
Peter Piccione has completed his third season working on the staff of the Epigraphic Survey at Chicago House, Luxor. In addition to his responsibilities there, he continued field work in his on-going Theban Tombs Publication Project. This personal project is a long-term epigraphic and archaeological undertaking to document the inscriptions and architecture in two noblemen's tombs in Western Thebes. The tombs belonged, respectively, to Ra (Tomb 72) and his father, Ahmose (Tomb 121), who were mortuary priests of King Tuthmosis III of the Egyptian Eighteenth Dynasty.

The epigraphic documentation includes the photography of all the walls and ceilings in the tombs and the creation of facsimile drawings of their decorative scenes and inscriptions. In two field seasons, 1990 and 1991, this project has taken over 313 photographs of 70 decorated scenes and wall sections inside Tomb 72, and it has completed preliminary hand-copies of inscriptions on two decorated walls. Along with the epigraphic effort, the second phase of the project will begin in the coming seasons when the architecture of the tombs is surveyed, they are cleared of archaeological debris, and their walls are conserved.

Logistical support for this project has been provided by the Epigraphic Survey at Chicago House in the form of loaning equipment, supplies, and transportation. The photography of the walls in Tomb 72 has been facilitated by Daniel Lanka, a Chicago House photographer, who has generously donated his personal services to the effort.

Architecturally, the tomb of Ra is unique in the Theban necropolis. With its system of colonnades, super-imposed terraces and, inter-connecting ramps, it emulates the style of a royal terrace-temple, such as the Temple of Tuthmosis III at Deir el-Bahari and the latter's mortuary temple at Qurna. Almost certainly the design of the tomb is related to the fact that Ra was the high priest of these temples in addition to two other temples in Western Thebes during the reign of Amenhotep II: the small temple of Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III at Medinet Habu and the temple of Amenhotep I and Ahmose-Nefertari. He also held the title of Overseer of the Mansion of Gold of Amun. Significantly, texts in his tomb reveal the names of his brothers: Senres, Menkheperreseneb, Amenhotep, and Nebamun, who also held very high titles in other Theban temples. In Tomb 121 their father, Ahmose, claims the title of First Prophet of Amun in the mortuary temple of Tuthmosis III earlier in the reign of that king. Therefore, this family of priests was closely allied to the Egyptian royal family, and it controlled many of the important priestly offices in Western Thebes.

Unfortunately, the interior of the tomb of Ra is in a lamentable condition. While the inscribed decoration is painted on plaster, about sixty-five percent of the plastered walls are destroyed, and half of the remaining decorated surface is covered with a thick black soot or is damaged by burning, cracking, peeling, and detachment from the underlying rock. The artwork that does survive reveals a fine style and quality almost identical to that of the near contemporary tomb of Rekhmire. Therefore, before the walls can be properly copied, the plaster surface must be consolidated and cleaned.

The tomb contains, among other scenes, two representations of King Amenhotep II, one as a young man enthroned with his mother, Merytre-Hatshepsut, the other in his chariot hunting in the desert. Such scenes occur infrequently in private tombs, and their presence here might reflect the tomb owner's high position and prerogatives.

Scattered debris inside the tomb reveals that it was reused for burials in the Late Period. However, even earlier in the Twentieth Dynasty, Ra's coffin was usurped for the reburial of Ramesses VI in the royal cache of Amenhotep II's tomb in the Valley of the Kings. That reuse indicates that by that time, Ra's tomb had been robbed and the coffin emptied of its first contents. Later in the Coptic period, the tomb was reused again as a house or hermitage, during which time the walls were blackened and burned.

In the coming seasons Piccione plans the archaeological clearance of the courtyards and burial chambers of Tomb 72, the conservation of its structure, and the execution of facsimile drawings of that tomb's decoration.

September 1990 saw Piccione present two papers related to his researches on Egyptian gaming and religion. The first, entitled "A Religious Subtext in the Gaming Episode of the Tale of Setne Khamwas," was read at the Fourth International Congress of Demoticists, held at the Oriental Institute. The second paper, "The Egyptian Game of Senet As a Ritual for the Migration of the Soul," was given at the Board Games of the Ancient World Colloquium, held at the British Museum.
