

The Brazilian Archaeological Program in Egypt: the first six years on TT123: assembling the puzzle

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Abstract: Created in 2015, the Brazilian Archaeological Program in Egypt (BAPE) develops transversal and participatory research on Egyptian soil. Since 2016, BAPE has been developing, together with the Egyptian government, an excavation project for Theban Tomb 123, located in Sheikh Abdel Qurna, Luxor, known as the Amenemhet Project. Tomb 123 served as a burial ground during the Pharaonic period and is currently a modern residence for Qurnawi families. This paper presents the first results of the research conducted at the site, offering a first interpretation based on the data collected so far, from an archaeological, historical and ethnographic perspective.

Keywords: Archeology; Egypt; Theban tomb; Sheikh Abdel Qurna; BAPE.

The beginning

Egypt has long been a place of interest to Western societies. Herodotus, Polybius, Diodorus of Sicily, Athanasius Kircher, John Greaves, Claude Sicard, Napoleon, Edward Lane, among many others contributed to shape Western imagination regarding the land of the Pharaohs by creating a discourse shrouded in mysteries and exoticism. Much of this discourse was used as a tool for domination, as exemplified by the history of Egyptology itself. Following the discovery of the Rosetta Stone and the deciphering of hieroglyphics, domain over Egypt's

history left the hands of the Egyptians and was given to Western hegemonic powers, especially France, England, and Germany. Western nations appropriated Egyptian history to not only create the idea of civilization but also to, paradoxically, reiterate their own civilized identity.

But such appropriation of Ancient Egypt history was not restricted to hegemonic nations. Brazil had its first contact with Egypt in 1824, when then Emperor of Brazil, Dom Pedro I, acquired a collection of Egyptian objects, creating the most important Egyptian collection in South America¹. This tie grew even closer during the reign

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1 Part of this collection was unfortunately destroyed during the Museu Nacional's fire on September 2, 2018. Although its directors had alerted the authorities for years about the terrible conditions of the Museum's infrastructure, no action was taken by the Brazilian government, resulting in the 2018 tragedy.

of Emperor Dom Pedro II, who considered himself a true Egyptologist.

This rapport between Egypt and Brazil greatly influenced Brazilian society. From a political standpoint, the elite appropriated Egyptian history to reaffirm its civilized character. From a cultural and mainly architectural perspective, many public and private properties began displaying Pharaonic aesthetics, which can still be seen today in cities such as Curitiba and Porto Alegre. Egypt and its history also features heavily in primary schools. As Funari (2010) points out, Brazilian textbooks lend more importance to Tutankhamun than to Zumbi of Palmares, a black leader who fought against slavery in Brazil. Egyptology and Egyptian Archaeology disciplines are in great demand in Archaeology and History courses at Brazilian Universities, and although no formal Egyptology or Egyptian Archaeology programs exist in Brazil, graduate courses in Archaeology accepts students interested in the subject. As Bakos (1998, 2003) argues, although not institutionalized, Egyptology plays a unique role in the formation of Brazilian civil society, sparking great interest in both youth and adults.

Despite such recognized importance of Egypt and Egyptology for Brazilian society, the country has never developed an archaeological project in Egypt organized by Brazilian researchers and Brazilian Universities. Rather, Brazilian archaeologists and Egyptologists usually work on international projects. In 2015, the Brazilian Archaeological Program in Egypt (BAPE) was created to change this very scenario. Coordinated by José Roberto Pellini and based at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, BAPE's main objective is to develop transversal archaeological and anthropological projects in Egypt. Its first initiative took place in January 2016 with the Amenemhet Project for the Excavation, Restoration and Conservation of Theban Tomb 123, developed together with the Centre of Documentation on Ancient Egypt (CEDAE), a department of the Egyptian government's Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

Rather than espousing the nineteenth-century interest that Brazil had shown in Egypt in the past, when it emulated hegemonic countries from a colonial ideology, the Amenemhet Project joins the discussions on Archaeology, Coloniality, Relationality and Ontology taking place in the Global South (Shepherd, Gnecco & Haber 2009). Despite including traditional Egyptology tools (such as epigraphy and the analysis of pharaonic materialities), the excavation agenda at TT123 is, above all, that of an integral archaeological project interested in the totality of materialities, remains, structures and, especially, relations that mark its biography—from the limestone excavation in Pharaonic times to the present day. Careful documentation and analysis of this record in its entirety, as well as the analysis of the different relations experienced in this space, will bring contributions not only to Egyptian history during the pharaonic period, but also to understanding the intertwining between these records, Egyptology, and local communities over the centuries. The Amenemhet Project posits that, rather than simply being a tomb—a fixed materiality, a predetermined category—, TT123 is a transitory materiality and the meeting point of different ontologies. By thinking of materialities as fluid elements, we recognize that a tomb, for example, can be a tomb, a house, an archaeological site or even a magical place inhabited by spiritual beings—all at the same time (Pellini 2022). Considering the tombs as relational phenomena allows us to go beyond the scientific archaeological landscape, approaching other potential landscapes, whether social, political, or spiritual (Pellini 2018).

Six fieldwork seasons have been performed so far in the years 2016, 2017, 2017-2018, 2019, 2019-2020, 2022. During the 2019 and 2019-2020 seasons, the fieldwork included the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, Argentina. The work developed allowed to learn a little more about the TT123 different materialities and temporalities, as well as their diverse ways of existing. In this article, we present the tomb, its complexities and the work conducted over the last six years.

Theban Tomb 123: general conditions

Located on the slope of Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, more specifically on the plain at the foot of the hill, west of the Ramesseum and near tombs TT55, TT124, TT56 and TT57, in the Pharaonic Period, tomb TT123 belonged to scribe Amenemhet, Overseer of the Barn and Bread Count of the Temple of Thutmosis III. During the 19th and 20th centuries it served as a home to Qurnawis families.

Built on the classic style of 18th-century dynasty private tombs, it features a floor plan corresponding to Vd type tombs (Kampp 1996: 412-414) and has a “T” shape, which when viewed from the entrance resembles an inverted “T” (Fig. 1). As with many of the Vd style tombs, TT123 features an outdoor Courtyard, a Transverse Hall, a Corridor, and a small Chapel housing the statues of the tomb owner and his wife, Henutiri. Its main axis is positioned almost exactly in the east-west direction.

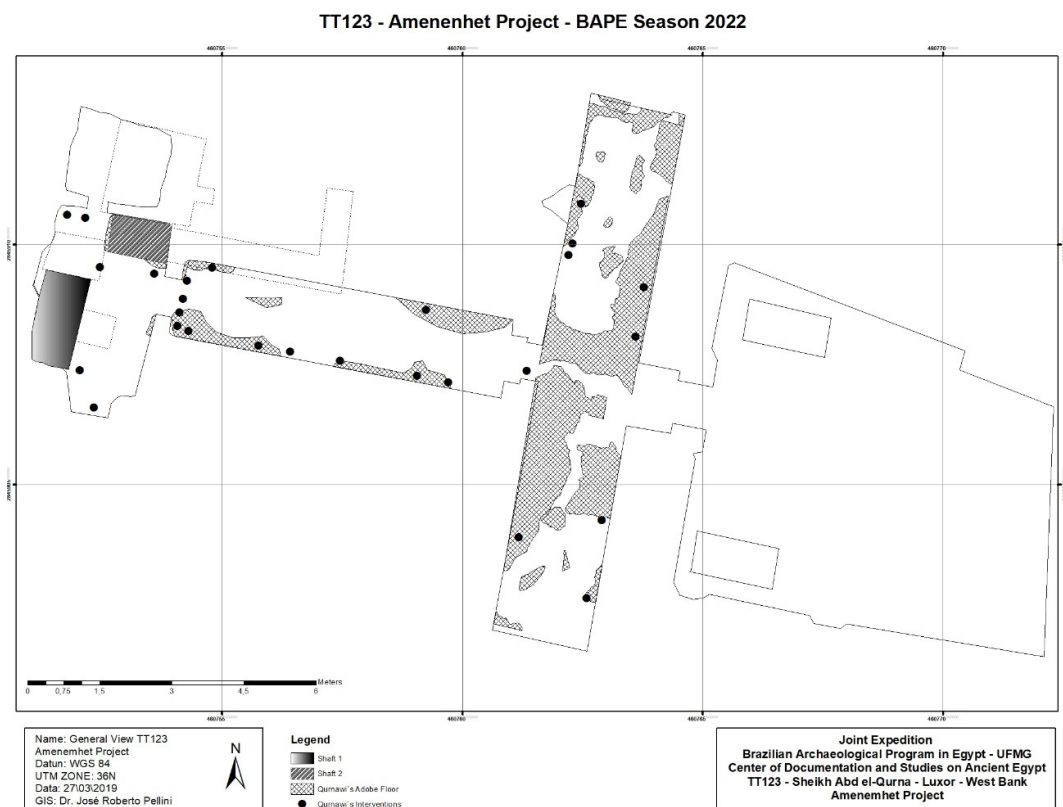


Fig. 1. Plan TT123.
Source: BAPE.

Nearly all parts of the tomb have fractures, both in the walls and in the ceiling. The Transverse Hall and Corridor show deeper fractures and present holes in the wall (Fig. 2a). These fractures and holes are directly associated with two factors:

- 1) natural diacalation processes (Aubry *et al.*, 2009, 2011; Bardaji *et al.*, 2017);
- 2) the collapse of tomb TT331, located below TT123, which resulted in the northward displacement of its roof.

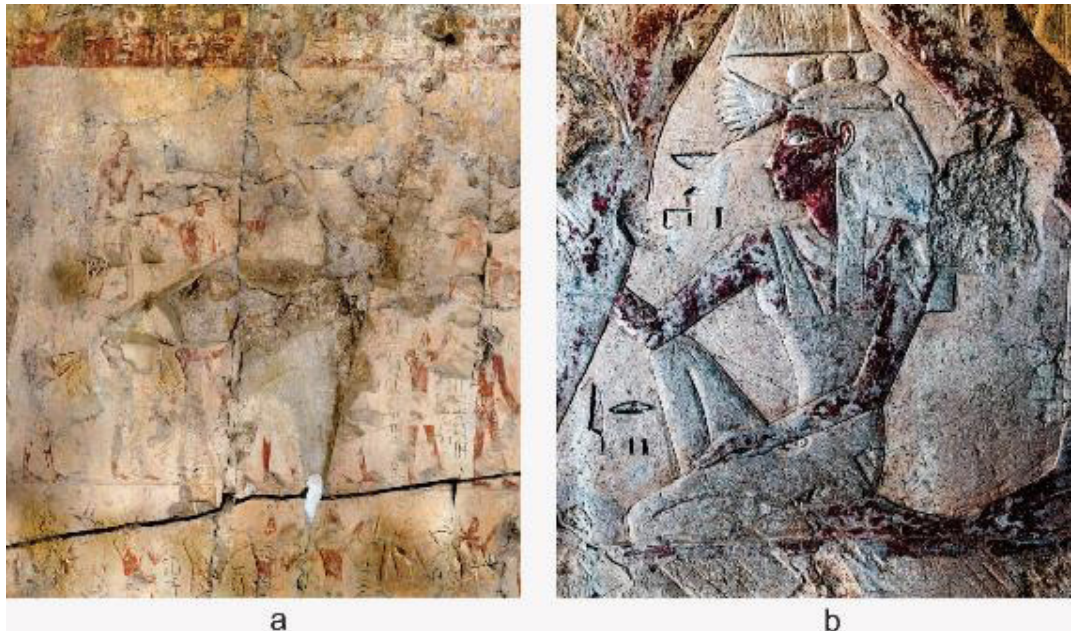


Fig. 2. General Conditions: a: Holes; b: Iri.
Source: BAPE.

The Courtyard has two shafts: one to the north, which ruptured and collapsed complete after the collapse of TT331; and one to the south of the entrance, which was covered by sediment in 2016 and excavated in 2018. To the south side we find an entrance to tomb (-270-), which is now blocked with adobe (Kampp 1996: 751). The façade wall has small line fractures in the north-south direction, which accompany the internal fractures and clearly show the sliding of the tomb's roof.

The Transverse Hall consists of two wings, one to the south and one to the north of its central axis. We can see fractures and holes especially on the northeast and southeast walls. Walls and ceiling are covered in soot and dung, and the ground shows traces of an adobe floor. At the northern limit we can see a passage that was closed with modern cement. The Corridor is narrower than the Transverse Hall, has some fractures and shows signs of soot and dung on the walls.

The Chapel is the tomb's sector with the least structural damaged, showing no fractures. The statues of

Amenemhet and his wife Henutiri had their faces disfigured. On its north side we find a passage leading to a debris-filled chamber. The southern side features two passages, both closed: one connects the Chapel to the Transverse Hall of tomb -293-, and the other connects the Chapel to the courtyard of Userhat's tomb (TT56). The north and south side of the Chapel have one shaft each. The north side shaft had been identified earlier, whereas the south side shaft was only discovered in 2019 and excavated in 2022.

Previous works

The only known archaeological excavation conducted at TT123 was led by Robert Mond in 1903-1904, when the archaeologist cleaned the courtyard and part of the tomb's inside (Collins 1976; Mond 1905). In his short account of the work performed, Mond states that the tomb showed evidence of recent housing but gave no further details. While cleaning the Courtyard, he identified

decorated blocks from the wall of TT331, a colossal limestone head, funerary cones, conical pendants, a wooden crocodile, and a horse's head.

As Kaczanowicz (2020) points out, Gordon Jelf reported that in 1910, TT123 became a storage area, possibly for the Antiquities Service.

Between 1920-1940, Norman and Nina Davies visited the tomb and recorded some of its scenes. In the same period, Siegfried Schott and the Oriental Institute of Chicago took photographic records of some scenes from the Transverse Hall and Corridor.

In 1947, Mohamed Zakaria Goneim, Chief Inspector of Antiquities for Upper Egypt between 1946-51, probably visited TT123. Evidence of this visit is an inscription identified on the northwest wall of the Corridor during our fieldwork, which reads: *M. Zakaria 28-1-1947*. That year Zakaria Goneim was working at several of the Qurna tombs, performing cleaning and restoration work. It is possible that Goneim or his team not only tried to clean the tomb's roof and walls, especially the south portion of the ceiling at the Transverse Hall, but also made the cement repairs found on the north walls. Unfortunately, the Luxor Antiquities Service has no records of the activities led by Zakaria Goneim in the years he oversaw the Luxor office.

In 2014, CEDAE visited the tomb and documented its images and structural situation.

Decorative program

The tomb decorations are striking in their quality and detail. Carved out of the bedrock, today fragmented, the architrave bears the titles of Amenemhet and the offering formula *htp-di-nsu*. A detailed Amenemhet, especially the hair and eyes, appears standing greeting the sun on the walls of the passage area between the Courtyard and the Transverse Hall.

In the Transverse Hall, the southwest wall depicts Amenemhet seated on a chair with lion paws before a complete list of offerings. The scene on the southeast wall is completely lost due to structural problems.

On the northwest wall, we see Amenemhet hunting in a swamp with his family alongside crocodiles, Nile perches and geese. Sitting on the boat between her father's legs, the figure of Iri stands out. As part of the original decoration, the figure has a striking presence due to the quality of the carving (Fig. 2b). Next to Iri, a scene containing lotus flowers depicts the process of decorating the tomb. Several layers of paint—first white, followed by blue, and finally a reddish color—are visible under the red. On the northeast wall, a triptych-like scene shows Amenemhet and Henutiri standing, welcoming a procession and their offerings of fish, fruit, geese, bread, drinks and other edible goods. Behind Henutiri is a child, but the wall's condition hinders a precise identification. In front of the couple, in the first row, we see Amenemhet's brother, Userhet. A herd of oxen adorned with lotus garlands stands out, particularly one whose horns are adorned with it. A stele with the name of Pharaoh Thutmose III, which today gives way to an opening connecting TT123 to TT368, a tomb from the Ramesside period, could be found at the south wing limit. Another stele can be found at the north wing limit, but much of the decoration has been lost overtime.

On the northwest wall of the Corridor, Amenemhet, wielding a bow and arrow and driving a chariot, is depicted hunting in the desert. On the other side, we have a scene of a man herding pigs. Next to it, a scene shows us Amenemhet standing, accompanied by Henutiri and wearing the leopard-skin ceremonial outfit. The south wall features scenes associated with the funerary ritual. Conserving part of its original decoration, especially the red tones, the south wall is divided into three registers: at the bottom we have the scenes associated with the Sacred District, followed by the tekenu and the procession to Sais, and at the top, the procession to the tomb and the Journey to Abydos. The Chapel has no decoration.

Most of the tomb scenes were never published, but some are featured in Kampp's works (1996: 751), who published the inscriptions on the tomb's façade;

in Säve-Söderbergh's (1953) study on the motive of the hippopotamus hunt; or by Settgast (1963), who discusses the Sacred District scenes, using images from the photographic and epigraphic records produced by the Oriental Institute of Chicago, Siegfried Schott, and Norman and Nina Davies. Publications on the complete funeral procession scene and the unpublished Sacred District scenes are underway.

Ethnographic information

In 2016, we started the project by talking with the local population about the tomb, seeking to know more about the modern occupation of the site and to understand the appropriation and meaning construction processes undertaken by the Qurnawi population. One of our first informants was Sheikh Abd el-Ati. Born and raised in the village of Qurna, Sheikh Abd el-Ati, now 78 years old, worked for many years with archaeological teams in the West Bank of Luxor. Despite not recalling the occupation of TT123 in full detail, Abd el-Ati helped us to recognize traits and structures associated with its modern occupation. According to him, the adobe marks found by the Mural Stratigraphic Analysis of the passage between the Transverse Hall and the Corridor and between the Corridor and the Chapel, belonged to Qurnawi doorjambs that supported two wooden doors, one in each passage. When a family lived intermittently inside a tomb, it was customary to place a door in the innermost part to protect their possessions. The Sheikh identified the dung marks on the Corridor and Transverse Hall walls as coming from dung disks that used to be left there to dry and later be used as fuel. As Spek (2011) and Pellini (2021) describe, the Qurnawi used to produce fuel by mixing animal dung with straw and sugar cane stalks and putting it to dry on the tomb walls. According to the Sheikh, part of the soot found on the tomb's ceiling, mainly in the Transverse Hall, is the result of burning dry dung plates. The presence of dung

on the Transverse Hall walls suggests that it was probably used to keep larger animals at some point.

We also talked to sculptor Ahmed el Fanan, whose studio is less than 50 meters from TT123. Ahmed recalled that a Qurnawi family, led by Abu Kalb, lived there in the between 1950 and 1980. Unfortunately, he could not specify the exact dates. According to him, Abu Kalb's family lived in TT123 until it was appropriated by the Antiquities Service in the early 1980s. The occupation, he said, was not permanent, with members of the family coming and going at different times of the year, and made use of tomb -266-, located in front of TT123, today a BAPE laboratory, as part of the housing system. According to Ahmed, when one of the tombs was used as a dwelling, the other was used for keeping livestock, with cattle being usually kept in the Transverse Hall. At -266-, we found a squash trough used to feed and water the cattle located east in the Transverse Hall.

For a few years we tried to find Abu Kalb's descendants, but to no avail. In 2020, during the pandemic, in a Facebook conversation with a former Qurna resident named ElTayeb Tayebukas, known by Elfanan, the topic of TT123 emerged. When asked if he knew any of the former tomb inhabitants, Elfanan answered positively and provided us with the WhatsApp contact of Mohamed Tayea Abu Kalb, son of Ahmed Tayea Abu Kalb, who had lived in the tomb.

We contacted Mohamed Tayea and learned more about the recent history of TT123. According to him, his grandfather, Ibrahim Tayea Abu Kalb, inherited the house-tomb from his mother. She, in turn, had received the tomb as a gift from her cousin, one of the leaders of the Horubat community, as was customary. Ibrahim, who was a farmer and had land property near the Nile, lived in the tomb for a few years with his wife, his two daughters and their two sons. As the tomb was far from the property and too small for the whole family, Ibrahim built a house close to it and the family lived between the two houses. Ahmed, Ibrahim's eldest son and Mohamed's father,

lived most of the time in the house near the Nile, but a fight between Ahmed and the elder caused Ahmed to move to the house-tomb with his wife and child.

During the early 1960s, Mohamed told us, a Qurnawi named Sheikh Abd el Satar offered to buy the tomb from Ahmed. A well-known person in Qurna, the Sheikh acted as a kind of real estate agent who negotiated the purchase and sale of tombs and as an antiques dealer. Ahmed agreed to sell the tomb without telling his father. After the deal was struck, the Sheikh began digging the tomb in search of antiquities. When Ibrahim learned of the transaction two days later, he furiously and immediately went to the tomb to cancel the deal. Mohamed recounts the meeting between Ibrahim and the Sheikh in detail: "I did buy the tomb from your son. He sold me the tomb. So, it is mine now." said the Sheikh, to which Ibrahim answered: "No, it is not yours, it's mine. It's not yours." "They had a big argument." Mohamed told us, "Then they agreed that my grandfather had to pay the money back, the money that my father had taken. And then my grandfather worked hard to give him the money back and closed the tomb. It was just one door, not nearly big enough for someone to enter..."

After the selling attempt, Ibrahim ousted Ahmed and his family from it and closed the entrance door. Only Mohamed kept going back to the tomb, and spent months living there alone. He divided his time between his mother's house-tomb in Dra Abu el Naga and his grandfather's house-tomb in Sheikh Abdel Qurna.

When Ibrahim died in the 1970s, Ahmed sold the tomb once again to Sheikh Abd el Satar for the sum of 20 Egyptian pounds. This upset his brother, Mohamed's uncle, who cancelled the deal and refunded the amount paid. Mohamed points out that his uncle had to save for nearly a year to pay off the debt and buy the house back. The Abu Kalb family held ownership of the tomb until the early 1980s, when the Antiquities Service took permanent possession of the site. According to Mohamed, the occupation took place between 1979 and 1981, but the

Antiquities Service in Luxor has no official record of when the tomb was definitively expropriated and institutionalized.

As for his life on the tomb, Mohamed recalled a lack of electricity in the place and neighbours living nearby. He also recounted being visited by spirits from the past on some nights, as the souls of people from the pharaonic past still inhabit the tombs of Luxor's West Bank.

BAPE's archaeological excavation

Courtyard

On the third fieldwork season (2019), while cleaning the Courtyard in front of the tomb, we identified four different stratigraphic levels associated with the modern Qurnawi occupation. Among the modern remains of palm roofs and consolidated adobe floors, we recovered abundant material linked to the daily life of Qurnawi population: vegetable remains, food for both humans and animals, clothes, pharaonic replicas, parts of bread ovens, modern metal tools and cans, pottery, plastic, and paper.

Courtyard, South shaft

In its south sector, beneath an extensive layer of straw, we identified a shaft that mirrors, in proportion and location, the shaft on the Courtyard's north side. During excavation, we recovered both modern and pharaonic materials. Plants of American origin, like corn and peanuts, were found together with parts of mummified bodies, contemporary ceramics and Pharaonic pottery, modern and Pharaonic fabrics and woods, coffin fragments, part of a canopy's box and funerary cones with Amenemhet and Userhet's names on it. We found evidence of manure-and-straw-made floors at three different depths—1,20m, 1,80m and 2,20m—, which confirms the local community's account that the shaft was used for storing food, as the cold rock preserves

the grains in the summer. Interestingly, the largest amount of straw identified during the courtyard excavation was located just above the south shaft area, suggesting that the straw came from the roof of some shelter built on site for protecting food stored in the shaft. At 3,90m deep, we identified a chamber connected to the shaft (Fig. 3a) containing the human remains of 6 individuals of different ages and gender. Some presented pathologies. The bones were wrapped in modern palm and branch mats, indicating they were a secondary deposit for the bodies. We found no objects buried next to the bodies, which were already in

an advanced deterioration state due to contact with limestone dropped from the ceiling. At the chamber's entrance, we discovered six funerary cones with Amenemhet's name. Four of them were reassembled and glued together, suggesting that the shaft and chamber had been excavated before being covered with rubble (Fig. 3b). We also found cones with Userhet's name on them. The care taken to reassemble and glue the cones together suggests the work of an expert, or at least someone who understood their importance. In this regard, we may have excavated Mond's excavation of the courtyard conducted in 1904.



Fig. 3. Courtyard, Chamber shaft: a) general view 1; b) funerary cones glued.
Source: BAPE.

Transverse Hall

During the fieldwork seasons of 2017 and 2019-2020, a surface cleaning conducted in sector III revealed an adobe floor covering the entire area, rather well preserved on the limits of the south and north wings but with parts missing in the most central portion. The floor continues towards the Corridor and the Chapel. Four ceramic fragments, two ostraca with Coptic inscriptions, eleven ushabtis, a piece of modern glass, two faience fragments, coffin fragments, modern paper and mudbrick fragments were recovered while cleaning.

Chapel

The Chapel excavation, started in the 2019-2020 season, began by taking altimetric measurements of the ground, used to define the different archaeological strata.

Stratigraphic Unit 1 (UE1) shows the presence of Pharaonic archaeological remains such as cartonnage fragments, ushabtis, mummy-cloth and wall fragments with painting and carving, and modern remains such as cigarette boxes, tobacco, newspaper fragments, Qurnawi pieces of cloth, ropes, and blue beads. Stratigraphic Unit 2 (UE2) contained larger amounts of straw, goat faeces, mudbrick and mud plaster fragments. Mainly concentrated in the southern area, near a closed entrance

to tomb -293-, the mud materials were probably part of the mud wall covering this entrance. Stratigraphic Units UE3 and UE4 are vestiges of adobe, deposited directly onto the bedrock floor at the Chapel's entrance door. Additional vestiges of the mud floor found in the south-eastern part of the room form UE5. Near the opposite wall, in the southwestern part, the mud floor was better preserved, with a few centimetres layer deposited directly at the bedrock. We also found goat faeces. UEs 3-5, we believe, are directly associated with the adobe floor identified both in the Transverse Hall and in the Corridor, thus suggesting that tomb TT123 was entirely covered by an adobe floor in the past. Perhaps it was the existence of this floor that prevented Mond from locating the Chapel shafts.

While excavating UE6, we identified a shaft (Shaft 1) in the southern sector, near the feet of Amenemhet and Henutiri's statues. As the excavation progressed, we detected a shortening of the shaft on the northern side, forming a step-like lower ground in front of the statues, where a Qurnawi basket was placed on a roughly-chiselled alabaster vessel-like base. In our understanding, this feature is not a random displacement of material, but an intended placement. The basket, which contained a human femur, pieces of paper, incense, and a rope, was completely covered by Extraction 1 sediments. We identified this feature as Stratigraphic Unit 7 (UE7), but were unable to confirm if it is contemporary to the mud floor built atop the shaft's filling (Fig. 4).

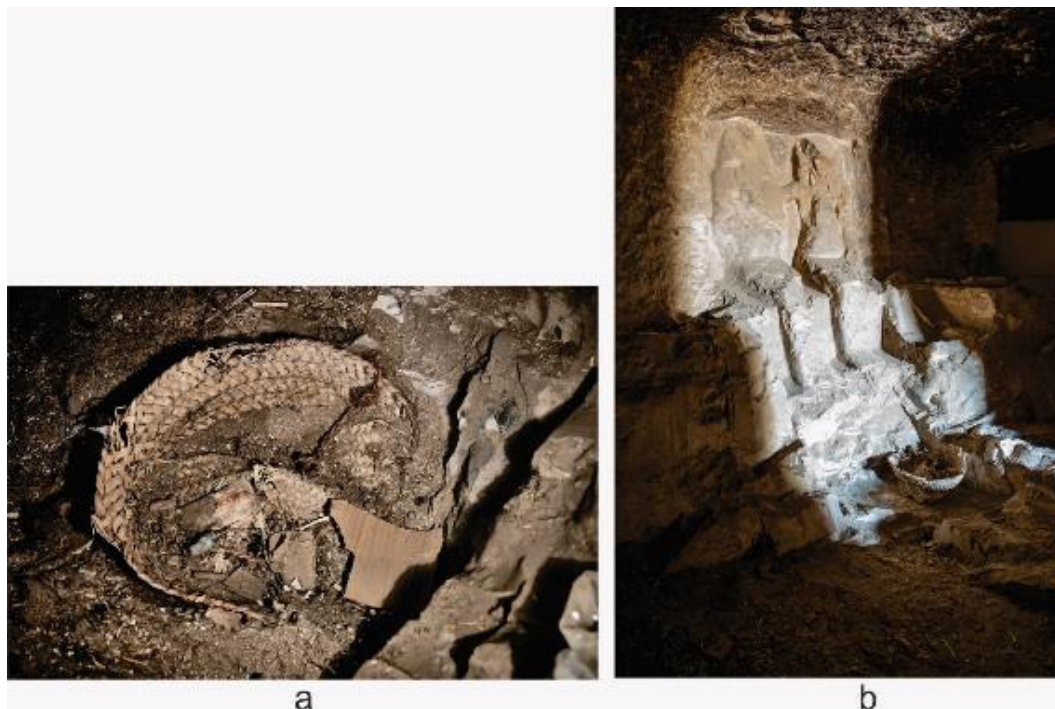


Fig. 4. Modern Qurnawi basket: a: detail; b: general view.
Source: BAPE.

Shaft 1

Shaft 1 (1,40m north-south; 1,15m east-west, 2,80m deep), was filled with the same type of sediment. During excavation, a pattern became visible regarding the depositions, with material remains concentrated towards the walls and lower frequencies in the middle of the shaft. Coffin pieces (wood and pottery), mummy cloth, disarticulated human bones, pottery, ushabtis, blocks of decorated ceiling and wall fragments, as well as modern materials (paper, clothes, glass fragments, pottery) were found all over the shaft's filling. It clearly forms a large palimpsest, probably created by a single event in modern times, which could be directly associated with the excavation reported by Mohamed Tayea and conducted by Sheikh Abd el Satar during the 1960s. The presence of modern remains like papers, fabrics, glass and Qurnawi ceramics corroborates this hypothesis. Unfortunately, so far none of the modern items has provided more accurate dates than those offered by Mohamed Tayea for the shaft excavation. At the end of the shaft, we found Chamber 1.

Chamber 1

Located directly below the statues of Amenemhet and Henutiri, Chamber 1 measures 1,82m north-south by 1,95m east-west 1,95 × 1,97m, with no decoration (Fig. 5a). It was full of material remains, sediments and limestone blocks, many of them from the partially collapsed roof. The ceiling and walls are partially covered by a yellowish soot, most likely accumulated from smoke inside the chamber. No signs of internal fire suggests that the soot was deposited at the time of its construction. Interestingly, the north wall shows no soot or change in color, only clean rock breaks, suggesting it was excavated at

some point after the chamber construction, possibly to enlarge the space.

We identified Pharaonic material remains dating from both the New Kingdom and the Third Intermediate Period, especially ushabtis, cartonnage fragments, human and ceramic remains. Modern material remains like fabric and plant material were also recovered. Although the deposit found in the chamber is largely associated with a single event, we could differentiate three different strata. Level 1 (0-50 cm) was mainly composed of large and medium-sized rocks resulting from the collapsed ceiling. Straw and goat feces, as well as a fine limestone sediment were observed in the southeast sector.

The northwest and northeast sectors present a large number of human bones and mummy tissue, some of it charred. At its central part, we identified a set of ushabtis on top of a rock (Fig. 6), suggesting they were deliberately selected and positioned there for preservation. At level 2 (50-70 cm), the large stones gave way to smaller blocks interspersed with a fine limestone sediment. We recovered cartonnage fragments, ceramic remains, coffin wood remains and ushabtis, dated stylistically and related to the Third Intermediate Period. Level 3 (70-92 cm) contained a large amount of ushabtis and cartonnage in the southern sector (Fig. 5b).

We identified three different types of ushabtis: blue chiefs, blue with the name of the deceased, and brown without decoration—all stylistically related to the Third Intermediate Period. Considering the data putting the chamber enlargement after its construction, and the presence of a vast number of materials dating from the Third Intermediate Period, we could reasonably hypothesize that the Chamber was initially built by Amenemhet and then enlarged during the Third Intermediate Period to be used as a burial area.

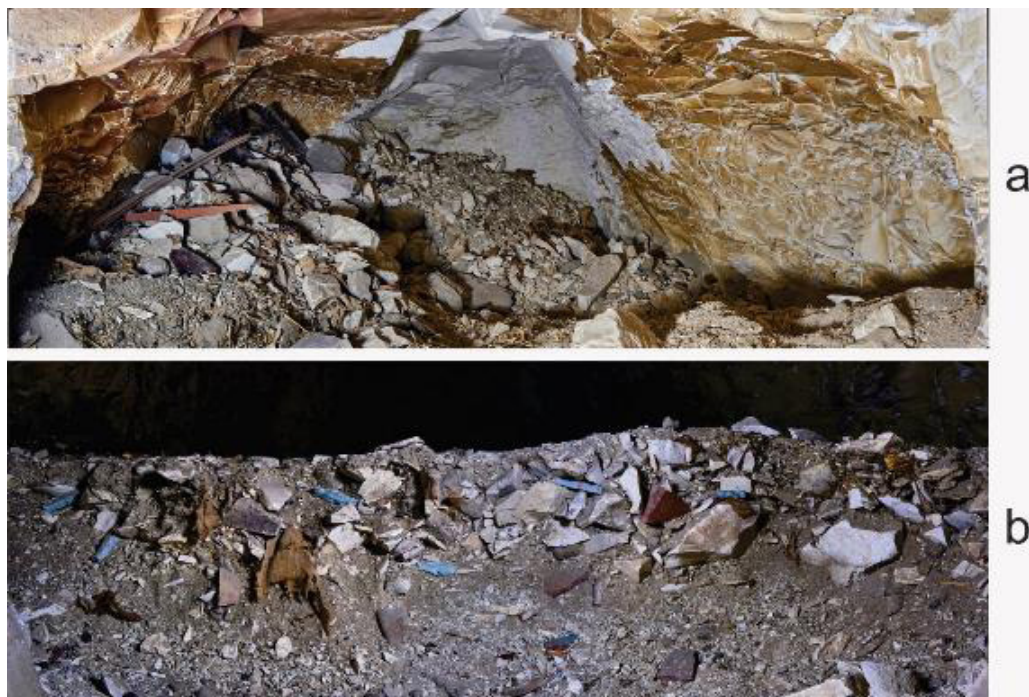


Fig. 5. Shaft chamber 1: a: general view; b: detail ushabti level.

Source: BAPE.



Fig. 6. Ushabti under stone

Source: BAPE.

Shaft 2

After finishing excavating Shaft 1, we began excavating Shaft 2 (Fig. 7), also located in the Chapel and already recorded in Kampp's plan (1996: 413). Located in the northern portion, Shaft 2 is 1,50m deep. At the surface, we recovered

large pieces of cartonnage, coffin wood mixed with cigarette packages and Qurnawi clothes, a scenario identical to the one found while excavating UE 1-6 in the Chapel (Fig. 8a). Its walls show signs of accumulated black soot as a result of burning. The shaft leads to two chambers, one located to the north and one to the east.

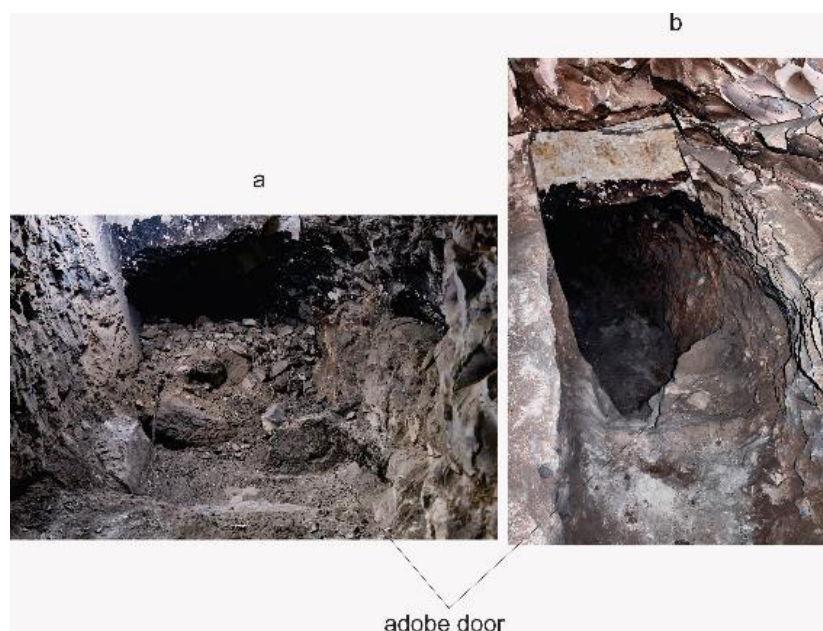


Fig. 7. Chapel shaft 2: funerary chamber.
Source: BAPE.



Fig. 8. Objects: a: modern (*qurnawi*); b: ushabti; c: amulets; d: ushabti sarcophagus; e: Bes bed.
Source: BAPE.

Shaft 2, north chamber

Measuring 2m north by 2,20m east and with no decoration, the north chamber presented on the west side very fine sediment, excessive presence of animal feces and straw, small and medium-sized stone blocks, adobe blocks and few artifacts, such as small cartonnage fragments, ushabtis, ceramics and human remains. During excavation, we identified an opening in the roof connecting sector VIII, a room located next to the statue room, to the chamber. As part of the sediment from the sector VIII room flowed into the chamber, we decided to postpone the excavation to the 2023 phase, when sector VIII will be excavated.

Shaft 2, east chamber

The east chamber measures $2,82 \times 2,25$, lacks decorations and has a large accumulation of blocks at its bottom, many of which show signs of burning while others are calcined. Mummified human remains and ushabtis were found on the surface. The objects identified are fairly well preserved compared with those excavated in Shaft 1, especially the cartonnage, shown in large and intensely colored fragments. We found entire ushabtis at this level. The stratum between 0,80 and 1,50m is mainly dominated by blocks with almost no sediment. From 1,55m onwards, we observed an increase in the number of calcined blocks, with the sediment showing alterations as a result of burning. Some burning spots with a good deal of charcoal can be seen along the entire chamber floor. The rock at the bottom of the chamber has a cut, forming a $3,67 \times 0,83$ m channel headed north. We identified remains of an ancient adobe door sealing the portion where the passage enters the mountain (**Fig. 7a-b**), which indicates this place was used as a burial site. The ceramic objects found there inscribed with Amenemhet's name suggests this was his burial chamber. We also recovered entire ushabtis and cartonnage pieces dated

to the New Kingdom. A bed with feet shaped like the god Bes, a box for ceramic Canopus vases featuring the children of Horus, two ceramic ushabti sarcophagi lids and some amulets are among the most unique materials found so far (**Fig. 8b-e**).

Mural stratigraphic analysis

Our objective was to map the different transformation processes of this space over time. For this purpose, we divided the tomb's walls into panels and sections and then analyzed each section considering: construction techniques, decorative techniques, stylistic characteristics, colors used, overlapping between figures, presence of non-pharaonic elements, structural conditions.

Preliminary results show: A) chisel marks related to the process of tomb construction, especially on the upper part of the walls both in the Transverse Hall and the Corridor. At some points we can see the marks below the images, revealing that they predate the decorative program installation process; B) holes in the Transverse Hall walls which were filled with adobe and later carved into bas-relief and finally painted. This shows that while installing the decorative program, the artists faced problems with the rock, which is very friable. When the rock broke, the best solution was to close the hole with adobe mass and carve on top of the new filling (**Fig. 9a**); C) the northwest sector of the Corridor shows significant change in the decorative program, with the bas-relief giving way to stucco decoration (**Fig. 9b**). At the edges of the painted stucco, traces of the old decoration can still be seen, clearly indicating that the bas-relief was erased to make room for a new decoration. While bas-relief scenes go from right to left, the stucco decoration is reversed and has new proportions. Interestingly, Amum's name was erased, suggesting that the stucco decoration was done before the Amarnian period. Numerous signs point to the changing in decorative program being abruptly interrupted,

such as: differences in proportions between the figures painted plaster and the part still in bas-relief,

different narratives, and erased images. It is difficult to say when this was done and by whom.

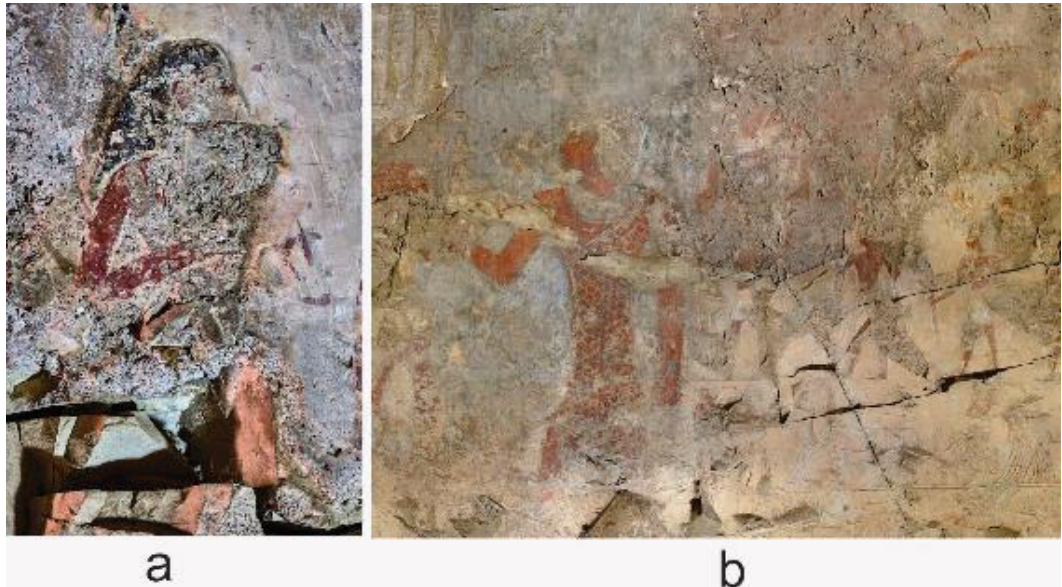


Fig. 9. Mural stratigraphy: a: Holes filled with adobe; b: Stucco decoration.
Source: BAPE.

Data show that: 1) natural diaclasation processes resulted in wall fractures that impacted the original decoration, that is, some big cracks and holes occurred after the original decorative program was finished; 2) the decoration was probably altered before the Amarnian period, since Amum's name was erased on the new decoration; 3) the new decoration features the name of an Amenemhet—whether this is the same Amenemhet or another remains unanswered. One might speculate that the original Amenemhet saw his tomb falling apart due to natural processes and decided to change the decorative program, but this was perhaps interrupted by his death. Attempts to change the decorative program can also be observed on the southeast wall, which shows superimposed images, with the bottom ones also erased.

Mural stratigraphic analysis also identified: D) images of human beings on the Corridor and the Transverse Hall with erased eyes, nose,

and mouth; E) hieratic inscriptions made atop a large fracture on the right of the passage between the Courtyard and the Transverse Hall. As the inscription was made after the wall fractured, the damage occurred as far back as the Pharaonic period; F) adobe marks in the passage areas between the Transverse Hall and the Corridor and between the Corridor and the Chapel. As seen above, the adobe marks at the top and sill of these sectors might indicate the presence of wooden doors, since the adobe was used to create the doorjamb (Fig. 10d). A subcircular structure excavated in the rock can be seen at the southwestern axis of the Corridor. We believe that this structure makes up part of the door that was possibly installed in this sector. This finding corroborates the accounts of Sheikh Abd el-Ati, who recalled doors at these points in the past; G) marks along the entire tomb ceiling, which could partially result from the tomb's modern occupation, since the

areas with the highest soot concentration, the Transverse Hall and the Chapel, are probably those with the highest degree of modern domestic activity. We identified adobe marks above the soot at the Transverse Hall. This suggests that some of the soot marks predate the doors and other modern structural modifications made. In other words, some of the soot in the ceiling may possibly be associated with, or even appeared prior to the Qurnawi occupation reported by Mond; H) remnants of modern white paint surrounding the wall in the Corridor and the Chapel (Fig. 10a). Like the modern adobe in these sectors, the paint is also found above the soot; I) at the Transverse Hall, to the left of the entrance, we find remains of adobe tiles that seem related to a cylindrical structure standing from floor to ceiling, suggesting the

presence of an ancient menama or adobe cabinet within the tomb (Fig. 10b); J) at the north-western axis of the Corridor, we can see adobe marks that suggest the existence of a modern bed, which are possibly traces of the bed used by Mohamed Tayea while he lived alone in the tomb; L) presence of dry animal manure on Transverse Hall and Corridor walls (Fig. 10c); M) a modern inscription on the northwest wall of the Corridor: *M. Zakaria 28-1-1947*. As mentioned, this name probably refers to Mohamed Zakaria Goneim; N) signs of an attempt to clean the ceiling and walls at the southern sector of the Transverse Hall; O) presence of modern cement in an old wall fracture at the northern limit of the Transverse Hall; P) a 1x1x1m post-pharaonic niche on the northwest wall of the Transverse Hall, where two Coptic ostraca were found.



Fig. 10. Qurnawis interventions: a: White paint; b: Menama marks; c: dung on the wall; d: Adobe doorjamb. Source: BAPE.

Painted blocks

Both TT123 and TT368 presented a great number of loose blocks in their Corridors in 2015, many of which were found in the Transverse Hall and Corridor. Such accumulation can be attributed to

the Antiquities Service, since tomb TT123 was apparently used as a deposit on at least two occasions. The first between 1909 and 1910, as stated by Gordon Jelf on his reporting of the work conducted at the West Bank of Luxor (Kaczanowicz 2020). The second moment took place in the 1980s. According to

unofficial information from Antiquities Service agents and former Qurna residents, the tomb began to serve as a storage place for blocks and various material remains after Mohamed Tayea's family left the site. We believe that these blocks were not deposited at TT123 and TT368 between 1909 and 1910, but rather after Tayea's family left. As described above, Mohamed Tayea's family inhabited the place between 1940 and 1980, and the number of blocks on the tomb floor would make it uninhabitable.

During the 2016-2017 fieldwork seasons, we dedicated our time almost entirely to organizing, analyzing, and curating the blocks. Since they vary in terms of raw materials (sandstone, limestone, etc.), size (some weigh more than 70 kg, others are rather small), presence/absence of decoration, and the type of inscriptions and iconography on them (polychrome paintings/engravings in sunk or high relief etc.), we grouped them according to stylistic and techno-morphological similarities. During this reorganization, we verified that many blocks belong to the same architectural element, as walls or ceilings. Moreover, the vast majority of the blocks belong to neither TT123 nor TT368. One hypothesis is that some of these blocks belong to the collapsed neighbouring tombs TT124, TT331 and even TT55.

We catalogued and analyzed a total of 1160 blocks, 747 from TT123 and the remainder from TT368. The blocks were cleaned with brushes, described, numbered, registered, and packaged. Descriptive analysis was performed paying attention to their general morphologic attributes and execution techniques. Photographic record was taken with a tripod in a wooden box filled with sand. Each block was labelled and numbered using permanent marker.

Some pieces have some numbers written on them with pencil (e.g., "55", "57" and "124"), which we assume mean that someone linked them as belonging to the walls of Theban Tombs 55, 57 and 124, respectively. After analysis, all blocks were packed in boxes and placed in tomb -266-.

Assembling the puzzle

During these first years of working at TT123, our in-depth experience of this site helped us to understand the different events that took place there over time. Much of the information we collected so far focuses on three periods: the New Empire, the Third Intermediate Period, and from the 19th century onwards. Information on other periods are unfortunately lacking or non-existent, hindering any interpretive process. For example, despite the remains found of a Roman ceramic vase and four Coptic ostraca, we have identified no other information that would suggest a Roman or Coptic occupation of the site. Historically, the Theban necropolis was inhabited almost without interruption since the Pharaonic period by different populations, from Coptic monks to Bedouin communities, but TT123 has so far shown no evidence of such events (Blondeau & Serdiuk 2008; Correas-Amador & Simpson 2017; Fábíán 2010; Górecki 2014; Simpson 2010). Thus, from the available data, we can stretch our imagination to picture the experiences that took place on this site and its different forms of existence.

It all started with Amenemhet, scribe at the temple of Thutmose III, choosing a place on the plain of present-day Sheikh Abdel Qurna, where the rock is quite friable, for constructing his *hwt n nhh* or The House of Eternity. As the walls are being evened out the rock starts to detach, forcing artisans to fill the gaps with adobe. The walls were then gridded, and the bas-relief created. For reasons yet unknown, once the decoration was finished someone, maybe Amenemhet himself, decided to change part of the decorative program in the Corridor. On its south and north walls, the bas-relief begins to be erased to make room for new scenes, but traces of the old images remain.

During the Third Intermediate Period, Shaft 1, built by Amenemhet, is enlarged and becomes a burial chamber. This reappropriation process may have taken place a second time, with the Courtyard Shaft also being used as a burial chamber.

Due to some event, tomb TT331, located below TT123, collapsed, resulting in the roof sliding and the shaft located in the northern portion of the courtyard rupturing. This sequence of events eventually resulted in new fractures and holes seen in the wall structure. Some of them might have taken place in antiquity, since we found hieratic inscriptions in one of the rock holes located at the tomb's entrance.

In the late 19th century, a Qurnawi family occupied the site and used it as a living area. At that moment, the *hut n nhh* turned into a house or *Beit el Hagar*, which the Qurnawi call tombs that became residences, granaries or stables. As such, the site was no longer Amenemhet's House of Eternity, but a Qurnawi home. This family likely installed an adobe floor across the tomb and opened the passage leading from the Chapel to the courtyard of Userhet's tomb. Some daily activities resulted in soot accumulating on the ceiling and walls, while part of the Chapel floor shows that this sector was used as a barn.

In 1904, the cleaning and excavation conducted by Robert Mond once again changes the subjectivity of the space which becomes an archaeological site, or more precisely TT123. As Mond makes no record on the existence of the Chapel Shafts, during his time on TT123 their entrance was probably hidden by the adobe floor.

In 1910, Gordon Jelf reported that TT123 had become a storage area, possibly for the Antiquities Service. Between 1911-1932, an iron door was installed at the tomb's entrance. In their work on the Necropolis topography, Gardiner and Weigall (1913) stated that in 1911 the door to TT123 was blocked by stones. Unfortunately, the photos published on the book does not allow the tomb to be visualized. Interestingly, the map of the Theban Necropolis published in 1923-24 by the Egypt Survey showing the floor plan of many of the Qurnawi houses existing at that time on the West Bank of Luxor, does not mark TT123 as a residence.

A 1932 film shows the entrance to the tomb already closed, but without stone blocks. A donkey tied up in the courtyard can be

seen in the footage. Between 1920-1940, Norman and Nina Davies visited the TT123 and recorded some of the wall scenes. In the same period, Siegfried Schott and the Oriental Institute of Chicago took photographic records of some scenes from sectors III and V.

In 1947, Zakaria Goneim probably visited TT123 and began cleaning and doing some restoration work to try and clear out sections of the Transverse Hall's ceiling.

In the 1960s, Ahmed Tayea's family occupied the space, transforming it into a house and stable. Once again, the site's subjectivity changes and goes back to being a Stone House, *Beit el Hagar*. Wood doors are installed at the beginning and end of the Corridor, a bed is placed at the end of the Corridor and a semi-circular structure is built on the Transverse Hall, right next to the tomb entrance. Perhaps a great menama, as seen in other tombs in the Necropolis². Manure slabs are left to dry on the tomb walls to be later used as fuel by the family. The south Courtyard shaft may have been opened at this time and adapted for grain and food storage. While Ahmed's family spends most of their time at another house-tomb located in Tarif, Ahmed's son, Mohamed Tayeb, regularly lives at TT123, being visited by spirits from the past at night. According to Tayeb, Sheikh Satar bought the tomb in the 1960s and began excavating the Chapel shafts, which would explain the presence of Qurnawi material in both the shafts and the chambers. A burning took place in the chamber while opening Shaft 2, which signs can be observed on the chamber's floor and walls, as well as on the materials and limestone blocks found. The adobe door sealing Amenemhet's burial chamber is broken and the material remains are removed, leaving only a few ushabtis, part of a mummy and other objects, among them the ceramic lids of ushabti sarcophagi and a bed decorated with the god Bes. Ibraim Abu Kalb, the first owner, repurchases the house. With Ibrahim's passing, his son Ahmed sells

2 Menamas can still be seen inside the TT236 and TT237 tombs located in dra Abu el Naga.

the house once again to Sheikh Satar, now for the price of 20 Egyptian pounds. Ahmed's brother cancels the deal and takes more than a year to collect the money to repay Satar.

In the early 1980s, Mohamed Tayeb's family leave the site and the tomb becomes a deposit of archaeological remains for the Antiquities Service. Funerary cones from various sources, painted blocks, sandstone, and basalt blocks, are deposited inside the structure, which once again goes from being house to an archaeological site, TT123.

Photos from 1992-1997 show the tomb entrance closed with stones. In 2014, the CEDAE visits the place and documents the tomb's scenes and structural situation. In 2016, BAPE assumes the concession of the tomb together with CEDAE, thus starting the first Brazilian archaeological project in Egypt.

As demonstrated by this text, throughout its existence this site has taken on different subjectivities: first, it was the House of Eternity for Amenemhet and others we ignore; then a home for Qurnawi families, and finally an archaeological site—TT123. All these subjectivities overlap, coexist and are created by encounters and relations established. Each different encounter generates different subjectivities. As such, this place cannot be thought of as having a fixed essence; rather, it is a transitory space and meeting point for different ontologies. It was a tomb, a house, a stable, an archaeological site, a heritage site, a place inhabited by spirits and perhaps many other things we ignore. Each of these

identities outlines different and complex relations between humans and non-humans, and presupposes different ways of existing and relating. As none of these identities take precedence over the others, we must consider the negotiation networks and assemblies formed by each of these potential realities to better understand the site (Alberti, Jones & Pollard 2013; Barad 2007; Deleuze 1987).

Before simply being a tomb or an archaeological site, TT123 is a potential space actualized in one way or another based on the relations being considered (Pellini 2022). Its identity and existence are defined by such relations, and they are the focus of our project. Human and non-human, living and dead have coexisted over the centuries at the tombs of Luxor's West Bank. Even today, the dead of the pharaonic Necropolis coexist with a multitude of actors such as foreign researchers, the Egyptian State represented by Ministry of Antiquities officials, local workers who collaborate with archaeological research, police officers guarding the tombs, tourists, spiritual beings, saints, etc. In these encounters, different worlds are created. Thus, we believe that such monumental spaces produce alternative narratives to the globalized heritage and classical Egyptology, mediated by the actions of those who affect and are affected by these spaces and which are made invisible by official discourse. In this regard, the Amenemhet Project seeks to be multivocal, giving space to different ontologies and ways of relating to this space.

PELLINI, J.R.; LEMOS, C.M. O Programa Arqueológico Brasileiro no Egito: os primeiros seis anos na TT123: organizando o quebra-cabeças. *R. Museu Arq. Etn.* 40: 104-123 2023.

Resumo: Criado em 2015, o Programa Arqueológico Brasileiro no Egito (BAPE) tem como objetivo desenvolver pesquisas transversais e participativas em solo egípcio. Desde 2016 o BAPE vem desenvolvendo junto com o governo egípcio o Projeto Amenemhet, para a escavação da Tumba Tebana 123, localizada em Sheikh Abdel Qurna, Luxor. A tumba serviu como área de sepultamento no período faraônico e como residência na modernidade para famílias qurnawis. O objetivo deste artigo é apresentar os primeiros resultados das pesquisas conduzidas no local apresentando uma primeira interpretação

baseada nos dados até agora levantados, tanto do ponto de vista arqueológico quanto histórico e etnográfico.

Palavras-chave: Arqueologia; Egito; Tumba tebana; Sheikh Abdel Qurna; Bape.

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