

A new double foundation deposit in the Hathor Shrine of Tuthmosis III at Deir el-Bahari



Abstract: A double foundation deposit was found in the southeastern part of the Tuthmosis III Hathor shrine at Deir el-Bahari. The architectural features, a pit with a niche at the bottom, confirm the dating of both of these deposits to the times of Tuthmosis III. An original feature of the southeastern one is the initial circular cavity changed into a semicircular one by the building of a mud-brick wall in the east. Several courses of mud bricks built up the rim of the pit above the rock-carved cavity. The whole structure was plastered inside with mud plaster. The bricks were mostly reused from the Middle Kingdom structure of Mentuhotep II. The content, although disturbed, still consists of organic offerings as well as ceramics, but no inscribed material.

Keywords: Deir el-Bahari, Tuthmosis III, Hathor, foundation deposit

Preparing the publication of the Hathor shrine of Tuthmosis III at Deir el-Bahari,¹ a monument built on a platform in the northwestern corner of Mentuhotep II's temple, Nathalie Beaux and Mariusz Caban planned a final clearing of the chapel in its southern part, a disturbed area missing a substantial part of the original pavement, and currently filled with debris and overturned blocks. It had supposedly been studied by Édouard Naville (1907: 63–67) and Jadwiga Lipińska (1977: 38–45), former excavators of this monument. Yet in December 2017, the team's architect Caban discovered a pit in the southeastern part of the area. Subsequently, he examined the interior of the pit with archaeologist Dawid F. Wieczorek and egyptologist Nathalie Beaux, who analysed the content of the deposit.

1 The forthcoming publication of the whole shrine at the IFAO will include a chapter on the architecture, in

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SOUTHEASTERN PIT

A row of limestone foundation blocks oriented N–S ran against the eastern edge of the pit [Fig. 1]. The cavity is close to the last three preserved blocks, still *in situ*, to the south [Figs 2, 3].² The pit was also lying below what can be restored, on one hand, as the wall between the last two rooms of the Hathor shrine to the south, and on the other hand, as the floor of the last room to the south, in its eastern part. This location could refer to the southeastern corner of the Tutmosis III temple structure and more roughly to the southeastern edge

of the Hathor shrine, which is bordered directly by the Middle Kingdom temple with the wall of the middle court on the south and the balustrade of the platform on the east.

The pit is circular and carved, in its lower part, into Esna shale roughly up to the level of the Middle Kingdom temple platform. In its upper part, above bedrock, it was made of mud bricks. The top of the preserved mud-brick rim is about 0.44 m below the Hathor shrine floor, which means about 0.60 m above the level of the Mentuhotep II temple platform.

Table 1. Dimensions of the Southeastern pit and niche

| | |
|--|---|
| Diameter | |
| At top | 1.05 m (2 cubits) (N–S)–1.10 m (E–W) |
| At bottom | 0.90 m (N–S)–0.65 m (E–W) |
| Total depth of pit | |
| Depth in bedrock | 0.98 m |
| Height of preserved mud-brick circle | 0.48 m |
| = 1.46 m | |
| Height with regard to the Vestibule of the Hathor shrine (level 0.00) | |
| Top of the pit | -0.44 m |
| Bottom of the pit | -1.89 m |
| Platform of the Temple of Mentuhotep II | -1.05 m |
| Niche interior (narrowing to the west) | |
| Ceiling | -1.39/-1.46 m |
| Bottom | -1.87/-1.82 m |
| Entrance | H. 0.47 m, W. 0.30/0.24 m, D. 0.44/0.33 m |

collaboration with architect Mariusz Caban, author of all the plans, and a chapter on hieratic graffiti from the shrine by Dawid F. Wiczorek. A special chapter will also be devoted to the two foundation deposit pits along with a study of their contents.

² The limestone block, which can be seen above the southeastern part of the pit in the original photo after discovery [Fig. 1] was moved to the south in order to clear the pit for study [see Fig. 3].



Fig. 1. Top of the southeastern pit at the time of discovery, viewed from the south (IFAO/PCMA UW/photo M. Caban)

The mountain rock, above which the rows of mud bricks rise, is on a level slightly higher than the Middle Kingdom platform (+0.10 m). The bottom of the pit is 1.89 m below the Hathor shrine floor and 0.84 m below the Middle Kingdom temple level [Fig. 4].

The inside of the pit was plastered with the same type of mud mixture used for the bricks (black mud mixed with a lot of straw). A straight section of mud-brick wall, built from the bottom of the pit up to 1.11 m, cuts off part of the pit, forming a semicircular interior with the baseline on the east [Figs 3, 4]. The bricks were probably reused material. Most of them were broken and bore remains of an older, different, mud mortar still stuck to

the sides. Furthermore, some of the mud bricks had a thin layer of whitewash on one side³ or edges burnt to a red color, also attesting to their reuse.

The pit was cut in a rough circle with a diameter of two cubits (1.05 m) at the top and 0.90 m at the bottom. A niche was carved in the western side of the cavity, facing the mud-brick wall on the east, its bottom flush with the rest of the pit [Figs 2, 4, 5]. The shape of the niche is irregular, but more or less rectangular, resulting overall from the weak and layered structure of the Esna shale with fissures running diagonally to the axis of the niche. Height and depth narrow toward the west (see Table 1 for the exact dimensions). Inside, the niche seems to



Fig. 3. Southeastern foundation pit after investigation, viewed from the west (IFAO/PCMA UW/photo M. Caban)

3 The “thin layer of whitewash” on the bricks indeed indicates their reuse as is the case of “the Serpentine brick wall south of the dromos of the Bab el-Hosan” (Arnold 1979: 24, 25, Pl. 19:b).

have been plastered with the same mud mixture as inside the pit.

The architecture of the niche includes a kind of add-on doorjamb on the southern side of the entrance. It is 0.40 m wide and 0.20 m deep, made of an upright rec-

tangular piece of Esna shale set perpendicular to the natural rock layers. Hence the strata, instead of lying horizontally, are vertical in the doorjamb piece. It was embedded precisely in the same mud mortar. The inside corner of the door-

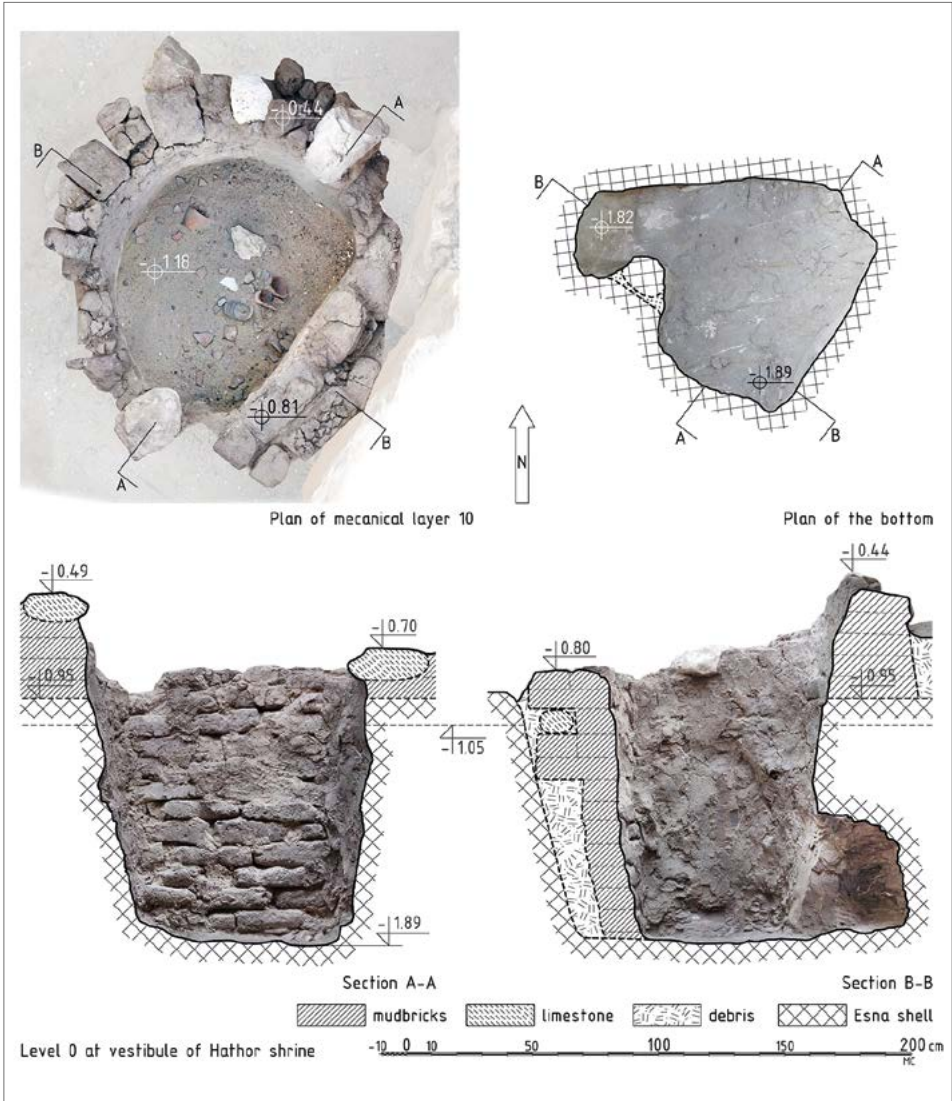


Fig. 4. Southeastern foundation pit: top left, orthophoto at arbitrary layer 10 with position of sections; top right, bottom of the foundation deposit pit with the niche; bottom, sections A-A' and B-B' (IFAQ/PCMA UW/photos and photogrammetry, orthophoto M. Caban)

jamb and all of its back face were thickly filled with mud, in which the builder's fingers left deep furrows going from the inside to the outside of the niche. Such a fragment of in-corner mortar is preserved at the bottom. A similar doorjamb may have existed to the north and could have been destroyed by robbers in the course of their "excavation". Should it have existed, then the entrance to the niche would have been very narrow, hardly over a dozen centimeters. One may reconstruct a kind of door at the entrance to the niche, as the south side seems to suggest [see *Fig. 5*]. Towards the bottom of the deposit, the plan of the pit is more rectangular.

The mud-brick wall running north-south and sectioning off the circular pit

on the east was built without mortar [see *Fig. 4* bottom left]. Its thickness is about 0.14 m. It is made, in width, of one row of bricks, preserved in 12 uneven courses in a stretcher bond, that is, with the length of most bricks facing in. An empty space was left between the wall and the eastern side of the rock cavity, about 0.25 m at the top and 0.06–0.10 m at the bottom.

The bricks are of two types, some are similar to the bricks used in the rest of the rim, that is, reused Middle Kingdom bricks made of rather black mud tempered with large pieces of reddish straw. In a few cases, the tops of these bricks present marker points in the form of finger holes, characteristic of Mentuhotep II's bricks in that temple (Arnold 1979: 7, 64, Pls 2–3) [*Fig. 6* top]. Another type of brick,



Fig. 5. The niche at the bottom of the southeastern pit (IFAO/PCMA UW/photo N. Beaux)

specific to that wall, is made of a yellow-grey mud and is much more compact. A very porous structure is visible in the breaks of these bricks, showing almost no straw content [Fig. 6 bottom left]. They are much smaller in size. Some of them have a very thin layer of whitewash on some sides, which indicates that they were re-used. As said above, fragmentary burned bricks were found in the wall structure [Fig. 6 bottom right].

While no mortar was used between the bricks, it was smeared on the front (western face) of the wall, especially in the joints and the corners where it touched the rock. This mortar is strong and sandy, beige, with tiny limestone inclusions. To the north and south ends of the western edge of the wall, a thin line of beige mortar is visible, thus indicating that the wall was built before the rest of the mud-brick rim was set (the mud plaster goes on top of the beige mortar in the corners).

The first layer of the bricks was put on thick levelling made of the said sandy, beige mortar, smoothing out the rough surface of the bottom of the pit. Courses 2–4 formed a small footing, projecting about 0.02–0.03 m. The whole wall face leans back slightly to the east to prevent collapse as there was no mortar. The narrow empty space between the wall and the rock cavity was filled with pieces of limestone and Esna shale to support the sloping wall. In the center of the eighth course, the two bricks in the middle were placed at right angle to the others, their

width facing in. These two bricks are the only ones in the whole wall to be set complete bonded with strong beige mortar. They were intended as a kind of perpendicular, made to consolidate the wall with the debris behind it. From course 10 the wall was extended to a width of 0.33 m by the addition of a second row of bricks at back. The bricks were set in both directions, adjusted also to the circular outline of the cavity. They formed a kind of cover of the space behind the wall, levelling it to the plane of the bedrock.⁴ The inner (west) face of the wall was covered with the same mud plaster as the rest of the pit cavity, but not with the same precision and the coating was thinner.

This “wall” is 0.37 m lower than the present attested upper brick of the semi-circular part. It has, at present, only one row of bricks higher than the rock top of the pit. It is clear that the limestone foundation blocks set to the east were put there after the pit had been built, as expected of constructions over a foundation deposit, since one of them extends over the northeastern corner of the pit, in the part lower than the rest of the structure [Fig. 7].

When discovered, the mud-brick rim of the pit was at roughly two different heights: that of the east wall as described above and another one, some 0.40 m higher, attested on the north and west. Here and to the south, the rim was made of bricks of different sizes, some recut to a smaller size to fit the desired width of the rim (more or less 0.24 m). Verti-

4 The back side of the structure could be seen once the upper two courses (11, 12) were completely and the three lower ones (10, 9, 8) partly dismantled. Each step of this process was documented with a detailed 3D scan.



Fig. 6. Bricks used in the construction of the southeastern foundation pit: top, reused bricks of Mentuhotep II with marker points in the form of finger holes; bottom left, types of bricks used: yellow-grey mud brick with almost no straw content and bricks made of black mud mixed with large pieces of reddish straw; bottom right, fragmentary burned bricks (IFA0/PCMA UW/photos M. Caban)

cally, there are five successive courses of bricks visible on these sides through a thin coating of mud plaster. The bricks are set alternately in layers, radial and following the circle. The fifth upper row of bricks must have been made in a circular manner, all bricks lined up in ring fashion, if one considers the highest brick as a remnant of that row. The fourth row of bricks appears to be set in a semicircle, in a radiating pattern perpendicular to the previous row. The pattern alternates for the next two rows below it. The last one above the mountain rock platform also presents a ring structure. Most of the bricks appear to be reused Middle Kingdom local building material, with finger holes on the upper sides of a few, same as already pointed out for the east

mud-brick wall. That part of the pit may have had originally no more than six rows of bricks above the original rock pit. Some limestone chunks of different size (at least three) were included in the mud-brick construction. The semicircle has a protuberance to the north (a brick projecting) and to the west (a big stone is sticking out of the mud brick circle) [see *Figs 2, 4*]. Only the inside of the pit presents a fine finish of the surface. It seems that the outside edge of the mud-brick circle was rough, leaning on and showered by debris lying below the floor pavement in that part of the Hathor shrine.

The inner plastering of the pit consisted of a black mud mixture full of straw, possibly made from the Middle Kingdom black mud bricks used for rim



Fig. 7. Top of the east wall of the southeastern foundation pit, covered in its northeastern corner by part of a limestone foundation block (IFAO/PCMA UW/photo N. Beaux)

construction. In some places, it has fallen off, exposing the rock. The bottom of the pit was also plastered (some sections are preserved) as was the inside of the niche.

In conclusion, the structure of the pit with a niche at its bottom is a significant

architectural feature indicating a structure of Tuthmosis III, as one might have expected (Weinstein 1973: 110–111, Fig. 8). It consists of a rock cavity with upper rows of mud bricks of two kinds: the biggest,⁵ some with a “one single hole” brick

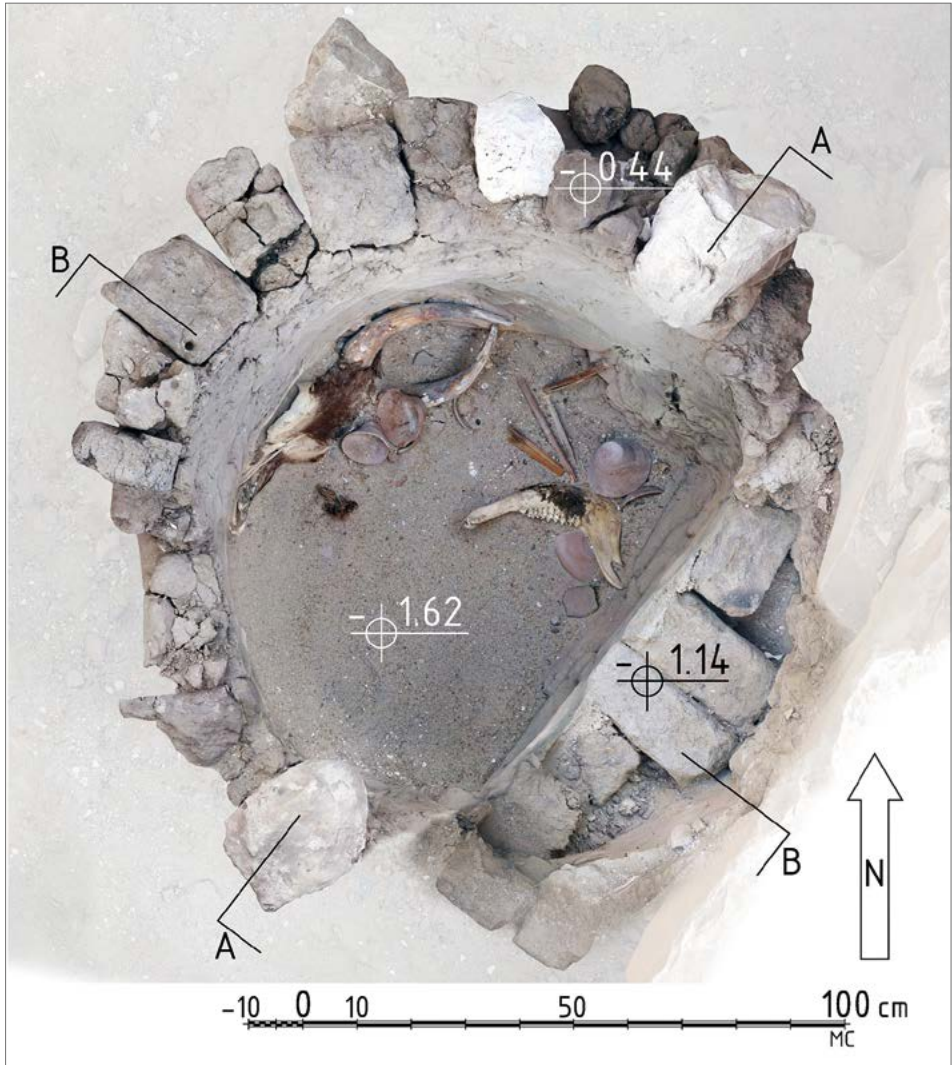


Fig. 8. Foundation deposit in the southeastern pit: disturbed content in arbitrary layer 12, level 1.62 m (IFA0/PCMA UW/orthophoto and processing M. Caban)

5 Measurements: H. 7.8–9.8 cm, W. 16–18 cm, L. 31–34 cm.

mark (Arnold 1979: 7), are clearly identified as reused Middle Kingdom bricks from the adjacent temple of Mentuhotep II. The smallest,⁶ some with a specific “two holes” brick mark (Seco Álvarez and Gamarra Campuzano 2015: 63, Fig. 7, MA036), are datable to the times of Tuthmosis III.

The east wall structure cutting the circular cavity is unusual. It was introduced intentionally before the pit was completed and its inside surface was plastered. Its purpose is obscure, but it could have been to reduce the size of the pit. Or it could

have been used to mark a later construction, since it is parallel to the bottom of the limestone foundation lying just next to and partly above it.

One should also address the lower height of this wall compared to the rest of the rim. The wall might have originally been higher, by 0.37 m to fit the upper height attested in the north and west. If so, then it was neatly dismantled to the level of the limestone foundation blocks; one of these blocks is still leaning to some extent on its northern edge.

PIT CONTENT

There is evidence that the original pit content was disturbed and taken out, then replaced more or less with the original yellowish fine sand mixed with some greyish sand and broken Esna shale. Some mud-brick fragments and section of the inner mud plaster, as well as some stones (mostly limestone flakes and a few sandstones chunks) had also fallen into the pit and were mixed with its content. The fact that most of the ceramics are broken is also a consequence of the content being disturbed [see Fig. 4].

The content has to be considered with caution as some of the material may have been thrown in by the modern-age robbers, mixing ancient and modern material collected from around the foundation pit with the already displaced original content of the foundation deposit, reduced to less valuable objects.

Considering the troubled stratigraphy, the content will be detailed by material and not layers, although it is worth noting that an ox skull [Fig. 9], jaws and legs were found towards the bottom of the pit, around 1.62 m from its top [Fig. 8]. Close to them were a few intact bowls and plates and at least two reed trays. Being bigger, they could have been moved around the bottom of the pit without being taken out, and thus remained more or less together.

The foundation deposit contained organic material of both animal and vegetal origin. There was in particular a complete ox head, accompanied by mammal and bird bones. Plant remains included branches, fruits, seeds, and cereals (see Beaux 2018, in this volume). Many fragments of flat breads were

6 Measurements: H. 7.8–10 cm, W. 13–16 cm, L. 30–31 cm. This size of brick is not attested in Mentuhotep II's material, but it is in that of Hatshepsut and Tuthmosis III from Western Thebes (Seco Álvarez and Gamarra Campuzano 2015: 62–66, measuring H. 10 cm, W. 14 cm, L. 33 cm; Spencer 1979: 67, measuring H. 9 cm, W. 15 cm, L. 33 cm).

found. Reed trays, blue faience beads, ropes, and various textiles fragments complete the deposit. Ceramics clearly

represent Eighteenth Dynasty foundation deposit vessels. The content will be analyzed in detail for the final publication.



Fig. 9. Ox skull found in arbitrary layer 12, level 1.62 m (IFAO/PCMA UW/(IFAO/PCMA UW/photo M. Caban)

SOUTHWESTERN PIT

The cavity lies 0.37 m to the west of the southeastern pit previously described, partly beneath a pavement block still *in situ* [Figs 2, 10]. It is more or less oval (1.05 m long, 0.76 m wide and 1.03 m deep) [Figs 11–12].

It was cut, in its lower part, about 0.40 m deep into the mountain rock (Esna shale), roughly to the level of the Middle Kingdom temple platform. Above bedrock, the pit was built up of a mix of stones (limestone or Esna shale blocks) and mud mortar. This structure is completely preserved in its western part, where half of the pit is still beneath

the pavement block. The eastern part is damaged, probably by robbers who dismantled it down to the bedrock level. The upper rim, as it is preserved today to the east, seems to have a thickness of about 0.10–0.13 m. The inside of the pit seems to have been plastered with mud, at least most of it, as a considerable number of fragments of broken mud plaster were found inside the pit. In the best preserved part of the upper rim, to the west, the imprint of a brick (0.25 m by 0.125 m), set lengthwise, is clearly visible at 0.55 m from the bottom of the pit. It could correspond to the bricks tradition-

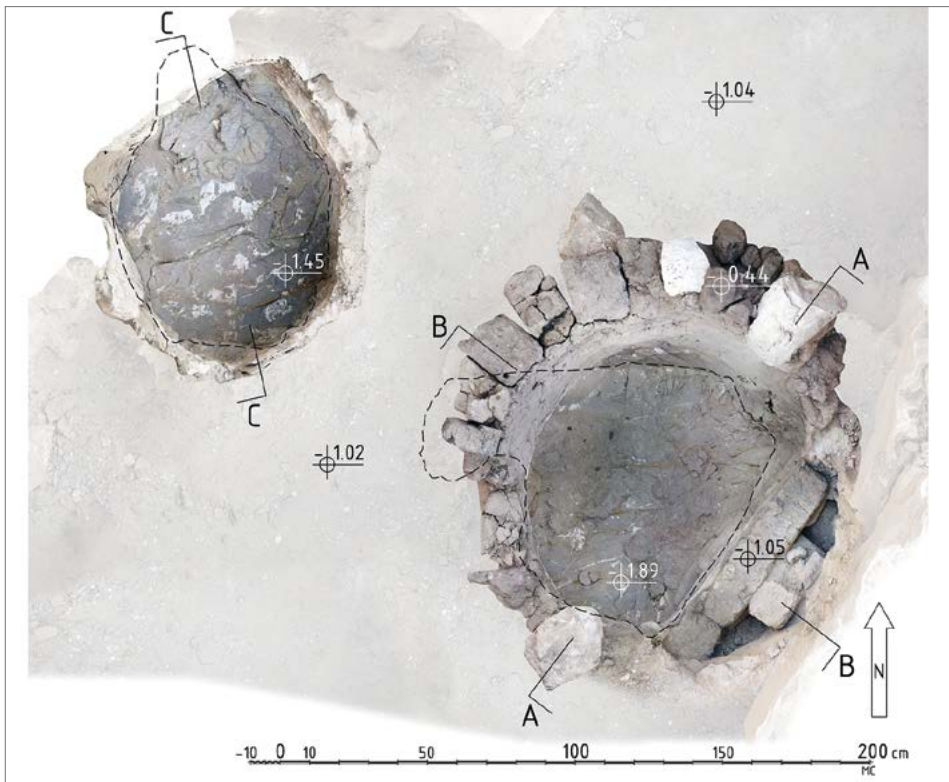


Fig. 10. Plan and location of the second pit discovered west of the southeastern foundation deposit (IFA0/PCMA UW/photogrammetry M. Caban)

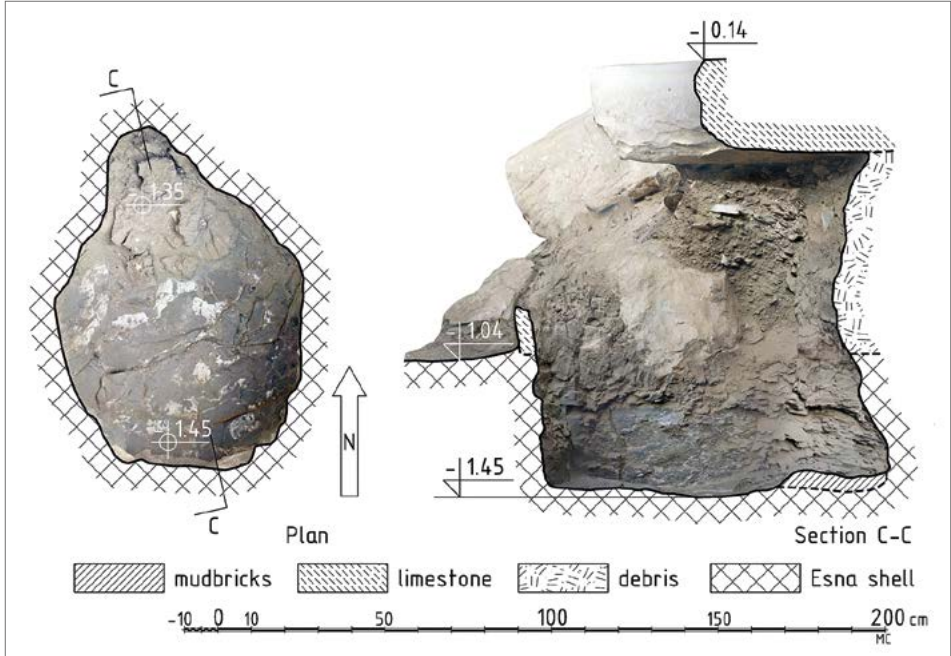


Fig. 11. Plan of the bottom and section of the southwestern foundation pit (IFA0/PCMA UW/photo-grammetry M. Caban)



Fig. 12. The southwestern pit, view from the east (IFA0/PCMA UW/photo M. Caban)

ally closing a foundation deposit, since there is no other brick imprint on the mud plaster above or below that one. It would therefore indicate that the deposit itself, beneath the bricks sealing it at the top, was 0.55 m deep.

A small niche is carved into the northwestern side of the pit [Figs 12–13]. Its orientation is more to the north than the niche in the other pit, although both niches are set roughly to the west of the pits. The bottom of the niche is covered with a thick layer of mud plaster preserving the builder's fingerprints. The niche is about 0.30 m wide and 0.20 m deep. Its ceiling is irregular: 0.30 m high at the entrance and only 0.10 m at the back.

The deposit was also plundered, yet contained a variety of material, though much less than in the other pit: some organic material, animal (in particular hair of the same color as on the ox head found in the other pit, small mammal bones) and vegetal (branches, fruits, seeds). Fragments of reed trays, blue faience beads, ropes, and various textiles fragments completed the deposit. The ceramics clearly belong to an Eighteenth Dynasty foundation-deposit vessel.

The pottery and architecture of the pit with a niche similar to the foundation deposit previously found to the east would indicate that the pit is also from the time of Tuthmosis III.



Fig. 13. View of the niche at the bottom of the southwestern pit, in its western side (IFAO/PCMA UW/ photo M. Caban)

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the two pits with a niche at the bottom are remarkable architectural structures that indicate a Tuthmosis III foundation deposit. One of the pits presents an original feature since the initial circular cavity was changed into a semicircular one by the building of a mud-brick wall on the east. Above the rock carved cavity, the rim of the pit was built up with a few courses of mud bricks. The whole structure was plastered on the inside with mud plaster from bricks. Bricks were mostly reused from the Middle Kingdom structure of Mentuhotep II.

The contents of the pits were taken out in modern times, the pieces disregarded by the robbers thrown back into the pits along with other elements that had been lying around. Yet, there are many fragments of supposed organic offerings, as well as ceramics, corresponding to what is expected to be found in such foundation deposits. No inscribed material has been found, no rocker or stone vessel, for instance.

Pieces of such allegedly missing vessels with the name of *Dsr-mnw* had been found nearby, in the debris of the Tuthmosis III temple (Lipińska 1988). They originated from an unknown foundation deposit. An empty foundation deposit, circular and with a niche at the bottom, was also found in the southern part of the temple, in its western part (Leclant and Clerc 1990; Grimal and Adly 2003). Therefore, two similar foundation deposits are now known to the south of the temple, one to the west on the upper platform (empty) and one double deposit to the east on the level of

the Hathor shrine (disturbed content). One cannot tell, however, whether both were intended as foundation deposits of *Dsr-mnw* or *Dsr-3ht*, as the temple was ultimately called.

Examples of double foundation deposits are rare. Some date to the rule of Hatshepsut (Weinstein 1973: 161–162, 166, 169–170) and one to that of Tuthmosis III. In his temple in El Kab, there is a set of four (in fact, three attested) double foundation deposits, each set supposedly beneath a corner of the monument, along the side walls. Each deposit was in a circular pit (diameter about 0.60 m, depth unknown). There was also a niche at the base in the two pits.

In the Hathor shrine, the two deposits are close together, aligned with the east–west wall separating the two rooms to the south. They are not exactly at a corner or edge of the monument, but on the whole not far from the southern border of the building. The deposit to the east is bigger and deeper than the one to the west. Its structure seems also more elaborate. Both were constructed in similar fashion. Since both deposits were disturbed, it is impossible to say whether they functioned simultaneously or whether they succeeded one another, the eastern one being probably the final one in the latter case. The hypothesis is that the eastern deposit on the level of the Hathor shrine could have corresponded to the northeastern door, initially planned between the two rooms to the south of the axis, traces of an ancient door being visible to the northeast, between the axial vestibule and the first room to the south. This door was later

moved to the northwest in the final plan.

On the level of the Tuthmosis III temple, the two deposits could have functioned (together or alternately) as a possible average southeastern corner. It is not possible today to say which interpretation is the proper one, nor why there was a double deposit and whether it was contemporaneous or introduced in succession, and in the latter case, why a decision was made to move a foundation deposit 0.37 m to the east.

Since the deposits were disturbed, their content cannot be easily established: the robbers may have transferred it from one to the other or spread it around. Indeed, some finds were discovered around the two pits. Yet the southeastern one seemed to have been filled with sand and layers of abundant (disturbed) content, whereas the fill of the southwestern one does not present any special arrangement and seems to have been much poorer (almost the same array of finds, but much less overall).

As said above, the pits contained no inscribed material, no rocker or stone vessels, for instance. The missing categories of objects are precisely the kind of

artifacts that were found scattered higher up, in Tuthmosis III temple debris, bearing the name of *Dsr-mnw* (Lipińska 1988). They originate from an unknown foundation deposit. However, an empty foundation deposit was found, also in the south of the temple, but in its western part (Leclant and Clerc 1990; Grimal and Adly 2003). It is also circular in shape with a niche at the bottom. Therefore, two foundation deposits are now known to the south of the temple, one to the west on the upper platform (empty) and another double foundation deposit to the east, on the level of the Hathor shrine (disturbed content). They corresponded possibly more or less to the two corners of the temple structure of Tuthmosis III considered in its entirety, although at different levels. Since no other deposits are known, either from the temple or from the Hathor shrine, the significance of these deposits is still to be explored or questioned. In particular, it is impossible to say whether they could have been dedicated as foundation deposits of *Dsr-mnw* or *Dsr-3ḥt*, the final name of the temple.

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