

ABUSIR

Archaeological season of 2003 – 2004



Czech Institute of Egyptology
Charles University, Prague

A B U S I R

Archaeological season of 2003 – 2004 Czech Institute of Egyptology

In accordance with the permission granted by the Permanent Committee of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Egypt, the Czech Institute of Egyptology's expedition carried out an archaeological season at Abusir.

The season lasted from early September 2003 through mid April 2004.

Expedition members:

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Ass. Prof. L. Bareš, Egyptologist

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Eng. V. Brůna, surveyor

Dr. V. Callender, Egyptologist

Eng. M. Dvořák, conservator

Dr. Salima Ikram, Egyptologist

Dr. Jana Kotková, petrologist

Dr. J. Krejčí, Egyptologist

R. Landgráfová, MA., Egyptologist

Dr. D. Magdolen, Egyptologist

J. Mynářová, MA, Egyptologist

Dr. W.-B. Oerter, Coptologist

Ass. Prof. M. Procházka, surveyor

Dr. K. Smoláriková, Egyptologist

Prof. E. Strouhal, anthropologist

Ass. Prof. J. Svoboda, archaeologist

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SCA inspectors :

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Foremen of workmen:

Mohammed el-Kereti

Ahmed el-Kereti

1. Pyramid Complex Lepsius No. 25

The pyramid complex Lepsius No. 25 is an extraordinary complex consisting of two tombs in the shape of truncated pyramids built closely beside each other on the southern edge of Abusir pyramid plateau. During this season, the excavation of this twin tomb was mostly focussed on the eastern of the two pyramids.

Under the layers of wind blown sand and stone rubble, partly removed already during the season of 2000—2001, the remnants of the white limestone walls of the funerary apartment were revealed. Regardless of large-scale devastation by stone robbers, it was possible to reconstruct the original plan of pyramid's substructure.

The funerary apartment had a rather unique plan. The entrance to the substructure lay in the middle of the northern side of the pyramid. The corridor giving access to the burial chamber descended at first under the angle of ca 32 degrees and then it turned in a horizontal passage ca 118 cm wide. From the descending part of the corridor survived only the roughly dressed blocks of the floor, the casing of the side walls was completely missing. Nevertheless, the width of the corridor could be inferred from the traces left in the floor.

At the southern wall of the substructure, the horizontal passage turned to right and opened in the southeast corner of the burial chamber. The north-south oriented chamber had a deep niche in its western wall. The chamber was ca 4.50 m (9 cubits) long and its maximum width, including the niche, was 2.70 m (5 cubits).

During the excavation of the substructure only scarce remnants of the burial equipment were discovered namely, fragments of canopic jars of limestone, model bowls of travertine and copper, a model vase of basalt, a model chisel of copper and shards of pottery (beer jugs, plates, bowls). In the area of the burial apartment and of the descending corridor were also found the remains of disarticulated human remains which mostly came from a secondary cemetery located on the eastern side of the tomb and which was destroyed by stone robbers in modern times. Among these human remains were also the fragments of a mummy, which may have belonged to the tomb owner.

Besides the works in the burial apartment, the eastern part of the tomb's superstructure was examined in which only the badly core masonry of an elongated offering room survived in situ. The entrance (0.875 m wide, 1.55 m long, 3.94 m high) to the room lay in eastern facade, near the south – east corner of the pyramid. Behind the door was a small vestibule (1.15 m x 1.65 m, height: 5.12 m) from which was the access to the offering room itself. The south-western corner of the vestibule is the only part of the tomb's superstructure which is survived up to its roof. The offering room was certainly lined with carefully dressed white limestone blocks as indicated by the extant fragment of the doorway. Though largely damaged, the room's plan could have been reconstructed on the basis of impressions of walls left in the floor of the beaten clay. The room was 6.45 m long and 1.05 m in wide. Unfortunately, the whole western part of the room, including its clay floor, was missing. Plausibly, in this part of the offering room was once the false door.

The examination of the southern part of the chapel revealed a few tiny fragments of a papyrus scroll, found below the floor level, with the remnants of the list of offerings. In the fill of the chapel, originally covering the whole eastern part of the superstructure of the tomb and consisting of stone rubble, sand and decayed mudbricks, were unearthed the remnants of completely disintegrated poor burials. Scattered among the burials were shards of the original,

Old Kingdom cultic pottery and those of pottery belonging to the secondary cemetery and dating from the Late Period.

Some minor investigations were also made outside the tomb. The sondages made on the eastern and southern sides of the tomb revealed that the whole eastern and southern facade of the truncated pyramid collapsed at once, probably due to the damage caused by stone robbers in the antiquity. It can be inferred from the stratigraphy of the area that the walls must have collapsed before the foundation of the aforesaid secondary cemetery. In total, the remnants of ca 30—40 individuals were unearthed (the precise number will result from the anthropological examination planned to take place in the next season). Under the collapsed large and roughly worked blocks of white limestone coming from the pyramid's outer face lay two tiny low walls of mudbrick which flanked on both sides the entrance to the offering chapel in the pyramid.

A minor trial digging was also made around the north-eastern corner of the monument. Circa 5 m to the east of the corner a part of another badly destroyed structure, of which only the lowest parts of its walls survived in situ, was partly disclosed.

The digging to the south of the south-western corner of the western pyramid revealed a rather complex archaeological situation consisting of several mudbrick walls running in different directions. The walls superimposed each other, and were separated by layers of sand mixed with decayed mudbricks and pottery shards. A part of a rectangular structure was also revealed ca 2.45 m to the south of the pyramid's southern wall.

During the works inside and outside of the complex Lepsius No. 25 about 95 masons' marks and inscriptions, both in situ and on loose blocks, were found and recorded. Interestingly, among them were several inscriptions with the name of the pyramid complex of Userkaf – *Wꜥb šwt Wsr-k3.f*. Except for mason's marks and inscriptions, there were also found several fragments of mud sealings dating from the late Fifth Dynasty as well as a large amount of the pottery shards and complete vessels dating from the Old and New Kingdoms and Late, Greco-Roman and Arabic Periods.

Because of the safety reasons, and after the authorization by the SCA Inspectorate in Sakkara, it was decided to cover the funerary apartment of the eastern pyramid of the complex Lepsius No. 25 with sand again. In addition to that, a wall of stone and tafla mortar was erected at the largely damaged core of the southern wall of the burial chamber in order to prevent its collapse in the future. The sand used for the aforesaid covering of the tomb's funerary apartment came from a trench excavated to the north of the entrance to the pyramid's substructure. At the bottom of the trench was discovered a pavement of beaten clay, chips of limestone and pottery shards. In the pavement were hewn nine mostly rectangular burial pits. Five of them were empty, four of them contained human skeletons in situ. The deceased were buried with their heads pointing to the west and facing the east. Hands of the deceased were laid along their bodies, or they were placed over the lap. Due to the lack of any burial equipment, the date of the burials will be determined only by the future anthropological examination.

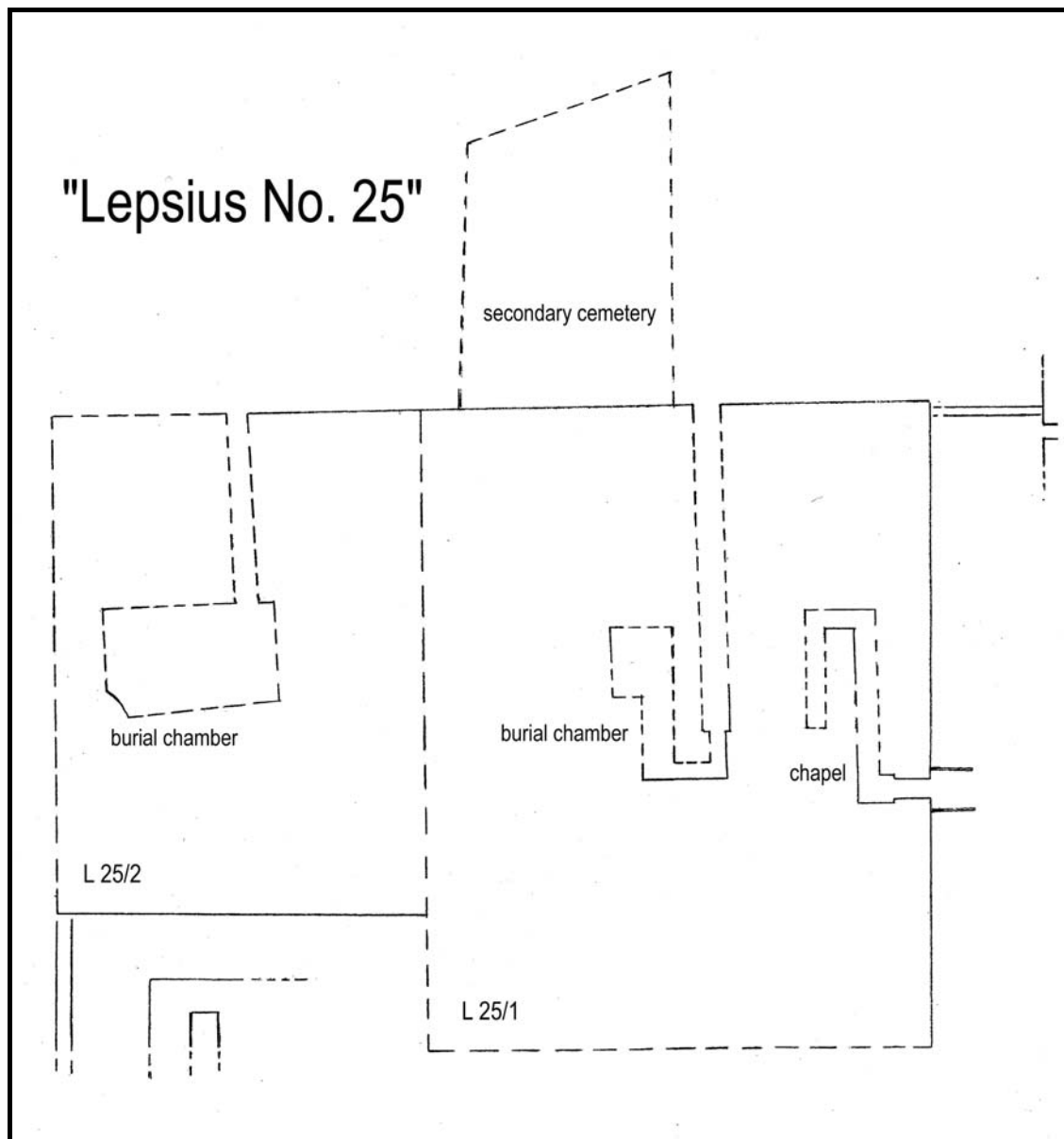


Fig. 1. A schematic plan of the mortuary complex "Lepsius No. 25".



Fig. 2 View of the burial chamber



Fig. 3 View of the offering room



Fig. 4 A model vessel of basalt found in the burial chamber



Fig. 5 Secondary burials on the northern site of the pyramid Lepsius No. 25

2. South Abusir

In the autumn of 2003, the Czech team worked also in South Abusir, mostly in the tomb of Kar but some protection steps were taken in the tombs of Inti and Hetepi, too.

The western inner mud brick wall of the tomb of Kar was consolidated and its narrow western corridor was roofed and provided with iron doors. On the wooden shelves were placed pottery fragments and bones found in Abusir-South in previous seasons.

The fragments of reliefs, miniature stone vessels and other objects, found in the tombs of Kar and Inti during previous seasons, were studied and fully documented. The reliefs and inscriptions in the tomb of Inti were drawn and studied, too. Two fragments of reliefs (148A-GG-1995, 148B-GG-1995) discovered in the 1995 season, and so far kept in the store room in the mastaba of Ptahshepses, were transferred to the store room in the tomb of Kar. Both will be placed back into their original position in the eastern façade of Inti's tomb during the archaeological season of 2004-2005.

In order to prevent any attack by tomb robbers, the offering chamber of Hetepi, situated to the east of the tomb complex of Kar, was roofed and provided with solid iron doors. These steps, taken to increase the protection of Hetepi's offering chamber, were done under the supervision of the authorities from the SCA Inspectorate at Saqqara.

The offering chamber of Inti was only temporarily provided with wooden shelves on which will be temporarily placed fragments of reliefs to be put together and then set in the walls of the tombs of Inti and Kar. The work is planned for the next season and after its conclusion the shelves will be removed.

3. Egyptian Museum

In October 2003 and in March 2004, the members of the Czech team (R. Landgráfová, H. Benešová, H. Vymazalová, J. Svoboda, P. Vlčková and K. Voděra) continued the study and documentation of the finds from the Czech excavations in the pyramid complex of Neferefre. The finds were examined in connection with the preparation of the manuscript on the pyramid complex of Neferefre for print.

4. Survey

In March and April 2004, two members of the Czech archaeological expedition - V. Brůna and J. Procházka - conducted a geodetic survey in the area of the pyramid field of Abusir. The aim of the survey was to obtain input data (spatial coordinates) for the completion of the map of archaeological objects at Abusir (scale 1:2000). Gradually the geometers surveyed both the terrain and the archaeological features visible on the surface (corners of the pyramids, causeways, temples, and mastabas). The obtained data will be used for the creation of a digital levels-map, which will be among others the basis for the 3D terrain modelling. A Total Station LEICA TCR 307 was used as the measuring equipment.

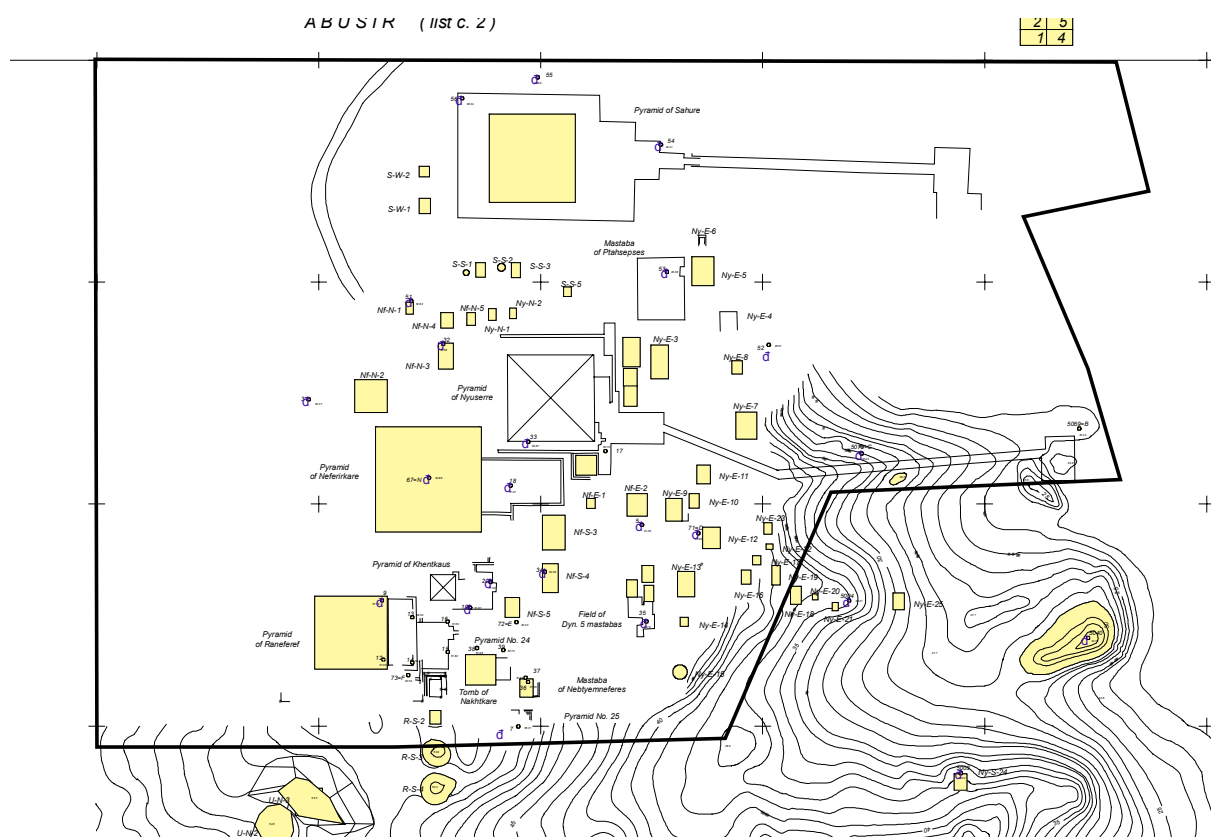


Fig 6 Extent of the surveyed area

5. The Tomb of Iufaa

In the tomb of Iufaa, two small and lateral burial chambers, intact until now, were opened. The first of them, situated in the western side of the western lateral shaft, was found lined with slabs of white limestone. On its sides, one line of the hieroglyphic texts was preserved, cut in incised relief. Inside the chamber, a double wooden coffin was found. The outer coffin, box-shaped, was decorated from both inside and outside with religious texts and representations, cut in relief or simply painted directly on the wood. The inner, anthropoid coffin, decorated with finely painted texts and images of deities, was unfortunately badly damaged by the excessive humidity. Inside this coffin, a mummy of a man was situated, covered originally with a net finely made of faience beads. As in the case of Iufaa, the mummy was orientated with its head to the east.

Around the double coffin, the pieces of the burial equipment were found, badly damaged by the humidity again: 403 shabtis, four canopic jars, inscribed with usual texts, a small wooden statue, a number of amulets, models of offering tables, receptacles for the sacred oils, a larger pottery jar, etc. In the wrappings of the mummy were revealed 21 thin golden sheaths were collected that originally covered all the finger and toe tips of the deceased, as well as 19 different amulets made of faience and different stones. Inside the outer coffin, were several badly decayed thin wooden slabs that were inscribed with various Book of the Dead chapters.

According to the texts, this burial chamber belonged to Neko, a man called also Neferibreseneb, who held several priestly titles, among them that of a "God's father." , too. Judging from the results of a preliminary anthropological examination, he died at an age of 35 to 40 years.

The second burial chamber, situated this time in the northern side of the western lateral shaft, about 3 metres above its bottom, was only dug in the tafl bedrock. Inside, the remains of an anthropoid coffin were found, badly damaged by the humidity again. Originally, the coffin was painted black, with yellow texts on its outer sides. Unfortunately, only the tiny remnants of the texts survived. Inside the coffin was the mummy of a man orientated with its head to the north. Originally, the mummy was covered with a net made of faience beads. On the sides of the coffin, in small recesses, a pottery jar and around 360 shabti figurines were found. Because of their very bad workmanship and the high level of humidity inside the chamber, some of the figurines were decomposed and turned to a mere powder. Inside the wrappings of the mummy were 15 tiny sheaths made probably of a gold-copper alloy, 10 small amulets made of the same alloy and 16 other amulets made of faience and different sorts of stone.

The badly readable inscriptions on the shabtis give the name of the deceased as Gemnefherbak who held the same title as Iufaa, namely "Administrator of the Palaces (of the Red Crown)." Preliminary results of an anthropological examination showed that he was a rather gracile male, not very muscular, and possibly of a short stature. He died 35 to 45 years old. The mutual relationship among Neko, Gemnefherbak, Iufaa and other persons buried in this complex tomb, are unclear at the moment. In addition to the work mentioned above, also other activities were continued in the tomb of Iufaa concerning mainly the planned opening of the tomb for the public in the future.

The cleaning and consolidation continued on the sides of the burial chamber and sarcophagi of Iufaa, amply decorated with beautiful texts and representations cut in relief. The chest of the basalt inner sarcophagus of Iufaa was lifted from its original position in a cavity inside the outer sarcophagus and moved aside. In that way, its outer sides and bottom beautifully decorated with inscriptions and vignettes became accessible and could have been photographed

and copied. The inscriptions consist mainly from varying Pyramid Texts and Coffin Texts spells, Book of the Dead chapters and other religious texts known from Saite tombs and include a rather unique series of images of protective deities. At the same time, the lifting of the chest of the inner sarcophagus gave us an access to the lengthy texts on the sides and the bottom of the cavity inside the limestone outer sarcophagus. These texts, religious in their contents, too, were copied and photographed together with the texts on the inner side of the lid of the inner sarcophagus.

In order to examine the possible relationship between the tomb of Iufaa and the tombs of Udjahorresnet and Menekhibneko in its surroundings, two narrow trial trenches were hewn between the north-western corner of the enclosure of Iufaa and the south-eastern corner of the enclosure of Udjahorresnet, and between the south-eastern corner of the enclosure of Iufaa and the north-western corner of the enclosure of Menekhibneko respectively. No traces of any walls or other installations were found that would separate those tombs from each other. Most probably, all these tombs were built at the same time and represented, in fact, a single complex.

Before closing the season, the most important finds were enlisted into the register book of the SCA and moved to the store-room of the SCA at Saqqara.

6. Work in the Field Magazin

During the archaeological season, the members (especially L. Bareš, K. Smoláriková, J. Mynářová, V. Černý, J. Kotková, V. G. Callender, J. Krejčí, D. Magdolen) continued the study and documentation of the finds from the Czech excavations in the Abusir. The finds were studied in connection with the preparation of manuscripts of scientific articles and monographs on the individual archaeological monuments excavated by the Czech expedition.