

The Asyut Project: Third season of fieldwork

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With an appendix by Ulrike Fauerbach**

Since August 2005 the Institut für Ägyptologie und Altorientalistik of the Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz and the South Valley University, Sohag have been going forth with “The Asyut Project” for which they have received financial backing from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.¹ The mission has conducted its third season of fieldwork in the ancient necropolis, situated in the western mountains, from the 29th of August to the 29th of September 2005. From 30th September to 12th October the mission studied objects in the EAO’s magazine in Shutb.²

In addition to the three authors of this report, members of the mission were: Omar Ahmed Abu Zaid, Meike Becker, Christiane Dorstewitz, Eva-Maria Engel, Ulrike Fauerbach, John Moussa Iskander, Diana Kleiber, Dietrich Klemm, Rosemarie Klemm, Yasser Mahmoud, Omar Nour el-Din, Sameh Shafik and Monika Zöller.

The fieldwork conducted this year focused on cleaning Tombs III and IV of the First Intermediate Period, on making facsimiles on Tombs I, II, V and some smaller tombs. Furthermore, an additional focus was laid upon mapping the necropolis.

Whilst surveying the necropolis for mapping, a hitherto unknown tomb, the walls of which covered with visitors’ graffiti, was detected.

Mapping the necropolis led to an assortment of new results. Twenty tombs and four quarries were added to and are now included in the map (fig. 1). The map divides the mountain into squares of 50 m x 50 m. Like in a city map, each square has a code consisting of a number and a letter. The different architectural structures are labelled within a square in numerical order. Thus the hitherto unrecorded tombs received a denotation according to this system, other already known tombs were also denoted accordingly and can be referred to either by this code or by their common labels, e.g.:

Tomb I (Siut I, Tomb of Djefai-hapi I) = P10.1

Tomb II (Siut II, Tomb of Djefai-hapi II) = O13.1

Tomb III (Siut III, Tomb of Iti-ibi) = N12.1

¹In regards to “The Asyut Project” cf. the following publications: M. El-Khadragy/J. Kahl, in: SAK 32, 2004, 233-243; U. Verhoeven-van Elsbergen, in: Natur und Geist. Das Forschungsmagazin der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz 2004, 14-17; J. Kahl/M. El-Khadragy/U. Verhoeven, in: SAK 33, 2005, 159-167; J. Kahl/M. El-Khadragy/U. Verhoeven, in: Sokar 11, 2005, 43-47; E.-M. Engel/J. Kahl, in: J. Popielska-Grzybowska, Proceedings of the Third Central European Conference of Young Egyptologists (in print); M. El-Khadragy, in: SAK 34, 2006 (forthcoming).

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Tomb IV (Siut IV, Tomb of Khety II) = N12.2

Tomb V (Siut V, Tomb of Khety I) = M11.1

Mapping and geological observations made the picture of the mountain become more concrete than ever before.³ In the south and the north, the mountain is cut by small wadis and consists of eleven layers of limestone (pl. 1.1). Rock tombs were hewn into each layer. Some chronological preferences are obvious: The nomarchs of the First Intermediate Period and the early Middle Kingdom chose layer no. 6 for constructing their tombs, the nomarchs of the 12th Dynasty preferred layer no. 2. Late Period tombs are situated in the north-western part of the necropolis in layer no. 3 (e.g. K6.10). During the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom, stones were quarried in that part of the mountain (O17.1), which adheres to the south, thus not violating the necropolis. During the New Kingdom stones were hewn in the First Intermediate Period/Middle Kingdom necropolis (O15.1), sometimes in the nomarch's tombs themselves (N12.2, N13.2).

In addition to the hitherto known nomarchs of Asyut, some new administrators of the 13th Upper Egyptian nome were identified. A *ḥ3.tj-ḥ.w* Djefai-hapi was the owner of Tomb P13.1 and two *ḥ3.tj-ḥ.w* are mentioned in the newly discovered tomb (Tomb N13.1): Iti-ibi and Mesehti⁴.

Being covered by debris, Tomb N13.1 was found to be completely preserved, yet could be studied only for a few hours before its entrance was cleaned and protected by an iron door. The tomb's importance for the history of Asyut cannot be overestimated: The tomb's wall decoration is perfectly preserved and, additionally, the walls are inscribed with a lot of graffiti which mention, among others, the *ḥw.t-ntr nfr.t nj.t ḏf3=j-ḥḥpj* "the beautiful temple of Djefai-hapi", thus pointing for the first time to a veneration of one of the 12th Dynasty nomarchs called Djefai-hapi as saint of Asyut comparable to Heqa-ib of Elephantine or Isi of Edfu.

The decoration of Tomb V (Khety I; M11.1) was cleaned and facsimiles were made. In addition to the well-known inscriptions, some remaining painted decoration is still preserved and shows that the tomb was originally completely decorated.⁵

The cleaning of Tomb III (Iti-ibi; N12.1) was finished and the documentation of the architecture, the decoration and the objects was continued.⁶ The tomb's forecourt could be made out and was added to the existing plans (pl. 1.2; fig. 2). Two small side chambers in the north and the

³We are grateful to Rosemarie and Dietrich Klemm for their five day visit in the gebel and their valuable comments to [on] the geological structure of the mountain.

⁴The tomb does not belong to the famous owner of soldiers' models (Cairo, CG 257, 258), because his tomb was larger and undecorated according to a statement of its excavators (cf. É. Chassinat/Ch. Palanque, Une campagne de fouilles dans la nécropole d'Assiout, MIFAO 24, 1911, V).

⁵Cf. already D.B. Spanel, in: Or 58, 1989, 304-305; El-Khadragy/ Kahl, in: SAK 32, 2004, 241-243.

⁶Publication of Tomb III will be prepared by Jochem Kahl.

south probably belong to the original layout of the tomb. It is not possible to determine the original size of the chambers because of the later destruction of the area. The axis leading to the tomb's entrance was also disturbed by later activities. The southern part of the forecourt shows clear signs of being reused with the installation of an offering basin made of limestone and two underground basins cut into the rock and plastered with pinkish mortar. They were found filled with (late) Roman pottery (fig. 3).

Another shaft could be detected in the large inner hall of Tomb III (fig. 2),⁷ bringing the total number of burial shafts in the inner hall to four. Shaft 4 is situated in the southwestern part of the tomb, close to shaft 3. Shafts 1, 2 and 3, all known from the plan of the Descripton de l'Égypte⁸, were already excavated at the beginning of the 20th century by Palanque and/or Schiaparelli as modern remains of both archaeologists prove. Shaft 4, however, escaped their attention and seems to have been filled for the last time during the Coptic Period. The shaft is 4,87m deep and leads to a burial chamber in the south. A fair amount of fragments of wooden models and pottery, typical of the First Intermediate Period, were unearthed in the burial chamber, so that there is no reason to doubt its original character. In the shaft, mainly bones which partially seem to belong to children and reed bundles from bodies wrapped in mats were found. Small baskets and some beads were also detected. Several other objects were found in addition to these: late coffin boards, a golden earring probably from the 5th/4th century BC (pl. 2.1), and a Ptolemaic mummy cartonage from a man called Pa-di-Imen, as well as baskets and oil lamps.

At present, the chambers of shaft 1, 2 and 3, all leading to the south, also seem to give evidence of First Intermediate Period objects: [follow stop instead of :] Again, especially pottery and wooden models point to the original character of the shafts. However, later objects were found here as well.

The burial chamber of shaft 3 still contained the fragments of at least 77 hemispherical cups (so [delete so] called "Näpfe") made of Nile silt. Five of these fragments preserved a complete profile (fig. 4), so that the relation of their height and diameter could be determined by the formula⁹

$$\text{Index} = \frac{100 \times \text{max. diameter}}{\text{height}}$$

The index of the cups from Tomb III, shaft 3, ranges between 250 and 270 and corresponds to the observation that the index number is higher in

⁷ We call it shaft 4, because it is situated in the inner hall of the tomb. Against its denotation on the ground plan from last year [add comma here] the shaft in front of Tomb III (last year labeled as shaft 4) will now be called shaft 5.

⁸ Commission des monuments d'Égypte, Description de l'Égypte ou recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française. Tome Quatrième. Antiquités: planches, 1817, pl. 48.9; cf. El-Khadragy/ Kahl, in: SAK 32, 2004, 236-239.

⁹ Cf. Do. Arnold, in: MDAIK 38, 1982, 60-62; M. Bietak, in: AJA 88, 1984, 471-485; id., in: Lebendige Altertumswissenschaft (Fs Hermann Vetters), 1985, 5-10.

earlier periods and lower in later periods of the Middle Kingdom (resp. First Intermediate Period).¹⁰

Different layers of plaster on the walls and on the floor indicate that the inner hall was reused several times during later periods. Many fragments of late Roman and Coptic pottery were found in the niches hewn into the hall's western wall, a pottery fragment with a representation of Christ and the inscription “[Do]m(i)nus Cristu[s]” (pl. 2.2) being amongst them.

In Tomb IV (Khety II; N12.2) the two recently found shafts were cleaned. Their existence remained hidden to Egyptologists until last year.¹¹ Shaft 1 is situated near the southeastern pillar, shaft 2 close to the southwestern pillar. Both shafts were already plundered in antiquity. Shaft 1 leads to a burial chamber in the south, shaft 2 gives access to three burial chambers in the south and two in the north. Even if the existence of the several chambers in shaft 2 points to a later reuse, there is some evidence that both shafts were already finished at the end of the First Intermediate Period: pottery, fragments of wooden models and bricks of typical FIP/MK measurements found in front of the burial chamber of shaft 1 are clear indications.

In Tomb I (Djefai-hapi I; P10.1) the restorer Madame Nagla el-Rage cleaned some walls; facsimiles of the inner hall, the inner passage and the northern wall of the large hall were made by Sameh Shafiq.¹² The inner passage and the large hall show painted decoration in vivid and well preserved colours, which has escaped the scholarly attention for centuries because of the tomb's darkness and some later plaster covering parts of it. The only exceptions are William Stevenson Smith, who published a small part of the northern wall of the large hall¹³, and Frederic Caillaud¹⁴, who published a drawing of a slaughter-scene in 1831, but Egyptologists raised doubt about the correctness of his attribution of this scene to the Tomb of Djefai-hapi, because of the beauty of this scene. It is now sure that he was right and that the quality of the decoration of Tomb I is quite high. The scenes represent the tomb owner standing in the marshes accompanied by female members of his family, offering bearers and boys picking figs.¹⁵

Tomb I10.1 seems to be identical with the tomb on pl. 48.6-8 in the *Description de l'Égypte*.¹⁶ It was described by the members of the French Expedition. Since then it has not been mentioned again in Egyptological literature, so that Griffith considered the report of the French Expedition

¹⁰Cf. Arnold, in: MDAIK 38, 1982, 60; cf. also E. Czerny, Tell el-Dab'a IX. Eine Plansiedlung des frühen Mittleren Reiches, 1999, 69-70.

¹¹Cf. Kahl/El-Khadragy/Verhoeven, in: SAK 33, 2005, 163.

¹²For a reconstruction of the tomb's architecture cf. E.-M. Engel/J. Kahl, in: J. Popielska-Grzybowska, Proceedings of the Third Central European Conference of Young Egyptologists (in print).

¹³W.S. Smith, in: MDAIK 15, 1957, 221-224.

¹⁴F. Caillaud, Recherches sur les arts et métiers, 1831, pl. 19.

¹⁵The painted scenes will be published by Mahmoud El-Khadragy.

¹⁶Descr. Ant. IV, pl. 48.6-8.

as „imaginary“ or an „error“.¹⁷ The tomb's architecture, especially the vaulted roof of its passage, points to a Middle Kingdom date. The tomb decoration emphasizes once more the military character of Asyut even after the reunification of Egypt by the Theban ruler Mentu-hotep Neb-hepet-re. In the today roofless large hall people are depicted holding spears. In addition, the names of those people are written beneath them.

Appendix by Ulrike Fauerbach: The map of the necropolis

The general map of the Asyut Necropolis (fig. 1) is constantly being worked on. It is currently limited to a selection of rock-cut tombs and buildings and does not yet feature all existing structures. The reason for this is that more than a thousand tombs are situated in the necropolis. The project will map as much as possible in the given time. There are four criteria for selecting a structure, the first one being accessibility. Due to the excavation activities being restricted to special areas, all other areas have to be surveyed without any excavation.¹⁸ Thus, those tombs which are completely or almost completely covered by debris cannot be mapped. The second criterion is inscriptions and decoration. Any architectural structure with inscriptions or decoration – as far as we find them – will be surveyed. The condition respectively of preservation of a tomb or building is the third criterion. One of the aims of the survey is to understand the tombs original architecture and development, which means that a finished and well preserved tomb will be given priority over an unfinished or destroyed tomb in mapping. The last criterion is [add: *the*] size and elaborate design. Most of the accessible, well preserved large tombs were mapped during the 2004 and 2005 campaigns, making it possible to deal with the smaller tombs in the coming seasons. A longer presence of the mission on the site is likely to reveal even larger or inscribed tombs. Heavy rain can cause landslide and uncover a hitherto unknown tomb or cover tombs already known to us.

Mapping was done with the help of a Laser-Totalstation, based on a reference grid which was laid over the necropolis.¹⁹ The identification-number given to each structure in order to make localization easier is also based on the grid. The map shows the tombs in extreme reduction (scale 1 : 5000). The survey was made detailed enough to publish the tombs in scale 1 : 100.²⁰ This is planned for the final publication,²¹ together with architectural description of each tomb, its inscriptions, its decoration and

¹⁷ F. Ll. Griffith, in: The Babylonian and Oriental Record 3, 1889, 246-247.

¹⁸ The mapped tombs may be more extensive than represented, as covered parts of the tombs could not be surveyed.

¹⁹ This was done by a closed traverse. The accuracy is plus minus three centimeters. This applied already for [This was already applied to] the general plan (fig. 1) in the second report. The accuracy of the latter was designated plus minus three meters by mistake.

²⁰ This does not apply for [replace by *to*] the quarries, which were mapped with more tolerance.

²¹ The final publication will be prepared by Jochem Kahl and Ulrike Fauerbach.

its research history. A further task for the coming seasons is to specify the contour lines, which are still based on the Survey of Egypt map and are rather inaccurate.

Figures:

Fig. 1: Map of the necropolis (October 2005)

Fig. 2: Tomb III, ground plan

Fig. 3: Tomb III, southern forecourt, underground basins, (late) Roman pottery

Fig. 4: Tomb III, shaft 3, burial chamber, cups

Plates:

Pl. 1.1: The mountain and its different limestone layers (photo by Klemm/Klemm)

Pl. 1.2: Tomb III, forecourt: remains of southern part of the front wall and entrance to southern side chamber

Pl. 2.1: Tomb III, shaft 4, golden earring (S05/073)

Pl. 2.2: Tomb III, hall, pottery fragment with a representation of Christ (S05/003)