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DEIR EL-MEDINA (DEVELOPMENT)

دير المدينة (تطور الموقع)

Jaana Toivari-Viitala

Deir el-Medine, Entwicklung
Deir el-Médineh, Développement

The site of Deir el-Medina, located in a desert valley on the west bank of Luxor, was conceived as sacred ground. Tombs were built there as early as the Middle Kingdom and a village settlement housing the royal-tomb builders was founded on the site in the early New Kingdom. The workmen's village gradually became surrounded by chapels and temples. Although the settlement was abandoned by the end of the New Kingdom, the site was still used for burials and for religious devotion. During the Ptolemaic Period a sandstone temple dedicated to the goddess Hathor was built there. A small chapel was added to it in Roman times. The Copts later converted the temple into a church and a monastery, to which the Arabic name of the site refers.

اعتبر موقع دير المدينة والذي يقع بوادي صحراوي بالبر الغربي بالأقصر كأرض مقدسة، فقد شيدت هناك المقابر بدءاً من الدولة الوسطى، كما شيدت منطقة سكنية لعمال المقابر ببداية الدولة الحديثة. بدأت تدريجياً أن تحاصر مدينة العمال بالمقاصير والمعابد. على الرغم من أن الموقع هجر بآخر الدولة الحديثة، ولكن استمر استخدامه للدفن والعبادة الدينية. شيد هناك معبد من الحجر الرملي مكرس للإلهة حتحور خلال العصر البطلمي، واضيفت إليه مقصورة صغيرة خلال العصر الروماني. قام الأقباط لاحقاً بتحويل المعبد إلى كنيسة ودير، وهذا هو أصل إسم الموقع باللغة العربية.

The Arabic name *Deir el-Medina*, “Monastery of the Town,” refers to a Coptic settlement with a church and monastery (Coquin and Martin 1991) situated on the fringes of the earlier (Coptic) town of *Djeme*. The church was installed in the ruins of a temple of the goddess Hathor built by Ptolemy IV Philopator (221 – 205 BCE) and his successors (Bierbrier 1982: 121). The Greeks used the name (*Ta*) *Memnoneia* when referring to the area (Verreth 2008: 301). In Pharaonic times the royal-tomb builders called their settlement *pa demi* (*p3 dmj*) “the village” (Valbelle 1984: 35; 1985: 114), whereas the most commonly used official designations for the area of the royal necropolis, including the village settlement as an administrative unit,

were *Set Maat* (*St M3t*), “Place of Truth,” and *Pa Kher* (*P3 Hr*), “The Necropolis” (Černý 2001: 6 - 67; Ventura 1986: 1 - 63).

Location and Layout of the Site

The site is located on the west bank of Luxor in a small desert valley behind the Qurnet Murai hill slope (fig. 1). The ruins of a New Kingdom royal workmen's village flanked by an eastern and a western cemetery form the center of the site (fig. 2). Ruins of numerous small chapels and temples of various types, the earliest of which date to the 18th Dynasty, are located around the northern part of the village settlement. The hill slope delineating the valley to the north houses one of the earliest tombs found on the site (P. 1200,



Figure 1. The site of Deir el-Medina. 1 = Village; 2 = Western Cemetery; 3 = Eastern Cemetery; 4 = Votive Chapels; 5 = Ramesside Cemetery; 6 = Ptolemaic Hathor Temple; 7 = Hathor Chapel of Sety I; 8 = Great Pit; 9 = Tombs of the Saite Princesses.



Figure 2. View of Deir el-Medina site, facing east.

dating from the Middle Kingdom to the early Second Intermediate Period). A number of Ptolemaic and Roman tombs are also situated in this cliff slope north of the Ptolemaic temple, perhaps to be interpreted as a location for a limited number of elite burials of the

period. The ruins of a Hathor chapel of Sety I stand adjacent to the northeast side of the enclosure within which the Ptolemaic Hathor temple is situated (fig. 3). The so-called “Great Pit” is located a bit further away, 55 meters northeast of the enclosure. To the east a small temple dedicated to Amun by Ramesses II stands against the hill slope of Qurnet Murai. Isolated elite burials, anonymous mass burials, and various dwellings dating from the Roman to the Coptic Periods, many of which reused older burial places, are scattered around the site (Haring 2001; Montserrat and Meskell 1997; Strudwick 2003: 176 - 178, 182, 183; Valbelle 1975; Yurko 1999).

Significance

The site of Deir el-Medina has had an enormous impact on our knowledge of

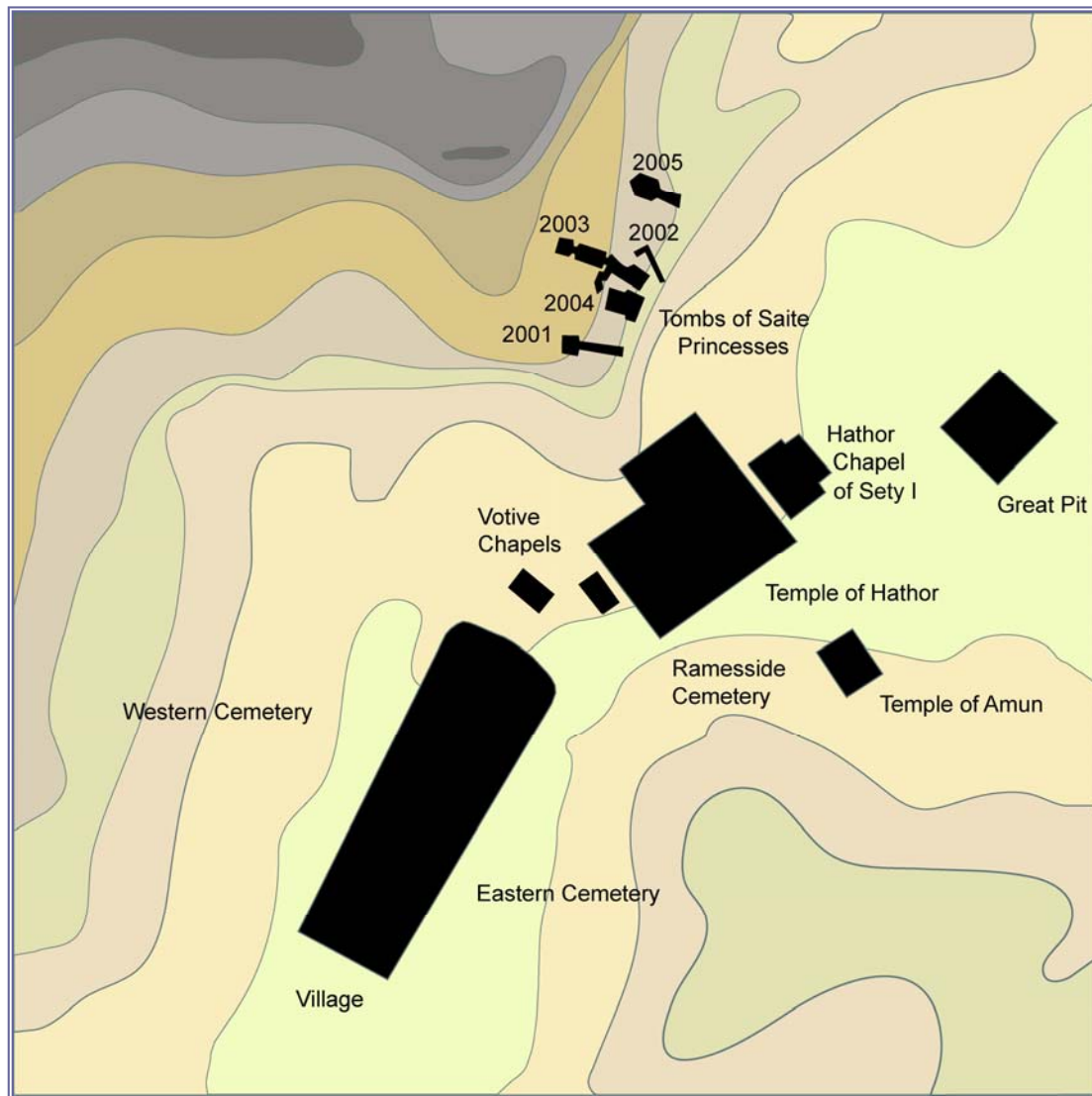


Figure 3. Map of Deir el-Medina site.

ancient Egypt—daily life, jurisdiction, economy, and administrative practices being only a few of the subjects to which the source material from the site has proven invaluable. Its desert location has provided excellent conditions for the preservation of a variety of materials, objects, and structures. The number and diversity of finds from the site is remarkable. Besides ruins of houses, chapels, and temples, and hundreds of tombs, some of which were found intact, tens of thousands of utensils and texts are now at our disposal for further research, and additional finds keep emerging. Due to the vast amount of unique

source material, Deir el-Medina studies form an important sub-field in Egyptology, producing a constant flow of new data (Gasse 1992; Valbelle 1985: viii). The studies are published in a wide range of journals and monographs; thus attempts are being made to compile a systematic and concise Deir el-Medina bibliography (Demarée et al. 2007; Haring 1992; Zonhoven 1982). As the finds cover a substantial time-period, part of the research is undertaken by Egyptological sub-fields such as Demotic studies and Coptology.

Historical Context

The site contains some Middle Kingdom tombs and scant remains of dwellings of uncertain age. The earliest dating is provided by cartouches of Thutmose I (1504–1492 BCE) stamped upon bricks of the enclosure wall associated with the first phase of the village settlement. Numerous finds originating from c. 400 years of settled village life provide valuable insights into almost all aspects of New Kingdom history and culture (Bierbrier 1982; Černý 2001; Roccati 2003; Valbelle 1985). After the village was abandoned during the reign of Ramesses XI (1099–1069 BCE), the site was still considered a vital part of the sacred landscape. Burials reusing older tombs and dwellings continued well into the Christian Period, perhaps to the eighth century CE (Montserrat and Meskell 1997: 179 - 197; O'Connell 2007: 239 - 273; Riggs 2003: 190 - 191).

Middle Kingdom Tombs

Middle Kingdom tomb P. 1261. The oldest structure that has been identified thus far on the Deir el-Medina site is tomb P. 1261, situated on the hill-slope to the west of the village. Its Middle Kingdom date is deduced from the techniques employed in its construction and its typological features. The tomb was discovered during the excavations of the French Archaeological Institute in 1931–1932 and contained few finds (Bruyère 1934: 4 - 6, fig. 1, pl. I).

Middle Kingdom tomb P. 1200. The rock-cut tomb P. 1200, excavated in 1929 by the French Archaeological Institute, lies to the north of the village (Bruyère 1930: 100 - 106, fig. 45, pl. I; Porter and Moss 1989: 688). Bernard Bruyère dated the tomb to the Middle Kingdom, but it may be of a later date (Grajetzki 2000: 31 - 32). Some of the fragmentary finds (totalling 16 and including the torso of a male mummy) bear inscriptions that refer to the deceased Amenemhat as Elder of the Portal (*smsw h3yt*) and Vizier (*ḥ3tj*); a wooden head and the foot-end of a coffin constitute the largest preserved pieces, the

former now belonging to the collection of the Náprstek Museum in Prague (Mynářová and Onderka eds. 2007: 232–233).

Village Layout

The central feature of the site is the village settlement, flanked by two necropoleis (east and west). Excavation of the settlement began in the early twentieth century by Italian and German expeditions. Jaroslav Černý, a member of the French team that had taken over the concession in 1917, identified the settlement's inhabitants as royal-tomb builders (Černý 1929), and hence the settlement as a workmen's village (Lacovara 1997: 47, 49). The main part of the settlement was excavated in 1934–1935.

The first phase of the village dates to the early New Kingdom (fig. 4). Cartouches of Thutmose I (1504–1492 BCE) stamped upon bricks in the enclosure wall provide the earliest dating. A dozen houses flanked the sides of a central pathway in the southern part of the settlement enclosure during this earliest phase. A few remains of domestic structures were located in the northern part.

A major transformation of the village coincides with the administrative reorganization of the work crew that took place during the reign of Horemheb (1323–1295 BCE), increasing the number of houses in the village to approximately 40 (fig. 5). Whether the village was abandoned during the Amarna Period is still debated. Altogether 12 modifications have been identified in the village layout, resulting in its rectangular form (northeast-southwest axis), covering 5600 square meters during its later phase. Within the enclosure, about 68 houses flank a central road following the village's general alignment (fig. 6). An area where water jars were stored (*ḥ3ir*-area) is situated outside the northeastern end of the enclosure wall. Some houses are also situated outside the enclosure.

The basic structure of the houses, each of which Bruyère named and provenanced with a number and letters, consists of an outer room with a second room functioning as the main

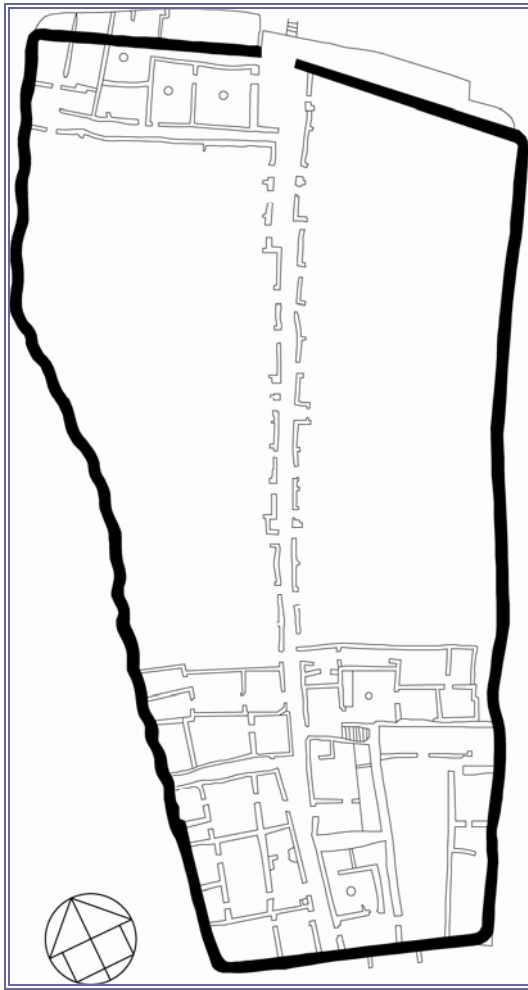


Figure 4. Plan of the earliest phase of the Deir el-Medina workmen's village.

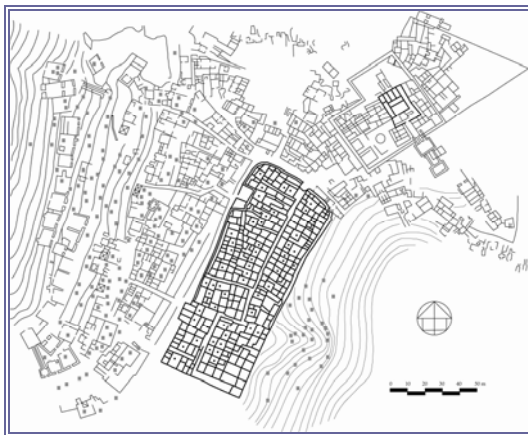


Figure 5. Layout of the workmen's village during the Ramesside Period.



Figure 6. The central road of the workmen's village of Deir el-Medina, facing south.

living area, often with a column supporting the roof and a bench along one wall. A rectangular, bed-like, unfired brick construction (a *lit-clos*, or enclosed bed) with a plaster and paint finish is found in a corner of most of the outer rooms (fig. 7). Remains of decoration show that many of these have been decorated with motifs associated with fertility. A smaller room is situated behind the second room, next to a corridor opening to a kitchen area at the back of the house. A flight of stairs leads to the roof (fig. 8).

Most of the houses have undergone alterations, in which space was divided or added to. The fluctuation in the number of village inhabitants reflected the fluctuations in the number of workmen employed at the royal necropoleis. The usual number of household members might have been between three and five, if not more. The village was abandoned some time during the reign of Ramesses XI (1099–1069 BCE), but the site continued to be frequented as a sacred place, where old standing structures were reused and modified to serve as burial places,



Figure 7. Workmen's house XI N.E., displaying outer room with benchlike *lit-clos* construction in corner (see outline); main living area and kitchen area visible in foreground.



Figure 8. Workmen's house XII N.E., displaying flight of stairs at the back of the house (foreground of photograph).

chapels, temples, and churches into the eighth century CE. As the village contained masses of finds, an exact provenance for every artifact has not always been documented (Arnold 2003: 66; Bierbrier 1982; Bonnet and Valbelle 1975: 440 - 441; Bruyère 1939; Bruyère and Bataille 1936-: 145 - 174; Koltsida 2007; Riggs 2003: 195 - 198; Toivari-Viitala 2001: 4 - 5; Valbelle 1985).

The Great Pit

To the northeast of the site lies an unusual feature known as the "Great Pit," systematic excavations of which were undertaken in 1949–1950 by the French Archaeological Institute. Various clandestine excavations, as well as a short work-season by the Berlin Museum, predated the French campaign. The original function of the 52-meter-deep pit, the inner walls of which are flanked by descending sets of stairs, has not been established with certainty, although it appears to have been used during two later periods as

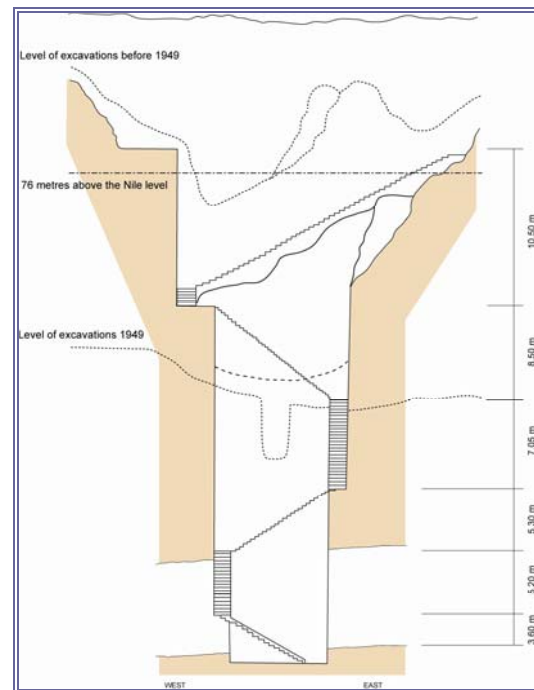


Figure 9. Section drawing of the "Great Pit."

the villagers' rubbish dump, with some time of non-use in between (fig. 9). The pit

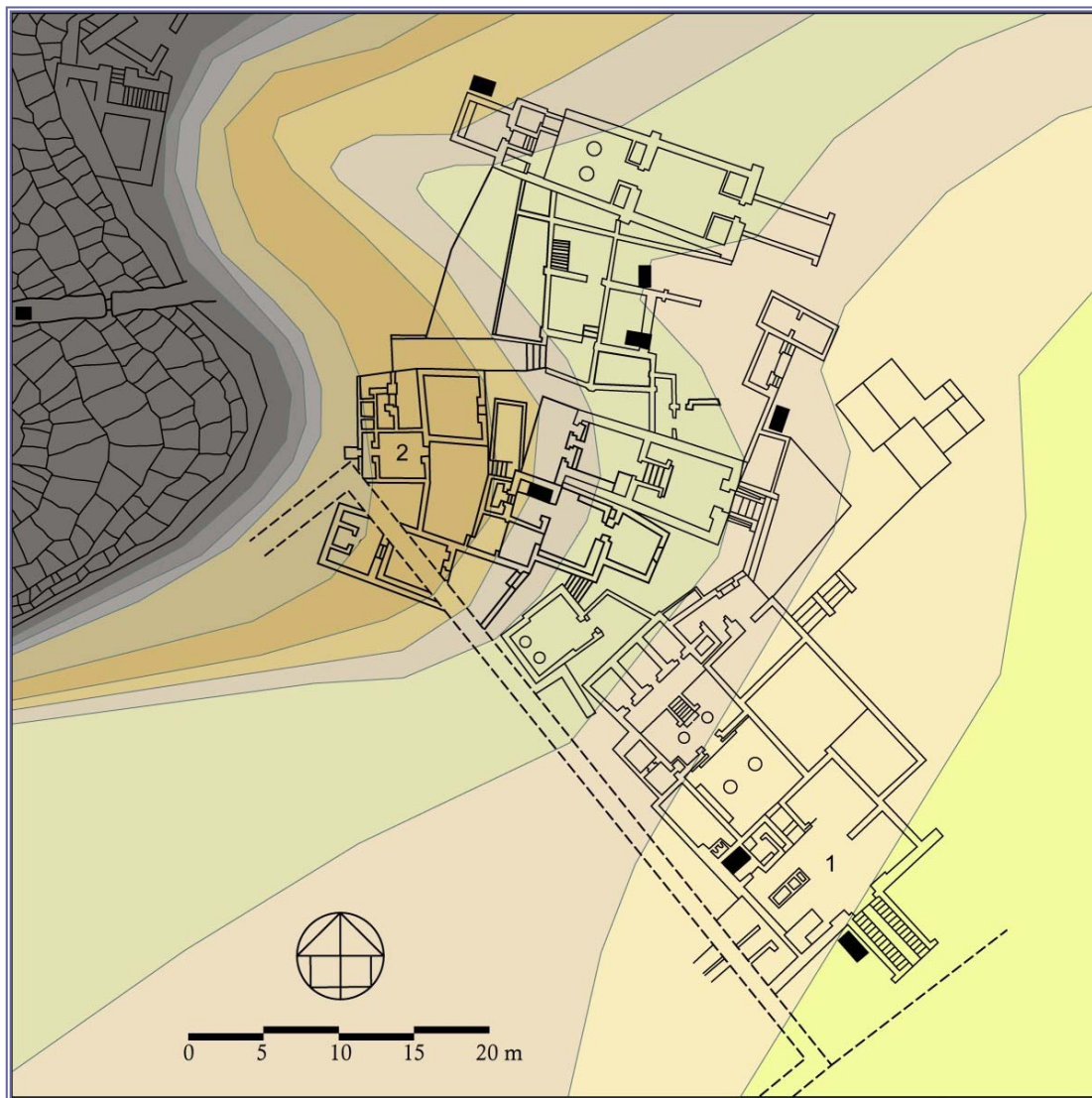


Figure 10. Layout of Hathor chapel of Sety I (Number 1) and Temple of Amenhotep I and Ahmose-Nefertari (Number 2).

contained numerous interesting finds such as statues, stelae, reliefs and other architectural features, furniture, basketry, sandals, pottery, ostraca, and papyri. Most of the finds were fragmentary (Bruyère 1953: 9 - 70, pls. I - IX). Recently additional finds have been made; they will be published in future.

Temple of Amenhotep I and Ahmose-Nefertari

Among the several buildings situated to the north of the site, one must mention a small temple dedicated to Amenhotep I (1525 –

1504 BCE) and his mother, Ahmose-Nefertari (fig. 10: Number 2). It was excavated in 1940 by the French Archaeological Institute. Previous work in the temple vicinity had been undertaken by Schiaparelli and Baraize. The temple lies at the northwestern corner of the Ptolemaic Hathor temple, partly beneath that later structure, and partly outside of its enclosure. It was built along an east-west axis. It is not well preserved, but appears to have consisted of a forecourt or an outer hall, an inner hypostyle hall with two benches, and a pronaos with pillars, columns, and a shrine.



Figure 11. Hathor chapel of Sety I, facing northwest.

The pronaos walls were decorated with red, black, and white horizontal bands and various paintings, of which remnants were found. These depict Amenhotep I and Ahmose Nefertari. Numerous finds originate from the temple, including statues and statuettes of the aforementioned regents (Bomann 1991: 48 - 49, fig. 23.6; Bruyère 1948: 97 - 98, 105 - 106, pls. 3, VXIII - XX; Bruyère 1952c: pl. I; Porter and Moss 1989: 693 - 694).

Hathor Chapel of Sety I

A Hathor chapel of Sety I (1294 – 1279 BCE), situated adjacent to the north wall of the Ptolemaic temple enclosure (fig. 11), was excavated in 1939–1940 by the French Archaeological Institute. The area contained heaps of debris, stemming partly from construction work dating to the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods, and partly from previous excavations by Schiaparelli and Baraize, as well as from various clandestine digs. The chapel is constructed along a north-northwest to south-southeast axis and consists of an outer and an inner hall, pronaos, sanctuary, a

left annex, and subsidiary chambers. A central ramp flanked with steps leads up to the paved forecourt, where two tomb-shafts were found, one (P. 1434b) predating the chapel's construction, the other (P. 1435) being of a Ramesside date. The outer hall is reached by five steps. In the hall two column-bases are aligned on either side of the central axis and a bench is situated against the southern wall. Two steps lead to the inner hypostyle hall, where two limestone altars and a rectangular limestone basin once stood, and where fragments of wall paintings were found. A narrow pronaos opening directly into a tripartite sanctuary is reached by a flight of stairs between balustrades. The three shrines were originally symmetrical, but their dimensions were altered during the Ptolemaic era.

An annex consisting of two sections was built abutting the southern wall of the chapel. The first section is reached by a door in the outer hall and contained two ovens. The other section, reached from the inner hall, is a smaller chapel consisting of an antechamber with a depiction of a procession of men and women carrying offerings. A series of at least three large enclosures was attached to the north wall of the temple (Bomann 1991: 48 - 49, fig. 23.1; Bruyère 1948: 18 - 19, 99 - 104, pls. 10, XIII - XV; Bruyère 1952b: 42 - 43; Bruyère 1952c: fig. 3, 28 - 30, 127 - 129, pls. IV, XXI; Porter and Moss 1989: 694 - 695).

Amun Temple of Ramesses II

The ruins of an Amun temple of Ramesses II (1279–1213 BCE) are situated to the east facing the Ptolemaic temple wall. The temple stands against the hill slope of Qurnet Murai. It was excavated in 1939–1940 by the French Archaeological Institute. A flight of stairs leads to the forecourt of the temple, which is faced with pylons and constructed along a southeast-northwest axis (fig. 12). An outer hall is reached by two limestone steps. Two columns have been axially placed in the center of the hall, and there are benches against the south and north walls. Originally this hall had been the temple's forecourt. Another set of

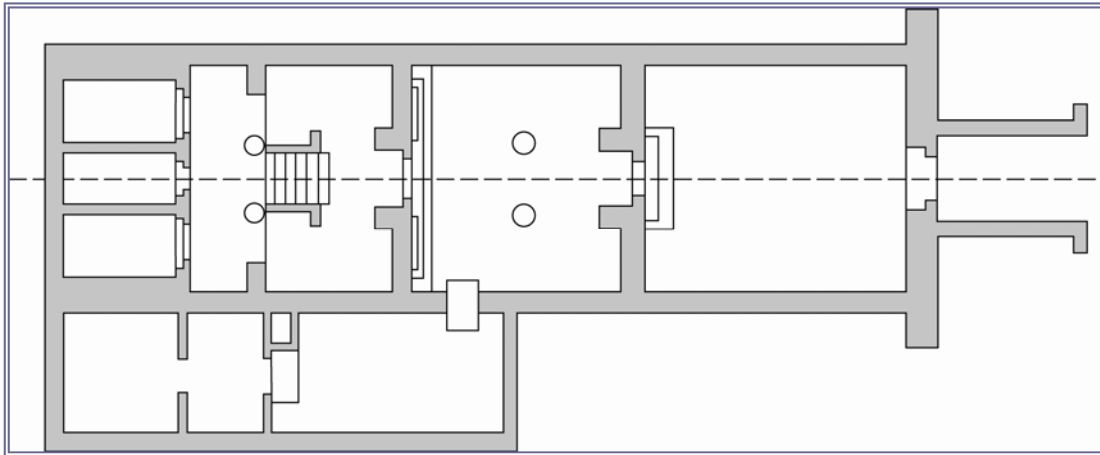


Figure 12. Plan of Amun temple of Ramesses II.

steps leads to an inner, vaulted hall, where the southern partition-wall (between the inner and outer halls) features a niche that perhaps once accommodated a stela. A pronaos with a tripartite sanctuary dedicated to the Theban triad is reached by a flight of six steps. A *serekh* pattern has been applied to the base of the walls, and traces of the figure of a kneeling man were visible on the southern wall. The temple has an adjoining chapel by its north wall consisting of an outer and inner hall, and a naos. It has undergone at least two construction phases. Fragments of wall plaster as well as a statue of the vizier Panehesy were found in the chapel (Bomann 1991: 47 - 48, fig. 22b; Bruyère 1948: 24, 120 - 126, pls. 3, 11, XXII - XXIV; Porter and Moss 1989: 691, 700).

Ptolemaic Hathor Temple

Northeast of the village lies the large enclosure of the Ptolemaic temple of Hathor. After some initial work undertaken by Schiaparelli and Baraize, the French Institute began systematic excavations at the temple precinct in 1939 (Arnold 1996: 146 - 147; 2003: 66 - 67; Bruyère 1948, 1952a; du Bourguet 2002; Heurtel 2004). Construction of the temple was begun during the reign of Ptolemy IV Philopator (221–205 BCE) and continued during the reigns of Ptolemy VI Philometor (180–164; 163–145 BCE) and Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (170–163; 145–116



Figure 13. Enclosure wall of Ptolemaic Hathor temple, facing northeast.

BCE). It is the last Egyptian temple to feature a brick enclosure wall imitating a fortress (fig. 13). The ruins of several older structures (small temples and shrines) lie beneath, or partly beneath, the temple enclosure, some of which were systematically torn down in order to vacate space for the new edifice. The Hathor temple, built of sandstone, consists of a small vestibule with two columns. Steps at the rear of the vestibule lead to a pronaos defined by two columns, pillars, and curtain walls. A tripartite shrine at the back of the temple is dedicated to Amun-Sokaris-Osiris, Hathor-Maat, and Amun-Ra-Osiris. A flight of stairs leads from the western side of the pronaos to the roof. The temple is well crafted and splendidly decorated. A depiction of the judgement of the dead—a motif quite

rare in temples—is, for example, featured in the Amun-Sokaris-Osiris shrine. A mammisi (birth-house), constructed in brick by Ptolemy IX Soter (116–107 BCE) and Cleopatra III, is situated next to the western wall of the temple. In Roman times (specifically during the reign of Caesar Autocrator/Augustus: 30 BCE –14 CE) a chapel of Isis was added at the back of the Ptolemaic temple, after some modification had been made to the enclosure wall. These were the last alterations before the beginning of the Coptic era, during which the Ptolemaic temple was converted into a Christian church. The number and diversity of finds spanning from the New Kingdom to the Christian period is notable. In addition to the interesting architectural features and artifacts, the temple also contains numerous graffiti.

Excavation and Research History

One of the earliest drawings of the site of Deir el-Medina, made by the British clergyman Richard Pococke (1704 – 1765) in 1737, shows the Ptolemaic Hathor temple as the only visible structure in the area, which was mostly desert. The first artifact originating from Deir el-Medina, a limestone statue of the workman Neferabu (reign of Ramesses II), was purchased on the antiquities market in Luxor in 1777 and subsequently given to Baron Françoise de Tott (1730 – 1793). Charles Sonnini de Manoncour (1751 – 1812) published a picture of the statue in 1799. The statue eventually ended up in Malta, where it is presently on display in the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta (Bierbrier 1982: 125 - 126; Espinosa Rodriguez 2005: 3).

Interest in collecting Egyptian antiquities increased in the nineteenth century. Deir el-Medina finds in collections such as those of Bernardo Drovetti (1776 – 1852), Henry Salt (1780–1827), Sven Lidman (1784 – 1845), Otto Friedrich von Richter (1792 – 1816), and William Bankes (1787 – 1855) were probably bought from local dealers rather than found in situ (Porter and Moss 1989: 709 - 749). The first westerner who may have undertaken excavations at Deir el-Medina was Frédéric Caillaud (1787 – 1869). In 1827–1828, Sir

John Gardner Wilkinson is attested to have excavated and documented a number of Deir el-Medina tombs (Bierbrier 1982: 127 - 133).

A French envoy sent to Luxor in order to transport an obelisk made a spectacular find on the site in 1832: a tomb (P. 2003) containing a black schist coffin, originally of the daughter of Psammetichus II Ankhnesneferibra. This coffin was later sold to the British Museum. The Berlin Museum acquired some tomb paintings from Deir el-Medina as a result of work undertaken by Richard Lepsius (1810 – 1884) in western Thebes in 1844 (Bierbrier 1982: 133 - 135).

The site underwent larger-scale and more systematic archaeological excavations in 1905, 1906, and 1909, with the arrival of the Italian campaign headed by Ernesto Schiaparelli (1856 – 1942) (Schiaparelli 1923). The Ptolemaic temple area, various tombs, and the northern part of the village settlement were excavated. The finds went to the museums of Turin and Florence. In 1909 – 1912, Émile Baraize (1874 – 1952) worked in the Ptolemaic temple precinct (Baraize 1914); during part of the same period (in 1911 and 1913), Georg Möller (1876–1971) of the Berlin Museum also worked on the site (Anthes 1943). After World War I, the German concession was taken over by the French Archaeological Institute in Cairo (Valbelle 1984: 48, note 7). Henri Gauthier and M. J. Leconte Dunoÿ (1877 – 1950) headed the 1917–1918 campaign (Gauthier 1920). Louis Saint Paul Girard (1877 – 1922) was in charge in 1919–1920. He was superseded by Charles Kuentz in 1921 – 1922. The 1922–1951 campaigns were mainly lead by Bernard Bruyère (Bruyère 1924, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1928, 1929, 1930, 1933, 1934, 1937 a and b, 1939, 1948, 1952 a,b, and c, 1953). Jaroslav Černý (1898 – 1970), who was to become one of the most renowned Deir el-Medina specialists, was a member of the French team from 1925 and worked on the Deir el-Medina material until his death (Onderka 2007: 17). Work on site continued in the 1970s (Castel and Meeks 1980). In 1974 – 1975 a survey of the development of the settlement was

undertaken by Charles Bonnet and Dominique Valbelle (Bonnet and Valbelle 1975, 1976). In recent years, valuable

conservation work has been carried out in the village settlement.

Bibliographic Notes

Deir el-Medina studies have contributed to research on almost all aspects of ancient Egyptian history and culture. An overview of issues studied is provided by the Deir el-Medina bibliographies (Demarée et al. 2007; Haring 1992; Zonhoven 1982).

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- Figure 1. The site of Deir el-Medina. 1 = Village; 2 = Western Cemetery; 3 = Eastern Cemetery; 4 = Votive Chapels; 5 = Ramesside Cemetery; 6 = Ptolemaic Hathor Temple; 7 = Hathor Chapel of Sety I; 8 = Great Pit; 9 = Tombs of the Saite Princesses. Google Earth photograph, accessed March 2011.
- Figure 2. View of Deir el-Medina site, facing east. Photograph by the author.
- Figure 3. Map of Deir el-Medina site. Drawing by Pavel Onderka. (After *PM I*, Part 2: plan XIII.)
- Figure 4. Plan of the earliest phase of the Deir el-Medina workmen's village. Drawing by Pavel Onderka. (After Bonnet and Valbelle 1975: pl. LXIV.)
- Figure 5. Layout of the workmen's village during the Ramesside Period. Drawing by Pavel Onderka. (After Castel and Meeks 1980, Vol. XII, Part 1: pl. 1.)
- Figure 6. The central road of the workmen's village of Deir el-Medina, facing south. Photograph by the author.
- Figure 7. Workmen's house XI N.E., displaying outer room with benchlike *lit-clos* construction in corner (see outline); main living area and kitchen area visible in foreground. Photograph by the author.

Figure 8. Workmen's house XII N.E., displaying flight of stairs at the back of the house (foreground of photograph). Photograph by the author.

Figure 9. Section drawing of the "Great Pit." Drawing by Pavel Onderka. (After Bruyère 1953: pl. III.)

Figure 10. Layout of Hathor chapel of Sety I (Number 1) and Temple of Amenhotep I and Ahmose-Nefertari (Number 2). Drawing by Pavel Onderka. (After Bomann 1991: fig. 23.)

Figure 11. Hathor chapel of Sety I, facing northwest. Photograph by the author.

Figure 12. Plan of Amun temple of Ramesses II. Drawing by Pavel Onderka. (After Bruyère 1948, Vol. 20, Part 1: pl. 11.)

Figure 13. Enclosure wall of Ptolemaic Hathor temple, facing northeast. Photograph by the author.