



## RECENT WORK OF THE AUSTRIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF EGYPT

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### TELL EL-DAB'A

The excavations in Tell el-Dab'a were undertaken in spring 2013 (director Irene Forstner-Müller). In this season a new project was initiated: the excavation within the main harbor of Avaris. This project is funded by the Austrian Archaeological Institute and in the future by the Austrian Science Fund (P25804-G19) and is undertaken in cooperation with the University of Strassbourg, CNRS, the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Archaeology Warsaw and VIAS.

Avaris was located on the Pelusiac branch of the Nile, the easternmost branch forming the eastern flank and limit of the fertile Delta, in a strategic position that made it a gateway between the Nile Valley and the Near East. It was both a good starting point for expeditions overland via the Sinai and an important harbour town from the Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period onwards, and was most probably the harbour of Piramesse during the Ramesside Period. This proximity to the east and its fortunate position on the eastern border/frontier of Egypt is also the reason why Asiatics settled here from late 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty onwards.

Magnetic survey (Christian Schweitzer and Tomasz Herbich) has revealed an image with a large basin in the central part of the town. Therefore it is most probable to assume that the main harbour of Avaris is located here.

In 2013 a 40 x 10 m trench was undertaken at the edge of this basin to get an idea of the range of dating and a first glimpse on the function of such a harbour. The occupation levels attested in this part were Late Middle Kingdom, Second Intermediate Period and after a hiatus, Ramesside period. This fits perfectly to the historical records: the main use of the harbour of Avaris was in exactly those periods. There is no evidence for the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty which makes the location of earlier New Kingdom harbour at this site and the association with Peru Nefer in the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty very doubtful.

A most surprising discovery was a cemetery dating into the Second Intermediate Period. This "harbor" necropolis consists of a row of large elite tombs aligned along a street which runs parallel to a large wall, which might have been



**Figure 1: Remains of Soldier, Hisn al-Bab**

originally (in the Middle Kingdom) a quay wall for the harbor basin in the Middle Kingdom.

### HISN AL-BAB

The Austrian Archaeological Institute has recently begun archaeological work at this site, which lies south of Aswan, on the east bank of the Nile at the southern end of the first cataract, the location of the ancient Egyptian-Nubian border (director Pamela

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Rose). The site takes its name from the nearby abandoned village of al-Bab. The project is funded by the Austrian Archaeological Institute and by the Austrian Science Fund. (P24589-621)

The main feature of the site is a very well-preserved early Islamic stone and mud brick fortress, and this overlies earlier fortified structures. Our recent work has concentrated on the latter, revealing part of an early fort of perhaps 4th century date, and later modifications to it. Amongst the modifications are the construction of a residential unit with benches and a deep subfloor crypt, and an outside kitchen area, dated from coins to the reign of Heraclius (610-641 AD). In the kitchen area were large numbers of broken pottery vessels and a wide range of remarkably well preserved plant remains, including large quantities of olive fruits that were stored in them. Work will continue next year to explore this important site further.

A spectacular find was the body of what was probably a Romano-Egyptian soldier, lying where it fell in the debris of the fortress. The skeleton was exceptionally well preserved and belonged to a man aged from 25 to 35, of Upper Egyptian or Nubian origin. The bones showed traits which may be related to long term military service. He was killed by a blow from a sharp bladed weapon to the upper inner thigh, which would have severed the artery here. The body was rapidly covered over by rubble – perhaps evidence of deliberate demolition of part of the fort in the immediate aftermath of the battle. It is not possible to say exactly when the conflict in which the soldier died took place, but it clearly took place soon after the Arab invasion of Egypt.

### THE NUBIAN VILLAGE

An associated project was started in 2012 (field director Lilly Zabrana) in the abandoned Nubian village of al-Bab. This project is funded by the Austrian Archaeological Institute and in the future by the Austrian National Bank. (P15559)

In consequence of the British Dam construction (1898-1902) near Aswan in Upper Egypt and the later building of the High

Dam (1960-1971), large areas of Nubian settlement were flooded as a result of the raised water-table of the Nile, and the parts of villages that survived above the high water mark were abandoned. The project aims to carry out a cultural-anthropological case study in two such villages abandoned in the 1930s.

In winter 2012 the documentation of the mud brick architecture and remains, including the house inventories, was analysed with a view to investigating what was left behind in a settlement which was systematically abandoned, and to consider whether these material assemblages reflected the occupation. In addition, cultural- and social anthropological field studies in the few still inhabited Nubian settlements in the immediate vicinity are underway to cross-check the inferences drawn from the analysis of architecture and the finds. This important study will not only produce an outstanding detailed documentation of modern Nubian culture, but will also make an important contribution to the discussion of cultural formation processes and their transformation into the archaeological record.



Figure 2: Overview, Hisn al-Bab Nubian Village