



Fig. 1 Excavation of the minor necropolis south of the tomb of Khufuhotep (LG 76 = GE 15) in 2013 (photo S. Vetokhov)

## A case of decapitation from Giza<sup>1</sup>

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The eastern cliff of the Giza plateau has always been one of the most visited and, thus, constantly disturbed outskirts of the necropolis. Situated close to the inhabited valley, it was targeted by numerous generations of people who came to loot, make secondary burials or settle in abandoned rock-cut chapels. Rare undisturbed or partly preserved Old Kingdom burials discovered in rock-cut complexes of the eastern cliff of the plateau provide valuable information on burial practices of the population buried in this marginal area of Giza. According to the available titles, the males who decorated their tombs at the foot of the plateau were palace attendants, administrators of the royal domain and royal works, or served in the necropolis as priests and craftsmen (Kormysheva – Malykh 2010; Kormysheva – Malykh – Vetokhov 2010; Kormysheva *et al.* 2015). The tombs also housed burials of their relatives; some women interred here held the titles of priestesses of Hathor and Neith (Kormysheva – Malykh – Vetokhov 2010: 132–138; Kormysheva *et al.* 2015: 110–111).

In 2007–2014, before starting excavations in the northern part of the concession close to the causeway of Khufu, the Russian archaeological mission at Giza (RAMG) explored the territory from the tomb of Khufuhotep (LG 76 = GE 15)<sup>2</sup> in the north to the tomb of Ipy (LG 80 = GE 24) in the south (fig. 1). During those eight seasons, the mission studied 66 complexes: shafts with burial chambers, single

burial chambers in shafts with several chambers, shafts without burial chambers and unfinished or ritual shafts. Most of these complexes (41) were excavated in ten rock-cut tombs (GE 11, GE 12, GE 15, GE 17, GE 18, GE 19, GE 23, GE 47, GE 48, GE 49); the other 25 complexes had no rock-cut chapels and were simple shafts with or without burial chambers. Thirteen of the studied

shafts appeared to be unfinished or were used for ritual purposes (Rzeuska 2006: 492–512; Kuraszkiewicz 2013: 266–267). The remaining 53 complexes were presumably used for burials: these include 35 complexes in rock-cut tombs and 18 shafts without rock-cut chapels. Rock-cut tombs presented a more elaborate type of burial structures than simple shafts with unpreserved superstructures and may have belonged to people of a higher status.

Twenty-nine complexes were completely plundered and only 24 shafts preserved traces of original burials, which makes *ca.* 45% of the number of people presumably interred in the excavated part of the necropolis during the Old Kingdom. The number of burials with traces of original internments is probably not that bad, taking into consideration the marginal position of the eastern cliff and its traditional proximity to the inhabited valley. Such

preservation is probably even good, supposing that people had lived in most of the excavated rock-cut tombs until the 1930s.

In more prestigious and obviously more visible rock-cut tombs, traces of original burials were preserved in 11 complexes (31% of the presumable number of Old Kingdom burials), while simple shafts contained remains of 13 original burials (72% of the presumable number of Old Kingdom burials). Thus, the chance to find remains of Third Millennium BC internments in this part of the Giza necropolis is twice higher if we deal with simple shafts. The same is true for undisturbed burials. In 2007–2014, the mission discovered 8 complete Old Kingdom skeletons: 4 in rock-cut tombs (11% of the presumable number of Old Kingdom burials) and 4 in simple shafts (22% of the presumable number of Old Kingdom burials).

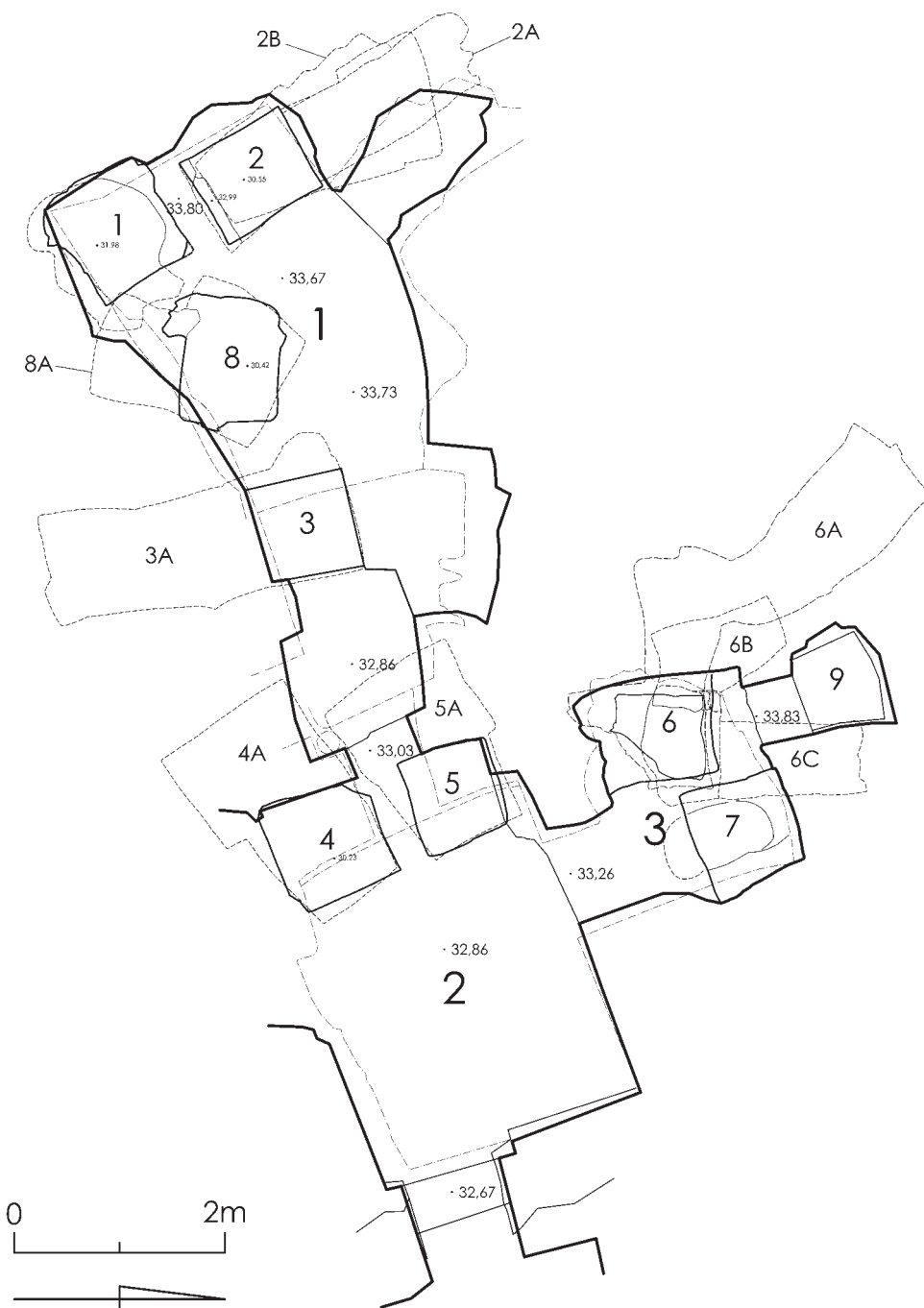


Fig. 2 Plan of tomb GE 19 (drawing S. Vetokhov)

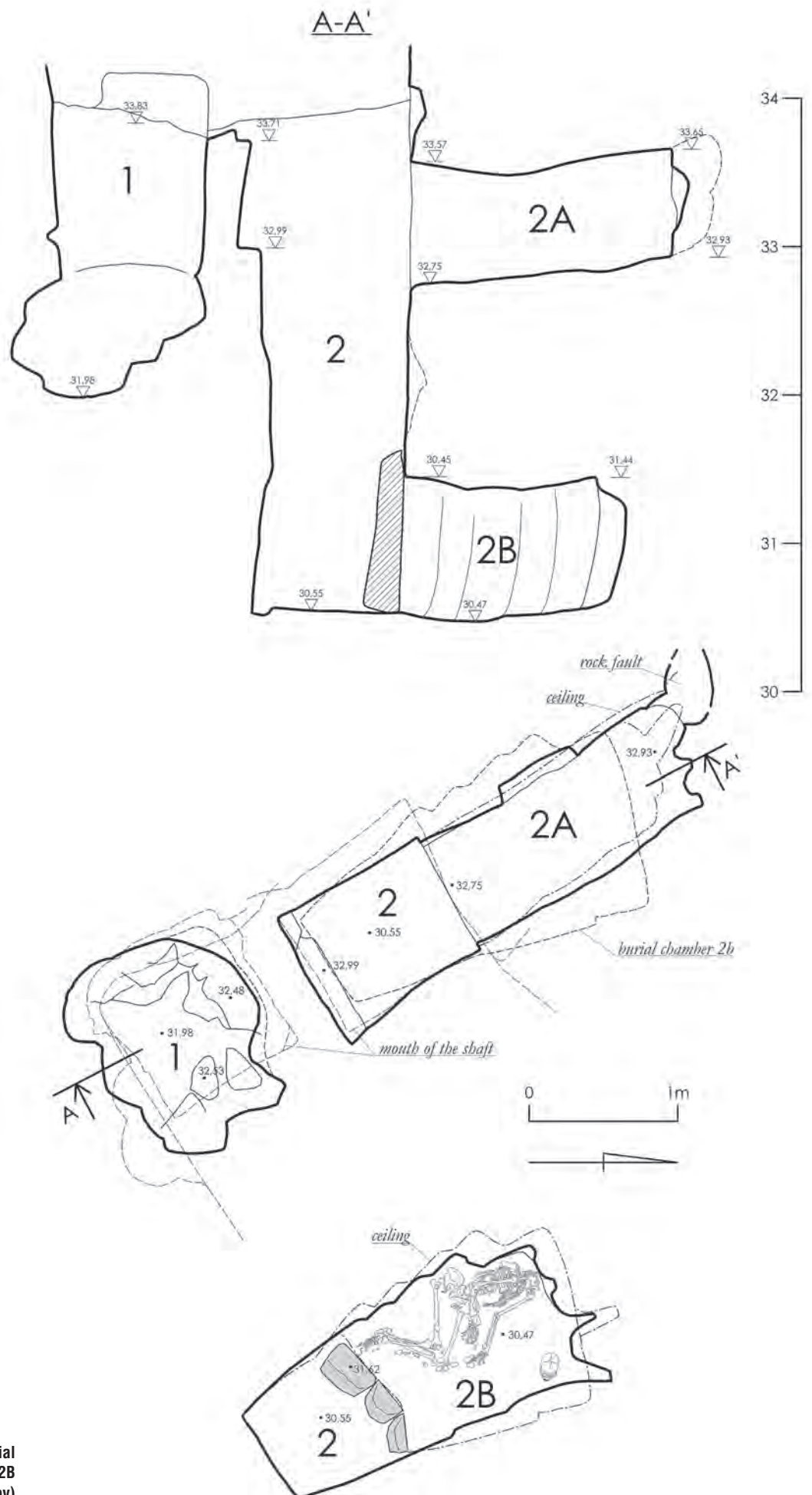


Fig. 3 Shaft 2 and burial chambers 2A and 2B (drawing S. Vetokhov)

## Shaft 2 of tomb GE 19: general description

Although rock-cut tomb GE 19 was cut directly under the well-known tomb of Perseneb (LG 78 = GE 20–22), it was recorded by neither Karl Richard Lepsius nor Auguste Mariette and remained almost completely unnoticed in Egyptological bibliography (Porter – Moss 1974: 212–213; Strudwick 1985: 286).<sup>3</sup> The entrance to the chapel was cleared of debris in 2006. The excavations in the tomb continued in 2010–2011.

Tomb GE 19 belonged to a metalworker (*bd.tj*)<sup>4</sup> whose name may be transliterated as *Pr.(i)-nd.(w)* or *Pr(j)-nd-w(i)* (Ranke 1935: 133, no. 29; Ranke 1952: 357; Scheele-Schweitzer 2014: 357 [1107]). The chapel of the tomb originally containing a single room (room A) was later expanded to the west and north (rooms B and C). The chapel housed 8 shafts and one burial niche (niche 9) (fig. 2). Shafts 1 and 7 had no burial chambers and were either unfinished or used as ritual shafts. The burials in chambers 2A, 3A, 4A (probably belonged to Perinedju), 5A, and 9A were completely destroyed, whereas partly disturbed original burials were found in chambers 6A, 6B, and 6C of shaft 6. Moreover, two undisturbed skeletons were found in burial chambers 2B and 8A.

The mouth of shaft 2 cut in the far western end of the chapel measured 1.08 × 0.89 m; its depth was 3.12 m. In the shaft, there were two burial chambers cut to the north on different levels. The upper part of the shaft (0–1.30 m) was filled with homogeneous brown sandy loam with limestone chips and crumb. The layer contained mixed pottery from different periods including ceramic materials dated to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries AD. Burial chamber 2A started 0.14 m from the mouth of the shaft. The size of burial chamber 2A is as follows: length 1.85 m, width 0.80–0.90 m, height 0.70–0.80 m. The entrance to the chamber is 0.84 m high and 0.80 m wide. The blocking wall was destroyed and the fill of the chamber, similar to the fill of the upper part of the shaft, preserved no traces of the original burial.

Chamber 2B was cut much deeper, starting 2.27 m from the mouth. Under burial chamber 2A, which was probably considered by robbers to be the only burial chamber in the shaft, the fill of shaft 2 changed its nature and contained pottery dating exclusively to the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties. The size of burial chamber 2B is as follows: length 1.45 m, width 1.35 m, height 0.85 m. The entrance to the chamber is 0.92 m high and 1.00 m wide.

The burials in shaft 2 of tomb GE 19 can only be dated approximately. The earliest tombs cut at the eastern cliff of the Giza necropolis had L-shaped chapels and may be dated to the second half of the Fifth Dynasty (Kormysheva – Malykh – Vetokhov 2010: 243–248; Kormysheva *et al.* 2015: 367–369). The plan and position of the tomb of Perinedju suggest that it was only cut after the best geological strata had been occupied by L-shaped chapels. The offering formulae *htp d.j n.j-sw.t* preserved at the entrance and inside room A of tomb GE 19 mention both Anubis and Osiris. The appeal to Osiris dates the decoration of room A of GE 19 most probably to a period not before the reign of Nyuserre, although this god may have been sporadically attested in non-royal monuments

from the beginning of the Fifth Dynasty (Smith 2017: 117–123). Shaft 2 was somewhat later because it was cut in room B which, according to the plan, was a later addition to room A. Architectural features such as shafts with more than one chamber (shafts 2 and 6) and a burial chamber that starts from the floor level (chamber 6A) appear at Giza by the late Fifth Dynasty (Malykh 2014; Vetokhov 2017). Diagnostic ceramic fragments from shafts 2, 6, and 8 belong to the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties. Two beer jars were found at the bottom of shaft 2; one of them was covered with a white wash and contained a false mud filling. Both jars may be dated between the middle of the Fifth Dynasty and the early Sixth Dynasty (Svetlana Malykh, personal communication). In sum, the available data suggests that the burials in shaft 2 of tomb GE 19 may be dated to the late Fifth or early Sixth Dynasties.<sup>5</sup>

## Burial chamber 2B: archaeological context

The entrance to the chamber was closed with an intact blocking wall made of limestone slabs (fig. 3). No traces of robbing were recorded during the excavation process. Inside burial chamber 2B, a semi-contracted skeleton oriented towards the north was found. The interred person was laid on the left side facing east. All the bones were in anatomical order except for the skull, which had been detached from the body and lay approximately 60 cm to the east (figs. 4–5). The upper part of the skeleton was found right against the northern wall. The absence of a headrest and the position of the lower jaw still attached to the skull gave evidence that the head could have not fallen away from the body in the course of natural decomposition. Clear traces of decay around the postcranial skeleton and the skull demonstrate that the head had been separated from the body when the flesh was still preserved. Under the skeleton, there was a layer of clean sand.

The position of the decapitated body was rather typical for this part of the Giza necropolis where most interred persons were placed without sarcophagi or coffins in a contracted or semi-contracted position on their left side.<sup>6</sup> The use of clean sand as an interlayer between the floor of the chamber and the body is not unusual at Giza, either. In 2007–2014, this practice was observed in 8 cases attested mainly in rock-cut tombs in the southern part of the area investigated by the RAMG (GE 19 and GE 58 in particular). Before 2007, this tradition had been recorded by the RAMG in the tomb of Khafreankh (G 7948) and in 4 burials of the minor necropolis opposite Khafreankh's chapel (Kormysheva – Malykh – Vetokhov 2010: 313–315) (tab. 1). A similar tradition had been observed in the West Field by George Andrew Reisner (Weeks 1994: 91) and Fisher (1924: 21, 29, 36, 96, 113–114) (tab. 2), while Hassan found a burial in a recess cut in the floor and filled with clean sand (Hassan 1932: 84–85). The practice has only been reported sporadically outside the Giza necropolis.<sup>7</sup>

One may assume that the tradition of putting clean sand at the bottom of Old Kingdom burial chambers referred to the Predynastic and Early Dynastic practice of interring deceased people in simple pits dug in the

RAMG				
Complex	Burial Ch.	Sand	Headrest	Date
Burial 31		+	-	Late VI (?)
Burial 36		+	-	Late VI (?)
Burial 50		+	-	V
Burial 53a		+	-	V
G 7948	Khafreankh	+	-	Nyuserre–Djedkare
GE 18	1A	+ (?)	(?)	V–VI
GE 19	2B	+	-	VI (?)
GE 19	6B	+	- (?)	V–VI
GE 19	6C	+	-	V–VI
GE 19	8A	+	-	VI
GE 58	4B	+	- (?)	Late V–VI
GE 59A	2A	+	-	Late V–VI
GE 59A	1A	+	+	Late V–VI
GE 49	1A	-	+	V–VI
GE 45	45A	-	+	V–VI
GE 19	6A	-	+	V–VI
GE 36	36A	-	+ (?)	V–VI
GE 49	3A	- (?)	+	V–VI
GE 52	52A	-	+ (?)	Late V–VI
GE 60	60A	-	+	Late V–VI

Tab. 1 The use of sand and stone headrests in Old Kingdom burial chambers on the territory of the RAMG



Fig. 4 Skeleton in burial chamber 2B of tomb GE 19 (photo S. Malykh)

desert (Kormysheva – Malykh – Vetokhov 2012: 313). However, other connections and symbolic meanings are also possible. For example, sand seems to have been interpreted as a pure material related to the creation. It was used for tumuli that were found in the burial complexes of Early Dynastic kings (Dreyer 1991; O’Connor 1991). These tumuli may have symbolized the primordial mound rising above the flood waters (Wilkinson 1999: 220–222). Sand was used to fill superstructures of mastabas (Josephson 2005), temple foundation trenches (Hikade – Pyke – O’Neill 2008), and pits with foundation deposits (Weinstein 1973: 422), as well as in royal and private rituals attested mainly since the New Kingdom (El-Aguizy – Mahdy 2014).

The use of sand in private burial contexts might point to strong connections or common knowledge shared between royal and private burial customs (Picardo 2007: 242, nos. 117–119). This common knowledge was probably reflected in the Pyramid Texts: “*Father Pepi Neferkare, stand up and receive these your first cool waters that come from Akhbit! Stand up, (all) you in your tombs; loosen your wrappings! Clear away the sand from your face, (Pepi Neferkare)! Raise yourself from off your left side, elevate yourself on your right side! Lift your face and see this which I have done for you!*” (Allen 2005: 272 [P 388]; Kormysheva – Malykh – Vetokhov 2012: 313).

It is noteworthy that the practice of putting sand under the body almost never coincided with the practice of

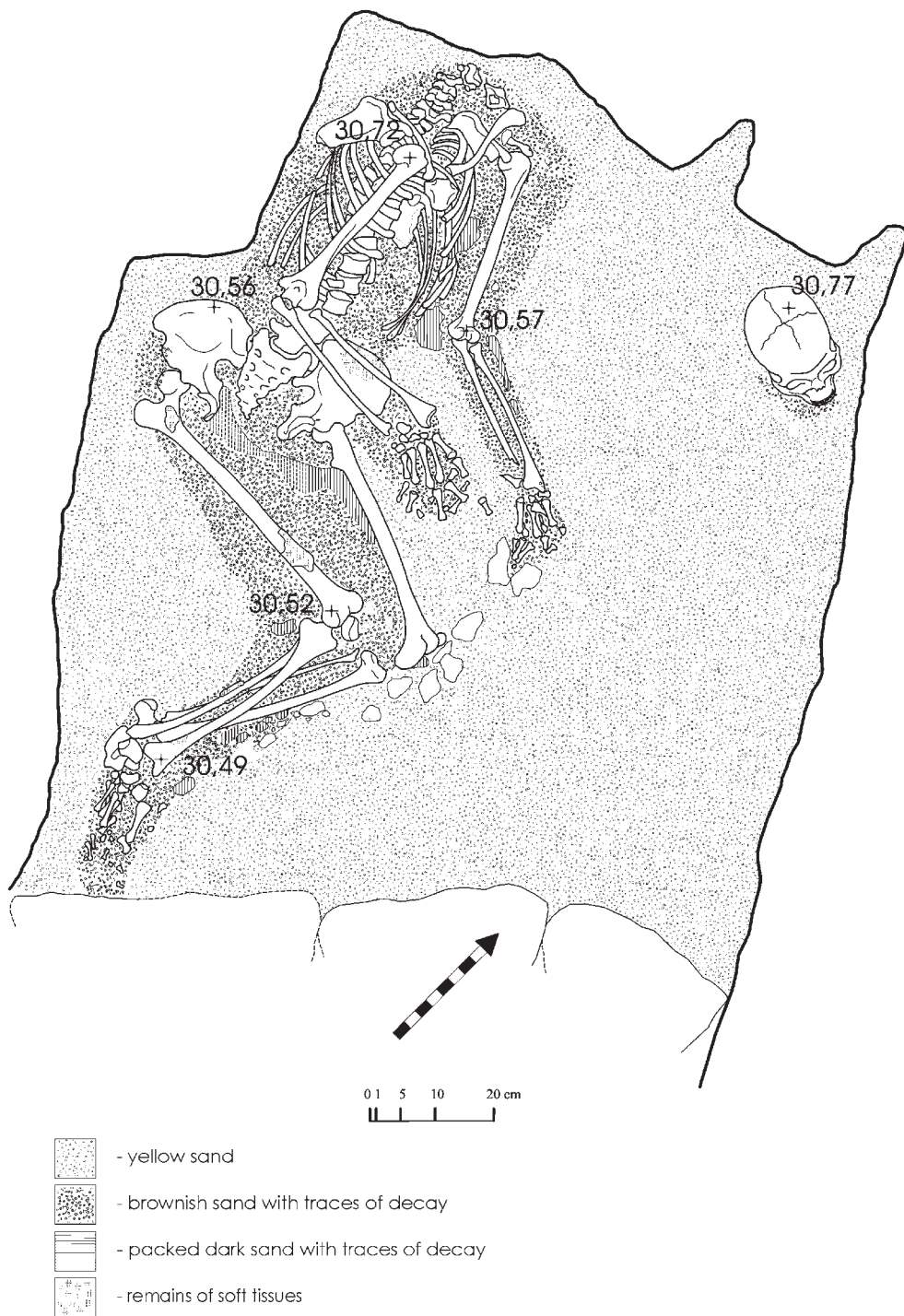


Fig. 5 Skeleton in burial chamber 2B of tomb GE 19 (drawing M. Lebedev)

Fisher 1924				
Complex	Burial Ch.	Sand	Headrest	Reference
G 2071		+	-	Fisher 1924: 21
G 2083 (B)		+	-	Fisher 1924: 29
G 2083 (C)		+	-	Fisher 1924: 29
G 2087 (B)		+	-	Fisher 1924: 36
G 3015 (B)		+	-	Fisher 1924: 96
G 3032	I	+	-	Fisher 1924: 113
G 3032	II	+	-	Fisher 1924: 114
G 2083 (B)		+	+	Fisher 1924: 26
G 2073 (A)		-	+	Fisher 1924: 23
G 2081 (B)		-	+	Fisher 1924: 26
G 3000 (A)		-	+	Fisher 1924: 70
G 3010 (A)		-	+	Fisher 1924: 87
G 3020 (G)		-	+	Fisher 1924: 99
G 3020 (Y)		-	+	Fisher 1924: 101
G 3023 (A)	I	-	+	Fisher 1924: 104
G 3023 (A)	II	-	+	Fisher 1924: 105

Tab. 2 The use of sand and stone headrests in the minor cemetery at Giza excavated by Clarence Fisher

using stone headrests attested in 8 burials on the territory of the RAMG. At the eastern edge of Giza, the tradition of using stone headrests was recorded, as a rule, in simple shafts. For now, both the sand and the headrest have been attested in a single burial on the RAMG territory (tab. 1). A similar pattern may be observed in a minor cemetery excavated by Clarence Fisher in the West Field: clean sand was attested under 8 skeletons, stone or mud brick headrests were found in 9 burials; both the sand and the headrest were attested only in one burial (tab. 2).

The meaning of headrests in burial contexts has long been discussed (Hellinckx 2001). Headrests were traditionally linked to sleep, which they were to make more comfortable. In the Pyramid Texts, sleep is often compared with death (Allen 2005: 79 [T 194]; 86–87 [T 228]; 130–131 [P 333]; 163 [P 473]; 246–248 [N 67]). From its earliest attestations in Egyptian written sources, the dream functioned as a link between the world of the living and the world inhabited by the gods, the justified dead, and the unjustified dead (Szpakowska 2010). Thus, a good sleep may have been associated with a peaceful transition to the afterlife. The use of clean sand or stone headrests probably give evidence of the way the community which buried their dead at the eastern edge of Giza gradually developed their ideas about the mechanics of the transition to the afterlife.

### Paleopathology

The skeletal remains from burial chamber 2B of the rock-cut complex GE 19 belonged to a man who died at the age of 30–39 years. The head of the individual was detached from the body by a sharp tool. On the left mastoid process of the temporal bone, a cut with a smooth edge was

recorded (fig. 6). Mastoid processes were often damaged in the course of decapitation if the blow was delivered high up on the neck or angled upwards (Buckberry 2014: 135; Saponetti *et al.* 2008: e12; Khudaverdyan – Hobossyan 2017: 327). However, the nature of the cut differs from damages caused by powerful strokes. It was presumably made with a sharp blade after the death of the individual when the upper part of the neck and the lower part of the head were available for careful cutting. No other traumas



Fig. 6 Cut on the left mastoid process of the temporal bone (photo M. Dobrovolskaya)

such as blunt or sharp force wounds that would be associated with a violent death have been observed. The bone tissue was damaged by many cracks, which could be the result of the changing conditions inside the chamber as the burial was regularly getting wet and then dried. The cracks caused considerable damage to the surface of the cervical vertebrae, erasing possible traces of cuts.

The individual looked quite tall compared to contemporary Egyptians (Zakrzewski 2003: 224; Kaczmarek 2008: 486), reaching about 1.72 m (Raxter *et al.* 2008; Kozieradzka-Ogunmakin 2011). The above-average stature might indicate a higher social status and better nutrition during the period of growth. Although the interred man spent his life in rather favorable conditions, his health was not actually perfect. Signs of periostitis on the cranial vault and the spine of the individual allow one to assume the existence of a chronic low-intensity inflammatory process. Some manifestations of anemia were also noted. The presence of dental calculus may have been the result of the spread of unfavorable pathogenic flora. Cervical fossae of Allen on the necks of the femurs may have been caused by mechanical factors if the individual spent much of his time squatting on his heels or sitting in the pose of a scribe. Traces of a thoracic disk herniation were also found. The absence of markers of a physical stress indicates that the occupation of the buried person did not involve hard physical labor.

### Decapitated bodies in Predynastic and Old Kingdom archaeological contexts

The earliest evidence of decapitation and, probably, “skull cults” may be found in Mesolithic and even Paleolithic contexts in Europe and North Africa (Schulting 2015). In the region of the Fertile Crescent, well-documented cases of dismemberment, including cached human crania, come from the pre-pottery Neolithic marked by the transition to sedentism (Kanjou *et al.* 2013; Bienert 1991; Santana *et al.* 2012). In Egypt, mutilated bodies became a rare but not unique feature of Predynastic burial grounds. First cases of pre-burial dismemberment were recorded by William M. F. Petrie and James E. Quibell in their excavations at Naqada (Petrie – Quibell 1896: 30–33). Later, further evidence was recorded at Gerzeh (Petrie – Wainwright – Mackay 1912: 8–15), Abydos (Peet 1914: 14), Deshasha (Petrie 1898: 20–24), Zarabi (Petrie 1907: 10), Matmar (Brunton 1948: 31), Badari (Brunton 1927: 48; Brunton 1928: pl. 1), and, probably, Naga el-Deir (Reisner 1932: 277–278, 287–288). More recent evidence of pre-burial head detachment comes from the necropolises at el-Adaima (Ludes – Crubézy 2000; Crubézy – Midant-Reynes 2005) and Hierakonpolis (Dougherty – Friedman 2008).

Dismemberment practices included excarnation, decapitation, removing or changing the natural position of some body part, replacing bones with burial equipment or arranging bones in piles opposite parts of the skeleton left in anatomical order. Unfortunately, the widespread plundering of burials as well as imperfect excavation techniques and documentation of evidence in the course of early archeological works makes it highly problematic to evaluate the proportion of dismembered bodies in relation

to “regular” burials recorded within the same necropolises. An element of caution is always needed in recognizing evidence of special treatment of the human head or other body parts in burial contexts. In any case, it seems that mutilated bodies were interred in a minority of the burials, and the practice of decapitation was quite rare as well (Wengrow – Baines 2004: 1099; Wengrow 2006: 118–119).

Some of the recorded Predynastic cases of irregular postmortem treatment of the head are of a particular interest (Petrie – Quibell 1896: 30–31, pl. 82–83; Petrie – Wainwright – Mackay 1912: 8–9; Wengrow – Baines 2004: 1098) and may be classified as follows:

- The body was buried close to the end of the burial pit, the head is completely missing and could not have been on the body at the time of interment (graves no. 37 at Naqada and no. 251 at Gerzeh);
- The head was missing and replaced by one or more pots (graves nos. 227 and 1377 at Naqada) or a decorated ostrich egg (grave no. 1480 at Naqada);
- The head was separated from the body and left near the neck (graves no. B 50 and 530 at Naqada; graves nos. 67, 200, and 206 at Gerzeh);<sup>8</sup>
- The upper part of the neck was missing, and the skull lay on the top of small vases in a large pan placed where the neck would have been (grave no. 845 at Naqada);
- The head was mounted on a pile of stones or mud bricks (graves nos. 18, 29, 38, 54, 57, and 541 at Naqada);
- The head was separated and placed by the legs (graves nos. B 107 and 1105 at Naqada);
- The head was separated and placed in the opposite end or at the side of the pit (graves nos. 263, 315, and 1505 at Naqada);
- The separated head was buried without the rest of the body (graves nos. 1827 and 1828 at Naqada).

As opposed to Predynastic times, the recorded cases of skull detachment are extremely rare for presumably intact Old Kingdom or First Intermediate Period burials. Some uncertain cases were reported from Matmar,<sup>9</sup> Zaraby,<sup>10</sup> and Naga ed-Deir.<sup>11</sup> Evidence of dismemberment is attested in Old Kingdom burials at Deshasha (Petrie 1898: 20–24, pl. 35) and, probably, at Balat (Minault-Gout 1992: 43–44, 61–62). Examples of pre-burial skull removal from seemingly undisturbed contexts are provided below:

1. Burial no. 5528 at Badari: the skeleton of a male, except for the head, was covered with fine dark dust, which made the bones dark and consisted mainly of decayed wood. All vertebrae were in position, including the axis and the atlas. The skull was clean, found above the brown layer together with two posts. Brunton assumes that the skull with the two pots had been placed on the lid of the coffin (Brunton 1927: 48);<sup>12</sup>
2. Burial no. 83 at Zaraby: the skull lay in front of the hands, and a travertine jar was placed where the head should have been (Petrie 1907: 10);
3. Burial no. 86 at Zaraby: two skeletons, the skull of one of the skeletons was six inches distant from the body (Petrie 1907: 10);
4. Burial no. 908 at Badari: the body of a male had no skull, although the skeleton looked quite undisturbed and was found in a bricked-up chamber (Brunton 1927: 48).



The main problem of the evidence provided above is the fact that Old Kingdom examples of presumable pre-burial head removal come from early excavations and, as in the case of William M. F. Petrie and Ernest J. H. Mackay, were recorded by excavators who were intentionally looking for evidence of dismemberment. It is also possible to conclude that there is no direct analogy to the decapitated body from chamber 2B of tomb GE 19 at Giza, although some published Predynastic and Old Kingdom burials demonstrate similar features. In a number of burials, for example, the detached head was placed at a considerable distance from the neck, sometimes near the opposite side of the chamber or the grave pit (burial no. 83 at Zaraby, graves nos. B 107, 263, 315, 1105, and 1505 at Naqada). There are also examples of decapitated bodies buried so close against the wall of the burial pit that there was simply no place for the head (graves no. 37 at Naqada and no. 251 at Gerzeh).

### Reasons for decapitation

The theme of decapitation had been attested already in the earliest pharaonic iconography such as the Narmer Palette and, later on, became common for the royal textual tradition. In the royal discourse, private threat-formulae invented for the necropolis, and execration magic, decapitation is involved as a commonly accepted way of dealing with enemies<sup>13</sup> and criminals. The term *hsk* used to denote the act of decapitation originally described the method of execution designed for enemies of the king who were, as a rule, foreigners. This punishment was probably reserved for people who had no legal status within the Egyptian society (Morschauer 1991: 103) or who were deprived of their status for some serious reasons. In the Old Kingdom, the term *hsk* was attested several times in the Pyramid Texts (Hannig 2003: 887). In later threat-formulae, decapitation appears among the threats addressed to wrongdoers,<sup>14</sup> but no examples are known so far from the Old Kingdom.

Since we can safely exclude the sacrificial nature of the internment in chamber 2B of tomb GE 19,<sup>15</sup> there are several possible interpretations of the unusual burial:

1. The decapitation is the result of a sanctioned<sup>16</sup> or criminal killing.<sup>17</sup> This variant seems unlikely. First of all, as was noted above, the cut mark on the left mastoid process of the temporal bone suggests that beheading took place after the death of the individual.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, the archaeological context indicates that the person received a proper burial and, thus, was hardly considered a criminal. Indeed, some evidence, including archaeological data (Vila 1973: 628–629, 635), demonstrates that the Egyptians did sometimes kill people who were characterized as enemies or rebels and burnt or discarded their bodies (Boochs 1991: 62–63; Willems 1990: 46–53). If the person from GE 19 was punished with beheading, one would expect that the execution would be completed by preventing the burial of the mutilated body. For example, threat-formulae of the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom clearly state that a serious crime implies the destruction of the criminal's body, the

destruction of his tomb, and the condemnation of his name to oblivion. The wrongdoer “will not be buried in the West”, his “flesh will burn” or will be destined to “smell the earth”, his “name will not exist”, *etc.* (Willems 1990: 34–37).

2. The decapitation is the result of postmortem manipulations with the body. The head may have been separated before the burial, in the course of the burial or as a result of an unauthorized penetration into the burial chamber. Three main possibilities offer themselves:

a) The head was separated by workmen of the cemetery in order to fit the body of the deceased into the small burial chamber. This explanation seems highly unlikely. The area of almost 2 m<sup>2</sup> puts burial chamber 2B (1.45 × 1.35 m) nowhere near the largest burial chambers excavated at the eastern edge of Giza,<sup>19</sup> but it certainly exceeds the smallest burial chambers with an area between 0.40 and 1.00 m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>20</sup> For example, burial chamber 8A of tomb GE 19 of a mere 0.61 m<sup>2</sup> (0.95 × 0.65 m) contained an undisturbed regular burial of an adult male in a contracted position.

b) The head was separated in the course of plundering. Since the fill of the lower part of the shaft and the block to the chamber remained intact, an unauthorized penetration could have occurred, for example, at night before the sealing of the chamber (Bárta 2011: 251–254). Even if the burial had been robbed, the undecomposed body would have hardly been decapitated (and then moved to the northern wall) because of valuable decorations that could have been taken with much less effort.

c) Regardless of the actual reason, the head was separated in accordance with some religious ideas or magical practices accepted by either ill-wishers or well-wishers of the deceased. On the one hand, the tragic consequences of an irreversible decapitation and the importance of preserving the head attached to the body were regularly discussed in both royal and private funerary texts: the Pyramid Texts, the Coffin Texts, the Book of Coming Forth by Day, *etc.* The loss of the head was one of the most feared manipulations (Allen 2005: 43–44 [W 165], 72 [T 144], 83–84 [T 204], 85 [T 221], 87 [T 229], 108–109 [P 44–46], 120–121 [P 303], 191 [P 544], 251 [N 92], 325–326 [Nt 243]; Hassan 2004: 792–796). The decapitation was considered to be a “second death” which probably terminated hopes for the afterlife (Picardo 2007: 221–222). If connected with cursing, corpse mutilation targeted directly the body of the victim rather than a medium in the form of a representation. The real focus of decapitation was probably the “effective spirit” (*3h*) (Colledge 2015: 165). Acute enough senses make a human being effective in the world. The head holds four of the body's five main senses – sight, hearing, smell, and taste – and shares the fifth, touch (Schulting 2015: 19). Decapitation was sometimes accompanied by a mutilation of the limbs<sup>21</sup> and may have been an effort to magically neutralize the power of the deceased (Bárta 2011: 32) through, probably, making his or her *3h* ineffective

in the world of the living. During the Old Kingdom, corpse mutilation as a form of cursing (Colledge 2015: 169–171) may have originated from human sacrifices (Wilkinson 1999; Midant-Reynes 2000; Menu 2001), cannibalism (Petrie – Quibell 1896: 32–33) or head-hunting (Trigger *et al.* 1983: 31) of the Early Dynastic Period.

On the other hand, it is possible to assume that decapitation and bone arranging were sometimes for the benefit of the deceased. As a matter of fact, the integrity of the body was probably not essential to survival in the afterlife (Smith 2017: 12–15). The death initially caused an inevitable dismemberment of the spiritual nature of the person. Manipulations with corpses, the funerary rituals, and the mortuary cult served one major goal – to reassemble the deceased for the afterlife (Assmann 2005). The Pyramid Texts fixed the idea that the separation of the head from other parts of the body and then receiving it back again was an important act on the way to resurrection (Petrie – Wainwright – Mackay 1912: 11–15). Dismemberment and decapitation, common in many regions of the ancient world, may have had links to the ancestors' cult, the Osirian mythology or the archaic intention to physically drive out the remnants of the previous life (Petrie – Wainwright – Mackay 1912: 11–12; Murray 1956; Wright 1979; Wright 1987: 156–167; Wengrow 2006: 118).

The position of the decapitated body in burial chamber 2B of tomb GE 19 has an interesting parallel in the story of Djedi preserved in the Westcar Papyrus. In GE 19, the decapitated body was placed along the western wall of the burial chamber, while the skull was found close to the eastern wall facing east. That was exactly as the decapitated goose and its head were placed in the story of Djedi: “*So there was brought to him a goose and its head was severed. Then a goose was placed on the western side of the pillared court and its head on the eastern side of the pillared court. Djedi said his say of magic words. The goose arose and waddled and likewise its head. After the one (part) reached the other, the goose stood up and cackled.*” (Simpson 2003: 20).

As noted by Stevenson, the act of decapitation was certainly a “striking social drama that would strongly impact social memories” (Stevenson 2006: 131). It was probably believed that the negative effect of decapitation could be undone only by the gods. Djedi refused to sever and reattach a prisoner's head “for the doing of the like is not commanded unto the august cattle”.

Being an extremely rare phenomenon during the Old Kingdom, postmortem decapitation was certainly not intended to help the dead person in the afterlife. Otherwise, one would expect the practice to be more common in the necropolises of that time. Like other acts of body mutilation, the aim of head separation seems to have been to disable the dead and prevent them from interfering with the world of the living (Colledge 2015: 181–183).

At the same time, the decapitated person interred in burial chamber 2B of tomb GE 19 received a proper burial on a layer of clean sand; his head was placed in the eastern part of the chamber facing the rising sun.

This care demonstrates that the people who buried the deceased man, despite of being afraid of him for some reason, did not actually wish him a bad fate in the netherworld and wanted to ensure his rebirth to the afterlife probably through the power of the sun. Indeed, the case of postmortem decapitation from tomb GE 19 might have reflected the same ideas that had been earlier materialized in the use of the so-called “reserve heads” found in Fourth Dynasty mastabas. Ritual mutilations of the “reserve heads” give evidence that these enigmatic objects were endowed with autonomous vital forces and may have been used for restricting the dead (Nuzzolo 2011: 209–215; Colledge 2015: 173–180). It is noteworthy that the only “reserve head” having been discovered so far in a seemingly undisturbed archaeological context was also found in a burial chamber laying to the east of the body (Hassan 1953: 4–5, pls. 3–4a).

## Conclusion

The rarity of body mutilations attested in Old Kingdom cemeteries indicates that this practice was not a common part of the burial procedure. The examples provided above demonstrate that mutilated bodies, including the decapitated corpse from tomb GE 19, were buried in the correct manner. This probably means that the people whose bodies were treated in these irregular ways were actually wished a successful afterlife and that the main reason for postmortem body mutilations was to prevent the spirits of the dead persons from affecting the world of the living. The case of decapitation from GE 19 is rather unusual within the corpus of contemporary burials. It provides valuable data on the burial practices, personal attitude to death and understanding of the afterlife formed within the middle strata of late Old Kingdom society of the Memphite area. The position and orientation of the head within the burial chamber allow drawing tentative parallels with the use of “reserve heads” in elite mastabas of the early Old Kingdom and with the solar cult. In the future, more analogies with clear archaeological and paleopathological contexts may shed new light on the practice of postmortem decapitations in Egypt.

## Notes:

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- <sup>2</sup> GE (Giza East) is an abbreviation used by the Russian archaeological mission in its field documentation for complexes that have no numbers assigned by Reisner or the Ministry of Antiquities.
- <sup>3</sup> The tomb was known to Reisner who misread the name of the tomb owner as *Ndw* (Museum of Fine Arts photo archive photos A7457\_NS, A7458\_NS, A7459\_NS, A7470\_NS, A7471\_NS, and A7615P\_ann\_NS).
- <sup>4</sup> Other possible variants of transliterations are *hm.tj* and *bj3.tj* (Hannig 2003: 430).
- <sup>5</sup> For more details, see Lebedev – Malykh (2017).
- <sup>6</sup> Some burials made in rock-cut tombs utilized rock-cut sarcophagi; traces of wooden coffins or coverings were rarely attested in simple shafts. No traces of reed coffins have ever been found. In one case (tomb GE 58,

- burial chamber 1A), a buried woman may have been tightly packed into a sack.
- <sup>7</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Hana Vymazalová for a reference to the use of clean sand in the burial chamber of Sheretnebtu (shaft 2 in tomb AS 68c) at Abusir (Vymazalová 2015: 54) and to Dr. Marleen De Meyer who informed about the use of sand in late Old Kingdom burial chambers at Deir el-Bersha (personal communication).
- <sup>8</sup> For similar cases at Hierakonpolis and el-Adaima, see Dougherty – Friedman (2008); Ludes – Crubézy (2000).
- <sup>9</sup> Burial no. 5323 (Brunton 1948: 37, 43, pls. XXVII, XXXIII: 22).
- <sup>10</sup> Graves nos. 15, 20, 39, 51, 60, 67, 97, and 118 (Petrie 1907: 10). On the date of burials at Zaraby, see Seidlmayer (1990: 349–350).
- <sup>11</sup> Burials N 705 I and N 737 (Reisner 1932: 277–278; 287–288). I am grateful for these references to Antje Kohse (Freie Universität).
- <sup>12</sup> A similar treatment of the head was probably attested in burial no. 3255 at Matmar: the skull of a female had been detached and was found on the top of the wooden coffin. The preservation of the coffin was far too poor for the excavator to decide whether the coffin had been opened by plunderers or not. However, a travertine vase was found inside the coffin, in its north-eastern corner, and a few beads were recorded at the neck (Brunton 1948: 31, pl. XXIV).
- <sup>13</sup> Including divine enemies (Allen 2005: 25 [W 98], 53 [W 194], 54 [W 203], 89–90 [T 260], 102–103 [P 14], 129–130, [P 327], 160–161 [P 467], 185 [P 522]).
- <sup>14</sup> “His head shall be cut off, being searched for (in) his tomb.” (Bakir 1943: 79, pl. I–II; Morschauer 1991: 103–104).
- <sup>15</sup> Human sacrifices were common during the Predynastic and Early Dynastic Periods but almost abandoned by the beginning of the Third Dynasty. From the Fourth Dynasty onwards, sacrificed retainers were probably symbolically substituted by figurines of working men and women. Human sacrifices, including those through decapitation, probably occurred in other periods of Egyptian history (Muhlestein 2011), but the evidence from necropolises is vague.
- <sup>16</sup> It is often accepted that capital punishment was generally a rather late phenomenon, not typical of Egypt at least until the Middle Kingdom (McDowell 2001: 316) or even the Eighteenth Dynasty (Boorn 1984: 372–373; Boorn 1988: 118–119). The *Teaching of Merikare* is often cited as one of the earliest mentions of the capital punishment (Lorton 1977: 51). The episode with King Khufu from the Westcar Papyrus is usually referred to as an illustration of the humanity of the Egyptians (McDowell 2001: 316). However, epigraphic evidence and representations suggest that beheading was probably a common form of execution during the Old Kingdom (Capart 1898; Bedell 1973: 157; Muhlestein 2011: 17–18).
- <sup>17</sup> There is a series of Old and Middle Kingdom individuals who were brutally killed but received a proper burial (Ghattas 1982: 48; Greenfield 2001: 22).
- <sup>18</sup> One can argue, however, that the person was killed by cutting the throat and only later completely beheaded. The extremely poor preservation of the cervical vertebrae makes it impossible to either support or reject this hypothesis.
- <sup>19</sup> For example, the size of the burial chamber in shaft G 7948/1-4 of the tomb of Khafreankh is 9.71 m<sup>2</sup>.
- <sup>20</sup> So far, 28 such chambers have been recorded on the territory of the RAMG. There are also 24 burial chambers with an area of 1 to 2 m<sup>2</sup>.
- <sup>21</sup> See, for example, graves nos. 315, 541, and 878 at Naqada (Petrie – Quibell 1896: 31).
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### Abstract:

In 2010, the Russian archaeological mission at Giza excavated chamber 2B of tomb GE 19 at the eastern edge of the necropolis and discovered an intact burial there.

The male found in the chamber had been decapitated, and the skull with the lower jaw was lying separately from the postcranial skeleton on a layer of clean sand facing east. The paper discusses the archaeological context of the burial, the paleopathology, and the possible reasons for this rare case of decapitation dating back to the Old Kingdom.

Giza – rock-cut tombs – decapitation – sand

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