

Karol Myśliwiec

Saqqara: Archaeological Activities, 2006

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SAQQARA

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES, 2006

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The Polish archaeological mission continued its work in Saqqara, west of the pyramid of Netjerykhet, from 30 August to 22 October 2006.¹ Archaeological work during this campaign was aimed at completing the documentation for the third volume in the Saqqara publication series, which will be an overview of the Upper Necropolis from the sand layer covering the remains of Late Old Kingdom mastabas. The recording of rock-hewn shafts from the Old Kingdom in the northeastern part of the area, i.e., in squares 1903-1905, 2002 and 2102, was continued concurrently with the other tasks, this in preparation for successive volumes of the final publication. The cult chapel of Nyankhnefertem, to be published in a subsequent volume, was also studied, together with anonymous chapels 16 and 17.

1 The mission included: Karol Myśliwiec, Director; Kamil O. Kuraszkiewicz, Teodozja I. Rzeuska, Annie Schweitzer, Agnieszka Kowalska, Małgorzata Radomska, Iwona Kozieradzka, Fabian Welc and Marcin Piechocki, egyptologists/archaeologists; Salima Ikram, egyptologist/palaeozoologist; Zbigniew Godziejewski, Urszula Dąbrowska, Magdalena Abramowska, and Teresa Żurkowska, restorers; Maria Kaczmarek, physical anthropologist; Jarosław Zieliński, palaeobotanist; Beata Błaszczuk, architect; Piotr Lelek, photographer. Mohammad Yusef Morsy proved very competent and helpful in his function as SCA Inspector. Sayed Kereti acted as rais of the workers in this campaign. The mission would like to express its deepest gratitude to Dr. Zahi Hawass, Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, for his understanding of the mission's efforts and problems, his efficient help and never failing friendship. The mission is indebted to Magdy El-Ghandour, Director of Foreign Archaeological Mission's Affairs and Permanent Committee, without whose readiness to help and organizational capabilities our work would hardly have been possible. General Director Ibrahim Suleyman, Director Osama Shimi and Chief Inspector Sabri Farag of the SCA Saqqara Department have also contributed extensively to the success of our undertaking.

DOCUMENTATION WORK

Recording activities in the area excavated in 2004-2005 necessitated additional cleaning and clearing work, which resulted in the discovery of some new burial pits in the Upper Necropolis (Ptolemaic Period), as well as shafts in the Lower (Late Old Kingdom) Necropolis.

The late burials identified in this campaign, nos 482-508 [Fig. 2], have been fully documented, the mummies and remains of skeletons studied by an anthropologist, and the funerary equipment, including cartonnages and other objects, subjected to conservation (Saqqara III/1,

325-370, cat. 376-394). Most of these burials were connected with the neighboring Old Kingdom shafts. Many have the shape of anthropoid pits hewn among the earlier shafts (Burials 488, 491, 492, 497, 498) and were covered with limestone slabs [Fig. 1]. Some burials were placed inside the shafts, in rectangular niches hewn in the upper part of one of the shaft walls, with a series of stones set vertically to cover the entrance to each niche (Burials 474, 477, 482, 483, 486, 487, 494, 495, 500, 501, 502, 504, 505). A specific way of using ancient shafts as new burial places was a combination of both: the mummy was placed by one of the walls inside a shaft and the head or feet, or both, were placed in hollows hewn in the adjoining shaft walls (Burials 477, 478, 482, 485). In most of the latter cases, the mummies were concealed behind a row of heavy stone blocks, some of which, obviously reused, retained a rectangular form.

Almost all of these burials were disturbed by ancient robbers; the head or limbs of some of the mummies were missing, and the upper part of most of them was torn open. Only one of the Ptolemaic Period burials, no. 483, found in a niche hewn in the northern wall of Shaft 18, was intact. In it, beside a mummy encased in a finely painted cartonnage, was a richly decorated wooden canopic chest [Fig. 3] (Saqqara III/1 326, 335-343, 347; *Seventy Years*, 132-133, cat. 54) and a statuette of Pthah-Osiris-Sokar made of the same material (Saqqara III/1 326, 344-348; *Seventy Years*, 134-135, cat. 55). The chest contained remains of organic materials wrapped in linen. A simple bundle of linen resembling a mummy in shape was found inside the hollowed-out figurine, [Fig. 4]. Unfortunately, the lower part of the mummy



Fig. 1. Old Kingdom shafts and Ptolemaic Period burial pits in northern part of the area excavated in 2006. View from the west (Photo P. Lelek)

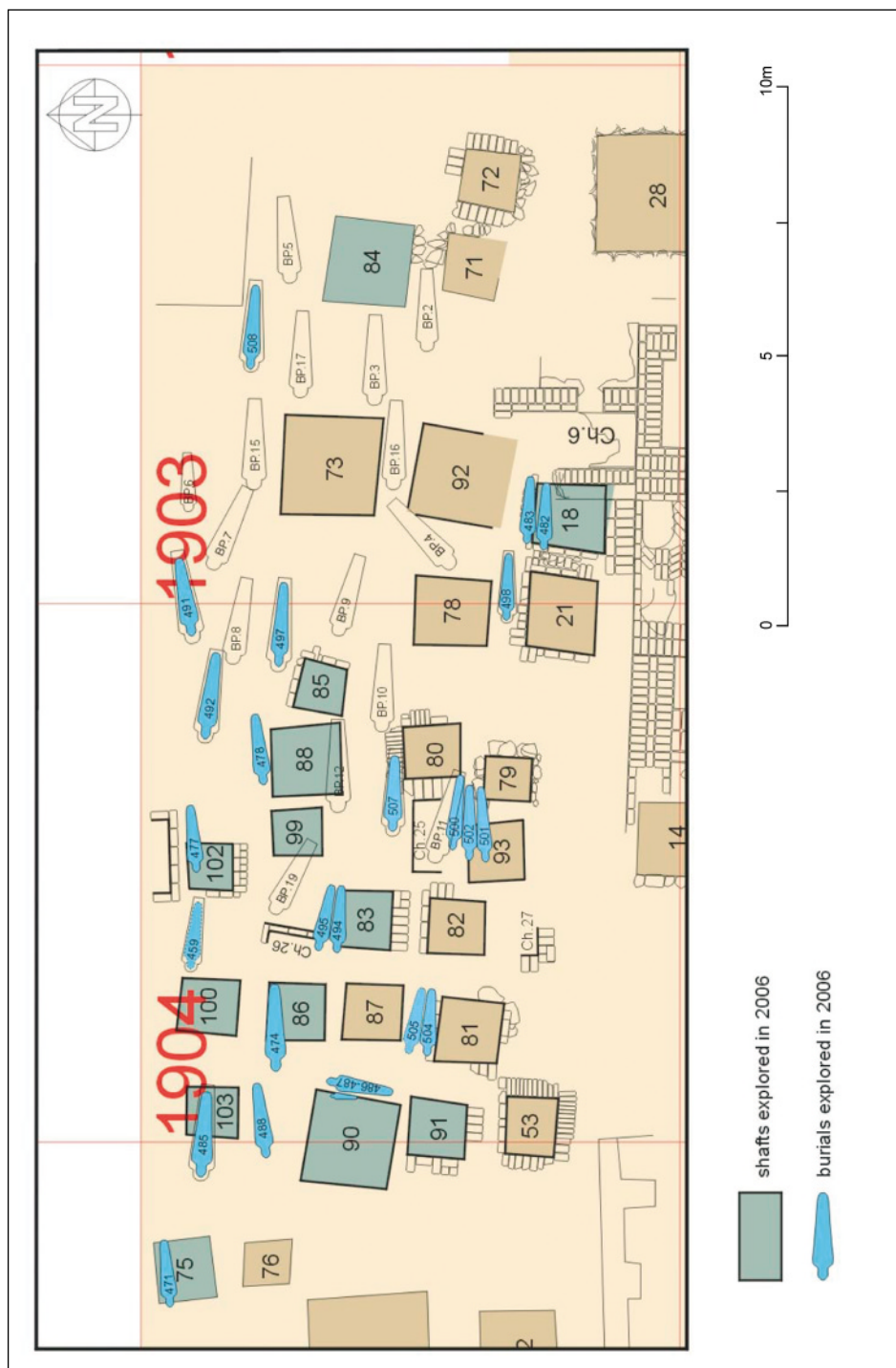


Fig. 2. Old Kingdom shafts and Ptolemaic Period burial pits in the northern part of the area excavated in 2006
(Drawing B. Błaszczak, K.O. Kuraszkiewicz)

was much affected by the humid conditions existing at the bottom of the niche due to heavy rains. The wall, on which the chest had lain in the burial for such a long time, was similarly affected. A thorough conservation of the cartonnage and finds was carried out first *in situ* and afterwards in the field lab (see below, contribution by Z. Godziewiczski in this volume).

Continued studies on the Old Kingdom shafts in squares 1904, 2002 and

2102 required some of the shafts explored in earlier campaigns (nos 20, 24, 29, 52 and 77) to be cleared again. Other shafts, located but not opened before (nos 18, 63, 75, 84, 85, 86, 88 and 91), were now excavated. Another five shafts (nos 96, 99, 100, 102 and 103) were discovered and excavated in the course of this year's work.

In six cases, the body, placed in a niche or burial chamber hewn at the bottom of a shaft, was deposited in a coffin made of papyrus reeds, covered with a mat made of



Fig. 3. Wooden canopic chest from Burial 483 (Ptolemaic Period), views of three better preserved sides (Photo P. Lelek)



the same material [Fig. 5]. In four cases (Shafts 83 , 85, 86, 102), this niche is found in the east wall, and in two other cases (Shafts 90, 103) in the west wall of the shaft. One of these coffins (in Shaft 83) was wrapped three times with broad white tape tied on top of the lid. Ancient robbers cut the tape where the case and lid met, then replaced it carefully after having robbed the interior. Nothing but two



Fig. 4. Wooden statuette of Ptah-Sokar-Osiris from Ptolemaic-period Burial 483 – after conservation (left) and front and interior view with remains of organic material (Photo P. Lelek)

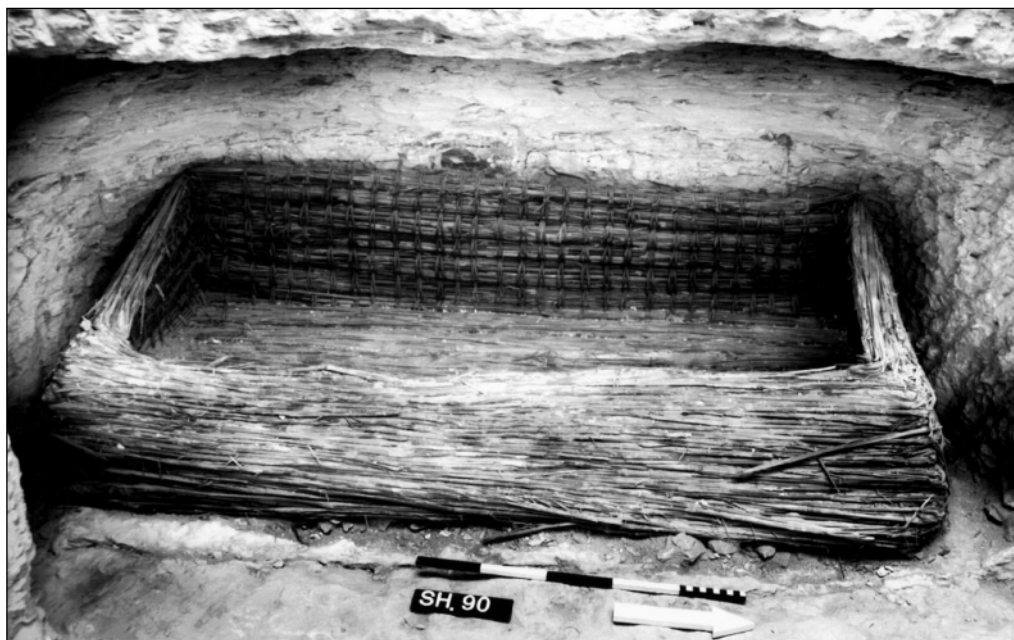


Fig. 5. Reed coffins from late Old Kingdom burials, seen in situ in the burial niche of Shaft 90 (top) and in the burial chamber of Shaft 86 (Photo P. Lelek)



Fig. 6. Part of jamb inscribed for priestess *Jhtj* found in Shaft 101
(Photo P. Lelek)

human bones remained inside. In shape and technology, these coffins resemble some other specimens found previously in this necropolis (Myśliwiec forthcoming; also 2005: 152-155). After clearing, conservation and documentation, they were secured in situ, and the shafts refilled with sand.

A fragmentary inscribed limestone block was found in Shaft 101. It is the lower part of a jamb inscribed in sunken relief for a priestess of Hathor called *Jhtj*. This fragment fits another one, the upper part of a jamb that originally bordered a false-door in one of the mastabas (Kuraszkiewicz 2002: 363-364; see also contribution by K.O. Kuraszkiewicz in this volume, esp. Fig. 5 on 171) [Fig. 6]. The location of the mastaba cannot be identified, for the other fragment was found (in 1998) in Shaft 2, located at a distance of c. 18 m from Shaft 101.

The area of Shafts 63, 96, 97 and 98 [Figs 7, 8], previously covered with the mud-brick platform adjoining the enclosure wall of the pyramid, was cleared and thoroughly studied in this campaign. It revealed further remains of structures built during the Old Kingdom. These structures enlarged or changed the original shape of the superstructure connected with the monumental false tomb, possibly of Archaic or early Third Dynasty date, hewn in the rock below these structures, and explored in the campaigns 2004-2005 (cf. Myśliwiec 2007: 160ff.; Welc 2007; also Myśliwiec 2006: 14-16).

At least five paved surfaces lying on different levels and corresponding to subsequent phases of use, have been identified in this place. The deepest one extends south of the cliff frame bordering the top of the E-W wall, in which the entrance to the archaic false tomb was hewn. This frame is cut in a porous, but hard rock

of grayish/white color, and its upper part is constituted by a kind of *dakka* containing an abundance of pale brownish sand and, particularly in its upper part, pebbles and small limestone chips. The surface of the “frame” preserves part of a pavement made of grayish mud mixed with pebbles and white mortar. The mortar forms a thin layer at the bottom of the *dakka*. This pavement originally extended further northwards, adjoining the edge of the rock-hewn “corridor”, which is well visible on the latter's west side. The total height of the “frame”, from the rock to the surface of the mud, is 0.50 m.

South of the “frame”, the sunken rock surface, whose brownish color is partly

uncovered, was overlaid with a layer of mud extending southwards until an irregular step running E-W. The step's lower part is cut in the same porous but hard whitish rock as the “frame” at the other end of this depression. The upper part of the step is overlaid and leveled with the same kind of *dakka* as the one described above. This implies that a depression, 0.40 m deep, was cut in the rock directly south of the edge of the false tomb. This is the oldest level of use, undoubtedly connected with the construction of the early “tomb”. The western edge of the depression is formed by a layer of mud, set partly on the rock, and partly on a layer of pebbles. Its eastern

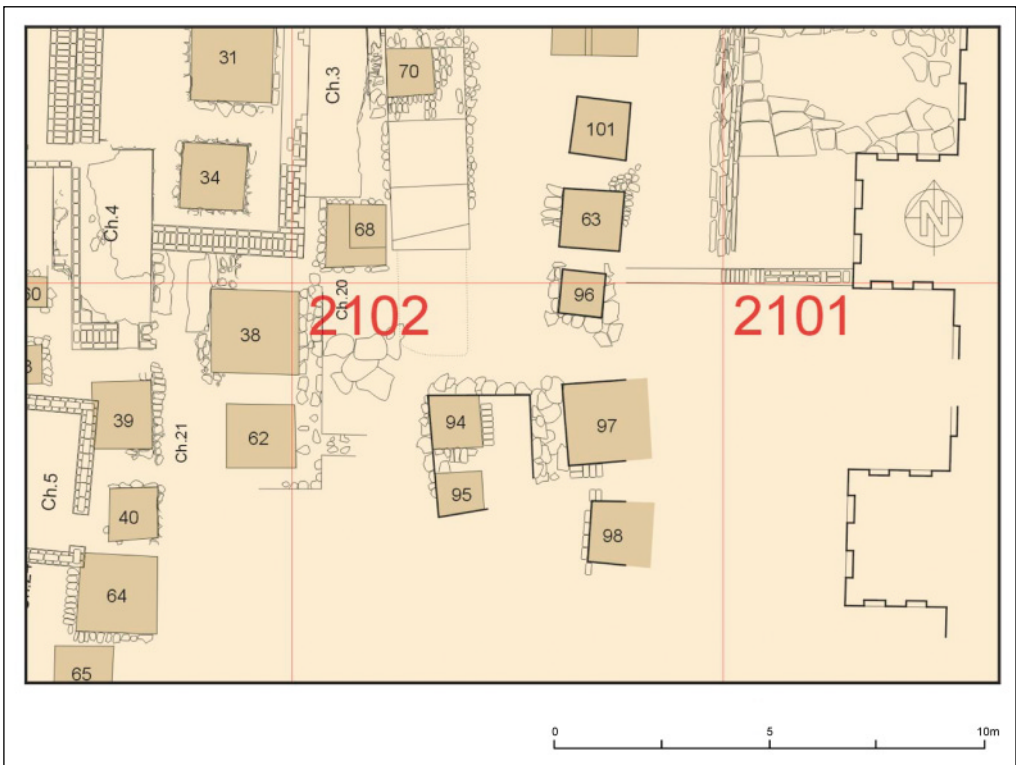


Fig. 7. Old Kingdom structures discovered under the later mud-brick platform
(Drawing B. Błaszczuk, K.O. Kuraszkievicz)

extension is not known, for it is still covered with the mud-brick platform. It seems very plausible that the layer of mud belongs to the same archaic mastaba, whose scarce remains are scattered all over the area in question. The mastaba's archaic date (most probably Second Dynasty) is unquestionable, for a well preserved fragment of this mud-brick structure, discovered in this campaign, enters under the enclosure wall of the step pyramid.

The depression, whose mud-overlaid bottom is doubtless the earliest level of use, was later filled with an agglomeration of irregular blocks and chips of local limestone mixed with mud-brick fragments, pebbles and sand. This stratum, well visible in the profile, below the remains of later structures covering the

east side of the depression, is 0.56 m high. Its upper edge is formed of a c. 5 cm thick white layer composed of a dense conglomerate of limestone chips and mortar. Extending westwards from this place, and clearly visible in the east profile of Shafts 38 and 62, this layer was the base, on which a monumental structure was built of larger limestone blocks.

The latter structure was later destroyed in some places. Its southern part, beginning 2.40 m away from the preserved northern border, was replaced with a large-size shaft measuring originally 2.10 m N-S by 2.20 m E-W; its walls, built of stone, were covered with a layer of dark mud. It was only 0.90 m deep, reaching the rock surface. The western part of the shaft was later divided into two smaller shafts of



Fig. 8. Old Kingdom structures discovered under the later mud-brick platform. View from the south (Photo P. Lelek)

irregular shape, discovered and explored in 2005 (Myśliwiec 2007: 167-168).

The uppermost pavement is well visible in the east profile of Shafts 38 and 62. Being a layer of mud, c. 1 cm thick, set on an agglomeration of limestone chips, pebbles and mud-brick fragments, this pavement was certainly connected with the functioning of the two shafts, doubtless at the very end of the Sixth Dynasty or at the beginning of the First Intermediate Period.

Research inside the cult chapel of Nyankhnefertem aimed at checking for shafts hewn in front of the three false-doors by its west wall (Myśliwiec 2004: 112=*Fig. 1* and 118-119=*Figs 5-6*; 2006:

10-11=*Fig. 11*). The western half of the mud layer covering the rock was removed revealing no shafts in the floor. It was thus confirmed that the two large-size shafts discovered east of the chapel in 2005, the northern one containing a burial chamber, were the burial and the ritual shafts of this mastaba (Myśliwiec 2007: 156-158).

Anthropological studies were pursued on the mummies and skeletons from both the Old Kingdom and Ptolemaic Period burials. The pottery found in the necropolis was subjected to examination and documentation. Palaeobotanical and palaeozoological research was carried out by specialists.

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