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The Hermitage in Sheikh Abd El-Gurna (West Thebes) : Excavations, Studies and Conservation in 2009 and 2010

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THE HERMITAGE IN SHEIKH ABD EL-GURNA (WEST THEBES): EXCAVATION, STUDIES AND CONSERVATION IN 2009 AND 2010/2011

Tomasz Górecki

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Abstract: The field seasons of 2009 and the turn of 2010 were focused on multidisciplinary studies and conservation of finds from the Coptic hermitage located in a Pharaonic tomb (MMA 1152) in the locality of Gurna in West Thebes. The objective was a multivariied study of the monks' everyday life in the 6th through 8th centuries AD, as well as a reconstruction of the history of the tomb from its founding through the Graeco-Roman period. A limited number of artifacts illustrate occasional visits to the ruins in later times by travelers, treasure hunters and finally early 20th century archaeologists. Some limited archaeological excavations were carried out in peripheral areas: in the lowest part of the refuse dump on the rock slope and on the edges of the path running from the site of the hermitage to the neighboring tomb MMA 1151. Conservation of metal vessels and other objects revealed elements of the decoration as well as technological features, aiding in determining their function and clarifying the decoration.

Keywords: West Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Gurna, Coptic hermitage, monasticism, metal/leather conservation, pottery, inscriptions

By 2008 the exploration of different parts of the hermitage 1152 (commenced in 2003) and the associated refuse dump in front of the complex appeared to have been completed. Unexpectedly, the two wadis in the lowermost part of the slope below the hermitage proved to be full of discarded pottery material covered with a thick layer of rock detritus. Exploration of this deposit in 2009 was undertaken when it was found that many joining sherds could be found to

the material already explored. In effect, the pottery assemblage can now be considered as sufficiently representative to support more general, final conclusions.

Apart from ongoing pottery studies, the two seasons in 2009 and 2010 were devoted to specialist work on the different categories of finds (ostraka, matting, textiles) as well as animal bone and archeobotanical remains. Restorers were also engaged to conserve the metal finds, textiles and animal hides.

FIELD SEASON IN 2009

Archaeological explorations in the 2009 season covered the southern part of the courtyard, which was free of any remains of installations under the rock detritus in the eastern end (Górecki 2011: 277, Fig. 1, map, area east of Pithos 1). The detritus

Team

Season 2009

Dates of work: 1 November–16 December 2009

Director: Tomasz Górecki, archaeologist (Eastern Christian Art Collection, National Museum in Warsaw)

SCA representatives: Hussein Mohamed Hussein (fieldwork supervision), Magda Sadiy Ebid (supervision of work in the Gurna storehouse)

Anthropologist: Beata Baliukeviciute[-Ryszkovska] (independent)

Pottery specialists: Teodozja I. Rzeuska (Research Center for Mediterranean Archaeology, Polish Academy of Sciences), Mariola Orzechowska (independent)

Plaitwork specialist: Christiane Hochstrasser-Petit (independent)

Archaeobotanist: Dr. Jarosław Zieliński (Szczecin Agricultural Academy)

Archaeozoologist: Urszula Iwaszczuk (independent)

Textile restorer: Barbara Czaja-Szewczak (Museum-Palace of John III Sobieski Wilanów)

Metal restorer: Władysław Weker (State Archaeological Museum, Warsaw)

Photographer: Dariusz Dąbkowski (freelance)

Student-trainee: Julia Górecka (Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw)

Season 2010/2011

Dates of work: 23 October 2010–24 January 2011

Director: Tomasz Górecki, archaeologist (Eastern Christian Art Collection, National Museum in Warsaw)

SCA representatives: Mahmoud Gabreel Abed el Aal, Samia Salah Riad (fieldwork supervision), Ahmad Hassan Abed (supervision of work in the Gurna storehouse)

Archaeologists: Patryk Chudzik (Institute of Archaeology, University of Wrocław), Katarzyna Danys-Lasek (independent), Szymon Maślak (Polish Ministry of National Education scholarship holder), Zbigniew Polak (Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw), Maciej Trzecicki (Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw)

Ethnoarchaeologist: Dr. Christiane Hochstrasser-Petit (independent)

Papyrologists: Dr. Anne Boud'hors (Institut de recherche et d'histoire des textes, CNRS), Assist. Prof. Tomasz Derda (Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw)

Egyptologist: Dr. Andrzej Ćwiek (Archaeological Museum in Poznań)

Parchment and leather restorer: Anna Thommée (Polish Ateliers for Conservation of Cultural Property, Toruń)

Geophysicists: Dominik Kaletta, Jarosław Majewski (both Geo-Radar. Badania Geofizyczne, Groffik A., Wilczyce)

Photographers: Dariusz Dąbkowski (freelance), Roman Stasiuk, Piotr Zambrzycki (both Academy of Fine Arts, Warsaw)

Student-trainee: Julia Górecka, BA (Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw)



*Fig. 1. The rock slope with the wadis in view, seen from the east
(Photo T. Górecki)*



*Fig. 2. Exploration of the southern wadi
(Photo T. Górecki)*

itself contained little actual archaeological material, which was also more abundant in human and animal bone remains than the fill in other parts of the courtyard. There was also more than usual fragments of cartonnages, mummy wrappings and Pharaonic pottery. Coptic ceramics were rare and limited almost exclusively to fragments of LRA 7 amphoras.

Explorations also concerned the lowest part of the refuse dump on the rocky slope, some 10–12 m east and northeast of the mud-brick tower. The dump produced almost nothing else but Coptic domestic pottery, mainly LRA 7 amphoras, *saqiya* pots, cooking pots and storage containers of all sizes. A smaller group was made up of Late Roman tableware, dominated by Aswan products. Late Period ceramics were present in small numbers and earlier pottery was even rarer. Two funerary cones were recorded, although the names could not be read at the time (for a current reading, see

Kopp forthcoming). Sections of the dump with distinct stratigraphy revealed two dumping phases. The earlier one, which started directly on bedrock, contained an abundance of LRA 7 amphora sherds, Late Roman tableware, cordage, organic remains (tree branches, seeds, palm leaves), which determined the brown color of the layer as a whole thanks to their abundance. The overlying layer of refuse was of a different nature despite also containing earlier pottery. It produced a much greater number of transport amphoras made of marl clay of unidentified production origin, although non-Egyptian (Tunisian perhaps) according to the present author (see Górecki 2004: 179, Fig. 6, note error in scale, amphora on the left is about 52 cm high). This layer also contained sizable amounts of rock chunks and detritus, making it a beige-gray color overall. The two layers, which are not evident all over the hermitage area, but are extremely distinct in places, indicate two



Fig. 3. LRA 7 amphoras leveling the path between the hermitage in tomb MMA 1152 and the presumed hermitage in tomb MMA 1151 (Photo T. Górecki)

phases of use of the hermitage, separated one from the other by at least a few dozen years. A corresponding phasing of the architecture has been noted: different wall bondwork and successive painting and repainting layers. Moreover, the pottery and the ostraka have also supported the idea of there being two separate occupational phases in the hermitage.

Investigations of the rock slope at the highest point just below the path connecting the two Pharaonic tombs MMA 1151 and MMA 1152 (roughly oriented north–south) revealed two groups of severely damaged LRA 7 amphoras on the eastern edge of the path. One group consisted of amphoras lying next to one

another, obviously for the purpose of leveling the path between the hermitages [Fig. 3]. The other group was made up of the upper parts of amphoras set up on end a few meters further on; they too seem to have been intended as leveling of the path.

The exploration of a bench inside the hermitage by the south wall was completed (for previous work in 2008, see Górecki 2011: 233 and Fig. 10). The fill in the core contained solely potsherds, human and animal bones, and organic material mixed with fine rock detritus. Four dried bricks lying in a row formed a structure perpendicular to the tomb wall [Fig. 4]; they could constitute relics of an earlier structure on this spot.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELDWORK IN 2010/2011

Documentation was the chief task in the 2010/2011 season, although limited archaeological fieldwork was also carried out inside the two hermitages (in the

tombs 1151 and 1152), in the courtyards and on the rock slope below the courtyard of MMA 1152. The main purpose of the excavations in this limited form was to



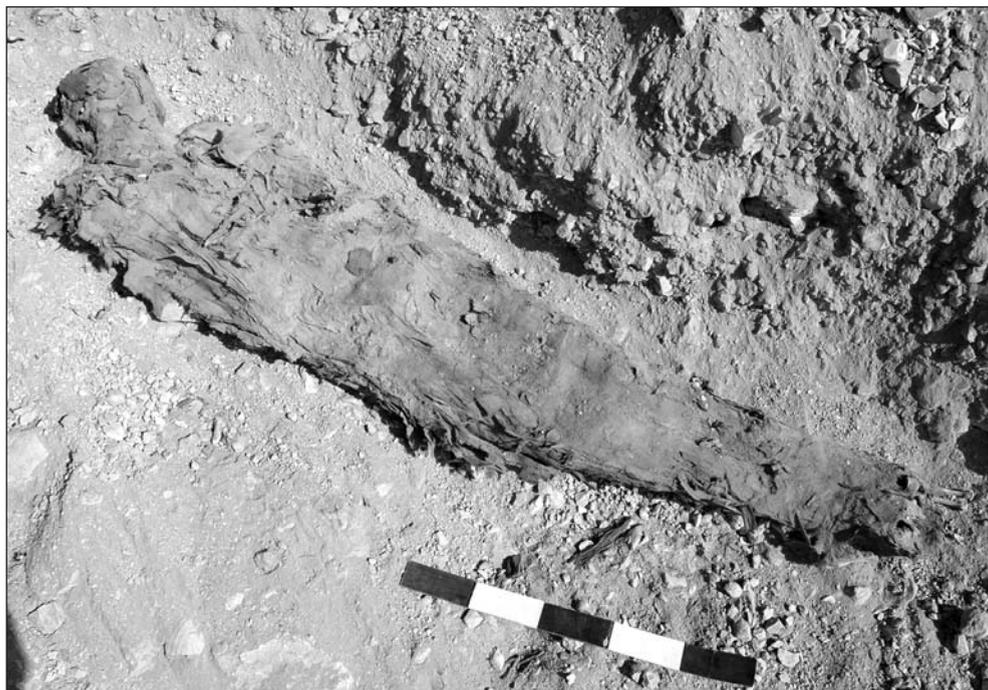
Fig. 4. Interior of an explored bench with walls modeled in clay; view from above (Photo T. Górecki)

address specific issues and answer specific questions that last season's verifying field-work had posed.

For one, it became clear after the 2009 season that the eastern borders of the refuse dump are not so evident and that an inestimable number of finds could have fallen even farther down the slope, into two wadis, north and south, that ran into a broad wadi at the bottom of the slope [Fig. 1]. The southern wadi [Fig. 2] had started to be explored already in 2009, contributing significantly to a reconstruction of the everyday life of the monks mainly through the broad range of functional categories represented by the ceramics found there. It is only natural, considering the topography of the refuse dump, that rains would have

transported many sherds down into the wadis, whereas the occupation of hermitage 1152 first and then the quasi-archaeological excavations in the 19th and early 20th century deposited more rock detritus filling the wadis and the pottery lying there. The same situation can be observed in many of the wadis of the southern slope of the gebel (behind the Valley of the Queens) where pottery on the surface is continuously being moved downslope following occasional heavy rains in the region.

The ceramic material from the wadi has contributed significantly to the pottery assemblage from the hermitage, broadening the range of recorded vessel forms. Among these is a group of fine bowls and cups covered carelessly with a beige-white-



*Fig. 5. Mummy found in the northern wadi
(Photo T. Górecki)*

yellow slip [Fig. 9, left] and a water bottle with similar coloring, but better applied slip [Fig. 9, right].

A damaged but fully wrapped mummy, most probably from pre-Christian times, was found in the northern wadi, lying directly on the rock debris with the head to the west [Fig. 5].

A long test was dug inside the corridor of tomb MMA 1152, along the axis, on either side of a stone threshold in the passage between the two parts of the hermitage [Fig. 6]. The stratigraphy of occupational layers could be read under the stone threshold (C). The uneven rock floor of the corridor (A) appears to have been leveled with a layer of lime plaster made of crushed limestone, presumably from the cutting of

the tomb (B). Superimposed on this floor were a few centimeters of brown organic remains and burning, covered thinly with ashes, which have remained wherever the monks did not clear it when adapting the interior to their purposes. Judging by ceramic finds, mostly small cult bowls with a decoration of white spots painted on the inside walls, the burning probably dates to the Second Intermediate Period–early New Kingdom period. A layer of rock detritus a dozen centimeters thick covered the burning layer; it contained Hellenistic potsherds (almost exclusively amphoras), animal bones and pieces of wood. The top-most layer under the threshold and floor of irregular stone tiles in the middle section of the corridor was laid on a leveling layer

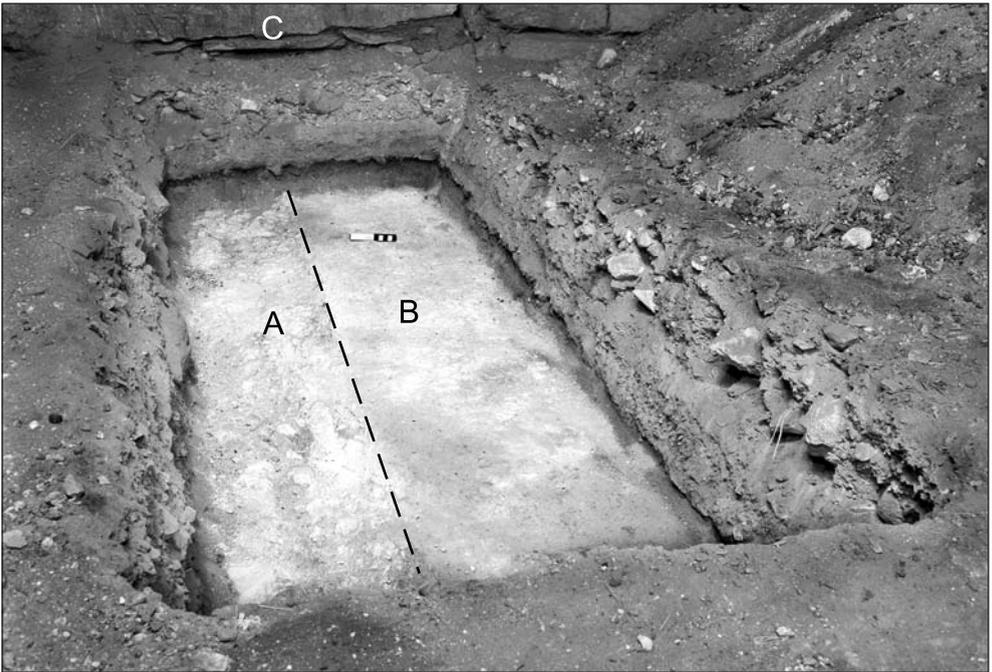


Fig. 6. Layers under the stone threshold (C) in MMA 1152; original rock floor (A) after cutting the tomb on the left and leveling layer of lime plaster (B) on the right; for a close-up of the threshold, see below, Fig. 3 on page 196 (Photo W. Wojciechowski)



Fig. 7. Southeastern corner of the chapel of MMA 1151 used by the monks; remains of benches in the corner and a niche cut in the rock wall (Photo W. Wojciechowski)



Fig. 8. Regular pit dug in the courtyard in front of the entrance to MMA 1151 (Photo T. Górecki)

related to the construction of the hermitage; it was dated by scarce fragments of Coptic pottery.

Clearing of the pharaonic chapel and shaft excavated in the 1920s by H. Winlock in the neighboring tomb MMA 1151 (which is believed to have been part of the hermitage 1152) revealed mud-brick benches in the southeastern corner and a mud floor, which the monks had laid directly on the rock floor of the tomb [Fig. 7]. The benches were covered with quality lime plaster, hard and with smoothed surface. A shallow, fairly high and irregular niche was cut in the south wall of the chamber; its walls and bottom were plastered with mud and its size suggested some domestic function. Above it, there were the remains of some small monochrome wall painting, possibly a cross rendered with red paint.

A pit was cut in the rock to the northwest of the entrance outside the tomb. It was approximately 1.50 m wide, 2.10 m long and about 2 m deep. It seems that Winlock inadvertently excavated the soft bedrock to this depth [Fig. 8], because the

reach of original bricks and pseudo-plaster of mud does not exceed approximately 1.20 m. The long rock walls on the east and west were lined with low walls of fairly identical dried bricks (24[25] x 11[12] x 6.50[7.50] cm). The purpose of this pit remains obscure.

The work in the vicinity of tomb MMA 1151 was aimed not so much at excavation of the area as at verifying H. Winlock's plan, which has kindly been made available to the excavators by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York through the offices of Andrzej Ćwiek (see Górecki, Szpakowska 2008: 307, note 4). Some of the inner structures that Winlock had marked as used by the monks did not seem very clear. Clearing of the corridor not only clarified these doubts, but also revealed new installations that Winlock had not excavated. Superimposed on Winlock's plan, these benches, low walls and diverse floors (of lime plaster, mud plaster and stone tiles) now give a more or less full idea of the appearance of the interior of the hermitage (the monks' chapel perhaps) in MMA 1151.

STUDIES

Most of the attention of specialists was focused on the study of collected categories of finds from MMA 1152: textiles, basketry and pottery, as well as the botanical and faunal remains. Work on the pottery repertoire continued in both seasons, whereas the ostraka were studied in the 2010/2011 campaign. In 2009 a metal conservator worked on the set of metal finds excavated in the previous season, concentrating on bringing out the decoration and technological features.

In 2010/2011 the leather artifacts were treated by a conservator. The following is a summary discussion of the results of specialist studies and conservation treatment.

PHARAONIC-AGE ASSEMBLAGE

The Pharaonic finds assemblage from the excavations in 2003–2009 was recorded this season by Patryk Chudzik. A statistical count was made of fragments of *ushebt* figurines, faience amulets, wooden statues and coffins, cartonnages, plaster with

traces of painted decoration. Cartouche impressions on mud bricks from the New Kingdom were also verified (for preliminary conclusions on this material, see Szpakowska 2007). New photographic documentation of finds from the Middle Kingdom through the Late Period should help in determining the chronology of burials in tomb MMA 1152 in periods preceding the founding of the hermitage.

PHARAONIC BURIALS

Anthropological research on human skeletal remains, found out of context either with the cartonnages or with the coffins, has supplied summary data on the number of burials preceding the adaptation of the tomb by the monks — between 35 as a minimum

number of individuals (MNI) for the whole assemblage — without assigning burials to specific periods (Robert Mahler and Beata Balukeviciute-Ryszkovska, unpublished reports). The combined anthropological and ceramological data attest to a continuity of the burial tradition in tomb MMA 1152 through the Roman period with emphasis on the Third Intermediate Period and the beginning of the Late Period (on a regular practice of burials being made in existing tombs, see Strudwick 2003: 173–176, 181–182; Riggs 2003: especially 189–193). Preliminary results of studies on material found with the burials, carried out earlier by Eliza Szpakowska and currently by Andrzej Ćwiek and Patryk Chudzik, lead to similar conclusions (Szpakowska 2007).



Fig. 9. Cup with light slip (left) and water bottle (Photo D. Dąbkowski)

POTTERY STUDIES

The pottery assemblage from the period preceding the adaptation of the tomb by Coptic monks is chronologically diverse and quite severely destroyed. The tomb had been used as a depository for the bodies of the dead after the Middle Kingdom and especially from the Third Intermediate Period; fragmentary coffins and cartonnages, as well as pottery attest to these dealings (for a preliminary report on relevant pottery, see Rzeuska, Orzechowska 2005).

Orzechowska and Rzeuska demonstrated the presence of Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period pottery

apparently associated with the cult of the dead, as well as New Kingdom and (the more abundant) Third Intermediate Period ceramics linked to funerary ritual and the cult of the dead. The Hellenistic period appears to be represented almost exclusively by transport amphoras with resinated walls. The presence of cult vessels indicates that the tomb was used for burials from the late Middle Kingdom through the Hellenistic and even Graeco-Roman age, although preferences in different periods will be easier to establish once the entire assemblage of cartonnages and wooden coffins has been studied.



*Fig. 10. Fragments of Late Roman type plates with traces of use
(Photos T. Górecki)*

REPERTOIRE OF POTTERY FROM THE HERMITAGE

Work began on determining the full repertoire of vessel types excavated in 2003–2009 and the number of vessels in each typological group. Selection of the pottery led to reconstruction of several hundred vessels representing mainly Late Roman tableware, storage containers of both dried and baked clay, water bottles, plain domestic and cooking pots. Of particular importance is the set of dried-clay containers, which are not frequently found in excavations in Egypt due to their impermanence. In the monastic context they attest to diverse economic functions in the

hermitage, including food storage strategies. Other fired vessels can be classified as industrial, meaning used at different stages of various activities, such as soaking palm leaves and stems, washing, dyeing and tanning, connected with basketry and weaving. In turn, the Late Roman pottery forms a set sufficiently big to help in establishing a chronological framework for the occupation of the hermitage.

Evidence of use on the vessels are documented with particular care. For example, strong scratches observed on some fragments of shallow plates made of Nile silt come from knives being used to cut up foodstuffs (bread, vegetables) on their surface [Fig. 10]. Of equal importance is evidence of repairs and adaptation of vessels for other purposes, reworking of sherds into tools, for example, sawing off damaged parts, drilling and incising sherds to be used in a new function.

A curious find in this context is a sherd of a transport amphora from the 6th–7th century, made of Nile silt, which was used by some monk to scratch a few Egyptian hieroglyphs, which he must have copied from a nearby temple or tomb (Górecki, Kopp 2013) [Fig. 11].

TEXTILE STUDIES

Textile finds constituted an important category in the assemblage collected from the hermitage, especially in view of the confirmed activity of a weaving workshop in the hermitage. About 300 fragments of textiles, from larger pieces to individual threads and yarn, were studied this season by textile restorer and specialist Barbara Czaja-Szewczak.

Coptic textiles made up approximately 35% of the studied assemblage. Different types of weave were represented:



Fig. 11. Body sherd of a wine amphora with scratched hieroglyphic signs (Photo T. Górecki)

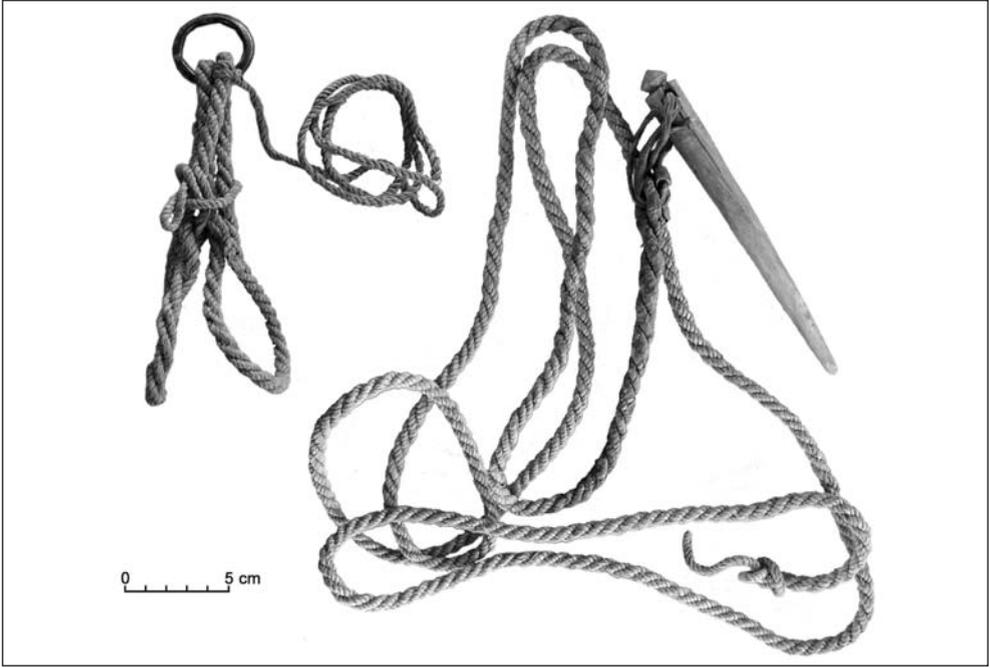


Fig. 12. Ropes attached to different objects: an iron ring (left) and a sharpened wooden peg, possibly a kind of compass? (right) (Photos C. Hochstrasser-Petit)

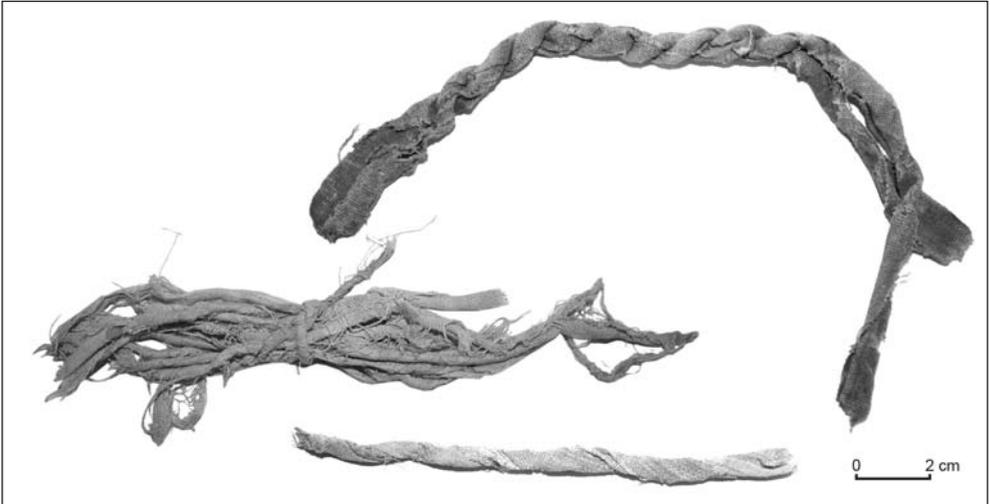


Fig. 13. Oil lamp wicks made of reused fabric top, CT113) and thread (bottom, CT105); center, analogous bundle of lamp wicks (L. 15–17 cm; average Dia. 0.5 cm), recorded in Polish excavations at the Temple of Hatshepsut in Deir el-Bahari (Photos B. Czaja-Szewczak)



*Fig. 14. Amphora with rope around the neck
(Photo C. Hochstrasser-Petit)*



*Fig. 15. Basket of palm leaves, 5th–6th century
(Photo C. Hochstrasser-Petit)*

canvas, tapestry, panama and sprang. In many instances a color wool weft was noted. Yarn and bunches of warp threads, as well as weaving materials found in abundance in the hermitage are proof that tablet weaving on a small scale took place there. Larger pieces of woven fabric may have been produced in the workshop as well, considering the remains of two installations (possibly contemporaneous) that were discovered in the hermitage in 2004. These installations corresponded in appearance to many others discovered in Egypt to date and interpreted as weaving looms (most recently, see Strudwick 2012: 377, who admits the possibility of Gurna inhabitants in the 19th–20th centuries installing weaving workshops next to Pharaonic tombs).

Textiles from the hermitage included reused fragments of mummy wrappings, shrouds and tapes, although the fragmentary condition of the remains often made it impossible to determine the purpose of these alterations or to ascertain what these “new products” were supposed to be used for. Strips of fabric torn from larger pieces of fabric were intended as oil lamp wicks [*Fig. 13*]. Coptic textiles (excluding yarn and semi-products) were dumped when they were no longer useful, following clothing repairs and as scraps leftover from the adaptation of clothes for other purposes. In many instances it is impossible to determine why a fragment was torn off from a larger piece of fabric.

BASKETRY

Christiane Hochstrasser-Petit recorded 118 artifacts made of vegetal fibers. Grave goods and some objects of everyday life objects made up the group of Pharaonic finds, those from the period of the Coptic

hermitage were exclusively objects of everyday use: baskets, matting, plaiting and cordage, made mainly of palm leaves and fiber. Some of the objects were functionally explicit because of the finds context: the basket shown here [*Fig. 15*] was produced in the 6th–7th century, the date corroborated by the objects found inside it, including the bronze vessels which could be dated to this period [see *Fig. 9*]. A rope around the neck of an amphora [*Fig. 14*] shows that the vessel must have been attached to a yoke or strapped to the back of a donkey or camel carrying water to the hermitage. A thinner rope was found attached to an iron ring in one case [*Fig. 12, left*] and to a sharpened wooden peg in another, in the latter instance tied to the rope with a leather thong (kind of compass?) [*Fig. 12, right*]. They must have had some application in the hermitage.

METAL CONSERVATION AND STUDIES

The sparse but consistently growing assemblage of metal objects, mainly of copper alloy and iron, justified a project for cleaning and preserving these artifacts. Władysław Weker treated first three objects of brass found in 2003, now at the SCA stores (“Carter House”) (for drawings of two of these, see Górecki 2004: 179 and note 6, *Fig. 5*) and an iron pan (Górecki 2011: 230, *Fig. 7*) discovered in 2007. The corrosion layer was removed and the objects protected against further rusting. The decoration on the pan was cleaned and technological features, like rivets and repairs, were uncovered under a layer of burning [*Fig. 16*].

With regard to the two brass pots, removing oil stains and common dirt revealed decoration that was hitherto

invisible on the outside of these vessels [Fig. 18]. The spouted vessel (C.B.1) [Fig. 19, left] bears engraved decoration on the inside and outside. Inside there were sets of horizontal lines, one set of lines in the indented rim edge and two concentric double circles on the bottom. On the outside a simple guilloche composed of small

pin pricks, made with a pointed tool which was probably of iron, appeared between the middle and lower sets of double engraved lines, overlapping them. The technique, the quality of its execution and the style of the guilloche suggest that it was added to the vessel at a later date.

The other vessel [Fig. 19, right] has on

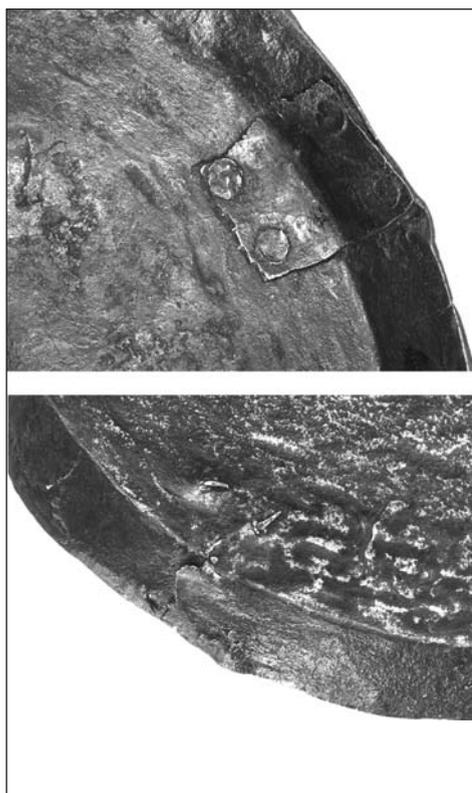


Fig. 16. Rivets and traces of repairs of the iron pan under a layer of burning



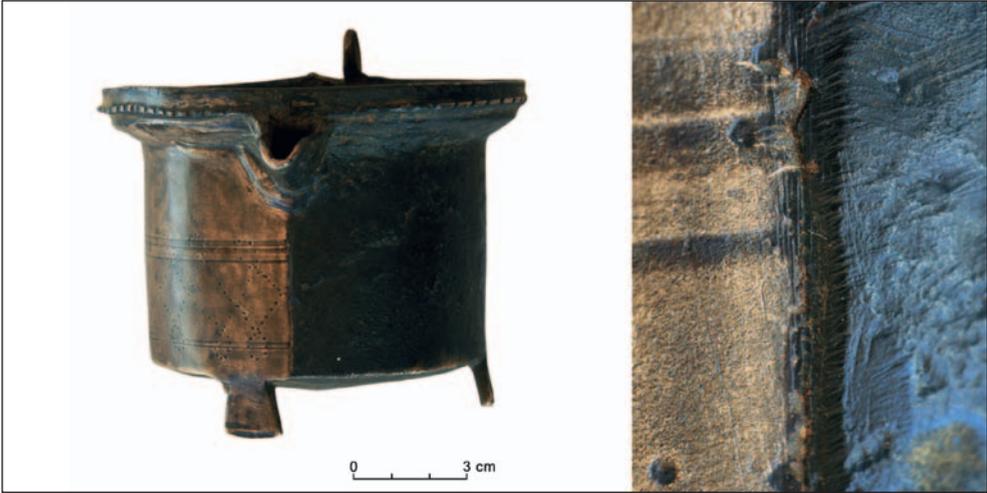
Fig. 17. Cup with loop handle decorated with a small cobra head

(opposite page)

Fig. 18. Spouted vessel/tripod C.B.1 during cleaning (left) and detail of the outside surface showing elements of the decoration

Fig. 19. Brass vessels after conservation: spouted tripod/vessel C.B.1, side and bottom view (left) and tripod/vessel C.B.2, side and bottom view
(All photos on this page D. Dąbkowski)

EGYPT



the inside three sets of circles composed of three parallel engraved lines, two on the walls and one on the bottom. On the outside wall there were two pairs of double lines on the projecting band marking the junction of the body with the bottom and two concentric circles, each consisting of a pair of engraved lines, on the underside.

Both vessels on the underside bear numerous more or less parallel surface scratches. They attest to the surface being smoothed or polished, presumably to remove any casting roughness left over from production.

The third bronze vessel is small and has a long spout and a handle at right angles to it [Fig. 17]. The handle is decorated with a small cobra head placed at its top. A date in the 5th–6th century seems very probable, although it is also possible that it is of much earlier date and was adapted by the monks for their purposes.

OSTRAKA STUDIES

Anne Boud'hors reviewed all the Coptic ostraka discovered so far (320 items), verifying the ones which did not have fully satisfactory photographic documentation. In most cases the texts could be read and copied. A preliminary classification of the texts was established, distinguishing a few key groups: letters, which are the most numerous group, official documents, receipts, religious texts (prayers and biblical texts) and writing exercises. The study of the content of the ostraka has confirmed conclusions drawn from archaeological and ceramological studies concerning the two phases of the occupation of the hermitage, from the middle of the 6th to the middle of the 7th century and from the end of the 7th through the middle of the

8th century.

LEATHER CONSERVATION AND STUDIES

Tanned animal hides and leather artifacts (thongs, parts of shoes and clothes) were conserved by conservator Anna Thommée. Of greatest interest undoubtedly were three hides (C.L.1–C.L.3) found together with the bronze vessels in a basket of palm leaves during the first season of excavations in 2003 [see above and Figs 15 and 19 in this report]. The hides as found were folded and partly rolled up [Fig. 20, folded]. In order to determine the animal species and age based on size of the hide, the hides had to be cleaned, greased and elasticized in order to unfold them for preliminary identification.

All of the hides were taken from young animals (either goat or sheep), C.L.1 being cut open on the belly side, C.L.2 and C.L.3 slipped off without cutting. The quality of the tanning (except for C.L.3) indicates possible use as binding for book covers. The assumption is validated by written sources speaking of monks being charged with bookmaking (Kotsifou 2007: 60–61, 66; Boud'hors 2008: 157–159; Maravela-Solbakk 2008) and an ostrakon featuring an order for goatskin to be used for a book cover (Crum, Evelyn White [eds] 1926: 254, No. 380 MMA.14.1.165) validate this assumption. There are many sources confirming that monks copied manuscripts, ornamented the pages, bound them in leather and decorated the covers. Numerous orders to this effect, also recording purchase of books from monks, attest to this activity.

Archaeozoological research has demonstrated that animals could have occasionally been slaughtered and skinned on



Fig. 20. Hides C.L.1, C.L.2 and C.L.3 before and after unfolding
(Photos A. Thommee)

site (a possibility not rejected by the team's archaeozoologist) and the hides tanned and processed to make book covers, pouches, bags, straps, thongs and other leather goods. According to modern specialists, tanning can be carried out under practically any conditions and therefore could have been accomplished also in the hermitages (for an ostrakon from the Phoibammon monastery dealing with the tanning of leather, see Biedenkopf-Ziehner 2000: 287–290). Finds of goat/sheep dung in the courtyard of the hermitage could also be construed as proof of animals being kept there occasionally before slaughtering.

FAUNAL REMAINS

In the present season Urszula Iwaszczuk studied 490 faunal remains, adding to the 3575 animal bones from excavations in 2003–2008, that she examined in the previous season (Iwaszczuk 2012). 363 bone fragments were identified. The bone material was slightly less diverse than the assemblages recovered earlier. Most of the bones came from ruminants and canids. A lesser number of canids and equids were represented than before. There were no camel and cat remains in the osteological material. The present results confirmed earlier findings, which had divided the animal-bone assemblage into two groups: one connected with human activity and the other associated with the presence of carnivores.

ARCHEOBOTANICAL RESEARCH

Macroscopic and microscopic examination of plant material (1028 samples) by Jarosław Zieliński covered a large assemblage of wooden artifacts evidently of Pharaonic

date and a definitely less numerous group relating to the phase when the tomb was utilized as a hermitage. Statistically, the most common species of wood represented in the assemblage (treated summarily) was cedarwood (49%), followed by tamarisk (18%), fig (16%) and acacia (13%). Willow and ash made up 4% with willow predominating. The finds included both unworked branches as well as fragments of wooden coffins and figures, ushebti boxes and other objects.

The botanical evidence, that is, seeds, fruit and plant fragments, represented 36 species, mainly dates, olives and doum palm nuts. The group is not homogeneous and while it gives important insight into the everyday life of the monks in Gurna, it should be treated with caution depending on the context. Plant remains from sealed deposits, like the fill of two benches (so-called Mastaba I and II) in the front part of the corridor in the hermitage (in tomb 1152), sealed after construction with a plastered mud surface, are of greatest value, because they represent an earlier phase in the occupation of the hermitage. The remains included, among others, broad beans, onions, garlic, parsley, peach, Egyptian plum, grapes, melon and hazelnut. Of similar import are the plant remains from the deepest levels of the refuse dump in front of the hermitage, although intrusions from later times and windblown material should be expected here. Of least value are the finds from surface layers in the dump and the fill of the corridor; they could have come from the plundered Pharaonic burials or been left by 19th and 20th century visitors.

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