

## TELL EDFU

Nadine Moeller

The 2010 season of the Tell Edfu Project was marked by the longest field season in the project's history, which lasted for two and a half months, spanning the period from October to mid-December 2010. During this time it has been possible to considerably advance the excavation in the columned hall and silo area, which will be fully completed in 2011. The overall research focus of this project will then gradually shift to the exploration of the Old Kingdom settlement and the origins of the ancient town of Edfu. In this respect, major clearance work was carried out along the northeastern part of the tell, close to the Ptolemaic temple, where Old Kingdom settlement layers had been previously identified (see *Oriental Institute 2009–2010 Annual Report*). Furthermore, the Tell Edfu Project was expanded to incorporate a first reconnaissance survey at the Old Kingdom step pyramid situated about 5 km southwest of Edfu. This will be another new focus for future seasons.

### Excavations in the Silo Court of the Second Intermediate Period

One of the main foci in the silo area has been the excavation of Silo 388, which is situated in the northern part of the granary court.<sup>1</sup> As noted already last season, its walls have been preserved to a considerable height, measuring more than 4 m from the silo floor to the last course of bricks, showing clearly the beginning of the vaulted top. We can estimate that it was about 80 percent intact at the time of its abandonment at the end of the Second Intermediate Period and any subsequent loss of the structure was minimal until the French expedition dug a deep trench in this area in the 1930s. This silo was built in the available space between Silo 316 and the northern enclosure wall (W 324) of the silo area (fig. 1). Therefore Silo 388 is slightly egg-shaped and not as round as some of the other silos in this area (fig. 2). Inside the silo numerous thick fill layers were excavated in which around seventy new Hieratic ostraca were discovered. They are inscribed with lists containing names, titles, and commodities, very similar to those found in the previous seasons.<sup>2</sup> The pottery from these layers consists mainly of sherds dating to the very end of the Seventeenth Dynasty to early Eighteenth Dynasty, which is the time



Figure 1. Northern part of excavation area with Silo 388 in the foreground and the Ptolemaic temple in the background



Figure 2. Silo 388, view from the top

when this area was being used for dumping large amounts of trash, an activity that continued at least until the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, more hippopotamus bones were excavated in these layers and they will be part of a detailed zooarchaeological study in the next season by Richard Redding (Museum of Anthropology, University of Michigan). It is interesting to note that relatively few broken mudbricks were found in these layers, which stands in sharp contrast to most

of the other silos whose interior space was predominantly filled with the mudbrick demolition from the collapse of their upper parts. In the case of Silo 388, this might be related to the fact that it had been very well preserved with its walls standing up to a considerable height.

The full excavation of Silo 316, which is the largest (6.5 m in diameter) and probably oldest silo of the granary court, was also completed this season. In contrast to Silo 388, its interior was filled by a large quantity of broken mudbricks, which came from the collapsed roof and upper wall parts. A considerable number of hippopotamus bones have been found here, too (fig. 3). When the silo floor was reached, excavation continued underneath it in order to find the earlier remains belonging to the columned hall complex of the late Middle Kingdom (see below).



Figure 3. Hippopotamus bones inside the fill of Silo 316

## TELL EDFU

Farther east, excavations also continued in the small space between the walls of Silo 316 and Silo 313. In order to create an additional storage space, a rounded wall was added between the two larger ones which then formed its own separate small silo (Silo 322). In the debris covering the mud floor of Silo 322 several pieces of decorated wood showing a *djed* pillar and a couple of *tjt* signs were found that had traces of colored plaster on their surfaces (fig. 4). Their original function remains speculative but it is likely



Figure 4. Wooden fragments of a small *djed* pillar

that they were part of some wooden furniture or boxes. Among those larger pieces were many smaller fragments of wood, some of them also showing remains of painted plaster on the surface. Hiroko Kariya (conservator for the Epigraphic Survey, University of Chicago) did some conservation on these pieces in the *Elkab* magazine where they are currently being stored.

The exterior space along the eastern sides of Silos 303, 393, and 405 was also investigated in depth (fig. 5). It is characterized by several succeeding floor levels showing multiple traces of settlement activity. The floors were covered with fireplaces and holes of various sizes for placing round-based pottery vessels as well as smaller holes for wooden posts. Two small col-



Figure 5. Exterior floor levels along the eastern sides of Silos 405 and 393





Figure 6. Street layers in southern part of excavation area

umn bases were also found in situ here (visible in fig. 5). These floor levels were cut by the very uneven foundation trenches for the construction of the later silos and thus must predate them. However, the analysis of the stratigraphic sequence linked to the late Middle Kingdom columned hall complex shows clearly that the floors are certainly later than the latter, too. Therefore, the analysis of the ceramic assemblage from this floor sequence will be very important because it contains pottery that belongs to the transitional phase

between the end of the late Middle Kingdom tradition and the Second Intermediate Period. This will certainly shed light on the evolution of the ceramic tradition during this time period in Upper Egypt, which is still little understood due to the presence of few sites with a reliable stratigraphy.

At the beginning of the 2010 season we carried out some cleaning work and excavated a small trench along the southern limits of the silo area. We studied the thick east–west–running enclosure wall, which has its origins in the Old Kingdom when it functioned as the southern town wall. This enclosure continued to be in use for a long time thereafter and was re-used as the southern wall enclosing the silo area during the Second Intermediate Period. On the outside of this wall, we excavated two meters of densely stratified street layers, which are the remains of a major east–west street of the ancient town (fig. 6).

### New Discoveries Related to the Columned Hall Complex

Excavations underneath Silos 316 and 308 reached the level of the earlier columned hall complex (fig. 7). During the previous seasons the columned hall itself had been excavated as much as possible but its continuation toward the north had not been explored yet because of the later silos lying on top of it. The excavations this season considerably changed this situation. Below Silo 316 we found a dismantled east–west–running mudbrick wall, which seems to have had an entrance to columned hall itself and a kind of bench along its northern face, delineating the columned hall to the north and separating it from another room, which had at least two columns, too (fig. 8). Two large empty holes were found in the mud floor where the column bases had been removed in ancient times. One of the holes had been filled with clean sand as foundation for the column base (fig. 9). The negatives left by the removal of the stone bases exhibit a larger diameter than those from the adjacent columned hall. Two seal impressions with the name of Sobekhotep IV have been found near the ripped-out columned bases in association with the mud floor of this room.

In order to better understand the floor levels and the traces of the east–west–running mudbrick wall, which was discovered underneath the floor of Silo 316, we excavated a 2 x 3 m trench immediately next to the exterior of Silo 316 and under Silo 308 (fig. 10). We recorded

TELL EDFU



Figure 7. Plan of the columned hall complex



Figure 8. Northern extension of the columned hall complex visible underneath Silo 316



Figure 9. Emplacement of two column bases visible in the mud floor of the columned hall complex

the foundation trench of Silo 316 and discovered two floor levels that are contemporary with the columned hall complex. In the thick fill layer between these two floors, we found around 140 new seal impressions, many of them with private names of the late Middle Kingdom, together with sealings that are clearly of Second Intermediate Period date. Among them are a large number of sealings showing impressions made by scarabs that are of a northern origin (Tell el-Dab'a and southern Palestine). The most unexpected discovery has been a group of eleven seal impressions showing the cartouche of the Hyksos ruler Khayan. Many of these broken sealings are peg sealings with the negatives of wooden fibers visible on their backs, which stem from the wooden boxes they were once attached to. Some jar sealings were found, too. This is the first time that Khayan is attested as far south as Edfu and this has important implications for the kind of contact between Upper Egypt and the Hyksos during the Second Intermediate Period which according to this discovery had been of economic nature at least for some of this period. We took several charcoal and wood samples from these contexts for radiocarbon dating.

Farther to the south, underneath Silo 303, several floor layers of the columned hall itself were excavated. In a layer of sandy silt covering the last layer of this floor which corresponds to the last phase of occupation of the columned hall before its final abandonment (US 2079), which is a very secure archaeological context. Three exceptional clay figurines were found in this layer: a broken figure of a striding male figure whose eyes were incised in the form of *wedjat*-eyes (fig. 11), a female figurine with a tripartite wig, and a mud “cocoon” with a headless



Figure 10. Lower floor level of the columned hall excavated on the western side of Silo 316 showing parts of a small bench, south view

## TELL EDFU

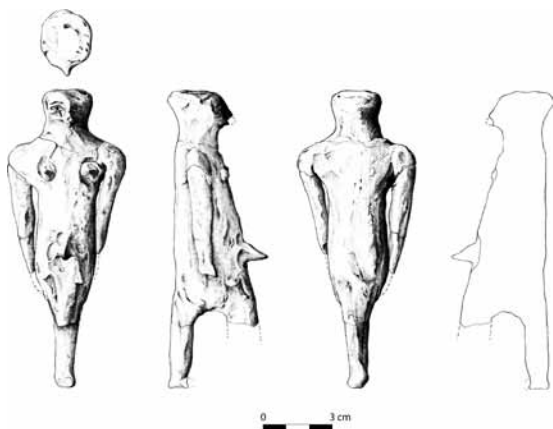


Figure 11. Mud figurine of striding male

female figurine inside it. All of them can be dated to the Thirteenth Dynasty according to the ceramic evidence. They were probably used for popular rituals related to fertility.

Another new discovery in the area was a large peg sealing stamped with an institutional seal in the form of a square stamp seal naming a mayor (*h3ty-ꜣ*) which was counter-sealed by another mayor's scarab seal. It was found among several hundred sealings mainly linked to the administrative activities taking place in the columned hall. Many of them belong to the category of private name sealings. They were found in a cluster along the western wall of the columned hall,

providing evidence for the accumulation of sealings being discarded during administrative activity.

## Old Kingdom Settlement Remains

Major clearance work continues at Tell Edfu in the area where we have identified the oldest settlement remains (fig. 12). This area lies close to the Ptolemaic temple enclosure wall and was covered by several meters of debris and rubble left by the sebbakhin and also by A. Bar-santi, who cleared an area 15 m to the north in order to place the decorated stone blocks



Figure 12. Area of Old Kingdom settlement remains at Tell Edfu



of the temple wall he dismantled in 1906.<sup>4</sup> A large group of local workers was employed for this purpose to advance the work as quickly as possible in order to reach the in situ layers underneath the rubble. This area will be a major focus of our excavations in the coming 2011 season. The aim is to find new information about the earliest settlement remains and the origins of the town of Edfu. The pottery samples we have found so far in this area date back to the Fourth to Sixth Dynasty but it is very likely that we will discover remains that date back even earlier than that. The presence of the Third Dynasty step pyramid in the vicinity (see below) and the reliefs in the Djoser complex mentioning the shrine of Edfu, provide some indication that the town of Edfu already existed back then.<sup>5</sup>

## Edfu South Pyramid

A first survey has been carried out at the small step pyramid located 5 km southwest of Edfu, at the village of el-Ghoneameya directed by Gregory Marouard (Oriental Institute, University of Chicago) with the collaboration of Hratch Papazian (University of Copenhagen) (fig. 13). This pyramid is a step pyramid and belongs to a series of almost identical small pyramids that have been discovered near several provincial centers in Egypt such as Elephantine, Hierakonpolis, Naqada, Abydos, Zawiet el-Meitin near Minya, and Seila in the Fayum. According to an inscription found at Elephantine that can be linked directly to this pyramid, it seems that the whole group dates to the reign of Huni, last ruler of the Third Dynasty. It is also clear from a study carried out by W. Kaiser and G. Dreyer in 1980 that these pyramids were not intended for funerary use. Their precise function has not yet been determined, but it has been suggested that they were markers of royal presence or a royal cult in the provinces.



Figure 13. Edfu South pyramid at el-Ghoneameya in its current state



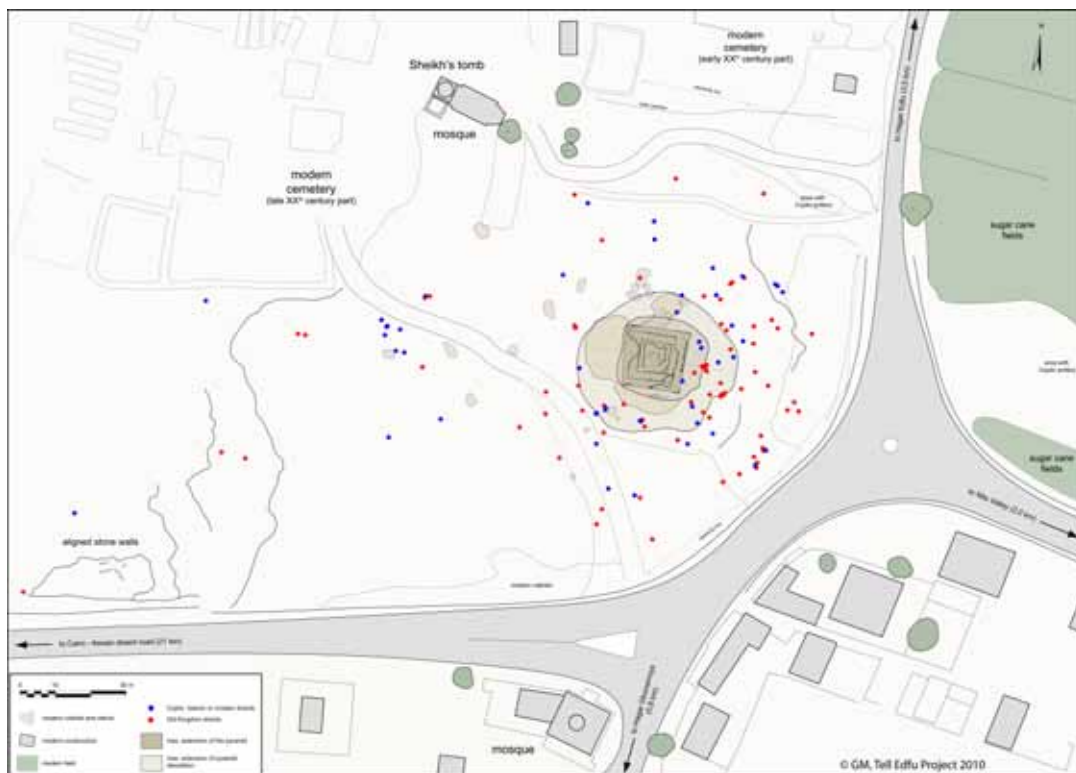


Figure 14. Plan of Edfu South pyramid at el-Ghonameya

The site is currently endangered by a fast developing modern cemetery and road works in the vicinity (fig. 14). This is the last pyramid of the group, which has so far been relatively untouched and has thus potential for the discovery of further data relating to its period of use and precise function. The monument in its current state of preservation has sides measuring 18 m in length; its height lies around 5.5 to 6.0 m consisting of four steps. The blocks are made of local sandstone.

Surface pottery was collected during this survey and the largest concentration of Old Kingdom sherds dating to the Third to early Fourth Dynasty was found along the eastern and northern sides. Within the frame of the Tell Edfu Project, we are hoping to continue next season with extensive cleaning and conservation work including some small-scale excavation along the eastern and northern sides of this monument, if granted permission and depending on the available funding. The Edfu South pyramid is still available for adoption!

## Study of Unregistered Objects in the Magazine of Elkab

During much of the season, Kathryn Bandy, Lindsey Miller (Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations [NELC], University of Chicago), and Christiane Hochstrasser (freelance) spent time working on the unregistered objects, which are stored in the magazine of Elkab located 20 km north of modern Edfu. They were joined for a few days by Hiroko Kariya, who helped with the restoration of a pottery bowl with a hieratic inscription and several mud figurines. She also consolidated the color on two fragments of a limestone relief we found during this

season in the silo area. Kathryn mainly focused her work on the study of the ostraca, and Lindsey worked on organizing and cataloging the seal impressions. Christiane did pencil drawings of the figurines and a selection of small finds, which will be prepared for publication. At the end of the season, Julia Schmied (Epigraphic Survey, University of Chicago) took photos of the objects, which included many seal impressions.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all the current team members of the project, and also the Edfu inspectorate for their ongoing support and collaboration, foremost Dr. Mohamed el Bialy (Aswan inspectorate), Mr. Mohamed Zenan, Ms. Nagwa Abdel Mageed, Mr. Mustafa Abdallah, and Dr. Sami Es-Zeidan Osman. A special thank-you also goes to Mr. Ramadan Hassan Ahmed, director of the Elkab magazine, for his collaboration and everlasting patience. Last but not least, I would like to thank Ms. Faten Abd el-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 Misty and Lewis Gruber, Andrea Dudek, Arthur and Janet Ferguson, Daniel and Annette Youngberg, Stephen and Patricia Holst, Joan S. Fortune, Steve Camp, and Rosemary Ferrand. Additionally, I would like to thank the Oriental Institute and the National Endowment for the Humanities for their generous contribution to the Tell Edfu Project.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a general plan of the excavation area, see the *Oriental Institute 2009–2010 Annual Report*, p. 97, fig. 4.

<sup>2</sup> The ostraca are currently being studied by Kathryn Bandy (NELC, University of Chicago) as part of her PhD thesis.

<sup>3</sup> Natasha Ayers (NELC, University of Chicago) is analyzing the pottery from these layers as part of her PhD thesis.

<sup>4</sup> See Alexandre Barsanti, “Rapport sur les travaux exécutés à Edfou en 1902–1905 (réparations et consolidations),” *Annales du Service des antiquités de l’Égypte* 7 (1906): 97–109.

<sup>5</sup> See pages 27–28 and pl. 3 of Alan H. Gardiner, “Horus de Behdetite,” *Journal of Egyptian Archeology* 30 (1944): 23–60.