

СТАТЬИ

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK AT GEBEL EL-NOUR AND IN THE AREA OF WADI GHAYADA (MIDDLE EGYPT) IN THE 2025 SEASON

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Abstract: *The article presents preliminary results of the third field season of the Egyptian-Russian Gebel el-Nour Archaeological Project, conducted in November–December 2025. The work included excavations; archaeological, topographic, and geophysical surveys; investigation of the Wadi Ghayada cultural landscape, and conservation of architectural remains. Late Roman and Byzantine buildings, a kitchen complex, pottery, and a coin from early Diocletian reign, found west of the temple, show that the local temple of Isis had been substantially dismantled by the late 3rd century AD. The space was subsequently replanned and occupied by domestic and economic buildings. In the Northern necropolis and quarry zone, 59 new features and groups of features were recorded, including rock-cut tombs, traces of stone extraction, and anthropoid burial recesses. In the Southern necropolis, ground-penetrating radar detected 26 major anomalies. Investigation of one, first identified in 2024, revealed a new tomb (hypogeum GN 6020). Completion of excavations in the tomb GN 6010 provided new evidence for local Roman period funerary practices, including ceramic and painted wooden coffins, funerary masks, and mummification. The regional survey in Wadi Ghayada area clarified the present condition of its cultural landscape. It documented traditional caravan routes, a possible chert-cobble extraction site, and two caravan stations on the route to the travertine quarries in Wadi Muathil. The new evidence demonstrates the long and complex development of the cultural landscape on the east bank of the Nile south of Beni Suef and provides a foundation for future research and preservation of the region's archaeological heritage.*

Keywords: Greco-Roman Egypt, Middle Egypt, Gebel el-Nour, settlement, necropolis, temple, cultural landscape

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Archaeological monuments in the mouth of Wadi Ghayada, located on the east bank of the Nile River approximately 25 km south of Beni Suef, were first recorded in the archaeological

atlas by George Daressy whose work remained unpublished until 2002 [Daressy, 2019, p. 51]. In published records, ancient monuments in the mouth of Wadi Ghayada were briefly described in 1961 and 1991 following German and Egyptian-German surveys conducted in 1958 and 1981 [Kaiser, 1961, S. 41; Gomaà et al., 1991, S. 183–184]. The biggest and best-preserved ancient site within the archaeological zone in the mouth of Wadi Ghayada is Gebel el-Nour. Today, it is known primarily for a largely dismantled Greco-Roman limestone temple, at least partially decorated during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (ruled from 284 to 246 BC). Between 2014 and 2016, Egyptian archaeological teams investigated the central part of the temple area of Gebel el-Nour [Boraik, Eissa, 2014; Boraik, 2015; Eissa et al., 2016; Eissa, Safina, 2019]. These works revealed the remains of a provincial sanctuary (measuring approximately 16.5×23.4 m), surrounded by Roman and Byzantine structures.

The surveys carried out by the Egyptian-Russian Gebel el-Nour Archaeological Project (GNAP) in 2022 and 2024 [Lebedev, 2023; 2025; Malykh, 2023; 2025; Vetokhov, 2023; 2025] identified six functional areas within the ancient cultural landscape of Gebel el-Nour: the temple area on Kom I (Area I); Kom II, with the remains of presumed monumental structures (Area II); a settlement area around and between Kom I and Kom II, now buried beneath modern agricultural fields (Area III); a settlement area north of Kom II (Area IV); the northern rock-cut cemetery and associated quarry zone (Area V); and the southern cemetery located in wadi deposits (Area VI). In 2024, the project initiated test excavations in the temple area (Area I) and the necropolis (Areas V and VI). In 2025, work continued in Areas I, III–VI at Gebel el-Nour and was extended to the southern part of the mouth of Wadi Ghayada and along the main course of the wadi (*fig. 1*).

The third field season of the Egyptian-Russian Gebel el-Nour Archaeological Project took place from November 8 to December 25, 2025.¹ The mission focused its efforts on excavations in the western part of the Greco-Roman temple complex (Area I) and test excavations in the southern cemetery (Area VI). At the same time, members of the mission continued topographic, archaeological, and geophysical surveys, carried out consolidation works within the Greco-Roman temple zone, and continued the routine study of material culture and bioarchaeological remains. The aim of this paper is to present the main preliminary scientific results of the 2025 field season.

SURVEYS IN THE AREA OF GEBEL EL-NOUR

Survey activities covered the entire archaeological zone of Gebel el-Nour, including the settlement (Areas I–IV), the quarries (Area V), and the necropolis (Areas V–VI). These activities implied the recording of surface finds, the removal of modern debris from visible anthropogenic features, subsurface testing with a geological probe, and ground-penetrating radar (GPR) research.

The recording of surface finds was undertaken to determine the extent of the settlement associated with the Greco-Roman temple in Area II. As the mission has access to Area II only through paths between cultivated plots and fields without standing crops (i.e. after harvesting,

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during ploughing, and immediately after sowing), the mapping of surface material remains is an ongoing process. The survey showed that pottery, predominantly dating to the Roman and Byzantine periods, is abundant on the surface of agricultural fields north and northeast of the temple area (Area I), whereas it is scarce to the east, south, and west. These preliminary results suggest that the Roman and Late Antique settlement developed primarily to the north and northeast of the temple, in the direction of the modern village of Gebel el-Nour, placing the temple area at the southern edge of the settlement.² The virtual absence of Ptolemaic pottery on the surface renders both the extent and the location of the Ptolemaic settlement associated with the temple of Gebel el-Nour rather uncertain. As in the temple area, Ptolemaic occupation deposits within the settlement zone may lie below the current groundwater level.

Cleaning of visible anthropogenic features from modern debris was carried out in the quarry zone and the northern rock-cut cemetery (Area V). In addition to removing modern refuse as part of the mission's ongoing site-management efforts, this work aimed to verify the nature of the artificial cuts first recorded during the 2024 season and to incorporate them into the general map of the area. These activities resulted in the identification of a number of potential rock-cut tombs, as well as extensive evidence of stone extraction.

Altogether, 59 different artificial features (tombs, cuts, burial recesses) or clusters of features (mostly areas of stone extraction) were recorded over 9 ha of the Northern cemetery and the quarries. Among the most interesting objects are rock-cut tombs with partly collapsed entrances. One of these tombs (feature 568) still houses at least one anthropoid limestone sarcophagus or sarcophagus lid oriented with the head to the southwest. Today, this tomb is almost completely covered with debris and may be one of the rock-cut structures observed by earlier surveyors in April 1981 [Gomaà et al., 1991, S. 184].

In addition to the rock-cut hypogea, one of which was excavated in 2024 [Lebedev, 2025, p. 15–16], a previously unrecorded type of burial installation – anthropoid burial recesses – was identified in this archaeological area. Three complete recesses (features 421, 423, and 424), measuring 1.9–2.0 m in length and 0.57–0.66 m in width, and one apparently unfinished example (feature 420) were recorded on a limestone slope in the far eastern part of the Northern cemetery, approximately 280 m east of the settlement. The recesses were intended for burials oriented with the head toward the northwest, with only minor variation. This orientation follows the alignment of the local limestone outcrops, which appears to have influenced the layout of many rock-cut features in the northern part of the mouth of Wadi Ghayada. It also broadly coincides with the position of the setting sun from early June to early August in this part of the Nile Valley [Hoffmann, 2026].

Among the features recorded during the survey, particular attention may be drawn to several rock-cut installations, presumably associated with production activities. The most intriguing is arguably feature 609 at the northern edge of the Northern cemetery (*fig. 1–2*)³, whose location was shown by local workmen employed by the mission. After surface cleaning, a rock-cut corridor measuring 2.67×0.70 m and oriented northeast-southwest was exposed. Two niches (0.60×0.55 m and 0.70×0.57 m) adjoin its western side and preserve narrow rock-cut ledges, probably intended to support limestone slab covers. Between them is a circular depression of unknown depth, 0.31 m in diameter. Geological probing showed that the corridor floor slopes approximately 0.5 m

² However, it should be borne in mind that surface finds alone cannot be regarded as a reliable indicator of ancient activity, as their distribution may have been affected by the extraction of occupation deposits and their subsequent use as fertilizer (*sebakh*) on surrounding agricultural fields [Bailey, 1999]. The virtual absence of pottery on the fields west of the irrigation channel, dug sometime before the early twentieth century about 130 m west of the temenos wall, suggests that at least part of the pottery recorded between the temple area (Area I) and the channel may have been redeposited through the use of *sebakh*.

³ For *figs 1–10*, see color insert.

from northeast to southwest. According to the workmen, a staircase or sloping passage leads to a series of underground chambers that they explored as children. This information cannot be verified without excavation and should therefore be treated with caution. Based on the available evidence, feature 609 may represent the remains of a Roman or Byzantine production facility (press installation?) rather than a funerary structure.

GPR surveys were conducted in Areas I, V, and VI. In Area I, the survey focused on the territory southwest of the temple with the aim of identifying possible stone structures located within the outer enclosure wall of the sacred complex. Only one anomaly potentially associated with a structure was recorded to the south of the temple vestibule (*fig. 3*). The lack of other clear anomalies may be explained by the presence of groundwater, salt accumulation in the soil or the large number of displaced stone blocks within the occupation deposits.

By contrast, GPR investigations conducted west of the enclosure wall confirmed two large anomalies: one (at least 5×9 m) located on the main axis of the temple approximately 30 m west of the enclosure wall, possibly representing an embarkation facility or some other element of temple infrastructure, and another (about 7.5×7.5 m) situated approximately 15 m north of the *dromos*, outside the *temenos*. The possible presence of stone or mud-brick structures beneath the surface in these two areas is further supported by the relatively sparse and weak vegetation visible on some satellite images (*fig. 3*).

Significantly greater effort was devoted to the continuation of the GPR survey in the southern cemetery (Area VI). In 2025, the geophysical team surveyed 8750 m² in this part of the Gebel el-Nour necropolis, substantially expanding upon the 6500 m² surveyed in 2024 (*fig. 4*). In four 25×50 m squares (Squares 1–2 and 4–5) and one 50×50 m square (Square 3), the new survey identified 26 anomalies preliminarily interpreted as potential ancient structures that require further detailed analysis and test excavations. The test GPR survey of the southernmost Square 6 revealed no major anomalies comparable to those detected to the north. Based on surface finds and information provided by SCA inspectors and local residents, Square 6 may be occupied by simple shallow graves and burials in wooden coffins; however, the full extent of this minor cemetery remains unknown. In general, the GPR results confirmed the eastern and southern limits of the Southern cemetery occupied by potential subterranean structures (possibly tombs), as initially proposed in 2024 on the basis of data from the first topographic survey.

The topographic survey conducted in 2025 focused on the southern part of the Northern cemetery (Area V). The area was documented using a GoPro 11 camera mounted on an eight-meter pole. The resulting 3D-model and digital elevation model (DEM) were generated from over 5000 photographs. The new model complements the areas of the necropolis documented using the same technique in 2024 and made it possible to produce a complete topographic plan of the burial ground of Gebel el-Nour.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY IN THE WADI GHAYADA AREA

As part of the study of the regional cultural and natural landscapes, the mission initiated a survey of the Wadi Ghayada area (*fig. 5*). In particular, team members examined the archaeological zone in the southern part of the mouth of Wadi Ghayada and confirmed the presence of a small number of scattered Greco-Roman shards south of the modern village of Ghayada el-Sharkiya. These finds are likely associated with a settlement and a cemetery that once may have existed in this area but now presumably buried under the modern village and its extensive cemetery. Even the scarce remains of ancient cultural landscape reported by earlier surveyors [Kaiser, 1961, S. 41; Gomaà et al., 1991, S. 183–184] and recorded on some 20th century maps [Daressy, 2019, p. 51] have not been observed. Ruins of an ancient tower marked on some early 20th century

maps over the limestone plateau to the south of Ezbet Abu el-Nour⁴ are either destroyed or under the modern-day cemetery or the powerplant. According to the local inspectorate of Beni Suef, in 1997 an Egyptian mission of the Supreme Council of Antiquities under the supervision of Amal Farag excavated a rock-cut underground structure consisting of a staircase leading to a chamber at its bottom to the north of Ezbet Abu el-Nour and west of Ghayada el-Sharkiya (coordinates: 305914, 3201959⁵). Today, this previously excavated structure (possibly a well or a nilometer) lies beneath a modern village road.

Additionally, the team documented animal tracks associated with traditional caravan routes. Most of the tracks traced in 2025 using CORONA satellite images [Lebedev, 2025] are now very disturbed or destroyed by contemporary infrastructure. Only two tracks about 550 m long crossing the limestone plateau south of the mouth of Wadi Ghayada were confirmed on the ground and described (*fig. 5*). East of the modern asphalt road connecting Beni Suef and Minia, a potential ancient extraction site covering approximately 1.7 ha was recorded (coordinates: 309338; 3203668) (*fig. 5*). It was probably used for the extraction of chert-cobbles from the upper strata of the Eocene plateau, as evidenced by comparable sites elsewhere in Middle Egypt (for example, in Wadi el-Sheikh, located approximately 25 km south of Gebel el-Nour). Test excavations are required to confirm the nature and date of the activity that took place in this area.

Using satellite imagery and in cooperation with the Beni Suef Inspectorate, the mission identified and preliminarily documented two caravan stations. One (56×47 m) lies immediately north of Wadi Ghayada (321049; 3197520), while the other (49×45 m) is situated at the junction of Wadi Ghayada and the larger Wadi Sannur (324076; 3183242). Both appear to have been built around water sources along the “Alabaster Route” (Darb el-Rukham), which connected the mouths of Wadi Ghayada and Wadi Sannur with the travertine (Egyptian alabaster) quarries in Wadi Muathil, about 45 km southeast of Gebel el-Nour. The first station lies approximately 15 km from the wadi mouths, and the second another 15 km farther upstream. Constructed of local limestone, both employ similar drystone masonry techniques. Pottery observed around the second station, particularly on the dump south of the structure, indicate that the station may have served as a stopping point from at least the Byzantine time through the Ottoman period. The stations may have been constructed under Muhammad Ali Pasha, who initiated large-scale extraction of travertine from Wadi Muathil for his monuments in Cairo [Harrell, 2024, p. 524–526]. This preliminary interpretation and dating require verification through further investigation.

CONTINUATION OF EXCAVATIONS IN AREA I

In 2025, the mission continued excavations west of the Greco-Roman temple decorated during the reign of Ptolemy II. A 52 m² trench (Trench 3) was opened immediately north of Trench 1 excavated in 2024 (*fig. 6*). The work aimed to continue investigations initiated by the Egyptian team in 2015–2016 [Eissa et al., 2016]. Earlier excavations had documented the upper stratigraphic layers and revealed Late Roman and Byzantine walls and pavements constructed of fired brick, mud-brick, and reused limestone blocks. The 2025 season focused on Late Roman and Byzantine occupation deposits and architectural remains, as well as on defining the extent of stone pavement 101F, first identified in 2015–2016 and re-examined in 2024.

All Late Roman and Byzantine structures exposed in Trench 3, regardless of construction phase, are associated with three brick platforms. Platform 154F (1.60×0.88 m) adjoins the temple

⁴ See, for instance: Survey of Egypt. *Beni Suef, Sheet 68/60*. Scale 1:100,000. First Survey of Egypt Edition, 1926; A.M.S. 1, 1949 and Survey Department, Egypt. *Mudira Beni Suef, sheet 111*. Scale 1:50,000. Cairo: Survey Department, 1908.

⁵ Unless otherwise stated, all coordinates are reported in the WGS 84 / UTM Zone 36N coordinate reference system.

pronaos (Room 18), while Platform 156F (1.60×1.06 m) lies approximately 2.5 m to the west. A third platform (168F), a further 2.5 m west, has only been partially exposed. Low walls of fired brick and reused limestone blocks extend north from platforms 156F and 168F, forming a room approximately 2.5 m long. These walls overlie earlier occupation deposits associated with a cooking installation (*fig. 7*).

In all contexts investigated in Trench 3, with the exception of deposit 194D, ceramic material dating to the Late Roman and Byzantine periods (4th–7th centuries AD) was recorded. The assemblage was dominated by fragments of Middle Egyptian wine amphorae of the *Late Roman 7* type (*LR 7*); other vessels included Asia Minor/Cypriot amphorae of the *LR 1* type, Palestinian amphorae of the *LR 4* type, and Aswan amphorae. The assemblage also contained kitchenware and tableware. Kitchenware is represented by fragments of cauldrons, storage jars, braziers, large vats, and lids. Some cauldrons and storage jars have been originally decorated with coarse painted geometric motifs executed in a yellowish-white pigment on red or red-brown surfaces. Tableware comprises various types of bowls, plates, and jugs (sometimes equipped with a filter in the neck); the latter are often decorated with black, red, and brown painting on a white slip. A significant proportion of the tableware was made of kaolinitic clay of beige-pink or beige-orange color and was likely imported from Aswan. Local pottery is generally of lower quality and frequently exhibits uneven firing, which was likely characteristic of workshops located in the immediate vicinity of Gebel el-Nour.

Of particular interest is the discovery in Square 187 of the upper part of a ceramic “frog” lamp decorated with a relief depiction of hands. It was found on an assumed ancient walking surface at the interface between deposits (layers) 153L and 159L. Such mould-made lamps are typically dated to the 2nd–4th centuries AD. In the same square, from context 179L, the lower part of another lamp with a potmark typologically characteristic of the Byzantine period, was recorded.

In Squares 187 and 188 (context 191L), a complex interpreted on the base of associated pottery as a kitchen was excavated (*fig. 7*). Within it, a large thick-walled vat, a storage jar, a brazier, a cauldron, and the upper part of a Palestinian amphora of the *LR 4* type were found *in situ*. The amphora had been set rim-down into the ground and was likely used as a container for charcoal, as indicated by the heavy soot layer on its interior. In the northern part of the room, a broken red-slipped plate dating to the Byzantine period was recorded.

In context 194L, alongside the usual varieties of Byzantine pottery, a rim fragment of a thin-walled bowl decorated in the Barbotine technique and dated to the 2nd century AD was found. This find likely marks the beginning of earlier Roman period deposits. The same stratum also yielded a small bronze figurine of a male deity, most probably Thoth.

A bronze coin, dating to the beginning of the reign of Diocletian,⁶ was found directly beneath wall 160W. Since this wall was constructed of reused stone, including blocks extracted from the temple foundations, the find contributes to the chronology of the temple’s reuse as a quarry. It appears that by the reign of Diocletian, or shortly thereafter, the temple of Isis had already been substantially dismantled, and the area in front of its pronaos had been replanned to accommodate new structures.

CONTINUATION OF EXCAVATIONS IN AREA VI

In 2025, investigations were continued in burial chambers GN 6012 and GN 6013 of tomb GN 6010 discovered in 2024 [Lebedev, 2025]. In addition, a new trench (Trench 3) was set to the south of tomb GN 6010 in order to verify the results of the GPR survey conducted in 2024. In the course of this trial investigation, a previously unknown tomb, designated GN 6020, was discovered.

⁶ Attribution was made by Svetlana E. Malykh (IOS RAS) and Evgeny Yu. Goncharov (IOS RAS).

GN 6012. Chamber GN 6012 measures 2.2×4.14 m; its floor was recorded at a depth of 4.8 m below the modern ground surface (27.84 m.a.s.l.). Groundwater that actively penetrated the chamber from the wadi aquifer significantly complicated excavation and documentation processes as well as affected the preservation of skeletons and burial equipment.

The main volume of the chamber was filled with deposits of sand and clay with small desert pebbles, representing the remains of the collapsed ceiling. In the 2025 season, three ceramic coffins (no. 4–6) and two skeletons (Burials 8 and 16) were excavated in addition to two ceramic coffins uncovered in GN 6012 in 2024 (*fig. 8*).

Coffin 4 (1.95×0.54×0.40 m) was placed along the northern wall of the chamber. Within its fill, a broken lid made of three separately produced pieces (sections) was found. The section that originally covered the upper part of the body (GN25/6012/p1) was decorated with a bust-length depiction of a person wearing a tunic (*fig. 9*). The representation was modeled with fingers in the unfired clay. Inside the coffin, a poorly preserved adult skeleton was found (Burial 14), lying supine with the head oriented to the west. To the north of the western end of the coffin, two small glass unguentaria crushed by the collapse of the ceiling were found.

Coffin 5 (1.9×0.59×0.40 m) was located immediately south of Coffin 4 and parallel to it. Two poorly preserved skeletons were found inside (Burial 13). Both individuals were oriented with their heads to the west. Between the skulls, fragments of a small glass unguentarium were recorded. The vessel had been crushed in antiquity as a result of the collapse of the chamber ceiling.

Coffin 6 (1.85×0.55×0.38 m) was situated along the eastern wall of the chamber. Above the coffin, a fragment of a limestone offering table (GN25/6012/st1) was recorded. Another fragment of the same offering table (GN24/6010/st3) had been discovered during the excavation of robber debris inside GN 6010 in 2024. At the bottom of the coffin, a poorly preserved skeleton of an adult (Burial 10) was uncovered. The individual was oriented with the head to the north.

Beneath the coffins, a layer containing charcoal fragments, small mummy fragments, rodent bones, and small human bones was recorded. Beneath Coffin 6, compactly arranged fragments of a small glass beaker with waved rim were uncovered.

Burial 8 was situated between Coffin 6 and Coffins 4 and 5. The poorly preserved and disturbed skeleton lay extended, parallel to Coffin 6, with the head oriented to the south.

Burial 16 was recorded between Coffin 5 and the southern wall of the chamber. The poorly preserved skeleton was oriented with the head to the west, with a slight deviation toward the north. Fragments of a crushed plaster mask were found to the north of the skull.

GN 6013. Chamber GN 6013 measures 2.50×5.50 m and was cut along a north-northeast-south-southwest axis. In plan, it is almost rectangular and has rounded corners (*fig. 8*). The ceiling collapsed in antiquity, making it impossible to determine the original height of the chamber.

The chamber floor was recorded at a depth of 4.7 m below the modern ground surface (28.36 m.a.s.l.). The northeastern wall was constructed of mud-brick and contained a passage 0.65 m wide leading to the central room of the tomb (GN 6010).

The chamber was filled with layers of windblown sand and loam containing small pebbles derived from the collapse of the surrounding virgin soil. It had been partly looted in antiquity and entered again in the 21st century, as indicated by a robber's shaft recorded in its upper part near the southwestern end.

The chamber contained one ceramic coffin (Coffin 7), two wooden coffins (Coffins 8 and 9), and four burials (Burials 9, 11, 15, and 17). Along the southern wall, a large deposit of disarticulated bones and skulls from disturbed mummified individuals had been discarded. The number of individuals represented by this deposit may have exceeded 25, judging from the skulls.

Coffin 7 (1.92×0.40/0.53×0.30 m) was located against the eastern wall in the northern part of the chamber. It was covered by a ceramic lid assembled from three fragments originally

belonging to two different lids. A small round-bottomed ceramic bowl, placed upside down, rested on the northern end of the lid. To the same internment may have belonged fragments of a Middle Egyptian AE 3 wine amphora, a complete “frog” lamp with relief decoration and a fragment of another “frog” lamp, decorated with hands (the first fragment of the same lamp had been recovered in 2024 from robbers’ debris filling the upper part of the adjacent burial chamber GN 6012). Inside the coffin, the poorly preserved remains of an adult (Burial 12) lay supine with the head to the north. Partial displacement of the skeleton indicates that the burial had been disturbed.

Burial 9, located along the southern wall, belonged to an embalmed adult interred in a wooden coffin (Coffin 8). The skeleton lay supine with the head to the west and the forearms crossed over the chest. Fragmentary remains of an anthropoid wooden coffin (preserved length 1.78 m) bore faint traces of polychrome decoration in red, white, green (?), blue, yellow, and black. The coffin rested on two limestone blocks with smoothed surfaces.

Burial 11 lay parallel to Burial 9, 10–15 cm to the north. It consisted of an embalmed adult interred in a wooden coffin (Coffin 9). The skeleton lay supine with the head to the west and the arms crossed over the chest. A small round faience (?) bead was recovered beneath the skeleton.

Coffin 9 (2.1 m long) rested directly on the floor, although its wood had completely decayed. Traces of red, white, green, blue, yellow, and black pigments applied over a thin plaster layer indicate that the coffin had originally been brightly painted.

Burial 15 comprised the remains of an embalmed child lying with the head to the east on top of Coffin 9. Several bones were displaced, including those of the right arm and vertebrae from the thoracic and pelvic regions. Bronze wire anklets were found on both ankles. A complete miniature cauldron with two pseudo-handles was found close the upper part of the child internment.

Burial 17, recorded in the northeastern part of the chamber against the northeastern wall, was badly disturbed. It consisted of a partially preserved inhumation with the head oriented to the northeast. The surviving remains included part of the ribcage with the thoracic spine and the arm bones, all exhibiting clear traces of embalming. The floor between Coffin 7 and Burial 17 was strewn with small textile fragments, probably mummy wrappings, suggesting the former presence of another burial that was later disturbed or destroyed. This interpretation is supported by the lower part of a mummified body recorded in 2024 on the mud-brick staircase of tomb GN 6010. Some isolated human bones were scattered across the chamber floor. All of the pottery found inside GN 6012 is characteristic of the Roman period.

GN 6020. During the 2024 season, several dozen anomalies were detected by the GPR survey in the Southern cemetery (Area VI). As was stated above, to verify these results, Trench 3 was laid out over one of the anomalies recorded south of tomb GN 6010 (*fig. 4*). Excavation revealed a subterranean structure interpreted as a hypogeum tomb labeled GN 6020.

In its upper part, the main fill of GN 6020 consisted of sand containing several compact lenses of sand. These lenses subsided toward the center of the structure and were likely formed during periods of water accumulation. In the central part of GN 6020, the sand layers were cut by a pit containing Burial 7 (*fig. 10*). It was oriented along the west-northwest – east-southeast axis and had been partially disturbed by a looters’ pit (83C). Position of the internment and its orientation suggest that it was an intrusive Muslim burial.

Within the fill of the looters’ pit in the central part of the chamber, several well-preserved ceramic vessels were recovered, including a lekythos, two oinochoai with loop handles, and a small unguentarium dated to the Ptolemaic period. On this basis, a somewhat earlier date may be proposed for tomb GN 6020 in comparison with the Roman hypogeum tomb GN 6010.

Beginning at an elevation of 30.28 m.a.s.l., another circular pit (context 70C; diameter 0.9 m) was recorded in the southeastern part of the structure (*fig. 10*). Its fill contained bones of various

animals, the overwhelming majority consisting of dog skeletons, many of which preserved in anatomical articulation.

The central room of tomb GN 6020 measures 2.35×1.9 m and is oriented along a south-southwest to north-northeast axis. Along the southern wall of the room, a structure constructed of mud-brick was recorded; the bricks rested directly on sand deposits. The function of this structure will be investigated in future seasons.

In the northern wall of the main room, a passage leading to burial chamber GN 6021 was identified. In its lower part, remains of a mud-brick blocking were preserved. Another burial chamber was likely cut into the western wall of the main room. Further excavations in tomb GN 6020 are planned for 2027.

CONCLUSION

The 2025 season substantially expanded both the geographical scope and research potential of the Gebel el-Nour Archaeological Project. Excavations, regional survey and geophysical prospection significantly advanced our understanding of the archaeological landscape at the mouth of Wadi Ghayada and the long-term development of the Gebel el-Nour site.

Excavations in the temple area dated the decline of the Greco-Roman sanctuary to the 3rd century AD and clarified the Byzantine reoccupation of the area in front of the temple. Surface survey also provided new evidence for the extent of the associated settlement.

The multidisciplinary investigation of the necropolis recorded nearly sixty previously undocumented rock-cut features and more than twenty geophysical anomalies. Excavation confirmed one of the anomalies recorded in 2024 as a new hypogeum (GN 6020), while the completion of tomb GN 6010 provided the first comprehensive modern archaeological study of a Greco-Roman hypogeum on the east bank of the Nile in Beni Suef Governorate. Its architecture, burial practices, and material culture offer an important basis for comparison with the better-known tombs of the west bank.

Beyond its individual discoveries, the 2025 season demonstrated the complexity and long-term development of the Wadi Ghayada cultural landscape and established a solid foundation for future archaeological research and the preservation of the regional archaeological heritage.

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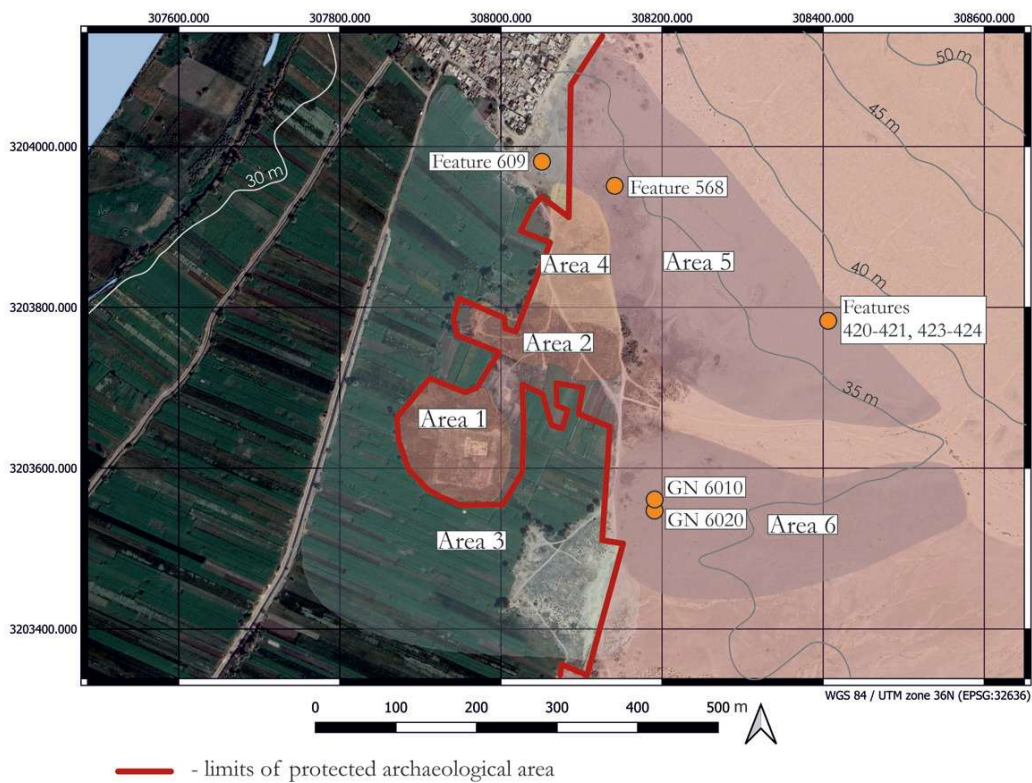


Fig. 1. Main areas of the Gebel el-Nour archaeological zone and the principal features discussed in this article (M.A. Lebedev)



Fig. 2. Feature 609 at the northern edge of the Northern Cemetery (M.Yu. Menshikov, M.A. Lebedev)

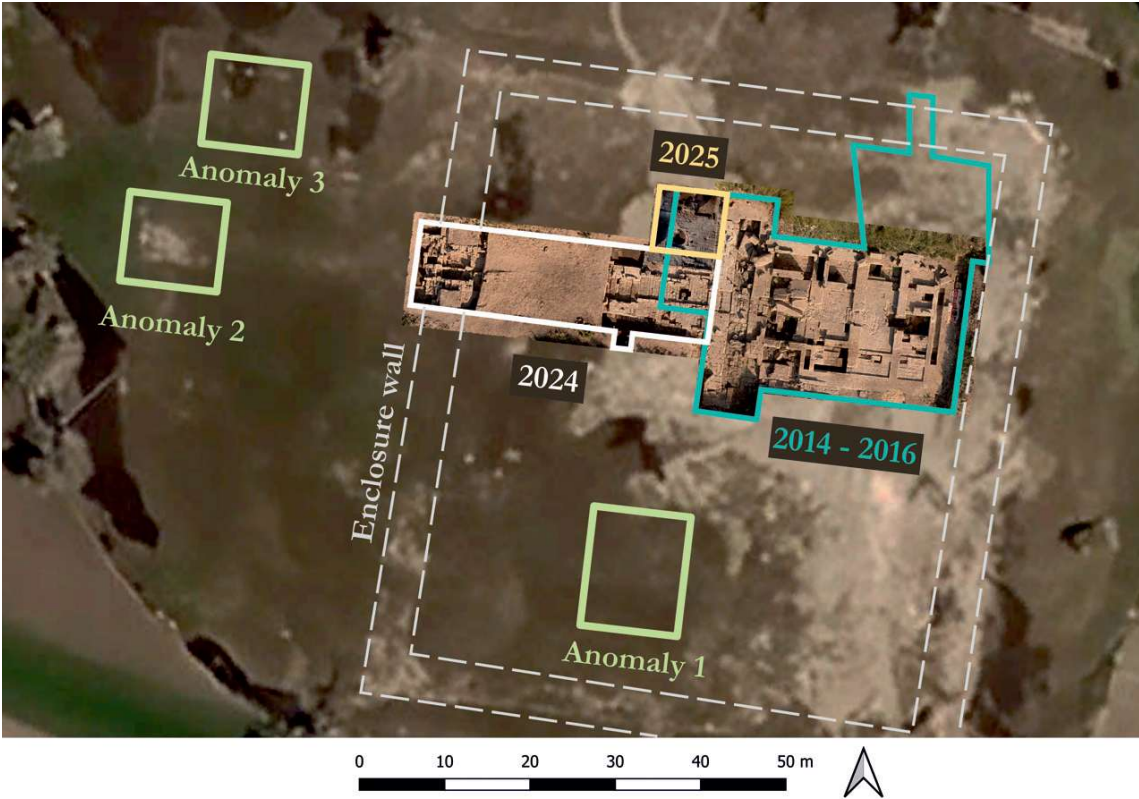


Fig. 3. Trenches excavated in the temple area (Area I) at Gebel el-Nour in 2014–2016 and 2024–2025, and the location of anomalies (potential structures) identified during the 2025 GPR survey (M.A. Lebedev)

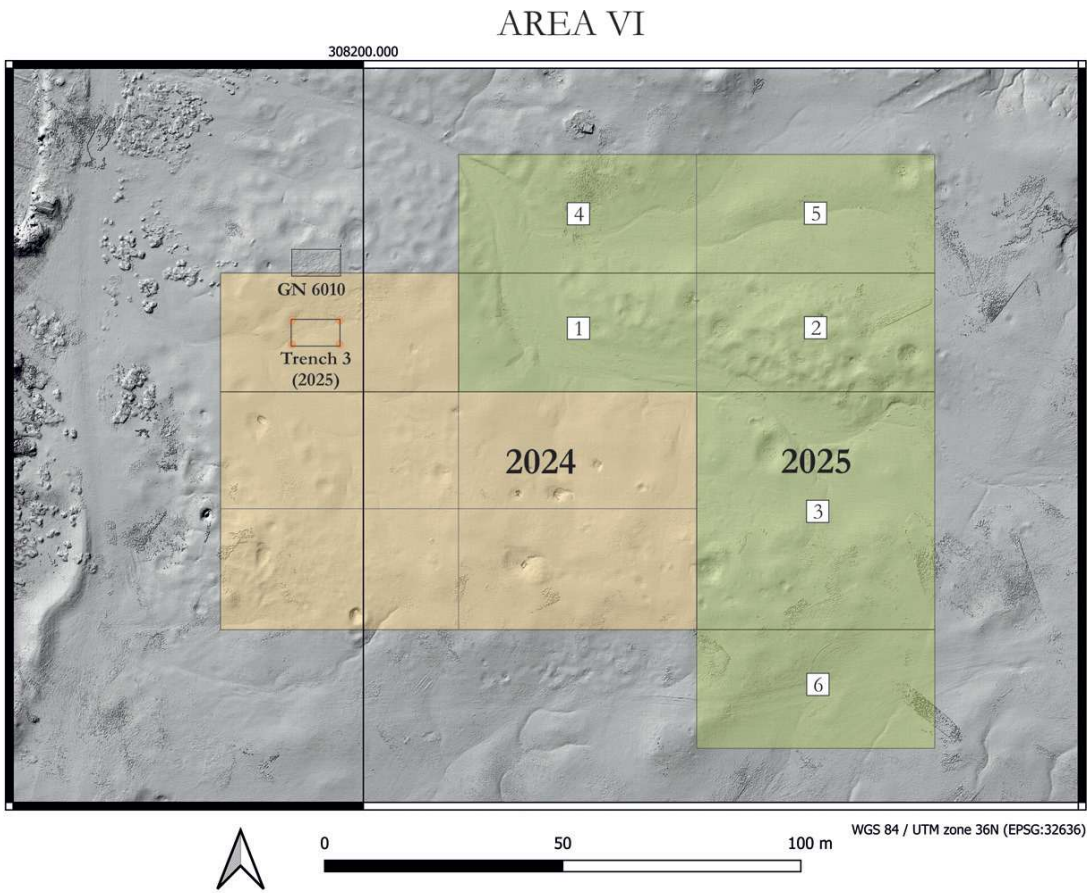


Fig. 4. Areas surveyed by ground-penetrating radar (GPR) in the Southern Cemetery in 2024 and 2025 (M.A. Lebedev)

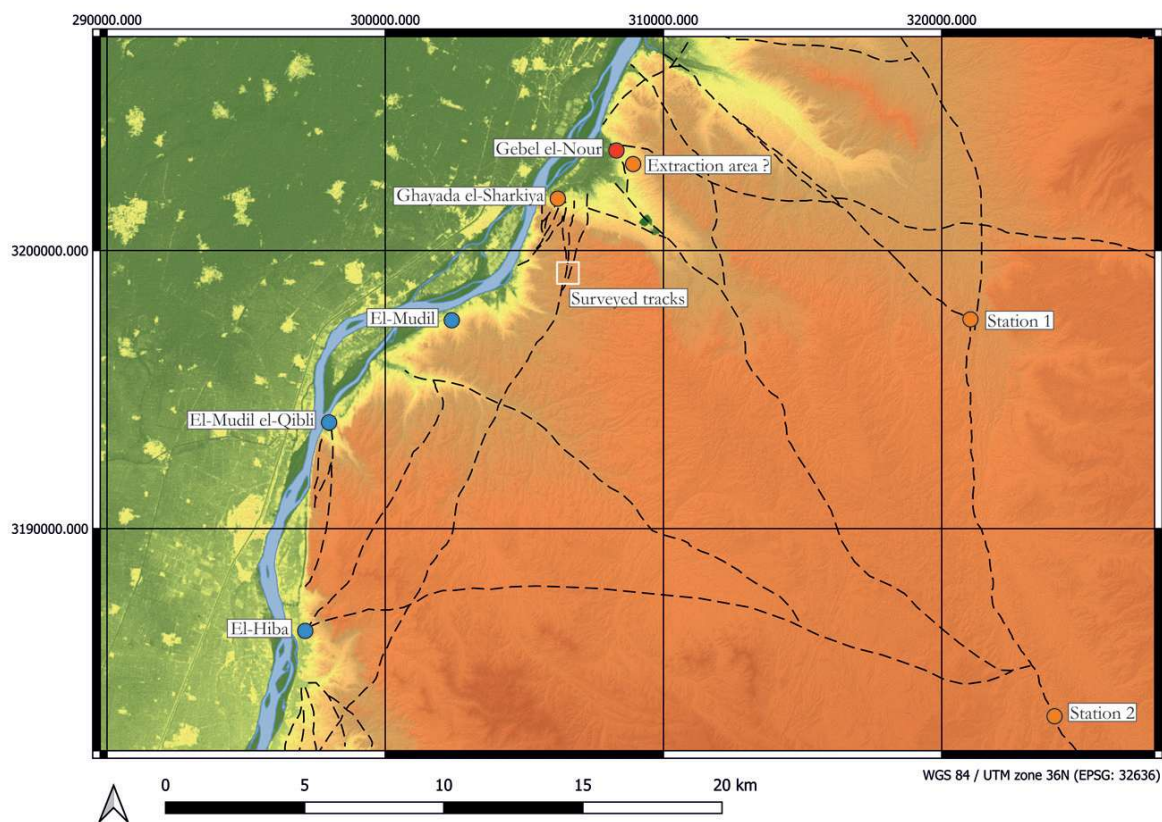


Fig. 5. General map of the archaeological survey conducted in the vicinity of Wadi Ghayada (M.A. Lebedev)

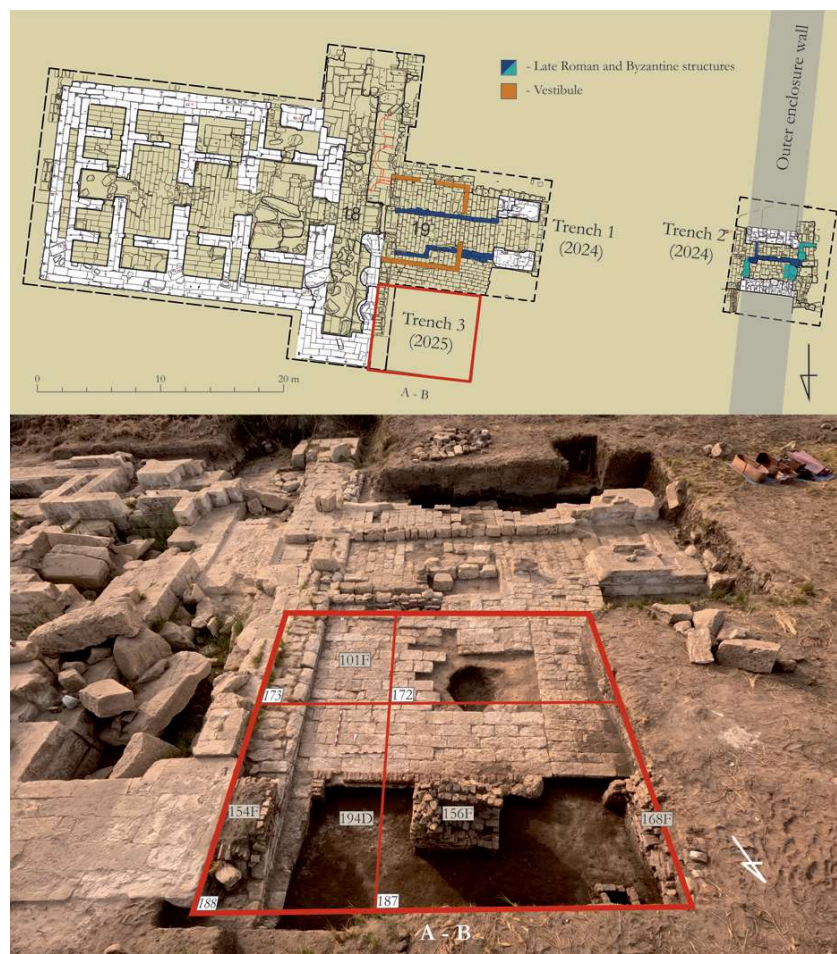


Fig. 6. Trench 3 and the principal features excavated within it in 2025 (M.A. Lebedev)



Fig. 7. Kitchen installation exposed in Trench 3 in 2025 (M.A. Lebedev)

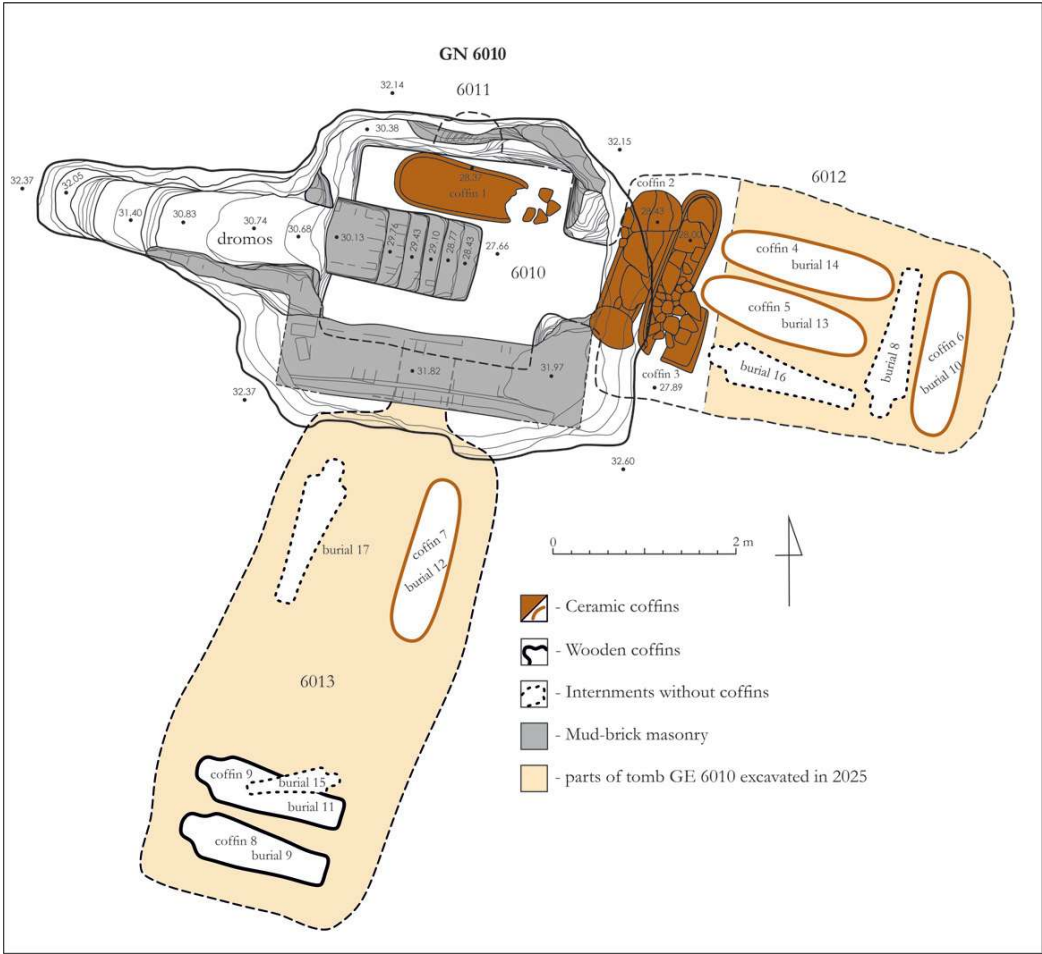


Fig. 8. Preliminary plan of tomb GN 6010 and its contents, excavated in 2024 and 2025 (M.A. Lebedev)



Fig. 9. Lid section (GN25/6012/p1) that originally covered the upper part of the interment in Coffin 4, discovered in burial chamber GN 6012 (M.A. Lebedev)

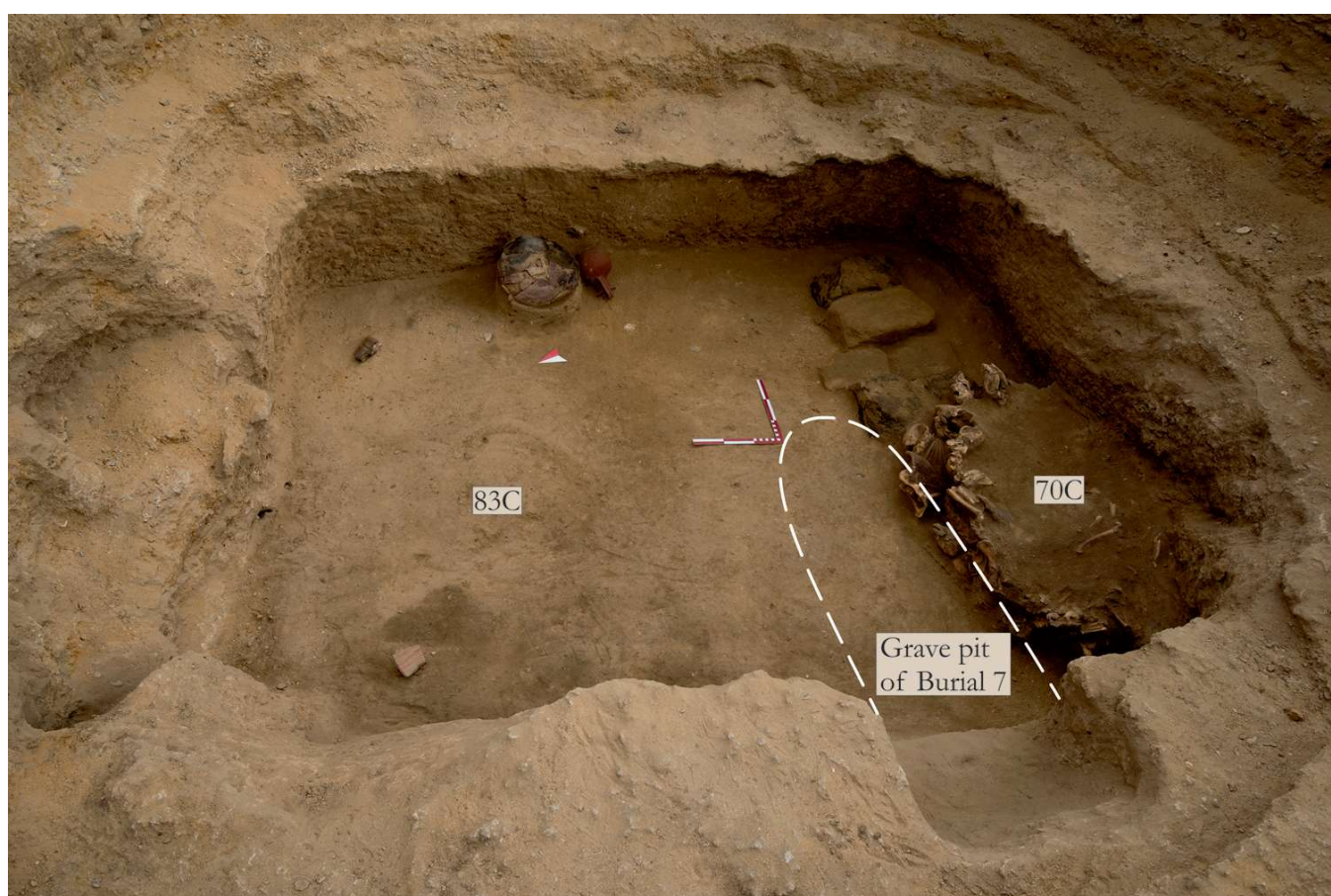


Fig. 10. Excavation of the upper part of tomb GN 6020, showing the principal features discussed in this article (S.V. Malykh, M.A. Lebedev)