

ACADEMY OF FINLAND AND UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI
WORKMEN'S HUTS IN THE THEBAN MOUNTAINS PROJECT
PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE WORK PERFORMED DURING THE FOURTH
SEASON IN 2011–2012*

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Abstract

The fourth season of the Workmen's Huts in the Theban Mountains Project by the Academy of Finland and the University of Helsinki took place 10th October to the 19th December, 2011 and 24th February to the 20th March, 2012. The main objectives of this season were the documentation of the western hut group and the ruins of the adjacent small chapel, as well as starting photographing and studying the finds now stored in the Carter magazine in Luxor.

The first part of the fourth season

The first part of the fourth field season of the Workmen's Huts in the Theban Mountains Project by the Academy of Finland and the University of Helsinki took place 10th October to the 19th December, 2011. 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, Kaarina Hemminki and a group of 41 local

workmen, reis Abd El Hamid Osman Taia Daramalli and five ghafirs. Mr. Muhamed Hatim acted as the inspector of the Supreme Council of Antiquities.

The work that had started during the previous years in the North and East Groups and the survey of the concession area as a whole was continued during the first part of the fourth season. The main objective was, however, the surveying, cleaning and documentation of the huts of the West Group with its surrounding areas as well as the chapel next to the mountain wall. The study of the pottery found and of the flint scattered across the concession area was also continued. As during previous years, the map published by Bernard Bruyère in 1939 has functioned as our main reference.¹

The survey and mapping

The major goal of Tanja Alsheimer and John Winfer consisted of the documentation of all remaining structures on the site. This included the mapping of the remaining huts of the Eastern Group not finished during season 2010 (approximately 35% of the cluster) and the documentation of the West Group and the chapel on the south side of the site. The challenges of the site are mainly topographical due to the fact that the “Station de Repos” is located in a quite extreme topographical setting. The surveying methodology was, as during the previous seasons, to take into account any specific or differing constructional and architectural features. In practice this meant that *in situ* contexts such as limestone plaster floor contexts and a number of architectural features were recorded in detail and in conformity with methods employed during previous years.

The data gathered during the conducted documentation is now going to be processed into a new accurate plan of the area. The results from the surveying have been successful in providing insights regarding the interrelated locations of the huts. The plans based on the new surveying results show a number of existing inaccuracies in the plan published in 1939 (Fig. 1).

During autumn 2011 a section running E–W through the whole site was surveyed also. This was done in order to gain a clearer understanding of the topography of the site and its relation to the huts, the result enabling also an estimation of the constructional interrelationship between the individual huts. The restoration work carried out by Bruyère was also taken into account, whereby all the phases of the site have, thus, become recorded in the surveyed section.

The West Group, the huts of the site in general and the chapel

The labels for the various room entities given by Bernard Bruyère to the rooms constituting the West Group² were kept by the WHTM-team, with a number of alterations. The latter were due partly to the discrepancies found existing between the publication of 1939 and Bruyère's notebooks now published on the internet by the French Institute³ and partly due to differences between the existing real layout of the huts and the published map. The alterations included inserting two room entities (W) U1 and (W) U2 adjoining each other along a S–N axis between (W) T and (W) S. Another room entity (W) S' was added to the east of (W) S (although, admittedly, this is more like an "open space" area than a room). One room entity, (W) w, was added to the south of (W) v and another, (W) j' to the west of (W) j. The latter

was discovered under a stone heap compiled by the archaeological team in 1935. The entity (W) x which features in Bruyère's notebook, but not in the publication, was not identified as a room unit. Rather, it forms part of the open space south of the western hut cluster. As a result of the aforementioned alterations, the number of documented room entities of the West Group was 51.

All the rooms of the West Group were leveled and photographed. After this each room was cleaned from all kinds of modern garbage. The rooms were moreover cleared from stone boulders from collapsed walls now lying on the floor surface (Fig. 2). Then debris, where occurring, was additionally cleaned away. Once this process was completed each room was photographed anew (Fig. 3) and the study of each individual room entity was started. The cleaned rooms were measured with total station.

Several corrections regarding factual versus "on the map of 1939 documented" locations of entrances, individual walls, mastabas and benches were documented. After cleaning, it was discovered that some of the room entities in the middle of the hut cluster had been constructed in a natural crevice of the limestone bedrock, whereby they were situated on a remarkably lower level than the surrounding huts (Fig. 5). Remains of fireplaces were found in rooms (W) a, e, L and outside the east wall of K and the south wall of w. Coptic pottery sherds were scattered among the ashes in the latter. In the mastaba of room (W) N two Nile silt plates were found, one of which complete. In room (W) A' a collection of pottery sherds was documented on the original New Kingdom level inside an entrance with steps which emerged during the clearing work. Most of the rooms in the western cluster were found to have remains of original floor surfaces consisting of limestone *dakka*. Many of the walls show original pharaonic stone constructions with limestone mortar and plaster.

In addition to the work focusing on the West Group, collapsed walls were cleared and mastabas cleaned from the other hut groups also. During the clearing of unstable walls constructed of loose stone boulders (originating from ancient collapsed walls) by the excavation team in 1935, a new room entity was discovered between rooms (E) t' and (E) v. In the south–west corner of this room entity, now numbered (E) t'', quite a remarkable find was made: old textile rags and a cloth bundle containing several completed lamp wicks had been buried in the ground. This provides indisputable evidence of one of the activities, that is, candle wick making, that have actually have taken place at the site.

The contents of the earlier excavation heaps of debris of the 1935 excavation of the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology in the western group of the huts and by the chapel was studied also. The work was undertaken in sections consisting of 12 trenches, (W) T 31–40 and (E) 41–42. The clearing was started with (W) T 31 in the NE corner of the hut group. Remains of limestone chips of various dimensions originating from the construction work, whereby the bedrock was cut to form part of the walls of the huts, was found in (W) T 31 and (W) T 32. The latter situated to the west of (W) T 31. The white limestone chips mixed with ancient debris consisting of pottery sherds of dishes had been left against the northern walls of the rooms so as to form a buttress of the latter, a precaution quite called for, as the terrain slopes markedly downward from south to north. The same technique had been employed also in the North Group. Trench (W) T 33 situated at the westernmost part of the north side of the hut group and trench (W) T 34, perpendicularly placed in relation to the former along the western side of the hut group, consisted of an approximately 30–40 cm thick debris layer where New Kingdom pottery originating from the adjoining huts was found. The debris layer of trenches (W) T 35–36, also situated to the west of the hut group, was similar. Trench (W)

T 36 contained a pottery dump that had been compiled during the French excavation in 1935. It consisted mainly of Nineteenth Dynasty and Twentieth Dynasty pottery sherds of beer jars and plates. Some Coptic sherds were also found in the aforementioned dump. It seems quite certain that the content of this dump originates from rooms (W) A', A, B and T, all of which adjoin (W) T 36. Trenches (W) T37–40 were situated on the south side of the western huts. The debris heaps in (W) T 39 and (W) T 38 contained limestone chips, sand and pottery sherds, a notable number of the latter being of a Coptic date. Trenches (E) T 41 and (E) T 42 were placed in the south end of the concession area, to the east of the path leading to Deir el-Medina. The level of debris was 30–50 cm and consisted of natural soil typical of the area, i.e. *hiba* (limestone and sand with flint fragments). The pottery found contained the highest number of Coptic sherds of all the trenches. The only Eighteenth Dynasty sherds of a black painted vessel were also found here. Small fragments of stelae found in (W) T 41–42 probably come from the closely situated chapel.

The building which by Bruyère was given the designation “chapelle” has been built against the mountain wall on the south end of the settlement. The layout of the original chapel is not clear and the plan on the map in the 1939 publication appears not to be entirely accurate either. The walls of the chapel have collapsed and big stone blocks lay inside the building. Only few stones on the front and the sides of the still existing shrine are *in situ*. A wall with an east–west alignment had been (re-)constructed by the French excavation team. It contains only few original Pharaonic stone layers at the bottom. As the chapel was cleared and subsequently underwent a preliminary examination, some of the modern walls of the French excavation were dismantled. An ancient stairway carved into the surface of the bedrock flanks the south side of the chapel. The stairway reaches above the chapel. Just behind the chapel a few “funny signs” are carved in to the surface of the bedrock and several graffiti

written by the Deir el-Medina workmen are found carved in the cliff wall. The chapel is the only building on the site which is facing the temple of Karnak on the east bank.

The number of finds from the room entities, the trenches and the chapel was quite meager. They consisted mainly of fragments of pictorial and hieratic ostraca and stelae, gaming pieces and game boards, pottery sherds, sandstones used as polishing stones, wood splinters (some of which from mallets) and remains of various other organic material as well as fragments of alabaster and faience.

The flint survey

Annika Eklund continued the flint survey of the site which she had started the previous season. As the mapping of the area and survey for surface finds was already completed, the sorting of the lithic finds was conducted. The first step was to separate real flakes from the natural flints which are a natural and a frequent phenomena in the area. Since the finds cannot be taken away from the site and due to the limited amount of time available for the study, a representative sample of the flint flakes was photographed. Real stone tools were recorded, numbered, drawn as well as photographed. Such forms were a hand axe and a crescent shaped stone vessel drill, both of which preliminary dated to the New Kingdom.

A short study was conducted on locating the raw material sources for the flints. Flint bearing beds are located both in SW and NE of which the south-eastern is most probable. The north-western sources are too high to be reached safely and without too much effort. It is most likely that the flints eroded from upper sources and readily available at the site have been

utilized. The plateau is covered with blackened pieces of flint. Their colour is the result of patination in which the flints have reacted to the changing environment of deposition by changing their natural grey colour into a blackened orange.

The minerals of the building blocks used in the huts were mapped. The majority of the blocks reflected the local geology of the Thebes Limestone Formation; they were either limestone or a silicified type of limestone. Occasionally pieces of flint were used to fill in the gaps between boulders, or flakes had been embedded into the plaster used in on walls. A conglomeratic or brecciated type of limestone was used on rare occasions as a building block. Such specimens were not encountered at the site, but similar large boulders can be located along the path leading towards the site from the Valley of the Kings. Fossils, also a common feature at the plateau, had been utilized in the walls but only in the Eastern Group.

Ceramic studies

The pottery work was carried out by Virpi Perunka in November and December 2011. During this time period the study was concentrated on areas from which the pottery had been collected during seasons 2009–2011. One week was solely dedicated to drawing pottery from trenches and the rooms of the East Group. About 300 pottery drawings were made. The analysis of the pottery during this season was conducted up on the site in the following manner: after all the sherds (and very rarely whole pots) had been washed and dried, the material was checked. All the pottery could be checked first hand from all locations, trenches and rooms. A division was made between diagnostics (rims, handles, bases and decorated sherds) and non-diagnostics. Moreover, a count, which included a count according to the main clay material (Nile clay or marl clay) was undertaken also. The diagnostic rim sherds

were counted with regard to open and closed forms, Nile and marl fabrics. After two seasons' pottery work at the site, the majority of the diagnostic pottery from almost every location of the site could be concluded to consist of open forms (plates, bowls) made of Nile fabrics. Many of the open Nile fabric rims have a red rim band applied to the vessel; a characteristic very common during the Ramesside Period. In contrast to the Nile clay material, open forms made of marl fabrics are rare. Further divisions in the diagnostic count are numbers of bases and handles (Nile fabrics vs. marl). Other classes of sherds included in the diagnostic count were all body sherds which had either decoration (of which blue-painted is the most common at the site), potmarks (which are fairly rare at the site, but not unusual for New Kingdom sites at large) and also, an additional class of diagnostics which are classified as "funny signs" (see Pottery figures 2 and 6). Foreign pottery as well as material post-dating the New Kingdom is counted also, and recorded. Some specimen will also be drawn. Other interesting pieces, such as sherds with remains of colour pigments, sherds with soot etc. are studied as well. A number of the diagnostic sherds have been put aside in order to be drawn and to undergo further fabric analysis using a 20x hand held lens. Classifying is done using the Vienna System.

Among the closed forms typical pottery finds include various kinds of jars and amphorae, both Egyptian and imported. Their fabrics have been analysed using the classification of the Canaanite Amphorae Project.⁴ Although most amphorae date to New Kingdom, later amphora types are also present in the corpus. Beer jars, mainly Holthoer's group BB4 with short necks, typical of the nineteenth dynasty, feature among the most common jar types. Different variations of Neckless Jars made of Nile fabrics constitute a common find in the closed vessel types also. One example, almost completely reconstructed from pieces, has a hieroglyphic inscription *Amon*[...] written on its upper body.

Examples from the pottery work of 2011 (Fig. 5: Pottery figures 1–6 consisting of field drawings):

Pottery figure 1 (provenance East Group, room (E) F')

This type of a small bowl is not very frequent among the corpus of the site; it appears to have been made always of Nile B2 fabric and its surface left uncoated. In most cases it has black sooty material stuck on its surface, testifying of the vessels use as a lamp or an incense burner. A comparable use for the type has been documented from New Kingdom Abydos.⁵

Pottery figures 2 and 6 (provenance, figure 6, East Group room (E) C')

These two examples provide an insight to a marking system specifically created and used in the Deir el-Medina's workmen's community. The post-firing ownership markings are being referred to by Egyptologists as the "funny signs". The funny signs shown in figure 2 are known from Deir el-Medina tombs no. 356 and no. 357, as well as from the Valley of the Kings.⁶ The sign in figure 6 is known from Deir el-Medina tomb no. TT 357.⁷ Both signs are attested during the Nineteenth Dynasty.⁸ In general, the funny signs occur at the site in pottery from trenches and rooms. Due to the bad state of the preservation of pottery, many signs are broken, and thus, proving quite a challenge with regard to the identification. Most funny signs occur in open Nile fabric vessels (Pottery figure 2), such as bowls and plates, but signs occur also on sherds which clearly derive from larger vessel types, like on the jar's upper body in Pottery figure 6.

Pottery figures 3 and 5 ovoid tall bottles with long necks

Pottery figure 3 (marl bottle, provenance East Group room (E) I)

These kinds of bottles are many times made of Marl B fabric, but there are also examples made from Nile clays. There appears to exist quite a bit of variation in the rims of these bottles in terms of diameter, size and alternation. The bottle type is quite common at the site indicating its importance in daily life of the community members. It has possibly been used as a water container, maybe for a workman's personal use.

Pottery Figure 5 (provenance East Group room (E) N'')

This specimen is made of Nile D fabric and has a thick red slip, and traces of decoration on its neck, a dark reddish band and below a very small area with blue paint (apparently from a blue band painted below the dark reddish one). Bottles with blue painted decoration from the Ramesside Period are known both from Deir el-Medina and Qantir.⁹

Pottery figure 4 (provenance East Group, room (E) m')

An amphora made of fabric marl D, thick yellowish slip applied is not a one of its kind at the site, but nevertheless much less frequent than for example in New Kingdom royal cities, such as Medinet Ghurob (personal observation). Similar kinds of amphorae from a contemporary site, Qantir have been published in Aston's work and also similar vessels are presented by Budka, from Abydos.¹⁰

The importance of the pottery from site of the workmen's huts in the Theban mountains is to some degree undermined by the fact that it is mostly surface material or unprovenanced pottery derived from the French expedition in 1935. Thus, the pottery cannot be used as a dating tool for structures or any archaeological features. There are only a few locations where pottery now has been found *in situ*. The pottery from the site does, however, reveal the main

occupational periods of the settlement. Most of the pottery indicates Ramesside occupation, and the dominating part of the material will fall into phase 3 and more specifically, mid- and later part of the Nineteenth Dynasty.¹¹ Nevertheless, material dating to mid-Eighteenth Dynasty as well as to Late New Kingdom is attested also, but not in significant numbers. Moreover, there is some Coptic pottery present at the site, roughly about 5% of the whole material. In very few specific locations its proportional share is greater, such as in trench (E) T 41. The cleaning of this area, just south of the settlement, nearby and to the east of Chapel, produced a significant amount of Coptic pottery sherds, whereas the lack of Coptic pottery has been noticeable in the rooms of the North Group as well as in many of the rooms in the East Group. The Coptic pottery found from T41 and the site in general, derives from various classes of vessels; there are open forms, such as bowls but also closed forms, such as jars and amphorae are noticeable in the material. The drawing of material from (E) T41 will take place during the fifth season in 2012. Other areas of special interest are those identified as the pottery dump of the 1935 French excavation (trench (W) T 36) and a pharaonic pottery dump (trench (W) T 31). These locations will be studied further next year.

The second part of the fourth field season

The second part of the fourth field season of the Workmen's Huts in the Theban Mountains Project by the Academy of Finland and the University of Helsinki took place 24th February to the 20st March, 2012. Team members during this season were Jaana Toivari-Viitala, Elina Paulin-Grothe, Kaarina Hemminki, Matjaz Kacicnik, Abd El-Hamid Osman Taia Daramalli and El-Azab Taia Osman. Mr. Hassan Ali Ahmed acted as the inspector of the Supreme Council of Antiquities.

The work of the team was undertaken in the SCA Carter magazine and consisted of cleaning, checking the condition of and repacking the finds in acid free paper and boxes. A preliminary study of the ostraca was started by Jaana Toivari-Viitala, who also began to do tracings of these. Matjaz Kacicnik, assisted by Kaarina Hemminki, photographed 515 of the numbered finds and Elina Paulin-Grothe started a study of the stela fragments. Consolidation and cleaning of the finds was done by Abd El-Hamid Osman Taia and El-Azab Taia Osman. All these work tasks will be continued during the fifth field season.

Concluding remarks

At the end of the first part of the fourth field season temporary walls were built around the site area and aligning the path leading through the hut area. The finds have been transported in a wooden locked box into the SCA Carter magazine with a list of the finds and pictures and the pottery has been stored in the stone hut, build by the team in 2010. During the second part of the fourth field season the documentation by photographing and study of the finds was started. The objective of the subsequent fifth season will be the consolidation and stabilization of the walls and protection of the remaining original materials and structures in the settlement. As discussed with the SCA authorities who visited the site, the floors are to be covered and the rooms partly filled with sand until a necessary height for preservation and avoidance of further deterioration caused by the sun, wind and visitors. Information panels will be put up with the plan of the camp and the huts like in the Valley of the Kings done by *Theban Mapping Project*.

CITATIONS

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FIGURES



Figure 1.

Layered map with map of Bruyère in yellow placed on top of map created by Tanja Alsheimer on basis of the huts of the East Group that were measured in 2010.



Figure 2.

Room (W) v before cleaning. Photograph Pavel Onderka.



Figure 3.

Room (W) v after cleaning. Photograph Jaana Toivari-Viitala



Figure 4.

Room (W) P constructed in the bedrock crevice. Photograph Jaana Toivari-Viitala.

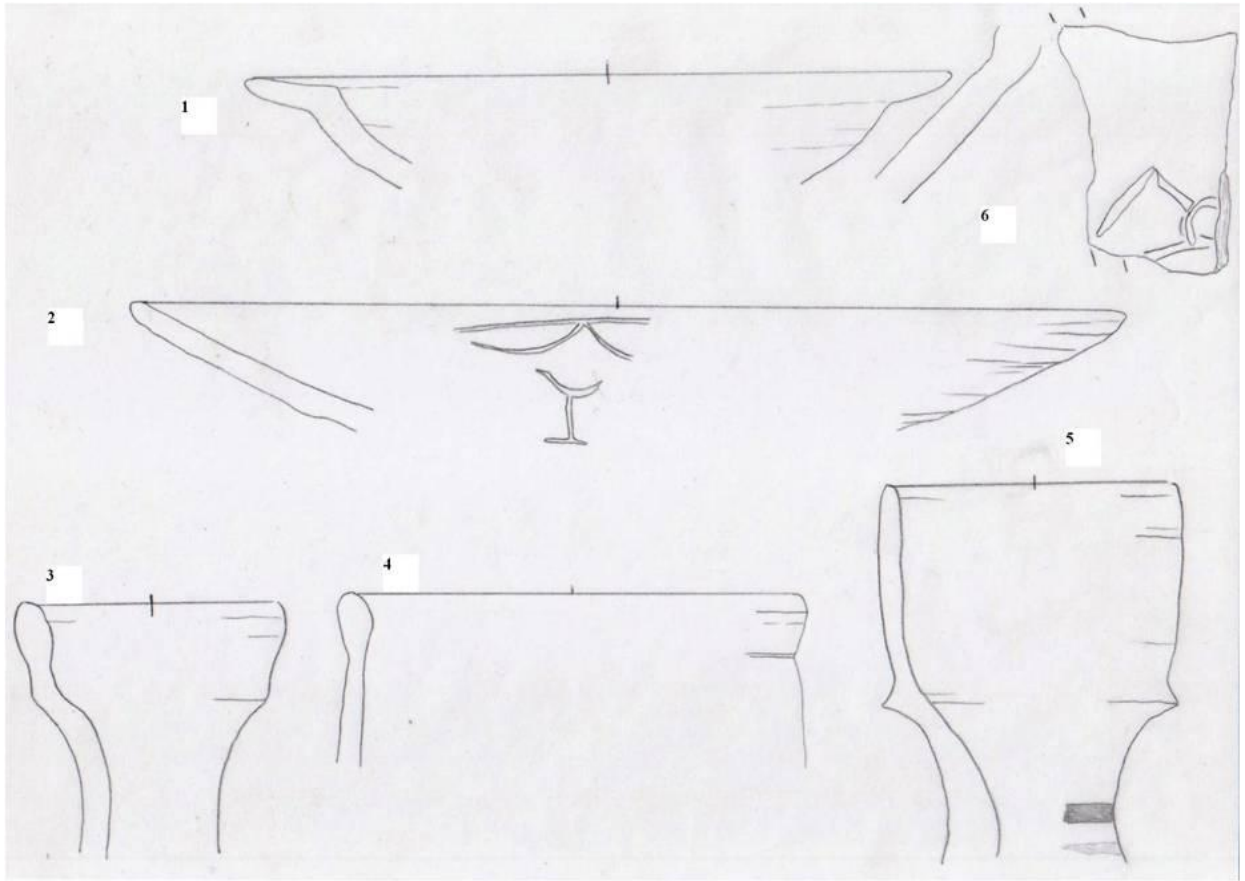


Figure 5.
Pottery figures 1–5. Drawing Virpi Perunka.

