

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE LEIDEN-TURIN EXCAVATIONS  
AT SAQQARA, SEASON 2015: THE TOMB OF AN ANONYMOUS OFFICIAL  
(TOMB X) AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

M.J. RAVEN, L. WEISS, B.G. ASTON, S. INSKIP AND N. WARNER

*Introduction*

The season 2015 of the Leiden Excavations at Saqqara was carried out in cooperation with the Egyptian Museum at Turin, which (next to the Leiden Museum of Antiquities and Leiden University) has become the third partner of the joint mission. Due to various reasons the present season was only a short one. The site was opened on 4 May and excavations continued until 26 May. The staff consisted of Prof. Dr Maarten J. Raven and Dr Christian Greco (field directors), Dr Lara Weiss and Dr Paolo Del Vesco (archaeologists and deputy directors), Dr Nicholas Warner (architect), Dr Sarah Inskip (anthropologist), Dr Barbara Aston (ceramicist), Dr Lyla Pinch-Brock (artist), and Ms Annelies Bleeker (surveyor). The fieldwork was carried out in close collaboration with Mr Alaa el-Shahat (Director of Saqqara) and Mr Mohammed Mohammed Yusuf (Chief Inspector of Saqqara-South) and was supervised in the field by the inspector Mr Ashur Abdelfatah Hussein. The Expedition is very grateful to Mr Mamduh el-Damaty (Minister of Culture), Mr Mustapha Amin (Chairman of the Supreme Council of Antiquities), Mr Hany Abu el-Azm (Chairman of the Department for Foreign Missions), and to the members of the Permanent Committee of the SCA, for permissions, advice, and assistance. We also acknowledge the help of the Saqqara restorers.

This season, work was continued in the south-east zone of the site of the Leiden Expedition (Fig. 1). The shaft of the anonymous tomb found in 2013 was excavated and its subterranean chamber fully cleared. Unfortunately no inscriptional evidence allows us to identify the owner, so the tomb will continue to be designated as Tomb X. Two square platforms at the west side of the courtyard of Tomb X were also excavated. A third objective was the location of the shaft belonging to a small limestone chapel (2013/7) built against the façade of Tomb X. Instead a large shaft was found that possibly belongs to a larger tomb located under the Ramesside chapel of Tatia (Fig. 2), which has to be further excavated and studied. A fourth objective was the clearance of the area adjacent to the north wall of Tomb X, a project that proved to be more time-consuming than estimated and which we also hope to continue next season. Finally, the mud-brick walls of the superstructure of the tomb of Sethnakht were consolidated and the tomb then backfilled with sand as a means to conserve it. Further restoration projects were agreed with the SCA restorers and will be continued after the close of the season. These projects will be briefly discussed in the following sections of this report.

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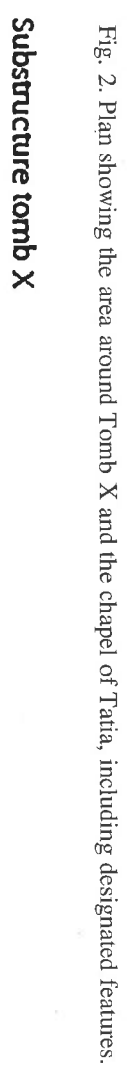




Fig. 4. Tomb X, Chamber C, niche in north wall.

#### *Excavation of the shaft of Tomb X*

In 2013, a new tomb was found due south of the tomb of Meryneith and to the west of the small chapel of Tatia (cf. Fig. 7).<sup>1</sup> Due to the fact that this tomb was unfinished and did not contain any inscriptions, the identity of the tomb-owner remains unclear, and therefore it is designated as 'Tomb X'. At the time, there was no time to excavate the underground part of the tomb, and therefore this task was executed in the present season (Fig. 3). The shaft proved to be 7.94 m deep, and gives access to a north chamber (Chamber A: 3.03 x 3.02 m). In the north wall a robbers' hole is situated which connects the chamber with the underground apartments of the adjacent tomb of Meryneith. A doorway in the west wall of Chamber A leads to a second chamber (Chamber B: 3.06 x 1.93 m), of which the floor forms a descending staircase of eight steps. Chamber B is also pierced by a robbers' hole in its northern wall; behind this hole a Late Period burial chamber is situated, which has its own shaft on the west side. At the foot of the staircase, about 2.75 m under the floor level of Chamber B, lies a lower burial-chamber (Chamber C: 3.11 x 2.63 m). The room has three niches in the east, south, and

<sup>1</sup> See M.J. Raven, B.G. Aston, L. Horáčková, D. Picchi and A. Bleeker, Preliminary report on the Leiden excavations at Saqqara, season 2013: the tombs of Sethnakht and an anonymous official, *JEOL* 44 (2013), 3-21, especially 9-11.

north walls, which (except for the one in the south wall) were framed by a raised edging surmounted by a shallow cavetto cornice (Fig. 4). The niche in the north wall shows traces of soot, which suggests it may have been used to hold a lamp. Against the west wall, there is a raised platform of 2.25 x 1.10 m, high 0.35 m.

Chambers B and C had already been entered by the Expedition in 2002, when the robbers' tunnel was discovered during the exploration of the substructure of the tomb of Meryneith.<sup>2</sup> Both chambers proved to be almost empty, having been cleared by previous intruders. The present clearance of the shaft and Chamber A revealed a few relief fragments (doubtless fallen down at some stage when the shaft stood open as a result of previous robberies), but none of these revealed a name and there is no proof that they belonged to the present tomb. The most interesting fragment shows a high official decorated with the gold of honour, followed by four attendants in two sub-registers (Fig. 5). Another interesting find from the shaft was a number of mud-bricks stamped with a royal cartouche which was identified as the prenomen of king Amenhotep II ('*hpr.w-R*'), parallels of which have been found before in the area of the Leiden mission (Fig. 6) and which seem to derive from a construction over at the Unas causeway.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Investigation of two offering platforms of Tomb X*

In the courtyard of Tomb X, two offering deposits were cleared which had already been located in 2013.<sup>4</sup> These were situated in two square platforms surrounded by low mud-brick walls and flanking the doorway from the courtyard to the west chapel (Fig. 7). The northern one could be cleared easily and had a flat smooth floor. Many fragments of New Kingdom blue-painted pottery could be retrieved, as well as a quantity of ordinary red-ware sherds (see also the pottery report below). The southern deposit had similar contents, but the original context of the finds had been partly destroyed by a pit dug down through its floor (d. 1.20, diam. 0.56 m). Nothing was found in the pit, except for a fragment of a wooden *djed*-pillar amulet.

#### *Excavation of the area to the east of Tomb X*

Another task undertaken during the present season was the clearance of an area between Tomb X and its eastern neighbour, the chapel of Tatia (Fig. 2). At the explicit wish of the SCA inspectorate, also a last remaining slope to the east of Tatia was removed. The whole area around Tatia's chapel proved to be paved with a rubble floor (feature 2015/1) containing

<sup>2</sup> See M.J. Raven, R. van Walsem, B.G. Aston, and E. Strouhal, Preliminary report on the Leiden excavations at Saqqara, season 2002: the tomb of Meryneith, *JEOL* 37 (2001-2002), 91-109, especially 97 and figs. 3, 9, and 13.

<sup>3</sup> For other bricks from the present site, see H.D. Schneider, *The Memphite tomb of Horemheb II* (Leiden/London, 1996), Cat. 325a-b; M.J. Raven, in: G.T. Martin, *The tomb of Tia and Tia, a royal monument in the Memphite necropolis* (London, 1997), Cat. 100; M.J. Raven, Twenty-five years of work in the New Kingdom necropolis, in: M. Bárta and J. Krejčí (eds.), *Abusir and Saqqara in the year 2000* (Prague, 2000), 134 n. 3; M.J. Raven, *The tomb of Pay and Raia at Saqqara* (Leiden/London, 2005), Cat. 115; L. Weiss, Evidence for Amenhotep II at Saqqara, *Saqqara Newsletter* 13 (2015), 34-37. For some doubt on the reading of the name, see M.J. Raven, V. Verschoor, M. Vugt, and R. van Walsem, *The Memphite tomb of Horemheb, V* (Turnhout, 2011), 28. For the wall near the Unas causeway, see C. Lacher-Raschdorff, *Das Grab des Königs Ninetjer in Saqqara* (Wiesbaden, 2014), 98 with Abb. 18 and 47, Tf. 18e and 42f. The attribution of the stamps from that wall to Horemheb should now be corrected. We thank G. Dreyer for this reference and for his comments.

<sup>4</sup> See Raven *et al.*, *JEOL* 44 (2013), 11 and figs. 6-7.



Fig. 5. Relief fragment showing a high official with the gold of honour and his retinue.

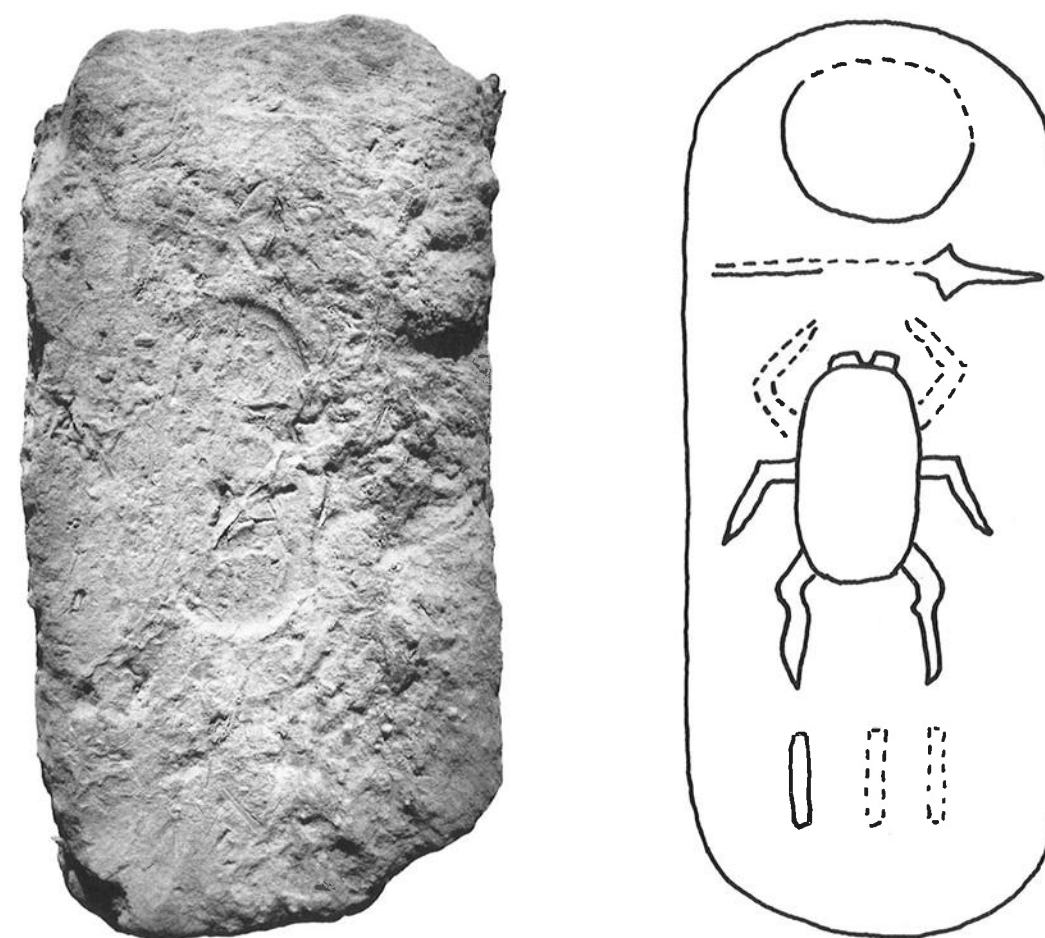


Fig. 6. Brick with the prenomen of Amenhotep II, and composite drawing of its stamp.

numerous New Kingdom potsherds, probably laid down during the Ramesside period because it lies at the same level as the floor of Tatia's chapel and of another limestone chapel (2013/7) built against the façade of Tomb X. When clearing this floor, a large shaft (2015/2) was found to the west of the chapel of Tatia. Its neat limestone rim lies about 1 m under the level of the rubble floor, so that it probably belongs to an earlier tomb. The shaft was cleared and again several reliefs were found in it, among which were a fragment of the tomb of Meryneith and showing the tomb-owner worshipping one of the gods of the Fields of Iaru (Fig. 8) and a broken slab from the south wall of the tomb of Tatia showing a seated couple with a nude child standing under the chair (Fig. 9). At a depth of ca. 8.5 m the shaft ends and opens into a large burial chamber on the south side (4.46 x 4.71 m). The chamber was found filled with sand, bones, limestone blocks, and rubble. Another, smaller shaft enters the chamber from above near its north-east corner, which makes it very dangerous to excavate. There are also two more chambers in the east and west. Clearly, proper excavation of this complex can only



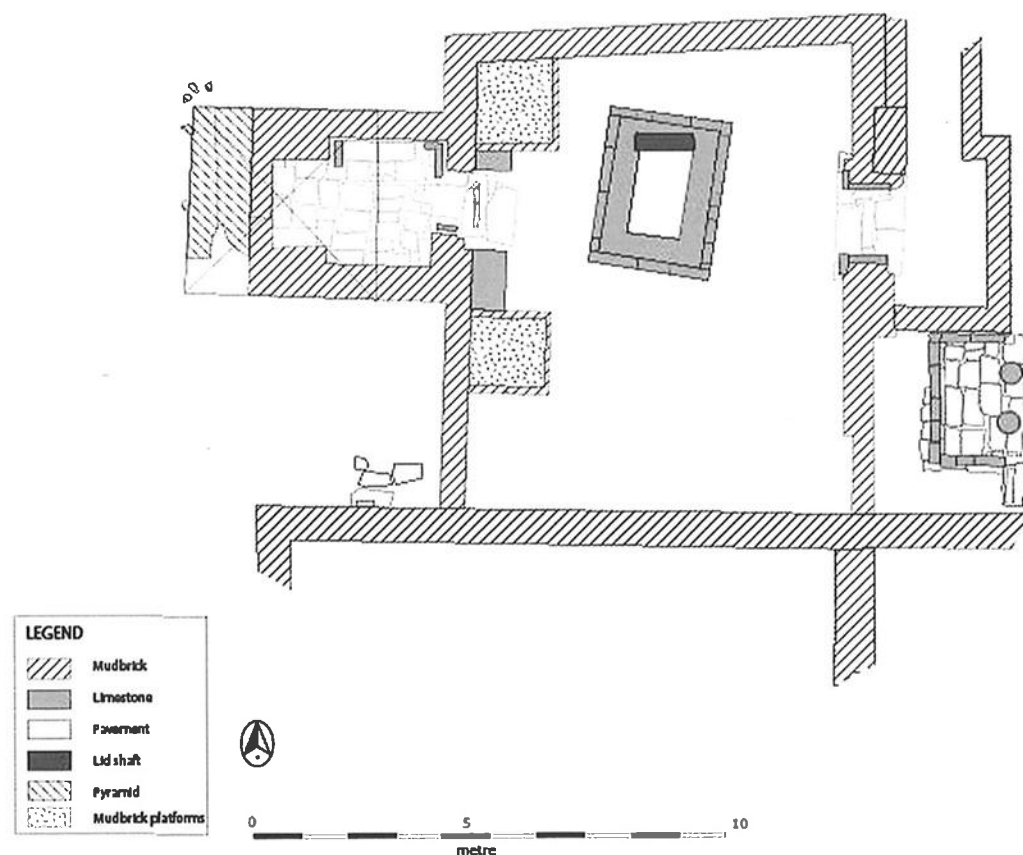


Fig. 7. Plan of superstructure of tomb X.



Fig. 8. Relief fragment showing Meryneith in the Fields of Iaru.



Fig. 9. Broken relief slab showing Tatia and his wife and child.

be carried out after consolidation of the rubble floor surrounding its aperture and of the small shaft. Therefore, further work here was postponed till next season.

The stratigraphical position of this shaft under the Ramesside floor and the neat revetment in courses of limestone of its upper part seem to indicate it belonged to an 18th Dynasty tomb. Some mud-brick walls in the surrounding area may belong to the same monument: thus there is a half-buried wall (2015/6) to the south of the shaft, running west-east and then turning north (2015/4) in the direction of Tatia's chapel, where it turns east again. Another wall running west-east (2015/7), not bonded with the former and standing on a different alignment, then takes over and continues to the south-west corner of the tomb of Sethnakht.<sup>5</sup> All walls consist of large New Kingdom bricks (about 34 x 17 x 10 cm), but their relationship is not yet fully understood and analysis will have to wait till next season. Possibly, the walls form the outlines of a single large courtyard and its eastern access, with the shaft lying in the centre of this courtyard.

<sup>5</sup> This is the wall designated as 2010/22 on Fig. 2 in: M.J. Raven, H.M. Hays, B.G. Aston, R. Cappers, B. Deslandes and L. Horácková, Preliminary report on the Leiden excavations at Saqqara, season 2010: an anonymous tomb, *JEOL* 43 (2011), 1-16.



Fig. 10. Statue of a falcon protecting a royal figure.

In the stratum directly above the top of wall 2015/6 a statue of a falcon was found (Fig. 10), lying on its side in loose sand and rubble. There is a kneeling person in front of the falcon's legs, probably depicting a king since private individuals in similar group statues do not usually face in the same direction as the god.<sup>6</sup> Although not many examples are known for statues of gods or sacred animals from the New Kingdom necropolis, a few parallels suggest a private Ramesside chapel as the original context of the statue. For example, in the tomb of Tia and Tia the fragment of a bull statue was found in the vicinity of the south chapel, which was probably devoted to the cult of the god Apis.<sup>7</sup> There are also indications for the existence of a private cult of the goddess Hathor in some of the Rameside tombs.<sup>8</sup> A large statue of a Hathor cow in the rock-cut tomb of Netjeruymes has a figure of the standing Ramesses II in front of her chest,<sup>9</sup> thereby forming a parallel for the combination of god and king in the present falcon figure. Unfortunately the falcon statue is very worn and flaked. There are no inscriptions and the features are not clear enough to study the iconography of the king. Perhaps the falcon statue once stood in the undecorated

<sup>6</sup> An exception is a statue of the Hathor cow with private individuals kneeling with their backs towards her (Leiden AM 108-a; cf. G.T. Martin, *The tombs of three Memphite officials: Ramose, Khay and Pabes* (London, 2001), 22-23 and pls. 70-71). The falcon, however, is usually associated with the king. For a later parallel made of basalt with the standing king Nectanebo II, cf. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 34.2.1 ([www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/34.2.1](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/34.2.1), accessed on 5 June 2015). Further research is necessary to solve this.

<sup>7</sup> Martin, *The tomb of Tia and Tia*, 5, pl. 153. There were two other fragments showing bull's ears, whereas a muzzle fragment was discovered in the tomb's forecourt; see Raven *et al.*, *The Memphite tomb of Horemheb*, V, 160 no. [66].

<sup>8</sup> *Supra* n. 6; cf. also G.T. Martin, *The tombs of three Memphite officials*, 15 and pl. 11, scene [7].

<sup>9</sup> A. Zivie, *Les tombeaux retrouvés de Saqqara* (Paris, 2003), pls. 52-55.

south annex of the adjacent chapel of Tatia, which was uncovered during the present season (Fig. 2).<sup>10</sup>

Clearing the rubble floor in front of Tomb X allowed a better scrutiny of that monument's eastern access, which has the shape of a portico screened off from the rubble floor on its east side (Fig. 7). To the north of this screen-wall, the rubble floor is edged with a line of mud-bricks which form a step down to the portico's floor lying about 35 cm deeper. The latter floor (1.30 x 1.71 m) is paved in neatly aligned bricks, forming alternating rows of transversal and longitudinal elements.

#### *Clearance of the area between Tomb X and the tomb of Meryneith*

In the area flanking the north wall of Tomb X scanty remains of Coptic huts were cleared during the season 2013. At the end of the present season a large part of the remaining debris used as the foundation for these huts was removed. The most notable find here was a four-sided stela (82 x 45 x 45 cm) which shows various persons in front of the gods Osiris, Isis, the Hathor cow, the Apis bull, and a tree goddess (2015/11; Fig. 11). Unfortunately the surface has suffered from salt and the texts are difficult to read. The owner of the stela is a stone-cutter Samut, who is represented with his wife Maia and other relatives.<sup>11</sup> The stela is still standing on a rubble floor and is Ramesside in date. On the north side, underneath the scene with the tree-goddess, three red plates were found *in situ*. East of this stela was a hill untouched by the 2013 excavations and still covered by a thick layer of rubble, most probably a robbers' dump. On the east side of this hill several layers of most probably Late Period date were uncovered, which revealed an embalmers' cache covered with a reed mat (2015/12) and a round pit of c. 1.5 m in diameter (2015/13). Further east the floor level of feature 2015/1 continued northward, though here the rubble contains almost no sherds. This area, and its potential connection with the floor under the four-sided stela, is scheduled for further study during season 2016.

#### *Architectural conservation (N. Warner)*

Architectural conservation work was carried out from the 4th to the 10th of May under the supervision of Nicholas Warner, and monitored by Inspector Ashur Abdelfatah Hussein of the Saqqara Inspectorate. The consolidation of the tomb of Sethnakht, located immediately to the east of the chapel of Tatia, was the main focus of work. All the mud-brick walls of the superstructure of the tomb were in a seriously eroded condition. The consolidation was carried out using new bricks of an average size of 20 x 10 x 7 cm, clearly distinguishable from the original bricks. Badly eroded sections were cut out and rebuilt in new masonry to a total height of

<sup>10</sup> We owe this suggestion to Dr Paolo Del Vesco, who points out that Tatia may have had a special relationship to the falcon god in view of the fact that his central stela depicts falcons in the cornice, instead of the usual jackals (just visible in M.J. Raven, H.M. Hays, B.G. Aston, L. Horáčeková, N. Warner and M. Neilson, Preliminary report on the Leiden excavations at Saqqara, season 2009: the tombs of Khay II and Tatia, *JEOL* 42 (2010), 5-24, Fig. 9).

<sup>11</sup> For another four-sided stela, cf. Martin, *The tomb of Tia and Tia*, 46-47, pls. 96-97. For slightly similar monuments, see also P. Vernus, *une formule des shaoubtis sur un pseudo-naos de la XIII<sup>e</sup> dynastie*, RdE 26 (1974), 100-114; M.I. Moursi, *Die Stele des Vezirs Re-hotep* (Kairo VdE 48845) MDAIK 37 (1981), 321-329, pls. 52-53. We owe these references to R.J. Demarée and N. Staring.



Fig. 11. Four-sided stela of Samut.

1.6 m above the internal floor level of the tomb. This covered most of the surviving remains with at least three courses of new brickwork, although some surviving fragments on the north wall protrude above this line. The entrance to the tomb on the east side was blocked with stone rubble masonry laid in mud mortar, in preparation for the backfilling of the entire tomb. This policy was agreed on because the tomb was an unfinished example, with very few surviving features of major interest. Backfilling was then carried out during the second half of the season, after the team of masons had left.

The east, west, and south mud-brick perimeter walls of Tomb X were also consolidated in certain areas to prevent the ingress of sand into the main courtyard of the tomb and to delineate the walls of this area more clearly. It is anticipated that the remainder of the walls will be consolidated next season.

The north-east corner and a section of the north wall of the tomb of Pay were also consolidated, as they were showing signs of deterioration due to erosion.

#### *Study of human skeletal remains (S. Inskip)*

During the 2015 excavation approximately 1417 fragments of human bone from 13 locations were recovered. Unfortunately no articulated or semi-articulated burials were identified. Analysis focused instead on assessing the number of individuals represented and any individualising criteria such as age and sex. Preservation was excellent with nearly all cortical bone surfaces available for inspection for pathologies. As the majority of fragments came from Tomb X and shaft 2015/2, these two areas will be discussed below. While bone fragments were also retrieved from squares J, K, L and M 96-99, as surface finds their use is limited. Accordingly they will not be elaborated on further at this stage.

#### *Tomb X*

In total 634 bone fragments were excavated from Tomb X; 72 fragments were located in the shaft fill. Remains were also located in all three tomb chambers: Chamber A had 477 fragments, Chamber B had 10 fragments, and Chamber C contained 75 fragments. Given the disturbance to the tomb it is extremely likely that the remains of some individuals are located in multiple rooms. A basic minimum number of individuals count (MNI) using body side and age to discriminate between individuals suggests that Tomb X could have contained at least 7 individuals. This included 2 infants, 1 child, 2 large male adults, 1 small adult female and another older adult.

The fragments were not dispersed evenly throughout the tomb; 75% of Tomb X remains came from the north east quadrant in Chamber A. The presence of many of the small bones of the hands and feet in this location suggests that some bodies were originally placed in this room, or that they were moved there while significant soft tissue or wrappings remained.

#### *Shaft 2015/2*

In shaft 2015/2 424 bone fragments were discovered. Of these 338 were at a depth of 6-9 meters. The MNI of this part of the shaft suggests the remains of 10 different people including 4 adults, 1 child, 1 infant, a small adult and 2 large young adults are represented. Other fragments likely belonging to these individuals were identified in sand



layers above 6 meters. While the number of bone fragments is very low for the MNI, many of the missing bones may be located within the tomb itself. It is also worthy of note that 38% of the fragments were burnt which suggests significant interference of the bodies.

#### Tomb of Maya

Previous excavations at Saqqara have yielded a significant amount of human remains from multiple tombs, time periods, and locations. As much material was excavated in the 80's and early 90's it is possible to undertake additional research using new methods and ideas. Accordingly a reanalysis of the material from Maya's tomb was begun. Research will focus on the skulls from each area of the tomb to assess for differences in metric dimensions, non-metric traits, pathologies, and the mummification process. This will be an ongoing project for the next few years.

#### Pottery (B. Aston)

A primary focus of this season's pottery work was the correction of drawings and the checking of pottery from the tomb of Maya and Meryt, which is scheduled for publication this year.

The New Kingdom embalmers' cache discovered against the south wall of the chapel of Tomb X at the end of the 2013 season was fully reconstructed and recorded.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the fluted storage jar found partly *in situ* in 2013, there was the nearly complete base of another large blue-painted storage jar which joined rim and neck sherds excavated over the east end of the tomb of Pay in 1994.<sup>13</sup> The vessel has an unusual sandy fabric and elaborate decoration including bands of alternating *wedjat*-eyes and *nefer*-signs, *neb*-baskets and mandrake fruits, and lotus flowers and leaves. The cache also included four large uncoated beakers with grooved rims, and six dishes with red rims, probably used as lids for the large jars.

The excavation of the shaft and upper level room of the substructure of Tomb X this year provided additional sherds which joined pottery from the lower level burial chamber (Chamber C) excavated in 2002. The rim of an oasis jar could now be re-united with its base, and a sherd inscribed 'wine' could unexpectedly be built into a small marl-clay flask painted (post-firing) with a red, white and blue collar decoration.

The excavation of the two intriguing shallow platform structures flanking the entrance to the Tomb X chapel was also completed this year. The low mud-brick walls enclosed a mass of broken offering pottery amounting to 27 crates which await reconstruction next season. This pottery includes many red funnel-necked jars as well as blue-painted ovoid jars, some with fruit and floral collar designs, papyrus marsh motifs, and a unique representation of hanging ducks.

Among the interesting surface finds was a shoulder sherd of a small Greek lekythos of black-on-red ware with incised white highlights over a black leaf design — a new ware for the Saqqara necropolis corpus.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. B.A. Aston, in: M.J. Raven *et al.*, *JEOL* 44 (2013), 20.

<sup>13</sup> Raven, *The tomb of Pay and Raia*, 126, no. 205, pl. 136.

Despite the short three-week season, over a hundred drawings were made of pottery from the substructure of the tomb of Sethnakht excavated last season, additions to Maya and Meryt pottery, and surface finds of Mycenaean sherds.

#### Other tasks

Before the end of the season, it was agreed with the team of Saqqara restorers to consolidate some of the finds made during the present season. This especially concerns the limestone statue of a falcon, which is covered in an outer layer of white plaster (Fig. 9). The plaster has numerous cracks and fissures and needs to be cleaned and then fixed to the stone core. Also, the relief slab from the tomb of Tatia discovered at the bottom of shaft 2015/2 was found broken in five parts; the SCA restorers have been asked to fit these together using epoxy resin and fibreglass rods and to cleanse its surface. These tasks will be carried out in the absence of the Expedition.

Dr Nicholas Warner has also proposed to replace some of the exterior layer of brickwork of the tomb of Ptahemwia in those places where the outer walls were rebuilt with an inferior quality of mud-bricks in the past. This work will likewise take place before the start of the Expedition's season 2016.