



Who was who in Elephantine of the third millennium BC?

Dietrich Raue

British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan 9 (2008): 1–14

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Since 1969, the German Archaeological Institute has been working in cooperation with the Swiss Institute of Architectural Research and Archaeology on the island of Elephantine. During the past decades, the mission established the general outline of the history and the development of settlement on Elephantine Island.¹

In the fourth millennium BC, a settlement with a small island necropolis to its south started to develop in a restricted area in the eastern part of the southern tip of the island (fig. 1). In about 2700 BC, the town occupied the entire eastern part of the southern tip of the island; later on, the western part was used as the necropolis. During the Middle Kingdom both the town, and the area taken up with its sanctuaries, expanded. Thereafter, the temple of Satet was rebuilt and enlarged in stone. In the early Middle Kingdom, a temple was built for the god Khnum on top of the *tell*. Until then, his cult had been performed in the precinct of the temple of Satet. A sanctuary was also established for the Old Kingdom official Heqaib, who was worshipped constantly from the late third millennium BC onwards. This sanctuary was erected in the area west of the temple of Satet where a metropolitan zone had developed in the Eleventh Dynasty. It was abandoned in around 1650 BC.

The increasing size of the temple correlates well with the enhanced importance of the settlement of Aswan on the east bank. More and more, the character of Elephantine evolved into that of a conservative, sacred Egyptian town with temples and their administration, including the Nilometers. The city retained its importance also in Late Antiquity. In the medieval period, the settlement was abandoned at the same time as Aswan.² Much is known about the history of the town, but who were its inhabitants?

The mission's aim is to better understand the social and economic processes that helped create the town on Elephantine. This is being achieved through extensive study seasons, and by resuming excavations in certain areas of the town to clarify any additional questions. This combined approach will hopefully pave the way for a detailed description of the living conditions at the First Cataract on the one hand and, on the other hand, the effect of external interferences, either from the north or from the south. Three sections shall illustrate the diversity of these circumstances.

How Nubian can a Naqada culture be to be still called Naqada culture?

Some years ago, while working on the pottery finds of the third millennium BC, an attempt was made to distinguish the Egyptian from the Nubian material culture.³ Is this always possible?

¹ Kaiser, *MDAIK* 55, 232–4, figs. 55–8; Seidlmayer, *Nilstände*.

² Von Pilgrim, *MDAIK* 60, 120–1.

³ Raue, *MDAIK* 55, 173–89; id., *Sudan and Nubia* 6, 20–4.

What leads us to distinguish cultures within the wider framework of northeastern African cultural development, and thereafter to discuss Egyptians as distinct from neighbouring cultures? Was there a mixed population, or was the mixed character actually a characteristic of a group that can be archaeologically attested around 3000 BC? Perhaps we should be more open to the second hypothesis.

The flood levels of the river Nile did not allow for any larger permanent settlements on the islands of the First Cataract during the Naqada Period. Small habitations did exist, but a natural sinkhole that was excavated in 2005 illustrates how disastrous the annual flood may have been (fig. 2). The hole was used for a burial in the late Neolithic period. Shortly afterwards, the flood filled the hole and broke the pots and ivory bracelets. The pieces were turned around and around, until the complete assemblage was rounded like river pebbles. The flood even covered the sinkhole with about 50cm of coarse sediments of sand and pebbles.

This early context can be dated to the earlier fourth millennium and features Neolithic fabrics in connection with early A-Group wares. All following contexts at Elephantine have a different character: various Egyptian vessels for storage or baking bread can be found next to different types of cooking and serving vessels of rather prehistoric and late-Neolithic manufacture. Usually, the latter vessels appear in Nubian sites to the south, the others in Egyptian sites to the north. However, on Elephantine a complete set always consists of both features: Nubian and Egyptian.

The same distribution was observed in material found in the temple of Satet and in the settlement to its east and south;⁴ this also seems to be valid for finds from the earliest necropolis as well. At the beginning of the third millennium BC, several people were buried in a geologic pothole.⁵ The pottery assemblage again points to the observation that the joint appearance of what is called Egyptian and Nubian features is rather systematic and should be described less in terms of ‘imports’.

But it is not only the pottery that displays features that seem strange or at least unfamiliar. At the period when the Satet cult was started in the natural niche between two granite boulders around 100m to the north of the pothole, another unusual feature appeared. During Naqada III, the dead were buried in sand deposits with simple fire places on top of the burials.⁶ One tomb, discovered in 2005,⁷ shows another remarkable feature that, to my knowledge, is thus far unattested in the burial practices of the Naqada Period, throughout the Egyptian Nile Valley (fig. 4): the head of the deceased was placed upon a heap of barley grains. This represents a very understandable but unique, in the Early Dynastic Period, solution to supply the deceased with food in his afterlife.

It might make sense to make a differentiation between cultural units and temporary topographical units that induce, for example, Nubians and Egyptians living around the First Cataract to use a similar material culture with elements of both roots. Hopefully, the new surveys on the west bank⁸ will help answer the question of the cultural description of these

⁴ Kopp, *Naqadazeit*.

⁵ Jaritz, *MDAIK* 26, 135–8.

⁶ Raue, *MDAIK* 61, 19, pl. 5a.

⁷ Raue, *MDAIK* 64.

⁸ Such as that of M. C. Gatto, ‘The British Museum/University of Rome ‘La Sapienza’ archaeological project in the Aswan-Kom Ombo Region’ presented at the 2007 Annual Egyptological Colloquium at the British

early strata, which date to the occupation after the flood levels decreased and allowed for larger settlements. The full publication of old excavation finds from Shellal and Qubaniya is urgently needed, since the description of the finds of the region as ‘A-Group’ or ‘Naqada’ remains unsatisfying.

A ‘Dynastic A-Group’ in local dynastic conditions

Nubian material regularly appears in Old Kingdom contexts at Elephantine, in small quantities.⁹ One of the possible reasons for this is the raids of early Old Kingdom kings. The increasing centralization led to an increasing need for luxury items, which were needed, for example, in the households and the tombs of tens of thousands of people close to Helwan in the Second Dynasty.

The Nubian producers of these vessels cannot necessarily be termed prisoners of war only. If the raids had been half as successful as they claimed to be in stealing the Nubian cattle, goats and sheep,¹⁰ they would have very effectively destroyed the economic basis of these semi-nomadic cultures. Textile production, transport and milk supply, amongst other aspects, would have ceased, forcing the populations to seek a place close to the Egyptian settlements. Those ready for service may have been part of the Egyptian expeditions sent to the deserts to explore them for precious materials like the diorite for Khafra, or other materials from the west of Dakhla Oasis that were needed during the reign of Khufu and Djedefra.¹¹

Natural places for such an encounter between Nubians and Egyptians would have been places such as Buhen¹² and Elephantine. In these locations, we find traces of a cultural unit that is called ‘Dynastic A-Group’. One remarkable feature of the lower Nubian A-Group can be observed on Elephantine until the later third millennium BC: the typical v-shaped cooking vessel that occurs regularly in the Second, Third and Fourth Dynasty contexts of the island; many of them appear in prominent places such as the temple of Satet.¹³ During the Second to Fifth Dynasties, the single row of incised triangles that is known from A-Group inventories is also attested.¹⁴ Furthermore, the early Fourth Dynasty on Elephantine still sees the presence of the *dent du loup*-pattern. There is a successor of the ‘eggshell ware’ (fig. 3) in the Fifth Dynasty as well as the chevron frieze, well known from A-Group times. A late successor of vessel type N70 shows up in Elephantine during the Fourth and Fifth Dynasty.

The latest examples of v-shaped vessels appear in the middle of the Sixth Dynasty; in addition, the last parallels of fine wares that are similar to the luxury fabrics of Qustul date to this time.

Excavations between 2003 and 2005 concentrated on the strata of the late Fifth

Museum: *The ‘Head of the South’ Current research in Upper Egypt, south of Thebes* (July 12–13, 2007).

⁹ First identified by S. Seidlmayer, in *Ägypten im afro-orientalischen Kontext*.

¹⁰ Meurer, *Nubier*, 57–60.

¹¹ Kuhlmann, *MDAIK* 61, 243–89.

¹² Gratién, *JEA* 81, 43–56.

¹³ Raue, *MDAIK* 55, 188–9, fig. 41.6.

¹⁴ Firth, *Archaeological Survey (1910-1911)*, 201 [8.1].

Dynasty. For the first time, clear evidence for a group of features was found that are also known from the earliest pottery phases of Kerma Ancien and, somewhat later in the published contexts, of the so-called ‘early C-Group’ in Lower Nubia. We should probably not attempt to arrange these findspots in a chronological order. With the recent finds from Elephantine at hand, I would prefer to consider the new techniques and vessel proportions as evidence for a population with common roots, who appear at different places throughout the Nile Valley at the same time, around 2400–2350 BC; the archaeological remains have several identical features in the earliest phase. After two or three generations, the people developed in the places of their arrival – Kerma, the former central part A-Group territory and the Aswan area – and diverged. This was also caused by the different conditions they encountered: the less densely inhabited pre-Kerma area, the almost void former A-Group territory, and at Elephantine the gateway to the urban society of the Egyptian Nile Valley. Therefore, they developed differently and are clearly differentiated: the Kerma civilization and the C-Group. Residents such as the ‘Dynastic A-Group’ people combine the material culture of both Lower Nubian cultural entities, the ‘A-Group’ and the ‘C-Group’.

The Change of Elites

Elephantine was probably not the favourite place of residence for officials of the Fourth Dynasty. This changed considerably towards the Sixth Dynasty and was closely connected with the end of the central state of the Old Kingdom.¹⁵ However, evidence for inconsistencies in this development emerges.

The first hints of elite burials on the island date to the second half of the Fifth Dynasty: a relief gives evidence for a doorway or for a representative facade and must have belonged to a mastaba.¹⁶ However, these structures suffered from immediate destruction shortly after the officials were buried. Merely one or two generations later, such funerary monuments were being taken out of their original context. A frieze-block of the late Fifth Dynasty, belonging to a mastaba of the expedition official Niankhmin, was reused in a workshop of only slightly later date.¹⁷ Furthermore, a fragment of a very well made limestone statuette was found in a late 5th Dynasty context. A limestone column base also hints that there was an elite necropolis at this time. It seems highly unlikely that limestone would have been brought 200km from the north just to be plastered and used as a post support in a simple workshop of the reign of Pepi II (fig. 5). The same speed of neglect can be observed in the harbour at the southern landing place. Within two generations, inscriptions of the early Sixth Dynasty were covered by simple harbour habitations and storage facilities (figs. 6–7).¹⁸

On the other hand, there is much evidence to suggest that the town was inhabited by an increasing number of people. Most of the Elephantine papyri of the Old Kingdom, either those from current excavations or those now in the Berlin Museum, can be dated to this

¹⁵ Raue, *BSFE* 163, 8–26.

¹⁶ Raue, *BSFE* 163, fig. 4.

¹⁷ Seidlmayer and Ziermann, *MDAIK* 48, 161–75.

¹⁸ Seidlmayer, *MDAIK* 58, 35–7.

period. In one of them, the ‘removal of persons’ is a matter of debate for a higher ranking lady.¹⁹ It is certainly not a coincidence that all evidence for these observations stops when the first rock-cut tombs are built on the west bank, late in or after the reign of Pepi I (figs. 8–9).²⁰

Two phases can be distinguished amongst the tombs at Qubbet el-Hawa. The first one starts in the time of Djedkara in the late Fifth Dynasty, around 2375 BC. This phase is proof of the elite’s new esteem for the southern part of Egypt. Of course it is tempting to connect this observation with the introduction of reforms and new administrative structures in the advanced Fifth Dynasty, which resulted, for example, in the new office of the ‘Overseer of Upper Egypt’.²¹ Also, it has to be noted that this is the period in which 20-30 year old tomb architecture and burials in Saqqara were back-filled and covered by the causeway of Unas.²² Whatever relation may have existed between these processes in the first phase, the esteem centred on the island-territory, but the new elites were unable to develop a joint culture of memory. Evidently, officials and potential tomb owners did not manage to create a society interested in the memory of their leaders, and their families are either not wealthy enough, or too distant, to maintain the tombs.

The second phase probably began with the famous expedition leaders Sabni, Mehu and Harkhuf. Their careers started in the reign of Pepi I, but their tombs belong to the first half of the long reign of Pepi II. The rock-cut tombs of the late Old Kingdom are well known for hundreds of small, inscribed vessels pointing to a remarkably increasing interest in jointly celebrated funerals of the elites.²³

Parallel to this, there is evidence for a cult for the successful leaders of these expeditions:²⁴ a group of shrines was discovered in 1996–1998, in strata of the late First Intermediate Period/Eleventh Dynasty, within the building complex of the Old Kingdom.²⁵ They attest to cult activities for Heqaib, Sabni, Mehu and Sobekhotep. Additional recent stratigraphical evidence supports a date for the first cult activity taking place in the late 6th

¹⁹ Fischer-Elfert, *MDAIK* 61, 215–16.

²⁰ The very first generation of rock cut tombs does not seem to be preserved, e.g. the tomb of Harkhuf is built in the place of an older tomb whose owner remains anonymous (personal communication, K.-J. Seyfried). Thus, there is, for example, time and space for officials of the time of Merenra or even the latter part of the reign of Pepi I on Qubbet el-Hawa. Similar movements from mastaba cemeteries to rock cut tombs are also to be expected at sites like Edfu, where the last noble tombs in form of mastabas do not seem to postdate the time of Pepi I; in Elkab, the situation seems to be different since the mastaba tombs there never developed a more elaborate form towards the later Old Kingdom and major parts of the social stratigraphy moved on to the rock-cut necropolis. On the other hand, it is interesting to see that due to the lack of a hill at Dendera, the elites continue to build elaborate mastaba tombs (Fischer, *Dendera*).

²¹ See the contribution of W. Grajetzki, ‘Aspects of local administration in the Head of the South: the late Old to early New Kingdom’, presented at the 2007 Annual Egyptological Colloquium at the British Museum: The ‘Head of the South’ Current research in Upper Egypt, south of Thebes (July 12–13, 2007).

²² Altenmüller and Moussa, *Nianchchnum*.

²³ Edel, *Qubbet el-Hawa*. It is important to note that such vessels are absent in the lower part of the social stratigraphy in the contemporary cemetery on Elephantine Island.

²⁴ Dorn, *Älteres Heqaibheiligtum*.

²⁵ Pilgrim, *MDAIK* 55, 85–90; id. *Studies Bietak*, 403–5.

Dynasty,²⁶ which matches parallel developments in the settlement of Ain Asyl in the oasis of Dakhla.²⁷

In this second phase, the necropolis of the elite becomes separated from the island. Only after this has happened does the island cemetery gain ‘stratigraphical stability’: single tombs are replaced every two, three or four generations, but the entire stratum of a cemetery is not removed at once.

With this separation one wonders whether the elites really spent a lot of time in town, or whether they mainly lived out on their estates. According to the biography of Harkhuf, his house contained a garden with plants and a lake.²⁸ Was this reality or is this phrase just part of an ideal biography? Given the special situation of Elephantine and its surroundings, I would take this statement seriously; if such a house and park really existed, it certainly was not realised on top of the tell of Elephantine, far away from ground water on a granite outcrop, but rather in the countryside.

Another important figure of the time of Pepi II is the official Khunes: the causeway of his tomb, which lies in the rock-cut necropolis on the Qubbet el-Hawa, is among the earliest examples facing north, leading to the cultivation north of the necropolis. In the last part of that strip, a rock-inscription of Khunes can be found at the top of the cliff (fig. 10). This text may have functioned like a boundary stela.

The gap, caused by this separation of elites, their burials and probably also their mansions, was also filled by celebrations. Material evidence for such feasts was found in the building complex of the Sixth Dynasty on Elephantine, where boxes of Sabni, Heqaib and others had been deposited. These wooden shrines are depicted in the rock cut tombs of the Qubbet el-Hawa. The festival required streets of a width that did not exist before in the settlement and that were invented at this moment in time to allow for proper processions.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to Justine Gesell for checking this paper.

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²⁶ Jeuthe, *MDAIK* 61, 25–9.

²⁷ Soukiassian *et al.*, *Balat* VI.

²⁸ Sethe, *Urkunden* I, 121, lines 13–17.

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Fig. 1: Island of Elephantine.



Fig. 2: Elephantine, Area XXXIV; natural sinkhole.



Fig. 3: Elephantine, Nubian Trichrome Ware, Fifth Dynasty.



Fig. 4: Elephantine, Area XXXIV; Early Dynastic burial.



Fig. 5: Elephantine, Area XXIV; column base in workshop of the Sixth Dynasty.



Fig. 6: Elephantine, Area XII; inscription of the Sixth Dynasty.



Fig. 7: Elephantine, Area XII; inscription of the Sixth Dynasty.



Fig 8: Qubbet el-Hawa; rock-cut tombs of the Old and Middle Kingdom, from the south.



Fig 9: Qubbet el-Hawa; rock-cut tombs of the Old and Middle Kingdom, from the east.



Fig. 10: West bank of Aswan, north of Qubbet el-Hawa; inscription of Khunes, Sixth Dynasty.



Elkab, 1937-2007: seventy years of Belgian archaeological research

Luc Limme

British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan 9 (2008): 15–50

Elkab, 1937-2007: seventy years of Belgian archaeological research

Luc Limme

Elkab, the ancient town of *Nekhheb*, is situated in southern Upper Egypt, on the right bank of the Nile, about 15km north of Edfu, and opposite Kom el-Ahmar (ancient Hierakonpolis).¹ The present-day name *Elkab* is probably derived from the ancient toponym *Nekhheb*,² which is in turn related to the name of the goddess Nekhbet. Most often represented as a vulture, Nekhbet was not only the local goddess of Elkab, but was also considered the tutelary deity for the whole of Upper Egypt. When travelling by train, boat or car between Luxor and Aswan, it is almost impossible to overlook Elkab. The site is noticeable in the landscape because of its massive mudbrick enclosure wall (fig. 1), which was probably constructed around the middle of the 4th century BC, during the Thirtieth Dynasty.³ This rectangular enclosure wall, measuring approximately 520 by 590 m, is not the only relic of the past that can currently be found at the extensive site of Elkab, which covers an area of 16km² (fig. 3). Archaeological remains dating to all periods of ancient Egypt, from Prehistory to Graeco-Roman times, are present at Elkab.⁴

Elkab was already visited by European travellers around 1740,⁵ but the first comprehensive investigations were those of British archaeologists during the late 19th and early 20th centuries: James Edward Quibell, Frederick William Green, Archibald Henry Sayce, Joseph John Tylor and Somers Clarke.⁶ The architect and archaeologist Somers Clarke not only undertook valuable work at Elkab, but he also built a marvellous expedition house in 1906 (fig. 2), about 3km upstream, close to the village of el-Nasrab. Somers Clarke wintered here until his death in 1926.⁷ Some years later the Egyptian authorities put '*Beit Clarke*' at the disposal of the Belgian archaeologists, who commenced work at Elkab in 1937. The celebrated Egyptologist Jean Capart, and his successor Pierre Gilbert, directed excavations at the site during the years before and after the Second World War.⁸

¹ For the geography, geology and topography of the site, see Vermeersch, *Elkab* II, 1–11 and Depuydt, *Elkab* IV/1.

² For the spelling 'Elkab', instead of 'El Kab', see Bingen and Clarysse, *Elkab* III, 13, n. 1.

³ De Meulenaere, *CdE* 61, 208–9; Hendrickx, Huyge and Newton in *Cities and Urbanism in Ancient Egypt* (forthcoming).

⁴ For an overview of the archaeological remains and their topographical location, see Hendrickx and Huyge, *Elkab* IV/2 (with bibliography).

⁵ For a survey of the discovery history of Elkab, see Derchain, *Elkab* I, 1–3.

⁶ Bibliographical references concerning their research at Elkab can be found in Hendrickx and Huyge, *Elkab* IV/2, 22–5; for A.H. Sayce, see also Cockle, *CdE* 66, 31–8.

⁷ Capart, *Elkab. Impressions et Souvenirs*, 23–30.

⁸ [Capart *et al.*], *Fouilles de El Kab*.

Excavations within the ancient town enclosure

The interest of Capart and Gilbert in the site of Elkab was essentially confined to the area within the mudbrick enclosure wall (fig. 4).⁹ Inside lie two contiguous temples. The larger, eastern, temple is dedicated to the vulture-goddess Nekhbet. The remains visible today date to the late Pharaonic era, but it is beyond doubt that the temple was constructed, at least in part, making use of blocks belonging to older buildings. The western temple principally dates to the reign of Ramses II, and was built in honour of the god Thoth, who was associated with Nekhbet at Elkab.¹⁰ These temples are presently in a rather ruined condition, with only foundations preserved (fig. 5). We know that they were partly demolished in the first half of the 19th century, probably in November 1828, and that the sandstone blocks were reused in various modern constructions in the area.¹¹ At the time of Bonaparte's expedition in Egypt (1798-1799), parts of the temples, with columns and architraves, were still standing (fig. 6).¹² Even though little remained of the temples, the work of Capart and Gilbert led to important discoveries regarding their building history, and interesting objects were also recovered. Some of these are now kept in the Egyptian section of the *Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire* in Brussels, for example a bust of Amenhotep II¹³ and a royal sphinx attributed to the Thirtieth Dynasty, probably from the reign of Nectanebo I.¹⁴ At that time, the excavations at Elkab took place under the auspices of the *Fondation Egyptologique Reine Elisabeth*¹⁵ and the *Musées Royaux*, of which the financial means were very limited.¹⁶ The situation became much brighter in 1965 thanks to the creation of a Committee for Belgian Excavations in Egypt, then financed by the National Ministry of Education.¹⁷ During more than 30 years, with some periods of interruption, this committee organized excavations at Elkab. The work during this period was directed by Herman De Meulenaere, until I had the pleasure to assume responsibility in 1988.

At the beginning, the principal objective was to continue the work done by the *Fondation Egyptologique* in the area of the temple of Nekhbet and its immediate environs. These investigations have not been without result. They have exposed part of the *dromos*,

⁹ For this temple enclosure, see Hendrickx, Huyge and Newton in *Cities and Urbanism in Ancient Egypt* (forthcoming).

¹⁰ For the architecture of the temples, see Clarke, *JEA* 8, 16–40; [Capart *et al.*], *Fouilles de El Kab*, I, 34–90; III, 79–82, pls.7–12, 36–7. For their development during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties, see Van Siclen in Teeter and Larson, *Gold of Praise*, 415–17.

¹¹ For the destruction of the temples, see Vanlathem, *CdE* 62, 34, n.2, and Hendrickx, Huyge and Newton in *Cities and Urbanism in Ancient Egypt* (forthcoming).

¹² *DE* I, pl. 66, fig.3.

¹³ E.7703. See Tefrin, *Statues*, 36–7 [9].

¹⁴ E.7702. See *Sphinx*, 188 [18].

¹⁵ In 2004, as a result of statutory adaptations required by a new Belgian law, the *Fondation Egyptologique Reine Elisabeth* (FERE) was renamed as the *Association Egyptologique Reine Elisabeth* (AERE). See www.aere-egke.be.

¹⁶ For a brief history of the Belgian excavations in Egypt up until 1955, see Mekhitarian in De Meulenaere *et al.*, *Liber Memorialis*, 225–9.

¹⁷ Limme in De Meulenaere *et al.*, *Liber Memorialis*, 231–7.

i.e. the paved road providing access to the great temple.¹⁸ Attention was also paid to the foundations of the temple in which decorated blocks belonging to earlier buildings were found. The most ancient blocks date to the Middle Kingdom and originally belonged to a barque shrine built by Sobekhotep III, a king of the Thirteenth Dynasty (fig. 7).¹⁹

These activities within the sacred temple enclosure of Elkab date back to the years 1966 to 1969.²⁰ At the same time, work took place at various locations within the great enclosure. For example, Pierre Vermeersch investigated the prehistoric sector of the site, which led to the discovery of a previously unknown epipalaeolithic industry that is now known in the archaeological literature as the '*Elkabian*'.²¹ It can be dated to around 7000 BC.

The excavations undertaken at Elkab over the years have confirmed that all major periods of Egyptian history are represented. Since 1968, but especially in the late 1970s, large parts of a predynastic Naqada III cemetery were brought to light by Pierre Vermeersch and Stan Hendrickx.²² The tombs are very simple, shallow, pit-graves, but they contain a large variety of often well-preserved objects. Among the finds, vessels are of course well-represented. The majority of these are made from pottery, but there are also a substantial number of receptacles in hardstone such as calcite and diorite (fig. 8). Some tombs contained greywacke cosmetic palettes. Necklaces and bracelets were also found, some with components from semiprecious stone, particularly of carnelian.

At a small distance from the predynastic necropolis, archaeological remains of a completely different nature were discovered: a village of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods with perfectly rectangular houses and a rectilinear street layout (fig. 9). In fact, the Graeco-Roman village of Elkab seems to have been demolished and abruptly abandoned around 380AD. Was this the result of a political or military event? In any case, the house walls, constructed in mudbrick, had been razed to the ground, either in ancient times or by the *sebakbin* of the 19th century. Only the lower part of the walls remains. But those responsible for their destruction did not pay particular attention to the contents of the houses. These still contained interesting objects. Numerous bronze coins were recovered, dating to the 1st-4th centuries of our era, and, of course, huge amounts of pottery.²³ Of major importance was the discovery of hundreds of demotic and Greek ostraca, bearing administrative texts. The Greek ostraca, for instance, are for the most part bills or tax receipts. They are all the more interesting as they often bear a date, which has proven to be very helpful for dating the archaeological context in which they have been found. The demotic texts on the other hand, are much more difficult to date and also more varied as far as their content is concerned: all manner of inventories, lists of names and festivals, and letters. Thanks to these texts it has been possible to gain an insight into the economic and social life of the inhabitants of Elkab during the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. According to the study of Stan Hendrickx,

¹⁸ De Meulenaere *et al.*, *CdE* 45, 27–8.

¹⁹ For these blocks and a theoretical reconstruction of the barque shrine, see Eder, *Elkab* VII.

²⁰ De Meulenaere *et al.*, *CdE* 45, 19–44.

²¹ Vermeersch, *Elkab* II.

²² Hendrickx, *Elkab* V.

²³ Some of the houses were occupied by potters. See Hendrickx in Clarysse, Schoors and Willems, *Egyptian Religion*, 1353–76.

it is highly probable that the houses where the ostraca were found were inhabited by potters, producing amphorae for the transport of natron, for which Elkab was an important centre.²⁴ The Greek ostraca have been published by Jean Bingen and Willy Clarysse.²⁵ The demotic texts were copied and studied by Jan Quaegebeur, but unfortunately this brilliant Egyptologist passed away in 1995, which leaves the final publication of his work to be completed.²⁶

The rock necropolis and the rock inscriptions in the Wadi Hilâl

The research described above all took place within the town enclosure of Elkab. From the 1980s onwards, however, our interest in the site shifted to the desert area north and northeast of the town. This area, in fact, corresponds more or less to the mouth of the Wadi Hilâl, in which several large free-standing rocks are situated (fig. 10).²⁷ At the entrance to the wadi, close to the road that links Luxor to Aswan, towers an enormous sandstone hill, about 50m high. This rocky hill is honeycombed with rock-cut tombs (fig. 11). During about fifteen years this immense rock necropolis has been the main focus of the Belgian archaeological mission. To explain the motivation for work in this sector, attention has to be paid to another archaeological particularity of the Wadi Hilâl.

The faces of several free-standing rocks and hills bear large numbers of petroglyphs, ranging from Predynastic to Islamic times,²⁸ and hieroglyphic inscriptions of the pharaonic period. About six hundred inscriptions, mostly written in semi-cursive hieroglyphs, have been recovered. For the greater part they date back to the Old Kingdom, more precisely to the Sixth Dynasty (fig. 12). Although Jozef Janssen and Arpag Mekhitarian produced hand copies and photographs of most of the inscriptions in January-March 1950,²⁹ four other seasons (1981-1987) were required in order to complete the recording. This work has been done in an exemplary fashion by Hans Vandekerckhove, who has made facsimiles (fig. 13) of the inscriptions and also produced a PhD dissertation on the subject. Unfortunately, the final publication of the texts has been much delayed because of the unexpected death of the author, at the age of twenty-nine. The cooperation of Dr. Renate Müller-Wollermann from Tübingen, however, enabled the production of a final publication in 2001.³⁰

Contrary to expectations, these rock inscriptions are not merely the graffiti of travellers passing through Elkab. In most cases, they have been engraved for residents of the settlement, particularly the priests attached to the cults of the vulture-goddess Nekhbet and other local

²⁴ Hendrickx in Clarysse, Schoors and Willems, *Egyptian Religion*, 1353–76.

²⁵ Bingen and Clarysse, *Elkab* III.

²⁶ Preliminary reports: Quaegebeur in Bagnall, Browne, Hanson and Koenen, *Proceedings XVI International Congress of Papyrology*, 527–36; Quaegebeur in El-Mosalamy, *Proceedings 19th International Congress of Papyrology*, 671–85. See also Depauw in Vandorpe and Clarysse, *Edfu*, 31–2.

²⁷ A detailed topographical inset map (1:1000) of part of the Wadi Hilâl has been published together with Depuydt, *Elkab* IV/1 and Hendrickx and Huyge, *Elkab* IV/2.

²⁸ These rock drawings have been fully recorded by Dirk Huyge between 1979 and 1983. For a recent preliminary report, see Huyge in Friedman, *Gifts of the Desert*, 196–206.

²⁹ Janssen and Mekhitarian, *ASAE* 51, 313–16.

³⁰ Vandekerckhove and Müller-Wollermann, *Elkab* VI.

divinities. With a few exceptions, the rock inscriptions are short texts mentioning proper names and titles specifying the function of the people involved. In gathering the evidence provided by this abundant philological material, it has been possible to construct complex genealogies and obtain a wealth of prosopographical data. At the outset of the study of these inscriptions, we had no notion as to where these people were buried. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, British archaeologists had unearthed a few Old Kingdom tombs in the vicinity of the town enclosure, but these dated back to the Fourth Dynasty,³¹ not to the Sixth, and thus did not present any link with the inscriptions in the desert.

The enigma was eventually solved through discoveries in the main rock necropolis. More than 300 ancient tombs have been identified, but only a dozen have decorated chapels. Four New Kingdom tombs are accessible to the public at this moment: the tombs of Pahery, Setau, Ahmose son of Ibana, and Reneny (fig. 14).³² The tomb of Setau dates back to the Twentieth Dynasty; the other tombs are of the Eighteenth Dynasty. Among the other decorated tombs, none were thought to pre-date the Middle Kingdom.³³ A prospection in the rock necropolis during 1986 proved that this was not the case, as a funerary chapel of the Old Kingdom was discovered (tomb BE 1). This chapel is a small rock-cut chamber with painted decoration on the back wall (figs. 15–16). Unfortunately, the decorated wall was heavily damaged by the insertion of two oblong niches, possibly in the Greco-Roman period. These niches were probably intended for the burial of crocodile mummies. Similar niches have in fact been found throughout the necropolis, and presumably attest to the cult of Sobek, the crocodile-god venerated at Elkab.³⁴ The inscriptions in this tomb indicate that the owner of the tomb bore the name Sawikai³⁵ and that he held, *inter alia*, the functions of ‘overseer of priests’ and *d3šty* (‘counsellor?’).³⁶ The same name occurs several times amongst the Sixth Dynasty rock inscriptions in the Wadi Hilâl (figs. 12–13).³⁷ Following the discovery of this tomb, a systematic exploration of the area was instigated in 1987, revealing the presence of four other tombs of the same type.

All of these tombs featured similar architectural layout, with (1) a rock-cut funerary chapel, (2) a burial pit in front of the chapel, often combined with a sloping ramp or a staircase which

³¹ Limme, *BSFE* 149, 17. The dating of these tombs has been confirmed by the pottery found by the Belgian Mission, in February-March 2000, during additional investigations in the same area; see Op de Beeck, *CCÉ* 7, 248–50.

³² PM V, 177–84.

³³ If the date (‘Dyn. XII’) to which the tomb of Senusert is attributed by Porter and Moss (PM V: 184) is correct. As the name Senusert also occurs *after* the Twelfth Dynasty (Ranke, *PN*, 279[1]), a more recent date (Second Intermediate Period?) is possible.

³⁴ De Meulenaere, *CdE* 44, 103–21. See also Gautier and Hendrickx in Becker *et al.*, *Historia animalium ex ossibus*, 1712; Gautier, *Archaeofauna* 14, 164–5.

³⁵ *Š3-w(i)-k(3=i)*. This name seems to be typical for Elkab. For its transliteration and its interpretation, see Vandekerckhove and Müller-Wollermann, *Elkab* VI, 287–8 [135].

³⁶ The title *d3šty*, the meaning of which is still problematic, is specific to Elkab, where it occurs many times. ‘Counsellor’ seems a plausible translation, Vandekerckhove and Müller-Wollermann, *Elkab* VI, 333–5.

³⁷ Vandekerckhove and Müller-Wollermann, *Elkab* VI, 287–8.

provided access to (3) a burial chamber located precisely below the rock-cut chapel.³⁸

The 1987 campaign was rather disappointing in terms of archaeological finds. Enormous quantities of pottery were discovered, but the Old Kingdom material was not found *in situ*, and the rest of the pottery dated essentially to the Greco-Roman period.³⁹ It was in any case clear that our tombs had been reused, and probably more than once. One element that prompted us to continue the excavations in this sector was the find of a fragmentary pottery platter – a so-called ‘Meidum bowl’⁴⁰ – with an inscription containing the name of a certain Idi (fig. 17), possibly a son of Sawikai.⁴¹ In November 1988, the façade of a small Old Kingdom chapel was revealed (tomb BE 7; fig. 18). It was immediately clear that this chapel was not intact, as a large stone originally used to block up the entrance was no longer in position. Furthermore, the interior of the chapel was filled with debris, including many fragments of a painted wooden coffin, indicating that the chapel had been reused as a burial chamber. Nevertheless, we started to clear the area in front of the entrance of the chapel, in order to locate the original burial shaft. Pottery vases began to appear, one after the other. Though rather crude, they were clearly datable to the Old Kingdom. The vases had been deposited haphazardly and constituted a 50cm thick layer, distributed over several square metres (fig. 19),⁴² amounting to over a thousand vases. It was clear that this must have been some kind of ritual deposit. As the layer of vases entirely covered the location of the burial pit, we were hopeful that the Old Kingdom burial chamber would be intact, which proved to be the case. The entrance to the chamber had originally been blocked with rough stones, but the upper part of the blocking had collapsed. At the other end of the pit, precisely below the funerary chapel, a second entrance was uncovered, which was still completely blocked up with stones (fig. 20).

We first started to dismantle the blocking of the smaller chamber (‘chamber B’). A pile of disintegrated wood fragments (originally from a coffin), a human skull, a globular pottery vase and a greenish metal object were immediately visible (fig. 21). The metal object proved to be an oval bronze mirror (fig. 22), inscribed for a lady named Irtenakhty,⁴³ who bore the titles ‘priestess of the goddess Hathor’ and ‘acquaintance of the king’. After Irtenakhty’s skeleton had been completely exposed, it was clear she had been buried on her side, with both knees pulled up (fig. 23). The body did not show any traces of mummification, but she had been adorned with bone bracelets around her arms. The wooden coffin had completely disintegrated, as had two small boxes that had been deposited against the back wall of the burial chamber. Negative traces of them were recovered from the sand fill of the tomb, but their contents were well preserved: bracelets and small calcite vases. Two bronze handles, with

³⁸ See, for example, our fig. 20 (cross-section of tomb BE 7).

³⁹ Hendrickx in *Atti VI Congresso*, 255–7, with pl.8.

⁴⁰ For this form of vessel, see Op de Beeck, *CCÉ* 7, 239–80.

⁴¹ Vandekerckhove and Müller-Wollermann, *Elkab* VI, 16–17 and passim.

⁴² For the pottery found in this place and in other parts of the rock necropolis of Elkab, see Hendrickx and Huyge, *Bulletin de Liaison du Groupe international d’Étude de la Céramique égyptienne* 18, 50–6 (where ‘tombe 17’ should be read ‘tombe BE 7’, since the tombs have been renumbered) and Hendrickx and Huyge, *Bulletin de Liaison du Groupe international d’Étude de la Céramique égyptienne* 20, 36–44.

⁴³ The name *Ir-t-n-3h(ty)* is not known to me from other sources. For its masculine equivalent *Ir(w)-n-3hty*, see Limme, *BSFE* 149, 26, n. 32 and Vandekerckhove and Müller-Wollermann, *Elkab* VI, 282.

which one of the boxes was fitted, also survived.

With the discovery of an intact burial, the mission was eager to investigate the second chamber ('chamber A') that was still completely closed up. At first sight, the situation was very similar to that in the other chamber: the disintegrated remains of a wooden coffin, and burial goods scattered around the room. Evidently, this tomb was also intact (fig. 24). The skeleton was placed in an identical position to the lady in the adjacent chamber. The remainder of the funerary assemblage was quite different from that of the other burial. In particular, the pottery was nearly all of a completely different type and must therefore have served a different purpose. Close to the feet of the skeleton, two dishes still contained the remains of nourishment: different types of cereal, a few chunks of bread or cake, and some currants. There was also a large cylindrical calcite vase, broken in pieces. It seems highly probable that at the time of the burial this vase was placed on top of the coffin lid and that it fell down and broke into pieces when the coffin collapsed. To the right of the skeleton, we found a copper hand basin containing a ewer with a long spout, also in copper, worthy of display in any museum (fig. 25). No inscriptions were found in this chamber, but it is reasonable to assume that this was the burial of Irtenakhty's husband. According to the anthropological analysis, the skeleton was that of a male person, aged about forty at the time of death.

The discovery of an unviolated Old Kingdom tomb has encouraged further research in this area. Shortly after the 1988 season, however, the federalisation of Belgium led to the withdrawal of financial support for the Committee for Belgian Excavations in Egypt, as was the case for most Belgian archaeological centres operating abroad. Substantial grants from the Flemish Fund for Scientific Research and the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels allowed the instigation of full-scale excavation seasons from February-March 1996.

The main purpose of the 1996 season was to continue the excavation in a sector that had already been partly cleared the year before. During the clearance of a funerary pit, about 2.50m deep (tomb BE 18), the entrance to a burial chamber obstructed by a large slab of stone was uncovered (fig. 26). This slab was still sealed with Nile mud. Once this blocking was removed, the interior of the tomb presented a rather confused appearance, despite being undisturbed since the burial. All of the funerary material was still present and in place. There were no less than four wooden coffins, partially devoured by vermin, but still containing the original mummies. In addition, two mummies were found without a coffin. One of the coffins even contained two mummies, separated from each other by a plank. The painted decoration of the coffins had largely disappeared and only a few traces of inscriptions were found. Some hieroglyphic signs were noted here and there but their context had been entirely lost. In any case, not enough of the inscriptions remained to allow for a reconstruction of the names and titles of the owners, which typically appear on coffins.

One of the mummies was provided with a bronze mirror (fig. 27), with a handle in the form of a blooming papyrus umbel, flanked by back to back falcons. This type of mirror with falcons occurs in Egypt and Nubia during the Middle Kingdom through until the New Kingdom. The stylistic features of our mirror, including the zigzag pattern on the stem of the papyrus umbel, are very closely paralleled by a specimen found in a tomb of the Eighteenth Dynasty at Semna (Sudan) and now kept in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.⁴⁴ The bronze

⁴⁴ 27.872. See *Egypt's Golden Age*, 185–6 [214] ('Early Dynasty 18'); *Soudan. Royaumes sur le Nil*, 83 [89] ('Moyen/Nouvel Empire'). Another very similar, but unprovenanced, mirror is kept in the *Musées Royaux d'Art et*

axe blade with openwork decoration that was found in the same tomb is also typical of the Eighteenth Dynasty (fig. 28). The object is badly corroded, but the openwork scene is clear, depicting a lion attacking a bull. Evidently this was not an axe intended for use in battle, but rather an object with an amuletic and apotropaic function.⁴⁵

Together with these two beautiful bronze artefacts, the assemblage in tomb BE 18 encompassed a large quantity of New Kingdom pottery, as well as funerary gifts, such as *dom*-palm fruits, knucklebones, gaming pieces, and a remarkable miniature ointment vase (figs. 29–30). This last piece was manufactured using a series of discs, of alternating types of wood, resulting in a lively light and dark colour scheme.

The mastaba on top of the rock necropolis

An enigmatic structure atop the rock necropolis was also the focus of work during the 1996 season. About ten years earlier, Dirk Huyge had undertaken a small survey of that part of the necropolis, and noted the remains of a building which he thought might have been an Old Kingdom mastaba. The position of this mastaba, at the summit of a 50m-high hill, is entirely unparalleled in the history of Egyptian funerary architecture.⁴⁶

This structure was built of mud brick (fig. 32) and covered an area of 20x10m; its original height could not be determined. The plan could be recovered (fig. 31), with the funerary pit and an L-shaped rock-cut staircase, which meet at a depth of about 10m. A series of shallow niches embellished the exterior of the mastaba. One of these recesses, found almost fully preserved, was much larger and deeper than the others, thus presumably intended for the deposition of funerary offerings. Vases and two pot-stands were found within the niche (fig. 33), undisturbed for over four thousand years. The architecture of this mastaba is similar to that of certain large Third Dynasty mastabas in the Memphite area, such as that of Hesyra at Saqqara.⁴⁷ The types of stone vessels and pottery, particularly the sherds from ‘Meidum bowls’, found in connection with the superstructure of the Elkab mastaba, also support a Third Dynasty date for its construction.⁴⁸

Thereafter, tons of debris filling the stairwell and funerary pit were removed; opposite the lowest step of the staircase appeared a small rock-cut chamber. The interior of the small chamber was stuffed with five coffins belonging to adults, and two child mummies without a coffin. Unfortunately, both coffins and mummies were in a poor state of preservation.

The painted decoration of the best preserved coffin (fig. 35) was partly covered with dirt, which turned out to be almost impossible to remove. Nevertheless, some parts of the painting were still intact and displayed the stylistic characteristics of painted coffins with

d’Histoire, Brussels: E.2249 (*Miroirs. Jeux et reflets depuis l’Antiquité*, 60, no. 9).

⁴⁵ For this type of bronze axe with openwork decoration, see Davies, *Tools and weapons* I, 52–4, pl. 28; Raven and Schneider, *OMRO* 76, 153 and 159, fig. 1.

⁴⁶ For preliminary reports on this project, see Limme, Hendrickx and Huyge, *EA* 11, 5–6; Limme, *BSFE* 149, 26–31; Huyge, *EA* 22, 29–30.

⁴⁷ Huyge, *EA* 22, 30.

⁴⁸ Huyge, *EA* 22, 30; for the ‘Meidum bowls’, see Op de Beeck, *CCÉ* 7, 249, fig. 3 [12–25].

yellow ground, produced at Thebes during the Twenty-first Dynasty.⁴⁹ Thus Elkab can now be added to the very small number of sites outside Thebes where private coffins of this type have been discovered.⁵⁰ Associated ceramics indicate that the mastaba was still in use in Graeco-Roman times;⁵¹ the fill of the funerary pit had clearly been turned over several times during ancient times.

It became evident that the funerary pit continued beyond the floor level of the small chamber with the coffins, which was not the original burial chamber of the mastaba, but rather a storage room intended for stone vessels. An enormous number of fragments, of various stone types, found in the vicinity of the superstructure and in the filling of the stairwell and the funerary shaft, provide evidence for this interpretation. The original burial chamber must have been situated at a greater depth, at the very bottom of the funerary shaft. Safety considerations and the lack of the necessary technical equipment precluded further investigation that season, with excavation ceasing at a depth of around 21m below the surface.

The acquisition of an electrical winch allowed work on the shaft to resume in 1999, with the hope of discovering an intact funerary chamber. At a depth of around 22m, however, two child skeletons were discovered in the shaft fill (fig. 34). These did not show any trace of mummification, and one was almost completely covered by a fragmentary coffin lid, probably of the New Kingdom or Third Intermediate Period.⁵² Two small blue faience vases were found nearby, datable to the same period (fig. 36). We do not completely understand the significance of this find, though it provided further evidence that the Old Kingdom mastaba had been reused several times. Its shaft and burial chamber even served as depositories for animal mummies and remains.⁵³ Several days later, we started to clear the true burial chamber, but it had been thoroughly plundered in antiquity. The room was of a modest size (3x1.7m), with rather roughly cut walls. Two skeletons were found within, completely disarticulated, and a few pieces of an Old Kingdom burial assemblage survived, including flint artefacts and two small calcite vases.

Though the excavation of the funerary pit and the burial chamber of the mastaba was a laborious, and at first sight disappointing, enterprise, the investigation was certainly worth the effort, particularly as it allowed our architect to fully document the architecture of this exceptional monument. The excavation also recovered a wealth of archaeological data relating to the different phases of use of the mastaba.

The Second Dynasty cemetery

In 1999, following completion of the excavation of the mastaba, the focus of archaeological

⁴⁹ For this kind of coffin, decorated with 'mythological' scenes painted on a yellow ground, see Niwinski, *21st Dynasty Coffins*; Taylor, *Egyptian Coffins*, 41–6; van Walsem, *BiOr* 50, 9–91; Gasse, *Sarcophages*; van Walsem, *Djedmonthuiufankb*.

⁵⁰ Amarna, Akhmim and Kom Ombo, according to Taylor, *Egyptian Coffins*, 46.

⁵¹ As shown, for example, by two short demotic ink inscriptions on pottery vessels, palaeographically datable to the 4th or 3rd century BC (according to Mark Depauw; personal communication).

⁵² Gautier, *Archaeofauna* 14, 166.

⁵³ Gautier, *Archaeofauna* 14, 166.

investigations at Elkab has shifted to the lower slope of the rock necropolis, where a number of small tombs dating back to the Early Dynastic period have been discovered.⁵⁴ This isolated cemetery was laid out around a large natural boulder (fig. 37). The tombs were lined with large undressed stone slabs, readily available in the immediate vicinity (fig. 38). In 1999 and 2000, more than thirty tombs of this type were excavated, all of them practically intact. The majority contained infant skeletons, with only five adult burials discovered. The corpses were buried in contracted position, with the hands mostly placed close to the face. Nearly all of the tombs contained one to three pieces of pottery and occasionally also a hard stone vessel. Some of the deceased bore necklaces composed of faience beads, others wore bone bracelets. Many of the corpses were covered one way or another, with one infant deposited in a small wooden box. Remarkably, the body had been deliberately dismembered prior to burial (fig. 40).

As already mentioned, the cemetery, which is possibly a family burial ground, dates back to the Early Dynastic Period. On the basis of the pottery, it is even possible to attribute a Second Dynasty date.⁵⁵ This is not without importance, as it provides a missing link between the well-known Naqada III cemetery within the town walls and the recently excavated Third Dynasty mastaba on top of the rock necropolis.

Epigraphic research

Research on the history of a site is not limited to pure excavation work. Egyptologists should also protect existing monuments from deterioration, to ensure their survival for future generations. A meticulous documentation complements the conservation of monuments. A first initiative in this sphere was undertaken over a century ago by the British archaeologist Joseph John Tylor, who published several facsimiles of monuments from Elkab, such as the rock-cut tombs of Pahery, Reneny and Sobeknakht, and the temple of Amenhotep III.⁵⁶ Subsequently, in 1971, the Belgian Egyptologist Philippe Derchain published two small temples situated in the Wadi Hilâl.⁵⁷ Between 1979 and 1987, as already mentioned, the petroglyphs and rock inscriptions were recorded by Dirk Huyge and Hans Vandekerckhove, respectively.

In the 1980s, Vivian Davies developed an interest in the decorated tombs of the rock necropolis, particularly those of the late Second Intermediate Period and early New Kingdom. The epigraphic research and preservation program of his team has led to numerous positive results, most notably in the tomb of Sobeknakht, a governor of Elkab during the Seventeenth Dynasty. Cleaning revealed a previously unknown biographical inscription, which sheds new light on the hostile relations between Egypt and the Kingdom of Kush during this period.⁵⁸

Naturally, the Belgian mission also wished to contribute to epigraphic research within the rock necropolis of Elkab. In recent years, extended attention was paid to the study of the tomb of Setau, which lies outside the chronological frame of Vivian Davies' investigations.

⁵⁴ Hendrickx, Huyge and Warmenbol, *Archéo-Nil* 12, 47–54. See also Newton, *Journal of Archaeological Science* 32, 355–67.

⁵⁵ Hendrickx, Huyge and Warmenbol, *Archéo-Nil* 12, 51–3.

⁵⁶ PM V, 177, 183, 185, 188.

⁵⁷ Derchain, *Elkab* I.

⁵⁸ Davies, *Sudan and Nubia* 7, 52–4.

The inscriptions in this tomb, not previously published *in extenso*,⁵⁹ provide evidence that Setau was a high priest⁶⁰ of the goddess Nekhbet during the Twentieth Dynasty, under the reigns of Ramses III to Ramses IX. He thus held this important position for around fifty years, from c.1175 to 1120 BC. During three seasons (two in 2000 and another at the end of 2005), a team of the Brussels Museum, with two more Egyptologists from the Université Libre de Bruxelles,⁶¹ have been working on meticulously copying, drawing (at a 1:1 scale) and photographing the scenes and inscriptions on the façade and interior walls of the tomb (figs. 39, 41–3).

Setau and his wife A'atmerut had many children, grandchildren and other relatives, who are all depicted inside the tomb, with their names and titles. This provides a treasure of genealogical and prosopographical information. But the tomb decoration contains more interesting elements. Ancient Egyptian art is typically anonymous, with a few exceptions: in general we do not know the identity of the artists and artisans that decorated tombs. In Elkab and at Hierakonpolis on the opposite bank of the Nile, several scribes or artists 'signed' their work in tombs by adding a short text with their names.⁶² This is particularly explicit in the tomb of Setau, where the scribe Merira, a man from Esna, depicted himself twice. The accompanying inscriptions state that he was proud to have been selected for providing the tomb of Setau with inscriptions (fig. 42).⁶³ Furthermore, he emphasizes that he did not merely act as a simple artisan, but that he performed his duties 'with his heart' and that no 'superior' gave him any additional instructions hereto. In other words, he conceived and organized his own work. Of course, this may sound somewhat exaggerated, as, except for a few details, the layout of the entire eastern wall of the tomb chapel of Setau is almost a perfect copy of the corresponding wall in Pahery's tomb, which is nearby and several centuries earlier in date.

Nonetheless, Merira was correct in two ways, as the tomb of Setau contains elements not found elsewhere. Firstly, the north wall of the tomb bears a long inscription containing a previously unknown and unpublished hymn to Nekhbet. The inscription has only been partially preserved, but the general nature of the text is clear. Secondly, although the west wall as well is rather damaged, there are still the remains of a scene depicting a barque bearing a shrine for the cult statue of Nekhbet (fig. 43). According to the accompanying inscription, this scene illustrates the statue of the goddess being taken by boat from the temple of Elkab to the royal residence of Per-Ramses, in the Delta, to attend the celebration of the king's *sed*-festival, in year 29 of the reign of Ramses III (around 1155 BC).⁶⁴ To our knowledge, this scene is absolutely unique.

⁵⁹ PM V, 181–2 (tomb no. 4); KRI V, 430, § 207; VI, 555–559. An extensive bibliography concerning the tomb of Setau will be published in Kruchten and Delvaux, *Elkab VIII* (forthcoming).

⁶⁰ *Hm-ntr tpy*.

⁶¹ Jean-Marie Kruchten and Luc Delvaux, who are preparing the final publication of the tomb.

⁶² Davies in Davies, *Colour and Painting in Ancient Egypt*, 119–20.

⁶³ Spiegelberg, *RT* 24, 185–6.

⁶⁴ Gardiner, *ZÄS* 48, 47–51.

Acknowledgements

This paper is essentially unchanged from that given as the *The Raymond and Beverly Sackler Foundation Distinguished Lecture in Egyptology*, at the British Museum on July 11, 2007, before the international colloquium *The 'Head of the South': current research in Upper Egypt, south of Thebes* (July 12–13, 2007). My deep appreciation goes to Vivian Davies for having invited me to participate in this interesting and prestigious meeting. I am also very grateful to Dirk Huyge and Ingrid De Greyt for their help with translating my text into English. Of course, responsibility for mistakes is my own. Some topics of the present paper, particularly those concerning the Old Kingdom remains at Elkab, were already dealt with, in a slightly different way, in Limme, *BSFE* 149, 14–31.

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Fig. 1: The eastern mudbrick enclosure wall (with ramp giving access to the top), seen from inside.
Photo: CFBE, Brussels.



Fig. 2: Somers Clarke's house. Photo: Y. Elpers.

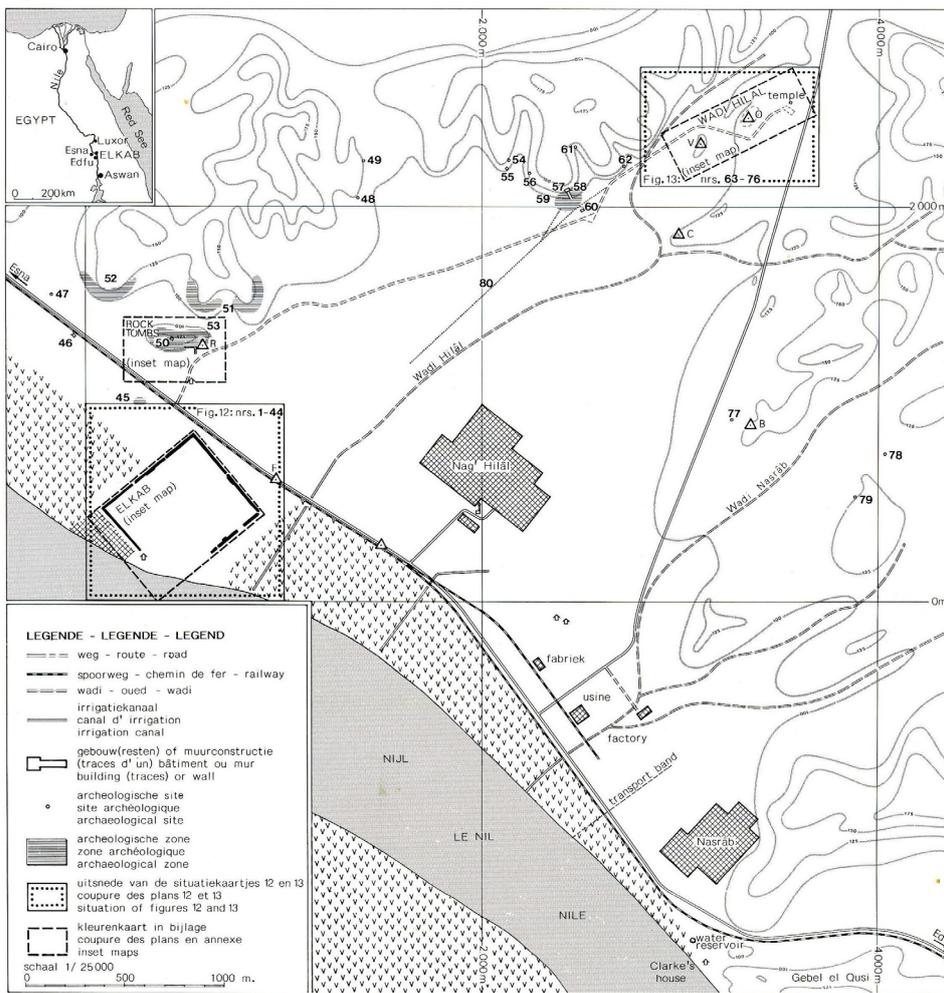


Fig. 3: Elkab and its surroundings (after F. Depuydt, *Elkab* IV, 28, fig. 11).

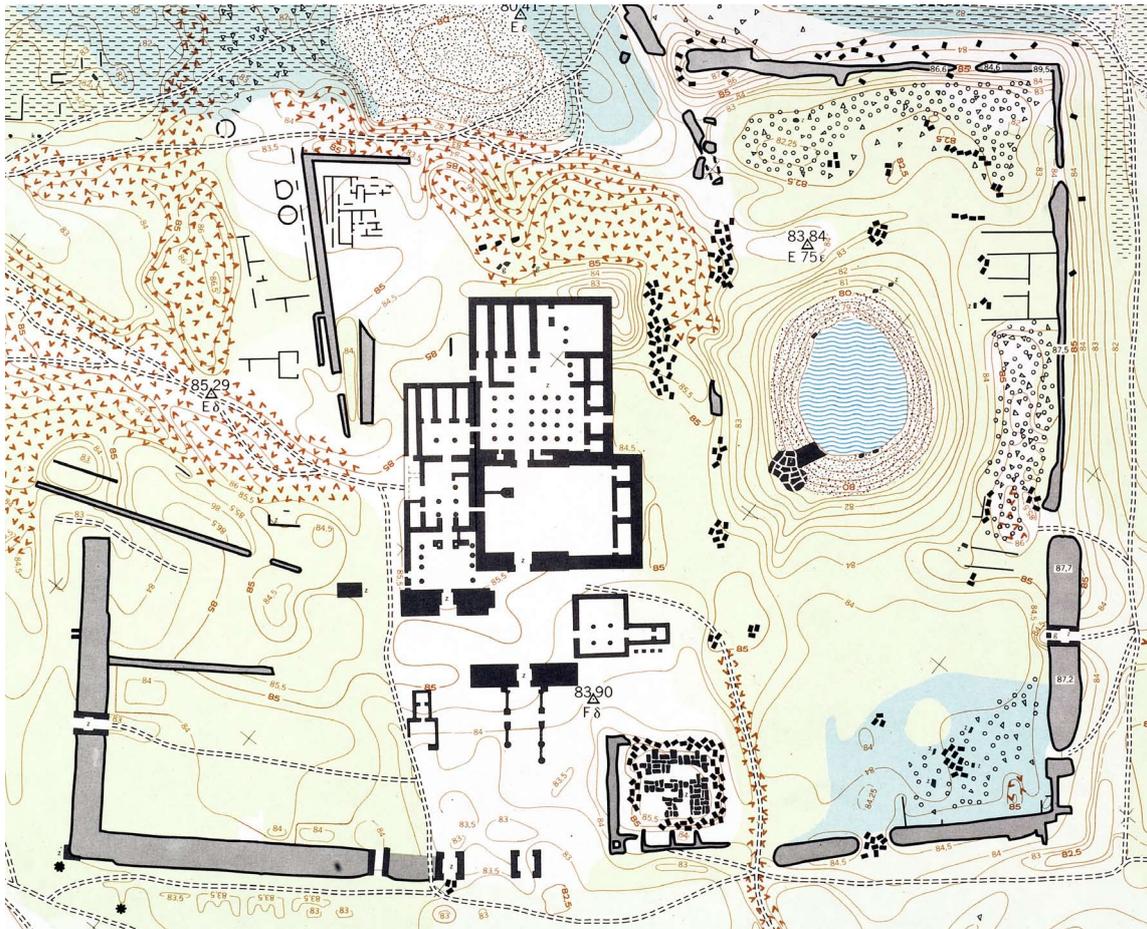


Fig. 4: Detail of the topographical map showing the central part (temple area) of the town (after F. Depuydt, *Elkab IV*, inset map).



Fig. 5: The present remains of the temples of Nekhbet and Thoth. Photo: CFBE, Brussels.

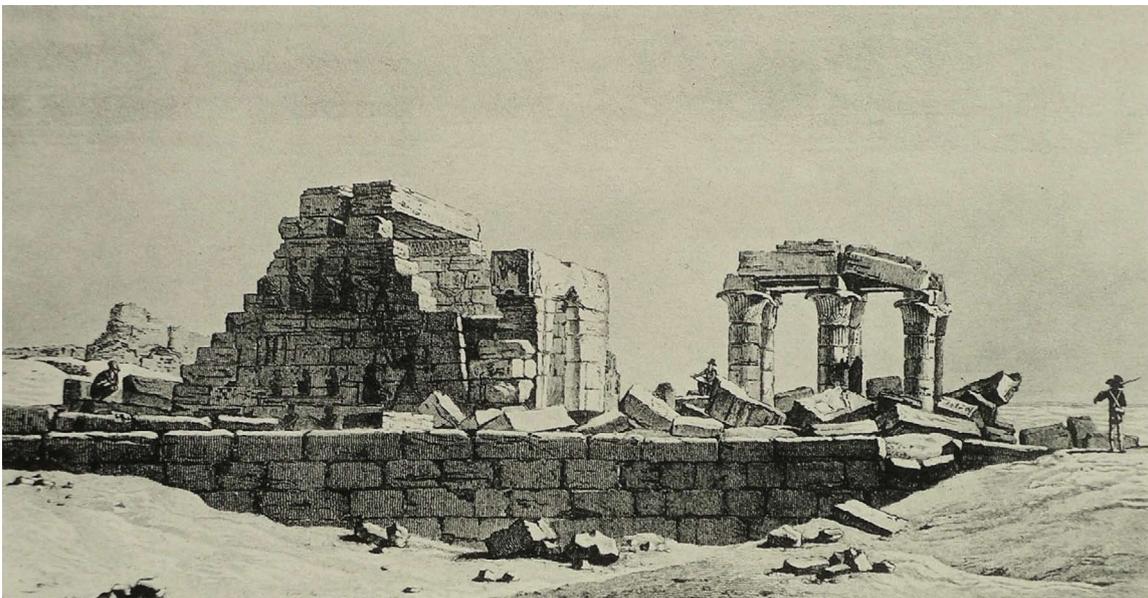


Fig. 6: The temples of Nekhbet and Thoth at the time of Bonaparte's expedition (*DE I*, pl. 66, fig.3).



Fig 7: Blocks from a barque shrine of Sobekhotep III, found in the great courtyard of the temple of Nekhbet. Photo: CFBE, Brussels.



Fig 8: Nagada III cemetery. Selection of calcite vessels. Photo: CFBE, Brussels.



Fig. 9: Part of the Greco-Roman village excavated between 1967 and 1982. Photo: CFBE, Brussels.



Fig. 10: The Wadi Hilâl, with one of the large sandstone hills, known as the ‘rocher des vautours’.
Photo: CFBE, Brussels.



Fig. 11: Part of the southern side of the rock necropolis. Photo: CFBE, Brussels.



Fig. 12: Rock inscription N 50 left by the ‘Counselor(?) (*d3šty*)’ Sawikai (possibly the same as the owner of tomb BE 1; see fig. 16) and his son, the ‘Chamberlain of the King (*hry-tp nsw*)’ Idi. See Vandekerckhove & Müller-Wollermann, *Elkab* VI, 62, pl. 70d. Photo: A. Mekhitarian.

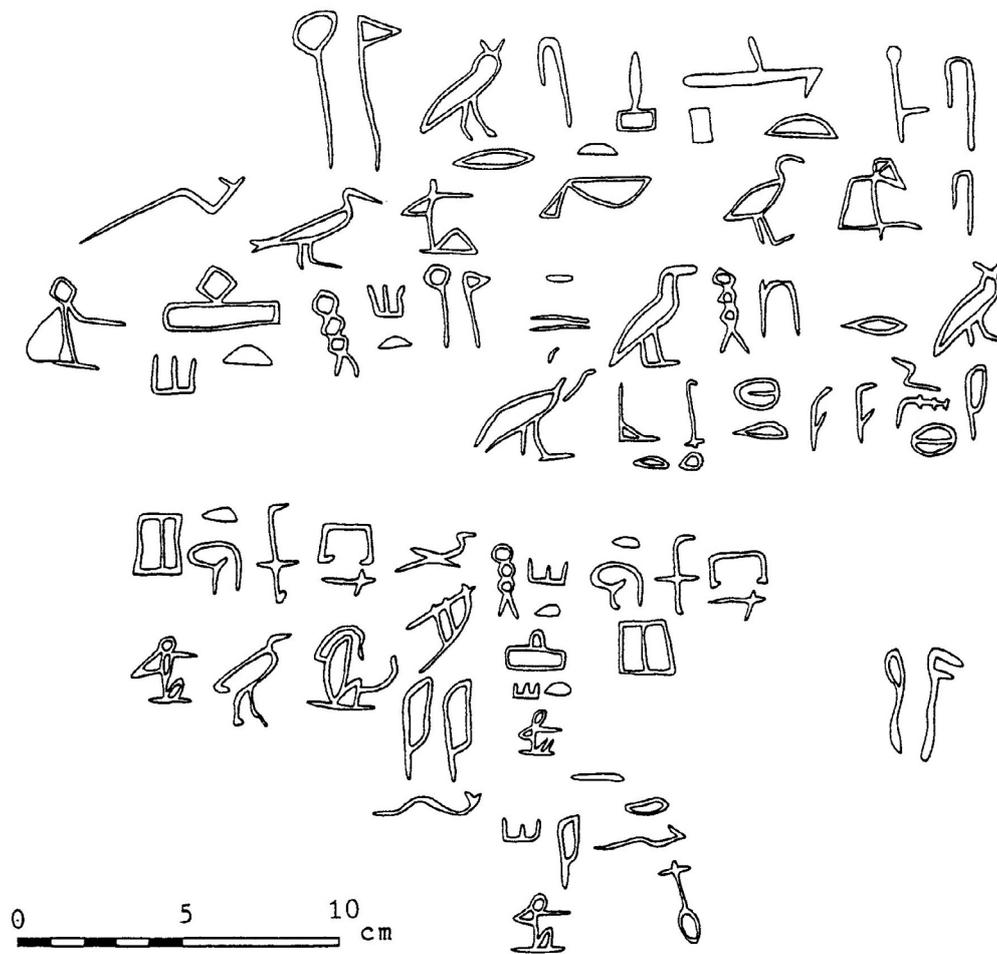


Fig. 13: Facsimile of rock inscription N 140 mentioning Sawikai, his son Ptahhotep, and his grandson Meniu. By H. Vandekerckhove (see Vandekerckhove & Müller-Wollermann, *Elkab* VI, 100–101, pl. 31).



Fig. 14: The eastern part of the rock necropolis seen from the south. The modern stairway and terrace (built in the early 1980s) give access to the New Kingdom tombs of Pahery, Setau, Ahmose-son-of-Ibana, and Reneny, which are now open to visitors. Photo: S. Hendrickx.



Fig. 15: Façade of the funerary chapel of Sawikai (tomb BE 1). The pit giving access to the burial chamber, located directly below the chapel, is visible in the foreground. Photo: CFBE, Brussels.



Fig. 16: Painted back wall of the chapel of Sawikai: deceased sitting in front of an offering table.
Photo: CFBE, Brussels.



Fig. 17: Fragmentary 'Maidum bowl' with the name of Idi, possibly a son of Sawikai (cf. our fig. 12).
Photo: CFBE, Brussels.



Fig. 18: Façade of the chapel of a Sixth Dynasty tomb (BE 7) discovered in November 1988.
Photo: CFBE, Brussels.



Fig. 19: Concentration of coarse pottery covering the burial pit in front of tomb BE 7.
Photo: CFBE, Brussels.

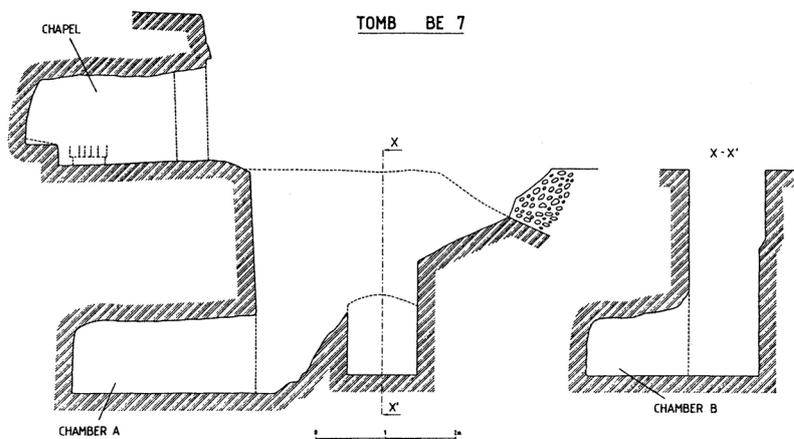


Fig. 20: Cross section of tomb BE 7. Drawing: D. Huyge.



Fig. 21: Tomb BE 7. The interior of chamber B before cleaning. Photo: CFBE, Brussels.

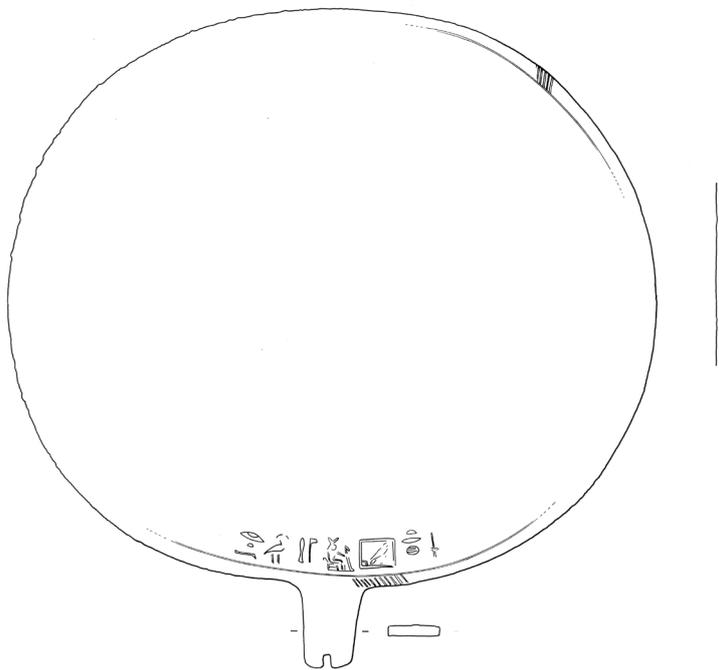


Fig. 22: Tomb BE 7, chamber B. Bronze mirror engraved with the name of the 'acquaintance of the king and priestess of Hathor' Irtenakhty. Drawing: F. Roloux.

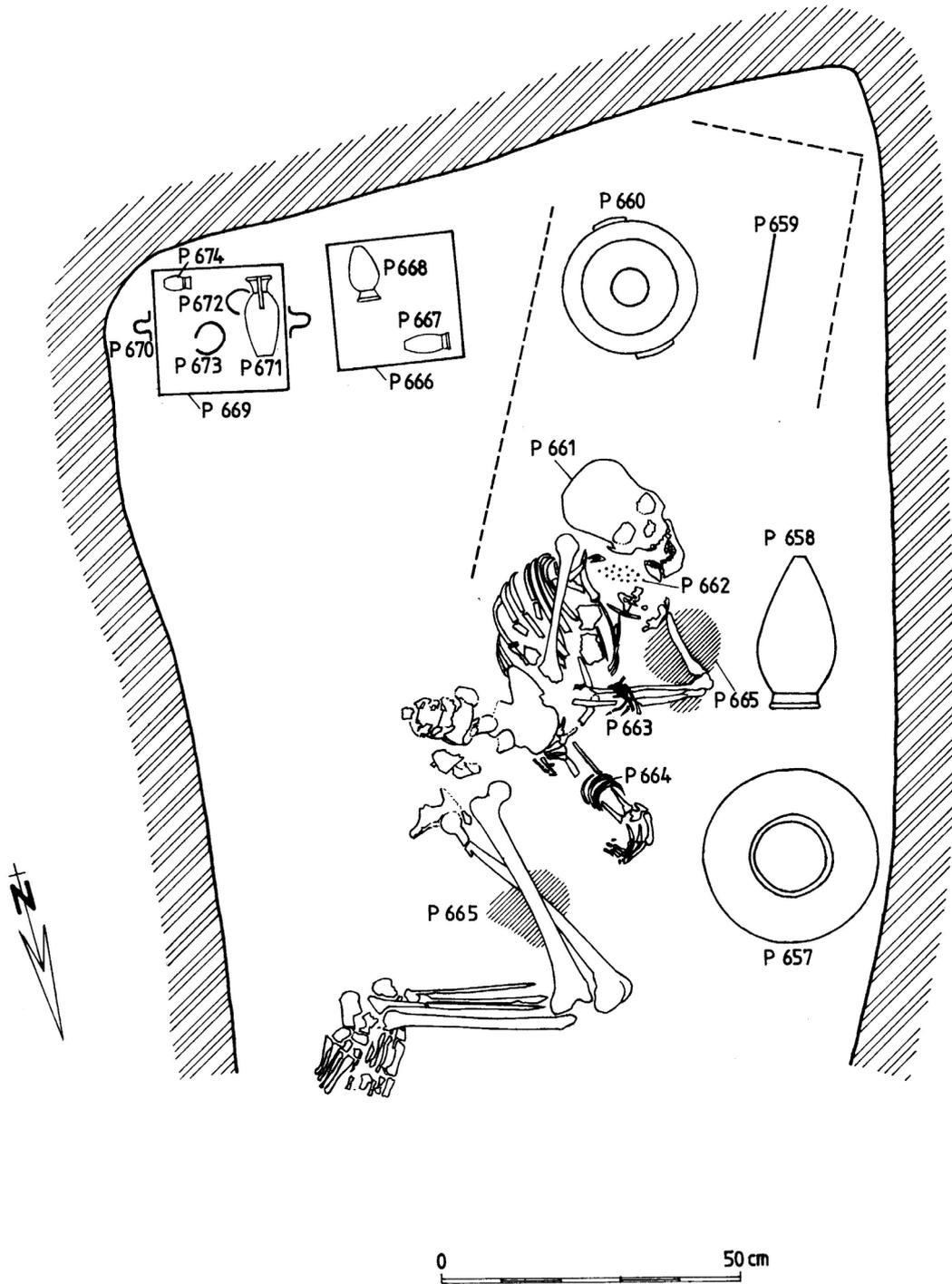


Fig. 23: Tomb BE 7, chamber B. Position of the skeleton and the funerary objects. Drawing: D. Huyge.



Fig. 24: Tomb BE 7, the interior of chamber A after cleaning. Photo: CFBE, Brussels.

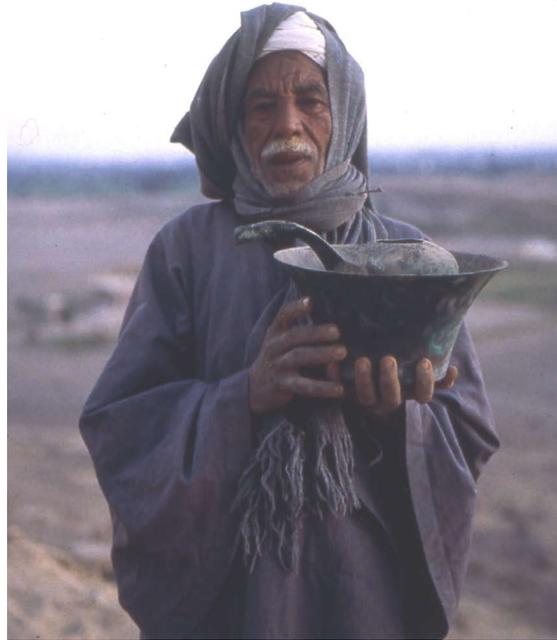


Fig. 25: Worker Hamid holding the copper hand basin with its companion ewer, found in chamber A of tomb BE 7. Photo: CFBE, Brussels



Fig. 26: Entrance to the burial chamber of an unviolated tomb (BE 18) obstructed by a large slab of stone. Photo: MRAH, Brussels.



Fig. 27: Tomb BE 18: Bronze mirror decorated with two falcons (Eighteenth Dynasty). Photo: R. Mommaerts.



Fig. 28: Tomb BE 18: Bronze axe blade with openwork decoration (Eighteenth Dynasty).
Photo: R. Mommaerts.



Fig. 29: Selection of the grave gifts discovered in the unviolated Eighteenth Dynasty tomb.
Photo: MRAH, Brussels.



Fig. 30: Ointment vase assembled from two varieties of wood, creating alternate bright and dark bands. Photo: R. Mommaerts.

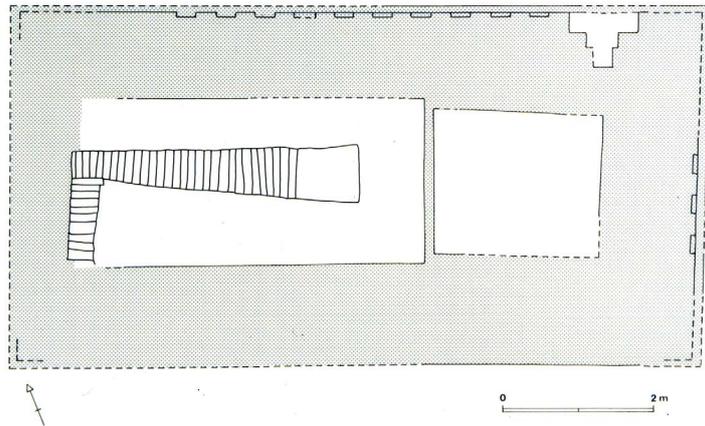


Fig. 31: Groundplan of the mastaba. Drawing by F. Roloux after an original plan by L. Moelants.

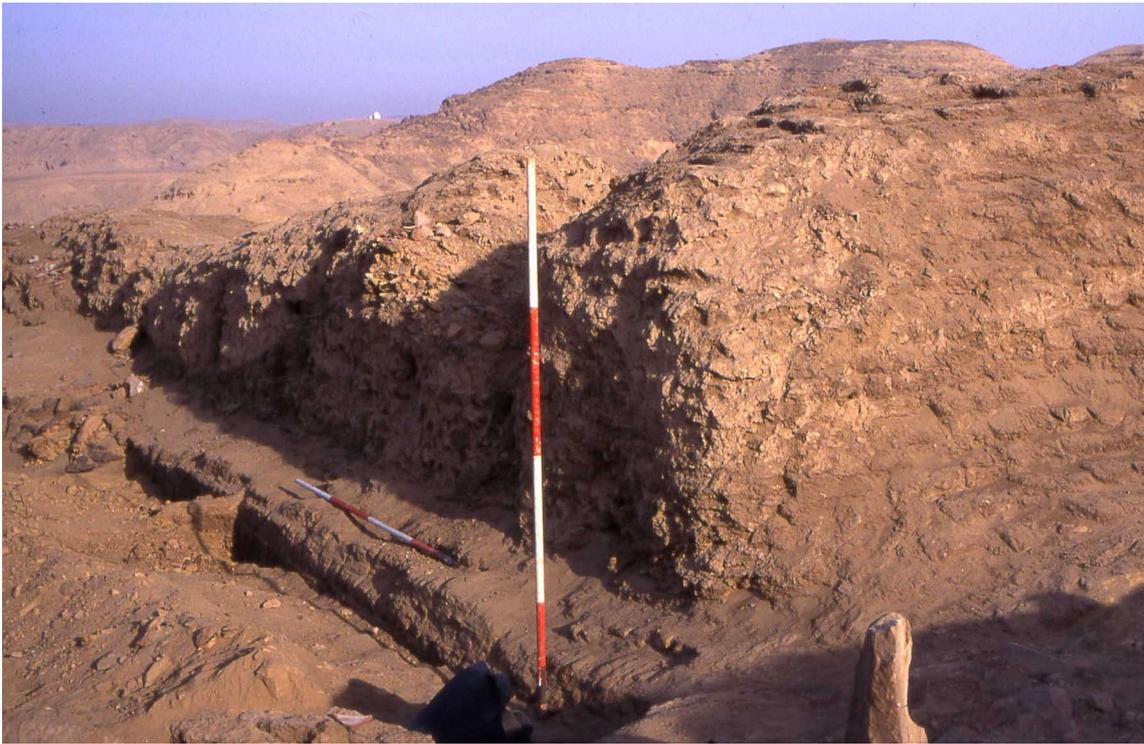


Fig. 32: The southeast corner of the mudbrick superstructure of the mastaba atop the rock necropolis. Photo: MRAH, Brussels.



Fig. 33: Offering niche near the northeast corner of the mastaba superstructure, with stands and jars. Photo: MRAH, Brussels.



Fig. 34: Two child skeletons discovered in the fill of the mastaba shaft. Photo: MRAH, Brussels.



Fig. 35: Detail of the outer decoration of a Twenty-first Dynasty coffin found in a small rock-cut chamber of the mastaba. Photo: MRAH, Brussels



Fig. 36: Two small blue faience vases found in the fill of the mastaba shaft. Photo: MRAH, Brussels.



Fig. 37: Central part of the Second Dynasty cemetery during excavation. Photo: MRAH, Brussels.



Fig. 38: Second Dynasty cemetery, tomb 12. The grave is lined with stone slabs. Photo: MRAH, Brussels.

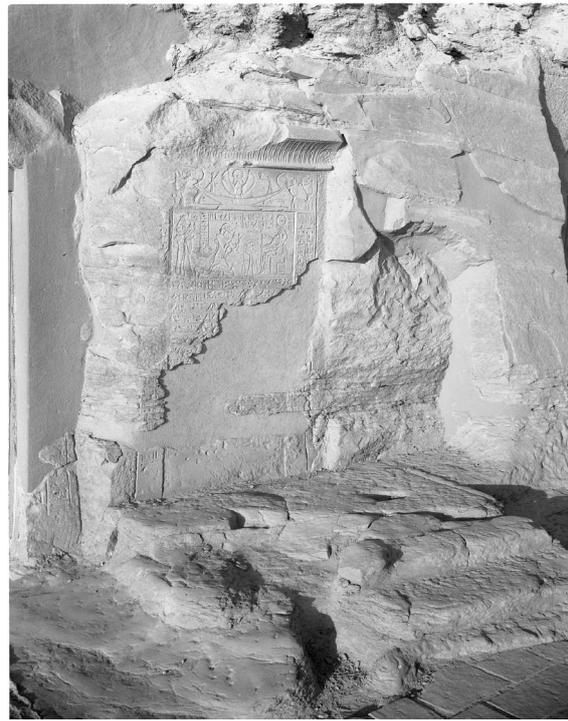


Fig. 39: Façade of the tomb of Setau. Stela next to the entrance. Photo: Y. Kobylecky.

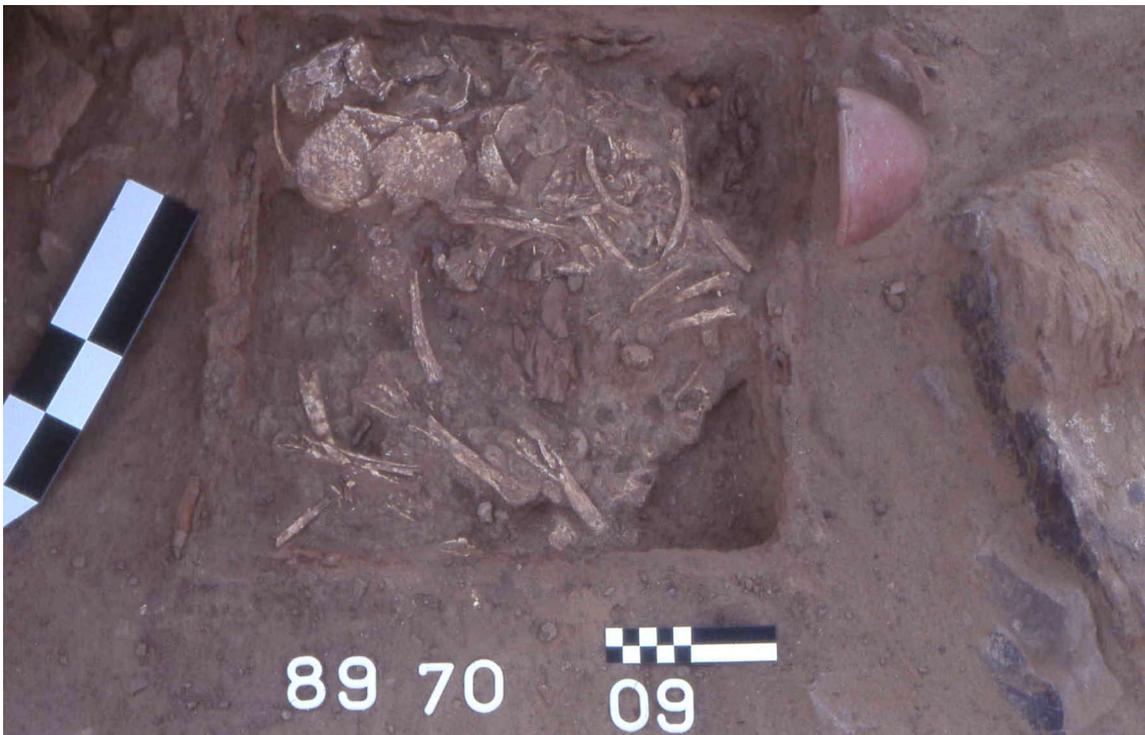


Fig. 40: Dismembered body of a child deposited in a small wooden box. Photo: MRAH, Brussels.



Fig. 41: Tomb of Setau, east wall: Setau's son-in-law, Merybast, consecrating offerings to the deceased and his wife A'tmerut. Photo: Y. Kobylecky.

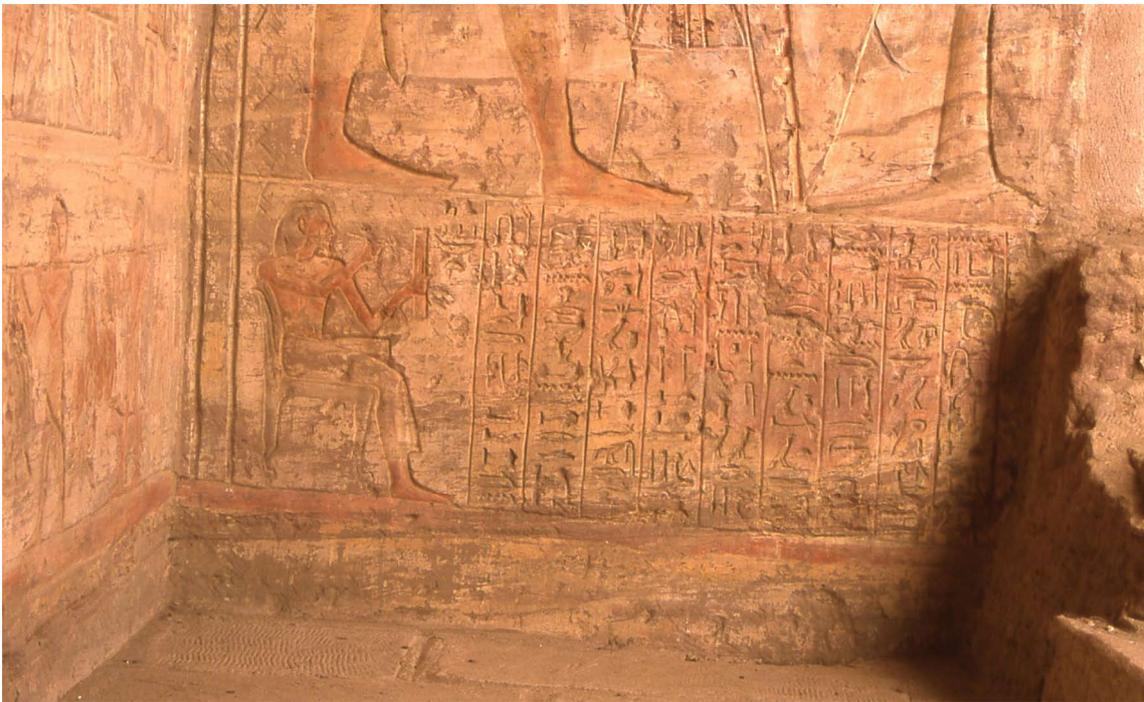


Fig. 42: Tomb of Setau, south wall: the scribe Merira and one of his 'signatures'. Photo: Y. Kobylecky.



Fig. 43: Tomb of Setau, west wall: part of the scene illustrating the journey of the cult statue of the goddess Nekhbet to Per-Ramses. Photo: Y. Kobylecky.



The rock inscriptions at el-Hôsh

Ilona Regulska

British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan 9 (2008): 51–67

The rock inscriptions at el-Hôsh

Ilona Regulski

The site of el-Hôsh is situated on the west bank of the Nile, about 30km south of Edfu and 6km north of Gebel Silsila (fig. 1–2). The area is rich in prehistoric rock drawings, pharaonic rock inscriptions and later graffiti. Only 2km to the south of el-Hôsh is the Wadi Shatt el-Rigâl, an area subjected to intensive scholarly attention due to its pharaonic rock inscriptions.¹ Given its close proximity to el-Hôsh, it is surprising that inscriptions at the latter site have received so little attention.

Only parts of the site have been referred to in publications. The main features at el-Hôsh, which attracted visitors as early as the second half of the 19th century, are the stone quarries in the northern part of the site.² Eisenlohr, for example, describes how he ended up at the stone quarries of el-Hôsh in 1885, although he had intended to visit the Wadi Shatt el-Rigal.³ Greek inscriptions connected to these quarries were subsequently published by Eisenlohr, many of which had already been noted by Harris in 1857.⁴ The most comprehensive study of the Greek inscriptions in the stone quarries comes from Legrain, who collected around hundred inscriptions in 1906.⁵

With regard to the pharaonic inscriptions, Petrie is the first to copy some of them when he visited the area in 1887:

After reaching the mouth of the Seba Rigaleh valley, a straggling succession of graffiti are to be seen on the sandstone rocks, which border the west side of the Nile for some three or four miles northwards.⁶

In 1938, Winkler visited the site and indicated that el-Hôsh and the area to the south was ‘an important site with regard to rock drawings and rock inscriptions’.⁷ Focusing on the rock

¹ Full bibliography up to 1937: PM V, 206–8. The most significant additions are Winlock, Reprint from *the American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* LVII.2, 137–61; Winlock, *Excavations at Deir el-Babri 1911–1913*, 87ff, 117ff, pl. 22; Winlock, *The Rise and Fall of the Middle Kingdom*, 58–75, pls. 9–12, 35–9; Červíček, *Felsbilder des Nord-Etbai, Oberägyptens und Unternubiens*, 25, fig. 6. The epigraphic work carried out by Caminos from 1955 until 1982 at Gebel Silsila and Wadi Shatt el-Rigal is presented in Caminos, *JEA* 41, 51–5; Caminos, *JEA* 69, 3–4; Caminos in Assmann, Burkhard & Davies, *Problems and Priorities in EA*, 57–67. The most recent work in the Wadi Shatt el-Rigal has been carried out by Osing but this has not yet been published.

² Baedeker, *Egypt and the Sudan*, 359; Winlock, Reprint from *the American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* LVII, 2 (1940), 158.

³ Eisenlohr, *ZÄS* 23, 56.

⁴ See Legrain, *PSBA* 28, 17–26.

⁵ Legrain, *PSBA* 28, 17–26, pls. 1–3.

⁶ Petrie, *A Season in Egypt*, 15.

⁷ Winkler, *Rock Drawings of Southern Upper Egypt* I, 9; see especially the map in his second volume; *Rock*

inscriptions, he published only one hieroglyphic inscription, which obviously escaped Petrie's attention (our ATQQ-T32).⁸

My first acquaintance with the site was through the prehistoric rock drawings. In 1998, I participated in the Belgian Archaeological Mission to el-Hôsh under the direction of Dr. Dirk Huyge of the Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels.⁹ This expedition yielded interesting results since el-Hôsh contains some of the oldest rock drawings in the Nile valley. The pharaonic inscriptions were not studied at this time, as the project focused on prehistoric rock art and salvage excavation. Since the entire area is threatened by various construction projects and quarrying activities, it was recognised that a record of the pharaonic rock inscriptions and graffiti of pharaonic date would also be necessary. In March 2006, a preliminary survey including recording and photography of the rock inscriptions at el-Hôsh was therefore started by the author, under the auspices of the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo.¹⁰ A complete understanding of the texts within their geographic context requires more detailed research, and more seasons of fieldwork. Nevertheless, the preliminary surveys have already yielded interesting results, and a better estimation of the potential of the site for future work. In what follows, I will present some of the clearest examples by way of introducing the pharaonic aspect of the site. A further season will take place during 2008.

Surveying the el-Hôsh area led to the discovery of 169 inscriptions at five different locations (from north to south, see fig. 2):

- stone quarries near the village of el-Hôsh: 9 inscriptions
- Gebelet Yussef (GYU): 6 inscriptions
- Abu Tanqura Bahari (ATB): 92 inscriptions
- Abu Tanqura Qebli (ATQ): 31 inscriptions
- Abu Tanqura Qebli Qebli (ATQQ): 31 inscriptions

All of these areas were surveyed, and the rock inscriptions were documented by photography and, in some cases, by epigraphic recording on acetate sheets. In addition, consideration was given to pottery fragments, which could be found in great quantities at some of the sites.

Most of the inscriptions feature strings of titles followed by a personal name; longer texts are almost completely absent. Many of the inscriptions cannot yet be properly read and consequently, their date remains to be more accurately determined. However, the minority of well datable inscriptions encompass a broad chronological range, from the Early Dynastic period through until the Byzantine era. The earliest inscription can be dated to the end of the First Dynasty, on the basis of palaeography and the existence of an exact parallel from

Drawings of Southern Upper Egypt II.

⁸ Winkler, *Rock Drawings of Southern Upper Egypt II*, pl. 9 [1].

⁹ Huyge, *EA* 13, 34–6; Huyge, *ASAE* 76, 45–52; Huyge, *Antiquity* 75, 68–72; Huyge, *EA* 20, 34–5.

¹⁰ The fieldwork at el-Hôsh took place from March 4–20, 2006. The Supreme Council of Antiquities of Egypt was represented by Mr. Hossam el-Dien Mostafa Soghier of the Antiquities Inspectorate at Kom Ombo (Upper Egypt). This expedition was followed by a short second visit in the beginning of November 2007 by the author in the company of Willy Clarysse (KU Leuven) and Annie Cottry (photographer).

another well-dated context.¹¹ The most recent text has been dated to the 6th or 7th century AD by Willy Clarysse. All major periods in between are represented, though Middle Kingdom inscriptions are most frequent.

A mixture of hieroglyphic and hieratic scripts were employed, sometimes even in the same inscription. In addition, there appears to be a correlation between the age of an inscription, its size, and the writing technique used. Texts from the Old, Middle, and New Kingdom generally show large signs, hammered out in the rock whereas most of the later ones are faintly engraved or carved. The latter is particularly true for the demotic inscriptions, hampering their reading and interpretation.

Gebelet Yussef (GYU)

On the east side of an isolated boulder, facing the Nile, six pharaonic rock inscriptions were found. The best preserved and longest inscription mentions the scribe Pashed (GYU-T1, fig. 4), and can be dated to the late Nineteenth Dynasty on onomastic evidence.¹² The other inscriptions, which appear to be associated with the previous one, probably follow a similar date, though their reading is still doubtful.

Abu Tanqura Bahari (ATB)

A total of 92 inscriptions have been identified on Abu Tanqura Bahari, which is located to the north of the Wadi Abu Tanqura.¹³ The majority (83 out of 92) appear on two large boulders on the northeast side of the site (fig. 5). The north sides of both boulders are completely covered by inscriptions, often superimposed on each other as well as upon older rock drawings.

The easternmost boulder contains 63 inscriptions. Only half of them can be dated more precisely to a period between the end of the Old Kingdom and the early New Kingdom on the basis of onomastic and/or palaeographic evidence. The appearance of well-known names such as *Rn-snb* (ATB-Teb19-20), *Hk3-ib* (ATB-Teb 1,¹⁴ ATB-Teb40, ATB-Teb50-51), *Sbk-Htp* (ATB-Teb23), and *Sbk-m-h3.t* (ATB-Teb5) was already noticed by Petrie¹⁵ and reflects the concentration of Middle Kingdom material.¹⁶ Most of the individuals are not accompanied by a title, but those who are mostly appear to be scribes. In addition to hieroglyphic and hieratic inscriptions, a few demotic and Greek texts are attested as well.

The westernmost boulder bears fifteen inscriptions, but most of them are difficult to

¹¹ Regulski, *JEA* 93, 254–8.

¹² Ranke, *PN I*, 119.13.

¹³ Called Khor Tangura by the few people who live in the area; Baedeker, *Egypt and the Sudan*, 359.

¹⁴ The stroke behind the *ib*-sign could be interpreted as an ʿ3-sign, which would point to a date in the Middle Kingdom; Ranke, *PN I*, 256 (4).

¹⁵ A few of the most readable ones have been copied by Petrie, *A Season in Egypt*, pl. 16 (nos. 534–5, 538, 540–1, 543, 551–2, 554–5).

¹⁶ Ranke, *PN I*, 222.26; 256.3; 259.12; 304.4 respectively.

date. Apart from one drawing of a Coptic cross, only pharaonic inscriptions appear on this boulder.

A further fourteen isolated inscriptions have been catalogued, scattered around ATB. One panel shows large, beautifully carved, hieroglyphs mentioning the *rh-nswt imy-r3 kd Im3-mdhw nb im3h.w*, ‘royal acquaintance, overseer of builders, Ima-Medehu,¹⁷ possessor of reverence’ (ATB-T1) and the *rh-nswt (m3^c mry=f) imy-r3 mš^c Sbk-htp nb im3h.w*, ‘royal acquaintance, overseer of troops, Sobekhotep, possessor of reverence’ (ATB-T2, see fig. 6). Both show a very similar palaeography suggesting that they are contemporary and even written by the same scribe. On the basis of palaeographical and onomastic evidence, they can be dated to the 12th dynasty:

1. The addition of *m3^c mry=f*, as can be seen in the second inscription (fig. 6), occurs in autobiographical contexts of the early Middle Kingdom as a qualification to *rh-nswt*.¹⁸
2. The unique hieroglyph followed by three dots in the personal name *Im3-mdhw* can be identified as sign S10 from the Gardiner list, probably representing a fillet.¹⁹ The el-Hôsh version shows a more cursive writing style, which is to be expected since we are dealing with a rock inscription. Its function as an ideogram is confirmed by the phonetic spelling on an offering table kept at Kyoto and published by Petrie.²⁰ The Kyoto offering table can be dated to the reign of Amenemhat III.²¹ The name recurs on an offering table from Abydos, dated to the late Twelfth Dynasty (probably reign of Senwosret III).²²
3. A *Sbk-htp* as holder of the title *imy-r3 mš^c* is known from a papyrus dated to the Twelfth Dynasty (reign of Senwosret III or Amenemhat III).²³
4. The spelling of *imy-r3* with the owl-sign over *ir* before the mouth sign recalls older writings and/or spellings in hieratic script.²⁴

This inscription shows that the site was visited by important people. The overseer of the army Sobekhotep was probably a national general rather than a local leader, as the prefix *rh-nswt* indicates.²⁵

¹⁷ I am grateful to Marcel Marée for the help in reading this name and for drawing my attention to two parallels mentioned further down in the main text.

¹⁸ Quirke, in Der Manuelian and Freed (eds.), *Studies Simpson*, 672.

¹⁹ ‘Band of cloth as fillet’; Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 505.

²⁰ Petrie, *Tombs of the Courtiers*, 10, pls. 23 [2], 25 [bottom].

²¹ Marcel Marée, personal communication.

²² Egyptian Museum CG 23045; Kamal, *Tables d’Offrandes*, 39 [23045(L)]; Ranke, *PN I*, 25 (13).

²³ Papyrus Berlin 10264E; *Ägyptische Handschriften I*, 342; Chevereau, *RdE* 42, 53 [73]; Stefanovic, *The Holders of Regular Military Titles*, 196 [1046].

²⁴ Jones, *An Index of Ancient Egyptian Titles I*, 258 [935]. The Middle Kingdom examples listed by Ward, *Index*, 51 (397), for example, are all written with the tongue-sign (F20).

²⁵ Ward, *Index*, 29 (205); Jones, *An Index of Ancient Egyptian Titles I*, 142 [551]; Quirke, *Titles and Bureaux*, 60.

Abu Tanqura Qebli (ATQ)

The east side of Abu Tanqura Qebli is extremely steep and numerous rock drawings and inscriptions are located on a high level, about 8m above present ground level (fig. 7). The reachable areas yielded 31 inscriptions, of all periods.

Among others, Petrie noted two instances of a *šhm-ꜥ šḥd-ib(?)* (probably our ATQ-T12, fig. 3, and ATQ-T13).²⁶ The reading of the personal name is not certain and the *ib*-sign is absent in ATQ-T13. The title *šhm-ꜥ* is considered to be an innovation of the Thirteenth Dynasty by Quirke.²⁷ Parallels confirm such a date: a spelling similar to the el-Hôsh panel, without the seated man and with the owl-sign, is attested on a stela from Buhen.²⁸ On the basis of iconography and various peculiarities of epigraphy this stela has been dated to the late Thirteenth Dynasty. A similar writing of the title, although with the seated man, is furthermore attested in an inscription in the Wadi Shatt el-Rigal, which Winlock dated to 'between the Thirteenth and the Eighteenth dynasties'.²⁹ The writing of the title with only the *šhm*-sceptre and the arm is more common.³⁰ One example of the latter spelling is attested in P.Boulaq 18,³¹ which is also dated to the Thirteenth Dynasty.³² The individuals bearing the title *šhm-ꜥ* in the above mentioned parallels have, however, different names. In addition, *šḥd-ib* is not listed as such by Ranke. Nevertheless, the fact that all parallels for the title come from more or less the same time allows us to date the inscription to the Thirteenth Dynasty.

The longest inscription at Abu Tanqura Qebli (ATQ-T15, fig. 8) mentions the commander of hosts/troops,³³ Nes-Amon.³⁴ The name is common in the New Kingdom and the Late Period.³⁵ The best parallel for the ligature *pr.w ʿ3 ʿnh wd3 snb*, at the beginning of the third line, comes from the reign of Merneptah (P. Sallier I) although the palaeography is closer to the examples from the reign of Ramses IV.³⁶ Only the *ś*-sign, which is clearly apparent in the el-Hôsh inscription, is absent from the latter. Since no royal name is following, this entry can be considered a reference to the palace.

Certainly one of the most important persons attested at el-Hôsh is the *ḥ3.ty-ꜥ n Nḥn*

²⁶ Petrie, *A Season in Egypt*, pl. 16 (no.503).

²⁷ Quirke, *The Administration of Egypt in the Late Middle Kingdom*, 6, n.6, see also Berlev, *Social Relations*, 163–5.

²⁸ Leipzig 3616, see Smith, *The Fortress of Buhen* II, 49. This man is also the owner of a statuette in Khartoum (Sudan National Museum 31) where the same title, but written without the owl-sign, is mentioned (Smith, *The Fortress of Buhen*, II, 41).

²⁹ Although it is not clear on what basis; Winlock, *The Rise and Fall of the Middle Kingdom*, 72, pl. 39 [III]. He translated the title as 'officer'.

³⁰ von Bergmann, *RT* 12, 14; Kminek-Szedlo, *Catalogo di Antichita Egizie*, 180; *Ägyptische Inschriften aus den Königlichen Museen zu Berlin* I, 151, 202; Simpson, *The Terrace of the Great God*, pl. 83 (67.2).

³¹ Scharff, *ZÄS* 57: 19**, xxxix, 12.

³² Quirke, *The Administration of Egypt in the Late Middle Kingdom*, 11–12 for a more detailed discussion. The personal name *ʿkw* confirms this date. The date of the other parallels is unclear.

³³ Ward, *Index*, 118 (991); al-Ayedi, *Index*, 378.

³⁴ Petrie, *A Season in Egypt*, pl. 16 (no.507).

³⁵ Ranke, *PN* I, 173 (19).

³⁶ Möller, *Hieratische Paläographie* II, 70 (LXVI).

Hr-mny, 'The mayor of Nekhen (Hierakonpolis), Hormeni' (ATQ-T26, fig. 9).³⁷ Hormeni is well known at Hierakonpolis.³⁸ The spelling of his name in his tomb also explains the vertical sign before the seated man in the el-Hôsh inscription as a mooring post (sign P11).³⁹

Further to the south, even more clusters of inscriptions can be spotted on an extremely high level, but unfortunately, they could not (yet) be reached. Their position indicates that large quantities of stone at the lower levels must have been quarried away after the inscriptions were applied and that the alluvial plain must have been extremely small here.

Abu Tanqura Qebli Qebli (ATQQ)

Examination of the east side of Abu Tanqura Qebli Qebli has yielded 31 inscriptions. In particular, there is a density of Greek and Coptic texts on the southeastern side of ATQQ. The depiction of an ithyphallic Min figure inside a shrine, located at the north-east side of a small wadi (fig. 10), is evidently earlier in date. The Middle and New Kingdoms are again well represented with names such as *ꜥnh-ib* (ATQQ-T15), *Rs-snb(.w)* (ATQQ-T7-8) and *Imn-nht* (ATQQ-T3). In 1936, Winkler published a remarkable scene showing a man kneeling in front of a shrine, which contains an image of *Hr Bhdjtj*, 'Horus of Edfu' (ATQQ-T32).⁴⁰ We relocated it in November 2007 on the top of ATQQ (fig. 12). The god's depiction does double duty as the hieroglyph that spells his name, and unusually the falcon is here crowned with a sun-disc and curled ram horns. Behind the kneeling man is a vertical column identifying him as *hw Msh*, 'the shepherd/warrior Mesch'.⁴¹ The name *Msh* 'crocodile' is followed by a determinative of a crocodile, apparently without feet. One attestation, from the Middle Kingdom, is listed by Ranke, but our composition could be later.⁴² To the right are some traces of hammering but it is not clear whether these should be associated with the text.

The earliest attestation of writing at the site was found opposite Abu Tanqura Qebli, on the other side of the road: a First Dynasty inscription, mentioned above (ATQQ-T21).⁴³

The stone quarries

Near the village of el-Hôsh, to the north of the concession area and beside the Gebel Abu Shega, are a number of roofless quarries (fig. 11). Four quarries were distinguished by Legrain, in which he recorded nearly one hundred Greek inscriptions, many of which had been noted by Harris in 1857.⁴⁴ Legrain numbered the quarries, starting from the North, by the letters

³⁷ For the title, see el-Ayedi, *Index*, 323.1091.

³⁸ Friedman, in *Colour and Painting in Ancient Egypt*, 110. See Ranke, *PN I*, 248.21 for the name.

³⁹ Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 499.

⁴⁰ Winkler, *Rock Drawings of Southern Upper Egypt*, I, 9, pl. IX.1. He also mentions a disturbed tomb on top of the hill.

⁴¹ *Wb III*, 49 [I-II] for the title. The reading was inspired by Marcel Marée.

⁴² Ranke, *PN I*, 164.14.

⁴³ Regulski, *JEA* 93, 254–8.

⁴⁴ Legrain, *PSBA* 28: 17–26.

ABCD. Being situated close to the river, carving the rock surface was an easy matter, further helped by the quality of the stone. Today, this clear distinction between the individual quarries is less clearly defined, due to ongoing modern quarrying.

Masons' marks and Greek inscriptions attest to the quarrying of sandstone blocks here, for a temple of Apollo in year 11 year of Antoninus Pius (AD 149).⁴⁵ Petrie identified the temple of Apollo (or Horus) as that at Esna, as work was executed there under Antoninus.⁴⁶ However, it may well have been a reference to the temple of Edfu where Horus is the main god and which is closer to the actual site. Most of the Greek inscriptions have disappeared during the last century, with only a small number being relocated during our surveys. For example, Petrie mentions the inscriptions of the engineer Apollonios, and the chief engineer Apollos Petesos (Petrie's nos. 575–6), who were apparently the leading persons. One of the workers is eager to record his feat in extracting stones of eleven cubits for the pylon of this temple (Petrie no. 571). Three of these inscriptions (nos. 570, 572, 578) also mention the mooring place where vessels came to be loaded with blocks; and we read of the Nile rising to the mooring place or quay on the 25th day of the month Mesore, i.e. July 8, 149 AD. Although these inscriptions have not (yet?) been relocated, the existence of a mooring place in this area is suggested by some blocks, which are now below the water level but which seem to be ancient (fig. 13). On the basis of these Greek inscriptions, the stone quarries have always been dated to the Graeco-Roman period. However, a few much damaged and faint hieroglyphic inscriptions were found in association with the quarries (fig. 14). They are very difficult to read and some of them seem to be deliberately destroyed, but they suggest that the quarries could have been exploited prior to the Graeco-Roman period.⁴⁷

Quarry marks are also found alongside the inscriptions upon the unworked walls. In some cases, these marks are carefully carved in bas-relief, occasionally with a double outline. They could be the insignia of the quarry, to indicate its name or that of its owner. The most beautiful example (fig. 15) is found in the centre of the west wall in the northernmost quarry (Legrain's quarry A). The mark is composed of two signs only: a harpoon and a circle crossed by a horizontal bar.

Conclusion

The site of el-Hosh was clearly being visited throughout the pharaonic period, with evidence of more activity in the Middle Kingdom and slightly before and after, and again in the Graeco-Roman period. A variety of scripts are attested, with hieroglyphic, hieratic, demotic, and Greek texts appearing next to each other, whether hammered out or engraved.

Most inscriptions appear on the east sides of the sites, close to the Nile, and many actually face the river. In contrast, many surfaces suitable for carving further into the desert

⁴⁵ Eisenlohr, *ZÄS* 23: 56; Petrie, *A Season in Egypt*, 16; Baedeker, *Egypt and the Sudan*, 359.

⁴⁶ Petrie, *A Season in Egypt*, 16.

⁴⁷ As perhaps already suggested by Winlock, *Reprint from the American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* LVII, 2 (1940), 158: 'If visitors to the Shatt el-Rigal in the Intermediate Period were not numerous, there were even less in the eighteenth Dynasty, in spite of the fact that sandstone quarries were then extremely active only a short way up the river at Gebel Silsila and down the river at el-Hosh'.

do not feature any inscriptions. The location of the inscriptions is thus related to the river. This may explain the low number of inscriptions at Gebelet Yussef, being further from the Nile than the other localities.

The orientation towards the river is significant. Unlike many other rock art sites, the site of el-Hôsh is not a passageway on a desert route. Of course, the landscape has changed considerably but it is likely that these rock formations were close to the water in antiquity, and perhaps even closer than today. The fact that many rock inscriptions are positioned on a very high level suggests that the part below it was quarried. At most localities, it must have been easy to reach the river banks (fig.13).

A more extensive investigation of the quarries could give us additional information about their date, and therefore the motive why people visited el-Hôsh. Were these quarries the main reason for a visit to el-Hôsh? Or was el-Hôsh just a temporary resting place for expedition members on their way to more southern destinations? The extremely narrow alluvial plain and the proximity of high quality rock formations are perfect conditions for both usages.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Willy Clarysse (University of Leuven) for helping me with the demotic and Greek inscriptions, and Marcel Marée (British Museum) for his useful comments on the content of the present article.

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Fig. 1: General view of el-Hôsh.

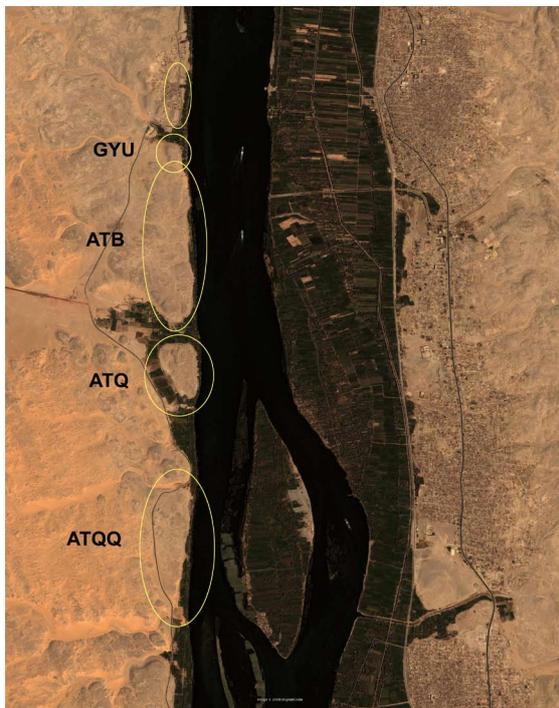


Fig. 2: Google Earth satellite image, indicating the concession area.



Fig. 3: Inscription ATQ-T12, mentioning a *sh̄m*^c *sh̄d-ib* (?).



Fig. 4: Inscription GYU-T1, mentioning the scribe Pashed.



Fig. 5: General view towards the two boulders at Abu Tanqura Bahari.



Fig.6: Inscription ATB-T2, mentioning the 'royal acquaintance and overseer of troops, Sobekhotep, possessor of reverence'.



Fig. 7: View from Abu Tanqura Qebli.



Fig. 8: Inscription ATQ-T15, mentioning the commander of hosts/troops, Nes-Amon.



Fig. 9: Inscription ATQ-T26, of the 'mayor of Nekhen, Hormeni'.



Fig. 10: Ithyphallic Min-figure inside a shrine at Abu Tanqura Qebli Qebli.



Fig. 11: Roofless stone quarries near the village of el-Hôsh.



Fig. 12: Inscription ATQQ-T32, showing a man kneeling in front of a shrine, which contains an image of Horus of Edfu.



Fig. 13: View towards a possible ancient harbour.



Fig. 14: Damaged hieroglyphic inscriptions near the quarries.



Fig. 15: Quarry mark in the northernmost quarry.



Fig. 16: General view from the site towards the Nile.