



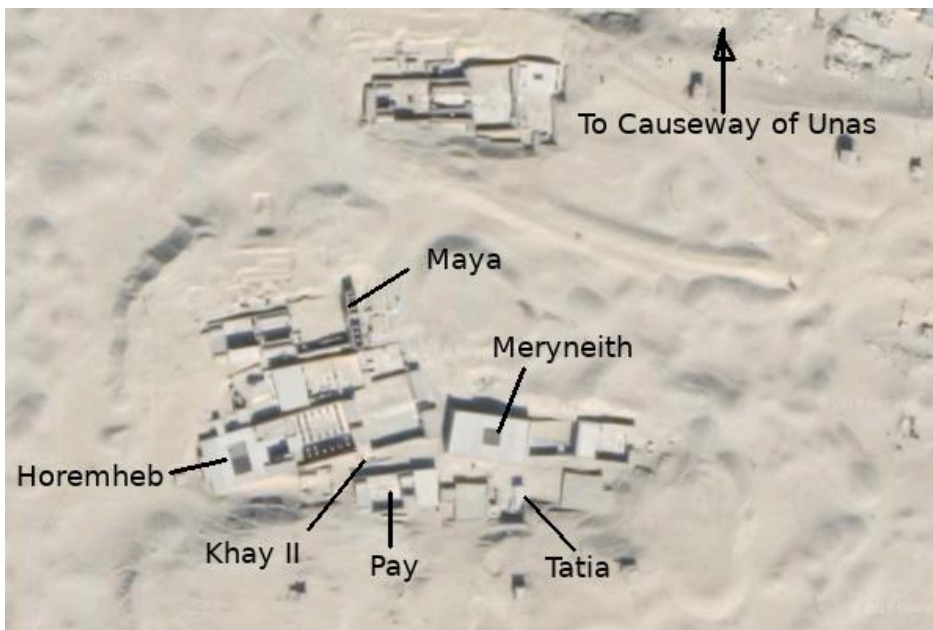
# ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP - REVIEW

## June 2018 Meeting by Margaret Patterson

### The Tomb of Tatia at Saqqara - Vincent Oeter

At the beginning of June Vincent Oeters returned to talk to us about some of his own work at Saqqara on a Ramesside era tomb chapel. This work is part of a long term on-going project (<http://www.saqqara.nl/>) which has been excavating south of the Causeway of Unas since 1975. Initially the project was a collaboration between the Museum at Leiden and the Egypt Exploration Society, then after 1998 the EES were no longer involved and the University of Leiden replaced them. Since 2015 the Turin Museum have also been part of the project.

Before telling us about the tomb chapel of Tatia, Oeters told us about the overall project. The genesis of the project was in the 1950s when the Museum began to investigate three statues which had been in the collection since 1828. They arrived without provenance, but were believed to be from Saqqara. The statues depict two people - Maya, the Overseer of the Treasury and Overseer of Works during the reign of Tutankhamun, and Merit, his wife who was a Chantress of Amun. One statue is of both of them, one is of him alone and one of her alone. On the map of Saqqara drawn by Lepsius in 1843 there is a tomb of Maya marked, and so the Museum wanted to excavate in that area - it took several years to get funding and the necessary permissions but they finally started work in 1975. Tombs have been discovered in their concession since 1975, although the tomb of Maya wasn't discovered until 1986. The first to be found was actually even more well known as it was the tomb that Horemheb was building for himself before he became Pharaoh.



Annotated satellite image of the tombs of Horemheb, Meryneith, Maya, Pay, Khay II and Tatia made by me using an image from Google maps and information from Oeters's slides.

The tomb chapel of Tatia was found in 2009, which is the year that Oeters started work with the project. The team were excavating between the tombs of Horemheb, Meryneith and Pay. They first found a tomb belonging to a man named Khay (the second of that name in the area, so referred to as Khay II). Then as they were looking for a shaft from the substructure of another tomb (to avoid having to constantly go in and out of the temple part of the superstructure) they came across a slab which had no apparent text. When they uncovered the bottom of it there was an inscription - and Oeters was given this to study for his Master's thesis. It is the stela of a man called Tatia. It wasn't intact when discovered, but when they looked in their stores there were some previously excavated fragments that filled some of the gaps.

There are several scenes on this stela - there is a scene of Tatia in front of Osiris, there is a scene of Tatia about to slaughter an oryx (a sort of antelope associated with Seth) as a sacrifice in front of Re-Horakhty and a scene of Tatia and his wife receiving offerings with family members sitting in front of them. The scene of Tatia slaughtering an oryx is particularly interesting as it is a unique representation of a private individual performing this ritual, as far as Oeters can tell - normally this sort of scene has the Pharaoh performing this ritual. This is also the only scene in all the depictions of Tatia where he is wearing a wig, rather than being shown with a clean shaven bald head. This must have some significance, but Oeters is still trying to find out what that might be.

Tatia's titles were Priest of the Front of Ptah, With Access to the Gold House, Chief of the Goldsmiths. The first of these titles means that he was a priest who walked at the front of a procession, in front of the barque bearing the (statue of) the god Ptah. Three of the family members depicted also have names and titles - two of his sons were stablemasters and another son was also a Priest of the Front of Ptah and Goldsmith.

As they continued to excavate the area where the stela was found they uncovered a door jamb and eventually found all of a very small tomb chapel. Oeters was able to persuade the field directors to let him include the whole chapel in his Master's research. The door jambs of the chapel show a bald individual in a praising gesture, doubtless the tomb owner. On the south wall there is a relief of a harpist, a flute player and 3 seated figures (who are singers). There is a part of text still visible above the reliefs which is the words of a song - including the phrase "may Tatia live 110 years". The west wall of the chapel has a large gap where the stela would fit. Adjacent to the stela a relief was depicted on both sides of Tatia as a sem-priest before an offering table. This wall also shows signs of reuse of the tomb-chapel after Tatia's time - remains of mudbrick were found on top of what remains of the original chapel wall. The north wall has a scene of a funeral - the top of it is missing and the part that remains is very damaged. It depicts the mummy in front of the tomb being held by a priest whilst a sem-priest performs the opening of the mouth ritual.

The burial shaft was found nearby, but had been robbed in antiquity. Oeters told us that the robbers had built a mudbrick wall in and around the top of the shaft to stop the sand falling in whilst they were robbing the tomb. Under this wall were some intact bowls and dishes which had been preserved by the wall. The shaft itself is at a different angle to the tomb chapel - so it would seem to be an older one that Tatia reused. The shaft is 5.25m deep, with two chambers at the bottom, one to the north with a mummy niche and one to the south of the shaft. There were several breakthroughs to other tombs. The tomb was probably not properly finished before Tatia was buried in it - the floor is not the same level throughout, which it would've been if the tomb builders had finished their work. There were two fragments of papyrus found while clearing the shaft belonging to a man namer Suner, thus it seems likely that they just blew in from the surrounding area rather than having been placed in there with Tatia.

Tatia's tomb chapel is not the only small chapel in the area. There seems to have been a second wave of use of the site with several small 19th Dynasty chapels amongst and to the south of the larger 18th Dynasty ones. There are no hieroglyphs on the other small chapels, so they remain anonymous.

As part of his investigation of Tatia's chapel and stela Oeters tried to find parallels with other stelae. This isn't as straightforward to do as one might think - there isn't a convenient list or database, so he had to spend quite a bit of time searching to make sure he didn't miss any out. Eventually he looked at more than 900 stelae of the New Kingdom to compare to Tatia's stela. All of those that have direct parallels to the scenes seem to come from Saqqara and date to the same period.

Oeters also tried to find other references to Tatia, which lead him to another New Kingdom tomb at the Teti cemetery at Saqqara. This tomb belongs to a man called Mose, Scribe of the Treasury of Ptah. His tomb is famous for a text in it that details a legal dispute over the land of Mose's mother, which dates him and his family to the second half of the reign of Ramesses II. In this tomb there is also a scene of three couples receiving offerings - Mose and his wife, Mose's parents and a man called Tatia and his wife. Not only is Tatia a rare name, but also this Tatia has the same titles as the Tatia whose chapel Oeters was investigating. So it's very likely to be the same man. At the point at which he wrote up his Master's thesis Oeters believed the most plausible explanation was that Mose and Tatia were brothers. Between the two tombs he was able to draw up a conjectured family tree of three generations.

The titles held by Tatia are also rare. Oeters has only found five instances of Priest of the Front of Ptah, and they are all from tombs in that part of Saqqara. This indicates that the burials are clustered by profession rather than by family - which fits with Mose's tomb being elsewhere in Saqqara. As well as Tatia and his son, Khay II (the owner of the nearby tomb discovered just before Tatia's tomb) was one of these priests. Another was a man called Ny and the last was named Khaempet (and his stela is in the Louvre).

Since the Revolution the team have been excavating to the west of Tatia's tomb - in a burial shaft belonging to another tomb nearby more pieces of the wall of Tatia's tomb chapel were discovered. Oeters discovered these were part of the south wall, containing the start of the text of the song. There is still a chance of more pieces being discovered as there is an area to the south of Tatia's tomb (and north of Meryneith's tomb) which hasn't yet been excavated.

The excavation to the west of Tatia's tomb has also discovered a falcon statue. This was pretty exciting as it is the first animal statue the team has discovered since work on the site started in 1975! It's made of pretty poor quality limestone, and is also quite damaged, but it's still possible to make out a figure kneeling in front of the falcon. Oeters believes this statue was originally placed in Tatia's chapel, he has no concrete proof but he argues that the indirect evidence is convincing. It was found just behind Tatia's tomb chapel, and dates to the same era. Furthermore, there is a side annex to the south of the chapel proper which might be where the statue sat. There is a lot of falcon imagery on Tatia's stela, which is unique among the comparable stelae he's examined. And the limestone the falcon is made out of is the same sort of poor quality stone that the whole of Tatia's chapel is made from. He talked a little more about the limestone in the Q&A session at the end of the talk - in the 18th Dynasty the large tombs were built of mudbrick faced with good quality limestone, and between them they used up all the locally available good stone. By the time the 19th Dynasty tombs were built they had to make do with lower quality stone sourced from a little further away.

The last part of Oeters talk was about his investigation into the name Tatia, as it's a very unusual name for an Egyptian. He also used this part of the talk to illustrate how an archaeologist's theories can change significantly as more evidence comes to light. There is only one other place where there are references to Egyptians named Tatia - tomb TT106 in Luxor. This is the tomb of the Vizier Paser, who was vizier to Seti I and Ramesses II. There are two individuals depicted in this tomb called Tatia - 5 references to a Stablemaster Tatia who was brother of Paser, and 1 reference to a Tatia with no titles who was the grandfather of Paser. The name is spelt differently even within this one tomb, which leads Oeters to speculate that it could be a foreign name which has no standard spelling. The younger Tatia, the stablemaster, was particularly interesting to Oeters and he looked into the possibility that this was "his" Tatia from Saqqara. The dates of the two tombs make it possible that both these references are to a single individual who changes job and moves from Luxor to Saqqara. It's also notable that two of the children of Tatia named in the Saqqara tomb are stablemasters, and they are younger than the child who is a Priest of the Front of Ptah and Goldsmith like his father. So there might be a career path in this particular family - that the next step after stablemaster was to become this particular sort of priest, and to become a goldsmith. The stablemaster Tatia was named after his grandfather Tatia. There are also other names that overlap between the family members named in TT106 and on the reliefs in Tatia's tomb chapel and that of Mose.

This evidence completely contradicts Oeters's previous theory about Tatia's family relationships. If Tatia is Paser's brother, as seems very plausible, then he cannot also be Mose's brother as Paser and Mose have different parents. But it is still true that Tatia is portrayed in Mose's tomb in a context where only a member of Mose's immediate family would be depicted. Oeters now thinks that it is most likely that Mose is Tatia's brother-in-law, and is married to Tatia's sister. So this demonstrates that no matter how plausible your theory is, it can still be overturned by a new piece of evidence!

This was a fascinating talk which demonstrated how archaeologists go about investigating the artefacts they find, and the sort of range of information they can glean including information about wider Egyptian culture and information about the family relationships and career path of a specific individual.

For more information see this paper that Vincent Oeters has published on the subject:

Vincent Oeters - "The Tomb of Tatia, Wab-Priest of the Front of Ptah and Chief of the Goldsmiths" in Verschoor V., Stuart A.J., Demarée C. (Eds.) *Imaging and Imagining the Memphite Necropolis: Liber amicorum René van Walsem*. Egyptologische Uitgaven no. 30 Leuven and Leiden: Peeters and NINO, 57-80.