

TELL EDFU

Nadine Moeller and Gregory Marouard

The 2014 Season

After having had to cancel the 2013 season due the political situation in Egypt, the excavations at Tell Edfu, directed by Nadine Moeller and Gregory Marouard, were able to continue during October–November 2014. The main research objectives for this campaign were closely related to investigating the origins of the town of Edfu in order to better understand its development during the third millennium BCE and the possible relationship with the other two major towns in the region, Hierakonpolis and Elkab, which are situated about 30 kilometers north of Edfu. The team consisted of Natasha Ayers (ceramics), Kathryn Bandy (hieratic ostraca and small finds), Rose Campbell (anthropology), Julia Gorecka (pottery assistant), Brendan Hainline (blockyard), Clara Jeuthe (lithics), Valerie Le Provost (pottery), Kate Lockhart (pottery assistant), Oren Siegel (archaeology), and Jonathan Winnerman (blockyard).

Previously, the work conducted in 2010 and 2011 at the Edfu South pyramid situated close to the village of El-Ghoneameya provided a first indication for a possible existence of the town of Edfu already during the late Third Dynasty–early Fourth Dynasty (ca. 2637–2589 BCE; see *News & Notes* 213 for further details). This season the fieldwork concentrated mainly in two areas, Zone 2 with Old Kingdom settlement remains, which is located to the west of the Ptolemaic temple, and Zone 3, which is situated along the northern side of Tell Edfu (fig. 1). It was possible to complete the excavation and recording of the settlement remains along the northern town walls in Zone 3, which can be dated from the end of the Old Kingdom until the early Middle Kingdom (ca. 2200–2000 BCE). Several test trenches were dug next to the town walls in order to investigate their foundations and any underlying settlement remains down to the geological strata and bedrock. In addition, much effort was put into the study and organization of the inscribed stone blocks in the recently constructed blockyard area. The analysis of lithics, ostraca, and three human skeletons discovered during the 2012 season, all of which are currently stored in the magazine at Elkab, was continued as well.

Zone 2: The Old Kingdom Settlement Remains

Zone 2 has been cleaned in previous years from several meters of *sebak*¹ debris and old excavation spoils, which covered much of this zone. In 2012 it became possible to start excavations in the northern half of Zone 2, which led to the discovery of three successive town walls and a large building of which only the entrance area has been preserved (see the Tell Edfu report in the *Oriental Institute 2012–2013 Annual Report*). The whole zone has suffered much by *sebak* diggers more than 100 years ago, but luckily enough of the ancient remains are still preserved to make the investigation of the Old Kingdom settlement remains worthwhile. This is especially important since only few settlements of the early Old Kingdom (Elkab, Hierakonpolis, and Elephantine) are known in the south of Egypt while the majority of information for this time period comes from the Memphite region.

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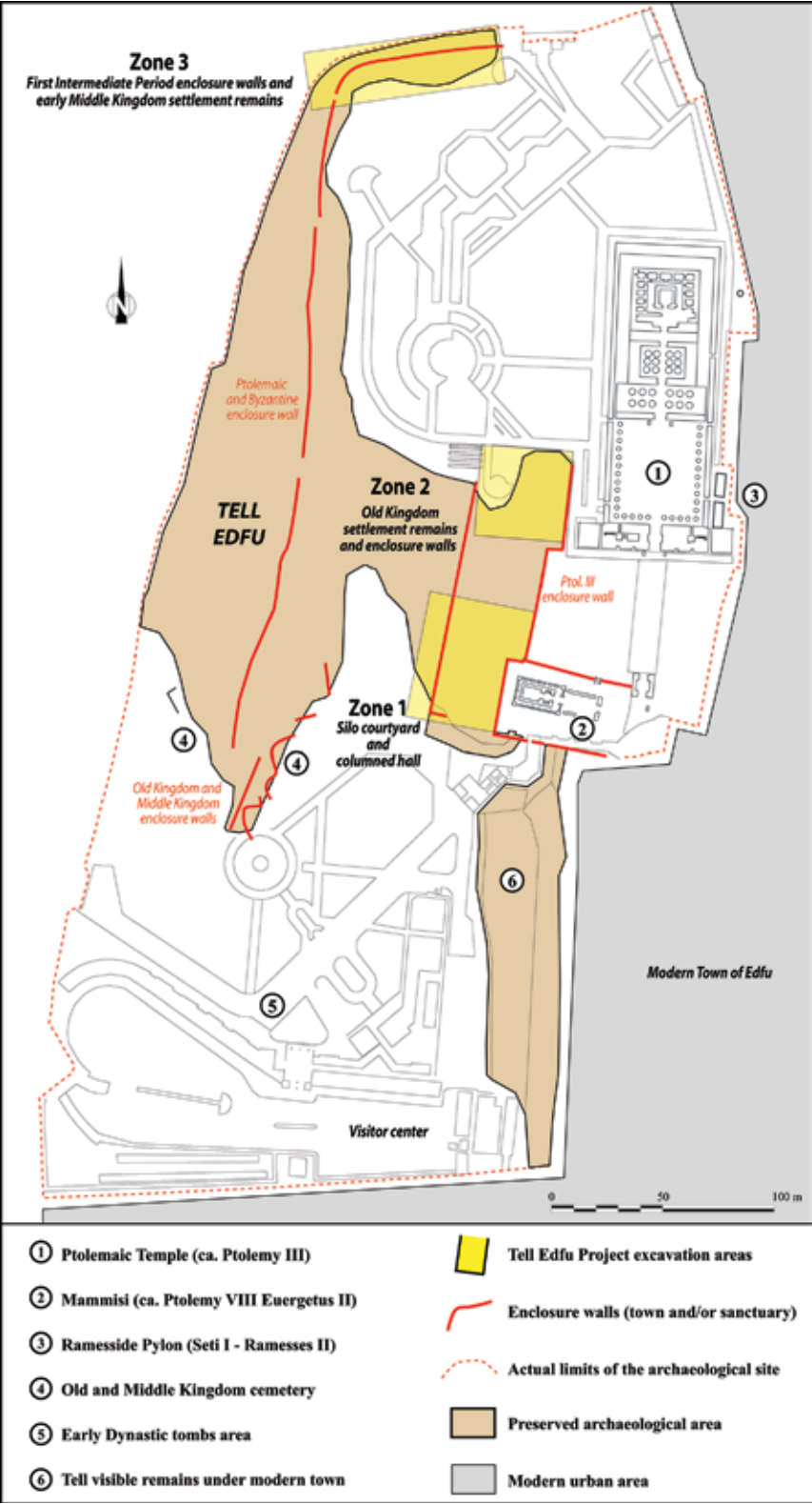


Figure 1. General plan of Tell Edfu showing the various excavation zones



Figure 2. Aerial view of ongoing excavations in Zone 2



Figure 3. View of Zone 2 and the tell in the background taken from the roof of the Ptolemaic temple

At the beginning of the season, several small round and oval silos were cleared of interior fill. These silos belong to the last preserved phase of occupation in this area and were severely affected by the extraction of soil for fertilizer (fig. 4). The silos are small (diameters between 1.2 and 2.8 m) and were most likely intended for domestic food storage. They had originally been built underground, below the corresponding floor levels, and seem to be part of a domestic settlement quarter that took over this zone after the earlier town walls had fallen out of use and the ground was leveled for new installations during the Sixth Dynasty.

This preparation of the ground involved the dismantlement of older wall systems, and the leveling operations can be witnessed by a thick layer of mudbrick demolition fill covering much of the surface in this area. The small silos contained different kinds of settlement debris, in some cases a lot of ash and mixed pottery fragments (fig. 5). No traces of the original material stored in them has been found and it is evident that they were filled in by old settlement trash when they fell out of use at the end of the Old Kingdom. According to a preliminary analysis of the ceramics found in these fill layers, it is relatively homogeneous and suggests the relatively rapid dumping of material to fill up the by then unused silos. The irregular shapes of these silos is quite noticeable, ranging from the better-known round examples with a small circular opening on top that would have corresponded to the height of the ground level from which these storage installations could be filled and emptied, to more unusual oval shapes. The latter are probably the result of the underlying wall systems these silos were built into, and which restricted the available space underground.



Figure 4. Old Kingdom enclosure walls and silos in Zone 2

This season saw also the continuation of the excavation and cleaning of the three phases of Old Kingdom enclosure walls in this area, first discovered in 2012 (see *News & Notes* 220, pp. 5–7). This season a particular focus was the excavation beneath the foundations of these enclosure walls and the older underlying settlement remains. These levels were reached in several deep trenches dug along the northern part in Zone 2 (figs. 6 and 7). It was possible to find out that even the oldest enclosure

walls were not built on previously unsettled ground as originally expected but are in fact covering older mudbrick walls. Most of those are rather thin, in several cases only one brick thick (ca. 15 cm; fig. 6) and the pottery fragments recovered from the associated floor levels can be dated to the late Fourth Dynasty according to a preliminary analysis. Among the discovered objects were several limestone fragments that were once part of seated and standing male figures.



Figure 5. Profile view through one of the silos showing the dense fill of ash deposits



Figure 6. Ahmed excavating wall remains underneath the enclosure walls



Figure 7. Three phases of Old Kingdom enclosure walls in Zone 2

Excavations also continued at the large building complex, of which the entrance area with a fully preserved wooden lintel and door we discovered in situ during the 2012 season (see *News & Notes* 220, p. 7, fig. 5). The extremely thick mudbrick walls (more than 2 m wide) of this complex suggest that this was some kind of official or cultic building, certainly not one of a simple domestic character.

Unfortunately, most of this complex was destroyed by *sebakh* diggers a long time ago and therefore only the door and entrance room have been found intact. The entrance room or vestibule has two doorways in addition to the main entrance on the eastern side, one leading to the north and one providing further access to the west. A small test trench was dug into this entrance room in order to find the corresponding floor level, which appeared in a depth of about 2 meters below the preserved lintel of the main doorway (fig. 8). A layer of natural sand has been found underneath this floor, revealing only scant traces of settlement activity before the foundation of the building.

The finds from excavating through various trash layers of different phases of settlement debris filling the vestibule once it had fallen out of use included many beer jars, bread-molds, and fineware vessels, specifically red polished, carinated bowls, which are also known as “Meidum bowls” after their first discovery at the site of Meidum in the Memphite region. The shapes are typical for the second half of the Fifth Dynasty according to the preliminary analysis of the assemblage. The building should therefore be slightly older than that and was probably constructed some time during to the first half of the Fifth Dynasty (ca. 2490–2440 BCE); a detailed ceramic study in the near future will verify this hypothesis. The entrance area also revealed some traces for low-level metallurgy, which happened probably during the final stage of occupation. These traces included fragments of crucibles and small pieces of copper and copper slag. These finds in addition to the architectural features such as the



Figure 8. Occupation level and doorways of the entrance room, large building complex



Figure 9. Old Kingdom enclosure walls along western side of Zone 2



Figure 10. Greg using the kite for aerial photos

very thick walls and the presence of a small vestibule are good evidence for the official nature of this building.

Along the western limits of Zone 2, several large enclosure walls dating to the Old Kingdom can be seen in the almost vertical cuts through the tell that were created by quarrying activity with the aim to extract fertile soil for agriculture (fig. 9). They are preserved much higher here than farther to the east. We dug a deep trench below these walls down to the natural sand and bedrock formations in order to find out more about the stratigraphy of human occupation and the foundation level of these enclosures in addition to investigating the geological substrata free of any signs for settlement activity. The enclosures were not built into any significantly deep foundation trenches but seem to have been constructed almost directly on top of the natural sand deposited

by former alluvial processes. Very few pottery sherds were recovered in a couple of layers (less than 20 cm thick) with few traces of human activity (ceramic fragments, small pieces of charcoal). At a depth of about 1.5 meters, the natural bedrock was reached. Deeply eroded lines in the rock were created by strong water currents, indicating that at some point the Nile River flowed here. However, it is currently not possible to determine the exact time line of this activity since no traces for any settlement were observed at this low level.

This is also the first season that we engaged in aerial photography using a kite (fig. 10). It turned out to be extremely useful for taking larger site photos of the various excavations areas (see, for example, fig. 2).

Zone 3: Fieldwork along the Interior of the Northern Town Walls

Most of this settlement area (Zone 3), which is located along the northern limits of the tell, has been excavated in 2012 (fig. 1). Several phases of storage installations and buildings dating to the early Middle Kingdom had been constructed against the interior of these town walls (see the Tell Edfu report in *Oriental Institute 2012–2013 Annual Report* for details). This season we were able to complete the missing profile drawings in addition to the excavation of three test trenches directly against the interior face of each of the three enclosure wall phases in order to investigate the foundation techniques and underlying layers that predate those enclosures. This work is part of the larger research program of studying the long-term evolution and architectural features of the existing town walls in order to determine how the ancient town developed over time and gradually expanded northward (fig. 1). In addition, the geomorphological characteristics of the site and changes in the river floodplain are also being investigated.

The first trench was dug along the interior of the oldest town wall at a place where it curves from a north–south direction toward the east. This test trench revealed the first mudbrick structures that were constructed in this area, some of which lean against the interior face of the enclosure wall, which also helped to clarify the precise time of its construction (fig. 11). The pottery from the lowest occupation levels detected in this test trench dates to the end of the Old Kingdom and indicates that the first town wall here was built at the very end of the Old Kingdom (Sixth Dynasty) or beginning of the First Intermediate Period (ca. 2160 BCE) on



Figure 11. First deep trench in Zone 3 showing foundations of enclosure wall and underlying bedrock formation

previously unsettled ground. This confirms that Zone 3 is part of a major expansion of the ancient town of Edfu to the northeast during the end of the third millennium BCE. A detailed study of all the ceramic material from this area is currently being completed by Valerie Le Provost (Institut français d'archéologie orientale, IFAO). The test trench also revealed the presence of several geological layers of sand and clay, which cover the natural sandstone bedrock formation that is very characteristic for Tell Edfu. Interestingly, no signs for any water erosion on the bedrock were noticeable in contrast to the results of the deep trench in Zone 2 described above.

The second trench in Zone 3 was excavated along the current eastern limits of the town walls where it has been possible to investigate the foundations of the first, second, and third wall phases. A second enclosure was built against the exterior of the first wall increasing its width to a total of about 4 meters. Some time during the early Middle Kingdom a third wall was constructed leaning against the exterior face of the second wall addition, which led to a total thickness of about 6 meters. The second test trench shows that the foundations of the first wall phase were built about 90–100 centimeters higher than in the first test trench located about 50 meters to the west. This is probably related to the thickness of the geological sand deposits overlying the natural bedrock, which increase toward the east. This second addition as well as the final Middle Kingdom wall were constructed approximately on the same elevation higher up. The natural sand and bedrock were also attained in this trench; they are almost identical to those seen in the first test trench; there were no signs of water erosion but the sand deposits are much thicker.

The third test trench was excavated along the interior of the first town wall at a point where two large wall segments form a straight line, visible in the brick layout (fig. 12). We were again able to record the layers of occupation leaning against this wall, the depth of its foundations, and the geological layers underneath it.

The three test trenches in Zone 3 have not only provided a complete ceramic sequence from well-stratified archaeological layers dating back to the foundations of the various town walls, they have also revealed the characteristics of geological formations pre-dating human activity. These factors reinforce Tell Edfu's significance as a site that is important for the study of site formation processes and environmental change. In terms of settlement development, it is now clear that the first enclosure wall to the north of the Old Kingdom town center was founded in a previously unsettled area and therefore it can be considered a major enlargement in this direction. It is also evident that this new wall enclosed a part of the town that had developed previously *extra muros*.



Figure 12. Oren drawing a profile in the second trench of Zone 3

Study of the Ceramic Assemblages from the Excavations

During the whole season the analysis of pottery from Zones 1, 2 and 3 was continued by Natasha Ayers and Valerie Le Provost with the help of Kate Lockhart and Julia Gorecka, who were in charge of preparing the drawings of the selected material (figs. 13 and 14). Several large storage jars and *zirs* (water jars) were reconstructed from the sherds, which was our only conservation work this season. Natasha focused her analysis on the ceramics excavated during the previous seasons in the silo area (Zone 1), which is part of her dissertation research. This concerned especially the pottery from the various fill layers of the silos dating to the late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth Dynasties.

Valerie mainly worked on the ceramic assemblages excavated in Zone 3, which contains the complete pottery sequence from the late Old Kingdom up to the early Middle Kingdom. She was also able to study the pottery of the three test trenches excavated this season. With the results from the ceramic analysis in addition to the archaeological recording it is now possible to date the foundations of the first town wall in Zone 3 along the northern side of the tell to the very end of the Old Kingdom, confirming the previously published hypothesis that the town had expanded considerably at the end of the third millennium BCE, a development paralleled at other towns in Upper Egypt such as Elephantine and Dendera. Multiple samples of the pottery were sent to the laboratory of the French Institute in Cairo for further analysis.



Figure 13. Kate drawing pottery



Figure 14. Ceramic analysis and recording in progress under tents on site

Work in the Blockyard Area

Jonathan Winnerman and Brendan Hainline continued to copy the inscriptions and to add all the relevant information into our project database using iPads. With the help of Gregory Marouard they also organized the blocks and placed them on the platforms that had been constructed in 2012 (fig. 14). The largest blocks, which could not be placed on the platforms because of their weight and size, were moved to the northern end of the blockyard, where they are newly organized as well as protected from groundwater (figs. 15 and 16). Some cleaning of the blocks was also carried out. A large amount of hand copies were made with a special focus on a group of inscribed and decorated blocks belonging to a small late Ptolemaic/early



Figure 15. The Edfu blockyard area with the platforms at the end of the season



Figure 16. The Egyptian team moving a large granite statue piece



Figure 17. Brendan recording an inscription on one of the blocks



Figure 18. Inspectors working in the blockyard for training

Roman sanctuary (fig. 17). Furthermore, the work at the blockyard involved the training of several inspectors from the local Edfu inspectorate (fig. 18).

Study of Objects in the Elkab Magazine

For two weeks, the study of various unregistered and registered objects was carried out at the Elkab magazine. Rose Campbell (UCLA) studied three human skeletons that had been found in 2012 in one of the Zone 3 silos without any traces for a proper burial (fig. 19). The preliminary results indicate that these three individuals were female. So far there is no specific information that could be obtained about the exact cause of death. This analysis will continue next year.

Kathryn Bandy was able to take the final photographs and check some additional details of the hieratic ostraca that were excavated in previous seasons in the silo area (Zone 1) for her dissertation research. Clara Jeuthe completed the recording and study of the lithic material excavated in Zones 1 and 3. She also prepared a number of samples that were sent to the French Institute in Cairo for further analysis and to be added to a larger database on the flint sources of Egypt.



Figure 19. Rose analyzing one of the human skeletons in the Elkab magazine

Acknowledgments

In the name of the directors and all the members of the Edfu mission, we would like

to sincerely thank the representatives of the Ministry of Antiquities and Heritage, especially Hani Abu el-Asm, Director of Foreign Missions, and the members of the Edfu inspectorate, foremost Chief Inspector Susi Samir Labib, for their support and collaboration. A big thank-you also goes to our two inspectors, Zanaa Ramadan Mohamed Khalifa and Heidi Fathi Abu Zeid, who were very helpful and supportive throughout the season. We would also like to thank ARCE, especially Amira Khattab and Jane Smythe, for all their help with the administrative side of things such as the preparation and submission of the paperwork to the Ministry. We owe a special thank-you to all our supporters, notably the Oriental Institute and numerous members, foremost Andrea Dudek for her continuous enthusiasm and interest including the generous gift of a new Leica total station to the Tell Edfu project (fig. 20). Nicole Williams and Larry Becker generously supported the new accommodations for the Tell Edfu team, which made a big difference for everybody's comfort and well-being. With Nicole and Larry's help, we were able to live in a small country hotel situated on the edge of a village about half an hour north of Edfu (figs. 21–23). Last but not least we would like to thank Ray Johnson and the team of the Epigraphic Survey for their advice in relation to the ongoing epigraphy training at the Edfu blockyard in addition to offering us the possibility to store a large amount of equipment in Chicago House, which in the absence of an excavation house at Edfu is of immense help.



Figure 20. Nadine using the new total station donated to the Tell Edfu project by Andrea Dudek

Note

¹ The Arabic term *sebak* is used for the rich soil quarried off abandoned tell sites in Egypt at the turn of last century, which was used as fertilizer for agriculture. The desired soil from ancient sites was usually cleaned from any non-organic materials such as stones and pottery, which were often left in thick heaps at the ancient settlement sites.

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Figure 21. The inner courtyard of our new accommodations



Figure 22. Students working on their computers after returning from the field



Figure 23. The Tell Edfu team, including our hosts Mohamed and Ulrike, at the end of the season