

ACADEMY OF FINLAND AND UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI
WORKMEN'S HUTS IN THE THEBAN MOUNTAINS PROJECT
PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE WORK PERFORMED DURING SEASON 2010*

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Abstract

The third field season of *The Workmen's Huts in the Theban Mountains* Project funded by the Academy of Finland, undertaken by the University of Helsinki and directed by Jaana Toivari-Viitala took place during 18th October to 18th December, 2010. The East Group consisting of 64 hut/room entities was the main objective of the season. Several interesting features were discovered, such as the existence of a number of fireplaces both inside and outside the huts and fragments of plaster still in situ on hut walls and floors. Our flint survey revealed that the reuse of flint flakes in the fillings of the stone walls of the huts as well as in the plaster that was visible in the lower courses of the walls had most likely been one of the causes that had lead to the ruining of a Palaeolithic site on the location.

The third field season of the Workmen's Huts in the Theban Mountains Project by the Academy of Finland and the University of Helsinki took place 18th October to the 18th December, 2010. Team members during this season were Jaana Toivari-Viitala, Elina Paulin-Grothe, Tanja Alsheimer, Annika Eklund, Virpi Perunka, John Winfer, Pavel Onderka, Taina Koivistoinen, Yrjö Viitala, Nina Maaranen and a group of 35 local workmen. Mr. Ahmed Ezz El-Din Ismail acted as the inspector of the Supreme Council of Antiquities.

The rough cleaning work of the whole concession area had started in 2008 when the project began. In 2009 cleaning work was continued and measuring and studying of the hut ruins of the North Group and the survey of the concession area as a whole were undertaken. This work was continued during the Season 2010. The main objective of Season 2010 was, however, the surveying, cleaning and documentation of the huts of the East Group as well as starting the study of the pottery found and of the flint scattered across the concession area.

The North Group

The processing of the data gained from last year's season which focused on the North Group continued throughout season 2010. The survey team has set out a goal try to amend the attention to detail that Bruyère's plan lacks.¹ Thus, a local grid has been created by deputy field director Tanja Alsheimer with the WHTM project's total station, a SOKKIA 4010 power set.

Alsheimer had had 12 temporary bench marks (tbm) created, all surrounding the site from different angles. The location of the tbm:s were recorded with a short description of the location of the point, and photographs. The tbm:s were surveyed in on the main map and a tbm record has now been created containing all necessary information on the points. An absolute height for the site was determined by using Kent Weeks's Theban Mapping Project point VK 12 above the tomb of Siptah (KV 47).² A preliminary 2D plan of the north area has now been compiled using AutoCad 2010 (Fig. 1). The study and description of the individual huts of the North Group which started in 2009 by Toivari-Viitala was continued during the present season also.

The East Group

The labels for the various room entities given by Bernard Bruyère to the rooms constituting the East Group were kept by the WHTM-team,³ with one minor alteration. The two-room compound labelled as "I" in Bruyère's map, where found designated as "I" and "i" respectively in Bruyère's notebooks, now published on the internet by the French Institute.⁴ By adopting the latter alteration the East Group now consists of a total of 64 room entities.

All the rooms of the East group were leveled and photographed. After this each room was cleaned from all kinds of modern garbage including animal and human excrement. The rooms were moreover cleared from stone boulders from collapsed walls now lying on the floor surface. Then debris, where occurring, was additionally cleaned away. Once this process was completed each room was photographed anew and the study of each individual room entity was started. The cleaned rooms were measured with total station.

The clearing away the debris from the rooms revealed a number of discrepancies regarding the factual layout of the huts compared to the map compiled by Bruyère. Such are, for example, the placement and sizing of room (E) t', which by Bruyère is located in line with and northeast of room (E) U, whereas it in reality adjoins the latter from the northwest side and is of a much smaller size than shown on the map. An existing transverse wall and a mastaba has been omitted from rooms (E) S and (E) S'', and a separating wall and entrance located in the middle of the wall between (E) Z and (E) Z' are in reality placed differently, whereas no entrance (as indicated on the map) exists between rooms (E) I and (E) h, or room (E) J to the outside of the east compound.

The huts have several interesting features. A fair amount of plaster remains (predominantly hiba but in a number of cases also mouna) are still attached to the wall surface. Dakka remains are visible on many floors. In one case, room (E) S'', the floor is even covered with multiple levels of dakka indicating long term use of the space. In some cases the hiba (alternatively mouna) plaster is covered with a coating of white limestone plaster. Floors as well as at least lower parts of many of the walls and the outer side or edge of the mastabas have, thus, originally been of a white colour.⁵ Some entrances, such as those in rooms (E) Q and (E) T', have thresholds consisting of a bottom layer of limestone boulders with patina on which finely dressed rectangular limestone slabs have been placed in order to create a smooth and even surface. The thresholds have originally probably been covered by plaster. Remains of fireplaces were found in rooms (E) m', (E) N' (two fireplaces), (E) t, (E) X', (E) Z and (E) Z'.

The area around the huts containing excavation debris of the IFAO excavation headed by Bruyère in 1935 were cleaned and documented for further study by being divided into 30 trenches (T). The numbering of the trenches was continued in the established ascending serial order, thus numbering T 18–30. One of the trenches, no. 28, adjoined (N) T 8, whereby it was designated as belonging to the North Group (N). The other trenches were all documented as being associated to the East Group as (E) T 18–27 and (E) T 29–30.

The finds and so called study material originating from the rooms and the adjoining area were quite modest and consist mainly of pottery sherds dating to the New Kingdom and Coptic periods. Additionally a small amount of broken faience and alabaster fragments were found scattered around in the area worked on during this season. Scanty remains of organic nature

were also found, mainly wooden splinters, halfa grass, and small pieces of rope, as well as some bones (human and animal, part of the latter definitely modern). In room (E) I, for example, a number of animal (probably some rodent) and human bones and pottery sherds from the Coptic period were found placed in a corner under a mastaba like construction situated along the NE-SW wall. Also fragments of limestone stelae as well as limestone and pottery ostraca were found, all of the latter unfortunately in poor condition with severely flaking limestone and hardly visible ink remains. In some cases, however, especially regarding the stelae, the remaining text passages were relatively clear. The textual as well as the pictorial material support the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Dynasty dating for the hut settlement already given by Bruyère.⁶

The Pottery

Analysis and recording of the pottery started in mid-season. A major objective was to pinpoint priorities i.e. significant areas, such as rooms in particular. For this reason rooms that had been cleaned already during the previous season of WHTM i.e. rooms of the North Group were targeted.

Analysis was conducted in the field whereby a series of steps was undertaken in order to work through the material with consistency. When the sherds and pots had been washed and dried, all the material, diagnostic (rims, handles, bases and decorated sherds) as well as un-diagnostic (body sherds) were studied from each archaeological context. The non-diagnostic sherds were discarded unless considered important in reconstructing whole vessels. Diagnostic sherds were kept for drawing and further fabric analysis. Fabric analysis was carried out on each of the diagnostic sherd using a 20x hand held lens and the fabric classification of Egyptian pharaonic fabrics follows the Vienna System. The sherds studied further are either decorated or have potmarks.

In the material the most common finds are open form Nile silt vessels, such as bowls and plates. These are a common find on any settlement site and can be called collectively as 'tableware'. Much of this material has a red band applied, possibly with a brush, to the rim. In many vessels the band is unevenly applied with no care. Most of our red band plates and bowls are otherwise uncoated. This kind of treatment for open forms is common during the Ramesside Period.⁷

Other typical pottery finds include various kind of jars and amphorae; both Egyptian and imported. The Egyptian amphorae fragments examined so far are made of Marl A4 and Marl D fabrics. The amphorae material dates to the nineteenth and twentieth dynasties. The imported amphora fabrics have been analysed using the classification of the Canaanite Amphorae Project.⁸ The amphorae fragments at the site are made of two fabric groups Fabric Group 1 and Fabric Group 2 according to the examples given in the web-pages of the Canaanite Amphorae Project. The fabrics of group 1 include mainly chalk, limestone and coastal quartz sand inclusions. It has been suggested by the scholars of the Canaanite Amphorae Project that the source of the clay would have been in the area stretching from Egypt's northern coast to modern Israel/Lebanon border area. Similarly to Group 1, quartz sand, calcareous inclusions as well as small quantity of volcanic rock fragments are present in the clay. But the indicative feature of the fabric is that it includes less basaltic inclusions than Group 1 and a more silty medium from red soil, known as Hamra, which indicates the clay's origin to a slightly more southern area than the first group.

Among the most common jars are beer jars and ovoid tall bottles with long necks,⁹ which are usually made of Marl B fabric, but there are also examples made from Nile clays. It would appear that there is quite a bit of variation in the rims of these bottles in terms of diameter, size and alternation and this will be an interesting theme to explore during the coming seasons. The beer jars fall into Holthoer's group BB4,¹⁰ which typically has a short neck, either vertical or slightly flared. This type is very common in the nineteenth dynasty.

The importance of the pottery at the site is somehow undermined by the fact that it is mostly surface material or pottery derived from the areas already examined by the French expedition in 1935 and thus, the pottery cannot be used as a dating tool for structures or any archaeological features. The pottery does, however, indicate the occupational periods i.e. when there settlement was in greatest use; most of the pottery indicates Ramesside occupation. There is also some Coptic pottery present at the site, roughly about 5% of the whole material. This material will be processed in a similar manner to the pharaonic pottery.

Mapping

During field season 2010 the surveying team set out with two goals. Firstly, the documentation of the eastern hut cluster and, secondly, to carry out a topographical survey of

the area surrounding the huts. The same surveying methodology was applied in the east group as in the north group in aim for a homogenous documentation methodology for the whole site. Some 70% percent of the eastern cluster was recorded during this campaign. In situ contexts such as dakka contexts were recorded with detail, specific or differing constructional and architectural details were also recorded with considerable care.

A topographical survey of the immediate surrounding area around the huts was completed. An area of approximately 100000 square meters was surveyed, extending to the immediate hill plain surrounding the site. The goal of this survey is to understand the site topography and the situation of the huts into the environment.

The Flint Survey

The primary goal of the flint survey was to examine the immediate vicinity south of the eastern complex in order to find out any possible existence of a Palaeolithic site. Lithic material had been observed in the area during last season and it was felt necessary to secure the area before the 2010 field work.

The first area to be studied was on the southern and south western side of Eastern complex. Flint tools in the form of flakes and blades were encountered on the surface. A representative sample was collected for later in-depth study. Preliminary examination revealed the existence of a ruined Palaeolithic site. The distribution of the artefacts followed paleocurrents and did not cluster in any distinct fashion. It was evident that the Palaeolithic site had already been destroyed during pharaonic times most likely because its location was right in the middle of the route to Deir el-Medina. Another path leading towards northeast might have acted as another possible element in the destruction of the site.

A secondary target was to examine the flint finds from the northern, eastern and western complexes. Since the northern huts had already been excavated on previous season the collected flint material was studied but in the case of eastern and western complexes the survey was conducted by surface collection. All the flint material that was visible on the surface was examined and real forms of stone tools were collected for later examination. Since the amount of material was vast and the time limited, it was decided that a second season should be used primarily on the study of the flint finds. This study would be

conducted 2011. A notable feature was the reuse of flint flakes in the fillings of the stone walls as well as in the plaster that was visible in the lower courses of the walls. This reuse has most likely been one of the causes that have led to the ruining of the Palaeolithic site. The flint material has been readily nearby for picking up during the pharaonic times in the construction of the huts.

Thirdly, a preliminary geological survey was conducted regarding the paleocurrents that have affected the surface distribution of the stone material. Raw material types and their provenances in the surroundings were studied briefly. Local black flint prevailed in the classes. In addition, hard semi-flint like limestone had been utilized and most likely the round fossils of oysters might have been used as *ad hoc* tools. Sedimentological anomalies in the plateau were also noted such as the remains of previous excavations by Bruyère. Such remains had affected the possible flint working sites near the western complex. During excavation Bruyère's team had disposed the filling inside the huts in southwestern and northeastern corners as well as on the northern side of the complex. This had resulted in the burial of lithic material. Also the paths that had been formed between the complex and dump heaps had further damaged the surface distribution and condition of possible sites by trampling. But on the northern side of western complex there was noted a possible flint tool production site which needs further examination.

Conservation measures and forthcoming Season 2011

A wall surrounding the concession area has been started during this season and is now almost completed (Fig. 2). Additionally a hut was built on the west side of the site for a guardian as requested by the SCA. The main objective for Season 2011 will, however, be the cleaning and documentation of the West Group and the chapel.

Figure 1.
A preliminary map of the North Group.
Compiled by Tanja Alsheimer.





Figure 2.

The construction of a wall around the concession area was started during season 2011.

Photo Yrjö Viitala.

Notes

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