View into the slab-lined burial chamber of a tomb in Cemetery S. This example (tomb CS.5) was architecturally well-preserved although—like all others—was robbed in antiquity.
as part of the ongoing excavations in the Middle Kingdom town of Wah-sut, a pressing question has arisen: where were its inhabitants buried? Although this might appear easy to answer, reality has proven otherwise. During 2012–2013, we began a program of survey and excavation—the South Abydos Tomb Census—to help answer this crucial question. Results so far have been both exceptional and unexpected, as we discovered an unexcavated group of New Kingdom pyramid tombs, dating to ca. 1350–1200 BCE, instead of a Middle Kingdom cemetery.

Archaeological remote sensing via magnetometry has proven useful at Abydos. This technique has revealed previously unknown subterranean features, including several different clusters of tombs. The project’s primary strategy has been to excavate selectively tombs that appear on the magnetic maps. During 2012–2013 we concentrated on two areas: a group of tombs composing the “Temple Cemetery” due to their proximity to the mortuary temple of Senwosret III; and burial structures near the base of the cliffs adjacent to the Senwosret III tomb enclosure, an area called Cemetery S.

Although both of these tomb clusters appeared initially to be good candidates for Middle Kingdom private tombs, in all cases so far they have turned out to date to the New Kingdom or later. We have, therefore, widened the goals of the Tomb Census to map all the non-royal cemeteries in the area surrounding the mortuary complex of Senwosret III. To date we have excavated 14 tombs from the Temple Cemetery and Cemetery S. We are also analyzing the evidence of Middle Kingdom mortuary objects discovered in Wah-sut along with an expanded program to document the changing patterns of private mortuary traditions at South Abydos.

**TOMB ARCHITECTURE**

The recent excavations at South Abydos have uncovered two basic models of tomb architecture: the shaft-and-chamber tomb which occurs in the Temple Cemetery, and the descending stairway or passage tomb common to Cemetery S. In the shaft-tombs, a rectangular brick pit some 2 m (7 feet) deep descends to an arched doorway providing access to a subterranean, vaulted burial chamber. Cemetery S stairway tombs descend into the earth through a series of vaulted chambers in a line, containing small stairs.

The stairway tombs of Cemetery S are larger and more elaborate than those of the Temple Cemetery. With one notable exception (the tomb of Horemheb which we shall examine further below) they certainly represent higher status burials. The burial chambers were constructed with a lining of carefully fitted stone slabs. In some cases the slabs are clearly reused or surplus building material from other projects. Due to ancient robbery, the exact date of these tombs remains to be specifically determined.

In the case of Cemetery S there is no evidence for any chapel or commemorative buildings above the tombs. Such offering places probably existed separately from the actual burials. Could this be a later parallel to the Middle Kingdom approach to burial and commemoration—a separation between tomb and offering place?

Based on in situ evidence and comparison with other New Kingdom cemeteries, the tombs of the Temple Cemetery were originally surmounted by hollow mud-brick pyramids. Pyramids measuring on average 1.5 m square sat directly above the vaulted brick burial chambers. The sides of non-royal pyramids in the cemeteries at North Abydos have steep-sided pyramidia or cap stones (with slopes of 65-75 degrees) rising almost 2.5 m (about 8-9 feet) tall. As in other examples at Abydos and elsewhere, these small pyramids of the Temple Cemetery would have had a niche facing the Nile cultivation, which held a decorated stela dedicated to the deceased buried below. A courtyard or walled chapel room surrounding the tomb entrance shaft would have completed the structure.

The tomb of Horemheb (TC.20), dated slightly earlier than the other tombs of the cemetery, had the...
largest pyramid with a base of just over five meters on a side. Assuming a 69 degree slope, this pyramid would have originally stood just shy of 7 m tall (about 21 feet), a very large example of a private pyramid of the New Kingdom. Its owner was evidently of considerable wealth and social status as the tomb is far larger than any other in the Temple Cemetery. Fortunately, although robbed, this large pyramid tomb preserved a good number of its original tomb goods.

ANALYZING THE ARTIFACTS
Funerary artifacts are an integral part of any Egyptian burial. All the tombs investigated so far in the Tomb Census have been heavily looted both in antiquity as well as in modern times. What has been left for us, however, indicates that these tombs were all well appointed. Painted wood Black-type (coffins with decoration on a black background) and early Yellow-type coffins (with yellow background) predominate, with indications of cartonnage mummy masks. Black-type coffins date from Thutmose III to the middle of the reign of Ramses II (ca. 1450–1250 BCE). Yellow-type coffins on the other hand first appear during the reign of Amenhotep III, and their use continues through the Third Intermediate Period. Based on the coffin styles of the Temple Cemetery, the tombs fall into the period from Amenhotep III to Ramses II (ca. 1390–1213 BCE).

During excavation, we recovered fragments of multiple faience bowls, including one example with the rare motif of a wesekh collar. A beautiful intact faience finger ring was discovered in the south burial chamber of TC.11 along with numerous faience beads. Glass vessel fragments from TC.19 attest to the richness of some of these burials, since glass was a high status commodity during the late 18th Dynasty. The modest architecture of TC.7 even contained pieces of a globular Mycenaean Stirrup Jar from the Aegean, an item that represents Egypt’s far-reaching trade network.

THE TOMB OF HOREMHEB
By far the richest tomb in the cemetery was that of a man named Horemheb whose tomb dates to the end of the 18th Dynasty, ca. 1350 BCE (he is not to be confused with the contemporary pharaoh of the same name). As mentioned above, this tomb (numbered TC.20) had the largest pyramid structure of any in the cemetery. Unlike the other tombs however, the pyramid surmounted the tomb entrance shaft, which led down to a suite of three vaulted chambers. Set into the floor of the burial chamber we discovered an inscribed sandstone sarcophagus carved for the “Scribe Horemheb.” The texts and images on this sarcophagus have their closest parallels in Black-type coffins from the reign of Amenhotep III. Each of the four corners has a depiction of Thoth, god of wisdom and writ-
Images of Anubis hold the central position of both sides, flanked by the Four Sons of Horus. Each divine image has traces of yellow paint, while the background of the coffin was colored red, perhaps in an attempt to emulate a more expensive sarcophagus of red granite.

Eighteen fragmentary and two complete pottery shabti figures were recovered from the tomb of Horemheb. These figures, intended as workers for the deceased in the afterlife, were originally brightly painted with the names of their owners written on the front. The names of three of these individuals are still partly legible: Horemheb himself, a man by the name of Ramesu, and finally the somewhat unorthodox name Hutefmipet ("His temple is as the sky"). The recovery of shabti figures with different owners suggests that TC.20 was probably a family tomb used for several generations.

Other objects from this tomb included an intact travertine cosmetic vessel (SATC.20.4) of the early 19th Dynasty. Composite glass eye inlays derive from wooden coffins and mummy masks. An anthropomorphized green jasper heart amulet, with red jasper face and black stone wig, bears an image of the Benu bird (a deity linked to the creation of the world) standing before an incense burner. Heart amulets such as this also appear at Aniba, and date to the period between the 18th and 19th Dynasty.

**FUTURE WORK**

Future seasons will target 14 additional tombs of the Temple Cemetery known from the subsurface survey. With heightened local interest in our discoveries in this area, it is imperative to document as much of this cemetery as possible before further damage can be done. At least two more tombs in Cemetery S, originally excavated by Arthur Weigall, require reinvestigation, and as yet we do not know the full horizontal spread of the non-royal tombs in this area. The coming seasons will find the Tomb Census Project exploring and surveying the vast desert expanse of the Senwosret III complex from his Mortuary Temple at the cultivation, to his Tomb in Cemetery S. It is hoped that this area will yield evidence on the location of the tombs of the ancient inhabitants of Wab-sut.