



Workman Jerays Tawfiq looks on as the burial chamber of Senebkay emerges from the sand.

## *An Update from the 2013–2014 Field Season*

# DISCOVERING PHARAOHS SOBEKHOTEP & SENEBKAY

BY JOSEF WEGNER

Archaeology can change quickly in the face of new data produced through excavation. In this issue of *Expedition* we have presented some of the recent research of the Penn Museum's excavations at South Abydos. Yet, already we have new results to add. The winter season (December 2013–January 2014) was extremely productive and has provided some exciting new discoveries.

These include the tomb of a previously unknown pharaoh, king Woseribre-Senebkay (*ca.* 1650 BCE), and an entire dynasty dating to Egypt's Second Intermediate Period. As a result, the royal necropolis of the *Mountain-of-Anubis* is coming into sharper focus. We now know that this site is the burial ground of many kings, both great and small. Senwosret III initiated the site *ca.* 1850 BCE,

but it continued to develop over the course of some three centuries. In a fascinating turn of events we now know that the site of *Mountain-of-Anubis* includes the tombs of a forgotten dynasty, the Abydos Dynasty to which newly identified king Senebkay belonged. Let us take a brief look at some of these results fresh from the field.

One of the important discoveries that we made in the summer of 2013 was the 60-ton quartzite sarcophagus chamber that originated in Tomb S10. In this issue we presented evidence that the chamber dates to the very beginning of the 13th Dynasty (*ca.* 1780 BCE), and may belong to pharaoh Sobekhotep I, first king of the 13th Dynasty. Over the winter season one priority was the investigation of Tomb S10 with the goal of retrieving evidence on the tomb's date and ownership. We completed work on a significant area encompassing the tomb's

entrance passage as well as the remains of a chapel or cult building that once stood against the front of S10. We were rewarded with some crucial evidence including remnants of the king's burial equipment. Most significant, however, were fragments of a large, limestone funerary stela of a king named Sobekhotep. This stela shows the seated king, and inscriptions confirm the identification of S10 as belonging to a pharaoh Sobekhotep. Other associated objects corroborate the early 13th Dynasty date. Consequently, S10 is almost certainly the tomb of Sobekhotep I, first pharaoh of the 13th Dynasty.

lar design to the nearby examples excavated during the summer. Expecting a private tomb, we began work on the structure with the hope of discovering reused blocks that had derived from the chapel of Sobekhotep. As the entrance to the tomb was exposed we were intrigued to find a beautifully constructed limestone portcullis, evidence of high status and considerable investment in the tomb. Working back to the tomb's inner end we were astounded when we reached a decorated burial chamber. Built of limestone, the burial chamber is painted with vibrantly colored scenes and texts naming a formerly unknown

pharaoh: Woseribre-Senebkay. Wall scenes show four goddesses, the protectors of the king's canopic shrine. Images of winged sun-disks surmount the walls which also bear hieroglyphic inscriptions associating the king with the four sons of Horus. The texts in the burial chamber provide the king's titulary (his throne name Woseribre, as well as his birth name Senebkay) and state that he is the *Lord of the Two-Lands* as well as *King of Upper and Lower Egypt*. Who is this mysterious king Senebkay?

The burial chamber had been entirely stripped of its contents by ancient tomb robbers. However, in the tomb's first chamber, just inside the stone portcullis we found substantial remains of the king's burial—the pharaoh's canopic chest and its lid, along with fragments of his funerary mask and painted coffin. These were strewn alongside the

Excavations in the chapel area of Sobekhotep's tomb led to an unforeseen and remarkable discovery that adds immeasurably to our understanding of the site of *Mountain-of-Anubis*. One of the issues we discuss in the current issue is the date and ownership of the elite tombs adjacent to Tombs S9 and S10. Based on their relatively modest scale, we had thought that these may be private tombs. However, the reuse of the 60-ton royal sarcophagus chamber from S10 in one of these tombs has been truly puzzling. Who would have the authority and wealth to extract this massive chamber from deep within the tomb of Sobekhotep for the purpose of reusing it in their own tomb? The answer to that question is now clear: it was, in fact, another pharaoh who reused Sobekhotep's chamber. Here is how we know.

In early January 2014, work in the chapel area of Sobekhotep's tomb revealed an intrusive tomb of simi-

This detail of the burial chamber shows the goddesses Neith and Nut protecting the canopic shrine of Senebkay.

remains of Senebkay himself; the king's body had been disarticulated by tomb robbers in search of amulets and jewelry. Important clues to the date of Senebkay were discovered on his canopic chest. Here we found that the chest which was once gilded retains painted texts of an earlier king—none other than Sobekhotep whose tomb nearby was the source of the reused sarcophagus chamber! Senebkay's artisans had reused cedar planks deriving from Sobekhotep's coffin for his own canopic chest.

As the evidence quickly mounted, artifacts, texts, and decoration of the burial chamber made it clear that Senebkay



dates during the fragmentary era of Egypt's Second Intermediate Period (ca. 1700–1550 BCE). It was at that stage, still at Abydos, that we consulted one of the most important ancient sources for Egypt's political history: the Turin Kinglist. This fragmentary 19th Dynasty papyrus contains crucial information on the sequence of kings and dynasties, as well as their lengths of reign. The names of at least 16 kings of this dynasty were once recorded in the Turin Kinglist, although most of the text is broken in this part of the papyrus. Importantly, the first two kings of this group have the throne name *Woser...re*, just as occurs with our newly discovered pha-



ABOVE: The fragmentary funerary stela of king Sobekhotep was found in the ruins of his funerary chapel. Note that the king is seated. RIGHT: The painted burial chamber of king Senebkay (ca. 1650 BCE) was discovered in January 2014.

raoh: Woseribre-Senebkay. We can now establish Senebkay to be the first or second pharaoh of a regional dynasty that dates from ca. 1650–1600 BCE. Archaeological evidence has now proven the existence of an independent “Abydos Dynasty,” which has been hypothesized by several Egyptologists including Detlef Franke and K.S.B. Ryholt, but doubted by many other scholars.

We are at an exciting juncture in the archaeological work at *Mountain-of-Anubis*. We can see that the site contains the tombs of earlier and more powerful kings from Egypt's late Middle Kingdom, such as Senwosret III and Sobekhotep I. But it also served as the necropolis of later kings ruling during the Second Intermediate Period. Senebkay ruled near the beginning of this dynasty. Indications

are that we have the tombs of the entire Abydos Dynasty in the necropolis at this site. The kings of the Abydos Dynasty appear to have linked themselves with their more illustrious forebears of the Middle Kingdom, but they also availed themselves of materials from at least one of those earlier kings' tombs. It was one of the later kings of this group who was responsible for reusing the sarcophagus chamber



of Sobekhotep I. The complexities of the site are now more apparent to us as we can appreciate that the *Mountain-of-Anubis* was the burial ground for perhaps two dozen pharaohs. Future work is likely to shed considerable light on the political history of Egypt's late Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period. No doubt, more surprises like the discovery of Senebkay, are in store. ●

#### FOR FURTHER READING

Ryholt, K.S.B. *The Political Situation in Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period c.1800–1550 B.C.* Copenhagen: Carsten Niebuhr Institute, 1997.

Wegner, Josef. “Kings of Abydos: Solving an Ancient Egyptian Mystery.” *Current World Archaeology* 64(2014): 18–25.