



## SHEPESPUPTAH IDU ACCORDING TO EVIDENCE FROM HIS ROCK-CUT TOMB AT ABUSIR SOUTH<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** The article discusses evidence uncovered by the mission of the Czech Institute of Egyptology, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague at the necropolis of Abusir near Egypt's capital Cairo. The tomb of Shepespuptah Idu was one of the four rock-cut tombs in the tomb complex of Princess Sheretnebtj in Abusir South. It was uncovered in 2012 and its exploration continued until 2013. The identity of the tomb owner is known from hieratic inscriptions in his tomb chapel, which tell us about his name, nickname and titles. Shepespuptah held administrative titles associated with legal matters and royal offerings and the latter offices connect him with the economy of the royal funerary cults. The burial of Shepespuptah, which was found in his sarcophagus reveals interesting details about his health.

**KEY WORDS:** Ancient Egypt – Old Kingdom – Abusir – Abusir South – tomb complex of Sheretnebtj – rock-cut tomb – Shepespuptah

### 1. Introduction

The tomb of Shepespuptah Idu is located in Abusir South at the necropolis of the mid Fifth–early Sixth Dynasty date near the mastaba of the vizier Qar (Bárta et al. 2009). Shepespuptah built for himself a rock-cut tomb within the tomb complex of Princess Sheretnebtj (AS 68), which consists of a courtyard serving as communal area, a corridor

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and four rock cut tombs. Besides the one of Shepesuptah (AS 68b), rock-cut tombs of Duaptah (AS 68a), Sheretneby (AS 68c) and Nefer (AS 68d) are located in this tomb complex (Vymazalová – Dulíková 2012, 2014; Bárta et al. 2014b; Vymazalová 2015). The tomb complex of Princess Sheretneby was constructed in the mid-late Fifth Dynasty and was used for burials until the end of the Old Kingdom. The four rock-cut tombs belonged to four major owners and their family members, while a number of additional burial shafts were hewn in the floor of the courtyard and the corridor (Bárta et al. 2014b: 20–22; Vymazalová 2015: 43–48). Shepesuptah was thus one of the four major individuals buried in this tomb complex in the late Fifth Dynasty.

## 2. The tomb of Shepesuptah (AS 68b)

The tomb of Shepesuptah, AS 68b, was discovered and explored in the spring season of 2012 when the courtyard of Princess Sheretneby was first uncovered (Vymazalová – Dulíková 2012: 343–345; Bárta et al. 2014b: 24), and its exploration was completed in 2013 when the burial shaft in the chapel was excavated (Vymazalová 2015: 50).

The entrance into the tomb chapel opens in the east part of the south wall of the courtyard AS 68, almost opposite to the descending staircase, which gave access to it. To its left, at the beginning of the corridor which runs eastwards to the tombs of Sheretneby (AS 68c) and Nefer (AS 68d), a 2.06 m high naos with a statue of a standing man was placed on a limestone pedestal with an altar in front of it (Fig. 1) (Vymazalová



Fig. 1 Naos with a male statue and an altar, situated on the eastern side of the entrance to Shepesuptah's tomb (photograph Hana Vymazalová)

– Dulíková 2012: 345–346; Bárta et al. 2014b: 22). This naos was uninscribed, and thus its owner is not known by name; its location might indicate an association with the tomb of Shepesuptah but no confirmation can be drawn from the extant evidence, and association with the tomb of Sheretnebtj cannot be excluded either.

## 2.1 The rock-cut chapel of Shepesuptah

The entrance to the tomb chapel was not well preserved but roughly carved in bedrock, and was fairly wide (Fig. 2). Two vertical lines drawn in red paint on the eastern wall of the entrance perhaps mark the place where the north wall of the tomb was originally built-up, which made the entrance narrower. No traces have survived of the lintel and drum, which most likely once decorated the entrance of this tomb. A fragment of a limestone drum (Excav. No. 249/AS68/2012; size: 62 × 37 × 27 cm) that was found 1.40 metres deep in Shaft 5 in the courtyard might have possibly belonged to this tomb's entrance. It had remains of pinkish gypsum plaster on the side but no traces of inscriptions were noticed.



Fig. 2 The entrance to the rock-cut tomb of Shepesuptah (AS 68b) with a part of the original fill (photograph Veronika Dulíková)

A fragment of a wooden statue was found in the sand and rubble fill in the entrance to Shepesuptah's tomb (Excav. No. 58/AS68/2012). It shows part of the head of a male statue made of acacia wood (Vymazalová – Dulíková 2012: 345; wood determination by J. Novák). It cannot be specified whether this statue was once placed in Shepesuptah's tomb and showed his own features, or whether it came from another tomb in this tomb complex. Serdabs with statues were found in the neighbouring tombs of Nefer and

Sheretnebtj (Vymazalová – Dulíková 2014: 3–7, Bárta et al. 2014: 25–27; Bárta – Vymazalová forthcoming). The latter comprised some remains of wooden sculptures but these were made of sycamore wood, indicating that the male head belonged to a different statue.

The fill of the chapel of Shepesuptah’s tomb reached 0.50 m under the ceiling in its northern part and it sloped down towards the floor of the chapel in the southern part, reaching as far as the chapel’s south wall. The surface of the fill was covered with a layer of dried mud, indicating that heavy rain entered the chapel in antiquity after the tomb was abandoned and filled but before its entrance was blocked by the fill of the courtyard (Vymazalová – Dulíková 2012: 345; Bárta et al. 2014b: 24–25). The fill of the chapel consisted of brown sand mixed with larger fragments of limestone and many limestone chips, which were more numerous in the bottom layers of the fill. The fill of the chapel contained numerous fragments of pottery (Pottery No. 21.AS68b.2012), scattered animal bones, small limestone objects, copper fragments, fragments of wood and coal and a hammer stone. In addition, human bones were found in the north part of the chapel in its entrance (Excav. No. 59/AS68/2012) and by its west wall (Excav. No. 99/AS68b/2012), and in the south part of the chapel where several bones were stuck in the layer of dried mud on the fill, and might have been brought here by rain (Excav. Nos. 100, 104/AS68b/2012). Some of these bones even entered into the entrance to the burial chamber (Excav. Nos. 118 and 120a–b/AS68b/2012).

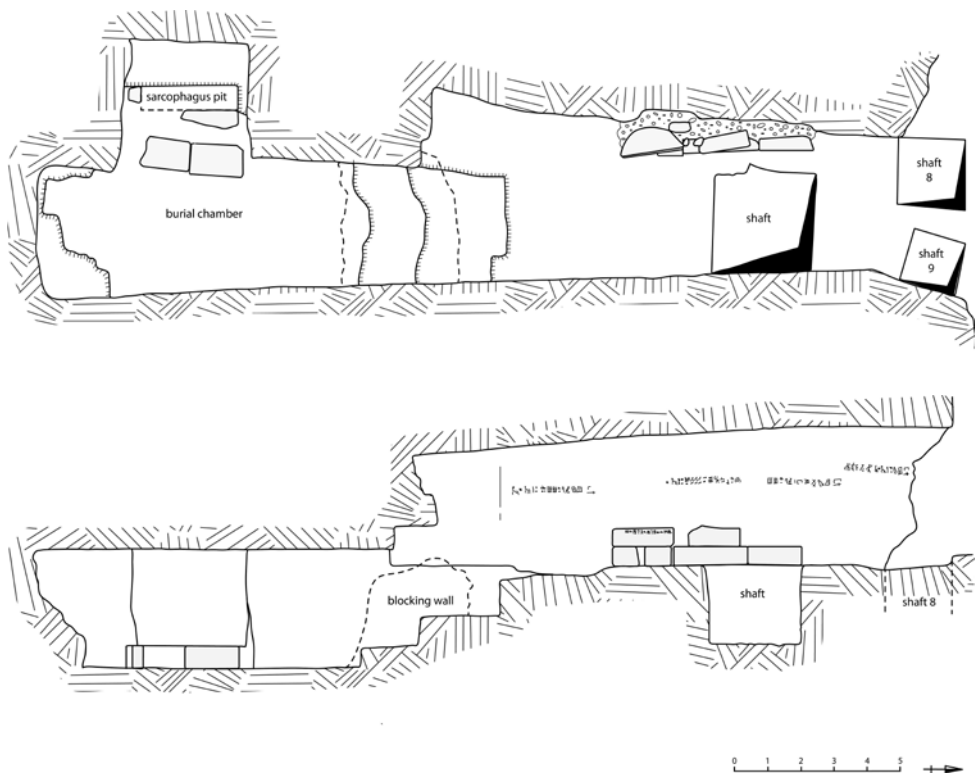


Fig. 3 Plan and section of the tomb of Shepesuptah (Hana Vymazalová)

The chapel itself has a rectangular plan, slightly wider in the southern part (Fig. 3). It was 7.40 metres long, max 3.40 metres wide and its ceiling reaches 2.50 metres height in the north but only 1.90 metres in the south part. The east wall of the chapel was straight and relatively smoothly carved in bedrock while the west wall was very roughly hewn and was originally cased with limestone blocks. This feature can be compared to Sheretneby's tomb chapel (Bárta et al. 2014b: 25; Vymazalová – Arias Kytarová forthcoming). The floor of the chapel shows a line imprint of the casing, which appears along the whole west wall of the chapel. Shepespuptah's casing was of fine white Tura limestone; several of its blocks survived *in situ*, and some more blocks were found in the fill of the chapel (Fig. 4). The around 20–30 cm wide space between the casing blocks and the bedrock wall was filled with rubble. This casing gave the chapel a more regular shape – it once was 2.10 metres wide in the northern part and 2.50 metres in the southern part.

Cracks in the east wall of the chapel appear to have been covered with light-pink mortar, and traces of dark grey plaster were found, which might have once covered the whole surface of the wall. No traces of mortar and plaster were detected on the remaining walls of the chapel, and on the fine white casing. The use of the mortar and plaster is another feature very similar to Sheretneby's tomb, where, however, not only the eastern wall but all four walls including the west wall's casing were originally covered (Vymazalová – Dulíková 2014: 3; Vymazalová – Arias Kytarová forthcoming).

No traces of a cult place could be noticed in the tomb chapel of Shepespuptah. It is highly likely that the limestone casing accommodated a cult niche with a false door to serve the funerary cult of the tomb owner. Considering the high quality of limestone of



Fig. 4 The rock-cut chapel of the tomb of Shepespuptah with the remains of the limestone casing of the west wall (photograph Veronika Dulíková)

the chapel west wall casing of this chapel, we can presume that Shepesuptah's false door might have been made of fine white limestone with nice relief decoration. No fragments of a false door, which could be ascribed to Shepesuptah, were however found in the tomb complex AS 68. In addition, no evidence survived indicating whether this chapel contained also other decoration.

One burial shaft was hewn in the chapel, located in its north part by the west wall. It is 1.60 to 1.60 metres large at the opening, hewn in hard bedrock. Surprisingly however, this shaft was unfinished, being abandoned in the depth of 1.40 metres. The fill of the shaft consisted of limestone chips and pieces, mixed with a small quantity of brown sand. It is very likely that this fill comes from the original digging of this shaft. The finds in the fill included very few fragments of pottery (Pottery No. 55.AS68b.2013) and a hammer stone with copper imprints (Excav. No. 280/AS68b/2013), which might have been used by the builders.

It cannot be excluded that the tomb-owner started to dig the shaft in the chapel for himself, before having decided to make the burial chamber. On the other hand, the position of this shaft, in the north part of the chapel instead of the south part, indicates rather that it was intended for the tomb-owner's wife or another family member.

## 2.2 The burial chamber of Shepesuptah

The tombs of the Old Kingdom usually contain burial chambers at the bottom of deep shafts but Shepesuptah's burial chamber was located to the south of the tomb chapel (see Fig. 3). It was accessible by means of three steps leading down from its south-eastern corner into an entrance passage. The floor level of the burial chamber is 1.80 meters lower comparing to the floor of the chapel. Other examples of such an arrangement are known from the Old Kingdom but they were not very common. These cases usually have a burial chamber that is accessed from the chapel through a simple entrance (for instance, Hassan 1953: 85–86; Hassan 1941: 7–13) or more often through a descending corridor (for instance, in the tombs of Bunefer, Nefer or Seshemnefer Ifi at Giza, see Hassan 1941: 194, 212; Hassan 1953: 62–63, as well as in other rock cut tombs at Giza, see for instance Hassan 1932: 89–90; Hassan 1953: 73–79, 81–84).

The entrance passage leading into the burial chamber was blocked with a wall, which was 2.50 metres thick at its bottom part and was built of irregular pieces of stones without the use of mortar. Most of the stones were found *in situ*, only the upper 0.50 metres of the wall were dismantled by the ancient tomb robbers who threw some of the stones inside the burial chamber. The preserved upper north-western part of the wall was covered with white plaster, it is therefore possible that the whole wall was originally plastered before the tomb robbers' activity (Fig. 5).

The burial chamber contained almost no fill, except of irregular pieces of stone and some rubble, which covered the floor of the chamber and most likely fell inside the chamber from the blocking wall. In addition to that, the floor of the burial chamber was covered with a thin layer of dried mud, indicating that the heavy rain(s), which entered the tomb chapel also, reached the burial chamber.

The plan of the burial chamber is roughly rectangular, 5 metres long, ca 2.20 metres wide and 2.60 metres high (Vymazalová 2015: 50 with the niche included in the width of the chamber). The east wall of the burial chamber is a continuation of the east wall of the chapel and the entrance passage, and is hewn straight and smooth. The south part



Fig. 5 Entrance to the burial chamber of Shepesuptah with the blocking wall partly dismantled by the ancient tomb robbers (photograph Hana Vymazalová)

of the burial chamber is very roughly cut, and it is possible that this part of the tomb was unfinished. The west wall contained a niche 2 metres wide and 2.5–2.7 metres deep. Its western part contained a 0.40 metre high and 0.80 metre wide step in the bedrock, on which the lid of the sarcophagus was placed before the burial.

This niche accommodated a sarcophagus partly built of limestone slabs. The west and north walls of the sarcophagus were actually carved of bedrock, to which limestone slabs 20–30 cm thick were placed to create the south and east wall of the sarcophagus (Fig. 6). The inside of the sarcophagus was 1.70 m long and 0.45 m wide and 0.40 deep (Vymazalová 2015: 50). Some of the slabs were displaced but two were found *in situ*. The lid of the sarcophagus was found in two pieces on the floor to the east of the sarcophagus. It was in total 1.78 meters long, 0.54 meters wide and 0.20 meters thick.

A burial of a man was found inside the sarcophagus (Excav. No. 120c/AS68b/2012), placed in outstretched position on the left side, with head to north, face to east, left arm besides the body and the right arm over the body with the hand on the pelvis. Some parts of his body were found in their original place but some other parts were apparently disarticulated (Fig. 7). Some of his bones were found outside the burial pit and a few body parts were missing as a result of grave robbing (see below Section 3). The missing parts indicate that the tomb-owner was adorned with jewellery on his neck and both his upper arms.

Besides the burial itself, not many finds were discovered in the burial chamber. They include some pottery fragments (Pottery No. 32.AS68b.2012). A small tablet made of bone with two pierced holes on its sides was discovered by the feet of the deceased (Excav. No. 120d/AS68b/2012, 42 × 19 × 2 mm large).

A block of white limestone casing, most likely coming from the chapel, was found in the chamber. Small fragments of wood and charcoal, a faience bead and tiny copper



Fig. 6 The burial place of Shepesuptah (photograph Veronika Dulíková)



Fig. 7 The burial of Shepesuptah (photograph Hana Vymazalová)

traces were detected on the stones of the blocking wall in the entrance passage, perhaps left there by the ancient tomb robbers. Some of these small finds might have come from the tomb equipment. Worth an especial mention are the small fragments of wood which include remains of flat planks as well as some shaped fragments, among which the foot of a very small wooden statuette can be recognised (Excav. No. 119/AS68b/2012, Fig. 8). The foot may have belonged to a very small statuette of the tomb owner, or to a model or servant statuette. Some human bones were found on the floor of the chamber, most likely having been washed in from the chapel by the rain.



### 3. The burial of Shepesuptah

The skeletal remains of the tomb owner, Shepesuptah Idu, were found partly disturbed, but have proven possible to reconstruct almost completely. Both the humerus bones were broken post mortem and their bottom parts were missing, as well as the third and fourth cervical vertebrae. This damage to the body indicates that the body of the deceased was adorned with jewellery, which was taken away by ancient tomb robbers. One of the missing bone fragments was discovered in the entrance corridor of the burial chamber, which confirms this supposition.

The anthropological examination of Shepesuptah's skeletal remains included an estimation of the sex (Brůžek 2002; Ferembach et al. 1979; 1980; Murail et al. 2005) and age (Brooks – Suchey 1990; Lovejoy et al. 1985; McKern – Stewart 1957; Schmitt 2005) and metric analysis. In addition, non-metric traits and enthesal changes were examined. Methods such as X-ray or CT could not be applied on the site.

The examination revealed that Shepesuptah was around 173 cm tall (Raxter et al. 2008) and lived until 35–50 years of age. His skeletal remains show numerous pathological changes, which undoubtedly complicated his life (for the report in Czech, see Havelková 2013: 49–50).

Shepesuptah suffered major problems with his teeth. Degenerative changes were noticed on his mandible; both the coronoid and condylar processes of the mandibular notch featured shortening as well as traces of subchondral cysts, porosity and exostosis.

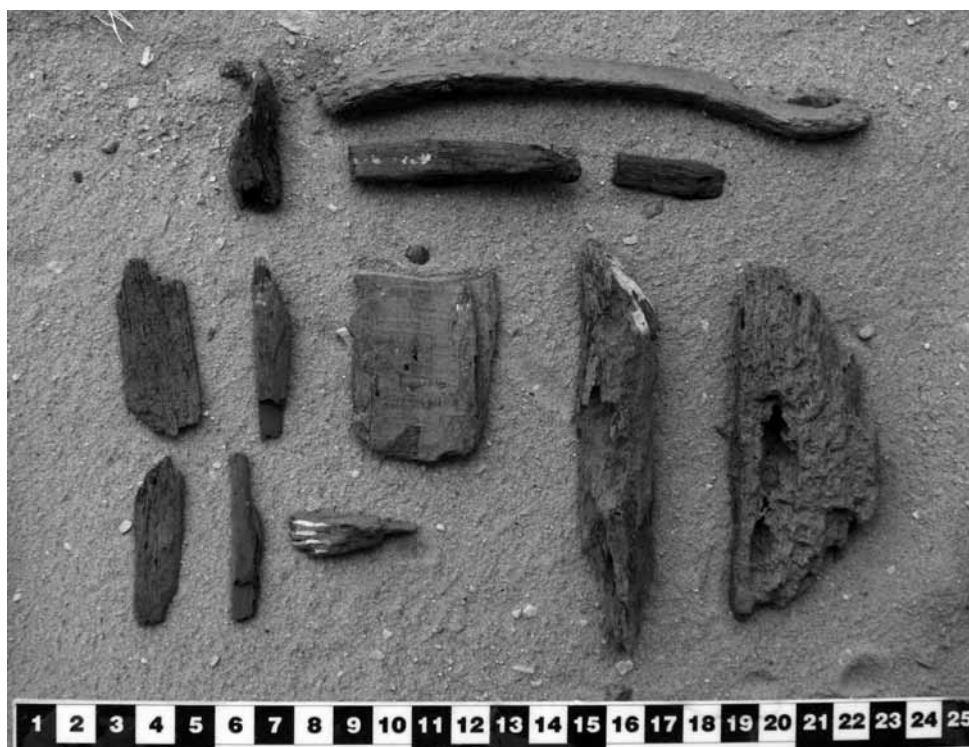


Fig. 8 Fragments of wooden objects found in the entrance to Shepesuptah's burial chamber (photograph Hana Vymazalová)

The strong abrasion of his teeth resulted some of the root canals being exposed. The dental abrasion was irregular; the maxillary molars had their occlusal surface bevelled towards the tongue (lingual), while the mandibular molars were bevelled on the vestibular surface. A noticeable porosity can be found in front of the mandibular fossa. All these degenerative changes of the temporomandibular joint indicate that that condyles were perhaps often dislocated from the fossa towards the front, and this was associated with a strong vertical overlap of Shepesuptah's maxilla. The question remains whether this was a congenital habitual luxation caused by the shortened mandibular processes, the condylar shape or the shallow mandibular fossa.

The mandible also featured an abscess under the first right molar. In addition, Shepesuptah lost his first right premolars, both maxillary and mandibular, sometime during his life. Both parts of the jaw were fully healed at the time of his death but the irregular bone structure in these places indicate that these premolars might have been removed by force or punched away (Fig. 9).

Another major problem for Shepesuptah's health was his cervical spine. Even though most of his vertebrae showed no degenerative changes, the second cervical vertebra (*axis*) had a strong arthrosis in its odontoid process (*dens axis*), which communicates with the first cervical vertebra (*atlas*) and allows the head to turn. Its front articular surface was entirely eburnated. This state is caused in the severe stage of osteoarthritis as a reaction of the bone, which gains a typical ivory-like colour where the cartilage erodes.

Another interesting feature was documented on Shepesuptah's skull, namely the thinning of both parietal bones (*depressio biparietalis circumscripta*, Fig. 10). This feature ranks among the discrete, non-metric (epigenetic) traits, which is presumed to indicate affinity or family relationships (Hauser – De Stefano 1989). It is worth mentioning that in Abusir two cases of *depression biparietalis circumscripta* were found in the skeletal evidence from the tomb of priest Neferinpu, which is located slightly to the north Shepesuptah's tomb and dates to the same period (Bárta et al. 2014a). The two individuals with this trait were buried in Shaft 1 and Shaft 4 of the tomb (Havelková 2014: 166, 173–174) and perhaps included the tomb owner himself and a female member of his family (two females and two males were also buried in this tomb besides these two individuals). Even though Neferinpu's tomb was used for burials of his family members and therefore a relationship between the two individuals is likely, it has been noticed that the non-metric variant under discussion can be found in 14.4 % of the population in ancient Egypt, which is ten times more frequent compared to other studied populations where it is usually 0.4–1.3 % (Breitinger 1983: 77). The above mentioned data refer to the late Fourth Dynasty material but the same or similar frequency can be presumed for the late Fifth Dynasty, and therefore we cannot yet confirm the family relationship between the individuals from Neferinpu's tomb and Shepesuptah Idu on the basis of this single trait. A detailed epigenetic investigation involving dozens of burials from two different sample areas in Abusir is under way, which might help in the future to specify the applicability of individual features for family relationship assessment.

Shepesuptah also suffered a major injury in the proximal (upper) part of his left femur (Fig. 11), which undoubtedly had a considerable impact on his life. It is most likely the so-called pertrochanteric fracture, which is typical with the fracture line in the trochanteric massive between the greater and the lesser trochanters (Hudec et al. 1970:



Fig. 9 Shepespuptah's skull showing traces of an abscess and missing premolars (photograph Petra Havelková)

714). It runs on the outside of the *linea intertrochanterica*, starting on the upper outside part of the greater trochanter and ending under the lesser trochanter. Such fractures are most often the result of direct trauma, when the hip suffers a blow while the leg is extended (Typovský 1972: 737). These hip fractures are especially common in elderly and old individuals in association with osteoporosis but can occur also in childhood. If the patient survives, as did Shepespuptah, the fracture usually heals without further treatment thanks to a good blood supply and a good spongiosis of this bone. However, the bone remains deformed, and this caused deformity in other joints of the limb as well (Typovský 1972: 737). The main clinical features include the shortening and the rotation of the neck of the femur, which was clearly noticed in Shepespuptah's femur. Even though the bone was healed and the fracture was not dislocated, there is a marked change and the axis of the neck is twisted (rotational malunion). Other post-traumatic changes, namely distinctive bone remodelling (*exostosis*), can be found mainly on the greater trochanter. The hip fractures usually also cause secondary arthritis of both the hip and the knee joints, as a result of the changed static pressure. Such changes were, however, not identified in Shepespuptah's skeletal remains, and this indicates that the injury probably happened not too long before Shepespuptah's death. It was long enough before his death for the fracture to heal well but not long enough to affect the



Fig. 10 Shepesuptah's skull showing *depressio biparietalis circumscripta*  
(photograph Petra Havelková)

other joints during his movements. It is possible that Shepesuptah remained in bed for a long time after this injury. He must have been in severe pain and once he could move about, he would surely have had a severe limp.

Examination of Shepesuptah's leg bones also revealed small lesions in the first metatarsus on the right foot. Such lesions can occur when a patient suffers gout (*arthritis uratica*, also known as podagra), which is associated with a metabolic disorder involving a failure to sufficiently break down purines and a high production of uric acid (Waldron



Fig. 11 Deformity on Shepesuptah's left femur, the result of a hip fracture (photograph Petra Havelková)

2009: 67). This then crystallises and forms deposits in joints. Gout is an inflammatory disease with recurring attacks associated with strong pain. It is caused by a combination of genetic and dietary factors and is related to the consumption of too much meat, sea food and alcohol. This is why gout was sometimes described as a "disease of kings" or "rich man's disease". It is not entirely clear whether Shepesuptah suffered from this disease, and further investigation is needed for the confirmation of this hypothetical diagnosis.

#### 4. Other human remains from Shepesuptah's tomb

Besides those of Shepesuptah himself, further human remains were found in his tomb (for the report in Czech, see Havelková 2013: 51). Two individuals seem to have been buried in the fill of the tomb at a later date in the Old Kingdom when Shepesuptah's tomb was already partly filled. Further human remains were scattered in the fill and/or found in the surface layer brought there by strong rain (see above).

Some cattle bones, as well the femur and radius of an adult human, were found scattered in the rubble fill in front of the entrance to the tomb (Excav. No. 46a-b/AS68b/2012). These bones perhaps did not belong to any of the burials from the tomb chapel, but might have been related to the activity of tomb robbers in the necropolis. Some more human remains were found further inside the chapel, about 1 m behind its entrance (Excav. No. 59/AS68b/2012). They belonged to a burial, placed in the fill around 20 cm above the floor of the chapel. The skeletal remains were gracile and perhaps belonged to a female less than 1.5 m tall, judging from the length of her fibula. The lady was more than 50 years old when she died; her teeth were strongly abraded, with some roots exposed, and the attachment sites of ligaments and muscles were

strongly deformed, confirming the advanced age of this woman.

Other fragments of human bones were found along the west wall of the chapel behind the entrance, in the fill of brown sand mixed with rubble and limestone chips (Excav. No. 99/AS68b/2012). These bones belonged perhaps to a male whose age could not be estimated. The left radius did not survive, but the left ulna shows an angular fracture in the distal part (near the wrist). It was healed with a medial shift of the fragment. The right ulna features changes to the attachment on the olecranon, which might be the result of greater strain being put on this arm, perhaps as compensation of the fracture of the left forearm.

Some more human bones were scattered in the south part of the chapel near the entrance to the burial chamber, as well as within the blocking wall in this entrance (Excav. No. 120a/AS68b/2012) and in the north part of the chamber (Excav. No. 120b/AS68b/2012). These bones perhaps belonged to a female 25–35 years old and around 154 cm tall. Her skull did not survive and no pathological features were noticed on the preserved bones.

## 5. Hieratic inscriptions from the tomb of Shepesuptah

A number of hieratic inscriptions were found in the tomb of Shepesuptah, both on the rock-cut walls of its chapel and on the casing blocks. Due to the lack of other textual evidence, it is these inscriptions, which reveal the identity of the tomb owner and his social status.

The east wall of the chapel contains at least two semi-hieratic inscriptions in red paint; some signs are written over the mortar and over the plaster, while other parts of the inscriptions are written directly on the bedrock surface. They read: *hrj (n) sdm(w) pr-ʿ3 jmj-r3 šhtj-ḥtp [wr 10 Šmʿ]* “chief of justice of the Great House, overseer of the two fields of offerings [great one of the ten of Upper Egypt ...]”. Another two parts of inscriptions can be found on this wall slightly to the south, of which only small traces survived on the plaster.

The west wall contained three hieratic inscriptions written in more or less the same height on the rock-hewn surface. They read: 1. *hrj (n) sdm(w) pr-ʿ3 Šps-pw-Pth njš m Jdw* “chief of justice of the Great House Shepesuptah called Idu” (Bárta et al. 2014b: 24); 2. *hrj (n) sdm(w) pr-ʿ3 m gšwj-pr (j)m(j)-r3 šhtj-ḥtp wr 10 Šmʿ nst-ḥntt ḥtm(w) ḥ3t ḥtpw dšw bjtj Šps-pw-Pth* “chief of justice of the Great House in the two administrative units, overseer of the two fields of offerings, great one of the ten of Upper Egypt, (he who belongs to) the foremost seat, sealer of the best offerings and provisions of the King of Lower Egypt, Shepesuptah”; 3. *hrj (n) sdm(w) pr-ʿ3 (j)m(j)-r3 šhtj-ḥtp Šps-pw-Pth* “chief of justice of the Great House, overseer of the two fields of offerings, Shepesuptah” (Bárta et al. 2014b: 24; for the individual titles of Shepesuptah, see Jones 2000: 231–232 no. 856, 388–389 no. 1437, 772 no. 2805–2806, 788 no. 2873).

The names of the tomb owner, Idu and Shepesuptah, are also attested on an irregular block of local limestone, which was found in the fill of the tomb chapel. In addition, another type of inscriptions was found on blocks of the fine limestone casing of the chapel. One of the blocks was found in situ by the west wall of the chapel, and contains the following writing (Fig. 12): *km n špt jrj ḥ3t m-ḥt sp 20 3bd tpj 3ḥt šw 9* “completion of a check made in the year after the 20<sup>th</sup> occasion (of cattle count), 1<sup>st</sup> month of the 3ḥt-season, day 9” (Vymazalová – Dulíková 2012: 344). Another block,



Fig. 12 Hieratic inscription on the casing block in Shepesuptah's rock/cut chapel  
(photograph Veronika Dulíková)

which was found in the burial chamber, contains only the beginning of a similar inscription, which was apparently written over more than one block, reading: *km n špt* "completion of a check".

The former inscriptions, written on the rock surface of the walls of the chapel, can be assigned to the tomb builders. These inscriptions were written around 1.25–1.6 metres high above the floor, reflecting the height of a standing scribe. The inscriptions on the east wall were visible to the visitors of the tomb chapel and were written in attractive semi-hieratic signs, while the west wall bore much more cursive inscriptions, which were not intended to be visible after the west wall was cased with white limestone.

The latter inscriptions, on the other hand, seem to refer to an event which was not related to the builders themselves. An inspection to the tomb may be, according to the high date, ascribed only to the reign of King Djedkare. The tomb itself, as well as the whole tomb complex of Princess Sheretnebtj, dates undoubtedly to the second half of the Fifth Dynasty. It is worth mentioning that Princess Sheretnebtj, who was buried in the neighbouring tomb AS 68c, died in the reign of either Menkauhor or perhaps rather Djedkare (Vymazalová – Dulíková 2012: 347–349; Vymazalová – Dulíková 2014: 10), and Duaptah, the owner of another neighbouring tomb AS 68a, was buried in the reign of Djedkare whose name was found on a seal impression in the owner's burial chamber (Vymazalová 2015: 49). It is very likely that Shepesuptah lived and perhaps died during the long reign of this ruler. It is, however, difficult to conclude whether the inspection in the tomb took place during the life of the owner, for instance at the moment of the tomb's completion, or whether it might have taken place some time after his death. Like the majority of the other tombs of the time, Shepesuptah's tomb was robbed in ancient times. Many of the fine casing blocks were removed from his chapel to be re-used for another building, and the burial of the owner was disturbed. The time span of the robbers' activities is very difficult to estimate, but evidence from other tombs show that this might have happened shortly after the burial (see, e.g. Bárta 2003: 28). The re-use of the limestone casing can be presumed to be dated to the time when the tomb owner's memory was no longer alive and his funerary cult abandoned, perhaps during the Sixth Dynasty.

## 6. Shepesuptah: his tomb and his social standing

The finds from the tomb of Shepesuptah Idu (AS 68b) provide us not only with archaeological but also with textual and physical evidence, which enable us to discuss the social standing of this official.

The name Shepesuptah is attested in the Abusir papyrus archives, and refer to an individual who was clearly associated with the royal cults of the Fifth Dynasty kings during his service in the temple phyles. He was perhaps the head of the *k3*-section of the *w3d*-phyle in the pyramid complex of King Neferefre according to document 11B from this king's temple archive (Posener-Kriéger – Verner – Vymazalová: 46–47). Even though the identity of Shepesuptah from the archives with our tomb owner cannot be proven from the extant sources, both these pieces of evidence can be dated to the same period and might possibly refer to the same individual (Vymazalová – Dulíková 2012: 344).

The hieratic inscriptions from his tomb chapel give us an overview of Shepesuptah's titles, however, it remains unknown whether these inscriptions give his full titulature or only a selection of the most important titles of the tomb owner. The latter is generally the case of builders' inscriptions in the non-royal tombs at Abusir (see for instance Vymazalová 2010; Vymazalová 2014a; Vymazalová 2014b). Five titles of Shepesuptah are listed in his tomb's inscriptions, which include his legal responsibilities ("chief of justice of the Great House in the two administrative units, the great one of the ten of Upper Egypt, he who belongs to the foremost seat") as well as economic functions associated with offerings for the royal cults ("overseer of the two fields of offerings, sealer of the best offerings and provisions of the King of Lower Egypt") (see Vymazalová – Dulíková 2012: 344). The dual form of some of the titles indicates that Shepesuptah had control over both parts of the country, while the whole of Lower Egypt was under his control in regard to the production of royal offerings and provisions.

The attested titles of Shepesuptah Idu are not among the highest levels of Egyptian administration, but were of undoubted economic importance. He worked with his mind more than his hands, and no enthesal and degenerative changes related to his profession were noticed on Shepesuptah's skeletal remains. Instead, his comfortable lifestyle might have caused him gout in his right foot (for discussion see above). His lower jaw might have been frequently painfully dislocated, and he lost some of his teeth by force. It is hard to say whether the loss of his teeth might have been in any way associated with the hip fracture, which resulted in a twisted hip, another painful condition. It might have perhaps been due to his social status that his fracture was healed. It is worth mentioning that several physicians were buried in the same site near Shepesuptah's tomb, including Ptahhetep, inspector of physicians (tomb unpublished; for basic information, see Dobrev – Verner – Vymazalová 2011: xxvii–xxviii), and Shepseskafankh, chief physician of Upper and Lower Egypt (Bárta 2015).<sup>4</sup> Their tombs can be dated to the same period of the Fifth Dynasty and close relationships are presumed for the tomb owners in the necropolis (Bárta – Vymazalová forthcoming); Therefore we can presume that Shepesuptah probably knew the physicians Ptahhetep and Shepseskafankh in person. Egyptian physicians were skilful and effective with treatment of fractures and injuries of various kinds. Evidence of their vast skills and

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<sup>4</sup> Another physician, namely the chief physician Neferherptah was buried nearby slightly later in the early Sixth Dynasty (for his tomb, see Dulíková – Odler – Havelková 2011); he was not contemporary to Shepesuptah.



experience can be found not only in skeletal remains but also in texts, including the Edwin Smith medical papyrus which deals with fractures and injuries (see e.g. Strouhal – Vachala – Vymazalová 2014). After his injury, Shepesuptah perhaps spent some time in bed and received good care. Despite this handicap, Shepesuptah was undoubtedly able to perform his duties and keep his offices and functions. The healing process of the fracture itself could take several months (about 8–14 weeks) and Shepesuptah's bones give evidence that he lived for some time after. It cannot be, however, stated, how long exactly he lived after this injury. The lack of degenerative changes on his other joints indicates that Shepesuptah did not do too much walking after his injury. It is possible that he did not live long enough for these changes to occur, or he possibly was carried around when needed.

Beside the titles, the tomb and the burial themselves indicate that Shepesuptah was of high social standing. His tomb was prepared with expensive materials and good craftsmanship; he could afford to case his tomb chapel with fine Tura limestone, and these casing blocks are carved finely and regularly. The chapel with its casing must have once given a splendid impression, very different from the tomb's appearance today. It is probable that the same fine limestone was used also for Shepesuptah's false door, of which nothing survived. The missing parts of the tomb owner's skeleton seem to show that Shepesuptah's burial was adorned with jewellery, and small remnants of wooden statuettes reveal that statues of the owner or model / servant statuettes were originally part of the tomb equipment. Some of the discovered wooden fragments were of cedar wood, an expensive material imported from Lebanon and not often to be found in non-royal tombs in the Old Kingdom.

Shepesuptah's social status can be related to the owners of the neighbouring tombs in the same tomb complex, AS 68. Shepesuptah was undoubtedly higher in status than Duaptah whose chapel was much smaller with no casing and burial perhaps more simple (AS 68a, Vymazalová – Dulíková 2012: 343; Vymazalová 2015: 48). Nefer, who was among other things "overseer of the two treasuries and the two granaries", had a rock-cut chapel with no casing, a serdab with four beautiful statues and a decorated false door in the niche in his tomb's west wall, which were, however, not of the highest quality (AS 68d, Bárta et al. 2014b, 27–30). The husband of Princess Sheretnebtj remains anonymous, but he was clearly of a higher social standing than Nefer, indicated by the size of his chapel, the greater number of statues in his serdab, depth of his burial shaft, his sarcophagus and remains of his tomb equipment (AS 68c, Vymazalová 2015: 51–53, 57). It is, however, not sure whether the higher status of Sheretnebtj's husband was a result of his unattested functions, or only of his marriage to the king's daughter, which most probably brought him economic benefits. Shepesuptah can, on the basis of the extant evidence, be considered socially closer to Sheretnebtj's husband and Nefer than to Duaptah.

On the basis of the location of his tomb and its date, Shepesuptah Idu is presumed to have been related to the families of Sheretnebtj and Nefer who were buried in the same tomb complex (for these tombs see Bárta et al. 2014b: 23–33; Vymazalová 2015: 57). At the moment, the evidence from the tomb complex is still under study and therefore it is difficult to say whether he could be of the family of Nefer and/or Sheretnebtj's husband (e.g. their brother), or a member of a later generation (e.g. the son of one of them).

The connection of Shepesuptah Idu with the offerings for the royal funerary cults goes well together with the same association of Duaptah and Nefer. Both these tomb

owners held functions in the pyramid complexes in Abusir, as their titles indicate. Moreover, both names are also attested in the Abusir archives, even though no direct proof can be found to connect the attestations in the archives with the individuals buried in tombs AS 68a and AS 68d. It is worth mentioning that one shaft in Sheretnebt'y's tomb has never been used for a burial, and it was a shaft possibly prepared for a son (Shaft 3, Vymazalová 2015: 54–55). To suggest that Shepespuptah was a son of Sheretnebt'y who managed to equip himself with a tomb next to his parents' tomb would be, however, too speculative.

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