

Report on the Excavations at Elephantine
by the German Archaeological Institute and the Swiss Institute
from autumn 2011 to spring 2012

by

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1. Overview

From October 2011 until December 2011 the German Archaeological Institute and the Swiss Institute of Architectural and Archaeological Research on Ancient Egypt in Cairo continued their archaeological work on Elephantine.¹ Excavation work was concentrated on a house of the Middle Kingdom in the northwestern sector, the history of settlement in the area in front of the museum and two houses of the Coptic period in the area south of the Khnum temple. In addition, several research and documentation projects were undertaken. The rebuilding of a Graeco-Roman temple was begun as well as the restructuring of the excavation magazines.

(S.J.S.)

2. Life in the town of the Middle Kingdom

The German mission initiated this season a project on the living conditions of the Middle Kingdom town. The aim of the project is the reconstruction of daily life and social interaction inside the houses of the town, based on the interdisciplinary investigation of a case study.

This season excavation work began in house H70, in the northwestern sector of the city (Area IX, Fig. 1). The latest phases of use of this house had been studied by the German mission under the direction of Cornelius von Pilgrim in 1987-1990². In the course of this work, a typical house of the late Middle Kingdom (Stratum 13, reign of Amenemhat III) had been revealed, comprising a large central space with four columns, an entrance room and an oven room in the north and two individual rooms in the south. A staircase led from the central space to an upper

¹ We are grateful to the members of the Supreme Council of Antiquities for their continued support, in particular the Directors of Aswan Inspectorate Dr. Fathy Abou-Zeid and Dr. M. Abd el-Hakim, and the inspectors Ahmed Mohamed, Amal Serif Tadriss, Fahmi Mahmoud, Hala Adel Mohamed, Sayed Ahmed and Abeeya Abd el-Rody. For the excavations on Elephantine see also the preliminary reports appearing regularly in MDAIK. Members of the team were, apart from the authors: M. Abd el-Latif, M. Beiersdorf, R.D. Colman, J. Drauschke, Ch. Eckmann, L. Fuchs, M. Gitzl, N. Kertesz, F. Keshk, I. Klose, T. Krapf, E. Laskowska, E. Millward, S. Olschok, S. Pater, B.v. Pilgrim, Ch. Rauhut, A. Schmuck, M.-Kr. Schröder, E. Simmance, P. Windszus, St. Ziegler.

² C. von Pilgrim, *Elephantine XVIII. Untersuchungen in der Stadt des Mittleren Reiches und der ersten Zwischenzeit*, AV 91, Mainz 1996, 134-141, Abb. 48.

floor, which must have comprised two additional individual rooms and a loggia with four more columns.



Fig. 1: House H70 of the late Middle Kingdom

This season concentrated on the investigation of the earlier history of the house (apparently still within Stratum 13). The house as it had been known from the earlier excavation was shown to be the result of a number of far reaching transformation phases. At the beginning, the area later occupied by house H70 seems to have been covered by a large courtyard. In the segments studied so far, several fireplaces existed, some with a very long period of use. On the floor extensive remains of animal dung were found, deriving from goats and sheep kept in the courtyard and possibly also used as firing material. Numerous net sinkers indicate extensive fishing, traces on some shards low-grade copper smelting.

The original entrance into the house lay in the east, leading from a street directly into the courtyard. Just behind the doorstep, two large grinding stones and an installation for a water jar was found (Fig. 2). The installation was later replaced by a beer bottle (Nile C ware) fixed into the ground. On the floor of the courtyard a sandstone offering table was found, face down. The offering table is of a type known from the sanctuary of Heqaib, comprising five water basins connected by small channels³. It is still unclear, whether the offering table was used inside the house or brought here for secondary use. Next to the offering table the fragment of a sculptor's model of the hieroglyph "m" was found, as well as the feet of a figurine and several seal impressions.

³ L. Habachi, *Elephantine IV. The Sanctuary of Heqaib*, AV 33, Mainz 1985, 49 f., pl. 58b.



Fig. 2: Original doorway of House H70 with water installation and grinding stone

At a certain point in time, the courtyard was subdivided by a wall into two spaces, both still covering a large surface area. Only the southern space received a mud floor of high quality. Inside a deep hole in the floor several complete pottery vessels were found, including a jar of Marl clay and several Nile clay cups. Inside the vessels several Faience beads and a scarab decorated with a scroll pattern were found (Fig. 3). It remains unclear whether the material was deposited for storage or as refuse.



Fig. 3: Middle Kingdom scarab from House H70

Only in a third stage were smaller individual rooms created inside the original open spaces. At the current state of investigation it seems likely that the house had covered a much larger surface area in the earlier phases, additional, smaller rooms lying outside the limits of the later house. The tendency to reduce the size of houses during the course of the Middle Kingdom has been noticed before in other parts of the city, possibly reflecting changes in the social structure.

(F.A.)

3. Excavations in the garden area of the Elephantine Island Museum

The work in the garden of the Museum of Elephantine was in spring 2012 continued in the area in front of the Annex Museum terrace (Fig. 4). The area was covered with a 3 m high layer of building rubble from the construction of the Annex. Beneath this was another metre of sebbakhin debris. In a smaller trench of 4 x 11 m the oldest features of this area were uncovered. The general development of the area is similar to that between the annex and the old museum, which was excavated during the previous years. The area is in a depression that was flooded each year during the Early Dynastic Period and the Old Kingdom by the annual inundation. Therefore for some weeks every year the island of Elephantine was divided in an Eastern island with the settlement and a Western island. In the depression itself only a temporary use was possible. On the natural granite bedrock (here app. 90 m above sea level) were several alternating layers of sand and compact pottery with smaller granites. The granites had sharp edges that indicate that they are remains of working bigger granite boulders to smaller slabs.

These layers were covered by clay that showed thin layers of sedimentation. These sediments of the Nile flood were found up to a height of 91.5 m above sea level. At this height were also 4 postholes that confirm an at least temporary use in the 1st Intermediate Period. To the end of the Old Kingdom due to climatic changes the flood was not so high anymore and probably additionally rubbish from the settlement was heightening the level of the depression. So from the late 1st Intermediate Period onwards it was not anymore flooded and a permanent use was possible. The oldest building was set on this layer and had a foundation of granite (Fig. 5). It dates to the 11th Dynasty and had in one room a lot of ashes.

During the following period the area was clearly an industrial area. Like under the annex museum and the area between the two museum buildings there was a pottery kiln of the early 12th Dynasty (Fig. 6). The area at the eastern edge of settlement was used for activities that were too dangerous to be placed inside the town because of the use of fire. The fire opening of the kiln pointed to the West. The kiln was preserved up to a height of 1.28 m and had a diameter of 1.2 m. There was no occupation level to these kilns preserved.

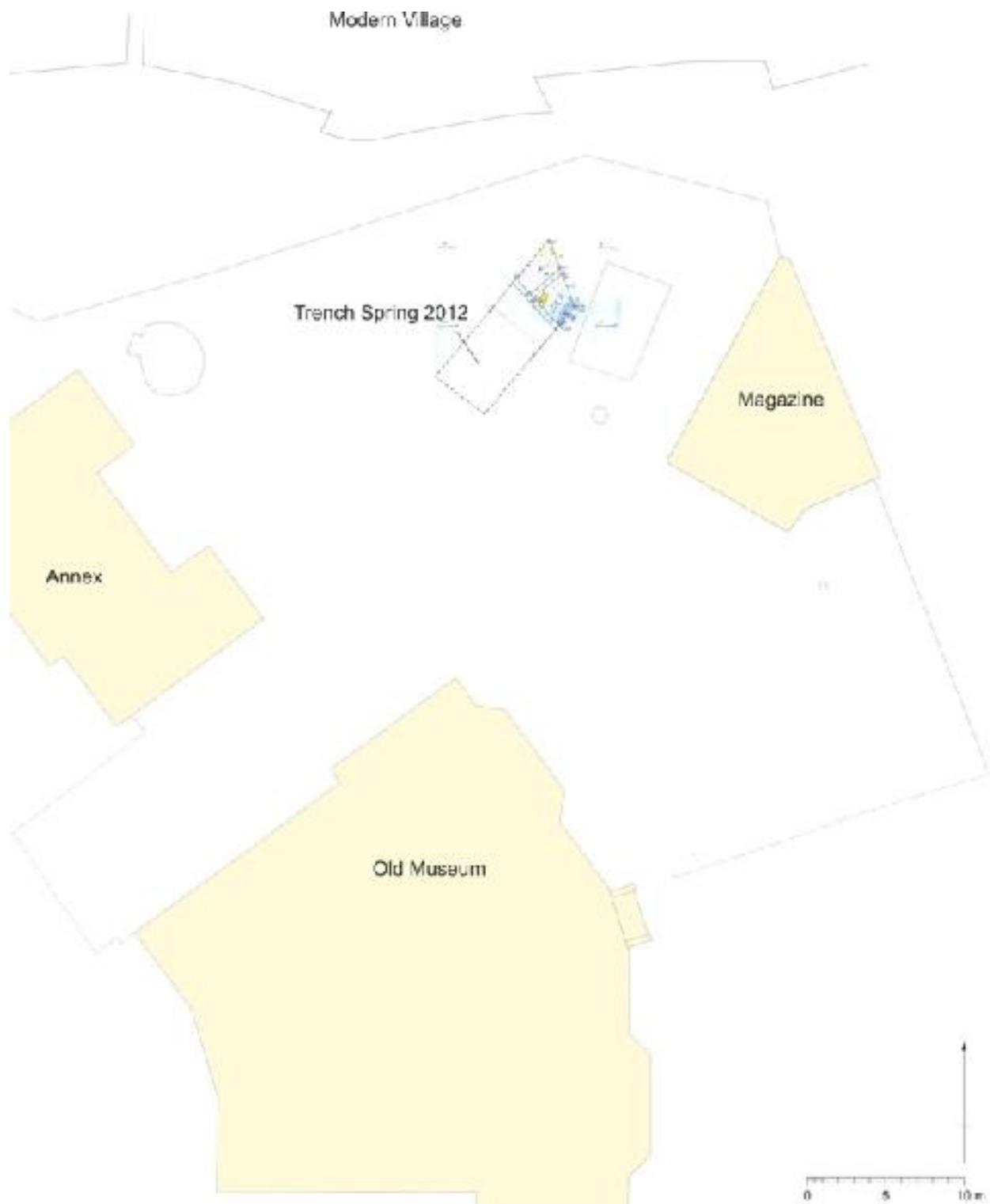


Fig. 4: Position of the excavated area in spring 2012

Still in the early 12th Dynasty the area was overbuilt by some kind of official building (Fig. 7). It had a long corridor of a minimum length of 10 m and some smaller rooms in the North. All walls of this building were 1½ bricks thick and well build. On the floor of the corridor was a layer of

red ochre pieces. They were taken as raw material from the wadi north of Aswan and probably distributed from this building. To the south of the corridor was a rectangular fire place. It was built of mud bricks without mortar. Its filling of ashes didn't indicate its use.



Fig. 5: Remains of a building of the 11th Dynasty with granite foundation



Fig. 6: Kiln of the early 12th Dynasty

In the middle of the 12th Dynasty the use of the area changed again completely. The official building was broken down and domestic buildings were built on top of it (Fig. 8).



Fig. 7: Official building of the early 12th Dynasty with fireplace and corridor behind



Fig. 8: Domestic building of 12th Dynasty

Three buildings levels of the middle of the 12th dynasty were excavated. They show smaller rooms, one with a pillar, and typical features for living houses like millstones and a small stable.

(P.K.)

4. *Town wall of the Middle Kingdom*

The Swiss Institute continued the investigation of the fortification wall of the town. Work has focussed this season on the area in front of the Site Museum (Area XXXVI) where remains of a

town wall had been uncovered and subsequently removed during the last season in March 2011. The suggested dating of the wall into the Graeco-Roman Period⁴, however, seemed to be rather questionable and made further investigations necessary.

The excavation area was extended in northern direction as far as the fence of the antiquities area and the continuation of the wall was uncovered on a length of 3,50 m. In a trench (3 m x 4 m) at the eastern side of the wall the stratigraphical sequence of deposits sloping down towards the former riverbank outside the town wall had been investigated.



Fig. 9: Town wall of the Second Intermediate Period, stone setting of undressed granite blocks

A closer examination of the brickwork and the construction of the wall revealed two different phases of the town wall. The older phase – presumably to be dated into the late Middle Kingdom – was built with a sloping sole plate and cuts off slightly older domestic structures. The wall is preserved up to a height of seven layers of bricks at maximum. Traces of beige coloured plaster in

⁴ P. Kopp in: S.Seidlmayer et al., *Report on the Excavations at Elephantine by the German Archaeological Institute and the Swiss Institute from autumn 2010 to spring 2011*, p. 7 (to be published in *ASAE*).

the adjoining layers of wind blown sand indicate that the outer face of the wall might have been plastered in the same manner as it is known for the fortification walls of the Late Period in Elephantine and Aswan. The outer face of the wall suffered from erosion and is badly preserved. A protruding wall segment might be taken as a later buttress but the exact relation of this construction is still unclear and needs further investigation. After the wall was destroyed due to unknown reasons it was completely rebuilt on top of the remains of the preceding wall in the late Second Intermediate Period. All layers accumulated outside the town wall slope down towards the former riverbank. The earliest layers attached to the wall on the riverside are already connected with a restoration phase at the foot of the wall. The restoration was executed together with a stone setting of undressed granite blocks that was built in a distance of 0,50 m in front of the town wall (Fig. 9). Apparently it was built in order to prevent an undermining of the wall by wind and in order to reinforce the slope outside of the town wall.

(C.v.P)

5. *Undulating walls*

Max Beiersdorf began a project on undulating walls – brick walls whose layers were built intentionally in a concave or convex shape⁵. Many of the late temple enclosure walls are good examples for this kind of masonry, the outer enclosure wall of the temple of Khnum being a characteristic case.



Fig. 10: Example of undulating wall (House K19, Ptolemaic Period)

⁵ Cf. J.-C. Goyon et al., *La construction Pharaonique du Moyen Empire à l'époque gréco-romaine*, Paris 2004, 117-123.

Beginning in the Late Period, the outer walls of most houses were built in the same manner (Fig. 10). The aim of the study is to determine whether this type of construction made sense from an engineering point of view, allowing houses of mud brick to be built higher than before.

(F.A.)

6. Khnum temple of the New Kingdom

The German mission has begun a renewed effort to document the blocks of the New Kingdom temple of Khnum⁶. A particular focus of the work this season lay on the investigation of the polygonal columns of the temple⁷. A total of 41 complete drums are preserved, most of them still in situ reused in the foundation of the courtyard of the Early Roman Period. Three different types of columns may be differentiated, each deriving from a different phase of temple construction (Fig. 11).

⁶ Cf. M. Bommas, *Der Tempel des Chnum der 18. Dynastie auf Elephantine* (Dissertation) Heidelberg 2000 and the latest preliminary report, M. Bommas, 31./32. *Bericht*, MDAIK 61, 2005, 44-51.

⁷ On the definition of the polygonal or so-called protodoric column see J. P. Phillips, *The Columns of Egypt*, Manchester 2002, 6 f.



Thutmosis II



Thutmosis III



Amenhotep II

Fig. 11. Different types of abaci from columns of the New Kingdom Khnum temple

Of the original temple of Hatshepsut, five column drums are known so far, three of them with an abacus. The columns were polygonal in shape and had twenty faces. The square abacus at the upper end measures about 79 cm in width, or about $1\frac{1}{2}$ cubits (=78.75 cm). The column was composed of four drums, each about 80 cm high, the total height of the column – including the abacus, but excluding the base – being about 3.45 m. The front face of the column was decorated by a single line of inscription, beginning with the Horus-name of Thutmosis II.

Of the courtyard of Thutmosis III, twelve column drums are preserved, two of them with an abacus. The columns seem to have been of the same height as the earlier ones, but were slightly thicker, the abacus measuring 82.5 cm in width (11 instead of $10\frac{1}{2}$ palms). The bottom side of the abacus was filled with a kind of pendentive, creating a transitional zone between abacus and shaft – a solution not found so far in other monuments.

Of the festival courtyard of Amenhotep II, 21 column drums have been found, two of them with an abacus. The columns were slightly larger than the others, being 97.5 cm (13 palms) wide at

the base and 90 cm (12 palms) at the top. The columns were composed of six drums, the total height including base and abacus being about 7 cubits (3.675 m). All columns of this type were decorated in the Ramesside period with full scale depictions of the king offering flowers. Only two columns were decorated by Ramses II – possibly those flanking the northern entrance of the court – while all the others by Ramses IV.

Five additional column drums inscribed with the name of Amenhotep II have 40 instead of the usual 20 faces. The two preserved abaci among them are 95 cm wide, indicating that these columns were slightly thicker. In addition, they bore inscriptions on all four sides. Their original location is still unclear.

(F.A.)

7. Cultic equipment of the Temple of Khnum

In the framework of examinations in the late Temple of Khnum the Swiss Institute has resumed a comprehensive study of the cultic equipment of the temple⁸. In addition to recording traces of 20 stands of bases and pedestals for statues visible on the surface of the pavement of the temple courtyard a register of all fragments of statues, pedestals and altars collected in all previous seasons in the area of the Temple of Khnum was set up. 234 fragments of statues and pedestals, belonging to at least 65 statues, were registered. All fragments are from statues and pedestals made of granodiorite or red granite. 14 fragments were joined together.

(C.v.P.)

8. Houses of the Late Antique and Early Islamic Period

The Swiss mission continued its investigation of the Late Antique and early Islamic settlement remains south of the Khnum temple. This season, work concentrated on a cellar of house K20 and house K26⁹.

House K20 was constructed in the mid-Fifth Century A.D. (Stratum 01). The cellar found this year in one of its rooms was added during a transformation phase of the house in the second half of the Sixth Century (Stratum 02). The cellar is rather small (1.25 by 1.85 m large and 1.10 m high) and was covered by a barrel vault. A small hole with three steps gave access to the cellar from the room above. In the destruction debris inside the cellar a collection of complete pottery vessels was discovered, including an amphora (LRA 5/6), a large wine krater and quantities of

⁸ Cf. H. Jaritz, *Ausstattung des Chnumtempels*, in: Kaiser et al, *Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. 19./20. Grabungsbericht*, MDAIK 49, 1993, p. 163.

⁹ On previous work in K20 and K26 see F. Arnold, *Elephantine XXX. Die Nachnutzung des Chnumtempelbezirks. Wohnbebauung der Spätantike und des Frühmittelalters*, AV 116, Mainz 2003, 69-77, 94-102, as well as the latest preliminary report, F. Arnold, 33./34./35. *Bericht*, MDAIK 64, 2008, 78-86.

table ware, many with a white slip. The pottery probably dates from the time of the destruction of the cellar, around the mid of the Seventh Century.



Fig. 12: Coptic House K26 (Fifth to Eight Century A.D.)

On the opposite side of a street west of house K20 lay house K26, also a building deriving from the mid-Fifth Century (Stratum 01, Fig. 12). In the Ninth Century the house was built over by House K27, possibly the dormitory of a Coptic monastery (Stratum 03). Beneath the foundations of this later building, the walls of house K26 are still rather well preserved, some standing up to a height of 1.5 m. This season, house K26 was excavated in its entirety, concluding a work already begun in 1999-2000.

House K26 was originally much larger than the neighbouring house K20, but did not comprise any secondary courtyards (Fig. 13). Inside the rooms of the house an extended sequence of its destruction, reuse and final abandonment could be studied, beginning in the second half of the Sixth Century and ending in the Eighth Century (Stratum 02). Extensive remains of collapsed vaulting were found, deriving from the original roof of the rooms. From a phase of reutilization of the house stem several installations, including a large fireplace.

(F.A.)



Fig. 13: Coptic Houses K20 and K26 (Fifth Century A.D.)

9. Late Antique pottery from the Khnum temple area

The main focus of this project, which will take the forthcoming two and a half years, lies on a typochronology of the late antique pottery at Elephantine. Based on this first step we want to find out more about dining and cooking habits. Late antiquity is a transitional stage from antique to medieval times. It still protects the antique traditions and also reflects the transformation into a new era. The finds of this excavation on Elephantine give a fabulous overview from the end of the 4th to the 7th century A.D. The pottery, which should be dealt with, comes from the late antique houses around the Khnum-temple. The selected complexes correspond with the houses M10/11, M12A, K20 and K26.

In spring 2012 the pottery, which was dealt with, was part of two special layers in the complex K26. The ceramics of a demolition deposit and the floor-layer of a cooking area in house K26 was counted and the important pieces were drawn. Afterwards their descriptions were entered into a database. Different fabrics of each group were determined to gain more information about local and imported pottery, respectively the manufacturing technology of single vessel types. Afterwards these forms and fabrics will be compared to already existing fragments on Elephantine as well as other late antique pieces in Egypt on the basis of literature. Since most fabrics will stem from clay deposits near Aswan, trade relations and the position of Elephantine in the late antique ceramic production should be reconstructed.

(D.K.)

10. Reconstruction of the Temple of Osiris-Nesmeti

Due to the unsolved situation of the legal status of the antiquities zone at the Roman Monumental staircase to the north of the fenced antiquities area it was decided in agreement with the then Director General for the Antiquities of Aswan and Nubia Dr. Mohamed el-Bialy in November 2010 to choose another location for the projected reconstruction of the Roman Temple of Osiris-Nesmeti of which hundreds of blocks and fragments had been discovered next to the Roman staircase in previous seasons¹⁰. In its meeting on April 20th 2011 the Permanent Committee gave its permission to rebuild the temple outside the ancient town at the southern edge of the island to the west of the rebuilt Ptolemaic chapel from Kalabsha.



Fig. 14: Reconstruction of the temple of Osiris Nesmeti

The Swiss Institute started preparation works for the reconstruction in November 2011. The building ground was cleaned of debris and excavation dumps in order to build the temple on alluvial soil of the island, and a preliminary landscaping of the area was carried out. Finally, a foundation slab was casted. It consists of reinforced concrete and measures 14 m x 9 m (thickness 0,4 m). Work was resumed end of February and continued until March 20th. The blocks of the stylobate and the lowest three layers were transferred from the temporary storage area next to the pyramid to the new location of the temple. Until the end of the season the stylobate and the lowest block layer of the temple were put in place. Missing parts of the walls were replaced by brickwork executed in sand-limestone bricks that will be plastered at the very end of the anastylosis (Fig. 14).

(C.v.P.)

¹⁰ Cf. C. Ubertini, *Restitution Architecturale du „Temple Y“*, in: Dreyer et al, *Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. 31./32. Grabungsbericht*, MDAIK 61, 2005, pp. 64 – 75.

11. Report on Middle Kingdom Pottery Project, Spring 2012

The Middle Kingdom pottery analysed in this season comes from the settlement phases (Bauschichten) XVI- XII in the area called H.G.S. (= area I), and from phases 15 to 13 in the other town areas as well as from the sanctuary of Heqaib (= area III, IV, VI, VII, IX, XI, XII, XIII, XIV, XVI, XXIII).

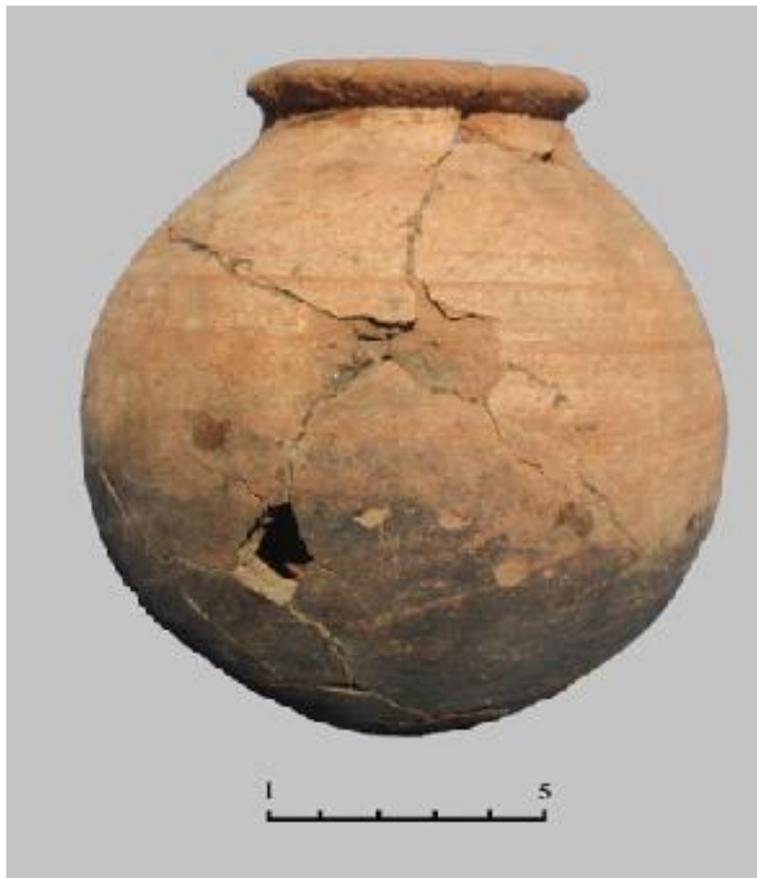


Fig. 15: Late XII dynasty small globular cooking vessel imported from Fayum-Memphis region, made of Marl C. Note sooting traces on the bottom(MR 479, 19605 U/c-15)

The majority of the material comprises of the local production made of both Nile (Fig. 16) and Upper Egyptian marl clay. Mainly Marl A3 in the Vienna System. The much smaller assemblage is represented here by the vessels imported from the North - the Fayum region, which are made of the characteristic Marl C clays (Fig. 15) and sandy fabric Nile E.

The pottery has been divided up into five broad chronological phases:

1. The late 11th and the beginning of the 12th dynasty
2. The regency of Senwosret I and a few years afterwards
3. The early-mid 12th dynasty (ca. Senwosret III)
4. The late 12th dynasty – the beginning of the 13th dynasty

5. The 13th dynasty

Special focus was made during this season on Marl C ceramics. All of the three Marl C clay variants are found on Elephantine, though it can be noticed that vessels made of Marl C1 are the most common, with Marl C2 vessels being slightly less numerous and pots made of Marl C compact represented by just a small group of fragments.



Fig. 16: Late XII-early XIII dynasties small hemispherical cup of Nile B1 with red-painted rim. (MR 2709, 7114 d)

In regards to the quantity distribution of the Marl C vessels on Elephantine, they appear during phase 1 but until the end of phase 2 they are relatively rare. They are most frequent in phase 3 and 4, while in phase 5 they gradually disappear. It must be emphasized that when analyzing the Marl C vessels from Elephantine, the significant majority is closed forms which may prove that we are dealing with the storage/transport jars used for distribution or transport of goods. (Th.R.)

12. Ostraca from the Islamic Period

Muhammad Abd al-Latif from the University of Mansura began the study of ostraca with Arabic texts. The ostraca have been found over the course of many seasons, for the most part on the surface or in the debris left by the sebakhin. The ostraca can be dated to the Eight and Ninth

Centuries A.D. and are thus contemporaneous with Stratum 03 of the settlement. The texts reveal many interesting details about the economic and social life of Elephantine during this period, including references to trade and other economic transactions. Some of the texts are religious in character and attest for the first time the presence of a Muslim population on the island of Elephantine in the early Islamic Period.

(F.A.)

13. Restructuring of magazines

This season a reorganization of the magazines of the excavation was initiated, with the aim of relocating all materials that are stored at the moment in the excavation house to the magazines in the basement of the museum annex. Simultaneously a comprehensive database of all objects and materials in the magazines is being created making it easier in the future to locate individual pieces.

(F.A.)