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Omar Abou Zaid

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A New Discovery of Catacomb in Qurnet Murai at Thebes

OMAR ABOU ZAID*

INTRODUCTION

The New Theban Tombs Mapping Project (NTTMP)[1] intends to contribute to the archaeological and topographical exploration of the Theban necropolis and to understand its layout as a World Heritage Site. Many maps have been produced for the Theban necropolis prior to the end of the 20th century. Since the demolition of the modern village of Qurna and its houses in 2005-2008, no up-to-date maps have yet been established for the site so as to include newly discovered tombs. The last complete mapping project for the whole Theban necropolis was accomplished by Friederike Kampp in 1996.[2] One of the main issues facing the NTTMP is therefore to provide a new general map of the entire necropolis, including known and newly discovered tombs with full documentation and a consistent numbering system.[3] Around a hundred and twenty tombs[4] have been uncovered behind and underneath the demolished houses, the majority of which were previously unknown because information concerning them was not provided by the houses' owners.

* Lecturer, Egyptology Department, Faculty of Archaeology, Aswan University. All greetings and gratitude go to Prof. M. el-Damaty, minister of Antiquities, and Mr M. Badr, governor of Luxor, who visited and announced this discovery on 2 March 2015. I would also like to thank Dr M. Afifi, head of the Egyptian Sector, Mr A. Al-Asfar, head of central administration, Mr S. Eid, head of central administration of Upper Egypt, Mr T. Abdel-Aziz, general director of Qurna, and Mr H. Abu el-Azm, general director of the Permanent Committee, for supporting the work. Finally, my deep thanks and respect to my team: A. El-Tayeb, O. Fathi, H. Hassan, M. Beabesh, M. Hassan.

1 I started this project in May 2014 after receiving the approval of the Permanent Committee in April 2014, and the work is ongoing with my team: A. Ezz, A. El-Tayeb, H. Hassan, O. Fathi, M. Azab, M. Beabesh, M. Abd el-Wahab, A. Hassan, H. El-Amir, W. Yousef, under the direction of the Egyptian Sector.

2 Kampp, F., *Die Thebanische Nekropole: Zum Wandel des Grabgedankens von der XVIII. bis zur XX. Dynastie*, 2 vol., Theben 13, Mainz, 1996.

3 Abou Zaid, O., *et al.*, "New Theban Tombs Mapping Project (NTTMP): Surveying Report", *EJARS* 5/1, 2015, p. 71.

4 *Ibid.*, pl. 1, 3a–b, 5.

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One of the most interesting discoveries made during the recent work of the NTTMP is the catacomb at Qurnet Murai, an area located in the southern part of the Theban necropolis, extending from the German house in the north to the Deir el-Medina cemetery and the craftsmen's village in the west and Medinet Habu (Djēmē).[5] Along with other mortuary temples in the east it reflects an important interface between the daily life and the afterlife.

LOCATION OF THE NEW CATACOMB [FIG. 1]

This tomb is located within the second level tombs of the southern cliff of Qurnet Murai (N: 337178 – E: 775603), close to the road to Deir el-Medina. It was hidden behind the house of Ahmed Mohammed Mahmoud and was uncovered during the work of the "New Theban tombs Mapping Project (NTTMP)" so it was given the preliminary number "NTTMP 202" according to the survey work of this project.[6] The entire area of the site was covered with modern houses and requires continued excavation.

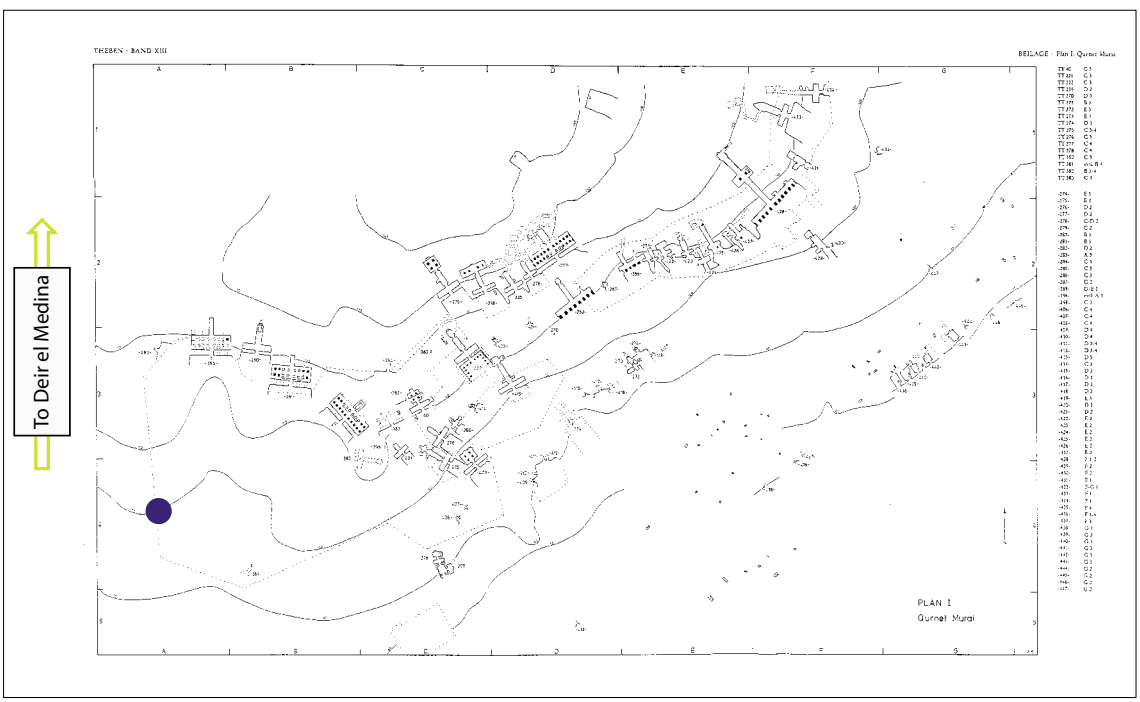


FIG. 1. Location of the new catacomb. Kampp, F., *Die Thebanische Nekropole*, vol. 2, plan 1.

5 MURNANE, W.J., *United with Eternity: A Concise Guide to the Monuments of Medinet Habu*, Chicago, Cairo, 1980, p. 2.

6 ABOU ZAID, O., *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 71–77.

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DESCRIPTION

This tomb was uncovered during our survey of Qurnet Murai, where the cliff facade and the house debris drew our attention and led us to move the debris and accumulation of the houses in order to check the bottom of the cliff. The deposits from the ceilings of the houses were covering the whole area, and modern retaining mud brick walls supported the fragile cliff. At this time we were quite sure that we were standing in the forecourt of a rock-cut tomb. While manually moving the accumulation of ceiling debris and fallen mud brick walls, particularly palm branch ceiling beams and mud-brick, suddenly a rock-cut entrance appeared.

The level of the house's floor was about 1.75 m higher than the floor of the tomb. As a result, the owner of the house built a stairway to go down to the tomb. Clearing the entrance to the tomb by the workmen took about two weeks,[7] along with uncovering the bedrock and fixing a door to protect the tomb. While cleaning the forecourt, at its northern corner we discovered a modern cemented floor which was the remains of the house's bathroom, giving an indication of what the tomb structure had endured; the owner of the house, as previously mentioned, had built a stairway with assorted stone blocks[8] to go down to the tomb, and also had installed a waste water pipe passing by the stairs for the drainage of the modern bathroom. Due to a lack of funds, cleaning the whole forecourt was stopped and we focused on clearing the entrance and installing an iron door to protect the tomb. At the end of the elongated hall (the gallery of *loculi*), the modern house owner had blocked the entrance to the inner hall and also made a small "*mastaba*"[9] for sleeping. Moreover he had made some additional mud structures to the *loculi*, to create nesting spaces for pigeons, resulting in damages to some of them.

Layout [FIG. 2]

This tomb consists of a rock-cut forecourt[10] measuring 13.50 m wide × 4.25 m long. The impact of structures added by the modern house owner has been discussed above. Additionally, the house owner supported the forecourt's rock-cut walls with modern mud-brick retaining walls. The forecourt leads to the main entrance in the facade of the tomb, facing east and fronted by a mud-brick structure (the mud bricks measuring ± 22 cm ×11 cm × 6.5 cm), which probably dates back to the New Kingdom. The lintel and jambs of the entrance were damaged and broken; in its present state, the entrance measures 2.5 m high × 1.75 m wide.

7 All my gratitude to John Shearman, director of ARCE Luxor, for helping us with workmen.

8 Now removed to uncover and clear the floor of the entrance.

9 This is a common tradition in Egyptian countryside.

10 Not excavated yet.

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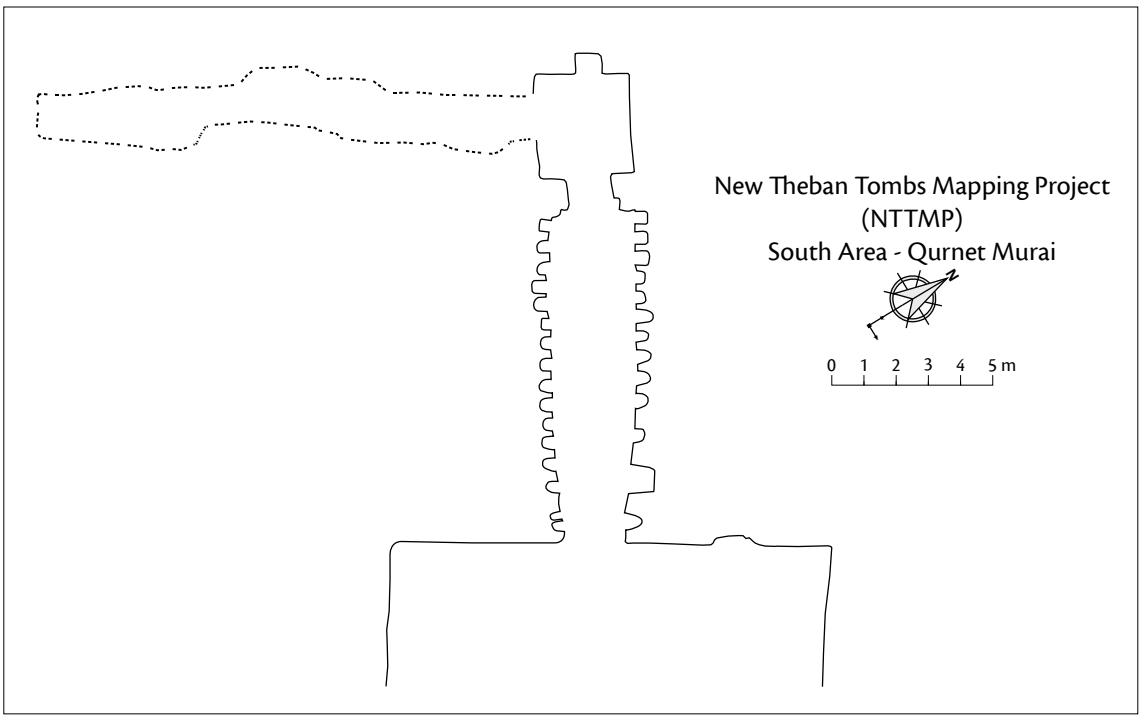


Fig. 2. Plan of the new catacomb (NTTMP202), showing lower row of *loculi*.

The entrance leads to an elongated passage or gallery (± 10.50 m × 2.75 m) with *loculi* in the northern (pl. 1a) and southern walls (pl. 1b). The northern wall measures 10.25 m long × 2.80 m wide and contains 42 *loculi* (pl. 1c, fig. 3). The southern wall measures 9.60 m wide × 2.60 m high and contains 44 *loculi* (pl. 1d, fig. 4). The western wall is a modern mud brick wall built by the house owner in front of the entrance to the inner room, and fronted by the "*mastaba*." By opening the modern mud block wall (pl. 2a), the real entrance (1.50 m) was uncovered, leading to an inner squared chamber (about 3 m × 3 m) filled with debris (pl. 2b), which ends with a small niche (pl. 2c) in the western wall (0.75 m × 0.75 m). This niche is one of the main elements of type IIb.[11] In the southern wall of the squared chamber is a rock-cut door that leads to an unfinished sloping corridor 15 m long × 1.75 m wide (pl. 2d), with rough walls and ceiling, also filled with debris. The ceiling of this descending corridor is so damaged that it is difficult to determine whether it was flat or vaulted. At the end of the *loculi* gallery (long hall), the ceiling seems to have been vaulted, while traces of plaster covered with soot survive at its north-western corner (pl. 3a). The passage's walls and ceiling were covered with soot and the owner of the house had also added a coat of pinkish paint to the walls. As mentioned above, the owner had also reused some of *loculi* as pigeon nests, fitted with red bricks and mud.

11 Kampp, F., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 18.

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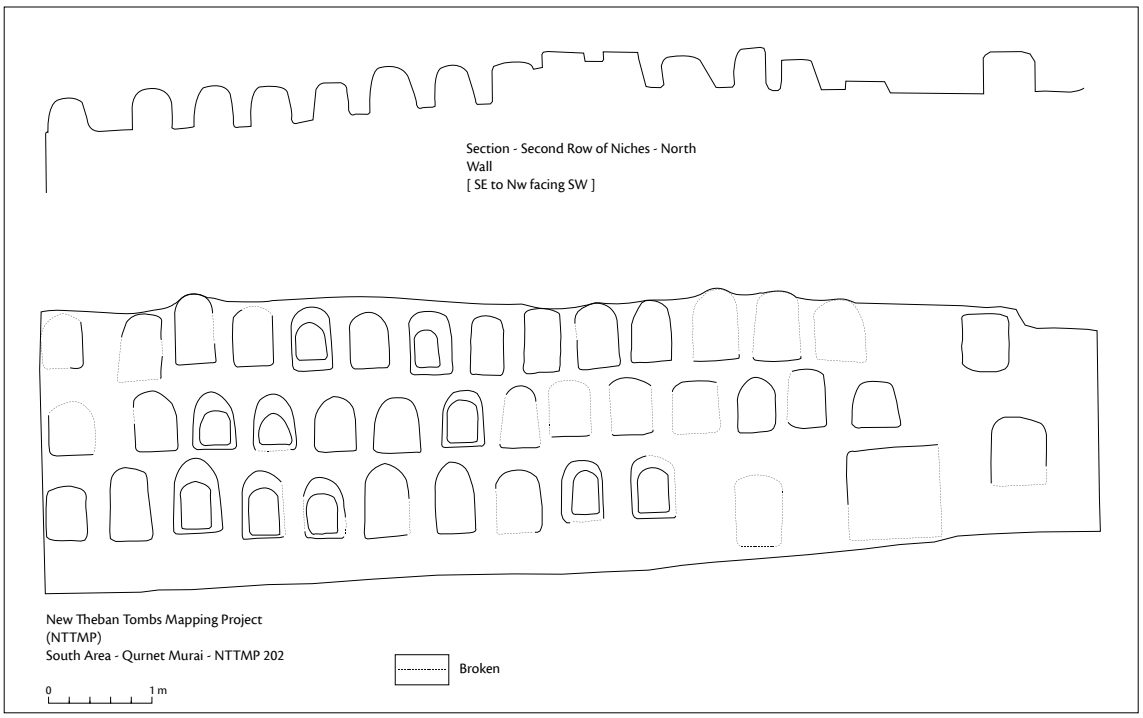


Fig. 3. *Loculi* of the norther wall and section of second row of *loculi*.

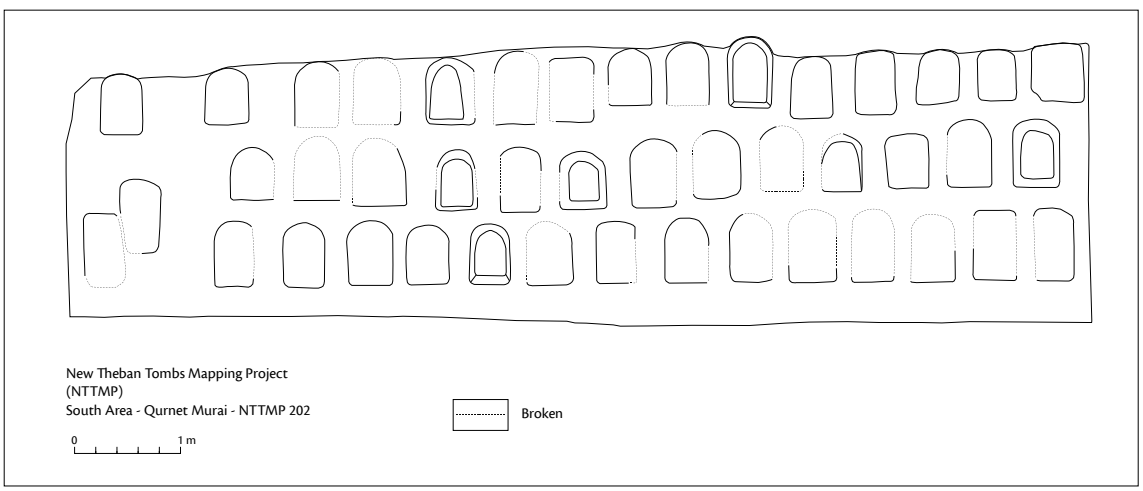


Fig. 4. Section of the southern wall.

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Rock-Cut *Loculi*: [FIGS. 5, 6]

In the newly discovered tomb, the *loculi* are different from traditional *loculi* such as those in Alexandria, Beni Hassan and the Faiyum in terms of size, shape and purpose. The inner parts of the *loculi* nevertheless show black soot as a remarkable indication of human activities, particularly in the Coptic period.

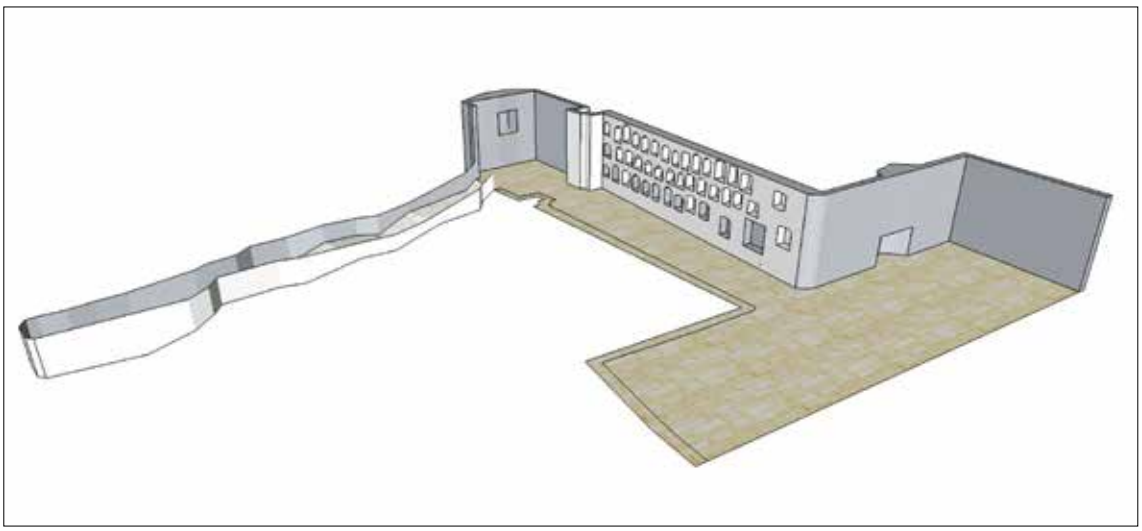


FIG. 5. 3D rendering of the *loculi* of the northern wall. Drawn by A. el-Tayeb.

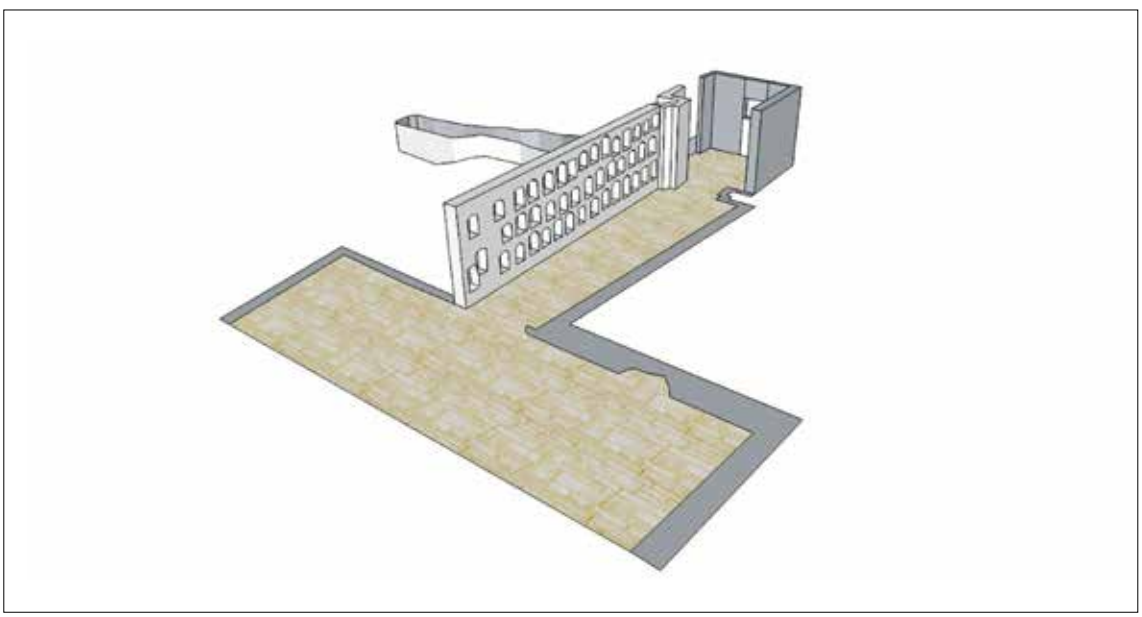


FIG. 6. 3D rendering of the *loculi* of the southern wall. Drawn by A. el-Tayeb.

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- **Rock-Cut *Loculi* in the Walls** (see, figs. 3, 4): the *loculi* were cut more or less in order in the inner half of the passage, while the *loculi* of the outer half were cut in disorder. The *loculi* also show irregularity of arrangement across the entire wall, with no vertical order among *loculi* of the upper and lower rows in the southern wall. Many of the *loculi* were entirely destroyed. Across both walls, there are many morphological differences between these *loculi* as follows:

1. Shape:

– ***Top***: the tops of the *loculi* can be either rounded or flat.
– ***Top and Base [Virtual] Lines***: there is no clear alignment of the bases or tops of the *loculi*, and no indication of any guidelines for sculptors to follow.
– ***Edges***: some of the *loculi* have sharp edges, but others have wide, deeply beveled edges (fig. 7). Indeed, the presence or absence of beveled edges is one of the most characteristic features of rock carving, which distinguishes sunk-reliefs and deep cut lines, and which also reflects the orientation of the craftsman's hand when using the chisel. *Loculi* with beveled edges may be distinguished from those with sharp edges as follows:

North Wall: two *loculi* in the upper row show beveled edges, along with three in the middle, and five in the lower one (see, fig. 3). Consequently, the exterior dimensions are different from the interior dimensions of the beveled *loculi* as follows: exterior dimensions: 70 cm high × 45 cm wide × 40 cm deep, and interior dimensions: 50 cm high × 35 cm wide × 40 cm deep).

South Wall: two *loculi* in the upper row show beveled edges, along with four in the middle row and one in the lowest row (see, fig. 4). The exterior dimensions are: 70 cm high × 50 cm wide × 45 cm deep, and interior dimensions are: 55 cm high × 40 cm wide × 40 cm deep (see, fig. 7).

– ***Squared Niche*** (1 m high × 0.9 m wide × 0.8 m deep): to the right of the entrance in the lower row of *loculi* there is a squared niche (pl. 3b).

2. Measurements:

2.1. **Loculi *of the Northern Wall***: between (70 cm high × 45 cm wide × 40 cm deep and 58 cm high × 45 cm wide × 45 cm deep). The height, width and depth are thus different from one *loculus* to another. An unfinished *loculus* (44 cm high × 34 cm wide × 10 cm deep) was carved above the large squared niche located at the bottom of this wall (pl. 3c).

2.2. **Loculi *of the Southern Wall***: between (70 cm high × 50 cm wide × 45 cm deep and 60 cm high × 40 cm wide × 40 cm deep).

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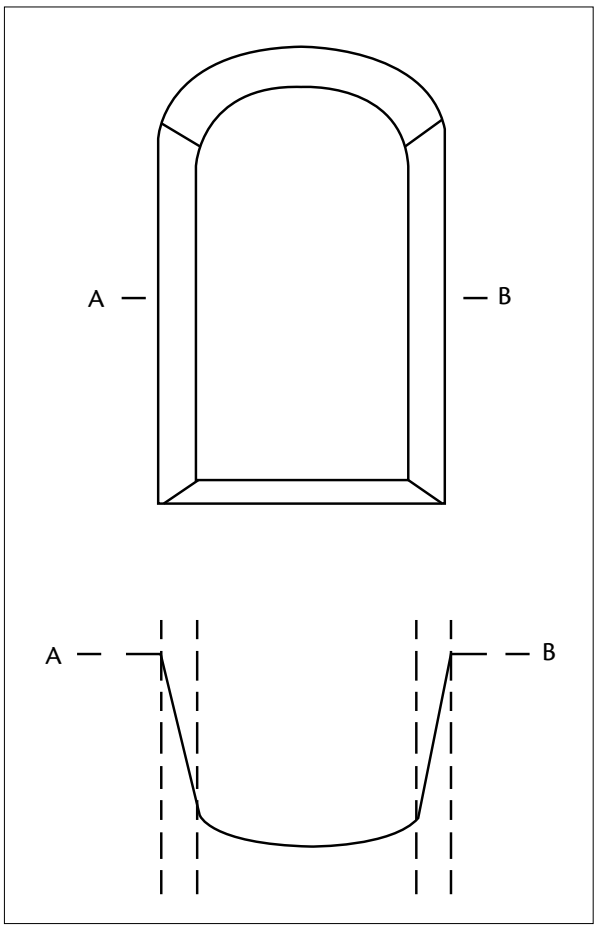


Fig. 7. Section (A-B) of a *loculus* showing the bevel edge deviation angles.

3. **Order:**

Although there is visible order in the arrangement of the *loculi* in the inner half of the northern wall, there is disorder among the *loculi* in the outer half of this wall, so the distinction among them is clear. The chisel marks and methods of cutting remain difficult to examine in detail because of the modern pinkish paint and the soot layer.

Date of the Tomb

The original plan of this tomb including a forecourt, elongated passage and inner chapel is classified according to F. Kampp as type IIb (fig. 8).[12] In fact, this type was commonly known at Thebes except for Qurnet Murai, it is the first known instance of this architectural type at Qurnet Murai, with the *loculi* and tunnel added later. As a result, the chart of F. Kampp may be changed (fig. 9).

12 *Ibid.*, p. 18 (II. 1.2.3.3).

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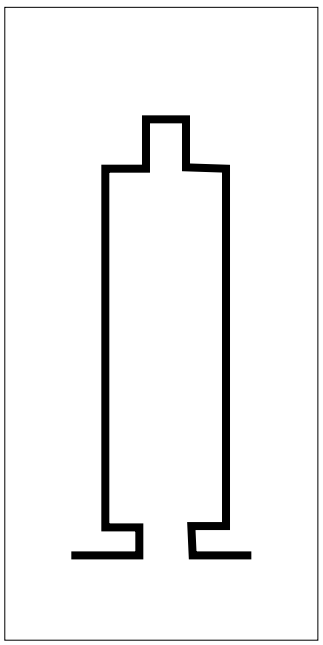


Fig. 8. Plan of type IIb of Kampp's classification. Kampp, F., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 18 (II. 1.2.3.3).

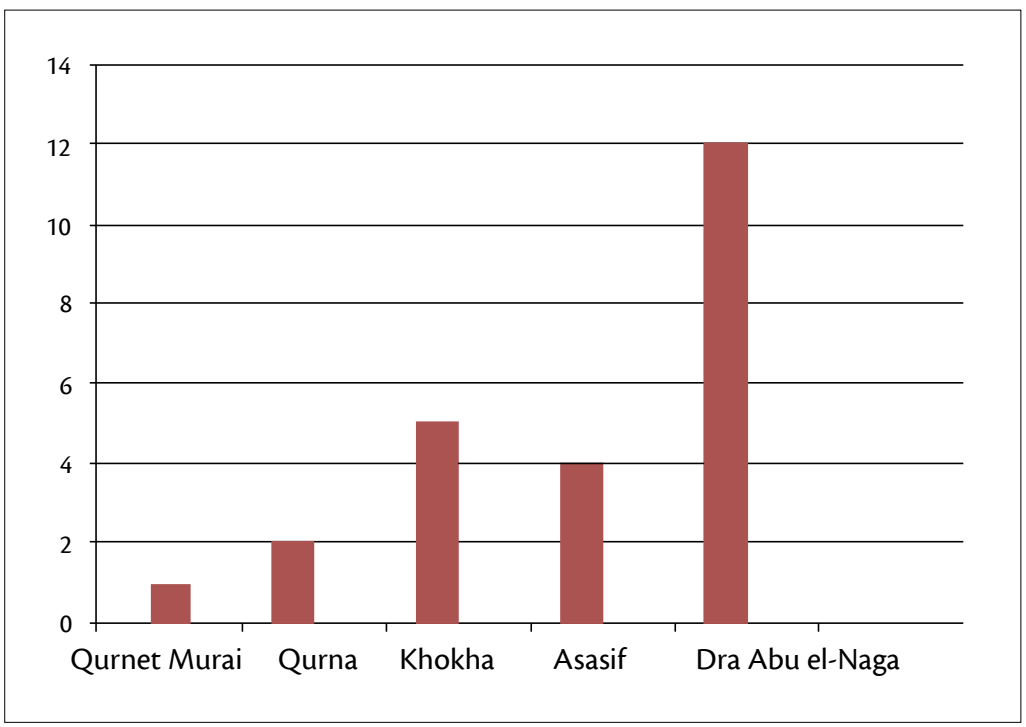


Fig. 9. A new chart of distribution of tombs of type IIb at Thebes after the new discovery. Modified after Kampp, F., *op cit.* vol. 1, p. 18 (fig. 13).

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The following is a list of tombs of similar design at Thebes:

- TT 145 (Neb-Amun), Draa Abu el-Naga (Temp. Hatshepsut / Thutmosis III).[13]
- TT 179 (Neb-Amun), Khokha (Temp. Hatshepsut).[14]
- TT 247 (Samut), Khokha (Temp. Thutmosis IV / Amenhotep III).[15]
- TT 258 (Men-kheper), Khokha (Temp. Thutmosis IV).[16]

Consequently, the original tomb (before addition of the *loculi* and tunnel) probably dates back to the 18th Dynasty, and most likely to the Thutmosi de period. It could thus be one of the earlier tombs of the 18th Dynasty at Qurnet Murai.

Origins and Development of the Catacomb Type

Catacombs are galleries of subterranean rooms and niches designed for the interment of humans or animals.[17] In Egypt, catacombs such as those in Alexandria and Faiyum were adopted from the Phoenicians, incorporating Greek and Egyptian influences.[18] The main features of catacombs are *loculi* (sing. *loculus*),[19] deep niches intended either to receive a body lying lengthwise,[20] as in a "hypogeum or mausoleum," or more generally a place of entombment where multiple bodies or cinerary urns were placed.[21] The entrance facades of the *loculi* were decorated with plaster and painting according to the Hellenistic tradition, but with Egyptian iconography, often combining the Egyptian Osirian myth with the Greek cycle of Persephone in the underworld.[22] Sometimes the *loculi* were closed with painted or carved stelae with traditional Greek funerary scenes, and sometimes with stone slabs decorated with painted doors or Shatby tombs.[23]

At Karnak, the Osirian catacomb uncovered by Henri Chevrier in 1950[24] is different in design and purpose. It belongs to the god Osiris; instead of being intended for burying individuals, as in Alexandria, its purpose was instead cultic (intended for use during the Osiris feasts and the festivals of Khoiak). As a result, the *loculi* in Karnak catacomb were smaller and shallower and were built of bricks, rather than carved into the rock.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 430, fig. 323; PM I/1, pp. 257–258.

14 Kampp, F., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, fig. 363; PM I/1, pp. 285–286.

15 Kampp, F., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 522–523, fig. 419; PM I/1, p. 333.

16 Kampp, F., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 536; PM I/1, p. 342.

17 Sullivan, E., *Architectural Features: General Temple Layout*, Los Angeles, 2008, p. 5 [Available from: Digital Karnak], <http://dlib.etc.ucla.edu/projects/Karnak/assets/media/resources/ArchitecturalFeatures/guide.pdf> accessed July 16th 2016.

18 Tomorad, M., "Ancient Egyptian Funerary Practices from the First Millennium BC to the Arab Conquest of Egypt (c. 1069 BC – 642 AD)", in A. Rifai (ed.), *The Heritage of Egypt*, vol. 2, no. 2, Issue 5 : *The History, Archaeology and Legacy of Egypt*, 2009, Cairo, pp. 12–28.

19 In ecclesiastical usage, compartment in an altar, in which relics are kept. See: http://www.dictionary.com/browse/loculus; See also: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loculus_%28architecture%29

20 Ikram, S., Dodson, A., *The Tomb in Ancient Egypt: Royal and Private Sepulchres from the Early Dynastic Period to the Romans*, London, 2008, p. 318.

21 Curl, S.J., *A Dictionary of Architecture and Landscape Architecture,* 2nd ed., Oxford, 2006, p. 880.

22 Ikram, S., Dodson, A., *op. cit.*, pp. 298–299.

23 McKenzie, J., *The Architecture of Alexandria and Egypt, c. 300 BC to AD 700*, New Haven, London, 2007, p. 71.

24 Coulon, L., Leclère, F., Marchand, S., "'Catacombes' osiriennes de Ptolémée IV à Karnak. Rapport préliminaire de la campagne de fouilles 1993", *CahKarn* 10, 1995, pp. 207–208.

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Function of the New Catacomb

The function of Qurnet Murai Catacomb leads to two possible hypothesizes:

Hypothesis 1: Animal's Catacomb

This assumption is based on a comparison with animal tombs at Thebes and Tuna el-Gebel (cases study), but it presents some difficulties:

- The animal tombs of Thebes, which are concentrated at Draa Abu el-Naga, contain an irregular elongated passage,[25] whereas the Qurnet Murai catacomb contains a regular gallery.
- At Tuna el-Gebel, the *loculi* are bigger than those in the Qurnet Murai catacomb, where the depth of each *loculus* is about 40 to 45 cm. The difference in size may be explained by the fact that the mummies of the ibis birds were placed into small sarcophagi.[26]
- There was no evidence or artifact scatter for animal burials, although we cleaned the forecourt and the gallery due to the activities of the house owner inside the tomb.

Obviously, concerning the second point, we can assume that some mummified animals could have been placed in the *loculi* of the new catacomb without being contained in sarcophagi.[27] However, it has to be kept in mind that ibis, falcons and snakes were uncovered in a main animal's tomb located to the north of the new discovery, in Draa Abu el-Naga.[28]

Hypothesis 2: Osirian Catacomb

This is based on the following reasons:

- Another corridor within the same gallery at Tuna el-Gebel contained around 400 faience ushabties and 125 bronze statuettes, some of which were gilded and some seated. These objects represent a variety of Osirian figures and were sculpted according to the traditions of the Theban school of art.[29]
- The Qurnet Murai catacomb probably dates back to the Ptolemaic period, which could make a relationship with the Deir el-Medina temple, particularly the Sokar-Osiris chapel.
- Although the Qurnet Murai catacomb is a rock-cut tomb, its *loculi* have the same order and dimensions as the brick-*loculi* found in the Osiris catacomb of Karnak.
- An Osirian catacomb of Oxyrhynchus, which dates back to Ptolemy VI and Ptolemy VIII, ended with an extension (tunnel) after the gallery of *loculi*[30] similar to the new catacomb.

25 Kessler, D., *Die heiligen Tiere und der König, part. I: Beiträge zu Organisation, Kult und Theologie der spätzeitlichen Tierfriedhöfe*, ÄAT 16, Wiesbaden, 1989, pp. 159–170, fig. 10.

26 Gabra, S., "Fouilles de l'université 'Fouad el Awal' à Touna el-Gebel (Hermopolis Ouest)", *ASAE* 39, 1939, p. 493; Boesneck, J. (ed.), *Tuna el-Gebel* I: *Die Tiergalerien*, HÄB 24, Hildesheim, 1987, p. 11.

27 Kessler, D., *op. cit.*, pp. 167–168.

28 *Ibid.*, pp. 159–170.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 496.

30 Al-Amer, H.I., "Les catacombes osiriennes d'Oxyrhynchos", in L. Coulon (ed.), *Le culte d'Osiris au Ier millénaire av. J.-C. Découvertes et travaux récents*, BiEtud 153, Cairo, 2010, p. 273, figs. 3–4. For a general view of these sites, see: Coulon, L., "Le culte osirien au Ier millénaire av. J.-C. Une mise en perspective(s)", *ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

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- The unfinished *loculus* (pl. 3c) refers to the continuing use of the catacomb, which was probably abandoned in later periods.
- The inner tunnel resembles the Osirian tombs of the Late Period.[31]

Therefore, the Qurnet Murai catacomb could be the first rock-cut catacomb in Thebes. Subsequently, although there are some mixed sites, Osirian and bird sepulchres (such as: Wadi Qubannet el-Qirud—where the Khoiak feast was celebrated[32]—and Oxyrhynchus[33]), we still have Osirian catacombs at Karnak (without bird sepulchres) that look like the new discovery at Qurnet Murai, which enforces this hypothesis that they actually represent an Osirian catacomb, where the main function of this kind of tomb consists in the rituals performed for Osiris during his Khoiak feast.[34]

CONTEXT OF QURNET MURAI DURING THE PTOLEMAIC PERIOD [FIG. 10]

Qurnet Murai was an important place in the New Kingdom due to its location, not only as a cemetery but also as a place for cultic activity, as indicated by the remains of a brick chapel on the eastern slope of the hill, probably dating back to the 18th Dynasty.[35] The western side of the hill of Qurnet Murai was closely associated with Deir el-Medina, while the bottom of the eastern side of the hill was associated with the cemeteries of Medinet Habu.[36] The surviving cemetery of the Ptolemaic Period to the north and north-west of Medinet Habu consists of the remains of a few brick tombs around the temple of Amenhotep, son of Hapu. These tombs consisted of four main types: large vaulted structures (3 tombs), two types of smaller individual brick graves (40-50 tombs) and sepulchres (burials directly in the ground, around 30 examples). In addition, some bodies were placed in pottery and some in earth coffins.[37] There was a community of Choachytes who lived in Medinet Habu (Djēmē), and it could be the case that they reused the tombs of Deir el-Medina. Also, the existence of brick tombs to the north of Medinet Habu suggests that there was a southern part to the necropolis.[38] Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the Ptolemaic and Roman bodies; interments classified as Roman could well have been made in catacombs begun in the previous era, which continued to be filled.[39]

31 Seyfried, K., "Bemerkungen zur Erweiterung der unterirdischen Anlagen einiger Gräber des Neuen Reiches in Theben: Versuch einer Deutung", *ASAE* 71, 1987, p. 232.

32 Four main pieces were found as cornmummie and Osiris brick, see: Saragoza, F., "L'acéphale et le rituel osirien de Khoiak. À propos de quatre pièces découvertes au Ouadi Koubbanet el-Qouroud", *EAO* 55, 2009, pp. 51–65, figs. 2–6.

33 Centrone, M.C., "Choosing the Burial Place for Cornmummies: A Random Selection?", Current Research in Egyptology 2004, Oxford, 2006, pp. 26–29; Coulon, L., *op. cit.*, p. 12.

34 Chassinat, É., *Le mystère d'Osiris au mois de Khoiak*, 2 fasc., PIFAO, Cairo, 1966–1968; Cauville, S., "Les mystères d'Osiris à Dendera. Interprétation des chapelles osiriennes", *BSFE* 112, 1988, pp. 23–36.

35 PM I/1, p. 685. Gauthier, H., "Rapport sommaire sur les fouilles de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale dans les nécropoles thébaines en 1917 et 1918", *ASAE* 19, 1920, p. 5.

36 Strudwick, N., "Some Aspects of the Archaeology of the Theban Necropolis in the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods", in N. Strudwick, J. Taylor (eds.), *The Theban Necropolis: Past, Present and Future*, London, 2003, p. 178 (2.2.5).

37 *Ibid.*, p. 178 (2.2.6).

38 *Ibid.*, p. 181 (3.1).

39 *Loc cit.*

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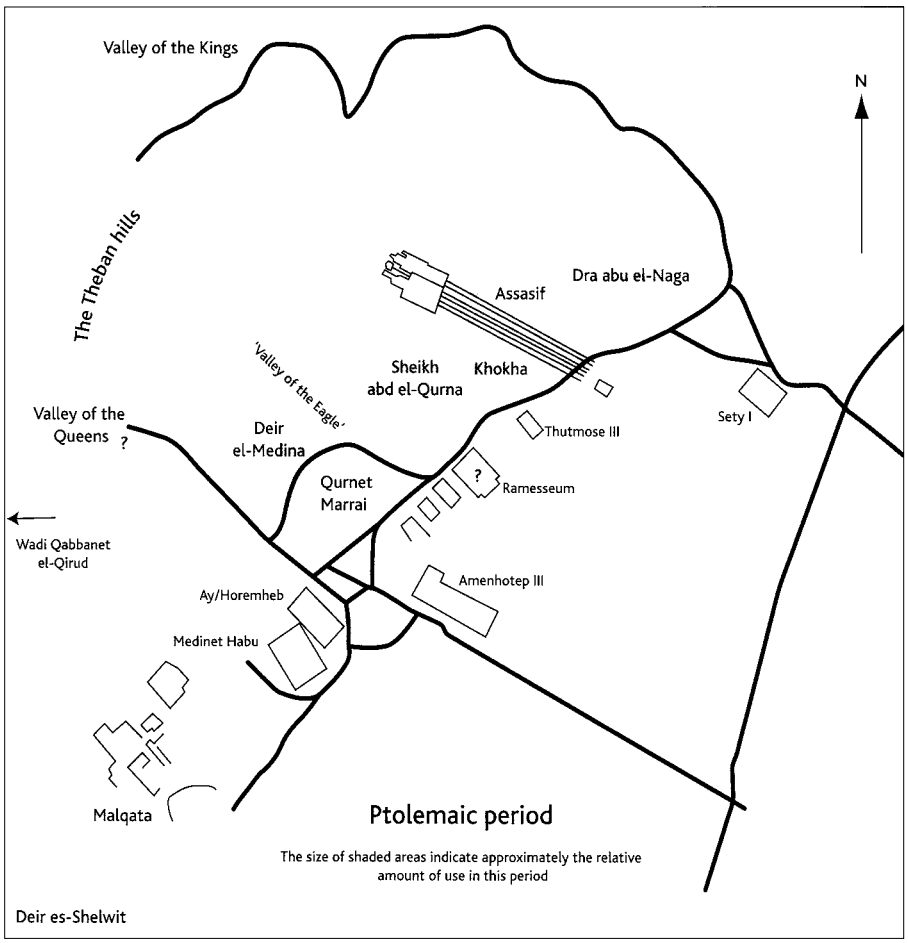


Fig. 10. Theban necropolis during the Ptolemaic Period. Strudwick, N., Taylor, J. (eds.), *The Theban Necropolis*, p. 183 (fig. 8).

According to an ostracon from TT 373 dated to 226 BC and to O. Louvre ODL 314, there is attestation of the "road of Djēmē" where tomb plots were purchased for 2.5 kite, making it possible that there was more formal Choachyte activity in this area at that time, due also to the association between the cemetery and Medinet Habu where the Choachytes lived.[40] Before this new discovery, the only monuments dating back to the Ptolemaic Period were the two jambs of TT 380[41] (fig. 11).[42] Additionally, an important contribution to this area was made by Ptolemy IV, who carried out the first Ptolemaic addition to the Hathor temple at Deir el-Medina.[43] There are three sanctuaries in this temple: the Hathor sanctuary in the middle, the sanctuary of Amun-Re-Osiris on the right and the one on the left dedicated to Amun-Sokar-Osiris.[44] This deity also received cult service at Medinet Habu. Finally, we have the Osirian catacomb at Karnak, where the Khoiak feast was also celebrated.[45]

40 *Loc cit*.
41 *Ibid.* p. 178.
42 After Kampp, F., *op. cit.* vol. 2, fig. I.
43 Wilkinson, R.H., *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt*, London, 2000, p. 190.
44 *Loc cit.*
45 Coulon, L., Leclère, F., Marchand, S., *op. cit.*, p. 205 ff.

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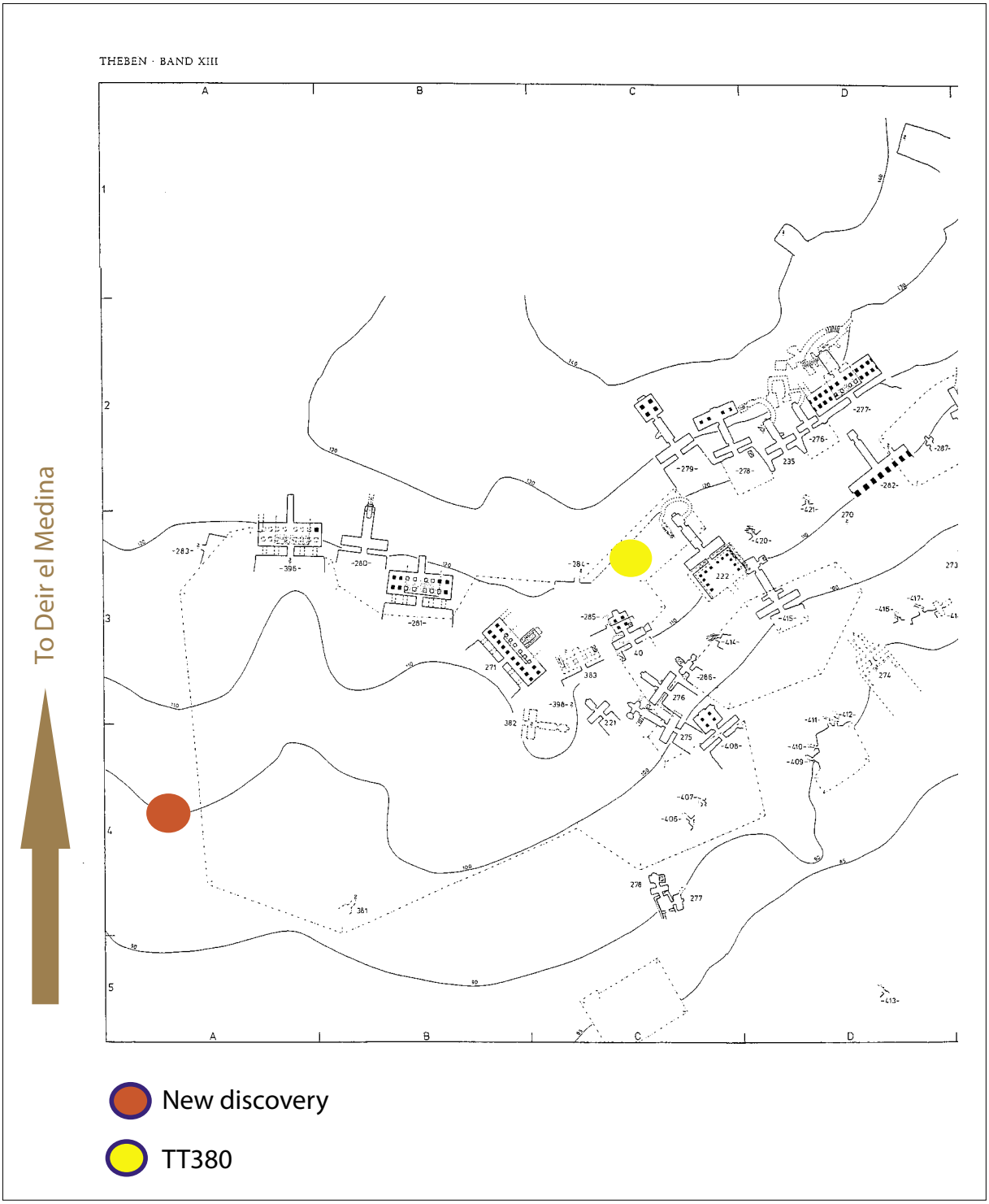


Fig. 11. Context of Qurnet Murai tombs during the Ptolemaic Period.

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COMMENTS

The first indication of a catacomb at Qurnet Murai became apparent when Bernard Bruyère uncovered tomb 1447, dated to the Roman Period, where he found more than 60 skulls and a great number of bones. He called it a "véritable catacombe" consisting of five rooms for burying the dead, similar to those of the Shatby catacombs in Alexandria.[46]

The newly discovered tomb most likely dates back to the Ptolemaic Period in light of the following:

- The dedication of catacombs was widely known and spread throughout Egypt during the Graeco-Roman Period.
- The presence of Ptolemaic funerary context around Qurnet Murai.
- The close similarity between the new catacomb and the one at Karnak which dates back to the reign of Ptolemy IV.
- Similarity of *loculi* in shape and design to the Karnak catacombs, despite being constructed in different materials.

The significance of the Osiris cult gave such catacombs a function similar to that of contra-temples, which could possess most or all of the essential elements of other shrines, including a monumental facade, courtyard, pillared hall, and a sanctuary, and were constructed in previously unoccupied locations, as with the contra-temple of Ptah at Karnak.[47] It is probable that there was a name for this type of tomb according to the rite of Osiris, which took place during the Khoiak feast, considering that the whole site of the Osirian catacombs at Karnak was called *st ꜥ3t* "the great place."[48] Consequently, the Qurnet Murai catacomb may have been given the same or another name derived from the term *ḏsr* "sacred" which was common in the Theban necropolis from the New Kingdom to the Graeco-Roman times.[49]

46 Riggs, C., "The Egyptian Funerary Tradition at Thebes in the Roman Period", in N. Strudwick, J. Taylor (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 190–191. After Archives de Bernard Bruyère (1879–1971).

47 Brand, P.J., "Veils, Votives and Marginalia: The Use of Sacred Space at Karnak and Luxor", in P.F. Dorman, B.M. Bryan (eds.), *Sacred Space and Sacred Function in Ancient Thebes: Occasional Proceedings of the Theban Workshop*, SAOC 61, Chicago, 2007, pp. 61, 65.

48 Coulon, L., Leclère, F., Marchand, S., *op. cit.*, p. 222.

49 McClain, J.B., "The Terminology of Sacred Space Ptolemaic Inscriptions from Thebes", in P.F. Dorman, B.M. Bryan (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 86–87.

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CONCLUSION

We cleaned the whole forecourt and the gallery of the catacomb, but it was clear that everything had been robbed and the walls had been deteriorated. There was evidence of aggressive human activity inside and outside the tomb, so no archaeological remains were found. However, according to the main hypothesizes and comments, the logical theory seems to be that of an Osirian catacomb. The similarity (order, shape and size) between the Karnak catacomb of Osiris and the new discovery, in addition to the difference between the Draa Abu el-Naga (irregularity and disorder) animal tomb, leads us to assume strongly that this new discovery could be an Osirian catacomb. The site needs a more detailed survey and excavation. The importance of this discovery is not only that it is the first case of a catacomb at Qurnet Murai, but also that it could lead us to find the main route of Khoiak feast in Thebes, which was illustrated on the walls of Habu temples and TT 50 Neferhotep. Additionally, the original tomb type (IIb) dates back to the 18th Dynasty, which is the first known occurrence of this type at Qurnet Murai.

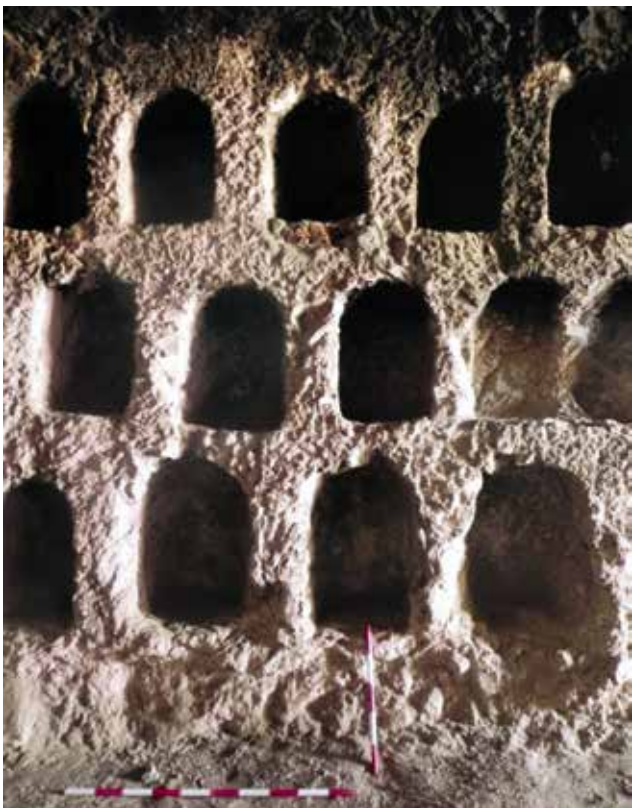
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Pl. 1a. Elongated hall (gallery of *loculi*): northern wall.



Pl. 1b. Elongated hall (gallery of *loculi*): southern wall.

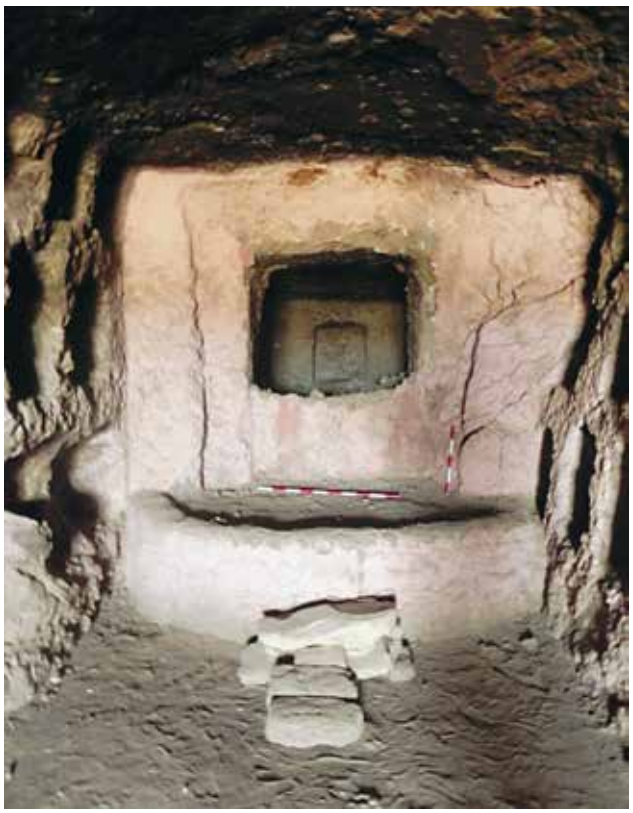


Pl. 1c. *Loculi* of the northern wall.



Pl. 1d. *Loculi* of the southern wall.

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Pl. 2a. Modern mud block wall.



Pl. 2b. Existing situation of the antechamber filled with debris.



Pl. 2c. Niche of the inner squared chamber.



Pl. 2d. Tunnel filled with debris.

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Pl. 3a. Traces of plaster on the ceiling.



Pl. 3b. Squared niche.



Pl. 3c. Unfinished *loculus*.

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