

A View from the North:

The Late Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period at Mendes

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Between 1964 and 1978, an archaeological mission led by Donald P. Hansen from the Institute of Fine Arts (IFA) of New York University uncovered important structures dating to the late 3rd millennium BCE at the site of Mendes. In one excavation area, a complex sequence of occupation made up of mastabas, simple burials, and settlement remains was excavated; to this day, these are among the few stratified remains spanning the late Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period ever found in the Delta. Unfortunately, the results of the IFA expedition have only been cursorily published. This paper re-examines the discoveries made by the IFA using the excavation notes, drawings, photographs, and objects that have been consolidated and stored at the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago. This presentation details how these archival records can be used to better define the chronology of occupation and material culture in the excavation area, allowing us to inquire about changes in burial practices and the use of

urban space at Mendes. This data provides an invaluable window into the late 3rd millennium BCE from a region that is too rarely included in scholarly discussions due to the dearth of archaeological evidence. The goal of this research is to gain a better understanding of the social and urban landscape of Mendes during the late Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period and, ultimately, to contribute to broader conversations about these historical periods from the perspective of the Nile Delta.

Émilie Sarrazin is a PhD Candidate at the University of Chicago in Near Eastern Art and Archaeology. Her dissertation focuses on the transition between the late Old Kingdom and the First Intermediate Period through the study of archaeological remains from the site of Mendes. Since 2015, Émilie has worked as an archaeologist and supervisor at the sites of Tell Edfu and Dendara, under the direction of Prof. Nadine Moeller and Dr. Gregory Marouard. As a member of the Coping with Changing Climates in Early Antiquities research project, she also investigates the use of proxy data and climate-centered narratives in the study of transitional periods in ancient Egyptian history. At the University of Chicago, she worked as a mapmaker and curatorial assistant for the Oriental Institute Museum, and worked with the Center for Ancient Middle Eastern

“Son of the House”: House-born Slave or Court Official?

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Four mysterious men show up in 5th century Aramaic witness-lists, lacking patronyms but bearing the epithet “son of the house”. In conjunction with the lack of a patronym—seemingly a mark of enslavement—this title was often interpreted to indicate a “house-born slave”, i.e., a slave born to an enslaved mother and a free father. This conclusion is not entirely unfounded: a similar term is known from Old Testament and Mesopotamian sources; the dynamic of a male owner and a female slave is likely to lead to such a situation; and the Elephantine corpus evidences at least six people born to enslaved women and their owners. In this paper, I analyze the Aramaic and Egyptian textual evidence for lack of filiation in enslaved persons, the use of “son of the house” as a courtly title in Achaemenid Persian tradition, and the naming practices of house-born slaves from the Jewish community at Elephantine, who all bear matronyms. This paper concludes that “son of the house” in the Aramaic texts of the Late Period is indicative of a high-status title, shared with Arsames the satrap and other individuals, and not a mark of birth to an enslaved mother. The correct identification of this title in its cultural context allows us to separate the Egyptian Aramaic material from Old Testament sources and contributes to a more accurate picture of the social and administrative structure of Persian period in Egypt.

Ella Karev is a PhD candidate in Egyptology, defending her dissertation on the topic of slavery and bound labor in the Late Period. After her PhD, Ella will remain at the University of Chicago as a Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow in the Humanities Division.