

DIRECTORS' REPORT ON 2006 SEASON AT DIME ES-SEBA/SOKNOPAIU NESOS

Team 2006

Mario Capasso (director), Paola Davoli (director), Alessia Armillis (student), Angela Cervi (registrar), Clementina Caputo (drawer), Ivan Chiesi (topographer), Antonella Longo (papyrologist), Francesco Meo (archaeologist), Giuseppe Alvar Minaya (field assistant), Elvira Pisanello (papyrologist), Alberto C. Potenza (drawer), Nicola Raimondi (topographer), Ashraf Senussi (pottery drawer), Tatyana Smekalova (engineer, V.A. Fock Institute of Physics, Saint Petersburg State University), Gabriele Soranna (field assistant), Martin Stadler (demotist, Würzburg Universität), Mohammed el-Zahabi (engineer, Giza University). The Supreme Council of Antiquities was represented by inspectors Sayed Awad Mohammed and Mayada Ahmed Neguib.

Archaeological Report

The fourth excavation season was carried out inside the *temenos* (fig. 3) of the main temple, dedicated to the crocodile god Soknopaios. The sanctuary is located North of the area explored during the 2005 season. The excavated areas (Sectors 3 and 4) (fig. 4) measure on the whole 22 m from east to west and 10 m from north to south. They include a central hall (F), a staircase with its under space (I, H), a side chapel (G) and part of the *pronaos* (L).

The building is made of regular blocks of local yellow limestone; the architraves and part of the floors are of local grey fossiliferous limestone. The temple is oriented North-South with the entrance on the South side. Access was by means of a monumental *propylon* made up of a courtyard paved in grey fossiliferous limestone and the Ptolemaic temple (ST 18), which was modified when the new temple ST20 was built. The first room (A) is on the main axis of ST18. It was identified as the *wesekhet* hall that led to room F (offering room) through a short ramp flanked by two groups of three steps. The latter room (8.20 x 2.80 m) is paved with grey limestone slabs and leads to the *pronaos* (room L) by means of a ramp flanked by two groups of three steps, like the previous one.

The South door of room F is 2.21 m wide and its threshold is made of a single brown limestone block raised for 11 cm from the floor. Originally the door was closed by two leaves, of which only the stone pivots remain. The North door, which led to room L, is 2.10 m wide and its threshold is made of a single brown limestone block as well. Inside room F the door is surrounded by a 81.5 cm wide flat cornice, and by a 13 cm diameter torus set on a rectangular section base (54.5 cm high).

The walls of room F, preserved up to a maximum height of 1.20 m, were all smooth and finished ready for the decoration that were never accomplished, except on part of the North-West wall of the room. Only one figurative register is visible at 60 cm from the floor. It represents nine partially preserved characters (the shoulders and heads are missing) in different stages of completeness (fig. 5). On the actual wall there are seven male figures, two of which can be identified as depicting a king and five as gods. All the figures are outlined with red ink and only two were carved in bas-relief, but are not finished. The gods are all standing and have the same peculiarity: a *was* sceptre in their left hand, an *ankh* in their right, a *shendit* skirt, a false tail and a tripartite wig. The latter is preserved only in the bas-relief figure. The king, instead, is wearing a triangular skirt with the front decorated by two hanging cobras. The register was probably divided into two panels: the first one on the right showing the first two figures where the king, turned left, was presenting an offering to the god; the

second one was comprehensive of the other five figures, with the king turned to the left making offerings to four gods.

Other two figures are carved on the flat cornice that surrounds the door between room F and L, to the right of the torus cornice. Only the legs of the characters remain, perhaps the king followed by the queen or a goddess. They were entirely carved and finished, but not painted. The king walking towards right seems to wear the same type of triangular skirt of the previous reliefs, of which only a tip of the front corner remains, and a false tail. The female character behind him wears a long close-fitting dress and holds the *ankh* in her right hand, of which only the lower part remains.

A narrow passageway (90 cm wide) is in the South-West corner of room F and led to staircase I. It was originally closed by a door (72.5 cm wide) on its West end. The floor was restored in antiquity and is made of irregular blocks. No traces of door pivots remain, but it is certain that the door was closed by a single leaf hinged in the South-West corner of the passageway.

The door leads to the first landing of the central-pillared staircase named I, to which room D also gave access through a door. This door, today in a bad state of preservation, opened between walls 210 and 247. It was 72 cm wide and closed by a single leaf, presumably hinged on wall 247. The staircase is almost completely destroyed. Only the first landing, three steps of the first ramp and one of the third, this one located on the surviving architraves that covered room H under staircase, remain. The staircase was restored in antiquity with reused mud bricks for the floor of the first and third landing and for some steps. The first ramp, the only one to be preserved, although partially, is 81 cm wide; the original steps were made in stone and measured 26.5-28 cm in width and 10-11 cm in height. They were covered by mud bricks on bed. Probably the first ramp had four steps and the second had six. The central pillar of the staircase is badly preserved at its base (1.33 x 1.59 m).

A door from the first landing led to the room H under the staircase. The door, 61.5 cm wide, was closed by a single leaf that was probably hinged inside the room, in the South-West corner. Room H has an upturned "L" shape and has the same width as the staircase ramps that also provided the covering. Only two brown limestone architraves remain from this room. The floor of the North-South space is entirely demolished and the removal was 1.35 m deep under the offset. The five foundation visible courses have rough bosses surrounded by three flat cornices. The limestone block floor of the East-West space is entirely preserved. This part of the room is preserved for a maximum height of 1.33 m and, in the back towards West, for a minimum of 1 m.

A door, in the middle of the eastern side of room F, leads to room G. The door is surrounded by a flat cornice (48.5 cm wide and projecting for 1.2 cm) and an incomplete torus (the rectangular section measuring 7.7 x 4.6 cm). Room G can be interpreted as a chapel given the importance of the decoration of its door. In fact, in addition to the torus cornice, there were a cavetto cornice decorated by a winged sun and a frieze of *uraei*, the fragments of which were found among the collapse inside F. A few vertical lines, part of the preparation of a red painted decoration, are still visible on the flat cornice. The door is 88 cm wide and probably had two leaves, since both jambs have niches where the leaves were set when the door was open. These niches are 55 cm wide. An unfinished flat cornice is also found around the door inside G (40 cm wide, 1.5 cm thick).

Room G (2.88 x 3.52 m) is preserved for a maximum height of five courses above the floor offset (1.10 m). The floor was originally made of limestone blocks, ten of which have been found not in place inside the room. This floor was removed in antiquity during a late phase of occupation of the building (many traces were still preserved here) and the room was then partly sealed by heavy architraves collapsed inside.

The *naos* of the temple is a self standing structure, included in a wide hall, named L, at the sides of which other rooms open. One of them perhaps is another staircase. During the season, the area in front of the *naos* (3.55 x 8.20 m), paved with grey limestone slabs, was brought to light. The door between F and L is 2.10 m wide and its threshold is made of a single brown limestone block, as found elsewhere. The door was probably closed by two leaves, the hinges of which were destroyed along with the flooring that has been completely removed in the central area of the room. The door, even inside L, is surrounded by a flat cornice 57 cm wide and projecting for 2 cm.

The room is preserved for a maximum height of 1.20 m and the walls have been smoothed ready to hold decorations, except for the flat cornice that surrounds the door on the West side. This door probably leads to a side chapel: the flat cornice is 50 cm wide and 2.5 cm thick and has an unfinished torus. A second door, also surrounded by a smoothed flat cornice (39 cm wide and projecting for 1.5 cm) opens on the East wall, in front of the chapel. It probably leads to the second staircase.

Only the West half of the façade of the *naos* has been brought to light so far. A large corner torus (diameter of 14.5 cm) on a rectangular section base (15.5 x 7 cm) is on the corner. The door of the *naos* is surrounded by a double flat cornice: the outermost is 13.7 cm wide and 2.5 cm thick; the innermost is 60 cm wide and 2.3 cm thick. A completely finished and painted figurative register, with a red base line, is found on the latter at about 55.5 cm from the offset. Only the feet of two facing male figures remain. It is certainly one of those scenes, enclosed in squares and arranged on more than one register, that usually decorate the cornices of the portals and often comprise two figures: the king, always turned towards the entrance of the temple, making an offering in front of the standing god with his back turned towards the door (fig. 6). In this case, the king is painted brown-red, while the god is light blue. The lower part of two hieroglyphic inscriptions on facing columns is recognisable between the two figures. They are separated by the *was* sceptre, the end of which has a bulb shape. Traces of the red lines of the drawing made before carving are still visible.

The investigated stratigraphy was mainly composed by debris, blocks, huge architraves related to the original roofs of the building and lintels of doors from the collapse and demolition of the building. Such stratigraphy was already disturbed by previous excavations. However, some good contexts were found in some rooms, dated to a late living phase, perhaps not continuative, when wooden furniture from the temple and papyri were used as fuel for fires. The fragment of a literary Coptic papyrus from the 6th century A.D. ca. and some Late Roman and Byzantine amphorae belong to this phase.

Many fragments, some also quite large, of cavetto cornices, *uraei* friezes of various sizes coming from the different doors (fig. 8), statues, both in sandstone and limestone, and of decorations and hieroglyphic inscriptions, already carved or only outlined in red, were found among the debris that filled the rooms. Among these fragments the most interesting bears part of the human bust and crocodile head of the god Sobek carved in high-relief and painted, with a *usekh* necklace and a tripartite wig (fig. 9). Another small fragment, carved in bas-relief, shows a wig with the ear of a male figure turned towards the right. The most remarkable fragment comes from one of the larger registers, and thus one of the main ones, compared to those previously described (fig. 10). It is made of two matching blocks, one of which was found in 2003. Parts of two figures both turned towards right and in bas-relief are preserved: the first one is a king, of whom only the double crown and the right ear remain; the second is a queen, of whom the left hand raised, in act of adoration, the nose, the forehead and the outline of the high crown with two feathers, usually worn by the queens of this period, are still visible. An inscription in column is between the two figures. It is the caption of the

queen: *neb(t) tawy* followed by an empty cartouche. The certain presence of a queen alongside the king in this relief put forth the hypothesis that the temple and its decoration date to the Ptolemaic period. Some papyri and a stela attest to works done in the temple during the reign of Ptolemy VIII and the construction of a *peribolos* that may be identified with the *temenos* of the temple, in 24 B.C. The size of the mud bricks used for the construction of the *temenos* and the buildings inside suggest a dating between the end of the Ptolemaic period and the beginning of the Roman period.

The decoration of the temple is described in a Demotic papyrus kept in the Papyrussammlung in Vienna (pWien D10100) and recently published by G. Vittmann (Enchoria 28 [2002/2003], pp. 106-136, Taf. 14-21). The papyrus was compiled during the Roman period (1st-2nd century A.D.), but it describes figurative scenes depicting a Ptolemaic king. The description proceeds by registers, four from top to bottom, and seems to refer to an internal room or perhaps the *naos*. The decoration of a portal is described in another Vienna papyrus (Wien Aeg 9976) from Soknopaiou Nesos. In this case, the king mentioned is Ptolemy VIII (NAWG 3 [1967], pp. 59-80). In both cases, however, the depictions and texts in the papyri do not match what has been found so far. Thus, it is possible that the papyri refer to parts of the temple still not brought to light or decorations that were designed but never realized.

Test trench 1

The exploration of other buildings in the *temenos* began from the structure ST 21, located West of ST 20 and partially built with the same materials and techniques as temple ST 18 (figs. 3, 7). The investigation is not finished. The structure (9.43 x 6.20 m) is composed of two buildings from different phases, the foundations of the later one (ST 21 II) having incorporated the earlier. The building is preserved only at the foundation level where cellars were built. One of the latter still has its barrel vaulted ceiling *in situ* (ST 21C). These rooms will be investigated in the future.

Below mud brick debris that covered the area an iron sword was found. It is a particularly important object and apparently out of context. The sword (ST06/338/1474) is 1 m long and 6 cm wide; it is complete, with an iron scabbard and an ebony pommel (fig. 11). The hilt is missing and fragments of dark red fabric were found around the tang. The scabbard is completely rusted but the blade seems to be in a good state of preservation. The sword, that has only been consolidated so far, will be restored during the next excavation season. It is comparable to the depiction of three swords on a relief coming from the Palmyra area (Louvre Museum, AO 19801). The relief depicts the divine triad of Palmyra, Aglibôl, Baalshamêm and Malakbêl, in military clothes and armed with long swords with very similar pommels to the one found at Dime. The relief has been dated to the first half of the 1st century A.D. on the basis of the type of cuirasses wears by the gods. Three similar pommels, but smaller, are exhibited at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Two of them are in bone and ivory (JE 45047) and belonged to swords found in Mit Rahina in 1914.

Geomagnetic and topographic Survey

A geomagnetic survey conducted by T. Smekalova with a magnetometer and an electrical conductivity meter was begun during the 2006 excavation season. Different areas, both inside the settlement and in the surrounding area, to the West and to the South, on the shores of the present-day lake, were detected. The survey in the latter area was carried out by Mohammed el Zahabi. The purpose is to verify the possible existence of sources of fresh water and ancient agricultural fields around Dime. Another purpose is to test the use of these instruments for a possible mapping of the

ruins not visible on the surface in the settlement. Numerous and interesting data have been gathered in the area surrounding the *kom*; however, these will have to be interpreted on the basis of geological and archaeological data before putting forward any interpretation. The area in fact has turned out to be particularly rich in necropoleis, small settlements and other structures dating to different periods and located around an ancient lake. G. Caton-Thompson and E.W. Gardner had already discovered this lake during their survey in 1926 and called it the West Dimai Basin.

The topographical survey of the settlement was carried out by I. Chiesi and N. Raimondi by means of a Total Station (Sokkisha GTS 220). The plan of the visible buildings has been completed (fig. 1) and the contour lines (fig. 2) of the *kom* have been plotted by surveying about 8000 points, over an area of 337.500 sqm. Survey data have been processed by means of a data-entering and processing software (Meridiana 2006). The data have been imported into a CAD platform and downloaded on SURFER 32 software in order to obtain the complete graphic data processing.

Papyrological Report

On the whole, the 2006 excavation of structure ST 20 has enabled us to retrieve the following materials of papyrological interest:

- 6 Greek papyri
- 2 Demotic papyri
- 2 illustrated magical papyri
- 1 Coptic papyrus
- 3 unwritten papyri
- 3 Greek *tituli picti*
- 2 Demotic *ostraka*
- 1 possibly Demotic *ostrakon*

These materials are altogether in a fairly good condition, although, with some exceptions, they are not wide.

The fragments were found in the following stratigraphic units (= DSU): US 256, 300, 301, 303, 317, 319, 323, 342, 343, 344. As it already happened in the 2005 season, DSU 256 in room E turned out to be the richest in papyri and *ostraka*. The layer is full of organic material and fragments of artefacts. The outstanding concentration among other things of ash, charcoal, small fragments of wood, beads and furniture glass inlays suggests that the layer was originated by the occupation of the room in a phase that followed the abandonment of the temple.

Two Greek papyri, a figured magical papyrus, a Demotic papyrus, a Greek *titulus pictus* and a Demotic *ostrakon* come from DSU 256. The two Greek papyri are in two small fragments (ST05/256/1365 e ST05/256/1435), but in a fairly good condition and certainly contain documentary texts likely dating to the 2nd-3rd century A.D. The most interesting series of letters can be read in ST05/256/1435: *eis euergh[*. A round image is outlined on the figured papyrus (ST05/256/1364) and can be interpreted as a wreath or an *ouroboros*. It is the same magic image on small scrolls found during the previous campaigns by our mission inside the courtyard that separates the Hellenistic mud brick temple dedicated to Soknopaios (structure ST 18) from the later one in stone dedicated to the same god. Such scrolls were amulets carried by people for protective purposes. Some of these were probably found inside the temple area by the mission directed by F. Zucker (1909-1910) as well. Another fragment of papyrus belongs to the same type (ST06/344/1363). It was found inside room G in ST 20, next to room E, and shows the so-called “herringbone” motif, a sort of palm branch, the

interpretation of which is not sure. This kind of motif also appears in other scroll-amulets that we found in the previous seasons.

The Demotic papyrus found in the same context (DSU 256) is complete (width 11.9; height 3.2 cm). An oracle question to the god Soknopaïos by a man named Satabous is on what seems to be the verso of a papyrus. The version found is the negative alternative to the question. The papyrus is very important because it is very likely to be dated to the 1st century A.D. and thus it is the only Demotic oracle question from the Roman period, all the others being from the Hellenistic period.

Finally, other papyri are worth mentioning. The Greek one ST06/344/1366 is almost certainly a *graphe hieron kai cheirismou*, in other words a list of priests and goods of the temple of Soknopaïos, dated on paleographic basis to the end of the 2nd – beginning of 3rd century A.D. The Coptic one ST06/323/1244 is probably a literary text of the 6th century A.D. The Greek *titulus pictus* ST06/317/1242 is a fragment of the shoulder of a small handled amphora showing the partly preserved indication of the quantity of a solid content, measured in *choinikes*. The Demotic *ostrakon* ST06/301/1241 bears a personal name with patronymic: a sort of Roman period voting *ostrakon*.

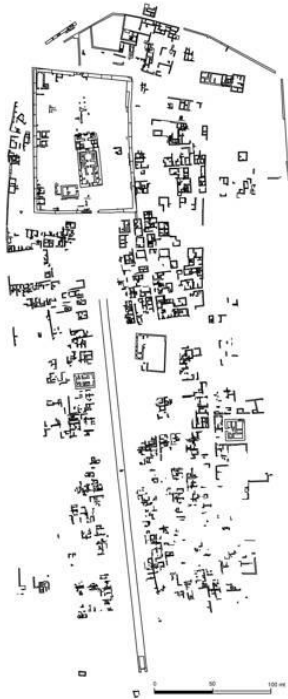


Fig. 1

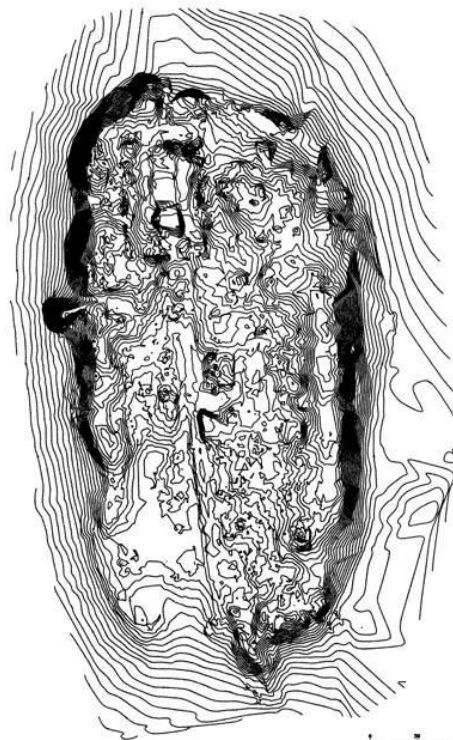


Fig. 2

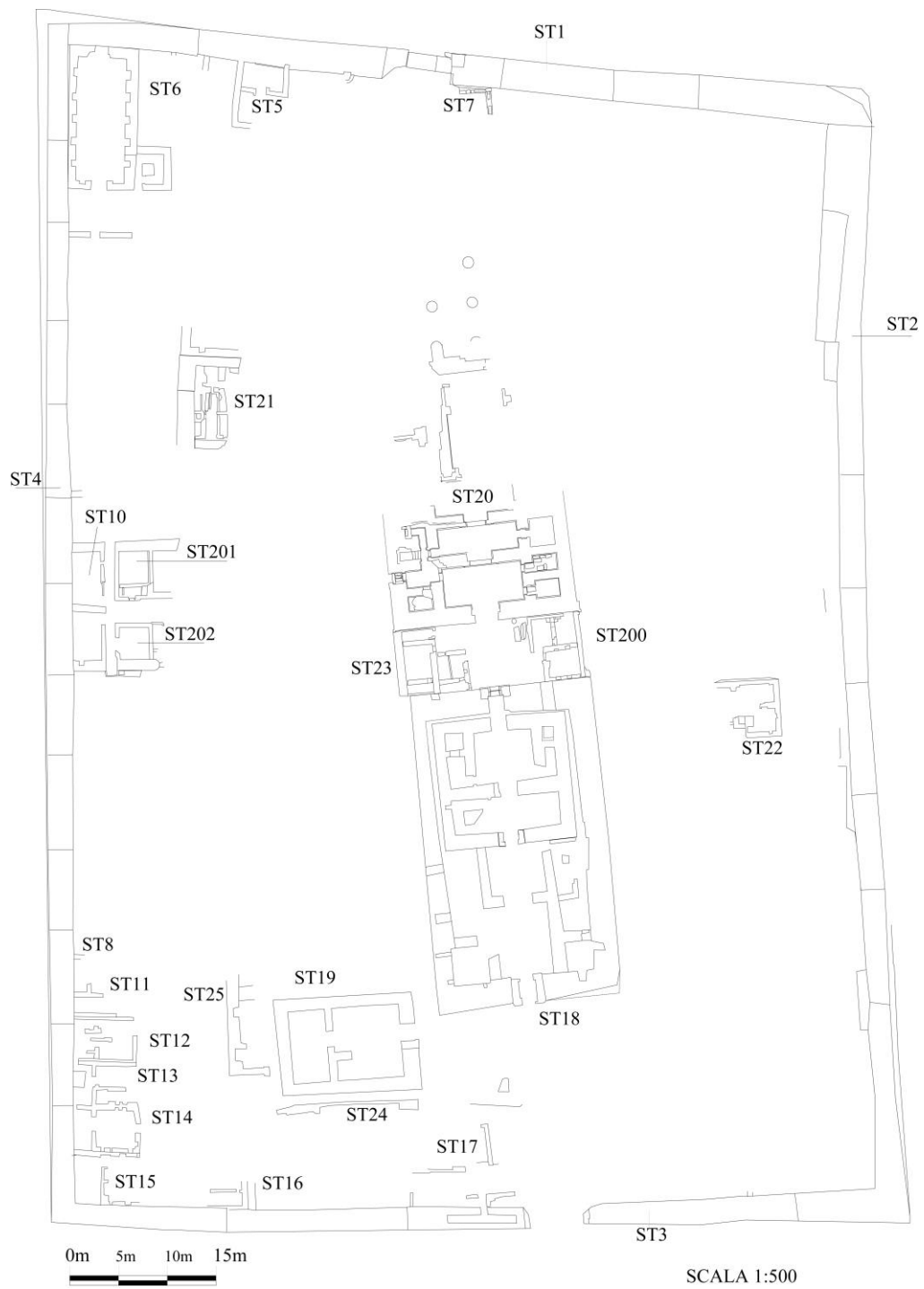


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8