

Seven Seasons at Asyut

First Results of the Egyptian-German
Cooperation in Archaeological Fieldwork

Proceedings of an International Conference
at the University of Sohag, 10th–11th of October, 2009

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Preface

On the 10th of October 2009, at the University of Sohag, the members of The Asyut Project had the pleasure of presenting some of the aims and results of their long term Egyptian-German project on the ancient necropolis of Asyut during a conference entitled “The Asyut Project - Seven Seasons of Egyptian-German Cooperation in Archaeological Fieldwork”.

This international and interdisciplinary meeting could be realized only because of the wonderful cooperation between several persons and institutions:

Professor Mohamed Sayed Ibrahim overtook a memorandum between the Sohag University and the Johannes Gutenberg-University (JGU) of Mainz from 2008; he has been very interested in our work and has supported our team on several occasions, last but not least in form of this conference. He enabled us to use a wonderful congress hall for this event, and provided us with all the facilities that we needed. We enjoyed the benefits of perfect organization, and our thanks are due not only to him but also to the staff of the university who worked on the preparations for several weeks in the background.

Financial support for the conference was provided by the Egyptological department of the JGU Mainz.

The bulk of the work in preparing this conference in Sohag lay of course in the hands of Professor Mahmoud El-Khadragy and his team, namely Professor Ahmed A. El-Khatib. All of the participants have to thank them most deeply for their immense efforts.

The conference was accompanied by two documentary films made by Ammar Abu Bakr M.A., artist at Luxor University, to whom we would like to express our gratitude for presenting our work and the Asyutian artefacts in such a fascinating and evocative manner. On the second day of the conference there was an excursion to the Gebel Asyut al-gharbi to visit the site itself and to discuss various features of the tombs with the scientific community of guests and participants.

This publication has been prepared by Andrea Kilian and we would like to thank the publishers Otto Harrassowitz for their support. Some of the results of the 2010 season have been incorporated in this volume, although the title of the book refers to only “Seven Seasons in Asyut” which are those of 2003-2009. We would like to list briefly the development of the project over this period, together with the people and institutions involved:

- 2003: Survey mission to Asyut by J. Kahl, M. El-Khadragy
- 2004: Fieldwork season financed by JGU Mainz and Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster. J. Kahl, M. El-Khadragy, U. Verhoeven

- 2005-2007: Short term project at JGU Mainz financed by the German Research Foundation (DFG). Project Director: U. Verhoeven, Field Directors: J. Kahl, M. El-Khadragy
- Since 2008: Long term project at JGU Mainz financed by DFG. Project Director: U. Verhoeven, Field Directors: J. Kahl, M. El-Khadragy
- Since 2010: Long term project at Freie Universität Berlin and JGU Mainz financed by DFG. Project Directors: J. Kahl, U. Verhoeven; Field Directors: J. Kahl, M. El-Khadragy, M. Abdelrahiem.

We are very much indebted to these universities and especially to the German Research Foundation. Such extensive fieldwork would not have been possible without their financial backing.

During these first seven years of The Asyut Project the cooperation between the Egyptian, German and other international colleagues has been outstanding. We would like to thank all the researchers, assistants, students and specialists, as well as the workers and the other people involved, for their extensive contributions and their commitment. Every year the season in the gebel has started in the middle of August which has meant that the daily work has not been easy for both Egyptian and European team members.

This is also the occasion to thank all the people who have supported and enabled our work during these years. We are greatly indebted to the Ministry of Antiquity and the Supreme Council of Antiquities, particularly Dr. Zahi Hawass, Dr. Sabri Abd el-Aziz and Mr. Magdy el-Ghandour; the General Director of Middle Egypt Mr. Samir Anis Salib; the Inspector General at Asyut Mr. Ahmed el-Khatib and his predecessors Mr. Hani Sadek Metri and the late Mr. Mohamed Abd el-Aziz; the Director General of Antiquities for Middle Egypt, Dr. Abdel-Rahman El-Aidi; the Director General of Asyut, Mr. Abd El-Satar Ahmed Mohamed; the Head of the Foreign and Egyptian Missions Affairs and Permanent Committee, Dr. Mohamed Ismail; the inspector of the magazine at Shutb Mrs. Nadja Naguib; the accompanying inspectors Emad Bostan Ata, Rageh Darwish Khalaf, Magdy Shaker, Mohamed Mustafa Al-Shafey, Ahmed Abd-Alrahim Abd-Almagid; and the restorers Ahmed Abd El-Dayem Mohamed, Khalid Gomaa Sayed, Gamal Abd El-Malik Abd El-Moneam, Naglaa Abd El-Motty Fathy, Helal Qeli Attalaa, and Mahmoud Hasan Mohamed Sallam.

Finally, our fieldwork would never have enjoyed any success without the efficacious support of the local ghafirs, especially the *Urgestein* Quraim (Mohamed Saad Moursi), or without that of the police and the military, of Reis Ahmed Atitou and Reis Zekry who supervised the numerous workmen, and of Sobhey and Salama, our drivers.

We simply cannot thank them enough and we hope that we will have the pleasure of continuing to work together for many years to come.

Mainz/Berlin/Sohag, May 2011

Jochem Kahl, Mahmoud El-Khadragy, Ursula Verhoeven, Andrea Kilian

List of participants of the Asyut Project 2003-2009 in chronological order:

Mahmoud El-Khadragy, Egyptologist (2003-present)
Jochem Kahl, Egyptologist (2003-present)
Eva-Maria Engel, archaeologist (2003-2005)
Dr. Mahmoud El-Hamrawi, Egyptologist (2003)
Ursula Verhoeven, Egyptologist (2004-present)
Ulrike Fauerbach, surveyor (2004-2006)
Monika Zöller, M.A., Egyptologist (2004-2008)
Yasser Mahmoud Hussein, Egyptologist (2004-2008)
Omar Nour el-Din, Egyptologist (2004)
Dr. Sameh Shafik, epigrapher (2005-present)
Meike Becker, M.A., Egyptologist (2005-2008)
Dietrich Klemm, geologist (2005)
Rosemarie Klemm, Egyptologist (2005)
Christiane Dorstewitz, student of Egyptology (2005)
Diana Kleiber, student of Egyptology (2005)
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Ammar Abu Bakr, draughtsman (2006-present)
Fritz Barthel, photographer (2006, 2007)
Hazim Saleh Abdallah, Egyptologist (2006-2007)
Eva Gervers, student of anthropology (2006-present)
Andrea Kilian, M.A., Egyptologist (2006-present)
Mohamed Naguib Reda, Egyptologist (2006-2007)
Laura Sanhueza-Pino, student of Egyptology (2006-2008)
Dr. Abd el-Naser Yasin, Islamic Studies (2007-2009)
Dr. Jan Moje, Egyptologist (2007)
Dipl.-Ing. Manja Maschke, surveyor (2007-2008)
Magdalena Patolla, M.A., anthropologist (2007-2009)
Ibrahim Kedeas, Egyptologist (2007-2008)
Hytham Aly Madkour, Egyptologist (2007-2008)
Prof. Ahmed Ali El-Khatib, botanist (2008-2009)
Dr. Hesham Faheed Ahmed, Egyptologist (2008-present)
Nadine Deppe, M.A., archaeologist (2008)
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Mohamed Mustafa Al-Shafey, Egyptologist (2008-present)
Mohamed Helmi, Egyptologist (2008-present)
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Dr. Ina Eichner, byzantine archaeologist (2009)
Dr. Thomas Beckh, Egyptologist (2009)
Dr. Silvia Prell, Egyptologist (2009)
Josuah Pinke, Egyptologist (2009)
Josephine Malur, M.A., Egyptologist (2009-present)

Corinna Garbert, architect (2009)

Cornelia Goerlich, student of architecture (2009-present)

Barbara Reichenbacher, student of Egyptology (2009)

Asyut and The Asyut Project

Jochem Kahl

1. Asyut: a city of culture, a border town and a wounded city

Museums all over the world display masterpieces of art which were found at Asyut. Especially worth mentioning are objects from the late First Intermediate Period/Period of Regions (for that term cf. MORENZ 2010: 35) and the Middle Kingdom, e.g. the wooden models of armed troops from the tomb of the nomarch Mesehti (Eleventh Dynasty; Egyptian Museum Cairo, CG 257, 258; GRÉBAUT 1890-1900, 30-36, Pls. 33-37; BIETAK 1985), the wooden statues (i.a. Paris, Louvre E 11937) from the tomb of Nakhti (CHASSINAT/PALANQUE 1911: 48-49, Pls. 11-12; KAHL 2007: 93-95) or the coffin of Wepwawet-em-hat with a diagonal star clock on its lid (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum ÄS 10135; HÖLZL 2007: 64-65). But also high quality pieces of art from later periods are known, e.g. a double-statue representing Wepwawet and Hathor-Isis (New York, MMA 17.2.5; cf. recently DUQUESNE 2008: 2-3), the cult chamber of the tomb of Amen-hotep (Ägyptisches Museum Berlin, Inv. 31010/1; Cleveland, Museum of Art, Inv. 63.100; Toledo (Ohio), Museum of Art, Inv. 62/64, Zürich, Kunsthhaus, Inv. 1963/36; KARIG 1968: 27-34; KAHL 2007: 97-99) and a Graeco-Roman statue of a dog (Paris, Louvre E 11657; KAHL 2007: 153-154).

Egyptology has claimed Asyuti workmanship to be one of the best in Ancient Egypt. William Stevenson Smith wrote in 1957:

Toward the end of the First Intermediate Period the workmanship at Assiut was well ahead of anything else being produced at any other site except at Thebes.
(SMITH 1957: 223).

William C. Hayes concluded two years later:

During the early Nineteenth Dynasty the ancient Upper Egyptian town of Si'ut (modern Asyut) was the home not only of several well-to-do officials of the national administration, but also of an accomplished atelier of sculptors, to whose able hands we owe ... admirable pieces of private tomb statuary.
(HAYES 1959: 347-349).

In like manner Asyuti architecture is held in high esteem. Dietrich Wildung classed the tombs of Asyuti Middle Kingdom nomarchs to the most important monuments of their period (WILDUNG 1984: 34). Walther Wolf highlighted the architecture of Tomb I:

In Asjut erreicht das Grab des Gaufürsten Djefai-hapi in seiner stützenlosen Felsenhalle eine Weite, die auch spätere Zeiten nicht übertroffen haben.
(WOLF 1957: 312).

Today also Asyuti texts of the Twelfth Dynasty nomarch Djefai-Hapi I belong to the most classics: Alan Henderson Gardiner included 282 quotations from Djefai-Hapi's tomb inscriptions in his *Middle Egyptian Grammar* (GARDINER 1957). The tomb of Djefai-Hapi I (Siut I; Tomb I) is the most quoted textual source in Gardiner's *Egyptian Grammar* after Sinuhe, *The Eloquent Peasant* and the *Teachings of Ptahhotep* (Table 1).

Literary works	Number of quotations
Sinuhe B	569
Peasant B1	358
Ptahhotep	347
Siut I (= Tomb I; Djefai-Hapi I)	282
Shipwrecked Sailor	272
Beni Hasan I	199
Admonitions (pLeiden 344 rto.)	160
Dialogue of a Man with his Soul	157

Table 1: Quotations in GARDINER 1957.

Not only modern Egyptology, also the ancient Egyptians esteemed Asyuti products (KAHL 1999; KAHL 2007: 16-18). Texts from Asyuti First Intermediate Period/Period of Regions and Middle Kingdom tombs were copied on monuments and papyri throughout Egypt from the New Kingdom to the Roman Period, such as we see in the tombs of Senen-mut (TT 353; KAHL 1994: 41-42), Puy-em-re (TT 39; MONTET 1928: 68), Mont-em-hat (TT 34; KUHLMANN/SCHENKEL 1983: 73, note 254), Ibi (TT 36; KUENTZ 1934: 161) and others (cf. in detail KAHL 1999) as well as on Roman papyri from Tebtynis (OSING 1998a). Presumably via libraries (KAHL 1999: 283-355), these texts were frequently copied and recopied and thus constitute a continuous tradition. The Asyuti material circulated all over Egypt: in Thebes, Naga el-Hasaya (near Edfu), Memphis/Saqqara, Heliopolis, Sais, Roda(?), Athribis, Kom Abu Yasin, Tuna el-Gebel and Tebtynis (KAHL 1999: 302-17). Asyut formed part of Egypt's cultural memory, that is to say, the stored knowledge and memories of the past which are specific to a given culture and through which a culture creates its identity in an ongoing process (for the conception of the cultural memory cf. ASSMANN 1992).

And even ancient people abroad were interested in Asyuti workmanship. Presumably during the Second Intermediate Period statues of persons named Djefai-Hapi were deported to Sudan and the Near East (HELCK 1976: 101-115; VALBELLE 1998: 176-183). They were valued as prestige objects in the Sudan (KENDALL 1997: 24-27; REISNER 1931: 80; DUNHAM 1937-1938: 14, Fig. 7) and in Lebanon (CHÉHAB 1969: 22, Pl. 4.1).

These short introductory remarks might reveal the importance of ancient Asyut as a city of culture. But Asyut was also a border town and a wounded city (cf. KAHL 2007: 3-20 for more details).

Despite of its location in the center of Egypt and just for that very reason Asyut played the role of a border town on many occasions. The etymology of Asyut's ancient toponym – *S3ww.ti* “The Guardian” (OSING 1976: 320, 866, note 1377) – refers to her unique geographical position: Situated to the south of the Gebel Abu el-Feda, the most dangerous passage of the Nile to the north of the First Cataract (KAHL 2007: 14), and at the beginning of the desert road Darb al-Arba'in (“The Forty Days Road”; KAHL 2007: 14-15), Asyut served as a crossroad along the Egyptian trade routes. Asyut was vulnerable and open to incursions, because it provided a direct link to the South. It was therefore a site of great strategic importance for the last five millennia and was involved in wars on numerous occasions.

A reflection of these times of war is represented by a dense attestation of weapons and soldiers in Asyut during Pharaonic Egypt. First Intermediate Period/Period of Regions and early Middle Kingdom nomarchs depicted themselves in their tombs with their troops – either as wall decoration as in Tomb IV (EL-KHADRAGY 2008), Tomb N13.1 (EL-KHADRAGY 2007a; KAHL 2007: 81, Fig. 60) and the Northern Soldiers-Tomb (H11.1; EL-KHADRAGY 2006a: 162, Fig. 6) or as models such as in the tomb of Mesehti (GRÉBAUT 1890-1900, 30-36, Pls. 33-37; BIETAK 1985), or they had weapons and models of weapons as grave goods (e.g. Tomb III; publication by Monika Zöllner in preparation). Hitherto unique is a representation on the walls of Tomb III (KAHL 2007: 76, Fig. 53): Here, Egyptian soldiers are depicted fighting against each other. Bows and arrows (D'AMICONE/POZZI BATTAGLIA 2009a/2009b: 54) were used as grave goods for First Intermediate Period/Period of Regions burials. Soldiers are well attested by the so-called Salakhana stelae, votive stelae, which date from the New Kingdom to the Late Period (DUQUESNE 2009: 575-594). Also the census register Papyrus Oxyrhynchos 984 recto from 89/90 CE mentions several soldiers (cf. *infra* 5.9.1).

Several horizons of destruction are attested for Asyut – the earliest one at the end of the First Intermediate Period/Period of Regions, when a civil war between Herakleopolis in the north and Thebes in the south severely affected the country. Asyut was obviously the last bastion of the Herakleopolitan kingdom and the final theatre of war, since Asyuti local rulers were the closest allies of Herakleopolis. These events must have occurred between 2063 and 2045 BCE (KAHL 2007: 6).

Also during the Second Intermediate Period Asyut and its surrounding area marked the border of a divided Egypt (BIETAK 1994: 27). There is circumstantial evidence that either the Hyksos or the Kushites plundered the Asyuti necropolis and eventually even the city itself (KAHL 2007: 10).

During the Assyrian invasion of Egypt, in the first half of the seventh century BCE, the Assyrian ruler Assarhaddon installed a governor in Asyut, who was driven away by dissident Kushites or Egyptians. Assurbanipal subsequently reinstated this governor, but

the governor himself finally revolted against his protector (Prism A; ONASCH 1994: 36, 55, 118-121). Asyut was once again the center of a civil war.

From 196 to 195 BCE the Theban rival king Ankh-Wennefer seized Aswan in the south of Thebes and advanced to the region of Asyut in the north. He brought his fight for Egypt's independence from the Ptolemaic sovereigns to the Asyuti region: A village near Asyut was depopulated. Once again Asyut was the critical point of separation in a civil war: Since we have no information that Ankh-Wennefer was able to move further to the north, we may suppose that he was driven back by the Ptolemies after a battle near Asyut (MCGING 1997: 299-310; VEÏSSE 2004: 11-26; KAHL 2007: 12).

In Late Antiquity Asyut was threatened and plundered by Blemmyes and other Nubian invaders (cf. KAHL 2007: 12).

Asyut's function as a border town is also reflected in the double vizierate during the New Kingdom as well as in Ptolemaic and Roman provincial administration. Both times Asyut marked the northern border of the southern administrative districts (KAHL 2007: 13).

On many occasions Asyut played the role of a border town, which led to its being wounded, ransacked and destroyed: Asyut has been a wounded city. According to the American sociologists Jane Schneider and Ida Susser "wounded cities, like all cities, are dynamic entities, replete with the potential to recuperate loss and reconstruct anew for the future" (SUSSER/SCHNEIDER 2003: 1). It is exactly this fate which might have led to Asyut's cultural achievements. Periods of flourishing art and architecture as well as prosperity followed periods of destruction.

2. The aims of The Asyut Project

Asyut's special role as a wounded city, a border town and a city of culture is the reason for our fieldwork in the western mountains of Asyut, in the Gebel Asyut al-gharbi (Pls. 14-15). Asyut's material culture, her theology, her schools and traditions show differences to other Egyptian cities and are an outstanding study object for the regional diversity within Ancient Egypt.

The Gebel Asyut al-gharbi is the only site currently accessible to explore ancient Asyut. The ancient city and its temples have been almost completely buried and lost under the strata of the alluvial plain and especially the rapidly growing modern city. Archaeological fieldwork is not possible without removing parts of the modern settlement. Illicit excavations of house owners in Asyut (KAHL 2007: 44) provide us with some information about the location of the main temple of Asyut, the temple of the chief deity Wepwawet. It can be located 8 meters beneath the modern surface in the Old City of Asyut (KAHL 2007: 39-48).

Beside the temple of Wepwawet we have inscriptional evidence of the temples of Anubis, Osiris, Hathor and Thoth (KAHL 2007: 49-54; cf. the contribution of Ursula Verhoeven in this volume). But, unfortunately, their exact location within the city is still unknown. Further temples or cults also attested to Maat, Aten, Amun-Ra, Amun, Khonsu, Sekhmet, Neith, Isis, Isis-Hathor, Horus son of Isis and son of Osiris, Serapis, Pepy I, Ramesses Meryamun, the God in Asyut, and Djefai-Hapi (KAHL 2007: 50, 54-58).