

Report to the Supreme Council of Antiquities on a study-season at the Kom Aushim magazine, Faiyum, working on the finds from the Liverpool/Copenhagen/UCL Gurob Harem Palace Project, 11-20 November 2014

Abstract: This article presents a preliminary (end-of-season) report on the November 2014 season of pottery and small finds study undertaken by the Gurob Harem Palace Project (GHPP) at the Kom Aushim magazine, Faiyum. The principal tasks accomplished were (1) study of small finds from the 2005-2012 seasons held in a study collection at the Kom Aushim magazine, (2) study of pottery from the 2006-12 seasons, with particular focus on imported types, and (3) initial processing of textiles from looted tombs at Gurob investigated by the GHPP in 2012.



Fig. 1. The 2014 Gurob Harem Palace Project team

The November 2014 Gurob Harem Palace Project (GHPP) team consisted of Dr Fredrik Hagen (in Copenhagen) as well as eight members in the field, comprising Dr Ian Shaw (University of Liverpool, UK), Jan Picton (University College London), Ivor Pridden (University College London), Elizabeth Jones (University College London), Dr Marine Yoyotte (Sorbonne), Dr Valentina Gasperini (University of Liverpool, UK), Martin Thygesen (University of Copenhagen), and Dr Ibrahim Abd'el-Baset Ibrahim (Faiyum University). We would like to thank Professor Mamdouh el-Domaty, the Minister of State for Antiquities, Dr Ahmed Abd-el Aal, the director of the Faiyum branch of the SCA,

Mr Hany Abu el-Azm, Director of Foreign Missions at the SCA Documentation Centre in Cairo, our inspector Adel Saad Mondy, and the Kom Aushim magazine director, Mustafa Feisal, for their generous assistance and advice in our work.

Our principal aims in the November 2014 season were to study, photograph and re-organise the objects in the study collection, as well as undertaking a major transferral of the finds database into Filemaker, in order to be compatible with the existing pottery database. In the three sections below we therefore present the results of our work on the small finds, the pottery, and a large collection of textiles.

1. Study of small finds stored as a study collection at Kom Aushim (Ian Shaw, Marine Yoyotte and Martin Thygesen)

During the lifetime of our project at Gurob, small finds have been either collected from the surface (in 2005-2012) or excavated from a number of different areas across the site (in 2010-12 only). The surface finds had their provenances recorded in three dimensions using the total station, while those from the excavations were recorded primarily in terms of context (since many were found through sieving). These small finds are currently stored at the Kom Aushim magazine, in the form of a study collection, and a small number of registered objects.



Fig. 2. Ian Shaw, Martin Thygesen and Marine Yoyotte working on the small finds database

From 12 to 19 November, we worked on a new GHPP finds database, adapting and converting a Filemaker template (provided by Valentina Gasperini), which had been initially created for another project, and which combines excavated features, pottery and finds into a single database. We began by making an inventory list of the small finds present in various boxes in the magazine. From 16 November, the actual work with the database began to take shape. We minimized the potential for confusion between different versions and sections of the database by creating a single empty template for each previous season. We then we worked on each year's finds separately and imported all individual templates into a single master-template at the end of the season. This procedure (i.e. creating a single template during finds recording, and then importing it into the master-template at the end of the season) might very well be the process for the seasons to come.

Some problems were encountered when importing the old data from the Access database system into the Filemaker template, since the information included in the Small Find Sheets has developed and changed over the years, needing to be more and more specific for each season. Furthermore, since the template was created for another project, it did not always correspond to our recorded information. However, after some time working on the organizing of the recorded information on the Small Find Sheets, and the information contained in the template, our finds database began to take shape. We have also now created additional options in the drop-down-menus, but there is no doubt that there will be a need to add further options in the future.

Despite many obstacles, we did manage to create a new database for the GHPP small finds; leaving only the finds from the 2009 season to be fully incorporated. When the (Small) Find Database and the Pottery Database are both complete, attention will turn to developing the template recording excavated features at Gurob, but this may well need to be modified in consultancy with a mixed team of individuals with excavation, survey and GIS experience, so that we are certain that all types of information needed regarding features are present in our template.

2. Work on the pottery corpus, focusing particularly on Canaanite, Mycenaean and Cypriot imports (Valentina Gasperini)

The study of pottery in this study season focused primarily on the analysis of the Mycenaean and Canaanite imports unearthed in the archaeological area of Gurob during the 2007 survey season and 2012 excavation season. Moreover, special attention was given to some of the Egyptian materials excavated during the 2012 campaign in order to achieve a more detailed knowledge of some of the diagnostics excavated in the 'Industrial Area I' area during the 2012 March-April season.

Our preliminary analysis and identification of the Canaanite wares found in the site of Gurob is in fact based on a comparative study of the Levantine fabrics from the site of

Qantir (ancient Pi-Ramesse), located in the Eastern Delta. This preliminary analysis has been realised using the photographic records of the thin sections of the Levantine fabric from Qantir. Both Gurob and Qantir show a high degree of coherence in terms of Levantine wares. The most probable areas of production of the Canaanite wares unearthed in Gurob are: the Akkar Plain, the Coastal Lebanon (possibly North Lebanon), Syria, Northern Coastal Palestine and Southern Cyprus.

Many of the Canaanite wares found in Gurob are represented only by body sherds, while a lower proportion of diagnostics (rims, bases and handles) has been unearthed on the site. The study of the Mycenaean wares, mainly body sherds, has shown, unsurprisingly, that the most common imports from mainland Greece in Gurob were stirrup jars. The Mycenaean ware most frequently found in the site is a pinkish ware, very fine and hard, often characterized by the presence of small mineral inclusions, as well as vegetal additions and tempers. Only one Mycenaean body sherd could be identified with a shape not corresponding to stirrup jars, but to a flask, another quite common import from the Mycenaean area in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Late Bronze Age.



Fig. 3. Valentina Gasperini recording Canaanite, Mycenaean and Cypriot pottery imports from Gurob

It is also worth noting that at least two local imitations of Mycenaean flask have been recorded from the site. Both are made from a fine Marl (Marl A2) that was probably used specifically in order to try to replicate the appearance of the original ware. Both

sherds are moreover characterized by a decoration based on circular black-painted lines, which clearly correspond to the original Aegean models.

The almost complete lack of Cypriot ware is surprising but it should be mentioned that at least one imitation of a one-handed Cypriot flask has been recorded during the analysis of the 2012 pottery from the kiln. The only original Cypriot sherd which has been identified can be recognized as a neck and handle of a BLWMW (Black Lustrous Wheel-Made Ware), a common import which can be dated between the end of the Second Intermediate Period and the beginning of the 18th dynasty.

3. Work on the textiles recovered from the looted tombs STB1-14 in the 2012 season (Jan Picton, Ivor Pridden and Elizabeth Jones)

At the end of the 2012 season there was no opportunity to examine the three large sacks of textiles recovered from the looters' spoil heaps from South Tombs 1 and 2 (STB1 and STB2). The contents of the two tombs had been gathered together by the looters, therefore it is difficult to provide any secure or definite context for most of the material. Using pottery dating, however, it has at least been established that the tombs were originally used for 18th-Dynasty burials and then re-used in the Third Intermediate Period. The range of textiles examined during this study season supports this late New Kingdom date for the tombs. Recovered among the textiles were fragments of the painted linen cartonnage identified and drawn in the 2012 season.

Two bags of textiles were sorted, and await specialist analysis during the planned 2015 spring season. Sorting has already resulted in some interesting discoveries and the identification of the following generalised categories as preliminary information for future specialist analysis:

Series 300+ - coloured selvedge fragments, 17 pieces

Series 400+ - plain selvedge fragments, 59 pieces

Series 500+ - weave samples, openwork and darned and mended pieces, 69 pieces

Series 600+ - torn strips of fabric 13-18cm in width, varying lengths, 10 pieces

Series 700+ - fine white linen, possibly pleated, 7 pieces

Series 800+ - large fringed textiles, 9 pieces, plus numerous smaller pieces

Series 900+ - varying lengths of twisted and knotted bindings, 100+ pieces

It is generally accepted that domestic textiles were re-used as funerary wrappings and the linen from STB 1 & 2 supports this. In a 20th-Dynasty letter, cited by Vogelsang-Eastwood (2000: 295) 'the general of Pharaoh' wrote to the scribe Tjaroy: 'As soon as my letter reaches you, you shall send some old cloths in the form of many strips ... And don't let them go to waste (?), for they shall be made into bandages with which to wrap up men' (Wente 1990: 182).



Fig. 4. Jan Picton and Ian Shaw discussing the textiles



Fig. 5. GU12.600 series cut cloths

The range of quality in the fabrics demonstrates the full spectrum of New Kingdom domestic textiles, both as garments and utilitarian cloths, with the very finest white (bleached?) pleated linen to heavy duty fabrics made from much coarser fibres. There has obviously been considerable post-depositional degradation, staining and insect activity, but it is worth noting the extent to which mending and darning of the linen supports the quote above 'send some old cloths'!

GU12.247

Among individual discoveries was a very fine child's tunic (much degraded) which supports the presence of child burials in the area, as suggested by Leonard Loat during his 1904(?) season's work at the site (Loat 1905: 2) and by Charles Currelly (1905: 34) a

year later. From the length of the tunic we are able to suggest an age range of 6-8 years although there is nothing in the design of the tunic to indicate the gender of its owner. With a length of 55cm, the neck-to-shoulder measurement of 27cm suggests that the tunic fell to the elbow. The heavy weave is too substantial to suggest the possibility of pleating, for which there is no evidence other than general creasing. The width of the tunic would have resulted in a very baggy garment and it is possible that a belt or sash was tied around the waist. However, the tunic appears to be a traditional *mss* bag tunic of New Kingdom style. Although now discoloured and fragmentary, this was a well-made garment – a single length of good quality fringed textile was folded over at the shoulder and joined at the sides by an edge-to-edge seam. There is a cut-out for the head, and the edge was neatly finished by rolling and stitching the cut fabric over a length of linen string to form the ties at the throat.

The quality of the fabric is demonstrated by the blue and neutral vertical bands woven into the selvedge and the horizontal blue bands along the transverse edge of the tunic above the fringe, which also incorporated the blue thread to decorative effect (see Figs 6-7).



Fig. 6. Child's garment GU12.247

Fig. 7. Detail of side-seam and fringe of GU12.247

Blue banding appears to be a feature of the linen in these tombs as there are a number of decorated vertical selvedge pieces and also a few examples of transverse decorative banding. There is a great variety in the width and number of bands, which should repay future study (see Figs 8-9 below).



Fig. 8. Photograph of part of the GU12.Series 300 blue-banded linen.



Fig. 9. GU12.250. Vertical and transverse blue-banded textile.

GU12.248

This textile provides a rare example of polychrome decorative banding, in the form of a series of blue and reddish/brown bands along the selvedge. Unfortunately only a small fragment survives. Figure 10 has been enhanced in Photoshop to show the colours more prominently. Figure 11 is not enhanced. The red colour could have been produced using either iron-oxide or madder: only scientific analysis will confirm which is correct.



Fig. 10. Polychrome banded textile (GU12.248).



Fig. 11. Polychrome banded textile unenhanced.

GU12.Series 800.

There are a quantity of good quality fringed sheets which may once have been part of garments or other fine household linen (see Fig. 12).



Fig. 12. Fringed sheets.

This preliminary overview indicates the value of detailed specialist evaluation of the Gurob textiles which we hope to undertake in 2015.

4. Visit to the site of Gurob to discuss permissions with the army

On Saturday November 15, the whole team visited the site of Gurob in order to:

- (1) ascertain which parts of the site are currently officially designated as protected SCA land, and which parts fall under the jurisdiction of the Egyptian army,

- (2) discuss the prospects for gaining archaeological access to the site in 2015 with a local army official, General Tamr
- (3) inspect the site as far as possible in order to determine whether further looting had taken place at the site since our last visit.

With regard to aims 1 and 2, Figure 13 below gives a rough idea of the situation. The current antiquities area is defined as the narrow strip of land (c.100m wide) running along the eastern edge of the site, as well as the northernmost cemetery area, shown here in red, with the rest of the archaeological area shown in yellow. There appear to be two principal options with regard to the resumption of archaeological work at the site: (1) to have the area shown in yellow designated as an antiquities area, or (2) to leave its status as military land but to be given permission to conduct archaeological survey and excavation there.

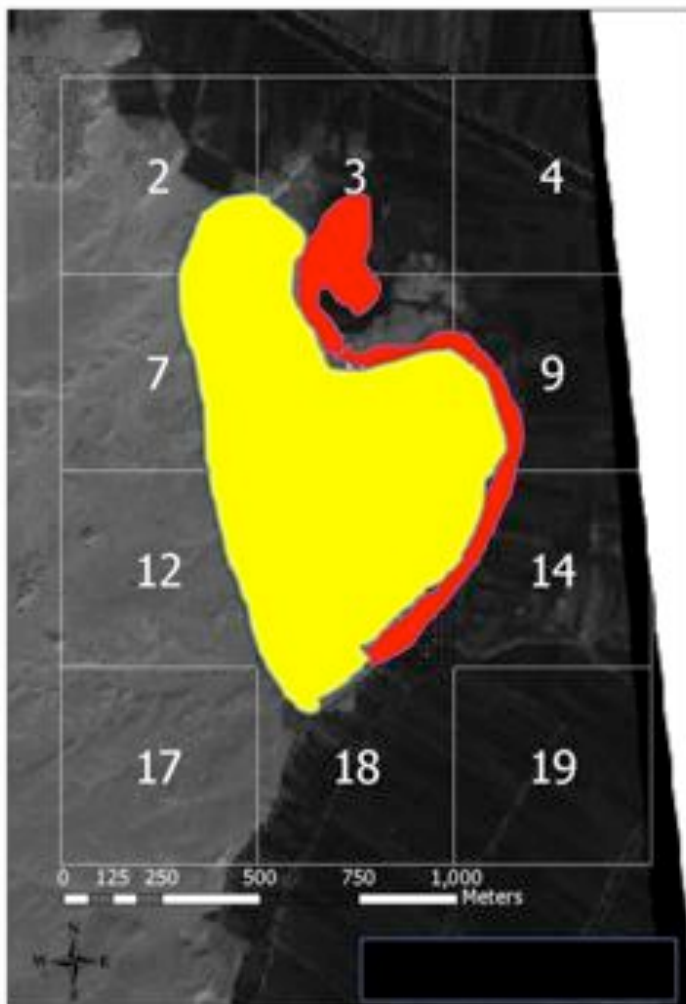


Fig. 13. Satellite image of the Gurob region:

- = approximate area currently defined as antiquities land
- = approximate full extent of the rest of the ancient site.

With regard to our third aim in visiting the site, we unfortunately found that a certain amount of further looting had taken place, even in the narrow strip of land currently designated as within SCA jurisdiction (we were unable to examine the area shown yellow in Fig 13, because of military restrictions, therefore we have no way of currently assessing the degree of damage in this major part of the site). The presence of fresh signs of looting since 2013 reinforces our argument that there is a pressing need for us to resume work at the site, both to document and assess the newly looted parts of Gurob and to send out a clear message that the whole site (both red and yellow areas in Fig. 13) should ideally be treated as a fully protected archaeological site, so that this precious area of New Kingdom settlement and cemetery remains can be properly examined and, as far as possible, properly secured against further damage.

5. Conclusions

Overall, the November 2014 study season has resulted in a more flexible database, allowing greater compatibility between pottery and small finds records and analysis. It has also provided numerous opportunities to improve the photographic records and interpretations of the small finds. In terms of pottery, our understanding of the Canaanite and Mycenaean forms and fabrics has been immensely improved. Finally, a great deal of preliminary work has been undertaken with regard to placing the textiles from looted tombs STB1-8 in a broader and more meaningful context.

With regard to the future of our work at the site itself, we will continue to pursue negotiations with the SCA and the Egyptian army in order to regain access to Gurob in order to continue our important task of documenting and preserving the ancient remains of this Late Bronze Age palace, town and temple, and its cemeteries dating to various periods from the late Predynastic through to the New Kingdom.

Dr Ian Shaw & Dr Fredrik Hagen
Co-Directors: Gurob Harem Palace Project

20 November 2014

References

- Currelly, C., 1905. "The cemeteries of Sedment and Gurob". In *Ehnasiya 1904*, W.M.F. Petrie, London: EEF, pp.32-5.
- Loat, W.L., 1905. *Gurob*, BSAE 10, London: Bernard Quaritch [published as part-volume with M. Murray, *Saqqara Mastabas I*].
- Wente, E. 1990. *Letters from Ancient Egypt*. Atlanta: Scholars Press.