

Title: **Preliminary remarks on the Architecture of Theban Tomb 1152 at Sheikh Abd el-Gurna**

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**Keywords:** West Thebes, MMA 1152, Middle Kingdom, rock-cut tomb

# PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON THE ARCHITECTURE OF THEBAN TOMB 1152 AT SHEIKH ABD EL-GURNA

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**Abstract:** Theban tomb 1152 is situated on an unnamed hill to the south of the Valley, where an unfinished mortuary complex of Amenemhat Sehetepibre is located. The original design of the tomb seems to originate from the Middle Kingdom. Pharaonic material still present in the tomb and datable to a period from the Second Intermediate Period to the beginning of the Late Period, as well as Coptic remains, indicate that the tomb was repeatedly reused. The complex consisted of an open courtyard and a rock-cut interior featuring an entrance corridor ending in a cult chamber. A shaft opening in the floor of the cult chamber has not been fully excavated yet.

**Keywords:** West Thebes, MMA 1152, Middle Kingdom, rock-cut tomb

## INTRODUCTION

A team from the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw, headed by Tomasz Górecki (National Museum in Warsaw), has been investigating the site at Sheikh Abd el-Gurna in West Thebes since 2003 (for a discussion of the results of this work, see successive reports in the *PAM* Journal for the relevant seasons). One of the team's objectives was the exploration of the inside and neighborhood of tomb MMA 1152, which was found to have been used both in the Pharaonic (Dynastic) times and in the Coptic period (Górecki 2004; Szpakowska 2007). The original design of the tomb seems to originate from the Middle

Kingdom (judging by the earliest pottery, which is of Middle Kingdom date, that is, late Eleventh and early Twelfth Dynasty, see Rzeuska, Orzechowska 2005: 248–250, Fig. 1). The architecture represents the corridor type II B (represented in West Thebes by tombs: 804, 806, 811, 1103, 1115 and 1118, Arnold 1971: 47). The tomb is located on an unnamed hill to the south of the unfinished mortuary complex of Amenemhat Sehetepibre. The tomb entrance faced east, toward the Ramesseum, where other Middle Kingdom tombs have been found (Quibell 1898: 3–4). It is located 150.08 m above sea level.

## ARCHITECTURE

The tomb had an open courtyard, which would have been planned to be surrounded by a mud-brick wall. The wall seems to have never been built and the same refers to a possible brick casing of the rock tomb facade. Cuts in the rock indicate the northern and southern limits of the courtyard. In the center of the facade there was a doorway leading to a horizontal corridor located on an east–west axis. The rock was smoothed in the upper right corner of the entrance [Fig. 2]. The work was never finished probably because the rock was too friable. Smoothed rock like this around the door opening is the first known example of this practice in the Theban necropolis.

The first element of the internal structure is a corridor 19 m long, leading into a square rock-cut chamber [Fig. 1].

Its height ranged from 4.30 m at its beginning to approximately 3.90 m at its end, while the width stood at 3 m at the bottom over the entire length, being variable at mid-height: 2.80 m at the entrance, 2.70 m around the middle and 2.50 m by the end, and diminishing at ceiling level, from 2.70 m by the entrance, through 2.60 m near the middle to 2.50 m by the corridor's end. The perspective trick of diminishing width and height give the impression of a much longer corridor than in reality. Upon discovery, the corridor was filled with debris (Szpakowska 2007: 275, Fig. 1). Accumulations in the entrance were just 1.50 m high, but at the highest point they reached 3.50 m in thickness.

About 6.50 m from the corridor entrance there was a small chamber cut

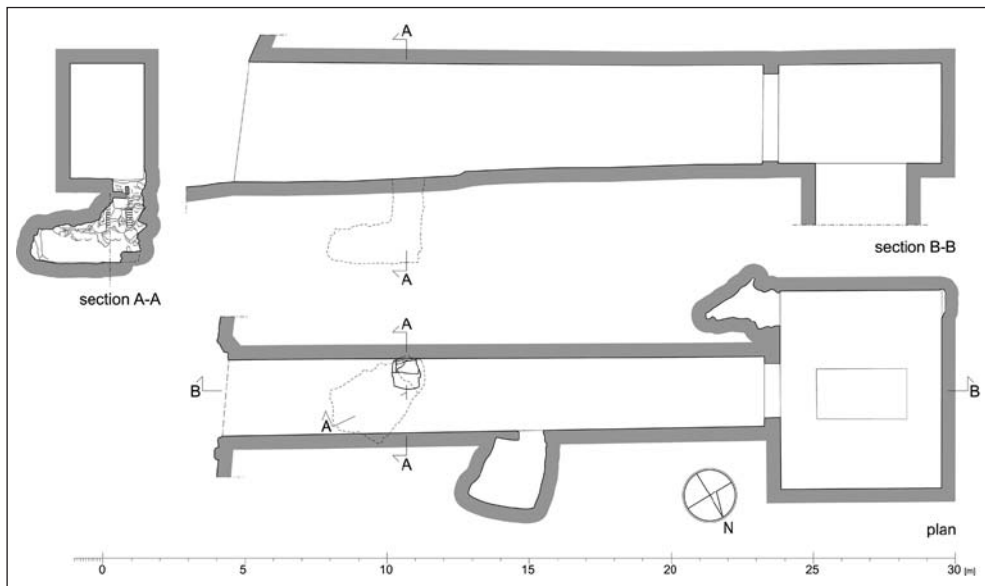


Fig. 1. Theban tomb 1152. Bottom of the shaft, sloping passage and burial chamber(?) still filled with debris (Drawing M. Caban, based on original documentation by M. Słowińska and S. Maślak)

under the rock floor, on the left side of the corridor. The entrance to the chamber was 1.10 m wide, the passage leading in for 1 m, but the shaft was only 0.55 m wide by 0.90 m long. The irregular surface of the chamber is approximately 2.80 m by 2.20 m and about 1.30–1.50 m high. Its shape and localization indicate that it was a *serdab*, where wooden models would have been deposited in Middle Kingdom times (complete sets of funerary models have been found in three tombs, that of Meshet from Asyut, Pepiankh from Meir and Meketre from West Thebes, Winlock 1920: 15). Not having been finished, this particular chamber was not used in the original tomb, but was made use of during the Coptic period (Górecki 2010: 301, Fig. 5).

In the north wall of the corridor there was a small, irregular chamber which was approximately 1.30–1.40 m high and

decreasing toward the back. The rock-cut entrance was 0.80 m wide and approximately 1.10 m high. The floor of the chamber was approximately 2.40 m by 2.40 m and was on the same level as the corridor floor.

Two trenches opened in the corridor fill revealed a clear stratigraphy from Pharaonic to Coptic times. The bottom layer referred to the earliest phase with powdered limestone being used to level the irregular bedrock under a presumed floor of limestone or sandstone slabs [Fig. 3]. No such slabs were found in MMA 1152 in the course of the excavations, but floors of this kind in entrance corridors are known from other tombs of high officials from the Theban Necropolis (Winlock 1920: 16; 1923: 16, Figs 9,10).

Jambs located on either side of the corridor at its end constituted the entrance to a cult chamber (Górecki 2007: Fig. 2;

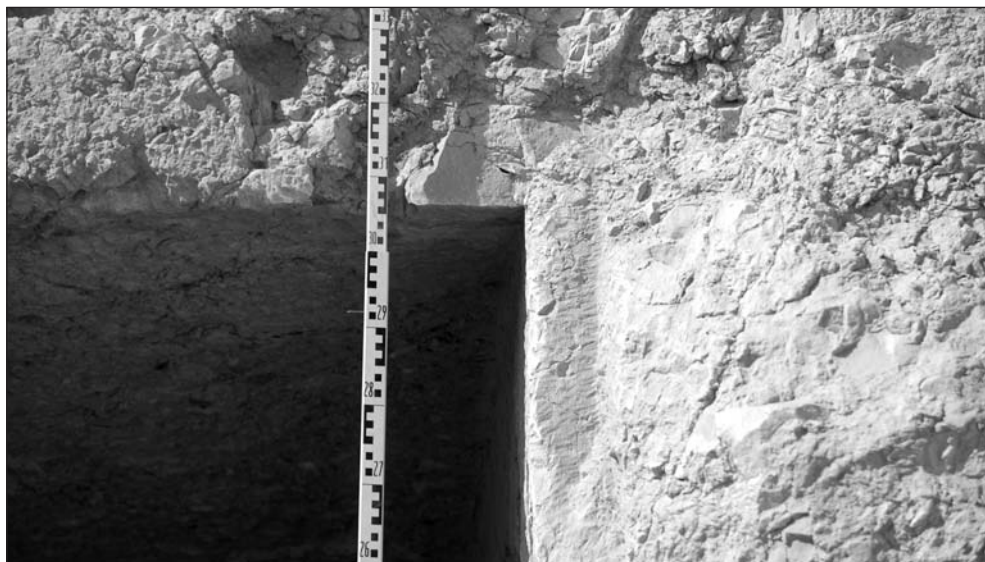


Fig. 2. Smoothed rock by the upper corner of the doorframe  
(Photo P. Chudzik)

the thick mud-brick wall in the foreground in this view belonged to the sleeping area of the Coptic hermitage installed inside the tomb). Both jambs were cut in the rock. The width of the right one (0.90 m at the bottom, 0.60 m at the highest point) was greater than that of the left one (0.65 m at the bottom, 0.54 m at the highest point). The chamber was an irregular rectangle in shape, drawn out slightly on a north–south axis. The walls at the bottom measured: 5.45 m on the north, 6.05 m on the south,



*Fig. 3. Powdered limestone (1) in the west part of the entrance corridor trench (Photo W. Wojciechowski)*

7.40 m on the east and 7.25 m on the west. They are damaged today, but the cutting had evidently been completed. It is not clear when the small irregular niche in the east wall, to the left of the entrance, was cut.

A shaft opened in the floor of the cult chamber. Its depth could not be ascertained precisely due to debris filling its bottom (Górecki, Szpakowska 2008: 307–308, Fig. 3), but it was at least 18.50 m. At the top the shaft measured 3.50 m (E–W) by 1.90 m (N–S), at the bottom reached in the excavation: 3.88 m (E–W) by 1.85 m (N–S). A niche (1.38 m wide, 0.80 m high and 1.90 m deep) was located in the north wall of the shaft, its lower edge approximately 16.50 m below the floor of the cult chamber. The niche opening was 1.90 m from the west wall and 0.95 m from the east wall. The top of an entrance to a sloping passage was located in the east wall at the bottom of the shaft, 18.05 m below the floor level of the cult chamber. The passage led down toward the east, to another shaft, room or burial chamber. It was 1.73 m wide and sloped downward at an angle of approximately 20°. After 4.20 m it ended on a wall. Debris from the bottom of the shaft, passage and other structures beyond it was not cleared.

Traces of chisels recorded on the walls provided insight into rock-cutting techniques. Middle Kingdom tomb builders apparently used copper chisels, which were 1.6 cm wide, to cut both the long corridor and the walls of the cult chapel.

## RECAPITULATION

Tomb 1152 was evidently prepared for one of the court officials of the Middle Kingdom in Thebes. It can be dated to the

end of the Eleventh or the beginning of the Twelfth Dynasty (Chudzik 2012: 122–123). The owner of the tomb is thought to

have moved to the north with king Sehet-epibre Amenemhat, leaving his funerary complex unfinished (Arnold 1991: 18).

While the tomb was apparently never finished, some parts of the interior, like the entrance corridor and the cult chapel, were practically ready. Tomb 1152 is the fifth known example of a tomb at Thebes with a chamber for models, the others being the tombs of Meketre (Winlock 1920: 16, Figs 4,5), Ipy (Winlock 1922: 33, Fig. 31), and

MMA 801 and TT 313 (Henenu), which have not been published. In this case, however, the chamber for models was not completed and was probably never used for its intended purpose. On the other hand, archaeological evidence indicates repeated reuse of the tomb in the Second Intermediate Period through the beginning of the Late Period and again in the Coptic age (although for non-sepulchral purposes at this time).

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