

Gurob Archaeological Project (Egypt)

Overview

The Gurob archaeological project is located in Egypt, at the entrance to the Fayum area (Fig. 1). Directed since 2017 by Marine Yoyotte under the aegis of the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology in Cairo (<https://www.ifao.egnet.net/recherche/archeologie/gourob/>), the excavations undertaken on the site also benefit from the support of the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, as well as the Kheops Fund for Archaeology (<http://fondskheopsarcheologie.fr/missions-recherche-archeologique-Gourob.php>).

The concession granted by the Egyptian Ministry of Antiquities to Ifao is about 80 ha and takes place on the ancient site of Mi-wer, founded by king Thutmose III (1479-1425 BC) (Fig. 2) to house a palatial complex, occupied at least until the reign of Ramesses V (1147-1143 BC). To this day, it remains the only palace of the pharaonic period identified as a royal harem. It was also in Gurob that the famous head of Queen Tiye (Fig. 3), wife of Amenhotep III (1390-1352 BC), was discovered at the beginning of the 20th century.

The harem of Mi-wer

Contrary to other known harems in Memphis for example, the case of Mi-wer is particular: indeed the city was created specifically to house a harem and is therefore not a simple palace within the royal palace complex. Looms, reels of thread, and pieces of linen clothing (Fig. 4) discovered on the site suggest that weaving, managed by the women themselves, also provided substantial income for the harem. Royal linen from Gurob was renowned and recurrent shipments were made to other royal residences, such as that of Pi-Ramesses in the Delta. A papyrus even describes a garment made for the Hittite princess Maahorneferura (Fig. 5), wife of Ramesses II (1279-1213 BC).

Other discoveries tell us about the women living in Mi-Our in the New Kingdom: several beautifully carved statuettes dating back to the time of Amenhotep III have been found in a funerary context (Fig. 6): they bear the titles of singer like lady Mi (Fig. 7) or singer of Amun, underlining their ritual and religious role.

Objectives of the fieldwork within the framework of the Marie project Skłodowska-Curie "PRINCESS"

The PRINCESS project (<http://www.arscan.fr/haroc/princess/>) aims to study foreign women coming to the Egyptian court in the context of the diplomatic marriages contracted by the Egyptian sovereign with the great powers of the Near East during the Late Bronze Age. Mi-wer is known to have welcomed an important foreign community during this period and special attention will be paid to its material culture. Indeed, many foreign potteries were discovered there. It will also attempt to relocate the tombs of women and foreign officials found during ancient excavations in order to put the objects in context and to study the phenomena of acculturation through funerary practices.

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement n° 212966.