



Fig. 1 Aerial view of the explored site, showing structures AS 66 and AS 69 to the south of the tomb complex AS 68, and the surrounding tombs in Abusir South (photo Archive of CIE)

Exploration of structures AS 66 and AS 69 in Abusir South: Preliminary report on the 2015 and 2016 seasons

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During the exploration of the tomb complex of Princess Sheretnebtj (AS 68) in April 2012, the northern walls of structures AS 66 and AS 69 were uncovered (fig. 1; Vymazalová – Megahed 2013; Bárta *et al.* 2014: 33–34). They were located south of Sheretnebtj's tomb complex on a hill sloping down from south to north. At the beginning of the work, they were fully covered with 3–4 m thick layers of compact rubble and sand. It was presumed at that time that these structures might have been related to the tomb complex of Sheretnebtj, as they appeared to have been built right above its four rock-cut tombs: the northern wall of AS 66 is situated above the tombs of Duaptah and Shepesuptah (AS 68a–b), and the northern wall of AS 69 above the tombs of Sheretnebtj and Nefer (AS 68c–d) (Vymazalová – Megahed 2013). Our work in the 2015 and 2016 seasons showed that this hypothesis was only partly correct.

Tomb AS 69

In 2012, a small part of the tomb behind its northern wall was cleaned to reduce the pressure on the cracking ceilings of the rock-cut tombs situated underneath.¹ During this work, the small structure, AS 69B, which had been

incorporated into the tomb's core, was uncovered, (Vymazalová – Megahed 2013: 79; Bárta *et al.* 2014: 33–34). This little rectangular chamber was built of mud bricks and limestone pieces and was closed by limestone slabs. Its inside walls and its floor bore a mud coating of an ochre colour. Structure AS 69B contained three wooden

boat models with oars, each of them showing a different type of boat (for discussion on these boats, see Vymazalová – Megahed 2013; Bárta *et al.* 2014: 34). The boats were placed with their prows towards the west.

Exploration of structure AS 69 continued in 2015, lasting from November 9 to 19. During this limited time, only part of the tomb was uncovered. The work commenced by the north wall of AS 69, and then continued towards the south, mainly in its eastern part. The exploration showed that the tomb was built of mud brick and limestone and had a core of limestone chips and rubble (fig. 2).

The north wall of the tomb had a limestone casing built directly on the bedrock above the tomb complex of Sheretnebtj (AS 68). Its eastern part survived to a height of 3.75 m (10 courses of casing blocks) but the majority of the blocks had fallen off the wall in antiquity and were discovered in the fill of the corridor of AS 68 in 2012 (Bárta *et al.* 2014: 21). Limestone pieces and chips (the so-called backing stones) filled the space between the casing and the northern wall, which was constructed of mud bricks and limestone pieces with the use of mud mortar; this wall was 0.5 m thick and features several small steps intended for higher stability (fig. 3).

The eastern part of the north wall adjoins another limestone wall, which was built above the eastern wall of the corridor of AS 68, and connects AS 69 with the tomb of Nefershepes (AS 67; see fig. 2).

The eastern wall of the tomb was built of mud bricks, and its surface was coated with mud plaster with organic additions (straw and a few molluscs). The façade of this wall is slightly inclined (86°), a usual design of Old Kingdom private tombs. The southern end of the wall reaches 2.50 m high above the floor, and this seems to be the original height of the eastern wall; its northern part is damaged and slopes 1.25 m lower.²

Along the eastern wall of the tomb, a 0.80–0.95 m narrow corridor runs (fig. 4) between AS 69 and the west wall of another tomb, AS 86, which is located further east.³ The south end of this corridor is closed by an east-west oriented mud brick wall, which clearly belongs to tomb AS 69; it was built of the same mud bricks and to the same height as the eastern wall, and had the same plaster coating. This south wall of the corridor adjoins the east wall of AS 69 as well as the inclined west wall of AS 86, which continues further south. The corridor was accessible from the north-east; the entrance was, however, blocked by

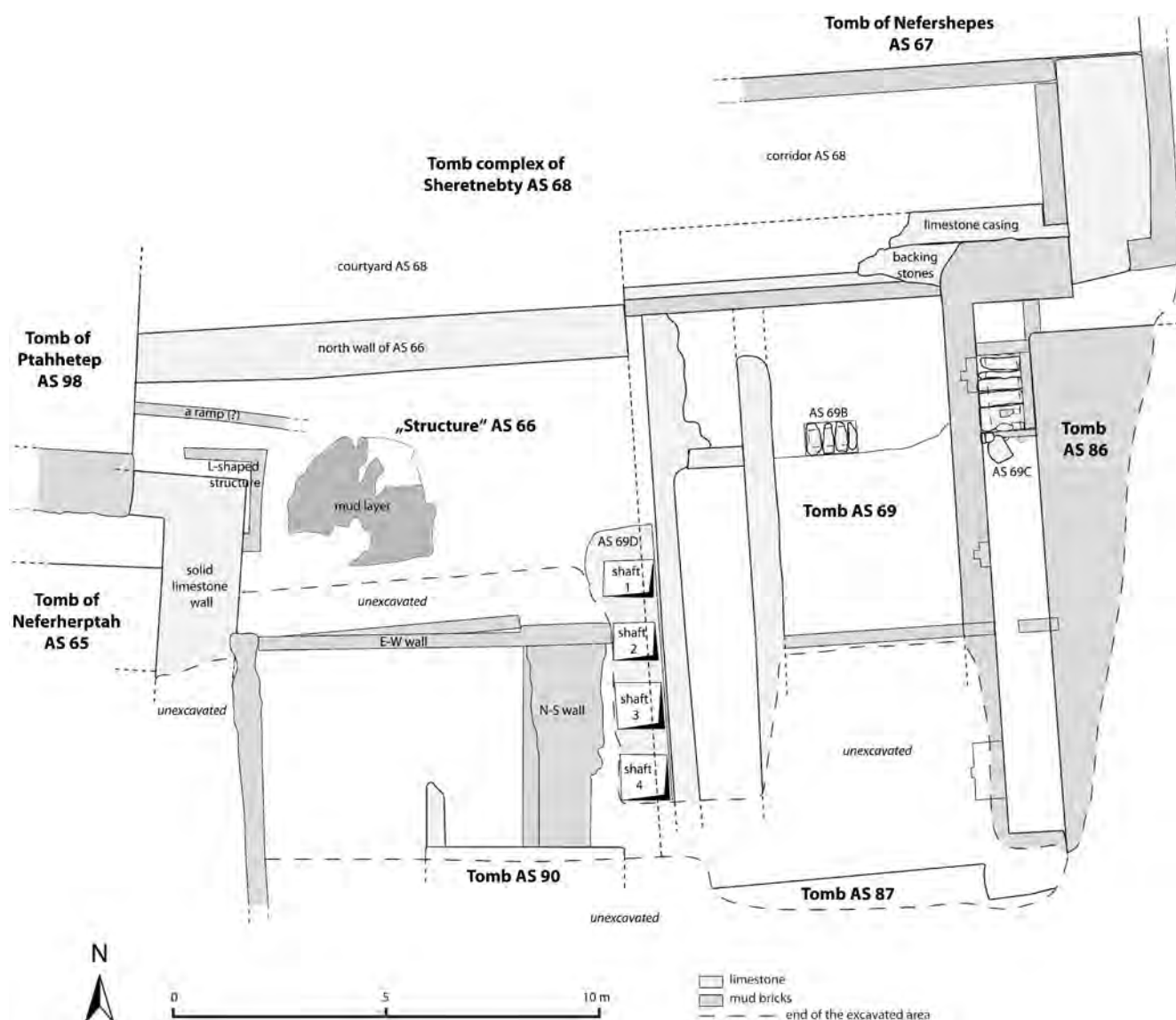


Fig. 2 Plan of the explored area (drawing H. Vymazalová)

Fig. 3 The northern wall of AS 69 showing its method of construction (photo H. Vymazalová)



a limestone and mud brick wall later in the Old Kingdom, when a secondary burial, structure AS 69C, was built in the corridor's north part (see below).

The eastern wall of AS 69 had three niches set into the mud brick masonry (figs. 4, 5) which were all part of the original structure. The number of niches indicates that AS 69 was built for a family, not for a single tomb owner (as the usual pattern for Old Kingdom tombs are two niches, one in the northern and one in the southern part of the east wall). The northern and central niches were built as composed niches. The northern niche was 0.86 m wide and 0.31 m deep, while the central niche was 0.53 m wide and 0.46 m deep and was preserved to a full height of 1.90 m. It had a simple, roughly carved limestone lintel.

The southern niche was the largest. It was 1.38 m wide, 0.72 m deep and 2.00 m high, with a limestone lintel, which was cracked in the middle. This niche contained a false door made of a single block of fine white limestone with a nicely smoothed surface. It bears no relief decoration, but some small traces of red lines can be noticed on its panel, which can be identified as a sketch of a male figure sitting on a chair and facing right (north). The red lines are hardly visible but some details can be observed, including the man having the right arm on his knee and the left arm bent in front of his chest; a lotus on the back of the seat can be recognised as well as its legs, which are in the shape of animal legs, and horizontal lines in front of the figure that were planned to receive inscriptions (fig. 6). The poorly visible sketch on the false door panel indicates that the false door was planned to be decorated on the site but was never finished. Unfortunately, no traces of the owner's name were found on the sketch. In front of the false door, the floor of the niche was covered with the same plaster as the wall's surface. This shows that no offering table was placed here.⁴

The floor of the corridor was made of beaten clay, which survived only in the southern part of the corridor. This floor was situated 0.5 higher than the foundation of the eastern wall, which is exposed in the northern part. A few foot imprints can be noticed in the floor, corresponding to one

person's walking. The 0.60 m thick bottom layer of the fill of the corridor consisted of fine yellow and brown sand with only a few pottery fragments (ceramic context 13.AS69.2015), and was covered by a mud layer with clear traces of flooding, which was apparently the result of a strong rain. The heavy traces on the south-eastern corner of the corridor show that rain brought in a flow of mud from there (from the hill's top) and spread in towards the east. This corresponds to the evidence of strong rains, which was



Fig. 4 Eastern side of tomb AS 69 (photo H. Vymazalová)

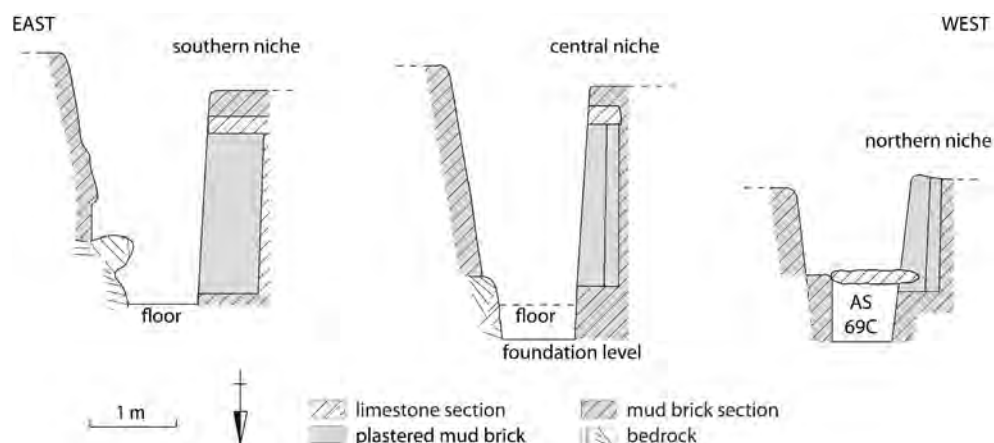


Fig. 5 Plans and sections through the niches in the eastern wall of AS 69 (drawing H. Vymazalová)

recorded in the rock-cut chapels of AS 68 (Vymazalová – Dulíková 2012: 345; Bárta *et al.* 2014: 24; Vymazalová – Havelková 2016: 92); we can date this event to the late Old Kingdom.

The upper part of the corridor, above this rain layer, was filled with brown sand with a large quantity of limestone chips, which were especially numerous in the top layers. A few larger undecorated limestone masonry blocks were found in the fill in front of the central niche. The fill of the corridor contained very few pottery fragments and a few other finds, including fragments of wood and coal, a stone pounder, and a fragment of low relief with part of an offering table with reed-shaped bread (Exc. No. 3/AS69/2015).

The west wall of tomb AS 69 was, unlike the eastern wall, built of limestone pieces; its external surface is inclined *ca.* 84°. Moreover, the external face was covered with a brown sandy plaster coating, rather different from the plaster of the eastern wall.



Fig. 6 Detail of the panel of the false door placed in the southern niche of AS 69 (photo S. Vannini)

The internal space of tomb AS 69 was divided into several sections by means of simple frame walls built of limestone pieces and chips with no mortar. One such wall runs in a north-south direction in the western third of the tomb. This wall has a grey plaster coating on its western face, indicating that the tomb might have originally been smaller and extended to the west.

Another frame wall was built in an east-west direction, connecting the eastern wall of the tomb and the inner west wall. The compartments between the frame walls were filled with brown-grey sand and limestone pieces and chips. Not much of this fill survived in the north part of the tomb, where thanks to the bad state of preservation, a small structure, AS 69B, was found (see above, also Vymazalová – Megahed 2013; Bárta *et al.* 2014: 33–34); it was built directly to the north of the east-west frame wall (fig. 7). The fill of the tomb to the south of the frame wall contained very numerous fragments of pottery beer jars and bread moulds (ceramic context 5.AS69.2015). This cluster was concentrated in the area 0.50–2.50 m west of the eastern wall of AS 69 and 1.70–4.00 m south of the east-west frame wall, and was *ca.* 0.8 m thick starting slightly underneath the top of the eastern wall of AS 69. This pottery included above all beer jars and several bread moulds, some of which were found unbroken.⁵ This pottery cluster might be interpreted as part of the fill of the tomb's core, referring to the date of its construction, or (perhaps more likely) to a secondary refuse of pottery collected in the vicinity of the tomb at a later date.

Above the central part of the tomb, another east-west orientated wall was built, which was apparently secondary. It is made of mud bricks, which differ from the mud bricks of the eastern wall, and its northern face bears a mud plaster coating with organic inclusions. This wall reached 0.55 m deep into the core of the tomb (measured from the top of the eastern wall of AS 69), and we cannot fully exclude that its construction corresponds with the pottery cluster mentioned above. This wall is preserved to a maximum height of 1.65 m and is not vertical but inclined towards the south. It is built upon the inner (frame) west wall where it seems to be damaged and does not run further west. In the east, it was built over the eastern wall of AS 69, where a clear seam indicates a connection of two stages of this wall, and continued further east over the fill of the corridor, where it partly collapsed, and over the



Fig. 7 Structure AS 69B built against the east-west frame wall in the core of tomb AS 69 (photo H. Vymazalová)



masonry of AS 86. Thus this east-west oriented wall must have been built after the corridor of AS 69 was entirely filled. This wall might have served as a protective barrier against the sand and rubble, which came from the south during the usual spring sand-storms. It is not clear at the moment, however, whether this was the only purpose of this wall or whether it served another function at the same time; it might have been related to tomb AS 87 (see below).

The south part of tomb AS 69, *i.e.* the area to the south of this mud brick wall, was partly explored in 2016 with the aim to specify the entire size of this tomb, expose its southern end and search for a potential shaft in its

southern part. Instead, however, another tomb, AS 87, was detected in this area. It was constructed higher up the hill and started above the south part of tomb AS 69. Its foundation rests on a 1.20 m thick layer of rubble fill collected above tomb AS 69, indicating a certain time difference between the constructions of both tombs (fig. 8). Only the northern wall and north-eastern corner of this tomb have been cleaned so far. The northern wall was built of limestone pieces and was originally cased with limestone blocks which fell off into the debris. The eastern side shows mud brick masonry adjoining the northern wall, but this part of the tomb was not explored further.

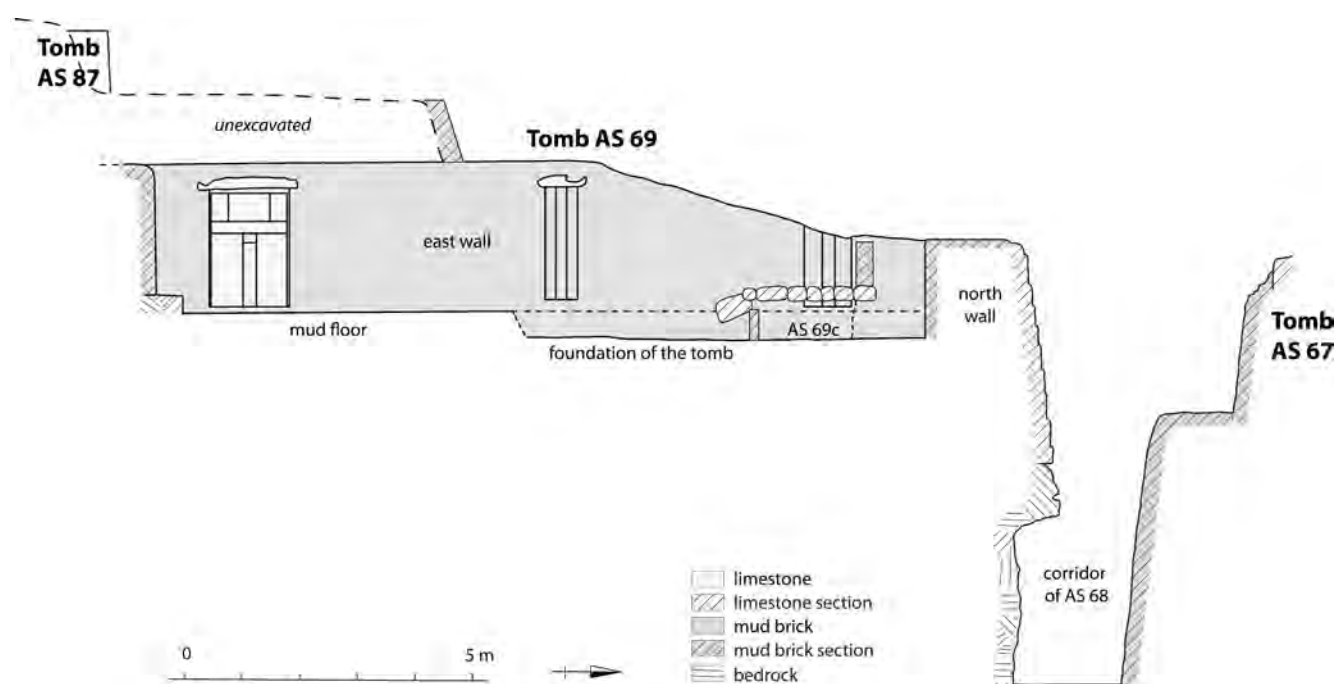


Fig. 8 North-south section through tomb AS 69 (drawing H. Vymazalová)



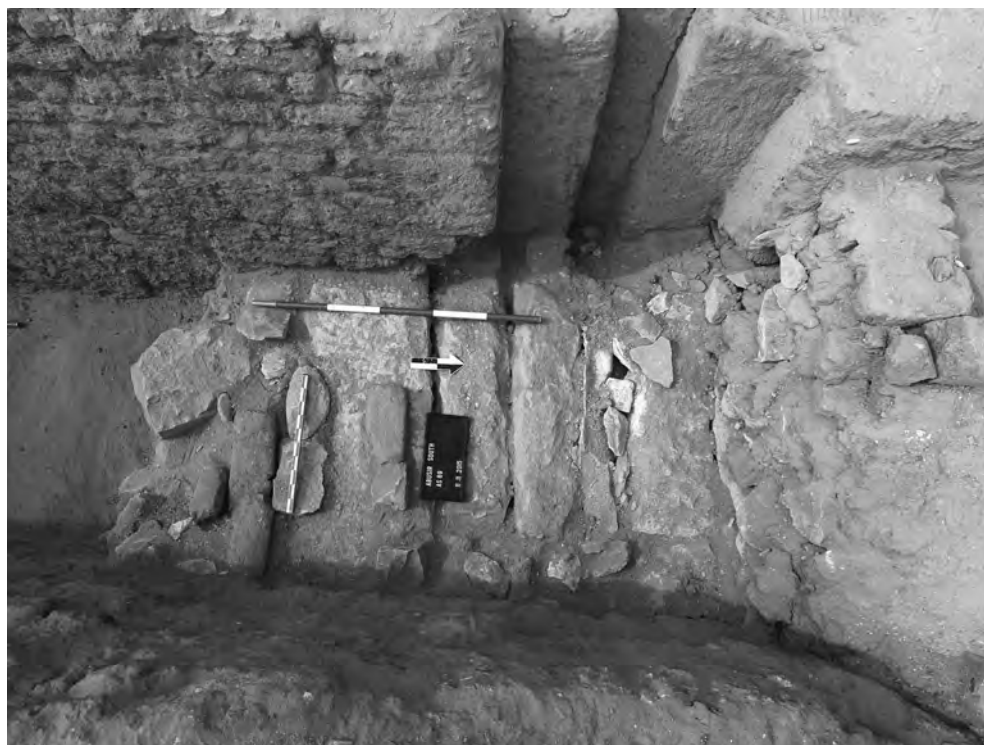


Fig. 9 Intact structure AS 69C in the eastern corridor of AS 69 in front of its northern niche (photo H. Vymazalová)

Secondary structure AS 69C

The eastern corridor of tomb AS 69 contained a structure which was secondarily added and was found intact. It was situated in front of the northern niche and reached under the floor level to the foundation of the eastern wall (fig. 9). This structure was built at a later point in time when the corridor was no longer used and perhaps after the heavy rain because no traces of rain were detected around,

on or within this structure. To the north of the structure, a secondary mud brick wall blocked the corridor, perhaps to protect and “seal off” this structure.

The structure consisted of mud brick walls built along and between the walls of the corridor, and its roof was made of 0.25 m thick limestone slabs. It was filled with very fine brown sand and contained a reed coffin with an intact burial of an adult individual. Several fragments of limestone



Fig. 10 Burial in structure AS 69C (photo H. Vymazalová)



relief (Exc. No. 6/AS69/2015) were found scattered between the roofing blocks and in the upper part of the fill of the structure, above the reed coffin. These fragments show very finely carved sunken relief and feature several hieroglyphic signs. The type of stone and the carving seem to be similar to those of the decorated block of Ankhiamptah, which was found in front of Sheretneby's rock-cut chapel (AS68c; Vymazalová 2015 and 2016).

The reed coffin was well preserved; the body was placed on the back with face up and arms along the body. The structure was too small to accommodate this burial, and therefore the head leaned against the north wall of the structure while the feet were resting on the south wall (fig. 10). Burials in reed mats of similar type have been found in other parts of the Abusir South cemetery. An intact burial in a reed mat was documented in the courtyard of the tomb of Kaiemtjenenet (AS 38) along the western wall of the tomb of Neferinpu (AS 37; Vymazalová *et al.* 2011: 44–45, Fig. 4.57), while another example was found in Neferherptah's tomb (AS 65; Dulíková *et al.* 2015). As the eastern corridor was relatively soon filled and no traces of any later activities were observed at the site, structure AS 69C is likely to be of a late Old Kingdom date. No objects were, however, found together with this burial, which would help us confirm this suggested dating.

Secondary structure AS 69D

Another structure was added to tomb AS 69 on its west side. This addition was found in the fall season of 2016; it consisted of a row of several shafts built against the west

wall of AS 69 in its central and southern parts (fig. 11). The walls of the shafts were built of small pieces of limestone with no mortar, starting on the foundation level of the west wall of AS 69 and originally reaching most likely up to the original height of tomb AS 69. It is worth mentioning that the western walls of three southern shafts are preserved to the same height, which corresponds to the highest preserved part of the western wall of AS 69. Moreover, a later construction sits on one shaft's western wall, and its existence perhaps helped to protect the shafts soon after their use. They were found intact.⁶

Shaft 1 measured 0.80 × 0.95 m at its bottom⁷ and reached to the level 0.50 m below the foundation of the western wall of AS 69; its fill consisted of very compact brown sand with rather few limestone chips and pottery fragments. At its bottom, a small rectangular, north-south oriented burial niche (0.40 × 0.70 m, 0.30–0.50 m high) was hewn to the east, *i.e.* underneath the foundation of the western wall of AS 69. This niche was closed with a wall of limestone pieces with no mortar. An intact burial of an adult but rather petite individual (preliminary determination by Petra Havelková) was placed inside the niche, in a contracted position on the left side with head to the north, face to the east, arms slightly bent and legs contracted in front of the body (Exc. No. 10/AS66/2016; fig. 12). The northern and southern walls of the niche show imprints of a wooden chest, in which the body was once placed and which had entirely decomposed. Tiny remains of wood were scattered around the burial, and the wooden remains clearly show that the burial had been attacked by insects,



Fig. 11 Structure AS 69D with four shafts attached to the western wall of AS 69 (photo H. Vymazalová)



Fig. 12 Intact burial in Shaft 1 of AS 69D (photo H. Vymazalová)

most likely fly larvae (preliminary determination by Zdeňka Šůvová).

Shafts 2 and 3 were situated to the south of Shaft 1; both were 1.00 × 1.00 m large in their bottom parts and reached ca. 0.20 m lower than the west wall of AS 69. Both these shafts contained no burials but a large quantity of pottery. Numerous beer jars and a few bread forms were placed in the fill of brown sand mixed with *tafla* fragments and a few limestone chips in the major parts of both these shafts. These vessels were broken and mixed with the fill in Shaft 2, while some complete jars survived in clearly visible layers in Shaft 3. The bottom 0.50 m parts of both shafts contained only fragments of fine pottery vessels in a layer of fine brown sand with not many additions. An intact bowl with the remains of textiles and organic materials attached to it on its outside survived at the bottom of Shaft 2, giving perhaps evidence of certain rituals (fig. 13). The bottom of Shaft 3 was marked by a layer of mud, in which some of the fine pottery fragments were stuck.

Shaft 4 was 1.30 × 1.10 m large at its bottom and was ca. 0.2 m shallower than the previous two shafts. It was filled with yellow sand mixed with a small number of limestone chips and a few limestone fragments. At the bottom of the shaft along its southern wall, a package was discovered (Exc. No. 13/AS66/2016; 55 × 26 × 20 cm large), which consisted of a very compact white material (most probably natron). Traces and imprints of plant remains (perhaps a mat) and textiles were detected on the surface of this package on all its sides, indicating that the natron (?) was originally wrapped in these organic materials. A few fragments of pottery were found around this package at the bottom of the shaft (ceramic context 21.AS66.2016).

It cannot be excluded that the row of these shafts continued further south. This area, however, could not be explored due to the existence of another structure at a higher level above the south part of tomb AS 69. The preliminary study of the pottery (by Katarína Arias



Fig. 13 A bowl found at the bottom of Shaft 2 in AS 69D, with attached traces of textile and organic material (photo H. Vymazalová)

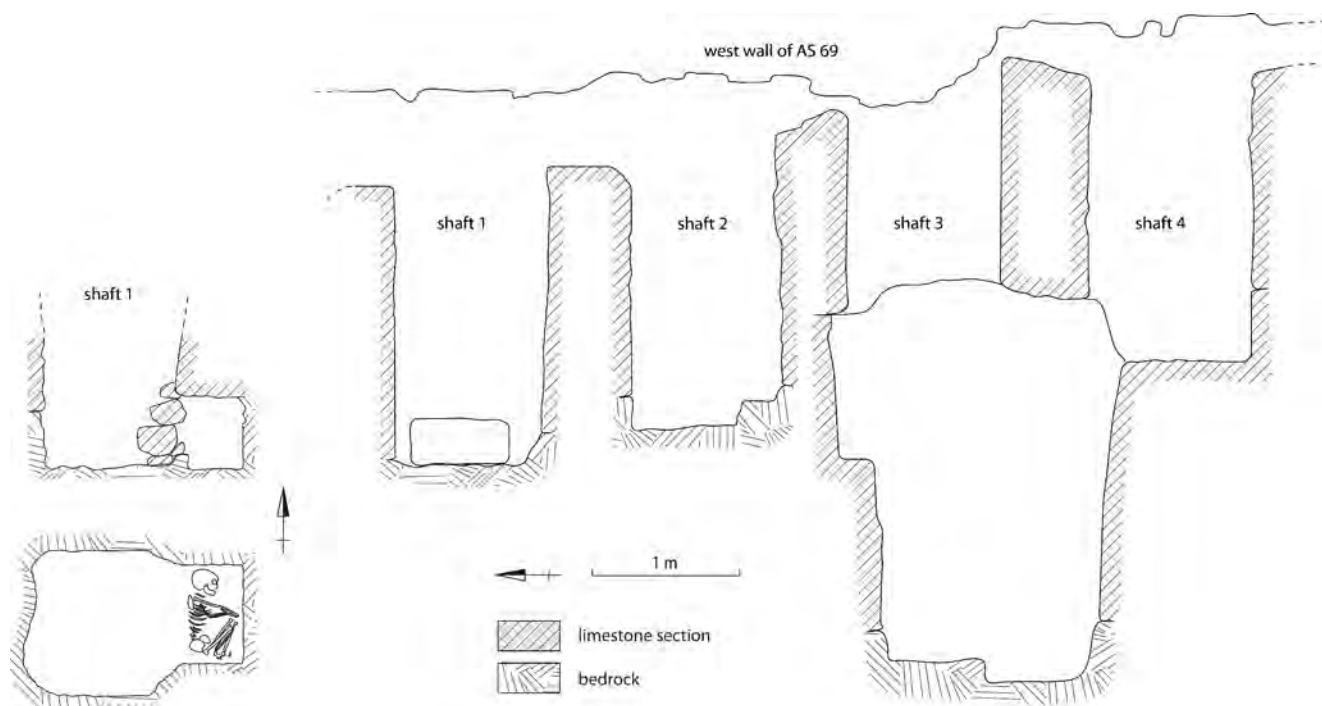


Fig. 14 North-south section through the explored shafts of AS 69D (drawing H. Vymazalová)

Kytarová) indicates a Sixth Dynasty date of the shafts of AS 69D.

Underneath Shafts 3 and 4, an earlier construction was detected, filled entirely with pure yellow sand, void of any finds (fig. 14). It has the shape of a 2.50 m deep shaft 1.40 × 1.30 m large, built of limestone pieces covered with a salinized brown mud plaster coating. The western wall seems to be inclined, and a 20 cm wide step was formed 1.50 m high on the northern wall. The bottom parts of the walls and the floor of the room were hewn in bedrock and the floor is *ca.* 15 cm higher in the northern part. The date and the purpose of this construction are unclear. It is possible that it was associated with tomb AS 69 and was intended to level out the terrain underneath this tomb and to strengthen it.

“Structure” AS 66

In the 2016 season, the exploration of the area above the rock-cut tombs of AS 68 continued from September 18th to October 6th, focusing above all on the area to the west of AS 69. In this area, the northern wall of “structure” AS 66 was uncovered in 2012 (fig. 15), situated on the bedrock above the rock-cut tombs of Duaptah and Shepesuptah (AS 68a–b). The eastern end of this wall was apparently attached to tomb AS 69, while its western end adjoins the eastern wall of the tomb of Ptahhetep (AS 36).⁸

The work in 2016 started from the south, along the north wall of AS 87 and further west. The north wall of another structure, AS 90, was detected in this area, which was constructed west of AS 87 and has a preserved limestone casing. This structure was not explored further south but marked the south end of our site in 2016. The eastern end of the northern wall of AS 90 sits upon a mud brick north-south oriented wall and rubble, while the foundation of its

western part reaches a further 1.75 m lower (with 11 courses of masonry preserved; see fig. 16).

This mud brick north-south oriented wall is max 1.60 m wide and has an inclined plastered western face, reaching to the same level as the foundation of AS 90. Its eastern side is only roughly built upon rubble fill. The wall runs 4.75 m to the north where it connects with another, east-west oriented wall, which has its northern face inclined to the south and covered with mud plaster with organic inclusions. It would be tempting to suggest a relation between this east-west mud brick wall and the one above AS 69, but a gap of 3.40 m exists between them and, moreover, they do not seem to be exactly aligned (see fig. 2). It is possible that the north-south and east-west mud brick walls surrounded the area in front of tomb AS 90. The eastern end of the east-west wall is built upon the masonry of the shafts of AS 69D (see above) and was, therefore, built later when the area surrounding AS 69D was covered with debris.

From the western end of the east-west oriented wall, another mud brick wall turns to the south; it is constructed of different bricks, made of dark grey mud with many molluscs and pottery fragments. This wall rests on rubble fill sloping from south to north indicating that the area was partly covered at the time of its construction.

The discussed mud brick walls were constructed upon sand mixed with rubble, and this condition made it difficult to continue the work deeper into the fill. The finds in this area were not numerous but included interesting objects. Most of them came from the layer of the preserved top of the east-west wall.

An Islamic coin (Exc. No. 1/AS66/2016) was discovered at the level of the top of the east-west wall, 0.4 m to its north, in the debris of mixed brown and yellow sand with additions of limestone chips. It is a 1 *qirsh* copper coin measuring 35 mm in diameter and 1.5 mm in thickness,



Fig. 15 The northern wall of AS 66 before its consolidation in 2012 (photo H. Vymazalová)



Fig. 16 The northern wall of AS 90 and the adjoining north-south mud brick wall (photo H. Vymazalová)





Fig. 17a, b The Ottoman coin dated to the 11th year of the reign of Sultan Selim III (photo M. Frouz)



minted on both sides. One side features the name of Sultan Selim III who ruled the Ottoman Empire between 1789–1807 AD. The minting on the other side of the coin reads: “minted in Egypt”, followed below by “year 1203”, which corresponds to the year of the sultan’s ascension to the throne according to the Islamic calendar. The number “11”

above the inscription refers to the regnal year of the minting, *i.e.* year 1800 (fig. 17; the identification of the coin by Mohamed Megahed; for Islamic coins of this period, see for instance Damali 2013).

Relief fragments were found in the fill both to the north and to the south of the east-west wall in the same level as

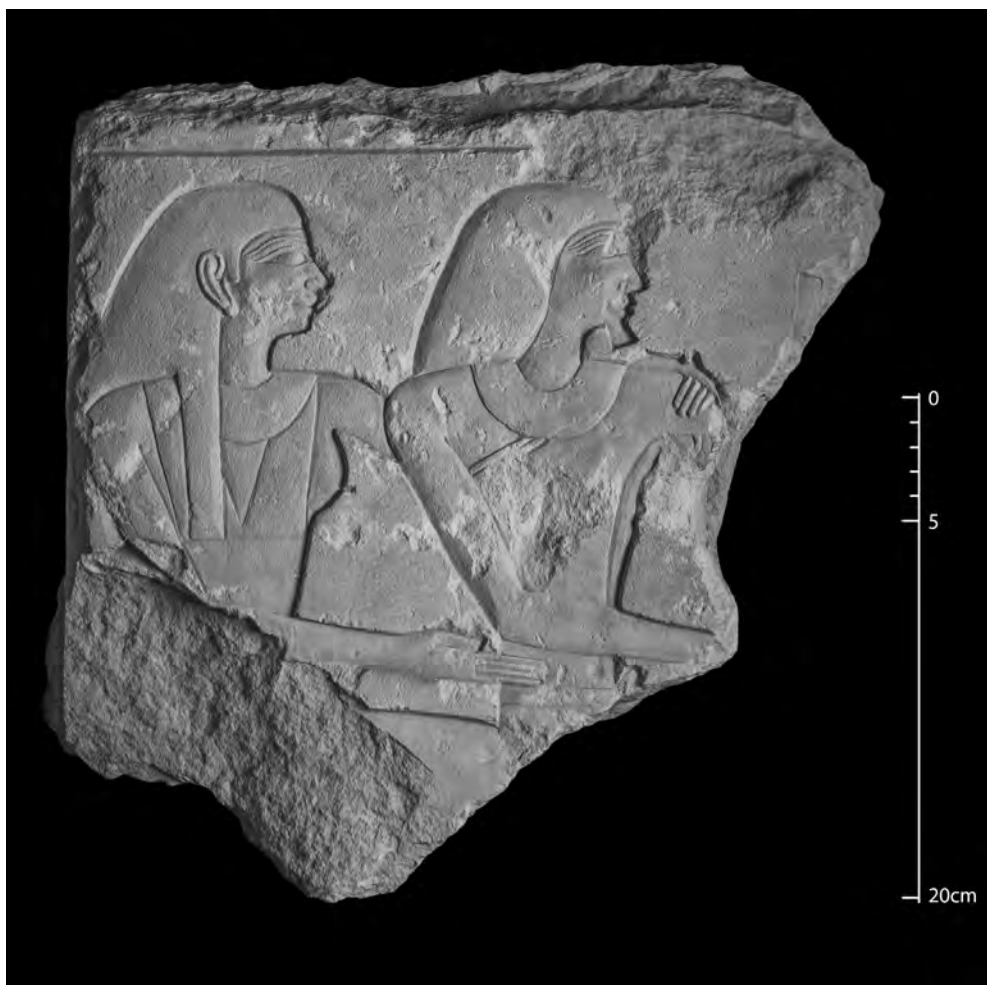


Fig. 18 Relief fragment with remains of a depiction of a seated couple (photo M. Frouz)

the coin and slightly deeper. Two fragments of sunken relief (Exc. No. 6/AS66/2016) contain parts of a scene showing a seated couple. The smaller fragment shows the back-rest of their seat and its lotus shaped ending while the larger fragment features the upper parts of their bodies. The top and left sides of the fragment are worked, indicating that this piece is the upper left part of a block. The couple is depicted facing right. The man wears a shoulder-length wig, a short beard and a panther skin and holds a staff in his left hand, while his wife has a collar and tight dress with shoulder straps; she embraces him with her left arm and touches his elbow with her right hand (fig. 18). These relief fragments can be compared to the relief block of Ankhiamptah, which was found in Shaft 14 in the corridor of the complex of Princess Sheretnebtj (Vymazalová 2015: 46–47): not only the type of limestone and the carving are very similar, but also the depiction itself, its size and details, such as the woman's pose. The previously found block and fragments of another, similar one were presumed to have belonged to a false door once placed in Sheretnebtj's rock-cut chapel (AS 68c; Vymazalová 2016: 10–16); however, this new relief fragment with a third scene complicates this interpretation.

Small fragments of the same type of stone and the same quality of relief were found to the south of the east-west mud brick wall (Exc. No. 4/AS66/2016), to the north-west of the north-western corner of AS 90. These fragments contain parts of hieroglyphic inscriptions showing very well-shaped hieroglyphs. It is worth mentioning that the relief fragments found in AS 69C (see above) are of the very same type as these finds.

Fragments of sunken relief with preserved polychromy were found in the debris to the north of the east-west wall as well (Exc. Nos. 2/AS66/2016; 5/AS66/2016). They feature remains of hieroglyphic signs, human figures and lines, and belonged to several objects.

Another mud brick construction is situated further north-west and was also built on sand and rubble fill, which

slopes from south to north to more than a meter lower than the foundation of the east-west wall; this does not necessarily indicate its earlier date in relation to the former structure but rather reflects the rising terrain of the hill. This small structure is only partly preserved, having a roughly L-shape turning from east-west to north-south, and it might have originally turned again to the west in its southern part (see figs. 2 and 20). It might have originally adjoined the east wall of Ptahhetep's tomb near its south-eastern corner.

To the west of the L-shaped structure, on a level underneath its foundation, a small part of an earlier limestone wall was revealed. This wall was 1.80 m thick and built in a solid manner, with limestone pieces and blocks forming the core of the wall, encased on both sides by a face of regular limestone blocks. The north-eastern corner of this wall was detected during the work in 2016 (fig. 20). The wall was incorporated into the south wall of Ptahhetep's tomb (AS 36, see fig. 2), namely underneath its southern extension. *Ca.* 2.70 m east of the tomb's south-eastern corner the wall turned towards the south. The western face of the wall was detected in 2010 during the exploration of the tomb of Neferherptah (AS 65), which was attached to it with its eastern side (see Jánosi in this volume). At that time, this wall was presumed to form the western part of the "structure" AS 66, however, the 2016 work indicates that this western solid wall was different in character, material and construction method, and was therefore most likely unrelated to the northern wall of AS 66. The purpose of this solid wall remains unknown at the moment, and further exploration might reveal whether it can be associated with yet another tomb. Later mud brick walls, including the L-shaped structure and the north-south wall constructed at a higher level on the fill above this wall, prevented its further exploration in the 2016 season.

Directly to the north of the L-shaped structure, and underneath its foundation level, another wall was traced, of which only its preserved top could be partly detected

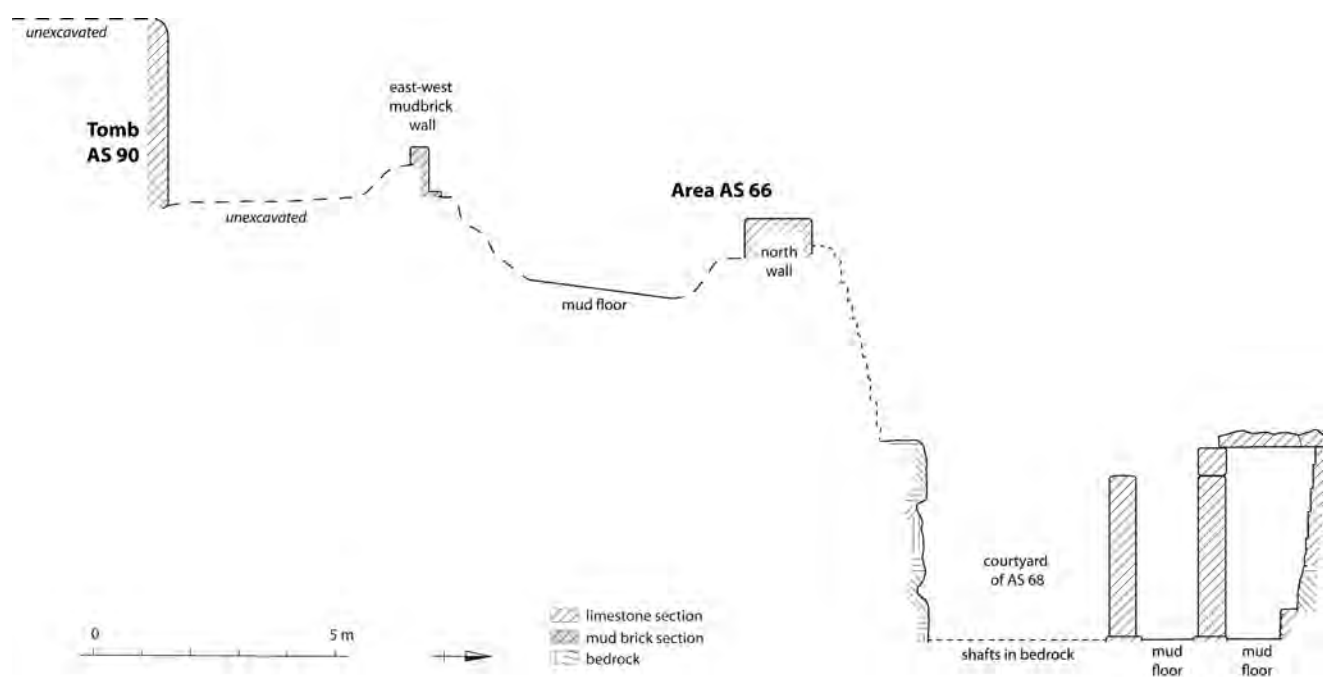


Fig. 19 North-south section through the area of AS 66 (drawing H. Vymazalová)



Fig. 20 North-east corner of the solid limestone wall in the western part of the explored area (photo P. Jánosi)



Fig. 21 The northern part of AS 66 showing a section through its debris and the mud layer (photo H. Vymazalová)



due to stability of the L-shaped structure. It was built of mud bricks against the east wall of Ptahhetep's tomb and ran to the east; after 1.90 m the wall started to slope down (see figs. 20–21). This slope was apparently intentional and not caused by damage to the wall. It is possible that this wall was part of a ramp that slopes down to the east and runs almost parallel to the northern wall of AS 66 not far from it. Only 1.60 m of the course of this declining wall were able to be traced, but it seems to continue still further east and deeper into the fill. Exploration of this structure, however, was not possible in the very short period of time and due to the instability of the higher situated mud brick walls.

The major part of the northern section of the site, behind the northern wall of AS 66, contains no further structures. This area was filled with brown and yellow sand mixed with smaller and larger quantities of limestone chips. Layers of this fill in the east-west section were not horizontal but diagonal, clearly indicating that the fill was intentionally dumped from the centre of the mud brick east-west wall creating a conical shape. This fill contained quite a few pottery fragments and no other finds (fig. 21).

Another cone of fill consisting of brown sand with numerous limestone chips was apparently dumped from the eastern part of the area. This part of the fill, which reached from the western wall of AS 69 and from above Shaft 1 of AS 69D towards the north-west and to the northern wall of AS 66, contained a very large quantity of pottery (ceramic context 5.AS66.2016). Mainly beer jars, but also bread baking forms, were included here in large numbers. Many of the vessels were intact but the majority were broken. This pottery group was most likely not an intentional deposit but rather a refuse cluster of discarded pottery from tombs in the surrounding area (for examples, see Arias 2017: Chapter 4.4.2).

The central part of the area east of the L-shaped structure features a partly preserved mud layer resting on yellow sand. The declining wall runs underneath this mud layer. Its surface was smooth and inclined slightly from south to north and from west to east. It is not entirely clear whether this mud layer was the remainder of some sort of a floor level or was rather related to rain. The latter seems more plausible but no traces of mud flow were detected.

Exploration of the deeper levels of the fill in this area was not possible in the short season; it thus remains unknown whether there is any original floor level behind the northern wall of AS 66 or what function this area had. Clearly there was no structure of a mastaba type to which the northern wall of AS 66 would relate. The fill of the area cannot be interpreted as the core of a tomb. The area was available to build AS 69D by the western wall of AS 69 sometime in the Sixth Dynasty. Slightly later it was filled with debris, possibly in order to prepare the foundation for AS 90, which is built on a higher part of the hill.

The northern wall of AS 66 might have been built to mark the southern wall of the courtyard of AS 68 and to block the debris that most likely continuously flowed from the south from the top of the hill. It is, however, impossible at the moment to say whether this was the only or the main function of the wall as the evidence is not sufficient to understand the area behind it; further research is needed to provide more clues and evidence.

Summary

The exploration of the area south of the tomb complex of Princess Sheretneby revealed that the hill rising towards the south was covered with many structures, which were constructed in several levels probably giving the hill a step-like impression. The short seasons, however, allowed only partial exploration; many parts of the site could not be uncovered and many questions are yet to be answered.

Tomb AS 69 in the eastern part of the explored area very likely relates to the rock-cut tombs which are located directly underneath, namely the tombs of Sheretneby and Nefer (AS 68c–d). It is, however, not clear at the current state of research whether AS 69 can be considered the superstructure of one of these two tombs. Taking into consideration the position and the architecture of these tombs, Nefer seems a slightly more likely candidate for the ownership of AS 69 than Sheretneby.

A secondary burial structure was constructed in the eastern corridor and another structure was attached to the tomb's western wall at a later point in the Old Kingdom. The western structure, AS 69C, consisted of several shafts, only one of which was a burial shaft, while two others were ritual shafts filled with pottery and the fourth shaft contained what seems to be an embalming package.

The eastern part of the explored area above the rock-cut tombs of Duaptah and Shepesuptah (AS 68a–b) contained no solid tomb or superstructure. Its northern part contained a wall designated as AS 66, which probably protected Sheretneby's courtyard from debris and sand coming from the south down the hill. Some mud brick walls were partly traced behind the AS 66 wall, but their exploration was very limited due to time and stability reasons. The original character of the area thus cannot be fully understood.

Later structures were built above the southern parts of AS 69 and the area to its west, which was by that time entirely filled with debris. East-west and north-south oriented mud brick walls possibly surrounded an area in front of two tombs, AS 87 and AS 90, which are located further south. These constructions are apparently later in date: the mud brick walls were built at a time when the eastern corridor of AS 69 was filled, and they also cover the shafts of structure AS 69C; tomb AS 87 sits upon debris that covers the southern end of AS 69. The instability of the mud brick walls prevented us from further exploring the southern part of the area. Tombs AS 87 and AS 90 are not yet uncovered, and it is not even clear whether they are in any way related. Their study is planned for one of the coming seasons.

During the exploration of the area, a solid limestone wall was partly detected in the north-west, adjoining the tombs of Ptahhetep and Neferherptah. The date and purpose of this wall is unknown, but it is constructed in quite a different manner compared to the surrounding tombs, and it seems to be older. This wall is planned to be examined further in one of the coming seasons, which will hopefully provide new information concerning the history of this part of the Abusir South cemetery and the diverse character of the structures located here.

Notes:

- ¹ In the tomb of Sheretnebtu (AS 68c), parts of the tomb's entrance ceiling fell off after it started to be cleaned and the tomb was first entered on October 21st, 2012. Since then, the cracks in the ceiling seem stable and they have been regularly monitored.
- ² The increasing damage northwards is very likely connected to the fact that the tomb was constructed on a hill; the preserved slope of the eastern wall corresponds with the original shape of the debris as well as with the slope of its clearly visible layers.
- ³ This tomb has not been explored yet, and its owner is unknown; its outline was only partly cleaned in 2015 due to lack of time. It is worth mentioning that the south part of this tomb's west wall was constructed on bedrock, which reached apparently higher here than in the north.
- ⁴ It is worth mentioning that offering tables were found inside the rock-cut chapel of Nefer (AS 68d), which is hewn in the bedrock right underneath AS 69. This indicates that the southern niche of AS 69 was perhaps not a main point of cultic activity.
- ⁵ The pottery has not been analysed yet but its preliminary examination showed a possible mid-Fifth Dynasty date (Katarína Arias Kytarová, personal communication).
- ⁶ Not more than a 4 cm thick layer of small rubble was noticed between the upper part of the west wall of Shaft 2 and the bottom-most bricks of the east-west wall.
- ⁷ The measurements of all the shafts were larger at their tops, due to the inclined west wall of AS 69, to which they were attached. The depths of the shafts differ depending on the preservation of their west, north and south walls.
- ⁸ Both structures seem to be interconnected in the bottom part, indicating perhaps that Ptahhetep's tomb and the north wall of AS 66 might have been built at the same time.

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Abstract:

The paper presents preliminary results of the exploration of another part of the Abusir South non-royal cemetery. Structures AS 66 and AS 69 were partly uncovered in the spring season of 2012 during the exploration of the tomb complex of Princess Sheretnebtu, AS 68. During the fall season of 2015 and fall season of 2016, the structures were explored and documented, revealing a mastaba, AS 69, above the rock-cut tombs of Sheretnebtu (AS 68c) and Nefer (AS 68d) and an enigmatic area, AS 66, above the rock-cut tombs of Duaptah (AS 68a) and Shepesuptah (AS 68b), which appears not to have been a tomb but perhaps an enclosed open area.

Old Kingdom – Abusir South – mastaba – shaft – false door – relief – coin

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