

LES MAISONS-TOURS EN ÉGYPTÉ
DURANT LA BASSE ÉPOQUE,
LES PÉRIODES PTOLÉMAÏQUE
ET ROMAINE

Édité par Séverine Marchi
avec une préface de
Dominique Valbelle



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Dominique VALBELLE

Située en bordure du delta oriental du Nil, dans la zone frontalière où se sont succédé de puissantes fortifications, depuis les mythiques « Murs du Prince » élevés au début du Moyen Empire pour prévenir une nouvelle invasion du territoire égyptien par des populations proche-orientales et le *khétem* de Tjarou au Nouvel Empire jusqu'à la forteresse de Péluse dans la deuxième moitié du premier millénaire av. J.-C., celle de Migdol se situe géographiquement à l'interface de plusieurs mondes : l'Égypte, bien sûr, le Proche-Orient et les pays de la partie orientale du pourtour méditerranéen. Dès le dernier quart du VI^e siècle av. J.-C., l'empire perse a généré la circulation des modèles architecturaux et des techniques de construction à travers les différentes provinces qui le composaient. Il n'est donc pas surprenant que chaque saison ait révélé des matériaux, des modes de construction et des types de bâtiments inconnus jusqu'à présent ou attestés dans des régions très éloignées des bords du Nil.

Parmi les modèles architecturaux présents sur le site de Tell el-Herr, nous avons choisi, en 2012, de privilégier celui de la maison-tour et des bâtiments élevés sur de puissantes fondations à caissons, bien représenté dans plusieurs niveaux archéologiques, et d'inviter les collègues qui avaient eu l'opportunité d'en dégager et d'en étudier récemment en Égypte ou au Soudan, afin de tenter de mettre en évidence un certain nombre de spécificités structurelles et fonctionnelles. Ces présentations archéologiques ont été complétées par deux communications portant sur l'apport respectif de l'iconographie et des papyrus grecs. L'idée de cette rencontre s'est nourrie de visites de sites et de contacts encourageants avec divers collègues. Une table-ronde cofinancée par l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne (Paris IV)¹, le CNRS² et le Ministère des Affaires Étrangères français³, s'est donc tenue au Centre de Recherches Égyptologiques de la Sorbonne les 29 et 30 novembre 2012⁴, avec l'accord de l'ensemble des institutions auxquelles appartiennent les spécialistes contactés⁵. Elle a été ouverte par M. Adelino Braz, responsable du pôle Sciences humaines et sociales à la Sous-direction des échanges scientifique et de la recherche.

1 Centre de Recherches Égyptologiques de la Sorbonne, École Doctorale n°1 « Mondes anciens et médiévaux », Fond d'Investissement pour la Recherche.

2 UMR 8167 « Orient et Méditerranée », équipe « Mondes Pharaoniques ».

3 Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (DGM/ATT/RECH – Pôle SHS).

4 Programme : Introduction par Dominique Valbelle, Les maisons-tours du site de Tell el-Herr par Séverine Marchi, Le quartier saïto-perse d'Hébova II par Elsayed Abd el-Aleem, Towerhouses in Tell el-Dab'a. The Late and Ptolemaic Period par Manuela Lehmann, Maisons-tours et organisation des quartiers domestiques dans les agglomérations du Delta : l'exemple de Bouto de la Basse Époque aux premiers lagides par Grégory Marouard, Tower houses in the sacral area of the temple of Bastet at Bubastis. New results par Eva Lange, Deux maisons-tours dans la chôra d'Alexandrie par Valérie Pichot, Industry and houses? Urban space and construction methods in Kom Firin during the Saite-Persian era par Neal Spencer, Les maisons-tours de Tebtynis par Gisèle Hadjiminaglou, Les maisons-tours de l'association religieuse à Touna el-Gebel par Melanie Flossmann, Les *pyrgoi* dans les papyrus grecs d'Égypte, Les maisons-tours dans la mosaïque de Palestrina par Jean-Yves Carrez-Maratray, Les édifices sur soubassement par François Leclère et Les soubassements à caissons des palais et demeures méroïtiques : une influence des *pyrgoi* ? par Marc Maillot, Conclusions par Mohamed Abd el-Maksoud.

5 CSA, IFAO, CEAlex, BM, OIC/HerMA (Poitiers), ÖAI, Univ. Göttingen, Freie Univ. Berlin.

Sur les treize communications présentées, quatre des intervenants n'ont pas souhaité donner un texte dans la présente publication en ligne. Notamment, Geneviève Husson⁶ et François Leclère⁷ s'étaient déjà exprimés sur le sujet dans les publications respectives de leurs doctorats, tandis que Elsayed Abd el-Aleem, qui traitait du site de Tell Héboua I aux périodes saïto-perses, devait réserver la primeur de ses découvertes à la rédaction de sa thèse, en cours. Neuf articles sont néanmoins présents dans cette publication dont la formule numérique a paru particulièrement adaptée à l'exercice de réflexion engagé et a été décidée par l'ensemble des participants lors de la séance de clôture. Conçu et mis en page par Séverine Marchi qui a co-organisé cette table-ronde avec moi, le présent volume est le numéro 2 d'une nouvelle revue en ligne gratuite, intitulée *Nehet*, de l'équipe « Mondes Pharaoniques » de l'UMR 8167 du CNRS « Orient et Méditerranée » et du Centre de Recherches en Archéologie et Patrimoine de l'Université libre de Bruxelles.

Les travaux évoqués ici illustrent, sur une dizaine de sites de la vallée du Nil, l'apparition dans le courant du premier millénaire av. J.-C. du modèle architectural de la maison-tour et de ses rapports avec des bâtiments également à étages, construits sur des plates-formes de fondation à caissons. On en connaît sur bien d'autres sites, tous les fouilleurs concernés n'étant pas disponibles aux dates fixées pour la rencontre ou n'ayant pas pu être joints à temps. La plupart sont néanmoins citées dans les contributions ci-dessous. Des maisons privées à un ou deux étages semblent avoir déjà existé en Égypte dès le Nouvel Empire, ainsi que le suggèrent, par exemple, les habitations figurant sur les murs des tombes de Djehoutynéfer (TT 104)⁸ et de Nebamon (TT 90)⁹, du papyrus de Nakht (BM 10411) ou la maquette en pierre E 5357 du Musée du Louvre.

Peu de quartiers résidentiels antérieurs à la Basse Époque ont été fouillés de manière suffisamment extensive jusqu'ici pour que l'on puisse se faire une idée précise de la hauteur moyenne des bâtiments dans les grandes villes d'Égypte. Cependant, l'analyse que propose N. Spencer de l'évolution de la topographie urbaine sur le site de Kom Firin est révélatrice de transformations majeures dans la conception de l'habitat entre le II^e et le I^{er} millénaire. Les vestiges en brique crue sur les sites de Kom Firin, Bouto, Tell el-Dab'a et Tell el-Herr décrits ici se situent dans une fourchette chronologique comprise entre l'époque saïte et l'époque ptolémaïque, tandis que ceux de Tebtynis, Touna el-Gebel et les deux maisons tours en pierre de Marea datent exclusivement de l'époque ptolémaïque. Enfin, à partir de l'exemple du bâtiment d'El-Mouweis, le cas des palais méroïtiques est également abordé.

La répartition géographique des sites pris en compte donne la part belle à l'ensemble de la Basse Égypte, mais le Fayoum est bien représenté avec le site de Tebtynis où il est possible de mettre en évidence plusieurs catégories de bâtiments à étages. La Haute Égypte n'est évoquée qu'à travers le cas particulier des maisons du village de l'association religieuse qui bordaient le dromos et la voie processionnelle du temple de Touna el-Gebel. Le Soudan est également présent pour l'époque romaine.

Selon l'état des vestiges, la nature et l'étendue des quartiers mis au jour, les résultats présentés sont évidemment très inégaux, mais ils permettent déjà de se faire une première idée de la

6 G. HUSSON, *OIKIA. Le vocabulaire de la maison privée en Égypte d'après les papyrus grecs*, Paris, 1983.

7 Fr. LECLÈRE, *Les villes de Basse Égypte au 1^{er} millénaire av. J.-C.*, *BdE* 144, IFAO, Le Caire, 2008.

8 PM I/1, 218 (5).

9 PM I/1, 183 (3).

diversité des caractéristiques architecturales et des fonctions que présente cette large catégorie de constructions qui se développe essentiellement à partir du VI^e siècle av. J.-C. L'objectif de cette rencontre étant de mettre en commun l'expérience acquise par l'ensemble des participants pour aider chacun à mieux percevoir, quel que soit l'état des ruines correspondantes, les spécificités des maisons-tours et bâtiments contemporains élevés sur des fondations à caissons en Égypte.

Les plus anciennes maisons-tours commentées ici, érigées à l'époque saïte, se trouvent donc à Tell el-Dab'a et à Bouto. La plupart de celles de Tell el-Dab'a présentent un plan carré ou rectangulaire, éventuellement en forme de L. Elles sont bâties sur de puissantes fondations à caissons qui ont parfois servi de magasins. Celles de Bouto, de plan carré à rectangulaire avec une distribution intérieure tripartite, sont bâties sur des fondations à caissons qui subsistent après un arasement intervenu plus ou moins tôt dans l'époque saïte. G. Marouard, qui a conduit une étude approfondie sur la maison en Égypte aux époques tardives, a pu mettre en évidence la relation entre ce type de construction et leur contexte urbain à Bouto comme sur d'autres sites contemporains. Sur les deux sites, les dimensions des maisons-tours varient entre 12/15 m et une vingtaine de mètres de côté.

À Tell el-Herr, se rencontrent des exemples de la période suivante. Les niveaux contemporains de la forteresse perse érigée durant la première moitié du V^e siècle av. J.-C, encore largement recouverts par les vestiges de bâtiments postérieurs, n'ont pas livré jusqu'à présent de vestiges de maisons-tours dans les quartiers accessibles. En revanche, les fondations de trois bâtiments attribuables à ce type ont été mises au jour dans les niveaux de la deuxième forteresse édifiée au tournant du V^e au IV^e siècle. Les deux plus anciennes furent élevées en briques cylindriques, tandis que la troisième, attribuable au deuxième quart du IV^e siècle et qui s'appuie sur l'arasement d'un bâtiment antérieur, est construite en briques rectangulaires. Quoiqu'elles appartiennent à deux catégories nettement différenciées, l'une d'elle de plan rectangulaire ayant une superficie au sol nettement plus réduite — 9 m sur 6 m — que les deux autres — 16,70 m sur 16,30 m et 13,75 m sur 13 m —, elles présentent toutes les trois une répartition interne tripartite, comme ailleurs.

Toutes les autres maisons-tours décrites dans ces pages datent de la période lagide pour laquelle nous obtenons donc une vision plus représentative de ce mode de construction manifestement en plein développement à l'époque, aussi bien dans d'anciennes villes du Delta et de la vallée du Nil que dans des territoires situés en bordure des terres cultivées, où l'espace ne manquait pas. L'analyse archéologique de certains de ces *pyrgoi* a permis de définir leurs fonctions. L'intérêt des exemples développés ci-dessous réside aussi dans la variété des contextes géographiques et urbains auxquels ils renvoient respectivement : le village de l'association religieuse de Touna el-Gebel aménagé le long de la voie processionnelle qui conduit vers le dromos du temple d'Alexandre IV, la partie sud de celui de Tebtynis en lisière méridionale du Fayoum, l'agglomération qui se superpose au site de Tell el-Dab'a, les niveaux ptolémaïques de la forteresse de Tell el-Herr, les quartiers situés en bordure nord-est du Kôm A de Bouto et l'agglomération de la presqu'île de Maréa qui comportait des fondations en pierre.

Parallèlement à cette analyse d'un certain nombre de maisons-tours présentant de nombreuses caractéristiques communes, a été évoqué le modèle architectural des grands bâtiments sur fondations à caissons qui se multiplient en Égypte et au Soudan, à la Basse Époque comme aux périodes grecque et romaine. L'exemple développé ici est celui d'un palais romain du site de Mouweis. Mais F. Leclère a rappelé que ce mode de fondation a supporté des bâtiments aux fonctions distinctes : palais, bâtiments administratifs divers, *chén'a ou 'ab*, etc.

KOM FIRIN: WITNESSING THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE EGYPTIAN URBAN FABRIC IN THE 6TH-5TH CENTURIES BC

Neal SPENCER*

Despite the poor preservation of architectural remains, and the limited extent of archaeological exposures, the site of Kom Firin nonetheless provides a contribution to the subject of how urban areas were transformed in the first millennium BC. This transformation was twofold: many cities and towns were re-shaped by the creation of new, and more extensive, sacred enclosures (*temenoi*), while the architectural fabric of settlements saw an important shift towards elevated buildings founded on casemate foundations, not limited to 'tower-houses' alone.

The 57 hectare site of Kom Firin lies 10.5km west of Naukratis, in a region subject to intensive agricultural development throughout the 20th century. Nonetheless, the extent of the settlement mound, preserved to over 12m high in places, provides considerable potential to investigate the nature of settlement in this region, thus far undertaken at few dynastic sites west of the Canopic branch of the Nile. A British Museum research project, comprising nine field seasons, has allowed the broad development of the settlement to be traced, with targeted excavations providing insights into selected parts of the site¹.

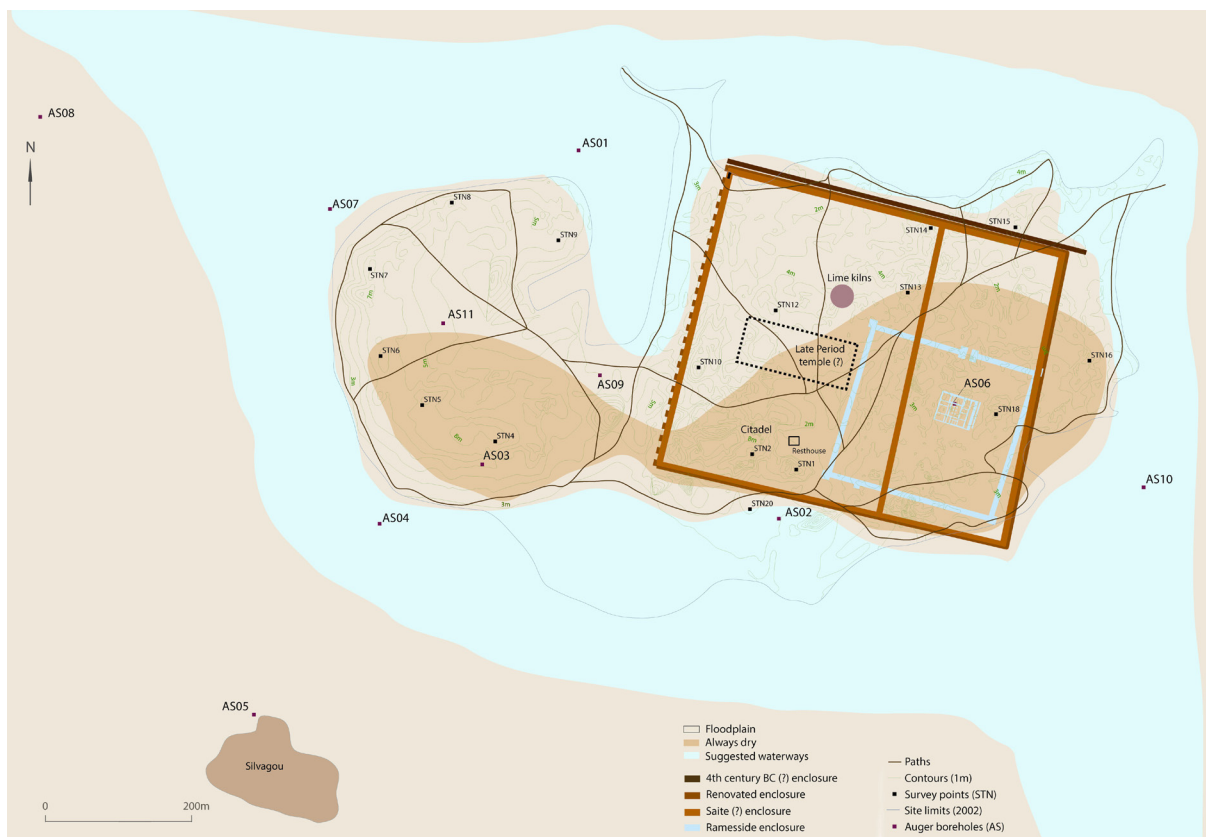


Fig. 1. Topographic map of Kom Firin with location of auger cores, plan of successive enclosures, suggested river channels and Silvagou cemetery

¹ SPENCER 2008A; SPENCER 2014.

Settlement in the local area must extend back to the late Middle Kingdom, given burials of the that date in the cemetery at Silvagou, 500m southwest of the ancient site (**fig. 1**)². No inscriptions or ceramics from the settlement mound pre-dating the 19th dynasty have been found at Kom Firin itself, and the town seems to have been a royal foundation during the reign of Ramses II, or perhaps Seti I. The newly founded complex comprised a modest cult temple³, set within a walled enclosure of 225 x 199m, embellished with corner towers and a monumental gateway⁴. Given the historical and geographic context, but also a modified inscription of the reign of Ramses II found at the site⁵, the newly founded complex should be considered as a response to the perceived threat from Libya. The remainder of the Ramesside enclosure is poorly understood, though excavations did reveal a dense network of rooms which comprised storage facilities, and perhaps domestic areas⁶. The site continued to be occupied throughout the Third Intermediate Period, at least partly within the limits of the Ramesside walled complex.



Fig. 2. Eastern wall of Late Period enclosure (0600) with additional brickwork (0601), view west

2 SPENCER 2008A, p. 9-17.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 36-37.

4 SPENCER 2014, chapter 3.

5 SPENCER 2011B, p. 307-318.

6 SPENCER 2014, chapter 4.



Fig. 3. Exterior face of south wall (0624) of Late Period enclosure

Enclosures

The urban layout at Kom Firin was significantly altered in the Saite era, with the construction of a new temple *temenos* (**fig. 1**). Though badly destroyed through *sebakh*-exploitation and other taphonomies, a combination of magnetometry survey and targeted excavations revealed its layout and extent. Dating this wall to the Saite era was possible through imported transport amphora sherds found in the vicinity of wall segments⁷, and further confirmed by deposits accumulated against the outer face of the northern wall (0417), containing pottery of the 4th century BC.

Broadly mirroring the orientation of the earlier enclosure, which was subsumed into the southeastern corner of the new *temenos*, the mud brick walls defined an area of 480 x 390m. One exposed segment (0600; **fig. 2**), still standing to 5.63m in height, can be seen in the northeast part of the site; it does not preserve the full thickness of the wall, which was at least 5.1m in thickness; part of the exterior façade of the southern wall was exposed south of the Citadel area (**fig. 3**). None of the wall segments preserve evidence of having been coated with plaster, in contrast to the Ramesside enclosure, covered in a thick coat of white wash⁸. Such a coating would, of course, have considerably modified the appearance of Kom Firin when seen from a distance.

A distinctive feature of this enclosure is the presence of a cross-wall, 185m west of the east wall, creating two distinct zones within the *temenos*. Walls of this type are found in other Late

7 Sherds from decorated amphorae from Chios (mid-6th century BC) and Clazomenae (second half of the 6th century BC), and fragments of Samian ware (perhaps as 5th–4th century BC); see SMOLÁRIKOVÁ 2006, p. 263-267.

8 SPENCER 2008A, pl. 79.



Fig. 4. Exposed section across enclosure wall 0621, with additional brickwork (0622) to left, view west

Period temple enclosures, notably at Mendes⁹ and el-Ashmunein¹⁰. This was not fully preserved or exposed, thus it is not certain that it was part of the initial layout. The enclosure wall was subsequently refurbished with a thickening of the wall through addition of a skin of brickwork to the exterior, up to 4.5m thick in places, creating a wall of at least 8.3m in thickness (**fig. 4**)¹¹. Where visible, the construction of this additional skin was less carefully undertaken than with the original wall. The motive for such a refurbishment is unclear. The outer face of the first wall does not seem to have become damaged or eroded; it may be that an accumulation of deposits outside the wall (**fig. 2**) had effectively reduced the standing height, and that in raising the height of the wall, the opportunity was taken to increase its thickness.

The scale of this Late Period *temenos* is consistent with that of temple *temenoi* constructed across Egypt, particularly in the 26th and 30th dynasties. The temple seems to have been approached along a limestone paved avenue, described by Griffith¹²; one paving slab might have been identified during our the project's topographic survey¹³. Unfortunately, few traces of the temple itself survive, limited to a finely carved quartzite block depicting a scene of shrines set

9 OCHSENSCHLAGER 1967, pl. 20.

10 SPENCER 1989, p.72, pls. 92, 99.

11 This thickness is considerably less than at other sites, for example around 17m at Buto (FALTINGS *et al.* 2000, fig. 12).

12 GRIFFITH & PETRIE 1889, p. 83.

13 SPENCER 2008A, p. 26, pl. 88. A description of sphinxes seen by Petrie and Griffith cannot be explicitly associated with the Ramesside or later temple at the site; see SPENCER, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

amongst palm-trees¹⁴, and a number of portable monuments (statues, a copper alloy aegis inlaid with gold) associated with the site¹⁵. Petrie described seeing a 1.8m-high monolithic shrine ‘covered with inscriptions written small inside + out... clearly of XXVI-XXX dyn.¹⁶ Priestly titles found in the cemetery include *hm-ntr n shmt*, *hpt-wdzt*, *hrp-hwwt* and *smn-m3’t*¹⁷. Given the divided layout of the enclosure, and the orientation of the paved avenue seen in the late 19th century, it is reasonable to posit a temple located at the western end of the *temenos* (**fig. 1**); the discovery of lime kilns immediately to the north of this area further supports this hypothesis¹⁸, as such installations were typically sited to offer convenient access to the monument from which limestone was being extracted. By the late Saite era, if not before, settlement areas were present within the temple *temenos*, as revealed in excavations within the Citadel area, described below.

The builders of the new temple enclosure were faced with laying out the new walls upon previously occupied ground, notably across the eroded remnants of the Ramesside complex, resulting in wide variations (up to 5m difference) in the foundation level across the site. It is unclear whether the western end of the enclosure was laid out on largely unoccupied ground. Whereas at the important temples of Mendes, el-Ashmunein and Tell Basta, the existing Ramesside and Third Intermediate Period temples were extended or partly replaced in the same location, a more radical approach was taken at Kom Firin¹⁹.

Geomorphological work at Kom Firin, including auger cores, the study of modern field boundaries, consideration of the routes of 19th and 20th century canals and the related distribution of ancient sites, has indicated that the site was once an island (**fig. 1**)²⁰. A major waterway flowed west-northwest along the southern part of the site, with another channel, perhaps not perennial, circumnavigating the northern part of the site. Coring suggests the presence of water – whether channels or pools – in areas of the site that were later constructed upon. Considering the topography of the site, it is possible that changing river courses, perhaps the receding of the northern branch, caused new land to be exposed northwest of the Ramesside enclosure, providing an opportunity for a much larger enclosure to be constructed. The influence of landscape change upon urban layouts and their development, especially in the dynamic fluvial environment of the Nile Delta, is often underestimated.

The Citadel at Kom Firin: new approaches to architecture

Located in the southwestern part of the Late Period *temenos* described above, the Citadel was named by Petrie, who interpreted it as a densely occupied area built upon a platform, perhaps of limestone, above walls retaining sand (**fig. 5**). Excavations undertaken by the British Museum project, in 2007 and 2008 (**fig. 6**), illustrated that this area was rather a typical, densely occupied, part of the ancient town, with accumulations of deposits and successive phases of architecture resulting in the elevated position of some buildings. Its distinctive nature, compared to other

14 SPENCER 2008A, p. 26-27, pl. 24.

15 SPENCER, *op. cit.*, p. 26-27; SPENCER 2014.

16 EES Archive XVII d 47.

17 SPENCER 2008A, p. 26–27, pls. 26-7.

18 SPENCER, *op. cit.*, p. 27-28.

19 Mendes: REDFORD 2004; el-Ashmunein: SPENCER 1989, p. 66–73; Tell Basta: SPENCER 2006, p. 41.

20 BUNBURY *et al.* in SPENCER 2014, ch. 2.



Fig. 5. View southeast over Citadel, with buildings cleared in 1940s and 1950s visible on surface

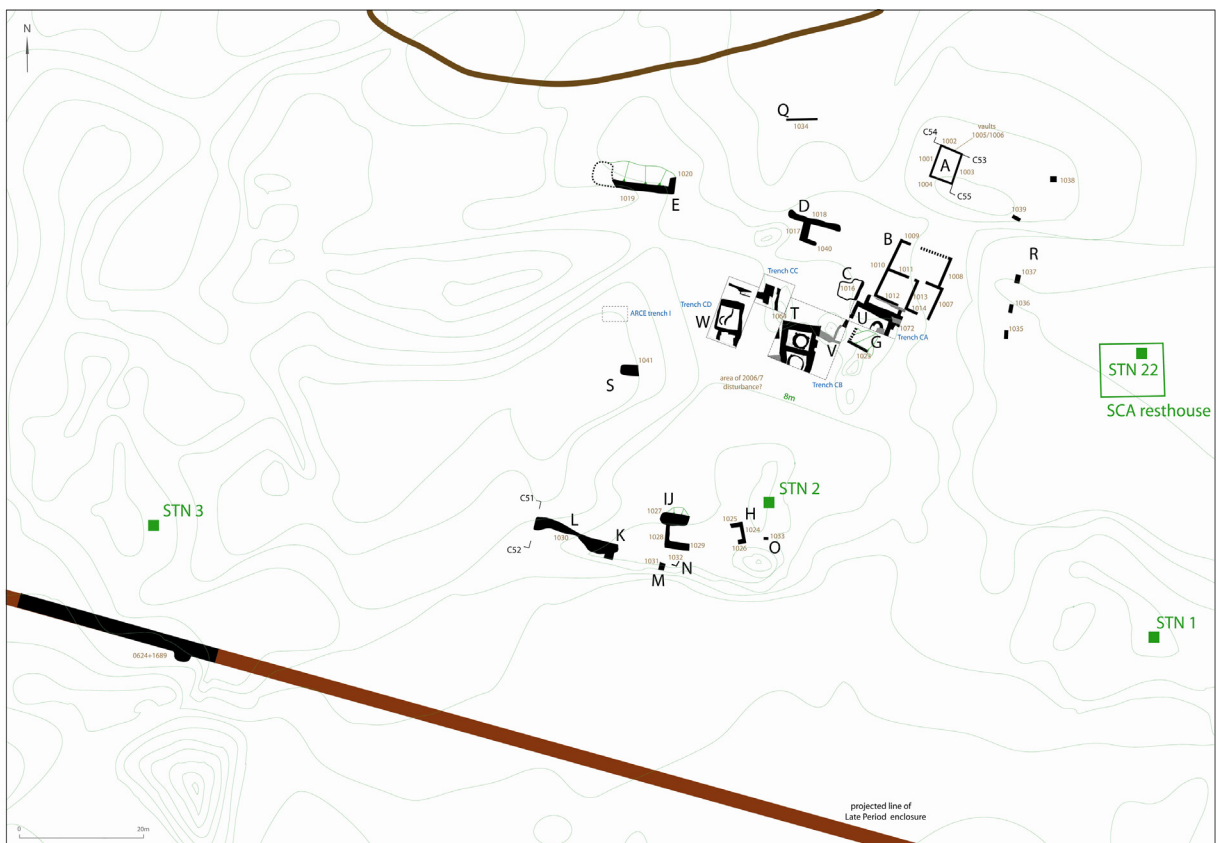


Fig. 6. Topographic map and plan of the Citadel area, with British Museum excavation trenches (CA, CB, CC, CD)

areas of the site, is likely to be the product of different taphonomic trajectories rather than a reflection of any distinct ancient appearance.

The area offers the potential for a detailed investigation of one part of the town in the second half of the second millennium BC. Most intriguingly, it is possible to trace a considerable shift in the construction methods used for the mud brick buildings, which may represent houses, but also with provision for storage and small-scale industrial (pottery and possibly faience) production. Our excavations focused on several buildings of the late Saite and Persian eras, but the area continued to be occupied through the Ptolemaic Period²¹.

A relatively homogenous ceramic assemblage allowed the deposits, and through association, the architecture, to be dated to one of seven phases, broadly equivalent to three absolute date ranges: the 6th century BC (C-I-A, C-I-B, C-II), the late 6th and early 5th century BC (C-III-A, C-III-B) and the end of the Late Period and first part of the Ptolemaic era (C-IV, C-V). Excavations were not continued beneath the phase C-I-A architecture; the small number of late New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period sherds can be characterised as residual.

Saite Kom Firin: persistent New Kingdom traditions

Two pre-phase C-III-A buildings were partly exposed (**fig. 7**): a multi-roomed structure, perhaps a house (V), and a building to the southwest (X) that featured grain silos, set within a room or courtyard. Building V comprised at least three contiguous rooms; two of these (1202, 1203) were provided with an interconnecting doorway, the southern room being of a modest 2.75 x 1.75m in area; the walls of this building were generally one brick length in thickness (17-2cm). Two ceramic, circular, ovens or kilns (1171, 1172), each provided with a flue-hole flanked by two bricks, were placed side-by-side at the back of room 1202 (**fig. 9**). Occupation deposits associated with these ovens were rich in charcoal, but also yielded an artefact of worked bone. Prompted by the rise of these occupation deposits, the south wall of the room was subsequently heightened, and the threshold of the door into room 1203 to the north raised up, at the start of phase C-II. The associated occupation deposit (1164) yielded a series of well-preserved ceramic

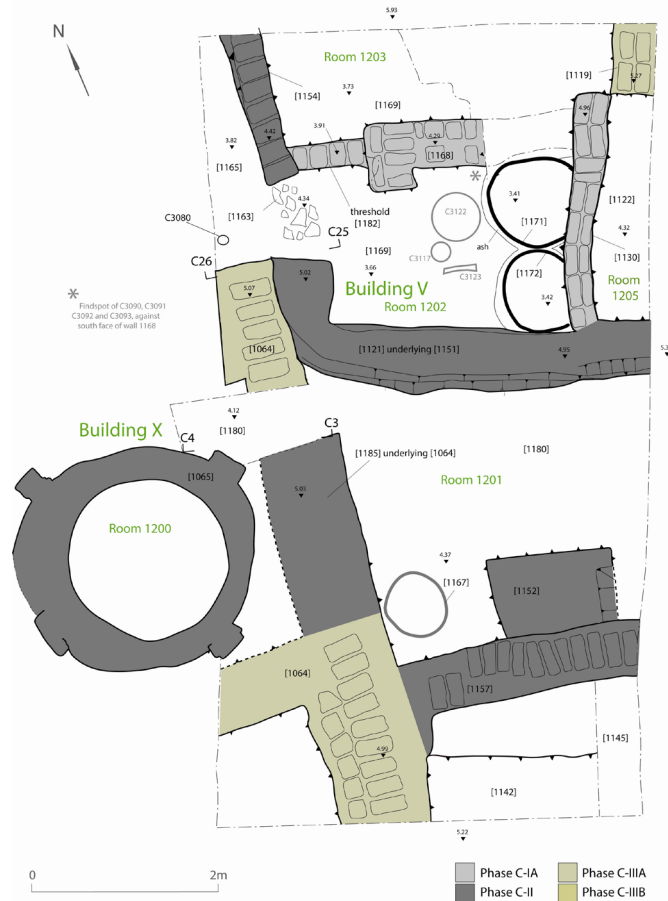


Fig. 7. Plan of trench CB, showing phase C-I-A and C-II phase architecture (early-mid 6th century BC)

21 For a more detailed presentation of these excavations, see SPENCER 2014, ch. 7.

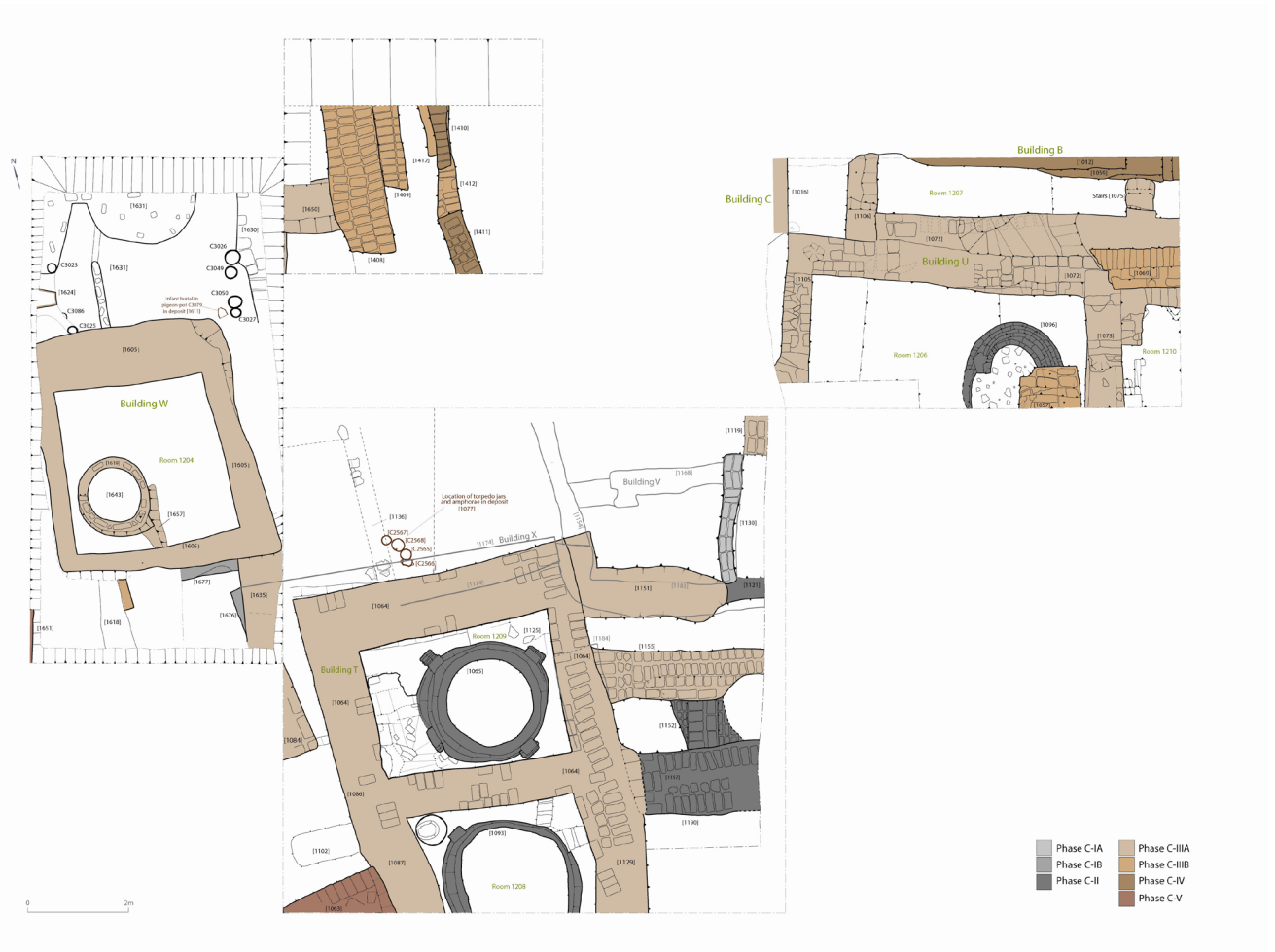


Fig. 8. Plan of excavated areas in Citadel, showing phase C-III A architecture (late 6th/early 5th century BC) overlying earlier buildings



Fig. 9. Building V (phase C-IA and C-II): rooms 1202 (right) and 1203 (left), view east

vessels, including a large bowl (C3122), tray (C3120) and a carinated bowl (C3117). Grinding tools (F745, F746) and faience bowl fragments (F747) were also found here. Rubble and further rubbish accumulated here prior to the phase C-III architecture, and more pottery of domestic character (jars, bowl) were found within (C3090-C3093). The architecture, in terms of scale of space and walls, but also the associated deposits and finds, would be consistent with a domestic or workshop setting, the two functions not being mutually exclusive.

To the south and west, further architecture was revealed, designated building X (**fig. 7**), though it may have formed part of the same complex as building V. The latter building is somewhat earlier, as it is abutted by the walls of X. Two spaces can be defined in building X, which is built with somewhat thicker walls than building V. To the east, a room (1201) at least 2.7m square was created in phase C-IB, and contained further ovens (1167, 1189). Walls were also heightened here, presumably to respond to the consequences of accumulating deposits, again a mixture of charcoal, ash and pottery, interleaved with windblown sand deposits. A 70cm wide doorway provided access into a more sizeable space (1200) of at least 5.2 x 3.6m, which was only partly exposed due to the architecture of later building T. This room, or courtyard, housed a dome-shaped silo (1065), 2.5m in diameter and preserved to a height of 2.38m (**fig. 10-11**), with four brick buttresses set around the exterior. Access to this silo was only from above, and while it was presumably designed to store cereal, excavations revealed only clean sand with few artefacts, part of the intentional filling of the silo in preparation for phase C-IIIA architecture.

At least three similar silos were found in the near vicinity (**fig. 8**). Structure 1093 may have been in the same room (1200) as 1065 (**fig. 10**), while 1096 was set in a space beneath the later building U (**fig. 8, 12**), northeast of building V. Finally, a segment of curving wall (1671) found beneath building W, which housed the pottery kiln, may have been part of a similar silo.

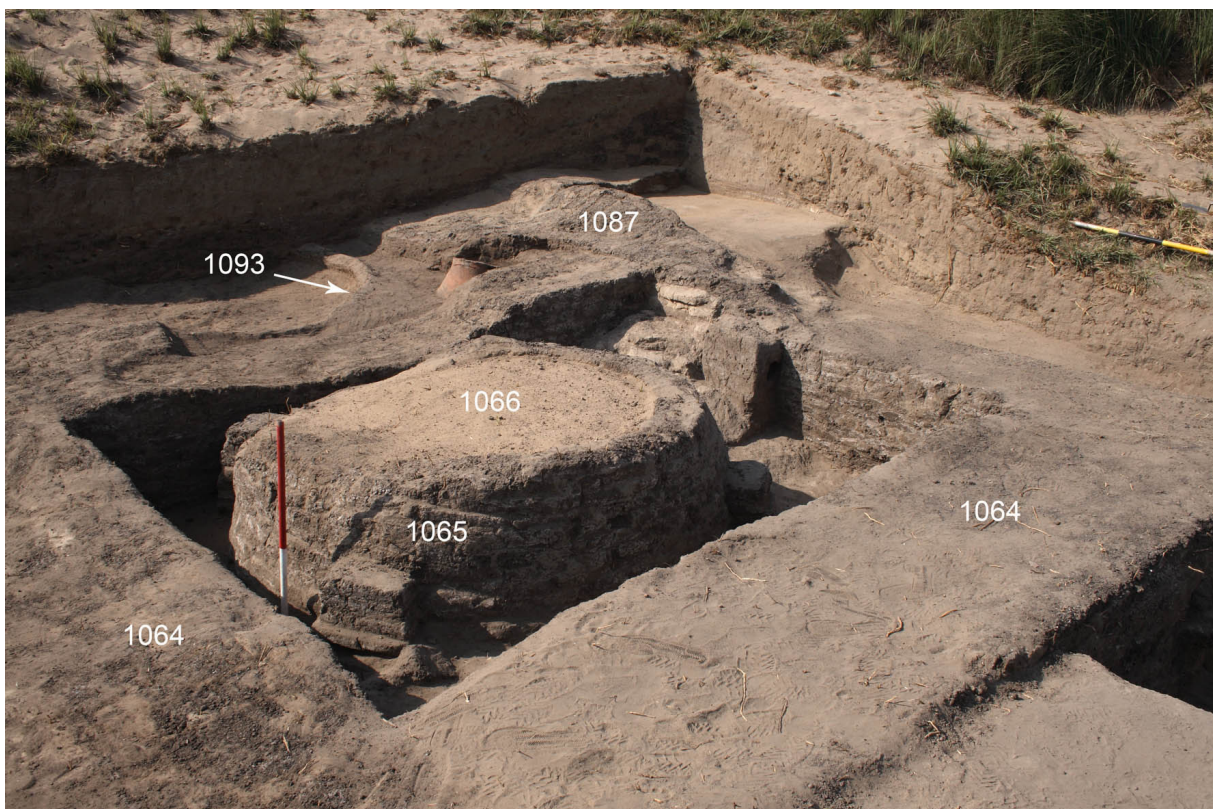


Fig. 10. View southwest over building T, built on and around remains of building X (including silo 1065)



Fig. 11. Detail of silo 1065, with wall of later building T constructed around it, view northeast



Fig. 12. Building U, with earlier silo 1093 within, view east

The architectural remains, and associated deposits, as far as revealed, all indicate structures designed to be occupied at, or near, ground level, whether for domestic or production purposes. The provision for storage is not inconsistent with these being houses; the relatively small scale of each unit, and their irregular layout in this area, might argue against them being part of a centralised storage facility. However, the lack of hearths would be surprising in a domestic context. Some buildings were clearly contiguous, sharing walls (e.g. V and X), and the character of the area is not far-removed from what is found within the northeastern corner of the Ramesside enclosure throughout the Third Intermediate Period²².

Late Saite/early Persian Kom Firin: a new architectural form

The character of this area changes relatively abruptly, with both buildings U and X partly levelled to create building T, but also the spaces to the northeast (overbuilt with building U) and northwest (building W). The three new buildings are characterised by more massive brick architecture (**fig. 8**), with walls of 72-120cm thick and bricks laid in panbedded courses, thus markedly different to what existed before. Furthermore, in two cases (U and X), rubble was used to fill the interior spaces: these were casemate platforms for buildings whose living or working levels are now lost.

Building X was rectangular in plan, 6.1m east-west by at least 6.5m north south (**fig. 8**). A plan view is somewhat misleading, as substantial new wall construction was not required

²² *Ibid.*, ch. 4.

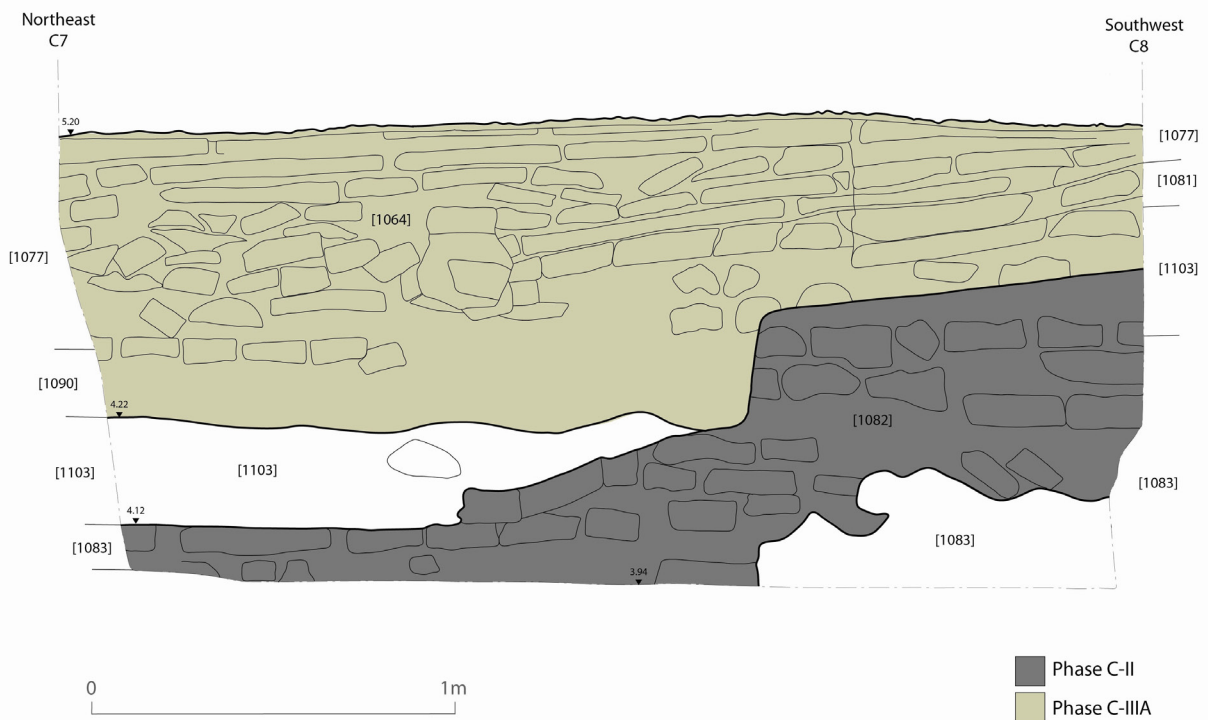


Fig. 13. Elevation of north face of building T, showing construction over truncated architecture of building X

along much of the eastern side: here, the standing remains of building X, namely walls 1185 and 1174, were simply embellished with a skin of brickwork (fig. 13-14). To the west, the new brickwork was more substantial, though in places overlay earlier walls. The new architecture defined two spaces, 1209 and 1208, each containing one of the earlier silos. These would have been very difficult to fill or empty within the newly formed rooms, and it appears they were both packed with sand, and the surrounding space filled with sand and rubble deposits, all with the intention of supporting the working or living surface (fig. 10, 14). A wide variety of artefacts were found in these deposits, perhaps the detritus from occupants of earlier buildings X and V: figurines in ceramic and faience, amulets, stone tools and vessels, fine bone tools and a large ceramic basin that may have been associated with grain storage and transfer.

To the east of building T, the space was partly paved with brick (fig. 8), over the levelled remains of buildings X and V, while to the north, a sondage revealed a series of coarse ceramic

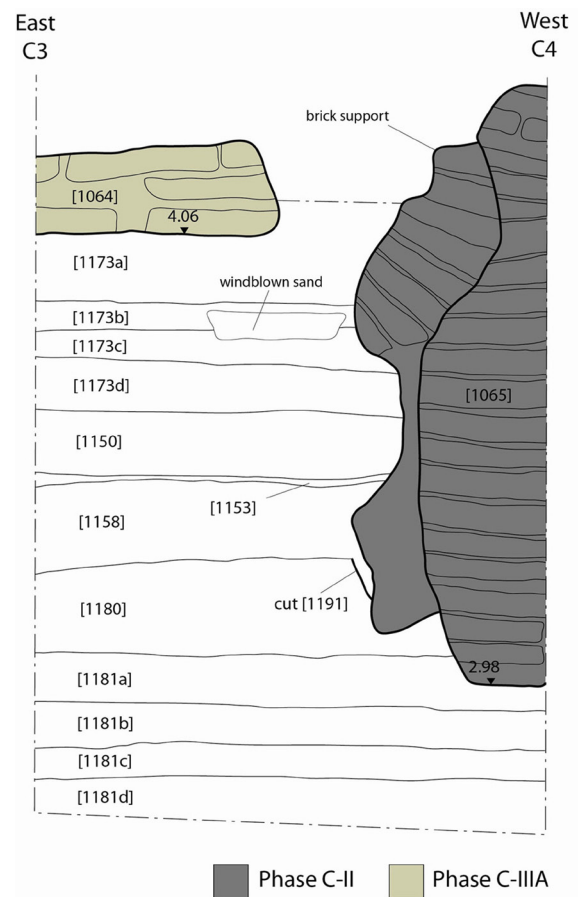


Fig. 14. Section drawing illustrating stratigraphic relationship between silo 1065 (phase C-II) and building T (phase C-III A), view east

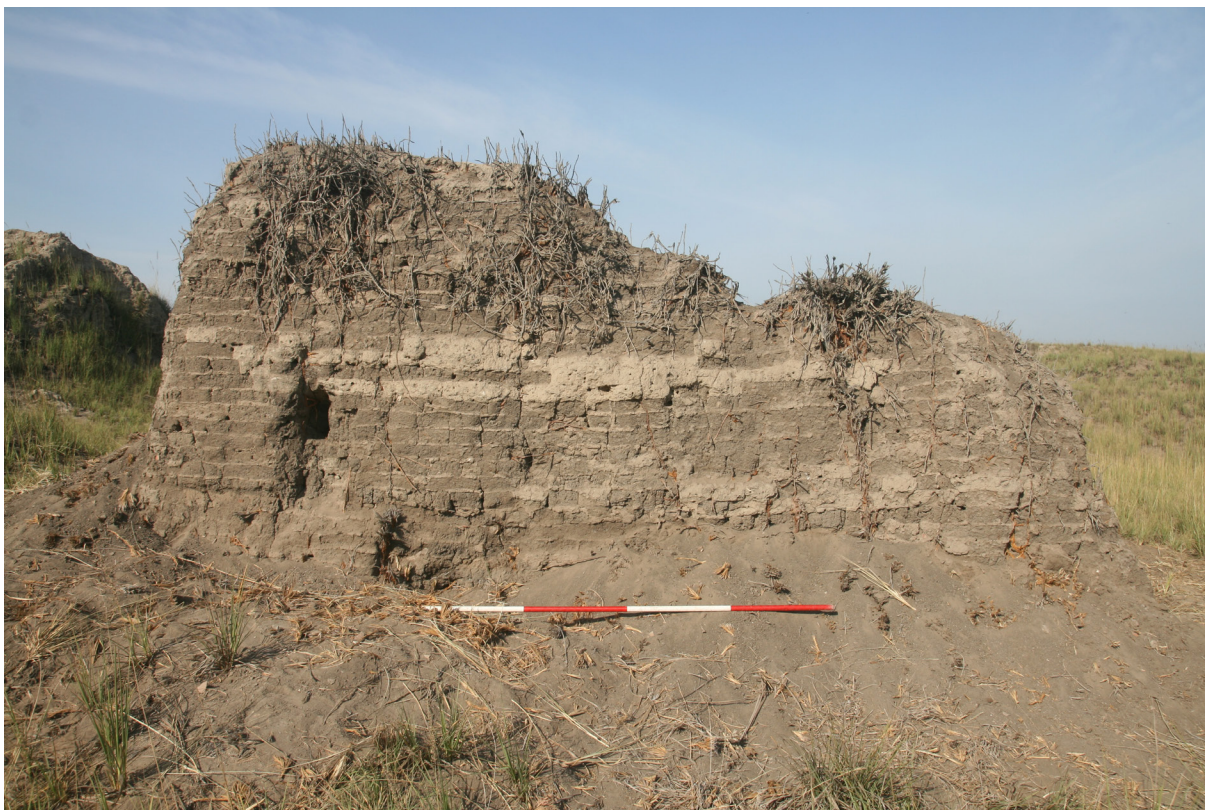


Fig. 15. East façade of building A, north of excavated area, cleared in late 1940s/early 1950s

sherds laid out as if for a wall foundation: could this have been street-level external space being partly defined as a courtyard or working area?

No steps, to provide access to the working/living surface, were identified in building X, but such a feature was found in building U to the northeast (**fig. 8**). While only partially revealed, the thickness of the walls (55-80cm), and the deposits of rubble around an abandoned silo, suggest a similar construction history to building X, which is contemporary. Though building U also features a rectangular plan, with at least two main cells, it is orientated east-west. A staircase (1072), 65cm in width and at least 2m in height, provided access from the space (street?) to the north. Artefacts recovered from this area were consistent with those in and around building T: beads, ceramic discs and figurines, faience bowl fragments and bone tools. Building U was later overbuilt with a new structure (B), set on a thick brick foundation but without pan-bedded courses (**fig. 17**), and featuring at least three rooms on its first (raised) floor: this structure was cleared by Shafiq Farid in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Beyond the excavation area, another building (A) cleared by Farid still presents a distinctive, stand-alone tower-like experience (**fig. 15–16**); arches are used as relieving mechanisms within the architecture²³.

Moving to the west of the excavated area, a brick structure (W) was built over an existing space which may have included a silo (1671). Preserved to 1.56m in height, building W comprised one internal space (3.35 x 3.25m), and walls of up to 130cm in thickness (**fig. 8, 18**). In contrast to buildings T and U, however, this was not intended to provide a raised platform, but rather designed as a ground-level building dedicated to pottery production. The small interior space housed a circular kiln (1619) with a firing chamber of 140cm in diameter; the badly destroyed

²³ *Ibid.*, ch. 7.

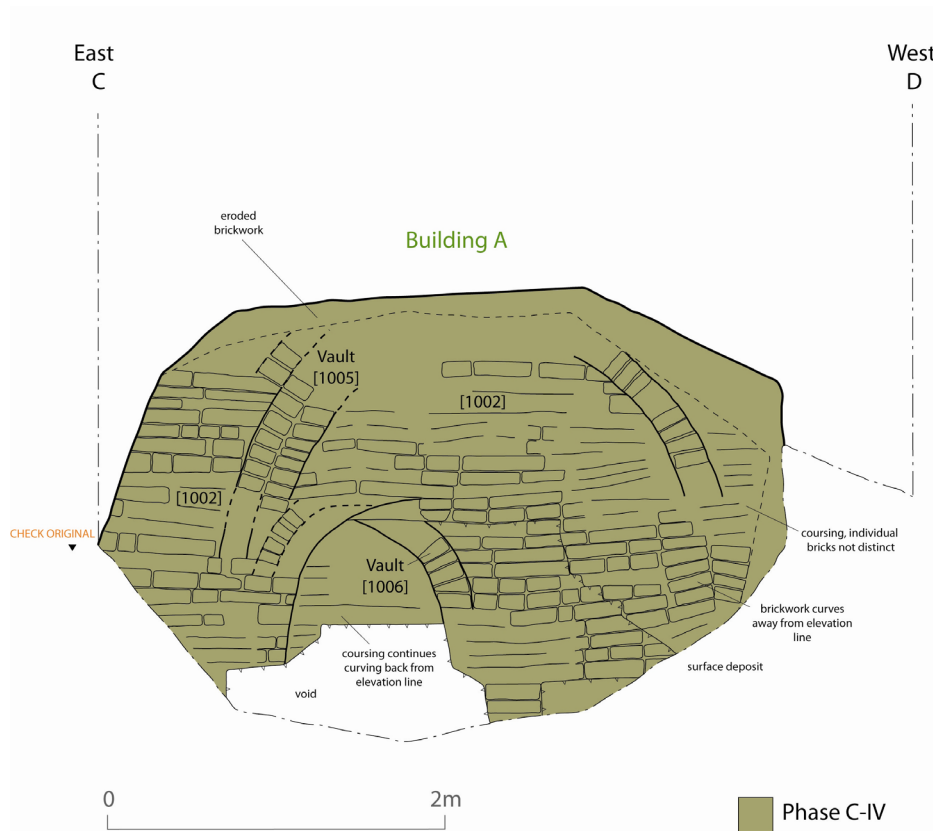


Fig. 16. Elevation drawing of north façade of building A

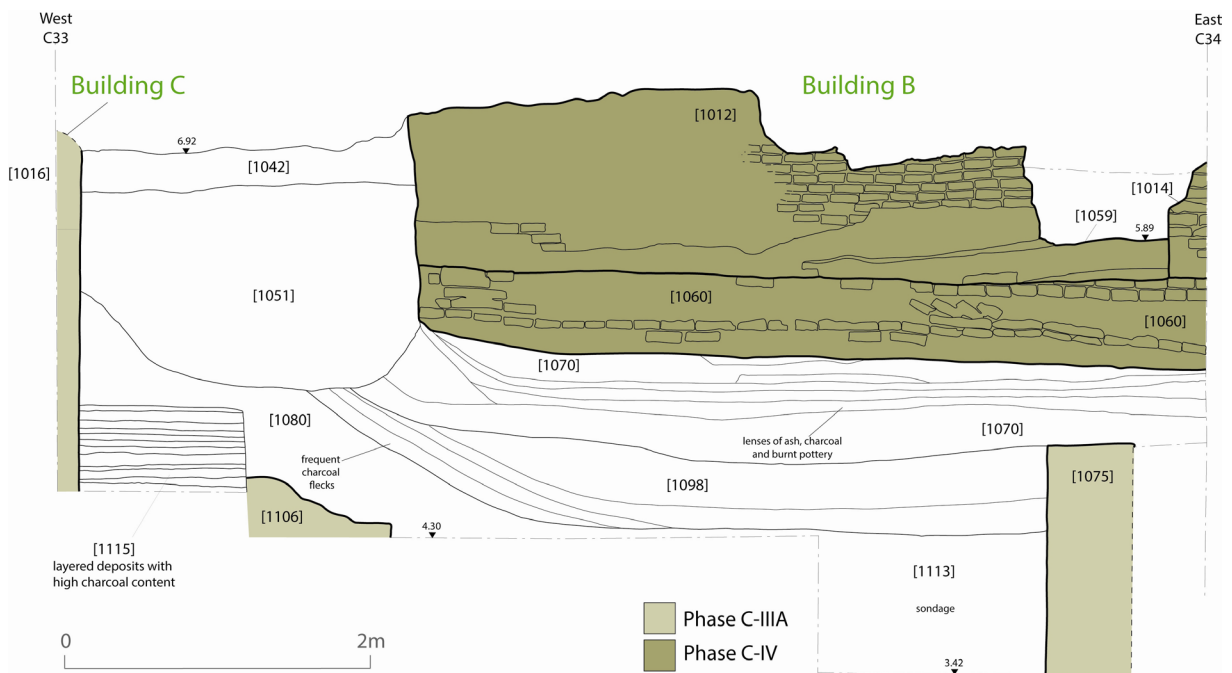


Fig. 17. Elevation illustrating foundation of building B, over truncated architecture of phase C-IIIa structure U



Fig. 18. Building W with kiln 1619, view west

remnants of the firing chamber floor were discovered within. This kiln was dedicated to the production of ‘pigeon-jars’: a distinctive form of open jar with a circular cavity in the base²⁴, and went through at least one major refurbishment. Use of the kiln produced considerable amounts of ash that accumulated within the single room. No areas for clay preparation were identified in or around the building. Access to this space seems to have been from the north, though the exact placement of a doorway is unclear due to considerable renovations and refacing of the north wall.

To the north of building W, the corner of another substantial structure was identified, but the space in between was also in use. Part of this area was also paved, but at the western end of the trench, a beehive-shaped kiln (1624) was partly revealed, faced in mud plaster and brick fragments (**fig. 19**). The kiln was not a stand-alone feature, but part of an installation that comprised three tall neck-less amphorae (C3023, C3025, C3086), with at least one bearing traces of pitch on the interior, and two additional amphorae set into the ground with bases broken off. A series of further amphorae were found set up 3.2m to the east, along with a pigeon-jar (C3079) re-used for the burial of a neonate, accompanied by a ceramic counter (F713). While the purpose of this installation is unclear, it is significant in the context of this paper as indicating the use of exterior space, whether street, alley, courtyard or simply undefined open areas between buildings, for activities that might have been associated with specific buildings. A similar phenomenon has been attested at Buto²⁵. Brickwork contemporary with building W was also added to its southern face, but limited exposure of this architecture precludes further interpretation.

24 SAGORY 2000, p. 29-51.

25 MAROUARD 2008, p. 125; HARTUNG *et al.* 2009, p. 138; BALLETT *et al.* 2011, p. 78-82, 94-96, figs. 1-5.

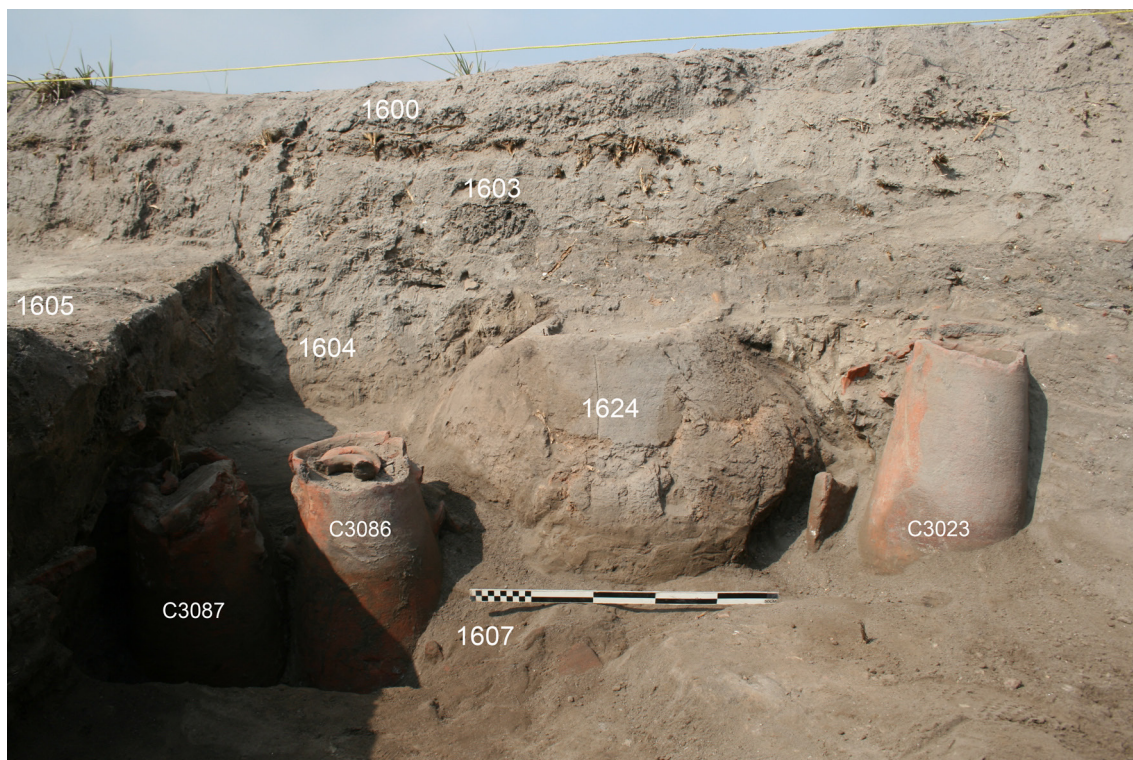


Fig. 19. Installation 1624 outside building W (visible to left), view west

This late Saite and early Persian phase of the Citadel area is somewhat difficult to characterise, hampered by the absence of living/working levels upon the casemate platforms introduced at this period. The ceramic assemblage reflects both the production of pottery, particularly pigeon-pots, in one building (W), but also a typical range of tablewares suggesting that we are within, or very near, a domestic zone. Some of the casemate foundations (T and U) may have supported houses, raised up on thick brick platforms of at least 2m in height: these could then be designated as tower-houses; the Kom Firin examples are on a similar scale to buildings at Buto and Tell el-Dab'a²⁶. It is equally possible, of course, that these were also for small-scale production²⁷, industry or even small chapels, though no artefactual or depositional factors provide positive evidence to support any of these possibilities.

A changing city, a changing Egypt

Kom Firin, founded in the early Ramesside era, remained settled through the Third Intermediate Period. It was, however, during the Saite era that the nature of the city is significantly transformed. On the one hand, a vast new temple *temenos* is created, presumably embellished with a decorated stone temple (**fig. 1**). The logistics of such a construction programme would have been considerable. The extraction of tonnes of river silt and sand deposits to create millions of bricks, that once shaped were laid out to dry and then delivered to the wall construction sites; the arrival of stone on river barges from the south (quartzite from Gebel Ahmar, and

26 Tell el-Dab'a: LEHMANN 2012, p. 30; Buto: HARTUNG *et al.* 2009, p.137-138, fig. 20.

27 Faience production is one possibility, given the considerable number of bowl fragments, but also the small kilns and ovens throughout the excavated area. The intermingling of living and production areas is well-attested in pharaonic Egypt, for example at late 18th dynasty Amarna (KEMP & STEVENS 2010, p. 487-496) or in Delta settlements of the Late and Ptolemaic Periods (LECLÈRE 2008, p. 652-653).

limestone from the Memphis area?); the levelling and demolition of some earlier buildings. Such a programme must have had a considerable impact on the town's inhabitants, and is likely to have been driven by a central agency, whether the pharaonic court at nearby Sais, or local elites²⁸.

Another considerable change occurred around the same time, this time in the architectural fabric of individual buildings. Towards the end of the 26th dynasty, a distinctive construction technique is introduced in the Citadel area: over the partly levelled remains of an area of housing and storage facilities (**fig. 20**), new casemate platforms were built, with brickwork laid in panbedded courses (**fig. 21**).

The absence of a narrow date-range for the construction of the Saite enclosure wall precludes answering one key question: are the two developments related? If the *temenos* wall at Kom Firin was constructed in the early 26th dynasty²⁹, there would be between 100 and 150 years before the appearance of a new form of architecture for domestic buildings and workshops. The new buildings at Kom Firin do not follow a consistent orientation, and the construction method relied on stand-alone structures. Together, this suggests these buildings are the product of individual or household agency, rather than a carefully planned neighbourhood or city quarter. Nonetheless, at least in the limited area of the Citadel, this preference for a new building technique seems to be introduced within a short time-frame. The broadly contemporary appearance of a new construction technique may simply be the by-product of many buildings being constructed by the same teams of workers.

The transition towards platform or tower-buildings is one that can be traced across Egypt. Examples of such housing are known from Third Intermediate Period el-Ashmunein³⁰, but the widespread adoption of such construction techniques seems to have occurred in the 7th or 6th centuries BC, particularly in the Nile Delta, as found at Buto (from the early 6th century BC)³¹, Mendes (late 6th century BC)³², Tell Muqdam³³ and Tell el-Dab'a (both 26th-27th dynasties)³⁴, Nebesheh (26th dynasty)³⁵, and at Tell Hebua II (26th dynasty)³⁶ and Tell el-Herr (late 5th century BC)³⁷ in Sinai. The construction method is also found further south, for example at Tuna el-Gebel (early to mid-Ptolemaic)³⁸. The form seems to appear earlier in the Delta, though this may simply be a reflection of what has been excavated. Elsewhere, survey has revealed the plans of stand-alone structures that are similar in size and layout, many presumably

28 On the role of non-royal individuals in shaping the sacred built environment, see SPENCER 2011A, p. 441-490.

29 Early 26th dynasty enclosure walls include those at Defenneh (LECLÈRE 2008, p. 511-515) and Tell el-Balamun (SPENCER 1996A, p. 26-32), though neither can be dated to a specific reign.

30 SPENCER 1996B, p. 215-218, plans 2-3, pl. 1.

31 HARTUNG *et al.* 2003, fig. 5; HARTUNG *et al.* 2009, p. 136-138, fig. 20; HARTUNG & BALLETT 2010, p. 191, fig. 131. Note that these buildings were being re-used for burials in the late Saite Period.

32 WILSON 1982, p. 5-9, pls. 3 and 9 [2]; and see LECLÈRE 2008, p. 653-654.

33 REDMOUNT & FRIEDMAN 1997, p. 57-83.

34 LEHMANN 2012, p. 29-31.

35 PETRIE 1888, pl. 17; LECLÈRE, *op. cit.*, p. 494-495.

36 S. Abd el-Aleem and M. Abd el-Maksoud, personal communication.

37 MARCHI, *infra*, p. 85-104.

38 FLOSSMANN-SCHÜTZE, *infra*, p. 9-32.

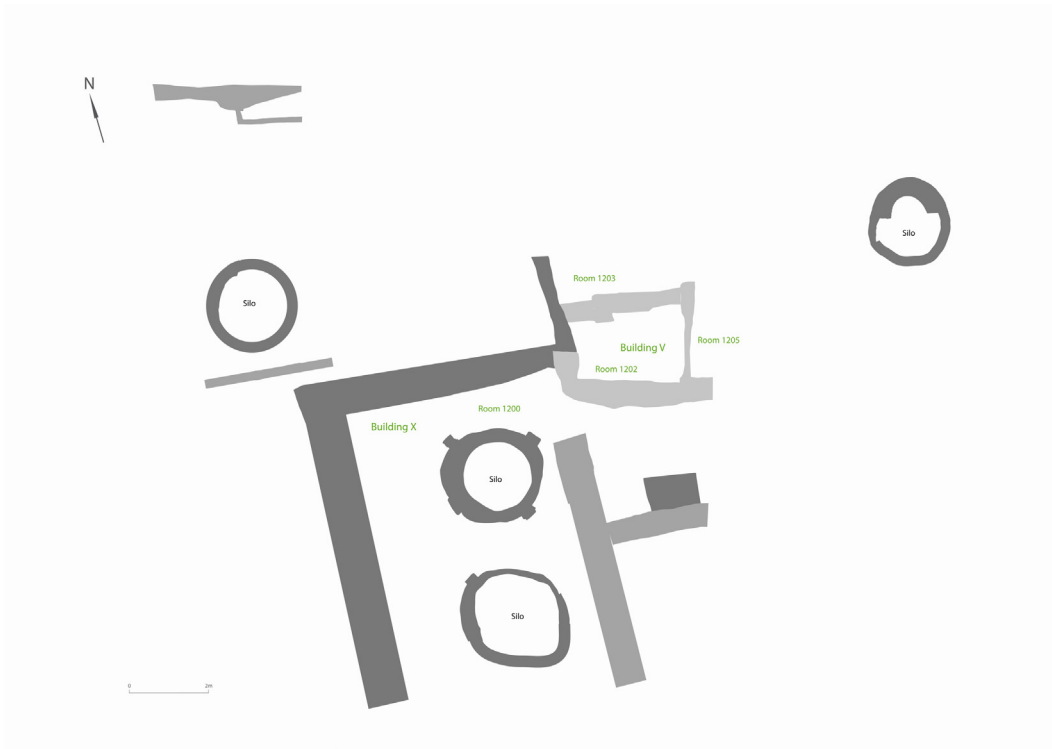


Fig. 20. Schematic plan of early-mid 6th century BC architecture in the Citadel area

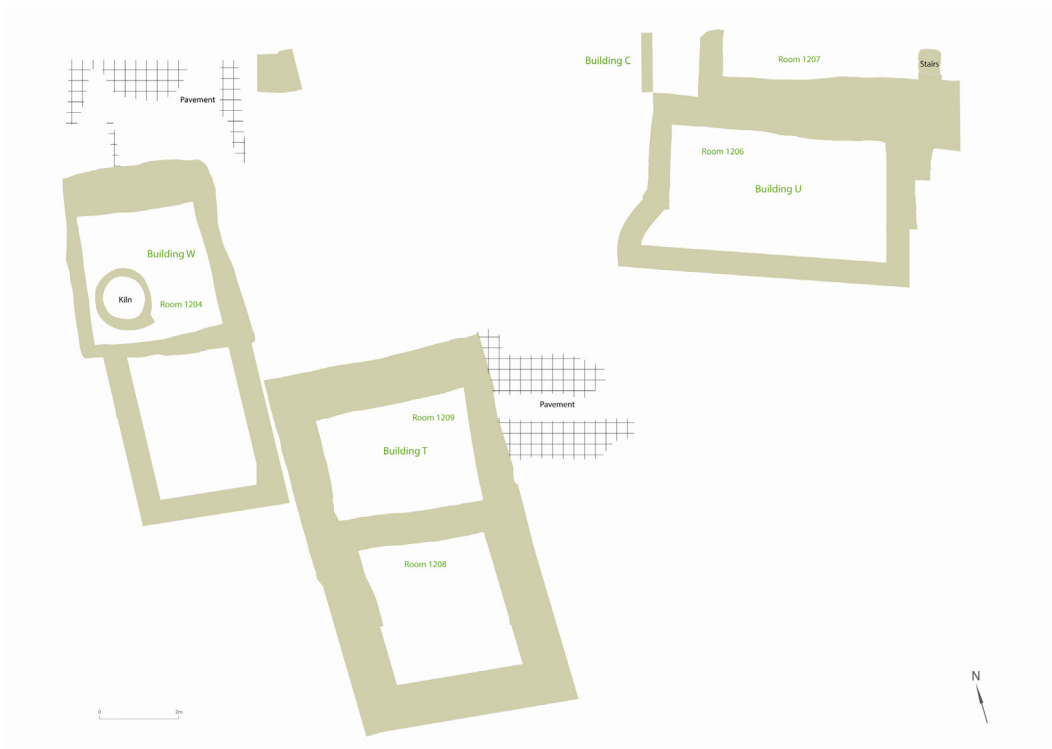


Fig. 21. Schematic plan of late 6th /early 5th century BC architecture in the Citadel area

houses, at Tanis³⁹, Sais⁴⁰, Tell Fara'on⁴¹ and Tell el-Balamun⁴²; much larger structures built in the same method were used for temple buildings, palaces and storerooms⁴³; the same architectural principles were then employed through the Roman era, the Fayum settlements feature particularly well-preserved examples⁴⁴.

The introduction of platform foundations would have had several advantages, in terms of a barrier from the damp and moisture of the alluvial plain, a more defined personal/household space and perhaps the structural possibility to construct taller buildings⁴⁵: the models of tower-houses have often been linked to such foundation platforms⁴⁶. Whether it reflects a shift towards a more individual, private, society is difficult to assess without contemporary textual evidence. Felix Arnold has suggested that the domestic architecture at Elephantine reflects a phenomenon of increasing household autonomy and privacy, but also division of clean and unclean spaces, traced from the Middle Kingdom through the Late Period, most notably the shift from placing a courtyard at the centre of a house to being an exterior space⁴⁷, perhaps like those outside building W at Kom Firin. Normative presentations of Egyptian houses, at any period, are likely to be misleading: the datasets from Tell el-Amarna and Amara West provide clear indication of how much variability existed, both in terms of architecture and installations for cooking. House D14.9, part of the latest occupation phase at Amara West (late New Kingdom), is notable for having stair access and constructed as a stand-alone unit, representing a notable departure from the remainder of housing at the site, and indeed typical houses at other New Kingdom settlements⁴⁸. The rows of tower-houses seen at many Delta settlements from the Saite era onwards rarely follow a consistent orientation, but unsurprisingly echo the alignment of major features such as nearby enclosure walls, river courses and processional avenues; nonetheless, they are a long way from the *insulae* of Roman towns. They are often densely distributed in particular parts of settlements, with narrow alleys running between them⁴⁹.

This paper has largely focused on architectural evidence, but it is worth considering the development of artefact assemblages in tandem with the shift in form of the buildings. In fact, the objects recovered from the Citadel are remarkably consistent across the 6th through 4th centuries BC⁵⁰: handmade quadruped figurines in fired clay, ceramic female figurines on plaques, ceramic discs (some drilled with a hole), small faience vessels, limestone mortars and bowls, stone rubbers, grinders and hammerstones, quernstones and a small array of amulets and simple beads. Absent are the ubiquitous fired clay cobra figurines and limestone architectural

39 BRISSAUD 2000, p. 9-11.

40 WILSON 2006, p. 160-161, fig. 46.

41 MUSTAFA 1988, p.144, fig. 3.

42 SPENCER 1996A, p. 104-109.

43 SPENCER 1999, p. 295-300; LECLÈRE, *op. cit.*, p. 628-638.

44 For example, at Karanis: see HUSSELMAN 1979.

45 The Kom Firin examples do not preserve evidence of wooden beams inserted into the brickwork, as at Mendes (WILSON 1982, p.7, pl. 8 [1-2]) and Buto (HARTUNG *et al.* 2009, p. 137); nor can obvious locations for internal staircases be posited, as at other sites. Arnold proposes walls of 60-100cm thickness could support four storeys (ARNOLD 2003, p. 106-109).

46 ARNOLD, *op. cit.*, p.172-177.

47 ARNOLD 2013.

48 See SPENCER 1997, p. 143-145, pl. 178; SPENCER 2014.

49 LECLÈRE, *op. cit.*, p. 651-652.

50 SPENCER 2014, ch. 6.

fittings that characterise excavations in the Ramesside temple and enclosure (spanning the Late New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period)⁵¹. The pace of change seems to operate at several levels in Kom Firin: whereas the material culture witness a shift from the Third Intermediate Period into the Saite era, a new construction technique would not be introduced until the late 6th century BC. In turn, the artefact assemblage remains consistent before and after this architectural shift, suggesting that the function of these buildings, and the activities taking place within, remained broadly similar.

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51 *Ibid.*, ch. 8.

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