The British Museum expedition to Elkab and Hagr Edfu, 2009

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This preliminary report presents the results of the 2009 season at Elkab and Hagr Edfu: Vivian Davies discusses the pharaonic tombs, with investigations on late antique Hagr Edfu presented by Elisabeth R. O’Connell. A separate paper offers conclusions from a geophysical survey of Edfu and Kom el-Farahy (Bunbury, Graham and Strutt 2009).

Elkab: the pharaonic tombs

The tomb of Bebi
A plan was made of the rock-cut tomb-chapel of ‘Commander of the ruler’s crew, Bebi’, dating to the Second Intermediate Period (PM V, 184, 8 bis). It consists of a single rectangular chamber with vaulted ceiling accessed from a staircase (Fig. 1). A burial-shaft is situated in the floor of the chamber. It appears that, internally, only the rear wall was decorated, with scenes and inscriptions done in incised work and painted. Present in the centre, lower half of the wall, is a deep, round-topped niche, which may once have contained a funerary statue.

The cleaning of the decoration, begun last year, was completed (Fig. 2). Close examination has revealed substantial remains of the initial draft of the decoration done in red paint. Study of the palaeography suggests that the tomb of Bebi is near contemporary with that of Sobeknakht.

The tomb of Senwosret
Senwosret was a governor of Elkab, probably during early Dynasty 12. A plan was made of the accessible part of the tomb-chapel (PM V, 184), a rectangular chamber with vaulted ceiling, entered from a central doorway (Fig. 3). Note that the present façade is largely a modern construct. A second doorway is present in the centre of the rear wall, now blocked up but probably giving access to another chamber, perhaps containing a burial-shaft. The walls and

1 The expedition took place between 28 January and 2 March 2009. The team consisted of Vivian Davies (Director/Epigrapher), Marcel Marie (Deputy Director/Epigrapher), Elisabeth R. O’Connell (Assistant Director/Epigrapher), Lamia El-Hadidy (Senior Conservator), Mohamed Badawy (Conservator), Thomas Beckh (Ceramic Specialist), Judith Bunbury (Fluvial Geomorphologist), Marisa Fischer (Surveyor Assistant), Angus Graham (Fluvial Geomorphologist), Günter Heindl (Archaeologist/Surveyor), Joel Paulson (Land Surveyor), Ilona Regulski (Epigrapher), Alena Schmidt (Surveyor), Kristian Strutt (Fluvial Geomorphologist), Claire Thorne (Epigrapher), and Susanne Woodhouse (Epigrapher). Our SCA inspector was Ramadan Hassan Ahmed, who did much to expedite the work. Father Moussa El-Pakhouni and his community from the monastery at Hagr Edfu provided valuable practical assistance. Full co-operation was received, as always, from the senior officials in the Aswan and Edfu Inspectorates, Dr Mohamed Baiya and Zanaa Noubi Abdel Salam, and their staff. We are grateful to Dr Zahi Hawass, Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, and his colleagues on the Permanent Committee for the permission to continue the project. For reports on previous seasons, see Davies 2006, 2008 and 2009. The plans published here are the work of Günter Heindl, assisted by Marisa Fischer; the photographs were taken by the author.
ceiling were decorated with scenes and motifs in pure paint, the façade with inscriptions in sunk relief.

Cleaning continued of the painted decoration, which is of high quality. Especially fine, though now faded, is a scene on the west wall showing birds trapped in a net (Fig. 5). There was further documentation of inscribed blocks originally from the façade (Fig. 4).

The arrangement and basic content of the decoration in Senwosret’s tomb is similar to those of Sobeknakht, suggesting that the latter drew inspiration from the former.

An investigation was carried out of open tombs adjacent to that of Senwosret. In one of the tombs, a fine inscription framing a stela emplacement and datable to early Dynasty 18 identifies the owner as ‘Ahmose’ (Fig. 6). Unfortunately, the stela itself is missing.

In addition to the above work, we continued to study the architecture and decoration of the tombs of Sobeknakht and Renseneb and to make plans of related tombs.

Hagr Edfu: introduction and the pharaonic tombs

Very good progress was made with the survey of the site, with the location of over a hundred tombs added to the new map. Detailed study continued of Tombs 1-3, and a tomb surmounted by a mud-brick structure, possibly a pyramid, was also investigated. There was continued planning of the visible Late Antique remains along the eastern escarpment, together with the study of pottery and recording of Christian motifs present both in one of the tombs and on top of the main hill (see below). A second season of geophysical survey in the floodplain, centred on the site of Kom El-Farah, proved to be very productive (see Bunbury, Graham and Strutt 2009). An examination of antiquities from Hagr Edfu stored in the SCA magazine at Elkab yielded much new information on the results of previous excavations at the site.

Tomb no. 1 (Sataimau) (Fig. 18, left)

Particular attention was paid to the decoration on the innermost half of the south wall of the niche. There are two main scenes, arranged in two horizontal registers (Fig. 7). The upper consists of an offering list, partly damaged, originally comprising 60 items. Most are traditional but some are less usual, including at least one entry designating a type of fish. To the left of the list, two figures, identified as sons of the tomb-owner, are represented, the one making offerings, the other libating.

The lower scene represents a procession of eight figures, facing right towards the back of the niche, where originally there was situated a rock-cut statue, probably a dyad of the tomb-owner and his wife, now destroyed. The figures are damaged but are shown holding various objects and implements that identify them as offering-bearers and officiants in the opening of the mouth ceremony, with one represented in the garb of a sem-priest.

Tomb no. 2 (Fig. 18, middle)

The clearing of sand and debris, begun last year, was completed, confirming that there is no internal burial shaft, unless it is situated just inside the entrance, an area partly covered by a secondary mud-brick platform (see below).

2 The main results of work on this tomb, up to and including the 2008 season, are summarised in Davies 2009.
Tomb no. 3 (Fig. 18, right)

Recording of secondary decoration on the south wall, consisting of various kinds of figures and motifs, was begun. The wall bears a number of hieratic visitor-inscriptions, one of which, dated to the reign of Ramesses II, was superimposed on the figure of a boat (Fig. 8), showing that the latter was already in place.

Study was undertaken of the rock-cut statues in the tomb’s niche (Fig. 9). The group originally consisted of four figures, a male (the tomb-owner), to his left two females (probably his wife and mother), and to his right a smaller figure of a male child (probably his son). The latter is now almost completely destroyed and the other three have suffered considerable damage, with the faces obliterated.

The adult figures, all shown as seated, are over life-size, their maximum height being approx. 2.1m. The females are shown as wearing sheath dresses and tripartite wigs, with lappets ending just above the breasts, their arms placed on their thighs; the tomb-owner as wearing a long cloak, with arms crossed (probably right across left), and a shoulder-length-wig with lappets (mostly gone) which appear to be of a form ending in a point, a type of wig especially characteristic of later Dynasty 12 and 13. There are remnants of red paint on the male figure and red and white on the females.

The pyramid-tomb (Figs. 10–11)

One of the more interesting of the other open tombs in the necropolis is located along the same terrace about 200m to the south. Orientated east-west, it has a subterranean substructure, consisting of two chambers, accessed by means of a steep staircase (Fig. 10). The inner chamber comprises a sunk central area surrounded on three sides (south, west and north) by a raised mastaba with emplacements for anthropoid coffins. Staircase-tombs, their date not yet determined, appear to be a feature of this area of the necropolis. Surmounting the tomb and located above the burial chamber are the remains of a rectangular mud-brick structure, suggestive of the base of a pyramid (Fig. 11). Further investigation is planned for next season.

Late antique Hagr Edfu

In the 2009 field season, the expedition continued to incorporate late antique remains into a topographical map of the site (A. Schmidt), refine architectural plans made in 2007 and 2008 (G. Heindl and M. Fischer), survey pottery (T. Beckh), conserve (L. el-Hadidy), and record painted wall decoration (E. R. O’Connell and M. Marèe). Targeted areas included those identified and prioritized in earlier seasons: Area 2a, Tomb D; Area 2c; Area 3, Tomb no. 2; and the hill-top rock-shelter.

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3 The hieratic inscriptions are being prepared for publication by Robert Demarée, see Davies 1009, 39–40, ns. 4, 11.
4 See Davies 2008, 40, pl.II.
**Area 2a, Tomb D**

In 2007, a painted decorative programme was identified in Tomb D (Fig. 12) and a selection of its dipinti copied. During 2009, the entrance of the tomb was cleaned for planning and elevations taken in the northwest and northeast corners of the first chamber and over the threshold in the second chamber. The tomb contained wind blown sand and modern debris suggesting that it was cleared at some point prior to the British Museum expedition to Hagr Edfu. Conservator Lamia el-Hadidy’s careful removal of wasp’s nests, dirt and carbon from the walls of the first chamber of the tomb revealed further details of the known programme and additional dipinti, painted in yellow below (Fig. 13). Most of the programme, consisting of six crosses and two Coptic inscriptions framed in guilloche bands, was systematically copied (Fig. 14).

**Area 2c**

Area 2c consists of several terraces of rock-cut tombs opening at different elevations (Figs. 15–16). In 2008, the area was planned and, in 2009, several sections were drawn in an effort to clarify relationships between tombs and mud brick architecture now largely destroyed (Fig. 17).

**Area 3, Tomb no. 2**

Tomb no. 2 is adjacent to and comparable in size with Tomb no. 1, the tomb of Sataimau (Fig. 18). The unfinished tomb lacks a courtyard and original decoration, but graffiti on its façade and on the north and south interior walls indicate that it was at least periodically active in the pharaonic period (see Davies 2006, 13–14, fig.4 pl.IV). In 2008, the BM team copied two large cross dipinti surviving on patches of plaster on the north and south interior walls and I. Ralston cleaned Tomb no. 2 for planning. The debris of windblown sand yielded numerous fragmentary finds, including human remains and linen (probably belonging to plundered mummies), ceramics, fragmentary wooden objects, leather, three small fragments of uninscribed papyrus, cordage, and other organic material. T. Beckh’s 2009 analysis of the ceramics confirmed that fragments of the same pot were discovered in different loci attesting the mixed character of the contents of the tomb. Nevertheless, numerous ceramics could be largely reconstructed, including Late Period (eighth- to seventh-century BC) ‘sausage jars’ (typically used to store embalming equipment) and at least ten late antique pots, including fine ware dating from the sixth- to ninth-century AD. One jar base was reused as an inkwell. It is tempting to consider that the late antique pots constitute an assemblage relating to Tomb no. 2’s Christian phase of use; however, given the mixed contents of the debris, the periodic reuse of Hagr Edfu into the twentieth-century, and the activities of modern official and unofficial excavators, it is possible that this material originated elsewhere at the site.

Today the entrance of Tomb no. 2 is blocked by a mud brick wall, which stands to a height of c. 120 cm above floor level outside the tomb (Figs. 19–20). Until recently, Tomb no. 2 was accessible from Tomb no. 1 where a natural fissure in the rock had been expanded into a corridor. Thick mud plaster covers the walls of the corridor. The southeast corner of the tomb was left unfinished and, along the length of the eastern end of the tomb, stands a mud plastered platform, perhaps built to level out the unfinished floor. Standing c. 40 cm. above the rock-cut floor of the original tomb, the platform abuts the mud brick wall blocking the
original entrance. On the platform, and within the original doorframe, is a mud-plastered mud brick installation comprised of two compartments. The stone of the left-hand door jam has been hacked into a rough niche at a height of c. 60cm. from the top of the platform. The dimensions of the niche measure a maximum of 38cm (h) x 35cm (w). On the right-hand side, at approximately the same height, a built up section of the mud brick installation provides a shelf. A thick mud plaster covered by whitewash is partly extant upon the upper surfaces of the east wall. The west wall is dominated by a large niche, made to hold statues comparable in placement to those in Tombs 1 and 3. The interior of the niche is covered in a thick mud plaster.

Hill-top rock-shelter

A rock-shelter on the summit of Hagr Edfu contains inscriptions dating probably from the Old Kingdom to the present (Fig. 21). In 2009, seven Coptic rock-inscriptions were systematically copied. Six are located on the west side of the shelter and a single inscription is written on a narrow ledge facing south. The texts consist of nomina sacra and personal names, including Apa Dios (Fig. 22).

Coptic ostraca in the Elkab magazine

Two visits to the Elkab magazine on 2 and 11 Feb 2009 confirmed the location of material excavated at Hagr Edfu prior to the British Museum Expedition’s work at the site and reported by G. Gabra (1991). Some 85 Coptic ostraca are stored in a wooden box. Less than half (37) of the c. 85 ostraca are numbered in the sequence 81.000–81.050, the ‘81’ apparently recording the year of excavation. The ostraca count must remain approximate because some objects have broken into two or more fragments (e.g., 81.018, now in three fragments, two of which are numbered) and there may be additional joins (e.g., an unnumbered ostracon now in three fragments).

Only one ostracon is complete (81.001) and the rest are fragmentary. Most ostraca are inscribed with only a few incomplete lines of text. Nevertheless, it is possible to make several points. First, many of the texts are letters, some of which begin with a request in an introductory formula common in texts known from the Theban region and dating to the seventh- and eighth-century (Biedenkopf-Ziechner 1983, 216–17). Second, the titles of men whose names appear in the texts are consistent with an ecclesiastical or monastic milieu, e.g., bishop, deacon, apa, and familial terms typically used to address monks and clerics, i.e., ‘my holy father,’ and ‘your fatherhood.’ The most common name is Ammonios, appearing on up to five ostraca, once or twice as Apa. The occurrence of the name Dios twice, once as Apa, recalls the same name appearing in a dipinto in Area 1 and in an inscription in the rock-shelter. Third, the lack of extended addresses and farewells, and relative informality suggests that we are dealing with a small number of individuals who corresponded within a fairly closed group (cf. Boud’hors 1999, 4). A mention of ‘papyrus’ (chartês) on one ostracon (81.010) suggests that materials for more formal writing were available to the inhabitants of the region. The ostraca from the 1981 excavation will be the subject of an in-depth study by Anke Blöbaum.

5 For a preliminary account of the hieroglyphic inscriptions in the shelter, see Davies 2006, 134, pls. VI–VII.
Conclusion
Future work will concentrate on clarifying the chronological horizons of the site and the character of activities undertaken there in Late Antiquity.

Bibliography


Fig.1: Elkab. Plan of tomb of Bebi.
Fig. 2. Elkab. Tomb of Bekh. Decorated rear wall of tomb, now cleared.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/online_journals/bmsaes/issue_14/davies_oconnell.aspx
Fig. 3. Elkab. Plan of tomb of Senwosret.

Fig. 4: Elkab. Tomb of Senwosret. Fragment of façade.

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/online_journals/bmsaex/issue_14/davies_ochonnell.aspx
Fig. 6: Elkab. Stela emplacement of a man called Ahmose.
Fig. 7: Hagr Edfu. Tomb of Sataimau. Decoration on south wall of niche.
Fig. 8: Hagr Edfu. Tomb no. 3. Secondary decoration including hieratic inscription.

Fig. 9: Hagr Edfu. Tomb no. 3. Statues in niche.
Fig. 10: Hagr Edfu. Plan of ‘pyramid’-tomb.

Fig. 11: Hagr Edfu. Planning of the ‘pyramid’-tomb in progress.
Fig. 12. Hagr Edfu. Area 2b.

Fig. 13: Hagr Edfu. Area 2b, Tomb D. Conservation work in progress.
Fig. 14: Hagr Edfu. Area 2a, Tomb D: cross dipinto in second chamber.

Fig. 15: Hagr Edfu. Area 2c, view west.
Fig. 16: Hagr Edfu. Area 2c.
Fig. 17: Hagr Edfu. Area 2c, sections A-B, C-D, E-F, G-H, I-J.
Fig. 18: Hagr Edfu. Area 3, plan of Tomb nos. 1, 2 and 3.
Fig. 19: Hagr Edfu. Area 3, section of Tomb nos. 1 and 2.

Fig. 20: Hagr Edfu. Area 3, Tomb no. 2, view east.
Fig. 21: Hagr Edfu. Hill-top rock-shelter, view south-east.

Fig. 22: Hagr Edfu. Rock-inscriptions including the name Dios and a nomen sacrum.