

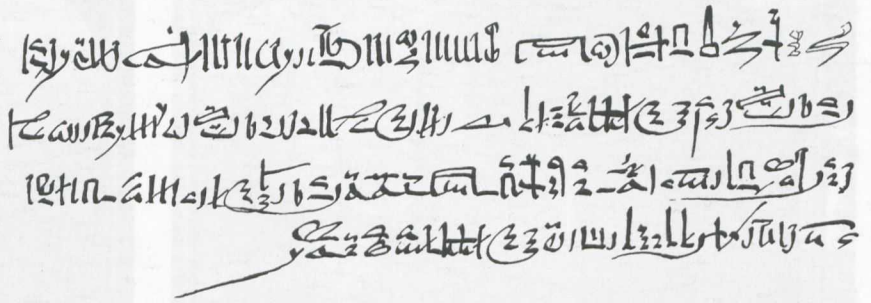


# The pyramid complex of Nubkheperre Intef

In spring 2001 the German Institute of Archaeology, Cairo started excavations in a new area of Dra Abu el-Naga, Western Thebes. **Daniel Polz** reports on the first three seasons' work, which have resulted in the discovery of a long-lost royal tomb of the Seventeenth Dynasty.

In 1859 Samuel Birch, then Assistant Keeper of the Department of Antiquities at the British Museum, published the first translation of the Abbott Papyrus, one of the most famous hieratic administrative documents preserved from ancient Egypt and now partially on display in the British Museum. The papyrus dates to the sixteenth regnal year of Ramesses IX (c. 1115 BC) and contains a meticulous account of a governmental inspection of some royal and non-royal tombs in the vast necropolis on the West Bank at Thebes. Reacting to rumours that up to ten royal tombs had recently been robbed, a committee was formed to investigate the matter. Each of the ten allegedly plundered tombs is listed separately in the report, with some entries accompanied by detailed descriptions of the tomb's position in relation to well-known landmarks of the Theban necropolis.

Ever since Birch's translation was made available, it has been used in the search for those royal tombs on the list which have not yet been located, including the pyramid-tomb of king Nubkheperre Intef of the Seventeenth Dynasty (c. 1645-1550 BC). The paragraph in the text of the Abbott Papyrus describing this tomb reads:



*The Abbott Papyrus (British Museum, EA 10221). The description of the inspection of the tomb of king Nubkheperre Intef (after Möller, Hieratische Lesestücke, Berlin 1909-1910)*

'The pyramid-tomb of king Nubkheperre, Son of Re, Intef - Life, Prosperity, Health! It was found in the course of being broken into by the thieves who dug a tunnel of two and one half cubits in its outer wall and (a tunnel of) one cubit in the (transverse) hall of the tomb of the deceased overseer of the offering-bearers of the temple of Amun (i.e. Karnak), (called) Yuroy. It (i.e. the pyramid tomb) was uninjured because the thieves did not know how to reach it.'

Mention of the tomb of Yuroy gave first Auguste Mariette (in 1860) and later Herbert Winlock the idea that if it were possible to locate this private tomb in the Theban necropolis, then the pyramid-tomb of

Nubkheperre Intef should not be far away. Indeed, it appears that Mariette did in fact locate the tomb of Yuroy, although he left no record of this discovery. His excavations in the northern part of Dra Abu el-Naga also resulted in the discovery of two small obelisks decorated with the royal titulary of king Nubkheperre Intef. Unfortunately, some twenty years later, in an attempt by Gaston Maspero to transfer the obelisks to Cairo, they were lost in the Nile. When Winlock returned to Thebes soon after the First



*The area of the new excavations at Dra Abu el-Naga. View looking west*



The pyramid of Nubkheperre Intef with the enclosure wall. The white wall at the bottom is a modern retaining wall. (Photograph: Peter Windszus)

World War, he too was able to locate and identify the tomb of Yuroy (TT 13 in Dra Abu el-Naga, now open to the public as the ‘Tomb of Shuroy’) and concluded that the royal tomb of Nubkheperre Intef must be nearby. Interestingly, neither Winlock himself nor any later excavator tried to verify, by archaeological investigations, the theory regarding the location of Nubkheperre’s tomb on the basis of its description in the Abbott Papyrus.

This unresolved problem was the starting point for a new investigation carried out by the German Institute of Archaeology (DAI) in the necropolis of Dra Abu el-Naga within the overall framework of the Dra Abu el-Naga Project (for earlier reports on the DAI work see *EA* 7, pp. 6-8; *EA* 10, pp. 34-35; *EA* 14, pp. 3-6). In Spring 2001 an attempt was made to identify an area in the vicinity of the tomb of Yuroy which, in



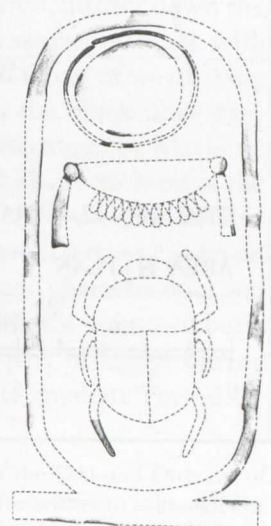
The chapel of Teti: the decorated north wall



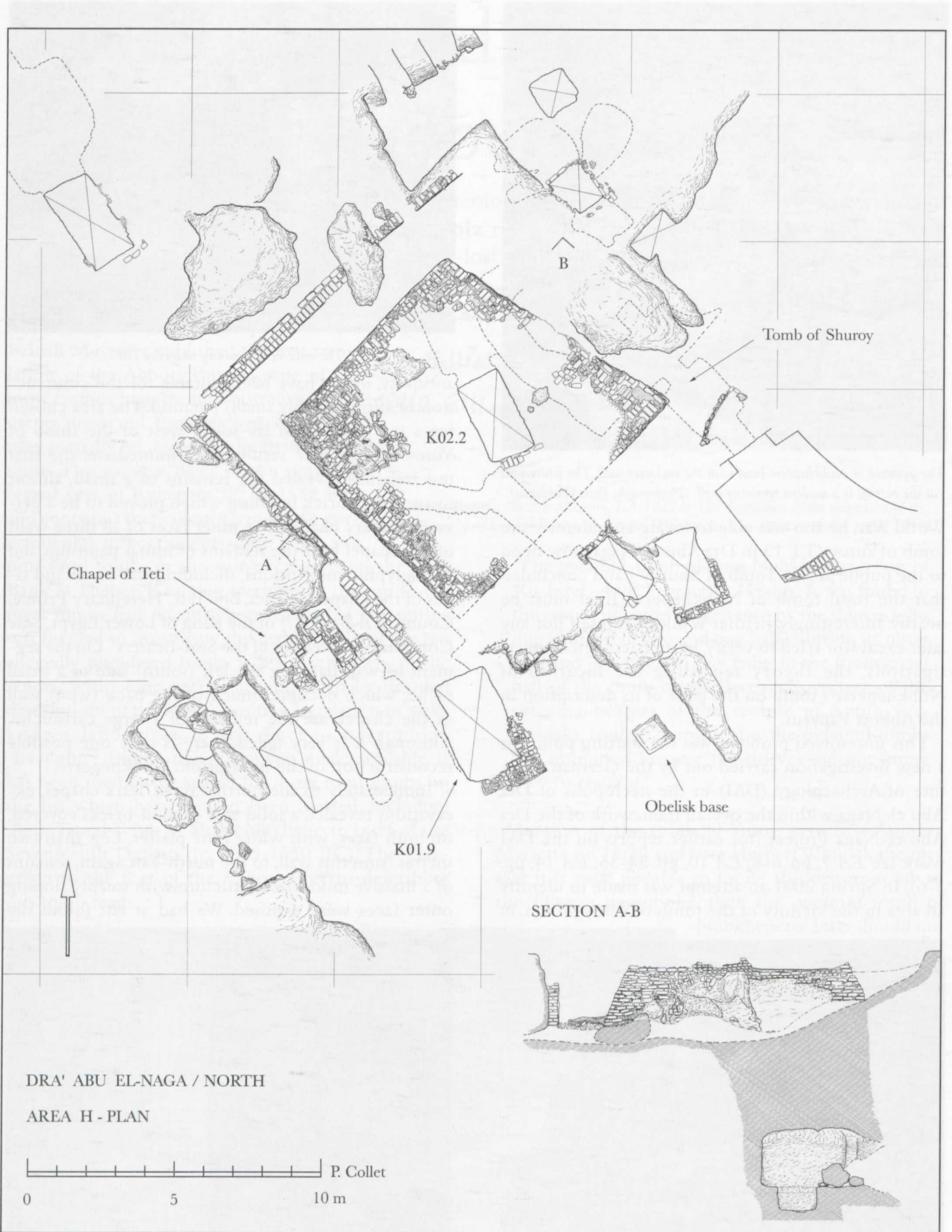
The mud-brick funerary chapel of Teti

antiquity, might have been suitable for the construction of a (presumably small) pyramid. The area chosen for a test excavation lay south-west of the tomb of Yuroy/Shuroy. The results were immediate: the first test trenches revealed the remains of a small, almost square, mud-brick building which proved to be a private funerary chapel. The inner faces of all three walls of the chapel bear the remains of mural paintings and hieroglyphic inscriptions, including the name and titles of the chapel’s owner, one Teti, ‘Hereditary Prince, Count, Seal-bearer(?) of the King of Lower Egypt, Sole Companion, Overseer of the Seal-Bearers’. On the segment of wall flanking the left (south) side of a small niche, which occupies much of the back (west) wall of the chapel, are the remains of a large cartouche. Although it is very faded, there is only one possible reconstruction of the inscription: Nubkheperre.

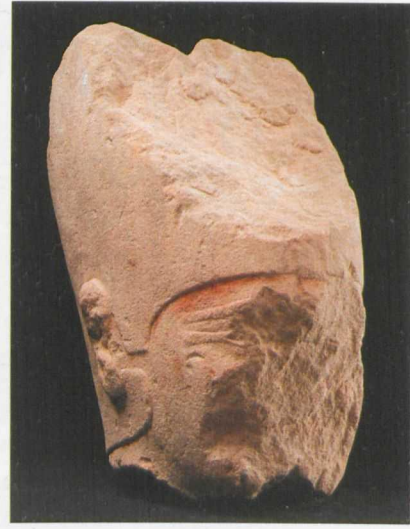
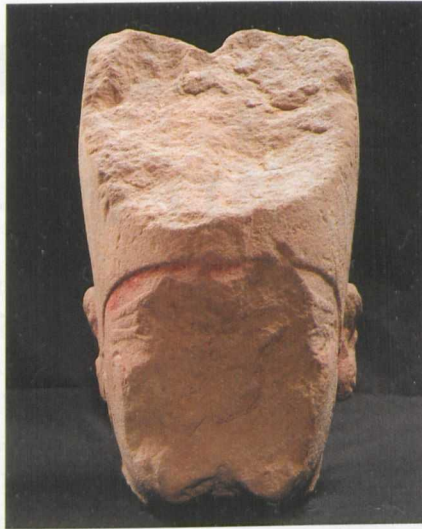
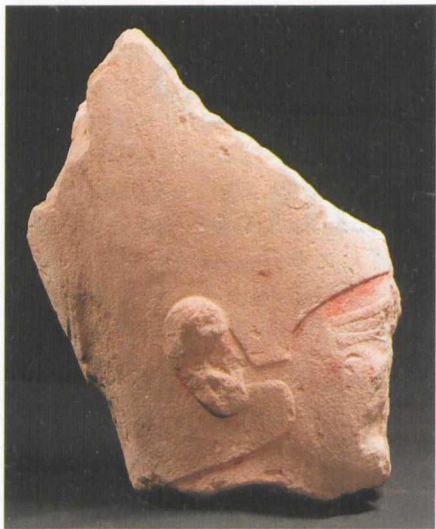
Immediately to the north-east of Teti’s chapel, excavations revealed a solid wall of mud-bricks covered, on both faces, with white lime plaster. Less than two metres from this wall, to the north-east again, remains of a massive mud-brick structure with steeply sloping outer faces were exposed. We had at last found the



The chapel of Teti: the remains of the cartouche of Nubkheperre. (Drawing: Ute Rummel)



Plan of the pyramid of Nubkheperre Intef and the surrounding area. (Survey/drawing: Pieter Collet)



Three views of the head of a royal sandstone statue which was found in the burial shaft K01.9 (Photographs: Peter Windszus)

enclosure wall and ruined mud-brick pyramid of the funerary complex of Nubkheperre Intef.

After two further excavation seasons, in Autumn 2001 and in Spring 2002, an attempt can now be made to reconstruct, at least partially, the architectural layout of the pyramid-complex and its surrounding structures. The mud-brick pyramid was built against the steep slope of the hill and in an area which, even today, is characterised by huge natural boulders (see plan: 'A' and 'B' mark the position of the section). The pyramid was built over a pre-existing shaft (K02.2) which, on the basis of pottery found in it, would appear to date to the mid-Thirteenth Dynasty, a few



The chamber of the burial shaft K01.9. (Photograph: Peter Windszus)

generations earlier than the pyramid. Another large shaft (K01.9), which may have been the royal burial shaft, is located outside the axis and south of the pyramid; it is approximately 7m deep and opens into a huge chamber with a recess cut into the floor to accommodate the coffin. It is possible that it was here, in 1827, that the inhabitants of the nearby modern village of Dra Abu el-Naga discovered the coffin of Intef, now on display in the British Museum. An intentionally defaced head of a life-size royal sandstone statue, probably once seated, was recovered from the fill of the shaft. It is doubtful that this statue was originally carved for Nubkheperre Intef himself, as the head's iconographic and stylistic features suggest an earlier dating. However, the statue may well have been usurped by Nubkheperre and taken from another site, such as the temple of Nebhepetre Mentuhotep at Deir el-Bahri.

The pyramid was originally surrounded by an enclosure wall, remains of which stand on the pyramid's north-west and south-west sides, with large areas of the original white plaster on the inner and outer faces still preserved. Fronting the pyramid, further down the hill slope, is a large, almost square sandstone block with three battered faces. Its shape and traces of weathering on its upper surface suggest that the block once supported one of the two obelisks discovered by Mariette.

The pyramid-complex of Nubkheperre Intef is the first royal funerary complex of the Seventeenth Dynasty discovered under controlled excavation conditions. Its location, architectural characteristics and contents shed new light on the hitherto unknown burials of the kings who ruled this part of Egypt during the 'dark ages' of the Second Intermediate Period.

□ Daniel Polz is Associate Director of the DAI and Director of the Dra Abu el-Naga Project. The author wishes to acknowledge the additional financial support generously provided by *Studiosus Reisen München GmbH*, and Bill and Nancy Petty (Denver, Colorado, USA). Plan and photographs: © DAI.