

Introduction

Julia Budka and Johannes Auenmüller***

From Microcosm to Macrocosm

This edited volume comprises the proceedings of a conference also entitled “From Microcosm to Macrocosm: Individual households and cities in Ancient Egypt and Nubia”. The conference, hosted by the Ludwig-Maximilians-University, was held from 1-3 September 2017 in Munich and represented the closing event of the European Research Council funded project AcrossBorders. Recent work on settlement archaeology, households, cities and urban patterns in Egypt and Sudan was presented. The emphasis lay on fresh fieldwork in Northern Sudan, highlighting latest results from New Kingdom sites such as Amara West, Sai, Tombos, Kerma (Dokki Gel) and Sesebi (see also Budka Households in this volume).

The conference focused on 1) individual households of selected sites in Egypt and Nubia (e.g., Tell el-Dab’a, Amarna, Elephantine, Amara West, Sesebi and Tombos). On this topic, architectural studies as well as analyses of material culture were presented. The fruitful application of new scientific methods such as microarchaeology, especially with regard to soil samples, micromorphology and a wide range of archaeometric methods, and their potential for Egyptian settlement archaeology was illustrated with a number of case studies.

In addition to this micro-approach, introducing microhistories of individual sites based on recent archaeological fieldwork that incorporates interdisciplinary methods, the event not only discussed 2) general patterns and regional developments – thus, the macrocosm of New Kingdom Nubia (cf. Auenmüller in this volume; Vieth in this volume), but also aspects of urbanism in earlier periods (see Moeller and Marouard in this volume). Comparative approaches were also regarded useful on a larger scale. Therefore, the role of foreigners in Egyptian towns was discussed from a broader perspective, with the Asiatics in the Nile Delta as a case study (Bietak 2016; in this volume).

The combination of micro-level research questions with the general macro-level promises new information about cities and households in Ancient Egypt and Nubia. Thus, the AcrossBorders conference represents an example for the current status of modern settlement archaeology in the Nile valley which is characterised by a strong interdisciplinary focus (cf. Moeller 2016). The rich potential of well-preserved but still not completely explored sites in modern Sudan, especially as direct comparison for already excavated sites located in Egypt, was particularly emphasised. In general, during the last decade settlement archaeology in Egypt and Nubia has moved away from a strong text-based approach and generalised studies to a more site-specific approach and to household studies (see Müller (ed.) 2015). Thanks to new and ongoing fieldwork, more detailed information on individual sites are now available and are currently being discussed also within comparative approaches (cf. already Shaw 1998). Sai Island and the AcrossBorders project are ready examples for this bottom-up perspective illustrating dynamic structures of Egyptian sites in both Egypt and Nubia (Budka 2017a; b).

*,** Institute of Egyptology
and Coptology, Ludwig-
Maximilians-Universität
München, Katharina-von-Bora-
Str. 10, 80333 Munich, Germany;
*Julia.Budka@lmu.de;
**Johannes.Auenmueller@lmu.de

Case studies of a bottom-up approach to settlement archaeology in Ancient Egypt and Nubia

Besides Sai Island in Sudan, the AcrossBorders project has in the last years concentrated on settlement archaeology at Elephantine in Egypt where it conducted fieldwork in cooperation with the Swiss Institute for Architectural and Archaeological Research on Ancient Egypt, Cairo. In his paper at the conference, Cornelius von Pilgrim discussed intriguing evidence from House 55 under the title “Beyond houses and temples: A building in the town of the late 17th and early 18th Dynasty at Elephantine” (cf. von Pilgrim 2015; in press). He focused on the general challenges in urban archaeology associated with the identification of the actual use of individual rooms or entire buildings. Especially for Egypt, there has been a diverse discussion about room function in the last decades (see, e.g., Moeller 2015; Müller 2015; Spencer 2015). As outlined in his conference abstract: *‘Many activities of daily life do not leave reliable traces to determine any specific function and possible traces may have been removed by later activities or by a later redesigning. Furthermore, many rooms in domestic buildings were predominantly used in a multi-functional way.’*¹ Von Pilgrim presented the meticulous examination of the extensive sequence of floors and deposits in House 55 and proposed a first interpretation of both its function and its building phases.

The paper “From the Delta to the Second Cataract: Households in Egypt’s borderlands in the late Middle Kingdom” by Miriam Müller tied in nicely within the comparative approach of both the AcrossBorders project and the conference. Her paper examined similarities and differences in domestic architecture and settlement structures in Egypt’s borderlands, in this case the eastern Nile Delta and the Second Cataract in Nubia. With several case studies on these regions and a particular emphasis on Tell el-Dab’a/Avaris, she presented thoughts about concepts in domestic architecture and especially about the perception of their function and use which are, according to Müller, *‘inherent to the Egyptian world view and often copied by new settlers of native and foreign descent in Egypt’s borderlands.’* This paper stimulated a rich discussion at the conference, in particular in direct conjunction with Manfred Bietak’s presentation about “Settlements of mixed societies: Tell el-Dab’a as a case study” (see Bietak in this volume). Indigenous Nubian traditions were discussed by Charles Bonnet in his new assessment of the latest findings at Dokki Gel/Kerma. He has identified an architecture which can be attributed to an African tradition since around 2400 BC and that influ-

enced the urban topography of the site also during the time of Egyptian domination (Bonnet 2017; in this volume).

Another paper focusing on household archaeology was the one by Kate Spence (cf. Spence 2015). Under the title “House, household, community and settlement at Sesebi”, she discussed the archaeological data of houses for the community living and working at Sesebi during the 18th Dynasty (see also Spence 2017). Her assessment of the houses and the town was mainly based on the original excavation records of the Egypt Exploration Society in the 1930s in addition to a comparison with contemporary housing at Amarna.

Amarna as one of the most important New Kingdom sites in Egypt was also discussed by Peter Lacovara’s contribution entitled “Everyman’s home a castle: The design of the Tell el-Amarna villa”. His survey of domestic architecture in the New Kingdom and beyond aimed to highlight that the uniformity found at Amarna is unique in many respects. Lacovara does not see the Amarna houses as a *‘natural development in vernacular building, but [as] the result of a uniform design imposed by the city planners, and one adapted from the plans of earlier royal palaces. In this aspect, Tell el-Amarna represents the culmination of the pre-planned royal city of the New Kingdom and the imposition of the state in designing almost every aspect of this unique community.’* Although some of the responses at the conference illustrated a certain disagreement in this matter (see also Spence 2004), Lacovara’s paper nicely illustrated that we need to re-study Egyptian house types and so-called “standards”, which are mostly derived from architectural plans omitting individual building phases and details (see now e.g. Adenstedt 2016 and Doyen 2017 in contrast to Azim 1975 for the example of Sai). Thus, also for studies of domestic architecture in Egypt and Nubia, a reflection of details and data from a bottom-up assessment seems appropriate after more than 80 years of discussions of Egyptian house types (see e.g., Ricke 1932; cf. Bietak 1996). Such a bottom-up approach is, among others, strongly illustrated by recent work at Amara West (Spencer 2014; 2015; 2017). At the 2017 conference, Neal Spencer discussed the topic “Beyond imperial power and town planning: an experiential perspective from Amara West.” In this paper, he stressed that the Egyptian towns of New Kingdom Nubia *‘have traditionally been researched within a framework of pharaonic control, resource extraction and even acculturation, with the formal temples, inscriptions and elite funerary monuments (and associated assemblages) attracting considerable attention.’* Spencer built upon recent developments within settlement archaeology in New Kingdom Nubia (see Budka 2015; Spencer et al. 2017) and the new concept of “cultural entanglement” (see below and also Budka Households in this volume) and highlighted often forgotten experiential perspectives: those of the inhabitants of a colonial Pharaonic foundation in Northern Sudan.

1 All quotations used in the following for papers not included in the present volume were taken from the Book of Abstracts, see <http://acrossborders.oew.ac.at/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/AcrossBorders-Book-of-Abstracts.pdf> (last accessed: 19/02/2018).

Research within settlement archaeology concerned with community and social stratigraphy can benefit substantially if the case studies also take funerary remains into account, thus if an integrated approach with funerary archaeology is feasible. In Nubia, this is the case at most “colonial sites” of the New Kingdom and therefore a number of papers at the conference focused on information provided by tombs and funerary remains (see Budka Tomb 26 in this volume; Smith and Buzon in this volume; Williams in this volume; Wohlschlagler and Stadlmayr in this volume). The case of Tombos highlights in particular that cemeteries are important tools when trying to estimate the character of a site, and that “cultural entanglement” often coincides with “biological entanglement” (Smith and Buzon 2014; 2017; in this volume). Furthermore, artefacts from tombs are important sources for aspects of daily life, especially when compared with objects from domestic contexts. Material culture and finds from both tombs and settlements were also discussed during the conference.

In general, the comparative value of material culture for the study of contemporary settlement sites was a cornerstone of the AcrossBorders project. Working on both sides of the early New Kingdom Nubian border at the islands of Sai and Elephantine, questions of production, trade and local innovation were discussed, phenomena that are especially traceable within the ceramic material (see Budka Pots in this volume; cf. also Rose 2017 for a comparison between Sesebi and Amarna). Here, recent work by the British Museum Amara West research project ties in nicely (see Spencer 2017). Manuela Lehmann presented aspects of the finds from both the town and the cemetery of Amara West. Preliminary findings on wooden, ivory, stone and faience artefacts were used to illustrate current research questions about cultural entanglement, self-sufficiency *vs.* external supply, trade patterns, local craft production and beliefs. These aspects are currently also explored by the AcrossBorders project and correlate the micro perspective of analysing specific find assemblages with meso-level questions about the distribution of goods between the sites located in Nubia. Valentina Gasperini gave an overview of her ongoing analysis of the ceramic material from Amara West. Within the rich corpus of primarily Ramesside pottery, she chose examples from the extramural house D11.2 as a case study to illustrate the main research themes within her project such as the dating, function and inter-connections of the ceramic material and its role in Nubian-Egyptian cultural entanglement.

The case studies presented at the 2017 conference that assess material culture from settlement sites in Egypt and Nubia in detail also discussed, among others, questions about so-called hybridity and “cultural entanglement” (see Stockhammer 2012; 2013; van Pelt 2013; Spencer *et al.* 2017; see also Budka Households in this volume).

The potential of micromorphological applications and other scientific analyses was highlighted by Julia Budka and Neal Spencer in their papers. Spencer referred, *inter alia*, to recent work by Matthew Dalton (Dalton 2017) and Kate Fulcher (2017) which represent milestones for future studies.

General patterns and regional aspects in settlement archaeology in Ancient Egypt and Nubia

The application of landscape archaeology (see, *e.g.*, Woodward *et al.* 2017) and in particular the study of resources and trade routes allows addressing questions dealing with macro aspects of ancient Egypt and Nubia. At the 2017 conference, Dietrich and Rosemarie Klemm (in this volume) focused on gold mining activities in Egypt and Nubia from a diachronic perspective and presented archaeological evidence for settlement remains associated with the exploitation of this highly valued resource (see also Klemm and Klemm 2013). Quarry logistics were also discussed in the paper “Settlement and logistics at quarrying and mining sites in the Eastern Desert” by Ian Shaw and Elizabeth Bloxam. They chose the complex set of archaeological remains situated in a mountainous region of the central Wadi Hammamat in the Eastern Desert, 75km east of Quft in the Nile Valley and 75km west of Quseir on the Red Sea coast as a case study. They convincingly argued that the Wadi Hammamat can be considered as ‘a “peopled” landscape at the centre of considerable social networks.’ Their paper discussed to which degree the social fabric of this landscape of procurement and production can be reconstructed and analysed on the basis of the survey results of the Wadi Hammamat Project (see also Bloxam *et al.* 2014).

Stuart Tyson Smith discussed “The fortified settlement at Tombos and Egyptian colonial strategy in New Kingdom Nubia” (see Smith and Buzon in this volume). Combining textual references with the archaeological evidence at both the settlement and cemetery allows putting forward important ideas about the role of Tombos within the so-called “re-conquest” of Kush and illustrates new aspects about the communities living and dying at Tombos which are of significance also for the regional and trans-regional perspective.

In her paper, Jödis Vieth focused on the so-called “temple towns” that have mainly been discussed in the light of Egyptian imperialism and colonialism (*e.g.* Kemp 1978; Morris 2005; see Vieth in this volume). She uses a landscape archaeological point of perspective to address the issues of definition, terminology and typology of these sites by means of spatial pattern analysis, site typology and landscape analysis. Vieth’s still ongoing work aims for a better understanding of the nature of Egyptian presence in

New Kingdom Nubia. Closely related to this topic is the contribution by Johannes Auenmüller (in this volume). He evaluated the towns of Sai, Soleb and Amara West, which were successive administrative centres of Upper Nubia in the New Kingdom, on the basis of compilations of prosopographical data from larger archaeological contexts such as cemeteries, settlements and temples. This analysis enables him to draw a more comprehensive picture of the people and the social fabric of these sites which is also of relevance for general questions regarding New Kingdom society and social structures in both Egypt and Nubia.

Outlook

The 2017 conference has both demonstrated recent advances and highlighted blank areas in our knowledge of settlement archaeology in Egypt and Nubia during the New Kingdom (see Budka Households in this volume). All in all, the conference can be regarded as an outcome of the new era of settlement archaeology in Egypt and Nubia, which is characterised by archaeometric methods and a strong focus on bioarchaeology, but also by new theoretical approaches foregrounding the phenomenon of “cultural entanglement” (Spencer *et al.* 2017). With a continued focus on settlement archaeology, a more holistic understanding of ancient Egypt, including its “colonial” phases in northern Sudan, different from elite-biased and idealised projections deriving from the mortuary record only, can be gained. Communication between the individual disciplines nowadays engaged in settlement archaeology and collaborative research between teams investigating settlement sites throughout Egypt and Sudan promise further advances in the near future. The editors

hope that this volume will contribute to this aim, making up-to-date analyses of a large variety of sites and materials available and opening up further discussions.

Acknowledgments

The 2017 conference was an outcome of the European Research Council Starting Grant project no. 313668, currently hosted at the Ludwig Maximilians University Munich, and the Austrian Science Fund START project Y615-G19 lead by Julia Budka. This volume brings together selected results of these two projects.

Many thanks go to all conference participants and especially to the contributors of this volume; further thanks are due to all AcrossBorders team members for helping with logistics at the event. We are very grateful to our colleagues from the Egyptian Museum Munich, especially Sylvia Schoske and Arnulf Schlüter, for providing us with the perfect venue for the event.

Last but definitely not least, many thanks go to the local authorities in Egypt and Sudan for enabling the archaeological fieldwork discussed in this volume. As the majority of projects presented work in Sudan, we would particularly like to thank the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums of Sudan (NCAM) and Abdelrahman Ali Mohamed (Director General) for all their support. Huda Magzoub participated as NCAM inspector at the Munich conference and the AcrossBorders project is deeply grateful for all her support during fieldwork on Sai since 2012.

March 2018. Munich.

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