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Maher Bashendi

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A Roman Period Tomb with a Pyramidal Superstructure in Bir el-Shaghala (Mut, Dakhla Oasis)

MAHER BASHENDI AMIN

The site of Bir el-Shaghala is located in Mut (Dakhla Oasis), some 3 km NW of new Mut. The full extent of the ancient remains is still in place and the area (750 m N/S × 350 m E/W) is one of the sites under the control of the Supreme Council of Antiquities. Bir el-Shaghala is not far from three other important ancient sites: to the SE, Tell el-Marqula and Kom Bishai, and, to the South, Mut el-Kharab.¹

The site is a cemetery. Tombs are partly hewn in the shale of the hill and partly built of mudbricks, some of them being large and decorated monuments.² The present article intends to provide a significant example of the architecture and decoration of these monuments, as an initial overview of the Bir el-Shaghala necropolis, which will deserve further publications.

The monument measures 8.30 m N/S × 9.00 m E/W (overall superstructure dimensions). The preserved height is 6.30 m, the restored one being up to 12.90 m. The upper floor consists of a chapel once covered by a pyramid. To the East, a staircase leads into two storeys of tombs, both including an antechamber and two funerary rooms. The superstructure and most parts of the monument are built of mudbricks coated with a lime plaster. The doors of both tombs and the funerary chambers of the lower floor are built of sandstone.

² During the last decade the SCA made cleanings, excavations and conservation work on the site.

The author, director of Dakhla Oasis area, was in charge of the field work.
CHAPEL

A vestibule precedes an inner room. The walls of the vestibule are preserved only to the height of 0.75 m. The façade shows four slightly protruding pillars (6 cm), on both sides of the door and in the angles. The vestibule is a broad room (5.22 m E/W × 1.87 m N/S) with a bench in the front of the chapel and recesses within the eastern and western walls. To the East, within the recess, opens a rectangular shaft (85 × 23 cm) 3 m deep, plumb with the door of the lower tomb. It was intended to operate a vertical slab to close the door of the lower antechamber. The vestibule was covered by a flat roof resting on engaged square pillars to the North and engaged semi-circular columns to the South. The inner room, under the pyramid, was certainly covered by a cupola-shaped corbelled vault. As the walls (thickness 70 to 75 cm) bend already from the floor level, the space left to stand inside the room was only around 3 × 3 m instead of 4.12 × 4.15 m (overall inside measurements). The angle of the outer slope of the pyramid is slightly different on the preserved parts from one face to another, the average being 71.1°. So, the pyramid was 8.05 m high, as measured from the floor of the chapel (fig. 4, 5, 7, 10).

Except for other monuments in Bir el-Shaghala still to be documented, the only contemporary similar pyramidal tomb in regard to shape and size, is the still unpublished pyramid of Amheida in Dakhla. Otherwise, the few pyramidal funerary monuments of the Graeco-Roman Period are completely different and incomparably smaller. From older periods, the pyramidal superstructure of Padineith’s tomb (Thebes, late XXVIth Dynasty) provides a good parallel, especially regarding the inner structure. Searching for an archetype, we have to look back to the New Kingdom private pyramidal tombs.

EAST ENTRANCE AND STAIRCASE

The level of the eastern entrance is 1.50 m lower than the level of the chapel to the North. The outer floor was sloping downwards W/E and N/S. A parapet wall protects the stairwell.

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3 West 70.2° (height preserved 2.08 m), South 71.6° (height preserved 2.20 m), East 72.2° (height preserved 0.90 m).
6 D. Eigner, Die monumentalen Grabbauten der Spätzeit in der thebanischen Nekropole, Untersuchungen der zweigstelten Kairo des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts VIII, Vienna, 1984, p. 102-105, fig. 75, pl. 40 c.
The staircase is broad (2.15 m) and convenient. The difference of level between the upper and the lower floor being 2.55 m and the length of the staircase being 4.85 m, the eighteen steps are rather gradual (tread 25 to 32 cm, riser 13 to 19 cm; average tread 28.5, average riser 14 cm). On the lower part of the western wall, a 1.10 m high plinth is painted red, the upper part being white.

**TOMB, UPPER FLOOR**

The door of the upper tomb opens from the upper floor of the staircase. It is set within a semicircular porch painted red. Two small columns suggest that it was covered by a false conch. The sandstone door is shaped in the usual Egyptian style with a cavetto cornice adorned with a winged solar disk. The lintel and jambs are carved and painted. They display standing figures of gods following and accompanying Osiris.

![Diagram of gods in the upper tomb](image)

**Lintel**

In the middle, three vertical red stripes separate two groups of five gods with their backs turned towards the door. Each group faces a stand covered with food offerings and lotus flowers. In front of each god a column was inscribed with his name painted but not carved. Nowadays the inscriptions are faded and have become mostly unreadable. The gods each hold a was scepter, the goddesses a wadj scepter. The goddesses wear the vulture shaped headdress under their crowns.

**Right (North)**

Osiris, green, depicted as a pharaoh, walking and wearing the atef crown.
Isis, a small seat or throne sign upon her Hathoric crown revealing her name.
Geb wearing a typical crown made of an *atef* with an elongated base for the two horns within a red crown.\(^8\)

Horus crowned with the *pschent*.

Nut with the sign of her name over her headdress instead of a crown.

**Left (South)**

Osiris depicted as on the right jamb, but with a small solar disk above his *atef* crown.

Nephthys with the sign of her name upon the disk of her Hathoric crown.

Nefertem, a clump of lotus above his head.

Ra-Horakhty with a solar disk comparatively far above his falcon head.

A goddess wearing the crown made of a disk and high feathers.\(^9\)

**Jambs**

[FIG. 13, 14]

Both jambs are divided into three registers. On each one a god, holding a *was* scepter, is followed by a goddess raising a hand. They look towards the outside. As the registers are symmetrical on both jambs, we shall describe the scenes by register in order to show the similarities.

**Upper Register**

- **Right (North)**
  
  Horus, falcon headed, wearing the *pschent*. A goddess wearing a Hathoric crown.

- **Left (South)**
  
  Horus with a human head, wearing the *pschent*. A goddess wearing a Hathoric crown.

**Middle Register**

- **Right (North) and Left (South)**
  
  Osiris, green, depicted as a pharaoh, walking and wearing the *atef* crown. Isis, a small throne sign upon her Hathoric crown giving her name.

**Lower Register**

- **Right (North)**
  
  Wepwawet (?),\(^10\) jackal headed, black. A goddess crowned by the high feathers with a disk.

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\(^9\) She may be Hathor-Sakhmet, according to the presence of Nefertem, Mut or even Isis.

\(^10\) By symmetry with the left jamb.
A Roman Period Tomb with a Pyramidal Superstructure in Bir el-Shaghala (Mut, Dakhla Oasis)

Left (South)

Wepwawet, jackal headed, black.\textsuperscript{11} A goddess crowned by the high feathers with a disk.

The gods following Osiris are the members of his family—the right part of the lintel with Geb, Nut, Isis and Horus being an example—the gods who take care of him (Nephthys, Isis, Anubis, Horus), and the gods who welcome him to daylight and eternally renewed life as Ra-Horakhty and Nefertem. The general composition is meaningful too. Indeed, on both jambs Osiris and Isis occupy the middle register between the registers of Horus and Wepwawet.

So, according to its location, its structure and to the decoration of the door, the porch was probably used to shelter offerings and could even perhaps have been designed to play the part of a small outdoor Osirian chapel in front of the tomb.

The door itself is low (height 1.05 m, width 0.62 m). Within the doorway, grooves on both sides and a shaft in the lintel were used in order to lift and lower a portcullis slab operated from the chapel above. The door opens onto an E/W antechamber (4.42 m × 1.05 to 1.15 m) divided by an arch and opening itself onto two N/S funerary chambers (3.25 × 1.88 m and 3.39 × 1.85 m). These rooms are covered with inclined brick vaults.

TOMB, LOWER FLOOR

At the bottom of the staircase, the lower landing (1.98 to 2.09 m N/S × 2.13 m E/W) opens to the West, onto the lower tomb, and to the East onto a vaulted niche, itself opening onto a second vaulted recess (fig. 3, 7-8). In the niche, on the southern side an altar (0.67 × 0.60 m, height 1.23 m) is built in, slightly protruding outside. It belongs to the so-called "horned altar" type, very frequently encountered during the Graeco-Roman Period (fig. 9).\textsuperscript{12} The niche with its altar must have been used as a place for offerings, the whole area of the floor providing a convenient space, in front of the door of the tomb, for performing the funerary cult.

The northern wall is decorated with a painted geometric red, yellow and green motif imitating a stone decoration (fig. 15).\textsuperscript{13}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{11} The name is readable.
\textsuperscript{12} The most famous example is the altar set up in front of the tomb of Petosiris in Tuna el-Gebel (Late 4th-Early 3rd century BC): G. Lefebvre, \textit{Le tombeau de Pétosiris}, Cairo, 1924, I, p. 13, II, pl. V.
\end{flushright}
Door

The sandstone door is built in the Egyptian style, with a cavetto cornice adorned with a winged solar disk. The lintel and jambs are carved and painted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Djed</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ba bird (ram head)</td>
<td>Goddess (human head)</td>
<td>ba bird (ram head)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thot</td>
<td>Goddess (human head)</td>
<td>Horus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ba birds (jackal head)</td>
<td>Anubis or Wepwawet</td>
<td>ba birds (jackal head)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protector deity</td>
<td>protector deity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lintel

In the middle of the lintel is the *djed* pillar crowned by a *henu* crown. On both sides of the *djed* pillar are symmetrical female figures, each with a disk above her head. They each raise a hand towards the *djed* pillar and present an ointment vase with the other. They could be Isis and Nephthys or the Hours who appear with an identical form in the antechamber. However it may be pointless to try to name them precisely, as they are meant to represent the goddesses who take care of Osiris. Behind them are four *ba* birds. The first two have a human head, the one at left wearing a long wig and the one at right having short hair. Behind these *bas* is an Osirian emblem: a *flagellum*. Then come two *ba* birds with a ram’s head. At the extremities, the ibis headed Thot, to the left, and the falcon headed Horus, to the right, raise one hand and hold a piece of folded linen in the other. As with the goddesses, they are depicted according to the part they play as embalmers. The general meaning of the scene is the resurrection of the dead as Osiris embodied by the *djed* pillar within a solar context.

Jambs

The scenes are perfectly symmetrical on both jambs.

- Upper Register
  Jackal headed *ba* birds raise their arms in adoration towards the entrance.
Middle Register
A standing jackal headed black Anubis or Wepwawet, holding a was scepter and an ankh sign, looks towards the opening. In front of him is the outline of a column of hieroglyphs left uninscribed.

Lower Register
A female protector deity holds a long ḫe knife upright and faces the doorway. In front of her is the outline of a column of hieroglyphs left uninscribed.

The opening is taller and wider (height 1.44 m, width 0.77 m) than that of the upper tomb. Within the doorway, the shaft intended for the portcullis slab opens in the lintel and there is a groove on both sides. Two steps lead down to the floor of the antechamber.

Antechamber and Funerary Chambers

The lower tomb is larger and looks much more spacious than the upper one. Moreover the funerary chambers are built of sandstone. The decoration is painted directly onto the stone, or on a very thin white priming.

The antechamber (4.70 to 4.80 m E/W × 2.92 to 3.00 m N/S) was covered by an inclined mudbrick vault 3.20 m high, found mostly collapsed and nowadays restored. To the South, the doors of the funerary chambers are protruding (15 cm) from the wall. This façade wall and the funerary chambers are entirely built of rather large courses of sandstone (height up to 35 cm). The openings are low (East 1.23 m, West 1.18 m) but comparatively wide (0.70 m). In the doorway, the door sockets and the holes for the bolts are visible. Inside, in the funerary chambers, the floors are paved with sandstone slabs. Both rooms have the same size (East 4.80 × 2.12 m, West 4.98 × 2.10 m) and symmetrical layout. They are covered by a vault, which is nearly semi-circular.14

Antechamber, South Wall

East Panel
Under a line of text, the eastern panel displays the procession of the Osiris reliquary from Abydos, the so-called “Abydenian fetish.”

Text

\[\text{Hw} \text{ntr} \text{m nb } \text{dsr } \text{di.f} \text{nfrt}\]

Welcome to you! It is Anubis, the great god, the lord of the Sacred Land, who gives you a great and beautiful burial.

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14 In Mut, similar stone vaults are documented in smaller tombs at Tell el-Marqula dating back to the XXVIth Dynasty onwards. As for Egyptian stone vaults in chapels and funerary chambers, mainly of Saite Period, see S. El-Naggar, Les voûtes dans l'architecture de l'Égypte ancienne, BdE 128,1, 1999, p. 366-367 and 128,2, p. 289, fig. 373, p. 293, fig. 376, p. 295, fig. 378.

15 As for the value of the cobra I12 as k, see H.W. Fairman, “An Introduction to the Study of Ptolemaic Signs and their Values,” BIFAO 43, 1943, p. 78.
The scene is very complete and elaborate. Four priests wearing long fringed kilts with belts and sandals\textsuperscript{16} carry a palanquin in the middle of which is erected the Abydenian reliquary containing the head of Osiris. The high box on a pole shows the detail of a bead-net covering it. It is crowned by the crown made of a disk and two high feathers. On both sides of the reliquary, a standard bears a ram. At the base of the reliquary, small figures of the souls of Pe (falcons) and Nekhen (jackals) perform the \textit{henu} gesture. Ahead of them, to the front, is the figure of a deity holding a \textit{was} scepter. Partly damaged, this figure is difficult to identify. To the rear, a goddess opens her wings in order to protect the reliquary. She wears a solar disk and holds a \textit{Maat} feather. She may be Isis or any other one among the goddesses accustomed to guarding Osiris. The fetish in the palanquin is set on a stand decorated with two images of the king supporting the sky on either side of a cartouche, which possibly contains the name of Osiris. In the upper part of the scene two falcons, each crowned by a solar disk and holding a \textit{hw} fan, seem to fly on each side of the reliquary. They are figures of Horus Behedety. The scene is appropriately oriented towards the entrance of the antechamber.

\textbf{East Door}  

\begin{figure}[h]  
\centering  
\includegraphics[scale=0.5]{fig20-22.png}  
\caption{East Door}  
\end{figure}

\textbf{Front}  

\textit{Lintel}  

In the middle of the lintel, a winged scarab pushes a solar disk. Its rear legs hold a \textit{shen} sign and two \textit{hw} fans. It is Khepri rising at dawn. On both sides four ladies, each with a disk over her head, raise their right arms and present an ointment vase in their left hands. The two ladies who are closer to Khepri turn the palms of their hands towards their faces, while the other

ones raise their hands towards Khepri. They are most probably the Hours. They are named in those Underworld Books from the New Kingdom displaying the sun god’s journey within an horary framework. During the Late Period they keep watch over Osiris as well. Here, they mainly play the role of acclaming the sunrise, but the ointment vase could be a hint towards the healing of Osiris. The location on the lintel is appropriate: the deceased comes forth to daylight with Khepri.

*Jams*

As the scenes are the same or similar on both jambs, we shall describe them by register.

**Upper register left (East):**

Isis welcomes and guides Osiris, her left hand gripping his right wrist and her right hand raised up towards his shoulder. She wears the vulture shaped headdress of goddesses and the Hathoric crown. Remarkably, a very small throne sign is placed over the disk in order to indicate her name. Osiris is not mummiform, but is shown as a king entering a temple. However, the light green colour of his body marks him clearly. He wears the *atef* crown. Between the gods are two columns designed for a hieroglyphic text but left empty.

**Upper register right (West):**

Mainly the scene is identical to the left one. However the Isis sign is missing over the crown of the goddess. So, she could be another one of the goddesses who used to take care of Osiris. Another slight difference is noticeable: there is a small solar disk with an *uraeus* on the top of Osiris crown.

**Middle register left (East):**

Anubis or Wepwawet faces Ra-Horakhty. The double *uraeus* is usually a feature of Montu; but here Ra-Horakhty is more likely. The gods raise up their right hands towards each other and link their left hands.

**Middle register right (West):**

The deceased, figured as the king, faces Ra-Horakhty. As on the left jamb, they raise up their right hands towards each other and link their left hands. Further details are significant: the light green skin of the left figure identifies him as the deceased. Moreover, his gesture, identical to that of the gods, puts him at the same level and shows that he takes his place among the gods.

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18 O. Kaper notices that this gesture by which Isis plays the part of protector and helper, well known for the gods welcoming the deceased pharaoh, was not yet documented for Isis and Osiris: O. Kaper, “Isis in Roman Dakhleh,” in L. Bricault, M.J. Versluys (ed.), *Isis on the Nile, Egyptian Gods in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, Proceedings of the IVth International Conference of Isis Studies, Liège, November 27-29, 2008. Michel Malaise in honorem*, Leiden, 2010, p. 151, 154 and fig. 3.
Lower register:
On both jambs, a crouching black Anubis or Wepwawet jackal faces the door and plays the part of the tomb’s guardian. Over him is a winged solar disk.

At first sight, we notice an apparent lack of symmetry between the jambs. Indeed, on a door, if Isis turns her back to the entrance on the left jamb, the goddess should do the same on the right one. Likewise, the figure of Ra-Horakhty on the right jamb should turn his back to the entrance. The West door displays the same layout. According to the accuracy noticed everywhere in the scenes and in their composition, an error is not likely. The most simple and probable explanation is the following one: the two highest registers of the door jambs are meant as part of the South wall and are related to the West wall of the antechamber which was probably considered as the rear wall and, so, the focus point of the room.

Doorway

[FIG. 21–22]

Soffit
The soffit displays the great female vulture Nekhbet, with outspread wings, as is usual on a temple door lintel.

– Left Jamb (East)   [FIG. 21]
Upper register:
Anubis or Wepwawet, holding the was sceptre, faces the entrance.
Lower register:
Thot with a black ibis head, crowned by a disk and holding the was sceptre, faces the entrance.

– Right Jamb (West)  [FIG. 22]
Upper register:
Anubis or Wepwawet, holding the was sceptre, faces the entrance.
Lower register:
Horus, holding the was sceptre, faces the entrance.
West door

Front

Lintel

The colours are mostly faded. Nevertheless the scene is readable. In the middle, a squatting mummiform image of Osiris faces right. He holds together three emblems including a heqa scepter (left), a flagellum (right) and a scepter made of an ankh sign over a djed like the scepter of Ptah (middle). On both sides are four deities, each crowned by a disk. Three of them are the Hours, each raising one hand and holding an ointment vase in the other. They are identical to the Hours of the eastern door. Here, however, the second figure starting from the center is, on the right side, a baboon and, on the left side, a jackal, both wearing a disk and making the same gesture as the Hours.

Jambs

Upper register left (East):

Osiris walking, clad as pharaoh, wears the atef crown with two uraei: he holds the was scepter. Facing him, Nephthys wearing the vulture shaped headdress and the Hathoric crown with the sign of her name upon the disk, holds the wadj scepter in her right hand and raises her left hand towards Osiris in a welcoming gesture. In front of each god, vertical outlines are intended for a column of text, but remain uninscribed.

Upper register right (West):

The scene is identical to the left one with some slight differences. There is a small solar disk over the Osiris crown. The goddess Isis has a small throne sign drawn upon the disk of her crown. Her raised left hand points an ankh sign towards Osiris.
Middle register left (East):
Horus and Thot face each other. Both of them wear a crown shaped like the lower part of the red crown. To the left, Horus holds a was scepter in his left hand and raises his right hand towards Thot in a greeting gesture. Thot makes the same gesture towards Horus with his left hand and holds a folded piece of linen, a mummy wrapping, in his lowered right hand.

Middle register right (West):
Horus and Anubis face each other. Both wear a crown shaped like the lower part of the red crown. To the left, Horus holds a was scepter in his left hand and points an ankh sign towards Anubis. In return, Anubis greets Horus with his upraised left hand and holds a piece of folded linen in his lowered right hand.

In this middle register Anubis and Thot play the part of embalmers. Horus greets them and presents the ankh sign in order to achieve the process. In this scene the gods congratulate each other on Osiris’s resurrection.

Lower register right (West):
On both sides a seated lion faces the entrance. He holds a long knife upright in his paws. The lion is a guardian deity defending the entrance of the funerary chamber.¹⁹

Doorway

[FIG. 24-25]

Soffit
As in the entrance of the eastern funerary chamber, the great female vulture of Nekhbet with outspread wings holds the hw fan.

¹⁹ Here, as with many guardian deities, the lion god is mostly defined by the part he plays, so that it is probably not necessary to try to name him more precisely. Concerning the lion as a guardian of the tomb, see C. de Wit, Le rôle et le sens du lion dans l’Égypte ancienne, Leiden, 1931, p. 72-73.
Jamb

On both sides, the gods having a solar disk above their heads face the entrance and raise their hands in a gesture of praise. In front of each god stands a tall ḫs vase with an uraeus. The left (East) jamb displays a human headed god (above) and a jackal headed one (below), while the right jamb shows a baboon headed god (above) and a falcon headed one (below). These gods are the four sons of Horus: Amset and Duamutef to the left, Hapi and Qebhsenuf to the right. They acclaim the resurrection of Osiris.

• Western Panel

Under a row of red stars is a very large frieze (height 50 cm) displaying an alternation of djed pillars and Isis knots. Below, the scene itself is partly damaged but clear. In the middle is erected the Abydos reliquary containing the Osiris head with the detail of a bead-net covering the high box. On both sides, goddesses protect it by their opened wings. Probably both of them hold a Maat feather. Noticeably, the disk crowning the right goddess is red, while the disk crowning the left one is blue with a yellow outline. The detail means that the protecting goddesses (who must be Isis and Nephthys) keep watch on Osiris throughout night and day.

Antechamber, West wall

Unfortunately the West wall is mostly destroyed. The remaining southern part is divided into two registers. In both registers we can see a standing goddess holding an ankhl sign in her right hand. The upper goddess is clad in red and wears a vulture shaped headdress. The lower one wears a yellow dress and bears an atef crown over her vulture shaped headdress. In front of her face, the column of hieroglyphs giving her name is vertically half cut and does not provide a secure reading, but Wadjet is likely. As an hypothesis, the standing goddesses could have taken part in scenes showing Osiris and/or Re-Horakhty seated on a throne and adored by the deceased.

East Funerary Chamber

The rear wall (South) displays the Osiris resurrection. The arch is occupied by a big winged solar disk with two long crowned uraei. Human headed ba birds hold an ankhl sign and look towards the central axis, facing the uraei. A green khekeru frieze separates the upper part from the lower scene. Above the scene is a long black sky sign. Osiris, mummiform, stands full face
instead of in profile as he is usually depicted. He is crowned by an atef crown with eight uraei upon ram’s horns and a disk on top of this. He holds the heqa scepter in his right hand and the flagellum in his left one. The detail of the net over the mummy wrapping is visible. Isis (right, red dress) and Nephthys (left, yellow dress), each wearing a Hathoric crown, present and protect Osiris by the same gesture. On both sides, Horus (right) and Wepwawet (left) each hold out an ointment vase and pour a libation. Horus wears the pschent and Wepwawet a crown shaped like the lower part of the red crown with two large uraei on top. In front of each god, a small column of red hieroglyphs gives his name.

Isis: ȝst wrt (destr.)
Isis, the great (…)  
Nephthys: Nbt but wrt
Nephthys, the great.  
Horus: Ḥr ṣ223
Horus the great.  
Wepwawet: Wpy ṣ23 ḫ nb ḥwyt nṯr ṣ24
Wepwawet, the great, lord of the Two Lands, the Great God.

The rear wall (South) displays the embalming of Osiris on the funerary bed. In the arch is a winged solar disk with two long uraei wearing the red crown (right) and the atef crown as a variant of the white crown (left). Under the disk, within the curve made by the uraei, are two symmetrical captions in red hieroglyphs:

[FIG. 27-29]
A Roman Period Tomb with a Pyramidal Superstructure in Bir el-Shaghala (Mut, Dakhla Oasis)

_Bḥdty nṯr ʿz nb pt sḥb šwt_  
_Horus_ Bebedety, the great god, lord of the sky, with brightly coloured feathers.

Under the wings, two crouching black jackals look to the outside. To the right (West), the jackal god holds a red _Maat_ feather. Above his head is a caption in small red hieroglyphs:

_Wpwȝwt nṯr ʿz nb ḕwȝy ir.n.f di ṣ nb ḏt_  
_Wepwawet, the great god, who has given life eternally._

The caption of the left jackal is:

_Inpw nṯr ʿz Ṣṣr ḏṣr_  
_Anubis, the great god, son of Osiris, given life eternally._

A line of red hieroglyphs and a decorative horizontal band separates the upper part from the lower scene.

The text says:

_Hy (n).k Ṣṣr Ḥry-tȝwy-Ṣṣr (or Ṣz-di-Ṣṣr) ms.n T(ɔ)y-hʿʿ-Rʿ (or T(ɔ)y-Hʿpy)  
Li.wy (n).k_  
_Inpw nb ṣ ḏsr  
Di.f (n).k qrst ṣ ḏsr nb Ṣṯt Ṣmt-IMEMNT_  
_Hail to you, Osiris Hery-tawy-Osiris (or Petosiris)25  
born to Tay-haa-Ra (or Tay-Hāpy).26_  
_Be welcome! It is Anubis, lord of the sacred land, who gives you a great and beautiful tomb at the edge of the Occident._

In the middle of the scene is a lion shaped bed. The body lying upon the bed is comparatively small and looks more like the mummy of a deceased than like Osiris, lacking the god's usual distinctions, such as the beard and the crown. Above him, Anubis, black with a yellow wig, puts his right hand on the mummy's chest and holds an ointment vase in his left hand. Under
the bed are three tall vases, each one with an uraeus instead of a spout. In this place they should be canopic jars.\textsuperscript{27} Isis, wearing a red dress, stands at the head of the bed, and Nephthys clad in yellow, stands at the foot of the bed. They symmetrically raise a hand and present an ointment vase with the other. At the extremities, Horus, to the right, wearing the pschent and Thot, to the left, wearing an atef crown are also performing a symmetrical gesture. They raise a hand and pour a libation from a spouted vase with the other hand. In front of the gods, small columns of red hieroglyphs give their names.

Anubis: $Dd\ mdw\ in\ Inpw\ sȝ\ Wsir$

Words said by Anubis son of Osiris.

Isis: $Dd\ mdw\ in\ ȝst\ wr(.t)\ nb(.t)$

Words said by Isis, the great, lady.\textsuperscript{28}

Nephthys: $Dd\ mdw\ in\ Nbt\ hwt\ wr(.t)\ irt\ sȝ\ n$

Words said by Nephthys, the great who makes protection for (Osiris).\textsuperscript{29}

Harsiesis: $Dd\ mdw\ in\ Ḥr\ sȝ\ ȝst$

Words said by Harsiesis.\textsuperscript{30}

Thot: $Dd\ mdw\ in\ Ḏḥwty\ ʿȝ\ ʿȝ\ wr$

Words said by Thot, the very great god.

According to the consistency of the architectural structure and of the decoration it is clear that the monument answers to a precise design and was realized in a single unit of time.

As for the architecture, the tomb units consisting of a vaulted antechamber opening on two vaulted funerary chambers follow a layout that is widespread in Dakhla (Kôm Bishai, Tell el-Marqula, Bir Talata el-Arab) from the Late Period onwards. However, usually, there is only one underground storey with a shaft going down from the ground level to the door of the antechamber, but here, there are two storeys linked by a staircase. Such a design meets the requirements of a family funerary complex intended to be available for burials over a lengthy period. Apart from its pyramidal superstructure, the upper chapel is also a common feature of great tombs in Dakhla, as for instance in Ezbet Bashendi\textsuperscript{32} or Ismant el-Kharab.\textsuperscript{33} However, in our monument, the chapel is not the only place for the cult. The niche and altar of the lower floor show that offerings were brought directly in front of the tomb’s door. The vestibule of the chapel was probably a room for people visiting the tomb during the feasts.

\textsuperscript{27} In the doorway too, the vases set in front of the Sons of Horus display the same \textit{heq} shape.

\textsuperscript{28} As the space was insufficient, the expected complement of \textit{nb} is lacking.

\textsuperscript{29} The central figure of the scene perhaps takes the place of the word \textit{Wsir}, a logical complement of \textit{irt sȝ n}.


\textsuperscript{31} The solar disk and the \textit{nṯr} are mere determinatives.


The decoration seems to be the work of one workshop. Apart from the style, we notice everywhere the same playing with colours, consisting of alternating them, especially red and yellow. Moreover, if we compare the figures of goddesses wearing a disk, the carved figures on the outer door are identical to the painted ones inside. Some features appear infrequently, such as the image of a crown looking like a vase (fig. 23, 26), the solar disk separated off from the headdress or from the crown (fig. 16, 19, 20, 25), or the *flagellum* distant from the divinities who should be holding it.

Despite a few Graeco-Roman features—such as the pillars on the façade of the chapel, the small columns of the door of the upper tomb, the horned altar and the painted wall imitating stone on the lower floor, the monument conforms to the pharaonic tradition. The scenes are representative of the Osirian beliefs: mummification (the eastern funerary chamber), the resurrection of Osiris (the western funerary chamber and antechamber), coming forth to daylight (the lintels). The *ba* birds, frequent during the Graeco-Roman Period, are present in both funerary chambers and at the entrance as well. Moreover, the location of the elements is appropriate, as, for instance, the figures of the gods guarding the tomb and taking care of Osiris (the door, the antechamber). We notice even some subtleties, such as the symmetry of Anubis and Wepwawet in the western funerary chamber. Finally some parts look like a temple decoration, mainly the door of the upper tomb, following a trend of the Late and Graeco-Roman Periods: the use in funerary monuments of representations borrowed from sanctuaries.\(^{34}\) In conclusion we may assume that the decoration of the tomb proves an accurate knowledge of the Osirian cult.

As for the date of the monument, we lack decisive proof. Nevertheless several indications help us to estimate it. Architectural features point to a late Hellenistic or Roman date. The style of the decoration suggests also the Roman Period. Within this period, the conformity to the pharaonic models, especially noticeable on the outer doors, and, above all, the well organized and meaningful composition point to an early date. Therefore we suggest the 1st century AD.

Fig. 1. Upper level, chapel and vestibule, plan 1/100.

Fig. 2. Tomb, upper floor, plan 1/100.
**Fig. 3.** Tomb, lower floor, plan 1/100.

**Fig. 4.** Eastern entrance and pyramid, view SE/NW.
**Fig. 5.** Section S/N (A-B on plans), 1/100.

**Fig. 6.** Tomb, upper floor, entrance, view E/W.
**Fig. 7.** Section E/W (C-D on plans), 1/100.

**Fig. 8.** Section N/S through the lower landing (E-F on plans), 1/100.

**Fig. 9.** Tomb, lower floor, altar, view N/S.
FIG. 10. Section W/E (G-H on plans), 1/100.
A Roman Period Tomb with a Pyramidal Superstructure in Bir el-Shaghala (Mut, Dakhla Oasis)

FIG. 11. Tomb, upper floor, door, view E/W.
FIG. 12. Tomb, upper floor, door, lintel.
FIG. 13. Tomb, upper floor, door, South jamb.
FIG. 14. Tomb, upper floor, door, North jamb.
FIG. 15. Tomb, lower floor, landing, North wall.

FIG. 16. Tomb, lower floor, door.
A Roman Period Tomb with a Pyramidal Superstructure in Bir El-Shaghala (Mut, Dakhla Oasis)

FIG. 17. Tomb, lower floor, antechamber, South wall, photomontage.

FIG. 18. Tomb, lower floor, antechamber, South wall, East panel.

FIG. 19. Tomb, lower floor, antechamber, South wall, West panel.
**FIG. 20.** Tomb, lower floor, antechamber, South wall, East door, front.

**FIG. 21.** Tomb, lower floor, antechamber, South wall, East door, doorway, East.

**FIG. 22.** Tomb, lower floor, antechamber, South wall, East door, doorway, West.
FIG. 23. Tomb, lower floor, antechamber, South wall, West door, front.
FIG. 24. Tomb, lower floor, antechamber, South wall, West door, doorway, East.
FIG. 25. Tomb, lower floor, antechamber, South wall, West door, doorway, West Panel, and in the background, the antechamber, West wall.
FIG. 26. Tomb, lower floor, East funerary chamber, South wall.

FIG. 27. Tomb, lower floor, West funerary chamber, South wall.
Fig. 28. Tomb, lower floor, West funerary chamber, South wall, detail of the inscriptions.

Fig. 29. Tomb, lower floor, West funerary chamber, South wall, detail of Anubis and the funerary bed.