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Deir El-Bahari: Tuthmosis III Temple, 1995

Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean 7, 77-81

1996

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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DEIR EL-BAHARI

TUTHMOSIS III TEMPLE, 1995

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The Polish-Egyptian Mission for Conservation and Preservation of the Tuthmosis III temple started work on January 17 and ended on March 31, 1995.¹ Following the approved programme, the work concentrated on the excavation and restoration of the polychrome reliefs stored in the magazine at Deir el-Bahari, and of the temple elements *in situ*. First, however, mention should be made of the damage caused by two heavy rainfalls, which occurred before the end of 1994. Fortunately, the main store at Deir el-Bahari suffered only small and insignificant leaks. Not so in the narrow room added to the main shed on its northern side. Rainwater flowing down the rocky slope seeped under the magazine wall and into the floor. The polychrome reliefs which are stored there directly on the floor – and they are of large dimensions – suffered from the humidity. Some of the blocks got wet, promoting salt crystallization processes and damage to the surface, including growing fungi. A number of larger and smaller fragments belonging to the scene of purification (originally from the Bark Hall) were most affected, as well as the lower part of a previously well preserved figure of the king offering (scene No. 97), lower parts of the

¹ The members of the Mission were: Prof. Jadwiga Lipińska (director), Dr. Joanna Aksamit, Mrs. Monika Dolińska, egyptologists; Dr. Rafał Czerner, architect; Mr. Zbigniew Godziejewski and Mr. Stefan Miszczak, restorers; Mr. Marek Puzzkarski, artist. From the Supreme Council of Antiquities the inspector Ali Abd el-Galil Ali was assigned to the Mission.

The gratitude of the Mission is due to Dr. Mohammed el-Soghir for his help and kindness, as well as to Dr. Sabry Abd el-Aziz, who was always helpful and ready to solve problems.

royal representation enthroned (No. 94) and two blocks with representations of offerings.

As the floor (actually of tamped soil) was still wet in January 1995, a strong ventilator was installed in one of the windows in order to force air circulation and speed up the process of drying. All the large blocks, which had rested directly on the floor, were raised and supported on red bricks and wood to eliminate direct contact with wet soil. The pieces affected the worst by crystallized salts and fungi growth were treated by the restorer with fungicidal agents. The remaining affected reliefs were left to dry slowly; whatever is possible for them will be undertaken during the next season.

As was agreed at the end of previous season, the restoration of the polychrome reliefs was continued, with the goal of restoring a large part of the so-called eastern sanctuary wall. Two blocks (nos 11 and 14) were restored during the 1995 season, nine other were prepared to be restored in the future. Block no. 11 is a part of an offering scene in which the king offers with his both hands meat and fat to the god Amun. Block no. 14 belongs to the lower part of that scene. The first block is 79 cm long, 63 cm high and 37 cm thick. There were 24 fragments used to reconstruct the relief. The second one, 116 cm long, 60.5 cm high and 37 cm thick, was reconstructed with 17 fragments. The restoration followed the method used previously: the fragments, after cleaning, were treated with stone-hardener Wacker H (in 1994) and after having dried completely were mounted on stainless steel supporting structures, then filled with artificial stone consisting of sand, lime and a 10% admixture of white cement.

Nine other blocks (nos 12, 12a, 13, 26, 27, 30, 31 and niche block 16) were hardened and left to dry and harden during the summer. When they are restored, only three more blocks will remain to be treated (nos 32, 33 and 34, the last preserved almost complete) to finish the planned reconstruction of the wall.

In the meantime, the blocks finished in 1994 were provisionally stored, still on their wood supports, in their approximate places among other restored blocks. It is planned to build a low base along the centre of the magazine hall during the next season, and after restoration of more of the lowermost blocks, to begin the rebuilding of the wall together with a niche in its permanent location. A figure of the Royal Ka occupies the centre of the rear wall of the niche and is accompanied by inscriptions.

The Mission's egyptologists devoted most of their time to searching for new fragments of reliefs to complete the blocks handed over for restoration. Several such fragments were located and joined to already assembled parts. In some cases, the newly identified fragments greatly helped to establish the exact dimensions of the blocks and their particularities. To bring the documentation up to date, the artist prepared a new, revised version of the drawing of the discussed wall, also preparing other drawings of different temple walls, to be finished in Poland.

The conservation of the temple elements *in situ* concerned three main activities:

- paving the western limits of the Hypostyle Hall with stone slabs, and constructing the retaining wall protecting the edge of the bedrock on the axis of that Hall;
- conservation of the column bases;
- conservation of the granite doorway.

The southern edge of the preserved half of the rock platform, once situated on the very axis of the Hypostyle Hall, needed protection and reinforcement. A retaining wall was constructed of two layers of *dubsh* stone laid upon the reinforced concrete slab. The entire construction, though inclined, is provided with drainage.

Bases of great, 32-sided columns in the middle of the Hypostyle Hall were consolidated (bases I and II), as well as a base and lower part of the drum of one column in the Bark Hall.

The process has been applied before and tested to be efficient. The reinforced concrete foundation slabs were made below the original parts, and protected with paraloid B-72. The previously removed original parts of the bases were replaced after treatment. All the original elements were stabilized on the foundation using mortar (based on white cement) and small stones. Missing parts were replaced with new sandstone elements.

Since only three of the original twelve polygonal columns have survived the destruction of the temple, another base was partly reconstructed on the spot of one that had surely stood there once, in order to mark their original position more clearly to visitors (no. IV)

Studies on the preserved fragments of the 32-sided columns resulted in establishing the fact that no such columns or their larger parts can ever be re-erected. The surviving elements are too scarce and fragmentary. So, in order to use the existing larger parts of the drums of such columns, it was decided to arrange them on their original bases in such a way, that it would be immediately clear to the viewer that they are not reconstructed, but simply stored.

Large parts of the northern jamb of the granite doorway were re-assembled and thus prepared for the reconstruction of the entire jamb, planned for the future. The fragments were glued together with Araldite resin and reinforced with stainless steel clamps and net.

Three more bases of the 16-sided columns and one of a 32-sided column can be consolidated. After the re-erection of the granite doorway jambs and final arrangement of the site, the work will have been finished.

It should be mentioned briefly that in spite of the heavy water fall from the cliffs during the autumn rains, only minor damages were noted. In some places, however, the bedrock shows some swelling, and the pavement slabs have moved a bit from their proper places. Their position will be corrected next year, if the rock is then dry.