



# ESSEX EGYPTOLOGY GROUP - REVIEW

## **July 2019 Meeting**

by Margaret Patterson

### **"The Cemeteries of Deir el-Bahri and Asasif in the Early Middle Kingdom: Recent Work by the University of Alacá Expedition to Thebes"**

**Antonio J. Morales**

At the beginning of July Antonio J. Morales visited to talk to us about the work of the Middle Kingdom Theban Project ( <http://thebanproject.com/en/home-2/> ) which he is the leader of. The project began in 2014 when he was working for Freie University in Berlin, and when he moved to the University of Alacá (outside Madrid) in 2017 the project continued under their sponsorship. Three-fifths of the €50,000/year needed to fund the project comes from the Spanish government, and the project must fundraise for the rest of it. To help with fundraising the project has several social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube) to keep the project visible. Morales told us that he began with this information because he believes it important to be transparent about how the project is funded. He also believes it is important to publish their discoveries as soon as possible. As a result they publish preliminary results in 2 journals each year - one in English and one Spanish. They also make sure any finds are made public so that experts from outside the team can see them and work on them. Morales' team is a multidisciplinary one that consists of around 40 experts across a variety of specialities - 50% are Spanish, the rest are from all over the world. There are also about 200 local Egyptian workers, so it's a huge number of people.

The project started in 2014 when he visited Luxor in August to check out 12 tombs to see what work would be possible. The tombs the project is interested in are the Middle Kingdom tombs at Deir el-Bahri which date to many centuries before Hatshepsut built her famous temple at the site. The early excavations were done by several people including Herbert Winlock and Howard Carter. Herbert Winlock began work on the site in the 1920s as the head of an expedition from the Met Museum in New York. He cleared the area to reveal the huge tomb complexes, but he was mainly interested in Hatshepsut's temple rather than the tombs in the northern hills. His teams worked at the site from the 1920s to the 1940s. Morales said that as part of planning his own team's work at the site he has read Winlock's excavation notes - which are something of an exercise in frustration as well as being useful. Winlock was a very good writer, but he was prone to writing detailed descriptions of the visitors to the site (and what they had for lunch) and then skimping on the actual excavation details. One of the tombs that Winlock discovered contained the bodies of 60 warriors (this is tomb MMA507), but Morales doesn't (yet) have permission to re-excavate it. Despite having been known (and discussed) for decades there's still a lot to learn about this tomb - when Winlock

originally found it he thought it was a Coptic burial, but subsequently he changed his mind and decided it was from the time of Montuhotep II (and thus the re-unification of Egypt at the start of the Middle Kingdom). More recently most scholars agree that the bodies date to the early 12th Dynasty (a few decades later).



Deir el-Bahri, photo by John Patterson

Morales showed us a photo of the site and told us to mentally subtract Hatshepsut's temple. The focal point for Middle Kingdom Egyptians was the mortuary temple of Montuhotep II which is now completely in ruins. In the photo above (taken by John Patterson in 2014) Montuhotep II's temple is to the left of Hatshepsut's temple and isn't really visible. The northern cliffs are to the right of the picture, and the officials' tombs that Morales is excavating are both in those cliffs and in cliffs to the south of the site. They have not been re-examined since Herbert Winlock left the site in the 1940s.

Having given us context for the project and the site Morales next moved on to giving us a high level overview of the tombs that his team are excavating and what sorts of questions the project is interested in asking. The Middle Kingdom is the "classical period" from the point of view of later Egyptians but we know surprisingly little about how this period began. The 50-60 years from the start of Montuhotep II's reign to the beginning of the 12th Dynasty is when it happened, but we don't know how. And it's this that drives Morales's interest in the tombs of Montuhotep II and his high officials. He wanted to explore the question from as many perspectives as possible, so he didn't want his team to concentrate on one tomb at a time - the information he would be able to get with that approach wouldn't answer the broader questions he's interested in. So first he asked for a commission to excavate in the northern cliffs (which he refers to as Sector A) - this includes the tombs of Henenu and Ipi that he discussed in detail later in the talk. He then realised that other nearby areas to the south of Montuhotep II's temple had tombs from the same period as the northern ones but with a different architecture. This area (Sector C) includes the tombs of Dagi and Djari which are also discussed later in the talk. They also provide an illustration of the sorts of information that Morales's broad approach can provide that a focus on a single tomb would not. Dagi had a lot of titles including Vizier and his tomb is very close to Montuhotep II's tomb; Djari is of much lower rank and is buried further away. So the layout of tombs in the cemetery reflects the hierarchy of the society they lived in - a demonstration of how stratified the society was. The last section of Morales's area of excavations he calls Sector B and it lies on the same side as Sector A but closer to the river - and the tombs here are a bit later in time.

The cemetery at Deir el-Bahri was a new foundation by Montuhotep II. When he came to power his family only had control of the area around Thebes, and his predecessors had been buried somewhere else. When he reunified the country Montuhotep II decided to build his tomb and mortuary temple somewhere completely new to symbolise the new era. His successors are also built elsewhere. To the south of Montuhotep II's temple there's the remains of another temple that was never completed, and in fact was barely started. This was once thought to be for Montuhotep II's immediate successors at the end of the 11th Dynasty but Dorothea Arnold argues that it is instead for Amenemhat I who was the first king of the 12th Dynasty. The tomb of Meket-Re, a high official who outlived Montuhotep II and died early in Amenemhat I's reign, is located near this abortive tomb construction.

One of the questions Morales is asking about the site is to do with how chronology and social stratification affect the layout of the cemetery as mentioned in the last couple of paragraphs. This is completely new to his investigation of the site - Herbert Winlock wasn't much interested in that sort of question, he was more interested in pretty things for museums! One of the features that Morales has seen so far is that the tombs of the officials are all east of an imaginary line extending north/south from the enclosure wall round the mortuary complex of Montuhotep II. In effect they are all outside the wall separating king from subject, even where the wall has not actually been built.

In Sector A in the northern hills there are three tombs of interest to Morales's project. These are TT313 (where a man named Henenu is buried), TT314 (Harhotep) and TT315 (Ipi). He is only excavating TT313 and TT315, however. The Polish mission who are working at Hatshepsut's temple worked on TT314 in the 1970s and wanted to keep it for their team to excavate. Morales said they were happy to co-operate in sharing this with the Polish mission and divided up TT314 so that both sides had something to work on. It had been originally excavated by Maspero, and the tomb contents that he found are now in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. So the Polish mission are continuing the re-excavation of the tomb itself and Morales's team are re-studying and publishing the items in the museum.

Each of the tombs in Sector A has a similar architecture and they are all in a row at the same geological level. They are built in a region of good white limestone, and the higher quality ones had a limestone facade as well. The lower quality ones have painted mudbrick facades. The general effect of the gleaming white tombs must have looked very spectacular. Each tomb also has a huge courtyard cut into the cliff in front of it. The tomb entrances themselves are high up in the cliffs and it's quite a scramble to get to them. The chapels where offerings were made for the deceased are nearer the bottom of the courtyard, thus easier for the priests to get to to perform the appropriate rituals.

Sector B has several tombs - three of which have numbers: TT316, MMA518 and MM519. There are also several more unidentified tombs which were robbed in antiquity but not re-excavated by Winlock. This includes a tomb called E1 which they discovered filled to the roof with debris. The only tombs in Sector C that Morales discussed are the two mentioned above: TT366 (Djari) and TT103 (Dagi).

Before talking about his team's excavations of each tomb in more detail Morales talked again about the chronology of the beginning of the Middle Kingdom. The First Intermediate Period had been a period of chaos, conflict and crisis lasting around 150 years. Montuhotep II reunified the country, after his predecessors had tried and failed.

From his base in Thebes he first went to the south and conquered the three regions there - which he then combined with his own region into a single unit. And then he went to the north and conquered it. It's often said that Montuhotep II's conquest of the region of Thinis to the immediate north of Thebes was just to secure his own control over Thebes but Morales says that it's clear that Montuhotep II already had the idea of reconstructing the previous Egyptian state in mind. As soon as he re-unified the country he began moving high officials from Hierakonpolis in the north to work on Theban monuments, including filling posts such as Head of Artisans. He also sent high officials from the south to the north - for instance a Theban man called Intef was sent to be Head of Priests in the north. So this is a sign that Montuhotep regards the country as a cohesive whole with a unified economy etc - not just some piecemeal collection of recently conquered regions. He's choosing the best man for any given job, not thinking of them as northerners vs. southerners or "his people" vs. the "conquered people".

The majority of Morales's talk after our break for coffee was a more detailed discussion of what he and his team have found in each tomb. He began with the tomb of Ipi (TT315) who was Vizier at the beginning of Dynasty 12 (during the reign of Amenemhat I) - amongst many other prestigious titles. This tomb has a very large courtyard with some tunnels and rooms to the side which include subsidiary tombs (there is a plan of this tomb on the Middle Kingdom Theban Project website: <http://thebanproject.com/en/tomb-of-ipi-tt-315/> ). The public areas of Ipi's tomb are the first you come to as you enter the tomb, and further in are the private areas. There is a long corridor that ends in the cultic chamber, then beneath this is a corridor down to the private burial chamber. The burial chamber itself has a false floor and the sarcophagus is under the floor - an attempt to make any robber think the tomb had already been cleared out before he got there.

While re-excavating the outer courtyard they found that the western wall had been built over the tomb next door - indicating that Ipi's tomb was newer than the other one. They also found a lot of small finds such as seal impressions and 500 shabtis. Sadly there's no archaeological context for any of that material as it was stuff that Herbert Winlock had previously found and discarded (as not being pretty or interesting enough for his museum).

One of the side chambers on the courtyard is an embalming cachette - it had been discovered by Winlock, and he had photographed it. But instead of clearing it he'd taken and opened a few jars and left everything else in place. Morales had believed that the chamber had been emptied, so it was a (very good) surprise to find most of the contents still in place - but this meant they'd had no plan in place for how they were going to clear the chamber themselves. They had to work fast before rumours started about exciting finds on the site as these would inevitably mutate into rumours about gold. So they had to improvise a chain of specialists (including Salima Ikram) to process the material. Morales told us a story of walking past Salim Ikram while she was working on the material and she was licking natron bags to get an idea for what specific purposes they had been used!!

The vessels are filled with materials used in the embalming of Ipi. This includes linen wrappings and natron filled bags - during the period mummifiers used bags of natron rather than loose natron on the body to dry it out. It's important to note that this was all material that had been used in Ipi's mummification, not fresh supplies. The jars were all labelled, but they're not sure what the labelling means. One very exciting find in the jars was what is probably the heart of the Vizier Ipi! It's definitely a mummified human

heart, and given the context it's probably Ipi's. The organs of the deceased were normally removed during the mummification process to be separately preserved, but normally the heart was put back in as the deceased would need this in order to pass through the Weighing of the Heart judgement. So this heart must've somehow been misplaced and put in the waste jars instead of back into Ipi - it's about the same size and weight as a used natron bag. So poor Ipi went off to his afterlife lacking his heart, but it's good for Morales's team who are hoping to get the heart scanned to see what it can tell us about Ipi.



### The Letters of Heqanakht in the Met Museum

Another of the subsidiary chambers in front of Ipi's is the tomb of Meseh. This is where the letters of Heqanakht were found by Winlock in the 1920s. These letters were accidentally sealed into the tomb, and the Vizier Ipi is mentioned in these letters. This makes it plausible that the tomb was initially Heqanakht's tomb - he was a dependent of Ipi and that's exactly the sort of person who would be buried in a subsidiary tomb outside the great man's tomb. The tomb must have been later re-used for Meseh.

Although there isn't much left in the tomb (it looks like a lot of material was taken out for re-use in antiquity) the sarcophagus is still there. It doesn't look like Ipi's tomb was quite finished when Ipi was buried in it. The sarcophagus doesn't look like it's quite in the intended space - there's an outline on the floor that it doesn't sit within. But this could also have been due to the geology of the burial chamber. If the intended area turned out to be hard to carve through than they expected then they might have changed the plan for his sarcophagus. The sarcophagus is splitting, and Morales explained that they had to stabilise it before any work could be done around it on the outside. The "fragments" that are splitting off are around 400kg each and so it would be very dangerous to be nearby if one of them slipped.



Moving on from Ipi's tomb Morales next briefly talked about his work on the coffin texts of Harhotep - as he said at the beginning of the talk his team are not getting to re-excavate Harhotep's tomb (TT314) but he is examining and publishing the texts on Harhotep's mortuary temple and coffin. These texts hinge round magically turning the sarcophagus into a boat with the deceased as its captain.

TT313 is the tomb of Henenu, who was Chief Steward in the time of Montuhotep II. His tomb is one of the first to be built in the area, and is close to Montuhotep II's mortuary complex. Like Ipi he has many titles, which include some "exotic" ones such as the rather splendid "Overseer of What Is and Is Not" (which Morales joked reminded him of his mother - in charge of everything, no matter what it is). There is a map of TT313 on the Middle Kingdom Theban Project website ( <http://thebanproject.com/en/tomb-of-henenu-tt-313/> ) - showing that this tomb has a complicated collection of side chambers off the main tomb corridor. There are signs of re-use and modification over the centuries, and these chambers are actually extra burial chambers for later occupants. Inside the main burial chamber they found fragments from two different sarcophagi - perhaps these were for Henenu and his wife? The courtyard outside the tomb is very wide, as with all these tombs, and uniquely it has steps cut as wide as the whole width of the courtyard leading up to the tomb. When freshly cut these would have been white and gleamed in the sun. At the foot of the courtyard where the rituals were held Winlock discovered a stela which is now in the Met Museum - Morales and his team have now found more fragments of this that Winlock overlooked. They also found a papyrus which almost sounded exciting but it turned out to be a fake, and not a particularly good one.

Morales now moved on to briefly discuss Sector B of the site. One of the tombs here is TT316, in which Neferhotep was buried and it dates to the end of Dynasty 12. The other tomb is called E1 and hadn't been excavated before. When they discovered it, it was filled to the ceiling with debris which they have cleared. He didn't tell us much about this tomb - they have done plans by hand as well as by 3D scanner. There's a crevasse outside the entrance to the main tomb formed by water. There's also a subsidiary chamber in the courtyard.

In Sector C the two tombs represent quite different social strata. TT366 is the tomb of Djari, who was Supervisor of the Harem in the time of Montuhotep II. His tomb is not as monumental as the other ones that Morales has discussed and it is made of less good quality stone. Both the tombs in this sector have what is known as a "saff facade" which has several square pillars. They know there are paintings on the pillar walls of Djari's tomb because Winlock's team made drawings of them - but they are currently covered with wooden screens for protection. Morales and his team don't yet have permission to remove the covers and re-examine the paintings directly. Based on Winlock's drawings it looks like the art style has some interesting features - some degree of playing with the audience's expectations and some unusual motifs. In the courtyard outside the tomb is the foundations of a funerary garden. It has deteriorated since it was originally found but he has discovered there are two courses of bricks beneath the sand so Morales is hopeful he'll be able to excavate and find out more about it.

Morales finished by telling us about the other tomb they are excavating in Sector C: TT1103. This tomb belonged to a man named Dagi who lived at the end of the 11th Dynasty in the reigns of both Montuhotep II and Montuhotep III. He was much higher status than Djari, he had many titles including Vizier. Whilst the architecture of the tomb is similar to that of Djari's (it also has a saff facade) it is of better quality materials.

Again there are still paintings on the saff facade, and fragments in the tomb as well. One of the common motifs is figs and fig trees for the cult of Hathor. Dagi's sarcophagus is now in the Cairo Museum - interestingly the only title on it was the first one that Dagi had, the lowest status one. So he presumably started to prepare for his death early in his career.

This was an absolutely fascinating talk where Morales really demonstrated how re-excavating sites that had previously been "cleared" by early 20th Century archaeologists can still yield more information. Looking at a site with modern questions and modern specialities can show us so much that's been over looked in the past.