

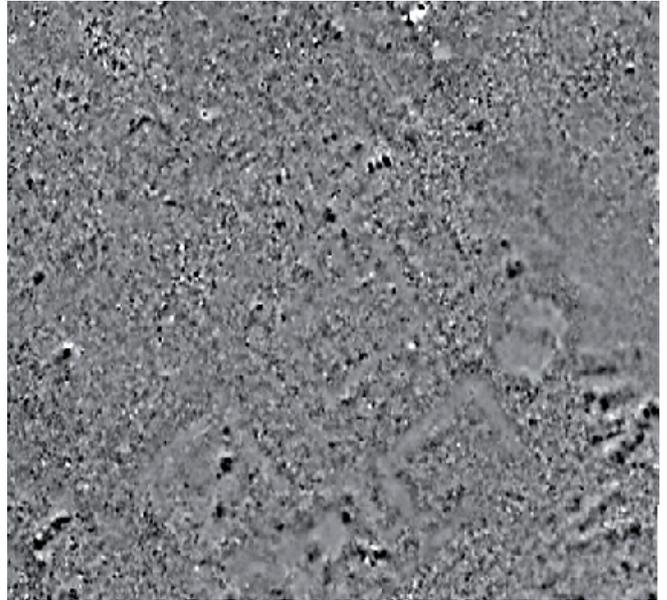
Tell Yetwal wa Yuksur

As part of the ongoing work of the EES Delta Survey, **Jeffrey Spencer** provides a summary of recent recording at the little-known site of Tell Yetwal wa Yuksur. A full report and the magnetic map of the site are available on the Delta Survey website (www.ees.ac.uk/research/delta-survey.html).

Tell Yetwal wa Yuksur is located 2km north of El-Masara and 4.8km north-west of the larger town of Bilqas, in the northern Delta. The site attracted brief attention in 1907 when part of a sarcophagus of the Late Period queen Wadjshu (probably the mother of Nectanebo II) was dug out of the mound for transfer to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, but there is no record of any subsequent archaeological interest. This made it a candidate for the general assessment programme undertaken by the EES Delta Survey, generously funded by the British Academy. A short visit was made in 2008 to check the extent and condition of the site, following which a magnetometer survey and some trial excavations were carried out, during two short seasons, in 2009 and 2010.

The mound rises to a maximum elevation of c.3m above the surrounding cultivation and measures just over 400m from north to south and c.360m from east to west. There is a small village on the eastern edge, at the end of a dirt-track from the nearby asphalt road. The surface in the higher parts of the site, towards the south end, is covered by loose dust which contains many fragments of red-brick and pottery, although most of the pottery is in a much eroded condition. An examination of the pottery revealed material from the Late Antique Period, but no certain older pieces in the accessible areas. Some fragments of red-slipped wares of around the fifth century, occasionally embellished with Christian motifs, were noted. On the surface of the site, there are also fragments of corroded bronze, glass fragments and Roman fired bricks.

On old maps from the early twentieth century, the site was named Tell Kurdud, but the name had changed to Tell Yetwal wa Yuksur by 1907. This unusual name (which means 'it gets longer and it gets shorter') arises from a local legend which alleges that a long granite block lying on the mound varies in size over the course



Detail of the magnetic map showing rectangular building plans

of the day. The stone in question was long thought to be part of a column, but in fact it is a slab embedded in the ground, with only the top visible, rounded by erosion. This is one of a group of some 20 large blocks of red granite which lie on the surface in the northern part of the site, with others half-buried. Among the other blocks are some which may once have had roughly rectangular shapes, but the surfaces have been eroded to rounded contours. Some of these blocks have been moved in modern times, and one is now lying just off the edge of the site, in a ditch beside the fields. In the light of the clear Late Antique occupation of the site, it is probable that this granite was used in the construction of a church, but of course it would have been quarried originally for a pharaonic temple. Whether that temple was at Tell Yetwal wa Yuksur or at another site in the vicinity is not possible to say. The fact that the surviving stone is all granite is a consequence of the usual manner in which ancient monuments are quarried, in which preference is given to the removal of the limestone which can be burned to make quicklime. Granite quarried anciently was often re-used to make mortars and for other durable purposes and so it is frequently found at settlement sites.

In March 2009, an area of 4.4 hectares of the mound was surveyed by magnetometry, including most



Coptic potsherd found on the surface of the site



SCA Inspector Yusri es-Sayed Ahmed explaining the origin of the site's name next to the so-called column



The magnetic survey in progress with the modern village in the background

of the western side of the site, and an additional area of 0.32 hectares was added in 2010. Part of the site at the south-east is occupied by a modern cemetery and is not, therefore, available for mapping. The results of the magnetic mapping at the south were not as clear as had been hoped, owing to the large amount of fired brick fragments in the surface dust. These fragments, because of their high magnetism, interfered with the readings and made features difficult to identify. The survey of the lower ground to the north-east produced better results and the outlines of several large buildings were revealed, arranged on a south-east to north-west alignment. These structures include at least three rectangular buildings, each of which is well over 20m in length. Once these buildings had been located on the magnetic map, their position on the ground was identified and a few small trenches cut in an attempt to determine their date from stratigraphic evidence. This excavation revealed that robbers' trenches had been cut along the walls to extract the building material after the abandonment of the buildings. The removal had been quite efficient and the trenches had been left open to fill up gradually with mud washed in by the rain - it is these mud-filled trenches which show in plan on the magnetic map. Test-trenches cut across the wall-lines revealed the water-laid mud in the original location of the wall, with more compact fill containing fragments of fired bricks around it. The width of the mud band was 2.5m, but robbers' trenches are often wider than the walls they intend to remove, to allow room to work, so the original wall was probably about 1.4m thick. Another test c.10m from the corner along the north-east side of the southern building revealed part of a plaster bedding layer for a floor, cut all along one side by the trench made to remove the wall, and by later pits on the other side. Excavation beside the remains of this plaster revealed the presence of an earlier plaster floor below a thin layer of fill. Around the remains of the floors were many pieces of red-fired bricks and a small quantity of pottery fragments of Late Antique date. From the fill on and around the upper plaster floor came a few small pieces of painted plaster, some of which bore both red and blue paint and may in fact have come from the walls

of the building. The lower floor had been built above a deep mass of compacted mud, probably the remains of a mud-brick wall belonging to an older archaeological level below the building. One side of the brickwork has been cut by the trench made to remove the wall of the building, which has sliced the mud brick at an angle. On the other side, the face of the wall had again been cut, this time by a pit driven down through the floor above. But at the west end of the trench the intact original face of the mud-brick wall was found, descending vertically and buried in a soft fill of earth. On excavating to greater depth, the foundation-level of the mud-brick was found

40cm below the base of the plaster floor, overlying a stratum of fill which contained broken fragments of limestone.

The date of the buildings can be established from construction materials and techniques to belong in the Late Antique Period but it is impossible to ascertain the nature or use of the structures. Little pottery was found in direct association with them but the small amount recovered in the vicinity, including ribbed sherds from amphora fragments and cooking-pots, appears to date from the fifth to seventh centuries AD.

The EES Delta Survey at Tell Yetwal wa Yuksur has surveyed the site for the first time, provided a magnetic map of the accessible parts of the site and established the date of the surface structures. It is now possible to say that the site was occupied in the Late Roman Period and may have had a monumental church with re-used granite elements from a pharaonic temple. The sarcophagus fragment of Queen Wadjshu was probably also moved to the site for reuse so there is as yet no evidence for earlier levels of occupation.



The plaster floors above the mud-brick feature

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