

The Faience Pendant in the Form of the God Bes, Excavated at the Site Deraheib (Sudan)*

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In December 2018, in course of the second season of the Nubian archaeological and anthropological expedition of the Research Institute and the Museum of Anthropology of Moscow State University, a faience pendant in the form of the head/mask of the Ancient Egyptian god Bes (2018/001) was discovered at the site of Deraheib in the upper reaches of Wadi al-Allaqi (Republic of Sudan). This settlement, based on the archaeological data and evidence of the written sources, dates back to the Islamic Period (9th–12th centuries). Based on the similar objects stored in museum collections and discovered in the archaeological context, this find is dated somewhere between the Late Period and early Ptolemaic Dynasty. The article describes in detail and analyzes the circumstances of the discovery of Ancient Egyptian objects in course of the works of Centro Ricerche sul Deserto Orientale (CeRDO), which conducted excavations at the settlement of Deraheib in 1997–1999, and of the Lomonosov MSU Nubian expedition in 2018. A separate part of this article deals with the history of Ancient Egyptian goldmining in Wadi al-Allaqi region, and illustrates that Egyptian expeditions reached the inlands of the Nubian desert up to the upper reaches of the wadi where Deraheib is located. In conclusion a hypothesis is drawn as to how Ancient Egyptian objects may have ended up in the fill of quartz veins excavated beneath a house built during the Islamic period.

Keywords: Nubian archaeological and anthropological expedition, Sudan, Deraheib, Ancient Egypt, Bes, amulets, Late Period, Ptolemaic Period.

Archaeological context of the find

The discovery of this amulet was made near a building excavated at the archaeological site of Deraheib (Sudan) (fig. 1.1, 1.2) by the Centro Ricerche sul Deserto Orientale (CeRDO) between December 1997 and January 1998. The object named “Zone 2” is a room with walls made of slate slabs on mortar (Fig. 2.1). The room has the following dimensions: 3 × 2.25 m. In its southern part there is a stairway with seven flights, 1.25 m height. In the south-eastern part of the room there was a stove. The floor of the room was paved with slate slabs. Based on the analysis of pottery, the functioning of this room was dated to the Islamic Period. A sack of ground quartz was discovered beneath the stairway,

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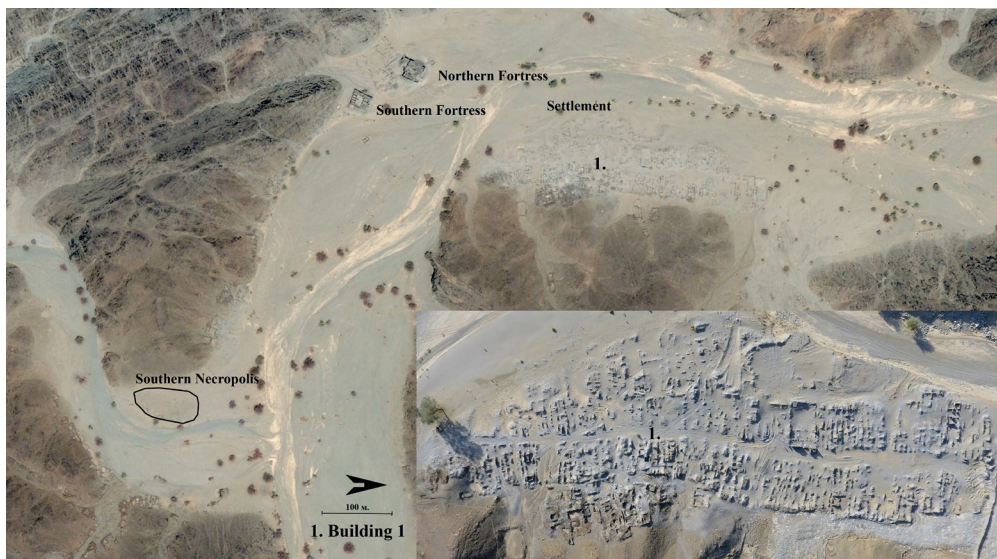


Fig. 1. A map of the caravan routes connecting the Red Sea port of Aizab and the cities of the Nile Valley. Compiled on the basis of the Google Earth resource (1). The territory of the concession of the expedition of the Lomonosov MSU Nubian expedition (2).

where, according to E. Llopes — the archaeologist who excavated the site — there was a closet with a door. On this basis Llopes made an assumption that this room was used for analyzing the rock from various quartz veins. In order to research the stratigraphy of the room Llopes has ripped out the floor, unearthing a worked-out quartz vein filled with re-deposited soil with a large number of artifacts relating to various time periods: Neolithic, Ptolemaic and Islamic [1, p. 15]. According to the archaeologist, this building site was originally the site for working out the quartz vein. The territory was cleared in the Islamic Period, the worked-out veins were backfilled, and on top of them a settlement was built. It was in the upper layers of the quartz vein fill (US2033) where Italian expedition has discovered several Egyptian objects: clay painted shabti (4.39 cm) dated by K. Andrews to the Third Intermediate Period, and an amulet which, according to Andrews, may be a depiction of a false beard (3.1 × 0.9 cm) [2, p. 47].

Unfortunately, the reports of the CeRDO provide neither photographs nor drawings of pottery which can be attributed to the pre-Islamic Period with a sufficient degree of certainty. However, it would have been logical to expect the presence of such pottery in large quantities if there was a settlement at the time and goldmining at that settlement.

The discovery of an Egyptian amulet next to a building dating back to the Islamic Period could mean that the building rested on strata of the earlier periods. On this basis the Nubian expedition decided to further research the object, which was named Building 1, Room 1 (Fig. 2.1.). The clearing of the worked-out quartz vein continued. Numerous fragments of glass, pottery, and bronze objects dated back to the Islamic Period were discovered in the fill [3, pp. 138–139].

Pottery, originating from Building 1, presents a typical picture of medieval Deraheib. Most of the pottery is the so-called Aswan pottery made of kaolin clay, related to the so-called late Aswan pottery — AIII–AIV according to W. Adams. Some vessels discovered in Deraheib combine features of group AIII (9th–10th centuries) and AIV (10th–14th centuries). Mostly these are Aswan early Islamic Utility Ware U8, Aswan Islamic Utility Ware U6, Aswan Early Islamic White Ware W22, Aswan Medieval White Ware W12, Aswan Medieval Decorated Red Ware R24. In the same Building 1 we have discovered some Nubian molded pottery, Egyptian glazed pottery, lusterware and pottery made of the Nile alluvial clay. The similar finds were made at other locations in Deraheib, for example, in the pits near the wall of the Northern Fortress (for details see: [4; 5]).

Description, functional purpose and dating of the pendant

This type of faience amulet pendants is well known in literature and has analogies both in museum exhibitions and collections, and directly in the archeological context. This pendant made of so-called Egyptian faience, cast in a clay mold using traditional Ancient Egyptian techniques, is often defined as an image of god Bes' head. However, another interpretation is also quite possible, with this artifact being a pendant in the form of a mask of Bes.

The dimensions of the faience pendant are as follows: 5.3 cm in height, 3.1 cm in width, and 1.4 cm thick (Fig. 2.2.–2.3.). The deity's large head is crowned with a tall headdress consisting of a narrow plain base in the shape of cavetto cornice topped with a plume of five feathers conditionally drawn in vertical lines. The crown is wider in its upper part than it is at the base, and the outermost feathers of the plume are bent outward — a characteristic feature of god Bes' headdress, which appears starting the end of the 25th dynasty [6, p. 153].

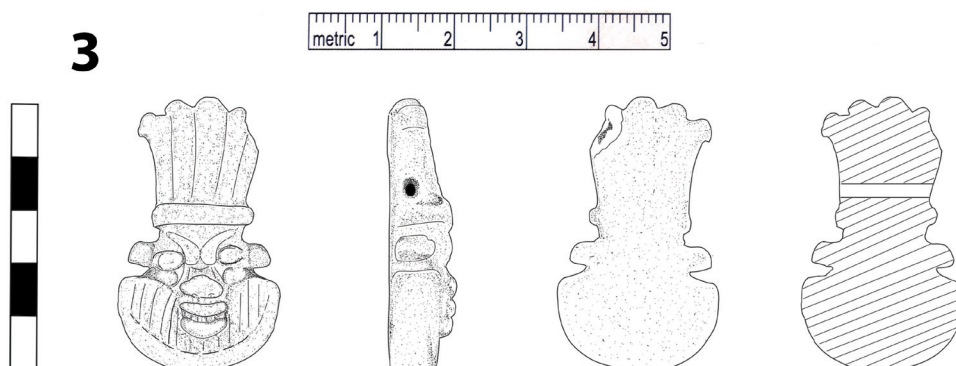
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Fig. 2. Building 1. Photo: C. Samyrskiy (1). The Faience Pendant in the Form of the God Bes.
Photo: C. Samyrskiy (2). Drawing of the Pendant. Drawing: Y. Dmitrieva (3).

Bes' head is relatively large, with round feline ears. Narrow-set almost vertical wide arched eyebrows, thickened at the bridge of his nose, frame his round, slightly bulging eyes. Plump lips with almost horizontal upper lip are curled in a half smile, revealing the upper row of teeth. Bes' beard and mustache are conditionally drawn in separate stripes, a little away from the lower edge of the amulet.

The hole for hanging is made just above the base of the crown.

A distinctive feature in the form of a mask/head of Bes from Deraheib is the semicircular lower part, reminding of a white usekh collar. Unfortunately the preservation state and the conditional nature of modeling does not allow us to draw definite conclusions, but comparison with more preserved objects suggests the similarity of the Deraheib pendant with the so-called aegis with Bes head group of amulets (*see details below*).

The literature on the origin, functions and significance of the cult of god Bes is quite extensive. His peculiar iconography, which had already become classical by the New Kingdom period, combines the features of a man (disproportionate body with half-bent at the knees, squat, crooked legs) and an animal (lion's mane, feline ears, and also often depicted tail and skin of a lion or a cheetah), full-face, rather than side-face depiction (which is typical only of other zooanthropomorphic deities, such as Hathor and Bat), and his uncertain age (Bes has the body of a child or a dwarf) distinguish Bes amidst other Egyptian deities (e. g., [7, p.95]). Literally filled with magic, liminal in his nature, Bes performed apotropaic functions, was the patron of women in labor and children, a bright character of folk religion, combining frightening beastly demonic and protective functions. That is why Bes amulets were among the most popular in Egypt since the Third Intermediate Period. Moreover, images of this deity are often seen on items of furniture and jewelry; his image was fashioned in numerous terracotta and stone statuettes, pictured on ceramic vessels, etc.

Pendants shaped as a mask or head of Bes appear in New Kingdom Egypt as a separate group of amulets, but become popular since the Third Intermediate Period [6, pp. 132–133]. Such amulets become very popular in Late Period. In our opinion, most parallels and analogies of the faience amulet-pendant from Deraheib relate to the Late Period objects.

Judging by the appearance of the pendant from Deraheib, it is obvious that it belongs rather to the mass production, but the simplified form of its iconography, functionality and symbolism reflect all the same trends and motifs typical of more famous similarly dated objects in the world museum exhibitions and collections¹.

Among the best images of Bes mask dating to the Late Period is a faience amulet-pendant from the Metropolitan Museum of Art (inv. 26.7.1040)². It is one of the most skillfully crafted and at the same time one of the most typical pendants of this group. The relatively large figurine (7.2 cm length, 4.4. cm width) is a full-face image of Bes' head in tall crown with a plum of five carefully drawn ostrich feathers, just like in the Deraheib pendant, emanating from the cornice-shaped base. Rounded feline ears, round cheeks, frowning arched eyebrows, flattened nose, and a widow's peak are the features typical of the amulets of this group. Unlike the Deraheib pendant, the Bes from MMA has a broad mustache framing his smiling mouth with barely hinted teeth and a protruding tongue. His mane is fashioned by separate stylized curls. In a similar but somewhat more conventional manner and style another amulet is fashioned — the pendant shaped as a head/mask of Bes dated to the Achaemenid period (539–330 BC), which was excavated in Susa and is now stored in the Louvre collection (inv. SB 3564)³.

¹ A selection of such objects is presented in Romano's dissertation [6, p. 175].

² Bes Amulet. Late Period. *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*. Available at: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/548299> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

³ Pendentif. *Louvre Collections*. Available at: <https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010121695> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

Amidst the dated Late Period amulets in the form of the mask of Bes, we should also mention a greenish-blue faience pendant from Chapel G7810 in Giza, currently stored in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (inv. 27.1005)⁴. This pendant resembles the Deraheib amulet in size (6.2 cm), as well as in the presence of a through hole in the base of the crown for hanging. The crown is also decorated with a plume of five feathers. However, the Giza pendant, like the amulets from MMA and Louvre collections, considered above, clearly relates to a number of positional goods, and is distinguished by the fine elaboration of details and skillful modeling of facial features. The god's beard is fashioned in the form of curling spirals, and his tongue is stuck out. Rounded cheeks and very typical slanted eyebrows, almost vertical, emanating from the wrinkled bridge of his nose, thickened in the lower part and narrowed closer to the temples, also bespeak similarity. His wide, flat nose and round, slightly bulging eyes also suggest that the amulets from Giza and Deraheib relate to approximately the same time period.

A separate group of analogies consists of several amulets and molds for their casting from Naukratis, stored in the British Museum (e. x. UC52848⁵, EA27540⁶; EA27539⁷, BM 1888,0601.747⁸ and others). According to the curator's comments on the museum's website, they were produced in Naukratis itself. Molds for Bes' head, though of different type, were discovered at the site (BM 1888,0601.747; BM 1920,0417.2). Despite the fact that Naukratis amulets are somewhat smaller in size (3.2 cm in height), than the Deraheib pendant, they relate to the same type — combining the image of Bes' head/mask and the wide usekh collar. This type is often called aegis amulets [6, p. 177]. Amulets of this kind were extremely widespread in this period both in Egypt and beyond its borders (see, for example: [8, S. 16, Tf. III, No. 13]), which is probably explained by the belief in the “double” magical power of the amulet, which absorbed the protective functions of both Bes' mask and the usekh collar. A similar aegis mask, only with a shortened crown plume, is also stored in the Louvre collection (inv. E 19334; MG 1825)⁹.

And although the pendant from Deraheib is fashioned in a rather conditional simplified manner, and the smoothened contours of the collar can be traced mainly by the outlines and sketched “drawing” of the beard, when comparing these two images, some similarity can be traced, which is emphasized by the modeling of the face: round cheeks, wide flattened nose, almost vertical upturned eyebrows, lips open in a half-smile, upper lip is straight and horizontal, the teeth are visible [6, p. 175].

The conditionally schematic manner, in which the Deraheib amulet-pendant is fashioned, does not allow us to attribute it with certainty to one of the types described above. This kind of mass production of faience workshops is found both in Egypt (compare with

⁴ Head of Bes — Works. *Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*. Available at: <https://collections.mfa.org/objects/146194/head-of-bes?ctx=cd9864ac-a026-4bff-b353-8e71ab15c991&idx=0> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

⁵ Amulet; pendant. *British Museum*. Available at: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/X_844 (accessed: 05.02.2024).

⁶ Amulet; pendant. Museum number EA27540. *British Museum*. Available at: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA27540 (accessed: 05.02.2024).

⁷ Amulet; pendant. Museum number EA27539. *British Museum*. Available at: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA27539 (accessed: 05.02.2024).

⁸ Amulet-mould. Museum number 1888,0601.747. *British Museum*. Available at: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1888-0601-747 (accessed: 05.02.2024).

⁹ Amulette. *Louvre Collections*. Available at: <https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010005580> (accessed: 05.02.2024).

one of the examples from NY Carlsberg: ÆIN 775 [9]), and beyond its borders, for example, in the Levant [8, S. 20, Tf. XVII, No. 29–32].

Several amulets in the form of the head/mask of god Bes are stored in the collection of National Museum of Khartoum (inv. 51/a [10, p. 268], inv. 2757 [10, p. 133]). Despite the similar iconography — frowning eyebrows sketched in almost vertical lines, open mouth, in some cases — a protruding tongue, as well as a crown with ostrich feathers — these amulets differ in style from the Egyptian images of god Bes.

Unfortunately, we were not able to find a complete analogy of the pendant-amulet in the form of the head/mask of Bes in an archaeologically precisely dated context, but a number of iconographic features allow us to date it back to the Late Period or early Ptolemaic period.

The issue of symbolic meaning and functions of such pendants deserves special consideration. Since the Old Kingdom god Bes was among the helper-deities — gods, whom people addressed for magical protection. The literature emphasized certain features of Bes' iconography, for example, his full-face images, which “were considered a powerful apotropay: no danger is hidden from their direct gaze” [11, p. 249]. Another typical feature of Bes amulets also draws attention — the Deraheib figurine lacks a protruding tongue “which can be interpreted as a threat (like archaic images of Gorgon Medusa, also a full-face with protruding tongue)” [11, p. 249].

Also in literature Bes is often ranked among the so-called liminal deities, who protected a person in critical transitional periods, when he or she was most vulnerable to the forces of chaos and evil: birth and death, sleep and illness, or at the time of war [11, p. 255; 12, p. 56]. Special attention should be given to the funerary context, where the majority of amulets in the form of mask/head of Bes were found. E. Bornemann and S. T. Smith note that “Bes was believed to preside over sleep, given the ancient Egyptian conception of the close relationship between sleep and death. He provided safe passage for the dead during their journey through the underworld, specifically assisting the deceased against demons and the bau of other deities” [12, p. 56].

Bes' liminal nature also had spatial and temporal significance. He helped to control and soften the boundaries not only between various cycles of a person, but also the boundaries between various geographical territories. The great popularity of this deity in Nubia, starting from the New Kingdom period and up to the Meroitic period, is directly related to these aspects. Bornemann and Smith explain it by the “concept of entanglement”, drawing attention to the “increasing examples of the coexistence and interweaving of both Nubian and Egyptian traditions in the later history of the Nubian cemetery at Tombos, from the late Ramesside period” [12]. Thus, Bes amulets were discovered in burials that represent “an excellent case of entanglement, since it combines a Nubian style tumulus superstructure with an Egyptian-oriented east-west shaft. One of the burials was in a coffin, head to the west, wrapped and probably mummified Egyptian style, but placed upon a bed in a longstanding Nubian tradition” [12, p. 52].

We should note that active acceptance of Bes and the deities of his circle in Nubia was not least connected with the peculiar iconography of this deity, pronounced negroid features and attributes. In the past, a number of Egyptologists have even suggested that Bes was a god ‘imported’ either from Nubia or from Southern Egypt. However, at the moment most researchers agree that Bes is a native Egyptian deity, and his connection with the South has a purely symbolic meaning — through the ‘exotic’ iconography he was associated with the remote southern borders [11].

Speaking of the symbolism of the pendant-amulet, one of its interpretations is that of a mask of Bes (e. g. [7; 13]). Thus, Ch. Loeben justifies a hypothesis that a number of Bes' images, in particular those similar to the Deraheib amulet discussed in this article, are not images of the deity himself but rather of his mask. The author also presents a curious interpretation of the deity known as Bes-Pantheos, often depicted as a winged figure with two sets of arms, wearing the Atef crown and having Bes' face. Often in historiography, Bes-Pantheos is interpreted as some kind of pantheistic deity, into which the cult of a domestic patron-deity of women in labor and small children has "grown". Loeben believes, that in late Egyptian history, a deity containing all Egyptian gods in one is shown simply wearing a Bes mask [13, p. 71]. "This is not the Bes himself making a career leap from good-natured household demon to cosmic all-god but simply his typical and familiar apotropaic visage. In the form of a mask, his face turns any Egyptian god into an available and present folk god" [13, p. 71]. It is no coincidence that amulets with an image of such a powerful magical artifact were so popular among the Egyptians, both in life and after death. Extra magical protection was probably given by joining the usekh collar to the already powerful talisman.

Historical context

So how did a pendant depicting an Ancient Egyptian deity end up many miles away from Egypt, in the heart of the Nubian Desert? The most logical answer to this question would be: the amulet was brought there by the Egyptian goldminers.

The question of how far deep into the Nubian Desert have Egyptian goldmining expedition reached seems to never have been seriously considered in Egyptology and Nubiology, although it certainly is of the utmost interest. However, the data for research of this issue is quite scarce. The Nile valley part of Nubia was studied in great detail in course of the First and Second archaeological research of Nubia, as well as during the rescue works relating to the construction of the Aswan hydroelectric project back in the 1960s. For the most part, however, the research was limited to the banks of the Nile [14, pp. 27–46]. The Nubian Expedition of the USSR Academy of Sciences was an exception. In course of the second season of their fieldwork (1962–1963) the expedition conducted epigraphic work in Wadi al-Allaqi. The basin of the dry river was explored to the depth of ca. 100 km. The researchers have discovered 200 inscriptions left by officials of the Old and New Kingdom periods, who mined stone and gold in the Nubian Desert [15]. In Umm-Ashira (or Bir-al-Askari) area, Soviet archaeologists have found fragments of stele similar to the so-called Qubban stele [15, pp. 29–30]. This object was discovered back in 1842 in the ruins of Qubban fortress, built in the Middle Kingdom where Wadi al-Allaqi enters the Nile. The text of the stele tells how a well was dug by order of Ramesses II in the 3rd year of his reign in the country of Ikait, which, according to the source, was abundant in gold but scarce in water.

Discovery of the stele fragments in Umm-Ashira region meant, first of all, that the path to the country of Ikait lay along Wadi al-Allaqi, and secondly, that the country of Ikait itself lay obviously further east, because no traces of ancient goldmining were discovered near Umm-Ashira. A staging post was located there, on the way deeper into the desert. Thus, the country of Ikait, where, according to Qubban stele, the expeditions were sent for goldmining, was probably located further east. Possibly, it was located in the upper reaches of Wadi al-Allaqi, where, because of precipitation during the fall and winter

months, water and vegetation, necessary for the year-round functioning of mines, were in abundance.

The Soviet expedition finished their epigraphic research in Wadi al-Allaqi at the site of Umm-Qaryat. The reason for this was lack of funding for the third season of fieldwork in Nubia, and the absence of confirmed sites southeast of Umm-Qaryat along the Wadi al-Allaqi riverbed. In fact, Umm-Qaryat lay outside the area flooded by Lake Nasser.

However, the goldmining sites of the New Kingdom were discovered in other places along the Wadi. First of all, in course of works of the Centro Ricerche sul Deserto Orientale. The Center's mission was to study archaeological sites of the Nubian Desert in the northeast of Sudan. Between 1989 and 2006, the Center has researched a vast area of about 90,000 km². About 200 archaeological sites were discovered, mapped and described, including ancient and medieval mines; quarries; goldmining settlements, relating to various periods, from the Middle Kingdom to the Middle Ages; necropolises and individual burials; rock paintings [16, pp. 203–204; 17, pp. 52–57]. The Center's studies have significantly enriched the body of Ancient Egyptian inscriptions, discovered along the roads that connected Korosko and Abu-Hamed.

Between 1996 and 1999, in the Eastern Desert of Egypt and the Nubian Desert in Sudan, in course of their research German scientists Rosemarie and Dietrich Klemm have discovered about 250 sites related to goldmining in Antiquity and Middle Ages.

In the region of our interest in the upper reaches of Wadi al-Allaqi they have discovered more than 20 goldmining sites [18, p. 608, Fig. 7.4] relating to the New Kingdom, and about 50 goldmining sites of the Arabic period (10th–14th centuries) [18, p. 620, Fig. 7.10]. Deraheib was also researched in detail. However, the scientists have found no traces of settlements preceding the Arabic period [18, p. 445]. And yet, in their opinion in Deraheib and its vicinity people could have been engaged in goldmining from quartz ore collected in the Wadi, destroyed by natural processes [18, p. 445].

According to the researchers, the importance of Deraheib was due to the fact that not only the route leading to the Red Sea ran through it, but also the route leading to much richer gold-bearing quartz veins of the Onib region [18, p. 445]. In this region, located to the southeast of Deraheib, D. and R. Klemm have discovered five New Kingdom settlements.

Unfortunately, only one hieroglyphic inscription was discovered in the upper reaches of Wadi al-Allaqi. It is located at a distance of ca. 20 km from Deraheib, in Wadi Nesari, whose dry bed runs parallel to Wadi al-Allaqi [19, pp. 42–44]. The absence of hieroglyphic inscriptions in Deraheib itself does not mean that there was no goldmining here in the Pharaonic period. They may have not been preserved, or were covered with crumbled rock. Or perhaps they may simply have not been discovered yet.

One of the goldminers' settlements is possibly depicted on two papyrus scraps of the 19th–20th centuries from the Turin Museum. E. A. W. Budge was, probably, the first one to imply that the map from the Turin Museum depicts gold mines, a settlement of miners, and the sanctuary of Amun, located in Wadi al-Allaqi [20, pp. 335–336]. Developing his idea, A. Paul suggested that the goldmining center was located in Deraheib [21, p. 27]. However, other scientist fairly point out that on the Turin papyrus, in addition to gold mines, places of mining *bxn* — graywacke (gray sandstone) were marked. Such a combination is found only in one place of the Eastern Desert — in Wadi al-Hammamat. There were located both graywacke quarries and gold mines with a miner settlement of the Bir

Umm Fawakhir area [22, p. 173]. The map from Turin Museum, most likely, dates back to the reign of Ramesses IV. B. B. Piotrovsky also believed that the papyrus from the Turin Museum depicts a goldmining center in the Nubian desert [15, pp. 18–19].

Researchers from the Centro Ricerce sul Deserto Orientale also shared the idea that the goldminers' settlement, marked on the Turin papyrus, may have been located in Deraheib [23, p. 150]. However, the main hypothesis, formulated by the Center's researchers, was an assumption that the city of Berenice Panchrysos (All-Golden), mentioned in the sixth book *Natural History* by Pliny the Elder, could be localized at the site of Deraheib. This hypothesis was discussed in 1990 by the international committee of Egyptologists and Nubiologists consisting of I. Caneva, Ch. Bonnet, J. Vercoutter, S. Donadoni, A.-M. Roveri Donadoni, Al. Castiglioni, G. Negro and An. Castiglioni. The committee concluded that the site discovered by Castiglioni mission could be in fact identified with Berenice Panchrysos [24, p. 44]. However, in our opinion, no convincing evidence was given that it was Berenice Panchrysos located in Deraheib in the Ptolemaic Period, and not some ordinary goldminers' settlement. As evidence Antique authors (Ptolemy and Agatharchides of Cnidus) were cited, that the Ptolemies were mining gold on the Southern outskirts of Egypt [25]. Another evidence given was the find made by the Center's expedition back in February 1989 using a metal detector at the Deraheib settlement — a tetradrachm of Ptolemy Soter [24, p. 44].

In course of the Center's field research at Deraheib, which began in 1997, other finds dating the pre-Islamic period were made, primarily in the Southeastern part of the site, the so-called Granite City. The most significant among them are a faience amulet typical for the Late and Ptolemaic periods — glazed composition quadruple 'wedjat'-eye amulet, a faience figurine of a goddess wearing a double royal crown, dated by the authors of the report from the 25th Dynasty to 332 AD, and a Ptolemaic coin.

Another Bes amulet was discovered at the side, which the Italian researchers related to the Graeco-Roman period, also noting that the dating of the object may have been even older [23]. God Bes is depicted in a crown of ostrich feathers, standing in a frontal pose, resting his hands on his hips. This is also a fairly common iconography of this deity. The lower part of the figurine has not been preserved. Amulets of this type are stored in the collections of various museums, and their dating is also quite vast: from the 1st Millenium BC to the Ptolemaic period.

According to the reports of the Centro Ricerce sul Deserto Orientale, pottery of Ptolemaic and Roman periods is also present at the site. The finds of this pottery come from the area of the so-called Granite City, which was identified by Italian specialists with Berenice Panchrysos. Unfortunately, this pottery remains practically unpublished, with the exception of a few fragments — Italian sigillata and Eastern sigillata (BP 98 40021, no. 1–3 of the report), and also the Egyptian plate that could be attributed to the Ptolemaic period (BP 98 42007, no. 4 of the report) [2, p. 47].

Possible hypotheses

The excavations data of Centro Ricerce sul Deserto Orientale in 1997–1999, in course of which Ancient Egyptian amulets, Ptolemaic ceramics and two Ptolemaic coins were found, seem to give grounds for stating that there was a goldminers' settlement at the site of the Medieval al-Allaqui back in the Ptolemaic period.

However, the paradoxical archaeological context of discovering the Egyptian amulets in the quartz vein fill beneath Room 1 of Building 1, requires explanation: how did these amulets end up in the upper part of the fill, directly under the floor, if the rest of the pit fill is dated precisely to the Islamic Period based on the pottery analysis. The most convincing hypothesis in our opinion is that in the 9th century¹⁰ in Deraheib on the site of the settlement the development of quartz veins began. In the beginning of the 10th century, when Deraheib gradually becomes the center of the gold mining region, the development of a town¹¹ begins opposite the Northern Fortress, which by that time had already been erected [4, p. 105]. For this purpose, the area along the eastern bank of the wadi is levelled; worked-out quartz veins are backfilled, and the buildings of the earlier Islamic period are demolished. It can be assumed that in the area of the future settlement there is an elite necropolis of nomadic tribes of the Nubian desert, in the shape of circular platform mounds with a diameter of 7 to 10 m and a height of 0.5 to 1.5 m, similar to the ones discovered by the MSU Nubian expedition in the Onib Depression [4, pp. 109–110]. The earliest burials in disk-shaped mounds are dated to the 7th BC [16, p. 214]. It is possible that the Ancient Egyptian amulets and shabti found there were part of grave goods of some Nubian desert dweller, who was involved in trading with Egypt, or escorted and supplied caravans with food and water, or served as a mercenary. While leveling the area for construction of the town this mound was demolished, and the grave goods ended up in a quartz vein backfill. At least this hypothesis explains the funerary nature of this Egyptian find — shabti and the absence of Ptolemaic pottery in the quartz vein backfill.

The above hypothesis is only one of the possible assumptions as of how this Ancient Egyptian amulet could have ended up hundreds of miles from the Nile and Egypt. Future excavations at the site will provide new data on the presence of Egyptians in the upper reaches of Wadi al-Allaqi in the pre-Islamic period.

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¹⁰ The earliest mention of gold mining in Wadi al-Allaqi is in Al-Ya'kubī's work (Ya'qubī Kitāb al-Buldan (in Arabic). A. W. T. Juynboll (ed.). 1861. Reprint. Legare Street Press, 2022.)

¹¹ Radiocarbon analysis of coal found in the deposit under the mihrab of the mosque (Building 3) in the center of the ancient settlement, conducted in the Laboratory of radiocarbon dating and electron microscopy of the Institute of Geography of the Russian Academy of Sciences gave a date: 1135 ± 20 BP (776–990 cal AD), Median 931 cal AD.

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Фаянсовая подвеска в виде бога Беса, найденная на памятнике Дерахейб (Судан)*

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В декабре 2018 г. в ходе второго сезона работ Нубийской археолого-антропологической экспедиции Научно-исследовательского института и Музея антропологии МГУ им. М. В. Ломоносова на городище Дерахейб в верховьях Вади-аль-Аллаки (Республика Судан) была обнаружена фаянсовая подвеска в виде головы/маски древнеегипетского бога Беса. На основании археологических данных, полученных в ходе работ экспедиции НИИ и музея антропологии МГУ, а также свидетельств письменных источников большинство находок на памятнике Дерахейб было отнесено к исламскому периоду (IX–XII вв.), тогда как предмет настоящего исследования — подвеска в виде маски Беса — принадлежит фараоновскому времени и может быть предварительно датирована с использованием сравнительно-типологического метода Поздним периодом — началом Птолемеевского. В статье детально описываются и анализируются обстоятельства обнаружения группы древнеегипетских предметов на памятнике, причем эти находки рассматриваются в контексте истории золотодобычи древних египтян в регионе Вади-аль-Аллаки. Авторы доказывают, что египетские экспедиции проникали вглубь территории Нубийской пустыни вплоть до верховий Вади, где расположен Дерахейб. В заключении приводится гипотеза, объясняющая один из вариантов появления древнеегипетских предметов в заполнении выработанных кварцевых жил под домом, выстроенным в исламский период.

Ключевые слова: Нубийская археолого-антропологическая экспедиция МГУ, Судан, Дерахейб, Древний Египет, Бес, амулеты, Поздний период, Птолемеевский период.

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