

## Famous Ancient Egypt Cities - Part II

### El\_Lahun

The pyramid now called el-Lahun stands north of the modern town of that name and was built by Senusret II, c. 1895 BCE, during the period known as the Middle Kingdom of ancient Egypt.

Flinders Petrie, who discovered and excavated the pyramid and its ancient temples and town, gave the name Kahun, since they stood in the vicinity of the modern town of el-Lahun, close to the Faiyum.

Papyri found in the town give the ancient name as Hetep-Senwosret, or, "King Senusret is at peace, or is satisfied."

Kahun overlooks the lakeside region to which the kings of the 12th dynasty devoted much attention.

The Faiyum, or She-resy in ancient Egyptian, meaning "the Southern Lake", is a large fertile depression, connected with the Nile by a river arm known as the Bahr Yusuf.

The 12th dynasty kings, including Senusret II, had moved their capital to el-Lisht, and constructed dams to irrigate the area.

Petrie discovered the town of Kahun in the desert adjoining the north side of the pyramid temple. Kahun is larger than the other known pyramid towns (though since there are not that many discovered to date, this comparison may be meaningless.).

He saw traces of brick walls, houses and pottery, indicating that herein lived the workmen building the pyramid and its temple and their houses and storehouses. The town also housed the priests and lay personnel responsible for the king's mortuary cult.

Tools of the builders of the pyramids. Beside the town lay a temple, the Valley Temple to the pyramid of King Senusret II to the west.

Foundation deposits in this more distant valley temple included four sets of seven bronze tools, chisels, knives and hatchet, strings of beads, couple of pieces of copper ore, a piece of galena and pottery vessels and baskets.

Beautiful Middle Kingdom period jewelry was found south of the pyramid, in the tomb of Princess Sithathor-iunet. Mastabas and graves dating from the Middle Kingdom through to Roman times lie in the neighborhood of this pyramid.

Layout of the workers village at the pyramid at Kahun. Petrie found that the town's general outline was in a square, walled on the east, north, and west sides, open on the south to the Nile plain. The town wall extended along the north, west, and partly along the east sides.

Though today the south side is open to the Nile Valley, Petrie had discovered the remains of a gateway at the east wall, so he concluded that the wall in this portion was missing.

Buildings adjoined the wall on each side. The town was roughly square, measuring 384 meters on the north and 335 meters on the west. The ground slopes gradually, the highest point on the northwest being the "acropolis."

At least three town districts, separated by walls, can be distinguished. The first, is the acropolis, perhaps intended for the king himself, the second, the east quarter, with large mansions centered around a court, and consisting of as many as 70 or 80 rooms, the west quarter of smaller uniform dwellings each with 4 to 12 rooms.

The larger houses each had a court with columns around the middle, and in the center stood a small stone tank. The roofs were of beams overlaid with straw bundles and plastered with mud, but some were of brickwork. The doors too were arched in brick.

Immediately south of the "acropolis" may have stood a temple. Many references in the papyri indicate that the town did possess its own temple, to the falcon star-god Sopdu, Lord of the East, and possessed its own priesthood.

Early construction drawings. The town possessed a haty'a, or mayor, an office of the vizier, where legal proceedings took place, an office for an administrative official called the wehemu.

Pottery and tools were often found in the houses. In one house, a basket with a lid was found containing hatchets,

chisels and a bowl made of copper. Discoveries of goods were also made under the houses.

For example, a statuette of a dancer and a pair of ivory "castanets," as well as babies buried in wooden boxes, often accompanied by necklaces and other items. Cylinders containing the king's name were on these necklaces.

Beside the pottery were found balls of thread, linen cloth, knives and tools of copper and flint, a copper mirror, fishing nets, wooden hoes, rakes, brick-mold, plasterers' floats, mallets, copper chisels with wooden handles.

Games were also found, such as dolls, a woven sling, draught-boards. Pieces of furniture also, such as a finely-made slender char of dark wood inlaid with ivory pegs. Blue glazed pottery was not unusual.

Papyri were also discovered, some carefully sealed up, such as the wills of Uah and Antefmeri. A hymn of praise to Senusret III, some pages of a medical work, a veterinary papyrus, mathematical works, and parts of legal letters, accounts and memoranda were also found.

The pyramid at Kahun One group of papyri derives from the temple of the royal cult and is concerned with temple organization and temple personnel, the other covers the life and business of the community involved with many other aspects.

A few documents actually deal with work outside Kahun, on a construction project for King Amenemhet III, possibly his own pyramid complex. Projects such as the dragging of stone by gangs of workmen, farming and measuring of land belonging to the temple estates, are subjects of some of these papyri.

Some of the legal documents included the amt-pr, a deed which recorded the transfer of property from one individual to another. One such will by a man named Mery transferred his priestly office and title of his property, house and contents, to his son, who would take on his office.

Other wills refer to members of one family. For example, the will of Sahu, an architect, leaves all his property and his slaves to his brother Uah, also an architect and priest of Sopdu, the falcon-god.

Uah in turn left a will, mentioned above, which transfers this property to his wife, giving her the freedom to pass it on to any of their children.

The next documents were the aput, official lists of a man's household, giving the names of the family members, and their slaves.

The third group of documents is the am rem.f lists. These were accounts which referred to the superintendents and workmen. Some were lists kept by the scribes for themselves, others formed part of an official journal which recorded the rations of the workmen, their attendance at the site, and some division of land and property.

The journal is of course interesting for its records, but it also highlights another aspect of the workmen's activities. It contains abstracts of a communication and reply centering round the apparent temporary withdrawal of manpower.

Some people were remaining at home instead of attending their work. The vizier or secretary suggested ascertaining what orders had actually been given, and to stop the people coming to the palace to air their grievances.

Considering there is a record of a strike out at Deir el-Medina several centuries later on, this incident in the 12th dynasty might foreshadow it.

The workers may have realized their potential power, and had gotten into the habit of staying away from the construction sites until their grievances were resolved.

In the 19th Dynasty the temple was cannibalized by Ramesses II for his own temple at Heracleopolis. By Petrie's time, it was little more than a ruin. But soundings and other archaeological work and study continue, and perhaps this first of the pyramid towns to be discovered will yield more secrets.

Naqada was the necropolis of the town of Nubt, the town of gold, known in Greek as Ombos. It had been devoted to the god Set, or Set of Nubt, Nubty, as he is called in the Pyramid Texts, and as evidenced by inscribed blocks found at Naqada.

Seth was thought to have been born in the Naqada region and had been connected with the kingship from Early Dynastic times at least, appearing on the macehead of King Scorpion. Along with Horus, Set was embodied in the person of the king.

First Dynasty queens held the title "she who sees Horus and Set," and the Second Dynasty king Peribsen emphasized

Set as his protector. There are ruins of the temple dedicated to Set which dates to the 18th Dynasty in New Kingdom times.

Naqada lies on the west bank of the Nile, downstream from Luxor (ancient Thebes), midway between Qurna and Dendara, and opposite Qena where the Nile bends.

It stood opposite the entrance to the Wadi Hammamat, one of the relatively few direct accesses to the Red Sea coast and the gold reserves of the eastern desert. Naqada and Koptos on the opposite bank were thus in good position to be the centers of Predynastic gold trade in the region.

The majority of Predynastic sites in Naqada region belong to this culture. The sites range in area from a few thousand square meters to 3 hectares. The settlements probably housed 50 to 250 persons.

Small postholes and the wooden stub of a post suggest flimsy wickerwork around a frame of wooden posts. Many dwellings were probably constructed from Nile mud and desert surface rubble.

The houses contained hearths and storage pits. Graves in some cases were dug right into the floor of the houses. Trash areas were interspersed with domestic dwellings. The houses included animal enclosures.

A portion of the site was termed "South Town" which was a walled town built of brick connected to a series of cemeteries. One of these, called cemetery T, seems to have been a rulers' cemetery, as the graves were lined with brick and were large and well-furnished.

A staggering total of 2,149 graves were discovered, packed into approximately 17 acres on the low desert overlooking the Nile Valley. Graves had been placed side by side, virtually saturating the area with tombs.

The study of the burials and their goods indicate the early stages of the Egyptian belief in an afterlife. Most of the inhabitants were buried in simple rectangular pits three to four feet deep, which were roofed with crude ceilings of interwoven branches and brush and capped of low mounds of dirt.

The dead were laid on reed mats in a contracted, fetal position, reclining on their left side with legs flexed and arms bent, hands in front of the face or neck.

With few exceptions, the head lay at the southern end of the tomb with the face pointing to the west. The deceased were accompanied by grave offerings reflecting their relative wealth and aspects of their daily life: tools like flint knives, scrapers and arrowheads; green slate grinding palettes with pigment stones; copper punches, awls and adzes, ornaments (some imported) such as shell and stone beads, containers crafted from stone, and a variety of fine, handmade polished red ware and black-topped red-ware jars, baked clay figurines, amulets and carved ivory plaques.

Mummification was not yet practiced at this time, but the hot dry desert sands preserved flesh and organic parts. Both men and women had long hair which they braided. Men were beardless and both men and women short in stature by modern Western standards.

Several graves were robbed of valuable objects like personal ornaments long before the first King ever took the throne. The looters thus had to be familiar with the funerary customs and burials.

Tombs varied from humble pits just large enough to accommodate a single body plus a few pots, to large brick-lined sepulchers 13 feet by 9 feet.

One grave contained more than 80 pottery storage jars, placed in a very specific manner as opposed to being haphazard. The northern end of the grave contained polished red or black-topped red ware, filled with gray ashes. In some cases a layer of some vegetable paste, perhaps a libation of thick beer, was poured on top of the ashes.

The southern end of the grave contained the wavy-handled jars. These were filled with a scented vegetable fat in the earliest burials, and gradually toward the end of the Predynastic period, these jars were filled with mud alone. Perhaps this indicated a social stratification of the "rich getting richer and poor getting poorer" type.

Body ornaments such as necklaces or bracelets were placed around the necks and arms of the deceased, while slate palettes, baked clay figurines, stone vases and knives, also appear but are not as carefully placed as were the storage jars.

One last connection to the development of Egyptian kingship that comes from Naqada should be mentioned here, especially with the current fascination for the Scorpion King and the continuing study of the earliest periods of Egyptian history.

A sherd fragment, now on display at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, shows what is interpreted to be a representation of the distinctive red crown of the king.

The sherd was found at Naqada itself, and formed part of a large black-topped red-ware vase dated from late Naqada I, Red was a color associated with Set. The drawing closely resembles the representations of the red crown Narmer wears as shown on his macehead and his palette.

The Red crown had later been considered the crown associated with Lower Egypt and the Delta. Yet here it was, in Predynastic times, linked with an Upper Egypt center. Could Narmer have completed a transfer expansion of power over Egypt which involved the Red Crown becoming associated with the Delta? There is more history to be found as work continues in Egypt.

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**Nubia Nubia**  
is located in today's southern Egypt and northern Sudan. The modern inhabitants of southern Egypt and Sudan still refer to themselves as Nubians. They speak the Nubian language as well as Arabic.

Thousands of Nubians from the north were forced to relocate from their endangered homelands to be resettled in Egypt and Sudan. This land has one of the harshest climates in the world. The temperatures are high throughout most of the year, and rainfall is infrequent.

The banks of the Nile are narrow in much of Nubia, making farming difficult. Yet, in antiquity, Nubia was a land of great natural wealth, of gold mines, ebony, ivory and incense which was always prized by her neighbors.

Nubia is the homeland of Africa's earliest black culture with a history which can be traced from 3100 BC onward through Nubian monuments and artifacts, as well as written records from Egypt and Rome.

The land of Nubia is a desert divided by the river Nile. For want of water and rich soil, most of Nubia has never been able to support a large population for long periods.

However, some of Africa's greatest civilizations emerged here, centers of achievement whose existence was based on industry and trade.

Because they did not write their own languages until very late in ancient times, we know these centers and their people largely through their archaeology and what the Egyptians and Greeks said about them.

To the ancient Mediterranean world, the land south of Egypt was a territory of mystery and legend. Wealth and exotic products came from there. It was the home of the Ethiopians, whom Homer called blameless and stories about its great achievements endured to tantalize the modern world.

This land is one of enormous distances, and its exploration was long impeded by problems of transport and political unrest. In the last hundred years, Nubia has slowly yielded its secrets, its vanished peoples, abandoned cities and lost kingdoms brought to light by the excavator and analysis of inscriptions.

This exhibit is a selection of objects recovered over twenty years ago by the Oriental Institute Nubian Expedition in the effort to rescue archaeology from the rising water behind the Aswan Dam.

In the 1960's, a dam was constructed at Aswan, Egypt. It created a 500 mile long lake which permanently flooded ancient temples and tombs as well as hundreds of modern villages in Nubia. While the dam was under construction, hundreds of archaeologists worked in Egypt and Sudan to excavate as many ancient sites as possible.

The Oriental Institute worked in Nubia from 1960 until 68. Today, the 5000 Nubian objects in the collection of The Oriental Institute Museum and thousands of objects in other museums are our sole resource for recovering the rich civilization of northern Nubia, for the sites themselves now lie beneath the waters of Lake Nasser. In contrast, expeditions from many countries are working in southern Nubia.