

The Cairo Branch and the Archaeology of Egypt and Sudan Group in Vienna

From Tradition to Future



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1 The Cairo Branch of the Austrian Archaeological Institute

1.1 Core Competencies and Infrastructure

The Cairo Branch of the Austrian Archaeological Institute at the Austrian Academy of Sciences is Austria's only permanent research institution for archaeological fieldwork in Egypt and simultaneously functions as the Office of the Scientific Counsellor of the Austrian Embassy. It represents Austrian research excellence abroad while serving as a central hub for scientific cooperation between Austrian, Egyptian, and international partners.

The branch provides researchers with a unique infrastructure, including an excellent Egyptological library, accommodation facilities, and organizational support, while also ensuring close networking with the local scholarly community. It acts as a contact point both for Austrian institutions wishing to conduct fieldwork in Egypt and for relevant Egyptian authorities, especially the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities.

Core Competencies



Archaeological Fieldwork

conducting and supporting OeAI projects in Egypt: long-term excavations at Tell el-Dab'a and Kom Ombo, epigraphic work at Philae and field investigations in Hisn al-Bab and Aswan



Science Diplomacy

representing Austrian scholarly interests vis-à-vis local authorities and fostering international collaborations



Networking & Exchange

organizing academic events and bringing together experts from Egyptology and related fields



Training

supporting early-career scholars through education and practice in archaeological fieldwork, as well as via grants providing funding, free accommodation, and research support in Cairo



Capacity Building

strengthening Egyptian partner institutions through training programmes, field schools, and knowledge transfer initiatives designed to foster long-term cooperation



Library at the OeAI in Cairo
(© OeAW-OeAI/N. Gail)

Library

The Cairo Branch houses a specialized Egyptological library of around 9,000–10,000 volumes on pharaonic Egypt, the Near East, and related subjects, with particular emphasis on the institute's key projects at Tell el-Dab'a, Kom Ombo, and Hisn al-Bab. Since 2023, in cooperation with BAS:IS (Library, Archives, Collections) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the library has been progressively catalogued into the ALMA library system by graduates of Austrian Library and Information Studies programmes during internships abroad. Several hundred volumes are already searchable online, enhancing accessibility for Egyptian and international students and visiting scholars.

Research and Publications

The branch's research spans from the Pharaonic period through the Roman and early medieval periods to modern times, covering topics such as urban landscapes, harbour installations, and ritual practices. Findings are disseminated in the branch's monograph series *Untersuchungen der Zweigstelle Kairo (UZK)* and in peer-reviewed journals of the OeAI, ensuring high scientific standards.



Monograph series
*Untersuchungen der
Zweigstelle Kairo des ÖAI (UZK)*
founded 1975

1.2 Technical Support

At the OeAI's excavation sites at Tell el-Dab'a and Kom Ombo, advanced documentation techniques are systematically employed to ensure high-resolution recording of archaeological data. Both sites use a Leica total station and a Topcon GPS system to collect precise spatial data, which is processed with CAD and GIS software to create detailed site maps and support spatial analysis.

Geophysical prospection further enhances the documentation strategy. Large-scale magnetometer surveys at both sites reveal subsurface features without excavation. At Tell el-Dab'a, these are complemented by geomagnetic and electrical resistivity surveys, enabling a more refined reconstruction of buried architecture and occupation layers.

At Kom Ombo, terrestrial laser scanning has been used to generate a detailed 3D model of the tell's surface. During the 2023 season, Structure from Motion (SfM) photogrammetry was widely adopted, allowing for the rapid creation of high-resolution 3D models from overlapping images. SfM is now a standard part of daily fieldwork. Photogrammetry is also applied to small finds and ceramic assemblages, producing digital 3D models for visual analysis, comparative study, and long-term archiving. These tools facilitate broader access to the material record and support interdisciplinary collaboration. By combining traditional excavation



Surveying and mapping of the excavation
(© OeAW-OeAI)

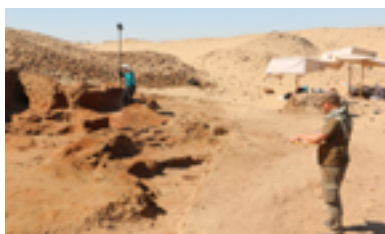


Image-Based Modelling (IBM) measurements
in the field (© OeAW-OeAI)

methods with innovative digital techniques, the institute ensures scientifically rigorous and accessible documentation, advancing archaeological research to meet the highest contemporary standards.

The technical experts at the Austrian Archaeological Institute in Vienna support the research.

Coordination: Astrid Hassler

1.3 Future Egyptology@OeAI: Bridging Past, Present, and Future

Launched by Barbara Horejs in 2024, the ›Future Archaeology‹ initiative at the Austrian Archaeological Institute (OeAI) is a cross-disciplinary research platform open to all institute members. It aims to position archaeology as a key contributor to shaping sustainable, inclusive futures by exploring how archaeological practice can respond to present and future global challenges.

The initiative focuses on two thematic areas: ›Archaeology in the Future‹, which addresses archaeology's evolving role in a rapidly changing world – engaging with emerging technologies (AI), theories (e.g., posthumanism, new materialism), nationalism, sexism, and disciplinary structures – and ›Archaeology and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)‹, which explores archaeology's relevance to global issues such as resource use, heritage preservation, education, and social equity.

›Future Archaeology‹ fosters collaboration across OeAI departments, encourages innovative thinking, and promotes archaeology's relevance to both academic and public audiences. It builds upon existing structures, such as the Code of Conduct for Fieldwork, while opening new avenues for research, ethical reflection, and institutional development.

Key activities include interdisciplinary discussions, pilot projects, workshops, and public outreach. The ›Archaeology in Egypt and Sudan‹ group members are involved in the following interdisciplinary activities:

- developing measures to hold green meetings and the implementation of the SDG into Egyptological research;
- theoretical debates on new materiality, postcolonialism, and future heritage;
- 2026 workshop on economic inequality and access to resources: presentation and integration of the outcome of the 2024 conference ›Who was poor in Pharaonic Egypt and in its Near Eastern neighbourhood‹.

By bridging past knowledge with present responsibility and future vision, ›Future Archaeology‹ seeks to make archaeology a more socially engaged and forward-looking discipline.

1.4 Public Engagement

Public engagement has become a central pillar of archaeological research. It fosters dialogue between scholars and society, ensures transparency, and highlights the wider relevance of scientific work. The Austrian Archaeological Institute has developed two key initiatives to promote this mission or Egyptological research: the lecture series »Austrian Studies in Egyptian Archaeology« (ASEA), launched in spring 2022, and the Institute's Annual Day in Cairo.

ASEA – Sharing Research Beyond Academia

The ASEA lecture series presents current projects and excavations of the Cairo branch, the Austrian Archaeological Institute, and their cooperation partners. It brings together specialists from a wide range of fields including Egyptology, prehistory, classical archaeology, philology, papyrology, geoarchaeology, archaeozoology, and raw material studies. This interdisciplinary framework allows ASEA to address multiple perspectives and makes the lectures relevant not only for experts but also for students and the wider public through hybrid participation (on-site and online). Beyond reporting on excavations and discoveries, ASEA creates an open platform for exchange, encouraging dialogue across disciplinary and cultural boundaries. It also strengthens

connections between Austrian research, Egyptian colleagues, and international partners, ensuring that the institute's work contributes to a broader intellectual and social context.



<https://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/oeai/events/lectures-series/austrian-studies-in-egyptian-archaeology>

Annual Day – Visibility and Networking

The Annual Day of the OeAI in Cairo provides a platform for presenting the institute's research highlights of the year alongside its future plans. It promotes discussion about the directions and challenges of ongoing projects. The event is designed not only as a formal report but also as a gathering point for scholars, cultural institutions, and heritage professionals. In this way, the 'Annual Day' becomes more than an internal review, highlighting Austrian contributions to archaeology within Egypt and beyond.



1.5 Third Party Funding

Since 2015, the research group, led by Bettina Bader, has successfully secured competitive third-party funding, ensuring the sustainability of its research. As Principal Investigator of the FWF START project Beyond Politics (Y754-G19), Bettina Bader has played a central role in attracting prestigious grants. Group members also achieved notable successes: Aaron de Souza received a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action (MSCA; 796050) and an FWF Lise Meitner project (M3026) on Nubia; Vera Müller was awarded an FWF project on the cemetery of Turah Centre or Periphery?, (P31551); and Natasha Ayers contributes with the ESPRIT project Communities Reassembled (ESP293).

With the merger of the Austrian Academy of Sciences archaeological institutes into the Austrian Archaeological Institute,

Bader's group aligned its funding strategy with the Cairo branch led by Irene Forstner-Müller. Under her leadership, several projects were acquired, including two FWF stand-alone projects on Kom Ombo (P31791; PAT4958923). Pamela Rose also secured two FWF projects on Egypt's southern border and early medieval frontier (P24589; P31169).

The group continues to pursue large-scale international funding, including ERC grant submissions and other major international project proposals. Several third-party funded publication projects are also in progress. This record of funded research highlights the group's strategic capacity in funding acquisition and academic excellence. Altogether, the group has acquired € 3.6 million in competitive third-party funding from 2015 to 2025.



1.6 Cooperations with National and International Research Institutions

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien | R. Hölzl

Naturhistorisches Museum, Wien | A. Stadlmayr & M. Marschler

TRIGA Center Atominstitut, Wien | J. Sterba

Universität Wien, Institut für Ägyptologie | E. C. Köhler, D. Driaux

Universität Wien, Institut für Paläontologie | M. Zuschin

Universität Wien, Institut für Alte Geschichte und Papyrologie | B. Palme

Joanneum Graz | K. Peitler

KU Leuven, Belgien | H. Willems, Y. Tristant

Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid | M. C. Pérez-Díe

The Ancient Egyptian Heritage and Archaeology Fund | P. Lacovara

Schweizer Institut für Bauforschung, Kairo | C. von Pilgrim

Polish-Slovak Mission to Retaba, Foundation Aigyptos, University of Warsaw, Institute of Archaeology | J. Hudec, W. Rzepka

University of the Alcalá, Madrid | The Middle Kingdom Theban Project, A. J. Morales

University of Arizona | M. Ownby

Universität Prag/Newcastle | M. Odler & J. Kmošek

Institut für Mumienforschung Bozen | A. Zink



Ägyptisches Museum Berlin | F. Kampp-Seyfried
Ägyptisches Museum Hildesheim | R. Schulz
Ägyptische Sammlung Krakau | J. Górski
Ägyptisches Museum Leipzig | J. Helmbold-Doyé, D. Raue
Yale University, Tell Edfu Project | N. Moeller, G. Marouard
Universidade São Paulo/Oxford University | T. Rocha da Silva
MOTA – Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities
LMU München, Institut für Ägyptologie | F. Hoffmann
LMU München, Historisches Seminar – Alte Geschichte | K. Radner
Universität Basel, Department Altertumswissenschaften | M. Müller; S. Bickel
Universität Heidelberg, Institut für Ägyptologie | J. Quack
Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Kairo
American Research Center in Egypt
British Museum, Egyptological Department | M. Marée
Centre national de la recherche scientifique | CNRS
Universität Liège, Institut für Ägyptologie | P. Seyr
Weimar, Thüringisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie | J. Nováček
The Djehutyj-Project, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC), Madrid |
J.-M. Galán
Universität Würzburg | M. Stadler, E. Lange
American University in Cairo | S. Ikram

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Kom Ombo, restoration of pottery by Hassan Mohamed
(© OeAW-OeAI/A. Hassler)

2 Archaeology and Material Culture in Egypt and Nubia

A Success Story of Interdisciplinary Archaeology

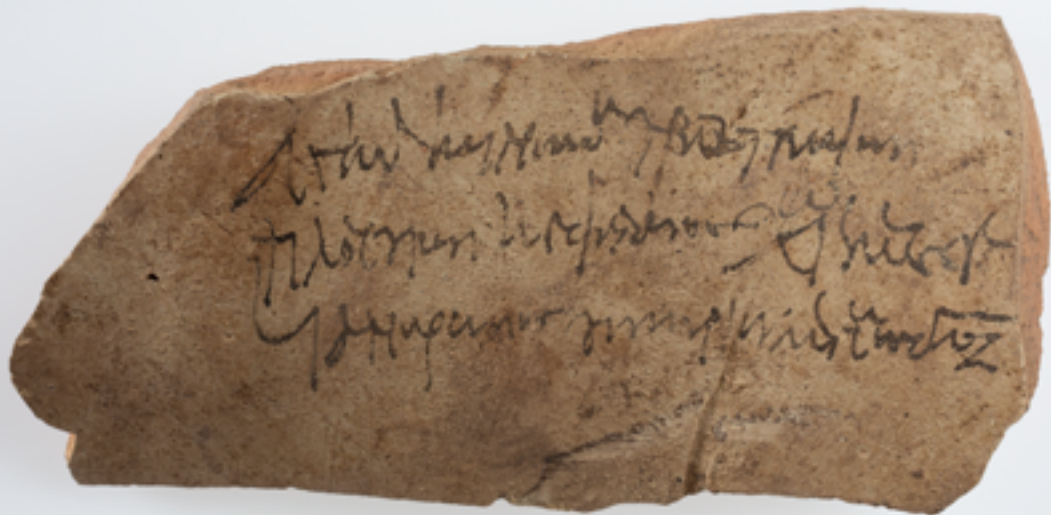
Focusing on the material, cultural, and social foundations of societies in Egypt and Sudan from prehistory to beyond the pharaonic period, research centres on the interpretation of material culture as a source equal to texts and pictorial evidence. Egypt's early literate and visually rich society, paired with the remarkable preservation of its material remains, provides a unique platform for reconstructing life across social strata and local contexts. The research group »Archaeology in Egypt and Sudan« at the Austrian Archaeological Institute (OeAI) at the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW) advocates for a pluralistic, bottom-up approach, addressing understudied artefact classes and

sites using modern recording techniques and theoretical frameworks – including post-colonialism and new materiality.

The research group was established in 2015 under the leadership of Bettina Bader within the framework of the Austrian Academy of Sciences' former OREA Institute (then »Material culture in Egypt and Nubia«), has developed into a leading centre for archaeological research in northeast Africa. Since 2021, with the integration into the OeAI, the group and the Cairo Branch led by Irene Forstner-Müller closely aligned their strategy enhancing their regional outreach and diachronic perspective.

Assemblage of bread moulds and beer jars
(© OeAW-OeAI/N. Gail)





Tax receipt found in Kom Ombo from the 11th year of Nero (64/65 AD)
(© OeAW-OeAI/N. Gail)

Key efforts include the excavation and publication of Tell el-Dab'a, a site under Austrian investigation since 1966, and the study of the temple of Philae in co-operation with the University of Leipzig. The Tell el-Dab'a archive is also being systematized, digitized, and maintained to support ongoing and future research. Since 2017, Irene Forstner-Müller has co-lead the Kom Ombo excavation project, funded in part by the Austrian Science Fund, to trace the city's development from the Early Dynastic period through to the 19th century AD. Additional fieldwork includes surveys in Hisn al-Bab and Aswan. With the merger of the three archaeological institutes of the OeAW in 2021 into the new OeAI, the research on Kom Ombo contributed to the group's third party funding and scientific success.

By combining archaeological fieldwork, archival research, and museum collaboration, the group fosters an inclusive understanding of Egypt and its wider cultural networks – challenging outdated narratives and enriching the archaeology of the future.

The series »Archaeology of Egypt, Sudan and the Levant«, founded in 2019, publishes current archaeological research in the Levant, Egypt and Sudan. It focusses on archaeological studies and new results from fieldwork, material, cultural and theoretical studies, as well as interdisciplinary analyses related to the focus region. The series is edited by Bettina Bader, Julia Budka and Felix Höflmayer (Department of Prehistory & WANA Archaeology).



Projects of the Austrian Archaeological Institute in Egypt
(© OeAW-OeAI/M. Börner)

3 Multi-site and Diachronic Work in Egypt and the Sudan

The investigation of the material, cultural and social foundations of past societies in Egypt and Sudan from prehistory beyond the end of pharaonic times forms the focus of the research group. Research concentrates on the interpretation of material culture, its contribution as an equivalent source to texts and pictorial evidence, but notably also on field work hosted by the Egyptian government. Material culture comprises an extensive body of evidence, much of which remains understudied.

Thus, the systematic study of material culture from Egyptian settlements and cemeteries to obtain relevant data for the reconstruction of several aspects of socio-economic and cultural history is a main goal. This includes insights into the daily life and death of elite and non-elite people as well as into local histories and regional

developments in order to gain a more pluralistic view of ancient Egyptian culture and the society that created it. We also include neighbouring areas to overcome the still widespread bias of Egypt being perceived as a culturally isolated society.

Using modern recording methods and analyses when possible and up to date theoretical frameworks, a bottom-up approach to Egyptian history is promoted and the somewhat neglected study of objects given a boost. There is no specific limit in terms of period or object class, but objects are set within their contexts and therefore in a wider interpretational framework.

3.1 Centre or Periphery? The Cemetery of Turah in the Creative Tension of Egypt (End of 4th/Beginning of the 3rd Mill. BC)



Turah during the excavations 1910
(© KHM Vienna/OeAW-OeAI)

When Hermann Junker excavated the cemetery at Turah near Cairo in 1910, he was granted the majority of the grave goods for Vienna (1028 of documented 1316 objects). The majority are housed by the Kunsthistorisches Museum, while smaller quantities were distributed to other institutions in Austria and other European countries.

Most tombs date to the transition of the 4th to the 3rd millennium BC (~550). Although the original documentation was modern for its time, updating was necessary. The objects were documented by drawings, photos and descriptions to enable comparison to other archaeological material. Scientific analyses (petrography, NAA and isotope analyses, etc.) provided new insights, such as a site-specific Nile clay fabric. Other pottery vessels came from Middle and Upper Egypt. Great diversity of interregional networks is

represented by jewellery, components of which derive from the Nile valley, the Red Sea and the Western desert. Corals and molluscs came from the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. Furthermore, an artificial paste for beads could only be distinguished from semiprecious stones by using a scanning electron microscope. Copper objects were attributed to mining areas in the Sinai and the Eastern Desert.

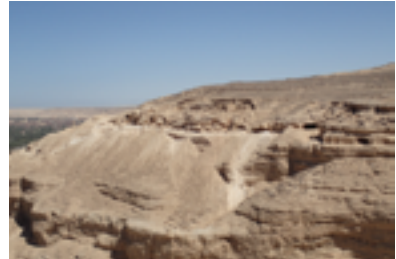
A new insight is the cemetery's structure according to kinship groups in which elaborate tombs are surrounded by simpler graves. This difference only appears in the tombs' architectures and sizes and not in number or effort expenditure of grave goods.

PI: Vera Müller
Period: 2018–
Funding: FWF [P 31551]

3.2 The Pottery Development in Northern Upper Egypt from the 1st Intermediate Period to the Early Middle Kingdom

The First Intermediate Period (c.2200–2000 BC) was long described as a period of decline filling the gap between the cultural climaxes of the previous Old Kingdom and the following Middle Kingdom (c. 2000–1800 BC). Recently, research suggests a regionalization in many respects that should not be viewed negatively as it affected local hierarchies of administrative officials, funerary architecture, tomb painting, coffin production, and developments in material culture. Pottery production serves as a case study, as large quantities of pots are available and they changed morphologically over time. While the historical chronology is unclear due to a high number of kings and few royal inscriptions, this makes a synchronous consideration of the different local ceramic traditions difficult, as research depends on relative archaeological sequences.

The aim is to present a comparative analysis of pottery from northern Upper Egypt including the cemetery sites of Ehnasya el-Medina (Museo Arqueologico Nacional Madrid), Sedment and Deir el-Bersha (KU Leuven) to get more insight into the nature of regionality and local produc-



North hill of Wady Nagla, Deir el-Bersha
(© OeAW-Oeal/B. Bader)

tion mechanisms. While the users of these cemeteries belonged to different social classes, the addition of pottery to individual graves is common to all cemeteries, which provides an opportunity to pinpoint different procurement processes, different usage of raw materials, differences in manufacturing technology and differential use of types of vessel and analyse them in the larger Egyptian cultural context.



Ring stand with hemispherical cup from the early Middle Kingdom, Deir el-Bersha
(© KU Leuven/B. Bader)

PI: Bettina Bader
Period: 2021–
Funding: Holzhausen-Legat

3.3 Beyond Politics: Material Culture in 2nd Intermediate Period Egypt and Nubia

The Second Intermediate Period (c. 1800–1570/40 BC) is one of the most complicated periods of Egyptian history, beginning after the end of the Middle Kingdom and spanning the later 13th to 17th Dynasties. It is a period of intense change, in which foreign influences and multiple social and political modifications culminated in the civilization of the New Kingdom. Due to contradicting historiographic, textual, pictorial and archaeological evidence as well as problems assigning firm dates to important groups of material culture relative dating remains problematic.

Political instability is indicated by short reign lengths of ca. 80 pharaohs in 200–250 years, a number derived from written texts and inscribed objects, and accordingly the current historical narrative mentions an increasing number of possibly concurring spheres of political influence. The period ended c. 1570/1530 BC with the reinforcement of the unification of Egypt by Theban rulers (18th Dynasty). The sources for the political/historical reconstruction are corrupted and fragmentary texts are far removed from the original period. Archaeological

sources may contribute considerably to a reconstruction of cultural and social processes in history but remain neglected.

It has been previously argued that material culture in this period exhibits a certain ›regionalization‹ that in essence, is thought to represent political divisions and to signify historical events in the

archaeological record. The project tests whether such a regionalization can be proved, how it becomes manifest, and which possible reasons exist beside the culture-historical explanation currently favoured. The stress on contextual study of material culture provides an additional level of interpretation for research into the behaviour and various identities of the people who created and engaged with objects. Some aspects of material culture theory derived from the large field of social anthropology offer

valuable clues of beliefs, ideas, values and identity, which are unconsciously inherent in the production of objects (chaîne opératoire). Also use traces and use patterns will be studied. Engaging



Scarab from Abusir el-Meleq,
Ägyptisches Museum Berlin
(© ÄMP/B. Bader)



Painted vessel from Tell el-Yahudia, Ashmolean Museum Oxford
(© Ashmolean Museum Oxford/L. Hůlková)

with the field of material culture studies is critical for achieving a better understanding of social and cultural processes. A major hindrance to identifying spatial and chronological trends in the material culture is the unclear relative chronology of less well-known sites that makes comparing site assemblages problematic. The project will collate archaeological contexts consisting of various object categories (e. g. pottery, scarabs, tools, metal finds etc). These objects will then be analysed in a multi-scalar approach, from the objects themselves, within their contexts to site specific relative sequences and finally to inter-site comparative analysis. Thus, a dense relative-chronological network will be established for further consideration and whether regional differences can be pinpointed – in the composition of contexts or the morphology of objects. To this end qualitative and quantitative analyses will be conducted.

To achieve this task assemblages from sites in Egypt and Nubia were re-documented for comparison. Thus, up to date re-documentation of several older excavations took place in museums and

archives (e.g. Abusir el-Meleq, Sedment, Mostagedda Abydos North Cemetery, Thebes, Kerma). This new data is supplemented by collaborations with ongoing excavations (Tell el-Dab'a, Tell el-Retaba, Deir el-Bersha, Deir el-Ballas, Luxor, Elephantine). A common terminology for phasing is being developed at present as it is largely incompatible across Egypt because it relies on very insecure dynastic cross references. The co-operation with current excavation projects continues at Tell el-Dab'a, Deir el-Bersha, Deir el-Ballas, Luxor and Elephantine.

PI: Bettina Bader
Team: Natasha Ayers, Lucia Hůlková, Christian Knoblauch, Elke Kraft
Period: 2015–2023
Funding: FWF START [Y754-G19]

3.4 Communities Reassembled: Rethinking Identity in Ancient Egypt

In modern societies we acknowledge the complex construction and negotiation of our varied identities and community memberships, but this dimension is missing in our study of past societies. The 19th – early 20th century framework of sharply-defined cultural groups with uniform sets of »things« still prevails, and archaeological evidence that does not fit this narrative is dismissed as an exception. Thus, over-simplified monolithic identities like »Egyptian« and »Nubian« are imposed on a culturally diverse landscape in ancient Egypt.

This simplistic view of community and identity is being challenged for the Second Intermediate Period – early New Kingdom (ca. 1780–1425 BC) by applying a multi-theory approach to the material culture and social practices from four sites: Saqqara, Qau el-Kebir and Badari, Thebes, and Tell Edfu. The new documentation of objects demonstrates that multiple »communities of practice« can be disentangled from the strict »Egyptian« vs. »Nubian« dichotomy through a novel theory-based appraisal.

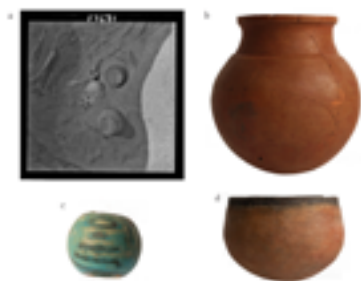
Qualitative analysis of material culture and social practices will be achieved with the combined theories of communities of practice, behavioural chain, and assemblage theory. Evidence for a more complex and diverse relationship of nested communities of practice than is currently distinguishable was already identified. This occurrence of nested and overlapping communities of practice allows the data to be resynthesized into groupings more representative of ancient communities and to perceive how material culture and social practice may/may not relate to identities.

PI: Natasha D. Ayers
Period: 03/2023–02/2026
Funding: FWF ESPRIT [ESP 293-G]



N. Ayers with newly excavated pottery at Tell Edfu
(© Tell Edfu Project/N. Ayers)

3.5 InBetween: Reappraising Nubian Identity through Material Culture



Photograph of Swedish Joint Expedition Grave 410/7 (Courtesy Gustavianum, Uppsala University Museum); b–d: Objects from SJE Grave 410/7 (© A. M. de Souza)

This project challenged old assumptions of cultural boundedness of people living in ancient Sudan and encouraged more nuanced approaches to Nubian cultural diversity. The difficulties and limitations of the culture-historical framework that was imposed upon ancient Nubia were identified and addressed. According to old frameworks, the Nubian Nile Valley was inhabited by the so-called Middle Nubian cultures, currently known as C-Group, Pan-Grave, and Kerma cultures. These modern labels create a false sense of cultural boundedness and homogeneity that does not fit the complex archaeological reality. The objectives were to contribute an updated understanding of the Middle Nubian Cultures, to identify

their key problems, and to move towards new perspectives. The starting hypothesis was that the ancient Nubian cultural landscape was more interconnected than previously thought. This was seen to be so through archival work, museum-based research, fieldwork in Egypt, and collaborative scientific analyses. By realizing the value of material technologies for understanding cultural complexity, previously unknown technological connections were identified using ceramic petrography and reflectance transformation imaging.

The project encouraged greater recognition of the diversity not only in ancient Nubia, but of human culture more generally in both ancient and modern times. The traditional dichotomy between ancient Egypt and Nubia was broken down. Through its Nubia-centric, post-colonial lens, it highlighted the imbalanced and heavily biased past interpretive models, preferring societies perceived as culturally and politically dominant.

PI: Aaron de Souza
Period: 01/2019–01/2021
Funding: Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions – Research Fellowship [No 796050]

3.6 Living Nubia: New Perspectives on Nubian Settlements



Small finds from SJE Site 228 from the SJE Collection
(© Gustavianum, Uppsala University Museum/A. M. de Souza)

We know more about what ancient people in Sudan did with their dead, than about their lives. This project set out to bring us closer to understanding where and how ancient communities lived in the Sudan, and how their social structures and identities might have become manifest in the living environments that they built for themselves.

Therefore, research concentrated on non-urban settlements in the Nile Valley of the Early and Middle Nubian periods (ca. 3200–1550 BC) that were previously identified as »Nubian« and investigate the question of what, actually, characterizes a »Nubian« settlement as opposed to an »Egyptian« one. Little explored habitation sites in the Nile Valley seemingly established by Nubian communities include rock-shelters, campsites, and

villages. The project's post-colonial stance aims to challenge Egypt-centric views of the past by shifting the focus away from Pharaonic installations in ancient Sudan.

In doing so, »Living Nubia« revises previous assumptions about architectural styles and technologies and how this might reflect identities and habits. It questions the sharp divisions that were imposed on ancient societies by past scholarship.

A key finding is that there is no single type of »Nubian« settlement, and the social and economic factors that impacted the character of habitation sites were also explored, such as mobility and subsistence strategies. Continued studies of Nubian-style material culture at settlements in Egypt raised further questions about cultural boundaries and divisions.

PI: Aaron de Souza
Period: 03/2021–03/2023
Funding: FWF Lise Meitner
[M 3026]

3.7 Pottery and the Valley of the Kings: »The remains of objects not worth describing«

The state-of-the-art analysis of the pottery from various New Kingdom tombs (ca. 1550–1000 BC) in the Valley of the Kings is an important contribution for a better idea of how long pottery vessel styles were in use throughout Egypt because they are connected to dated monuments.

During the heyday of exploration in the Valley of the Kings, beginning with Eugene Lefèvre's survey in 1883 and ending with Howard Carter's discovery of Tutankhamun in 1922, a large number of uninscribed, and evidently robbed, 18th Dynasty tombs were discovered. Of little interest to the early explorers, the fragmentary material from such tombs was only summarily examined and left in situ. Beginning in the 1980s re-examination of some of these tombs began (KV 21, 27, 28, 44, 45) and throughout the past two decades the Universities of Basel, led by Hanna Jenni (KV 32) and Susanne Bickel (KV 26,

29, 30, 31, 33, 37, 38, 40, 59, 64) and Tacoma, Washington led by Don Ryan (KV 48, 49, 50, 51, 52) have systematically re-cleared the others. Much pottery had been left behind in these tombs and has now been methodically recorded within this project. Publications continually appear of this important material. Cooperation with the Amenmesse Tomb Project (now led by Salima Ikram, American University Cairo) enables the inclusion of the pottery from the intact tomb KV 63. Currently The process of recording has been concluded and preparation for publication is ongoing.

PI: David Aston
Period: 2012–
Funding: OeAW-OeAI



Valley of the Kings with the Qurn
in background (© D. Aston)



Reconstructed closed vessel types
from the 19th Dynasty
(© University of Basel King's valley
project/D. Aston)



Mud trays from KV 63 (© American
University Cairo/D. Aston)

3.8 Reconstruction of Amphorae Trade Networks in New Kingdom Egypt

Amphorae were used as containers for wine, oil and resin, some of the major traded goods in New Kingdom Egypt (ca. 1550–1000 BC), which were moved within Egypt and in the Eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, research of amphorae trade networks may shed light on aspects of the economic situation and international relations at that time.

First, amphorae found at Saqqara, Dahshur and Luxor (with Japanese missions), are studied in detail to try and distinguish various characteristics of amphorae and link them to particular regions in Egypt and abroad. The combinations of fabrics, sizes, shapes, production techniques, hieratic inscriptions and the pre-fired stamps on some amphora handles, if any, with elemental composition in fabrics, will be tested for possible regional characteristics. The scientific analyses are being conducted by co-researcher Yoshinari Abe using non-destructive portable X-ray analysis. A chronological study of amphorae and their typologies from these sites will also be undertaken.

Subsequently, comparative studies with published vessels from all over Egypt and ideally reexamination in museums and/or on sites will be included to test possible production areas based on the regional characteristics identified before.



Egyptian Amphorae (© Higashi Nippon International University/K. Takahashi)

Finally, the datasets from sites where amphorae were produced and those where they were found are compared and, thus, amphorae trade networks will be reconstructed. Diachronic changes, if

they exist, will be highlighted according to the amphora typo-chronology examined in the first phase.

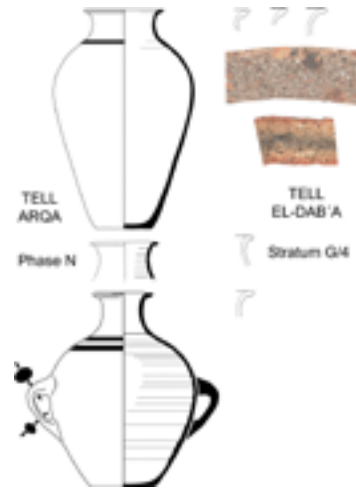
PI: Kazumitsu Takahashi
Period: 09/2023–09/2026
Funding: Research Fellowships for Young Scientists [202200937]
Japan Society for the Promotion of Science

3.9 Egypt in the Levant

The goal of this project is the synchronization of relative chronologies and modern stratigraphic excavations along the Levantine coast in Syria-Palestine and Tell el-Dab'a from the period of the Middle Bronze Age to the early Late Bronze Age (c. 1950–1450 BC), thus embedding them in the framework of the historical chronology of Egypt. In addition to the textual sources, scientific results such as 14C dates and pumice analyses will be incorporated.

Tell el-Dab'a's favourable geographical position in the north-eastern Nile Delta led the settlement of people in the late Middle Kingdom/Middle Bronze Age, which turned it into a major trade centre, where a mixture of Egyptian and Middle Bronze Age material culture was used. The combination of its stratigraphy and historical links to the Egyptian chronology makes the project important.

Comparative studies were carried out on Levantine sites in cooperation with excavators and specialists of the respective excavations. Special attention is being paid to the occurrence of Egyptian pottery in the Levant, which were either not identified or ignored. In addition, significant finds from early excavations in various museums were re-examined to evaluate them in the light of new



Synchronising ceramics from Tell el-Dab'a and Tell Arqa (© OeAW-OeAI/K. Kopetzky)

chronological considerations. A particular focus was on the funerary material from the Middle Bronze Age tombs in Byblos and the Egyptian material or imitations of Egyptian material from Tell el-Ajjul.

PI: Karin Kopetzky
Period: 2011–2014
Funding: MSCA [25367]



4 Kom Ombo

Since 2017, the Austrian-Egyptian mission has made a significant contribution to the study of urbanism and urban development in Egyptian archaeology through its investigations of the city of Kom Ombo in Upper Egypt. The site is best known today for its Ptolemaic temple dedicated to the gods Haroeris and Sobek. However, far less is known about the ancient town that surrounds the temple on three sides. The modern Arabic name »Kom Ombo« (كوم اومبو) meaning »Hill of Ombo«, derives from the ancient Egyptian name of the town, Nbwt > Nby.t, meaning »the Golden«. The name is first attested in the Old Kingdom (c. 2700–2200 BC), disco-

vered on a seal impression during current fieldwork. The seal bears the name of King Neferirkare, a ruler of the 5th Dynasty, and represents the earliest known record of the ancient name »Nebut« as well as the only example from the Old Kingdom. To date, archaeological work within the tell settlement has revealed nineteen stratigraphic phases of occupation, identified through material culture and epigraphic evidence, ranging from the second half of the 2nd Dynasty (c. 2890–2686 BC) to the 19th century AD. No evidence has yet been found in the excavation record for activity during the late Middle Kingdom, Second Intermediate Period, or early New Kingdom (18th Dynasty),



The temple of Kom Ombo
(© OeAW-OeAI/Ch. Kurtze)

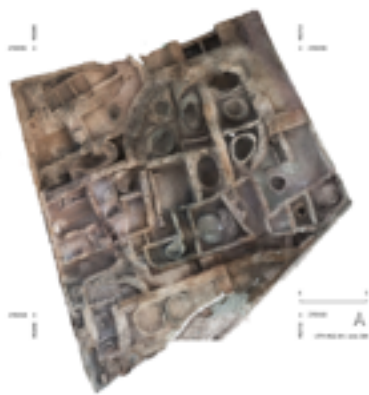
but other sources confirm that the site was inhabited during these periods not represented in the excavated layers. Current research focuses on the town of Kom Ombo during the 3rd millennium BC.

The goal is to study the town and its settlement history, the urban economy and cultural interactions within the city, and the developmental processes of its various neighbourhoods and hinterland through non-intrusive surveys and archaeological excavations. It is a joint mission with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA), partly funded by the Austrian Science Fund: Stand-alone projects »The town of Kom Ombo

in the 3rd millennium B.C.« (P31791) and »Life in the Provinces – The Early Town Kom Ombo« (PAT4958923).

4.1 Kom Ombo from the Early Dynastic to the First Intermediate Period

Kom Ombo was occupied from the Early Dynastic period into the early Old Kingdom, similar to other early Upper Egyptian sites such as Elephantine, El Kab, and Hierakonpolis. Its favourable geographic position – where the Nile Valley widens north of the First Cataract and several wadis converge – likely attracted early settlers. The earliest archaeological features date to the second half of the 2nd Dynasty.



Aerial view of administrative area s/9 south
(© OeAW-OeAI/M. Börner)

Area s/9

Area s/9, located between the northern modern enclosure wall of the temple and the Crocodile Museum, covers approximately 850 m². While the southern part is well-preserved, the central and northern areas have been heavily impacted by modern activity. The northern section revealed a cemetery dating to the later Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period, whereas the southern section contained an administrative complex from the later First Intermediate Period. This complex, enclosed by a substantial wall, is spatially distinct from the cemetery and includes two storage units divided by a central corridor. Geophysical surveys indicate that the complex continues southward beneath the Ptolemaic temple.

Excavations uncovered a complex and repeatedly rebuilt administrative area, consisting of nineteen rooms of varied size and layout. The walls, often thin and lacking proper bonding, suggest hurried construction. Some walls still stand over two metres high, with patches of original mud plaster preserved. Entrances, mostly from the south, were narrow, and many were later modified or sealed. Sixteen beehive-shaped silos were identified within the complex. The adjacent cemetery, dating from the



Area s/9 with temple in the background
(© OeAW-OeAI/I. Forstner-Müller)

late Old Kingdom to the early Middle Kingdom, features large mudbrick tombs with shafts and superstructures. The deceased were buried on their left sides, heads to the north, facing east. Most tombs had been looted, with only ceramic vessels remaining as grave goods.

Area s/9-N

In the northern part of Area s/9, beneath the cemetery, an Early Old Kingdom settlement was uncovered. The site revealed a dense stratigraphy comprising four main construction phases dating from the second half of the 2nd Dynasty to the early/mid-5th Dynasty. Excavations have yielded over 100,000 pottery sherds and numerous complete vessels from the Old Kingdom town of Kom Ombo, currently under study by Rita Hartmann. The earliest ceramics date to the first half

of the 2nd Dynasty, while pottery from higher layers confirms continuous occupation through to the late 5th Dynasty.

The ceramic corpus includes tableware such as red-polished bowls, cooking pots – some fire-blackened – and thin-walled storage jars. Particularly noteworthy are the abundant fragments of coarse Bedja bread moulds and beer jars, vital for bread baking and beer storage. These were found in all occupation layers. Bread and beer were staples of the Old Kingdom diet and central to its economy. Fragments of large, thick-walled vats also suggest intensive food production on-site.

Beyond subsistence, pottery offers insights into cultural interactions. Alongside typical Egyptian pottery, there are handmade Nubian bowl sherds and a small number of imported Levantine

jar fragments, indicating Kom Ombo's role in a broader network of interregional exchange during the Old Kingdom.

The material culture from the various occupation layers in Area s/9-N includes distinctive small finds: animal figurines, boat models, game pieces, spindle whorls, and ceramic tools. These objects are currently being analysed by Cristina Alù.

Despite often being fragmentary, small finds provide direct evidence of daily life – how people lived, worked, and interacted. They help reconstruct practices absent from monumental or textual sources. Their craftsmanship and spatial distribution can illuminate aspects such as social organization, trade, cultural identity, and ritual. Some items show evidence of reuse, reflecting changes in function over time. These finds are key to understanding everyday life in Old Kingdom Kom



Ombo. Ongoing analysis will deepen our knowledge of their lifecycle and the dynamic domestic and communal practices within Area s/9-N, enriching interpretations of both the artefacts themselves and the broader urban context.

Area s/11

Located at the northern edge of the tell, Area s/11 revealed Old Kingdom structures buried around four metres below the modern surface. This early city quarter, dating from the 2nd to early 4th Dynasty, appears to have had an industrial function. The presence of a bakery, evidenced by the discovery of over 1,000 bread moulds, suggests large-scale production, likely linked to royal administration.

PI: Irene Forstner-Müller
Period: 2017–
Funding: OeAW-OeAI
FWF [P 31791]
FWF [P 4958923]

Layer of bread mould-sherds, area s/11
(© OeAW-OeAI/A. Hassler)



Aerial view of area s/11
(© OeAW-OeAI/M. Börner)



Bread mould from area s/11
(© OeAW-OeAI/M. Kacicnik)

4.2 Kom Ombo in the New Kingdom

New Kingdom layers have so far only been identified in Area s/11 at Kom Ombo, beneath a dune over three metres high. These were encountered during excavations aimed at reaching Old Kingdom occupation levels, which required removing what was initially believed to be sterile sand. Unexpectedly, New Kingdom pottery and a few objects were recovered from within the sand, along with clusters of mud bricks and several rough, low mudbrick enclosures.

The excavation revealed modest structures resting directly on loose sand, suggesting opportunistic and ephemeral construction. Four architectural horizons were identified, including a round structure, three semi-circular ones, and associated walls. Some appear to have served as pot emplacements, supported by the discovery of six complete or nearly complete vessels, a small dish, and reconstructable jar bodies found nearby. Others remain unexplained. The pottery, studied by Pamela Rose, dates mostly to the mid to late 18th Dynasty, with some material from the 19th Dynasty. It is generally well-preserved and dominated by simple, unslipped Nile silt jars and bowls. Closer to the Old Kingdom deposits,

ceramics date to the early to mid-18th Dynasty. The undisturbed state of the finds indicates they were not redeposited. This evidence provides the first clear indication of New Kingdom settlement activity at Kom Ombo beyond the temple precinct, significantly expanding the known occupational history of the site.

PI: Irene Forstner-Müller
Period: 2017–
Funding: OeAW-OeAI
FWF [P 31791]
FWF [P 4958923]



Mud brick structure, probably pot emplacement,
Area s/11 (© OeAW-OeAI/A. Tavares)

4.3 Kom Ombo in the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods

Several Demotic, Greek and Coptic ostraca were found during the excavation campaigns since first investigations started in 2017.

The demotic ostraca are being analysed by Friedhelm Hoffmann (LMU Munich) and Philipp Seyr (University of Liège). Palaeographically, they date from the late Ptolemaic period and were written with the kalamos, pen made of reed.

The content of the demotic ostraca consists of administrative notes, in particular accounts with personal names and numbers. Goods such as wine are also mentioned. These ostraca thus offer valuable insights into the administrative practices and economic structures of the late Ptolemaic period.

The Greek ostraca are being analysed by Bernhard Palme (University of Vienna). They date from the 2nd century BC to at least the 6th century AD and contain a variety of different both private and public documents, written communications and vessel inscriptions. These documents cover the Ptolemaic as well as the Roman and Byzantine periods.

The most important finds include tax receipts from the 3rd and 5th year of Caligula and from the 11th year of Nero's reign. In addition to the tax receipts,

accounts, fragments of private letters, memoranda, jar inscriptions and docketts were found. These diverse texts provide valuable information on the economic and everyday history of the respective eras.

PI: Irene Forstner-Müller
Period: 2017–
Funding: OeAW-OeAI
FWF [P 31791]
FWF [P 4958923]



Tax receipt found from the 5th year of Caligula (40/41 AD), KO-KF 3260 (© OeAW-OeAI/N. Gail)



View of the temple from the river, showing the Anglo-Egyptian fort (Gr. Inst 769/4167)
(© Griffith Institute, University of Oxford)

4.4 The Anglo-Egyptian Fort at Kom Ombo

The remains of the Anglo-Egyptian fort lie atop the tell at Kom Ombo. Built in early 1886, it formed part of the defensive line established in response to the Mahdist uprising in Sudan, which threatened to spread north into Egypt. This fort is the only surviving structure from a chain that once extended deep into Nubia (FIG. x). It remained in use until 1901 and was soon after dismantled. Official documentation records its construction and maintenance, while preserved plans and elevations provide valuable insights into the internal layout and functions of its various parts.

Excavations led by Pamela Rose in 2018 and 2019 explored the main living area – often modified over time and labelled on plans as the ›shed‹, indicating possible use for equipment storage – and the defensive structures, including the gateway and the ›keep‹. The keep was the most fortified part, consisting of

a gun tower and semi-subterranean corridors accessible only from above.

Artefacts such as bullets, cartridges, and tins of leather and metal polish reflect military use. Personal items – buttons, a fez, smoking materials – illustrate daily life. Manufactured goods from Austria, Germany, Belgium, and Britain highlight broad supply networks, while remains of handwritten documents in Arabic, French, Italian, and English attest to the garrison's cosmopolitan nature.

PI: Irene Forstner-Müller
Period: 2017–
Funding: OeAW-OeAI
FWF [P 31791]
FWF [P 4958923]

4.5 Sediment Studies and Geoarchaeology at Kom Ombo

Mudbrick has served as the principal construction material in arid regions since the Neolithic period and remains in widespread use today. At Kom Ombo, the use of mudbrick from the Early Dynastic Period through to the 19th century CE reflects enduring building strategies, an informed engagement with the surrounding landscape as a source of raw materials, and sophisticated practices of resource management.

Mudbricks from all periods represented at the site are currently being studied by Saskia Pail and Markus Kutschka with a focus on manufacturing recipes, chemical composition, and raw material provenance. X-ray fluorescence (XRF) is employed to analyse their elemental composition and detect variations across time and space. To distinguish the function of built spaces – particularly domestic versus production contexts – micromorphological analysis of floor constructions within buildings is being conducted. Such microscopic investigations of floor surfaces can identify traces of past human activity, offering critical insights even in the absence of associated artefacts.

A second focus of the study is on mudbrick structures dating to the First Intermediate Period that show evidence of having been affected by a significant fire. To



Taking monolithic sediment blocks from different phases of use and floor levels, area s/11
(© OeAW-OeAI/M. Kutschka)

reconstruct the event and assess whether it was accidental or intentional, a range of geochemical and geophysical methods is applied, including XRF, infrared spectroscopy, micromorphology, and high-temperature magnetic susceptibility.

PI: Irene Forstner-Müller
Period: 2017–
Funding: OeAW-OeAI
FWF [P 31791]
FWF [P 4958923]



5 Tell el-Dab‘a / Avaris

Since 1966, with a brief interruption between 1970 and 1974, the site of Tell el-Dab‘a/Avaris has been investigated by the Austrian Archaeological Institute. Excavations were directed by Manfred Bietak until 2009 and have since continued under the leadership of Irene Forstner-Müller.

The archaeological site of Avaris lies in the eastern Nile Delta, near the modern town of Tell el-Dab‘a, around 8 km north of Faqus in Sharqia province. It is securely identified as Avaris, the capital of the Hyksos (ca. 1640–1530 BC), and later as the southern district of Pi-Ramesse, the great residence city of Ramses II and his successors. Avaris occupied a strategic position at the junction of major trade routes, linking the Pelusian branch of the Nile

and the Bahr el-Baqar with access to the Mediterranean, while also serving as the terminus of the Horus Road leading across northern Sinai into Palestine. It was one of the largest cities in Egypt and the Near East in the 2nd Millennium BC and a major harbour for both the Nile and the Sea. This is evidenced by the abundance of imported goods, particularly amphorae. The city’s location allowed control over the flow of goods and people, granting it economic weight and military significance.

Avaris’ position at the easternmost Nile branch offered rapid access to the coast and the Nile valley. Although much of the ancient landscape has vanished, geophysical investigations have reconstructed its topography. The city reached



View to the ancient harbour basin of Avaris,
in the background left the excavation house
(© OeAW-OeAI)

its peak under the 15th Dynasty and again during the Ramesside period, before the silting of the Pelusian branch around 1100 BC forced its abandonment. Monuments were relocated to Tanis, creating long-standing confusion in identifying the Ramesside capital. After centuries of decline, the site was reoccupied from the Saite and Persian periods until the early Ptolemaic and Roman era.

In the early phases of the investigations conducted by the Austrian Archaeological Institute, the focus was primarily on exposing palatial complexes. However, more recently the emphasis has shifted towards settlement archaeology and broader questions of urban development. A comprehensive geomagnetic survey has provided

an overview plan of the site, forming the basis for this new approach and enabling the study of ancient river branches and the reconstruction of the harbour landscape. Today, research at Tell el-Dab'a continues through a series of focused projects that explore different aspects of its urban, religious, and cultural history.

5.1 The Settlement of the Late Middle Kingdom in Area A/II

The goal is to better understand the living conditions of people in the marshy Egyptian delta during the late Middle Kingdom (ca. 1800–1700 BC). Comprehensive publications of ancient Egyptian settlement areas including all details are extremely rare. Three settlement phases, lying above each other, were inhabited by people of lower social status. This can be concluded from the size of the houses and the preserved house inventories.

The irregular mud-brick architecture, typical for ancient Egyptian residential buildings, includes round silos for storing grain, hearths, and industrial ovens. The connecting roads are also irregular, forming a stark contrast to the planned orthogonal settlements which are considered typical for Egypt with the best known example of Lahun. Due to the presence of three successive settle-

ment levels of ~3000 m² expansion each, the development of this site can be traced over a period of c. 100 years.

The houses with the associated finds are systematically described, presented and analysed. Vessels of pottery and stone, stone implements and figurines of faience and stone objects constitute the most common object categories. The (published) animal bones were included informing on the diet of the inhabitants. Imported ceramic vessels from the Levant and Upper Egypt provide insights into the trading networks with these regions.

PI: Bettina Bader
Period: 2006–
Funding: MSCA [040625]
FWF Esprit [V147-G21]



A/II-k/12, pl. 6, SW1177_6, house interior (© OeAW-OeAI)



Pottery fragments, K2030 (© OeAW-OeAI/B. Bader)



Fragment of siltstone palette, 3071A2 (© OeAW-OeAI/A. Krause)

5.2 Archaeological Remains of Temple Rituals in the Sacred District A/II and their cultural-historical Assignment



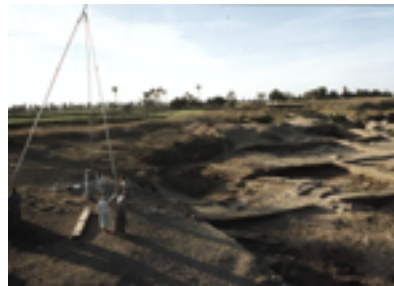
Donkey burial in square A/II-n/18 (© OeAW-OeAI)

A sacred district of the Second Intermediate Period (late 18th to mid-16th century BC) was discovered in Area A/II early in the excavation history of the OeAI at Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris under the direction of Manfred Bietak (1966–2009). It comprises two Syro-Palestinian temples, two Egyptian temples and a house for ritual meals. The temples thus reflect a typical mixed population, with their respective religious practices, at Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris, the capital of the Hyksos.

The analysis of the sacrificial pits in the forecourts of the temples revealed cult activities continuing into the early New Kingdom (second half of the 15th century BC). They demonstrate that even after the conquest of Avaris by the Upper Egyptian Thebans, old Levantine cult practices continued at this place. While Egyptian temples are always connected to a cemetery, which likely

associates them to the cult of the dead, the Syro-Palestinian temples in contrast seem to serve the worship of the gods. Only the walls of the Egyptian Temple I were preserved high enough so that the former temple inventory, ceramic vessels, was encountered. The other temples could only be documented in part through their foundation walls, so nothing more can be said about their former inventories. The temple forecourts, however, revealed built altars and extensive layers containing pottery and animal bones that allow insights into the ritual practices and cults.

PI: Vera Müller
Period: long-term project
Funding: OeAW-OeAI

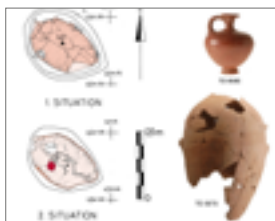


Temple III in A/II-o16 and A/II-r/18 (© OeAW-OeAI)

5.3 13th and 15th Dynasties Tombs from Area F/I

At Tell el-Dab'a c. 500 tombs were excavated in Area F/I from 1979 to 1989, covering about 300 years from the late Middle Kingdom to the beginning of the New Kingdom.

The archeological remains of these non-elite tombs from the early 13th to the late 15th dynasties are subject of this project. Although ~60 % of the tombs were robbed in antiquity, various funerary traditions can be observed. The tombs suggest that the individuals buried here had strong connections to the world of the late Middle Bronze Age IIA, MB IIB and C cultures in the Syro-Palestinian



Pot burial F/I - I/23 tomb 25
(© OeAW-OeAI)

region. These tombs were located either in separate rooms attached to houses (>Totenhäuser<), or were arranged in small cemeteries between larger mansions. Children were often buried in large storage vessels within or around these houses.

Whilst single burials are dominant in the MB IIA, collective tombs become more common in later phases. The tomb architecture includes large tombs with vaulted ceilings and entrance shafts constructed of sun-dried mud-bricks, simple cist tombs and pit burials. Social and/or regional distinctions were noted within the grave goods, which represent a mixture of Egyptian and Near Eastern traditions and origins.

Detailed analyses will show how Egyptian burial customs were adapted over time, and which non-local beliefs and traditions were preserved, thus, how the cultural horizons of the Near East and ancient Egypt merged over time.



Map of Area F/I, »Totenhäuser« and small cemetery in area F/I (© OeAW-OeAI/M. Bietak, D. Eigner)

PI: Karin Kopetzky
Period: long-term project
Funding: OeAW-OeAI

5.4 Ceramic Deposition L81 in Area F/II: Documentation and Evaluation



Closed vessel »beer jar« of the Second Intermediate Period in situ (© OeAW-OeAI/D. Aston)



F/II-r-/23 Overview of pit system Locus 81 (© OeAW-OeAI)



Decorated open vessel type – »fish dish« fragments of the Second Intermediate period in situ (© OeAW-OeAI/D. Aston)

This enormous accumulation of pottery and other finds from the late Second Intermediate Period (c. 1650–1550 BC) was found in a palace belonging to the Hyksos king Khyan in Area F/II. The material was found deposited in a series of pits cut from a courtyard, which was separated from the surroundings by large filling walls. The pit system (Locus 81) was explored in three seasons (2006–2008) and contained hundreds of thousands of potsherds and some other finds some being the remains of ritual meals or banquets, as well as what appears to be household rubbish and not related to ritual meals. While the recording of pottery, chipped stone tools, faience, stone, metal has been completed, the comprehensive publication is still in preparation.

Circa 35,000 diagnostic ceramic fragments and c. 2,000 reconstructable vessels were recorded and analysed. Whilst most of them were locally made, and provide a complete picture of the local Second Intermediate Period pottery repertoire, imported vessels were also among the finds. These come from Cyprus, the Levant, Upper Egypt and Nubia. Amongst the Egyptian imports are a small number of Marl C fish dishes, many of which bear highly interesting artistic representations of hunting, aquatic scenes and the like. Exceptional pottery such as rhyta in the form of hippos, ducks and naked female figures are noteworthy.

PI: David Aston
Period: 2006–
Funding: OeAW-OeAI

5.5 Building L in Area H/VI ('Ezbet Helmi)

At 'Ezbet Helmi (Area H/VI) a public building, Building L, was explored east of the large platform of Palace G in 2005–2007. The interpretation as public building is suggested by its size (ca. 3,200 m²), lay-out and white plaster on the walls in several rooms. Such fur-

nishings were usually not used for private dwellings. While the architectural design and the plan were addressed previously by Manfred Bietak and Irene Forstner-Müller, pottery and small finds remain to be recorded, reviewed, analysed and published.

The distribution and quantities of various object types in and around the building has to be plotted to understand possible functional areas within this complex, such as storage, manipulation of materials, craft production, food preparation and



H/VI-r-25 east, planum 6, pottery in situ
(© OeAW-OeAI)

consumption. Documentation and analysis of the pottery currently concentrates on floor deposits and room fills for use as comparative material for the project »Beyond Politics«.

Recently finds from Loci L6370, 6371, 6372, 6373 and 6374

were documented, which represent floor deposits and fills in a series of rooms in square H/VI-r/26 pl. 3. The scrutiny of cross joins between the ceramic material from various loci enables insights into post-depositional processes and how it was spread across after deposition. The analysis includes laying out the pottery, sorting it, checking with neighbouring contexts for joins, reconstruction and then recording the material begins by drawing, quantification and photography.



Bichrome Jug, 8985Y
(© OeAW-OeAI)

PI: Bettina Bader
Period: 2010–
Funding: OeAW-OeAI
FWF START [Y754-G19]

5.6 Chronological Evaluation of Ceramic Typologies from ‘Ezbet Helmi, Area H/VI



Fragment of anthropomorphic juglet, 8912X
(© OeAW-OeAI)



Restricted vessel with two handles, 8908Q
(© OeAW-OeAI)

The comprehensive compilation of a pottery chrono-typology based on the ceramic material found in Area H/VI covers the period from the late Second Intermediate Period to the reign of King Horemheb in the late 18th Dynasty (c. 1650 – c. 1300 BC).

The main objective of this project is to present an entirely new, well-grounded ceramic chronological typology for the consecutive period from Tell el-Dab’a Phase D/3, which can probably be equated to the reign of Khyam, and on through the latest Second Intermediate Period Phase D/2, covering also the New Kingdom up to and including the reign of Horemheb. To achieve this goal, the extensive ceramic material from Area H/VI was processed, documented and classified; more than 200,000 diagnostic sherds were reviewed. Whilst the early typology cannot be tied to specific kings, this study

provides the only ceramic evaluation that shows how the regional, typically northern, »Hyksos style« pottery was partially superseded, and replaced by a southern regional Egyptian pottery style (bichrome decoration, Marl clay vessels) during the 18th Dynasty. The result is a typological analysis of c. 500 Egyptian pottery type groups and 36 type groups of imported vessels. Each of these categories was fully described and parallels are discussed with ceramic material found at other sites in Egypt and elsewhere.

PI: David Aston
Period: 2005–2021
Funding: OeAW-OeAI

5.7 A Sacrificial Pit of ‘Ezbet Rushdi

An offering pit with significantly later content than the remainder of the findings in this area close to the site of Tell el-Dab’a was discovered by Manfred Bietak and Josef Dörner during excavations by the OeAI at ‘Ezbet Rushdi in 1996. It cuts the reinforced entrance wall of the temple of ‘Ezbet Rushdi built in the second half of the 12th Dynasty (19th century BC). The surrounding area is completely destroyed by modern agricultural activities, so that the original context of this pit can no longer be reconstructed.

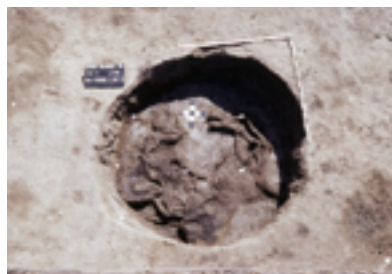
The offering pit contained pottery vessels as well as the skeletons of two donkeys that were placed over four sheep. The osteological analyses were carried out shortly after the discovery by Angela von den Driesch (†). This type of deposition is known to occur occasionally in the context of graves at Tell el-Dab’a from as



Sacrificial pit R/I-j/61, pl 1, being excavated by Egyptian colleagues (© OeAW-OeAI)

early as the late 12th Dynasty (late 19th century BC) and certainly originates in the Near East. Animal burials in the context of graves, however, contain significantly less pottery depositions than found in this pit.

Of particular interest is the late date of the pit content, which testifies to the continuation of ritual practices into the New Kingdom at this urban site, which can also be observed on the main tell site, in Area A/II.



Sacrificial pit R/I-j/61, pl 1, situation 3 (© OeAW-OeAI)

PI: Vera Müller
Period: 2005–2021
Funding: OeAW-OeAI

5.8 The Settlement Area in North-Eastern Avaris (Area R/III)

Located in the north-eastern part of Avaris, Area R/III was investigated in three excavation campaigns between 2010 and 2012 following a vast magnetometry survey in the previous years, uncovering approximately 2,400 m² of the ancient settlement. Initially settled in the early 15th Dynasty, the western part expanded eastward during the later Second Intermediate Period. Initially, it was a typical urban quarter without distinct domestic or funerary spaces.

In the Late Second Intermediate Period, the area was reorganized into three complexes, oriented north-northeast to south-southwest, separated by two parallel streets (Street 1 and Street 2).

Complex 1 consists of interconnected rooms, casemate structures, and courtyards. Only the foundations remain, but wall thickness suggests some buildings had upper floors. Courtyards contained silos and ovens, infant jar burials were the only interments.

Complex 2, the central area, is bordered by two streets. It includes two fully excavated house units with typical ancient Egyptian layouts – entrance areas, central rooms, and private quarters, accompanied by open spaces and silos. Evidence of manufacturing was found, but no burials.



Fayence-vessel in form of a hippopotamus (© OeAW-OeAI/N. Gail)

Complex 3, in the east, features dense building activity typical of Avaris, with smaller, separated units. Unlike the other complexes, burials were found here.

The architectural layout suggests distinct functions: Complex 1 likely served an administrative role, supported by storage facilities and administrative finds, including sealings bearing the name of Hyksos king Khyan.

PI: Irene Forstner-Müller
Period: 2010–
Funding: OeAW-OeAI



Plan of area R/III
(© OeAW-OeAI/A. Hassler)



TELL EL DAB'A - R/III
EXCAVATIONS 2010-2012





Overview of Area R/IV (© OeAW-OeAI/ U. Matić)

4.9 The Main Harbour of Avaris (Area R/IV)

Strategically located along the easternmost branch of the Pelusiac Nile, Avaris once lay much closer to the sea than today, serving as a crucial hub between Egypt, the Mediterranean, and the Near East during the 2nd millennium BC. This project reconstructs the ancient riverscape to understand the city's layout, connectivity, and harbour installations. Investigations in Area R/IV – identified as the site of Avaris' main harbour – were conducted through geomagnetic surveys (in collaboration with Tomasz Herbich and Christian Schweitzer) and auger drillings by French teams from Lyon and Strasbourg, building on earlier work by Josef Dörner.

The harbour lay in the centre of ancient Avaris, connected to the Pelusiac branch by two channels. Over time, natural silting and human activity reduced the basin, enabling urban expansion into the former harbour area. Archaeological evidence confirms Avaris as a major trade centre from the Middle of the 13th Dynasty to

the Ramesside Period, with a hiatus in the 18th Dynasty. From the Late Middle Kingdom to the end of the Second Intermediate Period, the area saw dense settlement and cemetery use, with domestic and funerary spaces intermixed – a hallmark

of 15th Dynasty Avaris.

Two large enclosure walls – one possibly a city wall – outlined the basin.

The site was abandoned after the 15th Dynasty and reoccupied in the 19th Dynasty, when it served as the southern harbour of Piramesse. The absence of 18th Dynasty

remains suggests the naval base Peru Nefer was likely located at Memphis. Numerous Near Eastern cylinder seals and Egyptian stamp seal impressions from Area R/IV attest to its harbour function as a transshipment point.



Cylinder seal impression
(© OeAW-OeAI/ N. Gail)

PI: Irene Forstner-Müller
Period: 2013–
Funding: OeAW-OeAI
FWF [P 25804]

5.10 Classification of Levantine Fabrics from Tell el-Dab‘a

As a consequence of the widely divergent results between the archaeological research and the Neutron Activation Analyses (NAA) for the origin of the Levantine Imports to Tell el-Dab‘a, more than 400 ceramic samples were taken from imports of this region for petrographic analyses from 2004 onwards.

While scientific investigations of Levantine transport vessels imported to the site started in the 1970s conducted by Joan Huntton (†) by means of NAA, Patrick McGovern succeeded her after her early death and published the results.

Very early in their investigation of the Levantine imported pottery ceramicists raised the suspicion that not only imported but also locally produced pottery occurred amongst this material, which by shape belongs to the Levantine Middle Bronze Age pottery corpus. However, the recipes of these fabrics were so similar

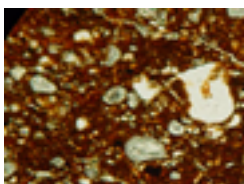
that a differentiation with the naked eye and even microscopy seemed impossible. Thus, simultaneously to the NAA samples approximately 400 pottery samples were taken for further analyses, namely petrography, covering the periods from the early 12th to the middle of the 18th dynasties.

In the framework of the SCIEM 2000 project (1999–2009) fabrics of Levantine imports and their possible imitations were grouped macroscopically and comparable samples from the Levant were collected. In recent years these samples were investigated petrographically and the results of this research are currently prepared for publication.

PI: Karin Kopetzky
Period: long-term project
Funding: OeAW-OeAI



Macroscopic image of sample K2817-31 (© OeAW-OeAI/K. Kopetzky)



Thin section image of sample K2817-31 (© OeAW-OeAI/K. Kopetzky)



Drawing of K2817-31 (© OeAW-OeAI/K. Kopetzky)



Excavation House in Tell el Dab'a (© OeAW-OeAI/N. Gail)

5 Philae: Exploring the Island of Isis and Osiris

The Philae temple complex (dating from the time of Nectanebo I to the Roman emperors) consists of the major temple of Isis as well as several smaller surrounding temples and other buildings including the temple of Hathor, the kiosk of Trajan, the temple of Imhotep, the gate of Philadelphos, the temple of Arensnuphis, the kiosk of Nectanebo I, the west colonnade, Hadrian's gate, and the temple of Harendotes).

The Philae Temple Text Project (PTTP) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences and Leipzig University analyses the temple island of Philae in all its aspects. It focuses on the hieroglyphic reliefs, the architectural development of the temples, the local theology, the supra-regional significance of the Philae cults, and the ancient as well as modern history of the site. The fundamental basis of the work is the edition of the hieroglyphic inscriptions and scenes from the great temple of Isis and its surrounding buildings in several

monographs. These editions are already and will be supplemented by articles that address not only the individual aspects of the inscriptions, the theological system of the temples of Philae, and their decoration program and cult, but also the integration of the complex into the Egyptian cultic landscape as a whole. Moreover, the Philae Temple Text Project engages in site management activities, including the installation of touristic visitor information signs, the cleaning and restoration of the temple reliefs, and the setting up of new storage areas for decorated temple spolia.

PI: Holger Kockelmann
Period: 2009–
Funding: Gerda Henkel Stiftung,
Fondation Michela Schiff
Giorgini, Stichting Mehen



Studying the epigraphy of the Philae temples
(© Philae Temple Text Project/H. Kockelmann)



The temple complex of Philae on Agilkia island,
UNESCO World Heritage site
(© Philae Temple Text Project/H. Kockelmann)



Example for site management activities: setting up
new storage areas for decorated temple blocks
(© Philae Temple Text Project/H. Kockelmann)



The cliff-top fortifications, looking south
© OeAW-OeAI/L. Fliesser

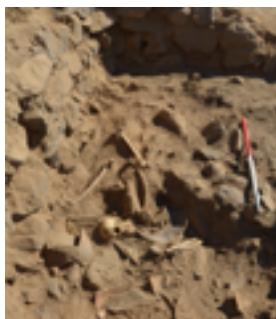
6 Hisn al-Bab

Hisn al-Bab is a clifftop fortification located south of Aswan, marking the frontier zone between Egypt and Nubia. It comprises stone walls that enclose part of the plateau and extend down the cliffs to the Nile. Chronologically and architecturally complex, most datable material relates to the Late Antique period, indicating this as the primary phase of occupation. However, evidence also exists for earlier and later use. The later phase may correspond to a border post mentioned in early medieval Arabic texts as al-Qasr.

Between 2011 and 2016, excavations and surveys led by Pamela Rose were conducted on the hilltop and on terraced structures down the cliff. A key discovery was a storage room abandoned with many

smashed pottery vessels and remains of stored food, including olives and chickpeas. The Late Antique occupation appears to have ended violently. Archaeological evidence suggests an attack, including a body found beneath a collapsed wall. Subsequent activity focused on clearing the site and disposing of disarticulated skeletal remains. These remains show signs of battle trauma. Nubian-style weapons were found among them, though it remains uncertain whether the Nubians were attackers or defenders. The site thus reflects the complex and often violent interactions in this border region.

PI: Pamela Rose
Period: 2012–
Funding: OeAI/OeAW
FWF [P 24589]
FWF [P 31169]



Skeletal remains found under collapsed wall (© OeAW-OeAI/ M. Harrison)



Terraced structures on the cliff side, looking north (© OeAW-OeAI/ P. Rose)

Imprint

Media owner & publisher: Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW),
Dr. Ignaz Seipel-Platz 2, 1010 Vienna, Austria
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