

The British Museum survey of the Asyut region. Report October 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 second field season took place from 4 to 27 October 2016 and included Ilona Regulski (field director – Egyptologist), Mohamed Soliman (Islamic Section, Ministry of Antiquities), Judith Collis (geologist), Ann-Cathrin Gabel (Egyptologist), Adel Farouk (augur specialist), Sylvie Marchand (pottery specialist), Khaled Bahaa (illustrator), Niazy Mustafa Mohamed (field assistant), Khaled Abd el-Malik Abu Zeid (field assistant), Mohamed Abosira (architect), Heba Omar (architect), Amina Salama (architect), and Yussef Halim (architect). The Ministry of Antiquities inspectorate was represented by inspector Ayman Ahmed Salim.

The work consisted of the following components:

1. Geo-archaeological survey of the landscape (by augur hand drill)
2. Study of the pottery of the March 2016 season (including drawing course)
3. Documentation of the modern village of Shutb

Geo-archaeological study of the landscape (by augur hand drill)

Inspection of the maps in the Description de L'Égypte and the modern Google Earth satellite images suggests that there are a number of occupation mounds (or kôms) in the Asyut-Shutb area: Asyut, Shutb, Musha, Rifeh, and Qerqares. Through auguring, the project hopes to (1) identify the periods at which the settlement of ancient Shashotep (modern Shutb) was occupied, (2) define the boundary of the ancient town at different periods, and (3) delineate the relationship between the town and the surrounding landscape.

A number of sites were selected to investigate with an augur hand-drill (see Figs. 1-2):

AS01: Outside North-East corner of the magazine

AS02: In fields to south of school and town mound

AS03: Behind farm north of Shutb.

AS04: Inside magazine enclosure to south near packing crates.

AS05: Field to the E of the village (belongs to the family of one of our workmen) where there are still fields on a low level.

AS06: Field SE of the village, just over the canal. Turn right before crossing the railway.

AS07: Field just to the west of the site (in walking distance to the SW corner of the magazine). The floor level is lower than the archaeological site.

AS08: Threshing floor close to the farm of the 'pink balcony'.

AS09: Farm land between Shutb and Qerqares. This field outside was chosen because an 1826 French map indicates two Shutb's. The existence of a second Shutb is also suggested by stories in the village, which suggest that the population of Shutb moved to another place at a certain time.

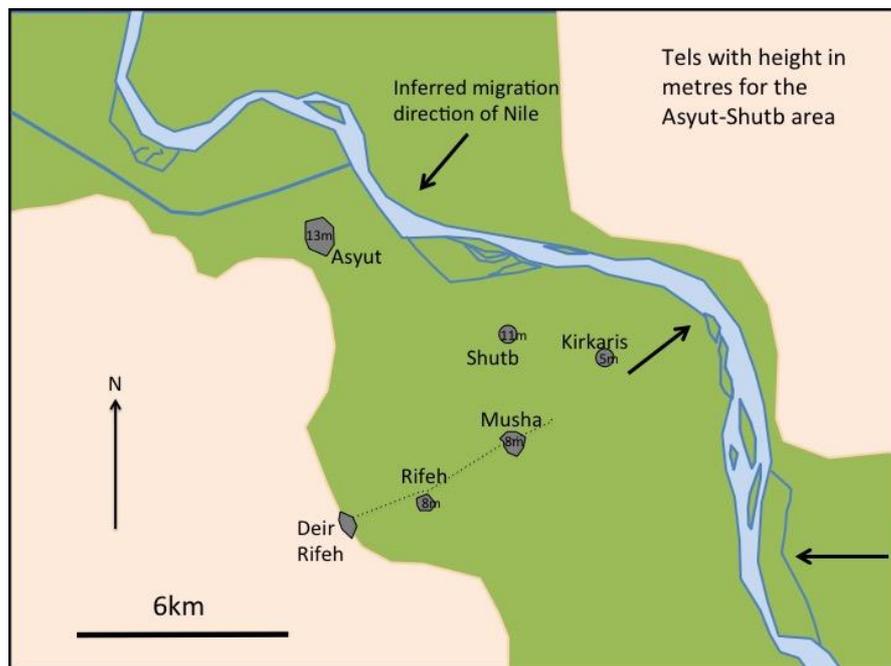
AS10: Field to the NE of the tell below the railway.

AS11: Field to the SW of the magazine, just next to the canal.

Most of the cores yielded pottery and other evidence of habitation, which helps us to define the boundaries of the ancient city. The results need more study but the auguring suggest that the ancient city stretched in south-western direction, i.e. the city gradually migrated north-east.

Future seasons

The former basin divide and h \hat{o} d boundaries as records of former Nile behaviour is not available in this area since it appears to have been laid out in a grid of fields around 200m square more recently, possibly during the Islamic period. This new grid covers the ancient structure of the landscape. Future auguring on either side of such divides, known from ancient maps, could determine whether sediments on one side suggest greater accumulation of water than the other. To test this hypothesis a SW-NE line of boreholes can be made to the west of Shutb between there and Musha.



The planned waste water project

The planned waste water project which connects the village to a central sewage system could reveal archaeological layers if pipes are laid out deeper than 2 meters. In addition, the sudden change in soil humidity will cause instability to the foundation of the houses on the tell resulting in cracks in the walls. However, the project will improve the living conditions of the villagers. Stopping this project would jeopardise the relationship between the village and

stake holders concerned with the preservation of the site, including the magazine. Without the cooperation of the people of Shutb, the site cannot be preserved or researched. In cooperation with the local inspectorate, we are working on a plan to modify the impact of this work on the archaeology and to provide consultancy for documenting any layers or archaeology that will be revealed by the waste water project.

Study of the pottery of the March 2016 season

Sylvie Marchand (Ifao) studied the pottery of the first season during which a 10-10m section was made in the kôm at Shutb to the north-east of the magazine. The slope was labeled STW I (Shutb Tell West, slope I). Sixty contexts in five horizontal sections produced 56 bags of pottery. Khaled Zaza (previous illustrator of the Ifao) made the drawings.

The aim of the study is to establish and understand the significant chronological occupation phases of the trench we investigated in March. The study will also allow us to determine the nature and function of the pottery. More generally, this initial study enhances our knowledge of ceramic history of the Asyut region.

Two chronological periods dominated the documentation: (1) the Third Intermediate Period (TIP) and beginning of the Saite period (26th Dynasty) and (2) the Byzantine period (5th until the beginning of the 7th century AD) (cf. tableau &3). The latter period is the best attested one and yielded most of the material. A third period, which is present in all the sections and contexts, although less pronounced, is the 'modern' era (end Ottoman - twentieth century). Lastly, some Ptolemaic, Roman and the first three centuries of the Arabic era are attested in some contexts. Their numbers are minimal when compared to the abundant Byzantine pottery. The low density of Ptolemaic, Roman and early Islamic ware is surprising.

Whether local or imported, most of the Byzantine and medieval pottery can be identified as domestic pottery: wine amphora, tableware for cooking, food preparation, storage, and transportation, and dishes, baking trays, and lamps. Some of these examples are beautifully decorated. The Pharaonic pottery is much less varied and specialized in its functions. We distinguished some major functional groups, such as (transport) containers, vessels for food preparation or cooking and presentational ware. We also observe several examples of ware imported from other regions in Egypt, such as the 'Qena ware' produced in the Theban region. The more modern phase dating to the Ottoman period until the 20th century consist of oven trays, glazed table ware in alluvial red fabric, and 'zirs'.

Documentation of the modern village of Shutb

A survey carried out in March 2016 resulted in a number of maps indicating significant vernacular architectural examples including buildings, facades or certain elements within the buildings (Fig. 4). In October 2016, a team of 4 architects started with the documentation of the vernacular architecture; a summary of housing typologies and public spaces and measured drawings of floor plans and street front elevations of selected structures.

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Figures



Fig. 1: working on bore hole AS06

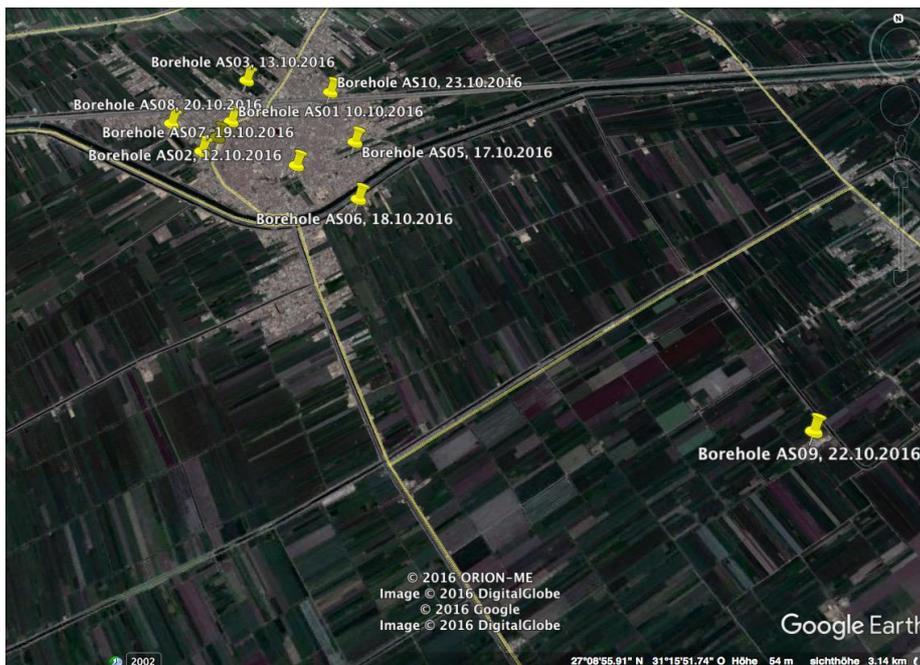


Fig. 2: map with bore holes



Fig. 3: pottery



Fig. 4: vernacular architecture in Shutb