

Qaw el-Kebir, also often just called Qaw or Qau was a settlement in Middle Egypt and refers in Egyptology to the town Tjebu (T<sub>bw</sub> – ‘city of sandals’) and its cemeteries. Tjebu was the capital of this 10<sup>th</sup> Upper Egyptian nome, called ‘Wadjet’ (Gomaà 1986, 239). From the ancient town there survived till the early Nineteenth Century parts of a temple built by Ptolemy VI Philopator. The stones of the temple were used in the early Nineteenth Century for a palace at Assiut. The few remains left were destroyed in a flood in 1821 (Steckeweh, p. 1), but the name is still used for the town and its cemeteries, although the actual settlement with the remains of the ancient town are fully gone. Nowadays the nearest village is al-Itmanya. The main deity of Tjebu was Nemty, called Antaios by the Greeks. The name Qaw goes back to Coptic TKWOy/TKOu, Egyptian Dw-kA. The latter name is attested from the Late Period on and referred perhaps originally only to the Eastern mountains in the region, but became later the name of the town itself (Gomaà 1986, 239). The Greeks called the town Antaioupolis, ‘the city of Antaios’ (Helck 1974, 96-97).

The ancient town lay about 45 km south of Assiut on the eastern banks of the Nile. The cemeteries of the town are along the desert edge and were labelled by Guy Brunton with numbers (Cem. 400, Cem. 1300, Cem. 1400, Cem. 1450) (Fig. 1). The ‘South Cemetery’ is the biggest and the one closest to the remains of the ancient town. It was most likely its main cemetery. The great Middle Kingdom governors’ tombs are situated about 3 km North of the ancient town at the cliffs of the desert escarpment. The placements of these tombs at some distance from the town might be for reasons of prestige. This is the nearest place where the high desert comes close to the fertile land in the region of the town. There are also important limestone quarries (Petrie 1930: pl. XIX 2, 3)

Early European travellers visited the remains of the Ptolemaic temple. A drawing and reconstruction of it was made for the *Description de l’Egypte* by the French Expedition in 1798-1801. A century later, there were several archaeological missions to the cemeteries of Qaw el-Kebir. Ernest Schiaparelli worked 1905/1906 in the tombs of the Middle Kingdom governors. A great number of finds, including many fragments of sculpture, reliefs but also coffins and parts of burial equipment were brought to the Egyptian Museum at Turin. However, the excavations were never fully published. Further research was undertaken by a German expedition under Hans Steckeweh in 1913/1914. The main target was again the Middle Kingdom tombs of the local governors, but also parts of the Greek-Roman cemeteries nearby were investigated (Steckeweh 1936). 1923/24 William Matthew Flinders Petrie excavated again the governors’ tombs (Petrie 1930), but also part of the cemeteries in the region. Petrie was working together with Guy Brunton who uncovered from 1922 to 1931 several cemeteries in the region, from Qaw el-Kebir in the South to Mostagedda in the North. As result, Brunton published several thousand tombs belonging to almost all periods of Egyptian history. He presented his results in four volumes (Brunton 1927, 1928, 1930; Brunton and Thompson 1928). Most graves are presented in tables, providing information on the types of objects found, not on the number (for several identical pots just the type appears, not their number). The expedition avoided heavily looted and poor tombs (Brunton 1927, 4), leaving a gap in the archaeological records. Seidlmayer (1990: 206-209) has argued that most of these burial belong to the farming population of the region. Even in a provincial town like Qaw el-Kebir/Tjebu a large part of the population was most likely farmers. Therefore, the publications of

Brunton remain the major source in Egyptian archaeology for burials in a provincial region and for the 'common' population.

The earliest remains at the cemeteries of Qaw el-Kebir belong to the Badarian Period. These cemeteries were in later times heavily disturbed, so that only few graves and some uncontexted artefacts were found (Brunton, Thompson 1928, 3). About 70 tombs belong to the Naqada Period. People were buried in holes in the ground or not very deep shafts. They were often wrapped in matting. Common burial goods are pottery vessels and beads (Brunton, Thompson 1928, 48-49, pl. XXX).

About 65 tombs are recorded by Brunton for the Early Dynastic Period at Qaw el-Kebir. Most burials are again surface graves or shafts with the body of the deceased placed in a contracted position. Burial goods include pottery, sometimes stone vessels, jewellery and tools (Brunton 1927, 10-18, pl. X-XI). There are also several 'staircase tombs' (Fig. 2) cut into the ground with a staircase leading to underground burial chambers, evidently belonging to the local ruling class or at least to people of some higher social level (Brunton 1927, pl XII). One of these tombs (429) still contained a high number of important objects, such as stone vessels and a copper ewer with a short inscription: 'the priest of Nemty, Hetep' (Brunton 1927, 11, pl. XVIII).

The burials of the following Old Kingdom (Fourth and Fifth Dynasty) are in general poorly equipped. There are some pottery vessels and personal adornments. In this time pot burials are well attested, often for children. There are hardly any burials which might belong to the local ruling classes. However, on a hill east of al-Itmanya were found small relief fragments belonging to the decoration of a mastaba (Brunton 1927, 68, pl. XLI, 18-23). This indicates that the local ruling class was buried in such tomb types. At Hemamieh were found some Old Kingdom rock cut tombs, all dating to the Fifth Dynasty. (Khouli, Kanawati 1990). It remains uncertain whether they belong to governors living in Qaw el-Kebir or to another town more close to that place (for the Old Kingdom governors of the Tenth Upper Egyptian nome, see Kanawati 1991). In the First Intermediate Period, the nome and therefore Qaw el-Kebir belonged from the time of Wah-ankh Intef II to the Theban territory (Gomaà 1979, 89-90).

A high number of burials at Qaw el-Kebir and in the region are datable from the end of the Old Kingdom to the beginning of the Middle Kingdom. Many of them are well equipped with personal adornments, cosmetic objects, pottery and stone vessels. The richness and high number of these tombs in a time normally seen as a period of decline and poverty remains a point of discussion (Seidlmayer 1987, 176-178; Kemp 2006, 309). Most of the burials of the period are simple surface burials. However, there are also some shaft tombs with a chamber at the bottom. The people buried were most likely not mummified but placed into simple wooden boxes, often in a slightly contracted position on their left side. From other sites it seems that the custom was to lie the body with the head to the North; however, the bodies here are not strictly oriented to the North but are placed parallel to the Nile. The pottery found here and at Badari, Matmar and Mostagedda has been evaluated several times. The corpus is perhaps the most important one for the First Intermediate Period (Seidlmayer 1990, 124-210). The cemeteries are especially rich of button seals, disk-shaped stamp seals (Brunton 1927, pls. XXXII-XXXIV). In one tomb (7695) was found a bowl being on

both sides a 'Letter to the Death', addressing the dead father on one side, the dead mother on the other, appealing them for help in a legal or family dispute (Gardiner and Sethe 1928, 3-5, 17-19, pls. II-III A). In some other tombs were found pottery hes-vases with short inscriptions (Brunton 1927, pl. XLI, 1-13).

In the Twelfth Dynasty several large rock cut tombs for the local governors were cut into the rock north of the town (Petrie 1930, Steckeweh 1936, D'Amicone 1988). They belong to the most monumental private tombs built in the Middle Kingdom. The three biggest belong to 'mayors' and 'overseers of priests' (HAty-a imy-r Hmw-nTr) Wahka I, Ibu and Wahka II. A fourth tomb is slightly smaller. The 'mayor' Sobekhotep was buried here. All tombs were found already heavily looted and destroyed. Therefore, their exact dating and the sequence of the Middle Kingdom governors remains problematic. The three larger governor tombs were all cut into the cliffs along the same line (Fig. 3). At the edge of the cultivation was some kind of gateway, the latter is only partly preserved for the tomb of Wahka I. Little can be said about its overall structure. The foundations are made of mud bricks. Behind the gateway was a causeway, again mainly made of mud bricks with some stone paving going up to the cult chapel of the tomb proper. The cult chapels were carved into the rock and had an entrance courtyard with columns at the back. In this court was a staircase leading up to smaller columned hall. There followed a second hall with several side chambers, presumably the central rear chamber was, as at other sites, the location for offering to the statue of the deceased. The burial chambers were underground reached by a shaft. At least one of the burial chambers discovered by Schiaparelli was decorated with Coffin Texts (Cimapini 2003). Each of these tombs had some special architectural features. The last tomb of Wahka II is the largest and most elaborate with three cult chapels at the very back. His causeway is the longest one having a bend with an additional gateway. In general the three big tombs resemble royal funerary complexes of the Old Kingdom.

In the burial chambers were found sarcophagi belonging to these governors. The limestone sarcophagus of Ibu (Steckeweh 1936, pl. 16) is decorated with an elaborate palace façade and has so far no parallel in the Middle Kingdom.

The tombs were richly equipped with statues (Fig. 4), some of them carved out of the rocks (Steckeweh 1936, pl. 2a). The chapels were decorated with fine reliefs surviving only in small fragments. In the tomb of Wahka II were also recorded paintings. The ceiling of the great hall in this tomb was painted too and shows a great variety of different patterns arranged in a chess board pattern (Steckeweh 1936, pl. 9). The wall paintings here are typical for tombs of the reign's of Senusret III and Amenemhat III, showing women at work and fecundity figures (Fig. 5). Similar paintings were found at Meir in the tomb of Ukhkotep IV and are to be connected with new religious beliefs of the late Twelfth Dynasty (Franke 1991, 54-55). The tomb of Sobekhotep is the smallest (Petrie 1930, 9, pl. XV), though still a monument on a larger scale. No causeway is so far known. It was decorated with paintings, none of which are yet published. The name of Sobekhotep was copied by Petrie from the wall painting. A fragment of an offering table bears his name too (Steckeweh 1936, 9).

The date and sequence of the Middle Kingdom governors remains a problem (for a discussion see Grajetzki 1997, for the titles Favry 2004, 47-49). No king's name was

found in any of the tombs. Only Wahka II had a son with the name Senusret-ankh (Steckeweh 1936, 7). The dating of the governors rests mainly on stylistic observations. The tombs of Wahka I and Ibu are the earlier ones. Especially the statue fragments found in the tomb of Ibu are datable under Amenemhat II and belong to the finest examples of the Middle Kingdom private sculpture, perhaps made in a workshop which also produced royal sculpture (Fay 1996, 53 and n. 238; several images of these sculptures: D'Amicone 1988, 120-123, fig. 161-166). Wahka I dates to about the same reign, but the sequence of both governors is not clear. Nakht is not attested by a separate tomb, but he is known from a wooden coffin lid and the filiations of his sons (Leospo 1988; Habachi 1977, 25-26). On the coffin he is simply called 'mayor' (HAtY-a). He might have been in office after Wahka I and Ibu. Wahka II, the son of Nakht was the owner of the largest tomb, and may be dated under Senusret III and Amenemhat III. In Stockholm there is a stela showing a Wahka, begotten of Nakht and dated by a cartouche of Amenemhat III (Steckeweh 1936, 7). This late date of Wahka II is supported by the style of his sculpture and the scenes in his tomb, mentioned above. The exact date of Sobekhotep remains unknown.

Further governors are no longer attested with their tombs, but from a range of other objects. Wahka III is known from a statue and stela, both datable by style to the end of the Twelfth or early Thirteenth Dynasty (Grajetzki 1997). Nemtynakht appears on an offering table (Petrie 1930, pl. XVII), while the name Hetep and Hetepuy on seals with the title 'mayor of Tjebu' and 'mayor of the Wadjet-nome' (Martin 1971, 91, nos. 1159, 1163; Grajetzki 1997, 62).

Near to the big rock cut tombs of the governors are some smaller ones belonging most likely to officials working for the governors, although the exact date of the tombs remains unknown (Petrie 1930, pl. XV-XVI). Otherwise, not much is known about the cemeteries of the lower officials and common population of the Middle Kingdom. Pottery and other objects types regarded as typical for this period are rare at the burial grounds around Qaw el-Kebir in contrast to the many burials of the First Intermediate Period, relatively few can be assigned to the Twelfth Dynasty. This problem was already noticed by Brunton (1930, 2). He discussed the option that the material culture, especially the pottery was so conservative in the region that some burials of the First Intermediate Period might indeed belong to the Middle Kingdom. A second option is the possibility that the population was buried on the West bank of the Nile, although that seems strange as the governors are buried on the East bank near the town. (Dubiel 2008, 166-169). A third option is that the graves were very close to the fertile land and are gone by now.

More burials are again known for the Second Intermediate Period. They are especially important for providing a pottery typology of Middle Egypt for the Second Intermediate Period. Several 'pan graves' were found (Brunton 1930, 5-7, pls. IX-XI, Bietak 1966, 72). In general the burials of the period make a poor impression. Inscribed material is rare for this period.

The burials of the New Kingdom sometimes reuse older chambers, but there are still many surface burials. Burial goods include pottery vessels, amulets and beads,

including scarabs. There were many remains of wooden coffins. Shabtis are not common, but they do appear (Brunton 1930, 13-18, pl. XXII-XXIII).

There are some bigger New Kingdom tombs. In one of them (1456) consisting of several underground chambers were found the remains of the inscribed and decorated sarcophagus of the 'governor' (HAty-a) May (Brunton 1930, pl. XXXVII, XXXVIA). The tomb was found close to those of the Middle Kingdom governors. May is also known from a statue, now in Berlin (Fig. 6). He dates according the cartouches on the Berlin statue under Thutmosis III. An uninscribed statue, now in the Luxor Museum was acquired at Qaw el-Kebir. It shows a standing official. Both statues are close in style and both depict a man wearing the same necklace, known as the 'gold of honor', so it has been proposed that the statue in Luxor shows May too (Azzam 2005) (Fig. 7). The 'gold of honor' is indeed mentioned in the text on the Berlin statue (Binder 2008, 309 [093]). The 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty stela of the 'sailor of Nemy, lord of Tjebu' Wersu found at Qaw el-Kebir, supports the identification of the town with Tjebu (Steckeweh 1936, 53, pl. 17). Another stela found in tomb 400 shows the 'mayor of Tjebu' adoring a hippopotamus (Brunton 1930, pl. XXXII, XXXIII). The inscription on the stela is not well preserved, but the name of this 'mayor' might be May too. From other sources further 'mayors' of the period are known (Helck 1974, 97): Mentuherkhepeshef was buried at Thebes (TT20) and Wesertnub (Hayes, 1951, fig. 18) appears on an ostrakon found at Malqatta datable under Amenophis III.

Exceptional New Kingdom finds at Qaw el-Kebir include several massive deposits of objects made of hippopotamus ivory, most of them cosmetic items such as 'kohl'-tubes, spoons or mirror handles, some in the shape of female figures (fig. 8). These deposits were placed in older tombs (Brunton 1930, 18-20, pl. XXXVI). It has been argued that they can be connected with the cults of Seth and Nemy (Brunton 1930, 20, Welvaert 2002).

There are few recorded tombs datable to the Third Intermediate Period and Late Period. In most examples the deceased were placed in anthropoid coffins, all found badly decayed. Pottery was no longer common, making the dating of single burials complicated. Some burials were richly equipped with amulets (Brunton 1930, 22-25, pl. XXXVIII-XXXIX).

From the Ptolemaic Period come the only known monuments of the ancient town proper. From the Ptolemaic temple at Qaw el-Kebir is recorded a text naming Ptolemy IV. Whether the king just added an inscription to an older temple or build a new one remains unknown. Later, Ptolemy VI Philometor built a pronaos to this temple (Fig. 9) consisting of three rows of six palm columns. The pronaos was about 15.62 x 44.63 m big and belonged therefore to the larger recorded ones. The name of Ptolemy VI and Cleopatra II appear on a Greek dedication inscription. A Greek inscription was added by the Roman emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June 164. The temple was placed within a big enclosure, about 85 x 260 m big and oriented parallel to the Nile. In the early Nineteenth Century the limestone naos (Fig. 10), once housing the cult statue was still in place, perhaps once part of the sanctuary. It was about five meters high, the top as usual for this objects type, in form of a pyramid (*Description de l'Égypte* IV, 38-40; text IV, 75-124; Arnold 1999, 184-85).

The cemeteries of the 30<sup>th</sup> Dynasty and Ptolemaic Period are still substantial. There were still many surface burials, but also shaft tombs. Here were found several inscribed anthropoid sarcophagi (Brunton 1930, pl. XLVIII; Steckeweh 196, 59-62, pl. 27). Many people were buried in clay coffins. Several offering tables were found, and there are examples of mummy bandages with hieratic texts, perhaps Book of the Dead chapters (Kochelmann 2008, 31). There were animal cemeteries for dogs, perhaps dating to the late Ptolemaic Period (Brunton 1930, 25).

From the size of the cemeteries at Qaw el-Kebir was clearly a still flourishing center in the Roman period. At the edge of the fertile land close to the big Middle Kingdom tombs was erected a chain of small mud brick chapels, some of them contained burials and some were adorned with Roman style wall paintings showing the deceased, standing (Steckeweh 1930, 57-58, pls. 21-22). Finds in burials of the period contain pottery vessels, glass vessels, jewellery, lamps and sometimes cosmetic objects (Brunton 1930, 26-29).

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#### Abstract

Qaw el-Kebir was a village in Middle Egypt, called in ancient times Tjebu and Antaioupolis in Greek. It was the capital of the 10th Upper Egyptian nome, Wadjet in Egyptian. The main deity of the town was Nemty. At the beginning of the Nineteenth Century there were still substantial parts of a Ptolemaic temple preserved, but they were destroyed by a change of the Nile's stream bed. The cemeteries of the town in the deserts east of the town include tombs of almost all periods of Egyptian history beginning from the Badarian Period. Those of the First Intermediate Period are especially well equipped and are an important source for burial customs of that period in a provincial town. The three large tombs of Middle Kingdom governors belong to the biggest private tombs built in the Middle Kingdom. They were excavated by Ernest Schiaparelli, W. M. Flinders Petrie and Hans Steckeweh at the beginning of the Twentieth Century. All three tombs had some kind of valley temple, a causeway leading to the cult chapels cut into the rocks. The burial chambers were carved into the rock under the cult chapels. All three tombs were richly adorned with high quality sculpture, reliefs and paintings. However, because of the destruction of the tombs, the dating and sequence of the governors with the Twelfth Dynasty remains problematic. In the New Kingdom was built the tomb of the governor May equipped with a sarcophagus and datable under Thutmosis III. Several New Kingdom hippopotami bone deposits are perhaps connected with the cult of Nemty and Seth. The Ptolemaic temple was built under Ptolemy VI. Its pronaos with 3 x 6 columns is known from depictions in the *Description de l'Égypte*.

Fig. 1 Map of Qaw el-Kebir/Qaw (Brunton 1927, pl. 1)

Fig. 2 Early Dynastic staircase tomb (Brunton 1927, pl. XII, 5)

Fig. 3 The tomb of Wahka I, plan; brown: mud bricks, yellow: stone (drawing by the author, according to Steckeweh 1936, pl. I-II)

Fig. 4 Statue, fragment from the tomb of Wahka II, UC 31288 © University College London

Fig. 5 Painting from the tomb of Wahka II, (Petrie 1930, pl. XXV)

Fig. 6 Statue of May, Egyptian Museum Berlin Inv. No. 19286, picture: © Lutz Franke

Fig. 7 New Kingdom statue from Qaw el-Kebir, Luxor Museum J. 1 © Dr. Karl Leser

Fig. 8 Fragment of a hippopotamus bone figure, UC 26085 © University College London

Fig. 9 Pronaos of the Ptolemaic temple (*Description de l'Égypte*, fig. 40)

Fig. 10 Pronaos of the Ptolemaic temple (*Description de l'Égypte*, fig. 38)