

# SUDAN & NUBIA

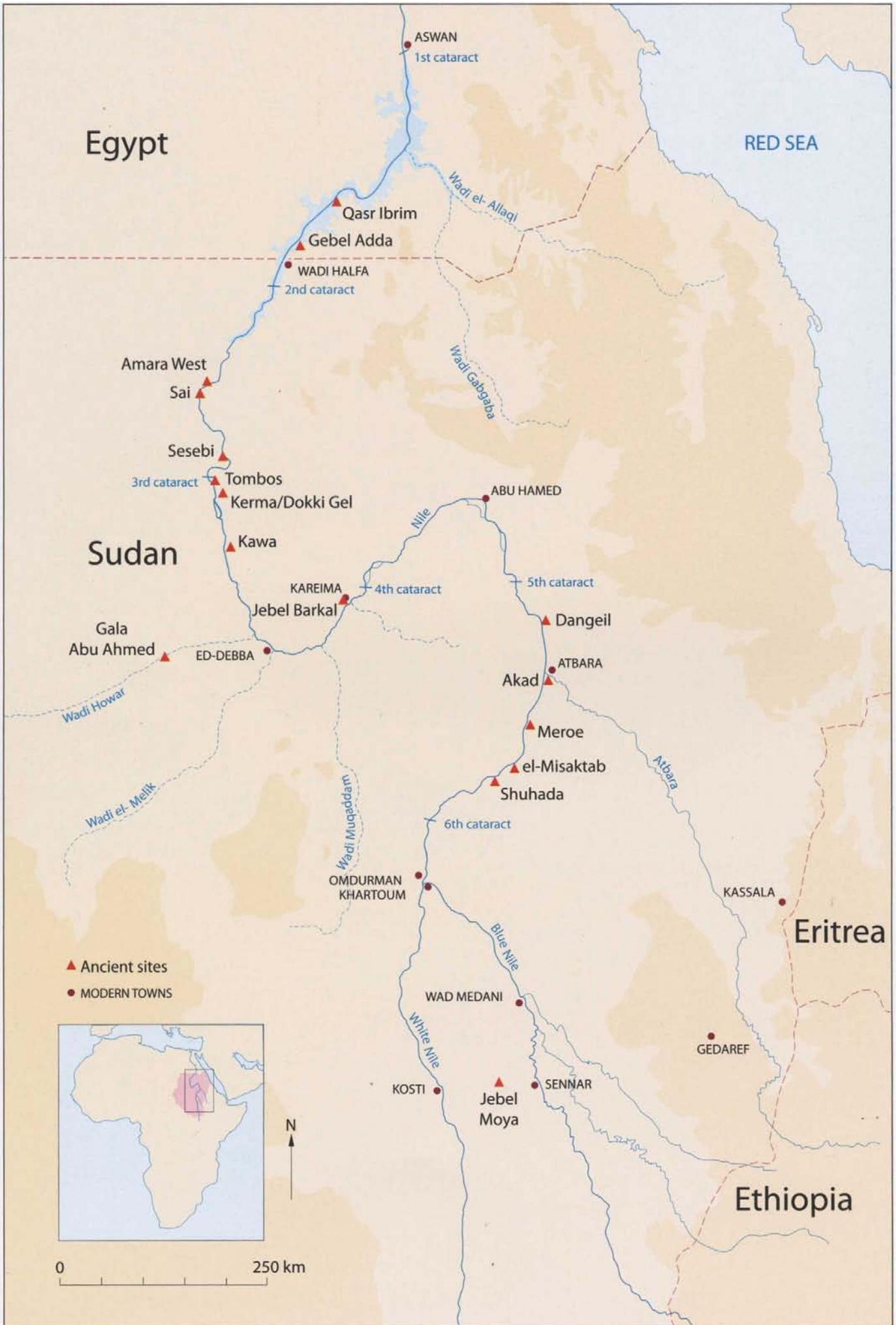
The Sudan Archaeological Research Society



*Bulletin No. 13*

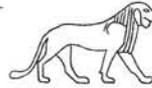
2009





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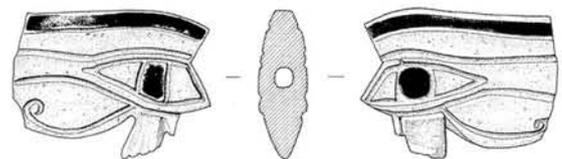
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Front cover: The head of a Kushite king, excavated in 2008, from the Amun temple at Dangeil. It has been tentatively identified as Aspelta (593-568 BC) based upon comparisons with statues of this king discovered at Jebel Barkal and Dokki Gel-Kerma. (Photo © J. R. Anderson, Berber-Abidiya Archaeological Project).

## Cemeteries and a late Ramesside suburb at Amara West

Neal Spencer

Downstream of Sai, as the Nile flows eastwards past the modern town of Abri, the ancient site of Amara West overlooks the river on the north bank (Figure 1, Plate 1). Egypt Exploration Society (EES) excavations, before and after the Second World War (Spencer 1997; 2002), uncovered a sandstone temple in the north east of the town surrounded by mud-brick magazines. This temple was decorated in the reigns of Ramesses II and his successors; a year 6 inscription of Ramesses IX (*c.* 1125 BC) around the hypostyle hall

ity of pre-19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty occupation at the site cannot yet be ruled out (Spencer 1997, 53; Edwards 2004, 106). Several monuments of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty have been found at the site (e.g. Barbotin 2005, 156–7 [85]), though these may have been brought from elsewhere.

Significantly, a large building (24.5 x 29m) near the West Gate was identified as the Governor's Residence (E13.2), on the basis of a series of inscribed doorjambs and lintels. These named several 'deputies' (*idnw*) including Sebaukhau (Spencer 1997, pl. 151) and Paser (Spencer 1997, pls 153 [b], 166), making it reasonable to assume Amara West was the administrative centre of occupied Kush (Upper Nubia, south of the Second Cataract) in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, perhaps replacing Soleb some 80km upstream (Müller 1976, 57–61). These deputies may have been of local origin, serv-

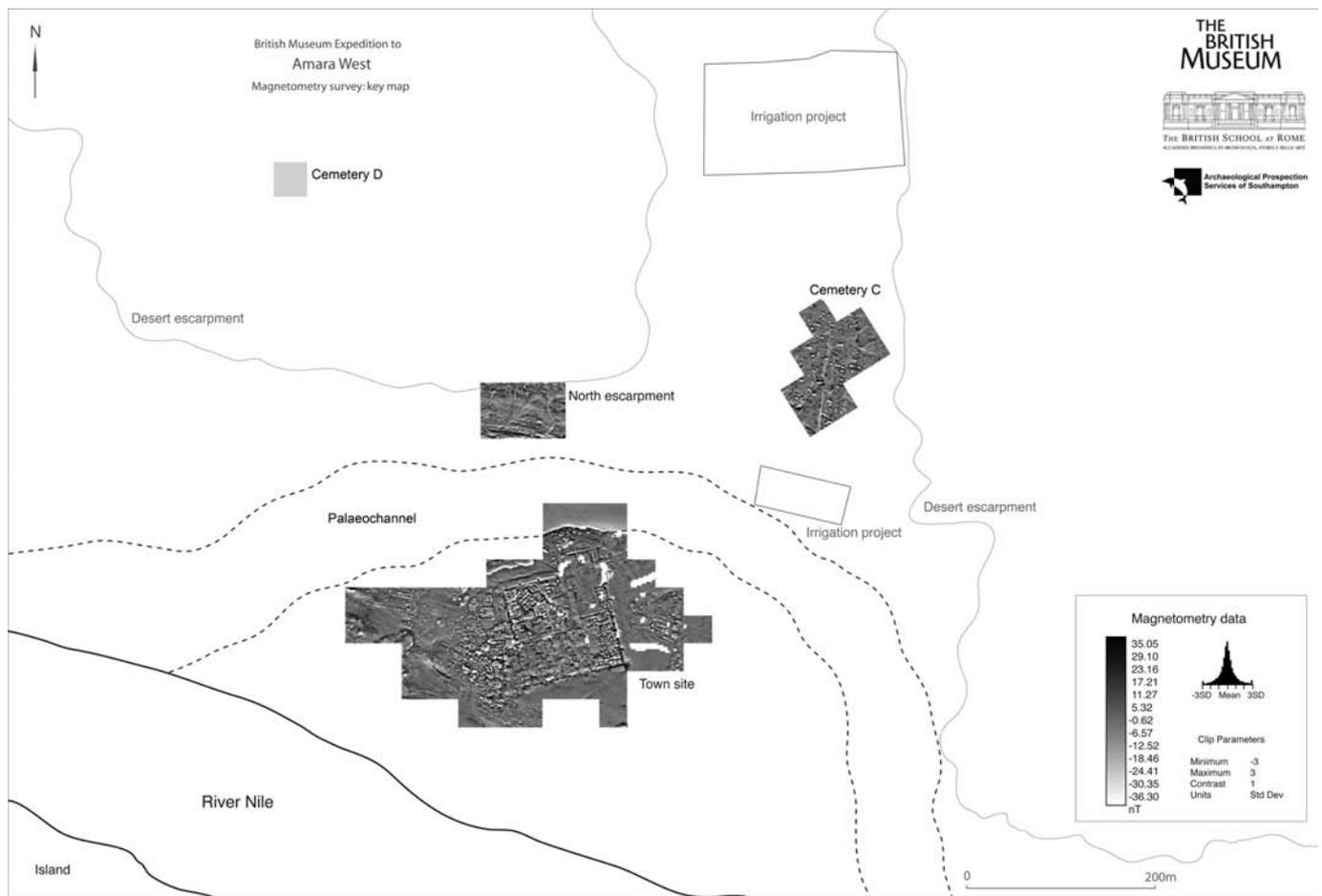


Figure 1. Map of Amara West area showing the location of the palaeochannel, areas of magnetometry survey (2008) and location of cemeteries.

(Spencer 1997, 36, pl. 27 [d]) is the latest royal inscription of the New Kingdom known in Upper Nubia. Two areas of the surrounding town, set within a mud-brick *temenos* wall, were excavated, to the south of the temple and adjacent to the gate through the western enclosure wall. The excavators identified four main architectural phases, amongst well-preserved remains of houses, magazines and storage bins, seemingly dating to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasties (*c.* 1307–1070 BC), with the highest levels being perhaps of later date. The possibil-

ing on behalf of the Egyptian administration (Kemp 2006, 35–7). The ancient name of the town was preserved on several monuments: 'House of Ramesses-beloved-of-Amun' and later 'House of Ramesses-ruler-of-Thebes' (see Grandet 1983, 108–9). Despite its administrative importance, the surface area of the walled town at Amara (11,660m<sup>2</sup>) is dwarfed by the extent of the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty town enclosures at Sesebi (54,000m<sup>2</sup>) and Sai (33,320m<sup>2</sup>), which may reflect respective population levels.

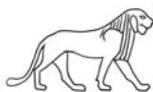


Plate 1. View over Cemetery C from the desert escarpment, with the town site in the background beyond the palaeochannel.

## Survey

Since the EES excavations were closed on New Year's Day, 1950, the site has suffered very little from further degradation or modern development. There is still no modern occupation on, or around, the site and the previous excavations have simply filled with sand, brought in by the strong northerly winds (Plate 2). Amara West thus offers the opportunity to investigate a well-preserved, late New Kingdom town, with the potential to elucidate aspects of the lived experience of both Egyptians and Nubians in occupied Kush, using a range of scientific methods of enquiry. It is worth bearing in mind that a significant number of Amara's ancient inhabitants may



Plate 2. Area of West Town excavated in 1948-50, now filled with wind-blown sand. Unexcavated areas, in the background, are covered with a stone and pottery sherd scatter.

have been of Nubian, not Egyptian, origin (see Smith 2003, 192–7, 202–6). Ancient health and diet, the effects of climate change, migration patterns, modes of cultural expression, and the process of assumed abandonment of the site at the end of the New Kingdom, are the research priorities of the project.

A magnetometry survey was conducted during the first season (January 2008) to investigate the extent of the underlying

architecture.<sup>1</sup> The archaeological strata, consisting of mud-brick and sandstone architecture shrouded by deep deposits of wind-blown sand, occupation layers and rubble, makes the site an ideal place for magnetometry, in this case using a Dual Array Bartington Grad 601-2 Fluxgate Magnetometer (Figure 1). The outline of buildings, and indeed the shoreline of the dried up river channel north of the site, can be clearly discerned, with the exception of the temple in the north-eastern part of the walled town (Figure 2). This is due to the deep layer of spoil used to rebury the temple after World War II, with the aim of protecting the reliefs from further erosion (Spencer 1997, 99).

## Complex E13.3

The magnetometry survey revealed modest buildings, populating the southern part of the enclosure within the town walls, not excavated by the EES.

The most intriguing feature was a sizeable structure (E13.3; 19.2 x 22.6m),<sup>2</sup> or series of adjacent structures, located in the north-west corner (Figure 3), just north of the governor's residence (E13.2).

Given its markedly different alignment in relation to other structures within the town, this feature could potentially be of a later phase than the majority of buildings previously excavated, particularly as the current surface level is noticeably higher in this part of the site. A 20 x 10m area of the building, along its western edge, was then exposed during the first season of excavations (2009).<sup>3</sup> Though excavations are still ongoing in this building, several observations can already be made. Two, possibly three, long, rectangular rooms (nos 6, 18, and 9/19) featured vaulted ceilings, though only the bases of the vault springs survive in most places, with thinner bricks laid on their ends to support the vault (Plate 3). This type of room is typical of New Kingdom storage magazines, as found associated with cult temples (such as the Ramesseum at Thebes and at Amara West, Spencer 1997, pls 4, 58c), but also attached to large houses (e.g. at Tell el-Amarna in Middle Egypt: houses M51.2, Q46.1, Q47.1, R44.2, T36.2; Kemp and Garfi 1993). Confirmation of such an interpretation was provided by the concentration of storage amphorae fragments found within these rooms and the discovery of a pottery *ostrakon* (F4017; Plate 4) in the eastern end of room

<sup>1</sup> Leonie Pett (British School at Rome) and Sophie Hay (University of Southampton, Archaeological Prospection Services) undertook the survey, assisted by Neal Spencer and Karis Eklund. Shadia Abdu Rabo acted as inspector for the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums.

<sup>2</sup> Grid, building and room references continue the system used during the EES fieldwork (see Spencer 1997, 6, pl.2).

<sup>3</sup> The project team consisted of Neal Spencer (director), Mary Shepperson, An Van Camp, Nick Soderberg, Stephanie Aulsebrook, René Kertesz (archaeologists), Michaela Binder (physical anthropologist), Marie Millet (ceramicist), Jamie Woodward and Mark Macklin (geomorphologists) and Shadia Abdu Rabo (NCAM inspector).

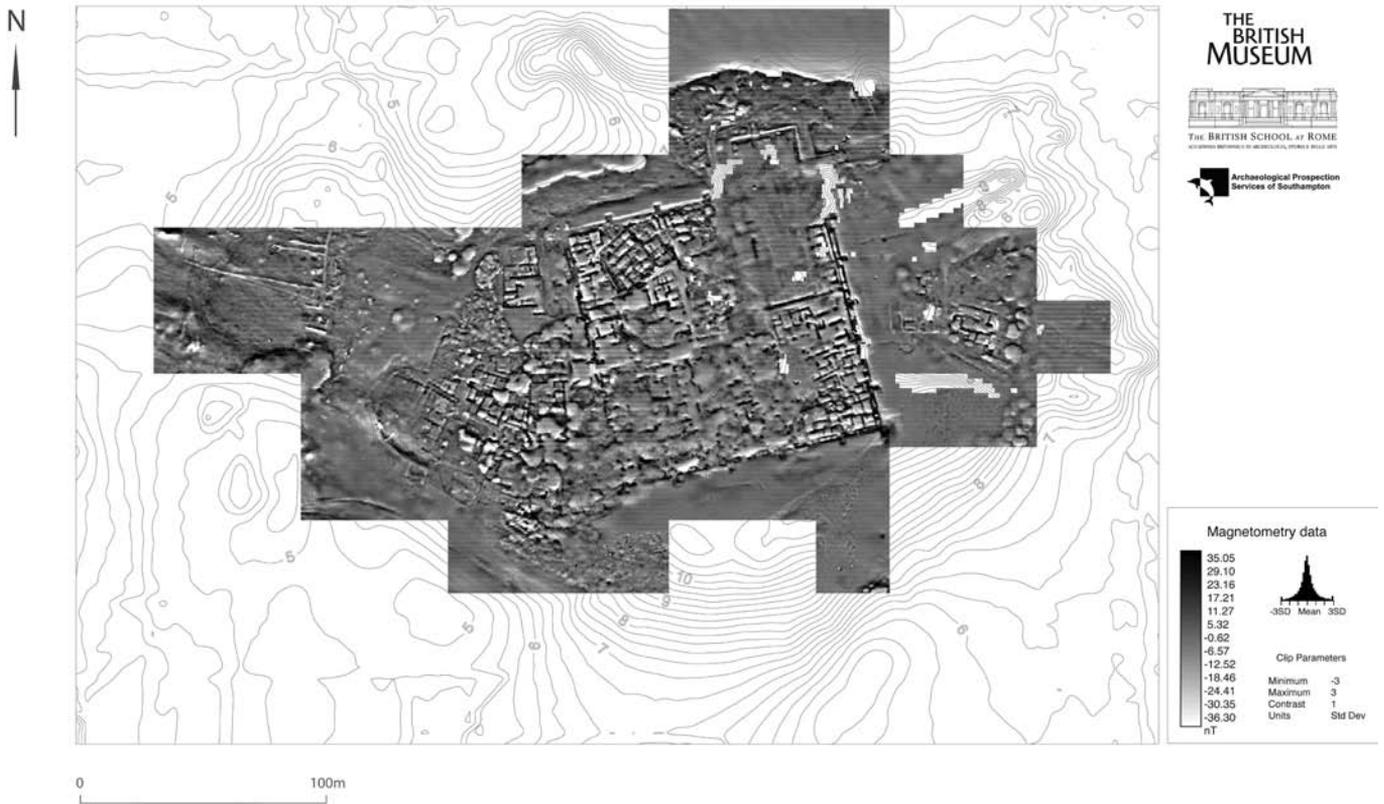


Figure 2. Topographical and magnetometry survey of Amara West town (2008).

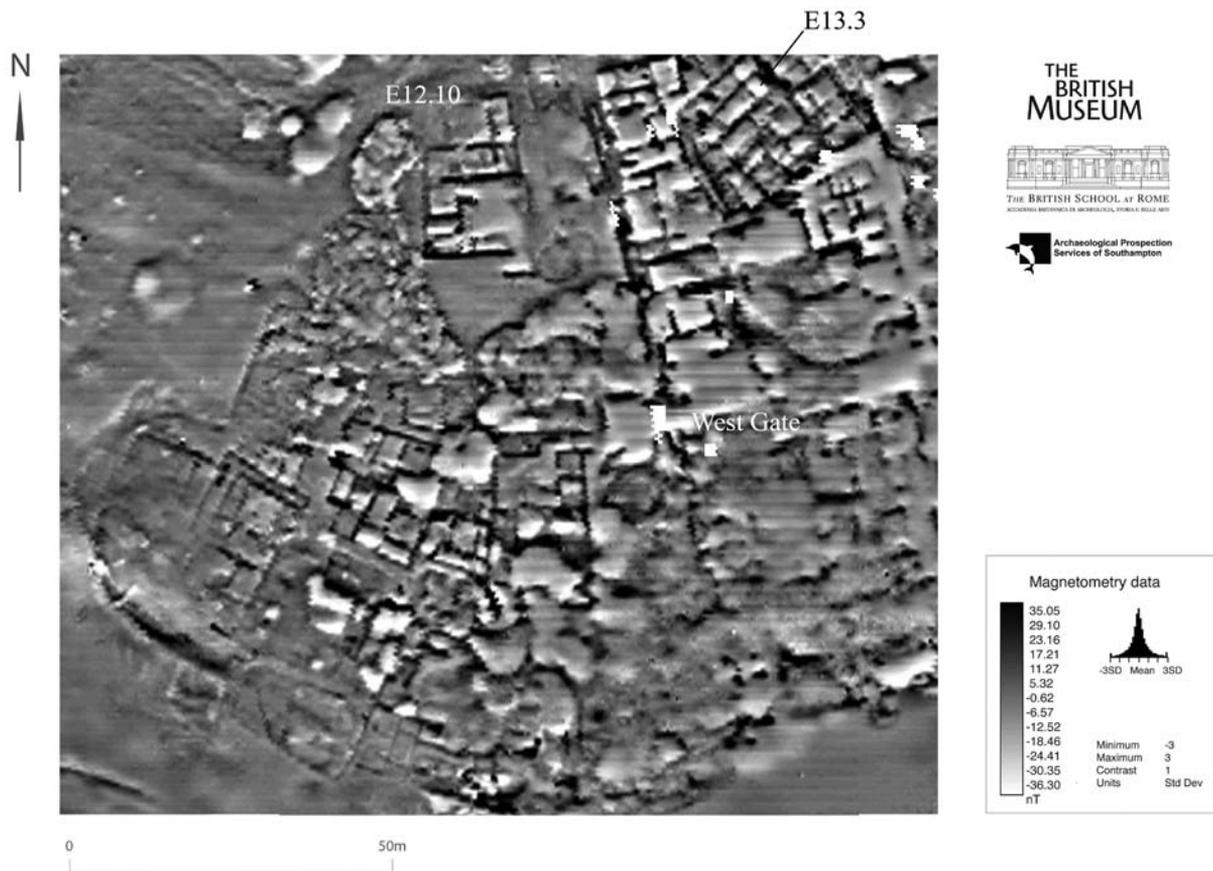


Figure 3. Detail of magnetometry survey of Amara West town (2008), showing western suburb.

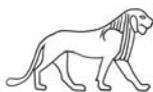


Plate 3. General view south west over building complex E13.3, with remains of vaulted storerooms, subsequently subdivided (for example, insertion of walls to create rooms 9 and 19).

18, bearing a hieratic text recording commodity deliveries (Rob Demarée, pers. comm.).

Our understanding of this group of storerooms is made difficult as they were subsequently converted into rooms of a more domestic character, with additional brick walls and stone-lined doorways inserted to divide the space into smaller units (Plate 3). The function of some rooms could be easily identified, such as one with three bread ovens along its back wall (room 11), or the adjacent room with three grain-grinding emplacements (room 10; Plate 5). Access to the roof, or an upper storey, was provided from some rooms, as remnants of two staircases were identified. The pottery found within the rooms was all of 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty date, with the exception of some 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty ceramics in one

of the magazines, within deposits predating the division of the space into smaller rooms. The top of a stela, depicting Amun-Ra as a ram, was found here, re-used as a vessel lid (F4096; Plate 6). The remains can thus be interpreted, at this preliminary stage of investigation, as a series of 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty dwellings built amongst the remains of a large-scale storage complex of an earlier period. It seems reasonable to associate the latter function with the Governor's Residence immediately to the south, although it is difficult to explain the shift in the axis of the building compared to those around it. It should also be noted that a series of vaulted magazines were identified west of the Governor's Residence (E12.3–5 and D12.1; Spencer 1997, 171–2, pls 115, 122–3) and in the area immediately south of the temple complex ('the Northern Complex', Spencer 1997, 104–5, pl. 76). Vaulted rectangular magazines, with schist floors, were also found in association with a large 'administrative' building in the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty town on Sai Island (Azim 1975, 111–19).

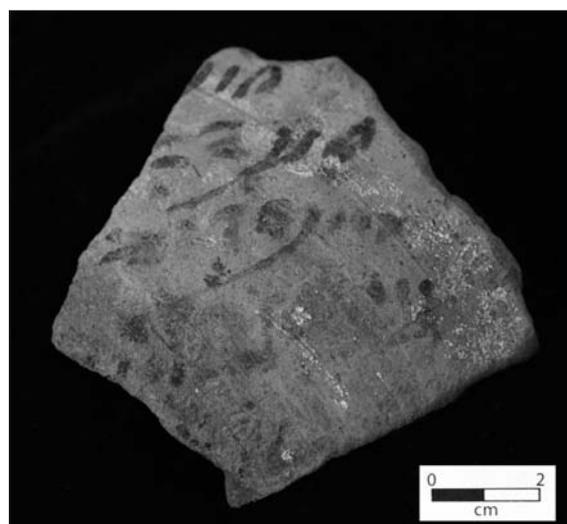


Plate 4. Hieratic ostracon, with a record of commodity deliveries. From complex E13.3 (layer 4002).

### Villa E12.10

The principal focus of this article is, however, the area west of the walled town. Fairman had undertaken some test trenches here, revealing floors and brick walls, but did not record their location, or provide a plan (Spencer 1997, 11). The magnetometry survey provided a high-resolution image of a series of large buildings (Figure 3), which could reasonably be termed villas, on account of their size and similarities with other New Kingdom elite houses, notably those at Tell el-Amarna. Up to six of these can be made out in the survey data. The northernmost one (E12.10) was selected for excavation in 2009.

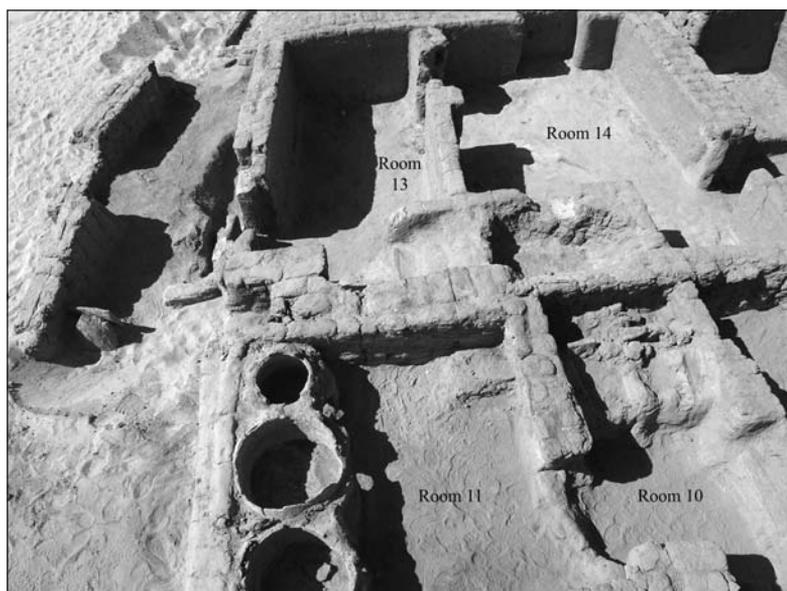


Plate 5. View over the southern part of complex E13.3, showing spaces with ovens (room 11), grinding emplacements (room 10) and staircases.

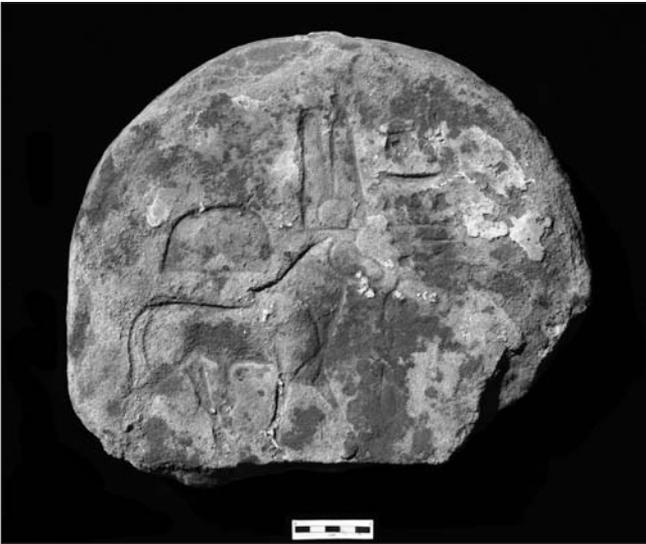


Plate 6. Upper part of a sandstone stela, found reused as a lid for a storage vessel buried in floor (4096) within room 9, complex E13.3.

The villa is well-constructed from mud bricks (365-395 x 170-200 x 50-80mm), with an 800mm thick external wall, defining a 28 x 17m building (Figure 4, Plate 7). There is no evidence for foundation trenches, cut to receive the walls, which seem to have been built directly on alluvial deposits and levelled rubbish from the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty occupation of the walled town (see below). In places the walls were preserved to 1.46m in height, though the architecture was more truncated in the northern half of the building, with only the first course of bricks preserved in the north-west corner. Wind erosion

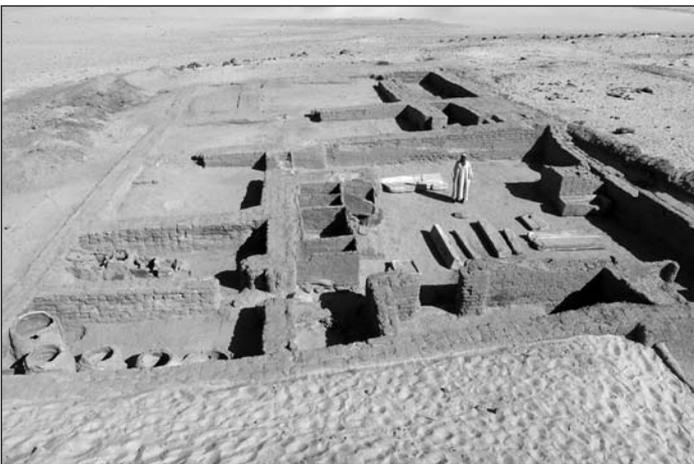


Plate 7. View north over villa E12.10 at the end of excavations.

may well be responsible for this uneven state of preservation (see Kemp 1995, 150–2), with accumulated sand deposits then protecting the southern parts of the villa. In some rooms, whitewashed mud-plaster still adhered to the walls. No remnants of painted decoration were found, although some of the other buildings at Amara were embellished with such décor (e.g. Spencer 1997, 172). Black schist slabs, quarried locally, were employed as door thresholds, many of which still remained *in situ*.

Deposits in the rooms consisted of interleaved layers of

wind-blown sand, containing a significant amount of pottery, and rubble deposits with a high proportion of mud-brick fragments. Function can be assigned to some rooms on the basis of internal features, but also in comparison to elite houses found at other sites.

An entrance porch (room 13; 3.73 x 2.75m; Plate 8) projected from the south wall of the villa was embellished with a row of schist paving stones leading up to the main doorway (Colour plate XIX). Wind-blown sand was clearly a problem for the ancient inhabitants, as at some point the porch had to be closed off with a cross wall (2143), and a set of steps (2154) built against this to allow persons to step down from the rising ground level into the villa's porch. The sandstone doorway (2076) was almost entirely preserved, with door-jambes bonded to the brick walls. The lintel was found lying nearby, broken into five pieces (F2024, Plate 9). Embellished with a cavetto cornice and torus moulding, this bore the remains of a white plaster coating, which would have been



Plate 8. Porch (room 13) in front of the doorway into villa E12.10, with later blocking wall (2143) and access steps (2154) visible to the left. A later circular structure (2145) can be seen, built over the south-east corner of the porch.

inscribed. No trace of any inscription survives unfortunately, as one would expect to find here the names and titles of the house owner (Budka 2001). Another similar lintel (F2096) was found leaning against the south wall of the porch.



Plate 9. Sandstone door lintel (F2024), probably from the main entrance to villa E12.10, reconstructed from fragments found lying upon the surface nearby.

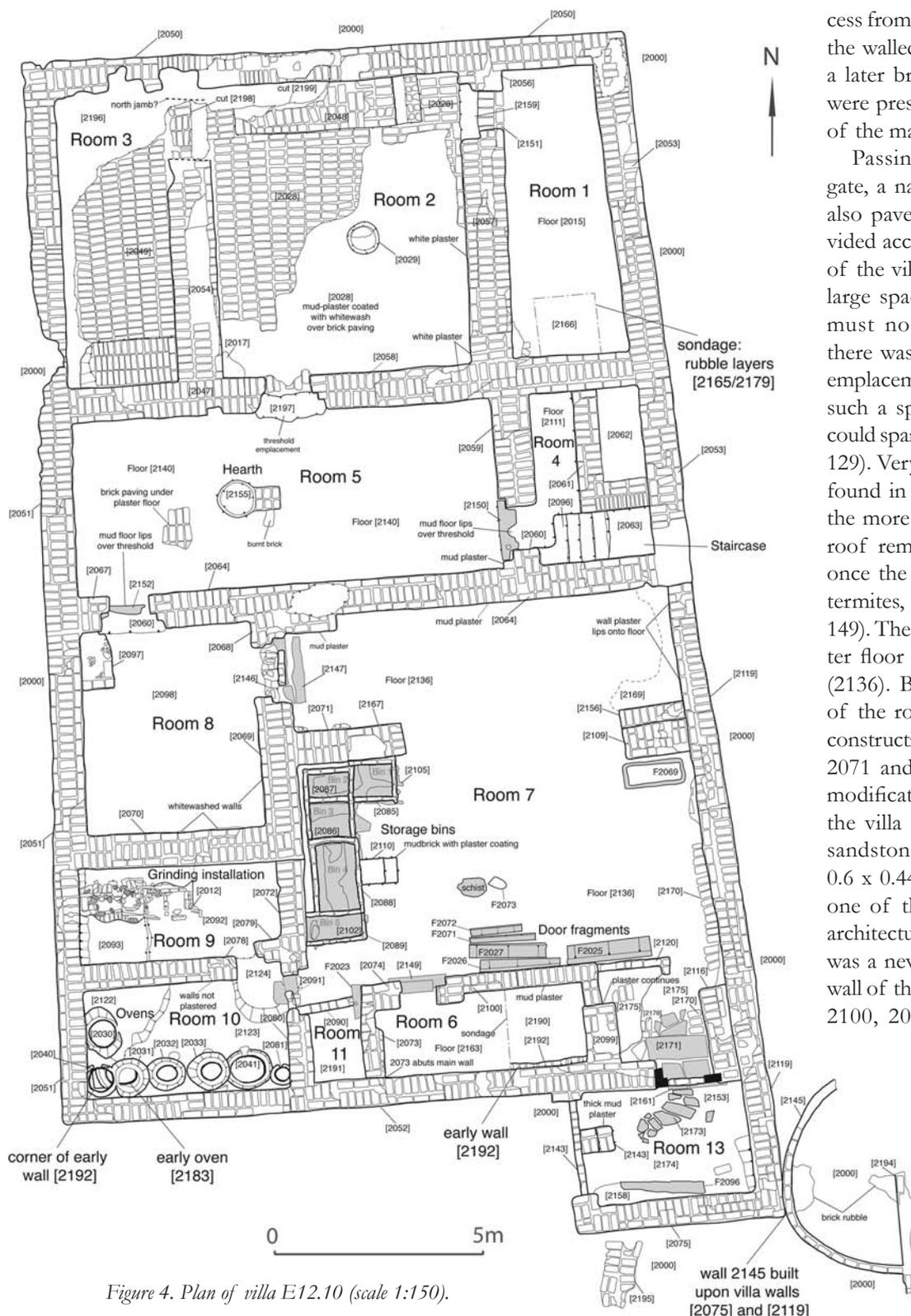


Figure 4. Plan of villa E12.10 (scale 1:150).

Entrance porches of this type are a common feature of Tell el-Amarna houses, usually reached via a staircase (see Spence 2004, 126–34) and were clearly an indicator of status (Kemp 2006, 311). The decision to orientate the house southwards at Amara West, in the opposite direction to Tell el-Amarna houses (Spence 2004, 127) may be explained by the strong northerly winds, but perhaps also by a desire to provide ac-

cess from the nearby West Gate into the walled town. Three courses of a later brick, blocking wall (2153) were preserved between the jambs of the main door.

Passing through the entrance gate, a narrow corridor (room 12, also paved with schist slabs) provided access to the main courtyard of the villa (room 7; Plate 7). This large space (originally 9.45 x 7m) must not have been roofed, as there was no evidence for column emplacements necessary to support such a span (it is estimated joists could span up to 3.7m, Spence 2004, 129). Very little ceiling collapse was found in this space, in contrast to the more northerly rooms, though roof remains can easily disappear once the wood has been eaten by termites, or decayed (Kemp 1995, 149). The well-preserved, mud-plaster floor extends across the room (2136). Brick piers on either side of the room revealed two distinct construction phases (2109 and 2156; 2071 and 2167), suggesting small modifications were undertaken in the villa during its occupation. A sandstone trough (F2069, 1.55 x 0.6 x 0.443m; Plate 10) lay against one of these piers. The principal architectural addition to the house was a new room against the south wall of the courtyard (room 6; walls 2100, 2073, 2074). The remains

of at least two other sandstone doorways (four jambs and a lintel; F2025–7, F2071–2) were found carefully stacked up against the southern wall of the courtyard; again, none bore the remains of decoration. Were these from elsewhere in the

villa, or from earlier buildings, and why are they so carefully arranged against the courtyard's south wall? A large milling stone in dark grey granodiorite (F2021), with a working surface of 640 x 500mm, was found discarded in the upper deposits excavated from this room.

The main features in the courtyard were five storage bins, arranged in an L-shape, against the western wall (Plate 11).



Plate 10. Sandstone trough (F2069) against brick pillar 2109 in the main courtyard (room 7) of villa E12.10.

These were raised above the courtyard floor by schist slabs laid on their sides, with another flat slab being used to create the base for the bins. Thin brick and plaster walls formed the sides of the bins (Colour plate XVIII). Though built against the western wall of the court (2072), they were not bonded with it, and it remains unclear whether they were an original part of the villa or were added during a renovation phase. However, as these are most likely to have been used to store grain, they may well be contemporary with the main occupation phase of E12.10, given the presence of processing and



Plate 11. View west over rooms 10, 9 and 8 (left-right) of villa E12.10, with storage bins against the western wall of the main courtyard visible in the foreground.

cooking areas in the adjacent rooms. Similar bins were found constructed on fill in rooms around the temple (Spencer 1997, 89–91, pl. 73a). Just south of the bins, a doorway provided the only access to a set of two rooms (Figure 4, Plate 11). That to the north (room 9) housed a grain-grinding installation (2012), with four adjacent settings for quern stones, which would have sat around 450mm above the ground, supported by schist stones, brick and mud plaster (Plate 12).

Bricks, laid at an angle on the north side, would have allowed an individual to rest his/her shins against the brick while grinding grain;<sup>4</sup> the flour then fell onto a plastered floor



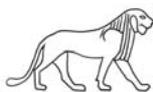
Plate 12. Grain processing installations (2012) in room 9 of villa E12.10. View looking west.

area (2093) bounded by a raised lip.

Similar emplacements have been found at Tell el-Amarna (Bomann 1995, 17–19, figs 1.11–1.12). The room immediately to the south preserved the remains of seven ovens (2030, 2031, 2032, 2033, 2040, 2041, 2081, 2081) at least some of which were in use together with a fired-clay core surrounded by mud and a flue hole at the base (Plate 11, Colour plate XVII). Thick deposits of ash were found within the ovens. Many parts of the brick walls in this room were discoloured reddish-black through the use of these ovens. It is notable that the thickness of the external villa-wall around the service rooms (9, 10) and the main court (room 7) is only 600mm, in contrast to 800mm for the

remainder of the villa. The southern part of the villa may not have been roofed or supported an upper storey. The presence of so many ovens and grain-processing emplacements is

<sup>4</sup> For the required stance, see Samuel 1989, figs 12.6 and 12.12. An ancient representation of this action is part of the lower register in the well-known depiction of the house of Djehutynefer (Shedid 1988, pl. 5a).



also somewhat unusual, even for a large house, and suggests that the house may have provided for persons other than its inhabitants. In smaller houses, oven and grinding emplacements are usually combined within a single room (e.g. Peet 1921, pl. 27 [2]).

An earlier oven (2183) was partly exposed, beneath two of the later ovens. It can be associated with the corner of an earlier wall (2192), visible beneath the main wall (2051-2052). This is likely to be from the first phase of building in the villa, though still post-dating the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rubbish layers (see below). The continuation of this wall was located to the east (2192) in a sondage dug through the floor of room 6, again with the main phase wall (2052) built directly over it.

Returning to the main courtyard, a doorway in the north-western corner led to a small square space (room 8), with well preserved white-plastered walls; the purpose of this room is unclear though a small brick setting, or bench, was found against the east wall (2097; 1.33 x 0.76m). Room 8 provides the only means of access to the rear, presumably more private, part of the villa. A large room (5) spans the width of the villa, and was found to be devoid of features, other than the base of a hearth (2155) at one end (Plate 13). The combination of a circular hearth, with a small step before it, is again well par-



Plate 13. View west over the hearth (2155) in room 5 of villa E12.10.

alleled at Tell el-Amarna (Bomann 1995, 9, 12–13, fig. 1.9). Its presence suggests this room was in regular use. The eastern end of the room provided access to a small room (4), where the first flight of a staircase leading to the roof and/or upper storey was preserved (Plate 14). As the second flight led from south to north, it would have emerged above room 1, perhaps suggesting that the area over the northern series of rooms offered accessible roof space, or even upper storey rooms. The truncation of the architecture has removed any roof remains, other than a mass of mud fragments bearing reed and matt impressions (Plate 15), likely to derive from the ceiling (very similar to those published by Bomann 1995, 8–11). Whether a built upper storey existed is unknown, but multi-storey dwellings were a typical feature of New Kingdom towns (Spence 2004). Three-storey Ramesside houses were seen by Flinders Petrie at Memphis (Drower 1995, 62), though space constraints may have been more acute in a city such as Memphis.

If a substantial second storey did exist, it is perhaps sur-



Plate 14. Staircase 2096 in room 4 of villa E12.10, with the doorway to room 5 in the background.

prising that more archaeological debris does not survive from it. While a significant amount of brick rubble was excavated out of the rooms, its volume is consistent with collapse from a single storey house of this scale; of course, a certain amount of rubble may have been removed through wind activity. If we assume the second flight of stairs ascended at a similar gradient to the first, we can posit the roof, or upper storey floor level, at around 2.48m, though it may have been somewhat lower if the upper flight also had a landing. The narrow space around the staircase preserved several complete pots lying on a floor (2111) beneath rubble layers (2094, 2095). These included two small Nubian cooking pots (C2017, Colour plate XXI) and a vessel which seemed to be a more modern intrusion, perhaps post-Medieval in date (C2016).

A doorway from the transverse room led north into a private courtyard (room 2), with fine white-washed brick paving across its extent and a *mastaba* against the north wall. This can be interpreted as the principal private reception space and probably had a column (perhaps with a sandstone base and a wooden shaft) in the middle of the room. The placement of this column would have facilitated roofing the space, unlike the main courtyard (room 7). To the right, room 1 preserved an original floor level (2015), not paved, with one shallow plate found *in situ* (C2000, Colour plate XX). On the opposite side of the rear courtyard, another paved room (room 3) was provided with a platform against its southern wall, perhaps intended to support a bed (Plate 16).

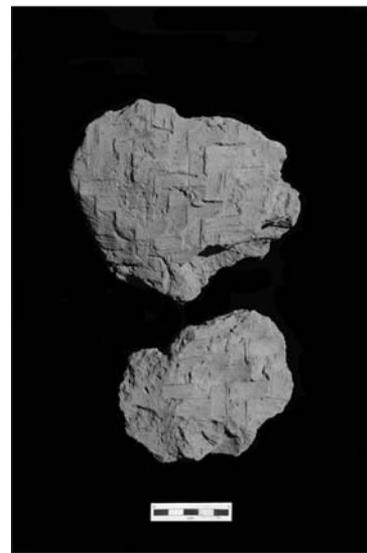


Plate 15. Pieces of mud bearing matting impressions (F2069) found in the fill excavated from room 6 of villa E12.10.

Pottery found within the villa allowed its occupation to be broadly dated to the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (c. 1200-1100 BC). Fineware vessel fragments were almost completely absent, with coarse siltware pottery dominating the assemblage: storage jars, cooking pots, plates and, to a lesser extent, bowls. Nubian pottery made up around 10%

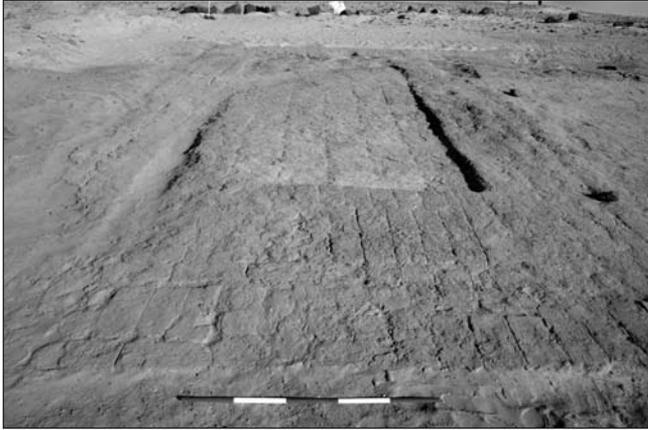


Plate 16. Brick pavement and platform within room 3 of villa E12.10.

of the total, consistent with the New Kingdom assemblage at Askut (Smith 2003, 115–16), though restricted cooking jars are the only class of Nubian vessels found at Amara West. Prior to the completion of petrographic analyses of the fabrics, it is not possible to assign Nile silt fabrics to a local source, rather than as imports from Egypt. Certain marl clays can, however, be assigned an Egyptian provenance. It is notable that the previous excavations and the magnetometry survey have not led to the identification of a single kiln within the settlement. Where was the pottery being produced?

The relative paucity of objects, even material of no intrinsic value, found within the villa is notable, and gives an impression that possessions were carefully removed prior to its abandonment. Other than a large number of quern stones, fragments of worked stone, pottery roundels, faience and shell beads, and clumps of yellow and red ochre, the only notable find was a copper alloy double-edged knife blade (F2008) found in room 1 (Plate 17).

Two sondages beneath the floors of E12.10 provided further confirmation of the building's use during the late Ramesside era. Firstly, a sondage through floor 2015 against the south wall of room 1, yielded fragments of a decorated faience vessel (F2066, Plate 18), the rim from a calcite beaker (F2064) and a carnelian spacer bead (F2063), all within a layer of rubble (2165, 2179). Fifty-one clay seal impressions were found within this deposit. These have yet to be studied, but include examples with the prenomen of Thutmose III (e.g. Colour plate XXV) and impressions of decorative scrolls, tilapia with lotus-flower in the mouth and other types of scenes. Such seal impressions are an indication of the functioning of

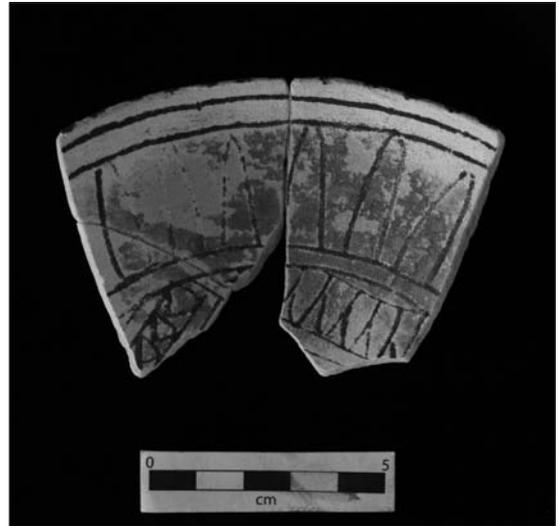


Plate 18. Fragment of a decorated faience bowl (F2066) found upon floor 2015 in room 1 (villa E12.10).

the Egyptian bureaucracy at Amara West. This rubble deposit clearly predates the construction of the villa and is likely to represent material discarded from the walled town prior to the development of a suburb of sizeable houses outside the western wall. Natural silt deposits lie beneath the rubble.

A second sondage was made through floor 2163 in room 6 (Plate 19). Once again, the deposit featured a distinctive repertoire of ceramics (2185-2187-2189), with more 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, blue-painted sherds. Natural silt was also found beneath this rubble layer (2193). Written on one of the sherds was a hieratic copy of an excerpt from the literary classic *The Teaching of Amenemhat* (F2137, Plate 20).<sup>5</sup> This is the first copy of a classic Middle Egyptian literary text found outside Egypt. An example from the 1938-9 excavations was subsequently identified for the first time in the EES archives (Parkinson and Spencer 2009). The significance of this discovery is that it is now beyond doubt that such literary classics were read throughout the Egyptian empire.

Unfortunately, the principal occupants of villa E12.10 remain unidentified. The 'Deputy of Kush' is one candidate, although the Governor's Residence (E13.2) was in continuous use throughout the site's occupation. Again, it is possible that the inhabitants of such houses were Nubians, partly acculturated and maybe even trained in Egypt, a process well known from textual sources (including 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty 'deputies', see Davies 2005, 54). The size of villa E12.10, at 476m<sup>2</sup>, underlines that these were elite dwellings; very few Tell el-Amarna houses approach this scale (Kemp 2006, 312, fig. 109 [inset]). Those houses with a larger surface area include the residences of the vizier Nakht (K.50.1), the high priest Pawah (O.49.1) and the overseer of works Hatiai (T.34.1; for all three, see Kemp and



Plate 17. Double-edged copper knife (F2014) found in room 1 of villa E12.10 (layer 2014).

<sup>5</sup> For an English translation of *The Teaching of Amenemhat*, see Parkinson 1997, 203–212.

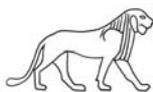


Plate 19. View of room 6 in villa E12.10, with mid floor (2163). Ostrakon F2137 was found in rubble layer (2189) beneath this floor.

Garfi 1993). Such officials and priests represent the highest echelons of pharaonic society. Of course, persons living in Egyptian towns in distant Kush may have had more freedom to construct large dwellings.

The closest parallel to E12.10 is a large house recorded by Steindorff at Aniba within the existing fortified walls, which displays many of the same characteristics, including a projecting entrance porch and a tripartite division of the space, though in this case with columned rooms in all three parts (Steindorff 1937, 19, pl. 8). It is also of near-identical size (26 x 17m). Unfortunately, only a general 'New Kingdom' date can be assigned to the structure on the basis of the published record, but it is noteworthy that Aniba became the seat of the *idnw* of Wawat (Lower Nubia) during the 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (such as Pen-niut, whose tomb was located here; Steindorff 1937, 242–5, pls 101–4). Parts of three large, contiguous

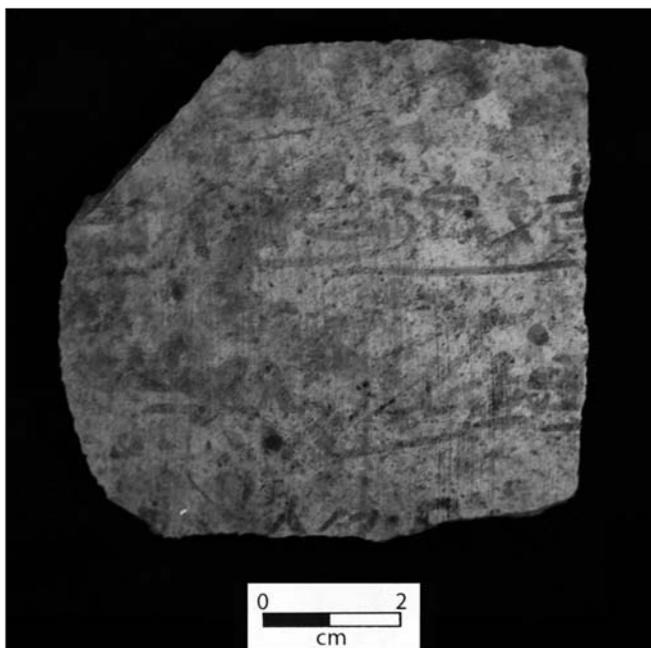


Plate 20. Pottery sherd inked with a stanza from The Teaching of Amenemhat (F2137), found in rubble (2189) beneath the floor in room 6.

houses were excavated within the walls at Sesebi. Though poorly preserved, it is clear that these large houses were of a similar scale to the Amara villas (Blackman 1937, 149–51, pl. 19). At Askut, New Kingdom occupation was actually focused outside the walls of the largely abandoned, Middle Kingdom fortifications and the largest house, of Meryka, was not within a walled area (Smith 1995, 154–66; 2003, 97–101).

By far the best comparative data for elite dwellings is, of course, Tell el-Amarna, the late 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty town founded by Akhenaten as a new residence in Middle Egypt. Built between c. 1350 and 1333 BC, the houses predate the earliest known levels at Amara West. Several clear points of comparison exist between the larger houses at Tell el-Amarna and E12.10 at Amara West. The effectively tripartite division of the space, with a porch, followed by 'front rooms' (courtyard with side rooms), a 'middle' group of rooms with staircase and hall, and an 'inner' area with bathroom and inner hall, is again easily recognisable (see Spence 2004, 126–34). Villa E12.10 is unusual, however, in the relative size of the main courtyard (room 7) and the manner in which it is not enclosed on all sides by other rooms. It also seems to be a feature of the villa immediately south east of E12.10 outside the West Gate. A light well is generally assumed to have been a component of large houses at Tell el-Amarna, but given that all of the rooms in E12.10 include an external wall, lighting through windows may have been sufficient.

Despite such variations in ground plans between New Kingdom villas at different sites, it is clear that E12.10 accords well with domestic architecture of the period, underlining that Egypt exported many of its architectural ideals throughout its Empire and that the houses at Tell el-Amarna should not be seen as 'an aberration' (for a summary of opposing views on this subject, see Spence 2004, 123). Two further elements are not present with villa E12.10, in comparison with the elite dwellings at Tell el-Amarna. Firstly, it does not sit within a walled compound which at Tell el-Amarna provided space for circular grain silos, wells, kitchen areas, animal pens and occasionally subsidiary accommodation (Kemp 2006, 327–9). The large houses at Sesebi were also without compounds (Blackman 1937, 149–51, pl. 19). Secondly, a cult place cannot be identified within house E12.10. While the larger houses at Tell el-Amarna were provided with a formal shrine with stone architectural elements, more modest cult settings are also found in Egyptian houses, often for the veneration of ancestors (see Hölscher 1939, 68–71, figs 54, 56; Ikram 1989; Smith 2003, 127–31). Given the truncation of the architecture of E12.10 in the northern more private rooms, it may simply be that all traces of such an installation are now destroyed. One of the smaller houses within the town walls featured a 'cupboard' cut into the town wall (Spencer 1997, 154, pls 78, 100[a]). The careful modelling of a torus moulding and an intimation of a formal lintel suggest that this could have been a domestic shrine.

Given the construction date of villa E12.10 towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, it is worthwhile to consider how it,

and the adjacent houses visible in the magnetometry data, compare to other dwellings at Amara West. The earliest architecture found in the EES excavations within the town was assumed to date to the early 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty ('Level Four'), and in the areas exposed, it appears that densely-built housing was arranged on a fairly regular plan following the temple alignment. The houses to the north west of the Residence match its alignment, set along the western side of a north-west alley, with houses E12.8 (117m<sup>2</sup>) and E12.10 (64m<sup>2</sup>; see Spencer 1997, pl. 113), and an enigmatic structure immediately to the north (for storage?). In the East Town south of the temple, the 'Level Four' buildings actually predate the preserved temple and may be contemporary with the reign of Seti I (c. 1306-1290 BC). Much of the exposed area was taken up with a large building which may not be a house ('the Northern Complex', Spencer 1997, 104–5, pl. 76), but featured small rooms off a central courtyard and a series of rectangular magazines to the east (497m<sup>2</sup>). Immediately to the south across a street, lay more modest houses: D14.16 (67m<sup>2</sup>), D14.17 (62m<sup>2</sup>), D14.10/8 (48m<sup>2</sup>) and D14.11/13/21 (36m<sup>2</sup>; Spencer 1997, 113–20, pl. 76) The alignment of these houses was slightly skewed in relation to the projected temple axis.

In the ensuing phases, many of these houses were modified, further subdivided, or even completely replaced, but the range of dwelling sizes did not change dramatically. Furthermore, the new areas of the walled town, revealed through magnetometry (Figures 2 and 3), suggest, if anything, an even denser area of housing, particularly evident in the south-east corner. Buildings in the south-western corner of the walled town are less clear in the survey data, but do seem to be arranged around a series of bisecting streets aligned on the town walls. It is difficult not to interpret the early architectural phases as evidence for a planned town with temple area, associated storage, governor's residence and a series of houses to accommodate the 'garrison', perhaps including officials, priests, soldiers and maybe even those involved in gold working and other trades. These roles would have been filled by both Egyptians and Nubians. It is noteworthy that the proportion of Nubian ceramics (10%) seems consistent between villa E12.10 and the areas excavated within the town wall (E13.3). Whether there was any real military threat to Egyptian control during the Ramesside Period – the few, known campaigns recorded having amounted only to conflicts with semi-nomadic, or desert-dwelling groups (see Morris 2005, 645–59, 782–8) – the appearance of the town had been couched in defensive symbolism and architecture. Buildings lay within imposing walls, the town had been situated upon an island and there was a temple with decoration propagating the rhetoric of Egyptian conquest and control. In fact, an inscription found in the Governor's Residence seems to refer to a 'fort-town' (*mnnw*, Spencer 1997, pl. 157).

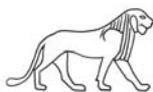
How did the villas fit into this scheme? They may not have existed at all in the early phase of the town's occupation, as 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty rubbish deposits underlie the walls of E12.10. If we assume a similar chronology may be applied to the villas

south of E12.10 (which will be targeted in future seasons), it would be the case that by the late 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty individuals had decided to construct spacious dwellings outside the town wall, effectively creating a small suburb of elite houses. An important prerequisite of extramural buildings is, of course, a sense of security. Space, freedom in terms of layout and perhaps even shelter from the northerly winds, would all have been attractive aspects of this western suburb. Given the decision to reside in extramural housing, threats from raiding parties, or the desire to live within an urban area separated from the alien cultural environment (Spence in Kemp 2004, 268–9), were clearly not issues at Amara West during the period when the suburb was built.

It has long been assumed that the city must have been totally abandoned after the New Kingdom, other than some 'squatter' occupation, identified by Fairman (Spencer 1997, 219); the term itself is rather judgmental. Settlements subsequently flourished on the opposite bank of the Nile, where Napatan, Meroitic and Medieval remains have been identified (Vila 1977b). The absence of any Napatan pottery on the settlement site at Amara would seem to support this interpretation. However, a large structure was built adjacent to, and over, the partly ruined remains of villa E12.10. This consisted of a thin wall, laid out on a semicircular plan (2145; diameter 4.84m; Plate 8), bonded with a north-south wall (2194). Both were only cleared to allow mapping and it is hoped that future excavations between the villa and western town wall may elucidate whether this is a very late New Kingdom feature, or it post-dates this period. A series of dry-stone constructions west of the walled town, some with three distinct spaces, may be of New Kingdom or much later date and also await investigation. In addition, the previous excavators had suggested a 'squatter' occupation of the town south of the temple, during the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (Spencer 1997, 221), but this is difficult to substantiate without ceramic evidence. The accumulation of thick deposits of wind-blown sand between occupation phases does not necessarily imply a lengthy time frame.

### The cemeteries at Amara

Despite the lack of clear evidence for continued occupation of the town following the end of the New Kingdom, it is clear that Cemetery C, set on a low rise above a *wadi* to the north east of the site, was in intensive use (Plate 1, Figure 1). This was probably identified by the EES team in the 1938-9 season, though the location of their work is not accurately recorded (Spencer 2002). A subsequent CNRS survey designated the site NF-36-M/2-R-8, and excavated a two-chambered tomb with pottery dated to the late New Kingdom, or perhaps later (Vila 1977a, 28–31). Following a magnetometry survey in 2008, which revealed the distribution of graves in part of the cemetery (Figure 1), a first season of excavation was undertaken in 2009 (Plate 21). The graves were cut into the Holocene alluvial silt and included simple pit burials (graves 202–5, 206, 208), tomb shafts with lateral burial niches (grave



210) and shafts leading to one or two, roughly-hewn chambers (graves 200, 201 [Plate 22]). No descending staircases or vaulted burial chambers were found during the 2009 season (see Smith 2007, 100–103).

While all the burials had been disturbed in antiquity, initial

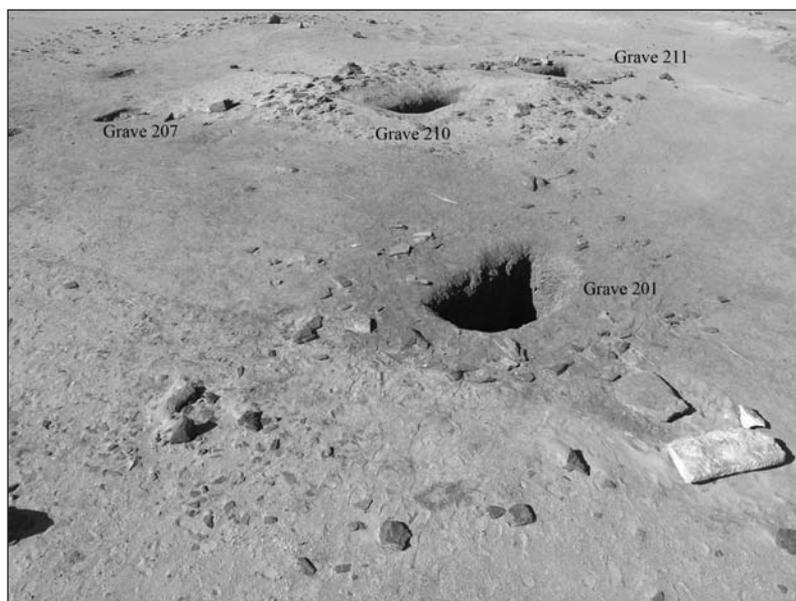


Plate 21. General view west over excavated graves in Cemetery C.

study indicates that the eastern chamber of grave 201 held up to 27 adults, two juveniles, four children and two neonates, with a further eight individuals identifiable in the second



Plate 22. Remnants of the original stone and brick blocking to the eastern chamber off the shaft in tomb 201 (Cemetery C).

chamber (and remains of two further bodies in the shaft). In addition to large amounts of pottery, numerous bone, shell, faience and carnelian beads were recovered, along with faience scarabs and plaques and a fine Egyptian blue bracelet (Colour plate XXVI). Specifically Egyptian-style objects (head-rest, scarabs and wooden coffins [Plate 23]) were complemented with Nubian elements (wooden funerary beds [Plate 24], metal vessels, bone-plaque bracelets). The better-preserved skeletal remains at Tombos suggested that Nubians and Egyptians (or Egyptianised Nubians) could be buried side-by-side,

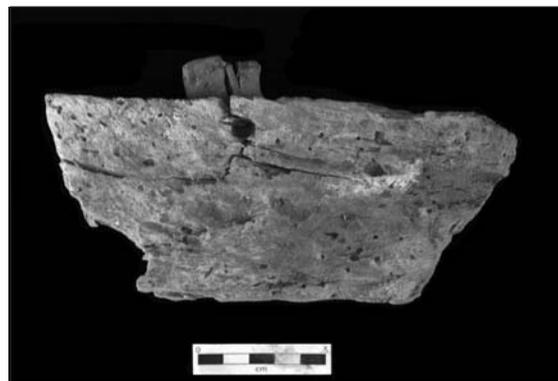


Plate 23. Fragment of a coffin panel (F9118) from the fill (9019) within the western chamber of Grave 201 (Cemetery C).

in the same tomb (Smith 2007, 103–5). A large number of fragmentary remains of matting were also encountered in grave 201. Fragments of plaster, bearing red and black painted decoration, were recovered; linear patterns predominate, but one fragment bears a representation of an Egyptian-style, bird-headed god (Plate 25). The original context of this decorated plaster is not clear, but some had originally



been adhered to wood, on the basis of impressions left on the reverse. Grave 211 features a chamber accessed from a shaft cut into the alluvium, which was used for the burial of four adults found with remnants of wooden funerary beds, beads

Plate 24. Wooden bed leg terminals (F9077, F9078) from the fill (9018) within the eastern chamber of Grave 201 (Cemetery C).

Plate 25. Two conjoining fragments of white plaster, bearing a painted depiction of a bird-headed god. From the fill (9018) of the eastern chamber of Grave 201 (Cemetery C).



(bone, faience and quartz), as well as faience Hathor-head amulets, copper-alloy tweezers and a faience *situla* (Plates 26 and 27). Fragments of painted plaster were also recovered here. A lateral niche at the base of the shaft housed a single burial, wrapped in textile and matting and sealed by a large, schist slab (Plate 28).

Unfortunately, the superstructures in this cemetery were almost entirely destroyed, though one tumulus was investigated (grave 210). This featured a single, lateral burial niche at the base of the shaft, sealed with a reused sandstone door-lintel invoking

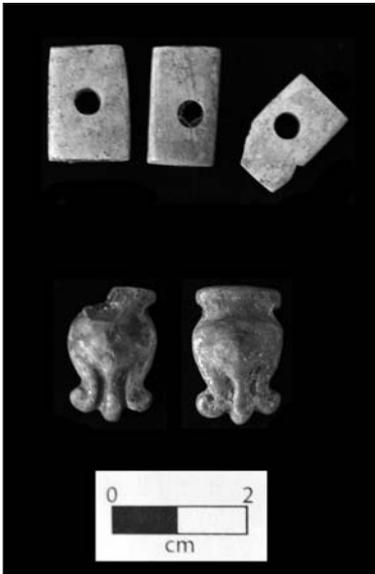


Plate 26. Hathor-head amulets (F9060, F9063) and plaques from bone bracelets (F9061), found in the fill (9034) within western chamber of Grave 211 (Cemetery C).

the goddesses Weret-hekau and Sekhmet, perhaps sourced from the town (Plate 29). Child burials were a notable feature of Cemetery C, with six infants and juveniles placed in shallow cuts into the alluvium, in one instance

provided with a single miniature pot (e.g. C9012 from grave 204 [Colour plate XXII]).

The pottery from this cemetery appears to post-date the New Kingdom, but pre-date the 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (Colour plates XXIII and XXIV). Some of the forms echo New Kingdom vessels: beer jars and shallow bowls, with red-painted rims. Other vessels seem to pre-empt the fashion for deep beakers, as are commonly found in Napatan tombs. Specifically, Nubian vessel forms were only found in graves 200 (a handmade



Plate 27. Faience *situla* (F9049) from the fill (9034) within the western chamber of Grave 211 (Cemetery C).



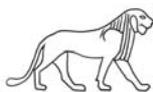
Plate 28. View north into grave 211, with a schist slab in situ over the lateral niche. The doorway to the western chamber is visible to the left.

bowl, C9100) and 204 (the above-mentioned miniature vessel, C9012). As such, this cemetery falls into a period about which relatively little is known. The best parallel for the ceramic repertoire are the tombs at Hillat el-Arab, particularly ARA 19 (Vincentelli 2006, 132–54). However, at both Amara West and Hillat el-Arab, the period throughout which the tombs were being employed for burials is far from clear. A closer parallel exists at site SAC5 on Sai Island, where New Kingdom tombs had been reused for ‘pre-Napatan’ burials, with a similar array of ceramic forms, though without the beer jars (Thill 2007). Again, there seems to have been multiple use of the tombs at Sai, with one of the chambers used for at least 17 individuals. Tombs at Tombos, both pit graves with, or without, side chambers and single burials beneath tumuli, can also be dated to the aftermath of the New Kingdom (Smith 2007, 105–113). These tombs indicate that both traditional Nubian forms of burial, as well as funerary practices displaying Egyptian elements, were in use alongside one another during the formation of the Kushite state.

In the publication of the EES graves, a similarity with the burials at Missiminia was noted (Spencer 2002, 3). These dif-



Plate 29. Ramesside door lintel (F9010) found re-used to seal the burial at the base of the shaft within tumulus (Grave 210) in Cemetery C.



fer from those excavated in Cemetery C, at Amara in 2009, in that deeper 'Napatan' beakers predominate at Missiminia, there are no beer jars and the pilgrim flasks are more spherical in form (Vila 1980). It is also notable that penannular earrings are not found. A similar lack of beer jars and penannular earrings occurs at Sanam (Griffith 1923).

It is possible that the Amara West area did not suffer from significant depopulation towards the end of the New Kingdom (Edwards 2004, 108–9): life may have continued much as before, despite the collapse of Egyptian control, as had occurred in the Second Intermediate Period (see Edwards 2004, 97–9). The graves excavated at Amara West clearly attest to inhabitants' access to luxury grave goods, including metal and semi-precious stone. The presence of so many individuals in grave 201 may be more typical of Egyptian funerary practices (see Williams 1992, 21; Smith 2003, 158–9) and consistent with the presence of coffins, which would be particularly interesting, given the period to which they can be dated. Strontium isotope analyses on dental remains from the grave may help elucidate the geographic origin of some of the interred individuals (Buzon *et al.* 2007).

A perplexing result of the EES excavations was the apparent lack of an elite cemetery with pharaonic architecture, leading to the suggestion that the wealthy inhabitants may have been returned to Egypt for burial (Spencer 2002, 3). However, this would represent a notable departure from the norm, as elite officials (whether Egyptians, or Egyptianised Nubians) were buried in tombs with chapels throughout Upper Nubia, such as are found at Sai (Geus 2004, 116, figs 90–1), Soleb (Schiff Giorgini 1971), Sesebi (Blackman 1937, 51) and Tombos (Smith 2003, 136–66). A similar situation existed in Lower Nubia, as is clear at sites such as Aniba (Steindorff 1937, 42–55, pl. 8). As the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty 'Deputies (*idnw*) of Kush' seem to have been buried at Soleb (Schiff Giorgini 1971), it would be reasonable to suggest their Ramesside equivalents were interred in a cemetery at their residence, Amara West.

In the 2009 season, extensive field-walking across desert escarpments to the north of the site revealed the presence of surface disturbances as well as degraded spoil heaps in a discrete location, prompting a surface clearance (perhaps near NF-36-M/2-R-56, see Vila 1977a, 61–2). This proved to be tomb 112 (Plate 30) which had been excavated by Egyptian workmen for the EES at the end of the 1938–9 season, as the British archaeologists attempted to complete their recording of the temple (Spencer 2002, 6–8, pls 7–11).

Unfortunately, neither the tomb's location nor its architecture were recorded by the excavators. The recent surface clearance exposed brickwork delineating a courtyard chapel (4.36 x 2.94m) with a schist slab still lying near the burial shaft, and a small foundation for a mud-brick pyramid (1.5m square) on its western side (Plate 30). Such forms of archi-

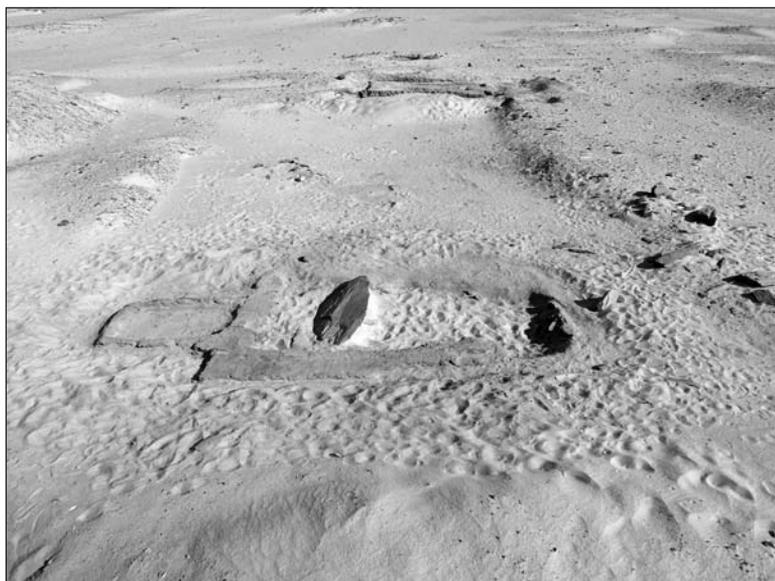


Plate 30. View east over the tomb chapels (nos 112 and 301) in Cemetery D. The chapel in the foreground (112) features a brick pyramid base at its western side.

tecture are consistent with the New Kingdom tombs found at other sites in Nubia, although at the more modest end of the size range (superstructure area, Smith 2003, 194–5). The pottery excavated during the 1938–9 season includes forms more typical of the Napatan era (Spencer 2002, pl. 10 [D1]), but also those which seem to be earlier in date (Spencer 2002, pl. 10 [H9] and pl. 9 [C2, C9]). Another such structure was then identified immediately to the north (tomb 301, 4.4 x 3.2m), though the pyramid foundation was almost completely destroyed. The pottery collected from the surface clearance can be dated to the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasties. The extent of this cemetery is presently unknown, as the remains are largely swathed in a deposit of schist gravel. That it remained in use during later times is suggested by the presence of tumuli some built over the remnants of the mud-brick superstructures. A two-chambered tomb, cut into the schist bedrock, was also identified (grave 300) though this had been almost entirely cleared out.

Two seasons of renewed fieldwork at Amara West have clearly illustrated the potential of the site to provide new insights into aspects of the lived experience of the inhabitants, both Egyptian and Nubian, at a New Kingdom town in Upper Nubia. Petrographic, botanical and food residue analyses have been instigated in the British Museum's Department of Conservation and Scientific Research, and isotope studies (University of Purdue) and geomorphological investigations (Universities of Manchester and Aberystwyth) are also being undertaken. Furthermore, an insight into the process of abandonment, which may have occurred much later than the collapse of pharaonic control of the region, may be possible. Key questions remain, some of which may be answered by future fieldwork. Given the proximity of the long-established Egyptian town on nearby Sai Island, and other 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty settlements further south, why was Amara West founded?

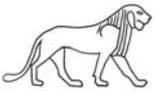
Was access to gold resources on the east bank a motivating factor or did control over routes north west to the Selima Oasis play a part in the decision to build a new town (see Hein 1991, 83)? Was the agricultural potential of the area a motivating factor, as hinted at by Edwards (2004, 83), with sizeable cultivable areas available in the winter? Future fieldwork may shed light on some of these problems.

### Acknowledgements

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*Colour plate XVIII. Amara West. Storage bin, set upon schist slabs, against the west wall of the main courtyard (room 7) in villa E12.10.*

*Colour plate XVII. Amara West. Bread oven (2030) in room 10 of villa E12.10.*



*Colour plate XIX. Amara West. The main doorway and porch of villa E12.10, with sandstone doorjambes (2075) and schist paving slabs (2173).*



Colour plate XX. Amara West. Shallow bowl (C2000) found on the mud floor (2015) in room 1 of villa E12.10.



Colour plate XXI. Amara West. Nubian cooking pot (C2017) found in room 4 of villa E12.10.



Colour plate XXII. Amara West. Miniature burnished bowl (C9012) from Grave 204 (Cemetery C).



Colour plate XXIII. Amara West. Selection of pottery from the fill (9018) of the eastern chamber, Grave 211 (Cemetery C): C9016, C9014, C9122, C9121, C9112 and C9013 (clockwise from top left).

Colour plate XXIV. Amara West. Selection of pottery from the fill (9019) of the western chamber, grave 211 (Cemetery C): C9010, C9008 and C9009 (clockwise from top left).



Colour plate XXV. Amara West. Clay seal impression, bearing the cartouche of Thutmose III (Menkheperra), flanked by two pairs of uraei. From villa E12.10, room 1, layer 2179.

Colour plate XXVI. Amara West. Selection of small finds from the fill within the eastern chamber of Grave 201 (Cemetery C): steatite scarab (F9055), carnelian earring (F9056), faience amulet of Bes (F9058) and faience plaque (F9027).

