

# The Largest Embalming Cache Ever Found in Egypt Unearthed at Abusir

For more than three decades, the Czech Institute of Egyptology has been exploring a cemetery dating to the late Dynasty 26 or the early Dynasty 27 (the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.). In a group of large shaft tombs situated in the western part of the ancient Egyptian necropolis at Abusi, a unique embalming cache has been unearthed. With a total of 370 large pottery storage jars and several smaller artefacts, it is probably the largest complex and above all undisturbed finding of its kind originating from Ancient Egypt.

All these vessels, containing remnants and residues of various materials and utensils that had originally been used during the mummification process, were found in a huge shaft measuring 5.3 by 5.3 metres going more than 14 metres deep, adjacent to a large, still unexcavated burial structure. Here, the vessels were subsequently laid in 14 clusters situated at depths reaching from 4 to 12 metres and adjoining the sides of the shaft in a spiral-like pattern. The numbers of vessels stored in each of those clusters considerably varied from 7 to 52 specimens.

Moreover, four inscribed canopic jars made of limestone were found in the uppermost group of the vessels, all of them empty and clearly unused. According to the texts inscribed on them, the canopic jars belonged to a certain Wahibre-mery-Neith, son of the Lady Irturu.

The director of the mission in Abusir, Prof. Miroslav Bárta, notes that “The season of 2021 was part of a long term project aiming to excavate and interpret monuments dating to a period when the Ancient Egyptian society was looking for new means of

how to maintain their unique identity that was challenged by the Greek, the Persian, and the Nubian armies.” The shaft tombs of Abusir – built in a similar fashion like the famous burial of Djoser, the founder of the Old Kingdom – played a major role in the unique cultural expression of the Egyptian elites of the period.”

“Although several dignitaries of this name are known from this period, none of them can be identified as the owner of these canopic jars. Judging from the size of the embalming deposit and mainly from the dimensions and arrangement of the nearby tomb, the owner of the tomb (and of the deposit) must have belonged to the highest dignitaries of his time as well as his closest neighbours in the cemetery – the famous admiral Udjahorresnet and general Menekhibnekau,” Prof. Ladislav Bareš, one of the leading experts on the period, said. In 2022, the excavation of this burial structure should continue by exploring the burial structure situated at the bottom of a huge central shaft. At the same time, analyses of the vessels and their contexts by the means of modern scientific methods are under preparation.



The shaft of the largest embalming deposit discovered in Abusir during the excavation works of the Czech Institute of Egyptology at CU FA.



A cluster of some of the more than 370 large vessels discovered within the embalming deposit of a certain Wahibre-mery-Neith.



Four unused canopic jars of Wahibre-mery-Neith.

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