

TELL EDFU

Nadine Moeller and Gregory Marouard

The 2011 season of the Tell Edfu project directed by Dr. Nadine Moeller took place from the October 18 to December 8. The members of the mission (in alphabetical order) were Natasha Ayers (pottery, PhD candidate, University of Chicago), Kathryn Bandy (ostraca and small finds, PhD candidate, University of Chicago), Dr. Valerie Le Provost (Old Kingdom pottery, French Institute in Cairo), Lindsey Miller (archaeology, graduate student, University of Chicago), Dr. Gregory Marouard (Assistant Director and Director of the Edfu South Pyramid project, Research Associate at the Oriental Institute), Dr. Hratch Papazian (Edfu South Pyramid project, invited Associate Professor at University of Copenhagen), Susan Penacho (archaeology, PhD candidate, University of Chicago), Aurelie Schenk (archaeology), Julia Schmied (photos, objects), and Janelle Wade (pottery, graduate student, University of Chicago). The inspectors of this season have been Osama Ismail Ahmed and Alaa Ahmed Kamal, whom we all thank very much for their excellent collaboration. A special thank-you also goes to Ramadan Hassan Ahmed, director of the Elkab magazine, and Amal Abdullah Ahmed, for their ongoing support and help to work in the magazine.

Edfu South Pyramid at El-Ghoneameya

One of the new objectives of the Edfu South Pyramid project, which is in fact a small fieldwork project under the auspices of the Tell Edfu project,¹ has focused on the investigation of the



Figure 1. Newly cleaned south face of pyramid



Figure 2. First day of cleaning the pyramid

small step pyramid, which is located 5 km southwest of Edfu at the village of el-Ghonameya (fig. 1). Gregory Marouard and Hratch Papazian conducted this work with the help of Aurelie Schenk. The pyramid belongs to a series of almost identical small step pyramids that have been discovered near several provincial centers in Egypt such as Elephantine, Hierakonpolis, Naqada, Abydos, Zawiet el-Meitin, and Seila in the Fayum. According to an inscription found at Elephantine, which has been linked directly to the pyramid, these pyramids date to the reign of Huni, the last ruler of the Third Dynasty, or possibly Snofru, his successor. The pyramid at Seila had some cult installations and two stelae that mention Snofru's name, but it is unknown whether he mainly finished or expanded on the work of his father Huni.

It is also clear from a study carried out by Werner Kaiser and Günther Dreyer in 1980 that these pyramids were not intended for funerary use or royal burial. None of them contains a burial chamber. Their precise function might be linked to the cult of the royal *ka* or markers of royal power in the provinces. The Edfu pyramid is the only pyramid of this group that has never been fully cleaned and investigated in detail (fig. 2). The site is currently endangered by a fast-developing modern cemetery and the placement of a gas pipeline close to the modern road. The cleaning work is part of a larger initiative to protect this site with the aim to start some site management next year.

The monument in its current state of preservation measures 18.30–18.50 m in length (about 35 royal cubits); its height is preserved at around 5 m consisting of three steps, two inclined layers leaning against a central core. The original elevation can be estimated to have been more than 13 m (25 royal cubits). On purely architectural grounds, this provincial monument is a “miniature” pyramid, its architecture is very similar to the famous step pyramid of Djoser



Figure 3. Eastern face after cleaning

at Saqqara, to the two pyramids at Zawiet el-Aryan, and to the Meïdoum pyramid, all built in the construction method called “accretion layers.” Typical for the reigns of the Third Dynasty, from King Djoser to Snofru, this method of construction precedes, from a technical standpoint, the appearance of the “true pyramid” with flat faces.

The blocks are made of local sandstone, which comes from a nearby quarry. The cleaning work concentrated on the eastern, northern, and southern sides, where the bedrock was reached. During this work, the original face of the lower layers of stone blocks became visible, showing between six and seven courses of well-preserved facing stones (fig. 3). The western side of the pyramid will be cleaned next season. No ancient remains of any installations along the sides of the pyramid have been found, and only a few pottery sherds have been discovered.

There are two groups of graffiti at the Edfu pyramid: two graffiti on the north face and two graffiti on the south face incised on the soft and light-colored stone blocks. Both groups are located toward the center of each side, and they were at eye level in antiquity. There are no visible inscriptions on the eastern or western sides.

One of the blocks on the south side contains four signs: a four-legged animal, a seated man, a reed leaf, and a book roll; a fifth sign, a bird, is placed a few centimeters away to the right. The second block on the south side only has parallel lines or lines that make triangles. On the north side, a block on the lower half shows a four-legged animal, which is not carved as nicely as the one of the south side. Another block above and to the right of this one shows a series of vertical lines, some of them double lines. Nothing is inscribed between the lines.

It should be noted that these marks do not appear to be from the Old Kingdom. It is also too early to make conclusions on their meanings, but they do not form complete sentences or represent actual Egyptian words.

Excavations in the Silo and Columned Hall Area (Zone 1)

This season the main excavation of the late Middle Kingdom (12th–13th Dynasties) administrative building and the later silo court of the Second Intermediate Period (17th Dynasty) was completed. The aim was to reach the mud floor of the late Middle Kingdom columned hall underneath all the silos. The excavation focused in the northern part of the silo area under Silo 388 and on the western side of Silo 316 (fig. 4). It has been possible to confirm the presence of a second columned hall to the north, which is linked to the southern columned hall by a doorway (see fig. 5).

Last year, two large round holes were found under Silo 316; these had once been



Figure 4. Excavation area west of Silos Si 316 and Si 388

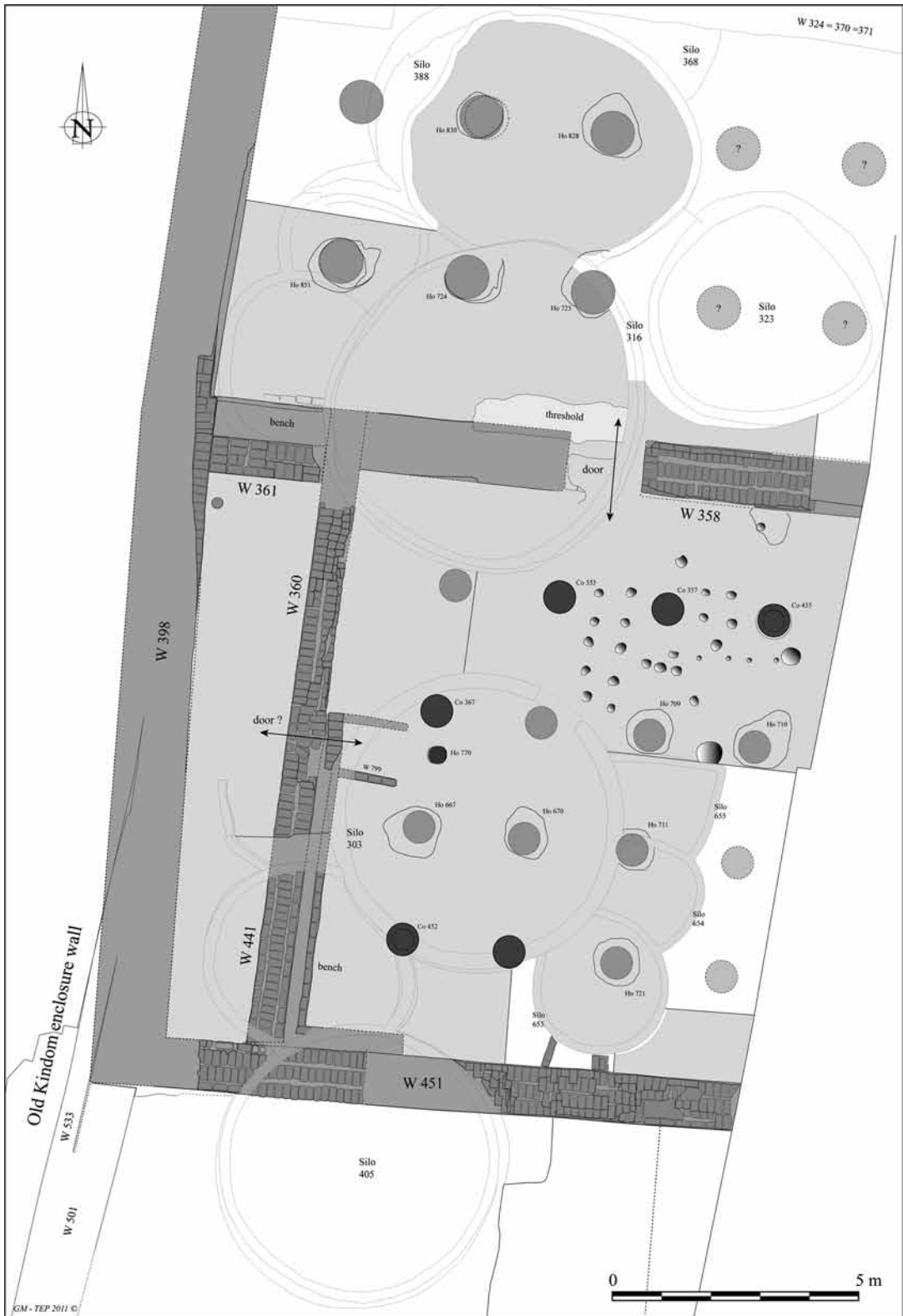


Figure 5. Plan of the columned halls



Figure 6. Silo Si 388 and underlying holes left by the removal of two column bases



Figure 7. Greg using the iPad in the field

filled by round stone column bases of a larger diameter than those sandstone column bases that were discovered in the southern columned hall. The two new holes (Ho 724 and Ho 725) measure between 1.25 and 1.44 m in diameter. This season three additional holes of the same size were found: two underneath Silo 388 to the north and one on the western side of Silo 316 (fig. 6). It is now possible to reconstruct a northern column hall with at least two rows of large columns. This seems to have been the main hall of this Middle Kingdom administrative building complex. Its layout resembles palatial architecture, and it is extremely likely that we are dealing with remains of the governor's residence of Edfu during the second half of the Middle Kingdom. The German excavations at the settlement of Elephantine, which is located on an island in the south of Egypt, next to the modern city of Aswan, have shown that such governor's palaces not only functioned as the residence for the local mayor but also were used for administrative activities.

The excavations also continued along the western side of Silo 316 and between Wall 300/389 (fig. 6). Here the abandonment layer of the northern columned hall, which contained a large amount of broken clay sealings, some of which show the cartouche of the Hyksos ruler Khayan, was carefully excavated, and much attention was paid to the stratigraphy. The original mud floor of the northern columned hall was renewed at some point, and on top of this new floor level, a thick layer of occupational trash accumulated marking the abandonment of this building. Within this layer (US 2654), which can be divided into three sub-layers (US 2732–2734), more than 300 new clay sealings have been found. A total of forty-one sealings with the cartouche of the Hyksos king Khayan (15th Dynasty) have been found in this layer together with nine sealings showing the name of the Thirteenth Dynasty king Sobekhotep IV. These two kings are traditionally considered to have reigned about 100 years apart from each other, which is impossible in view of the new archaeological evidence.²

This is also the first season that the team used three iPads on the excavation for entering the data directly into the project's database without using any paper sheets (fig. 7). Despite the heat, dust, and strong sunlight, the iPads turned out to be very useful and are a major improvement for the recording of our archaeological data. In order to protect them from the sand and dust, we used armored cases, which proved to be very effective.



Figure 8. Southeast view of Old Kingdom excavation area



Figure 9. Cleared Old Kingdom area at the end of the season with stone walls protecting the tell

Old Kingdom Area (Zone 2)

This season the clearance of the Old Kingdom area, which is situated immediately west of the Ptolemaic temple enclosure wall, was continued (fig. 8). Over the past two years, we have removed several meters of sebbakh debris and French excavation spoil heaps, which were covering the Old Kingdom settlement layers. This season we worked with more than seventy-five workmen in this area in order to speed up the clearance work, and by the end of the



Figure 10. Old Kingdom pottery in situ



Figure 11. Small silo below floor level

season, we had just started to reach the in situ Old Kingdom settlement remains. We have built two supporting stone walls along the southern end of this area to protect and stabilize the settlement remains lying above it (fig. 9). The area will be the main focus of excavations in the coming season.

More cleaning and small excavation work was carried out along the sides of the tell in this area, which had been cut by the sebbakhin, leaving almost vertical profiles that were studied with great care (figs. 10–12). This area lies immediately to the east of a large Old Kingdom town wall.

It has been possible to identify this entire part of the ancient town as the oldest town center, dating back to at least the Fourth Dynasty according to ceramic evidence. We were able to establish a good chronological sequence for the Old Kingdom in this area with pottery dating from the late Fifth to the Sixth Dynasty. Several walls and connecting floor layers were recorded, drawn, and then excavated. A small storage installation consisting of a roughly round-shaped silo that had been dug into the mud floor belonging to a house has been excavated (fig. 11). Along the western side, a small doorway was discovered (see fig. 12). All these settlement remains seem to be of domestic character.



Figure 12. Old Kingdom remains and door

The First Intermediate Period Town Walls (Zone 3)

Another aim of this season has been the cleaning of two large mudbrick enclosure walls that are situated along the northern end of Tell Edfu (fig. 13). They are relatively well preserved and had been up to now partially covered in sand and rubble. These three walls represent several building stages. The oldest wall is made of small mudbricks (26–27 x 12.5–13.0 x 6.5–7.0 cm) and has a thickness of about 3 meters. It is running in east–west direction and turns in a large curve toward the southwest, where it gradually disappears underneath the tell being covered by later settlement remains. At a later stage, a new enclosure wall was built directly



Figure 13. First Intermediate Period enclosure walls and settlement remains including silos situated along the interior of the town wall

against its outside, partially covering the top of the older one. This new wall consists of two wall layers, representing two building phases. It was made of very large mudbricks (36–37 x 17.0–18.5 x 9.5–11.0 cm), which can be easily distinguished from the older wall with the smaller bricks. Its two phases have a total width of about 3 meters. These walls represent the northern limit of the ancient town during the First Intermediate Period and the early Middle Kingdom. Along the inside of the walls, several mudbrick structures and ancient fill layers have survived the destruction by the sebbakhin. These remains are now our only chance to understand the development of the town in this area. They have been carefully cleaned this season, and it is our aim to excavate these settlement remains during the next season.

In a first phase, contemporary with the older town wall made of the small mudbricks, several buildings were constructed directly against the inner face of this wall, in some cases making use of the enclosure as rear wall. Additionally, it was possible to notice that this first phase of buildings used nearly the same type and size of bricks as those for the enclosure wall. This could be an indication for these installations to be almost contemporary. The preliminary analysis of pottery samples indicates a First Intermediate Period date for the structures and the town wall. Some time later on, these buildings fell out of use, and a group of round silos was erected between the older walls, making good use of the already existing mudbrick walls. They are smaller than the silos we have excavated over the past years on top of the tell, and their respective diameters lie between 3.5 and 4.0 meters. The empty spaces between the straight mudbrick walls of the earlier buildings and the round silo walls have in several instances been filled with white ash probably to protect the stored grain from insect infestation. So far we have been able to identify five silos during the cleaning work. It is possible that this was an official storage installation of the early Middle Kingdom that was then replaced during the late Middle Kingdom by the large silo court on top of the tell. The excavations next year we hope will shed more light on these questions. According

to pottery from the associated layers, a thick ash fill on the northern side contained a multitude of tubular bread molds that are typical for the early Middle Kingdom (end of 11th or early 12th Dynasty). There was probably a baking and/or beer brewing facility somewhere in the vicinity.

Work in the Magazine of Elkab

The study of the ostraca and sealings was continued at the magazine of Elkab, where all the registered and unregistered objects from the excavation are securely stored. The Tell Edfu ostraca corpus has 379 ostraca and fragments and is currently being studied by Kathryn Bandy, who has been focusing on the final documentation and photography this season. The majority of the texts are short hieratic economic accounts pertaining to the administration of



Figure 14. Kat and Nadine recording sealings in the magazine using iPads

the town. The texts were excavated over the past five seasons and primarily come from the fill layers of the late Second Intermediate Period and early New Kingdom. In addition to standard photographic documentation, all of the hieratic material (and a portion of the other ostraca) was photographed with an infrared camera setup during this past season. We have had great success with infrared photos especially in cases where the ink is worn, smudged, erased, or obscured by dirt and salt. The results have been remarkable, and it is now possible to verify the existence of text and read it on those ostraca that are otherwise impossible to decipher with the naked eye.

During the second half of the season, Nadine and Kathryn concentrated on the study of the 1,500 clay sealings that have been found during the past seasons in the late Middle Kingdom columned-hall complex, especially on the floor of the southern columned hall as well as along the western wall (W389) of the northern columned hall (fig. 14). Apart from the royal name sealings of Khayan and Sobekhotep IV, the other sealings show private names of officials and decorative spiral motifs, which are both typical of the late Middle Kingdom and early Second Intermediate Period. Julia Schmied joined the team for one week to take photographs of the sealings using the darkroom available in the magazine.

Post-excavation Work in the Oriental Institute

With the completion of excavations in the silo area (Zone 1) and the study of most of the related objects at the magazine in Elkab, the post-excavation work back at the Oriental Institute focused on the preparation of the first volume of the Edfu Reports series. The use of the iPad in the field for recording our data directly in the database has considerably reduced the time that needs to be spent on updating the database after the field season. Therefore, Gregory was able to concentrate on finishing the site plans, profile drawings, and illustrations of the clay sealings using a Wacom graphic tablet (fig. 15). He has also spent some time

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Figure 15. Greg using a Wacom graphic tablet back at the Oriental Institute to draw sealings

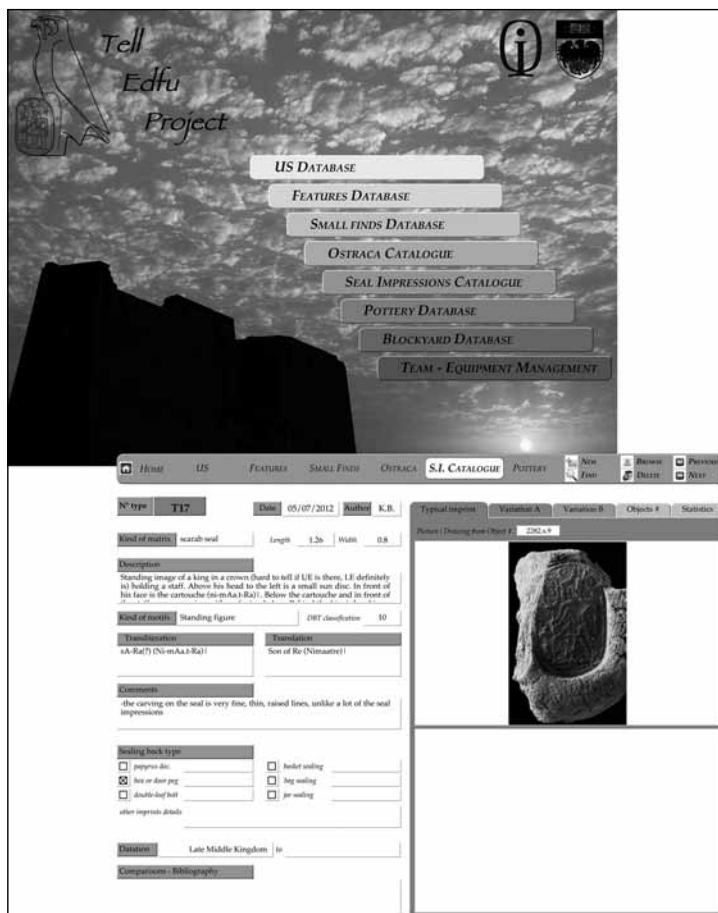


Figure 16. The Tell Edfu Project database

updating the database for improving its use with the iPad and creating some new tabs for the sealing catalog and the blockyard project, which will start in 2012 (fig. 16).

Kathryn has been in charge of organizing the object database and entering the new data of the sealings found in the autumn. A new study program is planned for the 2012 season, which will focus on the recording of more than 100 decorated stone blocks situated currently at the base of the tell. The blockyard project started this summer with Janelle Wade and Jonathan Winnerman in charge of the recording and analysis of these blocks. Both of them are spending the summer preparing the plan of the blockyard area and to create a comprehensive system for the database together with Gregory, and to start entering data that can be retrieved from photographs.

Acknowledgments

The director and the team of the Tell Edfu Project would like to express their sincere gratitude to all the people who have been making this work possible (fig. 17), especially the Edfu inspectorate led by Mr. Mohamed Zenan Nubia and Mr. Fathi Abu Zeid, general director of the Aswan area.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Faten Abd el-



Figure 17. The whole Edfu team including our Egyptian workers at the end of the season

Halim (Egypt Exploration Society) for her help with the translation of the final report into Arabic and other logistical matters occurring throughout the past year. I am also very grateful for the ongoing support of many of our Oriental Institute members, foremost Andrea Dudek, Janet and Bob Helman, Daniel and Annette Youngberg, Stephen and Patricia Holst, Jonathan D. Williams, and Rosemary Ferrand. Additionally, I would like to thank the Oriental Institute and the National Endowment for the Humanities for funding the Tell Edfu Project.

Notes

¹ For a detailed report about this project, see *Oriental Institute News & Notes* 213 (2012): 3–9.

² See the forthcoming article by N. Moeller and G. Marouard, with a contribution by N. Ayers, “Discussion of Late Middle Kingdom and Early Second Intermediate Period History and Chronology in Relation to the Khayan Sealings from Tell Edfu,” *Ägypten und Levante* 21 (2011).