Report of the 13th archaeological season (November-December 2014)

Mission Director: Prof. Marilina Betrò

University of Pisa
The Italian Archaeological Expedition of the University of Pisa (M.I.D.A.N. Missione Italiana at Dra Abu el-Naga), operates since 2003 in the Northern part of the Theban Necropolis, traditionally called Dra Abu el-Naga, under the direction of Prof. Marilina Betrò.

The excavation, documentation and conservation work has been concentrated since 2003 in the area of the tomb of Huy (Theban Tomb 14), a Ramesside tomb, but, from 2004 to present, Pisa University archaeological investigations brought to light in the area four more tombs, completely unknown and unrecorded. These five rock-tombs constitute a cluster of tombs, made up around the forecourt of the oldest and largest of them, MIDAN.05, whose construction dates at the true beginning of the 18th dynasty, but with many usage phases later on. Excavations are still in progress, at different levels of completion, but a book on the first seven campaigns was published in 2009 and yearly reports are published in scientific journals and on the web.

From November 5 to December 2, 2014, the expedition has carried out its 13th field season, in the area of Theban Tomb 14 and tomb M.I.D.A.N.05.

To this field season contributed the following members of the expedition: Marilina Betrò; Gianluca Miniaci, acting as vice-director; Paolo Marini; Anna Consonni; Anna Giulia De Marco; Emanuele Taccola; Claudio Benedetti. The Supreme Council of Egyptian Antiquities was represented by our inspector, Hassan Yousef Mohamed Ahmed, who always assisted us with competence and helpfulness.

The program of the afore mentioned field season focussed on the following objectives:

- Continuation of the clearance of the courtyard of MIDAN.05;
- Clearance of the pit (P3) inside the courtyard of MIDAN.05;
- Continuation of the clearance of the sloping passage G in TT 14;
- Continuation of the clearance of funerary room J in TT 14;
- Study and documentation of finds.
Clearance of the courtyard of MIDAN.05

The clearance of the courtyard of MIDAN.05, started in the season 2009, has been completed during the present campaign. The threshold of the entrance of MIDAN.05, completely cleared during this season, attested a reuse of limestone blocks. One of them presented the profile of a human standing figure and a name, Amenhotep, inscribed with carved hieroglyphs (Fig. 2). In the northern corner of the courtyard a thick layer of plants, garlands, and flower elements has been found. The plant remains were twisted and assembled together, forming bouquets which were part of the ancient funerary rituals performed in front of the tomb (Fig. 3). Their study is foreseen for next campaign.

Clearance was carried also in the area around the large mud-brick structure in the middle of the courtyard. The clearance revealed that the structure was not built directly on top of the original bedrock, but on a groundwork layer made of mud and mud-bricks. The core of the structure seems to be filled by bricks and loose material, and its ancient extension towards East (entrance to the forecourt) exceeded the eastern limit visible today. The construction of the structure is later than the first use of MIDAN.05. At the end of the season, we protected the entrance of MIDAN.05 with an iron gate.
Clearance of the funerary shaft 3

The shaft 3 (discovered in 2011 and already partially cleared for 1.67 m of depth) is located in the south-western area of the courtyard of MIDAN.05. Its clearance has been completed during the present campaign and led to the discovery of three funerary chambers, labelled Room K, Room L, and Room M (Fig. 4).

The shaft (2.10 m x 1.56 m) is 5.90 metres deep from its mouth to the bottom, and was filled for ca. 5 metres by loose material, resulting from human activities of robberies. Outside the two chambers L and M, at 5.10 metres from the mouth of the shaft, three depositions were found, bound in reed-stick mattings tied together with ropes and strings (Fig. 5). Each reed-stick matting enveloped a deceased, whose bodies have not been analysed in this season.
The burial equipment of these depositions included small coloured faience beads (blue, green, white, yellow, red and black) and shells. In many cases the ancient strings are preserved but at present it is not possible to assess if they are part of necklace, armlets, or girdles. Many parts of thick ropes and a reed-stick litter were found in the layer below the reed-stick mattings. They certainly were put there once the burials in Room L and M had already been looted in ancient times, probably very soon after their interments. At the bottom of the shaft large fragments of wood, probably belonging to coffins (side or bottom planks) or to a litter or bed, were found beside a wooden mallet, a blue faience amulet and a funerary cone for the scribe Maaty and his wife Huy (Davies-Macadam 503). Other samples of cones belonging to this man were found in the forecourt, during previous campaigns.

Room K

Room K (max. 2.78 x 2 m) was located halfway down the shaft (P3), at ca. 3.04 m from its mouth. The content of the chamber was deeply looted and the whole chamber was filled with loose material. The base of a New Kingdom coffin in daily dress garment was found in this room. The style of the coffin can be compared with other finds from room M.

Room L

Room L (max. 5.10 x 2.38 m) opened at the west side of the shaft (P3). The chamber was deeply looted and only at its very end a few remains of interments were preserved. Their state of preservation was very decayed and mainly consisted in loose reeds, few fragments of coffins, skulls and bones. At a lower level, two wooden uninscribed shabtis were found, which recall Ramesside style, probably part of one of the ancient usage phases of the chamber (Fig. 6).

Room M

Room M (max. 4.60 x 2.73 m) opened at the east side of the shaft (P3). The entrance of the chamber was completely filled by loose material, but for a row of mud bricks (10 cm of max height) roughly placed in the upper extremity of the entrance, in order to obstruct the passage. They were not part of the original room closure, since they lay on the loose filling and were clearly deposited after the last robbery. Loose filling also entered the room, partly filling its entrance.
We found a semicircle of large stones and limestone/sandstone blocks, placed about halfway of the room probably by robbers in the aim to retain the loose filling. Amongst them, a fine limestone fragment of a female statue has been identified. A heap of material was piled at the very end of the room with an apparently inconsistent order. The material included a large amount of yellow-type coffin pieces, including three faces, five foot-ends, two wigs, very few inscribed pieces from the lids and scattered planks (Fig. 8). The coffin pieces point out to a consistent date around the end of the 18th dynasty-beginning of Ramesside Period and this led to conclude that they could be part of the original interments of the room, although maybe not the first ones. Coffins were decorated with red, black and white decoration on a yellow background. The presence of many wooden sculptured feet suggests they belonged to coffins with daily-dresses; unluckily very few other decorated /inscribed pieces survive. On one fragment, feet were just painted in red: this piece, together with other similar fragments apparently belonging to the same coffin - that one of the musician of Amon TA-wr.t-m-Hb - shows some elements of comparison with that of Katebet in the British Museum (EA 6665). At least in one case, we could observe the reuse of an earlier coffin, since under the painted plaster
a previous carved inscription was visible. Such a kind of reuse, already at the beginning of the 19th dynasty, is quite noticeable.
Amongst the other types of material amassed at the bottom of the chamber, there were many bones, both human and animal (one ibex), wrappings (very decayed) and New Kingdom pottery. The way the material was amassed seems to be the result of a robbery, but no traces of fire have been detected. In the lower layer of the room a Ramesseide polychromous shabti in name of the same musician of Amon TA-wr.t-m-Hb (Fig. 9) was found, together with a carnelian hair-ring, and a faience scarab.

Clearance of passage G in TT14

During the previous seasons, passage G of TT 14 had been almost entirely cleared and only a small sector on the southern side remained to be cleared for an area of approximately 1.60 x 0.50 m. Passage G was originally filled up to its roof by several alluvial deposits. We proceeded to remove the last two flooding layers and a mummy, which lay over them. Inside flooding layers, a few objects and only traces of Third Intermediate Period coffins were found. In this sector was found a fragment of a backed brick with a representation of the god Bes, probably to be interpreted as a birth brick.

Clearance of room J in TT14

Clearance of room J continued after the work started in the previous season (2012). Clearance was only partial and confined to the upper levels of deposit, in order to detect the sequence of alluvial deposits and the height and the width of the room. Works were suspended, and a preliminary consolidation intervention was carried out.

Study and Documentation

As every season, we proceeded to survey by our total station the newly excavated areas and structures and we produced ortophotographs of the most relevant layers of excavations. All the topographical work was supervised by Emanuele Taccola. Under my direction, all the finds of the season were recorded and documented by Paolo Marini and Anna Giulia De Marco. The most relevant objects were photographed by Claudio Benedetti, who also documented various phases of work. When advisable, Paolo Marini proceeded to draw the most relevant pieces. Pottery was documented by Anna Consonni.
Conservation and works for secure the tombs and the area

During the campaign, the entrance of MIDAN.05 was made safe building and putting in place an iron gate, under our inspector supervision. The shaft P3, once completely excavated and cleared, was also closed with strong wooden planks. A preliminary consolidation intervention was carried out in Room J of TT 14.