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TWO NEW TOMBS IN THE FORECOURT OF M.I.D.A.N.05 AT DRA ABU EL-NAGA. PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE 2018 SEASON

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Abstract

This paper presents the preliminary report of the 2018 season of the expedition of the University of Pisa in the area of tomb M.I.D.A.N.05, at Dra Abu el-Naga (Theban Necropolis). The work focused on the archaeological investigation of two small tombs, T1 and T2, previously discovered during the 2010 season on the northern side of the forecourt of M.I.D.A.N.05 and probably contemporary or slightly later than the latter. During the 2018 campaign, the chapel of T1 and most of the first room of T2 were excavated, revealing two different life-stories, which depend on the events and transformations which affected M.I.D.A.N.05 and its forecourt through the centuries. T1, soon sealed by debris and flash-floods, proved to have been solely used in the New Kingdom. Between the end of the Eighteenth and the early Nineteenth Dynasty, the tomb was occupied by the “Chief of the *mrw*-servants of Amun”, Nany, whose name appears on some sandstone fragments of a lintel and on a beautiful but regrettably fragmentary pair statue, found in pieces. T2 is larger and probably composed of two rooms. It remained accessible for many centuries, until the flood deposits filled it, covering a layer containing at least ten burials, partly cut by robbers’ pits. Only scanty elements of the funerary assemblages were found with the bodies, but various painted plaster fragments, pertaining to anthropoid coffins, date the re-use of the tomb to the Third Intermediate Period.

1.Introduction¹

In 2010, during the expedition of the University of Pisa in the area of tomb M.I.D.A.N.05 (Fig. 1), directed by Marilina Betrò, the archaeological investigation in the forecourt of the tomb, after removing a substantial part of the layers of alluvial deposits, sand and debris that

¹ Support for part of this research came from the University of Pisa Research Project PRA 2018-2020 ‘Paesaggi funerari tra rito e società. Nuovi approcci allo studio delle necropoli nel mondo antico’, coordinated by Anna Anguissola

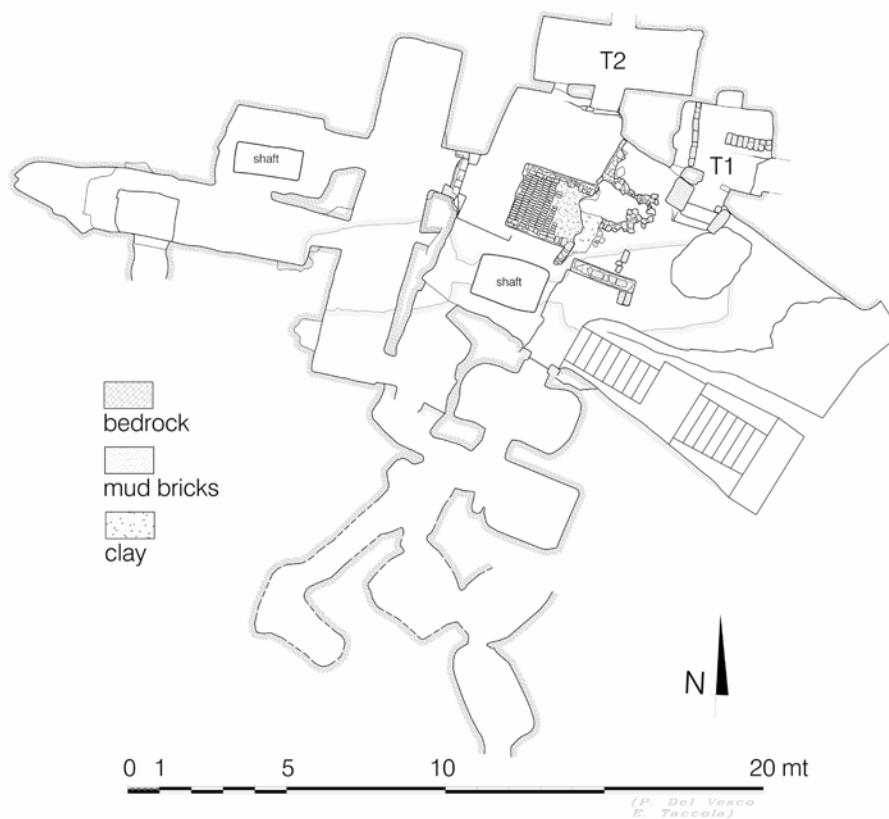


Fig. 7 – General plan of the area. Tomb M.I.D.A.N.05 on the left (West). Drawing by P. Del Vesco and E. Taccola.

filled it up, led to the discovery of two new tombs, cut into the rock on its northern side. Buried as they were under metres of deposits, their existence had never been recorded previously and they were unknown until then². They were provisionally labelled as T1 (“Tomb 1”, the easternmost one) and T2 (“Tomb 2”, closer to the north-western corner of M.I.D.A.N.05). Their investigation, not undertaken immediately at the time, could be launched in October 2018. After such first campaign, the Supreme Council of Egyptian Antiquities did not renew the permits to continue work in the two tombs. However, the results of this first and, so far, only excavation, even if incomplete, may have some interest for the scientific community and, for this reason, I decided to present them in this preliminary report³. During the 2018 season,

2 BETRÒ 2019; BETRÒ, MINIACI 2018; BETRÒ 2016; BETRÒ, MINIACI, DEL VESCO 2012; BETRÒ, MINIACI 2011.

3 The fieldwork took place in October 2018. The team consisted of Marilina Betrò, Egyptologist, director of the expedition (Università di Pisa); Gianluca Buonomini, conservator (Università di Pisa); Divina Centore, ceramologist (Museo Egizio di Torino), Paolo Del Vesco, Egyptologist (Museo Egizio di Torino), Anna Giulia De Marco, PhD student (Università di Pisa); Mattia Mancini, PhD student (Università di Pisa); Paolo Marini, Egyptologist and drawer (Museo Egizio di Torino); Carmen Muñoz-Perez, PhD student (Université de Montpellier); Camilla Saler, student (Università di Pisa), Lisa Sartini, PhD student (Università di Pisa); Maura Sedda, physical anthropologist (Università di Pisa), Emanuele Taccola, archaeologist

work in the two tombs was conducted in parallel under the field supervision of Emanuele Taccola for T1 and Paolo Del Vesco, with the assistance of Mattia Mancini for T2 (see below). Their detailed, more specific reports follow my general presentation of the results below.

In the framework of our work at Dra Abu el-Naga, one of the priority reasons of interest in the two tombs is their potential contribution to the understanding of the patterns and dynamics of use of M.I.D.A.N.05 and its cluster of tombs through the many centuries it was used as a burial ground. Moreover, the two tombs T1 and T2 were probably contemporary or slightly later than M.I.D.A.N.05, therefore datable back to the early Eighteenth Dynasty, and had possibly made for members of the same family. They share indeed with M.I.D.A.N.05 a rather rare feature, a small window on the left of the entrance door (facing it from the outside), which seems to be typical of the transitional architectural phase between the *saff*-tomb of the late Seventeenth Dynasty and the classic inverted T-shaped chapel of the Eighteenth Dynasty (Fig. 2 a-b)⁴. Their investigation could therefore be significant both for the study of the early development of the Theban T-shaped chapels and for the research project of the expedition of the University of Pisa at Dra Abu el-Naga.

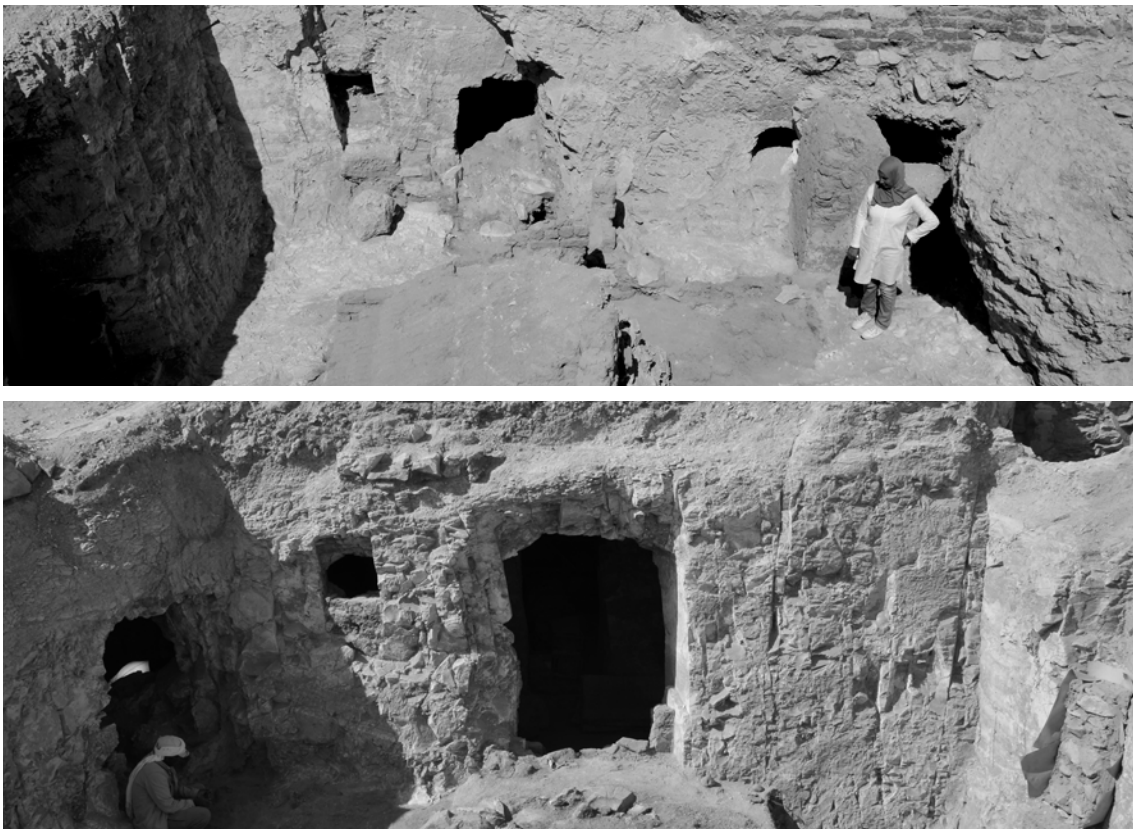


Fig. 2 a-b – a: T1 and T2 with their sequence of window - door. b: The façade of M.I.D.A.N.05 with its window to the left of the door (© M.I.D.A.N)

(Università di Pisa). The Supreme Council of Egyptian Antiquities was represented by Miss Amani Hassan Mohammed and Mr Mohammed el-Azab Mohammed, both of whom always assisted us with great competence and helpfulness.

4 BETRÒ 2016.

M.I.D.A.N.05, datable to the very beginning of the New Kingdom, underwent multiple interventions over the centuries. Its window, which was part of the original plan (first phase of the tomb), was closed by bricks, plastered and painted on the inside in a second phase, which can be approximately dated around the middle of the Eighteenth Dynasty, as suggested by the type of bricks, mortar and plaster of this closure and as confirmed by the few preserved painted scenes on its walls⁵. T1 underwent the same changes, its window closed by mud bricks, which were found collapsed inward during the 2018 excavation. The same cannot be said for T2, since its first room has not been completely cleared yet: possibly, its window was also closed by mudbricks, now still lying under the flash-flood deposits which almost filled the room up to its ceiling. The presence of the two small windows, together with the opening of the tombs onto the forecourt of M.I.D.A.N.05, is a concrete clue to their dating.

T1 is a small single-chamber tomb with a niche in the centre of its rear (northern) wall (Kampp Type IIa) (see Fig. 5-6). Apparently, the walls of this chamber had never been decorated, although a *muna* coating had been applied at least on the west wall, suggesting a preparatory work that was later abandoned. The tomb, which lies at about 80 cm lower than the forecourt, is accessed through three steps cut into the rock, contemporary to the original construction, and preceded by a vaulted mudbrick gateway, built in front of its entrance from the third and lowest step (Fig. 3 a-b). The chapel was entirely cleared during the 2018 campaign. Its archaeological investigation brought to light an opening in its eastern wall, close to the southern corner, leading to the underground burial area. This was found completely filled by deposits and left still unexcavated in 2018 (see Fig. 5b).

Tomb T2 turned out to be larger and probably made up of two rooms: the entrance to what



Fig. 3 a-b. – a: the mud brick gateway. On its left side, the window. b: view from the top (© M.I.D.A.N)

seems to be a second room was uncovered on the north wall but not yet cleared. The deposits filling the first room had not yet been completely removed either.

5 For a study of some of these scenes, see SIMINI 2012, 53-62; MARINI 2014, 89-100.

The life-story of the two tombs is somewhat different, depending on the events and transformations which affected M.I.D.A.N.05 and its forecourt through the centuries: both tombs were reused and pillaged, but T1 – or at least its overground chapel – was spared from 19th and early-20th century looters and diggers. It seems indeed that this tomb, in a relatively early phase of its history, was hidden by high deposits and debris and was no longer accessible. The archaeological research revealed no cuts, holes or tunnels dug through its alluvial layers, which are clear evidence of the passage of thieves once a tomb has been filled with flash-flood deposits. Traces of these paths were instead repeatedly found in TT 14 and M.I.D.A.N.05, as well as, in 2018, in T2⁶. Actually, since the very beginning of the archaeological investigation, this second tomb exhibited galleries and holes, dug in a sequence of flash-flood deposits stratified almost up to the ceiling.

Marilina Betrò

Tomb T1

T1 provided evidence of two phases of anthropic occupation in a circumscribed and relatively short period, before being abandoned, plundered by ancient thieves, inundated by a first flood and, subsequently, looted again. The first use should correspond to the very beginning of the Eighteenth Dynasty or slightly later, but, at least in the chapel, it left no remains⁷. It is not clear whether the vaulted mudbrick gateway in front of the entrance should be dated to this first phase, as part of the original project.

It was certainly built after the plastering of the north wall of the forecourt of M.I.D.A.N.05, but this could be compatible with the slightly later dating of T1 compared with M.I.D.A.N.05. An alternative and equally likely hypothesis is that it must have been built during the second – Ramesside – phase of use of the tomb. The survey, which Friederike Kampp dedicated to this kind of mudbrick structures in the Theban Necropolis, gives evidence of their use from the Seventeenth Dynasty to the Late Period, mainly concentrated in the Ramesside period⁸. Most of them are detectable only thanks to remains of mudbrick walls before the entrance to the tomb, perpendicularly to its façade, with the notable exception of Carter tomb 37 at Asasif, well preserved at the time of its photographic documentation⁹, and tomb -264- at Sheikh Abd el-Gurna, which Robert Mond judged to be a work of the Eighteenth Dynasty¹⁰. The structure outside T1, although the arch of its vault collapsed in ancient times, is thus one of the very few standing examples of this kind of architectural elements and fits well into their chronological range.

6 See DEL VESCO and MANCINI below.

7 The traces of a garland or bouquet found under the lowest row of mudbricks running south-north and aligned with the west wall of the chapel (see TACCOLA below), as well as the few fragments of a painted and gilded wig left by the first thieves (see below), could be associated with such original use.

8 KAMPP 1996, 73.

9 KAMPP 1996, 74, fig. 66.

10 KAMPP 1996, II, 748-749 and fig. 682.

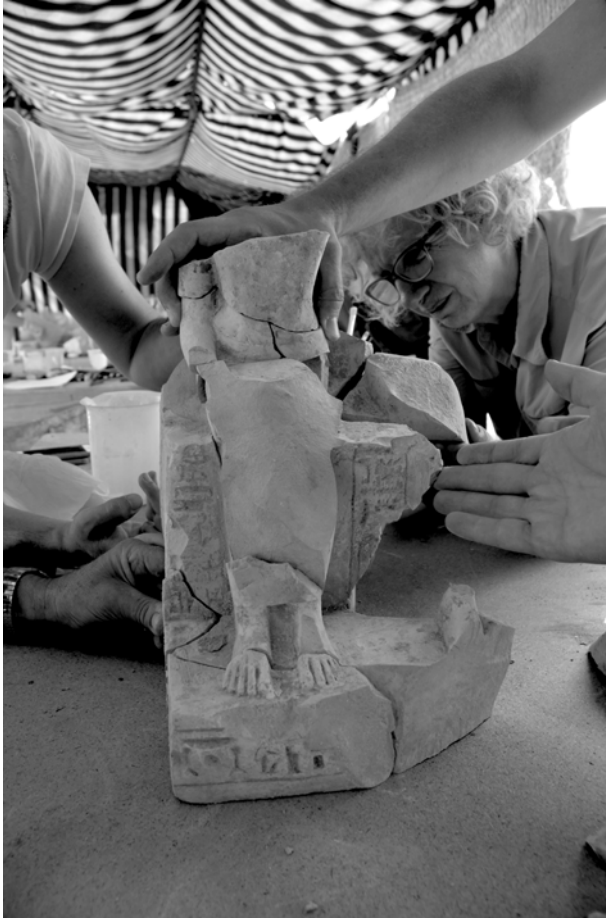


Fig. 4 – A 3D puzzle (© M.I.D.A.N).

After the first phase of use, the tomb was occupied, in a period that could probably be dated to between the end of the Eighteenth Dynasty and the early Nineteenth Dynasty, by a member of the middle rank administration in the temple of Amon, together with his family, Nany, Chief of the *mrw*-servants of Amun. He commissioned a statue in fine white limestone, which portrayed him and his wife Bakenwel, a chantress of Amun. This dyad, which might have been placed in the niche on the wall opposite the entrance, was broken in many fragments before the first muddy flow entered the tomb: some of them were found in layers under the oldest alluvial deposits (Fig. 4).

The retrieved fragments have been recomposed, regrettably not in its entirety, into a pair statue, with the heads and the upper part of the busts missing (28 x 27 x 36 cm): the couple was represented sitting side-by-side on two high-backed seats, one arm encircling each other's shoulders in the traditional gesture of embrace, suggesting their intimacy, the other one resting in their

lap. The back slab is inscribed in columns of blue hieroglyphs and other texts, with the names and titles of the couple, laid out on the plinth, in three columns at the sides of the two spouses and between them (Tav. I a). The dyad, which presents some peculiar features, such as the unusually long blue garland painted on the man's naked breast, will be separately published in a forthcoming article. Stylistic and palaeographic elements seem to suggest a dating between the end of the Eighteenth and the early Nineteenth Dynasty. The titles of Nany place him in the context of the *šn^c*, the institution in charge of certain production and manufacturing activities of the temple of Amon¹¹. The *mrw* were indeed prisoners of war assigned to this institution with tasks ranging from textile manufacturing to agriculture and livestock farming. On one of the fragments coming from the lintel of the chapel, Nany also bears the title of *hry šn^c*, Overseer of the *šn^c*. The text on the statue, in the column between the two spouses, recalls the God's Wife of Amun Ahmose-Nefertary as well, to whose temple (?)¹² the owners of T1 may have been connected¹³. It is worth noting that the owner of TT 14, on the opposite side of the forecourt, was a *wab*-priest associated with the cult of Amenhotep I, "the image (*ibib*)

11 EICHLER 2000.

12 The end of the column is broken.

13 Or, maybe, Bakenwel only, in view of the direction of the signs, which agrees with that of her text.

of Amun”, probably in the nearby temple of Meniset, an institution closely connected to the cult of the king and his mother Ahmose-Nefertary¹⁴.

The names and titles of Nany and Bakenwel are also inscribed on many fragments of pinkish sandstone, some of which carved and painted, which were found on the lower layers of the chapel, close to its access. They preserve parts of symmetrically opposite scenes with the two dead in front of Osiris and short columns of hieroglyphs above or close to the figures. The stone they were made of, the arrangement of the figures, the subject of the scenes and the accompanying short texts fit well with the typical decoration of the lintels of tombs and, together with their findspot, suggest they must have come from the lintel that once surmounted the entrance to the tomb, as part of Nany’s new arrangement.

This second, Ramesside, phase of occupation of the tomb could also be associated with the two low mudbrick walls erected in the room, whose mudbricks are the same size as those of the gateway and those of the small court of the Ramesside TT14. While the low wall running east-west up to the middle of the room seems to accompany and demarcate the gentle sloping of the floor towards the opening to the burial chamber(s), the low mudbrick wall parallel to the west wall of the room delimits an area that may have been served as a place to lay the funerary offerings (see Fig. 8). Indeed, many sherds were found there, together with an almost complete beer jar (inv. no. 5104), an amphora (inv. no. 5113) and a dish (inv. no. 5100), forming a homogeneous assemblage that can be dated to the Ramesside period, most probably to the Nineteenth Dynasty¹⁵.

No evidence of later uses of the tomb has been found so far, at least in the chapel. After the Nineteenth Dynasty, the funerary use of the tomb seems to come to an end. After a time lapse that cannot yet be determined, its abandonment led to a neglect and destruction: the vault of the gateway collapsed, the statue of the ancient owners was torn to pieces, and a first looting took place. The traces of this ancient plundering can be recognised in some remains lying under the first alluvial deposits: part of a mummy found in the north-east corner of the room, at floor level, and the scant remains of a painted and gilded wig (inv. no. 5062) from the lid of a coffin, along the west wall (Tav. I b).

The upper torso of the mummy, still adorned with multiple threads of polychrome faience bead necklaces, lay in many unfolded wrappings under the debris that the thieves piled up to access the burial chamber(s) during the second looting. The mummy must therefore have been already there when they started to remove the debris.

The fragments of the wig (and other from the collar), with thin strips of golden foil, might be connected to a very decayed wooden coffin, which was brought to light in 2014, during the excavation of the forecourt. It lay approximately in front of the entrance to T1, at floor level. Almost all that remained of the coffin was the silhouette drawn on the ground by a grid of cracked and fragmented cubes that followed the veins of the wood¹⁶ as crushed and flattened by a heavy mass. The right part of a black wig with faded traces of yellow stripes, a few metres away, under the northern wall of the forecourt, had escaped this fate. Its shapes and features suggest a dating in the Eighteenth Dynasty. Very small fragments of golden

14 BETRÒ 2009, 126-135.

15 The pottery of this season was documented by Divina Centore and is currently being studied by Divina Centore and Anna Consonni.

16 One of the possible causes of this type of wood cracking is humidity (personal communication by Victoria Asensi Amoros).

foil were found in the same area. The coffin might have been carried in the forecourt by the ancient looters who plundered T1. If this assumption is correct, the event would fit well in a time interval prior to the end of the Third Intermediate Period – the beginning of the Late Period, after which the court of M.I.D.A.N.05 began to be affected by a new arrangement. The construction of the mudbrick ramp in front of the entrance of M.I.D.A.N.05, which took advantage of the presence of the mud deposits and debris brought into the court by the flash-floods, was still a long way away¹⁷. The space in front of the entrance of T1 was therefore free and accessible.

The first flood that hit the tomb predated the second plundering. The muddy flow covered the collapsed mudbricks inside the room, probably coming from its closure, and others that had fallen from the vault of the gateway over the steps. The plunderers walked over this alluvial deposit and removed the filling they found in the passage to the burial sector, accumulating it in the north-east corner of the room while building a dry-stone retaining wall to prevent the deposits from slipping.

Three more flash-floods hit the tomb after this second looting, carrying stones, pottery and materials lying in the forecourt and surrounding areas into the room. Among these, an almost intact biconical vase (inv. no. 5112) is particularly interesting. It came with the third flood wave, which broke the mudbrick closure of the small window. The vase probably entered through this opening. The comparisons identified by Anna Consonni date it to between the end of the Twenty-fifth – the beginning of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty¹⁸, thus providing a useful post-quem term for this alluvial deposit and the subsequent one, which completely filled the tomb.

Marilina Betrò

Architectural description

Tomb T1 opens on the northern front of the forecourt of M.I.D.A.N.05, immediately east of tomb T2. As regards the architectural structure of the tomb, at the moment only its overground chapel, which was archaeologically investigated in its entirety, is known. Preliminary ceramic data show that its occupation was confined to the New Kingdom, while finds dating after this period are only sporadic, limited to the upper layers of alluvial deposits.

The room, pseudo-quadrangular in shape (2.3x3 m approx.), lies about 80 cm lower than the forecourt of M.I.D.A.N.05: the difference in height between the two floors is bridged by three steps, carefully carved along the regular limestone layering, at the end of which a large passageway opens (1x2 m approx.) (see Fig. 3a-b). Immediately to the west of the entrance, the wall has a small window, irregularly quadrangular in shape, positioned about 75 cm above the external level of the forecourt.

The room itself was excavated along the same limestone layering: in fact, the north and south walls have a smooth surface, while the east and west walls exhibit a more irregular appearance. This roughness was originally evened out by a *muna* coating, at least on the

¹⁷ Archaeological Mission of the University of Pisa at Dra Abu el-Naga. Report of the 13th archaeological season (November-December 2014), <https://egittologia.cfs.unipi.it/it/download/report-scavo-2014/>.

¹⁸ BOULET 2018, 344, fig. 6j, Theban ceramic production phase IV.

west wall, a large portion of which is still preserved until the regularized bedrock floor. The surface of the *muna*, brown-ochre in colour, black in section, bears the marks of the manual application, consisting of large grooves.

The room is characterized by a deep niche in the centre of the back wall (85x100x58 cm approx.) aligned with the entrance door, set at about 70 cm from the floor (Fig. 5). The hollow was presumably intended to house the double statue of the owners of the tomb. For this statue, found in fragments during the excavation, see above the observations made by M. Betrò.

The southern half of the east wall is marked by an opening (about 1x1.30 m) (Fig. 6). The floor in front of it, carved west-east, suggests that it must led to the burial area, still totally filled with alluvial sediments.

At a later phase of frequentation and use of the tomb, probably datable to the Ramesside period, the tomb underwent some changes in its internal and external layout.

Aligned with the carving of the floor from west to east in the south-eastern part of the room, a wall of mudbricks (16x32x8 cm and 20x36x12 approx.) bound by mud mortar was erected, two rows (plus a very incomplete third) of which are still extant. The upper row is arranged with the short side of the brick on the facing and the lower one with the long side exposed: the void created by the staggered installation of the lower row is filled with compacted limestone flakes. A second wall of mudbricks (16x32x8 cm and 20x34x8 cm approx.), bound by mortar, with traces of *muna* coating on the two faces, runs parallel to the west wall, approx. 50 cm away from it. Two rows of this latter wall with the long side exposed, are still preserved. The intended use of the two structures is still under discussion.

However, the most peculiar feature of the tomb is the external arrangement of the passageway (see Fig. 3a-b). The access to the tomb is indeed monumentalized by a forepart, built with mudbricks, plastered with a brown-ochre coating painted in white.



Fig. 5 – The north wall with the niche, seen from the entrance. (© M.I.D.A.N).



Fig. 6 – View of the south wall with the entrance and the window. On the left, the opening to the burial area, still unexcavated. (© M.I.D.A.N).

Originally, the structure culminated in an arch, collapsed in ancient times: some bricks found on the floor right outside the entrance (see below) have been interpreted as residues of the top part of the vault. The left side of this sort of vestibule, about 60 cm thick and preserved up to a height of about 1.5 m, is set on the third step at the bottom and protrudes about 90 cm from the rock wall into which the tomb is cut. The external face of the west side abuts the north wall of the forecourt of M.I.D.A.N.05, starting from the east side of the small window; the internal one leans against an arrangement of stones, bound with mud to even out the façade, probably associated with the original closure of the door.

At the lower edge, the plaster coating of the mudbrick gateway forms an arriccio on the original walking surface, evened out with plaster, directly applied on the rock level underneath. The same coating is applied to even out the steps where the stone had detached when cut.

The east side of the gateway, about 35 cm wide and preserved up to a height of about 1.5 m, is also set on the third step below. From this side, it is evident that the structure was built after the plastering of the north wall of the forecourt: the coating here has indeed different colour (pinkish-yellow), thickness and texture. Here as well, the façade is evened out by stones bound with mud. The east side of the gateway leans against the large pseudo-spherical boulder, which in turn rests on the walking level of the forecourt. This evidence testifies to the presence of the large rock when the structure was put in place.

The dating of the gateway is yet to be determined (see Betrò for a discussion). However, hypothetically, it cannot be excluded that this structure may belong to the same phase as the arrangement of the walls inside the room since the mudbricks have the same sizes (16x32x8 cm approx.).

Emanuele Taccola

Preliminary results of the excavation

Tomb T1 was investigated exclusively in the first room. Much of the stratigraphic layers, made up of alluvial detritus flown in through the door and window, formed in at least four distinct moments. These levels, together with the more superficial one interpreted as the collapse of the vault of the chamber, already identified in 2010, have completely obliterated the anthropogenic layers.

Since the very early stages of the excavation, it was established that no traces had been left by modern looters (i.e. those acting in the 19th and early 20th century), as opposed to those identified elsewhere in M.I.D.A.N.05, TT 14 and in tomb T2, in the form of exploratory tunnels.

The stratigraphic investigation revealed that the access to the tomb by ancient looters was passable before the oldest alluvial layer: in fact, some mudbricks (18x28x8 cm approx.) found at the entrance, collapsed inwards, probably belonged to the closure of the door.

A subsequent flood caused instead the collapse of the window closure. Even in this case, the mudbricks which sealed the small lateral opening were found. These elements (12x24x8 cm approx.), lying significantly near the window and made to collapse inwards by some outside thrust, are characterized by a deep thumbprint near the short side of the upper face. The detachment of the *muna* covering the west walls of the chamber can also be associated with this flood: in fact, during the removal of the layer, numerous fragments were recovered, similar in composition and colour to the one still adhering to the wall.

As mentioned above, there is no material evidence of modern looting. On the contrary, sure traces of two ancient plunders have emerged (see Betrò). Over the oldest alluvial layer, a clear mark of which has been left on the back wall of the room, an east-west retaining wall was built, composed of ten irregular rows of stones and fragments of a statue (Fig. 7). The structure is set directly on the wall of mudbricks positioned on the edge of the access to the funerary area (see above). A yellow coffin plank, dating back to the Ramesside period, was used by the looters as a backing for their retaining wall, to level the first row. The structure was erected to contain the debris that the plunderers accumulated as they proceeded into the underground burial area, toward the burial chamber. The layout of the rows suggests that the wall must have been gradually raised as the debris rose. This accumulation, clearly distinguishable by composition and compactness, lay between the wall and the north-east corner of the room.

At the current state of research, the exact chronology of such works cannot be determined yet. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that some fragments of the double statue of the owners of the tomb, already mentioned before, were used at the base of the wall. Other fragments were instead recovered in the upper layers, while most of them lay in the levels preceding the most ancient alluvial deposit: this shows that the artefact was already reduced to fragments before that event. However, we do not have enough evidence to determine whether the breaking of the statue was deliberate or accidental.

After removing the retaining wall and the related debris, the thick alluvial layer on which the plunderers had walked was excavated. Outside the tomb, right at the entrance, this layer covered a number of collapsed mudbricks, most likely coming from the vault of the forepart, since they have the same size, put on a layer of mud that covered the access steps.



Fig. 7 – The retaining wall built by the plunderers during the second robbery. At the bottom the coffin plank, on the left fragments from the statue. (© M.I.D.A.N).

Traces of leachate mud on the exposed surface of the mudbricks suggest that the collapse must have occurred on the occasion of a further and more ancient flood that also affected the interior of the tomb. Fragments of the lintel came from these layers, located at the entrance to the room and immediately outside it¹⁹.

After removing this layer, the first evidence of use of the tomb began to emerge inside the room: in addition to the wall of mudbricks aligned on the edge of the passage to the burial area, used as a backing for the retaining wall of the looters, a second wall of mudbricks appeared near the west wall of the room. Next to it, a portion of the collapsed structure was also preserved.

A considerable number of pottery sherds was found between the low mudbrick wall and the west wall of the room. In particular, in the north-west corner, an almost intact beer jar was unearthed, while in the south-west corner, a more fragmentary amphora, which could anyway be reconstructed, was found (Fig. 8). This material refers to a chronological horizon within the Ramesside period.

In the underlying level, composed of dark soil, probably as a result of the decomposition of organic material, the human bones of a young individual, wrappings and plant remains,

¹⁹ Part of a doorpost belonging to T2 and joining a fragment coming from that tomb was found here as well (inv. no. 5050).



Fig. 8 – Pottery for the funerary offerings placed along the west wall during the Ramesside occupation. (© M.I.D.A.N).

probably coming from bouquets, were brought to light. Worthy of mention are some small fragments of parts of a coffin decorated with gold leaf (Tav. I b).

In the rest of the room, a layer of pulverized limestone appeared and was interpreted as a walking surface at the time of the installation of the mudbrick walls. The layer contained several fragments of burnt bones and a fair amount of pottery. In the north-east corner of the room, a pile of wrappings, together with the remains of a mummy, was isolated and delimited. In addition to bone fragments, large portions of polychrome beaded necklaces were recovered in the wrappings.

Once such deposit was removed, a last, very thin layer of pulverized limestone was unearthed, with large burnt patches, which did not cover the whole area, as the regularized bedrock floor had already emerged in various points of the room. This layer clearly continued under the low walls, along with a bouquet or a garland flap, partly covered by one of the mudbrick structures. It is precisely this evidence that suggests that the interior layout of the room, as it has been preserved to date, must postdate a previous original use of the tomb.

Near the door, the excavation revealed what appeared to be residues of the original closure: a mudbrick placed directly on the bedrock floor, aligned with the internal limit of the east doorpost of the entrance, and a strip of grey clay, spread over the bedrock floor at the internal limit of the west doorpost, bearing the mark of the short side of a mudbrick.

Emanuele Taccola

Tomb T2



Fig. 9 a-b – a: the entrance to T2 and the gently sloping floor in front of it. b: detail of the entrance passage with remains of the west sandstone doorpost, the thick plaster covering the eastern side of the passageway and the lodgement for the east doorpost. On the left, the stone wall built over the façade of the tomb is also visible. (© M.I.D.A.N) .

Architectural description

The entrance to T2 is located at the north-west corner of the forecourt of M.I.D.A.N.05 (Fig. 1). The rock-cut opening is about 95 cm wide and 180 cm high (Fig. 9a). The west and east sides of the passageway are respectively 52 cm and 115 cm long, due to a different orientation of the outer façade and the inner room. The rock-cut floor of the passageway gently slopes down some 30-40 cm from the forecourt level to the level inside the tomb. The bottom part of the west sandstone doorpost was found still in place and protruding from the remains of a stonewall that was built, with abundant mud-mortar, over this part of the rock façade. The stone wall was very likely intended to smooth the slight difference in orientation between this part of the façade and the part situated to the east of the tomb entrance. Aligned with the west doorpost, the slot that originally housed the east doorpost was also found, moulded in a thick Nile silt plaster coating that still covered the lower part of the eastern side of the entrance passage (Fig. 9b). To the west of the tomb entrance, a window-like opening was cut, roughly measuring 90 x 60 cm (Fig. 10), which closely resembles, in both position and size, the one cut in the façade of M.I.D.A.N.05.

The first transversal chamber of the tomb is shaped as a rather regular rectangle measuring 5 x 2 m, with a ceiling reaching a height ranging from 1.9 to 2.2 m. The room has a west-east orientation, with its northern and southern sides deviating by a 50°-55° angle from the main orientation of the forecourt of M.I.D.A.N.05, most likely due to the decision of cutting it into the mountain based on the sedimentary structure of the local limestone. The practice



Fig. 10 – The window-like opening located to the west of the entrance to T2. (© M.I.D.A.N).

of following the natural layering of the stone when cutting underground tombs, which is widely attested in the Theban necropolis and was here used for the building of M.I.D.A.N.05²⁰ and T1 (see above), not only facilitates the cutting process, it also results in smooth and regular surfaces with less effort.

An opening in the northern wall of the first chamber, aligned with the axis of the entrance to the tomb, seems to lead to a second inner chamber, which has not been explored yet. The 2018 fieldwork season actually focussed on

the understanding of the main phases of use, reuse, abandonment and plundering of T2, as testified by the archaeological and natural stratifications found in the entrance passageway and in the first chamber.

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Preliminary results of the excavation



Fig. 11 – One of the uppermost layers of the alluvial deposits which were filling the first room of T2 almost up to its ceiling. The photo shows the dried mud crust that is typical of stratified alluvial sediments. (© M.I.D.A.N)

When the tomb was discovered in 2010, it was almost completely filled by the alluvial deposits (Fig. 11) that had entered into it until both the main entrance and the window were sealed off by the same kind of deposits, which had progressively accumulated in the external court as well. Similar deposits, characterized by a vertical granulometric gradation, typical of sediment accumulations of incoherent materials transported by muddy flows, were also identified in M.I.D.A.N.05, in its forecourt, in tomb E and in the innermost underground rooms of TT

14, during previous fieldwork seasons. They originate from the stratification of sediments carried by the occasional flash-floods that periodically hit the western desert regions of

²⁰ As proven by the orientation and appearance of all the tomb walls running east-west.

Egypt²¹. The peculiar layering pattern of these deposits – a sandy stratum with limestone flakes and chips at the bottom, one of fine and compact silt in the middle and a hardened mud crust on top – usually allows to identify and separate every single alluvial event, thus distinguishing between the materials possibly contained in them. Ten different flood deposits have been identified in T2 so far, with the last – more recent – one, which entered the first chamber before the window-like opening and the entrance were completely obstructed, lying just 20 cm from the top and covered with large limestone chips detached from the ceiling because of the high increase in relative humidity.

Some time after the tomb and the external court had been completely filled with these alluvial deposits, a widespread and unsystematic digging, which is commonly ascribed to the treasure-hunt-like activity of 19th and early-20th century robbers and archaeologists, took place in the area. The compact sediment stratification bore clear traces of this activity in the numerous pits and tunnels that were identified both outside and inside the tomb (Fig.12) and that give evidence of the last phase of “use” of the tomb before the recent archaeological exploration.



Fig. 12 – Pits and tunnels dug by modern robbers and explorers into the alluvial stratification filling the first room of T2. (© M.I.D.A.N).

Beneath the alluvial deposits, the 2018 excavation reached a layer containing at least ten burials. Their total number was most probably higher, considering that the deposits in the central area of the tomb chamber were heavily disturbed by the modern robbers’ pits. Apart

21 See DEL VESCO 2009, 138, 142-48, and the Reference List.

from the fragmentary skeletons, a few pieces of reddish linen bandages, various fragments of painted plaster and scanty elements of the funerary assemblages, nothing else was preserved. Most of the organic materials, including all soft tissues of the bodies and the wooden parts of the coffins, had decomposed and vanished, most likely due to the soaking action of the first flood deposits that entered the tomb and covered the burials²².

All the individuals were lying supine, with the arms by their sides and the hands crossed over the pubic area. Six burials were aligned with the heads to the west, in the eastern part of the room. The three southernmost ones (contexts 1228 a, b, c) were closer to each other and seemed to have been pushed against the south wall of the tomb. In the pelvic area of the first body adjacent to the wall, a few thin bone fragments, which may have belonged to a foetus, were found. Associated with the same individual, a small turquoise faience amulet in the form of a frog (inv. no. 5136)²³ with a horizontal perforation was also found (Tav. II a). Frog-amulets were connected with fertility and regeneration and appear to be well-attested in burials until the Late Period²⁴. Over the second body of this southern group, some well-preserved plaster fragments pertaining to an anthropoid coffin were found. They show painted decorations on a yellow-beige ground (inv. no. 5151) (Tav. II c). The floral collar which would have been painted over the chest, the horror vacui scenes with gods and religious symbols, and the remains of hieroglyphic texts seem to be compatible with a Twenty-first – Twenty-second Dynasty coffin²⁵. Of the four remaining burials in the eastern part of the tomb, the two closest to the north wall deserve a special mention. Here, the skeletons were found together with two groups of the small²⁶ mud shabtis that are commonly dated to the Twenty-second – Twenty-fifth Dynasty²⁷. This dating seems to be confirmed by the plaster fragments of the lids that will be more fully analysed in a next publication. The first group of 183 shabtis (inv. no. 5093) was above the skull of the fifth individual (context 1224), whilst the second set of 176 pieces (inv. no. 5124; Figs. 13 a-b) was located near the feet of the sixth skeleton (context 1225). The two dense clusters of statuettes suggest that the shabtis must have been originally stored in two wooden boxes that have gone lost. The number of pieces is compatible with the Third Intermediate Period tradition of using two boxes per person with about 200 shabtis each²⁸. These funerary figurines are moulded, uninscribed and often covered in a patchy whitewash. Their mummiform features are very simple and show only a few details, like a tripartite wig and the crossed arms over the chest. The back is irregular and, in some cases, still bears the fingerprint of the person who made them, impressed on the mud.

Three other individuals (contexts 1226 a, b, c) were found in the western part of the chamber, lying in a north-south orientation. Only the skeleton of the central one was almost completely preserved, but the human remains lying closer to the west wall of the tomb were covered by

22 A similar situation was found in chamber I of the nearby tomb TT 14 during the 8th campaign. See BETRÒ, MINIACI, DEL VESCO 2012, 31.

23 Cf. Louvre Museum E 73761 (information kindly provided by Carmen Muñoz-Perez).

24 PETRIE 1914, 12; ANDREWS 1994, 10, 63.

25 ASTON 2009, 275, Type ID.

26 The average height is about 5 cm.

27 ANTHES 1951, 25; ASTON 2009, 358-363.

28 ASTON 2009, 374; MARINI 2019, 118-120.

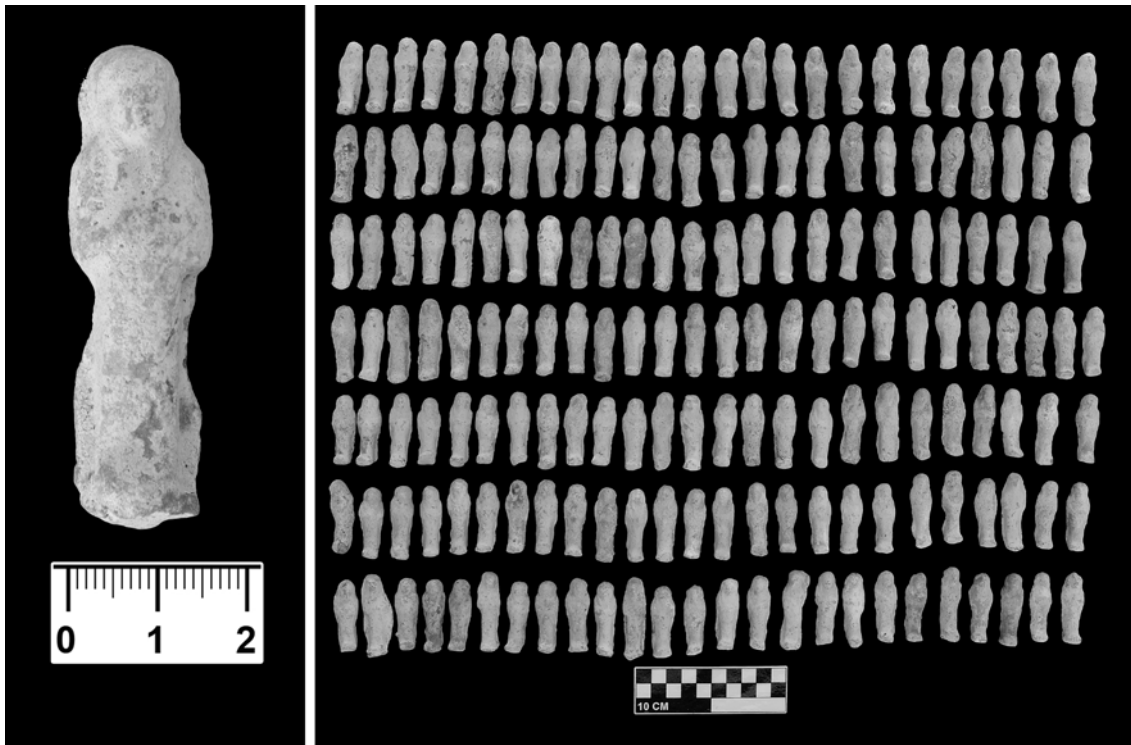


Fig. 13 a-b – a: one of the 176 small mud shabtis found near the feet of a skeleton in the eastern part of T2 (inv. no. 5124). B: the whole set of shabtis. (© M.I.D.A.N).



Fig. 14 – An inscribed sandstone fragment from the right doorpost of the entrance to T2, no. inv. 5023. (© M.I.D.A.N).

plaster fragments with a blue embossed decoration on a yellow-red ground (inv. no. 5116; Tav. II b).

Finally, a tenth body (context 1229) was found in a rather isolated position, almost at the centre of the room, and partly cut by one of the later robbers' pits. Its unusual oblique orientation, north-east to south-west, may be due to movements occurred when the muddy waters of the first flash-flood entered the tomb. A small blue glazed composition amulet, maybe in the form of a duck (inv. no. 5115), was found within the ribcage. All human remains are still being studied and will hopefully yield more information about the gender, age at death or pathologies of the group of individuals so far found in T2.

All of the burials herein described were resting on a sandy dark grey layer with substantial traces of burnt wood, which has not been excavated yet and lies at about 40-50 cm above the rock floor of the chamber. Interestingly, this level corresponds to the ground level of the external court where, during the 2014 fieldwork season, traces of funerary activities dating to the Late Period had been

identified. All the data collected so far from T2, M.I.D.A.N.05, E and the forecourt seem to consistently suggest the existence of a phase of funerary re-use of these tombs and of the westernmost part of the forecourt from the end of the Third Intermediate Period up to at least the Graeco-Roman period.

Although in 2018 the exploration of the first room of T2 had to be interrupted at this level, a few more data on the previous use of tomb T2 were collected during the excavation of the deposits accumulated on the sloping rock floor of the passageway at the entrance. Numerous fragments of the pinkish sandstone doorposts that had originally graced the entrance to the tomb were retrieved from one of the lower contexts (1208)²⁹. One of the fragments still contained traces of inscriptions but unfortunately no name was preserved (Fig. 14). Part of a red-slipped funnel-necked jar found in the same context might point to a New Kingdom dating of this deposit.

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²⁹ See note 19 above.

Tav. I



a. The recomposed dyad from the tomb T1: 3D photogrammetric model by E. Taccola (© M.I.D.A.N).



b. Fragment of a gilded wig from the tomb T1, inv. no. 5062 (© M.I.D.A.N).



a. Small faience amulet representing a frog, from Tomb T2, inv. no. 5136 (© M.I.D.A.N)



b. Plaster fragment from context 1126 (inv. no. 5116) (© M.I.D.A.N)



c. One of the individuals found lying in the eastern part of T2 (context 1228 b), still in situ and covered by painted plaster fragments of a coffin, inv. no. 5151. (© M.I.D.A.N).

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