

Fig. 1 Kite aerial photography of the New Kingdom temple AS 70 with uncovered walls of the Old Kingdom mud brick tomb complex AS 103 (photo V. Brůna)

## New Egyptian tomb type found at Abusir South? Report on the excavations of mud brick complex AS 103<sup>1</sup>

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In the autumn season of 2012, a New Kingdom temple (AS 70–73) was discovered in the Abusir necropolis (Varadzin – Bárta 2016), situated to the north-west of the so-called Bonnet's cemetery (see Bonnet 1928; Blaschka 2011) and close to the modern village of Abusir (Bárta *et al.* 2014: 34–37, figs. 15–16). The work on the temple continued in 2017 (Bárta *et al.* 2018). The excavations brought to light a structure built from mud bricks and limestone, accessible via a mud brick pylon from the south-east. Furthermore, it became apparent already in the first season that the temple had been built upon earlier mud brick structures, most probably dated to the Old Kingdom (fig. 1). These were excavated in November 2017, and the works uncovered an unexpected architectural disposition of traditional elements of the tomb superstructure and substructure.<sup>2</sup> Having found only a limited number of contemporary parallels so far (see below), we propose the designation “hollow tomb with a shaft below a niche” for this tomb (sub)type. Despite the fact that the processing of the finds is still pending (with the exception of the pottery and human remains), we offer the present archaeological report, in hope of opening discussion on the uncovered structures.

Four mud brick tombs (all designated as AS 103) were explored in a three-week time (from 7<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2017). Their position is fairly inconspicuous compared

to larger, mostly stone mastabas of higher echelons of the then society built on higher hills to the south-west of AS 103. The whole complex is oriented on the north-west

to south-east axis. This was presumably due to local topography – the presence of the Lake of Abusir or a canal. The four excavated tombs were just a section of much larger environs, given that other mud brick structures continue in all directions. Further excavations around AS 103 could reveal a broader ancient landscape context of the structures.

### Architecture and archaeology

The complex of four corridor chapels, *i.e.* tombs (AS 103), extends on an excavated area of 15.0 × 12.7 m (figs. 2, 3, tab. 1 and fig. 13 in colour plates). The chapels were built

of mud bricks, either black (with a higher concentration of Nile or lake mud) or light yellow (with more desert marl clay and sand). The structures were filled with yellow sand, partially possibly during the New Kingdom era, but the pottery from the sandy layers is predominantly of Old Kingdom dating. Only a few centimetres above the floor level, the sand was brown and also wet. Western walls of all chapels were decorated with niches (fig. 4) and the mud brick walls were covered with a mud plaster, sometimes with an addition of small fragments of animal bones, flint, ceramics, mollusc shells, *etc.* Traces of white-wash were seldom preserved on the plaster. The position of the shafts was not clear at first, as they were not apparent on top of

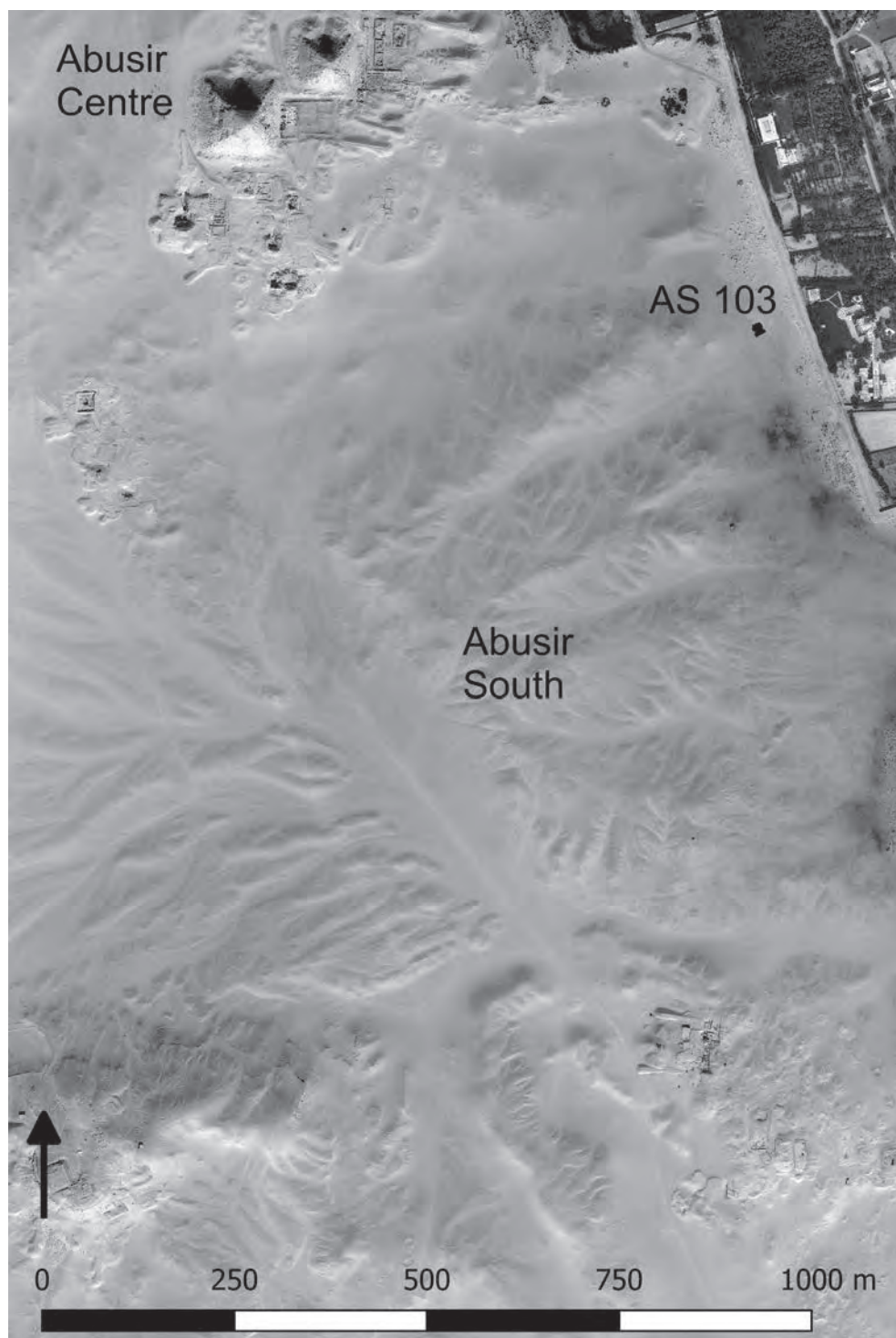


Fig. 2 Location of AS 103 complex in Abusir (background V. Brůna, updated by M. Odler)



Corridor chapel/tomb of AS 103 complex	Ground plan (m)	Max. preserved height (m)	Dating	Brick types and sizes
4	8.7 × 5.4	1.60	Third Dynasty	Black bricks: 24–20 × 12–10 × 10 cm
3	4.3 × 4.4	1.68	Third Dynasty	Black bricks: 24–20 × 10 × 10 cm, sand bricks: 30 × 12 × 10 cm (threshold)
2	14.00 × 5.45	1.65	Third Dynasty	Sand bricks: 22 × 10 × 7 cm
1	14.75 × 3.35	1.45	Fifth Dynasty, early	Brown sand bricks: 20 × 10 × 10 cm

Tab. 1 Basic measurements of tomb complex AS 103

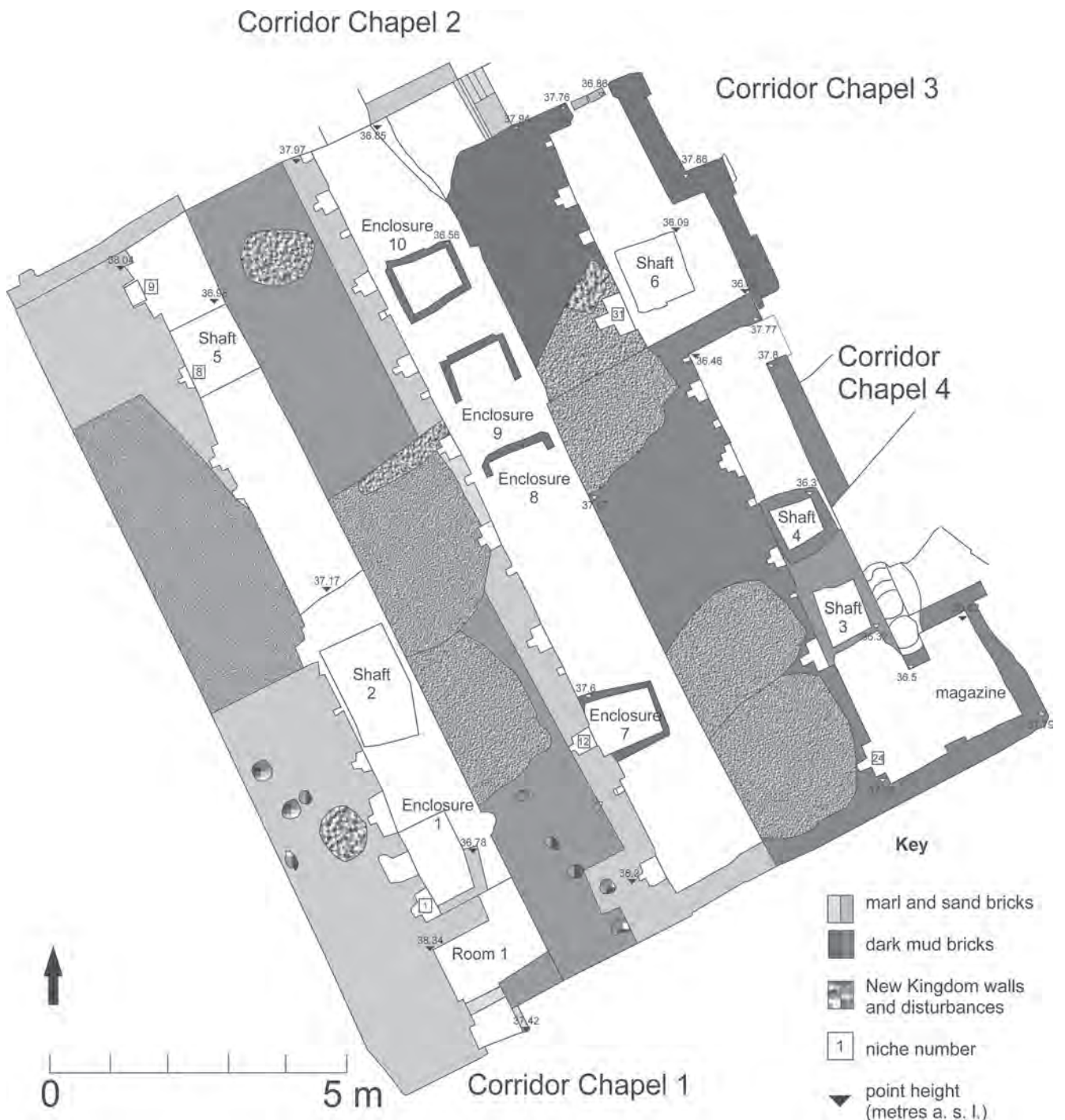


Fig. 3 General plan of the excavated mud brick structures AS 103 (drawing M. Odler, M. Peterková Hloučová and measurements V. Brůna)



Fig. 4 General view of AS 103 complex from the north-east (photo M. Odler)

the walls west of the niches. Only after a part of the floor in Corridor Chapel 4 collapsed during the uncovering, the shaft openings were found out east of the niches, and later also in other chapels.

The complex was excavated from west to east, and the chapels were numbered in this direction. However, the local chronology is exactly reverse: Corridor Chapel 4

in the south-east of the complex (figs. 5a, b) is the earliest. A narrow entrance from the north-east led to a long chapel with Niches 24 to 30B, two limestone offering basins (13/AS103/2017 and 14/AS103/2017) and Shafts 3 and 4. At the end, the chapel was widened by a room possibly identifiable as a magazine (2.05 × 0.98 m; fig. 3). Three complete beer jars were found there. Shaft



Fig. 5a Corridor Chapel 4 with offering basins, view from the south-east (photo M. Odler)



4 (opening: 0.72 × 0.72 m) ended after a half metre, whereas Shaft 3 (opening: 0.95 × 0.70 m) reached a depth of 3.10 m. At the bottom of this shaft, a burial niche was cut in its western wall. The shaft must have been robbed, most probably sometime between the Old Kingdom and New Kingdom temple construction. Disturbed and fragmentary human bones (15/AS103/2017) from the original burial mixed with ceramics were collected predominantly in the niche.

Corridor Chapel 4 was significantly damaged in later times, as its western wall was partially levelled down by bases of globular features at the time of the construction

of the New Kingdom temple (see fig. 13 in colour plates). Moreover, two later burials were excavated in Corridor Chapel 4. Only one was uncovered almost undisturbed in a crouched position on its right side, buried to the east of Niche 25 (12/AS103/2017). A dislocated skull was present in the vicinity of the knees. The second burial was uncovered at the north-western corner of the magazine, but only fragments of human bones were collected (10/AS103/2017).

From the north-west, the existing northern wall of the first tomb was used by Corridor Chapel 3, with an entrance also from the north-west and Niches 31 to 34



Fig. 5b Corridor Chapel 4 with Shafts 3 and 4 (photo M. Peterková Hloučová)

(fig. 6). The largest Shaft 6 of the complex (opening:  $1.10 \times 1.04$  m) was situated in front of the largest Niche 31. However, underground water reached the depth of 3.45 m, and it was impossible to excavate the rest. Moreover, the burial niche must have been inevitably damaged by groundwater. It is worth mentioning that the chapel's walls were partially preserved up to their original height (ca. 1.68 m) and mud plaster with traces of white-wash was also preserved in some places on the inner walls of the chapel. Only Niche 31 was damaged by a globular base of a New Kingdom feature. The chapel contained a large amount of pottery (altogether

23 baskets, excluding eleven complete beer jars, see below).<sup>3</sup>

The next structure, Corridor Chapel 2, made use of existing tombs from the west and north. Also in this case, the western inner wall was decorated with niches, numbered 10 to 23B, with the most complex one situated at the south-eastern end of the chapel. Four rectangular features were identified east of the niches. Although they were first assumed to be shaft openings, the excavations proved that they do not continue deeper, ending in the sand after a single course of bricks (fig. 7). Therefore, these enclosures more probably served as a kind of



**Fig. 6** Corridor Chapels 3 and 4,  
view from the north-west  
(photo M. Odler)



offering basins for presenting offerings in ceramic vessels. In the largest of them, Enclosure 7 (1.12 × 0.92 m), mud plaster was documented on one side and fragments of pottery (beer jar rims and bases, and a fragment of carinated bowl) were found inside Niche 12 (figs. 8a–d).

The last structure in the local architectural chronology was Corridor Chapel 1 (fig. 9) with an entrance from the south-east. Passing through an anteroom (Room 1), a long corridor chapel followed, divided by a step approximately in its middle. The inner western wall had niches, numbered 1 to 9, and a basin built of mud brick

and plaster with a one complete beer jar and a fragment of another (Enclosure 1, figs. 10a, b). The northern part of the chapel contained thirteen complete beer jars. Moreover, two offering basins were found with a shaft opening under each of them. The smaller basin (3/AS103/2017) was positioned in the opening of Shaft 2 (opening 1.95 × 1.10 m). The shaft ended at a depth of 2.3 m without any traces of a burial. Another basin (7/AS103/2017) was located in front of Niche 8 and in the opening of Shaft 5 (1.22 × 1.14 m). In this case, the groundwater level was reached at a depth of 3.4 m, preventing further excavation.



Fig. 7 Corridor Chapel 2 from the north-west, with mud brick enclosures (photo M. Odler)



Fig. 8a Ceramic fragments (ceramic context 10.AS103.2017) preserved in Niche 12 in Corridor Chapel 2 (photo M. Peterková Hloučová)

An interesting architectural detail was uncovered in Niche 9 of Corridor Chapel 1 (fig. 11): a casing of unspecified wood (6/AS103/2017).<sup>4</sup> It is worth mentioning that Niche 9 is one of the largest niches in the complex.

The timber was preserved in the lower part of this compound niche, 16–50 cm above the floor level, with a thickness of 3–3.5 cm, filling the whole width of the niche (1.05 m). A closer examination showed that the casing might have reached even higher: there is a tiny wooden piece preserved in the northern corner of the central recess, and the plaster for attaching the timber can be observed above it. Moreover, the wood was attached to the mud brick wall using mortar. At the moment of its uncovering, the wood was very fragile and wet. It was possible to document it *in situ* but without any finer details. Remains of red colour were observed on several fragments, possibly indicating that the wood was painted red. It can be speculated that it might have imitated a stone (red granite, for instance).

### Finds

The AS 103 structures were not rich in finds. As usual, the largest amount was represented by pottery (complete or almost complete vessels and sherds; see below). Moreover, several ecofacts and artefacts were collected as well. The former were represented by animal bones, molluscs, charcoal and fragments of unworked wood. Besides raw timber and the wooden casing of Niche 9 (see above), fragments of worked wood (1/AS103/2017\_a–c), perhaps remains of a post, were found in the fill of Room 1 of Corridor Chapel 1. Interestingly enough, only two tubular faience beads (2/AS103/2017, 5/AS103/2017) were collected in the whole area of the AS 103 structures, in the fill of Corridor Chapel 1. Finally, a few stone objects were found: four limestone offering basins (see below) and a stone artefact made of a granular hard stone (quartzite?), possibly representing the lower part of a grinder (4/AS103/2017) (24 × 14 cm). The latter was uncovered in a corner of Room 1 near the entrance to Corridor Chapel 1.



Fig. 8b Section through mud brick Enclosure 7 in Corridor Chapel 2, view from the south-east (photo M. Odler)





Fig. 8c Niche 12 with mud brick Enclosure 7 in Corridor Chapel 2, view from the north (photo M. Peterková Hloučová)



Fig. 8d Niche 12 with mud brick Enclosure 7 with visible mud plaster below the niche in Corridor Chapel 2, view from the north-east (photo M. Odler)

### Pottery

Ceramic finds from the AS 103 tomb complex were documented during the spring season of 2018, which is why only a preliminary analysis shall be offered here. Although the tombs are relatively small, the number of fragments as well as fully preserved vessels was comparatively high.

Three main chronological timeframes could be distinguished during the analysis: a Third Dynasty strata (mostly linked to burial activity, *i.e.* pottery from the burial shafts and, in some cases, the lowermost layers in the chapels), and later ritual activity from the early to middle/late Fifth Dynasty in the fills of the chapels. The precise

ceramic sequence will be studied further and offered in a separate paper.

There were only five shafts in the whole area; three of them seem to have been built during the Third Dynasty period. The ceramic fragments from them comprise many typical early Old Kingdom wares and types. The most notable were the so-called collared beer jars (Abusir type J-1h), characterized by an outer rib under the rim, an articulated shoulder and a tall body. In most cases, they were broken to pieces, but the number of the rims roughly corresponded to the number of bases and body sherds. Beer jars of this type had a very specific surface treatment, as they were almost always intentionally covered with



**Fig. 9 Corridor Chapel 1  
from south-east  
(photo M. Peterková Hloučová)**





Fig. 10a Beer jar fragments in front of Niche 1 in Corridor Chapel 1 (ceramic context 6.AS103.2017) (photo M. Odler)



Fig. 10b Niche 1 and Enclosure 1 in Corridor Chapel 1 (photo M. Odler)



Fig. 11 Niche 9 of Corridor Chapel 1 with wooden casing, the opening of Shaft 5 and Niche 8 to the left (photo M. Peterková Hloučová)

a distinct layer of well-smoothed fine Nile mud. Thanks to this feature, they are easily recognisable even in simple body sherds. They were attested in all the shafts of Corridor Chapels 3 and 4, *i.e.* Shafts 3, 4 and 6 (see fig. 12). This particular ceramic type is documented from the Second Dynasty (*e.g.* at Elephantine, Seidlmayer 1996: Abb. 4, upper right corner; Raue 1999: Abb. 36.7) up to the early Fourth Dynasty (*e.g.* Alexanian 1999: 132–134, Abb. 54, M28–39; *etc.*), but the Third Dynasty saw its most widespread use and occurrence. They are attested in numerous contexts of the Memphite region, such as the Step Pyramid of Netjerykhet (Firth – Quibell 1935: pls. XXV and CII, nos. 18 and 20) and its vicinity (Rzeuska 2000: fig. 1, SQ00-822; Rzeuska 2001: fig. 1, K.01-58/1, K.01-42/1, K.01-54/6 and K.01-28/1). At Abusir, they represent one of the most characteristic early Old Kingdom types and were attested in all Third Dynasty structures, including the tombs of Ity (AS 10; Kytarová 2009: 72) and Hetepi (AS 20; Arias Kytarová 2010: Fig. 2.5.1), the anonymous tomb AS 54 (Arias Kytarová – Jirásková 2015: fig. 7) and the recently uncovered large wooden boat AS 80, where the chronological attribution has been recently confirmed by C14 analysis (Bárta *et al.*, *in preparation*).

Another type exclusive to the early Old Kingdom is that of carinated bowls (inaccurately referred to as Meidum bowls) with a pronounced shoulder and the largest diameter at the shoulder.<sup>5</sup> Numerous examples were found in all early shafts, usually with around 40% of their diameter preserved, plus one bowl that has been reconstructed to its full shape (fig. 13, fig. 14 in colour plates). These early carinated bowls fall into several diverse forms, the main difference being in the shape of the shoulder – rounded (B-1b) or sharply angular (B-1a). Common features include the general height versus depth ratio (all of them being rather narrow and deep) and, most importantly, the position of the maximum diameter at the shoulder. Parallels for the bowls with sharply angular shoulders include examples from Elephantine (Raue 1999: 38.1 and 39.1) and Elkab (*e.g.* Hendrickx – Eyckerman 2009: Fig. 16). Bowls of this particular type with a rounded shoulder are much less common.

These were complemented by other instances of early pottery, such as shallow bowls with an inner ledge (type B-10a, see Arias 2017: 247; fig. 15 in colour plates) and a new type of beer jar, exhibiting a tall wide neck and a clearly articulated shoulder (type J-1k, see fig. 12). It is this particular type that points to the Third Dynasty rather than the early Fourth Dynasty, as parallels are known only from the earlier period, being attested in contexts from the late Second until the late Third Dynasty.<sup>6</sup>

A preliminary sequence of the shafts can be established as follows. The combination of the oldest pottery was found in Shafts 3, 4 (Corridor Chapel 4) and 6 (Corridor Chapel 3); presumably, they were built/used during the Third Dynasty or maybe even slightly earlier (see above). Of these, Shaft 3 was probably the oldest, as it contained collared beer jars with very shallow modelling, bowls with a short inner ledge and very deep carinated bowls (see fig. 13). While some of the other shafts contained some

early fragments (such as Shaft 2 in Corridor Chapel 1, with two small pieces of a collared beer jar and one fragment of a bowl with an inner ledge), the presence of a higher percentage of later pottery (specifically wider carinated bowls with rounded shoulders as well as very large ovoid storage jars, see *e.g.* Arias 2017: 238–239) points to the fact that they were used in the Fifth Dynasty. Similarly, the material from Shaft 5 in Corridor Chapel 1 included a few examples of bowls with an inner ledge, but with a prevalence of small ovoid beer jars with a triangular rim or a low neck, characteristic of the early Fifth Dynasty, complemented by wider and shallower carinated bowls (see fig. 13).

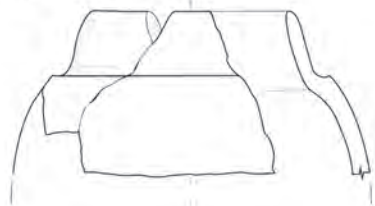
All the corridor chapels were very intriguing, as their upper to middle layers often contained remnants of a cultic deposition, *i.e.* fully preserved beer jars laid in or around the individual niches (see figs. 8a and 10a). Such practice could be observed especially in several niches of Corridor Chapel 1 and Niche 31 in Corridor Chapel 3. Careful archaeological documentation uncovered at least two, already mentioned main strata in the fill of the chapels – the upper one, with mostly yellow sand and the lower one, containing darker sand with brick fragments. Notably, while the ceramics from the shafts included several different classes (jars, bowls, stands, bread forms), the pottery from the chapels was almost completely limited to beer jars, only accompanied by a few bowl types. This fact is in accordance with the use of beer jars as the main offering vessel during regular cultic activity in front of the niches. Without any exception, all the fully preserved beer jars were filled with Nile mud (in many cases well-articulated), and the amount of other mud pieces supports the theory that all these vessels were originally filled and (very likely) sealed with mud stoppers.

The following chronological sequence could be observed in the corridor chapels. Early Old Kingdom ceramic fragments were uncovered in the lowermost layers of Corridor Chapel 4 above the shafts, in the fill of Corridor Chapel 3, as well as in a trench and several other contexts in Corridor Chapel 2. They included particularly many examples of bowls with an inner ledge that correspond to the dating of the shafts uncovered in these chapels, attributed to the Third Dynasty. The trench in Corridor Chapel 2 contained exclusively early Old Kingdom pottery, apart from bowls with a short inner ledge (B-10) also collared beer jars (J-1h) and beer jars with an articulated shoulder (J-1k, see fig. 12). These types were uncovered also in Niches 10, 12, in Enclosure 7 in front of Niche 12 and in the lower levels in the northern part of Corridor Chapel 2; it is therefore possible that this chapel was built shortly after Corridor Chapel 3.

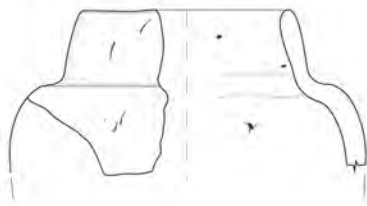
In all the corridor chapels, there was also a distinct presence of early Fifth Dynasty beer jars of types J-1a and J-1b (see Arias 2017: 226–227). These are markedly smaller than their later counterparts, with a height often reaching only around 25–26 cm and the smallest examples having only 23.5 cm (fill of Corridor Chapel 3) and 24 cm (found in Room 1 of Corridor Chapel 1; see fig. 12). They have an ovoid body with a partly pointed



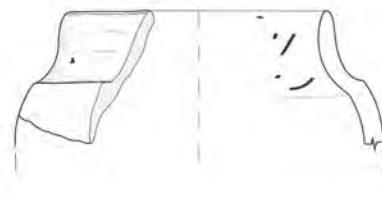
J - 1k 17-34.AS103.2017



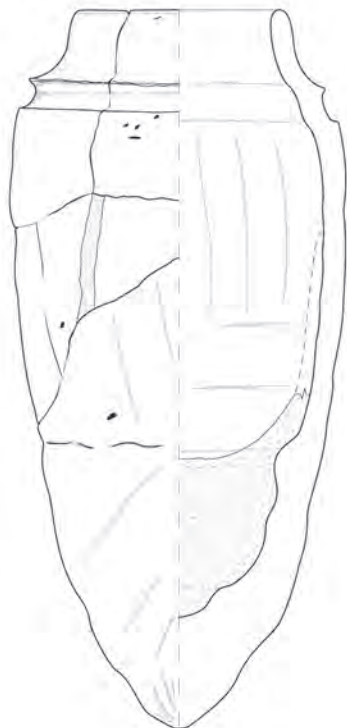
23-2.AS103.2017



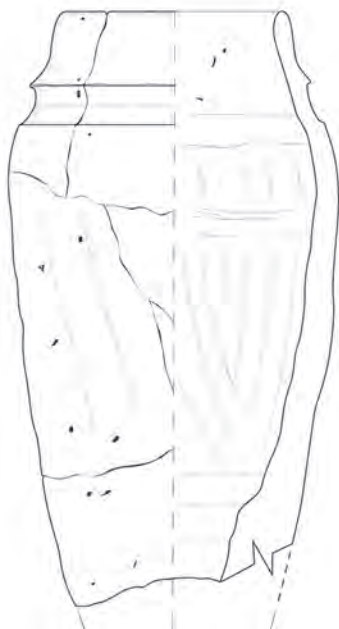
24-12.AS103.2017



J - 1h 17-1.AS103.2017



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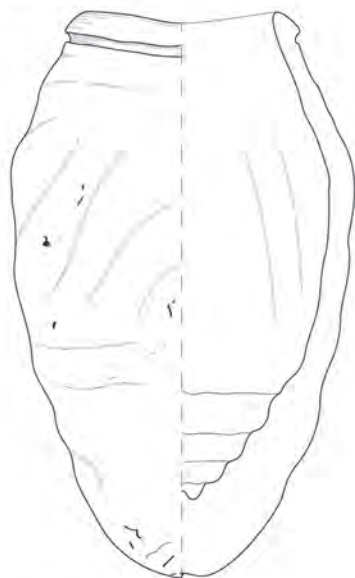


23-1.AS103.2017

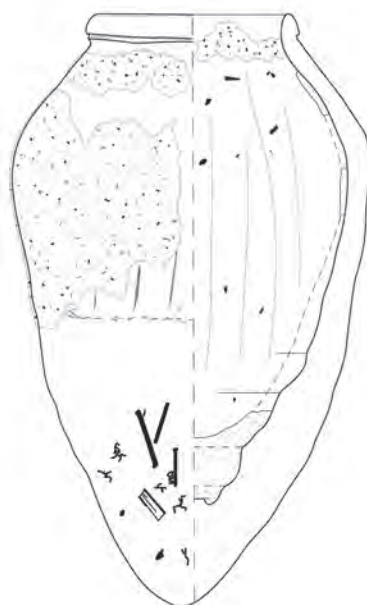


0 5 10 cm

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12-7.AS103.2017



22-4.AS103.2017

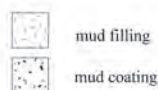
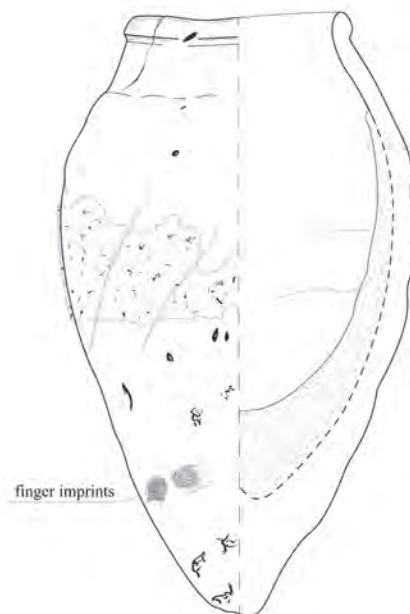


Fig. 12 Selection of the chronologically most relevant beer jars types from AS 103 complex. From the top: beer jars with a tall neck and an articulated shoulder (J-1k), collared beer jars (J-1h), ovoid beer jars with either a contracted aperture (J-1a) or a low neck (J-1b) (drawing K. Arias Kytarová, L. Vařeková)

base and either a modelled (most commonly triangular) rim, or a low neck (e.g. Bárta 2001: fig. LXXIIIa). It is very likely that during this period, Chapels 2, 3 and 4 were cleaned of possible older material, a new corridor chapel (no. 1) was built west of the whole complex to include new shafts, and burials and a new ritual activity was initiated at the niches of all the chapels. As an example, 11 fully preserved Fifth Dynasty beer jars, in many cases with remains of intact or broken mud filling, were found in Niche 31 or its vicinity.

According to the ceramic evidence from the upper layers of Corridor Chapels 2, 1 and partially also 3, the ritual activity very likely continued until the later Fifth Dynasty. The beer jars of this period were generally not only taller but also more massive (with a height of up to 34 cm and a maximum diameter of up to 16 cm, see fig. 12), corresponding to the usual second half of the Fifth Dynasty production of beer jars known from Abusir South tombs (see e.g. Arias Kytarová 2014: Fig. 7.11, 3.AS37.2007–15.AS37.2007; Arias 2017: Fig. 5.1).

### Offering basins

The most conspicuous finds from these excavations are four limestone offering basins. Two of them were uncovered in Corridor Chapel 1 and two in Corridor Chapel 4. There were no basins in Corridor Chapels 2 and 3, but mud brick enclosures might have had a similar function in Corridor Chapels 1 (Enclosure 1) and 2 (Enclosures 7–10).

The first offering basin (3/AS103/2017; fig. 14) (22.3 × 12.0 × 7.9 cm) was located in Corridor Chapel 1, between Niches 3 and 4. It was a trapezoidal artefact with a trapezoidal depression and an irregular sloping profile; even its bottom was not flat. Moreover, the edges were fairly eroded. Several stains of black material were observed in the depression.

Another limestone offering basin (7/AS103/2017; fig. 15a) (46.1 × 33.6 × 16.3 cm) was uncovered in front of Niche 8 in Corridor Chapel 1, indicating Shaft 5 (see above). It is the largest and the only inscribed artefact from the AS 103 complex. Its shape is fairly rectangular with a regular depression and inclining sides. On its lower edge

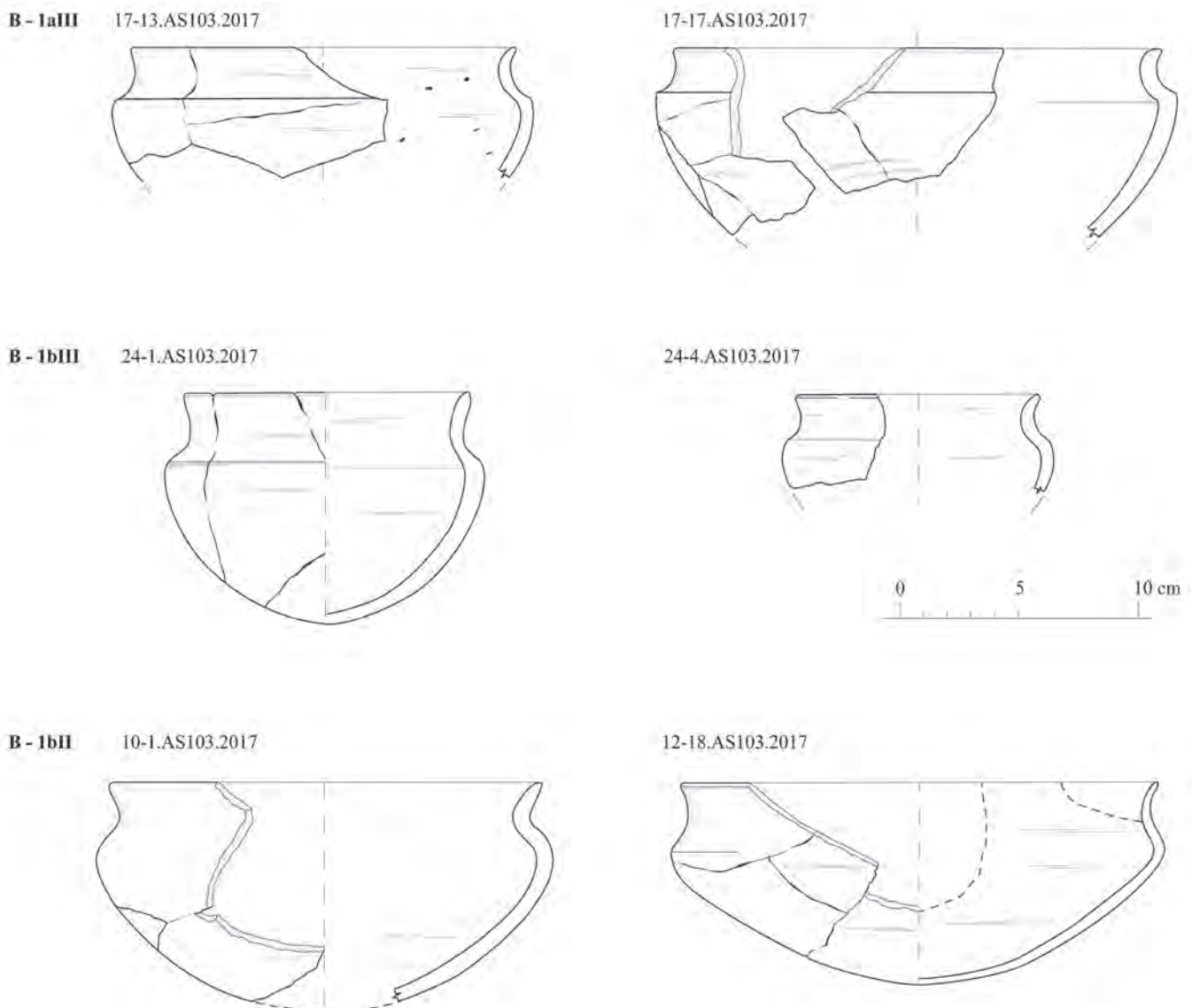


Fig. 13 Examples of carinated bowls from AS 103 complex, including Third Dynasty bowls with a rounded shoulder (B-1bIII) or angular shoulder (B-1aIII) and Fifth Dynasty examples with rounded shoulders (B-1bII) (drawing K. Arias Kytarová, L. Vařeková)





Fig. 14 Irregular limestone offering basin (3/AS103/2017) found in Corridor Chapel 1 (photo P. Košárek)



Fig. 15a Limestone offering basin (7/AS103/2017) with preserved female name Neferetiues *in situ* (photo M. Peterková Hloučová)

a female anthroponym *Nfr.t-jw=s*:  $\parallel$   $\Delta$   $\text{☉}$   $\text{☿}$  was incised twice: once with more elaborate hieroglyphic signs, and once the name was just scratched (fig. 15b). It has been translated as “The Good One Comes” (“Die Gute kommt”, Scheele-Schweitzer 2014: 490 [2038]).

The name was previously attested only in two Old Kingdom sources (Scheele-Schweitzer 2014: 490 [2038]); the Abusir excavations thus add a third attestation. The first mention is on one of the statues found in Ankhmare’s tomb at Giza (G 8460). It is a headless double statue with a female figure sitting to the right of her spouse, dated to the Fourth Dynasty. Below the female figure, on the right side of the seat, there is an inscription presenting the titles and the name of the female figure: *rh.t nswt hm.t-ntr Hw.t-Hr Nfr.t-jw=s* (Hassan 1950: 40 and Pl. XIX).

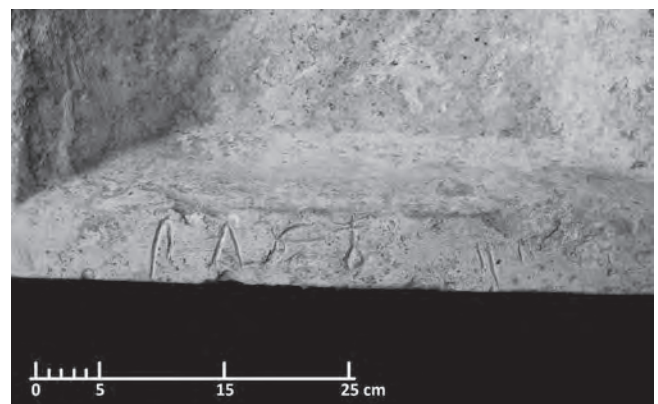


Fig. 15b Detail of the name Neferetiues written twice on the edge of the limestone offering basin (7/AS103/2017) (photo M. Peterková Hloučová)

The appellation was recorded in a slightly different manner than in the Abusir example. Selim Hassan transcribed it with a sign for a stela without a pedestal (a variant of hieroglyph O26 in Gardiner's Sign-list; Gardiner 1927: 495) instead of two striding legs (hieroglyph D54 in Gardiner's Sign-list; Gardiner 1927: 457). This sign is unclear in the published photography, however, as several secondary scratches appear, resembling strokes that certainly rule out the stela hieroglyph. It might be the D54 sign though.

Secondly, the name Neferetiuies can be found on a false door of a certain Deduhekenu, presently in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek of Copenhagen (catalogue no. 1930 A 675; Jørgensen 1996: 86–87). The door is dated to the Sixth Dynasty, but its provenance remains unknown. A female figure with the name Neferetiuies is depicted in the central recess of the false door together with a man. No titles are attested for her, like in the case of Neferetiuies from Abusir. Thus, we know nothing about her social status. It can only be supposed that the basin served for offerings for a woman of that name who could have been buried in Shaft 5 of AS 103. This hypothesis cannot be confirmed, however, since the bottom of the shaft was inaccessible due to groundwater (see above).

As mentioned above, two other limestone offering basins were located in Corridor Chapel 4. The first (13/AS103/2017) with rounded corners and an irregular surface (34.0 × 24.5 × 14.5 cm) was uncovered in front of Niche 29 (fig. 16). It is fairly remarkable that this object was not parallel with the wall (as in the other three cases) but oriented closer to the north-south direction. This position may have been intentional, given the fact that no traces of secondary disturbance were found in the chapel on the floor level. The other offering basin (14/AS103/2017), trapezoidal with an oval depression (20.0 × 17.0 × 5.4 cm), was discovered near Niche 27 (fig. 17).

It has to be noticed that the quality of the basins' craftsmanship is not very high. They represent simpler types and can be classified as "Type B 1", basins with a regular depression in the typology of Regina Hölzl (2002: 13–14, Tab. 2). Only the basin of Neferetiuies is more or less symmetrical, while the others are irregular with slightly rounded corners on their edges and in their depressions. Cultic activities connected to the basins can be expected. However, no macroremains were found in them, which may point to the fact that the offerings were brought in pottery vessels. The nature of the black stains in basin 3/AS103/2017 will hopefully be clarified by future analyses.

### Human remains

Although the AS 103 tombs were used as burial structures, only a few burials have been excavated. This was caused by two facts. Firstly, not many burial apartments were uncovered, and secondly, the groundwater level was reached in two shafts at a depth of ca. 3.5 m, preventing further research. Human remains were found only in Shaft 3 of Corridor Chapel 4 (15/AS103/2017). They belong to the only burial dated back to the Old



Fig. 16 Limestone offering basin (13/AS103/2017) in front of Niche 29 in Corridor Chapel 4 (photo M. Odler)

Kingdom within the tomb complex AS 103. The skeleton was unfortunately very fragmented and damaged by groundwater. Nevertheless, the most important parts of the left hip bone were preserved, making it possible to estimate the age-at-death and sex on the basis of morphological features on the hip bone. The individual buried in Shaft 3 was very probably a male (Ferembach *et al.* 1980; Brůžek 2002), which was confirmed also by several morphological features on the skull (Ferembach *et al.* 1980). He probably died at a young age between 25 and 30 years (McKern – Stewart 1957; Lovejoy *et al.* 1985; Schmidt 2005). No signs of pathological or degenerative changes were observed on the presented bones, except for a strong presence of dental calculus on the teeth. The most characteristic feature of the deceased was an extreme robustness of the bones, supported especially by the width of the long bones as well as the femoral head dimension, which makes this individual exceptional within Old Kingdom Abusir population studied so far. Regrettably, it was impossible to estimate the living stature due to the fragmentation of the long bones. From the taphonomic point of view, it is worth mentioning that the youth of the individual and extreme robustness of his bones could be the reason why only this skeleton has overcome the environmental conditions and survived till these days.



## Interpretation and parallels

Corridor Chapels 1, 3 and 4 are variations on the same structure type: the tomb architecture includes chapels with niches and an occasional presence of offering basins. A funerary cult, of which ceramics, animal bones and charcoal have remained, was performed in these chapels. Concerning the shafts, they were not located to the west of the niches, as was usual in tomb architecture, but to the east, *i.e.* in front of them. It seems that all three tombs were intended to be used only for a single burial, even though differences in the complexity of the architecture can be observed.

Corridor Chapel 2 is problematic in this regard, as the four supposed shaft openings ended after a single bricks course and were probably used as offering basins. No other shaft has been identified in this structure. A shaft was possibly located under the preserved mud brick wall of the New Kingdom temple, but we did not want to destroy the preserved later masonry. A less probable interpretation is that Corridor Chapel 2 was part of Corridor Chapel 1, forming one larger structure.

The corridor chapels of AS 103 are close to the type of hollow mastabas, as defined by Nicole Alexanian (2016: 414–415, Abb. 163–166), with the entrance to substructure of the tomb located inside a hollow mastaba building. Nevertheless, as the niches and chapels are a different part of these tombs, AS 103 can be defined as a separate category. A type of tomb combining the substructure and the superstructure in one compact form enabled a “brief” construction of both the place for the burial deposition and the place for the funerary cult. The proposed name for such structure is “hollow tomb with a shaft below a niche”. A possible reason for this development might have been the local spatial distribution – the space for the construction of a tomb might have been insufficient. Was it influenced by the existence of an important structure east

of these tombs? When compared to the area of the tombs, the massive western walls (with the possible exception of Corridor Chapel 2) probably did not involve shaft mouths west of the niches. Thus, this tomb complex implies a so far unidentified local tradition of tomb construction.

The following text discusses the most conspicuous architectural feature – the location of a shaft below a niche – and its analogues, predominantly at Memphite cemeteries. The positioning of shafts in front of niches is not very usual. In Abusir, a comparable situation is known from Tomb AS 77, where two shafts were found in front of two niches, but all other shafts were in the expected place – west of the niches and the chapel (Dulíková *et al.* 2016: 33, fig. 2; Dulíková *et al.* 2017: fig. 2). A shaft east of a niche was also published from the tomb of Shedu, with a very unusual burial of a dog. All other shafts with human burials were located in the main mass of the mud brick structure west of the niches (Tomb AS 12, Bárta 2001: 31–32, Fig. 2.2). Both these occurrences indicate an *ad hoc* solution for a location of an additional shaft, whereas the situation in AS 103 can be regarded as an intentional architectural plan from the beginning of construction.

Similar structures have recently been published from Helwan, Tomb 4/88, datable most probably to Naqada IIID, *i.e.* the Second Dynasty (Köhler 2017: 33–34, 307–323, Fig. 95). A rectangular mud brick tomb contained the entrance to a burial chamber inside the superstructure. Its size (8.15 × 4.50 m) is comparable to that of the smaller Chapels 3 and 4 in AS 103, but the contemporary height is significantly lower, only *ca.* 0.30 m. Its immediate neighbour to the east, Tomb 4/94 might have had a very similar disposition but was only partially preserved due to erosion. It is datable to Naqada IIID3 (Köhler 2017: 36–37, 363–380, Fig. 123). As the superstructure was largely destroyed by erosion, it is impossible to study the layout of the niches in both cases.



Fig. 17 Limestone offering basin (14/AS103/2017) in front of Niche 27 in Corridor Chapel 4 (photo M. Odler)

Elsewhere, a similar disposition can be found at the cemetery of the Teti pyramid at Saqqara, where five shafts were situated east of the niches of Shepesuptah's mud brick tomb, together with a funerary cult place consisting of a mud brick platform and a limestone slab, datable to the Fifth or Sixth Dynasty (Krekeler 1991: 215, Abb. 3). In an earlier report from this excavation, the niches were dated to the early Old Kingdom (Abd el-Raziq – Krekeler 1987). Furthermore, also at Saqqara, a complex of small mud brick tombs was identified south of the causeway of the Unas pyramid, mostly with shafts in the mastabas. However, some of the tombs are relatively small, and it can be supposed that the shafts were located in front of the niches, e.g. in the cases of Mastabas M6, M8, M19 and M20. The architecture of the tombs has been dated to the Third or Fourth Dynasties by the excavator; the pottery corroborates the dating, being analogous to the ceramic finds from AS 103 (Ghaly 1994). Michel Baud (2007: 216–217) dated both above-mentioned areas at Saqqara to the late Third Dynasty.

A similar assumption can be made in the case of small tombs of the so-called Wadi Cemetery at Giza (Manuelian 2009: Fig. 3). Offering basins were found in front of several small tombs, but it seems that not all of the main bodies of masonry could encompass also shafts. They might have been dug out below the basins and not excavated, as Reisner's works focused only on visible structures and did not continue below the chapel levels.

The Fourth and Fifth Dynasty tombs at Dahshur had the shafts inside the main body of masonry behind the niches (Alexanian *et al.* 2006). However, human burials were added secondarily to corridors, with niches appended above them (Alexanian *et al.* 2006: 13, Taf. 6: c–f). The shallow pits were covered with mud bricks and burials of children, which led the excavators to interpret the structures as family tombs.

Likewise, the search for parallels to other, less conspicuous architectural and archaeological elements of tombs AS 103 in the Memphite necropoleis provides only a limited number of comparable material. Hardly any parallel to the wooden casing of a niche can be found in the Egyptian architecture. Nevertheless, roofs and burial chamber casing with wood are attested in some Predynastic and Early Dynastic tombs (*cf. e.g.* Podzorski 2008; Radwan 1995: 313). A wooden encasing of a mud brick structure is known from the Early Dynastic Period (Emery 1961: 190, Fig. 111). It is also worth mentioning that decorated wooden panels were uncovered in the tomb of the Third Dynasty dignitary Hesire (see, for instance, Mariette 1885: 80–82; Quibell 1913; Reisner 1936: 270–273; el-Shahawy 2005: 63–67), allowing a speculation that the wood from AS 103 might represent the remains of a simple false door.

A mud brick structure used as an offering basin was identified in the small courtyard of the so-called complex of Djedkare's family cemetery at Abusir (Verner – Callender 2002: 83–84, Ff4). In this case, however, three bread forms were embedded into the structure, while pottery preserved in AS 103 was only fragmentary and freely deposited in the basins. A rather peculiar position of basin 13/AS103/2017 in Corridor Chapel 4, not aligning with the

wall, finds its parallel at Dahshur, with a similarly skewed basin of a lady, king's acquaintance Hy (Alexanian *et al.* 2006: Taf. 5a). Two mud bricks used as a threshold in the entrance to Corridor Chapel 3 can be likened to a similar entrance in Mastaba DAM 8/1 at Dahshur (Alexanian *et al.* 2006: Taf. 4d).

## Dating

Most of tomb parallels to the AS 103 complex can be dated to the latest part of the Early Dynastic Period and the earlier parts of the Old Kingdom. Finer dating of some comparable structures has not been possible due to the selective representation of pottery (making more precise dating of e.g. Wadi Cemetery at Giza or tombs at the Teti pyramid cemetery difficult). With the help of ceramic analysis, we can reconstruct the history of AS 103 in greater detail.

It becomes apparent that Corridor Chapels 4, 3 and 2 were built successively during the course of the Third Dynasty and can be added to the corpus of simpler funerary structures from this period (Baud 2007: 213–236). The ubiquitous presence of Fifth Dynasty pottery dates the second phase of the use of the complex when Corridor Chapel 1 was added. Corridor Chapels 4, 3 and 2 were reused, but not completely. Pottery in the shafts of Chapels 4 and 3 was from the Third Dynasty, without later intrusions; and although fragmented, the sherds belonged to a limited number of vessels. It is probable that only the chapels themselves were used for the continuation of the funerary cult (the shafts were not reused), and that some upper levels might have contained refuse depositions of pottery from some neighbouring structures.

With careful observation of the local stratification and ceramic depositions, we have reached the limits of possibilities of current archaeological methods in Egypt. There was not enough charcoal, animal bones or wood discovered to provide a sufficient weight of samples for radiocarbon dating by the indirect method, the only technique available in Egypt at present. Otherwise, a local chronology could be modelled on the existing finds.

## Tombs of poor people?

The Czech concession at Abusir contains many structures on an area of ca. 2 km<sup>2</sup>. It has to be admitted that mastabas located on the hilltops have been preferred in the research programme to the excavations of tombs in the lowland, near the level of the former Lake of Abusir. Some of the latter were identified during a survey of the Lake (Čílek – Bárta *et al.* 2012) and others looted during the Egyptian revolution in 2011 (Odler – Dulíková – Juříčková 2013). Several more structures can be seen right below the ground after rain, but they have not been excavated so far (Bárta – Brůna – Křivánek 2003: Pl. 5). Therefore, the sum of comparable structures at Abusir is low.

There is something almost all the above-mentioned architectural parallels to AS 103 at the Memphite necropolis had in common (with an exception of the tombs at the Teti pyramid cemetery): they were situated on lower positions



in the local topography, and “lower middle class” tombs were built there. It can be inferred that the position in the local landscape was also functional, expressing the social status. A kind of hierarchy mirrored in the burial places can be observed. However, the AS 103 tombs were not “low” in this regard.

Even though the tombs were not built of stone or decorated except for the niches and white-washing, they cannot be interpreted as poor tombs. There remain many intermediary stages separating them from simple desert pits. Yet, if we would compare the energy expenditure necessary to build larger mud brick “non-elite” tombs from Abusir South (Bárta 2001 and 2002), the AS 103 tombs are smaller. The AS 103 complex was not built by a single person, it is a result of group work, possibly (of a few generations?) of a family. Likewise, it is evident that the tombs were planned by skilled architects. The architecture is simple, but the niches are regularly spaced along the walls and, in all cases, lead the visitor to the most important place in the tomb – the main place of the funerary cult. Other tombs continue in all directions from AS 103 in this area. East of Corridor Chapels 3 and 4 there must be at least one tomb, presumably from the Third Dynasty or even earlier. This section of the necropolis was gradually extending from the east to the west, with an attested second phase of building activities in this particular area in the Fifth Dynasty. Furthermore, the area between the tombs is clearly delineated, containing paths with mud floors and the tombs respecting each other.

## Conclusion

The excavation of the tomb complex AS 103 offered detailed information on tomb architecture in this part of the Abusir necropolis during the Third and Fifth Dynasties. Significantly, the apparent contemporary surface level of the Lake of Abusir is at least 1.5 metres above the Old Kingdom level. Moreover, groundwater in this area reached the burial niches of some tombs in later times.

Besides this, the uncovering of AS 103 brought to light new findings about people who were below the highest echelons of society but had enough means and influence to afford a mud brick tomb built by a small community (possibly a family?). They were able to organise work of practical and religious importance, reinforcing the community. The future processing of the finds will contribute to the next phase of research and enable a more detailed interpretation of the whole complex AS 103.

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> The study has been compiled within the framework of the Charles University Progress project Q11 “Complexity and resilience. Ancient Egyptian civilisation in multidisciplinary and multicultural perspective”. The anthropological part was funded by the Ministry of Culture within the framework of the institutional funding of the long-term conceptual development of the research organization National Museum (DKRVO 2018/18, 00023272).

<sup>2</sup> The members of the expedition were archaeologists and Egyptologists Martin Odler and Marie Peterková Hloučová and geoinformatician Vladimír Brůna. Anthropological material was studied by Petra Havelková and Šárka Bejdová and the

ceramic analysis was carried out by Katarína Arias Kytarová. The excavations took place under the supervision of Ministry of Antiquities Inspector Tamer Ragab Abdalla and *reis* Ahmad Masud Fahin.

<sup>3</sup> The number is fairly large in comparison with sherds from the other corridor chapels: Corridor Chapel 4: 6 baskets, 1 bag and 6 intact vessels; Corridor Chapel 2: 6 baskets and 2 bags; Corridor Chapel 1: 3 baskets, 12 bags and 15 complete vessels.

<sup>4</sup> The wooden finds have not been analysed yet.

<sup>5</sup> On the general development of carinated bowls, see e.g. Arias (2017: 237–242).

<sup>6</sup> The closest parallels to beer jar of type J-1k come from several tombs excavated in Helwan, covering a time span of their Group IID3 to Group IV, i.e. the late Second to the Third Dynasties (e.g. Köhler 2017: Fig. 22, esp. nos. 3, 4, 7, 12–16).

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### Abstract:

In the autumn season of 2017, four mud brick structures designated as AS 103 were excavated in the area of the south-eastern part of the New Kingdom temple (AS 70–73). It is a complex of four corridor chapels/tombs (in an area of 15.0 × 12.7 m), with single or composed niches in the

western inner walls. One of the niches in Corridor Chapel 1 was cased with red-painted wooden planks. Shafts were detected in front of the niches, a fairly uncommon phenomenon in Egyptian tomb architecture. The term "hollow tomb with a shaft below a niche" is being proposed for this new tomb (sub)type. A preliminary study of the pottery leads to the conclusion that the tombs were built from the east to the west, with Corridor Chapels 4, 3 and 2 built successively in the Third Dynasty and Corridor Chapel 1 in the Fifth Dynasty. Even though they were funeral structures, not many burials were excavated: the remains of a single human body have been found. The structures did not contain many finds, either. However, four white limestone offering basins were uncovered *in situ*. One of them was inscribed with the female name *Nfr.t-jw=s*. It is evident that the excavations have brought to light new insights into burial practices of non-elite people of the Old Kingdom period. In the context of Abusir South, AS 103 represents the first thoroughly excavated complex of such a type of tombs. Based on preliminary probing, similar structures are very likely located nearby, continuing in all directions.

Abusir South – Old Kingdom – mud brick tomb – corridor chapel – niches – human burial – pottery – offering basin – wooden casing

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Fig. 13 View of corridor chapels of complex AS 103 from the south-west, Corridor Chapel 1 in front (photo M. Odler)



Fig. 14 Fragmentarily preserved Meidum bowl, found in Shaft 3 in the Corridor Chapel 4 (24-1.AS103.2017) (photo P. Košárek)



Fig. 15 Plate with red-slipped rim and traces of white substance on the surface, found in Corridor Chapel 2 (13-1.AS103.2017) (photo P. Košárek)