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Saqqara: Archaeological Activities, 2005

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SAQQARA

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES, 2005

Karol Myśliwiec

The Polish-Egyptian archaeological mission continued its work in the area adjoining the Netjerykhet pyramid enclosure on the west, from September 3 until October 24, 2005.¹

Archaeological activities were concentrated in square 2102, where part of the mud-brick platform covering Old Kingdom structures was dismantled with permission of the Permanent Committee, and in squares 1903-1905 in the northeastern part of the excavated area,² where excavations were necessary to complete the documentary base for the publication which is to appear as volumes III (Upper Necropolis) and IV (Old Kingdom necropolis between the tombs of Merefnebef and Nyankhnefertem and the enclosure wall of the pyramid) of the Saqqara excavation series.

Specialist pursued studies of particular categories of finds, notably the pottery which is reported on in this volume (contribution of T.I. Rzeuska below).

1 The mission comprised: Prof. Dr. Karol Myśliwiec, director; Dr. Teodozja Rzeuska and Dr. Kamil Kuraszkiewicz, egyptologists; Dr. Salima Ikram, egyptologist/archeozoologist; Mrs. Agnieszka Kowalska, Ms Małgorzata Radomska, Mr. Fabian Welc, Ms Katarzyna Grusiecka and Ms Edyta Klimaszewska-Drabot, archaeologists; Ms Beata Błaszczuk and Ms Daria Tarara, architects; Mr. Zbigniew Godziejewski, Ms Urszula Dąbrowska, Ms Magdalena Abramowska and Mrs. Teresa Żurkowska, conservators; and Mr. Jarosław Dąbrowski, photographer. The Supreme Council of Antiquities was represented by Mr. Zaki Awad Hussein and Mr. Shaaban Ahmed Mohamed, inspectors. Mr. Sayed Kereti assumed the task of *rais*.

We should like to express our deepest gratitude to Prof. Dr. Zahi Hawass, Secretary General of the Supreme Council, for his friendly attitude and competent decisions concerning our work. Our project benefited from the efficiency and wisdom of Mr. Magdy El-Ghandour, Director General for Foreign and Egyptian Mission Affairs. The SCA authorities in Saqqara were also extremely helpful, particularly Mr. Kamal Wahid, Director of Saqqara, and Mr. Osama El-Shemi, Chief Inspector of Middle Saqqara. Their practical approach and field experience proved inestimable in difficult moments.

2 K. Myśliwiec, K. Kuraszkiewicz, D. Czerwik, T. Rzeuska, M. Kaczmarek, A. Kowalska, M. Radomska, Z. Godziejewski, *The Tomb of Merefnebef Saqqara I*, (Warsaw 2004), Pls. I-II; K. Myśliwiec, "Fragen an eine Nekropole in Sakkara", *Sokar* 13 (2/2006), 14-16.

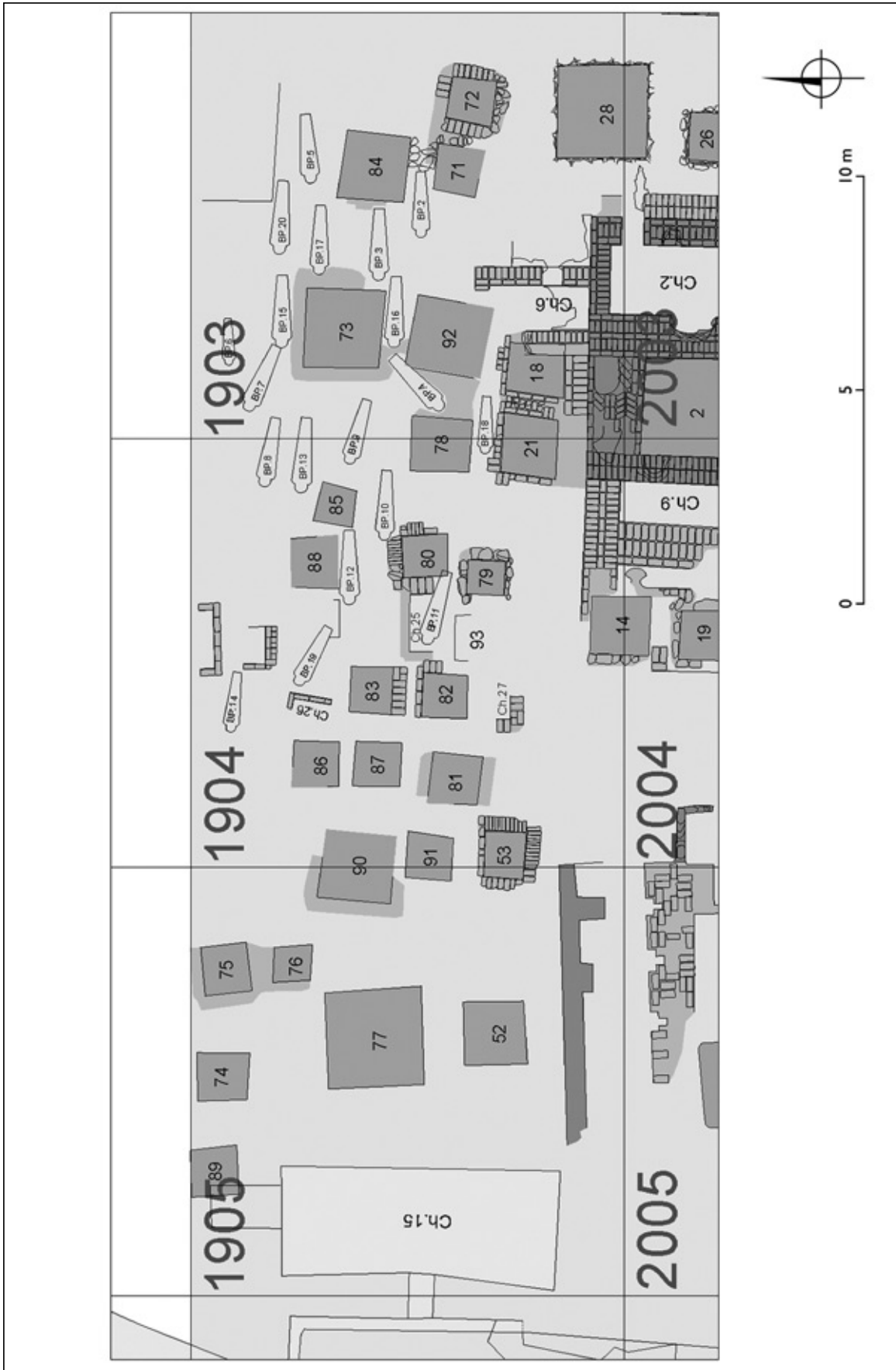


Fig. 1. Lower and Upper Necropolises in three squares excavated in 2005: shafts of late Old Kingdom mud-brick mastabas, and Ptolemaic/Roman Period burials in antbrooid rock-beun pits (Drawing B. Błaszczuk and K.O. Kuraszkievicz)

SQUARES 1903-1905

The archaeological stratum lying below a layer of sand followed by a thick layer of *dakka* turned out to be a dense agglomeration of late Old Kingdom shafts alternating with Ptolemaic Period (perhaps also terminal Late Period and Roman) burials [Fig. 1]. There were but scanty remains of mud-brick mastabas constituting the superstructure of Old Kingdom tombs.³ Altogether 25 shafts (nos 71-95) and 52 burials (nos 413-464) (including those of the Old Kingdom, found inside burial chambers) were unearthed in this campaign.

At the western edge of the excavated area, there were two large shafts belonging to the tomb of Nyankhnefertem: a larger and deeper one, no. 77, on the north side, and a smaller one, no. 52, to the south of it. Shaft 77 ended

with a spacious burial chamber on the west side of the shaft. The shaft was 10.10 m deep (8.30 m hewn in the rock, the upper part constructed of irregular stone blocks) and the burial chamber was a maximum 1.91 m high, 5.32 m long (N-S) and 3.31 m wide (E-W). A rectangular burial pit (2.19 m N-S by 0.88 m E-W; depth 0.90 m) was hewn in the floor and covered with a 0.32 m thick limestone lid. The long frontal face of the lid bears a graffito painted in black ink, apparently containing the three hieroglyphs of the name Temi. The skeleton could be seen inside through a hole in the lid's southwestern corner, but the burial was evidently disturbed and fragmentary. It appeared to belong to a stocky man. The skull lay separately. The cracked northern end of the lid was removed to



Fig. 2. Old Kingdom burial (no. 453) in a coffin made of *Cyperus Papyrus*, in the burial chamber of Shaft 80 (Photo J. Dąbrowski)

3 Cf. report by K.O. Kuraskiewicz in this volume.

enable close scrutiny of the inside of the pit. The skeleton was secured for anthropological examination.

The other smaller shaft (1.52 m E-W by 1.44 m N-S at the mouth; 5.10 m deep) had no burial chamber. Late Old Kingdom pottery was found inside it and it is obvious that it served purely ritual functions.⁴

Some other shafts found in this area were explored during this season (nos 72, 74, 80, 82, 89, 94, 95). Meriting special interest is Shaft 80 (1.06 m E-W by 1.11 m N-S at the mouth; 2.98 m deep) having a small burial chamber on the east. Inside the chamber was a rectangular coffin made of papyrus reed [Fig. 2]. Both the material and the con-

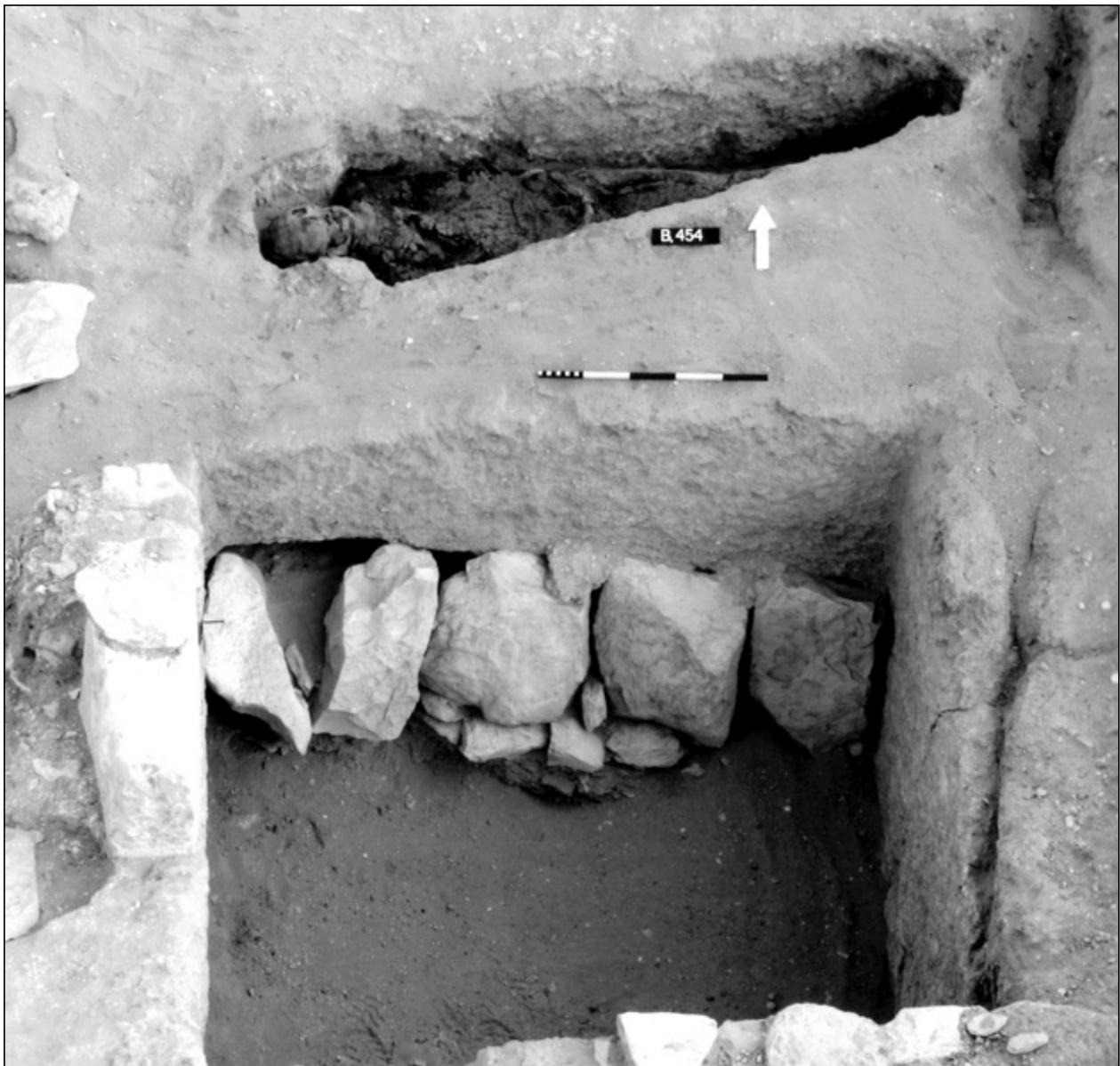


Fig. 3. Rock-hewn structures of the Upper Necropolis (square 1903). Burial 454 in an anthropoid pit and burial 455 in a niche hewn in the northern wall of the Old Kingdom Shaft 84 (Photo J. Dąbrowski)

4 Cf. T.I. Rzeuska, "The necropolis at West Saqqara: The Late Old Kingdom shafts with no burial chamber. Were they false, dummy, unfinished or intentional?", *ArOr* 70/3 (2002), 377-402.

struction of the coffin are reminiscent of Burial 393 found earlier in square 2104, and connected with Shaft 41.⁵ The shaft and the chamber in this case as well constituted a tomb *en four*, but the arrangement was different. The long side of the burial chamber lined the east side of the shaft and the corpse, like the coffin, was oriented N-S with the head to the north and facing east. In burial 393, the burial chamber extended southward from the south side of the shaft and the body faced east. In spite of structural similarities, the coffin of Burial 453 was of less solid construction than that of Burial 393.

A characteristic feature of the late burials found in the Upper Necropolis in the three squares in question is the predominance of simple mummies or skeletons deposited in anthropoid cavities hewn in the rock, usually oriented E-W, with heads to the west.⁶ Each of these cavities was covered with a sequence of irregular slabs of local limestone. However, the disturbed state of some burials (the mummy's upper part is frequently disarticulated or the bones of a skeleton are displaced) suggest that these "lids" were merely parts of the original, larger stone accumulations which had been destroyed by tomb robbers.

Particularly interesting and diagnostic for the intensity of burial activity in this region is the stratigraphy of two superimposed burials in square 1903 [Fig. 3]. The lower one, Burial 455, was found inside an oblong niche hewn in the north wall of a large shaft (no. 84), a broad entrance to which was covered by a row of large, vertically placed

blocks of limestone. The upper burial (no. 454, = BP 5 in Fig. 1) made on the surface of the rock took on the typical form of a rock-hewn anthropoid cavity. The corpse found inside it is a mummy with hands crossed on the chest in Osiris-like fashion, but there are hardly any bandages wrapping the desiccated body [Fig. 4].

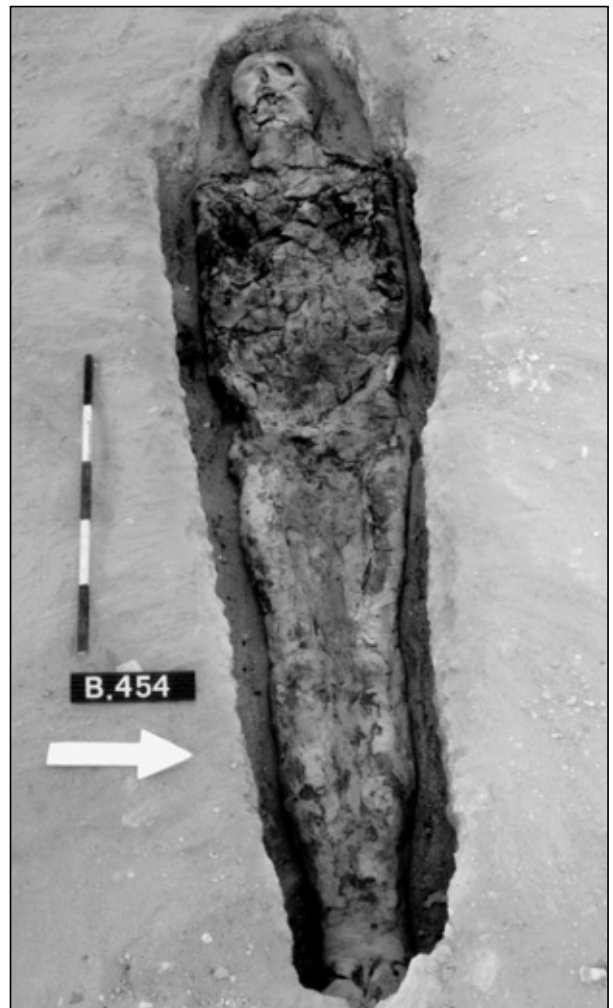


Fig. 4. Burial 454 in anthropoid pit (Photo J. Dąbrowski)

- 5 K. Myśliwiec, "Saqqara 2004: Excavations", *PAM XVI, Reports 2004* (2005), 153-155, Figs 7-8; id., "Old Kingdom coffins made of Cyperus Papyrus", *Studies in Honor of Prof. M. Verner* (Prague, in print).
- 6 Cf. the only grave of this type discovered in the area of our excavations during previous campaigns: K. Myśliwiec, T. Herbich, with a contribution by A. Niwiński, "Polish research at Saqqara in 1987", *EtTrav XVII* (1995), 188-195; K. Myśliwiec, *New faces of Saqqara: Recent discoveries in West Sakkara* (Tuchów 1999), Pls 8-10; id., "The Ptolemaic Period Cemetery in West Saqqara", in: T.A. Bacs, ed., *A Tribute to Excellence. Studies offered in honor of Ern Gaál, Ulrich Luft, Láslo Török*, *Studia Aegyptiaca XVII* (Eötvös Loránd University: Budapest 2002), 351.

SQUARES 2002 AND 2102

By decision of the Permanent Committee part of the large mud-brick platform extending westwards from the enclosure wall of the Netjerykhet pyramid was dismantled during this campaign in order to enable a study of the Old Kingdom structures lying below it. The dismantled section (in square 2102) was 8 m long N-S and 6 m wide E-W. In the north, it finished on a wall, 0.75 m high and 0.32 m thick, built of *tafl*-bricks, and running E-W, almost in line with the pyramid axis [Figs 5-6, 7]. The eastern edge runs parallel to the west enclosure wall of the pyramid, 4.10 m away from its westernmost projections.

The stratigraphy of this area reveals a vertical sequence of three layers found below the mud-brick platform: a) pure sand leveling the surface; b) *dakka* consisting of limestone chips, desert pebbles, stone and mud-brick fragments with a great deal of Old Kingdom (mainly late Old Kingdom) pottery; c) remains of Old Kingdom structures.

Only the western half of this section, 3 m E-W by 8 m N-S, was excavated through the three strata in this campaign. In the eastern half, exploration reached the surface of the *dakka* and will be continued next year.

The mud brick used in the construction of the platform comes apparently in two sizes: a) smaller, but more numerous, dark grey/black bricks ("clay" bricks) with varying dimensions around 30 x 15 x 7 cm; and b) larger, but less numerous bricks corresponding in size (an average of 36 x 18 x 10 cm) to those from the mastaba of Shaft 51, which neighbors with the platform on

the north, at a deeper level.⁷ The bricks were laid longitudinally on their largest face, in parallel rows extending N-S. The surface of the platform and the bottom face of the bricks were coated with a thin layer of mortar which also filled the spaces between the bricks. This mortar was made of material corresponding to the two brick fabrics: either black clay of quite homogeneous, rather fattish structure, or yellowish material with many inclusions, e.g. sand, tiny pebbles and bits of pottery (*tafl*-bricks). A thin layer of black mud (no more than 1 cm) was applied to the surface of the platform in a regular coat. The irregular but quite thick layer of clay found between the bottom face of the bricks and the sand surface was significantly mixed with sand, meaning that mud had been spread on the surface of the sand for better adhesion of the bricks.

The sand layer below the platform is very thick in the southern part of the excavated section, and almost nonexistent in the north. This means that the wall bordering the platform on the north was erected directly on the highest point of the *dakka*, guaranteeing the stability of the wall. At the sector's southern edge, and particularly in the middle of this area, the thickness of the sand layer reached and even exceeded 1 m.

The layer below the *dakka* revealed a complicated sequence of Old Kingdom structures. The oldest and most important element that dictated further development of the site was a rock-hewn structure apparently from the first half of the Second

7 For Shaft 51: Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz et al., Merefnebef, op. cit., Pl. II (square 2002); K. Myśliwiec, "West Saqqara Excavations, 2001", *PAM XIII, Reports 2001* (2002), 135-142. For the structure and size of the bricks used in the tomb of Merefnebef: Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz et al., Merefnebef, op. cit., 41 and 54.

Dynasty or the very beginning of the Third Dynasty [cf. *Fig. 7*].⁸ Its longitudinal shape, size and N-S orientation is reminiscent of Second Dynasty royal tombs found in Saqqara, south of the Netjerykhet pyramid enclosure,⁹ or early Third Dynasty tombs of the highest noblemen in Saqqara.¹⁰ The northern, open part of the structure comprises a rock-hewn passage with steeply sloping floor, descending southwards, partly under the mud-brick platform. It starts in the north more or less at the southern edge of the later (Sixth Dynasty) Shaft 69, the location and orientation of which probably complied with the existing passage. It is a maximum 1.86 m wide and runs for 6.42 m (measured along the upper edge) before reaching a dead end. This E-W wall is cut straight down into the rock, ending with a rectangular entrance at the bottom, 4.76-5.00 m (east and west side respectively) from the top [*Figs 8,9*]. All sides of the passage are weathered, although the local limestone structure here is stronger than in the case of many other rock-hewn tombs in this part of Saqqara.

All four upper edges of the corridor were reinforced and leveled with series of irregular, flat stones, never higher than 1 m despite varying height and outside extent. Parts have been destroyed completely, most frequently by later Old Kingdom structures (Sixth Dynasty shafts and chapels). Reparations with mud bricks are observable in places, e.g. in the southeastern corner of the passage [cf. *Fig. 6*].

The bottom of the passage slopes at a very sharp angle (about 41°), which contrasts with the gentle ramps leading to entrances in rock-hewn royal tombs of the early Second Dynasty.¹¹ Therefore, a date toward the end of this Dynasty or at the beginning of the next seems more plausible in this case, although it cannot be excluded that other circumstances, like different function, actually dictated the steepness. The passage ends sharply 1.61 m before the entrance to a subterranean room. The horizontal floor at the southern end breaks off diagonally and beyond the break there is a hollow, c. 0.41 m deep, extending from one wall to the other, measuring 0.52 m N-S along the east wall and 0.93 m along the west one. Its function is not clear, but it may have been intended originally as a slot for a huge slab blocking the entrance. The south side of the hollow is at the same time the threshold of the rectangular entrance described above. The entrance is as wide as the passage and 1.80 m high, and framed with a slightly projecting profile, 0.09-0.10 m wide. It leads to a chamber with sloping floor and gradually descending ceiling, which meet at floor level a respective 2.58 to 2.20 m, measured on the east and west sides, further to the south [*Fig. 11*].

The fill of this "chamber", which practically reached the ceiling [*Fig. 10*], contained pottery used for ritual purposes.¹² Many vessels, particularly those found on the surface, were intact, preserving the original contents. It proves that the mys-

8 K. Myśliwiec, *PAM XVI, Reports 2004* (2005) 152; id., "Eine geheimnisvolle Rampe und Plattform an der Westseite der Pyramide des Djoser", *Sokar* 11 (Berlin 2005), 6-7; id., "Fragen an eine Nekropole", *Sokar* 13, 14-16.

9 G. Dreyer, "The Tombs of the First and Second Dynasties at Abydos and Saqqara", in: Z. Hawass, ed., *The Treasures of the Pyramids* (Vercelli 2003), 74-75.

10 E.g. that of Hesire: H. Altenmüller, "Grab", *LÄ* II (1977), 829.

11 Dreyer, op. cit., 75 (Drawing E).

12 Cf. reports by F. Welc and T.I. Rzeuska in the present volume.



Fig. 5. Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom structures unearthed in squares 2002 and 2102. Entrance to the unfinished tomb (Second/early Third Dynasty) below New Kingdom (?) platform. View from the north (Photo J. Dąbrowski)



Fig. 6. Remains of Old Kingdom superstructures above the unfinished Early Dynastic tomb. View from the north (Photo J. Dąbrowski)

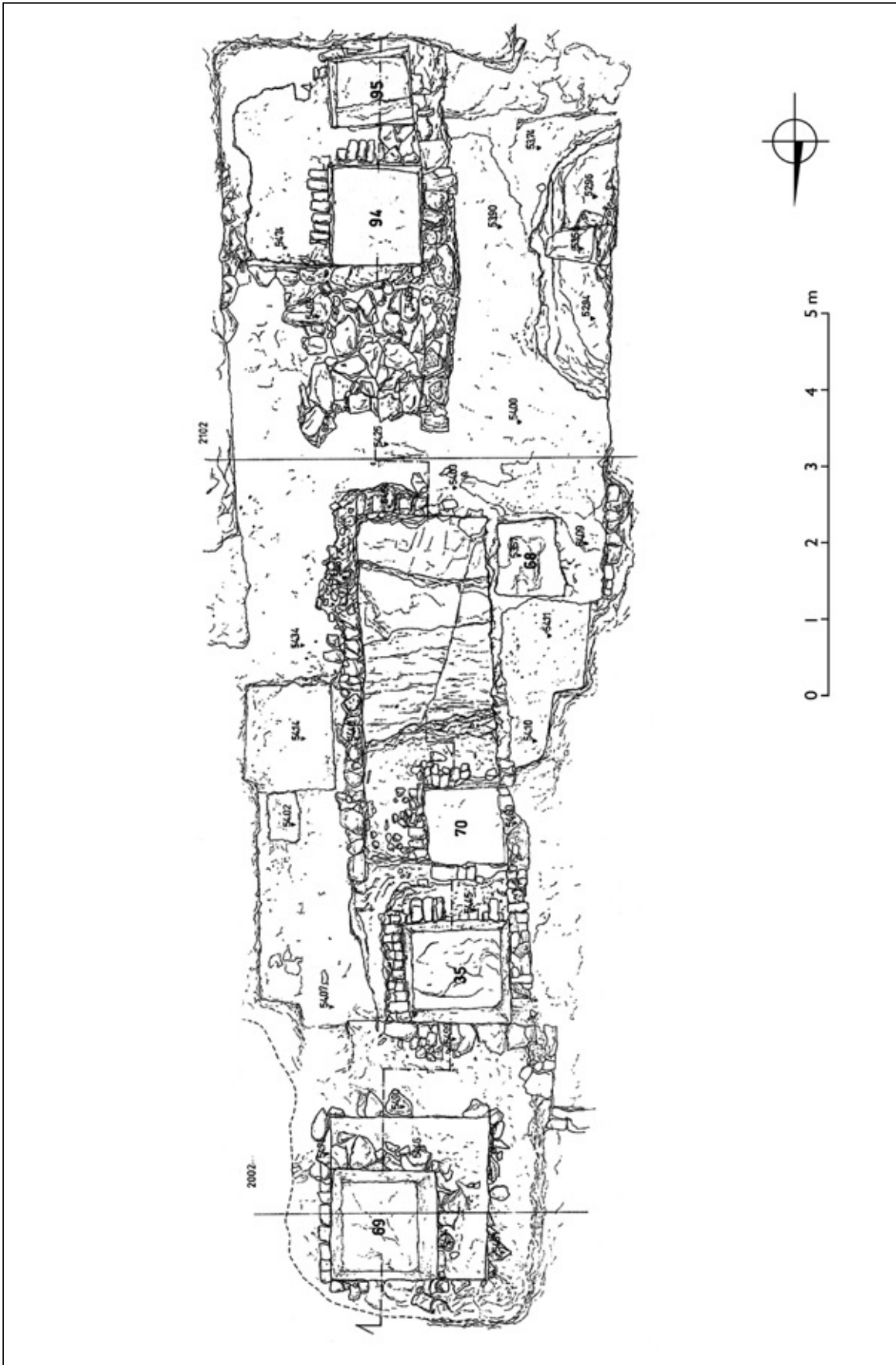


Fig. 7. Plan of the Sloping Passage with later Old Kingdom shafts (35 and 70) built into its structure, and remains of Old Kingdom superstructures including Shafts 94 and 95 (Drawing B. Blaszczyk)

terious chamber, possibly built with the aim of misleading potential robbers searching for a royal tomb, had long been used as a cult place, probably connected with a monumental tomb which should be expected in the close vicinity of this "chapel", possibly to the south of it.

Remains of various structures discovered on the surface of the rock south of the unfinished 'tomb' and beside the passage are witness to intensive building activities in this area during the Old Kingdom. The following phases have been distinguished [cf. *Fig. 9*].

- a) Construction of the quasi-tomb (Second Dynasty/early Third Dynasty). The rock surface around the passage is covered with c. 4 m of black/grayish mud mortar mixed with many small stones, both desert pebbles and fragments of white limestone (chips of limestone blocks similar to those used in the construction of the pyramid's enclosure wall?), as well as small pottery sherds. Visually, it has a mosaic-like structure. This layer does not lie directly on the rock surface, but on a leveling layer of yellow sand (up to 4 cm thick) containing similar chips although of smaller size. The "mosaic" layer is visible on both sides of the rock-hewn corridor.
- b) A layer of black/grayish mud with but very few inclusions and very smooth surface, originally whitewashed (surviving in a few places), found c. 2 cm above the first stratum. It testifies to alterations, perhaps repairs or a continuation of building activities in this area some time after the construction of the 'tomb'. This stratum contains almost no pottery. The chronological span between this and the lowest stratum is minimal; perhaps both are elements of the same construction. Only a part of this stratum

was revealed east of the corridor, but it appears to have existed also on the other side, where it can be seen in the section.

- c) The next level of occupation lay c. 20 cm higher (level with stones at the mouth of the passage). It has a less regular, but discernible surface of grey/yellowish *dakka* with many small desert pebbles and white limestone chips.
- d-e) Leveling wall of flat irregular *tafl* blocks of local limestone, raised along the upper edges of the corridor, doubtless in order to reinforce and protect it, visibly in two phases. In the south-eastern corner of this wall, there are some *tafl* bricks preserved at the top of this construction and doubtless belonging to the later phase. As this



Fig. 8. Entrance to the unfinished Early Dynastic/Early 3rd Dynasty tomb at the end of the sloping corridor, during exploration (Photo J. Dąbrowski)

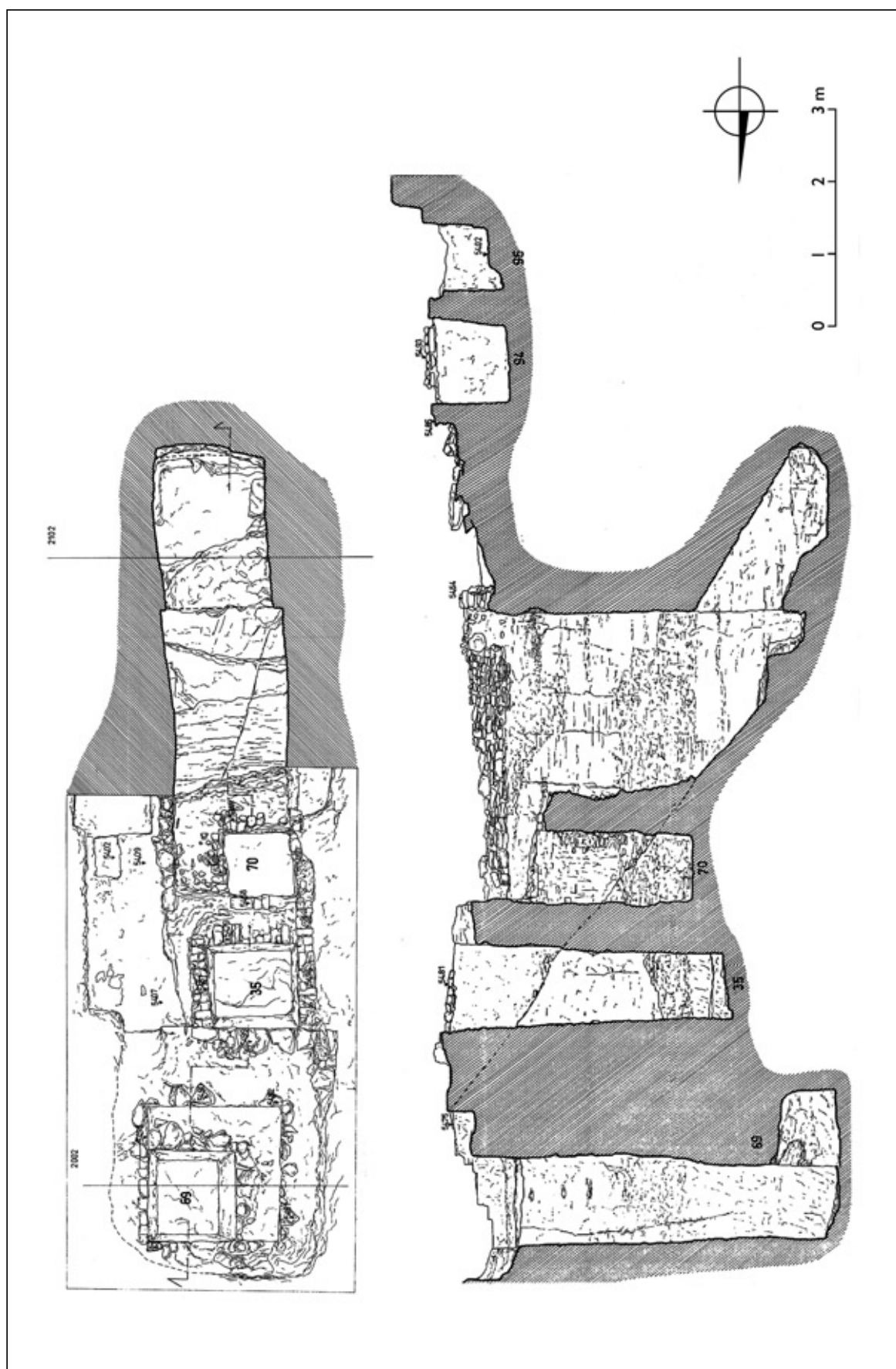


Fig. 9. Plan and N-S section of the passage and unfinished subterranean structure extending it to the south (with Sbafts 35 and 70), found in squares 2002 and 2102 (Drawing B. Błaszczuk)

"retaining wall" cuts vertically through all three described levels, visibly intruding into their original structure, these two phases must be considered as later than the previous ones. For the time being, they cannot be dated more precisely.

- f) Monumental structure made of large blocks of local limestone (same as in the thick core of the pyramid's enclosure wall), built to the south of the south wall of the sloping passage. In its present state, it is 2.40 m long N-S and 2.00 m wide E-W. It must have been larger originally, but was partly destroyed by later structures (Sixth Dynasty shafts found directly behind its façade). Indeed, it may have actually extended all the way to the southern edge of the

passage, but the present distance between the surviving parts is 0.60 m.

As seen on the west façade of this monumental building, it rested on a white bedding, 6-7 cm thick, consisting exclusively of crushed limestone, i.e., small limestone chips and powder. This bedding can be seen in sections all around the Early Dynastic 'tomb', implying the monumental character of this building. The blocks found *in situ*, i.e., in the preserved part of the façade, are up to 0.40 m long and 0.20 m high. Their front face is even. Thick mud/tafl mortar (with many inorganic inclusions) found on the surface suggests the presence of a higher layer. Considering the fact that this building was later destroyed by Sixth Dynasty structures, it



Fig. 10. Deposits inside the unfinished 'tomb' at the south end of the sloping corridor (Photo J. Dąbrowski)

may be dated with considerable probability to earlier times, perhaps even earlier than the Fifth Dynasty.

g) In the next phase, a huge rectangular structure (shaft?) was constructed inside this building, just behind its western façade. Nothing but the western part of this structure has been excavated so far. The west wall measured along the inner face is 2.90 m long. Further explorations should determine the actual E-W extension of the structure, but its considerable size is already suggested by the excavated part. The walls are built of small irregular blocks of local limestone and *tafl*. The west wall of the 'shaft' destroyed part of the earlier façade and its inner face did not line up with the front of the façade. The distance between

the two vertical faces varies from 0.30 m in the north to c. 0.48 m in the south. The inner faces of the 'shaft' were coated with black/grey mud. The size and technical details suggest a date in the Sixth Dynasty, possibly at the beginning.

h) Some time later, the large 'shaft' was re-used for another purpose. Its western part was divided into two smaller shafts, the northern one c. 1.30 m E-W by 1.30 m N-S at the mouth and 1.20 m deep, the southern one c. 1.13 m E-W by 0.98 m N-S and 1.00 m deep by the south wall. The continuous east wall of the two, as well as the wall between them, were built of irregular limestone blocks in their lower part (c. 1.00 m high at the south side of the northern

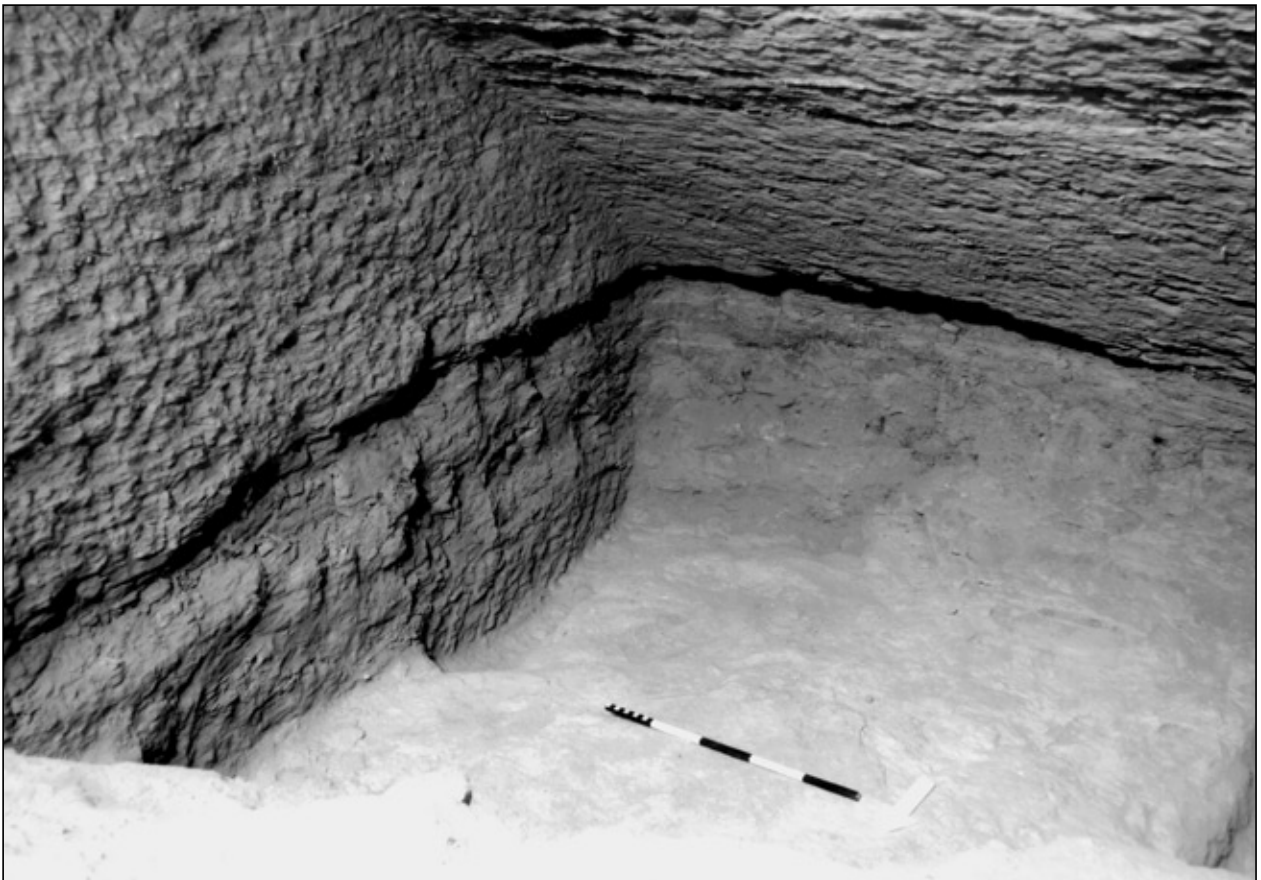


Fig. 11. The floor meeting the ceiling at the southern extent of the unfinished 'tomb'
(Photo J. Dąbrowski)

shaft), and *tafl* bricks in their upper part. Up to two layers of the bricks were preserved in places. Lying always on one of their largest faces, they were laid longitudinally in the lower stratum and transversely in the higher one. Irregular size and the different material used (both *tafl* and clay bricks have been found) prove that they were reused in this construction. The inner faces of both shafts, as well as the orientation of the dividing wall, are strikingly irregular. Their inner faces are coated with black/grayish mud, which also covers the upper surface of the walls, thus indicating that the shafts had never been higher than this. Surprisingly, the bottoms of both shafts, given a similar coating of mud, rested directly on the rock surface. There are no additional rooms or recesses at the bottom. Their function thus remains obscure and one cannot exclude that they were constructed as camouflage as well. Another surprising feature apparently excluding their ritual function is the almost total absence of any pottery in the fill. Considering the structure and execution of these shafts, one is inclined to date

them tentatively to the final phase of the Old Kingdom or the beginning of the First Intermediate Period.

The next, much later testimony of building activities in this area is the mysterious mud-brick platform.¹³ Recent examination of pottery from the fabric of the platform bricks and from between them has identified exceedingly numerous tiny sherds of Middle Kingdom date,¹⁴ as well as some fragments from the late Eighteenth/early Nineteenth Dynasty (e.g. painted fragments). Found mainly in the spaces between or below the bricks, the later fragments constitute a *terminus post quem* for the platform. If it was built in the early phase of the Ramesside Period, it may have been part of a restoration program undertaken by Khaemwase,¹⁵ the famous son of Ramesses II, high priest of Ptah in Memphis, who restored, among others, the nearby precinct of King Wenis' pyramid, enlarged the Serapeum in Saqqara, and had a residence on a hill located in the west of Saqqara.¹⁶ Even his tomb is supposed to have existed close to the Serapeum, that is, only a short distance away from the platform in question.¹⁷

13 Cf. note 8 above, and Myśliwiec, Kuraszkiwicz et al., Merefnebef, op. cit., 43, note 42.

14 T.I. Rzeuska, "The Pottery, 2004", *PAM XVI, Reports 2004* (2005), 172-174.

15 F. Gomaa, Chaemwese, Sohn Ramses' II. und Hoherpriester von Memphis (Wiesbaden 1973).

16 S. Yoshimura, I. Takamiya, "A monument of Khaemwaset at Saqqara", *BEES* 5 (1994), 19-22; further bibliography in: S. Yoshimura, I.H. Takamiya, H. Kashiwagi, "Waseda University excavations at North Saqqara: A preliminary report on the fourth to sixth seasons, August 1995-September 1997", *Orient* 34 (1999), 44, note 2; for recent discoveries on the site, cf. S. Yoshimura, N. Kawai, "An enigmatic rock-cut chamber. Recent Waseda University finds at North Sakkara", *KMT* 13(2) (Summer 2002), 22-29; id., id., "Finds of the Old and Middle Kingdoms at North Saqqara", *Egyptian Archaeology* 23 (2003), 38-40; S. Yoshimura, N. Kawai, H. Kashiwagi, "A sacred hillside at Northwest Saqqara: A preliminary report on the excavations 2001-2003", *MDAIK* 61 (2005), 361-402.

17 F. Gomaa, "Chaemwese", *LÄ* (1975), 897-898.