

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE LEIDEN-TURIN EXCAVATIONS AT SAQQARA,
SEASON 2017: THE SHAFT OF SAMUT AND THE NEW AREA
TO THE NORTH OF THE TOMB OF MAYA

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Introduction

During the 2017 season, the work of the joint Leiden-Turin Expedition was resumed after an interruption in 2016 due to various reasons. The works were carried out in two main areas (Fig. 1) between 16 March and 26 April. The staff consisted of Prof. Dr. Maarten J. Raven and Dr. Christian Greco (field directors), Ms Lara Weiss and Dr. Paolo Del Vesco (archaeologists and deputy directors), Dr. Nico Staring (archaeologist), Dr. Barbara Aston and Dr. Valentina Gasperini (ceramicists), Ms Alice Salvador (illustrator and photographer), Ms Lyla Pinch-Brock (artist), Dr. Nicholas Warner (architect), Mr Pieter Collet and Dr. Filippo Masino (surveyors) and Ms Ali Jelene Scheers (anthropologist). The fieldwork highly profited from the kind collaboration of Dr. Sabri Farag (General Director of Saqqara) and Dr. Mohammed Mohammed Yusuf (Director of Saqqara) and the supervision in the field of inspectors Eid Shaaban Mabrouk, Hassan Hassan Maghary, Ahmed Mounir Ali, and Ahmed Abdelkader Ameer.

The restoration of various limestone relief blocks found during the previous seasons as well as of those uncovered during this present season was carefully completed under the kind supervision of the head of restoration Ashraf Ashour Shaaban and Raghav Turki of the Imhotep Magazine. The joint expedition is very grateful to Prof Dr. Khaled el-Anany (Minister of State of Antiquities), to Dr. Mohammed Ismail (General Director of Foreign Missions) and to the Members of the Permanent Committee of the MSA, for permissions, advice and assistance.

The division of work between two teams allowed to complete the exploration of the area surrounding the so-called Tomb X¹ in the southern sector of the concession, so that the publication of the group of tombs here discovered so far could be prepared, and at the same time to start the investigation of the area situated to the north of the tomb of Maya.

The southern sector and the shaft of Samut (Maarten J. Raven)

During the first half of the season, some work was done in the southern sector of the concession, between the tombs of Pay and Raia in the west and that of Sethnakht in the east

¹ Since this article was written, the tomb formerly known as 'Tomb X' has been identified as the Tomb of Ry by Nico Staring: cf. N. Staring, 'Piecing Together the Dispersed Tomb of Ry at Saqqara', *Egyptian Archaeology* 54 (2019), 41-45.

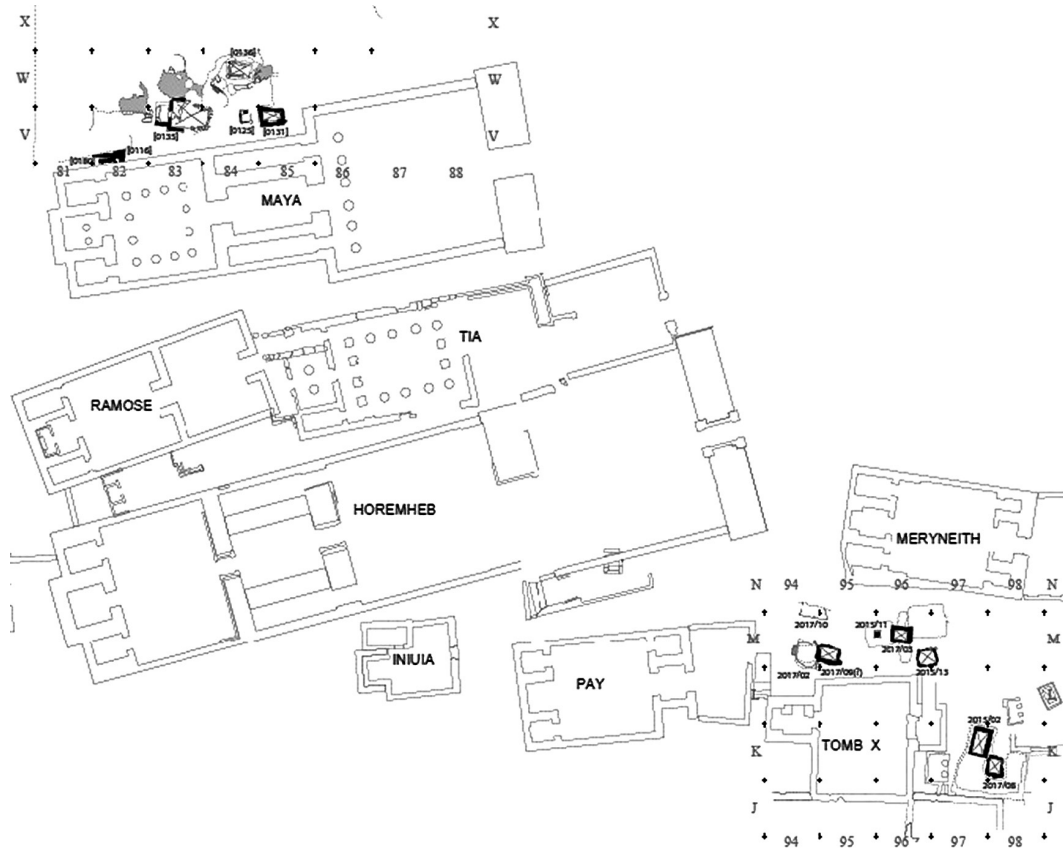


Figure 1. The two excavated areas in the north and south sectors of the Leiden-Turin concession (Drawing by Pieter Collet).

(Fig. 2). This was the area where the Leiden-Turin Expedition was also excavating during the 2015 season, and the aim of the present activity was to complete the records of some of the monuments found in this area. One of the objectives was to find out more about the tomb of Samut, whose four-sided stela was found in 2015 to the south of the tomb of Meryneith.² Another aim was to understand the relationship of the large shaft situated to the west of the chapel of Tatia (2015/2) and the mud-brick walls to the south and east of it.³ A third project was to find out where the shaft of the small chapel 2013/7 is situated.⁴ All three objectives could be realised in three weeks' time under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Maarten J. Raven. In addition, the tomb of an anonymous person (Tomb X) situated to the south of that of Meryneith could be consolidated by the Expedition's architect, Dr. Nicholas Warner.

² Raven *et al.*, *JEOL* 45, 13 and Fig. 11.

³ *Ibid.*, 9-11.

⁴ For the discovery of this chapel, see Raven *et al.*, *JEOL* 44, 11.

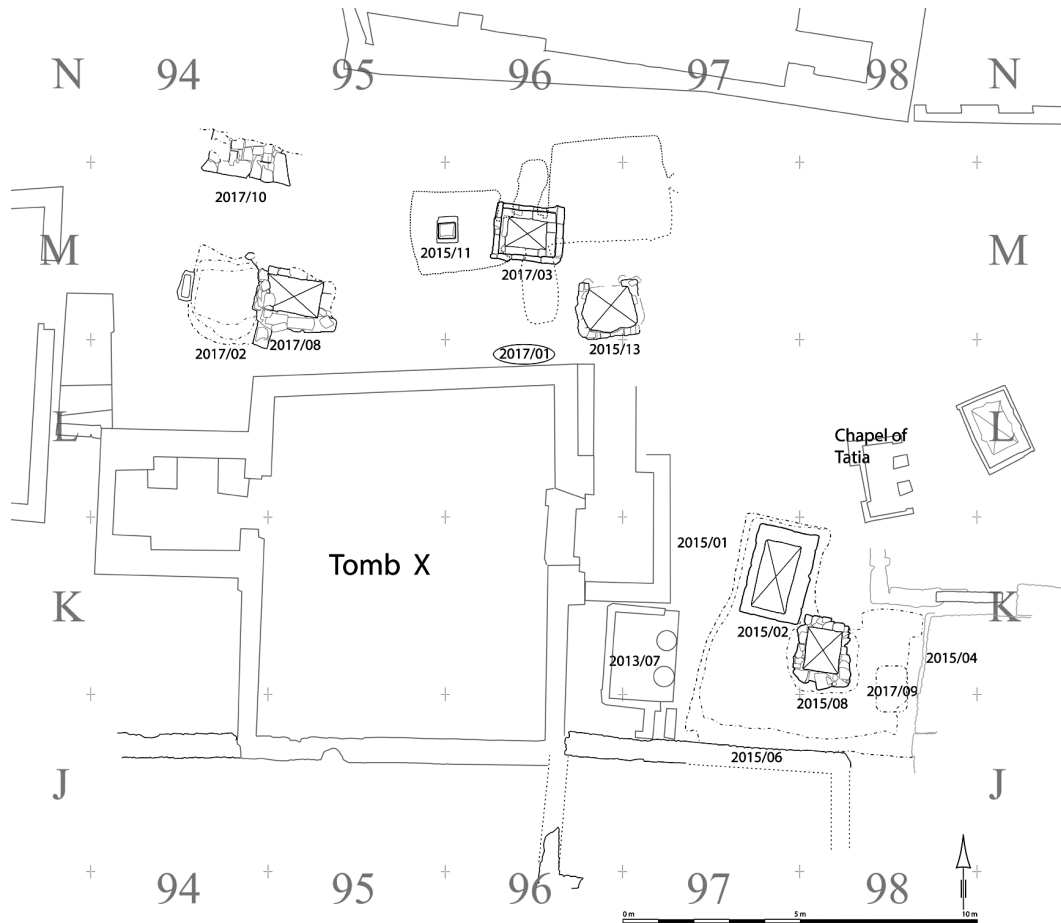


Figure 2. Plan of south sector of the Leiden-Turin concession (drawing by Pieter Collet).

The tomb of Samut (Maarten J. Raven)

The stone-cutter Samut is mentioned as the owner of a four-sided stela which was discovered at the end of the Expedition's last season (2015). This unusual monument was so far the only element seen of this person's tomb. In order to find out more about the remains of his funerary construction, a large heap of rubble and debris still left against the north wall of Tomb X was removed. This proved to contain an intact burial dating to the Third Intermediate Period (feature 2017/1) which was interred in a set of two painted coffins (Fig. 3), whereas the mummy itself was rolled in a reed mat and covered by a bead net. In total, several thousands of faience beads could be retrieved, which allowed a partial reconstruction of the appearance of this net. No other burial gifts accompanied this interment, which was identified as belonging to a young adult.

Removal of this heap of debris also led to the appearance of a small rectangular shaft to the east of Samut's stela (feature 2017/3), which doubtless belongs to this monument (Fig. 4).



Figure 3. The painted outer coffin of burial 2017/1 as found.

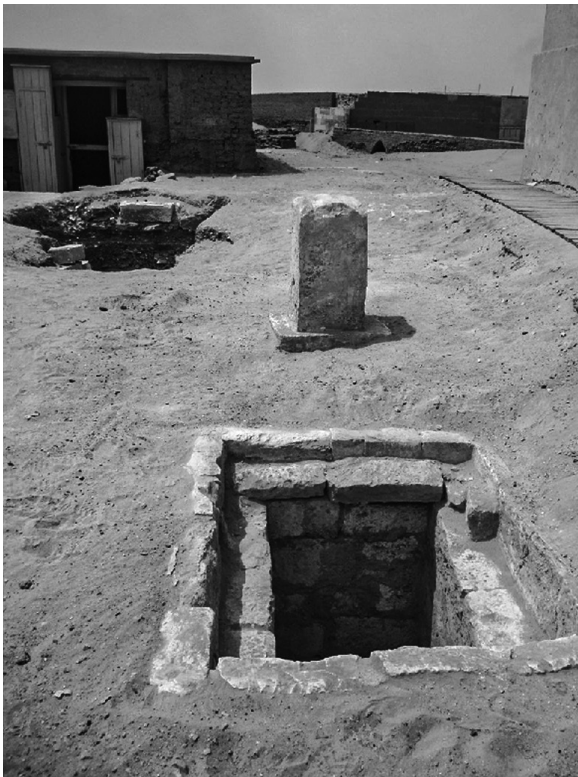


Figure 4. Tomb of Samut, with the shaft in the foreground and the four-sided stela behind. Shaft 2017/2 is visible in the background.



Figure 5. Limestone shabti inscribed for Samut.

The shaft proved to be 5 metres deep and has four chambers, one on each side, with an unfinished niche at the very bottom. All chambers had been plundered and contained only scanty remains of a number of Ramesside burials in black and yellow painted coffins. Among the few remaining finds were four shabtis (two of wood, one in faience, and the fourth in limestone), of which the latter was inscribed with the name of Samut himself (Fig. 5). The east chamber proved to have a robbers' break-through, probably leading to the chamber of shaft 2015/13.⁵

No other remains were found of Samut's tomb, and we are led to believe that it never consisted of more than the free-standing stela and the shaft. A bit further west, in front of the entrance to the tomb of Pay and Raia, a second plundered New Kingdom shaft was found (feature 2017/8), with another square pit to the west of it (2017/2). The latter may have been the location of the original New Kingdom tomb-chapel attached to the shaft, but was later converted to an additional shaft. Neither shaft was explored, but some relief blocks were retrieved from the robbers' walls surrounding their apertures. One of these seemed to belong to a door-jamb of the chapel of Iniua.⁶

Sondage to the west of the chapel of Tatia (Maarten J. Raven)

During the season 2015, a 7.5 m deep shaft was found due west of the tomb-chapel of Tatia (feature 2015/2). It could be excavated down to the bottom. However, the tomb-chambers were not emptied because this task appeared to be very dangerous, in view of the presence of a hole in the ceiling of the first chamber. The shaft's upper edge lies about 1 metre deeper than the surrounding rubble floor (2015/1), which seems to date to the Ramesside period. To the south of the shaft can be seen a mud-brick wall (2015/6), and a similar wall (2015/4) runs north-south to the south of Tatia's chapel. The question was whether these walls once formed a courtyard, with shaft 2015/2 originally situated in the centre of the courtyard.

Therefore, a sondage of 1 metre deep was cut along the west, south and east sides of the shaft. This demonstrated that wall 2015/6 is founded at a much higher level than the shaft's edge and cannot be contemporaneous. The same goes for wall 2016/4, so that no architecture seems to belong with shaft 2015/2. A positive result of the sondage was the identification of a smaller shaft (2017/8) as probably belonging to the limestone chapel 2013/7 further west (Fig. 6). Moreover, it now seems clear that this small shaft causes the hole in the ceiling of the underground chamber of the larger shaft. Since both shafts are so close together and not very well built, it was decided not to make an attempt to investigate the underground burial-chambers. Therefore, the shaft's concrete lid (installed in 2015) was left untouched, and the present fieldwork was restricted to a stratigraphic survey of the surrounding area. It could clearly be seen that once there was a rubble floor around the shaft in question and at the same level as its limestone edge. Later, two additional layers of rubble were deposited around the shaft's aperture, though not over its lid in order to respect the access to its sub-structure. The total thickness of these two layers is about 1 metre. Since both chapel 2013/7

⁵ For this shaft, see Raven *et al.*, *JEOL* 45, 13 and Fig. 2.

⁶ For this tomb, see Schneider, *Tomb of Iniua*. The block (2017-R9) could have belonged to the left-hand door-jamb of the central chapel (*ibid.* 71 and Fig. II.2a).



Figure 6. Shafts 2015/2 and 2017/8 as seen from the east, with chapel 2013/7 behind and the chapel of Tatia on the right.



Figure 7. Cache of embalming material as found.

and the chapel of Tatia are founded on top of this stratum, it was probably deposited or at least levelled during the Ramesside period.

An interesting result of this sondage was the retrieval of three burials of children, presumably dating to the late New Kingdom (2017/4, /5 and /7), inside the rubble heaped around the shaft. All three were wrapped in reed mats and then laid in shallow trenches roofed over by slabs of stone or large mud-bricks. One burial contained a small scarab, another child had an amuletic necklace in stone, glass and faience. Finally, in the corner formed by the walls 2015/4 and 2015/6 a cache of five pottery jars came up (2017/9), filled with potsherds and mummification material (Fig. 7). The pottery seems to predate the Ramesside floor. On the other hand, the burials may be Ramesside themselves, since at least for interment 2017/4 it could be seen that its trench had been dug down from the floor level of chapel 2013/7.

Restoration in the southern sector (Maarten J. Raven)

Tomb X is the name now given to the anonymous monument located to the south of the tomb of Meryneith during season 2013.⁷ In 2015, its walls were provisionally reinforced with modern mud-brick by the Expedition's architect, Dr. Nicholas Warner.⁸ However, during the intervening years the walls of this monument could be seen to suffer from further erosion. Since the tomb is unfinished and anonymous, and hardly contains any interesting features, it was proposed to backfill it as a means of preservation. Permission for this project was obtained from the Permanent Committee, and therefore the walls of the tomb were further reinforced during the present season, after which the whole tomb was refilled with sand and rubble. This will ensure a lasting protection for its vulnerable walls, a method that was already successfully applied to the tomb of Sethnakht in 2015.⁹

Another restoration project was executed during the present season inside the chapel of Tatia. When it was found in 2009, the chapel lacked quite a number of blocks from its original wall-decoration.¹⁰ Thus the south wall of the chapel had preserved only a single course of blocks, showing a lower register with musicians. The text of their song is inscribed above their heads, but these columns of inscription are clearly incomplete. In 2015, a large slab of relief was found at the bottom of shaft 2015/2, which is situated immediately behind the rear wall of Tatia's chapel. The slab had broken in five pieces, and was therefore left in the care of the Saqqara restorers in order to be rejoined. It was only after the Expedition returned home after the 2015 season, that we realised that this slab forms the major part of the second course of the south wall, and that the top of the inscription with the song text is written along its lower edge. Otherwise it depicts an offering scene before the tomb-owner, his wife and a little daughter. In the meantime, the restoration had been performed successfully,¹¹ and it was now installed in its original position on the south wall of the chapel of Tatia (Fig. 8). There, it forms an attractive addition to the wall-decoration of Tatia's chapel, of which the final publication is already well under way.¹²

⁷ See M.J. Raven *et al.*, *JEOL* 44, 9-11.

⁸ See M.J. Raven *et al.*, *JEOL* 45, 15.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-15.

¹⁰ See Raven *et al.*, *JEOL* 42, 9-13.

¹¹ See Hassan *et al.*, *JCHC* 4, 221-229.

¹² In the meantime V. Oeters, "The Tomb of Tatia, Wab-Priest of the Front of Ptah and Chief of the Goldsmiths" in Verschoor V., Stuart A.J., Demarée C. (eds.), *Imaging and Imagining the Memphite Necropolis: Liber amicorum René van Walsem*. Egyptologische Uitgaven no. 30. Leuven and Leiden, 57-80, has appeared.



Figure 8. Chapel of Tatia after reinstallation of the slab on the south wall.

The northern sector (Lara Weiss, Paolo Del Vesco)

In the northern area of the concession, the main aim was to explore the high ground located to the north of Maya's tomb, mostly deriving, as we realized during the fieldwork, from 1970s and 1980s excavation spoils. An "open-area" digging methodology was adopted in order to better understand the limits of the spoil dump and the use of this sector of the necropolis during and after the New Kingdom (Fig. 9), and we decided to extend the investigation over an area of approximately 500-600 square metres. The surface deposits were represented by heaps and dispersions of mud-bricks probably deriving from the conservation activities that took place in recent years in the tomb of Maya, after its excavation and documentation had been completed. Immediately beneath these superficial layers a more *tafl*-like deposit was found, which appeared to contain a high number of un-weathered New Kingdom shards and most probably derives from the late 1980s exploration of the subterranean chambers branching off from the funerary shaft of Maya's tomb. Already after the first few days of excavation the long modern dry-stone retaining wall that appears in the 1980s photos taken by the Dutch-British archaeologists at the end of their work in the tomb of Maya was again brought to light. At the same time, we also reached and extensively exposed the 1980s sloping compact surface that marked the original level of the high-ground located to the north of Maya. A few pottery shards found in the wind-blown sand deposit filling the gap between



Figure 10. Late Antique occupation surface with later robbery pits cut into it.

A few large robbery pits (contexts 124, 138, 160, 166, 168), most probably dating to the nineteenth century, have then been dug through the above-mentioned occupation levels, in search for decorated stone blocks, statues or funerary shafts (Fig. 10). These pits represent the last activity recorded in the stratification, before the loads of debris also amassed probably in the nineteenth century in connection with the ransacking of the area by the early explorers and before the start in the late 1970s and 1980s of systematic archaeological excavations.

Embalmers' caches from the area to the north of Maya's tomb (Paolo Del Vesco)

The underlying deposits pertain rather uniformly to the phase of abandonment and collapse of the late New Kingdom funerary structures. A 4 cm thick crust of mud with small inclusions of pebbles and pot shards marks the first part of this phase, and a 50 to 70 cm high deposit of fine wind-blown yellowish sand (contexts 150, 181) overlying the whole area clearly indicates a certain period of inactivity. Within this deposit of sand eight small pits (average size 60 x 50 cm) have been found containing fragmented or complete pottery vessels that were probably used during embalming activities (contexts 151-155, 173-174, 182). As a matter of fact these pits find extremely close parallels in what have been commonly termed “embalmers' caches”, i.e. the burial of the materials and substances used in the embalming process, and so deemed maybe impure or anyway not suitable for a second use, in the proximity of the tomb.¹⁵ A number of very similar caches had already been identified in the area surrounding

¹⁵ Raven, *Maya and Meryt II*, 13-14.



Figure 11. Cross section of one (context 153) of the small embalmers' caches found during this season.

the tombs of Horemheb, Maya and Tia during the previous seasons, and they appeared to be connected with interments placed in either reused spaces from earlier periods or specifically built funerary shafts and chambers.¹⁶

The deposits of embalmers' pots excavated this year were characterised by a stratification of dusty dark brown layers, ashy and whitish lenses, pots with darkened surface and straw or vegetal matting (Fig. 11) and sometimes also small linen bags full of *natron*. The vessels found in them are typologically akin to those found in the surrounding area in both Late Period shafts and Late Period caches, especially those dated to the second half of the sixth century and the fifth century BCE.

The New Kingdom chapels and structures in the northern sector (Paolo Del Vesco, Lara Weiss)

As already mentioned above the thick wind-blown sand deposit covers the New Kingdom levels, which on their turn appear to be lying about 1.6 m above the courtyard floor of Maya's tomb. At these raised levels the remains of two funerary chapels (125 and 135) and relative shafts (131 and 201) have been identified.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the embalmers' caches from previous seasons see: Aston and Aston, *Pottery*, 15, 117-123, and references to previous publications.



Figure 12. The small Ramesside chapel (context 125), from the East.



Figure 13. Mud tiles with grooves from a vaulted roof.



Figure 14. The wooden coffin that was found lying to the north of the small chapel (context 125). In the foreground the north-west corner of the chapel funerary shaft is visible.

The smaller chapel measures 1.05 x 1 m, with an inner space of just 80 x 80 cm, and it is made of three limestone slabs about 10 cm thick (Fig. 12). The decoration is unfortunately badly worn out and almost no inscriptions are visible. The surrounding stratification shows that the structure, after its cultic use, suffered the spoliation of its two limestone jambs, and went through a period of abandonment during which it was progressively covered by a compact muddy crust and a thick deposit of wind-blown sand, while the northern slab partially collapsed to the north. The shaft (inner size about 150 x 70 cm) dug immediately to the east of the chapel has been explored so far only to a depth of about 2 m, where, rather uncommonly, normal mud-bricks take the place of the limestone blocks in the revetment of the shaft's western and northern inner sides.¹⁷ In the deposit that filled the shaft, fired bricks and fragments of Coptic textiles, that likely indicate later plundering activities, were found. The same filling though, also yielded eleven interesting mud tiles with grooves,¹⁸ typical of vaulted mud-brick structures (Fig. 13), which may come from the original roofing of the

¹⁷ A very similar construction technique has been previously identified in the Ramesside Period funerary shafts of the so-called "mound-burials" found in the external area to the south of Horemheb's tomb (Raven *et al.*, *Horemheb* V, 41-43, Figs. I.25 and I.27).

¹⁸ Quite similar, but much smaller in size (about 24 x 16 x 6 cm), to those used for the vaulted roofing of the magazines A and B of the tomb of Horemheb. See Martin, *Horemheb* I, 51 Fig. 14, Pl. 157.



Figure 15. The bigger chapel 135, with the rim of its shaft in the foreground, seen from the East. The remains of the retaining wall built by the robbers are also visible in the centre.

small chapel itself or from the vault of the northern magazine of Maya's tomb, that is just a few metres away.

A badly damaged wooden coffin, with remains of the lower part of a mummified body (Fig. 14), was lying just 60 cm to the north-west of the funerary shaft and might have originally been buried in its subterranean chamber. It seems that the coffin was subsequently dragged out, hastily robbed of any valuable object and left at the mercy of the sun, the wind and the sand, that eventually covered it up.

The second and bigger chapel (context 135), situated some 4.5 m to the west of the small one, has a sort of antechapel that might have originally lodged a double-column portico and measures 1.10 x 2.38 m. This part of the structure was heavily dismantled by the later robbers (Fig. 15) and only scanty traces of the original pavement are preserved. The remains of a curved dry stone and mud-brick retaining wall also testify the plundering activity carried out within the structure, probably in search of the opening of the funerary shaft, most likely during the nineteenth century. A small inner room (about 0.9 x 1.5 m), accessed through a passage 0.64 m wide, still retained, under the collapsed fragments of the limestone slabs, part of the original deposit that progressively filled it, leaning against the southern wall. This deposit yielded few pottery fragments, among which one from a typical New Kingdom plate, and a badly preserved terracotta figurine (Fig. 16), but more importantly saved from complete destruction the lower part of the decoration of the chapel wall (see paragraph below). A big fragment of a stela, found collapsed outside the back of the chapel may be part of the decoration of the west wall of the small inner room.



Figure 16. SAK 2017-424. The terracotta figurine (9 x 5.5 x 4.4 cm), found in square V83, context 199, against the south wall of the inner room of chapel 135.

The very rough finishing of the outer faces of the limestone wall slabs, which average 24-26 cm in thickness, might have originally been smoothed with a plaster coating, as no traces of an external mud-brick wall have been identified yet. The general arrangement of the structure, with an antechapel with slightly widening side walls and an inner room that is about 64 cm smaller than the antechapel, slightly diverges from the common simple plan of most Ramesside chapels found in this area of the Saqqara necropolis. It finds though at least one parallel in the irregularly shaped chapel of Khay, found in 1986 to the south of Ramose's tomb.¹⁹

Immediately to the east of chapel 135 the stone revetment of a funerary shaft was identified, at least on three sides, but the excavation of the shaft filling has been postponed to a future season.

The foundations of the two chapels have been laid on a thick rubble and *tafl*-like deposit reaching the average elevation of 56.80-57.00 m ASL, and thus standing 1.40-1.60 m above the pavement level of the tomb of Maya. This artificial fill is remarkably similar to the so-called "builders' fill" identified under the tomb of Tia²⁰ (lying at about 56.65 m ASL) or under the chapel of Khay²¹ (56.80 m ASL), both to the south of Maya's tomb, and it apparently characterises the building activity carried out in this sector of the necropolis during the Ramesside period.²²

¹⁹ Martin *et al.*, *Memphite Officials*, 12 Fig. 4.

²⁰ Martin *et al.*, *Tia and Tia*, 3.

²¹ Martin *et al.*, *Memphite Officials*, 2, 57.

²² A similar fill also covered the area in front of Maya's tomb pylon and starting from its upper surface a number of funerary shafts were built by Ramesside officials. Cf. Raven, *Maya and Meryt II*, 9.



Figure 17. The two mud-brick walls (contexts 116 and 180) abutting the northern wall of Maya's tomb and covered by the modern retaining wall.

The earliest structures reached during the works of the present season are represented by two mud-brick walls abutting the northern outer wall of Maya's tomb (Fig. 17), but their complete understanding and recording will only be possible after the further removal of the 1980s retaining wall. The top of the lower wall stands just 60 cm above the level of Maya's tomb pavement and both walls were apparently covered by the rubble deposit on top of which the Ramesside chapels were built. The big size of the mud-bricks (32 x 16 x 9 cm) is a further element that points to an earlier dating of the two walls, which might be very close in time to the building of Maya's tomb.

The chapel reliefs from the northern sector (Christian Greco, Lara Weiss, Paolo Del Vesco)

Although the reliefs of the small chapel 125 were very weathered, the remains of an offering scene could be traced. No names or inscriptions were preserved. The larger chapel 135, lying to its west, instead possibly belonged to a man called (...)khau. Only the lower part of the name has been preserved. A lady attested on a stela fragment found collapsed at the back of the same chapel is called (We)rner²³ but her relation to a possible (...)khau is unclear. The chapel shows quite unusual reliefs with traces of colour such as a child figure crouched

²³ Cf. Ranke, *PN I*, 83.4 and information kindly shared with us by Anne Herzberg, *Prospographia Memphitica*, ongoing PhD research at the Freie Universität Berlin (Germany).



Figure 18. South wall of the inner room of the bigger chapel (135)

on a pillow on top of the feet of a male seated adult (Fig. 18) on the southern wall of the second room. A parallel of the motif is known from Thebes, in the tomb of Inherkhau dating to the 20th dynasty. On the eastern wall of room G, one of his granddaughters is depicted as sitting on the tomb owner's feet.²⁴

Another interesting detail in chapel 135 is the representation of a cow or bull on the northern wall of the antechamber. Only the legs of the animal have been preserved, but it is possible that we see the traces of a funeral procession.²⁵ Unfortunately the condition of the limestone reliefs is poor.

Main finds from the south and northern sectors (Maarten J. Raven, Lara Weiss)

In an attempt to find the remains of Samut's funerary chapel in the southern sector, a large heap of rubble and debris left against the north wall of Tomb X was removed. This proved to contain an intact burial dating to the Third Intermediate Period which was interred in a set of two painted coffins, whereas the mummy itself was rolled in a reed mat and covered by a bead net. In total, several thousands of faience beads could be retrieved, which allowed a partial reconstruction of the appearance of this net. Later Samut's shaft was discovered.

²⁴ Cherpion and Corteggiani, *Inherkhaouy*, 84-85 and 87 (detail) and Pls. 131-133 and 136.

²⁵ Compare, for example, Settgast, *Bestattungsdarstellungen*, 33-34 and Pl. 3.

Among the few finds were four *shabtis*: two of wood, one in faience, and a fourth limestone one that was inscribed with the name of Samut and confirmed him as the owner of the shaft.

In the northern sector comparatively fewer finds were retrieved, due to the nature of the deposits, being represented in great part by modern spoil dumps of previous excavations. Newspaper article fragments allowed to date the dumps to the late 1980s, while an old reed basket found inside a large robbery pit probably dates back to the nineteenth century exploration of the necropolis. As mentioned above several embalmers' caches of the Late Period were uncovered, and two flint stone knives, although retrieved from superficial layers, could also have been originally part of similar assemblages. Great focus was put this season on the collection of linen, wood and plaster samples, because we hope in future seasons to be able to add to the team a few specialists who will carefully investigate these materials. More than a hundred shabti and shabti fragments were recorded in total during this season mostly dating to the Late Period and found in surface deposits.

Among the interesting finds retrieved in the Late Antique occupation levels, in square W83, are a cross amulet made of copper and a little fragment of the rare and still poorly understood Coptic jar labels. This Coptic shard has a raised rim, and is inscribed with two letters at the shoulder. Unfortunately, we were yet unable to find any close parallel. Dr. Jenny Cromwell suggested a reading of the letter M and maybe of the delta sign, as shorthand for the content, the capacity of the vessel,²⁶ or as a symbol identifying the producer or the owner. Further research is necessary to decide the matter. Among the scattered objects found within the Late Antique occupation deposits, and probably deriving from digging and plundering activities, were also a quartzite whetstone, several Late Period shabti and a *tjt*-amulet.

Already mentioned is yet another interesting find from chapel 135: the badly damaged terracotta figurine (Fig. 16). The figurine has painted black eyes and two small clay appliques, most likely two arms or hands, added to the surface of the chest. It is hard to tell whether it is representing a male or female figure and further research is required to understand its possible meaning.²⁷

Pottery (Barbara G. Aston)

The New Kingdom embalming cache discovered this season southeast of Shaft 2015/2, consisted of five large jars, four of them blue painted (Fig. 19). The jars were complete, though crushed by the overlying deposits, and still had their mud seals in place. Inside were remains of linen and *natron* and six additional vessels which had been deliberately broken up and packed into the large jars.

Reconstruction work focused on the 'platform deposits' from Tomb X excavated in 2015, with numerous offering vessels reconstructed including a blue-painted, ovoid jar with a floral collar motif incorporating hanging ducks on one side, and a papyrus clump on the reverse. To the north of the tomb of Maya, the small groups of Late Period embalmers' cache pottery, recovered from the thick wind-blown sand deposit, remain to be reconstructed next season. Pottery drawing focused on completing the pottery from the tomb of Sethnakht and on recording and drawing the well-preserved Late Period pottery from Shaft 2002/16.

²⁶ 'M' could stand for 'mega' or 'micra' and the delta sign could be read as the number 4.

²⁷ For parallels see Stevens, *Private Religion*, 97, II.3.18 (Object 30/687) and Teeter, *Figurines*, 93 and Pl. 39 (OIM 14610), both registered as probably male in the absence of breasts.



Figure 19. Pottery found southeast of Shaft 2015/2.

Human Remains (Ali Jelene Scheers)

The Leiden-Turin excavation at Saqqara concentrated on two separate areas during the 2017 season. Together, these two areas yielded six (semi-)articulated burials, a shaft with human remains and 1428 fragments of human bones. Of these fragments, approximately 846 were found in a certain context, while the other 582 were loose finds. However, only one of the 1428 fragments (a mummified foot) was found articulated, while the others were all commingled bones scattered throughout various layers. Even the mummified foot could not be matched to the rest of its body, which lessens the research value of these finds. As such, they shall not be further discussed below, permitting focus on the burials instead.

1. Skeletal remains in the southern sector

The South area yielded four separate burials as well as a shaft. The individual graves were all placed against a previously existing wall, protecting the burial on one side. The other sides were often protected by stones scavenged from the surroundings.

Due to time constraints not all the graves were studied in the 2017 season, but at least some preliminary findings can be discussed here.

1.a. Burial 2017/1 (L96)

Burial 2017/1 was found on 18 March, the very first day on site for the 2017 season. The individual was buried north of Tomb X, against the exterior wall, with the head to the west and the feet to the east. The burial consisted of two painted coffins with patterns typical to the Third Intermediate Period, which protected the body as well as the reed mat, bead net, and some of the textile the deceased was buried in. The skeletal remains from this burial have not

been analysed yet, but preliminary observations indicate the individual was an adolescent. The body was complete and still articulated, with exceptional preservation (some finger- and toenails were recovered during excavation). This, combined with the *in situ* presence of the bead net, indicates that the individual has laid undisturbed since being buried. Further analysis of this individual should be carried out in the next season at Saqqara.

1.b. Shaft 2017/3 (M96)

Shaft 2017/3, found east to the stela of Samut, yielded five crates of skeletal material. These have not been studied yet, but at least four crania were among the crates – indicating an MNI (minimum number of individuals) of at least four.

During excavations a slipper coffin was recovered from the shaft. Analysis of the skeletal material should determine whether neonate skeletal elements (that could belong to the coffin) are present.

1.c. Burial 2017/4 (J97 & K97)

The third burial was found south-west of shaft 2015/2. This burial was excavated before it could be recorded, and as such there is no information about its burial position and materials. The only known associated material is a necklace made of semiprecious stones (item number 2017-8).

The skeletal remains of 2017/4 have been studied during the 2017 season. The burial belonged to a child around 7 years of age (epiphyseal fusion indicates an age older than 6 years, with dental age falling between 7 years \pm 24 months). No obvious cause of death could be determined, but the child did have active bone formation on the visceral surfaces of its ribs, indicating chronic respiratory problems at time-of-death. An additional pathology could be found on the mandible, which showed a perforation of the cortex as well as new bone formation on the right ascending ramus. It is unclear whether this lesion is associated with the pulmonary troubles the child might have experienced.

1.d. Burial 2017/5 (J98)

Burial 2017/5 was found near burial 2017/4, south-east of shaft 2015/2. The individual was wrapped in a reed mat, after which the body was surrounded and then covered by mud-bricks and stone blocks (one of them containing a small relief) taken from the area around the grave.

The individual was buried in a supine position, with the head towards the south and the face towards the west. Most of the body was still articulated, with some repositioning of certain skeletal elements probably due to the coarse gravelly soil around the burial and the paltry protection of the body itself.

1.e. Burial 2017/7 (K98)

In line with the other burials uncovered in the southern area, burial 2017/7 was also covered with a reed mat and various stones scavenged from the surrounding area. This individual was buried with its head against the east wall of shaft 2015/2 (head towards the west, feet towards the east). Other than the reed mat a small scarab (2017-15) was found together with the burial.

Analysis of the remains brought to light that the individual was a child around 6 years of age (dental age of 8 years \pm 24 months; long bone measurements indicate an age between 5-5.5 years old) also suffering from chronic pulmonary disease at time-of-death. Interesting to note is that only the left ribs were affected with the new bone formation on the visceral surfaces, indicating that only the left lung might have been affected.

Other than the new bone formation on the ribs the individual also suffered from *cribra orbitalia*, which is the formation of narrow apertures on the roof of the eye orbit. The cause for *cribra orbitalia* is currently debated, but it is probably connected to anaemia and might be used as an indicator of childhood stress.

2. *Skeletal remains in the northern sector*

The excavations at the north area yielded two semi-articulated burials and one assemblage of burned bones. These three features have been excavated in detail but still await analysis.

2.a. Context 127 (V84)

Context 127 consisted of a burned area containing bones that, at a first glance, seemed to be in anatomically correct positions. However, the whole assemblage was quite fragile and as such suffered from exposition to the elements. Analysis of the burned remains should show whether the assemblage contains more than one individual.

2.b. Context 148 (V82)

The individual in context 148 was buried adjacent to Maya's north wall, with the head towards the east and the feet towards the west. The burial made use of a crevasse created between Maya's wall and a mud-brick wall (context 116). In addition to these walls parallel to the body, multiple stones were used to cover the burial. This protection did not suffice against grave robbers, however, as the excavation showed that the grave was severely disturbed: only the left side of the thorax (consisting of seven sternal rib ends), the left radius and the left ulna, together with a layer of cloth and some reed mat fragments, were still *in situ*. More bones were found in the general area of the burial, although these also contained juvenile skeletal material – indicating commingling from other individuals.

2.c. Context 162 (W84)

The burial of context 162 consisted of a wooden coffin which was probably removed from its original burial position (most likely the very close shaft 131), robbed, and left exposed to be covered with a wind-blown sand deposit. Some of the coffin survived the ordeal, preserving the feet in the process. As such, the burial consisted of both feet and both legs, all still articulated and wrapped in badly preserved bandages, in addition to remains of the two scapulae. Some scattered vertebrae were found during excavation, but no sign of other skeletal material was found.

This report of the human skeletal material found during the 2017 season at Saqqara indicates the research that still has to be done in the following season: all burials not studied during this

season should be examined, and the MNI and skeletal assemblage of shaft 2017/3 have to be determined. In addition to that, the re-examination of the material from Maya's tomb, which was started during the 2015 season, shall be an on-going project for the coming years.

Architectural Conservation (Nicholas Warner)

Architectural conservation work was carried out from 2 to 6 April under the supervision of Nicholas Warner in Tomb X, south-west of the tomb of Meryneith, monitored by architects Hossam Hassan Mahmoud and Ashraf Ashour Shaaban from the Saqqara Taftish (see above). North of Maya's tomb the restorers cleaned and restored reliefs and a small chapel (context 125) and two reliefs in the Saqqara storage facilities were chosen to be restored and one to be cleaned under supervision of Ragab Turki.

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