

THE TOMBS OF ASASIF: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPLORATION IN THE 2013/2014 SEASON

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Abstract: In the 2013/2014 season, a Polish team from the University of Wrocław started work in the northern part of the Asasif necropolis, near the Temple of Queen Hatshepsut in Deir el-Bahari. An archaeological survey was carried out on the Asasif slope. Cleaning work and documentation were undertaken of the architecture of four private tombs: MMA 509/TT 312, MMA 512, MMA 513/TT 314 and MMA 514, as well as the archaeological finds thereof. The rock-cut tombs belong to a Middle Kingdom necropolis and were all reused in later times, especially in the Third Intermediate Period and Late Period.

Keywords: Theban Necropolis, Asasif, Middle Kingdom, Horhotep, private rock-cut tombs

In the 2013/2014 season, a team of Polish archaeologists from the Institute of Archaeology, University of Wrocław, started a project to document private tomb architecture of the Middle Kingdom in the northern part of the Asasif necropolis [*Fig. 1*]. Comprehensive archaeological and architectural recording of the tombs on the Asasif slope (excavated earlier in 1922–1923 and 1925–1927 by the Egyptian Expedition of the Metropolitan Museum of Art directed by Herbert E. Winlock, see Winlock 1922: 32–49; 1923: 11–22; 1928: 11–18; 1942: 68–83, 122–131; 1945) will enable in-depth analysis of the architecture of these sepulchers belonging to high-ranking officials from the reign of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II and successive rulers of the Eleventh and Twelfth Dynasties (Winlock 1947: 44–48; Hayes 1968: 163–166; Allen 1996; 2003;

Soliman 2009: 95–119, 126–129). Moreover, it will enhance understanding of the processes shaping this part of the Theban Necropolis during the initial development of the burial ground and later reuse.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK
Fieldwork was carried out first in four tomb complexes: MMA 509/TT 312, MMA 512, MMA 513/TT 314 and MMA 514. The courtyards and their immediate vicinity were surveyed, collecting artifacts, mainly elements of funerary equipment, dated from the Middle Kingdom [*Fig. 2*] to the Roman period. Areas adjacent to the brick and fieldstone walls were uncovered and cleaned in order to reveal the lowermost parts of these structures and enable a full documentation of the courtyard architecture. An exploration of the interior of the tombs was undertak-

en for the same purpose, removing modern debris due to the erosion of rock ceilings (e.g. MMA 512 and MMA 513/TT 314) and discovering undisturbed layers related to the original use of the tombs despite the earlier digging inside the tombs.

MMA 509/TT 312

The work in complex MMA 509/TT 312 was concentrated on the upper and lower parts of the courtyard. The mud-brick facade and part of the entrance corridor were cleaned, revealing a floor dated to the Middle Kingdom, made of high quality sandstone and limestone slabs. The upper parts of the fill yielded elements of funerary equipment: shabti figurines, wooden fragments of sarcophagi and fragments of cartonnages, as well as fragments of

mummified human remains. The uppermost layer contained waste, such as newspaper fragments and cigars, left there by modern-era explorers of this tomb.

In the upper part of the courtyard, excavations revealed the west side of the mud-brick facade and its joining to the field-stone wall of the courtyard. A pile of human remains and cartonnages lay about 15 m from the entrance, on the axis of the complex. They came probably from one of the tombs and were part of a Late Period burial [Fig. 3].

The work in the lower part of the complex uncovered damaged architectural features covered by later structures. Sections of the stone wall of the courtyard were found in the eastern part, largely destroyed by the construction of the

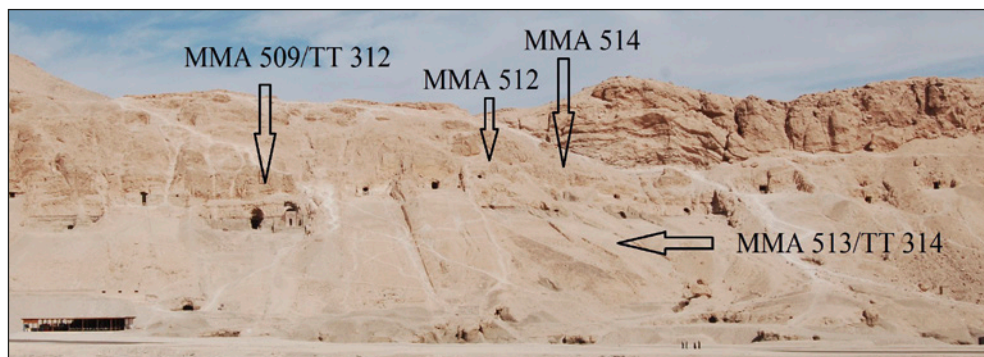


Fig. 1. The necropolis in North Asasif seen from the south
(Photo P. Chudzik)

Team

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Late Period tomb of vizier Nespakashuti. Remains of a causeway, 8 m wide, connected with this late tomb, were located on the axis of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty tomb. The structure was formed of rock debris between retaining side walls and high quality limestone blocks in its lower part. Some of the blocks came from one of the Eighteenth Dynasty Temples of a Million of Years at Deir el-Bahari (M. Caban, personal communication). Among the archaeological finds which represented mainly the Middle Kingdom and the Late Period, there was also a New Kingdom wooden votive ear dedicated to the god Ptah (Sadek 1987: 100–107). The main area of the cult of this particular god in the Theban necropolis was Deir el-Medina (Sadek 1987: 72–74, 83).

Two phases of the use of funerary complex MMA 509/TT 312 were distinguished based on the evidence supplied by the finds. The original tomb was located in the center of the facade and belonged to one of the high court officials of the Eleventh Dynasty ruler Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II (Allen 1996: 12). The second phase can be dated to the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, when a new tomb was cut in the eastern side of the facade. It was the burial place of the mayor of Thebes and vizier Nespakashuti. (Winlock 1923: 20–23; Pischikova 1998). Remains of Late Period burials were found in both tombs and in the courtyard and it seems that more than just the vizier's burial can be attributed to this period.

MMA 512

Exploration of the courtyard and entrance corridor of tomb MMA 512 made it

possible to reconstruct the building phases of the complex. Walls of field-stone were built only on the east and west sides of the courtyard. On the west side, about 20 m from the entrance to the tomb, the wall turns at an angle approximately 120° to the east. From this point it preserves only two courses of stones. Possibly it was an effect of sudden death of the tomb owner, which happened before the complex work was finished. Thanks to this, natural layers of slope which had remained from the Dynastic period were recognized. About 700 flint artifacts were found in this area.¹

The poor condition of the rock face in this area of the gebel was probably the reason why the entrance to the tomb was shifted off axis. Cleaning of the facade revealed a rock step located in front of the tomb entrance.² A fragment of a brick wall up to the second layer of construction was found in the entrance. It could be part of the brick door frame.

The material represents mainly Middle Kingdom funerary equipment: offering jars and fragments of wooden boxes and coffins. Found near the tomb entrance were clay offering trays (for similar objects, see Niwiński 1975: 85–92). Faience beads from a Middle Kingdom collar were discovered on the east side of the courtyard, near the stone wall; the collar had belonged probably to the owner of the tomb (for the similar Middle Kingdom broad collar found at Thebes see: Winlock 1940: 253–256, Fig. 4; Roehrig 2002: 15, Fig. 21; 2003). To the east of a doorway, a wooden female figurine has been revealed [Fig. 4]. A statue represents a woman sitting on the chair, probably a wife of the tomb

¹ A survey in the area by a Jagiellonian University expedition in 1972 yielded artifacts which were dated to the Middle Paleolithic Period (area No. 24, see Drobniiewicz, Ginter, and Kozłowski 1976: 17, Pl. 1).

² Similar steps are known from Theban tombs MMA 508/TT 311 and MMA 510/TT 313.



Fig. 2. Wooden steps from a Middle Kingdom model of a slaughterhouse; courtyard of the funerary complex of Horhotep (MMA 513/TT 314) (Photo P. Chudzik)

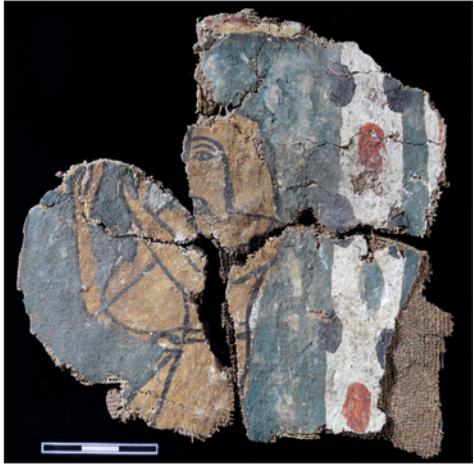


Fig. 3. Late Period cartonnage fragment with a representation of the deceased raising his arms in adoration (Photo M. Jawornicki)



Fig. 4. Wooden female figurine from the courtyard of tomb MMA 512 (Photo M. Jawornicki)



Fig. 5. Fragment of a limestone stopper from a canopic jar representing the human-headed Imsety; Eighteenth Dynasty burial, funerary complex MMA 514 (Photo M. Jawornicki)

owner.³ Fragments of burial equipment dated to the Third Intermediate Period, mainly clay and faience shabti figurines and faience beads from nets covering the wrapped bodies of the deceased, were also discovered.

MMA 513/TT 314

Excavations in the funerary complex MMA 513/TT 314, which belonged to an official named Horhotep (Maspero 1906: 84–88), were located in the courtyard. In the lower part of the courtyard, the work revealed remains of a small mud-brick building [Fig. 6]. Associated with this structure were potsherds [Fig. 7], a limestone altar fragment and a flint “knife”. The location of the structure, its size and building technique, as well as the finds suggest a small shrine for offerings made to

the dead after the entrance to the tomb had been sealed. A similar structure stood once in the courtyard of the tomb of Henenu (MMA 510/TT 313) (Winlock 1923: 20; 1942: 68)

An accompanying tomb was found next to the enclosure wall about 15 m from the tomb facade in the western part of the courtyard. The entrance was located in the rock under the courtyard wall. A small hole opened into the shaft leading to the tomb, but the actual entrance was located 3 m to the east of the courtyard wall. The location is atypical for accompanying tombs from the Theban necropolis, which were all found under or in the rocks behind the courtyard walls (Winlock 1920: 31–32, Fig. 4; 1922: 37–38). Archaeological finds recovered from the backfill: pottery, shabti figurines and wooden elements of



Fig. 6. Remains of a mud-brick shrine in the lower end of the courtyard of the Horhotep funerary complex (MMA 513/TT 314) (Photo P. Chudzik)

³ In the 1922/1923 season the Metropolitan Museum Egyptian Expedition working in tomb MMA 512 discovered a wooden stela of Nebseni (presumed owner of the tomb) and his wife Henenu. The decoration of this small stela of the rectangular type represents a provincial style typical of the Theban Eleventh Dynasty (Hayes 1968: 330, Fig. 218; MMA No. 26.3.237).



Fig. 7. Fill of a shrine containing a deposit of small ovoid jars left by the family of deceased (Photo P. Chudzik)

chests and coffins, indicate that the tomb was constructed in the Middle Kingdom and reused in the Late Period.

MMA 514

A similar chronological sequence was observed in the other Middle Kingdom tomb complex, MMA 514. Work inside the tomb, concentrated in the corridor near the entrance, yielded material from the Middle Kingdom as well as the Third Intermediate Period and the Late Period. Shabti figurines, cartonnages, fragments of wooden sarcophagi and chests dated to the Third Intermediate Period and Late Period were found in the fill of the

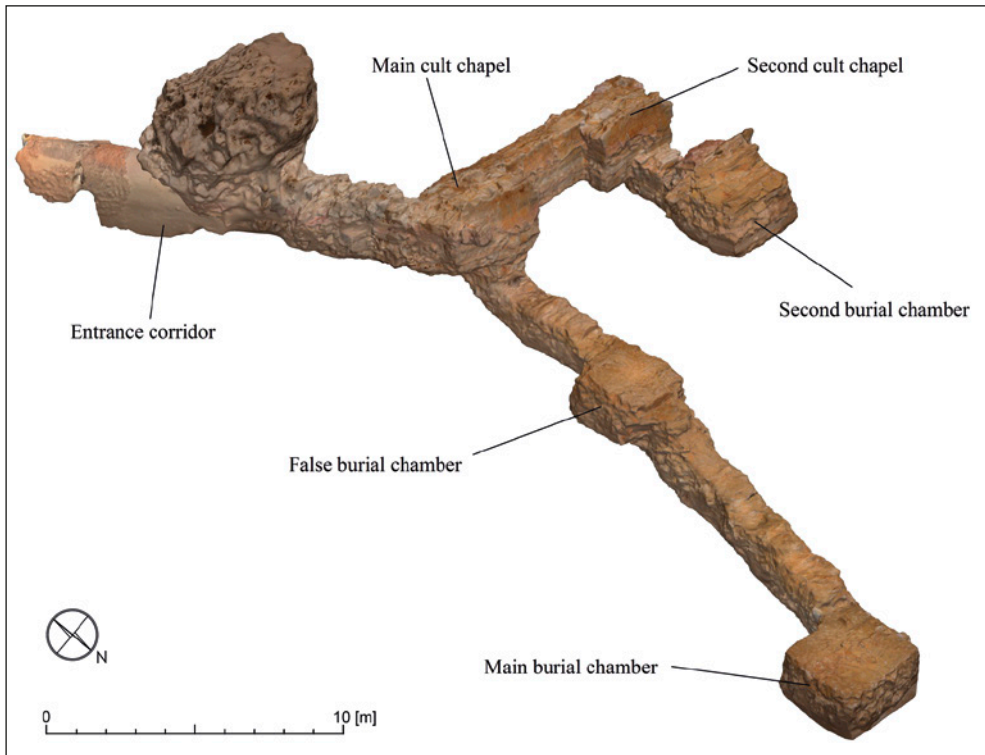


Fig. 8. 3D model of the rock-cut tomb of Horhotep (MMA 513/TT 314) (Documentation and processing M. Caban)

courtyard. Artifacts related to a burial in the Eighteenth Dynasty [Fig. 5] were found only in the accompanying tomb, which had been cut in the rock at the westernmost limit of the Middle Kingdom courtyard. The tomb, probably cut in the Middle Kingdom, had been reused twice, in the New Kingdom and later in the Third Intermediate Period.

ARCHITECTURAL DOCUMENTATION

Architectural documentation in the course of the season supplied data for the creation of 3D models of two of the studied tombs [Fig. 8]. Using Agisoft PhotoScan software architect Mariusz Caban created digital record of the structures cut in the rock based on a set of detailed photographs. The digital record will now serve as a basis for making the plans and sections of the tomb. Further work is needed on an analysis of the chamber layout of these two tombs.

The work also involved measuring the size of mud bricks used in the enclosure walls of the courtyards and the width and appearance of chisel marks apparent on sandstone slabs.

RECAPITULATION

Architectural documentation of two private rock-cut tombs from the Middle Kingdom was completed as a result of research carried out at the North Asasif necropolis in the 2013/2014 season.

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Moreover, finds collected during the field survey and excavations within the tomb complexes yielded data on the use of this particular part of the Theban Necropolis in different periods. The artifacts comprise mostly elements of funerary equipment dated to the Middle Kingdom, Third Intermediate and Late Periods. Archaeological material related to New Kingdom burials was discovered only in an accompanying tomb in complex MMA 514. Of interest is the presence of a votive ear of the god Ptah in the courtyard of tomb MMA 509.

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