Conservation of a Roman Tomb House in Tuna el-Gebel, October/November 2020

Heike Pfund, 29.02.2020

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The project incorporated stabilization work of the architecture, including a new roof for the connected chambers, and pre-consolidation of wall plaster and paintings.

Restoration of the architecture

Indispensable works for the conservation of this tomb house were the stabilization of dilapidated walls from inside and outside as well as the repair of a broken roof at the antechamber.

Repair of dilapidated walls

Mud brick walls were in some places in a state of deterioration and had to be stabilized. Holes were filled with mud bricks and mud mortar, the borders of the repairs were marked by small pieces of pottery.

Antechamber, mason repairing the mud brick wall

Wall repairs in the antechamber, east and south walls

Deteriorated wall in the main chamber, east wall, before and after repair

At the façade of the tomb house, some repairs of mud brick masonry were carried out.

South façade, closing of a hole to prevent animals from settling in

Shehata Abdelaziz and Osam Ismael repairing the walls

Repair of the roof

The roof of the antechamber was partly broken, due to degraded wooden beams and perhaps people walking on the weak roof. This had been noticed in February 2018, and during that year repairs were undertaken by local people, closing the hole in the roof.

Collapsed roof area of the antechamber after the repair of 2018

Deteriorated ceiling in the antechamber

It was decided to exchange the two visibly rotten beams without taking off the roof completely. Involved were workers and craftsmen, all with work experience in Tuna el-Gebel. Materials were bought on the local markets in Tuna and Mellawi.

Before any roof work could be done, the wall paintings in the antechamber and neighbouring chamber (GB33a, GB33B) had to be consolidated. It took two weeks and three conservators, to stabilize loose plaster and paintings, afterwards roof work could begin.

After having stabilized the roof by jacks, walls around the rotten beams were opened. A drilling machine was used to open the walls around the beams, instead of hammer and chisel,

to minimize vibrations. Then the two rotten beams could be slided out, and the new beams slided in.

Opening the walls around the beams (top), beams free and ready to be taken out (bottom)

Roof supported by jacks

Sliding out the rotten beam

Receiving the rotten beam

Sliding the new beam in

After the rotten beams had been taken out, it became obvious, that large parts of the wooden planks above the beams were also damaged, in areas directly above the beams, invisible from beneath; some planks were about to break down. As a consequence, the roof was then opened, completely removed and rebuilt with wooden beams, wooden planks, and red bricks, covered by a layer of lime plaster.

Katharina Westphalen dismantling the roof

Final work on the new roof: laying red bricks in lime mortar

New woodwork of the roof; interior wall relieved of pressure from the roof

The new roof of GB 33A/B, antechamber/chamber