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Recent Discoveries in Quesna

**Archaeological area
“Preliminary report”**

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Abstract

Department of History and Archaeology, Faculty of Arts, Minufiyeh University in collaboration with Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA),⁽¹⁾ succeeded in the discovery of an important part of the mausoleum at Quesna archaeological area, from 3/11/2012 to 9/12/2012. This new discovery included: new architectural unit (No. 6) contained eight funerary chambers. (b) Limestone sarcophagus contained a mummy of a woman and some bones of a small child. (c) Dozens of skeletons and mummies. (e) Seven complete pottery and vast quantities of shards. (d) Seven bronze coins. These additional features reflected the richness of this new architectural unit - despite the heavy damage - and sheds light on an important aspect of the lives of the ancient Egyptians during approximately the 2nd century B.C.

I. The location of Quesna archaeological area:

Quesna archaeological area is located about 2km from modern Quesna, and 12 km to the east of Shebin El-Kom in Minufiyeh Governorate. The site contains many archaeological remains including: a brick-built mausoleum, Roman coffin burials and a sacred falcon necropolis.

The archaeological remains visible today at Quesna were discovered in the mid 1990s by mere chance during removing of sand to the south of the sand gezira and were revealed by subsequent excavations of the Supreme Council of Antiquities and Mission of Dr. Joanne Rowland.

⁽¹⁾We would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to Prof. Dr. Ashraf Hilal, the former governor of Minufiyeh to help this mission to come to light. Thanks are also due to Prof. Dr. Eid Balbaa Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Minufiyeh University, for his support, honest cooperation and sincere efforts to provide all possible assistance for this mission. We would like also to thanks colloquies: Dr. Omaima Zahra, Tamer Mohamed, Randa Said, Daila Said, Tahany Said and Manar Ahmed, for their spiritual, helpful, effort and scientific support. All thanks for Mr. Abdullah Abu Hassan general manager of Central Delta Archaeology, Mr. Emad Ihsan Shayeb general manager of Minufiyeh Archaeology, Mr. Hafnaoui Lotfi Shalaby responsible for Quesna archaeological area, Mr. Ashraf Hindawi Chief Inspector in Quesna. Thanks also to the inspectors Sarah Mohamed, Hadeer Farhat, Bahaa Eddin Ibrahim, Yasir Saber Saadani, Ehab Mehran, Ahmed Saad Eddin, and Alaa Mohamed Shawky manager of restoration unit for their Active participation in the success of the excavation. Finally, we would like to express our deepest gratitude to Dr. Joanne Rowland for her support and sincere advice.

II. Aims of the excavation:

In view of the importance of Quesna archaeological area, The Faculty of Arts, Minufiyeh University decided to continue the work (halted in 2009) in the south side of the archaeological area, of the brick-built mausoleum containing burials of the Late and Ptolemaic Periods, overlaid by Roman burials. The aims were to:

- Complete the excavation of the mausoleum.
- To try to find any evidence of other structures.
- To study burial patterns and positions.
- To study Egyptian religion and architecture in the period when the mausoleum was in use.

III. Discovery of the new architectural unit (fig. 1):

The work began on the third of November 2012 at the north side of the mausoleum, along the Northern end of the fifth architectural unit. It is worth mentioning that unlike the results of previous excavations in the mausoleum, we did not find any burials on the surface or even bellow it immediately, except one to the east of the area. Instead of burials we found scattered blocks of brick and remains of walls showing signs of destruction. Then walls of chambers began to appear respectively, beside each others, followed by doors and niches.

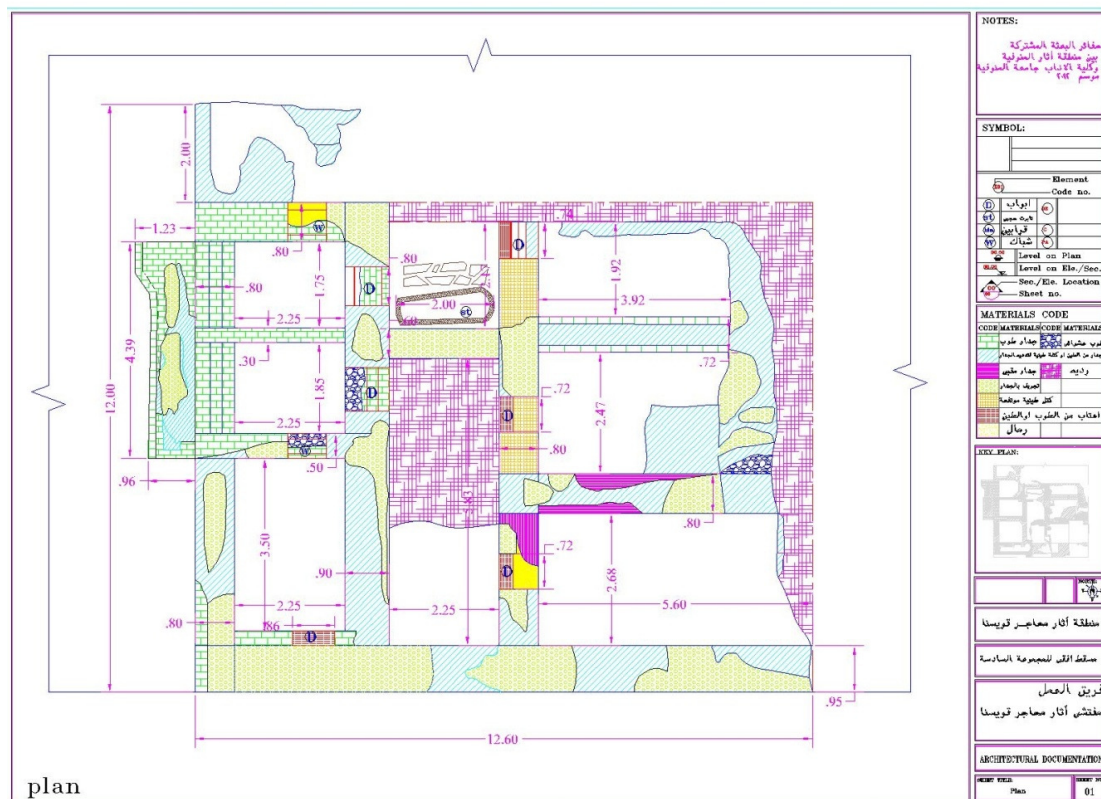


Fig. 1. Excavation of the faculty of Arts Minufiyeh University and the Supreme Council of Antiquities at Quesna Archaeological area (2012).

At the end excavation had revealed a new architectural brick-built unit, which given a unit number (6) differentiated it from the 5th architectural unit and the rest of the other units of the mausoleum. It's measured about 12 meters from south to north, and 13 meters from east to west. The new unit contained eight funerary chambers, a few walls were very well preserved, especially the walls of chambers no. 2 and 3, while the others were much damaged. As for all the ceilings, were completely fallen, all the bricks were missed.

Since we uncovered the walls, we have to face two problems; the first was the collapse of the trench sides, because of the nature of the earth, which was composed of very fine sand, so we used to protect the trench sand bags. The second was the bad state of preservation of the walls, which were very damaged by thieves, leading to dump some of the walls completely, leaving only the outer and inner surface, while other walls were missed except the first row of the wall.

III.1. The general architecture elements of the unit:

For the first glance, it seemed that this unit was not designed according to the same design of the mausoleum, both in terms of planning and patterns of the walls. Moreover, the plan of the new architectural unit was not symmetrically, except chamber nos.1 and 2 which were identically in dimensions and shapes, the other chambers vary in shape, design and direction, as if they were built in an untidy, or in different periods, while the axis of the first chamber oriented from south to north, and the entrance in the south side, the chambers no. 2 and 3 oriented from west to east, and its entrances in the east.

However, chambers no.1 and 2 were linked by a niche in the separating wall among them, which was coincides with another niche in the Northern wall of chamber no. 3 linked it with another chamber, which did not excavated yet. As for chamber 4, it was completely different, although its axis oriented from south to north, it was very big, as we will see later, and had two doors; one in the south-eastern wall, and the other in the north-eastern wall. It is strange that entering to chamber 2 should be through chamber 4.

Chamber no. 5, it is the smallest one in the new unit, the chamber is very damaged, so we did not found its entrance, or even its place, it probably lies in the Northern side, which did not yet excavated, although it is very strange to locate the entrance in the north side, or it could be the niche itself which lies in the eastern side, which was changed to fit a burial.

It was noted also that the entrance of chamber 3 located within this chamber. This means that the blockage of chambers 4 and 5 after the completion of Funerary rites will isolate chambers 2 and 3 from the mausoleum completely, as long as its entrances were located inside chambers 4 and 5, which indicates that there were an advantage in these two chambers, something that is consistent with their unique architectural planning.

As for chambers 6 to 8 they were also different in size and direction, and most of them were much damaged. They were oriented from west to east, as for the ceilings, It is certainly that most of the chambers had arched ceilings, as is evident from the remains of the upper parts of some walls.

It is then clear that this unit lacking for the consistency between its different parts, so it may be say that it was not built in accordance with a specific architectural design, but went through five architectural stages, chamber no. 1 in the first phase, then chambers 2 and 3 in the second phase, and after them chambers 4 and 5 were built, separately, finally chambers 6 to. It is likely that there were a number of other chambers, as is clear from the extension of some of the walls to the east and north. Although this hypothesis, it is very difficult to say that these stages reflect separate historical periods, because most of the archaeological finds in this unit, such as mummies, skeletons, pottery and coins, almost dating to one historical period.

III.2. Chambers description:

III.2.1 The first three chambers

Chamber no. 1 (fig. 2) located at the south west corner of the unit. Badly preserved. It is a rectangular room with approximately dimensions 3.50×2.25 meters. Built with brick, and some of its walls covered with plaster. The upper parts of the walls completely disappeared, as wall as the ceiling bricks which were completely missed. The walls were built on sand gezira immediately without foundations.

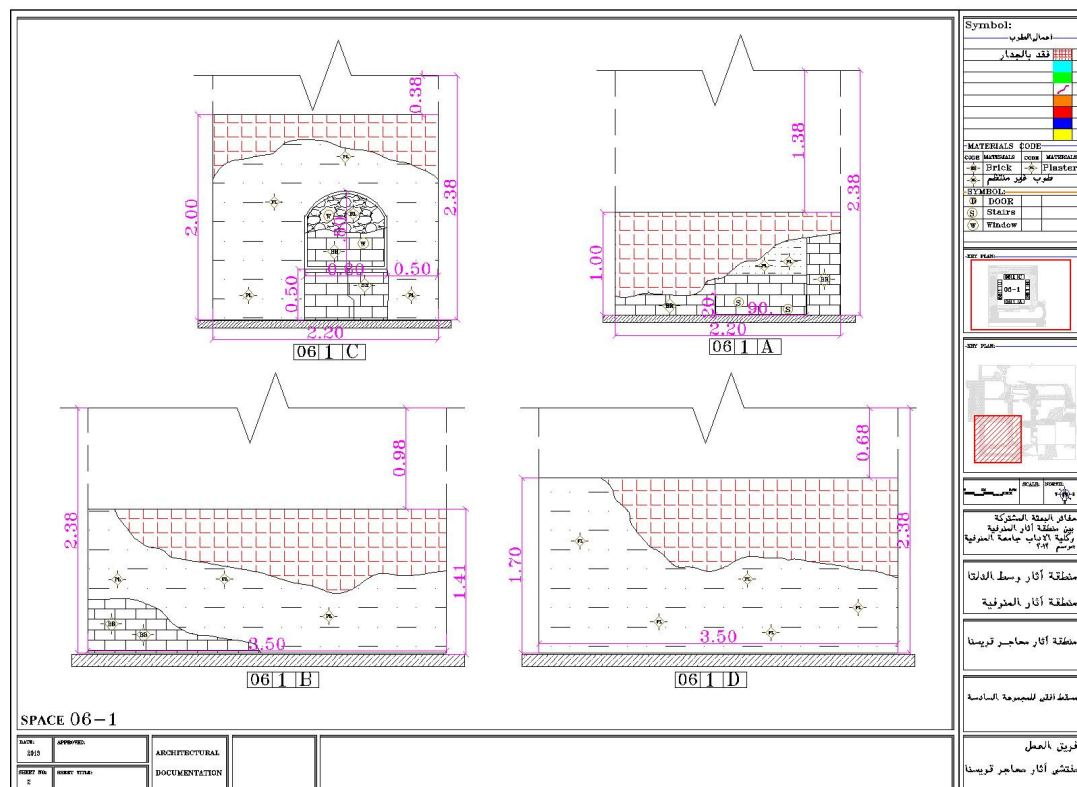


Fig. 2. Sections in the four inner faces of the walls of chamber no. 1.

As for the arched top of the entrance of chamber 3, it was collapse, and its bricks were missed. It is worth mentioning that we found a pile of bricks which were laid unsystematically, above and around some rows of bricks, to block this entrance, as well as some pieces of human bones among these bricks. It seemed also that the scattered bricks of this chamber were used as a shelter or grave for two mummies, who were buried between and above this pile of bricks and inside the niche, which was in the northern wall and its remnants still clearly visible. Therefore, it is difficult to know if these two mummies were buried in this grave, once again, after the destruction of the chamber, in the sense that they were the original owners of this chamber, or they were buried by mere chance in this place, in a subsequent period, especially we did not find any burial in this chamber, like chamber no. 1 and unlike the others chambers, so they were probably dedicated to some other religious aspects.

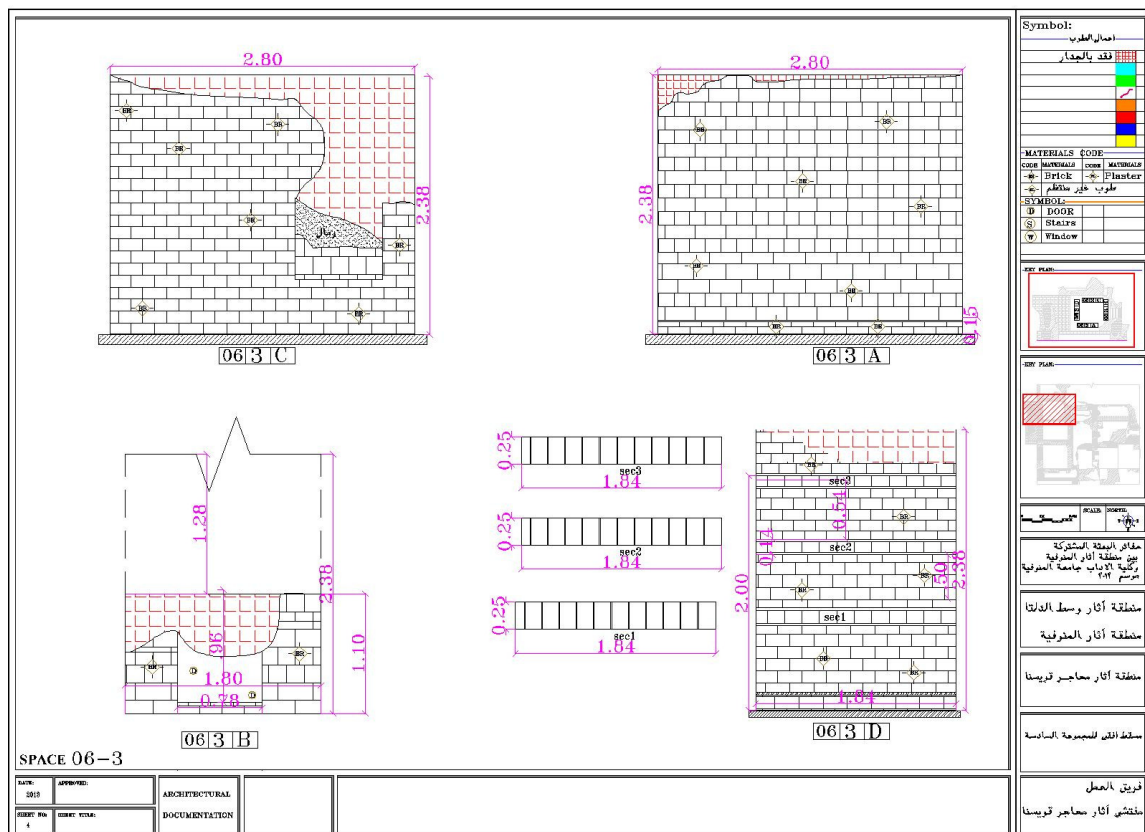


Fig. 4. Sections in the four inner faces of the walls of chamber no. 3.

III.2.2. The other chambers

To the east of previous chambers, there are two other chambers, oriented from south to north; they occupied the same space of the first three chambers. The dimensions of no. 4 about 2.25 x 5.83 meters. It was in a poor condition of conservation, the ceiling fell down, and the upper parts of the walls were missed. It is noticeable that the ceiling of this chamber was vaulted, as it was evident from some of

the bricks of the west wall. The chamber had two entrances, one at the south-east and the second at the north-east. The last one had a arched top.

The dimensions of chamber 5 approximately 2.25 x 2.17 meters. It is in poor condition also. And its walls completely missed except for the foundations and parts of the eastern wall. To the east of the chamber no. 4 and 5 there were three other chambers in one row, from south to north chamber no. 6 measured about 2.68 × 5.60 meters, followed by chamber 7 about 2.47 × 5.60 meters, and finally chamber no. 8 about 1.92 × 3.92 meters. The ceilings were completely missed as well as the upper parts of the walls.

IV. The objects

IV.1. The sarcophagus:

Excavations had revealed also a limestone sarcophagus in a poor state of preservation in chamber 5 east to west oriented, it was about 200 by 60 centimeters. It was found intact sealed with gypsum. Inside lies a female wrapped in several layers of linen strips, pasted together and covered by a thin layer of plaster which known as cartonnage - in a poor state of preservation - and next to the mummy there was some bones of a small child, badly damaged. A very small pieces of gold was found in between the wrappings of the mummy. It seemed most probably that all the burials inside this chamber had been removed to place this sarcophagus as it was clear from the scattered bones and skulls.

IV.2. The mummies:

In addition, many mummies were found wrapped in strips of linen in a (cartonnage), with arms crossed over breast it is noteworthy that some of these mummies were incomplete, sometimes without skulls, and sometimes without limbs, and in some cases only skulls were found, which may confirm the theft of this unit. It is important to note that some of these burials were truncated by each others unsystematically, besides these mummies were not all oriented in the same direction, sometimes the head was found towards the west, and others to south or to north or to west. The thing which is very important, that we found a very thin pieces of gold in between the wrappings of the mummy. There are few observations on the burials as follows:

- 1- The bones of some mummies were very large.
- 2- Most of the mummies show the dead with their arms crossed in the attitude of the god Osiris.
- 3- There is no consistent trend for burials.
- 4- There are small parts of colored wood down some burials, indicated a wooden coffins.
- 5- There were large numbers of nails around some burials which may be used to fix the wood of the coffins.
- 6- There were abnormalities in the spinal column of some burials.

- 7- There were two huge piles of mummies and parts of bones overlapped each other so it was very difficult to determine one of these mummies.
- 8- There were traces of fire on these two piles.
- 9- There were traces of white powder resembles lime in bones and around it in these two pile.
- 10- There were number of bags which contained mummification materials inside the pelvis of some mummies.
- 11- There were very small pieces of gold in between the wrappings of some mummy.

IV.3. Pottery:

Pottery is one of the most important archaeological finds this season. It was roughly-made, free of decoration, non-colored, Nile silt, imported pottery has not been found, some shards were from Roman coffins. In addition to the vast quantities of shards found on the site, there were (3) small bowls as follows:

- 1- Diameter 11 cm. Height 5 cm. Thickness 7 mm.
- 2- Diameter 12.5 cm. Height 4 cm. Thickness 7 mm.
- 3- Diameter 11 cm. Height 5 cm. Thickness 9 mm.

There were also (4) other pottery found next to some mummies.

- 1- Height 14 cm.
- 2- Height 16 cm.
- 3- Height 6 cm.
- 4- Height 4 cm.

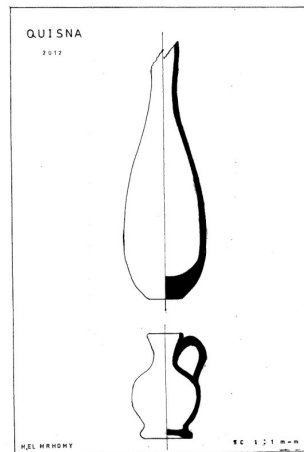


Fig. 5. Sections of some pottery

IV. 4. Coins:

There were found also seven bronze coins, most of them were badly preserved. The most evident of them was a one Chalkis, weight (5) grams had a Zeus-Amin on the obverse, and the two Ptolemaic falcons on the reverse, and some letters red as Ptolemy.

The second with a female representing the goddess Isis and the reverse with a winged falcon, with some litters red as Ptolemy. Others indications referred to the second quarter of the 2nd century B.C.

V. Conclusions:

Despite the discovery of most of these archaeological finds in the other units of the mausoleum, the uniqueness architectural design of the new unit makes it independent stand-alone, and the multiple levels of burial confirmed that it was used for long period, and the multiplicity of burial styles methods of mummification and the varying levels of burials confirms the wealth and richness. It merely reflects the richness of this new architectural unit despite the deliberate destruction of all the chambers, walls and ceilings and sheds light on the beliefs of the ancient Egyptians during this period.



Plate 1. The new architectural brick-built unit at Quesna Archaeological area (No. 6).



Plate 2. The northern wall of chamber no. 1.



Plate 3. Marks of the old destructions on the walls of the new architectural brick-built unit.



Plate 4. The eastern and southern walls of chamber no. 2.



Plate 5. Details of southern wall of chamber no. 3.



Plate 6. The western wall of chamber no. 4.



Plate 7. Remains of the foundations of chamber no. 7.



Plate 8. The limestone sarcophagus inside the ruins of chamber no. 5.



Plate 9. One of the burials in the new architectural brick-built unit.



Plate 10. Example of the new architectural brick-built unit's amphorae.



Plate 11. Example of the new architectural brick-built unit's pottery.



Plate 12. Seven bronze coins from the second quarter of the 2nd century B.C.