Report on the 38th season of excavation and restoration on the island of Elephantine

by

Dietrich Raue, Cornelius von Pilgrim, Felix Arnold, Werner Kaiser, Peter Kopp, Ewa Laskowska-Kusztal

The 38th season of the German Institute of Archaeology and the Swiss Institute for Architectural and Archaeological Research on Ancient Egypt at Elephantine was carried out from October 30th, 2008 till December 15th, 2008 and from January 8th to April 4th, 2009.

The work on finds from earlier seasons was continued. This included studies of small finds, seal impressions and lithics dating to the Old Kingdom, pottery of the Old, Middle and New Kingdoms, and the Roman era, Nubian pottery, as well as botanical, animal and human remains. The study of architectural fragments of the temples of Satet of the Middle Kingdom, and the Greco-Roman temples of Khnum was continued, together with the conservation of the wooden columns from the palace bakery of the First Intermediate Period.

Excavations were carried out in the area between the temple of Satet and the sanctuary of Heqaib, in the precinct of Khnum, and its later occupation layers and at the south-western part of the town enclosure of the 2nd millennium BC (Fig. 1-2).
Fig.1: Map of Aswan, scale 1:50,000 (from E.G.S.A. sheet NG36B3b)
Fig.2: Elephantine Excavations 2007/2008, scale 1:2.000: 1. Area XVIII, town enclosure and settlement of the Old Kingdom west of the temple of Satet; 2. Temple of Khnum: later structures north of the temple; 3. Temple of Khnum: house K19; 4: Area XIV: Town enclosure, south-western part
1. **Area XVIII: Town enclosure walls and settlement of the Third Millennium BC**
   *(Fig. 3-4, Pl. I-II)*

This season saw the completion of research in the area between the temple of Satet in the East and the sanctuary of Heqaib in the West. Thus it is now possible to describe the complete development of the settlement behind the Temple of Satet from the Early Dynastic through the First Intermediate Period.

Only some badly preserved features like floor levels, a fireplace and the lowest courses of walls remained from the transition between the 1st and 2nd Dynasties. In the 2nd Dynasty the southern part of the settlement on Elephantine was enclosed by a town wall. This connected it to the northern corner of the Early Dynastic Fortress and continued from there around the granite formations behind the Temple of Satet to the Southwest *(Fig. 3)*. East of the temple it followed the line of the higher rocks in order to avoid a deep depression in the granite that makes up much of the site. This higher line was probably followed as unusually high Nile floods might have reached this low area during the Early Dynastic period. Furthermore, much more building material and labour would have been required to pass straight through this depression. Due to a later renovation in this area, the Early Dynastic Town Enclosure is not well preserved, save for the granite foundations of a tower. This was semi-circular and was situated approximately the same distance from tower C as tower C was from the fortress.

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*Fig. 3: Area XVIII and the temple of Satet in the middle 2nd Dynasty*

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The settlement phase of the middle of the 2nd Dynasty was well preserved in area 18. (Fig. 4, Pl. I). Behind the town enclosure lay a group of rooms following roughly the same northeast-southwest orientation as the court walls of the temple and the fortress. The only finds in situ were a pottery vat and a basket on a floor. No traces of occupation layers were found outside the town wall.

In the late 2nd Dynasty the pattern of these rooms changed slightly. A bigger rectangular room was found in the centre of the excavated area. To its northeast, behind a step in a door, lay a slightly higher, open place where an unusually constructed kiln was found (Pl. II). The cylindrical oven had a trapezoidal opening for firing on its southern side, and was surrounded by a second low wall, half a mudbrick thick in the East and North. This feature had at least three renovation phases and must therefore have been an essential part of the kiln. A fairly similar construction of the same period is known from Buto. There, due to the finds nearby, it was determined that it was most probably connected with beer production.

Fig. 4: Area XVIII, settlement of the late 2nd Dynasty
Area XVIII is notable for the high number of stone vessel fragments and the small finds of organic materials found there. The layers of the 2nd Dynasty yielded three simple wooden spoons and two wooden cylinder seals. Weapons included a number of arrow tips of wood, and the end of an arrow shaft of reed. A smaller globular vessel with a narrow opening still had its seal of animal skin in situ, fixed by a string.

The development in this group of rooms can be followed until the 4th Dynasty. The general pattern does not change during this period. Despite several renovations and entire new constructions, the changes over at least 200 years are only slight, and the pattern of a large room surrounded by smaller ones persists. In the 4th Dynasty the large central room is partitioned into two smaller ones. The walls M1712/M1716 are replaced several times but never change their position. As this area never contained a door, it seems that these walls represented a main subdivision of the area.

The town enclosure of the 2nd Dynasty was replaced in the late 4th/early 5th Dynasty by a new wall at the same place (M1523). In the 5th Dynasty a new town wall with a 1.6 m high foundation of granite slabs was built (M1529), this time going through the granite depression. Apparently, the annual Nile inundation no longer flooded this place due to the decreasing maximum Nile flood levels that took place during the Old Kingdom.

As part of a restructuring of the complete area at the end of the 5th Dynasty or the very beginning 6th Dynasty, this wall was built over, and the ground levelled. The settlement and temple layers of the 5th Dynasty south and west of the temple of the Satet temple were removed and the depression filled with up to more than 5 m of debris. This newly won ground provided a fresh place for development, without any previous structures. As during former campaigns, the debris layers yielded different artefacts that originated from the temple of Satet. These included cult pottery, such as large pot stands and figurines made of various materials. (Pl. III). Also worthy of mention is the lower part of a faience figurine of a standing woman. Figurines of this kind are exclusively found in temples like the one of Satet on Elephantine, as well as in Abydos and Hierakonpolis.

Peter Kopp

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2 Op. cit., p.4, fig. 3.
The Swiss institute continued its investigation of the late antique stratigraphy north and south of the Khnum temple. On the north side (Area XXIX), the investigation of houses T43 and T51 was completed. The excavation of the last remaining corner of T43 proved essential in understanding the sequence of phases in this area of the site. According to the new information, the inner enclosure wall of the Khnum temple was dismantled at a later point in this area than in the west and south of the temple, probably at the end of the Sixth Century A.D. (Stratum 01). In the Seventh Century (Stratum 02), considerable parts of the northeast corner of the temple house and the Ptolemaic pronaos were still standing. Against these remains, building T43 and house T41 were built, using the temple remains as back walls. Building T43 can be identified as a small church with a single nave and a round apse. The nave was 7.9 m long and 4.2 wide. Its north wall has an unusually thick foundation of stone blocks, suggesting that it was relatively high, possibly about 5 m.

At the end of Stratum 02, the last parts of the temple house and the pronaos were dismantled. For protective purposes, house T41 received a new back wall. The church T43 was completely rebuilt in the subsequent Stratum 03 (Ninth Century A.D.). The building received thick walls of mud brick and its interior was paved with fired bricks. The design of the sanctuary was completely altered. The original apse was paved over, its shape now being visible only in the layout of the pavement. The new apse was rectangular in shape and lay further to the east, extending the length of the nave to 11 m.

South of the Khnum temple (Area XXVI the investigation of the workshop K20 and the adjoining street were continued. Inside the courtyard of K20 further evidence for stone cutting activities was found, dating to the Sixth Century A.D. Outside the perimeter of K20, the rubbish heap of an oven used for processing metal was excavated further, yielding fragments of crucibles and casting moulds. The study of the moulds has shown, that the principle product were bronze pans with beaded rims, some decorated with Christian crosses.

Felix Arnold

3. *Area XIV: Town enclosure (Pl. IV)*

The Swiss Institute continued the investigation on the town enclosure at the south-western edge of the town where substantial remains of all successive phases of the walls are still preserved (Area XIV). During earlier investigations in the 10th and 24th season two older phases of the enclosure (Wall A and

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Wall B) had been tentatively dated to the Middle Kingdom\(^8\) and the Third Intermediate Period\(^9\) respectively, whereas no justified date is available for the latest phase (C) of the former fortification wall\(^{10}\). It was built high above the ground on top of the older wall B. At the exterior the wall was supported with a massive buttress (D), which was apparently one of a series of buttresses. The space between these buttresses was later filled in with another wall (E).

During all periods, the town enclosure had been built up against higher accumulations inside the walls; thus, the preserved lower part of the wall served as a retaining wall without any adjoining contemporary layers inside. However, due to the higher foundation level of the preserved portion of the town wall, constructed on a high granite ride, all contemporary accumulation of debris have vanished in this particular area. To the east, however, the wall’s level sloped down into a shallow valley between the former two separate islands that made up the town site of Elephantine. Here, at least the lowest courses of some phases of the town enclosure are preserved with adjoining layers on the exterior. Further east, towards the granite boulders with the inscriptions of Khufu-ankh, the level ascends significantly again, and any remains of the town walls have disappeared.

After a large-scale cleaning of the area, which is disturbed by extensive sebbakh digging, almost all remaining brickwork of the different phases of the fortification walls have been uncovered (Pl. IV). During this work, another supporting wall (F) added outside of the latest phase of the enclosure wall (E) came to light. Three deep trenches were dug in order to investigate the stratigraphy of the layers connected to the different phases of the town enclosure. The results of the work are summarized below. The oldest phase of the town enclosure (A) dating to the late Middle Kingdom was built on top of a protruding foundation of stone. Two meters in front of the wall the foundation of another contemporary stone wall was discovered. It was built against the slope of the former riverbank and was apparently the lower part of an exterior, perhaps glacis-like supporting wall. The wall was covered with a sequence of wind-blown sand and layers of sherds, dating from the early 18\(^{th}\) dynasty to the early Third Intermediate Period, once again indicating the destruction of the wall after the end of the Second Intermediate Period\(^{11}\). At the foot of the wall the slope of the ancient riverbank continues to the south at a steep gradient. Sherds in the oldest layer connected to the wall point to a construction date in the late 12\(^{th}\) dynasty. This was covered by a continuous sequence of layers of pure wind-blown sand, interrupted by sporadic layers of sherds.

The chronological sequence of accumulations in this area is interrupted by the construction of wall F, which is built on top of sandy accumulations dating to the 25\(^{th}\) dynasty. According to the date of the

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\(^{11}\) C. VON PILGRIM, Area XIV: Town enclosure, in: RAUE et al., Report on the 37\(^{th}\) season of excavation and restoration on the island of Elephantine, ASAE (forthcoming).
earliest layers adjoining the wall, this latest phase of the fortification wall (F) cannot have been built later than the Early Ptolemaic Period. The character of layers accumulating outside this wall, however, had not changed and indicates that after the construction of the new enclosure wall the southern riverbank of the island remained a remote area. The steep gradient of the riverbank was apparently not suitable for any extramural activities or occupation and too far away for dumping any settlement debris. Moreover, a simple child burial at the foot of the wall and the skeleton of a young cow near by in a slightly older layer of aeolian sand underlines the remote character of the area. It is hard to assume, therefore, that the town enclosure was once equipped with a southern gate. In contrast, the town was obviously fortified only when Elephantine became a border town and during periods of crisis (SIP / TIP).\(^{12}\) Thus, defence against the south meant that any opening in the wall on that side would have been a strategically weak point.

Cornelius von Pilgrim

4. Temple of Khnum: Fragments of the Middle Kingdom (Pl. V-VI)

The early phase of the cult of Khnum on Elephantine was closely connected with the sanctuary of Satet, and subordinate to the cult of the “lady of Elephantine”\(^ {13}\). Inscriptional evidence from the 11\(^ {th}\) Dynasty confirms, that Khnum as nb qbw “lord of the Cataract Region” and ħntj Zmnt “foremost of Senmet”) was worshipped in the time of Intef II and Intef III besides the main cult in the natural niche that was formed by three large granit boulders.

It has been assumed for a long time, that the temple of Khnum had an architectural predecessor to the 18\(^ {th}\) Dynasty\(^ {14}\) building. While Khnum appears at least once in reliefs of Mentuhotep III, he is absent from decoration and texts in the temple of Satet of Sesostris I. The titles of officials of the 12\(^ {th}\) and 13\(^ {th}\) Dynasty, retrieved from various contexts, suggested an independent temple that gradually gained royal


attention\textsuperscript{15}. On the other hand, the primacy of the goddess Satet and the guest-status (\textit{hrj-jb 3bw}) of Khnum on the island seemed to persist throughout the Middle Kingdom\textsuperscript{16}.

The Middle Kingdom temple was probably located in the same position as the temple of the 18\textsuperscript{th} Dynasty, about 60 m south of the temple of Satet on a higher level, in the centre of the town\textsuperscript{17}. Secure evidence for this came from the discovery of foundation trenches. The group of limestone fragments that were found in construction trenches of later buildings for Khnum and other building fragments from other contexts indicate the erection of structures or buildings containing the following elements from the 13\textsuperscript{th} Dynasty: a gate, a decorated room with ritual scenes, and a barque shrine dating to the 13\textsuperscript{th} Dynasty\textsuperscript{18}. It was assumed that the Middle Kingdom Khnum Temple had rather modest dimensions and the evidence points to a number of different styles and materials\textsuperscript{19} used in its construction.

60 fragments of various sizes were found in different locations of the settlement, making a total of 75 fragments \textsuperscript{20}. These were of different materials and in a variety of styles.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the material that was documented this season:

- The assumption of an early core building that might date back to the time of Sesostris I\textsuperscript{21} is supported by a fragment with the cartouche Zj-n-Wsrt (CM 18, Pl. V). Although it has not been worked by the same crew of craftsmen that worked at the temple of Satet, the dating to the time of Sesostris I. seems to be clear.


\textsuperscript{19} The proportion of the core buildings of Hatshepsut in the Khnum temple point to a ratio of 2:3 in proportion to the temple building for Satet; if this ratio would be valid for the temples of the Middle Kingdom, the core building could have had about max. 60-70 sqm.

\textsuperscript{20} The attribution is based on the combination of the material (limestone) and the provenance:


- destruction of the temples of the Middle and New Kingdom from the 4\textsuperscript{th} Century BC onwards led to finds in the area of the courtyard.

- demolition of the late temple of Khnum in Late Antique period, with transport tracks to the north (via the area of the former sanctuary of Heqaib towards the area of the modern museums) and the south (southern and southwestern part of settlement and enclosure: surface cleansings of the 24\textsuperscript{th}, 37\textsuperscript{th} and 38\textsuperscript{th} season in the settlement and at the enclosure wall of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 1\textsuperscript{st} Millennium BC. More fragments can be expected by future work).

- A single fragment was found directly south of the temple of Khnum in Area XXX in recently moved debris (CM 51).

\textsuperscript{21} KAISER, 25-27. Bericht, p. 110 with Pl. 25c-d.
- A small group of fragments with beautifully carved signs in a very fine variety of limestone provides evidence for the existence of a historical inscription of probably the same date. Traces of blue colour can be seen on some of the signs. Only single words (e.g. $m\overline{n}$ = see, CM 14) and the remains of a grid with numerals (CM 41) are well preserved and thus do not allow for any further conclusions.

- Several blocks give evidence for ritual scenes carved in high relief, parts of which are well executed. There is plenty of evidence for polychromy. Some blocks show traces of exposure to fire – these belong exclusively to the group of fragments that was found in the settlement strata of the New Kingdom.

- At least one block assures the combination of limestone stone masonry in conjunction with mud brick walls (CM 74).

- Two fragments (CM 72-73), one reused in the installation of a house of the New Kingdom, indicate the existence of a gate made of sandstone. Carved surprisingly crudely, both cartouches of Sesostris I are preserved.

The systematic approach seen in the period of Sesostris I towards administration, border defence, language, iconography and other aspects of pharaonic culture can also be seen on Elephantine Island. During this time the spatial organisation of cultic buildings is established. Gradually the changes in cult (i.e. the increasing importance of Khnum) are being reflected in the titles of nomarchs. Important additions to these fixed points of the cult topography of Elephantine Island is the addition of a sandstone staircase between the two temples, as well as a narrow sandstone channel constructed in the later 12th dynasty.

The entire cataract region, and especially Elephantine, bear numerous attestations of activity of the kings of the 13th Dynasty. Several fragments point to a gate of the remarkable dimension of about 6 meters in height. A limestone block points to the construction of a barque-chapel for Khnum by a king Sobekhotep. An unknown number of rooms was added to the temple in this period. This fits with the evidence gathered by Eder: kings of the 13th dynasty mainly added to structures in the form of

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22 No fragment supports the assumption (EDER, GM 178, 24) of an undecorated building by Sesostris III / Amenemhet III, that was subsequently decorated by kings of the 13th Dynasty.

23 This was assumed yet by EDER, GM 178, p. 8.


27 EDER, GM 178, pp. 20-23; because of the quality of the relief, Eder proposes Sobekhotep VI as builder of the Barque chapel, who donated also statuary on Elephantine, cf. op. cit, p. 23 note 49
decoration, minor constructions, or dedicating equipment to existing sanctuaries. Some of the new fragments may be attributed to these constructions: a male god, probably Khnum (CM 51, see Pl. VI), is depicted in sunk relief of minor quality on a well polished surface. Further fragments attest to a ceiling decorated with lavishly executed stars (CM 49) and plain limestone floor slabs (CM 46).

The temples of Khnum and Satet did not receive any royal attention during the later part of the 2nd Intermediate Period. This is probably due less to a lack of interest than to a lack of control of the Theban monarchs of the 17th dynasty, since the kingdom of Kerma exercised at least influence, if not control over Elephantine.

Werner Kaiser and Dietrich Raue

5. Studies on the fragments of Ptolemaic and Roman temples in Elephantine and Aswan

The synchronisation of stylistic, iconographic and epigraphic studies in the Khnum temple is aided by a constantly developing, separate register of selected objects designated with the symbol GR (Greco-Roman), which currently contains 612 fragments. The selection of these fragments, is aimed at resolving the following crucial research problems:

a. Identifying decoration executed under Domitian, the style of which bears a close resemblance to Complex VIII; decorative fragments dating from the reign of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II; determining the location of both groups and verifying the hypothesis that the Ptolemaic decoration was originally found in the pronaos of the Khnum temple and in rooms of the temple dated to the time of Nectanebo II.

b. Determining the location of decorative fragments dated to the reign of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II, described and published as Complex IX, the style of which points to their connection with workshops that executed the decoration constituting Complex VIII.

c. Determining the location of decoration of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II, whose style is different from the decoration of Complexes VIII and IX, and resembles that of the Satet temple. The identification of

28 Brooklyn Inv. 77.194: R. Fazzini ET AL., Ancient Egyptian Art in the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn 1989, No. 29; it probably originates from Elephantine, D. Franke, Heiligtum des Heqaib, p. 152; cf. also Eder, GM 178, 19 with the statue Stockholm NME 75 of Sobekhotep III.


this distinctive group was inspired by fragments of architraves from the pronaos of the Khnum temple registered as GR 191, 202.

d. Identifying the sunken relief decoration of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II covered with thicker, cracked plaster, unusual for the Ptolemaic Period, and defining the criteria that distinguish it from the decoration of Trajan and Antoninus Pius, also covered with thick, concealing plaster. Also determining the location of the above decoration, verifying its possible associations with the pronaos of the Khnum temple.

e. Determining the location of Ptolemaic decoration in sunken relief originally found on walls refurbished by Trajan and Antoninus Pius, and verification of the hypothesis that the location of this decoration originates from the outer walls of the pronaos.

f. Determining the location of high relief decoration covered with thick, concealing plaster, which, according to the current state of research on the chronology of the temple, could belong only to the pronaos (if it is indeed Ptolemaic relief) or to the pronaos or walls of the courtyard (if the relief is Roman). Fragments representing this type of decoration do not bear cartouches.

g. Determining the location of sunken relief decoration with visible traces of whitewash, which is similar in style to Complex XII and includes fragments of columns and walls. Verification of the possible connection of this decoration with the pronaos.

h. Determining the location of sunken relief decoration on fragments of walls and columns, stylistically similar to Complex XII, originating from a building of smaller dimensions (based on smaller column diameter).

i. Determining the location of a set of fragments uncovered mostly to the south of the Khnum temple, the decoration of which includes astronomical scenes painted in red ochre (no relief).

j. Identifying the decoration of the Satet temple, or possibly of buildings from its temenos, which due to its finding place was assigned to the lapidarium of the Khnum temple. Erroneous identification is possible especially in the case of architraves and abacuses.

Collected with special care are architraves, abacuses, door jambs, screens and cornices. One can suppose that architectural studies on this category of material in the future should be the fastest way to the expected identification of accompanying buildings of the Khnum temple. The dating of the courtyard of the Khnum temple to the Roman period, which limits the location options for the Ptolemaic decoration to the pronaos of the Khnum temple and possibly selected rooms of the Tempelhaus (as a supplement to the decoration of Nectanebo II) supports the hypothesis of the existence of other undiscovered cult buildings in the vicinity of the temples of Khnum and Satet.

The Temple of Satet: Fragments originating from the Satet temple mixed with material evidently belonging to the Khnum temple permit a hypothesis that an unknown percentage of fragments found to the south of the Khnum temple, or collected in the past in the southern lapidaria, may originate from

the Satet temple precinct, e.g., decorative fragments dating to the reign of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (GR 594 – 597), which at the current stage of research do not have stylistic parallels in the decoration that is evidently associated with the Khnum temple precinct.

The decoration of Ptolemaic and Roman temples on Elephantine has particular traits that require caution when attempting interpretation:

a. Studies on the material from the time of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II indicate that the adornment of temples of both Satet and Khnum took place during this reign. Indeed, some parts of the decoration of the temple of Khnum are similar in style to those of the Satet temple.

b. Four instances have been recorded where rulers imitated the stylistic traits of decoration executed by their indirect predecessors: Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II, when enlarging Baukomplex X, imitated the style of reliefs executed in the older parts of this building dedicated by Ptolemy IV Philopator; the decoration completed under Domitian draws upon the reliefs dated with cartouches of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II; Trajan, as he continued to decorate the walls of the main body of the Khnum temple, imitated the decoration of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II that was already in existence; Trajan’s decoration complements the iconographic programme of the temple of Osiris Nesmeti not only imitates the stylistic traits of decoration executed by Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II, but is emphasized by Trajan’s use of the titulary of Ptolemy VIII.

c. The act of renovating the Ptolemaic reliefs by covering them with thick, concealing plaster typical for the period of Trajan and Antoninus Pius, limits the possibilities of establishing a dating for a part of the fragments, in particular those from the walls

The scattering of the decoration, small size of the preserved fragments, and few possible joins between small bits of larger blocks limit the amount of information that can be derived about the decorative programme, the repertoire of deities, and the theology. The interpretation of these problems requires special caution due to the fact that more completely preserved material found on Elephantine provides examples of unconventional religious concepts, which are special theological creations of this unique religious centre.

Ewa Laskowska-Kusztal
Pl. I: Area XVIII, settlement of the middle of the 2nd Dynasty.

Pl. II: Area XVIII, kiln of the late 2nd Dynasty.
Pl. III: Area XVIII, Figurine from debris of the Satet Temple, 5th Dynasty.

Pl. IV: Area XIV: Town enclosure, foundation in the south-western part.
Pl. V: Temple of Khnum: Fragment of the cartouche of Sesostris I (?).

Pl. VI: Temple of Khnum: torso of a god (Khnum?), late Middle Kingdom / Early 2nd Intermediate Period.