A Middle Kingdom Nomarchal Cemetery: Dayr al-Barshā

The main centres of the Nomarchy of the Middle Kingdom are well known. It concerns the sites of Qāw al-Kabīr, Dayr Rīfa, Asyūṭ, Mīr, Dayr al-Barshā, Bānī Ḥasan, Ṭīhnā al-Jabal, and outside Middle Egypt, Qubbat al-Hawā and Kawm al-Khalwa in the Fayyūm (fig. 7). Many of these sites were intensively studied between the 1890s and the early 1930s, but after this, archaeologists lost interest in them for several decades.

Before 1930, these sites were studied mainly for two reasons. In the first place, many of the monumental tombs contain decoration of the highest quality. This not only consists of wall scenes, but also of long autobiographical inscriptions, many of which had already attracted attention early in the nineteenth century, and which have since become the major sources of evidence concerning the history of the Middle Kingdom. Recording these tombs rapidly developed into a top priority after the publication of the inscriptions in the tombs of Asyūṭ and Dayr Rīfa, which was produced by F. Ll. Griffith in 1889.1 Soon after, additional missions, primarily from Great Britain, undertook the epigraphic documentation of the other sites.2

During the same period, archaeological excavations also began at these cemeteries. These operations, of which some (like SCHIAPARELLI’s at Asyūṭ and Qāw al-Kabīr [1905–1913]) were undertaken at a massive scale, are remarkable in several regards. On the one hand, the objects found number in the thousands, and many are of the greatest interest. On the other, SCHIAPARELLI apparently hardly bothered to take notes during his excavations, or to publish his findings. The first volume of the final publication of a small part of the material—the tomb of Henib at Qāw al-Kabīr—only appeared in 2003.3 The remainder is to a

1 Griffith, Siüt and Dêr Rifèh. These texts were recopied by Montet (Kêmi 3 [1930–1935], p. 138–163; Kêmi 6 [1936], p. 138–163) and are currently being republished by the Asyūṭ project (see below).
2 BENI HASAN I–IV (1893); El BERSHEH I–II (1895); MEIR I–VI (1915–1951); PETRIE, Antaëopolis; for the autobiographies in the tombs in the Qubbat al-Hawā, the editio princeps is GARDINER, ZÄS 45 (1908), p. 123–140; see also MÜLLER, Felsengräber. The most important of these inscriptions were republished in Urk. VII. See also the commentaries by EDEL, Beiträge.
3 CIAMPINI, La sepoltura di Henib.
Figure 7
The major nomarchal cemeteries and associated sites from the Middle Kingdom.