

***Preliminary Report on the work of the
Egyptian-German Mission at Matariya / Heliopolis
in Autumn 2005****

by

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Fig. 1: Temple precinct of Matariya / Heliopolis in 2003

The 1st season of the joint mission of the Supreme Council of Antiquities with the German Institute of Archaeology at Matariya / Heliopolis was carried out from August 25th 2004 till October 1st 2005.

The excavation work was concerned with the area north of the shopping centre “Suq el-Khamis”, within the northwestern part of the main temple precinct (Fig. 1-3).

Parallel to this, a training program for inspectors of the Taftisch Matariya was done. At the end of the work, nine members of the mission received certificates that testify for their successful participation in this program.

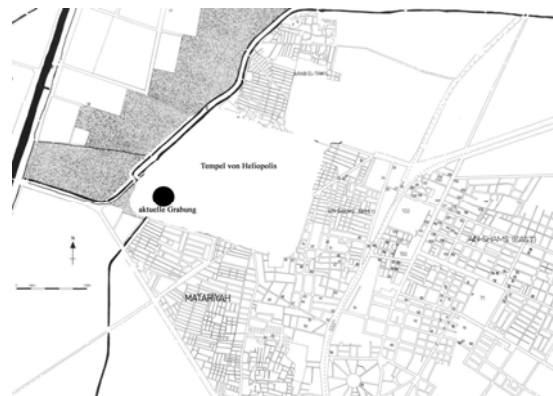
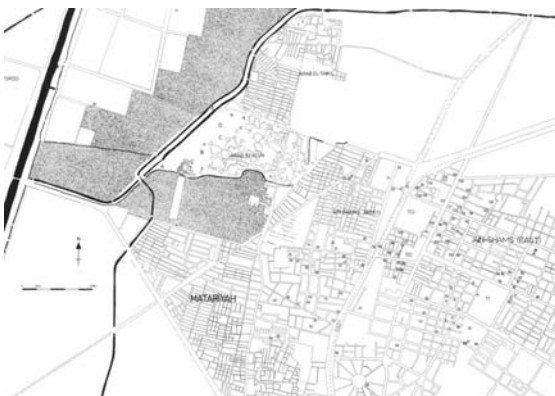


Fig. 2: Matariya / Arab el-Hisn / Ain Shams: modern habitation and position of temple area

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Fig. 3a-b: Matariya / Arab el-Hisn / Ain Shams: position of excavation and grid system in the temple area

This area is well known by the *Description de l'Égypte* and other descriptions of the earlier 19th century. Huge fragments of quartzite sphinx statues are mentioned by these early travellers. A fragment with the cartouche of Merenptah may belong to these sculptures (Fig. 4). Since then, no systematic excavation has been done till 2001, when archaeological investigations had to be resumed in course of the project of the shopping mall “Suq el-Khamis”.

In the area, 13 squares of up to 10 x 10 m were investigated. Additional insights to the earlier history of the site were gathered by core drillings.

The core drillings put a continuous occupation of this area in evidence (Fig. 5). More than 50 cm of industrial debris layers of the late Middle Kingdom were found.



Fig. 4: Fragment of colossal sphinx with cartouches of Merenptah



Fig. 5: Core Drillings in Square L22

Underneath, about one metre of occupation levels of the Middle Kingdom and about one meter stratigraphy of the later Old Kingdom have been observed. Below, a entirely different landscape was revealed.

In the 4th and early 3rd millennium BC, deep swamps or lakes must have been situated in the area of the later temple precinct.

The water table during the excavation period was surprisingly low. Therefore also the layers of the Second Intermediate Period could be reached without pumps or other facilities.

The walls belong to the southernmost Hyksos settlement so far known in Egypt. A part of a building with an attached silo was discovered (Fig. 6-7, see also plan: Fig. 11). Several fragments of pottery of the late Middle Bronze III-Culture were found. This fits well with the information from Papyrus Rhind, where an attack on Heliopolis during the very early 18th Dynasty is mentioned.

So far the area excavated does not allow to characterize these levels, especially since the extent of the temenos wall in that period is unknown. It could be a settlement in front of the temple or parts of the interior administrative arrangements.



Fig. 6: Walls of the Second Intermediate Period and floor level of the Hyksos settlement



Fig. 7: Silo of the Hyksos settlement in Square K21.

The Amarna Period is well attested among the finds from the recent excavations. Obviously Ramses II had destroyed a sun temple of Echnaton and used the material for his own building projects. When the ramesside structures were dismantled in early medieval period, a lot of this material reappeared.

Among this debris, there are several fragments of *talatat*-blocks, bearing e.g. depictions of the sun disk and the name of Nofretete (Fig. 8a-b). Other fragments attest the elaborated name of the god Aten. The building can therefore be more closely dated to the middle of the reign of Echnaton. It is obvious by this, that Heliopolis is one of the few temples of Egypt, in which cult was performed during the most extreme period of the time of Amarna.



Fig. 8: Talatat fragments of the sun-temple of Echnaton at Heliopolis; a) rays of the sun-disc with offering in the background; b) title and name of queen Nofretete.

The main work of the season consisted in documentation of the remains of an impressive monument from the time of Ramses II. A large platform of limestone blocks was framed by five courses of large slabs of basalt from the quarries nearby at Abu Zaabel (Fig. 9-11). So far, the north-south extension is minimum 30 m, east-west minimum 20m. The limestone blocks were brought to Cairo in medieval times and the frame wall collapsed. The platform had originally the same niveau like the base of the obelisk of Sesostris I some hundred metres to the east. From the foundation pits, major amounts of beer jars of the Ramesside Period were found. By future work it might be possible to gain the plan of the temple by studying the foundation trenches. So far it can be said, that a large courtyard and minimum one gate was situated in the place of the current excavations.



Fig. 9: Temple platform of Ramses II. from north



Fig. 10: Temple platform of Ramses II.: Collapsed frame of basalt slabs in square L21 and K21, from south.

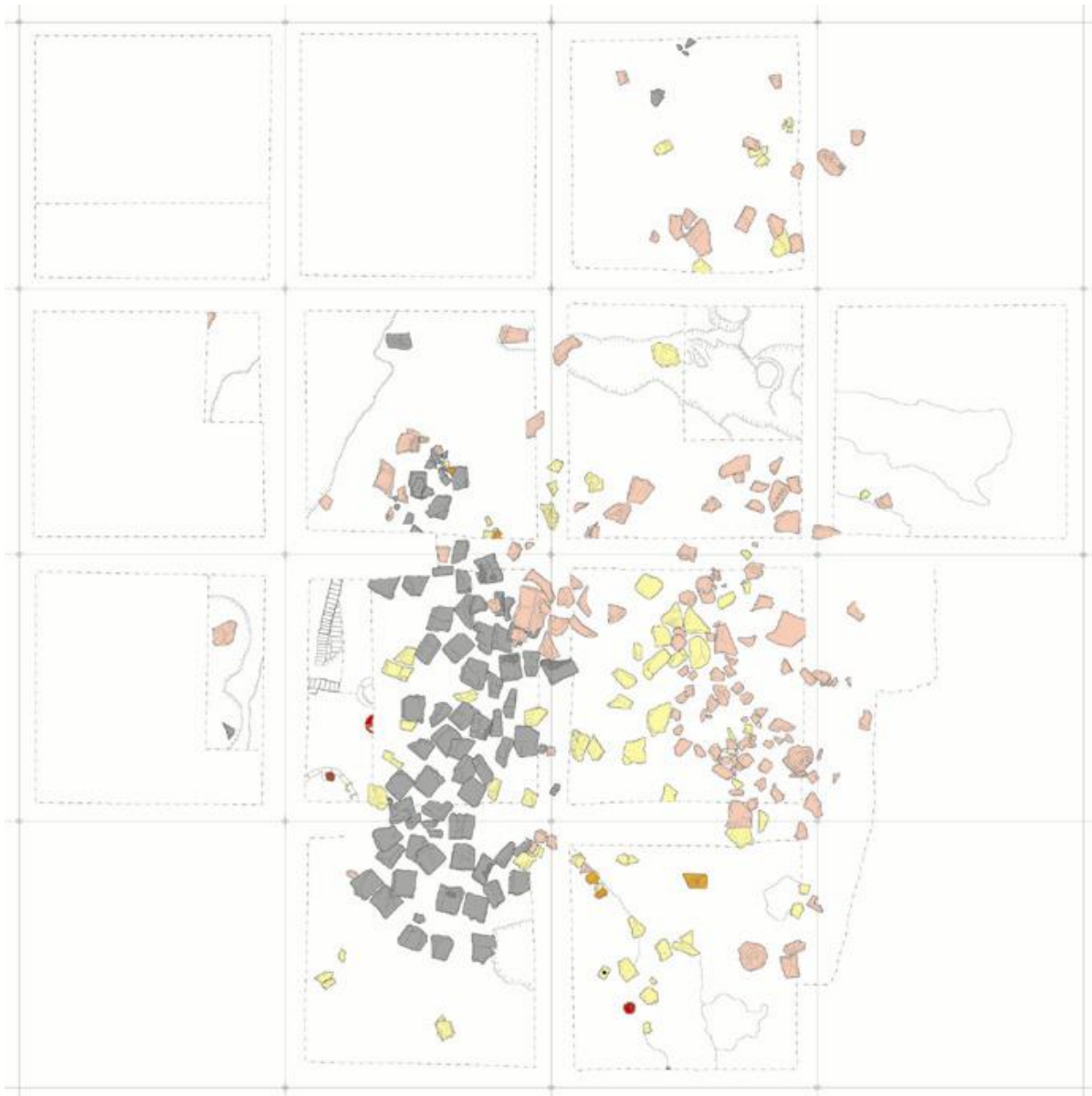


Fig. 11: Plan of the excavations of Autumn 2005 (grey: basalt; yellow: limestone; pink: granite; orange: quartzite)



Several large statues have been erected on the platform, probably in front of and inside of an open courtyard. Northernmost, in the squares I21 and H22/I23, fragments of 3.5x life-size statues were found (Fig. 12). The original total height might be estimated at about 5 metres. Both sculptures were made of red granite.

Fig. 12: Fragments of colossal statue in square I21: fist and kilt



Fig. 13: Head of Sesostri I, found in square I21

Furthermore three statues have been found in the squares K21, K22 and L22. They belong to statues of about 2.5x life-size, being probably about 3.5 metres high. One of them can be dated for stylistic reasons to the time of Sesostri I. (Fig.13).



Fig. 14: Fragments of colossal statuary from square K21 and L22: crowns of Upper Egypt

Among the fragments, an inscription with the horus-name of Sesostri I was found by the SCA mission in April 2005.

More fragments of colossal statues were revealed in square I20 and K20. Two further fragments were part of the Upper Egyptian crown (Fig. 14).

They can be either attributed to the king or to god Atum. In the latter case, one might deal with group statues Atum and the king in the courtyard. The work in the site revealed one of the largest complexes of statuary of Sesostris I. Like in Memphis and other sites, the colossal statuary of the Middle Kingdom was incorporated in Heliopolis to the building projects of Ramses II.

But also at least one statue of Ramses II himself was made for the furnishment and embellishment of this sanctuary in the northwestern part of the temple precinct. After it was already found in April 2005 by the SCA mission the statue was cleaned and studied this season. The sculpture depicts Ramses II reigning, e.g.: the heqa-scepter is held by the right arm in front of his chest. It is made of fine quartzite from the nearby Gebel Ahmar.



Fig. 15: Statue of Ramses II. from square K22.



Fig.16: Fragment of alabaster plate, 4th Cent. BC, from square K21.

Parts of the temple have been reinscribed in the reign of Ramses IV. The pottery and small finds point to the following periods. At the western rim of the platform, several layers of debris accumulated during the 4th Century BC. In this time, the temple of Heliopolis flourished for the last time. Fragments of precious alabaster vessels (Fig. 16), fine pottery wares, phoenician import amphorae and a hellenistic figurine (Fig. 17) were found in these layers.

After the early Ptolemaic period, the temples of Matariya / Heliopolis were neglected, as the Roman traveller Strabo confirms in his description of Heliopolis.

Beginning in the late Hellenistic Period, the temples lost their obelisks and sphinxes for the embellishment of Alexandria and Rom.

Almost no find is attested for this period of decrease, e.g. the Roman Period. Beginning in 5th and 6th century A.D., first major parts of the temples were dismantled.



Fig. 17: Hellenistic figurine, 4th Cent. BC.