

AcrossBorders' Fieldwork 2017 on SAI ISLAND (NORTH PROVINCE, SUDAN)



2017 SEASON REPORT (by Julia Budka)

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1. General

The 2017 mission of AcrossBorders on Sai Island was carried out from 31st December 2016 to 11th March 2017. AcrossBorders is conducted with the approval of the concession holder Dr. Vincent Fracigny (SFDAS, responsible for the Sai excavations since 2015). Permission to work in the field is kindly granted by the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums of Sudan (NCAM), sincere thanks go in particular to Dr. Abdelrahman Ali Mohamed (Director General) and El-Hassan Ahmed Mohamed (Director of Fieldwork).

Fieldwork with workmen under the supervision of Hassan Dawd was carried out from December 31 to January 26 and from February 18 to March 10. Excavations were conducted in two areas of the Pharaonic town (SAV1 East and SAV1 West, fig. 1) and in the New Kingdom cemetery SAC 5 in Tomb 26 (fig. 7).

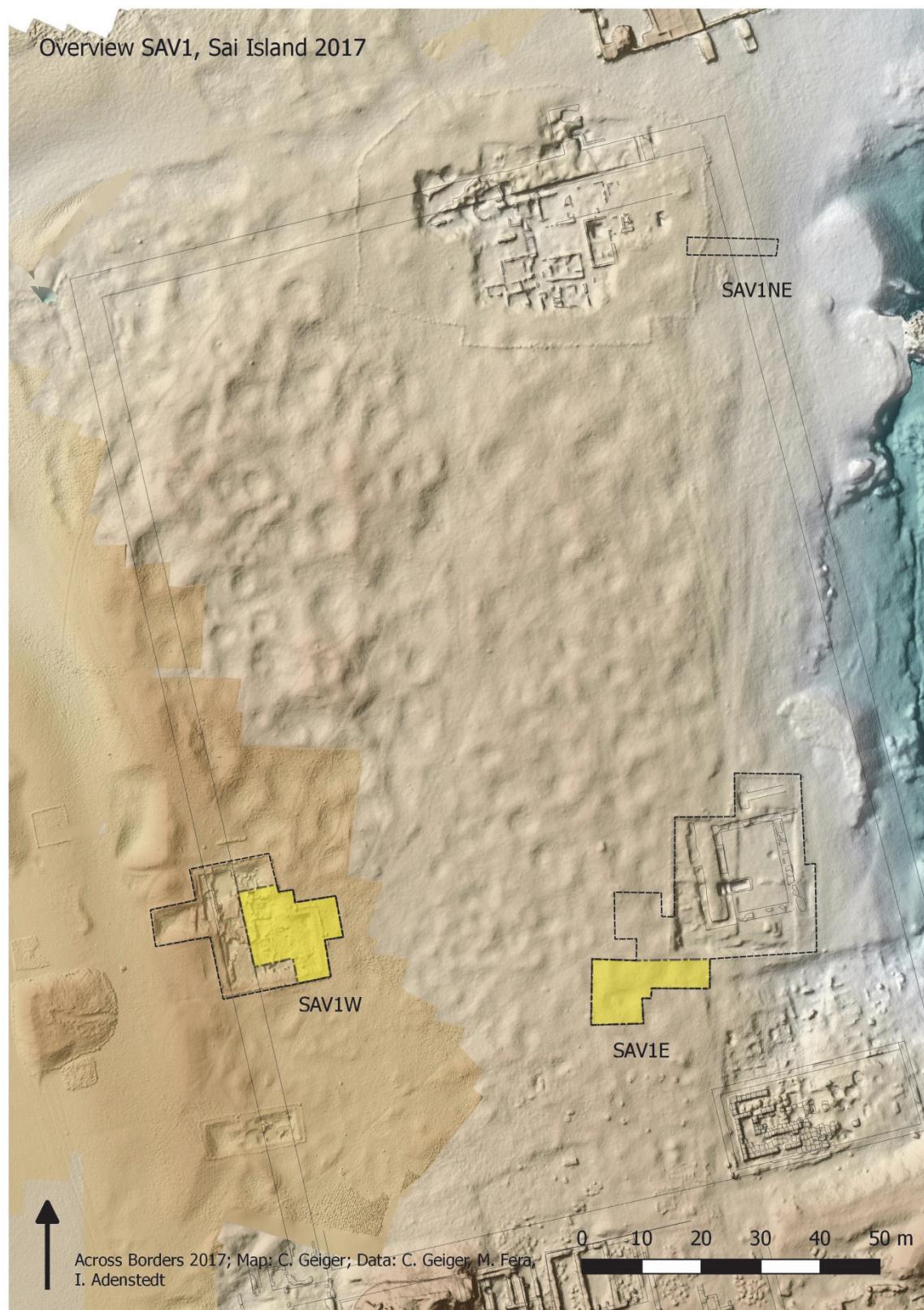
The inspector for NCAM in the 2017 season was Huda Magzoub—we would like to express our sincere thanks for her kind cooperation and support throughout all of the season.



Team members

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Funds for fieldwork in 2017 were granted to Julia Budka by the European Research Council (ERC Starting Grant no. 313668) and the Austrian Science Fund (FWF START project Y615-G19).



**Fig. 1: Location of AcrossBorders excavation areas within the New Kingdom town, Sai Island
(status 2017; map: C. Geiger).**

2. Excavations at SAV1E, fieldwork report (by Julia Budka)

Objectives

Fieldwork in sector SAV1 East continued based on the results from 2013-2016.¹ Work focused in 2017 on remains to be unearthed in the new Square 4D, aiming to test anomalies visible on the map of the geophysical survey conducted in 2011 and to contextualised *in situ*-remains of a schist pavement unearthed in 2016 in Square 4C (Fig. 2). Some cleaning work was also conducted in the southern part of Square 4C.²

SAV1 East, Square 4D

The upper levels of the new square 4D (6.5 x 9m) were dominated by a substantial amount of collapsed mud bricks, schist fragments and plaster fragments (Fig. 2). Obviously these are the remains of a large area which was originally covered by a schist pavement and heavily disturbed during later times. The material is of a mixed character and although most of the ceramics date to the 18th Dynasty, Medieval material is also present. The large percentage of 18th Dynasty ceramics indicates that the later destruction sits directly on the Pharaonic remains, as it was well attested in other parts of SAV1 East.

A sandy depression was soon noticed in the southern part of the new square. During excavation, it was identified as large rectangular cellar with an East-West alignment. The structure measures 3.3 x 1.8 x 2.00m and was cut out of the natural ground, which consists of pebble terraces. Lined with bricks, vault; some pottery vessels found smashed on floor – mid 18th Dynasty. Feature 83 is comparable to Feature 15 in Squares 2 and 4 of SAV1 East.³

Feature 85 is situated in the northern part of Square 4D (Fig. 3). It is much better preserved than Feature 83, but with the same East-West alignment and of similar dimensions (3.7 x 1.5 x 2.05m, Fig. 4). Feature 85 is clearly situated below the schist pavement unearthed in Square 4C – a large amount of collapsed schist plates was recovered in its eastern part. Its vault is partly still intact, but its sidewalls have mostly collapsed and the corresponding mud bricks filled the western part (Fig. 3). Feature 85 is, according to the preliminary assessment of the pottery from its undisturbed lower fillings, contemporaneous to Feature 83.

¹ See J. Budka, The Pharaonic town on Sai Island and its role in the urban landscape of New Kingdom Kush, *Sudan & Nubia* 19, 2015, 40–53 and most recently J. Budka, Crossing Borders: Settlement Archaeology in Egypt and Sudan, *Near Eastern Archaeology* 80/1, 14–21.

² See J. Budka, The 18th Dynasty on Sai Island – new data from excavations in the town area and cemetery SAC5, *Sudan and Nubia* 21, 2017, 71–75.

³ J. Budka, *Sudan & Nubia* 19, 2015, 44–45.



Fig. 2: Kite aerial photo from SAV1 East,
Square 4D after first surface cleanings.



Fig. 3: View of Feature 85 with part of
its vault still *in situ*; note the remains of
a schist pavement above the cellar
towards the east.

SAV1E, Sai Island 2017



Fig. 4: Overview of working areas in SAV1 East in 2017. Map: C. Geiger.

SAV1 East, Square 4C

In the southwestern corner of Square 4C, a large sandstone block was found in 2016, sitting within mudbrick debris on top of the *in situ*-remains of the schist pavement. Taking this stone out during the 2017 season, the block turned out to be a re-used block of a sandstone column base with a very fragmented hieroglyphic inscription. It is very likely that this column was originally used in Temple A, located nearby.

Further to the east in Square 4C, the substantial destruction layer of mud brick fragments, charcoal, slag, pottery and worked stones was removed. Remains of another mud brick wall in line with Feature 51 (further to the north) were uncovered.

All in all, the earliest remains unearthed in 2017 in Square 4C all correspond to floors, deposits and wall fragments found in the western and northern parts of the same square in 2016. They seem to date to the mid-18th Dynasty according to the stratigraphy and preliminary data from the pottery analysis.

3. Excavations at SAV1W, fieldwork report (by Julia Budka)

At SAV1 West, remaining deposits in Squares 1S and 1SE were investigated. Finding a cellar in the northeastern corner of Square 1SE (Feature 152), it was necessary to make a small eastern extension (3 x 5m) labelled as Square 1SE_E (Fig. 5). All in all, the remains of several small mud brick buildings were exposed and stratigraphic information was received from cleaning selected areas, including the “wall street” along the town enclosure. Most importantly, the earliest phase of occupation at SAV1 West seems to be contemporaneous to the one at SAV1 North – and is clearly predating the building of the town wall under Thutmose III. Only scarce remains of the early 18th Dynasty occupation at SAV1 West have survived, with the major phase in the mid-18th Dynasty partly superimposing earlier structures and lasting well into the late 18th Dynasty.

Square 1 Southeast and Square 1 Southeast_East (Extension 2017)

In 2016, a substantial demolition layer with much mud brick fragments and large quantities of worked stones and pottery was left unexcavated in the eastern half of Squares 1_SE. Removing this debris in 2017, earlier deposits and traces of mud brick structures were unearthed. Work focused in particular on a pile of bricks, debris and rubble in the southeastern corner. One of the large stones turned out as a re-cut royal lintel of the mid-18th Dynasty (Fig. 6). It was sitting on top of the debris filling the oval-shaped storage pit Feature 151.

A similar storage installation was discovered with the rectangular cellar Feature 152 in the northeaster corner of Square 1_SE and extension 1SE_E. Like Feature 151, it belongs to the mid-18th Dynasty building phase at SAV1 West. Several fragments of mud brick walls allow reconstructing the layout of several building units in this area which find close parallels in sector SAV1 North.



Fig. 5: Overview of working areas in SAV1 West in 2017 (Map: C. Geiger).



Fig. 6: Re-used sandstone lintel *in situ* above storage installation Feature 151. Square 1_SE.

4. Excavation in the cemetery SAC5, Tomb 26 (by Julia Budka)

Excavation work in Tomb 26 was completed in 2017.⁴ Its final map includes 6 features: Feature 1 (shaft), feature 2 (central burial chamber), feature 3 (doorway between f. 1 and f. 2), feature 4 (trench along the northern wall), feature 5 (western burial chamber) and feature 6 (lowest, original burial chamber towards the north).

Feature 4

In 2017, a systematic, stratigraphic excavation of Feature 4, completely filled with Nile silt from flood levels, was conducted. Remains of several individuals, a minimum of five, were documented. Only the burials in the lowest levels were found (almost) undisturbed, whereas the upper levels showed traces of plundering where bodies were ripped apart. Except for a small number of pottery vessels, no remains of burial equipment were found, but traces of painted wooden coffins (red, blue, yellow and white pigments) were documented. Among the ceramics, a burnished Marl D jug with a long neck from the late 18th Dynasty, which was found in the upper levels, is remarkable.

⁴ See J. Budka, Pyramid cemetery SAC5, Sai Island, Northern Sudan: An update based on fieldwork from 2015–2017, Ägypten und Levante 27, 2017, 107–130.

SAC5, T26, Sai Island 2017



Fig. 7: Ground plan of Tomb 26 after excavation with new chambers 5 and 6 (map: C. Geiger).

Feature 6

At the bottom of the trench along the north wall (Feature 4), a small room (2.13 x 1.35m with a height of 0.92-0.95m) which is most probably the original burial chamber opens towards the north (Fig. 7). It was found sealed and completely filled with flood deposits and was obviously undisturbed since ancient times. Chamber 6 held two coffins of which only traces survived in the flood sediments as well as rich burial equipment of Egyptian style (Fig. 8): scarabs, faience vessels, pottery vessels and one stone shabti were used as burial goods. Traces of the funerary mask, here especially inlaid eyes and gold foil, have also survived.

According to the inscribed finds and the human remains, the double burial in Feature 6 can be identified as the master of gold workers Khnummose (main burial along the north wall) and an anonymous female person, presumably his wife (second burial in the entrance area). The titles of Khnummose, preserved both on the shabti and the faience vessels, are *nbj* (gold worker) and *hrj nbjw* (master of gold workers).⁵ Especially the stone shabti (SAC5 350) but also the heart scarab (SAC5 349) are real master pieces and of high quality craftsmanship.⁶ The ceramics from Chamber 6 speak for a mid-18th Dynasty date: the late reign of Thutmose III at the earliest, but more likely the reigns of Amenhotep II and Thutmose IV (and definitely no later than Amenhotep III).

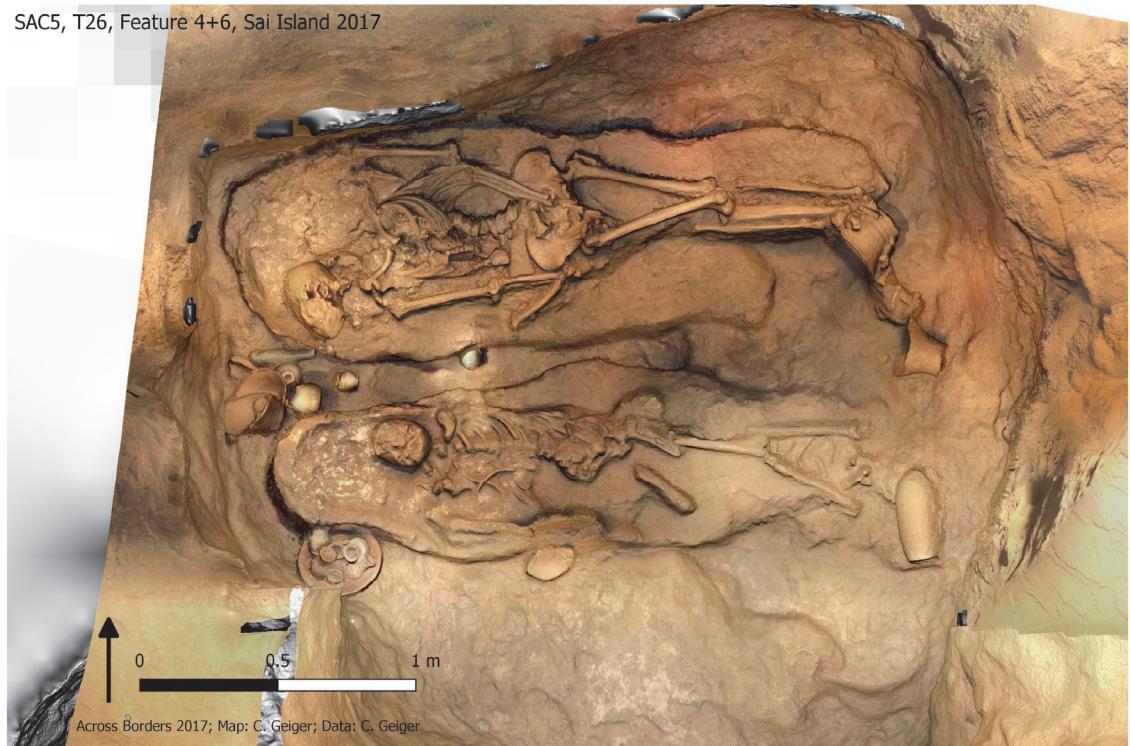


Fig. 8: Burials within Chamber 6, orthophoto. C. Geiger, ©AcrossBorders 2017.

⁵ See I. Müller, *Die Verwaltung Nubiens im Neuen Reich*, Meroitica 18, Wiesbaden 2013, 185.

⁶ The stone shabti falls into a group of five shabtis identified by Ann Minault-Gout based on palaegraphic and stylistic features as products from one workshop – found in Sai, Aniba and Toshka. See A. Minault-Gout, La figurine funéraire Saï inv. S. 964 (SNM 23424) et un groupe de quatre chaouabtis de la XVIII^e dynastie de même type, *Cahiers de Recherches de l'Institut de Papyrologie et d'Égyptologie de Lille* 29, 2011-2012, 189–200.

Feature 5

In 2017, the entrance to a hidden chamber, concealed by a plastered stone wall was revealed in the north-western corner of Feature 2. Such a wall separating rock-cut chambers from each other was also documented in the neighbouring Tomb 7.⁷ This new western chamber, labelled Feature 5, yielded eleven adult and three infant burials (see Fig. 9 for some of these burials). The burial equipment comprises a remarkable gold ring, several scarabs, amulets (extraordinary is a necklace with crocodile pendants in various materials) and pottery vessels as well as few traces of the funerary masks and coffins (comparable to Chamber 6).

According to the pottery, the early burials from Chamber 5 seem to be almost contemporary with Khnummose and his wife, suggesting that they represent probably further family members. This assumption will be further tested by tracing both ancient DNA from the skeletons and trying to correlate C14 dates with our archaeological dating.

SAC5, T26, Feature 5, Sai Island 2017

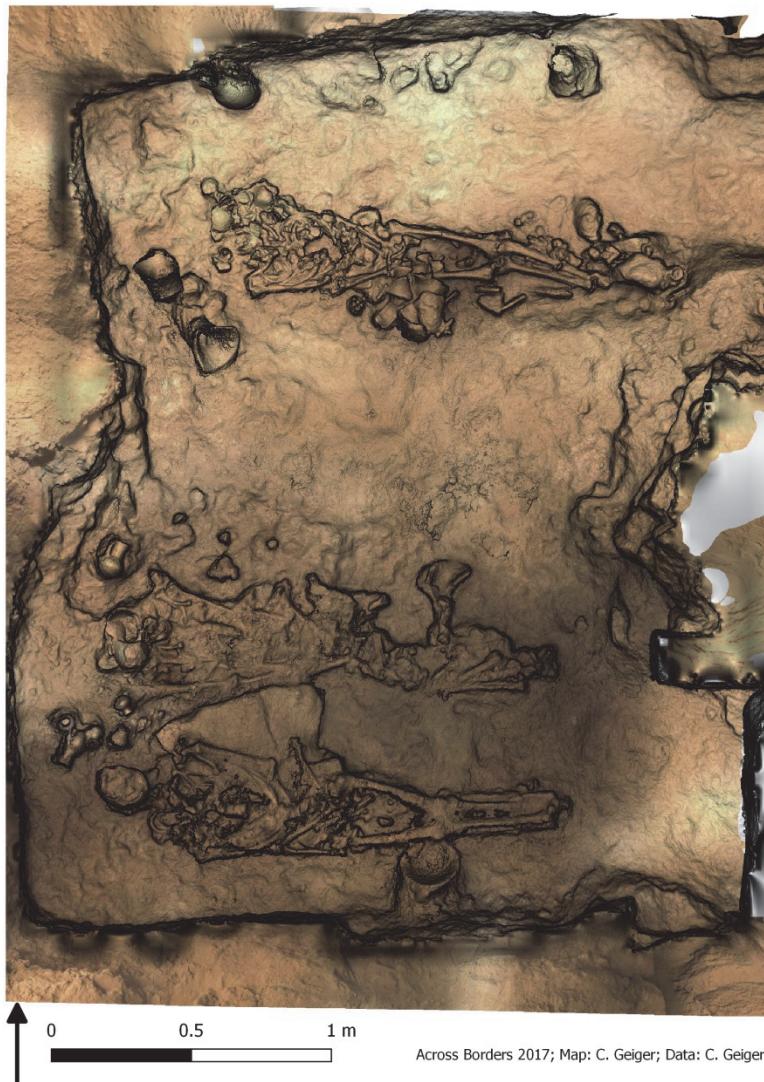
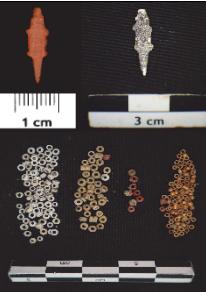


Fig. 9: Earliest burials within Chamber 5, orthophoto. C. Geiger, ©AcossBorders 2017.

⁷ A. Minault-Gout and F. Thill, *Sai II. Le cimetière des tombes hypogées du Nouvel Empire (SAC5)*, Fouilles de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale du Caire 69, Cairo 2012, vol. 1, 48–50, vol. 2, pls. 27a-b.

Selected finds from 2017 season in chamber 5

	SAC5 376	
	Object: Amulet	Find no. 310/2017
	Tomb 26	Feature 5
	Material: Fayence	Hip area (left) 300/2017, directly next to 308 & 311/2017 Dimensions L: 1.1 cm, W: 0.4 cm, H: 1.6 cm
	SAC5 377	
	Object: Amulet	Find no. 311/2017
	Tomb 26	Feature 5
	Material: Jasper	Hip area (left) 300/2017, next to 310/2017 (to S) Dimensions L: 1.1 cm, W: 0.3 cm, H: 2.1 cm
	SAC5 378	
	Object: Necklace (crocodile amulets and beads)	Find no. 325/2017
	Tomb 26	Feature 5
	Material: Carnelian, Bone & Gold	Upper body of 324/2017 Dimensions (for 1 crocodile) L: 0.5 cm W: 0.3 cm H: 2.1 cm
	SAC5 388	
	Object: Ring	Find no. 369/2017
	Tomb 26	Feature 5
	Material: Gold & Silver	Dimensions L: 2.9 cm W: 0.5 cm H: 3.0 cm
	SAC5 364	
	Object: Scarab	Find no. 261/2017
	Tomb 26	Feature 5
	Material: Steatite	45 cm from N wall/95 cm from entrance (E) Dimensions L: 1.4 cm W: 1.1 cm H: 0.7 cm
	SAC5 381	
	Object: Scarab	Find no. 337/2017
	Tomb 26	Feature 5
	Material: Steatite	N of 145/2017, leg area Dimensions L: 1.6 cm W: 1.1 cm H: 0.7 cm

	SAC5 398	
Object: Vessel		Find no. 276/2017
Tomb 26	Feature 5	SE corner
Material: Stone		Dimensions L: 13.7 cm W: 13.7 cm H: 15.1 cm

Selected finds from 2017 season in chamber 6

	SAC5 350	
Object: Shabti		Find no. 200/2017
Tomb 26	Feature 6	S of coffin (head part) 159/2017
Material: Serpentinite		Dimensions L: 5.0 cm W: 4.2 cm H: 19.2 cm

	SAC5 349	
Object: Heart Scarab		Find no. 217/2017
Tomb 26	Feature 6	S of 218/2017

	SAC5 346	
Object: Inlay		Find no. 198/2017
Tomb 26	Feature 6	N of skull of 159/2017
Material: Bronze, Stone & Plaster		Dimensions (Left eye) L: 6.3 cm W: 2.1 cm H: 2.6 cm

	SAC5 347	
Object: Model Vessel		Find no. 214/2017
Tomb 26	Feature 6	In/on top of 208/2017
Material: Fayence		Dimensions L: 6.6 cm W: 6.2 cm H: 9.0 cm

	SAC5 348	
Object: Model Vessel		Find no. 213/2017
Tomb 26	Feature 6	In 208/2017
Material: Fayence		Dimensions L: 6.3 cm W: 5.9 cm H: 8.6 cm

SAC5 352		
Object: Model Vessel		Find no. 225/2017
Tomb 26	Feature 6	S of 200/2017
Material: Fayence		Dimensions L: 8.1 cm W: 8.1 cm H: 10.0 cm

SAC5 353		
Object: Model Vessel		Find no. 224/2017
Tomb 26	Feature 6	S of 225/2017
Material: Fayence		Dimensions L: 8.3 cm W: 8.2 cm H: 9.2 cm

5. Processing finds and pottery from the New Kingdom town (by Julia Budka)

Registration of objects from SAV1 East and SAV1 West

The registration of the objects and finds from the ongoing excavations in SAV1 West and SAV1 East was continued in 2017.⁸ About 400 finds have been registered, photographed, and entered into the FileMaker database, which now comprises 4826 entries. The objects range in date from the Palaeolithic Period to Ottoman times. The most abundant genre of objects needing to be registered is stone tools: grindstones, hand mills, hammers, pounders, and whetstones. Among the highlights of this season were a faience cowroid, several ring beads and a miniature net-weight, all from mid-18th Dynasty contexts.

SAV1W 1736		
Object: Cowroid		Find no. 078/2017
SU 909	Sq. 1SE	
Material: Fayence		Dimensions L: 1.6 cm W: 1.0 cm H: 0.5 cm

SAV1W 1768		
Object: Bead		Find no. 087/2017
SU 909	Sq. 1SE	
Material: Fayence		Dimensions (max) L: 0.2 cm W: 0.5 cm H: 0.5 cm

⁸ By Meg Gundlach.

	SAV1W 1753	
Object: Model Net Weight	Find no. 149/2017	
SU 916	Sq. 1SE	
Material: Clay	Dimensions L: 2.7 cm W: 1.2 cm H: 2.2 cm	

	SAV1W 1733	
Object: Figurine	Find no. 021/2017	
SU 900	Sq. 1SE	
Material: Clay	Dimensions L: 2.4 cm W: 2.0 cm H: 5.5 cm	

Pottery from the New Kingdom town and Tomb 26

The study of the ceramics (conducted by Julia Budka, assisted by Daniela Penzer, Oliver Frank Stephan and Lucia Sedlakova) was focusing on three main working steps this season: 1) documenting the statistics & establishing the dating for newly excavated material from SAV1 East and SAV1 West (more than 400 baskets were processed); 2) detailed documentation of diagnostic pieces excavated in SAV1 East and SAV1 West for the final publication of this site; 3) detailed documentation of diagnostic pieces and complete vessels from Tomb 26 for the final publication. In total, 375 drawings of ceramics were produced in 2017.

Thanks to the kind permission of the General Director of NCAM, Dr. Abdelrahman Ali Mohammed, a selection of finds were brought to Khartoum to be studied there for publication. A detailed study of these objects, including in particular funerary equipment from Tomb 26 and inventories from Features 83 and 85, was undertaken in October 2017.

6. Summary (by Julia Budka)

To conclude, the 2017 field season resulted in important new insights and diverse observations about the phases of use and function of the New Kingdom town. Most importantly, excavations at SAV1 West and SAV1 East added new information about building phases and functional buildings.

(1) **Dating SAV1 West:** the earliest phase of occupation at SAV1 West pre-dates the building of the town wall and can be associated with the early 18th Dynasty. There is clear evidence for several phases of use within the mid-late 18th Dynasty. All of this corresponds exactly to findings at SAV1 North.⁹

⁹ As highlighted by Julia Budka and Florence Doyen; see J. Budka (ed.), *AcrossBorders I: The New Kingdom Town of Sai Island, Sector SAV1 North*, Contributions to the Archaeology of Egypt, Nubia and the Levant 4, Vienna 2017.

(2) **Magazines and cellars at SAV1 East:** All in all, further proof was gathered that sector SAV1 East has much in common and shows many parallels to the southern area of the town, SAV1, excavated by M. Azim in the 1970s. In particular, *in situ* schist pavements of large magazines located to the west of Building A are now associated with large cellars with brick vaults (Feature 83 and 85).

(3) **Tomb 26:** Tomb 26, with a very complex use-life and high quality finds, provides new data for a family residing on Sai during the mid to late 18th Dynasty. The inventory of the tomb compares nicely to Tomb 8 and Tomb 7, previously excavated by the French Mission.¹⁰

All in all, the new information provided by the latest, very successful field season of AcrossBorders will allow us to connect the findings in the town with fresh evidence from the cemetery SAC5 and here in particular the rich burials of Khnummose and his family. New material datable to the second half of the 18th Dynasty from both sites offers much potential.

For the results of the 2017 season see also:

Julia Budka, The 18th Dynasty on Sai Island – new data from excavations in the town area and cemetery SAC5, *Sudan and Nubia* 21, 2017, 71–81.

¹⁰ See A. Minault-Gout and F. Thill, *Saï II. Le cimetière des tombes hypogées du Nouvel Empire (SAC5)*, passim.