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Sheikh Abd El-Gurna: Hermitage in Tomb 1152 : Second Season of Excavations, 2004

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SHEIKH ABD EL-GURNA HERMITAGE IN TOMB 1152 SECOND SEASON OF EXCAVATIONS, 2004

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Archaeological work in February-March 2004 was conducted mainly in the central part of the hermitage complex.¹ Buildings B and C were explored, as well as the area between them, the area south of C and the rubbish dump east and south of B. More of the tomb corridor was cleared, directly beyond the A1-A3 units explored last year.

1 The mission headed by Mr. Tomasz Górecki was composed of: Ms Iwona Antoniak, Ms Ewa Czyżewska, Ms Eliza Szpakowska and Dr. Zbigniew E. Szafrąński, archaeologists; Mrs. Teodozja Rzeuska and Ms Mariola Orzechowska, ceramologists, who studied the unstratified Pharaonic pottery from the fill in the tomb corridor; Ms Teresa Kaczor, architect; Mr. Maciej Jawornicki, photographer. The SCA was represented by Mr. Gamal Mohammed Muawad from the Islamic and Coptic Antiquities Inspectorate.

BUILDING B

Inside the presumed tower, we were searching for confirmation of its function and for evidence of an upper story.

The entrance in the west wall was found to have a brick-and-stone threshold. It opened into the ground-floor chamber, which was filled with c. 2 m of rubble. Once this was cleared, it turned out that there were low walls built against the north and south walls, supporting the spring of a barrel vault, of which only the lowermost courses have survived [Fig. 1]. There were no windows apparent in this chamber, as well as no evidence of an internal staircase. A mud floor was found underfoot and the walls proved to have a fragmentarily preserved coating of coarse mud plaster.

Since the rubble yielded many small terracotta tiles, there can be no doubt that the floor of the first-floor room above the vault must have consisted of these tiles set in mud mortar. The walls of this room were also plastered. The entrance must have led, perhaps up a ladder, from the outside.

The pottery from the rubble, including pieces of large storage jars of unfired clay, suggested a storage function for both tower rooms, especially the upper one. Food must have been among the main provisions stored here. The tower was most likely later than the units A1-A3 inside the tomb corridor, considering that it was founded on a layer of rubbish that was evidently a dump connected with these rooms.



Fig. 1. View of the interior of building B (presumed tower). Dashed line on the back wall traces the imprint of the vault (Photo M. Jawornicki)

STRUCTURE C

A structure of domestic use (C) was cleared between the tower (B) and the tomb entrance. Mud-brick walls, oriented like the presumed tower, had been erected against the vertical cliff wall, constituting the back, west wall of the unit. The entrance led from the north [Fig. 2]. There were evidently two phases of occupation: a later one, marked by a mud floor, and an earlier one with a floor made of thin fired bricks, mud bricks and limestone tiles.

Below the original floor, an oblong pit was discovered (c. 2.50 m long, 1.00 m wide, 2.40 m deep) [Fig. 3]. Its east and west walls were faced with mud brick and stone blocks, but only in the lowermost parts. Most likely a storage bin from the Coptic period, it could have made use originally of some earlier pit (perhaps unfinished burial shaft?) from Pharaonic times.

The structure was in all likelihood domestic rather than residential in nature.



Fig. 2. Entrance to structure C from the north (Photo T. Górecki)



Fig. 3. Storage bin under the floor in structure C (Photo T. Górecki)

TOMB CORRIDOR

Further work inside the corridor leading to the inner chamber of Tomb 1152 resulted in another section of the fill being removed. Small finds in the rubble included objects of Coptic date, but also of Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom and Late Period origin. We are still unable to state with any certainty how far the hermitage extended inside the tomb. All that was discovered was a loosely laid floor of tiles made

of different kinds of stone. On one tile, a reused piece of limestone, a few shallowly carved hieroglyphic signs could be discerned. At the far end of the excavated section of the corridor (c. 7.00 m from the entrance), a transversal partition of mud brick was detected. Since only one course of bricks has survived, it could have been a low step just as well as a provisional partition wall.

RUBBISH DUMP

The rubbish dump to the south of the presumed tower (B) yielded considerable evidence of pottery. Over a dozen more or less complete examples of amphorae and many sherds thereof represented Egyptian vessels: LRA 7 type, products of Aswan workshops and their imitations in Nile silt. Other pottery categories from the rubbish dump included storage jars, water

vessels and tableware, mostly from Aswan workshops. Predominant among the latter were imitations of Hayes form 84.

By far the most important category of finds from the rubbish dump were the Coptic ostraca. A few had the full Coptic alphabet inscribed on them, and on one limestone flake letters of the Greek alphabet had been written in smaller size



Fig. 4. Egyptian amphorae of LRA 7 type, except for the vessel second from right, which is an Aswan product (Photo T. Górecki)

between the lines of the Coptic alphabet (cf. *Fig. 2* on p. 245 below).²

Finds of Coptic date from the period AD 450-700 constitute the biggest assemblage. Apart from the ostraca, we have recorded pottery, lamps and textiles. The latter were for the most part fragments of robes and few pieces actually bore any decoration. The fill

from the corridor also included several dozen fragmentarily preserved ushebti, a faience amulet, small pieces of broken amulets, faience beads, pieces of cartonnages, parts of wooden coffins and ushebti boxes with painted decoration, as well as broken pottery ranging from the Middle Kingdom to the Late Period.³

2 On the Coptic ostraca, see preliminary report by I. Antoniak in this volume.

3 Cf. preliminary report by T.I. Rzeuska and M. Orzechowska in this volume.