

## TOMB VII IN THE ASASIF, THEBES: ITS OWNERS, DATE AND IMPLICATIONS

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In the late 1960s and early 1970s an Austrian mission directed by Manfred Bietak conducted excavations in the Asasif, Thebes<sup>1</sup>. Apart from the monumental tomb of Ankh-Hor<sup>2</sup> several small tombs with mud-brick superstructures and many artefacts of different periods were discovered. The most striking discovery during these excavations is the subject of this paper<sup>3</sup>.

### GENERAL TOPOGRAPHY AND LANDSCAPE

In the eastern part of the Asasif monumental tombs of the Late Period (e.g. TT 389, Basa; TT 410, Mutirdis; TT 414, Ankh-Hor and TT 27, Sheshonq) as well as smaller structures with mud-brick built chapels are located<sup>4</sup>. The distribution of the tombs is influenced by the presence of important cultural landmarks that dominate the general landscape — the causeways to the royal temples at Deir el Bahari<sup>5</sup>. These causeways functioned as streets and routes of processions within the necropolis, especially on occasion of the 'Beautiful Festival of the Valley' and related activities. They were still used after the New Kingdom, particularly in the Late Period but also until the Ptolemaic era<sup>6</sup>.

The general allocation of the tombs shows a chronological pattern which is due both to the natural and the cultural landscape of the region. The series of small tombs situated along the so-called Hill 104, which lies north of the causeway of Thutmoses III, are probably the earliest burial sites and originated in the Twenty-fifth Dynasty. At the same time a new, larger-scale tomb type with a freestanding superstructure was introduced in the plain of the Asasif. Interestingly, the earliest of these monumental tombs can be attributed to people of Nubian origin like TT 391 to Karabasken and TT 223

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bietak, *Theben-West*, *SbÖAW* 278, 4., Wien 1972.

<sup>2</sup> Bietak/Reiser-Haslauer, *Das Grab des Ankh-Hor* I and II.

<sup>3</sup> This material forms the subject of my doctoral project. The research for the present paper was supported by a grant of the Austrian Academy of Science in 2003 (DOC/21321). I am indebted to Brittany Lehman for correcting my English.

<sup>4</sup> See the general plan by Eigner, *Monumentale Grabbauten der Spätzeit*, fig. 67.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Bietak, in *Ankh-Hor* I, 19–37.

<sup>6</sup> For the sacredness of Deir el Bahari and the Asasif until Ptolemaic times, see Strudwick, in Strudwick/Taylor (eds.), *Theban Necropolis*, 183.

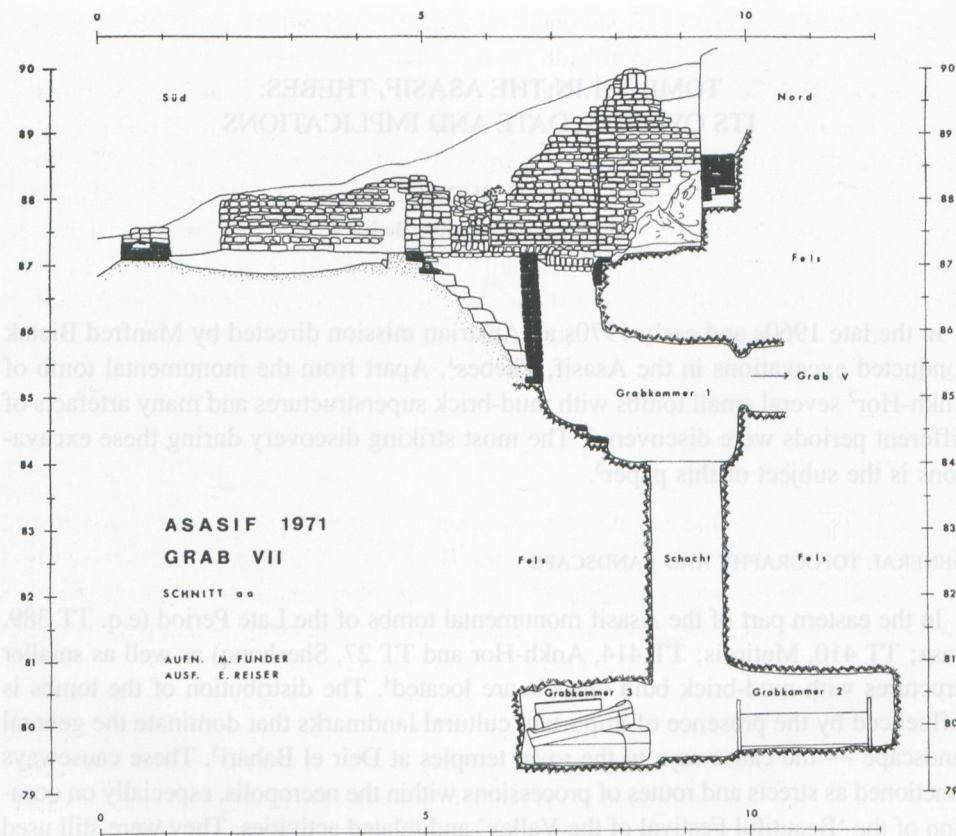


Fig. 1. Sectional view of tomb VII after Bietak 1972, fig. 9.

to Karakhamun<sup>7</sup>. After the capacity of Hill 104 was filled, also the smaller types of tombs were built on the plain. This series of structures in the region of the Thutmoside causeway belong to the Twenty-sixth Dynasty<sup>8</sup>.

#### THE ARCHITECTURE OF TOMB VII

In 1971 Bietak's team uncovered in the debris-covered slope of Hill 104 a small tomb, later registered as tomb VII<sup>9</sup>. Partially undisturbed contents and burials were

<sup>7</sup> For the development and distribution of tombs of Kushite officials see Eigner, *Monumentale Grabbauten der Spätzeit*, 26 and Aston, in Strudwick/Taylor (eds.), *Theban Necropolis*, 146.

<sup>8</sup> Tombs III, IV, VI, VIII, XVIII, XIX, XX, XXII, XXII, XXIII and XXV in the Austrian concession area.

<sup>9</sup> Bietak, *SbÖAW* 278, 4, 1972, 30-35.



discovered and provided the first concrete information about the ownership and date of one of the graves set in the hillside.

The mud-brick superstructure of tomb VII, set in between two already existing structures (tomb V and tomb XXIV), is divided into two parts: a small open court in the front and a vaulted cult sanctuary with a niche in the back. The substructure was reached by a staircase, which proceeds down from the courtyard (fig. 1)<sup>10</sup>. The staircase is comprised of six steps, built with stones re-used from the Thutmoses III-causeway. At the foot of the last step a wall built out of mud-brick was still found intact. Thereafter the corridor opens into a small chamber. This room was in a later building-phase used as a burial chamber. At the bottom of this chamber a shaft of 2.5-3 meters in length leads to the two original burial chambers (chambers 2 and 3).

### THE INVENTORY OF TOMB VII

Burial chamber 3 is the original structure from the first building phase. When it was discovered it was filled with rubble and stones. Between this rubbish five wooden coffins were found all together on one heap (fig. 2). At the very bottom a sparsely decorated anthropoid coffin came to light that revealed another wooden case with a large concentration of decoration. The inner coffin disclosed, covered with a fine bead net and amulets, the still untouched burial of an adult male, whose body was in a badly preserved state<sup>11</sup>. The inscriptions give the name of the owner. He is called Irw (*Jrw*, cf. PN 43.22), son of Pakhor (*P3-hr*, PN 116.17) and Shepet-Iset (*Šp(t)-(n)-Jst*, cf. PN 325.17). These personal names are not spelt precisely in the manner given by Ranke. Especially the variation on the inner coffin as *Jf3* or *J3* finds no parallel within Ranke's *Personennamen*<sup>12</sup>. In addition, the face of the innermost coffin is painted very darkly and the skeleton of the young man displays non-Egyptian features according to the excavator. Considering these implications Bietak identified the tomb's owner as a person of Nubian origin<sup>13</sup>. No titles are given, therefore his status and function in Thebes remains unclear. With the depiction of a ram-headed solar falcon on the breast and a small scale Abydos fetish in the lower part, the innermost coffin falls into Design 4A of Taylor<sup>14</sup>. This classification as well as some other parallels<sup>15</sup> point to a date around 700-670 BC.

<sup>10</sup> Type "Grab mit Felsräumen und vorgesetztem Schlammziegelbau" according to Eigner, *Monumentale Spätzeitgräber*, 36.

<sup>11</sup> Bietak, *SbÖAW* 278, 4., 1972, 34, pls. 23-25.

<sup>12</sup> Ranke (PN II, 265.29) quotes another variant of *Jrw* as the name of a Nubian.

<sup>13</sup> Bietak, *SbÖAW* 278, 4., Wien 1972, 34.

<sup>14</sup> Taylor, in *Theban Necropolis*, 115. This is the earlier group within Design 4, dated to the Twenty-fifth Dynasty; Taylor notes "a marked preference for the 'Kushite' graphic peculiarities".

<sup>15</sup> See the list by Niwinski, *BiOr* 42, 1985, 506 and Graefe, *Sat-Sobek und Peti-Imen-menu*, 40-1 as well as the inner coffin Zagreb 897 of a lady namend *Šp-n-wn* (dated by TAYLOR, *CdÉ* 59, 1984, 225, n. 3 to 700-670 BC). Her father *P3-n-jwjjw* seems to be of Kushite origin.

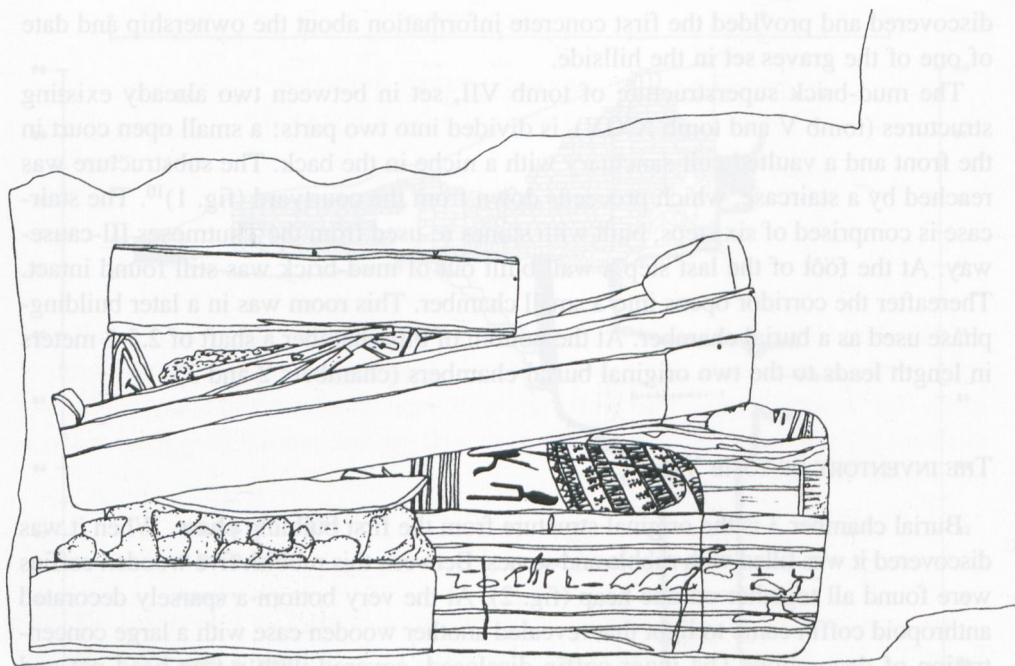


Fig. 2. Situation as found in burial chamber 3 (view North-South, scale 1:20)

The other four burials in chamber 3 comprise of an undecorated wooden coffin, roughly anthropoid in shape, with the body of an adult female and three simple wooden boxes containing skeletons of infants. Traces of plundering were recognizable from the way these coffins were arranged (fig. 2). Furthermore two of the infant-coffins, as well as some of the mummy bandages of the children, were partially burnt. Evidently the robbers used them to provide light during their hurried search for valuable objects. A small pottery vessel (reg. 306, A1998) found in one of the infant-coffins (reg. 305c) is the only burial supplement. Shape and ware of this slender round bottomed beaker are peculiar and find no close parallels within the contemporary Egyptian pottery corpus<sup>16</sup>. In the entrance of burial chamber 3 a wooden, painted statuette of a falcon (reg. 359, JE 94533) was found. These statuettes are associated with the god Sokar and are very common in Late Period tomb groups and are typically found sitting on top of various boxes<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> The beakers attested in Egypt differ in proportions; cf. Aston, *Egyptian Pottery*, fig. 217, group 10, Phase III South.

<sup>17</sup> See Satzinger, in *Funde aus Ägypten*, 108-9. All together six falcon-statuettes were found in tomb VII, dating to both the Late Period and Ptolemaic time.



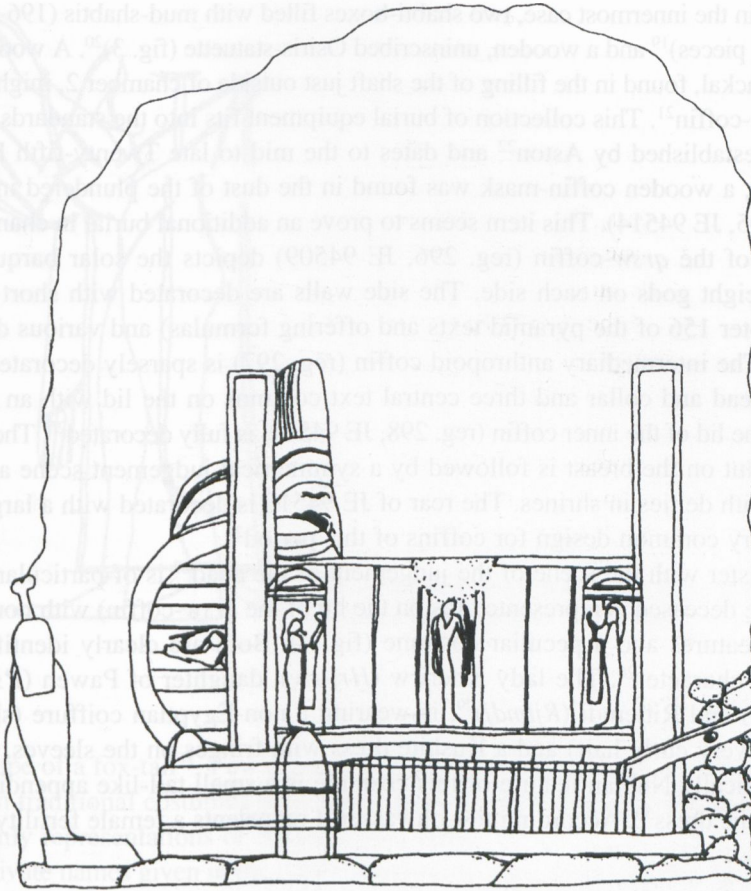


Fig. 3. Situation as found in burial chamber 2 (view East-West, scale 1:20).

Also belonging to the first building phase of tomb VII, but probably slightly later in date, is burial chamber 2. Despite the chamber suffered intense plundering, almost the complete set of burial equipment was found. This comprises a set of coffins — a large outer *qrsw*-coffin still standing *in situ*, an anthropoid intermediary coffin and an inner case with pedestal<sup>18</sup>. Each coffin-lid was left open and the mummy was gone, taken away by tomb robbers. Other than the missing mummy the tomb group is preserved entirely. It comprises the coffin-set, a bead net of which only fragments were

<sup>18</sup> This repertoire of coffin types is typical for the early Twenty-sixth dynasty, cf. Taylor, *Egyptian Coffins*, 56-9.

found within the innermost case, two shabti-boxes filled with mud-shabtis (196 and 181, in total 377 pieces)<sup>19</sup> and a wooden, uninscribed Osiris-statue (fig. 3)<sup>20</sup>. A wooden statuette of a jackal, found in the filling of the shaft just outside of chamber 2, might belong to the *qrs*w-coffin<sup>21</sup>. This collection of burial equipment fits into the standards of tomb groups as established by Aston<sup>22</sup> and dates to the mid to late Twenty-fifth Dynasty. In addition, a wooden coffin-mask was found in the dust of the plundered inner coffin (reg. 305, JE 94514). This item seems to prove an additional burial in chamber 2<sup>23</sup>.

The lid of the *qrs*w-coffin (reg. 296, JE 94509) depicts the solar barque being towed by eight gods on each side. The side walls are decorated with short lines of texts (chapter 156 of the pyramid texts and offering formulas) and various deities in shrines<sup>24</sup>. The intermediary anthropoid coffin (reg. 297) is sparsely decorated with a coloured head and collar and three central text columns on the lid with an offering formula. The lid of the inner coffin (reg. 298, JE 94510) is fully decorated<sup>25</sup>. The winged figure of Nut on the breast is followed by a symmetrical judgement scene and three registers with deities in shrines. The rear of JE 94510 is decorated with a large Djed-pillar, a very common design for coffins of this period<sup>26</sup>.

The register with the scene of the judgement of the dead<sup>27</sup> is of particular interest because the deceased is represented (as on the lid of the *qrs*w-coffin) with non-Egyptian body features and a peculiar costume (fig. 4). Both are clearly identifiable as Kushite in character<sup>28</sup>. The lady Kherirw (*Hrj-rw*), daughter of Pawen (*P3-wn*, cf. PN 103.25) and Ritjemdi (*Rjmdj*)<sup>29</sup>, is wearing a non-Egyptian coiffure (short wig or natural, very curly hair) and a Kushite dress with fringes on the sleeves. Another characteristically Nubian feature of this costume is a small tail-like appendix on the bottom of the dress<sup>30</sup>. According to Lohwasser it represents a female fertility symbol

<sup>19</sup> Bietak, *SbÖAW* 278, 4., 1972, pl. 19b (reg. 301). For the boxes see Aston, *OMRO* 74, 1994, 35 and 45 (Type VIIc).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Budka, in *Festschrift Satzinger*, Nr. 2, 35-6; Budka, *GM* 193, 2003, 100.

<sup>21</sup> Bietak, *SbÖAW* 278, 4., 1972, pl. 18c. Those jackals are normally placed on the lids of *qrs*w-coffins, cf. Aston, in *Theban Necropolis*, 147.

<sup>22</sup> Aston, in *Theban Necropolis*, 147, fig. 7.

<sup>23</sup> The back surface of this mask is a flat plane; therefore it once served as the face of an additional coffin and does not belong to Kherirw.

<sup>24</sup> Bietak, *SbÖAW* 278, 4., 1972, pl. 21b. This is the standard repertoire of these rectangular coffins, cf. Taylor, *Egyptian Coffins*, 56.

<sup>25</sup> Bietak, *SbÖAW* 274, 4., 1972, 33, pls. 20, 21a, 22.

<sup>26</sup> Taylor, *Egyptian Coffins*, 59.

<sup>27</sup> Seeber, *Totengericht*, 44-5, cat. 36.

<sup>28</sup> See already Bietak, *SbÖAW* 274, 4., 1972, 33; for the Kushite costume see Lohwasser, *Meroitica* 15, 586-595.

<sup>29</sup> All of these personal names differ either in orthography from those given by Ranke or do not have any parallels (cf. *rw* and above).

<sup>30</sup> This detail is attested on the *qrs*w-coffin (fig. 4) and on the right side of the judgement scene on the inner coffin; on the left of the latter this detail is missing.





Fig. 4. Representation of Kherirw on the lid of her *qrsw*-coffin in Kushite costume (not to scale).

in the shape of a fox-tail<sup>31</sup>. Few representations of private persons of Nubian descent clothed in traditional costumes have survived in Egypt<sup>32</sup>. Those of Kherirw are as of yet the only representations of Nubians on coffins.

The private names given in the coffin-inscriptions support the identity of the woman as Nubian. Similarly to the case of Irw, on the coffins of Kherirw her name is spelt in varying manners<sup>33</sup>. There is a noticeable difference between the version on the *qrsw*-coffin, the intermediary and the inner coffin and also between the exterior of the later and the inner side of its lid. On this inner side the father's name is given in a syllabic writing that is clearly not of Egyptian character but may be called "Nubian" orthography (*Pnpn-3nh* or *Pn3h* instead of *P3-wn*, cf. PN II, 286.6)<sup>34</sup>. Also the mother's name appears in a variant, as Merditj instead of Ritjemdi. Kherirw's name itself is spelt as Kherirtj.

<sup>31</sup> Lohwasser, *Meroitica* 15, 593.

<sup>32</sup> Lohwasser, *Meroitica* 15, 595 (list of all private Twenty-fifth Dynasty-records).

<sup>33</sup> Again the coffin Zagreb 897 may be quoted as parallel: The father-name is spelt in different manners, using syllabic writing; on the outer and intermediary it is given as *Pn-jwjw* and also *Pn-jj*; at the innermost coffin solely *Pn-jj* was used. For similar orthographies and variants of names within one coffin-set see also ANTHES, *MDAIK* 12, 1943, 33 and 36.

<sup>34</sup> See already Bietak, *SbÖAW* 278, 4, 1972, 33 with reference to H. Satzinger.

The coffin-set of Kherirw can be dated for stylistic reasons towards the transitional phase between the Twenty-fifth and Twenty-sixth Dynasties, around 675-640 BC<sup>35</sup>. Her relation- or kinship with Irw is not obvious. According to the archaeological context Irw is the primary tomb owner. Because of the given names of both parents it is certain that the two were not brother and sister. Marriage would be the most obvious relationship on one hand, but on the other hand this is rather unlikely — they were buried in different chambers, their coffins show stylistic differences that imply a divergence in dating and last but not least were the accompanying burials of a young woman and three infants found within the chamber of Irw. This anonymous woman in chamber 3 is more probably the wife of Irw and mother of his children. Maybe the hypothetical additional burial in chamber 2 (see above, the coffin mask reg. 305) was the son of Irw, and Kherirw could therefore be identified as his daughter in law. According to the stylistics of the coffins there is also the possibility that Kherirw is the niece or even grand daughter of Irw. In this case the missing link in the kinship would be the missing coffin in chamber 2. It is also possible that Irw was married to two women — one of them (Kherirw) — survived him by some years and was buried in an Egyptian coffin ensemble of high quality, whereas the simple coffin of chamber 3 was assigned to the second wife who died roughly contemporary to Irw.

#### THE USE-LIFE OF TOMB VII

It is beyond the scope of this short paper to give a full overview on the finds from tomb VII. But some remarks are necessary to understand its complex use-life. As is typical for excavation in the Theban necropolis, the material found within the tomb can only partly be connected with the original burials<sup>36</sup>. Most of the finds coming from the general debris that filled up the shaft and staircase give evidence of re-use<sup>37</sup>. Very often it is not possible to determine where these pieces belong exactly, but with consideration to the dating of all the artefacts, several phases of use can be distinguished. Because of the mixed contexts the later history of the tomb is difficult to outline, but definitely dates well into Ptolemaic time. Four major burial phases took place in tomb VII. The first two phases are roughly contemporary (burial of Irw + wife/sister and children and the somewhat later burial of Kherirw). Some coffin fragments and other tomb equipment seem to attest another burial phase during the Twenty-sixth dynasty. After a pause of plundering and destruction, the tomb was intensively re-used during the early Ptolemaic period. In this phase some architectural

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Taylor, *Development of Coffins* II, 365-7; Aston, *OMRO* 74, 1994, 35.

<sup>36</sup> This holds true for the items illustrated by Bietak, *SbÖAW* 278, 4, 1972, pl. 15b; pl. 18a and b.

<sup>37</sup> Two Ptah-Sokar-Osiris-figures were wrongly attributed to the tomb group of Kherirw in the literature — these statuettes actually attest later burials; see Budka in *Festschrift Satzinger*, 32-42, Budka, *GM* 193, 2003, 99-101.



alterations like additional chambers to accommodate a large number of burials were undertaken. After this last heyday the structure slowly went out of use and was finally permanently abandoned.

#### KUSHITE FEATURES OF TOMB VII

In summation, the identity of the tomb owners as non-Egyptians became evident through several aspects. Of particular importance are the coffin ensembles of both Irw and Kherirw with their inscriptions, variants in personal names and representations in Nubian costume. A further, very clear indication for this foreign origin is the beaker found within the infant-coffin in burial chamber 3. It is made of a non-Egyptian marl fabric<sup>38</sup> and finds its closest parallels in the chapel of Amenirdis in Medinet Habu<sup>39</sup> and particularly in the Kushite cemeteries at Nuri and Kurru<sup>40</sup>. Because it was deposited with one of the infants it is safe to assume that these children really belong to the family of Irw and were buried during the Twenty-fifth Dynasty. The anthropological features of Irw's skeleton may also be regarded as an indication for his identity as Nubian. The Kushite representations of Kherirw (costume, coiffure and body features) leave no doubt of her origin, despite her missing mummy.

At a first glance the lack of titles for male persons of the original burials is disappointing. The few given titles for the female family members are insignificant — all of the women (Kherirw, her mother and the mother of Irw) bear the same titles, *nbt pr* and *špst*. These serve in the Late Period simply as an announcement of personal names<sup>41</sup>. According to Bietak this negative-evidence of titles supports the dating of the burials into the early Twenty-sixth Dynasty, a period in which Nubian families had already lost their influence in Thebes. But considering the designs of the coffins it seems more probable that the non-existent titles prove the lower to middle social ranking of the people in question<sup>42</sup>. Furthermore this lack of titles finds parallels on stelae, partly belonging to people of probably Kushite origin<sup>43</sup>.

The most obvious aspect within the tomb equipment of both Irw and Kherirw is a kind of bipartite approach. Although the type of tomb, coffins and the choice of

<sup>38</sup> Similar to the late Marl A4, variant 2, but different in colour and texture.

<sup>39</sup> Hölscher, *Excavations of Medinet Habu* V, pl. 47: X4.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Williams, *Twenty-Fifth Dynasty and Napatan Remains at Qustul*, 8, fig. 2b, fig. 21b; Dunham, *El Kurru*, 40, fig. 10b, fig. 12C, pl. 43D; Dunham, *Nuri*, 41, fig. 27d, 337, fig. A:16 and 17.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. the comment of GAUTHIER, *CG* nos. 41042-41072, as introduction to the indices of *nbt pr* and *špst* and Berlev/Hodjash, *Catalogue of the Monuments of Ancient Egypt*, 25, n. f, 30, pl. 54 (translated as "lady").

<sup>42</sup> According to Wenig, in *Meroitica* 12, 345-6 high officials of Nubian origin took Egyptian names as soon as they got an important position. If this holds true, both Irw and Kherirw really had no functional titles.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. MUNRO, *Die spätägyptischen Totenstelen*, 193 (Oxford Ashmolean Museum 1178, Louvre N3943), 195 (Berlin 935) as well as the coffin of Memebi (Bratislava A 3219), NIWINSKI, *BiOr* 42, 1985, 498.

objects is, with the exception of the Kushite beaker, entirely Egyptian, they still managed to give everything a Kushite touch — at the least through spelling of names and with personal representations at the most<sup>44</sup>. One could even differentiate an external, Egyptianized appearance and a private, internal view with hidden hints on the Kushite identity that is only visible from the inside (e.g. inner side of coffin lid).

Except the small tomb in the Asasif no tomb groups of Nubian families in Egypt have survived — of course more tomb discoveries are expected<sup>45</sup>, but as of yet they have not been unearthed<sup>46</sup>. Tomb VII as a unique context is of special significance but the implications of it and its inventory are limited because of its singularity. Although it only gives a glimpse on the real situation in Late Period-Thebes it provides important information about lower ranking Nubians during the late Twenty-fifth and the early Twenty-sixth Dynasty in Egypt and their way of picturing themselves within the funerary architecture and burial equipment.

<sup>44</sup> Also the Osiris-statuettes of Kherirw might be of interest. It is possible that the space traditionally reserved for the inscription (name of the owner) was left free because the tomb owner was an illiterate foreigner.

<sup>45</sup> Wenig, in *Meroitica* 12, 346.

<sup>46</sup> Especially the series of tombs situated along Hill 104 would be good candidates for further burials of Kushite families.