

Fig. 1 Plan of the mastaba of Neferherptah (AS 65) (drawing E. Majerus)

The mastaba of the chief physician, *Nfr-hr-Pth* (AS 65)

Peter Jánosi

Tomb AS 65 is part of a complex compound of large stone mastabas dating from the reign of Nyuserre to the beginning of the Sixth Dynasty (Dulíková – Odler – Havelková 2011). The mastaba belonged to the chief physician, Neferherptah, and was excavated in the fall of 2010. After a break caused by the 2011 revolution in Egypt, work in the field continued in 2012. However, the entire structure was not completely cleared and documented, since other, more imperative work intervened (Vymazalová – Dulíková 2012: 339–356; Bárta *et al.* 2014). Thus, work at AS 65 was not resumed and completed until the fall of 2016. During the rather short season that followed, the western part of the mastaba was cleared, and a third shaft (no. 3) was found in the centre of the core. Despite all our efforts, however, no apparent entrance into this tomb complex was discovered during that last season either. It must be suspected, and hopefully verified in one of the next seasons, that the original access into the tomb complex was possible from the south.¹

The mastaba of Neferherptah (AS 65) belongs to the so-called corridor chapel type (Reisner 1942: 256–291) and features four rooms, an open court, probably two serdabs and three burial shafts (fig. 1). The size of the entire tomb is impressive, measuring 21.0 × 9.3 to 11.0 m (ca. 40 × 20 cubits). The main feature of the complex is the fact that, in comparison to the surrounding mastabas, *i.e.* AS 31, AS 36, AS 66 and AS 67 (Bárta *et al.* 2014), no real “massif” of the tomb’s core exists, but the entire structure consists of shafts and construction walls which surround a fill of debris (fig. 2).

The mastaba has suffered from extensive damage, stone robbery and looting. One cannot escape the impression that at a certain point, the tomb was exploited

as a quarry for other building operations at the site. Certain features observed in the remaining parts – the surface of Shafts 2 and 3 and the false door in the main offering room (IV) – clearly indicate that the remnants of the ruined structure and the emptied shafts were exposed to weathering for quite some time,² resulting in the poor preservation of the tomb complex that we see today.

The stone walls of the chambers were preserved up to five courses of dressed local limestone blocks (max. height 1.68 m) on the east and south walls; the west wall only had four courses (height 1.14 m). No ceiling blocks remained and, except for the floor of the main false door niche (Room IV), none of the rooms had a floor made of stone. This does not necessarily mean that the rooms originally had no

stone floor at all; it might be assumed that the blocks – probably smaller limestone slabs set between the walls (compare the floor of the offering place) – were more easily removed by stone robbers. The floor level can thus only be deduced from the remaining thresholds of the dividing walls and the floor of the offering niche. Another indicator for the floor level might be the numerous levelling lines found on the walls of the rooms (see below). The original height of the tomb is nowhere preserved. No foundation was uncovered either. The walls were built directly on clean sand and debris reaching down to the original bedrock surface.

None of the walls showed any traces of decoration – either in paint or relief. The lower part of the false door, which remained in quite good condition, was also void of any decoration. The roughly dressed walls of the rooms, however, exhibited long horizontal levelling lines in red paint, especially on the west wall. Despite the scarcity of inscribed material, the lowermost blocks as well as several loose blocks featured graffiti in red paint and charcoal, written on the undressed surface of the blocks. These inscriptions (fig. 3) established the name of the owner of the tomb, Neferherptah (*Nfr-hr-Pth*) (Ranke 1935: 198, no. 8; Ranke 1952: 369), who held the title of a chief physician, *wr sḫnw* (for the title, see Jones 2000: 396, no. 1462). Except for his title, nothing is known about this man, and the dilapidated condition of his tomb did not change this view. It is worth mentioning, however, that Neferherptah built his tomb next to the mastaba of an inspector of physicians, Ptahhetep (AS 36)³ and not far from the chief physician of

Upper and Lower Egypt, Shepseskafankh (AS 67) (Bárta 2015: 25). Among this group of physicians, Neferherptah's mastaba is the latest in this cemetery.

Considering the mastaba's position and its relationship to the surrounding structures, it is evident that this tomb was not built on an independent site in the necropolis, but was squeezed into the remaining space between the huge mastabas already standing before Neferherptah started constructing his eternal abode. Considering the condition of the still remaining parts of the tomb, it is also clear that Neferherptah was obviously not able to finish his tomb. Because of these circumstances and the less solid construction methods encountered in the architecture of his mastaba, the entire structure probably soon fell into disuse, was partly demolished and reused as a secondary burial place for poor interments that date to the very end of the Old Kingdom or the First Intermediate Period (Dulíková – Odler – Březinová – Havelková 2015).

The main structure of the mastaba is divided into two almost equally spaced halves. The northern part contains the huge mouth of a shaft and a long, rectangular serdab to the south of it. The main offering room (Room IV) with the deep niche belongs to this part of the mastaba. Because of the position and size of these installations (shaft and offering room), it can be assumed with confidence that this part was the main burial complex of the mastaba, and Neferherptah's eternal resting place. The southern part contains two smaller and closely spaced shaft openings and probably (see below) a smaller hidden chamber (serdab?) to the west (fig. 1). Room III with the



Fig. 2 Overview of mastaba AS 65 looking south (photo P. Jánosi)

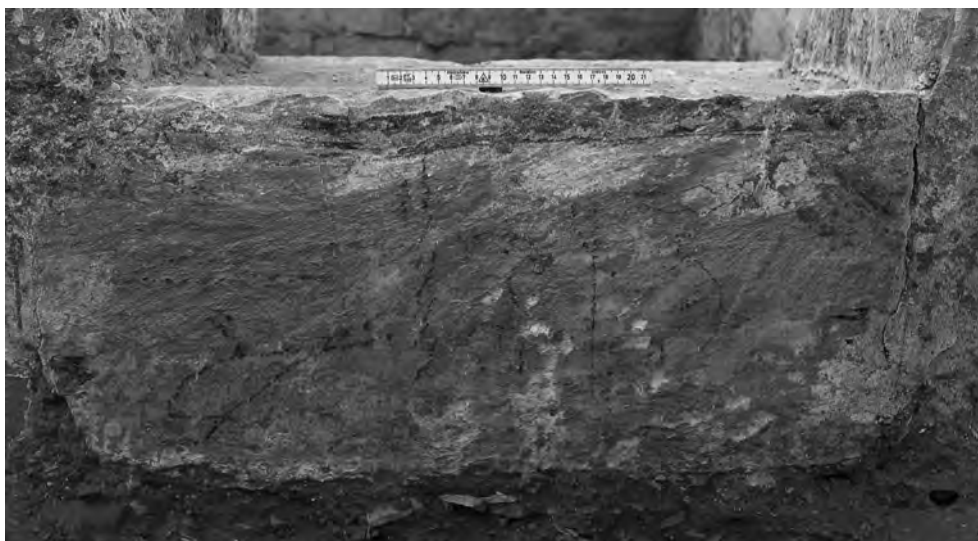
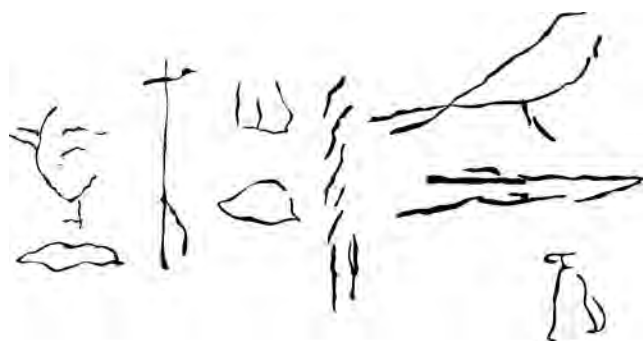


Fig. 3a, b Graffito naming the chief physician Neferherptah (photo and drawing H. Vymazalová)



two niches in the west wall served as the offering place for these two subsidiary shafts and burials. Rooms I and II to the south were added at a later stage in the construction of the mastaba (see below).

Concerning the building history of the complex and its chronological position within the cemetery, the following details can be gathered from the archaeological situation. When Neferherptah commanded the building of his tomb, he used the eastern façades of two already existing mastabas at the site. In the northern part he used the entire space alongside the mud brick casing of the east wall of the huge rock-cut mastaba tomb, AS 31, namely, the whole part to the south of its southern niche (date: mid-Fifth Dynasty, the owner remains anonymous; see Bárta 2011: 15–21). In the southern part, the north side of a huge mud brick mastaba (AS 64) was used (this tomb has not yet been excavated). This structure was built of dark mud bricks (30 × 16 × 10 cm) quite different from the material used in AS 65 and was older than AS 65; this is clear from the fact that the tomb's façade had already been plastered and whitewashed when the casing blocks of AS 65 were set along the front of its façade. As a consequence, Neferherptah initially respected the southern offering niche of AS 31 as well as the entrance into the huge mud brick mastaba to the south.⁴ This means that, at that time, both locations were still in operation and probably accessible to the funerary personnel in the necropolis. However, later on, when the offering rooms of AS 65 were built along the mastaba's east side, these chambers abutted the west side of the huge structure, AS 66, thus blocking any access to the north, including the southern niche of AS 31.

The situation there remains somewhat enigmatic, since the space between AS 65 and the mastaba of Ptahhotep (AS 36)⁵ to the north is formed by a narrow corridor running in an east-west direction and ending in front of the southern false door of AS 31. No apparent opening into this corridor was found, and as the huge stone wall to the north of the niche of AS 31 indicates, this space was obviously deliberately closed for good.

In fall 2016, further clearance was done at the junction of the north-east corner of AS 65, the south-east corner of the mastaba of Ptahhotep (AS 36) and the "structure" AS 66 (for a full description of the archaeological situation there, see Vymazalová in this issue). The excavation revealed that the narrow corridor between the two mastabas did not continue to the east, but was blocked at that end. During the clearing further down, an L-shaped wall, carefully built of good quality limestone with smooth northern and eastern faces, was discovered. Its bottom has not, as yet, been reached. However, it became clear that this L-shaped wall must be an older structure, which might be related to AS 31 to the west, since its northern part seems to run towards the southern false door of that mastaba. Presently, it is not clear if this wall is aligned with this cult place or not. Maybe the wall stopped at some point in front of the false door? Further investigations should clarify its relationship to AS 31. When mastaba AS 36 (Ptahhotep) was built, its southern extension incorporated this part of the wall. About 2.6 m east from the south-eastern corner of AS 36, the stone wall turns to the south and seems to become part of the western side of AS 66. While the northern part of the wall was ca. 0.8 m thick, the



Fig. 4 The main offering niche of mastaba AS 65 with the destroyed and undecorated false door (photo P. Jánosi)

part running north-south seems to be built as two walls running parallel (max. width 1.5 m). Presently, it is not clear exactly how this wall is related to AS 66. Is it an older structure that was built over by the tombs of the late Fifth Dynasty? Further clearing is needed to answer this question. It is worth mentioning that the east side of Neferherptah's tomb adjoins the western face of this limestone wall. For the time being, it is presumed that this wall continued further south, and this prevented Neferherptah from having an entrance to his own tomb from the east.

The situation to the south of AS 65 also remains unclear. An almost square open court (5.2 × 5.4 m) provided access either to the east into the entrance room (II) of AS 65, or, turning to the west, into the chapel of the mud brick tomb (fig. 1). Concerning the question of how this court and, in consequence, AS 65 and the mud brick tomb were entered, one would think that, initially, the access was from the south. At an unknown point in time, however, another huge mud brick tomb (AS 64)⁶ was built along the south of AS 65, closing the southern side of the open court. As can be gathered from the architectural features of Rooms I and II (fig. 1), these two chambers were built when AS 64 was already in existence. The south wall of room I abuts AS 64 and is much thinner than the other stone walls of AS 65.

In concluding, it must be stressed that the relationship of AS 65 to the structures in the north and south is not yet entirely understood. Is it possible to imagine that AS 65, after having received all the intended interments in its substructures, was closed and walled up without any

possibility of access to the offering chambers? Strange as this solution might seem, it would account for the unfinished state of the tomb as well as its early reuse and exploitation.

Rooms I–IV

As indicated above, the accessible rooms conform to the so-called corridor type and consist of four chambers (I–IV; see fig. 1). These were built by erecting a wall along the west side of the above-mentioned stone wall and, on the other side of the corridor, using the casing of the massif of AS 65's west side. The division between the rooms was achieved by simply erecting short, perpendicular connecting walls, which were not bonded to the masonry to the east and west.

Initially, Rooms I and II formed one long chamber measuring 5.66 × 2.06 (ca. 11 × 4 cubits). By erecting an intermediary stone wall of 0.77 m width, this long chamber was divided into a smaller room to the south (Room I: 2.05 × 2.10 m = 4 × 4 cubits) and a larger one to the north (II: 2.80 × 2.00 m, ca. 5.5 × 4 cubits). The latter was the entrance room and provided access from the court into the inner part of the mastaba. The dividing wall was not bonded to either the east or west walls.

The northernmost Room IV belongs to the T-shaped chapel type⁷ and contained the main offering place of the tomb. This had been formed as an extension and was a small, almost square-like niche with a false door occupying the entire west wall. The offering place measured 1.89 × 1.73 m in ground plan (fig. 4).

The false door was built of two huge slabs of white limestone of unequal size that were set upright. The joint between these two slabs is not vertical, but slightly slanted. The upper part of the false door is missing and the top has been worn away, due to exposure to weathering (see above). The form of the door consisted of a simple double-recessed false door without the torus moulding and the cavetto cornice typical for the later part of Old Kingdom false doors (Rusch 1923: 101–124; Vandier 1954: 389–431; Reisner 1942: 372–379; Wiebach-Koepke 1981: 6–10, 133; Strudwick 1985: 9–15). The surface of the false door was only superficially smoothed and covered with pink mortar/plaster to hide the uneven parts and cracks. No traces of inscriptions or relief were present. The two blocks of the false door rest on a third limestone block which served as the base.

In contrast to the outer room, the floor of the chapel consisted of irregular limestone slabs exhibiting a rough surface. No traces of an altar in front of the false door were visible.

The eastern part of Room IV was formed by a corridor measuring 7.00 × 1.58 m (13 × 3 cubits). For the building history of AS 65, it is interesting to note that the north wall of this corridor was bonded to the east wall, while the west end of the north wall was merely abutting the east face of the mastaba. Graffiti and levelling lines were found on all walls except the offering place itself. The southern part of



Fig. 6 The serdab of AS 65 (view to the east) (photo P. Jánosi)

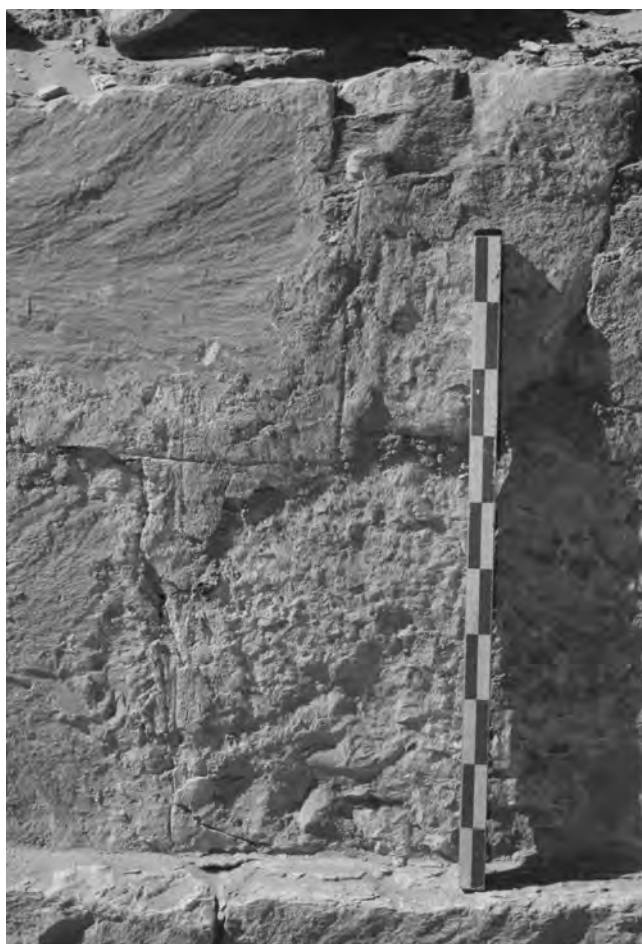


Fig. 5 Plaster covering the gaps of the wall. Note the artificially created lines in the mortar to indicate the outlines of the blocks (photo P. Jánosi)

Room IV is longer than the northern part, since it provided space for the “window” of the serdab, which was situated in the west wall.

Room III to the south of the offering room is a simple rectangular corridor (5.1 × 1.5 m, ca. 10 × 3 cubits) with two small niches in the west wall. Interestingly, these two niches do not reach down to ground level, but start only from the third course of the mastaba casing. This room is the subsidiary offering place of the mastaba, providing cult places for Shafts 1 and 3. Rooms I and II to the south of this corridor room were added by extending the mastaba’s architecture to the south. That these two rooms are a “later” addition is also clear from the fact that they both lack an independent east wall, such as seen in Rooms III and IV.

The walls of the rooms were built of local limestone of fairly good quality (Z-masonry; Reisner 1942: 178–179). The visible surface of the blocks was dressed, but with the exception of certain parts in Room IV, only superficially smoothed. The uneven parts, larger gaps between the blocks or faults and cracks were covered with plaster of pinkish colour (in some areas the mortar was grey), which in certain areas was thickly applied, covering large portions of the surface of the stones. This procedure is visible on almost all the walls. It is noteworthy that the stonemasons deliberately indicated the joints between two blocks covered by the plaster by incising vertical and horizontal lines into the wet plaster (fig. 5). The size of the individual blocks varies considerably from large slabs (1.47 × 0.36 m

north wall) down to smaller size blocks (13 × 30 cm). The form of the blocks varies too; many are rectangular, others have one or even two sides slanting, some exhibit a pointed angle (east wall). Despite these differences, the courses of blocks run straight through in all rooms and there are no steps.

The northern serdab

To the south of Shaft 2, a hidden chamber was unearthed in the core of the mastaba (fig. 6). The serdab is a narrow room (0.98 to 1.07 m wide = originally 2 cubits) running east-west. The walls consist of four courses of well-dressed white limestone slabs set in an upright position. The north wall was preserved to a height of 1.10 m, and the south wall to 1.25 m. The joints of the blocks were in some parts covered (as in other parts of the mastaba) with thick, pinkish mortar, giving the surface of the walls a somewhat irregular appearance. On both walls, horizontal levelling lines in red were preserved. No floor blocks were found in place and there is no indication that they ever existed. The wall blocks rested on debris consisting of small limestone chips. The roof, which has disappeared entirely, probably consisted of limestone slabs set horizontally upon the walls. The west end of the serdab was completely missing, while at its east end, a corner of the room and part of the south wall forming the squint remained. The room's original length as well as its former height can only be guessed, but the length did not exceed 4.5 m. Its height was probably not more than 3 cubits.

The (unfinished?) west serdab

Between the mud brick casing of AS 31 and the mud brick mastaba to the south, a small space of ca. 3 m remained. In the effort to document the west side of AS 65, it was surprising to note that the tomb had an extension of ca. 3 m to the west (fig. 1) that filled that empty space. For this purpose, an L-shaped wall was built running from AS 65 to the west and along the north face of the mud brick

mastaba; it then turned to the north until it connected with the south-east corner of AS 31. The space within this L-shaped enclosure was filled with coarse local limestone blocks and mud bricks. Interestingly, the centre of this construction showed a conspicuous empty space which had no installations, only accumulated debris. After removing the debris, the faces of the south-east corner of the mud brick casing of AS 31 were revealed (fig. 7). As such an extension of the west side of a mastaba is quite unusual, one might ask what purpose this construction might have served. Since no intact architecture inside the extension remained (except for the coarse limestone blocks, the mud brick casing of AS 31 and the west internal wall of AS 65), it could be speculated that this small structure was built to enclose another hidden chamber (serdab?), measuring no more than 2.5 × 1.5 m in size. This extension must be associated with the construction of Shaft 3, which was the latest of the three shafts and probably not envisaged from the beginning (see below). Since Shaft 3 is situated further to the west in relation to Shaft 1 and the axis of the mastaba, the tomb builders probably deemed it necessary also to extend the core construction of AS 65 westward in order to provide more stability for the tomb's core structure.

The substructures

Mastaba AS 65 contained three shafts, one large one (Shaft 2) in the northern half of the core, and two smaller ones (Shafts 1 and 3) in the southern part. The building sequence of these shafts might be possible to reconstruct, as Shaft 2 was built first, probably followed soon afterwards or even at the same time by Shaft 1. Shaft 3 is a later addition, regarding its position and orientation (see below).

The main shaft (Shaft 2)

Although situated in the northern part of the mastaba, Shaft 2 must be considered the main shaft because of its size and the spacious burial chamber. This is contrary to



Fig. 7 Shaft 3 in the centre of mastaba AS 65. To the west (right) the extension of AS 65 is visible, showing the empty space around the south-east corner of the mud brick casing of AS 31 (photo P. Jánosi)

the usual disposition of main shafts in a multi-shaft mastaba, where – as a rule – the southern shaft is the main shaft because it is closer to the main offering room, which is usually situated in the south of the tomb structure (Reisner 1936: 285; Junker 1929: 141).⁸ In the case of AS 65, the main shaft and also the main offering place were shifted to the north.⁹ Due to its position immediately behind the offering niche, which extends into the core of the mastaba, the mouth of the shaft was shifted to the west from the tombs's north-south axis. The upper part of the shaft (ca. 2.15×2.15 m = 4×4 cubits) was built of mud bricks laid in regular courses of headers and stretchers (brick size $29 \times 14 \times 8-9$ cm) and preserved for ca. 2 m. The fill of the shaft consisted of yellow sand, limestone chips and potsherds, as well as larger and well-dressed limestone blocks clearly dumped into the shaft as refill. Among them, relief blocks of varying sizes were retrieved, but these, however, did not belong to AS 65 (Exc. Nos. 25/AS65/2010, 28/AS65/2010), but were taken from other tombs on the site.

Below the mud brick lining, rough local limestone blocks were used to build the shaft for about 1.3 m down from the natural surface. The surfaces of these blocks were not dressed and the shaft walls appear uneven and rough. The depth of the shaft in the local bedrock (*tafla*) is 7.8 m. The entire depth of the preserved shaft measures 11.1 m. In the east wall, an entrance (1.55×1.60 m) was cut, opening on to a passage leading to the east. The original blocking was entirely gone, but the opening was completely covered – up to the ceiling of the passage – with a hardened fill, consisting of mud, mud bricks, limestone blocks and limestone chips originating from the gradual filling of the shaft after it was abandoned.

The substructure consists of a spacious U-shaped rock-hewn complex. This special form was employed to bring the place of the burial to the south of the shaft, as was customary for early mastabas. A narrow and short passage running east turns into a 4 m long connecting passage oriented north-south (width 4.5 m). This passage

opens into a spacious burial chamber oriented east-west (12.5×8.2 m max., ca. 24×15.5 cubits). The west wall of the burial chamber has a 0.87 m high bench ($3.3 \times 1.0-1.3$ m). In front of it, a rectangular cavity was roughly hewn into the floor, measuring $1.85 \times 0.52-0.55 \times 0.50$ m, which contained the burial of a male person. For the position of this burial in relation to the serdab in the superstructure, see the comment at the end of this article.

The coarsely dressed walls of the substructure were covered with a dark mud coating and smoothed with a hard, white plaster. The surface of the latter displayed dots and spots in red colour indicating the notion of red granite walls for the burial chamber. The surface of the bench and its front were also carefully covered with dark mud and white plaster. The ceiling was left in its original state, being undressed and unpainted. In a few areas, patches of pink mortar covering faults and cracks were preserved. However, large portions of the *tafla* ceiling had collapsed in antiquity (fig. 8).

Although the chamber was completely robbed, the burial in the pit was left untouched. The bones of the individual were in poor condition, displaying traces of simple mummification (the body wrapped in linen). Due to the repeated opening of the substructure and its accessibility for a longer period, rain water and mud had repeatedly poured into the burial chamber, filling the chamber floor and burial pit. Apart from the crumbling walls and portions of the ceiling that had fallen into the pit, the body had become completely soaked and, after the drying process, had solidified in the hard mud. The body had been laid on its back; it belonged to a mature man. The bones were in precarious condition and almost crumbled away during the cleaning process. Although successfully retrieved for examination from the burial pit, they were subsequently destroyed during the looting of the 2011 revolution. No objects were found with the interment. No fragments of a lid or of stone slabs for covering the pit were present in the chamber. Above the bench, in the southwest corner of the chamber, a small rectangular hole, measuring 30×20 cm,



Fig. 8 The burial chamber of Shaft 2 as found (view to the west) (photo M. Bárta)

opens into the burial chamber of Shaft 3 lying to the south of chamber 2 (see below).

The architecture and the remains found in this substructure clearly indicate that the tomb owner initially intended a “better” burial for himself, which obviously should also have included a stone sarcophagus set up against the bench. This installation or a narrow niche cut into the west wall of the chamber was used to hold the sarcophagus lid prior to the burial.¹⁰ However, the tomb owner seems to have passed away before his burial place could be finished and a sarcophagus brought down into the substructure. Therefore, a “cheaper” and faster installation – a simple pit in the floor – for the interment was substituted. Since this interment was found without any protection (such as covering slabs or a lid), some doubt remains as to the identity of the person buried here. It might very well be a later (secondary) instalment, one not related to the owner of the mastaba.

The subsidiary Shafts 1 and 3

Shaft 1 and Shaft 3 located in the south half of the mastaba core are smaller than Shaft 2. While Shaft 3 (1.75 × 1.65 m) was located almost in the north-south axis of the tomb, Shaft 1 (1.6 × 1.5 m) was located to the east.¹¹ Both shafts are quite close to each other, but do not share the same orientation; the mouth of Shaft 3 being turned northeast-southwest.

The lining of Shaft 1 with bricks (29–30 × 12–13 × 8 cm) extended down to 2.8 to 3.0 m. The entire depth of the shaft as preserved measures 10.6 m. At the bottom of the shaft, two openings were detected. The one to the west was still entirely blocked when uncovered, while the opening to the east was only partly intact and refilled with fallen *tafla*, local limestone blocks, sand and mud. The opening to the west measured 1.2 × 0.8 m and was situated *ca.* 0.2 m above the floor of the shaft. It was entirely filled with large irregular and undressed local limestone blocks set in hard mortar, thus forming a solid massif, originating from the time of the tomb’s construction. No finds or any other deposits apart from the stones were found. This completely blocked cavity is somewhat puzzling but provides some clues as to the tomb’s building history. It might be inferred that originally the tomb builders intended to excavate the burial chamber to the west of the shaft, which would have been the normal position. Maybe at that point Shaft 3 had already been started and would have caused problems in positioning the burial chamber of Shaft 1. Thus, work was halted, the gap filled and a new burial chamber excavated to the east. The condition of the burial chamber indicates that looting took place more than once and – as with Shaft 2 – Shaft 1 remained open for quite some time.

The floor of the passage into the burial chamber is irregular and slightly sloping downwards. Apart from the extensive damage carried out by tomb robbers witnessed throughout the entire substructure, a large portion of the deterioration resulted from the poor condition of the natural *tafla*, which in many parts resulted in the collapse of the rock, leaving the burial chamber in a precarious and chaotic state. Large portions of the ceiling and of the chamber walls – especially in the southern and western

part – had entirely collapsed, covering half of the room with huge stones and debris, thus giving the chamber an irregular shape.

Compared to Shaft 2 the burial chamber of Shaft 1 is smaller and less well-prepared. The walls were only coarsely cut from the rock, and no intention of the tomb builders to rectify walls or dress surfaces was observable. The floor was uneven and *ca.* 35 cm below the floor level of the shaft. In the southern part of the burial chamber, the floor remained unfinished. No traces of any coating of the walls as seen in Shaft 2 were encountered. No burial pit was excavated and no traces of a limestone sarcophagus or wooden coffin were found. The max. length of the chamber was 4.22 m; its width measures 2.32 m at the south wall; the height is 1.55 m. Since the chamber remained unfinished, it might be concluded that the owner had died and the finishing work was halted.

Along the east wall, a simple interment was laid at rest.¹² The corpse was laid on a slightly raised shelf cut from the natural rock. Due to the looting and damage caused by natural effects (water and mud), however, little of the original burial could be discerned, the body being completely decomposed and destroyed. Because of some longer fragments of bones found in the south and parts of the head (jaw and teeth) in the north, it might be inferred that the corpse was originally positioned head towards the north, feet to the south. The bones were fragmented and broken into small pieces. Intruding water mixed with sand added to the rapid decomposition of the interment, which presented itself as a mixture of debris, mud, bone fragments and organic material. After having removed the first layer of bone fragments and mud debris, a complete mirror made of copper (Exc. No. 54c/AS65/2010, diameter 19 cm, thickness *ca.* 3 mm) was discovered embedded in the mud in the south (pl. 2). Apart from the corrosion due to humidity, the object was in very good condition and still exhibits the short extension for fixing the wooden handle – the latter itself had disappeared. The mirror was found in the southern part of the burial place and must have been hidden underneath the legs of the body, since such a precious object would hardly have been neglected by thieves. It should be noted that although heavily robbed, no sherds of vessels of any kind were found in the entire chamber.¹³

Shaft 3

Although Shaft 3, which was discovered in the fall season of 2016 only, is located almost on the north-south axis of the mastaba, its position is secondary and certainly inserted between Shaft 1 to the south and the masonry of the serdab to the north. The mouth of the shaft was 1.75 × 1.65 m. The shaft’s depth from the preserved surface to the bottom was 10.5 m; 3.6–3.8 m at the top lined with mud bricks. The fill of the shaft contained the usual debris mixed with pot sherds, limestone fragments and sand. In this fill, however, also complete limestone blocks originating from the casing of AS 65 were found. Thus, the backfill of the shaft must have occurred at a time when AS 65 was already in a ruined condition.

From this fill, a relief block showing a tomb owner boating with his daughter, Neferhetepes, was retrieved. It

was part of a marsh scene (Exc. No. 2/AS65/2016). The relief certainly originates from another tomb, since AS 65 was left undecorated. The surface of the block is well preserved, exhibits a well-cut relief and in many places even preserved its original colour (fig. 9).

From the bottom of the shaft, a simple and narrow burial chamber orientated north-south opened to the west (max. 4.35 × 2.16 × 1.45 m). The chamber was found in a ruined condition filled with accumulated debris, sand and mud bricks as well as large pieces of natural rock fallen from the ceiling and the side walls of the chamber. The walls were only superficially dressed and the floor slants from north to south, clear indications that the room was left unfinished. No traces of a burial, grave goods or even pieces of pottery were found in the chamber. In the northeast corner of the room and right under the ceiling, the breakthrough (31 × 30 cm) into the burial chamber of Shaft 2 opens (see above). This opening must have occurred during the process of building the substructure, since in the northern burial chamber the hole was carefully blocked with mud bricks and covered with plaster to hide the hole. No such effort was undertaken in Shaft 3. Considering the unfinished state of this substructure, its dilapidated condition and the absence of any grave goods, Shaft 3 was obviously never used for an interment.

Concluding remarks

In finishing this report, one important observation concerning the layout of AS 65 should be mentioned. The method of building this mastaba, the material employed

and the “cheap” workmanship put AS 65 into the category of the less-wealthy tombs of this necropolis. However, by looking more closely at the disposition of the three burial chambers and the position of the cult installations in the superstructure, one recognizes a clever arrangement which should guarantee the afterlife of the deceased persons intended to be buried in AS 65 (fig. 1). The burial chamber of Shaft 2 is not only situated to the canonical south, but it is exactly positioned underneath the large serdab, which certainly belonged to the main offering place of this tomb. In the case of Shaft 1, one wonders if the tomb builders changed their plan, abandoning the initially conceived burial chamber on the west side in preference to one on the east, in order to move the burial place exactly underneath the southern niche of the offering room (Room III). A similar case might be proposed for Shaft 3, which, as shown above, was a later installation. The mouth of the shaft is exactly to the west of the north niche of offering Room III. The burial chamber of this shaft is situated further to the west and underneath the curious extension of the superstructure on the west side (see above), probably incorporating another serdab intended for this burial place. The fact that Shaft 3 was abandoned and never used might have caused the tomb builders also to halt construction of the hidden chamber in the superstructure. This would neatly explain why nothing of this instalment was found when excavated. It was simply never built. Be that as it may, despite its present, fragmented condition, mastaba AS 65 as part of a huge compound of late Fifth Dynasty tombs at Abusir South, offers a wealth of information worthy of further study.



Fig. 9 Relief showing part of a marsh scene. Only the lower part of a female figure standing on a papyrus skiff facing right and the toe of the tomb owner are preserved. The woman's name, probably a daughter, was Neferhetepes (photo M. Frouz)

Notes:

- ¹ For valuable comments and help in writing this article, I extend my thanks to Hana Vymazalová and the peer reviewers. All mistakes remain, of course, mine. The line drawing was kindly prepared by Elisabeth Majerus.
- ² At the bottom of Shaft 2, bones of carnivores, the digestion of owls, and in the middle of the burial chamber, the head of a dog were found, confirming that for some time this shaft was left open.
- ³ As Hana Vymazalová kindly pointed out to me, it seems plausible that because of the position of both mastabas and the titles of the tomb owners, both men were probably related to each other. It is certain that AS 65 was built after AS 36. This is also confirmed by the pottery corpus found in both structures (see Arias 2017).
- ⁴ For the curious extension of the mastaba's façade into the small space between AS 31 and the mud brick tomb, see p. 31.
- ⁵ This tomb consists of a huge mastaba with one shaft in the south and a rock-cut chapel in the north, which was entered via the court of AS 31. Graffiti found on some casing blocks reveal that the owner was *shd sijnw Pth-htp*. This mastaba and the tomb of Neferherptah (AS 65) will be the issue of the next volume in the Abusir series (Dulíková – Jánosi – Arias Kytnarová – Odler, *in preparation*).
- ⁶ AS 64 is certainly older than the final stage of AS 65. The tomb awaits complete exploration in the near future.
- ⁷ This type of offering room is common in the later part and at the end of the Fifth Dynasty. See, for instance, the tomb complex of Seshemnefer IV and Tjeti (Junker 1953: figs. 49, 50).

- ⁸ Such a disposition in changing the main shaft's position in a mastaba is a common feature of Fifth Dynasty tombs (Jánosi 2002: 338–350).
- ⁹ The position of the main offering room is a further argument to look for the tomb's original entrance somewhere in its southern part (later occupied by the huge mud brick tomb AS 64).
- ¹⁰ It should be noted, however, that the size of the bench is remarkably large and wide compared to the sarcophagus normally intended. Usually the stonemasons created a ledge wide enough to support part of the lid, the other half resting on the sarcophagus.
- ¹¹ On top of the preserved mouth of Shaft 1 and covering its north-east part, the remains of a rectangular mud brick construction were uncovered. These obviously belonged to a poor secondary burial which had made use of the mud bricks of Shaft 1. No objects or fragments of the interment were found.
- ¹² This unusual position in opposition to the traditional west wall might indicate that the western part was unfinished at the time the burial took place.
- ¹³ Since the bones were decomposed to mere fragments any hope of establishing the age of the person became impossible. The bones and objects were destroyed during the 2011 revolution.

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Abstract:

During the fall season in 2016, the Czech Institute of Egyptology continued its field work at Abusir South. The western part of mastaba AS 65 belonging to the chief physician, Neferherptah (end of Fifth/beginning of Sixth Dynasty), was cleared and documented. One aim of the work was to clarify the relationship of AS 65 to AS 31 and an as yet unexcavated mud brick mastaba to the east. During this work, a third shaft was discovered in AS 65 situated between Shaft 1 in the south and Shaft 2 in the north. This shaft was probably the latest in the sequence of building Neferherptah's tomb, but it was never used for a burial. Neferherptah is the latest of the physicians found in this part of the cemetery thus far (*cf.* Ptahhotep, Shepeseskafankh) and his tomb reveals a complex building history, which is detailed in this contribution.

Abusir South – graffiti – Fifth Dynasty – Old Kingdom – chief physician – serdab – tomb building

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