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Second Preliminary Report on the Town of Kom Ombo (2019-2021)

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## Second Preliminary Report on the Town of Kom Ombo (2019-2021)

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### ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of five seasons of excavation and study at the townsite of Kom Ombo in Upper Egypt. The work, carried out by the Cairo branch of the Austrian Archaeological Institute (ÖAI), has concentrated on remains of the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period. From the latter, an exceptionally well-preserved building containing numerous round silos, perhaps for grain, and a further building to its south provide evidence for large-scale administrative organisation. To the north lay a cemetery dating from the Old Kingdom into the First Intermediate Period, which overlay occupation levels dating from the later 2nd into the earlier 5th Dynasty. Artefacts associated with these structures—pottery, stamped sealings including examples with royal names, and stone tools—are discussed. Finally, results from cleaning surface features of Roman and later date at the south end of the Kom Ombo tell are described.

**Keywords:** Kom Ombo, Ancient Egyptian Towns, Old Kingdom, First Intermediate Period, settlement archaeology, funerary archaeology.

### RÉSUMÉ

Cette contribution présente les résultats de cinq saisons de fouilles et d'études dans la ville de Kôm Ombo en Haute Égypte. Le travail, mené par l'Institut archéologique autrichien du Caire, s'est concentré sur les vestiges de l'Ancien Empire et de la Première Période Intermédiaire. En ce qui concerne la Première Période Intermédiaire, un bâtiment dans un état de préservation exceptionnel, qui contient de nombreux silos ronds, probablement pour le stockage de céréales,

et un autre bâtiment plus au sud témoignent d'une organisation administrative à grande échelle. Une nécropole de l'Ancien Empire et de la Première Période Intermédiaire est située au nord, couvrant les niveaux d'occupation d'une ville qui date de la fin de la II<sup>e</sup>/du début de la V<sup>e</sup> dynastie. Les artefacts associés à ces structures – la céramique, les sceaux imprimés avec, pour certains, des noms royaux, et les outils lithiques – sont discutés. Enfin, l'article décrit les résultats obtenus au cours du nettoyage de structures visibles sur la surface du flanc sud du tell de Kôm Ombo, qui datent de la période romaine ou plus tard.

**Mots-clés :** Kôm Ombo, villes de l'Égypte ancienne, Ancien Empire, Première Période Intermédiaire, archéologie urbaine, archéologie funéraire.



## I. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Irene FORSTNER-MÜLLER

Since 2017 the Austrian Archaeological Institute/Cairo branch has undertaken archaeological research at Kom Ombo in Upper Egypt. The site is today mainly known for its Ptolemaic temple, dedicated to the gods Haroeris and Sobek. Far less is known about the ancient town, which surrounds three sides of the temple. The objective of the project is to investigate the town, its settlement history and its hinterland through non-intrusive surveys and archaeological excavations. The project is a joint mission with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA).<sup>2</sup>

The work presented was undertaken over five seasons (seasons 3 and 7 were excavation and study seasons, seasons 4, 5 and 6 study seasons) between 2019 to 2021 with a half-year interruption due to the Covid 19 crisis.

<sup>1</sup> We thank the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and especially his Excellency, Minister Prof. Khaled el-Enany for his co-operation and support. We also thank the Director General of the Pharaonic Section, Dr. Ayman el-Eshmawy, the Director General for Foreign Missions, Dr. Nashwa Gabir, the former Director General for Foreign Missions, and present General Secretary, Dr. Mohamed Ismael and the former Director General for Upper Egypt Dr. H. Aboul-Azim for their help in initiating the project. We are indebted to the General Director of the Kom Ombo site, Mr. Mohamed Aly el-Nagar, Director Zainab Aul Hassam Bastawyall and especially the director of the Kom Ombo magazine, Mrs. Iman Sobhy Fahmy, as well as our inspectors and all the Egyptian members of the team for their generous assistance. Above all, we would like to thank the Director General for Aswan, Kom Ombo, Edfu and Abu Simbel, Dr. Abdel Monem Said, who invited us to work at the site and has supported us in all our efforts. We are grateful to Wolfgang Müller for his assistance in data management and survey. Special thanks are due to Dr. Zahi Hawass, for his long-term support of our work. The work in Kom Ombo began at his recommendation.

<sup>2</sup> For the work in the previous seasons 1 and 2 see FORSTNER-MÜLLER et al. 2019.

## Season 3 (2nd March-1st April 2019)

Irene Forstner-Müller	Head of mission
Pamela Rose	Deputy Head
Nicolas Gail	Photographer
Clara Jeuthe	Egyptologist
Judith Kreuzer	Photographer
Uroš Matić	Egyptologist
Vera Michel	Egyptologist

MoTA Inspectors: Merfat Abdallah, Mahmud Mohamed

## Season 4 (26th October-12th December 2019)

Irene Forstner-Müller	Head of mission
Pamela Rose	Deputy Head
Marie Bagnoud	Egyptologist
Martina Bardonova	Egyptologist
Jared Carballo Perez	Egyptologist
Uroš Matić	Egyptologist
Vera Michel	Egyptologist
Sandra Müller	Egyptologist
Erico Peintner	Conservator
Andrea Pillon	Egyptologist

MoTA Inspectors: Mohamed Ahmed Abdel Wahab, Said Mohamed el-Rekaby, Walaa Ali Rashadi, Naglaa Fathi Mohamed, Merfat Abdallah

## Season 5 (8th February-18th March 2020)

Irene Forstner-Müller	Head of mission
Pamela Rose	Deputy Head
Hassler, Astrid	Egyptologist
Uroš Matić	Egyptologist
Laure Pantalacci	Egyptologist
Rainer Pauer	Egyptologist
Philipp Seyr	Egyptologist

MoTA Inspector: Abul Hassan

## Season 6 (6th October-9th December 2021)

Irene Forstner-Müller	Head of mission
Pamela Rose	Deputy Head
Nicolas Gail	Photographer
Jelena Gvozdenovic	Egyptologist
Astrid Hassler	Egyptologist
Judith Kreuzer	Photographer
Nisha Kumar	Egyptologist
Uroš Matić	Egyptologist
Carla Mesa Guzzi	Egyptologist



Sandra Müller	Egyptologist
Saskia Pail	Egyptologist
Laure Pantalacci	Egyptologist
Erico Peintner	Conservator
Philipp Seyr	Egyptologist
MoTA Inspectors: Hassan el-Taher, Abul Hassan, Mustafa Mohamed	

Season 7 (6th February-10th March 2022)

Irene Forstner-Müller	Head of mission
Pamela Rose	Deputy Director
Ernst Czerny	Egyptologist
Galik, Alfred	Archaeozoologist
Jelena Gvozdenovic	Egyptologist
Clara Jeuthe	Egyptologist
Uroš Matić	Egyptologist
Novacek, Jan	Anthropologist
Christina Scheelen-Novacek	Anthropologist
Saskia Pail	Egyptologist
Philipp Seyr	Egyptologist
MoTA Inspectors: Hassan el-Taher, Mahmud Mohamed	

Up to now,<sup>3</sup> work within the tell settlement (Fig. 1) has identified 19 stratigraphic phases of occupation on the basis of material culture and epigraphic evidence (Fig. 2), extending from the second half of the 2nd Dynasty to the 19th century A.D. No evidence for activity of the later Middle Kingdom, Second Intermediate Period and earlier New Kingdom (18th Dynasty) has yet been identified in the excavation record, but other sources<sup>4</sup> show that the site was occupied in the periods not attested within the investigated tell layers.

The focus of archaeological research in the seasons discussed here was in areas s/7,<sup>5</sup> s/9 and s/10 (Fig. 1).

<sup>3</sup> See also FORSTNER-MÜLLER et al. 2019.

<sup>4</sup> See a detailed overview of this body of evidence in FORSTNER-MÜLLER, ROSE 2024, pp. 15–17.

<sup>5</sup> This area, the Anglo-Egyptian fort on top of the tell, is not included in this report, as the final publication has been submitted for publication, ROSE in press.



FIG. 1. Overall map of Kom Ombo with areas s/9 and s/10 marked in red.

Relative Dating	Area	Context	Absolute Dating
Phase 1	all areas	layers and pits	modern
Phase 2	s/7	Anglo-Egyptian fort (three subphases)	under construction January 1886, in use to c 1901, demolished by 1905. Subphases not specifically dateable within this
Phase 3-9	all over the tell		18 <sup>th</sup> Dynasty, Ramesside, Late Period, Ptolemaic, Roman, Late Antique, Early Islamic
Phase 10-11	not attested on the tell		later 12 <sup>th</sup> Dynasty, 13 <sup>th</sup> Dynasty
Phase 12	s/1, s/3, s/6, s/9, excavation (IP27)	later phase of the cemetery, administrative building and silos	later F.I.P. (11th Dynasty) to Early MK (12th Dynasty)
Phase 13	s/1, s/9	earlier phase of the cemetery	later OK to earlier F.I.P.
Phase 14	s/1, s/9	massive levelling layers	later OK
Phase 15	s/9	s/9 structure 1	early to mid 5th Dynasty
Phase 16	s/1	s/1 (three subphases)	4th Dynasty (reign of Cheops and Chephren)
Phase 17		s/9 structure 2	second half of the 3rd and 4th Dynasty
Phase 18	s/9	s/9 structure 3 and stone plates in foundation area	mid 2nd to second half of the 3rd dynasty
Phase 19	s/9	s/9 structure 4 and silo wall	mid 2nd to second half of the 3rd Dynasty

FIG. 2. Chronological table showing the periods of occupation so far attested at Kom Ombo.



## 2. AREA S/9

[FIG. 3]

Irene FORSTNER-MÜLLER

This area was described by Barry Kemp in his survey as the “red zone”, as most of it has a reddish colour, probably evidence of heavy burning.<sup>6</sup> At the time of his survey, ancient remains in this part of the tell (walls A, B, C and D) were clearly visible on the surface.<sup>7</sup> An Egyptian mission of the SCA (Supreme Council of Antiquities) made limited excavations near the modern north enclosure wall of the Ptolemaic temple.<sup>8</sup>

The Austrian-Egyptian Mission began its excavations there, between the northern modern enclosure wall of the temple and the Crocodile Museum over an area of ap. 850m<sup>2</sup>.<sup>9</sup> The area is divided into separate parts, s/9 North, s/9 Central and s/9 South. The separation of s/9 North and s/9 Central resulted from the installation of a fibre optic cable between the 2017 and 2018 seasons, which runs from the direction of the modern coffee shop south of the Crocodile Museum towards the tell<sup>10</sup> and makes it impossible to connect them. Area s/9 South is well preserved, whereas areas s/9 Central and North have been greatly damaged by modern activity since Kemp’s survey. This damage, which saw the digging of deep pits across the area, gave the Austrian-Egyptian Mission the opportunity to investigate deeper strata of the ancient town.

A cemetery was found in areas s/9 North and s/9 Central, and in area s/9 South an administrative complex and a large building were discovered. The cemetery and buildings are separated by a massive multi-phased wall that encloses the administrative complex. The cemetery can be dated from the later Old Kingdom to the very beginning of the Middle Kingdom and the administrative complex and the large building were in use during the later First Intermediate Period. The magnetogram from a geophysical survey carried out by Tomasz Herbach<sup>11</sup> using a fluxgate magnetometer showed that the large building continued to the south under the open-air area north of the Ptolemaic temple (Fig. 1).<sup>12</sup> It underlies the temple showing that the temple was built on top of the First Intermediate Period town.

### 2.1. Area s/9 South: The Administrative Complex (Phase 12)

[FIG. 4]

So far, only the central part of the administrative complex has been uncovered, but there is evidence that it extended in all directions. It is best preserved over its eastern part, whereas structures to the west are disturbed by many pits, which in turn are overlaid by massive layers of ancient rubbish consisting of a vast amount of pottery from a wide range of periods from the First Intermediate Period until Late Antiquity. These rubbish layers become thicker to the west. The area is most densely built up to the north, near the enclosure wall.

<sup>6</sup> KEMP 1985, pp. 43–44, fig. 1; see also Kemp’s article (KEMP 2022, pp. 17–22), which specifically discusses this sort of site burning.

<sup>7</sup> KEMP 1985, pp. 43–44, figs. 1, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Personal communication Mohamed Aly el-Nagar.

<sup>9</sup> FORSTNER-MÜLLER et al. 2019, pp. 81–84.

<sup>10</sup> FORSTNER-MÜLLER et al. 2019, p. 81.

<sup>11</sup> University of Warsaw and the Polish Academy of Sciences.

<sup>12</sup> FORSTNER-MÜLLER et al. 2019; HERBACH in FORSTNER-MÜLLER, ROSE 2024, pp. 115–134.



FIG. 3. Overall plan of area s/9.

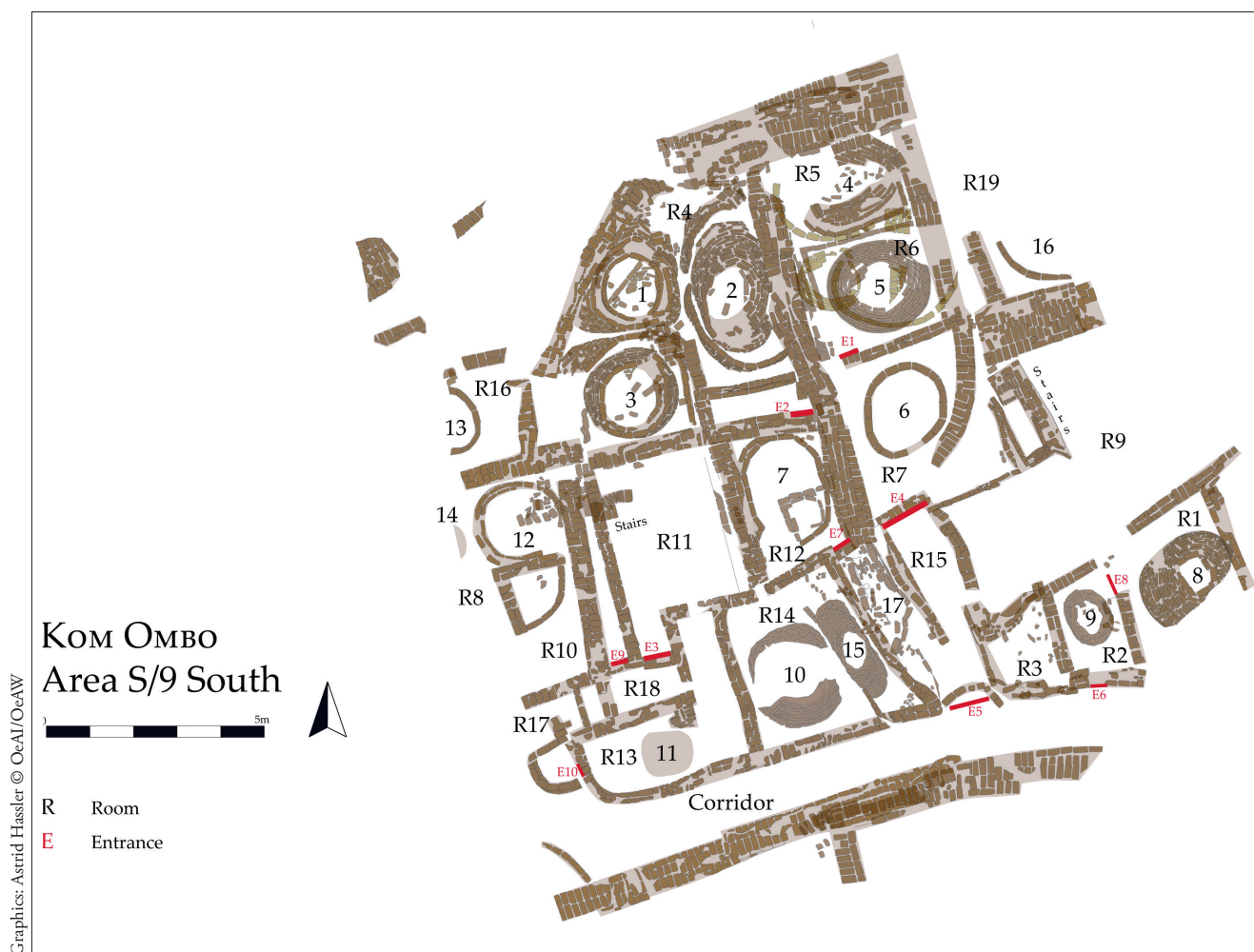


FIG. 4. Administrative complex and southern building of the Later First Intermediate Period.



Excavations revealed a complex sequence of structures that were rebuilt and renewed over time (Fig. 5). Later walls were sometimes built on top of visible older walls, or were built directly onto the existing terrain and no foundation trenches were identified. The walls are exceptionally well preserved, some standing to a height of more than 2 metres. However the walls are only one to one-and-a-half bricks wide (between 15 and 45cm) and were therefore too thin to support a second storey. The whole construction was rather weak, as the walls were rarely bonded, which suggests that the structures were built hastily and were not intended to be used for a long period of time. Original mud plaster was found *in situ* on many of the walls; it is up to 2cm thick.



Photo: Uroš Marić © OcAI/OcAW

FIG. 5. Overview of the administrative complex with rooms and granaries.



Nineteen rooms were identified in the complex. No uniform pattern could be discerned in the architecture; the rooms varied in size and layout, ranging from rectangular to oval or trapezoidal. Entrances to the rooms were usually from the south. The entrances were narrow and varied in width from 54 to 92 cm. The frequent alterations and renovations of the rooms and walls within the complex were reflected in the changes to the room entrances; some were later walled up. Thus, Room 2 was originally accessible from the east (entrance E8); the original entrance to the room was walled up in a later construction phase and a new entrance (entrance E6) was added. This meant that the room could be entered from the south side of the corridor in the later phase.



FIG. 6. Niches inside the wall, most probably for lamps.

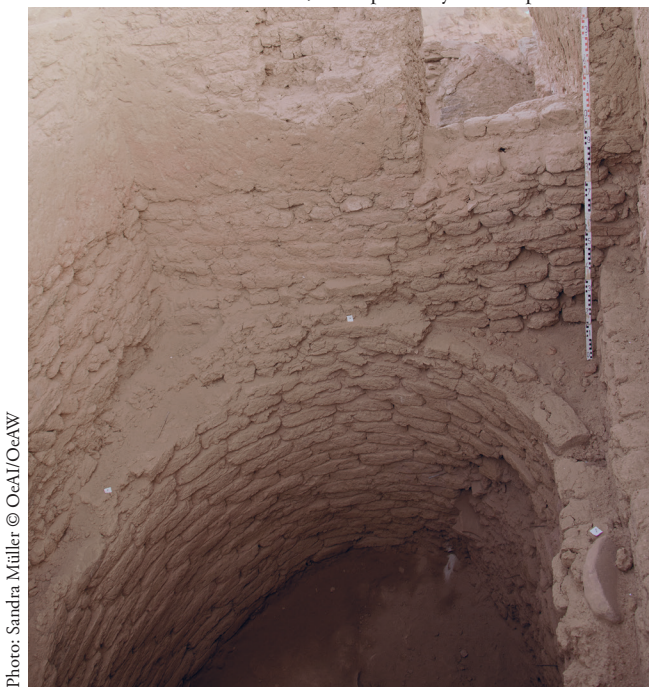


FIG. 7. Robber's hole in wall of silo 7.

In two of the rooms, in the southern wall of room 14 and the eastern wall of the staircase in room 9, rectangular recesses with traces of fire staining were found. These probably served as niches for lamps (Fig. 6). This suggests that these rooms were originally roofed, probably with organic material, wooden planks or straw. It can be assumed that some of the other rooms were also roofed. Roofs could only have been lightweight, however, as otherwise the flimsy walls would have collapsed.

Most of the rooms contained silos, of which 16 have been identified so far. These were of beehive form. Some (nos. 1–4, 10, 12) were built with double-shelled domes, others had only single-shelled domes (nos. 5, 7–9, 11, 15). As with the shapes of the rooms and their spatial organisation, the silos have varied layouts and sizes, as they were fitted tightly into the space available within the rooms. Some of the domes were plastered on the inside. In some of the double-shelled silos, ash was found between shells, probably for disinfection. Access to the silos was probably via hatches in the dome top (see the example in room 1, below). So far, no example of lateral access has been noted. Neither has any original infill been found, thus it is uncertain what was stored in them. It is very likely, however, that they were granaries, well known from Ancient Egyptian tomb decoration and models.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> For an overview of the granary representations and models in Egypt see recently BARDOŇOVÁ 2018, 2019; BATS 2017; FLORÈS 2015.

The silos were certainly of interest to robbers, and their activities could be reconstructed in room 12. In silo 7 a large hole of ap. 75 cm in diameter was made through the entire silo wall in the otherwise well-preserved walls (Fig. 7). Since the contour of the hole is irregular, it is unlikely that this was an intentional opening hatch, the hole is of a size that would easily allow access to a robber.

#### 2.1.1. *Room 4*

This is the only room in which multiple silos were present. Three were built, all double-shelled beehive silos of different shapes and sizes, standing close together so that the outer vault shells touched. All three were probably filled from above. Layers of ash were found between the outer and inner vault shells. The three silos seem to have been in use at the same time.

#### 2.1.2. *Room 1*

[FIG. 8]

This room, in the south-east of the administrative complex, is of particular interest. It could not be fully investigated as it lay partly under the modern temple enclosure wall. Originally, it contained a small roughly round silo, the only example of an intact silo with the support and frame for the hatch still in place on the top. Due to its exceptionally well-preserved state, the silo was not excavated further.



Photo: Astrid Hassler © OcAI/OcAW

FIG. 8. Room 1 with intact silo.



In the earliest phase of use, the room had an entrance from the west (entrance E8), which connected room 1 with room 2. The entrance was later blocked, the silo was abandoned and the room was reused, still for storage purposes. In this later phase, 41 stacks of pottery were stored in the room. More than 500 ceramic vessels were discovered, mainly undamaged, most of them small dishes made of Nile sil (Fig. 9). Small animal bones (rodents) were found between them; it seems that dishes containing remains of food were left here, since the silo seems to have been backfilled with brick before the room was reused. The room was then abandoned leaving the dishes in place.

Only rooms 9 and 11 did not contain silos, and their function remains unclear. Both had stairs in their north-western corners. The stairs presumably served to provide access to the silo hatches. That access to the rooms in general was strictly controlled is shown by seal impressions found throughout the administrative complex, which demonstrate that entrances were closed and sealed.



FIG. 9. Room 1 with stacks of pottery vessels.

Photo: Sandra Müller © OeAI/OeAW

### 2.1.3. *Earlier structures*

Under some of the well-preserved structures in rooms 5, 6 and 12, earlier structures were identified. In room 5, an older obviously storage structure lay under silo 4 (Fig. 10). It is likely that this was also a round silo. Since silo 4 was preserved in its entirety and not dismantled, the earlier silo could not be investigated further. In room 6 an earlier silo lay below silo 5. Only its uppermost brick layer could be recorded as silo 5 above it is preserved and further excavation would endanger its stability. The earlier silo was probably a beehive type. It is orientated northeast-southwest and is of irregular oval plan. In room 12 earlier features were found below silo 7. As silo 7—like silos 4 and 5—was not dismantled, these features could only be investigated from within, where various ash layers and walls were found below it.



FIG. 10. Earlier below silo 4.

Photo: Saskia Pail © OeAI/OeAW

### 2.1.4. *Large Southern Building (Phase 12)*

[FIGS. 3–4]

To the south of the administrative complex and separated from it by a corridor, was a large building (the “Large Southern Building”). It was heavily damaged by later activities and the northern sector of the modern enclosure wall of the Ptolemaic temple lies on top of it. The building continued under the open-air area to the north of the Ptolemaic temple and it was also encountered in the course of excavations conducted by the Kom Ombo inspectorate in 2019. Its walls were more massive than those of the administrative complex, and in general the architecture gives a more organised and solid impression. The rooms are plastered with whitish mud. A massive staircase found by the Egyptian mission indicates that at least the southern part of the central building had two floors. The Austrian-Egyptian Mission was only able to explore a small part of this building.

### 2.1.5. *Corridor (Phase 12)*

[FIGS. 3–4]

A corridor is located between the administrative complex and the Large Southern Building. Its width varies between 1.11 and 1.20 m. The layers within the corridor were heavily disturbed by numerous large pits, underneath which were layers of ash, and below them, street layers. These were loose in consistency and light brown and reddish in colour, in contrast to more commonly encountered compact street layers.

## 2.2. *Enclosure Wall/Town Wall (Phases 12 and 13)*

The administrative complex and the cemetery were separated by a massive curved wall (Fig. 3) dividing funerary from non-funerary space. The multi-phase wall stands to a height of more than three meters (Fig. 11).





FIG. 11. Massive multiphased curved wall enclosing the administrative complex of the First Intermediate Period.

Similar walls were found at Edfu,<sup>14</sup> where it indicates the long-term evolution of the site: they were not built on top of each other as at Kom Ombo but shifted. At Edfu the enclosure wall of the First Intermediate Period was constructed to the west of the late Old Kingdom wall on its exterior facade<sup>15</sup> and the Middle Kingdom wall again slightly to the west of its immediate predecessor.<sup>16</sup>

All over the area s/9 layers of reddened and burned soil were found. Burnt layers were already observed here by B. Kemp,<sup>17</sup> as well as the Ground Water Lowering Project during their work within the temple<sup>18</sup> and recent survey in the north-eastern part of the tell.<sup>19</sup> The Austrian-Egyptian Mission confirmed these findings both in the later phase of the late Old Kingdom/First Intermediate Period cemetery and in the administrative complex,<sup>20</sup> in which the mudbricks were secondarily burned to a bright red colour.

<sup>14</sup> MOELLER 2016, pp. 228–231, figs. 7.10, 7.11a, 7.13.

<sup>15</sup> MOELLER 2016, p. 231, fig. 231.

<sup>16</sup> MOELLER 2016, pp. 228–229, fig. 7.11b.

<sup>17</sup> KEMP 1985, pp. 43–44, fig. 1; KEMP 2022, pp. 20–22.

<sup>18</sup> SADARANGANI et al. 2015; SADARANGANI et al. 2019.

<sup>19</sup> ROSE in FORSTNER-MÜLLER et al. 2019, pp. 66–67, fig. 6.

<sup>20</sup> FORSTNER-MÜLLER et al. 2019, pp. 63, 64, 67, 68, 70, 72, 74, 83.

### 2.3. Area s/9 Central (Phase 12)

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Area s/9 Central, which is situated immediately adjacent to the slope of the tell, was covered by a massive layer of windblown sand and debris, containing material from Pharaonic through to modern times. This had accumulated during recent site development processes. Excavation proved to be extremely difficult here, as the sections of the trench had to be excavated in steps and secured by walls of sandbags to ensure the safety of the staff and prevent the debris from slipping.

The area (Fig. 3) is dominated by a large mudbrick mastaba tomb L329, which was part of the cemetery of the late Old Kingdom/First Intermediate Period. It is oriented north-south and consists of a massive superstructure and multiple subterranean burial chambers, with at least three entrance shafts in the southern part.

In 2018 the top layers of the tomb's superstructure, heavily disturbed by large pits, were revealed. At that time it was interpreted as a massive mudbrick platform, perhaps part of a tower (Fig. 12).<sup>21</sup> The dimensions of the superstructure are at least 4,5 × 3,5 m. The mudbrick superstructure was burnt secondarily to a reddish-brown hue, apparently by the same event



FIG. 12. Mastaba L329 from above.

<sup>21</sup> FORSTNER-MÜLLER et al. 2019, p. 83.



that affected the rest of the area.<sup>22</sup> The outer wall on the western side, which is 1m wide, and the northern facade of the tomb about a wall from an earlier phase of the cemetery, M160, thus integrating the wall's upper part into the superstructure of the mastaba. On the southern side of the tomb, the shafts about the massive wall that encloses the administrative complex in area s/9 South and at the same time separates the cemetery from the administrative complex.

In 2021, excavations were extended eastwards to locate the outer eastern wall. Unfortunately, the area here was destroyed by an enormous and extremely deep pit filled mostly with modern debris. However, the remains of the foundation courses of a wall (M424) were identified to the east that corresponds in width and alignment with the outer western wall of the tomb and is probably the eastern outer wall. Thus the tomb's size can be reconstructed as covering an area of 6,5 × 5,5 m.

The western and central tomb shafts were fully excavated but the easternmost shaft was partly destroyed by the modern pit and excavation stopped here for safety reasons. The shafts were 1,20 × 1 m wide and approximately 3m deep. The upper inner parts of the shaft walls faces showed traces of fire. The western and central shafts each gave access to a rectangular burial chamber, L622 and L664, 2,10 × 0,80 m in size, with walls of the chambers one brick wide. The chambers were oriented north-south and covered by single layer barrel vaults, both of which leant towards the wall that separated the chambers and abutted the older wall M160. Again, the bricks were burnt reddish-brown.

The westernmost chamber, L622, had a completely collapsed vault, presumably destroyed by robbers. The tomb was looted and contained neither the burial nor grave goods.

The second tomb chamber, L664, (Fig. 13) accessed from the central shaft, was also looted via a robber's pit cut into the southeastern part of the vault. Interestingly, the vault was not built as a complete arch, resting on two equally high base walls, but rested against a higher straight wall on its east side. The burial chamber was heavily disturbed. At least three individuals could be identified, the remains of the skeletons all dislocated and scattered across the tomb floor. The bones were burnt to a bluish-grey colour and were extremely brittle. The soil found inside the tomb was of the same reddish colour as the bricks. Due to the poor state of preservation, nothing can be said about the orientation of the burials.

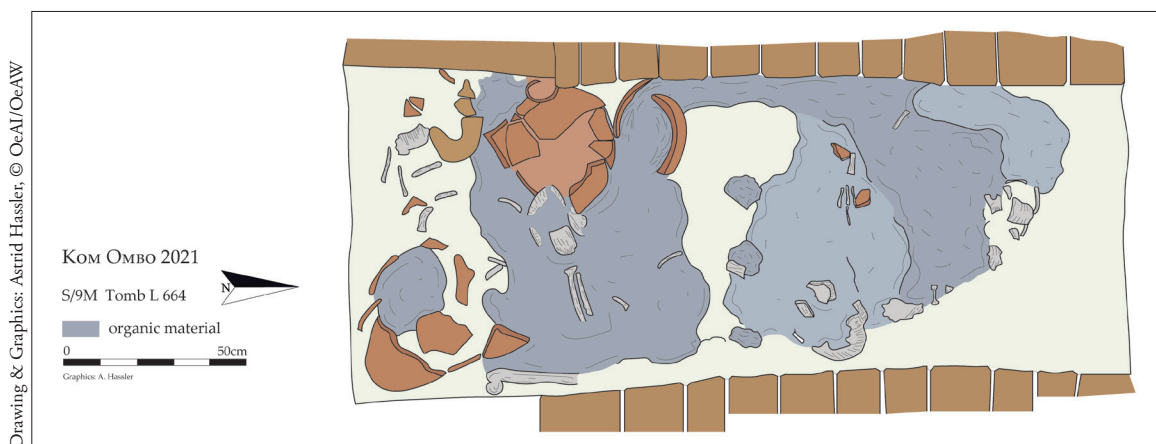


FIG. 13. Tomb chamber L664.

<sup>22</sup> See above.

Few grave goods were found in the tomb. Those left by the robbers consisted of some broken pottery vessels, mostly large storage containers that were located near the northern front wall of the chamber, and a small, circular stamp seal<sup>23</sup> (type: SF-BAI)<sup>24</sup> made of bone. On the front of the seal was the simplified and stylized figure of a so-called *tête-bêche* gazelle motif in *Kerbschnitt* technique,<sup>25</sup> which finds its closest parallels in the 6th Dynasty and the early First Intermediate Period (Fig. 14).<sup>26</sup> The pottery dates to the same period,<sup>27</sup> the late Old Kingdom or early First Intermediate Period. The chamber's interior was covered by a whitish, flaky material, especially where bones were found, but also on and inside the pottery. This may be the remains of shrouds, covering or enveloping the deceased persons.



Photo: Niki Gail, © OeAI/OeAW

FIG. 14. Small circular stamp seal from L664, KO-KF 1529.

The rectangular shaft entrance was vaulted and bricked up after each burial. Whether the three burials were put in at the same time or sequentially cannot be clarified due to the poor state of preservation.

The mastaba was built over an older phase of the cemetery, which was identified in earlier seasons in the northern part of area s/9.<sup>28</sup> To the north of the mastaba, under four layers that were probably levelling layers connected with the construction of the mastaba, were two earlier vaulted tombs (L461, L466). They also abut the older wall M160. These could not be excavated because of the modern fibre optic cable mentioned above.

Immediately below mastaba tomb chamber L622 and the lowermost course of bricks from the shaft, and therefore belonging to an earlier use of the cemetery, was another chamber tomb L845. L845 was of similar style and size as L622 and again, the bricks were burned. The rectangular chamber measured approximately 2,20 × 0,80 m and was covered by a single course barrel vault, which subsided slightly due to the weight of the structures above it. Like mastaba tomb L664, a robbers' pit cut into its vault in the southeastern part of the tomb, almost removing half of the vault on the eastern side. The interior of the tomb was slightly better preserved than L664 and the overlying L622. A single burial was identified, oriented north-south, buried on its left side in a flexed position with the knees towards the east. The head originally lay to the north but was not preserved. Only the lower part of the body up to the pelvis survived the robbers' depredations. The bones were burnt blueish-grey and were very

<sup>23</sup> Information on description and dating was kindly provided by Philipp Seyr.

<sup>24</sup> SEIDLMAYER 1990, p. 185; DUBIEL 2008, p. 92.

<sup>25</sup> WIESE 1996, D.8.d „*degenerierte Antilopen-Muster*“. The stylistically most similar examples *Ibid.*, pl. 27, cat. nos. 547-552 belong also to the type SF-BAI and are also made of bone (or tooth).

<sup>26</sup> Type SM-D (SEIDLMAYER 1990, p. 193; WIESE 1996, p. 26). A comparable motif (with a frog figure on the seals' rear) is found on the glazed steatite seal 3816/B 1396 from tomb 105 at Balat which is dated to the late 6th dynasty to the early First Intermediate Period (CASTEL, PANTALACCI 2005, pp. 157-165, pp. 418-420 Fig. 267); cf. its similarity to variant D.7 (WIESE 1996, pl. 24-25) remarked by PANTALACCI in CASTEL, PANTALACCI 2005, p. 233.

<sup>27</sup> Dating of the pottery courtesy Uroš Matić.

<sup>28</sup> FORSTNER-MÜLLER et al. 2019, p. 81, table 1.

brittle. The tomb was completely looted, and no grave goods were found besides some pottery fragments which may be part of tomb offerings or from the tomb filling.

Beneath the tomb chamber of L664 and immediately east of tomb L845 was the vault of another tomb, L1016, similar in shape and size to the other tombs associated with or pre-dating the mastaba L329. This had also been robbed via a large pit cut into the vault, destroying most of the top. As with tomb L845, the tomb belongs to an earlier phase of the cemetery. It has not yet been excavated.

## 2.4. Area s/9 North

Irene Forstner-Müller and Uroš MATIĆ

Area s/9 north (Fig. 3) is located to the north of area s/9 Central, to the south of the control building for the groundwater levelling project and to the east of area s/1. Area s/9 North, as area s/9 Central, was covered with massive layers (until 3 metres thick) of windblown sand and debris, which contained mixed material from ancient to modern times.

The area was first investigated in 2018.<sup>29</sup> After the surface debris was removed, an earlier phase of the cemetery of the late Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period (phase 13) was found. Below this, thick levelling layers, probably for the construction of the cemetery, were revealed (phase 14). These levelling layers covered the remains of an Old Kingdom settlement (phase 15; Fig. 15).<sup>30</sup>

In 2019 and 2021 area s/9 North was investigated further. Due to the increasing depth of the trench it was necessary to reduce the size of the trench by stepping the southern and eastern edges inwards. In 2021 the area was, however, enlarged to the east, the area limited by the control building to the north and a modern concrete shaft in the east. For safety reasons, baulks were left on all four sides (Fig. 16).

Four main building phases dating from the second half of the 2nd Dynasty to the early/mid 5th Dynasty were identified (Kom Ombo phases 15 to 18; Figs. 15, 17). All building constructions were preceded by levelling activities.<sup>31</sup> Pits from later periods cutting into the cemetery above destroyed the structures from phases 15 and 16.

### 2.4.1. Phase 15

[FIGS. 15, 17a]

Poorly preserved remains of one mudbrick structure (Structure 1) can be linked to phase 15. Despite the small size of the excavated area it was possible to identify interior spaces (corridor, rooms) and exterior areas (courtyards?). The mudbrick walls were on average one brick wide (40cm). A 70cm-wide entrance was situated in the north-western part of the building and consisted of a mudbrick threshold with a limestone fragment (diameter 19 × 8cm thick) built into the entrance wall M255. It may have been used as a door socket. A similar mudbrick threshold with a limestone fragment was found at the entrance of another house in area s/1,

<sup>29</sup> FORSTNER-MÜLLER et al. 2019, pp. 83–84.

<sup>30</sup> FORSTNER-MÜLLER et al. 2019, pp. 81–84, Tab. 1.

<sup>31</sup> The dating of the individual phases is preliminary, since not all contexts have been studied yet.



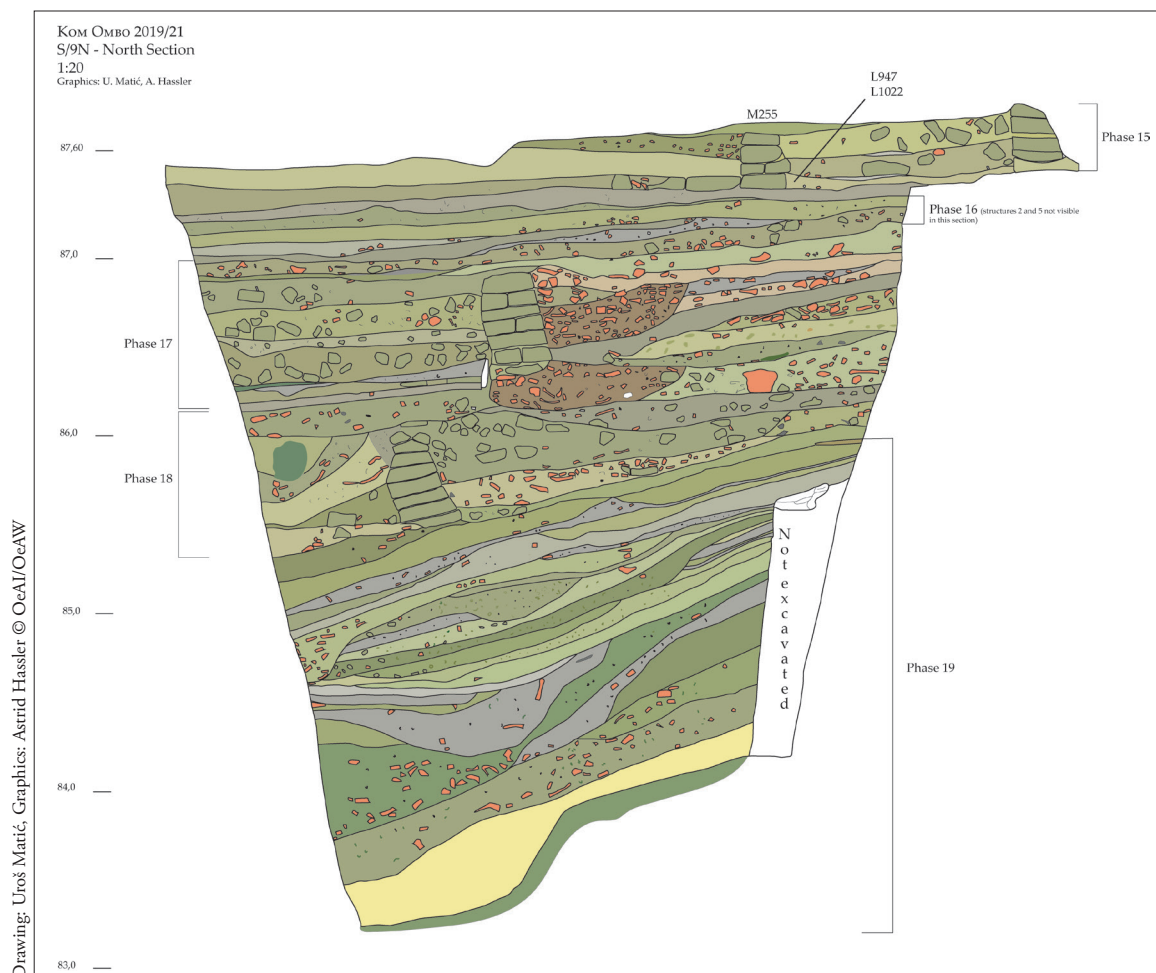


FIG. 15. Drawing of the main north section of the trench in area s/9 North.



FIG. 16. Overview of the trench in area s/9 North in winter 2021, showing the control building of the GWLP in the background.  
BIFAO 124 (2024), p. 207-249 Irene Forstner-Müller, Clara Jeuthe, Laure Pantalacci, Pamela Rose, Philipp Seyr  
Second Preliminary Report on the Town of Kom Ombo (2019-2021)  
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just a few metres to the west of area s/9 North.<sup>32</sup> Outside Structure 1, directly to the left of the entrance, was a mudbrick installation (ca. 85 × 45 cm). This had ap. 15cm-wide walls and was hollow inside (size of interior space ca. 70 × 20 cm). At some point it was filled with mudbrick debris. Its function is not clear but it may have been a bench or a manger for feeding animals.<sup>33</sup> An east-west oriented wall about 75 cm south of the entrance divided the exterior area into two zones.

Settlement debris including pottery fragments, seal impressions and sealing mass, lithics and animal bones was found. Seal impressions with the name of Userkaf, the first king of the 5th Dynasty, occur in this phase.<sup>34</sup> The pottery indicates an early to mid 5th Dynasty date. Fragments of jars in fabric Kom Ombo Nile 1, roughly corresponding to Vienna System B1 (Fig. 18a, KO-KV 103-3), and Kom Ombo Marl 1 (Fig. 18a, KO-KV 101-5), with a characteristic highly modelled rim type with an inner groove which can be dated to the early to middle, possibly even late 5th Dynasty,<sup>35</sup> were found on the floors of Structure 1 (L947 and L1022 directly below and in foundation area of the structure). A parallel occurs in area s/1 (L118) in the levelling layer for the construction of the cemetery (phase 14). Common in phase 15 are red polished Kom Ombo Nile 1 fabric and Kom Ombo Marl 1 fabric carinated bowls of type Elephantine KRS (*Knickerandschale*) 4 (Fig. 18a, KO-KV 123-8), which are attested there in phases C2 to C5 (early 4th to early to mid-5th Dynasty).<sup>36</sup> Although most of the pottery dates to the early to mid 5th Dynasty, pottery that seems earlier in date is attested in Kom Ombo in phase 15: collared beer jars with smoothed collars (Fig. 18b, KO-KV 123-54) made in Kom Ombo Nile 3 fabric (roughly corresponding to Vienna System C), found at Elephantine in phases C3 to C4 (early to late 4th Dynasty) and those with clearly pronounced furrow (Fig. 18b, 74-1), which are found at Elephantine in phases C2 to C4 (late 3rd to late 4th Dynasty).<sup>37</sup>

#### 2.4.2. Phase 16

[FIG. 15, 17b]

Remains of Structures 2 and 5, which probably belonged to the same building, were less well preserved than Structure 1. The walls were ap. 25 cm wide. In Structure 5 was an installation consisting of a small rectangular mudbrick enclosure M449 (approximately 65 × 60+x cm) with a circular pit (approximately 40 cm in diameter) in the middle. The pit was filled with ash. No oven nor fireplace was found directly next to it. The pottery from the foundation levels of Structures 2 and 5 dates to the 4th Dynasty and the building is contemporary with the building excavated in area s/1 in autumn 2017.<sup>38</sup> The most common pottery type was the carinated bowl of type Elephantine KRS 4 in fabrics Kom Ombo Nile 1 and Marl clay 1 (Fig. 18a, KO-KV 123-8) and the collared beer jar with smoothed collar in fabric Kom Ombo Nile 3 (Fig. 18b, KO-KV 123-54).<sup>39</sup>

<sup>32</sup> FORSTNER-MÜLLER et al. 2019, p. 75, fig. 22.

<sup>33</sup> Similar installations were documented in ethnographic studies of modern Egyptian villages next to the house entrances, BLACKMAN 2000, pp. 29, 37, 51, 219; EIGNER 1984, p. 13; HENEIN 1988, pp. 9–12; HIVERNEL 1996, pp. 16–17.

<sup>34</sup> Information is courtesy of Philipp Seyr who is studying the seal impressions from Kom Ombo.

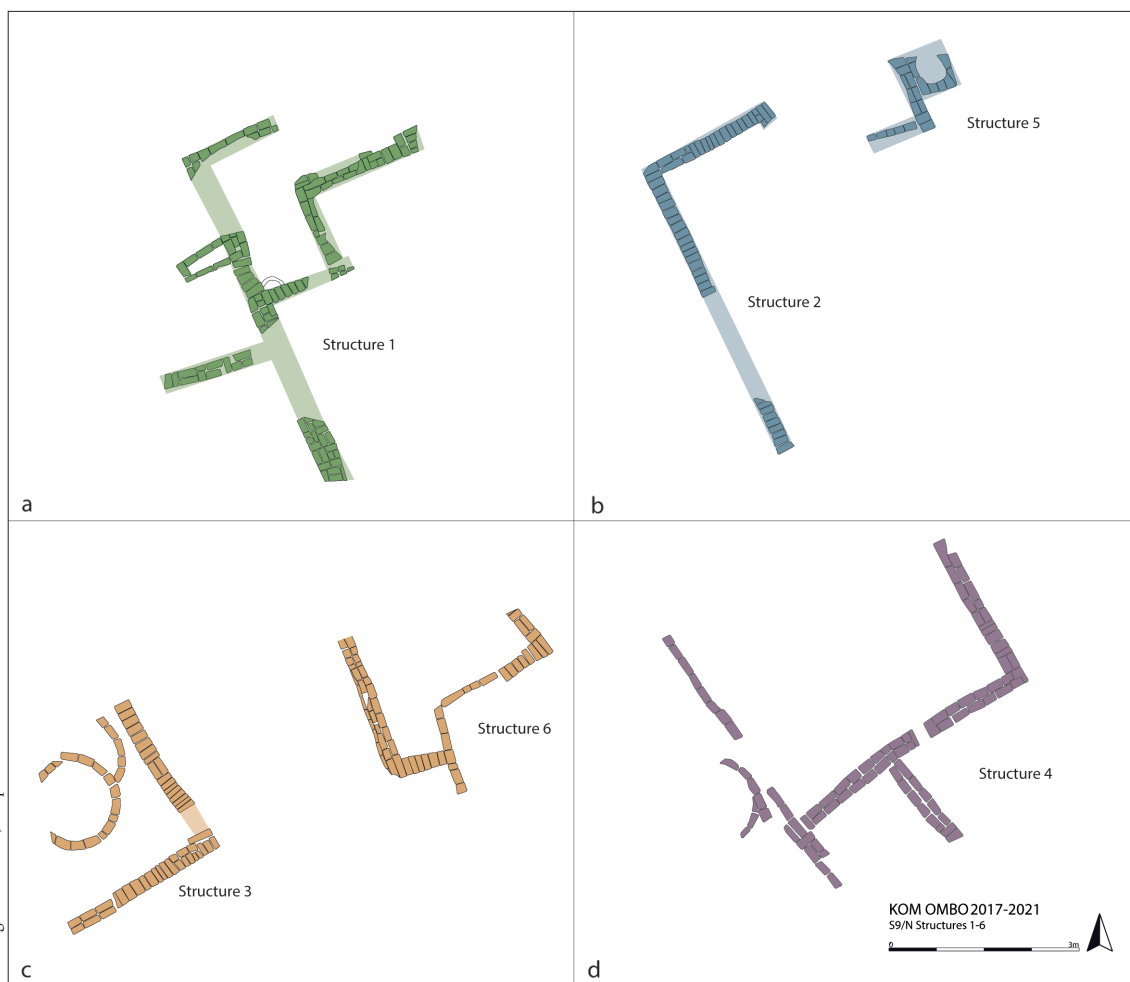
<sup>35</sup> ARIAS KYTNAROVÁ 2014, fig. 4.20, p. 123.

<sup>36</sup> RAUE 2021, p. 124.

<sup>37</sup> RAUE 2018, pp. 191–193; RAUE 2021, p. 270.

<sup>38</sup> FORSTNER-MÜLLER et al. 2019, pp. 75–76.

<sup>39</sup> RAUE 2021, pp. 124, 272.



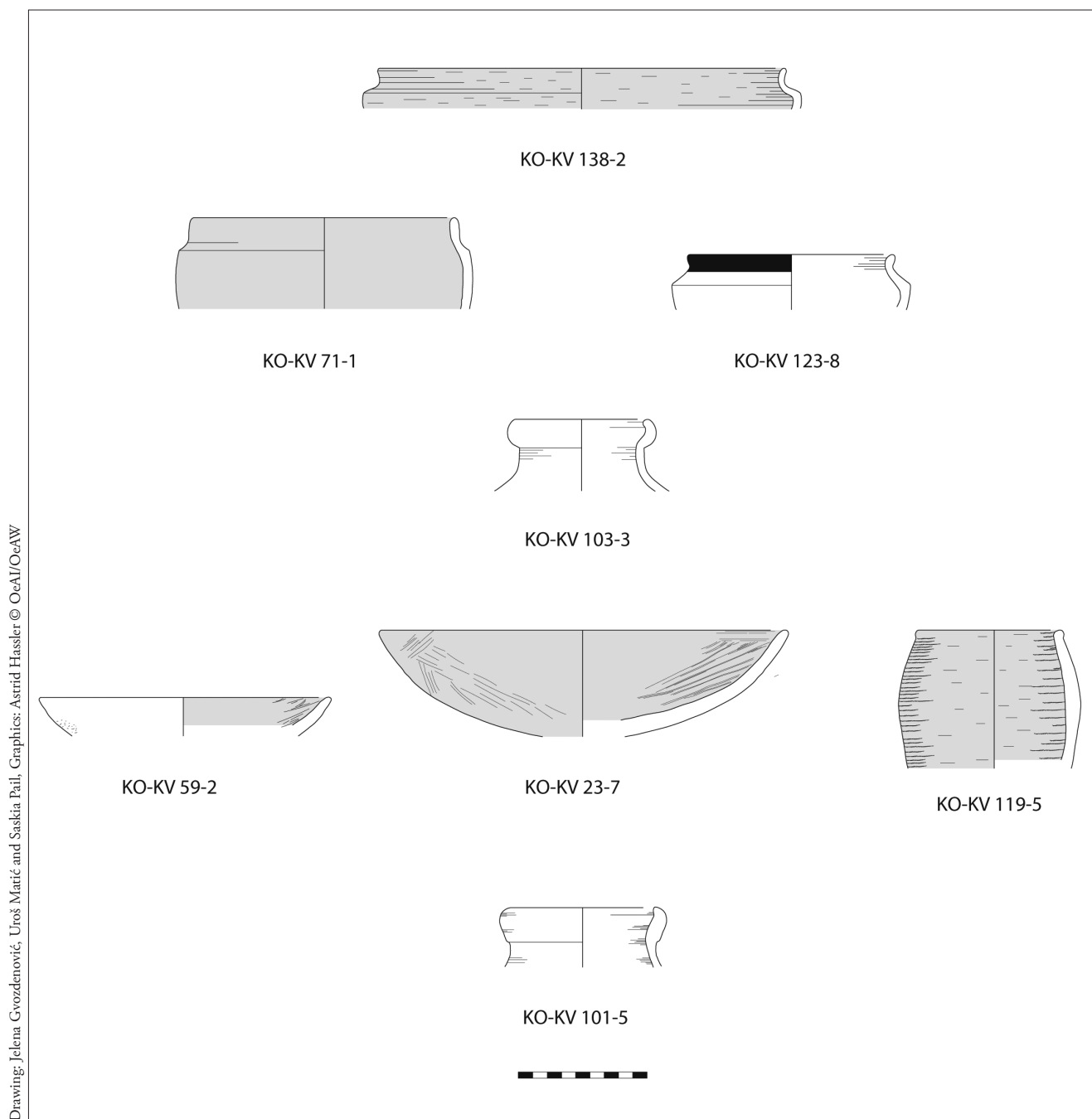
**FIG. 17a.** Structure 1 in area s/9 North with the entrance and the mudbrick installation next to it; **b.** Structures 2 and 5 in area s/9 North; **c.** Structures 3 and 6 in area s/9 North; **d.** Structure 4 in area s/9 North.

### 2.4.3. Phase 17

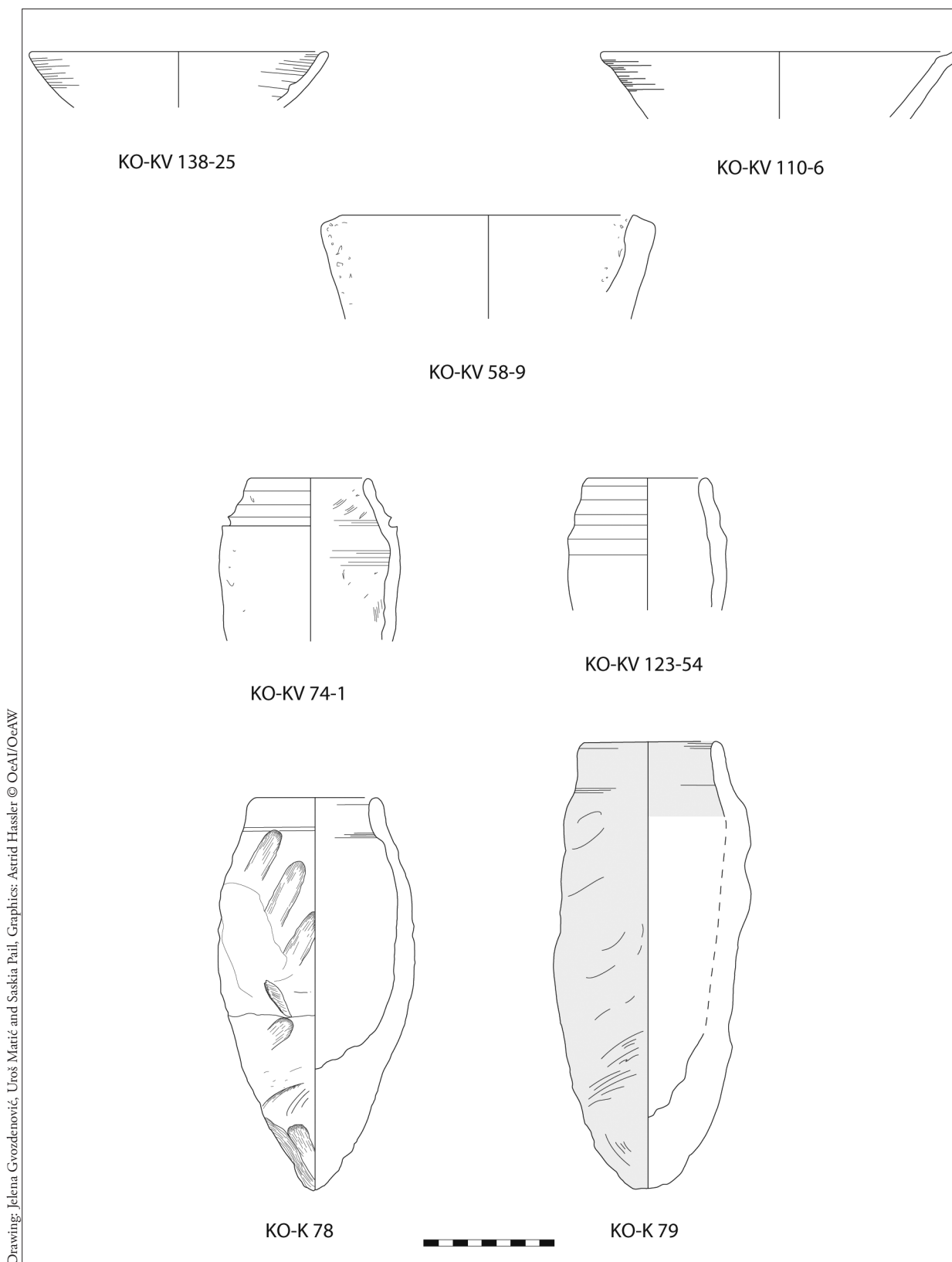
[FIGS. 15, 17c]

In this phase the remains of Structures 3 and 6 were found. These could be attributed to the same building complex. Several subphases were distinguished as the original threshold and the entrance to Structure 6 were first moved about 1m to the south when a new threshold was built, after which this new threshold was also renovated in the same place. The average width of the walls was 35 cm. Between Structures 6 and 3 was a courtyard containing several fireplaces, and another courtyard lay outside Structure 4 in the west. This courtyard west of Structure 4 had a mudbrick silo M476 (approximately 1,40 m inner and 1,65 m outer diameter) with a 15–20 cm- wide wall. After the silos were no longer used, the courtyard was levelled. Next to the west face of wall M262 of Structure 3, circular postholes approximately 35 cm in diameter were identified. They may have held wooden columns for roofs providing shade or for other building activities. The pottery from the foundation area of these structures indicates a date in the second half of the 3rd, possibly even early 4th Dynasty. Collared beer jars with an overhang, common in Elephantine in phases C1 to C4 (first half of the 3rd to early 4th Dynasty)<sup>40</sup> are attested. An early type of inner ledge bowls “with cut off rim and

<sup>40</sup> RAUE 2021, p. 269.



**FIG. 18a.** Selection of most common pottery of fabric groups Kom Ombo Nile 1 (KO-KV 138-2; KO-KV 71-1; KO-KV 123-8 and KO-KV 103-3), Kom Ombo Nile 2 (KO-KV 59-2; KO-KV 23-7; KO-KV 119-5) and Kom Ombo Marl 1 (KO-KV 101-5) from stratigraphic phases 15 to 19, organized into open and closed vessel types.



**Fig. 18b.** Selection of most common pottery of fabric group Kom Ombo Nile 3 from stratigraphic phases 15 to 19 (KO-KV 138-25; KO-KV 110-6; KO-KV 58-9; KO-KV 74-1; KO-KV 123-54; KO-K 78; KO-K 79) organized into open and closed vessel types.

an overhang” (Fig. 18b, KO-KV 110-6) of Kom Ombo Nile 3 fabric are quite common and are found in Elephantine from phase B6 to phase C1 (late 2nd to first half of 3rd Dynasty).<sup>41</sup> Occasionally there are also fragments of the developed form of the inner ledge bowl of the same fabric (Fig. 18b, KO-KV 138-25) and found in Elephantine from phase C1 to C3-possibly C4 (first half of the 3rd to early 4th Dynasty).<sup>42</sup> Kom Ombo Nile 1 and marl clay carinated bowls of type KRS 3 at Elephantine (Fig. 18a, KO-KV 138-2), occurring there in the same phases as the developed form of the inner ledge bowl, are also present.<sup>43</sup>

#### 2.4.4. Phase 18

[FIGS. 15, 17d]

In phase 18 remains of Structure 4 were found. This phase—based on renovations of the entrance through the construction of new thresholds and the renovation of the walls—can be divided into four subphases (a–d). The walls were on average 30cm wide. The entrance was 50+x cm wide in all subphases. As in phase 17, two small silos were erected in a courtyard outside the structure. Two beer jars made in coarse Nile silt (Kom Ombo Nile 3) were found on floor L863 (Fig. 18b, KO-K 78 and KO-K 79; Fig. 19) associated with threshold M404 (subphase c) are of the type “beer jars with a simple rim and pronounced shoulder” found in Elephantine in phases B5 to B8, which date from the second half of the 2nd to very early 3rd Dynasty, based



Photo: Uroš Matić © OeAI/OeAW

**FIG. 19.** Beer jars in situ on the floor L863 associated to threshold M404, subphase c of Structure 4 in area s/9 North.

<sup>41</sup> RAUE 2021, pp. 66–67.

<sup>42</sup> RAUE 1999, pp. 180–182; RAUE 2018, pp. 190–192; RAUE 2021, pp. 6–7, 66, 159.

<sup>43</sup> KÖHLER 2022, p. 418, tab. 1; RAUE 2021, p. 119.

on associated seal impressions with royal names (Peribsen and Sekhemib-Perenmaat).<sup>44</sup> This phase also marks the appearance of the first carinated bowls made in Kom Ombo Nile 1 and marl clay fabrics (Fig. 18a, KO-KV 71-1). Parallels are found in Elephantine type KRS 2 (B8 to C1, or late 2nd to early 3rd Dynasty).<sup>45</sup>

#### 2.4.5. Phase 19

[FIG. 15]

In phase 19 no architecture was found in the excavated area. An ap. 2 m-thick package of alternating layers of sandy-muddy soil with pottery, ashy deposits containing a small amount of pottery and muddy soil with a large amount of pottery was present. The pottery consisted of shapes common in the second half of the 2nd Dynasty, such as red streak-burnished plates (Fig. 18a, KO-KV 59-2) with direct rim (Elephantine B4-B8), red streak-burnished bowls with direct (Fig. 18a, KO-KV 23-7) or modelled (Fig. 18a, KO-KV 119-5) rim (Elephantine B2-B8) and *bedja* bread moulds (Fig. 18b, KO-KV 58-9) with an indentation in the rim area of the inner wall (Elephantine B5-C2).<sup>46</sup> No early forms of collared beer jars, no early forms of bowls with an inner ledge nor carinated bowls were found in these layers.<sup>47</sup> Below the earliest archaeological layers was a 20–40 cm-thick layer of alluvial sand with no archaeological material. This layer covered a thick dark muddy deposit, also with no archaeological material. These two layers sloped from east to west at an angle of incline of approximately 40°. Core drillings conducted in the area by the Ground Water Levelling Project (GWLP) indicate that geological layers without human activities were reached at this level. The layers of phase 18 may be refuse originating from a settlement of the second half of the 2nd Dynasty, which slowly accumulated on the ancient eastern Nile bank. As the settlement expanded, more refuse accumulated, shifting the eastern bank further towards the west and allowing the creation of new land for building activities, at least during seasons without flooding. Since the late 2nd Dynasty, the eastern Nile river bank at Kom Ombo has shifted far to the west.

### 3. SEAL IMPRESSIONS AND SEALS: SEASONS 2018–2020<sup>48</sup>

Philipp SEYR and Laure PANTALACCI

Sealings rank among the most numerous finds from all excavated parts of the ancient town of Kom Ombo.<sup>49</sup> They are of different stages of fragmentation depending on their original supports, opening techniques, disposal methods, as well as site formation processes. So far,

<sup>44</sup> RAUE 1999, pp. 176–182; RAUE 2021, pp. 6–7, 241–243. In Helwan this is Type 4 beer jar characteristic for Date Group IIID3 which continues into Date Group IIID4, KÖHLER 2014, p. 37.

<sup>45</sup> KÖHLER 2022, p. 418, tab. 1; RAUE 2021, pp. 115–118.

<sup>46</sup> RAUE 1999, pp. 174–176.

<sup>47</sup> However, the dating implications must be taken with caution as not all the material has been studied yet.

<sup>48</sup> This work was funded by the Archive and Travel Grant GO.INVESTIGATIO of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW).

<sup>49</sup> This large number is not due to the particular richness of the site, but to the specific sieving technique, which involves drying all excavated material in the sun and sieving it thoroughly with fine sieves; cf. the description in SARTORI 2009, p. 283. Previously, a good number of Old Kingdom seal impressions—mostly of officials' seals—was found by the Kom Ombo Ground Water Lowering Project (JONES 2019).



994 pieces have seal impressions or incisions and are distributed over the excavated areas as follows:<sup>50</sup>

Area	Sealings with		
	Cylinder seal impressions	Stamp seal impressions	Incisions
s/3	1	—	1
s/9 North	524	2	5
s/9 Central	17	8	4
s/9 South	49	258	88

TABLE 1. Distribution of the sealings over the excavated areas.

### 3.1. Area s/9 North

[FIG. 3]

The 2nd Dynasty settlement waste layers of phase 19 contained exclusively sealings fixed on portable objects, e.g. jar caps, jar-neck sealings, and triangular labels.<sup>51</sup> They were impressed by officials' seals (*Beamtensiegel*) whose owners bear the epithet *swtꜥ-jb* "the one who causes to rejoice" (Fig. 20a)<sup>52</sup> or the title *ḥm-nzw* "royal dependent" (Fig. 20b-c).<sup>53</sup> In some cases, the inscriptions contain only the name of the seal owner (Fig. 20.d). Interestingly, the title *ḥm-nzw* appears on seven seals, two of which are attested on two different sealings.<sup>54</sup> As all nine sealings were attached to jar necks, this evidence points toward a practice of regular deliveries, which was organised, supervised or checked by these royal agents (Fig. 20).<sup>55</sup>

The sealings from the Old Kingdom settlement of phases 18–15 were mostly fixed on containers such as jars, baskets, chests or sacks, and only occasionally on wooden doors. Some levelling layers, streets and dumping spaces outside the buildings contained especially high quantities of broken sealings (e.g. L1121 with 24 pieces), while interior spaces are generally devoid of them. According to their inscriptions, officials' seals also dominate this corpus. In theophoric names, the ram gods Khnum, Ba and Kherty<sup>56</sup> as well as Anubis appear, and in

<sup>50</sup> The small sealing fragments that could not be assigned to one category with certainty do not appear in the following table. The same is true for simple mud sealings, which were neither impressed with a seal nor marked by incisions.

<sup>51</sup> The shape of the latter is comparable to those found at Elephantine (PÄTZNICK 2005, p. 53 and 241 middle: type Tb. 3 "Vorhängeverschluss").

<sup>52</sup> KO-KF 1810, 1821, and 1832; cf. the contemporary evidence from nearby Elephantine (ENGEL 2021a, p. 36). J.-P. Pätznick (2005, pp. 105–107) interprets the group as title *ḥry-s(w)ḏꜥ(w)* "Oberster Bewahrer"; that is, however, contradicted by the form of the last sign.

<sup>53</sup> Translation after PAPAŽIAN 2021, p. 208. Note that *ḥm-nzw* and *swtꜥ-jb* do not both appear on one single seal according to our current evidence.

<sup>54</sup> KO-KF 1823, 1834, 1841, 1849, 1852, 1853, 1854, 1857, 2220.

<sup>55</sup> Only three other attestations of this title on Old Kingdom seal inscriptions have been published so far: Elephantine Chufuanch/32250 (ENGEL in press), the unprovenanced seal London, UCL 11069 (ENGEL 2021a, p. 25, III no. 8.2.16: "frühestens in die Mitte der 3. Dynastie"), and possibly the seal impression Elephantine 14945f (PÄTZNICK 2005, p. 309 Cat. 75: "frühestens 3. bzw. 4. Dyn.") that was kindly pointed out to me by E.-M. Engel. Yet, the title is abundantly attested in the Gebelein papyri of the 4th Dynasty (PAPAŽIAN 2021, p. 208; ANDRÁSSY 2021, p. 234). Therefore, one might wonder whether the provincial setting during the second half of the 2nd Dynasty Kom Ombo was comparable to that of 4th Dynasty Gebelein, at least in terms of resource management.

<sup>56</sup> ENGEL 2021a, p. 47.

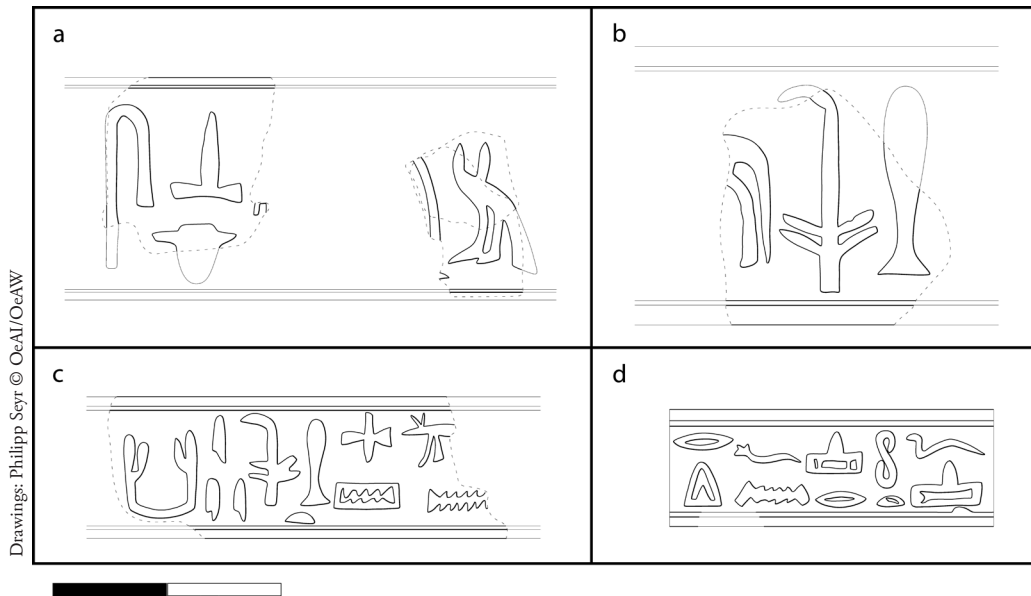


FIG. 20. Seal impressions of phase 19, s/9 North: a. KO-KF 1810 + 1821; b. KO-KF 1852; c. KO-KF 1823 + 2200; d. KO-KF 1827.

addition to names, the Neith-standard is also attested.<sup>57</sup> However, in contrast to the earlier material, these sealings mainly feature the titles *mjtr* (20×)/ *mjtr.t* (4×), *rnw* (6×)/ *rn.ty* (5×), *sd* (2×), *hbn(.y)* (3×), and the epithet *nfr-kd-mꜣ.t* (12×) (Fig. 21a-d).<sup>58</sup> As such, they seem to form a quite homogeneous group indicating that the area did not undergo any significant change in function during this period. Among them, scattered impressions of seals of office (“*Amtssiegel*”) were found only rarely and in most cases royal names are lost.<sup>59</sup> Two of them from 5th Dynasty deposits, however, bear the Horus name of the 3rd Dynasty king Khaba and parts of the laudatory phrase *jrr dd.tꜣf* “who does what he says” (Fig. 21e).<sup>60</sup> In view of this evidence, it is especially noteworthy that institutional sealings of Khaba were also found near Elephantine<sup>61</sup> and at Hierakonpolis (Fig. 21).<sup>62</sup>

Of paramount importance for the historiography of the town are the sealings from the massive levelling layers (phase 14) that underlie the early phase of the First Intermediate Period cemetery. On the one hand, these deposits yielded fragments of officials’ seals with titles that are known from previous phases as well as—for the first time—the epithet *twt-n-mrw.t*<sup>63</sup> and the so-called ‘offering scene’ (Fig. 22a).<sup>64</sup> On the other, parts of the debris appear to come from the

<sup>57</sup> Cf. ENGEL 2021a, pp. 42–43; ENGEL 2021b.

<sup>58</sup> ENGEL 2021a, pp. 22–23 (*mjtr/mjtr.t*), 25 (*rnw/rn.ty*), 29–31 (*hbn* and *sd*) and 35 (*nfr-kd-mꜣ.t*).

<sup>59</sup> E.g. KO-KF 1623 that shows a crudely sculpted perched falcon on top of a *serekh*.

<sup>60</sup> KO-KF 1528 preserves the whole epithet while KO-KF 1583 has only *jri* [...]. This phrase is paralleled in the unprovenanced seal impression London, UC 11755 (KAHL et al. 1995, p. 160, Ch/?/3).

<sup>61</sup> Exc. Nos. 14300l (PÄTZNICK 2005, p. 413, Cat. 280), 16355d (*Ibid.*, p. 512, Cat. 469), 21311e (*Ibid.*, p. 578, Cat. 578), 21329 (*Ibid.*, p. 616, Cat. 651), 32101 K/e-1 (ENGEL 2009, p. 372), and 38901G/c-11 as well as 38901G/c-12 (ENGEL 2018, Kat. 128 Nr. 248, fig. 59).

<sup>62</sup> Nr. 168 in QUIBELL, GREEN 1902, p. 51, pl. LXX.I. Another seal impression of this king was recently found at Quesna in Lower Egypt (ROWLAND, TASSIE 2017, pp. 377–378, fig. 4).

<sup>63</sup> ENGEL 2021a, p. 36.

<sup>64</sup> The three examples from Kom Ombo (KO-KF 384, 558, and 563) augment the corpus of sealings with this scene from settlement contexts recently collected by SPECK 2021.



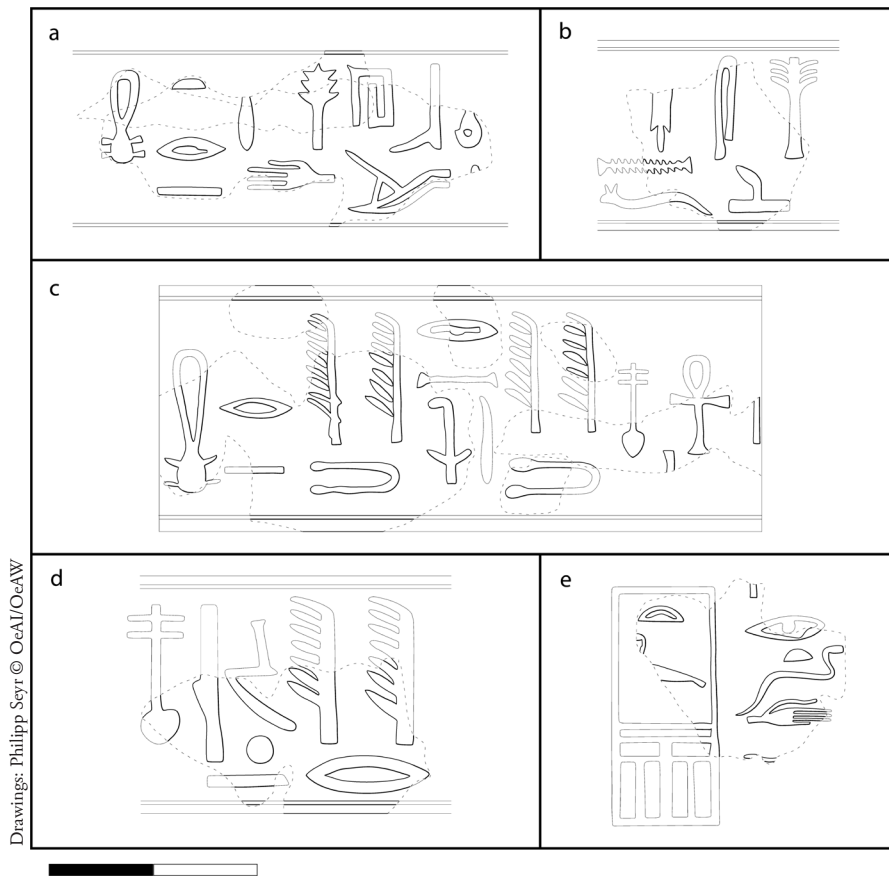


FIG. 21. Seal impressions of phases 18–15, s/9 North: a. KO-KF 1705; b. KO-KF 1306; c. KO-KF 1317 + 1320; d. KO-KF 1741; e. KO-KF 1528.

waste of one or more early 5th Dynasty institutions.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, they contain a substantial number of sealings impressed with seals of office, which mention the first three kings of this dynasty.

King Userkaf is attested by 16 sealings that were made with ten different seals, as an outside estimate.<sup>66</sup> Most bear the king's Horus name *jri-mꜣ.t*, other parts of the royal protocol,<sup>67</sup> royal epithets, and laudatory phrases referring to the seal owner (Fig. 22d). Only in one inscription is a partly readable title preserved, namely *hry-ꜥ jmy-rꜥ* [...] “assistant of the overseer of [...]”.<sup>68</sup> Two additional sealings come from more ‘informal’ seals of this kind and display the name of the Userkaf alternating with royal epithets (Fig. 22b).<sup>69</sup>

From the reign of king Sahura, six sealings that were impressed by five different seals were identified.<sup>70</sup> On them, the royal epithets *mrr ntr.w* “of the one whom the gods love”, *mry*

<sup>65</sup> FORSTNER-MÜLLER 2019, p. 84.

<sup>66</sup> As for Upper Egyptian sites, sealings with the name of king Userkaf were recovered at Abydos (KAPLONY 1981, pp. 146–148, pl. 51, *Wsr-kꜥ-f* 4–5), Buhen (KAPLONY 1981, pp. 163–164, pl. 55, *Wsr-kꜥ-f* 29–31), and Elephantine (ENGEL 2009, pp. 371–372, Fig. 6.1).

<sup>67</sup> An already published example is the sealing KO-KF 566 (SEYR 2022, p. 227, fig. 128).

<sup>68</sup> KO-KF 366, 367, 1292 stemming from one seal.

<sup>69</sup> KO-KF 378 and 381. Cf. seals with the name of this king but without titles of officials that were purportedly acquired at Elephantine (KAPLONY 1981, p. 147, pl. 51, *Wsr-kꜥ-f* 1) and Elkab (*Ibid.*, p. 146, pl. 51, *Wsr-kꜥ-f* 3). Furthermore, this example proves that “Ringnamensiegel” were indeed used for sealing commodities (*contra Ibid.*, pp. 11–12, §4, 61–62).

<sup>70</sup> Others sealings with the name of this king from Upper Egypt come from Abydos (*Ibid.*, pp. 171–172, pl. 56, *Sḥw-Rꜥ* 5–6) and Buhen (London, UC 21808, 21812, 21844, 21852, 21871 and 21921 = *Ibid.*, pp. 183–185, pl. 58–59, *Sḥw-Rꜥ* 15; *Ibid.*, pp. 200–206, pl. 62–64, *Sḥw-Rꜥ* 36–48).

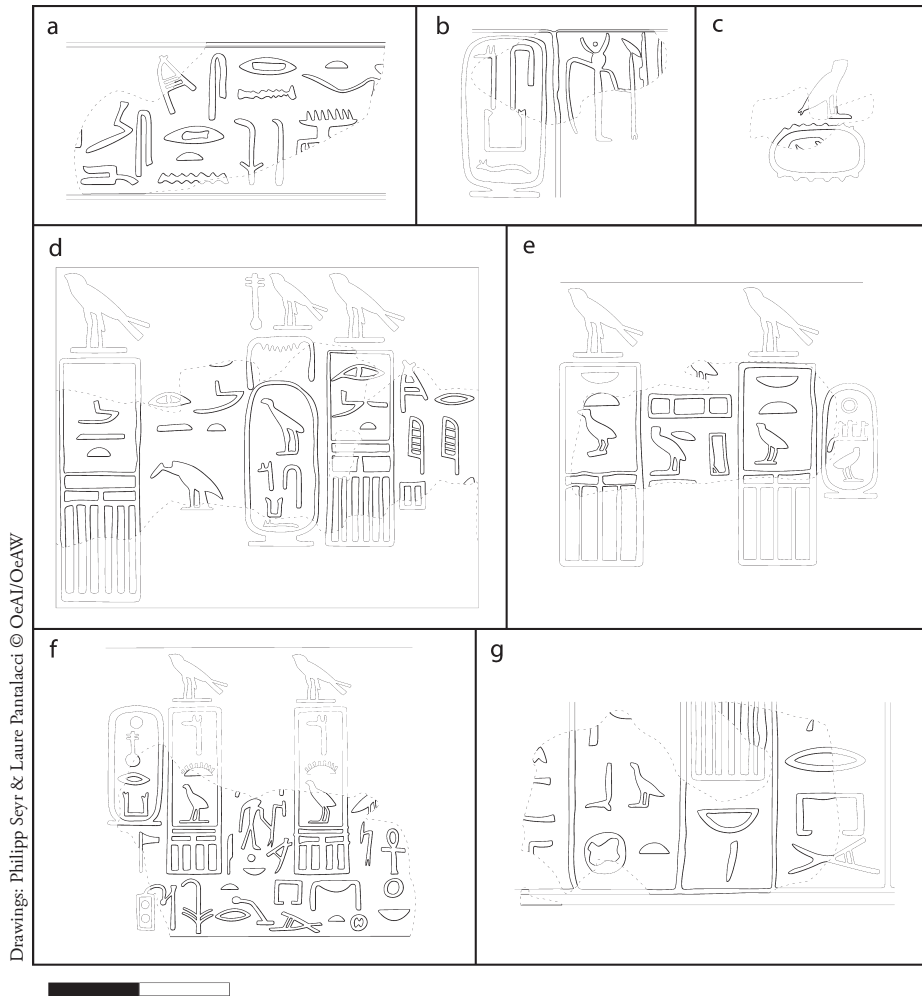


FIG. 22. Seal impressions of phase 14, s/9 North: a. KO-KF 384; b. KO-KF 381; c. KO-KF 568; d. KO-KF 374 + 376 + 512 + 532 + 540 + 582; e. KO-KF 526; f. KO-KF 207 + 546 + 1426; g. KO-KF 535.


*šm.t* “beloved of Sekhmet”, and [*mry?*] *hnm.w* “[beloved?] of the Khnum” are mentioned.<sup>71</sup> A scribe (*zš*) with the epithet [*jrr*] *wḏ.t* [...] “[who does] what the [the king?] orders” appears on KO-KF 365, and the impression joins with KO-KF 77 from the 2017 season.<sup>72</sup> The most interesting inscription from this reign is on a barely readable sealing that bears the title [...]. *spṣ.t jmy-rṣ ḥw.t* [...] “[...] of the nome, overseer of the domain [...]” (Fig. 22e).

The impressions of one of the two seals of office from the reign of king Neferirkara provide the most telling evidence for the Old Kingdom infrastructure at Kom Ombo. This seal belonged to a [...] *zš(.w?) pr-šn' bw-nzw nbw.t* “[overseer(?) of the scribe(s) of the *pr-šn'* of the royal repast (at) *nbw.t*” and is the first surely identified attestation of the name of the ancient town (Fig. 22f).<sup>73</sup> More importantly, it is evidence for the existence of a *pr-šn'* institution that was

<sup>71</sup> KO-KF 536 + 537, 517, and 555. Could this mention of Khnum relate to the setting next to the town of Elephantine? The similar epithet of Sahura *mry hnm.w hnty znm.t* “beloved of Khnum, lord of Zenmet” is found on a seal used at Buhen (*Ibid.*, pp. 183–185, pl. 58–59, *Sḥw-R'* 15).

<sup>72</sup> For KO-KF 77 see FORSTNER-MÜLLER et al. 2019, p. 84, fig. 33.

<sup>73</sup> The reconstructed seal inscription is discussed in FORSTNER-MÜLLER, SEYR, ROSE 2022. Other possible attestation of *nbw.t* are found on the sealings KO-KF 535 (Fig. 22g) and KO 2018 Object No. 586 from the Ground Water Lowering Project (JONES 2019, p. A2-180).

subordinated to the royal installation of the *bw-nzw*. It is not clear if this is the same *pr-šn'* that is mentioned on several other fragments as part of the title *jmy-r' pr-šn'* “overseer of the *pr-šn'*”, because the royal name is lost on them (Fig. 22g).<sup>74</sup> Finally, a small fragment mentions the overseer of a fortress (*jmy-r'* ) the name or location of which is not preserved (Fig. 22c).<sup>75</sup>

### 3.2. Area s/9 Central

[FIG. 3]

The small and unhomogeneous corpus of sealings from the large early First Intermediate Period mastaba in area s/9 Central (L329)<sup>76</sup> and its surroundings (phase 13) comprises scattered fragments of Old Kingdom seal impressions, as well as a few incised sealings and stamp seal impressions from the early First Intermediate Period. The decoration of the stamped sealings is characterised by animal motifs and geometric patterns with thick lines (“*Kerbschnitt*”) that are generally dated to the late Old Kingdom and the early First Intermediate Period.<sup>77</sup> A case in point are six impressions of a large rectangular seal with rounded corners decorated with two lizards in *tête-bêche* composition (Fig. 23a).<sup>78</sup> While four of them come from deposits within area s/9 Central, one was recovered in the foundation layer of silo 4 in room 5 (LI157) in area s/9 South and thus links the areas chronologically.

Additionally, a small group of cylinder seal impressions that was found scattered in this context provides first evidence for the 6th Dynasty at Kom Ombo. One contains a *serekh* of Pepy I (Fig. 23b), and a second mentions an *jmy-r' pr-šn' hwt jri.t=f* “overseer of the *pr-šn'* of the domain that he (= the king) made” (Fig. 23c). A third sealing from the fillings of room 9 in area s/9 South bears the names of Pepy II and the epithets [*mry*] *bz.w* “beloved of the *Bau*” and [*mry*] *pt[h]* “beloved of Ptah” (Fig. 23d).

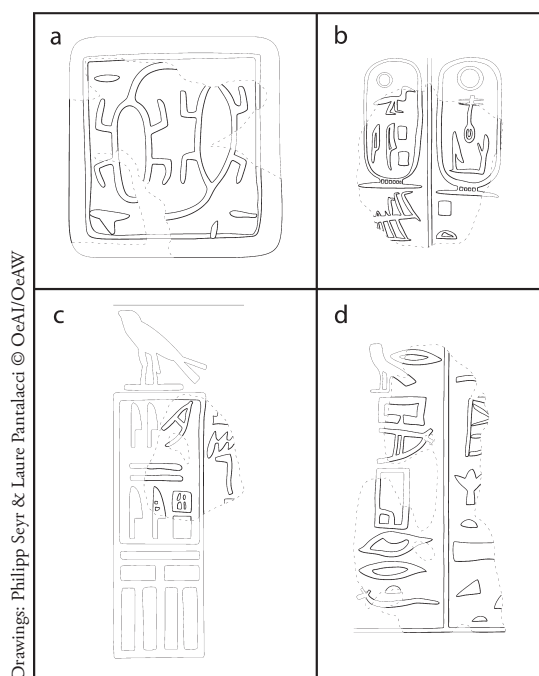


FIG. 23. Seal impressions of phase 13, s/9 Central:

a. KO-KF 329 + 353 + 354 + 355 + 2088; scattered Old Kingdom seal impressions of phase 13–12, s/9 Central; c. KO-KF 1608; S/9 South:

b. KO-KF 1526; d. KO-KF 1861.

<sup>74</sup> KO-KF 369: *jmy-r' pr-[šn']*; 524: *jmy-r' pr-[šn']*; 535: [*jmy*]-*r' pr-šn'*.

<sup>75</sup> KO-KF 568.

<sup>76</sup> For the seal KO-KF 1529 that was found in this tomb see §2.3 above.

<sup>77</sup> SEIDLMAYER 1990, pp. 190–194; WIESE 1996, pp. 81–83.

<sup>78</sup> We know no direct parallels on stamp seals for this composition (cf. WIESE 1996, pl. 35), but it is represented on figurative cylinders from Balat (PANTALACCI 2001, p. 108, fig. III no. 4784).

### 3.3. Area s/9 South

[FIG. 3]

The administrative area s/9 South yielded mainly sealings impressed with stamp seals or incised with pens of reed or wood, all of which were baked during the large fire covering the late First Intermediate Period town (see §2). In comparison to those from area s/9 North, the sealings from this area are less fragmented but also smaller in size and belong mostly to one archaeological phase, namely the process of filling up the large administrative buildings and levelling the area (phase 12). Apart from a few jar-neck sealings, most of them were originally fixed to wooden planks or pegs of varying diameters (c. 1–4,4 cm) that were most probably parts of closing mechanisms for doors and granary shutters.<sup>79</sup>

Although four stamp seals of faience and stone were recovered from area s/9 South, no matching impression could be identified. Yet, many stamp seals are attested through impressions on multiple sealings and thus allow the association of different actors to specific sealing practices and spaces within the administrative buildings. For instance, an oval seal that probably depicts the façade of a building (Fig. 24a) was impressed on sealings of smaller pegs (d.: 1,8cm) in room 2 and 9 (Fig. 3). Impressions of figurative cylinder seals (sometimes countersealed) are also virtually limited to “room 9”, and sealings with reed pen incisions<sup>80</sup> are concentrated in that space. Conversely, the most common ellipsoid seal with a bipartite “labyrinth” pattern (Fig. 24b)<sup>81</sup> is attested on about 40 small door or shutter sealings from rooms 11, 12, the area north-west of the large wall M270 and scattered in the fillings of rooms 6, 9, and 15 (Fig. 3).<sup>82</sup> In term of motifs, so-called “labyrinths” (Fig. 24c) outnumber all other patterns, e.g. abstract, human or animal figures. The typologically most recent seal impressions—that were not baked during the fire—come from scarabs or cauroids with a double-spiral pattern (= SM-M; Fig. 24d) and a papyrus plant with two *ankh*-signs on baskets (= SM-H; Fig. 24e). They were recovered in the modern surface debris and have their closest parallels at late First Intermediate Period Elephantine.<sup>83</sup>

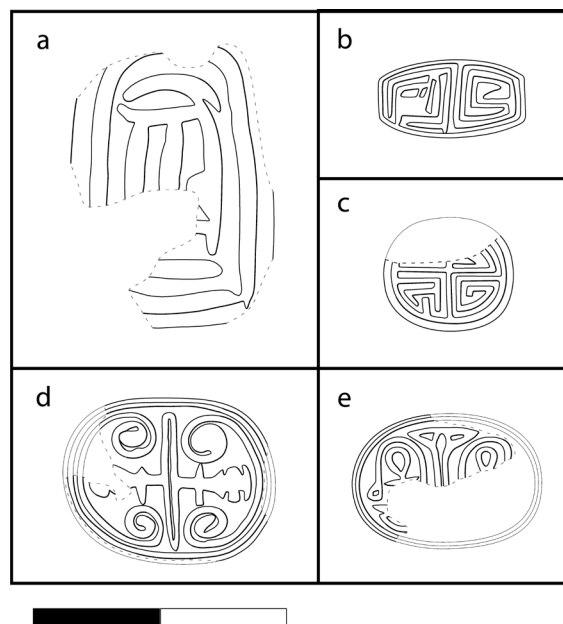


FIG. 24. Seal impressions of phase 12, s/9 South:  
a. KO-KF 2036 + 2139 + 2149 + 2165 + 2166 + 2167 + 2178;  
b. KO-KF 259 etc.; c. KO-KF 313 + 1936 + 2092;  
d. KO-KF 1428; e. KO-KF 1432.

Drawings: Philipp Seyr © OeAI/OeAW

<sup>79</sup> This type corresponds to Elephantine “Typ A” of VON PILGRIM 1996, pp. 234–237 and DORN 2015, pp. 85–88; see SEYR in press.

<sup>80</sup> Due to their fragmentation, it is not clear yet whether they are hieratic writing or a non-textual writing system. Interestingly, some signs find parallels in other sites: for example, at least three sealings (KO-KF 1920, 2082 and 2114) feature a schematized bee that is reminiscent of the incisions on mud sealings from First Intermediate Period Elephantine (DORN 2015, pp. 89–90, fig. 50) and Balat (PANTALACCI 2005a, p. 428: as part of the noun *bj.t* “honey”).

<sup>81</sup> Parallels are generally dated to the 11th Dynasty (WIESE 1996, pl. 41, L.4).

<sup>82</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the distributional patterns that takes in account the stratigraphic record, see SEYR in press.

<sup>83</sup> For KO-KF 1432 see DORN 2015, p. 93, type 382. As for KO-KF 1428, we are not aware of any corresponding patterns but compare the similar disposition of the spirals in *Ibid.*, p. 93, type 388b and 458 with spirals. SM-H and SM-M are generally attributed to phases IIIA–IIIB (SEIDLMAYER 1990, p. 193; DUBIEL 2008, pp. 100–102), but *caveat*: PANTALACCI (2005b, p. 234) highlighted that spiral patterns (SM-M) appear at Balat already in the first half of the First Intermediate Period.

#### 4. THE LITHIC INDUSTRIES

Clara JEUTHE

The recent excavations at Kom Ombo offer sequences from the Early Dynastic Period through the Old Kingdom and early First Intermediate Period to the beginning of the Middle Kingdom. In total, 429 artefacts from these deposits were recorded, of which 380 come from area s/9 and 49 from other areas. However, the latter cluster lacks a precise date and the bulk can only be dated roughly to the First Intermediate Period or later. By contrast, 346 finds from area s/9 come from well-dated deposits from the 2nd Dynasty (phase 19) to the late First Intermediate Period/beginning of the Middle Kingdom (phase 12). The majority of the finds recorded so far comes from area s/9 North. Hence, they date predominantly to the Early Dynastic Period and Old Kingdom, and the first results can be compared to other settlements from the same region.

Regarding the tool kit, only a short overview is possible for the sake of this paper. Generally speaking, there is no difference in tool type selection between Kom Ombo and other settlements of these periods. The individual frequency rates of course differ according to the function of an individual complex or settlement area. The oldest excavated deposits in Kom Ombo, phase 19, have been described above as accumulation of debris and fill layers, possibly a relocation of deposits from other parts of the town. There was evidence of (limited) local tool production from two contexts (L1303 and L1309), however, without evidence of the complete *chaîne opératoire*. Worth mentioning are three fragments of bifacial knives within the tool kit. In the deposits from the following Old Kingdom buildings (phases 18–15), local tool production on the spot is not evident, although it took place elsewhere in Kom Ombo. The tool kit was more restricted than before, with a large number of simple tools and those with wear damage only, as well as sickle implements and segmented blades being dominant within the formal tools. Although a connection with the silos attested in the structures seems likely, the tool kits do not differ drastically from other settlements from this time but may need to be reviewed within a detailed stratified analysis.

Taking a broader view over the lithic industries, two supply strategies exist at Kom Ombo as observed in other (Upper) Egyptian settlement sites during the Early Dynastic Period and Old Kingdom. Besides local (blade) production, blanks and finished tools made from usually high quality chert are common. They are not made at the settlement sites but were mined and produced in presumably state-organized quarries, hence were an expression of state supply.<sup>84</sup> Depending on the location and access of the quarries, the raw materials used for local production needed to be brought to a settlement as well as weathered-out unmined nodules. The possible directly available river cobbles were also used but always to a lesser extent than the nodules (as well as other stones such as quartz, which occur in very low numbers but were frequently selected at Kom Ombo). Although the basis for comparison is still small, the differences in raw material observed by the author between Kom Ombo, Edfu and Elephantine Island point to an individual collection strategy by each settlement rather than to a regional network supplying various settlements. Moreover, there is not much change in the materials

<sup>84</sup> Cf. for the raw materials and different strategies at settlements with a similar date, see for example: ANGEVIN 2012; KABACIŃSKI 2012; HIKADE 2014; KOBUSIEWICZ 2015; JEUTHE 2018; JEUTHE 2019; HAMDAN, JEUTHE 2022; for research on quarries, see: BRIOIS, MIDANT-REYNES 2015; KÖHLER, HART, KLAUNZER 2017; but also HARRELL 2012, as well as TILLMANN 2007, with a general overview.



used in an individual settlement during different periods, although the variety seems to shrink over time. Thus, as the finds from Kom Ombo also demonstrate, local tool production in Upper Egyptian settlements appears to rely of self-organisation with preferred spots for the collection of raw materials, which were exploited over the long term, while the supply with imported, e.g. state-distributed items decreased during the Old Kingdom.<sup>85</sup>

In the latter case, changes can be observed in the distribution system of imported blanks and finished tools. The rich inventories from Elephantine Island show significant changes in both raw material exploitation and tool distribution between the Early Dynastic Period/ Early Old Kingdom on the one hand and the late Old Kingdom and later on the other, however, lacking a solid data base for the intervening period.<sup>86</sup> The finds from Kom Ombo, although in comparably small numbers, provide more detailed information because of the well-stratified contexts throughout the Old Kingdom. The variety of raw materials attested at Kom Ombo is not as large as at Elephantine Island, where, however, the appearance of specific material variants in the excavation areas can also fluctuate. Not all variants known elsewhere are attested in Kom Ombo, but there are no variants attested in Kom Ombo that are unknown elsewhere either. At least the Upper Egyptian settlements are hence likely to be in the same (state controlled) distribution system of high quality items, coming from different quarries and potentially different regions. Regarding Kom Ombo, based on observation and of what we know from Elephantine Island,<sup>87</sup> we may assume that imports come from at least three different quarries. There is no significant difference observed within the layers dating to the late Early Dynastic Period and the (early) Old Kingdom (phase 19 to 17). During the 4th/5th Dynasties, in phases 15 and 16, the quantity of finds is low but the decrease in variants attested indicates a change in supply system. Not only the number of raw material variants is smaller than before, but also the characteristic tools of the Early Dynastic Period/ Old Kingdom, the so-called bitruncated tools, are absent. However, while the change in tool production and tool supply seems to happen rather suddenly in the 4th or at the latest by the early 5th Dynasty, the finds from Kom Ombo indicate that the decline in the variety of imports coming from different quarries was a slow process. This suggestion about the change of network and supply policy has to be followed up by the study of much larger inventories dating to the 5th/6th Dynasties. Nonetheless, the imported artefacts in Kom Ombo during the late Old Kingdom and later (phase 13 to 12) may come from only one source as they are, aside from minor exceptions, all from the same raw material variant.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>85</sup> No changes in raw material selection for the local production have yet been observed in Kom Ombo. At Elephantine Island, only minor relatively insignificant change is yet attested in Elephantine before the New Kingdom. The same can be observed in Edfu, although the number of artefacts studied by the author is not large enough in the different periods to be certain.

<sup>86</sup> JEUTHE 2019.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. HAMDAN, JEUTHE 2022; JEUTHE 2019.

<sup>88</sup> This specific raw material variant was also very popular in other settlements in different regions from the late Old Kingdom until at least the end of the Second Intermediate Period; cf. for example Elephantine variant 3.7 (JEUTHE 2019); but also Edfu, Buto and Dakhla Oasis in the late Old Kingdom (from the author's experience). That being said, the source of this particular material has not yet been discovered and as major parts of a geological formation stretching over large parts in Egypt, there may have been different quarries supplying the various settlements with this specific material. We may still assume that an individual settlement, such as Kom Ombo, may have had only a specific quarry region as the source of supply for that particular variant.

## 5. AREA S/10

Pamela ROSE

This area lies at the southern edge of the Kom Ombo tell, south of the southern wall of the Anglo-Egyptian fort (Fig. 1). Originally laid out as a rectangular area on a relatively level surface below the fort, the area was then extended southwards to include part of the mud brick wall protruding from the tell face towards the south (Kemp's wall M),<sup>89</sup> and was then extended again to clean the whole of the wall top (Fig. 25). Work here consisted of removal of surface sand and a few small patches of surface rubble only, without serious archaeological intervention.

### 5.1. The northern area

[FIG. 26]

In the original area, two lengths of east-west mud brick walls were uncovered (M419, M420), which have a similar but not identical alignment. M420, the more westerly of the two, is composed of alternating layers of stretchers and vertically placed bricks (rowlocks). The southern face preserves areas of mud plaster. The wall probably turned northwards at its east end to join M421, although the actual junction was not exposed. M421 is visible in the north section, in which it stands *c.* 55 cm high, and is composed of alternating rows of stretchers and rowlocks. It becomes thicker towards the top and this may represent phasing of construction. Immediately to its south is a dismantled section of wall that is slightly narrower than that seen in the section, and can be connected with the lowest course of the standing wall below the thickening. Wall M419 is of similar construction. It has a northward return at its east end, which again includes rows of rowlocks between stretcher courses. A small stump of wall, M454, was seen in the extreme north-west corner of the area but was not traced further.

These walls follow the general alignment of others in the wider area, and in their building technique can be connected with structures excavated on the western edge of the tell in the 1990s, and by further structures seen at the eastern edge of the modern tell.

At the southern edge of the area it can be seen that the walls to the south, part of Kemp's wall M, underlie the walls just described. Taken in conjunction with the similarity in building techniques seen in structures over a wide area of the tell, it would seem clear that the wall, which is sufficiently massive to suggest a town wall (see below), no longer functioned as a boundary at the time these structures were built.

### 5.2. Kemp's wall M

The main part of the work concentrated on Kemp's wall M (Fig. 26). This rises from low on the south edge of the tell as seen today and slopes steeply up towards the level of the northern area of S/10, where it can be seen in the south section. We have no idea of the underlying topography of the area but the presence of the stairs indicates that there was a significant underlying slope to the tell.

<sup>89</sup> KEMP 1985, pp. 42, 46.

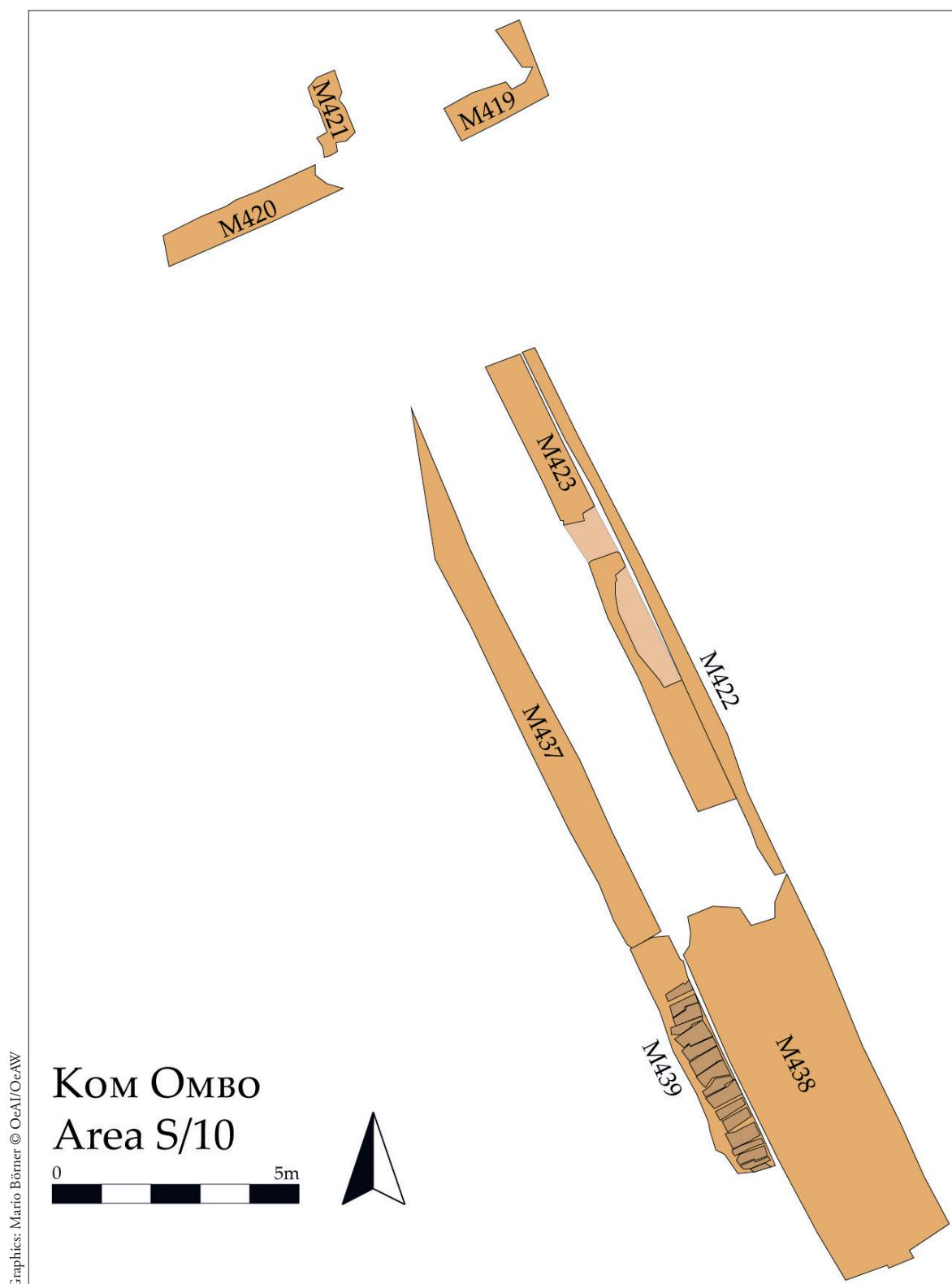


FIG. 25. Orthophoto of area S/10.



Graphics: Astrid Hassler © OeAI/OeAW



FIG. 26. Plan of area s/10.

Photo Pamela Rose © OeAI/OeAW



FIG. 27. South end of M438 showing blocking wall M452, staircase M439, looking north.

The wall consists of a number of apparently contemporaneous mud brick elements that form a single unit. At the southernmost, lowest, end, the wall is of a solid mass of brickwork, M438. This preserves the original east, west and south faces. All faces are composed of regularly laid alternating courses of headers and stretchers, of bricks of uniform size of *c.* 33 × 16 × 10,5 cm. The courses are precisely horizontal, so that the wall throughout its length must have been dug into the surrounding sloping deposits. The south face marks the termination of the wall and has a flat face with a centrally placed jamb, which is integral with the wall face. The jamb is *c.* 60 cm wide and projects *c.* 17 cm from the wall, and suggests that the south face was one side of a gateway (Fig. 27).

On top of M438, about 10 m from its southern end, the continuous mud brick can no longer be seen on the surface, and is presumably covered by fill retained by the eastern and western scales of the wall (M422/M423 and M437, described below). In fact, clearance of a pit a short distance to the north of the southern edge of the fill showed brickwork continuing at a lower level, and an inner row of brick was also visible against the western face of M422 in the same area. It is thus logical to assume that the underlying brickwork continued northwards. Bricks on top of the wall ranged from 25 to 3 cm in length by *c.* 16 cm wide.

The western scale of the wall (M437) is continuous with the structure of a staircase M439 abutted against the western face of M438, described below. Although more damaged than the scale on the eastern side, M437 appears to have been of solid brickwork throughout. It is 71 cm wide, and at its southern end there is a gap between the end of the wall and the top of the staircase. This area, perhaps the edge of a platform, is accessed from the staircase. A quadrant-shaped scar in the top of the brickwork M438 in the gap suggests that it was closed by a door.

Along the eastern side, the outer scale (M422) is one brick (30 cm) thick. When seen from the east, there is no change in the brickwork to suggest this was a separate construction, rather it appears integral with the concept of the wall. At its southern end it disappears more or less at a level with the end of M437, but this may be due to the loss of the corresponding level further south. Examination of the eastern face suggests that there was an opening in the wall, corresponding to the northern void in M423 (see below). The opening was blocked with mud brick.

Against M422's western face is a further brickwork mass (M423), which is *c.* 80 cm wide. The bricks used in M423 do not show any significant difference in size from those used in M422. Its southern end is a little to the north of the apparent end of M422. As preserved, it appears to be of solid brickwork, but there are two voids visible within the mass, both still filled by sand. The larger, to the south, is *ap.* 2 m in length and extends almost from the western face of M422 to a half-brick-thick western border, which continues the line of the western edge of M423. It may have the remains of vaulting bricks visible along one edge, but this requires clarification. The blocking in M422 described above more or less aligns with the northern void and may form a "passage" through M423 as there is no western wall visible at the surface here. However, the blocking ends do not quite line up with the brickwork in M423 and there are bricks that protrude from the closest lines of bricks to the ends of the blocking. This needs to be investigated further. Brushing showed that the base of the southern face of M423 is on sand, suggesting it is a significantly later addition to M422, but this also needs further investigation. At the southern end, in the angle where M422 and M423 meet, is a mud mass with what seems





FIG. 28. Staircase M439, looking north.

to be a socket in it, but this also stands on loose material and may not be significant.

Between M437 and M423 and sometimes overlying the former is a sloping rubble deposit that has not been cleared, and there is therefore no indication as to the floor level between the faces. Over the rubble at one point are the very denuded remains of a later mud brick structure, which may go with wall remains seen further to the west or those to the north.

Staircase M439 abutted the western face of M438, and is a continuous build with M438 (Fig. 28). It is not clear how many steps there were in it due to the loss of bricks from the structure, but there seems to have been about 15. There was a kerb wall along the western edge, made of two thin half-bricks; it is not clear how tall it was originally. The top step, leading up on to the wall top, has a rise of *c.* 65 cm (5 brick courses) so is rather higher than appears comfortable. At the lower end, the stairs stop at a level well above the base of wall M438 (which has not been reached): the bottom of the face of the lower step is 16 courses above the lowest visible course of the south end of M438. This step was three courses in depth, so steep like the top step, and rested on

at least one course of bricks set back by 9cm from the face of the step. There is no indication that further steps were originally present, neither is there any indication in the deposits to the west as to the surface from which the steps were accessed. Bricks used in the staircase are *c.* 34 × 16 × 12–13 cm in size. There is a distinct vertical scar in the brickwork of M438 *c.* 40 cm south of the bottom step; whether this has any connection with the use of the stairs is unknown.

### 5.3. Structures to the west of the wall

North of the stairway a wide (89 cm) east-west wall was bonded with the brickwork of the west face of M437, and formed part of the original plan here. It is assumed to be a wall although less than a metre of it was seen: further west, a wall on the same alignment is preserved, making a junction with a north-south wall parallel to M437/439, but there is no connection between them at the surface. Further north is another east-west wall. Its relation to M437 is unclear, as immediately next to M437 is what appears to be a blocked doorway. The wall west of the blocking extends to the same north-south wall just mentioned. Between M453 and the east-west wall is a rough row of stones apparently associated with floor levels, which may mark some sort of division within the area. There seems to be another wall immediately north of northern east-west wall that rendered the doorway useless, so clearly there is some sort of phasing here. This too had a northward return at its west end, on the same line as the wall to the south, but this wall seems to be rather thinner.

#### 5.4. Blocking wall M452

South of the south end of M438 is wall M452, the eastern face of which more or less continues the alignment of the face of M438 but is separated from it by a distinct vertical join running the entire height of the wall as preserved. At the join, the bottom level of M452 as seen stands east of M438 by *c.* 8 cm, but slopes back to be almost flush with M438 at the top. The wall extended from the eastern face back to enclose the eastern edge of the jamb in the south face of M438, but finished before the western edge of the jamb. It is preserved for *c.* 2,25 m to the south, but thereafter has collapsed. The blocking does not seem to be mortared to the wall face. The brick size used is *c.* 32 × 10/11 × 16 cm, so hardly different from that used in M438. It may be the remains of the blocking of an original gateway here.

#### 5.5. Dating

Clearance of the original area and its extension produced a mix of pottery, mainly late Antique (probably 5th and 6th century) but with a little later material (Aswani wares of the 9th–10th century) and including two Arabic ostraca and two 20th century coins; there was almost no immediately identifiable earlier material. Further south, the material outside the east face of the wall included an increased proportion of 1st–2nd century ceramics (including fragments of imported bifid amphorae and eastern sigillata A), and this was also noticeable in the material removed from over the more southerly parts of the wall top. In general, the deposits to the east of the wall, which reach almost to its top as preserved, appear to be dense rubbish deposits of 1st–2nd century date. This provides a *terminus ante quem* for the wall, but nothing has been discovered so far to indicate the date of its construction.

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