



Evolving Communities: The Egyptian fortress on Uronarti in the Late Middle Kingdom

Christian Knoblauch and Laurel Bestock

Uronarti is an island in the Batn el-Hagar approximately 5km from the Egyptian Middle Kingdom border with Kush at the Semna Gorge. The main cultural significance of the island stems from the decision to erect a large trapezoidal *mmmw* fortress on the highest hill of the island during the reign of Senwosret III. Together with the contemporary fortresses at Semna West, Kumma, Semna South and Shalfak, Uronarti constituted just one component of an extensive fortified zone at the southern-most point of direct Egyptian control.

Like most of these sites (excepting Semna South), Uronarti was excavated early in the history of Sudanese archaeology by the Harvard/Boston Museum of Fine Arts mission in the late 1920's (Dunham 1967; Reisner 1929; 1955; 1960; Wheeler 1931), and was long believed to have been submerged by Lake Nubia (Welsby 2004). Since 2012, the site has been the focus of renewed excavations by the Uronarti Regional Archaeological Project under the co-directorship of the authors (Bestock and Knoblauch 2014; 2015; Knoblauch and Bestock 2014). In restarting excavations at the fortress, we are chiefly interested in two problems: firstly, better understanding the intended colonial structures as reflected in the construction

and omitting any later additions. As such, it would be fair to argue that our notion of the spatial organization of these sites and the lived environment is more or less petrified at their moment of foundation.

To start to rectify these shortcomings, we have begun a series of small, targeted excavations within the fortress; we are combining this new data with a reanalysis of unpublished field notes from the Harvard/BMFA excavations as well as incorporating important new studies on the finds from that excavation, for example that on the sealings by Penacho (2015). The current paper demonstrates how this modest approach can yield valuable results and contribute to a model for the development of Uronarti and the Semna Region during the Late Middle Kingdom and early Second Intermediate Period.

Block III

The area selected for reinvestigation in 2015-2016 was a small 150m² part of Block III (Figure 1, Plate 1) directly to the local south of the treasury/granary complex (Blocks IV-VI) (Dunham 1967, 7-8; Kemp 1986) and to the north of the building probably to be identified as the residence of the fortress commander (Block II) (Dunham 1967, 6).¹ The actual excavated area (Unit CC) lies at the northern end of the western half of Block III taking in the rooms labelled by the Harvard/BMFA excavators as 132, 134, 135, 137, 138, and some portions of the adjacent access ways labelled Middle Street and Cross Street East (Room 136). To clarify these rooms it was also necessary to excavate rooms 127-9,

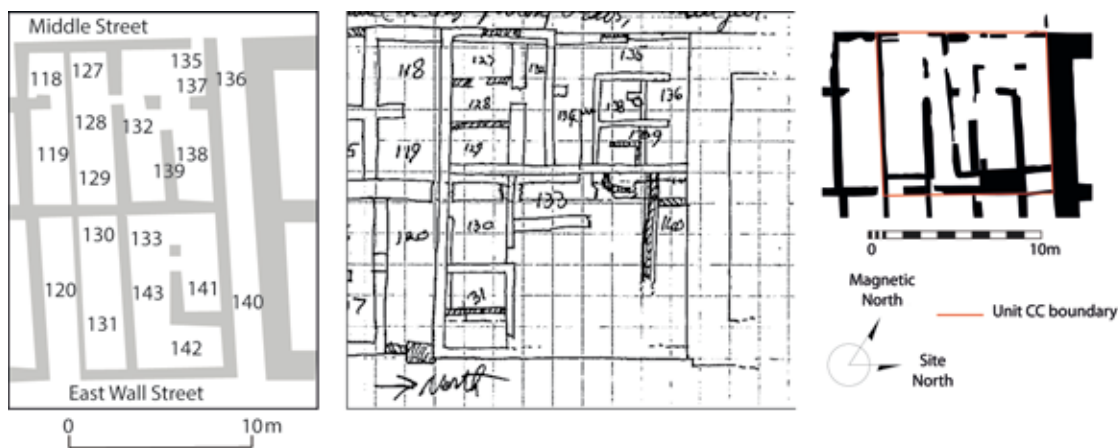


Figure 1. The published plan of the area of Block III excavated by the URAP in 2015-6 (left) as compared to the plan in Wheeler's unpublished notebook (center) and our own recording of walls (right). Some discrepancies between the notebook and our plan are due to the fact that Wheeler removed some walls. Published plan after Dunham (1967), Map III; Plan of Unit CC from Wheeler's unpublished Field Diary (courtesy BMFA).

and layout of the original complex – this is not always possible based on the extant publications which are brief and short on details; and secondly, examining architectural and archaeological evidence for changes in the nature of the occupation in the long term. This last aspect of the previously published record of the fortresses is particularly weak, partially because of the practice of reducing the plans to what was interpreted as the initial building phase for publication

though in our interpretation these did not in the original construction belong to the same unit as formed the central part of our Unit CC. Importantly, the published plan of this area differs from the preliminary plan in Wheeler's field notes considerably. Whereas Wheeler's notes (Figure 1, centre)

¹ The orientation of the fortress is north east-south west. Local site directions are used by us both in orienting our excavation units and in the descriptions here, with 'north' thus being north east.



Plate 1. Aerial photograph of Uronarti photograph, marked to show the areas discussed here. Looking south west.

record a number of alterations and rebuilding that obscured and partially erased the original layout of the structure(s) in this portion of Block III (Wheeler Diary, 1 Jan. 1929), the published plan (Figure 1, left) depicts a reconstruction solely of the poorly visible initial building phase. Amusingly, by retaining the room numbers (though with some errors) on this plan an obvious confusion was created in the mismatch between visible rooms and the larger number of labels for them: a three-room unit had five room numbers. In this representation, the rooms under investigation constituted a street and a single unit. The latter comprised a transverse room entered from Middle Street (Rooms 135, 137) with two parallel chambers at the rear (Rooms 132, 134; 138). A doorway through the southern wall provided access to a single long chamber (Rooms 127-9) that ran the length of the unit. Thus reconstruction of the architecture of the unit matched, more or less, that of an adjacent unit in the eastern half of Block III (Rooms 130, 131, 133, 142 and 143) and possibly mirrored that of two further units that directly adjoined the two northernmost units of Block III to the south. In this reconstruction the units of Block III had many similarities but were not in fact rubber stamps across the whole unit. We now think that the published plan – while it attempts to show the original construction and certainly leaves out some walls of later phase – in fact conflates different building periods (see below) and makes this area look less uniform than it was.

Given both the highly hypothetical nature of this reconstruction and the dearth of information pertaining to the episodes of rebuilding in this area it was an obvious target for re-examination as it offered the opportunity to clarify both a part of the original plan of the fortress and to examine how

the plan was changed over time. Moreover, Wheeler left parts of the excavation unfinished, allowing us to hope for undisturbed deposits. The preservation of the original phase of construction was poor in the western half of the excavation area with some features identified by Wheeler no longer visible, but we were able to confirm some of his observations and make new ones. The preservation in the eastern half was much better and here we can be somewhat more confident in our reconstruction of two major phases of construction, involving a substantial reimagining of the space, as well as potential sub-phases. Based on our new data combined with Wheeler's unpublished notes it is now possible to demonstrate that the original tripartite unit was replaced with a new building or buildings that utilized some of the old walls, built new walls on top of some old walls that had been diminished, and sited some new walls in entirely new locations that

suggest that not only this building but also the general traffic pattern in the northern sector of the fortress had changed by what we identify as Phase II.

Architectural Phase I

As was to be expected, the oldest phase encountered in the excavation represents the blue-print of the fortress – the plan as envisaged by the architect. This plan had evidently been marked out according to the cubit on the uneven, rocky ground; this was then prepared for construction by cutting it into terraces whose contours corresponded approximately to the boundaries of individual rooms, houses and streets. Thereafter the architectural elements were presumably marked out with more precision and mud bricks of approximately 320-330 by 150-160mm in the area of Block III were laid in walls with a thickness of 500mm directly onto the living rock. Construction was relatively regular, with wall courses consisting of one side header and one side stretcher, alternating sides between courses.

At this stage, the northern end of Block III was clearly separated from the granary/treasure complex (Blocks IV-VI) by a road of approximately 4 cubits or 2m width that was paved with a thin mud floor (Figure 2). This street provided the only direct access path between the eastern and western half of the settlement in the north, and was important for efficiently moving men around the fortress perimeter and for access to the units entered off the Eastern Wall Street. Directly to the south of this was the northern wall of Block III.

In Phase I the building unit excavated in CC had a transverse room measuring 4.75 x 2.6m that was entered from the street, as seen on the published plan. Both we and Wheeler

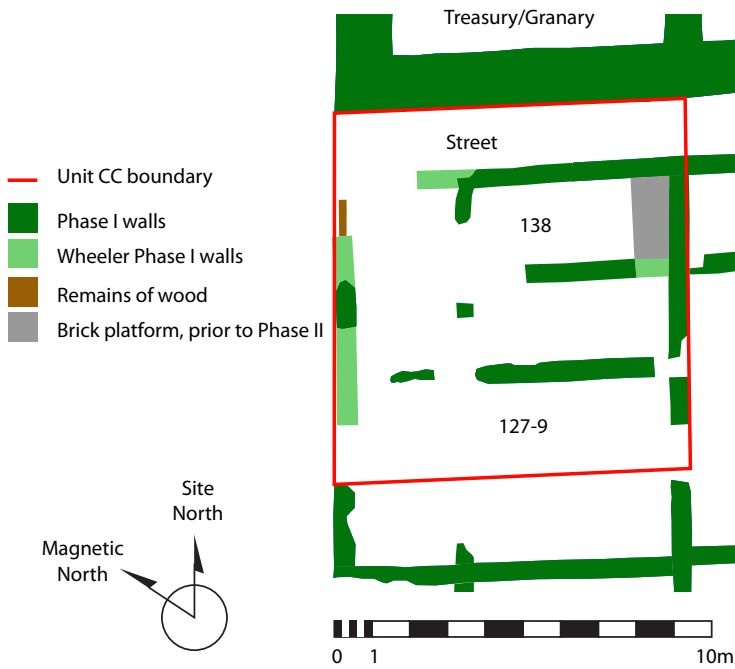


Figure 2. Phase I architecture in and immediately adjacent to excavation unit CC. Some walls apparently seen by Wheeler are no longer present, and the approximate location of these is indicated in light green. In this phase the building that occupies the majority of the excavation area was a three-room unit, thought to have been a barrack. This is one of ten identical such units that comprise Block III (scale 1:200).

noted the remains of wood that are likely connected to an exterior door in the north of the wall of this room. Remains are too scarce now, and were too scarce in Wheeler's time, to be certain of the arrangement of doors leading to and between the two equal-sized parallel rooms behind the transverse vestibule. These measure 5.1 x 2.1m. There is no reason we have seen yet to link, in Phase I, the long room 127-9 with this unit as has been done on the published plan; that link probably came later during the remodelling of our Phase II, and those rooms were probably initially the northern half of a separate tripartite unit identical to that formed by rooms 132, 134-5, 137-8. (As noted above, that there are multiple room numbers designating what were originally only three rooms stems from the remodelling that subsequently made this area so complicated). An enigmatic brick platform at the eastern end of room 138 is of uncertain precise date, but probably was built subsequent to the original construction but prior to the major remodelling of Phase II. It is tempting, but probably misleading, to read this platform as an emplacement for a bed: the walls show no narrowing to a niche. Perhaps it was the base for a staircase, though no steps remain. The feature is noted here because of its uncertain date, but as we think it unlikely to belong to the very first phase of construction it plays no role in our interpretation of the initial fortress layout.

Now that the plan of the north-western corner of Block III has been clarified, we can reconstruct with some confidence Block III as originally consisting of two rows of five

three room units, identical but for being mirror images of one another reflected across a shared back wall. The dimensions of all ten units were essentially identical, namely 17.5 cubits long and 10 cubits wide, with an insignificant margin of error. The east-west walls do not always match up perfectly, suggesting that in the original planning the rooms were not in fact all laid out on the ground prior to building walls but rather the dividing wall between the eastern and western five-unit blocks was built first and then the almost identical units constructed backing onto it. Despite this small discrepancy, the pre-planned and essentially rubber-stamp nature of these units is very clear. These three room structures of Block III correspond closely to Ricke's so-called 'Dreiraumgruppe' (Ricke 1932) or Bietak's House Type B (Bietak 1996) which had been a standardised structural unit within the 'official' architectural oeuvre since the Old Kingdom (Von Pilgrim 1996, 190-192). During the Middle Kingdom when Uronarti was built, such simple units were particularly prevalent in the other Nubian fortresses in the Second Cataract region, for example Semna West (Dunham and Janssen 1960, 13-14, maps IV, VIII), Shalfak (Dunham 1967, pl. X) Rooms 52-83) and Askut (Badawy 1965, fig. 1). Due to their simple, repetitive character as well as their concentration in settlements where accommodation for large numbers of men was required in a limited space, it is unsurprising that such units are usually interpreted as soldiers' barracks, which circumstantially makes sense, even if there is not much direct evidence for it: if it was intended that soldiers were to sleep in the fortress which seems likely, they must have slept somewhere and these units seem to be the obvious candidates. It has been suggested on the basis of a single preserved archaeological situation at Qasr el-Sargha (Śliwa 2005, 479-480) that the front room/courtyard was intended as a space for food preparation and other domestic chores. In the fortresses, it is presumed that such spaces would also have been used for maintenance of weapons and equipment (Vogel 2010, 421). The rear rooms, which were only accessible via the ante-room, are understood to be two separate sleeping spaces.

Assuming the identifications of the units under investigation as comprising barracks and the rear chambers as sleeping rooms are correct, we may tentatively speculate concerning the original purpose of Block III as planned by the architects of Senwosret III. Central to this endeavour is the estimation of how many men these units could comfortably house. The space available in each of the rear chambers is just over 10m², with a width of about 2m. Allowing that the comfort of the low-status armed men was not the main priority of the architects who planned these spaces, a generous estimate of 2 x 1m for each man and his belongings would imply that at least five men could have slept side to side in relative comfort in each rear chamber, with clearance to walk the length of the room without stepping on one's companions, but the space could easily have accommodated more men if circumstances

required it. It follows that each individual unit in Block III could have accommodated at least ten individuals and Block III a minimum of 100 individuals with a suggested upper limit of *c.* 160 men. Irrespective of the obvious subjective nature of such estimations, it seems inarguable that in simple relative terms Block III originally constituted a fundamental element of the fortresses as it had been intended by the architects to be the central (though not the only, as sets of similar units are present in other blocks of the fortress) residential block for soldiers in the fortress of Uronarti, and thus the bulk of the muscle by which the original aims of the Egyptian state in the cataract region were to be achieved.

Architectural Phase II

The Second Main Phase is characterised by new walls, generally one brick-length thick (approximately 350mm) and laid in alternating rows of headers and stretchers, using older bricks and some new ones (Figure 3). The new walls in most

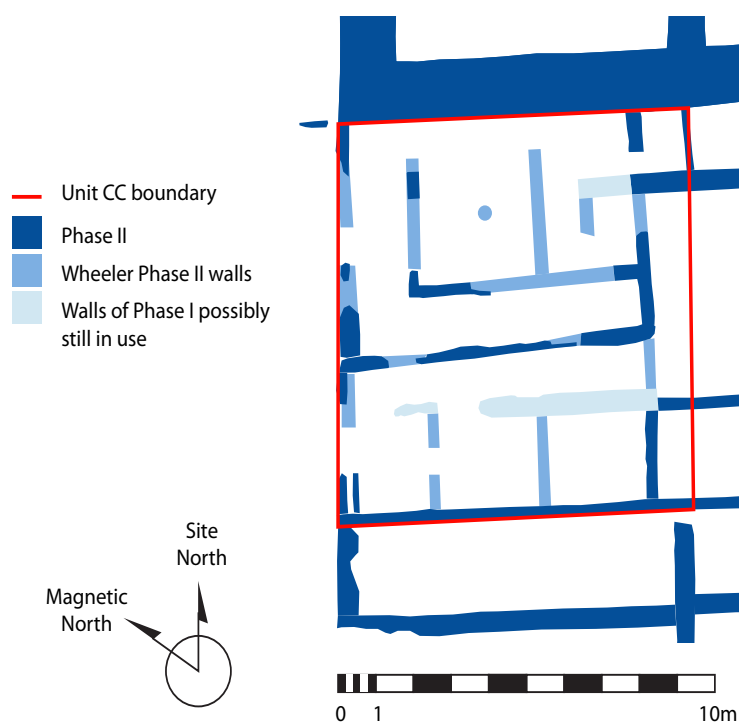


Figure 3. Phase II in and immediately adjacent to excavation unit CC. Some walls seen by Wheeler are no longer present, and the approximate location of these is indicated in light blue. He removed many of these walls in order to clarify the Phase I architecture. In some cases it is not clear if Phase I walls were still standing in Phase II (scale 1:200).

cases define new lines, making clear that in this area – unlike anywhere else in the fortress – the original walls were not preserved to a usable or in-the-way height at the time of Phase II construction. Whether this is because of targeted wall destruction on the part of those who remodelled the area or because of differential erosion is not clear, but it is notable that this is also the most denuded part of the interior of the fortress today, with the Phase II walls having suffered badly as well. Sub-phases are not possible to identify in most cases,

so to some degree the following description is only certain for the end-phase of major use of the fortress. It is possible that some alterations took place in between our Phases I and II (as noted above with the platform in the east of room 138).

In addition to incorporating what had originally been the street (see below), Phase II constructions erased the older boundaries between the four northern rubber-stamp tripartite units of Block III, though those units were preserved (not without modification of doorways) in the six such units in the south of the block. Phase II architecture is both thinner-walled and less uniform than Phase I architecture, and much of it was removed by Wheeler; it is thus difficult to plan or describe entirely. However, what we think we can trace in the space previously occupied by the street and the first 1.5 north-western tripartite units are two irregular units with long areas in the north and parallel spaces coming off them. These new units are of similar length to one another, measuring 7.5m east-west (and thus shorter than their predecessors of Phase I) but of notably unequal width. The northern such unit probably maintains the original doorway of Phase I. This leads into a transverse hall, relatively narrow at 1.5m wide. This hall in the south turns a corner to form a long and similarly narrow room that runs the length of the unit. North of this in the centre of the unit is an approximately square room, possibly with a column in the centre. To the east the picture is difficult to see clearly; if the original Phase I wall was partly maintained here, then there was a small sort of snail shell of a room; if not, there may have been two small parallel rooms.

The unit to the south of this structure, with which it shares a wall, has an open area on its northern edge. If the Phase I remnant of wall still surviving to one course was utilized in Phase II, then there was a narrow corridor in this area. If, as seems somewhat more probable, this wall was not still a feature, then there was no such corridor but rather open access to three rooms to the south. The back wall of these three rooms certainly utilized the wall lines of Phase I; a cross wall was also added to what had been one of the parallel long rooms of an earlier structure. The two units of Phase II then, if we are correct in seeing them as two units at all, thus both have quite narrow long corridors – somewhat more than half the width of one of the original Phase I long rooms. The rooms coming off these corridors are more idiosyncratic. The back wall of these units does not follow the Phase I wall, and that narrow leftover space appears to have been incorporated into rooms that similarly redefined the north-easternmost of the original Phase I units of Block III. This area is our next target for excavation. While doorways and movements in these newly defined Phase II rooms are not possible to trace, and we cannot be entirely certain of which rooms belong together, even these seeming problems are telling: the switch from Phase I to Phase II involved a reimagining of space that was more complete than simply subdividing old rooms and knocking



new doors through walls. It also represents a rejection of rigid standardization.

The alteration to this area that would have had the most obvious effect on the use of the fortress as a whole was the blocking off of the western entrance to the street and its incorporation into a new structure. The best preserved parts of this blocking are from the centre of the street, where a small storage room was defined by new walls that crossed the street. Unfortunately, this is also the most difficult modification for which to suggest a relative date. While the final configuration of rooms in what had been the street probably dates to Phase II, with the storage chamber to the east and the western parts of the former street incorporated into the rooms of the northernmost Phase II unit, it appears likely that the street itself was blocked off somewhat earlier. This is suggested by the eastern cross-wall defining the storage room, which itself has two clear phases. This wall is not aligned with the central wall defining the axis between the eastern and western halves of Phase I Block III, and there is no reason to suppose it dates to Phase I. Nonetheless, the first construction of this cross-wall is founded at the bottom elevation of the street, which is not true for the western cross-wall defining the storage room. The western cross-wall, which has a door through it at the south, aligns with the back of the two units of Phase II and probably is similar in date; it also rests on stratified deposits some 400mm thick (Plate 2). This suggests



Plate 2. Stratified deposits in the street below the Phase II wall that defines the western side of the storeroom in the street. The sequence of walls and deposits in this area – the only place we have yet found stratified deposits intact – demonstrates the presence of subphases between our Phase I and Phase II constructions.

that the street both ceased to be a thoroughfare and began accumulating deposits prior to Phase II, but that the final configuration of the small room was not clarified until Phase II. Even at that time its precise relationship to the units we can describe with confidence as belonging to Phase II is not clear. This can be read as an indication that the remodelling of the fortress should be understood both as an organic and ongoing process of smaller modifications and as punctuated by at least one major and – we will argue below – probably state-sanctioned, redesign of some import.

The interruption to the flow of movement between the eastern and western halves of the settlement, and the attendant change in access to the Treasury/Granary complex, that resulted from this building activity is, in fact, hardly an isolated phenomenon at Uronarti and is indicative of a widespread willingness to sacrifice scribal-proscribed efficiency of access in return for increased floor space. This is particularly noticeable in the Eastern Wall Street, which lost its original function after being blocked off at numerous points, presumably to create long storage magazines (Wheeler Diary Jan. 12 1930). These developments attest not only to the shifting priorities of the inhabitants of the settlement (see below), but also point towards significant adjustments in the way people and goods moved around the settlement, and thus related to it and each other. Traffic between different 'Blocks', and indeed between the eastern and western halves of the settlement, must have increasingly taken place through a complicated network of interconnected buildings and open spaces rather than along clearly marked routes.

Regarding the functions of the newly created Phase II buildings we unfortunately have little direct evidence in the nature of finds, rather we only have loose materials which were found in non-stratified debris levels in the area. These included stone querns (Plate 3) and implements (Plate 4), a fragment of a faience vessel (Plate 5) and one so-called



Plate 3. A broken quern excavated in Unit CC.

crumb bead with a body consisting of fragments of crushed faience set in a translucent faience matrix (Plate 6). The largest single group of objects is pottery and this is largely utilitarian in nature including table-ware (Figure 4c-g), cooking pots (Figure 4j), moulds for baking bread (Figure 4a, b) and jars of different sizes (Figure 4h (Marl C)), suggestive of domestic chores taking place in the vicinity. For purposes of function and chronology, however, it is important to note that the pottery from this area is certainly not in a pristine archaeological context and, therefore, can only provide some general indications. We note that the pottery is wholly in the late Middle Kingdom tradition, but somewhat advanced



Plate 4. A stone grinding implement excavated in Unit CC.



Plate 5. Faience bowl fragment excavated in Unit CC.



Plate 6. Faience Crumb Bead excavated in Unit CC.

from that related to the founding event of the fortress as known from the extramural settlement Site FC (Knoblauch and Bestock 2014, fig. 24). The assemblage includes styles which are not present in the earliest deposits from the site, namely micaceous slipped pottery (Figure 4g), painted linear decoration (Figure 4c, f), incised undulating decoration on red-slipped silt bowls (Figure 4e), and some decorated Nubian pottery (Figure 4j), all suggesting that the local production

and consumption of material culture was beginning to find its own trajectory. Moreover, the debris from this area includes only types which for simplification can be said to start in the very late 12th-early 13th Dynasty horizon and continue well into the 13th Dynasty. These include jar rims with an internal ledge rim or so-called 'kettle'-shaped apertures (Figure 4i), and a plethora of small bowls with vertical or in-turned rims (Figure 4c, d). As there is little or no overlap with the earlier site FC, presumably the debris is separated from it by some time.

In summary, the scale of the building work in Phase II was considerable. It involved throwing together previously independent buildings in the western strip, redefining the original boundaries relative to other buildings in the whole area, especially those to the east, and finally, though perhaps not for the first time, the appropriation of 'public space' in the form of designated, official access ways. Considering these developments together, one is inclined to suspect that the building work they represent was an 'officially' sanctioned rebuilding of the entire northern section of Block III, rather than just a series of piecemeal, small-scale initiatives undertaken to meet the personal requirements of those people living in the spaces. Given that we know the administration of the fortress in the Late Middle Kingdom was still very much closely linked with the state through the vizierate in Thebes (see below) with power exercised locally in the form of a fortress commander, the rebuilding of parts of Block III, one presumes, may have taken place at the latter's behest – or at the very least with his tacit approval.

The broad correctness of this version of events is supported by the exercise of tracing the distribution of other object categories across the whole of Block III which suggests that while the character of the entire block had indeed altered, its official character was maintained to some extent, although blurring of public and private spheres of activity can be assumed. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the occurrence of 441 mud sealing impressions in the debris of Block III (Penacho 2015, 127), which is at odds with the characterisation of this area purely as barracks for housing low-status troops/recruits. These mud seals from Block III were used to seal and guarantee the contents of letters, bags, boxes and storage rooms and the clustered distribution of them in this area, in four particular rooms (87, 106, 115 and 120) suggests that the items to which the seals were originally attached were opened and/or stored in close proximity to their find spots, with the discarded seals then being dropped on the floor in corners of the room as waste (Penacho 2015, 127). In all cases, the clustering of seals can be linked spatially to secondary alterations in which garrison structures had been repurposed, but the stratigraphic information is never precise enough to ascertain the vertical relationship to such features with any confidence (Wheeler Diary Dec. 31 1929 and Jan. 1, 6-7, 1930).

As is characteristic for deposits of seals in Middle Kingdom settlements, for example at Abydos (Wegner 2007, 304-313) or Elephantine (Von Pilgrim 2001, 169), most of the

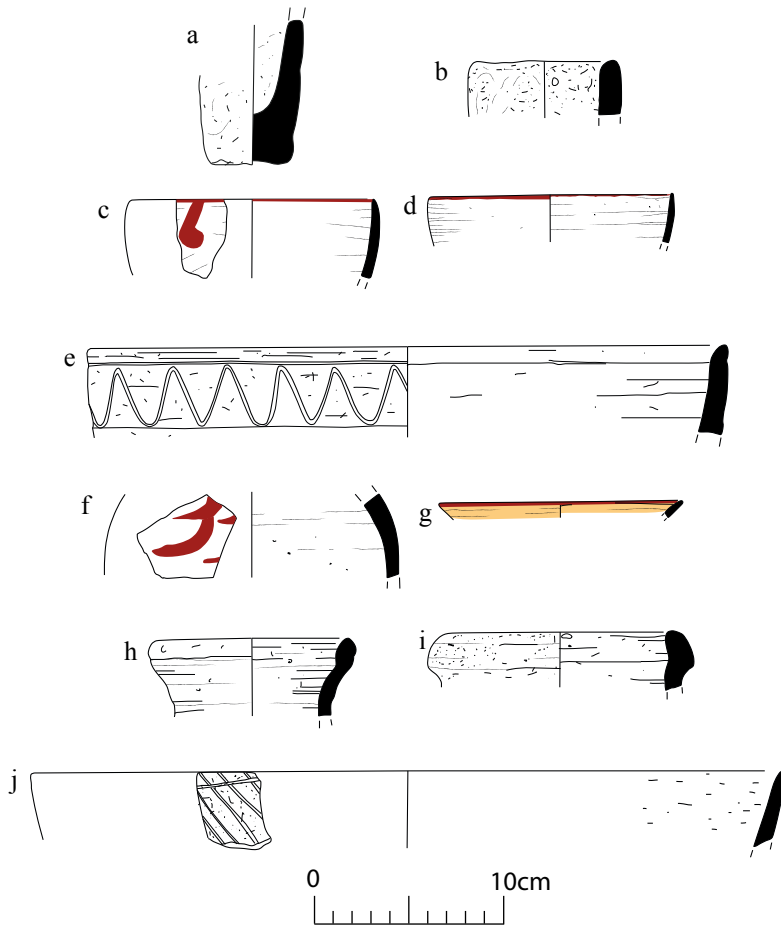


Figure 4. Ceramics excavated in Unit CC, none from secure contexts (scale 1:4).

seal impressions from Block III were from so-called personal design or decorative scarabs – thus bearing no legible inscriptions – that probably represent repetitive official sealing by individual sealers in this area (i.e. Von Pilgrim 2001, 169-172). There were also a number of both institutional and private name seals however, that provide invaluable insights into the identity of the people and institutions that were active there. In the units closest to Block II – arguably the Residence of the Fortress Commander – there were found peg and basket seals that would have been attached to goods sent to Uronarti from the fortress of Buhen (Dunham 1967, 64:18A) and its goods storehouses (Dunham 1967, 64:17A), while the reception of documents from the vizierate at Thebes is attested to by two letter seals (Dunham 1967, 65:68). Importantly, one of these was countersealed with a royal seal of Horus Mery Tawy (Dunham 1967, 64:61A; Reisner 1955, 36; Ryholt 1997, 404: File H/401), a 13th Dynasty king who may have ruled in the first half of the Dynasty (Ryholt 1997, 321-322), although this is far from certain. Evidently, this unit was used for storage of goods and correspondence exchanged between the highest officials at Uronarti, the central administration at Thebes and other Nubian fortresses. This possibility is also suggested by the discovery of inscribed papyri in two places in this unit, Rooms 86 (Dunham 1967, 101-102) and 87 (Dunham 1967, 103-105), and in rooms belonging to the

unit immediately adjacent to the north to which it was joined by a new doorway, namely Rooms 94 and 96 (Dunham 1967, 105).

A particularly dense concentration of 67 sealings occurs in Room 120. This room was originally part of a barracks structure in the north-eastern quarter of Block III, that appears from Wheeler's notes and the published plans to have been converted into a single long chamber (Wheeler Diary Jan. 7, 1929). This space contained sealings from letters and goods sent to Uronarti from the fortresses of Buhen and Shalfak (Dunham 1967, 65:65A, 66:64) as well as a letter seal from a 'royal endowment' of Senwosret III (Dunham 1967, 65:65A). Following Reisner (1955, 37), seals of this type were unlikely to have been personal seals of the king. Rather, they may have been institutional seals of endowments founded by this king. They, therefore, provide only a *terminus post quem* for the contexts in which they are found. Papyri were also found in this room (Dunham 1967, 107) and it seems probable that it too was used to store official communications and fortress records. However, two of the private name seals originally attached to baskets and boxes found in Room 120 were countersealed with institutional seals of the Uronarti Granary/Treasury Complex (Blocks IV, V and VI), indicating that Room 120 also functioned as a store for items deriving from these neighbouring institutions (Dunham 1967, 64:10A/11A; Penacho 2015, 128). In light of this clear repurposing of

Room 120, it is unlikely to be a coincidence that a doorway had been opened up in the south-eastern corner of the treasury/granary (Wheeler Diary Jan. 9, 1929). This was presumably a counter measure to the blocking off of Cross Street East noted above and was intended to provide direct access to the units in the north-eastern portion of Block III from the Treasury and Granary complex.

While only a single seal was found by Wheeler in the area we are currently investigating (Dunham 1967, 66:39), and we have found none, it is nonetheless possible to argue that the changes to the architecture that we have observed during our excavations are best understood in the wider context of a fundamental shift in the nature of use of this whole area, and probably also in the social status of those working and residing there: although Block III was intended originally for barracks, the area was increasingly used instead for official storage and administration. Given the location of Block III directly between the treasury/granary (Blocks IV, V and VI) as well as the probable residence of the fortress commander (Block II), it is reasonable to propose that the whole precinct was converted away from military accommodation towards fulfilling the requirements of the officials who worked in these two institutions. The presence of scribes working in these spaces is certainly hinted at by the scribal pestles in room 83 (BMFA, 28.1775, <http://www.mfa.org/collections/>

object/scribes-pestle-447467), 84 (BMFA 29.2240, <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/scribes-pestle-447479>), and 110 (BMFA 29.2284, <http://www.mfa.org/collections/object/scribes-pestle-447484>). Whether these spaces also incorporated domestic functions – such a function is imaginable for the spaces in excavation Unit CC (see above) – and, therefore, a mixture of social and economic and administrative functions as known from elsewhere during the Middle Kingdom is a distinct possibility, but difficult to confirm on current evidence.

Conclusion

One might cautiously propose that by the time of architectural Phase II, the military needs foreseen by the architects of Senwosret III, as measured by large numbers of low-status recruits and the ability for them to move efficiently and quickly around the fortress perimeter, were superseded by more immediate and pressing concerns manifested in an intensification and expansion in administrative and storage activity at the site. Although we can only make educated guesses at this stage concerning what the purpose of this administrative activity was, it probably relates to supply, local resource extraction, trade and the logistics of organising the onward transportation of goods to the north and south. Moreover, taking into consideration the latest analysis of the Semna Despatches by Kraemer and Liszka (2016), Uronarti may have become the patrol headquarters of the Semna-Uronarti border region already by early in the reign of Amenemhat III (if not before), with officials at Semna South, Semna and Kumma reporting to a higher official in a central ‘reporting office’ at Uronarti (Kraemer and Liszka 2016, 39-40). The location of such an office at Uronarti, of course, would only make sense if Uronarti had become more generally a seat of local importance coupling various oversight roles. The shift in favour of these activities would have required a larger body of officials to oversee these activities who in turn required more space.

It is probably no coincidence, therefore, that the first attested burials at Uronarti date to this period or just after to judge by the pottery and other finds (Dunham 1967, pl. XXIII) indicating the growth of a small permanent community contemporary to, or directly following the proposed growth in the administrative character of the settlement: the burials include those of children and adults (Dunham 1967, 31-32), and thus reflect the first appearance of families in the Egyptian settlements in this part of the Cataract region. These burials, moreover, are not the burials of low rank garrison soldiers, but show some evidence of a funerary and mortuary culture commonly associated with the relatively wealthy lower rank officials, for example inscribed wood and stucco coffins (Dunham 1967, 32) and an elaborate gold and amethyst jewellery set (Dunham 1967, pl. XXIII). Considering this, it is certainly tempting to see the developments visible in our present excavation unit as part of a shift away from a block originally intended to house a garrison of soldiers

who were sent to Nubia on tours of duty and a handful of administrators, towards administrative and social structures more commonly known from ‘civil’ settlements or towns in the Egyptian Nile Delta and Egyptian Nile Valley. Specifically, there is a growth in a class of literate officials and their families, some living permanently at Uronarti, and perhaps also the growing importance of households of important officials acting as centres of local political, social and economic life as opposed to institutions strictly bound to purpose built structures.

Of course infantry was still required, especially for fast moving patrols that traversed the deserts in and around the border zone, but the intention of these actions was not to stop armies but rather to hinder unauthorised circumvention of boundaries by small groups and individuals as recorded in the Semna Despatches (Smither 1945). As the last evidence for hostile conflict with Kush was back in Year 19 of the reign of Senwosret III (Wheeler 1931, 66), after which the relationship between Kush and Egypt may have been peaceful, it seems likely that during the 13th Dynasty, soldiers were simply not required at Uronarti in the large numbers planned for when state-level hostilities with Kush were ongoing or just ceased. Whether this was also true for fortresses at the actual border, for example Semna and Kumma, is unknown and requires further study and new data.

On current evidence it appears that the occupation of Block III does not continue very long into the Second Intermediate Period. We of course do not have the upper layers preserved, but there is not a great deal of obviously SIP pottery in any of the spoil heaps we have tested in the vicinity. Nearly everything is of the Late Middle Kingdom. Accumulatively, this suggests that Block III was at least partially abandoned or used far less intensively during the SIP – a separate issue from the reconfiguration and change in use demonstrated by architectural Phase II. The absence of SIP ceramics seems to also continue into other parts of the site which have so far been the subject of both random and targeted sampling (Knoblauch and Bestock 2014). Whether this means that the whole site was abandoned or simply used far less intensely (i.e. in a different way) during the course of the Late Middle Kingdom-early Second Intermediate Period phase is unclear and requires further study. Such a scenario, however, is not contradicted by the cemetery record, which is of a very small population with only a weak or no SIP presence at all.

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