Revisiting the Old Kingdom at Thebes: Extracting meaning from highly fragmentary evidence

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Abstract

The 'tomb complex' that developed over time around the New Kingdom tomb of Neferhotep in el-Khokha comprises TT49 (the main tomb), TT187, TT362, TT363, and Kampp -347- and -348-. These tombs were heavily reused starting from the end of the New Kingdom. During the Third Intermediate Period, widespread architectural alterations resulted in a complex network of tombs connected by new passages and shafts. In the process of altering and expanding the original plan of TT362, builders encountered a much earlier tomb dating from the late Old Kingdom, as suggested by its architecture and preserved fragmentary decoration. This elite tomb is part of a cluster of provincial rock-cut tombs in el-Khokha and adds more depth to our knowledge of Old Kingdom Thebes. This paper discusses the observable elements of the tomb's decorative scheme, providing additional information regarding the still poorly understood role of Thebes in the Old Kingdom.

Introduction

The Old Kingdom (c. 2686–2160 BCE) is not consistently understood in all provincial areas of Egypt, with much of what we know coming from clusters of rock-cut elite tombs dating from this period.[1] These tombs yield key information on central and provincial

[1] For example: Mohamed Saleh, *Three Old Kingdom tombs at Thebes* (Mainz, 1977); Naguib Kanawati, *Governmental reforms in Old Kingdom Egypt* (Warminster, 1980); Yvonne Harpur, *Decoration in Egyptian tombs of the Old Kingdom: Studies in orientation and scene content* (London, 1987).

administration, as well as the officials originally buried there.[2] However, the lives of the majority of the population and how non-elite groups experienced centralized bureaucracy remain to be better understood, with current work progressively advancing our knowledge of all social strata.[3] Throughout the Old Kingdom, the growing numbers of provincial elite tombs have been usually interpreted as the materialization of both state power among local communities and the appearance of powerful local elites which gathered enough power to be buried in their localities, instead of in proximity to the king.[4] These perspectives stem from interpretations emphasizing the role of communal identity building, which are recently becoming more prominent within studies on the Old Kingdom in Egypt.[5]

In comparison with other provincial sites, we still know little about Thebes in the Old Kingdom. For instance, major excavations at Karnak failed to reveal stratigraphic sequences for Old Kingdom occupation. Pottery resembling that of the Old Kingdom and statues referring to Old Kingdom rulers found during these excavations are accepted to date from later periods.[6] Our knowledge of Old Kingdom Thebes owes much to discussions on the chronology of a cluster of tombs dating from this period identified in el-Khokha (fig. 1).[7] The date of most of the Old Kingdom remains at Thebes ranges from the 4th to the 6th Dynasty. These remains also include two mastabas dating to the early 4th Dynasty,[8] although Pre-Dynastic (c. 5300–3000 BCE) and earlier settlement material has also been retrieved at the site, between the two Old Kingdom mastabas.[9] The bulk of the Old Kingdom remains at Thebes concentrate in the area of el-Khokha.

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[2] Nigel Strudwick, *The administration of the Old Kingdom: The highest titles and their holders* (London, 1985); Émilie Martinet, *L'Administration provinciale sous l'Ancien Empire égyptien* (Leiden, 2019); Juan Carlos Moreno García, *The state in ancient Egypt: Power, challenges and dynamics* (London, 2019).

[3] Richard Bussmann and Bart Vanthuyne, "Zawyet Sultan: Second preliminary report. Excavation season 2022," *MDAIK* 79 (2023); Richard Bussmann, *The archaeology of pharaonic Egypt: Society and culture, 2700–1700 BC* (Cambridge, 2024).

[4] Jessica Tomkins, "Provincial elite burials in the Old Kingdom: A reflection of changing power dynamics?" in Victoria Almansa-Villatoro, Silvia Š. Nigrelli and Mark Lehner, eds., *In the House of Heqanakht: Text and context in ancient Egypt. Studies in honor of James P. Allen* (Leiden, 2023), 515–26.

[5] Deborah Vischak, *Community and identity in ancient Egypt: The Old Kingdom cemetery at Qubbet el-Hawa* (Cambridge, 2015).

[6] Luc Gabolde, *Karnak, Amon-Rê: La genèse d'un temple, la naissance d'un dieu* (Cairo, 2018), 167.

[7] Saleh, *Three Old Kingdom tombs*; Zoltán I. Fabián, "News from Old Kingdom Thebes," in Ezter Bechtold, András Gulyás and Andrea Hasznos, eds., *From Illahun to Djeme: Papers presented in honour of Ulrich Luft* (Oxford, 2011); Zoltán I. Fabián, "The autobiographic inscription of Seni-iqer (TT 185), a Theban dignitary of the late Old Kingdom – 2016," in Tamás Bács, Ádam Bollók and Tivadar Vida, eds., *Across the Mediterranean – Along the Nile: Studies in Egyptology, Nubiology and Late Antiquity dedicated to László Török on the occasion of his 75th birthday*, vol. 1 (Budapest, 2018).

[8] Dieter Arnold, *Gräber des Alten und Mittleren Reiches in El-Tarif*. (Mainz am Rhein 1972), 11–18; Rasha Soliman, *Old and Middle Kingdom Theban tombs* (London, 2009), 12.

[9] Bolesław Ginter, Janusz K. Kozłowiski and Joachim Śliwa, "Excavation report on the prehistoric and predynastic settlement in el-Tarif during 1978," *MDAIK* 35 (1979).

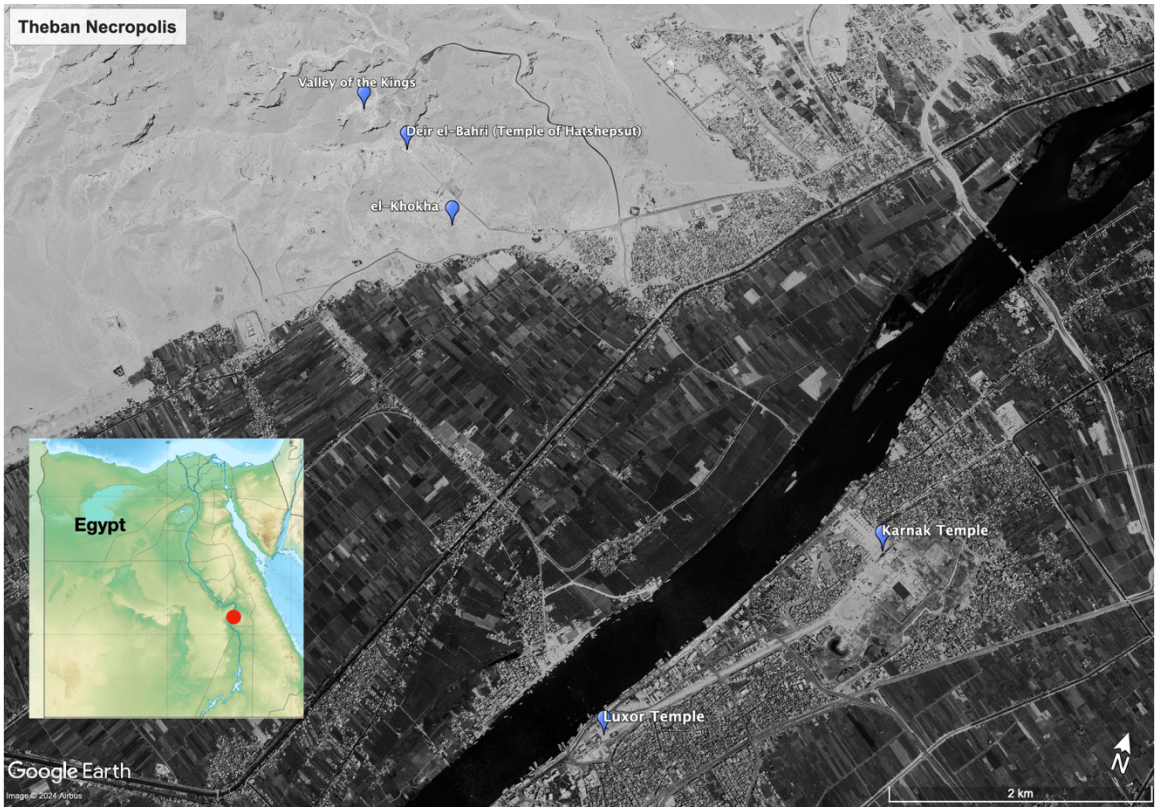


Fig. 1 The Theban necropolis World Heritage area, highlighting major sites and the location of el-Khokha, discussed in this paper.

The tombs of Seniqer, Khenty, Ihy, Unasankh and Khenu were identified in el-Khokha (table 1). Most of them seem to date to the 6th Dynasty, including the most recently excavated of these tombs, i.e., TT185. Based on comparisons with other tombs, the excavators dated the TT185 to the 6th Dynasty,[10] pushing the chronology of this cluster of tombs a little further in time.[11] Both TT405 and TT186 seem to date to the late 6th Dynasty,[12] although attempts to refine the chronology of these tombs have placed them in the middle and early parts of Pepy II's reign, respectively.[13] According to Saleh, the tomb of Unasankh (TT413) probably dates to the early 5th to 6th Dynasty, although Harpur believes a 6th Dynasty or later date to be more likely, which would be more consistent with the overall chronology of the Old Kingdom rock-cut tombs in el-Khokha.[14] Earlier suggestions of a First Intermediate Period date seem unlikely, especially in light of recent debates based on

[10] Zoltán I. Fabián, "News from Old Kingdom Thebes."
[11] Saleh, *Three Old Kingdom tombs*; cf. Friederike Kampp, *Die thebanische Nekropole. Zum Wandel der Grabgedankens von der XVIII. bis zur XX. Dynastie* (Mainz am Rhein, 1996), 475.
[12] Saleh, *Three Old Kingdom tombs*; Harpur, *Decoration in Egyptian tombs*, 281; Kampp *Die thebanische Nekropole*, 475.
[13] Kanawati *Governmental reforms*, 142; Harpur, *Decoration in Egyptian tombs*, 281.
[14] Saleh *Three Old Kingdom tombs*, 27; cf. Harpur *Decoration in Egyptian tombs*, 241.

compelling historical and social evidence pushing the chronology of the Old Kingdom further to the 8th Dynasty.[15] Another Old Kingdom Theban tomb, that of Khenu, is located north of the other tombs. As reported by Saleh, the tomb remains unexcavated and unnumbered, but probably also dates from the late Old Kingdom.[16]

Tomb	**Tomb owner**	**Reference**
TT185	Seniqer	Fabián, "News from Old Kingdom Thebes;" Fabián, "The autobiographic inscription of Seni-iqer"
TT186	Ihy	Saleh, *Three Old Kingdom tombs*, 23–26
TT405	Khenty	Saleh, *Three Old Kingdom tombs*, 18–22
TT413	Unasankh	Saleh, *Three Old Kingdom tombs*, 12–17
Unnumbered and unexcavated	Khenu	Saleh, *Three Old Kingdom tombs*, 10–11
Unnumbered, unexcavated	Unidentified	First recognition in 2016 reported by Menozzi, "Funerary uses and reuses," 11–4; architectural and iconographic assessment carried out in 2017 reported here

Table 1 The identified Old Kingdom tombs in el-Khokha.

A further rock-cut tomb has been recently added to the same cluster of Old Kingdom tombs in el-Khokha as a result of excavations in TT362 (Paenmuaset).[17] As reported by Menozzi, the additional tomb is connected to the funerary chamber of the 19th Dynasty tomb of *wab*-priest Paenmuaset due to architectural alterations to the tomb's original plan in the Third Intermediate Period (1069–664 BC).[18] Based on the tomb's architecture and fragmentary decorative elements, it can also be dated to the late Old Kingdom, although future excavations might reveal further chronologically relevant information.

Despite a long history of archaeological explorations, major historical periods of Theban history, such as the Middle Kingdom, remain less known. This is partly due to an extensive focus on dominant New Kingdom remains, but also due to a lack of representation,

[15] Hratch Papazian, "The state of Egypt in the Eighth Dynasty," in Peter der Manuelian and Thomas Schneider, eds., *Towards a New History for the Egyptian Old Kingdom: Perspectives on the Pyramid Age* (Leiden, 2015), 394–95.
[16] Saleh *Three Old Kingdom tombs*, 10.
[17] Oliva Menozzi, "Funerary uses and reuses of Theban rock-cut architecture between the 9th century BC and the Ptolemaic period: Planimetric re-functionalization of tombs at the Neferhotep Complex (Luxor-Egypt)," *Frankfurter elektronische Rundschau zur Altertumskunde* 45 (2021), 19–20.
[18] Menozzi, "Funerary uses and reuses;" Rennan Lemos, "Making plundered spaces sacred again: Fragmentation, reorganisation and respect in reused Theban tombs," *Antiquity* 99.403 (2025).

in the archaeological record, of earlier remains, and the heavy reuse of earlier tombs.[19] A good example are the tombs of the Middle Kingdom uncovered under the New Kingdom mortuary temple of Thutmose III.[20] Expanding the corpora of available evidence for less known historical periods is crucial to our understanding of society before the New Kingdom.[21] Both due to an Egyptological focus on the re-examination of New Kingdom tombs, which mostly produces circumstantial new evidence for a largely well-understood historical period, and a lack of representation of earlier periods in the archaeological record, the Old Kingdom at Thebes remains poorly understood.

An increasing focus on tomb and object reuse and the complex, multi-temporal nature of the archaeological record of the Theban necropolis is contributing to a broader understanding of its archaeology beyond the New Kingdom.[22] Recent research has gradually revealed aspects of the role that New Kingdom rock-cut tombs played in later periods of Theban history, including the reconceptualization of these spaces and the reuse of earlier funerary items as votive offerings within the tombs.[23] This work prompts an opportunity for renewed investigation of archaeological material of later periods as a promising avenue for uncovering the remains of poorly represented periods in Theban history.

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[19] Dziobek, "The architectural development of Theban tombs in the early Eighteenth Dynasty," in Jan Assmann, Günter Burkard and Vivian Davies, eds., *Problems and priorities in Egyptian archaeology* (London, 1987), 76–7; Julia Budka, "Reuse of a Middle Kingdom saff tomb in the Assasif," in Bori Németh, ed., *Now behold my spacious kingdom. Studies presented to Zoltán Imre Fábián on the occasion of his 63rd birthday* (Budapest 2017).

[20] Miriam Seco Álvarez and Javier Martínez Babón, "Middle Kingdom tombs and objects in Thutmosis III's Temple of Millions of Years (Luxor)," in Alejandro Jiménez-Serrano and Antonio J. Morales, eds., *Middle Kingdom palace culture and its echoes in the provinces* (Leiden 2021); see Aidan Dodson, "Earlier royal tombs, the royal cemeteries of Thebes, and the beginnings of the Valley of the Kings," in Richard Wilkinson and Kent Weeks, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Valley of the Kings* (Oxford 2015).

[21] E.g., James P. Allen, "The high officials of the early Middle Kingdom," in Nigel Strudwick and JohnTaylor, eds., *The Theban necropolis: Past, present and future* (London 2003).

[22] For example: Nigel Strudwick, "Use and re-use of tombs in the Theban necropolis: Patterns and explanations," CIPREL 28 (2010); Nigel Strudwick, ""And many men of the land rob them as well, and are (our) companions": The Deir el-Medina gang and the involvement of wider society in late New Kingdom tomb robbery," in Christina Geisen, Jean Li, Steven B. Shubert and Kei Yamamoto, eds., *His good name: Essays on identity and self-presentation in ancient Egypt in honor of Ronald J. Leprohon* (Atlanta, 2021); Rennan Lemos, Pedro von Seehausen, Marialaura Di Giovanni et al., "Entangled temporalities in the Theban necropolis: A materiality and heritage approach to the excavation of Theban Tomb 187," *Journal of Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology and Heritage Studies* 5.2 (2017); Kara Cooney, "Coffin reuse in the 21st Dynasty: A case study of the Bab el-Gasus coffins in the Egyptian Museum of Florence," in Rogério Sousa, ed., *The tomb of the priests of Amun: Burial assemblages in the Egyptian Museum of Florence* (Leiden, 2018); Kara Cooney, *Recycling for death: Coffin reuse in ancient Egypt and the Theban royal caches* (Cairo, 2025); Gábor Schreiber, "Mummy-boards from a Theban group burial dating to Dynasty 20," in John Taylor and Marie Vandenbeusch, eds., *Ancient Egyptian coffins: Craft traditions and functionality* (Leuven, 2018); Marta Kaczanowicz, *Old tombs, new tenants: Third Intermediate Period and Late Period reuse of Theban tombs* (PhD thesis, Adam Mickiewicz University, 2020); Menozzi, "Funerary uses and reuses"; Lemos, "Making plundered spaces sacred again."

[23] Menozzi, "Funerary uses and reuses," 42; Lemos, "Making plundered spaces sacred again," 142.

Scholars have put forward different perceptions of Old Kingdom Thebes, attributing varying importance to the site during this period.[24] However, increasing work on re-contextualizing the available evidence in light of new data helps us expanding our knowledge of the important role of Thebes the Old Kingdom.

Thebes in the Old Kingdom

The tombs of el-Khokha comprise our main source of historical information for the Old Kingdom at Thebes. Information extracted from the titles of tomb owners provide glimpses of provincial society at Thebes during the Old Kingdom (table 2).

Tomb	**Owner**	**Titles**	**Trasliteration**
TT185	Seniqer	"Divine seal-bearer"	*sḏꜣwty-nṯr*
		"Foremost of the elite"	*ỉry-pꜥt ḥꜣty-ꜥ*
TT186	Ihy	"The sole companion"	*smr-wꜥty*
		"Lector"	*ḫry-ḥbt*
		"Great leader of the province"	*ḥry-tp ꜥꜣ n spꜣt*
		"Overseer of the phyles of the province"	*ỉmy-r sꜣw spꜣt*
		"Overseer of the two granaries"	*ỉmy-r šnwty*
		"Royal chamberlain of the palace"	*ḫry-tp nswt pr-ꜥꜣ*
		"Staff of the Rekhyet-people"	*mdw-rḫyt*
		"The one who is privy to the secret of every word that is brought to the province"	*ḥry-sšṯꜣ n mdwt nbt šṯꜣt ỉnnt r spꜣt*
		"The one who is favorite of the King and tenant of his two banks"	*ỉmy ỉb n nswt ḫnty ỉdby.f*
		"Judge and border official of preeminent place"	*sꜣb ꜥḏ-mr ny nst ḫntt*
		"Estate manager"	*ḥkꜣ ḥwt*
TT405	Khenty	"Royal seal-bearer"	*sḏꜣwty-bỉty*
		"The sole companion"	*smr-wꜥty*
		"Lector"	*ḫry-ḥbt*
		"Great leader of the province"	*ḥry-tp ꜥꜣ n spꜣt*
		"The one who is privy to the secret of every word that is brought to the province"	*ḥry-sšṯꜣ n mdt nbt šṯꜣt ỉnnt r spꜣt*
		"Overseer of the two granaries" (?)	*ỉmy-r šnwty* (*?*)
TT413	Unasankh	"Royal chamberlain"	*ḫry-tp nswt*

[24] Cf. Daniel Polz, "Thebes," in D. Redford, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, vol. 3 (Oxford, 2001); Martina Ullmann, "Thebes: Origins of a ritual landscape," in Peter F. Dorman and Betsy M. Bryan, eds., *Sacred space and sacred function in ancient Thebes* (Chicago, 2007); Soliman, *Old and Middle Kingdom tombs*.

		"Overseer of Upper Egypt"	*ỉmy-r šmˁw*
		"Overseer of the two granaries"	*ỉmy-r šnwty*
		"Great leader of the province"	*ḥry-tp ˁɜ n spɜt*
		"The one who is privy to the secret of every word that is brought to the province"	*ḥry-sšṯɜ n mdt nbt ṯṯɜt ỉnnt r spɜt*
Unumbered	Khenu	"Overseer of the phyles of the province"	*ỉmy-r sɜw spɜt*

Table 2 Titles of Old Kingdom Theban tomb owners, based on: Saleh, *Three Old Kingdom tombs*; and Fabián, "News from Old Kingdom Thebes."

Evidence from titles reveals the proximity of some tomb owners to the king, which likely indicates they played a role in the central administration of the Theban province. Some titles were shared among various tomb owners, while others are exclusive to certain individuals. Based on a higher variation of titles, Saleh believed Ihy should be considered the highest official among the known tomb owners.[25] Ihy occupied positions in the central administration of the province and is the only attested Old Kingdom tomb owner to bear the title of "favorite of the king". Other titles only attested for Ihy include: "overseer of the phyles of the province", "judge and border official" and "estate manager". These reflect a larger set of responsibilities bestowed upon Ihy by the central administration. Some of his titles offer further glimpses of the wider functioning of provincial society: "overseer of the phyles of the province" suggests that Ihy was responsible for coordinating gangs of workers likely involved in various building projects in the Theban region, which would reflect, in a smaller scale, the situation at Giza.[26] Evidence for a "Dominion Behind Thebes" in the West of the Theban mountain includes a rock signature of an individual named Kem, a metalworker from the Old Kingdom.[27] Combining the two sets of evidence allows us to suggest that Thebes was fully included in the Egyptian administration, at least from the late Old Kingdom.[28]

The next in importance below Ihy would have been Unasankh, who shared the title of "great chieftain" with Ihy's son, Khenty. Ihy and Unasankh shared the titles of "overseer of the granary" and "royal chamberlain", which were not recorded for Khenty . Unasankh, on the other hand, is the only one who bore the title of "overseer of Upper Egypt", a title which

[25] Saleh, *Three Old Kingdom tombs*, 12.
[26] Pierre Tallet and Mark Lehner, *Les papyrus de la Mer Rouge. L'inspecteur Merer: un témoin oculaire de la construction de la pyramide de Chéops* (Paris, 2021).
[27] John Darnell and Deborah Darnell, "Theban Desert Road Survey," in Gene Gragg, ed., *The Oriental Institute 1997–1998 Annual Report* (Chicago, 1998), 90.
[28] Martinet, *L'Administration provinciale*.

was given to various members of provincial elites responsible for tax collection halfway through the reign of Pepy II.[29] This evidence likely indicates the increasing importance of Thebes towards the end of the Old Kingdom within the administration of the country, which would reinforce Harpur's dating of the tomb of Unasakh. Therefore, most of the known Old Kingdom tombs in el-Khokha would be likely contemporaneous to the late 6th Dynasty or even later.[30] The relative hierarchy expressed by the titles of Old Kingdom Theban tomb owners also suggests inner differentiation among the local elite of the province during this period.[31]

The wives of the el-Khokha Old Kingdom tomb owners seem to have played both political and religious roles. Even if their names are not always known due to preservation issues, preserved titles include "priestess of Hathor" and "she whom the king knows." The wives of Unasankh, Ihy and Khenty were all priestesses of Hathor, which reflects the role played by these women in promoting social cohesion from the top down through religion. The wives of Unasankh and Khenty were also "known by the king," which demonstrates their political importance through their husbands.[32]

Despite their fragmentary character, evidence from these tombs allows us to establish a general image of Thebes during the Old Kingdom. Considering the highly hierarchical nature of ancient Egyptian society, evidence from the top social echelons of the provinces allows us to extrapolate the roles played by specific individuals who represented royal administration in the provinces and imagine those groups under their control. Evidence for the workers under the control of provincial officials is very limited. However, it was control over local working populations, granted by the central state, that allowed local tomb owners at Thebes to gather power to distinguish themselves within their province. The title "Overseer of Upper Egypt" wielded by Unasankh would therefore express the increasing importance of local Theban officials within the central administration, from the very end of the Old Kingdom.

New evidence from el-Khokha

[29] Kanawati, *Governmental reforms*, 129–130.
[30] Martinet, *L'Administration provinciale*, 775–8; Harpur, *Decoration in Egyptian tombs*; see also Papazian, "The state of Egypt in the Eighth Dynasty."
[31] Edward Brovarski, "Overseers of Upper Egypt in the Old to Middle Kingdoms," *ZÄS* 140.2 (2013); Henry G. Fischer, "A provincial statue of the Egyptian Sixth Dynasty," *American Journal of Archaeology* 66.1 (1962); Émilie Martinet, *Le normarque sur l'Ancien Empire* (Paris, 2011); Strudwick, *The administration of the Old Kingdom*.
[32] Saleh, *Three Old Kingdom tombs*, passim.

Extensive tomb reuse from the Third Intermediate Period connected several New Kingdom tombs excavated into the rock from the courtyard of the tomb of Neferhotep (TT49), which became the center of what later became a mortuary complex.[33] The main tomb, dated from the reign of Ay, belonged to Neferhotep, scribe great of Amun.[34] The other tombs are Ramesside and belonged to other temple personnel, including two *wab*-priests and one chief musician.[35] With the exception of TT49, which had its architecture altered to accommodate a later Ramesside burial, all other tombs were connected by new passages and altered chambers (fig. 2).

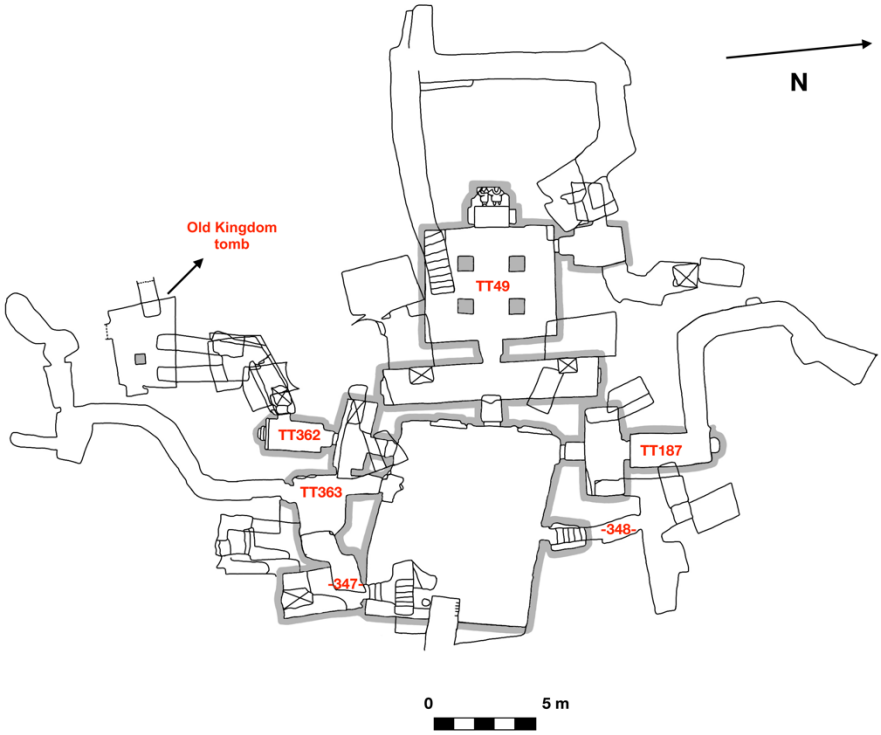


Fig. 2 Plan of the later set of interconnected tombs around the tomb of Neferhotep (TT49), showing the position of the additional Old Kingdom tomb discussed here. Drawn by Benji de

[33] María Violeta Pereyra, Maria Giorgia di Antonio, María Violeta Carniel et al., "Il Complesso funerario di Neferhotep (Luxor): una lunga storia di 'riutilizzi'. Progetto, metodologie, tecnologie, scavo e protocolli archeometrici integrati," *Frankfurter elektronische Rundschau zur Altertumskunde* 28 (2015); Lemos, von Seehausen, Di Giovanni et al., "Entangled temporalities in the Theban necropolis"; Menozzi, "Funerary uses and reuses"; Marialaura Di Giovanni, Chiara Santarelli and Rennan Lemos, "Analisi strutturale e studio dei riutilizzi nelle tombe tebane 187 e -348-," in Sonia Antonelli, Vasco La Salvia, Maria Cristina Mancini et al., eds., *Archaeologiae, Una storia al plural: Studi in memoria di Sara Santoro* (Oxford, 2022).
[34] Norman de Garis Davies, *The tomb of Nefer-hotep at Thebes* (New York, 1933); María Violeta Pereyra, María Silvana Catania, María Laura Iamarino et al., *Neferhotep y su espacio funerario. 1: Ritual y programa decorativo* (Buenos Aires, 2019).
[35] Lemos, von Seehausen, Di Giovanni et al., "Entangled temporalities in the Theban necropolis," 182; María Violeta Carniel and Rennan Lemos, "A preliminary note on the shabti corpus from the tomb complex of Neferhotep (TT49, TT362 and TT363), in Menozzi, "Funerary uses and reuses," 38–9.

Almeida Newton after Davies (1933: pl. VI) and Menozzi (2021: figs. 1 and 16), and original hand-drawn plans by the authors.

Major architectural interventions took place in TT362 during the Third Intermediate Period, including the excavation of a shaft leading to underground chambers in the antechamber; the opening of a passage connecting TT362 to TT363 (Paraemhab), also in the antechamber; the excavation of a pit in the corridor leading to the burial chamber; and the enlargement of the tomb's small burial chamber. [36] The enlargement of the burial chamber led to the encounter of a much older tomb dating from the Old Kingdom, as first reported by Menozzi.[37]

The Third Intermediate Period expansion of TT362's original burial chamber led to the destruction of two Old Kingdom burial chambers, accessed through two parallel descending corridors. However, comparison with similar tombs dating from same period allow us to propose a reconstruction of the original plan of the earlier funerary chambers, which are connected to the additional Old Kingdom el-Khokha tomb.

The tomb is accessible through the descending corridors that, from above, originally led to the two separate burial chambers (fig. 3). Following Menozzi's original report on the tomb, the two descending corridors start on the north side of a large, rectangular pillared chamber/chapel. On the west wall, a third opening, likely another descending corridor leading to a funerary chamber, remains blocked by rubble. A roughly rectangular niche was excavated into the east wall. The entrance to the pillared chamber lies on the south wall and is also blocked by rubble (fig. 4). This could either be the entrance to the tomb or lead to an antechamber. Comparison with the neighboring tombs of Unasankh and Seniqer would suggest the existence of an antechamber.[38]

[36] Menozzi, "Funerary uses and reuses," passim.
[37] Menozzi, "Funerary uses and reuses," 11–14, 30–1.
[38] Saleh, *Three Old Kingdom tombs*, pl. 2; Fabián, "News from Old Kingdom Thebes," 50.



Fig. 3 Descending corridors leading to separate funerary chambers, which were later incorporated into the plan of TT362 as a result of Third Intermediate Period architectural alterations inside the tomb. Separate funerary chambers accessible through descending corridors are a feature of provincial Old Kingdom tombs at Thebes and elsewhere. Photo by P. von Seehausen.



Fig. 4 The blocked entrance to the pillared chamber. The entrance, which is located to the south of the pillared chamber, may lead to an antechamber. All other Old Kingdom tombs in el-Khokha are also oriented to the south. Photo by P. von Seehausen.

Access to the pillared chamber through the northern funerary chambers destroyed in the Third Intermediate Period allowed a survey of the tomb's architecture and decoration to be conducted, which resulted in an accurate, yet unfinished plan (fig. 5).

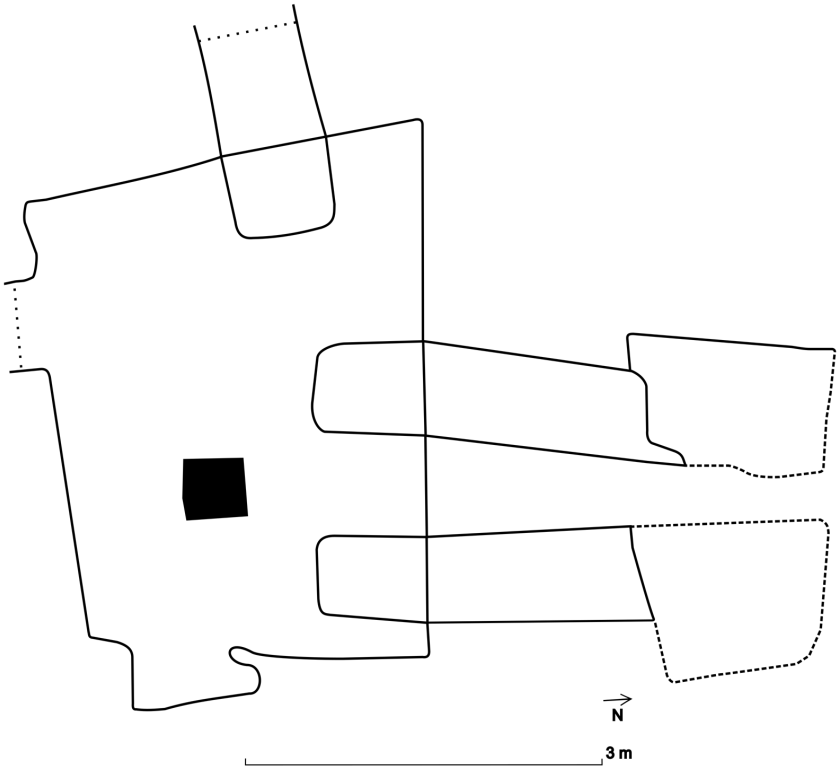


Fig. 5 Plan of the additional Old Kingdom tomb in el-Khokha, based on Menozzi's original plan and first-hand field observations, by R. Lemos. The two northern funerary chambers have been reconstructed based on a comparison with the plan of the neighboring tomb of Unasankh (TT413) and observable features in the enlarged funerary chamber of TT362.

The similarities between the plan of TT413 (Unasankh) and the newly identified tomb may offer chronological clues. The tomb of Unasankh comprises a main chamber from where three descending passages lead to three burial chambers, two from the west wall and one from the north wall. A passage on the west wall leads to a 'offering chapel'.[39] The additional tomb exhibits the same features as the tomb of Unasankh, including two descending corridors from the north wall and an further opening from the west wall, all likely leading to burial chambers. The niche on the east wall would probably have fulfilled the role of the 'offering chapel' similar to the one in TT413.

The burial chambers in both tombs comprise Kanawati's type 9, which consists of an opening to a chamber at the ground level in the shape of a descending ramp or staircase

[39] Saleh, *Three Old Kingdom tombs*, pl. 2.

leading to a small burial chamber.[40] In the Memphite Old Kingdom cemeteries, this type of burial chamber would occur from the early 5th Dynasty to the reign of Pepy II. However, in the provinces, sloping corridors leading to small burial chambers seem to date from the reign of Pepy I to the late 6th Dynasty, with subtypes.[41] Based on the type of burial chamber, we can accept the late 6th Dynasty as the earliest date for both the tomb of Unasankh and the additional el-Khokha tomb, which is in line with accepted chronologies but also takes into account recent discussion on the later stages of the Old Kingdom.[42]

The arrangement of the two burial chambers reconstructed in fig. 5 also bears similarities with the arrangement of burial chambers in the tomb of Unasankh. The burial chamber located in the northwest corner of TT413 was the largest in the tomb and potentially the main burial chamber. If this is the case in the newly discovered tomb, a feature of Old Kingdom provincial tombs at Thebes would likely be the differentiation of the tomb owner's burial chamber and those where family members would have likely been buried.

Tomb decoration

As reported by Menozzi, decoration can only be observed on the north wall of the additional el-Khokha tomb (c. 6m x 1.5m).[43] The highly fragmented state of preservation of painted scenes prevents the overall reconstruction of the tomb's decoration at this stage (fig. 6). Only minor painted elements survive: scattered hieroglyphs in black and red ink; human and animal figures in red/brown; plant figures in red and green. The top part of a black-painted headdress of what once was the representation of a seated nobleman was also detected on the top-east part of the wall. More significantly, the representation of granaries could also be identified. In order to be able to understand the nature of the fragmentary decorative remains, the wall was sectioned in 60 squares to guide detailed analysis (fig. 7).



[40] Naguib Kanawati, *Decorated burial chambers of the Old Kingdom* (Cairo, 2010), 36.
[41] Kanawati, *Decorated burial chambers*, 41.
[42] Papazian, "The state of Egypt in the Eighth Dynasty."
[43] Menozzi, "Funerary uses and reuses," 12.

Fig. 6 The decorated north wall. Photo by P. von Seehausen.

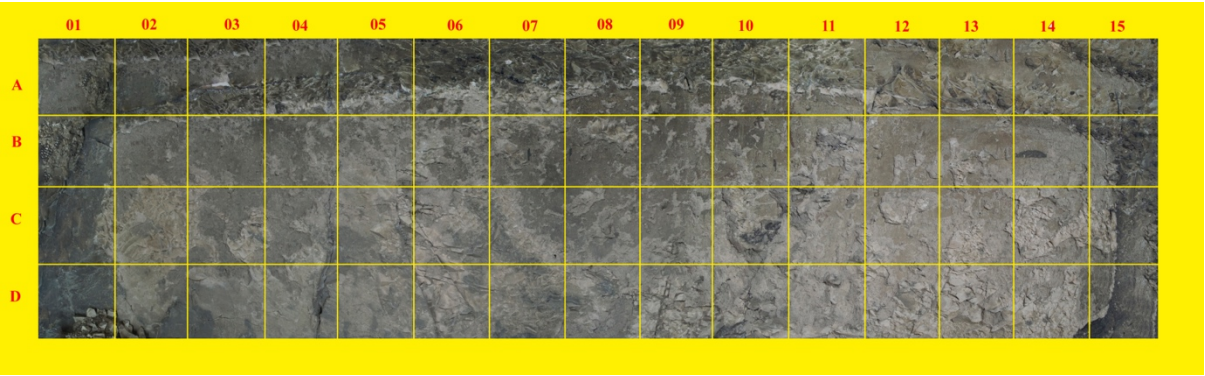
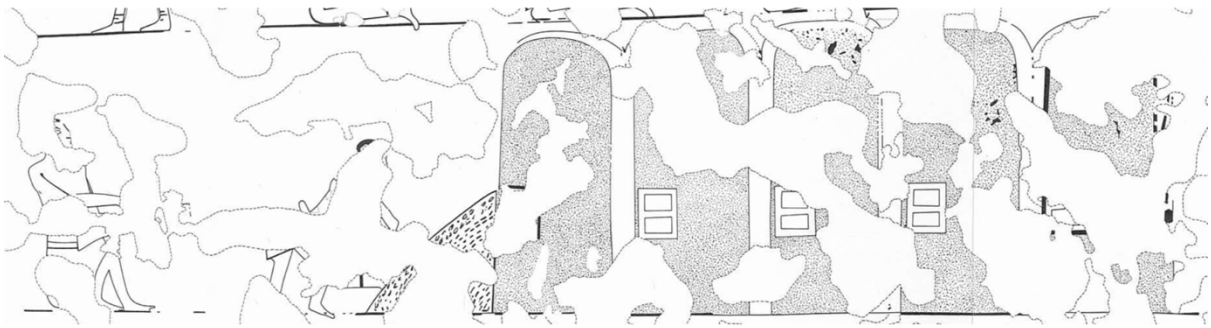


Fig. 7 The sectioned decorated north wall. Prepared by P. von Seehausen.

One significant aspect of the decoration on the north wall is the depiction of granaries, visible in A09-10 and B09-10.[44] Four elongated cylindrical granaries can be identified based on a comparison with depictions in TT413,[45] where five granaries are visible on northern wall A (fig. 8). In TT413, a worker is depicted filling a container with grain, while a seated man, likely a scribe, oversees the action.[46] This is probably the case in the newly identified tomb.





[44] For similar structures in Old Kingdom tomb paintings, see: Rodna Siebels, "Representations of granaries in Old Kingdom tombs," *The Bulletin of the Australian Centre for Egyptology* 12 (2001).
[45] On the shape of granaries, see: Hratch Papazian, "The central administration of the resources in the Old Kingdom: Departments, treasures, granaries and work centers," in Juan Carlos Moreno García, ed., *Ancient Egyptian Administration* (Leiden, 2013), 62–3.
[46] Saleh, *Three Old Kingdom tombs*, 14.

Fig. 8 Representations of granaries on the decorated north wall. Photo by P. von Seehausen. Drawing adapted from Saleh (1977: pl. 3).

As previously discussed, as "overseer of Upper Egypt", Unasankh was responsible for tax collection.[47] From the 5th Dynasty, individuals bearing this title worked under the vizier.[48] Unasankh was also "overseer of the double granary", which might directly refer to the two Upper Egyptian operating granaries in the late Old Kingdom, one at Thebes and the other at Meir.[49] The representation of granaries and their regulation as represented in the tomb of Unasankh is certainly connected to his local responsibilities within the central administration as "overseer of Upper Egypt" and "overseer of the double granary." It is possible that the unknown owner of the additional tomb performed a similar role in the administration of Upper Egypt in the late Old Kingdom. Alternatively, the unknown owner could have been an "overseer of the granary" similar to Ihy (TT186), which might have represented a lower rank than that of Unasankh.[50] Given the decorative programs of Old Kingdom Theban tombs, it is plausible that the depiction of granaries was intended to reflect or reinforce the administrative roles referenced by the associated titles.

In the immediate vicinity of the granaries, a relatively well-preserved, small-scale standing man can be distinguished at the intersection of A10-11 and B10-11 (fig. 9). The standing man's left arm is bent downwards in front of him, while his right arm (east) is slightly raised to his right side (west). This position suggests the performance of labor,[51] including butchery,[52] fowling[53] or animal husbandry.[54] It is therefore possible that the bovine figure in B13 could be associated with the standing man figure.

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[47] Kanawati, *Governmental reforms*,129; Brovarski, "Overseers of Upper Egypt," 98; Lisa Sabbahy, *Kingship, power, and legitimacy inaAncient Egypt: From the Old Kingdom to the Middle Kingdom* (Cambridge, 2020), 90.
[48] Papazian, "The central administration," 46–47.
[49] Sabbahy, "Kingship," 118.
[50] See Papazian, "The central administration," 59–60.
[51] Jacques Vandier, *Manuel d'archéologie égyptienne. Tome VI: Bas-reliefs et peintures. Scènes de la vie Agricole à l'Ancien et au Moyen Empire* (Paris, 1978), passim.
[52] Naguib Kanawati and Mohamed Abder-Raziq, *The Unis cemetery at Saqqara. Vol. II: The tombs of Iynefert and Ihy (reused by Idut)* (Warminster, 2003), fig. 24 (b).
[53] Norman de Garis Davies, *The rock tombs of Deir el Gebrâwi: Part 1: Tomb of Aba and smaller tombs of the southern group* (London, 1902), pl 5; Wild, *Le tombeau de Ti. La chapelle* (Cairo, 1953), pl. CXXII.
[54] Wild, *Le tombeau de Ti*, pls. LXXVIII and LXXIX; Harpur, *Decoration in Egyptian tombs*, figs. 125–13; Van de Walle, *La chapelle funeraire de Neferirtenef* (Brussels, 1978), pls. 11–2; Rodna Siebels, "Agricultural activities," in Ann McFarlane and Anna-Latifa Mourad, eds., *Behind the scenes: Daily life in Old Kingdom Egypt* (Oxford 2001), 89–90, 92. 2012; Paul Jones, "Animal husbandry," in Ann McFarlane and Anna-Latifa Mourad, eds., *Behind the scenes: Daily life in Old Kingdom Egypt* (Oxford, 2012).

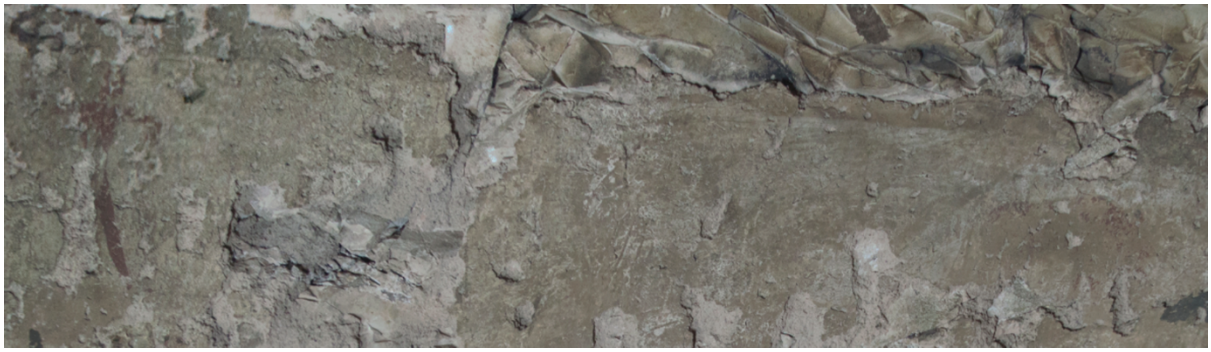


Fig. 9 A representation of a standing man (left), likely associated with a cattle figure (right). Photo by P. von Seehausen.

Other Old Kingdom tombs provide context for interpreting the fragmentary scenes. Men depicted in similar postures in other Old Kingdom tombs can carry whips and are associated with animals.[55] Additionally, Old Kingdom animal husbandry scenes also show men in similar positions touching the backs of cattle while holding a stick in their raised right hands.[56] It is therefore likely that the standing man in the el-Khokha tomb was engaged in animal husbandry and that the bovine figure was originally part of the same scene. Similar to the tomb of Ptahhotep, this depiction may have represented a continuous line of men leading cattle.[57] In fig. 10, traces of brown pigment immediately in front of the preserved standing man might suggest the presence of another bovine. Much later, in the Middle Kingdom, shepherds in similar positions appear lassoing sheep, as shown in the tomb of Djehutyhotep at Deir el-Bersha.[58] However, it is highly unlikely that a lassoing scene was originally part of the decorative scheme of the additional el-Khokha tomb, as these scenes had ritual purposes and seem to have been restricted to the Memphite area.[59] In any case, given the fragmentary state of the new tomb's decoration, the representation of other activities such as fowling or butchering cannot be discarded at this stage.

Another feature that can be distinguished in the decoration of the north wall is the presence of a seated elite man, depicted on a much larger scale, on the east end of the wall (fig. 10). The top part of his headdress is preserved in black (B14), together with the shape of his arm and body, painted in brown (C13). Although difficult to determine, additional traces of brown painting in front of the man's arm/shoulder could indicate the presence of one or

[55] Wild, *Le tombeau de Ti*, pl. CXIII; Vandier, *Manuel*, fig. 56.
[56] Vandier, *Manuel*, fig. 3.
[57] Yvonne Harpur and Paolo J. Scremin, *The chapel of Ptahhotep. Scene details* (Oxford, 2008), drawing 10.
[58] Percy Newberry, *El Bersheh I: The tomb of Tehuti-Hetep* (London, 1895), pl. 25.
[59] Inês Torres, "A unique lassoing scene from the mastaba of Akhmerutnisut at Giza (G 2184)," *JARCE* 57.1 (2021).

more servants, commonly represented offering a drink to the tomb owner (C13, top center). A very similar scene in TT405 (Khenty) provides a guide to interpret these fragmentary decorative remains (fig. 11).[60]



Fig. 10 The painted remains of a seated elite man, potentially the tomb owner. Note the well-preserved top of his headdress and the shape of his torso and right arm, painted in brown. Photo by P. von Seehausen.

[60] Saleh, *Three Old Kingdom tombs*, figs. 50 and 51.



Fig. 11 A comparison between the fragmentary scene in the additional tomb (left) and a parallel scene from the neighboring tomb of Khenty (right). Photo by. P. von Seehausen. Drawing adapted from Saleh (1977: fig. 51).

Green and black-painted papyrus flowers seen in C09 indicate the presence of marshland motifs in the decoration of the additional el-Khokha tomb. It is unclear what the brown crescent shapes in B09 and B10, immediately above the papyrus flowers, might have originally represented (fig. 12). In tombs of the same period, papyrus flowers usually appear below boats[61] or wild birds.[62]





[61] Samantha Dunnicliff, "Marsh activities," in Ann McFarlane and Anna-Latifa Mourad, eds., *Behind the scenes: Daily life in Old Kingdom Egypt* (Oxford, 2012), figs. 5, 9 and 12; Ali el-Khouli and Naguib Kanawati, *The Old Kingdom tombs of el-Hammamiya* (Oxford, 1990), pl. 51; Naguib Kanawati, Alex Woods, Sameh Shafik and Effy Alexakis, *Mereruka and his family, part III: The tomb of Mereruka* (Oxford, 2010), pl. 79; Naguib Kanawati, *The Teti cemetery at Saqqara* (Oxford, 2006), pl. 38.

[62] Wild, *Le tombeau de Ti*, pl. CXIX; Naguib Kanawati and Mohamed Abder-Raziq, *The Teti cemetery at Saqqara. Vol. 3: The tombs of Neferseshemre and Seankhuiptah* (Warminster, 1998), pl. 76.

Fig. 12 A marsh scene comprised by papyrus flowers, which are usually associated with boats or wild birds. Photo and drawing by P. von Seehausen.

Textual evidence

Only very fragmentary remains of texts survived in the decoration of the north wall. A few signs can be seen in association with the marsh scene previously identified, while other signs are now scattered on the wall, although also certainly associated with original scenes. Hieroglyphic signs were executed in black and red ink on top of the smoothed rock surface.

In association with the marsh scene, a few signs can be recognized (fig. 13). It remains difficult to deduce any complete readings for inscriptions in the tomb given the extremely fragmentary state of the scene. In black, ‘t’ and ‘i’ signs can be recognized, while a potential ‘s’ and a ‘w’ can also be spotted.



Fig. 13 Preserved hieroglyphic signs associated with the identified marsh scene (B10). Enhanced with DStretch. Photo by P. von Seehausen.

On the western portion of the decorated north wall, more scattered signs can be recognized. The reed signs are easily identified, while other signs are only fragmentarily preserved, making it difficult to provide any tentative readings. At this stage, the additional Old Kingdom tomb in el-Khokha provides little textual information generally. However, future excavations could potentially reveal useful historical data.

Tomb reuse

During a preliminary survey in 2017, a Third Intermediate Period small, finger molded shabti was recovered from the debris in the chapel of the additional el-Khokha tomb. This is consistent with the comingled situation of archaeological remains in the neighboring tombs of the 'mortuary complex.' The same situation characterizes the other Old Kingdom tombs of el-Khokha. In the additional el-Khokha tomb, various parts of mummified human remains are scattered throughout the pillared chamber, which further works as basis for detecting various temporalities 'entangled' in the archaeological record of the tomb.[63]

However, the most significant evidence for tomb reuse comes from the decorated north wall. The eastern section of the wall, where a seated nobleman was likely once represented, seems to have been systematically covered with plaster (fig. 14). No significant preserved elements of decoration seem to survive on the western section of the north wall. Perhaps this is connected to a need to erase the original owner of the tomb to prepare it for later use.

[63] Lemos, von Seehausen, Di Giovanni et al., "Entangled temporalities in the Theban necropolis."



Fig. 14 The eastern half of the decorated north wall, enhanced with DStretch. All decorative elements discussed in the text appear in the image. Plaster (pink in the enhanced photo) was added on top of the Old Kingdom smoothed layer onto which the original decoration was painted (greenish in the enhanced photo). Photo by P. von Seehausen.

At this stage, evidence for reuse of Old Kingdom Theban tombs in the Middle Kingdom and the New Kingdom is very limited. No evidence of reuse during these periods has been detected in the additional el-Khokha tomb at this stage. Thus far, the only evidence for the New Kingdom historical layers inside Old Kingdom tombs in el-Khokha comes from the tomb of Unasankh, where several New Kingdom shabtis have been found in the debris.[64] Similar polychrome shabtis likely belonging to members of one or more families of temple personnel have been extensively found in neighboring el-Khokha tombs.[65] Alternatively, these New Kingdom shabtis found in the tomb of Unasankh attest to Third Intermediate Period reshuffles of earlier material culture, as also attested in other el-Khokha tombs.[66]

Conclusion

[64] Saleh, *Three Old Kingdom tombs*, figs. 23–25.
[65] Schreiber, "Mummy-boards;" Menozzi, "Funerary uses and reuses;" Carniel and Lemos, "A preliminary note."
[66] Lemos, "Making plundered spaces sacred again."

Based on the arrangement of distinguishable decorative elements on the north wall, it seems that the overall decoration of the additional el-Khokha tomb was less rigid and elaborate than the other known Old Kingdom Theban tombs. However, it should be noted that the highly fragmentary state of preservation of scenes in the tomb poses major challenges to the above interpretation of specific aspects of tomb paintings. This means that artistic evidence from the tomb is unsuitable for providing specific chronological information at this stage.[67]

However, the architecture of the tomb, especially in comparison with other tombs in the southern slope of the el-Khokha hill, offers glimpses on the tomb's chronology. If it is impossible to provide definite dates, one can suggest a likely late Old Kingdom date for the additional tomb, which would be consistent with the chronology of the tomb cluster to which it belongs.

The whole body of evidence for provincial Thebes in the late Old Kingdom, together with evidence for other developing provinces in this period, offer glimpses of the regionalization process that occurred in the course the Old Kingdom. Considering all the evidence—archaeological, artistic and historical—together is key to rewriting the history of the Old Kingdom from beyond royal monuments and agency, despite the fragmentary aspect of various sites.[68]

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[67] Cf. Joyce Swinton, *Dating the tombs of the Egyptian Old Kingdom* (Oxford, 2014), 4–7.
[68] Bussmann, *The archaeology of pharaonic Egypt*, 22–3, 32–3.