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The Dark Side of a Model Community: The 'Ghetto' of el-Lahun

David Mazzone

El-Lahun¹, also called *Kahun* or *Illahun*,² is the site of one of the largest state-planned settlements dating back to the Late Middle Kingdom period of Egyptian history (c. 1850-1700 B.C.).³ This isolated site occupies an area of approximately 13 hectares in the present-day governorate of the Fayum (Fig. 2). The site lies on the west bank of the Nile, along the desert edge, north of the modern village of Al-Lāhūn (Fig. 3). It is around 1 km west of the pyramid of pharaoh Khakheperra Senwosret II.⁴ Kahun, as it was originally referred to by Petrie, was excavated and recorded in two separate fieldwork campaigns funded by the Egypt Exploration Society (EES). Petrie and his colleagues mapped nearly three quarters of the existing buildings (approximately two thousand rooms), and uncovered an impressive grid of mud-brick structures above paved floors.⁵

The function of the relatively large, dense and permanent settlement of el-Lahun was connected to the cultic activities that took place in a series of temples and sanctuaries. Apart from its architectural features, the social characteristics of this rather isolated *Pyramidenstadt* are still largely unexplored. The recent publication of two documentary archives from the site, covering a duration of approximately four generations, is central to any attempt to reconstruct the daily life of its working population.⁶

El-Lahun was one of several settlements of considerable size that are considered urban centers of the multi-ethnic Middle Bronze Age society. Complex activities were carried out in these centers and they were often permanently occupied for long periods of time.⁷ The appearance of urban

1 I am grateful for many useful suggestions from S. Quirke, R. Bussman and R. Ambrosini. Thanks to JAEA for revisions, editing, typesetting, and formatting, and Angela McDonald for reviewing and editing transliterations and hieroglyphs. I wish to thank University College of London for the permission to use their library. Any faults which remain are my own.

2 For the origin of the locality's name see Gunn (1945); Luft (1993; 1998b; 2013).

3 Excavation reports: Petrie (1890; 1891); Petrie *et al.* (1920-23); Brunton (1920). Also relevant are Petrie's unpublished journals (October 1888-January 1890) in the Griffith Institute, Oxford. More recent site plans, architectural details and images are in Frey and Knudstad (2008). The 'El-Lahun Survey Project' is available at: <http://www.kairo.balassiintezet.hu/en/hungarian-archeological-expeditions/>

4 Circa 1897-1878 B.C. (Baines and Málek (1980), p. 36). The chronology of the reign of this sovereign is still uncertain (Stone (1997); Luft (2001; 2006); Edgerton (1942) and Wegner (1996)).

5 Gallorini (2008); Drower (1985); Quirke (2009). Most of the surveying records made by Petrie are preserved in their original draft form. They include sketches, detailed plans with dimensions of rooms, walls, structural elements and occasionally locations of finds. They are contained in a series of notebooks (39b; 39e; 48; 48a; 49 and 50) now in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology (UCL), London.

6 For the so-called 'town papyri' (P. UC) see Griffith (1898); Collier and Quirke (2002; 2004; 2006); Collier (2009). For the second group, the so-called 'temple archive' (P. Berlin) see Borchardt (1899); Kaplony-Heckel (1971); Scharff (1924).

7 As a general principle, a 'city' is a relatively large and dense, complex, urban centre, permanently settled by a heterogeneous population and containing many urban functions. A 'town' is a smaller urban centre with fewer urban functions (Bietak (1979)). The definition of cities and towns remains a topic of vivid debate due to the lack of an agreed set of criteria which can be



Fig. 1. The remains covered with sand of the city of el-Lahun (photo courtesy of Franck Monnier).

invokes a narrative about life within. Their somewhat excessively institutional aspect together with the function and scale of the architectural features conveys a sense of both social inclusion and exclusion of specific groups from the center of social activity. A strict separation, defined by a rigid zoning system, created areas for the 'élite' and areas with 'dwellings for the masses'. These were common features of the urban layouts of both el-Lahun and Abydos.¹⁷ Despite scant architectural remains, the footprint of the original grid-iron town planning at el-Lahun left significant evidence for a fundamental and rigid form of social stratification. The town planning and the consequent social order at el-Lahun may have imposed a condition of coercion over the population, effectively caging people in 'ghetto-quarters' with the intention of centralizing the resources of thousands of individuals.¹⁸

In this light, and in the sections that follow, this article reviews the contextual evidence from el-Lahun that seems to indicate that a punitive institution known as a $\overline{\text{𓆎𓅓}}$ *hnrt*¹⁹ ('prison', 'fortress/enclosure' or 'workcamp') was in existence in the western part of the town called the *Sekhem*.²⁰

under the floodplain.

- 17 For the concepts of 'élite' and 'lower status' in the Middle Kingdom Egypt have been recently explored in Wegner (2001), p. 282.
- 18 'Ghetto' is generally adopted through the present work to refer to 'an impoverished, neglected, or otherwise disadvantaged residential area of a city, usually troubled by a disproportionately large population'. The term is used metaphorically to describe slum areas and represents the overcrowded area of a settlement in which the immigrant finds his first dwelling after the arrival in a new country (Wirth (1928; 1938); Calimani (2001)). Almost certainly 'ghettos' existed much earlier than they received a specific designation, doubtless much earlier than the 16th century, when persecuted Jews were forced to live in confinement in Europe.
- 19 Written with the house-determinative (Gardiner-sign U31+X1+O1). The term is also used figuratively in literary compositions (Gardiner (1957), pp. 544-548). For the writing of $\overline{\text{𓆎𓅓}}$ *hnrt* (Aa1+N35+M1+X1+U31+A24) with the omission of 'r', attested in the Old Kingdom see Roccati (1982), pp. 36-38; 18 note (a). For the occurrence of the architectural house-determinative see Quirke (1988), p. 83.
- 20 The name *Sekhem-Senwosret* is written with the logogram S42 'sekhem-scepter'. This symbol is most associated with concepts such as 'power', 'might', 'control', 'strong arm', 'authority' (Gardiner (1957), p. 509). The scepter is defined essentially as a 'symbol of terrifying power, tribal in essence, and its origin divine'. Its symbolic role may have originated in Abydos as a fetish



Fig. 2. Map of Egypt with locations mentioned in the text.

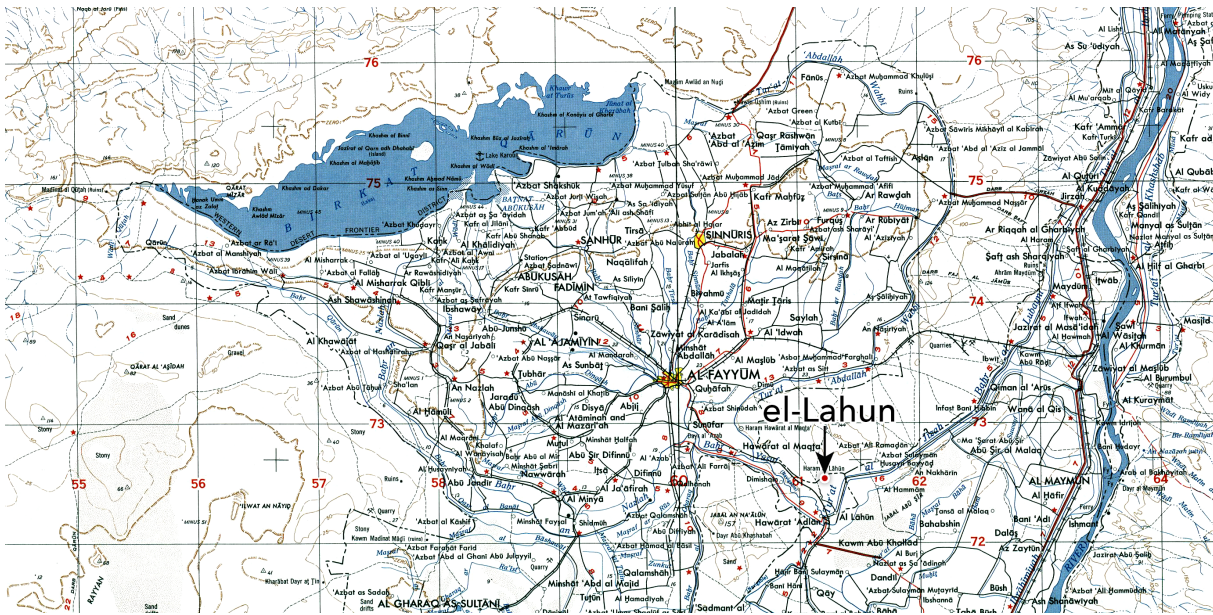


Fig. 3. The Fayum area in Egypt with the location of the ancient site of el-Lahun at 29°14' N, 30°59' E (AMDE, map compiled in 1953).

Overview of the urban form

At el-Lahun, Petrie unearthed evidence of significant poverty from the lanes of the *Sechem*.²¹ As reconstructed in his conclusions, the all-urban compound was originally surrounded by an enclosure wall of monumental proportions, which gradually disappeared over time due to erosion and the depredations of fertilizer diggers. Recent excavations have confirmed Petrie’s first impression that the western block of *Sechem* was a later addition against *Hetep*’s enclosure wall. This was revealed by the remains of a low thin lining of limestone in the north-west corner of the enclosure wall.²²

It is possible that an earlier nucleus of the town was already in existence, named $\left(\overline{\text{H}}\right)\text{p snwsrt } \text{nh} \text{ dt r nhh}$ (‘satisfied is Senwosret alive for ever and eternity’), perhaps built to support the numerous irrigation projects in the area prior to the establishment of the pharaoh’s funerary cult.²³ *Senwosret-ankh* would have been located in the middle of a series of projects to govern the abundant produce of the region of ancient lake Moeris (modern Birket Qarun). The town’s name appears on several clay seal impressions and is followed by the epithet $\overline{\text{H}}\text{p snwsrt } \text{nh} \text{ dt r nhh}$ (‘alive for ever and eternity’) instead of the expected $\overline{\text{H}}\text{p m}^3\text{-hrw}$ (‘true of voice’).²⁴ *Senwosret-ankh* could have been established at the beginning of the reign of Senwosret II, sometime around 1897 B.C. In the Fayum region it would undoubtedly have played a significant administrative and religious role. It seems that el-Lahun was therefore built in two successive chronological phases. A first phase, when *Senwosret-ankh* functioned as a local administrative center, and subsequently a second phase when the funerary cult was established, with a compound formed by a core town *Hetep* and a western ‘ghetto’ built against the first enclosure.

of Osiris (Harari (1950)).

21 Petrie (1891), pp. 5-8.

22 Frey and Knudstad (2008), pp. 54-55, fig. 35; Arnold (2008), p. 78.

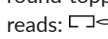
23 P. UC32184 in Collier and Quirke (2002).

24 Petrie (1891), pl. 9.

Circulation within el-Lahun seems to have been restricted, due to the limited number of roads and the calculated subdivision of the urban area into separate sections. Blind alleys divided the settlement into uniform and equal blocks, with the majority of these blocks being long and narrow. Dwellings are small in floor plan and often similar in style, indicating a relatively constrained system of public interaction.²⁵ At el-Lahun, like in most ancient Egyptian towns, it seems that streets did not have names. A stele, Cairo JE 47261, provides evidence that blocks probably had specific designations and that streets were just the empty space in-between. Few main streets appeared to be dominant, but in *Sekhem* the *cardo maximus* was oriented north south and intersected by constricted secondary east-west lanes which ended in *cul-de-sacs*.²⁶ Buildings facing these lanes show similar plan arrangements. The high density of the housing and the narrowness of the streets may have conveyed a feeling of bureaucratic control, which would have been particularly evident in the conglomeration of smaller units.

In the presence of such meticulous urban organization, it might be expected that towns such as el-Lahun would be oriented towards important features such as royal palaces or religious places of worship. Possibly the pyramid of Senwosret II was the most important monument in the area, but this was hardly visible from the town due to the great enclosure walls. The eastern ends of the longer blocks were nearly closed at the entrances to the north-south main road, indicating the possible use of a system of admittance for individuals arriving and leaving. The entire western suburb was a closed environment. Its prominent axially, the symmetrical arrangement of houses, the walled areas with limited access and a strict system of gates or entrances to pathways was perhaps required so that a few watchmen could effectively control it, perhaps even day and night, a circumstance already suggested by Petrie.²⁷ The only preserved gateway into the city was found at the north east. It gave access to an east-west running street. The gate appears unfortified and unusually narrow for the primary entrance into the town. Perhaps the surveillance of the entrance was under the control of an *jmy-r ʿ3 hnr* ('door-keeper of a Prison').²⁸ With the width of the main streets and of the minor lanes reduced to a minimum, *Sekhem* seemed to have been a walled town with restricted circulation and a large population, and so it would have felt overcrowded (Fig. 4).²⁹

The internal wall dividing *Hetep* from *Sekhem* has the same characteristics as the northern and eastern boundary walls of the settlement site. It excluded any direct communication between the

25 Stele Cairo JdE 47261 published in Wainwright (1925) and Fisher (1980) is one of the most enigmatic objects recovered. This round topped stele of limestone is said to come from the sebakh of el-Lahun. On the front there is a single column which reads:  *pryt 4 nt 20h30*, 'Four houses (apartments) of 20x30 (cubits)' (measures are here expressed in cubits *mhw*, corresponding to four apartments of circa 10,5 x 15.75 = 165 sqm, based on the standard cubit of 0.525 m). The stele, written in exceptionally large and well-formed hieroglyphs, was probably intended for public display. It was located at one of the intersections of the main road with one of the alleys. It is possible that all alleyways of the ghetto suburbs had similar stelae somehow recessed in wall corners, presumably to mark the entrances of specific dwellings in one of the most crowded areas of the settlement. Stelae like this one in the town were perhaps used to mark the dwelling distribution/zoning based on social groupings. The position of the 'four houses apartments of 20x30' can be tentatively localized in in the quarter EB 1 to 3N/S (see architectural plan in Doyen (2010), pp. 87, fig. 5).

26 A curious feature of this road system is the existence of a provision for the disposal of water and liquids (?) typical of a small sewer/drain in the centre of the street. Although not sufficiently investigated in this context, this feature is already attested in several cases in other urban settlements of the Ancient Near East. The disposal of solid waste on the other hand does not seem to have been of concern and was probably left to personal/household behaviours, and most probably was disposed of as refuse which accumulated around the city wall.

27 Petrie (1890), p. 23.

28 Ward (1982), no. 504.

29 Contra Quirke (2005), pp. 48-49. With sometimes less than 5 cubits (c. 2.6 m) of width, lanes in ancient Egyptian urban contexts were hardly generous for circulation of donkeys and large crowds at the same time and this can be interpreted as a sign of a low-level of quality of life. This applies also to the street of Tell el-Dab'a (Bietak *et al.* (2010), p. 17).



Fig. 4. The plan of el-Lahun reproduced from Petrie's reports, on a satellite image. In yellow is the workers' quarters at el-Lahun, the 'ghetto' *sh̄m snwrt m3c-hrw*. In blue are the 'élite residences' of the eastern suburb *h̄tp snwst m3c-hrw*.

two main sectors and it also indicates an intentional, strict, administrative and social separation.³⁰ The width of the west enclosure wall dividing *Hetep* from *Sekhem* (c. 3.2 m wide), its sloping sides and, more significantly, the impressive elevation of more than 6 m when complete, imply that no view was allowed over the enclosure walls, surely inducing a sense of restriction and seclusion. The monumentally sized enclosure walls would have been impressive to the inhabitants of el-Lahun, and certainly represented a very significant investment of resources.

At the southern end, the regular north-south direction of the western boundary wall bends slightly, but significantly, to become aligned with the pharaoh's funerary temple which is located directly to the south. The slightly different alignment of the southernmost house-blocks adjoining this boundary wall, in comparison to the rest of blocks at *Sekhem*, could be the result of a later phase of construction associated with the cult temple to provide services dedicated to its distinctive function.³¹

Monumentality, conformity and organization according to architectural rules at el-Lahun seems to have conveyed important social messages to the town's inhabitants. The consistent pattern, imposed by the state, restricted and shaped the dwelling forms and limited personal choices. Social

³⁰ Horváth (2010), p. 174.

³¹ This fact discussed by O'Connor seems to acquire symbolic or cosmological meaning (Horváth (2010), p. 195; O'Connor (1997), p. 389).

rules, physical constraints, and imposed directives from above determined how people carried out and arranged their domestic activities, within and outside their houses. The power and supremacy of the institutions were first used to mobilize the resources to build these vast projects. This demonstrated their authority to divert a large number of people and force them to conform to set rules. The structures then reinforced this idealized vision for the society and its individuals, and maintained the social differentiation necessary to transform 'chaos' into 'order'.

From farms to townhouses: The emergence of state planned towns

The transition that took place from rural villages to state planned settlements, often referred to as the 'urban revolution' in the Nile valley, is a poorly documented and little understood developmental phase.³² Our knowledge of the social and ideological context in which the evolution from village life to the 'civilization' of planned towns took place, is inadequate given the complexity of the phenomenon.³³ In Egypt, the layouts of prehistoric settlements like Merimde Beni-Salame³⁴ and el-Ma'adi³⁵ provide evidence of primitive urban planning and community organization, with rows of huts positioned along what look like roughly-formed roads, as early as the Fayum Neolithic (c. 4000 B.C.). The archaic remains reveal a series of dwellings organized in approximately rectangular blocks, along straight streets, evidence of the initial stages of a planning strategy, in sharp contrast to the more spontaneous organic developments of the majority of farming villages.³⁶

Although the lexicon used to describe these developments remains unclear, terms such as *hwt*, *mdt* ('walled, rectangular (?) settlement', sometimes also used for 'royal funerary domain'), *njwt* ('walled, round (?) settlement'), *dmjt* ('town', 'quarter' or 'sanctuary'), *whyt* ('village'), *dmj* ('farming village'), for example, are used in Egyptology, but they tend to cover a rather large and often vague range of meanings.³⁷ Clearly, clusters of small dwellings at the back of a sanctuary cannot be considered a 'town' by even the broadest definition.³⁸ More securely, some of the earliest evidence for an urban community is recorded in the annals of the Palermo Stone under the pharaoh Horus-Nebmaat Snefru (c. 2600-2450 B.C.). Several foundation ceremonies are recorded for the first two dynasties, and also the 'making of thirty-five houses', almost certainly a new settlement for funerary personnel and priests.³⁹ The emergence of these earliest 'planned settlements' in Egypt, but also across the entire Fertile Crescent, contrast with the more familiar organic developments.⁴⁰

Examples of towns with a certain degree of standardization between sites are well attested in the

32 For this concept, and more generally for ancient urbanism in pre-industrial societies see Childe (1950), pp. 3-17; Smith (2009), pp. 3-29; Wilson (1963), pp. 33-36; and more recently Bietak, Czerny, Forstner-Müller (2010); Mellaart (1979), pp. 22-34. A list of dynastic settlements in ancient Egypt can be found in Butzer (1976), pp. 60-70.

33 For discussions and critique of Wilson's statements in 'Egypt-civilization without cities' see Kemp (1977), pp. 185-200. Urbanism in ancient Egypt is discussed in O'Connor (1972; 1993); Bietak (1979), pp. 105-106.

34 Junker (1928), pp. 14-33; Eiwanger (1999), pp. 501-505.

35 Menghin and Amer (1932; 1936); Menghin (1934), pp. 111-118.

36 The term 'organic' town is here intended to be an urban aggregation which developed naturally in contrast to the 'planned' town conceived as a single concept and organized in a structured layout, although in some cases the two situations can be combined. As a general rule, urban planning was typically focused on alignments over a long distance, perhaps oriented towards a symbolic feature, often ignoring topography, and also on the repetition of modular building units.

37 Egyptian terminology for settlement categories is purely functional (Faulkner (1962), pp. 66, 125, 313).

38 Kemp (1989), p. 141; Redford (1997), pp. 210-220.

39 Roccati (1982), pp. 36-38; Breasted (1906-7), p. 147. Similar quarters for funerary personnel and priests at Giza are discussed in Arnold (1998).

40 Bietak (1979), pp. 128-133. Of particular importance is the site of Hierakonpolis, probably one of the first organized communities as can be seen from the town plan (Hoffman, Hamrrouch and Allen (1986), pp. 175-187; Hoffman (1980), pp. 119-137; Hoffman (1984), pp. 235-245). An analysis of spatial organisation in mortuary context is in Roth (1993), pp. 33-55.

Old Kingdom. Several urban centers emerged⁴¹ characterized by a combination of organic layouts and closely packed streets, often thought to represent the typical Egyptian town.⁴² Most likely, this arrangement was representative of the majority of the ancient urban settlements in early Egypt.⁴³ The ancient urban settlements of Elephantine,⁴⁴ Dahshur,⁴⁵ and Memphis⁴⁶ are examples of ancient towns which evolved organically.⁴⁷ They are characterized by a lack of noticeable overall direction of growth, and contained a compact community with a variety of trade specializations, which were organized and developed into different quarters. In these settings, most likely one house was added to an earlier one along narrow streets, according to arbitrary alignments.

From the beginning of the 4th Dynasty, the transformation from farming villages to urban agglomerates and, in a similar way, the shift from 'farms' to 'town houses' was doubtless triggered by the emergence of strong centralized government, an increasingly military attitude, the concentration of resources, and social control of the wider population.⁴⁸ The Decree of Dahshur of pharaoh Merytawy Pepi I (c. 2300-2181 B.C.) mentions two early pyramid towns built near the pyramids of Sneferu.⁴⁹ Another town, currently under investigation, is Heit el-Ghurab at Giza. Its inhabitants would have supported the mortuary cults. It extends over an area of c. 0.65 ha to the east of the main pyramids, in the vicinity of the causeway of the monument of Queen Khentkawes (late 4th Dynasty, c. 2529-2471 B.C.).⁵⁰ Such settlements seem to have had a series of dedicated quarters in a similar manner to el-Lahun. There were quarters for bureaucratic officials, priests and overseers employed in the temples, on one side, and a more congested sector for larger number of workmen involved in the heavy toil at the pyramids and sanctuaries, on the other. An early stage of urbanism can be recognized in these state planned developments of the Old Kingdom. They are physical manifestations of an ideology inspired and controlled by a dominant élite group, who were intent on building institutionalized mechanisms enforcing community integration.⁵¹

The natural, original, form of Egyptian society in Antiquity was rural village life, and it was inherently conservative. It was characterized by a society in which the majority of its members lived

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- 41 Kemp (1989), pp. 144-145, fig. 50. In terms of town sizes, the best guess for Mit-Rahina in the Old / Middle Kingdom is between 120 to 150 ha, probably the largest settlement in Egypt. Abydos, c. 2 ha, was enlarged to c. 3.7 ha; Elephantine was between 2 and 2.5 ha in early Old Kingdom, growing in Middle Kingdom to over 8 ha; Edfu approximately 8-9 ha at around the same time; Hierakonpolis c. 8.5 ha; El-Kab c. 8.5 ha; Dendera in the Old Kingdom c. 2 ha; Abu Ghalib in early Middle Kingdom c. 3.4-4.2 ha; Kahun c. 14 ha; Tell el-Yahudiya in the 2nd Intermediate Period, 21 ha (according to Bietak (1979), pp. 108-128).
- 42 See for instance Seidlmayer (1996), p. 108. Rectangular house construction is more favourable for a rectangular settlement pattern. For example see the case of Mahasna (Site S2-M2) in Garstang (1902), pp. 6-8, pl. 4. A rare model in clay of a rectangular Predynastic house from el-Amrah is discussed in Randall-Maclver and Mace (1902), pl. 10.
- 43 Kemp (1972), p. 675. For planned versus organic cities in Antiquity see Smith (2007), pp. 5-6. Planning in Ancient Egypt is exclusively referring to a group of contemporaneous urban centres within a single cultural area. It is possible that the sample in this investigation could be biased by an uncertain number of disappeared but nonetheless important urban centres in the valley.
- 44 Von Pilgrim *et al.* (2004), pp. 119-148; von Pilgrim (1996); Kaiser *et al.* (1999), p. 234; Dreyer (2002), pp. 157-225.
- 45 Arnold (1980), pp. 15-16, fig. 1; Arnold (1989), No. 4, figs. 1-4.
- 46 Jeffreys (1985); Jeffreys *et al.* (1983), pp. 30-42; Jeffreys and Málek (1988), pp. 15-29; Kemp (1976), pp. 25-28.
- 47 Dwellings in these settlements have been discussed also in Shaw (1992), p. 150.
- 48 Seidlmayer (1996a; 1996b).
- 49 Moret (1917), pp. 359-447, II, pp. 387-427, pls. 5-6. For the hieroglyphic text see Sethe (1906-1933), pp. 209-213; Goedicke (1967), pp. 55-77; Borchardt (1905), pp. 1-11.
- 50 Lehner suggests the possibility that the galleries served as 'barracks' and the whole Heit el-Ghurab site has been described as a 'workers' camp'. The settlement went through a series of developmental phases and was most likely inhabited until the end of the Old Kingdom (Lehner and Tavares (2010), pp. 171-216; Lehner (2002), pp. 27-74; Tavares (2011)). The Giza Plateau Mapping Project is available at <http://oi.uchicago.edu/research/projects/giza-plateau-mapping-project-gpmp-0#Introduction>.
- 51 De Marrais *et al.* (1996), p. 15; Hassan (1993), pp. 551-569; Kemp (1989), p. 151. The Middle Kingdom is defined as 'intensely structured and bureaucratic with a dominant tendency for regulations and correspondingly structured views of the society', and this is reflected in the ordered, rigid, rectangular building models used for its settlements.

in relatively small homogeneous groups, based on closely knit primary relations, usually involving immediate family, and a neighborhood that was inter-related.

There are good reasons for inferring that the subsequent establishment of state control over the built environment was characterized by the dissolution of the model of *civitas* prevalent in the Predynastic and Old Kingdom periods, and the intensification of social complexity and social control. Ancient Egyptian society progressed through a profound socio-cultural change as a result of the diffusion of new planned settlements. With the abandonment of the conservative thinking typical of traditional rural life, the cultural evolution undoubtedly had consequences for social relations.⁵² As well as state planning, state architecture was closely related to the governmental system. State authority enabled control over both the physical environment and its inhabitants.⁵³ Ideology, as an active force within the society of the Middle Kingdom, was communicated via both material and symbolic elements, and was undoubtedly influential in shaping the urban architectural forms of the new planned settlements.

Where the symbolism of architecture emerged, it was very closely linked to royal ideology and was used as a form of ‘monumental propaganda’.⁵⁴ Urban planning in Egypt first became systematic within defended forts and work camps built by the royal establishment. In these developments, orthogonal planning was widely used to establish the urban layout and the housing arrangements, using an architectural language of rigid grids, straight lines and square corners; clearly the manifestation in the built environment of strict norms and rigid social rules.⁵⁵

State planned pyramid towns had common elements on which the royal establishment depended in order to control and organize people and resources. Bottlenecks at doorways and entrances and exits to pathways facilitated guarding and controlling the flow of people and materials, while the impressive monumental walls enforced the social differentiation, concealing and separating individuals of different status. Over time, via the width of the streets, the materials used and, the comparative sizes of residential dwellings, the state bureaucrats were able to assert complete control over the population and their *modus vivendi*.

The bureaucratic and rigid organization of the Middle Kingdom produced planned settlement schemes that were easily duplicated, but which gave the ancient architects less autonomy, and preventing them from incorporating variation or modernization over time. The typical new settlement of the Middle Kingdom was the end product of a planning process that had a precise purpose. It was an artificial construct rather than a natural or spontaneous development. The monumental aspects of the architecture were visible on a large scale to the population. They were an effective way to convey a sense of mind control or indoctrination, and they provided a means of disseminating that propaganda.

The physical environment: urban order, housing and lifestyle

At el-Lahun, the largest concentration of houses in the west compound *Sechem-Senwosret* is distributed along eleven parallel east-west lanes extending off a main north-south running street (Fig. 5). For Petrie, it was evident that the west block was a ‘barrack-like camp’ or a sort of ‘dormi-

52 Wenke (1989), pp. 129-155; Seidlmayer (1996b), p. 108. However, it is rather difficult to infer the specifics of ancient religious beliefs, sacred symbolism, and cosmology from the socio-cultural changes. The absence of textual data have made the attempts largely speculative (Wenke (1991), pp. 279-329; Rapoport (1969), p. 7).

53 Fairman, (1949), p. 49.

54 De Marrais *et al.* (1996), p. 15.

55 Kemp (1989), pp. 149-179; Czerny (1999), pp. 17-29.

tory for confined people'.⁵⁶ The majority of blocks are of similar size and have the same internal layout, with a prevalence of rectangular rooms of two or three standard size variants.⁵⁷ Its design was repetitive in room arrangement and in allocation of space. The use of an integrated orthogonal interior plan suggests a higher level of planning than simply common alignments or semi-orthogonal urban blocks. Even though only the lower courses of their walls survive, we can conclude that this repetition reflects a precise vision of society in the town. This man-made environment is the expression of social division, made by a ruling élite class to separate themselves from those located at the bottom of the social ladder.⁵⁸ The house units in the sample at el-Lahun range in ground floor area from about 44 to about 170 square meters for the most generous units.⁵⁹

In contrast to this regularity, the nature of mud-brick generally encouraged development of the houses by gradual enlargement. In the Fayum mud was much cheaper and easier to obtain than stone, and as a result, all of the structures, whether private houses or royal palaces, were built of sun dried mud brick. Studies of mud brick architecture have shown that when a house collapsed or was pulled down, the mass of debris was not necessarily removed but sufficiently levelled before another house was erected on top of it. The rectangular ground plans of houses at el-Lahun indeed show that rooms were added or subtracted when family groups extended, using the most common building material available. The simplicity with which additions could be built allowed houses to 'grow' as required, and as opportunities for expansion occurred such as through the destruction or abandonment of adjacent properties.⁶⁰

Even with the excellent survey conducted by Petrie, we do not possess a reliable source of information regarding these changes.⁶¹ The extensive re-use of material mixed-up traces of structural alterations corresponding to different owners, which perhaps also indicate changes in the rank of the inhabitants.⁶² Looking at the pattern of altered structural walls it is possible to infer that, originally, all blocks of the houses were extended as a standard scheme for the full extent of the west precinct, and perhaps extended into the unexcavated area at south.⁶³ After the initial flourishing of the settlement during the Middle Kingdom, the division of the residential quarters into elongated strips was maintained into the New Kingdom era, however, larger dwellings in the south-west area may have been part of a subsequent re-construction, aligning houses with the temple. They may have accommodated the priests and lay personnel responsible for the perpetual cult of the deceased king, during this later phase⁶⁴. Suggestions have been put forward that they provided

56 Petrie (1891), p. 8.

57 The architectural aspects of dwellings are vividly reported in Petrie (1890), pp. 21-32. Mud brick architecture in Antiquity is dealt with in Spencer (1979).

58 Mud brick houses are undoubtedly the reflection of a dynamic social system, in contrast with the more static stone built constructions of royal and administrative palaces (Shaw (1992), pp. 147-166). For the reasons for the diffusion of rectangular construction see Steadman (2006), pp. 119-130.

59 Discussion can be found in Quirke (2005), pp. 74-87; Doyen (2010), pp. 81-87, Figs. 3, 4 and 5. Gross floor areas range from 44.1 sqm (16 c x 10 c = 8.4 m x 5.25 m) for types 1 in the east sectors ED a,b,c,d, E; ED b,c,d, W and EB w,x,y,z,E and for the largest ones 297.6 sqm (36 c x 30 c = 18.9 m x 15.75 m) for types 22 in sectors Wd 1,2. The types 3a, 3b (15 c x 15 c = 7.875 m x 7.875 m = 62 sqm) is the most frequent dwelling, although not the smallest one which is of about 44 sqm with 2 or 3 rooms. See also Roik (1988).

60 Shaw (1992), p. 150. This applies also to administrative buildings (Kemp (1987), pp. 120-136).

61 Gallorini (2008). The plan of the town, with its units and doorways, is still approximate (see Frey and Knudstad (2008), p. 73, fig. 51).

62 In early settlement types, circular dwellings tend to be characteristic of nomadic and semi-nomadic societies, while rectangular dwellings are characteristic of fully sedentary societies. Rectangular structures are easier to construct in bricks and it is much easier to add one to another (Flannery (1972), pp. 23-53. See also Flannery (1993), pp. 109-117; Flannery (2002), pp. 417-433; see also Shaw (1992), p. 150).

63 Kemp (1989), p. 151.

64 Quirke (1990), p. 178; O'Connor (1997), p. 389; Doyen (2010), p. 81; Bietak (1979), p. 115.

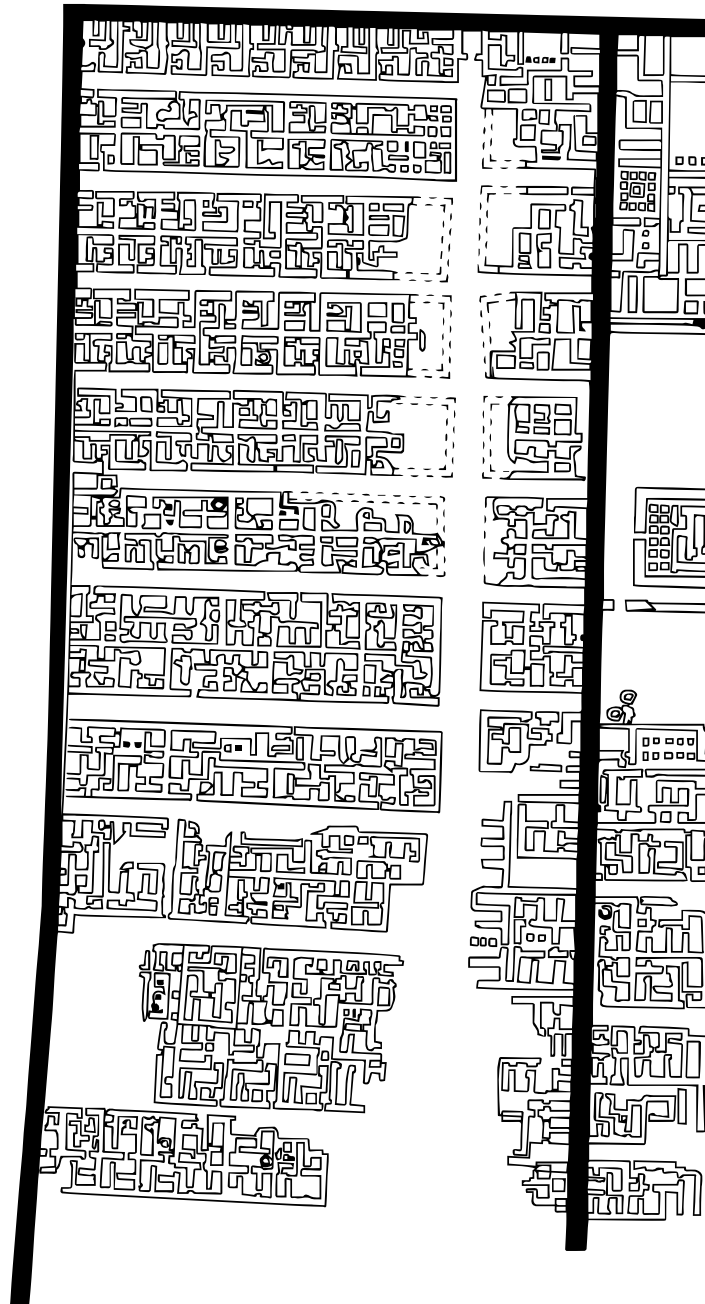


Fig. 5. Detailed plan of the workmen quarters 'ghetto' *šhm snwsrt m³c-hrw* (after Petrie's reports).

temporary accommodation and offices for the high-status temple functionaries and the temple staff, in direct proximity to the place of the cult. These larger dwellings may have been the result of a longer-term commitment to maintaining rituals and the ritual purity of cult attendants and temple functionaries.⁶⁵

65 David (1991), p. 36. Hygiene, water supply and sewage could have been serious problems at el-Lahun. We learn for example from Petrie that '...rats were as great a plague in the XII dynasty as they are at present in Egypt. Nearly every room has its corners tunnelled by the rats; and the holes are stuffed up with stones and rubbish to keep them back...' (Petrie (1891), p. 8). The Petrie Museum preserves a pottery rat trap (UC 16773) originally identified as a coop for small chickens or incubator (available at <http://petriecat.museums.ucl.ac.uk>).

Reconstructing and characterizing site use through time

Understanding the chronological sequences and site stratification at el-Lahun is challenging. After the death of its founder, Senwosret II, el-Lahun went through a series of occupational phases that spanned many decades. These are evident in the archaeological record, especially in the southern part of the west suburb, however, alterations made during the later history of the settlement, mainly during the New Kingdom, also appear in Petrie's survey plans.

In places, the houses of the earliest strata of the settlement are badly destroyed by the more recent building activities of the late Middle Kingdom, but in the case of the layout of Rank B, the sequence of dwellings of medium size, identical shape, and uniform appearance is remarkable.⁶⁶

Reconstructing the overall architectural form of a *hnrt* is not easy. There is no documentary or pictorial evidence for what a 'special work camp' looked like. Quirke has argued that *hnrt* were initially defense related but 'impermanent edifices of loose stone or organic materials' which roughly resembled a well-planned, regularly constructed and well-organized 'district'. Hence, *hnrt* seem to have been *kd* ('assembled') but were not necessarily intended to endure, at least in the face of offensive military action.⁶⁷

How much can be said about the feelings of those who lived in these type of dwellings? This is difficult to answer due to the concept's multi-dimensional nature. Any hypothesis must be related to the local environment as well as to the design and functionality of the dwellings. Central to understanding peoples' feelings and quality of life in this environment is the ability to evaluate the various factors in play.

Households cannot be studied in isolation, but need to be contextualized within their wider social setting. In the west block of *Sekhem-Senwosret*, there does not seem to have been any significant natural or man-made elements within sight or in the surrounding environment, meaning that it was a largely barren landscape. There were neither distant nor varied views nor additional spaces such as public areas or meeting places within the urban scheme. In fact, el-Lahun did not include communal or shared gardens, courtyards or private open spaces. In 'work camps' such as el-Lahun, it seems that there was no opportunity for public interaction within a social space, which could have contributed to a better quality of living.

The multiple dwellings were arranged in ranks with no traces of communal property within the complex. The buildings shared a common orientation aligned with the rectangular compound wall, and this rectilinear form may have been particularly susceptible to prevailing winds.⁶⁸ Government control and enforced standardization can also be manifested by the use of standard units of length, but at el-Lahun the hypothesis put forward by Doyen, for an urban scheme based on a unique unit of length for the construction of the whole settlement, appears weak.⁶⁹

At el-Lahun, only one outer door opens to the street from each property. The level of privacy this provided is unclear, but it should be expected that the entrances provided a degree of privacy for

⁶⁶ Petrie applied, after excavating and exposing the walls, a lettering system to specific rows of terrace housing. The first, most southern row of terraces, has been called Rank A.

⁶⁷ Quirke (1988), p. 86. There are no indications of what a *hnrt* could look like, since no pictorial representation or architectural model have ever been recovered. See also the case of Qasr el-Saga (Herbich (2001)).

⁶⁸ Doyen (2010), p. 98, fig. 14.

⁶⁹ It is here considered that 1 cubit (c.) = 7 palms (p.) = 52.5 cm (Doyen (2010), pp. 98-99; Carlotti (1995), pp. 127-139). In reality, a variety of royal cubit rods have been recovered at el-Lahun, varying from 64.5 to 68.275 cm in length. See Petrie Museum catalogue at <http://petriecat.museums.ucl.ac.uk>. For their unusual size, away from the canonical 52.5 cm, Petrie suggested Asiatic origins (Petrie (1926), pl. 6 and successive, nos. 646, 652, 3453, 4149, 4354).

the interior even when the door was open. All households forming part of a group were positioned next to each other in a patterned arrangement. It is not clear if discrete groups of inhabitants occupied each separate structure. Many of the houses seem excessively small, with only four small rooms that can be considered 'living spaces' each, arranged back to front in rows in most cases. Doyen defines them as 'pièce d'accès' (a), 'annexe' (b), 'circulation' (c), 'antichambre' (d), 'pièces terminales' (e).⁷⁰ When interpreting the differences between rooms it is easy to fall in the trap of assuming that a single room was allocated a single function, whereas the reality in ancient times was usually more complicated. In the majority of buildings there was a predominance of rectangular rooms with widths of 2 or 3 multiples of standard vault spans, indicated by the positions of structural walls of the appropriate thickness. This arrangement is characteristic of mud-brick vaulting which was probably similar in form to better preserved examples from the Middle Kingdom, such as the cenotaphs at Abydos. It is likely that the interiors of the chambers were roofed with barrel vaults in mudbrick in the so called 'Nubian' or 'skewed construction' style,⁷¹ unlike other domestic examples from the New Kingdom at Deir el-Medina or Tell el-Amarna.

The whole settlement was surrounded with a six-meter high monumental wall on its four sides. Kemp, Uphill and Smith, and others, concord with the idea that the settlement was closed to the south by a fourth side consisting of a 'dike-like' wall, as Petrie anticipated. The only ancient entrance to the settlement so far identified is in the eastern enclosure wall, with a width of less than two meters (c. 2.8 cubits). It is still unclear if any other town gates existed to provide access to traffic routes linking this community to other contemporary urban centers, to the north, such as the towns of el-Lisht,⁷² Medinet el-Madi,⁷³ Memphis, Dahshur, or perhaps towards the south, as far as Abydos and Elephantine.

The separation walls and enclosure fortifications are often assumed to have been built for defensive purposes, but despite their magnitude, more careful analysis suggests that they may have been erected primarily in order to segregate and control the work-force. Their primary purpose may in fact have been symbolic, to dwarf and dominate the surrounded individuals with their monumental proportions,⁷⁴ and as such they articulated a form of monumental propaganda.

This conclusion can be justified in part by considering that Egypt, at the time the work-camp was constructed, was not at risk of attack or raids during the late Middle Kingdom. Structural aspects and symbolic elements imply that ideology was an active force in shaping the earliest state-planned settlements. Massive elements of architecture were ideal for population mind control and indoctrination and for the dissemination of propaganda.⁷⁵ The thick wall dividing the two parts of the settlement seems to support this logical explanation. The two blocks *Hetep-Senwosret* and *Sekhem-Senwosret* co-existed at el-Lahun within a system of separate but 'contained communities' in which enclosure walls, rather than active force, impressed and intimidated the population, imposing differentiated status, and standing for power, influence and social control.⁷⁶

70 Doyen (2000), p. 72.

71 Fathy (1973).

72 Arnold (1996); Arnold (1989), pp. 75-93.

73 Medinet el-Madi, ancient *Dja*, a locality at about 30 km southwest of the town of Medinet el-Fayum, near the village of Abu Gandir, was the site of a 12th Dynasty Middle Kingdom settlement connected with the cobra goddess Renenutet and the crocodile god 'Sobek of Shedet' temple. Ptolemaic and Roman urban schemes seemed to follow, like many of the other towns in the Fayum, the original orthogonal layout of the Middle Kingdom town (<http://www.medinetmadi.org> and excavation reports in Vogliano (1936; 1937); Bresciani and Giammarusti (2012); Bresciani *et al.* (2006)).

74 Kemp (2000), pp. 335-346.

75 De Marrais *et al.* (1996), p. 16.

76 Moeller (2004), p. 265.

Evidence from the First Intermediate Period demonstrates that local families in power frequently decided to build enclosure walls.⁷⁷ Town walls in antiquity, according to several authors, invite a functionalist explanation rather than a structural one.⁷⁸ The form of the walls at el-Lahun suggests limitations on mobility and intimidation were the design criteria, rather than protection from external threat. As an extension of this logic, we should consider the possibility that in the Ancient Near East, walls were not only constructed as defenses against an external enemy, but perhaps more often as protection against possible internal state disorder and turmoil.⁷⁹ Upon deeper examination, the arrangement of the town at el-Lahun is more complicated than originally assumed.

Apart from uncovering the major architectural elements, investigations of the town have produced other informative archaeological discoveries. The re-flooring of some of the big 'mansions' over burials in the eastern part of the town suggest that the town was occupied for many generations, and that it was abandoned at least twice.⁸⁰ As often happened in the dynastic history of Egypt, once the maintenance of the mortuary cult of a pharaoh ceased, the funerary establishment and related town were mostly deserted, and parts of it were subsequently used as burial areas. A significant number of Asiatics were found in the burials at el-Lahun, but it is difficult to conclude if they were slaves brought into Egypt following conflicts abroad, as war prisoners, or as merchandise to be traded in exchange with others, or possibly both of the above.⁸¹

One of the important aspects that Petrie noted was the introduction of the custom of burying infants within the interior of several houses at el-Lahun, a practice that was not originally part of traditional Egyptian culture or rituals.⁸² Several wooden boxes were found *in-situ* containing infant burials, which scholars have interpreted as indicative of high childbirth mortality:

'...beneath the brick floors of the rooms were, however, the best place to search; not only for hidden things, such as a statuette of a dancer and pair of ivory castanets, but also for numerous burials of babies in wooden boxes.⁸³ These boxes had been made for clothes and household use, but were used to bury infants, often accompanied by necklaces and other things...'.⁸⁴

Artefacts in bronze, such as a mirror tang, weights, and large amounts of pottery were discovered by Petrie and identified as imported goods from their morphological styles and compositions.⁸⁵

77 Moeller (2004), p. 265.

78 Kemp (2000), pp. 335-346; Kemp (2004), pp. 250-260; Moeller (2004), pp. 261-265; Spence (2004), pp. 259-288.

79 Trigger (1972), p. 589.

80 The town was again occupied, although sparsely, during the 18th Dynasty under pharaoh Nebmaatre Amenhotep III (c. 1402-1364 B.C.), as is confirmed by the occurrence of numerous scarabs produced during this renewed occupation.

81 Posener (1957), p. 158.

82 Petrie (1890), p. 12. Intramural burials for infants have been recovered in contemporary settlements such as Elephantine, Abydos, Tell el-Dab'a and Lisht. This custom began with the earliest settled communities in the Near East and continued through the Bronze Age, predominantly in sites with South Levantine connections (el-Omari, Merimde Beni Salame). Initially thought of as a custom of foreign origins, (it has been suggested it was introduced by immigrant, Asiatic workers) it was widespread and attested as native in Egypt as well, although the topic is still debated. We can speculate that the number of infant burials at el-Lahun is indicative of a high mortality rate for babies at birth. For the foreign origins of this practice see Sparks (2004), pp. 25-54; David (1991), p. 37. At the Abydos town site, burials of small children were found in pots or shallows under the house floor (Richards (2005), pp. 66, 169-170; Wegner (2001), p. 303). This practice does not have a single interpretation for all cultural contexts, although it implies a religious belief in rebirth and hope for an afterlife (McGeorge (2011) available at <http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00808172>). In the case of Elephantine island, the custom of in-settlement burials of fetuses and infants that is seen in later periods is attested as early as the 6th Dynasty (Kaiser *et al.* (1993), p. 182; Raue (2004)).

83 These boxes were originally fabricated for other purpose and later re-used a coffins (Manchester Museum Catalogue available at <http://harbour.man.ac.uk/emuweb/pages/common/imagedisplay.php?irn=815&reftable=ecatalogue&refirn=102925>).

84 Petrie (1892), p. 116.

85 See discussion in Petrik (2011), pp. 215-217; Posener (1957), p. 161. The well-known torque or necklace was the distinctive ornament of the western Asiatic area and a typical product of Byblos. Kamares pottery entered Egypt and was imitated and

Burials attested across the whole settlement and, more intriguingly, within domestic contexts, have shown that after a first occupational phase, the town was inhabited during a second phase of intense activity in the New Kingdom, during the reign of Nebmaatre Amenhotep III (c. 1391-1353 B.C.). Petrie was certainly right in classifying the site of el-Lahun as the workers' town related to the construction of the pyramid of Senwosret II. Only in the second season did he recognize the sparser evidence for occupation during the 18th Dynasty, in particular during the reign of Amenhotep III. The presence of later burials in the south-eastern part of the site indicate that el-Lahun was uninhabited and partially in ruins by the late 18th Dynasty.⁸⁶

Characterizing the inhabitants of the *ḥnrt wrt*, the 'Great Prison'

The minority of officials and élite people in Ancient Egyptian society have received a disproportionate amount of scholarly attention, and this misrepresents the realities of the past. The workers that lived in the high-density town suburbs of el-Lahun are a good example. They would hardly have been noticed were it not for the recovery of documents recording information about their everyday lives from the town and elsewhere in Egypt. These have provided information about the large population in the lower social strata who would otherwise have left few traces of their existence.⁸⁷

The formation of a social class system and the origins of inequality and social stratification in Ancient Egypt are matters of some scholarly debate. El-Lahun offers the opportunity to explore to what extent differences between social groups and diverse backgrounds can transform a view of Ancient Egyptian society from one of an orderly and reverential culture into one of an environment rich with confrontational situations.⁸⁸

There is certainly evidence of abundant cultic activity at *Sekhem-Senwosret*.⁸⁹ From the highest of fices down to the household level, participation in the royal cults was enforced. There were at least four temples⁹⁰ in *Sekhem-Senwosret*, and there is also evidence of other cults, such as for Hathor.⁹¹ Hieratic documents attest to other institutions involved with the cults such as the *šnwt nt ḥtpw-ntr* ('granary of divine offering') and *šn^c n ḥtpw-ntr šḥm snwsrt* ('food production area of divine offering of *Sekhem-Senwosret*'),⁹² but the majority of the documents recovered provide anecdotal evidence of a much harsher daily life. The administrative texts are pre-occupied with keeping track of prisoners and making sure they complete their allocated work.

The majority of the papyri recovered from domestic and religious settings at el-Lahun consist of records of the daily interactions of the inhabitants. These activities were conducted through and

produced locally (Hughes and Quirke (1998), pp. 112-140). Minoan sherds and imitations at el-Lahun were not luxury items for it appears that none of them were discovered in the vicinity of the north rows of mansions, rather it seems to have been domestic ware used by some ordinary people.

86 A burial ground for the inhabitants of this ancient town is located at 8 km east of el-Lahun in the locality of Qaryat el-Harajah, south of the modern village. It contained poor graves as well as a few scattered burial (Engelbach (1923); Grajetzki (2004)). No forensic investigations have been carried out so far.

87 Broadly speaking, with 'lower status' categories such as *tšj.w* ('defectors'), *mry.t* ('employed'), *ḥsbw* ('conscripted workers'), *b3k.w* ('workers'), *skrw-ḥḥ* ('bound for life' or foreign 'prisoners of war'), and so on are intended here.

88 The formation of social class systems and the origins of inequality and social stratification connected to the 'urban revolution', are subjects still inadequately explored in Egyptology. For an overview see Bard (1992), pp. 16-21.

89 Horváth (2010), p.179. See also Kemp (1989), pp. 149-166.

90 *jnpw tpj-dw.f* ('Anubis who is upon his hill'), *sbk nb r3-šḥ.wj* ('Sobek lord of Ra-sehui') and the most important cult-temple for Senwosret II, the *ḥwt-ntr n.t nsw.t-biti ḥ^c-ḥpr-r^c m3^c-ḥrw* ('temple of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt, Khakheperra true of voice') (Horváth (2010), p. 183; Quirke (1997), p. 28).

91 Horváth (2015), pp. 125-144.

92 P. Berlin 10048+10319 and 10055 (Quirke (1997), p. 29).

recorded in a large number of administrative texts.⁹³ Many of them manifest personal or social disputes, and reveal a rigid system of rules operating in the community. The central context of the discussion at el-Lahun is the term $\text{𓂏𓂏} \text{ hnrt wr}$ ('great prison'), often mentioned in connection with the community of *Sekhem-Senwosret*.⁹⁴ For some scholars the translation of the term *hnrt* remains ambiguous, but this masculine noun may originate from the verb stem $\text{𓂏𓂏} \text{ hnr}$ ('to imprison', 'to restrain', and 'to confine').⁹⁵ Faulkner⁹⁶ related the term to the word $\text{𓂏𓂏} \text{ hnrrj}$ ('criminal, prisoner'), implying an institution equivalent to a prison. Gardiner⁹⁷ also considered the meaning to be connected to the root *hn(r)j* to 'restrain'. The *Wörterbuch* defined the term *hnrt* as 'prison', 'fortress', or a kind of 'barrier'.⁹⁸ The translation and interpretation of this term was amply discussed by Hayes,⁹⁹ and more recently reviewed by Quirke.¹⁰⁰ Hayes saw a link between institutions such as the *hnrt* and concepts such as 'prison', or in the case of *hnrt wrt* (the 'great prison'). Roccati¹⁰¹ followed this interpretation, finding that the *hnrt wrt* of Thebes denoted a '*campo di concentramento*' (a concentrations camp) that provided forced labor for a series of state projects. Quirke's work provided a very thorough survey and analysis of the relevant textual data, and he raised some objections against Hayes' interpretation, concluding that for these terms a softer rendition such as 'compound' or 'enclosure' would be more appropriate.¹⁰² Despite the ambiguities of Egyptian terminology in the documents of the Old and Middle Kingdoms, and several alternative interpretations, in the majority of cases this term refers to *hsb.w* ('conscripted' or 'confined men/women' or similar). One of the best known examples of the use of the word is in a tale from the Westcar Papyrus. It describes an event that took place in the court of king Khufu¹⁰³ involving a *hnrt*, who is clearly considered to be a *hnrrj* ('criminal' or 'confined man'):¹⁰⁴

dd.jn hm.fjn jw m3ct pw p3 dd iw.k rh.tj ts tp hsk dd.jn Ddj tjw jw.j rh.kwj jtj nh wd3 snb nb.j dd.jn hm.fjmj jn.tw n.j hnrrj nty m hnrt wd nkn.f

'...then his majesty (Khufu) said: is it the truth what they say that you know how to tie a severed head? And Djedi said: yes, I know how to, sovereign my lord, life-prosperity-health. Then his majesty said: let me be brought a criminal who is in prison and inflict the injuries on him'.¹⁰⁵

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- 93 The discovery of a number of unpublished Lahun fragments led several authors to produce the followings works addressing the town's papyri: Collier and Quirke (2002; 2004; 2006); Quirke (2009). For the temple's archive in the Berlin Museum see Luft (1992; 2006); Luft, (1998), pp. 185-200; Quirke (1988), pp. 86-106. This work relies heavily upon these publications for extracts and later translations.
- 94 For the occurrence of this term (P. Brooklyn 35.1446, dating to the reign of Amenemhat III) see Hayes (1955), pp. 36-42. For a recent discussion on this term see also Eyre (2013), pp. 72-73. Two variants in spelling exist, due to the similarity in the hieratic sign M91 with M90 (Quirke (1988), pp. 83-84).
- 95 *Wb* III, pp. 295-296.
- 96 Faulkner (1962), p. 193.
- 97 Gardiner (1957), p. 519.
- 98 *Wb* III, p. 296.
- 99 Hayes (1955), pp. 16, 36-42, 49, 53-54 65-66. See also Eyre (2013), pp. 72-74, 196.
- 100 Quirke (1988), p. 86 and the bibliography cited there. More recently also reviewed in Eyre (2013), pp. 72-74.
- 101 '*hnrt* designa il 'campo di concentramento' destinato a provvedere manodopera coatta per le varie imprese statali...' (Roccati (1982), pp. 16-19 and also Lorton (1977), p. 17). For the great prison of Thebes see Lacau (1984), p. 24 and Ilin-Tomich (2015), pp. 127-128.
- 102 Quirke (1988), pp. 95-96. For the completeness of possible reconstructions, it should also be mentioned that the term *hnrt* has been proposed also as 'the official institution of the ancient Egyptian royal harem'. For this hypothesis see Reiser-Haslauer (1972), briefly discussed also in Hayes (1955), p. 41. The terms is attested for example in several documents (see above Eyre (2013)).
- 103 Circa. 2589-2566 B.C.
- 104 For the P. Westcar, col. VIII, 15-6, dated to 16th or 17th Dynasty, but composed probably in the 12th Dynasty, see Blackman (1988); Lichtheim (1973), p. 216; Quirke (2004), p. 85.
- 105 In this account, the sage Djedi confirmed in front of king Khufu that he could reattach a severed head to a body. But when the king ordered him to apply his magical abilities on 'a captive taken from the *hnrt*', Djedi refused and ended up to demonstrating

Similarly, when describing the tragic events that took place during the First Intermediate Period, the *Admonitions of Ipuwer* recorded in the P. Leiden 334, refer to the widespread deterioration of the institutions. A significant episode concerns the escape of a number of individuals from a *hnrt*, who were found walking freely in the streets:


jw ms hpw nw hnrt djw r hnty sm.tw m ms hr.s m jwwyt

‘...indeed, the laws of the *hnrt* are thrown out and men walk on them in public places’.

In another passage a similar situation of scandal is described as follows:

jw ms hnrt wrt m pr-h3.f hwrw hr šmt jyt m hwwt wrwt

‘...indeed, the great *hnrt* is a popular resort, and poor men come and go to the Great Mansions’.¹⁰⁶

Here again textual evidence conveys the sense of undesirable freedom of movement of individuals outside what should have been a place of incarceration. This episode could only have happened if those individuals had previously been detained in the establishment. Clearly they had been released or had left their restricted condition during a period of political instability and uprisings, when social control was evidently more relaxed.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, texts from the end of the Middle Kingdom, and the New Kingdom *Duties of a Vizier* included a specific task associated with a  *šfd n hbnty* (‘criminal register’)¹⁰⁸ which indicates a list of individuals, certainly a group, who were kept in the *hnrt* (*wrt* ‘great prison’):

‘Now as for every act of the vizier when hearing cases in his bureau. As regards anyone who is not efficient in every duty concerning which he (the vizier) questions him, namely the one who will be unable to exculpate himself in a hearing instituted on the matter, he shall be entered into the criminal register which is in the Great Prison. The same goes for the one who will be unable to exculpate his messenger, and if their wrongdoings will occur for the second time, then it shall be reported and passed on to the vizier that they are registered on the criminal register, with a statement of the case for which they were previously entered on the register in accordance with their offences’.¹⁰⁹

These criminal registers were surely necessary for controlling such institutions, and they indicate the complexity of organizing them, particularly with respect to the number of people involved and the level of activity described. A state workforce could potentially have been concentrated in the *hnrwt*, the ghettos of the *njwt m3wt* (‘new towns’). Those institutions may have served as the basis of the state’s corvée labor workforce.¹¹⁰ It seems likely that the main purpose of the *hnrwt* was to amass and control, on a considerable scale, a workforce of convicts, criminals and captives, either prisoners of war and/or natives. This restricted the social status of the convicts, while making them available as required for cult activities, private household work, quarrying, mining, and large-scale construction works. It is also possible that people could have been forcibly relocated from the countryside in order to construct and populate new forts and planned towns.

his talent on a goose. The cruelty of this tyrant was also noted by the Greek historian Herodotus in *Historiae*, Book II, chapter 124-126.

106 P. Leiden 334, col. VI, 9-10. Ipuwer described the difficult situation around the towns of Egypt during the First Intermediate Period in detail (Lichtheim (1973), p. 150; Quirke (1988), p. 97, note 41).

107 P. Leiden 344, col. VI, 9-11 (commentary in Quirke (1988), pp. 94-95). See Gardiner for a slightly different translation: ‘forsooth, the laws of the judgment hall are cast forth. Men walk upon them in the public places. Poor men break them up (?) in the streets’ (Gardiner (1909), p. 49).

108 Hayes (1955), p. 40.

109 Quirke (1988), p. 98. See also Quirke (1986), p. 115 (in particular note 37) and Hayes (1955), p. 40.

110 Within the *hnrwt* each member was expected to execute some *hn.t* (‘task’) (see below).

During the Middle Kingdom, a large number of captives, Asiatic/Western Asiatic (Levantine) and Nubian, were taken by force to Egypt after successful campaigns as a result of the expansion of the Egyptian state over that time.¹¹¹ Many of these non-acculturated groups, especially those mentioned in papyri with the ethnic label *ʿ3m.w/ʿ3m.t* ('male/female Asiatic'),¹¹² were transported to Egypt, organized into gangs and sent to work in ghetto camps or on estates,¹¹³ while others ended up in private ownership.¹¹⁴ This movement of people must have had a significant effect on the Egyptian demographic, and in particular on the urban communities which were established during the Middle Kingdom.

Obliged to work: Anecdotes from the hieratic documents

It is still a challenge for Egyptologists to explain the huge volumes of construction work achieved in pharaonic Egypt, but it is probably safe to assume that the work could only have been achieved under some form of pressure, and that consequently, it depended on some levels of coercion and conscription. Collective 'religious enthusiasm', 'devotion to the sovereign', and 'social obligations' could have represented the less forceful motivations to work,¹¹⁵ but the administrative documents attest to a legally codified system of slavery or servitude at el-Lahun. It should be noted that the concept of 'slave' is essentially derived from later Roman law, but there is evidence for the organization of labor into divisions or 'phyles' spanning all of Ancient Egyptian history. It was the system put in place to organize workers employed in quarries. Stone masons were typically designated as members of teams involved in construction works or in tomb preparations, and in a few instances also in military projects.¹¹⁶ Similarly, people of foreign origin who lived in Egypt must have been obliged to adapt to the social and cultural systems of their host country and were probably subjected to restrictions on their freedom.¹¹⁷ It is, however, not always clear from texts attesting to slavery in the late Middle Kingdom which mention the sale of labor, whether they are referring to the person or to his/her labor.¹¹⁸

111 Larkman (2007), pp. 107-113.

112 The term is related to the occurrence of the Egyptian *ʿ3m* (sign T14), Gardiner, Grammar, 513, for 'boomerang' or 'throwing stick', the person using this weapon was a 'boomerang thrower'. The Egyptians labelled foreigners according to their weapons. Later on this sign was used as a determinative to mark barbarian people of any sort. The term *ʿ3mw*, attested from the 6th Dynasty onwards, seems to derive from the Semitic word *alm*, a Semitic stem used to indicate a 'slave' in Ugaritic, or a 'young man' in Hebrew. Probably used by Semitic people in Ancient Egypt to address each other within a homogeneous or socially related group, the Egyptians might have adopted this term from the population to which they refer. For a more recent discussion of the term see Luft (1993), p. 291.

113 The title *jrj-ḥ3swt* ('responsible for supplying of the court with foreign products') is clearly associated with this task. Expeditions where Medjay and Aamu were captured as prisoners are amply documented (Posener (1957), pp. 145-163; Petrik (2011), pp. 211-226; Posener (1957), p. 159; Redford (2004); David (1986), p. 190). A discussion on foreign populations is in Schneider (1998; 2003; 2010).

114 Quirke (1991), pp. 141-149; Luft (1993), p. 292.

115 For the long-standing discussion on the production of monumental construction and the existence of slave labour in Ancient Egypt see Loprieno (2012). On the topic of possible connection of Egypt and the history of Israelites enslaved see Hoffmeier (1997), pp. 52-76.

116 Rosters and name lists for workers were used extensively in Ancient Egypt. Papyrus Reisner I, (reign of Senwosret I) is one of the most cited (Eyre (1987)). The phyle system in the Old Kingdom is discussed in Roth (1991). For the Middle Kingdom phyles see Kees (1948), pp. 71-90, 314-325; Kóthay (2007), pp. 138-150; Kóthay (2016), pp. 763-771. Stone worker gangs are widely attested at el-Lahun (Di Teodoro (2013), pp. 64-80).

117 That Egypt was a multicultural society is probably related to the fact that it is surrounded by one of the harshest environments of the planet. Egyptians saw the world consisting only of four races: Egyptians, Tjehenu, Meshwesh and Libu tribes (Booth (2005)).

118 Bakir (1952), p. 38. On a case of the sale of a slave-girl see Smither (1948), pp. 31-34; Eyre (1987), pp. 18-20; Lorton (1977), pp. 2-64. For the list of seventy-nine slaves appearing in P. Brooklyn 35.1446 (reign of Sekhemre' Sewadjtawi Sebekhotpe III, circa 1740 B.C.) the verso contains a list (partial) of slaves with statements of transaction of property.

At el-Lahun, the term *mrjt* ('dependent') is frequently used to refer to foreign captives brought to Egypt, primarily as property of the king, and assigned to temple workshops, granaries and to the fields. According to Bakir, *n-dt* refers to subjugated foreigners and people who contributed service to religious institutions. The population of el-Lahun, composed mainly of confined men and women, often of Syrian-Palestinian origins and scarcely motivated by religious devotion to the sovereign, were most likely subject to a certain amount of coercion.¹¹⁹ Seclusion and beatings were probably common, and were most likely aimed toward subduing the foreigners.¹²⁰ There is evidence documenting this in the historical record, in literature and in iconography. The role of foreigners within Egyptian society, a society considered by some to have been liberal in some respects, was clearly one of total subjugation:

*js ʕ3m hsy ksn pw n bw ntf 3hw mw šb m ht ʕš3 w3wt jry ksn m-ʕ dww n hms.f m st wʕt stšw ʕkw
rdwy.fy jw.f hr ʕh3 dr rk Hr*

'...the miserable Asiatic! He is wretched because of the place he is in, lacking of water, scarce in wood, many are its roads and painful because of mountains. He has not settled in one place. Food forces his legs forward, he has been fighting since the time of Horus'.¹²¹

Based on the evidence, the living conditions of these confined men and women must have been low due to poverty, cramped quarters and general overcrowding in the town.¹²² While a controlled level of hostility and forced assimilation of social groups into the social system were essential in this setting, at el-Lahun there were all the components of a violent society in which social cohesion was achieved by the use of physical force.¹²³

A high concentration of different ethnic groups in such a relatively small area must have produced social problems typical of small districts, rather than of larger urban contexts.¹²⁴ Maintaining social cohesion, perhaps in conjunction with the corvée system of manual labor, a type of tax system in the form of manual work, must have required a strict regime controlling behavior, attendance, and monitoring progress. From the institutional point of view, the intent seemed to have been to remove the personal cultural traditions of the rural individuals and force them to conform to the patterns of urban behavior required for state labor projects. It is likely, therefore, that the society was susceptible to class-based, racial, and ethnic disputes between different groups, and between those in charge and the subordinates. Although ideas and beliefs are only indirectly preserved in the archaeological record, it is possible to interpret the walls around the houses and the districts as instruments for regulating social stresses.¹²⁵ The architecture manifested social divisions and

119 Kadish (1996), pp. 439-449.

120 Szpakowska (2008), pp. 150-151. Although we do not have information on skeletal remains from el-Lahun townspeople, individuals buried at Abydos in similar context and contemporaneously have shown fractures from intentional violence (fractures on the forearm are typical of a defensive posture). Forensic analysis indicates violence, and this is reported in Baker (2001), p. 47. Human remains reveal trauma caused by the accumulation of years of hard labour and repetitive motions, for example vertebra had depressions caused by lifting/carrying heavy loads, some joints in lower back and neck showed stress osteoarthritis, nutritional deficiencies, infections and tuberculosis (Baker (2001), pp. 42-49). Diseases such as tuberculosis are typical for people living in settlements with a high population density and in close proximity to animals harbouring diseases or parasites. Common in the Old Kingdom are scenes of workers being beaten, sometimes with sticks that are shaped to look like a man's hand, often while tied to a post (Beaux (1991), pp. 33-53; Muhlestein (2015)).

121 For the Instruction addressed to King Merikare see Lichtheim (1973), pp. 103-104.

122 Quantifying overcrowding is a difficult task. Generally, experts define overcrowding as the presence of an exaggerated number of people within the available space, but of course, the theories and definitions vary in different contexts and countries and depend on sociocultural, economic, and geographical dynamics (Clauson-Kaas *et al.* (1996), pp. 349-363).

123 Vila (1973), p. 159. For example, this is clear from the historical background of the period in the Instruction for King Merikare, which record events which took place during the First Intermediate Period during the reign of king Achotoes III (c. 2130-2140 B.C.) (Lichtheim (1973), pp. 103-104; Quack (1992)).

124 On this topic see also Walmsley (1988).

125 Rowlands (1972), p. 448.

distinctions as a form of 'institutionalized racism'.

From the 4th Dynasty onwards, the pharaohs obtained the necessary workforce of *hmw/hmwt* ('male/female slave') from Asia and Nubia. Often the foreigners were brought to Egypt via trade or as prisoners of war, and were assigned to local temples or to prominent officials.¹²⁶ It appears that inside *hnrwt*-quarters, every captive was forced as an individual to execute the required *h3w* ('manual labor') as demanded by the institutions, or find a *iw3w/iw3yt* ('male/female substitute').¹²⁷

A document of the time of Amenemhat III (c. 1844-1797 B.C.) recovered in a similar urban context seems to depict the control of food supplies and relief from 'deprivation' and 'starvation' as another aspect of the labor system during the Middle Kingdom Egypt. Individuals from the desert seeking refuge in Egyptian towns and volunteering to work are attested in several places.¹²⁸ The papyri P. BM10752 contains on its *recto* a military dispatch from Elephantine, one of the so-called 'Semna dispatches', a series of reports on Egyptian border activities from the fortress of Semna West:

'Copy of a document which was brought to him as something brought from the fortress of Elephantine as something sent by a fortress to another fortress. For the gladdening of your heart, may you be healthy and living. To the effect two Medjay-men three Medjay-women and two infants came down from the desert hills in year 3 third month of the winter season day 27(?). They said, we have come to serve the Palace (i.e. the Pharaoh) life-prosperity-health. It was asked about the condition of the desert. They said we did not hear anything, except that the desert population is starving to death so they said. Then the servant there caused them to be dismissed to their desert on this day'.¹²⁹

Based on sources such as the one above, it is reasonable to think that many individuals were forced to live in state-planned towns because they had little choice over their lifestyle.

Although largely conjectural, scholars have estimated that the population of el-Lahun was up to 9000 individuals.¹³⁰ This is based on the capacity of the granaries,¹³¹ and taking into account Butzer's hypothesis of a total Egyptian population of 1.1 million during the Middle Kingdom.¹³² Estimates of the town's population vary considerably based on estimates of housing density, the possibility

126 Bakir (1952), pp. 30-32. Military activity in Nubia is attested throughout the Middle Kingdom (Altenmüller (1991), pp. 1-48; Marcus (2007), pp. 137-90). The Amenemhat inscription mentions that one of the aims is the capture of a workforce for the king's pyramid city (see also Yeivin (1967), pp. 119-128).

127 Quirke (1988), p. 90.

128 Famine in Ancient Egypt is amply documented. Although perhaps biased by its use as an ideological motif, the scene from the causeway of the pyramid of Unas depicting emaciated Bedouins is an example. Famine in Antiquity is attested in the book of Genesis (12:10): '...now there was famine in the land. So Abraham went down to Egypt to sojourn there for the famine was severe in the land (Canaan)...'. See also Vandier (1936).

129 P. BM10752, P. Ramesseum C, recovered from a tomb of a magician of the 13th Dynasty who reused its verso. Despatch no. 5 (page 4, lines 6-12) was issued during year 3 of the reign of Amenemhat III (c.1840 B.C.) (see Smither (1945), pp. 3-10; Spanel (1984), pp. 844-847. Wente and Meltzer (1990), no. 82; also discussed in Quirke (1990), pp. 187-188, 191-193; more recently also see Porten (2011); Vogel (2004), pp. 82-83). For an overview of the identity of *md3w* Medjay people see Liszka (2011), pp. 149-171. Egyptians seem to have thought of the Medjay as a foreign ethnic group (Negroid) of a non-specific location in the region of the Eastern Desert around the First and Second Cataracts.

130 According to Naroll, a rough estimation of settlement population is in the order of one-tenth of the floor area in square meters occupied by its roofed dwellings (Naroll (1962), pp. 578-589). For the debate see also Helck (1957), pp. 9-11; Stadelmann (1981), pp. 67-77; Stadelmann (1984), pp. 10-14.

131 A vast majority of the population was dependent on the larger houses for their rations. Kemp has suggested that much of the population, especially in the western town, was dependent upon the mansions for their rations. Kemp estimates that the granaries in the five large houses could have held enough grain to support a population of 5,000 people, or 9,000 people on minimum rations. Whatever the total population figure, the el-Lahun granaries could have sustained the entire town. It should be noted that this figure is based upon the granaries from 8 of the possible 10 large houses; so it is possible that even more people could have been fed by the granaries (6,000 to 11,000 people) (Kemp (1989), pp. 153-155; Kemp (1987), pp. 133-134; Badawy (1967)).

132 The hypothesis of a population of 1.1 million during the Middle Kingdom in Egypt was advanced by Butzer (1976), pp. 82-84. For an overview of demography in Ancient Egypt see Kraus (2004).

that the dwellings had an upper story, and estimates of the storage capacity of the granaries in large houses, pushing the upper limit up to as many as 11,000 inhabitants.¹³³ A consistent number of documents mention Asiatics who were permanent residents in the town. Generic ethnonyms such as *ʿ3m.w/ʿ3m.t* ('male/female Asiatic') or *nḥsy* ('Nubian'), were used by the ancient Egyptians to refer to both foreigners living outside of Egypt, and 'adapted members' living in the Egyptian social system, i.e. assimilated members of Egyptian society.¹³⁴ The terms remained vague and did not differentiate individuals according to their precise origins, as these were rarely of importance to the Egyptians. Nevertheless, residents came from numerous areas comprising the Levant, Syria, and Mesopotamia. As discussed above, it appears that the individuals also included Egyptians who, due to famine, debt and the like gave up their legal freedoms voluntarily. They were usually referred to as *b3k.w* ('servants') but generally not as *ḥm.w* ('slaves'). The generic word for *ʿ3m.w* ('male Asiatic'), became synonymous with 'slave' to indicate those condemned to live on the fringes of Egyptian society, in awful conditions, occupied in heavy labor in the mines and in the quarries of the eastern desert. The term *ḥsy* ('miserable', 'wretched' or 'vile') is often associated with it.¹³⁵ Lorton noted that in the context of the *Instruction for King Merikare* this emphasizes the misery of their daily life and their hopeless situation.¹³⁶

Members of workforces engaged in heavy labor, especially during the unbearably hot months of the summer, would have had little or no autonomy. Furthermore, if they were held in isolated town-communities with all of their relatives, they would have had little reason to escape. The individual's relationship with the state was one governed by an ideology centered on the king and the subjugation of non-Egyptians. The longevity of the state¹³⁷ depended on this ideology. It drove the workforce to feel obliged to perform *corvée* on major royal projects, such as pyramid building, and to work effectively within a disciplined but effective construction system. The majority of the time spent awake for most Egyptians seems to have been devoted to work, or, in the case of the bureaucrats and/or officials, to the organization and inspection of work.¹³⁸

The west suburb of el-Lahun also accommodated the priests and the personnel associated with the temples in the town and the royal mortuary cult of the pharaoh.¹³⁹ Temple personnel included doorkeepers, musicians and dancers, mostly women, as well as ritual celebrants.¹⁴⁰ Inhabitants of el-Lahun were perhaps sorted into different suburbs or zones according to their socio-economic status, their ethnic affiliation, their seniority by age, religious beliefs, family and clan structures, trades or craft specializations. This type of arrangement may have been imposed via official zoning

133 Petrie's floor plan covers only about half of the homes enclosed. The possibility of a living spaces on rooftop of small dwellings needs to be considered, based on several flight of stairs documented in situ.

134 Asiatics are mentioned in the temple's archive in the following documents: P.Berlin10002; 10004/1 and 10004/2; 10021; 10033; 10034; 10046; 10047; 10050; 10055; 10071; 10081C; 10082; 10104; 10127b,c,d,+10129a; 10287. In UCL London, the followings town's papyri: P.UC32058; 32098; 32101; 32124; 32127; 32130; 32143E; 32147G; 32151B; 32167; 32168+269; 32191; 32201; 32286; 32294; 32295.

135 The *Prophecy of Neferti*, composed during the early part of Amenemhat I describes the troubles that plagued Egypt '...with Asiatics roaming in their strength, frightening those about to harvest and seizing cattle from the plough...the chaos of the land, and all happiness has vanished. The land is bowed down in distress, owing to those feeders, Asiatics who roam the land. Foes have arisen in the East; Asiatics have come down to Egypt...' (Lichtheim (1973), p. 141).

136 Lorton (1973), pp. 65-70. Herodotus (*Histories*, II, in De Selincourt (1954), pp. 102-3, 106-108) mentions the king Senwosret capturing a series of prisoners who were brought to Egypt to work on building projects. See also Posener (1957), p. 161.

137 Leahy (2000), pp. 225-234.

138 Another important question is how far élite and non-élite shared the same ideology. The complexity of this reality has been discussed in Baines (1990), pp. 1-23.

139 Quirke (1990), p. 178; O'Connor (1997), p. 389; Doyen (2010), p. 81; Bietak (1979), p. 115.

140 As mentioned in the case of P. UC32147G in Collier and Quirke (2006), p. 259: '...Deliveries of temple of Sobek Lord of Djedu [...] of Sobek Lord of Geregabaf [...] of Sobek Lord of Resehwy [...]...Asiatic women 12(?)'.

regulations. El-Lahun, Abydos and also Thebes are good examples of late Middle Kingdom royal establishments containing this type of prison-like camp within their boundaries.

The *hnrt* in el-Lahun is mentioned in several daily reports which attest to the careful management of camp populations, in this case the relocation of an individual by force in the great *hnrt* of el-Lahun:

I speak so that I let you know regarding having him in the great enclosure camp...saying...'.¹⁴¹

In another case an Asiatic called Jarw is to be transferred from the special Asiatic camp together with his son and other individuals.¹⁴² Registers and letters¹⁴³ mentioning the *nhšyw/nhšyw.t* (Nubians) and *mdšyw/mdšyw.t* (Medjay) include their occupations and titles. The textual records agree with the archaeological record in indicating that foreign slave workers were almost as numerous as the native Egyptians.¹⁴⁴ Several individuals were grouped together and labelled as *hb.w* ('dancers') and *hs.w* ('singers'), designations that should be regarded as their title and profession, while others were designated as *mdšyw* guards.¹⁴⁵

Some Aamu and Medjay men mentioned¹⁴⁶ refer to more privileged foreigners among the temple workforce, using Egyptian names for the most part, and in some cases outnumbering the Egyptians.¹⁴⁷ Some names had Egyptian aspects but were Asiatic in origins¹⁴⁸ and it appears that Asiatics who had another title were no longer obliged to use the term *aAm* before their name.¹⁴⁹ Undoubtedly, after extended contact with the Egyptians, Asiatics and Nubians became settlers, and so a steady influx of new imported workers could have been necessary for the state to maintain the working population of towns and estates.¹⁵⁰ Despite assimilation in some respects, the settled immigrants retained a lower status than native Egyptians.

Immigrants were required to leave behind their own countries and cultures, which were regarded as disgraceful and hostile, and adapt to the Egyptian ethic of servitude to the reigning king. They would eventually no longer be referred to as *h3s.tyw* ('foreigners'), an adjective reserved for people living in lands outside of Egypt.¹⁵¹

Immigrant people who lived and worked in *Hetep-Senwosret* and *Sekhem-Senwosret* and the surrounding area were subordinate to several officials such as the *jmy-r hnrw* ('overseer of prisoners'),¹⁵² the *jmy-r hnrt* ('overseer of a prison')¹⁵³ or the *jmy-r hnrt n r-3-wr* ('overseer of the prison of the Great Doorway').¹⁵⁴ Their lives were under the scrutiny of the *sš n hnrt wrt* ('scribe-secretary

141 P. UC32109E, Collier and Quirke (2002), pp. 20-21.

142 P. Berlin 10021 in Luft (1993), p. 296; Scharff (1924), pp. 45-47.

143 See Collier and Quirke (2006), p. 4-5, fig. 1 and Collier (2009), pp. 205-259.

144 Quirke (1988), p. 90.

145 Luft (1993), p. 296.

146 The term *mdšyw/mdšyw.t* ('Medjay') appears for instance in P. Berlin10160+10162, P. Cairo JdE 71580, P. UC32143A, 32191, 32143A and 32191. In few cases they record the names of musicians and dancers (attendance sheet) and the day they served in festivals (Liszka (2011), pp. 149-171). See also Collier and Quirke (2006), pp. 92-93.

147 Luft (1993), p. 293. Asiatic names were rendered by the Egyptians in their hieroglyphic script, which are not always easy to read, especially when the consonants differ from the Egyptian ones.

148 It is highly probable that this could have played some role in the process of assimilation by giving Egyptian names to foreign children and adults, perhaps because of the difficulty that Egyptians found in pronouncing the foreign names (David (1986), p. 190).

149 Luft (1993), p. 292.

150 Trigger (1972), pp. 581-582.

151 Schneider (2010), pp. 143-163.

152 Ward (1982), p. 40, no. 298.

153 Ward (1982), p. 40, no. 302.

154 Ward (1982), p. 40, no. 303.

of the great enclosure')¹⁵⁵ who controlled their movement within the special camp, and the *s3 hrnt* ('prison guard').

A significant number of families lived permanently in the vicinity of the main administrative block.¹⁵⁶ Every member of those low status families¹⁵⁷ was expected to contribute labor. They were represented by the head of the household who was responsible for the group and when communicating with officials. Those called up to work could be, and were often, replaced by other family members or other substitutes,¹⁵⁸ sometimes for brief periods on tasks such as temple duties. There are even examples of replacements working for a month at a time.¹⁵⁹

In one such typical situation a man declares that:

jwt.kwj hr s3.j k3wty n hw.t-ntr jm r dd jw.f m nhw n h3w

'I was seized on account of my son the workman of the temple there (by my district officers who said) that he is in deficit for state-labor'.¹⁶⁰

The administration registered individuals that belonging to households and enrolled them in the monthly staff allocated to temples or work groups.¹⁶¹ Massive construction projects and state planned work in stone quarries seem to have been particularly in need of *hsbw* ('the counted', 'enlistees' and 'conscripted workers'). Low status workers like the 'stone-pullers of *Hetep-Senwosret*' and 'men of *Sekhem-Senwosret*' are mentioned in temple archives.¹⁶²

Egyptians *rmṯ*¹⁶³ often appear in Middle Kingdom documents in parallel with terms such as *tšj.w* ('defectors'), *mry.t* ('employed'), *b3k.w* ('workers'), *skr.w-ḥnh* ('bound for life'), usually foreign prisoners of war or *nfr.w* ('low status young')¹⁶⁴ often recruited for heavy work in quarry expeditions. The evidence from the papyri indicates that sooner or later everyone at el-Lahun had to respond to roll-calls from the authorities, although it seems that protesting against work was not rare, especially among people involved in the more arduous labor in the stone quarries and building sites.¹⁶⁵ A fragment of a papyrus¹⁶⁶ indicates that such protest could be substantial: *m...n...m wṯ hrw* ('...in...not...in raising rebellion').

The local administration kept an up-to-date list of all the residents in a series of name lists¹⁶⁷ with

155 Ward (1982), p. 163, no. 1412; David (1986), pp. 190-191; Lacau (1984). Among the el-Lahun accounts, labour control is one of the duties of the *jmy-r pr hsb rmt* ('accountant of people'), as well as the *h3 n dd rmt* ('bureau for issue of people') (Collier and Quirke (2006), p. 4; see also Petrik (2011), p. 214 and Ilin-Tomich (2015), pp. 127-153).

156 Luft (1992), p. 296.

157 Larkman (2007), pp. 107-113.

158 P. Berlin10023 Ar(1)-(2) in Luft (1998a), p. 7, note 50; P. Berlin10081B in Luft (1992), pp. 103-104, 162; P. Berlin10081 in Luft (1992), pp. 101-102, 161; P. Berlin10020rt unpublished. A 'roll-call', where a substitute has been called to attend is common as in P. UC32174 and P. UC32168+32269.

159 P. Berlin10065A and P. Berlin10104 (Quirke (1991), pp. 144-145).

160 P. Berlin10023A (Horváth (2010), p. 173; Wente (1990), p. 74; Luft (1992), no. 10023; Quirke (1990), p. 163). To these titles *h3w* and *iw3w* seem to be associated a sense of constraint and obligation within the setting of *Sekhem-Senwosret*.

161 For example as can be found in a list of an unspecified numbers of male temple attendants in *Sekhem-Senwosret*, as well as in several others texts where the Asiatics were documented as dancers in P. Berlin10046.9 (David (1986), p. 190; Luft (1993), p. 93).

162 Loprieno (1996), pp. 197-233. Hauling stone mentioned in P. UC32201 (Collier and Quirke, Letters, (2002), p. 107).

163 P. Berlin10104 in Quirke (1991), pp. 144-145.

164 Loprieno (1996), pp. 197-233.

165 P. Berlin10023A, 12th Dynasty, reign of Amenemhat III, in Wente and Meltzer (1990), p. 74, no. 88; Luft (1992), pp. 103-104, and 162.

166 P. UC32107E+H perhaps a literary composition?

167 P. UC32174 and P. UC32352 and P. UC32168+32269.

headings *jmy-rn.f ḥsbw jthw-jnrw* ('name-list of conscripts stone haulers') or simply *jmy-rn.f mnyw* ('name-list of conscripts'). Several documents,¹⁶⁸ not surprisingly, suggest that several individuals were able to vanish in the middle of the crowded suburb.

An *ʿ3m* worker called *Sn-wsr.t* is included in a dispatch reporting five individuals '...who did not come to work...'.¹⁶⁹

Punishment, however, could be harsh. The *Nauri Decree*¹⁷⁰, a much later text of the 19th Dynasty, records the 'discipline' of the government included the '...beating with two hundred blows' together with exacting the work *b3k.w* of the person belonging to the foundation from him, for every day that he shall spend with him, and give them to the foundation...while also ...punishment shall be done to him by cutting off his nose and his ears he being put as a cultivator in the foundation...and as previous plus...and putting his wife and his children as serfs(?) of the steward of his estate...'.¹⁷¹

The written evidence consistently records cases of fugitives from the *hnrt*. A list of corvée-fugitives of the reign of Amenemhat III¹⁷¹ includes a report on absences from duties. A certain man called *Sn-wsr.t*, who apparently had been hiding in *Sekhem-Senwosret*, came to be the concern of a certain steward *Hrw-ms3.f*:

'this is a communication about the man of *Tp-jhw Nmtj-nhtw*'s son *Snwsrt* saying he is guardian in *sh̄m Snwsrt m3c-hrw* there are no duties of his since many years... behold he is the son of the retainer *Jm̄nj* the son of *Jjkj*'.¹⁷²

In a dispatch a servant called *Hm-nsw.t* is caught before an attempts to run away:

swd3-jb pw n nb ʿnh wd3 snb ḥr rdjt djt.tw jb hnt p3y.k Hm-nsw W3d-h3w m rdjt sšw.f nn rdjt bt3.f mj bw nb nfr jrrw nb ʿnh wd snb

'...this is a communication to the lord life, health and prosperity, about having attention given to your servant *Wʿdj-hʿw*, in assigning his documentation without allowing him to evade, in accordance with everything suiting which the lord, life-prosperity-health, can do if he pleases'.¹⁷³

Another example concerning fugitives is even more illuminating:

'...as for any persons whom you may find missing among them, you are to write to the steward Horemsaf about them...I your humble servant, have sent a list of missing persons in writing to the pyramid town *ḥtp snwsr.t m3c-hr.w* satisfied is Senwosret true of voice'.¹⁷⁴

A letter found on a fragmented sheet of papyrus describes the fate of someone who tried to escape from the *hnrt*.¹⁷⁵

168 Luft (1993), p. 24.

169 Luft (1993), p. 296.

170 For the Inscription on the cliff of Nauri, a stele carved on the face of the hill at c. 35 km north of the Third Cataract, in the time of king Seti I (c. 1300 B.C.), see Edgerton (1947).

171 P. Brooklyn35.14446 (Quirke (1991), p. 146).

172 P. Berlin10065b, a 'register' for the inhabitants (Collier (2009), p. 208).

173 P. UC32210, Lot VIII.1 in Griffith (1898), p. I, 79, II, pl. XXXV; Collier and Quirke (2002), p. 133. This situation is also dealt with in the P. Brooklyn 35.1446 (year 36 of Amenemhat III): *3w()n hnrt wr m* (date) *r wh hr:f m d3d3t m 3wy r jrt hp r:f n wʿrw hnrt*, 'It was issued to the *hnrt wr* (or the *hnrt wr* issued) on (date) to release his dependents from the board being(?) (the document) issued to execute the regulation against him for one who flees the *hnrt*' (Quirke (1988), p. 90, note 22; Hayes (1955) pl. 1-7, pp. 19-66).

174 P. Berlin10073, 19th year, under Amenemhat III (Wente and Meltzer (1990), p. 76, no. 91, Luft (1992), no. 10073).

175 P. UC32209 (f)+(b) (see Collier and Quirke (2002), pp. 128-129, lines 1 and 6; Wente and Meltzer (1990), p. 83, no. 102; Petrie (1891), pp. 1-2, pls. 34, no.12.1; Griffith (1898), pl. 34, lines 17-20). 'Egyptian law courts' are known with the term *d3d3t*

*mt wj 3b3b.kw gm.n.j hm-nsw Sbk-m-ḥb mt wnn.f w^cr mt rdj.n.j sw n hnr:t n sdm mt grt pw m-^c.t k3
dj.t mwt.f m h3 n whmw jmj spr.tw r:f m t3 3t*

‘...look I am delighted! I have found the king’s servant Sobekemheb. Look he had indeed fled. Look, I have handed him over to the prison for judgment. Look, moreover this means it is in your hands, so you seem to be letting him die/languish (?) in the office of the reporter. Have someone to go to him right away!’¹⁷⁶

Each worker’s presence and absence were clearly noted and addressed, thus making it possible for administrators to monitor work attendance across time and space. Fleeing from work on state projects was classified as a criminal offence against the state and punished severely, possibly including capital punishment.¹⁷⁷

Another piece of correspondence, in this case between the pharaoh and the temple scribe *Hrw-ms3.f*, refers to an individual taken by force: ‘...you should know that the door-keeper of the temple *Sn’s* son *Jmnj* appealed to me saying, I was deprived of my son ...’¹⁷⁸

A papyrus recovered from Thebes, now in Brooklyn, contains a list of 76 residents of Upper Egypt who were held in the ‘great prison of Thebes’ ‘...because they avoided performing the compulsory services required by state administrators...’. This list comprises Egyptians of humble origins, amongst whom were ‘those not certain who their fathers were’.¹⁷⁹ The same papyrus includes instructions to the ‘Great Prison’ to deal with these individuals in accordance with the relevant sections of the criminal law. A section records the sentences given and the conclusion of nearly all the cases, such as the following:¹⁸⁰

‘...the daughter of Sianhur Teti the scribe of the *Fields of This* a woman an order was issued to the Great Prison in regnal year 31, month 3 of Shomu, day 9 to release her people in the law-court being an order issued in order to execute against her the law pertaining to one who runs away without performing his service here (check mark) statement by the scribe of the vizier, Deduamun it is completed, case closed’.¹⁸¹

The papyri also indicate that many individuals who lived in *Sekhem-Senwosret*¹⁸² belonged to some-

during the Old and Middle Kingdoms, and Qnbt from the Middle Kingdom until the beginning of the Late Period. Translated often with the term ‘council’, ‘committee’ they dealt with ordinary cases which were punished with beatings, and crimes entailing heavier punishments such as mutilations or death penalty. The ‘action of the judges’ was referred as *wq^c* or *wq^c-mdw* the last as a noun can also designate ‘judge’ and ‘judgment’ thus it appears related to the existence of a *hnr t n sdm* (‘judgement enclosure’). For example the stele of Simontu of year 3 of Amenemhat II (BM828) describes his career as *sš n hnr t n sdm* (‘scribe of the enclosure of hearing’) (Quirke (1988), pp. 100-101; Lippert (2012)).

176 Although difficult to demonstrate, this could be a case of ‘forced’ suicide. Egyptian attitude to criminal punishment is still poorly understood but evidence from dynastic Egypt is quite convincing, such as in the Turin Judicial Papyrus: *jw.w w3h.f hr st.f jw.f mt n.f ds.f*; ‘...they left him in his place and he killed himself...’ (Loktionov (2015), p. 107). For an overall picture of law and legal practice in Ancient Egypt see Mota (2010), pp. 6-26.

177 P. UC32126 (Collier and Quirke (2002), p. 63; Collier (2009), p. 214). The town of *Ges-iab* (‘the left side’) is an undefined settlement in the vicinity in existence since the time of Senwosret I (Quirke (1997), p. 26).

178 P. Berlin 10023Ar (1)-(2), year 11th, reign of Amenemhat III, from the temple archive (Sharff (1924), pp. 27-30; Quirke (1988), p. 89, note 18; Luft (1998a), p. 7, note 50; Luft (1992), P. Berlin10023). In P. Berlin10021 a collection of people from the *hnr t* at the mouth of the Fayum is attested, and in few cases a *jw3w*, i.e. a person taken by the state to replace someone listed for work (Quirke (1988), p. 88, note 17; Scharff (1924), pp. 45-47).

179 P. Brooklyn 35.1466. For the list of fugitives see Hayes (1955), p. 25, (lines 1-24, 25-54, 55-80). Its verso contains a long list of slaves from the first and second regnal years of Sekhemre-Sewadjetaw Sebekhotep III (c. 1749-1742 B.C.), with 95 slave names, 37 of whom are labelled as Semitic with names preceded by the Egyptian *3mw* (‘male Asiatic’) or *3mwt* (‘female Asiatic’). They are always followed in a second column by an Egyptian name. See also Albright (1954), pp. 222-233.

180 Hayes (1955), p. 64.

181 Ezzamel (2004), p. 515. Field of This still remains an unknown locality.

182 P. Berlin 10004. See also P. UC32168+32269. A small fragment has a headline: ‘...conscript of the *3mw* who are in

body. This is demonstrated by the name of a person or the name of an institution written behind the name of the enrolled individual.¹⁸³ A document of year 29 of the reign of Amenemhet III deals with the sale of slaves. It is a *swn.t* ('deed of cession') for a female Asiatic made for an official called Ihysonob. The text reads:

'...regnal year 29, month 3, inundation, autumn, day 7 drawn up in the office of the vizier ... a cession deed of the assistant to the treasurer Shepset's son Ihysonob of the northern sector...the female Asiatics Akhiatof Kemeteni, Keme[t]eni Sopduemmeru, Mashy 2 years and 3 months [...]am Benwy(?)'.¹⁸⁴

Foreign manual workers were in demand as workforce all over Egypt in the second half of the 12th Dynasty in Egypt. Bietak's excavations¹⁸⁵ at Tell el-Dab'a uncovered a special Aamu quarter that was still in use during the Second Intermediate Period, but there is evidence of Egyptian intolerance towards the easterners as can be found in the letter of the official Senwosret's son Khakheperre Sonbe to the steward Horemsaef in the year 37 of Amenemes III. An 'overseer of the sealers' called *Snbjtj.fj* addressed his concerns towards the nomarch saying: '...from the overseer of treasurers and judges *Snbjtj.fj*...saying, send 30 corvée-workers to follow the lord-life-prosperity, do not send these Asiatics!'.¹⁸⁶ Another document referring to the delivery of poultry is particularly revealing when it mentions two Asiatic men *ʿ3m.w* among the delivery goods.¹⁸⁷ According to the documents from the archive, the Asiatic and Nubian population slowly increased, in particular during the second half of the reign of Ammenhat III.¹⁸⁸ Fragments recovered from the *hnrt wrt* ('great prison') of Thebes¹⁸⁹ give detailed glimpses of life in these burgeoning communities:

3w n hnrt wrt m (date?) r whʿ hr.w.f m d3d3t m 3wy r jrt hp r.f n wʿrw hnrt

'It was issued to the *hnrt wrt* (or the *hnrt wrt* issued) on (date?) to release his dependents from the board, being the document issued to execute the regulation against him for one who flees the *hnrt*'.

Less serious infringements recorded include a petty theft:

jr p3 bjt hnw 1 rdy n b3k-jm gm.n b3k-jm sw(r)j.n sw p3 ʿ3m dd.f smj n b3k-jm m-dd mk jn bnrt rdj jry.j st

'...as for the hin of honey (already) assigned to the servant-there, the servant-there has discovered that the Asiatic has drunk/used it up, saying quote: look, it was the sweetness which made me do it...'.¹⁹⁰

A final unfortunate individual exclaims dramatically *mwt.kwj mjn jh tm.j m33 hprt.tj.sj*, 'I am dead today, rather than see what may happen...?.'

Conclusion

Studies of the earliest urban settlements in the Nile Valley often neglect the social organization and built environments of the 'poor'. Studies of ancient settlements, including at el-Lahun, have had

Sekhem-Senwosret. The rest of the line is lost (Luft (1993), p. 297).

183 Luft (1993), p. 296; P. Berlin10021 and 10047.

184 P. UC32167 (Collier (2009), p. 210).

185 Bietak (1991; 2001).

186 P. Berlin10111 Aa r II (2)-(5), originally P. Berlin10228e+10323a+10111Aa rt II (3)-(5) (Luft (1993), p. 297).

187 In a series of documents from year 1 to year 19 of the reign of Amenemhat III (Luft (1993), p. 297).

188 P. Berlin10050, year 6 of Senwosret III. P. Berlin10050r I (Borchardt (1899), pp. 98-99).

189 Hayes (1955), p. 64, discussed also in Ezzamel (2004), pp. 514-515.

190 P. UC32124 (Collier and Quirke (2002), p. 59). This rather curious episode is significant in showing that at el-Lahun there was evidently marked variation in diet and food consumption among the inhabitants.

a tendency to focus on the minority of 'élite' people and their living conditions. They use the traditional top-down approach to the subject, overlooking the people of lower status and their social and living conditions. This article and the associated study were intended to advance the discussion by addressing the daily lives of the majority of the population in these highly-structured communities.

For the western community of el-Lahun, the textual and architectural data demonstrate a built environment reflecting strong social boundaries; a community regulated by way of impressively regimented settlement forms. Moving from a spatial scale of individual building to the urban settlement as a whole, the architectural aspects discussed appear to be particularly relevant for social interpretations. Information about the lives of the inhabitants of el-Lahun is scarce, and so the architecture is a valuable resource, but analysis at the single household level is not easy because of the difficulties in understanding architectural variations in structures with no clear-cut functional distinction between rooms. The structuring of space within households and the degree of internal and individual variations between living spaces was undoubtedly of cultural and functional significance to the inhabitants, but a full understanding of this, based on the archaeology alone seems irremediably lost. In addition, the daily lives of those living in that environment were surely different to those of the officials who designed and constructed it.

Nevertheless, general cultural patterns can be inferred from investigations of the structural remains. The intended organization of daily life, the physical limits on movement and social interaction, were rooted in social rules, rituals and relations of power intended to control the community and subject it to centralized coordination. It seems that the city enclosure walls, often thought to be erected for defensive purposes, were largely symbolic. They were primarily intended to dwarf the individuals with their monumental dimensions and to segregate the low status workers from the ruling group, into what were essentially prison-like conditions. Nevertheless, or perhaps as a result of those efforts to control the population, the textual evidence shows that el-Lahun experienced more social turmoil than equivalently sized traditional rural villages. In such an overcrowded environment, social discrimination and injustices caused by ethnic differences and inequality often led to disputes and conflicts.

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