



PROCEEDINGS OF THE XI INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF EGYPTOLOGISTS

Florence, Italy 23-30 August 2015

MUSEO EGIZIO FIRENZE
Florence Egyptian Museum

edited by
Gloria Rosati and Maria Cristina Guidotti



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MUSEO EGIZIO FIRENZE
FLORENCE EGYPTIAN MUSEUM



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Contents

XI International Congress of Egyptologists	x
--	---

Preface	xiii
---------------	------

Papers

Development of Old Kingdom pottery: three cases studies ('Cemetery of the Workers', Heit el-Ghurab and the Khentkawes Town).....	1
--	---

Sherif M. Abdelmoniem

Of Min and moon – cosmological concepts in the Temple of Athribis (Upper Egypt)	7
---	---

Victoria Altmann-Wendling

Les relations entre l'horloge stellaire diagonale et le corpus des Textes des Sarcophages dans le sarcophage intérieur de Mésehti : le temps et les décans	14
--	----

Bernard Arquier

The Qubbet el-Hawa casting moulds – Late Period bronze working at the First Cataract	19
--	----

Johannes Auenmüller

Overlapping and contradictory narratives in Ancient Egyptian visual programs	26
--	----

Jennifer Miyuki Babcock

Sāmānu as a human disease in Mesopotamia and Egypt	29
--	----

Susanne Beck

The pyramid as a journey – cultic encounters between father and son in the Pyramid of Pepy I.....	35
---	----

Nils Billing

The Ancient Egyptian dialects in light of the Greek transcriptions of Egyptian anthroponyms	41
---	----

Ana Isabel Blasco Torres

Dalla sabbia alla teca: esempi di interventi conservativi eseguiti su alcuni papiri del Museo Egizio di Firenze.....	46
--	----

Paola Boffula Alimeni

New evidence on the king's son Intefmose from Dra Abu el-Naga: a preliminary report.....	53
--	----

Francisco L. Borrego Gallardo

The Merenptah Sarcophagi restoration project.....	59
---	----

Edwin C. Brock and Lyla Pinch Brock

Egyptian names and networks in <i>Trismegistos</i> (800 BC – AD 800).....	64
---	----

Yanne Broux

The Ptolemaic dedication of Archepolis in the Bibliotheca Alexandrina: materiality and text	69
---	----

Patricia A. Butz

Bernard V. Bothmer and Ptolemaic sculpture: papers on Ptolemaic art from his archives held at the Università degli Studi di Milano	75
--	----

Giorgia Cafici

The Tell el-Maskhuta Project	81
------------------------------------	----

Giuseppina Capriotti Vittozzi and Andrea Angelini

Silence in the <i>Tale of the Eloquent Peasant</i> : themes and problems	87
--	----

Ilaria Cariddi

Progetto Butehamon. Prospettive e ricerche nella necropoli tebana.....	92
--	----

Giacomo Cavillier

Notes on the inscribed Old and Middle Kingdom coffins in the Egyptian Turin Museum	103
--	-----

Emanuele M. Ciampini

Rethinking Egyptian animal worship (c. 3000 BC – c. 300 AD): towards a historical-religious perspective.....	107
Angelo Colonna	
Before and after the Temple: the long-lived necropolis in the area of the Temple of Millions of Years of Amenhotep II – Western Thebes.....	112
Anna Consonni, Tommaso Quirino and Angelo Sesana	
Papyri with the Ritual of the Opening of the Mouth in the Egyptian Museum in Turin	120
Federico Contardi	
Notes for a building history of the temple of Ramesses II at Antinoe. The architectural investigation.....	124
Michele Coppola	
Animal mummies in South African collections	131
Izak Cornelius, Salima Ikram, Ruhan Slabbert, Liani C. Swanepoel, Frank Teichert and Tiffany van Zyl	
Nouvelle lecture d'une scène de la théogamie d'Hatshepsout	137
Alice Coyette	
Worship and places of worship in the Greco-Roman town at Marina El-Alamein.....	140
Grażyna Bąkowska-Czerner and Rafał Czerner	
Middle Kingdom coffin of Khnum from the National Museum of Warsaw	148
Dorota Czerwik	
Non-destructive analysis on 11 Egyptian blue faience tiles from the 2nd and 3rd Dynasties.....	154
Joseph Davidovits and Frédéric Davidovits	
Scenes from the Amduat on the funerary coffins and sarcophagi of the 21st Dynasty.....	159
Cássio de Araújo Duarte	
Votive pottery deposits found by the Spanish Mission at Dra Abu el-Naga	166
Elena de Gregorio	
The building activity of Pinudjem I at Thebes	172
Gabriella Dembitz	
The 'Book of Going Forth by Day' in the funerary chamber of Djehuty (TT 11): past, present, and future	177
Lucía Díaz-Iglesias Llanos	
The pre-Egyptological concept of Egypt as a challenge for Egyptology and the efforts to establish a research community	184
Florian Ebeling	
The Gebelein Archaeological Project, 2013–2016	188
Wojciech Ejsmond	
Trois nouvelles harpes découvertes à Thèbes ouest: Quel apport pour l'égyptologie ?	192
Sibylle Emerit	
The 'pantheistic' deities. Report from research on iconography and role of polymorphic deities	198
Grzegorz First	
Études sur le cadre de vie d'une association religieuse dans l'Égypte gréco-romaine : l'exemple de Touna el-Gebel ...	203
Mélanie C. Flossmann-Schütze	
Forme di imitazione egizia nella decorazione architettonica di Nea Paphos.....	209
Leonardo Fuduli	
Ahmose-Sapair in Dra Abu el-Naga: old and new evidence	215
José M. Galán	
The Moon god Iah in ancient Egyptian religion	222
Gudelia García-Fernández	
Expression of loyalty to the king – A socio-cultural analysis of basilophoric personal names dating to the Old and Middle Kingdoms	228
Christina Geisen	

Love and gold in cross-cultural discourse in the Amarna letters	233
Graciela Gestoso Singer	
Some unpublished inscriptions from Quarry P at Hatnub	237
Yannis Gourdon and Roland Enmarch	
Names of eye parts in different text genres: a contribution to technical language in ancient Egypt.....	242
Nadine Gräßler	
The transformation of Theban Tomb 39 (TT39). A contribution from a conservation viewpoint in terms of its history after dynastic occupation	247
Dulce María Grimaldi and Patricia Meehan	
The complete corpus of viticulture and winemaking scenes from the ancient Egyptian private tombs.....	254
Maria Rosa Guasch-Jané, Sofia Fonseca and Mahmoud Ibrahim	
Des étoiles et des hommes : peurs, désirs, offrandes et prières	260
Nadine Guilhou	
Cracking a code: deciphering the marks of the royal necropolis workmen of the New Kingdom	266
Ben Haring	
The Egyptian Dionysus: Osiris and the development of theater in Ancient Egypt	271
Allison Hedges	
The Abydos Dynasty: an osteoarchaeological examination of human remains from the SIP royal cemetery	276
Jane A. Hill, Maria A. Rosado and Joseph Wegner	
You up – I down: orientational metaphors concerning ancient Egyptian Kingship in royal iconography and inscriptions	283
Shih-Wei Hsu	
Image processing. Elaboration and manipulation of the human figure in the <i>Pyramid Texts</i>.....	287
Francesca Iannarilli	
Hieroglyphic inscriptions on precious objects: some notes on the correlation between text and support.....	291
Agnese Iob	
Predynastic precursors to the Festival of Drunkenness: beer, climate change, cow-goddesses, and the ideology of kingship	296
Victoria Jensen	
Crowdsourcing in Egyptology – images and annotations of Middle Kingdom private tombs	303
Peter Kalchgruber and Lubica Hudáková	
‘To build a temple in the beautiful white stone of Anu’. The use of Tura limestone in Theban architecture.....	308
Christina Karlshausen and Thierry De Putter	
The motif of the kiosk during the first half of the 18th dynasty	313
Edyta Kopp	
A heritage in peril: the threat to Egypt’s urban archaeological sites	318
Peter Lacovara	
Le <i>sdm.f</i> circonstanciel. Une forme verbale rare en néo-égyptien littéraire	320
Vincent Pierre-Michel Laisney	
Amduat type papyri in the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.....	325
Nika Lavrentyeva	
Carving out identities in the Egyptian desert: self-presentation styles adopted by the ancient travelers of Kharga Oasis.....	328
Nikolaos Lazaridis	
Ya-t-il une « fabrique d’albâtre » et un atelier de tissage au Ramesseum ?	333
Guy Lecuyot	

Deux nouvelles ‘Recommandations aux prêtres’ datées de Ptolémée X Alexandre I^{er}	339
Nicolas Leroux	
Scenes representing temple rituals on some 21st Dynasty coffins	345
Éva Liptay	
Building B, a domestic construction at Tell el-Ghaba, North Sinai	351
Silvia Lupo, Eduardo Crivelli Montero, Claudia Kohen and Eva Calomino	
The Montecelio Obelisk in Rome	357
Lise Manniche	
The role of e-learning in Egyptology: ‘Hieroglyphs: Step-by-Step’ website as a case study	362
Ahmed Mansour and Azza Ezzat	
The function and importance of some special categories of stars in the Ancient Egyptian funerary texts, 1: <i>3h3h-</i> and <i>i3d</i>-stars	368
Alicia Maravelia	
Chapel of the tomb belonging to Amenhotep III’s Vizier, Amenhotep Huy. Asasif Tomb No. 28, Luxor-West Bank. Excavation results: ‘Vizier Amenhotep Huy Project’ (2009–2014)	377
Francisco J. Martín-Valentín and Teresa Bedman	
Objets découverts dans des tombes thébaines situées sous le Temple de Millions d’Années de Thoutmosis III à l’ouest de Louxor	384
Javier Martínez Babón	
Fish offerings found in Area 32 of the archaeological site of Oxyrhynchus (El-Bahnasa, Egypt)	389
Maite Mascort Roca and Esther Pons Mellado	
The <i>Akh-menu</i> of Thutmosis III at Karnak. The Sokarian Rooms	394
Julie Masquelier-Loorius	
The 13th Dynasty at Abydos: a royal tomb and its context	399
Dawn McCormack	
The transmission of the <i>Book of the Twelve Caverns</i>	405
Daniel M. Méndez Rodríguez	
A new reading of Problem No. 53 in the Rhind Mathematical Papyrus. The limits of proportionality	410
Marianne Michel	
The <i>ang</i>-morphs in Coptic and their grammaticalization in Later Egyptian	416
So Miyagawa	
‘Augmented Reality’ technology and the dissemination of historical graffiti in the Temple of Debod	422
Miguel Ángel Molinero Polo, Alfonso Martín Flores, Jorge Martín Gutiérrez, Cristóbal Ruiz Medina, Lucía Díaz-Iglesias Llanos, Fernando Guerra-Librero Fernández, Daniel Miguel Méndez Rodríguez, Luis Navarrete Ruiz, Manuel Rivas Fernández and Ovidia Soto Martín	
The <i>Min Project</i>. First working seasons on the unpublished Tomb of Min (TT109) and Tomb Kampp -327-: the Tomb of May and a replica of the Tomb of Osiris	427
Irene Morfini and Milagros Álvarez Sosa	
Figurative vase painting from the First Intermediate Period through to the Fatimid Dynasty: a continuity?	433
Maya Müller	
Basic considerations on the construction of pyramids in the Old Kingdom	437
Frank Müller-Römer	
Die Verwendung von Münzen in pharaonischer Zeit	441
Renate Müller-Wollermann	
In the footsteps of Ricardo Caminos: rediscovering the ‘Speos of Gebel el Silsila’	445
Maria Nilsson and Philippe Martinez	
The folding cubit rod of Kha in Museo Egizio di Torino, S.8391	450
Naoko Nishimoto	

The mystery of the ‘high place’ from the <i>Abbott Papyrus</i> revealed? The results of the works of the Polish Cliff Mission at Deir el-Bahari 1999–2014.....	457
Andrzej Niwiński	
The mummies of the ‘Three Sisters’ in the Museo Egizio: a case study. Conservation and studies of textiles and bandages	462
Cinzia Oliva and Matilde Borla	
Technical aspects of faience from Hierakonpolis, Egypt – a preliminary report	468
Marina Panagiotaki, Elizabeth Walters, Yannis Maniatis and Anna Tsoupra	
<i>Horus Seneferou ka-s</i> : quand le dernier souverain de la Ire dynastie devient la première femme pharaon de l’Histoire à porter un nom d’Horus	472
Jean-Pierre Pätznick	
The Herakleopolis Magna Project: seasons 2012–2015.....	480
M. Carmen Pérez-Die	
The Stelae Ridge cairns: a reassessment of the archaeological evidence	485
Hannah Pethen	
The Italian-Egyptian Mission at the Monastery of Abba Nefer at Manqabad: results of the first four seasons’ work.....	491
Rosanna Pirelli, Ilaria Incordino, Paola Buzi and Anna Salsano	
<i>Wedjat-eyes</i> as a dating criterion for false doors and stelae to the early Middle Kingdom.....	499
Melanie Pitkin	
La collection égyptienne du Musée Sandelin à Saint-Omer (France).....	506
Jean-Louis Podvin	
Some remarks on the Egyptian reception of foreign military technology during the 18th Dynasty: a brief survey of the armour.....	513
Alberto Maria Pollastrini	
Medical re-enactments: Ancient Egyptian prescriptions from an emic viewpoint	519
Tanja Pommerening	
Textual layers in <i>Coffin Texts</i> spells 154–160	527
Gyula Priskin	
The cat mummies of the <i>Società Africana d’Italia</i>: an archaeological, cultural and religious perspective	532
Maria Diletta Pubblico	
Khnum the Creator: a puzzling case of the transfer of an iconographic motif	538
Maarten J. Raven	
Temple ranks in the Fayyum during the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods: documentary sources and archaeological data.....	543
Ilaria Rossetti	
Le musée de Mallawi: état des lieux après les destructions et projets pour l’avenir	549
Ashraf Alexandre Sadek	
A new light on Coptic afterlife (O.4550 from the Coptic Museum in Cairo).....	553
Hind Salah El-Din Somida Awad	
The lost chapels of Elephantine. Preliminary results of a reconstruction study through archival documents	556
Daniele Salvoldi and Simon Delvaux	
Doors to the past. Rediscovering fragments in the new blockyard at Medinet Habu	563
Julia Schmied	
Les dépôts de fondation de la Vallée des Rois : nouvelles perspectives de recherche sur l’histoire de la nécropole royale du Nouvel Empire	568
François C. A. Schmitt	

Economic mentalities and Ancient Egyptian legal documents	576
Alexander Schütze	
Excavations in the ‘Temple of Millions of Years’ of Thutmosis III.....	581
Myriam Seco Álvarez	
Rituels funéraires au temps de Hatchepsout : le sanctuaire de la tombe de Djehouty et ses parallèles	587
José M. Serrano	
The so-called <i>Book of Two Ways</i> on a Middle Kingdom religious leather roll	594
Wael Sherbiny	
Ibyc. PMGF 287 and Ancient Egyptian love songs	597
Anna Sofia	
The <i>Physiologus</i> in Egypt.....	603
Marco Stroppa	
A survey of astronomical tables on Middle Kingdom coffin lids	608
Sarah L. Symons	
Blue painted pottery from a mid-18th Dynasty royal mud-brick structure in northwest Saqqara	613
Kazumitsu Takahashi	
Studies on BD 17 vignettes: iconographic typology of <i>Rw.tj</i>-scene (New Kingdom – Third Intermediate Period).....	619
Mykola Tarasenko	
Were components of Amarna composite statues made in separate workshops?	626
Kristin Thompson	
Research on Old Kingdom ‘dissimulation graphique’. World-view and categorization	633
Simon Thuault	
La funzione del tempio tolemaico di Deir el-Medina alla luce dell’archeologia.....	638
Claudia Tirel Cena	
The ‘geography’ of the <i>hierogrammateis</i>: the religious topography of the Western Harpoon (7th Nome of Lower Egypt)	644
Elena Tiribilli	
The Ancient Egyptian shabtis discovered in the regions of Roman <i>Illyricum</i> (<i>Dalmatia, Pannonia</i>) and Istria: provenance, collections, typological study and dating.....	650
Mladen Tomorad	
From Egypt to the Holy Land: first issues on the Egyptian collection in the <i>Studium Biblicum Franciscanum</i>, Jerusalem	656
Benedetta Torrini	
Tradition and innovation within the decoration program of the temple of Ramesses II at Gerf Hussein.....	661
Martina Ullmann	
The Egyptian Execration Statuettes (EES) Project.....	667
Athena Van der Perre	
A new long-term digital project on Hieratic and cursive hieroglyphs	671
Ursula Verhoeven and Svenja A. Gülden	
Hierakonpolis Faience, 2005–2013, with context and accompanying finds – a quest for chronology and possible use	676
Elizabeth J. Walters, Amr El Gohary, Shelton S. Alexander, Richard R. Parizek, David P. Gold, Recep Cakir, Marina Panagiotaki, Yannis Maniatis and Anna Tsoupra	
The Berlin Plans from the New Kingdom Period.....	680
Yoshifumi Yasuoka	
The career of Nakhtmin (TT 87) as revealed by his funerary cones	686
Kento Zenihiro	

Object biographies and political expectations: Egyptian artefacts, Welsh Heritage and the regional community museum.....	693
Katharina Zinn	
Who am I - and if so, how many? Some remarks on the ‘j-augment’ and language change.....	701
Monika Zöllner-Engelhardt	
 Poster presentations	
Vocabulaire de l’Égyptien Ancien (VÉgA). Plateforme numérique de recherche lexicographique.....	709
A. Almásy, Ch. Cassier, J. Chun-Hung-Kee, F. Contardi, M. Massiera, A. Nespoulous-Phalippou and Fr. Rouffet	
Pottery from the early Roman rubbish dumps in Berenike harbour.....	711
Agnieszka Dzwonek	
A sequence of five 13th Dynasty structures at Memphis	714
Rabee Eissa	
Funerary culture of the Memphite region during the Early Dynastic Period	717
Barbora Janulíková	
3D-Reconstructions of Late Roman fortresses in Egypt.....	718
Dmitry Karelin, Maria Karelina and Tatiana Zhitpeleva	
The Roman Imperial cult temple at Luxor: its architecture and possible connection between Roman and Egyptian cultures	720
Irina Kulikova and Dmitry Karelin	
One of the earliest discovered houses at Memphis	722
Hanan Mahmoud Mohamed	
Reden und Rufe, are they kingly patterns? A first step towards an explanation of the origin(s) of speech captions in ‘daily life’ scenes in private tombs	724
Aurore Motte	
Étude pluridisciplinaire de têtes de momies (Lyon).....	725
Annie Perraud, Matthieu Ménager, Pascale Richardin and Catherine Vieillescazes	
Progetto Osiris: valorizzazione delle piccole collezioni egizie	727
Massimiliana Pozzi Battaglia e Federica Scatena	
Study and restoration of two mummies from the Moulins Museum	729
Noëlle Timbart	
 List of papers presented at ICE XI.....	 731
Massimiliano Franci	

Before and after the Temple: the long-lived necropolis in the area of the Temple of Millions of Years of Amenhotep II – Western Thebes

Anna Consonni, Tommaso Quirino and Angelo Sesana

CEFB - Centro di Egittologia Francesco Ballerini

Abstract

Recent research undertaken by the Centro di Egittologia F. Ballerini, under the direction of A. Sesana, has brought into focus the intensive funerary use and reuse of the area occupied by the Temple of Amenhotep II in western Thebes. 24 shaft tombs with one or two irregular chambers at the bottom dating to the Third Intermediate to Late Period were discovered. The work conducted by our team also revealed the presence of funerary structures that predate the construction of the temple, dating from the early Middle Kingdom to the early 18th Dynasty: two corridor tombs and less complex burials in niches, shallow shafts or simple holes. Despite the extensive looting of many of these tombs, we still had, at times, the chance to recover well preserved or undisturbed burials. We therefore have the opportunity to present an overview of the tombs found in the area of the Temple of Amenhotep II in their chronological context.

Keywords

Temple of Amenhotep II; Theban necropolis; Middle Kingdom; Third Intermediate-Late Period; Ptolemaic Period

The Temple of Millions of Years of Amenhotep II, located in western Thebes just north of the Ramesseum, has been under investigation since 1997 by the Italian Archaeological Expedition of the Centro di Egittologia F. Ballerini,¹ directed by Angelo Sesana. The current excavations constitute a resumption of research activity after a long period of neglect following the work of Petrie at the end of the 19th century (Petrie 1897: 4–6).

The work of the Mission, while focused primarily on the remains of the temple itself, also revealed the presence of numerous funerary structures that occupied the whole area, both before the construction of the temple and again after its abandonment (Sesana 2010, with bibliography of prior work; Sesana and Quirino 2010; Sesana *et al.* 2011; Sesana *et al.* 2013; see Figure 1 for a summary of the chronological development of the necropolis in the temple area).

While the presence of Third Intermediate Period tombs in this area was already known thanks to Petrie's work, the discovery of older tombs at the site is one of the recent results of our research. However, Petrie himself did recognise mud-brick structures beneath the temple walls (Petrie 1897: 4, pl. XXIII) and it should be noted that Middle Kingdom to early New Kingdom tombs and structures are well known in the surrounding area.²

The necropolis predating the construction of the Temple for Amenhotep II was used from the Middle Kingdom until the beginning of the New Kingdom (Figure 2). The most impressive features are two tombs, designated A17 and D21, with complex structures and different phases of occupancy. Less complex burials in niches, shallow shafts or simple holes are also present.

Period	Total nr. of tombs/ contexts	Cited tombs/ contexts	Structure type	Chronologically relevant items	Chronology
MIDDLE KINGDOM – EARLY 18th DYNASTY	4	A17	Corridor tomb	Pottery, grave goods (amulets, mirror, calcite vessels), offering tray	12th-13th dynasty; late 17th-early 18th dynasty reuse
		D21	Corridor tomb	Pottery, grave goods (calcite vessels), offering tray	12th-13th dynasty; late 17th-early 18th dynasty reuse
		F23	Shallow shaft with niches	Pottery	Amenemhat III-early 13th dynasty
THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD – LATE PERIOD	24	L9	Shaft tomb with 1 chamber	Ushabtis type D-E (faience), shabti boxes type VII (?), canopic jars type II, cartonnage decoration, amulets (type Nakhtefmut E)	22nd dynasty
		L9b	Shaft tomb with 1 chamber	Ushabtis type D-E (faience) and K, shabti boxes type VII (?), amulets (type Nakhtefmut E)	22nd dynasty
		L13	Shaft tomb with 2 chambers	Ushabtis type K, shabti boxes type VII (?), coffin decoration, bead nets Silvano type A, pottery	25th-early 26th dynasty
		H13	Shaft tomb with 1 chamber	Ushabtis type G (faience) and K, shabti boxes type VII (?), canopic jars type II and boxes type A, pottery	Late 25th-early 26th dynasty
PTOLEMAIC PERIOD	2	L9	Jars deposit (burial?) on the surface	Pottery, grave goods (leather shoes)	3rd-early 2nd century BC
		C6	Mummification deposit on the surface	Pottery	2nd-1st century BC

FIGURE 1: SUMMARY TABLE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NECROPOLIS FOUND IN THE AREA OF THE TEMPLE OF AMENHOTEP II; FOR THE TYPOLOGIES OF THE THIRD INTERMEDIATE TO LATE PERIOD MATERIALS, SEE ASTON 2009 AND SILVANO 1980.

¹ We are indebted to all those who contributed to the archaeological excavation of the Temple of Amenhotep II, carried out under the terms of the excavation licence. We would also like to thank Dr Craig Alexander for improving the English of this paper.

² For the area of the Temple of Thutmose III, see Seco Álvarez 2015; for the Ramesseum, Quibell 1898: 3–5, pl. III, VI–IX; Nelson 2003: 88; for the Temple of Thutmose IV, Guidotti 1985, 1987.

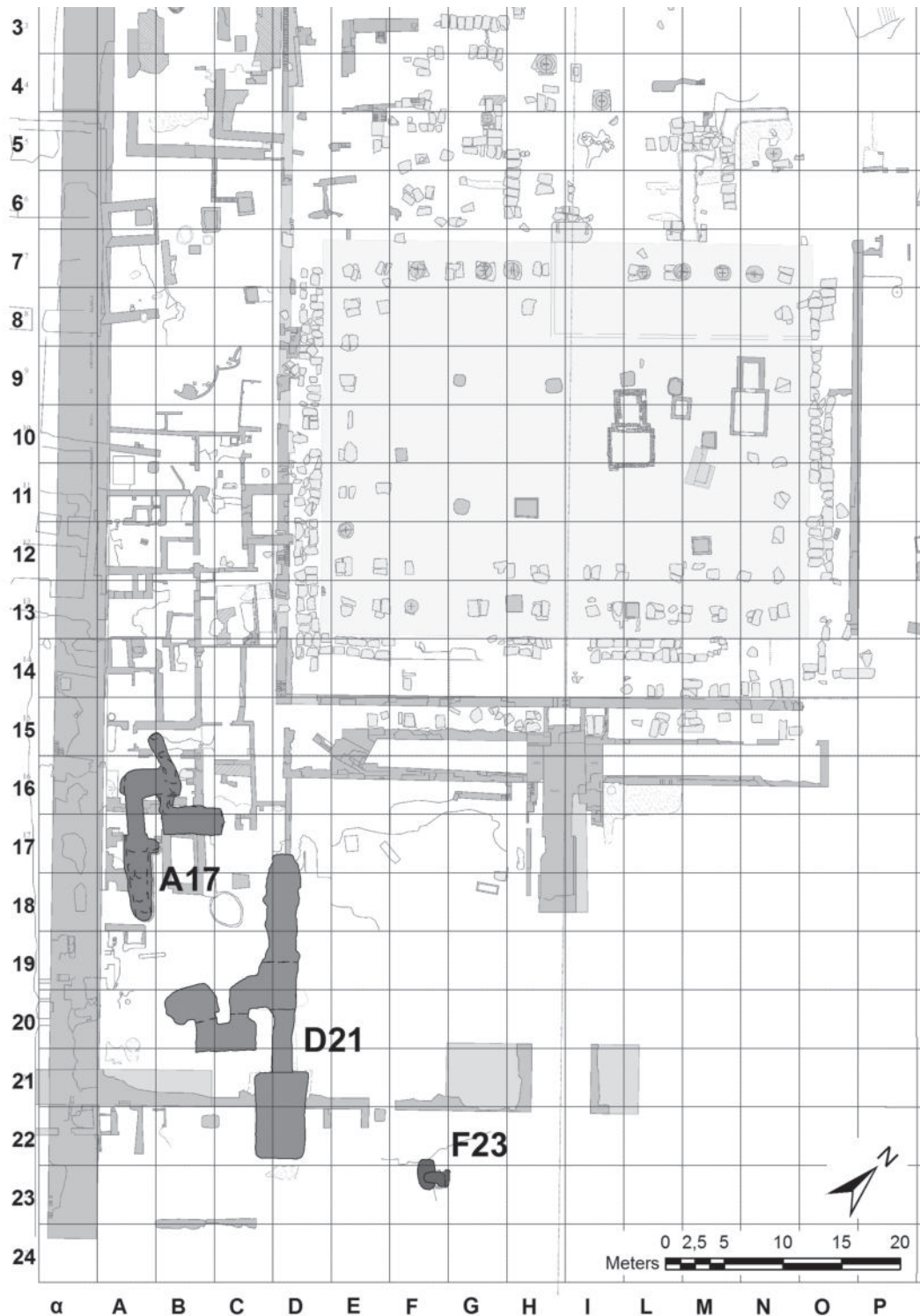


FIGURE 2: PLAN OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM/EARLY 18TH DYNASTY NECROPOLIS (TEMPLE STRUCTURES ARE ON THE BACKGROUND), WITH PLANS OF UNDERGROUND STRUCTURES.

Of the two bigger tombs, only A17,³ located just north of the southern boundary wall of the temple, has been completely excavated (Consonni 2016a; Consonni and Sesana 2016). The archaeological context was well preserved thanks to the presence of some later mud-brick structures linked to the

³ The tombs found in the Temple area are named with the number of the grid square where their entrance was discovered.

economic functions of the temple that covered its entrance. The other tomb (D21), the entrance to which was covered by the remains of the second pylon, is still under excavation.

Tomb A17 has a complex structure. The entrance⁴ was reached via a sloping ramp ending in a small open passage which

⁴ The entrance was originally decorated with uninscribed funerary

gives access to a corridor oriented east-west. At the end of the corridor a transverse irregular chamber leads into two funerary chambers.⁵ The burials were placed in chamber E, where the assemblages were well preserved, and chamber F, where the original burials were disturbed by later burials and looting.

Study of the pottery assemblage in its stratigraphic context (Consonni and Sesana 2016) allows us to state that the first occupation occurred during the Early Middle Kingdom, when burials were made in chambers E and F. Chamber E originally housed nine primary burials (Bellandi *et al.* 2015: 23–8) – five females, two males and two children – almost all provided with grave goods: in addition to a small quantity of pottery, we recovered calcite vessels, small amulets and beads, and a mirror with an ivory handle (Consonni 2016a). Only in the corridor do the materials suggest a prolonged use of the tomb, continuing into the Late Middle Kingdom.

A ritual deposit belonging to the first phase and composed of a large group of vessels⁶ was also discovered *in situ* (Figure 3). It was located in front of the entrance of the two burial chambers, close to the burials for which ceremonies were apparently performed.

After a period of disuse, the tomb was again exploited for funerary purposes during the Late Second Intermediate Period–Early New Kingdom. The burials of this phase are very disturbed, probably from looting occurring at the time of the construction of the temple,⁷ and the pottery of the original funerary assemblages is distributed throughout the upper levels inside the tomb as well as in the corridor and in the open passage. A child was buried in a shallow pit covered by stones near the entrance of the tomb, accompanied by just two vessels.

The excavation of a similar tomb, named D21, began in 2008, but was suspended for several years for safety reasons and was resumed only in 2014. This tomb is bigger than A17 and



FIGURE 3: TOMB A17, CHAMBER D. RITUAL DEPOSIT IN FRONT OF THE ENTRANCE OF CHAMBER E (PHOTO © FRANCO M. GIANI).

consists of a corridor 12m long, a transverse irregular chamber and at least two funerary chambers that are currently under excavation.

We can suggest, based on a preliminary analysis of the materials, that the burials in tomb D21 may have followed the same pattern as in A17, even if the older archaeological levels are less well preserved in D21. Further, we also have clear proof of a later reuse of tomb D21.

In fact, a Late Period mummification deposit⁸ was discovered in one of the chambers, covered by the collapsed ceiling and overlapping the Middle Kingdom layers. Moreover, traces of a coffin with an inner cartonnage, very badly preserved, were found lying at the end of the corridor (Figure 4). The excavation of the burial is not finished yet, but we are working with digital photos⁹ to try to reconstruct the decorative schema of the cartonnage that has almost totally vanished and is not clearly recognisable to the naked eye.¹⁰

Tombs A17 and D21 represent the most monumental funerary structures of the Middle Kingdom necropolis in this area, but another and totally different burial was also discovered just east of the remains of the second pylon.

Here a shallow shaft lined with mud-bricks bearing the stamp of Amenhotep II¹¹ leads to two niches excavated in the

cones that were found in the debris filling the tomb courtyard. Uninscribed funerary cones are well known in Late First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom tombs in the Theban area. See for example Arnold 1972: 20–21; Loyrette *et al.* 1993/1994: 123.

⁵ The structure recalls the 'corridor type' well known in the Theban Necropolis at the beginning of the Middle Kingdom (Arnold 1971: 46–8, type IIb, tav. 20, with examples in the Ramesseum area). The lack of funerary shafts in tomb A17 (and in tomb D21) is due to the nature of the geological substratum: in fact the whole tomb – except the ceiling – was cut into a layer of compact sand which would have collapsed in case of deep excavation.

⁶ Mainly hemispherical cups used as burners, *hes* vases and miniature plates, bowls and jars associated with terracotta offering plates.

⁷ We remark that Amenhotep II started the construction of the Temple, probably beginning in his fourth regnal year (Der Manuelian 1987: 165–6).

⁸ Probably belonging to the Late Third Intermediate Period/early Saite Period, according to Aston (1996: 50, Fig. 161).

⁹ To improve the visualization of decoration and painted figures, we started using the software ImageJ, with plug-in DStretch, written by J. Harman (2008). This plug-in applies the image enhancement technique called 'decorrelation stretching' and has been specially developed for the study of rock paintings, being widely used in that field. It is now being exploited, for the first time, on artefacts in an Egyptological context.

¹⁰ Even if this study is still in its earliest phases, the initial results seem very promising, allowing us to recognise some of the figures and the general structure of the decoration, dating this burial probably to the 22nd Dynasty.

¹¹ For stamps on mud-bricks from the Temple area, see Sesana 2012.

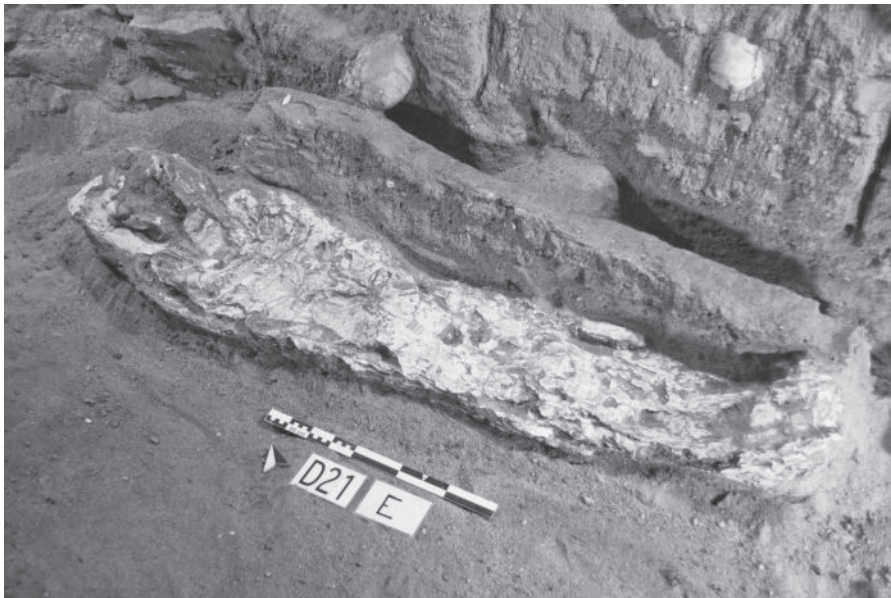


FIGURE 4: TOMB D21, CHAMBER E. CARTONNAGE PROBABLY DATING BACK TO THE 22ND DYNASTY, FOUND AT THE END OF THE CORRIDOR (PHOTO © T. QUIRINO).

conglomerate. The presence of mud-bricks of the Pharaoh suggest that the tomb was known in his time, probably being closed and filled-in prior to the construction of the nearby pylon. In the southern niche we found two superimposed burials, without funerary assemblages, that were probably originally contained within painted mud coffins. A terracotta rectangular coffin was placed in the northern niche and contained the body and simple funerary assemblage of a baby (Sesana and

Consonni 2013), consisting of a simple necklace and a set of small pottery vessels dated to the Late Middle Kingdom. The lid of the coffin was missing a piece, later found in the level of loose fill, providing further evidence that the tomb had been somehow disturbed.

Related to the presence of this Middle Kingdom/early New Kingdom necropolis there are other local contexts such as a deposit of broken red vases found in the area north of the temple and two small chapels razed to the level of just a few mud-brick courses at the time of the construction of the temple courtyard. The chapels retained some traces of their original decoration and, on the use-surface, the remains of floral offerings.

After the falling-out-of-use of the temple and the consequent removal of reusable materials, the site was again used as a necropolis during the Third Intermediate Period/Late Period: 24 shaft tombs from this phase have been investigated. Sometimes these had a mud-brick chapel on the surface (Figure 5). Those located in what had been the courtyard of the temple were provided with a more complex above-ground structure

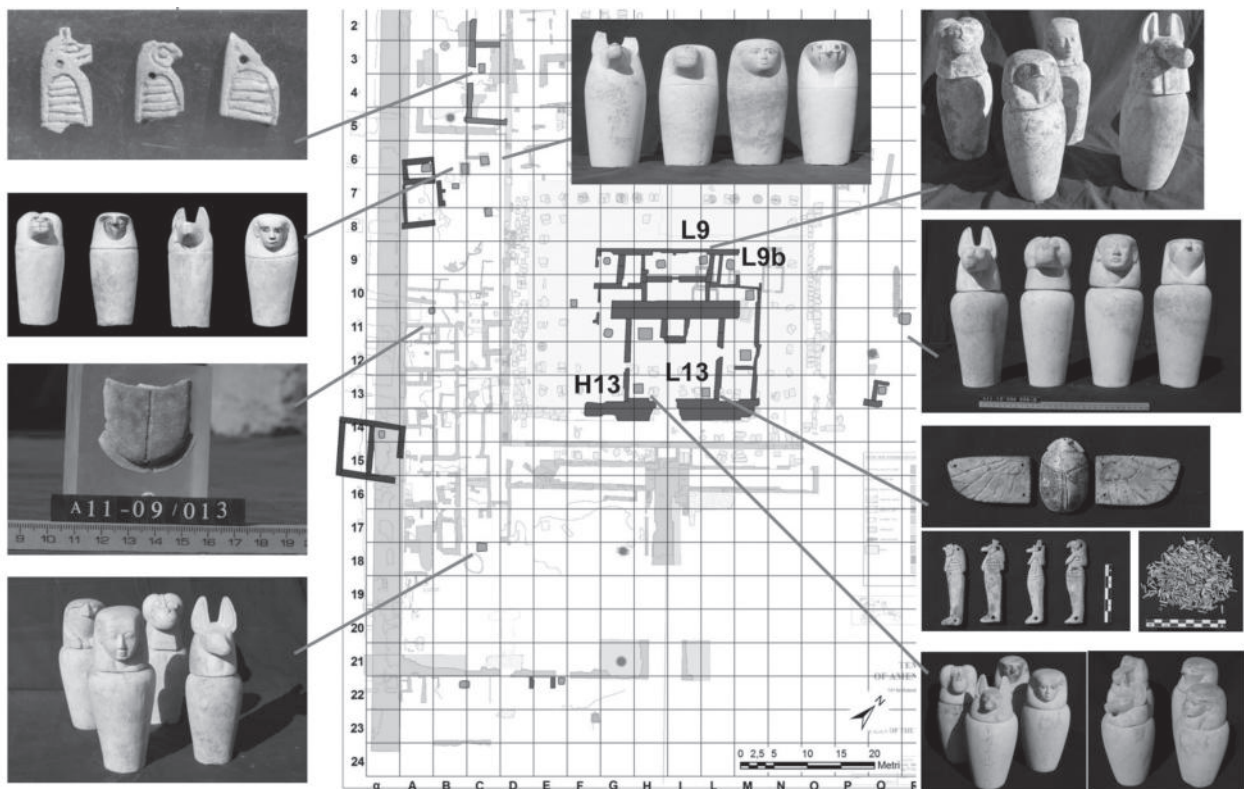


FIGURE 5: PLAN OF THE THIRD INTERMEDIATE/LATE PERIOD NECROPOLIS (TEMPLE STRUCTURES ARE ON THE BACKGROUND), WITH THE LOCATION OF THE 24 SHAFT TOMBS AND OF THE MUD-BRICK CHAPELS ON THE SURFACE.

which probably had two pylons, an open court, a transverse hall and chapels to the rear.

The tombs of this period have a square vertical pit of about 2 to 6m in depth. Where the upper part of the pit was excavated in a less-stable stratum it was strengthened with mud-bricks until reaching the compact conglomerate stratum. Likewise, when the ancient builders digging the pit reached the sand level, they always began to excavate the funerary chamber at that point. Usually these tombs have only one chamber, not large, oriented north-south or east-west, sometimes still partly closed by an original mud-brick wall. Only six of them at the site have two chambers.

About 60% of these tombs have been almost entirely robbed, only a few faience beads or ushabtis escaping the plunderers. At times, we have had the chance to explore better preserved burials and to recover more complete funerary assemblages, even if also in these cases the perishable materials such as coffins were badly damaged by the humidity and by the actions of white ants.

Some recently excavated examples of these tombs help us in formulating our working hypothesis regarding the development of the necropolis.

The tomb L9 contained two intact burials,¹² lying side by side inside the remains of their wooden coffins, with badly damaged cartonnages. Near their heads and feet we found a total of about 540 light-blue glazed ushabtis, among which were 46 overseers. As is normal in the tombs we have excavated, the ushabtis were lying in quite well-defined rectangular areas, retaining, more or less, the shape of the now-disappeared original boxes.

Four limestone uninscribed canopic jars were lying near the north wall of the chamber. The cavity inside the jar is half hollowed out and had been left unused.

The northern burial had on its chest a stone scarab and small amulets in hard stones or faience. These formed, along with green, red and gilded beads, one or more necklaces, which have a ready parallel in those of Nakhtefmut E, buried at the Ramesseum at the end of the reign of Osorkon I (Quibell 1898: pl. 17; Aston 2009: 239). The few surviving hieroglyphs on the cartonnage reveal to us that this man, whose name was not preserved, held the title of vizier.

The general character of this assemblage fits well with the Aston (2011: 16–21) Theban burial assemblages dated from 890 to 750 BC and the presence of green glazed ushabtis would also suggest a date after 850 BC.

¹² Probably two male adults, one of whom was 35/45 years old (we thank G. Bellandi for the L9 and L9b shaft anthropological information, which should, however, be treated as preliminary).

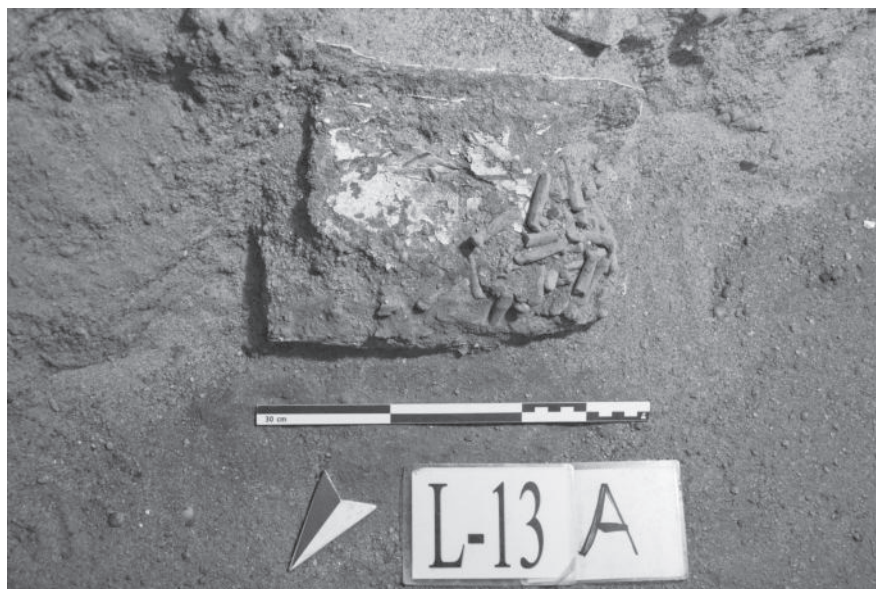


FIGURE 6: SHAFT TOMB L13, CHAMBER A. WOODEN SHABTI BOX: NOTWITHSTANDING THE POOR STATE OF CONSERVATION, TRACES OF A RED BOAT PAINTED ON THE LID ARE STILL VISIBLE (PHOTO © T. QUIRINO).

In a tomb near L9, named L9b, a couple¹³ was buried, without canopic jars, but with two boxes at their head and feet containing green-glazed and sun-dried clay ushabtis with light-blue paint on the surface, partly mummiform and partly of the supervisor type.

We would like to note that only in these two tombs have we found ushabtis both in mummiform and supervisor shape.

In a tomb named L13 the situation was more complex. Many bodies were lying side by side, once provided with coffins that have now totally disappeared. The winged scarabs, the figures of the four sons of Horus and the faience beads which formed the nets were not found on the bodies, but, rather, were lying in small piles near the coffins, probably removed by thieves and, for some reason, not taken away.

In this tomb we did not find canopic jars, but we did find five shabti boxes, distributed across the two chambers, one of which preserved exceptionally well the traces of a red boat painted on the lid, which was probably flat (Figure 6). The ushabtis were all made of sun-dried clay, blue-washed, only crudely modelled, sometimes provided with beards. Some wooden traces have been identified as the base of a *qrs*w coffin decorated with the vignettes of BD 41.

The presence of the bead nets of Silvano (1980: 83–4) type A and the type of shabti boxes and ushabtis suggest a dating to the 25th or 26th Dynasty for these burials (Aston 2011: 23–30).

Another tomb, named H13, was probably explored by Petrie and seems to be on his plan of the site. The chamber, cut as usual into the sand level, seemed totally empty: no traces of coffins, the deceased or anything else other than a few beads and some ushabtis. Actually, what we saw in that first glance was the sand collapsed from the walls of the chamber, which, compacted by the humidity, had covered the remains of the funerary assemblage.

¹³ Probably a man 45/55 years old and a woman, a little older.



FIGURE 7: SHAFT TOMB H13. THE TWO WOODEN CANOPIC BOXES STILL CONTAINING CANOPIC JARS (PHOTO © T. QUIRINO).

Subsequently, a more careful examination through the digging of test trenches revealed two boxes near the entrance of the tomb. One contained green-glazed bearded ushabtis, the other mud ushabtis, blue-painted and without beards. Most likely, these should be connected with the man-woman couple probably once buried here (Aston 2009: 396), but we cannot say for sure because no traces of either bones or coffins have been recovered from the chamber.

Two canopic boxes, each containing the four canopic jars, were discovered in two irregular pits excavated in the floor of the chamber (Figure 7). The inscriptions on four of the jars reveal the name of the owner, the only name we have found to date in all the tombs of the necropolis: Bak-en-Ptah. These are also the only canopic jars found so far that actually contained the viscera of the dead.

The inscription of Osiris with pennant determinative (Gardiner sign R8) on the jars suggests a date after 740/720 BC for this tomb (Leahy 1979; Aston 2009: 37), in agreement with the type of ushabtis and the probable type of canopic boxes. These, on the basis of the small fragments of surviving decoration, may most probably be assigned to the Aston (2009: 301–2) type A.¹⁴ All these items reflect the Aston (2011: 23–30) Theban burial assemblages of the phase 720–650 BC.

It is intriguing that on the almost totally vanished remains of a *qrsw* coffin, found in 2003 near the ramp of the temple, we were able to read the name of a Bak-en-Ptah. The study of these data and their interconnections is ongoing and we hope to arrive at a well-supported interpretation.

As noted above, most of the tombs in this necropolis have been completely looted. However, in some of them we have found canopic jars of Aston (2009: 293–9) type II or V, always uninscribed, elements of bead nets of Silvano (1980) Type

A and sun-dried clay ushabtis usually with a light-blue wash on the surface.

In the almost total absence of coffins, stelae or other funerary equipment beyond ushabtis, canopic jars or amulets, the tombs of this period cannot be accurately dated.

However, the recovered materials suggest that the necropolis was used from the 22nd Dynasty to the early 7th century BC, which agrees with the chronology proposed for the Ramesseum necropolis (Elias 1993: 97–107; Aston 2009: 237). For the tombs located in the temple courtyard it also seems possible to propose a developmental schema moving from the older burials placed in the western part of the mud-brick structure to the more

recent located in the eastern part, between the two pylons.

At this time, we cannot exclude an extremely prolonged use of the necropolis: some recently recovered vases could actually be assigned to the Persian Period.

Finally, there is also clear evidence of the use of the site during the Ptolemaic Period and several clues lead us to suppose that in this period the temple area was once again exploited for funerary purposes.

The only class of material until now clearly identified is pottery,¹⁵ spread throughout the upper levels in different sectors and found in large quantities in the fill of the funerary shafts, mainly in the area of the temple courtyard. In addition to these finds, two *in situ* Ptolemaic deposits were discovered in 2004 and 2007.

The deposit of jars found in 2004 in the space between two small leaning walls at the west side of the Third Intermediate Period–Late Period mud-brick structure built in the temple courtyard is the most interesting context. The in-fill consisted of sand and temple debris up to the top of the walls, which are still preserved to a height of about 1m. At the highest level, a set of small vessels was lying on poorly preserved matting: an *unguentarium*, a small beaker and two bowls apparently used as burners, as suggested by the burn marks on the inside. These vessels, which seem to invoke ritual activities – such as libations of liquids and the burning of incense (Budka 2010: 403–5) – probably connected with the presence of burials, were closely related to the deposit under the matting: three jars buried up to the mouth, side-by-side and closed with bowls (Figure 8). The jars vary in terms of some of their morphological details and two of them bear potmarks at the shoulder. The bigger one, deformed at various points on the surface and partially blackened, contained seven leather shoes. As suggested by André Veldmeijer (2011), these shoes

¹⁴ Small fragment with a goddess pouring a libation and cavetto cornice.

¹⁵ For a detailed study of the Ptolemaic pottery and of the two deposits, see Consonni 2016b.



FIGURE 8: PTOLEMAIC JARS DEPOSIT ON SECTOR L9
(PHOTO © FRANCO M. GIANI).

may have been foreign-made and were 'relatively expensive': worn-out and repaired, they were finally put in the jar, much too valuable to be simply thrown away.

The current context immediately recalls parallels in the Ptolemaic cemeteries on the Theban West Bank, where similar jars were frequently interred in connection with tombs to hold water and food for the deceased but also used as containers for papyri, or as containers for ritual vases (Strudwick 2003; Schreiber 2003: 53–9). We could well suppose that the area of the Temple of Amenhotep II might also have housed a necropolis in the Ptolemaic Period and that the deposit described above is one of the few remaining traces. Our hypothesis seems reinforced by the likely ritual character of the vases found on top of the matting, whereas the deposition of the shoes might be understood as relating to the deposition of certain personal belongings of the dead at the point of burial.

For the time being, other burial evidence for this period is lacking in the area of the temple.¹⁶ However, this is not uncommon for a necropolis of Ptolemaic-Roman times, when the presence of tombs, in particular those of persons of low rank, is often visible only through the presence of pottery, the burials having left few other archaeological traces (Budka 2010: 474–5).

¹⁶ The only additional clues to the presence of burials of the Ptolemaic-Roman Period on the surface are some fragments of terracotta coffins we found in the fill of tomb H9-L9.

Some other data may give further support to this funerary hypothesis. Another deposit was found in 2007 at the mouth of a Third Intermediate Period/Late Period shaft tomb in sector C6. It comprises about 40 vessels,¹⁷ either complete or almost completely reconstructible, carefully stored inside a square-shaped mud-brick structure, at about 50cm depth, and probably originally sitting on a wooden platform, now almost totally vanished, which once blocked the shaft.

Some of the vessel might have been related to the presentation of food and drink and so may recall a domestic context. However, human bones, seeds and fragments of bandages have also been discovered in the deposit, mixed in with the vessels. In addition, the majority of the pottery displays on its surfaces resinous traces and fragments of bandages. These data might suggest a connection with mummification/funerary rituals, leading us to identify this set of vessels as a mummification or ritual deposit.

The intense Ptolemaic presence in the area of the temple is further confirmed, as mentioned above, by the amount of Ptolemaic pottery found in the fills of the pits and in the upper archaeological levels of the chambers of the Third Intermediate Period/Late Period tombs. The assemblage includes a full range of familiar Hellenistic forms, some of which were very common in the Theban Necropolis at the time. Among them, there are also types whose shape recalls once again the performance of rituals, probably connected with the hypothesised presence of burials, such as a cylindrical beaker with two projecting spouts at the base.

Stratigraphic observations suggest that these fill materials come from structures and contexts originally located on the surface, the only two still surviving *in situ* having been briefly described above. So, although found out of context, the types and their functional indications provide additional data on the nature of the use of the temple area during this epoch.

This overview is the first attempt to present the tombs found in the area of the Temple of Amenhotep II in the context of their chronological development from the Middle Kingdom to the Ptolemaic Period. Further work on the individual contexts and on the different classes of materials will allow us to deepen our reconstruction and to highlight all the funerary and ritual aspects connected with the presence of this long-lived necropolis.

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¹⁷ Among these vessels there are plates and bowls, cooking pots, a pitcher, a flask, two wide-mouthed jars, an amphora and an *amphoriskos*.

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