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New data on the Apries' palace complex

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The paper presents new data on the palatial complex at Kom Tuman (Memphis), which was obtained in course of archaeological excavations held by the Centre for Egyptological Studies in the fall 2021. The works were done in the area of the so-called Postern Gate made in a massive mud-brick ramp that led from Apries's palace to the temple of Ptah. The gate led to a passage that had had several floor levels. The latest one was made upon a layer of burnt brick material that contained burials of an adolescent and an adult persons.

Excavations were also held on the edge of the platform that was used as a foundation for the palatial complex in the squares VI.N4–N5. The uncovered area contained more than 30 000 sherds of pottery vessels, most of which belong to amphorae of Lesbian origin dating to the 6th — late 5th c. BC.

Keywords: Memphis, Kom Tuman, Apries' palace, White Walls, workshops, Late Period, Ptolemaic period, Roman period.

In the fall of 2021, the Centre for Egyptological Studies of the RAS (CES RAS) held a regular field season at the site of Kom Tuman (Memphis)¹. One of the goals of the mission was to continue studying the remaining structures of Apries' palace. The main area of excavations is located south of the palace and conventionally named "Postern Gate" (II.R15–R17; II.S15–S17); the study of this area was launched in 2018 and is still ongoing². In previous years, the gate located at the eastern side of the ramp was cleared and its construction was studied. The ramp leads from the Apries' palace to the temple of Ptah.

¹ Belova, Ivanov 2022.

² Belova 2018: 16–17. For results of pottery analysis see Lammel 2021; Yarmolovich 2019; 2020a; 2020b; 2021a; 2021b, etc.

The gate itself (II.S17) was made of limestone blocks. It has been well preserved. It originally closed with a heavy door. This is evidenced by a deep trough in the body of the lower limestone slab, which served to install the door. In the limestone blocks of the floor, a groove for water drainage was preserved, running parallel to the walls of the gate. According to B. Kemp, “remains of limestone gateways presumably leading to stairways in the thickness of the walls”³. During the excavations, traces of the underground corridor led from the gate to the west with traces of whitewash on the walls and floor were discovered (fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Passage leading to Apries's palace

³ Kemp 1977: 107.

The task of the 2021 season was to draw up a detailed plan and establish the nature of the revealed structure. To trace the corridor, and establish its connection with the ramp, the excavation area was extended to the west and the north of the Postern Gate (II.S16, II.R16). The excavation area was also slightly expanded to the east (II.R17–S17) to join our planum with one of the Portuguese Mission⁴.

The area planned for excavation was cleared of turab and debris⁵, as well as the mixed soil left over from the excavations of the Portuguese Mission. In the course of this work, in squares II.S17–R17 was assembled pottery with well-preserved Ptolemaic elements and with Old and New Kingdom intrusions. The bulk of the fragments dates back to the 5th–3rd c. BC. The assemblage includes imported fine wares of the 4th c. BC, amongst which Attic salt cellars, as well as Aegean amphorae, were presented (21/0001).

The corridor began with a large vestibule about 2 m wide and 2.50 m long, which then was transfigured into a passage 1.50 m wide, and after 1.50 m connected at right angles to the main part of the corridor going in a southerly direction. The width of this part was 3.50 m. The corridor, undoubtedly, came right up to the palace, however, at 14.00 m from its beginning and at a level of about 14.40 m AMSL its traces are cut off. It is probably impossible to trace the entire length of the corridor, as this is apparently from where F. Petrie's excavation zone began. The latter disrupted the already poorly preserved traces of link between neighbouring structures. Illegal excavations at this site further aggravated the situation. That is why closer to the palace it was only possible to identify high-quality brickwork.

The walls and the floor of the passage were whitewashed. Judging by the large clusters of whitewash fragments found on the floor, the ceiling of the corridor was also whitewashed. Whitewash on the walls has been preserved to a height of 11–12 cm from the floor level. Fragments of the whitewashed floor covered with a thick layer of lime-like material can be traced throughout the corridor. The floor was levelled and whitewashed several times according to numerous layers of whitewash preserved in the eastern profile of the corridor. This profile across the corridor shows a sequence of mud/clay floors. In Trench 420, at least four-floor levels are traced to a depth of 15 cm from the surface (15.10 to 14.95 m AMSL). Herewith the plaster used to whitewash the walls was about 1.0 cm thick, whereas a denser solution of up to 2.0 cm thick was used for the floor.

The brickwork under the floor of the corridor can be traced to a depth of 1.30+x m and it is an integral part of the brickwork to the east and west of the corridor (fig. 2). There is no doubt that the passage was incorporated into the body of the ramp. The exact width of the ramp has not been established, but due to the results of excavations to the east of the corridor, it is significantly higher than indicated by B. Kemp⁶.

The large-sized bricks (50×25×12–15 cm) used to build the ramp were carefully moulded from high-quality material of both silt and mud. High-quality brickwork, of course, provided strength, reliability, and durability for the structure.

Several accumulations of pottery were found in Corridor 323. The assemblage which was discovered directly on the floor of the corridor at level 15.09–14.99 is represented by mainly Persian pottery with a few Old and New Kingdom, as well as Third Intermediate

⁴ Trindade Lopes 2007; 2011; Trindade Lopes, Pereira 2015.

⁵ Construction waste of different times.

⁶ B. Kemp believed it was 87 m (Kemp 1977: 107).



Fig. 2. Brickwork of the ramp

Period fragments. This assemblage contains also some definite 3rd, if not 2nd c. BC elements (II.S16, 21/0010), which indicates the activity of the Ptolemies in one capacity or another.

It is significant that the pottery found deeper on the previous layers of the corridor floor dates from the Late Period, including the Saite period, and does not contain later material. Moreover, the quantity of fragments of ceramics from earlier periods is noticeable. On the floor in Corridor 323 (II.S16) at level 14.60–14.71 m AMSL assemblage of Late Period up to the 5th c. BC was found, which did not contain anything Ptolemaic but a few Old and New Kingdom intrusions. Local ware includes Nile silt bottles of the late 6th to early 5th c. BC. Imports are represented by the Chian and Lesbian amphorae as well as by several Levantine jars (21/0025). The fragments collected closer to the entrance of the corridor are also dated mainly to the 5th century BC (21/0004). Pottery in the fill of Pit 397 (II.S16) is dated back to the Late Period with some fragments of the late 5th — 4th c. BC (21/0040).

To clarify the time of construction of the corridor, several trenches were laid. The meter-wide Trench 420 was cut between the Walls 400 и 402 through Corridor 323, Grave 391 and Pit 397. At level 15.10–15.05 small assemblage was collected dated to the Late Period: nothing later than the 5th c. BC was discovered. The fragments of the late 6th to early 5th c. BC (21/0044) were found at level 15.05–14.95 (21/0045). Below Floor Level 424, ceramics are represented by fragments which were dated to the late 6th to early 5th c. BC with numerous earlier, Old and New Kingdom intrusions (21/0050).

In the brickwork of Wall 400 mainly Old and New Kingdom sherds but also some fragments of Late Period were discovered and there is nothing dated to the Ptolemaic period. Two assemblages (21/0020 and 21/0033), one of which included imported Levantine jar sherds, were found to the west of Wall 400 at level 14.70–14.60; both are dated back to the Saite-Persian period.

Thus, the time of construction and operation of the underground passage should be defined with confidence as Saite-Persian one. There is no doubt that it was in direct connection with Apries' palace.

Archaeological research has shown that the gate opened the way to an underground passage laid in the massif of the ramp connecting Apries' palace and the temple of Ptah. The corridor went first in the western direction, and then turned at right angles to the north and ended in one of the rooms of the palace. Several blocks that made up the small doorway, discovered by F. Petrie during his excavation of Apries' palace inside the mouth of the new roadway and to the east of it⁷, was probably the gateway providing the entrance directly to the palace. It should be noted that stone doorways were most often used in ancient underground constructions.

Numerous finds of imported ceramics, primarily Greek, once again confirm the reports of ancient authors that Greek mercenaries were part of the Egyptian army in the Late Period and fought also on the side of the Persians. Military detachments of Greeks were stationed as guards in the palace itself and as well on the territory of the camp⁸. Nor should the strength of trade ties with Greece be underestimated, nor should the presence of Greek craftsmen, who were enjoying a well-deserved reputation at the court of the Egyptian pharaohs. International relations already in those days were not only the exchange of goods, and raw materials, but also services and products of intellectual labour. Traces of the presence of the Greeks are ubiquitous on the site. Fragments of North Aegean amphorae dated back to the 4th c. BC were found in the underground passage at different levels (21/0012). Chian amphorae, basket handle jars, and torpedoes all dated to the 5th century BC (21/0040), as well as late 4th c. Greek fine wares, 5th c. imported lamps (21/0010) have been discovered everywhere. Imports are also illustrated by Lesbian amphorae as well as by several Levantine jars. The material is richly represented and belongs at the same time.

During the excavations of Apries' palace, F. Petrie discovered fragments of Greek and Persian weapons. His finds included various types of copper alloy arrowheads, which were very common⁹. F. Petrie also managed to find a long sword in a sheath with a bone handle, probably of Persian origin¹⁰. Thus, bone was used in the decoration of weapons in those days. During the expedition of the CES RAS, a bone arrowhead was found in the brickwork of the floor among the fragments of ceramics dated to the 5th BC (21/0005/001). Such a find is quite rare and judging by the thoroughness of the production, the arrowhead was rather an object of ceremonial dress.

Later, due to some events or simply over time, the eastern part of the corridor was destroyed and used for burials. The fired clay seems to be a levelling layer that goes at the level of 14.84–14.88 under the whitewashed floor. This layer is very thick up to 0.50 m (fig. 3).

⁷ Petrie 1909: 4.

⁸ Herod. III, 91; Petrie 1909.

⁹ Petrie 1910: 41.

¹⁰ Petrie 1910: 40–41.



Fig. 3. A layer of burnt clay in the eastern profile of the passage

According to the profiles of the trench laid to determine the stratigraphy of the underground passage, the layer passed closer to the northern wall of the limestone gate and to the east of them, where the furnaces later functioned¹¹. The profiles also showed that a layer of burnt clay and fragments of the furnace was located above the layer of the destruction of the brickwork of the ramp. The graves were stretched along the eastern wall of the passage, they were dug after its partial destruction. Under the graves at level 14.63, the brickwork of the ramp can again be traced.

To date, two burials have been discovered: a child (14.73–14.83 AMSL) and an adult (14.62–14.71 AMSL), both corpses skeletonized (fig. 4–5). The graves have the shape of elongated ovals that taper to the leg area. It should be noted that the sides of the graves were made of chunks of burnt clay, while the bodies were covered with a layer of the same but finely dispersed material. After that, the entire surface of the corridor was evened, and probably a new floor was laid above the burials.

The adolescent's body was laid on his back stretched with his head facing south. The hands were folded on the pubic area (though the left hand is missing). The head was placed on a fragment of the burnt clay, such fragments fringed the southern side of the grave. The

¹¹ Tridade Lopes 2011: 252–253.



Fig. 4. Burial of a child



Fig. 5. Burial of an adult

feet resting on the north side, are also lined with large fragments of burnt clay. On the sides of the grave at the level of 14.72, there were found fragments of ceramics that dated back to the Late Period. Some sherds could be more precisely dated to the late 6th c. BC but nothing is later than the 5th c. BC. Fragments of fine ware handled jar with a flattened rim of Persian type were found (21/0018). The pottery collected in the fill of Pit 393/324, next to the child's burial (21/0023), corresponds to the pottery from the burial itself and is also represented by fragments exclusively dated back to the Late Period, including Saite times, but nothing dated to the Ptolemaic period was found. The dead child probably had earrings of grey metal (badly decayed), which were traced only by the unusual colour preserved at the level of the earlobes.

The adult was laid on his back, with his head to the north. The burial was partially destroyed and only his rib cage and skull were preserved. More detailed information will be available after examination by physical anthropologists. No burial goods were found. Only ceramic fragments remained on the graves' sides, dating back to the Saite-Persian period (21/0058).

In the southwestern corner of the passage, just opposite the burials, a significant drain installation was found (fig. 6). To study the structure of this drain, a trench was laid on the north side of the drain with a width of 1.00 m, a length of about 2.00 m and a depth of about 2 m. The vertical drain was made in a large pit (diameter c. 100 cm) the depth of the latter was more than 1.50 m. The lower part of the pit was filled with fragments of ceramic vessels, the number of which exceeded 10 000. Two big-size amphorae without bottoms, one inserted into the other, were installed atop these fragments. Fragments are mainly represented by Levantine torpedo jars dating back to the Persian period. To stabilize these vessels, rather large limestone blocks were used.

The underground passage dug during the construction of the palace was used at least in the Persian period.



Fig. 6. Drain installed in the underground passage

Besides the main work at the Postern Gate the mission conducted an archaeological survey at the Northern Site (V.R5–R6), which was caused by the illegal activities of inhabitants. At one of the areas in the northern part of the site, preparations for archaeological excavations began in 2005. In this part of the camp geophysical research managed by T. Herbich was carried out. Magnetic prospecting in this area was a part of the field program of the expedition of CES RAS. Studies have shown that the surface is uneven, ranging in height from 26 to 33 m above sea level. There were evident hollows left by earlier excavations (?) and by sebakhin' digging, which revealed numerous mud bricks and fragments of dressed limestone blocks. Structures resembling small villas were identified.

The area subjected to illegal excavations in 2021 was cleaned of grass and garbage.

This part of the palace structures was not included in F. Petrie's excavation area and was not a matter of his interest. A regular masonry of massive well-crafted and fitted to each other limestone blocks was discovered at a depth of 3–4 m from the modern surface in one of the old robbers' pits (V.R6). An accumulation of limestone blocks of medium size with traces of regular masonry was reached in the neighbourhood. No traces of decoration or inscriptions were found on the blocks. The pits were cleared and conserved for further excavation, which will hopefully provide detailed information on the area and allow us to find the contexts that were not contaminated by robbers (fig. 7).

Another important goal of the season was to determine the size of the massive platform on which Apries' Palace was erected (VI.N4–N5). According to the satellite image, the platform significantly exceeded the size of the alleged foundation of the palace.

B. Kemp was the first to point out that the palace was collapsing catastrophically. So, F. Petrie excavated only part of the palace, noticeably destroyed by 1909. By the 1970-s, only half of what F. Petrie had excavated had been preserved¹². B. Kemp thus indirectly raised the question of the need to determine the true dimensions of both the palace and the platform that served as its foundation. B. Kemp also tried to determine the thickness of the platform; however, his measurements were not accurate.

Thus, the task to revive the plan for the palace complex in its historical development remains urgent. By now the possibility of its solution is facilitated by the level of technology development.

Using space images and geodesic surveys, the corners of the palace platform were preliminary detected. In the 2018 season, during core drilling in the area of the planned points, presumably corresponding to the tops of the angles of the platform and studying the samples obtained, the location of the palatial platform on the ground was clarified. The thickness of the platform, which reached at least 16 m, was also specified.

In 2021 to reach this goal we opened a new excavation area in squares VI.N4–N5, which is a hypothetical location in the southeastern corner of the platform (fig. 8). With a high degree of probability, it can be assumed that two lines of walls running perpendicular to each other, discovered during excavations, formed the angle of the platform. The walls are revealed to be a height of 1.26 m.

The inner segment of the structure (the western one) consisted of two walls that formed a right angle. Due to the decomposition of bricks brickwork is not recognizable.

¹² Kemp 1977: 102.



Fig. 7. Robber's pit in V.R6



Fig. 8. Southeast corner of the platform

The width of the walls according to preliminary calculations was $1.05 + x$ m. The outer segment of the structure (the eastern one) represented a fragment of the wall with a width of 4.50 m. The size of the mud bricks from which the wall was built (35–40×15–20×12 cm) is consistent with the size of the brick of the palatial structures, including the ramp, although the position of the actual angle of the outer walls has not yet been determined. However, the trench between the lines of the inner and outer walls, having a width of 2.50 m, forms a right angle. At the moment, the trench is open to the level of 15.85.

In the layer of mixed soil in the trench between the two parallel walls forming a corner of the platform, a large assemblage of ceramics was collected on a segment 1.5 m wide and 10 m long at level 15.80–15.50. The top layer of the ceramic complex dates mainly back to the 5th and 4th c. BC, but with the presence of clear Ptolemaic and late Ptolemaic elements. Amongst the latest fragments are the base of a Mareotis amphora (1st c. BC to 1st c. AD). The other Ptolemaic sherds are belonging to the 3rd to 2nd c. BC. The Late Period material is typically the 5th c. in date, with some fragments of the late 6th c. BC. It includes a large proportion of imported amphorae from the Aegean (with a majority of Corinthian and Lesbain amphorae), East Greek fine ware pottery, and Levantine jars. Imports also include 4th to early 3rd c. BC mushroom rim amphorae (21/0021). The other is a very large deposit located under the described one, mostly from the late 5th to 6th c. BC, with definite later intrusions, up to the Ptolemaic period. This assemblage is related in character to 21/0021 but it is more firmly

anchored in the Late Period with far fewer Ptolemaic sherds. Besides being earlier than the former, it also has a still greater proportion of imported jars. Corinthian and Lesbian amphorae (which so far have not been the most frequent at Kom Tuman) are the dominant Aegean imports. Their numbers are nonetheless easily surpassed by those of Levantine transport vessels, of which about two hundred have been tallied so far (21/0042). Assumption of Sabine Laemmel that the ceramic-rich deposit might be a pottery dump from F. Petrie's excavations of the palace have some reason. However, the fact that a layer consisting of fragments of ceramics is oriented along the trench and bounded by its walls, rather, in our opinion, indicates the possibility of late restructuring of the structure and the purposeful filling of the trench. In any case, the striking homogeneity of this deposit suggests that its components mostly originate from a single location, such as a palace storeroom.

Fragments of painted plaster were found in the mixed soil, which may indicate the decor of the interior of some palatial structures (21/0022/002, 21/0057/002).

Thus, the excavation of this part of the platform led to intriguing conclusions. In the trench, the largest accumulation of fragments of vessels of Aegean imports discovered on Kom Tuman, which date back to the 6th — late 5th c. BC, was found. In total more than 30 000 fragments were collected — most of them belonged to the Levantine torpedo jars, the same type as the ones used for the drain in the Postern Gate area, but another very significant part was grey clay amphorae for wine from the island of Lesbos, which indicates not only the direction of foreign trade relations in the Saite period but also preferences of the Saite pharaohs. For instance, amphorae of Lesbian origin were used for expensive wine. The vessels dumped here were used as containers for the elite products consumed in the royal palace.

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Новые данные о дворцовом комплексе Априя в Мемфисе

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В статье приводятся новые данные о дворце Априя, полученные в ходе археологических исследований Центра египтологических исследований РАН на памятнике Ком-Туман (Мемфис) осенью 2021 г. В этом сезоне работы велись в районе так называемого «тайного» хода, сооруженного внутри массивного пандуса, который соединял дворец Априя и храм бога Птаха. За воротами, сделанными из крупных известняковых блоков, начинался длинный коридор. Пол коридора сооружен поверх мощного слоя пачины, в котором были обнаружены захоронения подростка и взрослого человека.

Второй раскоп был разбит на южной границе платформы, сложенной из сырцового кирпича, на которой был возведен дворцовый комплекс, — в квадратах VI.N4–N5. В ходе работ было обнаружено большое скопление керамики, содержащее более 30000 фрагментов керамических сосудов. Большая часть фрагментов — это остатки лесбосских амфор, датированных VI–V вв. до н. э.

Ключевые слова: Мемфис, Ком-Туман, дворец Априя, Белые Стены, Поздний период, птолемеевский период, римский период, лесбосские амфоры.

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