

Preliminary Report on the Work Carried out During the Season 2009

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This campaign in the Valley of the Kings undertaken by the University of Basel King's Valley Project (former MISR: Mission Siptah-Ramses X) was dedicated to some of the undecorated tombs in the lateral valley leading to KV 34 of Thutmose III. Work concentrated on topographical surveying of the area as well as on the shaft tombs KV 26, KV 30 and KV 59. (1) As work of preceding seasons had allowed to identify KV 32 as being the tomb of queen Tiaa, wife of Amenhotep II and mother of Thutmose IV (2), it seemed interesting to pursue investigations in the area in order to better define the chronological and social relevance of this part of the cemetery.

There are numerous undecorated tombs in this part of the Valley: KV 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 37, 40, 42, 59 and 61. For many of them, however, the history of their discovery and of former excavations is very badly or not at all documented, their date is not ascertained and for some of them only partial architectural information is available. The University of Basel Project seeks to document the area and its undecorated tombs and to elucidate the different phases and forms of use of this sector of the King's Valley. It also has a strong concern for the consolidation and protection of the tombs which all cluster around the heavily frequented path leading to the tomb of Thutmose III.

The tomb KV 26

The undecorated tomb KV 26 is known since 1898 when Victor Loret attributed its number, but no records are known concerning an excavation inside the tomb. It is situated on the slope to the East of the path leading to the Thutmoside tombs KV 32 (Queen Tiaa), KV 42 (Thutmose II/Queen Meritre-Hatshepsut?) and finally KV 34 (Thutmose III) (fig. 2). The latest information before our clearing in 2009 is the plan included in the Theban Mapping Project established in the 1980s (fig. 3). (3)

KV 26 consists of a shaft A opening toward the northeast into a corridor B and to a small room J. The TMP plan shows the floor of the tomb entirely covered with debris, the tomb's original height being only estimated. The upper part of the open tomb shaft A was filled with modern garbage. (4) The lower part of the shaft as well as corridor B and room J were filled with sand, debris and stone boulders. The shaft is approx. 6 meters deep, the size of its mouth is 1,4 m by 2,0 m and its orientation is East-West. The elevation according to TMP is 190.150. The total length of the tomb measures approx. 11 meters. The actual heights of the rooms are lower than estimated in the plan of the TMP, with a maximum of 2 meters. The final plan of the architecture will be established during the coming seasons.

Clearing of KV 26

The shaft was first cleared from modern garbage (dating from very recent years till the 1980s) until a layer with limestone chips, sand and flint boulders appeared. This layer started approximately in the middle of the height of the entrance door leading to corridor B. Debris without any modern remains continued down to the floor of the shaft. Three very large flint boulders (fig. 4) could only be moved within the shaft in order to clear the debris underneath them. Between the boulders a few fragments of Eighteenth Dynasty flowerpots were discovered. Before entering corridor B a profile was drawn of the layers in the passage from A to B. Inside corridor B (fig. 5) the debris reached almost to the ceiling on the south side, 40 cm higher than on the north side. This is probably due to the visit of the team of TMP in the 1980s.

The debris in corridor B and in room J were removed in three layers, which had the same consistence. In all three layers the same kind of pottery sherds was found and even joining fragments of jars were found in all the rooms and layers as well as outside the tomb KV 26. The fragments mostly come from big storage jars with white slip on the surface and of different fabrics. Work on the jars will be completed in the coming season, their number can be estimated to 12-15. Fragments of decorated flasks (fig. 6) and jars made of marl silt and dating to the Thutmoside period could be joined together. These fragments were also discovered in rooms B and J in all three layers. Several fragments of calcite jars remained, all of them without inscriptions. Some faience inlay fragments and beads as well as two broken pieces of very small figurines, one with a falcon head and one of a jackal, were found in room J.

The organic material - wood, textiles, bones - was in a very poor and fragile condition. This is due to the flooding of the tomb, probably already in Pharaonic times, and to the robbers. Proof for this flooding remained as small debris with sand layers in the southeast corner of corridor B, underneath which a human skull was found. It seems that the mummies were not taken out in the Twenty-first Dynasty but that the tomb was robbed of all its valuable objects, probably at this period. This is suggested by fragments of a jar from the late Twentieth or Twenty-first Dynasty with bitumen on its surface found in all the rooms in KV 26, with one joining sherd even found in the shaft of KV 30. This jar and fragments of a small bowl are the only objects belonging neither to the Eighteenth Dynasty nor to modern times. The human bones found in the debris were very fragmentary and fragile, except the skull from the southeast corner of corridor B and no mummy bandages covered the bones anymore. They have been taken off the bodies and only stripes of linen were found inside the tomb. Probably the tomb has contained originally more than one burial. The fragments of wood of coffins with black surface and remains of yellow signs date to the Eighteenth Dynasty. All the burial material and the debris were mixed up and moved around within the tomb. A large amount of flint boulders were in all the layers and it is not clear when and how they came inside the tomb, as far back as to the last room J where the entire surface was covered with big flint stones. There are more stones than can come from the blocking of the tomb entrance, probably these boulders were also used to fill the shaft. Shaft A and room B are well carved and show chisel marks on their walls. Room J (fig. 7) has been left unfinished, it has chisel marks only on the West wall and at the East end. The height of the room is only approx. 1,20 meters and its ceiling and the other walls have not been smoothed. The limestone is generally of good quality and the water damage is not visible in the tomb itself, only on the remains of the burial objects. Conclusions: The preliminary results concerning KV 26 are that the tomb dates to the Eighteenth Dynasty, to the reigns of Thutmose III-Amenhotep II. The tomb was used at least for one burial. The identity of the deceased could not be established. The tomb was not decorated and room J was left unfinished. It was probably opened in the Third Intermediate Period. Because no earlier finds have been recorded, we assume that the tomb was not excavated in modern times except for the visits by early archaeologists. All the modern remains date to the time after the work of Loret in 1898-99. At the end of this season an iron door was built over the shaft entrance on a brick wall, covered with hiba (fig. 8). This door was built larger than the opening of the shaft, so that the original measurements remain visible. Fig. 8. KV 26 with protection door. The tomb KV 30 KV 30 is located to the West of the path leading to the Thutmoside tombs KV 32 (Queen Tiaa), KV 42 (Thutmose II/Queen Meritre-Hatshepsut?) and finally KV 34 (Thutmose III), roughly opposite KV 26 (fig. 1). Little is known about the history of KV 30. The first surely attested visitor is James Burton in 1825, who drew the tomb on his plan and noticed a „mason mark“ made with red ink in the „chamber of pit“ (5) Elizabeth Thomas suggested that KV 30 might be one of the two „spots of ground“ which Giovanni B. Belzoni indicated to Lord Belmore in November 1817 as possible excavation area. (6) This can, however, not be assured, (7) nor can the hypothesis of Reeves and Wilkinson be verified according to which the sarcophagus British Museum EA 39, which once figured in the collection of Lord Belmore, stems from this tomb. (8)

Thomas was the first to publish a sketch of the tomb's architecture in 1966. The Theban Mapping Project produced the following plan and section in the 1980s (fig. 9). From Thomas' description and the plan and section of the TMP, it was clear before our work that KV 30 consists of a shaft A leading to the west into a corridor B and to a big room C, surrounded by four rooms or annexes Ca-d at the end of the burial system. The total length of the tomb measures approx. 23 meters. The lower part of the shaft and the whole corridor were described as still filled with debris, which ranged into room C.



Fig. 1. Valley of the Kings, the lateral valley leading to the tomb of Thutmose III.

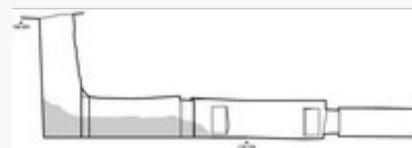


Fig. 9b. KV 30, Theban Mapping Project.

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Clearing of KV 30

In the open shaft (A) the door leading to corridor B was not visible anymore. The upper part of the debris in the shaft consisted of an accumulation of modern rubbish (A1 on fig. 10), the lowest layer of which reached for about a meter inside corridor B. The rest of the fill, which continued into room C, had a similar consistence: sandy debris with a lot of limestone chips.

Shaft A

The shaft has a depth of approx. 7 meters and its orientation is E-W. About 1,70-1,80 m above the door, a graffito traced in red ink (fig. 11) is visible on the west wall of the shaft. It contains a big scarab on the right, a mn-game board above the hieroglyph of the reed (j) and a small circle (sun disk?) on the left. Although the name Men-kheper-Ra can be expected in this part of the Valley, the interpretation of this inscription remains uncertain. It is surely not the „mason mark“ which Burton saw in 1825 and of which we did not find any trace until now.

Under the rubbish were sandy debris and older modern finds: fragments of packaging, bottlecorks and the page of a newspaper, which dates between 1925 and 1928. Under this level (A2), an enormous flint block stands inclined in the middle of the shaft, the western half being lower than the eastern half. The block fills the shaft almost completely in its width (fig. 12). The next layer (A3) contained pottery and wood; among the pottery was a fragment of a docket of an amphora for fat. One sherd was found which joins with jar fragments from the late Twentieth or Twenty-first Dynasty from KV 26. An installation subsisted in shaft A, which was used to move the enormous flint block from the front of the door and to give access to the tomb. Along the northern and the southern wall of the shaft, two wooden beams were laying on the debris (A5) together with a few mudclumps and a reed mat. The wooden beams were still lying under the block. No other modern objects were found under this construction.

Corridor B und chamber C

The debris in corridor B (fig. 13) and chamber C (fig. 14-15) were similar to those in shaft A and quite homogenous. The top of the debris was only 50 cm under the ceiling of corridor B. In chamber C, the debris ended in a cone, which reached 3 m to the west of the door between B and C. Pottery, remains of wood and reed fragments were found in every layer; clay clumps were discovered mainly in the western part of the corridor. About 0,75-1,00 m above the ground of corridor B, a big quantity of reed (mainly from mats) was laying under the upper part of the debris. Some modern objects were discovered in these upper levels, but the shoulder fragment of a wooden coffin (fig. 16) as well as an ostrakon with hieroglyphic inscription were also found in these upper layers. The lower part of an amphora was standing on the north-western side of the cone of debris in room C; this is probably the vessel fragment mentioned by Thomas as the unique find known in KV 30.

Under the reed mats (B I 3-4 and II 2-4 on fig. 5), big flint boulders began to appear; more than 15 remained in corridor B and chamber C, the biggest were left inside the tomb. A few fragments of wooden coffins were discovered in these lower layers (mainly in the western half of the corridor), two of them are still covered by remains of colour (fig. 17). Interesting small finds were also discovered here: two wooden fixation pieces belonging to a bigger object (fig. 18), a polychrome glass fragment, a faience bead and a few inlay fragments, a small piece of cartonnage and the fragment of an ostrakon with a strange drawing; in chamber C, the fragment of a stone vessel and a small wooden vessel lid with carved decoration were found. In corridor B, the last modern object was discovered in these lower levels: a waxcandle.

The rest of the tomb (western part of room C and chambers Ca-d) was found as Thomas described it in 1966: "quite clean, except for bat dung". On the side of the cone of debris, a modern brush was still standing, covered with bat dung, and at some places, the dust was swept to small humps.

An interesting architectural observation could be made in chamber C: the doorframes of all the chambers Ca-d are drawn with red colour on the rock wall. Two of them (Ca und Cb) have been cut much narrower by the stonemason than it was planned originally (fig. 19).

Area A, outside of KV 30

To prepare the construction of an iron door over the shaft of KV 30, an excavation area of 4x6 m was opened around the entrance of the tomb. Only little loose debris were found directly beside the entrance of the shaft, but their height reached 90 cm in the north-eastern corner of this area. Under the loose debris lay very hard geological debris. The shaft of KV 30 has been partly cut through this harder layer before the stonecutters reached the real bedrock. In the small trench close to the tomb entrance no remains of a foundation deposit were found.

Conclusions

The results after the preliminary studies of KV 30 prove that the monument has surely been used, at least once, as a burial place (coffin and cartonnage fragments). The pottery indicates a dating to the Eighteenth dynasty, but its analysis has to be completed in the coming season. The identity of the deceased could not be established. The tomb has never been decorated. The enormous flint block standing in the shaft has been thrown intentionally inside to block the door to corridor B. The other big stones found inside the tomb were maybe also part of a blocking system in the shaft.

At some time after the opening of the first door (probably in modern times), the lower part of the tomb (chambers C and Ca-d) has been completely emptied and cleaned, the debris from these rooms being then accumulated in the corridor.

At the end of the work in KV 30 an iron cover with a door was built on a brick wall painted over the shaft entrance, like in KV 26, in order to protect the tomb and to avoid anything falling into the deep shaft.

The work of the University of Basel Kings' Valley Project in 2009 has allowed the clearing of the situation in KV 26 and KV 30 as well as the first complete photographic documentation of the tombs. During the next season, the documentation and analysis of the finds will be completed and final plans of the architecture established.

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(2) <http://aegyptologie.unibas.ch/17812/>.

(3) *K.R. Weeks, Atlas of the Valley of the Kings, Cairo, 2000; <http://www.thebanmappingproject.com/>*

(4) *A preliminary cleaning of the shaft mouth had already been undertaken by our team in 2007.*

(5) *E. Thomas, The Royal Necropoleis of Thebes, Princeton, 1966, 159.*

(6) *A. Siliotti (ed.), Belzoni's Travel. Narrative of the Operations and Recent Discoveries in Egypt and Nubia, London, 2001, 208-209; E. THOMAS, The Royal Necropoleis of Thebes, Princeton, 1966, 157.*

(7) The size and complexity of the tomb do not correspond to Belzoni's mention of "small mummy pits".

(8) N. Reeves, R.H. Wilkinson, The Complete Valley of the Kings. Tombs and Treasures of Egypt's Greatest Pharaohs, London, 1996, 109.