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The Dark Side of Urbanisation: Inequality, Precarity and “Gentrification” in Middle Kingdom Tell el-Dab^a, Ancient Avaris

Abstract: Tell el-Dab^a, ancient Avaris (eastern Delta in Egypt), was initially settled in the late 11th-early 12th dynasty, when a planned settlement was built in area F/I. This settlement was abandoned two times. The first abandonment was followed by the return of the same people, or the people of the same social background and class, to the existing planned settlement. After the second abandonment and a hiatus, the demolition and levelling of the area took place. These changes were previously interpreted as a simple reorganization of space. This paper argues that the changes in the settlement structure in the area, are a reflection of a profound change in the social background and class of the inhabitants. These changes are a consequence of class inequality and precarity understood as “politically induced condition” which allowed the “gentrification” of the area.

Key words: inequality, precarity, gentrification, urbanism, Middle Kingdom, Tell el-Dab^a, ancient Egypt

Introduction

Urban and settlement archaeology, studies of cities, towns and villages are not a neglected topic in the archaeology of Egypt anymore (see among others Bietak, Czerny and Forstner-Müller 2010; Köpp-Junk 2022; Lacovara 1997; Moeller 2016; Snape 2014). Still, in comparison to mainstream Egyptological focus on written sources, and royal and elite tombs and temples, studies of settlements and urbanisation are indeed marginal. Ongoing archaeological excavations of sites such as Tell el-Dab^a, Amarna, Edfu, and Elephantine, among others, have significantly contributed to our knowledge of ancient Egyptian settlements, previously largely based on older excavations at sites such as Lahun, Amarna and Deir el-Medina, for example.

Some recent studies have also shifted the focus of settlement archaeology in Egypt to questions of the embodied experience of living in a village, a town, or a city (Koltsida 2007; Meskell 2002; Rocha da Silva 2018). These authors investigate how the categories of gender or class can enrich our understanding of how life might have been for different inhabitants of ancient Egyptian settlements. Unfortunately, such studies are not many.

The topic of changes in settlement, space transformation, and urban development has been a primary occupation of archaeologists. However, one of the main problems is that, more often than not, changes in the settlement and transformation of space are approached as changes on a site plan, and consequently on a paper or a computer screen. Such site plans are the result of studies of various and rich archaeological data, such as geophysical surveys, excavations (measurements; drawn and digitalised plans and sections; photos), field diaries, and studies of different archaeological materials. However, such a vast amount of data inevitably undergoes a process of selection and compression (Lucas 2001, 159; Lucas 2012, 71), and as a result, we are always left with a representation (Tilley 2019, 42). Therefore, in the process of selection, we more often than not lose the richness of past materiality, the plethora of experiences and the temporality of the archaeological record. We look down on urban life from above and remove ourselves from the streets and the people (Tilley 2019, 4), with archaeological plans being reduced to a “series of slices through time” (Massey 2005: 41).

Bearing all of the above in mind, in this paper, I will address the changes in the area F/I of Tell el-Dab^a, the late 11th-early 12th dynasty (ca. 1950-1900 BCE) ancient Egyptian planned or workers’ settlement in the eastern Delta, and argue that the observed changes on the site plan should not be read solely as changes on the paper or a computer screen, but as a series of events. These events revolved primarily around people of different social backgrounds, and these backgrounds were shaping their experiences of the changes they, and their living space, were going through. I will argue that we cannot understand these changes without seeing them through the lenses of social inequality and precarity (sensu Butler 2004; 2009; 2020). In this, I adopt the polytemporal methodology of Barbara L. Voss (2018, 287) in her study of 19th century settlements of Chinese railroad workers in North America. This means that I will consider different events which preceded and followed after the establishment of the workers’ settlement in area F/I, making the lives of the inhabitants precarious and demonstrating the embedded social inequalities in Middle Kingdom Egypt. Following, Judith Butler, I understand precarity as “politically induced condition in which certain populations...become differentially exposed to injury, violence and death” (Butler 2009, 25).

Tell el-Dab^a, ancient Avaris: From a planned workers' settlement to a Bronze Age megacity

Tell el-Dab^a, ancient Avaris, is located some 7km north of the modern town Faqus in the modern province of Sharqeya in the eastern Delta of Egypt. According to our current knowledge, the site was first settled in the late 11th to early 12th Dynasty when a planned settlement (Figure 1) was constructed on a *gezira* (sand turtle back in the Delta) in area F/I (Czerny 1999, 17). It is commonly accepted that the plan of this settlement, with its orthogonal grid and houses of the same size organised in blocks, indicates that this is a planned settlement whose foundation is related to the so called “colonization” of the eastern Delta by the early Middle Kingdom rulers (Forstner-Müller 2010, 103; Czerny 1999, 133). The suggestion that the settlement “was founded as a military settlement, serving as a gateway for eastward deployments, both by sea and land, under the auspices of the Pharaonic army” (Burke 2021, 168) is not supported by any

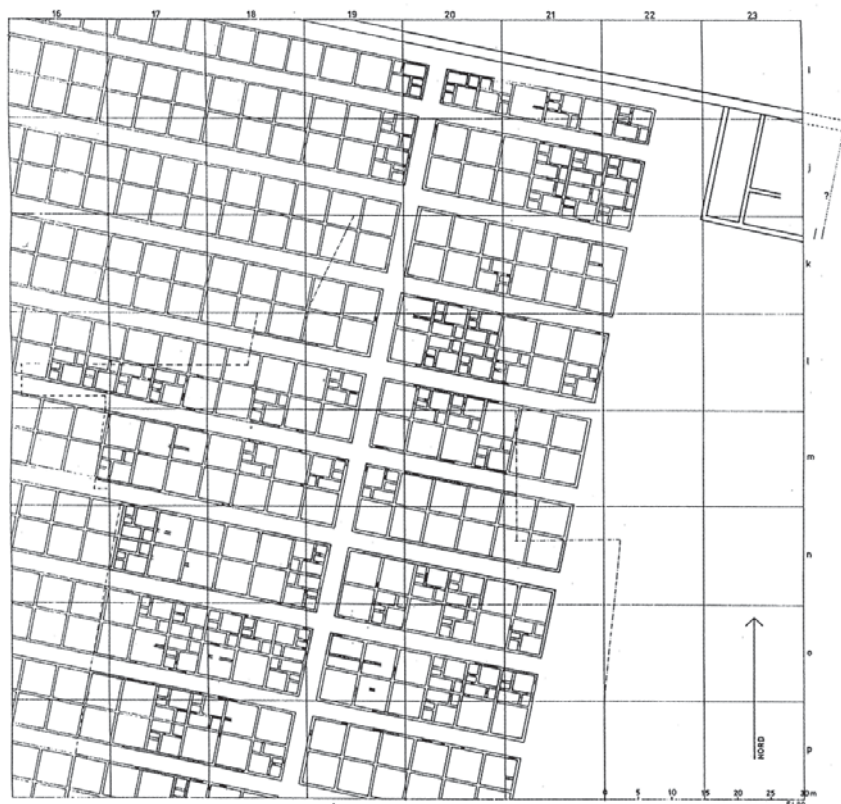


Fig. 1. Planned settlement in area F/I, Tell el-Dab^a, phase c/3
evidence whatsoever. (after Czerny 1999, 18, Abb. 2)

Soon after, or roughly contemporary with the latest phase of the settlement in area F/I, another mid-12th dynasty settlement with two main phases was founded in area R/I of ^cEzbet Rushdi in Tell el-Dab^a. Not much is known of this earlier phase (date: Amenemhat II, ca. 1878-1854 BCE?), however, in the next phase, during the later 12th dynasty (Senwosret III, ca. 1837-1819 BCE) a temple surrounded by houses was built on this earlier settlement (Forstner-Müller 2010, 107; Czerny 2010). Sometimes during the 13th dynasty (ca. 1750 BCE) inhabitants of Avaris experienced significant changes. South of area R/I, new parts of the town developed in areas R/II and R/IV. New areas of the site were settled (A/II, A/IV and F/I-resettled), however, this time not based on a strict orthogonal grid. Instead, these were the so-called grown settlements (most recently with further references, Forstner-Müller 2022, 17–18; see also Bader 2020; Forstner-Müller 2010, 107–109).

Several scholars argue that these changes coincide with the arrival of Syro-Palestinian people to Tell el-Dab^a during the late 12th and early 13th dynasty, and their presence is traced in the changes of the archaeological record of the site observable in the appearance of imported Middle Bronze Age Levantine pottery or the introduction of new architectural forms and burial customs, such as intramural cemeteries and tombs and equid burials (Bietak 1996, 10–35; Forstner-Müller 2008; Bader 2011; Mourad 2015; for problems with culture-historical approach see Matić 2020, 28–30).

The settlement of Tell el-Dab^a was growing rapidly and its structure was changing too, probably demonstrating the growing importance and the power of this provincial town, especially concerning the fact that it was situated close to the Mediterranean coast, on a route to the Levant (Ways of Horus) and that it had an important riverine harbour and several mooring places (see with further references Forstner-Müller 2021). The site was surely connected to the mining activities on Sinai, one of the most important projects of the ancient Egyptian state at that time (Bietak 1996, 19).

By the late 13th Dynasty, Tell el-Dab^a was not just a provincial workers town. The growing power of its elite inhabitants probably led to the growing awareness of their novel position in the region. Eventually, they established a state which separated from the Egyptian crown (Forstner-Müller 2008, 125; Forstner-Müller 2022, 6). Tell el-Dab^a became the capital of the Hyksos 15th Dynasty (ca. 1650-1550 BCE), with 6 rulers of foreign descent as judged by the north-western Semitic names of 5 of them (Roberts 2013; Ryholt 1997, 118–119). They adopted Egyptian titulary (Forstner-Müller 2022, 8; Ryholt 1997, 119), iconography (Bietak 1996, 65–67), exchanged diplomatic letters in Egyptian language with their peers in Egypt and Nubia (Ryholt 1997, 138–142) and caused a serious threat to the successors of the Middle Kingdom state or the rulers of the 17th Dynasty and early 18th Dynasty (ca. 1550 BCE), which were ruling in the south with their capital in Thebes.

Eventually, Theban rulers engaged in a series of military campaigns which resulted in their taking over of the Hyksos governed territories in the north and the Lower Nubian fortresses, that had been lost by their Middle Kingdom predecessors to the Kushite kings in Nubia. The Hyksos rulers became a memory that was, in the official state narrative of the 18th Dynasty and later, heavily coloured by pro-Theban royal ideology (Polz 1998). This narrative lived on in the Ramesside period and a millennium later it is also found in the works of Egyptian priest Manetho, who lived under the Ptolemies and whose work was transmitted by authors such as Josephus (most recently with further references Forstner-Müller 2022, 7; see also Mourad 2015, 3).

Tell el-Dab^a was not destroyed when the Hyksos were defeated: its rulers changed. They built monumental palaces and employed Aegean painters to decorate them with frescoes (Bietak, Marinatos and Palivou 2007; for problems with interpretations provided so far see Matić 2015). In the Ramesside period (ca. 1292-1139 BCE), Tell el-Dab^a became the suburb of the new capital in Pi-Ramesse (Qantir). Its harbour grew smaller as time passed, and its importance diminished as the Pelusiac branch of the Nile was slowly drying up. In the Third Intermediate Period, the capital of the 21st Dynasty (ca. 1076 BCE) was moved from Qantir to Tanis (San el-Hagar) and the town of Tell el-Dab^a slowly but surely became a provincial town again.

In the Late Period (ca. 722-305 BCE) and during the reign of the Ptolemies, a small town with tower houses dominated the landscape of ‘the Tell’ (Lehmann 2021). Little is known of later life on the site. Today, Tell el-Dab^a is only one of many villages at the site. Its inhabitants are primarily occupied in their private agricultural fields, tending animals or working in local factories, and some of them occasionally work on the archaeological excavations of the Austrian Archaeological Institute’s Cairo branch.

This short history of the site has the “city” and its elite inhabitants and royalty as its main protagonists. Surely, this is not the only story of Avaris and not the only way such a story can be told. As Arundhati Roy wrote: “There can never be a single story. There are only ways of seeing” (Roy 2004, 14). There are other stories on Avaris worth telling, other perspectives worth considering and experiences worth acknowledging. One of them is the story of its ancient “gentrification”, a process in which a poor urban area is changed by wealthier people moving in. Telling the story of ancient “gentrification” instead of telling only the story of the elites and rulers of Avaris means correcting the substitution of “naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation” with “exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions” (Marx and Engels 2015: 5). It means telling the stories of inequality and precarious lives and remembering those lives which were distinguished as dispensable in relation to lives distinguished as “to be preserved” (Butler 2009, xviii). Following the political philosophy of Judith Butler,

it is out of utmost importance which political language is chosen to describe precarious lives (Zaharijević 2020, 354). For archaeologists, it is of course important that this language is used to speak about available data and not only for speculative fabulation. Unfortunately, even in a recent work which tends to focus on the subalternity of some ancient social groups from Avaris, such as the inhabitants of workers' settlement in area F/I, the consequences of inequality and precarity are not fully considered (Rees and Schreiber 2019). The change(s) that inhabitants of area F/I experienced during their lifetime are in recent works described simply as a "peaceful process of redevelopment rather than the result of dramatic events" (Kemp 2018: 224) or as a "reorganisaton" (Mourad 2021) without taking into consideration: Who was behind the reorganisation? What were the consequences of and who benefited from the reorganisation? Was the redevelopment really peaceful? Were the related events dramatic and for whom? Contemporary relocation projects remind us that the way relocation events are represented in the media, or how their consequences materialise in the city, is not necessarily the same as how those who are relocated experience them (El-mouelhi, Meyer, Reda and Abdelhalim 2021; Meskell 2000, 151–156; Tilley 2019, 38). Barbara L. Voss argued that what differentiates us archaeologists and the past populations we study is, among other things, the fact that what the known outcomes of processes and events are to us (retrospective perspective), were either only imagined or possible futures for the peoples we study (Voss 2018, 291). Therefore, we must attempt to "put into words the city as felt, a structure of feeling and emotion, delight and disgust, fear and loathing, contest and conflict, or a sense of well-being and relative harmony" (Tilley 2019, 43). Bearing this in mind, I will next turn to the precarious lives of the original inhabitants of area F/I in Tell el-Dab^a.

Precarious Lives in Area F/I of Tell el-Dab^a

The macro-changes at the site cannot be understood without paying close attention to the micro-changes at the site, bearing in mind that the experience of the macro- and micro- are subjective. This will be demonstrated using the change in settlement structure in area F/I, the foundation of which was briefly mentioned in the previous section.

Although I am very well aware that the data to answer the following problem are lacking, I could not help but notice, that in all known published accounts on the foundation of the settlement, one does not seriously consider the history of its inhabitants. If the settlement was a result of "colonization" of the Delta, then its inhabitants had to come from somewhere else, meaning that the foundation of the settlement was not only the foundation of new homes for these people,

but also the abandonment of the places and homes they inhabited previously. One should not neglect the impact that such a change had on their lives. Lived experiences of different people should also be understood in relation to pasts and anticipated futures (Voss 2018, 289). For some, this change could have been beneficial, for others it could have been experienced as negative. The point here being that the change from an unsettled *gezira* to a workers' settlement is much more than a change in landscape or on a site plan.

The excavations of the Cairo branch of the Austrian Archaeological Institute, Austrian Academy of Sciences, from 1979 to 1989 opened an area of 10.000m² designated as F/I (Czerny 1999, 17). In the eastern part of the area, remains of the settlement showed organisation into blocks of houses in 2 rows, containing 6 houses each (Figure 1). In the north-eastern part of the settlement 1 single block is organised in 1 row. In the western part of the settlement rows of houses were also detected and, although they seem to be organised in the same way as in the eastern part of the settlement, their exact organisation is unknown. According to Ernst Czerny, it is possible that the double rows in the western part of the settlement contained 12 houses, making blocks of 24 houses each, since the partly excavated block contained 10 houses in each row and both rows continued to the west. The only exception is the north-western block which just like the north-eastern block contained only 1 row of houses (Czerny 1999, 17–18). The single houses are rectangular with ca. 5,5m long walls. The walls of single houses are shared where the houses meet. The blocks of houses in the eastern area are ca. 32m long and 10,5m wide. Each block in the eastern part of the settlement is surrounded by streets on all four sides which divide the neighbouring blocks. The streets were ca. 2,6-2,7m wide. (The exact length of the streets is unknown since the settlement was not entirely excavated). The settlement was surrounded by a wall which was detected in the northern area of the excavation, ca. 2,6-2,7 (street wide) away from the northern walls of the northernmost house blocks. Within the excavated area, no corners of this surrounding wall nor entrances to the settlement were found (Czerny 1999, 18–19). In the north-eastern area of the settlement was a large building. South of this building and east of the eastern most blocks of the settlement was an open area. The individual houses covered a surface of 27m² (Czerny 1999, 20).

Finding themselves in their new homes, the inhabitants of the workers' settlement in area F/I had to face life conditions which modern archaeologies interpret as hard. Among these are the limited size of housing and narrow streets, causing crowdedness (Bietak 2010: 17; Mazzone 2017).

Estimating the number of people who could have inhabited these houses is not without theoretical and methodological challenges. Manfred Bietak estimated that the number of inhabitants could have been more than a thousand (Bietak 1996, 9), and although he is most probably right, he does not explicitly write how he came to this number. Nadine Moeller writes that the individual houses could not have

accommodated more than 2 or 3 people (Moeller 2016, 258, 408) and bases this on the conversion constant of 10m² per person, suggested by Raoul Naroll (1962). However, Naroll's conversion constant is problematic because it is based on a cross-cultural analysis of only 18 largest settlements from 18 different societies and does not take into account variations within settlement organisation (Porčić 2016, 167–169). If we rely on settlement paleodemographic methods and use models based on correlation analyses between house floor surface and the number of inhabitants, the mitigating circumstance is that the narrowness of the walls in area Area F/I of Tell el-Dab'a does not indicate a second floor (Forstner-Müller 2010, 106). Based on a cross-cultural ethnographic sample of 132 houses, Marko Porčić argued that although the relation between house floor surface and the number of inhabitants is statistically significant ($r=0.902$, $p<0.001$) this relation is not particularly strong. This is due to the fact that high correlation is gained when one includes the case of particularly large houses. Variability is greater in the sample of smaller houses with smaller number of inhabitants. In order to test this model further, Porčić divided the sample into three categories based on the floor surface, the first group is up to 60m², the second from 60 to 100m² and the third over 100m². The results showed that there were no statistically significant and strong correlations between floor surface and the number of inhabitants for the first two categories, whereas they could be noticed in the third category, but only if the previously mentioned cases of particularly large houses are included (Porčić 2016, 163–164). Depending on different proposed settlement paleodemographic models and conversion constants, one comes to different estimations for the number of inhabitants in the excavated area of workers' settlement in area F/I. Table 1 summarises the results using different proposed conversion constants. It also has to be stressed that the estimations of individuals per house based on different conversion constants do not differ significantly from the estimated number of individuals per house as based on data from an early modern Egyptian census in 1917 (see with further references Forstner-Müller 2010, 120).

Table 1. Different estimations of the number of inhabitants of excavated part of area F/I, based on different conversion constants.

Conversion constant (m ² per person)	6m ² (Casselberry 1974)	6.12m ² (Kolb 1985)	6.1m ² (Brown 1987)	6.97m ² with modal value between 5 and 6m ² (Porčić (2016, 166–167)
Number of inhabitants per house	4,5	4,4	4,4	3,8
Estimated number of inhabitants in the excavated area of the settlement where at least 154 houses can be argued to have existed	693	679,4	681,6	596,5

It has to be stressed that these estimations are based on the excavated area of the settlement, as the settlement was not fully investigated and its exact size and structure are unknown. This of course has to be taken into account (Nikulka 2016, 128–129). According to Diethelm Eigner 342 houses can be discerned, and a hypothetical reconstruction suggests a figure twice the size (as communicated to Forstner-Müller 2010, 103). Although possible, one has to bear in mind that based on the published plan around 154 houses can be discerned (Figure 1). Furthermore, changes in the structures of the houses themselves have to be considered, as there is evidence that their inhabitants changed the functions of different rooms or areas, ultimately changing what counts as the house floor surface and what as the courtyard. In the latest phase of the settlement the houses also slightly expanded into the territory of the streets (Czerny 1999, 22–23). Lea Rees and Stefan Schreiber see this as evidence that inhabitants had agency (possibly even subversive acts). They suggest that this indicates the absence of strict control over the settlement by the government, at least in phases e/2 and e/1 (Rees and Schreiber 2019, 125). These numerous micro-changes in the house organisation cannot be addressed in detail here. We can however be safe in the knowledge that the overall size of the uncovered house blocks did not change considerably. This would indicate, contrary to Rees and Schreiber, that the government was more interested in controlling the overall size and layout of the settlement (Moeller 2016, 258).

However, estimating the possible number of inhabitants of excavated area of the workers' settlement in area F/I from 596,5 to 693, depending on the conversion constant taken, is still not an indicator of crowdedness. According to David Mazzone (2017, 54), the narrow streets of planned settlements such as those of Lahun and Tell el-Dab^a, indicate “low-level of quality of life”. One possibility to estimate whether or not life in the settlement could have felt crowded is to compare the sizes of outdoor surfaces which were used to a different degree. Preliminary results of the space syntax analysis of the settlement I conducted in depthMapX¹, show that connectivity is higher in the north-south running street which connects/divides the western and eastern house blocks than in other areas of the settlement visible on the plan (Figure 2). More work has to be done in order to investigate if the connectivity nudge (represented by reddened area) suggested by depthMapX, indeed shows archaeological evidence for more intensive use than other less connected streets and areas. One also has to stress that in the latest phase of the settlement, some streets or at least their parts became even more narrow (ca. 1m) due to the expansion of the houses (Czerny 1999, 23). These changes over time will have to be taken into account.

¹ Pioneer work using space syntax analyses for area A/II of Tell el-Dab^a has been published by Silvia Gómez-Senovilla (2019). The results of her and my analyses have to be checked against other available data from the two areas and can at this point be understood only as preliminary indications.

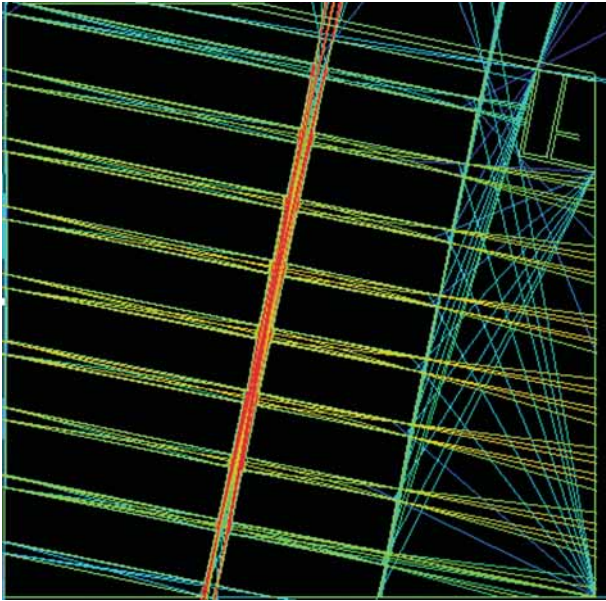


Fig. 2. Results of depthMapX axial connectivity analysis of settlement in area F/I, Tell el-Dab^a, phase e/3, conducted by Uroš Matić. Red area indicates area of higher connectivity grade.

The area to the east of the houses was an unoccupied area. According to Manfred Bietak (1996, 9), it could have been used for the keeping of flocks during the night. However, there is no archaeological evidence for this and the expected midden layers which one could associate with animal keeping (e.g., coprolites) were not attested (Czerny 1999, 131). One should also consider other possible use. The fact that the area was never expanded into, but continuously kept open, indicates strict control, as is indeed expected. Such areas could be used to gather not only animals, as suggested by Bietak, but a larger group of people too. Consequently, they could be used to communicate powerful messages to the community, one of them being public punishment, as is well attested in the written and visual record of the period (Bestock 2018; Muhlestein 2011). Therefore, also contrary to Rees and Schreiber (2019, 125), individual house block changes do indicate agency of the inhabitants, but this agency does not diminish the strict control of the government observable in continuous division between the living area with house blocks and streets and the open area in the east.

Without romanticising the poor (for criticism see Banerjee and Duflo 2011, vii) or relativising the hardness of life, we have to be aware of the fact that our statements on the harsh life of the ancients are preconditioned by our own ideas on class and our own class positions today (Driaux 2020). The only way we can consider this is dialectically. We can measure the crowdedness of the settle-

ment in area F/I only by comparing it to other settlements and we can evaluate the floor surfaces of the houses in area F/I only by comparing them to floor surfaces of other houses. Only by considering other classes and their relations to the workers can we consider inequality and precarity, since there were also those who did not had a roof over their heads and those whose roof was larger (Bussmann 2020; Driaux 2020).

This leads us to the change in the settlement structure in area F/I which, as I will argue, can be interpreted as a reflection of the change in the social background and class of the inhabitants of this area. Furthermore, we have a word for this change in the social background, or better said the change in the class background of the inhabitants of one area of a city-gentrification, a process in which a poor urban area is changed by wealthier people moving in. We have a very specific idea on what this change means in the modern urban areas, e.g., the attraction of new business or increasing the economic value of a neighbourhood, which often displaces current inhabitants in the process (Tilley 2019, 55–56). This of course cannot be a “one size fits all” model for past urbanisation processes. However, several things indicate that something similar was going on in Tell el-Dab^a.

“Gentrification” in ancient Avaris: The change in settlement structure in area F/I, Tell el-Dab^a

The arrival of Syro-Palestinians to Tell el-Dab^a, which I mentioned previously, is usually interpreted just as the arrival of foreigners. However, one should not forget that these people were not only foreigners, they were also men and women of different occupations, children and people belonging to different classes. Among them were specialists in seafaring, military and expeditions (Forstner-Müller 2022, 5). The arrival of people of different social classes, some of them of better standing than the one of the inhabitants of workers’ village in area F/I, affected the lives of all inhabitants of ancient Avaris. This is also demonstrated in the change of the settlement structure in area F/I. However, contrary to a recent work (Mourad 2021), I would insist that class differentiation was already present before the people from Syro-Palestinian origin started to settle at the site.

The first question we should address is when did the change occur in area F/I? The settlement was established in the late 11th or early 12th Dynasty, a dating primarily based on the pottery in the lack of stratified datable epigraphic material. Since our current knowledge of the pottery of this period indicates that dynastic changes are not reflected in it, it is possible that the settlement was established anytime during this period. Ernst Czerny sees the upper border in

the first years of Senwosret I (as communicated to Forstner-Müller 2010, 103). There is a hiatus between the final abandonment of the settlement sometimes in the 12th Dynasty and the establishment of a new kind of settlement in this area in the late 12th Dynasty. However, if the settlement was indeed established in the early 12th rather than late 11th dynasty, the hiatus in question does not have to be so long, since the ultimate question is, how late or how much later is “late 12th Dynasty”? Ernst Czerny estimated 60 years long duration of the planned settlement, from its establishment to its abandonment (Czerny 1999, 132).

Sometimes during the phase d/2 (late 12th Dynasty), the settlement structure of area F/I was completely changed. The walls were destroyed up to the level of several brick high, the area was levelled and a new settlement (Figure 3) was constructed centred around the house (10x12,3m) of “Mittelsaal or courtyard type” in the northern part of the area with a cemetery in the south (Bietak 1996, 10; Czerny 1999, 19; Schiestl 2009, 479).

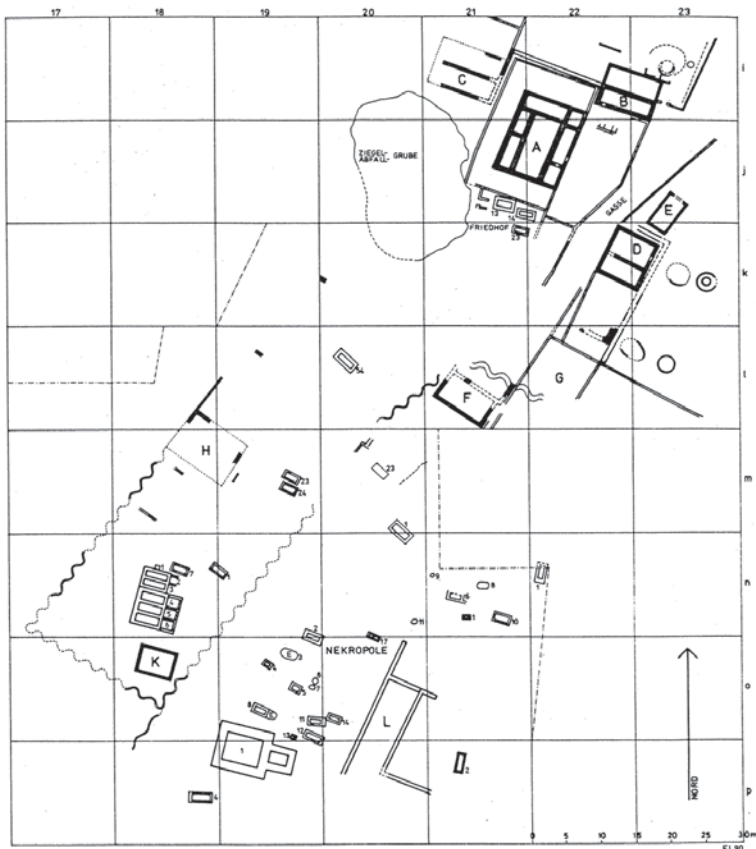


Fig. 3. Settlement in area F/I, Tell el-Dab'a, phase d/2 (after Bietak 1996, 11, Fig. 7).

Such houses have parallels from Levant to Mesopotamia (Bietak 1996, 10; Burke 2021, 207; Schiestl 2009, 25). In later phase d/1 (early 13th Dynasty), two residential complexes in Egyptian style, so called palaces (over 4000m²) replaced the settlement of the previous phase. The southern area was converted into a garden and after a short time the garden was replaced by a cemetery with two rows of very large tombs (Bietak 1996, 21–30; Czerny 1999, 19; Schiestl 2009, 26, 479). Small houses and narrow streets of the planned settlement, with all their material and sensory experiences, were gone. Instead, one found themselves in an area occupied by wealthier members of the community, living in more spacious buildings often termed “villas” (Forstner-Müller 2010, 107). Therefore, our discussions of “culture contacts”, in this case between the locals and the incoming Syro-Palestinians should go beyond “one size fits all” models of culture-historical approach and the increasing misuse of postcolonial theory (Matić 2017; Matić forthcoming). We should seriously consider that cultural contacts or encounters are often played out in social contexts of inequality.

What happened then to previous inhabitants of the area F/I? Almost all of them had to leave. Ernst Czerny suggested that the first abandonment of the planned settlement, at the end of phase e/2, was the consequence of forced relocation to another location, maybe due to demographic reasons, as the wished number of inhabitants at that presumed other location was not achieved. He also claimed that we do not have indications for the reasons for the second and final abandonment at the end of phase e/1 (Czerny 1999, 135). We can only assume that some of them found a new home in settlement area R/I, which was only ca. 1km away or 10-15 minutes average walking time from area F/I, contrary to the opinion that it was “quite a long way” from it (Bader 2011, 43). If so, then the inhabitants of F/I found themselves in more spacious houses of 50m² in area R/I (Forstner-Müller 2010, 107). It cannot be entirely excluded that a very small number could have gotten higher up on the social ladder. For those who lived long enough to witness this, such a change would have meant leaving home for the second time, as they already had to leave one home to come here when the settlement was originally founded. However, evidence from the analysis of 257 skeletons from area A/II during the Second Intermediate Period indicates low life expectancy of 30 years for women and 34,4 years for men (Winkler and Wilfing 1991). This could be an indication of gender-based structural violence, which is well supported by the written sources in ancient Egypt (Matić 2021). We do not know where the original inhabitants of area F/I were buried, but there are exceptional burials of the children in this area and some burials which post-date the abandonment of the settlement, but predate the cemetery from phase d/1 (Czerny 1999, 29 Schiestl 2009, 479). This means that people were returning to the area of the planned settlement to bury their dead, either due the lack of burial space or their close emotional bonds to the place. We are safe to assume

that their life expectancies could not have been much higher than those buried in area A/II. This actually means that not many would have known a third home. This change might come forth as insignificant to us, bearing in mind the overall size of the city and the fact that the distance from area F/I to R/I is only ca. 1km. However, when people leave buildings and settlements, they do not leave walls, they leave homes.

Conclusion

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote in 1888 in *The Communist Manifesto* that their time, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, simplified the class antagonisms (Marx and Engels 2015: 3). It seems that contemporary Egyptologists are still predominantly focused on the “rich and beautiful”, celebrating in 2022, two jubilees, one of two hundred years since the decipherment of hieroglyphic script and its publication, and the other of one hundred years of the discovery of the tomb of Tutankhamun. Such celebrations are not mere neutral romanticizing of the ancient Egyptian past, instead, they reflect the Egyptological simplifications and neglect of embedded class inequalities in ancient Egypt (notable recent exception Grajetzki 2020).

My attempt here was not to have the inhabitants of area F/I in Tell el-Dab^{ca} appear as “dramatis personae of some uplifting anecdote or tragic episode, to be admired or pitied” (Banerjee and Duflo 2011, viii). Instead, I wanted to demonstrate with a case-study that what we call urbanisation processes in the archaeology of Egypt concern real people, with real life experiences, homes, hopes and dreams (cf. Voss 2018, 287). Following the body-centred political philosophy of Butler, we should not only ask which lives are liveable and grievable (Butler 2004; Butler 2009; Zaharijević 2020), but also which lives are moveable? Movement and migration are not experienced in the same way by different people. The inhabitants of the workers’ settlement in area F/I changed their homes several times. Stating that this was not a dramatic event (Kemp 2018: 224) neglects the strong emotional ties people have with their homes, as is indeed demonstrated by the archaeological record of area F/I.

Originally, the inhabitants of area F/I had to leave one home to come to Tell el-Dab^{ca} and initiate the settling in area F/I (phase e/3). Then, after living there for some time they had to leave their new homes (e/2). The area F/I was inhabited again, probably by the same people (phase e/1) and finally abandoned by these people and inhabited by the people of a different social and class background (phases d/2 and d/1). These new people organised the demolition of houses that must have been visible, levelled the area and built anew. The novel settlement structure represented the social background of the novel inhabitants.

The spatial and material consequences of this primarily social and class change are an example of ancient “gentrification”, demonstrating the dark side of urbanisation, inequality among city inhabitants and precarious lives of the inhabitants of Middle Kingdom planned settlements.

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uros.matic@oeaw.ac.at*Tamna strana urbanizacije: Nejednakost, prekarnost i gentrifikacija u drevnom Avarisu (Tel el-Daba) tokom Srednjeg carstva*

Tell el-Daba, drevni Avaris (istočna Delta, Egipat), je lokalitet prvobitno naseljen tokom kasne 11. ili rane 12. dinastije kada je plansko radničko naselje sagrađeno na arealu F/I. Ovo naselje je napušteno dva puta. Prvo napuštanje naselja praćeno je povratkom istih ljudi ili ljudi iste društvene pozadine ili klase u postojeće plansko radničko naselje. Kada je naselje napušteno po drugi put, nakon hijatusa, došlo je do uništenja i nivelacije areala, te uvođenja strukturalnih promena. Nekada plansko radničko naselje organizovano u blokove sa kućama čije su podnice površine 27m² i ulicama širine 2,6 do 2,7m, zamenjeno je naseljem sa vilama, palatama, vrtovima i velikim grobnicama gradske elite. Raniji radovi su ove promene tumačili prosto kao re-organizaciju prostora. U ovom radu tvrdi se da su promene u strukturi naselja na ovom arealu odraz značajnih promena u društvenoj, odnosno klasnoj pozadini stanovnika. Ove promene posledica su klasne nejednakosti i prekarnosti, shvaćene kao politički proizvedeno stanje koje je omogućilo “džentifikaciju” areala, kojoj je prethodilo izmeštanje prvobitnih stanovnika. Urbanizacija nije puka promena strukture naselja koju arheolozi predstavljaju putem planova na kojima se vide različite faze naselja i promene koje ih prate. Ovo je proces koji se prvenstveno tiče ljudskih života i življenih iskustava koja su između ostalog i klasno određena.

Ključne reči: nejednakost, prekarijat, džentifikacija, urbanizam, Srednje carstvo, Tel-el-Daba, stari Egipat

Le côté obscur de l'urbanisation : inégalité, précarité et « gentrification » dans le Moyen Empire Tell el-Dabca, ancienne Avaris

Tell el-Daba, ancienne Avaris (Delta oriental, Egypte), est un site initialement peuplé durant la fin de la XI^e ou le début de la XII^e dynastie lorsqu'un habitat ouvrier planifié a été construit sur l'aire F/I. Cet habitat a été abandonné à deux reprises. Le premier abandon d'habitat a été suivi du retour des mêmes gens ou des gens du même milieu ou de la même classe sociale dans l'habitat ouvrier planifié existant. Lorsque l'habitat a été abandonné pour la deuxième fois, après le hiatus, la destruction et le nivellement de l'aire, ainsi que les changements structuraux se sont produits. Autrefois un habitat ouvrier planifié, organisé en blocs avec des maisons dont la surface au sol était de 27m² et les rues de 2,6 à 2,7m de large, il a été remplacé par un habitat avec des villas, des pa-

lais, des jardins et de grandes tombes d'élite de la ville. Les articles précédents interprétaient ces changements comme une simple réorganisation de l'espace. Dans cet article on avance que les changements dans la structure de l'habitat sur cette aire sont le reflet de changements importants dans le milieu social ou dans la classe des habitants. Ces changements sont une conséquence de l'inégalité de classe et de la précarité, comprise comme l'état politiquement produit ayant permis « la gentrification » de l'aire qui a été précédée par le déplacement des habitants d'origine. L'urbanisation n'est pas un simple changement de la structure d'habitat que les archéologues présentent à l'aide des plans qui montrent les phases différentes des habitats et des changements les accompagnant. Il s'agit d'un processus concernant principalement les vies humaines et les expériences vécues étant, entre autres, déterminées par la classe.

Mots-clés : inégalité, précarité, gentrification, urbanisme, Moyen Empire, Tell el-Dab^a, Égypte Ancienne

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