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THEBAN TOMBS PUBLICATION PROJECT: TOMBS NO. 72 (RÂY) AND 121 (AHMOSE)

**A REPORT TO THE PERMANENT COMMITTEE
OF THE SUPREME COUNCIL FOR
EGYPTIAN ANTIQUITIES**

1998 FIELD SEASON

**by Peter A. Piccione, Ph.D.
Project Director**

Acknowledgments

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Project Description

The year 1998 marked the fifth field season of the Theban Tombs Publication Project, sponsored by the University of Charleston, South Carolina, and the Serapis Research Institute. The purpose of this project is to copy the inscriptions and to document the architecture, as well as to clean and conserve the wall decorations of Theban Tombs no. 121 and 72. Tomb 121 belonged to Ahmose, the Second Prophet of Amun, and Theban Tomb 72 belonged to Rây, the First Prophet of Amun and Menkheperre during the Eighteenth Dynasty. Ahmose and Rây were related as father and son. Their tombs are located in Western Thebes on the northeastern face of #Elwet el-Sheikh abd el-Qurna, in the Upper Enclosure. Situated near the top if the hill, they overlook the districts of el-Khokha and el-Assasif and the village of Qurna.

The tomb of Ahmose was apparently begun in the reign of King Thutmose III, and thereafter decorated and completed during the coregency of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II. The tomb of Rây was begun during the coregency and probably completed early in the sole reign of Amenhotep II. Findings in the 1998 season would suggest that after Ahmose's death, Rây completed the construction of his father's tomb (no. 121), perhaps even enlarging the structure, while embarking on the construction of his own tomb (no. 72).

1998 Project Schedule and Staff

Plan and Goals of the 1998 Season

In planning the field campaign of the 1998 season, our goals were:

- (1) resume and hopefully complete first-phase epigraphic photography of the wall and ceiling decoration in Tomb 72, which we had begun in previous seasons;
- (2) continue copying and drawing inscriptions of the wall decoration of Tomb 72, including making controlled epigraphic hand copies of the texts;

- (3) prepare a series of documentation photographs of the exterior of Tombs 72 and 121, including details of the rock surfaces, facade, and surrounding features;
- (4) resume and complete the preparation of the key plan of the wall decoration in Tomb 121;
- (5) resume first-phase epigraphic photography of the wall and ceiling decorations in Tomb 121;
- (6) initiate and conduct a proper condition survey of the structure and interior of Tomb 72 and Tomb 121 as a necessary first step in the conservation of the two tombs.

The field staff for the 1998 season consisted of Dr. Peter A. Piccione, as field director and epigrapher, Mr. Daniel E. Lanka as photographer, Mr. Stephen Rickerby as conservator, Mr. Wallace Eldredge, photographer and photographer's assistant, Ms. Myrna Lane, project manager and data recorder, and Mr. Abd el-Rahman Ahmed abd el-Rahim, as inspector.

Field work for the project began on 7 October 1998 and ended 12 November 1998. Although the field season lasted only four and one-half weeks, we accomplished all that we planned and more, and we came to understand the history of the tombs and their owners much more than previously. In addition, we surveyed the exterior of Tomb 72 at the top of the hill. There we made some discoveries in relation to the shrine of Sheikh abd el-Gurna which overlies the top of the tomb, and in Tomb 121 we began to survey and map the various burial chambers and secondary tomb pits.

In the 1998 season, the Theban Tombs Publication Project initiated the first step in the conservation and repair of the wall decorations, including the painting and plaster work, when it undertook a full and proper condition survey of the two tombs, under the direction of the project conservator, Stephen Rickerby. This condition study was the greatest accomplishment of the 1998 field season. Mr. Rickerby's two reports, compete with his findings and recommendations for the conservation program of the tombs, are included below.

The Photographic Campaign in the Tombs

Background and Previous Work

Prior to the 1998 field season, the Theban Tombs Publication Project had executed more than 397 photographic images of Tombs 72 and 121 since its inception, as part of phase-one photography in those structures. These images include black-and-white prints and color transparencies in formats of 120 mm. and 4x5 inch. They document the walls and their condition, decorations, and texts. Additional transparencies in the 35 mm. format record general views of the tombs and walls, and they document the actual field work itself. In 1998 the Theban Tombs Publication Project completed a total of 158 additional photographic setups as part of the phase-one epigraphic documentation of both tombs.¹ In addition, the project made more than 360 color transparencies in 35 mm. format to document the work in progress and to provide study photos of exteriors of the tombs and specific textual and architectural details of the exteriors and interiors. Finally, the project took 45 infra-red images of the wall decorations. We are pleased to include with this report a set of contact prints of the epigraphic photographs (120 mm. and 4x5 inch) taken in the 1998 season (see below).

Photography of Tomb 72 (Râÿ)

In 1998 the photographic goals of the project inside the tomb of Râÿ were to resume and complete epigraphic photography of the walls and ceilings and to prepare a series of photographs in 35 mm. and 120 mm. of the exterior of the tomb, the rock surfaces, facade, and surrounding features.

¹Each setup consists of two or three identical photos of the same subject shot at different exposures (i.e., a 2-stop or 3-stop bracket) to ensure a perfectly exposed image.

Previously in the 1996 season, because the project adjusted its work schedule in order to clean the doorway of Tomb 121 and build a door (as requested by the inspectorate), it was not able at that time to complete the last of the epigraphic photography in Tomb 72 as planned. That task was left for the following season. Thus, in 1998, the photographic team of the Theban Tombs Publication Project completed the last of the phase-one epigraphic photography in Tomb 72. Also, a small number of photographs from 1996 had to be retaken due to subsequent problems in the development of the negatives. Hence, in 1998, the photographic team of the project, led by Mr. Daniel Lanka, executed a total of 48 photographic setups in 4 x 5 inch format inside Tomb 72.

The team also took a number of photographs in smaller formats of the exterior of the tomb. In doing so, the project sought to recreate in modern photography a series of older images that were taken in 1914 by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and so provide a basis for understanding how the structure of the tomb and its surroundings had changed in the previous eighty-four years.

As an experiment in the use of beyond-the-visible-spectrum photography, the project also made 45 photographs of damaged wall decoration with infrared film in formats of 120 mm. and 35 mm. The purpose of this exercise was to determine the usefulness of infrared photography to reveal details on the walls otherwise obscured by soot and burn damage. Result: under certain limited conditions, infrared photography might be useful in the documentation of damages surfaces.

Photography of Tomb 121 (Ahmose)

In Tomb 121, the goal of the project in 1998 was to resume first-phase epigraphic photography of the wall and ceiling decorations and to prepare a series of documentation photographs of the exterior of the tomb, including surrounding features.

In 1996 the project began the epigraphic photography of Tomb 121 in the doorway of the tomb. In 1998, it continued this project and executed a staggering number of 110 photographic setups inside the Tomb 121. These images included 4 x 5 inch color transparencies and black-and-white prints where the wall decoration survives and black-and-white prints only of the wall surfaces where no decoration exists. In additions, the project began to photograph in 120 mm. format fragments of the granite stela with a goal of reassembling them on paper, and with a view, perhaps, of reassembling the fragments themselves as part of the conservation of the tomb.

Architectural Survey of the Tombs

Survey of Tomb 72

Shrine of Sheikh abd el-Gurna

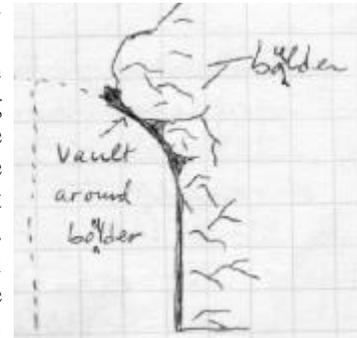
What began as the conservator's analysis of the exterior of Tomb 72, including the stonework on the top of the tomb, along with the photographer's documentation of the same area, ultimately became a survey to determine if the remains of any superstructure of the tomb still existed up there. Eighteenth Dynasty tombs might be expected to include some superstructure above the doorway of the tomb consisting of a small pyramid or shrine.

Today situated only five meters above the courtyard of the tomb, on the crest of the hill, is the relatively modern cenotaph of Sheikh abd el-Gurna. This shrine, built and maintained by the local villagers, is located outside on the top of the hill, and it lies *nearly centered* over the rear of the axial corridor of Tomb 72 down below. An informal walking survey, undertaken at the request of and in conjunction with the local inspectorate, indicates that a mudbrick installation occurs on the slope of the hill up near the base of the shrine. These appear to be the top of the ancient mudbrick retaining wall that still partially exists above the tomb. Furthermore, the shrine, made of mudbrick and painted plaster, is built in a foundation of reused sandstone blocks and flakes. Examination of the surface

surrounding the shrine also reveals evidence of sandstone blocks in the ground, apparently as a foundation. All the evidence would seem to indicate that the shrine of Sheikh abd el-Qurna has been built on the foundations of a sandstone superstructure that was part of Rây's tomb.

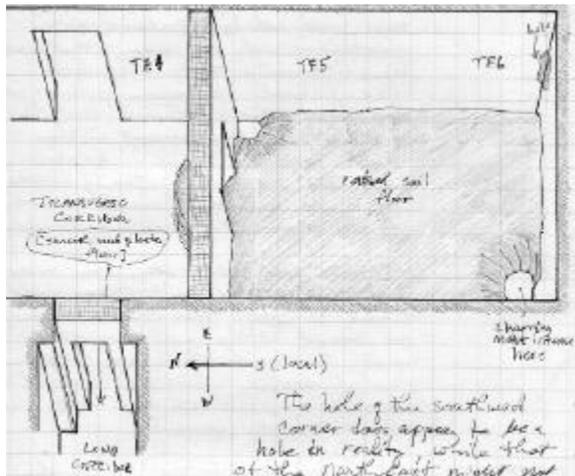
Vaulted Statue Niche in the Axial Corridor

What has perplexed the project for a long time was an adequate explanation for the atypical statue niche at the rear of the axial corridor. Although the niche is partially destroyed, enough survives to indicate that its roof vaults outward toward the front. While this type of vaulting is unexpected before the Coptic period, the plaster work of the niche indicates that it is an Eighteenth Dynasty construction. In 1998 the project finally resolved the issue after careful study of the niche. What appears as vaulting is probably the sloping roof/ceiling of a *seh*-pavilion. The reason that the builders fashioned a niche in the form of a pavilion is likely due to the large boulder protruding from the rock behind the niche. The stone in this part of the tomb is poor, and the builders already had to contend with a collapsed ceiling here. Therefore, when they encountered the boulder they chose not to remove it, which might cause a collapse of the entire rear of the tomb. Rather, they halted construction and masked the boulder's protuberance with the arcing surface of the *seh*-pavilion ceiling.



Sketch: Niche Elevation

Coptic Era Installations and Reuse



Analysis of graffiti and the patterns of secondary burning and heating on the walls of Tomb 72 indicate that in early Christian times, the southern extension of the transverse hall was reused as a workshop in which kilns, furnaces, or ovens operated for a long period of time. They were located in a room that at one time was partitioned from the rest of the tomb by a secondary mudbrick wall built across that part of the hall. The floor was higher here than the rest of the tomb, consisting of tamped soil or ash. Two or more ovens generated heavy smoke in this room that sooted the walls and collapsed the ceiling. However, while the soot, fire, and smoke damage were confined to this end of the transverse hall, intense heat radiated to all parts of the tomb, altering the colors of paint pigments

throughout the structure (as discovered by conservator Stephen Rickerby in 1998), baking the upper surface of the black mud plaster red and cracking and destroying most of the painted plaster decoration. Today none of the secondary walls survive, nor does the raised floor of soil or ash. They were removed and cleaned, perhaps by Arthur Weigall, when he first cleared the tomb in 1907. However, their silhouettes can still be detected where they abutted the walls.

Within the entrance of the axial corridor, remains of secondary mudbrick doorjambs were also found, as well as an undisturbed mud-plaster Coptic floor laid on top of the original floor. That the persons who used this workshop were Christian monks is suggested by Coptic graffiti scrawled on an adjacent wall as a prayer to "our Lord." Tomb 72 is located only several hundred yards in either direction from two nearby Coptic monasteries that regularly employed abandoned tombs as outbuildings, i.e. the monasteries of St. Cyriacus and St. Epiphanius. It seems likely that Tomb 72 functioned as a service establishment for one of the monasteries.

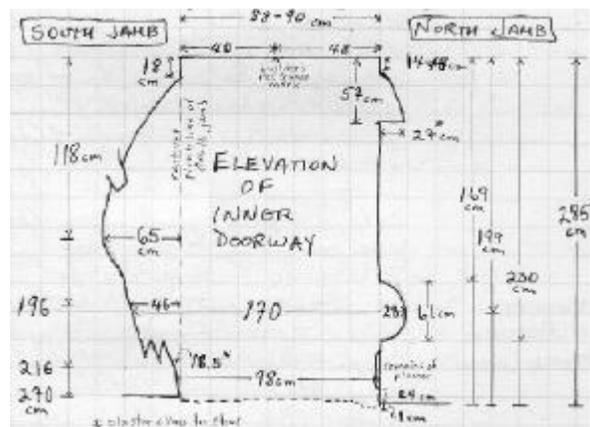
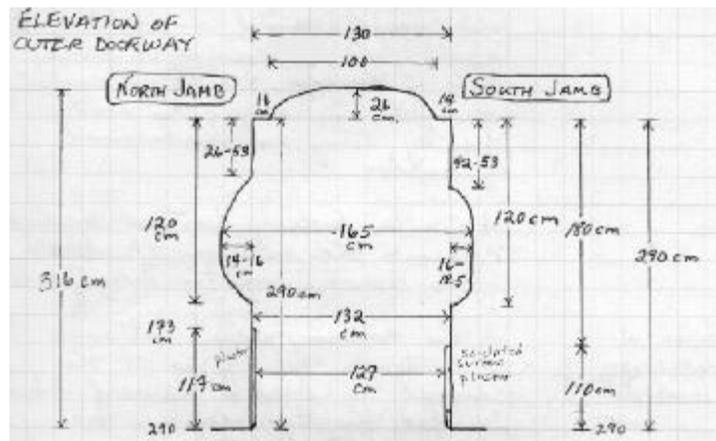
Survey of Tomb 121

In 1998 the project undertook an architectural survey of the Tomb 121 to further the condition study and to support the epigraphic survey of the tomb. Special attention was paid, among other things, to the burial chambers, the condition of the doorways, architectural details which seem to suggest that the tomb was built in several phases, the slope of the ceiling, and the statue niche high in the west wall of the axial corridor.

Condition of the Doorways

In the 1996 report, it was noted that the doorjambs of both the inner and outer doorways of Tomb 121 had been hacked in such a way as to widen them at key points. In the 1998 season, we studied these patterns of hacking to determine when they occurred and for what reasons.

Sometime after the doorways had been completed, stone from the thicknesses had been roughly hacked out from both sides of each door, leaving semi-circular gashes or large cut-outs in the masonry extending from through the full thicknesses of each doorway. It is clear now that the Egyptians had widened the openings in the doorways to take out from or bring into the axial corridor a large or odd-shaped object that, otherwise, could not fit through the doorways, e.g., a large stela, a stone sarcophagus, etc.



This damage probably occurred after the tomb was abandoned or later in its history when it was used for a series of subsidiary burials when new burial chambers were cut into its walls and floors. Cutting the thicknesses of the outer main doorway destroyed the plaster decoration of the adjoining walls of the transverse hall and would have seriously damaged the sandstone door jambs in the outer facade of the tomb, as well as the sandstone doorjambs of the inner door to the axial corridor. It is more than likely that the subsequent cutting of these gashes was responsible for the destruction of the doorways and any associated inscriptions.

Comparison of the dimensions of the breaks and their locations in both doorways indicates that the dimensions of the unknown object that passed through the two doors was 132-170 cm. wide and no more than 67 cm. thick. It passed low through the inner door and high through the outer door, perhaps because the outside level of the courtyard was higher than the inside level of the transverse hall at the time of removal. The only object in the tomb that met these specifications was the large red granite false door stela that once stood at the rear of the axial corridor. Fragments of that stela were drawn by the Metropolitan Museum in the 1930's. It had been broken up in antiquity, and only pieces of it still exist inside the tomb, lying in the transverse hall where it had been hauled and seemingly broken up before being taken from the tomb. Clearly the stone was to have been reused for building, statuary, etc.

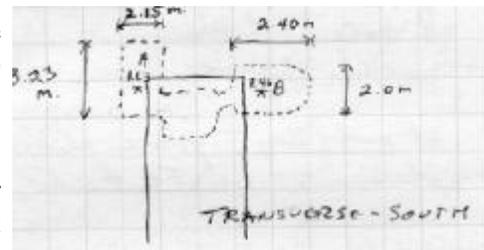
Interestingly, other Theban tombs show similar patterns of destruction in their doorways, suggesting that the removal of granite stelae from Theban tombs was a common occurrence (perhaps from as early as Ramesside times onward).

Courtyard Burial Shaft

Outside the tomb near the northwest corner of the open courtyard is a rock-cut platform that rises 39-74 cm. above the surface of the court. This platform is roughly rectangular in shape. At the center is an irregular rectangular opening 251-266 cm in length and 130 cm in width. This opening accesses a deep vertical burial shaft that descends to a depth of 10.58 meters. At the bottom of the shaft, apparently there are three entrances in the rock leading to separate burial chambers, one in the south wall, the second in the northwest corner, the third in the northeast corner. Given the parallels to other tombs from the this period, the chambers of this shaft probably are the original main burial chambers of Tomb 121, first constructed for the use of Ahmose and his family.

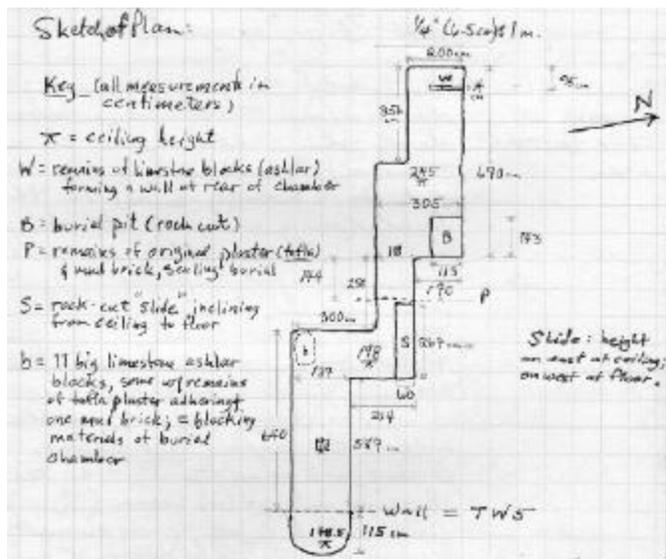
Interior Burial Chambers

The interior of Tomb 121 is constructed with four complete subsidiary burial chambers and several incomplete recesses that were meant to function for burials. Perhaps only one of these was original with the construction of the tomb. The rest were constructed in the Late Period and later. At the south end of the transverse hall (TS), a vertical shaft descends 9 meters into the ground where it joins with two other subterranean chambers. Here the ceiling varies 1.47-1.67 m. high.



The most elaborate of the interior chambers descends under ground 16.88 meters from the floor adjacent to the west wall of the transverse hallway-south (TW 5). It consists of a series

of passages that descend to the west with several turns to the right (north), leading into a burial chamber 305 cm. wide x 690 cm. long x 245 cm. high. In the northeast corner is a recess in the floor (113 x 143 cm.) for the placement of a coffin or canopic shrine. Directly opposite near the western wall are the remains of smooth limestone ashlar blocks (14 cm. wide) forming the base of a wall. Between this wall and the roughly hewn rock face is a space 200 long cm. x 95 cm. wide.



just at the entrance, which at one time was blocked with large limestone ashlar blocks that were sealed with a gray plaster of *tafla* (desert marl). The plaster still adheres to the sides of the wall and to the blocks which are piled at the side of the passage. The *tafla* that sealed the burial chamber looks very much like the *tafla* applied to the walls as a plaster base coat in the tomb chambers above. This particular chamber might have been original with the tomb's construction as additional rooms for family burial, or else, it was constructed shortly after the tomb was completed. Lying in the debris near the entrance to this chamber is the remains of a human mummy (chest and rib cage only).

The remaining burial chambers in the tomb above are constructed at or near floor level like separate rooms, or they are large gaping recesses roughly hewn into the rock at least a meter or more above the floor level. Objects from subsidiary burials dating from the Eighteenth Dynasty and Late Period were discovered in the tomb by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1935.

Epigraphic Survey of the Tombs

Tomb 72 (Rây)

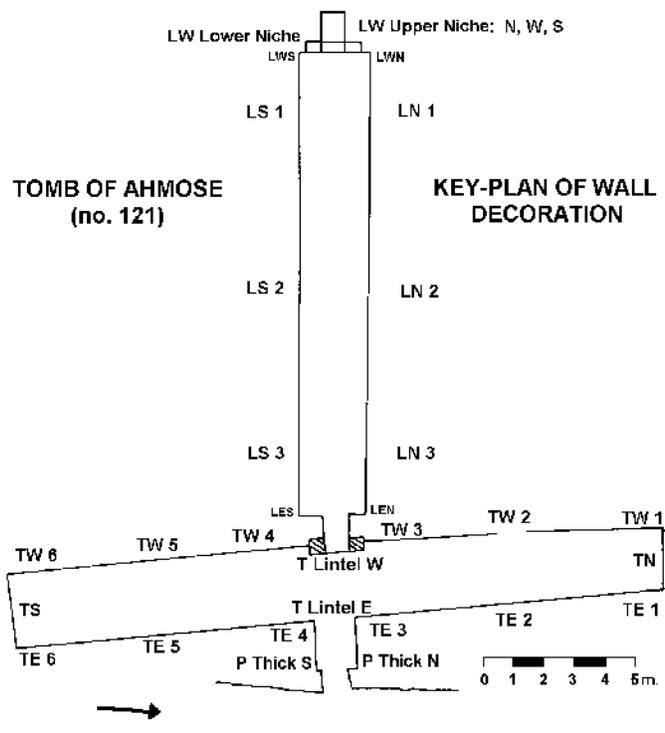
In 1998 the epigraphic goal of Theban Tombs Publication Project in the tomb of Rây was to resume and to continue drawing texts and scenes from the walls, especially by making controlled epigraphic hand copies of the texts. These texts included those of the transverse corridor north and south walls.

Tomb 121 (Ahmose)

Key Plan of the Wall Decoration

The primary epigraphic objective of the project in the tomb of Ahmose during 1998 was to begin the key plan of the wall decoration. Sections of the plan had to be completed before the epigraphic photography could begin, since the plan would be necessary to chart and coordinate the photographic effort. The field director was able to at least start the planning of the decoration of the axial corridor of Tomb 121, while the photographers were still engaged in photographing Tomb 72.

The entire decorative scheme of Tomb 121 was divided into twenty-seven wall sections designated according to the following: LS, long corridor (axial corridor), south wall; LN, long corridor (axial corridor), north wall; LWS, long corridor, west wall (south of stela niche); LWN, long corridor, west wall (north of stela niche); LW Upper Niche (N, W, or S), long corridor, west wall (upper statue niche: north, west, or south surface); LES, long corridor, east wall (south of doorway); LEN, long corridor, east wall (north of doorway); LC, long corridor ceiling; TW, transverse hall, west wall; TE, transverse hall, east wall; TS, transverse hall, south wall (or south extension); TN, transverse hall, north wall (or north extension); T Lintel E, transverse hall east wall, lintel above doorway; T Lintel W, transverse hall west wall, lintel above doorway; TC, transverse hall ceiling; P Thick S, portal (main entrance) thickness south; P Thick N, portal (main entrance) thickness, north.



Copying Wall Inscriptions

In addition to creating the key plan of the wall decoration, the epigraphic work in Tomb 121 consisted of making hand copies of the hieroglyphic inscriptions. In the transverse corridor, these texts included those of T Lintel W and T Lintel E, TW5, TW3, TE3 and TC6. In the axial corridor, they consisted of LS 1 and the remarkable texts of LW Upper Niche S.

Discoveries in the Statue Niche

The most important historical discovery of the 1998 field season was an unknown inscription that had never been found or read previously in modern times. Although the tomb was cleared by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the archaeologists apparently did not gain access to the statue niche high up in the western wall of the axial corridor (LW Upper Niche), nor did they realize that there was a significant inscription at the rear of the niche inscribed on the southern surface. In 1998, the Theban Tombs Publication Project gained access to this niche, previously inaccessible, and discovered a new text which reveals new official titles of Ahmose and, for the first time, the names and titles of his father and mother:

"The Seal-bearer of the King of Lower Egypt (i.e., 'Chancellor'), Overseer of Upper and Lower Egypt, [Second] Prophet of Amun in Karnak, this Ahmose, engendered by the Magistrate (*zab*) Ramose, justified, born of the Housewife, Bak[...]."

The first two titles in this inscription suggest that Ahmose could have commanded a high civil authority in addition to his priestly powers, and it indicates that his father was a high government administrator. Importantly, along with the texts from tomb of Rây, we now know the names of members of three generations of this important Theban family, which will aid us greatly in our study of the family's history.

Conservation and Condition of Tombs 121 and 72

Stability and Condition of Tombs 121 and 72

According to our regular practice at the start of every field season, prior to resuming documentation inside Tombs 72 and 121 in 1998, we conducted a close inspection of the physical condition of the tombs to determine if any deterioration of the structures had occurred since the previous field season in 1996.

In Tomb 72, the plastic sheeting that we left clean on the floor in 1996 showed hardly any new debris. Actually the sheeting was clear except for a negligible amount of dust and pebbles that had fallen from a fracture in the ceiling above—adjacent to the northeastern wall of the transverse hall (keyplan no. TE2). On the exterior of Tomb 72, the main ramp revealed little change in its eroded condition, despite that between 1991 and 1993, vandals had ripped from it seven courses of mud brick. However, as long as local residents continue to walk regularly on the ramp to approach the shrine of Sheikh abd-Qurna above the tomb, the friable limestone will decay and erode further, and the ramp could experience severe damage.

Tomb 121 also appeared not to have experienced any measurable change from 1996. The new door which we fabricated two years earlier was strongly in place to protect the tomb from intruders. The plaster door socket and foundation-deposit recess in the floor of the entrance, likewise, were still in good condition. Previously, in 1996, we covered this with fine sand and matting which were still in place and undisturbed. However, large amounts of airborne dust had settled in the tomb, due to the open cleft in the ceiling above the entrance of the transverse hall.²

It is clear that little or no measurable change had occurred in the structures or conditions of Tombs 72 and 121 in the years between 1996 and 1998.

The Formal Condition Study of Tombs

²Q.v., P. A. Piccione, "Theban Tombs Publication Project: A Preliminary Report to the Permanent Committee of the Egyptian Antiquities Organization on the 1993 Field Season," p. 4.

In October 1998, the Theban Tombs Publication Project officially began the conservation of Tombs 121 and 72, starting with a formal condition survey, although building a door for tomb 121 in 1996 could be construed as conservation and protection. Conservator Stephen Rickerby spent more than three weeks engaged in the study of the tombs. Using the most modern state-of-the-art techniques and methods of examination, Mr. Rickerby made an exhaustive physical survey and micro-examination of the tombs to assess the condition of the structures, their stability, the factors affecting the walls and ceilings, the composition and integrity of the mudbrick and plaster work, paint pigments, and painted decorations. He studied the physical structures of the tombs, their exterior situations, the nature and condition of the walls, ceilings, and floors, and the extent to which the decorations were preserved. Here he was seeking to determine the various micro and macro factors which were affecting the condition of the tombs in order to formulate an effective program of conservation.

Mr. Rickerby's expertise extends primarily to the interface between the surface of the wall painting and the rock strata below, as well as the many environmental factors that can affect wall surfaces. However, his expertise does not include a complete understanding of the rock itself. Therefore, it has become clear to us that we need to engage the services of a geologist to study the native rock of the two tombs and their environs. This geologist should specialize in geochemistry (the chemical formulation of the stone) and tectonics (movement, faulting, and fracturing of the rock). Adding a geologist in future seasons will provide us with the technical and scientific information necessary to expedite the conservation of the wall paintings.

Mr. Rickerby's two reports, complete with his findings and recommendations to the Theban Tombs Publication Project, are included below as part of this report package: "Summary Report on the Condition of the Wall Paintings" and "Report on the Condition of the Wall Paintings and Conservation Proposals." With these reports in hand, we have begun to formulate an effective conservation strategy for the two tombs, which we intend to inaugurate in the coming years. The project is using these reports to plan and budget the conservation and repair of the tombs, which it hopes to expedite after necessary fund-raising and applying for financial grants-in-aid.