The Archaeology of Urbanism in Ancient Egypt

From the Predynastic Period to the End of the Middle Kingdom

In this book, Nadine Moeller challenges prevailing views on Egypt’s nonurban past and argues for Egypt as an early urban society. She traces the emergence of urban features during the Predynastic Period up to the disintegration of the powerful Middle Kingdom state (ca. 3500–1650 BCE). This book offers a synthesis of the archaeological data that sheds light on the different facets of urbanism in ancient Egypt. Drawing on evidence from recent excavations as well as a vast body of archaeological data, the volume explores the changing settlement patterns by contrasting periods of strong political control against those of decentralization. It also discusses households and the layout of domestic architecture, which are key elements for understanding how society functioned and evolved over time. Moeller reveals what settlement patterns can tell us about the formation of complex society and the role of the state in urban development in ancient Egypt.

Nadine Moeller is Associate Professor of Egyptian Archaeology at the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago. She has been directing excavations at the urban settlement of Tell Edfu in Egypt since 2001. She has also participated in excavations of settlement and cemetery sites in Egypt, such as Abu Rawash, Memphis, Zawiet Sultan (Zawiet el-Meitin), the Theban necropolis, and the Valley of the Kings. Her work has been published in journals including the *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt (JARCE)*, *Near Eastern Archaeology, Journal of Near Eastern Studies, Ägypten und Levante*, *Bulletin de l’Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale (BIFAO)*, and *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*. 
The Archaeology of Urbanism in Ancient Egypt

From the Predynastic Period to the End of the Middle Kingdom

NADINE MOELLER

University of Chicago
To my teacher and mentor, Barry Kemp, and in memory of Michel Baud —
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of figures</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Ancient Urbanism and the Case of Egypt</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 General considerations relating to urbanism in early civilizations</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 The case of ancient Egypt</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Categories of ancient Egyptian settlements</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Current and Past Studies of Egyptian Settlements</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Historical overview of settlement archaeology in Egypt</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 The role of Egyptian settlements in interdisciplinary studies on ancient urbanism</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Environmental Setting</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Introduction</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Environmental settings for ancient settlements in Egypt</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Settlement archaeology in Egypt: Problems and priorities</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The Origins of Urban Society</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Introduction</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 The first appearance of urban elements</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 The case of Hierakopolis</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Evidence for an Early Dynastic building complex at Buto</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 The Early Dynastic settlement remains at Elephantine</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 General conclusions concerning the emergence of urban features in Predynastic and Early Dynastic settlements</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The Settlements of the Old Kingdom</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Introduction</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# CONTENTS

5.2 Settlements related to royal mortuary cults in the Memphite region 117  
5.3 Discussion of Memphis versus a “capital zone”: The evidence for a “shifting capital” during the Old Kingdom 158  
5.4 Evidence for Old Kingdom settlements in the Delta and the Nile Valley 161  
5.5 Old Kingdom settlements in the marginal regions of Egypt 174  
5.6 Concluding remarks 186  

6 The Layout of Old Kingdom Houses 192  
6.1 Introduction 192  
6.2 Evidence from Giza 196  
6.3 Houses at Elephantine 204  
6.4 The layout of the residential part of the governor’s palace at Ayn Asil in the Dakhla Oasis 206  
6.5 The layout of Building C at Ayn el-Gazzareen 210  
6.6 Concluding remarks 211  

7 The Development of Towns during the End of the Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period (ca. 2200–2050 BCE) 214  
7.1 Introduction 214  
7.2 The Memphite region: A widespread abandonment of settlement sites linked to royal mortuary cults 214  
7.3 Middle Egypt: The evidence for settlements dating to the late Sixth Dynasty and First Intermediate Period 216  
7.4 Evidence for settlement development in Upper Egypt 219  
7.5 Evidence for First Intermediate Period activity at Ayn Asil/Balat in the Dakhla Oasis 241  
7.6 Concluding remarks 244  

8 The Middle Kingdom: Town Planning and Internal Colonization at Its Height 249  
8.1 Introduction 249  
8.2 State-planned settlements 252  
8.3 Karnak: Evidence for a Middle Kingdom city 300  
8.4 The town of Elephantine during the Middle Kingdom 305  
8.5 Tell Edfu: The town of the Middle Kingdom 317  
8.6 Tell el-Dab’a: The evolution of a major urban center in the eastern Delta region 321  
8.7 Concluding remarks 327  

Further discussions and archaeological details relating to Chapter 8 334  
8.I The function of sinusoidal mud-brick walls dating to the Middle Kingdom 334  
8.II The purpose of the settlements at Qasr el-Sagha and the function of the stone-revetted mounds 335
Figures

CHAPTER 3

3.1 View of the Nile Valley showing the receding floodwaters, from the top of the Khufu pyramid at Giza 46
3.2 Pyramid at Giza and the flooded Nile Valley in the foreground 47
3.3 Inundated floodplain at Dahshur 48
3.4 Idealized cross-section across the Nile in Upper Egypt 48
3.5 Aerial view of the inundated Nile Valley near Qena in 1964 49
3.6 Floodwaters surrounding houses in 1964 50

CHAPTER 4

4.1 Map of Predynastic and Early Dynastic sites in Egypt 60
4.2 Semisubterranean house at Maadi and detail of the mud-brick wall (Buto-Maadi culture) 62
4.3 Semisubterranean house with stone wall at Maadi (Buto-Maadi culture) 63
4.4a Subterranean building at Maadi (Buto-Maadi culture) 63
4.4b Entrance to the subterranean building at Maadi 64
4.5 Mud-brick building, Phase IIId (Naqada IIIA period), at Buto 65
4.6 Satellite view (2009) of the archaeological area at Tell el-Farkha 66
4.7 Mud-brick buildings (Naqada III period), at Tell el-Farkha 66
4.8 Mud-brick structures in the area of the later Satet temple (Naqada IIIC1 period), at Elephantine 67
4.9 Satellite view (2006) of the archaeological area at Naqada and the South Town area at Nubt (late Naqada II–early Naqada III period) 69
4.10 First phase of breweries on the Western Kôm at Tell el-Farkha (Lower Egyptian culture) 70
4.11 Temple of Satet during the Early Dynastic Period at Elephantine 72
4.12a Plan of the early shrine (Dynasty 0) at Tell Ibrahim Awad 73
4.12b View of the early shrine (Dynasty 0) at Tell Ibrahim Awad 74
4.13 View of the Naqada period “residence,” Western Kôm at Tell el-Farkha 74
4.14a Early Dynastic administrative-residential complex, Western Kôm at Tell el-Farkha 75
4.14b Early Dynastic administrative-residential complex, Western Kôm at Tell el-Farkha 75
4.15 Early Dynastic fortress and settlement (second half of 1st Dynasty–early 2nd Dynasty) at Elephantine 77
4.16 Position of Tell es-Sakan in the Gaza region 79
LIST OF FIGURES

4.17 View, plan, and northern profile of the different phases of enclosure walls, Area A at Tell es-Sakan 80
4.18 Satellite view (2009) of the archaeological area at Hierakonpolis 82
4.19 Development of the Predynastic–Old Kingdom settlement at Hierakonpolis 83
4.20 Brewing facility and pottery kilns at HK 24B (mid–Naqada I period) at Hierakonpolis 85
4.21 Food production installations at HK 24B (mid–Naqada I period) at Hierakonpolis 87
4.22 Plan of Phase I at HK 29 (Naqada IIA period) at Hierakonpolis 88
4.23 Early ceremonial center at HK 29A (late Naqada II–early Naqada III period) at Hierakonpolis 90
4.24 Satellite view (2009) of Kôm el-Gemuwia at Hierakonpolis, which shows the position of the excavation grid by W. Fairservis 92
4.25 Plan of the grid laid out by W. Fairservis at Kôm el-Gemuwia (ancient Nekhen) at Hierakonpolis 93
4.26 Plan of the Early Dynastic building complex at Kôm el-Gemuwia 97
4.27 Detail of the palace–façade gate of the Early Dynastic building complex at Kôm el-Gemuwia 98
4.28 Detail of the Early Dynastic building complex at Kôm el-Gemuwia 99
4.29 Stratigraphy of the deposit inside the niche of Room A3 (Square 13N6XW) at Kôm el-Gemuwia 100
4.30 Detail of the “clay platform” area, Early Dynastic building complex at Kôm el-Gemuwia 101
4.31 General plan of Buto and restitution of the possible limits of the occupation from the Predynastic Period to the Old Kingdom 104
4.32 Early Dynastic building complex at Buto 106

CHAPTER 5

5.1 Map of Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period settlement sites in Egypt 115
5.2 Map of the Memphite region 118
5.3 Plan of the pyramid complex of Radjedef (4th Dynasty) at Abu Rawash 120
5.4 Aerial view of the eastern side of the pyramid complex at Abu Rawash 121
5.5 Plan of the priests’ accommodations of the pyramid complex at Abu Rawash 122
5.6 Plan of the mortuary complex of Raneferef (5th Dynasty) at Abusir 124
5.7 Plan showing the two phases of the courtyard of the “Expanded Temple” at the Raneferef mortuary complex (5th Dynasty) at Abusir 125
5.8 Map of the royal necropolis at Dahshur 127
5.9 Plan of the “workhouse” and remains of the workers’ settlement south of the Red Pyramid complex of Snofru (early 4th Dynasty) at Dahshur 128
5.10 Plan of the Giza Plateau showing the locations of the Khentkawes monument, the Khentkawes townsite, the Menkaura Valley Temple, and the Heit el-Ghurab site 129
5.11 Plan of the Heit el-Ghurab settlement (HeG) at Giza 130
5.12 Western Town section at Heit el-Ghurab (HeG), showing House Units 1 to 3 131
5.13 Map and view of Gallery III.4 at Heit el-Ghurab (HeG) 132
5.14 Plan of the Royal Administrative Building (RAB) and surrounding areas at Heit el-Ghurab 133
5.15 Plan of House Unit 1 (4th Dynasty) in the Western Town at Heit el-Ghurab 135
5.16 Plan and view of the Eastern Town House, Eastern Town at Heit el-Ghurab (the core domestic unit is outlined with a dotted line) 137
LIST OF FIGURES

5.17 Plan of the “Standing Wall Island” (a cattle corral?), south of the Western Town at Heit el-Ghurab
5.18 Satellite view of the Menkaura pyramid complex (4th Dynasty) at Giza with the location of the industrial settlement
5.19 Plan of the industrial settlement south of the Menkaura pyramid complex (4th Dynasty) at Giza
5.20 Settlement remains along the southern side of the Valley temple at the Snefru Bent Pyramid complex (4th Dynasty) at Dahshur
5.21 Plan of the Khentkawes town and the Menkaura Valley Temple (4th Dynasty) at Giza
5.22 Isometric reconstruction of the lower approach to the Khentkawes town and the basin area
5.22b View of the eastern part of the Khentkawes town and the basin in the foreground
5.23 Plan of the Khentkawes town, from the pyramid (west) to the lower town (east), and the settlement remains east of the basin newly discovered by the AERA excavations
5.24 Southern part of the Khentkawes southern town showing the location of Building K
5.25 Plan of the Menkaura Valley Temple and the lower part of the Khentkawes town at Giza
5.26 Plan of the ante-town of the Menkaura Valley Temple at Giza and view of the second vestibule during the excavations by AERA
5.27 Interface area between the Menkaura Valley Temple and the Khentkawes town
5.28 Satellite view and plan of the southern part of Memphis (Mit Rahina)
5.29 Satellite view of the region around Deir el-Bersheh
5.30 Location of the trenches and details of the Old Kingdom “industrial site” (S4) at Al-Shaikh Said
5.31 Plan of Elephantine during the Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period
5.32 View of the eastern side of the step pyramid (end of 3rd–early 4th Dynasty) on the western island at Elephantine
5.33 Plan and section of the step pyramid (end of 3rd–early 4th Dynasty) and the “terraced” administrative building (2nd–3rd Dynasties) on the western island at Elephantine
5.34 Plan of the Old Kingdom settlement remains (early 3rd Dynasty), south of the former fortress gate on the eastern island at Elephantine
5.35 Expansion of houses and courtyards (3rd Dynasty) in the Old Kingdom settlement area, south of the former fortress on the eastern island at Elephantine
5.36 Houses and courtyards (late 3rd–early 4th Dynasty) in the Old Kingdom settlement area, south of the former fortress on the eastern island at Elephantine
5.37 Extramural settlement remains (6th Dynasty) outside the main gate, eastern island at Elephantine
5.38 Location and plan of the Old Kingdom buildings (late 4th–late 5th Dynasty) of the Kôm 14 at Ayn Sokhma
5.39 Map of the Dakhla Oasis
5.40 Plan of Balat – Ayn Asil
5.41a Round tower of the northern enclosure (6th Dynasty) at Ayn Asil
5.41b View of ka-chapels at the governor’s palace at Ayn Asil
5.42 Plan of the governor’s palace at Ayn Asil
5.43 Detailed plan of the outbuildings of the ka-chapels, northern part of the governor’s palace at Ayn Asil
5.44 Plan of Ayn Asil settlement and the Qila el-Dabba necropolis
5.45 Plan of Ayn el-Gazzareen

xii
L I S T  O F  F I G U R E S

CHAPTER 6

6.1 Plan of the Old Kingdom settlement remains, Area A at Kôm el-Hisn 193
6.2a Examples of Old Kingdom house layouts 195
6.2b Layouts of buildings in the Dakhla Oasis, late Old Kingdom 196
6.3 Plan of House E at the Khentkawes town at Giza, (Phases 1–3, late 4th to 6th Dynasty) 197
6.4 Reconstruction of the major occupation phases of House E at the Khentkawes town at Giza 198
6.5 Plan of House K at the Khentkawes town (late 4th Dynasty) at Giza 201
6.6 Plan of the North Street Gate House of Gallery Set II (4th Dynasty) at Heit el-Ghurab site at Giza 202
6.7 Bed platform with footrests in House Unit 1 (4th Dynasty), Western Town of Heit el-Ghurab site at Giza 203
6.8 Plan of the House Unit 3 (4th Dynasty), Western Town of Heit el-Ghurab site at Giza 205
6.9 Plan of the Eastern Apartments of the governor’s palace (late Old Kingdom) at Ayn Asil 207
6.10 Plan of the Western Apartments of the governor’s palace (late Old Kingdom) at Ayn Asil 208
6.11 Building of the 3rd row of the outbuildings (late Old Kingdom – 2nd Phase, preconflagration) at Ayn Asil 209
6.12 Building C (6th Dynasty) at Ayn el-Gazzareen 211

CHAPTER 7

7.1 Satellite view of Zawiet Sultan/Zawiet el-Meitin archaeological area (2006) with location of the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period settlement remains 215
7.2 Plan of the late Old Kingdom storage installations at Zawiet Sultan 218
7.3 Plan of the governor’s residence (6th Dynasty) at Elephantine 220
7.4a Western wall of the governor’s residence at Elephantine (view to the north) 221
7.4b Stone threshold marking the main entrance of the governor’s residence 221
7.5 Bare interior of the governor’s residence, which was to a large extent destroyed by the sebbakhin (view to the northeast) 222
7.6 Plan of the governor’s residence (House H2) at Elephantine, from the early First Intermediate Period 223
7.7 Deposit of cult objects inside the governor’s residence 224
7.8 First Intermediate Period decorated wooden panels at the main entrance of the governor’s residence (a); detail of the wooden panel (b); and facsimile of the complete scene (c) 225
7.9 Satellite view and schematic plan of the Tell Edfú archaeological area 227
7.10 First Intermediate Period town enclosure wall area (Zone 3) at the northern limit of Tell Edfú 228
7.11a First Intermediate Period town enclosure wall at Tell Edfú during the excavations in 2011 229
7.11b Middle Kingdom wall built against the exterior of the First Intermediate Period town enclosure wall 229
7.12a Different phases of storage installations built against the interior of the First Intermediate Period town enclosure wall 230
7.12b Floor remains of a small room used for administrative activities built against the First Intermediate Period enclosure wall 230
7.13 First Intermediate Period enclosure wall built above the late Old Kingdom cemetery, south of Tell Edfú 231
LIST OF FIGURES

7.14 Different phases of Old Kingdom town wall remains and First Intermediate Period addition (Zone 2) 232
7.15 Satellite view of Kôm Ombo archaeological area (2010) with location of the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period settlement remains 233
7.16 Satellite view of ElKab archaeological area (2010) 234
7.17 Views of the intramural area of the temple of Hathor at Dendera showing the location of the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period settlement remains 236
7.18 Plan of Dendera with an enlargement of the settlement area east of the temple of Hathor in the urban area at Dendera 238
7.19 Schematic plan of a First Intermediate Period domestic unit (Sondage 1) 239
7.20 View of the First Intermediate Period urban area east of the Hathor sanctuary enclosure wall at Dendera 238
7.21 Plan of the Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period settlement remains at Abydos (a) and plan of the First Intermediate Period buildings, Level Ia/b, of the settlement site at Kôm es-Sultan (b) 240
7.22 Detailed plan of the First Intermediate Period occupation and reconstruction of the governor’s palace at Ayn Asil 243
7.23a Overview of workshop complex in the southern part of the governor’s palace at Ayn Asil 244
7.23b Plan of the workshop complex, southern part of the governor’s palace at Ayn Asil 245

CHAPTER 8

8.1 Map of Middle Kingdom settlement sites in Egypt 251
8.2 Tell el-Dab’a archaeological site with the two Middle Kingdom areas, F/I and R/I, at Ezbet Rushdi 253
8.3 Early Middle Kingdom planned settlement (Phase e/2–3), area F/I at Tell el-Dab’a 254
8.4 Two house units of the settlement in area F/I at Tell el-Dab’a 255
8.5 Phase e/2 of the planned settlement in area F/I at Tell el-Dab’a 256
8.6 Phase e/2 of the planned settlement with added silos and storage magazines, area F/I at Tell el-Dab’a 257
8.7 Phase e/1 of the settlement, showing large houses with courtyards, area F/I at Tell el-Dab’a 257
8.8 Geophysical survey of Ezbet Rushdi North showing the orthogonally laid-out settlement 260
8.9 Sinusoidal walls and silos of the courtyards belonging to the houses of phase e/1–2, area R/I, at Tell el-Dab’a 261
8.10 Satellite view of the northern part of the Fayum depression showing the position of Qasr el-Sagha 263
8.11 Satellite view of the settlements in relation to the temple of Qasr el-Sagha 264
8.12 Plan of the Western Settlement at Qasr el-Sagha 265
8.13 Courtyard of Unit C-I, Western Settlement at Qasr el-Sagha 266
8.14 View of the courtyard of Unit C-I, Western Settlement at Qasr el-Sagha 266
8.15 Detail of the northern part of the courtyard of Unit C-I, Western Settlement at Qasr el-Sagha 267
8.16 Sinusoidal wall remains close to the enclosure wall of the Western Settlement at Qasr el-Sagha 268
LIST OF FIGURES

8.17 Upper part of an unfinished female statuette in basalt found at the Eastern Settlement QS VIII/80 at Qasr el-Sagha  
8.18a Stone-revetted mound on the eastern side of the Western Settlement at Qasr el-Sagha  
8.18b Details of the stone-revetted mound  
8.18c L-shaped ridge with stone cover 700 m south of the Qasr el-Sagha temple  
8.18d Basalt fragments at the southern end of the quarry road  
8.19 Satellite view showing the location of Lahun and its relation to the pyramid of Senwosret II  
8.20 Satellite view and plan of Lahun and its relation to the Valley temple of Senwosret II  
8.21 Details of the northeast corner recorded by Ludwig Borchardt  
8.22 Plan of the western and the central parts of Lahun, showing the temple and the administrative areas  
8.23 Detail of the main gate area at Lahun  
8.24 Wall remains of the “acropolis” at Lahun  
8.25 Wall remains of the temple building at Lahun  
8.26 Plan of the center of the town of Lahun showing the temple, the “acropolis,” and the elite residences  
8.27 Remains of external stairs on the northern side of the enclosure wall at Lahun  
8.28 Plan of the Valley temple area and the southwest corner of the town of Lahun  
8.29 Mortuary complex of Senwosret III and associated town of Wah-Sut at Abydos  
8.30 Plan of the settlement of Wah-Sut at Abydos  
8.31 Plan of Building A at Wah-Sut showing different building phases  
8.32 Schematic reconstruction of the settlement of Wah-Sut showing possible size of the town (currently known buildings are marked in gray)  
8.33 Satellite view of Lower Nubia showing the locations of the Middle Kingdom fortresses  
8.34 Citadel of the Middle Kingdom fortress at Buhen, Nubia  
8.35a Middle Kingdom institutions at the fortress of Shalfak, Nubia  
8.35b Middle Kingdom institutions at the fortress of Askut, Nubia  
8.36 Middle Kingdom fortress at Uronarti, Nubia  
8.37 Middle Kingdom palatial buildings at Uronarti and Kor, Nubia  
8.38 Location of the settlement remains at Thebes around the Karnak Temple during the Middle Kingdom and the Second Intermediate Period  
8.39 Middle Kingdom settlement remains east of the Sacred Lake at Karnak  
8.40 Late Middle Kingdom settlement at Elephantine  
8.41 Late Middle Kingdom houses southwest of the governor’s residence at Elephantine showing distribution and size of sealing deposits (Area HGS, Level XIII)  
8.42 Late Middle Kingdom domestic quarter at Elephantine showing distribution and size of sealing deposits (late 13th Dynasty)  
8.43 Ka-chapel of Sobekemsaf (late 13th Dynasty) at Elephantine  
8.44 Administrative complex H84 with storage facilities (Area B IV, Level 13, Phase b, 13th Dynasty) at Elephantine  
8.45 Plan of the two columned halls of the Middle Kingdom administrative building complex (mid-12th to mid-11th Dynasty) at Tell Edfu  
8.46 General views of the silo courtyard of the 17th Dynasty and underlying Middle Kingdom administrative building complex at Edfu  
8.47 Site of Tell el-Dab’a within the eastern Delta region  
8.48 Plan of Tell el-Dab’a showing the different excavation areas and harbors  
8.49 Late Middle Kingdom temple precinct and cemeteries (late 13th Dynasty?) in area A/II at Tell el-Dab’a
LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 9

9.1 Typology of Middle Kingdom house types 345
9.2 Courtyard houses and “three-row” houses from the Middle Kingdom at Elephantine 346
9.3 House layouts of the early Middle Kingdom settlement (phase e/2–3), area F/I at Tell el-Dab’a 348
9.4 Houses of the first half of the 12th Dynasty (phase e/3), area R/I (Ezbet Rushdi) at Tell el-Dab’a 349
9.5 “Mittelsaalhaus” of Palestinian origin (phase d/2, late 12th Dynasty), area F/I at Tell el-Dab’a 350
9.6 “Egalitarian” settlement pattern with two-room houses of phase G/1–3, area A/II at Tell el-Dab’a 351
9.7a Simple two-room house (phase G/1–3, 13th Dynasty), area A/II at Tell el-Dab’a 352
9.7b Two-room house with vestibule (phase c, 13th Dynasty), area F/I at Tell el-Dab’a 352
9.8 Houses of the late 13th Dynasty (phase E/3), area F/I at Tell el-Dab’a 353
9.9 Houses of the early Second Intermediate Period (phase E/2), area F/I at Tell el-Dab’a 354
9.10 Palatial complex of the early 13th Dynasty (phase d/1), area F/I at Tell el-Dab’a; general plan of the excavated area, including gardens and cemeteries south of the buildings 355
9.11 Plan of the Middle Kingdom palace at Tell Basta 357
9.12 View looking west into the main columned hall (f) with statues of the mayors in situ, Middle Kingdom palace at Tell Basta 358
9.13 Lintel and doorjamb fragment of Amenemhat III, Middle Kingdom palace at Tell Basta 358
9.14 Drainage traps to the north of the Middle Kingdom palace at Tell Basta 359
9.15 Water basin in the peristyle court (i), Middle Kingdom palace at Tell Basta 359
9.16 Middle Kingdom cemetery complex at Tell Basta 360
9.17 Plan of the cemeteries at el-Lisht 361
9.18 House A 1.3 of the 13th Dynasty at el-Lisht 362
9.19 Development of House A 3.3 of the 13th Dynasty at el-Lisht: (a) Phase 1: initial construction; (b) Phases 2–3: later alterations and additions 361
9.20 Mansion 10, southern row of mansions at Lahun 365
9.21 Mansion 2, northern row of mansions at Lahun 366
9.22 Internal layout and room functions of Building A, settlement of Wah-Sut at South Abydos 368
9.23 Comparison between Buildings A and D at Wah-Sut and the large mansion and smaller houses at Lahun 368
9.24 Layout of the central core residence and adjacent areas of Building A at Wah-Sut 369
9.25 Different examples of “three-row” houses at Elephantine 371
9.26 Courtyard houses at Elephantine 372
9.27 Houses of the 17th Dynasty (Phase 11) at Elephantine 373
This study is the result of more than ten years of research and six years of teaching graduate seminars on ancient urbanism at the University of Chicago. My first interest in settlement archaeology arose during my time as an undergraduate student at the University of Heidelberg in Germany, where the main focus of research centered on the ancient Egyptian religion and mortuary culture. With the firm intention (and with much motivation) for delving further into ancient Egyptian archaeology, I applied in 1997 for the MPhil program in Egyptology at the University of Cambridge in order to study under Barry Kemp. With the generous support of a grant from the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) – for which I am deeply grateful – I started the MPhil program at St. John’s College in the fall of 1998. I still remember the reading list I was sent to prepare for my first term in Cambridge, which included one of Kemp’s most influential works, entitled *Ancient Egypt, Anatomy of a Civilization*, confirming to me that this was the kind of research I wanted to pursue in my future career. After the MPhil I was accepted in the PhD program at Christ’s College and therefore remained in Cambridge until 2004. Under Barry’s guidance, I applied to work at the site of Tell Edfu in Upper Egypt, a large tell settlement that he had investigated in the late 1970s and that still had a lot of interesting data to offer in the form of Pharaonic-period settlement remains. The decision to work in Edfu came at a crucial moment and has had a great impact on the development of my career until the present time. In this respect I will forever be grateful to Barry Kemp, who was my PhD advisor and mentor throughout the formative years of my academic career. Another friend and colleague who provided much advice and support, especially during my time in Cambridge, is Kate Spence, to whom I express my gratitude. I also thank Pamela Rose, Janine Bourriau, and Will Schenck for their encouragement and first lessons on pottery.

My first season at Tell Edfu took place in the spring of 2001, and I started out with a team of two – myself and my friend and colleague Alison Gascoigne, who taught me a lot about getting around in Egypt in addition to coping with difficult work conditions. I am deeply grateful for her encouragement and support during the first season at Edfu, and I also thank Renee Friedman, who generously offered the two of us accommodation at Hierakonpolis while we worked at Edfu. In the following years, a small team was formed, with Barbara Böhm, Candy Hatherley (to whom I owe my first experience in using a Leica Total Station), and Andreas Jansen (our faithful cook). These first years at Edfu would have not been possible without them, and I am sincerely grateful to them for supporting me in my endeavors.

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