



P R A G U E
E G Y P T O L O G I C A L
S T U D I E S

XV/2015

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Mastaba of Queen
Khentkaus III
in Abusir

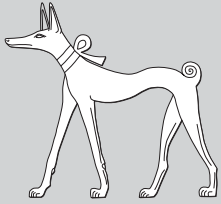


Tomb of the chief
physician
Shepseskafankh

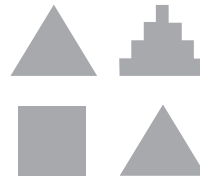
The miraculous
rise of the Fifth
Dynasty



Old Kingdom
canopic jars from
new perspective



P R A G U E EGYPTOLOGICAL S T U D I E S



XV / 2015
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Photograph on the front page

A reconstruction of the offering place in front of the false door of Nefer in tomb AS 68d (photo M. Frouz)

Dear readers,

It has been thirteen years since the first issue of *Prague Egyptological Studies* was published in 2002. Since then it has become an important and wide-selling journal, providing both the scientific and laymen audience with the latest results of our fieldwork and various studies in the field of Czech Egyptology dealing with the civilisations of ancient Egypt and Sudan.

After more than a decade of its existence, we are pleased to launch the first issue of the English edition of *Prague Egyptological Studies*. The English edition is dedicated exclusively to the history, archaeology and language of third millennium BC Egypt. Yet it also aims to include studies dealing with foreign relations during the period. At the same time, we also welcome publications on the latest advances in the study of the environment and studies evaluating the significance of applied sciences. Our principal aim is to accommodate studies concerning either primary research in the field or those that bring up theoretical inquiries of essential importance to the indicated scope and time frame of the journal.

The present issue is devoted to the excavations at Abusir, the principal field of research of the Czech Institute of Egyptology. The individual reports are dedicated to the excavation projects carried out in the pyramid field (Khentkaus III), as well as in the Abusir South area (tomb complex AS 68, the tomb of Shepseskafankh). In addition to these, you will also find more theoretical studies focusing on the "Khentkaus problem", which analyses the significance and importance of three women bearing the same name during the Fourth and Fifth Dynasties, a study dealing with model beer jars and their typological evolution, an interesting seal with a figure of Bes, and an interpretation of canopic jars bearing significant tokens of past treatment on their bodies.

We trust that the English edition of *Prague Egyptological Studies*, which will be produced once a year, will find a firm place among other Egyptological scholarly journals. We are convinced that a clearly defined profile of this scientific journal will attract not only the attention of many readers but also submissions of significant contributions from the scientific community and thus streamline major advances in the fields of third millennium BC Egypt history, archaeology and the like.

Miroslav Bárta and Lucie Jirásková

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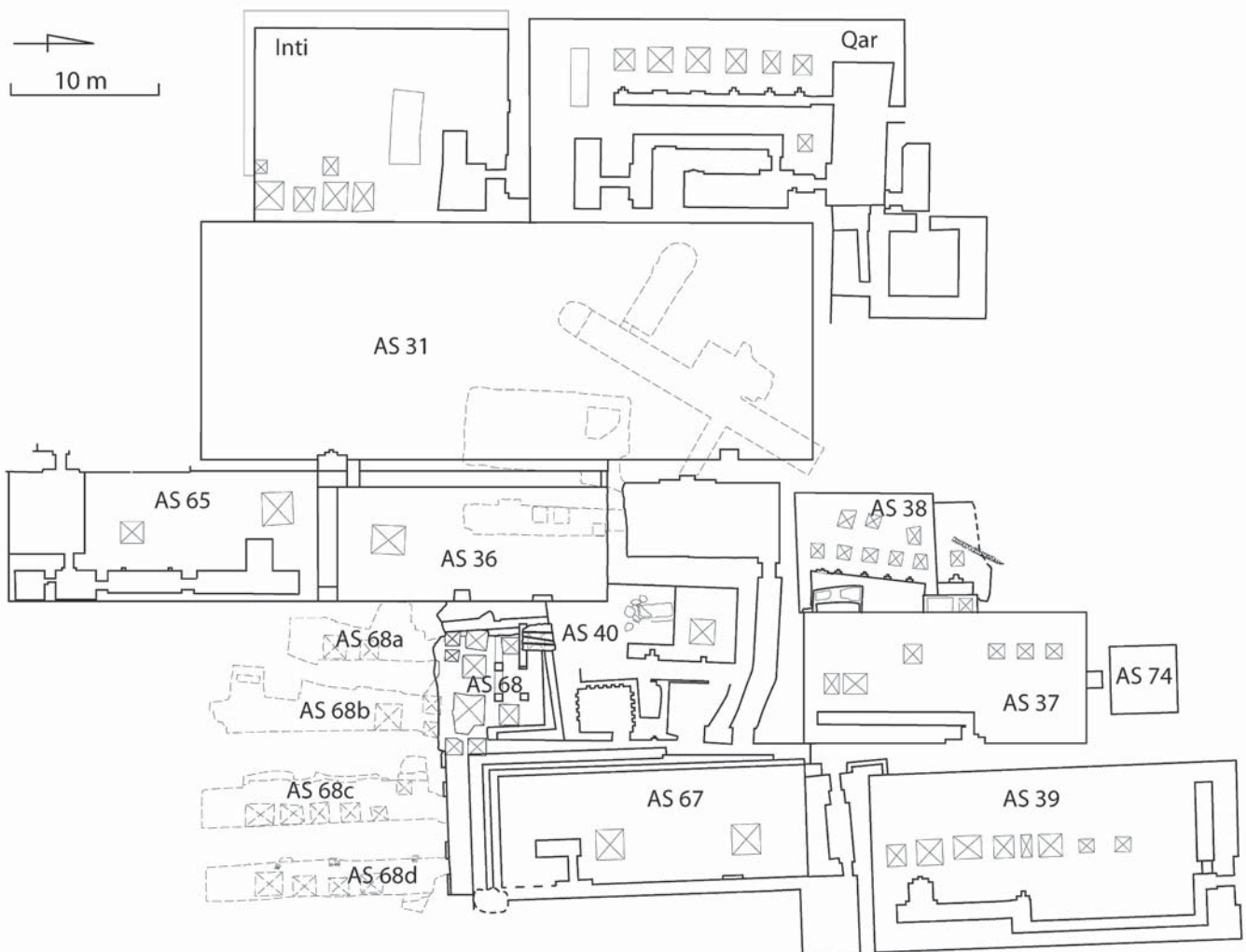


Fig. 1a Ground plan of the cemetery including the mastaba of Shepsefkafankh (drawing L. Vařeková, H. Vymazalová)

Tomb of the chief physician Shepsefkafankh

Miroslav Bárta

This mastaba was discovered during the course of the 2013 season in Abusir South. It is located in the northeastern part of the cemetery of officials dated to the Fifth Dynasty, to the reigns of Nyuserre, Menkauhor and Djedkare (*i.e.* 2402–2322 BC; Hornung – Kraus – Warburton 2006: 491) (figs. 1 and 2). Based on archaeological and epigraphic evidence, it may be supposed that it is one of the earliest structures in the examined cemetery which was in use at least for a century or so (Bárta – Vymazalová – Dulíková *et al.* 2014). In fact, there is an increasing probability that the cemetery was not inactive until the end of the Sixth Dynasty, as indicated by some evidence provided by the tomb complex of Inti (Bárta – Vachala *et al.*, *in preparation*).

Architecture of the mastaba

Superstructure

The tomb is oriented in a north-south direction with the façade facing north. The entrance orientation was very likely due to the major access route to the cemetery, which started several hundred meters to the northeast, at the Lake of Abusir (Bárta 1999). The tomb measures 21.90 × 11.50 m in ground plan (covering an area of

252 m²). The façade was preserved to a max. height of 1.60 m (fig. 3). The outer walls of the mastaba were built of regular blocks of local limestone, whereas the inner masonry was the result of a combination of mud brick shell construction and loose fill. A comparison of its built area shows that it is one of the larger structures in the cemetery and that it is significantly larger than most of the mastabas of the contemporary members of the royal family discovered in the Abusir Central field (Bárta *et al.* 2014: 208) and in this cemetery:

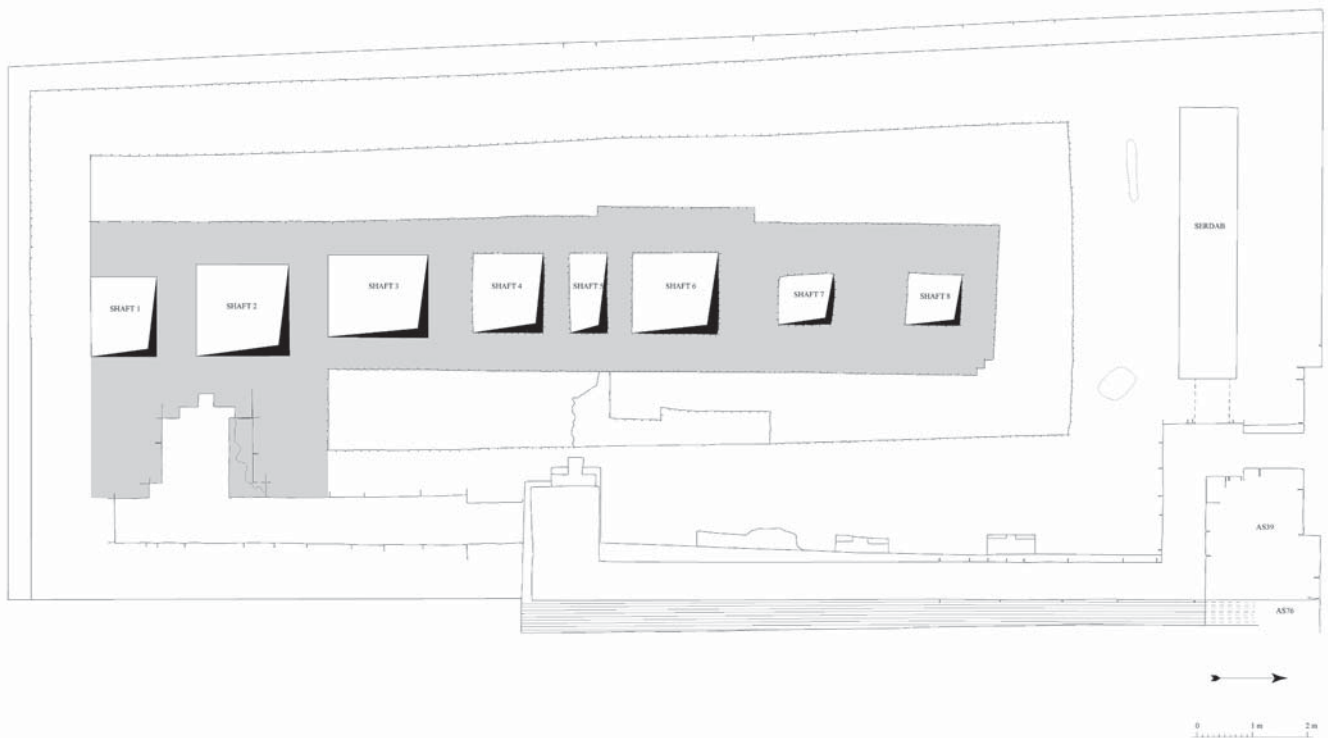


Fig. 1b Ground plan of the mastaba of Shepseskafankh (drawing L. Vařeková)



Fig. 2 Kite view of the cemetery. 1 – mastaba of Shepseskafakh (AS 39), 2 – mastaba of Neferinpu (AS 37), 3 – anonymous mastaba AS 31, 4 – mastaba of Nefershepes (Memi?), 5 – mastaba of Ptahhotep, 6 – rock-cut tombs of Sheretnebty, Nefer and others (AS 68a–d) (photo V. Brůna)



Fig. 3 Entrance into the mastaba, view from the northeast (photo M. Bárta)

AS 31, anonymous: 41.30 × 17.20 m, 710 m².
 AS 36, Ptahhotep: 17.00 × 7.50 m, 127 m².
 AS 37, Neferinpu: 19.00 × 8.90 m, 170 m².
 AS 39, Shepsefkafankh: 21.90 × 11.50 m, 252 m².
 AS 67, Nefershepes (Memi?): 20.00 × 6.80, 136 m².

The northern portico was 3.00 m wide and 0.25 m deep. The entrance proper was 0.68 m wide and 1.00 m long, giving way to an L-shaped anteroom measuring approximately 1.50 × 3.15 m. To the west of it, a spacious serdab was situated (fig. 4). This room (Room 5) was 4.92 m long and 1.00 m wide, preserved to a max. height of 1.90 m. The floor was made of beaten clay. Despite the fact that the upper part of the room was badly denuded, a detail of the wall top at the western end of the northern wall shows that the room was originally covered with a mud brick vault. The serdab was found empty and was visually connected to the anteroom, with a small slot in the upper part of its eastern wall.

The anteroom gives access to the north-south oriented, long, narrow chapel (Room 4), with four embedded false doors in the west wall. This room was 11.96 m long and 0.70 m wide, with a floor made of beaten *raksha* and mud. Its walls are built entirely of limestone blocks preserved to a height of about 3.00 m (fig. 5).

In the western wall, four false doors made of limestone blocks were embedded, devoid of any decoration and inscriptions. It is very likely that all four stelae were supposed to be undecorated and corresponded with lesser shafts in the massive of the mastaba further to the west (see below). Proceeding from the south, the first false door starts 0.60 m above the floor and is 0.88 m wide and 2.20 m high; its top part is missing. The second one is completely preserved and starts 0.95 m above the floor and is 0.86 m wide and reaches a height of 2.70 m. The third false door starts 0.90 m above the floor and is 0.90 m wide and reaches its original height of 2.69 m. Finally, the fourth stela starts 0.90 m above the floor, is 0.90 m wide and is preserved to a height of 2.20 m.

From this corridor chapel one enters into the main chapel (Room 3) through a 0.80 m wide and 1.00 m long passageway (fig. 6). This is the principal cult chapel of Shepsefkafankh, which dominates the whole superstructure. The room is 6.40 m long and 0.84 m

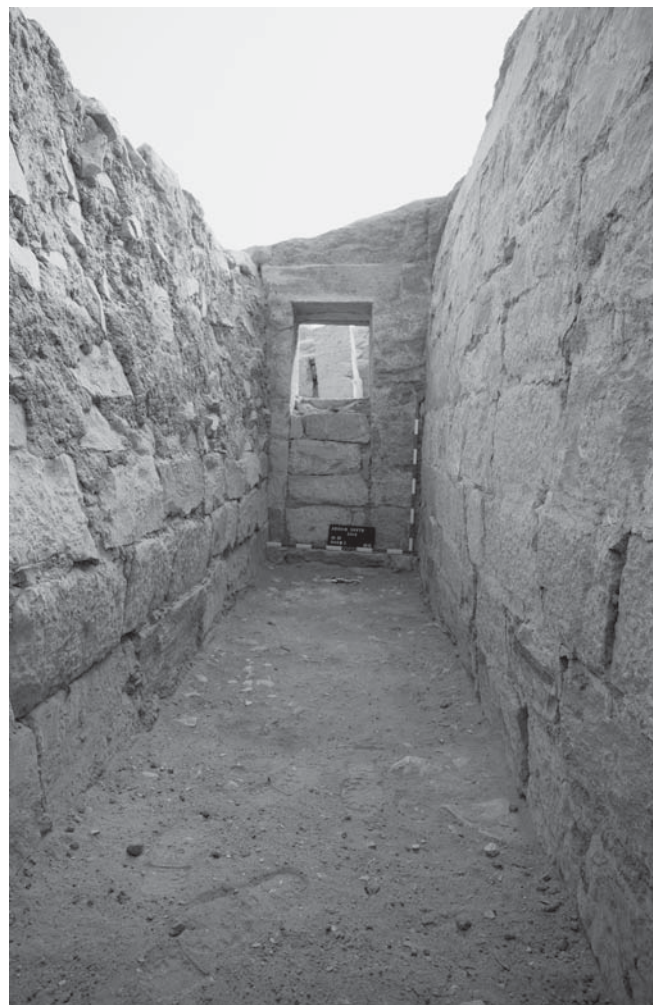


Fig. 4 Serdab of the mastaba, view from the west (photo M. Bárta)



Fig. 5 Corridor chapel, view from the north (photo M. Bárta)

wide, with a floor originally covered with mud plaster. At the southern end of the room, set in the western wall is a cult niche, 1.60 m wide and 1.17 m deep. Its western wall is entirely taken up by a false door made of whitish limestone blocks joined carefully together.

The false door is 1.60 m wide and 3.60 m high and almost completely preserved, only its upper lintel missing. It bears hieroglyphic inscriptions which contain the titles and the name of the owner, Shepseskafankh. The most

particular feature of the false door is the fact that it was only partially finished and thus most of its decoration is still painted in black with red correcting lines. Some parts of the planned decoration scheme are executed in a fine low relief (see below) (figs. 7 and 8).

Substructure

Altogether eight shafts were built to the west of the respective corridor chapels. They are arranged in a single



Fig. 6 Central cult chapel with the false door of Shepseskafankh, view to the north (photo M. Bárta)

row tentatively orientated in a north-south direction. The architect designed a unique solution to strengthen the superstructures of the individual shafts. Within the mastaba's massive, he built a 16.40 m long and approximately 2.80 m wide solid mud brick core in which the individual shafts were excavated. These are numbered from the south to the north. Shaft 5 appears to be secondary, yet still of Old Kingdom date.

Shaft 1

Shaft opening: 1.00 × 1.00 m.

The shaft was 5.00 m deep. It was lined with mud bricks to a depth of 3.50 m (Nile mud bricks of 30 × 15 × 10 cm). The rest of the shaft was dug in a layer of quaternary desert deposits of sand and pebbles. It appears that the shaft must have been used before it reached the solid bedrock. In the fill of the shaft human remains were found, probably of a woman 40–60 years of age (42/AS39/2013).

Shaft 2

Shaft opening: 1.70 × 1.70 m.

The shaft was 12.80 m deep. The lowermost 2.00 m of the shaft were hewn only in very poor tafl bedrock.

A shallow niche was cut into the eastern wall. It measured 2.50 × 1.07 m and was 1.02 m high. In the northwestern corner, some 0.80 m above the floor, there was a secondary (?) cutting that opened into Shaft 3. The opening is 0.70 m wide and 0.80 m high.

In the fill of the shaft, scattered human remains were found, probably belonging to a man 50 years plus of age (29/AS39/2013).

Shaft 3

Shaft opening: 1.80 × 1.50 m.

Shaft 3 was 10.30 m deep. The bottom of the shaft descends to the west where the burial niche was cut. The niche measures 2.80 × 1.14 m and is 1.30 m high. The southeastern corner of the room is broken and gives access to Shaft 2, which starts some 0.20 m above the floor. Inside the niche the torso of a limestone statue was found, measuring 52 cm tall, missing lower parts of the legs and the head and still preserving remains of the original polychromy (17/AS39/2013) (fig. 9). Remains of an individual were found at the bottom of the shaft (19/AS39/2013), probably belonging to a woman 35–60 years of age.



Fig. 7 Detail of the false door showing the nature of the unfinished decoration (photo M. Bárta)



Fig. 8a, b False door of Shepseskafankh (photo M. Bárta, drawing J. Malátková)



0 10 50 cm

Fig. 9 Male statue
(of Shepseskafankh?,
17/AS39/2013) as discovered
in the niche of Shaft 3
(photo M. Megahed)



Shaft 4

Shaft opening: 1.30 × 1.30 m.

The shaft was 9.20 m deep, lined with mud bricks down to the bottom. No chamber or niche was found at the bottom, yet in the fill human remains of a 35–50-year-old man were found (21/AS39/2013).

Shaft 5

Shaft opening: 0.74 × 1.46 m.

The shaft was 3.10 m deep. A secondary burial completely destroyed was found in the fill of the shaft (31/AS39/2013).



Fig. 10 Burial chamber of Shaft 7 (photo M. Bárta)

Shaft 6

Shaft opening: 1.50 × 1.50 m.

The shaft was 10.60 m deep. The burial niche was cut into the western wall: it was 2.47 m long, 1.12 m deep and 0.86 m high. It contained a completely destroyed burial of a woman who was certainly over 50 years of age (27/AS39/2013).

Shaft 7

Shaft opening: 0.96 × 0.96 m.

The shaft was 4.20 m deep and completely cased with Nile mud bricks. The burial chamber was constructed to the west of the shaft (fig. 10). It was 1.80 m long and 0.92 m wide with a max. height of 1.17 m. The side walls were built of mud bricks and the roof consisted of a vaulted construction, also of mud brick. The size of the *tafl* bricks was 30 × 15 × 10 cm. The floor of the chamber and the shaft was made of a 15 cm thick layer of mud lying directly on a layer of clean yellow sand. Based on the construction of the vaulted chamber, it may be concluded that the whole structure was built in an open space and only later filled over with loose material. The same construction technique had to be used for Shaft 8. A destroyed burial (20 and 23/AS39/2013) belonged to a woman 40–60 years of age.

Shaft 8

Shaft opening: 1.02 × 0.92 m.

The shaft was 3.90 m deep and completely cased with Nile mud bricks of 30 × 15 × 10 cm. The burial chamber was built with the same technique as in the case of Shaft 7, to the west of the bottom of the pit.

The chamber is 1.70 m long, 0.90 m deep and 1.05 m high, the vault itself measures some 0.35 m. Destroyed human remains (22 and 53/AS39/2013) of at least two individuals were found inside the chamber.

Decoration of the tomb and inscriptions

The only decorated part of the tomb was the false door in the chapel. The particular characteristic and importance of the unfinished state of the stela lies in the fact that major parts of the texts were executed only in black ink. The texts also feature some corrections carried out in red ink, whereas only small portions of the texts were carved. It is interesting that some individual signs on the outer jambs are significantly larger than those featured on the inner jambs. The finished signs were executed in sunken relief with a limited amount of inner detail. The upper lintel of the false door is missing. Most of the painted surface of the central panel had been washed away in the past, as also had some sections on the top parts of the individual jambs, lower lintel and drum. The texts read as follows:

Central panel:

...*h3tt Thnw, r̄f*...

...*t(3) 1,000, hnk̄t 1,000, d3bw*...

...best Libyan oil, *r̄f*-bags...

...*t3*-bread, 1,000; beer, 1,000; figs...

Lower lintel:

1. *smr-pr, zwnw n pr-ʿ3, hm-ntr R̄c m Nhn-R̄c,*

2. ...*jm̄h(w) hr ntr-ʿ3, jm3hw hr nb.f,*
špss-k3.f-ʿnh

1. Friend of the House, physician of the Great House, priest of Re in (the sun temple) *Nekhenre*,

2. ...well-provided before the Great god, well-provided before His Lord,
Shepseskafankh.

The drum:

1. *wr-zwnw šm̄w Mhw,*

2. *špss-k3.f-ʿnh*

1. Chief of the physicians of Upper and Lower Egypt,

2. Shepseskafankh.

Inner left jamb:

1. *hm-ntr R̄c m Nhn-R̄c, [hm-ntr R̄c] m St-jb-R̄c, [hm-ntr R̄c] m šsp-jb-R̄c*

2. *hm-ntr Hwt-hr m swt.s nbt, w̄b nzwt, hr(j)-sšt3 n nb.f*

3. [*smr*]-*pr, zwnw n pr-ʿ3, (j)m(j)-r phrt n pr-ʿ3, špss-k3.f-ʿnh*

1. Priest of Re in (the sun temple) *Nekhenre*, [priest of Re] in (the sun temple) *Setibre* and [priest of Re] in (the sun temple) *Shesepibre*,

2. Priest of Hathor in all her places, *wab*-priest of the king, keeper of secrets of His Lord,

3. Friend of the House, physician of the Great House, overseer of the healing substances of the Great House, Shepseskafankh.

Inner right jamb:

1. *hm-ntr R̄c m Nhn-R̄c, hm-ntr R̄c m St-jb-R̄c,*

2. *wr-zwnw šm̄w, T3-Mhw, hm-ntr Hr šnwt, [hm-ntr] Jnpw hnt(j) Sp3,*

3. *hm-ntr Dšrt, hm-ntr Hk3, hm-ntr Hnmw hnt(j) Pr-ʿnh Pr-z3*

šmr-pr, zwn Pr-ʿ3, špss-k3.f-ʿnh

1. Priest of Re in (the sun temple) *Nekhenre*, priest of Re in *Setibre*,

2. Chief of the physicians of Upper and Lower Egypt, priest of Horus of Shenut, [priest of] Anubis, foremost of Sepa(-district),

3. Priest of the Red Crown, priest of the Magic, priest of Khnum, who is foremost of the House of Life and the House of Protection,

friend of the House, physician of the Great House, Shepseskafankh.

Outer left jambs:

1. ...*h3st, krst(j)f(j) m hrt-ntr (m-ht) j3wt nfr(t) wrt, smr-pr,*

2. ...*mpt-tpj, 3bd, smdt, hb-nb r̄c-nb, zwn pr-ʿ3*

špss-k3.f-ʿnh

1. ...may he be buried in the necropolis (after) beautiful old age, friend of the House,

2. ...at the New Year's Festival, at the month (and) half month festivals, every feast and every day, physician of the Great House,

Shepseskafankh.

Outer right jambs:

1. ...*krst(j)f(j) m hrt-ntr (m-ht) j3wt nfr(t) wrt, smr-pr,*

2. ...*hb-nb r̄c-nb, (j)r(j)-(j)ht nzwt, zwn pr-ʿ3*

špss-k3.f-ʿnh

1. ...may he be buried in the necropolis (after) beautiful old age, friend of the House,

2. ...every feast and every day, property custodian of the king, physician of the Great House, Shepseskafankh.

The lower part of the false door features four standing figures of the tomb owner oriented towards the centre, two on each side of the stela. The two central figures facing each other are significantly larger in proportions. The figure on the left is dressed in a leopard skin with a pointed, partially crimped kilt. He wears a wide collar and a tight-fitting wig. Shepseskafankh is leaning on a long staff and holding a papyrus-like artefact in his right hand. The opposite figure is dressed in a simple pointed kilt, with a wide collar, tight-fitting wig, a papyrus-like artefact in his left hand and is leaning on a long staff. The two smaller figures, each on one extremity, are identical. They are both dressed in pointed kilts, wearing wide collars and shoulder-length wigs, leaning on long staffs with button top ends and holding cloth pieces. Concerning the cloth pieces, it is worth mentioning that in these two cases they take the typical form of a folded cloth piece; however, the central figures are holding completely different shapes of artefacts, which may indeed be hypothetically considered to represent papyrus rolls.

Name and titles of the tomb owner

The name of the tomb owner, Shepseskafankh is attested on the northern façade of the mastaba as well as on his false door. Gourdon (2007: 148.2) provides evidence for seven officials bearing this name. The latest example dates to the early reign of Nyuserre (Gourdon 2007: 390). It indicates that the name and memory of King Shepseskaf was rather popular during this specific period (Stadelmann 2000).

Altogether, fifteen titles and two epithets feature on the false door of Shepseskafankh.

Titles:

1. $(j)m(j)-r\ phrt\ n\ pr-^{\epsilon}3$ – “overseer of the healing substances of the Great House”. This title is yet unattested. For the noun *pekheret* as “Heilmittel, Arznei, Medizin, Medikament, Grundlagendrogen” see Hannig (2003: 474) and von Deines and Westendorf (1961: 284).
2. $(j)r(j)-(j)ht\ nzwt$ – “property custodian of the king” (Jones 2000: 327–328, no. 1206).
3. $w^{\epsilon}b\ nzwt$ – “wab-priest of the king” (Jones 2000: 373, no. 1382).
4. $wr\ zwnw\ \check{S}m^{\epsilon}w\ Mhw$ – “chief of the physicians of Upper and Lower Egypt” (Jones 2000: 398, no. 1467).
5. $hm-ntr\ Jnpw\ hnt(j)\ Sp3$ – “hem-netjer-priest of Anubis, foremost of Sepa” (Jones 2000: 506, no. 1894).
6. $hm-ntr\ R^{\epsilon}\ m\ Nhn-R^{\epsilon}$ – “hem-netjer-priest of Re in Nekhenre” (Jones 2000: 534, no. 1997), *i.e.* in the sun temple of Userkaf.

7. $hm-ntr\ R^{\epsilon}\ m\ St-jb-R^{\epsilon}$ – “hem-netjer-priest of Re in *Setibre*” (Jones 2000: 537, no. 2004), *i.e.* in the sun temple of Neferirkare.

8. $[hm-ntr\ R^{\epsilon}]\ m\ \check{S}zp-jb-R^{\epsilon}$ – “[hem-netjer-priest of Re] in *Shesepibre*” (Jones 2000: 538, no. 2006), *i.e.* in the sun temple of Nyuserre.

9. $hm-ntr\ Hr\ (j)m(j)-\check{S}nwt$ – “hem-netjer-priest of Horus of Shenut” (Jones 2000: 552, no. 2048).

10. $hm-ntr\ Hk3$ – “hem-netjer-priest of Heka” (Jones 2000: 564, no. 2083).

11. $hm-ntr\ Hwt-Hr\ m\ swt.s\ nb(w)t$ – “hem-netjer-priest of Hathor in all her places” (Jones 2000: 550, no. 2041).

12. $hm-ntr\ Hnmw\ hnt(j)\ pr-^{\epsilon}nh\ pr-z3$ – “hem-netjer-priest of Khnum who is foremost of the House of Life and of the House of Protection”. This title is yet unattested. The most similar form can be found in “hem-netjer-priest of Khnum, foremost of the Mansion of Life in all his places/sanctuaries” (Jones 2000: 570, no. 2100).

13. $hm-ntr\ D\check{S}rt$ – “hem-netjer-priest of the Red Crown” (Jones 2000: 586, no. 2146)

14. $hr(j)-s\check{S}t3\ n\ nb.f$ – “keeper of secrets of the king” (Jones 2000: 628, no. 2298).

15. $zwnw\ n\ pr-^{\epsilon}3$ – “physician of the Great House” (Jones 2000: 827, no. 3021).

Epithets

1. $jm3hw\ hr\ nb.f$ – “well-provided/revered before/with His Lord” (Jones 2000: 27, no. 129).
2. $jm3h(h)\ hr\ ntr-^{\epsilon}3$ – “well-provided/revered before/with the Great God” (Jones 2000: 30, no. 141).

Interpretation and Conclusions

The mastaba of Shepseskafankh is a typical family tomb type which appears at the time of Nyuserre. This type of tomb is characterised by one central cult place for the owner of the mastaba and minor cult places associated with other members of the family who were buried within the tomb. The series of eight shafts was probably not built at one time but perhaps more likely in at least two successive stages, as indicated by the differing designs of Shafts 7 and 8. This type of tomb is an indicator of the profound changes which took place in the society of the day. Among the most important of these changes was the principle of heredity, which was one of the major instruments used by powerful families at the court when securing offices for their relatives. And, of course, symbolic expressions such as through the funerary architecture or the setting of a particular tomb in the specific sacred landscape of the Abusir and Saqqara cemeteries conveyed very important information about the family members, their ranks and position within the society (Bárta 2005 and 2006).

Out of the fifteen titles of Shepseskafankh, several preliminary conclusions may be drawn. First of all, Shepseskafankh's most relevant titles were clearly those associated with his profession. They show that he was the highest physician in the country and at the same time he also served in the royal palace and to the king (on physicians in ancient Egypt in general see Jonckheere 1958 and Ghaliounghui 1983). In the last few years, however, more tombs associated with physicians have been discovered in the very close vicinity of the mastaba of Shepseskafankh. The tomb of chief physician, Neferherptah, was discovered and explored in 2010, as was also the tomb of inspector of physicians, Ptahhotep (Dulíková – Odler – Havelková 2011; Vymazalová – Dulíková 2012). All of them date, similar to Shepseskafankh, to the middle of the Fifth Dynasty. Also the owner of mastaba AS 31 was a physician, judging by his fragmentarily preserved titles (Bárta, *in preparation*). In fact, this is one of the highest concentrations of physicians' burial places dating to roughly the same period.

The title "*hem-netjer*-priest of Khnum who is foremost of the House of Life and of the House of Protection" is particularly interesting in the Abusir context. The title, itself, is yet unattested but indicates a very close connection between these two institutions and the god Khnum. The House of Life was a complex with the primary function to store, safeguard and maintain important texts, in a way a centre of contemporary knowledge. At the same time, it was also an educational institution, and this is why many scribes were engaged by this institution as well (Gardiner 1938). Members of the House of Life were undoubtedly representatives of the elite of the day. The principal god associated with the institution was the god Khnum. Later tradition, however, makes the House of Life a sacred institution, with limited access requiring some initiation. At the same time, it was associated with the Osiris myth (Jasnow – Zauzich 2014: 43). Reviewing the meagre Old Kingdom evidence for this institution, we have mainly titles of several officials, and no data indicating the true nature of the House of Life at this period. What we know, however, is that the creator god Khnum, was associated with the institution. The House of Life occurs in connection with the House of Birth (also in tomb AS 31). And perhaps most significantly: the House of Life starts to appear during the reign of Nyuserre, which is also the time of the earliest attestations of Osiris (Mathieu 2010; Bárta *et al.* 2014: 211).

In the case of the House of Protection the issue is even more complicated. The institution is attested only sporadically and based on later parallels, it may be suggested that it was a place where children were born (Meeks 1981: 78.1471). In this specific context we may suppose that the children under consideration were offsprings of the king. This may also account for the very close association of the institution with the creator god Khnum. A close relationship between the House of Protection, Khnum and the royal son who was to become the king is explicitly addressed in the mortuary temple of Sahure in Abusir (Borchardt 1913: pl. 18).

Based on several indications, a close connection between the mastaba of Shepseskafankh and yet

anonymous tomb AS 31 may be assumed (Bárta 2011). The owner of AS 31 was also a physician and held the titles of "*hem-netjer*-priest of Khnum who is foremost of the House of Life" and "*hem-netjer*-priest of Khnum who is foremost of the House of Protection", which are almost identical with Shepseskafankh's title no. 12 (Bárta 2011).¹ He probably also held the title of "*hem-netjer*-priest of Horus of Shenut" (no. 9 of Shepseskafankh) as indicated by the 14m/AS31/2004) and the title of "chief physician of Lower Egypt" (23/AS68/2012).

The titles no. 5 and 9 – "*hem-netjer*-priest of Anubis, foremost of Sepa" and "*hem-netjer*-priest of Horus of Shenut" bring yet another unexplored aspect of Shepseskafankh's career into discussion. Moreover, the same two titles are also attested by the anonymous holder of mastaba AS 31. According to Leitz (2002: 853 and 244–245), Sepa was a locality in the Eighteenth (cult centre of the gods Anti/Nemti) and Shenut in the Ninth Upper Egyptian nome (for these nomes see Helck 1974). In both cases, they seem to be connected with places associated with the god Re. Bernard Mathieu was able to demonstrate recently that the concepts of Re and Osiris were strongly complementary. Moreover, Mathieu stresses the link between Osiris as a Lord of Maat and King Sneferu whose Horus name was also the Lord of Maat (Mathieu 2010).

These are highly interesting associations that throw, among other things, a new light on the professional and personal ties between Shepseskafankh and the owner of AS 31. Given their prominence in the cemetery and their unique titles, it may be suggested that they were closely related (most likely a father-son relationship). The unsolved issue still remains the relative chronology of the incipient stage of the cemetery. It is quite possible that AS 31 was started first as the most prominent structure in the cemetery and that the tomb of Shepseskafankh was simply added later. Equally possible, however, is the "other way round" scenario.

To develop the issue a bit further, the famous Akhetotep from Saqqara had several titles that put him in connection with the owner of AS 31 and Shepseskafankh. His two sons (Rakhef and Akhetotep II) were physicians, and it is rather rare in Old Kingdom contexts to have evidence for whole families of physicians (Jonckheere 1958; Ghaliounghui 1983). Moreover, Akhetotep himself held the title of "*hem-netjer*-priest of Khnum who is foremost of the House of Life in all his places" (Ziegler 2007: 25–27). At any rate, the Abusir evidence is probably so far the largest source of information for such an extended family of physicians in the Old Kingdom.

The principal characteristics of individual burial installations allow some preliminary interpretations as well. Out of the eight excavated shafts, just one (no. 5) seems to be secondary. This is also indicated by the unusual dimensions of the shaft opening as Old Kingdom shafts always tend to be square in ground plan. Altogether nine burials were identified during the course of the excavation (Shaft 8 comprising probably two individuals). Six of them could be identified according to sex (four females and two males) and three of them remain unidentified. All of them belonged to elder individuals. The

deepest was Shaft 2 (12.80 m), which belonged to a male. The next two (Shafts 3 and 6, 10.30 m and 10.60 m deep, respectively) were prepared for female members of the group. The fourth deepest shaft, Shaft 4, reached a depth of 9.20 m and belonged to a man. The remaining shafts were considerably less deep (Shaft 1 – 5.00 m, female burial; Shaft 5 – 3.10 m, sex of the owner unidentified; Shaft 7 – 4.20 m, female; Shaft 8 – 3.90 m, two unidentified individuals). Only three shafts had proper burial chambers – Shaft 2 (2.50 × 1.07 × 1.02 m, vol. 2.72 m³), Shaft 3 (2.80 × 1.14 × 1.30 m, 4.15 m³) and Shaft 6 (2.47 × 1.12 × 0.86 m, 2.38 m³). It is interesting that by far the most spacious chamber belonged to a woman, the owner of the second deepest shaft.

Conspicuously enough, virtually no items of the original funerary equipment were found. In Shaft 3 a statue in the burial niche was discovered. Based on the context, it seems that it was part of the original burial equipment (17/AS39/2013) belonging to the burial in Shaft 2.

Last but not least, quite interesting cultic evidence is provided by the earlier discovery of two ceramic bovine heads (19a/AS32/2002 and 19b/AS32/2002) during the 2002 season. The models were discovered during a clearing operation to the north of the chapel of Iykai, very close to AS 31 and AS 39. They were lying in a layer of debris in front of one of the smaller mud brick chapels of later Old Kingdom age. At that stage, it was impossible to interpret a chance discovery of two ceramic models of ram heads with characteristic faces and ears and even with the remains of cords preserved on their back sides, which were used to fasten the detachable horns. Being votive offerings, they are rather unique in this cultural context and date. More than a decade later we can surmise that they could be related to a local, Abusir South tradition connected with several officials who were associated with the god Khnum.

Note:

¹ I tender my thanks to Veronika Dulíková for assistance and data supplied with regard to several fragments complementing the reconstruction of the false door lintel from the chapel of AS 31.

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Abstract:

Mastaba AS 39 was discovered during the course of the 2013 season in Abusir South. It is located in the northeastern part of the cemetery of officials dated to the Fifth Dynasty, spanning the reigns of Nyuserre through Djedkare (2402–2322 BC). Shepsekafankh was a person of elevated status at the royal court as indicated by the titles on his unique unfinished false door. These

include, among others, the title of the chief physician of the king, property custodian of the king, chief of the physicians of Upper and Lower Egypt as well as two so far unattested titles of *hem-netjer*-priest of Khnum who is foremost of the House of Life and of the House of Protection and overseer of the healing substances of the Great House. These titles attest to his historically unique position. Shepsekafankh's duties included supervision over the House of Life, which was a centre authority for storing and maintaining written documents. At the same time he was in charge of the House of Protection, which, most likely, was a facility where royal children were born. Based on archaeological and epigraphic evidence, it may be supposed that it is one of the earliest structures in the examined cemetery. Despite the fact that most of the burial facilities of the tomb owner and his family members were looted in antiquity, the tomb represents a unique testimony of the latter part of the Fifth Dynasty history on a microscale.

Abusir – Old Kingdom – Fifth Dynasty – physician

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