

**ACADEMY OF FINLAND AND UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI**  
**WORKMEN'S HUTS IN THE THEBAN MOUNTAINS PROJECT**  
**PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE WORK PERFORMED DURING THE FIFTH**  
**SEASON IN 2012–2013\***

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**The first part of the fifth field season** of the Workmen's Huts in the Theban Mountains Project by the Academy of Finland and the University of Helsinki took place 13<sup>th</sup> October to the 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2012. Team members during this season were Jaana Toivari-Viitala, Elina Paulin-Grothe, Robert Demarée, Tanja Alsheimer, Virpi Perunka, John Winfer, Taina Koivistoinen, Yrjö Viitala, Matjaz Kačičnik and Mr. Abd El-Hamid Osman Taia Daramalli heading a group of 33 local workmen and four night guards. Mr. Said Mamdou, Mr. Mahmoud Salah Bakri and Mrs. Zeinab Ali acted as the inspectors of the Supreme Council of Antiquities.

### **Documentation**

The main objective of the first part of the fifth and last season of the project was the consolidation and the conservation of the hut area of the builders of the royal tombs of the New Kingdom 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty on the hill slope between the Deir el-Medina village and the Valley of the Kings. Before this conservation work was started, Koivistoinen and Toivari-Viitala studied and documented the floors of the huts. Remains of floor plaster was found mostly only in small amounts next to the walls. In many cases this plaster was similar to what had been used on the walls. There were also floor surfaces for which it was difficult to ascertain whether one was looking at remains of deliberately made floor plaster or a *dakka* surface that had come about naturally (cf. Kemp<sup>1</sup>). In some cases remains of layers of white wash could be detected on the floor plaster surface indicating that the floor had originally had a white colour. No remains of the limestone floor paving reported by Bruyère<sup>2</sup> in the room (E) R could be discerned.

The walls of the “chapelle”, constructed against the foothill on the south end of the settlement,<sup>3</sup> were found to have collapsed whereby big stone blocks were laying inside the

building when our cleaning began last year. During the present fifth season, a closer examination of the chapel structure was undertaken (Fig. 1). Some of the wall parts reconstructed during the excavation in 1935 were dismantled. It has, unfortunately, turned out to be impossible to distinguish with certainty all original architectural features from those reconstructed in 1935. This hampers a detailed understanding of the lay-out of the chapel. Only few original stones at the front and the sides of the still existing pharaonic shrine are clearly *in situ*. Remains of stairs cut into the bedrock, flanking the south side of the shrine, lead up to a height levelling approximately what would have been the roof of the shrine niche. Higher up, a natural recess in the mountain wall might have functioned as an additional shrine-like niche.

### **Mapping**

The structural recording of the site had been completed during season 2011 and now a new complete plan, where the results of the undertaken conservation work of walls and structures is clearly visible in comparison to pre-conservation situation, has been created by Winfer and Alsheimer. As conservation work was carried out in all hut groups on the site (north, east and west) including the mastabas and the other architectural features, as well as the chapel, all of these structures have been duly recorded. Three-dimensional coordinates were maintained whereby absolute heights for the conserved walls were provided. The surveying and mapping of the site is now complete. It includes also a topographical survey done around the area and the paths passing through the site.

### **Conservation**

Original materials, mainly stone boulders, were used for the consolidation and stabilization of the walls. These were stone boulders that had collapsed from the walls after the excavation by the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology had been completed in 1935. Several walls, high and dangerously unstable due to the rebuilding measures undertaken in 1935, were now lowered. Thus, we dismantled parts of the “modern” conservation that had been done previously. Remains of two previously unknown rooms (now labelled (W) o’ and (W) s’) were discovered during this wall dismantling work in the western hut group. The small room or space (W) o’ is situated on the North side of the western group and has no discernible entrance door (Fig. 2). It had been used as a dumping place for wood and pottery during the New Kingdom. Room (W) s’ is situated in the south-eastern corner of the western group,

towards the central path of the settlement. It consists presently only of a natural bedrock floor with some loose debris and remains of two perpendicularly adjoined walls.

The thickness of the hut walls is reported to have been between 35 to 50 cm by Bruyère.<sup>4</sup> The walls in the inner part of each hut group are quite thin (approximately 30 cm) when compared to the walls which constitute the outer part of the hut group. In order to avoid further future damage, the height of the inner wall ruins were mainly kept at the level of the preserved original pharaonic stone layers. The outer walls of the hut group were repaired and strengthened with big stone boulders, the gaps between which being filled with sand and surface debris from the site (Fig. 3).

In accordance with our discussion with the Director of the Valley of the Kings Mr. Ayman Mohamed Ibrahim at the site in 2011, all the rooms have now been filled with sand and debris so that the floor surfaces and parts of the original plaster on the walls, as well the mastabas inside the huts, are covered in order to safeguard their preservation and to avoid further deterioration caused by the sun, wind and visitors. The fill material consists of fine sand originating from the 1935 excavation debris. Modern low walls have been constructed around the site using the remaining boulders from our clearing in order to function as protection of the settlement (Fig. 4). A modern path between the eastern and western group of the huts connects the existing natural tracks leading to the Valley of the Kings in the north and to Deir el-Medina in the south. This modern path is now delineated by a low stone wall aiming at to some extent preventing visitors from entering the ancient huts.

## **Study**

### Pottery

The pottery work was carried out by Perunka during a two-week period (1.-16.12.), most of the material having been processed already in the previous field seasons (2010 and 2011). Work continued mainly on the pottery from the west group, pottery collected during the 2012 season, as well as pottery which was of special interest, such as potmarks (many of which can be categorised as identity markers of Deir el-Medina workmen, also known as funny signs). All pottery carrying markings and signs, complete or incomplete ones, has been stored for further study in spring 2013. For this same purpose some complete, or nearly complete, pottery vessels were stored in the MSA/SCA magazine also, amounting up to a total of 152 stored pieces (pottery vessels and sherds with potmarks). Among the complete/nearly

complete specimen one finds, for example, small bowls used as lamps and a jar with an a partly preserved inscription [...] -imn (Amon). The number of different kinds of potmarks found by the Workmen's Huts on Theban Mountains Project is around 150. These can be roughly categorised into two groups, those made by potters, which are pre-fired markings. The second group are the post-fired marks, many of which will belong to an interesting group called identity markers, or funny signs. Most of the potmarks recovered during the course of cleaning of the hut site are found on vessels which are of open form, either plates or bowls. Over half of the marked pots are made of Nile B2 fabric, the most common pottery fabric in pharaonic Egypt (Workmen's Huts on Theban Mountains Project employs the Vienna System in fabric classification). The fact that most of potmarks occur in these bowls/plates, made of Nile B2, is not surprising as the open forms are dominating the pottery corpus from the site and also, the Nile B2 is the most occurring fabric. Closed forms, especially those made of marl fabrics, are clearly rarer than Nile fabric open forms.

Many of the potmarks survive in an incomplete form and occasionally only few random lines survive, from which it is challenging to determine the original sign in question. However, some marks are well-known from Deir el-Medina, such as the mr-sign and ms-sign. All potmarks, as well as some of the most complete vessels have been photographed.

#### Alabaster/Travertine work

The studying of stone material, alabaster/travertine, was carried out by Perunka in the magazine during two work days. The travertine found by the Workmen's Huts on Theban Mountains Project is classified as study material with documented find locations and dates. While studying and drawing the material, the pieces drawn, totalling 15, we numbered A1 to A15. Most of the travertine was found during the third season (2010) from trenches (E) T23, (E) T24, (E) T25, (E) T26, (E) T27 and (E) T28. Trench 24 was especially rich in travertine findings as more than thirty fragments were found there. Roughly one third of the latter were diagnostics. Unfortunately many of the diagnostic fragments discovered have been very small, so the shape of the vessel has been difficult or occasionally impossible, to determine. Many fragments could, nonetheless, be identified to be lids of vessels and it also appeared that one or two of the vessels had been quite elaborate and equipped with handles. One fragment bears a hieroglyphic writing for mrhyt-oil, whereby one is drawn to think that this is a piece from a vessel originally made for funerary purposes. Why were so many fragments

found in one location T24? One might speculate that this could have been a place where the workers kept and made stone vessels. Or alternatively, it might a spot where stolen vessels were stored and remade. Another possibility is that this is the area where the Bruyère team dumped alabaster fragments they came across while working at the site in 1935. In the light of the limited evidence, all above mentioned suggestions are, of course, purely speculative.

A small number of additional fragments were discovered during the work of 2012 and those fragments have now been stored for future study.

#### Ostraca

Some of the ostraca uncovered during the previous field seasons were studied preliminary in the MSA/SCA Carter magazine during a period of one week (2.–6.12.2012) by Toivari-Viitala and Demarée, the main objective being the identification of text types. A total of 57 hieratic ostraca worked on during the aforementioned study period.

**The second part of the fifth field season** of the Workmen's Huts in the Theban Mountains Project by the Academy of Finland and the University of Helsinki took place 29<sup>th</sup> of January to the 10<sup>th</sup> of April, 2013. Team members during this season were JaanaToivari-Viitala, Robert J. Demarée, Elina Paulin-Grothe, Kaarina Hemminki, Virpi Perunka, Matjaz Kačičnik, Abd El-Hamid Osman Taia Daramalli and Mohammed Osman. Director of the Magazines of Qurna Inspectorate Mr. Yahya Abd El-Alem and Mrs. Zeinab Ali acted as the inspectors of the Supreme Council of Antiquities.

The work of the team was undertaken in the SCA Carter magazine and consisted of cleaning and checking the condition and the measurements of the finds from all the previous seasons. The finds (field numbers 1–864), were, moreover, repacked. The study of the ostraca was continued by JaanaToivari-Viitala and Robert Demarée. The former also continued to do tracings of the ostraca. Kaarina Hemminki studied stela fragments and Virpi Perunka continued her study on the identity markers on pottery sherds as well as the collection of study material of alabaster and faience. Matjaz Kačičnik, assisted by Elina Paulin-Grothe, photographed the numbered finds. Consolidation and cleaning of the finds was done by Abd El-Hamid Osman Taia Daramalli. Mohammed Osman assisted all work procedures.

## Notes

\* We would like to express our sincere thanks to Dr. Mohamed Ibrahim, Minister of State for Antiquities, members of the Supreme Council of Antiquities and its Secretary General Dr. Mustafa Amin and to the members of the Permanent Committee and Director of Foreign Missions Dr. Mohamed Ismail, to the General Director of Egyptian Antiquities Department Dr. Abd El-Hamid Maarouf, to the General Director of the Antiquities of Egypt Mr Adel Hussein, to the Director of Luxor Mr. Mansour Boreik and to the Inspectorate of Western Thebes and its General Director Dr. Mohamed Abd El-Aziz Ahmed, to the Director of the West bank Mr. Nour Abd El-Ghaffar, to the Director of excavations and missions department in the West bank of Qurna Ghadaffi Abd El-Rahim, to the Director of the Valley of the Kings Mr. Ayman Mohamed Ibrahim, to the Director of the Magazines of Qurna Inspectorate Mr. Yahya Abd El-Alem and to the representative of the Supreme Council of Antiquities Inspector Mrs. Zeinab Ali, and the staff of the SCA magazine, with special thanks to Mr. Ahmed Hassan, Mr. Mahmoud Salah Bakri, Mr. Said Ahmed Said and Mr. Ahmed Ezz for their support and cooperation during our campaign in 2013.

1. B. Kemp, 'Soil (including mud-brick architecture)', in P.T Nicholson and I. Shaw (eds.) *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 92.
2. B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1934–1935). Troisième partie: Le village, les décharges publiques, la station de repos du col de la Vallée des Rois*, FIFAO XVI (Le Caire 1939), 349.
3. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1934–1935)*, 353.
4. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1934–1935)*, 349.

## Bibilography

B. Bruyère, *Rapport sur les fouilles de Deir el Médineh (1934–1935). Troisième partie: Le village, les décharges publiques, la station de repos du col de la Vallée des Rois*, FIFAO XVI (Le Caire 1939).

B. Kemp, 'Soil (including mud-brick architecture)', in P.T Nicholson and I. Shaw (eds.)  
*Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 78–103.

**Illustrations**

Figure 1.  
The "Chapelle".  
Photo M. Kačičnik



Figure 2  
Room (W) o'  
Photo J. Toivari-Viitala



Figure 3  
Outer and inner walls of room (E) J'.  
Photo J. Toivari-Viitala



Figure 4  
Protective walls built around  
the site.  
Photo Y. Viitala

