

**PRELIMINARY REPORT**  
**SOUTH ASASIF CONSERVATION PROJECT**  
**Karabasken (TT 391), Karakhamun (TT 223), Irtieru (TT 390)**  
**Egyptian-American Mission of the Supreme Council of Antiquities**  
**Director Dr. Elena Pischikova**  
**Season 2010, June 1-August 26**

On August 26<sup>th</sup> 2010 the South Asasif Conservation Project mission completed its fifth season in the South Asasif necropolis, West Bank, Luxor re-discovered by the mission in 2006. This season's work concentrated on the clearing of the Second Pillared Hall in the tomb of Karakhamun (TT 223) and conservation and reconstruction work in the tombs of Karabasken (TT 391), Karakhamun (TT 223), and Irtieru (TT 390).

### **Tomb of Karakhamun (TT 223)**

The tomb was built around 713-690 B.C. for the First aq Priest of Amun under Kushite kings Shabaqo and Shebitqo. As far as it is known from 19<sup>th</sup> century sources, the vast tomb was built with two pillared halls and multiple burial chambers. The tomb was richly decorated with brightly painted sunk relief carving. Later, the tomb of Karakhamun, one of the best examples of Kushite architecture and relief carving, completely collapsed and disappeared under a modern village.

### **Second Pillared Hall**

#### ***Clearing***

This season most of the Second Pillared Hall was cleared of debris. The undertaken clearing exposed three pillars, three pilasters, and remains of the walls of the four-pillar hall. A debris section was left in the south-west part of the hall to support the descending wooden ramp which was the main excess to the tomb this year.

The cleared area demonstrates significant destruction of the walls and pillars due to the fact that this room was the last to collapse and was used by the local villagers much longer than the First Pillared Hall. As seen today, the south east and north-west sections of the hall are severely destroyed. The best preserved wall is the north section of the east

wall. The wall is beautifully decorated with a wide painted freeze of sacred oil jars and tools for the ceremony of the Opening of the Mouth. The lower part of the wall is inscribed with the Text of the Pyramids 25, 73, 74 and 77. Large number of sizable fragments of the Second Pillared Hall decoration found in debris and burial compartments allow the relief decoration to be reconstructed in the future.

The north wall was decorated with the largest offering scene in the tomb. Fragments of the torso, arms, legs and head of Karakhamun indicate an over life size figure of the tomb owner seated at the offering table. A large offering list separated his figure from a standing priest. The lower part of the body of the priest and the offering list are still in situ. The north wall demonstrates one of the most elaborate carving in the whole tomb. 2324 carved fragments of the relief decoration were found during the clearing of the Second Pillared Hall.

Conservation was carried on at the time of clearing in order to consolidate weak elements *in situ* and newly found fragments. Found pillars were consolidated and cleaned. Limestone fragments found in debris were cleaned of soot and dirt with 5-10% solution of Ammonium Carbonate in distilled water and consolidated with a 5-10% solution of Paraloid B-72 in acetone and Primal AC 33 in distilled water. As the main goal of our work is the reconstruction of the tomb's architecture and decoration *in situ*, some restored fragments were immediately reinstalled on the walls and pillars. This season 100 fragments were reinstated in their original location. Fragments were reattached to the walls with Paraloid B-72, Araldite 2014 and AW 1306, and Epoxy 150. Cracks and losses on the walls and pillars were filled with lime plaster (3 parts sand, two parts lime, and one part heba).

### ***Side Room***

A side room at the north-east corner of the Hall was found and cleared in July. Remains of its east and north walls indicate the rooms original size as 250 x 170 cm. Although irregular and roughly carved, the room is not a later addition but an originally planned chapel dedicated to a family member of a close subordinate. Remains of the decoration on the east doorjamb although chiseled off by a later intruder show three full columns of text and a seated figure. The entrance lintel found in large fragments shows

the remains of an offering scene carved in the style of the original tomb decoration. Unfortunately the name of the suggested relative was impossible to determine.

The room contains a 4m deep burial shaft with a small burial chamber 150 x 90cm. The burial compartment was disturbed in the past and refilled with the carved blocks of the tomb's relief decoration and animal bones. Fragments of about 150 small (5-6cm) mud shawabties could have been part of the original burial. The rest of the finds include mummy fragments, numerous blue glazed faience tubular beads and a greywacke scarab with traces of gold foil. A limestone *Atef* crown of Osiris (21 cm) found in the burial chamber could have belonged to the statue of Osiris placed in the divine niche of the Second Pillared Hall.

### ***Passageway***

A vast space was discovered beyond the walls of the Second Pillared Hall. It surrounds the Hall from the south, west and north in a shape of a wide (about 15 m) passageway. This feature requires further exploration but so far it can be interpreted as a corridor surrounding the room containing the main burial chamber and isolating it from the rest of the tomb giving it a symbolic meaning of the tomb of Osiris. This feature is well preserved in the later tomb of Harwa.

### ***Pillars***

Three pillars and three pilasters uncovered this season are badly damaged with only about 1 -1.5 m still *in situ* or completely destroyed. Yet the amount of found fragments of the pillars' decoration and remains of the inscriptions *in situ* allows us to identify the texts and reconstruct them in the future. So far the text on the pillars were identified as the Chapters of the Book of the Dead 26, 27, 52, 57, 63, 86, 104. Numerous painted fragments of the procession of offering bearers suggest this scene on the pilasters of the west wall.

## **Main Burial Compartment**

### ***Staircase***

A staircase leading to the main burial chamber was found in the north isle of the Second Pillared Hall lined up with the first pillar. The staircase is 465 cm long and 120 cm wide. It is comprised of the 14 steps about 17 cm high with narrow ramps on the sides. The walls and the steps are in a good condition. The staircase was protected by the early collapse of the large ceiling blocks which were found on the steps. The surface of the steps is burned as they were used as part of the Ptolemaic faience workshop which damaged the whole tomb. A large amount of burned bones covered in glaze were found on the steps. Right outside the steps a large (21.8 cm) faience badly burned shawabti was found in two pieces. Judged by its size it could have belonged to Karakhamun.

The second flight of steps has a different configuration as it is divided by a ramp in the middle as well. Only 8 steps are cleared so far.

### ***Shaft and Burial Chamber***

A spacious shaft room contains an eight-meter deep shaft. Two side rooms need clearing to see if they have shafts as well. The shaft leads to two burial chambers, main and secondary right above. The main burial chamber is almost completely filled with debris with only the top of the walls and the ceiling still visible. The approximate size of the room on the ceiling level is 5 x 3.3 x 2.3 m. The burial chamber was plastered and brightly painted with astronomical scenes. The ceiling is painted blue with yellow and red stars. The middle of the ceiling is occupied by a large figure of goddess Nut painted yellow with black hair. It is surrounded with astronomical figures and deities in barks. There are cracks and losses on the ceiling and walls. Numerous fragments of fallen painted plaster were seen on top of the debris and more might be found in the lower debris layers. Only one area of the ceiling shows the loss of bedrock. Wall decoration with mummiform figures shows more considerable losses but some sizable fallen fragments are visible on the pile of debris.

A group of SCA conservators under the supervision of the Conservation Director of Luxor Ahmed Ali Hussein examined the condition of the burial chamber decoration and found it generally stable with some weak areas needing emergency consolidation. Lime

plaster was used to fill the largest cracks. Thick layers of plaster separated from the falls were injected with a 2% solution of Paraloid B72 and flaking areas of thinner plaster were injected with a 2% solution of primal. Conservation and reconstruction of the burial chamber will be undertaken next season.

### **Reconstruction work in the tomb of Karakhamun**

The main areas of reconstruction chosen for this year are the entrance to the Second Pillared Hall and the fourth pillar on the north side of the First Pillared Hall. 297 fragments of the relief decoration were joined by the conservators and 90 were reinstalled to their original locations.

#### ***Entrance to the Second Pillared Hall***

The weak bedrock above the entrance area was reinforced by white cement, steel rods and clips. A supportive buttress was built with limestone blocks.

The thickness of the entrance contained a fragment of two figures of the procession of the deities leading Karakhamun to the Netherworld. Their precise detailed carving with exquisite modeling is among the best in the tomb. The two figures are probably Karakhamun being held by his far arm by a female deity. A few more fragments of this scene have been found in debris last year and reinstalled to their original location. It is the shoulder of a deity painted blue, his foot and a was scepter. The missing fragments were replaced with new blocks of limestone.

The back part of the entrance featured a figure of Karakhamun seated on a chair with a jar for sacred oil under it. It is an influential archaizing feature re-introduced by Karakhamun. The decoration was found in fragments and reconstructed on the ground last year and this season was reinstalled *in situ*.

#### ***North-west pillar in the First Pillared Hall (NP 5)***

The height of the pillar as found in 2008 was below 1 m *in situ* with the height of the ceiling in the north-west corner 330 cm. The south side of the pillar featured the text of the 11<sup>th</sup> Hour of the Day. Numerous fragments found around the pillar allowed us to immediately start the reconstruction of the text and the image of Karakhamun kneeling in

front of Ra-Harakhty and the deities of the Hours on the ground. The reconstruction was considerably altered in 2009. As almost 80% of the text and imagery was preserved it permitted the reconstruction *in situ*.

The first step was consolidation of the remaining part of the pillar with steel rods, lime plaster and Paraloid B72. The second step was to build a metal structure which will take the weight of the reconstructed sections off the ancient pillar. Five holes 2 cm in diameter and 1m deep were drilled in the pillar going through the remains of the pillar *in situ* and into the bedrock floor. Steel rods were inserted into the holes forming support for a metal frame made of steel bars. Therefore the reconstructed section of the pillar composed of ancient fragments and new limestone rested of the metal frame built into the floor of the tomb.

Four courses of limestone were built to support the fragments of the decoration. Ancient fragments were attached to each other to form larger sections with Araldite AW 1306 and 2014. Deep sockets were carved in the new limestone to receive ancient fragments and ensure their stability and protection. The gaps were filled with lime plaster.

The pillar was built to the original height of 306 cm and crowned with a section of an architrave 24 cm to reach the ceiling height of 330 cm.

The mapping of the new architectural features and survey was undertaken at the time of clearing the tomb.

The results of this year's work demonstrate the tomb of Karakhamun is a unique monument that occupies a special place in the history of Egyptian tomb art. The tomb of Karakhamun is the first fully decorated large Kushite tomb built in the Theban necropolis. The first Kushite tomb built for the Mayor of Thebes Karabasken (TT 391) was left unfinished with decoration only in the entrance area. These tombs declare the beginning of the revival of the tradition of building monumental decorated private tombs after a long interval.

The tomb introduces new design concepts for the Late Period temple-tomb type with a divine nich replacing a false door and a surrounding corridor imitating the tomb of Osiris surrounded by water.

The tomb of Karakhamun is the first known to reform the grid system by reducing the size of the squares and replacing the 18-square grid with the 21-square grid that dominated in the art of the Late Period.

The tomb of Karakhamun is the first known private tomb to adopt traditional subjects of Royal tomb decoration such as the Books of the Hours of Day and Night and place the text on eight pillars, three Hours on each pillar. This example was often followed in later Kushite and Saite tombs.

Karakhamun is a beautiful example of early Kushite art. With not so many monuments of the time of Shabaqo-Shebitqo preserved, the tomb's decoration notably adds to the picture of "archaizing" stylistic trends in early Kushite tomb art based on the Old Kingdom tradition known as Kushite Renaissance. Furthermore the tomb demonstrates the highest quality of relief carving, leading to the suggestion that Karakhamun could have belonged to a royal family.

New discoveries in the tomb of Karakhamun are evidence of the high quality of the decoration of this early Kushite tomb. The number and sizes of the found fragments will allow the reconstruction of most of the hall's decoration in the future.

### **Tomb of Karabasken (TT 391)**

The tomb was built for the Major of Thebes and Fourth Priest of Amun, Karabasken who was appointed by Piye and served during the reign of Shabaqo, Dynasty 25. The tomb was left unfinished by the builders with only the entrance of the Vestibule and probably the False Door decorated. The tomb suffered dramatically from floods and numerous periods of occupation. Excavation in the Vestibule and Cult Chamber in 2006-2007 showed deterioration and flaking of the stone and major damages on the carved surface.

On the Vestibule doorframe Karabasken is shown seated on a lion-legged chair with a short back decorated with a papyrus umbel. He wears a short pleated skirt and a priestly pelt vest supported by a sash tied on his shoulder with a large elaborate knot. The image

on the south jam is slightly better preserved than its counterpart on the north jam but both show deterioration and flaking on the surface. The carving was done in the bedrock. Unfortunately the quality of limestone bedrock in this area is the worst in the necropolis. Already when carving the doorframe, the artists had to replace stone in some areas and attached new blocks by means of mortar. When the surface was plastered and painted the joints were invisible. Later when the superstructure was destroyed and part of the vestibule's ceiling collapsed, the doorframe got exposed to different types of danger including floods and damage by people. As a result the upper doorframe decoration was partially chiseled off and the lower part buried under a layer of dense debris periodically moistened by floods.

Cleaning and consolidation of the images of Karabasken and surrounding inscriptions was started in 2006 and continues every year. The surface of the stone was cleaned with a solution of acetone and distilled water (1:11) and consolidated with injections of Acryloid B-48 and B-72 (1-3% solution with acetone) and Primal AC 33 (1:10 or 1:15 solution with water). Fragments of inscriptions found in debris were reattached in their original places with Epoxy or solution of Acryloid. Cracks were filled with lime plaster (lime, sand, and water).

### **Tomb of Irtieru (TT 390)**

Lady Irtieru served as the Chief Attendant to the Divine Consort, Nitocris, daughter of Psamtik I of Dynasty 26. The tomb of Irtieru was lost under the houses of the modern village being used as living quarters, quarry, and a stable. Most of the tomb was excavated in 2007. The beautiful painting of the ceiling of the vestibule was cleaned of soot in 2007.

This season the work was continued on the walls of the First Pillared Hall. The north and south walls were weakened as large pieces of bedrock were removed from the bottom and middle parts. They were reinforced with lime plaster mixed with chips of limestone. The remaining surface was consolidated with a 10-20% solution of primal AC-33.

The work was started in the Second Pillared Hall. The pillars, walls and ceiling of the were partially cleaned of soot with a cleaning solution consisting of 5-10% ammonium



carbonate in distilled water, 2-5% EDTA in distilled water. CMC was added to the solution for compresses applied on sheets of thin paper. This method helps to avoid mechanical rubbing of the painted surface. The ceiling was cleaned of soot and dirt in the north isle of the hall.

The walls of the Second Pillared Hall were covered with a thick layer of salt. The conservators used a mixture of hibe, and ammonium carbonate to absorb the salts. The thick hibe “paste” was applied to the affected areas for three days, after the removal of hibe the wall was cleaned with water and ethyl alcohol.

The burial chambers were checked by the conservators and found in satisfactory condition. Partial consolidation was performed in the vaulted burial chamber. Conservation work in the tomb will be continued next season.

**This season’s work was carried by the following team members**

Dr. Elena Pischikova, *Director of the Project*

Luda Katherine Blakeney, *Assistant Director, photographer and digital artist*

Dr. Diethelm Eigner, *Survey and mapping of the tomb of Karakhamun*

Dr. Miguel Polo Molinero, Daniel Mendez Rodriguez, Kenneth Griffin, *Epigraphy in the tomb of Karakhamun*

Anthony Browder, *Archaeologist, Researcher*

Birgit Schoer, *Geology of the South Asasif necropolis*

Fathy Yassen Abd El Kerim, Ramadan Ahmed Ali, Meg Gundlach,

Janet L Duffy, Leighton Syd, John Howells, Rosalyn Anne Thomas, Rebecca Kelly,

Joanne Marie Edwards, Atlantis Browder, Janice George, Lisa Douglas, Cynthia

Hopkins-Brown, Olubunmi Bakare, Tenesha Bazemore, Tywana Bazemore, Jamie

Nicholas Gibbs, Hanna Jane Brown, Sarah Louise Jackman, Francis Ian Arthur Crouch,

Jessica Lee Penman, *Field Supervision, Fragments and Object Registration and Registration Photography, Database Input*

Walker Bodo Behl, *Anthropologist*

Tor Mor, Montsho, Xiomara Ortiz, Adrienne Cook, *Photography*

Jonathan Pourzal, *Database specialist*

**Conservation work was performed by SCA conservators:**

Ahmed Ali Hussein, *Chief Conservator*,

El Taib Hassan Ibrahim, Abd Al Rassul Said Mohamed, Taih Mohamed Ragab, Rafahi Ahmed Abed, Ahmed Mohamed Ahmed Rabih, Ahmed Salah Abd Alla, Mohammed Mustafa Merai, El Azeb Said Yassin, Ahmed Mohamed Ali Ahmed, Ali Hassan Ibrahim, Hamdi Mahmud Hussein, Hassan El Dimmerdash, Said Ali Hassan, Mohammed El Azzab Hakem

We would like to thank Dr. Zahi Hawass, *Secretary General*; Dr. Mansur Boreik, *General Director of Antiquities for Upper Egypt*; Mr. Mustafa Waziry, *General Director for the West Bank of Luxor*; Fathy Yassen Abd El Kerim, *Chief inspector of the Middle Area*; Ramadan Ahmed Ali, *chief inspector*, and Mr. Ahmed Ali Hussein Ali, *SCA Chief conservator, Director of the Conservation Department of Upper Egypt*.