

WEST SAQQARA

SAQQARA 2004

Karol Myśliwiec

The Polish-Egyptian archaeological mission at Saqqara pursued its activities in the area extending west of the Djoser pyramid enclosure, from September 4 until October 26, 2004.¹ The work was concentrated on the conservation of the tomb of Ny-ankh-Nefertem discovered in 2003, and on the archaeological investigation of the area extending between the tomb of Merefnebef and the enclosure wall of the step pyramid. Specialist studies were pursued on specific groups of objects, particularly the pottery (ceramology) and human remains (anthropology).²

1 The mission was composed of the following: Prof. Dr. Karol Myśliwiec, director; Dr. Kamil Kuraskiewicz, egyptologist; Prof. Dr. Maria Kaczmarek, physical anthropologist; Dr. Tomasz Stępnik, archaeologist; Mrs. Teodozja Rzeuska, egyptologist/ceramologist; Ms. Małgorzata Radomska and Mr. Fabian Welc, archaeologists/egyptologists; Mr. Zbigniew Godziejewski, Ms. Urszula Dąbrowska, Ms. Magdalena Muc and Mrs. Teresa Żurkowska, conservators; Ms. Beata Błaszczuk and Mr. Mieczysław Niepokólczycki, architects; Mr. Maciej Jawornicki, photographer. The Supreme Council for Antiquities was represented by Ms. Yasmin Hassan Mostafa, the inspector of the mission. Our tasks were fulfilled thanks to the friendly and constructive attitude of Dr. Zahi Hawass, SCA Secretary General. We are also indebted to Mr. Magdy El-Ghandour, Director General for Foreign and Egyptian Mission Affairs, for assistance in preparations for the present campaign. Extremely efficient and competent in their decisions were the Director of the Saqqara Antiquities, Mr. Kamal Wahid, and Mr. Osama El-Shimi, the Chief Inspector of Saqqara. We wish to thank all of them for their assistance. The two *raises* of the mission, Mr. Sayed Kereti and Mr. Mahrouz Abdel Tawab Beheri, were helpful and systematic in their difficult work.

2 Cf. contributions by T. Rzeuska, K. Kuraskiewicz and Z. Godziejewski in this volume.

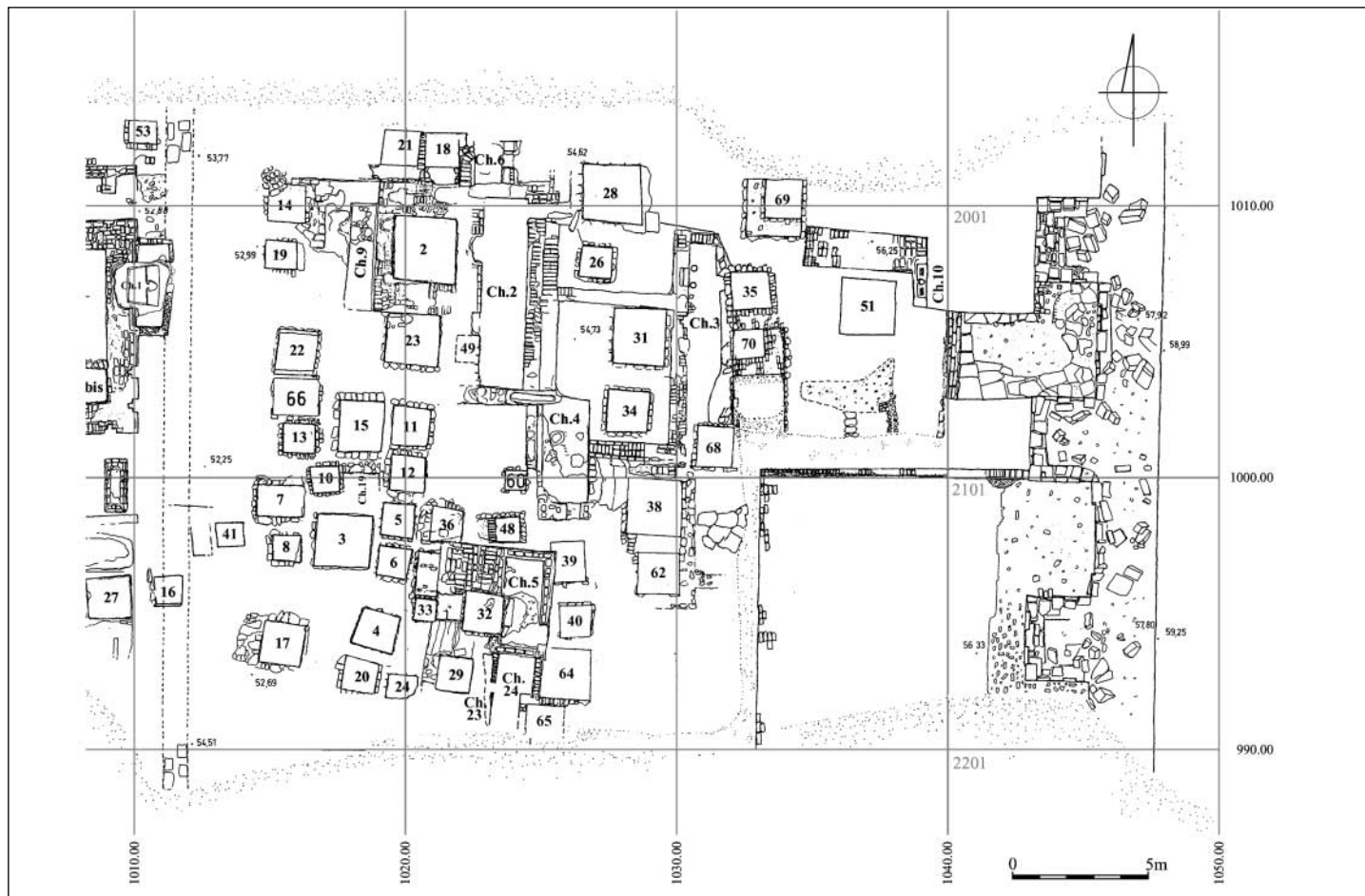


Fig. 1. Area covered by archaeological research in 2004

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ACTIVITIES

The aim of work done in squares 1903, 1904, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2102, 2103, 2104 during this campaign was to complete the documentation of the Old Kingdom structures found between the tombs of Merefnebef and Ny-ankh-Nefertem, and the pyramid's enclosure wall [Fig. 1],³ in preparation for forthcoming volumes of our publication.⁴ It was necessary to clear some previously excavated funerary shafts in order to collate their plans and cross-sections, and to take some additional photographs. While clearing the superstructures of some mastabas, several new shafts were discovered and subjected to regular excavations. Together with some poor remains of cult chapels, they proved to constitute a dense conglomeration of mud brick-built mastabas, often partly overlapping, built and used in the second half of the Sixth Dynasty, possibly also in the First Intermediate Period.

Part of this necropolis was covered by a mud-brick platform built in later times and extending westwards from the pyramid enclosure wall [Fig. 2]. The western end of the preserved part of the platform has now been dismantled (section c. 2.60 m wide at the northwestern end) in order to enable the exploration of Old Kingdom Shaft 38, the western part of which became visible in our earlier excavations. New funerary structures comprising shafts (nos. 62 and 68) and walls built of part stone and part mud brick were discovered below the platform, beside Shaft 38 [Fig. 3]. The

walls are oriented E-W, and they extend further eastwards under the remaining part of the platform.

Similar structures were unearthed north of the platform, where they lie on leveled bedrock, 2.10 m below platform level. These are two walls oriented N-S, made of irregular stone blocks, continuing southwards under the platform. These two walls divide the area between Shaft 51 and the north wall of the platform into three sections. The eastern section, adjoining the foundations of the step pyramid's enclosure wall, consists of a filling of desert pebbles and fine reddish gravel, doubtless as bedding for the foundations of the enclosure wall.

The section between the two longitudinal walls contains the lower layer of an agglomeration of dark gray mud brick (of same texture and size as that from the remaining part of the east and north walls of the mastaba, to which Shaft 51 belonged). This section should be interpreted as the southern extension, and foundation, of a tomb reused several times during the Old Kingdom, whose latest occupation (late Sixth Dynasty) was marked by an anonymous autobiography carved on a limestone jamb fragment.⁵

Of particular interest is the third, western section, which is 2.15 m wide (E-W) [Fig. 4]. Its eastern part contains a continuation of the mud-brick layer belonging to the mastaba and directly overlying the rock, but its western extremity is a kind of

3 The following shafts were cleared for documentation: 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 26, 34, 36; K. Myśliwiec, K. Kuraskiewicz, D. Czerwik, T.I. Rzeuska, M. Kaczmarek, A. Kowalska, M. Radomska, Z. Godziejewski, *The Tomb of Merefnebef, Saqqara I* (Warsaw 2004) (= Merefnebef), 43-44, Pls. II, III, XXVa,c, LXXXVa-h.

4 Volumes in preparation: II. Late Old Kingdom Pottery; III. The Upper Necropolis; IV. Old Kingdom Necropolis between the tomb of Merefnebef and the Step Pyramid enclosure.

5 K. Kuraskiewicz, "An Old Kingdom Autobiography from Saqqara", *PAM XIII, Reports 2001* (2002), 147-150; id., "Saqqara 2002: Inscriptions (Jamb S/01/20 with autobiographical inscription)", *PAM XIV, Reports 2002* (2003), 133-137.



Fig. 2. Mud-brick platform in squares 2101 and 2102 before exploration of its western part. View from the south (Photo M. Jawornicki)



Fig. 3. Late Old Kingdom funerary structures unearthed below the western part of the platform. View from the south (Photo M. Jawornicki)



Fig. 4. Remains of Old Kingdom structures north of the mud-brick platform. View from the west (Photo M. Jawornicki)

pavement constituted by several layers of roughly worked, irregular, rather flat blocks of local limestone, leveling the somewhat inclined surface of the rock in this area (maximal height of the 'pavement': 0.75 m). The western edge of this 'pavement' lines up with a vertical rock-hewn wall, which runs parallel to a similar wall hewn west of it, at a distance of 1.80 m, forming a corridor that runs N-S, descending steeply to

the south, under the northern part of the platform. This archaic structure must have been considered very old in the late Old Kingdom (probably late Sixth Dynasty), when mud-brick shafts were built inside the 'corridor', partly using its rock-hewn walls (e.g. Shaft 70).

The dismantling of the platform⁶ enabled an examination of potsherds found in the clay of the bricks. Some Middle Kingdom fragments proved to be of latest date, providing a dating *terminus post quem* for the platform.

New data concerning the southern extension of the platform was obtained from five small trial pits (2 by 2 m), located in squares 2303, 2403 and 2503 [Fig. 5]. The platform continues southward at the same level, c. 0.50-1.00 m below the present surface, forcing us to conclude that it is longer in this direction than the presently known 49 m. No pottery of diagnostic value was found in the layer of sand, either on or below the platform, and there are literally no remains of any human activities on its surface, not even traces of ritual fireplaces, which is the case of the chapels and open courts in front of the mastabas.⁷ Therefore, it seems plausible to think that this platform was not ritual in nature. It may have had a protective function.

A new feature of the late Old Kingdom necropolis excavated this season is the occurrence of several skeletal burials in rectangular reed coffins, placed in funerary chambers at the bottom of rock-hewn shafts. The best preserved one (Shaft 41, burial no. 393) was found in a longitudinal chamber (extending N-S), the short northern side of which adjoins a shaft [Figs. 6-8]. This burial resembles the 'furnace tombs'

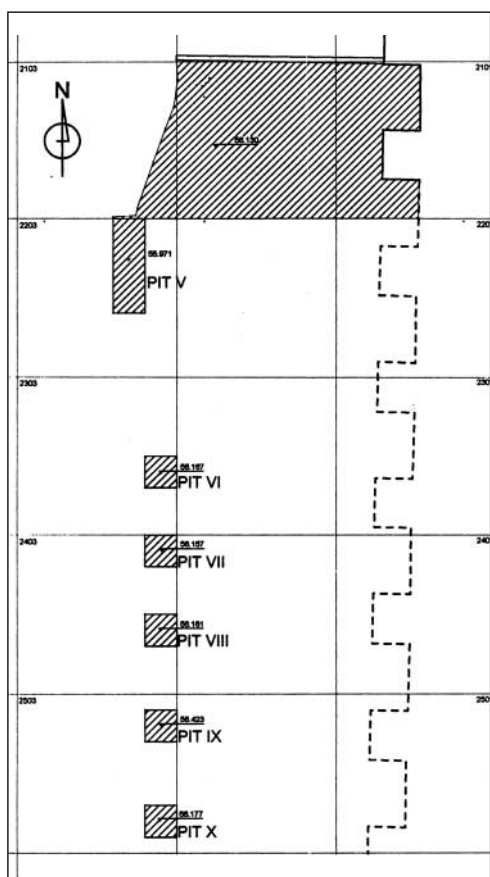


Fig. 5. Localization of trial pits testing the southern extension of the mud-brick platform

⁶ For the platform, cf. K. Myśliwiec, "West Saqqara Excavations, 2001", *PAM* XIII, op. cit., 135-142. .

⁷ Merefnebef, 62-63, Pls. XXVg, XXVlb,c, CXIIIId.

in South Saqqara, dating from the very end of the Old Kingdom.⁸ Therefore, similar burials, often with badly destroyed reed coffins, also those found lying freely in the upper necropolis, e.g. on the ruins of the mastaba of Merefnebef,⁹ doubtless date from the late Old Kingdom as well. The body of the deceased in burial no. 393 was lying with its head to the north, facing east [cf. Fig. 8].

Most of the reed coffin burials are found inside small undecorated chambers or niches hewn on one or two sides at the bottom of a shaft. Shaft 39 had two burial niches, one

on the east and another on the west side. Both contained skeletons, the eastern one with remains of the original garment.

Large quantities of pottery, including some sealed, possibly complete deposits, were found during this campaign, sometimes still *in situ*, and sometimes on the surface of a shaft, where they were abandoned by tomb robbers (e.g. Shaft 38). One of the shafts (no. 32) and its burial chamber still contained several objects belonging to the original equipment. A 'false door' was found in two fragments inside this shaft (cf. illustrations in Z. Godziejewski's

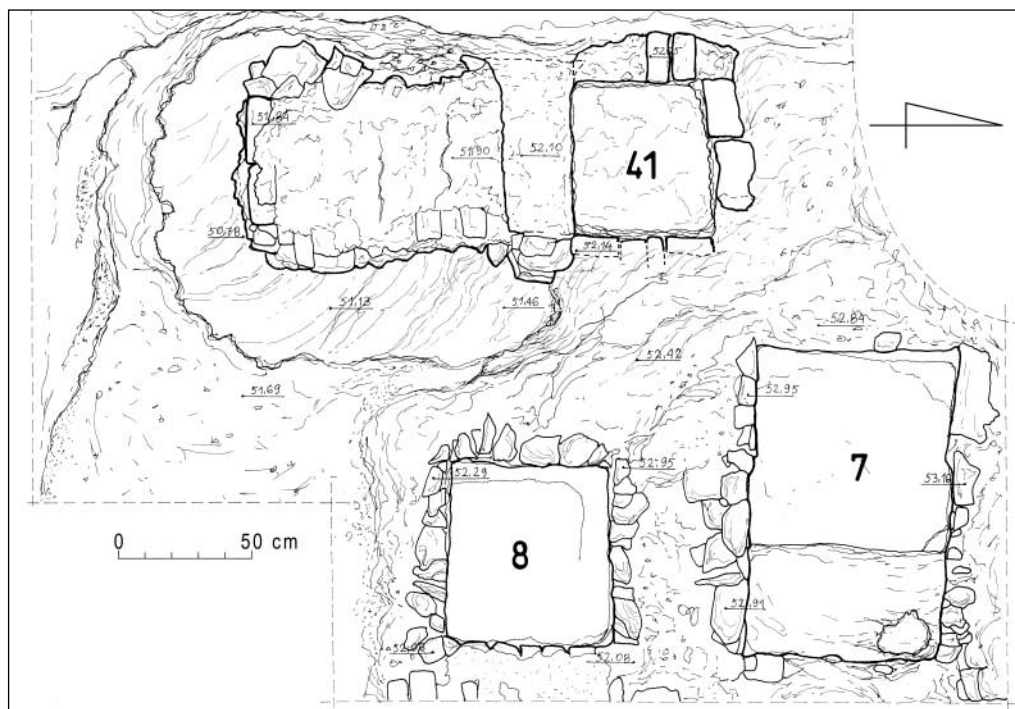


Fig. 6. Square 2104 with Shaft 41 being part of a tomb with vaulted burial chamber containing a reed coffin (burial no. 393) (Drawing B. Błaszczuk)

8 G. Jéquier, *Tombeaux de particuliers contemporains de Pepi II* (Cairo 1929), 6-8 (M.I), 58-66 (M.IX), 93-94 (N.III), 117-120 (N.VII); J. Vercoutter, *L'Égypte et la vallée du Nil*, 1. Des origines à la fin de l'Ancien Empire, 12000-2000 av. J.-C. (Paris 1992), 347.

9 K. Myśliwiec, *New Faces of Saqqara, Recent discoveries in West Saqqara* (Tuchów 1999), Pls. 11, 18.

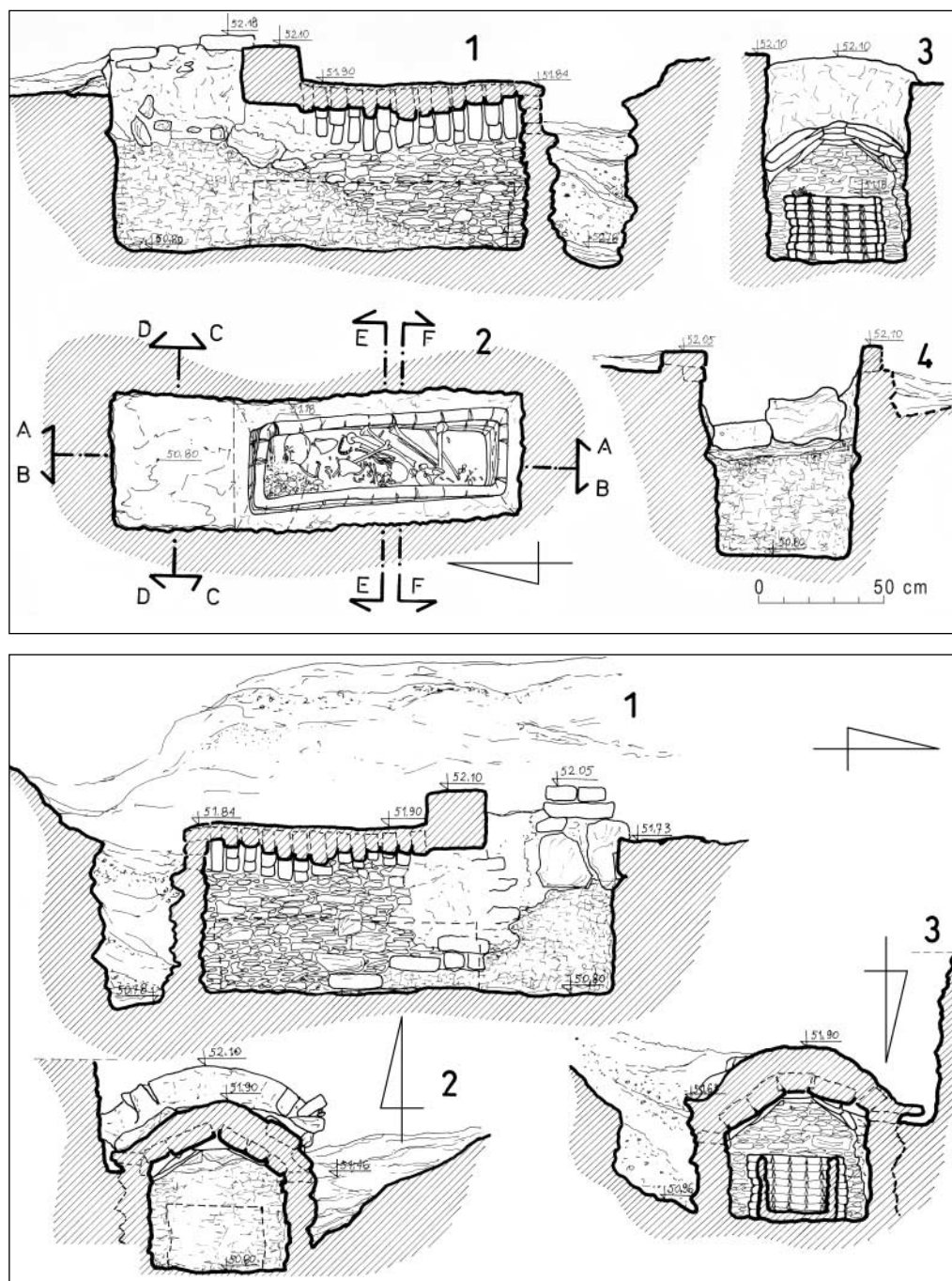


Fig. 7. Cross sections through the burial chamber containing burial no. 393 and Shaft 41
(Drawing B. Błaszczuk)



Fig. 8. Burial no. 393 in a reed coffin. View from the north, i.e., from Shaft 41 (Photo M. Jawornicki).

contribution and the article by K. Kurasz-kiewicz, both in this volume). It is inscribed for Khekeret, a priestess of Hathor, who was certainly not the owner of this tomb.¹⁰ Three almost complete wooden figurines representing nude men [Fig. 9 *a,b*], and frag-

ments of at least three other figurines of the same type, were found in the funerary chamber of this shaft, together with eight miniature models made of various kinds of stone (e.g. two small jars made of rock crystal) and ten small copper vessels, nine

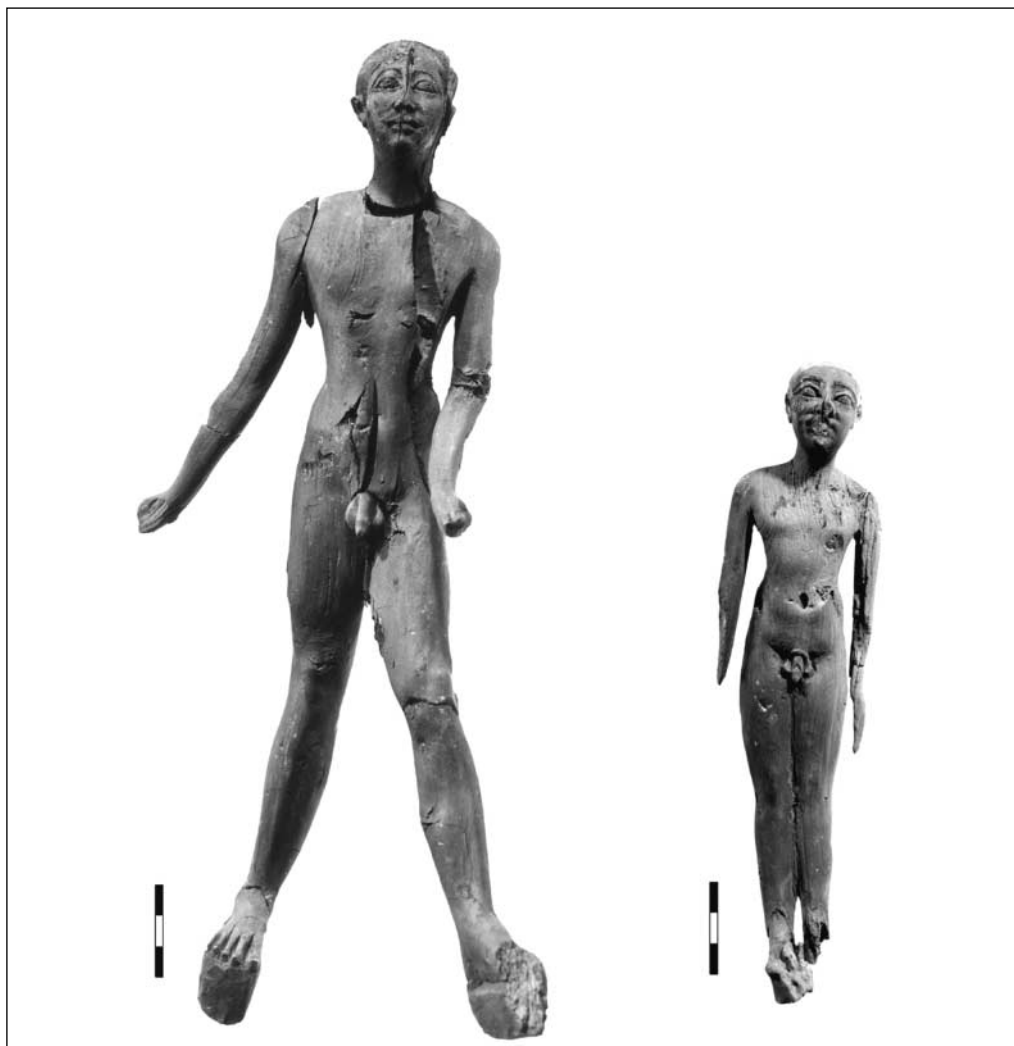


Fig. 9. Two wooden figurines: (a) Inv. nr. S/04/16 a; (b) Inv. nr. S/04/16 b, found in the burial chamber of Shaft 32 (tomb of Ny-Pepy) (Photo M. Jawornicki)

10 For the owner of the tomb, Ny-Pepy, cf. K. Kurasz-kiewicz, "Two fragments of False-door frame of Ny-Pepy from West Saqqara", *EtTrav* XIX (2001), 127-133.

of which with the tomb owner's name, Ny-Pepy, incised on their surface.

During the clearing of the area subject to research in this campaign, the following shafts were discovered, explored and documented: 60, 62, 66, 69, 70.

Shaft 69, situated in square 2002, is noteworthy. It measures 1.43 x 1.48 m at the mouth and is 5.66 m deep. In the west wall, there is a small niche hewn 3.41 m above the floor. At the bottom, there is a burial chamber on the west side, oriented N-S, measuring 2.42 m (N-S) by 1.12 m (E-W) and 1.08 m high. In the burial chamber, the skeleton of a young woman, about 24 years of age, was found (burial no. 397) together with fragments of the plaster coating once covering the body [Fig. 10 *a,b*]. Tomb robbers had obviously disturbed the body; upon discovery the skeleton was lying with head to the south and facing down, while the remains of the plaster mask were found in the northern part of the burial chamber. A hole, witness to a trepanation

that probably failed to help the patient, can be seen on the back part of the skull.

The Upper Necropolis, predominantly corresponding to the second half of the first millennium BC, was poorly represented in this campaign. Nevertheless, a perfectly preserved mummy (burial no. 406), possibly from the Ptolemaic period, was found above Shaft 21, in an unusual, doubtless secondary position [Fig. 11]. It was seated in the southwestern corner of the shaft, whose mud brick-built upper part had been destroyed in this place. In this secondary position, it was facing east. The mummy must have slipped from its original, horizontal position and fallen into a hole left between destroyed Old Kingdom structures. This displacement stripped the cartonnage from the mummy, leaving it squashed under the mummy's feet. In spite of its deformation, the polychromy, including the predominantly blue background, is well preserved. So is the polychrome painting on the two large size gesso panels decorating the torso

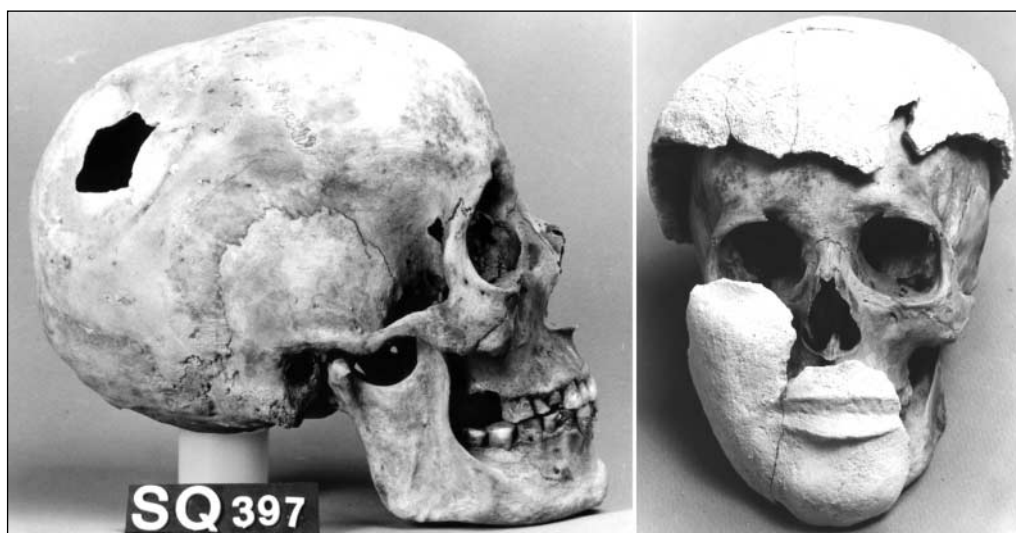


Fig. 10. The skull of a young woman with a trepanation hole (left), and view with part of the gypsum coating (Photo M. Jawornicki)

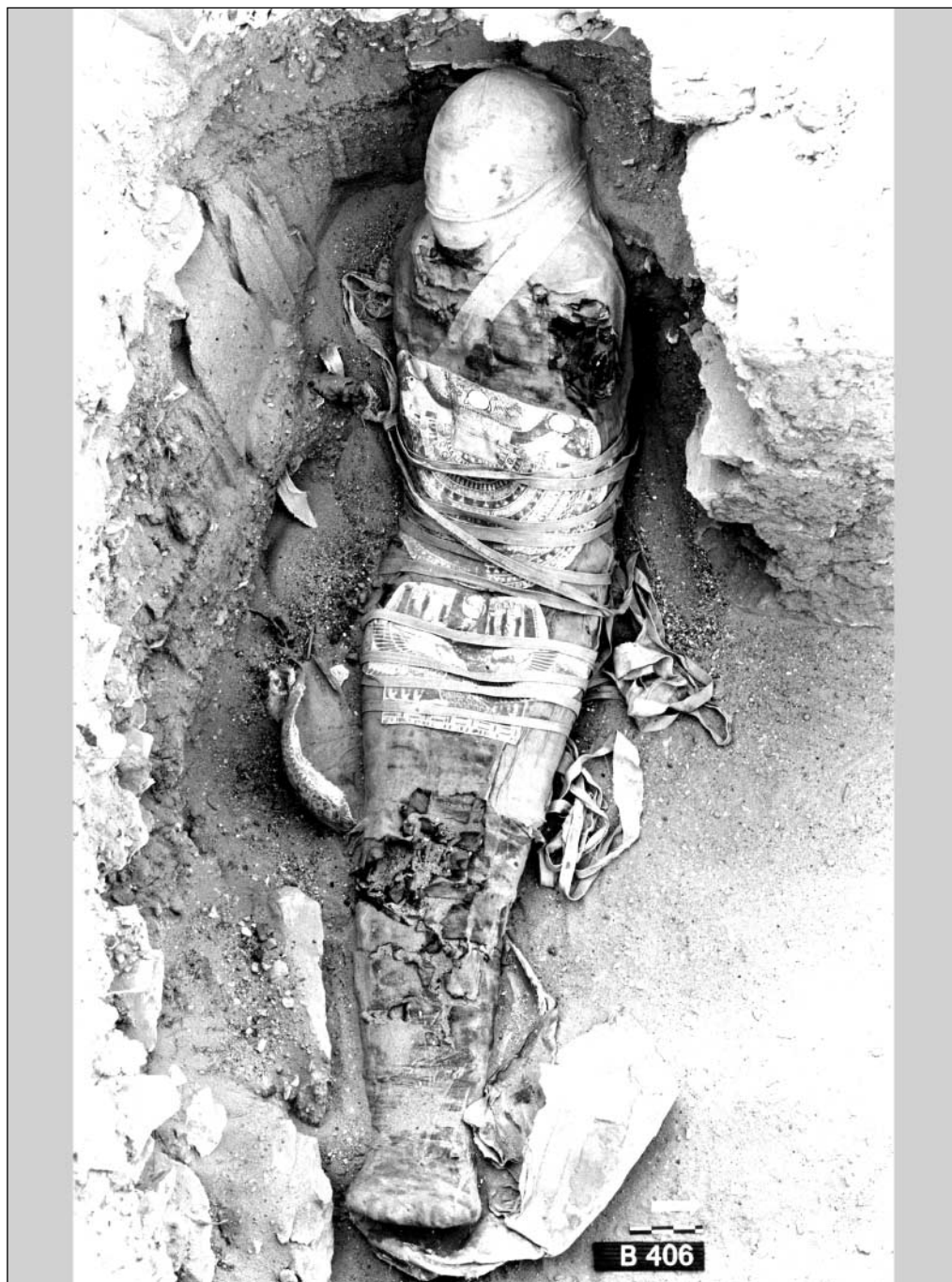


Fig. 11. Mummy (burial no. 406) found in secondary position above the Old Kingdom Shaft 21. Probably Ptolemaic period (Photo M. Jawornicki)

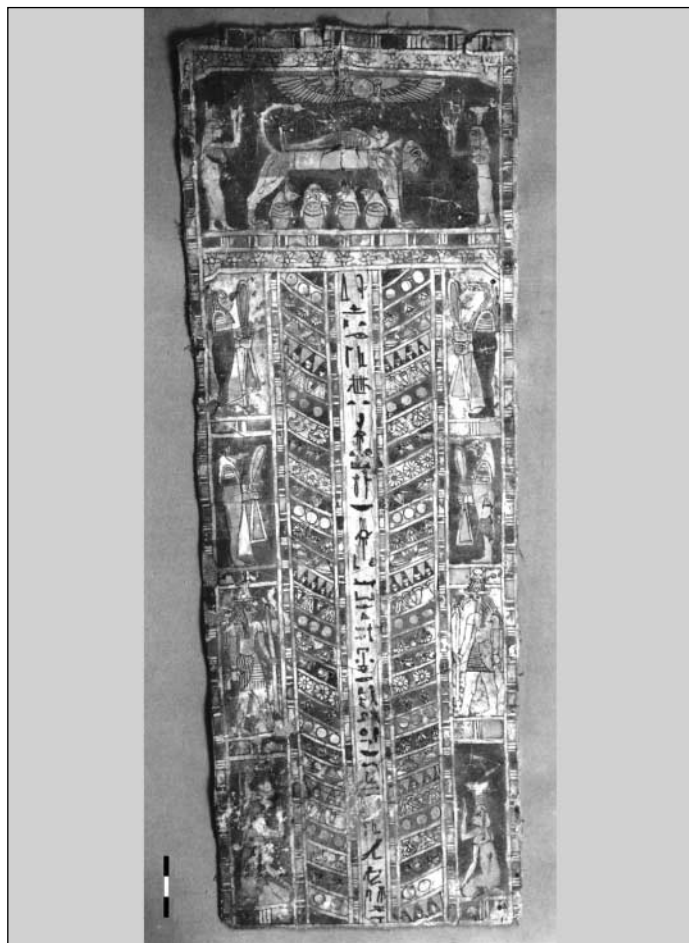
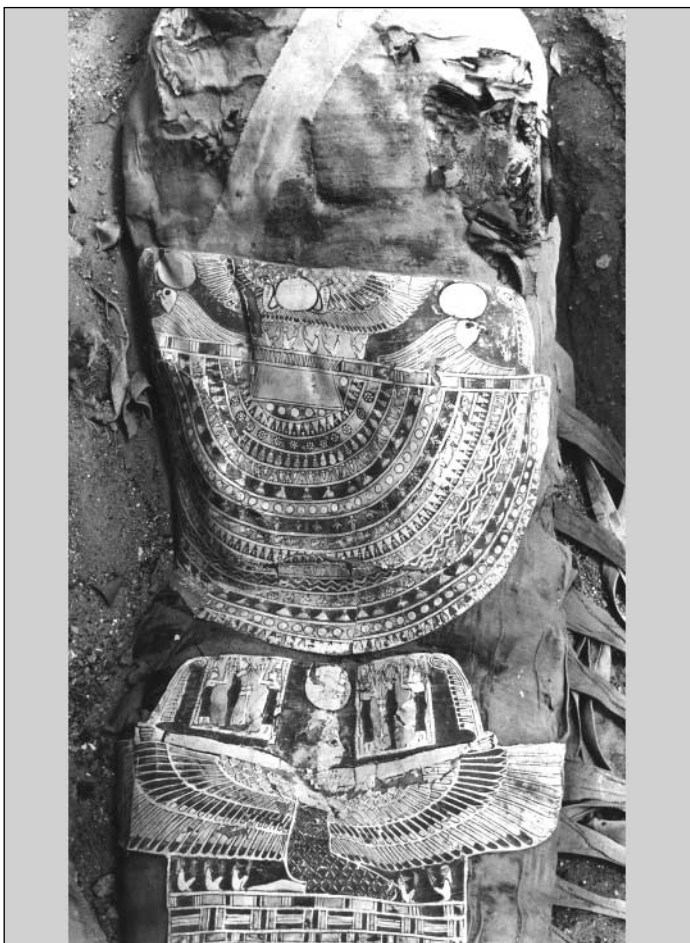


Fig. 12. Mummy (burial no. 406): a. Gesso panels attached to the mummy; b. Fragment of painted cartonnage
(Photo M. Jawornicki)

of the mummy: a broad collar with falcon head painted at each end of the collar, and a rectangular panel on the chest, both fixed to the bandages [*Fig. 12 a, b*]. The mummy was bound with straps made of the same white-brownish linen that was used for making both the bandages and the simple circular "wreath" found below the mum-

my's head. All painted elements were detached by our team and underwent conservation, after which they were fixed on a convex support modeled out of small rice-filled bags. The mummy itself was unwrapped and subjected to anthropological examination, after which the bones were re-buried in one of the shafts.