

EXCAVATIONS AT SELIB 2 IN 2012

Roksana Hajduga,¹ Katarzyna Solarska²

^{1,2} Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Polish Academy of Sciences

Abstract: Selib 2 is a Meroitic settlement site of the 1st–4th century situated on the right bank of the Nile, 9 km upstream from the Christian pilgrimage site of Banganarti. Archaeological excavation in 2011/2012 was focused on two (of three recorded) Meroitic houses located in the northeastern part of the site. The mud-brick architecture was preserved at foundation level. Large amounts of pottery, stone finds and bone fragments were collected for further analysis.

Keywords: Dongola Reach, Selib 2, Meroitic, settlement, house, pottery

Selib is a multicultural site located in northern Sudan between the Third and Fourth cataract, on the right bank of the Nile, 9 km upstream from the Christian pilgrimage site of Banganarti. It comprises three separate locations at some distance from one another. Selib 2 once occupied Tanqasi Island on the Nile, now incorporated with the right bank. It is part of a more than a kilometer long belt of Meroitic ceramics from the 1st–3rd century AD scattered over the surface, extending along the Nile backwater (Żurawski et al. 2013: 285; Hajduga 2013: 289).

Excavations at Selib have been conducted since 2008, and at Selib 2 since 2010, by an expedition from the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology of the University of Warsaw, directed by Bogdan Żurawski (Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences). Earlier work at the

site, in 2010 (Hajduga 2013) and 2011 (Żurawski et al. 2014: 336–338 and Fig. 10 plan) had established the stratigraphy of the site, placing its founding in the 1st century and its continuation through the 4th century, and attested a direct link to the Meroitic-period buildings observed under a layer of early Christian pottery from the 6th and 7th century (Selib 3 some 300 m to the southeast). Sandstone columns, probably from a Meroitic temple, were found reused as *spolia* at a church in Selib 1, located less than a kilometer to the east, also establishing a link with the site at Selib 2.

HOUSES 1 AND 2

Three houses have been recorded so far to the northeast of the main warehouse [Fig. 1]. Houses 1 and 2, apparently connected with a series of small cubicles (A–G) located between them, were the focus of excavation in 2012.

The houses were preserved at the level of a few lowermost mud-brick courses raised on shallow foundations made of mud brick as well. They differed in plan from the workshops discovered earlier around the storehouse; the latter presented a bicameral

arrangement. House 1 comprised six rooms covering about 100 m² [Fig. 1 inset]. Room dimensions ranged from 3 m² to 14 m². Walls were one brick thick, made of unfired mud bricks of typical sizes, 16 cm by 32 cm and 17 cm by 34 cm. Fired red bricks were

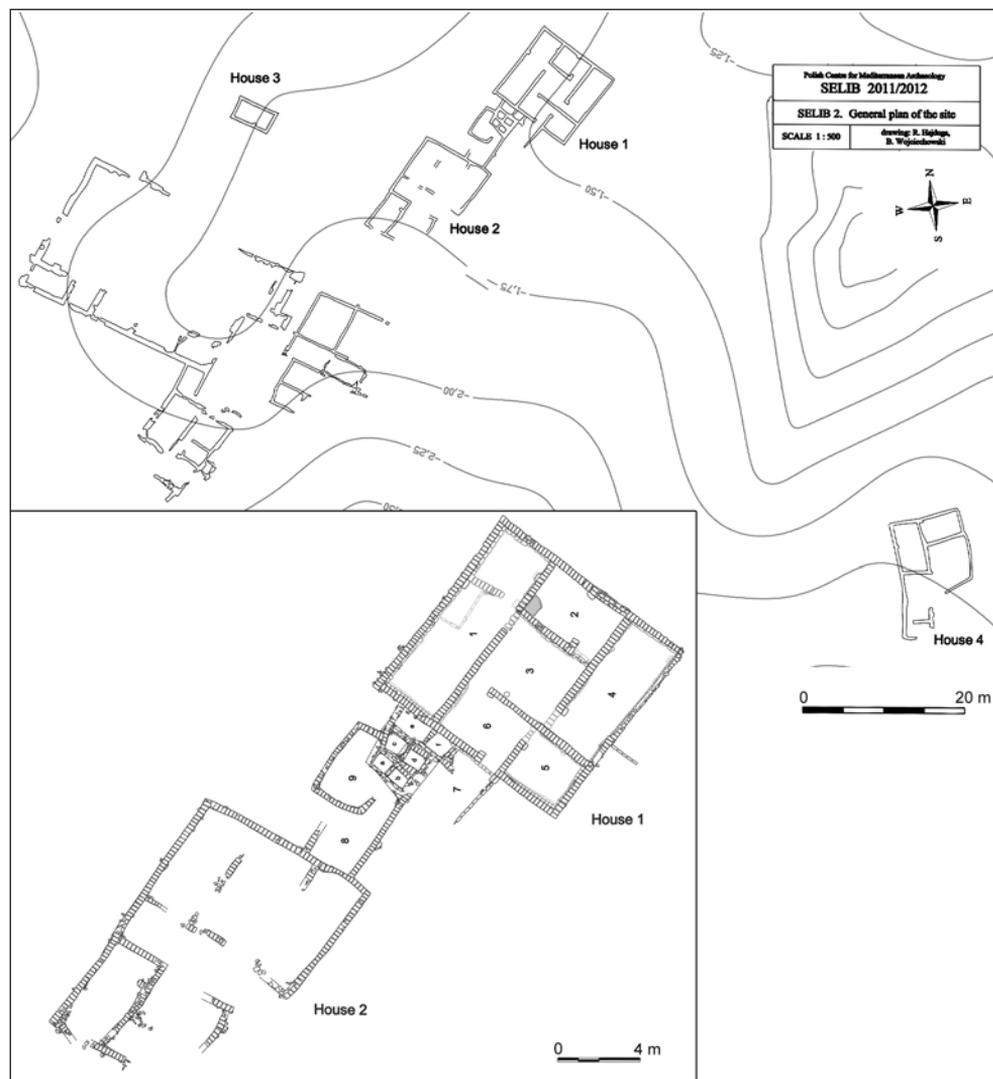


Fig. 1. Plan of Selib 2; inset, close-up of the plan of Houses 1 and 2, state in 2013 (Drawing R. Hajduga, B. Wojciechowski)

used for special purposes, for example, as a doorstep. There was probably only a ground floor, but some poorly preserved traces of steps, apparently introduced at some point as part of a rebuilding event, led to either an upper floor or the roof made of palm ribs.

The rooms were arranged in three rows. The central section comprised room 6 entered from a passage(?) (7), leading from the direction of House 2. From here one could either enter a corner room (5) on the east or pass into the central unit (3) which gave access on a diagonal into room 2, and through separate entrances to the two side wings of the house: unit 1 with its

presumed kitchen space occupying the entire length of the western wing and unit 4 with the presumed secondary staircase that blocked the entrance to room 3 at one point.

The building had two chronological phases, the second phase involving the changes in room 4 (adding of an upper floor perhaps?) and passage 7, which was evidently added later, when the whole house was adapted for some manufacturing process. From this period date the small cubicles A to G found north of the facade, to the west of passage 7 (see below).

Distinct traces of ashes and soot were recorded on the walls of the structure



*Fig. 2. Rectangular annex and cooking jars in situ in unit 1
(Photo K. Solarzka)*

(east and south walls of room 3, east wall of room 5). Evidence suggesting cooking was present throughout the house. In the central room 3, a large, coarse pottery jar was found sunk a meter below ground level, by the south wall. The jar was filled with ash and charcoal, and surrounded by layers of ashes. The fill in the room yielded a large quantity of animal bone material demonstrating an exceptional accumulation of cattle bones in the face of a complete absence of pig remains (M. Osypińska, B. Żurawski, personal communication).

A rectangular structure of one row of mud bricks formed an annex by the west wall of room 1 [Fig. 2]. Next to it was a concentration of small pebbles in an ash layer. Heated, these pebbles could have been used for baking bread, as is still the custom of seminomadic tribes in Sudan today. Many almost complete storage jars

and cooking pots were found scattered throughout the room. Of greatest interest, however, was an apparent storage vessel standing next to the annex. It had a narrow mouth on a wide body that tapered from mid-height sharply to a pointed bottom. Painted decoration was arranged concentrically around the vessel mouth; motifs consisted of geometrical elements, ankh crosses and lotus flowers in horizontal bands. A quern and iron axe were found next to the vessel.

Room 4 seems to have had a windbreak wall protecting the entrance to it from outside. The east wall of the room had collapsed inward, sealing under the rubble a ceramic assemblage that included storage and kitchen jars, as well as eggshell cups [Fig. 4] and a pottery appliqué with a fragmentary figure and a scarab [Fig. 5].

Tall storage jars and handmade cooking pots were found in the corners of all of the



Fig. 3. Room 4, view from the east
(Photo K. Solarska)

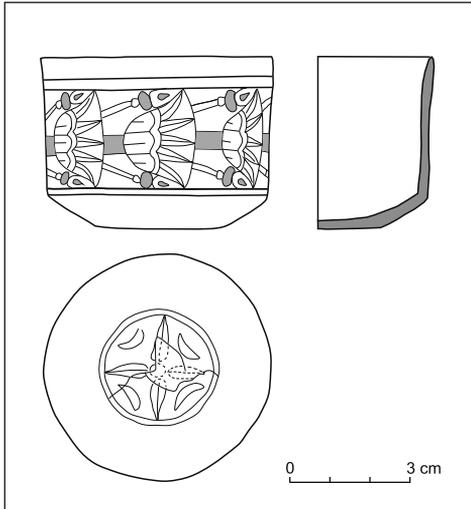


Fig. 4. Painted eggshell cup
(Drawing A. Cedro, K. Solarska)

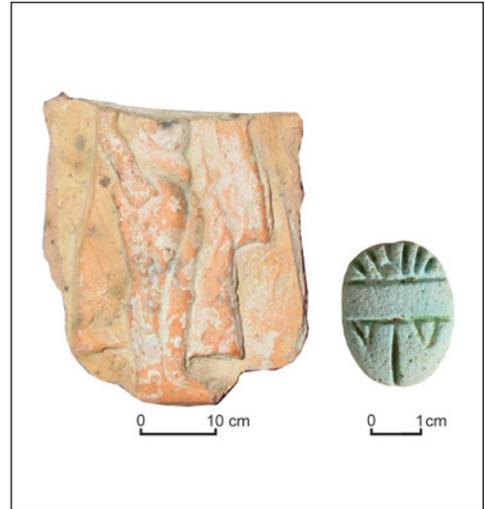


Fig. 5. Terracotta appliqué and scarab
(Photos R. Hajduga, K. Solarska)



Fig. 6. Pottery in situ from Houses 1 and 2: top left, storage jar; top center, storage jar with incised decoration; bottom left, cooking pot; bottom center, brazier/offering stand; right, amphora half
(Photos E. Skowrońska)

excavated rooms [Fig. 6]. Altogether 12 almost complete storage jars were recorded from room 4 alone. These vessels were set into the ground and probably served as water reservoirs or storage containers.

House 2, which was larger but poorly preserved, consisted also of six rooms, but in different arrangement; two rows of three rooms, all of similar size from 8 m² to 10 m², were separated by a central corridor, presumably entered from the east [see Fig. 1 inset]. The foundations were three brick courses high at the most. Walls were made of a single row of unfired mud bricks of typical size 16 cm by 32 cm and 17 cm by 34 cm. Mud stoppers (plugs) were evidenced in the walls between the rows of bricks, similarly as in the walls of the workshops excavated in the southern part of the site.



Fig. 7. Loom weights from House 2
(Photo R. Hajduga)



Fig. 8. Units A–G: general view from the east
(Photo R. Hajduga)

The fill yielded traces of sooty and charred material, ash as well as fragments of charcoal and animal bones inside storage jars and kitchen pots. An installation in the northern part of the house consisted of two ceramic elements. The upper part was formed of a cup with apertures located in the body and a large opening in the bottom; this form has been identified as a brazier/offering stand (Edwards 1999: 53, Fig. 77) [Fig. 6 bottom center]. It passed smoothly into a much more spherical shape, which was only partly preserved, hindering an interpretation of this installation. Usage is a contentious issue, but it was not for storage, rather for overflow. The find is unparalleled in the known material and hence its functionality cannot be determined.

A large number of loom weights from the house, 140 pieces, but only a few bearing traces of use [Fig. 7], suggested textile manufacturing. The weights came in two sizes: large from 8 cm to 14 cm high and smaller and more slender, up to 8 cm high. The large-size items corresponded to those found in the Meroitic house in Hamadab (Wolf, Nowotnick, and Hof forthcoming: 8, 18, Fig. 10). The presumed fabric-related function of the houses in their last phase was confirmed by loom weights and spinning bowls found nearby (Hajduga forthcoming).

Roksana Hajduga
rhajduga@gmail.com

Katarzyna Solarzka
katarzyna.solarzka@gmail.com

Connecting the two houses was a passage (7), the east wall of which was made up of a single row of bricks (preserved height 0.40 m). The brick doorsill from this passage into House 1 stood on loom weights that had been used to fill voids between bricks, making it evident that the passage belonged to the latest building phase of the complex, when the structure was presumably reoccupied. The corridor gave onto small cubicles A to G [Fig. 8] attached to the wall of House 2 and from there to units 8 (adjoining House 2) and 9. The complex filled the space between the two houses. The small cubicles (0.90 m by 0.50 m or 1.00 m by 0.60 m; height 0.20–0.30 m) may have been a storage facility or otherwise used for the production process in the last phase of the operation of the two houses. Room 9 was set off from unit 8 by a partition wall and was connected with the cubicles. In it were nine vessels standing upturned, all poorly preserved and bearing evidence of heat transfer (cracks, attached frit and damages). An almost complete amphora from the Mareotis coast of Egypt (type AE 4), dated 1st–late 2nd century AD (A. Cedro, personal communication), came from this context.

The area around this complex, especially in the vicinity of cooking pots found *in situ*, was said to have been littered with many grinders and querns (information from the local villagers).

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