

Presentation

Excavations at the Southeast Necropolis in Palmyra since 1990

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In this presentation, I would like to introduce the work that we have been doing at the Southeast Necropolis in Palmyra since 1990. The works has been carried out under the permission of the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums of Syria and with the cooperation of the Palmyra Museum and financially supported by Nara prefectural government of Japan. The Southeast Necropolis stretches for approximately 1.5km on the south of the Temple of Bel. There are about twenty tombs such as tower tombs and house tombs still visibly existing. However underground tombs were not well-known until the installation of pipelines started in the late 1950's. About twenty tombs were discovered and about ten tombs were excavated by Syria. Since then, no archaeological work has been performed around this area.

In 1990 we carried out research for the purpose of understanding funerary practices with ground-probing radar which is a geophysical prospecting technique using electromagnetic waves. We searched about 30, 000 m and the radar showed us unusual reflections in five localities (A to E) which indicated underground tombs.

In 1991 we started excavation of Loc. We found that it was the foundation of a house tomb and the basement of the loculi. In this basement we found the remnant of sixteen loculi and the upper structure was completely destroyed and inside of these loculi were disturbed and no burial goods. We learned that this tomb might have been constructed with the standard until 1.85cm, especially in the loculi.

At loc. C fortunately, we found the underground tomb. This tomb consisted of a sloped stairway, a dooryard and a tunnel like vault burial chamber. The stairway was 8.0 m long and 2.9 m wide the burial chamber consists of three rooms: the front room the rear room and the left side room.

We found a rectangular stone plate having Palmyrene inscription on the left side of the front room. It says that the tomb was founded by YRHY, the son of ISMS, the son of MLKW, in April A. D. 109.

Moreover, there were two lines of loculi in the right side wall of the front room and several funerary sculptures in situ. There are YRHY, a son of LSMS and a daughter of YRHY and a man.

The rear wall of the funeral chamber was constructed of four loculi and an arched niche. There were four funerary sculptures in the front. The arched niche set up over the loculi was sealed by a semicircular funerary sculpture. This sculpture consists of a man in the centre and two winged ladies like Nike holding the garland.

In front of the loculi under the arched niche, there are two stone relief-slabs. One has two figures: a man named YRHY and a boy SLM', son of YRHY, and the other has a male bust named ML', son of YRHY.

There is a sarcophagus and a pit grave in the left side room. The sarcophagus was made of soft limestone without any decoration. This consisted of two stepped floors and one body was buried on each floor without any grave goods.

Inside this tomb, we found more than 50 human skeletons. Tomb F.

In 1996 we began to excavate another underground tomb F. This is the same type with the Tomb C, but the tunnel-type burial chamber is more gorgeously decorated. Both side-walls in the rear part of the chamber, have the rows of pillars, and the loculi for coffins are made between the pillars.

The main coffin-room was made in the back wall of the chamber. Three sarcophagi are set in the three sides. The main sarcophagus has the stone sculpture of a banquet scene and several bust-figures. Two exedras with one sarcophagus are set in the front part of the side walls of the main chamber. These sarcophagi have also the sculptures of banquet-scene. Two unfinished side rooms are in the both side of the front part the main chamber.

We unearthed a stone epitaph with Satyr's design. It tells that this tomb was founded by BWRPA and BWRPA and BWLHA in A.D. 128.

Now we are continuing for excavation of this tomb.



Tomb C



Tomb F