

Karol Myśliwiec

West Saqqara: Archaeological Activities, 2003

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WEST SAQQARA

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES, 2003

Karol Myśliwiec

The Polish-Egyptian archaeological mission pursued explorations at Saqqara between October 4 and November 23, 2003.¹⁾

The program of the campaign in the field consisted of three elements:

- *conservation of reliefs and paintings in the tombs and of the objects discovered in previous and present campaigns;²⁾*
- *excavations in the area adjoining the tomb of Merefnebef on the north side and explorations of the shafts discovered previously in Corridor 2 in the east façade of the 'Dry Moat';*
- *special studies, including anthropological examination of the human remains and a study of the pottery assemblage.³⁾*

1) The mission included: Prof. Dr. Karol Myśliwiec, director; Prof. Dr. Maria Kaczmarek, physical anthropologist; Dr Kamil Kuraszkiwicz, Egyptologist; Ms Teodozja Rzeuska, Egyptologist-ceramologist; Ms Dorota Czerwik, Egyptologist; Ms Agnieszka Kowalska, Ms Małgorzata Radomska, archaeologists; Mr. Zbigniew Godziejewski, Ms Urszula Dąbrowska, Ms Magdalena Muc and Ms Teresa Żurkowska, conservators; Ms Beata Błaszczuk and Mr. Mieczysław Niepokólczycki, architects; Mr. Maciej Jawornicki and Mr. Piotr Parandowski, photographers; Mr. Hubert Chudzio, Mr. Robert Pencak and Mr. Sławomir Malinowski, documentalists. The Supreme Council of Antiquities was represented by Mr. Aly Abdallah El-Batal, and the supervision of the workers was assured by Rais Sayed El-Kereti.

The success of the mission was due to the understanding and efficient help of Dr. Zahi Hawass, Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities. Mr. Magdy El Ghandour, Director General for Foreign and Egyptian Mission Affairs, was also extremely helpful, as were Mr. Atef Abu ed-Dahab, General Director of Giza, Mr. Kamal Wahid, Director of Saqqara, Mr. Tawfik Abellatif and Mr. Afifi Rohaym Afifi, chief inspector of South Saqqara, and all the inspectors of this site. We would like to express herewith our deepest gratitude for their efforts.

2) Cf. communication by Z. Godziejewski in this volume.

3) Cf. contribution by T.I. Rzeuska in this volume.

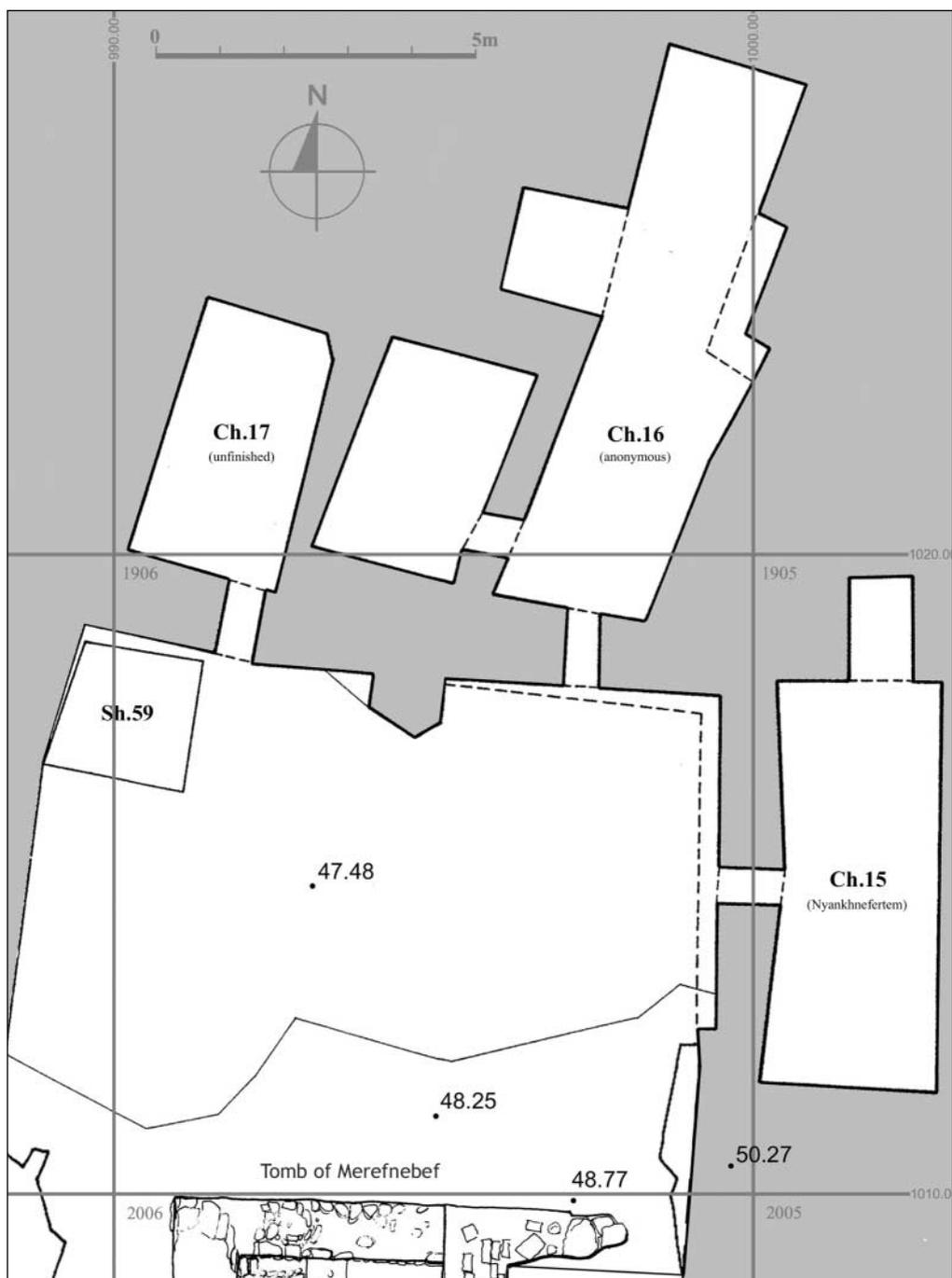


Fig. 1. Old Kingdom tombs discovered north of the tomb of Merefnebef in 2003
(Drawing B. Błaszczuk)

ROCK-CUT CHAPELS NORTH OF MEREFNEBEF'S TOMB

The area north of the tomb of Merefnebef (square 1906)⁴ was the object of excavations in this campaign. The stratigraphy here comprises two principal layers, the same that were identified elsewhere in our excavations west of Djoser's pyramid. The first is a layer of sand accumulated in the times following the Old Kingdom and used as burial ground in the second half of the 3rd millennium BC. Between this layer and the bedrock, in and on which tombs of the noblemen of the Late Old Kingdom were founded, there was a layer of local *tafl*, which is a dense agglomeration of stone

chips and sand with pottery mixed in, in some places as thin as c. 0.20 m, in others reaching approximately 2 m in thickness.

LATE NECROPOLIS

The upper stratum turned out to be up to 2 m deep at the western edge and 0.15-0.20 m at the eastern edge of the excavation, where the cliff ledge with the cult chapel of Merefnebef is. Thirty-five burials were found in this stratum, including 13 skeletons in differing condition and 22 mummies. Some of these were found in wooden coffins. Three of these were of the anthropoid type, one (No. 360)

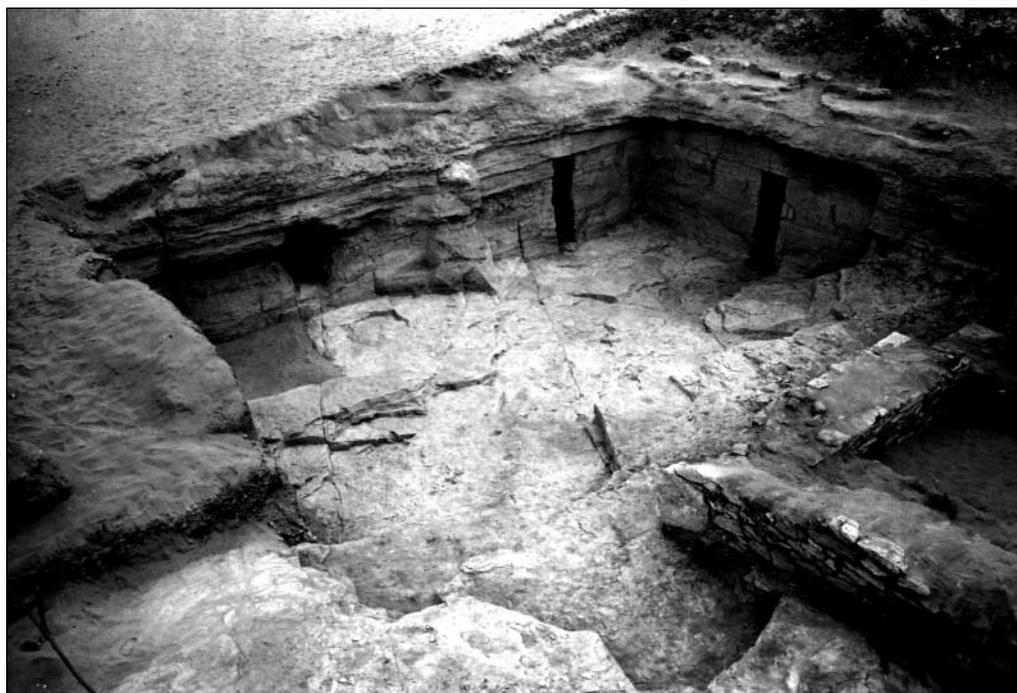


Fig. 2. *The façades of rock-hewn cult chapels of tombs nos. 15 (on the right), 16 and 17. On the right side, part of the upper (west) court of the tomb of Merefnebef (Photo M. Jawornicki)*

⁴ Cf. site excavation grid in: K. Myśliwiec, K. Kuraskiewicz, D. Czerwik, T. Rzeuska and others, *The tomb of Merefnebef* (Warsaw 2004), pl. I.

completely preserved, one without the lid (No. 363), and the last (No. 355) missing the mask. Two rectangular coffins were in a poor state of preservation. The orientation of these burials varied; most of them, however, were oriented E-W, with the head pointing to the west. The wooden coffins, each made of several planks that were pegged together, had lids made of the same material. A simple mask was carved into the top, well preserved in the case of coffin 360. Coffin 363 also bears traces of a painted hieroglyphic inscription on the outside of the case. These coffins were otherwise plain with no evidence of polychromy on their surface.

Each burial was documented *in situ*⁵⁾ and subjected to preliminary conservation steps. The human remains were then studied from the anthropological point of view, the most interesting cases of pathologies were photographed and x-rayed with a special device brought specially for the purpose from Cairo (skeletons nos. 35, 216, 217, 282, 288, 289, 360). Except for a few particularly interesting cases, which were left for further study, the human skeletons were secondarily buried in an explored shaft.

CULT CHAPEL OF NY-ANKH-NEFERTEM

In the course of the present campaign, three new Old Kingdom tombs with rock-hewn cult chapels were discovered to the north of Merefnebef's tomb (*Figs. 1, 2*).⁶⁾ About 8.90 m north of the façade of this

tomb, the cliff in which it was cut turns at almost a right angle and runs west for 10.07 m before turning back more or less south. The resulting rock-hewn area forms a quasi-rectangular court. The south side of this court is less regular, being formed of a sequence of "steps" or mini-terraces descending from the upper (west) court of Merefnebef's tomb to the leveled rock in front of the three newly discovered tomb chapels. The difference in levels between these two courts is 0.97 m. One of the new chapels, no. 15, was hewn in the east wall of the court, beside the chapel of Merefnebef, some 3.30 m away from the vizier's tomb. The entrances to two other cult chapels, nos. 16 and 17, were cut in the north wall. All three chapels had façades in the form of a rectangular niche hewn in the rock.

The façade of chapel 15 is 5.45 m long, 2.35 m high and 0.68 m deep. Its only decoration is a long inscription in four lines placed above the entrance, a kind of "inner lintel", which contained, like in Merefnebef's tomb, an ideal biography carved in sunken relief. The inscription was damaged, especially in the southern part. It ended with a label presenting the tomb owner in the company of his wife and one of his sons.⁷⁾ There was no evidence of painting on this relief and no trace of any carved decoration on the lower part of the façade; instead, the rock revealed many places where the crumbling surface had been repaired with a mortar of pinkish color. Neither was there any decoration on

5) To be published in the next volume of the Saqqara series.

6) Cf. preliminary reports already published: K. Myśliwiec, "Zwischen der Stufenpyramide und dem 'Trockenen Graben': Neue Entdeckungen in Sakkara", *Ma'at. Archäologie Ägyptens* 1 (2004), 6-23; id., "Śąsiedzi wezyra", *Świat Nauki* (Polish edition of *Scientific American*) 5 (153) (May 2004), 36-47; id., "Teologia polityczna w Egipcie faraonów czyli *nihil novi sub sole*", *Nauka* (Quarterly of the Polish Academy of Sciences) 1 (2004), 55-63; id., "Wezyr, cztery żony i kochanka", *Polityka* 2 (2434), Jan. 10 (2004), 66-69.

7) For the names and titles of the family members, cf. communication by K. Kuraskiewicz in this volume.

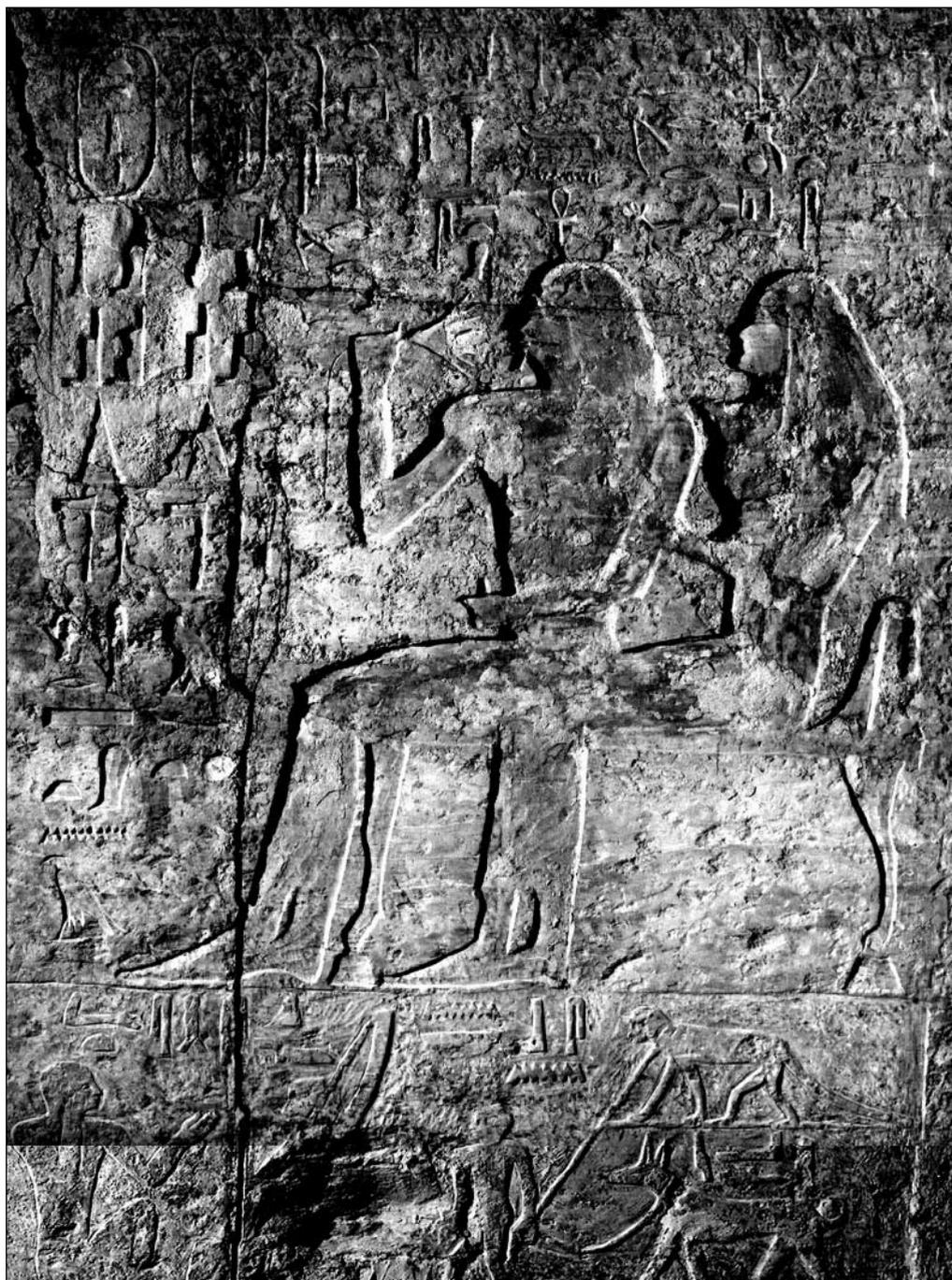


Fig. 3. Ny-ankb-Nefertem and his wife Seshsesbet carved on the south wall of cult chapel 15. In the lower register, a monkey and dog being led by an attendant (Photo M. Jawornicki)

the walls of the narrow entrance (1.80 m high, 0.56 m wide, 1.10 m thick) hewn approximately in the middle of the façade. The chapel itself was a quasi-rectangular room, the west wall especially angling away back on either side of the entrance. The facing east wall is 6.53 m long and c. 1.83 m high. The length of the north wall is 2.65 m, that of the south wall 2.80 m. The height differs as well: 1.89 m for the north wall, and 1.83 m for the south one. Most of the north wall above the lowest register of decoration had caved in, letting debris pour into the chapel through the hole. Behind the wall in this spot a shaft had been cut at a later date; the wall between the two structures had either collapsed on its own or had been broken through accidentally by the stonemasons (cf. *Fig. 1* on p. 128 for a view of this part of the chapel immediately after discovery). Fragments of the original decoration containing an extensive offerings list were found in the debris.⁸⁾

A secondary burial was discovered at the bottom of the debris in this part of the tomb. The skeleton lay 0.90 m away from the north wall, the head to the west, and was covered with a reed mat. Given the fact that no pottery of later date than the Old Kingdom was found in this context, the burial should be considered as intrusive and dated putatively to the very end of the Old Kingdom.

All the chapel walls are decorated, but the carving of the reliefs, which are generally well preserved, was left off at various stages of completion. On the southern wall, the representations are unfinished and there is substantial evidence of preliminary sketches in black or red ink on the surface of the rock or on the pinkish mortar filling uneven places.

The scenes carved on this wall occupy the surface from the ceiling to the upper edge of an undecorated, c. 0.60 m high, zone that runs around the chapel. The panel is 2.70 m long and 1.20 m high. It shows the tomb owner, Ny-anekh-Nefertem, and his wife Seshseshet seated facing left (*Fig. 3*), and in front of them various scenes carved in three registers: men in papyrus boats in the upper register, offering bearers in the middle one, and female dancers and musicians in the lowest one (*Fig. 4*). The titles of the tomb owner, presented not only here, but also on the false doors and the offering-table, include, among others, those of “god's servant of the pyramid of Wenis” and “god's servant of the pyramid of Teti”. Temi (the “fair name” of the tomb owner) could have been a contemporary of the vizier Merefnebef, but, considering the style of the reliefs in his chapel, the tomb can be dated plausibly to slightly later times, beginning with the second half of Pepi I's reign. The style betrays simplification, even naivety compared to the extremely fine reliefs and painting in the other tomb, although imitations of the latter may be observed in many regards.

The west wall was decorated primarily with false doors hewn in the rock: two situated south of the entrance and one north of it. The southern ones were never finished; there is evidence of sketching in black ink on the smoothed rock surface and the inside of the sunken-relief hieroglyphic signs seldom feature any carved details (except for the finely rendered face hieroglyphs *Hr* and owl *m*, and a few other signs) (*Fig. 5*). The decoration of the west wall to the north of the entrance was markedly different. It was finely executed and preserves a rich polychromy (*Fig. 6*). Just next to the

8) An effort to reconstruct this decoration will be made in the coming season.



Fig. 4. Unfinished reliefs on the south wall of the cult chapel of Ny-ankb-Nefertem
(Photo M. Jawornicki)



*Fig. 5. False doors carved on the west wall of the cult chapel of Temi, south of the entrance
(Photo M. Jawornicki)*



Fig. 6. False door and reliefs with well preserved polychromy on the west wall of the entrance of the cult chapel of Temi, north of the entrance (Photo M. Jawornicki)

entrance there was a scene depicting the tomb owner at an offering table, beyond that another false door. The colors surviving in this part of the tomb astound with their freshness, intensity and variety, even if they demonstrate no such fine hue gradation as was the case in Merefnebef's tomb.

The decoration of the north wall was also perfectly accomplished. The tomb owner, facing right (east), is shown seated in front of an offering list, unfortunately badly damaged. Of unique artistic fineness are the representations of offering bearers in the lower register of the decorated surface. However, it is only in its middle part, just below the large hole, that this procession is well preserved.

Occupying the entire length of the east wall is a symmetrical depiction of eight figures showing Temi in the company of his wife and his children. As usual, the figures representing family members are of much smaller size than those of the father. Sculpted in sunken relief, these figures preserve but scant remains of the original polychromy. They are divided into two groups, walking toward a column of inscription facing the entrance to the chapel.

As in the tomb of Merefnebef, the ceiling is painted red with black patches, imitating Aswan granite. One shaft has so far been identified (but left to be explored next season) in the southwest corner of the chapel. A large offering table made of white limestone was found lying near this shaft, to its northeast. It had been removed from the northern false door leaving a gaping longitudinal hole at the bottom of the wall.

CULT CHAPEL 16

Cult chapel 16 of the next tomb hewn in the rock has its façade in the east part of the court's north wall. Its narrow entrance

(0.50 m wide, 1.10 m deep) is located 2.03 m away from the northeast corner of the court, and it leads to a 9.00 m long room of quasi-rectangular shape, with another room, c. 3.58 m (N-S) x 2.33 m (E-W), entered from the main room's west wall, just behind the chapel entrance, and a niche, 1.92 m (N-S) x 1.81 m (E-W), hewn further north in the same wall. No traces of any decoration were found on the walls of these rooms. The only decoration of the chapel is preserved in its façade. It is an "ideal biography" extending along the entire façade above the entrance. Only its eastern part (2.72 m long) has been preserved, containing the beginning of each line. Completely lost is its left, western part, where the name of the tomb owner had been written. Thus, this unfinished tomb must remain anonymous. The width of its façade, having the form of a rectangular niche, is 4.36 m, its height 2.33 m, and depth 0.30 m. At its west end, the façade reaches a protruding part of the rock, a kind of "pilaster" of irregular shape, behind which another unfinished tomb had been hewn in the rock. Its chapel (No. 17), much smaller than the previous one (4.16 m N-S x 2.40 m E-W) and entered from the south (like chapel 16), was not decorated. No traces of any decoration was to be found on the small façade (4.60 m wide, 2.00 m high, 0.30 m deep). The dimensions of the entrance are very reduced: 1.26 m high, 0.53 m wide, 1.10 m deep. Outlines of a shaft (c. 2.03 m N-S x 2.05 m E-W) are visible in the rock at the court's northwestern corner.

Chapels 15 and 16 with at least traces of decoration were secured with a solid L-shaped wall built of white limestone blocks and painted a neutral color. The wall runs at a distance of 1.10 m away from the two facades, concealing them from view.

BURIAL SHAFTS IN CORRIDOR 2

Inside the chapels off Corridor 2 and in the corridor itself,⁹⁾ fifteen rock-hewn shafts were now explored (C2/1-4, 7-11, 13, 15-17, 21-22) (*Fig. 8*). Ten had a burial chamber or niche located east, west or south of the shaft. In nine of them there were skeletal remains

and in one case a mummy (shaft C2/3); occasionally, there was a wooden or reed coffin (C2/7, C2/13, C2/21). Remains of funerary equipment, e.g. head rests (*Fig. 7*), small figurines or a wooden box with pottery jars (shaft C2/10)¹⁰⁾ were found in some of them.

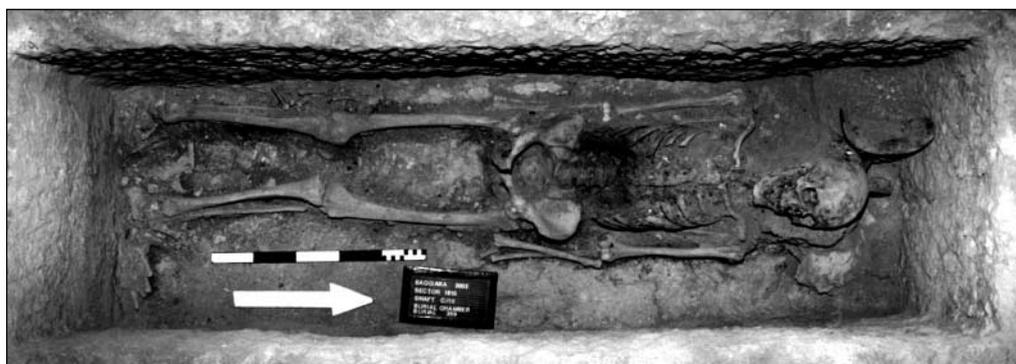


Fig. 7. Burial with head rest in the burial chamber of shaft C2/10, at the time of discovery (top) and close-up (bottom right). The head rest, S/03/45 (Photo M. Jawornicki)

9) The corridor was discovered and explored in 2000, cf. *PAM XII, Reports 2000* (2001), 111-119, 122-125, and 127-145.

10) For a discussion of this find, cf. below, contribution by T.I. Rzeuska, p. 138 and Fig.7.

WEST SAQQARA
EGYPT

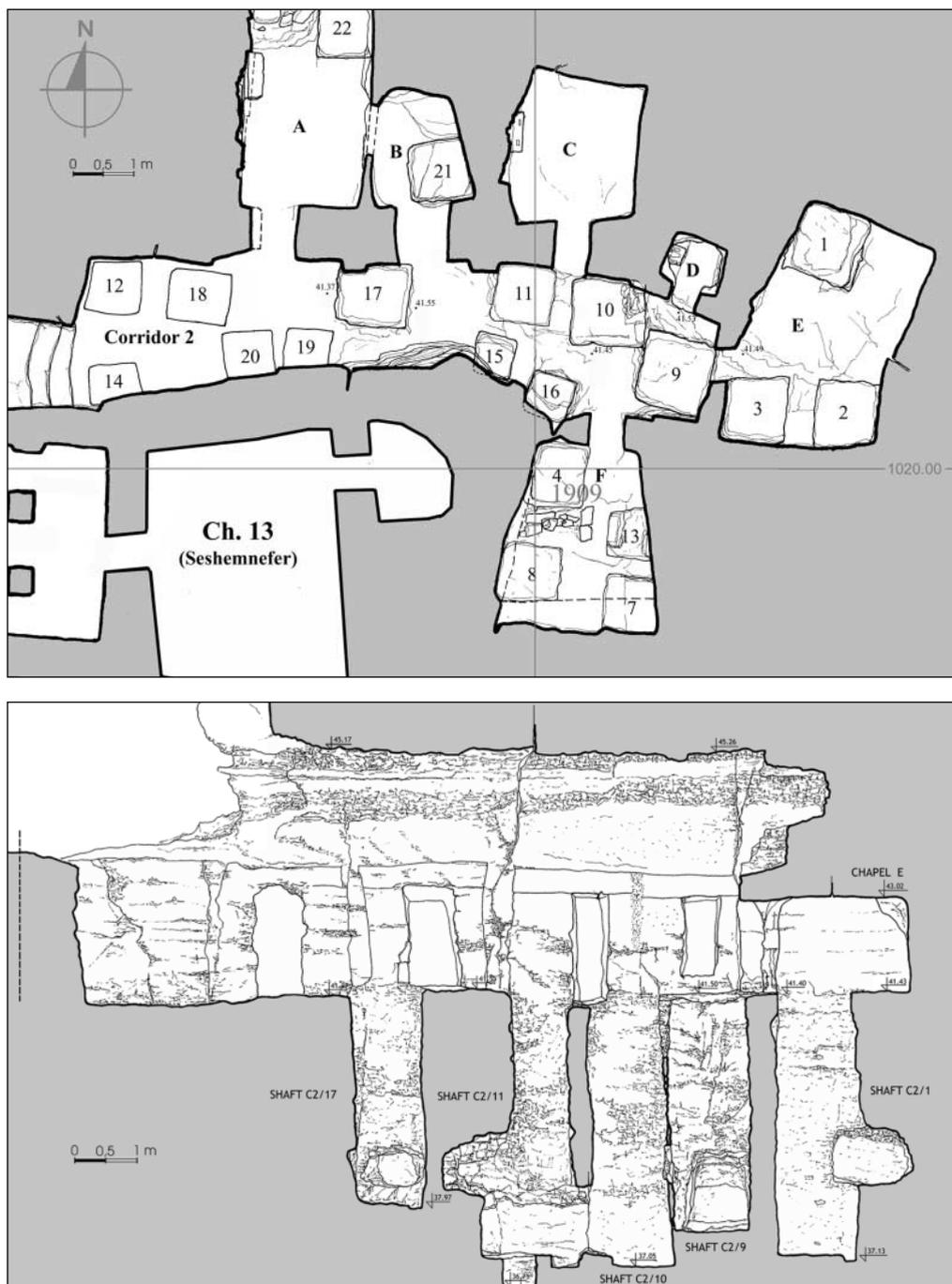


Fig. 8. Corridor 2 after exploration of shafts in 2003, plan and cross-section (Drawing B. Błaszczuk)