

## TELL EDFU

**Nadine Moeller and Gregory Marouard**

In 2015, the archaeological work continued in two areas on the tell, in Zone 2 with Old Kingdom settlement remains, which is located to the west of the Ptolemaic temple, and in Zone 1, which is the area where we previously discovered a large silo court and an administrative building complex on top of the tell, along the eastern side. We also excavated three trenches in order to investigate several sections of town walls along the southwestern side of the tell. In addition, we also continued the documentation of the decorated stone blocks in the blockyard and the study of objects that are currently stored in the magazine of El-Kab. One of the main objectives of this season was to continue our investigation of the earliest settlement remains in the Old Kingdom zone (Zone 2) in order to get a better understanding of

the evolution of structures dating from the Fourth to Sixth Dynasties. Additionally, we decided to extend the excavation in Zone 1 to the north in order to reach the limits of the northern columned hall and to investigate possible additional silos, all of which are currently buried underneath later settlement remains. Another aim of the ongoing research concerning the long-term evolution of the ancient town of Edfu is the study and recording of the late Old Kingdom, First Intermediate Period, and Middle Kingdom town walls and precincts.

The 2015 season of excavations at Tell Edfu was directed by Nadine Moeller and Gregory Marouard, and took place from October 8 to November 14. The team consisted of Natasha Ayers (ceramics), Kathryn Bandy (sealings and small finds), Rose Campbell (anthropology), Aaron de Souza (Nubian pottery), Elise MacArthur (photography), Sasha Rohret (archaeology), Emilie Sarrazin (archaeology), Ariel Singer (blockyard), Oren Siegel (archaeology), and Jonathan Winnerman (blockyard).



*Figure 1. Overview of Zone 2 at the end of the 2015 season*

## Excavations in Zone 2 – Old Kingdom Settlement

This area (fig. 1) has been cleaned in previous years of several meters of sebakh debris which covered this zone.<sup>1</sup> In 2012 it was possible to start excavations on the northern side of Zone 2 which led to the discovery of three successive phases of enclosure walls and a large building of which only the entrance area has been preserved. The whole zone has suffered much from the removal of sebakh (fertilizer for agriculture) more than 100 years ago, but luckily enough is preserved to investigate the Old Kingdom settlement remains in much detail. This is especially important since only a few settlements of the early Old Kingdom are known in the south of Egypt dating to the early third millennium BC.

At the beginning of the season, the interior fill of several small round and oval shaped grain silos was excavated, which belong to the last preserved phase of occupation in this area during the Sixth Dynasty (fig. 2). This level of occupation had been most severely affected by the extraction of soil for fertilizer (sebakh), leaving larger holes and making the site look like “swiss cheese.” These small silos were most likely intended for domestic food storage. They had originally been built underground 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. This preparation of the ground involved the dismantlement of an older wall system, and the leveling operations can be witnessed by a thick layer of mudbrick demolition fill covering much of the surface in this area. These small silos contained different kinds of household refuse, in some cases a lot of ash, and mixed pottery fragments. No traces of the original material stored in them has been found and it is evident that they were filled in with trash when they fell out of use some time at the end of the Old Kingdom. According to a preliminary analysis of the ceramic material found in these fill layers, the material is relatively homogeneous and suggests the relatively quick dumping of material to fill up the by-then unused silos, which was probably also necessary in order to provide a stable ground level for later structures and foundations. The irregular shapes of these silos are quite noticeable (fig. 2), ranging from the better known round shapes with a small circular opening on the top that would have corresponded to the height of the above lying ground level from which these storage installations could be filled and emptied, to the more unusual shapes of some of the oval silos, which are probably the result of the older underlying wall systems these silos were built into, which restricted the available space underground.

These lower settlement layers were reached in 2014 in several deep trenches dug along the northern part, and those trenches were extended during the 2015 season in an area that measures 8 m × 4 m. It confirmed that even the oldest enclosure walls were not built on previously unsettled ground but are in fact covering older mudbrick walls that were directly built on the geological substrata (Nile sand and pebble deposits). Most of those are rather thin, and in most cases only one mudbrick thick (ca. 15 cm), but they are carefully built at right angles with good quality bricks giving the rooms a very structured appearance. A preliminary analysis of



*Figure 2. An oval grain silo of the Sixth Dynasty in Zone 2*



Figure 3. Overview of the late Fourth Dynasty remains in the northern part of Zone 2

the pottery fragments recovered from the associated floor levels revealed that they can be dated to ca. the second half of the Fourth Dynasty. These installations are the oldest settlement remains ever discovered so far in Edfu (fig. 3). They provide new evidence for the origins of the ancient nome capital dating back to the earlier part of the third millennium BC.

The finds from these deeper trenches revealing Fourth Dynasty remains include stone tools, flint chips and blades, many beer jars, bread-molds, and fine ware vessels. A significant amount of well-made red polished, carinated bowls, which are also known as “Meidumbowls” after their first discovery at the site of Meidum in the Memphite region by Flinders Petrie, were excavated. The shapes are typical for the second half of the Fourth Dynasty according to the preliminary analysis of the pottery assemblage. In addition to pottery, small pieces of copper and copper slag have been found and some fragments of crucibles, particularly for a phase that immediately followed the abandonment and the demolition of the Fourth Dynasty settlement remains. They attest to some metallurgical activity in this part of the ancient town which is an important attestation for a more “official” kind of activity, since metallurgy and copper



Figure 4. Émilie Sarrazin excavating a Fifth Dynasty pottery kiln set into the first phase of enclosure wall



smelting are mostly associated at these early times with administrative and official buildings instead of smaller household activities.

A pottery kiln, probably from the second half of the Fifth Dynasty, was also discovered in the eastern part of the Zone 2 area (fig. 4). The lower chamber of this structure was cut into the first phase of the enclosure wall and it is so far, with an example from the settlement at Elephantine in the First Cataract region, one of the oldest and unique examples for such an installation in Upper Egypt.

## Expansion of Excavation Area to Northern Side in Zone 1

This season we also decided to continue the excavation to the north of the silo court (fig. 5) and the underlying administrative building complex characterized by two columned halls. In 2011 we made the discovery of more than forty clay sealings naming the Hyksos ruler Khayan on a mudbrick bench in the northern columned hall. This year we decided to continue the excavation down to the northern columned hall floor in the northeast corner of the later silo court. There we were able to reach, in a small area measuring 5 × 2 meters, the mud floor of the northern columned hall. We also found two more holes in the floor, which are the negatives left when the stone column bases were ripped out after the abandonment of this building complex and before the large silos were built later, during the Seventeenth Dynasty, above it. We were also able to identify the layer of the final abandonment in this new trench, which is char-



Figure 5. Overview of Zone 1 with the new excavation area to the north of the courtyard



Figure 6. Ceiling fragments from the collapse of the northern columned hall roof

acterized by collapsed roof and ceiling plaster fragments that show the imprints of the wooden beams and reeds used for the roofing (fig. 6). Directly underneath it we excavated the layer that can be associated with the final occupation of the northern columned hall. It is characterized by several phases of renewal of the thick mud floor, which were excavated and entirely sieved in order to keep any of the finds that come from this level. We discovered several sealings with impressions of scarab seals; some of these are new motifs and others we already knew from the previous excavations of the other parts of this building. There was also a concentration of tiny amethyst and rock crystal chips in addition

to some pieces of carnelian, which indicate that some manufacturing activity, probably for beads, had been carried out in this part of the columned hall.

We also expanded the excavation beyond the large east–west running wall, which currently limits the silo court to the north (fig. 5). The first structures on the uppermost level of occupation that we found consist of walls dating to the Late Period. They were part of several domestic buildings, which are characterized by large open spaces and relatively thin walls that did not seem to have supported more than one story. These walls were already excavated by the French mission in the 1920s, who had removed the associated floor layers and only left the walls standing with little connecting stratigraphy. In the remains of a small square silo that belongs to a later phase of occupation of the Late Period houses, a partial skeleton of a child was found, but from the archaeological context it is not possible to determine exactly the date of its burial (fig. 7).

Underneath these house remains, a large trash deposit including many pottery vessels such as beer jars and bottles dating to the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty were excavated (fig. 8). A complete Nubian cooking pot was found in the same trash deposit which contained the burial of an infant.

Below this thick fill of pottery, further structures appeared, which belong to the early New Kingdom according to the pottery evidence. We were able to excavate two rooms with a connecting door, and the eastern one was equipped with two column bases. Remains of a staircase belonging to this house were found on its northern side (fig. 5). To the southern side a large open courtyard was found which contained four column bases made of sandstone in the southwestern corner. On its northeastern side, the remains of two circular bread ovens were found, which were still covered by white ash. The excavation of this building will be continued during the next season. As far as the preliminary analysis of the ceramic evidence stands, the house is likely to be contemporary to one of the last phases of the silo court, when the large east–west running mudbrick wall was built to limit the silos to the north. The function of this building, as far as can be seen from the excavated remains, seems to be domestic, but it is impossible to exclude that the owner or inhabitant was closely linked to the silo court and its supervision.



Figure 7. Parts of a skeleton found in Silo 802



Figure 8. Trash layer with mid-Eighteenth Dynasty pottery

## Study of the Enclosure Walls

In order to continue our study of the evolution of the various town walls at Edfu, three areas with enclosure walls were cleared on the southwestern side of the tell (fig. 9). They have been studied and recorded for further research conducted by Oren Siegel for his dissertation. Oren cleaned parts of these large mudbrick walls and excavated three small trenches in order to investigate the foundations of these walls, with the aim to determine the date of their construction by using pottery fragments from associated occupation and construction levels. Close to the Old Kingdom cemetery several town walls were analyzed which date to the end of the Old Kingdom/early First Intermediate Period. These walls follow a kind of irregular zigzag course adapting to the older mastaba superstructures, and they were later replaced by a thick wall dating to the Middle Kingdom. This sequence of enclosure walls has close parallels to the walls we investigated in Zone 3 last year along the northern side of the tell.



Figure 9. Oren Siegel and some of our workers clearing a section of an enclosure wall



## Study of the Pottery

The study of pottery which has been excavated in the late Middle Kingdom and early Second Intermediate Period administrative complex in Zone 1 was continued by Natasha Ayers and Aaron de Souza (fig. 10). The aim is to establish a new pottery sequence for the transition of the 13th Dynasty and the early Second Intermediate Period characterized by the reign of Khayan in the Delta. Another aim has been to investigate the Nubian pottery from the town which provides important new information about the differences between Nubian ceramics found in settlements and those vessels excavated from cemeteries situated along the margins of the Egyptian Nile valley.



Figure 10. Natasha Ayers and Aaron de Souza holding beer jars from the excavations

## Work in the Blockyard

The study and recording of decorated stone blocks in the Edfu blockyard area was continued by Jonathan Winnerman and Ariel Singer (fig. 11). The main aim of this season was to complete the photographic documentation of the blocks and to continue adding information to our database. In addition, more hand copies were made of those blocks that seem to belong to a small Roman chapel and which are decorated in a rather peculiar style with interesting motifs.

All the blocks had been mounted on benches and arranged in rows by the end of the 2014 season, and we therefore did not need to move or reorganize the blocks as we have had to do in previous years. Since we still needed to rotate blocks in order to properly document them, foam pads were used to prevent any damage to their bottom or sides. This methodology allowed for the easy and safe movement of the blocks.

Most of the epigraphic work focused primarily on a group of late Ptolemaic or early Roman blocks, which are displayed on the second bench in the blockyard. These blocks are

remarkable for their number but also the relatively poor quality of their carving. Many surfaces appear to have been unfinished or carved asymmetrically, yet they still reveal important and surprising information about the Greco-Roman period in Edfu. Several of these blocks are decorated on all four sides, which indicates that they belong to a previously unknown free-standing structure, probably a chapel or shrine, in Edfu. The combination of depicted human figures is also unique, as the reliefs show child gods, gods like Bes, elements of royal iconography, and festive processions.



Figure 11. Ariel Singer copying a block on a sheet of transparent plastic foil

## Small Finds and Work in the Magazine of El-Kab

The excavations in 2015 recovered seal impressions, ostraca, a scarab, miscellaneous beads, and many pieces of flint (mostly lithic debitage). All small finds were sorted, numbered, and documented in the field. More than 100 seal impressions were found during the excavations of the northern columned hall floor (see details above), with motifs that are typical for the late Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period. Seven ostraca were found, all of which are broken. Five are inscribed with hieratic (dating from the Old Kingdom through New Kingdom) and two show Demotic texts. In addition, a scarab naming Thutmose III was found during the excavation of the New Kingdom settlement remains situated in Zone 1, north of the silo court. The excavations also yielded many small faience beads (ring, tube, and round beads) from various contexts.

In addition to the small finds objects, two boxes of animal bones were recovered from the excavations. Two human remains were also found, one of which was an infant burial in a Nubian cooking pot (see above). Both the faunal and human remains were studied during the 2015 season in the magazine of El-Kab and on site.

For two weeks — from October 28 to November 10, 2015 — the work on unregistered objects continued in the magazine of El-Kab, including the study, documentation, and photography of the seal impressions, ostraca, animal bones, and human bones. This work focused on finalizing documentation for publication. Rose Campbell continued the study of three skeletons, which were discovered in 2012 in a silo along the northern town wall in Zone 3. Kathryn Bandy worked on the analysis of the clay sealings showing seal impressions of the late Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period, which were excavated in the columned hall complex during the 2010–2012 seasons in Zone 1. A selection of those sealings were photographed by Elise MacArthur. Sasha Rohret studied the faunal remains (animal bones), specifically the contexts from which hippopotamus bones were discovered in the 2009–2011 seasons in Zone 1. Sasha also started analyzing the faunal remains that were recovered during this season’s excavations in Zones 1 and 2 (fig. 12).



*Figure 12. Sasha Rohret holding a hippopotamus bone from the excavations in Zone 1*



## Acknowledgments

The directors of the mission, Nadine Moeller and Gregory Marouard, would like to thank the Edfu inspectorate for their support and collaboration, specifically Susi Samir Labib and our two inspectors on site. We would also like to express our gratitude to Hany Abu el-Azm for his help with our application to the Ministry of State of Antiquities. A special thank you also goes to Madame Amira, Jane Smythe, and Mary Sadek from the American Research Center in Egypt, Cairo office. We are of course also very grateful to the Oriental Institute, foremost Gil Stein (director of the OI), for his unfailing encouragement and help, in addition to the numerous Oriental Institute donors without whom this work would have not been possible.

### **Note**

<sup>1</sup> See Moeller and Marouard 2013; Moeller and Marouard 2015.

### **References**

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