

The Tomb of Senneferi (TT99): Architecture, Finds, and Social Position in Eighteenth Dynasty Thebes

The tomb of Senneferi (TT99) is located in the Upper Enclosure of Sheikh Abdel Qurna on the West Bank of Luxor, the ancient Thebes, in close proximity to the tombs of other high-ranking officials of the Thutmose period, including the vizier Rekhmire (TT100) and Sennefer (TT96).¹ Senneferi served under Thutmose III as *imy-r sDAwty* (overseer of seal-bearers, or chancellor), a role that placed him in charge of the king's personal wealth and resources.² First excavated by Robert Mond in 1903, the site of Senneferi's tomb became the focus of excavation and study under Nigel Strudwick's Cambridge Theban Tombs Project from 1992 to 2002.³ This essay will examine the tomb's architecture and finds, using Strudwick's publication and project website, to analyse how the material culture illustrates Senneferi's position within ancient Egyptian society.

Architecture

The tomb comprises a traditional 18th dynasty T-shaped decorated tomb chapel, with a facade incorporating a cult niche, an extensive courtyard, and burial shafts giving access to underground chambers, sunk both within the courtyard and inside the chapel.⁴ This follows the tripartite structure typical of Theban tombs: façade and niche on the upper level, chapel and courtyard on the middle level, and burial chambers on the lower level.⁵ The scale and complexity of the tomb in this area of the necropolis immediately mark it as the burial place of an individual at the uppermost level of the administrative elite; tombs of this type were the preserve of the highest-ranking officials of the 18th dynasty. The individual components of the tomb support this in detail.

¹ Strudwick, N. (ed.) ((2016)) The Tomb of Pharaoh's Chancellor Senneferi at Thebes (TT99). Oxford: Oxbow Books, p. 1.

² Strudwick ((2016)), p. 13.

³ Strudwick ((2016)), pp. 3-4.

⁴ Strudwick (2016), p. 1 p. 45.

⁵ Strudwick (2016), p. 7.

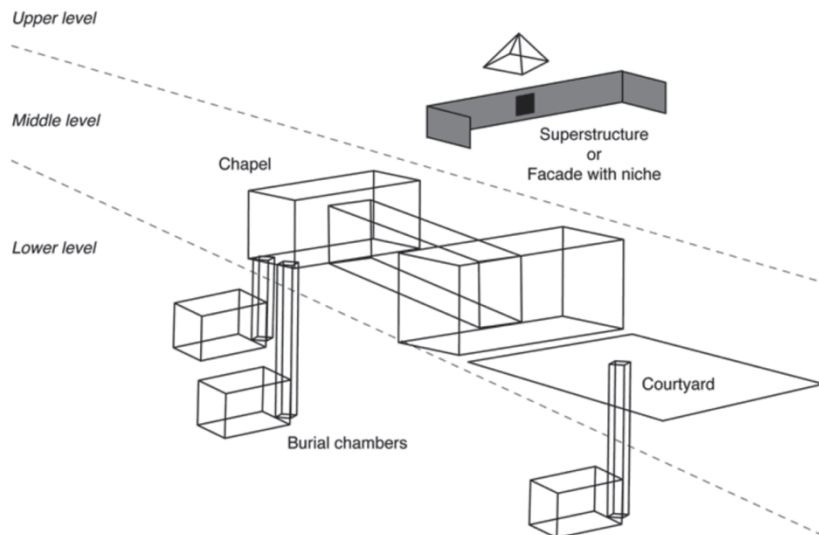


Figure 1 Schematic diagram of Theban tomb TT99. After Strudwick (2016), p.6

Façade

The façade, built up with stones and mortar, incorporates a cult niche and small side extensions typical of 18th dynasty Theban tombs.⁶ As the tomb's public face, it was also the original setting for Senneferi's funerary cones: 187 stamped cones and bricks bearing his name and titles were recovered from the complex, sufficient for possibly two rows across the 11.5m wide façade.⁷

130 cones of type DM 154 carry Senneferi's full honorific title string: *iry pat* ('one who is over the nobility'), *HATy-a* ('count'), *sDAwty bity* ('seal-bearer of the King of Lower Egypt'), *smr waty* ('sole companion of the king'), and his principal functional title *imy-r sDAwty* ('overseer of seal-bearers'). A further 52 examples of type DM 93, unusually elongated with text spread across two cones, add the rarer title *r shrr m tA r Dr.f* ('the mouth who makes peace in the whole land'), which Strudwick notes is restricted to only the highest-ranking officials.⁸ These titles, displayed publicly on the façade, mark Senneferi as belonging to the very top tier of the 18th dynasty administrative hierarchy.

Courtyard

The courtyard contains a subtle indication of Senneferi's status: two depressions cut into the bedrock floor for trees or plants, which Strudwick suggests are perhaps the earliest certain examples of such emplacements.⁹ Ceiling text 9, referencing Senneferi's *ba* alighting on 'his

⁶ Strudwick (2016), p. 46-48.

⁷ Strudwick (2016), p. 54.

⁸ Strudwick (2016), p. 50.

⁹ Strudwick (2016), p. 55.

trees', supports the interpretation that the courtyard functioned as a ritual landscape for the deceased. This suggests that Senneferi may have been at the forefront of funerary practices and possessed the means to implement such innovations.

Chapel

The rock-cut chapel is substantial in size, consisting of a wide front room with emplacements for stelae and false doors, a passage, and a rear pillared shrine containing an offering niche, following the Kampp type VIa plan typical of the early to mid-18th dynasty.¹⁰ Strudwick notes the presence of pink granite fragments, which he believes were once a freestanding false door.¹¹ He states that while false doors are a standard feature of 18th dynasty Theban tombs, a freestanding example is rare, primarily associated with royalty and the most senior officials, owing to the significant investment required in its construction. In addition, the rear shrine ceiling is shaped like the hieroglyph qAr ('shrine'), a rare feature found in only a few New Kingdom tombs.¹² Like the courtyard emplacements, this is another subtle marker of status; replicating sacred architecture within the chapel required skilled craftsmen and significant expenditure.

Burial Shafts

Burial shafts A-F, located inside the chapel, are evidenced as being cut in the Third Intermediate Period, and not part of Senneferi's original tomb design.¹³ There are three burial shafts in the courtyard. Shaft G, in the south-western corner, is unfinished, and according to Strudwick, was planned in the post-Senneferi period.¹⁴ Shaft H, which is 8m deep, has two chambers. Evidence indicates two phases of 18th Dynasty use, with ceramic finds suggesting burials spanning Thutmose II–IV, then Amenhotep III–Horemheb.¹⁵ Strudwick suggests that the shaft was extended and that the second room was added for later interments of the tomb-owner's relatives. A secondary shaft used over generations demonstrates that the tomb complex served an extended household over a long period, consistent with the resources of a top-ranking official.

¹⁰ Strudwick (2016), p. 55.

¹¹ Strudwick (2016), p. 90-91.

¹² Strudwick (2016), p. 61.

¹³ Strudwick (2016), p. 67.

¹⁴ Strudwick (2016), p. 67-66.

¹⁵ Strudwick (2016), p. 69.

Shaft I is considered to be the main burial shaft. At 14.25m deep, the main shaft is one of the deepest in the private Theban necropolis.¹⁶ The shaft's exceptional depth required enormous resources to cut and served as a deterrent to robbery. From the bottom of the main shaft is a complex underground plan, see figure 2. Strudwick and Strudwick suggest the construction occurred in phases, with room 1 enlarged, then the staircase shaft added in order to facilitate the construction of two further rooms.

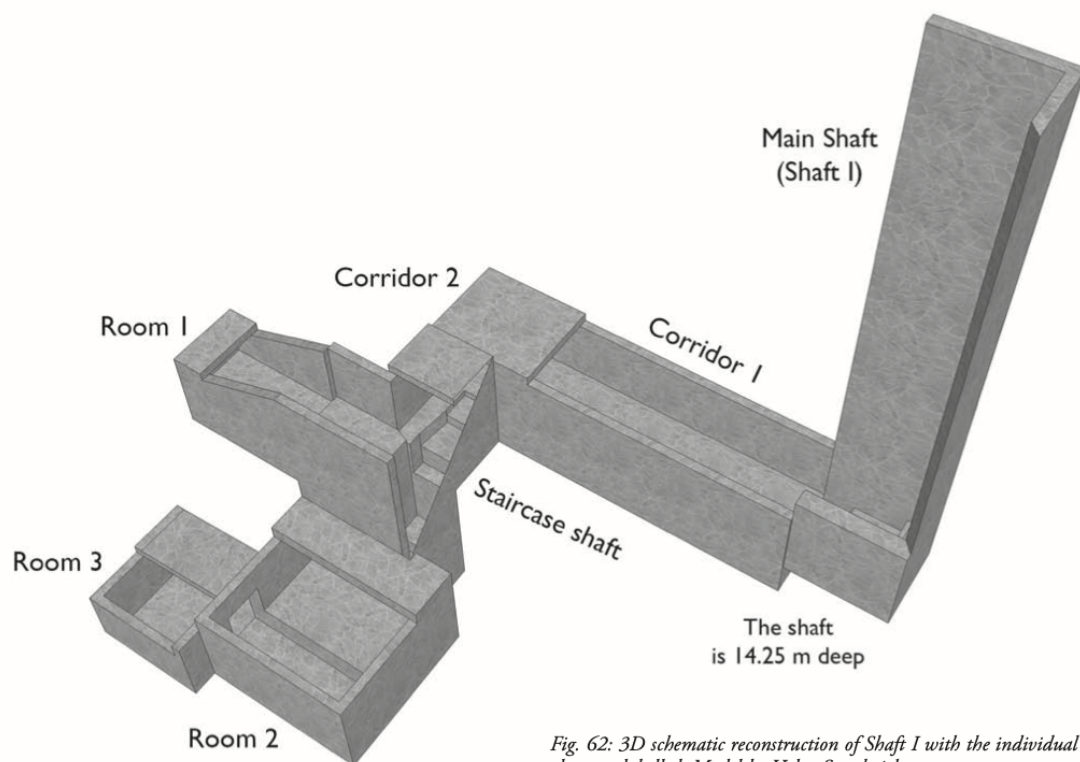


Fig. 62: 3D schematic reconstruction of Shaft I with the individual elements labelled. Model by Helen Strudwick

Figure 2 3D schematic reconstruction of Shaft I

Due to the finds in the burial shaft, Strudwick and Strudwick suggest that Shaft I was the burial site of Senneferi.¹⁷ They note that at least five adults were buried in this area, suggesting Senneferi's wife Taiamu, Senneferi's parents Haydjehuty and Satdjehuty, and an unmarried daughter were interred with Senneferi. The multi-phase construction accommodating family burials suggests this was not simply an individual tomb but a dynastic monument. Strudwick proposes that Senneferi's parents may have been brought from the Delta to be buried alongside him, indicating the means and authority to provide for his extended family within one of the most prestigious areas of the Theban necropolis.

¹⁶ Strudwick (2016), p. 80.

¹⁷ Strudwick (2016), p. 77.

Tomb Paintings

Strudwick states that the majority of the chapel's wall decorations are damaged.¹⁸ Of the decorations that remain, there are notable biographical depictions of Senneferi and his family. (See Appendix 1 for a map of the chapel decorations.) Wall 12 displays Senneferi's biographical text, describing three stages of his career, and an extensive list of his titles and epithets.¹⁹ Scenes in the chapel's front room depict his foreign expeditions on important royal missions. Strudwick questions whether this biography is strictly the truth or exaggerated to reflect Senneferi's importance, but whatever the case, we can be certain that Senneferi was a man of considerable standing.

Notably, the titles recorded on Wall 12 mirror those displayed publicly on the facade cones and reappear in relief on the coffin fragments, suggesting that Senneferi's status was consistently projected across public, ritual, and funerary contexts from the tomb's entrance to its deepest burial chamber. Walls 4 and 8 depict Senneferi directly before the king, providing visual confirmation of the close relationship implied by his titles.

Finds

Strudwick maps TT99 finds against Smith's 1992 typology of intact 17th–18th dynasty elite burials (see Appendix 2).²⁰ Despite evidence of extreme looting and destruction in the tomb,²¹ the majority of Smith's object categories are present: coffins, canopic equipment, funerary papyri, mummy shroud, jewellery, furniture, boxes, baskets, ceramics, provisions, with any absences potentially explained by the previous looting, interment of other family members, or excavations. Strudwick postulates that, overall, the “evidence available certainly suggests Senneferi's burial would not have been atypical for what (little) is known from the period.”²² Nevertheless, several categories of finds stand apart as direct indicators of elevated rank.

Coffins

Taylor notes that Shaft I contained fragments of at least four anthropoid coffins, in the characteristic ‘black’ type which was typical of high elite coffins of the period.²³ Due to the small

¹⁸ Strudwick (2016), p. 85.

¹⁹ Strudwick (2016), pp. 16–17.

²⁰ Strudwick, N. and Strudwick, H. (2016) 'Small Finds from Shaft I and an Overview of the Burial Assemblage of Senneferi', in Strudwick, N. (ed.) *The Tomb of Pharaoh's Chancellor Senneferi at Thebes (TT99)*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, p. 290.

²¹ Strudwick (2016), pp. 81–84.

²² Strudwick and Strudwick (2016), p. 291.

²³ Taylor, J.H. (2016) 'The Coffins from Shaft I', in Strudwick, N. (ed.) *The Tomb of Pharaoh's Chancellor Senneferi at Thebes (TT99)*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, p. 190.

size of fragments, reconstruction of individual coffins is not possible; Senneferi’s coffin cannot be identified. However, some fragments contain gold-leaf, while others bear traces of inscriptions of Senneferi’s name and some of his titles in relief, indicating that his coffins were commissioned specifically for him and not mass-produced examples with inscriptions painted directly onto blank spaces.²⁴ Bespoke coffins with gold leaf are a direct marker of elite wealth and commissioning.

Ceramics

The sheer volume of ceramics indicates a well-provisioned burial.²⁵ The presence of dated wine jars, imported vessels such as Cypriot Base Ring ware juglets, and unused vessels deliberately intended for funerary use indicates Senneferi’s wealth and status. In addition, two amphorae stamped with the cartouche of Thutmose III suggest royal gifts or produce from royal estates, demonstrating Senneferi’s close relationship with the king.

Opening of the Mouth Ritual Equipment

A remarkable find in TT99 is the presence of Opening of the Mouth ritual equipment, which includes ivory objects, a ‘finger of electrum’, and a censer.²⁶ See Strudwick’s summary table of objects (figure 3, right) for the full list. Strudwick notes that the physical inclusion of ritual implements, not just their depiction on walls, is unprecedented in the Theban record for this period. Their presence is potentially the strongest single piece of evidence for Senneferi's elevated position. It indicates a level of religious investment and/or privilege that exceeds the usual even for high officials.

Table 18: Summary of contexts of Opening the Mouth objects from TT99

<i>Object type</i>	<i>Provenance</i>	<i>Object numbers</i>
Adzes (various)	Room 3	99.98.0518, 99.98.0601, 99.98.0619
Finger	Room 3	99.98.0648
Model ox leg (<i>hps</i>)	Room 2/3 (join)	99.98.0608, 99.98.0609
Censer	Room 3	99.98.0650
Uncertain items	Room 3	99.98.0640, 99.98.0665
Ostrakon	Room 2/3, Staircase shaft and Corridor	See p. 268 ff
Label	Room 3	99.98.0622
Box H fragment	Room 3	99.98.0658
Box A (possible)	Room 3, Corridor	See p. 279

Table 1: Summary of contexts of Opening of the Mouth objects from TT99 (Strudwick, (2016), p. 271)

The architecture and finds of TT99 together present Senneferi as a man operating at the very highest level of the 18th dynasty elite. As Strudwick observes, a person's importance within the elite was principally determined by their relationship with the king;²⁷ by this standard,

²⁴ Taylor (2016), p. 187.
²⁵ Rose, P. (2016) 'The Ceramics from Shaft I', in Strudwick, N. (ed.) *The Tomb of Pharaoh's Chancellor Senneferi at Thebes (TT99)*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, p. 192.
²⁶ Strudwick, (2016), p. 260.
²⁷ Strudwick, (2016), p. 17.

Senneferi's material record speaks clearly. His titles, particularly the rare *r shrr m tA r Dr.f*, restricted to only the highest officials, his depiction undertaking foreign expeditions on royal service, and the presence of amphorae stamped with the cartouche of Thutmose III all point to a man in close and sustained proximity to royal power. His tomb is situated among those of the highest officials of the Thutmoside period in one of the most prestigious areas of the Theban necropolis and was constructed to accommodate multiple generations of his family, reflecting both the wealth and authority that such proximity to the king provided. Yet TT99 also suggests a man of exceptional ambition. That no comparable burial of a high official from this period survives intact makes TT99 all the more significant; it offers a rare and largely unreplicated glimpse into the material world of the Thutmoside elite at its uppermost level. The tree emplacements, possibly the earliest certain examples in the Theban record, the qAr-shaped shrine ceiling, and above all the physical inclusion of Opening of the Mouth ritual equipment, unprecedented in the Theban record for this period, indicate someone who was not merely wealthy, but who appears to have had access to the craftsmen, wealth, and materials necessary to push at the boundaries of contemporary funerary practice. The material culture of TT99 preserves a record not only of exceptional wealth and status but also of a man who appears to have approached his own commemoration and burial with considerable deliberation.

Reference List

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Appendix 1:

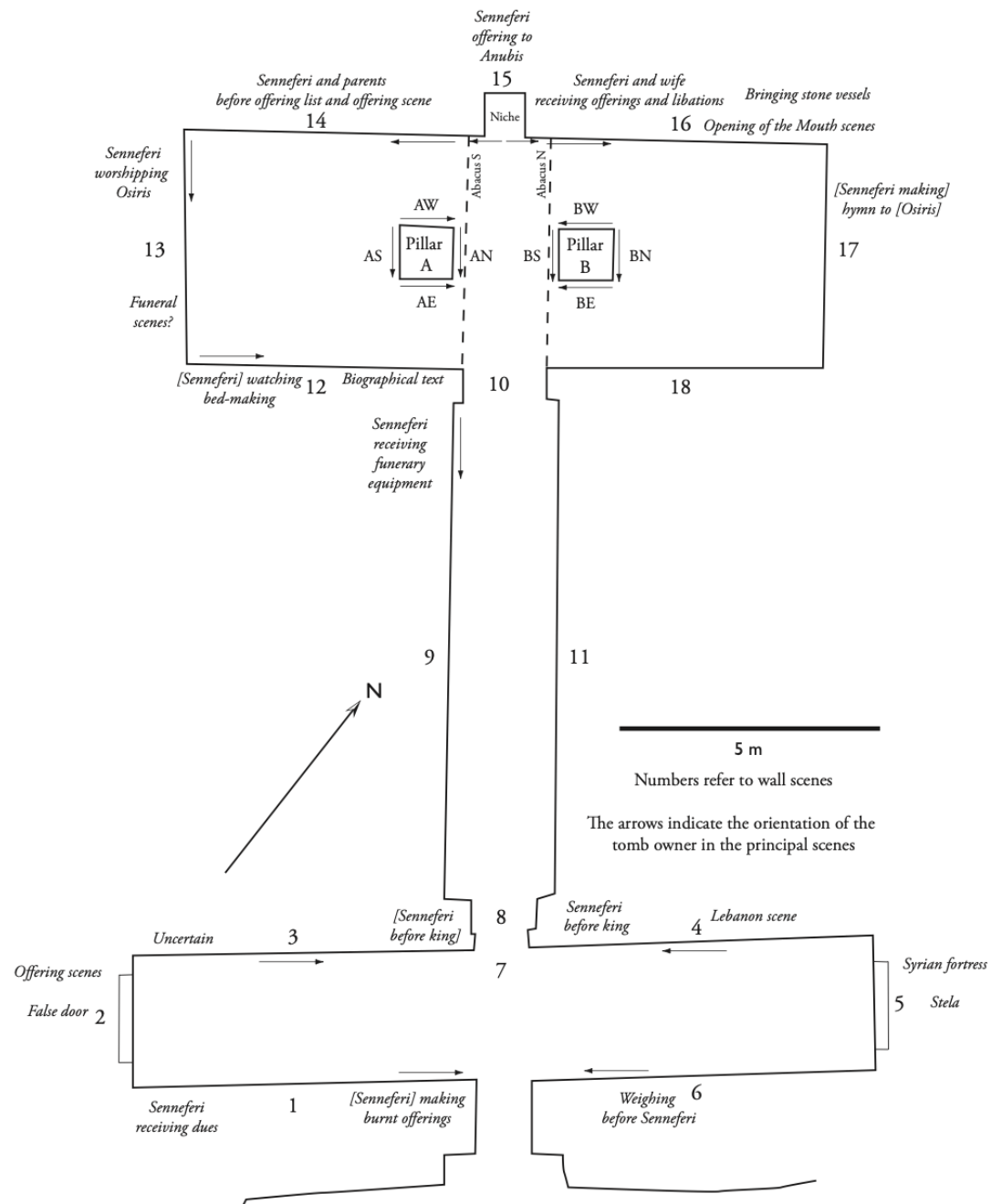


Fig. 78: Schematic diagram of the Chapel of TT99, showing numbering of the walls and summary of their thematic content. For a full plan of the chapel, see Pl. 1

Appendix 2:

Table 19: Summary of Smith's types of tomb equipment as applied to the burial of Senneferi

<i>Object category</i>	<i>Present?</i>	<i>Observations and notes</i>	<i>Tomb area</i>			<i>Book pages</i>
			<i>Co Ss</i>	<i>R2</i>	<i>R3</i>	
Coffins	X	Black type. Percentages here are for all fragments, not just those in Chapter 8, and so may include some misidentified pieces of boxes Significant diagnostic fragments in Chapter 8 only	51%	17%	32%	Chapter 8, p. 181
Masks	?	Two beards found are included in coffin fragments above	17%	21%	62%	
Canopic chests and vessels	X	Only the fragments considered here	15%	62%	23%	p. 282
Shabtis						
Statue						
Funerary papyri	X	See list of locations in Table 13 on p. 178	1%	25%	74%	Chapter 7,
Mummy shroud	X				100%	p. 169
Fertility symbols						
Jewellery	X	A minimal amount	42%	5%	53%	p. 271
Game boxes						
Bouquets and garlands						
Furniture	X	Not including boxes or canopic chests		20%	30%	p. 283
Boxes	X	Not including the canopic chest	50%	7%	43%	p. 279
Baskets	X	The full number was not recorded		X	X	p. 289
Toilet sets	X	Probably--only one fragment of a kohl stick; the small stone vessel fragments could have come from such a set			X	p. 276
Professional equipment						
Staves						
Sandals						
Clothing		Linens and metals may have been stolen				
Large metal vessels						
Large stone vessels	X	Includes smaller examples	35%	5%	60%	p. 273
Provisions	X	See also the storage jars and the hieratic labels on them (Chapter 9 and Chapter 10)		Traces		Chapter 9 Chapter 10
Containers for provisions	X			67%	33%	p. 277
Amphorae	X	Based on sherd count in Chapter 9; see also Table 14 to Table 17 starting p. 220. A considerable number of sherds were found in the Corridor; perhaps this is where some vessels removed from Rooms 2 and 3 were broken?	34%	32%	34%	Chapter 9, p. 206
Painted storage vessels		(Not really common at this date)				
'Flowerpots', bowls, platters	X		18%	25%	57%	Chapter 9, p. 214
Other ceramics	X	These sherds are too numerous to count. See tables beginning p. 220				Chapter 9
Additional categories from TT99 evidence						
Ritual equipment	X	See Table 18 on p. 271		5%	95%	p. 260

Present? some evidence of its existence in TT99

Tomb area Co Ss = Corridors and Staircase shaft; R2 = Room 2; R3 = Room 3