

The early Ramesside occupants of tomb MIDAN.05

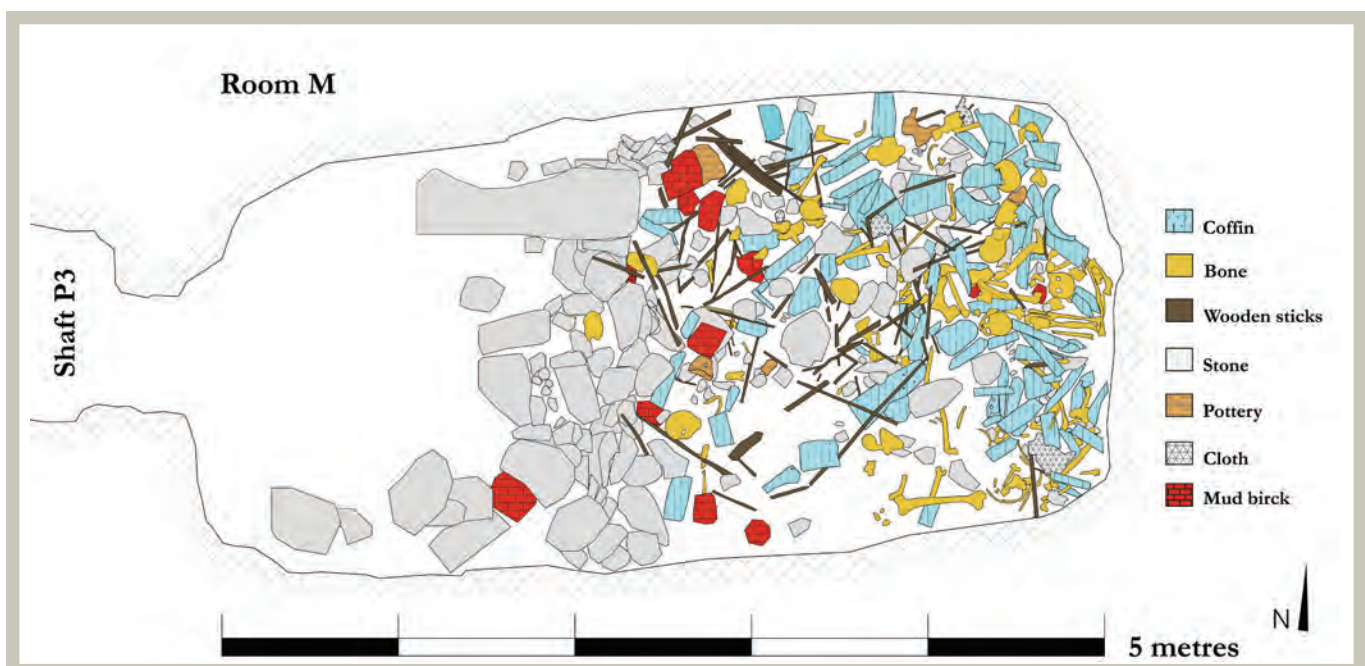
Marilina Betrò and **Gianluca Miniaci** continue the exploration of tomb MIDAN.05 in the Theban Necropolis. Discovered in 2004 by the archaeological expedition of the University of Pisa at Dra Abu el-Naga (= MIDAN: Missione archeologica Italiana a Dra Abu el-Naga) and under investigation since 2005, it turned out to be the largest and oldest among a cluster of rock-cut tombs, laid out around its forecourt. With the exception of TT 14, all of them had been unknown and unrecorded until then.

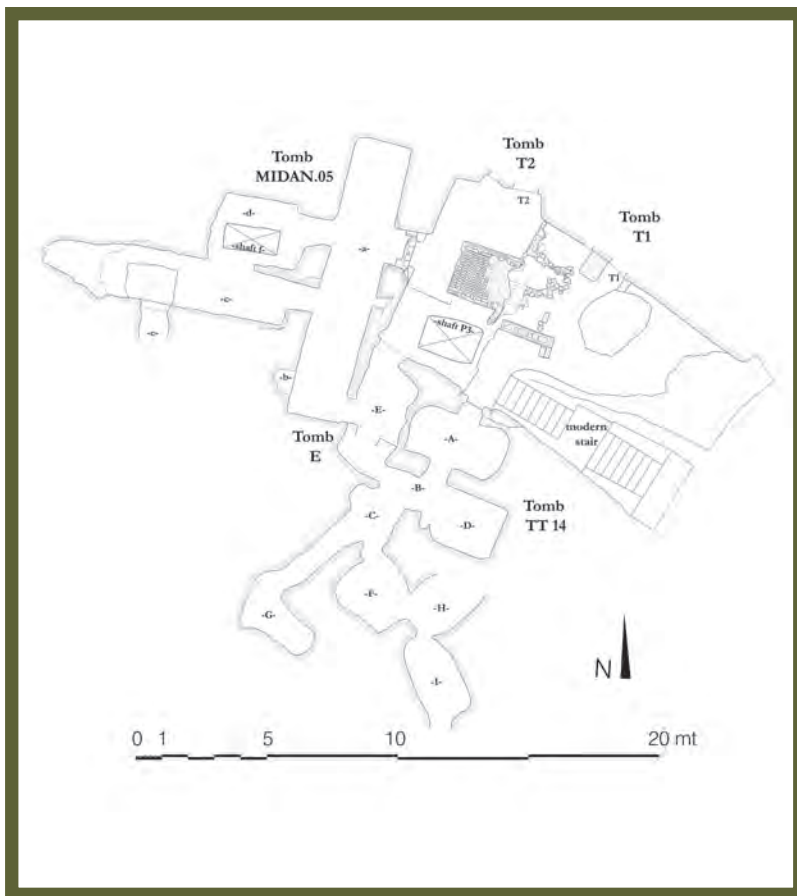
Explorations at Dra Abu-el Naga since the early 19th century have brought to light a number of royal as well as non-royal burials dating from the Second Intermediate Period into the Saite Period. MIDAN.05 is located on the main hill of this area, just below the recently re-discovered pyramid of Nubkheperre Intef, one of the kings of the Seventeenth Dynasty.

As our work shows, MIDAN.05 was used, re-used and occupied until the Graeco-Roman period. Its first phase, however, is datable to the very beginning of the New Kingdom, as attested by the presence of several rishi coffin

fragments (funerary coffins adorned with a feather design, typical of the Second Intermediate Period), found inside its burial rooms. A prolonged use of the structure, until the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty, is indicated by the surviving painted scenes on the walls, which can be stylistically dated no later than Thutmosis IV. However, the traces of the original occupants of this period are very scant, and at the moment the identity of the original owner or owners of the tomb is still unknown. In the Ramesside Period, the forecourt underwent some structural and functional

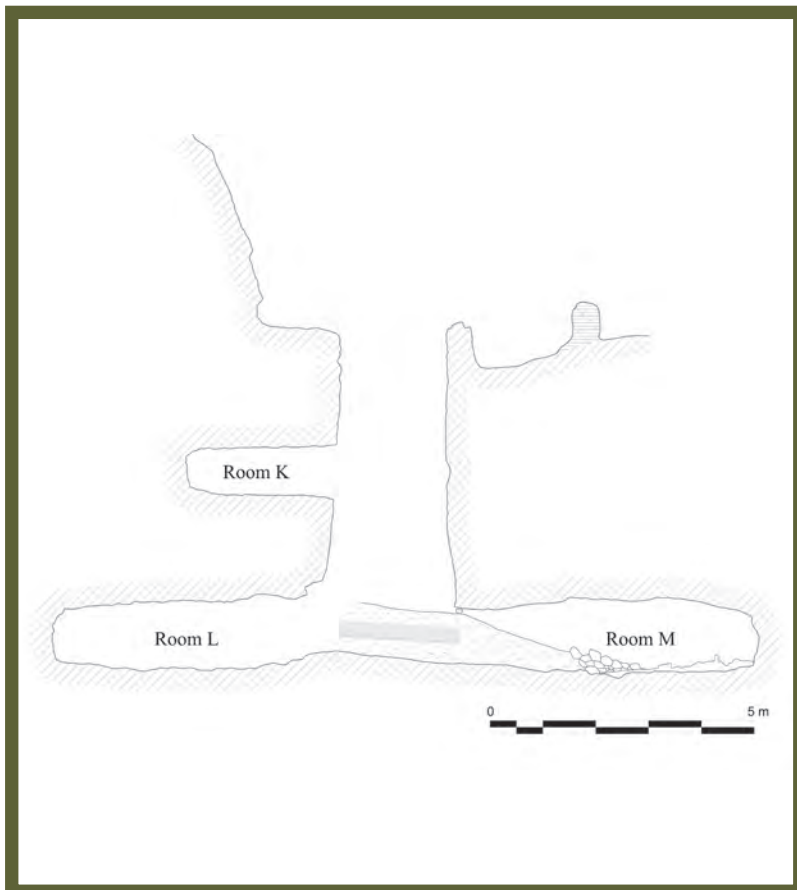
Below: plan of room M.
Drawn by Gianluca Miniaci and Emanuele Taccola.





Above: plan of the MIDAN.05 complex. Drawn by Paolo Del Vesco and Emanuele Taccola.

Below: section of the shaft P3 with its three funerary rooms (K, L, M). Drawn by Emanuele Taccola and Gianluca Miniaci.



changes, and on its southern side, Huy, a priest attached to the cult of Amenhotep I during the time of Ramesses II, decided to cut his tomb into the rock (TT 14). Other architectural transformations affected the original morphology of the funerary complex in the following centuries. Once the tomb was abandoned – after the Roman period – the whole area was buried under five metres of debris, gradually transported here and deposited by a number of flooding events. Eventually, during the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, plunderers dug their own way through this deposit, adding modern anthropic disturbances to the ancient ones and to natural events.

In 2011, in the south-western corner of the courtyard, the opening of a funerary shaft (P3) was brought to light. It was found completely filled with loose sand, limestone chips and debris; scattered materials of different epochs, spanning from the New Kingdom to Coptic times, are evidence that the shaft had been entered – more than once – and pillaged in the past, and in all probability also in modern times. However, in one of the rooms (M) at the bottom of the shaft, these ravages were interrupted at a certain moment in ancient times, when its entrance was blocked by the deposition of other burials.

Three reed-mat burials tied together with ropes and strings, wrapping the bodies of three mummified individuals, were laid in

Focus: Shaft P3

The shaft is 6.33 m deep. On the eastern and western sectors of its longitudinal walls there are climbing holes, grooved at regular intervals one above the other. At the bottom of the shaft, two chambers open on the western and eastern sides, respectively labelled rooms L and M. Another chamber labelled room K opens half-way along the shaft (at 3.26 m from its mouth) on its western side, just above room L.

front of the entrance to room M, obstructing its access. The mat burials were found completely intact and no sign of disturbance was recorded on them. Just below, thick ropes and a group of thicker and longer palm sticks were discovered. They probably represent the remains of some sort of litter used to transport the burials and lower them down into the shaft. Therefore, the archaeological context in room M is the result of the last human action taking place in this space before it was sealed by the installation of the mat-burials in the shaft.

At the deep end of room M, a heap of material had been amassed, including a large amount of coffin and other wooden pieces, many bones – human and animal (specifically, those of an ibex)– fragments of reeds, bandages, but only a few fragments of pottery. The objects were piled up unsystematically against the north-eastern corner of the room. A semicircle of boulders, limestone/sandstone rocks and chippings, intentionally arranged in the middle of the chamber, might have been intended as a divider against the heap of objects on the opposite (eastern) side, effectively creating a new funerary space. Inexplicably, this space was never used for other burials but filled with debris pouring in from the entrance of room M. Blocked by the semicircle of stones, this did not spill over into area beyond. A row of fragmentary mud bricks was placed at the upper reach of the entrance to room M, above the heap of loose material, in order to close the passage in a somewhat rough fashion. The symbolic obstruction of the entrance to room M probably occurred at the time of the installation of the reed-mat burials in the shaft.

Hundreds of coffin parts and fragments were found in the deposit piled up in the eastern part of the room. The state of preservation of these pieces, disassembled but not forcibly broken, without traces of fire or violent destruction, points to deliberately planned and carefully executed actions. The pieces all clearly belong to a homogeneous type, sharing the same decorative pattern, colouring, and manufacture. The surviving coffin fragments, mainly small (short-pieces, foot-ends/-boards, hands, masks) and curved (parts of the wig, collars), and the almost complete absence of long planks (such as floor-boards, side-walls, planks of the lid)



suggest 'selective' plundering, aimed at larger and longer pieces of wood suitable for reuse. These would have been dismantled in the tomb and taken outside to be reassembled or reused for new equipment or furniture, while the shorter pieces and fragments would have been left behind in the tomb. The preserved pieces suggest that at least eleven coffins had originally been placed there. In addition, fragments of the same type were found all over other funerary rooms of the shaft, although in a very disturbed context and in considerably smaller quantities.

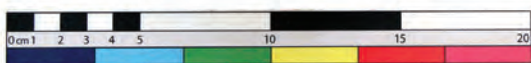
Most of the coffin fragments found in P3 belong to the 'yellow type', well attested for the Ramesside period. Notwithstanding the relatively scant quantity of well-preserved inscribed and decorated fragments, their rather sober features provide a solid base for a more precise dating, as they are characteristic

Three reed-mats inside the shaft P3 at the time of discovery; note the row of bricks loosely placed over a heap of debris, blocking the entrance to room M. Photo: Gianluca Miniaci.



Above: east side of room M at the moment of discovery, showing a pile of coffin pieces, fragments of wood and human remains. Photo: Gianluca Miniaci.

Below: foot-end with drawn feet. Photo: Claudio Benedetti.



M.43

of the transitional period between the late 18th and the beginning of the Nineteenth Dynasty. No fragments were found showing the rich and relatively 'crowded' iconographic repertoire already typical of the second half of the Nineteenth Dynasty. The presence of sculpted and painted feet is a clear evidence of the 'daily life dress' iconography, attested from the end of Eighteenth Dynasty to the reign of Ramesses II. Furthermore, a characteristic black (or blue), white and red frame for the text-bands appears on some inscribed pieces: this is a rare feature on Ramesside coffins, which finds a parallel only on the earliest examples of the yellow type.

A preliminary pottery investigation also seems to confirm our dating of the deposit to the late Eighteenth Dynasty/early Ramesside period, as do the few surviving objects of the heavily pillaged burial equipment.

In some of these coffin fragments evidence of reuse from earlier coffins, possibly dating to the beginning of the New Kingdom, is visible. The painted plaster of the Ramesside period was applied over coffin types with carved decorations, including hieroglyphic texts. This probably indicates a reuse of Eighteenth Dynasty burial equipment during the early



Ramesseid phase of occupation. Later on, also the early Ramesseid burials of shaft P3 suffered acts of plundering, which deprived the mummies of their valuable funerary equipment and personal ornaments. Only a few scattered amulets, one painted wooden shabti, and one carnelian hair-ring, which might belong to the original Ramesseid burial equipment, have been found in the lowest layer.

Unfortunately, the coffin fragments do not preserve the name of their Ramesseid owners, who remain unknown to us. Only the identity of one of them emerges from darkness: a woman, Taweretemheb, whose name is painted on the foot-end of a coffin lid and on the surviving painted wooden shabti, accompanied by her title of 'Musician of Amun'.



M.19



Top: painted wooden shabti belonging to Taweretemheb found in room M (under the lowest layers at the room entrance). Photo: Claudio Benedetti.

Above: left edge of a lid with lateral longitudinal inscriptions. The drawing shows the reuse of a piece belonging to the beginning of New Kingdom. Photo: Claudio Benedetti.

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