

# The large Late Period shaft tombs at Abusir - continuity and change (a case study)<sup>1</sup>

Ladislav Bareš

## ABSTRACT

The large shaft tombs at Abusir have apparently been constructed during a rather short period of time (certainly not exceeding one generation) and, most probably, by one and the same group of architects, workmen and artists. According to the present knowledge, moreover, their owners seem to have been related to each other in some or other way. In spite of that, those structures display a remarkable number of differences in their layout, in the decoration of their burial chambers and even in such a fundamental feature as the orientation of the mummy of the deceased. While some changes in the construction details can easily be explained as an outcome of the growing experience in the building process, other differences (concerning, e.g., variations in the decoration of the burial chambers or the general orientation of the tomb) can only result from a deliberate decision of those who commissioned those monuments (including perhaps their owners as well). The paper enumerates the differences among the large shaft tombs at Abusir and tries to find their motivation.

## KEYWORDS

Abusir - Late Period - large shaft tombs - architecture - development

المقابر البثرية الضخمة من العصر المتأخر في أبوصير - الاستمرارية والتغيير (دراسة الحالة)\*  
لاديسلاف بارش

## الملخص

يبدو أن المقابر البثرية الضخمة في أبوصير قد شُيّدت خلال فترة زمنية قصيرة نوعاً ما (بالتأكيد لا تتجاوز تلك الفترة جيلاً واحداً)، ومن المرجح أيضاً أنها شُيّدت بواسطة نفس المجموعة من المهندسين والمعماريين والعمال والفنانين. وفقاً لمعرفتنا الحالية، يبدو أن أصحاب تلك المقابر قد ارتبطوا ببعضهم البعض بطريقة أو بأخرى. وعلى الرغم من ذلك، فإن تلك المباني القديمة تُظهر عدداً ملحوظاً من الاختلافات في تصميمها المعماري، وكذلك في نقوش حجرات دفنها، بل وحتى أيضاً في سمة أساسية، مثل اتجاه مومياء المتوفى صاحب المقبرة. وفي حين أن بعض التغييرات في تفاصيل البناء يمكن تفسيرها بسهولة كنتيجة لتجارب البنائين المتزايدة في عمليات تشييد المقابر، فإن الاختلافات الأخرى (فيما يتعلق، على سبيل المثال بالاختلافات الظاهرة في نقوش حجرات الدفن أو الاتجاه العام للمقبرة) يمكن أن تنتج فقط نتيجة قرار متعمد من أولئك الذين انتجوا تلك

1 An abridged version of this text was presented during the conference "Continuity, Discontinuity and Change: Adaptation Strategies of Individuals and Communities in Egypt at Times of Internal and External Transformations", held in Prague (24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup> August 2021). - The author is indebted to anonymous reviewers for a number of valuable comments.

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الأثار (ربما بناء على طلب أصحابها أيضًا). تعدد تلك الورقة البحثية الاختلافات بين المقابر البثرية الضخمة في أبو صير وتحاول إيجاد الدافع لتشييدها.

### الكلمات الدالة

أبو صير – العصر المتأخر – المقابر البثرية الضخمة – العمارة – التطوير

In some respects, especially what concerns the protection of their burial chambers against the activities of the omnipresent tomb looters, the large Late Period shaft tombs might have reached the peak of the long development of ancient Egyptian funerary architecture.<sup>2</sup> So far, about twenty such tombs are known from Egypt, situated – with perhaps only one exception – in different parts of the large Memphite necropolis, such as Giza, Abusir and, above all, Saqqara.<sup>3</sup> The only exception might be tomb S 14 at Kom el-Ahmar/Shurafa close to El-Minya (Gestermann *et al.* 1988: 68–70), but this opinion is not generally accepted and, moreover, the tomb is only rather insufficiently published.<sup>4</sup> Of that number, perhaps more than one half of the structures has been found with intact burial chambers, although in some of them – *e.g.* in the tomb of Iufaa at Abusir, the ancient looters have tried their luck.

According to the generally accepted opinion of Jean-Philippe Lauer (1972: 12–13; see also Smoláriková 2006: 42–43; Gestermann 2005: 200–205; for a somewhat different opinion see Stammers 2009: 31–34), the construction of this type of tombs was inspired by the arrangement of the central part of the Step Pyramid of Netjerikhet (Djoser) at Saqqara, namely a huge and deep shaft with a burial chamber situated at its bottom. Although the underground parts of the Step Pyramid have been made accessible during the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty, perhaps at the end of the long reign of Psammetik I (Firth – Quibell 1935: 5–6, 90–91), the tombs consisting of a deep shaft with a burial chamber at its bottom can be found in Egypt in much earlier times (El-Aguizy 2010; see also Stammers 2009: 39). Recently, it has been suggested that a rather unique arrangement of the underground parts of some large Late Period tombs with a huge central shaft surrounded on its four sides by a narrow peripheral trench might have been inspired by the Step Pyramid enclosure as well, namely by the huge Dry Moat that surrounds

2 On this type of Egyptian tomb in general, see, *e.g.*, El-Sadeek (1984: 162–164); Bareš (1999: 21–28); Gestermann (2005: 355–407); Stammers (2009: 26–39).

3 Generally speaking, the fact that the large shaft tombs appear predominantly in the Memphite area and, until now, no such sepulchre is known from the Theban region is perhaps due to different religious traditions but, at the same time, might have been caused by different natural conditions as well. While the cliffs in the Memphite area are rather low and – in most places – hardly allow more than one or two rows of tombs to be situated above each other, the ground behind them is rather flat and suitable for digging of deep shafts. In the Theban region, on the other hand, much higher cliffs were quite suitable for preparation of large tombs deeply hewn into the rock and situated above each other. At the same time, the Late Period tombs at Thebes (Asasif) were accessible via stairs and their entrances were orientated towards the processional way; these differences can certainly not be attributed to other geological conditions alone (I owe this last remark to an anonymous reviewer).

4 Recently, a number of Late Period shaft tombs belonging to priests of the god Thoth were discovered in the el-Ghureifa region in the el-Minya governorate; those tombs still remain unpublished (I owe this remark to an anonymous reviewer).

its outer walls (Bareš 2006a). Only two such tombs are known so far, however, that of Pakap in Giza (Perring 1842: 21–24 and pls. XIX–XXI; El-Sadeek 1984: 126–132; Zivie-Coche 1991: 283–287) and the structure of Udjahorresnet at Abusir (Bareš 1999). Here again, however, a direct inspiration is difficult to prove, as this special arrangement might have more likely imitated the central part of the presumed tomb of Osiris, known *e.g.* from the Osireion at Abydos.<sup>5</sup>

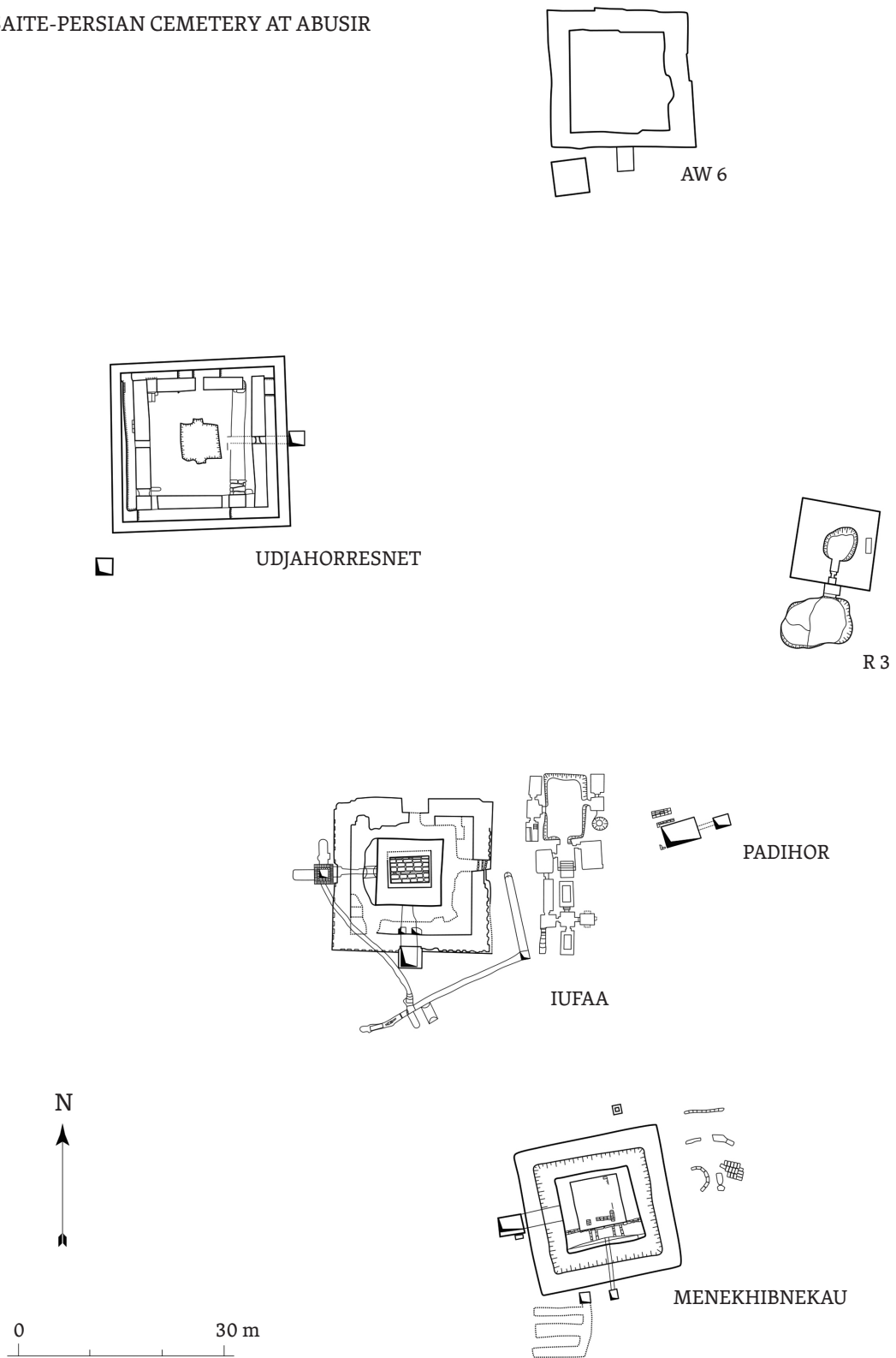
In any case, the construction of the large Late Period shaft tombs started at the beginning of the Sixth Century BC, although a more exact date setting is still disputed (Gestermann 2005: 404–407; Bareš 2013a: 15–20). Among all the large Late Period shaft tombs known so far, only those at Abusir can be dated more precisely (Bareš 2009a: 51–52) (fig. 1). On the northern face of the core masonry in the enclosure wall of Udjahorresnet, a few short demotic graffiti were found that mention year 40 to 42 of an anonymous king. Although the name of the ruler is not given, Ahmose II (Amasis) – mentioned, moreover, in the sets of foundation deposits found here – is the only option. Thus, the core masonry of the enclosure wall of Udjahorresnet was constructed around the year 530 Bc. As the enclosure wall seems to be one of the last sections of the entire structure to be built, the construction of the underground parts must have started some time earlier. The time span needed for the construction of a structure as huge as a large shaft tomb can be only guessed at – perhaps about two or three years judging from the time and amount of work necessary for its unearthing in modern times. Because of that, the construction of the tomb of Udjahorresnet might have started around 535 BC or shortly later.

For many reasons, the structure of Udjahorresnet, westernmost in the entire group of such structures at Abusir and situated at the highest place among them, seems to be the oldest one of them. Most probably, the construction of the large shaft tombs here must have ended in 525 BC (on even two years earlier according to the opinion of Joachim F. Quack [2011]) when Persian army invaded and conquered Egypt. Whether it might have continued later, especially in times when the Persian rule has fully been consolidated under Darius I, is perhaps conceivable but rather unlikely. Until now, no construction of any such structure at Abusir can be undoubtedly dated to the Persian times, although their use for burial purposes and, above all, activities connected with the funerary cult have lasted here until the end of the sixth century BC at least, *i.e.* one generation or more, as dated finds from the tombs of Iufaa and Menekhibnekau suggest (Bareš – Smoláriková 2011: 69). On two papyri and two inscribed sherds regnal 20 or 21 appear. The name of the ruler is never mentioned (although the name of Darius appears on another fragment of papyrus from the funerary cult installation found on the eastern side of the tomb of Iufaa), but Darius I is perhaps the only reasonable option (Bareš – Landgráfová 2019).

In spite of the fact that all the large Late Period shaft tombs at Abusir seem to have been built during a relatively short span of time – some ten years at the maximum, belonged to a group of high dignitaries that seem to have been related to each other (Bareš 2010a) and, moreover, were probably constructed by one and the same group of architects, workmen and artists, they show a remarkable number of variations (Bareš 2015). They even differ in such a fundamental feature, as the orientation of the burial chamber (and, therefore, of the deceased) certainly is.

5 Suggested for the first time by Harry S. Smith in 1996 (see Bareš 1999: 63, footnote 314; see also Stammers 2007). On the conception of the “Osirian tomb” in the Late Period in general, see also Eigner (1984: 163–183).

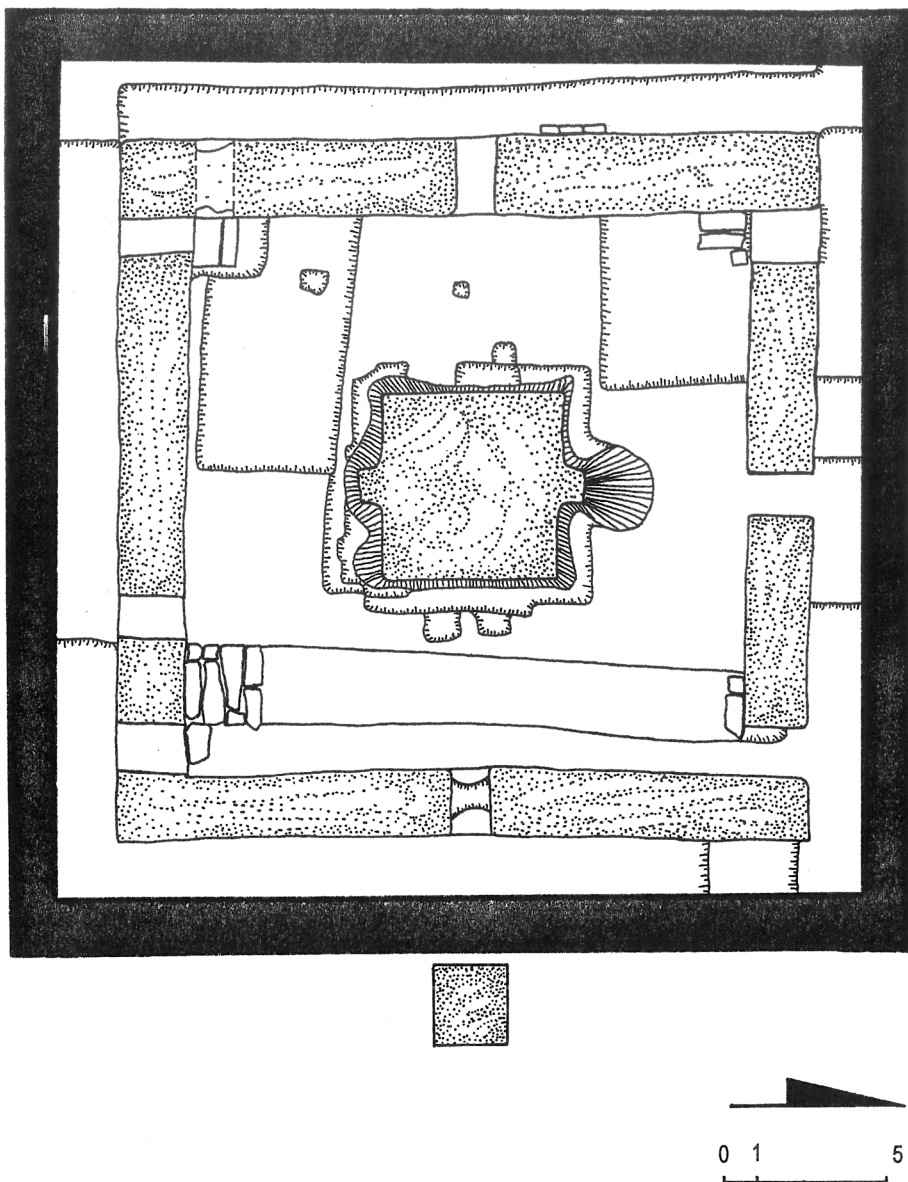
SAITE-PERSIAN CEMETERY AT ABUSIR



**Fig. 1** Plan of the Late Period cemetery at Abusir (drawing K. Smoláriková and L. Vařeková)

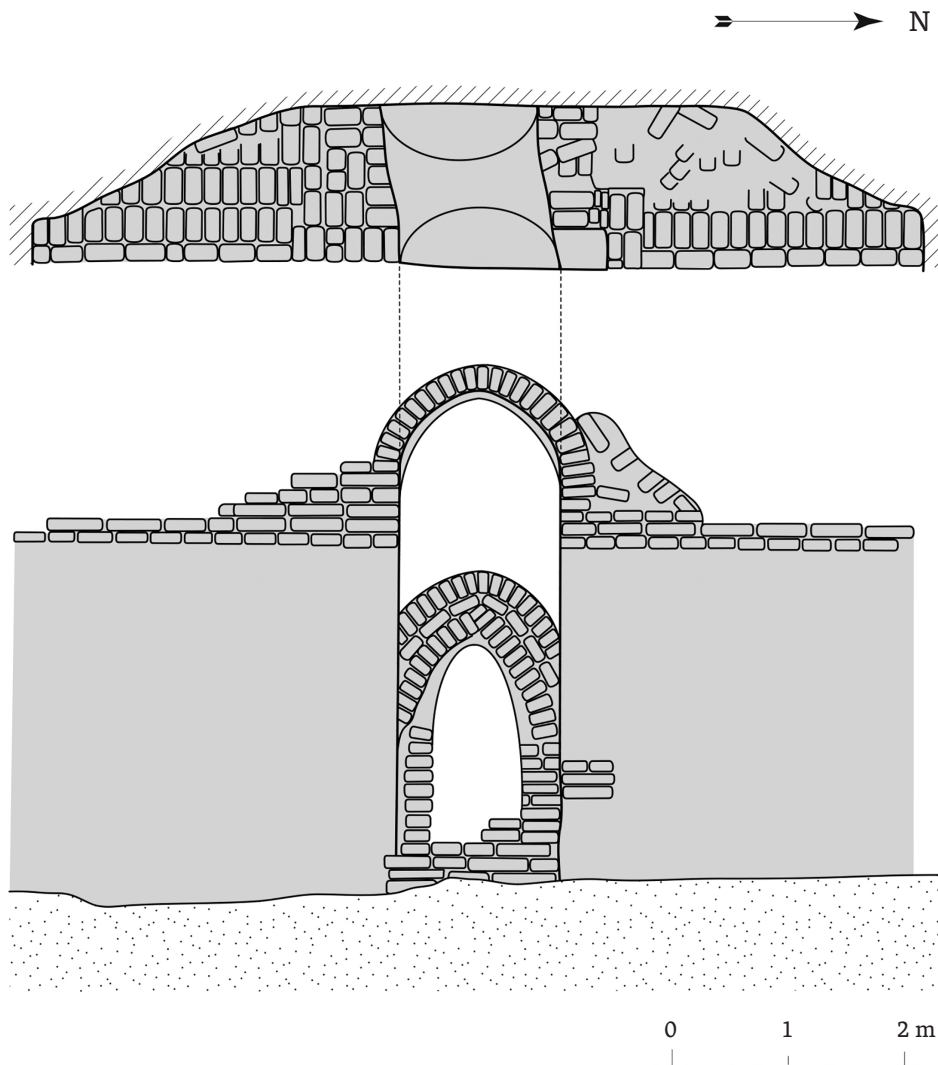
Some changes, especially in the arrangement and construction of certain parts of the entire structure, almost certainly resulted from the experience gained during the construction. Additionally, such changes may enable us to establish the sequence in which those structures have been built.

In the tomb of Udjahorresnet, the central shaft ( $5.5 \times 5.5$  m) has been surrounded by a narrow trench on all its four sides (fig. 2). Although several “bridges” or struts have been left in the bedrock during the digging of the peripheral trench, the entire system was seemingly too unstable even for its builders. Because of that, probably, both the central shaft and the peripheral trench have been merged to form one huge shaft (thus measuring up to  $14 \text{ m}^2$ ) in all the other tombs of this kind built at Abusir later on.



**Fig. 2** Plan of Udjahorresnet's shaft tomb at ground level (after Bareš 1999: fig. 2)

Certainly, this change has enhanced the stability of the central part of the structure but, on the other hand, caused another problem. In such huge shafts, that had to be left open for several months at least during the construction of the tomb, the sides have been much more exposed to the weather, above all the sunshine that caused drying of the shale layers and their subsequent cracking and crumbling. To protect the most important and, at the same time, the most vulnerable part of the bottom of a huge central shaft, namely the area between the end of the horizontal corridor leading to the narrow adjacent shaft (that had to be left open until the moment of the burial) and the entrance to the burial chamber proper, a massive mud brick wall has been attached to the western side of the main shaft in the tomb of Iufaa (Bareš – Smoláriková 2008: 47-49). In the centre of this wall, three mud-brick vaults situated above each other have been added to protect the entrance leading from the horizontal corridor (fig. 3). Later on, in the tomb of Menekhibnekau, this additional arrangement had been replaced by a “step” about



**Fig. 3** Western mud-brick wall of the main shaft in the tomb of Iufaa – frontal view and section (drawing K. Smoláriková and L. Vařeková)

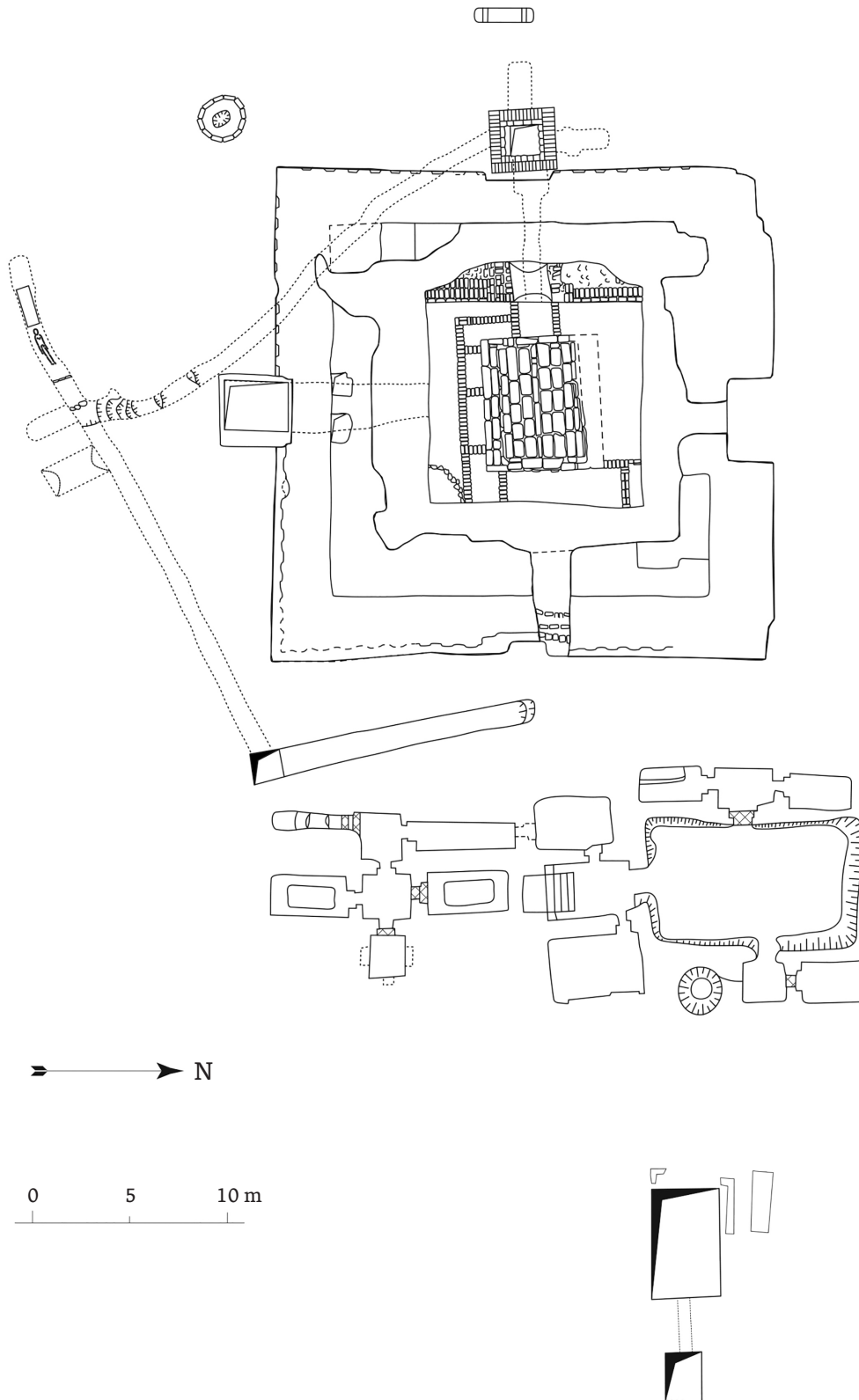
one metre wide and left in the maternal bedrock that ran along the entire southern side of the central shaft and protected the lowermost part of this side (including the end of the horizontal corridor) during the construction of the burial chamber (Bareš – Smoláriková 2011: 47–49).

In the tombs of Iufaa and Menekhibnekau, moreover, another lateral shaft has been added that enabled to reach the bottom of the central shaft with the burial chamber. This second lateral shaft, somewhat bigger than the narrow shaft that had to be left open until the moment of the burial to bring the mummy of the deceased into the burial chamber, ended in a sloping corridor that led directly to the side of the burial chamber. In the tomb of Iufaa (fig. 4), this “second” lateral shaft was situated in the south (thus directed to the left side of the deceased; Bareš – Smoláriková 2008: 68–71),<sup>6</sup> while in the sepulchre of Menekhibnekau (fig. 5) it adjoined the enclosure wall from the west, thus leading to the right side of the deceased (Bareš – Smoláriková 2011: 66–68). In the large shaft tomb AW 6, only partly unearthed so far, a similar shaft (measuring 2.7 × 2.17 m) is situated in the south and might represent the only access to the burial chamber at the bottom of the central shaft, as no other smaller shaft seems to have existed here.<sup>7</sup> The aim of those shafts remains unclear (except perhaps for that in the structure AW 6), as their position in the tombs differs and, moreover, does not appear in any other tomb of this kind known from Egypt so far. On the other hand, their function must have been clear for the ancient builders and satisfy their needs in some way. Most probably, they have been used for construction purposes.

In a way, a similar development can be observed in the arrangement of the embalmers’ deposits, although they were always located in the same position, namely to the south of the south-western corner of the enclosure wall. In the burial structure of Udjahorresnet, remnants of the mummification process – rather scarce when compared with their counterparts in the tombs of Menekhibnekau and the anonymous owner of tomb AW 6 – were stored at the bottom of a rather narrow and simple shaft about 11 m deep (Smoláriková 2019; Smoláriková – Bareš 2020: 181). In the tomb of Iufaa, quite unique in many respects, a few pottery sherds and a set of empty canopic jars were found in the upper part of the underground corridor that started close to the south-eastern corner of his enclosure and ended at the bottom of the western lateral shaft (Bareš – Smoláriková 2008: 99). In this case, however, it remains doubtful whether these items are to be connected with Iufaa himself or, perhaps, with some other person who had been buried in this structure. Theoretically, they might have been used as just symbolic artefacts protecting the dead body during the mummification process in the embalmers’ workshop, not intended as containers for the viscera, in the same way, perhaps, as the canopic jars of Wahibremerneith that had been unearthed in the embalmers’ cache of the burial structure AW 6 at Abusir recently (Bareš *et al.*, *forthcoming*).

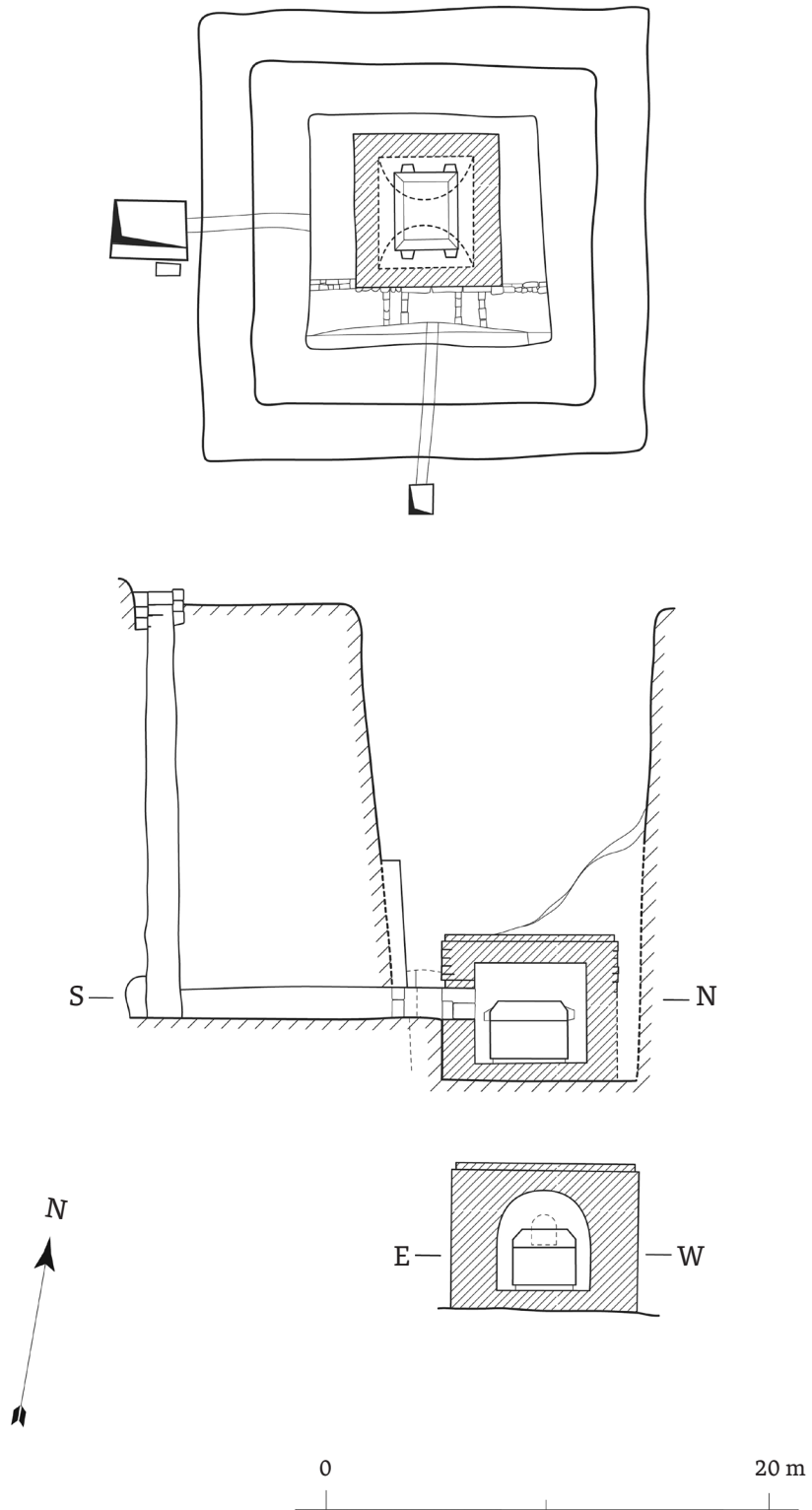
6 Certainly, one has to bear in mind that Iufaa’s mummy was orientated with its head to the east, *i.e.* quite contrary to the prevailing habit during this time.

7 One can even speculate, whether the position of the lateral shaft and corridor giving access to the underground burial chamber on the southern side of the enclosure (in the structures of Menekhibnekau and perhaps also AW 6, seemingly the youngest among the large shaft tombs excavated at Abusir until now) might have been somehow related to the fact that the southern side of the huge main shaft was the one best protected against the sunshine and subsequent drying and cracking. If so, it could be considered as another measure to protect the area around the entrance to the burial chamber during its construction.



**Fig. 4** Plan of Iufaa's shaft tomb (drawing K. Smoláriková and L. Vařeková)





**Fig. 5** Plan and section of Menekhibnekau's tomb (drawing M. Balík and L. Vařeková)

The embalmers' deposit of Menekhibnekau, consisting of more than 320 large pottery storage jars and numerous other pieces, was placed in an underground space (a corridor with three large niches) leading from a bottom of an 11 m deep shaft (Bareš – Smoláriková 2011: 81–184). Quite recently, an even larger embalmers' cache was unearthed in the area of the yet anonymous structure AW 6. Here, about 370 large vessels and other items were carefully stored in several groups situated at various levels inside a rather large shaft, measuring 5.3 m<sup>2</sup> and 15 m deep (Bareš *et al.*, *forthcoming*).

While those rather minor changes in the architecture of the Abusir shaft tombs can easily be explained as a result of an increasing experience of their builders, the reasons for differences in other features, such as the orientation of the deceased and, above all, in the decoration of the burial chambers seem to be much more complex. Generally speaking, ancient Egyptian tombs were only rarely built according to one and the same plan<sup>8</sup> – one of the exceptions being a group of four Fifth Dynasty mastabas situated in front of the Raneferef's unfinished pyramid at Abusir (Krejčí 2019).

In the indisputable absence of purely technical reasons for the orientation of each of the burial structures (Udjahorresnet, Padihor and AW 4 to the west, Menekhibnekau and perhaps also AW 6 to the north, Iufaa to the east), it must have resulted from the personal choice and preferences of those who had the final word – be it the tomb owner or people from his entourage (see also Stammers 2009: 31). This might be true even in the case of Iufaa, whose orientation with head to the east seems to be in sheer contrast to the habits of his time. Anyway, recently my colleagues Jiří Janák and Renata Landgráfová tried to explain this exceptional feature as a result of a deeply considered religious thinking.<sup>9</sup> According to them, this change – clearly intended from the very beginning judging from the layout of the burial chamber and, in fact, of the entire underground part of the tomb – is to be connected with Iufaa's desire to become part of the daily resurrection of the newly born solar god on the eastern horizon. To this purpose, even a niche situated in the eastern wall of the burial chamber (fig. 6) had to be used as a “niche of appearance” (parallel in a way to the false door, although orientated in a completely opposite way), through which the deceased hoped to join the solar god (Landgráfová – Janák – Míčková 2021). One has to bear in mind, in this respect, that a considerable number of texts clearly connected with the Heliopolitan solar theology (and often unique) have been used to decorate the sides of Iufaa's burial chamber and his double sarcophagus (Landgráfová – Janák 2021).

On the other hand, Lauer suggested that a possible correlation might have existed between the orientation of the large Late Period shaft tombs and the dates of their construction (Lauer 1954: 134 and footnote 2; see also El-Aguizy 2010: 16). According to him, the tombs with burial chamber orientated in a north-south direction might have been slightly younger than those orientated east-west. Generally speaking, in the case of tombs situated at Abusir, some hints (see above) seem to corroborate such an assumption, namely that the sepulchres of Menekhibnekau and the yet anonymous AW 6 might have been built later than the structures of Udjahorresnet and Iufaa. One has to bear in mind, however, that all those tombs at

8 As Gabriele Pieke (2017: 268) quoted, referring to Georg Andrew Reisner (1942: 220): “... in general, ‘no two tombs are exactly alike’, and each tomb is to a certain extent one of a kind, although they have a number of common features.”

9 See also the remark by Vivienne Gae Callender in Bareš – Smoláriková (2008: 67, footnote 215).



**Fig. 6** Eastern side of the burial chamber of Iufaa at the moment of its discovery (photo K. Smoláriková)

Abusir seem to have been constructed successively by one and the same group of architects and workmen during a rather limited time span, perhaps not exceeding ten years. Because of that, the different orientation of their burial chambers can hardly reflect any deeper changes in the religious thought.

Since many years, methods and processes are considered and discussed by scholars through which the textual and decorative programmes in ancient Egyptian tombs were produced. In this respect, one can mention, *e.g.*, the question raised by Lucía E. Díaz-Iglesias Llanos (2020: 40): “What role did those who commissioned private monuments play in the selection of the decorative programmes deployed in their tombs?”. In a more general way, the concepts of tradition and creativity in the ancient Egyptian art are discussed by Dimitri Laboury (2017).

The superstructures of all shaft tombs at Abusir had almost completely been demolished already in antiquity (Bareš 2003). Only in one of them, namely the structure of Menekhibnekau, several hundreds of relief fragments and other finds coming surely from this part of the tomb enable us to discuss – partly at least – the decorative programme of his tomb’s superstructure, if not, unfortunately, its layout and inner structure. According to those pieces, the decoration of those parts of the tomb situated above the ground has more or less copied the decorative programme in the Old Kingdom mastabas of the Memphite area. In addition to remnants of typical scenes such as bringing the offerings, harvesting flax plants and other field activities, fishing and even butchering, as well as pictures of life in a papyrus thicket, offering the linen, *etc.*, fragments of a scene of counting of year’s seasons deserve to be mentioned (Bareš 2016). In this scene, unfortunately preserved in only a few fragments, the owner of the tomb is

depicted while painting the three seasons on a papyrus put on an easel;<sup>10</sup> similar scenes are in fact quite rare even from the previous epochs of Egyptian history – in the Old Kingdom tombs of Mereruka (Duell 1938: pl. VI) and Khentikaikhekhi (James 1953: 20–21 and pl. X) at Saqqara and, perhaps, also in a Middle Kingdom tomb of Wahhetep at Meir (Blackman – Apted 1953: 31 and pl. 13) and the Ramesside tomb of Mes at Saqqara (Desroches-Noblecourt 1991: 67–68; referring to Malek 1981: 164–165 with fig. 4)<sup>11</sup>.

In the underground parts of the Abusir shaft tombs, the decorative programme as attested on the sides of their burial chambers and both outer and inner sarcophagi is usually much more varied (Bareš 2006b). One has to bear in mind, of course, that only four shaft tombs unearthed at Abusir so far are decorated in their underground parts. While a decorative programme inside the burial chamber of Udjhorresnet is rather sparse and, moreover, has never been finished in relief (Bareš 1999: 51–54), the burial chambers in tombs of Iufaa and Menekhibnekau are lavishly decorated including their double sarcophagi. In the smaller tomb of Padihor, only the sides and the ceiling of the burial chamber were decorated (Coppens 2009: 46–73), while his sarcophagus or, more probably, a wooden coffin, had completely been destroyed by the ancient looters and its probable decoration thus remains unknown.

Until now, no single text has been found in all of the decorated burial chambers (including sarcophagi). Seven texts<sup>12</sup> at least are attested to in three burial structures (among them four Coffin Text [CT] spells – 151, 208, 352, 716 – in the tombs of Iufaa, Menekhibnekau and Padihor), and thirty-three texts in two of them.<sup>13</sup>

The reasons for choosing a certain sets of texts seem to be more obvious only in the case of Iufaa, who – according to the anthropological examination – died at a relatively young age following a serious and lengthy illness (Strouhal – Němečková 2008: 257–258). Because of that, a considerable part of the decorative programme on the sides of his burial chamber and both his sarcophagi deals in some or other way with the protection against evil forces causing his disease, in addition to usual texts aiming at his resurrection and a transition into a blessed future existence in the Netherworld (Landgráfová – Míčková 2020; Landgráfová – Janák 2021). Numerous examples of offering lists, appearing on not only the southern wall of his chamber but in several copies found on both inner and outer sides of his basalt sarcophagus as well (Bareš 2017; see also Bareš 2020a), might have served the same purpose. Whether or not he personally participated in choosing those texts can only be guessed at; while it might perhaps be probable, it cannot be proven with any certainty.

Interestingly enough, Iufaa and – to a certain degree, also Menekhibnekau – followed (although in their own special way) a tradition observed in a number of burial chambers in other large Late Period shaft tombs. Instead of the usual set of the so-called serpent spells

10 For a recent discussion on that scene, see Bochi (2003) and Altenmüller (2005).

11 I owe this reference to Dr. Vivienne Gae Callender.

12 PT 25: Udjhorresnet, Iufaa, Padihor; PT 213–214: Udjhorresnet, Iufaa, Menekhibnekau; CT 151: Iufaa, Menekhibnekau, Padihor; CT 208: Iufaa, Menekhibnekau, Padihor; CT 352: Iufaa, Menekhibnekau, Padihor; CT 716: Iufaa, Menekhibnekau, Padihor.

13 Minor differences in arrangement, wording, etc. appearing in one and the same text in different tombs (or even in different places in one and the same tomb) are not discussed here. On this phenomena, see, e.g., Landgráfová (2015) and Vernus (2017). Moreover, as Laboury (2017: 232) posted: “... even when duplication was intended, ancient Egyptian art never produced two exact copies.”

(Pyramid Text [PT] spell 226–243) situated close to the entrance to the chamber to protect this vulnerable place against any threat (Hussein 2013; see also Topmann 2010; Theis 2015: 129–142), in the tomb of Iufaa we found here another set of texts dealing with snakes, the so-called “snake encyclopaedia” as my colleague Renata Landgráfová has dubbed it (Landgráfová *et al.* 2017; Landgráfová – Janák 2017). In the tomb of Menekhibnekau, the entrance to the burial chamber is surrounded – and therefore protected – by depiction of netherworld gates and their guardsmen from Book of the Dead chapter 144 (Landgráfová 2020; Bareš 2020b: 11–14). Anyway, an incomplete set of “serpent spells” (PT 226–240) appears on the northern outer side of the outer sarcophagus of Menekhibnekau, perhaps to protect the mummy of the deceased also from the opposite side – surely Menekhibnekau or those who formulated the decorative programme in his burial chamber did not want to give any chance to the evil forces.<sup>14</sup> The opening spell of this group (PT 226, together with a very small part of PT 242) appears even in the burial chamber of Udjahorresnet (on the southern wall, *i.e.* to the right of the deceased), in spite of the brevity of its decoration (Bareš 1999: 53).

Some elements of the decorative programme, known from large shaft tombs at Abusir, are uncommon among other burial structures of that kind, although they appear rather often in other contemporary tombs. One can mention, *e.g.*, sets of funerary demons on the inner sarcophagi of Iufaa (Bareš 2010b; Bareš 2020b: 5–11) and Menekhibnekau, personifications of the day and night hours on the ceiling of the burial chamber of Menekhibnekau (Bareš 2009b; see also Griffin 2017), a voluminous quasi-archaic frieze of objects on its western wall (Bareš 2013b), or a solar text (“*ein kosmographischer Begleittext zur kultischen Sonnehymnik*” according to Jan Assmann [1970]) that appears on the eastern side of the burial chamber of Iufaa (Bareš 2011) and is clearly connected with his wish to join the solar god appearing on the eastern horizon every morning (Landgráfová – Janák – Míčková 2021). To the same purpose, a rather unique texts identifying the deceased with the sun god Re might have been intended that appears on the inner sarcophagi of both Iufaa and Menekhibnekau (Bělohoubková – Janák 2019; Bělohoubková – Bareš – Janák 2019).<sup>15</sup>

In most cases, however, the reasons for choosing certain texts and scenes remain rather obscure, especially as the amount of data available so far is rather small.<sup>16</sup> We can hope, that the future excavations in the yet unexplored shaft tombs at Abusir – in the monumental structure AW 6 above all that in many respects resembles the tomb of Menekhibnekau – would enable us to consider these questions in more detail.

A number of questions connected with the architecture, building history and decorative programme of the large shaft tombs situated at Abusir are still open to debate. Perhaps the most complex and, at the same time, the most distressing among them is why the burial chamber in the tomb of Udjahorresnet, the oldest structure in this group, has been left in such a rough and unfinished state, especially when compared with the lavishly decorated

14 For the complete edition of texts and decoration inside the burial chamber of Menekhibnekau (including the double sarcophagus), see now Landgráfová – Bareš – Míčková (2022).

15 On the identification of the non-royal persons with the sun god Re during the First Millennium BC, see now also Blöbaum (2020: 222).

16 One has to bear in mind, in that respect, that a deliberate imitation of certain motifs or even complete scenes was fairly common within one and the same necropolis (Laboury 2017: 235–247) or, in fact, in the Egyptian art in general (Laboury 2017: 251–254; Pieke 2017; Bács 2020).

chambers of Iufaa and Menekhibnekau. The more so that Udjahorresnet has almost surely been interred in his obviously unfinished<sup>17</sup> and only meagrely decorated<sup>18</sup> burial chamber (Smoláriková – Bareš 2020).

Summing up, large Late Period shaft tombs at Abusir, although most probably built by one and the same group of architects, artists, and workmen,<sup>19</sup> were in no way uniform. A number of smaller and larger modifications in their architecture and arrangement clearly show that their builders were able to take lessons from their previous work and adapt separate features of the structures to existing conditions. On the other hand, the decisions concerning the most important features, such as the orientation of the deceased and the amount and arrangement of the decorative programme seem to have been left to other people, either the future owners of those tombs themselves or persons from their close entourage. The reasons for their choice remain mostly unknown to us.<sup>20</sup>

## ADDENDUM

In the spring season of 2022, remnants of the burial of Wahibremeryneith were found inside a smaller shaft situated in about the centre of the main shaft of the structure AW 6. Contrary to previous suppositions, the double sarcophagus of Wahibremeryneith was orientated towards west and was not connected with the smaller shaft situated to the south of his enclosure.

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- 17 According to Naguib Kanawati (2005: 55–71), the ancient Egyptian tried to stave off death by not finishing their tombs deliberately (I owe this reference to Dr. Vivienn Gae Callender). Such an explanation, however, seems hardly to apply to the unfinished state of decoration inside the burial chambers of Udjahorresnet and, in fact, also Iufaa (Bareš – Smoláriková 2008: 54 and footnote 121).
- 18 Interestingly enough, the sides of the burial chamber of Pakap in Giza are also decorated by just one single line of texts (El-Sadeek 1984: 130–131, 146, footnote 84; referring to Perring 1842: pl. XIX, 9–12; Vyse 1840: plate facing page 134; see also Lepsius *et al.* 1897: 100–101).
- 19 For the work conditions of Egyptian artists, craftsmen, and workers in general, see now Laboury (2020: 91–95).
- 20 Contrary to a rather vivid discussion on the analysis and interpretation of the decorative programmes in the Old Kingdom tombs (including the reasons for choosing certain motifs), on which see, *e.g.*, a set of interesting and valuable studies published by Martin Fitzenreiter and Michael Herb (2006); as well as van Walsem (1998, 2005, 2013, 2016a); Kanawati (2009); see however Stauder-Porchet (2016: 590, footnote 38); Vonk (2015: 88–89), much less attention is devoted to the study of the same phenomena during the Late Period (see, *e.g.*, van Walsem 2016b).

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**Ladislav Bareš**

Czech Institute of Egyptology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University; ladislav.bares@ff.cuni.cz