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Preliminary report on the work of the CES RAS archaeological mission at Deir El-Banat (Fayoum). The 14th season (March 3 — April 24, 2019)

G. A. Belova, S. V. Ivanov

Research director of the CES RAS
galinabell@yahoo.com

Director of the CES RAS
s-ivanov@mail.ru

From March 3 until April 24, 2019, the Centre for Egyptological Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (CES RAS) conducted the 14th season at Deir el-Banat (Fayum). Besides some other directions, the works included analyzing funeral rites, conservation of finds made in previous seasons and survey for searching Paleolithic sites.

The main task of this study season was to identify typical features and peculiarities of burial customs performed on the necropolis. As a result of comprehensive and detailed analysis of more than 20 burials, seven types of funeral rites were described and pre-identified; among them are those that were performed in intermediate periods of Egyptian history. Burials differ in a set of funeral equipment, assortment of burial clothing and shrouds, position of the dead body, way of preparing the body for interment.

The most important textile objects were subjected to complete conservation treatment. Other fabrics were prepared for storage.

One more task of the work in 2019 was conducting archaeological survey to identify Paleolithic sites. Several sites of those times were discovered, and their stratigraphy was clarified.

Keywords: Egypt, Fayum oasis, Deir el-Banat, necropolis of the Ptolemaic period, necropolis of the Roman period, necropolis of the Byzantine period, funeral rites, anthropology, archaeological textiles, field conservation, Paleolithic sites.

From March 3 until April 24, 2019, the Centre for Egyptological Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (CES RAS) conducted the 14th season at Deir el-Banat (Fayum)¹.

The site of Deir el-Banat is located in the south-eastern part of the Fayum oasis, a few kilometers north of the Deir el-Malak (Deir el-Naqlun) monastery. For convenience, the territory of Deir el-Banat was divided into three areas — the ‘nunnery’, the southern and northern necropoleis.

In 2003 the CES RAS was granted permission to carry out archaeological and anthropological research at the site. Since then a detailed topographic map of the site was drawn and the central part of the southern necropolis was excavated and studied.

According to permission granted by the Permanent Committee of the Ministry of Antiquities of the ARE, in the study season 2019 the works included analyzing of funeral rites, studying of objects discovered by the mission in previous seasons, conservation of finds and survey for searching Paleolithic sites.

I. Study of funeral rites

The Fayum oasis played an exclusive role in economic, political and cultural life of Egypt since ancient times. On the one hand, the Fayum like other oases was relatively isolated, which brought forth local features in funerary rites, and, on the other hand, an interest of the Greeks and then the Romans in the Fayum grain contributed to the exchange of values in a social and religious spheres.

Preliminary examination of the material found during excavations of the necropolis showed that the latter was used for a long time, from the reign of Ptolemies to the Late Antiquity. That is why establishing a relative chronology of the site is of great importance. Therefore, our main task was to identify typical features and peculiarities of burial customs performed at the necropolis.

This task is complicated by the fact that a settlement associated with the necropolis was inhabited by a large number of foreigners² who influenced, among other things, religious beliefs of the local population. The influence was mutual: the Greeks and Romans adopted many features of the ancient Egyptian culture including rites and customs of the funeral cult.

¹ Team members: Dr. Galina A. Belova (Director); Dr. Elena G. Tolmacheva (Deputy Director, textile expert); Dr. Sergej V. Ivanov (Deputy Director, Egyptologist); Mrs. Asmma Abd el-Rahim Mohammed, Mrs. Dina Ahmed Mohammed and Ms. Amira Mohsen Ahmed (Inspectors of the MSA, archaeology, conservation, a trainee in archaeology respectively); Mr. Anton A. Simonenko (archaeologist); Ms. Oksana V. Vintgolts (draughtswoman); Ms. Alexandra O. Kitova (physical anthropologist); Ms. Victoria I. Yarmolovich (pottery expert); Dr. Olga V. Osharina (textile expert); Dr. Elena Yu. Chepel (papyrologist); Mr. Bernard Boismoreau (photographer); Ms. Natalia P. Sinitsina, Ms. Yulia V. Fedotova, Mr. Youri A. Voronin (conservators).

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² It is known that the Fayum oasis was inhabited by a large number of foreigners at that time. E. g. the Greeks constituted 30 % of total population. See Thomson 2009: 401.

Nevertheless, the most significant thing is that such an interchange gave rise to new burial rites. This complicates the task of determining the relative chronology of the necropolis.

Thus, burials of the earliest period of the history of the necropolis date back to Ptolemaic times³. One of these graves is the *grave 160* located in square III F16 of the southern necropolis.

This grave is oriented along the west — east axis. The burial pit has a rectangular outline, it is 2.00 m wide, 2.05 m long and 1.38 m deep (from the present-day surface). The grave had two side chambers located to the south and to the north of the entrance pit. The reconstructed height of the chambers is approximately 0.60 m. The bottom of the northern chamber was 4 cm higher than that of the southern one.

The grave was partially destroyed in the course of construction of later graves. The southern chamber was reused for burial 165.

The southern side chamber contained a wooden anthropoid coffin decorated with polychrome painting. The cover of the coffin was partially broken during later burial.

Inside the coffin there was a mummy, almost completely covered with sand. The mummy was decorated with cartonnage elements (mask, breast plate, etc.).

Another anthropoid coffin of 1.80 m in length and 0.50 m in width was found in the northern chamber. Its outer surface is also decorated with polychrome painting. The cover was broken by robbers; its fragments were found in the fill of the grave.

Inside the coffin there was a mummy of a woman (fig. 1). Despite the mummy was badly damaged by robbers, the initial position that had been given to the body while preparing for burial could be traced. The mummy's hands were bent at the elbows, the palms were placed on the shoulders. Solid fragments of resins of various sizes were found on the body, which indicates artificial mummification.

The remaining fragments of the mummy provide information on patterns of the bandaging system that was used during the mummification process. Basically, wrapping the body was presented by altering layers of bandages and 'fillings' according to the following scheme: large fragments of textiles — bandages — scraps of various textile items and bandages. These distinct layers all together formed a single component and were repeated several times in the course of wrapping. Of course, exceptions to this order happened time to time for different reasons⁴. So, in this particular case we have the following.

I. A large textile fragment (50×30 cm) was put on the mummy's chest and attached to a fringed one (the fringe's length is 4 cm) with stitches made at regular intervals along the entire length of the fabric. The fringed piece was laid under the back and knotted at the neck; it reached the knees.

A 'filling' layer was put on shoulders and the upper part of the chest. It consisted of fabric fragments varying in size (3×3 or 10×10 cm) and quality, and a fringe. The edge of one fragment was hemmed with green threads preserved on the left shoulder. Consequently, garments and household textiles were also used during preparation of the body for burial.

³ In accordance with papyrological data, see part VI on papyrological studies.

⁴ Here and below the description of layers is given from the top down.

Different kinds of bandages were found. Thinner bandages without bending (1–1.5 cm) wrapped the head, while wider ones (3 cm) were on the chest. Where the bandages are well preserved, it can be seen that they were laid along threads indicating the direction of bandaging.



Fig. 1. Mummy in a painted coffin. Grave 160, the burial 1

II. Below, bandages and wide stripes of fabrics, used for the same purpose as the bandages, fixed the lower layer of fabrics and ‘filling’.

Large fabric fragments were distinguished in the next layer of ‘filling’. One of these fragments (115×70 cm) was knotted around the neck and reached the middle of the shins. This piece ended with a long fringe (9 cm) twisted in 15 threads. At the shins the fabric was bent over them. The ‘filling’ layer of textile strips of 30×8 cm, fragments of bandages of 3×3 cm, fringes, etc. was additionally fixed with bandages (2.5 cm) on the chest.

III. Another fabric fragment (90×30 cm) covered the body from the neck to ankles; its lower edge is hemmed. Its edges went under the neck where it was fixed with bandages. Two other textile fragments layer went from the upper part of the body underneath the hips and along the sides of the body (the first piece is 50×15 cm, the second one is 50×20 cm). One of these fragments is folded inward and hemmed from two sides. All together they formed a tight-fitting cover of the body. This layer included one more fabric fragment 0.5–1.0 cm wide, ending with a twisted fringe and a red wool knot (fragment of clothes?).

It is of interest to note that all fabric layers (their total thickness is 5 cm) were cut with a sharp object to a depth of 15 cm on both sides in order to create an illusion of the waist.

These three layers mentioned above served to give natural shape to the deceased woman's body.

IV. More careful preparation of the body for burial can be seen below, where the high-quality wrapping of the legs and hands with bandages remained (fig. 2). The bandages were put diagonally at large intervals pressing legs to each other from hips to feet.

Each foot was separately closed with a piece of fabric of relatively high quality, which was cut and applied to the upper surface of the foot in such a way as to separately cover every toe and to meet on the sole. The soles and heels were provided with a natural-like shape by means of 'filling'.

A piece of relatively high quality textile covered the belly and chest. A papyrus-based cartonnage, imitating female genitals and painted in dark blue, was put to its proper place. Female nipples are imitated by two flesh-colored cartonnage circles. Probably, a similar circle was put on the navel, as it can be concluded because of a dent in its supposed location.

Pieces of papyrus painted in dark color imitate nails on the hands and feet. An imitation of 'bracelets', made of 1.5 cm wide bandages, painted in red and bent from both sides, is preserved at the ankles. A fragmented papyrus strip remained under the right hand; it came from under the wrist and partially wrapped it. Painted in middle, the strip was also an imitation of a bracelet. For some reason, a craftsman started wrapping the strip around the right wrist, but then, instead of cutting it to fix the first piece on the right hand and use the rest for the other, dropped work. The strip's length matches the added lengths of 'bracelets' for both hands.

An example of a burial custom dated to a later period is *grave 332* (fig. 3).

According to preliminary conclusions, the burial was made in Roman time.

A child's grave with a niche for a head is located in the squares III E17/E18 of the south necropolis. The grave is oval-shaped in outline. Its western and eastern walls become narrower to the bottom. The grave's length reaches 121 cm in the upper part and 95 cm along the bottom. Its width is 42–43 cm, depth is 80 cm. Walls and bottom are even. The spherical head niche is 23 cm high and 25 cm wide along the bottom. After burial the pit was covered with grayish yellow loose sand.

On the grave's bottom a mummy of a 4–5 years old child was found. The child was laid on its back in the outstretched position, his head oriented to the west. His legs were brought together, the feet were stretched. Arms were laid along the body; hands with bent fingers were put upon the pelvis, palms down. Dark straight hair, trimmed at 10 cm, remained on the head.

Several layers of shrouds, only one of which covered the head, were preserved on the body. At the feet the shrouds ended with a short fringe. The shrouds were fastened to the deceased with bandages arranged in a certain order. Unfortunately, a poor state of preservation of wrapping patterns prevents us from tracing all their nuances; however, it is obvious that it was rather complicated and thoroughly made. In the course of wrapping the body different bandages were used: unfolded ones (4 cm); ones folded in half (2.5 cm); ones with the edges bent from both sides (2 cm); ones with the edges bent from both sides and folded in half (1 cm). In order to increase the length of bandages they were tied together in knots.

The child's body, probably, was naturally mummified, though artificial mummification cannot be excluded as well.



Fig. 2. Pattern of the leg's wrapping



Fig. 3. Grave 332

Grave 366 was probably made during the Late Antiquity. The grave is located in the squares III E17/E18 (fig. 4).

A simple ground grave has an oval outline. The pit reaches 115 cm in length, 49 cm in width, 60 cm in depth. The grave's walls are vertical. The bottom is flat and bumpy. In the south-east a 'step' is adjacent to the grave's wall. It is 40 cm long, 26 cm wide and 12 cm high.

The body of a two years-old child was laid on its back in an outstretched position, his head oriented westwards. His hands were placed along the body, his palms were put under the buttocks, its legs were brought together, and his feet were left free. Short curly hair was preserved on his head.

Shrouds on the body are well-tracked only at the head and legs, where they form 'cocons' of different shapes. A rather large 'cocoon' tied with red and bicolor braids wrapped the head. The foot 'cocoon' is small and flat. Bicolor and red braids fastened the shrouds to the body, but only some of their fragments could be traced sporadically.

Regretfully, the body's wrapping is impossible be fully restored due to its poor preservation and can be traced only at the head and feet. While preparing the body for burial, five textile pieces with long and short fringes at the edges were used as burial shrouds. These fabrics have coarse texture with thick wefts and occasional inserts of red wool threads.

The child's body was wrapped in the shrouds as follows.

The high 'cocoon' on the head (18 cm in its central part) is oval in shape, which was accented by additional loops of ribbon in its upper part. Closely fitting to each other to create an illusion of homogeneous bands, four braids of various colors were laid in two rows across the 'cocoon'. These 'strips', put at some distance from the 'cocoon's edges, divide it into three parts.

Another 'strip' consisting of two closely fitting braids (bicolor and red one) runs vertically in the middle of the 'cocoon' under just mentioned horizontally laid 'stripes', dividing it into halves.

The feet 'cocoon' is trapezoid-shaped. A braid marks the footing of it wrapping it in its narrow part several times. Three 'strips', which are formed of braids laid in three rows (bicolor, one-colored, bicolor), passed diagonally (in different directions) across the 'cocoon', dividing it into several parts. Similar to what could be seen in the case of the head 'cocoon', three rows of 'stripes', consisting of three braids each, were laid horizontally at a certain distance from the 'cocoon's edges, dividing it into four parts. The difference in wrapping the braids between the head and feet 'cocoons' is the braids' color and the procedure of wrapping.

'Cocoons' were formed by twisting ends of separate burial shrouds and putting the resulting wisps on the face and on the feet of the deceased. The head 'cocoon' was formed by twisted ends of two shrouds, which were placed one upon another on the deceased's face. Thus a significant height of the head 'cocoon' and its expressive shape were obtained.

The body was wrapped in a linen tunic (?) with tapestry inserts in the form of medallions and a tapestry band⁵. The head of the deceased was covered with a linen hood, which hid the face. This hood was also decorated with a tapestry band.

⁵ The description of the clothes was prepared by Dr. Olga V. Orfinsakaya.

Then the body was wrapped in childe's wool 'poncho', a tunic of yellowish brown color (perhaps, originally white), in such a way that the tunic's lower (?) part was under the back of the deceased at the shoulder's level and edges of its upper part was gathered near the right shoulder. The tunic was trimmed with a fashion seam made with a linen thread along the side plain seams. 'False' sleeves had been sewn to the tunic, and due to the need for repair one of them was replaced with another sleeve from similar fabric, but with a different decoration.

This tunic is decorated with clavi having embroidered medallions on their ends. On the tunic's right shoulder a tapestry inset in the shape of an equal-sided brown cross has preserved.

The body was naturally mummified and wrapped in shrouds soon after death. A process of decomposition of soft tissues occurred under layers of shrouds⁶.

The child's body was laid on four rachides⁷ cut neatly, around 90 cm long.

Grave 209 dated to Late Antiquity is of great interest since it combined characteristic features of both Egyptian and Roman funerary rites.

A simple ground grave is located in the central part of the square III F17. Oval in planum, it is 1.90 m long, 0.60 m wide, 0.85 m in depth from the present surface. Walls of the grave are vertical. Its bottom is even and flat.

Two persons were buried in the grave one above another (209/1 and 209/2).

The burial 209/2 is characterized by a very high head 'cocoon' strengthened with a special structure of rachides (fig. 5–6). The foot 'cocoon' is small, neat, square in planum, its dimensions are 30×30 cm. The body was wrapped in several shrouds. The upper shroud covering the body was sewn from one side in a way to form a hood for the head area. The shroud was attached to the body with a braid. Another textile fragment decorated with tapestry inserts was laid on the right side of the body and fixed to it with one more braid. Besides, wrapping was made in such a way that a large medallion was in the center of the head 'cocoon', on its upper relatively flat surface.

A shroud below was decorated with vertical and horizontal stripes made with green and red wool threads. This shroud, from the head to thighs of the deceased, was covered with grains of cereals (oats?) (fig. 7).

The body was laid on a mattress, its head resting on a pillow. The mattress padded with flax waste, its cover was decorated with tapestry inserts. Two pillows were laid under the hips and legs respectively. Another pillow was laid at his feet.

The dead was dressed in two tunics, but the arms were not put into sleeves. A long-sleeved tunic of yellow wool was over a thinner linen one. A shawl of yellow wool tightly wrapped the head of the deceased. A kerchief, tied around his head like a turban, was preserved under the shawl.

The man's body was laid on its back, with the head pointing westward. The legs were stretched and shifted together; the arms were stretched along the body. The left palm was pressed against the torso and straightened, and the right-hand fingers were pressed to the palm. Toes were tied. The body was laid on a mat made of long (c. 160 cm) reed and rachis fragments.

⁶ The observation was made by our anthropologist Ms. Aleksandra O. Kitova.

⁷ Rachis is the main stem of a compound leaf of the palm tree.



Fig. 4. Grave 366



Fig. 5. Grave 209, burial 2



Fig. 6. Head 'cocoon' of the deceased from the burial 209/2



Fig 7. The body of the deceased with the grain scattered on it

Thus, a combined ritual is observed in the case of this burial. It syncretized characteristic features of Egyptian and Roman funeral rites. The deceased was sprinkled with the grain according to an ancient Egyptian custom⁸. At the same time the body was laid on the mattress and pillows, which was a common practice in Roman times.

Conclusions. As a result of a comprehensive and detailed study of more than 20 burials, seven types of burial customs were described and preliminarily identified; among them there are those that had been performed in intermediate periods of Egyptian history. Burials differ in a set of funeral equipment, an assortment of burial clothing and shrouds, a position of bodies of the dead and a way of preparing the bodies for interment. It should be taken into account that there were no strict rules about how to bury the dead in intermediate periods. For example, some burials combined wrapping bandages with funeral clothes.

It should be noted that studying funeral rites is complicated by the lack of written evidence and the relative poverty of funeral equipment, including pottery, found in graves. Nor can we ignore the fact that the extensive illegal digging, which took place both in ancient times and in our day, caused great damage to the necropolis. Among the most informative finds coffins, fragments of cartonnage elements with inscriptions on them as well as various textiles should be mentioned.

II. Studies of wooden coffins and cartonnage

During the season 2019 finds from excavations conducted in 2003–2017 was continued to be studied. Dr. S. V. Ivanov examined 16 coffins and their fragments. One of the main goals of this work was studying coffins that were found in different graves in numerous fragments. Examination of these fragments made it possible to collate them in order to reconstruct larger pieces and in some cases (grave 160, burial 1) — to suggest a reconstruction of whole coffins. This provides information on the coffins' construction and allows to define stylistic features that were typical for certain masters or workshops.

Grave 160, burial 1 (FN 08/0007+08/0062a)

A mummy⁹ was laid into an anthropomorphic coffin of the 'rhomboid' type¹⁰, a hexahedral elongated chest that represents general proportions of the human body (see fig. 10 showing a coffin of the same type from the burial 160/2). These coffins consist of a thin flat bottom with low borders and a high cover that forms the main volume of the chest. The bottom and cover were fixed together with 6–8 tenons inserted into corresponding slots in edges of both parts.

The coffin has a typical shape and average dimensions (180×50×30 cm at terminal points) shared by the majority of coffins from Deir el-Banat for several centuries.

The coffin is made of wooden boards of relatively regular shape and good quality of timber. The level of carpentry was average; masters used the simplest joints and connected the pieces with wooden dowels¹¹.

⁸ Griffiths 1982.

⁹ For patterns of mummification see Белова 2012.

¹⁰ Győry 2007: 912–914. This type is also known as *Dreiecksärge* (Niwinski 1984: 456, Abb. 19).

¹¹ For a more detailed description of technological aspects of coffins' construction see Ivanov 2017.

Both the inner and outer surfaces of the coffin were smoothed with mud plaster, the outer surface was decorated with polychrome paintings (fig. 8–9). The head part of the coffin had a mask (now missing) framed with a tripartite wig, front strands of which were adorned with blue vertical lines. The chest part bore a representation of a broad *wsh*-collar with falcon-headed terminals on shoulders. It was followed by two horizontal registers showing a winged scarab and a winged goddess with outstretched arms holding ostrich feathers in each hand. Below was a scene of mummification showing Anubis' manipulations over the body of the deceased laying on a lion-bier. The composition was continued with three horizontal registers representing sitting deities. The leg part of the cover was decorated with two columns of hieroglyphic ornament that was imitating a traditional offering formula; the inscription was flanked with representations of cobras wearing the crowns of Lower and Upper Egypt and sitting on wadj-poles. The lowest — the feet — part of the coffin bore a representation of two jackals with flails facing each other and recumbent on naoi. Sides of the cover were also divided into horizontal registers showing sitting goddesses Isis and Nephtys, the Sons of Horus and a ram-headed deity.

This find belongs to a very small group of Deir el-Banat coffins demonstrating a high level of craftsmanship. This refers to both construction (quality of timber, shape and size of panels, carpentry) and decoration. An artist made an effort to show small details. There is an impression that his main specialty or passion was miniature ornamentation: it can be seen in the composition (a large number of horizontal registers with numerous personages, which decreases the size of each element) and deliberate work of small details (beads of collar, feathers of wings, details of lion-bier and covers of canopic jars). Parts of the composition were framed with rather elaborate and diverse geometric ornament. The artist was obviously avoiding empty spaces by adding small figures of deities or sacred symbols. All elements of the drawing were outlined in black, and these lines show a distinctive graphical manner of the artist. E. g. human faces are shown with three horizontal strokes marking nose and lips (see fig. 9)¹².

Unlike the top surface, sides of the cover were decorated in a usual for Deir el-Banat coffins manner, showing relatively large figures with much less details. It is possible to suggest that this part of decoration was made by another artist, however treatment of facial features of human-headed personages shows a strong influence of the main master.

¹² Based on stylistic features, the coffin from grave 178 can be ascribed to the same master.



Fig. 8 (left). Reconstruction of cover of the coffin from grave 160, burial 1 (No. 08_0062)

Fig. 9 (right). Detail of decoration of the coffin No. 08_0062



Grave 160, burial 2 (FN 08/0016)

The coffin from the burial 2 belongs to the same type and has equal dimensions as the chest from the burial 1 (fig. 10). The main difference between them is quality, which is several times worse in this case.

This coffin is made of low-grade timber, the boards are irregular-shaped. The artistic level of decoration is rather basic: on the cover (which is unfortunately badly damaged; fig. 11) a draughtsman presented registers of traditional scenes following usual patterns, however he experienced certain problems showing proportions of human bodies. Unlike the artist of the first coffin, this painter did not go into details.

This trend becomes clearer in the decoration of sides and bottom of the coffin. The manner of drawing is so careless that one can suggest insufficiency of the artist's skills. It is also likely that sides of the coffin were decorated by another person, possibly an assistant draughtsman.

In the coffin there was a mummy decorated with cartonnage elements: a helmet mask, a large piece with a representation of a winged goddess, a broad *wsh*-collar; a winged scarab that covered the breast and belly of the mummy; a rectangular shin plate with a representation of six deities; mummy soles. The cartonnage pieces were made of papyri covered with a primary layer and painted.

The mask represents the deceased in a blue wig decorated with a diadem and a winged scarab that protects the top of the head. The face of the mask is painted with golden ochre, facial features are outlined in blue¹³. Breast and belly pieces were done in red gamma; the background for most elements is rhomboid net, which imitates a traditional net made of faience beads. Soles are decorated with a simple geometrical ornament painted in white and dotted red over blue background.

If the mask and breast part demonstrate a certain level of craftsmanship, the shin plate was presumably made by another artist, whose manner is very close to one, in which sides of the coffin were decorated (fig. 12). Deities are drawn in a very simple and unsure style. Six of them are arranged in three horizontal registers, two figures facing each other. Vertically the composition is divided into two symmetrical parts by a column of pseudo hieroglyphic inscription.

It is worth mentioning that burials of grave 160, which were done at different (but not distant) periods, had the equipment made by different masters (or workshops). At the same time both coffins and cartonnage pieces seem to be made by a single person. It is likely that there were certain areas of responsibility, which could be divided between a master and his assistant(s).

Stylistically, coffins and cartonnage pieces from grave 160 belong to a group of 'northern' coffins¹⁴ that contain coffins from Gurob¹⁵, Gamhoud¹⁶, el-Hibeh¹⁷, Saqqara¹⁸ and other

¹³ A detailed description and stylistic analysis of the mask were done by Dr. A. M. Friedmann (Фридманн 2015: 108).

¹⁴ Taylor 2009; Stövesand 2018.

¹⁵ Grajetzki et al.; Yoyotte et al. 2018: 559, fig. 2.

¹⁶ Kóthay 2012: pl. 51, fig. 3; Kóthay 2017: pl. 57, fig. 1; Györy 2007: 913, fig. 2, etc.

¹⁷ Botti 1958: Taf. 20.3, 27.32–34, etc.; Kóthay 2012: pl. 51, fig. 4; Gessler-Löhr 2017, etc.

¹⁸ Myśliwiec 2008: pl. 84, 101, 116–119, 125, 130–131, 217–218.



Fig. 10 (upper left). Anthropoid coffin from grave 160, burial 2 (No. 08_0016)

Fig. 11 (right). Reconstruction of cover of the coffin No. 08_0016

Fig. 12 (lower left). Shin cartonnage plate of the mummy from grave 165, burial 2 (No. 08_0117_001)

sites. While most of the coffins of this group date to the Late Period, the Deir el-Banat coffins originate from the Greco-Roman period and thus appear to be the latest in this group. In most aspects they follow Ancient Egyptian patterns and traditions, however some features like pseudo-hieroglyphic inscriptions and obvious ignorance of iconography point to a certain degree of oblivion of traditional culture.

Following preliminary conclusions can be made:

1. Independently of material and whether a painting decorates an item or not, the coffins' sizes are mostly unified: their length is about 180 cm, maximal width is 45–50 cm, height is about 30 cm.

2. The coffins' manufacturing quality is low. This relates to wood itself (uneven texture, knottiness, fungi spoiling, etc.), its processing (very uneven shape, possible reuse, etc.) and — in the case of painted coffins — to the paintings.

3. Hieroglyphic 'texts', located in the feet part of some painted coffins, imitate inscriptions that were usually written on 'classical' Egyptian coffins. Images of gods do not meet Egyptian standards as well. This may indicate some kind of 'oblivion' of Ancient Egyptian art, which led to exceptionally mechanical reproduction of traditional images and shapes.

Unfortunately, the collected data is not enough for certain conclusions on temporal changes of burial equipment at the necropolis of Deir el-Banat¹⁹.

III. Study of textiles

During the season 2019 about 300 textile objects were studied and described by Dr. Olga V. Orfinskaya and Dr. Elena G. Tolmacheva. The technical description of textiles was made according to a methodology developed in previous years. It provides the following data: a textile's size, technique of weaving, thread count, raw material, type and colour of yarns, spun (twist) direction, diameter of yarns, tightness of spin, weaving peculiarities (borders, selvages, fringes, open-work, self-bands, decorations, brocade, tapestries), decoration of the textile after weaving (applications of brocaded bands, sewn-on tapestries, embroidery, sewing (tailoring), type of seams, sewing threads), etc. Special attention is paid to description of darning or patching. For tunics and other clothing, the description includes sketches or layouts of possible reconstructions.

Analysis has shown that there are different types of textiles among Deir el-Banat finds. Two main chronological groups are Roman and Late Antique textiles. The first group is mainly represented by bandages and funeral shrouds. The Late Antique fabrics are more diversified: tunics and other garments, caps, shawls, hangings, household textiles.

One of the goals of this season was description of the garments. A collection of clothing and headdress (more than 100 fragments) from Deir el-Banat cemetery is impressive and includes several interesting objects. There is a visible predominance of linen tunics (37 items) over wool ones (18 items), but it reflects a poorer state of preservation of wool textiles rather than any significant tendency. Linen tunics belong to various types and date from different periods. Most of them are woven to shape in one or three pieces of fabric. Some tunics are plain (on rare occasions with self-bands and twining wefts), others have elaborate ornamentation.

¹⁹ For problems of dating see Белова 2017: 2.

One of the best examples of woven long-sleeved tunics is tunic 280/0/T002 (fig. 13). It has a semicircular neck-slit decorated with sewn-on tapestry panels. This item was conserved this season. Unfortunately, its state of preservation is rather poor. Nevertheless, its woven tapestry clavi, sleeve-bands and roundels with typical vegetable ornamentation on a red background are much appealing. This type of decoration is considered influenced by Sasanian silks, clothes from which are usually dated to 7th–9th centuries. Representations of tiny crosses in ornamental roundels as well as cross-like rosettes on the neck panel and sleeve-bands are also worth mentioning.

Woolen tunics are not so numerous. Several of them that were woven to shape in three pieces (e. g. from grave 209) are extremely important for studies of technologies in Late Antique Egypt. Many fragments of wool tunics are literally covered with decorative darning (fig. 14) Tailored linen and woolen garments are also present among the finds from Deir el-Banat graves.

A collection of Deir el-Banat sprang wool caps and linen hairnets includes 33 items. All of them come from female burials and have a standard shape and design.

Unfortunately, despite the fact that a rich collection of clothes has already been built, we are very far from establishing its relative dates. Nevertheless, further study of textiles in the context of funeral rites performed on the necropolis is an area of great promise.

IV. Anthropological study of human remains

During years of work rich anthropological material was collected and studied by our anthropologists — Dr. Sergey V. Vasiliev, Dr. Svetlana B. Borutskaya, Dr. Natalia V. Kharlamova and Ms. Aleksandra O. Kitova. Direct information on physical characteristics of ancient population, the racial type and physical development, the nature of diseases prevalent in the society and, finally, demographic indicators like gender ratio, life expectancy, child mortality was obtained from this material. In the course of investigation of human remains various modern paleoanthropological methods were used such as the classical craniometry, angular skull morphometry, osteometry, osteoscopy, etc.

During this season the remains of 30 individuals were examined and described. Work with bodies lifted from graves was carried out according to the following scheme: general examination and description of the remains, examination and description of preserved soft tissues, anthropological study of bone remains. For each individual a procedure of mummification was reconstructed. The obtained data will allow establishing local versions mummification techniques and procedures that were performed at the site in different periods.

The methodology of study of mummified remains was improved this season. In particular, macro-photography of soft tissue was used.



Fig. 13. Tunic 280/0/T002 with a semi-round neck slit decorated with a tapestry panel and clavi



Fig. 14. Tunic 295/0/T009 with darning and mending

V. Study of pottery discovered on the necropolis

Previous seasons the work on pottery was concentrated on shards collected from the surface at the 'nunnery', northern and southern necropoleis. Although the bulk of these shards were made of Nile silt, other fabrics are presented too. There are such Egyptian wares as red slip Aswan ware and grey marl ware. Imported pottery such as red slipped pink Cypriot ware is also registered on the site. It seems that the majority of this pottery is contemporary and dates from the late 5th c. AD to the end of 7th c. AD²⁰. However, carefully analyzing and comparing Deir el-Banat types with results obtained in the course of other excavations allow suggesting the presence of an earlier ware dated to the late Dynastic and early Ptolemaic periods.

That is why the current season was devoted to a more thorough study of pottery found in graves. Examining pottery from some burials was conducted by our expert Victoria I. Yarmolovich.

Grave 161. The material of this assemblage is mixed in terms of its dates and functions (fig. 15). It includes seven fragments of vessels. Two of them are parts of barrels (08/0005/007-1, 08/0005/007-2). The base of an amphora (08/0005/007-3) has features of those, which were produced over a long period (1st c. BC — 5th c. AD) and widespread in Egypt, including the Fayoum oasis²¹. Two bowls (08/0005/007-4, 08/0005/007-5) are tentatively identified as imitations of Red slip wares²² dated from 4th to 9th c. AD. A cauldron (08/0005/007e) is tentatively attested to 3rd–6th c. AD. This kind of pottery was widespread in Egypt. A ring base (08/0005/007-6) could be dated to 4th–9th c. AD.

Grave 175. One fragment of the rim of a cauldron (08/0024/001) came from the filling of this grave and dates back to 3rd–6th c. AD (fig. 16).

Grave 230. Five fragments of vessels were found in this grave (fig. 17). A complete profile of a bowl (09/0062/001) has analogies in a ceramic corpus from Tebtynis, which are dated to the end of 1st c. BC — 1st c. AD. Another fragment is a base of a jug (juglette) with a relief body (09/0062/002), possibly an imitation of a Greek juglet. It can be tentatively dated to the 1st c. BC — 2nd c. AD. A neck of an amphora (?) (09/0062/003) has morphological features of amphorae of the Roman period. It is preliminarily dated to 1st — early 2nd c. AD (?). Two other sherds from this grave will be studied in future.

Grave 326. A ring base of a big jar (326/F/002) was found in the filling of this grave. This type of base made of Nile silt was used in 2nd c. AD in Tebtynis. According to fabric analysis, this base is tentatively dated to 2nd–3rd c. AD.

Grave 327. One fragment of a ring base (327/F/002) was found in the filling. Probably, this base belonged to a vessel of closed shape (jug or juglette)²³; however, it is difficult to determine the shape.

²⁰ Pottery of previous seasons was studied by Dr. Ashraf Senussi.

²¹ Roman amphorae: a digital resource [data-set]. York: Archaeology data service: https://archaeology-dataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/amphora_ahrb_2005/

details.cfm?id=318&CFID=4ba1c95c-1a69-4143-a714-65027c48a1a0&CFTOKEN=0

²² Konstantinidou 2015: 236.

²³ Cf. Ballet, Południkiewicz 2012: p. pl. 54 (485). This jar presented in this publication is made of Marl clay.

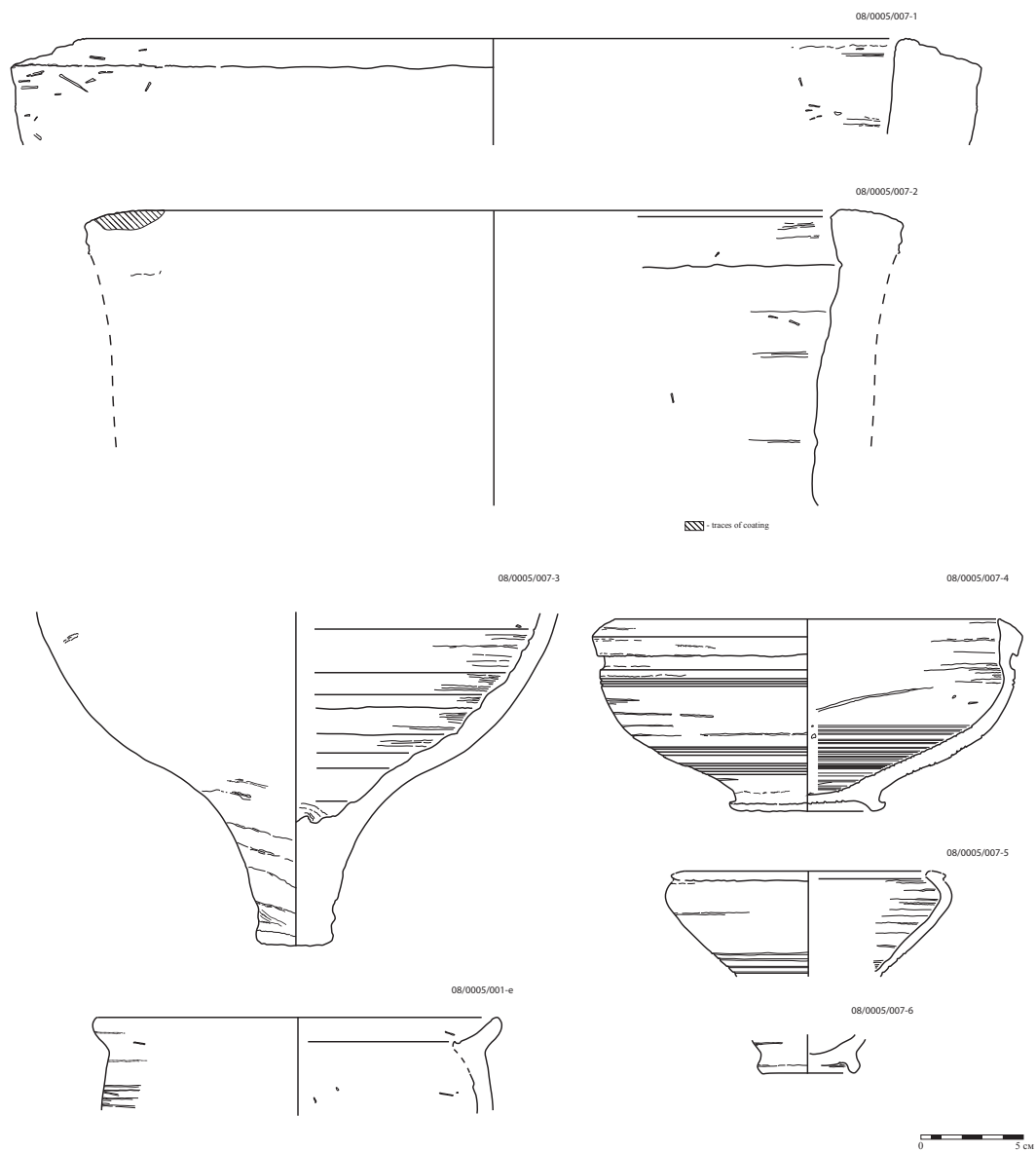


Fig. 15. Grave 161

08/0124/001

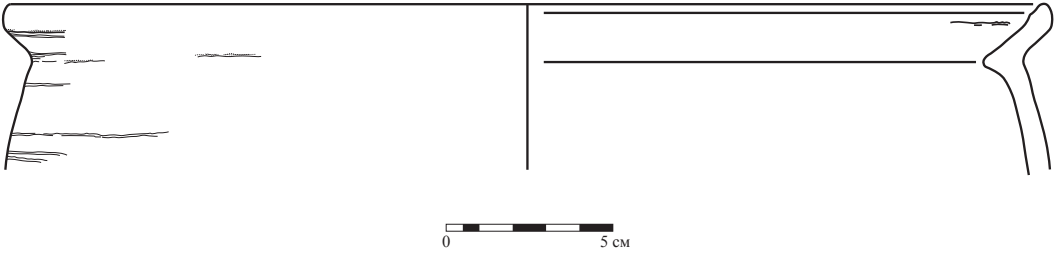
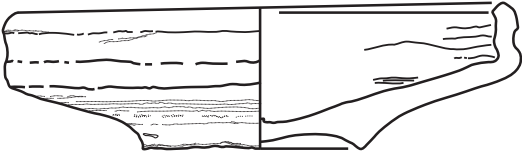
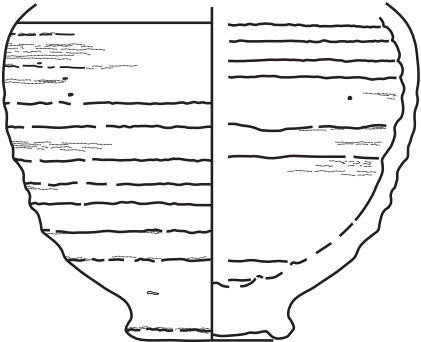


Fig. 16. Grave 175

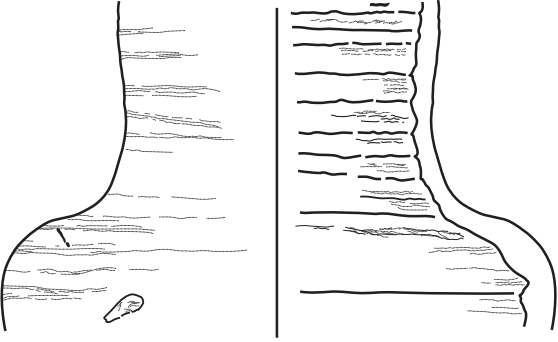
09/0062/001



09/0062/002



09/0062/003



0 5 cm

Fig. 17. Grave 230

Grave 334. Four body sherds were found in the filling of graves 334 and 335 (fig. 18). Two fragments of bowls (334/F/002a, the second one does not have a number) are tentatively dated to the 1st–2nd c. AD. A cooking pot (334/F/002b) is dated to 2nd c. AD. It is made of coarse Nile silt fabric (A-IVa)²⁴. It is interesting to note that this kind of fabric was used for production of barrel coffins from Deir el-Banat (fr. *jarres accolée*). This assemblage also contained a body sherd, which was a part of a barrel coffin.

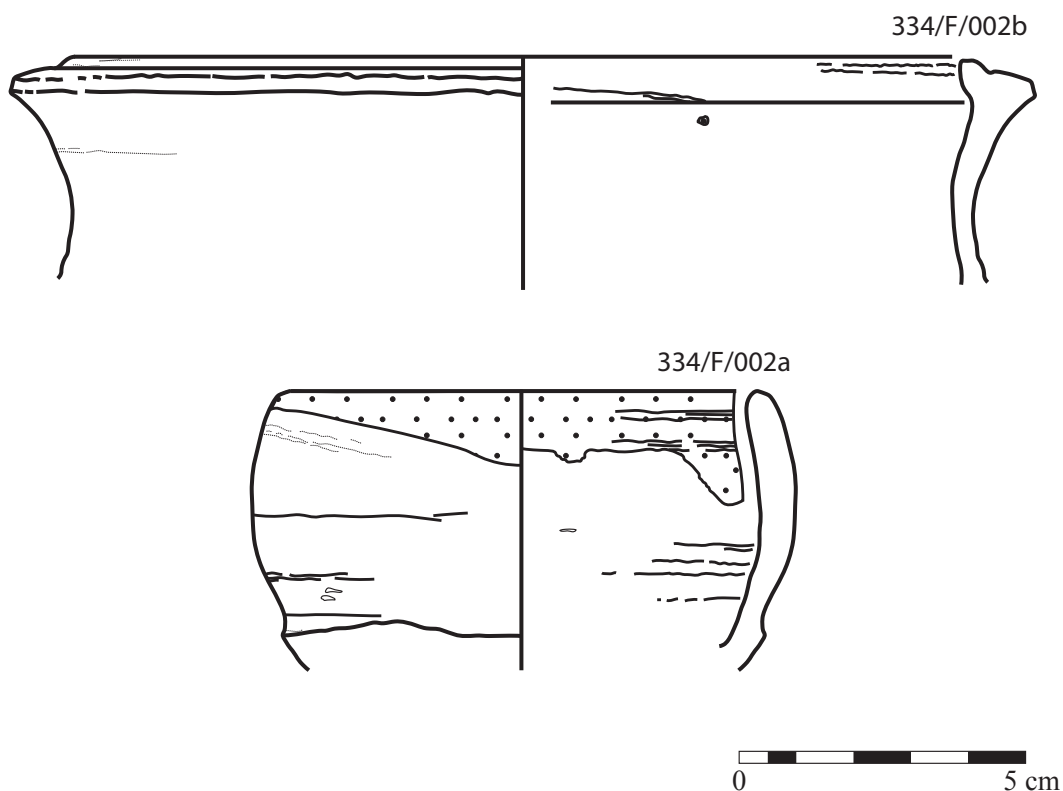


Fig. 18. Grave 334

²⁴ A-IVa is coarse dense Nile silt fabric with very common coarse sand quartz (various shapes), rare fine vegetable temper. Bi-partite: 5YR 5/6 and black.

The fabric description was made with a 10x hand lens during the work on the site. The visual analysis com-

prises description of the texture, hardness, porosity, size and quantity of inclusions, as well as colour of break and surfaces. The colour description are made using the Munsell, Soil color charts (New Windsor, 2000).

Grave 335. Its filling contained two fragments of closed vessels (fig. 19). Both shapes can be attributed as neckless jars. According to analogies, these vessels are preliminarily dated to 2nd–1st c. BC (Ptolemaic period).

Thus, the studied material helps us make certain conclusions about the time when the burials were performed as well as when the graves were disturbed.

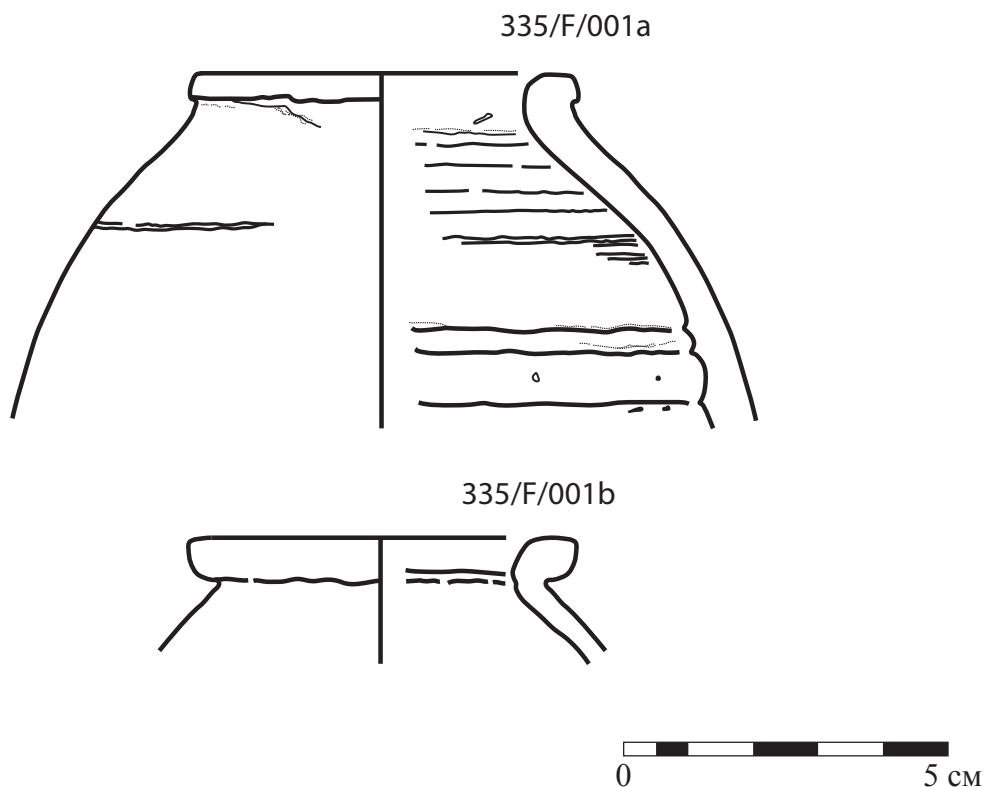


Fig. 19. Grave 335

VI. Papyrological studies

Papyri from damaged cartonnages found in graves 315 and 336 in 2017 were described and studied in 2019²⁵. Results were included into an existing catalogue of Deir el-Banat papyri.

Most of the papyri are written in Demotic, and some are written in ancient Greek. All fragments were photographed. Selected papyri were photographed in ultra-violet light with the help of the innovative lamp Reskolux UV 365 LED (fig. 20). After that they were placed between two pieces of glass.

As a result of this examination it was confirmed that a papyrus fragment from a cartonnage found in grave 315 contains a date in ancient Greek, saying '29th year'. This corresponds to the year of the reign of one of the kings of the Ptolemaic dynasty.

In order to make it easier to join remaining fragments and reconstructing texts in future preparatory work with papyri was done. The fragments were selected in separate groups.

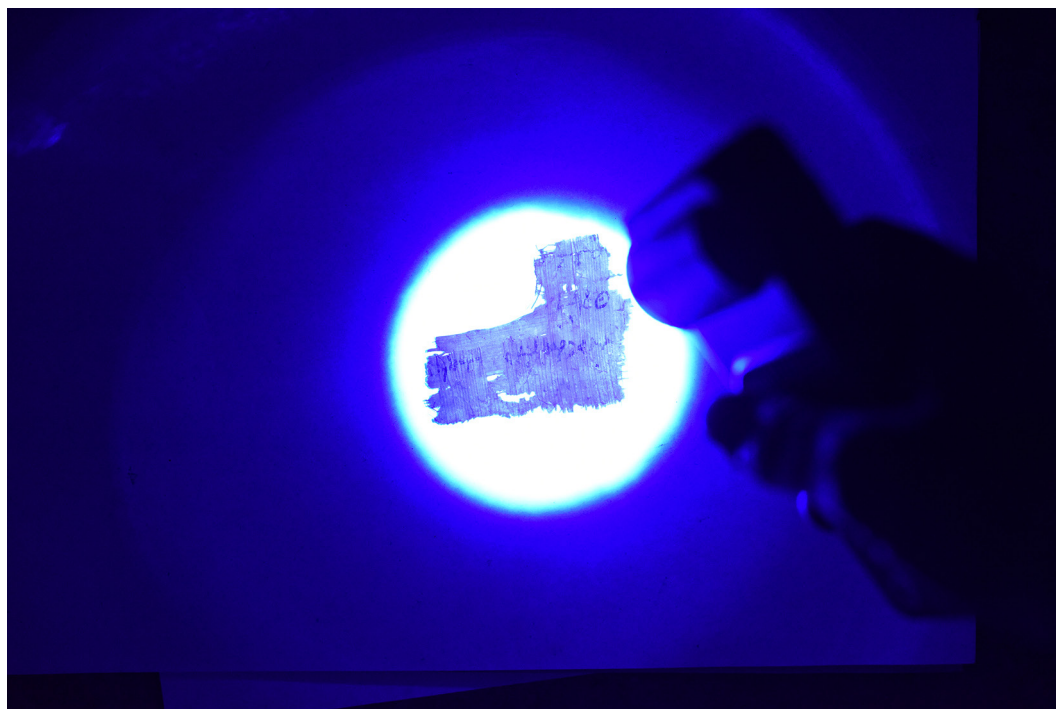


Fig. 20. Photographing of papyri in ultra-violet light

²⁵ Papyri found at the necropolis were studied by Dr. Elena Yu. Chepel.

VII. Study of small finds

During this season some small finds discovered in previous years were re-examined, photographed and drawn (fig. 21). Results of this work will be included in a catalogue of finds that is now in preparation for publishing.



a



b

Fig. 21. Examples of our small finds: a — ring; b — terracotta figurine

VIII. Conservation of textiles

Textiles from Deir el-Banat are mostly in a poor or sufficient state of preservation due to systematic plundering of the necropolis²⁶. A following procedure for textile conservation treatment has been developed by the group of conservators led by Ms. Natalia P. Sinitzina (Moscow Grabar Art-Conservation Center).

1. Primary treatment of textile objects: disinfecting with the 'preventol', describing the state of preservation, etc.
2. Surface cleaning of objects with a soft brush. Selection of a method for further conservation treatment — dry cleaning without application of water solutions or mixed cleaning with use of water solutions.
3. Dry cleaning is carried out with a brush or scalpel. It is highly recommended to use a microscope or magnifying glass while working.
4. Water cleaning is conducted with a Polyethylene glycol 400 solution in water (3%, 5% or 10%). The solution is sprayed or applied with a brush upon a textile's surface in order to moisten it and remove deformations. Excess water is removed via applying of a filter paper.
5. The most fragile areas are consolidated with a solution of the 'Ftorlon' (3% 'Ftorlon', 97% acetone). This is an extreme procedure applied only to the most damaged fragments that are literally crumbling into dust.

At this point conservators and textile specialists select the most important objects for complete conservation treatment. Other textiles are prepared for storage.

The following stages are obligatory only for the most important objects:

6. A silk gauze support (or the one made of other materials, mostly cotton) is dyed the same colour as the original textile with synthetic dyes, then gets stretched on a wooden frame. A thin adhesive layer is sprayed over the surface of this conservation support with a high-pressure compressor. After that the cleaned fragments of a textile object are laid upon the adhesive support according to a prepared preliminary layout and yarn directions.
7. As the next step a piece of transparent conservation silk with a thin adhesive layer is placed upon the object. Two layers of the conservation gauze support are processed with a heated spatula (T 60–70 °C) in areas of losses. Thereafter the layers are carefully sewn together with a hair silk thread following the boundaries of the original fragments. The tangled weft threads are strengthened with a couching stitch.
8. Well preserved areas are left open in order to be seen and examined by a specialist when required.

The first five stages are obliged for all treated items. Only three garments and one hat were mounted onto the new conservation support and sewed (fig. 22). For some items conservation treatment will be continued the next season.

²⁶ The description of a conservation process was prepared by Dr. Elena G. Tolmacheva.



a



b

Fig. 22. Tunic 357-0-T004: a — before conservation; b — after conservation

IX. Survey for searching Paleolithic sites

The survey for searching Paleolithic sites on the territory of the CES RAS concession was also conducted this season. One of the reasons for it was discovery of several Acheulean stone tools in previous years. In the course of this survey a number of accumulations of Paleolithic tools were discovered on the nowadays surface of the necropolis, which can be a sign indicating the location of Paleolithic sites. The survey was conducted by a research fellow in the Department of Archaeology of the State Historical Museum Mr. Anton A. Simonenko with the participation of Dr. Sergej V. Ivanov and Ms. Aleksandra O. Kitova.

The survey covered an area to the east of the Deir el-Banat cemeteries that was spotted in 2017 (fig. 23). Clarifying the site's stratigraphy, defining its archaeological, geological and geomorphological characteristics were among aims of the survey as well.

Geologically, the site is formed of solid sandstone covered with a layer of eroded travertine. At the top of the sandstone hills and in deposits of the travertine, numerous flint nodules in the shape of pebbles embedded. Apparently, the abundance and availability of flint raw materials attracted people in Paleolithic times. The morphology of flint artifacts discovered on the site proves the long history of visits that took place from the middle to the upper Paleolithic period.



Fig. 23. General view of the surveyed area

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Предварительный отчет о работе миссии Центра египтологических исследований Российской академии наук (ЦЕИ РАН) на памятнике Дейр-эль-Банат (Фаюмский оазис) за 2019 г.

Г. А. Белова, С. В. Иванов

Весной (3 марта — 24 апреля) 2019 г. Центр египтологических исследований Российской академии наук (ЦЕИ РАН) провел 14-й (камеральный) сезон исследований в Дейр-эль-Банате в Фаюмском оазисе. В задачи специалистов входили изучение погребальных обрядов, реставрация находок прошлых лет, разведка, направленная на обнаружение памятников палеолита, а также ряд других работ.

Анализ более чем 20 погребений позволил выявить семь типов погребальных обрядов, проводившихся на некрополе в разное время, в том числе в переходные периоды египетской истории. Захоронения отличаются друг от друга набором погребального инвентаря, пелен и одежд, положением тела усопшего в могиле, процедурой подготовки тела к погребению.

Наиболее интересные образцы археологического текстиля, найденного на памятнике, были отреставрированы в полевых условиях. Остальные ткани — описаны и подготовлены к хранению.

В ходе археологической разведки ученые обнаружили на территории концессии несколько памятников палеолита, выявили их стратиграфию.

Ключевые слова: Египет, Фаюмский оазис, Дейр-эль-Банат, некрополь, птолемеевский период, римский период, византийский период, погребальный обряд, антропология, археологический текстиль, полевая реставрация, памятники палеолита.

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