

## TELL EDFU

### Nadine Moeller and Gregory Marouard

The 2012 season at Tell Edfu, Upper Egypt, including work at the Edfu South Pyramid at the village of el-Ghoneameya, took place from October 8 to November 25. The Edfu team was Nadine Moeller (director, University of Chicago), Gregory Marouard (co-director, research associate at the Oriental Institute), Natasha Ayers (pottery, PhD candidate, University of Chicago), Kathryn Bandy (small finds, PhD candidate, University of Chicago), Georges Demidoff (archaeology assistant), Clara Jeuthe (flint tools, post-doc French Institute for Oriental Archaeology in Cairo [IFAO]), Valérie le Provost (pottery, post-doc IFAO), Aurelie Schenk (archaeology, Roman Museum of Avenches, Switzerland), Aaron de Souza (pottery assistant, PhD candidate, Macquarie University), Janelle Wade (epigraphy and pottery assistant, PhD candidate, University of Chicago), Lindsey Miller-Weglarz (archaeology assistant, PhD candidate, University of Chicago), and Jonathan Winnerman (epigraphy, PhD candidate, University of Chicago).

This season, the archaeological fieldwork at the site of Edfu focused on two principal areas that are new to the project's research program. The first area, Zone 2, is situated along the eastern side of the archaeological tell, close to the Ptolemaic temple (fig. 1), where Old Kingdom (ca. 2500–2200 BC) settlement remains have been found. This new excavation area is particularly important because settlement remains dating to the third millennium BC are quite rare outside the Memphite region with its prominent pyramids and royal cemeteries that were the focus of the ancient Egyptian elite during this period. These urban archaeological levels are also the oldest ones ever excavated at Edfu.

The other excavation area, Zone 3, lies at the northern edge of the site, which is characterized by the presence of a massive town wall that runs in an east–west direction, turning south where it disappears under later settlement remains. Remains of several round silos, square magazines, and smaller mudbrick buildings have been excavated in this zone. All these had been built against the interior face of the town wall, often making use of it as a rear wall. Preliminary analysis of the pottery assemblages from the associated occupation layers indicates that this part of the settlement dates to end of the third millennium BC, which encompasses the First Intermediate Period and the early Middle Kingdom (ca. 2200–1985 BC).

In addition to the excavation at the tell, our work also focused on the construction of several brick benches or mastabas to serve as platforms for the large number of decorated and inscribed stone blocks in our concession area, which had been placed along the base of the tell several decades ago (fig. 2). The benches will serve to protect the blocks from future groundwater damage as we start to study them and perform conservation work on them. This site-management and “open-air museum” program has been made possible with the very generous support of Bob and Janet Helman.

Work also continued at the Edfu South Pyramid, situated near the village of el-Ghoneameya, with the aim to complete the cleaning of the western side of this small step pyramid. The final objective of the 2012 season was the construction of a low brick wall around this pyramid, which is the first step in a plan for the long-term protection of this site. This work also contributes to an increased awareness of the importance of this pharaonic

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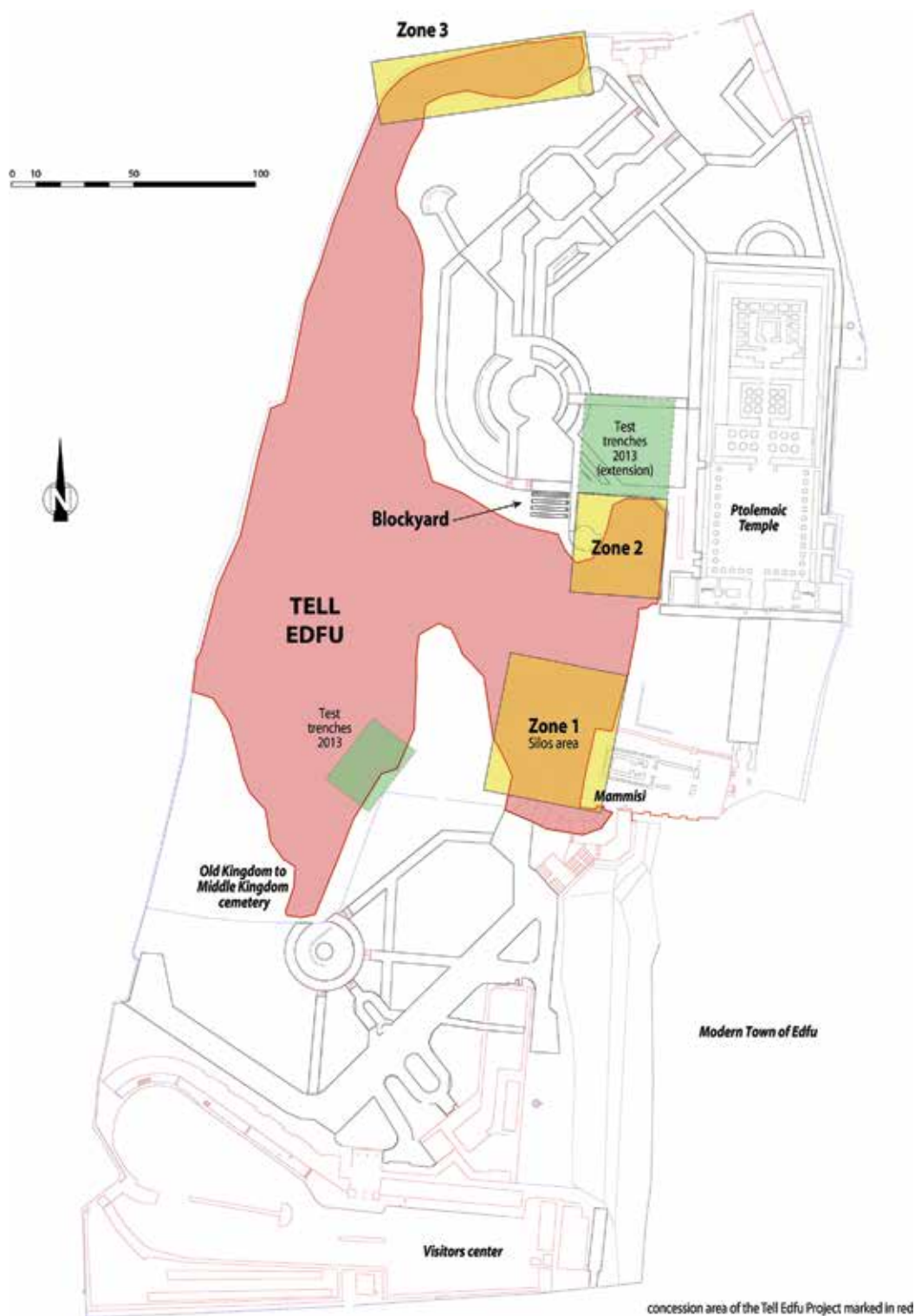


Figure 1. General plan of the site of Tell Edfu showing excavations zones



Figure 2. The Tell Edfu blockyard at the end of the 2012 season

monument among the locals from the surrounding areas. This project has been supported by a grant awarded to Gregory Marouard by the Antiquities Endowment Fund of the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE).

### Zone 2: The Old Kingdom Settlement Remains along the Eastern Side of the Tell

This season it has finally been possible to start excavations of the Old Kingdom settlement remains in Zone 2, which had been prepared for fieldwork over the past two years by removing several meters of *sebakh* debris that had been covering the ancient walls (fig. 3).<sup>1</sup> The excavations have focused so far on the upper layers of the preserved settlement remains, which were quite damaged by *sebakh* diggers who have left many deep holes — several up to two meters deep. The diggers cut through the ancient walls and floor levels in order to extract nitrogen-rich soil



Figure 3. Zone 2, Old Kingdom area (top) in 2009 and (bottom) in 2012

for agriculture. Nevertheless, it was possible to excavate the disturbed areas down to the better-preserved archaeological layers that were still largely intact. The uppermost settlement layers, which were quite fragmentary in their state of preservation, consist of domestic units and small, round or sometimes oval underground grain silos that have been found in a very good state of preservation (fig. 4). According to the associated pottery, they date to the very end of the Old Kingdom (late Sixth Dynasty and possibly the early First Intermediate Period). Some of these grain silos have well-built vaulted mudbrick tops and small openings for filling them from the corresponding floor level above (fig. 4). Our ceramicist Valérie le Provost will study the ceramic assemblages in detail next season.

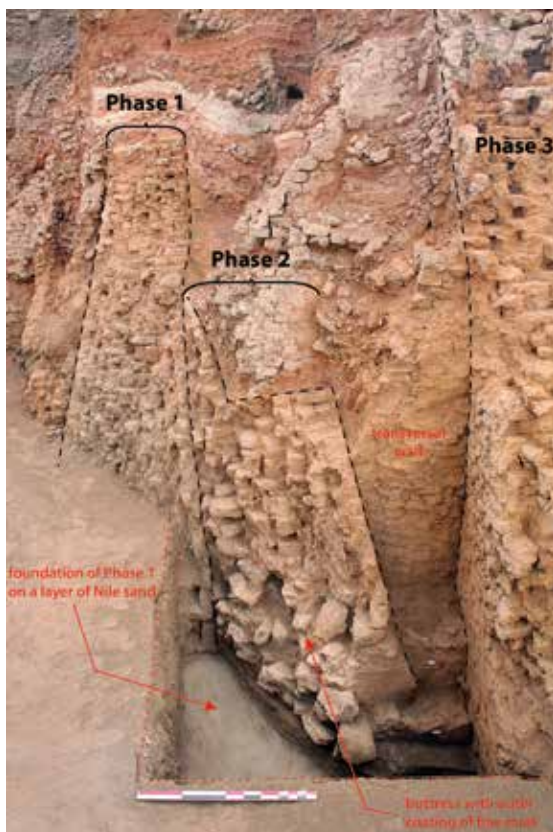
Farther below these domestic settlement remains, several very thick mudbrick walls were discovered that belong to a sequence of three successive enclosure walls with sloping exterior sides (fig. 5). The oldest enclosure wall seems to have fallen into disrepair at some point prior to the end of the early Sixth Dynasty and was reinforced by a new mudbrick wall that had been built against its exterior face with an inclined foundation made of several layers of sandstone blocks of medium size. The exterior face of this restoration shows the remains of small, square buttresses and, particularly rare, traces of exterior plaster, which might indicate that this secondary repair had a primarily decorative function. These details clearly underline the importance of this wall and its permanence in the urban landscape in this part of town. Much later a new wall, 1.70 meters wide, was built on the exterior of the older enclosure and its restoration. This latest wall addition was separated from the older ones by a small gap, produced by the relatively steep inclination of the outer face of the first set of walls, into which several small transverse walls forming small compartments were inserted that were then filled with rubble (fig. 5). This sequence of three consecutive phases of walls in fact represents the same sequence of Old Kingdom enclosure walls already known from the



Figure 4. The newly discovered Old Kingdom enclosure walls and domestic silos



Figure 5. The sequence of successive enclosure walls excavated in Zone 2



western side of Zone 2 (fig. 6). Based on the orientation and architectural details, there must have been an angle in the area that is now under the modern paved pathways of the “open-air museum,” where they would have turned toward the east. This angle was certainly destroyed by *sebak* digging and, despite archaeological diagnostic works conducted prior the construction of the benches of the new blockyard, it has not been possible to identify any traces of these walls here. The enclosure walls seem to have had rather shallow foundations, which were completely removed when the *sebbakhin* used this area as a quarry to dig for fertilizer at the turn of last century. However, the newly exposed town walls in Zone 2 provide new evidence about where the possible northern limit of the Old Kingdom town had been during the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties. This newly discov-

Figure 6. The Old Kingdom enclosure walls visible in the vertical cuts left by the *sebbakhin* to the west of Zone 2

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ered sequence of walls, if they had functioned indeed as town walls, runs in an east-west direction but forms a right angle in the area close to the later Ptolemaic temple enclosure wall. It is possible that this angle was once part of a large gate area.

To the south of these enclosure walls were excavated several unusually thick mudbrick walls (between 2.30 m and 2.70 m wide) that belong to some large building complex (fig. 7). On the western side of one of these walls was discovered a small doorway that still had its wooden lintel and parts of the actual door were preserved in situ (fig. 8). This doorway seems to have provided access to a larger open space or courtyard toward the east. The precise function of this building remains unknown and will be investigated further in the next season. The objects that have been discovered in relation to this building and the surrounding



Figure 7. Remains of a large Old Kingdom building complex (ca. Fifth Dynasty)



Figure 8. Wooden lintel and door remains on the Old Kingdom building complex



Figure 9. Bread mold, pot stand, and complete potteries found in the upper, abandonment layers of the Old Kingdom building

area show numerous traces of metallurgic activity (fragments of crucibles and some pieces of slag) as well as an interesting ceramic assemblage with a large quantity of bread molds and beer jars. One of the complete bread molds that was excavated here was an unfired one with the hieroglyphic sign for bread attached to the outside of the vessel as if it had served as a sample mold (fig. 9). The pottery assemblage as well as the other finds from this area are not really characteristic for a purely domestic settlement context but indicates either the presence of an official type of building linked to the elite such as a palatial complex or it might have been part of a sanctuary or temple complex.

### **Zone 3: The First Intermediate Period Remains on the Northern Edge of the Settlement**

Zone 3, the second area where this season's work focused, lies at the northern side of Tell Edfu. Last year we cleaned a sequence of two large town walls in this area, including some settlement remains that had been spared from destruction by the earlier *sebakh* extraction. The aim of this season was to excavate the mudbrick structures that had been built against the interior face of the first town wall in order to establish the chronology of the enclosure walls and the function of the various buildings and storage installations in this part of the ancient town (fig. 10).

Three principal phases of mudbrick structures have been excavated which include numerous mudbrick walls forming small rooms and square storage magazines. Most of these walls are relatively thin, with a thickness of about 30–40 centimeters. Some of them were built with the same size bricks as the enclosure wall. In two cases it has been possible to note that bricks of the structures that were built against the enclosure wall were linked directly to the bricks of the wall while other constructions were simply leaning against it. This strongly suggests that the construction phase of the town enclosure and these buildings occurred at the same time, indicating that this settlement area was subject to some larger planning effort within the town.

In one of the rooms excavated in this area, just south of where the wall curves, more than forty clay sealings stamped with button and scarab seals were found in the occupation layer covering the mud floor. A large storage jar had been sunk into the southern part of this room (fig. 11). Remains of a small doorway with its stone threshold and door socket in situ were found leading into another room, much of which has disappeared due to *sebbakh* digging. An additional room was excavated a few meters northeast of the previous one, and here the remains of a burnt and collapsed roof of wooden beams, smaller wooden branches, twigs, and pieces of matting have been excavated (fig. 10). The collapsed roof lay directly on the mud floor of the room, sealing occupational remains under multiple wooden beams, which had been quite well preserved. The wood and related organic material was collected for further analysis.

The second phase of buildings in this area consists of several small, square silos or magazines used for grain storage. They were constructed of thin mudbrick walls, which were only one brick thick (ca. 13–14 cm). Most of them had been built into rooms of the earlier building phase (fig. 10). All these square grain silos had a fill of gray ash on their outsides in order to protect the stored grain from insect infestation and rodents. On the floor of one of these silos a thin deposit of grain was found which has been collected for an archaeobotanical analysis.

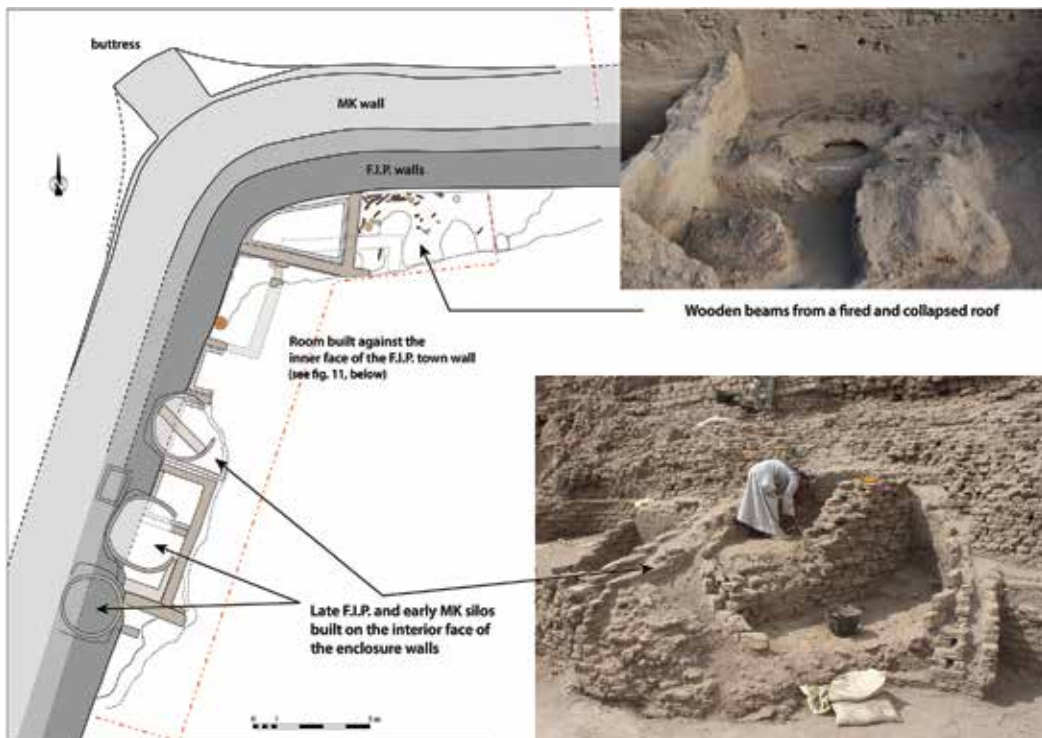


Figure 10. Schematic plan of Zone 3 with town walls and settlement remains of the First Intermediate Period and early Middle Kingdom



Figure 11. Building remains found along the interior face of the First Intermediate Period town wall





Figure 12. Human and dog skeletons found inside a silo (late First Intermediate Period –early Middle Kingdom)

While excavating the remains of a larger grain silo built against the round curve of the town wall at the northwestern side of Zone 3 an unexpected discovery was made. On the floor of this silo three human skeletons were discovered together with the remains of at least two dogs (fig. 12). No signs for a proper burial were found and it seems that the three individuals were simply thrown into the silo, which is also confirmed by the fact they lay partially on top of each other with different orientations. On the arm of the uppermost skeleton pieces of a small bracelet made with faience beads and a faience stamp seal together with a scarab seal were found. This

could be an indication that one of these individuals had been an administrator, a supposition that is further corroborated by the signs of heavy use on these two seals.

The last phase of occupation in this area consists of round grain silos (fig. 10) that were built on a higher level and already cutting into the oldest phase of the town wall, which by then must have fallen out of use and into disrepair. By that time, the first enclosure wall had been replaced by a second town wall, which was built with much larger bricks against the exterior face of the first wall and partially above it. The associated pottery assemblage recovered during the excavations in this area spans the early First Intermediate Period (abbreviated F.I.P. in the figures) into the first half of the Middle Kingdom (abbreviated MK). This provides an excellent opportunity to investigate the evolution of pottery dating to one of the lesser-known periods of ancient Egyptian history.

## The Edfu Blockyard Project

Another aim of the 2012 season was to construct four large brick benches to be used as low platforms for the more than 300 decorated and inscribed stone blocks lying at the base of the tell (fig. 13). These blocks originate from various different locations, some of them having been excavated in 1984 beneath the first court of the Ptolemaic temple, others having been found to the east of the temple, in the modern town of Edfu, which still covers part of the ancient settlement. A large number of the stone blocks come from the French and Franco-Polish excavations at Tell Edfu, which took place in the 1920s and 1930s.

One of the tasks has been to clean the blocks as carefully as possible and to record them in detail in our Filemaker database on an iPad (fig. 14). This was done on site by NELC students Janelle Wade and Jonathan Winnerman, who were in charge of the epigraphic study. This work follows the guidelines of the Chicago House Epigraphic Survey (Luxor), and in October Epigraphic Survey senior epigrapher Brett McClain together with Chicago House staff members Krisztián Vértés, Jen Kimpton, and Keli Alberts joined the Edfu team for a site visit in order to provide advice to Jonathan and Janelle about the best methods to record the blocks.

By the end of the season, four large benches (mastabas) were constructed from red bricks with two waterproof layers of black tar (bitumen) between the brick layers, which will pro-



Figure 13. General view of blockyard project area with Zone 2 and Ptolemaic temple in the background



Figure 14. Graduate student Jonathan Winnerman copying a hieroglyphic inscription on a sandstone block

tect the stone from any groundwater and dampness in the future. The blocks were carefully placed on these mastabas and can now be easily seen by interested visitors (see fig. 2).

## Work at the Pyramid of El-Ghonameya

Work also continued this season at the small step pyramid near the village of el-Ghonameya, which lies to the southwest of the modern town of Edfu (fig. 15). The main aim of the Edfu-South Pyramid Project has been to continue the work of cleaning the western side of the monument, which is the only side that had not been cleared last season (see *Oriental Institute News & Notes* 213 [2012] for details). The lower courses of stones were freed from sand and rubble, exposing a small graffito, which post-dates the pyramid and probably belongs to the New Kingdom. On the eastern side of the pyramid, more cleaning work was done to complete the work from last year (fig. 16). The stone foundation of a small shrine or offering chapel that once had stood here is now clearly visible (fig. 17). It might have been used for the royal cult of the late Third Dynasty king Huni, to whom this pyramid has been attributed. This clearly emphasizes a cultic purpose of these pyramids, which were not royal funerary monuments but had a more symbolic function, one perhaps linked to the cult of the living king. The results from the Edfu-South Pyramid have finally laid to rest any theory relating to administrative buildings being part of these monuments. Some additional survey work was also carried out in the neighboring quarry areas north of the pyramid.

Another objective of last season at the pyramid had been to build a wall around the site in order to protect it from the growing cemetery on the northern side as well as the main street and expanding village on the southern side of the pyramid (fig. 15). With support from an Antiquities Endowment Fund grant from ARCE, it was possible to construct a low brick wall 250 meters (820 feet) in length around the site employing as much as possible local workers in order to support the village community (fig. 18). The red bricks used for construction were produced in the vicinity of el-Ghonameya in traditional brick kilns, which also reduced the problems with the timely supply of building materials. This protective wall is one meter high and encloses the archaeological site on the northern, southern, and eastern sides (figs.

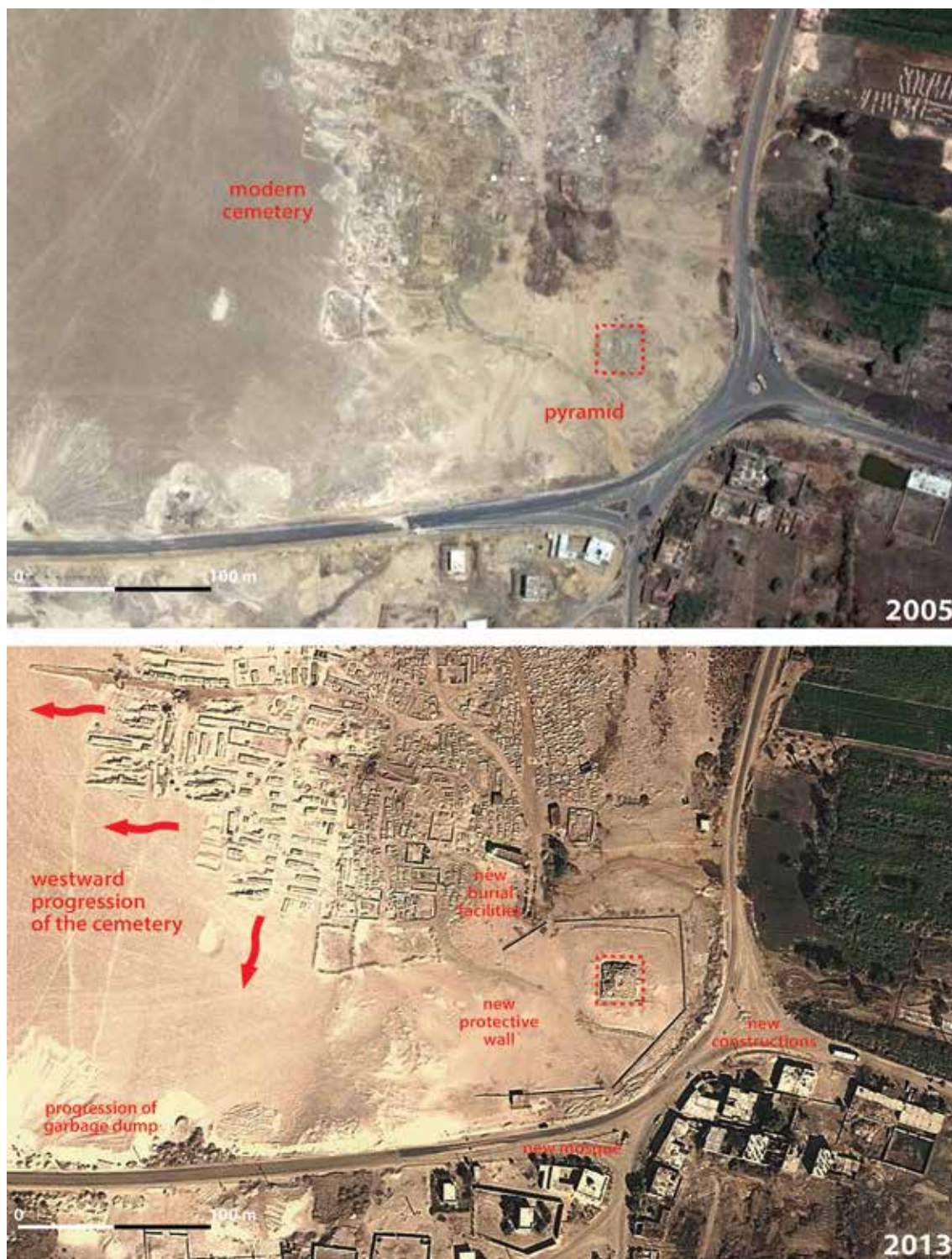


Figure 15. Google Earth® view of the small pyramid site at el-Ghonameya in 2005 (top) and 2013 (bottom), showing the encroachment of the modern cemetery and village

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Figure 16. East face of the small step pyramid showing remains of a shrine or chapel



Figure 17. Details of the foundation and the negative of a small shrine-chapel on the eastern side of the pyramid



Figure 18. The Edfu-South Pyramid team



Figure 19. The new wall protecting the pyramid site, view to the southeast



Figure 20. Backfilling operation in progress to protect the chapel remains, with the new protective wall in the foreground; view to the southwest

19–20). In negotiation with the local mayor, two entrances were left open to allow people to walk through the site in direction to and from the cemetery, but no vehicles can pass here anymore (fig. 20). This wall should also reduce the deposition of modern waste, which has been an ongoing problem at the site.

## Acknowledgments

The directors would like to thank the Edfu Project team for their excellent contributions and efforts during the excavation as well as the local inspectorate at Edfu, foremost Ahmed Saadi, Susi Samir Labib, and our inspectors Afrah Mahmoud (Tell Edfu) and Mustafa (Edfu-South Pyramid) for their collaboration and support. A big thank-you also goes to Ramadan Hassan Ahmed and Amal Abdullah Ahmed for providing access to work in the magazine of Elkab.

We would also like to express our sincere gratitude to many of our Oriental Institute members, foremost Bob and Janet Helman, who have made the blockyard project possible, Andrea Dudek, Daniel and Annette Youngberg, Stephen and Patricia Holst, Joan S. Fortune, Steven and Heidi Camp, and Rosemary Ferrand. Additionally, we would like to thank the Oriental Institute and the National Endowment for the Humanities for their generous financial contribution to the Tell Edfu Project.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For details on the practices and effects of *sebakh* extraction, see Bailey 1999.

## Reference

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