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CEMETERIES OF THE LATE PERIOD
IN DAKHLA OASIS

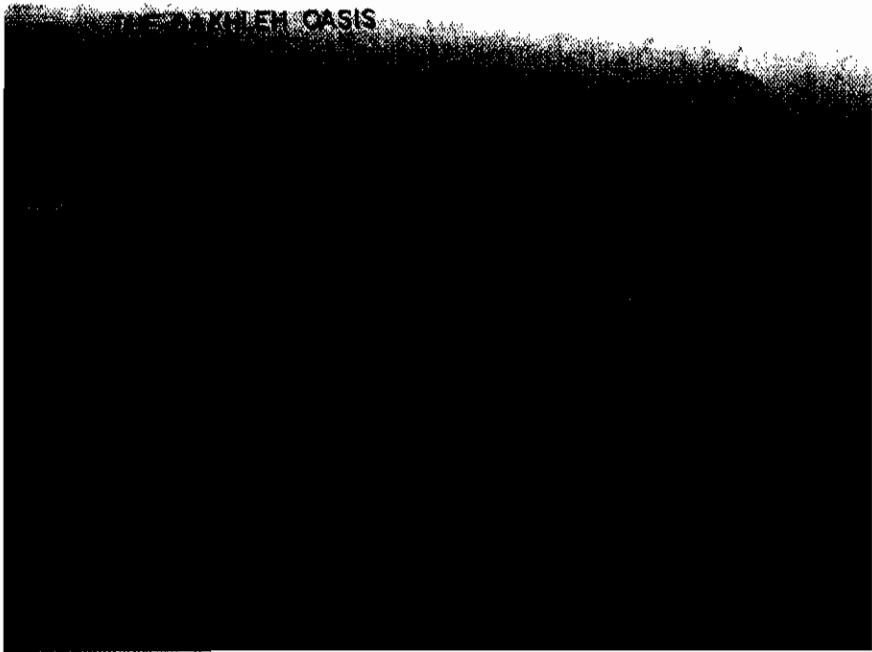


Fig. 1. Dakhla Oasis general plan.

Abstract.

Many archaeological sites are scattered through the Dakhla Oasis dating from all the major periods: from prehistory through pharaonic to Greek and Roman periods. There are also a number of important Coptic and Islamic archaeological sites.

This paper will focus on some late sites used as necropoleis, to compare their architecture and artifacts brought to light during the excavations. The Supreme Council of Antiquities recently excavated four of them: Tell Marqula, Tell Ayn el-Hammam, El-Homayat B. and Bir Talaat el-Arab. Two other sites, Ayn Turghi and Mut el-Kharab, were studied by the Dakhla Oasis Project.

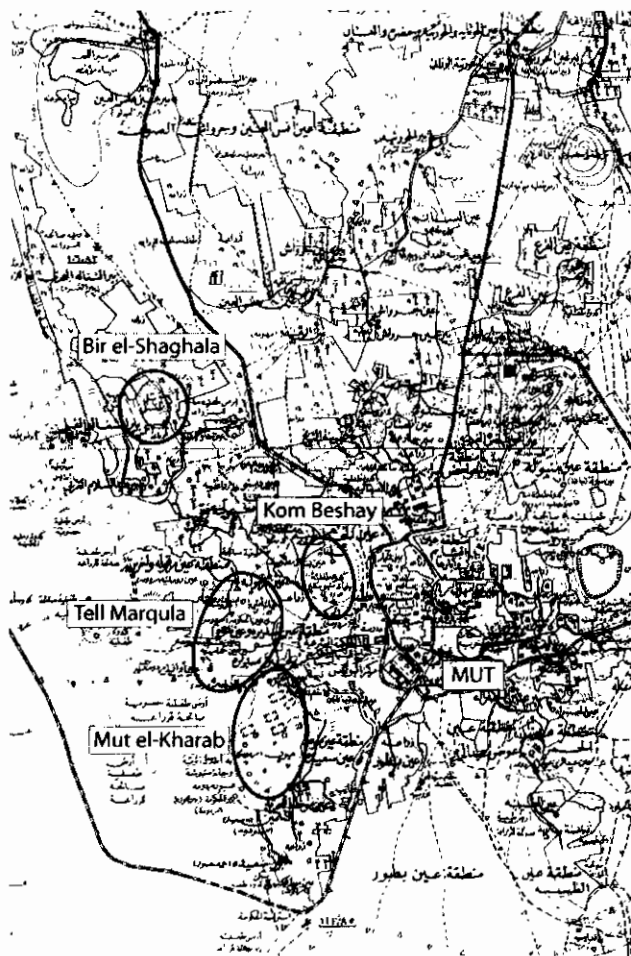


Fig. 2. Geographical map of Mut area with the position of its surroundings cemeteries.

1. The area of Mut.

1.1 Tell Marqula.



Fig. 3. Tell Marqula tombs.

Tell Marqula is located west of Mut, the capital of the oasis. The necropolis of Tell Marqula probably covers completely the area of the tell. The tombs have been built both on the top of the hill and on its slopes. In the northern, eastern and western parts of the hill the tombs are hewn at different depths in the geological clay layers. In the southeastern zone the tombs are distributed at different elevations along the slope of the hill.

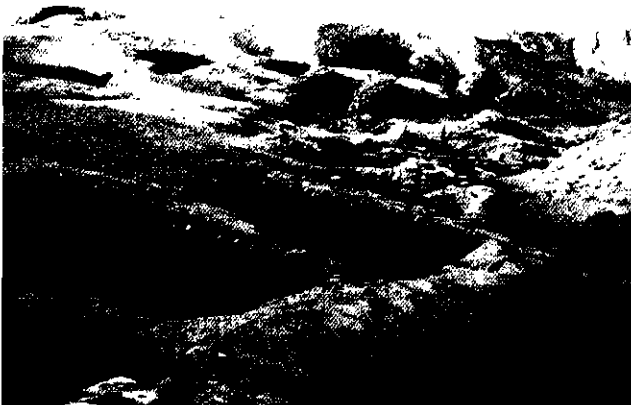


Fig. 4. Tell Marqula tombs.



Fig. 5. Tell Marqula tombs.

Style of tombs Necropoles of Tell Marqula

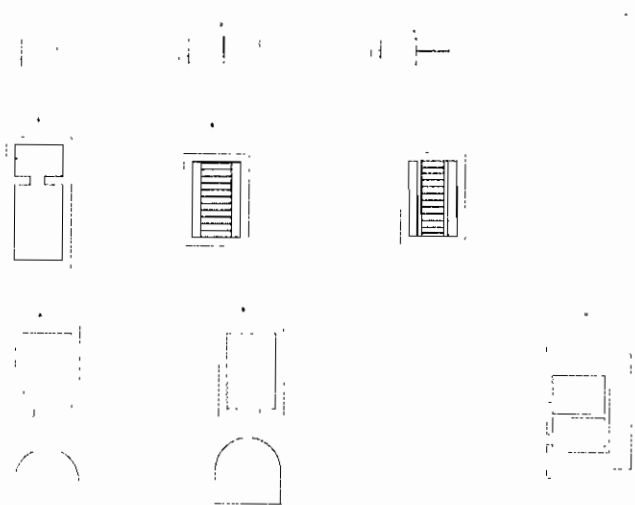


Fig. 6. Typology of tombs at Tell Marqula.

Most of them are built in mud-brick with vaulted ceilings, some others have flat roofs. In some cases sandstone blocks have been used to build partly or completely the tomb. Sometimes only the floor and/or the foundations are built in stone, but in some others, floor, walls and vaults are made of sandstone. The tombs are of different design as they differ by their plan and the distribution of the chambers.



Fig. 7. Multi-chambered tombs.

In some cases they are multi-chambered. The access to the funerary chambers differs from tomb to tomb and pits or corridors are located in different positions. It has been noted that there is no fixed position or orientation for the coffins inside the rooms.

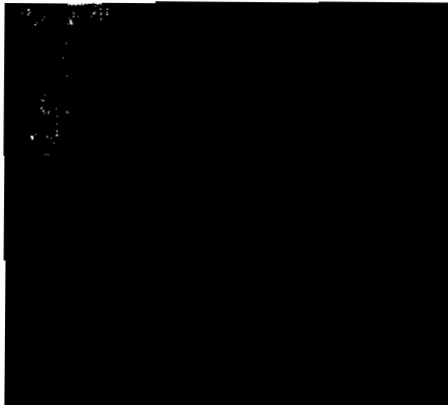


Fig. 8. Tomb with stone foundation and two coffins.



Fig. 9. Tomb with the external structure in mud-brick and the inner structure in sandstone.

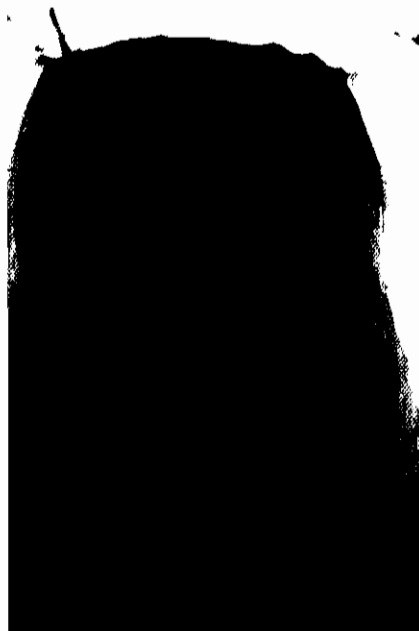


Fig. 10. Sandstone tomb with two burial levels separated by flat slabs: exterior and interior.

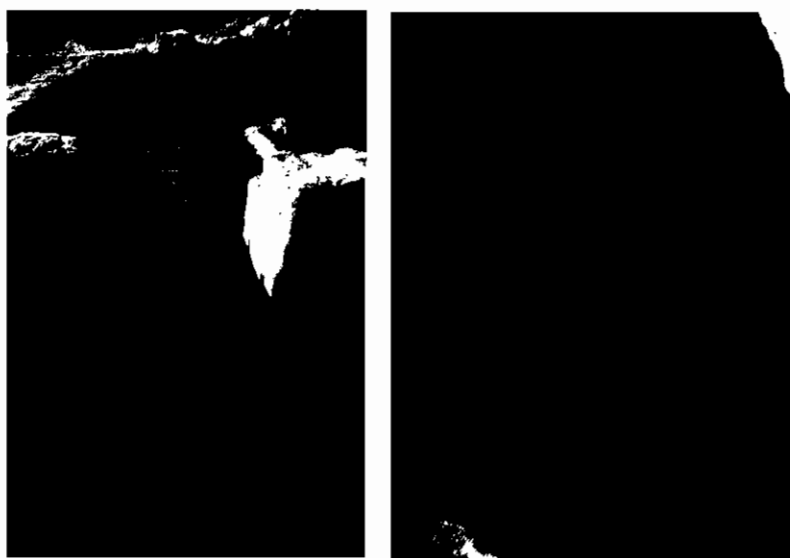


Fig. 11. Tomb with vaulted room built in sandstone blocks: exterior and interior.

The tombs contained plain sandstone coffins, some of them having been hewn from one single block, while others had been built on the spot using sandstone slabs. Terracotta coffins were also used. In some cases the burial chambers housed more than one sarcophagus.



Fig. 12. An example of arrangement of sarcophagi in one chamber.

The funerary deposits consist of ceramic vessels, faïence new-year bottles¹, amulets (like scarabs etc.), bronze mirrors and rings. These do not lead to a well-defined dating. For instance, the new-year bottles, or the scaraboid inscribed with the name of Psamtek are well known from the 26th dynasty. On the other hand some of the ceramic vessels belong clearly to the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods.

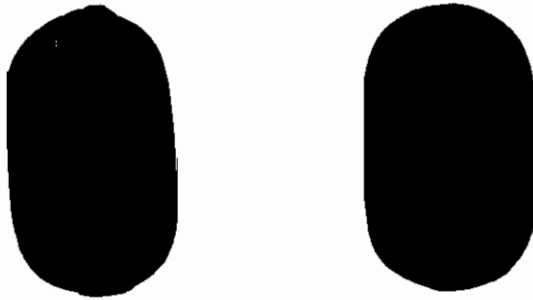


Fig. 13. Scaraboid with Psamtek name.

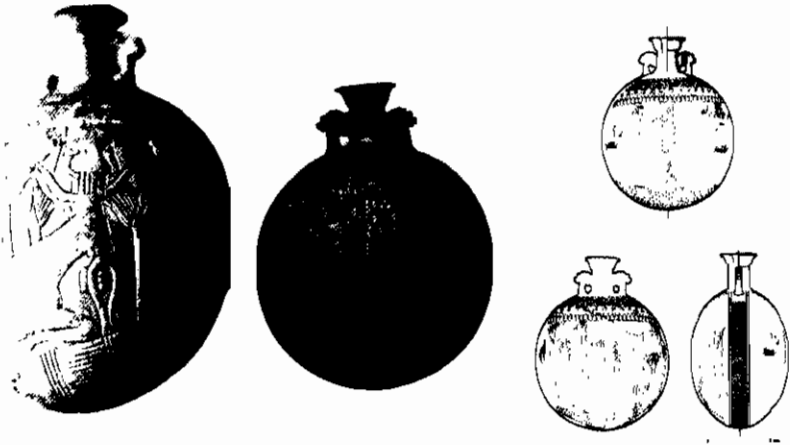


Fig. 14. One of the four *faïence* new-year bottles.

¹ S. YAMANI, *New Year's Bottle from Tell Marqula (Dakhla Oasis)*, «BIFAO» 102 (2002), pp. 425-436.



Fig. 15. A female statuette probably used as an amulet.

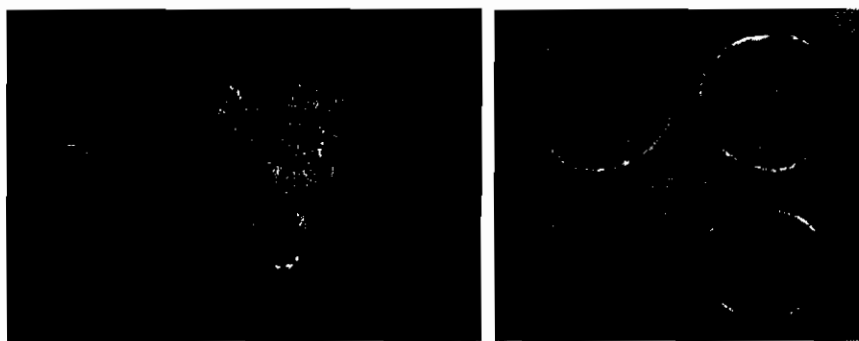


Fig. 16. Bronze mirror and rings.



Fig. 17. *Faïence* scarab with wings.



Fig. 18. Group of *faïence* oudjat-eye amulets.

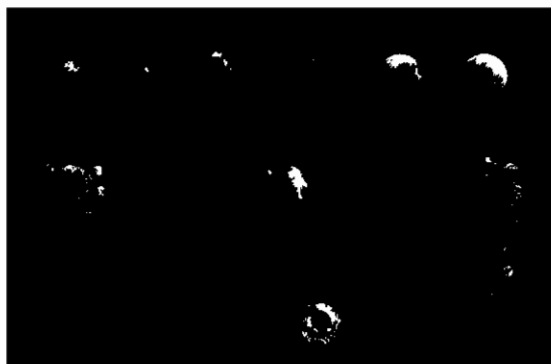


Fig. 19. Different types of *faïence* and glass beads.

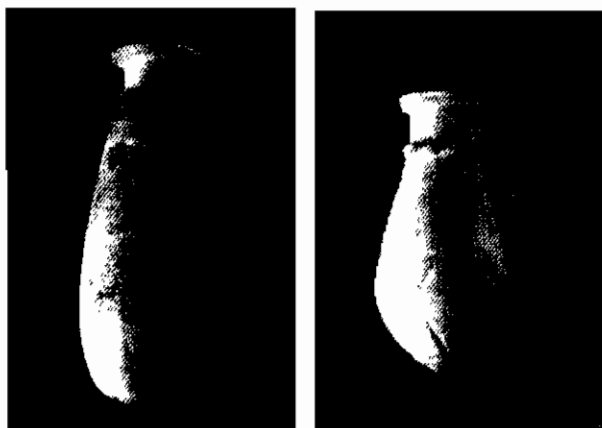


Fig. 20. Two *alabastra* vessels of calcite.



Fig. 21. Ceramic and sandstone *shawabtis*.

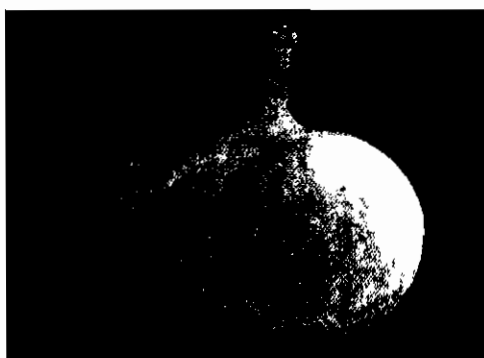


Fig. 22. *Siga* vessel (27th-30th dynasties).



Fig. 23. Ceramic lamp with woman face.

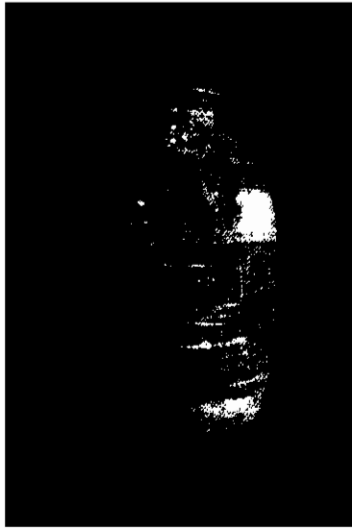


Fig. 24. decorated jar (28th-30th dynasties).

1.2 Mut el-Kharab.



Fig. 25. Remains of the *temenos* of the temple of Seth.

Mut el-Kharab is located in the southern part of Mut. Its main impressive remains include a temple of Seth, lord of the oasis and a cemetery. The pottery survey allowed collecting a lot of sherds from the late Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom, Late Period and Mameluk period. Recent archaeological investigation revealed a cemetery located in the southeast corner of the *temenos* of the temple.



Fig. 26. Mut cemetery.

One of the two excavated tombs belonged to a priest named Sutekhardis². The burial was articulated in one main room with a barrel-vaulted stone roof and two secondary chambers. On the burial chamber inner walls there are two religious mortuary figures and texts that enable us to date the tomb within dynasty 27th.

² C.A. HOPE, *Egypt and Lybia: the Excavations at Mut el-Kharab in Egypt's Dakhleh Oasis*, «The Artefact» 24 (2001), pp. 41-43.

1.3 El-Homayat B.

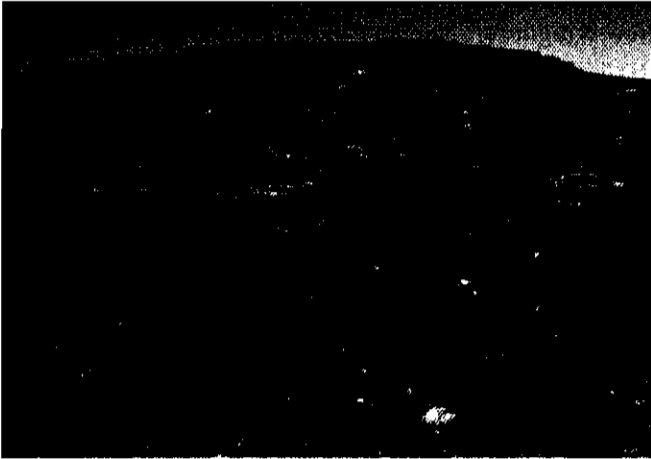


Fig. 27. Mud-brick tombs dug into a spring mound.

El-Homayat B is located in eastern part of Mut. The site is an elevated hill on which is an old spring located on the northern part of it. The spring is now dry and hosts a cemetery with a number of tombs dug into the clay and built in mud bricks.

The excavations proved that the hill contains groups of tombs carved into the hill and its slope.



Fig. 28. A tomb on the slope.

Test trenches dug in a number of burials revealed that they were mud brick vaulted constructions. 18 tombs were found and they can be divided into five types.

The objects found, such as terracotta coffins, bronze rings and pottery vessels, date these tombs to the Late Period.



Fig. 29. Terracotta coffins.

1.4 Tell Ayn el-Hammam.



Fig. 30. The cemetery.

Tell Ayn el-Hammam is located in the center of Mut. It is a hill on which a cemetery with many tombs in mud bricks with vaulted ceilings is still visible. The tombs are concentrated in two areas around the hill: one group is to the south, at the top of the hill and at the base of its slope. The second is placed north in a circle spring mound of clay. No tombs were placed in the middle of the hill, probably because of the rocky composition of the subsoil, very hard to dig in.

In the northwest of the hill, some mud brick Islamic tombs with domes were built.

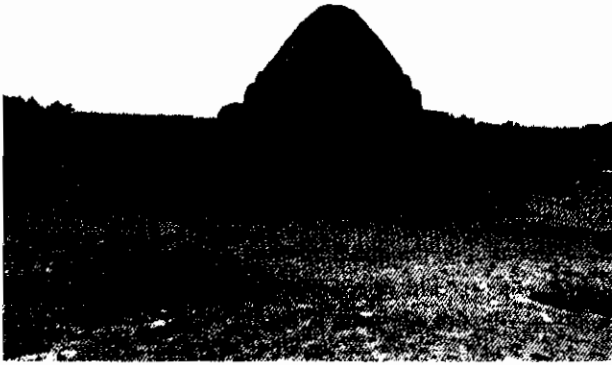


Fig. 31. Islamic *sheikh* tomb.

Sandstone sarcophagi and pottery coffins were found in the tombs located south of the hill, while nine golden beads and some Bes and Sekhmet amulets were collected in the tombs built around the spring. All the objects found can be dated to the Late Period.



Fig. 32. Offering table in sandstone.

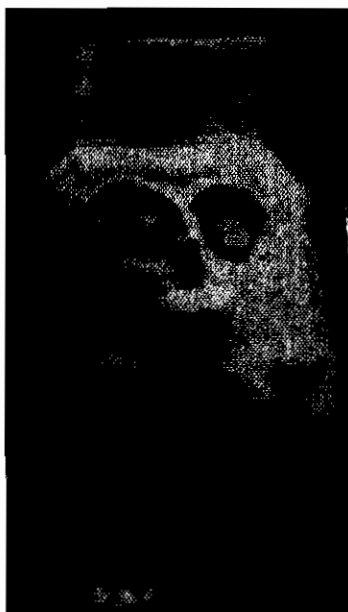


Fig. 33. Bes vase.

Nowadays these sites are not under SCA protection and are going to be used by the Government to build tourist facilities, being located right in the middle of the city.

2. Dakhla east: Ayn Turghi.

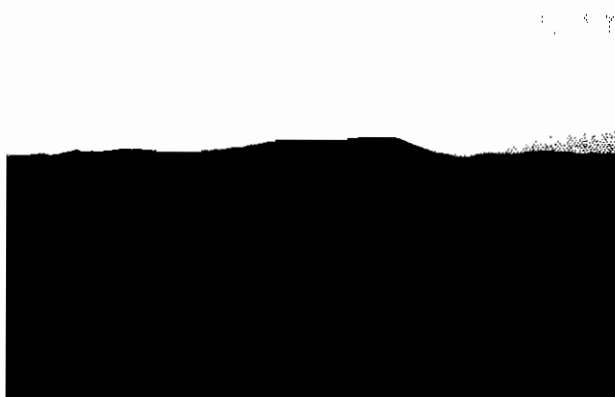


Fig. 34. Balat cemetery.

Ayn Turghi is located south of Balat, which lies about 45 km far from Mut, the capital of Dakhla Oasis. It is a cemetery with about 200 graves dug into a large, curving mound of clay.

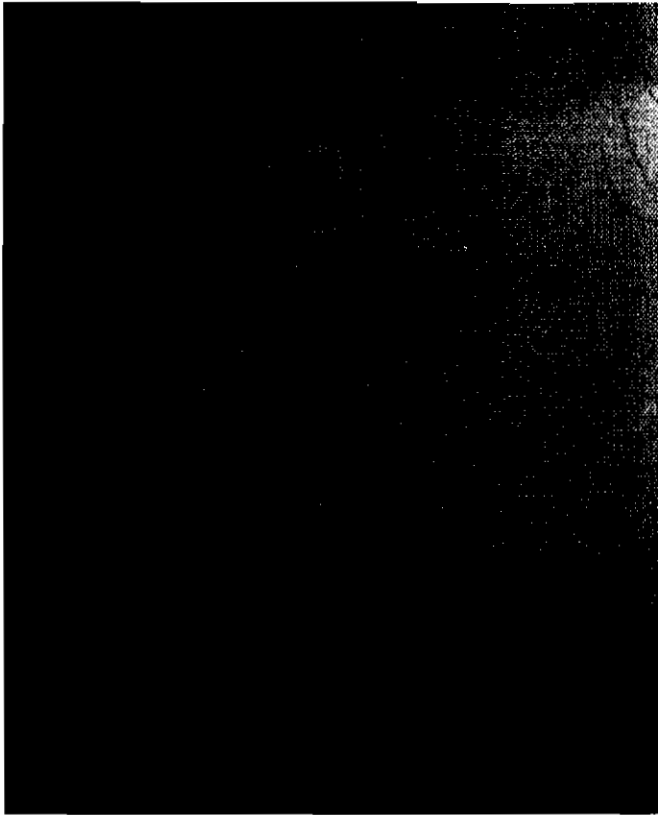


Fig. 35. Plan of the southwest segment of Ayn Turghi.

The excavations revealed the presence of tombs of different periods³. The earliest tombs date from the Second Intermediate Period. In them pottery vessels, jewelry and amulets were found. Other burials dates to the 19th, 21st-22nd, 26th, 27th dynasty and Ptolemaic period. Among the findings we can list some painted amphora of the 19th dynasty; *cartonnage* cases of 21st-22nd and 26th dynasties; and a group of coffins of the Persian Period (5th-4th centuries B.C.).

³ A.J. MILLS, *The Dakhleh Oasis Project. Report on the Fifth Season of Survey, October 1982-January 1983*, «JSSEA» 13 (1983), p. 128, site no. 31/435-D5-2.



Fig. 38. Inner and outer wooden coffins.

3. Dakhla west: Bir Talaat el-Arab.

The area of Bir Talaat el-Arab is located southwest of the village of Mawhub which lies about 35 km from Mut. The area is named after a small deserted village situated to the south of the archaeological remains. The survey done before starting the archaeological work revealed that the site is situated on a plateau, that extends from Ezbet Abd el-Qadir, and that rises gradually from north to south.



Fig. 39. Plateau at Bir Talaat el-Arab.

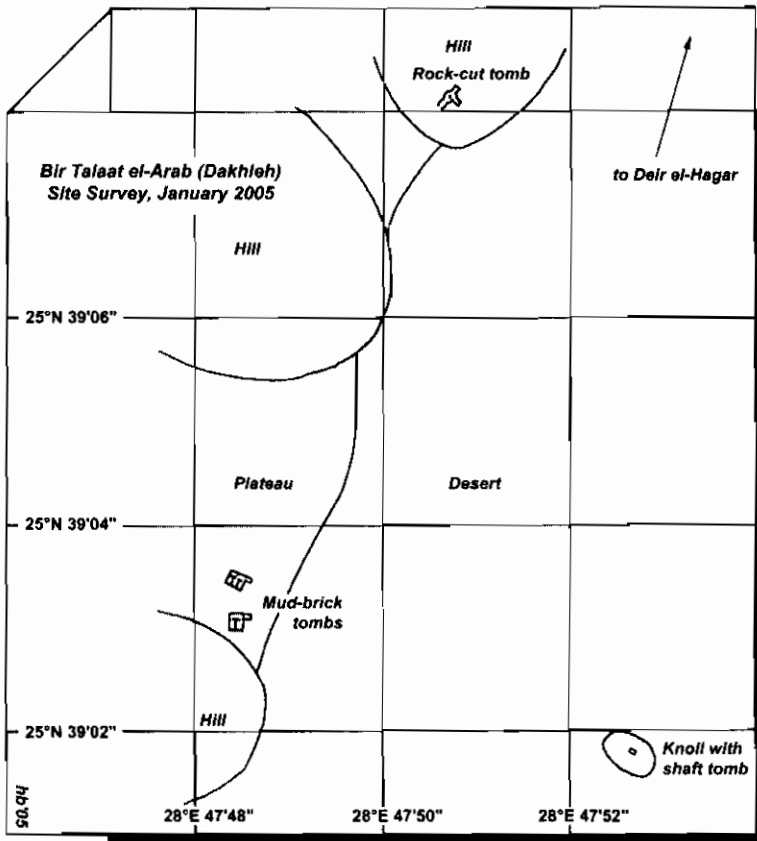


Fig. 40. Bir Talaat el-Arab; site survey plan, January 2005.

Some ancient buildings are visible on the surface, whereas others are buried. The plateau is sloping down on the east side towards the Deir el-Hagar temple, where other tombs are cut into the rock. The plateau ends on the southern side with some high hills, where some tombs were cut. The tombs were arranged in different ways according to the orography of the hill. Mud brick tombs, rock-cut tombs and a shaft are present in this site.



Fig. 41. Shaft in the hill.

The survey and excavation works on one hill revealed a new architectural type of tomb, which has not been encountered before in the oasis. The tomb is fronted by an open court, which contains the tomb's entrance, measuring 1 m in width.



Fig. 42. Rock-cut tomb.

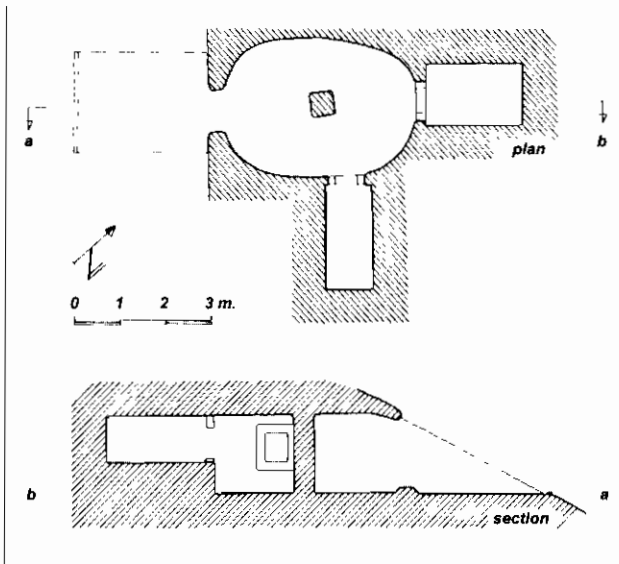


Fig. 43. Plan and section of the tomb.

There is a main burial chamber inside this kind of tomb, from which two secondary rooms open, the floor level of which is 75 cm higher than the tomb's general floor level. The main burial chamber is rectangular. A squared sandstone pillar (178 cm high, 43 cm wide) is carved in the middle of the main room, supporting the ceiling.

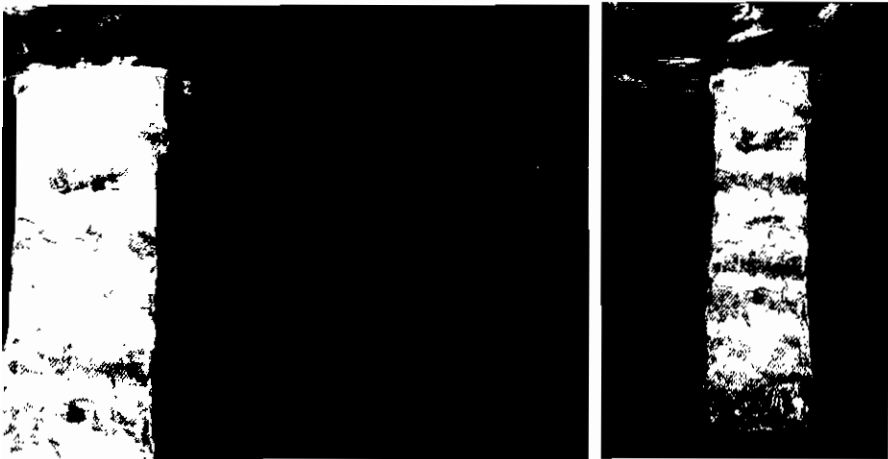


Fig. 44. The main burial chamber with two secondary rooms.

Another hill with archaeological remains was selected for excavation. It is located to the south of the highest hills orientated east-west, and it is characterized by an almost flat surface (up to 2 m in height). Excavation and survey revealed the presence of two narrow rectangular mud brick tombs, both oriented east-west. Each tomb opened into a shaft leading from the superstructure to a group of burial chambers.

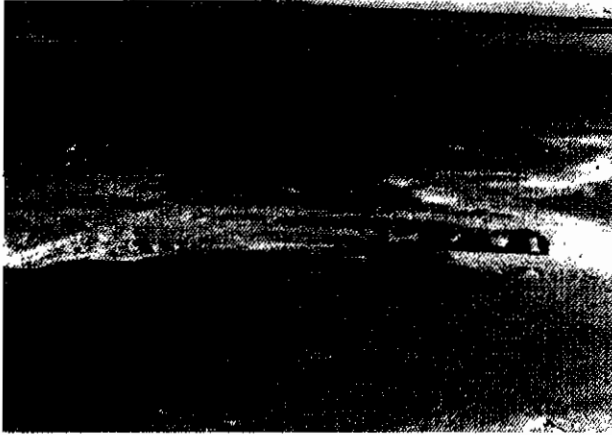


Fig. 45. Two rectangular mud-brick tombs.

The first tomb consists of a shaft that leads to five burial chambers that were originally covered by vaulted roofs, found already partly destroyed.

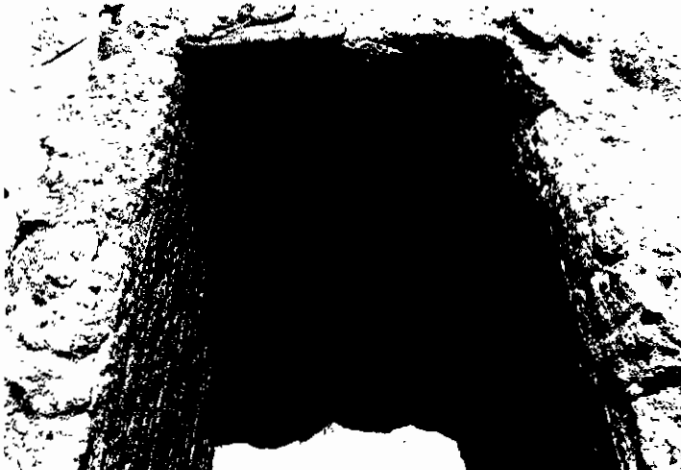


Fig. 46. The first tomb.

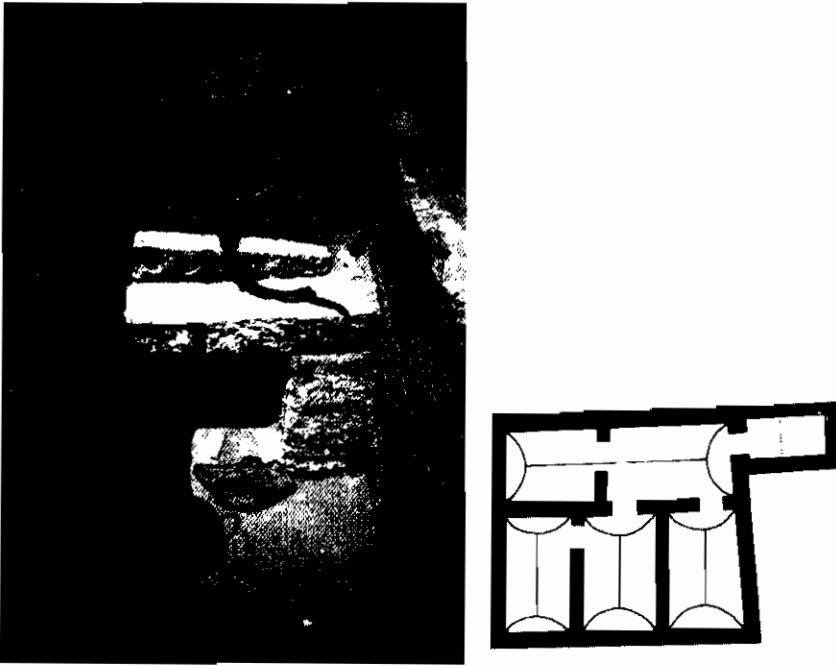


Fig. 47. The second tomb.

The second tomb is located to the south of the first one. In its eastern side is a rectangular shaft (2.50 x 1.50 m) with a monumental entrance built at its bottom and leading to the burial chamber. The jambs (80 cm high) and the lintel (1.15 m in width) are made in sandstone and the door was closed by means of a sandstone slab that blocked the access. A hole is drilled on the upper edge of the slab, to which a rope of palm fibers is still attached, to lift the block up.

Behind this door is the tomb's main chamber, which is of rectangular shape with two doors in its southern wall, leading into side chambers with vaulted roofs now partially collapsed. The artifacts, such as wooden coffins and pottery found in these two mud brick tombs, date back to the Late Period.



Fig. 48. Main chamber of the second tomb with wooden and terracotta coffins.

The wooden coffins found in mud brick tombs are dating to 27th dynasty and are similar to those found in Tell Marqula tombs and in Ain Turghi area.

However, this huge cemetery at Bir Talaat el-Arab was used for a long span of time and not only during the Late Period. Some pottery vessels testify the Second Intermediate Period and some rock-cut tombs are dating to Roman period. These are similar in the shape to those found at Mozawaka and Ismant el-Kharab.

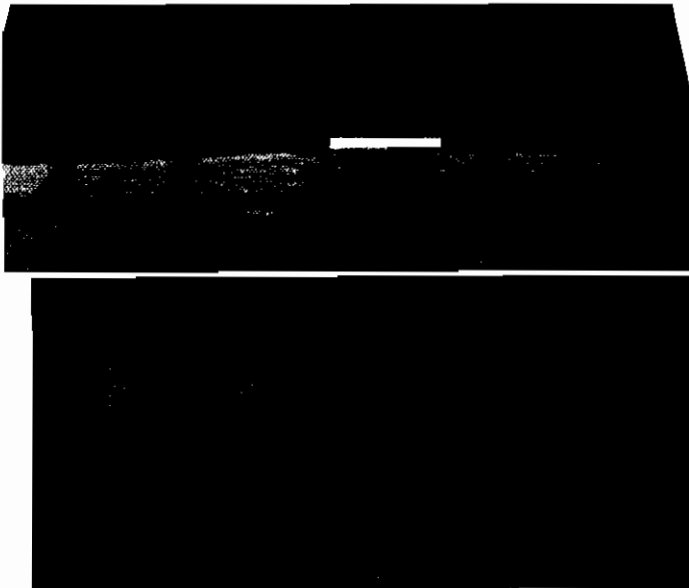
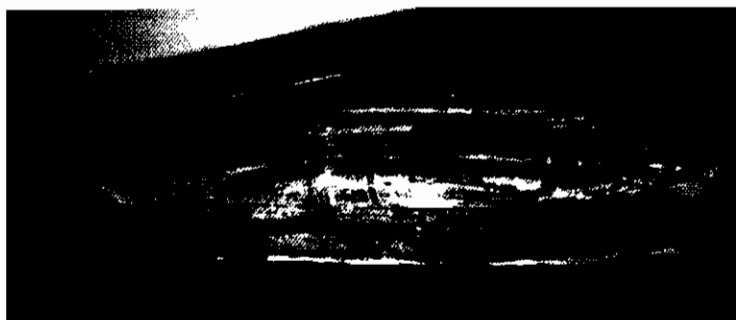
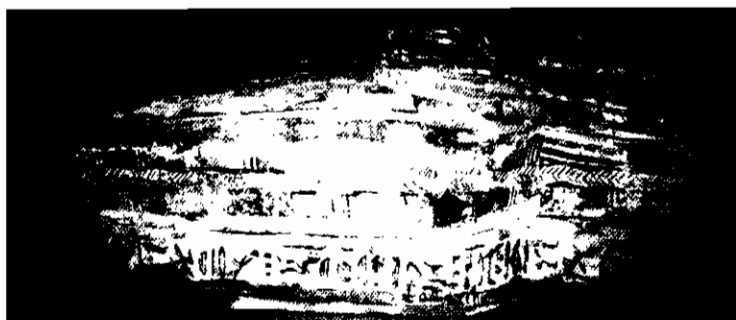


Fig. 49. Simple wooden bed from the second tomb.



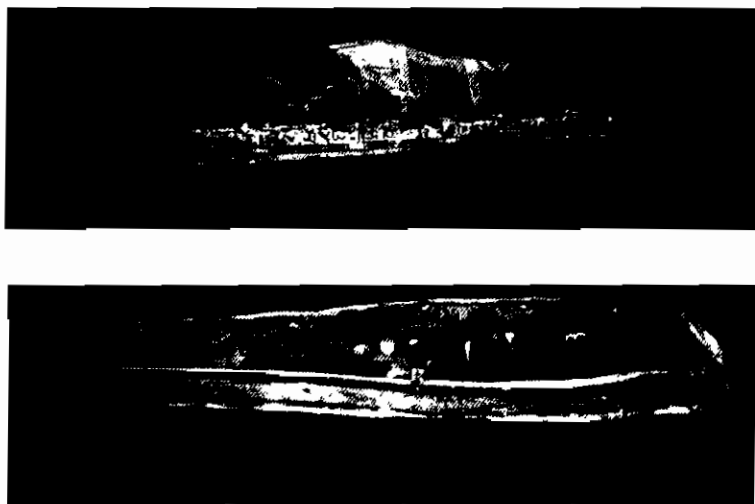


Fig. 50. Anthropoid coffins from the second tomb.

To conclude, it is possible to summarize the main features of these cemeteries as follows.

An architectural development has been noted in the stone tombs at Tell Marqula, where the building technique of the vaults changed. These developments were implemented both outside and inside the crypt. The latest development in the vault design can be seen in a sandstone tomb in Mut el-Kharab. Another kind of vault design has been found in the necropolis of Bir el-Shaghala, where a combination of vault (of the same kind found at Tell Marqula and Mut el-Kharab) and of a layer of mud brick, built right above the first vault, was used.

Two different types of sandstone tombs are in Ezbet Bashendi. The first one is the tomb of Kitynos with a flat ceiling, while the second one is Qubbat Sheikh Bashendi that is covered by a dome⁴.

Thus, generally speaking, we can assess that there is a sequence in the development of the sandstone tombs in the Dakhla Oasis. The architecture of the tombs, which were found in the above-mentioned cemeteries, is similar in design but different in size, in orientation of the entrances and in the method of burial. All these cemeteries were in use for a considerable length of time and they testify to the distribution and the presence in the whole Dakhla oasis of Late Period cemetery and

⁴ S. YAMANI-L. PANTALUCCI, *A Stele from Ezbet Bashendi*, «BIFAO» 100 (2000), pp. 437-441; S. YAMANI, *Roman Monumental Tombs in Ezbet Bashendi*, «BIFAO» 101 (2001), pp. 393-414.

thus of settlements. The occurrence of the painted wooden coffins in Ayn Turghi and Bir Talata el-Arab tombs shows a sizeable stratification and general prosperity in the society, and suggests the presence of rich people.

Surveys and archaeological excavations in Dakhla have so far discovered important settlements of the Old Kingdom and of the Roman Period, with their related necropoleis. However no settlements dating back to other periods and corresponding to the above mentioned cemeteries have ever been identified. The question where Late Period people lived in Dakhla is still an open matter⁵.

Supreme Council of Antiquities, Egypt

⁵ One of the Late Period settlements was certainly located in the capital Mut, as was demonstrated recently by excavation of Monash University: C.A. HOPI, *Report on the Excavations at Ismant el-Kharab and Mut el-Kharab in 2005*, «Bulletin for the Australian Centre for Egyptology» 16 (2005), pp. 40-47; HOPI., *Egypt and Lybia* cit.; C.A. HOPI., *The 2001-2 Excavations at Mut el-Kharab in the Dakhleh Oasis, Egypt*, «The Artefact» 26 (2003), pp. 51-76.

Another settlement was at Amheida, the Roman period *polis* of Trimithis, where the archaeological mission of Columbia and New York University discovered recently a number of decorated blocks belonging to one or more temples built there in the Third Intermediate and Late Period: cf. P. DAVOUI-O. KAPLER, *A New Temple for Thoth in the Dakhleh Oasis*, «EA» 28 (2006), pp. 12-14; R.J. DEMARLE-O.E. KAPLER, *A Donation stela in the name of Takeloth III from Amheida, Dakhleh Oasis*, «Jaarbericht Ex Oriente Lux» 39 (2005), pp. 19-37.

