

CHAPTER 3

REPORT ON THE 1983 EXCAVATIONS CHAPELS 570 AND 571

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3.1 Introduction

The chapels excavated by Peet run along the hillside eastwards into the adjacent valley. As the hill curves, a small lower rounded plateau swells out. The twin building "Chapel" 540 and 541 lies on it, and its western slope, as it overlooks the ground in front of the Walled Village, is strewn with stones which may be the remains of further buildings. At its southern end, where it reaches the valley floor, more definite lines of stones attracted attention at the beginning of the work (Kemp 1978: 25, Figure 2), and during the 1983 season excavation was begun (Figure 3.1). By the end of the season a group of six squares had been excavated, revealing parts of at least two more chapels. One of these six squares, T5, was not completely excavated. In Figure 3.2 the plan of this square is at a slightly higher level than the plan of the others.



Figure 3.1. Chapel 571 at an early stage of excavation, with top of rubble exposed, looking north-east.

The site extends further to the east and to the north, and it is intended to continue in these directions in future seasons. The two recognisably separate chapels were given the numbers 570 and 571 in continuation of the Peet and Woolley sequence (Figure 3.2).

The site was in the same condition as so many other parts. The walls had been a mixture of marl brick and stones and boulders set in marl mortar. These had collapsed anciently, leaving only the stumps of walls standing, protected by the rubble. Usually the brick walls stood to a height of one or two courses only. The rubble had weathered and become covered by a thin layer of sand and gravel. This condition prevailed over much of the site, except in square V6, where a sand-filled pit and adjacent mound showed where a robber's hole had been dug in recent times. This was, however, a single pit with defined sides which our own excavation was able to isolate. The rest of the area excavated was undisturbed.

3.2 Chapel 570

As so far revealed, Chapel 570 has a simple plan of two elements: a Hall and a Sanctuary. A further element adjoins on the north [806], but appears to be only a courtyard.

The Hall was entered from the west, over a brick threshold [757]. It measures 2.35 by 3.20 metres, and contains no sign of a bench along the walls. The floor [633] is of marl plaster, with a burnt patch near the centre. In the north-east corner a piece of projecting wall and the relationship between walls [701] and [702] suggest that the plan was changed slightly, and the Hall extended northwards. A piece of matting [703] lying on the floor may be from light roofing.

The most interesting part of Chapel 570 is the Sanctuary (Figure 3.3). This was a small square chamber, 1.25 metres across. The eastern half has been destroyed by the modern pit. The northern and southern walls ([694] and [700, 814]) are doubled in thickness. The reason for this was found by an examination of the brick rubble which filled the room. It contained many pieces of flat brick with one broad surface deeply grooved. In a few cases one of the long narrow sides had been plastered to provide a slightly concave surface, which had then been coated with gypsum. These are the distinguishing marks of bricks from a barrel-vault, painted white on the inside (Spencer 1979: 141-142, Plate 53B).

The west wall of the Sanctuary [701] was preserved only to a height of 46 cms. This was just sufficient, however, to preserve a small patch of gypsum on the upper surface revealing that a window had been let into the wall. Immediately below the window, on the inside, stood a pedestal-like projection, also coated with gypsum, as were the walls and floor [807]. The Sanctuary had thus been a little vaulted room, completely white on the inside, communicating with the Hall by means of a window. It must have extended back for only about half the length of this part of the chapel, for the break in the floor on

[(Facing page). Figure 3.2. Plan of Chapels 570 and 571 (originals by C. Hulin)].



Figure 3.3. Sanctuary of Chapel 570, looking west.

the east corresponds with a neat vertical break in the gypsum plaster on the adjacent north wall. The robbers must have removed a cross wall here. How the chamber was used must remain for the present a matter of surmise. One possibility is that a tall pottery cult stand, such as was found in the neighbouring Chapel 571 and is discussed in Chapter 12, stood there.

3.3 Area in front of Chapel 570

The ground immediately in front of the Hall seems to have been a courtyard [957]. On the south side are the remains of a wall [762], but so denuded as to signify that it was no longer standing when the chapels were abandoned. At the western edge of square U6 two further enclosures appear. One, bounded by walls [763] and [765], looks like an open space floored only by the desert surface [958]. The other, bounded by wall [763] and the stone wall [764], had been floored with marl plaster [959]. In the south-east corner stood the remains of a step-like construction of brick [960]. Possibly this is the

remains of an altar in a further chapel. Some clarification should come from the excavation of the adjacent squares.

3.4 Chapel 571

This chapel had been built later than 570. Where the modern pit has cut through walls [698] and [699] it has revealed a coating of gypsum plaster on the outer face of wall [699], belonging to Chapel 570. Like its neighbour it consists of two main parts, a Hall and Sanctuary, but in addition an annexe had been built on the south side, and a larger court protected the approach.

The Hall is roughly square, measuring 3.45 by 3.70 metres. Its floor was of marl plaster [816] showing two burnt areas. No trace of roofing was noted, but the rubble generally in this site is much decayed. The area of the doorway in the middle of the west side was denuded, but did include the remains of a limestone block, either from a door pivot or the stump of a door jamb. Benches had been built along the full length of north and south walls [809, 708]. The southern one had lost its top surface altogether, but the one on the north was well preserved, standing 26 cms. high, with its top surface largely intact. The space between the north wall and the side of Chapel 570 [813] was filled with packed marl, either deliberate fill or congealed rubble. At the west end an articulated hind limb of a young goat was found towards the top of this deposit (marked on the plan, Figure 3.2; cf. Chapter 11, section 5.1).

The Sanctuary was not a separate room, but a broad bench extending across much of the width of the chapel. It consisted essentially of a core of marl rubble [712] within a rectangle of brick and stone walls. The line of the stonework [750, 751] divides the bench into two parts, the smaller [749] having the size only of a cupboard. A patch of marl plaster [939] bearing a slight north-south ridge survives from the original surface of the bench, and gives its height as 58 cms. above the floor of the Hall. The front wall of the Sanctuary must have been provided with an opening to the Hall with painted surround, for the remains of painted plaster, some from a border, were found immediately in front. This will be studied in a future season.

The eastern end of the Hall produced more finds of interest: a small limestone block pierced with a large hole (no. 5362), perhaps a tethering-stone (a piece of rope lay nearby); and the two pottery cult stands (nos. 50177 and 50178) which are dealt with in chapter 12. Between them lay a collection of tiny blue and turquoise faience pieces.

3.5 Annexe to Chapel 571

A group of four rooms had been added to the south side of Chapel 571, built from stones in marl mortar. Their southern wall [565], which continues as the southern boundary wall for the whole chapel group [940], is aligned more closely to a true east-west direction than Chapel 571 itself. The most easterly

room [889] was entered from the chapel forecourt through a narrow door [620]; rooms [890] and [891] interconnected on the north; the position of the entrance to room [947] is not clear. The rubble filling of these rooms lay directly on the packed floor surfaces, with no organic deposit in between. A third pottery cult stand (no. ~~44443~~) was found on the floor [890].

3.6 The forecourt and ground west of Chapel 571

The patch of ground in front of Chapel 571 and its annexe bore a layer of compacted marl [892], fading away to the west. Eventually, along the eastern side of square S5, the southern boundary wall [940] turns north, and seems to provide a western perimeter to the chapels. Further west still, however, a narrowing area of compacted surface [935, 938] continues down the slight natural slope of the ground. At one point it seems to be crossed by a stone threshold [933], associated with faint traces of brickwork (principally [974]). Their relationship to Chapel 571 must not, however, be taken for granted. For they lie on the course of a pair of parallel walls [941, 950] which cross square T5, and had clearly been destroyed before Chapel 571 was abandoned. The southern wall is broken by a small bay outlined by brick [953]. A further stage of excavation to remove unit [951] is required to expose this part further. More of the southern wall of this pair of walls surfaces in square U5 [894], and eventually joins Chapel 571 in the corner close to the annexe. It is not clear if these walls formed an early approach to Chapel 571, or pre-dated it, perhaps providing an approach to Chapel 570, which had been built first.