and their crystallisation on the decorated surface would lead to the irreversible destruction of these unique works of art. We are however aware that such an amazing discovery should be made accessible to the broader public. This is not taken care of by the comprehensive, coloured, English-language scholarly publication on Merefnebef's tomb, issued seven years after the discovery was first made, which in the archaeology of Egypt is an unprecedented event.³⁷ A few years later, a similar study devoted to Nyankhnefertum's tomb was published, available on the shelves of all the most prestigious academic libraries around the world.³⁸

But that is simply not what it is all about. We would also like every Pole and foreigner visiting our country to be able to have more personal contact with the unique reliefs and paintings from over 4000 years ago. These are in fact works of art that belong to our global cultural heritage. Was it not also the source of much inspiration for the much later European civilisation? As a result, we prepared a design of a model faithfully replicating Merefnebef's tomb on a scale of 1:1, corresponding to the latest technological and aesthetic standards. All of the members of the mission were actively involved in this enterprise, especially the architect working with us at the time, Daria Tarara from Poznań. Our fantastic photographer, Jarosław Dąbrowski from Kraków, also joined in the project with exceptional enthusiasm and dedication, preparing special detailed documentation. Each of the decorated planes was divided into small squares, photographed separately, always in an orthogonal shot, maintaining the same distance and lighting.

37 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, passim.

38 Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, passim.

Daria approached the project with such dedication that a day after my operation at the Warsaw Oncology Centre, she came to the hospital with her entire team of colleagues to discuss some of the details. The hospital personnel on the third floor first gaped in bewildered awe, and then joined us in looking for an appropriate table on which we could spread out our enormous plans and drawings. It is a shame that I could not gaze from a distance at this ‘alien,’ barely standing on his own two feet while grasping onto a walker, connected by tubes to everything that could be moved around on wheels or carried with us, debating the technology of the project.

The Chair of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Professor Andrzej Legocki was just as enthusiastic towards the idea, reaching generously into the almost empty pockets of this mighty scholarly institution. Unfortunately, he did not find any imitators. Despite our most earnest efforts, we were unable to collect the remaining 80 % of the project price. Academic institutions could not assign even a penny, because they do not have a paragraph in their budgets entitled ‘activities popularising science,’ while institutions linked to culture were only able to express their enthusiasm. Even this was lacking from museum facilities, to whom we proposed that we could supplement their collections with a modern copy of a unique monument, revealing the artistry of the sculptors and painters from the third millennium BC. At that moment, there was nothing similar to it anywhere else in Europe; thus, the structure would become one of the most important tourist attractions on the historical Warsaw route. From the various concepts of exhibiting it, the best one seemed to be the idea to construct a special pavilion in the scarp adjacent to Książęca Street between the National Museum and the Museum of the Earth. The pavilion could have become a showcase of Polish architectural concepts, which are usually formed in our country, but are executed far away from Poland, while the tomb could be an inimitable testimony to our contribution to world culture. All this would require financial input that can only be dreamed of by institutions as lean as the facilities huddled under the roof of our ‘national heritage,’ including the ministry itself, or rather – beginning with it. In this situation, it is difficult to be surprised the museums did not want to take on yet another problem, investing their time, imagination and responsibility. The Copernicus Science Centre in Warsaw was very interested and would probably have exhibited the vizier’s tomb, if it had not already had every centimetre of its area planned ages ago. The documentation awaits better times, ‘post-crisis ones,’ if any such should return. If they do, the discoverers of Merefnebef’s tomb will be happy, even if they happen to observe its execution from a different, more horizontal perspective.

One could assume that in Saqqara our conservators only occupy themselves with taking care of the tombs. However, every day excavations generate a large number of problems linked to moveable artefacts. In the case of

the Upper Necropolis, this primarily refers to cartonnages and items made from wood.³⁹ Covered in rich polychromy, they are frequently preserved in a terrible state. The reasons for such a situation are multiple, not only the destructive activities of looters during different periods of history. The greatest threats include moisture, mould, insect larvae, as well as various microorganisms, which to an equal extent damage the wood of sarcophagi, figurines and ritual chests as they do the linen canvases, adhesives and pigments used for the production of cartonnages. The stratum of the Upper Necropolis, sometimes lying just underneath the surface of the sand, is especially vulnerable to the influence of atmospheric conditions. Some coffins unearthed at a depth of about one metre continue to retain the moisture that destroys the structure of the artefact even eight months after the rainy period.

In turn, in the much older and deeper located Old Kingdom tombs, especially those that were hewn into the lower terraces of the former quarry, the annual inflow of water from the direction of Djoser's pyramid has activated the salts to such an extent that over the course of the centuries they have transformed the equipment from many a burial chamber into a compact mass with the structure of stone. How does one go about taking out a wooden chest from this mass, containing the skeleton of a child, which in itself is so delicate that it would immediately disperse into powder (Fig. 197). Softening this mass with the aid of various chemicals, and sometimes even shattering it with a hammer, can take weeks before items can be pulled out, preserved in such shape that they have to be subjected to long consolidation procedures (Fig. 198). The extraction of miniature models made from stone, wooden figurines or exceptionally delicate copper vessels is equally difficult. As luck would have it, the flooded tombs are precisely those in which the most have been preserved, as even the ancient looters disliked such dirty and time-consuming work.⁴⁰

Archaeologists are also not spared the inherent 'thermal shock' artefacts experience at the moment they are discovered, i.e. as a result of the sudden contact with the atmosphere of our times. This especially weakens their polychromy, which requires the immediate, sometimes very time-consuming intervention of the restorers before any attempt is made at extracting the artefact from its original context. Weeks passed before we could take out a bundle of cartonnages with a very flaky and loosened polychromy from an open grave (Figs. 178–180).⁴¹ The fragment was small, so we did not expect it to have high

39 Z. Godziejewski, "Conservation Work," in: *The Upper Necropolis*, pp. 546–556.

40 See, e.g., grave XLI b, shaft 50: Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, pp. 199–200.

41 Z. Godziejewski, "Appendix: Conservation Work in Saqqara (2008–2009)," in: K. Myśliwiec, "Saqqara 2008–2009," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 21 (2012): *Research 2009*, pp. 170–172, fig. 8–9.

academic value, all the more so as the state of preservation of the canvas and stucco allowed for only the most pessimistic prognostics. In turn, archaeologists were interested in the rapid extraction of this damaged artefact since its presence made it impossible to explore the mummy lying deeper underneath, also not-too-well preserved. We could not believe our own eyes when – towards the end of the campaign – the conservators demonstrated the effects of the laboratory-based operations to which they had subjected this ‘obstruct.’ The polychromy of this cartonnage surface, reinforced and straightened, revealed a whole world depicting the inhabitants of the Netherworld (Fig. 180).

Similar motifs also appear on the so-called canopic chests, which have been preserved in only a very few burials from the Ptolemaic period (Figs. 165–167).⁴² Similarly as the figurines presenting the mummiform god Ptah-Sokar-Osiris (Fig. 168)⁴³ and the Old Kingdom statuettes depicting the tomb owner, sometimes completely naked (Figs. 76–78),⁴⁴ they were usually made from wood, which had been deformed, weakened and lost part of its polychromy for the above-listed reasons. We felt special regret for the wall of one of the most beautiful chests: the one on which it had laid for centuries in the grave.⁴⁵ The concentration of moisture in the ground led not only to the splintering of the wooden material but also the loss of most of the decoration.

For similar reasons, some of the wooden figurines, depicting people with ideal proportions and facial features, have the consistency of an old mushroom. For their reinforcement we use a whole arsenal of chemicals, among which a high position is held by Mowilith 50 (PVA) mixed with alcohol and acetone.⁴⁶ In order to stop the decay of the painting layer on the surface of the wood, the already frequently mentioned Paraloid B72 is often used with a ca. 8 % mixture with toluene. In some cases, the lack of small fragments of the artefact makes it impossible to connect its larger parts into a whole. The conservators fill in the gaps with small strips of balsa wood, which is perfect for such purposes thanks to its elasticity. It is precisely this cosmetic procedure that ended the many-year-long process of the conservation of the most

42 A. Kowalska, “The Catalogue,” in: *The Upper Necropolis*, pp. 335–343, pls. CCXLIV–CCXLVII; T. Kowalska, “The Catalogue of Burials and Small Finds,” in: Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 38–47, pls. XXIII–XXVI.

43 Kowalska, “The Catalogue,” pp. 344–348, pls. CCXLI–CCXLIII; Kowalska, “The Catalogue,” in: Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 47–51, pls. XXVII–XXIX.

44 Kowalska, “Small Finds,” pp. 453–456, pls. CCII a, CCIII a–b; cf. pls. CXCIII–CXCVI, CXCIX, CCIV–CCV, CCVIII.

45 *The Upper Necropolis*, pl. CCXLVI.

46 Godziejewski, “Conservation Work,” p. 548.

exceptional wooden item we have discovered so far. This is the famous ritual harpoon and its cylindrical sheath (Figs. 72–75).⁴⁷ Both items are in their entirety made from juniper (*Juniperus*). Upon completion of the conservation in our excavation area, they made their first journey to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo for the exhibition on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of Polish archaeological research in Egypt,⁴⁸ while they currently constitute part of the permanent exposition in the monographic Imhotep Museum, greeting tourists near the entrance to Saqqara.

It goes without saying – similarly as the decorated Old Kingdom tombs – the matter of all categories of moveable artefacts was subjected to comprehensive analyses before initiating conservation procedures.⁴⁹ Among other things, these tests showed the enormous diversity of raw materials used in the production of dyes and adhesives, as well as the causes of the ‘illnesses’ from which the artefacts suffer. The most valuable items from our excavations made their way to the well-secured and protected storehouses of the Imhotep Museum in Saqqara, where they are monitored annually by our conservators and, if need be, ‘pampered.’ Urszula Dąbrowska, to whom Zbigniew passed on the torch, now heads the team of conservators. After gaining experience not only at the excavations in Saqqara but also in a few European and Asian countries, Urszula enables the archaeologists to sleep peacefully, knowing that no challenge will catch her unawares.

From time to time, Ewa Parandowska comes back to us in Saqqara, as if she were visiting her own child. It was she who gave the vizier his first injections. During one such visit, she brought her husband with her, an archaeologist with the soul of an artist, writer and filmmaker. The motif of our excavations in the foothills of Djoser’s pyramid appears repeatedly in some of the sixty films he managed to make before he left us forever. Multi-talented, like his famous father, throughout his life Piotr had to constantly choose between science and art. Using the first, he talked about the second, though he just as willingly turned these roles around. While Ewa can be considered to be a doctor of the arts, without any hesitation Piotr could be referred to as a conservator of culture, especially in times when its significance is undergoing constant degradation. If ever a specialisation is formed called ‘conservation of culture’ at the universities (and it is greatly needed!), Piotr Parandowski (1944–2012) would surely be named its precursor.

47 Bibliography in K. Myśliwiec, “Trois millénaires à l’ombre de Djéser: Chronologie d’une nécropole,” in: Ch. Zivie-Coche, I. Guermeur (eds.), “*Parcourir l’éternité*” – *Hommages à Jean Yoyotte*, Vol. 2, Brepols 2012, pp. 855–856, fn. 15.

48 *Seventy Years*, pp. 82–83.

49 Z. Godziejewski with a contribution by W. Weker, “Conservation,” in: *Old Kingdom Structures*, pp. 533–547.

Chapter 12. The rest is silence

Abstract: Questions to the georadar: where to go next? Dilemma: Dry Moat in the West or Mudbrick Platform in the East? Unusual tomb architecture in a rock wall. Where is the tomb owner and his namesake son? More puzzles than answers.

Keywords: Ikhi/Meri, geophysical survey, rock tomb, nobleman, double burial, cult chapel, false doors.

Archaeological research is frequently reminiscent of a trial based on circumstantial evidence. The gaps in the source records have to be supplemented based on analogies, if they exist at all, as well as constantly extended historical knowledge, and they then have to be glued together using one's imagination. But woe to the archaeologist who would harness the analogies to the chariot of his or her wishful thinking. There are no two identical cases in history, even though the directions of development frequently follow the same pattern. The fates of individuals and entire social groups were decided by so many varied factors that their results always differ slightly. And they are most definitely different from what an archaeologist might dream up. Disappointment is experienced as a rule by those who think they know better than history and foresee the results of excavations in advance. Fate tends to be wilful in such cases, or even spiteful. It punishes the researcher for his arrogance, presenting him with a barren layer, even though in Egypt this happens exceptionally seldom. Much more frequently, reality brings us something that is the exact opposite of what the products of our schematic thinking had led us to expect.

Even though in Saqqara we try to show the maximum humility in the face of the history of this exceptional place, reality continues to exceed our imagination and attempts at reconstruction. Things were no different at the two opposite sides of our excavations, the eastern and western ones. When we unearthed the part of the necropolis located east of the vizier's tomb, we encountered an unexpected obstacle. The ruins of the Old Kingdom mastaba, situated at a distance of only a few metres from the recessed wall of Djoser's pyramid (Fig. 61), were not only covered with a layer of pure Aeolic sand but also sealed from above by an extensive platform of mud brick.¹

1 K. Myśliwiec, "Eine geheimnisvolle Rampe und Plattform an der Westseite der Pyramide des Djoser," *Sokar. Das ägyptische Pyramidenzeitalter* 11 (2005/2), pp. 6–7; K. Myśliwiec, "Fragen an eine Nekropole in Sakkara," *Sokar. Das ägyptische Pyramidenzeitalter* 13 (2006/2), pp. 14–16; K. Myśliwiec, "Trois millénaires à l'ombre de Djéser: Chronologie d'une nécropole," in: Ch. Zivie-Coche,



Fig. 183. Old Kingdom tombs overlaid with a brick platform during the New Kingdom. View from the south, cf. Il. 28.

The sandy surface was levelled for this purpose and a thin floor of mud was poured onto it, while only one layer of large-sized bricks was placed on top (Fig. 183). One could tell right away that these were bricks from the pharaonic period. Since the preserved eastern part of the platform covered the graves, the exploration of which we had already initiated at their western edge, it would have to be partially dismantled in order to continue with the excavations. We faced the type of dilemma that vexes many an archaeologist: can artefacts located in the upper layers be removed to get to the structures situated beneath? One has to make a choice. We came to the conclusion that it would be a Solomon-like judgement to dismantle only the part of the platform that covers the graves already visible, while leaving behind its eastern fragment *in situ*, adjacent to the recessed wall. Of course, before conducting this operation, the structure had to be precisely described, photographed and drawn, as there would never again be any access to it.

But our decision is not enough to go ahead with such an action. In order to conduct an ‘abortion’ of this type, one has to have the permission of the

Supreme Council of the Antiquities. The Egyptians are very unwilling to hand out such permission, but we were lucky that the platform did not bear any decorations and had not been preserved intact. Its ragged western edge indicated that originally it had run much further westward, perhaps as far as Merefnebef's mastaba, which protruded above the level of this brick 'cap.' After a year of waiting, we received the permit from the Egyptian authorities for the disassembly.

We took advantage of these circumstances to take a closer look at the content of the clay in the bricks, and especially at the vessel sherds used in order to slim the mass for the better coherence of the building material. If any of the pottery sherds, particularly the larger ones, had born any characteristic elements, making it possible to determine the production date of the broken vessels, we would have acquired a valuable *terminus post quem*, i.e. the date after which the brick was made and the entire platform constructed. This would be information all the more valuable as the platform itself does not have any diagnostic features. Its surface does not bear any traces of having been used, while in the sand covering it only pottery sherds from the New Kingdom were found, which do not have to be contemporaneous to the erection of the brick structure.

An archaeologist does not like to discover artefacts about which he or she can say little else than that they exist. However, they are simultaneously the most intriguing, as they force one to think like a detective and search for details that would help to reveal the secrets behind these objects. The lack of any signs of usage suggested that the platform had not been a structure of a ritual function. If it had been, the clay surface would have contained some remnants of the offerings placed there, e.g. small animal bones, the remains of altars on which piles of plants or even fragments of items used in cult activities would have been burnt, i.e. all those things we observed on the example of Vizier Merefnebef's funerary chapel.² This leads us to the conclusion that the platform must rather have performed a protective function and that its creators aimed to make some especially important structures inaccessible, probably sepulchral ones located underneath. But who and when had built it?

The analysis of the pottery sherds used to slim the clay from which the bricks were made initially suggested a relatively early date, since the youngest sherds originated from the Middle Kingdom. However, after we had studied a larger number of bricks, it turned out that they also contained pottery material from the New Kingdom, including fragments of particularly

2 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, Warsaw 2004, pp. 62–63, pls. XXIV e, XXV g, XXVI a–d, XXVII a–c, XXVIII a–c.

diagnostic vessels, the surface of which was adorned with motifs painted using blue paint.³ This type of pottery appeared in Egypt in the middle of the Eighteenth Dynasty and survived until the Ramesside period. Since larger fragments of similar vessels were also present in the mud mortar between the bricks and just above the platform, we could assume with a high level of probability that the platform was built during the New Kingdom, supposedly in the beginnings of the reign of the rulers named Ramesses, i.e. the Nineteenth Dynasty.

Such a dating can be supported by a *graffito*-type sketch carved onto the recessed wall of the pyramid, just next to the platform, slightly above the latter's level.⁴ In its schematic form, the *graffito* depicts a sphinx and pyramids; doubtless those that are located in Giza and are sometimes visible even from Saqqara. The motif and style of this representation find striking analogies with similar sketches dated to the New Kingdom. The artist who drew the *graffito* in Saqqara must have been one of the constructors of the platform. Such a dating is also supported by the fact that in a few places the brick platform 'squeezes' into the numerous, sometimes extensive cavities that existed already at that time in the lower part of the pyramid's recessed wall.⁵ It can be assumed that after almost 1500 years since Djoser's tomb had been constructed, the snow-white face of the wall must have been strongly damaged. In turn, the platform survived no longer than to the beginnings of the Ptolemaic period, since at that time the above-described ephemeral structure was constructed at its western edge from the re-used blocks of the recessed wall, while the dead began to be buried within the ruins of the mastabas located below.⁶

Nonetheless, it is difficult to determine the function of this mysterious brick construction without knowing its size. Beyond its eastern border, we can establish with precision its northern edge, where the platform is enclosed by a low wall also erected from mud brick, running from east to west almost precisely along the extension of the pyramid's axis, abutting its recessed wall

3 T. Rzeuska, "West Saqqara. The Pottery 2001," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 13 (2002): *Reports 2001*, pp. 155–157, figs. 3–4; T. Rzeuska, "Saqqara 2007: The Pottery," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 19 (2010): *Reports 2007*, p. 222.

4 F. Welc, "A New Kingdom Graffito on the Enclosure Wall of the Netjerikhet Funerary Complex," *Études et Travaux* 22 (2008), pp. 225–235.

5 F. Welc, "Some Remarks on the Early Old Kingdom Structures Adjoining on the West Enclosure Wall of the Netjerikhet Funerary Complex," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 18 (2008): *Reports 2006*, p. 174–179.

6 Myśliwiec et al., *The Tomb*, p. 44, pls. LXXVII a, d, LXXXV a–e, h; *The Upper Necropolis*, pp. 42–43, figs. 10–11 (sector V), pl. XXXVI a–c.



Fig. 184. Entrance into the Old Kingdom 'false tomb.' View from the north.

(Figs. 183–185).⁷ Thus, it seems that the constructors of the platform very much wanted to emphasise its organic connection with the already ancient structure built by Imhotep, an object of widespread cult.

Even though as a result of later damage, it is difficult to establish the range of the platform in the western direction, it should be excluded that it at any point covered Merefnebef's mastaba. Therefore, its width in an east-west line should be estimated as amounting to about ten metres. It is most difficult to establish its expanse in the north-south line, while it is this dimension that interests us the most as the platform is adjacent in this area to the pyramid's *temenos*. This terrain had not yet been the object of our systematic excavations, even though – in order to satisfy our curiosity – we had conducted a few trial pits here at a distance of about five metres from each other (Il. 27).⁸ It turned out that in each of them a fragment of the platform appears at a depth of about one metre beneath the surface of the ground. Therefore, the entire structure must have been at least fifty metres in length. When in

7 K. Myśliwiec, "West Saqqara Excavations, 2001," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 13 (2002): *Reports 2001*, pp. 135–140; K. Myśliwiec, "West Saqqara. Saqqara 2004," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 16 (2005): *Reports 2004*, pp. 148–152, figs. 1–5.

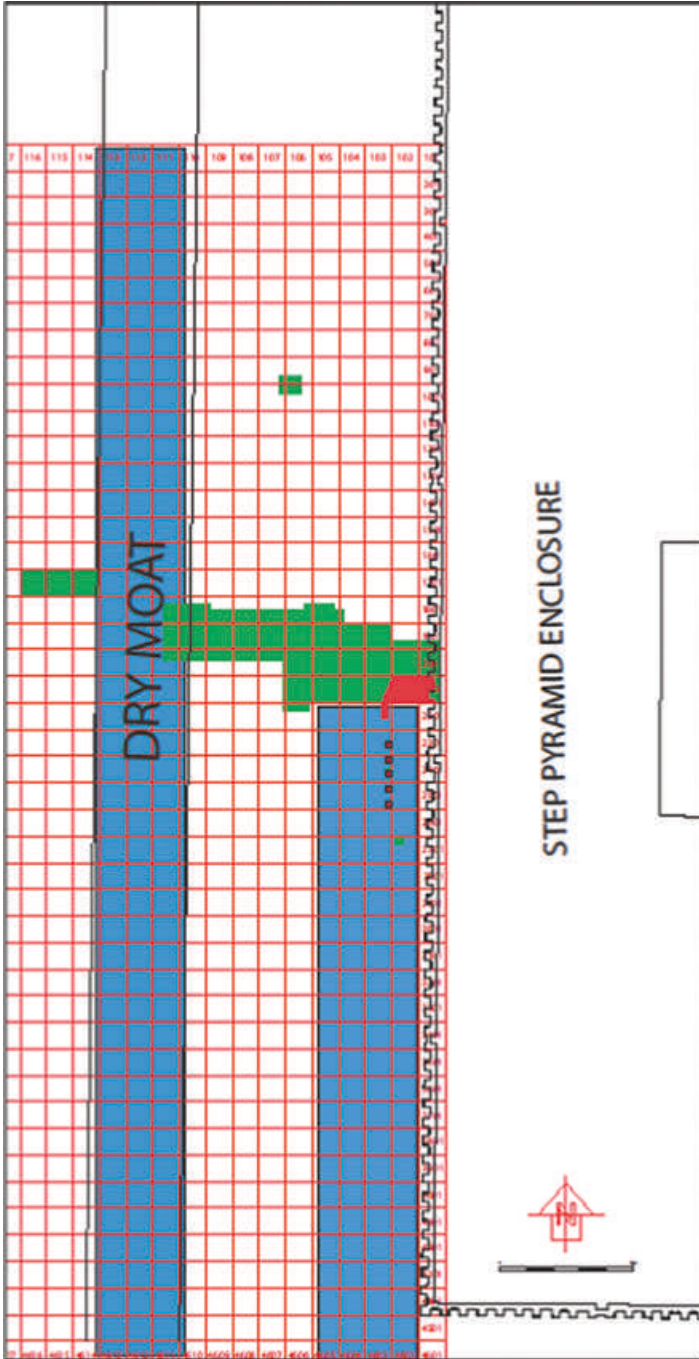
8 Myśliwiec, "West Saqqara. Saqqara 2004," p. 152, fig. 5.



Fig. 185. Frontal wall of the ‘false tomb’ (bottom level) and the northern edge of the brick platform (top level) on the E-W axis of Djoser’s pyramid (visible in the background). View from the west.

2012, we brought a ground-penetrating radar (GPR) to Saqqara in order to ‘inspect’ the interior of the earth within the territory of our concession using a non-invasive method (Fig. 188), we also checked the area adjacent to the recessed wall. The initial results of the studies make it possible to assume that the brick platform accompanies the pyramid *temenos* up until the latter’s southern⁹ edge. This would thus be a construction strictly linked

⁹ F. Welc et al., “Geophysical Survey (GPR) in West Saqqara (Egypt): Preliminary Remarks,” *Studia Quaternaria* 30/2 (2013), pp. 106–107.



II. 27. The main directions for further excavations have been marked in blue: the brick platform by the recessed wall encircling the pyramid (to the right) and the 'Dry Moat' (to the left).

to the pyramid, ‘glued’ to its recessed wall along the entire southern half of this gigantic fencing. If its function was to shield the tomb of an important person buried in this place, why would it have been so enormous?

While the initial results of the GPR surveys require detailed verification, certain suppositions can already be made. Even if it turned out that the meridional stretch of the platform amounts to little more than fifty metres, its proportions and dimensions bring to mind the tombs of some of the first rulers of the Second Dynasty, unearthed earlier slightly to the south of Djoser’s funerary complex.¹⁰ Archaeologists expect to find further tombs in this region. Did the platform cover one of these, so important or – despite the passage of millennia – so well-preserved that it had to be protected from intruders?

In 2005, it seemed for a moment that we had discovered such a tomb underneath the platform. When we decided to clear the surface of the Old Kingdom structures, we had discovered during the earlier excavation campaigns right next to the foundations of the recessed wall surrounding Djoser’s pyramid (Fig. 61), the outlines of a new monument appeared on the rock surface. The first were the remains of a broad mud-brick wall, running underneath the stone foundation from Djoser’s times (Fig. 61). This is yet another piece of evidence that monumental tombs had existed here before the first pyramid was ever built. This type of large dark brown mud brick was exactly the same as in the mastabas of the noblemen from the archaic period, discovered at one point in the northern part of the Saqqara plateau. This is irrefutable proof that the earlier necropolis had fallen victim to Imhotep’s architectural ideas.

However, a few metres further westward, the contours of an even more original construction were outlined on the surface of the rock (Figs. 186–187). The remains of two long parallel stone walls running from the north to the south turned out to be the upper part of rock walls hewn out deeper into the rock.¹¹ This must have been a funerary structure used for some time, since a few layers of a sturdy flooring with the structure of cement with pebbles imbedded into its hard texture were located adjacent to these walls on their external side. We immediately slackened our work pace and began observing the pile of rubble filling the corridor between the rock walls. We soon discovered the structure must be relatively old, since it was re-used again during

10 G. Dreyer, “The Tombs of First and Second Dynasties at Abydos and Saqqara,” in: *The Treasures of the Pyramids*, pp. 74–75.

11 Myśliwiec, “West Saqqara. Saqqara 2004,” pp. 149, 151–152, fig. 4; K. Myśliwiec, “Saqqara Archaeological Activities, 2005,” *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 17 (2007): *Reports* 2005, pp. 160–168, figs. 5–11.



Fig. 186. Structures from the Old Kingdom (bottom level) and the New Kingdom (top level) (Fig. 185) on the pyramid's axis. View from the north-west.

the Sixth Dynasty, through the insertion of two burial shafts into the corridor, perhaps supplementing the mastaba of a dignitary called Pehenptah ('beautiful name' – Pehi), erected on the western side of the corridor.¹² It sometimes happened, especially in the later phases of the development of this necropolis, that room was lacking for new burials within the area of the mastabas, which forced the family of the deceased to hew out new shafts beyond the walls of the original tomb. For example, the tomb of one of the priestesses of the Goddess Hathor was such an extension, located adjacent to the above-described mastaba belonging to Ny-Pepi.¹³

12 Kuraskiewicz, *Architecture*, Warsaw 2013, pp. 45–59.

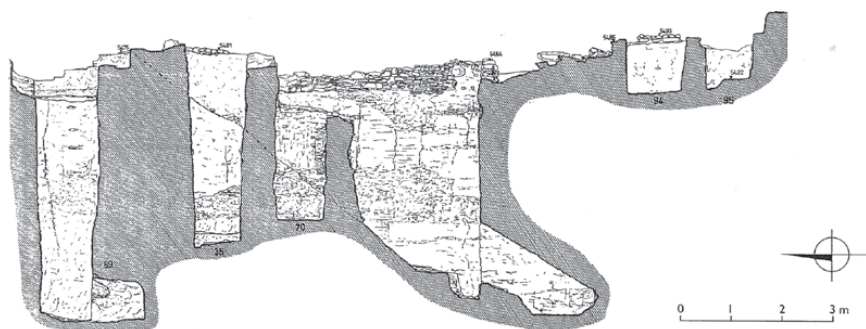
13 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 109–111 (XVII: Tomb of Khekeret).



Fig. 187. 'Blind' ending of the underground corridor: ceiling converging with the floor.



Fig. 188. Field survey determining the location of future excavations.



II. 28. Section through the underground structures within the 'blind tomb,' cf. Figs. 183–187.

Nonetheless, the most intriguing aspect in the corridor explored with such exceptional meticulousness was the outline of its original flooring, best visible in the profile of its eastern wall. The wall here had the form of a ramp sloping steeply southwards (II. 28; Figs. 184–186). Even this, similarly as the width of the corridor (1.86 m) and its orientation along the north-south line, brought to mind associations with two Second-Dynasty royal tombs, located south of the Djoser sepulchral complex. The only significant difference lay in the fact that the rake angle of the ramp in this structure was much steeper than in the case of archaic tombs. From that moment onwards, we began to expect that a few metres further a vertical rock wall would appear with an entrance that would be in the shape of a rectangle rimmed with a profiled frame. This is precisely what happened.¹⁴

Almost certain that we had discovered a new tomb, probably a royal one, from the period preceding the construction of the first pyramid, we began to sift every clump of earth so as not to miss, for example, stamps with the name of a king or other inscribed artefacts. We studied all the ceramic vessels with particular meticulousness, which in this spot formed an exceptionally abundant deposit. We did not worry much that almost all of them originated from the final phase of the Old Kingdom, and not, as we would have wanted, from the reign of the Second or Third Dynasty. Such tombs happened to be reused; thus, late pottery could be evidence of secondary burials or even originate from those burial shafts which were inserted into the corridor just a few metres from the mysterious entrance at the end of the ramp. The fact that a type of trapdoor was constructed just in front of the

14 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, p. 54 (VI: Corridor 3), fn. 26, pls. VI–VII, XXXV–XXXVI.

entrance, meant for a large and heavy stone slab that usually blocked access to the interior of royal tombs, only contributed to working up even more of a scholarly appetite.

However, our concern increased with every second after we passed through the entrance hewn into the rock. Since the ceiling of the chamber lowered systematically at the same angle that had been determined in the corridor by the slope of the floor, we had expected the latter to decline in parallel, continuing the corridor inside the rock mass, up until the next passage which would lead us to a horizontal gallery with many small chambers to the sides, analogically to the Second-Dynasty royal tombs. But nothing like this happened. The floor did not want to decline. It adopted a horizontal position that gave us heart palpitations. Up to a distance of one metre beyond the entrance, we continued to allow for the possibility that in order to ensure the safety of the burial the practical Egyptians had forfeited hewing a normal passage and had left a cleft further inside, only narrow enough for a sarcophagus or its elements to be deposited in the burial chamber. However, every step brought us closer to the inevitable truth that the floor met the ceiling at a distance of less than three metres from the entrance (Il. 28; Fig. 187).¹⁵

What could have occurred that after putting such an enormous amount of stone-working effort into hewing out a corridor with a steep, diagonal bottom, work had been ceased inside the ‘tomb,’ just past the entrance, which itself bears all the features of a completed job? We would have understood this decision if the workers had suddenly encountered a layer of rock in this spot so brittle that it was necessary to give up the execution of the ambitious plans. However, at the spot where the ceiling connects with the floor, the Saqqara limestone is characterised by a hard, homogeneous structure, which would not have discouraged the builders from continuing their work. Everything indicates that the halting of the work had a specific purpose, perhaps planned from the very beginning.

The location of the entrance to the ‘tomb’ is especially diagnostic in this case. It was hewn in precisely the same spot where, over 1000 years later, the wall bordering the brick platform from the north ran a few metres higher up (Figs. 185–186).¹⁶ Both elements lie along the same line, which is almost

15 F. Welc, “Exploration of an Archaic (?) Funerary Structure in Sector 2002,” *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 17 (2007): *Reports 2005*, pp. 176–181; Myśliwiec, “Saqqara. Archaeological Activities, 2005,” pp. 160–168, figs. 9–11.

16 Myśliwiec, “Saqqara. Archaeological Activities, 2005,” p. 162, figs. 5–6; K. Myśliwiec, “Fragen an eine Nekropole in Sakkara,” *Sokar. Das ägyptische Pyramidenzeitalter* 13 (2006), pp. 14–16, Abb. 20–21.

an exact extension of the axis of the pyramid in the western direction. The conclusion is simple: already during the New Kingdom some sort of essential correlation was felt to exist between the old rock pseudo-tomb and the brick construction covering the Old Kingdom tombs. Nonetheless, it is equally certain that this extensive platform was not built to protect this very sepulchral structure, abandoned at an initial phase of work. If this was the case, the object secured from the top with the platform should be searched for further southward, in an area where we had not yet conducted excavations.

But why was an unfinished pseudo-tomb, hewn into rock, incorporated into a protected architectural complex? It must have performed some significant function; however, the only one the context suggests is the role of a trap being a kind of false structure, misleading potential looters. This would have been possible with the assumption that the thieves – who were generally well-prepared for their profession – thought using *per analogiam* schemes. Deceived by the entrance, similar to the ones in Second-Dynasty royal tombs, they would have fallen into a trap construed as a ‘blind chapel,’ leading nowhere, while the entrance to the authentic tomb would have been located somewhere else, further southwards. It cannot be excluded that the trap functioned so well that in later times it was transformed into a type of primitive cult chapel, in which, e.g., offering vessels were deposited, of course meant for the individual buried ‘beyond the wall.’ As such, it could have made its way under the ceiling of the platform built 1000 years later.

This theory does however have its weak points. While various systems securing the tombs from potential thieves, well prepared to disrupt the eternal rest of the carnal ‘Osirises,’ have been unearthed in the tombs of important Egyptians, there is no evidence that anyone was capable of coming up with an effective system. The thieves frequently won, be it thanks to their intelligence or by using force and showing determination. Even the heaviest of stone slabs blocking the passages in the pharaoh’s pyramids did not pass the test. Only once were the guards of a necropolis, this time the one in Western Thebes, able to chase them away during work they had already initiated, as a result of which the ephemeral, quite insignificant young man named Tutankhamen is today one of the most famous pharaohs of all times. It is hard to imagine that the creators of a monumental tomb right next to the royal pyramid in Saqqara would have been naïve enough to hope that the looters would not find the real entrance, wherever it might be. If, however, we were to assume that the tomb covered later with a ‘cap’ was hewn already in archaic times, it would be possible to suppose that the Egyptians of those days had chosen a solution that would surely not have been repeated in the New Kingdom, following their abundant experience with the plundering of royal tombs. Unless this was an example of the proverbial ‘make-believe actions’ with which we are well acquainted from the everyday practices of

other totalitarian states, closer to us chronologically. The construction of a mock tomb would have been listed by one of the functionaries responsible for security matters, showing his superiors that ‘something had been done.’ However, the price to pay for such planned deception during the early pharaonic period would surely have been much higher than in our times.

If we were however to assume that the thieves had in this case also come out victorious, we would have to consider why a 1000 years later such significance was attached to the protection of looted chambers. It cannot be excluded that such an important person had been originally deposited there that even his or her place of burial, even void of funerary equipment, deserved the highest respect and to be secured with a brick platform. It seems more probable that this was all about symbolic protection and not about concealing treasures located underneath, since for a thief there would be no easier barrier to overcome than a single layer of mud brick and the thin coating of sand underneath.

Another possibility also seems close to the truth, i.e. that the platform was built above the sepulchral structures not due to their original ‘user,’ but out of respect for a secondary burial arranged here in much later times, perhaps even during the New Kingdom. This kind of reusage frequently occurred in ancient Egypt, even in royal circles. Perhaps even Alexander the Great’s mummy spent some time here, maybe just a few months, in the tomb of an earlier celebrity at the Memphite necropolis, as already discussed in chapter 10. In the case of the mysterious structure on the western side of the ‘step pyramid,’ it would have been someone from a much earlier period, if the platform actually was created, as suggested by the structure of the bricks, during the Ramesside Period.

If our reasoning is correct, a solution presents itself that is highly probable. The construction of the brick casing might be linked to the already mentioned individual called Khaemweset, one of the first sons of Ramesses II.¹⁷ Performing the function in Memphis of the main priest of the god Ptah, he was a great admirer of Old Kingdom monuments and was famous for his conservation activities involving the royal pyramids in the Memphite necropolis, especially in Saqqara. This was also where he was buried, probably near the Serapeum. The sensitive ‘conservator’ was accompanied in Memphis by his mother, Ramesses II’s first wife, who later had to give up her seat to the beautiful Nefertari, buried in the Theban Valley of the Queens. The tomb of Iset-nofret, Khaemweset’s mother, has not been found to this day. Did the aesthete of royal blood bury his mother right next to Djoser’s

17 Myśliwiec, “Trois millénaires à l’ombre de Djéser,” pp. 860–861, fn. 53–54.

pyramid, in the ancient, though probably already emptied tomb of one of the rulers of the Second Dynasty?

We might perhaps find this out in the course of further excavations, though it is equally probable that some other important person, especially respected during the Ramesside Period, found his or her eternal resting place here. An archaeologist would be the most satisfied if it turned out that this was a person thus far completely unknown. However, we should not expect too much, especially not an intact tomb with a full set of funerary equipment. It seems simply impossible in this place. The results of the GPR surveys conducted in 2012 in the entire area of our concession lead us to be especially careful in formulating hypotheses. While they did confirm that the brick platform continues on southward as far at the south-west corner of the recessed wall encircling the holy pyramid complex, they also sent out an ominous signal suggesting that an extensive hollow lies more or less in the middle of its length. Let us hope it does not turn out to be evidence of an even later secondary usage, e.g. another gigantic shaft left behind in Saqqara by the Persian Period.

When we completed our excavations in 2012 in the area between the holy complex of Djoser's pyramid and the eastern edge of the 'Dry Moat,' we faced the choice of a new direction for our excavations. We wanted the area selected for further research to offer promise of finding the solution to an important scholarly problem or at least for its posing, and not just to be the source of new tombs. We decided once again to look for assistance in the results of geophysical prospection. To this aim, we brought a ground-penetrating radar (GPR) from Poland, run by a group of geophysicists from the University of Warsaw and the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw under the direction of Dr Fabian Welc and Dr Jerzy Trzcіński.¹⁸ We were especially interested in two areas of the necropolis lying on the western side of the 'step pyramid,' running along the eastern and western edge of the cemetery (Il. 27). We really wanted to find out what type of structures were concealed by the brick platform located adjacent from the west to the recessed wall, how deep they were and how far they extended southward.

The second aim was the 'Dry Moat' in its western arm, of which we had already previously surveyed the middle part (Il. 3; Figs. 2, 69, 159 and 189–191), but only to a depth of about five metres.¹⁹ What lies at a greater depth?

18 F. Welc et al., *Geophysical Survey (GPR) in West Saqqara (Egypt): Preliminary Remarks*, pp. 99–108; Myśliwiec, "Archaeology Meeting Geophysics on Polish Excavations in Egypt," *Studia Quaternaria* 30/2 (2013), pp. 45–59; F. Welc et al., "Preliminary Remarks on Enigmatic "White Casing Limestone" from Saqqara Archaeological Site in Egypt," pp. 115–123.

19 Myśliwiec, "Trois millénaires à l'ombre de Djéser," pp. 854–857.



Fig. 189. Excavation by 'Dry Moat's' western section.

Are there some sepulchral structures earlier than the ones we unearthed in the highest layer? What is the course of the 'Dry Moat' to the north and south of the central fragment we had already excavated? Do the lower 'floors' of this gigantic hollow conceal any especially important burials or sanctuaries? Were the layers of sand filling the bottom part of the 'Dry Moat' used for cult purposes, sepulchral ones or some other aims before the Ptolemaic period? These were the questions we first posed to the geophysicists. The results of their intense work are in the course of being interpreted in detail. Nonetheless, even their initial observation, still requiring checking through excavations, lead to the conclusion that the 'Dry Moat' can be treated as a time capsule, demanding multidisciplinary studies that might cast new light on the history of Saqqara, the Memphite necropolis, and northern Egypt over the course of a few thousand years.

While we were grappling with our ideas about which of the two directions of research should be considered the more important, worthy of concentrating our efforts on it during subsequent campaigns, something suddenly happened which took the decision out of our hands. Any reader searching for signs of the intervention of supernatural forces can be given the satisfaction of knowing that the sensational discovery made in the final week of an excavation campaign, i.e. towards the end of October 2012, occurred in precisely the same place where ten years earlier a living guardian of the



Fig. 190. View of the same spot after the excavation campaign: entrance to an Old Kingdom tomb in the façade of the ‘Dry Moat,’ in the foreground – burials in terracotta coffins from the Ptolemaic period (Upper Necropolis).

Netherworld had almost taken my life. At the time, I had stopped in my tracks, lost in thought, at the top of a sandy hill on the western side of the ‘Dry Moat,’ while I considered the structure of the elevation. Was it a natural geological formation or an ancient structure later covered by sand? Suddenly, a terrifying mass scream issued from the throats of the Egyptian workers digging at a distance of just a few metres from me. With raised pickaxes and hoes, they raced in my direction. In the last second that separated us from our macabre encounter, I thought that they must have been paid off by some terrorists, who for the first time in history had chosen an archaeologist as their target. But the attackers quickly turned out to be my defenders. From afar, they had noticed the cobra, whose colour did not differ one bit from that of the sand in that spot. At a distance of just several dozen

centimetres before me, it was already raising its trunk to strike. However, the panting boys got to him in the last second and immediately beat it to death.

This was the only time in my fifty-year-long archaeological career that I had been attacked by a snake. Earlier encounters had led me to see this species as creatures exceptionally shy and skittish, or – at any rate – friendly. The ancient Egyptians, acute observers of nature, attributed snakes with many contrasting qualities, identifying the animal with various gods and goddesses.

I could not see the slithering cobra in time as it had approached me from the side from which the sun shone, which in Egypt completely blinds a person looking in that direction. In turn, the workers, turned the opposite way, could see its every twitch. I was suddenly reminded of my master's, Professor Kazimierz I' only phobia, or at least his greatest one. He spoke of it every occasion he could. "Every snake is dangerous," he would repeat. I took this unusual event to be a good sign, a signal to accelerate excavations in this spot. It turned out to be exceptional in all regards.

Already the layer of the Upper Necropolis, located here at only a few centimetres underneath the surface of the sand, was very rich and diverse. In its upper part, we discovered many burials in variously-shaped coffins, reflecting the stratification of Memphite society during the Ptolemaic period (Figs. 37–38).²⁰ The most beautiful one were sculpted in a single piece of wood, while its elegant proportions and subtle modelling of the facial features were so similar to the stone sarcophagi of the dignitaries from the first half of this epoch that it could be dated to the third century BC without a moment's hesitation.²¹ Other, slightly poorer ones, were made out of boards, which – however – were distinguished by the individualised expression of the masks sculpted onto the surface of the lid.²² It sometimes happened that the polychromy of some coffins, especially their bottoms, had been impressed so precisely into the underlying layer of sand that the painted hieroglyphic inscription could just as easily be read from the original or from its negative in the sand.²³ In this part of the necropolis, there were fewer mummies shrouded in cartonnages with rich polychromy, but in its upper layer

20 M. Radomska et al., *The Catalogue with Drawings* (Saqqara III, Part 1), p. 33 (fig. 1), 34 (fig. 2), 35 (fig. 3), see pls. CCXIII–CCXVIII.

21 Radomska et al., *The Catalogue with Drawings*, pp. 216–221 (cat. 245, burial 295), pls. CVI b–c, CVII, CCXV–CCXVI.

22 Radomska et al., *The Catalogue with Drawings*, pp. 239–242 (burials 335–336, cat. 284–285), pls. CXVI c, CXVII, CCXVII.

23 Radomska et al., *The Catalogue with Drawings*, pp. 216–221 (burial 295, cat. 245), pl. CCXV c–d.

terracotta containers appeared of an almost anthropoid shape, with schematically marked facial details (Fig. 190).²⁴ A pair of such sarcophagi, discovered just underneath the surface of the sand, might have originated from the beginning of the Roman period. Simpler burials frequently lay between the coffins, mummified and bandaged bodies without any container or casing, sometimes groups of three or even four deceased lying next to each other (Fig. 189).

The social differentiation is also indicated by the quality of the mummification in the case of particular individuals. In the context of a body embalmed with care, wrapped in many layers of bandages and a few shrouds, frequently there were also mummies prepared hurriedly, without maintaining the appropriate proportions in the dosage of the reagents, sometimes transformed into black powder, and – in other cases – almost completely lacking conservation substances. It can be assumed that these last burials represent the lowest social group, probably servants to the middle class.

While the mummies and coffins lie in the sand at various depths, it is difficult to distinguish layers, the sequence of which would correspond to chronological phases. It is clearly observable that the bodies were buried as deep as possible in light of the context of already existing burials. All attempts at establishing the diachronic development of the necropolis on the basis of the stratigraphy are methodologically risky and not aided even by the artefacts accompanying the richer burials or found in their vicinity. These are usually faience amulets depicting various Egyptian deities,²⁵ sometimes very elaborately modelled, fragments of necklaces from various materials, and even a deposit of bronze figurines portraying, among others, Osiris – the god of the dead – and the Apis bull.²⁶ It seems that these last were not originally linked to the described necropolis, but rather made their way here from the nearby Serapeum, which additionally emphasises the cult connections between the catacombs of the holy bulls and the cemetery for the middle class.

In later times, looters clearly seem to have also hacked their way through the cemetery from the Ptolemaic period, wanting to get to the much richer tombs, located further down. We have every reason to believe that at a certain point they were scared away or simply became bored by the thickness of the layer containing these burials. While the mummies in the upper part of this layer are almost always torn apart as a result of the search for valuable

24 Radomska et al., *The Catalogue with Drawings*, pp. 247–250 (burials 345–346, cat. 292–293), pls. V, CCXX a–d.

25 A. Kowalska, “Catalogue of Finds from Outside the Burial Context,” in: *The Upper Necropolis*, pp. 394–396, 402–403, pls. CCLIII, CCLV–CCLVII, CCLX.

26 *The Upper Necropolis*, pp. 403–410, pl. CCLIX a–c.

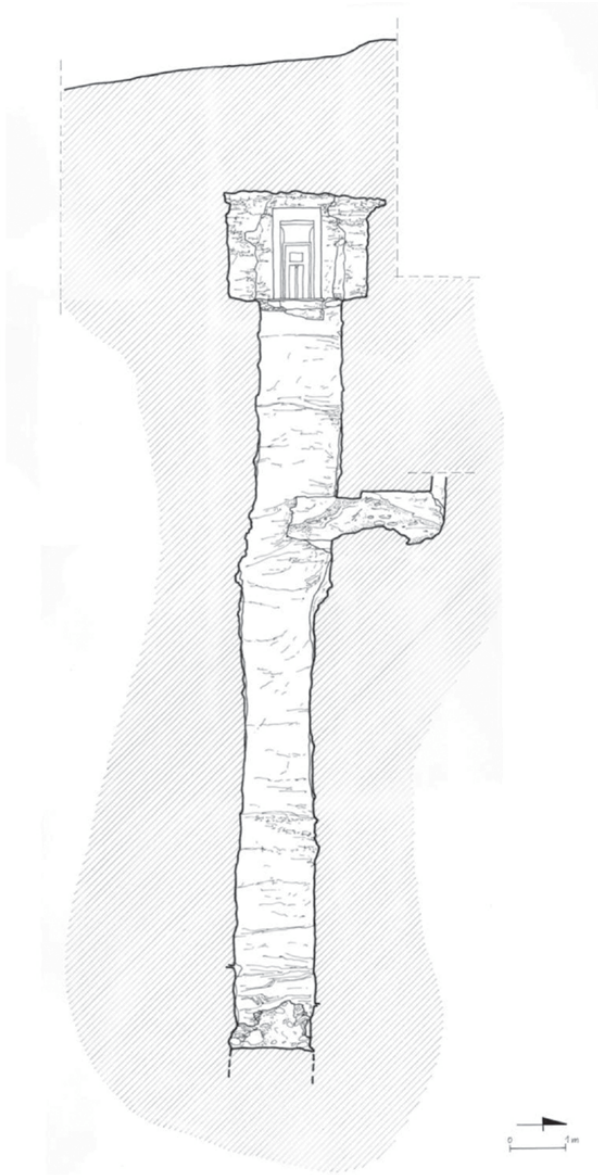
amulets, and the burials have usually been tampered with, in the lower parts there are no traces whatsoever of thieving penetration. Discouraged intruders found a different route to the Old Kingdom tombs hewn into the rock. They would not have been prominent specialists in their line of work if they had not realised that it was easier for them to get to the interior of these tombs through the shaft located a few metres further west. Its top might even have protruded from underneath the layer of sand, thin in this spot. This shaft was used to get to the cult chapel interior containing a few shallow shafts hewn in the rock floor, and thus constituting a collective grave, most certainly not containing any items more valuable than pottery vessels or a headrest on which a mummy's head lay. They must surely have been frustrated by the effects of their efforts; thus, they left behind a pile of earth mixed with vessel sherds, while they placed a souvenir of their stay in the form of an oil lamp at the top of this trash dump. This last item is a valuable historical source for an archaeologist, since it enables dating the 'visit' of uninvited guests to the Arabic Middle Ages (the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries AD).²⁷

But this was not the end of the thieving expedition. They decided to check if a more important chamber was not hidden behind the rock wall enclosing the chapel from the south. They hewed out a large opening in this partition and used it to enter the neighbouring chapel, this time belonging to an individual from the highest levels of social hierarchy. Of course, they were not interested in the chapel interior, since they had not come there in order to pray. Their object of interest was primarily the deep burial shaft hewn into the rock floor next to the west chapel wall (Il. 29–30). If they had known how to read, they would immediately have known whose tombs they were dealing with. A large rectangular plate made from the best quality of limestone is still imbedded in the western wall (Il. 29, Fig. 191).²⁸ This is the 'false door' of a dignitary with two names, Ikhi and Meri, responsible at the royal court for the organisation of distant expeditions, probably including expeditions to the stone quarries from which raw material was brought for the construction of the monumental temples and tombs in Memphis, the capital of the country.²⁹ It was precisely this titlature that became a clue leading to

27 T. Rzeuska, "The Pottery, 2002," *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 14 (2003): *Reports* 2002, p. 144, fig. 1.

28 Myśliwiec, "West Saqqara in 2002," pp. 123–127, figs. 14–15.

29 K. O. Kuraszkiwicz, "Inscriptions from the Tomb of Ikhi," pp. 137–140. This title is 'regulator of the crew of the ship.' The other functions of the tomb's owner include 'overseer of the residence,' 'overseer of the scribes of the crews,' 'attendant of the pyramid of Pepi I,' 'attendant of the pyramid of Teti,' 'sealer of the King



II. 29. Vertical section through the upper part of the shaft adjacent to the west wall of General Ikhi-Meri's cult chapel, cf. Fig. 191.



Fig. 191. Extracting the ‘false door’ from inside General Ikhi-Meri’s burial shaft, cf. Il. 29.

Wadi Hammamat, located in the Eastern Desert in Upper Egypt, the place of famous quarries, in which the royal expeditions left many engravings on the rock with inscriptions of a high historical value. Ikhi-Meri also left behind traces of his presence here. Not only is he attested, but so is his son and namesake, bearing the same two names: Ikhi and Meri.³⁰ This same descendant is mentioned also on his father’s ‘false door’ which we had unearthed and on the inscribed blocks excavated from the burial shaft, making it possible to suppose that the son might have been buried in the same tomb.³¹ The inscription from Wadi Hammamat also made it possible to establish that the expedition supervised by Ikhi took place during the reign of Pharaoh

of Lower Egypt,’ ‘god’s sealer’ (= ship’s captain), ‘god’s sealer in two great boats,’ ‘royal chamberlain’ and ‘sole companion’ (p. 138), as well as the deceased man’s titles preserved in blocks found later: K. O. Kuraszkiwicz, “The Tomb of Ikhi/Mery in Saqqara and Royal Expeditions during the Sixth Dynasty,” *Études et Travaux* 27 (2014), pp. 204–214.

30 Kuraszkiwicz, “Inscriptions from the Tomb of Ikhi,” pp. 138–140. On the blocks found in his father’s grave shaft, Ichi/Meri II also bears one of his father’s titles (‘sealer of the King;’ p. 138).

31 Kuraszkiwicz, “Inscriptions from the Tomb of Ikhi,” p. 140.

Pepi I. Since we have dated the death of Vizier Merefnebef to the first half of this pharaoh's rule, it cannot be excluded that both courtiers knew each other, though it is difficult to imagine that Pepi's confidant would be all that friendly with a representative of the opposite political camp, linked to a suspect king, perhaps even a usurper, who went by the name Userkare.

The exploration of the tomb belonging to this important historical figure was the most difficult enterprise in terms of logistics that we had ever undertaken in the course of our activities in Saqqara. It was hewn out into rock that is more reminiscent of stratified crumble cake than limestone. When we entered the interior of the spacious cult chapel through the thieves' opening in the lateral wall, it was difficult to be enraptured by the ideally preserved white plate of the 'false door,' standing in its original spot by the western wall. A few enormous fragments of the ceiling, detached from the bedrock, hung above our heads, ready to plummet downwards at any moment. Maintaining the maximum of caution, we first had to construct a scaffolding consisting of vertical pales and horizontal boards, which took a few days. It was not until then that we could approach the 'false door' in order to read the tomb owner's names and titles. We wondered why the inscription referred to two people, the father and the son, bearing the same name.

Unfortunately, the chapel lacked any kind of decoration on the crumbling wall surface with the structure of a layer-cake made up in turn of powder and hard strata of various colours. We were soon to discover that initially doorjambs had stood to the sides of the 'false door,' made of the same highest-quality limestone. Inscriptions of a biographic nature had also been carved into their surface.³² But the doorjambs had not been preserved *in situ*. They had fallen inside the burial shaft that had been dug into the floor right in front of the 'false door.' In the process, they had broken apart into a few fragments, which we put into a whole after they had been recovered.

At a depth of about eight metres from the floor, when we had begun to hope to soon enter the burial chamber, a more serious obstacle appeared. Lying crosswise in the shaft, there was a huge rectangular stone slab, yet another 'false door,' cast inside the shaft by someone. Who, when and why had pushed it in there? Who did it belong to? We could not answer this last question as the slab had fallen with its decorated side facing downwards. In order to pull it out of the shaft, a special device with a turnstile would have to be installed (Fig. 191), which was a logistics undertaking exceeding the time we had available till the end of that campaign. As usual, the most important discovery of the excavation season had been made in the last week of the campaign. It can be assumed that the perpetrator that had

32 Kuraszkievicz, "Inscriptions from the Tomb of Ikhi," pp. 138–140.

caused our problems was once again a band of looters, but where had they dragged this ‘false door’ from and why had they thrown it into the shaft? Was this supposed to have been some sort of temporary blockage of the burial chamber they had never reached due to the crumbling texture of the rock at this depth, and that they had planned to complete their work at some other time? It is obvious that they never returned. And if that was the case, the burial chamber might have remained intact.

Our academic appetite grew by the minute, but we had to make do with hope and patiently wait until the next campaign, during which we would also take care of the opposite, eastern part of the chapel, beyond which the tomb’s façade was located. Paradoxically, ‘thanks’ to the ancient thieves, we were uncovering this structure from its interior to its front. We did not want to explore in a rush, so that we would not suddenly end up standing before decorated walls that would require immediate and prolonged conservation. However, during the next campaign, even more serious academic challenges faced us on the other, eastern side of the ‘Dry Moat,’ so we were only able to return to this mysterious tomb ten years later, when the exploration of this part of the necropolis became the most important aim.

In the autumn of 2012, we took advantage of the technologically versatile skills of a master famous throughout Cairo, a jack-of-all-trades called Mariusz Dybich (Fig. 191), who – especially among Egyptian Christians – is considered to be almost a saint, since he can do almost anything, from sculpting a religious scene on the rocks bordering the Coptic district called Moqattam to repairing the most complicated of mechanisms. In addition, he knows everyone and solves any problem he is faced with immediately. He dealt with the issue of the ‘false door’ blocking the lower part of Ikhi-Meri’s burial shaft within a few hours (Fig. 191). We had hoped that pulling this ton of stone to the surface would make it possible to answer a few questions. Instead, new mysteries appeared.

Imagine the disappointment felt by the archaeologists when it turned out that the decorated side of the ‘false door’ lifted out with such difficulty was anepigraphic, i.e. it did not contain any inscriptions. Thus, it is an unfinished work, though doubtless prepared for a particular person. The most probable candidate seems to be the tomb owner’s son, already mentioned on his father’s ‘false door’ and bearing the same name. This seems all the more likely since this tomb’s chapel, an exceptionally long one, consists of two parts separated from each other by a low threshold and not lying precisely on the same axis. In addition, in the front part, right in front of the threshold, there is a second burial shaft, while a shallow cavity runs along its western edge, the dimensions of which correspond exactly to the base

of the anonymous ‘false door’.³³ However, it is hard to imagine that such a plate would have been installed there without a hieroglyphic inscription, even though we had already encountered such cases in one of the largest, at least twice used tombs located on the opposite, eastern side of the ‘Dry Moat’,³⁴ while the large ‘false door’ in another cult chapel hewn into the eastern façade of this gigantic trench only has the deceased’s name (Seshemnefer) and two short titles (“companion, overseer of the palace”), carved out using very shallow relief.³⁵ Such an inscription could have easily been made even when the stone slab had already been placed in its final destination and did not have a retaining wall behind it.

Therefore, if we assume that the ‘false door’ taken out from the burial shaft had originally been located (or was supposed to have been) in the front part of Ikhi-Meri’s cult chapel and was meant for his son, it could be expected that the burial chamber containing the body of Ikhi Junior was located at the bottom of the adjacent shaft, if he had at all been buried there and not instead been killed elsewhere, e.g., during one of the expeditions. The exploration of this shaft might have provided many explanations if it were not for... a new surprise that suddenly changed our plans. Of course, this happened again during the last week of our excavation campaign that year.

It was our main aim to complete the studies of the cult chapel, i.e. work that had been initiated ten years earlier. Moving further inside the chapel in an eastern direction, we would have come out into the courtyard before its fronton and we would have seen what the entrance to the tomb looked like. But there was yet another logistical challenge awaiting us, since the western wall of the façade, i.e. the eastern wall of the chapel, had not been hewn into the rock, but built from blocks of beautiful white limestone, of which part had fallen out or been taken out already in antiquity, which led to cracks forming and other of its fragments being displaced (Fig. 192). It looked especially bad above the entrance to the chapel.

If we had suddenly removed the rubble filling this gap, the entire stone structure would have collapsed onto our heads. Once again, we had to build wooden scaffolding immediately after unearthing another fragment of the

33 K. Myśliwiec, “Saqqara: Seasons 2012 and 2013/2014,” appendix Z. Godziejewski, U. Dąbrowska, “Conservation work in Saqqara (2012, 2014),” *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* XXIV/1, Research, pp. 215–229.

34 Kuraskiewicz, *Architecture*, pp. 194–195 (XLI: Anonymous tomb, fig. 101, pls. CXL–CXLII a–b).

35 K. Myśliwiec, “West Saqqara. Excavations, 2000,” *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 12 (2001): *Reports 2000*, pp. 118–119, fig. 11.



Fig. 192. Façade of Ikhi-Meri's cult chapel with unfinished wall decoration. View from the east, cf. Il. 30.

wall. When this ‘tightrope walking’ was finally completed, we went through the gate and found ourselves in front of the beautifully decorated façade of Ichi-Meri's tomb.³⁶ It turned out that not only its western wall but also its lateral walls, adjacent to the bedrock, were made from blocks of white limestone of the highest quality, very different from the brittle local rock. Unfortunately, the upper part of the snow-white cladding had fallen away from the walls in antiquity. In this way, a significant part of the decoration adorning their surface, i.e. reliefs and paintings, had been lost (Fig. 194). Those that had been preserved led us to realise that the tomb decoration had never been completed, which seems almost to be a *signum temporis* in the mastabas of the dignitaries from these turbulent times. We have already observed this in the case of Nyankhnefertum's cult chapel³⁷ or the anonymous burial chamber containing an unfinished stone sarcophagus.³⁸ It can

36 Myśliwiec, “Das Grab des Ichi westlich der Djoser-Pyramide,” p. 52 (Abb. 11) and 54 (Abb. 15–16).

37 Myśliwiec, Kuraskiewicz, *The Funerary Complex*, pp. 132–200, pls. LXI–LXVI, LXIX, LXXI, LXXXIII–LXXXVII, CXII–CXXXII.

38 F. Welc, “Installing a Stone Sarcophagus in the Burial Chamber of an Old Kingdom Shaft,” with an appendix by T. Rzeuska, “Pottery from the Shaft No. 113 and



Fig. 193. Scene of offering table. Sketch on façade's west wall.

be assumed that Ikhi-Meri the father died before his place of eternal rest was fully prepared for its cult functions.

In this context, what does surprise is the fact that the tomb was not completed by his son, considering he was to be buried in the second shaft we unearthed in the chapel interior. Perhaps neither of them returned from the next expedition and the burial chambers prepared for them remained empty. However, we will only find this out when we manage to reach at least one of the two chambers.

Even though the decoration of the tomb façade was never completed, and – in addition – it has not been preserved intact, the fragments we discovered contain information that casts new light on the tomb owner. The hieroglyphic inscriptions accompanying the scenes carved here are especially valuable. The inscriptions have been preserved on the façade's northern wall (Figs. 193–194) and on both doorjambs flanking the courtyard. One of the inscriptions adds the function of general to Ikhi's titlature,³⁹ which makes it possible to assume that at least some of his expeditions were of a military character. If this was the case, both the tomb owner and his son might not

Its Burial Chamber," *Études et Travaux* 23 (2011), pp. 179–211; Kuraszkiewicz, *Architecture*, pp. 178–185 (XXXVII), pls. CXXX–CXXXI.

³⁹ See fn. 29.



Fig. 194. Unfinished relief on the façade's north wall (Fig. 192): procession of offering bearers (bottom register) and feet from the fragmentarily preserved image of the general.

have achieved eternal happiness in the tomb prepared for them. Which of them is portrayed with the sketch made by the painter on the western wall of the façade, where we can see a man seated in front of an enormous offering table in a large-sized scene (Figs. 192–193)?⁴⁰ This composition, belonging to the classical iconographic repertoire of the tombs of Egyptian dignitaries, is not accompanied by any inscription. While the sketch has all the features of a base for a planned relief, the execution of the latter clearly must have been abandoned, since the uncovered parts of the figure's body were painted red, which normally only occurs after the relief is sculpted. In turn, on the northern wall the opposite procedure has been attested: in the upper register of the relief decoration, an almost natural-sized figure of the general has been portrayed, but it bears no traces of paint.⁴¹

The outstanding craftsmanship of the sculptor is evidenced by the only preserved element of this image, i.e. the foot of a man wearing sandals (Fig. 194). The modelling of the footwear and of the nails shows such skill

⁴⁰ See fn. 33.

⁴¹ See fn. 33.

that it builds up quite an appetite for finding the blocks on which the upper part of this figure was sculpted. These hopes are not completely vain, since one of the blocks, bearing a fragment of an inscription, was later found in the layer of sand filling the 'Dry Moat' in front of the chapel façade. The bottom register of this scene, depicting four priests bearing gifts for the tomb owner, was preserved *in situ* (Fig. 194).⁴² The beginnings of the planned polychromy are observable on this relief, since the painter managed to apply those elements of the painting that were black, primarily the long wigs of the offering bearers. This means that the work was unexpectedly interrupted, probably upon receiving news of the dignitary's death. We also find out in this way that the first colour to be placed on a ready relief was black, probably to avoid any potential black stains on details with a different colouring.

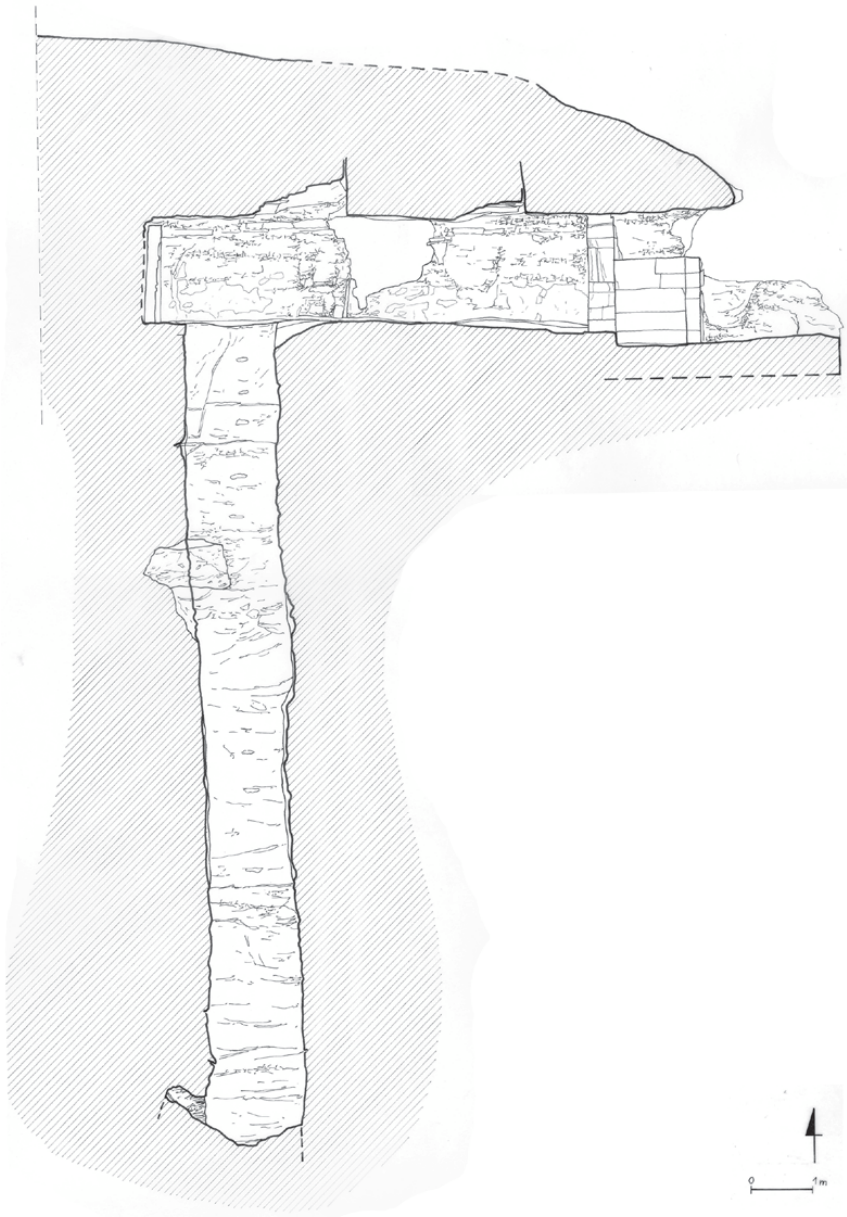
In order to prepare the full documentation of the façade, it was necessary to clear its floor until the eastern edge of the courtyard, hewn into rock and linking the tomb with the 'Dry Moat.' What did the area linking them look like and what was the route leading from the cult chapel to this abysmal cavity? This time around our curiosity was awarded beyond expectations. The eastern, i.e. the external edge of the courtyard turned out to be a sharp rock edge, running along a straight line from north to south (Il. 30; Fig. 195). It seemed suspiciously regular, but why would it not have been, for example, the upper step of a monumental staircase hewn into the rock? However, when the vertical face of the tall 'step' revealed its bottom, equally sharp and regular edge, beneath it a hollow was outlined, recanting into the interior of the rock, our attention was raised to the level of high alert. After removing some more of the sand from in front of the suspect 'step,' it was possible to attest traces of a very weather-beaten hieroglyphic inscription running horizontally across its face.⁴³

At that moment, everything became clear: the 'step' turned out to be the architrave of a rock tomb located beneath Ikhi-Meri's chapel. The ceiling of the bottom tomb later played the role of the floor of the upper chapel. If this was the case, the entrance to the bottom structure should be located underneath the architrave, more or less in the middle of its length. In order to check if this was indeed the case, we deepened the trench slightly and could soon see the upper edge of a narrow, rectangular entrance.⁴⁴ The size of the trench made it possible to look inside the new structure: the interior of the chapel was replete with a backfill almost up to the ceiling. Thus, for the first

42 See fn. 33.

43 See fn. 33.

44 See fn. 34.



II. 30. E-W section through the general's tomb after uncovering the architrave above the entrance to the lower tomb.

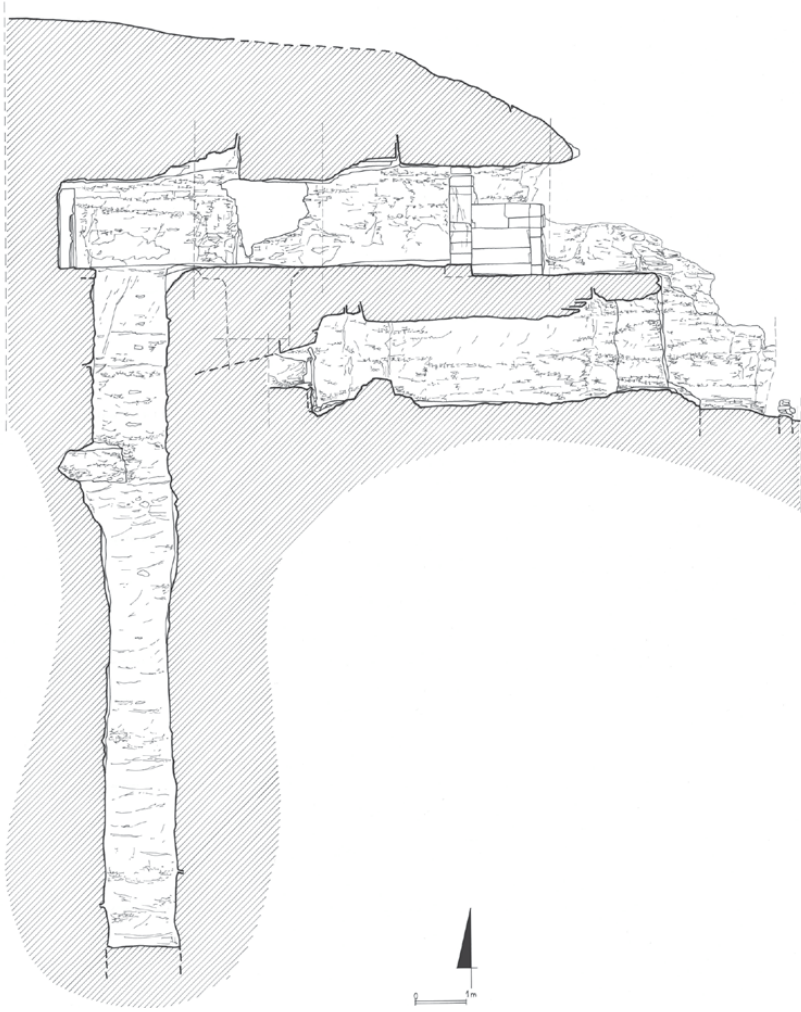


Fig. 195. Lower 'floor' of a unique sepulchral structure emerging from underneath the general's funerary chapel, cf. Il. 30.

time in Saqqara, we were dealing with storeyed (perhaps multi-storeyed) Old Kingdom sepulchral architecture (Il. 31).

This discovery immediately raised an abundance of questions. What period did the bottom tomb originate from? The stratigraphy suggests that it was earlier than Ikhi-Meri's tomb, but by how many years? Since no remains of a passage are visible so far between both structures, it can be assumed that the upper tomb was only created when the lower one had been covered by sand; in the opposite case, there would not have been any passageway from the exterior to Ikhi's cult chapel, and if that was the case, why would such a beautiful façade with two pillars have been built in front of it? The relatively early dating of the bottom tomb is suggested by the fact that the 'son's' shaft in the front part of Ikhi's chapel clearly vertically transpasses the structures of the tomb located lower down. It was either forgotten that there was an earlier 'house of eternity' located underneath, or its existence was acknowledged, but it was considered so old and unimportant that its perforation with a vertical shaft was not considered sacrilege.

Yet another fundamental issue refers to the thick layer of sand lying in front of the entrance to the bottom chapel. Just above its surface, we found one of the decorated blocks of white limestone that had fallen out of the façade of Ikhi's chapel. It cannot be excluded that in the course of further



II. 31. Next step in the exploration of the double tomb. Upper and lower cult chapels.



Fig. 196. Old Kingdom burial shafts in front of ‘Dry Moat’s’ east façade.

exploration we will find more blocks (which we are quietly counting on), but this would raise the question of whether the façade of the bottom tomb had still been uncovered when the upper structure was in use. Perhaps the presence of fragments of the latter’s architecture in front of the entrance to the tomb located lower down was only the joint result of the ‘work’ done by looters and earthquakes?

Our attention had thus far been focused on what was concealed inside the rock walls of the ‘Dry Moat’ (Fig. 196). However, the layers of sand that had over the course of many centuries filled this gigantic anthropogenic hollow could also turn out to be an important source of information. In order to study these layers in their chronological sequence, it is necessary to go as far down as the bottom of the ‘Moat,’ at least in a few diagnostic spots, which might turn out to be an undertaking equally time-consuming as it will be costly. One thing certain at the moment is that this will have to be research of a holistic nature, encompassing various fields of science, from geology, palaeozoology and palaeobotany to anthropology (Figs. 199–203), philology, ceramology, art history and history in general. In this way, the idea was born for an interdisciplinary project called ‘Dry Moat’ in Saqqara as a unique time capsule – a source for gaining knowledge about the history of the Memphite necropolis as a function of changes in the natural environment.

The prelude to these studies began in the beginnings of 2014 (Il. 31). We started with the tonnes of sand blocking the entrance to the bottom tomb. In order to get inside the interior from the side of the façade and not, for example, through the ceiling, which would be possible even now by using the ‘son’s’ shaft in Ikhi’s chapel, we would first have to clear the foreground, i.e. explore and remove a layer of sand eight metres deep, blocking the entrance to the lower chapel. However, its length and width are also important, because as we move further downwards it is necessary to build another stone retaining wall every forty to sixty centimetres to stop the sand bordering the trench from collapsing onto the workers and archaeologists. Thus, such a width of the trench needs to be calculated to ensure that the sequence of terraces leaves us at the bottom with a surface of the appropriate size, located opposite the entrance to the tomb in the desired layer.

We are not interested of course in the mechanical removal of sand. More or less in the middle of this depth lies another fragment of the Upper Necropolis, requiring slow exploration and precise documentation. During the 2014 campaign, we unearthed over thirty burials in this layer, which for various reasons deserved our attention.⁴⁵ This is not only a paradise for an anthropologist, who sees a reflection of the life of yet another inhabitant of Memphis from the Ptolemaic period in every studied skeleton. The content of the fragment of the cemetery studied in 2014 indicates a topography conditioned by social stratification. These were almost exclusively burials of the poor, mummies and skeletons deposited in the sand without any sort of casing in the form of cartonnages or coffins. They contrast starkly with the content of this same necropolis in its northern part, located just a few dozen centimetres further, which we had unearthed over ten years earlier. There we had found beautiful coffins with varied shapes and decorations, doubtless containing the bodies of people from the higher layers of social hierarchy (Fig. 174).⁴⁶ In contrast to this part of the cemetery, the place of burial of the poor contained many children’s skeletons, probably the victims of diseases and malnutrition (Figs. 197–198).

After exploring the Upper Necropolis at this place, we neared the ancient ground level corresponding to the floor of the lower Old Kingdom chapel. Underneath the layer of sand, the surface of the *dakka* we had expected appeared, i.e. a hard mass of earth mixed with fragments of various objects, mainly pottery vessels of a sepulchral purpose. It is worth mentioning that at a level slightly higher, in front of the entrance to Ikhi’s tomb, there was no *dakka*, but a stratum of desert sand, which over the

45 See fn. 33.

46 See fn. 20–24.



Fig. 197. Burial of a child at the bottom of a shaft in a collective tomb from the final phase of the Old Kingdom.



Fig. 198. The child's wooden coffin after exploration, reconstructed by conservators.

course of centuries had filled the 'Dry Moat' up to its upper edge, and even slightly higher.

Does this confirm the hypothesis that the tomb of an important general named Ikhi was only built after the structure lying below it had been covered with sand? What does the sequence of the strata look like in other parts of the 'Dry Moat' and what conclusions can be drawn from this for the history of Egypt spanning a period of 5000 years?

Let us allow the sands and rock to speak on behalf of the silent dead, before some device is invented that will open the mouths of the latter.



Fig. 199. Plaster casing for a dead body from an Old Kingdom tomb.



Fig. 200. Facial features of the plaster casing (Fig. 199).

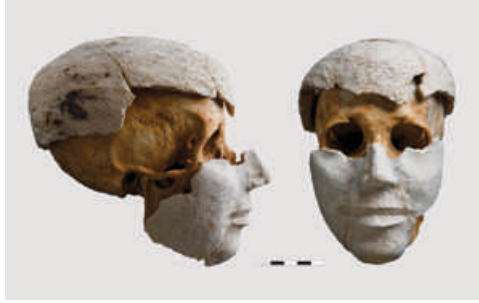


Fig. 201.



Fig. 202.



Figs. 201–203. Skull of a young woman with fragmentarily preserved plaster casing covering the hole left from trepanation. Old Kingdom.



Fig. 204. Archaeologists of the world, unite! Karol Myśliwiec with Egyptian workers during exploration of burial shaft.



Fig. 205. Last day of a two-month excavation campaign.

Extroduction

Resurrecting every day at dawn on the horizon on the eastern side of the Nile, the sun sends a sign out into the desert, located on the western side of the river: a sign in the form of a deep shadow cast by Djoser's pyramid, making it possible for the archaeologists to enjoy a breath of fresh air for the first two hours of the daily excavations. Then the shadow grows shorter by the minute, leaving us in the sultry embrace of the god Re. We are left with the question of what the next day of excavations will bring us. We expect to find answers to questions provoked by the discoveries made the previous day. Meanwhile, instead of solutions to these first mysteries what usually appears are new questions which we will be pondering the following day. Which ones will we have to store up for the next year? Excavations are almost a synonym of patience.

An equally long shadow is cast by Djoser over the whole history of Egypt. What would the fate of this exceptional civilisation have been like if the idea to use stone building material to erect the first pyramid had not popped into the imagination of the ingenious Imhotep? This question refers not only to the architecture but also to the entire culture of the pharaonic period. Would the largest compendium of earlier religious literature have ever been immortalised in stone, as in the case of the *Pyramid Texts* carved onto the walls of the burial chambers in the pyramids of the last few Old Kingdom pharaohs? Would this rich eschatological literature, with such milestones as *The Coffin Texts* (Middle Kingdom), *The Book of the Dead* (New Kingdom) and numerous texts from the Late Period, have even developed without this source? They are an irreplaceable testimony to the mentality and creative imagination of pharaonic-period Egyptians, an inexhaustible intellectual treasury, which later inspired the Greeks and the Romans, but also an artistic one, which through the syncretic forms of the Hellenic *koine* made its way into Early Christian art, resonating, though today barely noticeably, in later European culture.

Since an archaeologist must know a lot, interlocutors from outside the field frequently expect him or her to know everything. It is time to make them realise their misconception. While it is commonly thought that Egyptian artefacts, including those found in the museums and collections of various countries, constitute a third of the ancient artefacts in the world, an Egyptologist would probably state, 'I know that I know nothing.' This is because he or she knows that a very small number of this culture's written sources and artefacts have been preserved to this day. This is true particularly for certain areas and epochs, constituting blank spots in the over 3000-year-long

history of ancient Egypt. We are still missing, for example, many of the links in the earliest history of the language, which in the *Pyramid Texts* appears in a form so mature that we have to assume a long evolution over an earlier period. Increasingly more frequently, thanks to new discoveries, we are surprised by the wealth of content and artistic forms from the time when the Two Lands (Upper and Lower Egypt) joined into a single whole, functioning in perfection under the pharaoh's rule. The creative role of the so-called Intermediate Periods, separating the epochs of the greatest splendour, i.e. the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms, continues to be underestimated, especially as they remain largely a mystery. These intermediate periods are commonly considered to be ones of decline, while it is often forgotten that the temporary relaxation of social and artistic norms provides space to voice elements that go beyond the patterns thus far followed, creating the foundations for original cultural phenomena in the subsequent period.

We know much too little about the relations Egypt maintained with neighbouring countries and the mighty powers of the ancient East, which frequently played an enormous role in the evolution of Egyptian civilisation. In terms of the sphere of spiritual culture, the culminating moment in mutual influences seems to have been the so-called religious revolution, which for a short period during Akhenaten's times brought the country of countless deities closer to monotheism. The genesis of this ideological concept remains a mystery to this day.

When, during the subsequent period, contacts between Egypt and the external world took on the form of aggressive imperialism, the economic crisis brought about the decomposition of the internal cohesion of the state, which for over 1000 years became an easy target for its neighbours. From the fall of the New Kingdom until the end of the Roman epoch, Egypt, usually ruled by 'pharaohs' of foreign origin, functioned as a pawn on an extensive political chessboard. Only twice during the first millennium BC (the Twentieth-Sixth and the Thirtieth Dynasties) were rulers of local origin able to unite the country again, though only for a short time, under their reign. This entire long period, referred to generally as the Late Period, still hides an abundance of mysteries, even though we know many details. However, this information rarely comes together to form a coherent whole.

A special role was played during this period by the conquest of Egypt conducted by Alexander the Great. He sealed the prominent role of Hellenic culture in the country by the Nile. Greek became an official language, on equal footing with the local language written using demotic script, a simplified form of hieroglyphic writing. The symbiosis of the Old Egyptian element with Greek culture transformed Egypt into the lair of Hellenic civilisation, surviving until the end of the Roman epoch and having a profound impact on early Christian culture. Despite the obvious osmosis of cultural elements

of various origins, the researchers of the Greek and Roman period until recently were divided into two separate groups, only rarely looking over each other's shoulders to check if the other had not reached some exactly opposite conclusions based on the material they studied. Classical archaeologists perceived Greek-Roman Egypt from the perspective of Hellenistic Alexandria and its cultural radiation onto Egyptian provincial areas, assuming *a priori* the epigonic, not-too-original nature of indigenously Egyptian culture during this period. It was not until the last quarter of the previous century that the classicists and Egyptologists understood the extent to which their knowledge about the epoch would be better grounded if – instead of looking down on each other – they would merge their research into one organic whole. This enabled the significance of the mutual influences of different cultures to be perceived fully. It is from this intellectual and artistic melting pot that Christian Europe drew to the fullest extent possible.

In terms of the topography, the largest gap in our knowledge pertains to northern Egypt, i.e. the Nile Delta. During the pharaonic period, for various reasons, including its close neighbourhood to other cultures, this was the most innovative region of Egypt, with such important centres of administration, religion and culture as Tanis, Bubastis or Athribis. Unfortunately, the climatic conditions and political circumstances led to this plateau's damp ground, intersected by thousands of canals and channels, preserving much less artefacts than the dry areas of Upper Egypt, lying on both sides of the Nile. The progressing urbanisation of the Delta terrains actively influences the act of destruction. As is rightly proposed by Egyptologists, especially Egyptian ones, the archaeology of the Delta requires an enormous rescue campaign. For example, their postulate seems justified that concessions for excavations in Upper Egypt be dependent on the simultaneous conducting of rescue excavations in the northern part of the country, much less extensively studied, but also much poorer in terms of preserved artefacts. In turn, the proposal to suspend all excavations in the Nile Valley and focus exclusively on the threatened Delta area is debatable. The political events of recent years have confirmed the fear that this would only bring benefits to artefact looters. The new authorities of the ex-Supreme Council of Antiquities no longer have any doubts that both for the artefacts and for Egyptology as an academic field, with archaeology as its main tool, the best solution would be the systematic activities of excavation missions from various countries, with the application of the most modern research and conservation methods. One remains with the hope that the further development of political events will encourage those researchers to return who suspended work for safety reasons.

Saqqara lies at the crossroads between Upper and Lower Egypt. It is the middle point of the largest royal necropolis in the world, which functioned

for over 3000 years. Our excavations on the western side of Djoser's pyramid have disproved the certainty some researchers held that the only thing that could be found there was at most an 'ancient waste dump.' They have instead made it possible to establish that this place had been of a sepulchral character even before the 'step pyramid' was built, and that this earlier necropolis must have been for noblemen, if one takes into account the structure of the mud-brick building on top of which Imhotep had the stone recessed wall erected encircling the pyramid *temenos*. There is no doubt that the future saint treated the tombs of the dignitaries, who might have lived even a few dozen years earlier, with a certain unceremoniousness typical for totalitarian systems. The construction site was probably similar to the area around the Warsaw Palace of Culture and Science, when the rest of the preserved pre-war houses were being demolished.

We have determined with complete certainty that the constructors of the pyramid did not look very far for the raw material they used. The entire area adjacent to Djoser's holy complex became a quarry, up until the giant moat, which was probably also formed as a place for the extraction of half-products, later processed on site to take the form of cuboidal blocks in a shape similar to brick. This structure testifies to the investment genius of the creators of the first pyramid. Already in how the 'Dry Moat' was conceptualised it was given such a shape as to perform later a few different functions. This was not only to be a source of building material but also an abyssal moat separating the sacred, i.e. the area directly adjacent to the pyramid *temenos*, from the profane, or the desert extending further westward. Encircled from all four sides by the 'Dry Moat,' as if by a unique, gigantic negative of a wall, the area of the sacred was expanded westward by such means by over 100 m.

The preserved remnants of the architectural structure that had been erected partly directly on the surface of the depleted quarry, partly in the rock grotto located lower down, almost on the axis of the pyramid, indicate that soon after the construction of Djoser's monumental tomb the quarry became a sacral structure. While the items found in the crypt at the end of the long subterranean corridor attest to a cult from 300 years later, they make it possible to assume that a place of cult dedicated to the gods Osiris, Horus and Seth had been created here earlier, leaving its original mark on the necropolis which began to develop around it almost exactly in the same years when the first versions of the *Pyramid Texts* appeared in the nearby royal pyramids.

One of the most peculiar features of the burials we discovered at this cemetery are the coffins plaited from Nile reed, probably in reminiscence of the basket into which Isis placed Osiris's body, dismembered by Seth, which

enabled the lord of the afterworld to be resurrected and then sire his son, Horus, identified frequently with the pharaoh.

Did Imhotep foresee that the abandoned quarry by the pyramid would also perform sepulchral functions aside from its sacral ones? It seems that he did not, since the oldest among the noblemen's tombs we discovered at this cemetery come from the end of the Fifth Dynasty, i.e. they are at least 300 years later than Djoser's pyramid. The necropolis, which then functioned in this place for two centuries, until the fall of the Old Kingdom, and perhaps even also during the so-called First Intermediate Period, turned out to be an exceptionally rich and original source for acquiring knowledge about the social relations during this stormy period of history, i.e. during the first half of the Sixth Dynasty. Both the architecture and the decoration of the tombs attest to a progressing downfall, expressed not only in the increasingly poorer burials but also in the usurpation of royal prerogatives by dignitaries, even those belonging to the middle class of officials. This is clearly visible in the beautifully decorated tombs belonging to Merefnepf and Nyankhnepfertum, probably the oldest of the well-preserved funerary structures at this necropolis. Some of the hieroglyphic texts and scenes adorning the walls of their cult chapels fell prey to iconoclasts, while their vandalism turned out to be diagnostic for the family conflicts, which had frequently resulted from political reasons. Despite this, the reliefs sculpted onto the walls of both chapels belong among the most original works of Egyptian art from the final phase of the Old Kingdom.

The revival of the necropolis on the western side of Djoser's pyramid took place only 2000 years later. Suddenly, the deceased belonging to the middle class began to be buried in the layer of sand which had in the meantime covered the ruins of the ancient mastabas and in the rubble. The first phase of this 'revival' can be dated to the end of the fourth century BC, i.e. the beginnings of the Ptolemaic period. What led the inhabitants of Memphis to return to this necropolis that had remained forgotten for ages? The close neighbourhood of the *dromos* and the Ptolemaic exedra, objects decorated with monumental sculptures in the Greek style, but most frequently made from local limestone, and bearing many features of a commemorative monument linked to the posthumous cult of Alexander the Great, suggests the hypothesis that the cemetery we discovered was constructed in the neighbourhood of the first, provisional burial of the great commander, for whom it would be difficult to imagine a better place of final rest than a spot near the Serapeum and the oldest pyramid, the monumental work of the still revered Imhotep. In support of this hypothesis, it should be remembered that precisely this part of Saqqara was the cult centre of the Memphite necropolis during the reign of the last indigenous dynasty, directly before the second short rule of the Persians, who were soon expelled by Alexander the Great.

However, the significance of our discoveries for broadening our historical knowledge cannot obscure the unique value of the artefacts that we unearthed. The polychromy of the reliefs in the tombs of the two dignitaries from the beginnings of the Sixth Dynasty, preserved better than in any other tomb from this period, has changed our perception of the craftsmanship of the artists from the epoch of the construction of the great pyramids. It turned out that the painter's palette had been much richer than we had thus far imagined, primarily with reference to the nuances making it possible to render the impression of three-dimensionality in a two-dimensional image. It can clearly be observed that overcoming the barrier of two-dimensionality was one of the fundamental elements towards which the creative efforts of the sculptors and painters were dedicated, also in the composition of the individual scenes. The original evidence of this formal quest can be found primarily in Nyankhnefertum's funerary chapel. Its unfinished decoration reveals the subsequent stages of the work done by the artists and craftsmen.

In this context, it takes on special significance that the decorators of these burial complexes had to work in exceptionally brittle rock, requiring constant repairs and fillings. This can best be understood by our conservators, who today rescue these artistic treasures for posterity. Throughout the world, their efforts are appreciated as highly as the research conducted by archaeologists. In many cases, they develop new methods of saving artefacts, imitated later by other schools of conservation in various countries. This constitutes Polish archaeology's substantial input into the work of saving world cultural heritage.

Glossary of deities

APHRODITE – a Greek goddess, the equivalent of Egyptian goddesses Hathor and Isis. Her iconography frequently merges Greek stylistics with Egyptian content. Revered throughout Egypt, she was especially popular from the middle of the first millennium BC. Many towns in Ptolemaic-Roman Egypt were named Aphroditopolis in her honour.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT – considered by many Egyptians to be a god, as well as a commander and king, owing his political and theological ‘career’ in the land by the Nile primarily to his liberation of Egypt from Persian occupation. Buried provisionally in the Memphite necropolis, and then moved to Alexandria to his final resting place, the mummy of the Macedonian god of the Egyptians, like his grave, has not yet been discovered.

AMON (= ‘the Invisible,’ ‘the Hidden One’) – the personification of invisible divine power present, for example, in the air or in the wind. He was the main god of the Theban pantheon, forming the triad together with the goddess Mut and the god Khonsu. The Greeks saw him as the equivalent of Zeus. Since the Middle Kingdom, the main centre of Amon’s cult was Karnak (East Thebes), where subsequent generations enlarged the enormous temple, one of the best-preserved sacral complexes of pharaonic Egypt. Usually depicted in anthropomorphic form with a crown in the shape of two long feathers and a band encircling the forehead and dropping at the back of the head. His blue skin colour identifies him as a deity with heavenly connotations. As of the New Kingdom, the holy animal of Amon was most frequently the ram. One of the god’s iconographic hypostases was the sphinx with a ram’s head. Amon played a very important role in the royal cult. The pharaonic funerary temples of the New Kingdom period were considered to be his sanctuaries. It was at this time that the legend of ‘divine birth’ was created, according to which Egypt’s rulers were Amon’s sons.

ANUBIS – a chthonic deity responsible for the mummification of the dead, frequently conceived as an embalmer who prepared mummies on a table. Anubis’s iconographic hypostasis is a man with a canine head; sometimes represented as an animal lying on a chest. A guardian of secrets and of anything associated with the coffin and Canopic jar housing the deceased’s entrails.

APIS – the most popular of the Egyptian holy bulls, with his seat located in the temple of the god Ptah in Memphis, while his burial place were the famous catacombs (see Serapeum) in Saqqara, not far from the pyramid of Djoser. Chosen from among his peers based on the animal’s physical features, Apis

was venerated throughout Egypt. Numerous sarcophagi of the holy bulls have been preserved, but none of the animal's mummies. The votive stelae placed beside these sarcophagi by the founders of subsequent burials are of enormous historical importance.

ASCLEPIUS – Greek god-healer revered in Egypt since the Ptolemaic period, frequently in sanctuaries dedicated to Imhotep. He played an important role in magic, acting in sanctuaries through the oracle and healing dreams, as well as through travelling priests/doctors.

ATON – deified solar disc; he became the sole god in the solar religion during the so-called Amarna Period (the final phase of the Eighteenth Dynasty's time in power, i.e. during the reign of Akhenaten – the 'pharaoh-heretic'), considered to be the first monotheistic religious system in history. Associated with Akhenaten's father, i.e. Amenhotep III, the solar disc became an omnipresent iconographic motif in the art of this period, characterised by mannerist naturalism as a radical departure from the ancient canons of Egyptian art.

ATUM – creator of all things, beyond whom nothing exists; an incarnation of the setting sun, frequently in the form of a tired man walking with a stick. Associated with the pharaoh, he frequently appears in anthropomorphic form with the double crown of Lower and Upper Egypt on his head. He was zoomorphically identified, among other things, with an ichneumon, a snake, an eel, a scarab, a lizard, a monkey shooting a bow and arrows, and other animals. The most important centres of his cult were Heliopolis (the 'City of the Sun') and Pithom (e.g. Per-Atum, i.e. 'House of Atum').

BASTET – a lion-headed goddess worshipped particularly in the Lower Egyptian Bubastis, but also in Memphis, where she was equated with the local goddess Sekhmet. As of the Old Kingdom, she played an important role in the political theology related to the ruler. In the Late Period, the goddess's holy animal and her incarnation was the cat. Numerous cemeteries with mummified cats have been discovered in various parts of Egypt. In the mythological circles of the goddess Hathor, Bastet appears as a 'distant goddess.' She was also perceived as the left eye of the god Re.

BES – a benevolent guardian of pregnant women, a dwarf with demonic facial features; always depicted with a frayed beard and frequently an exaggerated sexual organ, but never ithyphallic. He played an especially important role in positive magic, which resulted in his frequent presence on magical stelae, as well as in figural art.

DIONYSUS – the Greek god of wine, popularised in Egypt by the rulers of the Ptolemaic dynasty, who considered him their dynastic deity. During this period, the cult of Dionysus had a State character and was ruled by

strict regulations. In art, especially coroplathy, Dionysus was associated with Egyptian deities.

HATHOR – personification of the mother and guardian of the sun, king and every human being, in life and after death; wife of Horus; a goddess whose zoomorphic representation was the cow. Her name means ‘the House of Horus.’ Depicted most frequently in anthropomorphic form, she was considered to be the goddess of love. In the Roman period, she was identified with the Greek goddess Aphrodite. The most important place of her cult was the Upper Egyptian Dendera, where to this day an enormous temple complex has been preserved from that period.

HORUS – ‘the face of god’ looking down from the heavens, the incarnation of divine power immanent in the human world and personified by the king; son of Osiris, depicted in Egyptian literature as noble but not very resourceful. The pharaoh was considered to be the earthly incarnation of Horus, which was reflected in the titles and names given to subsequent rulers. Horus’s holy animal was the falcon, worshipped both in a purely zoomorphic form and in his anthropomorphic incarnation with a falcon’s head. Along with Seth, they formed a pair of heraldic gods, between whom the entire country was divided: Horus was the lord of Lower Egypt (the Nile Delta), while Seth was attributed with Upper Egypt and the desert areas.

IMHOTEP – a deified architect, priest and doctor, creator of the so-called ‘step pyramid’ in Saqqara, the oldest pyramid in the world, erected in ca. 2650 BC for a pharaoh called Djoser. Imhotep’s cult survived throughout antiquity. A typical image used to depict the sage was a seated man with a cap similar to the one worn by the god Ptah.

ISIS – the most popular ancient Egyptian goddess. In Egyptian mythology, she was the wife of Osiris. She was usually depicted as a woman wearing the hieroglyph representing a throne on her head, which became the source of the hypothesis that Isis was the personification of the throne. In New Kingdom, she was frequently depicted with a headdress typical for the goddess Hathor, i.e. a solar disc between two cow’s horns set in a diadem consisting of a frieze of ureai with raised heads, or – as in the case of the queens – with a vulture’s scalp. In the Graeco-Roman period, the representation of Isis breastfeeding Horus, *Isis lactans*, gained hugely in popularity, becoming the iconographic prototype of the Holy Mother and Child.

KHEPRI – the hypostasis of the sun god being born at daybreak. Depicted as a beetle, he was also represented in anthropomorphic form, sometimes with the head of a scarab.

NEPHTHYS – Greek version of the Egyptian name Nebet-hut (= ‘Lady of the house’). In Egyptian mythology, the wife of the god Seth, even though during his conflict with Osiris, she backs his adversaries. Together with Isis, they form a pair of mourners, expressing grief after the god is killed in an underhanded manner, and they guard his son, Horus. She is depicted as a woman wearing a hieroglyph on her head signifying her name.

OSIRIS – god of the dead, but simultaneously the symbol of rebirth. He was usually depicted as a mummy-shaped human figure holding a curved sceptre and fly swatter in his hands crossed at his chest. He was worshipped throughout Egypt and had many centres of cult; the most important of which was Abydos in Upper Egypt. In Egyptian theology, he was the father of Horus conceived with Isis.

PTAH – the demiurge in the local pantheon of ancient Memphis, guardian of artists and craftsmen, usually depicted as a mummy-shaped figure with a characteristic headdress similar in appearance to a swimming cap. This is the only Egyptian god depicted with a beard characteristic for the pharaohs, perhaps due to the association with the coronation ceremonies that took place in Memphis. Along with Sekhmet, a goddess with the head of a lioness, and the young Nefertum, symbolised by a lotus flower, they formed the local triad conceived as a divine family.

RE – the universal form of the sun god. He is frequently equated with other deities, especially the solar ones, and endowed with their iconographic attributes, as well as their names. He is usually portrayed anthropomorphically. In political theology, he performed the function of the father of the pharaohs.

SERAPIS – Greek name of a god merging – in his nature and name – the features of Osiris and Apis. He was especially worshipped in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, and usually depicted as a hairy man, seated on a throne.

SETH – a deity with the traits of a murderer and violator, but simultaneously the heroic defender of the sun god. He is frequently represented in human form with an animal’s head, similar to that of an okapi, whose exact identity remains uncertain. Together with Horus, they form a pair of conflicted gods with contrasting personality traits. Like his rival, he was often associated with the pharaoh. In Egyptian mythology, he performs the role of Osiris’s murderer. The main location of his cult was in the Upper Egyptian Ombos.

SOKAR – god of the Memphis necropolis, frequently associated with Ptah and Osiris. The present-day name of Saqqara comes from his name. He is depicted as a falcon standing on a pedestal in a *ben* barge, which is frequently the ideogram used for his name. He was also imagined as a man with a falcon’s head. In the Old Kingdom period, he was considered to be the patron of

craftsmen, especially those working with metal. The *Pyramid Texts* describe him as the creator of the royal harpoon. As a chthonic deity, Sokar was lord of the desert and of the land of the dead.

THOERIS (= 'great one') – guardian goddess-mother, depicted as a female hippopotamus with a crocodile's head, lion's legs and human hands, holding a reed plaited *sa* yoke, the symbol of safety. Theoris's important role in Egyptian magic was expressed through the popularity of amulets representing the goddess.

THOTH – god of wisdom, frequently identified with the Greek Hermes, which is where the name of the main centre of his cult, Hermopolis Magna in Upper Egypt, comes from. Considered to be the scribe of divine words and an expert on all the rituals, he was usually depicted as a man with an ibis head. Thoth's holy animal was also the baboon. Memphite theology endows him with the function of the god Ptah's tongue, while Horus is the demiurge's heart.

Glossary of archaeological terms

akh (Egyptian) – spiritual element of a tomb's owner, attributed with many superhuman, almost divine traits

akhet (Egyptian) – a higher level of existence, to which the deceased was raised during the funeral through the ritual of 'transformation into akh'

anastylosis (from Greek) – the reconstruction of architectural structures from original fragments of an ancient ruined structure

ankh (Egyptian) – symbol of life

archaeological context – the arrangement in reference to each other of soil deposits, relicts of structures, moveable artefacts and other traces of human activities

archaeological layer – the smallest distinguishable stratification unit at an archaeological site

artefact (from Latin) – an object that is the product of human thought and work

aspective (from Latin) – in Old Egyptian art, a method of depicting three-dimensional reality on a plane in such a view as to enable each element's immediate identification through its diagnostic features

'beautiful name' (Egyptian) – a type of sobriquet, usually a shortened version of a name

benben (Egyptian) – a stone object or hill, considered to be the spot at which Atum appeared in Heliopolis

Canopic jar – a burial urn with a lid in the shape of a human, baboon, jackal or falcon head, i.e. one of Horus's four sons – the patrons of mummification; it was used to store the deceased's entrails after the body had been embalmed; the name comes from the town Canopus in the Nile Delta

cartonnage (from French) – 'a case' for a mummy made from layers of canvas or papyrus stuck together, covered with a layer of gypsum on which a polychrome decoration was made

cartouche (from French) – an oval frame around a hieroglyphic inscription bearing a pharaoh's name (depicted as a double rope with the endings joined at the shorter side)

choragic monument (from Greek) – in ancient Greece, a monument commemorating a *choregos*, a citizen who was the patron of a choir that had been victorious in a musical *agon*

'closed deposit' – intact group of objects preserved in their original spot

dakka (Arabic) – a dense mass of earth mixed with fragments of various objects, mainly pottery vessels for sepulchral purposes

- dating material– artefacts enabling the precise attribution of an archaeological layer to specific historical periods, e.g. the reigns of specific rulers
- demotic script (from Greek) – the simplest form of writing down Egyptian texts, used from the seventh century BC to the fifth century AD, especially in administrative, legal and personal documents
- deposit (from Latin) – objects laid away for safekeeping
- determinative (from Latin) – a hieroglyph written at the end of a word in order to determine its meaning
- djadjat* (Egyptian) – a courtyard in front of a mastaba, more precisely – in front of the cult chapel
- djed* pillar (Egyptian) – a symbol of Osiris
- domains (from French) – land property, from which victuals were drawn, necessary in the posthumous cult of persons from the higher levels of the social ladder
- double crown of Lower and Upper Egypt – a composite pharaoh's crown consisting of the red crown of Lower Egypt, in the form of a headdress with a flattened top raised in the back, and the white crown of Upper Egypt, in the shape of a high calpac
- dromos* (Greek) – an alleyway
- 'false door' (Egyptian) – a stone slab in the form of a door, part of a mastaba foundation deposit – an assemblage of various small objects deposited below the foundations of newly-constructed buildings
- graffito* (sing.), *graffiti* (pl., Italian) – an inscription or drawing carved or drawn onto a wall, stone or vessel
- Great House (Egyptian *per-aa*) – a royal palace
- hieratic script (from Greek) – a type of cursive that is a simplified form of hieroglyphs, used from the Old Kingdom onwards to write on less permanent materials, such as papyrus, wood, clay, rock chips
- 'house of eternity' (Egyptian *per-djet*) – a tomb
- ibu en wab* (Egyptian) – a 'purification tent'
- in situ* (Latin, 'in place') – a term used in reference to artefacts that have not been moved from their original spot
- Isis lactans* (Latin, 'Isis breastfeeding') – a representation of Isis breastfeeding Horus, especially popular in the Graeco-Roman period; the iconographic prototype of the Holy Mother with Child
- ka* (Egyptian) – afterworld incarnation of a deceased person; a spiritual element
- khepresh* (Egyptian) – a pharaoh's blue crown, in the form of a type of helmet worn especially during battle
- kherep* (Egyptian) – a pharaoh's sceptre, which doubtless initially was a mace with a cylindrical head

- lychnaptai* (Greek) – functionaries responsible for the lighting at cult celebrations
- Maamur* (Arabic) – supervisor of all the works concerning antiquity
- mastaba (from Arabic) – a type of ancient Egyptian tomb in the shape of low-cut pyramid with a rectangular base, consisting of an aboveground part (made from dried brick or stone) and an underground part with a burial chamber
- mummy (from Arabic) – a corpse preserved from decaying through appropriate treatment or dried-up due to natural mummification
- muu* (Egyptian) – the name of a person participating in the funerary ritual as the performer of mythological roles: they can be distinguished due to their headdress in the form of a wreath or crown, similar to the middle element of the ‘atef’ crown (the crown of the god Osiris)
- nome (from Greek) – the name of an administrative unit in ancient Egypt
- obelisk (from Greek/Latin) – a tall column, usually quadrangular, which becomes slightly narrower towards the top and ends in a small pyramid (pyramidion)
- odeon (from Greek) – a theatrical building in ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt housing musical and poetic spectacles
- ‘Opening of the Mouth’ ritual – a funerary ceremony supposed to give the deceased back the ability to use his/her mouth, which was equivalent to regaining skills that are expressions of life; it involved a priest touching the deceased’s lips with a miniature hatchet and chisel, with the ritual ending in a washing ceremony
- ostrakon (sing.), ostraca (pl., from Greek) – the shard of a clay vessel used as writing material and for voting (in ancient Greece): in reference to Egypt, this name also refers to stone sherds, mainly limestone, used for writing material
- palaeography (from Greek) – the study of the history of old writing forms, tools and materials
- portcullis – a dropped blockade of the entrance to a tomb, consisting of one or two heavy stone plates
- pylon (Greek, ‘gate’) – one of two buildings in a shape similar to a cut pyramid, bordering the entrance to a temple or palace
- pyramid (from Greek) – a monumental building in the shape of a polyhedron on a square base, serving as a pharaoh’s tomb in the Old Kingdom period
- sarcophagus (from Greek/Latin) – a decorative coffin, made, for example, from stone, wood or metal, usually in the form of a chest
- scarab (from Latin) – a large black beetle worshipped in ancient Egypt as the god of the rising sun
- shen* (Egyptian) – a sign expressing the cohesion of the world and having a protective function in Egyptian magic

- sphinx (from Greek) – in ancient Egyptian art, a figure of a lying lion with a human or animal (e.g. a ram's) head
- 'step pyramid' – a pyramid in the form of a few, increasingly smaller mastabas, arranged one on top of another
- stratification (from Latin/French) – an arrangement of layers
- stratigraphy (from Latin/Greek) – in archaeology: the succession of cultural layers in the vertical section of the excavated site, allowing for the establishment of its relative chronology
- survey – prospection of the terrain
- temenos* (Greek) – a 'holy circle'
- terminus post quem* (Latin) – the bottom limit of possible dating
- tumulus* (Latin) – a 'burial mound'
- Two Lands – Upper and Lower Egypt
- udjat* eye (Egyptian) – a symbol of a favourable ending, recovering one's health and victory over one's enemies
- uraeus (from Greek/Latin) – a symbol of a pharaoh's power, in the shape of an attacking cobra, placed above his forehead
- ushebti* (Egyptian, 'the one who responds') – funerary figurines, made from such materials as clay, faience, wood, stone; they were given the task of working for the deceased in the Netherworld
- wabet* (Egyptian, 'pure place') – a place in which the body of a deceased person was prepared for the funeral
- wabet net ut* (Egyptian) – 'place of embalment'

Glossary of foreign expressions and words

acolyte (from Greek) – helper

alter ego (Latin, ‘second self’) – a person equated with someone else

anepigraphic (from Greek) – not containing any inscriptions

anthropoid (from Greek) – humanoid in shape

anthropomorphic (from Greek) – having human features (e.g. a god)

antithetic (from Greek) – contradictory

apotropaic (from Greek) – possessing magical properties, capable of expunging evil spirits

architrave (from Italian) – a horizontal beam resting on column heads, supporting the upper parts of a structure

basilophoric (from Greek) – containing a king’s name

bucranium (from Greek) – a decorative architectural element in the shape of a bull’s head or skull

casus (Latin) – ‘case’

cenotaph (from Greek/Latin) – a symbolic grave not containing a corpse

chantier (French, ‘place of work’) – an excavation site

chthonic (from Greek) – linked to the underground world

commemorative (from Latin) – honouring or preserving the memory of a person

cosmogony (Greek, ‘creation of the world’) – a set of mythological notions about the genesis and essence of the universe

cryptography (from Greek) – coded script

damnatio memoriae (Latin, ‘condemnation of memory’) – the erasing of a person from the memory of posterity, the removal of his images and name

de facto (Latin) – ‘in reality’

deification (from French) – making someone into a god

demiurge (from Greek) – creator of the world

deus ex machina (Latin, ‘god from a machine’) – an unexpected saviour, an apparition

diachronic (from Greek) – that which considers the succession of processes in time

didascaly (Greek, ‘teaching, explaining’) – an author’s explanations or notes contained in the text, referring to the way in which a play should be staged

ephemeral (from French/German) – short-lived, fleeting, temporary

exedra (from Greek) – a semi-circular niche with a bench running along the inner wall

embarras de richesse (French) – a problem resulting from superfluous abundance

- en face* (French) – from the front, opposite
- Eolic (from Greek/Latin) – created as a result of the wind's actions
- eschatology (from Greek) – a field of theology focused on the posthumous fate of humans and the end of the world
- euphemistic (from Greek/German) – not expressing (articulating) something directly, vague
- ex definitione* (Latin) – ‘by definition’
- expressis verbis* (Latin) – clearly, emphatically, avoiding understatements
- hemicycle (from Greek/Latin) – a half circle or semi-circle
- hermitage (from Greek/Latin) – a settlement for monks leading a reclusive life
- hypostasis (from Greek) – an aspect of a deity that is usually a personification of his abstract traits
- holistic (from Greek) – comprehensive
- horror vacui* (Latin) – a fear of leaving an empty space in works of art; a tendency towards covering it completely with decorations
- hybrid (from Latin) – a composition made up of different elements, frequently not suited to each other
- iconoclast (from Greek) – a person who destroys religious images or opposes their veneration
- iconology (from Greek) – the study of the content of artistic works and their symbolism
- in spe* (Latin, ‘in hope’) – a term characterising something that is not yet present or existent but is expected
- interlocutor (from French) – someone with whom one is having a conversation
- khedive (from Ottoman-Turkish) – a title used by the rulers of Egypt at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries
- koine* (Greek, *koine (dialektos)* – ‘common tongue’) – widespread Greek language that formed in the Hellenistic period, more generally – a culture merging elements from various civilisations
- lapidarium (from Latin) – a collection of stones or stone fragments of statues, buildings, etc
- lege artis* (Latin, ‘according to the law of the art’) – in accordance with law, legally
- lingua franca* (Italian, ‘language of the Franks’) – a language that is the means of communication between people who normally speak different languages (e.g. in contemporary times – English)
- madrasa (Arabic, ‘place of study’) – a Muslim school
- ménage à trois* (French) – a sexual arrangement involving three persons
- milieu* (French) – ‘environment, sphere’
- monastic (from Greek/Latin) – concerning monasteries and life in them
- monochromy (from Greek) – a single colour
- monotheism (from Greek) – belief in a single god

- necropolis (from Greek) – a cemetery
- novum* (Latin) – ‘something new’
- Oflag (from German) – a German prisoner of war camp for officers during the Second World War
- onomastics (from Greek) – a field of linguistics studying proper nouns, names
- onomatopoeic (from Greek) – imitating a sound
- padre* (English from Italian/Spanish ‘father’) – a spiritual father; chaplain
- panta rhei* (Greek ‘everything flows’) – everything in the world is constantly changing
- pantheon (from Greek) – all of the deities of a particular religion or religious centre
- par excellence* (French) – quintessential; to the highest degree
- partage (from French) – resulting from a division (e.g. of objects after excavations)
- per analogiam* (Latin) – ‘by analogy’
- Philhellenic (from Greek) – associated with a love for Greek culture
- phoneme (from Greek/French) – the smallest unit of a language’s system of sounds
- polychromy (from Greek) – multicoloured paintings decorating walls or ceilings in buildings; the paintings decorating a work of art
- portico (from Latin) – part of a buildings consisting of a row of columns supporting the vault
- primum non nocere* (Latin) – ‘first, to do no harm’
- progeniture (Latin) – offspring
- prosopography (from Greek) – the study of a collective biography
- rais* (Arabic) – the supervisor of labourers
- reconnaissance (from French) – a preliminary survey
- relief (French) – a sculpture on a flat surface
- risalit (from German/Italian) – part of a building’s façade protruding from the wall surface
- schism (from Greek/Latin) – division or disunion
- signum temporis* (Latin) – ‘a sign of the times’
- status quo* (Latin) – the existing state of affairs at a given moment
- stela (Latin ‘tomb pillar or stone’) – an upright stone plate, usually decorated with a bas-relief and inscription
- tableau* (French) – a ‘painting’
- tambour (from French) – a drum
- theophoric (from Greek) – containing the name of a god
- theogamy (from Greek) – divine nuptials, marriage of gods
- toponym (from Greek) – the name of a place
- topos (Greek, ‘place’) – a permanent motif; element of culture

wadi (Arabic) – a dry desert valley, formed in the Pleistocene, which fills with water following seasonal downfalls

zoophobia (from Greek) – fear of animals

zoomorphic (from Greek) – in the shape of an animal

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