

Archaeological Site Report of Kom Ombo

Emma Crabtree

A55753671

Archaeology of Ancient Egypt and Nubia

Professor Ethan Watrall

December 12, 2022

The Temple of Kom Ombo has been known to be one of the most unique temples of Ancient Egyptology. Unfortunately, unlike the Great Pyramids at Giza, the Temple of Kom Ombo is less known and taught about in the United States primary education curriculum. The Temple of Kom Ombo is known to be unique due in part to the fact that it was built as a double temple, dedicated to the Falcon God Horus and The Crocodile God Sobek. Once being referenced as Nubt (translating to modern day ‘The Golden City’), it is the only structure in ancient Egypt that has two identical temples built as one complete structure (Kummert, 2). The ruin now only consists of colossal columns overtopped by fragments of beautiful ceilings and walls, all still tied together with just a few still standing and broken shafts. Yet, it remains one of the most beautiful ruins to date (Perry, 138). The name “Kom Ombo” is derived from the ancient Egyptian name “Nubt”, also seen as “Nbw”, translating to the golden one. Modern Arabic translates the meaning of Kom Ombo to “The Hill of Ombo” (Forstner-Müller, 2019). The most notable feature of the temple at Kom Ombo is the symmetry it has between the two sides for the two separate Gods. While each side was built with great detail in mind, each hallway mirrored itself on the other side of the temple. There is yet to be another pyramid built as the Temple of Kom Ombo was, which is where the initial draw to investigate this site came from. A double pyramid, built in near perfect symmetry ignites several questions; why these two Gods? Were they related and how so? Why did they not get their own beautiful temples placed near one another’s temple? These questions pose great interest to archaeologists aiming to study ancient Egyptology.

The town of Kom Ombo is a small town, situated on the riverbanks to the East of the Nile River. The quaint town also lies about fifty kilometers north of Aswan, and roughly one hundred and twenty kilometers south of Luxor (Kummert, 1). The plain in which Kom Ombo lies extends over four hundred and fifty square kilometers to the east of the Nile River, which widens the area and river winds to the west. Archaeological finds in the basin of Kom Ombo date the temple to the Old Kingdom at the latest (Forstner-Müller, 2019). Kom Ombo is a protected area that contains remains of the ancient history of its people. There is little epigraphic evidence to expand the knowledge of Kom Ombo in Pharaonic times; though it is vital to understanding the whole picture of Kom Ombo’s past. This suggests that Kom Ombo was already a significant settlement in the Old Kingdom (Kemp, 1985). In the Ptolemaic period, The Temple of Kom Ombo functioned as a key administrative center for the First Upper Egyptian Nome and was the metropolis of that nome in the Roman Imperial period. The temple began under Ptolemy VI, but evidence of earlier activity comes from a block of Philipp Arrhidaios found during recent excavations (Sadarangani et al. 2019.) Although the city of Kom Ombo was never seen as an industrious settlement with wealthy people, in the 20th century it developed to become a very large, affluent town of industrialization. The town grew popular mostly notably for the rapid production of sugar factories that were obtained in this area (Forstner-Müller, 2019). Due in part to the good fortune of the geography of Kom Ombo, the town is settled snug between Nubia and the Red Sea Coasts. The city of Kom Ombo was able to take great advantage of their position between these two and become a very large export for a multitude of luxuries, goods and supplies. This was vital during the Ptolemaic period, as it was a conclusion of time for different trading routes coming through and across the desert (Keesling, 2012). Where paths were left empty, Kom Ombo was able to capitalize and turn some of their previous misfortunes around. It is also apparent that Egypt is well known for the high oil production capabilities the land holds. The Kom Ombo basin is one of multiple other basins located in the South West Egyptian Desert (Abdelhady, Darwish, El Araby, Hassouba, 376). The basin of Kom Ombo in Upper Egypt

contains non-marine sediments and sands deposited in a marine environment area which makes oil potential (Abdelhady, Darwish, El Araby, Hassouba, 379). Oil is still to date an essential for many different countries, for many different purposes. To date, according to the Oil & Gas Journal (OGJ), Egypt was holding and proved oil reserves of 3.3 billion barrels, as of January in 2021 (Energy Information Administration, 2022)

Unlike general plans of Egyptian temples, The Temple of Kom Ombo had two separate sanctuaries met by two separate hallways. The architect of the Temple of Kom Ombo used a similar design as other temples used during their time. The structure of the temple was held together by sandstone. Archaeologists were able to investigate this by utilizing different microscopes that aided in examining the microstructures and other physical properties of the sandstone. (Temraz, 2016). Winged disks were found carved into the colorful doorways, to lay against the sage colored roof of the central passageway. A multitude of depictions of scenes in dedication to the Falcon God Horus and the Crocodile God Sobek and inscriptions bearing festivals of worship to these God's cover the walls in abundance. There is evidence found of holes in doorways, laying about six inches deep and drilled into lintel stone. This represents the pivoting hinges of great doors that would open and close to greet the priests for worship of the Egyptian Gods (Perry, 143). The temple of Kom Ombo was enclosed by high and lofty mud brick walls. One of the most fascinating and modern-like findings of Kom Omo temple was the carvings into the walls. While depicting historical events such as festivals and religious ceremonies, many of the carvings depicted different medical instruments in use, along with the first Egyptian calendar. I found this to be quite interesting, since we hear about the Egyptian Calendar often, but not as often we hear about the first use of medical instruments (Kummert, 5). This goes to show how advanced the people who inhabited these areas were.

The Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquity carried out a detailed excavation at the temple of Kom Ombo in 2018. The council aimed to uncover a multitude of ancient artifacts that were preserved well enough to be able to study and further preserve. Some of the artifacts found at the Temple of Kom Ombo were able to be dated to the reign of Queen Hatshepsut (1502-1482) and King Thutmose III (1483-1450) (Faraman, 2022). While lowering groundwater to ensure the perseverance of the Temple of Kom Ombo prior to excavating, a fascinating artifact was found and appeared to be a small statue seeming to be a sphinx, made of sandstone with no other inscriptions visible (Faraman, 2022). Of the other things uncovered during the same 2018 excavation carried out by the Egyptian Supreme Council of Antiquity, a private stela was discovered under the pavement of the birth house of the Ptolemaic Temple of Kom Ombo during excavations in works with a project set to lower the groundwater level within the temple's enclosure. This was attacking the temple's foundation and integrity (Faraman, Elrekaby, Badawi, 3). The stela was somewhat eroded but in relatively good condition for archaeologists to examine aside from the upper left corner being chipped off. Archaeologists were able to recover some hieroglyphics and text. Text produced common formulae to suggest it was from a private funeral near the temple where cults performed by typically the deceased's eldest son, or a soul servant. Personal names in the precise cursive hieroglyphics pertain particularly to context that is identified through that of typical New Kingdom text, giving us the ability to estimate time (Budge, W., 137). Both the statue of the sphinx and the stela were found at a depth of three meters under the ground (Faraman, 2022). The city of Kom Ombo was able to decide on how to handle the precious artifacts uncovered during this excavation. They chose to place

them in the local inspectorate magazine, thus able to ensure safe keepings until they were able to be transported to the Egyptian Civilization Museum in Cairo, where they would be placed in a safe display as part of the museum's exhibit (Faraman, 2022).

Another excavation to dive into was conducted by members of the Yale University Prehistoric Expedition to Nubia. This expenditure began in October of 1962, and led on until March of 1963. During the excavation, Dr. Martin A. Baumhoff of the University of California Davis and their team uncovered a part of a human frontal lobe. On February 4, 1963 other fragments of a human skull were discovered adjacent to the frontal lobe discovery origin. The difference between the two were the fragments were uncovered in ground that was disturbed prior to the excavation performed by the archaeologists from Yale's Prehistoric Expedition team. Suggestions were made based solely on the relative massiveness of the bones that could be the parietals belonging to the frontal lobe that was uncovered (Reed, A., 1965). This is vital to understanding who was last occupying these areas, their relative age of deceased, and so forth. Finding multiple human remains in this close of context gave the archaeologists a lot of ideas to form into hypotheses to later uncover.

Professors Amany Mohamed Kamel Abu Krorra, Abdu Abd Allah Omran El -Derby and conservational specialist from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities - Aswan and Nubia Antiquities area, Hassan Taky Hussein Ismail aimed to research and identify an artifact considered to be a cartonnage. The cartoonage was discovered around 1904 and is believed to be dated back to the Roman Era. To begin, examining the stratigraphic structure of cartonnage objects in general consists of the Preparation layer and the painting layer. The first layer's examination showed clear signs of there being two different layers present. The first layer is coarse and composed of Calcium Carbonate, and the second layer is fine and smooth. (Korra, El-Derby, Ismail, 260). Cartonnage decoration began in the Middle Kingdom, drawing objects as feathers, beards and eyes on men, and embodying women's chests (Dodson A Ikram, S, 176). By analyzing samples from the cartonnage, the researching archaeologists were able to find that Ancient Egyptians did use the compound iron oxide as a source for red color, calcium silicate and copper as a source for the blue color, arsenic sulfide as a source for the yellow color, Carbon C as a source for black color, and the compound CaCO_3 was calcium carbonate as a source for the white color. These findings are so important to understanding the scientific pathway that Ancient Egyptians created. Archaeologists uncovering this great find could later lead to greater discoveries on resources they were able to extract and knowingly use for religious, medical, and lifestyle purposes. Further exportation of these ideas such as why were these specific colors used, were they used on certain occasions, and so forth will also later uncover a great deal on what the culture around ancient Egypt was truly like. These discoveries will eventually lead to an ability to predict human behavior.

In 1963, the Yale Prehistoric Nubia Expedition discovered what seemed to be an unusual Paleolithic occupation site on the plain of Kom Ombo (Phillips, Butzer, 343). The excavation partially took place throughout January and February of 1963, it was conducted by David S. Boloyan with the assistance of labor workers and under the supervision of Martin A. Baumhauff. The excavation of site GS-2B-II was done in three arbitrary levels. Sadly, only three squares of the forty to fifty centimeter "Z" level were able to be collected prior to the excavation being prematurely terminated. This caused large segments of the Z-level to be left exposed to climate, and unrecorded. During this excavation, artifact concentration was

the greatest. A total of three thousand five hundred thirteen lithic artifacts were found in the collections, which is where most of the focus here will remain. Among the lithic typology, there were seven end-scrapers, eleven bruins, six multiple tools, five straight-backed pointed bladelets/ microblades, fifteen Ouchtata bladelets, thirty one notched pieces, ninety three truncations, one geometric, and one hundred twenty one microburin technique. (David, S.) The findings here were clearly dominated by three main features: truncations, backed bladelets and the microburin technique. An interesting find among this assemblage was the high frequency of retouching on the butts of microlithic tools. Fully, 27.7% of all of the tools found in this level had signs of retouching. This could lead archaeologists to indicate that artifacts were hafted, as in spear points or arrows. (David, S.) By concluding that some of the tools found in GS-2B-II have these hafted alterations, archaeologists on site were able to conclude that they may have been used for hunting small game, fishing, and other foraging techniques. These findings can point archaeologists in a few directions. One of which directional questions could be, what did this mean for the diet of those who lived in and around the site of Kom Ombo? For one, what the occupants of Kom Ombo were eating can tell historians and archaeologists the significance of religious meals and what they may have contained at these meals. For another example of a posed question gathered from this research would be how did their diet impact their ability of physicality. If occupants were eating mainly fruit and vegetables, they may have had a leaner build than what archaeologists have been led to believe in the past, whereas if these tools were used to hunt small to medium game, their builds could have had more muscle mass than archaeologists previously believed. All of these questions led to a more well rounded understanding of Kom Ombo, and what eventually caused its collapse, or what was able to keep it surviving for the time it did.

The excavations carried out across all sites is very important work. Around Egypt and world-wide, the goal of archaeology is to understand how and why human behavior has and will continue to change over an extended period of time. Archaeologists aim to search for patterns in the evolution of significant cultural events, such as the Temple of Kom Ombo. The rise and collapse of major civilizations provide historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and so forth, a blueprint for the ever complex and cynical thought; what are we doing here (humans)? What is the purpose, why do we choose to live in accordance with certain normalities and structures? Although the posed question may be one that inevitably never has a concrete answer, humans are creatures of patterned behavior. Despite archaeologists carrying out these large excavations, utilizing copious amounts of government resources and potentially completely disrupting a sacred site, it seems there still lacks a place for archaeologists to be in public policy. The goal in this research is not only to value the past of where we came from, or to develop a capitalistic exhibit in a museum and claim to be aimed at providing some kind of social justice to a marginalized group, at least one would hope not. The goal is to use these findings is similar to that of today having political scientists create models based on socioeconomic characteristics of subgroups to predict election results. The benefit of predictability is generally seen as a great value. Archaeologists, if allocated the appropriate resources, would be able to have a strong voice in issues such as climate change and its impact on the entirety of our world. Archaeologists should be aware of this shortcoming, and aim to make a distinction in their work and really question what benefit does society gain from this knowledge. Egyptian archaeology is extremely important to understanding these human patterns to predict and prevent human disasters and commonalities.

Overall, The city of Kom Ombo has carried out several very telling excavations that led to greater discoveries of ancient egyptology. While all archaeologists agree that this is vital work to human nature,

public leaders need to get on board with them. Archaeologists need to be solely responsible for the ethics of their excavations. If a great historical artifact is found belonging to a marginalized group, it deserves to be with its rightful people. Others may argue that by placing it in a research facility researchers are able to access pertinent information to their posed question or hypothesis, but it is clear that these artifacts do not hold up in changing public policies. These artifacts have rightful homes, where they belong. With all of these thoughts in mind, the Temple of Kom Ombo along with Egyptian archaeology is an art that should not be soon forgotten. By learning things such as, how much effort, time and perseverance was put into the care of their kin's after life demonstrates how greatly important it was for the Egyptians to be prepared to pass onto their next life. Not only can this keen archaeologists and historians into their mortal and immortal beliefs, but this can also tell researchers about the way they led their lives, the culture they had, the societal norms that were once in place. The Temple of Kom Ombo is notably the first temple built in the way it was, perfectly symmetrical to honor and worship two Gods separately. By gaining a wider viewpoint of the cultural heritage, political environment, and religious beliefs of the people who were living in, around and near Kom Ombo, archaeologists are able to better understand human behavior and patterns. These excavations will aid in planning for our future generations as long as they are carried out to be done in an ethical way with respect to the grounds they are working on, and the groups of marginalized communities that may face suffering due to the excavations.

References

“Aulis -Keesling - Major Reference Works - Wiley Online Library,” October 26, 2012.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah14057>.

BUDGE, W.: Hieroglyphic Texts from Egyptian Stelae in the British Museum, vol.2, London (Oxford University Press) 1912.

David, S. "A «Silsilian» Occupation Site (GS-2B-II) of the Kom Ombo Plain, Upper Egypt: Geology, Archeology and Paleo-Ecology."

Faraman, Ahmed, Sayed Elrekaby, and Mostafa Badawi. "Stela of Menekh Recently Uncovered at the Temple of Kom Ombo." *Journal of the General Union of Arab Archaeologists*, 2021.
<https://doi.org/10.21608/jguuaa2.2021.92032.1074>.

Faraman, Ahmed, and Mohamed Aly Elnaggar. "Sphinx Statue from the Temple of Komombo." *مجلة كلية الآثار، جامعة القاهرة*. جامعة القاهرة، كلية الآثار، January 1, 2022.
https://jarch.journals.ekb.eg/article_212072.html.

Forstner-Müller, Irene. "KOM OMBO: CITY AND HINTERLAND." Kom Ombo: City and Hinterland. Accessed December 2, 2022.
<https://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/oeai/research/prehistory-wana-archaeology/archaeology-in-egypt-and-sudan/kom-ombo-city-and-hinterland>.

Gatto, Maria Carmela, Antonio Curci, and Alberto Urcia. "Nubian evidence in the Egyptian first nome: Results of the 2013-2014 field seasons of the Aswan-Kom Ombo Archaeological Project (AKAP)." *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 6, no. 4 (2014): 38-41.

Kummert, Thomas. "Edfu & Kom Ombo Temples Nubian Oracle & Medical Centre." Archive.Org. Accessed December 1, 2022. <https://archive.org/details/new-edfu-ko/page/2/mode/1up?view=theater>.

Mohamed Kamel Abu Krorra, Amany, Abdu Abd Allah Omran El -Derby, and Hassan Taky Hussein Ismail. "Examination and Restoration of an Artifact of Cartonnage from Komombo Excavation, Egypt." *International Journal of Advanced Studies in World Archaeology* 4, no. 1 (2021): 260–73.
<https://doi.org/10.21608/ijaswa.2021.203241>.

Perry, Walter Scott. "The Temple of Kom Ombo." Essay. In *Egypt, the Land of the Temple Builders*, 123–45. Nabu Press, 2010.

Reed, Charles A. "95. A Human Frontal Bone from the Late Pleistocene of the Kom Ombo Plain, Upper Egypt." *Man* 65 (1965): 101. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2797442>.

Sadarangani et al. 2019, 106.

Temraz, Mostafa Gouda, and Mohamed K. Khallaf. "Weathering behavior investigations and treatment of Kom Ombo temple sandstone, Egypt–based on their sedimentological and petrographical information." *Journal of African Earth Sciences* 113 (2016): 194-204.

"U.S. Energy Information Administration - EIA - Independent Statistics and Analysis." International - U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), April 4, 2022.
<https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/EGY>.