Qal'at Sheikh Hammâm (2020)

(Ottoman Fortification in Upper Egypt)

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Année de la campagne : 2020 (15 November – 15 December)

National Authority Presents: Ahmad Al-Shoky

Numéro et intitulé de l'opération de terrain : 19139 – Qal'at Sheikh Hammâm

Composition de l'équipe de terrain : The mission was composed of Ahmad Al-Shoky (archeologist, Ain Shams University, Institut d'Égypte), Mohammed Ibrahim (archeologist, Ain Shams University), Mohamed Gaber (topographer, Ifao) and Hamed Yousef (foreman).

Partenariats institutionnels: Ain Shams University

1. The site and its interest

- 1 The citadel of Sheikh al-'Arab Hammâm is located in Qena Governorate, near the village of Al-'Arakî, about 6 km southwest of Farshût. The site is remarkable for the presence of the citadel which faces the wadi el-Hûl, which leads to Darb el-Arba'in, the famous camel trail on which caravans have continued to circulate since remote times in the history of the Egypt. Never excavated to this day, this site constitutes a unique example of military fortifications from the Ottoman period that have survived in Upper Egypt (el-Şa'id).

2. The personality of Sheikh el-'Arab Hammâm

- 2 The site is deeply linked to the name of Sheikh al-'Arab Hammâm, Prince Šaraf ad-Dawla Hammâm ibn Yūsuf ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Hammâm known as Cheikh

al-‘Arab, one of the eminent personalities of the Ṣa‘īd born in 1709 (1121 H.) in Farshūt and died in 1769 (1183 H.). Historian al-Jabartī wrote about him¹:

The great and glorious man is dead. It was a refuge for the poor and the princes, a shelter for the elders and the nobles. The Sheikh of the Arabs, the Prince, the Honor of the State Hammām ibn Yūsuf ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Hammām ibn Ṣubeih ibn Sībīh al-Hawārī, great of the land of Ṣa‘īd whose goodness and righteousness covered the near and far [...]

- 3 Sheikh al-‘Arab Hammām extended his power over much of Ṣa‘īd, from Minyā to Aswan, and chose Farshūt as his capital. Building what can be called a state by establishing a diwān to run the affairs of the territories under his control, he formed a military force made up of Bedouin Hawāra and Mamluks fleeing the power of ‘Aly Bey el-Kebīr. The latter sent three armies to fight him until his fall. In this, Sheikh Hammām is one of the figures with central influence in Egypt in the second half of the 18th century.

3. Site description

- 4 The site consists of the remains of the citadel of Sheikh el-‘Arab Hammām, destroyed in 1769 by Muhammad Bey Abū al-Ḍahab during a battle and then ruined by the action of time and sand winds (figs 2-3). Large in area, it is made up of palaces, houses and various outbuildings. The citadel was built of mud bricks and its walls are about 6 m high. It consists of two separate buildings, main and secondary, flanked by defensive towers, and includes stores, grain mills and barracks.

4. Expected results of the excavations

- 5 The excavations will help answer several important questions such as knowledge of the organization of the citadel, construction methods and materials for both the foundations and the walls, as well as the study of the different elements ranging from simple coatings to arches, and domes, and more generally the search for architectural planning methods of this period. Added to this is the clearing of the parts that remain under the sands and the search for artefacts or objects that may be there, helping to reconstruct social life. These excavations will make it possible to lift the veil on the obscure points which still surround the frame of the citadel and its use, and will make possible the studies allowing its restoration and its preservation.

5. The results of the 2020 season

- 6 1) At first excavation team conducted an archaeological survey of the entire site in order to develop an archaeological vision of what the excavation and excavation work could reach, and it was found that the site is promising and very large. To facilitate the documentation work, it was divided in principle into a number of sectors starting from A to L.
- 7 2) The mission has produced a map of the site, on which the archaeological evidence that resulted from the archaeological survey has been included (fig. 1). The following elements has been found:

- The total area of the site is about 34 acres, not 18 acres, and 6 shares, as mentioned in the papers of Ministerial Resolution no. 2661 of 2011, as well as the papers of the Minister of Culture 661 for the year 2011 to register the site.
- The archaeological evidence is distributed over the entire site with a total area of 34 acres, which is the actual current boundary of the site. Therefore, we recommend, based on the survey and registration work, to correct the error contained in the registration decision of the Prime Minister's state as well as the Minister of Culture to record the actual area of the site, which is 32 acres.

Fig. 1. General plan of the site of Qal'at Cheikh Hammâm (M. Gaber).

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- 8 Cleaning works have started for the surface layer in Sector D (US 1001), which is a sand layer from which no walls or foundations protrude and is located roughly in the middle of the site, and it has been divided into five squares to facilitate excavation and documentation (part 1-5).
- 9 In Sector D (figs 4-6), many walls and foundations constructed with different types of mud bricks were revealed, which suggest that these walls were constructed in different periods, and it is likely that they belong to a number of houses because they contain many elements that suggest this, even if the excavation work has to confirm it during the following seasons. The next one will provide us with more evidence and proofs about the nature of these facilities.
- 10 With the development of the excavation work, many remarkable architectural elements emerged that emphasize the importance of this site and its role in understanding the traditional architecture of Upper Egypt: various construction methods for the walls and foundations, architectural elements such as domes, stairs (fig. 7) and a number of silos. In addition, a group of artifacts were recorded and handed over to the Inspection Department. All of this confirms that the coming seasons

will carry many answers about understanding the nature and history of this extended site, as well as revealing the relationship of these walls and finds with the castle.

- 11 The work in Sector D has resulted in a number of rooms with different spaces and shapes and may represent configurations of some residential homes, and perhaps also that they were built in different periods of time, which raises a set of questions: is there a connection between these houses, and is there a connection between these dwellings and the building of the castle? Are these buildings for the housing of families, or are they for the soldiers, or are they hotels for merchants, or are they rooms for some industrial facilities in this place?
- 12 A huge number of pottery chips of various shapes, colours and sizes were found, which will be studied later.

Fig. 2. Interior view of the castle's walls and rooms (A. Al-Shoky).

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Fig. 3. External view of the castle walls (A. Al-Shoky).

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Fig. 4. Sector D during excavation, revealing buildings and walls (A. Al-Shoky).

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Fig. 5. Part 4 in Sector D, after the excavation and discovery of buildings (A. Al-Shoky).

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Fig. 6. Part 2 in Sector D showing the buildings that were discovered (F. Abécassis).

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Fig. 7. One of the stairs that were discovered in part 2 (A. Al-Shoky).

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Fig. 8. Pottery with organic remains (A. Al-Shoky).

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NOTES

1. Al-Jabartî, *‘Aja’ib al-aṭār fî ‘l-Tarājim wa’l-Akhhbār*, vol. 1, p. 343.
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INDEX

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AUTHORS

AHMAD AL-SHOKY

Archeologist, Ain Shams University, Institut d’Égypte