

Qubbet el-Hawa north: Destruction of a necropolis not yet known

Spring 2013.

Google shows a photograph of an interior of tomb. It clearly is a rock tomb.

It is not a professional image, the ground looks strangely translucent and on the right we can see someone shooting by a small camera (see fig. 1). The caption reads: tomb discovery north of Aswan.

October 2013.

We finish our work on the tomb 98 and the survey of other ones at Qubbet el-Hawa one day in advance, so that we decide to look for the tomb showed on Google.

With only just that photo and no other indication of landscaped reference we decide to scout the surrounding hills and desert, and we finally find four rock tombs open, but hidden by mounds of debris near the village of Aswan North (see. fig. 2-3).

Given the topography of the area, these tombs are certainly part of a necropolis of the largest size. The hill is rocky, covered with sand and cones that fall from the top in clusters on the slope. The entrance of the tomb is open to the west and the interior rooms penetrate into the rock along the East-West axis.

Two Nubians -an old and a young man-, an ambiguous characters, come close to us and let us know that the site belongs to them and it is forbidden to enter everyone and that we must leave the place immediately.

Only pretending to be two inexperienced and uncultivated tourists and with the promise of a hefty *baksheesh*, we have the permission to take a glimpse at the tombs.

We descend from the heaps of debris for 4/5 meters and we enter the third tomb from the right. It is the tomb of the Google photo: we read the name of the owner: User and his wife Tuiu, probably dating back to the New Kingdom.

For the emotion and desperation our eyes fill with tears: the tomb has been ravaged!

On the east wall, the lintel of the door between the first and the second chamber was removed with irreparable destruction of the upper part of the two jambs. Heaps of debris are placed against the south wall and in the second chamber (see fig. 4).

To the left of the door in the east wall, the north wall is painted and written down in bright colors and framed by branches and bunches of grapes. The same wall presents theories of characters and hieroglyphs that look like freshly painted (see fig. 5).

In the northeast corner a deep shaft was dug (about 6/8 meters) from which a tunnel heading east, leads in the burial chamber below (fig. 6).

The two Nubian allow us to take some pictures and they claim to have found in the burial chamber, mummies, wooden coffins and funerary objects that they have pulled out through the shaft. A stone sarcophagus, they say, is still in the room below.

After a quick examination, it seems that the depictions on the eastern and the northern walls have been carried out at different times, by two different hands, and even perhaps for lack of time, the figures depicting the deceased, his wife and a third female character (perhaps his wife's sister) in addition to eleven-givers -including six *sem*-priests- seem to have been completed in a rather rushed.

Colors and background are blurred, non-homogeneous, the clothes of the givers and the offering vases have not been painted. Not so the twenty four characters -16 males and 8 females- in the west section of the north wall that are drawn and painted with fine and strong stroke and have an amazing wealth of details.

The hieroglyphic texts, blacks on white, are written in column. In the northwest corner of the north wall there is a large iron rod (see arrow fig. 5) to be used, presumably, to extract part of brickwork and plaster depicting vine branches. A portion of these paintings is actually already missing..

The fourth tomb from the right (see fig. 7) has hieroglyphic depictions of the deceased and other characters engraved on the façade.

The Governor of Elephantine Imenhetep and his wife Hatshepsut (see fig. 8-9) are also depicted on the walls of the first of the three rooms that make up the tomb.

The walls of the first chamber (see fig. 10) are covered with hieroglyphic texts carved in an elegant and refined way and, except for a few sections, the writings are well preserved. We have not noticed traces of coloring.

The first two tombs, on the right in the necropolis (Fig. 11-12), were partially excavated, in fact the first room of each tomb is still full of sand and debris for a height of about one meter.

A beautiful scale of about ten steps, well kept, regularly squared out, partly carved into the rock, brings in the court of the first tomb (see fig. 11).

The two Nubians seethe. They want us to go, even for a further baksheesh offer us tea at their house that is no more than two hundred meters from the necropolis.

To reach the house we go round the north side of the hill at whose base a deep shaft has been dug by the grave-robbers. The shaft is external with respect to the probable tomb, covered with sand on the adjacent hill.

In the left corner of the courtyard of the house, the lintel of the tomb of User lies on the ground, alongside a pick, a shovel and a hoe (see fig. 13-14). Tea, cigarettes, other Egyptian pounds and we can take a picture. Furthermore the young Nubian shows us some finds from the User tomb: an *ushabt*, a wooden mask and a brownstone head (Fig. 15-17).

The photographic material in our possession is perhaps the only and last witness of the lintel and finds that, probably, at the time of this writing, they have already "taken off."

Back in Cairo, we talk to the Egyptian Deputy Minister dr. Amr Abbas (former Ambassador to Italy for four years and our friend) that suggests that we inform the SCA.

We carry all our documentation personally to the Egyptian Consulate in Italy together with a written report for the SCA. The Consul General of Egypt dr. Ali El-Halawani wrote to us thanking us and reassuring us that he would follow with great attention the developments of this situation that harms Egypt and the whole world of culture.

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Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4



Fig. 5.



Fig. 6.



Fig. 7.



Fig. 8.



Fig. 9.



Fig. 10.



Fig.11.



Fig. 12.



fig. 13.

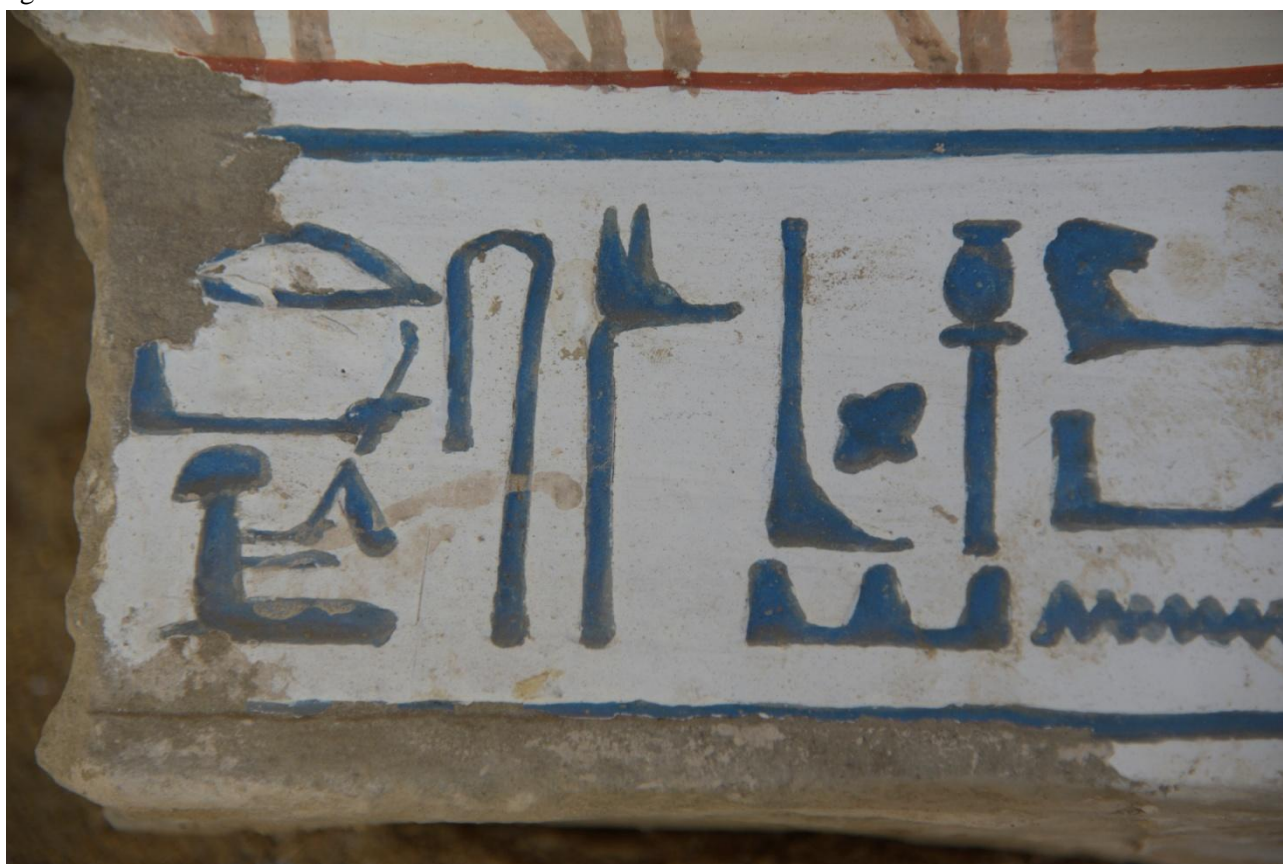


Fig. 14.



Fig. 15.



Fig. 16.



Fig. 17.