



The Gurob Harem Palace Project

Report to the Supreme Council of Antiquities of work conducted at Medinet el-Gurob, 25rd March – 3rd April 2008.

Abstract: This article presents a report on the 2008 season of survey undertaken by the University of Liverpool at the site of Medinet el-Gurob in the Faiyum region. The principal tasks accomplished were survey and surface collection of pottery, lithics and small finds from the agricultural area bordering the main site.

Introduction

The 2008 season at Medinet el-Gurob focussed attention on the areas adjacent to the main site of New Kingdom 'Harem Palace' remains which have been under investigation since 2005 by the University of Liverpool.¹ The survey work conducted this season was directed towards understanding the wider landscape of the area around the Gurob 'Harem Palace', and determining if it is possible to detect any of the ancient settlement areas, as well as examining the spread of cultural material through the cultivated areas next to the site. The results were recorded using GPS (Global Positioning System) equipment and analysed within a GIS (Geographic Information System).

The 2008 team consisted of just five members:- Director: Dr Ian Shaw, Deputy Director/Survey: Miss Claire Malleson, Ceramicist: Miss Virpi Perunka, Lithics/Survey assistant: Miss Cordula Werschkun, SCA Inspector: Mr Girges Moneir Amin.

Method.

A GPS survey was conducted on the cultivated area, field boundaries were mapped and material visible on the surface was collected, analysed and recorded. Brief walking surveys were conducted in the wider area. The quantity of material collected was far greater than expected, thus limiting the area able to be surveyed fully in the time available. However, initial basic survey work was conducted in all the areas close to the site and it was possible to determine that very little cultural material was visible on the surface beyond the area fully surveyed.

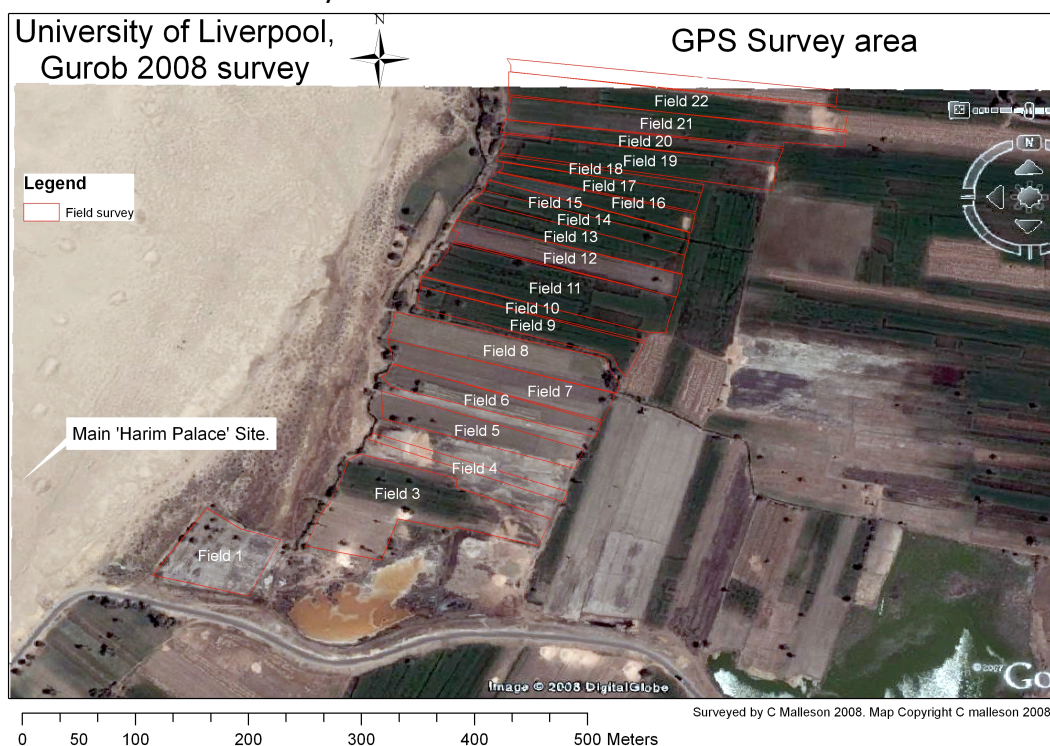
¹ See Reports by Dr Ian Shaw, 2005, 2006, 2007.

The majority of the material collected was ceramic sherds, dating mainly to the New Kingdom with a few sherds of earlier periods (see ceramics report below). A few New Kingdom lithic fragments were also collected (see lithics report below). Most of the ceramics were collected in the area between a canal and the fields themselves; and most of the material was gathered from small depressions created by the water pumps that supply the fields from the canal. Some material was also collected from the ridges that divide field plots. The surface survey collection of pottery was conducted in and adjacent to fields 1-11 (see plate 6). A total of 1320 sherds were collected.

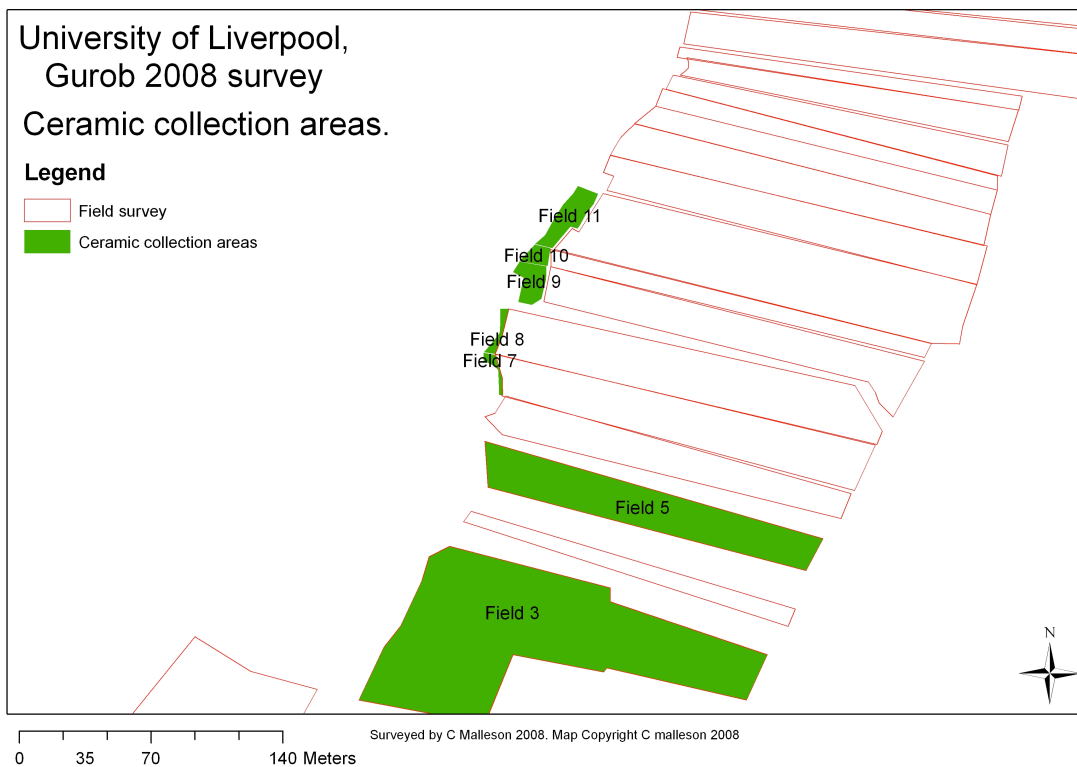
Main Survey Area. SURVEY.

A GPS survey was carried out alongside the ceramics collection in order to map the spread of material collected, and record the field boundaries we encountered. Map one (below) shows the full extent of the GPS survey, while Map two shows the areas in which ceramics were encountered. Immediately adjacent to the ceramic collections areas – to the west, runs a small (deep) irrigation canal.

MAP ONE:- Survey area



MAP TWO:- Ceramic collection areas.



CERAMICS.

The pottery work refers to the Vienna System, published in: Nordström, H.-Å. and Bourriau, J. 1993. 'Clays and Fabrics' in Arnold, D. and Bourriau, J. (eds.) *An Introduction to Ancient Egyptian Pottery*. SDAIK 17. Mainz: Philipp von Zabern.

MAP ONE AND TWO:- Sherd count/density.

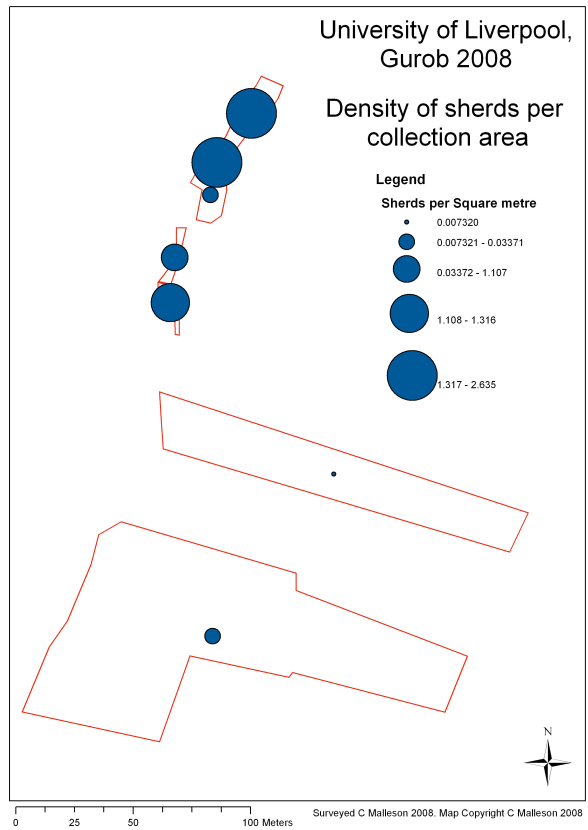
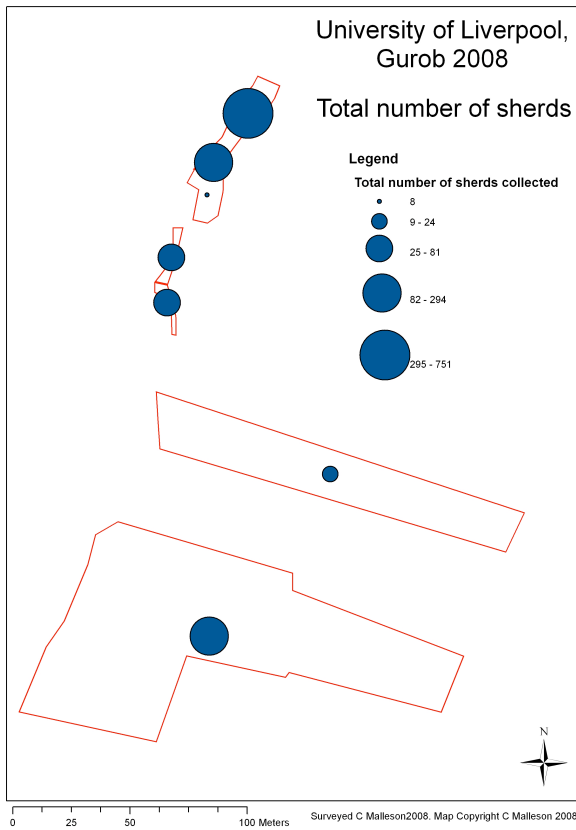


TABLE ONE:- All Ceramic Fabrics.

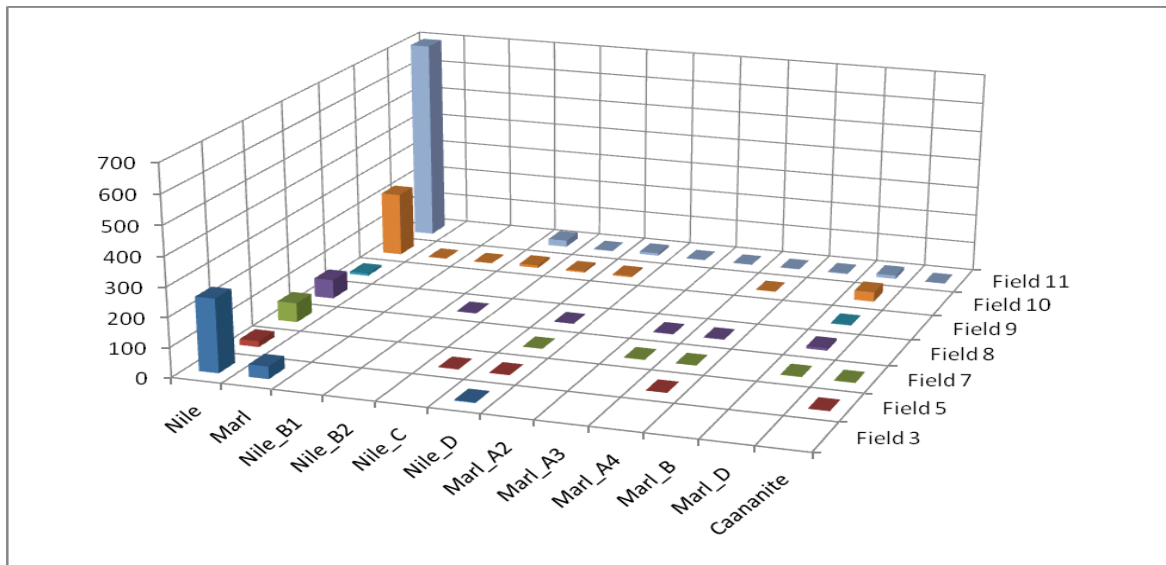


TABLE TWO:- Diagnostic fabrics

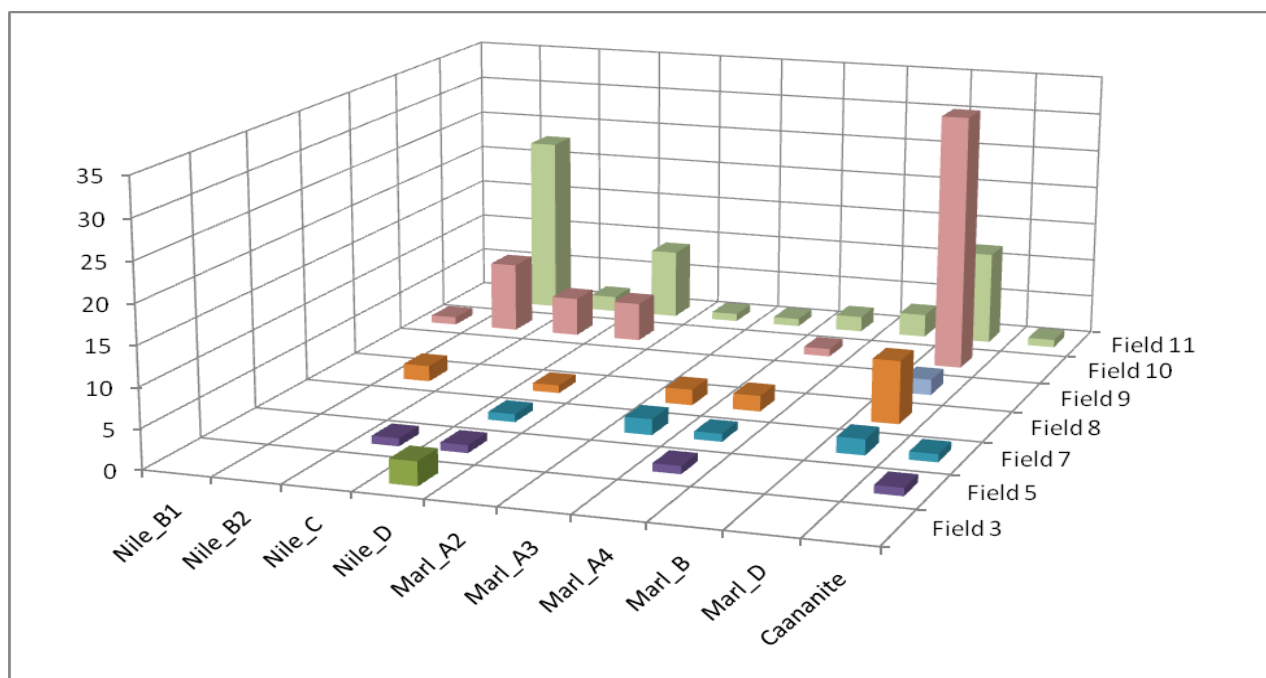
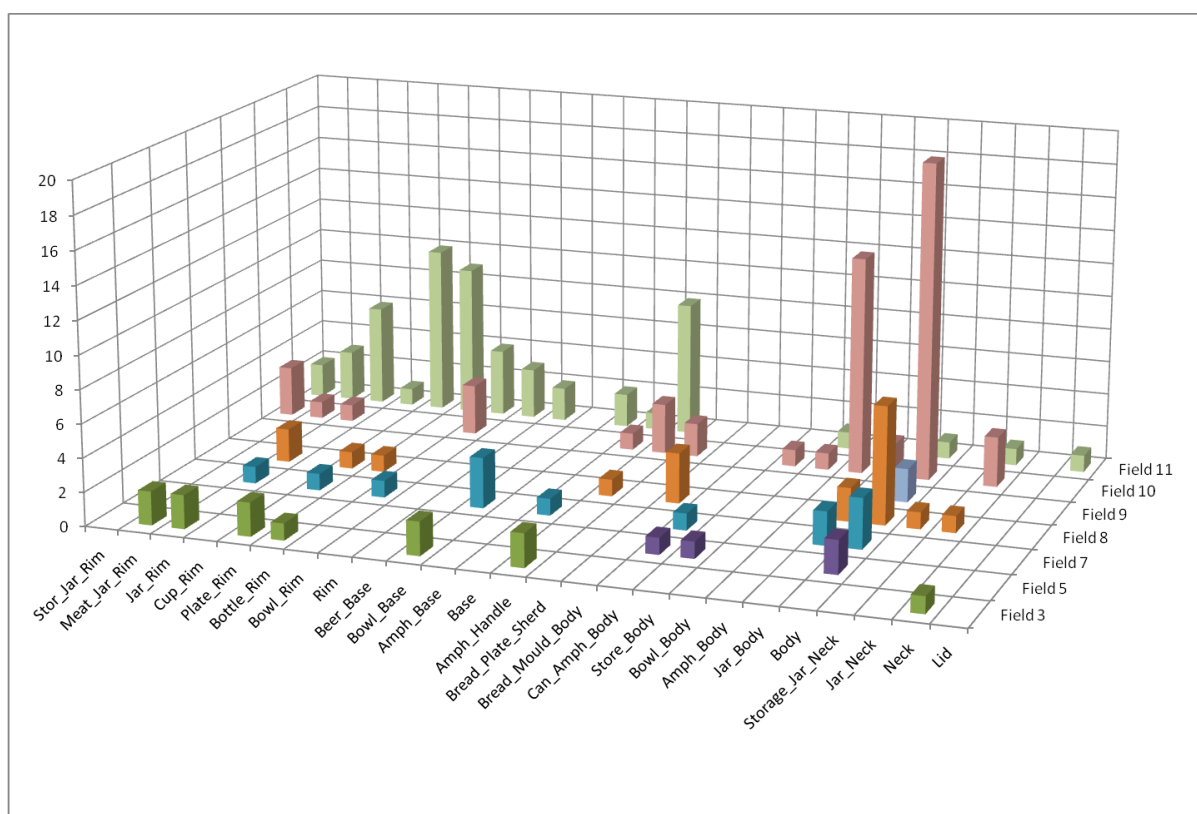
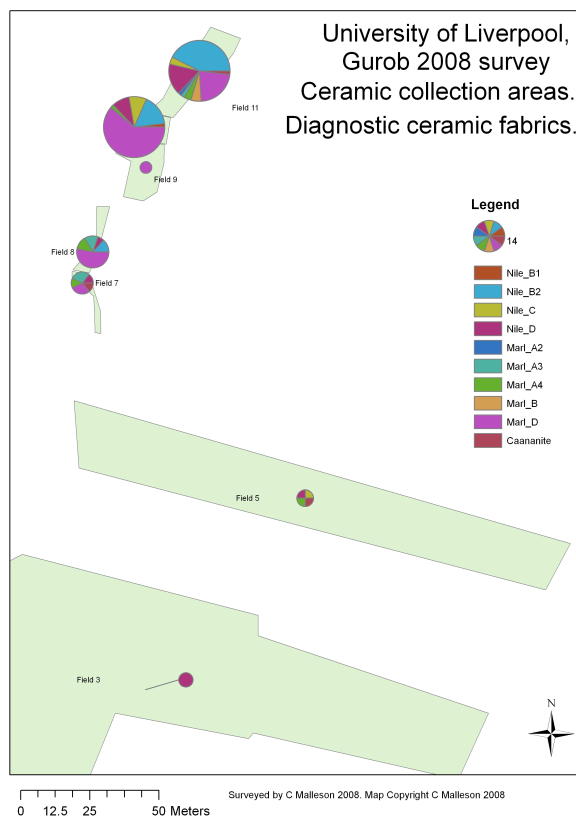
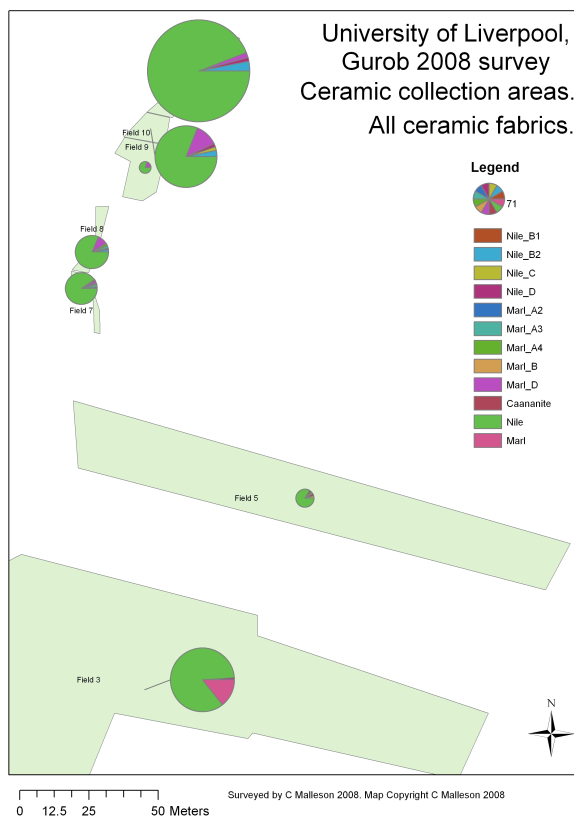


TABLE THREE:- Diagnostic sherd forms.

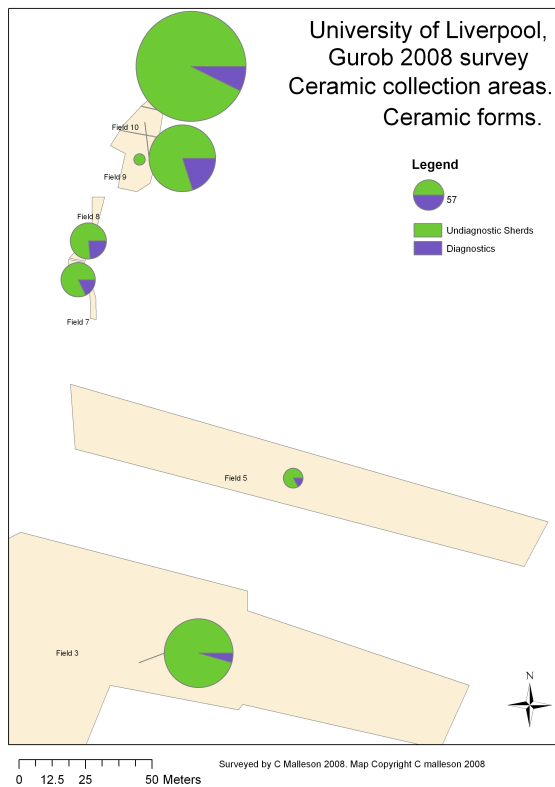


MAP THREE:- All ceramic forms.

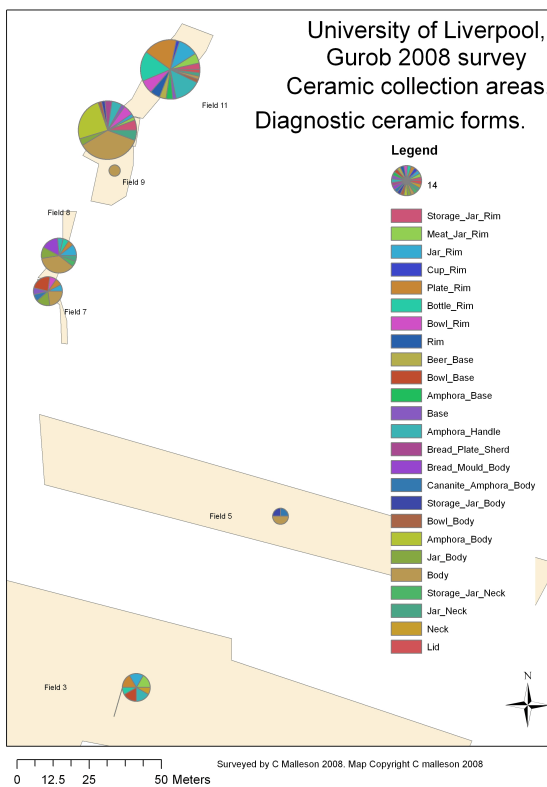
MAP FOUR:- Diagnostic ceramic forms



MAP FIVE:- Basic ceramic forms.



MAP SIX:- Diagnostic ceramic forms.



As is clear from the tables and maps, Fields 10 and 11 had much more pottery in them than the other field units, in general, there were increasing quantities of pottery the further north the survey moved. The one exception was field 3. Field 11, especially, contributed to our knowledge. The dating of 99% the material recovered from fields 10 and 11 (like the other fields) can be fairly certainly to the New Kingdom. There could be possibly be one or two sherds from the First Intermediate Period or late Old Kingdom. There were, both in field 10 and 11, in total more than 20 diagnostic sherds from amphorae made of characteristic New Kingdom amphorae fabric, Marl D (clearly the dominant fabric, see map four). Other frequently appearing fabrics are Nile D and especially Nile B2 which is a dominating fabric at many sites and throughout the pharaonic period. The most frequently occurring material was un-diagnostic sherds of Nile fabric – which, due to its nature, became far more abraded over time (in the water gulleys) , and thus less identifiable than the marl fabric sherds. It is clear from the tables above that there are a wide range of ceramic forms, which are most likely to derive from a domestic context – probably the New Kingdom Palace. The ceramic fabric and form statistics match up well with the material collected from the main Palace site during 2006 and 2007.

LITHICS.

During field walking eight chipped stone artefacts were recovered. All were made from local raw material available in the form of nodules in the surrounding desert.

Two artefacts were found in Field 3, a complete blade-like flake possibly manufactured in blade technology, but not with blade proportions, and a complete blade-like notch with distinct tool characteristics. One medial-lateral flake fragment (probably burnt) was found in Field 7.

Field 10 yielded five artefacts, three complete flakes and two cores. The largest of the flakes is possibly natural. A second flake might have been produced in Levalloisian technique which would date it to the Middle Palaeolithic. One of the cores is broken and is a flat double or triple platform cobble core, i.e. the striking platform and the core foot are cortical surfaces. There are no signs of core preparation. The state of reduction cannot be determined with certainty due to its being incomplete, but is probably intermediate. The second core is a complete single platform core using a large shallow negative as striking platform. The reduction surface shows roughly parallel reduction and some core preparation. The state of reduction is ca. 50%.

On the whole the small lithic assemblage is unremarkable and probably dates to the pharaonic period (with no more specific dating possible), with the exception of the possible Levalloisian flake.

ANALYSIS.

Through talking to the local farmers we learned that land has had to be reclaimed in recent years due to increased salt levels in the soil, and standing water in the fields close to the Gizr el-Bahlawan. We suspect that the final stage of preparation of field for cultivation

involves fertilising the fields with soil dredged from the small canal – thus spreading the material that has migrated from the site to the canal (by natural processes) across the fields. Field 3 had only recently become cultivatable, therefore the material is close to the surface, while fields 7-11 are much older established fields, therefore the material is likely to have become trodden-in, and buried. Fields 4-6 are still in the process of being reclaimed – currently being raised up with large deposits of sand. This would explain the uneven spread of material. The large quantities of material found along the western edge of the fields (7-11) were predominantly found in small gulleys adjacent to irrigation pumps. We suspect that the material derives from canal dredging, which becomes packed down into the path, and then becomes washed out and very apparent on the surface, as a result of the water pumping into the field irrigation systems.

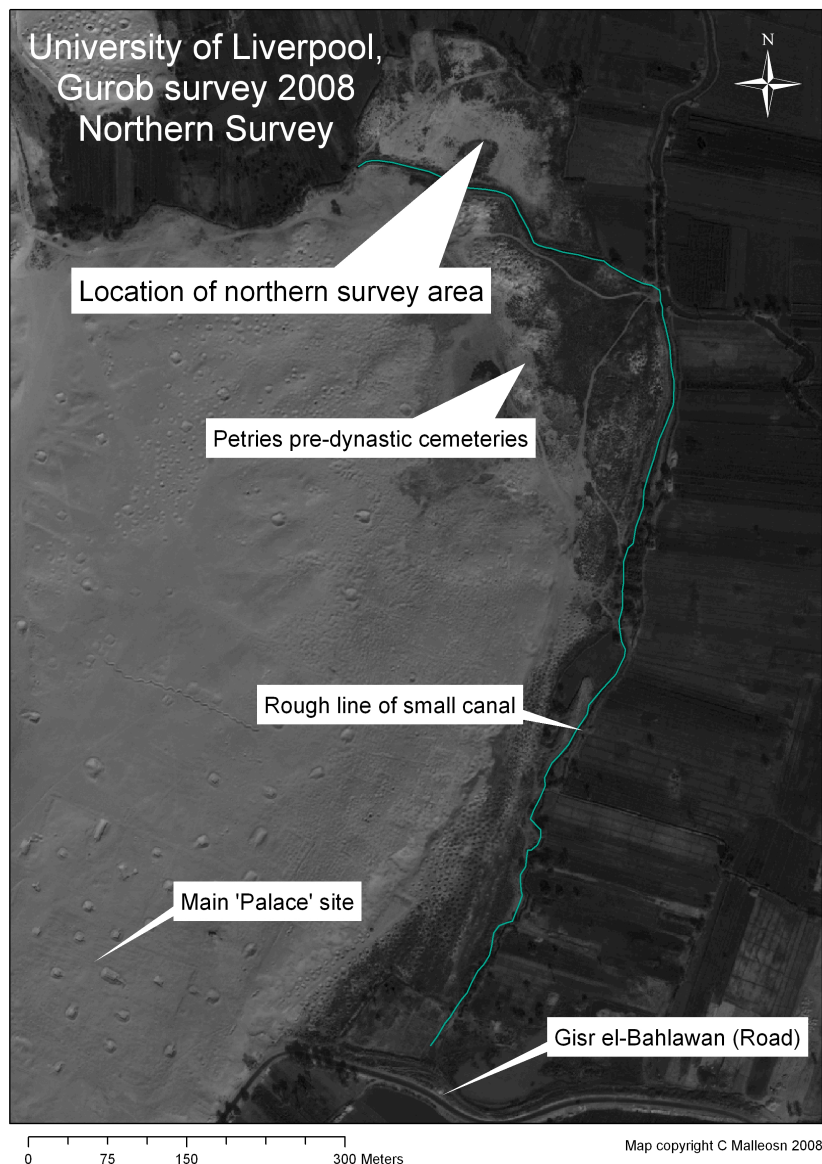
Northern Survey.

One further surface survey was conducted along the edge of this canal, where it cuts across uncultivated (antiquities) land, close to the area in which Flinders Petrie detected Predynastic cemeteries in his late 19th century excavations. Only diagnostic sherds were collected here. Aside from the ceramic material, found in large quantities in soil clearly coming from canal-dredging activities, some architectural stone fragments were discovered; part of a limestone basin and 2 parts of a limestone door socket. These fragments can only be from an élite domestic context, as all the cemeteries in the area are rock-cut shaft tombs. They are likely to derive from past excavators' spoil heaps, or have been thrown into the canal by *sebbakhin* or other looters in the past. They could possibly be an indication of undetected settlement remains in the northern part of the Medinet el-Gurob area.



Stone fragments from Northern Survey

MAP SEVEN:- Northern Survey



The ceramics in this area, having not been washed many times by irrigation pumps were far better preserved, larger fragments. The surface pottery recorded here was clearly of New Kingdom date, including typical forms and types of the period, like the amphorae. The find spot also yielded open forms, such as table ware. The fabrics are comparable to the palace area; Nile silts being mostly of fabric Nile B2 with some examples of Nile D. The marl fabrics, which are more chronologically sensitive indicate clearly the period of pottery vessel manufacture to be of a New Kingdom date here. The dominating marl fabric is Marl D, which according to our current knowledge of ancient Egyptian pottery fabrics, is the amphorae and storage jar fabric par excellence of the New Kingdom.

TABLE FOUR:- Ceramic forms, Northern Survey.

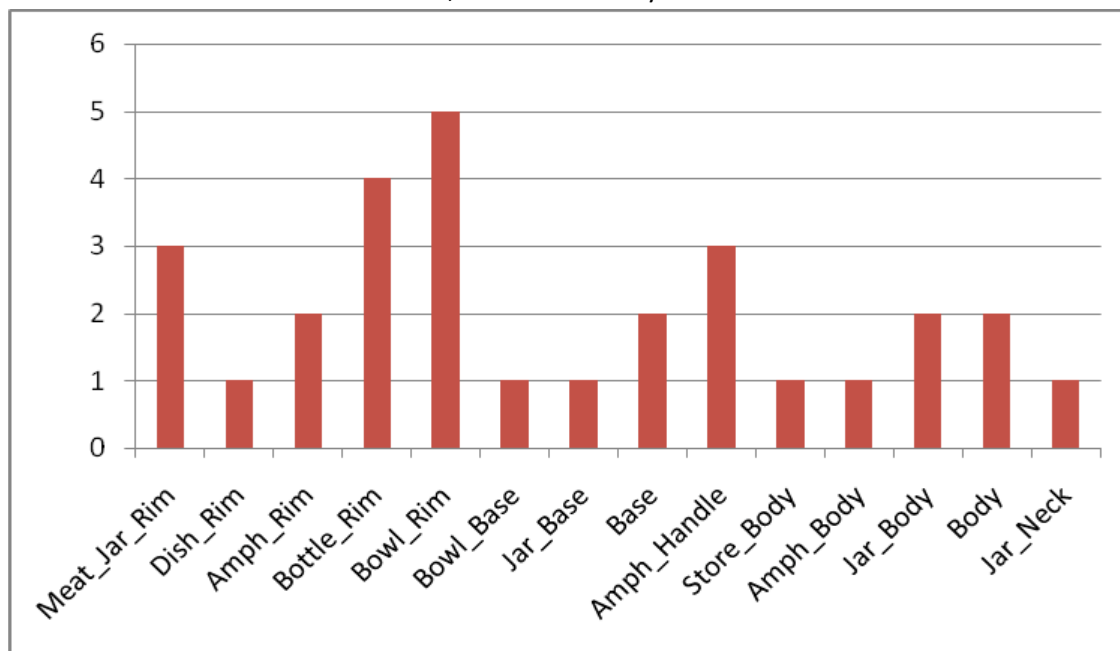
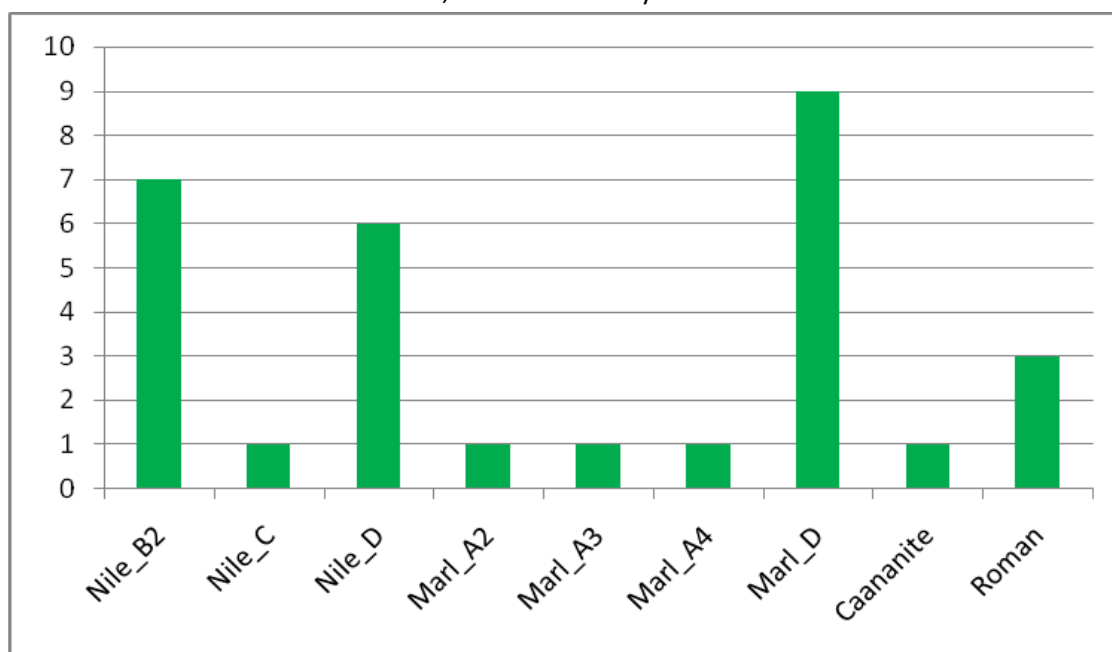


TABLE FIVE:- Ceramic fabrics, Northern Survey.



Summary.

The field survey taught us a lot about the taphonomy of the area around the main 'Palace' site at Medinet el-Gurob. The spread of cultural material extends past the edges of the recognised antiquities land, and has been spread further by local agricultural activities. On the basis of the reports of farmers, it is likely that any settlement remains in the area have become deeply buried by this movement of soils from the site and the canal, and would only be detectable through an auger-bore survey. The Northern survey provides some tentative evidence for the possible existence of settlement remains in this part of the site.

Claire Malleson and Dr Ian Shaw
University of Liverpool
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