

# **Report on the work of the Egypt Exploration Society Delta Survey at Kom ed-Daba in 2012**

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Work at the ancient site of Kom ed-Daba in Kafr es-Sheikh (SCA reference is KS 090128) was continued in the 2012 season from the 10th to the 27th of March, continuing from the survey achieved in the previous year. This site is situated to the north-west of the town of Er-Riyad and consists of an archaeological mound measuring 500 x 545 metres. The personnel consisted of Patricia and Jeffrey Spencer with Chief Inspector Magda Zaki from the SCA.

## **Description of the work**

The work consisted of continued study and selective excavation of the mud-brick ruins in the northern part of the site, which had been briefly investigated in 2011. One large building was selected for detailed exploration. Its remains include some high brick walls standing above the general level of the surface of the mound, but these ruins are only the core of the original building and none of the original exterior wall faces had been located. We decided to limit our work to tracing the outside of the building because we knew from our research of the previous season that the interior was overbuilt by a later structure and not easily accessible. A plan showing the excavated area and its relation to the visible brickwork is given in Figure 13. Work began at the north side to try to find the position of the outer north wall in a trench of 2.3 x 4.7 metres (this size was dictated by the difficulty of working on the sloping ground in the area). By cleaning the edge of the visible brickwork and then following the continuation of the bricks below the dust that covered the present surface, an exterior face was reached some 2.4 metres distant from the standing brick remains (Fig.1). This face was then cleared for a length of 2.5 metres towards the east, at which point it had been cut by some later pitting. The pits were filled with traces of some industrial activity, consisting of ceramic slag and remains of lime. The fill beside the face of the wall was composed of soft wind-blown dust, empty of any archaeological material. This empty area was undoubtedly the location of an ancient street between the building under investigation and another one situated to the north. At a deeper level, the dust was replaced by more compact mud, created by material fallen from the wall itself.

The excavation was extended with a 4 x 3 metre trench to follow the building towards the east and south. In this area the continuation of the wall was found extending to the south, cut by deep pits full of empty dust (Fig.2). At first sight these hollows give the appearance of chambers within the building, but they are only the result of the removal of brick for sebak, and there is no doubt that the brickwork was originally a solid mass of great thickness. The section at the west side of the trench showed the irregular height to which these pits had reduced the brickwork (Fig.3). The southern end of the trench was increased in width by half a metre to include the exterior eastern face of the building. This was followed in another extension of 4 x 3 metres (later increased to 5 x 3 m, with the longer dimension running west to east) and offset to include more of the area to the east in front of the face of the wall. The brickwork of the building was found to continue to the south, where more deep pits were encountered, up to 2 metres in diameter, dug through the structure to remove the bricks. Continuing the excavation another 3 metres to the south finally reached the south-eastern corner of the whole building (see Figs. 4 and 13). The full length of the building from north to south was 10 metres. Although the north-east corner had been destroyed in the later pitting, its original position could be determined and the full extent of the building along its eastern side established. It is clear that all the brickwork revealed by the excavation belonged to the same wall as the high mass of mud brick that still survives above ground (Fig. 5). The difference in level from the top of this mass to the upper surface of the brickwork revealed in the excavation was 4.6 metres, an indication of how much of the brick has been removed. The outer part of the northern and eastern exterior walls had been cut down to a low level long ago to leave the high brick as a remnant of the core of the whole structure. In the late part of the season work was resumed

on the north wall, which was traced along the sloping ground for 12 metres to the corner with the west face of the building.

The building therefore had a rectangular plan of 10 x 12m and seems most probably to have been an example of a type of Ptolemaic town-house built with multiple floors, often four or five storeys high. The brickwork found in the excavation belongs to the foundation, which consisted of an almost solid podium of brick with perhaps just a few small internal compartments. These would have been filled up with earth in the foundation. The same kind of house is known in a good state of preservation at sites in the Fayum, such as Karanis. The house investigated this year is only one of several such house ruins at Kom ed-Daba, and it is probable that similar houses once existed over a wide area at the site, arranged along crossing streets.

From the middle of the east face of the wall of this house two thin walls, also of mud brick, extended to the east (Figs. 6 and 13). These had been built against the exterior of the main building. The more northern of these walls was 52cm in thickness and extended for 2.5 metres before continuing into the east section of the trench. At a point 74cm along its length from the exterior of the Ptolemaic house, a cross-wall ran southwards to meet the second thin wall extending from the face of the main building. This was only 35cm in thickness. Beyond this junction the depth of the first wall was reduced to only three courses of bricks, built over occupation-fill which extended to the north of the wall. From this area came a curious object of fired pottery, possibly part of a hearth (Fig.7). The bricks of all these small walls measured 36 x 18 x 11cm. Very little pottery was found in the excavation, the fill above the walls consisting of empty dust from the decay of the standing brickwork above. Only beside the face of the east wall of the house was there any concentration of pottery, consisting of a few discarded silt ware bowls dating from the Ptolemaic Period. Some fragments of Roman pottery were also found close to the south-east corner of the house, but these had been introduced in later pits. Almost all the pottery fragments were very rough products in coarse red wares. The forms that could be identified are drawn at one-quarter scale in Figure 12. The only other object found was part of a granite mortar. This object has two projecting lugs are preserved on the rim; there certainly would have been four on the whole object (Fig. 11).

List of pottery:

Flat dish or lid of coarse red silt clay, with traces of a red slip on the surface. (Fig.12, 1). Compare the example in Spencer, Excavations at Tell el-Balamun 1991-1994, pl.51, no. 13; pl. 84, nos. 1-2.

A bowl with a flat base and flared sides, made in uncoated red silt clay. (Fig.12, 2)

A rough bowl with a flat base and flared sides, made in uncoated red silt clay. (Fig.12, 3)

A bowl similar to the previous one, made in uncoated red silt clay. (Fig.12, 4)

An open bowl with a flat base and flared sides, also made in uncoated red silt clay. (Fig.12, 5)

A bowl with a flat base and carinated sides, made in uncoated red silt clay. (Fig.12, 6)

A bowl similar to the previous one but slightly smaller, made in uncoated red silt clay. (Fig.12, 7)

A open bowl with a flat base and flared sides, made in uncoated red silt clay. (Fig.12, 8)

A bowl of red silt pottery with remains of a polished red slip on the exterior. The sides turn inwards at the top. Unlike many Ptolemaic bowls of this shape, the base is flat, not the usual ring-foot. (Fig.12, 9).

Part of the side and rim from a wide bowl of red silt clay. (Fig.12, 10).

Part of the side of a deep bowl with convex sides and an external rim, made in hard red clay. (Fig.12, 11).

Part of the side of a bowl with convex sides and a low, rounded rim. Made of compact red clay. (Fig.12, 12).

Fragment from the base of a fine vessel of black ware, with a ring-foot. This was the only example of Delta Black Ware found (Fig.12, 13).

The base from a small vase, made of red silt clay with traces of cream paint on the exterior. (Fig. 12, 14).

A later building to the south-east of the Ptolemaic house

To the south of the house which formed the main focus of the excavation, an area of 5 x 4 metres was cleaned to reveal the walls of a small, later domestic building (Figs.8, 9). The walls of this were preserved up to the modern ground level and showed as pale traces on the surface. A section between the north wall of this building and the Ptolemaic house showed that the smaller building had been constructed much later, probably in the Roman Period. In the fill between the Ptolemaic house and the Roman building a few fragments of silt clay cooking-pots were found, of Ptolemaic date.

The north wall of the Roman building was 1.20m in thickness and built of bricks measuring 32 x 14 x 12cm. At its western end, where it entered the edge of the trench, there had been a doorway through the wall. The walls at the east and south were built of the same type and size of bricks; the thickness of the east was 1.08m. and that of the south wall, 1.16m. These walls were not founded at any great depth, but reached their base level after only a few courses of bricks. The south wall was particularly shallow, with a preserved depth of only 32cm. The small internal room of 2.7 x 3.2 metres contained very empty earth fill, but outside the south wall there was a dump of pottery containing fragments from cooking-pots, hearths and amphorae of the Roman Period.

The north wall was preserved only to a height of 80cm or six courses of bricks and had been built above an older one on a slightly different alignment, belonging to a house of an earlier period (Fig.10). This lower wall was likewise not very deep and its base was reached at a depth of 120cm below the ground surface. It consisted of bricks measuring 30 x 15 x 10cm. The alignment of this lower wall is indicated on the plan in Figure 13 by a dotted line. Both the upper and lower walls ran into the section of the excavation on the west, which provided the opportunity to study the profile between these walls and the corner of the Ptolemaic house. The latter had been constructed in a wide foundation-trench, which showed in the section extending some 1.5m from the south side of the house. Above the level of the top of this foundation-pit, collapsed brick and mud sloped down to the face of the later building, coming into contact with both the upper wall and the older one below. This shows that the wall of the Ptolemaic house did not begin to collapse until after the construction of the later building. The fill below the lower wall had been cut by the foundation-pit for the Ptolemaic house and must have been the oldest context in the area although judging by the limited quantity of pottery fragments recovered from it, the date would also have been within the Ptolemaic period.

This year's work has shown that the high mud-brick ruins at the north end of Kom ed-Daba belonged to multi-storey Ptolemaic houses, indicating that there was probably a prosperous settlement here during that period.



1. View from the north-east showing the cut-down north and east walls linked to the high standing brickwork.



2. View of the excavation from the north showing both the north and east walls.



3. West section, showing the mud brick cut by deep pits



4. The south-east corner of the Ptolemaic house.



5. The east wall and the connection back to the high mass of brickwork



6. View from above of the east wall cut by pits, with added walls against it



7. Ceramic moulding from a hearth or similar object.



8. Tracing the bricks of the later Roman building with the SCA Inspector.



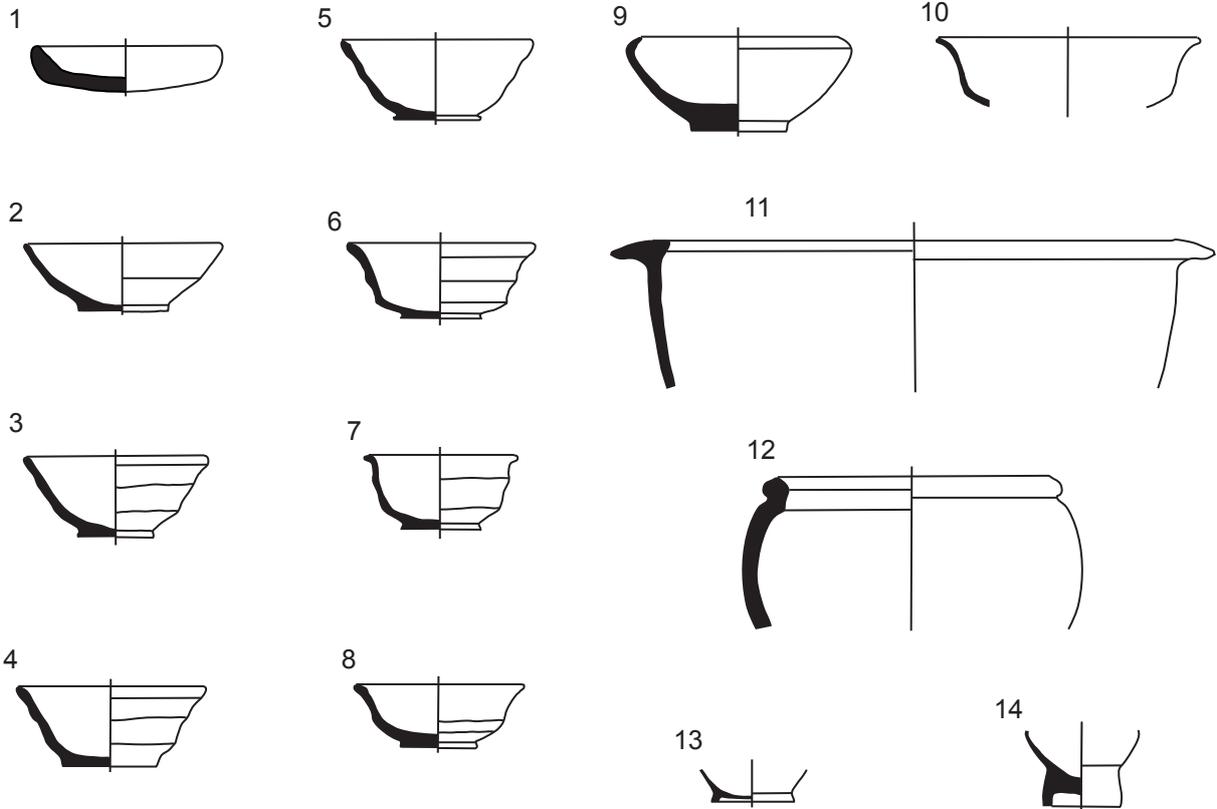
9. The later Roman building south of the Ptolemaic house.



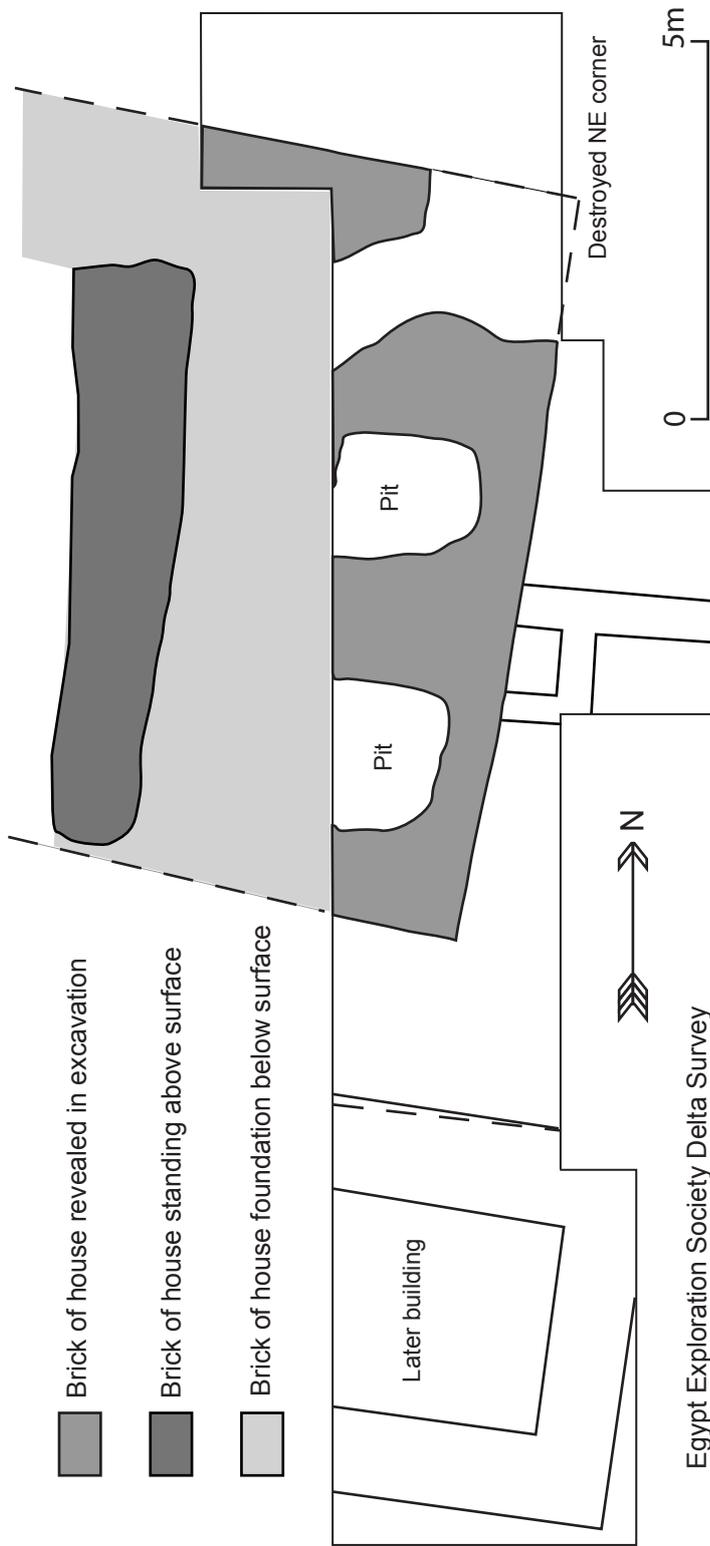
10. The north wall of the Roman building built over an earlier wall.



11. Part of a granite mortar.



12. Pottery.



Egypt Exploration Society Delta Survey  
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13. Plan of the excavations.