

In spite of quite vivid archaeological activity, there are still quite a few wide-scaled investigated settlements in Egypt. Such research does not often bring quick discoveries but requires long analysis. But such analyses are at the end very interesting.

One of the most interesting, but still poorly researched, Egyptian settlements is Tell el-Retaba. The site is located approx. 35 km west of modern town of Ismailiya, more or less in the middle of the Wadi Tumilat valley. The valley was one of the roads leading, through Sinai, to the East, on the territory of the Levant. It seems that the location of Tell el-Retaba was not accidental. Already in the moment of establishing of a settlement there during the Second Intermediate Period its place was closely associated with easy access to the eastern border of Egypt. A fortress was built here in the New Kingdom, during the reign of Ramesses II, which was later rebuilt during the reign of Ramesses III. After collapse of the New Kingdom conditions of life in Tell el-Retaba changed, but the settlement remained here. On the basis of the material from Third Intermediate Period we know that in spite of political changes the town was still in use but its character probably changed. In the course of recent work of the Polish-Slovak Archaeological Mission several houses dated to the period were uncovered. Broader archaeological work is planned, which will allow uncovering larger part of the settlement from the Third Intermediate Period.

The main objective of the project is uncovering possibly the largest domestic space from the Third Intermediate Period in Tell el-Retaba to find out what were the living conditions in the town of this period.

On the basis of the excavated materials it should be possible to describe the character of the entire settlement: was it a densely packed compact town, or rather a loosely overbuilt village? What buildings stood inside and how were they organized? How the local community was differentiated? What was the diet of the town inhabitants? Was the town self-sufficient or it was supplied with some commodities from outside? Who did administrate the settlement during the political regionalization of Egypt? What role played Tanis, political and religious center of the eastern Delta during the 21st and 22nd Dynasties, in the functioning of the town in Tell el-Retaba? Can we recognize changes in conditions of life between New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period? What kind of changes? What was the character of the town: fortified (as in the New Kingdom), or open, without defensive functions? How the settlement changed in the course of the Third Intermediate Period?

Research carried out in Tell el-Retaba is interdisciplinary. Several specialists have been invited – pottery specialist, archaeobotanist, and archaeozoologist. Results of the cooperation of the specialists will be a comprehensive picture of daily life of Tell el-Retaba community: the town infrastructure (analysis of architecture and artifacts), influence of natural environment on living conditions (archaeobotanical and archaeozoological analyses), diet of inhabitants (archaeobotanical and ceramological analyses), contacts with local and international centers (analysis of artifacts and pottery).

The Third Intermediate Period as a period to be studied in the proposed project, was a deliberate choice. It belongs to the least known periods of history of Egypt. We even talk about ‘dark ages’ because we still have very little information on the exact functioning of the country between the 21st and 25th Dynasties. We lack especially well researched settlements. Till now only a few sites, for instance El-Ashmunein, Tell el-Balamun, Mendes, Sais, Kom Firin, have been excavated, still on a very limited scale. The settlement in Tell el-Retaba, because it was not intensively excavated in the past, has a great research potential for the future. Recently uncovered structures indicate that the settlement was quite vast. Material found inside is very rich and it indicates that the local territory was intensively occupied.

The proposed project is also very innovative because of its multi-faced character of research. Tell el-Retaba is for sure exceptional. Intensive work can make it a model – benchmark for other researchers dealing with similar material.