A New 26th Dynasty Sarcophagus from Thebes

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During the course of the Egyptian Antiquities Organisation's ongoing restoration of the giant tomb 34 at Asasif (that of the famous Fourth Prophet of Amun and Mayor, Montuemhat, of the 26th Dynasty), it was decided to undertake the clearance of the southern portico of the pillared forecourt.

On the 14th of February 1988, a previously unknown burial shaft was found which had been hidden beneath the ramp and staircase leading to another burial chamber. The shaft was cleared of sand and debris to a depth of 9 metres when a sealed doorway was discovered on its northern face. The stone sealing wall had been broken through in ancient times and, by means of the hole left by the robbers, a small burial chamber was revealed to the excavators. This chamber measured 2.40 x 2.90 metres with a height of 2.45 metres.

The burial chamber contained a magnificent schist anthropoid sarcophagus 2.28 metres in length by 84 centimetres wide and 52 centimetres in height, the lid of which is carved to represent a reclining male figure. The face is framed by a large well carved wig with long sidelocks tucked behind large ears. The features of the owner have been excellently worked with rounded eyebrows, straight nose and smiling lips. The sarcophagus lid shows little sign of damage except for a large chip at the base of the long chin-beard. The hands are crossed on the chest holding an ankh and djed pillar. The goddess Nut is shown as a seated woman with her wings extended beneath the hands of the deceased.

There are five vertical and four horizontal lines of hieroglyphic text on the sarcophagus which give the name and titles of the owner - 'Nespiah son of Montuemhat', like his father, 'the Fourth Prophet of Amun, Prince of Thebes, Scribe of the Priests in the Temple of Amun, and Mayor of the City'. His mother is given as Neskheons.

As well as the goddess Nut already mentioned, the lid and sarcophagus base also bear the figures and names of other gods and goddesses. Neith and Selkis are placed behind the head, Isis at the feet, and Osiris, Anubis, and the four sons of Horus - Inset, Hapy, Duamutef and Qebehsef, along the sides.

The sarcophagus was found empty with the lid removed. Also in the chamber was an alabaster canopic jar without lid.

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