

TELL EDFU

Nadine Moeller

The 2008 season of the Tell Edfu Project, directed by Dr. Nadine Moeller (Oriental Institute, University of Chicago), took place from the 11th of October to the 16th of November. Tell Edfu is located in southern Egypt, halfway between Aswan and Luxor. The members of the mission were Natasha Ayers (small finds), Barbara Boehm (pottery), Georges Demidoff (Egyptology), Virginia Emery (archaeology), Elise MacArthur (archaeology), Gregory Marouard (archaeology), Lec Maj (3-D imaging and photography), Aurelie Schenk (archaeology), Julia Schmied (object photography), and Jane Smythe (pottery). The Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) inspector for this season was Osama Ismail Ahmed.

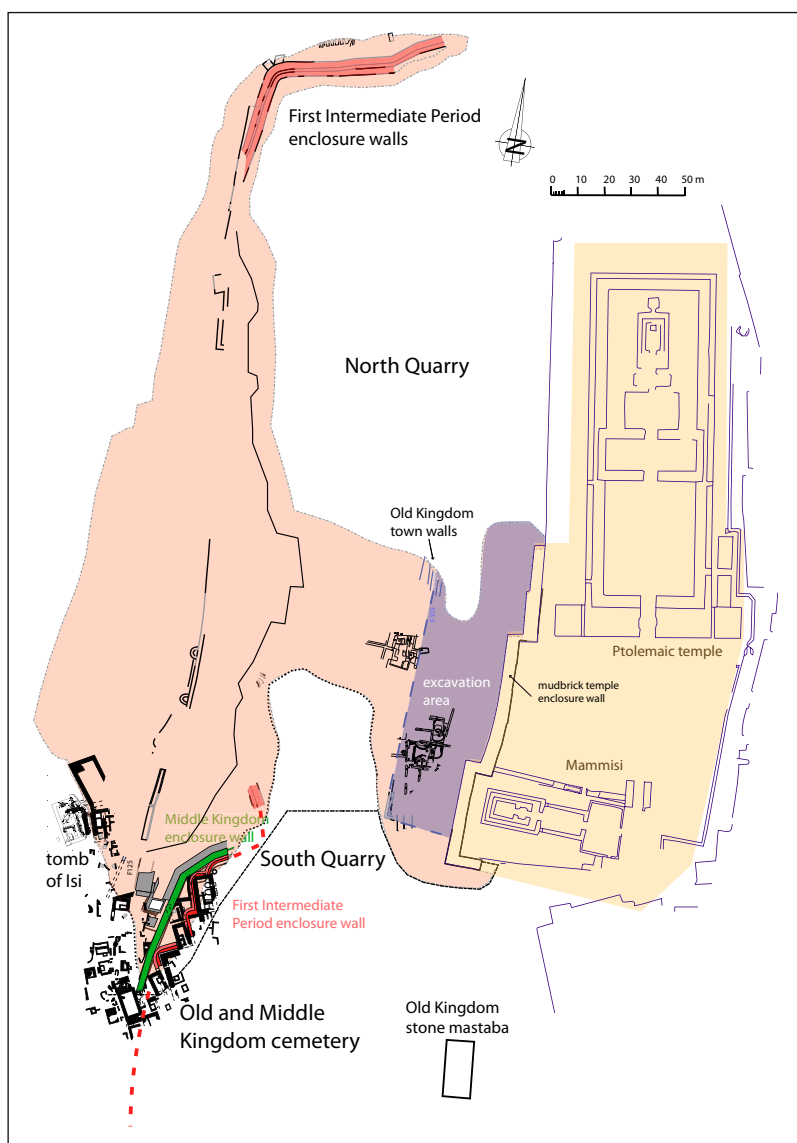


Figure 1. Site plan of Tell Edfu

Introduction

The Tell Edfu Project of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, is a long-term archaeological project with the aim to explore an ancient Egyptian provincial capital and its evolution during the pharaonic period (ca. 2500–332 B.C.). In 2005 we made the important discovery of the administrative quarters of the town along the eastern part of the tell, not far from the Ptolemaic temple enclosure wall (see fig. 1). The earliest phase of occupation which we have partially excavated so far consists of a large columned hall with at least sixteen columns according to the discovery of remaining sandstone column bases which were still in situ in the original mud floor. It dates to the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2055–1650 B.C.) according to the ceramic evidence. In the Second Intermediate Period (ca. 1650–1550 B.C.), when this building fell out use, it was purposefully dismantled in order to provide space for a new installation, which is a large silo courtyard to keep the town's grain reserve. So far we have been able to partially excavate seven silos and to establish the limits of the large courtyard made of walls along its western and southern sides. Its northern and eastern limits are still buried under later settlement debris. A detailed study of granaries based on archaeological evidence has never been done before and so we are eager to present our results, which will contribute to a better understanding of grain storage in ancient Egypt in general.

Clearance in the Eastern Part of the Excavation Area

One of the main objectives of the 2008 season was to remove large amounts of debris and rubble covering the eastern half of our excavation area that were left by the *sebbakhin* and the French mission working there in the 1920s and 1930s. This was necessary in order to reach the archaeological layers and walls, which are still in situ and currently covering parts of the silo courtyard area (fig. 2). Their study is a priority before we can continue excavating the silos. A photograph taken in 1928 from the top of the temple pylon shows parts of our excavation area. Although the silos are not visible since they are lying too low, one can clearly see the ash layer and the small square magazines that were built into it and which are covering the silos (fig. 3). A comparison with photos taken from the pylon in 2008 shows that most of the walls lying above our excavation area were already excavated more than eighty years ago but remained unpublished until now (fig. 4). These wall remains provide important new information about the Late Period activity in this part of the ancient town and help us to clarify the complete sequence of different occupational levels, which date from the late New Kingdom to the early Ptolemaic Period.

In fact, it turned out that we can follow the administrative character of the excavation area from the late Old Kingdom without break until the Second Intermediate Period. Big changes occur from the New Kingdom onwards, after the demolition of the silos. Instead of constructing new buildings, the whole area was used as a rubbish dump through the rest of the New Kingdom. It is during this time that the thick ash layer accumulated. Only in the Late Period do we have evidence for new mudbrick walls being built here; these belong to domestic buildings. This confirms Barry Kemp's observation at various urban settlements in Egypt that the traditional town centers with their official institutions were abandoned and rebuilt somewhere nearby (Kemp 1977). Here at Edfu we still have to discover the precise location of the main New Kingdom occupation.

Cleaning of the Ptolemaic Temple Enclosure Wall

A thorough cleaning of the top of the temple enclosure wall in order to make it safe from possible debris falling on tourists below has been carried out. We also cleared a small area to the west

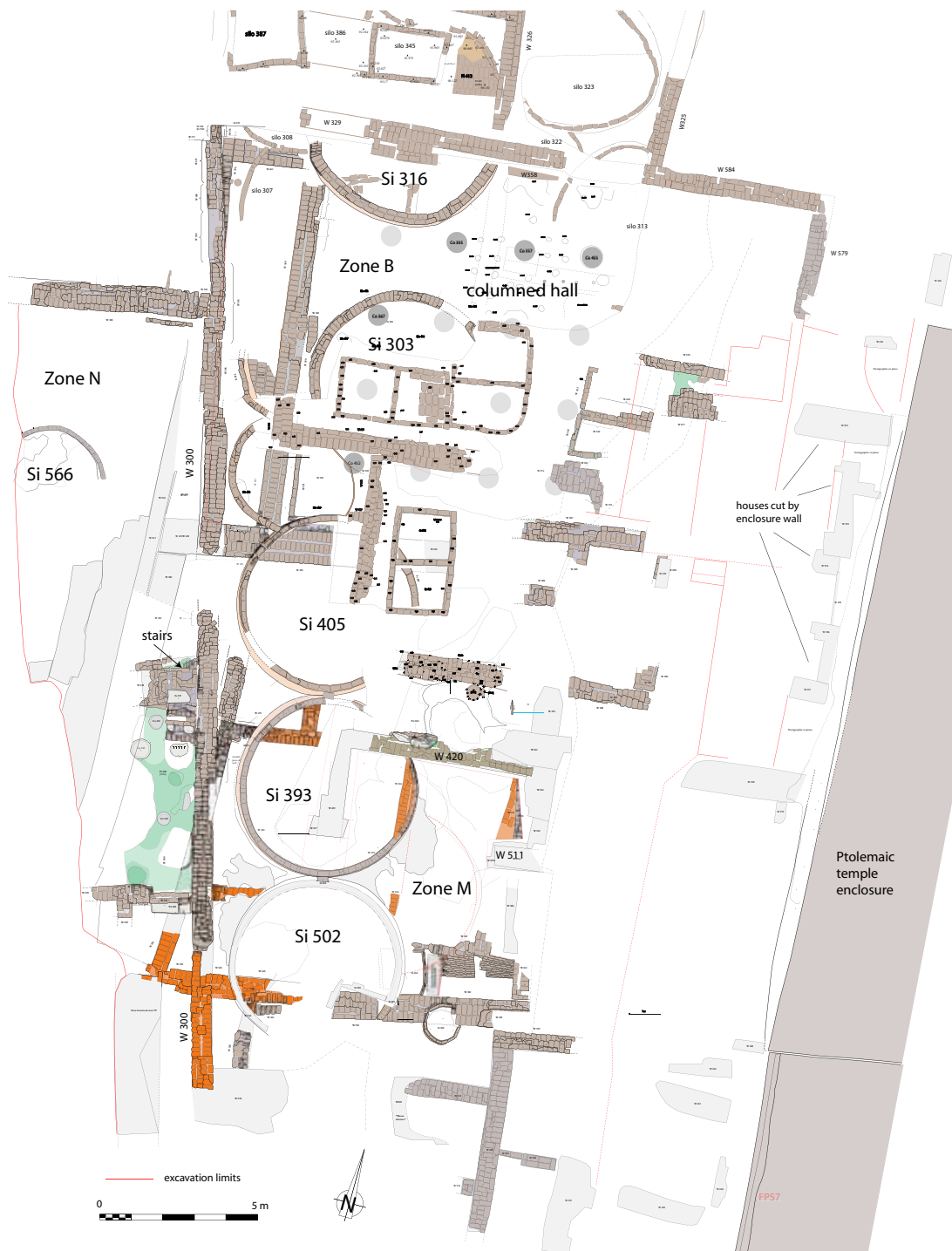


Figure 2. Preliminary plan of the silo courtyard excavation area

TELL EDFU



Figure 3. Photo of Tell Edfu taken in 1928 looking southwest from the temple pylon showing clearly the square magazines built into the ash layer deposited over silos (after Guéraud 1929, pl. 1.1)



Figure 4. Same view of Tell Edfu as figure 2, taken in 2008

of it which led to the discovery of its foundation trench. This enclosure wall had been built directly into the tell by removing a fair chunk of it down to the natural bedrock. There seem to be at least two or even three phases of this wall; the southern part was probably a later addition when the *mammisi*¹ was built. Several houses that were cut by the foundation trench of the enclosure wall have been discovered during our clearance work (fig. 5). So far the massive mudbrick wall around the temple has received little attention and needs to be studied in more depth. Its foundation trench was filled with broken mudbricks, discarded pottery, as well as numerous fragments of painted wall plaster coming from the demolished houses. The plaster fragments were all photographed and sent as unregistered objects to the magazine at Elkab. The foundation trench as well as the buildings that were cut by it should provide new data for its construction and will be the focus of a thorough re-investigation and analysis.

Study and Documentation of Walls Excavated by the French Mission in 1923

The walls excavated by the French in 1923 (Henne 1925: 15) are currently the focus of a special application to the SCA asking permission to remove them in order to continue the excavation of the silos. These walls are in a very fragmentary state and are void of almost any connecting stratigraphy. We have mapped and studied them as far as it was possible during the previous seasons.

According to the ceramic evidence, the large debris layers and ash deposit (the latter reaches an impressive height of about 2.6 m above the ruins of the silo court) were deposited during the New Kingdom. It is only during the Third Intermediate Period to early Late Period that new domestic installations were constructed here. These buildings are characterized by cellars consisting of small square magazines about 2.0 × 2.0 m in size and at least 1.5 m deep (their upper parts are no longer extant) (fig. 6). Only a few courses of the related mudbrick walls — which were part of the first floor of these buildings — have been preserved, which makes it impossible to fully reconstruct their layout. A group of those square magazines was built directly into the ash layer. The study of these wall remains is currently being prepared for final publication in the form of a chapter in the first volume of the Edfu Reports (to be submitted to the Oriental Institute for publication in January 2010).

Zone M

Another aim of the 2008 season was the full excavation of the southern end of the silo area, which is called Zone M (fig. 7). The precise chronological sequence was clarified. The foundation trench of Silo 393, which dates to the end of the Second Intermediate Period, was cut into older layers of the late Middle Kingdom which are characterized by reddened soil from a phase of intensive burning. The corresponding floor level outside the silo was prepared very carelessly



Figure 5. Houses cut by the Ptolemaic temple enclosure wall, view to north



Figure 6. Late Period walls and magazines above the silos, view to southeast



Figure 7. Zone M, view to north

and indicates that most emphasis was placed on the careful construction of the silos themselves and less on the exterior floor. This also shows the full complexity of an urban settlement where occupational levels that belong to the same period can vary considerably in their absolute height across the site; for example, the floor of the columned hall 35 m farther to the north lies about 2 m lower than the contemporary walls in Zone M. After Silo 393 fell out of use rubbish and debris were dumped inside it, which can be clearly seen in the northern profile (fig. 7). In one of these layers around thirty hieratic ostraca have been found, including several ration lists and texts naming various titles of officials, which date the Second Intermediate Period according to the paleography (Hratch Papazian, pers. comm.).

Zone N

A large stretch of the Old Kingdom enclosure wall running north–south was thoroughly cleaned in this zone, which lies along the western side of the excavation area (fig. 8). Its upper brick layers had already appeared beneath the surface last season. This year we completed its full documentation and mapping using photogrammetry. Further elements of this wall are clearly visible in the vertical cuts created by the *sebbakhin* in the northeastern part of the tell. Some parts of it are also visible in the cuts along the southern side where the wall turns sharply toward the east. This enclosure wall surrounded the Old Kingdom town during the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties. West of it another smaller silo was found (Si 566). In the same area a small staircase and an entrance with a stone threshold were excavated; these lean against the outside of the silo court enclosure wall (W 300) and are probably contemporary with it.



Figure 8. Tell Edfu, Zone N, view to south

Zone B

The room west of the columned hall was also further examined (fig. 9). Under a large mudbrick pavement contemporary with the columned hall, a thick ash layer was discovered which contained large amounts of pottery and seal impressions (ca. 150 pieces). The pottery dates from the late Old Kingdom to the Middle Kingdom. Several seal impressions made by First Intermediate Period button seals and Middle Kingdom scarab seals have been identified (figs. 10 and 11); they indicate that this zone was used for administrative purposes from at least that early and continued without interruption until the end of the Second Intermediate Period, encompassing more than 500 years.



Figure 9. Room west of the columned hall showing ash and ceramics in Zone B, Tell Edfu



Figure 10. Seal impression of a First Intermediate Period button seal



Figure 11. Seal impression of a Middle Kingdom scarab seal

* * * * *

I would like to sincerely thank the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH Digital Startup Grant), the Women's Board (University of Chicago), the Oriental Institute, and the Michela Schiff Giorgini Foundation for their financial support. In the name of the director and the whole team, we would like to thank the Edfu Inspectorate and the Supreme Council of Antiquities in Cairo for their help and support. A special thank-you also goes to Iaten Abd el-Halim, EES representative in Cairo, for his help with the paperwork.

Credit

All photos (except fig. 3) and drawings by the Tell Edfu Project 2008.

Web site: www.telledfu.org

Note

¹ This is a separate chapel which is also called "birthhouse" that belongs to the Ptolemaic temple complex. It was built under Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (182–116 B.C.).

References

Guéraud, Octave. 1929. *Rapport sur les fouilles de Tell Edfou (1928)*. Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale 4/6. Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale.

Henne, Henri. 1925. *Rapport sur les Fouilles de Tell Edfou (1923 et 1924)*. Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale 2/3. Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale.

Kemp, Barry J. 1977. "The Early Development of Towns in Egypt." *Antiquity* 51 (1977): 185–200.
