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# Extraordinary Discovery by Czech Egyptologists from the time of the pyramid builders

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Czech Egyptologists from the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague discovered a burial complex of high officers of the Egyptian Old Kingdom, including the court of an Egyptian Princess dating back to approximately 2500 BC. "This extraordinary discovery opens a new chapter in the history of the burial site in Abusir," commented Prof. Miroslav Bárta, the head of the archaeological expedition in Abusir, about the success of the Czech team. "We can get an insight into a time 4500 years ago and step by step we can document the life and afterlife of several historically important personalities from the time of the pyramid builders."

The complex, which has been explored very little, is formed of several excellently preserved mastabas, rock tombs and a remarkable courtyard with pillars bearing the name and titles of an Ancient Egyptian Princess. The Ancient Egyptian architects most likely used the natural depression in the rock surface to build the yard that is 4 metres deep. It is almost lost between the mastabas of the officials that were built around it on higher ground. The northern and western walls of the yard were panelled by lime stone blocks, whilst the southern wall was carved into the rock. The eastern wall was also built out of lime stone and along it there is a long staircase of lime stone slabs running from the North to the South. In the yard, four pillars can be found which originally supported the architraves with the ceiling stone blocks. On the south side of all four pillars, there are the name and titles of the owner of the site: "*King's daughter of his body, his beloved, revered in front of the Great God, Sheretnebtj.*" The owner of this yard was a princess who is so far unidentified, but the preliminary research implies that she lived in the second half of the 5th dynasty, around 4500 years ago.

It is worth taking note of the fact that the court of the princess is located in the southern part of the necropolis of Abusir, among the tombs of non-royal officials. At this time, the majority of the royal family members were buried about a kilometre to the north, in the proximity of the complex of pyramids of the Egyptian rulers from the 5th dynasty. It was here that 30 years ago, the then Czechoslovakian team researched the complex of pyramids of King Raneferef and his mother Queen Chentkaus II, as well as the tombs of the princesses from the end of the 5th dynasty.

A corridor runs from the court towards the east and there are entrances to four tombs located in the southern wall of the court. The tombs were carved into the rock on the southern side. So far three tombs have been explored, all of them belonging to high officials. The owner of the first of them was Duaptah, an inspector of the palace attendants. The second one was built for the chief of justice of the Great House, Shepesuptah, and the most eastern tomb belonged to the overseer of the scribes, Nefer. The first two tombs can most likely be dated back to the time of the rule of Djedkare Isesi in 25 BC, whereas the last tomb seems to be slightly older. The last tomb, which is located between Nefer's and Shepesuptah's tombs, is still being researched by the archaeologists and the name of its owner is not yet known.

The Czech team were able to make some extraordinary finds when exploring the court, corridor and rock tombs. Amongst others, they found a remarkable set of statues. Four large lime stone naoi with engaged statues were found in the eastern corridor, between the tombs' entrances. The one furthest west depicts a man, another shows a man with a small son and in the eastern part of the corridor, to the sides of the entrance to Nefer's tomb, there is a naos depicting three figures, a woman in the middle and two men at her sides. Their identity is subject to further archaeological and historical research. Inside of Nefer's tomb, another surprise awaited the archaeologists. On its western wall, in the original location, a beautifully decorated false-door has been preserved. False-doors were supposed to serve the purpose of being a connection between this world and the afterlife, so the deceased inside the tomb could accept offerings placed there by the family. The false-door is covered by inscriptions that were there to magically ensure Nefer and his wife Hathorneferet had a sufficient amount of food for their afterlife existence. The inscriptions also list their titles and ranks. The hieroglyphic marks are not only carved but also painted and the original colours are still well preserved.

In the entrance part of the tomb the Czech team discovered a serdab, i.e. a walled niche, in which Nefer put his statues. The serdab was found intact and contained four lime stone statues with polychrome decoration. The statues depicted Nefer in several roles; two of them show him as a walking officer, another as a scribe with a papyrus scroll in his lap and the last statue presents him together with his wife Hathorneferet as she embraces him gently around the shoulders.

Fragments of other statues were found in the court and the corridor. It is the largest set of statues of officers that have been discovered in Abusir. The quality of the artificial craftsmanship is truly extraordinary and it reflects the high status of the owners.

The research in this site will continue for another four weeks and it is already possible to say that the information that has been acquired will change our current opinions on this important period of the history of Ancient Egypt greatly.