ResearchGate

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348147034

Middle Kingdom tombs from the North Asasif cemetery: field seasons 2018/2019 and 2020

Article *in* Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean · December 2020

DOI: 10.31338/uw.2083-537X.pam29.2.06

CITATIONS
5

READS
1,223

1 author:

Patryk Chudzik
University of Warsaw

13 PUBLICATIONS **48** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

All content following this page was uploaded by Patryk Chudzik on 21 April 2022.

The user has requested enhancement of the downloaded file.

Middle Kingdom tombs in the North Asasif Necropolis: field seasons 2018/2019 and 2020

Abstract: The early Middle Kingdom mortuary complexes of Khety and Meru continued to be the main research target of the Polish Archaeological Mission to North Asasif in the two winter seasons of 2018/2019 and 2020. The rubble dump on the eastern side of Khety's forecourt, left over from the 1922/1923 excavation, was now explored, leading to the discovery of hundreds of objects—fragments of wooden statues and models, cartonnages and coffins, shabti figurines and pottery—shedding light on the Middle Kingdom burial assemblages as well as the later usurpation of the tomb, mainly in the Third Intermediate Period. Conservation objectives included treatment of the decorated burial crypt and sarcophagus in the tomb of Meru and stabilization and cleaning of the plaster decoration in the mortuary cult chapel of Khety. The season in 2018/2019 was also devoted to a reconnaissance of the underground structures and protection of tomb MMA 507. Specialists studies of finds from the excavations, both recent and earlier, were continued.

Keywords: Theban Necropolis, North Asasif, Middle Kingdom, rock-cut tomb, conservation

The mission from the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology University of Warsaw continued its work on the hillside of North Asasif, a high-officials' cemetery dated to the reign of Nebhepetra Mentuhotep II, in two successive seasons, 2018/2019 and 2020. A major part of the effort was to

Patryk Chudzik[1]

[1] Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw

Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 29/2
Chudzik 2020: 167–191
https://doi.org/10.31338/uw.2083-537X.pam29.2.06

Team
Directors: Dr. Patryk Chudzik egyptologist/archaeologist (2018/2019; in 2020 acting as deputy director); Dr. Anastasiia Stupko-Lubczyńska, egyptologist (2020) (both PCMA UW)
Archaeologists: Aleksandra Pawlikowska-Gwiazda (Institute of Archaeology UW; 2020), Ayman Amer (IFAO; 2020)
SCA representatives: Mahmoud Hassan El-Azab Ramadan, Rasha Mohammed Abd el Kareem, Mahmoud Saad Eid Yousif, Zeinab Mohammed Khrashy Dyab (all 2018/2019); Ghareib Younis Ahmed and Samia Gamal Mohamed (2020)
Physical anthropologist: Dr. Roselyn A. Campbell (Getty Research Institute; 2018/2019, 2020)
Architects: Katarzyna Andrak and Grzegorz Biczak (freelance; 2018/2019, 2020)
Engineer: Mieczysław Michiewicz (freelance; 2018/2019)
Ceramologist: Dr. Teodozja I. Rzeuska (Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences; 2018/2019)
Archaeozoologist: Dr. Urszula Iwaszczuk (PCMA UW; 2018/2019)
Conservators: Izabela Uchman (freelance; 2018/2019); Saleh Mohamed Abd El Galeil (2018/2019), Fatma Khairy Mohammed, Sayed Abo Almagd Mohammed, Ahmed Farag Allah Ahmed (both seasons), Mohamed Ali Abdalah and Badawy Mustafa Ahmed (2020) (all Ministry of Antiquities)
Photographer: Maciej Jawornicki (feelance; 2018/2019, 2020)
Documentalists: Dariusz Flajszer and Waldemar Kubiczek (freelance; 2018/2019, 2020)

Acknowledgements
On behalf of the members of the mission to North Asasif I would like to express my gratitude to the authorities of the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, with particular emphasis on His Excellency, Prof. Khaled al-Anany, Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Dr. Mostafa Waziri, Secretary General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, and Dr. Nashwa Gaber, Director of Foreign Missions Affairs and Permanent Committee, for their invaluable help and continuous support. I am also much indebted to the local authorities in Luxor and Gurna Inspectorates, Dr. Mohamed Yehia, General Director of Antiquities for Upper Egypt, Mr. Fathy Yaseen Abd el-Karim, General Director of the West Bank of Luxor, Mr. Ramadan Ahmed Ali Ahmed, General Director of Foreign Missions of the West Bank of Luxor, Mr. Ezz el-Din Kamal el-Nuby, Director of the Middle Area of the West Bank of Luxor, as well as inspectors and colleagues from the SCA for their friendly cooperation, understanding of our problems and support on all matters relating to the fieldwork. I also wish to express our appreciation to the PCMA Director Dr. Artur Obłuski and the staff of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology in Warsaw and Cairo for their invaluable assistance throughout the seasons. I would like to thank Iwona Zych for help in editing this paper.

conserve and restore the burial crypt and sarcophagus in the funerary complex of Meru (TT 240) and the mortuary cult chapel of Khety (TT 311), where weak wall plasters covered with painted scenes were in need of consolidation. Both tombs have been under investigation for the past few seasons and current work included both archaeological exploration and specialist studies. Excavation of the rubble dump in the eastern sector of Khety's courtyard yielded an assemblage of finds illustrating the sequence of reuse of this tomb. Research continued on the human and animal remains, the pottery and other elements of the pharaonic grave goods, as well as artefacts of everyday use from the Byzantine era discovered during the team's earlier work in the two tombs.

The team also undertook a reconnaissance of the underground parts of tomb MMA 507 [*Fig. 1*], a multiple burial of more than 60 soldiers discovered in 1922/1923. By permission of the Ministry of State of Antiquities, the tomb interiors were protected prior to further research.

Site management objectives included the construction of a wooden floor and balustrades in the main passageway of Meru's tomb and an accessway consisting of massive steps built of rubble on the steep slope from the foot of the hill to the tomb doorway.

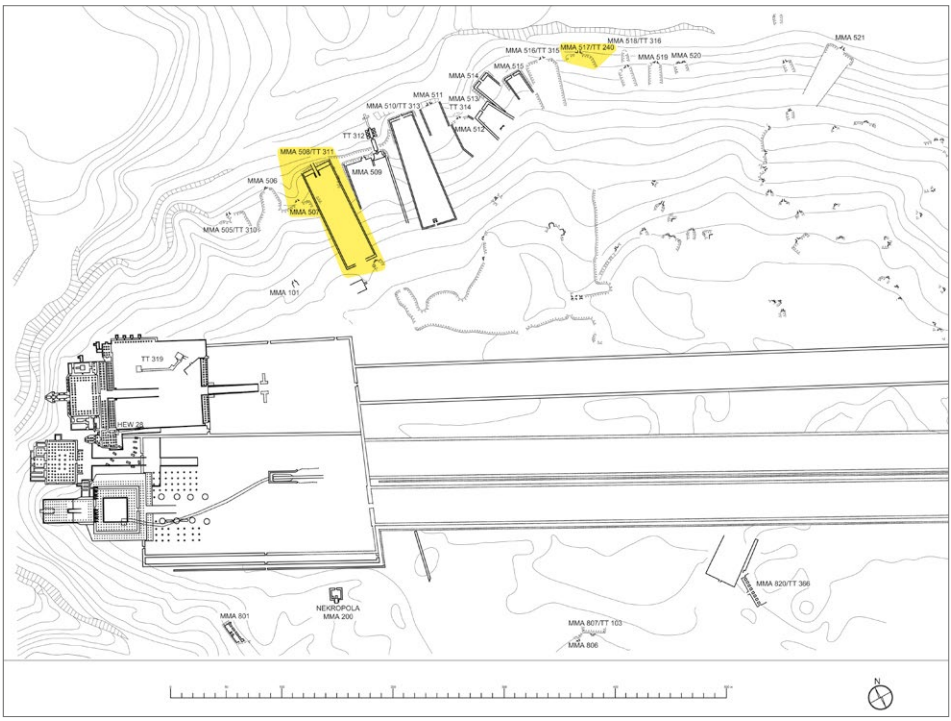

Fig. 1. Plan of Deir el-Bahari and the North Asasif necropolis – highlighted tombs where the work discussed in this article was conducted (PCMA UW Asasif Project | drawing K. Andraka after Arnold 1979: Pl. 38 and Eigner 1984: Plan 1).

TOMB OF KHETY (TT 311)

1. ARCHAEOLOGICAL ACTIVITY

The tomb of chancellor Khety was discovered by the Egyptian Expedition of the Metropolitan Museum of Art directed by Herbert E. Winlock in the 1922/1923 season [see *Fig. 1*]. At the time of discovery, the rock-hewn corridors and chambers of the tomb were filled with rubble containing ancient artefacts. The debris brought out from inside by Winlock's workmen formed a vast dump on the eastern side of the

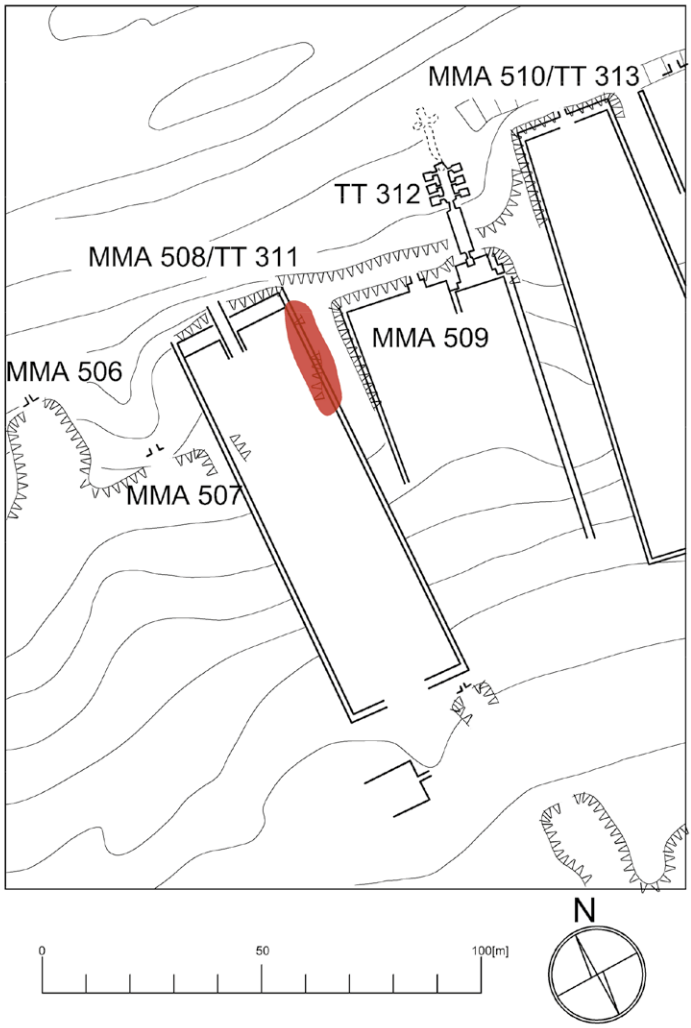

Fig. 2. Location of the rubble dump in the forecourt of Khety's tomb (PCMA UW Asasif Project | drawing K. Andraka)

forecourt [*Fig. 2*]. A reexamination of this archaeological dump became the task of the PCMA team during field seasons in 2017 (for preliminary results, see Chudzik 2018: 186–188) and 2018/2019. A ground survey in 2015 had already revealed an oval clay tray in the upper parts of the dump, close to the east lateral wall of the facade, and fragments of decorated limestone blocks from the main passage of the tomb protruding from debris in the middle of the dump (Chudzik 2017: 186). Systematic exploration of the rubble in the next years brought to light hundreds of artefacts and architectural elements from the interior of the tomb. A horizontal and vertical stratigraphy was observed in the dump, substantiating a closer examination of the finds aimed at reconstructing the sequence of use and reuse of the tomb. The present observations are limited, however, to preliminary remarks on human activity in the tomb after the Middle Kingdom, as well as to natural erosion processes and the original context of the finds.

1.1 Horizontal arrangement

The rubble dump was piled up alongside the eastern boundary of the courtyard for approximately 37.80 m, covering the remains of a mud-brick enclosure wall in the upper part of the steep slope. The width varied from 0.50 m at the northern end to more than 7.50 m in sectors I and II. Four different sectors of the rubble were distinguished, corresponding to the different rock-hewn structures of Khety's funerary complex [*Fig. 3* top]. It is also fairly clear that the distribution of finds within individual sectors likely indicates the original context [*Fig. 3* bottom].

Sector I

The lowermost part of the dump is a thick layer of debris, reaching nearly 3.00 m at the highest point. The artefacts found among the rubble must have come from the fill of the innermost structures of Khety's tomb explored in Winlock's time, namely the sarcophagus camber and most likely the interconnecting room, from where a reverse descending corridor leads to the main crypt. Hundreds of clay vessel fragments were found together with finely decorated fragments of the burial chamber wall decoration and the massive sarcophagus of limestone, fragments of Khety's wooden coffin covered with Spells from the Coffin Texts and a frieze of objects, as well as elements of Middle Kingdom grave goods, i.e., arrows, wooden models, a 5-cm-long head of a *sekhem* sceptre of one of Khety's figurines [*Fig. 4*], as well as remains of Nile crocodiles, which are particularly interesting and extremely rare in funerary contexts. The debris also contained remains of intrusive burials from the Third Intermediate Period, among others fragments of wooden anthropoid coffins, cartonnages, shabtis and Ptah-Sokar-Osiris figurines, faience amulets [*Fig. 5*], textiles and human remains. One of the mummies was undoubtedly buried in a niche hewn into the west wall of the interconnecting room. It should be kept in mind that clear boundaries between sectors in the rubble dump naturally could not be established, hence the finding of a few decorated block fragments from the main passageway, as well as fragments of the sandstone ceiling slabs in this context.

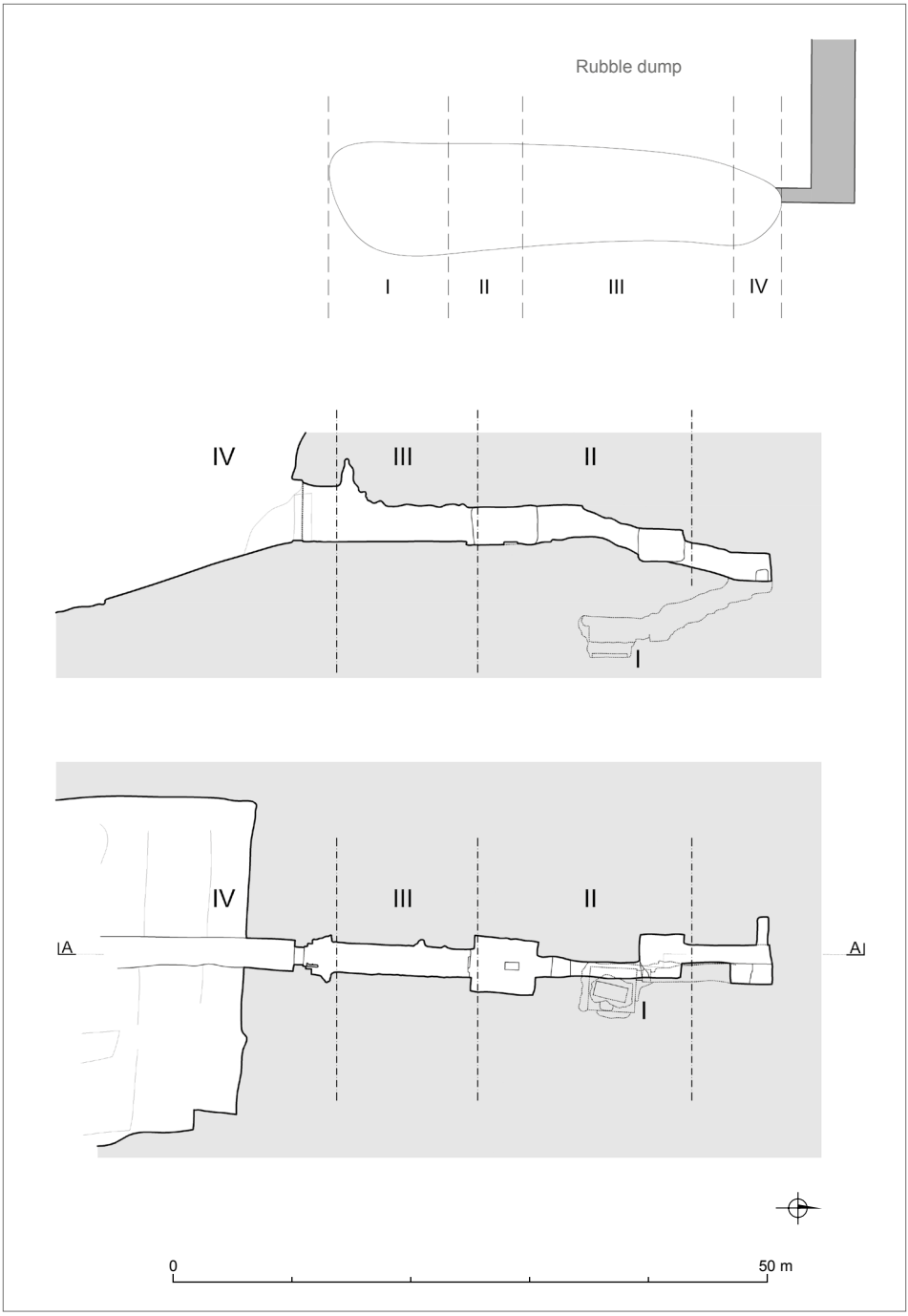

Fig. 3. Plan and section of the Tomb of Khety (bottom): numerals refer to the four sectors distinguished in the rubble dump located in the forecourt of the tomb (top) (PCMA UW Asasif Project | drawing K. Andraka)

Sector II

Although a small number of fragments from the wall surfaces of the burial chamber was found in the southern part of Sector II of the dump, which was 6.20 m long, the context as a rule contained remains of painted lime plaster and fragments of limestone blocks covered with relief scenes clearly originating from the first descending corridor, the funerary cult chapel and the terminus of the main passageway. Exploration of this sector resulted also in the discovery of fragments of at least five wooden statues and figurines, including a life-size statue of Khety, which must have once stood in a niche in the cult chapel.[1] Another statue, the head of which Winlock discovered and shipped to New York,[2] belonged most likely to Khety's wife. She was depicted also in scenes on the walls in the main corridor. The fill also contained incomplete Third Intermediate Period burials: remains of mummies, cartonnages and coffins, shabti and Ptah-Sokar-Osiris figurines.

Fig. 4. Wooden model of the head of a *sekhem* sceptre from the Tomb of Khety (PCMA UW Asasif Project | photo M. Jawornicki)

Sector III

Sector III of the dump, 17.60 m long, also produced a large number of limestone block fragments covered with relief decoration, clearly from the main corridor. Hundreds of greater and smaller pieces were decorated with sunk and raised reliefs. Different carving techniques can be observed, indicating that several artists were at work creating this decoration [*Fig. 6*]. Of particular interest are the relief-decorated block fragments with graffiti painted in both black and red ink.

A small fragment turned out to be the missing piece of Ramesses II's name written in the cartouche on a graffito that Winlock discovered excavating the tomb. The graffito was of the vizier Paser, who visited the funerary monument of the Middle Kingdom official in Year 17 of the reign of User-maat-Ra Setep-en-Ra

1 A wooden statue of the tomb owner was set in a regular niche hewn into the wall opposite the chapel doorway, whereas the sandstone block in the centre of the chapel, which Winlock described as the base of this sculpture (Winlock 1942: 71), was in fact a purification basin (Chudzik 2016: 293).

2 MMA Inv. No. 26.3.104a (Winlock 1942: Pl. 36 [upper left]; Hayes 1968: 164, 210; Arnold 1991: 28-29, Figs 39-41; Roehrig, Hill, Allen and Brand 1995: 149, Cat. 56).

Fig. 5. Faience amulets from the fill of Khety's tomb (PCMA UW Asasif Project | photo M. Jawornicki)

Ramesses II (Winlock 1923: 17, Fig. 9); the second part of the king's prenomen was missing, but this had not affected the identification [*Fig. 7*]. Other similar short text fragments are presumably dated to the same period.

Special attention should be paid to a number of graffiti, which were most likely written shortly after Khety's funeral. A group of seven inscriptions and their fragments, painted in red ink, consists only of the names written next to the representation of men facing left, hence originally depicted in a row on the eastern side of the entrance corridor. One of the names, Senwosret [*Fig. 8*], clearly indicates that they were added to the decoration of the main passageway

Fig. 6. Relief block decoration from the main passageway in Khety's tomb (PCMA UW Asasif Project | photos M. Jawornicki)

in the early Twelfth Dynasty at the earliest. However, it is still uncertain why they were written here in the first place. Chancellor Khety was one of the most prominent officials in the court of Nebhepetra Mentuhotep II. His position is clearly confirmed not only by his funerary monument in the Theban Necropolis, but also by inscriptions containing his name and titulary in

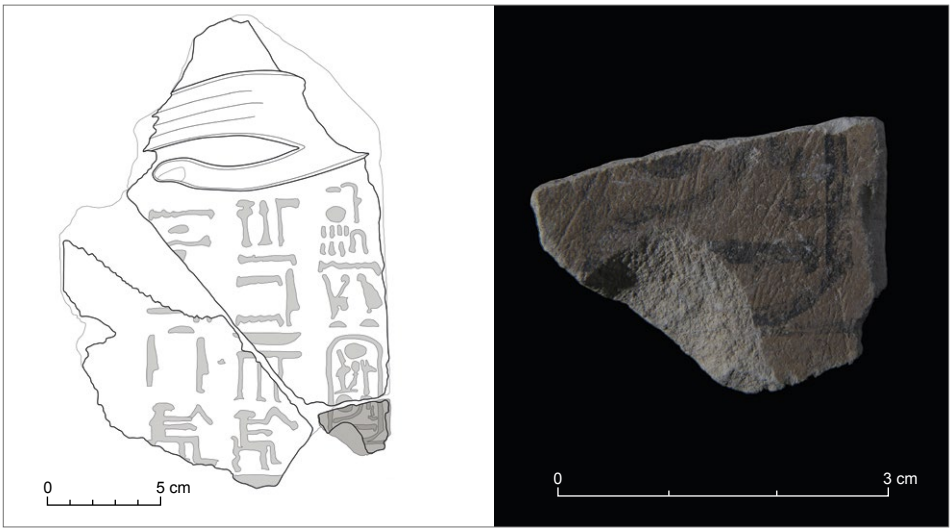

Fig. 7. Ramesside graffito from the main passageway in Khety's tomb: left, fragment from the dump discovered in 2020; right, drawing of the graffito found by Winlock with the newly discovered fragment of the king's name added at bottom right (PCMA UW Asasif Project | photo M. Jawornicki; drawing and modification G. Biczak after Winlock 1923: Fig. 9)

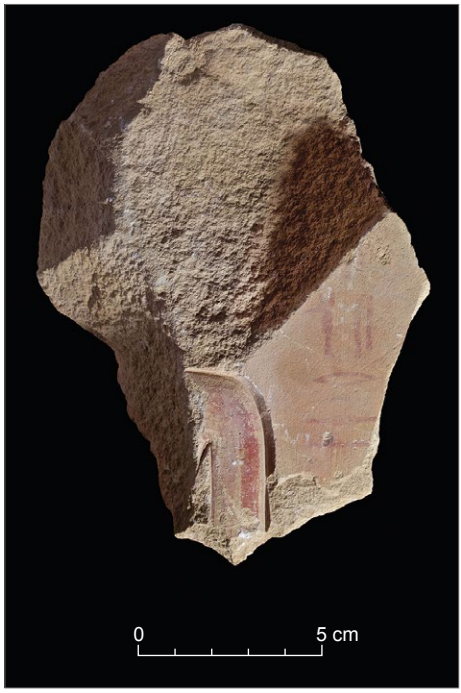

Fig. 8. Relief block decoration with the arm of a male and later graffito mentioning the name Senwosret (PCMA UW Asasif Project | photo M. Jawornicki)

the royal mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahari[3] and rock graffiti at Wadi Shatt er-Rigal.[4] His reputation presumably endured after his death as attested by two other objects, both made of red granite, inscribed with Khety's name and titles, found in Karnak. The first is a headless statue mentioning *ḫtmti-bitj smr wʿtj jt-nṯr jmj-r ḫtmt m tꜣ r ḏr=f imꜣḫ ḫty mꜣʿ ḫrw* "king's seal-bearer, unique friend, god's father, overseer of the seal in the entire land, revered Khety, justified".[5] The other one is an altar with an offering formula *ḥtp-di-nsw ḫꜣ t ḥnkt kꜣ ꜣpd sš mnḫt n jmj-r ḫtmt imꜣḫ ḫty mꜣʿ ḫrw* "an offering, which the king has given, of a thousand of bread and beer, beef and fowl, alabaster and clothing for the overseer of the seal, revered Khety, justified" and *imꜣḫ ḫr nṯr ꜥꜣ nb ꜣbḏw jt-nṯr mry-nṯr ḫty mꜣʿ ḫrw* "revered by the great god, lord of Abydos, god's father and beloved Khety, justified".[6] The stylistic features of the two monuments from Karnak clearly indicate their creation in the Twelfth Dynasty, but it is uncertain whether they were dedicated to Khety's cult or were donated by another individual of the same name and bearing the same titles in later times (Allen 1996: 8–9; 2003: 19).

The uppermost part of this sector also yielded a large assemblage of limestone block fragments (over 200 pieces) from a doorway system. All of these pieces were painted red with black dots, whereas some of them also contained fragments of scenes and texts (see below).

The other materials from the sector represent the same repertoire as the two contexts described above. Human and animal remains, fragments of wooden coffins, cartonnages, shabti figurines and pottery sherds, but also some fragments of Middle Kingdom wooden statues and figurines indicate that the tomb was robbed in antiquity and the grave goods were scattered in various parts of the substructures.

Sector IV

The uppermost and the smallest part of the dump, only 4.00 m long, covered the eastern part of the lower rock-cut step crossing the courtyard, and the bedrock behind the lateral mud-brick wall. The maximum height of homogeneous debris in the lower part of the dump reaches 0.80 m. Excavation of the sector recorded a small quantity of mostly fragments of uninscribed terracotta cones, mud bricks, pottery sherds and pieces of a round funerary clay tray, as well as fragments of decorated doorjambs and lintel. This part of the dump clearly came from the cleaning of the tomb façade and its doorway.

3 His name is attested on three block fragments: Nos 82, 660 and 3078, see Allen 1996: 6, footnote 22; 2003: 19, footnote 58.

4 Petrie 1888: 15, Pls XV–XVI (Nos 443 and 489, respectively); Winlock 1940: 142–143, Figs 7–8; 1947: 62–63, Pls 12, 36–37.

5 Currently on display in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden (National Museum of Antiquities) in Leiden, Inv. No. AEBB (Mariette 1875: 44, Pl. 8j; Boeser 1910: 5, No. 40, Fig. 13, Pl. XXI; Schneider and Raven 1981: No. 39).

6 Collection of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, JdE 67858 (Kamal 1938: 15–19, Pl. 3).

1.2 Vertical stratigraphy

A thorough analysis of the nature of the debris distinguished a vertical stratigraphy, which however could not be recorded other than by descriptive documentation and schematic sketching of layers, thus due to the steepness of the slope whch resulted in continuous down-sliding of the rubble [*Fig. 9*]. In some parts of sectors I, II and III, three layers of the dump were identified, reflecting an inverse stratigraphy:

(1) uppermost layer of debris consisting of small- and middle-sized stones and rocks, containing a large number of decorated fragments of limestone blocks and bowls made of blocks. The ancient rubbish also included fragments of wooden coffins and cartonnages, shabti figurines, as well as human and animal remains. The team also found remains of Middle Kingdom funerary equipment.

(2) the second stratum in the middle of the dump contained only a few decorated block fragments, but definitely more remains of mummies and burial assemblages. Interestingly, this layer of debris consisted mostly of small-sized rocks, almost without any middle-sized examples and a total absence of large rocks.

(3) the lowermost strata contained only single bone fragments as well as some wooden and faience objects. This layer consisted mainly of middle- and large-size rocks, which had fallen as a result of natural erosion.

The character of the ancient rubbish, especially when considered in accordance with the vertical stratigraphy of the dump, illustrates the history of the tomb after the Middle Kingdom. A preliminary reconstruction of the various phases of reuse of the tomb runs as follows. In the reign of Ramesses II, when the vizier Paser visited the tomb of Khety, its walls were still in place, but it is not clear that the sarcophagus chamber had not been robbed as yet.

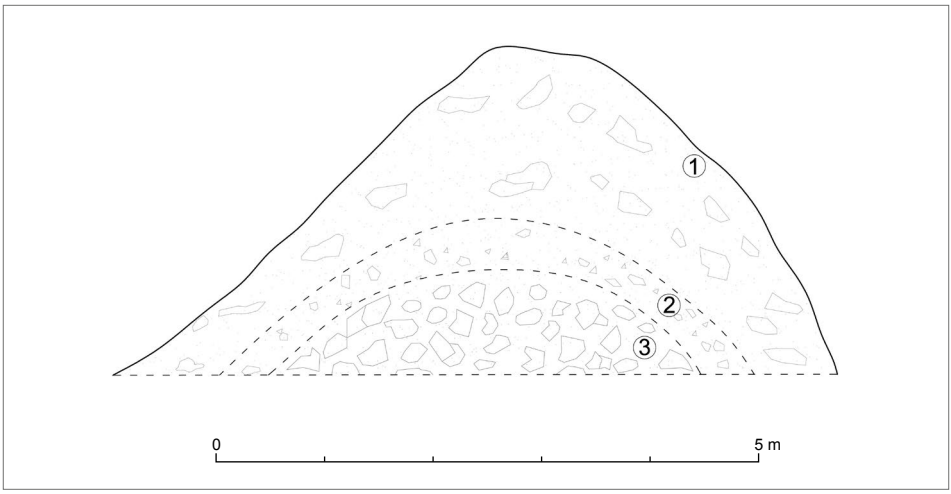

Fig. 9. Section through the rubble dump in the forecourt of Khety's tomb (PCMA UW Asasif Project | drawing P. Chudzik, digitizing K. Andraka)

Subsequently, most likely at the close of the New Kingdom or in the beginning of the Third Intermediate Period, the finely decorated walls of Khety's main passageway and partly the walls in the burial crypt, as well as his sarcophagus made of high-quality limestone, were intentionally shattered into smaller pieces using small chisels. Stone vessels were made from these pieces. This was the most destructive phase in the history of Khety's tomb.

The period that followed was a time of intrusive burials. Many people, both adults and children, were buried in the deepest chambers and presumably also in the corridors of the underground structures. Looting was commonplace, the burials from the Twenty-second and Twenty-third Dynasties being scattered around the tomb interior. After that the tomb appears to have been visited only by wild animals, until finally the rock ceiling in the front part of the entrance corridor collapsed and filled almost the entire tomb with rock debris, which is the condition in which the tomb was discovered in the early 20th century.

2 CONSERVATION WORK

A program for the conservation of the mortuary cult chapel of Khety was initiated in 2020. The walls of the tomb are covered with lime plaster heavily mixed with plant fibers and small stones, and decorated with a painted repertoire of scenes of food and beer production, workshops, offering bearers and a pilgrimage to Abydos. The plaster is fragmentary on both sides of the chapel doorway (south wall), small fragments appear on the east wall and bigger ones on the west wall, whereas the northern side of the room reveals remains of plaster on the west side of the statue niche in particular. Natural processes of rock erosion have left the plaster in very poor condition, requiring immediate stabilization treatment.

The first step was to mechanically remove dust and hornet nests (the following description is based on unpublished reports by conservator Ahmed Farag). Voids under the plaster, where it has come loose from the rock, were grouted with liquid mortar to make the plaster readhere and the fragile edges of preserved patches of ancient plaster were protected with sealing bands of mortar. Finally, the filled voids as well as smaller gaps and cracks were covered with a second layer of mortar mixed colored with an earth pigment.

3 STUDIES

Specialists focused concurrently on the tomb architecture and specific categories of finds: grave goods from original and intrusive burials, as well as human and animal remains.

3.1 Architectural research

The progress of archaeological work in the tomb has contributed new data for architectural research, which has been ongoing since the beginning of work in this tomb five years ago. Among the newly studied structural elements is the doorway system connecting the substructures with the corridors and chambers carved into the mountain. The tomb entrance, situated in the centre of a monumental mud-brick façade, was flanked by two limestone doorjambs, decorated with

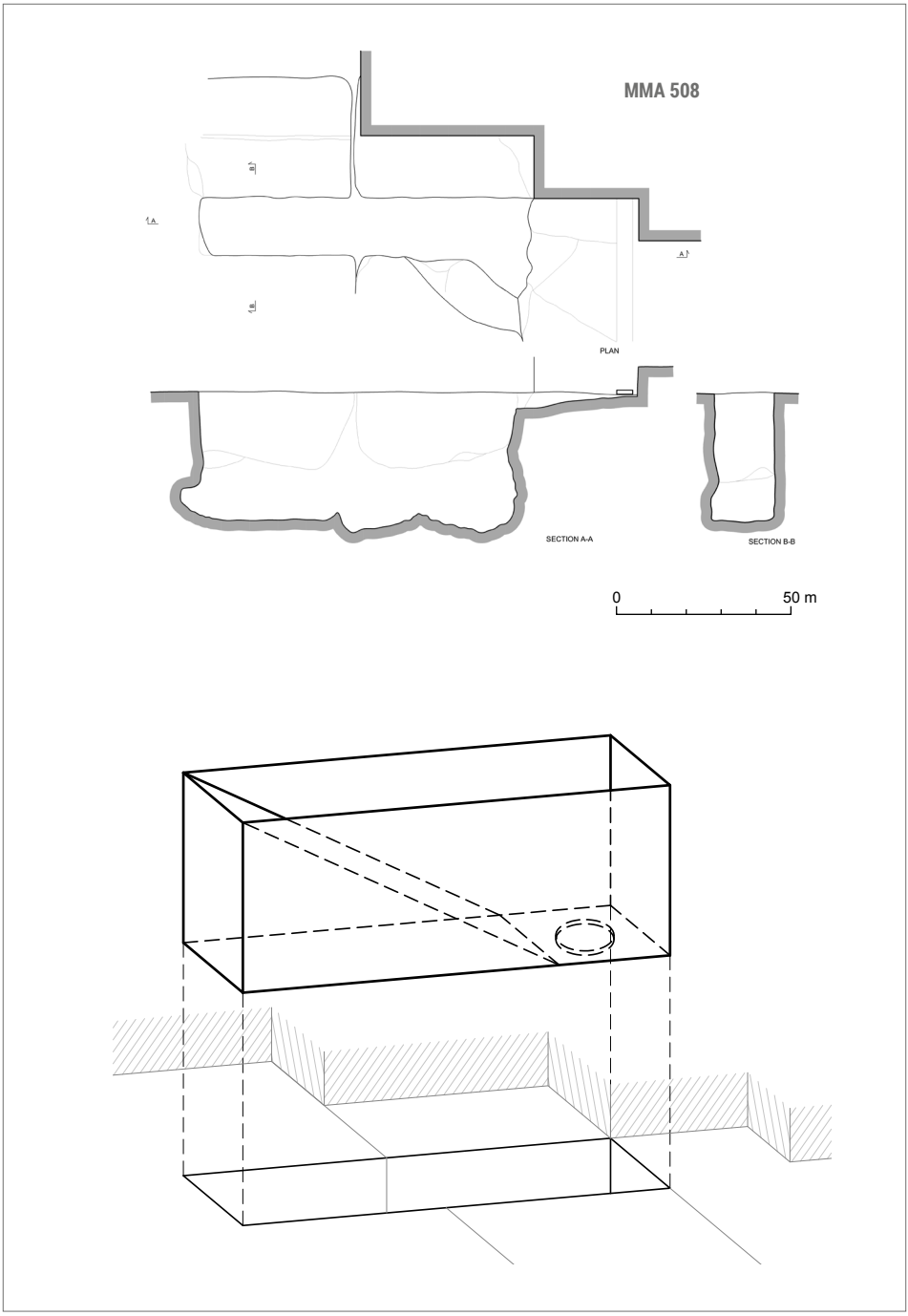

Fig. 10. Floor recess for the lower door socket behind the doorway in Khety's tomb: top, plan and section; bottom, hypothetical reconstruction of a wooden door socket (PCMA UW Asasif Project | drawing K. Andraka)

representations in sunk relief and painetd with vivid colors. The representation depicts Khety sitting on a chair, above his head a hieroglyphic inscription painted blue, containing his name and titulary. The lintel was decorated in the same technique, depicting a winged sun-disk and the name of the king Nebhepetra written in cartouches on either side. The background is painted red with black dots imitating red Aswan granite, which has strong solar connotations.

New fragments of the doorjambs and lintel, recovered from the dump in the forecourt of Khety's tomb, contribute to a more complete reconstruction of both these architectural elements. Cleaning in the main passageway uncovered a rectangular recess in the sandstone floor of the corridor, just behind the eastern doorjamb [*Fig. 10* top]. The size and shape of this recess suggests that it had served to position the lower door socket. It is possible to reconstruct the shape of the socket and the technique of mounting the door. The socket was most likely made of a single block of wood of rectangular shape. A long descending groove led down from the rear end to the circular socket at the bottom [*Fig. 10* bottom].[7] The door leaf was hung up first by passing the upper pivot into the socket carved in the lintel, and then letting down the lower part of the leaf into the lower socket using the slot.[8]

Exploration of the tomb entrance did not reveal a recess that could be expected on the left side of the corridor. This clearly indicates that the doorway was closed with a single-leaf doorway. No remains of the doorway have been identified so far, but it is to be assumed that it was made of long boards of sycamore wood that were doweled together and backed with wooden cross-pieces. The door was then coated with gesso and decorated with a representation of the king and the name of the deceased, which seems to be provided by a fragment of a door leaf discovered by Winlock in 1923 in nearby tomb MMA 509a (Winlock 1923: 15, Fig. 15 *in situ*; 1942: 70, Fig. 15; Hayes 1968: 257, Fig. 163).

3.2 Human remains

The exploration of the underground structures and the dump in the courtyard yielded a large number of human remains, both skeletonized and mummified. Examination by physical anthropologist Roselyn A. Campbell[9] leads to the preliminary conclusion that the tomb of Khety was the last resting place of at least 20 (probably more) individuals (Campbell 2019: 163). Whether this group includes the remains of Khety himself one cannot say at the present stage of research. A large and massive femur undoubtedly belonging to an adult was excavated in the burial crypt.

7 For a similar lower door socket from the temple of Kom Ombo, see Clarke and Engelbach 1930: 164.

8 On door leaf mounting techniques, see Arnold 2003: 74–76.

9 Campbell also examined human remains from the Middle Kingdom Tomb MMA 514, which was repeatedly reused in later periods, as confirmed by intrusive shafts and chambers hewn in the original entrance passageway and mortuary cult chapel (see Campbell 2018; 2020 in this volume).

Some of the buried individuals could have been interred here during the Third Intermediate Period. This is suggested by fragments of at least five wooden coffins, cartonnages and remains of grave goods.

Remains of five infants have also been identified, changing the previously held view that there were no child burials in this tomb.

3.3 Archaeozoological research

Animal bone remains are among the most frequently discovered materials from ancient Egyptian tombs. The exploration of the mortuary complex of Khety, both the underground structures and the dump on the courtyard, also brought to light hundreds of bones, bone fragments and teeth belonging to different species of animals. Archaeozoological research initiated by Urszula Iwaszczuk in the 2018/2019 field season provided particularly interesting data on the early Middle Kingdom burial assemblages, but also on the later history of Khety's tomb.

The faunal assemblage examined during the 2018/2019 season counted altogether 344 animal bones, bone fragments and teeth. The material mainly consists of mammals: domestic (donkey, cattle and dog) and wild, as well as fishes. Of particular interest is, however, the presence of the bones of a Nile crocodile.

Considering the four types of animal burials distinguished by Salima Ikram (2005: 1–16), i.e., beloved pets, votive mummies, funerary food offerings and sacred animals, one can say that some of the species found in the tomb of Khety clearly correspond with the last two types. The most common finds from the Middle Kingdom funerary context, also well attested in the tomb of Khety, are cattle bones, which were not part of the

Fig. 11. Conservation work in the burial crypt of Meru (TT 240) (PCMA UW Asasif Project | photo M. Jawornicki)

everyday diet. Their consumption was recorded mainly during celebrations, such as funeral ceremonies and mortuary rituals (De Meyer, van Neer, Peeters and Willems 2005: 60–66); the parts that were deposited foremost in the tombs were cattle heads, forelegs and feet. For the same reason probably the burial assemblage of Khety contained fragments of the body of a Nile crocodile, a sacred animal of the god Sobek;[10] however, in contrast to the cattle bones, the Nile crocodile remains are an extremely rare discovery.[11]

TOMB OF MERU (TT 240)

1 CONSERVATION WORK

In order to ensure stability of the ceiling and therefore the safety of the mummified body of the overseer of sealbearers Meru and his funerary equipment, the burial crypt was carved deep into the hard limestone beds of the Theban Formation. Although the walls of the sarcophagus chamber were carefully smoothed with copper chisels, they were not formed as perfectly flat surfaces. Therefore, the crypt has the shape of an irregular cube. Additionally, a wide crack running across the chamber and sarcophagus raised concerns. In some places the crack was so wide that it was filled by the ancient workmen with small stones or a limestone block, for example, in the floor on the western side of the sarcophagus. Subsequently, the walls were covered with a very thin layer of lime plaster and then painted with colourful friezes of objects, false doors, offerings and inscribed with offering lists and Spells from the Coffin Texts,[12] whereas the ceiling of the crypt was painted blue.

Conservation activity in the tomb of Meru began in 1996 with the Italian Archaeological Mission from the University of Rome "La Sapienza", directed by Alessandro Roccati, removing a thin layer of accrued smoke, dirt and bat excrements from the surface of the paintings (Roccati 1997: 241–243, Pl. LXIV [B]).[13] The Italian conservators, Adriano Luzi and Luigi de Cesaris, replaced some fallen fragments in their original position and cleaned part of the east wall, as well as small fragments on the west wall and ceiling, revealing the original colors of the painting, which are still quite bright, and the vertical columns of texts.

Twenty years later, the Polish mission started a comprehensive conservation and restoration program prepared by Izabela Uchman and under her management. The aim is to revitalize the original historical and aesthetic values

10 For the cult of god Sobek in the Theban Necropolis, see Kockelmann 2011.

11 Remains of Nile crocodiles were also found among others in Tomb MMA 509a, located east of Khety's funerary complex (unpublished material) and in Tomb 16L05/2 at Dayr el-Bersha (De Meyer, van Neer, Peeters and Willems 2005: 58, Fig. 10).

12 For preliminary results of the epigraphic studies, see Stupko-Lubczyńska 2020, in this volume.

13 I am deeply indebted to Francesco Tiradritti for sharing information on the work of the Italian mission.

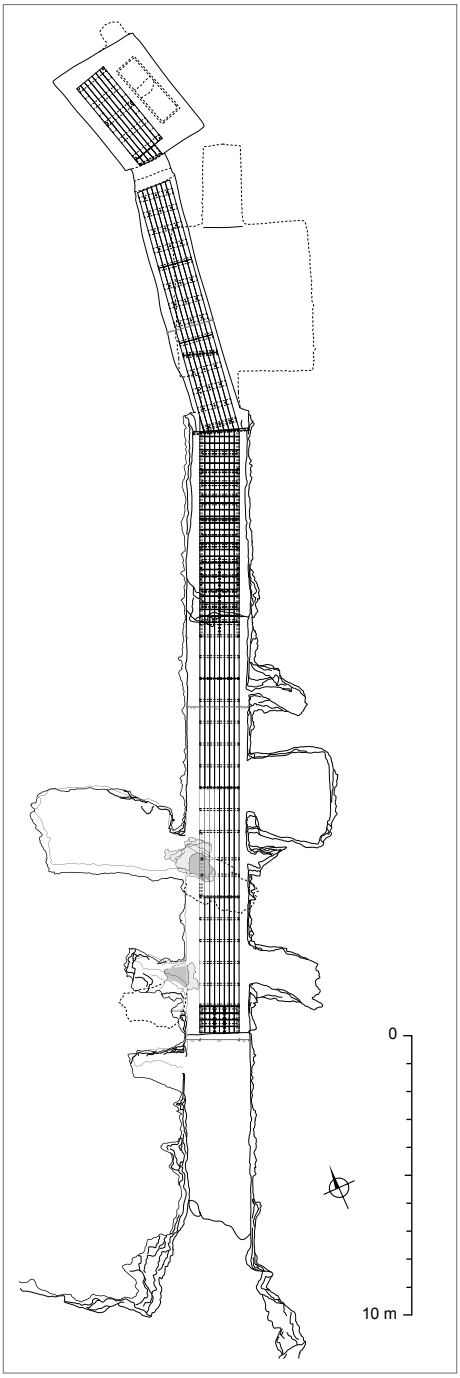

Fig. 12. Plan of the wooden floor system in the Tomb of Meru (TT 240) (PCMA UW Asasif Project | drawing G. Biczak)

of the decoration by implementing a complex treatment based on research. It was observed that the ancient wall decoration was not only covered with accumulations, but large fragments of the plaster, on the north and south walls, were almost totally gone. Damage in the form of an irregular niche was observed on the eastern side of the north wall; it was carved apparently in Byzantine times. The focus of work in the in 2018/2019 season was on reinforcing and stabilizing the technological structure of the painting [*Fig. 11*]. The team concentrated on cleaning the thin layer of accumulations. The procedure took place in two phases: the dirt and bat excrements were first removed from the surface and this was followed by chemical cleaning. All the powdering plaster and polychromy was consolidated. The conservation work and studies will be continued in the following seasons. Ultimately, wooden floors and balustrades will be constructed and lighting installed in order to open the tomb to the public.

2 STUDIES

Pottery assemblage in context

Most of the pottery collected from the mortuary complex of Meru was found on the forecourt, hence it is difficult to associate it with any particular underground structures. Despite the fragmentariness of the assemblage, ceramologist Teodozja Rzeuska reconstructed a chronological sequence that corresponds almost completely with that represented by other finds from the tomb (T.I. Rzeuska, unpublished report).

The overseer of sealbearers Meru was a high official in the court of Nebhepetra Mentuhotep II and his position is clearly exemplified by the oldest pottery group consisting of large storage vessels that are characteristic of the late Eleventh and early Twelfth Dynasties. These vessels were brought to the tomb together with other elements of the grave goods and left in the burial crypt during the funeral ceremony. Other fragments of Middle Kingdom pottery are dated to the period between the mid-Twelfth and early Thirteenth Dynasties. Interestingly, while the chronological context of the oldest ceramic material is confirmed, among others, by a flint knife (Chudzik 2016: 300, Fig. 13) and the wooden head of a *sekhem* sceptre from a small figurine, presumably representing the tomb's owner, the second phase of the Middle Kingdom assemblage has not been attested in the other groups of finds.

The tomb of Meru was reused in later periods, chiefly during the Third Intermediate Period and in Byzantine times, but the ceramological research also revealed material from the New Kingdom and Late Period. After the fall of the New Kingdom, the tomb was reused for an intrusive burial during the Twenty-second or Twenty-third Dynasty, which is also confirmed by finds of cartonnages and shabti figurines from that time. The antechambers on both sides of the main passageway were cut most probably for these burials (Chudzik 2016: 298, Figs 11–12). One of these was subsequently used by Coptic monks for a small hermitage, as attested by pottery typical of such occupation.

2.2 Archaeozoological material

The assemblage of faunal remains from the mortuary complex of Meru provided equally interesting data. Whole and fragmentary animal bones were found during a ground survey in 2015 of the steep forecourt (Chudzik 2016: 300). Iwaszczuk examined the set in the winter season of 2018/2019, finding a predominance of cattle bones, which represent most probably remains of sacrifices at the tomb during the funeral ceremony of Meru. Among the remains there were also wild mammals (small ruminants) and other domestic mammals. The latter were identified as donkey and camel and should be connected with the latest phase of the tomb's reuse, that is, the Coptic hermitage.

3 SITE MANAGEMENT

Site management and presentation are tasks undertaken by the team within the frame of a comprehensive approach, involving also conservation, restoration, archaeological, epigraphic and architectural research, aimed at broadening knowledge of Ancient Egyptian civilization while protecting cultural heritage. In recent seasons this called for introducing an inner communication system, that is, a wooden floor starting from the present doorway (located in the main passageway) all the way into the sarcophagus chamber [*Fig. 12*]. A path in the form of steps leading from the foot of the hillside to the doorway of the tomb was constructed of debris on the slope. Protective screening of the decoration of the burial crypt, lighting and information boards will be carried out in the next field season.

TOMB MMA 507

Winlock discovered tomb MMA 507 at the end of the winter season in 1923. The tomb was located high up on the hillside in the western part of North Asasif, in the neighborhood of the funerary complex of chancellor Khety (TT 311) (Winlock 1942: 122). The tomb had been robbed before, but Winlock found dried-up human remains and therefore assumed that they were bodies of Coptic monks, whose burials were frequent in this area. Three years later, in 1926, the New York expedition returned to complete the excavation of the funerary complexes in the North Asasif necropolis. It was then that some of the textiles from MMA 507 were found to be marked with names typical of the Middle Kingdom. Work was resumed in the tomb revealing more marked linen and other finds that changed Winlock's earlier interpretation. Of particular interest was a detailed anthropological examination by Douglas E. Derry, which resulted in several interesting observations. The number of individuals buried in this tomb reached over 60. All of the bodieds had been wrapped without mummification and showed signs of external violence, including a group of individuals killed by arrows (Winlock 1945: 9–24). The nature of the injuries together with bows and wrist guards found in the debris were clear evidence to Winlock that Tomb MMA 507 was the burial place of a group of soldiers slain in battle. Moreover, due to the Middle Kingdom date of the names marked on the linen, he was convinced that they fell during the most important historical event

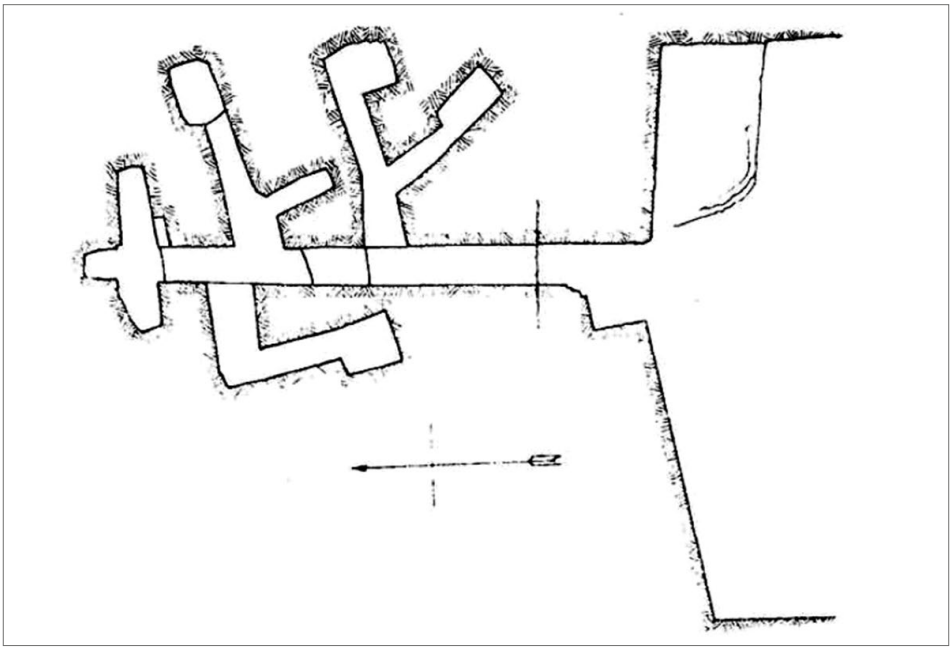

Fig. 13. Plan of Tomb MMA 507 (After Winlock 1945: Pl. II)

during the reign of Mentuhotep II, i.e. the siege of Heracleopolis (see Winlock 1928: 14–16), the main adversary of Thebes in the battle for the reunification of Egypt.[14] According to Winlock, the corpses of the soldiers were collected from a battlefield, where they must have been left for some time for vultures to scavenge on. They were then wrapped and finally buried together in a honorable tomb, placed in the vicinity of the royal mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahari.

Winlock also drew attention to the unusual architectural layout of Tomb MMA 507 and its catacomb character [*Fig. 13*]. The tomb entrance was located in the centre of a roughly-carved rock-façade, which is more than 23 m wide, and it leads deep into the mountain. One should point out, however, an uncommon architectural feature in the main passage. The perspective trick of diminishing height of the entrance corridor, which gives the impression of a much longer passage than in reality, is frequent in other tombs (e.g., MMA 1152, see Chudzik 2013: 194), but in MMA 507 it has been achieved in a slightly different way. The ceiling becomes lower, but one can observe two steps, also leading down, in the floor. Despite the descending line of both planes, the corridor decreases in height from 2.20 m at the entrance to just 1.60 m at its end. Moreover, unlike most other Middle Kingdom rock-cut tombs, the main passageway did not lead to the mortuary cult chapel, but was

Fig. 14. Human remains, textiles and ancient rubbish in the Tomb of Soldiers (MMA 507) (PCMA UW Asasif Project | photo M. Jawornicki)

14 For the situation in Egypt at the end of the First Intermediate Period and the conflict between Thebes and Heracleopolis, see Gomaà 1980: 145–157; von Beckerath 1996: 13–20; Darnell and Darnell 1997; Seidlmayer 2000: 118–147; Franke 2001: 526–532.

blind-ended, which may have been due to the fact that work in this tomb were never completed.[15] Short side corridors, two on the east and one on the west side, were hewn on both sides of the corridor, leading to small burial crypts. Deep niches or unfinished side corridors were carved on either side of the end of the entrance passageway. This uncommon architectural design was observed not only in Tomb MMA 507, but also in two others tombs, MMA 101 and MMA 506, discovered by the MET expedition in the lower and upper parts, respectively, of the western sector of the North Asasif necropolis. These tombs have a similar catacomb character, but only Tomb MMA 507 contained remains of slain soldiers.

Winlock's theory was taken up by Sydney Aufrère (2000), but more recently Carola Vogel pointed out many inaccuracies in the considerations regarding the date of the burials in Tomb MMA 507 (Vogel 2003: 241–245). In her opinion, the funeral ceremony took place definitely later than Winlock assumed, the names written in hieratic on the linen bandages actually being characteristic of the reigns of Amenemhat I and Senwosret I (Vogel 2003: 242–243). Regardless of the interment date of the slain soldiers in the early Twelfth Dynasty, it is not clear whether Tomb MMA 507 was arranged at this time or should rather be dated to the reign of Mentuhotep II.

In 2018, the PCMA mission received permission from the Ministry of State for Antiquities to visit the tomb and to protect it by building a new doorway system, facilitating access to the tomb and comprehensive work in this complex. A preliminary reconnaissance by the Polish team demonstrated the need to undertake a cleaning of the interior and securing the rock-ceiling, which is loose and in danger of collapse. Remains of corpses of slain soldiers were observed, although in a much smaller number than when Winlock described it over 70 years ago. In addition, the assemblage included no skulls, which clearly suggests that the main diagnostic materials had been removed from the tomb. Nevertheless, the tomb still contained a large number of torn linen bandages scattered in the back part of the entrance corridor [*Fig. 14*]. The bad condition of the rock ceiling, debris in the main passageway and the site chambers, as well as anthropological material and huge amounts of textiles require quick and decisive action to protect and reexamine this tomb, using modern scientific technology.

CONCLUSION

The two most recent field seasons of the PCMA UW mission to North Asasif resulted in the discovery of many artefacts, revealing relevant information on the archaeological context of the late-Eleventh-dynasty burial assemblage as well as the later history of the funerary complex of Khety. A reexamination of

15 A similar state of work and a blind-ended entrance corridor was attested in the nearby tomb MMA 504 (see Ragazzoli 2017: 19–21).

the rubble, which had filled the interior of the tomb before being dumped outside in the course of the modern excavations, helped to reconstruct the chronological sequence of the reuse of the early Middle Kingdom funerary monument.

The primary task of the mission being the protection of archaeological heritage, the team conducted thorough conservation work in the tombs of Meru and Khety. The focus here is on the preservation of the unique decoration repertoire of Middle Kingdom funerary art, as well as site management leading to the opening of the tombs for visitors in the near future.

Finally, comprehensive studies of different find categories, such as pottery and human and animal remains, have contributed to the knowledge of Ancient Egyptian burial assemblages and funerary practices in the Theban Necropolis, mainly in a historical context. Of particular interest are Nile crocodile remains, which must have been left during the funeral ceremony in Khety's sarcophagus chamber. Their function in the mortuary beliefs remains unknown, but the uncommonness of the find in Middle Kingdom funerary context, undoubtedly indicates Khety's particularly important position.

Dr. Patryk Chudzik
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4300-5584
University of Warsaw, Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology
pm.chudzik@uw.edu.pl

How to cite this article: Chudzik, P. (2020). Middle Kingdom tombs from the North Asasif cemetery: field seasons 2018/2019 and 2020. *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean* 29/2) (pp. 167–191). https://doi.org/10.31338/uw.2083-537X.pam29.2.06

References

Allen, J.P. (1996). Some Theban officials of the Early Middle Kingdom. In P. Der Manuelian (ed.), *Studies in honor of William Kelly Simpson* I (pp. 1–26). Boston: Department of Ancient Egyptian, Nubian, and Near Eastern Art, Museum of Fine Arts

Allen, J.P. (2003). The high officials of the early Middle Kingdom. In N. Strudwick and J.H. Taylor (eds), *The Theban Necropolis: Past, present, and future* (pp. 14–29). London: British Museum Press

Arnold, Di. (1979). *The Temple of Mentuhotep at Deir el Bahari*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art

Arnold, Di. (2003). *The encyclopaedia of Ancient Egyptian architecture* (S.H. Gardiner and H. Strudwick, trans.). London: I.B. Tauris

Arnold, Do. (1991). Amenemhat I and the early Twelfth Dynasty at Thebes. *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 26, 5–48

Aufrère, S.H. (2000). Les vétérans de Montouhotep Nebhépetrê: Une garnison funéraire à Deir al-Bahari? *Égypte, Afrique et Orient*, 19, 9–16

Beckerath, J. von (1966). Die Dynastie der Herakleopoliten (9./10. Dynastie). *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*, 93(1–2), 13–20

Boeser, P.A.A. (1910). *Beschreibung der aegyptischen Sammlung des niederländischen Reichsmuseums der Altertümer in Leiden* III. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff

Campbell, R.A. (2018). Human remains from Tomb MMA 514 in North Asasif: Preliminary assessment. *PAM*, 27/1, 195–202

Campbell, R.A. (2019). Human remains from the Tomb of Khety (MMA 508/TT 311) in North Asasif. *PAM*, 28/2, 159–176

Campbell, R.A. (2020). The human remains from MMA 514 in North Asasif. *PAM* 29/2, 203–218

Chudzik, P. (2016). Middle Kingdom tombs in Asasif: Archaeological activities in 2015. *PAM*, 25, 289–301

Chudzik, P. (2017). Middle Kingdom tombs from Asasif: Work in the 2015/2016 season. *PAM*, 26/1, 185–198

Chudzik, P. (2018). Middle Kingdom tombs of Asasif: Archaeological fieldwork in 2017. *PAM*, 27/1, 183–194

Clarke, S. and Engelbach, R. (1930). *Ancient Egyptian masonry: The building craft*. London: Oxford University Press

Darnell, J.C. and Darnell, D. (1997). New inscriptions of the late First Intermediate Period from the Theban Western Desert and the beginnings of the northern expansion of the Eleventh Dynasty. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 56(4), 241–258

De Meyer, M., Van Neer, W., Peeters, C., and Willems, H. (2005). The role of animals in the funerary rites at Dayr al-Barshā. *JARCE*, 42, 45–71

Eigner, D. (1984). *Die monumentalen Grabbauten der Spätzeit in der thebanischen Nekropole* (=*Denkschriften der Gesamtakademie* 8). Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften

Franke, D. (2001). First Intermediate Period. In D.B. Redford (ed.), *The Oxford encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* I (pp. 526–532). Oxford: Oxford University Press

Gomaà, F. (1980). *Ägypten während der ersten Zwischenzeit* (=*Beihefte zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients. Reihe B, Geisteswissenschaft* 27). Wiesbaden: Reichert

Hayes, W.C. (1968). *The scepter of Egypt: A background for the study of the Egyptian antiquities in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* I. *From the earliest times to the end of the Middle Kingdom*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art

Ikram, S. (2005). Divine creatures: Animal mummies. In S. Ikram (ed.), *Divine creatures: Animal mummies in Ancient Egypt* (pp. 1–15). Cairo: American University in Cairo Press

Kamal, M. (1938). Gift of His Majesty King Farouk Ist (1937) to the Egyptian Museum. *ASAE*, 38, 1–20

Kockelmann, H. (2011). Sebek Neb Waset. On the crocodile cults of Thebes and its neighbourhood. In Z.A. Hawass, T.A. Bács, and G. Schreiber (eds), *Proceedings of the Colloquium on Theban archaeology at the Supreme Council of Antiquities, November 5, 2009* (pp. 83–93). Cairo: Conseil Suprême des Antiquités de l'Égypte

Mariette, A. (1875). *Karnak: étude topographique et archéologique avec un appendice comprenant les principaux textes hiéroglyphiques découverts ou recueillis pendant les fouilles exécutées à Karnak*. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs

Petrie, W.M.F. (1888). *A season in Egypt: 1887*. London: Field & Tuer, The Leadenhall Press

Ragazzoli, C. (2017). *La grotte des scribes à Deir el-Bahari: la tombe MMA 504 et ses graffiti* (=*MIFAO* 135). Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale

Roccati, A. (1997). The activities of the Italian Archaeological Mission in Egypt, University of Rome "La Sapienza" – Report 1996. *Memnonia*, 8, 241–244

Schneider, H.D. and Raven, M.J. (1981). *De Egyptische oudheid: een inleiding aan de hand van de Egyptische verzameling in het Rijksmuseum van Oudheden te Leiden*. 's-Gravenhage: Staatsuitgeverij

Seidlmayer, S. (2000). The First Intermediate Period. In I. Shaw (ed.), *The Oxford history of Ancient Egypt* (pp. 118–147). Oxford: Oxford University Press

Thomas, N., Scott, G.D., and Trigger, B.G. (1995). *The American discovery of Ancient Egypt*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Vogel, C. (2003). Fallen heroes? Winlock's "slain soldiers" reconsidered. *JEA*, 89, 239–245

Winlock, H.E. (1923). The Museum's excavations at Thebes. In The Egyptian Expedition, 1922–1923. *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 18(12), 11–39

Winlock, H.E. (1928). The Egyptian Expedition 1925–1927: The Museum's excavations at Thebes. *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, 23(2), 3–58

Winlock, H.E. (1940). The court of King Neb-Ḥepet-Rē Mentu-Hotpe at the Shaṭṭ er Rigāl. *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*, 57(2), 137–161

Winlock, H.E. (1942). *Excavations at Deir el Bahri, 1911–1931*. New York: The Macmillan Company

Winlock, H.E. (1945). *The slain soldiers of Neb-ḥepet-Rē' Mentu-ḥotpe*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art

Winlock, H.E. (1947). *The rise and fall of the Middle Kingdom in Thebes*. New York: Macmillan

View publication stats