Preliminary Report on the Season 2012 at Tell el-Dab’a/Sharqeya

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GENERAL

The work of the Austrian Archaeological Institute Cairo continued at Tell el_Dab'a in 2012 in two seasons, in spring and autumn.

We are very obliged for the onsite collaboration of the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquities and its Minister, Dr. Mohamed Ibrahim, as well as Dr. Abd el-Maqsoud and the Director for the Eastern Delta area, Mr. Ibrahim Suliman, and the local inspectors Mr.. We are also indebted to the administrative support of the Director General for Foreign Missions Dr. Mohamed Ismail and his office. We are especially grateful to the Austrian Embassy, to ambassador Dr. Thomas Nader and to René Amry, M.A., for their valuable support. We are also grateful to the director of the Austrian Archaeological Institute, Dr. Sabine Ladstätter, for her ongoing untiring support. Without the support of all of the above, the project at Tell el-Dab’a could not have continued.

The research this year was focused on continuing excavations in area R/III, (fig. 1).

EXCAVATIONS IN AREA R/III

Area R/III is situated to the north of the road which, leading from the main road, connects the modern village of 'Ezbet Rushdi es-Sughayar with Tell el Dab'a. Excavations have been undertaken since 2010 in order to combat the ongoing destruction of archaeological remains by modern agricultural activity. The excavation was undertaken in the area to the east of 'Ezbet Rushdi is-Sughayar on the land of Dr. Samir el-Bilbeisi, a local doctor who owns approximately 30 fedan and therefore is one of the largest landowners within the concession of the Austrian Archaeological Institute, Cairo. A first investigation was conducted based on the magnetometry survey (Forstner-Müller et alii 2008). The magnetic image shows a densely built up area. Individual houses and streets can be discerned, although less clearly than in other parts
of Avaris, partly due to the stratigraphic overlap of structures. When the Austrian mission began its season in spring 2010 it discovered that about three *fedan* of agricultural land had been removed by modern activity after the remote sensing in 2008. Therefore it was decided in cooperation with the SCA (general director Mr. Ibrahim Suleiman and the local inspectorate) to undertake a salvage excavation on this land.


Area R/III can be considered a key spot within the town, which played a crucial role in the development of the then capital Avaris during the later Second Intermediate period. (fig. 2, 3) At this place a transition is visible from a (possible) administrative quarter in the east to a domestic quarter in the west. The earliest settlement of this town quarter can be seen in the west (earliest 15th Dynasty), and during the Second Intermediate Period the town extends gradually towards the east. The whole area is heavily destroyed/disturbed by huge pits from the Late Period until recent times.

The excavation showed that the area was separated by ca. 3.2 m wide streets (street 1, 2 and 3) leading from north-north-west to south-south-east and converging towards the south, into several *insulae* (fig. 2). This orientation is typical for the period. While the western part consisted of one block, in the eastern part narrower side streets subdivided the quarter into smaller units. Two different quarters of Avaris could be distinguished and thus provide the opportunity to conduct a study on the function of individual areas in the central part of the town.

In the western part (administrative quarter) spacious buildings dating to the later Second Intermediate Period with attached courtyards and granaries were discovered. Several courtyards were grouped around a central part that rested on an elevated platform, of which the casemate substructure was still preserved. The actual floor level did not survive in most parts; only the foundations could be excavated. Wall widths suggest that at least some of the buildings had upper floors. The courtyards contained silos of varying sizes (diameter range 2.5 to 3.5 m). Narrow doors, a rare feature in silos from other parts of Avaris, show that the granaries were accessed from the southeast, could be sealed properly and were used over a long period of time.
Ovens for food production were situated in the corners of the courtyards. A street (fig. 2: street 1) approximately 3.2 metres wide bounded this district of the town to the east. No burials (with the exception of jar burials of infants) were found within this district. This is remarkable as burying the dead within living quarters is a characteristic feature of domestic occupation at Avaris.

In 2012 detailed research was undertaken in the western part in order to clarify some stratigraphic issues, the focus of this year's work was, however, in the eastern part.

The eastern district is a typical domestic town quarter. (fig. 2). This district is of a layout more common at Avaris. The central part is separated from the neighboring districts by streets 1 and 2. Two buildings (fig. 2: House 1 and 2) were excavated completely. These two central buildings of considerable size show features deemed characteristic of ancient Egyptian house architecture as known from other sites such as Amarna and Illahun where houses comprise an entrance area, a middle part with a central room and an intimate back part, with courtyards and open spaces around them. In the case presented here the houses are accessible from the East, from street 2. Such a house usually had an upper floor or at least a usable roof. In houses 1 and 2 of area R/III the original floors were found only in the entrance area. It seems that the rest of these houses were only substructures for second stores and not used as real rooms.

Towards the east and south the domestic settlement pattern changed from larger to smaller houses sometimes separated from each other by secondary streets (streets 3 and 4). In contrast to the western district tombs were found within this domestic quarter, as was usual in domestic quarters at Avaris in the Second Intermediate Period. After their abandonment, the buildings stood for some time as ruins but were not re-used nor overbuilt.

After the abandonment of the buildings they stood still as ruins for some time.

The pottery allows a dating of this quarter of Avaris into the later Second Intermediate Period. Again Nubian pottery was found in area R/III (Forstner-Müller/Rose 2012: 184, 201).

Besides the pottery which is by far the largest find group the second largest finding group consists of material related to administrative activities. (Forstner-Müller/Rose in press, Reali in press)

The intensive sieving during the two excavation campaigns in R/III allowed to recover more than one thousand impressed lumps of clay bearing late Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period seal impressions from scarab seals (Marée in press).
Among the group of sealings recovered in 2010-2011 in R/III were identified further fragments bearing royal names (Reali in press), at least ten of them bear the royal name of the Hyksos Khayan (fig. 4), one of the major rulers of the 15th dynasty and another seal impression bears the prenomen of king Khauserre1.

While most of the Khayan sealings were found in late Second Intermediate Period contexts one of them was found in an earlier Second Intermediate Period context (Tell el-Dab'a Stratum E/1) giving a terminus post quem for this king to the earlier 15th dynasty. Among this group of sealing impressions a fragment of a Middle Bronze Age cylinder sealing impression was also found.

First results show that nearly half of the identified sealing impressions were applied to bags or sacks, 25% to baskets and 14% to boxes. In the framework of experimental archaeology an experiment was undertaken to seal various types of (modern) containers using different materials. One of the most surprising finds was a faience figurine in the shape of a hippopotamus. (fig. 5). This object comes from the central room in house 1 in the middle block of the excavated area. It stands on a flat base, has an opening on its back and another in his mouth to serve as a spout. On the shoulder, back and mouth painted rosettes were visible, as well as images and vegetation and flying birds on each side. It most probably served as a libation vessel. The glaze was mostly weathered and only visible on few parts but showed that the figurine originally had a bluish green surface.

**Geophysical Prospections** (fig. 6) ².

The geophysical survey was continued during this season. The focus in 2012 was to investigate the western border of the Pelusiac Nile branch, the main Nile branch of the Avaris and the Eastern most Nile branch in the Egyptian Delta during this period. The eastern edge is well attested by the magnetic survey where a clear distinction between the settled area and the river branch is visible in the image. The results at the western edge were not as clear therefore an different prospection method was applied. Already in 2011 a section was put over the assumed

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1 Khauserre could possibly be ascribed to the 16th dynasty (according to von Beckerath 1984: 119), cf. Ben-Tor 2007: Taf. 46. For an identification of Khauserre with Amu, see also Ward in Tufnell 1984:164; against it see: Rholt 1997:43-46.

2 In cooperation with UMR 5133 Archéorient, CNRS, partly financed by an ANR-Project directed by Prof. Beatrix Midant-Reynes).
western edge by VES-measurements. A clear edge was visible, these results were confirmed by auger drillings in 2012.

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3 This work was undertaken in cooperation with Tomasz Herbich, University of Warsaw and Polish Academy of Sciences.
استمرت أعمال المعهد النمساوي للأثار بالقاهرة باتّ البضعة لمواسمين خلال عام 2012 موسم الربيع وموسم الخريف.

يتوجب علينا تقديم الشكر للتعاون بالموقع إلى المجلس الأعلى للأثار وقيادة الوزير الدكتور محمد إبراهيم والدكتور محمد عبد المقصود. وكذلك السيد مدير عام شرق الدلتا الأستاذ إبراهيم سليمان واعتماد الآثار المراقق السيد ... كذلك نحن مدينون بالشكر للدعم الإداري إلى السيد الدكتور محمد إسماعيل مدير عام اللجنة الدائمة وأعضاء مكتبته. نشكر خاص للسارة الدراسية بالقاهرة وسعادة السفير الدكتور توماس نادر Dr. Thomas Nader والسيد رينيه أمري René Amry على الدعم القيم، ودعاها المتواصل. دون دعم كل هؤلاء ما كان استمر العمل يتلقى الضغبة. تركز العايد هذا العام على استمرار الحفائر بالموقع (رشدي)


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وحدات أصغر. في أورايس يمكن التمييز بين مربعين سكنيين مختلفين هذا الاختلاف يعطي لنا الفرصة لإجراء دراسة عن وظيفة كل مربع على حد في الجزء الأوسط من المدينة.

تم اكتشاف مبانٍ فسيحة في الجزء الغربي (المربع الإداري) تعود إلى أواخر عصر الانتقال الثاني. كان هناك العديد من الساحت التي تجمع حول الجزء الأوسط والذي يقوم على منصة مرتفعة والتي تمتاز طبقاتها السفلي مخفّحة، رغم ذلك فإن الطبيعة الفعلية للأراضي غير معرفة بالكامل وإمّا يمكن فقط حفر الأساليب. سمك الجدران يرجح معه أن بعض هذه المبانك كان لها طوابق أخرى وتحتوي الأغنياء ذات صور وفيها مساحة مختلفة تتراوح قطرها بين 2,5-3.5 متر. هذه الصوامع كانت لها أبواب ضيقة وهي صفة نادرة تختلف عن سائر أورايس وتغطي هذه الأبواب في الجانب الجنوبي الشرقي. ومن الممكن أن هذه الصوامع كانت مخزنة بأثاث مما يدل على أنها قد استخدمت لفترات طويلة. وفي وسط الأفني كان هناك أفران استخدمت لإنتاج الطعام. هناك شارع يمتد على طول 3.5 متر (شتر 2 شارع 1) يبعد هذا الجزء من المدينة من ناحية الشرق. لم توجد أي داعف في هذه المنطقة عدا بعض الأوانى التي ذكرت بها أطفال رضع، وتزداد دفن الموتى داخل المناطق السكنية هي إحدى السمات المميزة للمجمعات السكنية بأورايس.

في عام 2012 أجري البحث بصورة تفصيلية في الجانب الغربي وذلك لتوضيح بعض الطبقات الأثرية. ومع ذلك فقد تركز العمل في الجزء الشرقي. 

تعتبر المنطقة الشرقية تنوع الأحياء السكنية بالمدينة (شتر 2) ويعتبر تخطيط هذا الحي شائع في أورايس. الجزء الأوسط منفصل عما يجاوره من أحياء بواسطة الشوارع 1 و 2، وتكتل كاملاً عن مبنىتين (شتر 2 شوارع 1 و 2). هذين المبنىين بأحجام كبيرة ومظهر يعتبر من مميزات عمارية المنزل في مصر القديمة مثلما هو عليه الحال في أماكن أخرى مثل البايبرة واللاصون حيث تشكل المنازل على منطقة الحدود ومنطقة وسطى ثم جزء خلفي للاستخدامات العائلية. ومساحات مفتوحة بينهما. في هذه الحالة يمكن الوصول إلى المنزل من الجهة الشرقية عن طريق الشارع رقم 2. كانت هذه المنازل ذات عثر فقط على الأرضية الأصلية ليهما فقط في منطقة R/III طبقتين أو على الأقل سطح يمكن استخدامه المنازل 1 و 2 من المدخل، ويبدو أن بقية أساسات المنزل كانت للمخازن الثانية ولم تكن للعمر الحقيقي.

تغيرت أنماط الأحياء السكنية في اتجاه الشرق في أوايس لتعتبر المنازل من الأوسع إلى الأضيق والتي في بعض الأحيان ما تتلفت عن بعضها عن طريق شوارع فرعية (شارع 3 و 4). وعلى النقيض من المنطقة الغربية فقد وجدت المعابر داخل المجتمعات السكنية كما هو الحال في أورايس خلال عصر الانتقال الثاني. بعد أن كبرت هذه المنازل يبدو أنها ظلت قائمة لمدة كافية وحداً مراة أخرى.


من بين مجموعة المكتشفات الطينية التي عثر عليها خلال المواسم 2011-2012 هناك بعض القطع التي تحمل أسماء ملكية (Reali in press) على الأقل عشر من هذه القطع تحمل اسم الملك الهكسوس خيان (شكل 4) الذي يعتبر واحد من أكبر

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Figures:

1. Overall map of Avaris/Tell el-Dab'a with area R/III marked in a red circle, copyright ÖAI

(ÖAI) خريطة عامة لأواريس / تل الضبعة، منطقة R/III باللون الأحمر. (جميع الحقوق محفوظة)
2. Plan of area R/III, copyright ÖAI

(ÖAI جميع الحقوق محفوظة R/III)
3. Street 2 in area R/III and house 3 with a mudbrick staircase leading from the street into the interior of the house, copyright ÖAI

3- شارع 2 من المنطقة R/III ومنزل 3 بدرج من الطوب اللين يؤدي من الشارع إلى داخل المنزل (جميع الحقوق محفوظة اÖAI)
4. Sealing impression bearing the name of King Khayan, ruler of the 15th Dynasty, photo: Axel Krause, copyright ÖAI
5. Faience figurine in the shape of a hippopotamus, photo: Axel Krause, copyright ÖAI

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(جميع الحقوق محفوظة (ÖAI), Alex Krause)