

First Glimpse of a New Pharaoh

THE REMAINS of SENEBKAY

BY PAUL VERHELST AND MATTHEW OLSON

On January 6, 2014, sunlight fell upon the visage of a pharaoh whom history had forgotten for over three and a half millennia. This man was the pharaoh Woseribre-Senebkay.

Like virtually every ancient Egyptian royal tomb, Senebkay's resting place was extensively robbed in antiquity. Looters opened his wooden coffin, removed his cartonnage mummy mask, and dragged his mummy from the burial chamber to a location just inside the tomb entrance. When our team found the king's body, it had been broken into a number of pieces, presumably during the robbers' search for jewelry and amulets. Senebkay's torso lay on its left side, facing east, near his disarticulated arms. His hips and the long bones of his legs were directly to the south, while his skull lay displaced behind his pelvis. Small fragments of linen near the bones indicate that his body had undergone some form of mummification and wrapping prior to burial.

The following day, Senebkay's jumbled remains arrived at the dig house where we began to articulate his relatively intact skeleton while piecing together Senebkay's osteobiography, an account of the king's life through the examination of his skeletal remains. His skull and pelvic bones confirmed that the skeleton was male. The pelvic bones also played an important role in determining Senebkay's approximate age through the pubic symphysis, a small area where the two hipbones join in the front of the pelvic region, which indicated that Senebkay died sometime in his 40s. In addition, we determined Senebkay's stature by



Matt Olson (left) and Paul Verhelst (right) conducted a preliminary examination of Senebkay's skeleton.

using his femur length to estimate that he was somewhere between 1.72 to 1.75 m tall (approximately 5 feet, 9 inches), quite tall for an ancient Egyptian of his time. Senebkay's teeth showed wear associated with consuming food that had grit particles. We also began looking at Senebkay's bones to determine if he suffered any health issues during his lifetime. So far, we noticed deterioration concentrated on the right clavicle and first rib, but the few days we were able to spend with him did not give us enough time to determine if this deterioration happened before or after he died.

What we learned about Senebkay this past season represents a preliminary analysis of this forgotten king. Additional research on Senebkay's skeleton in future seasons will allow us to confirm and improve upon these preliminary results as well as look at genetic and dating methods that might connect Senebkay to other skeletal remains found in nearby tombs. It is with great enthusiasm that we continue to learn more about Senebkay, the pharaoh that we will ensure history never forgets again. ●

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