ARCHAEOLOGICAL MISSION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PISA
AT DRA ABU EL NAGA

Report of the 15th archaeological season (October 2018)

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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 Ramesseum 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 later usage phases. 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 October 13 to November 2, 2018, the expedition has carried out its 15th field season, devoted to the excavation of two tombs discovered in 2010, opening onto the Northern side of the forecourt of M.I.D.A.N.05 and provisionally labelled T1 and T2 (Tomb 1 and Tomb 2).

To this field season contributed the following members of the expedition: Marilina Betrò; Gianluca Buonomini; Divina Centore; Paolo Del Vesco; Anna Giulia De Marco; Mattia Mancini; Paolo Marini; Carmen Munoz-Perez; Camilla Saler; Lisa Sartini; Maura Sedda; Emanuele Taccola. The Supreme Council of Egyptian Antiquities was represented by our inspector, Miss Amani Hassan Mohammed, who always assisted us with great competence and helpfulness, and by Mohammed el-Azab Mohammed, chief worker for the SCA Inspectorate. I wish to thank both for their appreciated cooperation.

I wish finally to express my warmest thanks to the SCA authorities on the West and East bank, and especially to the Director of the West Bank, Fathy Yaseen Abd el-Karim. I am grateful to Ramadan Mohammed Ali, responsible for the foreign missions, for its friendly and precious support.

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

1. Clearance of tombs T1 and T2 on the northern side of M.I.D.A.N.05 courtyard (see map)
2. Study and documentation of finds in the storerooms.

1. Clearance of tombs T1 and T2 on the northern side of M.I.D.A.N.05 courtyard (see map)

The two tombs discovered in 2010 on the northern side of the forecourt share with MIDAN.05 an interesting feature, a single window left of the door (facing the entrance). This peculiar element, which seems to point to an earlier stage of development in the evolution of the classic Theban T-shaped chapel, is rather rare: tombs with windows are attested at the beginning of the 18th dynasty or around Amenhotep III and IV, but in these periods they usually show pairs of windows and not a single one (Betrò 2016, Tombs in transition: MIDAN.05 and windows in the Eighteenth Dynasty, in: G. Miniaci, W. Grajetzki (eds), The World of Middle Kingdom Egypt II, London, pp. 1-11). This feature might indicate a family cluster of tombs, originally dating approximately at the same epoch, although later reused.
In 2014, when completing the archaeological investigation of the forecourt and its shaft P3, we closed the entrance to the two new tombs and their windows by means of stones walls with mortar. These walls have been demolished at the beginning of our October 2018 mission, to start works.

The entrance to T1, the easternmost of the two tombs, is preceded by a mud-brick structure, vaulted and plastered, whose upper part had fallen in ancient times. The East wall of this structure had been built leaning against a huge rock boulder which occupies a portion of the forecourt. Our excavations brought to light some steps, rather regularly cut into the rock, giving access to the tomb, placed at a level lower than that of the forecourt. The tomb revealed to be partially filled by flood deposit, but no traces of the modern pillages of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century were visible: these thieves usually dug pits and tunnels inside the alluvial deposits. Such pits were for example well evident in the other tomb, T2, filled almost up to the ceiling with alluvial debris cut by the pillagers.
T1: on the left, the West part of the brick structure at the entrance, on the right the boulder.

Tomb T1, rather small, shows a single room with an almost square plan, with a well-cut niche in its North wall, in front of the entrance, and what seems the beginning of a sloping passage in its East part.
Very probably T1 had been soon filled by the flash floods deposit and remained concealed during the late phases of usage of MIDAN.05 and its satellite tombs: at present, our finds in this tomb were mostly datable at the New Kingdom. Especially significant was the discovery in its western part of many fragments of white limestone, sculpted, painted and inscribed, belonging to a beautiful double statue of a couple. We were able to find the joining of almost the totality of those fragments, but it is highly probable that many others and possibly the heads, still missing, will be found during the clearance of the sloping passage in next campaigns. Our conservator Gianluca Buonomini used a light glue able to keep together the joining fragments, but at the same time soluble with proper products, so that to allow adding new pieces and completing the statue reconstruction. The inscription carved on the back of the double statue, with fine blue hieroglyphs in columns delimited by red lines, attribute the statue to an Overseer of the Weavers in the Temple of Amun and his wife, also linked to the cult of the queen Ahmose Nefertari. The statue can certainly be dated to the New Kingdom: its study, currently ongoing by Marilina Betrò, will be able to precise better its dating and the identity of its owner. His name and titles, together with those of his wife, also recurs on some sandstone fragments carved and painted coming from our excavation in the tomb and, partly, found during our previous excavations in the forecourt in past years. They could come from the lintel and jambs of the tomb.
Reassembling the statue.

Tomb T2 revealed larger dimensions, with at least two rooms: the entrance to a second room, on the North wall, was in fact brought to light during our work, but not yet cleared. The deposit filling the first room has not yet been completely removed: under the flood layers, very high in this tomb, an original and apparently untouched layer of occupation with at least 8 bodies, was found. Their skeletonized bodies were almost complete, but for the parts intercepted by the robbery pits: bones were in connection, the position of their bodies showed the traditional attitude, with arms straight along the bodies and hands crossed on their pubic region. Above all, they still laid in the remains of their coffins, with considerable parts of the plastered and painted lids above them. But the action of fire set by ancient thieves looking for jewels and precious materials, clearly detectable under them in a thick layer of ashes and black substance, and, possibly the further decay caused by the floods arrived later, completely destroyed the ligneous part of their coffins, leaving only the painted plaster.

The decoration of these fragments points to a date to the 21st Dynasty.
Parts of the fragments of a lid coffin in situ.

All the remains of those bodies and the fragments of painted plaster were carefully removed by Emanuele Taccola, who supervised their excavation, with the help of Mattia Mancini, and Anna Giulia De Marco. Our anthropologist, Maura Sedda, being already left at the time of their retrieval, they will be studied during next season.
Lisa Sartini and Camilla Saler recorded the coffin fragments as well as the other finds.
Emanuele Taccola completed the photogrammetric survey of the two tombs and made their 3D model, together with that of the double statue.
All the finds were cleaned and consolidated, when necessary, by our conservator Gianluca Buonomini.
An iron door to close T1 was made and mounted at the end of the season. Stone and cement walls were built to close the window of the tomb, as well as the door and window of T2.

2. Study and documentation of finds in MIDAN.05 and in the magazine.
In the framework of the project of publication of the Shaft P3, its chambers and finds, Paolo Marini completed the drawing of some objects found during the 2014 season and studied during last study season in 2017.

Maura Sedda completed the study of the bones of individuals buried in the funerary chambers of the shaft P3. She also started the study of the bodies found wrapped in reed-sticks mats at the bottom of the shaft in 2014.

In the framework of our work in the October season, Carmen Munoz-Perez, who is making her PhD at the Montpellier University and at the Louvre, studied the funerary amulets found during our excavations, most of which are kept in the SCA storerooms in Gurna. For this reason, she devoted
two days to the study and photographic recording of some of these amulets in the SCA storerooms, belonging to the 2005 and 2007 campaigns in tomb MIDAN.05. She was kindly assisted by the staff of the storeroom, and especially by Mr Ahmed Hasan, director of the storeroom, and Mrs. Nefisa el-Azab Mohammed, director of the study storeroom, which I wish to thank warmly for their help.

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