

The British Museum survey of the Asyut region. Report March 2016

Submitted to the Ministry of Antiquities

The 'British Museum survey of the Asyut region' aims at documenting the pharaonic and post-pharaonic history and reconstructing the natural and archaeological environment of the Asyut region through time.

The first season took place from 7 to 24 March 2016 and was considered a test season to establish proof of concept and initiate contact with local stake holders. The team included Ilona Regulski (field director – Egyptologist), Barbara Chauvet (archaeologist), Ann-Cathrin Gabel (Egyptologist), Matjaz Kacicnik (photographer), Niazy Mustafa Mohamed (field assistant) and Khaled Abd el-Malik Abu Zeid (field assistant). The SCA inspectorate was represented by inspector Azza Abd el-Nasser Abd el-Ghrani and trainee Ali Khallaf Ali from the Egyptian department, and inspector Asraf Kamil Amin and trainee Ayat Mokhtar Osman from the Islamic section.

The work consisted of:

1. Cleaning and documentation of a section of the tell at Shutb (including collecting pottery and other finds)
2. Condition assessment in order to plan future documentation of the modern village and community engagement activities
3. General photography of the modern village and the archaeological section

Cleaning and documentation of the tell at Shutb

The first season concentrated on cleaning and documentation of a section of the tell at Shutb, in particular the area aligning Ministry's storeroom where mud brick walls are visible. In order to get a better understanding of the date of the visible remains around the magazine, the expedition opened a slope of 10m by 10m to the north-east of the magazine. The slope is labeled STW I (**Shutb Tell West, slope I**).¹

Within this slope, several horizontal sections were cleaned in order to document the different layers of habitation. The steepness of the slope forced us to create a stepped trench. At the top of the slope, the soil is crumbling; hence we left sections S01 and S02 as a buffer for stability. We subsequently cleaned sections S03 (later merged with S04), S06 and S07. S05 was also left as a barrier between the upper and lower layers for stability.

In all 3 sections, numerous mud bricks walls became visible almost immediately below the rubbish and rubble (Fig. 2). The bricks show a large variety of composition and building technique. Only few of them were burned. In between, several deposits have formed over time. Within each section, we classified the different phases of deposits into stratigraphic

¹ The word 'tell' is used in order to distinguish the archaeology work from work in the modern village of Shutb.

contexts and studied the relationship between the contexts and the walls (Fig. 3). We identified 58 contexts.

The nature of the section did not allow us to reconstruct the function of the buildings but the thickness of some of the walls suggested administrative functions. The large amounts of pottery discovered in most of the sections confirm this idea. Apart from pottery, the finds consisted of glass, bone, small metal objects (such as parts of furniture or clothing) and some hand-made statuettes. All finds, including pottery, were collected according to context, cleaned and stored per context in cotton bags or boxes in the Shutb storeroom. Study of the pottery (in October 2016), in particular, should provide dates for the sections/contexts.

Each section was drawn to scale 1:20. A profile drawing of the entire slope was made to scale 1:20.

Documentation of the modern village of Shutb

Documentation of the post-pharaonic history of the Asyut region started with surveys and photo-documentation of vernacular architecture in the village of Shutb (Fig. 5). Through a number of site visits, a team from Takween Integrated Community Development explored the entire perimeter of the old village, mainly corresponding to its administrative boundary 'Dāyir Al-Naḥya', and performed a survey of alleyways and inner streets. The initial survey aimed at exploring the urban fabric of the village, assessing the condition of the vernacular architecture and plan more detailed work and community engagement activities for the future.

The team focused on locating the significant vernacular buildings, including facades and certain architectural elements within the buildings. Besides mapping, the site visits incorporated photographic documentation of the selected buildings, facades and elements, and collecting information on the main characteristics in terms of the building typology, type of construction, state of conservation, state of integrity and use. The site visits also aimed at gaining understanding of the main stakeholders, the previous and current upgrading/public projects, and the challenges facing the village and its community. The mission resulted in a preliminary condition assessment report.

The team introduced the aim of the project and the scope of works to the *umda* (mayor) of *Shutb* and the governor of Asyut. Both were very supportive and cooperative. The *umda* talked about the collectively shared history of the village and its current social and urban composition while highlighting the main opportunities and challenges encountered by the local community. He also recommended a couple of references to help *Takween's* team in their study of the modern history of *Shutb*.

During the survey, inhabitants of the village mentioned an older *Shutb*, to the south of the current village. These stories perhaps relate to a 1826 map on which the French surveyors indicated two *Shutb's*. The latter has disappeared under modern fields but should be located in the area between modern *Shutb* and *Qerqares*. We hope to receive permission to survey and measure this area with non-destructible methods next time.

Finally, *Takween's* team assisted Ilona Regulski in a lecture for inspectors of the Ministry of

Antiquities to introduce the project and elaborate on the work, the preliminary findings, and the expected future activities and plans.

The photography was done by Matjaz Kacicnik.

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Figures

Fig. 1: general view of the slope STW I



Fig. 2: view on S03 with mud brick walls



Fig. 3: contexts in S06



Fig. 4: pottery



Fig. 5: vernacular architecture in Shutb