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The Asyut Project: Twelfth Season of Fieldwork (2016)

Jochem Kahl / Ahmed Alansary / Ursula Verhoeven / Tina Beck /
Ewa Czyżewska-Zalewska / Eva Gervers / Andrea Kilian

(Taf. 9–11)

Abstract

This report refers to the different tasks of fieldwork in the necropolis of Asyut (Gebel Asyut al-gharbi). It focuses on the scattered façade and entrance of Tomb V (M11.1), the architecture and pottery of the main shaft of Tomb I (P10.1), Geological Step 3, as well as on Late Roman pottery.

From 18 August 2016 to 5 October 2016, the Egyptian-German Mission from Sohag University, Freie Universität Berlin and Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz conducted its twelfth season of fieldwork in the ancient necropolis of Asyut situated in the western mountains (Gebel Asyut al-gharbi; Fig. 1).¹ Fieldwork focused on the scattered façade of Tomb V (M11.1), the causeway and the main shaft of Tomb I (P10.1), as well as on Geological Step 3. Epigraphic work was conducted in Tomb I, Tomb V and Tomb M12.3. In addition, the mission studied objects from Gebel Asyut al-gharbi on the mountain itself, as well as in the magazine of the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) at Shutb. Animal bones, pottery, oil lamps, and Coptic ostraca were mainly studied. Objects found during the 2016 season were registered by the accompanying inspectors of the MSA.

J.K., A.A., U.V.

¹ During fieldwork we received full cooperation and encouragement from the Ministry of State for Antiquities. Thanks are due in particular to the Minister for Antiquities Dr. Khaled el-Enany, to the Chairman Dr. Mostafa Amin, to the Head of the Foreign and Egyptian Mission Affairs and Permanent Committee, Dr. Mohamed Ismail, and to the Director General of Asyut, Mr. Abdel-Satar Ahmed Mohamed. We are also thankful to the accompanying inspectors Hassan Saad Hassan Osman and Manar Mohamed Naguib as well as to Madame Nadja Naguib and Tarek Hassan at the magazine of the Ministry of State for Antiquities (MSA) at Shutb. Members of the mission were: Prof. Dr. Jochem Kahl (project director; field director), Prof. Dr. Ahmed Alansary (field director), Prof. Dr. Ursula Verhoeven (project director), Prof. Dr. Mahmoud El-Hamrawi, Prof. Dr. Mohamed Abdelrahim, Prof. Dr. Abd El-Nasr Yasin, Dr. Hesham Faheed Ahmed, Dr. Sameh Shafik, Dr. Teodozja Rzeuska, Dr. Ilona Regulski, Mohamed Alshafey, Fritz Barthel, Tina Beck, Aneta Cedro, Ewa Czyżewska-Zalewska, Eva Gervers, Ana Sofia de Carvalho Gomes, Stephan Hartlepp, Philipp Jansen, Andrea Kilian, Chiori Kitagawa, Katarzyna Molga, Adel Refaat, Alice Sbriglio.

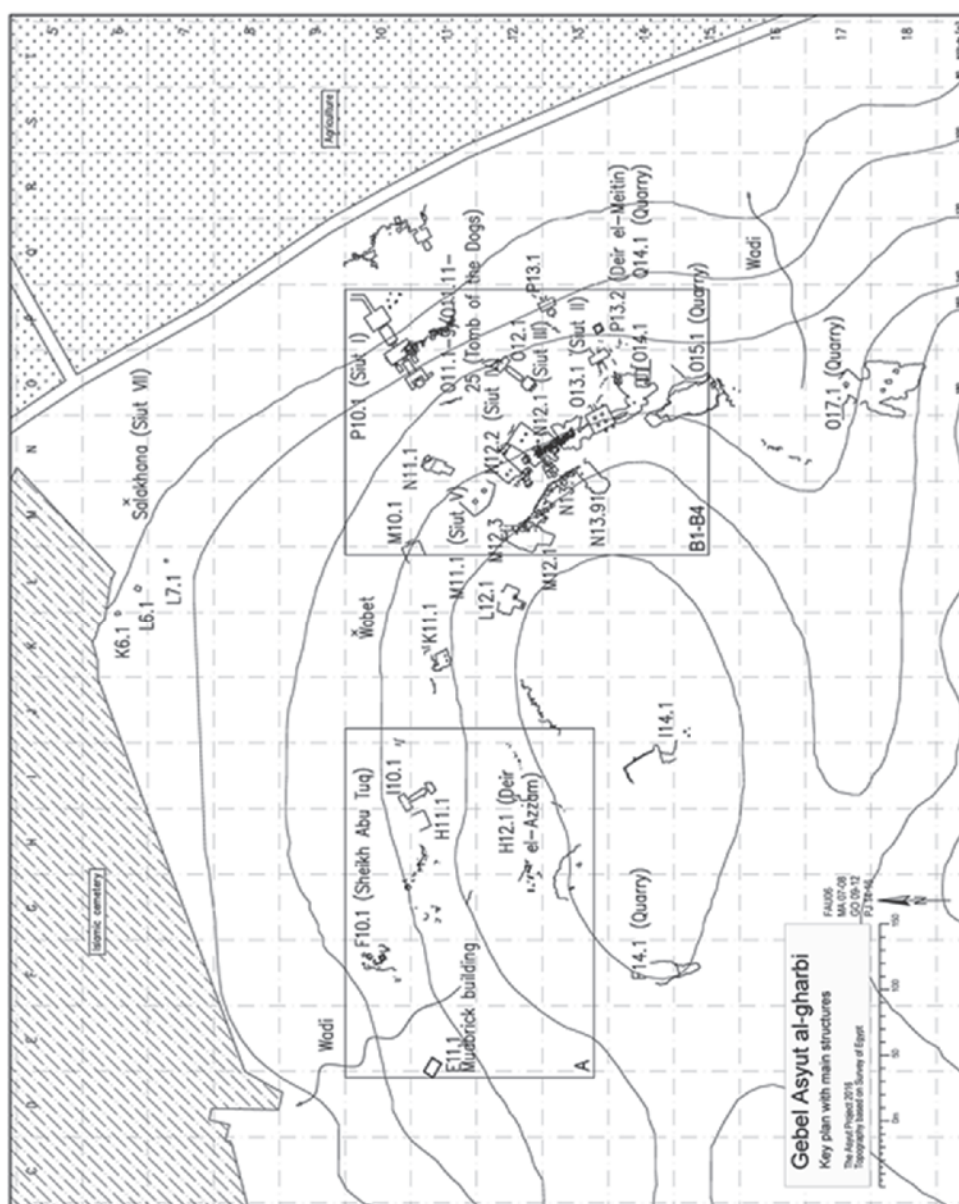


Fig. 1: Gebel Asyut al-gharbi, key plan with main structures
© The Asyut Project, Ph. Jansen

1 Reconstruction of Ernesto Schiaparelli's fieldwork at Gebel Asyut al-gharbi

Between 1903 and 1914, four major officially sanctioned excavation campaigns took place on Gebel Asyut al-gharbi. They were led by Émile Chassinat and Charles Palanque (1903), Ernesto Schiaparelli (1906–1913), David George Hogarth (1906–1907) and Ahmed Bey Kamal (1913–1914). Acting on behalf of museums or national governments, the excavators clearly had their employer's best interests in mind – the objective was to enlarge the respec-

tive collections in Europe or in Egypt, as the case may have been. It seems that Asyut was chosen due to a widespread feeling among Egyptologists that the site had been neglected for far too long. Still intact tombs were systematically sought out, opened and stripped of their contents. No attention whatsoever was paid to the mapping of the precise location of the tombs or to the adequate documentation of their architecture. Although a few tomb plans were drawn (four by Schiaparelli and several dozen by Hogarth), the documentation of the architecture is poor overall, and it is very difficult to identify these tombs on the mountain today. In addition to this, the exact positions of the finds were only recorded sporadically. All told, publications detailing the results of the excavations remained few and far between. None of the campaigns drafted a precise map of Gebel Asyut al-gharbi, making these large-scale activities all but impossible to retrace.²

The fieldwork carried out under the supervision of the Italian Egyptologist Ernesto Schiaparelli between 1906 and 1913 constituted the most extensive archaeological activities at Asyut up to that point. Schiaparelli and his staff (the *Missione Archeologica Italiana*) excavated numerous tombs on Gebel Asyut al-gharbi in the course of seven campaigns undertaken on behalf of the Egyptian Museum in Turin, where the resulting finds amount to no less than 9 % of the total inventory of Egyptian antiques.³ Yet Schiaparelli's undertakings, too, were driven by a desire to augment the Turin museum's collection and to fill its chronological and typological gaps; so much so, in fact, that the specific contexts of his finds – especially those from Asyut – received only insufficient attention or remained undocumented altogether. Torn from their original environment, the Asyuti objects reached Turin as isolated and incoherent individual pieces. As Schiaparelli himself never published a report on his campaigns at Asyut, his finds still await academic appraisal a hundred years on – an appraisal, moreover, which can at best attempt to close at least some of the gaps left by the inadequate documentation of finds *in situ*. In most cases, the valuable opportunity to establish a relationship between the finds and the tombs, and in turn between the tombs and the mountain as a whole, was irretrievably squandered. Crucial religious, sociological and stratigraphic aspects remained unexplored.⁴

Together with Alice Maria Sbriglio, the author attempted to provide detailed information on Schiaparelli's campaigns at Asyut by combining his data with the findings of recent fieldwork of The Asyut Project. Some important events can be reconstructed from hundreds of unpublished documents including fragmentary notes concerning the excavations, from financial accounts, from letters and reports to the King of Italy and the relevant ministries, as well as from the photographs and architectural drawings that documented the operations on site.⁵ A synopsis of the examined documents referring to the fieldwork car-

² Even Hogarth's general sketch map proved to be of little use in practice, particularly due to the large heaps of debris caused by the excavations, which cover the surface of the Gebel. The relative locations of the tombs seemed to be mere approximations; cf. D.P. Ryan, *The archaeological excavations of David George Hogarth at Asyut, Egypt* (Cincinnati 1988), 3.

³ Personal communication by Paolo Del Vesco.

⁴ J. Kahl, *Die Zeit selbst lag nun tot darnieder. Die Stadt Assiut und ihre Nekropolen nach westlichen Reiseberichten des 17. bis 19. Jahrhunderts: Konstruktion, Destruktion und Rekonstruktion* (The Asyut Project 5; Wiesbaden 2013), 93.

⁵ It is only thanks to the intensive studies carried out by Alice Maria Sbriglio at the Archivio di Stato di Torino, that it has become possible to determine the exact sites of Schiaparelli's excavations with more precision than was previously the case.

ried out between 1906 and 1913 made it possible for the first time to link certain areas of the mountain with the associated excavation campaigns. As a result, it has become feasible to establish at least the approximate position of a number of hitherto unlocatable tombs that contained significant objects relating to Asyut's history.⁶

The intact tombs of the officials Shemes and Min-hotep with their numerous burial objects are exemplary cases in point: both tombs were excavated by Schiaparelli in spring 1908. The tomb of Min-hotep comprises 88 entries in the inventory list of 1908.⁷ The Italian archaeologists brought 130 artefacts from the tomb of Shemes and the lady Rehu-er-ausen to Italy.⁸ All in all, the 1908 excavations yielded 168 human burials, 35 of which were in inscribed coffins.⁹ Unfortunately, the area excavated in 1908 could not be located due to the lack of archaeological recording. Marcel Zitman proposed that the excavation led by Schiaparelli in 1908 took place in the northeastern half of the necropolis.¹⁰ The existing records for this year, however, supply clear evidence that the Italian excavations (from 11 March 1908 – 13 May 1908) took place at first to the south of Tomb I and then, especially, above the geological step of Tomb I (that is, on Geological Step 3 and possibly also on Geological Step 4). Therefore, the tombs of Shemes, Rehu-er-ausen, and Min-hotep, as well as many others, must be located somewhere on Geological Step 3 (Figs. 2–3). And the 60 architectural structures (Figs. 4–7; Pls. 9–10) recorded in 2016 by Philip Jansen on Geological Step 3 above the Tomb of Djefai-Hapi I (Tomb I) may be a part of the tombs excavated by Schiaparelli in 1908. Due to the missing notes from the Italian excavations, however, an exact identification of the tombs is not possible anymore. Further, one can assume, that the larger tombs P13.1 (owner: Hatia, Foremost of the South Djefai-Hapi)¹¹ and O12.1 (unknown owner)¹² on Geological Step 4 (Fig. 2) are related to the tombs on Step 3. Both can be dated approximately to the transition from Dynasty 11 to Dynasty 12. This date corresponds well with the suggested date¹³ for the tombs of Shemes, Rehu-er-ausen and Min-hotep.

The limestone of the tombs on Geological Step 3 (P10.7-P10.10, P11.1-P11.29, Q11.2-Q11.11, Q12.1-Q12.17) is weathered, the general condition of the tombs is poor. A cleaning was not undertaken.

J.K.

⁶ The results of these studies will be published in a forthcoming volume by Jochem Kahl, Alice Maria Sbriglio, Marcella Trapani & Paolo Del Vesco.

⁷ M. Zitman, *The Necropolis of Assiut. A Case Study of Local Egyptian Funerary Culture from the Old Kingdom to the End of the Middle Kingdom* (OLA 180; Leuven – Paris – Walpole, MA 2010), Text, 218, Maps, 273–274.

⁸ Zitman, *The Necropolis of Assiut*, Text, 226; Maps, 273.

⁹ Zitman, *The Necropolis of Assiut*, Text, 231; Maps, 278.

¹⁰ Zitman, *The Necropolis of Assiut*, Text, 231.

¹¹ U. Verhoeven, Tomb P13.1 of a certain Djefai-Hapi, in: J. Kahl *et al.*, *The Asyut Project: Eighth Season of Fieldwork* (2010), in: SAK 40, 2011, 186–191. The location of the tomb on Geological Step 4 of Gebel Asyut al-gharbi places it between the tombs from the First Intermediate Period, Dynasty 11 and early Dynasty 12 on Geological Step 6, and the tombs from the reign of Sesostris I and later on Geological Step 2.

¹² The vaulted roof of the corridor points to a date at the end of Dynasty 11 or later.

¹³ Zitman, *The Necropolis of Assiut*, Text, 222, 227.

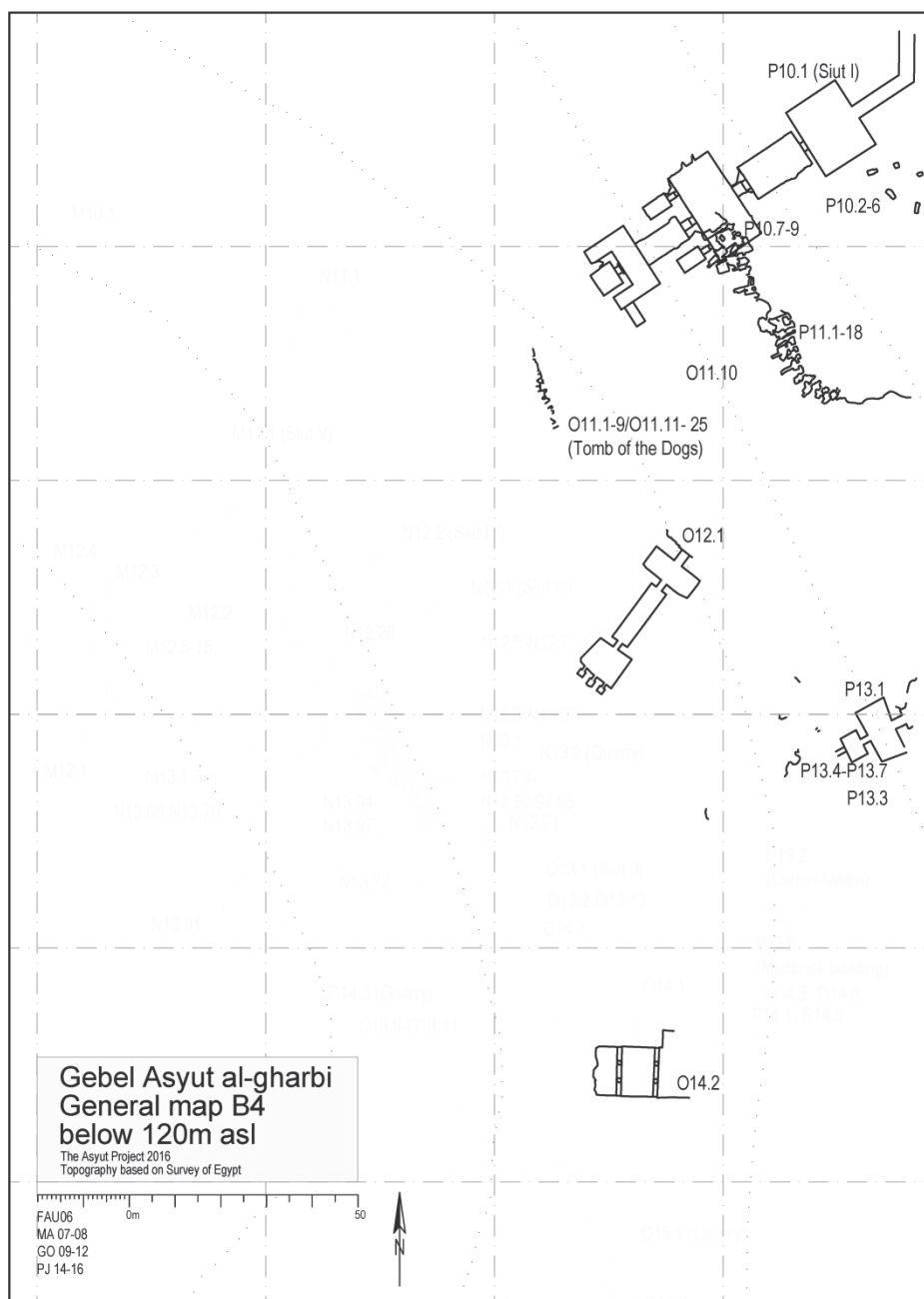


Fig. 2: Gebel Asyut al-gharbi, the area around Tomb I/P10.1, Tomb P13.1, and Tomb O12.1

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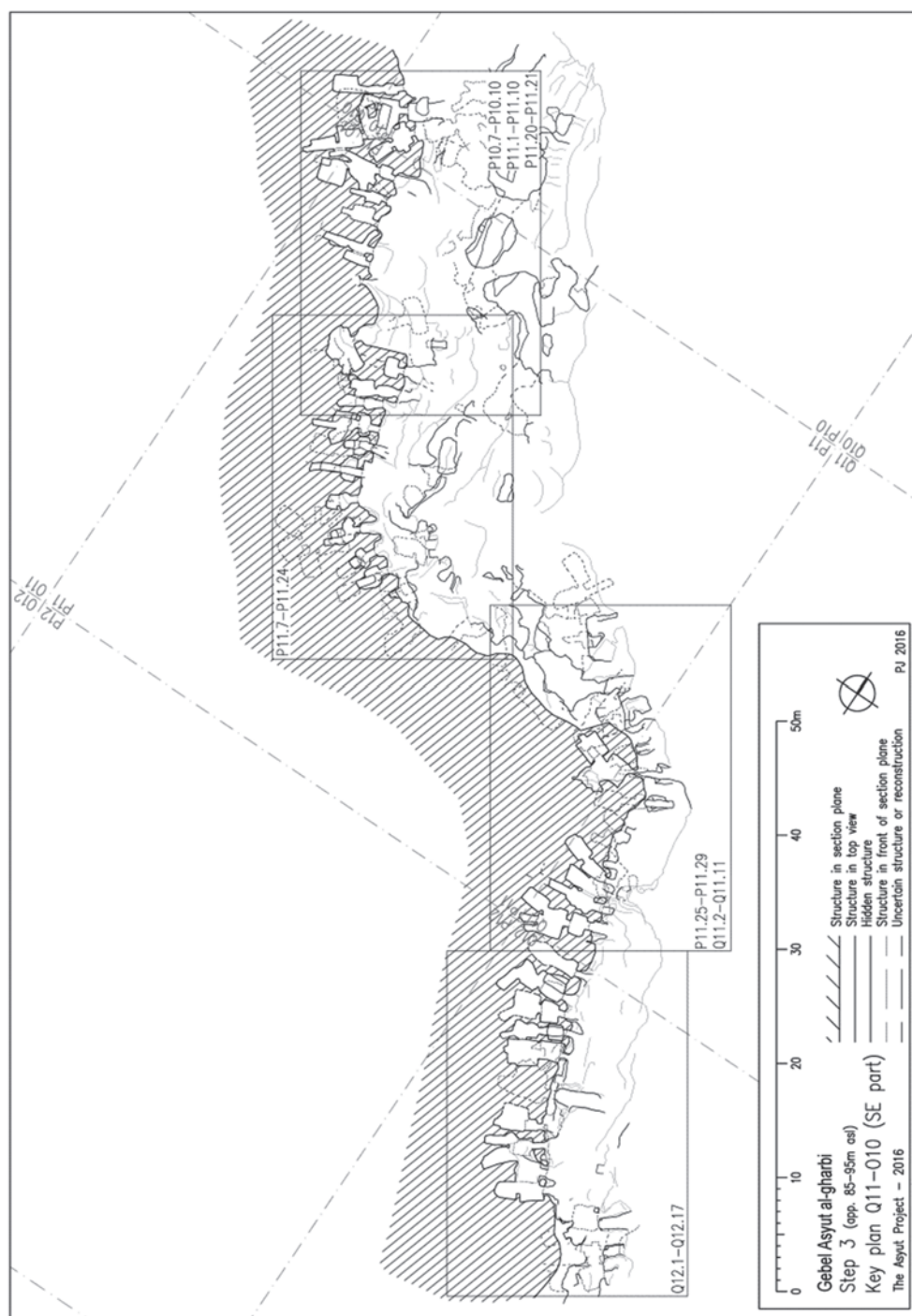


Fig. 3: Gebel Asyut al-gharbi, Geological Step 3 above Tomb I

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Pl. 9a: Geological Step 3 above Tomb I
© The Asyut Project, photo Fritz Barthel.



Pl. 9b Geological Step 3 above Tomb I
© The Asyut Project, photo Fritz Barthel.



Pl. 10a Geological Step 3 above Tomb I
© The Asyut Project, photo Fritz Barthel.



Pl. 10b Geological Step 3 above Tomb I
© The Asyut Project, photo Fritz Barthel.