

LIFE IN THE NEW KINGDOM TOWN OF SAI ISLAND: SOME NEW PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract

Current fieldwork in the Pharaonic town upon Sai Island is focusing both on living conditions and on the general layout of the town during the New Kingdom. The present paper summarises results of the work in excavation areas SAV1 North and SAV1 East, with a focus on aspects of the material culture, particularly the ceramics. Pottery, selected small finds and tools will be presented in relation to objects found in association with them, architecture and past human actions. The potential of this analysis of material culture to inform the question of a 'Nubian' or 'Egyptian' lifestyle within New Kingdom fortified towns in Upper Nubia, such as Sai, is discussed. The artefacts and ceramics testify to an obvious co-existence between Egyptians and Nubians, from the foundation of the town in early Dynasty 18 through the remainder of the New Kingdom. As this paper aims to illustrate, the present state of knowledge allows a reconstruction of some patterns of the lifestyle and living conditions at one of the key sites in Upper Nubia.

Introduction

New evidence for life in the Pharaonic town of Sai Island has come to light during recent excavations (2008–12) by the Sai Island Archaeological Mission (SIAM) of Charles-de-Gaulle – Lille 3 University, at a site labelled SAV1 North (Doyen 2009; Budka and Doyen 2012–13), and since 2013, through the European Research Council Project AcrossBorders (Budka 2013). The AcrossBorders project will focus on, first, assessing, at a micro-level, the multi-faceted lives of the occupants and the question of 'Nubian' vs. 'Egyptian' lifestyle; and second, understanding Sai within the broader perspective of New Kingdom Egypt and Nubia, through comparison with other sites, both Nubian and Egyptian, particularly Elephantine and the Nebpehtira Ahmose town at South Abydos. A new excavation area within the town, SAV1 East, was opened in 2013 and added important knowledge concerning the general layout of the town.

The present paper summarises results of the work conducted both at SAV1 North and at SAV1 East, which reflects the rapid development of Sai Island in early Dynasty 18: by the reign of Thutmose III, Sai had become one of the most important Egyptian centres in Upper Nubia.

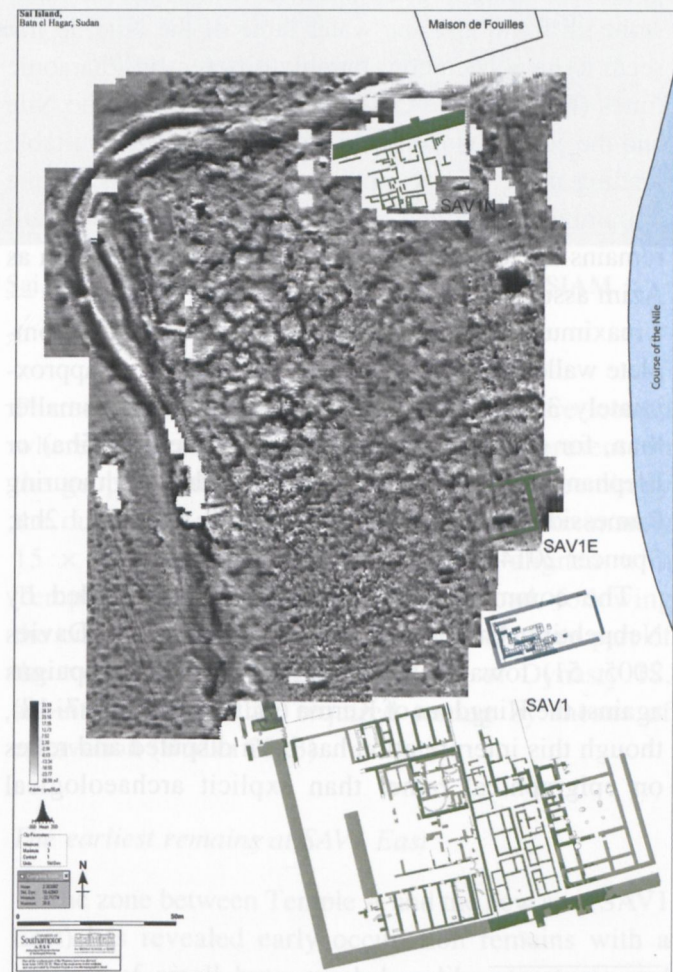


Fig. 1: The Pharaonic town of Sai Island with excavated areas SAV1, SAV1 North and SAV1 East. Greyscale image of the magnetometer survey results (British School at Rome/University of Southampton), illustrating the main areas of excavations (SAV1 from Adenstedt 2013 after Azim 1975).

The Pharaonic town of Sai: the key architectural remains

A Pharaonic town (Fig. 1) was built on the eastern bank of the island during the New Kingdom in the typical form of an Egyptian fortified settlement (cf. Kemp 1972, 651–6), featuring an orthogonal layout, domestic and administrative buildings, large magazines, a sandstone temple for Amun and an enclosure wall surrounding the site (Azim 1975; Doyen 2009). The eastern part of the walled town is more or less unknown. Former researchers assumed that this area had been lost because the cliff towards the Nile had collapsed since antiquity (Azim 1975, 94; Geus 2004, 115, fig. 89; Morris 2005, 86, fig. 13; Doyen 2009, 18), but recent archaeological fieldwork suggests that this was not the case, even if the state of preservation of the Dynasty 18 remains close to the river is very poor. According to geologist Erich Draganits, the sandstone cliff and also the water table of the Nile do not seem to have been considerably different in Pharaonic times (Fig. 2).¹ The current curved course of the Nile and the eastern slope could have represented a suitable landing place, if not a proper harbour. All in all, the maximum extent and area covered by the town still remains unclear, but the 140m east–west dimension as Azim assumed (1975, 120) is no longer sustainable — a maximum width of 120m can be supposed. The complete walled town therefore covered an area of approximately 3ha (30,000m²),² being considerably smaller than, for example, Sesebi (5.4ha), Buhen (3.55ha) or Elephantine (4.5ha)³, but larger than the neighbouring Ramesside town of Amara West (108 × 108m, 1.2ha; Spencer 2014, 44).

The common view is that Sai was founded by Nebpehtira Ahmose⁴ as a ‘bridgehead’ (e.g. Davies 2005, 51) towards the south and for the campaigns against the Kingdom of Kerma (cf. Kahn 2013, 17–18), though this interpretation has been disputed and relies on epigraphical rather than explicit archaeological

evidence (Doyen 2009; Budka 2011; Gabolde 2011–12). As around two-thirds of the New Kingdom fortified town remain unexplored, a detailed assessment of the town’s evolution is not possible at present. The areas investigated so far are the following (see Fig. 1):

1. The southern part (SAV1), comprising a temple (Temple A) built by Thutmose III and a residential quarter, investigated by a French mission in the 1950s and 1970s (Azim 1975; Vercoutter 1986, 12–14).
2. The zone around Temple A, excavated in the 1970s (Azim and Carlotti 2011–12).
3. An area along the northern enclosure wall (SAV1 North) (Doyen 2009; 2014; Budka and Doyen 2012–13).

The earliest strata at SAV1 North (Levels 5 and 4), potentially crucial for identifying when the town was founded, comprise scarce architectural remains with associated occupation levels. The sequence of the beginning of Egyptian occupation on Sai is therefore hard to reconstruct in this area (Budka and Doyen 2012–13, fig. 3) and mostly relies on the ceramic evidence (Budka, *in press*). Nonetheless, the results from SAV1 North mirror the evidence from Azim’s work in the southern part of the walled town, indicating that the Pharaonic settlement was built in stages. The appearance of substantial architecture in SAV1 North Level 3 represents the major building phase at the site when the enclosure wall with bastions was built: the ceramic evidence suggests this occurred during mid-Dynasty 18, i.e. in the reign of Thutmose III and later (Budka and Doyen 2012–13). This is consistent with the date when the sandstone temple was constructed (Azim and Carlotti 2011–12).

¹ Draganits conducted a geological survey in January 2014 as part of the AcrossBorders project, confirming that the present outline of both Nile and Nubian sandstone cliff are comparable to the situation in the New Kingdom (a complete report will be published elsewhere); possible remains of the eastern enclosure wall will be sought in future excavations.

² This is the updated state of research based on the geological information from the survey in 2014 (see note 1); Budka and Doyen 2012–13 still give 3,400m² as the size of the town, a number which has to be corrected.

³ Town sizes according to Uphill 1988, 66.

⁴ A designation taking into account the recent finds from Karnak; see Biston-Moulin 2012, esp. 66.



Fig. 2: The sandstone cliff and eastern edge of the town of Sai, view towards east. Photo: B.-N. Chagny, © SIAM.

Several cemeteries contemporaneous with the New Kingdom town are known on Sai Island. The two main cemeteries are located south of the town site, designated as SAC5 and SACP1 (Vercoutter 1986, 14; Minault-Gout and Thill 2012). Another cemetery (SAC4), with Egyptian-style funerary architecture and assemblages yet with strong links to the Kerma Culture, is situated further towards the north of the island but awaits a full investigation (Gratien 1985; 2002).

New fieldwork of the AcrossBorders project: SAV1 East

Aiming to achieve a more complete understanding of the layout of the Dynasty 18 occupation at Sai, a new excavation area was opened in 2013 (SAV1 East), 30–50m north of Temple A at the eastern edge of the

Pharaonic town (Fig. 3). The new squares are located where very promising anomalies were present on the geophysical survey map (see Fig. 1),⁵ seemingly the outline of an orthogonal building, approximately 15 × 10m in area. The structure is aligned with Temple A and the main north–south road, following the orientation of the buildings in the southern part of the town (SAV1), suggesting a date of Dynasty 18, an interpretation that required testing by means of excavation (Budka 2013).

The earliest remains at SAV1 East

The zone between Temple A and the new site (SAV1 East) has revealed early occupation remains with a number of small huts, workshop-like structures and storage facilities. They have recently been published by

⁵ The magnetometer survey was conducted by Sophie Hay and Nicolas Crabb, British School at Rome and the University of

Southampton; I am grateful to Didier Devauchelle and the SIAM for the possibility to use these data.



Fig. 3: Aerial view of the eastern part of the Pharaonic town, with SAV1 North and SAV1 East, looking south.

Photo: B.-N. Chagny, © SIAM.

the late Michel Azim (Azim 2011–12). He clearly shows that the remains are earlier than the stone temple, thus pre-dating Thutmose III. Azim even proposed a dating prior to the New Kingdom, based on Kerma ceramics found associated with the structures and through comparison with similar structures at the Kerma village of Gism el-Arba (see Gratien 1995; Gratien et al. 2003; Gratien et al. 2003–8).

As the pottery of this excavation is unfortunately not available for re-evaluation of this assessment and dating, it is significant that we discovered evidence allowing us to link the new site SAV1 East with the surroundings of Temple A. In the southern part of SAV1 East, a small plaster-coated installation, set directly upon the sloping natural gravel, was discovered (feature 14, Fig. 4). This well-preserved storage bin was concealed by debris and resembles in size and building technique the silos unearthed by Azim below the temple level. Feature 14 still held two complete pottery vessels *in situ* (Fig. 5) allowing a dating to early

Dynasty 18 rather than the Second Intermediate Period (Budka 2013, 82).

Within feature 14 and its surroundings several fragments of Kerma vessels in the local Nubian tradition have been found, but the associated Egyptian material allows a close dating of these Kerma sherds to the early Dynasty 18 up to Thutmose III. Consequently, it has to be stressed that there is no evidence for pre-Dynasty 18 occupation at SAV1 East: there is no Kerma level pre-dating the Egyptian occupation in this area of the Pharaonic town. As at SAV1 North, the earliest remains in the parts of the town so far exposed date back to the time span of Nebpehtira Ahmose up to Thutmose I (Budka, *in press*).

The large building complex at SAV1 East

In the northern area of SAV1 East regular outlines filled with sand were revealed just below the surface: these are the negative outlines visible on the results of

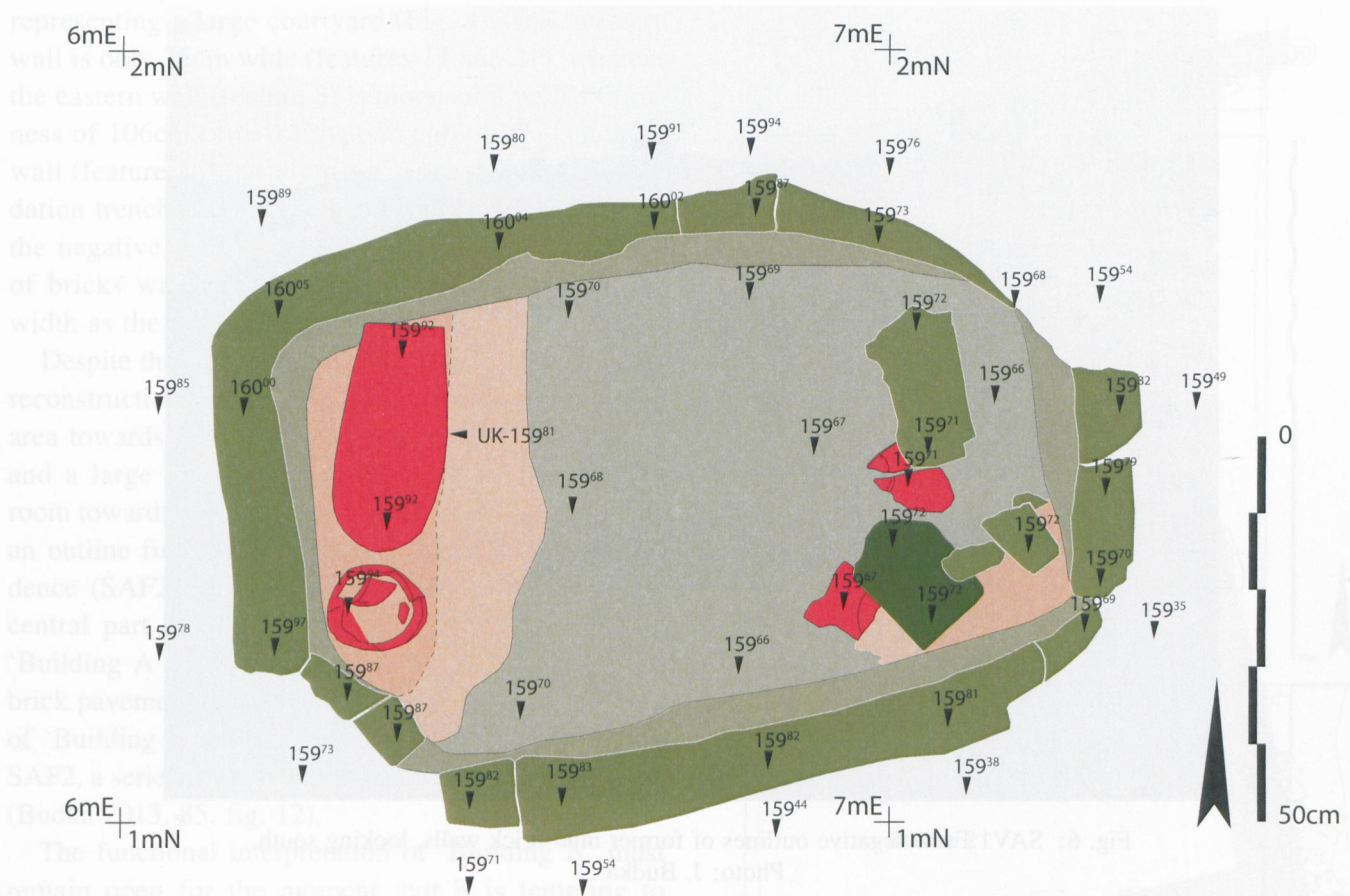


Fig. 4: Plan of feature 14 with *in situ* vessels. Original drawing: D. Köther.

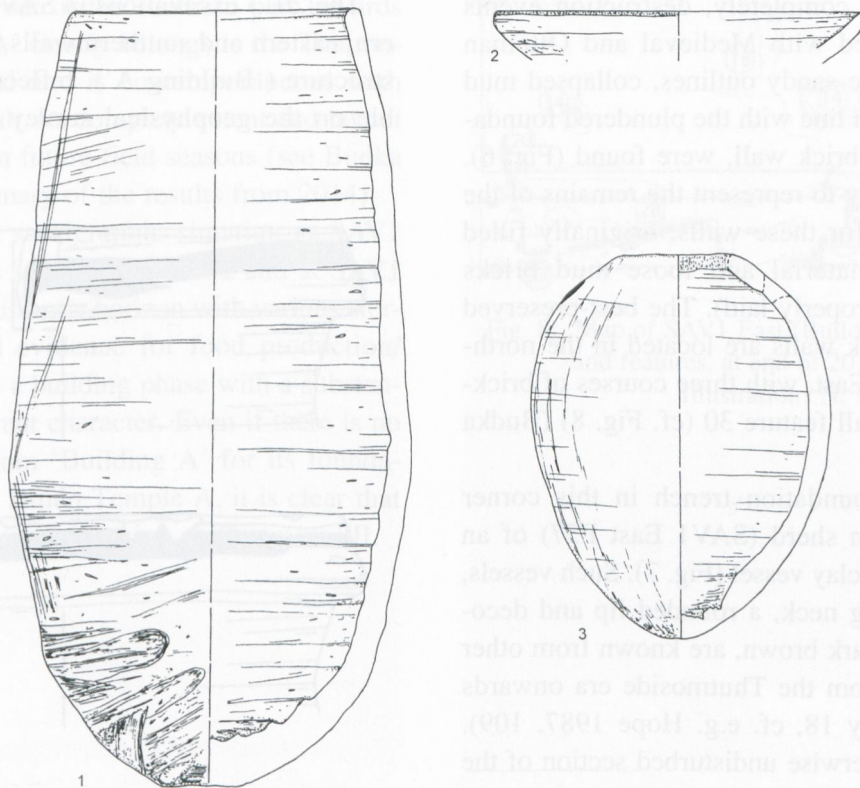


Fig. 5: Ceramic vessels from feature 14. Scale 1:2. Illustration: J. Budka.



Fig. 6: SAV1 East, negative outlines of former mud-brick walls, looking south.
Photo; J. Budka.

the magnetometer survey (Fig. 1). The Pharaonic building material once forming the walls has been hacked away almost completely, destruction events that can be associated with Medieval and Ottoman times. Adjacent to the sandy outlines, collapsed mud bricks, more or less in line with the plundered foundation part of the mud-brick wall, were found (Fig. 6). These bricks are likely to represent the remains of the foundation trenches for these walls, originally filled with loose gravel material and loose mud bricks (thrown in and not properly laid). The best-preserved parts of the mud-brick walls are located in the north-east corner of SAV1 East, with three courses of brickwork preserved of wall feature 30 (cf. Fig. 8) (Budka 2013, 84–5, fig. 10).

An undisturbed foundation trench in this corner yielded a painted rim sherd (SAV1 East P57) of an Upper Egyptian Marl clay vessel (Fig. 7). Such vessels, with a slightly flaring neck, a rounded lip and decorated with bands in dark brown, are known from other contexts in Egypt, from the Thutmoside era onwards (mid- to late Dynasty 18, cf. e.g. Hope 1987, 109). Found within the otherwise undisturbed section of the foundation trench of wall 30, this vessel therefore provides a Dynasty 18 (but not earlier than Thutmose III)

dating for 'Building A', a substantial structure located in SAV1 East (Budka 2013, 84).

The 2013 excavations in SAV1 East exposed northern, eastern and southern walls forming a rectangular structure ('Building A'), reflecting the features visible on the geophysical survey map and most likely

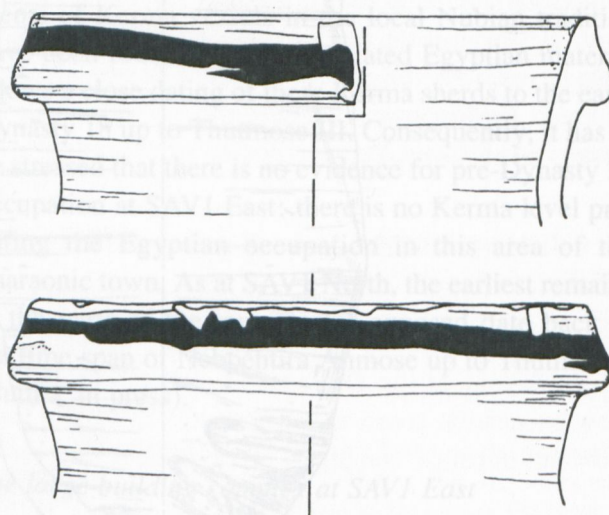


Fig. 7: Rim sherd SAV1E P57 from the foundation trench for wall 30. Scale 1:2. Illustration: J. Budka.

representing a large courtyard (Fig. 8). The northern wall is only 75cm wide (features 13 and 21), whereas the eastern wall (feature 3) is more solid with a thickness of 106cm or two Egyptian cubits. The southern wall (feature 16) has almost disappeared — its foundation trench was exposed in some parts, adjacent to the negative outline of the wall. In one area a layer of bricks was still in place and confirms the same width as the northern wall (75cm).

Despite the building's fragmentary state, a tentative reconstruction of 'Building A' is possible: a roofed area towards the north with a mud floor (feature 22) and a large courtyard probably flanked by a lateral room towards the east, as indicated by feature 30. Such an outline finds a close parallel in the so-called residence (SAF2) in the southern part of the town. The central part of SAF2 is not a courtyard like that of 'Building A', but a large columned hall with a mud-brick pavement (Azim 1975, 100–3). The western part of 'Building A' was not excavated in 2013, but as in SAF2, a series of small entrance rooms can be expected (Budka 2013, 85, fig. 12).

The functional interpretation of 'Building A' must remain open for the moment, but it is tempting to assume an administrative role like SAF2 or a possible connection to Temple A.⁶ With the new excavations at SAV1 East it is now possible to suggest an extension of the orthogonal layout of the southern part towards the north. 'Building A' clearly belongs to the Thutmose modelling of Sai and is contemporaneous with Level 3 at SAV1 North. Its complete extent and layout will be investigated in future field seasons (see Budka 2014 for a short summary of the results from 2014).

In conclusion, the stratigraphic situation at SAV1 East mirrors both the sequence at SAV1 and at SAV1 North: scattered remains of a horizon with various storage installations and evidence for food production/consumption pre-date a building phase with a substantial structure of different character. Even if there is no inscribed evidence from 'Building A' for its foundation, as in the nearby Amun Temple A, it is clear that this second phase dates to the reign of Thutmose III.

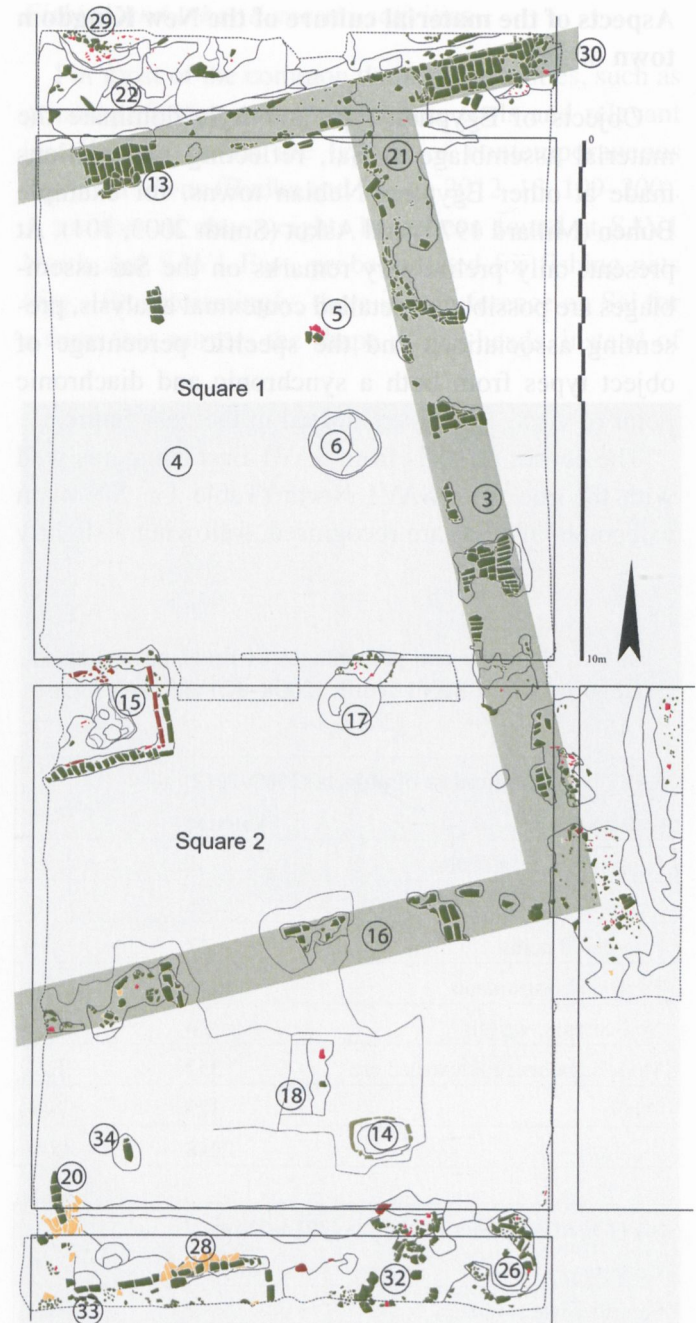


Fig. 8: Map of SAV1 East (Building A) with all squares and features, at end of 2013 field season.

Illustration: N. Math.

⁶ Further data for this interpretation, especially for functional aspects connected with storage and bread-baking, came to light during excavations in 2014 (see Budka 2014) and will be published elsewhere.

Aspects of the material culture of the New Kingdom town of Sai

Objects of Egyptian type and style dominate the material assemblage at Sai, reflecting observations made at other Egyptian-Nubian towns, for example Buhen (Millard 1979) and Askut (Smith 2003, 101). At present, only preliminary remarks on the Sai assemblages are possible. A detailed contextual analysis, presenting associations and the specific percentage of object types from both a synchronic and diachronic point of view, will be conducted in the near future.

The corpus of finds from SAV1 East compares well with the one from SAV1 North (Table 1).⁷ Six main categories of finds are recognised, following a slightly

Table 1: Number and percentages of finds, according to categories, from SAV1 North (2008–12) and SAV1 East (2013–14).

SAV1 North - number of objects (2008–2012)		
Category	Amount	%
Figurines and statuettes	71	3%
Personal adornment	85	4%
Household items	47	2%
Tools and instruments	1340	60%
Non-ceramic vessels	24	1%
Models, games, unidentified etc.	352	16%
Other	329	14%
	2248	100%

SAV1 East - number of objects (2013–2014)		
Category	Amount	%
Figurines and statuettes	7	0.6%
Personal adornment	21	2%
Household items	57	5.1%
Tools and instruments	813	72%
Non-ceramic vessels	40	3.5%
Models, games, unidentified etc.	24	2.1%
Other (slag...)	166	14.7%
	1128	100%

modified system developed by Giddy for Memphis (Giddy 1999; see also Budka and Doyen 2012–13, 182–8).

1. *Figurines and statuettes*: Manufactured in clay and mud, figurines in both human and animal shapes are attested in various sizes and qualities (covering 3% of the finds from SAV1 North, 0.6 % from SAV1 East).
2. *Personal adornment*: Beads are attested in various shapes (disc/ring, conical, drum-, barrel- and tube-shaped) and in a range of materials. Some of the larger and more irregularly shaped ones may actually represent pendants and/or amulets (4% at SAV1 North, 2% at SAV1 East).
3. *Household items*: This group comprises mostly large rectangular stands and basin-like installations in clay but also mud sealings and other objects (2% at SAV1 North, 5.1% at SAV1 East).
4. *Tools and instruments*: (60% of the finds at SAV1 North, 72% at SAV1 East. The largest group comprise stone tools: weights, querns, grinders, hammer stones, pounders and pestles and multi-purpose tools (cf. Giddy 1999, pls 39–50; Prell 2011). Re-used sherds, mostly designed as scrapers, are also frequently encountered.
5. *Non-ceramic vessels*: A small number of stone and faience vessels were excavated in fragmented condition in the New Kingdom town of Sai from all excavation areas (1% at SAV1 North, 3.5% at SAV1 East).
6. *Models, games and unidentified pieces*: These comprise 16% of the finds from SAV1 North, but only 2.1% from SAV1 East.⁸ Small tokens or pottery discs of unclear function (Giddy 1999, pls 72–3) and miniature balls in both fired and unfired clay fall into this category. A large number of model balls from Tell el-Amarna provide parallels to the

⁷ Table 1 gives preliminary numbers based on the object database which are not yet conclusive for the New Kingdom structures — the total of 2,397 finds from SAV1 North and 1,128 pieces from SAV1 East includes all periods, thus also post-Pharaonic material.

⁸ The high number from SAV1 North is at least partly due to the fact that a large amount of finds were simply classified as 'artefact' (334 pieces) during the course of the French excavation, and remain to be studied in more detail.

ones from SAV1 North (Arnst 2006; Stevens 2006, 112–15). One remarkable piece, discovered during the early French excavations in magazine SAF5 of the southern part of the town, is a small ball (SAV1 003, $5.1 \times 4.7 \times 4.6$ cm) bearing a minimum of seventeen impressions from a finger ring with a scarab giving the throne name of Thutmose III, Menkheperre, with the epithet *ntr ʿ3* (Fig. 9). Two exact parallels for such a scarab are known from Sai, having been found in tomb 25 at SAC5 (Minault-Gout and Thill 2012, 263–4, T25P14 and T25P17). Clay balls like SAV1 003 may contain human hair and are connected with magical purposes (Arnst 2006).

Despite the close parallels of the material remains from Sai with those found in towns located in Egypt (Memphis, Tell el-Amarna, Elephantine etc.), there are also some differences. For example, moulds for small faience objects, very commonly attested at Egyptian sites (cf. Giddy 1999, 243–50, pls 53–4 with various parallels), are completely missing. Obviously there was no faience production at Sai Island during the New Kingdom.



Fig. 9: Clay ball with seal-impressions SAV1 003.
Photo: J. Budka.

Fishing and other domestic activities

For most of the common domestic activities, such as grinding, fishing and spinning, the tools and relevant installations at Sai are typical of contemporaneous Egyptian towns (Budka and Doyen 2012–13, 199–200). A number of clay weights have been found at SAV1 North and SAV1 East, probably used for fishing nets (Fig. 10); interestingly, there is a preference on Sai for a form that mirrors the shape of axe-heads, instead of



Fig. 10: Fired clay net weight SAV1 East 119.
Photo: N. Bozet.

the re-used sherds common in Egypt (von Pilgrim 1996, 279, fig. 123), but only attested in small numbers at SAVI North (Budka and Doyen 2012–13, 200). This might indicate a centralised organisation of the distribution of these objects rather than an *ad hoc* production. A similar situation at Askut was interpreted by Smith as reflecting a ‘centralized system of food production’ (Smith 2003, 101). One might add here that according to the Nauri decree, fishing rights were owned by temples (cf. Morkot 1995, 177), and restricted access to fishing devices could correspond to this.

In one of the small Thutmoside houses at SAVI North, N12 (Fig. 11), typical domestic installations are well preserved (Budka and Doyen 2012–13, 176–7). All the installations are small in scale: a quern emplacement (N16), finding a number of parallels such as the examples at Tell el-Amarna and Elephantine; a circular silo (N17); two rectangular storage bins with coated surfaces (N19 and N20); and a small oven room in the rear of the structure. All of the features within N12 seem to be related to the preparation of bread, particularly flour — the (long-term) storing of grain (N17), the temporary storing of grain ready to be processed (N19 and N20) and finally the grinding implements to produce flour (N16).

Utilitarian pottery shapes include both vessels imported from Egypt and locally produced variants, thus obviously reflecting a local demand. Locally made products could replace original Egyptian imports when the latter were no longer functional. Objects such as spinning bowls and so-called fish dishes are foreign to the local Nubian culture, yet are well represented in the corpus of Sai. Re-cut sherds with a disc-shape and a central perforation might have functioned at least partly as spindle whorls⁹ and, together with the spinning bowls, suggest that spinning took place on Sai (cf. Kemp and Vogelsang-Eastwood 2001).¹⁰ The distribution of finds points towards a concentration of such activity in the area of SAVI North.

Large quantities of stone tools from Sai can be associated with grinding. Querns, pounders and hammer

stones find comparisons in Egypt settlement sites, but are also present in the indigenous tradition (from Neolithic times onwards, see Krzyżaniak 2004; cf. Kerma contexts on Sai: Gratien 1986, 47, fig. 28; 50, fig. 31; 51, fig. 32c and *passim*; for settlement finds see Gratien 1999, 11). The very high number of mills and grinding stones (562 mills/grinding stones from SAVI North and 382 grinding stones from SAVI East) indicates that these were not only used for cereal grinding, but also fulfilled a multi-functional purpose. Some of the mills are probably connected with extracting gold from quartz stones (cf. Klemm and Klemm 2013, 8–11, fig. 1.7),¹¹ while others show traces of pigments (cf. Storemyr et al. 2013, 230). The numerous pounders (320 from SAVI North, 189 from SAVI East) are perhaps associated with the grinding stones and their cutting and trimming (cf. Budka and Doyen 2012–13; Storemyr et al. 2013, 230).

The assumption that grinding stones were used for several purposes seems to be supported by the insignificant number of functional ceramics associated with bread production at SAVI North. Conical bread moulds, more common for temple and ritual contexts (cf. Rose 2007, HC 2, 288), are almost absent, whereas flat bread trays are somewhat more common. On the contrary, at SAVI East, hundreds of examples of this typical offering pottery were unearthed (Fig. 12). It seems likely that this is related to Temple A or maybe associated with the general temple administration — ‘Building A’ might have housed one of the temple bakeries (see Budka 2014).

Domestic rituals and private religion

Objects from the settlement at Sai cover a large spectrum of functions, from personal items and tools to storage and food production, but references to fertility and religious acts are also present. Multi-faceted and variable private religious practices are to be expected in an Egyptian town of the New Kingdom, as was demonstrated by Stevens for Tell el-Amarna (2006). Rebirth

⁹ Close parallels are known from Tell el-Amarna: Kemp and Vogelsang-Eastwood 2001, 277, fig. 8.6; see Budka and Doyen 2012–13, 200 with n. 226.

¹⁰ Possible clay and stone loom-weights of longitudinal, pentagonal or rhomboid shape pierced at one end have also been found at SAVI North and SAVI East, but these tools are not straightforward in their interpretation: a multi-functional use is most likely.

¹¹ Large grinding stones with a single concave working surface, often with a deep depression in the centre, have been found in SAVI North and SAVI East and are visible in considerable numbers on the surface of the town area (see Klemm and Klemm 2013, 570–2).



Fig. 11: House N12, SAVI North, square 190/2260, view to northeast. Photo: F. Doyen, © SIAM.

and creative aspects formed important issues not only in funerary and cultic contexts, but also within settlements and daily life. Several categories of objects from Sai fall into this category (see Budka and Doyen 2012–13, 183–7): the rudimentary female figurines and other figurines, faience Nun-bowls and also specific ceramic vessels like duckbowls and feminoform vessels (see Budka 2016). Especially remarkable are small clay balls from SAVI North, which may be related to the ritual of the first haircut (Arnst 2006). SAVI 003 has been sealed for apotropaic reasons with a common finger ring referring to Thutmose III (see Fig. 9), a king who was especially popular in Nubia and to whom godlike features were attributed both in official temple cult and in domestic contexts (cf. Budka 2001, 53–4; Spencer 2014, 48).

Regeneration is also closely related to ancestor cult and the commemoration of individuals. At Amara West



Fig. 12: Examples of conical bread moulds from SAVI East (SAVIE P66). Photo: J. Budka.

and Sesebi anthropoid busts attest to the invocation of ancestors within the houses (Spencer 2014, 49), while domestic shrines have been identified at Askut and Mirgissa (cf. Smith 2003, 124–33). No such installations have been identified to date at Sai, though pot

stands and footed bowls with a gypsum coating have been found at Sai (Budka and Doyen 2012–13, 201), which might be related to such shrines (cf. Smith 2003, 127, fig. 5.25; Stevens 2006, 193–4).

Household items and the identity of their users

One of our main objectives is to evaluate lifestyle in the New Kingdom town of Sai, on the basis of the material culture, and thereafter compare this with data from sites in Egypt itself. Can typical household inventories attested at Sai be classified as ‘Egyptian’, as ‘Nubian’, as ‘Egyptianised’, or something else? Theoretical approaches highlighting considerable problems connected with ‘postulating hybridity from changes in the material culture’ (Pappa 2013, 36) have recently been applied to Nubian case-studies (Spencer 2014). Individual choices and group dynamics may sometimes be more significant than cultural identities (cf. Spencer 2014, 47). If one takes these aspects into account, household activities such as food preparation offer much information in respect of lifestyle.

For Egyptian sites in Nubia it seems essential to study the craft specialisation of functional ceramics associated with cooking and to make a distinction between wheel-made and hand-made pottery. However, both aspects are complex and hard to categorise. For example, some Nile clay pottery vessels from SAV1 North have been modelled on Egyptian types but were locally produced, sometimes with a ‘Nubian’ influence as far as the surface treatment, production technique or decoration is concerned. The appearance of such hybrid types — Egyptian types made of Nubian fabrics, shaped by hand rather than wheel-thrown, or with a Nubian surface treatment like ripple burnishing and incised decoration — is very significant, but not straightforward to explain (cf. Pappa 2013, 36–7). It remains to be investigated whether such pots are products of a temporary or local fashion, whether they refer to the cultural identity of their users, or whether they are the results of more complicated processes. All in all, they seem to attest a complex mixture of lifestyles at Sai.

The general coexistence of Egyptian (wheel-made) and Nubian (hand-made) pottery traditions on Sai Island finds many parallels at other Upper Nubian New Kingdom sites (cf. Smith 2002; Smith 2003, 43–53; Spencer 2014, 55). A Nubian component is traceable at both sectors recently excavated in the New Kingdom town, SAV1 East and SAV1 North (cf. Budka, in press). Hand-made cooking pots, but also some fine wares (cups and beakers) are well attested, especially in the early levels (Levels 5 to 3), and find parallels at other Upper Nubian sites such as, for example, Sesebi (Rose 2012).

One intriguing aspect of foodways at Sai seems, however, to be unique: there is a composite fusion of Nubian and Egyptian tradition regarding the cooking pots — both imported, authentic Egyptian wheel-made cooking pots (Budka 2011, 26; 2012, 60) and locally made examples thrown on the wheel are used side by side with Nubian-style products (hand-made pots with basketry impression or incised decoration) (Fig. 13). Whereas the Egyptian examples show comparable proportions with a mouth diameter between 28cm and 30cm, the range of the Nubian ones is much larger, covering a rim diameter from 20 to 35cm. Residue analysis, planned in the near future, might illustrate whether a distinction was made regarding the specific food to be prepared in which kind of pot (cf. Smith 2003, 113–24) and/or whether the choice was dependent on the cooking pot’s user and his or her identity (cf. Smith 2003, 119; see also Pappa 2013). Another possibility is that local products were simply integrated into the material culture of the Egyptian occupants and that their significance for distinguishing cultural identities is less significant. In the earliest levels at SAV1 North (Levels 5 and 4), the Egyptian type of cooking pot seems to be most common, gradually becoming less frequent¹² — in later phases the Nubian variants of cooking pots become more numerous (cf. Budka and Doyen 2012–13, 196). The exact diachronic development, the distribution and possible reconstruction of individual households still remain to be undertaken.

¹² At present, wheel-made cooking pots imported from Egypt, discovered in stratified contexts at SAV1 North, are restricted to Levels 5 to 3.

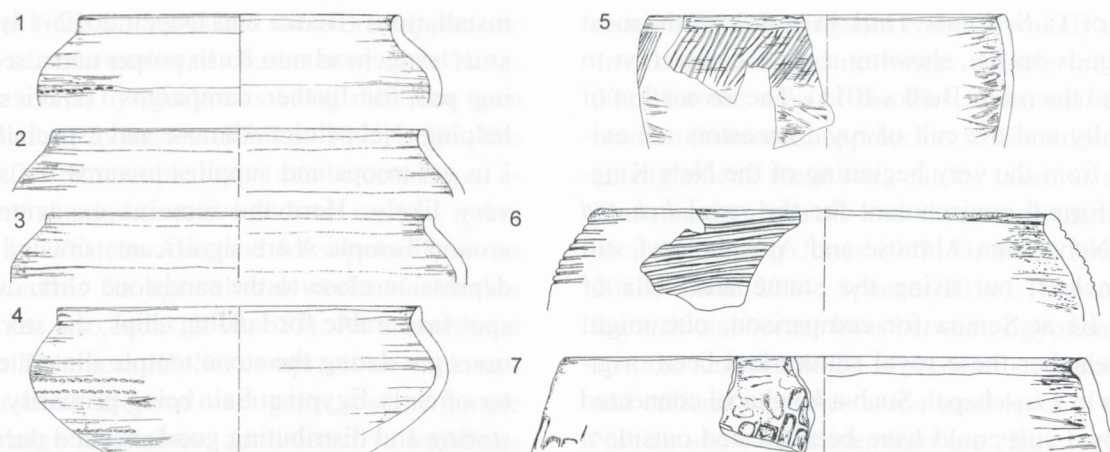


Fig. 13: Examples of Egyptian-style (left) and Nubian-style (right) cooking pots from SAV 1 North. Scale 1:6. Illustration: J. Budka.

Specific Egyptian devices thought to be connected with the preparation of food are the so-called ‘fire dogs’ (cf. Budka 2012, 60–1, figs 9–10). The functional use of these objects is not precisely known, but they are linked with processes involving fire and burning, and are most likely to have been used in association with cooking pots placed in or above fires (see Aston 1989; Giddy 1999, 250–3). ‘Fire dogs’ might therefore indicate that some inhabitants at Sai used a typical Egyptian tradition of food preparation, despite the presence of Nubian cooking pots (Budka 2012). Until now, no other site in Upper Nubia has produced early Dynasty 18 cooking pots imported from Egypt, and the large quantity of Egyptian ‘fire dogs’ from SAV1 North (more than 100 pieces) is also unique. Further research¹³ will seek to elucidate whether this indicates a distinctive, highly Egyptianised, tradition of food preparation during Dynasty 18 on Sai Island or reflects another phenomenon, for example a multi-functional use of the ‘fire dogs’. Large amounts of these objects found at Buhen in Lower Nubia were tentatively associated with copper production processes (Millard 1979, 123–6, pls 43, 103) rather than cooking.

Household and cooking devices should always be considered within their architectural and archaeological

context. According to the architecture, the remains at SAV1 East are functionally different from SAV1 North, with a considerable difference in the size and in the wall thickness of the buildings. However, the material remains (pottery, stone tools, small finds) compare well, with differences largely restricted to variations in quantity and proportion of individual object classes. In the small workshop-like structures at SAV1 North more cooking pots have been found and at SAV1 East, close to the temple, the amount of conical bread moulds is considerably larger. Grinding stones and pounders, probably related to each other, are numerous in both areas. This suggests that a variation in the principal function of distinct areas within a town is not always reflected in material correlates — at least, they can appear diluted in the archaeological record.

Aspects of cult and religion in the New Kingdom town of Sai

The official Egyptian cult and religious rituals for Egyptian gods can be traced at Sai within the context of Temple A, built by viceroy Nehy under the reign of Thutmose III and dedicated to Amun-Ra (Carlotti 2011–12; Gabolde 2011–12). Amun-Ra and ‘Horus the

¹³ In the framework of an MA thesis by Nicole Mosiniak (Humboldt University, Berlin).

Bull, Lord of Ta-Seti' (see Thill, in press) are the most important gods on Sai, showing a close connection to kingship and the ruler (Budka 2015). The invocation of divine royalty and the cult of royal ancestors are evident at Sai from the very beginning of the New Kingdom. The formal environment for the royal *heb-sed* statues of Nebpehtira Ahmose and Amenhotep I still remains unclear, but using the statue and stela of Senwosret III at Semna for comparison, one might speculate whether these royal statues had been originally set up in a *ka*-chapel. Such a *ka*-chapel connected with the royal cult could have been located outside a possible fortification (cf. Seidlmayer 2000). Within the context of a *ka*-house, the statue and cult for Nebpehtira Ahmose might have been installed during his lifetime, but a posthumous act by his successor Amenhotep I is also possible.¹⁴

The New Kingdom town of Sai: an evolving Egyptian centre in Upper Nubia

In conclusion, the general assumption that the temple town of Sai Island was founded by Nebpehtira Ahmose (see above and cf. Morris 2005, 70), who also built a temple housing royal statues, can be re-assessed and modified in some respects. First of all, it has to be stressed that the appearance of Sai as a Pharaonic town was subject to considerable changes during Dynasty 18 — a detailed diachronic approach like that which is currently being applied to Amara West (Spencer 2014, 42) is therefore essential.

The earliest known occupation levels within the town area, sector SAV1 North (Budka 2011, 23–33; Budka and Doyen 2012–13), SAV1 and the new area SAV1 East (Budka 2013), can be dated to the reigns of Nebpehtira Ahmose and Amenhotep I. The precise appearance of the town at this early stage is still difficult to assess, but the architectural remains mostly comprise of workshop-like buildings and storage

installations (Budka and Doyen 2012–13). A function as a 'bridgehead into Kush proper and a secure launching pad for further campaigns' (Davies 2005, 51), helping Nebpehtira Ahmose and especially Thutmose I to get troops and supplies towards the south, seems very likely. Here the remains excavated by Azim around Temple A are significant: situated in a kind of depression close to the sandstone cliff, overlooking a spot favourable for landing ships, the storage installations pre-dating the stone temple illustrate the character of early Egyptian Sai: being primarily a station for storing and distributing goods needed during the campaigns against the Kingdom of Kerma.

However, the exact nature of the site under the earliest rulers of Dynasty 18, Nebpehtira Ahmose and Amenhotep I, remains vague. There is no evidence of an enclosure wall or a proper (stone) temple and it is hard to contextualise the *heb-sed* statues of these kings (see above). The major building phase of the New Kingdom town of Sai, which comprises the enclosure wall at SAV1 North and 'Building A' at SAV1 East, can be attributed to Thutmose III (cf. Budka 2013).¹⁵ During the later Dynasty 18 some additions and renovations took place. This general evolution of Sai based on the results of excavations at SAV1, SAV1 North and SAV1 East nicely corresponds to the epigraphical evidence, particularly that from royal and private statues and stelae found at Sai (Minault-Gout 2006–7; Gabolde 2011–12).

With the change in function and appearance during the first decades of the New Kingdom in mind, the assessment by Morris of Sai being the 'first of a new breed of Upper Nubian fortress-towns' (Morris 2005, 81) can be questioned. From the archaeological perspective, Gabolde's assumption that Thutmose I was the founder of the fortress on Sai (Gabolde 2011–12, 135–7) is also unlikely (cf. Valbelle 2012, 459–60)¹⁶ — the fortification and temple justifying a label as '*mnnw*' were only built during the reign of Thutmose III.¹⁷

¹⁴ The question of whether the statue of Nebpehtira Ahmose is from his reign or was set up posthumously has been debated and is still unsolved — see Davies 2004 (contemporary) and Gabolde 2011–12 (posthumous).

¹⁵ A date of the enclosure wall as mid-Dynasty 18 was also confirmed by new excavations in 2014 at a site called SAV1 West (see Budka 2014).

¹⁶ According to recent evidence from Dokki Gel, Thutmose I probably founded a fortress there; see Bonnet 2012, 67; this volume.

¹⁷ Corresponding also to the text from Temple A by viceroy Nehy mentioning the *mnnw* of Š3.t (Year 25 of Thutmose III), Vercoutter 1956, 74–5; Valbelle 2012, 448, n. 9.

The recent finds on Sai Island therefore support the assessment of the functional character of New Kingdom temple towns by Morkot as being different from Middle Kingdom fortresses (Morkot 1995, 176). The site exemplifies that temple towns can be considered as 'elite residential, administrative and cult centres, rather than — as in Western Asia and Mesopotamia — as residential centres for agricultural workers' (Morkot 1995, 176; see also Judas 2010, 653). As a functional *mnw* under Thutmose III, Sai comprises an enclosure wall with bastions and two main gates, a stone temple for Amun, large magazines, administrative buildings and typical Egyptian houses (see Fig. 1). An orthogonal layout is traceable for these features which are well attested at other sites, for example Sesebi and Amara West. Royal decrees and the installation of a cult barque (Gabolde 2011–12, 136) support the reconstruction of Sai as one of the most important centres of Upper Nubia. Private statuary (Davies, this volume [statues]; Thill 2011–12) and tombs (Minault-Gout and Thill 2012) attest to the presence of Egyptian officials, including members of the highest level of the Nubian administration like the viceroys Nehy and Usersatet, but also mayors of *Ṣṣ.t* (Sai) and others. Gold production (Klemm and Klemm 2013, 570–2) and sandstone quarrying (cf. Vercoutter 1958, 147–8, n. 24) is traceable and compares well to other Egyptian sites such as Sesebi (Spence et al. 2009). The frequent references to viceroy Nehy, who served under Thutmose III, are a good indication that the storage areas and large magazines are connected with the *innw*. It was one of the main tasks of the viceroy as highest official of the Nubian administration to ensure the transport of these so-called tributes and especially the gold of Kush to Egypt (cf. Müller 2013, 74–9; Darnell 2013; Morkot 2013, 926–9).

Life in New Kingdom Sai

The Egyptian 'reconquest' of Upper Nubia introduced central changes for the local population as they were confronted with Egyptian culture and with particular representatives of the Pharaonic administration (Smith 2003, 56–96). Consequently the question arises: who were the occupants of the newly founded towns as far as their cultural identity is concerned: Egyptians, Egyptianised Nubians or a mix of both?

As recent research (e.g. at Tombos: Smith 2003; Buzon 2008; Smith 2014) has begun to highlight, impenetrable boundaries and prominent ethnic catego-

risation in New Kingdom Nubia are likely to be a modern conception and no longer tenable (cf. also Näser 2013 for the area of the First Cataract). In line with modern theoretical approaches to identities and cultural entanglement, these sites can be taken as examples to illustrate the dynamic and situational character of past societies (cf. e.g. Jones 1997; Gramsch 2009; Van Pelt 2013; Smith 2014; Spencer 2014). Rather than drawing artificial border lines between Egyptians and Nubians, the aim should be to reconstruct social, economic and cultural identities at the local level of these Upper Nubian sites. Such identities are changing, interacting and merging with each other (cf. Morkot 1995, 181), and will allow a more direct approach to diverse aspects of life, rather than a stereotypical perspective derived primarily from textual references. As Spencer could demonstrate: 'the actions of individuals and small groups play a major role in maintaining and developing social organization and cultural expression' (2014, 47). Recent works have furthermore stressed that 'hybridization and entanglement have a temporal dimension' (Spencer 2014, 57; see also Smith 2014, 3; Pappa 2013, 36–7) and a diachronic approach to Egyptian-Nubian relations at individual sites is necessary (Budka 2015).

For Sai it is clear that by the mid-Dynasty 18, in the reigns of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II, things had changed for its inhabitants — the outer appearance is that of an Egyptian town, governed by viceroys like Nehy and Usersatet and a mayor of *Ṣṣ.t* as the highest local representative. During this heyday of Egyptian building activity at the site, the occupants living there were the second generation of witnesses to the campaigns of the first kings of Dynasty 18. We should take into account that the relationship of these individuals with the Egyptians was considerably different compared to their ancestors who lived under Kerma rulers. It is not surprising that the persons we can trace in the archaeological records are fully integrated into the Egyptian power structure and administrative system (cf. already Morkot 1995, 181).

Recent work in Upper Nubia by Spencer and others mirror 'a picture appearing throughout the region of a complex two-way entanglement of Nubian and Egyptian cultural features' (Smith 2014, 2). This 'heterogeneous cultural mix' (Smith 2014, 3) has to be embedded in the changing appearances of the respective towns, also taking into account generations (Spencer 2014, 42).

In the upcoming years, the AcrossBorders project aims to deepen this line of research by analysing all available sources and the complete set of evidence. Even with the difficulties in connecting material remains with cultural identities, we will investigate whether the identities projected by the occupants of Sai are consistent (or different) in life and death; thus a detailed comparison between the material found in the town and in the cemeteries will be undertaken. The evidence from the cemeteries has been partly published by Minault-Gout and Thill (2012), but human remains hold much potential and are essential in this respect, as was illustrated by studies at Tombos (Buzon 2008; Smith 2014, 3). Even if funerary objects reflect contemporaneous Egyptian style, the individuals with Egyptian names and titles might still be of Nubian origin (cf. Minault-Gout and Thill 2012, 415).

Summary and outlook

The New Kingdom town of Sai was founded at the perfect place on the island, in a strategic position, both to control the river traffic and to facilitate landing and loading of ships. It is clear that the location was not primarily chosen due to its proximity to cultivable land. This corresponds well with the image drawn by Morkot and others of the fortified towns in Nubia as administrative centres inhabited by the elite (Morkot 1995, 176; Judas 2010, 653) rather than as key agricultural sites in the area. The architectural and material remains of Sai support an interpretation of the island as an important site for the state's administration and control of Nubia.

The potential and challenges of analysing the material culture for the question of 'Nubian' vs. 'Egyptian' lifestyle in New Kingdom fortified towns in Upper Nubia, like Sai, have been briefly discussed. The artefacts and especially ceramics testify to a cultural fusion from the foundation of the town in the early Dynasty 18 throughout the New Kingdom. The ceramics in particular indicate that there was a complex, two-way mixture of lifestyles, resulting in great variability and also in hybrid forms that display both Egyptian and Nubian features.

With future fieldwork in the upcoming years AcrossBorders will provide new data necessary for a more complete assessment of the history and nature of the

Pharaonic town on Sai Island. As this paper aims to illustrate, the present state of research allows the reconstruction of some patterns of the living conditions at one of the key towns of Upper Nubia. Similarly to Amara West, much potential lies in a bottom-up approach with a strong diachronic focus (Spencer 2014) as Sai was a changing microcosm throughout the New Kingdom, shaped by different individuals and adapting to historical and economic progress.

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