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Herausgegeben von
Jochem Kahl und
Nicole Kloth



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Harp on Object Friezes of the Middle Kingdom Coffins

Symbolism and Function in Funerary Context

Mohamed Abdelrahiem
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Abstract

On Monday September 2, 2024, the Asyut Project, discovered two wooden coffins belonging to lady Idy, a priestess of Hathor and the only daughter of Djefai-Hapi I, nomarch of Asyut during the reign of Senwosret I. The interior of the foot end of her outer coffin features an object frieze that notably includes two harps. This particular motif is extremely rare and otherwise paralleled only on few known examples from the Middle Kingdom. This paper, presenting the initial findings from the newly discovered outer coffin of Idy, aims to provide a general overview of harp depictions within object friezes on rectangular coffins from the Middle Kingdom. The representation of harps in funerary context raises the important question, if these instruments could point out the musical activity of the deceased or even his/her profession, or if they only belong to the grave inventory, with a more ritualistic or particular symbolism.¹

1 Introduction

Tomb I of Djefai-Hapi I, nomarch of Asyut during the reign of Senwosret I, is the largest non-royal tomb of the Middle Kingdom in Egypt. Measuring approximately 70 meters in length, its chambers reach heights of over 10 meters. Until 2014, only a single tomb shaft was known (Shaft 1).² It was first documented by the French Expedition in 1799 and was later cleared by the Asyut Project in recent years.³ This shaft, 28 meters deep, terminates in the heavily weathered burial chamber of Djefai-Hapi I. In 2022, cleaning of the ground floor revealed two additional shafts: one cut into the floor of the northern part of the Great Transverse Hall (Shaft 13), and the other cut into the lowest part of the southern wall of the second corridor (Shaft 12). Shaft 12, located in the second corridor, descends vertically (Fig. 1). The Asyut Project proceeded with the clearing of Shaft 12, which was completely filled with stones and debris. At a depth of approximately 13 meters, following the removal of the fill, the entrance to a side chamber was uncovered. This chamber is located to the north and contained the burial of Djefai-Hapi I's only daughter, named Idy.

The chamber was ransacked in antiquity, resulting in the destruction of Idy's mummy, but was subsequently forgotten and remained unknown to modern researchers until recently.

¹ This study is the result of a collaborative effort between the directors of the "Asyut Project", the author, and Prof. Jochem Kahl, to whom I extend my deepest thanks for his generous support of this investigation. In May 2025, I was granted the opportunity to receive a scholarship that allowed me to conduct this research at Freie Universität Berlin for fifteen days. On behalf of the "Asyut Project," I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the generosity of our sponsor, Freie Universität Berlin.

² See J. Kahl, et al., *The Asyut Project: Eleventh Season of Fieldwork* (2014), in: SAK 44, 2015, 121–124.

³ On the architecture of the tomb, see J. Kahl, *Ancient Asyut: The First Synthesis after 300 Years of Research, The Asyut Project 1*, Wiesbaden 2007, 88–90, cf. J. Kahl, *Die Zeit selbst lag nun tot darnieder: Die Stadt Assiut und ihre Nekropolen nach westlichen Reiseberichten des 17. bis 19. Jahrhunderts: Konstruktion, Destruktion und Rekonstruktion, The Asyut Project 5*, Wiesbaden 2013, 95–106; T. Beck, *Tomb I, Shaft 1*, in: J. Kahl et al., *The Asyut Project: Twelfth Season of Fieldwork* (2016), in: SAK 46, 2017, 131–141, figs 12–17; M. Zöllner-Engelhardt, *Tomb I (P10.1), Shaft 1, Level-3, side chamber: Report on the work 2017/2018*, in: J. Kahl et al., *The Asyut Project: Fourteenth and Fifteenth Season of Fieldwork* (2018–2019), in: SAK 50, 2021, 208–215; A. Kilian, *P10.1, Pottery*, in: J. Kahl et al., in: SAK 50, 216–226.

The First Season of the Qaw el-Kebir Expedition (2024)

José M. Alba Gómez / Raúl Sánchez Casado / Jesús Martínez Fernández /
Patricia Mora Riudavets / Antonio J. Morales

Abstract

This paper presents the preliminary results from the first season of the Qaw el-Kebir Expedition, which took place in November 2024. The expedition marks the resumption of archaeological research at this significant Middle Kingdom necropolis after a long period of inactivity. Our primary objectives were to survey the site systematically, document its current condition, and establish a foundational record for future research and preservation efforts. The fieldwork led to the identification and documentation of thirty-seven funerary structures, which have allowed us to correct and refine earlier accounts, particularly those from Flinders Petrie's early 20th-century surveys that contained notable inaccuracies and omissions. Our findings highlight a complex history of multiperiod reuse, with evidence of structures and modifications dating from the Old Kingdom to the Graeco-Roman era. In addition to archaeological recording, we implemented initial site management and conservation measures, including emergency cleaning, security enhancements, and basic repairs to vulnerable areas. This campaign has laid a robust foundation for a long-term research strategy that will focus on re-examining the entire funerary landscape, including the lesser-known tombs of lower-ranking individuals, and expanding surveys into previously unexplored areas such as the wadis.

Introduction

This paper presents preliminary results from the first field season of the Qaw el-Kebir Expedition conducted in November 2024.¹ This campaign marks the resumption of archaeological research after a prolonged hiatus and seeks to restore scholarly attention to the significance of the Middle Kingdom necropolis (see fig. 1), while also addressing the broader archaeological landscape of the site, which spans from the Predynastic period (ca. 4300–3000 BCE) to the Graeco-Roman era (332 BCE–640 CE).

Specifically, we share the identification of various features/structures, which are clearly visible and were easily recognizable during the survey carried out on the hill. For this purpose, we have used Petrie's plan published in *Anteopolis* as a reference framework.

¹ The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) for granting permission to work at the site. We are especially thankful to the General Director of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, Dr. Mohamed Ismail Khaled, and to the Director of Foreign Missions, Dr. Hany Abdallah Eltayeb, for their continued support and facilitation of our work. Special thanks are also extended to the ex General Director of Middle Egypt, Dr. Adel Okasha; to the Assiut Inspectorate Office, led by Dr. Mohamed Sedky Abd-El Sabor; and to the Head of the Excavations Department, Dr. Gamal Abdel Malek Abd el-Monem. We are grateful to Hesham Salah Mohamed, Ahmed Mahmoud Abd el-Rahman, and Enas Mohamed Tawfik (members of the Egyptian team), as well as to inspector Esraa Mohamed Ahmed, for their dedication and professionalism throughout the project. We would like to express our deepest appreciation to Osama Amer, whose tireless support and generosity were vital to the success of the 2024 season. Osama passed away some months after the end of the campaign, and we remember him with great affection and respect. His extraordinary help, kindness, and unwavering dedication will remain in our memory and in the legacy of this project. Our thanks also go to Islam Mohamed Elamir for his essential assistance with the team's logistics. This campaign was funded by the University of Alcalá (UAH) and the high-performance research group "CIARQ – Sciences in Archaeology" (CH-CT2019/803).

Breaking the Official Channels – Sociolinguistics in Identifying Patron-Client Relationships in the Lahun Letters

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Abstract

The unique collection of letters from the town and temple site of Lahun (1850–1700 BC) is mostly known for its formulaic correspondence between local and royal officials. For most of the letters, however, the knowledge of the correspondents' social status and relationship with each other can be defined only roughly. In this article, a new contextual reading to some of these 'formal' Lahun letters is proposed, and it is suggested that these texts bear evidence of patron-client relationships. It is argued that they were written, not merely by a subordinate to a superior, but by a client to his patron. These kinds of relationships are essentially informal, personal, and situational. The study thus contributes to the discussion on the social interdependencies in the community of Lahun and in late Middle Kingdom Egypt.

1 Introduction

Since Petrie's first archaeological investigations in the Middle Kingdom town of Lahun,¹ the site has been of vital importance for research on late Middle Kingdom communities and social culture. Despite this long research tradition,² the knowledge of the inhabitants and how they identified themselves within their social circle remains very general. This is partly due

* My thanks are due to my PhD supervisors Sami Uljas and Melanie Wasmuth for all their help and comments on the drafts of this paper. I also wish to thank Emanuel Pfoh and Lena Tambs for valuable discussions and comments on the draft of this paper. I am grateful also to Joachim Quack for his valuable comments on my translations of the letters.

¹ Petrie directed the first two excavation seasons at the town site in 1889–1890, from which most of the first part of the collection was recovered (known as the town papyri). For reports of the field seasons, see W.M.F. Petrie, *Kahun, Gurob and Hawarra*, London 1890; Petrie, *Illahun, Kahun and Gurob*, London 1891; Petrie/G. Brunton/M. Murray, *Lahun II*, London 1923. For more recent archaeological investigations at the site, see e.g. Z. Horváth, *El-Lahun survey project: The archaeological mission of the Museum of Fine Arts*, in: *Bulletin du Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts* 110–111, 2009, 186–190; R.M. Frey/J. Knudstad, *The re-examination of selected architectural remains at el-Lahun*, in: *JSSEA* 35, 2008, 27–81. The second part of the collection (known as the temple papyri) was purchased by Reinhardt and Schäfer for the State Museum in Berlin. Although the papyri were not found in their original context, the content of the texts firmly connects them to the temple. See L. Borchardt, *Der zweite Papyrusfund von Kahun und die zeitliche Festlegung des mittleren Reiches der ägyptischen Geschichte*, in: *ZÄS* 37, 1899, 89–103. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the exact find spot can be defined securely for only a couple of the papyri. It is, for example, possible that the distinction between the town site and the adjacent areas has not been consistent throughout Petrie's field seasons, and some of the material may have been found outside the town site and delivered to him later.

² For research on the social organization of Lahun, see e.g. S. Quirke, *Townsmen in the Middle Kingdom*; on the term *s n niwt tn* in the Lahun Temple Accounts, in: *ZÄS* 118, 1991, 141–149; Quirke, *Gods in the temple of the king: Anubis at Lahun*, in: Quirke (ed.), *The temple in Ancient Egypt. New Discoveries and Ancient Research*, London 1997, 24–48; A.K. Kóthay, *Houses and households at Kahun: bureaucratic and domestic aspects of social organization during the Middle Kingdom*, in: H. Gyóry (ed.), *'Le lotus qui sort de terre'. Mélanges offerts à Edith Varga 2001* Budapest Le Musée Hongrois des Beaux-Arts, Budapest 2001, 349–368; Quirke, *Lahun, a Town in Egypt 1800 B.C. and the History of its Landscape*, London 2005; M. Collier, *Lots I and II from Lahun*, in: D. P. Silverman/W. K. Simpson/J. W. Wegner (eds), *Archaism and Innovation: Studies in the Culture of Middle Kingdom Egypt*, Boston 2009, 205–261; Z. Horváth, *Temple(s) and town at el-Lahun: A study of ancient toponyms in the el-Lahun papyri*, in: *Archaism and Innovation*, 171–203; M. Di Teodoro, *Labour Organisation in Middle Kingdom Egypt*, *Middle Kingdom Studies* 7, London 2018; M. Aprile, *A study of the procurement of offerings system for the funerary complex of Senwosret II at el-Lahun*, in: *SAK* 52, 2023, 1–20.