

Report on the
Eleventh Season of the Joint Swiss-Egyptian Mission
in Syene / Old Aswan (2010/2011)

by

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in cooperation with Mohamed el-Bialy¹

The eleventh season of the joint archaeological project of the Swiss Institute of Architectural and Archaeological Research Cairo and the Supreme Council of Antiquities Aswan (SCA), now Ministry of State for Antiquities, in Syene/Old Aswan took place between October 16th, 2010 and April 7th, 2011².

In preparation of the site for the construction of an urgently needed magazine and office building for the mission, the work of last season focused mainly on archaeological investigations in Area 2 at Birket Damas (Fig. 1). Beneath high accumulations outside the

¹ The Swiss Institute Cairo bemoans the loss of the Director and Chief Inspector of the MSA Aswan MOHI EL-DIN MUSTAFA who passed away after a serious illness in November 2010. For almost 30 years MOHI was a responsible member of the Inspectorate of Antiquities in Aswan in various positions. He not only always supported all our missions in the region of Aswan sympathetically and with true commitment, but he was also a close friend who will be greatly missed.

² We are grateful to the Ministry of State for Antiquities and the members of the Permanent Committee, and in particular to H.E. the Minister, ZAHY HAWASS, for granting permission to undertake the Joint Mission in Aswan. We appreciate very much the fruitful cooperation with our colleagues of the Aswan Inspectorate in this joint mission. The mission was directed by CORNELIUS VON PILGRIM and MOHAMED EL-BIALY. The fieldwork was directed by WOLFGANG MÜLLER. Team members were the Egyptologists, I. FORSTNER-MÜLLER, M. MAREE, N. MATH, V. MICHEL and MARCUS MÜLLER, archaeologists P. COLLET, J. DORNER, M. FINK, V. HAUPT, M. HEPÄ, D. IMRE, L. REMBART, H. SCHWAIGER, J. STRUBER and I. WINET, the epigrapher J. DIJKSTRA, photographer A. KRAUSE, geomorphologist M. DE DAPPER, palaeobotanist U. THANHEISER, the paleozoologist J. SIGL, anthropologists J. NOVACEK and K. SCHEELEN, and conservator E. PEINTNER. The assigned inspectors were MOHAMED GAD, AHMED HASSAN, SCHAZLI ALI und USAMA AMR. In June 2010 work was supervised by MAHMOUD ABDELLA, in August and September 2010 by ADEL TOHEIMI. We are much indebted to PAMELA ROSE for correcting the English of this report.

Late Period town wall a long-lasting burial ground was investigated. Beneath a layer with simple burial pits most probably dating to the Second Intermediate Period and New Kingdom, two multi-chambered tombs of the late 6th dynasty were discovered. One tomb consists of three chambers containing four burials in total. The second tomb, which is much better preserved, consists of four vaulted chambers with ten burials in total. At present these tombs are the oldest attested on the east bank of Aswan, and may be taken as a further indication of proper Pharaonic settlements in Aswan since the Old Kingdom.

Beyond the town wall remains of Roman houses were cleaned and recorded. Further excavation and subsequent restoration of the houses, however, is dependant on progress in creating a central archaeological zone in Aswan by removing the road between the area of the Isis Temple and the area of Birket Damas³. In December 2010 the Governor of Aswan and the responsible departments of the City Council agreed a timetable for the scheduled works that will include the relocation of the northern end of Sh. el-Gabbana Fatimiya. After some delay the first step was concluded, that being the requested improvement of two roads to take the traffic during building the magazine.

The systematic survey of ongoing construction sites that come to the attention of the MSA Aswan was also continued during summer 2010. Three smaller construction pits were investigated by means of limited sondages (Areas 63, 64, 65). All of them were located north of the Graeco-Roman town (Fig. 1). Whereas two sites had to be abandoned before substantial excavations were started, Area 65 revealed valuable information regarding the settlement history of the town.

After the demolition of a house in the district of el-Shouna more than one hundred fragments of decorated temple blocks were collected in March 2011⁴. All the blocks were used in the lower part of the walls and were probably taken from the Late Roman town wall that may have still been visible nearby when the house was built at the beginning of the 20th century. Among the recovered blocks are several fragments that can be attributed to the so-called Temple X from Elephantine dating to reign of Ptolemy IV⁵. Other blocks are from temples of the New Kingdom and the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods of uncertain location. A hieroglyphic inscription on a block decorated in Roman style mentions the god Osiris-Nesmeti to whom a temple is dedicated in Elephantine⁶. All the blocks are now provisionally

³ We are very much indebted to Mr SAMIH SAWIRIS and to the *Bundesamt für Kultur BAK* of the Federal Department of Interior in Berne for the financial support of this important project.

⁴ Area 67 in Sh. Harid Ibrahim Arif no. 14. Monitoring of the construction site started on March 6th 2011.

⁵ C. UBERTINI, *Elephantine XXXIV. Restitution architecturale à partir des blocs et fragments épars d'époque ptolémaïque et romaine*, AVDAIK 120, Mainz 2005.

⁶ For a preliminary assessment of the blocks we are indebted to EWA LASKOWSKA-KUSZTAL. For the temple in Elephantine (Tempel Y) see C. UBERTINI and E. LASKOWSKA-KUSZTAL, in: *Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine*. 31./32. Grabungsbericht, in: *MDAIK* 61 (2005), pp. 75 – 82.

stored in the open air in the area of the Isis Temple until the construction of the mission's magazine in Birket Damas (Area 2) is finished.

Further reused architectural elements were retrieved from another site in the Shouna District (Area 68)⁷.

Besides the current fieldwork, the restoration and documentation of small finds and pottery sherds was continued, and also palaeobotanical and anthropological studies. The pottery studies concentrated on Ptolemaic and Roman pottery found in previous seasons in Areas 13 and 15 as well as on the Middle Kingdom pottery from various areas in the town⁸.

A final check of all graffiti in the Isis Temple was conducted before concluding the manuscript dealing with all textual and figural graffiti for publication⁹.

The recording of the rock inscriptions that were cut off in various construction sites in previous seasons was continued as well as the restoration of a sarcophagus from the rescue excavations of MOHAMED ABDELTAWAB EL-HETTA in 1962 (stored in the Museum of Elephantine).

Additionally, a proper register of all architectural elements, fragments of temple blocks and large stone artefacts such as grinding stones, milling stones and stone basins was made, totalling more than one thousand entries. All of these heavier stone objects were collected over the last decades from excavations and constructions all over Aswan and were preliminarily stored open-air in the fenced site of the Isis Temple (Area 1).

C.v.P.

⁷ Supervision of the construction site in the Sh. Ahmed Maher started on March 27th and ended on March 28th 2011.

⁸ The pre-Roman pottery is studied by SABINE LADSTÄTTER. and LAURA REMBART, the Middle Kingdom pottery is studied by IRENE FORSTNER-MÜLLER.

⁹ JITSE .F. DIJKSTRA, *Syene I. The figural and textual graffiti from the temple of Isis at Aswan*, BeiträgeBf 18, Mainz 2011 (forthcoming).

1. Areas excavated during summer 2010 (Areas 63, 64 and 65)

All three areas were situated in densely built up quarters of the city and surrounded by derelict houses and ruins, and in some cases the collapse of neighbouring buildings seemed to be imminent. Fully fledged excavations were therefore either impossible or limited in space and time.

The excavation in Area 63, a small area situated in the Sheikh Saleh quarter of Aswan, had to be abandoned after only one day.¹⁰ Area 64, a small site near the Kelany Hotel was not excavated at all due to the imminent collapse of a neighbouring building. Several decorated reused blocks could be retrieved when the modern house occupying the site was demolished.

Area 65

Area 65 (Fig. 2)¹¹ was situated in the Shona district of Aswan immediately to the east of Area 47 and to the north of Area 48.¹² Only a small trench of approximately 10sqm was excavated in the center of the area. An east-west road was excavated to its full width (ca. 1.5m) with the outer walls of two neighbouring houses. The north-eastern corner of the house to the south of the street was just within the small excavated area. The north- south street meeting the east-west road to the east of the southern house and the houses themselves could not be investigated. Archaeological work was restricted to a deep trench in the east-west road in the centre of the site. The street had not changed its course significantly since the Roman Imperial period. The archaeological investigation produced evidence for at least three major Islamic and several Roman building phases. The evidence of Roman habitation here is of the utmost importance with respect to the northern limit of the Roman town and the beginning of the northern necropolis of Syene.

2. The development of a central archaeological zone for Aswan continued (Area 2)

Archaeological work in the area was resumed as a part of the preparations for the construction of a new magazine at its southern limit.¹³ After the investigations of the foundation pit for the magazine were concluded in Trenches 1 and 2, a baulk was dismantled. This mainly consisted

¹⁰ The site was situated in the Sh. Mohamed Nur Qasim and lasted from the 5th – 6th of June 2010. It was carried out by the Egyptian members of the mission (OSAMA AMER MOHI ED-DIN and MOHAMED ABD EL-BASET).

¹¹ The site in the Sh. Osman Koleep was excavated from August 14th until September 30th 2010 by ADEL KAMIL TOHEIMY.

¹² W. MÜLLER, in C. v. PILGRIM/W. MÜLLER, 'Report on the Ninth Season of the Joint Swiss-Egyptian Mission in Syene/Old Aswan (2008/2009), ASAE, forthcoming.

¹³ The work lasted from November 11th 2010 until April 7th 2011.

of layers of Late Roman pottery, and is limited to the north by the trench excavated by HORST JARITZ and to the south by a huge pit that had been filled with modern waste and was cleaned by the mission in Seasons 8 and 10 (Figs.3-4). The western limit is defined by the modern street leaving the necessary safety margin of 4.5m; the eastern limit is marked by a rectangular structure of post-Roman date that had been termed the “Tower” by JARITZ. The structure, probably the foundation of a house, was sitting on top of the layers of Late Roman pottery in its western part and was touching the granite outcrop, with the south-eastern corner of the city wall on top of it, with its eastern wall. The investigation of this structure had been finished in Season 10.¹⁴ The “Tower” and the easternmost part of the casing had to be removed because they were in danger of collapsing.

Old Kingdom quarrying activity

In sandy layers just on top of the bedrock (sapolithic granite), predynastic pottery was found. The material resembles sherds found during Season 10 in the south-east part of Area 2 in the same stratigraphical position. Except for the pottery no other traces of human activity were found. First traces of quarry activity, chips of granite and sapolithic material, were associated with large granite boulders. A mud-surface with several small fireplaces and small pits was contemporary to the beginning of quarrying (Fig. 5). Small circular pits (depth: 0.3-0.4m, diameter: ca. 0.3m) were dug from this surface. The insides of the pits were coated with *muna*.¹⁵ The function of these pits is not clear. They are too small for any storage function. For a primary function as pot stands they seem to be too elaborate. No traces of sunken vessels were found in any of the five pits. Several of the pits show traces of fire and layers of ash.¹⁶ A secondary function as simple fireplaces is a possibility. The pits were far apart and scattered all over the area without forming any obvious pattern. A similar pit was found next to the Old Kingdom house excavated at the south-eastern limit of the site. This pit was slightly earlier than the house but still connected to quarrying activity. Even though the pottery has yet to be analyzed, a date in Dynasty 4 or 5 seems likely.

Late Old Kingdom burials

¹⁴ Cf. for the work of Season 10 and earlier work at the site: W. MÜLLER, in C. v. PILGRIM/W. MÜLLER, ‘Report on the Tenth Season of the Joint Swiss-Egyptian Mission in Syene/Old Aswan (2009/2010), ASAE, forthcoming.

¹⁵ Mud-plaster.

¹⁶ Cf. A. BADAWY, *A History of Egyptian Architecture* (Cairo 1954), 16-17 fig. 5 for very similar installations in Predynastic Abydos and Mahasna, interpreted there as simple ovens.

Up to two metres of quarry debris that were deposited on top of the surface are evidence of long-term uninterrupted quarrying activity. The layers mostly consist of saprolitic material and granite in all stages of erosion mixed with some granite chips and occasional fragments of dolerite tools. The refuse is consistent with Pharaonic quarrying techniques.¹⁷ The dump of quarry waste continued to the south of Area 2. It was still visible in Trench 1 at the southern limit of the site. On top of this massive layer a compact surface of mud and fine-grained granite chips was preserved in some places.

Tomb 5 (Figs. 6 – 8)

The substructure of the tomb consisted of a rectangular mastaba-like construction with banking side-walls 1.5 bricks wide. The approximate measurements of the tomb were 6.3 x 4.2m. The structure was orientated NNW – SSE orientated with the entrances and shafts in the east.

A narrow wall (one brick wide) enclosed a rectangular area to the east of the tomb. The northern end of the enclosure was destroyed by a huge pit filled with granite boulders, as was the eastern wall of the tomb in its northern part. The room, of uncertain function, had an east-west extent of 3m and a north-south extent of (3+x)m. Against the eastern wall of the room the original surface was still preserved with a bowl *in situ* on top of it. The shallow bowl with a u-shaped bottom showed traces of soot on the inside and was therefore probably used as a lamp. The southern sector of the enclosure wall did not abut the eastern wall of the tomb but was separated from it by a gap. The wall was disturbed by a narrow and shallow trench that came into existence in the course of repair works that became necessary after the eastern wall of the tomb was damaged in the course of a secondary burial in Chamber 4. The mud floor to the east of the chamber was destroyed by the same activity.

On top of the burial chambers traces of four small chapels were found. The chapels were part of the original plan of the tomb. The floor and walls of Chapel 2 were plastered with white lime mortar. As the remains of the chapels were in a very poor condition, the reconstruction is to some extent hypothetical. While the intermediary walls between the chapels were undoubtedly narrow, at 1 brick wide, the back and southern- and northernmost walls may have been wider. As the southern wall of the eastern annex to tomb 5 was originally aligned with the southern wall of the tomb-chamber, it is possible that the outer walls of the chambers were put exactly on top of the outer walls of the subterranean part of the tomb. The remaining traces however do not allow such a reconstruction.

¹⁷ R. KLEMM/D. D. KLEMM, *Steine und Steinbrüche im Alten Ägypten* (Berlin 1993), 320-324.

The part of the tomb below ground was only damaged in its north-eastern part, at first by Grave 3, then by the huge pit filled with granite boulders. The superstructures and eastern parts of the vaults that covered the burial chambers were damaged by later activity, mostly secondary burials, and robbery pits. Bones and pieces of pottery were scattered over a wide area.

The width of the chambers was 0.9-1.0m, the original length approximately 2.80m. The effective length after walling up the entrance was only 2.5-2.6m. The height of the chambers was 1 – 1.1m. The roofs were double ringed barrel vaults (Fig. 9). The lower ring was an inclined or pitched vault that needed no centering during construction. The upper ring consisted of a rowlock course that was supported by the lower ring during construction.¹⁸ The most important structural element of the roof construction was the lower vault. In the case of Chamber 2 the upper vault was transformed into a foundation for the floor of Chapel 2. In the other chapels horizontal floors were achieved by filling the pendentives between the vaults and side walls with a dense mixture of *muna* and broken mud bricks. The level of the floor was defined by the sommet of the upper vault. Narrow walls (0.5 brick wide) were attached to the insides of the southern and northern walls of the tomb as abutment walls for the vaults. At least during the earlier stages of the tomb, the entrances were walled up in an elaborate way with mud brick constructions up to a thickness of 1m.

Chamber 1

The northernmost chamber of Tomb 5 was used for three burials. The original burial was that of a male of 40-50 years that was found in a supine position (Fig. 10).¹⁹ The interred body had been put in a coffin. Traces of creamy white plaster and eroded remains of wood were found around the skeleton. The coffin was 2.10m long and 0.50m wide. The eastern end of the coffin was destroyed when the entrance into the chamber was again walled up after the placement of a secondary burial. In the course of this burial the chamber was reduced to a length of 2.60m, probably due to the fact that the eastern part of the vault collapsed when the chamber was opened.

The remains of the second burial in Chamber 1 were completely destroyed, probably when the tomb was robbed.

The final burial was again well preserved. When the last burial took place, the chamber was already filled with debris and collapse from the partly destroyed vault. The interment was positioned just 0.4m below the roof of the chamber. The uppermost part and the upper part of

¹⁸ A. J. SPENCER, *Brick Architecture in Ancient Egypt* (Warminster 1979), 125. The author terms this layout „cd1“ (*ibid.*, pl. 19).

¹⁹ Any information concerning the human remains courtesy of J. NOVACEK.

the walling up of the entrance were destroyed by this burial. The chamber was closed rather carelessly with granite rubble. The body, a presumably male late adolescent, was in a supine position with the head to the east. It was disturbed as parts of the skeleton were missing and the head and shoulders were slightly dislocated, typical indicators that the body had been pulled out by the shoulders when decomposition was still under way.

Chamber 2

Four burials were made in this chamber. The original burial was a female individual with an age of 30-40 years. She was positioned in a lateral position with slightly contracted legs and facing to the south (Fig. 11). The upper part of the body, especially the ribcage gave a slightly dislocated impression. As the body was not moved, the damage most probably was of non-anthropogenic nature. The burial was accompanied by the richest equipment of all investigated burials. A simple marl jar was positioned to the south-east of the chamber leaning against the southern wall next to her head. She held a bronze-mirror in her left hand. A necklace with beads made of carnelian, turquoise and faience, some of them ptheromorphic (in the shape of frogs) and a small medal pendant were originally present. Due to the dislocated state of her upper body, the beads were mostly found when the bones were cleaned. The original position of the necklace was therefore lost. The original wall that closed the entrance was still preserved up to the level of the secondary burials.

After a considerable amount of time (more than 0.2m of loose sandy material had accumulated on top of the undisturbed primary burial) three individuals were buried at the same or within a short period of time. An adolescent presumably male individual was interred in the southern part of the chamber. He was put in a supine position with the head to the east. Only the pelvis and one leg were still *in situ* due to the damage inflicted by the consecutive burials. The next individual buried was a most probably also a male adolescent. He was positioned just to the north of the earliest burial in a supine position with the head to the east. Like the latest burial in Chamber 1, the body had been moved while not completely decomposed, as the head and shoulders were dislocated in the same way. The complete skeleton was retrieved. A button-seal was found in the pelvic region of the body. This type of seal is commonly dated to the First Intermediate Period.²⁰ The latest burial of this phase was of another adolescent. The scarce remains of the skeleton encountered, mostly parts of legs and arms, were orientated north-south with the upper part to the north. This was the only body buried in that manner in Tomb 5. The fragmentary condition of the adolescent of uncertain sex, and the fact that the whole body would have been too long for the width of the narrow

²⁰ The seal has yet to be studied in more detail but I thank CORNELIUS V. PILGRIM for his assessment.

chamber, indicate that the body was destroyed in the course of looting that again must have taken place not too long after the burial, as the body was not yet decomposed at the time. The chamber was sealed with a mud brick wall after the burial.

Chamber 3

The first individual buried in the chamber was an adult male. He was positioned in a lateral position facing to the south with extended legs. The head (originally to the east) was missing. On top of 0.4m of sand, mud brick debris (from the partly collapsed vault) and broken pottery a single skull was encountered together with a hemispherical cup (Fig. 12). The anthropological investigation showed that the skull most probably belonged to the skeleton of the original burial in the chamber. The hemispherical cup dated to the late Middle Kingdom and was completely preserved.²¹ The cup may have been part of a Middle Kingdom burial or been left by robbers. As there were bones of at least one more individual found within and immediately outside the chamber, a final use of the chamber in the late Middle Kingdom seems feasible.

Chamber 4

The first burial in the southernmost chamber was of an adult male (ca. 50 years old). He was positioned in a lateral position facing to the north with extended legs (Fig. 13). The head (originally to the east) was missing. Traces of a coffin were found around the body. The coffin measured 0.4 x 2.6m and was too long for the body. Inside and outside of the discoloration marking the walls of the coffin, traces of whitish-yellow plaster were detected. Traces of plaster and brownish discolorations to the north of the coffin represent broken fragments of the coffin. Five jars of different sizes were deposited in the eastern part of the chamber, only one single vessel lay next to the foot of the coffin. All the vessels were approximately bi-conical ovoid types common during the late Old Kingdom.²²

A second burial in the chamber was largely destroyed. Parts of the skull and single vertebrae of an adult, possibly female individual were found scattered all over the chamber.

Tomb 6 (Figs. 6 and 14)

²¹ We thank IRENE FORSTNER-MÜLLER for a first assessment of the vessel.

²² For a first assessment of the pottery we are indebted to Dietrich Raue.

This tomb was largely destroyed. Its original layout and dimensions were lost, when the tomb was looted and severely damaged in the Late Period, as implied by material from the huge robbery pit that covered the whole area of the tomb.

Three chambers were identifiable from the scarce remains of the walls. Chamber 1 was the best preserved part of the tomb. Its eastern and southern walls were significantly wider (the width of the southern wall exceeded 2, the eastern wall 1.5 bricks) than the northern and western walls (1 brick wide). The southern and eastern walls were probably outer walls of the subterranean part of the tomb. The chamber was most probably entered from the north.

Chamber 1 contained two burials, both of them probably interred at the same time (Fig. 15). The primary burial was of an adult (40-50 years old) female. She was put in a coffin in supine position with her head to the east. Her skeleton was covered with the remains of the lid of the coffin. The remains of the coffin did not show any traces of plaster, and the outlines were therefore difficult to estimate. It was 0.4-0.5m wide and (1.8+x)m long. The skull was situated to the north of the northern limit of the coffin, on top of the remains of the northern wall of the chamber. The body had therefore been pulled partly out of the chamber by the head. The fact that there was no dislocation of bones indicates an act of robbery soon after the interment before decomposition had advanced. A miniature model jar made of alabaster was the only grave-good.

A small wooden chest had been positioned in the south-eastern corner of the chamber. Its edges could be detected from the preserved traces of color (0.5 x 0.28m). Both the inside and outside had been painted in a yellowish white color. The wood was only preserved as brown discoloration of the sand filling the chamber. The box was damaged during the looting. Fragments of the skeleton of a small child (two years old) were found with the remains of the chest but were no longer *in situ*.

Chambers 1 and 2 were oriented north-south, Chamber 3 east-west. As the eastern wall of Chamber 3 continued to the north, another chamber to the north of Chamber 3 seems likely. The room to the east of Chamber 3 and to the north of Chambers 1 and 2 was significantly larger than the burial chambers and provided access into all the adjoining chambers.

Chamber 2 measured approximately 2 x 0.8m if its southern end is reconstructed following the southern limit of Chamber 1 to the east of it. Fully dislocated parts of at least two skeletons mixed with mud brick debris filled the chamber.

Chamber 3 measured 0.6 x (1.4+x)m. Only scarce remains of the lowest course of bricks and parts of the mud floor inside the chamber survived without traces of a burial.

Tombs 6 and 5 were the only examples of elaborate tomb-architecture in Area 2. Due to their fragmentary state of preservation, remains of mud brick architecture to the east of Tomb 5 can neither be interpreted nor dated reliably. A connection to Tomb 5 and its eastern annex seems

probable. Further graves found during season 11 were simple pit burials. All of them were of significantly later date than the chamber tombs.

Grave 2

An assemblage of dislocated bones, belonging to at least two individuals were found in the vicinity of the robbery pit in the east of Tomb 5/Chamber 2 in a shallow pit. The “grave” most probably contained material from the chamber to the west of it.

Grave 3

Grave 3 was situated to the east of Tomb 5/Chamber 1. It cut into the eastern wall of the tomb and was damaged by the pit filled with granite boulders (Fig. 16). The skeleton of a senile female individual (60-70 years old) was put into the pit in a supine position with the face towards the west and the legs contracted. Two pottery vessels were positioned in the southern part of the pit. Both of them were damaged before they were used as grave goods. The stratigraphic position and the pottery make a date between the late Middle Kingdom and the late New Kingdom probable.

Grave 4

Grave 4 was situated to the west of Tomb 5. An adult male individual was positioned in a lateral position facing to the west. He was put in a wooden coffin. Scarce remains of the coffin were preserved but traces of white paint allowed a reconstruction of its dimensions (approximately 0.4-0.5 x 1.75m). The skeleton was completely preserved. The stratigraphic position of the tomb, which was covered by Late Period layers and cut into mud brick collapse from the superstructure of Tomb 5, provides a time range for the burial.

Interpretation and chronology of tombs and burials in Area 2

Area 2 had a very long tradition as a burial ground from the Late Roman period (Grave 1 found in Season 10) back to the Old Kingdom, or even longer, as scattered finds of human bones from Predynastic layers indicate. Another cemetery with tombs from the New Kingdom to the Roman period was found by an Egyptian mission in el-Salaheen, to the east of the

Birket Damas depression.²³ Later on, the southern part of Old Aswan had a long tradition as a burial ground as the Greek and Christian cemeteries were situated to the south of Area 2 until the second half of the 20th century.

Tombs 5 and 6 are the earliest tombs ever found on the east bank of Aswan. Except for their stratigraphic and topographic position they have little in common. They differ significantly in design and orientation. The types of tombs encountered in Area 2 are common for the late Old Kingdom all over Egypt. Of special interest are contemporary tombs from nearby Elephantine. The results of the extensive research done on the Old Kingdom cemeteries on the island facilitate the classification and interpretation of the newly discovered tombs.²⁴

Tomb 5 belongs to the group of tombs with egalitarian character.²⁵ The preserved part of Tomb 5 was definitely below-ground in exactly the same way as observed on Elephantine.²⁶ The findings in Area 2 may also contribute considerably to the solving of the problems concerning the superstructures of similar tombs. The remains of the chapels were scarce but clearly detectable. As on Elephantine, human bones were found within the remains of the chapels. A funerary function has been suggested for the better preserved examples from Elephantine, where the vaulted roofing could still be observed.²⁷ Although the fragmented bones found on top of Tomb 5 could well have been scattered by robbers and are, at least in the case of Tomb 5, not conclusive evidence of a function as a burial chamber, the term chapel should be considered as *terminus technicus* for the time being. An area to the east of the tomb that was protected by an enclosure wall and contained the entrance shafts and probably the offering installation, was a typical element of tombs dating to the end of the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period.²⁸ The fact that the enclosed area to the east of Tomb 5 showed no subdivision corresponding to Chambers 3 and 4 befits well the egalitarian character of these presumed family tombs.

While Tomb 5 clearly was an egalitarian tomb, the organization of chambers around a central entrance shaft in Tomb 6 resembles the hierarchical type of tombs.²⁹ While Tomb 6 produced little datable material, the model stone vessel and the wooden box are frequently encountered

²³ L. WERLEN, in C. V. PILGRIM ET AL., 'The Town of Syene. Report on the 8th Season in Aswan', *MDAIK* 67, forthcoming

²⁴ S. SEIDLMEYER, in: W. KAISER ET AL., 'Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. Neunter/Zehnter Grabungsbericht', *MDAIK* 38 (1982), 284-296. *Idem*, 'Die Ikonographie des Todes', in H. WILLEMS (ed.), *Social Aspects of Funerary Culture in the Egyptian Old and Middle Kingdoms*, OLA 103 (Leuven 2001), 211-245. Cf. for a comparative study: *idem*, *Gräberfelder aus dem Übergang vom Alten zum Mittleren Reich. Studien zur Archäologie der Ersten Zwischenzeit*, SAGA 1 (Heidelberg 1990).

²⁵ *Idem*, *Gräberfelder*, 405-408.

²⁶ *Idem*, in *MDAIK* 38, 288.

²⁷ *Loc. cit.* Unlike on Elephantine, where the superstructures were constructed cumulatively as a consequence of the need to bury additional individuals after the subterranean chambers were completely occupied, the above-ground rooms of Tomb 5 were part of the original design of the tomb.

²⁸ *Idem*, *Gräberfelder*, 410-411.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 403-405.

in burials of the late Old Kingdom;³⁰ the situation is much more promising with Tomb 5, as the funerary equipment of the initial burials in Chambers 2 and 4 was found *in situ* and gives a good *terminus* for the construction date of the tomb. The vessels found in Chamber 4 are of an ovoid type commonly dated to Dynasty 6.³¹ Both the vessel and the goods on the body of the individual in Chamber 2 are found in other contemporary tombs. It was a common trait of female burials dating to the same period on Elephantine that their grave goods were more numerous and elaborate than was the case with male burials.³² The burial in Tomb 6/Chamber 1 is further evidence of this trend. Of the initial burials in Tomb 5/Chambers 1, 3 and 4, all of them male, only the one in Chamber 4 had grave goods deposited with him. All others had coffins but no additional funerary equipment.

The objects found with the secondary burials cannot be attributed to any specific skeleton as they were dislocated by looters or later burial activities. A button seal found with the secondary burials in Chamber 2 has close parallels in tomb contexts of the First Intermediate Period. If the hemispherical cup from Chamber 3 were part of the funerary equipment of a completely robbed 12th Dynasty burial, the tomb would have been in use for a very long period of time.

Late Period – Early Ptolemaic activities

There were only scarce traces of New Kingdom activity. Some quarrying seems to have taken place. While Grave 3 and 4 are difficult to date, they may well belong to the New Kingdom as did the badly damaged remains of an amphora burial excavated in Season 10 to the east of Tomb 5. Pottery from the pit filled with granite boulders that cut into the north-eastern part of Tomb 5 dates to the Late Period. The same is true of material from the huge robbery pit that damaged Tomb 6. Both pits and a compact surface of fragmented granite and mud that covered them were probably connected to the construction of the Late Period city wall, when obstacles and other possible covers for attackers to the south of the wall were demolished.

Ptolemaic structures (Fig. 17)

From the construction of the city wall onwards layers of windblown sand accumulated on top of the Pharaonic remains of quarrying. The fine layers of sand were deposited to the south, and thus in the lee-side of the city wall. The layers were thus significantly thicker in the

³⁰ *Idem, Ikonographie*, 234 Abb. 14.

³¹ *Idem, Gräberfelder*, 368 Abb. 160 for the contemporary pottery ensemble on Elephantine Island, 196, Abb. 82 with examples from Qau Matmar, stages IA and IIA.

³² *Idem, Ikonographie*, 233.

vicinity of the wall than further to the south. In the Early Ptolemaic period an east-west wall was constructed on top of the loose sand. The wall was two bricks in width. It ran nearly parallel to the city wall at a distance of approximately 6m. The wall was too narrow for a fortification and was therefore not built as an outwork or similar addition to the city's defenses. Its function is enigmatic for the time being. Soon after its construction the wall broke along its central axis and fell in one piece towards the south (Fig. 18). The lower courses of the brickwork of the wall were perfectly preserved in the collapse. A reconstruction of the wall shows peculiarities in its construction: normal header-courses alternate with rowlock courses (bricks are laid on their edges as headers). In Pharaonic Egypt this type of construction was usually applied in foundations or as levelling courses within the above-ground wall.³³ Above-ground walls constructed in the same way as the wall in Area 2 are commonly dated to the Late Roman or Early Islamic periods.³⁴

Soon after the collapse, a small building was erected on top of the mud brick debris (Fig. 19). The structure was a roughly square building with well preserved western, eastern and northern walls (three layers of bricks of the 1-brick-wide wall and its carefully set foundation made of granite rubble were preserved). The southern end of the building had to be reconstructed from impressions in the mud brick debris of the earlier Ptolemaic wall. The building consisted of one room only, measuring 4 x 3.8m. It was entered from the west via a door with a threshold made of reused sandstone slabs. Of special interest was the interior of this small building: a bench-like construction consisting of a wooden board sitting on mud bricks was set against the northern wall of the building. A small stone artefact of stela-like shape, unfortunately undecorated, was found deposited next to the eastern wall. Immediately inside the door a number of completely preserved vessels stood upside down on the floor in the north-west part of the room together with a bowl made of granodiorite. The pottery dates approximately to the third century BC (Fig. 20).³⁵ Faïence beads belonging to a long necklace were found in and next to a niche in the western wall adjacent to the north-western corner. A stone plate of uncertain use was sunk into the floor exactly in the north-western corner. The floor of the room was a carefully laid mud brick pavement that rested on a levelling course of discarded wooden boards and beams. The door was carefully walled up, apparently soon after the deposition of the vessels as the material and dimensions of the bricks used for it were the

³³ SPENCER, *Brick Architecture*, 114. F. Arnold, *Elephantine XXX. Die Nachnutzung des Chnumtempelbezirks*, AV 116 (Mainz 2003), 149 Abb. 95b with an early Ramesside example of the technique (*ibid.*, 149 no.647). Cf. for an example from Elephantine dating to the Late Period: C. v. PILGRIM, 'Die „Festung“ von Elephantine in der Spätzeit – Anmerkungen zum archäologischen Befund', in A. BOTTA, (ed.), *FS Porten*, forthcoming.

³⁴ Cf. as an example from Aswan the mud-brick walls of a substantial Fatimid building in Area 32 (W. MÜLLER, in C. v. PILGRIM ET AL., 'The Town of Syene. Report on the 7th Season in Aswan', *MDAIK* 66, forthcoming).

³⁵ We are indebted to LAURA REMBART for a first assessment of the pottery.

same as those of the bricks used for the building itself. The design and use of the building as indicated by the intentional deposits of the pottery and other goods are arguments against any interpretation of the structure as a normal domestic construction. No traces of a contemporaneous burial or even a pit were found within the building or in its vicinity. Some kind of cultic function seems feasible but needs further study for confirmation.

Late Roman Pottery layers

After the collapse of the small Ptolemaic building a thin layer of windblown sand on top of the ruins indicates some time of abandonment. On top of the sand some Roman pottery was deposited prior to the construction of the casing of the city wall. A very compact mud surface covered this material. Stratigraphically the surface is contemporary with the erection of the casing. More than two meters of settlement debris, mostly fragments of pottery, but also industrial waste such as discarded crucibles and slag, were deposited to the south of the city wall from the construction of the casing onwards (Fig. 21). An analysis of the vast amount of pottery retrieved from the baulk is currently under way and will provide better data for the construction date of the Late Roman casing. The obvious difference between the deposits of windblown sand, indicating long periods of very little activity, the small-scale Ptolemaic structures of unknown function and the massive layers of pottery and other refuse from the settlement inside the city walls of Syene allows conclusions concerning the development of the town. The ongoing study of the Late Roman city quarter in Area 2 will produce crucial chronological data for a synchronization of extramural waste deposits and the intramural settlement. The growing building density during the Late Roman period correlates well with the accumulation of waste outside the wall.

W.M.

Abstract:

This reports gives an overview on the work conducted during the eleventh season of the joint archaeological project of the Swiss Institute of Architectural and Archaeological Research, Cairo and the Ministry of State for Antiquities, Aswan in Syene/Old Aswan. Excavations focussed on the area beside the designated construction site for the mission's magazine to be built in the framework of the general project of site management of the central archaeological zone (Areas 1 and 2) in Old Aswan. The most remarkable discovery is a long-lasting burial ground with simple pit burials of the 2nd millennium BC and two multi-chambered mud-brick tombs of the 6th dynasty, the oldest tombs ever discovered on the east bank of Aswan.

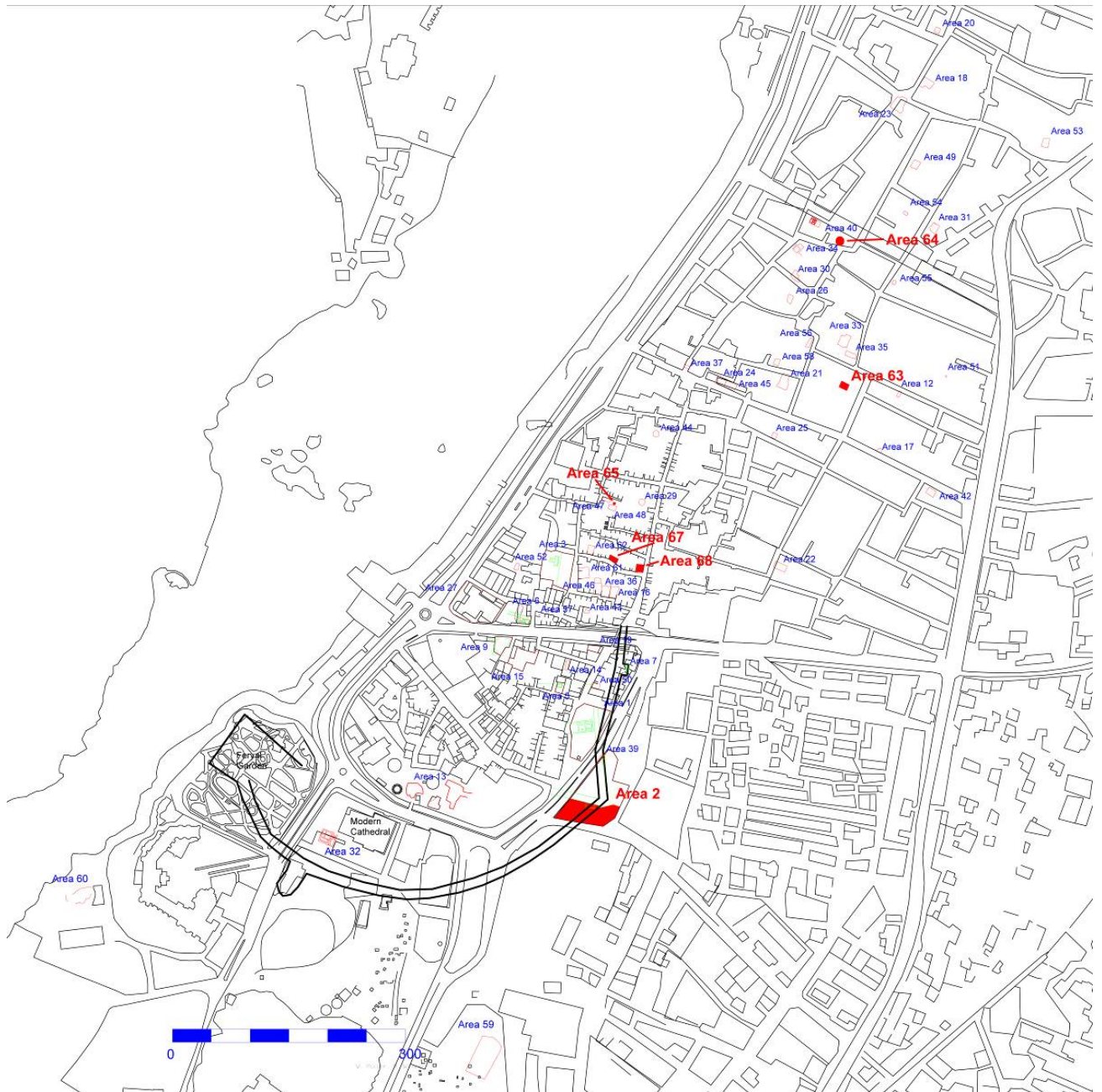


Fig. 1: Map with excavated areas.



Fig. 2: Overview of Area 65.



Fig. 3: Map of Area 2 with investigated areas.



Fig. 4: Overview of the southern Part of Area 2.



Fig. 5: Area 2: Old Kingdom Structures.



Fig. 6: Plan of Tombs 5 and 6.



Fig. 7: Overview of Tomb 5.

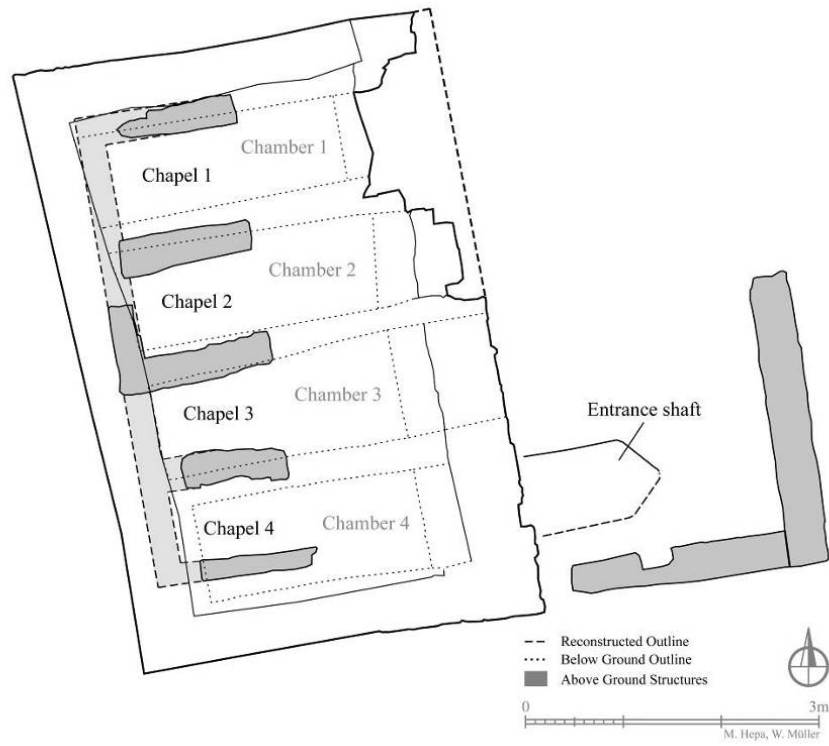


Fig. 8: Schematic plan of Tomb 5.



Fig. 9: Tomb 5: Detail of the vault-construction.



Fig. 10: Detail of burial in Tomb 5/Chamber 1.



Fig. 11: Detail of burial in Tomb 5/Chamber 2.



Fig. 12: Looted burial in Tomb 5/Chamber 3.



Fig. 13: Detail of burial in Tomb 5/Chamber 4.



Fig. 14: Overview of Tomb 6.



Fig. 15: Detail of Burial in Tomb 6/Chamber 1.



Fig. 16: Detail of Grave 3.

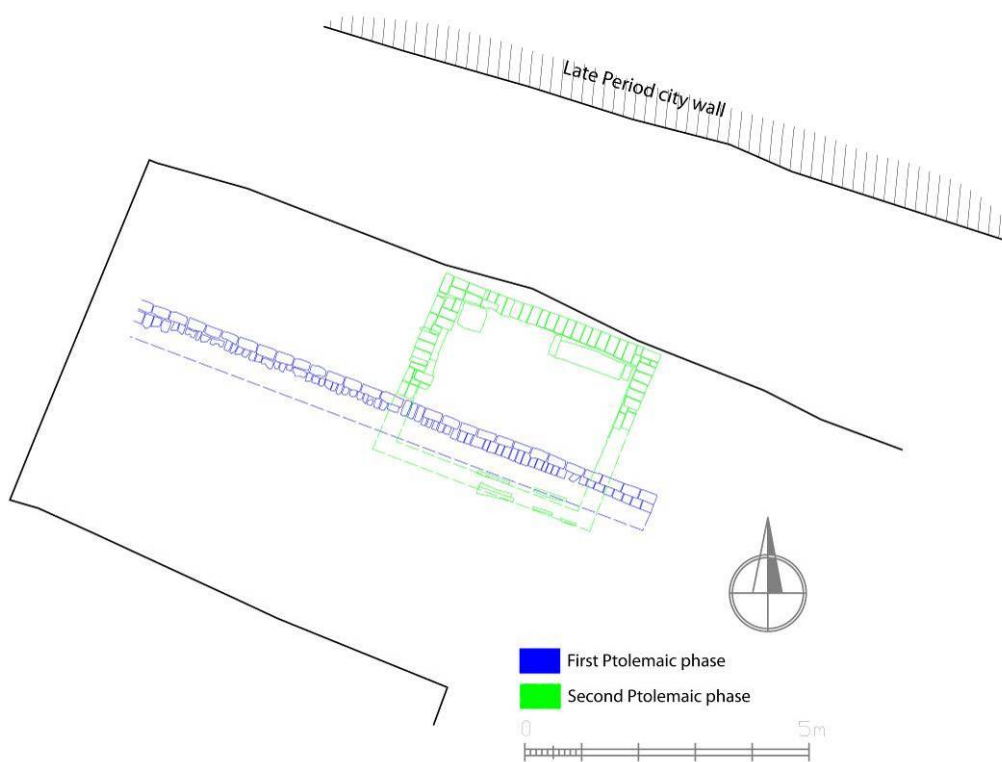


Fig. 17: Plan of Ptolemaic structures.



Fig. 18: Collapsed Ptolemaic wall.



Fig. 19: Ptolemaic building.



Fig. 20: Detail of Ptolemaic pottery assemblage.



Fig. 21: Detail of the western section of Area 2 with layers of Late Roman pottery.