

LES MAISONS-TOURS EN ÉGYPTÉ  
DURANT LA BASSE ÉPOQUE,  
LES PÉRIODES PTOLÉMAÏQUE  
ET ROMAINE

Édité par Séverine Marchi  
avec une préface de  
Dominique Valbelle



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*Dominique VALBELLE*

Située en bordure du delta oriental du Nil, dans la zone frontalière où se sont succédé de puissantes fortifications, depuis les mythiques « Murs du Prince » élevés au début du Moyen Empire pour prévenir une nouvelle invasion du territoire égyptien par des populations proche-orientales et le *khétem* de Tjarou au Nouvel Empire jusqu'à la forteresse de Péluse dans la deuxième moitié du premier millénaire av. J.-C., celle de Migdol se situe géographiquement à l'interface de plusieurs mondes : l'Égypte, bien sûr, le Proche-Orient et les pays de la partie orientale du pourtour méditerranéen. Dès le dernier quart du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C., l'empire perse a généré la circulation des modèles architecturaux et des techniques de construction à travers les différentes provinces qui le composaient. Il n'est donc pas surprenant que chaque saison ait révélé des matériaux, des modes de construction et des types de bâtiments inconnus jusqu'à présent ou attestés dans des régions très éloignées des bords du Nil.

Parmi les modèles architecturaux présents sur le site de Tell el-Herr, nous avons choisi, en 2012, de privilégier celui de la maison-tour et des bâtiments élevés sur de puissantes fondations à caissons, bien représenté dans plusieurs niveaux archéologiques, et d'inviter les collègues qui avaient eu l'opportunité d'en dégager et d'en étudier récemment en Égypte ou au Soudan, afin de tenter de mettre en évidence un certain nombre de spécificités structurelles et fonctionnelles. Ces présentations archéologiques ont été complétées par deux communications portant sur l'apport respectif de l'iconographie et des papyrus grecs. L'idée de cette rencontre s'est nourrie de visites de sites et de contacts encourageants avec divers collègues. Une table-ronde cofinancée par l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne (Paris IV)<sup>1</sup>, le CNRS<sup>2</sup> et le Ministère des Affaires Étrangères français<sup>3</sup>, s'est donc tenue au Centre de Recherches Égyptologiques de la Sorbonne les 29 et 30 novembre 2012<sup>4</sup>, avec l'accord de l'ensemble des institutions auxquelles appartiennent les spécialistes contactés<sup>5</sup>. Elle a été ouverte par M. Adelino Braz, responsable du pôle Sciences humaines et sociales à la Sous-direction des échanges scientifique et de la recherche.

1 Centre de Recherches Égyptologiques de la Sorbonne, École Doctorale n°1 « Mondes anciens et médiévaux », Fond d'Investissement pour la Recherche.

2 UMR 8167 « Orient et Méditerranée », équipe « Mondes Pharaoniques ».

3 Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (DGM/ATT/RECH – Pôle SHS).

4 Programme : Introduction par Dominique Valbelle, Les maisons-tours du site de Tell el-Herr par Séverine Marchi, Le quartier saïto-perse d'Hébova II par Elsayed Abd el-Aleem, Towerhouses in Tell el-Dab'a. The Late and Ptolemaic Period par Manuela Lehmann, Maisons-tours et organisation des quartiers domestiques dans les agglomérations du Delta : l'exemple de Bouto de la Basse Époque aux premiers lagides par Grégory Marouard, Tower houses in the sacral area of the temple of Bastet at Bubastis. New results par Eva Lange, Deux maisons-tours dans la chôra d'Alexandrie par Valérie Pichot, Industry and houses? Urban space and construction methods in Kom Firin during the Saite-Persian era par Neal Spencer, Les maisons-tours de Tebtynis par Gisèle Hadjiminaglou, Les maisons-tours de l'association religieuse à Touna el-Gebel par Melanie Flossmann, Les *pyrgoi* dans les papyrus grecs d'Égypte, Les maisons-tours dans la mosaïque de Palestrina par Jean-Yves Carrez-Maratray, Les édifices sur soubassement par François Leclère et Les soubassements à caissons des palais et demeures méroïtiques : une influence des *pyrgoi* ? par Marc Maillot, Conclusions par Mohamed Abd el-Maksoud.

5 CSA, IFAO, CEAlex, BM, OIC/HerMA (Poitiers), ÖAI, Univ. Göttingen, Freie Univ. Berlin.

Sur les treize communications présentées, quatre des intervenants n'ont pas souhaité donner un texte dans la présente publication en ligne. Notamment, Geneviève Husson<sup>6</sup> et François Leclère<sup>7</sup> s'étaient déjà exprimés sur le sujet dans les publications respectives de leurs doctorats, tandis que Elsayed Abd el-Aleem, qui traitait du site de Tell Héboua I aux périodes saïto-perses, devait réserver la primeur de ses découvertes à la rédaction de sa thèse, en cours. Neuf articles sont néanmoins présents dans cette publication dont la formule numérique a paru particulièrement adaptée à l'exercice de réflexion engagé et a été décidée par l'ensemble des participants lors de la séance de clôture. Conçu et mis en page par Séverine Marchi qui a co-organisé cette table-ronde avec moi, le présent volume est le numéro 2 d'une nouvelle revue en ligne gratuite, intitulée *Nehet*, de l'équipe « Mondes Pharaoniques » de l'UMR 8167 du CNRS « Orient et Méditerranée » et du Centre de Recherches en Archéologie et Patrimoine de l'Université libre de Bruxelles.

Les travaux évoqués ici illustrent, sur une dizaine de sites de la vallée du Nil, l'apparition dans le courant du premier millénaire av. J.-C. du modèle architectural de la maison-tour et de ses rapports avec des bâtiments également à étages, construits sur des plates-formes de fondation à caissons. On en connaît sur bien d'autres sites, tous les fouilleurs concernés n'étant pas disponibles aux dates fixées pour la rencontre ou n'ayant pas pu être joints à temps. La plupart sont néanmoins citées dans les contributions ci-dessous. Des maisons privées à un ou deux étages semblent avoir déjà existé en Égypte dès le Nouvel Empire, ainsi que le suggèrent, par exemple, les habitations figurant sur les murs des tombes de Djehoutynéfer (TT 104)<sup>8</sup> et de Nebamon (TT 90)<sup>9</sup>, du papyrus de Nakht (BM 10411) ou la maquette en pierre E 5357 du Musée du Louvre.

Peu de quartiers résidentiels antérieurs à la Basse Époque ont été fouillés de manière suffisamment extensive jusqu'ici pour que l'on puisse se faire une idée précise de la hauteur moyenne des bâtiments dans les grandes villes d'Égypte. Cependant, l'analyse que propose N. Spencer de l'évolution de la topographie urbaine sur le site de Kom Firin est révélatrice de transformations majeures dans la conception de l'habitat entre le II<sup>e</sup> et le I<sup>er</sup> millénaire. Les vestiges en brique crue sur les sites de Kom Firin, Bouto, Tell el-Dab'a et Tell el-Herr décrits ici se situent dans une fourchette chronologique comprise entre l'époque saïte et l'époque ptolémaïque, tandis que ceux de Tebtynis, Touna el-Gebel et les deux maisons tours en pierre de Marea datent exclusivement de l'époque ptolémaïque. Enfin, à partir de l'exemple du bâtiment d'El-Mouweis, le cas des palais méroïtiques est également abordé.

La répartition géographique des sites pris en compte donne la part belle à l'ensemble de la Basse Égypte, mais le Fayoum est bien représenté avec le site de Tebtynis où il est possible de mettre en évidence plusieurs catégories de bâtiments à étages. La Haute Égypte n'est évoquée qu'à travers le cas particulier des maisons du village de l'association religieuse qui bordaient le dromos et la voie processionnelle du temple de Touna el-Gebel. Le Soudan est également présent pour l'époque romaine.

Selon l'état des vestiges, la nature et l'étendue des quartiers mis au jour, les résultats présentés sont évidemment très inégaux, mais ils permettent déjà de se faire une première idée de la

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6 G. HUSSON, *OIKIA. Le vocabulaire de la maison privée en Égypte d'après les papyrus grecs*, Paris, 1983.

7 Fr. LECLÈRE, *Les villes de Basse Égypte au I<sup>er</sup> millénaire av. J.-C.*, *BdE* 144, IFAO, Le Caire, 2008.

8 PM I/1, 218 (5).

9 PM I/1, 183 (3).

diversité des caractéristiques architecturales et des fonctions que présente cette large catégorie de constructions qui se développe essentiellement à partir du VI<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C. L'objectif de cette rencontre étant de mettre en commun l'expérience acquise par l'ensemble des participants pour aider chacun à mieux percevoir, quel que soit l'état des ruines correspondantes, les spécificités des maisons-tours et bâtiments contemporains élevés sur des fondations à caissons en Égypte.

Les plus anciennes maisons-tours commentées ici, érigées à l'époque saïte, se trouvent donc à Tell el-Dab'a et à Bouto. La plupart de celles de Tell el-Dab'a présentent un plan carré ou rectangulaire, éventuellement en forme de L. Elles sont bâties sur de puissantes fondations à caissons qui ont parfois servi de magasins. Celles de Bouto, de plan carré à rectangulaire avec une distribution intérieure tripartite, sont bâties sur des fondations à caissons qui subsistent après un arasement intervenu plus ou moins tôt dans l'époque saïte. G. Marouard, qui a conduit une étude approfondie sur la maison en Égypte aux époques tardives, a pu mettre en évidence la relation entre ce type de construction et leur contexte urbain à Bouto comme sur d'autres sites contemporains. Sur les deux sites, les dimensions des maisons-tours varient entre 12/15 m et une vingtaine de mètres de côté.

À Tell el-Herr, se rencontrent des exemples de la période suivante. Les niveaux contemporains de la forteresse perse érigée durant la première moitié du V<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C, encore largement recouverts par les vestiges de bâtiments postérieurs, n'ont pas livré jusqu'à présent de vestiges de maisons-tours dans les quartiers accessibles. En revanche, les fondations de trois bâtiments attribuables à ce type ont été mises au jour dans les niveaux de la deuxième forteresse édifiée au tournant du V<sup>e</sup> au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Les deux plus anciennes furent élevées en briques cylindriques, tandis que la troisième, attribuable au deuxième quart du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle et qui s'appuie sur l'arasement d'un bâtiment antérieur, est construite en briques rectangulaires. Quoiqu'elles appartiennent à deux catégories nettement différenciées, l'une d'elle de plan rectangulaire ayant une superficie au sol nettement plus réduite — 9 m sur 6 m — que les deux autres — 16,70 m sur 16,30 m et 13,75 m sur 13 m —, elles présentent toutes les trois une répartition interne tripartite, comme ailleurs.

Toutes les autres maisons-tours décrites dans ces pages datent de la période lagide pour laquelle nous obtenons donc une vision plus représentative de ce mode de construction manifestement en plein développement à l'époque, aussi bien dans d'anciennes villes du Delta et de la vallée du Nil que dans des territoires situés en bordure des terres cultivées, où l'espace ne manquait pas. L'analyse archéologique de certains de ces *pyrgoi* a permis de définir leurs fonctions. L'intérêt des exemples développés ci-dessous réside aussi dans la variété des contextes géographiques et urbains auxquels ils renvoient respectivement : le village de l'association religieuse de Touna el-Gebel aménagé le long de la voie processionnelle qui conduit vers le dromos du temple d'Alexandre IV, la partie sud de celui de Tebtynis en lisière méridionale du Fayoum, l'agglomération qui se superpose au site de Tell el-Dab'a, les niveaux ptolémaïques de la forteresse de Tell el-Herr, les quartiers situés en bordure nord-est du Kôm A de Bouto et l'agglomération de la presqu'île de Maréa qui comportait des fondations en pierre.

Parallèlement à cette analyse d'un certain nombre de maisons-tours présentant de nombreuses caractéristiques communes, a été évoqué le modèle architectural des grands bâtiments sur fondations à caissons qui se multiplie en Égypte et au Soudan, à la Basse Époque comme aux périodes grecque et romaine. L'exemple développé ici est celui d'un palais romain du site de Mouweis. Mais F. Leclère a rappelé que ce mode de fondation a supporté des bâtiments aux fonctions distinctes : palais, bâtiments administratifs divers, *chén'a ou 'ab*, etc.





# TOWER HOUSES IN TELL EL-DAB'A. THE LATE AND PTOLEMAIC PERIOD

*Manuela LEHMANN* \*

**T**ower houses of the Late and Ptolemaic Periods consisted typically of very solid and often deep foundations made of casemates. As this workshop made clear, this architectural type was used for a huge range of different buildings, having among others administrative, prestigious, defensive or domestic purposes. In Tell el-Dab'a the buildings of this type are mainly used as living houses among other smaller houses. This article shall give a short insight into these living houses.

In the New Kingdom Tell el-Dab'a constitutes the southern part of the capital of Pi-Ramesse that expands up to the modern village of Qantir, which is about 3km to the NE of Tell el-Dab'a. It is mainly known for the Temple of Sutekh (Seth) that was surrounded by a large mud brick enclosure of *ca* 200m x 150m. Tell el-Dab'a could also be identified as the

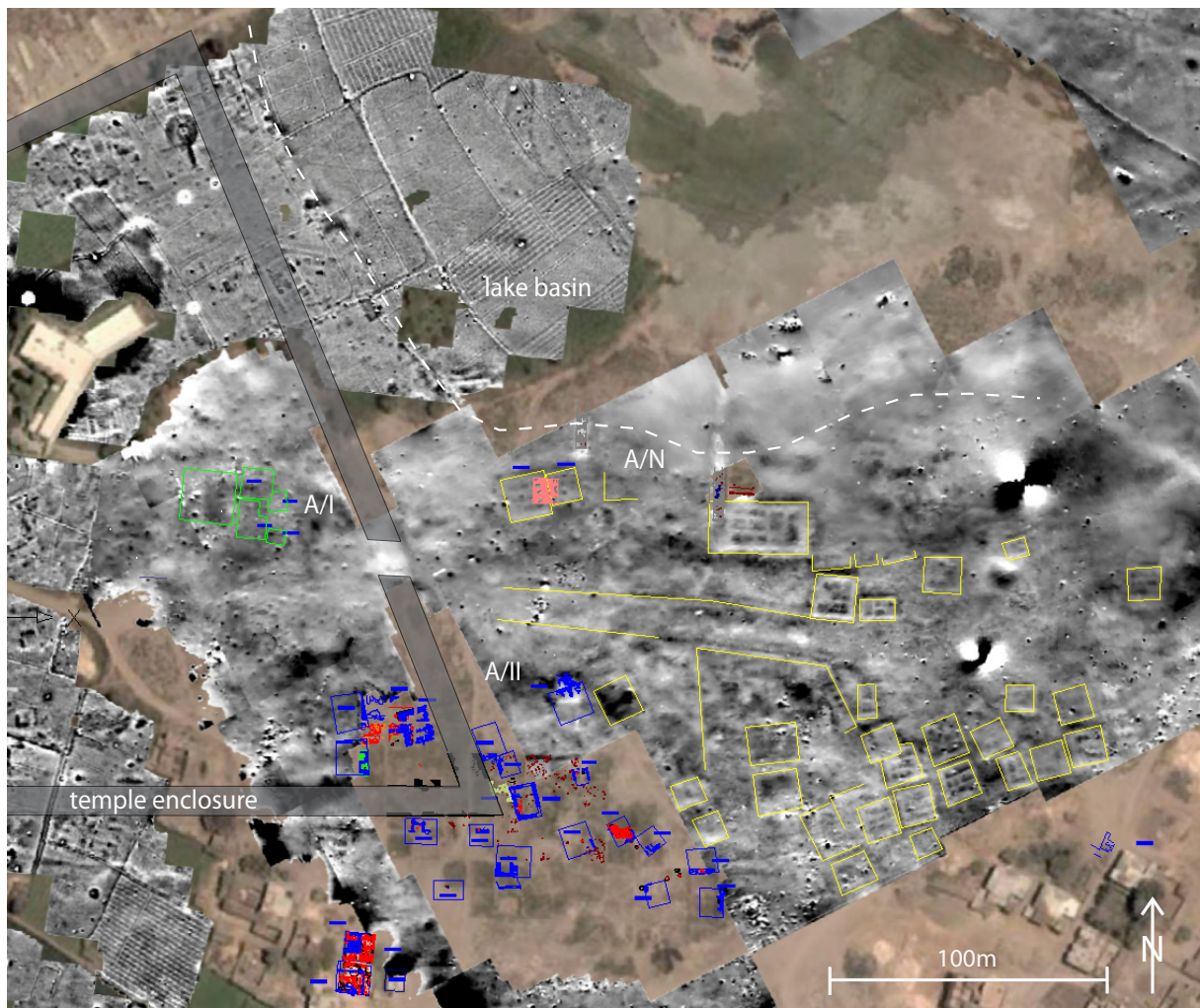


Fig. 1. New Kingdom Temple Enclosure of Sutekh and Late Period Houses on the Main Tell, © OEAI

harbour of Pi-Ramesse<sup>1</sup>. At around the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty, the capital was shifted to Tanis due to the silting up of the Pelusiac Nile branch by that time and the site of Tell el-Dab‘a was abandoned.

After the site was resettled in the 26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, the enclosure of the New Kingdom temple must have been visible because many houses of the settlement are still in the same alignment. Perhaps due to a basin that lay directly east of the enclosure, the east wall of the temple here has the shape of a trapezoid with the eastern wall oriented NNW-SSE, while the southern wall is oriented E-W (**fig. 1**). The buildings close to the eastern wall and further east of it follow therefore this NNW-SSE wall alignment while the buildings close to the southern wall are N-S oriented. The orientation of the houses depends therefore on the topography of the site and its architecture standing at that time.

Originally the tell of the site was so large that it was possible to walk on it without interruption from Tell el-Dab‘a to Qantir 3km in the NE<sup>2</sup>. Due to the enormous reduction of the ancient tells in the Delta by the *sebbakhîn*, the uppermost layers are less well preserved. Pottery indicates that settlement continued here at least until Roman times, but no architecture of this time survived. The remains of the Ptolemaic Period are only preserved in the highest part of the tell, while remains of the Late Period are found spread across the region of Tell el-Dab‘a<sup>3</sup>.

The full extent of the settlement in the Late Period can only be estimated, but due to the many remains, an area of *ca* 1100m East-West and 600m North-South, which is *ca* 66 hectares, can be suggested (**fig. 2**).

### The Late Period tower houses

On the main tell (Area A/I, A/II and A/N) 50 buildings of the Late and Ptolemaic Periods were partly excavated, in the areas F/II, H/III and A/IV indirect traces of 23 buildings are preserved and about 30 more buildings with casemates are visible in the magnetometry plan<sup>4</sup>. All in all more than one hundred buildings are therefore attested for the settlement of the Late Period, which originally was larger still, as the gap between area F/II and the main tell was also most probably settled (**fig. 2**).

With some certainty, about 40-50 of these hundred buildings can be identified as tower houses.

The main tell itself slopes downwards to the east and south. This was already the case in antiquity as can be seen on the levels of the walls. In the eastern part of the tell only the casemate foundations of the houses survived. These are visible very clearly in the magnetometry results (**fig. 1**). In the western part of the tell the buildings are preserved to higher levels and in some cases the floor levels could be identified. In this area the magnetometry results are less clear due to the upper parts of the walls and the rubble around the houses. Here only excavated structures give information about the establishment of the settlement.

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1 BIETAK & FORSTNER-MÜLLER, 2001, p. 23-50, with further literature.

2 GRIFFITH 1888.

3 The first buildings were already discovered in the first excavation seasons. Cf. BIETAK 1968, p. 79-114; BIETAK 1970, p. 15-42.

4 FORSTNER-MÜLLER *et al.* 2007, p. 97-106.

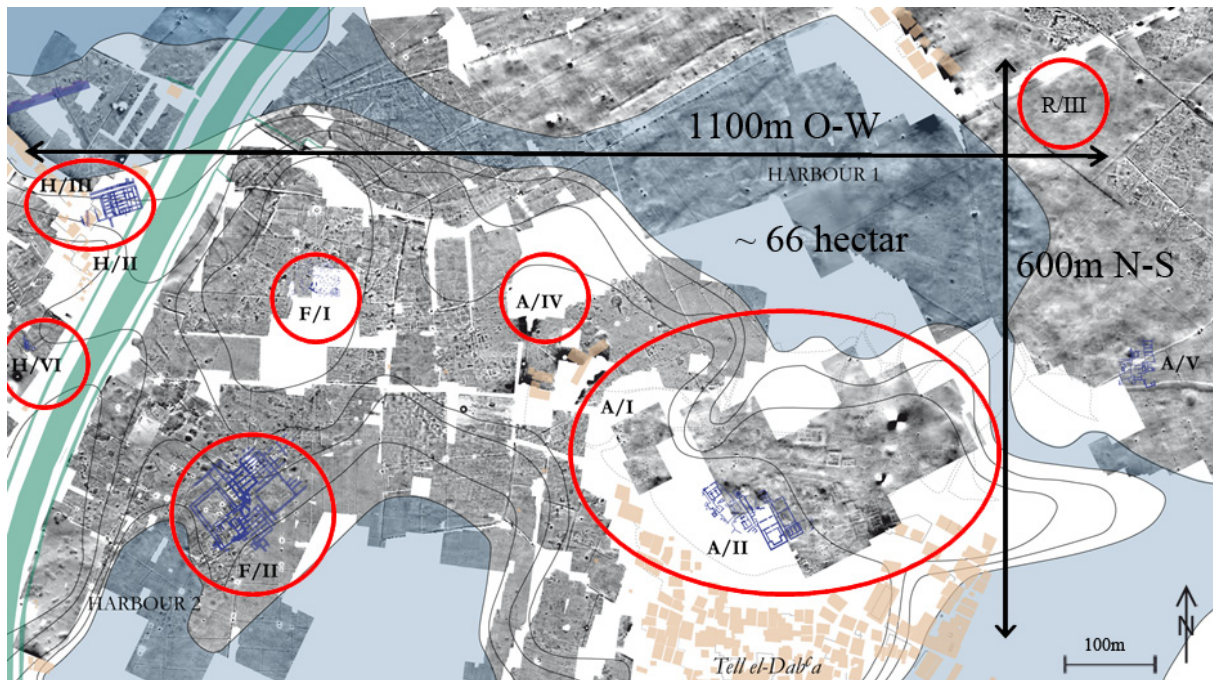


Fig. 2. Remains of Late Period settlement in all areas of Tell el-Dab'a, © OEAI

The most common size of the 50 buildings excavated in Tell el-Dab'a is about 12 x 12m. These houses often have foundations with a framing wall of 1.5-2.0m and frequently show nine casemates arranged in three rows. The largest buildings have a size of 19 x 19m (361m<sup>2</sup>) and 22 x 32m (704m<sup>2</sup>) with a frame wall of 3-4m in breadth, while the dimensions of the smallest building are *ca* 5 x 5m (25m<sup>2</sup>).

Compared to other sites in the Delta, the larger houses in Dab'a show similar dimension to the Saitic buildings from Buto (Area N of Sekhmawy)<sup>5</sup>, and the smallest houses of 5 x 5m coincide with many smaller buildings from Tell el-Herr, for example buildings 3, 4 or 7<sup>6</sup>.

In Tell el-Dab'a as well as in Buto and other sites smaller and larger structures are found immediately next to each other. No spatial organisation according to the size of the buildings can be seen in any of the settlements.

The ground plan of the buildings in Tell el-Dab'a is mainly square or rectangular, seldomly houses are also built in an L-shaped form. Casemates or horizontal strips which are filled up with rubble are used for the foundations. In some cases foundation trenches were used, in other cases the buildings were built on top of older buildings from the New Kingdom. This can vary even in the same building, some parts being built with foundation trenches, other parts without<sup>7</sup>.

Some of the buildings in Tell el-Dab'a show already the panbedded brickwork that later becomes so typical for tower houses, while some other houses still consist of horizontal layers of bricks.

Sometimes two different types of bricks were used, dark grey bricks and lighter beige-greyish bricks. Only in one case the regular matting used in the walls between the brick courses still could be documented due to the impressions that it left in the soil. Other organic material that

5 HARTUNG *et al.* 2003, p. 199-267.

6 VALBELLE 2007, p. 134.

7 This is also known from Ashmunein, see SPENCER 1996, p. 215.



was very frequently used in tower houses, for example wooden beams within the walls, doors, stairs, windows, wall niches, floors etc. was not preserved because of the humid conditions in the Delta.

Typical brick sizes used for the buildings of this period in Tell el-Dab'a are 40-45 x 17-22 x 8-10cm and more seldom attested smaller ones of 34 x 16 x 8cm.

The best example of a tower house from the Late Period is the building in A/II h-i/10 - 11. This building has already been described in further detail in the preliminary report of the excavation<sup>8</sup>. With its rectangular ground plan and the three horizontal foundation parts, it is an example of an earlier tower house (end of 26<sup>th</sup>, beginning of 27<sup>th</sup> Dynasty), marking the transition to the typical form of the Ptolemaic period showing a square ground plan and square casemates. The foundations of only one metre are not very deep, the wall thickness nevertheless was large enough to support a building up to four or five storeys<sup>9</sup>. Excluding the frame wall of 1.30m at the ground level, the size of each floor was approximately 70m<sup>2</sup>. A building with five floors and a roof terrace would have had an area of about 420m<sup>2</sup>.

As typical for these buildings, the walls of the ground plan are slightly concave and the walls are much thicker in the foundations, becoming thinner with every floor. While the outer wall is sloped, the inner wall gets thinner by stepping inwards at certain heights for the size of half a brick or a brick, sometimes even for two bricks. The foundations of this house vary between 1.70 to 2.45m, stepping inwards to 1.30m at the ground level.

The inner structure of the house consists of a large northern room and a smaller southern room as well as a staircase. Part of the inner equipment of the houses were pits in the floor, often with fragments of limestones inside. They were used as placement for storage jars; one of them was found still *in situ*. Apart from those also square structures built by stones sometimes divided the inner rooms.

The finds inside the house consisted of many grinding stones and bread plates which prove that the room was used, among other purposes, for producing bread.

West of the building lay an open courtyard, in which another pit containing an imported Clazomenaen amphora was discovered. Pits with storage vessels are a very frequent feature found both inside and outside of the tower houses of Tell el-Dab'a.

A good example for a square casemate building can be seen for example in Area A/I - e/17<sup>10</sup>.

The building in the west of this area measures *ca* 17 x 17m (**fig. 3**). Only the casemate

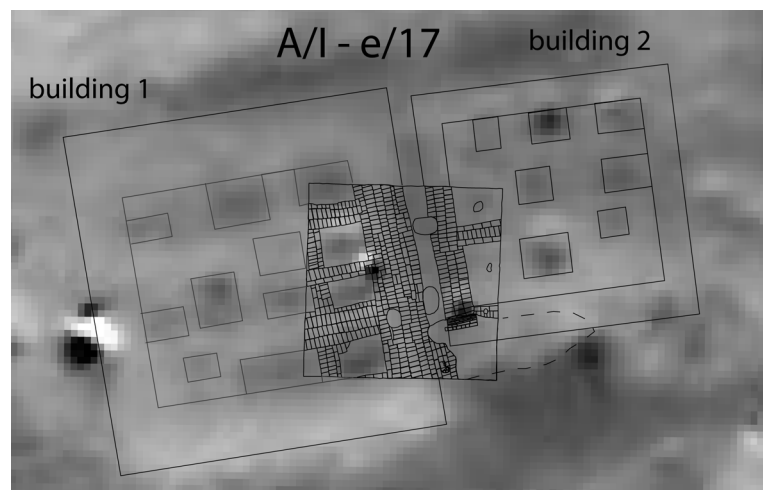


Fig. 3. A/I - e/17 Building 1 and Building 2

<sup>8</sup> LEHMANN 2011, p. 47-65, a short report see also LEHMANN 2012, p. 29-31.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. the reconstruction of the houses of Elephantine: ARNOLD 2003, p. 169, tab.13.

<sup>10</sup> LEHMANN 2012-2013.

foundations of the house were preserved. As with the building in A/II - h-i/10-11, this structure consisted also of two different kinds of unburnt mud bricks, a darker grey sort with a size of 40 x 22 x 10cm and a slightly larger type with a beige color at 44-54 x 20-22 x 10cm. The framing wall shows a thickness of five bricks (2.20-2.30m) that were all headers. Only four brick courses were preserved and it also shows panbedded brickwork.

The inner walls of the casemates differ in size between one and three and a half bricks in breadth (0.6-1.6m). They are all abutted to the framing wall and therefore were built in a later working phase. The six casemates that were excavated have a size of 2 x 1.25-1.85m. Between this and the eastern building there is a small alley of 0.8-1.0m. Since the outer walls of the buildings were sloping, the alley would expand in breadth in the upper parts.

The eastern building is also square but at 12 x 12m, somewhat smaller than the building in the west. The framing wall is 1.20-1.40m broad. A large pit in the south western corner of the house disturbed the structure but revealed that the framing wall was set into a foundation trench of 1.93m. In this trench the wall is 15cm broader than in the upper brick courses. The frame wall had eight brick courses preserved and shows therefore a foundation of just under one metre. The inner walls are bonded with the frame wall, and were therefore built at the same time. They are two bricks (0.90m) broad.

### **The Ptolemaic Period tower houses**

The Ptolemaic Period in Tell el-Dab'a is preserved only on the highest part of the tell, in the northwestern region of Area A/I which measures *ca* 90 x 60m and therefore does not allow conclusions to be made concerning the original extension of the city in Ptolemaic times. In eleven squares the remains of eight buildings belonging to three different phases were partly excavated (**fig. 4**).

The oldest phase that was reached in these squares in 2011 is formed by building E which is orientated to the north (with a small deviation to the northwest) and therefore is different to all the other later buildings. This building E was later overbuilt by building F in the north and building B in the south both of which constitutes the second phase. Their orientation is slightly northeast which is clearly different to the northwestern oriented houses from the Late Period (**fig. 3**). Building G to the west of building B and F has the same orientation and therefore should be approximately contemporary with the other two houses. Building B was then later overbuilt by building A, forming the third phase. Building A has a more northeasterly orientation.

In four of these five buildings horizontal ash layers between the layers of brick in the walls could be documented. These ash layers were traceable in larger parts of the walls, being situated about 10cm above the floor level, but no traces of ash could be found in the floors of the buildings themselves nor were there any hints of burning in the rooms. These ash layers were only few centimetres thick (see for example the ashlayer in building G, **fig. 5**).

In the city of Shibam, Yemen, where tower houses are still built nowadays, horizontal layers of salt mixed with ash are used in the foundations of the walls to prevent insects from getting

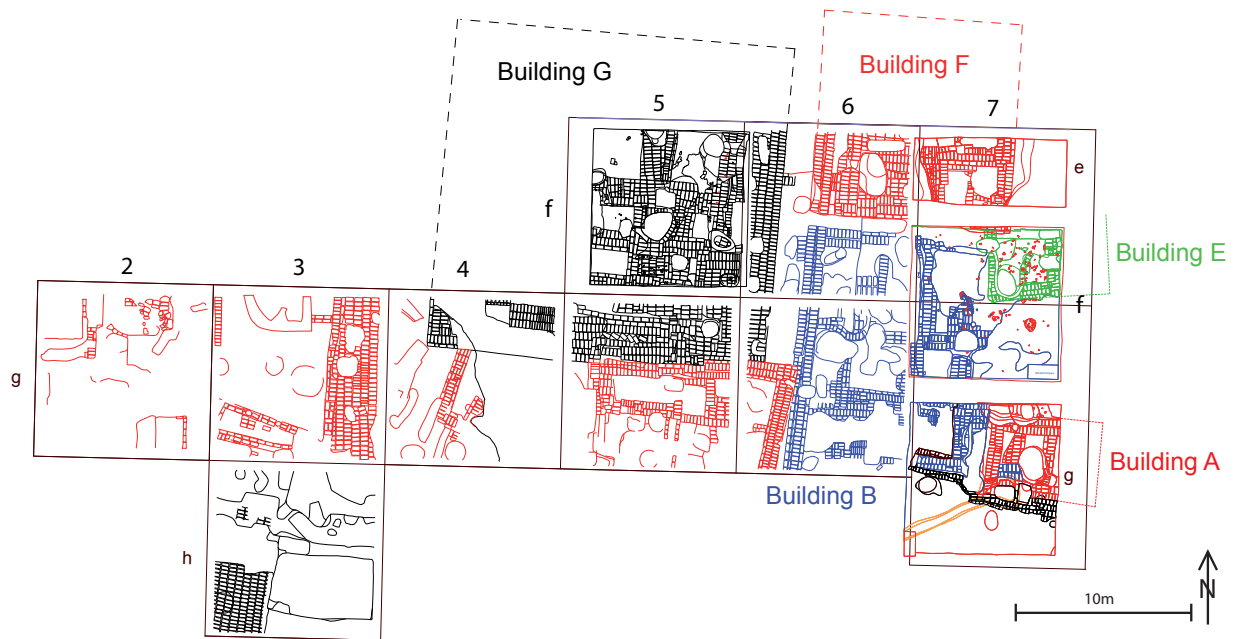


Fig. 4. Area A/I, Ptolemaic settlement in three phases, © OEAI

into the masonry<sup>11</sup>. If the ash layers in Tell el-Dab‘a also consisted of salt could not be tested yet, as the walls were not taken down. Parallels for horizontal ash layers in tower houses are so far unknown but ash between the vaults of the cellars and the first floor are also known from Tuna el-Gebel<sup>12</sup>.

As a good example building G shall be described in detail. Although this building was only partly excavated, the foundation wall of the building was reached in some parts of the building (**fig. 6**).

The surface of the tell in this area was sloping down so that the southwestern part of the structure is much more poorly preserved than in the higher part in the northeast which still consists of about one metre high standing walls above the foundations. The house was probably square and measured 19 x 19m, being one of the largest buildings in Tell el-Dab‘a. The framing wall had a breadth of seven to eight bricks (3.0m) consisting mainly of headers. The size of the floor therefore is *ca* 361m<sup>2</sup> for each storey, and without the framing wall 118.8m<sup>2</sup> remain. If the building had four floors and a roof terrace the house would have a size of 594m<sup>2</sup>, with five floors 712m<sup>2</sup><sup>13</sup>.

In building G the floor level was still preserved. In the middle part of the eastern frame wall a part of the wall protrudes into the building. In the northern corner between this protruding part and the frame wall a pivot stone made of limestone was found. This seems to have been the entrance of the building. In the southern part of the building three walls form a niche, in which some pottery was preserved. In the same area a concentration of ash was found within the room,

11 DAMLUJI 1992, p. 136; this is also reported by TOM LEIERMANN, whom I want to thank for this information. Ash was used for repelling insects in Egypt from the Old Kingdom onwards, usually under silos as the settlements of Edfu and Elephantine show; other examples of ashlayers were found in Amarna, see: MILLER 1987, p. 14-15.

12 For this information, I would like to thank Mélanie Flossmann-Schütze.

13 ARNOLD 2003, p. 169, tab.13.





Fig. 5. Ash layers in wall M124, © OEAI

all in all three ash layers in alternating with three mud floor levels could be documented here (see matrix, **fig. 7**). In this niche the highest concentration of ash was found, spreading into the northwest and also into the northeastern part of the building.

The first floor in building G was the mud floor L327, which was *ca* 10cm thick. Fragments of dishes and jars were found. On top of it the first ash layer L314 follows which included charcoal, sherds and remains of beige plaster. The difference in colour in comparison with the layers above and below was very clear. The thickness of this layer varied from 1-6cm. The second floor layer L296 followed and it still had rests of a beige plaster as floor in the niche. Also here fragments of dishes were preserved. The thickness of this layer was *ca* 6-10cm. Above it the second ash layer L272 was traceable in the whole southern part of the building. It was only 2-4cm high, still containing rests of plaster fragments, four sherds being formed into round objects ('tokens'), one grinding stone and some sherds including fragments of a beaker, a pigeon pot and an oasis vessel, the latter probably deriving from a pilgrim flask. This is the only layer in which traces of fire were preserved in this building. In L268, west of the niche, an area of 80cm north-south and 40cm east-west show the typical red colour of a burnt mud floor. Also in the northeast of the niche some traces of fire were visible. On top of L272 was then the third floor level L261, being between 3-10cm thick. Fragments of a persian arrowhead, some seal impressions and a wadjet eye were found as well as a face made of clay that might have been part of a vessel.

The thickest ash layer L225 which also represents the last layer before the house was abandoned, was *ca* 8-10cm thick. This layer consisted of very compact soil into which a lot of charcoal and pottery sherds were pressed and when the soil was removed it still showed



Fig. 6. Ground plan of Building G

impressions of papyrus matting<sup>14</sup> underneath. In this niche the tip of an iron knife as well as a fragment of a New Year flask of faience were found and also fragments of four small dishes, consisting of the typical Nile silt with a lot of chaff and a red slip.

Except for the traces of fire, nothing was found to explain the accumulation of the ash layers. So far no ovens, fireplaces or hearths were discovered in this building, although the western and northern third remain unexcavated. It may be that whatever was being produced here was being made in portable braziers that are very typical for this the Late and Ptolemaic Period.

Very common in mud brick buildings are installations made of mud brick inside the rooms, for example rectangular or rounded compartments. Those were often used in kitchen or production areas as storage facilities. This can be found in building G as well. In the northern part of this building a mastaba like structure, which consisted of two compartments, was built against a wall. This functioned like a cupboard and there still was some pottery *in situ* consisting of several jars, globular storage jars, fragments of dishes and a jug.

<sup>14</sup> I would like to thank Dr. A.J. Clapham for this information.



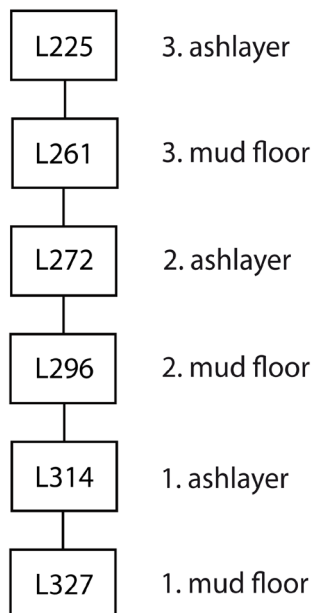


Fig. 7. Matrix of ashlayers and mud floors in niche, Building G

Parallels for the mud brick installation are known, for example, from Ashmunein<sup>15</sup>, Tell el-Herr<sup>16</sup>, Elephantine<sup>17</sup> and Tuna el-Gebel<sup>18</sup>.

Inside and outside of the rooms of the Ptolemaic houses some remains of wall plaster were still partly preserved, some of them still *in situ*. Here two different kinds can be distinguished: inside the rooms a white plaster made of gypsum and lime could be found, whilst a beige plaster was preserved sometimes outside the houses on the outer walls as well as on one floor inside.

In Area F/II, 17 pits with storage vessels which would have originally related to building structures as well, could be found. Some parallels from Area A/II show, that the pits can be situated inside and outside the houses. Since no architecture was preserved, the pits here originate probably from courtyards belonging to houses. The majority of the pits showed an oval form, with the size of 1.0-1.5 x 0.6-1.0m, and

contains one large two-handled storage vessel of a rough Nile C clay with a typical bulging base. Sometimes the vessels still contain a smaller pot which might have been used as a scoop to remove some of the original content like grain or other substances out of the bigger vessel. Due to their spatial distribution one pit can be allocated to one building, which provide indirect proof of the settlement even though the associated architecture is not preserved.

## Summary

The different examples briefly presented here show that the tower houses in Tell el-Dab'a constitute an important type of house within the settlement. In some areas they can be found between other lower buildings while in other parts of the settlement they are the major type of building used. The tower houses in Tell el-Dab'a were clearly used for a domestic purpose as the finds indicate. Since no upper storeys of the houses are preserved the reconstruction is mainly based on the thickness of the mud brick walls which easily allows 4-5 storeys for many of the buildings.

As the whole settlement of the Late Period in Tell el-Dab'a is not completely known and analysed yet, it is still difficult to say how this domestic area is related to other functional parts of the settlement. Administrative buildings could not be identified so far. A larger rectangular building in the northern part of the Tell (see **fig. 1**) can probably be identified as a Late Period Temple due to parallels from Tell el-Herr<sup>19</sup> and Tell Hebua. However if and how the tower houses were related to this building is still unknown.

15 SPENCER 1993, site W, square k10, no. [1021], see pl. 3 and 5d.

16 VALBELLE 2007, for example bâtiment 9, 12, 13, 14, fig. 86, p. 129, 137-138, 140-141.

17 KREKELER 1996, p. 113, fig. B7.

18 FLOSSMANN-SCHÜTZE 2011, p. 26-37, Abb. 13.

19 VALBELLE 2007.

The estimated area of the Late Period settlement with at least 66 hectare show that Tell el-Dab‘a was a quite substantial settlement of the northeastern Delta in the Late Period. Apart from the unknown exact size and spatial organisation of the Late Period city of Tell el-Dab‘a its ancient Egyptian name is still unknown for so far no textual evidences pointing to the original toponym have been discovered.

As the settlement of Tell el-Dab‘a is lying on the Pelusiac branch of the Nile and was situated across several geziras, the high tower houses standing very close to each other must have formed an interesting skyline as seen from the Nile.

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