I am honored to dedicate this piece of research to my esteemed colleague and friend, Jack Josephson. His works on Egyptian art of the Late Period were always an inspiration and source of learning for me. I will never be able to thank Jack Josephson and Magda Saleh enough for being such great supporters of my work in Egypt. Without their help, the present and future of the dog of Karakhamun would be precarious.¹

The dog in question was found in the necropolis of South Asasif, south of Qurna, in 2006 under rather challenging circumstances. The necropolis of South Asasif is not so well known. It incorporates four Late Period tombs, Karabasken (TT 391), Karakhamun (TT 223), Ramose (TT 132), and Irtieru (TT 390), which offer incredibly interesting and diverse examples of Late Period tomb decoration. The importance of the necropolis can be determined by the fact that the tomb of Karakhamun is the earliest known Kushite decorated tomb in the Theban necropolis.²

The necropolis of South Asasif was practically lost by the beginning of the century and had to be rediscovered in order to be explored. South Asasif was first located and visited beginning in the 1820s by such great explorers of Qurna as John Gardner Wilkinson, Robert Hay, and James Burton. Their notes and drawings are the main records of the condition of the tombs in the early nineteenth century. They documented the tombs’ ruinous condition, weakness of the bedrock, and continuous decay.³ Richard K. Lepsius, who must have seen the tombs around 1840, left more comprehensive records, yet it is hard to say how much of the tombs’ decoration was still intact at that time. Although in the nineteenth century the tombs of South Asasif were already in a ruinous state, the notes and plans of early explorers provide priceless guidance now, when most of the tombs are almost completely destroyed. Lepsius was the first one to record the name and some of the titles of Karakhamun and a few fragments of his tomb’s decoration: the standing figure of Karakhamun’s brother, and a scene of Karakhamun in front of Re-Horakhty and a goddess of one of the hours of the night.⁴ The latter scene is a well-preserved block that was sent by Lepsius to the collection of the Berlin Museum.⁵

The latest observation of the condition of the tomb of Karakhamun was made in the 1970s by Diethelm Eigner, who was able to photograph a few fragments of relief decoration in the Second Pillared Hall.⁶ Eigner concluded his observations with the statement that the tomb was being used as a quarry so intensely that it soon may completely disappear.⁷ The tomb disappeared shortly after without raising much concern in the scholarly world, as very little was seen of it and known about it.⁸ A modern village built in the middle of the necropolis concealed the remains of the tomb.

¹ I would like to express deep gratitude to Jack Josephson and Dr. Magda Saleh for their support of the “South Asasif Conservation Project” in Luxor, directed by the author.
² The author starts the Late Period with the Kushite Dynasty, so as not to separate the cultural trends of the Saite Dynasty from their roots in the Dynasty 25.
³ Drawings by R. Hay show remains of some of the architectural features of the tomb of Karakhamun (British Library Manuscripts, Add. 29 848, 77); see D. Eigner, Die monumentalen Grabbauten der Spätzeit in der thebanischen Nekropole (Vienna, 1984), Abb. 16. J.G. Wilkinson’s observations, made around the same time, do not leave much hope that anything would remain intact for a length of time. Describing his visit to the tomb, he mentions bringing down “half of a doorway by merely placing [his] hand against it previous of entering it.” (J. Wilkinson, MSS, v. 176); see Eigner, Monumentalen Grabbauten, 41-42.
⁴ LD III, Text, p. 288, pl. 282d.
⁵ Berlin Museum (2110), see H. Schäfer and W. Andrae, Die Kunst des alten Orients (PKG 2) (Berlin, 3rd ed. Rev., 1942), fig. 450 (lower); R. Hamann, Ägyptische Kunst: Wesen und Geschichte (Berlin, [1944]), Abb. 314; PM I 2, part 1, pp. 318 (plan), 324.
⁷ Ibid., 41.
⁸ Only one relief fragment showing Karakhamun in front of Re-Horakhty is now outside Egypt in Berlin’s Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung (2110), as it was chosen by Lepsius to represent the tomb; see Hamann, Ägyptische Kunst, Abb. 314; PM I 2, part 1, 318 (plan), 324.
allow the reconstruction of the plan of the tomb as a version of the Kushite type similar to the tomb of Karabasken (TT 391): one east-west axis, entrance on the east side of the court, no porticoes in the court, one or two pillared halls. The tomb of Harwa (TT 37), of the time of Taharqo, is the first 25th Dynasty tomb that offers elaboration of this plan, making a transition to a 26th Dynasty type, such as a bent axis and the introduction of the colonnaded porticoes in the court.

10 J.-F. and L. Aubert, Statuettes égyptiennes: chaouabtis, ouchebtis (Paris, 1974), 199, pl. 54, fig. 129.

Nothing is known of Karakhamun’s family. Karakhamun himself did not seem to have any important administrative positions, and his priestly title, first votive priest (variation of a w:b-priest title) does not signify any particular importance. His Nubian name is one of the reasons why rare studies that mention Karakhamun date his presence in Thebes to the 25th Dynasty. The tomb’s architectural features, as far as they are known, also confirm this date. Karakhamun’s serpentine shabti is of a Nubian type with facial features that suggest a pre-Taharqo date, probably the time of Shabaqo. The tomb of Karakhamun, with its two pillared halls and multiple burial chambers, was the largest in the necropolis. As it was built for a person of no important position, he must have had close connections to the royal court or the royal family itself. Further exploration of the tomb must bring more accurate information on the date of Karakhamun’s tomb and identity of the tomb owner.

The fieldwork in the tomb of Karakhamun is only at the beginning (fig. 1). Its full excavation and reconstruction will take some time, considering its present condition. As first seen by the author in 2001, the tomb of Karakhamun had ceased to exist. It was supposed to be positioned to the east of the tomb of Karabasken (TT391), but the only remaining trace of the collapsed tomb was a large crack in the bedrock almost hidden under the sand. The crack was covered in soot and the depression under it became a village dump, showing signs of multiple reuse of the tomb site until recent times. From the villagers, we knew that the Abd el-Rasul family used to live in the tomb, which was gradually collapsing due to floods and

Fig. 1. First Pillared Hall in the process of excavation in 2007.