

Gebelein Archaeological Project 2018: temple and fortress area on the Eastern Mountain



Abstract: The report outlines fieldwork conducted on the Eastern Mountain of Gebelein (ancient town of Per-Hathor/Pathyris) in the 2018 season. Despite extensive exploration in the past, the publication record for this area is poor. Current epigraphic research and archaeological field survey, as well as an analysis of published and unpublished archival materials have yielded new data concerning the topography and history of the area, which is presented in this paper.

Keywords: Gebelein, Pathyris, Per-Hathor, archaeological survey, epigraphic survey, archival materials, temple

The area in the northern part of Rock II on the Eastern Mountain of Gebelein (for the nomenclature in the documentation, see Ejsmond et al. 2017: 241–242) was the main focus of this year's investigations. This was the place where the pharaonic town of Per-Hathor, known also as Pathyris during the Ptolemaic period, was located. Fieldwork was limited due to time constraints. The survey of the temple and fortress area was continued, as was the epigraphic documentation of the inscriptions on the rock-shelf and documentation of the material from the 2016 season (see also Ejsmond et al. 2017).

TEMPLE AND FORTRESS AREA

The area where the temple of Hathor and fortress were located was researched by a number of scholars in the past (for the most important work, see Fraser 1893 and Schiaparelli 1921; for the history of the town, see Bergamini 2003; Vandorpe and Waebens 2009; for the temple, see Morenz 2009 and Fiore Marochetti 2010). None of the previous excavators published satisfying accounts

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of their work, thus the sacred precinct is practically unknown from scholarly publications despite yielding important finds, e.g., early dynastic decorated blocks (Morenz 1994), elements of a chapel erected by Mentuhotep II (Fiore Marochetti 2010), blocks with names of the Hyksos kings (Polz 2006), foundation and votive deposits (Donadoni Roveri, D'Amicone, and Leospo 1994: 65; Trapani 2017 respectively) dated to the New Kingdom, to name several well-known discoveries.

Mud-brick walls in this area were mentioned by previous scholars (e.g., Fraser 1893; Schiaparelli 1921; see also Bergamini 2003), but the documentation of the structures is insufficient. They were excavated and partly dismantled, but the results were never published to a satisfying extent. Some structures are visible in archival images from Italian excavations at Gebelein (see, e.g., Bergamini 2003; Figs 2, 3, 12; Fiore Marochetti 2010: 2, 4–5), but their nature is obscure. Ernesto Schiaparelli, who was excavating this area

in 1910 and 1920, wrote that there was a fortress and temple built by the High Priest of Amun Menkheperra (Twenty-first Dynasty), but he published merely interpretations, not the details regarding location and the state of the structures (Schiaparelli 1921: 126). An unpublished sketch of unknown date made by Norman de Garis Davies, kept at the Griffith Institute (Davies n.d.), is the only documentation of the now almost completely destroyed structures. The sketch shows the layout of some rectangular mud-brick structures that may be identified with the temenos wall and/or fortress. Somers Clarke (1902) wrote, in an unpublished report, that some walls made of stamped bricks were being dismantled by *sebakh* diggers without proper supervision in 1902. It is very possible that the aforementioned thick walls were that of the temenos or presumed fortress. Pieces of sandstone and granite blocks (see below) are mentioned inside the rectangular structure in de Garis Davies's sketch.

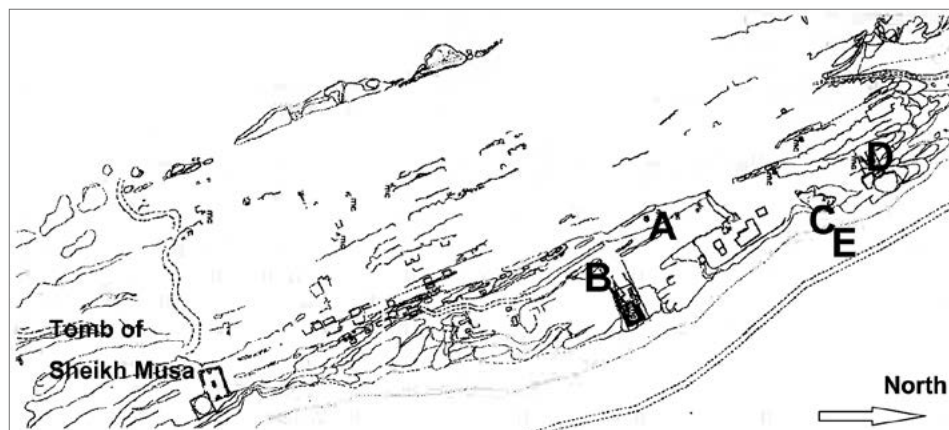


Fig. 1. Location of places and archaeological features on Rock II mentioned in the text: A – granite blocks, sandstone and limestone fragments of decorated blocks, B – south wall, C – rock-shelf, D – north wall, E – Hathor's rock-cut chapel (Adaptation of Fiore Marochetti 2010: 4, Fig. 4)

These can be seen today as well, and it is tempting to think that they indicate the location of the temple, although this may be misleading (see below).

There is a concentration of mud bricks in the northern part of Rock II of the Eastern Mountain [D in *Fig. 1*]. Three types of stamp impressions were found on the mudbricks: two with cartouches of the High Priest Menkheperra and one with his name alongside the name of his wife Isetemkheb, both in a cartouche [*Fig. 2*]. The bricks have never been properly published before,¹ therefore they were documented during this season and will be the subject of further studies and publication.

Some remains of a wall, north from the concentration of stamped bricks, are still preserved [*Fig. 3*]. The foundation of the northern part of the wall is exposed,

revealing raw limestone chunks. Layers of reed matting were inserted every four brick courses. No stamped bricks were observed there, hence the structure made with stamped bricks may represent a different building phase than the wall with reed-matting between the courses of bricks. Neither can one exclude reuse of stamped bricks. It is also important to note that a wall constructed in the same technique as the northern one, that is, with a mat placed every four courses of bricks, was found in the southern part of the researched area (Ejsmond et al. 2017: *Fig. 20*). Therefore, it seems that the massive north and south walls may have been part of one building complex, probably the bulky rectangular wall sketched by de Garis Davies, enclosing the whole structure. It is hard to say, however, whether



Fig. 2. Three types of cartouches stamped on bricks (Gebelein Archaeological Project/ photo D.F. Wiczorek)

¹ Some bricks from Gebelein are stored in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (JE 32812), Egyptian Museum in Turin (Donadoni Roveri, D'Amicone, and Leospo 1994: 66) as well as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (25.3.328). Some of the types of the inscriptions from the bricks were published insufficiently (Fraser 1893: 498, Pl. XXI; Spencer 1979: Pls 34–35).

or not it was constructed at one time and what was the relation between the stamped and unstamped brickworks.

The eastern hill was subject to rock quarrying (Lane 2000: 393), using dynamite to clear space for a local village (Vandorpe and Waebens 2009: 18). Thus, changes in the morphology of the hill would not be surprising. Comparison of archival images and the current state of preservation of the area² led to the conclusion that at the time of the Italian excavations in 1910 and 1920, the eastern part of Rock II had extended further east. This is also suggested by comparing de Garis Davies's plan with that published by Giovanni Bergamini (2003: Pl. 5).

Further analysis of walls in the area is necessary to understand the relations between them and the clustering of stamped bricks. Bricks from the times of the Twenty-first Dynasty may have been part of a different construction³ than the aforementioned wall surrounding the complex or they could have been reused in later periods.⁴ It is not clear why Schiaparelli interpreted the walls at the top of the Eastern Mountain as the remains of a fortress. Further research is needed to explain the nature of the complex. It is possible that the wall surrounding the temple was misinterpreted as fortifications.

Granite blocks located on the top of the Eastern Mountain, south of the con-



Fig. 3. Brick-wall (D in Fig. 1): left – looking west; right – looking south (Gebelein Archaeological Project/photo D.F. Wiczorek)

- 2 Archival image CO1834 from the Soprintendenza Archeologia, belle arti e paesaggio per la città metropolitana di Torino; the authors would like to thank Dr. Marcella Trapani for access to the images.
- 3 Possibly a watchtower built by Menkheperra. The authors would like to thank Huub Pragt for this idea. According to José Lull (2006: 225), the stamped bricks could have been part of a project to strengthen the external wall of the temple.
- 4 A garrison was functioning in Pathyris during Ptolemaic times and some documents refer to fortifications at an unknown location within the town area (Pestman 1965: 54–55, 73–74, 101; Vleeming 1987: 156–160).

centration of the stamped bricks, were photographed and drawn. The blocks may have been door sockets in a portal of the local temple. Structures surrounding them can be seen in archival images of the area (Fiore Marochetti 2010: 2). Comparison of the old and current images of the area [Fig. 4] shows that there was a big accumulation of layers on the western slope of the mountain (west of the gran-

ite blocks), which may be equated with the walls of the temenos or the presumed fortress.

A fragment of a limestone libation bowl was found this season in the immediate vicinity of the granite blocks, along with small fragments of decorated limestone and sandstone blocks. Based on stone-dressing technology and the stylistic features of the fragmentary relief



Fig. 4. Location of granite blocks and other structures on top of the Eastern Mountain: top, in an image from 1910 or 1920; bottom, in 2018, looking west (Archival image after Fiore Marochetti 2010: 4, Fig. 3; modern image, Gebelein Archaeological Project/photo W. Ejsmond)

decoration on the blocks, the fragments can be dated to the Middle Kingdom; thus, this may have been where the chapel of Mentuhotep II from the Eleventh Dynasty had stood. One needs to keep in mind that the temple was rebuilt repeatedly since its construction (Daressy

1893: 26), thus the walls of the temenos could have been reused as a fortress in post-pharaonic times and strengthened by reusing the stone elements of the temple. Therefore, the decorated as well as the granite blocks may not be in their primary locations.

EPIGRAPHIC WORK

There is a rock-shelf on the eastern face of the Eastern Mountain of Gebelein directly above the rock-cut chapel of Hathor [C in Fig. 1] (for the chapel, see Takács et al. 2015). Some inscriptions were observed there previously (Morenz 2010: 143), but they have never been recorded nor published. The epigraphic documentation of the remains on the rock-shelf started in the 2016 season (Ejsmond et al. 2017: 260–261) and was continued this season. To

date, five natural rock-panels have been recognised (Graffiti Panel [=GP.] 1–5a and 5b). Four of them, namely GP.1, 2, 5a and 5b, have been documented completely. GP.4 is extremely hard to access, hence its provisional recording; it still requires further work with the use of specialist climbing equipment. Altogether 33 graffiti, both textual and figural in type, have been recognized on these panels. They were executed with a sharply pointed implement, possibly a flint chip. The inscriptions were scratched or scratched and painted red, written in hieroglyphs with elements of the hieratic script. The epigraphic material is to be dated overall from the late Middle Kingdom (Thirteenth Dynasty) to the early New Kingdom (Eighteenth Dynasty).

Most of these inscriptions are poorly preserved, mainly those on the lower rock panels, whereas those on the higher-lying rock panels are clearly in better condition. Mainly digital technology (that is, RTI, photogrammetry and 3D modelling) was utilised in the documentation process. It was especially convenient during documentation work on the higher rock panels, located about 3 m above the present walking level of the rock-shelf, which are extremely hard to access. The technology turned out also very useful,

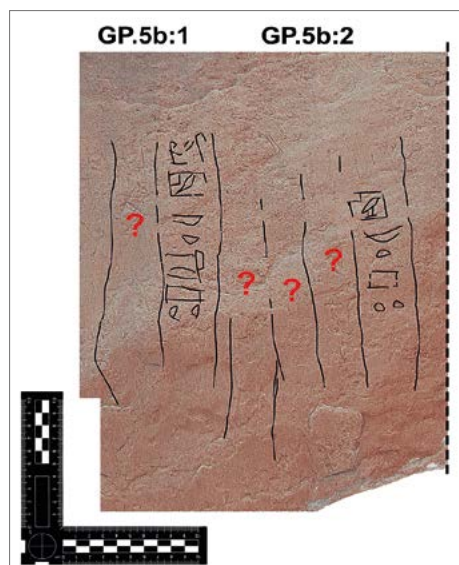


Fig. 5. Fragment of rock panel 5b: example of documented inscriptions (Gebelein Archaeological Project/ drawing D.F. Wiczorek and P. Witkowski)

in contrast to traditional methods, during post-processing, giving unexpectedly good results in detecting hardly noticeable textual graffiti (for the method, see Ejsmond et al. 2017: 242–243 and Witkowski, Chyla, and Ejsmond 2016). This year's reexamination of the graffiti on site, after the initial study of the material recorded in the 2016 season, provided many new epigraphic details which enabled some corrections in the preliminary facsimile

drawings and epigraphic interpretations.

The textual graffiti are related to the local temple of Hathor. They are primarily short religious inscriptions, in which local priests and scribes expressed their worship of Hathor Lady of Gebelein. The texts also mention other local gods, such as Anubis and Sobek (Wieczorek and Ejsmond 2018) [Fig. 5]. Documentation of the graffiti will be continued in the upcoming season.

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